



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 12, No. 3 2009

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Executive Director's Column

A number of years ago, writing in Rolling Stone magazine, Jon Landau said, "I have seen the future of Rock and Roll, and his name is Bruce Springsteen."

After attending Bones Fest XIV, I can honestly say I've seen the future of rhythm bones and the Rhythm Bones Society. I've seen the future of the organization in Kenny and Teri Wolin producing a Bones Fest which will long inspire those in attendance. I've seen the future of the membership in Lauren, Barbara, Zip, Skeff, Bob, Joe, Damian, Jesse, Maggie, Judy, and every other first time attendee who, now bitten with the bug, will be playing and attending

bones fests for years to come.

And I've seen the future of bone playing in Sky Bartlett who has fused everything Jerry Mescher, Donnie DeCamp, Ernie Duffy, and Shorty Boulett taught him, and added his own electricity at the tender age of 22.

Jon Landau, in that famous article, also mentions how his "rock and roll past flashed before his eye's" which also was true at Bones Fest XIV. Joe Birl, looking more like 50 than the 94 years young that he is, and playing long into the night, the entire Cowett family up on stage, The Meschers now three players strong letting us see

(Continued on page 2)

Highlights of Bones Fest XIV

When I go to a Bones Fest magic happens because talented people attend, and Bones Fest XIV was no exception. The Lyceum, steeped in its own history in Historic Old Towne Alexandria, VA, was the perfect venue for the Fest. Across the Potomac River was our nation's

Capital and the home of "The President's Own" U.S. Marine Band with hosts Kenny Wolin, a member of that Band, and Teri Davies, who as you will see, was moving from Buffalo to Virginia.

(Continued on page 7)



Bones Fest XIV Group Photograph taken by Louise Krafft of the Alexandria Gazette and used with permission. Shown in the center are hosts, Teri Davies (in purple) and Kenny Wolin, who were married on Sunday with this group as witnesses.

Editorial

It is Sunday morning of Bones Fest XIV weekend, and I awake about 6 AM to first light. From my Crowne Plaza seventh floor window, I can barely make out the outline of the Capitol building. My wife, Janet, in bed says “what are you doing?” I tell her that I am capturing memories while they are still fresh in my mind and getting ready for a few more (like hosts Kenny and Teri’s wedding.)

It is impossible to say which Fest is best though BFXIV will be long remembered. Each have their own personality shaped by their host and this year by two very talented co-hosts.

The Lyceum was a terrific venue, and there were 51 paid with many new and many returning attendees.

We were joined by Bob Winans who produced *The Early Minstrel Show* recording that featured Percy Danforth on rhythm bones. We owe him a debt as there are very few recordings of Percy other than his instructional video.

Having said that, membership is down and as successful as BFXIV was with five new members, it is down for the second year. This again was discussed at the General Membership meeting and while there were some good suggestions, it is still not clear to me how to fix this. A redesigned website is in the works with Paypal for new members and renewals, and it should help. There will be more on the website in the next newsletter.

In the past few weeks, three performers came to Chattanooga that play rhythm bones. Matt Kinman’s and Dom Flemons’ performances are described on Page 6.

The third performer, Ernie Hawkins, performed at a local college playing on guitar and singing the old style Piedmont blues. I learned about him from member Guy Gillette who played rhythm bones on one track of Ernie’s CD titled *Rags and Bones*. While Ernie plays the bones, he does not perform with them. He spent some time at my house looking at my collection of rhythm bones stuff including videos of you members performing. Maybe you will inspire him to perform rhythm bones publically.

(Executive Director—Continued from page 1)

into the development of a style, and how great to see Wilma Myers and her daughter Jennifer, reminding us that the bone playing spirit of Russ Myers will never die.

Bones Fest XIV will stand amongst the best Bones Fests not because of the standard of play, which was very high, not because of numbers of attendee’s which was decently in the 50’s, and not because of the impressive surroundings of the Alexandria Lyceum, which was very impressive. It’s true measure can be felt in the spirit it created amongst the people in attendance, which truly will carry us long into the year. Heck, I’ve even started practicing again, preparing for next year! *Steve Brown*

Letters to the Editor

I wish I could have made the Bones Fest in St. Louis a couple of years ago. I grew up in central Missouri, so I could have killed several birds with one stone!

I’m still teaching bones workshops 2-3 times/year here in Albuquerque. I always do a workshop at the ABQ Folk Music Festival in June. When it gets closer to Halloween, a folk music store in town—Apple Mountain Music—has me do a Saturday bones workshop. It’s fun and little extra money.

I appreciate you keeping me on the list. Thanks for thinking of us westerners. I’ll see if I can make BFXV. *David A. Wilson*, Albuquerque, New Mexico USA, Elevation: 5,170 feet

Here is a follow up to the Ted Mack/Mescher article in the last newsletter. See the on-line version of the story at <http://www.carrollspaper.com/main.asp?SectionID=1&SubSectionID=284&ArticleID=9703&TM=26724.77>. *Mary Lee Sweet*

Website of the Quarter

Jim Pistarelli posted this on the rhythmbones yahoo list. “The below Utube link to a clip from the 1935 movie *Go Into Your Dance* shows Al

Rhythm Bones Player

Rhythm Bones Society
Volume 12, No. 3
Third Quarter 2010
ISSN: 1545-1380

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

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

Rhythm Bones Central web site: rhythmbones.com

Jolson playing bones, in blackface, with Ruby Keeler dancing. It’s part of a large production number titled *About A Quarter To Nine*. The bones part starts at about 3 minutes, 4 seconds into the clip and lasts about 30 seconds.” www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rr5XQ9BhOqM

Co-incidentally from Hank Tenenbaum’s biography in the BFXIV Program, “When I was about 12, I showed my Pop a set of bones I bought and asked him to show me how to play. His explanation took place to big band music on the phonograph as he showed me how he used to sand dance under the occasional gas lamps on the street corners of N.E. Washington with his next door neighbor, Al Jolson.”

Tommy Cowett's Essay Contest

I was the winner of a \$25 gift certificate from Scott Miller's Bone Dry Musical Instrument Company in the drawing held on Saturday night of Bones Fest XIV. I want to award this certificate to the winner of an Essay Contest.

My thoughts for the essay contest would be success stories of how a rhythm bones player has been able to join in playing with musicians in various styles. I want the story of how they were able to fit in or sit in at gigs with bluegrass, country, rock, folk etc.

The winner would be the story I feel could best help other rhythm bones players in breaking the ice and joining a band. I heard some pretty good stories at the Bones Fest, so put them in writing and you might win.

Email your story to me at blueludwig@triad.rr.com or snail mail it to me at 4538 Brandt Ridge Road, Greensboro, NC 27410. This will be fun. *Tommy Cowett*

Joseph Kooi Wins Bones Contest

This year, Joseph Kooi, 12, won the bones contest at the 2010 National Traditional Country Bluegrass Music Festival. Last year he bought a set of bones from us because he wanted to learn to play. Well, at this year's festival he came to our workshop and showed us what he had accomplished.



Joseph Kooi playing at the NTCMA Festival

We could not believe our eyes and we were speechless!! He is playing all the rhythm patterns. We had him play on a couple of our shows. He is amazing! He comes from a wonderful, musical family. *Sharon Mescher*

New Members

We received several new members at Bones Fest XIV. Welcome to Rowan Corbett, Matt Holcomb, Joe Machado, Irvin Peterson, and Bob Winans.

Minutes of Board Meeting

The meeting was called to order by Steve Brown on July 23 at 1:50 in the Lyceum Museum, Alexandria, VA. Members present were Steve Brown, Jonathan Danforth, Steve Wixson and Kenny Wolin.

Steve Wixson read the minutes of the last meeting and a motion was made, seconded and approve to approve the minutes as read.

Steve Wixson gave a brief Treasurer's report. We ended FY 2009 with an actual balance of \$2,326, less than most years due to a small loss from BFXIII, \$400 for the Ted Goon DVD project and \$1,783 for the BFXIII CD/DVD project that will produce recordings that we can sell to the public. A draft of the DVD should be ready for review by the end of 2010. A motion was made, seconded and approve to approve the Treasurer's Report. A copy of the 2009 Treasurer's Report and all supporting documentation will be sent to Steve Brown as Executive Director.

The following approved email motions are read into the record; BFXIII and its budget, \$550 for live music from Rascals of Ragtime, \$900 for Mike Carter to video BFXIII, and \$410 for the TV/DVD for the Russ Meyers Memorial Project.

The Board met as the nominating committee and the motion was made, seconded and approve to nominate the current Officers and Board members to serve for another year.

Due to the fact that Kenny Wolin, had to leave to do host duties, the

meeting was adjourned due to lack of a quorum. It was planned that the meeting would resume, but since the host was also getting married, remaining business will be conducted using the internet.

Respectfully submitted, Steve Wixson, Secretary.

Minutes of General Membership Meeting

The meeting was called to order by Steve Brown at 2:00 PM on July 24 in the Lyceum Museum, Alexandria, VA

Steve Wixson read the minutes of the last meeting and a motion was made, seconded and approve to approve the minutes as read.

An election was held. The nominating Committee nominated the Officers and Board Member to serve for another year. Steve Brown called for nominations from the floor. Being none, the motion was made, seconded and approved to elect nominees by acclamation. Those elected were Steve Brown, Executive Director, Gil Hibben, Assistant Director, Steve Wixson, Secretary/Treasurer, and Board Members Jonathan Danforth, Mel Mercier, Bill Vits and Kenny Wolin.

There was a brief discussion of declining membership.

Steve Brown welcome the four new members who joined at the Bones Fest.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted, Steve Wixson, Secretary

Bones Calendar

Check out the Calendar on the rhythmbones.com website.

Bones Fest XIV. June 10-12, 2011, San Antonio, TX. See announcement above.

NTCMA and Bones Contest. August 29—September 4, 2011. 36th National Old Time Country Bluegrass Festival, Lemars, Iowa.

Photographic Highlights from Bones Fest XIV



Tim Reilly's workshop with Jonathan Danforth and Kenny Wolin helping



Steve Brown's workshop on Irish bones playing and session etiquette



Tim Reilly, Teri Davies (now Wolin) and Kenny Wolin performing



The Meschers with Jerry's wife, Sharon, Jerry and sister Bernie Worrell



Dennis Riedesel, host of Bones Fest XV in San Antonio, Texas



Mary Lee and Frank Sweet in their Backintyme costumes



Our in-house band with Jonathan Danforth, Mary Audette, Bill & Terry Johnson, and Maureen Wilson with Steve Brown performing.



Spike Bones juggling tambourines with from left, Rowan Corbett, Jonathan Danforth, and Greg Adams



The Irish jam session at the Farmer's Market Pavilion with Shepherd's Pie and friends providing the music. The biggest pass off in history took place here.



The Cowett family from left, Al, Dan, John, Martha and husband Joe, Ev and Tom with guitar



Joe Birl still playing great at 94



The make shift band of Tim Reilly, Greg Adams, Jonathan Danforth, Bob Winans and Rowan Corbett



The traditional congo line Bones Fest finale



Late night jam session at the hotel with Greg Adams (white T-shirt) and Bob Winans playing their period minstrel banjos

Carolina Chocolate Drops Play Chattanooga

The Carolina Chocolate Drops performed in Chattanooga the first weekend in September and were better than advertised. The three of them are all great musicians and Dom Flemons played bones on at least one fourth of their songs in a wild style that the audience loved. They are a high profile group now and Dom is currently the Ambassador of Rhythm Bones, if there is such a title. Maybe they will get on national television and we will see some interest in rhythm bones.

The group learned much of their repertoire, which is based on the traditional music of the Piedmont region of North and South Carolina, from the eminent African American old-time fiddler Joe Thompson, although they also perform old-time versions of some modern songs.

Before the performance, Dom stopped by my house and I showed him all of the rhythm bones stuff that I've collected. He told me more about his rhythm bones playing style.

"I play cow bones in left hand and osage orange in the right. I was given a pair of bones by a woman in Mt. Airy, NC at the fiddler's convention in 2006. She showed me how to hold them and told me I needed to learn them because "they were part of the tradition." She told me her whole family played bones and that for a while she had a pair that her uncle had taken with him through France during WWII.

"I developed my style from a few different people. I first met Cliff Ervin at the Black Banjo Gathering a few months before Mt. Airy and watched him with no inkling to play. The same day I received a pair in Mt. Airy, I got a lesson from Matt Kinman, a great old-time renaissance man. I also met Mike Baytop from DC at Commonground on the Hill and he showed me more way to play bones. He showed me it wasn't just for Irish music. It could be played next to the jukebox which is a technique he learned from his mentor, Mr. Bones (who played with Archie Edwards).

"Finally, I met another fellow

named Rowen Corbett from around the DC area and he and I had a bones "duel" at the Folk Alliance in Memphis in 2007 (which you can find on youtube) and that gave me another perspective on playing the bones.

"Also having met people like Bob Winans (whose Early Minstrel Band album was a staple of my collection), Greg Adams (researcher of minstrel/African connection), and Bob Carlin (The Birth of The Banjo book) all of whom are prominent minstrel banjo scholars as well as folks like Cheick Hamala Diabate from Mali, Joe Thompson, and Sule Greg Wilson. I learned I lot about the varied rhythmic aspects of American music and minstrel music. There is so much going on in that material and it just explodes with energy especially when bones are added to the mix. I was never a dancer but I've learned to dance with a pair on bones in my hand in a way that I could never do with my feet.

"Taking the pieces of music and applying them to abstract elements of folkloric academia such Alan Lomax's cantometric studies and Mike Seeger's experimentation with old-time music 'styles' along with bebop jazz nuances such as Charles Mingus' rhythms and textures, I developed a way of thinking about how to approach a fully adaptable instrument. "

In addition to being talented, he is a nice fellow. *Steve Wixson*

Another Website to Check Out

This is a follow on to Jonathan Danforth's article on Chlefeldi in the Vol 7, No 2 newsletter. Peo Oertli-Kassim (peo@rhythmics.ch) sent us two pairs of Chlefeldi that I took to Bones Fest XIV. As shown in the website below, they have a different look, but sound quite good.

To view the website, copy the following to your web browser and when the translate page comes up click translate: <http://translate.google.com/#auto|en|http://www.rhythmics.ch/clappers.html>. *Steve Wixson*

Matt Kinman Plays Old Time Rhythm Bones

Matt Kinman is an old time musician who plays many instruments including fiddle, guitar, banjo, mandolin, and rhythm bones. Matt, thirty eight years old, actually grew up playing old-time music. He appears regularly with the Roan Mountain Hilltoppers and the Pea Ridge Ramblers. He has performed with Old Crow Medicine Show, Mike Seeger, Tennessee Mafia Jug Band, and others.

"It was an old-time band that started the Grand Ole Opry, and they were playing fiddle tunes then," says Kinman.

He and a friend, Jonathan Farrell, played in Chattanooga a few weeks back. I had the feeling that the two were jamming in his front room and that we were just sitting there listening to them. They played old time Americana music and the newest song they played was by Jimmie Rogers.

My only regret was that he played rhythm bones on only one song, but it was some fine bones playing. He would occasionally hit the bones against his other hand or his knee to get an extra click.

After the show I got to spend some time with him. He learned to play one-handed bones from his father when he was about 8 years old and his father learned from a sailor who was 103 at the time. Matt plays shin bones that came from England (however they don't look like Nick Driver shin bones that several of us play.) He introduced Dom Flemons of the Carolina Chocolate Drops to the rhythm bones.

After his previously mentioned bones song, he told this story about musician John Hartford. He was jamming with John and others and such sessions quickly became Hartford sessions. Matt started playing his bones and John yelled out, "No Bones." Being a rhythm bones player, I was sorry to learn about that.

You can watch Matt play a neat fiddle tune at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0oZjoOQ0Y4>

You can see how he teaches bones at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ssMEbMYkOX8&feature=related>. *Steve Wixson*

(Bones Fest Highlights—Continued from page 1)

The Fest actually began on Thursday evening with a reception in the RBS Hospitality Suite in the Crown Plaza Hotel for those folks for whom two and a half days of rhythm bones playing was just not enough.

The Fest officially began Friday at 11:30 AM with a reception with food and drink, jamming, the Bones Marketplace, and people renewing old and making new friendships.

The planned Skype link to our new found Tuscany rhythm bones friends unfortunately did not work, and we were not able to share techniques with them. There is a photograph below of the Italians who sat waiting for us to come on-line. There were technical problems in the Lyceum, and next year hopefully it will work.

This was followed by an afternoon of workshops. Steve Brown led a workshop on how to play Irish music and how to join in an Irish Session, and Tim Reilly led a workshop on how to play drum rudiments on rhythm bones.

Can there be a Bones Fest without a Rib Bones dinner? This was catered by the Red Hot and Blue Restaurant. The rest of evening was fun with informal performances by most everyone. The photographs on Pages 4 and 5 tell the story.

We continued on Saturday with an Irish Bones Jam Session at the Alexandria Farmer's Market on the City Hall Pavilion Stage. We held the largest Pass-Off in history, and tried to get it sanctioned by the Guinness Book of Records. Music was provided by Shepherd's Pie and some of our host's friends. This was a grand highlight.

Lunch was followed by more workshops in the Lyceum. These were titled 'Art' workshops, and Tim Reilly started them off with 'The Ancient Art of Bone Scrimshaw.' Spike Bones led 'Rhythm Bones and the Art of Dance.' and Kenny's was 'Taking it to the Next Level – The Art of 2-Hand Independence.'

After a pizza dinner, we reorganized for our public performances. The doors opened at 6 PM for beginner lessons led by the Meschers and an open Bones Marketplace. At 6:30 the show began, and continued until eve-

ryone who wanted to perform did perform most in some kind of costume or better dress. Apart from the wedding, host Teri's greatest Bones Fest highlight was performing bones on stage for the first time with her daughter Emily. Everyone had a great time.

Most of us went back to the hotel and jammed until the week hours. Greg Adams and Bob Winans, both with their period minstrel banjos, played for a couple more hours. Lots more rhythm bones jamming.

According to the hosts, the highlight of the weekend happened Sunday Morning. At 9 AM sharp, attendees gathered in the lobby of the hotel and waited for Gunnery Sgt Kenneth Scott Wolin, in full dress uniform, to walk down the stairs and lead everyone to TransPotomac Canal Central. Music was provided by Jonathan Danforth on violin and Mary Audette on flute, playing Teri's favorite waltz, *Give Me Your Hand*. The crowd hushed as Teri Davies walked down the curved stairs to the landing where after pausing down more stairs through the raised bones of the Rhythm Bones Honor Guard (see photograph). It was a beautiful culmination of Kenny's proposal to Teri on stage at Bones Fest XIII (to the surprise of Teri and all attendees).

Then it was back to the hotel for a champagne breakfast and farewells.

Steve Brown thought the new atten-

dee's were quite impressive, and there must be 10 -15 folks who had never been to a Fest. Each and every one of them were enthusiastic, and charmed by the event. He was pleased to see Wilma Myers, who looked in good health, and the Cowett's all playing together again. He was thrilled that Bob Winans had come, and he was, Steve thought, impressed with the event. Many thanks to Bob and Greg Adams for coming back to the hotel and playing tunes and informing us about the banjo long into the night.

Steve Wixson

First Announcement

Bones Fest
XV

San Antonio, Texas

June 9-12, 2011

Host

Dennis Riedesel
riedeselD@uhv.edu



The Italian rhythm bones players waiting in Tuscany for a Skype internet link so they could share Bones Fest XIV with us. Unfortunately the link did not work. Next year it will!

The Wedding of Teri Davies and Kenny Wolin



Teri and Kenny's daughters pass out flowers to attendees



Teri Davies walks through the Rhythm Bones Honor Guard



Music by Mary Audette On flute and Jonathan Danforth on violin



Mr and Mrs Kenny Wolin

Rhythm Bones Society

1060 Lower Brow Road
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Address Correction Requested