



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

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In this Issue

The Memorabilia of Ted 'Mr Goon Bones' Goon

John Perona
Obituary

Russ Myer's Memorial Dedication Set

Bones Fest XIII
Preview

A Note from
Nick Driver

Adam Klein on
Animal Bones Making

Review of the Book *The Birth of the Bajno* by Bob Carlin

John Hennessey
Obituary

A Boban Spoon
Sculpture

Columns:
Executive Director

Editorial

Letters to the
Editor

Website of the
Quarter

Bones Calendar

Future Issues
Who were the Great Rhythm Bones Players in History

Highlights of
Bones Fest XIII

Executive Director's Column

It was just about 10 years ago that I received a transcript of the interview of Steve Wixson's conversation with Ted Goon. Ted was truly the forgotten bones player, one who had transcended to heights unheard of for a bones player. His professional recordings placed him solidly on the charts in the late 40's and early 50's.

As I read through Steve's conversation with him both my fascination and admiration grew leaps and bounds. I was thoroughly entranced by Ted's story, and eventually gave in to my urges, and called him around noon time from my place of employment. He was slightly taken aback, but warmed up quickly as we talked bones, and told me details of his story, and then asked me about my experiences.

I was thrilled, sent him some recordings, and dreamed of visiting him in California, something I

knew wouldn't be possible. About three weeks later, while working around the house on a Saturday afternoon, the phone rang, it was Ted. He was returning my call, we chatted a bit, and then he said, "Got your bones handy?" He wanted me to play, which I did, and then he played for me, in that Ted Goon style, from 3000 miles away. I don't think my feet touched the ground for a week. We would have those conversations every few months, and then they faded away.

I called him after winning the All Ireland bone Playing Championship my first time, and he was thrilled. When he passed away, I was truly saddened though I know it was his time.

In this issue Steve Wixson has commemo-

(Continued on page 3)

The Memorabilia of Ted 'Mr Goon Bones' Goon

In the last issue, I mentioned that Ted Goon's son, Robert, sent us his father's scrapbook titled *Goon Bones Braggin' Book* which contains all kinds of memorabilia about his recording career, i.e., news articles, photos, recording charts, letters, and the like. This is a real treasure as it documents the state of rhythm bones playing in the 1950s time period when both Ted and 'Brother Bones' were recording and popular. It also shows how much hard work it takes to be a full-time professional rhythm bones player.

You can read Ted's story in RBP, Vol 2, No. 2. His recording of *Ain't She Sweet* was seventh on the Jukebox Billboard Chart in 1949 and sold a million 400,000 copies at a time when 200,000 was a hit. It went international and he received royalties on it for 25 years.

His rhythm bones called *Goon Bones* were made of northern Wisconsin maple which Ted found by experimenting produced the best recorded sound (we are the first to know about this wood.) Ted said that *Ain't She Sweet* was the first record to use the new electronic echo chamber.

Ted spent as many as 80 hours working out the arrangements for his recordings. His last Mercury recording, *Tiger Rag*, is extremely fast and was made to challenge future rhythm bones players.

I look at Ted Goon differently now than when I wrote the original article. We've had several years

of collecting information about rhythm bones players, and I now see him as a much more important figure than I did in 2000. He and later his

(Continued on page 6)



Mr. Goon-Bones Trio. From left, Barney Lantz on organ and accordion, Harold Fisher on banjo and guitar and Ted Goon on rhythm bones.

Editorial

Randy Seppala called me with the news of John Perona's passing, and followed that with an obituary he asked me to email to all members. That is followed by the article on John in this newsletter. Many of us were touched by John's sweet personality and by his special way of playing ringing silver spoons in rhythm bones style. While I write this, I am listening to the Finnish CD reviewed in newsletter Vol 7, No 1. John is not on it, but it has John's apprentice, Randy, on rhythm bones. The accordion and bones remind me of John's playing, and in particular Track 9, *Yo Lintu*, a song he played bones along with in my home at Bones Fest IX. (I've got to stop now and get my bones out.)

The story on Ted 'Mr Goon-Bones' Goon beginning on Page 1 continues a story in newsletter Vol 2, No. 2. As I look at Ted's memorabilia, I now view him as one of the more important figures in rhythm bones history.

Those who attended Bones Fest V got to meet Nick Driver, another important rhythm bones player. He sends us a nice note.

Another historic rhythm bones player is Frank Brower, the first minstrel bones player. An article on Frank appeared in RBP, Vol 6, No 1, and here is more information in a review of a book by Bob Carlin.

Adam Klein shares his experience making real animal bones (see *Animal Rhythm Bones* in RBP Vol 10, No 1.)

My church choir director has finally accepted me as a musician, and I play rhythm bones on occasion to hymns and anthems. A few Sundays ago, we had an African version of *Alleluia* with a wood block line in the sheet music that I played with rhythm bones. It took a bit of practice to play what was written instead of playing by instinct. I need to try more of that.

Bones Calendar

Bones Fest XIII. August 28-30, 2009, Louisville, KY. More details in this issue.

NTCMA and Bones Contest. August 31-September 6, 2009. This is one week after Bones Fest XIII.

Letters to the Editor

Sad news. My lovely wife, Ethel, passed away suddenly last month. A great shock for all the family we have lost a gentle and kind lady. Kind regards to all. Tony Humphreys [From England and attended BFX.]

This is too weird--or is it really? I'm just starting to accept these things as the norm, and all the other stuff (what we hear daily on the news, for example) as delusional weirdness.

On Saturday, the day before Johnny Perona passed over to the jam session of the angels, I was working my part-time temp office job on Manhattan's East 42nd Street and perusing rhythm bones websites (tough day at work). I found the site that featured Johnny Perona, playdembones.com, and remembered with great joy the time I met him at the Reston, VA bones fest (VIII) and his pal Randy Seppala. To this day I have a crisp, clear memory of those two playing these celestial-sounding hammered-flat silver spoons and bones, one of the highlights of the fest for me. RIP, Johnny. *Greg Burrows*

Greetings from the not too distant past. Sorry that I have let life's practical realities keep me from much more important things like music and soul fulfillment! LOL!

Say, I just saw the Russ Myer's video and thoroughly enjoyed it. In fact, by the end of it I had dug out my far too dusty bones and was playing along with Russ in the closing segment. I hope that he appreciated my humble tribute and ability.

As a man with financial responsibilities, you will be much gladder to hear that it has stimulated me to renew my membership and throw myself on the mercy of the group for my temporary insanity.

Reality calls so gotta run. But, thanks for the video and thanks, God, for people like Russ.

All the best for continued success down there in Bonedom. *Bill Burdette*

Rhythm Bones Player

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Editor
Steve Wixson
wixson@chattanooga.net

Executive Director
Stephen Brown
Bones@crystal-mtn.com

Web Site Coordinator
Jonathan Danforth
webmaster@rhythmbones.com

Board of Directors
Steve Brown, Executive Director
Everett Cowell
Jonathan Danforth
Gil Hibben, Assistant Director
Mel Mercier
Jerry Mescher
Steve Wixson, Secretary/Treasurer

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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

Websites of the Quarter

From Mike Passerotti. There has been an explosion of videos posted of my favorite bones players! Here is one and you can find many more with the related videos links: You go Don!
www.youtube.com/watch?v=k-17dBuOpUo

Mike is designing wireless electric bones and posted his own Youtube video at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=txfOSIlopkk

From Michael Satterwhite. I found a video of a two-person bones impromptu jam it would be nice to share with members. It's titled "Dom Flemons and Rowan Corbett jam on bones." Dom Flemons from the Carolina Chocolate Drops and Rowan Corbett from Tinsmith met for the first time at the Folk Alliance artist showcase in Memphis, Tennessee.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLazWX8uxPU

(Executive Director-Continued from page 1)

rated Ted in a special way, and one that I think will help you all to feel as special about him as I do, and those of us privileged to have known him.

Also, this issue marks the passing of one of our true characters, Giovanni "Johnny" Perona. I met Johnny for the first time in 2002, when we competed against each other at the Avoca Country Music Festival and Contests in Avoca, Iowa. He not only was a gentleman, he was a true artist, and I will remember his spoon playing, like angels, to the day I die. RIP Johnny.

And a final note, Steve Wixson is working hard on a number of projects to improve the web site and the position of bone playing in the world at large. I hope you will all respond as best you can when he sends out those emails requesting your opinion about bone playing and bone players. After all, he's doing it all for you. *Steve Brown*

Note from Nick Driver

I made thousands of bones in my life time often at the peak 2 to 3 thousand a year in bone alone. I have no idea where they have all gone, but it's very rewarding to know that some at least are in the hands of serious players. I'm just amazed that an art that was almost dead on both sides of the pond has now been revived in so many places.

You in the States owe a great debt to the tireless crusading of Percy, I just feel that beyond the correspondence that Percy and I had in the dark days, I had the enormous pleasure of meeting with him on his visit to Eng-



Aubrey Driver on bones and Nick Driver on Bodhran.

land.

One of the things that people forget about the States, when there is often so much negativity going around is the real passion that some of you guys bring to something once you get your teeth into it. There is nothing like the Rhythm Bones Society outside of the States. Nothing that keeps alive and promotes this amazing little pocket instrument that has so much percussion versatility with so many kinds of music, lending that special, unique lift.

My visit to that Fest in New England was a truly memorable time in my life, not only the warm and genuine friendship but the amazing passion of experienced and novice players alike. What a true buzz that I took away with me.

If only I could have taken my father with me! Only today I was looking at some old pictures of him on the bones and me on the bodhran not long before he died, and it brought back some memories of him tossing them in the air as he played. I attach the picture for your interest. As I said, I hope make it back for a visit with some old friends and some playing one day.

Give my best to them all. *Nick Driver*

Adam Klein on Real Bones Making

Here is my experience turning the ribs of dead bovines into playable percussion paraphernalia.

All the rib bones I have made have been from skeletons of cows I found in fields or on hikes. Farm country is a great place to look, and also range country out west. The cow dies, the vultures pick it clean and the sun bleaches the bones. No need to boil the marrow out or anything. Only drawback is you don't know how old the bones are. In any case I was able to make playable bones sets out of all but the last two cow rib pairs, if memory serves. They get smaller toward the back, but those are great for making kid bones.

My favorite part to use is very close to the spine, where the bones have a nice compound curve. I cut the two knobs off the end, about 2 inches

worth including the knobs, and then cut them again anywhere from 7 to 9 inches long, depending on the sound I want--longer is deeper-- so that when I'm playing them the bones curve like reverse parentheses and also curve inward such that if you hold the palm of your hand straight out from the forearm the tips of the bones touch your wrist-- but we play bones with the hand flexed back, so the curved part follows the curve of the bottom or inside of your wrist while you're playing.

Depending on how wide the bones are, you can usually get another, straighter pair of bones from the next 7 to 9 inches. The limiting factor is how wide the marrow part is. You can't really make bones that will last and that are playable if the marrow is more than about 3 centimeters or 1.25 inches wide. (I'm talking width here, not thickness. 1 cm or 3/8 inch is the thickest a bone should generally be.) Because if you sand it or cut it to be a max of 3 cm wide to make it playable, you cut past where the outer rind of thick bone is and your finger will be resting on hard marrow bone lattice, which is uncomfortable and will lead to early breakage of the bone. But my favorite set of bone bones is actually two pair from just 2 ribs: I hold the spine-side piece stiff against the palm (the position near the thumb) and let the further out, flatter one swing free (near the pinkie). Those babies really sing.

I have also found that eventually the thinner or more weathered bones will start to crack and fall apart with play, and when this happens, or better yet BEFORE this happens, you can coat them with high-strength clear epoxy and then they'll last till the end of time as we know it.

I have several pairs for sale if anyone is desperate. They are all matched pairs, meaning in this case that they came from opposing ribs so they look like mirror images of each other, or close. Most of them are from the spine end of the rib. They can email me.

Cheers. *Adam Klein*, bones maker (among other pursuits that don't pay the bills either)

John Perona Obituary

Johnny B. Perona (Giovanni Batista Perona) passed from this life early Sunday morning February 1, 2009 at "Our Lady of Mercy Nursing and Rehab Facility" in Hubbell, Michigan where he had been a resident for the past 18 months. Born to Italian immigrant parents in the copper mining and cultural melting pot of Calumet, Michigan, Johnny was exposed to many cultures and their music which he had a very keen ear for.

He gave his first musical performance at the school Christmas program at the age of 12 on the accordion. He is regarded a virtuoso on the concertina, accordion, violin, mandolin and guitar, instruments on which he played old-time dance music for Italians, French, Finns, Slovenians and Croatians at local house parties, community dances, taverns and many music festivals for over 75 years. He has been referred to as a "one man Yooper (resident of Upper Michigan) multi-ethnic music festival" because he plays so many instruments in such a diversity of ethnic musical styles. But it is his mastery and performance on the rhythm bones and his own original spoons playing style that is most widely appreciated.

Johnny was introduced to the bones in 1948 while playing his concertina in a local tavern that an alcoholic bones and spoons player often frequented, playing to the music on the jukebox or to Johnny's concertina for drinks. He showed Johnny how to hold the bones but was reluctant to teach him too much, fearing competition. "You'll never learn I can see that right now" he told Johnny. Johnny became obsessed with the bones and learned to play them impeccably and also created his own unique "chiming" spoons playing style. Beginning in 2001, Johnny was awarded three apprenticeships teaching the bones and spoons by the Michigan Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program through the Michigan State University Museum, which named him as a master folk musician. He was also honored with a Michigan Heritage Award in

2002 for his bones and spoons playing. On December 15, 2007 while playing at a Christmas party he was given an award honoring him for 75 years of performing live music in the Great Lakes Region by the Upper Peninsula Ethnic Music Alliance, which puts on the Annual Finnish Music Festival in the tiny village of Covington, Michigan. At the 10th Annual Finnish Music Festival on June 28, 2008, though he was bound to a wheelchair, Johnny showed his great stamina, playing his bones and spoons relentlessly for both days of the anniversary event.

We will miss our dear friend and fellow musician greatly. He has inspired and delighted so many people with his soft spoken nature, inventiveness, charismatic aura and authentic presentations. After a long illness may you finally rest in peace partner.

Randy Seppala randyplaydembones@jamadots.com

Memorial contributions can be made in Johnny's honor to: 11th Annual Finnish Music Festival, c/o U.P.Ethnic Music Alliance, 26217 Korpi Road, Watton, Michigan 49970

[There are three photographs of John and Randy on Page 8.]

Russ Myers' Memorial Dedication Set

The dedication ceremony for the Russ Myers' Memorial at the Madison County, Virginia Historical Society is set for Sunday, June 28, at 2:00 PM.

Rhythm Bones Society members donated \$440 towards this memorial which consists of a video presenting Russ' life from a rhythm bones point of view and a combo TV/DVD player for the Historical Society.

Russ' band, the Possum Ridge String Band, will attend and perform. After the dedication, there will be a Mini-Bones Fest where rhythm bones players will play to this great string band and dedication attendees can enjoy rhythm bones played live.

If you plan to attend, email me for more details which at this time are not complete. The event is free to everyone. *Steve Wixson*

A Boban Spoon Sculpture



I ran across this sculpture in a new museum on Bathhouse Row in Hot Springs, AK. The artist is Boban and the sculpture is titled *Horn Blower*, (c) 2009 Masterpiece Publishing Inc. Check out website masterpiecepublishing.com/Artists/Boban for other works. The sculpture is made almost entirely from spoons, and immediately reminded me of John Perona and his ringing silver spoons. *Steve Wixson*

John Hennessey Obituary

John P. Hennessey's licks on the rhythm bones enlivened the popular Irish music sessions at Brighton's Green Briar pub for years. Mr. Hennessey, known to bandmates as Mr. Bones, died of heart failure April 6, 2008. He was 88.

"That was what he was living for - those Monday nights," said one of his daughters, Erin Collings of Waltham. "I know he loved it."

He picked up the bones about 10 years ago and became something of a pub celebrity. He could play with a pair in each hand until an injury forced him to play a single pair.

Mr. Hennessey was the son of Irish immigrants from County Cork.

"He believed in Irish music, only Irish music," his daughter said. "Everything else was just noise."

Review of the Book *The Birth of the Banjo:* *Joel Walker Sweeney* *and Early Minstrelsy* by Bob Carlin

I am proud of my article on Frank Brower, the first minstrel rhythm bones player. It appeared in Vol 6, No 1 of our newsletter and summarized considerable research.

My favorite part was one no one else had written about, and it graciously came from Bob Carlin, who at the time was researching this book on banjo player Joe Sweeney. Here it is reprinted again.

"But what shall [we] say of the castanet player? It is almost in vain to describe the manner in which Mr. Brower makes this [supply sic] the place of every other instrument necessary to complete a full band. Every limb, muscle, feature, and nerve is brought into operation while he is performing—sitting, lolling, standing, throwing out the arms, legs, head, and tongue, alternately, drawing up the extremities, tossing the arms about in every direction, at one time giving his neighbor's head a rapid succession of imaginary fatal [lumps/bumps], now commencing a serious attack upon his own breast, with an apparent view of quickening the flow of blood through the arteries, at another time measuring himself, with extraordinary determination and celerity, for a coat of unknown magnitude, and repeating similar movements over the head, under the legs, behind his back, and below the soles of his feet. While indulging in these fierce performances, the castanets, or rather a couple of rib bones, inserted between the fingers, sustain a continuous rattle in correct time with the melody." *Liverpool Mail*, May 27, 1843.

With a photograph of Frank Brower from the previously mentioned newsletter in mind, the antics of our own Spike Bones and this quote, one can almost picture Brower performing.

So why is this book relevant to us? Rhythm bones player Frank Brower and banjo player Joe Sweeney were friends and performed on and off together for several years. Carlin gives us a broader picture of Brower and of the background of 'blackface' minstrelsy that preceded the formation of the Virginia Minstrels with Brower as its rhythm bones player. While the main thrust of the book is Joe Sweeney as a banjo player who "introduced mainstream America to a music which had its roots in the trans-

planted black culture of southern slaves," there are plenty of interesting tidbits about Brower.

Carlin begins by tracing the African American roots of the banjo and origins of 'blackface' minstrelsy. His chapter on the 'Virginia Minstrels and the Dawn of the Minstrel Show' is the most complete I've seen, and includes biographies on each member. He then outlines minstrelsy and minstrel shows that followed after the Virginia Minstrels. And lots more on Sweeney.

The following are some Brower quotes, and in the book facts are meticulously referenced though the references are not included here.

From Page 41. "When the Birmingham's Theatre Royal reopened on September 23 [1943], Sweeney and Brower were back on the radar. From Monday, September 25, until Wednesday, October 4, "the Virginia Banjo and Bones" were a featured attraction. Their act combined elements of Sweeney's solo performances and the routines featured by Brower's former ensemble the Virginia Minstrels the previous spring."

From Page 42. "[In March 1844] Frank Brower rejoined Sweeney with his dancing and bones playing, drawing the comment that "But of all the amusements which the Amphitheatre now teems withal, commend us especially to the Nigger dance of Brower, accompanied by the banjo playing of Sweeney...Half-a-dozen encores... nightly inflict their pleasurable pains on Brower."

From Page 42. "After a spring tour with the reconstituted Virginia Minstrels in Ireland and Scotland, Brower and Sweeney returned once again to Liverpool, the city of their biggest success."

From Page 46. "[in May 1845] Sweeney accepted an engagement with the familiar confines of the circus with his old partner Francis Brower. Since the previous fall, when Frank Brower had been in New York City, the bones player had toured up and down the East Coast..."

From Page 55. "One of the major downfalls in the minstrel business was a performer's dependence on circus and theatre owners for employment...Regardless of whose idea it

was, using fiddle, banjo, tambourine and bones to present songs, dances, imitations and skits in a freestanding program revolutionized the blackface business."

From Page 55. "Brower, who performs upon a pair of Bone Castinets equal to the divine Fanny."

From Page 58. "The two other Virginia Minstrels, fiddler/banjoist Dan Emmett and bones player/singer/dancer Frank Brower had met as performers in the Cincinnati Circus...Francis Marion Brower was hired to provide blackface entertainment as a singer, comedian and all-around performer."

From Page 59. "Mr. Ferguson will play upon the Banjo....Accompanied by Brower wid de Bones."

From Page 62. [1841] "For Sweeney's song "Old Tar River," Frank Brower joined Dan Emmett on the bones, an instrument which Frank had used as early as the previous fall."

From Page 74. "...and ex-Virginia Minstrel Frank Brower. This partnership continued until 1858, at which time George Christy reformed the Christy Minstrels."

From Page 69, a reviewer of his performance [as a Virginia Minstrel] in London "emphasized Brower's playing of the bones, a feature popular among English audiences, while suggesting that the dance numbers might well be eliminated."

From Page 93. "By 1851, Brower had resorted to playing clown rolls with Robinson & Eldred's New York City Circus."

Short Quotes. "Brower defined Bankruptcy Laws." "Brower gave his Locomotive Lecture." "Brower wrote songs such as 'Old Joe.'" "Old Dan Tucker, sung by Frank Brower."

There are extensive chapter notes, selected bibliographies and a good index. Published by McFarland & Company, Jefferson, North Carolina, 2007, 193 pages. Soft cover. ISBN13: 978-0-7864-2874-8. Quoted text used with permission. The Rhythm Bones Society thanks Bob Carlin for sharing this information with our members.

Member Norm Conrad donated a copy of this book to the Rhythm Bones Society. Thanks also to Norm. *Steve Wixson*

BFXIII Preview

Linda and I are proud to host Bones Fest XIII. Thanks to a dear friend, Mike Carter, we were introduced to the Clifton Center and discovered it is a perfect place for the Fest.

The Clifton Center is an exquisitely restored 1930's performance and meeting complex located 2 miles east of downtown. It is an anchor piece for the Frankfort Avenue historic business district, encouraging vitality and welcoming groups of people from across the Greater Louisville area. It is bursting with restaurants and shops, all within walking distance of the Clifton Center. Visit: www.franfortave.com to view all of the restaurants and shopping in the area. Check out www.fatfridayhop.org/about.html for part of the Friday program.

The stage is better than can be imagined. The Eifler Theater has 366 plush seats on the main floor and 120 plush seats on balcony. The theatre is also equipped with a modern sound system and modern lighting.

We are planning to video this Fest for a DVD and this is the perfect opportunity for all of you bones players to be featured on the DVD. Steve Wixson will have more information on this project.

More information regarding our host hotel will be forthcoming as soon as we firm up a great location. *Gil and Linda Hibben*

Bones Fest XIII

Louisville, KY

Gil & Linda Hibben, Hosts

August 28-30, 2009

Clifton Center

www.cliftoncenter.org/about/

Special Event

Professional recording of the Fest with the intent of producing a commercial Bones Fest Live CD/DVD

(Ted Goon—Continued from page 1)

trio, shown in the photograph on Page 1, had what appears to be the biggest catalog of recorded rhythm bones music of all time. He recorded at least 36 songs with a variety of performers whose instruments included piano, Hammond organ, harmonica, banjo, etc., and one vocal group.

The chart of top artists below tells

POSITION	ARTIST	LABEL
1.	Andrews Sisters	Decca
2.	Mills Brothers	Decca
3.	Ink Spots	Decca
4.	Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Jordan	Decca
5.	Dinning Sisters	Capitol
6.	Ames Brothers	Coral
7.	Mr. Goon Bones and Mr. Ford	Crystal

Chart of top artists from Ted Goon's scrapbook.

us a lot. Not only did Ted rise to seventh on the list, but look at the company he is in. The chart probably dates to 1949, and likely reports on jukebox artists. Another chart had him twentieth overall.

The following article was found in Ted's scrapbook. It had no author or newspaper name, but appeared to be a local newspaper.

"Tuesday, January 30, 1950, Corona Del Mar, CA. Few of his neighbors are aware that Mr. Goon-Bones lives in Corona del Mar. In fact, even the name will mean nothing to a vast majority of people ... this despite Billboard magazine having recently rated his records as having been played more than any other (of the instrumentalists) throughout the nation for a year on the juke boxes.

"He might well be called the least known big name of the popular music world. Chances are very good, that you have heard the contagious toe-tapping rhythm that he creates with his "bones" if you have ever turned on the radio, watched television or listened to someone's choice of a juke box number.

"In a contest last week, disc jockey Hawthorne featured each day Mr. Goon-Bones' rendition of "Goofus." Red Barber, sports announcing for one of the big games, remarked how much

he enjoyed Mr. Bones and paused so that the listening audience could hear a portion of a number being played over the loudspeaker system.

"From a childhood pastime of playing with musical bones, Mr. Goon-Bones (real name is Ted J. Goon) has parlayed a hobby into an institution, Although: he was considering vaudeville in 1929, the stage business collapsed before he started. Consequently, he entered business instead.

"*Entertains Patients.* Hospitalized in 1944, Ted was once again drawn to his hobby. Encouraged by his fellow bed. patients when he entertained them, he set about to work out a modern technique of the old minstrel art. He and his wife experimented with hundreds of materials for an improved "bone." Using woods from all over the world, ivories and ebonies, all of which were coated with various substances, each was electronically tested. Finally, an American wood was selected which they specially treated.

"Ted's first recording "Ain't She Sweet" in 1949 was responsible for the revival of this old favorite and sold nearly a million platters. Since this recording, Mr. Goon-Bones has recorded, eight numbers, two of which he wrote with Barny Lantz of Santa Ana.

"Ted is neither a musician nor a professional recording artist. He says that he has merely taken a short leave of absence from his insurance business and expects to return to the field shortly.

"*Inspired by Trains.* Listening to the plaintive sounds of the freight winding up way through the rolling hills down to Capistrano gave him the idea of writing "Fast Freight Blues," a highly successful record used by numerous disc jockeys throughout the country as signature music for their programs.

While waiting at a crossing in Santa Ana, he got the inspiration for "Diesel Drag," a number which begins with the actual recording of a diesel engine starting at the Santa Ana Station.

"He is a soft-spoken man who lives quietly with his wife, son and daughter, going about Corona del Mar as

Ted Goon, business man. To the rest of the country he is Mr. Goon-Bones, the rhythm king who dares you to listen with your feet standing still.”

In addition to recording, Ted performed frequently, both with his trio and by himself. That included television such as his trio performance on the Steve Allen show.

Several years after he stopped recording, he and his wife went on a road tour to high schools and colleges and finally with the USO touring military bases outside the country.

Ted’s son, Robert, remembers his father’s *Mr Goon-Bones Rhythm Show* this way. “He created--and constantly worked on changing and improving--and performed an act that invariably captivated audiences. It included costumes, discussion of the history of rhythm, percussion, and the bones, humor, playing the bones with a variety of recordings, and some plain old showing off of his amazing skills.”



Ted Goon performing in costume

Ted explained his success this way. “Prior to making records, I recorded every single show where I performed regardless of what it was or what the audience was. Then I studied the reaction of the audience using the applause to learn what sort of tunes, melodies were preferred over others and that sort of thing.” As you can see, his success was no accident.

So how could someone as apparently important as Ted be so overlooked. Beth Lenz, in her master’s thesis on *Bones in the United States*, doesn’t mention him, and she had access to Percy Danforth’s library suggesting Percy didn’t know of him.

I was young and playing bones at that time and I never heard of him. The only other bones player that I recall was ‘Brother Bones’ playing on television during halftime at Harlem Globetrotter’s basketball games. Because of the Globetrotter connection, Brother Bones is more well known.

I don’t know the answer to my question, except that his recording career was short and he did not go on record promotional tours which were a great way to promote oneself. As the above newspaper article says, even in his own time “he was the least known big name of popular music.”

However, if you met Ted or heard him play the rhythm bones, you might be influenced. Here are a couple of stories.

Recording partner Del Wood was a regular on the Grand Old Opry and one of the best country piano players of her time. Their partnership began after she wrote Ted a letter saying that, “the entire technique I had adopted in playing the piano was based on studying your records.”

Mel Mercier met Ted on two occasions and here is an excerpt from *The Irish Echo* by Earle Hitchner that shows Ted’s influence.

“...That left Dublin-born Mel Mercier and Abbeyfeale, Limerick-born Michelle Mulcahy to take solos, and a form of musical levitation took place on stage for each. A Board member of the Rhythm Bones Society, Mercier was spellbinding in a rare demonstration of two-handed Irish bones playing, backed by Mulcahy on piano. He drew inspiration for his performance from an American two-handed bones virtuoso named Ted “Goon” Bones in the early [actually mid] 20th century.”

I wonder how many untold stories like these are out there.

This Goon-Bones unawareness is about to change, and rhythm bones players at least are going to hear about Ted Goon. All of Ted’s collected

memorabilia has been packaged on a Memorabilia DVD and sent to the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress for future historians fulfilling a promise I made to Ted and forgot about until I reread the transcript of our telephone interview. It includes his scrapbook scanned to an Adobe Portable Document Format (.pdf) file, his recordings converted to digital audio, his interview done back in 2000 both in digital audio and transcribed to text, the original and this follow on article, photographs of the labels of his known records, a brief history by his son, Robert Goon, and a live recording of one of his performances titled *Mr Goon-Bones Rhythm Show*. An abbreviated version with 29 seconds of each of his released records is available for purchase.

In 2002, I sent Ted some video from our Bones Fests and he was impressed. He said, “They [us] could go down that same road I did. Study and analyze these modern rhythms that I don’t understand because I am out of touch. Do like I did and concentrate on getting something going. Believe it or not, if you get it and its smooth and fresh and clean, there isn’t any sound in the world, I’m convinced, as the sound of rhythm when its clean like the bones can make it.

“There were drummers in orchestras accompanying me on personal appearances that were just ecstatic at getting to hear while they were performing— that sound with that music - that pure rhythm. I hadn’t become surprised at that because back when I started I’d considered the fact that rhythm, clean pure rhythm is the essence of the whole universe. Everything in the universe is in a rhythm. Human beings, when they hear clean, fresh, precise rhythm, they feel it.

Who will be the next Ted Goon? Not me, too old—so, maybe you!

This article would not have been possible without the help of Ted’s son, Robert, who dug out, packaged, mailed, scanned labels, etc, items including Ted’s original recordings. Sincere thanks, Bob. *Steve Wixson*

P.S. I will present a workshop on Ted and the DVD at Bones Fest XIII. A copy of this amazing DVD will be sent to all current members.



Three photographs of the late John Perona extracted from a Mary Barnett video recorded at Bones Fest IX. Shown are a smiling John, those wonderful ringing silver spoons played rhythm bones style, and Randy Seppala with John playing his concertina. Randy was an apprentice to John and wrote his obituary.

Rhythm Bones Society

1060 Lower Brow Road
Signal Mountain, TN 37377-2910

Address Correction Requested