



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

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Executive Director's Column

Bones Fest in Grand Rapids this year was in a word Fabulous! Thanks again to our hosts Bill and his wife, Stacey, Vits for a job well done! We were clearly shown the town from our Thursday performance at One Trick Pony, to our home base in the Guest House and to a now traditional flash mob with our own Celtic Kilroy as the Bronze Man of the bones. Shall I say a splendid time was had by all.

The amazing dinners of Polish and Italian food were only topped by the amazing deserts provided by our co-hostess Stacey Vits - magnifique!

As we reflect back on each Bones Fest, we have a tendency to summarize or categorize the main theme of each one. Last year could be one of community, San Antonio, and Orlando provided many opportunities for performance, and Alexandria Virginia was

one of workshops (and of course a wedding!).

Grand Rapids will for me always be the tribute to Percy Danforth. Being held in his state, and attended by so many people influenced to play the bones by him (myself included), but of course, the major contributors would be his son, Malcom 'Mac' Danforth, grandson, Jonathan, great grandson, Emmet, and Sue Barber, his co-author and friend. The stories were glorious, and the nostalgia vivid, as we heard Mac's descriptions of accompanying his Dad to festivals, and Sue's stories of Percy and her writing. Mac was gracious enough to bring a great deal of Percy memorabilia and it was much fun looking through it all. Percy I think would have been

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Highlights of Bones Fest XVIII

"Rattle in the Rapids" I'm still energized from a wonderful weekend of bones playing with over 50 attendees in my home town, Grand Rapids, Michigan. After arriving at the Riverfront Hotel on Thursday, many folks went to the One Trick Pony and had dinner and a rousing evening of bones playing with Sean & Seamus. These guys are dear musical friends who played "bone-friendly" tune after tune. Then San Slomovits surprised many with Emily & Jacob and a mini-set of their intimate music. They were on their way to another music festival, but timed their visit perfectly. <http://sanemilyandjacob.wix.com/sanemilyandjacob> San invited me to sit in and I was beaming ear to ear. Our hosts, Dan & Lisa Verhil, loved our rhythm bones family!

Friday started at the Guest House with registra-

tion, group jamming and bones for sale. The cheezy charm of this old Polish hall made us feel right at home. Before noon we organized to head downtown for our "Flash Mob" mission. At 12:30 we all converged at Rosa Parks Circle where Celtic Kilroy had been "frozen" as a bronze statue with bones and a crowd had developed. Suddenly 30 bones players brought him to life and played along to Irish tunes from a hidden speaker (see the photograph on Page 8). Lunch on the mall had many options from hot dogs to sushi. Steve Wixson and I enjoyed jamming with a local street musician who is an extra with Opera Grand Rapids. We played a medley with Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean!"

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Bones Fest XVIII Attendees at Guest House in Grand Rapids, MIv (See Page 6 for the key to attendees names)

Editorial

As is my practice when I fly home from a Bones Fest, I write part of my Editorial in the air. I echo the appreciation of BFXVIII attendees to Bill Vits and his lovely wife, Stacey, for another memorable Fest, and I make special note of how smoothly everything went. The highlights article starts on Page 1, and has more pages in color than previous highlight issues.

Part of Bill's plan for the program was Remembering Percy Danforth and his contributions to rhythm bones. To help with that were Sue Barbers who in collaboration with Percy wrote a history of rhythm bones that is on our website (click the Resources Tab and then the History Tab) and an instruction booklet that to Sue's great surprise is still being sold some 35 years later.

Also present was Percy's son, Mac, member and grandson, Jonathan and great-grandson, Emmett. After the session, Mac presented Jonathan with two boxes of Percy's memorabilia with more to come. Many had assumed that this had gone to the University of Michigan. The session was videoed and highlights will soon appear on our website.

Also in the works is a major project to capture Percy's rhythm bones contributions for future historians. In 2000, RBS profiled Percy in the second issue of the Rhythm Bones Player newsletter. Jonathan wants to write a follow on article using all of the information now available about Percy. So that people can see Percy in action, Lark in the Morning has given us permission to use parts of Percy's instructional video and Tom Spence gave us a video of Percy from the 1983 Old Songs Festival.

Due to the success of the flash mod that Steve Brown had at BFXVII, Bill Vits scheduled another for his Fest. It was on a raised knoll and much easier to video. As soon as possible I will edit the video and upload it to YouTube. Then I will email everyone in our database and request they forward the YouTube link to everyone they know and hope that the video goes viral and the world learns about us. An important reason why it could go viral is Celtic Kilroy who as a

bronze stature started it off. It was great!

Most of the photographs and video shot at Bones Fests and used on our website and in our newsletter comes from me, but mostly from Mary Lee Sweet. Next time you see her, give her a thank you hug!

Letters to the Editor

I was most pleased to read and see the BFXVIII highlights on our website and see you had 50 or so in attendance. Good job. I seldom play anymore as I had a problem in my right arm that makes it difficult. Still enjoy listening and carry on. It was good to see some familiar people as well. *Bob Waddell*

Hey, look what I found: Storytelling helps celebrate Scott Joplin Ragtime Festival. <http://www.monett-times.com/story/2098819.html>. This year's festival represented a concentrated approach, with 45 contracted performers...the only percussion player this year was me, a bones player who offered a symposium on the ancient craft. *Scott Miller*

[Tim Reilly missed Bones Fest XVIII and here is why.] I am hoping to put in a little blurb about the 38th voyage of the Charles W Morgan in the next newsletter. I wore many hats during the voyage as a rigger who worked to rebuild the ship and make her sea worthy, as a sailor who represented the seaport staff as foreman on 5 legs of her 38th voyage, as interpretative staff, and as the only bones player on the ship. I made a set of bones while underway to ports such as Newport, New Bedford, and Stelwagen Banks. I met Jonathan Danforth during my New Bedford stint. *Tim Reilly*

I've restored a cat playing bones image and transformed it into a large print. Folks who have no connection to rhythm bones have bought copies, so I thought I should take it right to the heart of the instrument! Please have a look, and if it pleases you perhaps a link to it is a newsworthy item. All the best! <https://www.etsy.com/listing/173471515/antique-cat-print-formal-cat-in-white>. *Todd Kimmell*

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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

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proud to see an organization of bones players, and to know how much he meant to us all!

One last thing, a hearty congratulations to Sky Bartlett and Jesse Weinstein who were married the week after Bones Fest, and still managed to attend this year! They met at Bones Fest in Alexandria Virginia, and are the second marriage we can claim to have come out of Bones Fest! Woo Hoo! *Steve Brown*

Website Update

The RBS website updates for July and August were highlights from BFXVII. The September update had Bill Vits' highlight article with a photograph of the Flash Mob plus overall video highlights from BFXVIII. During the next several months the videos will include the Remembering Percy session and workshops and individual performances.

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After lunch we were back to the Guest House for Stephen Brown's clinic on beginning bones. With his logical and relaxed approach several newbies were playing in no time. Teaching bones requires patience, humor and physical contact and Stephen has the magic.



I did a clinic on rudimental bones and covered flams, paradiddles, doubles as they can work into our bones playing. I enjoy playing the bones at a small drum-set which adds lots of possibilities.



This Bones Fest was a tribute to Percy Danforth and we were blessed to have his son, grandson and great grandson in attendance. Another special guest was Sue Barber, who wrote and documented much of Percy's rhythm bone history. Discussion and stories were lively and all agreed Percy would be thrilled to see our

organization. Malcolm (Mac) Danforth brought an inherited treasure box of his father's memorabilia of clippings, pictures, drawings and awards that Percy



had received. He gave it to Jonathon who quickly selected a few significant items and arranged a table display.



We all found something in that box that excited or touched our hearts. One article quoted Fran, Percy's wife saying, "Percy is a musician like a bird is...but I'm a trained musician."

A Polish dinner followed with Kielbasa, pierogies, sauerkraut and my wife Stacey's desserts. After that meal we still had energy to all get up and perform as a rehearsal for our Saturday night show.



Jay Round & Tom Devries supplied hammered dulcimer, bass and guitar for live music while Jay ran sound and coordinated CD's, iphones, tablets and anything with a output. For the Saturday night show we had 26 acts to coordinate.

Saturday found some second day registrants and folks jammed while we snuck in a Board Meeting.



Randy Seppala & Stephen Brown were selling beautiful bones of all types between teaching and giving tips.



At lunch time, 90 year old Lew Guernsey from Ionia arrived in a BMW convertible. Lew knew Percy and even made a set of bones on his machinery. He shared his wonderful collection of bones with me and even gave me a set of noise-maker "cheater bones". He had never seen such a congregation of players!

Saturday saw clinics by Skeffington Flynn on Bones History and Beginning Bones. Skeff is doing great things for the RBS, including a brochure that is now available to promote the bones.

Spike Bones got the crowd loose by circling the players and encouraging participation.



Celtic Kilroy gave great tips on harmonica & bones while busking. His multi/instrument energy was infectious.



A quick membership meeting featured lowering our dues from \$25 to \$20.

Saturday's dinner had more great food (homemade lasagna & chicken) while Stacey made more delicious desserts.

Before you knew it it was almost showtime and folks wandered in not really knowing what to expect. After doing three radio and a TV promotion we had good turnout of interested listeners.

The show was fast paced and the variety of styles and techniques was as-

ounding. All the regulars performed, but I must mention a few others. The next generation of bones players were Anika & Joseph Kooi who played the bones AND tap danced!



Jack Frost cracked me up when he played a gallop rhythm and pretended to 'whip the horse.' Kathy Whisler sang and played with a wonderful voice (she's a lawyer). Jeremy Brown, the "Superman of the Bones," closed the first half with a crowd pleasing performance to 'Happy' which caused big smiles all around.

The second half featured the Mescher family, Mary Lee & Frank Sweet and more veterans of previous Fests.

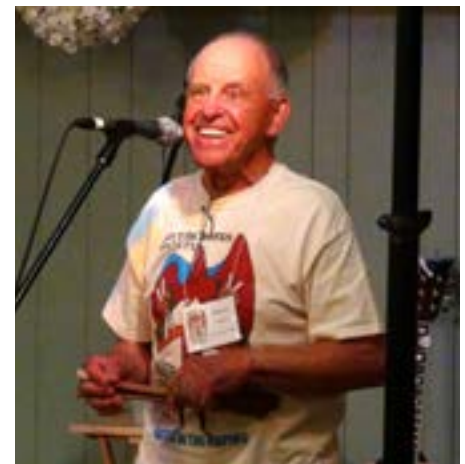
Gerard Arseneault brought out the smiles and Sky Bartlett blew the roof as he looked like Bruce Lee with rhythm bones. Celtic Kilroy showed his musical versatility, Steve Wixson jammed with Jay on upright bass and Spike Bones put

on a mini-minstrel show. The grand finale was our conga line with all participants on their feet.

After the show, tear down & clean up we celebrated back at the "Danforth Suite" and said our good byes at brunch the next morning. The RBS is healthy, happy and teaching new people to play the bones. Thank you to all who traveled to GR and trusted me to host Bones Fest XVIII! *Bill Vits*



Mary Lee and Frank Sweet



Gerard Arseneault



The Mescher Tradition; Sharon and Jerry Mescher and Bernie Worrell



Sky Barlett and Ernie Duffy performing a move they learned from the late Shorty Boulet. They are accompanied by Tom Devries on guitar and Jay Round on hammered dulcimer.



Jessye Weinstein and Sky Bartlett met at a Bones Fest and were married a week later



Michael Ballard



Blue Hammond



Stan Von Hagen



Skeff Flynn



Ernie Duffy teaching Kate Barfield



Gerry Hines



Kathy Whilser



Jack Frost



Steve Wixson jamming with Jay Round on bass



Lew Guernsey



Randy Seppala teaching



'Superman' Jeremy Brown



Mitch Boss and Randy Seppala with Jonathan on fiddle



Mike Passerotti and Canadians Jay and Deborah Thomson in the Congo line



Key to Photograph on Page 1

- 1- Steve Brown
- 2- Mark Stone
- 3 - Jonathan Danforth
- 4 - Sharon Mescher
- 5 - Jerry Mescher
- 6 - Gerard Arseneault
- 7 - Tom Worrell
- 8 - Bernie Worrell
- 9 - Jay Thomson
- 10 - Barry Palmerton
- 11 - Deborah Thomson
- 12 - Skeff Flynn

- 13 - Sky Bartlett
- 14 - Ernie Duffy
- 15 - Spke Bones
- 16 - Jessye Weinstein
- 17 - Jerry Hines
- 18 - Jeremy Brown
- 19 - Anika Kooi
- 20 - Blue Hammond
- 21 - Randy Seppala
- 22 - Stan Von Hagen
- 23 - Kathy Whisler
- 24 - Mike Passerotti
- 25 - Bill Vits
- 26 - Josh Passerotti
- 27 - Michael Ballard
- 28 - Matt Kilroy
- 29 - Mitch Boss

- 30 - Kate Barfield
 - 31 - Frank Sweet
 - 32 - Mary Lee Sceet
 - 33 - Jim Quiram
 - 34 - Sandra Quiram
 - 35 - Lew Guernsey
 - 36 - Joseph Kooi
 - 37 - Jennifer Brown
- Not present for the photograph were:
- Sue Barber
 - Clay Beringer
 - Scott Craig
 - Jack and Greta Frost
 - Chyarles Johnson
 - Jim Lochowitz
 - Jean Von Hagen and
 - Steve Wixson who took the picture

Minutes of General Membership Meeting

The meeting was called to order on August 15 in the Guest House in Grand Rapids, MI. Executive Director called the meeting to order at 4:50 PM. Steve Wixson read the minutes of the last meeting and a motion was made, seconded and approved to accept the minutes as read. Steve Wixson gave a brief Treasurer's Report noting we had \$4,689.33 at the end of 2013. He noted that he had given a copy of the Report with all supporting documentation to the Executive Director.

The Board serving as the Nominating Committee nominated all current Board members to serve another year. The floor was opened for further nominations, and being none the motion was made, seconded and approved to elect all by acclamation. They are Steve Brown, Executive Director, Bill Vits, Assistant Director, Steve Wixson, Secretary/Treasurer, Skeff Flynn, Sharon Mescher, Tim Reilly and Kenny Wolin.

Steve Wixson gave a brief overview of the Board Meeting. He thanked Mary Lee Sweet for all of the videoing she does of Bones Fests.

A motion was made, seconded and approved to adjourn the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 5:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted, Steve Wixson

Minutes of the Board Meeting

The meeting was called to order on August 15 in the Guest House in Grand Rapids, MI. Steve Brown called the meeting to order at 10:22 AM. Members present were Steve Brown, Skeff Flynn, Sharon Mescher, Bill Vits and Steve Wixson. Visitors present were Jerry Mescher and Tom and Bernie Worrell.

Steve Wixson read the minutes from the last meeting and a motion was made, seconded and approved to accept the minutes as read.

Steve Wixson gave a brief Treasurer's Report noting we had \$5,917.55 in the bank at the end of 2013 but owing a re-

imbursement check to Steve Wixson for \$1,226.22. He gave a copy of the Report with all supporting documentation to the Executive Director. A motion was made, seconded and approved to accept the Treasurer's Report.

The Board gave appreciation to Skeff Flynn for completing the brochure discussed at the last meeting. He reported he printed 600 copings, giving 250 each to Dom Flemons and Rowan Corbett to pass out at their shows.

A motion was made, seconded and approved to reimburse Skeff for the 600 copies he had printed. There was a desire to print 10,000 more copies and after quotes are obtained, we will approve this with an email vote.

There was a discussion as to how to distribute the brochure. It will be put on our website for downloading. We will put a note on our website so that people who can use the brochure to the benefit of RBS can order it.

Steve Wixson moved that we reduce the membership dues to \$20 per year due to lower newsletter printing costs. The motion was seconded and approved.

Skeff initiated a discussion about redesigning our website. He noted that a local graphic artist did our brochure for free and asked that we consider her if we do a major redesign of our website. We need to document what we want from our website and he will initiate and circulate such a document.

Motion was made, seconded and approved to suspend the meeting to determine if Tim Reilly would like to serve another year on the Board. The meeting was suspended at 11:42 AM.

The meeting resumed at 3:20 PM. With the Board serving as the Nominating Committee, a motion was made, seconded and approved to nominate the current members to serve another year.

A motion was made, seconded and approved to adjourn the meeting. Meet was adjourned at 3:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted, Steve Wixson

Scott Miller Has a Ragtime Story

Last June I gave a symposium on "Bones and Ragtime" at the 2014 Scott Joplin Festival in Sedalia, Missouri.

Joining me was ragtime pianist and composer Rich Egan. A few days later Rich and I opened the neighboring 2014 Blind Boone Ragtime & Early Jazz Festival in Columbia, Missouri. While there I met Adam Swanson, a young and highly gifted musician who was a headliner at both events. Adam made his New York debut in Carnegie Hall at the age of nineteen. He has also performed solo at the Kennedy Center Millennium Stage in Washington, D.C.

Anyway, Adam and I had a great conversation about minstrelsy. A few days later I ran across a recording of "St Louis Tickle" and "Crazy Bone Rag" that Adam posted on YouTube which was recorded by his mentor, Johnny Maddox.

Johnny Maddox's First Record
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWwMf7O1YE8>

The Bones and Ragtime symposium I gave at the Scott Joplin Festival in Sedalia centered on the lack of documentation that connects bones with ragtime. In fact, the presentation began with this quote from ragtime luminary, Trebor Tichenor: "Bones were definitely played with ragtime. We just don't have documentation."

And now I just stumbled across an important recording by a legendary ragtime player - with bones accompaniment. I had to dig deeper.

The percussion in the recording sounded like a wood block to me. But that could be bones from 2:37 to 2:51. So I asked Adam if he could confirm specifically where in the recording bones are played. "I spoke with Johnny Maddox yesterday," said Adam. "And he says, to the best of his memory, that "Temp" Templeton played the bones on this record. He says he used Ebony and Ivory bones, with both hands." It appears that the bones on these two tunes are...well bones.

The 1950 recording of "St Louis Tickle" (side A, Dot 1005-A) and "Crazy Bone Rag" (side B, Dot 1005-B) with bones are among the first releases on the Dot Records label. (#1005 indicates this was their 5th release.)

In any event, the fact that rhythm bones were rattled in the first published recording by the legendary piano player Johnny Maddox, and that bones played a role in helping launch Dot Records, is a historic event - and significant news for rhythm bones players. *Scott Miller*



Flash Mob centered around Matt 'Celtic' Kilroy, a frozen bronze statute, on the knoll at Rosa Parks Circle in downtown Grand Rapids

Rhythm Bones Society

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Address Correction Requested