



# Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 14, No. 2 2012

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## Executive Director's Column

Well the Brown Family are actively planning our first trip to Florida. Rattling the bones with Mickey Mouse! Our bone playing community has an amazing opportunity to come to Florida to experience all that the Orlando area has to offer, and to show Florida what bone playing is all about. Please take advantage of our first Bones Fest in Florida, bring your family, bring your friends, and above all bring the bones!

With the tremendously exciting prospect of our first bones fest in a major family resort, time now to think about next years fest. As you may know, the Board regularly reviews proposals for bones fests at our yearly board meeting at the fest, and though we are not always able to make a decision at the Fest, it's always good to start planning as early as possible so that members

have time to make plans. Several idea's for future fests have been mentioned, the elusive fest in Ireland, expanding to new frontiers in Arizona, and returning to old, stomping grounds in New England are all possibilities, but as your Executive Director, I want to put the question to the membership, what do you want for a Bones Fest?

Bones Fests, as I'm sure you are aware, sprouted from the humble confines of Everett Cowett's back yard, and have travelled to major cities around the country, including St.Louis, Milwaukee, and San Antonio. We have now been to almost every major section of the country, from the West (Texas) to the East (Massachusetts) the South (Florida) to the

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## Bill Vits

Born in the Chicago area in 1957 (which Bill Vits now realizes coincided with the birth of rocknroll and the plastic drumhead), his Dad was transferred to Nashville, TN as a salesman for Mirro Aluminum Company. His earliest memories recall being sent home from religious preschool for calling another child a liar. The next day he returned and successfully called the child a prevaricator.

At 6, Bill started piano lessons with a very hip lady, June Wolfe, who could read a book while playing background jazz in the strip clubs of Printers Alley. One day he heard her son playing drums in his bedroom and he asked if he could have drum lessons. Bill promised he would practice more than watching TV, which was easy when you only had 3 channels. Jim Wolfe was the funkier white kid who played with all the area soul bands. The first record he gave Bill was "Green Onions" by Booker T. and the MG's. He would stack 45's on Bill's record player and play along with Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, Beatles, Stones and Bill's favorite, James Brown.

Jim got Bill involved with Vanderbilt's Blair Academy of Music where he started lessons with Farrell Morris, who was a Nashville studio and orchestral percussionist. This lead to Bill becoming the youngest member (11 years old) of the

Nashville youth symphony playing along side high school players.

Once again, Bill's Dad was transferred and they moved to Indianapolis. His mom found the Paul-Mueller Percussion studio and Bill became a student of Erwin Mueller. The drum set took a back set for a while as Bill worked on his marimba and timpani playing. Jazz band and marching band led to him becoming drum major. His summers were filled with music

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Bill Vits at Bones Fest VII in Louisville, KY

## Editorial

Bill Vits has magical wrists. Of course he should as a professional percussionist, and others have them too. I first thought that when I saw him play quadruplets, and then tried to play them his way and could not. This nice story about our Assistant Director starts on Page 1.

Skeff Flynn has some thoughts about what to do after you learn the basics and have reached a plateau in your playing.

Mike Passerotti's YouTube Page on our website is something I look at when I need a break. He, with the help of our members, has collected all of the known rhythm bones videos (at least that is his goal.) Members were asked which of these are their personal favorites and why and these choices are presented in this issue.

Bones Fest XVI in Orlando is just around the corner so to speak, and host, Mary Lee Sweet, gives us a last minute update. We have many first timers this year.

## Letters to the Editor

Hello. I will be playing bones with Bruce Carver in Austin, Texas at a clinic workshop for the Percussive Arts Society International Convention on November 1-3 this year. The clinic is entitled 'Bones and Bohdran Beyond Tradition.' *Brad Dutz*

Hope you all have a great time in Orlando - wish we could be there but we have just a month to play away from home the rest of the year and we're going to Washington State. Don't give up on me just yet .... I think that I've found the perfect music for my bones playing and have adopted a new technique for bones placement in my hands that might just raise me a step or 2 on the bones playing greatness ladder. I'd be more likely to appear in some back woods place than a big city - as a guy from Tellico Plains I have difficulty being somewhere that there are more people in their cars at a 4 way stop intersection than in our whole town! Have fun. *Mike Hannan*

Just got back from a four day Ac-

ordion festival in Moncton N.B. Our band "Le Vent Des Cantons" (The Township Breeze) played a total of 6 different stages in Moncton for this event.

The Bones were prevalent in each show and people just loved to see them played. Four of the events were widely covered by the C.B.C. T.V. --- Global T.V.--- C.T.V., as well. Tough to do so many shows in such a short period of time. One show at the Lions' Club lasted almost four hours backing up some 35 Accordion, Guitar, Mouth Organ and many other players.

Taught bones playing to six new would be interested players who bought bones that I make. Told them all they would be invited to play on stage with me next year as motivation to get them really interested..

Unfortunately, I will not be able to go to Orlando this August (I would have loved to go) as the band is booked for three different gigs around Quebec, then Sept 8th we will be in Woonsocket R.I. for two more concerts there. This really fills our schedule up for a bit.

If anyone is interested in getting a copy of our latest CD, just look at our Web page [www.leventdescantons.com](http://www.leventdescantons.com) and we would be pleased to send one along to ya. Keeping the beat---*Bob Goulet* "The Quebec Boner"

Hope you like my video--- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jijXsW6gt0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jijXsW6gt0), Rap! Rap! On Your Minstrel Bones' by Ed Meeker---From old wax cylinder recording.

How have you been? Sorry I haven't been involved with the Bones Society for a while, but I had a career change and haven't had time for much of anything but that for a few years now. I do still play my bones!

I've collected old record players and records for 45 years, but that is the only bones-specific record of which I'm aware. It's relatively easy to find if you'd like me to find you a copy. Would probably run between \$10-\$25 depending upon the circumstance. Best, *John Meader* [We last saw John at BFIX. Also you can Google the recording name and find two higher quality versions]

## *Rhythm Bones Player*

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Editor  
Steve Wixson  
[wixson@epbf.com](mailto:wixson@epbf.com)

Executive Director  
Stephen Brown  
[Bones@crystal-mtn.com](mailto:Bones@crystal-mtn.com)

Web Site Coordinator  
Jonathan Danforth  
[webmaster@rhythmbones.com](mailto:webmaster@rhythmbones.com)

Board of Directors  
Steve Brown, Executive Director  
Jonathan Danforth  
Skeffington Flynn  
Mel Mercier  
Sharon Mescher  
Bill Vits, Assistant Director  
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](http://rhythmbones.com)

## Recording of the Quarter

In a Dave Scott review of the Diamonds in the Rough CD, he says "it has a unique compilation of outstanding harmonica driven blues." The harmonica is played by Harmonica Knan, who was influenced by Sonny Terry (who also influenced JC Burris—see Vol 13, No 4 for a story about JC.)

There are 2 tracks (5 and 9) on this CD featuring Harmonica Khan and me, and whilst the bones playing is raw and hence not technically brilliant, the overall effect is great from a blues perspective. *Dennis Rigg*

[To listen to these tracks, copy this link into your internet browser—[www.cduniverse.com/search/xx/music/pid/6875651/a/Diamonds+in+the+Rough.htm](http://www.cduniverse.com/search/xx/music/pid/6875651/a/Diamonds+in+the+Rough.htm).]

(Continued from page 1)

North (Wisconsin), and I personally have the bones to thank for getting me to parts of the country which I know I would never have been to, but I'm concerned about leaving some of our members on the side lines, wishing, but unable to attend a Fest. It's true we can't be every where, but I am wondering what format would allow for greater participation? We would want to see each and every RBS member at each Bones Fest, the only time that could claim to have happened would be at Bones Fest III, when the organization was founded, and it's probably not possible, but having seen Fests which boast 50+ bones players in attendance, it may be possible to bring more of us together on a regular basis.

One possibility is to look at our format. Bones Fest has traditionally been proposed and sponsored by a single member, independent of the Board, who presents a plan, reviewed and approved by the Board, and carried out by the member and their spouse, or in some cases, co-sponsored by another member. While this has been successful for the most part, it places a lot of responsibility on the sponsors, and creates inconsistency in location. The question of selecting one or two more or less permanent sites has been raised. This might require the Board to become more involved in the planning, and utilization of a planning committee, rather than the reliance on one or two individuals. The major question for me is, what is going to get more people at the fests, what is going to bring out as many of our members as possible? I have benefited so much from the current format that I almost feel biased from making a decision on it, but ultimately we (the Board) have to focus on what's best for the membership, and I believe we are more than willing to do this but we need to hear from the membership, what do you want? A Bones Fest that moves around the country, discovering new locations as invited by a member, or one that swings between two locations, more or less permanent, presented by a committee overseen by the Board? I want to hear your thoughts on this topic so that we can discuss it at our

upcoming Board meeting in August. Please feel free to contact me: [bones@crystal-mtn.com](mailto:bones@crystal-mtn.com), 36 Royalston Road North Winchendon, Ma. 01475, 978-297-1104

Bones Fests are the one opportunity to bring our bone playing family together, lets bring as much of the family together as we can! *Steve Brown*

## Update on Bones Fest XVI in Orlando

Orlando - Rhythm Bones Fest XVI. Please save the date - August 9-11, 2012 and plan to attend the Rhythm Bones Fest XVI in Orlando!

Registration forms are available on the Rhythm Bones website: <http://www.rhythmbones.com/documents/BFXVIRegistrationForm.pdf>

Our July 10th deadline for booking online is past, so please call for reservations to get our special rate while rooms are still available. 1-800-627-8258. You must tell them your reservation is for the Rhythm Bones Fest XVI to get the special GUESTROOM RATES of Single/Double: \$89.00 Add'l Person: \$20.00.

Thursday night, the 9th, will begin the Fest with an excursion for dinner or drinks (you decide) at the Raglan Road Irish Pub in Downtown Orlando. <http://www.raglanroad.com/> Raglan Road Irish Pub & Restaurant, Orlando's only authentic Irish pub, built entirely in Ireland, shipped Lock, Stock and Beer Barrel to Downtown Disney! They've agreed to let us rattle the bones a bit in between the Irish dancers and the songs of the house band Creel.

All Bones Fest XVI events and sessions will be in the air conditioned comfort of a Rosen Plaza Hotel conference room or an air conditioned restaurant/pub. Pointe Orlando is across the street from the hotel - 5 minutes walking time. <http://pointeorlando.com/dining/> There you will find great places to do a Pub Crawl. Arrangements are being made to perform on some of these stages.

Adobe Gila's <http://orlando.adobegilas.com/> B.B. King's Blues Club <http://www.bbkingclubs.com/index.php?>

page=orlhome. The Pub <http://www.experiencethepub.com/orlando>

A preliminary schedule is listed here <http://www.rhythmbones.com/nextFest.html>

Visit our Rhythm Bones Society homepage to learn more about playing rhythm bones. <http://www.rhythmbones.com>.

Don't miss the opportunity to join the Rhythm Bones Society in an unforgettable Fest in the City Beautiful. See You Soon. *Mary Lee Sweet*

## Here Comes the Judge

A friend of mine in Abbeyfeale once said to me, and rightly so, we can't have a competition with out the competitors, but clearly, we can't have a competition with out the judge.

Judges or adjudicators are used widely in competitions in Ireland on the local, regional and national level to judge the Fleadh Ceol (feast of music) competitions through out Ireland. Established in the 50's they have grown into the major competitions in Ireland culminating in the All Ireland Championships in a variety of categories, and including almost all instruments played in traditional Irish music, but not the bones. Rules for the competitions are complex, and rigid. The New York Ceili Band was disqualified in the 60's for borrowing a drummer. I saw a Ceili band penalized for playing two reels in a row at the Mid Atlantic Fleadh here in the states.

The All Ireland Bone Playing Competition which was established out side of the Fleadh system has been held since the mid nineties. Judges are hired by the Fleadh committee, and are expected to utilize their own system of rules. The committee has gone out of it's way to hire judges that are well known, and experienced bone players, not an easy feat when you consider how rare the instrument is in the music, and rarer still to be played well. Mel Mercier and Tommy Hayes judged the contest on opposite years, each being asked to judge on alternating years. Mel is of course well known to RBS, having learned the

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## I Know How to Play Triplets . . . Now What?

I'm sure that many of the folks reading this are often asked to demonstrate how to play the bones. For me it has reached the point that I have a fairly standard presentation down. Typically I start by demonstrating my grip, explaining the mechanics and then seeing if the inquisitive individual in front of me can get a single click. If they can we move on to the triplet. It's not often that someone makes it past this point in my presentation. However when they do I almost always get the same question, "now what?"

While this question is almost universally heard from beginning players it is also echoed by experienced players looking to branch out from the musical styles they are most familiar with. So without getting into too much detail on specific rhythms or patterns I'd like to share a few thoughts on what to do once you can play triplets.

The first thing I recommend is to commit the basic mechanics to muscle memory. In order to play in a group setting you need to be able to execute your techniques. This may seem fairly obvious but what may be less obvious is that while you are committing techniques to muscle memory you are also (or should be) committing them to aural memory. Knowing how to play a triplet isn't always enough in a musical setting. You also need to know what it sounds like before you play it. That way you'll have a fair sense of whether or not it's appropriate. Start with single clicks and triplets and expand what you commit to memory as your bones repertoire expands. Can you recall the sound of one triplet? Two? Do you have a specific pattern of single clicks you like to play? As you commit patterns to memory they become a part of your bones vocabulary. That means you'll be able to speak up when the time comes.

A few months after I first picked up the bones I was fortunate enough to get to see the Carolina Chocolate Drops in concert. After the show I asked Dom Flemmons if he had any advice for a beginning bones player.

He asked if I had the single and the triplet and when I said yes he told me to watch dancers. There are definitely great bones players out there who play with a very controlled range of motion and whose playing bears little resemblance to dancing. Like all of the thoughts I'm sharing today this may not be for everyone, so take what works and feel free to disregard the rest. For me this advice was perfect.

There are two important components that made this tip so useful. Bones playing requires movement and if you're moving like a dancer you're probably getting a sense of the underlying pulse of the music you're playing to. The act of dancing and allowing the bones to flow as an extension of your movement is an excellent strategy for developing a playing style. The other element that thinking like a dancer brings is showmanship. When you watch players like Dom Flemmons and Spike Bones you'll notice that their movements are almost as important as what they're playing. Their flamboyant gestures almost can't be separated from their musical styles and they add a whole new dimension to their performances.

Regardless of whether you move like Fred Astaire or have two left feet there are definitely some other guiding principles that can help you in developing your ability to play with other musicians. For me the most important of these is to add without subtracting. Every time I pull out the bones in a group I want to make sure that they add an element that is appreciated. My motivation is simple; I want to be able to play with that group again. If I constantly play really loud rolling triplets over everything regardless of the context I probably won't be welcome the next time I see them.

So when you play with people try to add something to the music without taking anything away. That may sound a little clichéd but it's generally a good approach. How do we achieve this? I think there are a few good, simple strategies to employ. But before we pick a strategy, I think it's good to take note of something that will be pretty important to how you fit into the ensemble. Are you the only (or at least primary) percussionist?

Being the only or primary percussionist in a group allows a certain amount of freedom but it also comes with a certain amount of responsibility. In situations where I am the primary percussionist I actually tend to play less busy or flashy lines. Instead I tend to accent the strong beats. This works in any style. Find the strong beats of the tune accent those beats. Add flash only occasionally.

Think of it this way, drum fills can be really cool but most of the time a really good drummer is just accenting the strong beats of the piece. If the drummer played fills over the whole song the listener (not to mention the rest of the band) is in danger of losing the pulse. So if you're the primary percussionist I recommend thinking like a good drummer and accenting the strong beats.

This approach can work in ensemble settings where you're not the primary percussionist as well. However, if there is another percussionist already accenting the strong beats I generally like to look for space and add flair. If a drummer is always hitting the snare drum on beats two and four I don't necessarily need to hit those beats. Instead I tend to look for spaces in the music that aren't already filled up by a lot of other instruments and I try to play something in that space to further the groove. Aural memory is really helpful here. If you have a repertoire of patterns in your aural and muscle memory it will be easy to arrange them in the spaces you find.

There is another approach that's usually appropriate for either situation. Pick out a thematic line and try to mimic it. This could be the melody or it could be a figure played by one of the accompanying instruments. My only word of caution with this approach is to be sure you don't overwhelm the line you're mimicking.

The last thing I want to consider when thinking about what to play with other musicians is the setting. Is the session public or private? Are you or some of the other musicians being paid to play? If you're in public and (or) you're playing with folks who are getting paid to be there I would tend to advise playing more subtly than if you're at a house jam with a group of

friends. Of course if you're offered a solo then by all means play your heart out, but if you're not, remember this mantra: add without subtracting. On the other hand if you are at a house party with friends remember to experiment. Go for that new pattern you've been practicing that you're not totally sure is going to work. Experimentation is generally necessary for growth. But again, in public settings with paid musicians you're generally going to want to keep that experimentation within reasonable levels.

Playing with other musicians is always a learning experience and can be extremely rewarding in many ways. Now that you can play triplets try committing the basic mechanics and a few of your favorite patterns to aural and muscle memory. Dance if you have the inclination. Ask yourself about the setting and whether you are the primary percussionist. Always do your best to add something to the music without taking anything away and above all, have fun! *Skeffington Flynn*

## Michael Satterwhite's Arizona Workshops

RBS member Michael Satterwhite taught two "Musical Bones" workshops again at the Arizona Highland Celtic Festival (<http://nachs.info/festival.shtml>) on July 21-21, 2012 in Flagstaff, Arizona.

The festival is produced by the Northern Arizona Celtic Heritage Society (NACHS). Michael has taught this workshop on prior years and loves introducing curious folks to the fun of playing bones. He uses 'penny bones' {see *Dutch Penny Bones* article in online newsletter, Vol. 7, No. 4} so everyone can begin to learn the basic mechanics of playing, and they are affordable enough for the festival to send everyone home with instruments. The workshops are full of giggling and banter as players realize they too can deliver a basic rhythm and bones can be flying every which way.

Michael's final request of his new bones players is to observe them playing their new bones as they take in the various musical offerings of the weekend. Wooden bones from various sup-

pliers are offered close to cost. Any profits go into the NACHS scholarship fund - which has dispersed over \$67,000 to deserving students of Celtic culture through the years. Recipients can study, music, culture, language with Celtic orientation. Indeed Michael received a small scholarship to offset travel expenses to attend Bones Fest XV last year based on the anticipation it would strengthen his workshop leadership. Michael was amazed by his fellow players at Bones Fest, learned a huge amount and was able to carry back more knowledge to share with his students.

Michael also taught a bodhran workshop and assisted with a spoons workshop taught by another local, Nicole Bauge. The festival makes the bodhran workshop affordable by dispensing small cardboard pizza boxes and dowel 'tippers' for the students to use during the workshop.

This family-friendly festival is a lively offering of music, children's activities, bagpiping competition, traditional athletic games, visiting clans, vendors and Celtic-oriented food vendors. But near and dear to NACHS is the festival's strong educational component which is exemplified by the bones, bodhran and spoons workshops. They are joined by whisky-tasting, language, storytelling, genealogy, Celtic attire, Celtic plants, the history of salt and much more.

*(Judge—Continued from page 3)*

bones from his father Peadar Mercier, former member of the Chieftains. Tommy Hayes is a world renown percussionist, former All Ireland Champion on the Irish drum, and well known bone and spoons player. Other judges who have taken over the duties are Seamus O'Kane, Bodhran maker, Gino Lupari, Bodhran and bones player with Four Men and a Dog, Ronnie McShane, bone player with the Chieftains, and Sean O'Riada's group Ceoltori Culannan, and Junior Davey, 5 time All Ireland Bodhran Champion, and bone player.

I think the judges really set the Abbeyfeale contest a head of the other bone playing contests held in the World. The Australia contest is totally

unknown to me, so I would defer on that contest, but the Bones and Spoons competition at the Missouri Valley Old Time Music Festival and Contests use of judges is better known. Holding more than a hundred contests over the course of the week, Judges are asked to judge multiple contests, and expertise on an instrument is not a requirement, and the judges remain anonymous both during and after the contest. Judges in Abbeyfeale by and large are well known players with performance, and recording track records who value the bones, and it's place (albeit a small place) in Irish music. The most recent Judge, Junior Davey, has a long history of adjudicating competitions, and competing himself.

In 2005 I was asked to judge the Junior Bone Playing Competition in Abbeyfeale. I had given some thought to it, but had expected to receive some guidelines regarding the judging process. As I sat behind the adjudicators table, one of the Festival Committee members placed a booklet in front of me, "ah here are the rules," I thought. Opening the booklet I soon found it to be blank! "Excuse me" I said, "where are the rules?" "You're the adjudicator, you should know the rules," they replied. It was then I realized that in this competition, the judge sets their own standards and methods. I devised a 5 category point system quickly, and I was happy when several of the bone players present told me the judging was, "Spot on".

Competitions can help to focus attention, and further interest, and I believe that to be true with bone playing. The unfortunate thing is not every can win, or even place for that matter. I think it's important for competitions to continue, and would like to see renewed interest in the bones and spoons competition in Iowa. But make no mistake about it, the judges opinion is what rules on that day, and we know what they say about opinions, every one has one. *Steve Brown*

[Steve Brown has participated in 8 separate competitions playing bones, coming in first 3 times, second once, third 3 times, and 5th once.]

## Members Favorite YouTube Videos

Here's a bit of fun. Mike Passerotti edits the Rhythm Bones YouTube Video Summary Page on our website. On that page he says, "Rhythm Bones is a musical instrument, and yet playing bones is a performing art. Take a walk through videos of many bones artists and discover new styles, new movements, new/old costumes, and new sounds. I spent some 15 years thinking that bones was only a blues and jazz type instrument. Thanks to the internet and RBS, the truth is now known that rattling spans every continent, every tongue, every music style. See what others are playing, and post your own video. When you post your video, make sure you tell us about it so we can add it to the growing list. (Please send additions or corrections to [mikepasserotti@hotmail.com](mailto:mikepasserotti@hotmail.com))"

Recently Mike said, "The YouTube video collection is growing, and rhythm bones playing is showing up in so many places. I am hearing from players who have watched the videos and learned a lick or two. With rhythm bones playing, sometime you just have to see it before it clicks. I've been watching for new videos and new players.

Some players just don't know how to publish YouTube videos. We all want to hear and see you perform dem bones. Go to [youtube.com](http://youtube.com), follow the instructions for creating an account. Then follow the upload link to add your video. Don't forget to tell the rest of us about it. Email your video link to me and I'll include it with the others.

"The Bones Fest is recorded by so many people who attend, and I am hoping that those recordings will show up on YouTube. Please don't delay and upload as soon as you can.

"My favorite, for the moment, is Dom Flemon's video, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=iMokBr9cTxM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iMokBr9cTxM)"

Also recently members were asked what their favorite rhythm bones YouTube video is and why. The result—a lot of good video to check out.

The first reply was from Ana

Mitchell, and she likes [www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gNt9Jocpqk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gNt9Jocpqk)—"Junior Davey & John Joe Kelly, Bones & Bodhran duet, Coleman Bodhran School, 2011." She likes the rhythm bones and bodhran duet, and Junior Davey's playing looks effortless and he only used one hand!

Debbie Duffy likes [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jp4sVvDfdUQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jp4sVvDfdUQ)—"Down Yonder with Bones." She doesn't say why, but the video features Sky Bartlett and husband Ernie Duffy

Michael Satterwhite likes [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWvpfc28i88](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWvpfc28i88)—"Carolina Chocolate Drops: The Briggs Medley (FolkAlley.com.)" "The Carolina Chocolate Drops are a wonderful band that has some roots in Arizona. Dom Flemons (on the left) was born in Phoenix and went to Northern Arizona University here in Flagstaff. He was a steady part of our Flagstaff Friends of Traditional Music and regular participant at our annual Flagstaff Folk Festival. He's been into old time music from day one I think. I'm not sure if he was playing bones before I sat in with he and Riannon maybe 4 years ago at the Folk Festival in one of many jams on the grounds. I was trying my best to rattle bones then...and still am but at least playing two-handed now. As you can see from this video Dom has become a solid bones player, as is his new band mate. Enjoy!

Gerry Hines favorite rhythm bones video is [www.youtube.com/watch?v=4\\_R9FvUQtG](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_R9FvUQtG) - "Jack Frost Plays the Bones" because it reminds me so much of my grandfather playing and how he just loved to entertain.

Steve Wixson likes [www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1hoRz-Aa2o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1hoRz-Aa2o) - "The Wish" Music Video (HD.) Go to the 'Ninja Bones' section at about 3:30 into the video. It's a guy thing!

Sharon Mescher's pick for favorite video is [www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jjqXsW6gt0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jjqXsW6gt0), The Russ Myers Memorial Video. Here are the reasons why:

Within that short video, one can experience the "larger-than-life" per-

son that was Russ. He was a "walking encyclopedia," as his wife, Wilma often opined. Ask him anything about history. He certainly knew the history of the bones.

Russ had his own unique way of playing the bones. When Russ would play at the bones fests, I found myself just staring at his hands; trying to figure out how "he did that". In the video he explains how he changes the pitch without moving the bones. Russ was a master bones player.

I'm thankful that the Rhythm Bones Society has this memorial video of Russ. *Sharon Mescher* [This video is on our website in widescreen format.]

Steve Litsios likes [http://](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)  
—Rick Franklin & Mike Baytop / Eastern Market #1, 22 July 07.

Although not a bone tutorial this video remains one of my favorites. The lazy late morning weekend atmosphere goes so well with a great song - Stop and Listen Blues - played by Rick Franklin and Mike Baytop. I stumbled on this video a few years ago just after learning the basics of bone playing and was wondering how to apply those rhythms when playing with someone. Mike Baytop's bone playing is so cool, beautiful and modest/beautifully modest it blew me away; and it still does every time I watch it. [We saw Mike Baytop at BFXIII. A few years ago he suffered a stroke, and has made a recovery.]

## Website Updates

Not a lot to report other than promotional images and test to advertize Bones Fest XVI.

By the you receive this newsletter, the website will have one more BFXVI update and a photograph and video of Assistant Director, Bill Vits.

## Bones Calendar

**Bones Fest XVI.** August 9-11, 2012, Orlando, FL.

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

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campus at Ball State University.

Dr. Mueller taught at Ball State and suggested Bill start in the summer and do an undergraduate degree in three years. This led to him doing the same at the University of Michigan for his Masters Degree with Charles Owen of the Philadelphia Orchestra. This is when Bill first met Percy Danforth (1978) as he played with their ragtime ensemble and gave all the players a lesson on the rhythm bones. Bill had never seen or heard of rhythm bones, but was very interested and bought two pair! By age 22, Bill had degrees and had performed at Carnegie Hall and the Montreux Jazz Festival with University of Michigan ensembles.

After winning (and declining) a position with the US Coast Guard Band, Bill took several orchestral auditions and won the job with the Grand Rapids Symphony which at the time paid \$26/service. His bones playing was slowly improving, but it still took a couple years before he learned to relax and get both hands under control. He settled into Grand Rapids and began teaching and playing jazz to supplement his income.

Opportunities to perform on the rhythm bones with orchestra have included using them in *Mahler's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony* as "holzklappers" (instead of the often used slapstick). In ragtime numbers, like *Xylophonia*, Bill will often play the breaks on rhythm bones. He has even performed Morton Gould's *Tap Dance Concerto* using rhythm bones instead of tap shoes.

Bill's technique is obviously rooted in drumming techniques and rudiments. He can do most things with rhythm bones that he can do with sticks. He says the opposite is NOT true as nobody can play with one drumstick the fast triplets that rhythm bones can accomplish. He loves to play rhythm bones at the drum kit, sometimes with a brush in one hand.

After 34 years of playing the rhythm bones he says, "I'm still amazed how few people know about them." The first thing most people say is "oh, they're like the spoons". To this he replies, "no, with the spoons you have to self flagellate!"

His organization is spreading the

word and high profile players can help educate the public. He says, "Learning the bones is not easy and many people don't have the patience or coordination to crack the code."

"As a player I often feel I've barely scratched the surface of the rhythm bones potential. I've never practiced the rhythm bones as seriously as classical music as I enjoy improvising and being in the moment. I think we will see young players in the future that really push the envelope of what is possible. Hopefully, this will keep the bones alive for generations to come."

Being a professional musician, Bill has amazed everyone at annual Bones Fests. There are many ways to play quadruplets, but Bill has a way that is fast and hypnotizing, and to date no one has duplicated it.

While not a Charter Member, Bill has been a member of the Rhythm Bones Society since its beginning, and currently serves as Assistant Director.

Bill is the Principal Percussionist for the Grand Rapids Symphony. He has led a musical outreach program for Michigan youth called "Percussion Discussion" for the past 15 years. In addition he performs in the rock band "The Concussions."

## Book Review Traditional Notes—A Celebration of Irish Music and Musicians

In my opinion, books on Irish Traditional Music can fall into two categories; books written by the devoted, the scholars, the believers which are excellent connections to the tradition, and good introductions to the music, and the culture of the music.

They include the *Blooming Meadows* with text by Fintan Vallely, and Charlie Piggott and Photo's by Nutan, *Last Nights Fun* by Ciaran Carson, and the recently released *Companion to Traditional Irish Music*, 2nd edition edited by Fintan Vallely.

The second group would be written by hangers on, people who really don't know the music, and are attempting to

profit from what little they do know. The recently released book, *Traditional Notes* most definitely falls into the first category. I can't think of a better example of a book which lovingly describes musicians, instruments, and instrument builders.

Stephen Power has gone to great length to feature exceptional musicians, and to connect us with the essence of the music.

The book is a show case for his beautiful photography, displaying each instrument by chapter, and featuring some of the best musicians on each instrument, for example Noel Hill in the concertina chapter, and Kevin Crawford in the flute chapter.

In addition, each chapter has text which describes the instrument, and some of the prominent players. Nearly every instrument regularly seen in the music is included from the pipes to the bodhran (Irish drum), each featuring a major player, and most featuring a maker working in their natural environment.

The really exciting news for those of us which are practitioners of rhythm bone playing, is that the bones are also included in the chapter which also features the bodhran. At one point in the music every major player of the Irish drum also played the rhythm bones.

Our dear friend Mel Mercier's father Peadar Mercier blazed the trail with the Chieftains, and Johnny McDonnagh of DeDannan, and Tommy Hayes of Stockton's Wing, carried the tradition on in their performances, and recordings. You'll be interested to note that not only are both Johnny and Tommy represented in this book, but our own Yirdy Machar is also featured quite prominently, and is wearing his RBS cap from Bones Fest IX.

The rhythm bone playing section is short, only three pages, but that might also speak to the rhythm bones place in Irish music. My only complaint is that Sport Murphy is not represented, although my understanding is that the book was not under production until after his death.

But the great depth on the instruments (a separate section for the low

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Johnny Ringo McDonagh

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whistle!), and great musicians tastefully, and caringly represented both in picture and in text, far out ways any minor exclusions.

For those of you looking for an introduction to the music, and the instruments which comprise the music, you could not be better served than to get a copy of this book. For those of

# Bones Fest XVI

Orlando, Florida



August 9-11,  
2012

Latest Update in  
This Issue



Yirdy Machar

you who have been bitten by the bug of Traditional Irish Music, this book will help feed your addiction and keep you coming back for more.

Authors note: This book is available from major book sellers in the US. I purchased my copy from [www.bookdepository.com](http://www.bookdepository.com). Steve Brown

## *Rhythm Bones Society*

1060 Lower Brow Road  
Signal Mountain, TN 37377-2910

*Address Correction Requested*