



# Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 15, No. 4 2013

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## Executive Director's Column

The December snow is melting at a fast rate outside during an early winter thaw, and the craziness of the Holiday Season is upon us. I'm in my usual reflecting mood which settles in this time of the year. Thinking back on the amazing experience of hosting Bones Fest again, and the loss of good friends like our founding father, Everett Cowett, and Texas bones player Guy Gillette. We are experiencing these losses way to frequently.

I want to share something important which has recently come to my attention. Dan Cowett, Everett's oldest son is in the midst of fighting for his life. Dan was a constant fixture at Bones Fest's from the earliest days. Pairing with his brother Al, who was the MC, Dan ran the sound board to make sure we all sounded good. Like many people in his position, he did a lot of work, and got little credit or attention. He has been diagnosed with a serious case of cancer,

is having frequent Chemo treatments, and is unable to work. I don't have to tell you how important the Cowett family is to our instrument and organization. I would encourage all of you to reach out to Dan and the Cowett's during this difficult time. Donations or cards, and letters can be sent directly to Martha Cowett in Dan's name Martha Cowett USPS - 9 Wetherburn Way Greensboro, NC 27510

I am extraordinarily excited about Bones Fest this year. The prospect of going to Grand Rapids MI, to Percy Danforth's state, and experience one of the great communities in the country is, in a word, thrilling. Bill Vits and other Michigan folks are working hard to put it together, and the details will be forth coming. Hope to see you there! *Steve Brown*

## Rhythm Bones in a Civil War Prison Camp

There is a grim story about prisoners during the Civil War. It is mostly forgotten, but member Jean Mehaffey found the story in a magazine-like book American Heritage, Vol XV, No 6, October 1964, titled "A Civil, and Sometimes Uncivil, War."

In summary, "The living conditions were atrocious, food and medical care were incredibly bad, crowding was almost unendurable. The soldiers in charge were not inhumane; it was the product of war and too many prisoners.

"The story was told by one of the prisoners, Ezra H Ripple, a Yankee in the Confederate prison who started a camp orchestra. What makes it relevant for us is the orchestra included a rhythm bones player. Ripple also hired James E. Taylor, who made the sketches included with this article that give us some idea of what happened.

"It began when Ripple found a violin and began playing for the other prisoners who started dancing and singing. The next day he was called up and asked to play for the officers. He found a few others who could play and "soon they played every evening in front of

the Colonel's quarters."

"Ripple had found a way to soften his camp experience, and "presently his music won him and his makeshift band a trip to the village." After the difficult job of finding suitable clothing, they performed in the open-air to an audience mostly of slaves. They did so well that they were invited to come inside and play. A few days later they played in a more formal setting.

(Continued on Page 8)



Ripple's Camp Band moves inside to play for the help.

## Editorial

I met Jean Mehaffey at the NTCMA festival in Avoca, IA and later at the Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, KS (the home of bones player, Barry Patton). She knows a lot about rhythm bones and I've enjoyed talking with her. Jean, now a member, sent me a copy of the American Heritage magazine with the article that is reprinted on Page 1. She also sent us the photograph of the maritime band with a rhythm bones player that has been included in a couple of newsletters. Thanks, Jean.

Board Member, Kenny Wolin, led a workshop on Latin rhythms at Bones Fest XVII. Part of what he had to do was develop some notation that would be easy for rhythm bones players to use. His article is on Pages 6 and 7, and a video of his workshop is the Video of the Month for January and will have a permanent home on our website after that.

While I learned to play rhythm bones from my father, the two main influences on my playing were Dr Fred Edmond, who many consider the grandfather of RBS, and his 'Bones Unlimited' book and video and Aaron Plunkett's bones instructional video. The first is now owned by RBS and is available for free on our website. The later has been converted to DVD and can be purchased. In this issue, Aaron tells us his bones making story.

Bill Vits will be our host for Bones Fest XVIII on August 7-10, 2014 in Grand Rapids, MI. Put it on your calendar and look for details in the next issue and on our website. And read his Natalie McMaster story on Page 3.

Jerry Mescher obtained a video when he and his dad appeared on the Original Amateur Hour TV show. Turns out the producer of that show is still alive and wrote an article for us. Member John Hall also was on that show (See Vol 15, No 3.) Jack Frost was also on that show and see Page 4 for his remembrances.

Thanks to Dr Christopher Smith for his excerpt on *The Bones Player* painting from his book on William Sydney Mount. (see Page 7.)

Member Mardeen Gordon of Shooting Star Bones does more than make them. She tells how she embroidered the just

mentioned *Bhe Bones Player* painting Brad Dutz's Youtube video (see letter in the column to the right) demonstrates rhythm bones in a studio setting with sheet music and direction. You've got to watch it!

## Letters to the Editor

Thank you for the tribute to Guy!

When Guy gave me the instructional video by Mel Mercier on playing the bodhran, he never would have guessed what he was getting himself in to. The segment in the video on playing the bones sparked Guy's interest.

He went out where an old grey Brahman cow had died and found his first set of bones. That first set, strangely enough, ended up being the set he played from then on.

Playing the bones was I feel for Guy a very liberating experience. He was able to jam with musicians from a variety of genres of music and always made it work.

After every performance, Guy would be surrounded by a group of inquiring people-both young and old-wanting to learn to play the bones. He would always give an impromptu bones workshop.

Thank you for the video, thank you for all you've done, and my wife and I hope to make it to one of your events soon. With Highest Regards, *Pipp Gillette*

I thought your readers may want to know about a new show starting in January 2014 on STARZ channel called *Black Sails* and it's about some pirates. Bruce Carver and I have played on all the episodes. I have played many bones on all the cues and Bruce is doing all the bodhran work. Below is a Youtube link so your readers can check it out. Bear McCreary is the composer (he is the one who does walking dead and Battlestar Galactica). [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qwMmJfF\\_xrEifF\\_xrE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qwMmJfF_xrEifF_xrE). *Brad Dutz*

Saw the Carolina Chocolate Drops play at the Ottawa Folk Festival last month and was fascinated with Dom Flemons' playing of the bones. So when I was in Halifax, NS recently on business I dropped into the local folk music shop and bought the only set they had (mahog-

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

Rhythm Bones Central web site: [rhythmbones.org](http://rhythmbones.org)

any). I dabble in playing some rhythm instruments (including the bodhran) so familiar with reels and jigs, etc. Have watched some YouTube video and now teaching myself (great thing to do while walking the dog in the woods out back our country house).

Found out about RBS just by Googling the bones. And now have connected with Bob Bolton of Sydney, Australia (who's under "players" on the RBS site) since I'm traveling to Sydney on business in November - I'm hoping to get together with him for a lesson! (BTW: I also play the didgeridoo, and will be getting more lessons on that instrument too while Down Under).

Already thinking about attending next summer's festival! *Jay Thomson*

[RBS introduced Jay to Bob Bolton and Bob sent this email.] I'm hoping that Jay will be able to work out dates and spare time in his lightning visit

... and we can get together and rattle a few sets of 'bones'. I did mention in my email reply to Jay that I have made a lot of different ... generally wooden ... sets of "bones" and that my late father had made many sets for Boy Scouts to play in Scout Camp concerts & sessions. In the long run, I have decided that Dad's sets ... following the general design written up in early 1960's Bush Music Club "Singabout" magazine(s) ... but using Australian "Brush Box" timber were as effective as any I have heard ... but I have subtly modified the grip and mass distribution - in ways that don't mirror the form of a beef rib - but do help player grip and resonance - so they are both firm and responsive.

I also just skimmed through my 'bones sets' making / assessment records and

realised that, during my obsessive 'wooden bones' period it seem to have experimented with subtly different designs and configurations of 'bones' sets ... in some 34 ... mostly ... Australian (regional) timbers ... plus beef shin bones ... and "densified wood" from a 1930s electrical switchboard!

Some of them are clearly good! Unfortunately, I haven't played them nearly enough with the serious permutations of the Bush Music Club's (~) 'Concert Party' assemblies over the years to expand that observation ... and I'm mostly playing Button Accordion / Anglo Concertina / Mouth Organ or Tin Whistle in band gigs! (The only one of these that allows me to also play bones simultaneously is (.. left-handed ...) mouth organ ...)  
Regards, *Bob Bolton*

## Bill Vits Plays Bones With Natalie MacMaster

The Grand Rapids Symphony did a pops weekend with Natalie MacMaster, fiddler & stepdancer three years ago. At that time, she had a new baby 4 1/2 weeks ago and was dancing & looking fabulous. I was playing drum set trying to pull along a sluggish orchestra with my teeth. My monitor mix was troublesome, but the first half went well on Friday night.

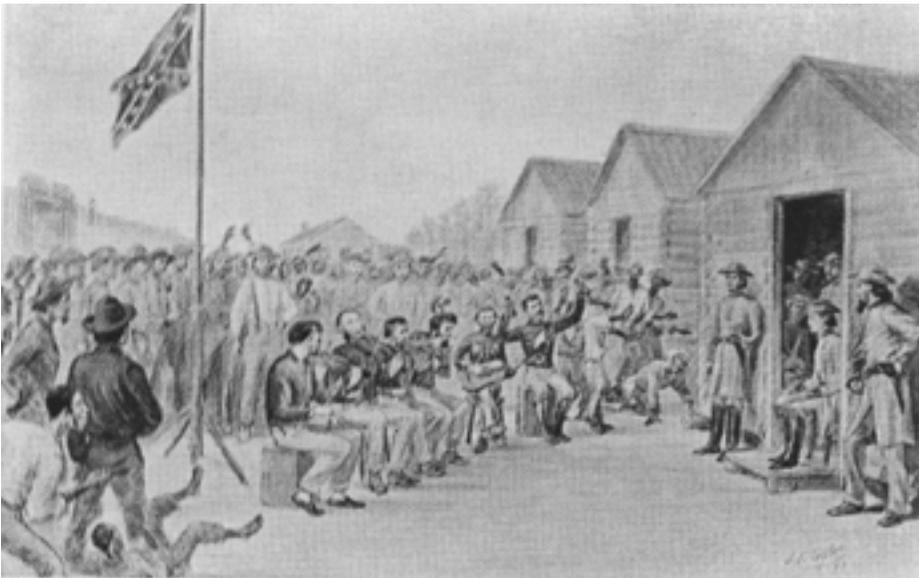
At the intermission she was in the hall with her nanny, baby & two other children. I said "I've been wanting to tell you I played the rhythm bones, but waited till we got off to a good start." Her eyes lit up and she said "come on" and we went into her dressing room with her piano player and kids. In 30 seconds we played a bit, she said wait till the piano solo and she'd give me the nod to come out front.

The orchestra and our conductor didn't even know till I came downstage and the crowd went wild. We did it for the next two shows and people have been stopped me all week to comment on the magic of the bones along with her star qualities.

Check her out on Youtube if you haven't seen her. Here's a link to the review. [http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2009/03/canadian\\_musician\\_plays\\_and\\_lo.html](http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2009/03/canadian_musician_plays_and_lo.html)

Recently Natalie returned to perform on our summer Picnic Pops series outdoors at the Cannonsburg Ski Area. We have a gorgeous white acoustical tent that covers the orchestra and thousands sit up the ski hill. This visit she brought her keyboard player and a percussionist, Eric Breton, who played a left handed drum set up with congas. He worked the bones into a couple numbers and did so while playing the rest of the kit. Eric is from the East Townships of Quebec and studied in Montreal and specializes in World Music.

After the show we rattled the bones a bit and I brought him a local Founders IPA. He's an excellent player and was hip to all my tricks. Natalie (who wasn't even tired after a 2 hour show in 95 degree heat) joined us and kept saying "I should have got both of you up there playing the bones!" *Bill Vits*



Another photograph for the article on Page 1. Ripple and fellow musicians play for the officers. The bones player is on end of band



A third photograph for the article on Page 1. After the band found suitable clothing, they performed in the open-air to an audience mostly of slaves.

## Rhythm Bones on the *The Original Amateur Hour*

“The Original Amateur Hour” was proud to have been one of the few outlets in American broadcasting to offer an open forum for one of the country’s most unique and original performance arts: the bones! Over the span of the radio series with Major Edward Bowes as host and the TV series with Ted Mack as host, scores of bones players were given their chance at the proverbial “15 minutes of fame.” This unusual entertainment form dating back to early minstrel and vaudeville days was enjoyed by millions of “Amateur Hour” listeners and viewers.

On television, we had many performers ... solos, duos, families, etc. Here are just a few that I have in my archives at The Library of Congress in Washington, DC:

11/21/48: Jack Gerson from Brooklyn plays the musical bones

4/3/51: Luther Tall plays the bones

8/5/56: From New York: Amerose & Gerson play guitar and the bones and yodel

4/21/57: Brooklyn salesman Donald Watts plays the bones

4/5/58: From East. Haddam, Conn., Lauren Copperthite plays the bones

6/7/58: From Garden City, Long Island, John Hall & Father play the bones

8/23/58: From Columbus, Ohio, Mary Jean Young plays the bones and the marichas

11/2/58: From Camden, NJ, Paul Jones plays the spoons and bones

7/31/59: New Yorker Marian Barber plays the musical minstrel bones

6/18/61: Iowa Dad & Son team Albert

& Jerry Mescher play the bones

1/10/65: From Opalaka, Florida, Harry Darne plays the musical bones

7/25/65: From Camden, NJ, George Meares plays the bones

9/5/65: From Columbus, Ohio, Alfred Kerns plays the musical bones

10/10/65: From St. Paul, MN Jack Frost plays the bones and The Devils Fiddle Stick

10/20/68: Worchester, Pennsylvania, Ormerod “Ducky” Duckworth plays the bones

I gladly make these shows and others available at my own cost to individuals and organizations.

If you would like a longer history of the show, I have attached an article I wrote a while back for The Caucus for Producers, Directors and Writers in Los Angeles. You have my permission to use any and all of it in your publication as well as the photographs.

Let me know if there is anything else I can do. *Albert Fisher*, Producer, The Original Amateur Hour, website: [originalamateurhour.com](http://originalamateurhour.com).

[Today’s American Idol show and those like it can trace their roots to The Original Amateur Hour. The radio version created by Major Edward Bowes was on the air from 1935 until 1944. The television version with his former talent scout, Ted Mack, was on the air from 1948 until 1970. There was a one year revival with Willard Scott in 1992. All of these shows had high ratings.

There are several recognizable names in this list. Jerry Mescher obtained a copy of he and his father’s performance and played it at Bones Fest IV. John Hall’s story was in the last newsletter. Read a story in the column to the right that former member Jack Frost wrote of his experience.]



Major Bowes and radio announcer, Ralph Edwards



Ted Mack host of the television show

## Jack Frost’s Ted Mack Story

I got selected when I auditioned here in Minneapolis. They announced it in the paper, and I said why not - let’s do it. I’m 80 years old now. I’m trying to remember where we auditioned - some theater.

I was surprised to get a call saying “you’re on the show.” I was playing bones and my devil’s fiddle - sort of a one man band. It’s funny and a lot of people just laugh at it. I figure they are enjoying it and I’ve done it a lot of shows, particularly solo shows. When I play in a band they let me do at least one number with the devil’s fiddle and maybe a couple with the bones.

The show was in Chicago in a special theatre. I was so proud to be on the Ted Mack show. They paid for us to come, but we drove - they paid for gas.

When we were practicing - each one taking our turn - I think I got the most applause of anybody. They had a band. They gave each one of us 4 minutes, and for me I could play the bones for 2 minutes and the devils’ fiddle for the other two minutes.

I saw Ted Mack for the first time on the show. I don’t think I saw him before the show - might have. Ted was very gracious, and they treated us real well. They took care of our housing, our meals - everything.

The winner was selected with maybe 2 points by applause and the rest by people calling in or sending post cards.

I had to laugh like crazy because there were so many funny things that happened. You know when you’re practicing and playing things fall apart. The devil’s fiddle came apart and I had to repair it.

My bones were steady, and they were sort of new too. I made them when I was about 15 years old - out of ebony wood. I’m still playing them, and can’t wear them out. I’ve made other bones, but didn’t like the sound and threw them out.

I did not win - a singer won. *Jack Frost*

[Jack is mentioned in the column to the left. He was interview over the telephone, and this may not be an exact transcription.]

## Aaron Plunkett Bones Maker and More

Hi, I'm Aaron Plunkett. I'm a professional percussionist. I'd like to share a bit of my story.

In the mid-1980's I traveled to many countries on a World Music Tour following the path and history of how hand-struck musical instruments migrated around the world. After leaving the Middle East I went to Ireland. I wanted to trace my family roots and learn about the history of my ancestors that date back to Ireland, 900A.D. I spent many rainy days traveling throughout the greener than green highlands playing bones and bodhran with the locals.

Dunsany Castle, Townland of Dunsany, County Meath, in the Northeast was passed through marriage to the Plunkett's in 1180 A.D. and remains so today. It was used to film the marriage scene in the film Braveheart.

My most famous ancestor, Canonized Archbishop Oliver Plunkett, circa 1629-1681, was taken to London—hung, drawn, and quartered, July 1, 1681, by Cromwell. His skull and bones eventually returned to Ireland and are preserved on display in St. Peter's Church in Drogheda, County Louth, just north of Dublin. Seeing Saint Oliver's skull inside a glass case sent me straight to the warmth in the pub, the comfort of a pint, and a bonus "Jam". The experience left me with the profound desire to better play the Irish bodhran and the Irish musical bones. It sent me on a journey throughout the Emerald Isle, East/West, North/South. I was privileged to be taken in by Master Irish musical instrument makers, players and performers and tutored in the arts of making and playing traditional Irish percussion instruments.

Since that time, I have continued on the path to steward these ancient Irish musical art forms. I was commissioned to compose and record tracks for the film, TITANIC. I teach and have produced a "how-to" video to play musical bones—'Bones from the Beginning': [http://world-beats.com/cd\\_vid/VID\\_bones.htm](http://world-beats.com/cd_vid/VID_bones.htm)

I encourage and welcome others to preserve the Irish cultural heritage by learning to play.

I make bones and distribute hand struck instruments: <http://world-beats.com/store/index.htm>

I make bones out of three materials: genuine goat bones, Lignum Vitae/ Ironwood, and Blue Bones made from a polycarbonate composite plastic. Each offers a subtle different feel, playing action, and "crack" or sound.

The Goat-Rib Bones are "hands-down" the premium instrument to play. The tonality and intensity of their vibrations is superior in clarity, depth of sound, and "crack." The natural bone produces a wider range of frequencies.

Making musical bones from goat ribs is a craft that was passed on to me from Masters in Ireland. A mature, specific breed, goat must be sacrificed. You ask for the Creator's Blessing and thank Her for providing such a perfect instrument. The rib bones are first soaked for several weeks in a special organic bath to remove the flesh and to sanitize the bone. They are then sun-dried for several more weeks. After all of that, I size, seal, and tether matching pairs of ribs with a strap of leather: <http://world-beats.com/instruments/bones.htm>

Lignum Vitae or Ironwood Bones are made from the Lignum Vitae tree that grows mostly in South America. It is one of the densest woods on the planet. I use this dense material to make bones to capture the quality of the sound produced by the vibration created when two of these wooden "ribs" are struck together in mid-air. That action produces a piercingly loud, crisp, "crack." The process to get to the "rib" is tedious. The log of Ironwood must first be cut using a method called "quarter-sawn." This technique produces greater stability of form and size with less warping. The log is quartered lengthwise, resulting in wedges with a right angle ending approximately at the center of the log. I then cut strips and trim them in sized lengths. These I steam bend and cooper to the specific arc curvature. Proper protective precautions, i.e., ventilation and a mask are essential because inhaled dust is deadly:

<http://world-beats.com/woodbones.htm>

My relatively new creations are the Plunkett Blue Bones (see photographs on right). They are made from a polycarbon-

ate compound with a mystery ingredient added for weight. The weight enhances the pendulum action allowing speed and accuracy. The mixture results in an exothermic reaction that is poured while still "hot" into bone shaped molds using the French cold-caste bronze displacement method. I have made these molds from my personal collection of authentic Irish goat bones collected while touring Ireland. Blue Bones distinct sound and playing action are the result of the materials used being evenly distributed and suspended throughout the length of the bone. They are easy to hold, super fast to play, not too loud in volume, less costly and come with the added bonus of saving rare Lignum Vitae trees and rare long horn goats. I make them in two sizes to create different pitches and to create a better fit and feel for different sized hands: <http://world-beats.com/instruments/bones-plastic.htm> Aaron Plunkett



Plunkett Blue Bones - Large Size

# Latin Bones and Notation Workshop Recap

[This article is illustrated in a video on the [rhythmbones.org](http://rhythmbones.org) website]

Many traditional rhythms in what we call “Latin music” are structured around a repeated 1 or 2 bar, pattern called the “clave.” Clave basically means “key” (the key or repeated guide pattern). The clave is also the musical instrument often used in Latin music, especially in Cuba, Africa (hence the term Afro-Cuban), and Brazil.

Since claves as percussion instruments are so incredibly similar to our beloved rhythm bones, they fit really well with the music. Putting together a Latin Bones Clinic for our most recent Bones Fest was quite challenging in notating my thoughts, as well as what I could cram into a 45 minute workshop. This reminds me, I must give a big shout out to our Bones Bretheren, Mike Ballard who provided me with the use of his claves! What doesn't he have in that magic bag of his?

I started the class with a one and two-hand demonstration of some of the rhythms that could be achieved with bones by applying many patterns I've learned from drumset, congas, bongos and timbales.

Next, I talked about breaking it all down to just 3 basic rhythms that seem to work well with most Latin music.

The first rhythm I demonstrated on claves is the “clave,” which I previously mentioned:

a) 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +    b) 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

I had everyone stand up, or sit up, and walk in place. Since walking is human nature, I like to have everyone do this because it gets your entire body in motion, so you can really feel the beat. We all CLAPPED anything that is **bold with an underline** (if you watch the video I circled what I wanted everyone to clap). After we got comfortable with this we tried it out on bones (one or two-handed).

Looking at my notation, your feet touch the ground on every number. In other words, you're walking on the downbeat. I also insisted on everyone counting OUT LOUD! Sorry, that was just beaten into me for many years while learning all

the drum rudiments.

When we say the word “and” notice that your foot is lifted off the ground. You guessed it – that's called the upbeat. This is very important to understand because when we're talking about the term “syncopated music.” It means that you're playing rhythms that have a lot more upbeats than downbeats in them. Latin, African music and Old Time American music has a lot of this!

We played along to “What's New” by Jamie Abersold – Latin Jazz Vol.74, that emphasized the clave pattern. I pointed out that this is called a “2-3 Clave Pattern” because measure “a” has 2 bones clicks, and measure “b” has 3 bones clicks.

Some Latin music has it reversed so if you start with measure “b” and then measure “a” you end up with a “3-2 Clave Pattern.” No worries, if you're playing along and the clave is not obvious, just play what you think sounds good, but make sure you try and lock in with the Bass player!

Before I moved on to the next pattern, I threw in an advanced exercise for the 2-hand independence bones players - Play the clave pattern with your Left Hand, while playing the following rhythm with your Right Hand:

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 ±

Work this out very slowly starting with just measure “a” of the clave till you can feel where the beats fall and gets comfortable, then isolate measure “b”. It's very awkward at first, but once your body is entrained it just feels good!

Remember that repetition (ideo-kinetic exercise) is crucial because we're working on muscle memory. To quote one of my teachers, “it's not that you can do them, it's that you do do them!”

The next pattern we worked on is called the “rhumba pattern,” which works really well with slow Latin dance music.

a) R L L R

b) L L R L

OK, this is where

the notation discussion got interesting. I came up with this after experimenting with beginning bones players who aren't familiar with Western notation. I taught my mom, and this seemed to make it much easier for her to have a visual example of what she was playing and hearing.

Anyway, take a look at measure “a.” I normally just circle the “L” but for typing purposes it's underlined. That represents a 3-tap, triplet, triple-flourish, 3-note Willie, or whatever else you wanna call it. The point is, when you walk in place every tap (whether it's Right or Left hand) should be on the downbeat. Measure “a” has 4 downbeats, so go back and forth counting either

“1 - 2 - 3 - 4 -” or “R - L - L - R -”

When you get to the “L” that is underlined, or circled (some people suggested to me notating the L with a triangle around it, which I really like) do your bones flourish, but just make sure that those 3 taps are evenly spaced starting on beat “2.”

In percussion notation, I would say the word “tri-pe-let.” To connect it all together, L L is verbalized as “Tri-pe-let Tap.”

In non-western verbal notation, Greg Burrows I think would say “ta-ke-ta” for the 3-note triplet. Greg, could you please elaborate on this so Steve could add an article to the next newsletter and I could get credit for this shameless plug?

Anyhoo....we played along to a Slow Rhumba with a 2-3 Clave called: “ii/V7/I (Twelve Keys)” by Jamie Abersold – Salsa/Latin Jazz Vol.64

The last rhythm we touched upon is a repeated 2-measure rhythm called “cascara” which means “shell.” This is commonly played on the side of the tim-



Kenny Wolin's Latin Workshop with large sheet of bones notation.

bale, or with the Right hand on a drumset cymbal or cowbell, while the Left hand improvises.

a)  $\underline{1} + \underline{2} + \underline{3} + \underline{4} \pm$     b)  $\underline{1} + \underline{2} \pm 3 + 4 \pm$

Notice that this has a lot of syncopation, or upbeats. Same drill as before. Experiment with this by alternating your clicks between Right and Left, then try the whole thing with just your dominant hand. A lot of this music can be pretty up-tempo, so I use a lot of drumstick techniques to get the bones bouncing off of each other in rhythm.

I like to play this rhythm with my right hand while playing different clave patterns with my left, then reverse it by playing the cascara with my left hand. I'm a big proponent of playing 2-handed bones with 2 very distinct high-low pitches so that even a slight variation can make it sound more interesting. The slow rhumba pattern is a great example of that when you change up the Lefts and Rights.

We played along to "What's New" by Jamie Aebersold – Latin Jazz Vol.74

Finally, we talked briefly about improvising in this style by using lots of upbeat rhythms. When we walked in place (sitting or standing) we tried to focus on tapping/clicking when our foot was lifted up.

We played along to "Manteca" in a fast 2-3 Clave by Jamie Aebersold – Salsa/Latin Jazz Vol.64.

I wrapped everything up with a little teaser of the Ricky Ricardo skit/performance that I did that night, so everyone could pick out many of the rhythms we worked on.

FYI: the opening commercial announcements were done by my 11yr old son, Ben, which included Spike Bones Dog Treats, Doc Brown's Irish Whiskey, Dapper Danforth's PalmAid ("Don't be a Dapper Dan man, be a Dapper Danforth Man!"), and Cap't Reilly's Fishsticks ("That Mystical treat!").

Next article I'd like to talk more about notation ideas for many of the different techniques our members have come up with over the years.

Thanks again for attending and supporting these workshops. Teri and I hope to see many old friends and new faces in Michigan (my home state!) this Summer!  
*Kenny Wolin*

## Book Excerpt: Mount's Painting of The Bone Player

William Sidney Mount's *The Bone Player* was painted in 1856 the same year as his possibly even better-known *The Banjo Player*. It is one of a collection of four paintings which in the Creolization book I called the "Gallery", because all four— *Just in Tune* from 1849, *Right and Left* from 1850, and *The Banjo and Bone Player* — employ elements of classical portraiture. In this period, the portrayal of African American vernacular musicians, especially for African American musicians, was highly unusual. Though Mount was quite conservative in his politics, he had learned from black players, and his rendering of these musicians as heroic figures conveys respect and admiration. Moreover, the precision and accuracy with which he renders details of instruments and technique confirms his usefulness in understanding how musicians played in this under-document period. There is little documentation in the period of rhythmic practice or instrumental technique: hence Mount's paintings are particularly useful musical reportage. *The Bone Player's* grip, body posture, and sense of rhythmic motion are as concretely rendered as the symbols of itinerancy (a rumpled overcoat, a battered hat, the jug and glasses of the roadside tavern) and of mixed-race identity (skin tone, facial features and hair, his rakish earring) which physically embody what I have called the Creole synthesis: the collision between African and Anglo-Celtic, Caribbean and North American, rhythmic and melodic conceptions which gave rise to the birth of blackface minstrelsy and the first wave of American popular musics. In a pre-War era when African American musicians were viciously caricatured, in print and on the burnt-cork stage, Mount gives us the commanding authority of the source musicians he knew and admired. *Christopher J Smith*, Chair of Musicology and Director of the Vernacular Music Center at Texas Tech University. His new book is *The Creolization of American Culture: William Sidney Mount and the Roots of Blackface Minstrelsy* (Illinois, 2013).

## Inspired by The Bone Player

I see in the newsletter that BFXVII will be in Massachusetts, and that a side trip is planned to visit William Sydney Mount's *The Bone Player* at the Boston Museum of art. I do so wish we could be there for that, because that painting has a special meaning for me. [Editor note: That trip did not happen at the Fest.]

My parents-in-law visited Boston some 28 years ago, and were so surprised to see a painting of a bone player that they bought a postcard of it to send to me. I hung on to it for 15 years until in 2000 I finally decided to create a hand embroidered interpretation of it which I attached to the back of a leather jacket. I have been proudly wearing it ever since. See the photo below.

I have done 13 other hand embroidered interpretations of well-know artworks, albums covers and original compositions, but *The Bone Player* is the one that fellow boners will no doubt appreciate.

I would be delighted to recreate the embroidered image for someone as a commission, but since it would take over 300 hours to do, the price would be prohibitive for all but the most passionate and well-to-do. However, I have just established a store on Etsy, where I offer beautiful giclee prints on canvas or metal. The canvas prints can also be partially embroidered to make it more unique and special. For instance, just the bones could be embroidered, making the cost of the embellished print reasonable. Here is a link to my Etsy.com store: [Embroidistry. Playfully, Mardeen Gordon](#)



See this in color on Mardeen's Etsy website

“There’s more to the story including an escape and recapture. On February 26, 1865, the ordeal was over. Ripple concluded with “ That was the end of the story. A few days of recuperation, then payday, after which each man got

a thirty-day furlough. The final muster out came short after that, and now, years after, I am permitted to recount to you what, if I had not experience myself, and know to be true, I could scarcely believe.” *Bruce Catton*

[Editor note. The flamboyance of the rhythm bones player is intriguing. Scott Miller and Spike Bones have that look.

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Later, Ripple’s Camp Band plays for a formal affair. Photographs reprinted with permission.

## *Rhythm Bones Society*

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*Address Correction Requested*