



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 5, No. 1 2003

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Greetings to bones players everywhere. The year 2002 was a great year for bones players and followers who love the sounds and accompanying music. We had over 100 dues paying members last year and hope for a modest increase in 2003. To date more than 90 have renewed their membership. If you are one who has not, please remit \$20 to the Rhythm Bones Society.

The Newsletter keeps improving, as does the quality of bones playing by all members which is evident from viewing the many hours of video tape from Bones Fest VI. Editing is under way and should be completed before the one goes out.

Our editor of the Rhythm Bones Player, Steve Wixson, has been known to troll malls and other public places for bones enthusiasts with great success and lots of fun. If you have tried it send a letter to the editor describing your experience. Steve and I as well as other members would love to hear about it.

Bones Fest VII is just around the corner. July 25-27 should be marked on your calendars. Gil and Linda Hibben will host the event in Louisville, KY and they know how to throw a party. Plan to be there. They would also appreciate suggestions for the program.

May your bones be with you. *Ev Cowett*

Bones at Sea

This study starts with records from 1817 to 1820 with the *Uranie*, a French frigate, and her expedition. They used castanets to gain confidence with the native aborigines in Sharks Bay, Australia. There is a picture of a meeting between the natives and Monsieur Arago, an artist on the voyage, who is holding the castanets. The natives were actually knocking on a piece of wood as the castanets were being sounded. Then the party opened

up trade goods and traded back and forth for food stuffs for the crew and the ship and also trinkets for the natives.¹ The real recorded time line sort of starts there.

Out at sea the instruments help keep connection with the land playing tunes and accompanying songs that sailors sang when they were not working. This is an important demarcation because when working, just songs

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The photograph from the deck of the USS Wasbash was taken in 1863 by Henry P Moore while the ship was off-shore from South Carolina. Note the bones player on the left. Photograph courtesy of Jean Mehaffy

Editorial

I suspect all of us would like to thank Tim Reilly personally for his article on *Bones at Sea*. Tim dictated it while in the hospital following a car accident on the way to Bones Fest VI. Part 1 is in this issue and Part 2 will be in the next issue.

Hank Tenenbaum submitted the obituary on Richard *Mr Bones* Thomas. Richard said he would attend Bones Fest III, but never showed up. His CD, *Bones and Blues*, was the Recording of the Quarter in Volume 2, No. 2 of the newsletter.

The obituary states that Richard was inspired to play the bones after seeing Sammy Davis, Jr., his uncle and father perform. Does anyone know anything about this trio and their bones playing?

Hans Weehuizen, a member from the Netherlands, sent a short article and photograph on some very unusual and interesting bones.

As you must know by now, I troll for bones players when I travel. That is I make a fool of myself by walking around playing bones. And it works! We spent part of the holidays in Mexico and, in the small town of San Miguel de Allende, Fred Edmund's nephew came up and introduced himself. He had heard Fred play many times but was not a bones player himself. Fred Edmund inspired Ev Cowett to organize Bones Fest I and has one of the bones instructional videos. Small world!

Letters to the Editor

Ev, We got it!! The old Louisville Theater in downtown Louisville. Seats 200 with stage and good acoustics. The date for Bones Fest VII is July 25-27, 2003. We will work on getting a room rate downtown. Also, where to have our Friday night clash. All the best, *Gil Hibben*.

My name is Tom Lockhart and I come from Bannockburn in Scotland. Myself and my good friend Paw Broom both mastered the Bones after being blown away by a two handed player we had the opportunity to hear

down at a folk festival in Edale England. They took a bit of learning but we mastered the technique and are in demand at all sorts of folk music events, especially Paw who is like a Chinook Helicopter in full flight. They sound beautiful miked up.

The bones I own, which are about seventy years old and made of ebony, have a deep stinging rattle to them. They used to belong to a professional entertainer and his daughter, who gave me them to me, told me he appeared playing them on very early BBC Radio programmes. The best sound I ever made from bones was from real whale bones, very heavy and an indescribable sound; they were also very old. I wrote to Tromso in Norway to try and obtain a piece of whale bone to manufacture my own as they are still allowed to take whales there for scientific purposes but to no avail.

I enjoyed visiting your web site. I am presently on an oil rig in the middle of the North Sea. Good luck to the world's fellow bones players; it is amazing the enjoyment the 'Worlds Smallest Percussion Instrument' can bring to so many people with a lot of them asking, "What is that you are playing?" Just like I did as they have never 'clapped' eyes on them before.

I once played them in Mexico with a Macharachi Band. They loved them and asked what they were. I told them Scottish Castanets. Kindest Regards, *Tom Lockhart & Paw Broom, the "Scottish Castanet Players."*

I spoke to Ted Goon last night and he told me that his beloved wife Barbara died on December 18th after an eight month battle with illness.

I was fortunate to meet Barbara on both of my visits to Ted in LA. I was hoping to see her again on my next visit. She was a wonderful, warm, and caring person, full of vitality and fun. She made me very welcome in their home and I will miss her.

Ted's loss is a great one. *Mel Mercier*.

I thought the Guilford College venue was superb. Why not just make it our permanent site for the Fest? We could have an occasional fest at other venues; we should even have Regional Fests like one a quarter at some venue and

Rhythm Bones Player

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

Rhythm Bones Central web site: rhythmbones.com

the annual Fest at Guilford. Our Regional Fests should attract more local members and give them a less expensive opportunity to participate.

Seems to me it is time now to also recruit some musician members to the society. We could use Blue Grass, Dixieland, Ragtime, Blues, Celtic groups to play live. This could even evolve to where the society could put on shows at folk fests, Broadway, and Hollywood!!

Host responsibilities at Guilford could be rotated; I would not expect Ev to be burdened with any of it. Also, Guilford could play a more direct role. Use their staff. Hey I get carried away. *Walt Watkins*

I have worked with rhythm bones for over 30 years...mainly with Percy Danforth who played bones for many events. Percy would accompany me to schools where I, as a composer, would involve the

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students in writing songs about the history of their area and then we would teach them how to play the rhythm bones...especially in connection with my musical about lumbering, T-I-M-B_E-R (www.songsalive.com/plays.html)!!

I have a nursing background and am currently a music and health consultant at U of Michigan's Mott Children's Hospital here in Ann

Bones in Modern China

Recently Bob Everhart, organizer of the National Traditional Music Festival and Contests (including the Bones Contest) formerly in Avoca, Iowa, went to China and performed some traditional music for them. He sent a news release of that effort to all of the people on his email list including me. I sent a return email asking if he saw anything like bones in China. Here is his reply:

"We did! In Xian we saw a blind couple performing in the street. He was playing a one-string fiddle-like instrument, but the woman was playing with what appeared to be bones. They were wider than those we are familiar with and tied with string on one end to keep them together. They 'clapped' more than anything but she kept a remarkable rhythm with them to the old fiddler. We watched them for some time and found it very interesting. Both of them were quite old, and passers-by dropped in small coins quite often. We didn't see much begging anywhere but these two blind ones must have had permission to solicit. Actually they were pretty good, so we left a donation, too. It was

Bones in Ancient China

The Harper's New Monthly Magazine article titled *The Ancestry of Brudder Bones* appearing in the 1878-9 issue states that bones were among the musical instruments of Chinese Emperor Fon Hi the first. The date was around 3500 B.C.

Call for Regional Bones Fest Organizers

Members have expressed interest in getting together in between Bones Fests at what might be called Regional Bones Fests. These would be one day events for people within a couple of hours driving time. Lunch could be as simple as delivered pizza and motels would not be needed. Steve Wixson would send email and snail mail notices to members and non-members in our database. The event would probably be similar to Bones Fests I and II that Ev Cowett organized and he will share that organizing experience. If you are interested in organizing such an event, contact Ev Cowett at 336-294-5332 or

Richard 'Mr. Bones' Thomas Obituary

Richard 'Mr. Bones' Thomas passed away peacefully in his sleep Friday morning, November 29th, 2002.

Mr. Bones, a fixture in the Washington music scene for at least seven decades, was born in Pomonky, MD July 30, 1922 and was raised in Washington, DC from six months of age.

Developing an interest in the bones at the age of six, after seeing a vaudeville performance by Sammy Davis Jr., his uncle and his father at a train station, he crafted his first set of bones from a cigar box. He then began fashioning them from wood and finally settled upon 6 to 7 inch beef rib bones (a process that takes approximately nine months).

During World War II he was drafted into the Army and was a member of the famous Red Ball Express. During the war he earned four Battle Stars. After the war he worked a series of jobs in both the private and public sectors until his retirement.

Mr. Bones met Archie Edwards at the recording of *Blues and Bones*. After the recording they performed at the Chicago Blues Festival, and in



Richard 'Mr. Bones' Thomas from the www.acousticblues.com website

1997 they performed at the St. Louis Blues Festival.

Along with other Barbershop members (Archie opened the Barbershop in 1959 and it soon became a meeting place for local and national musicians, and was the first meeting place of the Washington, DC Blues Society), Mr. Bones had been a hit at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, the Bull Durham Blues Festival, Blues in the Burg (where he was a featured performer), the DC Blues Society Festival and various local festivals. He had also performed community service benefit shows at hospitals, schools and civic events.

Mr. Bones' percussion, which sounds similar to castanets and tap drums, can be heard on "*Blues and Bones*" with Archie Edwards. He also recorded with Michael Roach on the CDs "*Ain't Got No Home*" and "*The Blinds of Life*."

Mr. Bones' craft is compatible with most, if not all, musical genres, including blues, jazz, folk, Latin, etc. He had a delightful personality and was always a crowd favorite.

Mr. Bones was a senior member of the AEBHF and last July Mr. Bones turned 80 years old. For more information about Mr. Bones and the Foundation, please go to website www.acousticblues.com. Submitted by Hank Tenenbaum

Recorded Bones Music

Flapjack. Old time Bush Swing with Teilhard Frost on bones and feet. There are only two bones tracks (3 and 5) but the feet percussion sounds like slow bones. See www.flapjack.ca for information on this CD.

Benoit Bourque. May I suggest these CDs on which I play bones: 1) TB-035 Hommage à Alfred Montmarquette, 2) TB-091 Les pieds qui parlent, 3) Matapat on Borealis Records, 4) Petit fou on Borealis Records. Here is where you can find a lot of very québécois music including the first two recordings: www.qbc.clic.net/~thirtybe Call Borealis Records at 877-530-4288.

Website of the Quarter

www2.nlc-bnc.ca/gramophone/src/m2-1041-e.htm. This website is great if you like French Acadian music which I do. I have several of Alfred Montmarquette's tapes and CDs that I got from the Smithsonian Folkways Records several years ago (See Recorded Bones Music, Volume 3, No 1 for their address). Click on Virtual Gramophone Database to listen to lots of old recordings. *Ev Cowett*

Albert "Bones" Baker Dies

We will always remember 'Bones' as a tall, thin man, wearing razor-sharp pressed trousers and spotlessly clean dress shirts. His clothing was accented with highly polished dress shoes and gentleman-style hats.

At age 89, Bones was the eldest of the Fruit Jar Picker's band members. Over the years he played on the TV show Hee-Haw with Roy Clark, and on the Grand Ole Opry. Al had a great sense of rhythm, rattling the bones at a break-neck pace which added the winkle to the music.

When Albert joined the U.S. Army he brought his 'bones' with him. The bones were cow's ribs, shortened to about seven inches. In the evenings he would join with a few other soldiers to play music. See www.fruitjarpickers.com for more details. *Submitted by Steve Brown*

Review of Barry Patton's Bones Instructional Video

Barry "Bones" Patton's 13 minute video is titled *Introduction to Playing the Rhythm Bones*. It begins with a one-handed bones demonstration with Byron Berline playing the fiddle.

Barry first shows how to hold the bones. He then teaches the forward roll followed by a figure-eight roll. This is followed by the stop (or tap).

He moves to two-handed (or double fisted) bones playing. He demonstrates several different two-handed licks again with Byron on the fiddle. He shows how to play a rhythm beat in one hand to go with the pattern played in the other hand.

Barry suggests that the student get recorded music and practice to learn how to keep the rhythm. He has some advice on what level of proficiency a student needs before jamming or playing with other instrumentalists.

He concludes with a small bit of the history of bones playing.

Barry also sells bones and information on purchasing this video or his bones is available at his website: doublestop.com/barrybones.htm (temporarily down for reorganization) or call 316-221-9201. *Steve Wixson*

Indiana University Playin' The Bones

The Rhythm Bones Society was able to help the Indiana University add bones playing to a theatrical play by introducing them to former member Malcom Dalglish. This effort was quite successful and Malcom helped the actor learn to play a little and he managed to do all of the effects that were needed live. The following is their initial request.

"I found your address via a website about your Bones Players Society. I am hoping that you might be able to help me with a problem. I am a lighting designer working on my MFA at Indiana University. I am working on a new play written by one of my fellow MFA playwright students called *Playin' the Bones*. It is a terrific play set in Appalachia about a girl who can see and communicate with the dead. The play uses the bones as a representation of the dead communicating with the living.

"I need to find some bones recordings to use for sound cues. I am hoping to find recordings of the bones alone (without other instruments). I would be grateful for any help or leads that you may offer.

"Thank you for your time. I hope that we can help spread the beauty of this musical media." *CC Conn*

Bones Fest VII

Louisville, Kentucky

Hosted by Gil and Linda Hibben

July 25-27, 2003

Saturday at the Louisville Theatre in
downtown Louisville

Details in the next newsletter

Bones Calendar

March 8th. Downeast Country Dance Festival. No word if there will be a bones workshop, but Steve Brown will be there selling bones and playing with Ryan Thomson. Information at website home.gwi.net/dance/decdf.

March 30. 2-4 P.M. McCabes, 3101 West Pico Blvd. Santa Monica, CA, 310-828-4497. Join Aaron Plunkett for a one day workshop at Mc Cabes (Just West of the 10 Fwy.) where he will present an exciting "hands-on" look into drumming styles and rhythms from Ireland (Bones, Spoons, Bodhran), The Balkans (Teppan), Egypt (Dumbek/Table), India (Tablas), Persia (Tombak), Indonesia (Gamelan), Africa (Anlo Ewe), Cuba (Congas) and Brazil (Birenbau, Pandeiro).

The workshop will accommodate beginner, intermediate and advanced playing levels. Participants will learn the elements that make up music: beat, rhythm and pitch and the class will play traditional musical forms from various regions around the world. Basic instruments will be provided for you or you can bring your own.

Cost is \$30.00 and you are encouraged to bring your cassette recorders and notebooks; however video taping or digital recording is not allowed. For further information contact Mc Cabes at 310-828-4497 or Aaron at 818-569-5465.

April 25-27. New England Folk Festival, Natick Mass. Steve Brown's Bones workshop tentatively scheduled for Saturday at 12-1 pm. Member Adam Kline and Constance Cook performing just before. He hopes to have some of the kids from the school Constance teaches at come to the workshop to show their stuff, as well as the usual cast of characters from up here Shorty Boulet, Tim Reilly, Rob Rudin, Parker Waite, etc. The NEFFA web site is www.neffa.org.

May 5. All-Ireland Bones Competition. Abbeyfeale, Ireland. First prize 300 Euros. Several members have expressed interest in this event. For information send email to info@fleadhbythefeale.com.

June 14-16 (tentative). Sea Music

Festival. Traditional music. Jam sessions where bones players are welcome. Contact Tim Reilly at 860-245-0789 or 860-572-0711.

July 25-27. Bones Fest VII. Louisville, KY. Hosted by Gil and Linda Hibben.

August 25-31. Bones and Spoons Contest at National Traditional Country Music Festival. Bones Contest is traditionally on last Saturday, August 31. Contact Jerry Mescher or www.oldtimemusic.bigstep.com.

September 27th and 28th. Celtic Festival in Cincinnati at the beautiful and historic Coney Island. The festival has many things going on and the music is top notch. I'd be willing to open my home to anyone wanting to go to the festival. Jam sessions at my house available. If someone wants to come in, I'll setup a jam session with a celtic band. Mike Passerotti, (513) 505-6545, mikepasserotti@hotmail.com.

Sandor Slomovits' Gemini Calendar
March 21, 616-754-9163

Greenville Area Community Center, 700 E. Kent Rd. Greenville, MI
A Gemini family concert at a wonderful, intimate theater where they have played an annual concert for the last 11 years. For part of this performance they will be joined by a local children's choir.

March 27-29, Grand Rapids, MI,
They will be presenting workshops at the Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children Conference.

April 12, Whitewater, WI, They will be presenting workshops at the Early Childhood Conference of the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater.

April 26, Kerrytown Concert Hall, Ann Arbor, MI, San will join members of the Phoenix Ensemble, the wonderful group he worked with on his most recent CD, "The Orchestra Is Here to Play" for an evening of classical, folk and jazz. For details look on www.hoenixensemble.com.

April 30, Lansing, MI, San sings as part of the Annual State of Michigan Holocaust Commemoration in the Rotunda of the Capitol Building.

May 4, 734-665-4744, Temple Beth

(Bones at Sea continued from page 1)

were employed, in a call and response pattern called chanting. With both hands full of ship's gear, sails, lines, large pieces of wood or iron, and in all weather, there was no where to use an instrument effectively. It was when they were off watch in between work shifts most notably the end of the solar day that the idlers or day men and the crew with instruments gathered to play tunes.

In my research the day men consisted of cooks, stewards (the ship's butler), the sail maker, the carpenter, blacksmith and the cooper on whalers who normally worked from 6 in the morning to 6 in the evening every day. This is also the time where there would be a staggering or dogging of the four hour watch system and normally a four hour watch for half of the crew would be dogged into two two hour watches which each half would take. That way you did not have to stand the same watch all the time. (Sally Carroll can bear out the fact of this having had the same experiences.) It's time to patch your clothes, swap stories, sing ballads or national or patriotic airs, or practice instruments if they had them. If more than three or four were present, including bones and percussion, you were likely to have a fu-fu band, named by the effect it had on the officers. Jack London has a very, very good quote about a fu-fu band in the *Mutiny of the Elsinor*. He mentions bones playing and mentions the possibility of bones being made out of rib bone that were hanging out of salt meat; when the meat was actually consumed and the bone was left over, somebody would grab it knowing what the instrument was like on land from the minstrel bands. They were constructed out of the rib bones and they would polish up nicely in the sun and salt water.²

There are several document references to bones playing aboard ship. One that is very important to our Society is the Virginia Minstrels trip to Liverpool from New York City in 1844. While the actual log is still to be found of the packet ship *New York*, it is probable that Dan Emmet

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rehearsed their material on the month's voyage to England, from April to May 1844 (perhaps we need to check Han's Nathan on his biography), composed new tunes for their British Isle tour which started in May. Our revered father, Frank Brower, was on that tour and played with Emmet even as the troupe was disbanding and that is quoted in Nathan that the troupe actually disbanded for a little while and later got back together.³

In 1853 the USS Powaton dropped anchor in Tokyo Bay. Matthew C. Perry had come to open negotiations for trade with Japan. One of the American things that the Japanese painters recorded was a minstrel troupe made up from different members of the crew in full regalia. I recently got the American Heritage Junior Library's copy of Perry's visit to Japan which shows that whole minstrel troupe and it has a little of the text of that visit. Officially it doesn't say exactly what tunes they played but you can see the bones player playing in the left end of the depiction.⁴

In 1855, the San Francisco Minstrels went to Australia and at that time Sydney would have been the biggest city to play in. It was still more or less a settled penal colony. It was also a very popular place for whalers to come in and reprovision, as were places like Russell and Auckland, New Zealand. We know this from the *Charles W. Morgan's* logs as well as first hand narratives of other whalers. The San Francisco Minstrels crossed the Pacific either by steamer or sail, probably the latter because the coaling stops for steamers were still being established in the Far East. This is the time of the Australian gold rush and mass settlement in the port cities of the West Perth, Dunbury, Fremantle and in the South in Adelaide and in the East in Melbourne and again Sydney. The whalers caught the minstrel craze early usually from crews who had been shipped from New York City to New Bedford as Herman Melville was and used the songs and music as a tangible link to better times back home. The whalers were on the sea continually for as long as four or five

months between water and recreation places and three to five years away from home. There's also a cross reference from *One Whaling Family* by a man named Williams who saw a minstrel troupe in western Australia which I believe might have been the San Francisco Minstrels. The publishing date of the narrative is very, very close - within a few months of the trip that the minstrels made.^{5,6}

There are bones playing references from the voyages of two whale ships in 1851, one from New London, CT, one from New Bedford, MA. The whaler, *Julius Caesar*, sailed from New London for the South Georgia Islands down near Antarctica to go Sea Elephant hunting in 1851. A month or two into the trip the writer of the book *Life of a Whaler*, his name was Nathaniel Taylor, notes the musicians on the crew were reticent to play, but soon "the merry notes of a triangle, two fiddles, fife and a pair of bones resounded through the focsle." There is no record given, however, of the name of the man playing the bones or any of the instruments.

In New Bedford, later in 1851, the ship *Eliza Adams* was ready to sail. The day before she did a young man was issued a Seaman's Protection, a sort of ID. He was a US citizen, Albert Evans, 21 years old from Providence, RI. He was five feet, four inches tall with brown hair and blue eyes. He had signed aboard as an ordinary seaman for 1/175th of the profits of the voyage. Ten weeks into the voyage, John Jones, the ships steward recorded a busy deck scene.

Eliza Adams, January 7, 1852, found the fiddler playing the Fourth of July, Evans keeping time with the bones, blacksmith playing the jubler on the banjo, Goss was playing Bonaparte Crossing the Alps on the fife and some of the others were singing Old Dan Tucker Has Come To Town. In addition to this, part of the quote also mentions Portuguese sailors they picked up in the Azores singing in their national language on the focsle, the other end or bow of the ship, and this is on a vessel that was similar to the *Charles W. Morgan*, 100' long by 25' wide. About Mr. Evans; his name in the quote in John

Jones was misspelled so finding his name on the shipping list was part of the detective work. That led me to the Seaman's Protection paper and I found that personal information on him. At this point I haven't found relatives or a photograph yet.^{7,8}

You had bones players on steamboats too. In the research that I found there were plenty of minstrel troupes going up and down the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. One of the early troupes was on a boat called the *James Raymond* and it was Dave Reed of his own troupe, Dave Reed's Minstrels. He played on the *James Raymond* in 1856. And then after the *James Raymond's* entry, I have in my research another steamer called the *Dixie*. In 1859 there was a fellow named Billy Manning who was playing on the *Dixie*. But to go back to the *James Raymond*, that was a push boat for the *Floating Palace* that was going up and down the Mississippi River. The *Floating Palace* had no engines, it was a huge museum/entertainment hall and dormitory for the performers and Ralph Keeler in his article, *Three Years as a Negro Minstrel*, mentions what the *Floating Palace* was like and he also mentions the *James Raymond*. They had the Redondo, which was the area the minstrels played in. The *James Raymond* was bought by the Union Navy as a store ship and as a possible floating battery in 1861. The price they got for it was \$40,000 so it must have been a significantly sized vessel.^{6,9}

There are lots of photographs of these bones players and I am always looking to find more. I have to try to find more photographs of the United States Navy in the Civil War or just go to different maritime museums. I've tried ours at Mystic Seaport, but I haven't been able to get the access or the enthusiasm yet for the project that I am looking for. I also want to go to the Greenwich Maritime Museum in England because I think their records are a little better. Europeans tended to keep music at sea a lot more and later than the Americans did because of the punishment that happened on the American ships. Their photographs

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are much more comprehensive. There is a wonderful photograph that started all of my research on the instrument at sea that is taken from the 19 teens or early 1920's. It a photograph of a fu-fu band and the man right down on the front row on the left hand side has a pair of bones in his hands and they are bone bones. You can tell by the color of them in his hands. He is wearing a straw hat with no brim and the whole top of the hat is knocked off and cocked at a 45 degree angle.¹⁰

I think, in the fu-fu bands, they adapted the idea of the minstrel second part and they dressed up in pretty outlandish outfits. A lot of the guys are barefoot. One guy is wearing a beautiful pair of sail cloth pants and 'Boiled' shirts or striped shirts. One fellow in that picture has a southwester hat on over formal clothes which really looks ridiculous. They would often take the songs they had heard from the melodeons or dance halls and there is no great distance between the waterfront at South Street, New York City and the Bowery Theater and Mechanic's Hall where Christy's and Bryant's Minstrels played.¹¹ You can just see the whole impetus for these guys taking this music out and sailorizing the lyrics - *Camptown Races* in sea lexicon becomes *Sacramento* because it's a reflection of everyone going out to California for the gold rush. You have an obvious influence from the entertainment point of view. The tempo was very fast and very catchy and the men wanted to remember it on a 15,000 mile voyage to California. There is a sea version of *O Susannah* as well.

In the 1840's when minstrelsy was young you have the cotton trade really booming, and you have an itinerant labor force coming from the British Isles and the Northern ports of America to New Orleans, and taking those boats back with cotton to England; there was a lot of transatlantic trade. In Rice's *Monarchs of Minstrelsy*, myself and another musician at Mystic Seaport noted a huge influx of British Isle and Western Europeans as minstrels rather than native born Americans or Yanks. You have a huge melting pot as we call it

now. These people who have a natural gift for entertaining people are going on and doing delineations of the lowest class of citizens, but the people who are doing these delineations are themselves on the bottom of the ladder. That's where I did some research into the idea of the African Americans and the Irish being in the same social ladder really popularizing this instrument, both having it in their cultures.

A lot of the music that was played on the ships was saved. I mentioned *Sacramento* before. *O Susanna*, of course, was played. They had *Liza Lee* and *Clear The Track* or *The Bulgine* as shanties and also what they called forbitters or recreational songs or focsle songs. Jibs and reels were also popular music.¹¹⁻¹³

They were fairly quick rhythmically and they got the attention of the other crew members. It breaks down the idea that you're not doing concert music, you are doing popular music. So in the *Julius Caesar* quote that I gave you before all of the possible instrumentalists come out and start playing along because everyone wants to get playing and cement good feelings. The Captain smiles because everyone is playing together which means the ship is going to be happier, a major point of ship psychology. And if the Captain is getting his coffee on time he is pretty happy as well.

Whale ships in the 1840's and 1850' would be going all over the Pacific so they often chopped wood for firewood and you can imagine they might be going onto a beach that had sandalwood or teak or ebony or rosewood. All of these sorts of wood when they were cut up and polished would make an awesome set of bones. We know that now - that is a given. But they also could uses whale's bones, the jawbone. We know this perfectly from Nick Driver's sets and antique bones that were made out of whalebone. The part that you would make it from would probably be the front third of the whale's jaw under the tooth sockets because it would give you both the length and the density and you could machine in the curve to suit your fancy. There is also a very gentle curve at the back of the jaw in

the pan bone or the mandible. Pieces were given by seniority, but after everyone was done shaping, any scrap could be utilized to make a pair of bones. I have photograph of fiddle pegs and a tailpiece being made out of pan bones complete with scrimshaw. The peg heads all have flower motifs on the flat and the tail piece is a really wonderful piece of patriotic workmanship with a sailor at the top of a mast nailing a national flag to the mast. So with 'stock' measurements all that was needed for bones was 7" long and an inch of width and a little thickness.

(This article concludes in the next issue of the newsletter.)

References

1. [Music of the Sea](#) by David Proctor.
2. [The Mutiny of the Ellsinore](#) by Jack London
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8. [To Pass the Time Away](#) by Carol Tobal
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11. [Songs of the Sailor and](#)

A Short Biography of Tim Reilly

Tim started playing bones in 1988 at Mystic Seaport after listening to and meeting Martin Fay of the Chieftains. He teaches a class at Williams College on bones and percussion instruments used at sea. He also makes bones.

He became part of Mystic Seaport after going there to read Moby Dick. He is a ship rigger and repairs and restores masts and spars and rigging of tall sailing ships.

He crossed the Atlantic in 1994 and played bones in all of the ports that he visited.

Special Bones

Last summer we visited friends in Oregon and we had a nice music weekend, 20 miles up Roque River.

During one of our sessions, my friend Bo Shindler found out that there could be more sound (effect) from the bones. I told him that is not possible; bones are bones! A few weeks ago I met my friend again and he gave me three pairs of bones (see the photograph to the right).

The middle pair in the thickened part has a spent bullet cartridge filled with shut hail. The holes are made for giving a *samba* sound.

The left pair has the thickened part closed. No holes, but the cavity space is also filled with shut hail (no bullet spent cartridge).

The right pair is wrought on one side with light metal cartridge-cases in the bones. That gives a special effect, plus when you turn around the bones, there is a much different sound!

I hope you enjoy this photograph of very special bones. Maybe it is also nice to mention them in the newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society. The



Photograph of the 'special bones' described in the article on this page. Photograph by Han Weehuizen.

bones are made from Myrtle wood.

Hans Weehuizen.

(Editor's note: Parker Waite's aluminum bones are another example of 'special bones.' I tried them at Bones Fest VI and they sounded very good which is not what I would have

predicted. This article has me thinking about other possibilities for making bones. If you have an example of 'special bones' please send a description and a photograph for a future newsletter.)

Rhythm Bones Society

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Address Correction Requested