

DOWNTOWN PERCUSSION STORE HOSTS PARTY  
CELEBRATING TWO DECADES IN SANTA CRUZ

# The Beat Goes On



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

World-renowned percussionist Dror Sinai plays some music at Rhythm Fusion, his downtown Santa Cruz store, on Thursday. Sinai has had his hands on the beat of Santa Cruz and the rest of the planet for 20 years through the store.

By WALLACE BAINE

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If, as the cliché goes, Santa Cruz does indeed march to a different drummer, you can bet where the drums came from.

Rhythm Fusion, the Santa Cruz-based percussion-instrument retailer, will be bringing out its drums Saturday for a downtown celebration, marking the company's 20th anniversary in business.

The store, tucked in an alley just off Pacific Avenue, has for two decades trafficked in percussion instruments imported from all over the world, from Indian tablas to African djembes to Middle Eastern frame drums, as well as gongs, bells, chimes and string instruments.

The business was significant in Santa Cruz from its beginnings. It was the late 1980s, in fact, when the drum-circle

SEE RHYTHM ON A2

## IF YOU GO

RHYTHM FUSION 20TH  
ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

**WHO:** Performances by Jim Greiner, Feldhouse, Danjuma Adamu and Onola  
**WHEN:** Noon to 5 p.m. Saturday  
**WHERE:** Rhythm Fusion, 1541, Suite C, Pacific Ave., Santa Cruz  
**DETAILS:** www.rhythmfusion.com

## RHYTHM

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movement swept across the country, fueled by such evangelists as Santa Cruz's Arthur Hull and the Grateful Dead's Mickey Hart, whose book and CD "Planet Drum" in 1991 turned into a global phenomenon.

Rhythm Fusion's founder and owner Dror Sinai was a pioneer in that movement as one of the first to bring ethnic and international percussion instruments to American audiences. When Sinai first started selling his own handmade drums, inspired by traditional drums from other parts of the world, he became part of a percussion arts trade association.

"When I first arrived there," he said, "there were only two people who had ethnic instruments and drums, me and somebody else."

Sinai started by making his own drums — "I would go to the flea market and buy those wooden salad bowls, put a skin on them, and there you go."

Soon, he was selling his own drums and others he had imported in various local stores. He didn't have a store of his own until the



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Dror Sinai works the counter at Rhythm Fusion where percussion is king, but not all that he sells. Sinai's business has been a fixture in downtown Santa Cruz for the last two decades.

1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. Then, he moved into an affordable space in one of the downtown tents provided for local businesses.

The interest in ethnic music and percussion exploded about the same time that Sinai was getting established

as a local business and a mail-order house. It has brought a parade of world percussionists — Zakir Hussein, Babatunde Olatunji, Layne Redmond, Poncho Sanchez — to Rhythm Fusion over the years.

The downturn in the

economy and new import regulations by the federal government has presented the company with some new challenges. "There's been some very serious changes to the industry," said Sinai. "But now, we just want to celebrate 20 years."