



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

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In this Issue

JC Burris, Bones Playing Blues Performer

Greg Adam's and Rowan Corbett's 19th Century Music Workshop

First Announcement of Bones Fest XVI

The Klepperle Video From Germany

Nice Story from Hank Tenenbaum

Mitch Boss Gets a Nice Gig

Columns: Executive Director

Editorial

Letter to the Editor

Website of the Quarter

Recording of the Quarter

Bones Calendar

Executive Director's Column

Never assume that you've told everyone you know about the bones, and never forget there are budding bone players lurking around every corner.

A few weeks ago we were off to a family gathering, my brother in law's 50th birthday, in fact. Now I love my brother in law, but having been busy for the three previous week ends, I would much have preferred to stay home and work on an over due bones order. But being the supportive family man (my wife isn't going to read this, is she?), I volunteered to drive her, my son Jeremy, and my mother in law the 50 or so miles over to his house.

I don't usually bring the bones to things like this, although I always have bones in the car. They tend to be mismatched, seconds I keep to

be ready when the urge hits and a good piece of music comes on the car radio, and I just can't not play to it. ????

But on this occasion, bone playing was the farthest thing from my mind, hoping to pay my respects and be home before dark.

I have a number of nieces and nephews all of whom I assumed are well acquainted with the bones, and have perhaps heard too much bone playing, which would make my hauling out the bones a torturous event, or so I assumed.

In one section of the kitchen, I sequestered myself next to several of my nephews, the oldest having been well indoctrinated into the bones, but the other two in their teens, and perhaps. I had always assumed they weren't inter-

(Continued on page 3)

JC Burris, Bones Playing Blues Performer

As is sadly the case with much blues, recognition of the art of JC Burris has been extremely long in coming. He lived and played in the Bay Area for nearly twenty years, yet he remained a stranger to many local audiences. Thus, it did not seem particularly strange that Burris opened a radio concert by singing his composition, *'I'm a Stranger Here, Just Mowed Into Town.*

Born in 1928 near Shelby, North Carolina, some JC Burris' earliest memories were of music

as played by his uncle, the venerable bluesman Sonny Terry. Terry was frequently accompanied by Blind Boy Fuller or Big Bill Broonzy, both seasonal visitors to the Burris farm, and Terry remains the most important Influence on Burris' music.

Music was an integral part of the rural community of North Carolina. During harvest time, families from neighboring farms gathered to aid in corn shucking. Burris' father would motivate the helping hands by hiding jugs of white lightning' beneath the piles of

corn. As J.C. puts it, the white lightnin' seemed to stimulate the corn shucking so that the party could begin.

"There was no pay to shuck the corn." he recalled. "The lady folk would cook barbecue, and everyone'd have whiskey to drink. They'd bring out their guitars and the tub with a string and they'd play. I was a little boy and I'd stay out and watch 'em. If they tried to make me go

(Continued on page 6)



J.C. Burris playing harmonica and Joe Birl Rhythm Bones. Photo by Susanne Kaspar

Editorial

I discovered JC Burris when I researched rhythm bones in the Library of Congress just prior to BFIII in Brightwood, VA. I purchased a custom recording from Smithsonian/Folkway featuring JC, his uncle Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee, all old-time blues musicians. More recently, I bought a copy of his *Blues Professor* CD, and while there are only two tracks with rhythm bones, they contain long bones solos that are great. Ed Michaels produced a video of Burris, and helped with the article which starts on Page 1.

Mary Lee Sweet is hosting Bones Fest XVI. She worked hard trying to get us performing at Disney World, but they just don't know what to do with us. The Orlando area is a playground and the venue she had lines up is great.

The response to the November update to our website about the Klepperle is gratifying as reflected in emails and Letters to the Editor. See the brief story on Page 3, and then look at the video on our website. They have a tradition that gets children involved. Can we learn anything from them?

Member Dom Flemons of the Carolina Chocolate Drops performed at our 10 day spring festival called Riverbend (the Tennessee River runs through Chattanooga), and acknowledged me from the stage. In the audience was the Editor of the slick paper Chattanooga Magazine, and she became intrigued by the rhythm bones. The result was a story about me in the magazine, and if you haven't heard enough about me from this newsletter, check it out at rhythmbones.com/documents/ChattMagWixson.pdf.

This issue has the 2012 dues notice as an insert. After a couple of years of declining membership, we end the year with about 90 members. Some of the credit goes to PayPal, and you can use it to renew for 2012.

Letters to the Editor

I just had a look at your homepage, it looks great! I want to set a link on

our Niggelturm Museum homepage to your homepage, so our members and visitors can then see what we have connections to USA. On 11/11/2011 we have our annual General Meeting of Narrenzunft Gengenbach. Greetings to you all from Gengenbach, Germany. *Reinhard Enderle* [Reinhard edited the Klepperle video.]

[Member Andy Cox forwarded a link to our homepage to a friend, and this was her reply.]

O Andy, that video is wonderful. I make them too with children! Not from bone but from wood.

The "kleppers" are not popular in the Netherlands nowadays, but they were very popular in the days my mother and father were young. They both play on family-occasions like birthdays. I have an uncle and an aunt also in their late eighty's who went until a couple of years ago to schools and tell the children about how life was before WWII. They also taught the children to play the Kleppers.

When I go with one of my choirs to perform in a home for the elderly, I take lots of kleppers with me, and there are always elder women who were klepperkampioen (I think clapperchampion) in their youth. So we sing the famous song you've heard (go to <http://www.gerardlenting.nl/Kleppermars/kleppermars.html> to hear it), and the public kleppers with us! Of course we rehearse first. You heard some louder claps, and places where the kleppers must be kept silent. You can imagine it's a lot of fun.

I live near The Hague, and in the Hague was until approx. 50 years ago a famous girls- band, called "De Ooievaartjes" which means "the little Storks". The stork is the symbol for The Hague. And storks clapper of course. They had lots of songs, and performed on the national radio.

The Dutch kleppers are made from different kinds of wood, and have no exact measures. It's just a rectangle piece of wood in the measures you like. Some like them a bit round, or longer than usual, or thin. Some put pins in it so the metal heads klepper even louder.

The tradition is that your father makes them for you out of some left-

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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

over wood. Some ladies in my choir have beautiful old kleppers with a beautiful patina from using them a lot. I will send you some pictures, when I see the ladies again.

I like very much reading on your website about the kleppers, the bones and the klepperle, and I try to make and play them all. Thank you! *Dorine Maalcke*

Website Updates

The October update featured the graduation of now Dr. Mel Mercier and a BFIII highlights video. November featured the Klepperle as described on Page 3, and the video was children making Klepperle. December featured the Adams and Corbett 19 Century Music Workshop (See Page ??????) in both photograph and video. (OR Greg & rowan video from BFXIV.)

(Continued from page 1)

ested. Video games, and intelligent phones were the topic of choice, and although I made a bit of small talk, I was mostly an observer.

"Have you ever seen him play the bones?" my oldest nephew asked the other two. Soon, he was launching into a description of bone playing and recounting some of my adventures, somewhat documented on YouTube. He went to the silverware draw, and produced two spoons, and holding them like bones, began to produce a very credible rattle. As the scene unfolded, I began to realize the awe, and sincere interest my younger nephews were displaying, all at instruction of my older nephew.

Off to the car to find as many bones as I could, and back with two or three very mismatched pairs, but workable.

The rest of the afternoon turned out to be a delightful teaching experience for me, and the beginning of their bones playing, which I think will continue on for some time.

When the afternoon was up, and leaving was impending, each one asked if they could "borrow" the mismatched bones to practice.

The next week, they both attended a birthday party for my mother in law at my house, and received their own pair, and more instruction.

So right in my midst, after I thought I had mined all the interest there was in my family, come two sincere, and budding bone playing students! And seeing the obvious delight in their faces at playing the bones, it has made me realize that there are many more people out there to reach, to teach, and bring into this bone playing experience. Never give up, the next youngster you meet just might be the next Sky Bartlett!

When I bounced up stairs after talking to Mary Lee Sweet, to give my wife the news that Mary Lee is seeking to hold the next Bones Fest in the Orlando area, you'd think I had just won the lottery. The idea of going to Florida, and all that it offers, had her dancing around the house. Mary Lee has some excellent idea's, and her hard work and persistence will pay off for us, I'm sure of it. Hope to see you all there! *Steve Brown*

Bones Fest XVI

Orlando, Florida

August 9-11,
2012

Host

Mary Lee Sweet

Preliminary
Information Below

Bones Fest XVI
Brings the
Magic Bones to
the Magic City of
Orlando, Florida

Come on down to the land of Magic! If you are a sports fan, we are the home of the Orlando Magic. If you are a horticulturist, we have orange blossoms, orchids and air plants (Spanish Moss). If you like critters you can swim with Manatees, try to see the mockingbird's wings fluttering or watch the alligators - from a safe distance.

Come to the Land of Sunshine and create some Bone Rattling magic! Orlando is a city where people sing, play, dance and are waiting to discover how to play the rhythm bones. Amid palm trees swaying in the warm summer breezes the Rhythm Bones Society will bring a new experience to Orlando's city of entertainment. *Mary Lee*

Bones Calendar

Bones Fest XV. August 9-11, 2012, Orlando, FL.

NTCMA and Bones Contest. August 29-September 4, 2011. Bones contest on Saturday or Sunday.

Mitch Boss Gets a Nice Gig

I had the pleasure a while back of playing bones as the guest performer with the Philidor Percussion Group (see photograph on Page 8.) John J. Beck set it up at a concert in Greensboro NC. John teaches percussion at UNC School of the Arts School of Music and he is President Elect of The Percussion Arts Society. John is a new member of The Rhythm Bones Society.

The Philidor Percussion Group is made up of John, Wylie, Kris and Peter (last names evade my feeble brain). They are all teachers of percussion and performers in regional symphonies. At the Greensboro concert, I got to play bones with them playing marimbas (go to <http://vimeo.com/29967523> to see the performance.) I have to tell you these guys put on a performance of various percussion instruments that was mind boggling. John has asked me to come to School of the Arts December 13th to be 'guest artist and clinician' to talk to the students and play a few of the rags that we played with the Philidor Group. I would just love to see some of these young percussion musicians add rhythm bones to their repertoire.

Mitch Boss

Website of the Quarter

Greg Adam and Rowan Corbett's 19th Century Workshop

It was with great anticipation that I hopped into the car of my fiddler friend Bruce Reich on the morning of November 12th. Bruce and I were on our way to The Harpers Ferry Violin, Bones and Banjo Workshop Weekend, hosted by the National Park Service Harpers Ferry 19th Century Music Academy. I knew organizer and banjo instructor Greg Adams and bones instructor Rowan Corbett from Bones Fest XIV and simply couldn't wait to see them again. Anyone who attended that Fest knows what rare talents these two affable gentlemen are. Just the thought of a visit with these two and meeting the violin instructor Chuck Krepley was enough to get me up in the wee hours of a chilly November morning in West Virginia. But Greg's organizational skills, extensive knowledge of minstrel period music, early banjo history, and his ability to attract like minded individuals combined to produce a workshop weekend that will long be remembered by all those in attendance.

The workshop was held at the train station in the Harpers Ferry Historic District in the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia. One of the first exercises was simply to introduce ourselves. I was immediately struck by the distances some of the attendees had travelled. Harpers Ferry is roughly a 2 hour drive from DC or Baltimore and a mere 45 minute commute for me and Bruce. Others had come from Pittsburgh, New York State, Massachusetts, North Carolina and Michigan. Clearly they were expecting something special and the workshop did not disappoint.

Park Ranger Melinda Day welcomed us and reinforced the importance of engaging the public. Our historic sites are suffering record lows in visitors. As the stewards of a musical tradition reaching back through the ages we have not only the opportunity but also perhaps the responsibility to reach out and engage the public. This responsibility comes not only from the interest of preserving our shared musi-

cal tradition, but also in raising critical awareness as well as enthusiasm for the history that has defined our American culture.

This brings us to an interesting conundrum. Many of us in the bones community are familiar with and excited about minstrel music. Many of these tunes are just plain fun! But minstrelsy cannot be separated from its historical context. That context raises many issues that we generally aren't comfortable with in the framework of a modern society. While race, class, gender and political issues are often integral to almost any kind of music, with blackface minstrelsy these issues are punctuated by burnt cork, stereotypes, and repertoire that is often difficult to discuss or openly perform without explanation. Yet, without them blackface minstrelsy could not have existed. So how do you promote an inclusive discussion of this period in our history without perpetuating the racial, social, and political attitudes that were minstrelsy's foundation?

To shy away from these issues does a disservice to our shared cultural experience while bringing them up can often times be painful. Only by placing these musical pieces in their historical context can we hope to be true to our heritage by taking personal ownership of both the good and the bad. Whether we sing the songs as written or eliminate certain words or phrases it is important to call attention to how the piece would have been understood at the time. Ignoring the social implications of a piece of music written long ago, because it contains language or ideas that are out of our current comfort zone, does not help our society to move forward. Denying a trauma does nothing to help it heal.

This of course led us into a discussion of the history of the three instruments featured in the workshop. As there are many excellent sources and many individuals more qualified than I to speak on these topics I won't go into detail. Suffice to say that the evolution of Violin, Bones and Banjo in the context of the minstrel band was created largely through the confluence of European and West African interactions in a distinctly American way.

Our instructors did an excellent job in painting this picture for us.

After a break for lunch, the instrumental workshops began. There were two sessions so that attendees were not limited to joining a session for just one instrument. Banjo was by far the most popular. Violin and Bones were both well attended, though the number of banjo players interested in the bones probably made the bones sessions the second most popular. Forgive me if I'm expressing a personal bias here.

Rowan is an expert bones player and a patient teacher. Unsure of how to gauge the level of interest in the bones I had offered to assist in facilitating that portion of the breakout sessions. That turned out to be a welcome proposition. I don't have a completely accurate count of how many bones pupils we worked with but it was definitely in the double digits. Given that the total attendance was limited to 30 individuals, I'd say that was pretty good.

The first thing that struck me in working with these musicians was the high level of interest and motivation that they brought with them. I'm sure that most if not all of you reading this have encountered inquisitive individuals and given impromptu bones lessons on probably more than one occasion. The difference in the attitudes of these attendees was immediately apparent.

Working together with Rowan was a real treat. With an instructor and a teacher's aide, if you will, we were able to provide a high level of individual attention. Not only that, we were able to provide different perspectives on both instruction and approach. If someone was working with me and hit a wall, Rowan was able to lift them over it and vice versa.

This sort of tag team teaching approach proved highly successful. By the end of the weekend everyone that we worked with exhibited a fundamental grasp of the triplet with at least one hand. Even better than that was the fact that we started to field questions along the lines of "how do I integrate my left hand?" and "now that I have the basics, what do I do in a musical setting?" What a joy to be able to

offer insight and suggestions to budding bones players!

My friend Bruce was ecstatic to attend the violin sessions. He noted that there was plenty of individual attention from instructor Chuck Krepely. They worked on interpreting banjo notation for the fiddle as well as building repertoire, often by ear. Banjo was certainly the most attended workshop, along with supplying the bulk of the bones players, but I think it's best if I let Greg speak to this.

After the instrument breakout sessions came a dance presentation by Emily Oleson. Emily reminded us that it's impossible to look at modern Appalachian Flat Footing, Clogging, Tap or Irish Step Dancing to see exactly what these dances would have looked like. At the same time, there are threads of the minstrel tradition in all of these styles. Like its instrumental counterparts, dance in the minstrel era evolved from a mixture of European and West African influences. Emily's presentation established a framework that allowed for a greater appreciation of her husband's (Matthew Olwell) virtuosic dance performance, which came at the culmination of the weekend.

Following Saturday's dinner break it was time for what I generally consider to be my favorite thing – jamming! All of the attendees had something to offer musically. Early Sunday we continued this theme. Those who wanted additional time with the instructors were given access while everyone else was encouraged to continue to make musical connections and to sign up for the performance. I was fortunate enough to accompany some great players and thoroughly enjoyed every minute.

The weekend culminated in a public performance outside the station. We began with all attendees playing "Old Dan Tucker" as part of Greg's "How large can we make an ensemble?" experiment. Highlights are too numerous to name as all of the performers excelled. I will however point out a personal favorite of mine which was Rowan playing bones while Rhianon Giddens played banjo and sang "Georgia Buck". Another favorite was a medley by our instructors featuring the dancing of Matthew Olwell. You can check out the video of that piece here: <http://youtu.be/njAy2TjD1ts>

All in all I can't say enough about

Steve Brown at the Lost Arts Festival

Times certainly have changed in this vast country of ours. Words like Web, and mouse have taken on a whole new meaning. People carry around phones, and do things with them that we couldn't have imagined even 10 or 20 years ago. Vinyl recordings look ancient and out of place next to a compact disc, not to mention an iPod.

But if we think things have changed in our life time, think about our fathers and grandfathers. My father was born into a world that most people got around on horses, and electric lights were a luxury.

That to a certain extent is the basis of the Lost Arts Festival sponsored by the Rutland Massachusetts Historical Society, and held on the Rutland Common on October 1st of this year. Blacksmithing, spinning wool, and weaving are only a few of the activities featured in an attempt to bring people back to a previous time in our history.

And for music what else could you have at a "Lost Arts" Festival, but the rhythm bones and the banjo! It was on that premise and at the invitation of the Historical Society that my good friend Andy Chase, banjo player extraordinaire, and I made our way to the Rutland Common to give people a taste of music of the 1800's as played on an authentic tack head banjo, and, of course, the rhythm bones.

It was, unfortunately, a misty, rainy day there in Rutland. The rain poured down as I gathered bones and 'period' clothing, and ran from the car to the organizers tent to announce our arrival. We were met with enthusiastic response, little effected by the weather, and within a few minutes we

had our own shelter of a tent constructed just for the music and bone playing instruction that we were scheduled to give.

But would there be anyone to play to or teach the bones to would be the question. At 10am we began our program, and slowly the rain drops started to disappear. With each tune, things became a little brighter, and gradually folks began to emerge, and make their way to the common. People really seemed to like the music, and a number of folks asked questions both of the bones and the banjo.

The rhythm bone playing workshop was scheduled for 11:30, and low and behold, 10-15 hearty souls had gathered to learn

how to play the bones. Undaunted by the rain, and clearly enthusiastic, a number of them were able to produce the rattle, and were well on their way to playing bones! After a brief intermission,



Andy Chase and Steve Brown at the Lost Arts Festival

Andy and I paraded around the common, which by now was completely dry, and even a few peaks of sunshine were starting to show. We marched down to the Blacksmiths tent, over by the sheep pen, up to the spinning wheel, and back by the loom, to the tunes of *Lucy Neal*, *Old Joe* and *The Boatman*. I began to feel like we were in another time, when this music and these instruments were more regularly heard and seen.

As the hour of two o'clock approached and we played our final tune, the folks of Rutland voiced their appreciation, not only of our music, but of the festival itself. We had many a heartfelt appreciation expressed to us, for which we were grateful. As we made our way off of the Common, and expressed our thanks at being asked to be part of this unique festival, we hoped that next year we would again be a part of the festival, and that the sun might make a longer appearance as well! *Steve Brown*

Klepperle Video From Germany

There was an interesting video about Karnival in Germany on the television Travel Channel. It included a section on the Klepperle, what we call rhythm bones (see photograph on Page 8 and read Jonathan Danforth's article in the Vol 7, No 2 newsletter now on-line.) From the credits, I was able to contact the producers who gave us a copy of a video just about the Klepperle and permission to add it to our website. It became the centerpiece of the November update to our website, and got a big response from people (see Letters to the Editor.)

This is a wonderful video about the Klepperle (go to rhythmbones.com/KlepperleVideo.html.) What you will see is Klepperle instruction, children making Klepperle, children competing to be the Klepperle King, Queen, Prince and Princess and children and adults marching in parades, the most important being part of Fastnacht, a Marti Gras-like event, where the Klepperle and other noise instruments drive out the evil spirits of winter. Four cities are highlighted; Gengenbach, Haslach, Radolfzell (see also klepperle.de) and Waldkirch.

This is a tradition that goes back hundreds of years, and there are hundreds if not thousands of children and adults who play the Klepperle. The video is in German, but you will have little trouble understanding what you see. It is amazing!

Video credits: Narrators, Rudiger Stadel, Michael Bahr and Gerd Birsner; Photographs, Rutiger Stadel; Camera and Editing, Reinhard Enderle; Producer: Thomas Rautenberg; and Director, Reinhard Enderle. Released March 2011. RBS also thanks Jurgen Rapple for his help. Reinhard Enderle and I have exchanged several emails, and his last is a Letter to the Editor. Enjoy the video! *Steve Wixson*

Nice Story from Hank Tenenbaum

What does this have to do with bones? Bear with me a moment.

Years ago I shared a house in Cabin John, MD with a guitar maker, Andy Adams, deceased last year. It was not uncommon to wake up on a Sunday morning to the whole Seldom Scene band or Doc Watson jamming in the living room or kitchen. From time to time I would go with Andy to visit his mentor, Sophocles, at the Guitar Shop when it was located on M Street in DC. Andy & Sophocles would talk technique (making or playing or both) and I would stare at the wood.

Years after I moved out and Andy moved to Shepherdstown, WV, Sophocles gave his shop to Steve Spellman. Steve later relocated the shop to its current location just off Connecticut Av around the corner from M Street.

About two years ago when Steve was tidying up his shop he found these (see photograph) stuck behind something and buried in the clutter. He knew of my avocation and gave them to my friend Carl to give to me. You can see from the photo they were opened and re-stapled. This is a pair of member Joe Birl's plastic bones with the PAT. NO. 2436283 on the bones. The instructions are still inside the package. How these bones came to be in one of the premier guitar shops in the country is certainly a mystery. Steve doesn't know. They came with the shop, buried and forgotten.

Simon and Garfunkel bought guitars here. Jim Hendrix left signature clothing (proudly displayed in the vault) for repairs. Charley Byrd used to "hang out". The list of renowned classical and contemporary guitar players that came thru this shop is staggering. And plastic bones. This ones for YOU, Joe Birl! *Hank*



(Continued from page 1)

to bed, I'd hide under the shucks because I loved music. They'd do the hand jive and play the two sticks or bones. During the day I'd practice on the bones when no one was around."

The hand jive and the bones are part of a family music tradition which J.C. Burris incorporated into his stage. The hand jive consists of a rapid hand slapping of the chest, legs, arms, and other hand. It progresses from simple rhythmic patterns into complex melodies, requiring immense concentration, stamina, and hand speed. Burris throws himself into the hand jive with such ferocity that on one occasion he loosened two teeth with one flailing blow.

The bones or African rhythm bones, are two sticks which are held in one hand and clicked together with quick wrist motions, establishing a basic rhythmic pattern. When J.C. Burris played harmonica, bones and sings simultaneously, he was indeed a busy man.

The harmonica was the mainstay of Burris' blues. He was only seven years old when Sonny Terry began teaching him the fundamentals of harmonica playing. He began seriously exploring the harmonica when he moved New York City in 1949. There Terry coached J.C. on the circle breathing method which allows him to play without pausing to inhale or exhale. This "loop breathing" technique let Burris play for hours without tiring.

In New York, Burris spent his days working in the garment district and his nights playing with such blues luminaries as Sticks and Brownie McGee, the Rev. Gary Davis, and of course Sonny Terry. Burris began to forge a distinctive style; and soon he was doing recording sessions with Sonny, Brownie, Sticks, and Lightnin' Hopkins for the Folkways, Prestige, and Bluesville labels.

A failed marriage forced Burris to leave New York. As Burris put it half seriously, "wife trouble got me to really start playing the blues". Hitching a freight headed west, Burris found his way to Los Angeles in October, 1959.

In L.A., Burris survived by passing hand bills and playing music In the

streets. That didn't last very long, however because his music drew such large crowds that Burris was soon arrested for 'creating a public nuisance.

"They took me to Jail." he says. "This being my first time in L.A. they didn't know me. The judge told me not to do it no more. He said that the harmonica makes a sound that people like, and you can draw a crowd especially out where the elderly people live, some young boy might think about stealing their purse. I said 'Yea you can keep it clean, but I'm getting' out of here.' And so I hit the road again."

J.C. moved to San Francisco in 1960 and made it his permanent home. He found day time employment unloading rice trucks in Chinatown, and in the evenings he played intermissions at San Francisco night clubs like the Sugarhill, the Jazz Workshop, and the Coffee Gallery. Burris was often featured at the original Matrix Club on Fillmore, and on some occasions played alongside a fledgling San Francisco rock band known as the Jefferson Airplane.

The years of hard labor extracted their toll, however, and in 1966 Burris suffered a severe stroke. While convalescing, he revived a toy figure which his grandfather had first built when Burris was eight years old. At physical therapy sessions J.C. created the dancing wooden marionette figure known as Mr. Jack. When tapped on the head, Mr. Jack dances a mad-leg jig or James Brown shuffle while producing a clicking syncopated melody.

Before his death, Burris did gain some of the exposure his music deserved. He performed in most of the Berkeley and San Francisco Blues Festivals and regular gigs at the Boarding House or Great American Music Hall when performers like Mike Bloomfield, Clifton Chenier and Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee were in town. He also played a scene in the movie 'Leadbelly,' and performed in the San Francisco film 'Riverboat 1988.'

A live solo album, *J. C. Burris*, was released in 1976. It was recorded at the Northeast Community Center in San Francisco and the West Dakota Cub in Berkeley by local blues archi-

vist Chris Strachwitz, for the Arhoolie label.

Burris died of a heart attack on May 16, 1988, at age 60. He was in North Carolina for an appearance at the Greensboro Blues Festival, and was stricken while visiting his stepmother, Mozell, at the family's Kings Mountain home. He left 3 children.

In 2001, Chris Strachwitz, released on the Arhoolie label a CD titled *Blues Professor* that includes all but one of the songs from the 1976 album plus songs from a cassette that Burris had given him hoping they would be considered for another album.

The liner notes for the CD are full of information about Burris. Tom Mazzolini had written the liner notes for the 1976 album, and these were reprinted. Chris' Editor Notes has stories about Burris in later years including an invitation to perform at the National Folklife Festival. The CD is Arhoolie CD 497.

There are only two rhythm bones tracks on this CD, however, they both include long bones solos that are great. *Highway Blues* is one of them and it can be seen on the internet (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iADvf40k-rU>). The rhythm bones solo is about 2:20 minutes into the video.

Another internet video is *Smoke Filled Room* (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edX_vVtmdTA) which starts about one minute into the video.

Another video titled *J.C. Burris: American Folk Blues* was produced by Ed Michaels from recordings made in 1978. Ed gave RBS permission to include *Highway Blues* on our website (see Resources:Audio/Video:Audio/Video on our Website.) Ed also helped with this article and provided the photograph on Page 1. The video can be purchased, and a DVD version is in the works (Ed Michaels—email to drumsong@earthlink.net)

From the perspective of the Rhythm Bones Society, J.C. does something interesting—he calls his bones—African Rhythm Bones. The use of the term rhythm bones in 1976 seemed odd when they were normally just called bones. Then when I saw him play them on a video, I saw they

were really member Joe Birl's black plastic bones that carried an embossed 'Rhythm Bones' trademark. I'm sure when Joe reads this article he will appreciate that another well known person used his patented rhythm bones.

Ed Michaels remembers him saying they use to play beef bones when he was a kid. In addition to the Birl bones he used in Ed's video, he showed Ed a pair made out of galvanized aluminum, decorated with red reflectors that he said were made by a friend in San Quentin.

Though Burris has achieved the admiration of other musicians, his audience remains small, his fortune illusory—yet one can sense no bitterness in his demeanor. He was at peace with the world and himself, secure in the accomplishment of his music.

"There is a river somewhere
Goes through the life of everyone.
And it flows around the mountain
Down though the meadows, under
the sun.

There's a star in the sky
Brightens up the life of everyone.
And they see the life of happiness
Long with the future of the lonely
ones." 1976 J.C. Burris.

Steve Wixson [Many thanks to Tom Mazzolini who gave us permission to use his words. Most of this article is taken verbatim from his articles.]

References:

1. *J.C. Burris: Happy with the Blues* by Harton Firmin, Bay Area Magazine
2. *J.C. Burris: 1928-1988* by Tom Mazzolini, Calendar Magazine, Volume 7, Number 19, September 1-15, 1988.
3. *J.C. Burris* by Sheldon Harris, Blues Who's Who, 1979. Contains a short biography plus extensive list of performance credits.
4. *J.C. Burris: Blues Professor*, Liner Notes by Tom Massolini and Chris Strachwitz, Arhoolie CD 497, 2001.
5. *Sonny Terry's Washboard Band*, Folkway Records FA2006. Burris is not credited, but is probably the rhythm bones player.

[See a related story by Hank Tenenbaum on the opposite page.]



Mitch Boss performs with the Philidor Percussion Group. See Page ????



Still photograph from Klepperle Video (See Page 1)

It's Time to Renew Your Membership

Membership in the Rhythm Bones Society runs from January 1 to December 31 of the same year. The Dues Renewal Form is an insert in this newsletter, and if you do not have an insert that means your dues are already paid up for the 2012.

You may pay by check or PayPal. Go to rhythmbones.com and click on the box 'Join the Rhythm Bones Society.'

Membership is up this year, and maybe PayPal is part of the reason. Thanks from the RBS Board.



Jonathan Danforth and our youngest rhythm bones player

Rhythm Bones Society

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Address Correction Requested