



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

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Executive Director's Column

I am sad to announce the death of RBS Founding Member, Joe Birl. I first met Joe Birl at Bones Fest IV in Chattanooga, and was immediately impressed by his amazing bones story and the big band music he loved to play with. His story of learning bones with the left over pieces of his parents wooden floor resonates with me.

Over the years Joe was a constant. Although he lived to be 96, he remained the same old Joe to me. He was almost always at Bones Fests, and he seemed to defy aging.

The thing I will always remember Joe for came after Bones Fest X. A few days after the Fest, I picked up a package from the mail box addressed to my son Jeremy. Jeremy who has Down Syndrome, had thoroughly enjoyed the

Fest, and had begun playing the bones in public only recently. Joe had sent Jeremy two pairs of bones and an amazing letter. We called Joe, and he spent some time on the phone with him. Joe always asked about Jeremy, and spent time with him when he came to Bones Fests. We always say if you want to know what someone is made out of, put them next to Jeremy, and Joe certainly showed us. He will be sorely missed.

From 1989 up until 2002, I had a bones booth, and gave workshops on bone playing at the North East Organizers Music and Dance Festival held each year at the Newtown High School in Sandy Hook, Ct. It was a great festival, and one my whole family has fond memories of.

(Continued on page 3)

Rhythm Bones Makers

Where would rhythm bones players be without rhythm bones makers? We, of course, are and would be making them ourselves, but missing out on the vast array of rhythm bones styles and materials that we would never think of or make.

This article will introduce some of our rhythm bones makers, and future issues of this newsletter will profile others. It will concentrate on makers whose rhythm bones were marketed on a wide scale. You can help by letting me know of rhythm bones makers not mentioned in this article or on our website.

As a Society, our first introduction to a rhythm bones maker was Joe Birl who gave a presentation at Bones Fest III on his black plastic rhythm bones patented in 1948. Joe told us of the difficulty of getting such a patent and followed that up by giving RBS a copy of all of the documentation that was required to get the patent and then market it. This documentation can be found on our website under the 'Resources:History' tab.

There was a feature article on Joe in the Vol 6, No 3 issue of the newsletter that is on-line at the 'Resources: Newsletter' tab. His bones were made from a mold using a plastic called spaldite. The curve was copied from bones he bought in a music store. His patent was the notch at the top

of the bone to keep it from slipping out of your hand. He shortened the bones to keep the cost down. Joe sold over 100,000 bones.

Joe lived in Philadelphia and made a wood version of his plastic bone. In 2000, I bought a pair of plastic bones for \$4.50. You can occasionally find a set on Ebay.

(Continued on page 6)



Bones maker Ido Corti died May 19, 2012. Story on Page 8

Editorial

As you know, I am having trouble finding new stories for our newsletter. I was perusing a stack of old papers, and ran across an email that Mardeen Gordon sent to then Executive Director, Ev Cowett, telling him about the Shooting Star bones she makes.

Bingo! How about an article on rhythm bones makers I says to myself. And with the help of many of them, the article on Page 1 was born. I gave Mardeen a separate story space since she was my inspiration.

The last rhythm bones maker story that arrived is also an obituary for Italian rhythm bones player and maker Ido Corti. Ido's story is on Page 8

One interesting thing about Ido's story is the grove that he made at the top of his Tuscan castanets, i.e., rhythm bones, that is similar to Joe Birl's black plastic rhythm bones. We will probably never know whether Ido thought of that independently or was inspired by Joe's bones. If inspired, there would be the question of how Joe's bones traveled to Tuscany, Italy.

My wife and I have taken several bicycle vacations in Europe. Recently we received notice of a trip in 2013 to southern Germany, Austria and Switzerland, the land that Jonathan Danforth described in his article on the Klepperle/Chlefeli, (online newsletter Vol 7, No 2.) Guess what? We are going, and I will meet some Klepperle players in Germany and some Chlefeli players in Switzerland. I would like to go during Karnival when the children are competing, but can't pass this up.

In that article, Jonathan got help from Dieter Ringli. I contacted him, and he provided more information on the Chlefeli and an interesting recording, soon to be on our website.

Dean and Della Price came to Bones Fest XIII in Louisville with a slightly different style of playing (hold in the middle and tap on both top and bottom.) We had fun with them and they had fun with the rest of us. We have not heard from them for a while, so I sent Dean an email. I got back an update from a band they play with.

Crystal Rice is a new member with an interesting father/daughter story that sounds a bit familiar.

Letters to the Editor

A BIG thanks to everyone at the festival. My dad loved every minute that he was there and was extremely disappointed that he did not stay at the hotel so that he could participate in more. You made my dad feel very special. He is playing every day and trying to get better. Thanks again for all that you and everyone did. *Jimi Johnson* [At age 100 less two months, Jim Steakley attended Bones Fest XVI and became a member wanting to learn something new.

I'm so sorry I couldn't be at BFXVI, Bones Family! I am very happy to say, that for years, not a gig has gone by that some of the audience does not ask me how to play those things. I am always happy to teach them what they are, give some background, and show them some stuff. This past weekend of 3 gigs, I showed over 11 people. Always clicking and carrying on! *Dan Griffin*

Good video [BFXVI on website]. Looks like everybody had a grand old time at Sixteen. I'm still playing the bones, occasionally anyway, whenever an opportunity presents itself. Few people in the small towns of central Kansas have ever seen or heard them, so I always get an enthusiastic response when I play them.

It's been a lot of years since we first met in Avoca, Iowa. You and all of those involved have done a whale of a job with the Rhythm Bones Society. My compliments to you all and best wishes for the future of the society. Former Member *Bill Rexroad* Hutchinson, Kansas

[Check out Bill's articles on getting kids started playing bones in online newsletter Vol 2, No 1 and finding bones in Egypt in Vol 4, No 3.]

"I can't believe there is a whole society for bones playing! That's so cool! Last year I played at Symphony Space and Town Hall and in each place I did a bones solo while running and jumping all over the auditorium - you would have loved that one. I'd love to join the Bones society - what does that involve? I'll check out your website in the meantime. *Raquy*

Rhythm Bones Player

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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

Danziger [Her website is www.raquy.com. She is a talented percussionist as shown in this YouTube video. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PL5CF7EA1BF8689169&v=P1hoRz-Aa2o>. Her short, but interesting rhythm bones playing starts at 3:32 into the video.]

Website Updates

Our homepage was updated with videos from Bones Fest XVI in Orlando. The September video was overall highlights, October video was highlights from the BB King performance, November video was highlights from the Raglan Road performance, and the February video will be highlights from everyone making sure the new attendees are included. The January update will be all about the late Joe Birl. Mike Passerotti's YouTube Summary was updated.

(Continued from page 1)

I remember the people of Newtown as being open, friendly, and very interested in learning how to play the bones. I had anywhere from 25 to 50 people at each workshop, and remember some of the high school kids who volunteered there.

I can remember having conversations with the police and fire personnel who are stationed at big public events like this, more for precautionary purposes. One in particular spent quite some time listening to my own family problems. We usually stayed in the area for the week end, and would have breakfast at the same restaurant each Sunday.

Now the name Sandy Hook and Newtown bring an image of unbelievable horror. Over the last week, I've often thought of my time in Newtown, and wonder how many of the people effected by this tragedy I came in contact with. Of course it was too long ago to have had contact with any of the children who were victims, but I remember the high school and the middle school vividly. I'm sure you all have the people of Newtown in your thoughts, as we do, and hope their community will survive this horrible attack.

It's funny how this bone playing journey has taken me all over the country, and to other parts of the world, but the memory of Sandy Hook will stand out for a long time.

Looking back over the year, it truly has been one of ups and downs for me. We had one of the best Bones Fests in Orlando, Fla. This year, I traveled again to Ireland to participate in the All Ireland Bone Playing Championship, and while the outcome wasn't quite what I had hoped for, the pure pleasure of the experience was well worth it. I lost two family members, one quite unexpectedly, but our bone playing family seems stronger than ever.

My apologies for the lack of information around Bones Fest in Massachusetts this year, and look for complete information in the next newsletter. Please accept my most sincere wishes for a Happy Holiday Season, and a joyous New Year! *Steve Brown*

More on the Chlefeldi

Chlefeldi [or in English, rhythm bones] in Switzerland are used in two ways: a) As a children's toy, mainly in the Catholic parts in the Lent season (i.e. after the Karnival in contrast to Klepperle in Germany). Schools organize competitions for the pupils. You can find some information here: www.chlefeldi-schwyz.ch/

b) Chlefeldi are also used as an instrument in the Swiss country dance music (called "Ländlermusik"). There are also some examples for that on the above mentioned page or on youtube for example

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqMvkZU60hU>

or <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqVJyt0YWq0> (this is me playing the Guitar. The chlefeldi player is too fast, but we needed someone for this TV live performance (in the Studio I play the Chlefeldi myself as in the mp3 -example on the rhythm bones website (see below), which we play also on live gigs.)

In Switzerland, Chlefeldi players are not normally members of the bands; it's the audience that plays Chlefeldi or Spoons, if the band and the vibes are good.

The Chlefeldi tradition in Lent has in fact nothing to do with the schools or better: it has no direct connection. The Lent-Tradition almost died out in the 1950s. A wealthy man sponsored a Chlefeldi-competition for children to revitalize this tradition in the early 1960ies in the town of Schwyz where every participant got a sausage with bread. From that time on, several teachers of the public schools started to follow his example (there are no private schools in the countryside, almost every child goes to the public school and the teachers are traditionally important cultural people, for example leader of the local choir, organists in the church, etc.) So we have until now in some schools in Central Switzerland these competitions for the children at the age of 7 to 12 years. (Of course only there, where the teachers can play the chlefeldi themselves.)

It would be an honor for us if you

put our example on your website. The title of the track is "De Truempi-Chlefeldi," and it's an improvisation for Jew's harp and chlefeldi. The Band is called "Zweidieter", a duo consisting of Dieter Ringli (Guitar, Chlefeldi, Backing vocals) and Dieter Sulzer (Lead vocals, Flute, Jew's Harp) For information about the band see <http://www.zweidieter.ch/>. To listen to the track go to <http://rhythmbones.com/DieterRingliTrack.html>. *Dieter Ringli*

Joe Birl Obituary

Just as I was finishing this newsletter, I got a call from Joe Birl's son telling us that Joe died on Christmas Day at age 96. Joe's influence on the Rhythm Bones Society is large. His gave us his patented black plastic bones trademark "Rhythm Bones" to use in our society name. He attended seven Bones Fests several times with his son also named Joe and was a founding member. In this newsletter, I mentioned him twice. He entertained us for many years with his outgoing personality and rhythm bones playing. The next website update will be all about Joe Birl. He will be missed. *Steve Wixson*

Recording of the Quarter

[http://www.cduniverse.com/productinfo.asp?pid=1179742&style=music track 2 &9](http://www.cduniverse.com/productinfo.asp?pid=1179742&style=music%20track%20&9). The album's centerpiece, however, is stripped down even further -- "Gol Na Mban San Ar," an epic track in 13 sections that recalls the hero Alastair Mac Colla Ciotaig, is performed only on bones and tin whistle; it takes some listening, but the experience proves to have remarkably rich depths.

Bones Calendar

Bones Fest XV. Summer 2013, New England area.
NTCMA and Bones Contest. August 25-31, 2013. Bones contest on Saturday or Sunday.

The Wildwood Dean and Della Price Story

Having read this publication for the rhythm bones enthusiasts, I have come to realize that even though there isn't a large number of "bones" players out there, that number is growing. Also growing is the enthusiasm that this particular instrument tends to generate with its participants.

Allow me to set the stage if you will. I own a "Country Music Opry." Here in Southern Oklahoma, we enjoy old country music from local talent mixed in with good old family fun. No alcohol here folks, just good music and lots of fun for all ages. I tell you this because it was here that an ambassador for bones players everywhere appeared at our show. Dean and Della Price, a couple from across the Red River started coming regularly to our Saturday night dances. After a few such visits, Dean approached the band just before show time with a gift for each member. It was a set of hand crafted "bones" made from extremely attractive Bois d'arc wood. We didn't know for sure what we had but we all expressed our gratitude for the gift and after eying the little slats and looking around at each other with that what-the-heck-is-it look, we went back to tuning up for the night's show. Don't get me wrong, we appreciated that someone liked us enough to go to the trouble to give us a handmade gift. After all, I was already thinkin' how much easier it was going to be to eat Asian cuisine with the wider, flatter, chop sticks. Finally I would be able to get full at the China Bear restaurant! That's when we heard it. Click, click, clickety-clickety click. This wonderful percussive progression wafts over the stage. I look up from my amp, and there is Dean and Della, waving their arms like they are about to fly and making this terrific "beat".

My bass player, Connie begins thumping out a bass line to match. Larry, like all lead guitarist that refuse to be outdone, started playing along with the trio adding a nice bluesy

whaling to the music. That was all the invitation I needed to back everything up with a common 12 - bar blues progression. The drummer started looking in the want ads for a job and wondering if he was going to be eligible for unemployment, (sorry Marty, no such luck.)

After a couple of minutes we all fell apart laughing and the Prices promised to show us how to play the "bones" after the gig, a promise they gleefully (and patiently) kept. That was our introduction to the "bones".

That was somewhere around six years ago, and though I have by no means mastered the playing of the bones, I have really developed a love for the sound of them, as well as a respect for those that can bring them to life. Dean showed us how to hold them. He related the history of the bones to us with such enthusiasm that even if you originally had no interest in them you did by the time he was finished. He showed how he had designed his own bones with little adjustments to the creation that made it easier for a novice to play a little and a pro to play a lot!

After a couple of weeks of monkeying around with the hardwood sticks it hit me. Every dance night we have a couple of songs that the crowd line dances to. This type dance requires a strong beat that allows the dancers to perform some of the more popular routines like "four corners", etc. I thought what a great format to showcase our new found friends! So, we invited Dean and Della onstage during the show and our crowd loved em! They have become a main staple here at That Country Music Place. Whenever I announce a line dance, the band waits for our "honorary members" to come onstage to perform their magic. I am including a photo of the couple performing with the band.

Two to three years after our first introduction, Dean had been refining and polishing his product. Once satisfied it was what he wanted, he has now applied for a patent on his clicky sticks. Perhaps someday you will be able to purchase your own "Wildwood Dean's Clicky Sticks" rhythm bones right off the rack at a music store near you! I visited with Dean and Della to

gain permission to write this article and he gave me further information about how they came to be players. They were visiting a mountain music retreat in Arkansas when they first ran into a bones player. An "old feller" as Dean described him "whose name I can't recall showed me how to hold and play em". Being an accomplished author and quite the bookworm, when Dean got home he delved into the history of the bones and learned all he could about the origins of the little percussion pieces. It is because of this historical knowledge as well as their ability to play that, (in my opinion), the Prices are great representatives of this musical genre.

It is true your numbers aren't in the millions, but if the fire and devotion to playing the bones is the same with others as with the Prices, it will continue to grow and grow. The next time someone hears you play and expresses interest, take a moment to embrace their curiosity. It just might mean another player is added to the fold, or perhaps as in the case of the Prices, a weekly gig will appear! Happy clicking! *Boyd Newton*
[See photograph on Page 8]

New Member Sid Hausman

[Sid is a fairly new member.]

I remember hearing bones in acoustic blues bands when I was a teenager. The idea stuck in my mind for years, but I didn't do anything about it.

In the eighties, I was touring in Europe with my wife Cappie and we met an ex Irish priest turned folk singer who played bones. Cappie learned to play from him and plays Celtic style bones that she taught me. My style tends to be a little more bluesy, and I use them often for songwriting.

I have a couple of you-tubes featuring bones. We'll have to pick or clack together some time. My Youtube videos are, "Bill Picket" - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tP3BWxlyrvU> and "Ain't No Worrying Me" - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zArsh9aRg2A>. Best, *Sid Hausman*

A Familiar Story From a New Member

[We received a Membership Application from Crystal Rice with a story similar to Bernie Worrell's story ("One afternoon she felt as if her Dad were in the room telling her to pick up the bones and give them a try). Crystal's father died and she found an old set of rhythm bones that he played. The following is from a follow up email.]

I feel honored to have found my dad's old bones. It was a delight trying to play them while my brother played the guitar. Of course at the time I had no idea how to hold them, much less play them so they did go flying across the room a couple of times, and still do. But in my heart, I can just picture my dad laughing down at me and my efforts.

A few lessons from your website helped me figure out how to hold them and make them clack, then double clack and finally on occasion even a triplet clack here and there. I've been practicing playing the bones daily with music and am becoming more comfortable with them. But I don't think I'll ever be as good as I remember my daddy being.

I don't know what type of bones they are. A dark wood with a deep sound. He also played the spoons and both electric and acoustic guitar and harmonica (which I have never been able to master), and the accordion. But somewhere deep inside me, the desire to play the bones has been awakened and now.....I'm having a blast with them, and driving my poor husband crazy.

Eventually, I hope to get really good at this and share it with everyone I love. We should never let things like this die. I hope to pass this little known skill on to my friends and loved ones and keep it going forever!

I look forward to receiving your newsletters. I also look forward to hopefully seeing a future Bones Fest in Phoenix or Flagstaff!!!! I am excited though to be a part of something so unique. *Crystal Rice*

Jim Lande Wood Bones Maker

[Jim Lande is a friend of the Rhythm Bones Society. He taught a rhythm bones making workshop at Bones Fest XIII bringing in lots of tools from his workshop.]

I have a great deal of fun making bones, but I don't actively market them. It has given me an excuse to buy and try all sorts of interesting woods. Last year I bought lifetime supplies (i.e. a big board each) of American Chestnut, Kentucky Coffee Wood, fiddle-figured maple, Persimmon, Ipe, etc. There is a box full of bones on sale at the Saturday jam and occasionally I'll bring some to events such as Blues Week.

Altogether I probably sell a dozen pairs a year, the money all goes to the Archie Edwards Blues Heritage Foundation, which is a 503-C, which, like most non-profits, is always looking for money. Fortunately, the organization has other sources of funds.

I have taught a couple bones making workshops at the shop, but so far, attendees tend to treat this as a do-it-once activity. Most people don't like sanding.

I have not wanted to sell mail order for two principle reasons.

1) I don't use wood shop techniques. I start with rough cut blanks -- several different patterns, and bone widths anywhere from 3/4" to 2 1/4". I am shaping them a little with wood gouges, but mostly with wood rasps.

My bones are relatively short because that tends to work better with the one - four grip that I favor. My bones are not symmetrical. The tops generally have more curve and the bottoms more weight. I don't like to pair up similar looking bones. I like pairs that sound different if switched around. As I shape the bones, I am trying to get them to play well with my hands.

If you already play bones, then you'd probably want to search through the pile to make your own selection. I don't like the idea of me picking out

a pair for someone, sight unseen. I tell folks who buy a pair at the shop that they can come in a swap anytime.

2) It takes between an hour or two to make a pair of bones before I start to sand and finish. They play fine unfinished so the ones at the shop are unfinished and sell for \$15 a pair. That is pretty cheap, but it seems silly for someone to shell out a lot more for two pairs of finished bones that they end up tossing in a drawer.

I am willing to finish bones for \$20 a pair. Finishing means sanding with 80, 120, 220, 300, 400, 600, 800, 1000, 1200, 1500 and then 2000 grit papers; marking with my barbershop stamp; and then using at least six coats of walnut oil.

As I mentioned, I don't think they play better, but they sure look better. Either way, that is a lot of effort for the money and there isn't a lot of satisfaction if they don't get used. I have a flyer that goes with the bones.

Jim Lande

Jim Lande on 'Mr. Bones' Bones

Richard 'Mr Bones' Thomas who played with Archie Edwards made his own bones. He would buy long cut beef ribs from a butcher, carefully scrape the meat which of course he would cook and eat. After that he would wait a long time for the bones to dry out. Then he cut to length and then sanded the ends with 100 grit sandpaper. I don't believe that he did any shaping -- he just selected the section that most looked like it would play. I'm sure he simply tossed ones that didn't play well -- I once noticed that he had about a dozen in his bag, varying sizes. I know that he once went over to The House of Musical Traditions and tried some pairs that they had. Wood bones mostly were too light or too quiet. The ones he used were pretty hefty.

I ran into the keyboard player in this clip at Blues Week, and he remember that he had this recorded. He just posted it to youtube. I think rhythm bones society members would enjoy it. This clip really brings me some joy.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRN4zWPhlkk&feature=youtu.be>
Jim Lande

Mardeen Gordon's Shooting Star Bones

I learned to play the bones when I was dancing with an English Country Dance Troupe at the Renaissance Pleasure Faire in Agoura, CA. A man whose name I don't recall was playing spoons and bones in the evening after the Faire had closed, and my husband and I were both intrigued.

My husband actually got the first pair, some Percy Danforth bones, which were given to him at the Renaissance Faire with a very brief lesson. We both struggled to get a triplet with them for several weeks and had actually succeeded not long before we ran into Percy at a Dulcimer Festival. Watching him play two handed to classical music on his boom box, we both said "So that's how you play the bones." I hung out with him for what felt like hours, learning everything I could.

I think I made my own pair before then, because I didn't know where to get them, and I was frustrated by waiting until my husband was done with them. I traced the curve of Percy's bones and made mine the same length, but I preferred them to be thinner, because the thickness of Percy's was uncomfortable between my fingers. I have experimented with different lengths, but finally settled on 7.5" to create the perfect weight and balance for both speed and sound quality. I make two widths, both 1" and 1.25" for smaller and larger hands.

I briefly considered eliminating the wide ones because it is difficult to get wood planks 5/8" thick, and there is so much more waste when cutting the wide blanks out of a 4/8" board. But I continue because many players prefer the wider pairs, and there aren't many other bones makers offering them. I might even be the only one.

So many people wanted to try them, I found myself making and then selling them at the Renaissance Faire. Soon, I hooked up with Lark in the Morning, and they started selling Shooting Star Bones in their catalog.

The name Shooting Star came from

the way I wrote my name as a teenager, with the "M" in Mardeen written as three vertical lines and the "S" in Smith (my maiden name) written as a star below them. I have experimented with many different woods and after eliminating some endangered species, I have narrowed it down to 25 kinds of hardwood that offer a range of colors, some with beautiful figuring, and each with their unique variations in tone quality.

I enjoy combining high and low toned woods when I play with two hands. I prefer one-handed playing, however, finding it easier to concentrate on dynamics, tone changes and rhythmic variations along the melody line.

I have been playing, making, and teaching hundreds of people to play the bones since 1983. My favorite music to play with is Celtic, followed by folk, world beat, bluegrass, reggae, jazz and some rock (especially Jethro Tull). I have never played with a band, but look forward to jamming all night at the Strawberry Music Festival in Yosemite every Fall.

About a year ago, I attended a workshop at a local music store, where I got invited up to play along with Brendan Power, harmonica player extraordinaire. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pWZX1zS6gE>.

Playfully, *Mardeen Gordon*

(Continued from page 1)

Joe's trademark for the plastic bones was 'Rhythm Bones' and it was moulded into each bone. It was that trademark entered into an internet search that lead me to Ev Cowett and Bones Fest II and the next year to being a founding member of the Rhythm Bones Society. Joe gave us permission to use his trademark name as our society name.

It was not long afterwards that Nicholas Driver joined RBS, and Nick came from three generations of English rhythm bones players and makers. There is a story about him in the Vol 3, No 2 newsletter. Nick's favorite material was whalebones, however in later years his bones were made from cow shin bones.

He said, "The ultimate material for bones must be whalebones, though not politically correct, as it combines the hardness of bones with the easily worked qualities of wood, its special hollow membrane giving an unique sound."

Nick at his peak made as many as 3,000 bones a year. Unfortunately, he no longer makes bones, but I am fortunate to own a couple of sets of his cow shin bone.

Another player and maker from the late 1940s was Ted Goon, and we have featured him with many stories (see the Resources:History:Mr Goon-Bones tab.)

He was a recording artist and needed rhythm bones that would sound good when recorded. Ted experimented with woods and plastics using professional recording equipment to evaluate the sound. He selected a maple from a section of Northern Wisconsin.

He said the shape and length came from research on bones playing in England in the 1400s. He made his bones under the trademark of 'Goon-Bones,' and sold about 20,000 sets of two pair with instruction book. He had an order for 200,000, but had no way of producing that many. You can occasionally find them on Ebay.

The King of rhythm bones makers in the last several decades was Percy Danforth - that is Ray Schairer who made bones for Percy. There is a story about Ray with a photograph of him in his workshop in the Vol 5, No 2 on-line newsletter. There is a story about Percy in Vol 2, No 1, and references to him can be found in many other newsletters.

He made more than 35,000 bones in many woods and exotic woods. He was a craftsman in the old tradition, though he used power tools.

It is unclear how Percy came up with the design for his bones. Sandor Slomovits said Percy gave Ray a piece of wood with the curve that he wanted (Sandor still has this) and possibly the two of them refined the design together. The article mentioned above describes his technique in some detail.

Ray died last year, but his tradition continues with member Sandor

Slomovits, a protégé of Percy.

If you want cow shin bones, RBS Executive Director, Steve Brown, tells how he makes his.

Well to begin with, I'm not handy, and never intended to make anything much less bones out of any material.

From the first time I met Percy, he took 25 pairs of bones and put them in a bag and told me to go sell them, and send him the money when I could, so I was used to selling the things out of the gate.

I had several partners who made them out of wood, first Doug Reiner, a wood worker, and later Ralph Sweet, the well known flute maker. I would play the bones at their booths, and eventually I had my own booth.

I was selling bones at the annual "Fiddle and Flea" Flea Market, and a strange old character came up to the booth and asked questions about the bones, "Ever make them out of bone?" he asked, and that's how I hooked up with Milton Shipanka.

He was an old merchant marine sailor who processed bone and made things out of them. He made a few pairs, which were awful, and I offered to start working with him to guide him on shape, he cleaned and worked the bone. He was an interesting guy, but very cantaceros, and our relationship didn't last too long.

I learned a bit from him, but Sandy Sheehan, a music shop owner convinced me I should start doing it my self, probably 82' or 83.

First I started getting the bone from a farm, Blood Farm in Groton. Cleaning was a dirty horrible mess. I lived in an apartment, and I would take a little electric motor from a washing machine with a drum sander on one end and grind the bones in the only place I had, the bathroom! I'd sit on the toilet with the seat down and balance the sander on the tub, why my wife didn't divorced me, I don't know.

Gradually I made my way to shops, first in my father in laws basement, and then borrowed the shop of my employer.

Those days I had no idea what I was doing, I just got the bones raw, whole, cleaned them, cut them in fours, and tried shaping them. I barely polished them, they were pretty basic.

It gradually turned over the years. I moved to my own house, worked out side and in the cellar at times. Finally got my own shop, purchased a variety of machines.

About 15 years ago I found a source of clean bone, and I haven't cleaned a bone since.

It has taken me some time to tell which bones make the best ones, but I can look at them and know which ones are the best. To a degree the cow dictates what the bones will look like.. Sometimes it's like sculpting, the rhythm bone is in there and you have to let it out. I'm always amazed when I finish and they look so good.

It's not always easy to tell which ones sound the best, some of the best looking ones don't necessarily sound the best.

Some great players have some of my bones; Tommy Hayes, Mel Mercier, Cathy Jordan, and Junior Davey to name a few. Well, I guess that's the story. *Steve Brown*

Whamdiddle Bones. I first learned about bones from Hank Tenenbaum in Washington D.C. in 1975. I was busking in Georgetown on hammer dulcimer and Hank would come by and play bones with me once in a while. I got interested, and so he taught me how to play and make them. I have been doing it ever since.

I started playing bones when I could not play hammer dulcimer because it was out of tune or I did not know the tune in a jam session. Selling bones gave me an extra income at craft fairs, and made nice gifts for friends.

I use my scraps from making bones to make interesting laminate bones and then I use the scraps from the laminated bones to make art pieces, including note cards.

I make bones by cutting the curve on a band saw, rounding off the edges with four passes with a custom made router bit, belt sanding to 120 grit, scraping with a sharp knife, and finishing with a mixture of marine spar varnish and Watco that I brush on and then wipe off.

I have marked every bone I have made with a "W" for Whamdiddle. I have had lots of fun with bones on many fronts. *Rick Fogel*

Gillette Bones. Almost 14 years ago, I gave my brother Pipp the instructional video "Bodhran & Bones" by Mel Mercier for Christmas. Pipp was learning the Bodhran and the Bones segment inspired me to try and learn to play bones.

We are ranching in Texas (we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the ranch this year), and I knew where an old Brahman cow of ours had died about a year earlier. I went and got her now dried rib bones and brought them home, and made my first pair of rhythm bones. Since then Pipp and I have made many a pair of bones all from cow ribs and sell them through our Camp St. Cafe & Store and at our musical performances in Texas and around the country. *Guy Gillette*

Black Barts Bones. I was 30 years old when I was visiting my folks in Toledo. For whatever reason I remembered my Dad playing what I thought were sticks. I asked Dad what was that you once did with those sticks that made that click, click sound. He said, "that's playing the bones". He showed me basic triplets on a couple of flat pieces of wood.

Then he made me a pair from some old hickory. He soaked them in some water, settled some weight on the middle so the curve was right, varnished them and gave them to me on the next Christmas. I played the bones as best as I could figure them out while I traveled Wisconsin as a salesman.

After a little research, I found out they were called bones because they were originally made out of "bone." I got to be almost obsessed with the concept. I started getting cow rib bones from my local butcher. I boiled them in a pot, then boiling them in a bigger pot. Now I boil them in a pressure cooker and dry them out on the roof of my garage. Then I dump a pile of bones on the garage floor and start matching single ribs that somewhat match. From there I sand and shape and polish the pair so they look good together. I finish the bones with my scrimshawed Black Bart logo. I figured that anybody could make bones out of anything so I wanted my bones, my process to be

special. I wrote the story *The Legend of Black Bart*. I started to go to old time music festivals as my character to see if anybody was interested in my bones and my story. They were and have been ..thus the legend of the original "Black Bart's Bones." *Dave Boyles*

Rhythm bones players influence makers. Percy Danforth influenced Mardeen Gordon, and Mel Mercier influenced Guy Gillette. There will be more of these stories in the next newsletter. *Steve Wixson*

Ido Corti Obituary Italian Player and Maker

Ido Corti had played the Tuscan Castanets [what we call rhythm bones] since he was a boy, but it was only later in life that he started to construct this percussion instrument. He worked on its traditional structure innovatively and he experimented with many different types of wood. In an interview he said, "I start working on two slender, roughly outlined pieces of wood. Obviously, the wood must be well seasoned."

He modified the structure of castanets by changing their thickness and width, and by making the surface concave to allow the nuckle to rest in it. In addition, he tied them together by using a small cord attached to the upper end, "They would always slip out of my hands, so I suddenly thought that I could keep them together by tying them up." Corti labelled each pair of castanets that he constructed with the construction date, the type of

wood and his own initials, I. C.

During his final years, he also experimented with the use of three castanets, which he played at the same time, alternating between two and three in some musical passages to highlight the intensity of rhythm. "When they are ready, before finishing them off and before making the hole for the cord, I test and weigh them to see if one of the two is heavier. For instance, I have noticed that the heavier one should stay below" (i.e. on the external part of the handle).

Ido Corti passed away on May 19th, 2012. He was born in France in 1926 to Italian parents, but when he was thirteen, he moved to Italy, where he lived until his death. *Paolo Casini*

[For more information on Ido and Tuscan Castanets, see online newsletter, Vol 9, No 4, titled 'Nacchere Toscane.']



Wildwood Dean Price (second from the left) and Della Price (in middle) with Too Long in the Saddle Band. See story on Page 4

Rhythm Bones Society

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Address Correction Requested