



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

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In this Issue

Steve Brown—
Our Executive
Director

Shakespeare and
Bones

Wireless Electric
Rhythm Bones

Bones Fest XIV
Preview

Recording
Rhythm Bones
for Posterity

Columns:
Executive Direc-
tor

Editorial

Letters to the
Editor

Recording of the
Quarter

Bones Calendar

Executive Director's Column

When you see the pictures of Bones Fest I held at Ev Cowette's house, with the bones hung on the mail box with love and care, you begin to realize what humble beginnings we have come from. Not that the pictures don't look absolutely delightful, or that I wouldn't now have given anything to have been there (I was actually invited), but when we take a close look at the upcoming Fest in Washington, D.C., we truly realize how far we've come. Bones Fest I, held in the cozy confines of the Cowettes back yard in Greensboro, N.C. was the first event of it's kind, between 12 or so bone playing crazed individuals with enough enthusiasm for 10 times that many. This years event is the culmination of the last 13 years, and brings us back to the DC area in great style. The surroundings, facilities, and

activities planned harkens us into a new era of Bones Fests, and one, I think, that Fred Edmunds would be proud of. Just the idea of a Bone playing parade in our Nations Capital alone is awe inspiring. Kenny Wohlin and Teri Davies are very hard at work, and plan on bringing us a number of firsts, in what promises to be a one of a kind venue. We may never have been able to plan a fest this far in advance, in what I hope will give everyone a good long opportunity to make their arrangements. So please, let's all make an attempt to attend the fest this year, one that will truly be looked upon as something special for years to come.

I want to thank Steve Wixson for giving me an opportunity to write about my Chieftains experi-

(Continued on page 2)

Steve Brown—Our Executive Director Played with the Chieftains

Steve Brown learned to play the bones from Percy Danforth in 1978. Over the last thirty years he has performed the bones and other percussion instruments in a variety of settings including festivals, concerts, coffee houses, and workshops. He has been a featured lecturer at the MFA in Boston, won the All Ireland Bone Playing Championship in 2003 and 2004, and is currently on staff at the Boston branch of the Comhaltas Music School. Here is the story of how he got to perform with the Chieftains.

The Chieftains were at the very beginning for me, not only of traditional Irish music, but of rhythm bone playing itself.

It was a warm spring afternoon when I wandered into a Cambridge record store nearly 35 years ago, and purchased a Chieftains recording with the bones on the cover. Although I've had many experiences with the music since then, I've never gone far from those early recordings, and I've been trying to replace some of my favorites on CD, having initially purchased them on vinyl.

So you can imagine the effect my phone call with Paddy Maloney had on me, just the presence of him alone was very moving, but when he invited me to come down to Symphony Hall in

Boston in March, 2009 to sit in with them, I had everything I could do to contain myself.

Six long months separated that phone call and the eventual performance, and it was a bit of a roller coaster experience. The world of professional musicians, and I say professional on a rather high level, is so very different than mine, I can tell you. Thousands of miles of traveling, and

(Continued on page 7)



Steve Brown in concert with the Chieftains in Symphony Hall in Boston. Steve is on the far left next to Kevin Coneff.

Editorial

An article on Steve Brown is way overdue except for the fact that you know a lot about him from his editorials and article submissions. So starting on Page 1 are a few details about his rhythm bones life that you probably don't know and his story about when he played with the Chieftains in Symphony Hall in Boston. This is the Profile of a Member for this quarter.

Scott Miller is making an impression on the rhythm bones community with his internet company, and promotes RBS resulting in a few new members. He has written a interesting and provocative article on William Shakespeare and bones. Steve Litsios, one of those new members who also created the illustration for the article, plays bones and washboard with The Crawfish Blues Band in Switzerland.

Mike Passeroti and I have been working for years on what I call digital bones and he calls electric bones. I put together a clumsy system using wires that ran up my arms to my electronics that I demonstrated at Bones Fest VI. Mike's article in this issue talks about the first practical version using a wireless transmitter. I would love to buy such a product in a store. Good work, Mike.

Bones Fest XIV will be here before we know it. This week I made my hotel reservations, and made plans to visit the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress where rhythm bones information is kept including recordings and these newsletters. Jennifer Cutting is our contact, and sent us information on how to visit them.

Letters to the Editor

The on-line newsletters are a good piece of work!! Thanks and congrats. I used Firefox and had no trouble searching any of the newsletters. The Table of Contents mentioned will add greatly. *Walt Watkins*

I met Dom Flemons at the Carolina Chocolate Drops show in Grand Rapids [read about Dom in the last newsletter]. That group is about to break it big time. He plays rhythm bones, jug, banjo and Dobro and really lives his music. Best to all. *Bill Vits*

(Executive Director Editorial continued from page 1)
ence, and in fact, for it happening at all. If it weren't for his idea of the article on rhythm bones and the Chieftains, my path would perhaps never have crossed with Paddy Maloney at all. Thanks too to Mel Mercier, who helped arrange the phone conversation that led to my performance with them. It's quite amazing to me that my accidental visit to a record store some 35 years ago would not only lead eventually to rhythm bones, but to a performance with the band in 2009, almost 31 years to the day when I saw them perform on the exact same stage! And thanks, of course, to Paddy himself, for giving an old bones player the opportunity. *Steve Brown*

Recording of the Quarter

Maybe after reading Bill Vits' Letter to the Editor and the short article in last quarter's newsletter on Dom Flemons, you are ready to hear what he and his Carolina Chocolate Drops sound like. You might love their new CD, *Genuine Negro Jig*. First there are four tracks with Dom on rhythm bones. Then there are tracks with vocals, throat singing, guitar, fiddle, four and five string banjo, jug, and other percussion by guest Sule Greg Wilson who also plays rhythm bones, but not on this CD.

They credit the Music Maker Relief Foundation "for their help in providing music and support during our journey." Music Maker says it is "dedicated to helping the true pioneers and forgotten heroes of Southern musical traditions gain recognition and meet their day-to-day needs. Our mission is to give back to the roots of American music."

Every track on this CD has a history of the legendary people who wrote it or who first recorded it. Credit for writing down the CD title song goes to Dan Emmett of the Virginia Minstrels (see Vol 6, No 1 for an article on Frank Brower, the first minstrel rhythm bones player, Dan Emmett and the Virginia Minstrels.)

Then if you want to listen more to the talents of Dom (1 bones track), get *Dom Flemons, American Songster*. See www.carolinachocolatedrops.com

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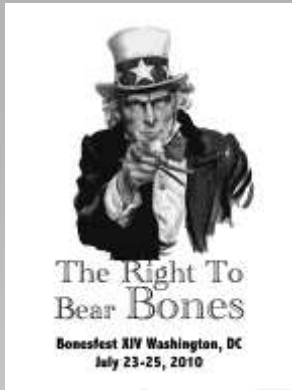
The Rhythm Bones Player is published quarterly by the Rhythm Bones Society. Nonmember subscriptions are \$10 for one year; RBS members receive the Player as part of their dues.

The Rhythm Bones Player welcomes letters to the Editor and articles on any aspect of bones playing. All material submitted for consideration is subject to editing and condensation.

Rhythm Bones Central web site: rhythmbones.com

Recording the Rhythm Bones for Posterity

The Museum of Fine Arts Musical Instrument Collection regularly records the instruments in their collection to preserve and demonstrate the sound of the instrument for their website and for future generations. Recently they asked me to play their set of antique ebony bones during a recording session. "What do I play?" I asked. "No music just the bones." The nearby recording studio was quite friendly, and the recording technician quite interested in the bones. Sometime in the future when you go to their website and click on hear instruments in the collection, the bones, it will be me clacking away all by myself in a recording studio! *Steve Brown*



Bones Fest XIV

Old Towne
Alexandria, VA
July 23-25, 2010

Hosted by
Teri Davies
and Kenny Wolin

For more information
kenny@mac.com

**PUT IT ON YOUR
CALENDAR NOW**

Details and
Registration Form
in this newsletter

Bones Calendar

Check out the Calendar on the rhythmbones.com website.
Bones Fest XIV. July 23-25, 2010, Old Towne Alexandria, VA. More details in the next issue.
NTCMA and Bones Contest. August 30-September 5, 2010. Bones contest on Saturday or Sunday.

Bone Fest XIV Preview

Greetings Rhythm Bones Society Members! The site for the 2010 Bones Fest has been set for Historic Old Town Alexandria VA on July 23-25 (registration and festivities begin at 11am!) This location offers so much in the way of history, entertainment, proximity to our nations Capital and of Old Town itself.

The newly renovated Crown Plaza (www.cpoldtownalexandriahotel.com) Hotel is located a block from the Potomac and minutes from Reagan National Airport and King Street in Old Town. For the DC area, we got a great rate of \$99 for Friday night and \$119 for Saturday (which includes our Sun. buffet in our private conference room). So that we may encourage you to come earlier and/or extend your stay, the Crown Plaza has agreed to hold our group rate of \$99 for all other days. **The deadline for hotel registration is June 21. Once the room block is released the hotel will most likely be booked up this time of year, and standard room rates are very high. Parking at the hotel is complementary for us!**

We are also pleased to announce that our host site for performances will be at the historic Lyceum (<http://oha.alexandriava.gov/lyceum/>). We are excited to note that the stage is being renovated using some of the original 18thc. ballroom flooring from Gadsby's Tavern, where notable visitors including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, James Madison & James Monroe danced. Members take advantage of our reduced rate for Bones Fest XIV!

In the meantime, we strongly urge you to make your travel and hotel booking arrangements as soon as possible, because Washington, DC is more visited than Disneyworld!

For those of you who attended last year's festival, we're also happy to announce that we'll be tying our "bonesfest knot" on Sunday morning!

To make this another great bone Fest, we'd love your input, so please feel free send suggestions.

Kenny Wolin & Teri Davies

Shakespeare and The Bones

Was William Shakespeare a big fan of the bones? Some players think so. After all, he did mention the bones in one of his plays. But what was Shakespeare really telling us about the bones?

Did Shakespeare hold some special regard for the rattle of the bones? I would like to think the Bard was a bones booster. But alas, if he thought bones were boss, then it must have been outside the world of the theatre. So for better or for worse, below are the results of my exploration into Shakespeare and the world of musical bones.

PROLOGUE. Shakespeare calls attention to the bones in just one play. And in that one-and-only play where he mentions the bones, the picture that he paints of them is bad - and I don't mean good. Well, that is my interpretation anyway. You are free to disagree of course. And if you do disagree, then I hope you are right and I am wrong.

SHAKESPEARE'S FAMOUS BONES QUOTE. If you hang around the world community of bones players long enough, then sooner or later someone will cite Bill's illustrious bones quotation.

Truth in advertising: This is the first time in 40 years that I have cracked open my Signet Classic paperback edition of this work. The last time was while I was in college on the G.I. Bill at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale majoring in theatre during the notorious 1970 spring semester noted for the student anti-war riots which shut down my school and others across the nation. The lingering aroma of tear gas still wafts up from the pages--but I digress.

The citation appears in Act IV, Scene I (line 31 and 32) of Shakespeare's play, "A Midsummer's Night's Dream," where Bottom the Weaver says in reply to Titania, queen of the fairies:

"I have a reasonable good ear in music. Let's have the tongs and the bones." (1)

So there you have it. That is the

famous Shakespearian bones quote in its entirety. It's short and sweet, isn't it? And it is blatantly obvious that our man (errr...ass) Bottom the Weaver holds the rattle of the bones in high esteem, right? And if you are familiar with the setting, then you are aware that Bottom fully expects the fairy queen would also share his taste in music. Yes, Nick Bottom holds the sound of the bones in awe. There is no doubt about that. Yes, I can see you shaking your head at this newsletter and bellowing, "But Shakespeare isn't saying bones are bad! He's saying bones are cool." Well...maybe. But look closely. That ain't Shakespeare saying the bones are cool. It's that yahoo Bottom who is doing the talking here. And friends, that's what makes all the difference. And it is the difference between night and day. Below is the reason why.

THE BARD'S BACKHANDED COMPLIMENT TO THE BONES? Anyone with an ounce of literacy can tell you that Shakespeare was England's greatest playwright. I am sure we can all agree that he was (and many say still is) the preeminent master of the dramatic word. So why did Shakespeare cast Bottom's lines about the bones in such a peculiar way?

Sorry if I seem to be the bearer of bad news, but when Bottom the Weaver speaks those lines, he is not exactly heaping praise on our favorite musical instrument. At best, Shakespeare was making a back-handed compliment about the bones. But don't take my word for it. You can evaluate the evidence and decide for yourself.

So what is it, exactly, that Mr. Shakespeare is trying to tell us about the bones? We will get to that soon enough. But first, what the heck are tongs?

An excellent answer to this often asked question can be found in "A Midsummer Night's Dream Study Guide" published by Glencoe/McGraw-Hill. The guide also gives us a good hint about what folks in Shakespeare's day think about the bones.

"Tongs were pieces of metal struck against each other and bones were actual bones," the citation reveals. It goes on to explain that "these

instruments were used in comical or in less sophisticated musical performances." (2)

The description seems reasonable enough. After all, I don't think any of us would claim the bones were ever a mainstay of high-brow music. The Study Guide clearly confirms the wacky nature and lowly status of the instrument. So here we have it on record that 16th century hooligans claimed the bones as their instrument of choice.

This is why it comes as no surprise

enchanted as our esteemed bones advocate Bottom the Weaver might be, he is nonetheless a tactless, low-class dolt. That repugnant oddball, I am sorry to report, is the personage Shakespeare chooses to "glorify" the bones.

THE PASSAGE IN PLAIN ENGLISH. Below is what Bottom is saying in modern English. These lines come from the SparkNotes study guide, "No Fear Shakespeare."

"I have a pretty good ear for music. Let's hear someone play the trian-



Shakespeare and The Bones. An illustration by Steve Litsios. Used with permission.

that Shakespeare uses the bones as a literary device to help him convey the distinctly unsavory demeanor of a character in the play; namely, Nick Bottom - whom at that fateful moment is literally an ass. As enchanting and

gle and the sticks." (3)

I don't know about you, but that description gives me the feeling that even one tune played by "the triangle and sticks" is more than a normal person would want to endure.

BAD BONES? I can't knock

Shakespeare for what he infers about the bones. After all, he was just doing his job. Bill was merely reflecting the sentiment of 16th century English society. And polite society during the Elizabethan Era held that the bones are a brash rustic instrument. So by implication, the instrument is played by persons who are rude, crude and socially unacceptable. That's why Shakespeare evokes the spirit of the bones. That's why the bones portray the sorry essence of that impertinent dimwit, Nick Bottom. That's why the bones are bad.

But don't lose hope. After all, Shakespeare was only 30 years old when he wrote this play. So, hey...what could a kid that young know about the bones anyway?

SHAKESPEARE MEETS AMERICAN MINSTRELSY. Let me point out to you that "A Midsummer Night's Dream" was written around 1595. And as many bone players know, Mister Bones, along with Mister Tambo (who were exceedingly popular during the U.S. Civil War), were the comic "end men" who first appeared on the American minstrel stage in 1843. Why are these two dates important? Because the Study Guide characterization of the comical quality of bones applies equally well to the quote in Shakespeare's day as it does to our celebrated Mister Bones two-and-a-half centuries later.

Just to be clear, tongs are a kitchen gadget, okay? Tongs are not exactly a proper musical instrument. And in Shakespeare's day the bones were closely associated with tongs. So in both eras, the bones were considered a lesser folk instrument. This suggests that bone playing was considered just as goofy during the American Minstrel Era as it was in Shakespeare's day.

I love bone playing and don't want to degrade the art. But let's face facts. Shakespeare's "tongs and bones" passage, as well as the 150-year American Minstrel Era, both portrayed bone playing as a cheeky practice.

BONES: "THE TERROR OF THE TRUE MUSICIAN" Below is an excellent interpretation of the "tongs and bones" passage by Shakespearean scholar, James Stalker. His analysis is

far more eloquent than mine.

"In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, that daintiest melange of fun and beauty, when Bottom the Weaver is resting his ass's head in the lap of Titania, the queen of the fairies, whom a perverse spell has caused to fall in love with him, she asks him,

"Wilt though hear some music, my sweet love?" And he answers, "I have a reasonable good ear in music. Let us have the tongs and the bones."

"The tongs and the bones were the highest of poor Bottom's musical aspirations. And there is a class which prefers the tongs and the bones to all other music still. I remember a worthy magistrate, who had exerted himself to provide some innocent entertainment to keep the loungers of the streets or of the public-house on Saturday nights, complaining to me that he could not get that class to come to hear any music unless the performers were dressed up with woolly wigs and corked faces. The tongs and the bones are the symbol of the crude, laughable and vulgar; and poor Bottom's ideal reigns in the music-hall; it invades the concert-hall and the drawing-room; and sometimes it does not spare even the Church itself. The tongs and the bones - and all they stand for - are the terror of the true musician." (4)

Stalker's 1913 interpretation of Shakespeare's "tongs and bones" passage was corroborated in 1970 by James Blades, a distinguished authority on musical percussion.

"Clappers in the form of marrow bones and cleavers were prominent in the traditional music of the butchers of England and Scotland. Both instruments are seen in Plate VI of Holbein's famous series (1538) "The Wedding of the Industrious Apprentice to His Master's Daughter." Shakespeare refers to such clappers in Bottom's remark in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: "I have a reasonable good ear in music: let us have the tongs and the bones." The tongs in this case were almost certainly kitchen utensils. With other items from this important room of the household - such as the pot and stick, stick and salt-box (Merry Andrew's instrument),

pan lids etc. - they were associated with burlesque music, though not on all occasions. Such implements and utensils formed the "orchestra" of the children and the elders of the poorer class who believed in the power of noise to keep away evil and add zest to rejoicing." (5)

NICK BOTTOM: A BONE PLAYER'S WORST NIGHTMARE? Well, I suppose you can interpret the "tongs and bones" passage as some sort of oblique tribute by Shakespeare to musical bone playing. But in my view that would be twisting his intent. The "tongs and bones" remark is an oxymoron. After all, Bottom is a fool whose idea of good music is the clamor of kitchen gadgetry. If Bottom was a cool dude that would be one thing. But he is not. Unfortunately, that bones-loving character is a creep.

We don't know if Nick Bottom plays the bones or not. But assuming he does, the characterization below by Oxford educated Jem Bloomfield, who specializes in Renaissance drama, describes Nick Bottom as what might just as well be the stereotypical bones player from hell.

"...he's a complete extrovert, bossy, energetic and quite annoying." (6)

A SIGNIFICANT BENCHMARK FOR MUSICAL BONES. So there you have it. Shakespeare thinks the bones are crass. But I do think it is cool that Shakespeare mentions my favorite instrument in one of his plays. Even if he does not regard them with glowing praise, this is indeed a significant benchmark in the long history of musical bones. And it just makes us want to work all that much harder to give bone playing a good name. After 400 years, I hope we can show that bone playing is more than just a kitchen gadget turned into a noise-maker.

EPILOGUE. Musical bones are a rustic instrument. And that pretty much sums it up. I am all for rustic instruments. They are often ingeniously simple contraptions that add a very special flavor to a tune - especially when played with skill and thoughtfulness.

So when it comes to Shakespeare and the bones, I guess the more things change, the more they stay the same.

But for most bone players - and please forgive me, Will - this entire article is much ado about nothing.

RESOURCES

(1) A Midsummer Night's Dream (By William Shakespeare, Signet Classics, The New American Library, 1963, 5th printing, Edited by Wolfgang Clemen, New York and Toronto, p 98)

(2) A Midsummer Night's Dream Study Guide (Glencoe/McGraw-Hill, August 1999, ISBN: 9780028180205, p 20)

(3) No Fear Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream (Act 4, Scene 1, Page 2, Edited by John Crowther, SparkNotes LLC, 2005)

http://nfs.sparknotes.com/msnd/page_124.html (accessed November 25, 2009)

(4) How to Read Shakespeare (By James Stalker, M.A. D.D., Hodder and Stoughton, 2nd ed., 1913) http://books.google.com/books?id=bOJIAAAIAAJ&pg=PA275&lp_g=PA275&dq=%22I+have+a+reasonable+good+ear+in+music%3B+let+us+have+the+tongs+and+the+bones%22&source=web&ots=DxwB3fzwqU&sig=gat4FQjnuFGkJyr-yveGRkvSgXI&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=7&ct=result

(5) Percussion Instruments and Their History (By James Blades, Edition: 4, rev., Bold Strummer, 1992, 1st Ed. published in 1970, p 195) James Blades was former Professor of Timpani and Percussion at The Royal Academy of Music, London, and contributor to The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians. http://books.google.com/books?id=a8V3ZGj2ExEC&pg=PA195&lp_g=PA195&dq=tongs+ancient+historic+musical+instrument+chinese&source=web&ots=AV6MRxiqLJ&sig=chZRmZMqQjoaZXuLL2FP42OO5CY#PPA194_M1

(6) Bottom in Midsummer Night's Dream: Shakespeare's Extrovert Actor With a Dream, Aug 20, 2007 by Jem Bloomfield http://shakespeare-comedies.suite101.com/article.cfm/bottom_in_midsummer_nights_dream

http://shakespeare-comedies.suite101.com/article.cfm/bottom_in_midsummer_nights_dream

Scott Miller. Copyright 2010.

Wireless Electric Rhythm Bones

Ever since the cave men began smacking bones together, our musical heritage has had percussive sounds. Or perhaps some grumpy cave men began smacking heads together and noticed a nice hollow sound. We just don't have that history written down. What we do know is that bones have been contributing percussive joy to music in just about every culture around the world. The tones vary from natural bone, cut and shaped bones, shin bones, rib bones, to wood "vegetarian bones" including all manner of wood in all manner of shapes. Now to bring this hand held instrument into the 21st century, electric rhythm bones are being invented to include wireless technology.

We'll leave the discussion of why to the end.

Inventing a new product involves many disciplines such as materials science, mold making, electrical and mechanical engineering. It also helps to know what off-the-shelf parts are available to make the development time shorter. The best designs take complex ideas and simplify the solution. As soon as I disclose how to make a wireless electric bone, you'll think it is simple. This particular invention is a fairly simple combination of other inventions that have also been simplified over the years. And fortunately for us, the components have also come down in price. You must know that the inventing process is never done in isolation and I owe a great deal to Dan Ludemann for his time, knowledge and investment.

The wireless bones comprise of audio pickup packaged in a bone, wireless transmission of the sound, wireless reception of the sound, and then some form of amplification of the sound. Once the audio signal becomes electrical, more options are available such as shaping the sound or just using a portion of the audio signal to trigger the formation of a totally different sound. This invention opens new possibilities even though it is incomplete.

Audio pickup and transformation

into an electrical signal representing the audio wave is accomplished with a very small microphone. There are other options such as piezo electric sensors like drum triggers. There are accelerometers, pressure sensors, proximity sensors, magnetic sensors, infrared sensors and others yet to discover. I have attempted to test with as many as I could and I found that a simple lapel microphone picks up the sound very well in a wave shape that is strong enough and well formed to become a trigger to or for straight amplification.

Dan and I attempted to find a wireless transmitter that fits inside the shape of a real bone. The transmitter miniaturization is a task yet to be accomplished. Until we find a good one, the best option discovered is a belt clip sized wireless transmitter with a small wire running between the transmitter and the microphone embedded into a bone. The small size of the lapel mic and the small, discrete wire makes it fairly easy to wear. The wire is a temporary discomfort and the hope is that a smaller wireless transmitter will become available or be revealed.

The lapel mic and wireless transmitter also comes with a wireless receiver. There are many options for wireless transmitters for circumstances such as multiple wireless microphones operating in close proximity or the need for longer transmitting range. With each additional feature, the cost rises. Fortunately for my experiments, I only needed one transmitter with a short range and the sound quality didn't matter very much to me. I found a low cost lapel mic transmitter set on sale for less than \$80.

To play the rhythm on a bone we needed a way to embed the lapel mic in the bone. We started by molding a plastiscene bone shaped thing that had a chamber where the lapel mic could be snapped in and the wire held. We hoped to make the bone durable but found that the modelers' plastiscene is weak. The second experiment kneaded fiberglass into the plastiscene and found the strength is greatly improved. Another experiment com-

(Continued on page 8)

(Steve Brown Continued from page 1)

hundreds of people all working together to make it work. Sometimes it's easy to get lost in those many layers that separate the performers from the everyday people, and it was amongst those layers that I found myself for several months. Very busy people, unreturned phone calls, and very strange reactions to my standard explanation, "I play the bones". Although the Chieftains, and Paddy Maloney himself are well familiar with the bones (see the Chieftains article in Vol 10, No.3), many of the people who work with him and around him have no idea of some of the intricacies of traditional music, of which rhythm bones would be one.

Suffice it to say that gradually things began to smooth out, and I had my instructions: report to the stage entrance at Symphony Hall at 5:30pm for the 8pm show where Paddy would go over my part with me. It was all starting to seem like it was really going to happen, now the panic sets in.

Symphony Hall is truly one of the great performance venues in the country, perhaps the world. In fact it was almost 30 years to the date that I had seen the Chieftains perform there in what was to be my first of many times seeing them. The thought enough was overwhelming.

One of my truly bad habits is showing up early for everything. This can be particularly difficult in the Irish culture, because you could almost say the opposite is true—they are late for everything. In fact we've come to refer to it as real time versus Irish time, and you never expect things to start on time—in fact plan for it to be late. But there I was, walking up to the stage entrance at 5 pm for my 5:30 time.

Now starts my indoctrination into the world of professional musicians and production people. My name was not on the guest list as the agent had said, and the tour manager was not informed that I was to perform with them. None of the Chieftains were anywhere near Symphony Hall at 5:30, and all of this in the back drop of, "you play the what? You're going to do what? Who told you to be here?"

When Paddy and the boys arrived they had much bigger fish to fry than

one lonely bone player standing at the back of the stage. When I did speak with him Paddy was very friendly, but the strain of touring was obviously taking it's toll. On this night he had a great deal of difficulty getting the pipes to behave, which took up most of his time. For my part I waited, back stage for most of the 2 and ½ hours until the performance, trying not to get in any ones way, but feeling a bit like a distant relative who showed up unexpectedly for dinner.

The Chieftains, or the "Chieftain" as a friend of mine refers to them, has only one of the original members left, Paddy Maloney himself. Kevin Coneff, Bodhran, and Matt Molloy, flute, are all that remain of the core of the band having joined in 1976, and 1979 respectively. They are now joined by some very talented musicians and dancers from Canada and the United States. Two very good fiddle players, an accomplished harpist, a well known country singer, and some amazing step dancers now comprise what once was an entirely Irish ensemble. But they wear the mantle well, and put on a very tight, and exciting show with music sampled from their numerous recordings. This evening they were joined by a local bag pipe band, and a group of young Irish step dancers from one of the local schools. I stood back stage in awe of the comings and goings, watching most of the show on the monitors.

I began to gather that my part would be entirely at the end of the evening, when the band performed what is now known as the "Grand Finale." Taken from several albums, the band plays on tune several times, a member does a solo of sorts, the band repeats the tune again until each member has taken a turn. The Chieftains often ask local musicians to join them on this, playing mostly on the main tune.

The show progressed well. By the time we were well into the second half, I had relocated to the stage managers chair, just off stage left. I was much more comfortable, had a much better view and was really settling in, when I could have sworn Paddy called my name. "Did he call my name?" I asked the lead female singer, "What's

your name?" she said, "Steve Brown" I replied, "I believe he did!" She went out on stage and soon was waving me on, the time had come and I had almost missed it, perhaps getting a little too comfortable.

Kevin Coneff motioned for me to join him on his side, and when I settled in and looked up, the enormity of the building and it's grandiosity struck me. I was playing the bones on stage at Symphony Hall! The band broke into an old Scottish reel, "Miss McLeod's Reel" also called Uncle Joe on this side of the pond. Soon I was clacking away, oblivious to my surroundings, and just enjoying the moment. At one point Kevin turned around and moved a microphone in front of me, I have no idea if anyone could even hear me, but who cares, I'm playing with the Chieftains! Hey I can hear them! Several more local players joined the band, Peter Molloy, Matt's son, Tommy McCarthy jr from the well known Clare musical family and an old friend of Paddy's, and Jimmy Noonan, great flute player and Professor of music at Boston College, I was in good company.

Just as quickly as it had started, it was over, as the strains of Miss McLeod's reel came to a halt. Off the stage and back to my place, but it had worked! Soon they were playing their encore, the bagpipes were chanting for the last time, and the musical evening had come to a close. As the band left the stage and the audience began to file out, I went out to the lobby to meet and greet my own little entourage, my brother and his wife, two of my students, and a number of my fellow session members, all congratulating me.

Before taking off, I went and thanked Paddy once more, and made my way up to Matt Molloy to also thank him. I was able to squeeze into Kevin Coneff's dressing room for a brief chat on the bones (he has some but doesn't play them much) and to thank him for the assistance with the microphone. As I went out of the dressing room, he said, "See you next time" and the possibility hit me. Well I won't be waiting for that phone call, but if it comes, I'll be ready. *Steve Brown*

(Continued from page 6)

pared an open mic on the bone to the microphone completely embedded with a sound chamber. The closed sound chamber has the benefit of reducing feedback and stray audio pickup. The electronics adjustment is vital to dealing with the audio pickup sensitivity because the embedded mic is very sensitive.

The wireless receiver audio output jack can go to either an amplifier or to the trigger input to a drum module. If anyone desires a straight amplification of the sound a bone makes, it might be possible with very careful selection of the materials, very careful shaping of the sound chamber in the bone, and very careful adjustment of the microphone sensitivity. Our experiments didn't create a very convincing bone sound. However, the sound used as a drum trigger input provided some great fun in choosing what the bone sounded like. We tried snare drum, toms, cymbals, and some far-out sounds. We immediately recognized that the method of playing rhythm could be separated from what sounds come out of the instrument.

We have molded a bone shaped instrument with an embedded lapel mic, wirelessly transmitted that audio signal, and used the receiver audio output as a drum trigger input. The equipment list is fairly small: plasticene, fiberglass, wireless lapel mic setup, drum module, and an amplifier with speakers. The only thing custom made was the bone. The rest is readily available with many options and prices.

After this accomplishment, Dan and I have set our sights on the ability to rotate through different drum sounds while playing the bones like Steve Wixson demonstrated at Bones



Photograph of a Wireless Electric Rhythm Bone

Fest VI. Why? Because we can, and it is so much fun inventing a new kind of instrument based on what I love playing most, rhythm bones. Besides, what Steve Wixson accomplished with a wired setup, I just had to try to make a wireless system. The Rhythm Bones Society inspires me.

Want to see it in action. Check out this YouTube link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txfOSIl0pkk>
Mike Passerotti (Cincinnati)

Rhythm Bones Society

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Address Correction Requested