



# Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 22, No. 2 2020

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## Executive Director's Column

I suppose you don't need me to bring back Thomas Paines' famous words, "These are the times that try mens' souls," but how much more appropo can they be. We're in Day 90 of our self imposed quarantine for the good of ourselves and anyone we might infect. Rhythm bone playing activity has been canceled, from the New England Folk Festival to the Washington, DC Bones Fest sponsored by Kenny and Teri Wolin, to the All Ireland Bone Playing Championship in Ireland.

But rhythm bones in some way is the least of our worries, given the COVID-19 Virus, a completely stalled economy, and civil unrest across our country.

We're hoping that you are well and surviving this most difficult time!

As we search our own souls for strength and reach out to our neighbors to provide help where needed, I bring some news which might shed a little ray of sunshine in a dark time. The Rhythm Bones Society Board of Directors has unanimously voted to conduct the first ever Virtual Bones Fest on July 25th, and possibly on July 26th. In all of the difficult times in my life, the coming together of like minded people to give support has been a strengthening, and heartening experience. (Continued on Page 2)

## Sky Bartlett

It was 20 years ago this year that I learned to play rhythm bones. I learned from Ernie Duffy, a close family friend. He had learned to play from Shorty Boulet a few years before. I had the advantage of a teacher in Ernie. Ernie had to learn from Shorty via pure observation and will power. Once I got the hang of it Ernie would take to square dances and let

(Continued on Page 6)

## Ernie Duffy

I was born and raised in a small New Hampshire town called Thornton. My elementary class had less than 16 kids in it. Most everyone was a local so we knew our friend's siblings, parents and grandparents. It wasn't until many years later that it became a getaway spot for vacationers and condominium complexes and

(Continued on Page 7)



Sky Bartlett and Ernie Duffy performing together at Bones Fest XXII, hosted by Sky and Jessye Bartlett

## Editorial

In this series of member profiles, what a treat it is to present Ernie Duffy and his protege, Sky Bartlett, though their story is not complete without mentioning the late Shorty Boulet who was profiled way back in Vol 6, No 2. That story was a reprinted newspaper story and does not mention Ernie and Sky, but Ernie's story ties the three of them together. This new story has extra meaning as it shows how a mentor or two can introduce rhythm bones to a talented youth, namely Sky.

Many of us including me have only recently been introduced to percussionist James Yoshizawa, but as you will read in his profile, he is one of the very few professional rhythm bones players.

It is sad to cancel Bones Fest XXIV in Alexandria, Virginia, but in the long run we may have instituted an annual virtual Bones Fest that brings together rhythm bones players from all over the world. The preliminary program for our Virtual Bones Fest I begins on this page.

Periodically, I search the Internet for new websites, and this time found Walter Hollister in an old newspaper article. Were he still alive, I'm sure we could all learn something from him.

## Letters to the Editor

At least so far, I've always taught in person. I know a couple musicians who teach other instruments that are trying out doing it online.

A few years ago, I made my '101' documents for both rhythm bones and bodhrán available on my web site. I don't track downloads so I have no idea who has seen them. *Michael Ballard*

<https://www.mdb-services.com/app/download/2138000/Bones+101.pdf>

<https://www.mdb-services.com/app/download/2137966/Bodhr%C3%A1n+101.pdf>

Billy Dunbar is a musician who attends the NCTMA Festival and frequently accompanied Jerry Mescher and Bernie Worrell and later Sharon Mescher in their shows. He wrote the following in response to the June RBS Email, "All the Best to you and God Bless the Bone Players of the World!"

### (Director continued from Page 1)

Bones Fest has often been described as a family reunion, and we're really hoping that by getting together in a virtual sense, we can feel the community and love we will miss by not getting together in person.

But think about this for a second. The Rhythm Bones Society literally has members all over the world! Bones Fest attendees have been almost exclusively come from North America given the expense of travel. For the first time attendees are not expected to travel which immediately opens the prospect of members attending literally from all over the world!

For example, I have often lamented that my friend and percussionist Boris Sichon from Vancouver could not attend a Bones Fest because not only is he an amazing rhythm bone player, he's an amazing human being. But here is his chance!

Already we have had interest from Ireland, and several European countries. Several folks from California have expressed an interest in attending. We really think the proverbial sky is the limit, and all we need is you!

Please register at the web site to give us the information we need for planning and implementing the Fest. We will be presenting the details on the web site, as well as providing support for folks who need it to access Zoom, the format of choice for the Fest. Please help to make this Virtual Bones Fest a success, and join us to renew the family feeling of our organization. We've experienced the worst of times, let's experience and remember the best of times! *Steve Brown*

## Virtual Bones Fest XXIV Preliminary Program

Bones Fest XXIV will be a virtual Bones Fest using ZOOM teleconferencing technology that will look like the photograph of the proposed t-shirt on Page 3. The exciting aspect is that people who have never been to Bones Fest are attending this Fest, and that means we have rhythm bones players from around the world in virtual

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Editor  
Steve Wixson  
wixson@epbfi.com

Executive Director  
Stephen Brown  
bones@crystal-mtn.com

Web Site Coordinator  
Steve Wixson  
webmaster@rhythmbones.com

Board of Directors  
Steve Brown, Executive Director  
Skeffington Flynn  
Sharon Mescher  
Dennis Riedesel  
Bill Vits, Assistant Director  
Steve Wixson, Secretary/Treasurer  
Kenny Wolin

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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)

attendance.

The Virtual Fest is scheduled for July 25, 2020, and will begin at 1 PM, GMT which is 9 AM Eastern Daylight Time, the time used in the program details below.

**Zoom Meeting Rooms.** Bones Fest XXIV will use three Zoom meeting rooms, and attendees will receive an email with the information needed to join each room (Meeting ID and Password). The room titled 'Main Room' will be open for the entire Fest. The 'Bone Room' and 'Rhythm Room' will be open for concurrent workshops.

**Legal Backup Music Required.** At previous Fests, performers who played to commercial CDs did not get their performance video on our website due to copyright issues. Since this year's Fest is entirely online, we have a library of legal music that you can download and use. This has the benefit that you can practice to a song ahead of time. Attendees will be emailed a link to the library. If you have

legal music, you can certainly use it.

If you would like to play to a fiddle tune, Jonathan Danforth will record it for you. Details will be emailed to attendees. Thanks to Jonathan.

**Fest Graphic/Motto/T-shirt.** There will be a t-shirt that can be ordered after the Fest. It will be similar to the photograph on this page, but with the Group Photograph. The Fest motto is “*Streaming Rhythm Bones Around the World.*”

**Technical Details.** Prior to the ‘Practice Workshop’ described in the next section, attendees will receive an email with the technical details needed to attend the Fest.

**Saturday, 12:00 to 3:00 PM - July 18, 2020 – Practice Workshop – Moderator: Skeff Flynn**

This Pre-Bones Fest workshop is for attendees and us as hosts to practice how to use Zoom for the greatest benefit. It will cover how to sign in, basic controls, microphone placement, video camera placement, lighting, screen sharing, chatting and more so all of us get the most out of the Fest.

**Preliminary Program.** The following program is likely to change based on responses to Registration Forms still coming in.

**Saturday, 9:00 AM – July 25, 2020 – Bones Fest XXIV Begins**

**9:00 AM- Opening Session - Meet and Greet with Steve Brown**

The session begins with opening remarks from Rhythm Bones Society’s Executive Director, Steve Brown. During this session in a somewhat controlled way, attendees can say hello or chat with old friends, and we can find out what parts of the world are represented.

**9:30 AM – Individual Introductions – Moderator: Steve Brown**

Each participant gets an allotted time (5-10min) to introduce themselves, talk about how they came to the bones, and demonstrate how they play. This is the hallmark of the Rhythm Bones Society, including everyone, no matter level of play.

**1:00 PM – Workshop Sessions A**

**Main Room – Intermediate – Moderator: Tommy Hayes**

Know the basics, how to hold, make the sounds, and playing a bit to music? Tommy picks you up from here, and helps you develop skills to apply to music.

**Bone Room - Beginner – Moderator: Steve Brown**

This session teaches the basics of getting started, holding, producing the sounds, the tap, the triplet, and shaping the sounds to music.

**Rhythm Room – Advanced – Moderator: Kenny Wolin**

This workshop will focus on taking 2-hand independence to the next level. We’ll start with thinking the bones triplet-tap motion as 4 sixteenth notes to create more syncopated rhythms. Then, we’ll work on some right hand repeated rhythms (ostinato patterns) while improvising basic rhythms with the left hand. I use this technique a lot in my playing, especially with rock, bluegrass, polkas, and Latin music. Search “Kenny bones Wolin” on Youtube for some examples.

**2:00 PM – Workshop Sessions B**

**Main Room – Rhythm Bones Around the World and History – Moderator: Jonathan Danforth**

Rhythm Bones date back literally thousands of years, and can be found in a multitude of cultures. Join our resident historian Jonathan Danforth as he takes us on a journey to different times, and places where rhythm bones have been played and developed.

**Bone Room – Round table discussion on teaching techniques: – Moderator: Mardeen Gordon**

Teaching is paramount to spreading rhythm bones to a new generation, and keeping it alive. Each player has their own unique approach, passed to them from their mentor, and given their own personal touch. Hear the experience of attendee’s, and join in on the conversation.

**Rhythm Room – Tips, techniques, and food for thought – Moderator: Steve Brown**

This session will feature several short presentations including, Graham Hargrove, accompanying Ottawa Valley Step Dance, Brad Dutz, Quads and odd

**Bones Fest XXIV  
July 25, 2020  
Virtual Using Zoom**



Sessions, Workshops, Performances

**Your Host, Board of Directors  
of the Rhythm Bones Society**

*To Register go to*  
[rhythmbones.org/nextFest.html](http://rhythmbones.org/nextFest.html)

time signatures, Borris Sichon, rhythm bones and Didgerdoo, Mardeen Gordon History Rap, Tom Connolly rhythm bones and washboard, Brad Dutz and James Yoshizawa rhythm bones duets, and others yet to be identified. This session continues for another hour.

**3:00 PM – Workshop Session C**

**Main Room – Applying Rhythm Bones to the Drumset – Moderator: Bill Vits**

We will explore the possibilities of rhythm bones with sticks, brushes and shakers while incorporating the feet at the drum set. Different styles (bluegrass, country, Latin, swing and rock) can all add rhythm bones for a unique flavor. Drumming techniques that apply to rhythm bones playing will encourage experimentation as we sample some rudiments that work on rhythm bones. You don’t know till you try!

**Bone Room – Round table discussion on Judging the All Ireland Bone Playing Championship: – Moderator: Steve Brown (Continued on next page)**

Ever want to compete in a rhythm bone contest? So very few exist, but perhaps the best known, and most competitive is the All Ireland Bone Playing Championship, held in Abbeyfeale, County Limerick, Ireland. We have assembled a panel of 5 Judges who have more than 15 contests between them. Junior Davey, Tommy Hayes, Johnny Ringo McDonagh, Mel Mercier discuss their perspective and experience judging the contests.

***Rhythm Room – Tips, techniques, and food for thought*** – Moderator: Steve Brown

This session continues from Workshop Session B above.

**4:00 PM – *Virtual Pass Off/Open Jamming*** – Moderator: Skeff Flynn

The late Walt Watkins gave us the Pass Off where each person in turn plays for a short time and then passes the playing to the next person. In Zoom there is a time delay so the players will seem to be out of ‘sync’ with the music, but it will still be fun for all.

**5:00 PM – *General Business Meeting*** – Moderator: Steve Brown

The Rhythm Bones Society Bylaws require an annual meeting to elect the Board of Directors and other matters raised by the members present. This is normally a short meeting.

**5:30 PM – *Open Jamming*** – Moderator: TBD

**6:00 PM – *Show Performances*** – Moderator: Steve Brown

This will be like our Public Performance at a traditional Bones Fest. Attendees who want to perform sign up using the Chat tool.

**?:00 PM – *Cocktail Party*** – Moderator: TBD

The time for this session is approximate as the Show may run longer than planned. This is a time to enjoy more jamming, say goodbyes and close with the traditional Congo Line with each person presented full screen.

## Virtual Bones Fest Presenter Preview

Virtual Bones Fest is almost upon us, and as the chairman of the Program Committee, I’m particularly excited about the new faces we will see who have never been able to attend a Bones Fest due to distance, and schedule commitments. Now that we are meeting on line, and during a time when many events have been canceled, it has freed up time and availability to include some really interesting players.

From Canada we have two professional percussionists who have registered to attend. Borris Sichon was classically trained percussionist at the University of Leningrad in Russia. He toured Europe as part of a state sponsored ensemble, and defected to France and later to Israel. He picked up rhythm bones and has brought his own sense of spirit to the instrument. He now lives in Vancouver, BC. Graham Hargrove is a multi-instrument percussionist, living in Toronto, Canada. He picked up rhythm bones after an interest in Bodhran, and has competed in the All Ireland Bone Playing Championship twice, coming in 2nd, and 3rd respectively.

I am thrilled to announce that some legendary rhythm bones players from Ireland have registered to attend. Johnny Ringo McDonagh’s name is synonymous with bodhran and rhythm bones in Ireland, having been a founder member of DeDannan, and his own band Archady, and someone who has literally changed percussion in traditional Irish music. Equally as iconic, Tommy Hayes, founding member of Stocktons Wing, and appearing on literally hundreds of recordings as a percussionist, Tommy’s unique approach to percussion has made him one of the most innovative players in traditional Irish Music. His video of how to play rhythm bones, bodhran, and spoons has taught a generation to play the instrument. Junior Davey, 5 time All Ireland Bodhran Champion, and 2 time All Ireland Bone Playing Champion, and a product of County Sligo, one of the most legendary areas for traditional Irish music. His Father, Andrew Davey was a corner stone in the Sligo fiddling style. And our own Dr. Mel Mercier, for-

mer Board Member and regular attendee of Bones Fests, son of iconic Bodhran / rhythm bones player Peadar Mercier, and Director of World Music Performance at University Limerick. We are thrilled to have Mel back in the fold. One of the events we have planned is a discussion on judging rhythm bone playing contests with all of the above players.

From California we have Randy and Mardeen Gordon, both expert players, and the proprietors of Shooting Star Bones. Randy and Mardeen have attended one Bones Fest Previously, and have an exuberant style of play that will spur you into playing. Brad Dutz, professional percussionist in the Los Angeles area, has appeared in a number of films, and television programs, including Black Sails, the popular HBO program. One of his former students, James Yoshizawa, professional percussionist, and 2nd place finisher at the 2019 All Ireland Bone Playing Championship, will also be attending. See below for a separate profile of James.

Several of our Board Members will be involved in presentations as well. Kenny Wolin, percussionist with the ‘Presidents Own Marine Band,’ will be presenting an advanced rhythm bone playing workshop, and one that he has done at previous Bones Fests. Bill Vits, principal percussionist with the Grand Rapids Symphony will present a workshop on how to integrate rhythm bone playing into the drum set. Jonathon Danforth will be taking us around the world in rhythm bones, and throwing in some history as well.

These are just a few of our registrants so far, with a month to go, who knows who else will register! Register today at [rhythmbones.com](http://rhythmbones.com)!

## James Yoshizawa

I am a lifelong student of the percussive arts. I was born in the greater Los Angeles area, and my first paying gigs ever were when I was 12 years old playing Japanese percussion and taiko for the Obon Festivals in the summer in Little Tokyo. [Photograph on Page 8.]

My foray into rhythm bones began in 2004 after being introduced to them by my teacher at the time, percussionist Brad Dutz. I was instantly hooked and have since earned a reputation for

utilizing rhythm bones in a wide array of musical situations. My rhythm bones playing can be found on many albums that range from more traditional Irish and folk music to progressive modern jazz and electronic music.

In 2016, I served as the bodhrán and rhythm bones soloist and percussionist for the Broadway musical, “Come From Away” during its run at Ford’s Theater in Washington, DC. In 2019, I competed in the All-Ireland Bones Competition in Abbeyfeale, Ireland and was awarded 2nd place. I have also been a guest artist at the annual Fairbanks Summer Arts Festival in Fairbanks, AK since 2013 where I perform and teach classes in Irish percussion.

One of my favorite sets of rhythm bones are a pair of wooden rhythm bones made by Barry Patton in one hand and a pair of Pea Patch Tri-Tone rhythm bones in the other hand. Another set of real rhythm bones I play often were custom made by Steve Brown.

The All-Ireland Bones Competition was canceled this year, so I put together a video of all of the US competitors who would have competed this year in Ireland. To view go to: <https://youtube.com/watch?v=P8LDDfpC2Zk>. *James Yoshizawa*

## Walter Lee Hollister

When the traveling medicine show came to his hometown in rural eastern Pennsylvania back in 1917, young Walter Hollister was fascinated by the rhythm bones, and he determined to have some of his own. The next time the family butchered a pig, his wish came true.

Walter Hollister was born June 10, 1909 and died August 16 1985. After 37 years as an employee of the Borough of Brooklyn, Hollister retired to Florida and lived in New Smyrna.

He was a 33rd degree Master Mason who contributed thousands of hours to the Shriner’s hospital. He was a World War II veteran of the Army Air Corps (Engineer).

Walter, known as “Mr. Bones,” had been clacking them for nearly 70 years (except for a brief time in the 1940s when he lost his rhythm bones and used spoons instead). His daughter said he

was self taught and his favorite music was Dixieland. There is a photograph of Walter playing with a band on Page 6.

He played at Mummers’ parades, Macy’s parades, mall openings and wedding receptions, and in taverns, churches, hospitals and resort hotels, and entertained President Nixon.

He appeared on Ted Mack’s Original Amateur Hour on September 13, 1964, and according to Albert Fisher who was producer of the show, he played to Won’t You Come Home Bill Bailey. [Editor Note. Albert Fisher bought the rights to the show video and donated the video to the Library of Congress. See <http://originalamateurhour.com>.]

His original ivory bones were at the Roy Acuff Music Museum in Nashville, but that museum is now closed. The connection between the two of them is unclear, but David Holt notes, “At one time when Roy Acuff was opening his museum in Opryland he was buying a lot of unusual instruments. My guess is he had seen rhythm bones players and wanted to show the instrument, but I never saw Roy play rhythm bones.”

The only Internet information on Hollister and his ‘Rattling Rhythm Bones’ was a performance in Orlando during Artfest ‘85, a festival sponsored by the Council of Arts & Sciences for Central Florida. The schedule read, Noon: Rosie O’Grady’s Goodtime Band with Walter Hollister’s Rattling Rhythm Bones. 3 PM: Altamonte Springs Community Jazz Ensemble with Walter Hollister’s Rattling Rhythm Bones. The Artfest people purchased 10 sets of plastic rhythm bones for use in children’s workshops. [Editor Note. The reference to plastic and that they were called ‘rhythm bones’ before the Rhythm Bones Society was formed suggests they were made by the late Joe Birl.]

He once said, “I used to have a nice set of calluses between my fingers and could play all day, but now I have to wear Band-Aids and take a good breather after each three-minute piece.”

Some of the information in this article is from the Orlando Sentinel. Go to - [http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/1985-04-21/news/0290200127\\_1\\_artfest-rhythm-bones-hollister](http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/1985-04-21/news/0290200127_1_artfest-rhythm-bones-hollister), April 21, 1985

## Online Rhythm Bones Teaching

[Editor Note: This article is in response to an email asking for online rhythm bones instruction experience.]

The school where I teach music has gone on to online teaching, so I have a couple of weeks experience so far, teaching music lessons one to one.

I’ve discovered a good trick to get around the limitation that two people can’t play at the same time because of the time delay. It works fine with Zoom or Facetime, for example.

One person, me, perhaps, plays a tune on my fiddle into my computer (I use an external mic)

The person on the other plays along with me while simultaneously using another app on their computer which records what is coming into their microphone. So they are recording both the sound of their instrument (bones perhaps) plus the sound of me playing.

Then, after the recording is made, they play it back from the app they used to record with, so that we can both hear each other playing together and then we discuss playing techniques, timing, etc.

It works from either end of the online conversation.

Another variation is to use a pre-made recording. I play the recording so that my student can hear it. The student records them self playing along, and then we both listen back after the recording is made.

I found that when I am playing along with someone on the other end, and recording our duet, It works best to set the volume of their playing on my computer speakers, to be about the same volume as that of the instrument that I am playing. That way it sounds much like two people playing together in the same room. And we can do that from either end of the video call.

I’m on a Mac and I found that either Quicktime or Photobooth works to do the recording. I set Quicktime to save and place the recorded audio file right onto my desktop to make it easy to find and play back. Photobooth puts the file into a sub folder so I have to dig it out. Not a big deal though. *Ryan Thomson*

(Sky Bartlett continued from Page 1)  
me play along with him and Shorty. That was the key to continued effort - playing in public. (see on-line newsletter, Vol 18, No 1 for more details)

Ernie brought me to my first Bones Fest (and many more), his second I believe. Part of the fun was that Ernie hadn't learned to play very long before I did, meaning that we got to learn a lot of things together or at nearly the same time. This allowed us to develop a similar style of playing that allows us to sound, what I believe to be, greater than the sum of our individual playing. Check us out at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jp4sVvDfdUQ>.



Sky's rhythm bones dance at Bones Fest XXII

I've had twists and turns, stylistically speaking, with rhythm bones. I've tried to imitate as many players as I could over time. But I always come back to the fact that the high quality triplet is the magic of rhythm bones. That's about where Ernie was at when I first saw him play, high quality triplets. It's funny to think how hard we worked on triplets and stopping and starting, things that seem so natural now.

I've been influenced and awed by too many people over the years at Bones Fests to even think about listing anyone, but what a list it would be. The talent of the rhythm bones community never ceases to amaze me. *Sky Bartlett*

[Editor Note. Sky has written several articles for this newsletter.

The first was his primetime appearance on the ABC television show 'Wipeout' described in Volume 14, No 1 that is online on our website.

He and his aunt were watching TV when the show came on and his aunt thought he was the perfect contestant. He drove his truck to Hollywood and auditioned with hundreds of others.

During a camera audition, he brought out his rhythm bones and said "Watch this." After several month's he got a call, "Our producer loves your bones, be here in 10 days if you want to be on TV." He got in back in his truck, and did stop along the way in Colorado to see Jessye Weinstein before continuing on to California.

He did not win the contest, but had a second fastest time. And he did get to play rhythm bones on national television. He said, "I was rather surprised at the response I got for my 20ish seconds on TV. Dozens of people found me through Facebook wanting to know what those 'thingsy' were I was playing."



Sky and Jessye perform at the Alamo Compound at Bones Fest XV

That Jessye person mentioned is the lady in the photograph with the violin, and it turns out the two of them got married. You can watch that performance at the Alamo Compound at Bones Fest XV in San Antonio at <http://rhythmbones.org/video/BFXV-SkyJessyeEngagement.mp4>. This is the second couple who met at a Bones Fest and got married (the first was Kenny and Teri Wolin.)

Hosting a Bones Fest is a lot of work, but very rewarding. Sky and Jessye hosted Bones Fest XXII in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. This was a super Fest and you can read the highlights online in Volume 20, No 2.



Walter Hollister performing (see story on Page 5)

**(Ernie Duffy continued from Page 1)** housing developments sprang up where there used to be farms. Eventually we became a “real” town and Thornton built a municipal building and police station.

I had lots of hobbies growing up but most of them were with the older crowd. I didn’t have much in common with my peers so I never cared much for the party crowd. I enjoyed hunting, fishing and gardening. The outdoors was always my playground.

I knew my wife, Debbie, most of my life since she also grew up in Thornton. In fact, our houses were probably less than a ½ mile from each other. We were married at an early age. She was 17 and I was 19. Everyone predicted it wouldn’t last. I hope they’ve stopped waiting for us to call it quits since on June 30th of 2020 we’ll celebrate our 48th wedding anniversary! We raised two sons, Chris and Matt, but they moved to southern NH once they grew up and got married. We have three grandchildren and they are one of the biggest joys of our lives.

I don’t recall my family having much of a musical background. My sister, brother and I did attend the local grange and they held square dances on occasion, so we all liked that type of music. I was always tapping my toes and moving my feet anytime a song with a beat was played.

The Blake Mountain Band was the group that played most of the local square dances. Lester Bradley was the caller and he loved to instruct people how to dance. It was so much fun to have several squares full of experienced dancers as well as brand new folks. I loved attending those monthly dances.

One time when the Blake Mountain Band was playing, a jolly old guy named Shorty Boulet joined them and played rhythm bones with gusto. He was obviously having fun and added a new level to the dance. I later told Debbie “If I had a pair of bones, I could play them.” That year for Christmas I received a pair and soon began annoying the family with my constant practicing!

After that I was invited to play a song or two at the square dance. What I liked best was playing with Shorty. It was a pleasure teaming up with him as we played and the crowd always liked hearing us together.

A young friend of mine (about 13 years old at the time) seemed interested in playing the bones so I showed Sky Bartlett how to play. It wasn’t long before Shorty, Sky and I were a trio. We attended the local square dances as often as we could and soon the three of us and Shorty’s wife, Shirley, started traveling to Bones Fests. The four of us made quite a picture as none of us were world travelers but we somehow managed. When Shorty, Sky and I played together we intuitively understood each other musically. These are some of my best memories of playing rhythm bones.

To give you an example of how well we clicked (pun intended), one time I was at a Bones Fest and was standing outside of one of the doors. To hear the music better, I closed my eyes. Without knowing it, Sky came along and began playing next to me. I knew it was him on the first click of the bones. Even with my eyes closed and with any one of the 40 or 50 other players that it could have been, I knew it was Sky.

The bond I have with Sky is very special. There are videos of the two of us playing off our knees, arms and heads. We didn’t plan it but automatically were able to start and stop doing this – like mirror images. I am also pleased to step aside and let Sky play as only he can. He not only plays rhythm bones, but can entertain the crowd. I love watching him!

A couple of highlights of my rhythm bones playing was one time Debbie and I and another couple were waiting to go into the Grand Ole Opry. Of course, I had my rhythm bones in my back pocket so I pulled them out and softly started playing to the tune that the warm up band was playing. One of the band members spotted me and gave me a nod to join them on stage. I was reluctant to get up in front of that crowd, but now I can honestly tell people that I played at the Grand Ole Opry!!

Another treat was playing with street musicians and in pubs in Ireland. One of the most special Bones Fests was in 2007 when I had decided I wouldn’t be able to attend that year and Debbie surprised with a trip to Bones Fest XI in Wisconsin. To say I was shocked that she was able to pull off all those details would be an understatement. Sky went with me and the two of us had a blast.

From having traveled to many Bones Fests, I believe being around others encourages you to grow as a musician. Watching other players techniques inspires me to improve. I also really enjoy teaching others to play rhythm bones. I believe the ability to pass on the love of rhythm bones playing is the way to keep it alive for the next generation.

I am proud to be a part of the Rhythm Bones community. They are a wonderful group of people and I look forward to future Bones Fests. I also appreciate all the work behind the scenes in hosting Bones Fests and for the Rhythm Bones Player newsletter. Thanks to each of you for all you do. *Ernie Duffy*



Ernie Duffy playing rhythm bones off his body ‘Shorty Boulet’ style

## Bones Calendar

**Bones Fest XXIV.** Virtual Fest using Zoom technology, Saturday, July 25, 2020. Preliminary details in this newsletter.

**NTCMA Festival,** October 3-6, 2020, Fremont, NE (NEW LOCATION). Rhythm bones contest will likely be on



Sky Bartlett, Ernie Duffy and Shorty Boulet performing at Bones Fest X (See Page 7)



James Yoshizawa (see Page 4)

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## *Rhythm Bones Society*

1060 Lower Brow Road  
Signal Mountain, TN 37377-2910

*Address Correction Requested*