



May 2 - 5, 2024  
Shack Up Inn, Clarksdale, Mississippi

# ***Program***

## **Welcome to Clarksdale, Mississippi and Bones Fest XXVIII**

Welcome to Bones Fest XXVIII, once again we are fortunate to be back at Shack Up Inn on the edge of Clarksdale, Mississippi in the heart of the Delta, home of cotton and “Home of the Blues.” Five years ago I hosted Bones Fest XXIII here so many of you already know what a perfect environment the Shack Up Inn has created for an event such as this. Twenty eight years of Bones Fest and twenty five years since the Rhythm Bones Society was born is certainly reason to celebrate and celebrate we will !!!! There are so many great rhythm bones players involved in this fellowship, all with wonderful stories to tell and music to share. Some are calling this the Blues Bones Fest, but all musical genres and rhythm bones playing styles are certainly welcome and encouraged. “Bon Ton Roulette” good people, let the good times roll.

Thanks to Bill Talbot (owner) and the crew at Shack Up Inn for making us feel welcome and at home. Thank you to Tate and Chelsea Antici, the new owners of Hopson Commissary for being part of our celebration on Friday evening by making dinner available to us and the public and providing another music venue. Thanks to Ms. Tameal, manager of Ground Zero Blues Club, for providing an incredible venue for our “BIG SHOW” rhythm bones playing production on Saturday evening. And most of all thank each and every attendee for coming here to celebrate 25 years of the Rhythm Bones Society and caring enough to keep this organization alive. Here’s to another 25 years.

Your humble host, Randy “DaBonesMan” Seppala, 906-235-5928

PS. In the Mississippi Delta the tip bucket is a significant item, in many cases it may be all musicians get for their service. Sometimes they will get the door if the club owner is generous and charges admission. If you see a musician with a tip bucket and enjoy what that musician is playing, please put some money in their bucket. Thanx.

[The Bones Fest XXVIII graphic is an acrylic creation by our Host.]

## **Bones Fest XXVIII Program**

**Primary Venue Location:** Shack Up Inn

**Thursday, May 2nd:**

3:00 - Registration Opens

7:00 PM – Reception at Shack Up Inn (appetizers included with registration). This will be open to jamming and a core group of musicians Reverend Robert, Libby Rae, Fast Eddie Consolmango, Randy Seppala, out host, will be do a set and back up anyone else who needs help. Registration, meet and greet, get settled in.

**Friday, May 3rd:**

7:30 AM – Breakfast (included with registration)

9:00 AM – Welcome and Introductions Session

10:00 AM - Beginner and Intermediate Workshops

11:00 AM - History of the Blues - Vgo

12:00 PM – Lunch (included with registration)

1:00 PM – Roundtable discussions on approaches to Blues playing

2:00 PM – Advanced Workshop with focus on the blues shuffle with variations- Kenny Wolin

3:00 PM – Sign up and prepare for Hopson stage time with individual performances with backup musicians.

5:00 PM - We have 2 hours of stage time next door at Hopson Commissary, and they have a band featuring internationally famous blues man Watermelon Slim from 5:00 to 7:00. They will have a Southern buffet available for \$15 from 5:00 until the food is gone. Food will be available to public as well and both facilities open for public involvement in Festival.

6:00 PM - Beginner's workshop and getting the public from the Hopson Commissary into rhythm bones playing. On Shack Up Inn's back porch.

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7:00 PM - We will return to the Shack Up with Joe McLerrin & The Hokum Cats for an hour or so. Great ones playing music.

**Saturday, May 4th:**

7:30 AM – Breakfast (included with registration)

9:00 AM – Informal Jamming, Pass-offs

10:00 AM - Beginner and Intermediate Sessions (continued)

11:00 AM - Irish Discussion with Tom Connelly, Mel Mercier, and Skeff Flynn

12:00 PM – Lunch (included with registration)

1:00 PM – Sean “BAD APPLE” with DaBonesMan demonstrate the different styles of da blues of Mississippi while the Board of Directors Meets

2:00 PM – 25th Anniversary Session- Steve Wixson

3:00 PM – General Membership Meeting and Group Photograph

3:30 PM – Sign up and prepare for the BIG show with individual performances with backup musicians.

7:00 PM – This will be the BIG show at Morgan Freeman’s Ground Zero Blues Club. We have the stage from 7 to 9 for our individual performances. Local favorite Heather Crosse with her band “Heavy Suga’ and The Sweet Tones” will play from 9 to 12. Food is available to purchase.

**Sunday, May 5th: Good-byes**

7:30 AM - Continental Breakfast (included with registration)

**Other Musicians**

Kurt Gronvall - Ishpeming MI

Amy Carlson - Neguanee, MI

Fast Eddie Consolmagno - Marquette MI

Rev Robert Reynolds - Clarksdale, MS



## Attendee Biographies

**Michael Ballard** - Michael Ballard - “I was introduced to rhythm bones at the Renaissance Pleasure Faire near Los Angeles in 1983. I’ve been playing on the stages and streets of the Faire ever since. Since then, I’ve played in pubs and parties and parades around Southern California and, sometimes, further afield.



I’ve taught rhythm bones, both one-on-one and in workshops almost from the beginning. Most notably, I was invited to teach at the California Traditional Music Society’s annual Summer Solstice Folk Music Dance and Storytelling festival for more than 20 years.

Friend, dancer and multi-instrumentalist Molly Bennett told me about the Rhythm Bones Society and I signed up. My first Bones Fest was hosted by Steve Wixson (BFIV). I read through the list on the web site. I believe I’ve attended 13 Bones Fests so far.”



**Kate Barfield** - I am an eternal student of rhythm bones and am indebted to my wonderful teachers, Mike Baytop, Hank Tennenbaum, Rowan Corbett, and James Yoshizawa. I often play rhythm bones for Old Time musicians, as well as the blues, as long as they will put up with me. When I am not playing rhythm bones, I am working on fused glass art.

**Sky and Jessye Bartlett** - I learned to play rhythm bones from Ernie Duffy when I was thirteen. Ernie was gracious enough to take me around to all sorts of events where I had the opportunity to play, and eventually to Bones Fests. I met my wife, Jessye, at the Bones Fest in Alexandria, VA. She is an excellent fiddle player. We hosted Bones Fest XXII and XXVII.



**Ron Bruschi (Marie)** - Ron Bruschi has been dabbling in various forms of hand percussion as far back as he can remember. Three years ago while playing spoons, a minstrel banjo playing friend asked him if he also played rhythm bones. He didn't, but, his wife Marie had recently bought him a set of Percy Danforth Bones (still his favorites). He started practicing and he's been playing them constantly ever since.



Ron and Marie have both been involved in traditional folk music and dance since the revival of the 1960's. They regularly teach several types of traditional folk dance: Cajun, Zydeco and Irish Sets (squares) in the Albany, NY area, including the Dance Flurry Festival Februarys in Saratoga Springs. They attended Bones Fests XX & XXI and enjoyed both the camaraderie and talent.



**Tom Connolly** - I've been playing and making rhythm bones since 1979 in Galway, then later in Cork, Ireland. Around 2010 I heard about the Rhythm Bones Society and it was fantastic to know there were like-minded people who love rhythm bones! I sell rhythm bones on my website [www.irishbones.com](http://www.irishbones.com) and so far I've sent around 300 pairs to 28 countries. I also make a jig doll called Reeling Ray, and a washboard derivative called the BoneBoard. My wife, Brid, and I attended Bones Fest XXII hosted by Skye

and Jessye Bartlett in Lincoln, New Hampshire and Reeling Ray had a dance there. I am really looking forward to the Blues Fest in Clarksdale and I can't wait to try to play along to a very different rhythm than I am accustomed to. Slán go fóill, Tom [Tom is the newest member of the Board of Directors.]

**Jim Connor (Cindy)** - Jim Connor is described as a song writer, composer, vocalist, and instrumentalist on the banjo, guitar, harmonica, and rhythm bones. His most famous song is *Grandma's Feather Bed* made famous by John Denver. Banjo legend, Earl Scruggs, said "Jim is the finest living traditional banjo player, and perhaps the best that ever lived." Jim was member of The



New Kingston Trio, and played in John Denver's band for many years.

Jim was Ted Goon's newspaper delivery boy in the 50s and he learned to play rhythm bones from Ted 'Mr. Goon-Bones' Goon. Jim is the only person known who learned to play from 'Mr. Goon-Bones.' Ted was a rhythm bones recording artist in the 50s, and important enough that there is a Ted Goon Exhibit in the RBS online Museum. Over the years Jim played hundreds of live club, festival and theatre appearances throughout the world. He played in 68 countries on 4 continents, and while rhythm bones were not his main instrument, they were always in his pocket ready to bring out for an encore or jamming after a show (as shown in his photograph). He was profiled in RBP, Vol 25, No 4.



**Jonathan Danforth** - Jonathan, Melissa, and Emmett Danforth live in Westport, MA, near New Bedford where they hosted Bones Fest X. Jonathan learned to play rhythm bones from his granddad when he was five or six years old, but didn't meet other rhythm bones players until he and Melissa met Steve Brown at NEFFA in 2001, and attended Bones FestV that year. Jonathan likes to keep it simple on rhythm bones, and loves teaching rhythm bones to beginners almost as much as playing them. He'll be happy to play a fiddle tune with you, too.

**Ernie Duffy** - I was born and raised in New Hampshire and live within a few hundred yards from the home where I grew up. So, it was a rewarding experience for me to travel to many of the Bones Fests in other parts of the country. It is very exciting for me to have the Bones Fest in my home state last year so I can share the beauty of the White Mountains with my bones playing friends. I want



to express my sincere appreciation to Sky and Jessye Bartlett for hosting it last year. They have worked hard to make it a fun filled few days. I'm looking forward to seeing everyone soon!



**Skeffington Flynn** - I got my first set of rhythm bones in 2009 and attended my first Bones Fest in



2010. I was welcomed with open arms from the very beginning, and I am still enthralled by the musical possibilities of our instrument. The Rhythm Bones Society has really helped me to develop as a player, and I cherish the many connections I have made as a result. I joined the Board in 2011, hosted Bones Fest XIX in Shepherdstown, WV in 2015, and I promise to do whatever I can to steward this amazing musical community as Executive Director. I look forward to engaging with you all in Clarksdale, MS!



**Sam Foster** - An amateur musician of long standing, I have only recently discovered rhythm bones.



**Randy French (Melissa)**  
I was introduced to rhythm bones in the late 80s, early 90s, by Peter Shortall of the Armagh Rhymers. Most of

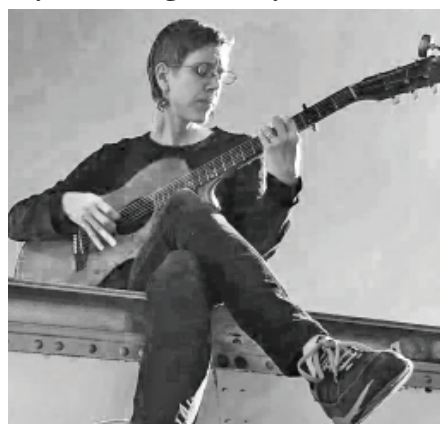
my experience is session play, Irish and Scottish. I spent a few years running around with the New Orleans Strathspey and Reel Society.



**Bruno Giles** -I have been playing rhythm bones ever since I was introduced to them by Steve Brown at the New England Folk Festival back in 2015. I'm a retired correction officer living near Boston MA. and also, a member of a hand drumming performance group called The Drum Nomads. I have perfected the art

of driving along long, winding mountainous roads using both knees, while playing two handed rhythm bones and not missing a beat.

**Mary Gunderson King** - I remember with great fondness the first Bones Fest that I was a part of in 2015 hosted by Skeffington Flynn in Shepherdstown, WV. The joy of all the rhythm bones players was evident in their faces and in the music they created. Though I don't play rhythm bones, it is a gift to make music with all who do, especially with Skeff. I play rhythm guitar and sing. Skeff and I have been making music together for twelve years. It's a joy to be with you all again!





**Heidi Hess-Bynum** - Heidi Hess-Bynum is primarily an old time banjo player and has been known to play fiddle, bass, and other stringed instruments. She currently serves on the Louisville Folk School board. Previously she taught classes for the Community Music Alliance out of New Albany, Indiana and has taught workshops at the Ohio Valley Gathering and the Heartland Dulcimer Club festival. Heidi lives in Radcliff, Kentucky with her husband and various rescue animals.



**Travis Kostell** - My name is Travis Kostell from Charlotte, NC (originally from Central NY). I learned about rhythm bones through my father, Randy 'Da Bonesman' Seppala. I am a rhythm bones novice, but have had a lifetime love of music throughout my life.

**Maggie McCabe** - Detroit artist Maggie McCabe has been performing in the Midwest region for over 20 years in several genres; blues, rock, soul, Celtic and more. Maggie also fronts the band First Raitt - Detroit, a tribute to Bonnie and Maggie's Farm Blues duo in addition to her solo work. She is a ten time Detroit Music Award winner as well as dozens of WDIV's "Best of Detroit" awards. Maggie is a frequent visitor to Clarksdale and has performed at several festivals there.



"...wails the blues like the ladies of a by-gone era.", "Her vocals are something to behold." - Detroit Blues Society news

**Mary Matthews** - Randy the Bonesman introduced me to rhythm bones and I am going to give it a try!

**Mel Mercier** - Mel Mercier is a multi-disciplinary, award-winning, Tony-nominated artist with an international reputation as a performer, composer and sound designer. Renowned as an innovative musician, rooted in traditional music, he is committed to collaborating across art forms, music genres and traditions. He is director of the Irish Gamelan Orchestra, MÓNCKK new music ensemble, and PULSUS, the first Irish traditional percussion ensemble.



Mel received his M.F.A. in World Music at CalArts in 1992 and his Ph.D. in Music from University of Limerick, Ireland, in 2011. He was Lecturer/ Professor of Music at University College Cork, Ireland, from 1992 to 2016, and inaugural Chair of Performing Arts at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick, Ireland from 2016 to 2022.

Mel was introduced to music by his father Peadar Mercier, a member of The Chieftains, who taught him to play the bodhrán and rhythm bones. He collaborated as a traditional percussionist with Irish pianist and composer Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin for 40 years. Throughout the 1980s, Mel and his father performed in Europe and the USA with John Cage and the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. In addition to Irish traditional music, Mel has studied and taught musics from Ireland, Indonesia, West Africa and India for more than 30 years.

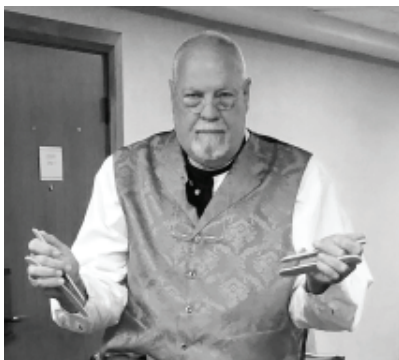
Mel has created music for theatre in Ireland and internationally for 25 years, during which time he has worked regularly with some of the world's most respected theatre artists, including Fiona Shaw, Deborah Warner, Phyllida Lloyd and Gare St Lazare Ireland. He has composed the music for many critically-acclaimed theatre productions and art installations that have been presented at theatres and venues in Ireland, the UK, Europe and America.



**Sharon Mescher** - Coming to Clarksdale for the first time was exciting, so much so that I had to come back. In September, 2017 I traveled to Eufaula, OK for a Gospel Weekend at Mattie and Paul Maloy's Longtown Theater. Gospel groups from around the country perform. I played rhythm bones with the Maloy's group. It was a wild time! Otherwise, I enjoy staying at home, playing cards with two groups

of widow-friends, reading, and going out with friends. [Sharon is shown with her late husband, Jerry, who was one of our rhythm bones legends.]

**Darryl 'Spike Bones' Muhrer** - "My first performance was as Dr. Spike in June 1978, and inspired by Percy Danforth from whom I learned to play rhythm bones, I soon changed my stage name to Spike Bones. I gather my performance 'vits' and pieces from the period 1840-1940, an era I call pre-TV entertainment. I have developed a lot of my character and material as a street performer in Chicago and New Orleans. Although I have played with a lot of Irish, Old-Time, Folk and Jazz bands, I consider myself as much a dancer as a musician. A twenty one year old membership with RBS has provided me with great inspiration, friendships, and rhythm bones insight into the art and history of rhythm bones.



**Dennis Riedesel (Susan)** - I was working as an extra and on the wardrobe crew on an "Alamo" movie set and saw my first rhythm bones player. Later, I saw another one at the San Antonio Folklife festival. I play many different kinds of instruments and here was a weird one that I knew nothing about. I found a set of rhythm bones and an instruction book and tape from "Lark in the Morning" and ordered the set. I had to do a lot of driving so I used this time to learn to play with either hand and then when I was not driving I taught myself to play double rhythm bones.

I belong to a Civil War and Cowboy era music group called "Dr. E.T. Bushrod and the Tanner Family Medicine Show or "Col. Bushrod's Tanner Family Wild West Extravaganza". We usually play what our fiddle player calls Authentic Americana Folk Music. Sometimes, when we are all together, I get to play bones with the "Sweet Song String Band", and the "Next Generation String Band/No Foolin' String Band". Also, very occasionally, our fiddle player switches over to his primary instrument, the "Blues Guitar" and I get to groove along with him!

I was on an Alaskan Cruise and found a piece of Mammoth Ivory at one of the tourist traps. I now have a set of Mammoth Ivory Bones!!



**Jim Runner** - I learned to play rhythm bones from my grandfather, who used to jam with the radio, or play with my grandmother at the piano. I met Percy Danforth in the seventies, and bought some of his rhythm bones. At that time, he was the only rhythm bones player I had ever met other than my grandfather. I like to fit rhythm bones into a wide range of musical styles, but I also enjoy them as a portable solo instrument. I take them hiking, particularly in rocky canyons where the terrain influences the **echoes**.



**Jenny and Tom Sartain** - Tom and I are a husband/wife duo performing old time music on banjo and guitar. We play regularly at the Ozark Folk Center and Club Possum in Mt. View, Arkansas.

**Randy Seppala** - Randy Seppala is the host this year for Bones Fest XXVIII, and also was the host for Bones Fest XXIII. He is from Watton, Michigan (May to December) and Clarksdale, Mississippi (January to April). He started playing the rhythm bones in January 2001 in an official apprenticeship through Michigan State University Museum's - Michigan Traditional Apprenticeship Program with master rhythm bones player and traditional musician Johnny Perona of Calumet, Michigan. He met members of the Rhythm Bones Society at a festival in Avoca, Iowa in 2002 and has been a member ever since. Randy has played rhythm bones with traditional American and traditional Finnish and Lumberjack music, as well as Irish, Cajun and blues. He has conducted many workshops, mostly at festivals, over the years exposing hundreds of people to the joy of playing the rhythm bones.



He plays a unique spoons playing style, invented by his mentor Johnny Perona, with tuned nickel silver spoons played in a bones fashion but with much different result.

**Becky Shannon** - I live in Northampton, Mass and play fiddle with the Fiddle



Orchestra of Western Massachusetts and the Rocky Road Band. I've been to three Bones Fests in the past and am glad to be coming again!

**Nikki Shaner-Bradford** - My name is Nikki Shaner-Bradford and I am a History PhD candidate at Brown University currently working on a project involving the history of playing the bones. I am sadly not a percussionist, but a historian moving further into the history of the rhythm bones through my research into the legacy and music of the late Abner Jay. [Note: Abner Jay has a Player-Profile in our online Museum.]



**Erin Sharkley** - Hi everyone! I am Erin Sharkey from Rhode Island. and this will be my second official Bones Fest and first time in Mississippi. I have been playing the rhythm bones for a few years and am very excited to continue my learning journey.

**Mark Shelton** - Mark Shelton's career has included work as a percussion soloist, producer, author, educational consultant, drum circle facilitator, and content creator. An active freelance musician, his performance credits include percussion work with Gateway Worship, North Carolina Symphony, Strata Big Band, Daystar Singes & Band, Wichita Falls Symphony, TALEA and Dallas Winds. Mark has appeared as a featured artist at the North Carolina and West Texas Days of Percussion, the Percussive Arts Society International Convention, and state music educator conventions in Texas, Nebraska, and Florida. As artistic director of the world music group Tin Roof Tango and a percussion soloist, Mark has logged hundreds of performances playing rhythm bones. Mark is an endorsing artist with REMO, Toca Percussion, Grover Pro Percussion, Natural Acoustics Lab, and One Beat Better.



**Ellen Stern** - I'm a car rhythm bones player but please don't tell anyone--and don't scold me: I learned to drive with a long cigarette in my right hand. It's lots easier and safer to drop a pair of rhythm bones. I mostly play Irish tunes on mandolin, tenor banjo or whistles but recently I've been learning a few Old Time and pop tunes. This weekend I hope I get to accompany some of you rhythm bones players in search of tunes. Your grins are so infectious! See you soon.



**Mary Lee Sweet (Frank)** - Mary Lee Sweet and husband Frank perform as Backintyme. Frank plays the banjo in the classical style of the 19th century and Mary Lee “rattles the bones,” or keeps time with tambourine. History will come alive as you hear the popular songs of the nineteenth century, performed as they were written, by song writers Stephen Foster, George Root, Henry Clay Work and others. Sing along to favorites like Oh Susanna, Camptown Races and Grandfather’s Clock. Tap your feet to the lively music of nonsense songs, patriotic songs and gospel tunes, or enjoy the gentle love ballads of nineteenth century America. More information about Backintyme at [www.backintyme.com](http://www.backintyme.com)



**Keith Symanowski** - Connecticut native Keith Symanowitz is a singer, rhythm guitarist, and percussionist who makes his home in the “Folk Music Capital” of Mountain View, Arkansas. Keith is a founding member of folk & country blues duo Billy Yank & Johnny Reb and plays percussion for The Creek Rocks from Springfield, Missouri. He is the 2023 Ozark Jig Dancing Champion and works as a park interpreter and promoter at the Ozark Folk Center State Park in Mountain View, AR where he teaches beginner jig dancing and folk percussion workshops to visitors of all ages and ability levels.



**Vgo (Patricia Labree)** - Vgo is a multi instrumentalist; rhythm bones and string instruments, and he has been entertaining over six decades. Music preferences are blues, Irish, jazz, ragtime, folk, gospel bluegrass and oldtime. He lives in Arcadia, Florida



**Stan Von Hagen (Jean)** - I got interested in playing rhythm bones after hearing Carolina



Chocolate Drop recordings. I have played guitar, banjo, dulcimer, auto harp in a local amateur folk group 'Strings and Things' (now disbanded). I was asked to demonstrate rhythm bones playing on a Grand Circle cruise ship show (see accompanying picture). I take my rhythm bones with me everywhere we visit to try to get others interested.

**Libby Rae Watson** - Libby Rae Watson grew up on the Gulf Coast in Pascagoula, Mississippi. She started piano in the third grade and was given a classical guitar by the sixth grade. At an early age her love for the Blues got her involved with great blues mentors such as Big Joe Williams and Sam Chatmon. She continues to keep the old time acoustic blues of her mentors alive playing their music and her own original music at festivals and joints around Mississippi and the country, as a solo act or in many configurations with other musicians. Libby attended BonesFest XXIII in 2019 and caught on to rhythm bones playing with a big smile.



**Steve Wixson** - I am your Secretary/Treasurer and Editor of the *Rhythm Bones Player* newsletter. I learned to play one handed from my butcher father and then, after finding Ev Cowett and attending Bones Fest II, I learned to play two handed. I love to research and write about rhythm bones, but I really love it when members renew their membership and research and write articles for the newsletter.





**Kenny Wolin** - "I've been playing rhythm bones for about 45 years now and joined the Rhythm Bones Society in 2004 (now Assistant Director), and have also been teaching the advanced Bones Fest workshops since that time. I first learned to play rhythm bones from Percy Danforth at the 1979 Michigan Percussion Festival.



I'm also a percussionist and the resident rhythm bones player with "The President's Own" United States Marine Band since 1997, and have enjoyed many performance opportunities on rhythm bones throughout the United States, as well as at the White House with the Marine Band's Celtic Ensemble.

Fun fact: I met my wife Teri at Bonesfest IX, I proposed to her on stage at Bones Fest XIII, we hosted Bones fest XIV with a Bones Fest July 25th wedding (our very own Tim Reilly was our Best Man), and we celebrated our 10 year anniversary with many of you at Bones Fest XXIV!



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