

# Life Today

## Julie-Ann strums along to

## the feel-good beat

At the age of 45, Julie-Ann Rudge decided it was time to change her life and re-discover her love of music – so she turned her back on her PR career to become a drummer and music teacher

**M**usician Julie-Ann Rudge is passionate about drumming and wants to flood the UAE with the beat of the African instrument.

The former PR executive set up Dubai Drums three years ago and now runs community drum circles and corporate team-building sessions, as well as teaching in local schools and entertaining guests at social events.

The 49-year-old, who describes herself as a "citizen of planet earth" was born in Chiswick, United Kingdom, but spent her teenage years in New Zealand before moving to the Middle East.

Julie-Ann has two children, Tamer, 26, and Dima, 13, and lives in the Green Community with her husband, Guy, a 46-year-old offshore survey manager.

Here, she tells *Emirates Today* how she neglected her love for music for 30 years and why she shares her home with 160 drums.

**06.30** My husband wakes me; he's up at the crack of dawn anyway to go to work. If I've had a late drumming session I'll sleep in later, otherwise I get up to take my daughter, Dima, to school. Breakfast is eaten in the car – usually a banana or a yogurt.

**07.30** We arrive at school. If I'm teaching that day, we'll go in the white transit van that has 240 drums in the back. I receive a lot of funny looks from lorry drivers who are surprised to see a woman whizzing by in such a big van.

I sometimes fill in for the music teacher at Dima's school because drumming is a brilliant way to educate children about rhythm, so I'll unload the drums and prepare for a morning of lessons.

Drumming came into my life when I turned 45. I was working in PR and decided that if I didn't start my own business then I never would.

I've always been interested in holistic health, energy healing and astrology so I decided to set up a mind/body/spirit festival in Dubai.

I spent months working on it and one of the acts I booked was a community drum circle from Canada.

### A DAY IN MY LIFE

By Alice Haine



■ The music teacher leads Dubai Drums, which has 25 members  
SATISH KUMAR

■ Julie-Ann Rudge discovered the Jembe drum after quitting PR to start her own business  
SATISH KUMAR

Then at the last minute the main sponsor let me down and the event was cancelled, but the thing that disappointed me the most was the fact the drum circle was not coming anymore.

That's when I decided to lead my own community drum circle – a way of bringing people together through music – but I needed to learn how to play first.

So when my daughter won a performing arts competition and was invited to the finals in South Africa, I went too.

While she was rehearsing, I took an intensive course in drumming. I'd never done it before, but it was magnificent and such a buzz.

If you think about it too much you lose the rhythm, but if you let yourself go you enter an alpha state almost like meditation and it becomes a form of healing.

It's been medically proven that drumming de-stresses you because it connects the right and left side of the brain and raises your level of endorphins – the happy hormones – in your body.

The drum I use is the Jembe, originally from West Africa. I've actually got 400 in total – 240 in the van and the rest are spread around the house.

Learning to play the drum is like learning a language. In Africa, tribes play the Jembe to communicate from village to village. There are different rhythms for everything from births to deaths to marriage.

I have taken that language and brought it to Dubai and what started off as a hobby has turned into a fully fledged business.

I did my first corporate team building session two years ago; then I was asked to perform at Gitex and I haven't looked back since. I don't advertise – it's just grown through word of mouth.

**13.00** After the school lessons are over, I catch up with the business development side of my company. That involves answering all the e-mails I receive and

setting up meetings with firms to discuss what they want me to do. If I remember, I'll grab some lunch but I often forget to eat.

**15.00** I'll try to pick up Dima from school but if I'm rushing to another job she'll go home in a taxi. I feel guilty not being there myself but the guards on the school gate take the taxi drivers' number so I know she's safe.

Dima loves me being a drummer; I think she's quite proud her mum has her own business and is involved in something creative.

The main thing that stops me meeting Dima is a team building corporate session.

It's amazing to watch the effect the drum can have on a group of

“Drumming de-stresses you because it raises your endorphins”

executives – it's a real ice-breaker.

When I first arrive at a corporate event, I'll meet a group of stern-looking professionals with arms folded and ties knotted.

Fifteen minutes later the ties have loosened, there's big smiles on their faces and there's a sense of unity in the room as they drum together like a tribe.

It's taken 30 years for me to get to where I am today – doing the thing I love most – playing music.

I was born in Britain but left when I was nine because my parents moved to New Zealand.

It was a great place to grow up, and as an only child I spent a lot of time on my own riding my horse and experimenting with music. I played the clarinet, learned the guitar and sang.

Then at 18 I hit a crossroads in my life. I was offered the chance to join a rock band, but I'd also fallen in love with an Italian man who had returned to Italy because he was very ill.

He was the captain of an Italian ship and I'd met him at a hotel I was working in as a receptionist.

My father gave me an ultimatum, either I stay in New Zealand and join the band, or he would buy me a one-way ticket around the world so that I could go to Italy and see my boyfriend.

In the end I took the ticket. At the time I did not realise what an impact that decision would have on my life. From then until now, I totally ignored music.

The relationship with the Italian guy didn't work out either, so I headed to the United Kingdom where I met my first husband.

He was Egyptian and on holiday from university. We fell in love and married in Cairo when I was 20 and two years later I gave birth to my son Tamer, who's 26.

By then both my parents had died. Their deaths made me feel very cut off from people, but I suppose what doesn't kill you makes you stronger and turns you into a survivor.

Sadly my marriage didn't work out and we divorced in my late 20s. I stayed in Egypt for my son and there I met my second husband – Dima's father.

My husband was a pharmacist and his job took us around the Middle East – including Dubai – but the marriage didn't last either.

After we split, Dima and I stayed here because I had a PR career so I've been here for more than eight years now.

I love the city because it has such a great energy. I often think there's a real synergy between Dubai and parts of my own personality. We both like to take risks, and live life on the edge in an exciting, dynamic environment.

At the same time we both believe in the family and having a supportive network around you.

It was here I met Guy at a party

five years ago. We knew straight-away that something was going to happen – Cupid's bow was definitely fired that night.

When we first got together there was no music in my life and no performing – that side of me was buried – but now it's my life.

**19.00** If there's no drumming event that evening, then I stay in and cook dinner for the family. It could be homemade tacos or roast beef. I prefer vegetarian food, but Guy is a real carnivore.

Trying to balance the drumming and see my family can be hard. Last weekend was the first weekend I've spent at home for months so we spent it chilling out together as a family.

If Drums of the World – my drumming group – is booked in for a gala dinner, then I charge out the door at about 6pm ready to perform.

I set up the group towards the end of last year gathering together a group of percussionists from across Dubai.

Our first performance was in Deira City Centre and we had no time to rehearse so it was a spontaneous jamming session.

Now we have a core group of 12 drummers but we can perform with as many as 25. We have musicians from Iran, Morocco, Kenya, South Africa, the Philippines, Japan and three locals too. We have all learned on different instruments, but we can blend all the rhythms together into this spectacular sound.

I sometimes think if we can make such an amazing sound without rehearsing – imagine what would happen if we did.

**00.00** I arrive home any time between midnight and 3am so bedtime falls into that slot. But as long as I get eight hours then I'm ready to start all over again.

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