



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 13, No. 2 2011

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Executive Director's Column

When Dr. Edmunds, Russ Myers, Ev Cowett began to get together and hold Bones Fests, there was great joy that people were continuing to play the bones. The most frequently heard statement at those early bones fests was, "I thought I was the only one left!" My first fest was so much like meeting a family I had been estranged from. It continued to give me energy for the bones well into the year, and beyond.

The Rhythm Bones Society itself was such a revelation that we could bring so many people together, have increasingly bigger Fests, see better and better players, bring more new players into the group, and produce both a newsletter and a web site of extremely high quality, that we felt great satisfaction and a sense of security that we have something concrete that will continue to

grow well into the future.

But I have to tell you, I fear for that future, and have come to the realization that what we have built is somewhat tenuous. There are no guarantee's in life, that's for sure, but our actions can sustain the present, which will contribute to the legacy that we leave.

And I think that we need to think about how our actions can sustain and contribute to making sure our society continues. I had a frightening and sobering realization during the great San Antonio Bones Fest, what if Steve Wixson wasn't there. What if Steve moved on to other things, or worse was not able to continue in his role as Newsletter Editor/ Treasurer/ glue that holds us together? His contributions to both the

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Highlights of Bones Fest XV

I really enjoyed being with all of you during Bones Fest XV. I hope you enjoyed San Antonio and all the activities.

The staff at the Alamo personally thanked me --and through me to you--for what we did in the Courtyard on Friday and Saturday morning. (A special note: For those of us who do so, we need to send a thank you to the appropriate entity for the wonderful cool temperature, low humidity,

and breeze we enjoyed on Friday and Saturday morning.)

As of this writing date, the Folklife staff has not had time to develop and share their review. It will be sent to Steve Wixson for inclusion in a future newsletter when it is received.

When setting up the performance times, I did not know how many bones players would be

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Bones Fest XV Group Photograph. Dinner cruise on the San Antonio River that meanders through downtown San Antonio.

Editorial

I am again juiced up by the Fest and writing this on my flight home. Bones Fest XV, hosted by Dennis Riedesel, was another great Fest, and will be remembered as the 'Performer's Fest.' There were 9 and a half hours of stage time and over 8 hours of jamming to live music. Capping it off was a dinner cruise on the San Antonio River. Dennis' highlights article begins on Page 1. Our thanks to Dennis for being a wonderful host.

Many people deserve credit for the photographs in this issue. Mary Lee Sweet again photographed and videoed the Fest. I also shot some photos and video. Tom Worrell, Larry Wheat and others shot video that you will see on our website soon.

While I am acknowledging credits, I have to step into my grandfather roll, and thank my granddaughter, Abbie Hanson, for drawing the Fest Graphic used for T-shirts and posters. The concept for the graphic came from our host Dennis Riedesel.

Special thanks to Walt Watkins for hosting the duo of Tammy and Jay Roy for Friday afternoon and late evening jamming. It was a welcomed change of pace.

I feel the need to comment on Steve Brown's nice words about me. It amazes me that I was able to turn an elementary school hobby into a retirement avocation. A trait of many first born children is the need to produce, and RBS has given me that opportunity. If I have been a blessing to my rhythm bones family, you and our society have been a blessing to me. Thanks Steve for the kudos.

In closing, when someone calls out "Remember the Alamo," it will have two meanings for me and for this year's group of tired Bones Festers.

Letter to the Editor

I spent four days (March 17-20) teaching banjo at Suwannee Banjo Camp in Florida. I was impressed by the number of people learning to play the bones that came out of the woodwork once they realized that I played as well. Bones playing was not part of the schedule, but once I realized that at

least 6-8 camp attendees were interested (some of whom already had their own sets), I made time to get together with people to go over rudiments and offer tips on how to blend in with old-time banjo/fiddle music. I think more people are asking questions not only about the history of playing bones, but also looking for more opportunities to play. It's a notable sign. BTW, here's a video that includes me playing bones as part of the faculty concert during the camp (www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFQIThdKH14.) You can hear me in the background, but I eventually get a chance to briefly "solo" during one of the breaks. I'll keep doing my part in sharing with people as opportunities arise. I'm glad that RBS' website is updated so that I can direct interested individuals in your direction. Best Regards, *Greg Adams*

My name's Ari, and I taught rhythm bones at the Downeast Dance Festival. Thanks for having this society and this website. I have referred to it many times. Jonathon, if you're the one this email goes to, thanks as well as you're the one I learned from at the NEFFA festival. *Ari Erlbaum*

I am excited to find this web site about bones playing. The bones have been in our family for years. My grandfather, Chet Davids played for dances while shearing sheep on the desserts of Idaho and surrounding area. His bones were made of ebony. My father Theron Davids, then taught himself to play them as they were setting around his home. He played with an orchestra in Chesterfield Idaho for years. Chesterfield is on the national historical register and is visited by many each summer. The restoration group has rebuilt the original recreation hall on the town site, and my brother Paul Davids and I played with a band there last summer. Paul has a metal set of bones and a pair of ivory bones. I started to play the bones in 1963, and my father taught me his techniques and his enthusiasm for the art. It was my talent in a Miss Caribou County Pageant, and I placed second runner up in that contest. I forwarded your web address to my daughter who also enjoyed it. I am

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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

planning a family bone fest in a few months with my brother's families. I think we will have a great time, and we will start the next generation on their bone playing fun. *Shirley Christensen*

Bones Calendar

Bones Fest XVI. Date and location not decided, but Ireland, Orlando and Flagstaff are possibilities. Interested in being a host—send for the Bones Fest Host Guide.

NTCMA and Bones Contest. August 29-September 4, 2011. Bones contest on Saturday or Sunday.

William Turnbull Died

RBS recently learned that member William Turnbull of Toledo, OH, died in 2008. He was a self taught player who liked Dixieland music. He played with cherry and ash rhythm bones.

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newsletter and the web site, and his tireless energy for the bones is truly staggering.

I think about the original Board of which there are only three of us left on the board after 10 years. Russ Myers has passed on. Our dear friend Ev Cowett is not able to be as active as he once was. And being an organization based on an ancient art, we are getting older as well. (I got my first senior discount in San Antonio this week end!)

So what can we do to make sure what we have will continue? I think we can all participate up to our level, and ability. I can give Steve more support, write more articles when he needs them, pay more attention to the inner workings of the organization, so that in the event that I am needed to take on more responsibility, I'll be there.

We have two new Board Members, Sharon Mescher, and Skeff Flynn. Great choices who will bring much needed energy to the board, and a wealth of knowledge and experience.

But what can you do? You can participate to the level of your ability. Attend a Bones Fest when you are able, give your opinion as to where and when bones fests should be held to make sure you can get to one now and again, write an article for the newsletter, or just tell us what you think.

Because I fear that what Fred, and Russ, and Ev had envisioned could easily become dust in the wind, as we will all become, I sincerely hope that when I'm gone, there will be five more of you to take my place, and carry on what we have contributed to building.

I want to thank Dennis Reidesel for putting on a truly fantastic fest—what a great time. I want to thank each and every Bones Fest participant for being there and contributing in their unique way. What a great city San Antonio is!

And finally I want to thank Gil Hibben, and Kenny Wohlin for their service on the Board. Gil had been a Board Member since 2002, and Assistant Director since 2004. His leading the conga line at the end of the Bones Fest was a fixture at Fests since my

first Fest in 2000.

Kenny's term on the board was a bit shorter, but no less valuable. We will always have fond memories of the Fest he sponsored last year, and continue to be wowed by his technical expertise on the bones. We encourage them to return to the Board in the future.

In addition I welcome on the Board, Sharon Mescher and Skeff Flynn. Sharon is well known to all of you not only with her remarkable progress as a bones player in the Mescher Tradition, but also for her exemplary work on the 10th Anniversary commemorative issue of the Rhythm Bone Player newsletter.

Skeff, although a relative new comer, has great enthusiasm for the bones and RBS, and represents the newer player. Please join me in welcoming them! *Steve Brown*

Minutes of the General Membership Meeting

Steve Brown called the meeting to order at 4:10 PM in Room 3 of the Emily Morgan Hotel. The motion was made, seconded and approved to accept the minutes of the last meeting as printed in the newsletter. Steve Wixson presented a brief Treasurer's report noting that we ended the year with \$2,460 in the bank. The motion was made, seconded and approved to accept the report.

There was an election of officers and Board members. Since there was not a quorum for a Board meeting which is also the Nominating Committee, all nominations were from the floor. The following were elected; Steve Brown, Executive Director, Bill Vits, Assistant Director, Steve Wixson, Secretary/Treasurer, and Board Members Jonathan Danforth, Skeffington Flynn, Sharon Mescher and Mel Mercier.

There was a discussion about the location of Bones Fest XVI. There are three possibilities; Mel Mercier in Cork, Ireland, Mary Lee Sweet in Orlando and newcomer Michael Satterwhite in Flagstaff, AZ. The Board will follow up.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:05. Respectfully submitted, *Steve Wixson*

Minutes of the Board Meeting

Steve Brown called the meeting to order at 8:00 AM in the Emily Morgan Hotel restaurant. Present were Steve Brown, Bill Vits, Steve Wixson, and new members Skeff Flynn and Sharon Mescher. There were three visitors, Jerry Mescher, Randy Sepala and Michael Satterwhite.

The motion was made, seconded and approved to accept the minutes of the last Board meeting as printed in the newsletter and summarized by Steve Wixson.

There was a discussion of our website and how to continue to improve it. Since Skeff Flynn is a web developer, the motion was made, seconded and approved to give him access to the website so he can develop a clone (a copy) using the web tools he uses that the Board can evaluate.

The issue of rhythm bones to give away to kids was discussed. Steve Wixson did a little research to see if Joe Birl's plastic bones could be inexpensively duplicated. His first quotes were high, so Steve Brown will check with some people he knows who might be able to do it cheaper. Randy noted that the Dem Bones Company is retooling and will be able to quote on give away kids bones soon.

Many years ago Doug Rideout of Liberty Films shot professional multi-camera 16mm film of Percy Danforth for a documentary. He was not able to finish that project, and it would be a contribution to the history of rhythm bones if this project could be completed. As a way to hopefully restart the project now using digital techniques, the motion was made, seconded and approved to authorize \$400 for the purpose of scanning as much film as possible into the computer so the Board could examine it as video and determine the feasibility of completing the project.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:55. Respectfully submitted, *Steve Wixson*

Bones Fest XV Photographic Highlights



The Alamo with our Fest Hotel in the background



Randy Seppala, Annette & Mitch Boss performing in the Alamo Courtyard



Steve Wixson teaches a group of youth in the Alamo Courtyard



Sky Bartlett playing rhythm bones to Jessye Weinstein's classical solo



From the left, Dr Winders who led our Alamo tour and learned to play bones a bit, Steve Wixson, Jessye Weinstein, Courtney Byrne-Mitchell, Annette Boss, Becky Shannon, Jerry Mescher, Skeff Flynn, Sky Bartlett, Bernie Worrell, Michael Satterwhite, Sharon Meacher, Ernie Duffy and Mitch Boss.



Walt Watkins hosted afternoon and after hours jamming sessions with Tammy and Jay Roy who can play most any song that someone can name. A very nice change of pace.



Another Spike Bones rhythm bones extravaganza performance



The Mescher Trio, Sharon Mescher, Jerry Mescher and Bernie Worrell, performing on the Grape Arbor Stage



Performing on the Grape Arbor Stage are from the left, Skeff Flynn, Sky Bartlett, Randy Seppala, Mitch Boss, Walt Watkins, Ernie Duffy, host Dennis Riedesel on the one string bass banjo, Bill Vits and Steve Brown. What a treat to perform with the Tanner Family Old Time Medicine Show Band.



Mary Lee and Frank Sweet in their Backintyme costumes



Sky Bartlett driving, Becky Shannon, daughter Jessye Weinstein and friend Courtney Byrne-Mitchell start back to Colorado after the Fest

Profile of a Member Michael Ballard



In 1983, I visited Renaissance Faire, then in Agoura Hills, California and I got "shanghaied" into working there. I've worked there every spring since then. At the Faire, amongst all of the oddly dressed people, there was one group that was more odd than most and they put on a really fun show of Scottish and Irish music and dancing. I was hooked immediately.

The group is called The Clan Mac-Colin of Glenderry. Through them I was introduced to two more styles of dancing and I was introduced to Bones and Bodhran. I've been dancing and/or playing in their dance shows (and many other places) for more than 20 years.

In 1985, I noticed one Faire weekend when many musicians were missing. The following weekend they were all back so I asked where they had gone. That's when I found out about the California Traditional Music Society and their annual Summer Solstice Folk Music, Dance and Story Telling Festival. I went to the 1986 Festival as a paying customer and found out about the benefits of being a volunteer. After being a volunteer for a few years, I was invited to join the staff as a teacher and as Artistic Director - Small Instruments/Percussion. I've been teaching, co-teaching or assisting in bones, bodhran and spoons classes since 1987. I've also learned a bit of clave, doumbek and djembe at the Festival.

In 2000, I found out about the Rhythm Bones Society from a bones player friend, Molly Bennett. I attended Bones Fest IV in Chattanooga, TN that year and several more since then (IV, VI, VII, IX, X, XI, XII).

Over the years I've played in innumerable pub sets and jam sessions, mostly in Southern California. I've played concert gigs with everything from classical orchestra to heavy metal and mariachi bands. Highlights include:

Gigs with Silverwood, Kitchen Fire and The Shamrockers (all based in the San Diego area).

Playing with the San Diego Repertory Theater Company in their Christmas 2000 production of Dickens' "A Christmas Carol".

Many years of playing on the streets of the Renaissance Pleasure Faire (and occasional other venues) with hammered dulcimer master Glenn Morgan. *Michael Ballard*

[In the photo, Michael at BFXII went to top of the Gateway Arch.]

Key to the Page 1 Group Photograph

In the left boat on the left side from front to back; Sharon Mescher, Jerry Mescher, Annette Boss, Mitch Boss, Skeff Flynn, Marynell Young, Gene Young, and Randy Seppala

In the left boat on the right side;



Tom Worrell, Bernie Worrell, Michael Satterwhite, Steve Wixson (not shown taking the photograph), Steve Brown, Rebecca Shannon, Jessye Weinstein, Courtney Byrne-Mitchell, and Sky Bartlett.

In the right boat on the left side: host Dennis Riedesel, Ernie Duffy, Glen Christian, Mike Szymanski, Renee Neese, Spike Bones, and Bill Vits.

In the right boat on the right side: Larry Wheat, Joy Watkins, Walt Watkins, Jennifer Szymanski, Craig Brubaker, Frank Sweet, and Mary Sweet.

Recording of the Quarter

Spike Bones found the 33rpm vinyl record shown below. It features Sterling Kelly on bones and hickory leaf and Ralph Smith on harmonica. Sterling was born in Flat Rock, MO several miles south of where Spike lives. He learned to play rhythm bones from his father who worked for the Dandy Dixie Minstrel Show.

The liner notes say, "The instruments featured on this album are, in a sense, the folk instruments par excellence of the America of not long ago...What you will hear on this record, is a direct transmission of American folk art of the earlier years

of this century?"

The record number is listed as TR-4 from Troubadour Music, Inc., copyright 1977. We have been unable to locate them, and assume they have gone out of business. Therefore, we will digitize some of the tracks and add them to the growing list of rhythm bones music on our website. If anyone knows anything about this company, please contact Steve Wixson.

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attending the conference. The rationale for a 3 hour block of performance time was because I recalled that this was about how long it took for everyone to perform at the Bones Fests with a large attendance. When it looked like our attendance would be low, the 3 hours of performances were locked in at Folklife, but that opened more time to schedule other activities around the morning and early afternoon jam and meeting times. I hope all of you got in enough performance time before an audience and at the jam sessions!

Many of you commented about how much you enjoyed the dinner cruise. I have taken the barge tour many times, but enjoyed the dinner cruise since it was the first time for me. I also enjoyed the parts of the river that the tour barges do not visit so that was also a "baby book" experience for me. The Casa Rio is my favorite place to eat when I am downtown, but I choose this restaurant to serve us dinner because Steve Brown said he wanted some real Texas Chili. From the 1860's to the 1930's, the San Antonio Chili Queens plied their food wares from their carts on Alamo Plaza. The chili on your dinner plate was one of those Chili Queen's recipe!

I also hope you found the Alamo and the I-Max move informative. If we had been in another part of San Antonio I would not have scheduled this event—but since we were right across the street...

My music folks shared with me why they enjoyed this event: 1) they really liked the configuration of players that were able to assemble for this gig. We stayed and jammed until after 1 AM Sunday morning after all of the bones players left; 2) they were glad that they were once again able to perform at Folklife since it has been too many years since the last time they performed there; and 3) they were enthralled with the talent the bones players brought to the jam sessions and public performances. When I asked them what they thought of the bones players that had much more talent than I do—they said, "Wow!"

A big thank you goes out to Walt.

Early on I gave Walt the times and rooms that were available for the Friday jam sessions. We did not have enough hotel rooms reserved on Friday and Saturday night for us to be able to use the hotel's meeting rooms as per our contract. So plan "B" was developed which was to use the Alamo Compound meeting rooms. Then we were able to settle on plan "C" where those of you who came in the extra nights before and after the Friday and Saturday night block allowed the re-negotiation for the use of the hotel's meeting rooms. Walt had a contract with his music group so he and I had some anxious moments while all of this was resolved. His duo was wonderful and really added extra enjoyment to our Friday afternoon and evening jam sessions.

Steve Wixson and I were discussing the event and how we both enjoyed developing the vision, doing the planning and negotiations involved in putting this event together. I really had fun doing my part for this event. Steve told me that if I follow true to form with those who have hosted more than one event that I would do this again in about 5 years. If you want to come back to San Antonio, I would be happy to serve once more.

Performance Highlights that I enjoyed:

The way the pattern of the notes of "Golden Slippers" are played on the Hammered Dulcimer allows for this song to be played at a very high tempo. When Sky and Dana shifted through the gears into super overdrive it was all I could do to keep up and I was just thumping along on the beat—pity those musicians that had to fill up less and less space in between the beats!

Jessye and Sky's duets on Celtic Fiddle and Bones were a treat.

Mary Lee and Frank Sweet's sets were enjoyable. And a big thank you to them for being willing to time their performance so the band could get a break.

Naturally all of the individual performances were wonderful for me to observe, but I was especially enthralled when the players formed the various combinations to perform together in twos or threes. I do not recall seeing many of these combinations in

past Bones Fests so it was interesting to watch each player fit their technique into the technique of their partners. I am glad things worked out time wise so we could do more of these group performances that what we were able to do in past Fests.

And while I am thinking in terms of duets and trios, it is always a highlight experience to watch the Meschers! Also a thank you goes to Bernie's husband, Tom Worrell, for help with the sound systems and to remind me that some of you wanted to perform to your own music.

Randy's silver spoon bones were very interesting when applied to the waltz. I can only recall Randy doing this to "Silver Bells." After I heard him play some of the other waltzes, I thought maybe I could throw Randy a curve when I asked the band to play my favorite waltz "OOT PIK" but Randy's spoons were beautiful with this song.

When I saw the list of attendees developing, I felt pretty sure that I would not have to schedule any workshops during the afternoon sessions. I left this part of the schedule open so that we could hold workshops if anyone wanted one or wanted to present one. But, I think the way things developed, everyone wanted to jam with Jay & Tammy on Friday afternoon and with the Tanner Family Minstrels on Saturday afternoon. I believe that everyone did as I did. They attend workshops as they watched each other's solo performances and then watched each other during the pass-offs and picked up techniques via that method instead of a formal workshop.

I was also interested in those of you who played along with Gene's blues guitar. I have performed along with him in the past so I was interested in what could be done in concert with this instrument.

An off stage event that many of you probably missed was that I had asked Larry to bring along his "Fiddle Sticks" fiddle. Steve Brown, Bill Vits, and a few others got to try out or see this percussive technique.

I do not know why the Alamo Staff were so interested in the bones. They had a set (modern) in the archives

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The Fabulous Tanner Family Minstrel Band



Shown on the Grape Arbor Stage of the Texas Folklife Festival are our backup musicians for the Fest. From right to left are BFXV host, Dennis Riedesel, rhythm bones, one string bass banjo, Dana Hamilton, hammer dulcimer, Marynell Young, fiddle, Jenny (Young) Jones, fiddle, Chuck Chandler, banjo, Larry Wheat, guitar, mandolin, fiddle, Glen Christian, guitar, Judy Hamilton, bouzouki, Karol Wheat, dancing jack, tambourine, bodhran. Not shown is Rachel (Young) Lester, fiddle and RBS members who sat in on occasion, Jessye Weinstein, fiddle, and Michael Satterwhite, bodhran.

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collections and brought the set out to the patio. I did not see this, but Steve Wixson told me that Dr. Winders,

who lead our special Alamo tour, actually played in our final group on Saturday. I was also pleased to see most those who were with us at the

hotel were able to rattle out the triplets. Thank you, teachers; maybe we can actually get some new members. *Dennis Riedesel*

Rhythm Bones Society

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Address Correction Requested