



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 3, No. 4 2001

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Executive Director's Column

Bones Fest VI is just around the corner, August 2, 3 & 4, 2002. Mark your calendars and start practicing. It is going to be the biggest and best yet. BFVI will be held on campus at Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina. On-campus housing will accommodate singles, doubles and families. Meals, reception and banquet will be provided in Founders Hall in the center of campus and the Joseph Bryan Jr. Auditorium will be available for our bones demonstrations, business meeting and Saturday night concert. This is a brand new facility with the latest in acoustical design. All buildings are in close proximity of each other; therefore you can walk to all activities. Hotels, motels and restaurants are also nearby for those who wish to stay off campus.

Guilford is a four-year liberal arts college

with about 1500 students and the campus is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is beautiful and has great energy (See www.guilford.edu/ for a campus tour.) Preliminaries cost figures look exceptionally good. The college is located less than 5 miles from the Piedmont Triad International Airport, which serves Greensboro, Winston-Salem and High Point, North Carolina.

Greensboro and the entire state of NC are great places to visit. North Carolina beaches are some of the finest in the world and the Great Smoky and Blue Ridge mountains have breathtaking views and cool summer nights. For more information about accommodations and vacationing ideas contact the Greensboro Visitors Bureau at 1-800-344-2282 or the NC Visitors Bureau at 1-800-847-4862. We hope to see you in North Carolina in 2002. May your

Bones Fest V Morning/Evening Highlights

Bones Fest V, hosted by Steve and Jennifer Brown, was a weekend filled with forty-four Bones stories, each one shared through word and demonstration.

Saturday, August 4, was the first full day of the fest, and I had the honor and opportunity to MC the morning and afternoon events which highlighted 33 bones players from all over the US and England. My first impression was WOW! What a group. I personally got to greet, shake hands and introduce each individual who then performed in front of a responsive audience of peers.

Each performer had his or her unique style and played to their choice of recorded or live music. From my viewpoint, you could almost sense the satisfaction it gave each performer, for he was now playing in a Fest of all bones players, and they weren't alone.

Also, it was remarkable to see so many good bones players, and they all need to be praised and congratulated for their efforts. I can't name them all, but the performers who caught my eye, just to name a few are highlighted below.

Fiddler Dave Reiner and his two sons,

Fiddler Andy Reiner and Eric Reiner on piano provided most of the music for the bones players making the important connection to live music.

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Bone Fest V host Steve Brown with bones moving so fast they blur in the photograph. *Photo by Jennifer Brown*

Editorial

During this time of national/world tragedy, people are comforted and strengthened by prayer and music. We can take pride that music, such as we help make, is an important part of this healing. The only RBS member I heard directly effected was Nick Driver (see his Letter to Editor)

This issue highlights Bones Fest V. This was another high point in the young life of the Rhythm Bones Society. Jerry Mescher was the MC for the daytime activities, and Steve Brown was MC for the evening performances. Each of them has summarized the highlights of their session.

Having hosted Bones Fest IV, my wife and I know the work it takes to put on the event. I take my hat off to Steve and Jennifer for the outstanding job they did with Bones Fest V.

After the Fest, my wife and I visited New England, and I had the opportunity to have breakfast with Parker Waite. He told this story. "Nick Driver and I did a duet together off to the side with music. It was a purely jazz type response with the both of us playing off each other. We burst out laughing when it was over cause it seemed to go so well but of course we couldn't really hear how it sounded." My first thought was how about a quartet with Jim Runner's big boomers on bottom, whale bones on top with cow bones and wood bones in the middle. Actually I got lots of new ideas from the Fest including an idea for my performance at Bones Fest VI. I hope the same happened to those of you who attended the Fest.

I attended the National Storytelling Festival in early October. My first such festival, but because member Bill Rexroad tells stories and plays bones, I knew I would find some bones players there. And I did, 19 in fact. They each received a newsletter and application form. Help us get the word out by letting us know of other

Letters to the Editor

Just a note to say how sad I am about the tragedy that has struck your

country, all the more strong to me as my wife was at the World Trade Centre when it happened and just escaped with her life. She is physically ok but saw and experienced many dreadful things. We are behind the US here in the UK.

I would like to thank all the folks I met at Bones Fest V for the deeply friendly welcome I received and the valued new friendships I made. It was so good to see and hear such talent in an ancient art. I look forward very much to the time I can make it to another gathering. Take care and best wishes. *Nick Driver*

Dear Editor,

Russ, Walt and Steve on Avoca competition. CONGRATULATIONS to the 3 of you for your effort. I wish I could have been there to come in 4th or Also to Jerry Mescher for induction into the Hall of Fame. Great job for RBS. *Ev Cowett*

Dear Editor,

Dave Reiner was the fiddler who played Saturday at Bones Fest V. On October 13th. I got a message he had been taken into the hospital with chest pains and later that week underwent bypass surgery. He's since come home and is doing well. If anyone would like to write him and wish him well, his address is 7 Russell Road, Lexington, MA, 02420, dsreiner@rcn.com, 781-863-0140. *Steve Brown*

Bones Calendar

August 2-4, 2002. Bones Fest VI, Greensboro, NC, Ev Cowett host. Details in this and future newsletters. Note date change!

August 31, 2002. 27th Annual Bones and Spoons Contest at Avoca, IA. Contact Board Member Jerry Mescher (smescher@netins.net).

December 31st. Twin Cities First Night, Steve Brown performing as part of the "Retelling History Through Song" with Paul Luria, Leominster Historical Society 2pm-4pm for additional information please contact Steve Brown,

bones@crystal-mtn.com, 978-297-1104

April 19-21, 2002. New England Folk Festival, Natick High School, Natick, Ma. Tentative plans include a

Rhythm Bones Player

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The Rhythm Bones Player is published quarterly by the Rhythm Bones Society. Nonmember subscriptions are \$10 for one year; RBS members receive the Player as part of their dues.

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

bones workshop and performance by bones society members. For more information on bones activities contact Steve Brown. For more information on New England Folk Festival visit their

Website of the Quarter

Do your own web search with such search terms as "rhythm bones", "bones playing" and cliquette. Write a Letter to the Editor if you find other good search terms.

Recorded Bones Music

J.C. Burris, Blues Professor. This legendary blues artist plays the bones on only two tracks, but these both include bones solos that make the album worthwhile. Also included are hand jive and his dancing doll percussion. CD497, Arhoolie Productions, 10341 San Pablo Ave, El Cerrito, CA 94530,

Myers wins at Avoca Mescher in Hall of Fame

The 26th National Old Time Country and Bluegrass Music Festival hosted by the National Traditional Country Music Association was held, as always, 27 August until Labor Day in Avoca, Iowa. There were eleven stages, each with something going on from 9 am until after 10:30 pm, as well as many impromptu groups forming wherever two or more musicians gathered. The attending members of the RBS had no difficulty in assimilating with a variety of groups each and every day, and in joining some of these groups in stage performances. Jerry Mescher and Bernie Worrell have been mainstays at this festival for years, and on Saturday alone they participated in six different stage shows. RBS fared well in the Bones and Spoons contest, taking the top three honors winning prize money and a plaque. (*Editors note: Russ Myers won first, Walt Watkins second and Steve Wixson third.*) RBS members who have won this contest in the past include Jerry Mescher, Bernie Worrell, Jerry Barnett and Donny Decamp.

Perhaps the most moving event of the week was Sunday's Old Time Country Music Hall of Fame induction for Jerry Mescher who paid special tribute to his father. Jerry learned to play the bones from his father and together they won first place on the Ted Mack Original Amateur Hour. Jerry and sister Bernie Worrell now play bones duets

Dustin Griffin is Youngest Member

Maybe there is a future for bones playing. Dustin Griffin is a twelve year old drummer, and met Jerry Mescher at the above mentioned Festival. Jerry showed him the bones, and within five days he was playing. Walt Watkins gave him a set of Nick Driver bones. Dennis applied for membership and is our youngest member.

(Morning Highlights continued from page 1)

Don DeCamp from Redfield, IA with his rhythmic style is always a crowd pleaser, and the stylish Walt Watkins from Arlington, TX played like he was warming up for the Avoca Bones Contest.

I think this performer surprised us all, Steve Wixson with his creative performance of the cave man bones player with a bone sticking from the sides of his head gave his presentation "The Legend of Mr Bones" in a rap style—very good, Steve

Nick Driver made his presence felt playing to his music and playing various types of rhythms. Following him came Russ Myers playing very good rhythm and changing pitch with his bones, an outstanding performance Russ.

Also I was impressed by Joe Birl's presentation on the pattern of the bones and the history of Joe's playing. He is truly a legend.

In summary, let me say that Bones Fest V was a great success and I'm looking forward to Bones Fest VI to

Bones Fest V Evening Highlights

Saturday night at Bones Fest V was an attempt to open our fest to the general public and give each bones player a chance to showcase their playing. And a showcase it was with contrasting styles, music and stage presence to an audience of approximately 100-150, many of whom had never seen the bones before! Both the old masters and relatively new bones players took their turns, and giving it their all, each and everyone a delight to me, as I saw the night unfold before my eyes almost exactly as I had envisioned it some months before. Fiddler Dave Reiner and his two sons again provided live music.

The evening was divided into two halves with Spike Bones Muher opening the first half and Norm Conrad's Mini Minstrels opening the second half. Both Spike and Norm were given 15 minutes to do a more in depth presentation, Spike to give the

general public an introduction to the bones and Norm to present his version of the minstrel show. Each of the other participants were asked to perform one number and keep their total time within 5 minutes. One performer, Nick Driver, played twice, the least we could do after he came all the way from England!

Clearly every bones player did an outstanding job, but some remain as highlights to me. I want to retell the evening as I remember it with apologies to anyone I leave out or misrepresent.

Don Decamp displays one of the most unique styles I have ever seen. He played "The Beaumont Rag" and "Sweet Georgia Brown," the former of which was just great. Later in the evening he and his son Larry played to a prerecorded version of "Alabama Jubilee" in a duet style and looked like they were standing in front of a mirror. The energy was just incredible and they just brought the house down.

Jerry Mescher once again showed an amazing staccato, syncopated style, reminiscent of rudimental drumming. Clean, yet full of emotion and powerful, Jerry's playing continues to amaze and inspire me. He played to a Joanne Castle recording of the Scott Joplin rag time piano classic "Maple Leaf Rag" weaving his magic and accompanying the music perfectly. An additional treat was Jerry's duets with his sister Bernie Worrell. Showing the style which certainly makes her an expert bones player in her own right and certainly the best woman bones player I have seen, Jerry and Bernie demonstrate a style of playing the bones as a duet which as far as I know Jerry and his father began, truly amazing. They played to a recording of the "Dark Town Stutters Ball" in identical western wear shirts and pants and were great!

For many years I have carried and played a set of bones made by Nicholas Driver. During Bones Fest V I not only got to meet Nick and see him play, but got to know him as a person and what a great experience it was. Easily winning the award as the bones player who traveled the longest distance, Nick thrilled us with his stories of his Grandfather, and his playing. During his individual performance he did a rousing version of Rag time Annie, and

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later thrilled us with a duet with Bonnie Dixon of acappella voice and bones, well done Nick and Bonnie!

Saturday night included another great duet. Last fall I had the great pleasure of meeting Elwin "Shorty" Boulet of Whitefield, NH. Shorty just captivated me with his enthusiasm and energy and his great love of music. Seeing Shorty playing away with his eyes closed and emerged in the music is a great sight. He and Ernie Duffy of Campton, NH, a great player in his own right, gave us a taste of bones duet "New Hampshire" style on "Bow on the fiddle." At one point

Shorty plays the bones of various points of his body including his head! Don't try this at home.

Russ Myers continues to amaze me in his subtle but intricate style changing tone in his inimitable way. Russ seems to play effortlessly and shows great command of the instrument as well as a real connection to the music. His rendition of "Golden Slippers" with Dave and his sons showed a great chemistry between the two and convinced me that emphasizing live music is the way to go at bones fest.

One of the amazing things about Bones Fest is you never really know who will show up. Largely due to the

local publicity by Bill Rose, we had the great pleasure of meeting Dave Gagne. Dave who lives in Princeton, MA, some 20 miles from my house, has been playing the bones for 60 years! Not only had we never met, I never even heard of him! Dressed in a western style shirt and hat, he displayed a great style playing "Down Yonder" and was well received by the audience and fellow bones players alike!

What truly may be the only bones playing opera singer and conga drum duet in history, Adam Kline delighted everyone with his strong vocals and unique bones playing. He and his

(Continued on the Insert)



Rhythm Bones Society

1060 Lower Brow Road
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Address Correction Requested

(Continued from page 4)

friend Constance Cook played a rousing version of "Pick a bale of cotton" and had the whole audience singing and dancing in their seats.

Space simply does not permit me to elaborate on the other great performances but they included: John "Mr. Bones" Cahill showing great style in dress as well as bones playing accompanying a tape of Polka's, Dr. Jerry Barnett's amazing stories and fine accompaniment on "Andy's Waltz" an original tune by Andy Reiner, Tim Riley an incredible young bones player and sailor from Mystic, CT displayed an intricate style on a set of Irish reels, Newsletter Editor Steve Wixson making an incredible transition to a two hand bones player and doing a superb accompaniment to a pre-recorded Doyle Dykes finger picking guitar piece, Joe Birl's entertaining stories and energetic version of Red Wing all done at the age of 85 years, Gerard Arsenaault all the way from Quebec charming both in personality and bones playing, played to Dave Reiner and band playing an interesting French Canadian tune and wearing a wooden tie, Executive Director Ev Cowette's energetic "Black Mountain Rag," Donald Lee Clair showed his stuff on "Turkey in the Straw," Sally Carroll doing a fine version of the tune "Chinese Breakdown," Rob Rudin did a great job to Dave's version "Orange Blossom Special," Carleton Johnson demonstrating a unique one handed style with metal bones, 100th Bones Society member Tom Coyle playing energetically to the Swallow Tail Jig, Jim Nelson from Wilton, NH told a great story about local bones player "Happy Day" and doing a nice version of "Sweet Georgia Brown," Walt Watkins all the way from Texas did a great job on "Cripple Creek" and relative new comer Lisa Wilkins joining in on "Old Joe Clark."

Once everyone had been given a chance to play all bones players came up and all played together for several tunes (see photo on Page 4). The inevitable conga line formed and

bones were played around the whole hall! At one point I stepped out of the line and watched as each player took their turn moving in front of me. I played with each one and what a great experience to enjoy each persons company! Although 32 bones players played on Saturday night performance several others were in the audience and joined in making the total 44 bones players. I can't thank everyone enough for coming and helping me see

Minutes of Board of Director's Meeting

Ev Cowett, Executive Director, called the meeting to order at 4:30 pm on August 3, 2001 at the Red Apple Barn in Phillipston, MA. Steve Wixson read the minutes of last year's Board and Membership meetings. The minutes were approved. He also read the email motion approving the Honorary Member category and selecting Ted Goon as the first Honorary member. This action was reaffirmed. An interim Treasurer's Report was presented but not approved. The Treasurer's Report will be submitted in October after the fiscal year ends.

Steve Brown reviewed his plans for the upcoming Fest. A discussion followed. The Fest is getting big enough that a Program Committee is needed to support the local host. Motion was made and approved that the Board of Directors be the Program Committee for Bones Fest VI augmented with the local host and volunteers. The date for the Fests was discussed and should be consistent from year to year so that people can plan. Motion was made and approved to allow the Program Committee to select this date. (*Editor note: Bone Fest V financially broke even.*)

A motion was made and approved that the Board adopt a logo and it be based around the hands in the Mount painting titled 'The Bones Player.' Ev Cowett volunteered to handle this.

The Board again served as Nominating Committee for election of

Officers and Board Members at the Membership meeting. The motion was made and approved to resubmit the previous Board for election.

A motion was made and approved to bring up the Frank Brower Meritorious Serve Award for reconsideration at the Membership Meeting.

Minutes of Membership

Ev Cowett called the meeting to order at 4:40 pm on August 4, 2001 in the Red Apple Barn in Phillipston, MA. Motion was made and approved to dispense with reading of the minutes.

There was an election of Officers and Board members. The Board presented the previous Officers and Board members for election and Ev opened the floor for additional nominations. The motion was made and approved to close nominations and elect the nominees by acclamation.

A motion was made and seconded to rename the Frank Brower Meritorious Service Award in honor of Percy Danforth. A discussion of blackface minstrelsy followed. The original motion was withdrawn and a straw vote was held as guidance to the Board in support of naming the award the RBS Meritorious Service Award. The straw vote heavily favored the generic name.

Steve Wixson asked for ideas for new directions for the newsletter. He publicly thanked Sally Carroll for her editorial review of the newsletter.

Walt Watkins announced National Park Service ceremonies to commemorate the Civil War. There are funds for bones players for those who would like a paid gig.

Ev Cowett passed on a apology from Martha Cowett, web mistress. The website was down due to a lighting strike, but is in operation again.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:15