

Torontonians feel the beat in Queen's Park



by [L.C. Willis](#) in [Arts](#) at 7:31 am on June 7, 2009

Tags: [concert \(4\)](#), [culture \(2\)](#), [Dragon Ritual Drummers](#), [festival \(7\)](#), [Muhtadi Festival](#), [music \(44\)](#)

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People of all ages danced to the beats of different drummers in Queen's Park on Saturday, exploring cultural and spiritual differences in percussion music from around the world.

The Muhtadi International Drumming Festival, celebrating its 10th anniversary, featured drummers playing African, Caribbean, Chinese and Celtic beats. First Nation's troupe Mexicree performed Aztec ritual music – harmonizing elements such as fire and water to worship Aztec goddesses.

Later in the afternoon, the [Dragon Ritual Drummers](#) performed music infused with African, Tropical, and Creole influences. Frequently referencing Voodoo theology, lead-drummer Utu engaged listeners with tales of Voodoo gods and Creole history, and encouraged people to touch a wooden Tikki for luck. Fans of the group, who frequent every local performance of the band, were front and centre to dance to the rhythmic beats.

For Adrian, a long-time member of the Dragon Ritual Drummers, the experience of drumming is a spiritual one. Adrian recalled performing once for nearly five hours – without a break, and without tiring.

"I once asked one of the guys, several years ago, why I was in the band," he said. "The answer was that this is what I'm supposed to do."

Founded 10 years ago by members of the Niagara Pagan Men's Circle, The Dragon Ritual Drummers are currently the highest ranking unsigned Afro-beat / Tropical band on MySpace Music. They have released four compilations independently, including a "drum opera" focused on the spiritual history of Niagara. The drummers perform at pagan festivals across North America, frequently incorporating local music into their performances. At the Muhtadi festival, they are expanding their audience to include people who otherwise wouldn't experience pagan rituals or theology.