



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

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Executive Director's Column

The bones have barely stopped ringing in my ears from Bones Fest XVII as I write this about a month from the Fest. I have many great memories of the Fest, and perhaps some "hind sight is 20/20" observations. I've never been more convinced that securing a base of operations is a key to planning a successful fest, and though it took me some time, the Unitarian Church, did in the long run, serve us well. I still wonder if this is a task which should be undertaken by one person, and I strongly advise future hosts to enlist support, and the board to consider a committee-type format. That being said, it's equally clear that the foundation of Bones Fests

in general is the people who attend, and we had a great and talented group this year. Something magical happens when we get together as it has in every fest I have attended (13 in all).

Judging from the many comments I have received, I would say every one who came felt the same as I. I was especially delighted to see almost all of the Cowett Family, and hope that Tommy is able to get to the next. Everett's spirit surely was there as we played "Swedish Rhapsody." As usual, I leave bones fest energized for bone playing, and eager to plan for next years fest. I hope every

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Highlights of Bones Fest XVII

Despite a late start in organizing, Bones Fest XVII began as scheduled on August 8th, and unfolded much like the lotus flower in the Buddhist parable. From the performance on Dean Mazzerella's program on Thursday to the last hug goodbye on Sunday morning, Bones Fest XVII lived up to every expectation of what the Fests have become to us, a gathering of good friends, old and new, with a large helping of bone playing all around.

In reflecting what the general theme of this years fest could be described as, one thing stands out above all else: Community. A community of Bone players reaching out to a small community in Massachusetts to embrace each other. Perhaps the first open television performance at a Bones Fest on Inside Leominster to performance and teaching at the Senior Center and the Boys and

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Bones Fest XVI Group Photograph following Rhythm Bones Flash Mod at Kimball Farms

Editorial

I am sitting in the Hotel Cafe waiting for our final breakfast get-together reflecting on another great Fest. I'm starting to organize the video that Mary Lee Sweet and others shot and post on our website and YouTube (We owe her a big thank you for her labor of love by videoing many Bones Fest over the years). So much happened - I can't wait to see it.

I asked attendees for one word to describe the Fest. Last year in Orlando was the Beginner's Fest as we had maybe 60% beginners. In San Antonio it was the Performers Fest as we had 9 hours of stage time at the Texas Folklife Festival and The Alamo. In Alexandria it was the Workshop Fest as it left us with hours and hours of workshop videos on our website that many people have viewed. None of these Fests, of course, can be described in one word, but it helps me organize my thoughts.

This year the word is Community and it came from our host, Steve Brown. You can see it in the Fest graphic on our T-shirt, and Steve talked about how it was one of his organizing principles. Community for him was both out reach to the Leominster community as well as community within the attendees. This year among attendees, other than Saturday only attendees, there was only one beginner. The RBS community came together as we remembered Ev Cowett, RBS founding father, and Joe Birl. Ev set the tone - Fests are like a family reunion.

Lots of personal highlights for me. One in particular was watching Bill Vits lead the program where we taught bones playing at the Boys and Girls Club. I'll copy him next time I teach a group, and you will see him in one of the videos. Since teaching kids is one of our priorities, maybe it's time for some teaching articles in the newsletter.

The Video of the Quarter on Page 3 is interesting as it shows rhythm bones in a studio using sheet music. I don't think I could ever get good enough to do that.

The Rhythm Bones Society has an alternate web address. We are a non-profit organization and the Board approved purchasing the rhythmbones.org domain name. It is up and running.

Letters to the Editor

Annette and I went to Everett Cowett's memorial service on the 18th of May. I was surprised to see that Jonathon Danforth made it all the way from New Bedford. It was a happy occasion with family and friend telling great stories about Everett. I was really tickled to find that Everett's kids, Dan, Al, Tommy, Martha, and John (I think I named them all) had brought their bones and intended to play as part of the service. For some unknown reason Jonathon and I just happened to have our bones with us and the family was kind enough to let us join them. We played a favorite of Everett's and it seemed just right. Annette told me that a lady sitting in front of her said, "I would not have missed this memorial service for the world." *Mitch Boss*

Here are pictures [one shown on Page 8] of some actual rhythm bones that I cut and polished and my sister-in-law decorated with Celtic patterns. She is quite versatile and can do other motifs (Indian, Eastern, Old English, etc., etc.) I look forward to the newsletters. *Stan Von Hagen* [Stan is a new member.]

Minutes of the Board Meeting

The Board Meeting was called to order by Steve Brown at 3:54 PM in the First Unitarian Church in Leominster, MA. Those present were Steve Brown, Jonathan Danforth, Skeff Flynn, Bill Vits and Steve Wixson. Scott Spiegler was a visitor.

The minutes of the last meeting were read and approved. The Treasurer noted that he had emailed the 2012 Treasurer's Report to all Board members, and a complete listing of all supporting documents to the Executive Director. At the end of 2012, we had a bank balance of \$4,272.43. Motion was made and approved to accept the report.

The Board, serving as the Nominating Committee, nominated Steve Brown, Executive Director, Bill Vits, Assistant Director, Steve Wixson, Secretary/Treasurer, and Skeff Flynn, Sharon Mescher and Kenny Wolin as Board Members. One position was left to be nominated

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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 Players welcomes letters to the Editor and article on any aspect of bones playing. All material submitted for consideration is subject to editing and condensation.

Rhythm Bones Central web site: rhythmbones.org

from the floor.

There was a discussion about a host for Bones Fest XVIII, and a decision will be made at a later time.

Dom Flemons requested a rhythm bones brochure that he could pass out at his shows. The motion was made, seconded and approved to print a trial run of 200 brochures. Steve Wixson presented a draft of a brochure and the Board will review and edit it.

There were two email motions passed this year; the first to make Ev Cowett a Fellow of the RBS and the second to authorize Bones Fest XVII.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:58. Respectfully submitted, Steve Wixson,

Rhythmbones.org

The domain name of <http://rhythmbones.org> is an alternate address for our website. The <http://rhythmbones.com> will continue to work indefinitely.

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one of you are able to attend.

Jennifer, Jeremy and I are just back from a brief stay in the North woods of New Hampshire, where with Ernie Duffy, and Shirley Boulet, we attended a concert by the Carolina Chocolate Drops. I know many of you have seen them, but if you haven't I strongly recommend seeing them when they come around. Multi-instrumentalists Dom Flemons and Hubby Jenkins are fabulous bone players, and well worth the ticket price alone. But the bones alone scratch the surface of this amazingly talented band. Both Dom and Hubby illustrate how different we each are as bone players, and how we each develop a unique approach to playing the bones. The band, by the way, just returned from Europe, where they caught up with old friend Yirdy Machar at the Tonder Festival in Denmark, Dom was happy to report.

After re-reading my highlights article, I realized I left out an important ingredient to the Saturday night performance. Dave Reiner has been a good friend of the bones for many years. Dave and his friend JR played Saturday night, and added that magic he so often does.

As fall begins, I think again of gathering our bone playing friends for a regional Fest. Even after the effort of organizing BFXVII, the prospect of getting together before the snow flies is truly tantalizing. So think about it in your own area, you just might find eager participants! *Steve Brown*

Minutes of the General Membership Meeting

The General Membership meeting was called to order by Steve Brown at 5:54 PM in the First Unitarian Church in Leominster, MA. The minutes of the last meeting were read and approved. The Treasurer reported that RBS had a bank balance of \$4,272.43 at the end of 2012.

The Nominating Committee report was read and the floor open for nominations. Tim Reilly was nominated and the motion was made, seconded and approved to elect the slate by acclamation.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:02PM. Respectfully submitted, Steve. Wixson

More Bone Making From Walter Messick

I have been making bones for about 15 years. I learned from a musician friend of mine who had a retail shop and wanted some bones to sell but didn't know where to get them. So he showed me a pair and the rest is history. I now make them out of almost every kind of wood I have. Most are made from native woods but I also make them out of exotic woods when I have some. You name the wood and sound and I either have made or do make them. Most hardwoods are somewhat loud to loud with varying degrees of brightness and mellowness. These woods include black walnut, cherry, oak, maple, osage orange and the like. Woods like red cedar, western red cedar and similar woods are softer and more mellow. Not everyone wants to stand out in a crowd and they like a more quiet sound.

I cut my bones on a bandsaw with a jig I made to cut the same angle every time. I then sand them on a belt sander and an inflatable sander after rounding the edges on a router. There isn't much to a set of bones, but it takes more labor than what I can get out of them. If I wasn't a frustrated percussionist and understand that there are a lot of folks out there like me I wouldn't make them.

I have made thousands of pairs of bones selling most of them at craft shows over the years. I have them in several craft shops, galleries and the Country Store in Floyd, Va. Now I sell mostly through my website. *Walter Messick*
cabincreekmusic@aol.com

Guy Gillette Obituary

Member Guy Gillette passed away on September 2, 2013. Guy attended Bones Fest X with his daughter Dorcie and both Guy and his brother, Pipp, who performed as the Gillette Brothers, attended Bones Fest XI. They performed at that Fest, and many remember jamming to their music at the Nature Center.

A more complete obituary can be found on their website, campstreetcafe.com. Guy's most recent contribution titled 'Cowboy Bones' is on Page 6. There will be a short tribute video on our homepage in October. *Steve Wixson*

Steve Wixson Played Rhythm Bones Made on a 3D Printer

The Chattanooga City Library has a new printer. Not all that interesting except that it is one of the new 3D printers, a Makerbot Replicator-2 using the PLA polymer, and it is available free for anyone having a Chattanooga Library card which I happen to have.

Stereo lithograph has been around for more than 25 years, but only recently has this new lower cost generation of 3D printers become available.

To print in 3D, you need to prepare a 3 dimensional electronic drawing of what you to print. I did not have the program to do that, but had a friend at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga who suggested I try Sketchup.

Sketchup can be downloaded at Sketchup.com. You can use this program free for 8 hours, and after that time if you want all of the features you have to buy the program. The program will still work, but not all of the features can then be used. It took me under 3 hours to learn how to use the program and do my rhythm bone design.

You can design lots of things with this software. I decided to model a Danforth rhythm bone which is really pretty simple. I started drawing an ellipse of 5/16" by 1." To do that I had to download an extra tool—called the Ellipse Plugin. Then I extruded the ellipse to 7" making a straight rhythm bone. To get the curved shape I had to download and use the Bender Plugin.

The 3D printer cannot use the output from this program, so you have to download the .stl Plugin that formats your model so it can be printed. I was able to email this file to the library, but you could put it on a DVD or USB card and take it to the printer which is not a bad idea because you probably want to see the printer in action.

The photograph of my 3D bones is on Page 8. They required a bit of sanding to remove material on one edge that supported the bone while it was being printed. I played them at BFXVII.
Steve Wixson



Riedesel, Duffy & Boss on Mayor's CATV Program



Bill Vit's leading a beginners workshop for the Boys and Girls Club



Senior Center



Le Vent des Cantons and Victor Albert at Franco American Club



Flash Mob at Kimball Farm



Bill Vits' Workshop



Dan, Martha and John Cowett with Dan Reiner



Tim Reilly, Jerry Bell, Kenny and Teri Wolin

Photographic Highlights by Adam Klein, Mary Lee Sweet and Steve Wixson



Ari Erlbaum



Michael Ballard and Dave Reiner



Norm Conrad



Parker Waite



Gerry Hines



Nicole Singer



Jonathan Danforth



Blue Hammond, Jeremy & Steve Brown with Dave



Skeff Flynn



Traditional Conga Line Finale with Bill Vits in front followed by Steve Wixson and Ivan Browning

John Hall's Ted Mack Story

The other folk whom I know from talking to them were Joe Bennett and the Sparkletones (of “Black Slacks” fame, way back when) and Pennsylvania-born singer and songwriter Ed Rambeau. My dad thought I ought to audition for the show, and so he encouraged me to do so. After I auditioned at the Golfb Studios in New York City, the producers, spotting a natural connection, book Dad and Me for the Fathers Day show in 1958, so we were on the show in June. I had a great time; little did I know my dad was petrified, but he carried it off beautifully. I was 15 at the time; almost 71 now. As soon as I figure out how to copy the DVD I have without wrecking the thing, I'll make a copy for you! *John Hall*

Rhythm Bones Project in Switzerland

Last June we started a bones-project in Switzerland. We are trying to introduce the bones to the Swiss Bluegrass and Old-Time players and maybe get some interested teachers that would like to play bones with their students.

I have visited the Chlefeldi-builder Röbi Kessler and bought some of his Chlefeldis (See Vol 15, No 1, Page 5 for more about Röbi). I think the bones are a bit easier to play, so a friend and I started to build our own bones-prototypes.

To get started we set up a crowd-funding project in Switzerland. The moto is “Swiss-Bones - an old instrument re-discovered”. The crowd funding project was a success. We found 45 supporters for our Swiss-Bones project.

So we could start to produce our first series of Swiss-Bones. In a few weeks the bones will be ready for shipping and the Swiss-Bones website will be upgraded. We are planning to include tutorials, links and of course a contact/order-form for anybody who is interested in our bones. *Caspar Noetzi* (www.swiss-bones.ch)

Cowboy Bones

We have always assumed that many of the cowboys that went up the trail following the War Between the States, probably played the bones. Not only because they could carry them easily and they were readily available to them, but because the Irish and African American cowboys among them (which there were many) would have been familiar with the bones from their backgrounds. Also, Minstrel Show Music was among the popular music of the Trail Driving Era and cowboys would have been exposed to it, like everyone else. In spite of this, we have had very little luck in finding written or concrete evidence.

We thought we had hit pay dirt a while back when after acquiring a copy of “Black Cowboys of Texas”, we saw a chapter on Mathew “Bones” Hooks, but it turned out that his nickname referred to the “thin and wiry” build of the horse wrangler / bronc buster and not to the playing of the bones.

Our only positive historical confirmation came several years ago while my brother Pipp and I were playing our music at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming. After finishing a set, we were approached by an excited 80 something year old Montana rancher, Marvin Bell, who said he heard the bones while walking through the museum and immediately set out to find the source.

He then went on to relate how that an Irish cowboy that he had worked with as a young man, Paddy Ryan, had taught him to play bones and that together the two of them played in a cowboy band. Paddy was born sometime in the 1890's in Miles City, Montana and was working on the Flying D Ranch (now owned by Ted Turner).

We have included the bones in our music for the past 14 years and have taken them to Cowboy Gatherings around the country, from Elko, Nevada to Alpine, Texas, to Monterey, California, etc., and have included them on recordings for 5 albums of cowboy music.

We have not given up looking, but at this time that is the extent of our knowledge connecting bones playing with cowboys and ranching history.

I found this in my notes and unfortunately did not make a note of where I found it. Best wishes *Guy Gillette*

Now gather 'round me fellers,
we'll have a little fun
We'll dance upon the boards,
and beat upon the drum
We're a happy band of cowboys,
and we're gathered here to play
So strike the bones and tambourine
and drive all cares away.

Rhythm Bones Workshop at Albuquerque Folk Music Festival

In June, 2013, I gave my annual rhythm bones workshop at the Albuquerque Folk Music Festival. As usual, it went very well. Over 25 beginner and intermediate players showed up. We had a great time, despite a huge, 10,000+ft plume of smoke from a raging forest fire that was clearly visible in the Jémez Mountains to the northwest.

At the workshop I started with a short oral history of the bones that included their appearance in the Bible (Ezekiel), in human grave-sites dating 2000 years and more, the Irish connection, the addition of polyrhythms by American slaves, and the whole minstrel show thing.

I then showed how it's not the bones per se but the technique that counts. I played butter knives, pencils, spoons (the bones way, not the spoons way), and even a meter stick cut into four 10 cm pieces. At that point I pulled out my real bones: ribs from a cow skeleton I found 20 years ago bleaching in the sun at the base of the volcanoes that sit on Albuquerque's western horizon.

Next we hit the basics with the tap, some simple rhythms, and lead up to the roll. My muse the entire time was Percy Danforth. It was from him in 1981-1982 I learned to play the bones and bought my first pair of Danforth Bones. I still have quite a stash of his bones in my collection of about 30 pairs.

I don't get to play the bones much during the year due to my full time obligations to teaching, pursuing a PhD and, oh yeah, baseball dad, but I look forward every year to the ABQ Folk Fest where I hope to turn more folks onto the bones.

David A Wilson

(Continued from page 1)

Girls Club, to the first ever Bone playing Flash Mob at Kimball Farm, The Rhythm Bones Society reached out to Leominster and it reached back to us. Every where we went we were greeted with openness and friendliness, if not with a little surprise and curiosity. As hard as it was to get this thing started from an organizer's perspective, it fulfilled all of my dreams and expectations. I'd like to reflect back on the highlights, although I'm afraid there may be so many as to cover the entire fest.

Although I appreciate our invitation to play on the Mayor's program, what really stands out about Thursday for me was seventeen bone players enjoying dinner together in one of my favorite restaurants, Il Forno in Fitchburg. Literally like a family dinner, there was frivolity all around, and of course bone playing as we attempted to teach our server Josh just what we were all about.

Highlights of Friday have to include teaching 60+ children in Leominster what the bones are and how to play, nothing like looking over a Gym full of kids clacking away!

We connected so well at the Senior Center, that we had a number of Seniors following us around throughout the week end!

Friday afternoon was good, but Friday night was more than fantastic, my good friend Paul Luria set the scene with a bone along, and the band Le Vent Des Cantons just rocked our bone playing spirit. When my friend Victor Albert, master French Canadian Fiddler, showed up and played with the band, it truly was magical. At 88, he still has the ability which saw him win numerous fiddle contests.

To say that Bones Fests have been good for my son Jeremy is an understatement. Watching him playing on Friday night and through out the weekend brought tears to my eyes!

Good friend Jerry Bell showed up toward the end of the night at the Franco Club, but was still playing at the hotel when I went to bed at midnight, and continued into the wee hours, I understand!

Saturday morning started with a loving tribute to Everett Cowett by all present, including six members of the Cowett family. It was great to reflect on the life

of our founding father. I was thrilled when Martha Cowett produced a CD of Swedish Rhapsody, one of Everett's favorite bone playing tunes, and we all played away.

Intertwined with this was a tribute to Joe Birl, an Iconic figure in the bone playing world.

After Bill Vit's enlightening program on integrating the drum set with bone playing (man can that guy play!) we headed over to Kimball Farm in Lancaster, a short drive away. The Flash Mob was truly inspirational! The entire experience at Kimball's was remarkable, and a number of attendees came to our Saturday night performance as well, and we got free ice cream, by the way.

Saturday afternoon saw a great presentation on Latin rhythms by Kenny Wolin, our resident marine. My only regret was that Sharon Mescher, who requested the workshop, was unable to be at the Fest due to a family emergency. Somebody send her the video, please!

Ok, I have to admit there are just too many highlights of Saturday night to include in this brief overview, it really shined and there was total agreement that it was one of the best programs we have presented.

But with general acknowledgment that I simply have to leave some out here are my highlights: Ari Erlbaum's hysterical Star Wars bone playing rap complete with nose flute and kazoo, Mitch Boss' persistent dry humor, and bone playing pyrotechnics, Adam Klein's soaring version of John Henry, Tim Reilly's intricate accompaniment to a harpsichord piece, Frank and Mary Lee Sweet accompanied by Dave and the band on Tell Me Ma, Bernie Worrell demonstrating why the Mescher Tradition is one of the most fascinating aspects of bone playing, Steve Wixson playing to the 17 year cycle of cicada's, Bill Vits blowing our socks off accompanying his own band on CD, and Kenny Wolin doing a Rickey Ricardo tribute complete with advertisements for RBS members parody products (that one is hard to explain, but trust me absolutely hysterical).

I would be amiss if I didn't thank all of the first timers who beat their fear and reluctance, and got up and performed admirably including Nicole Singer and Scott Spiegler, to name two.

I am truly in awe of our community which came together to produce one of the best Bones Fests, and to name all of the help and assistance I received in this is simply to put everyone's names down, but to thank the following people quite simply with out whose help this Fest simply would not have happened.

It goes with out saying that Steve Wixson is the glue that holds us together, and his help with this fest was phenomenal. From the structure, organization, including the program book, and general encouragement, I just couldn't have done it with out him.

In my darkest days preceding the Fest, Mary Lee Sweet gave me the gentle strength to continue, and know that the most important thing was in bringing us together, and for that I sincerely thank her.

In the waning moments of Saturday night, when I could barely stand up, and think straight, two people were there with me to the end, Kevin Kelly and Ernie Duffy. Sweeping floors, carrying equipment, emptying trash, they lifted me up to the end and for that I thank them.

As they say, last but certainly not least, is my wife Jennifer whose tireless work before, during and after the fest helped me to persevere.

Bones Fest XVII is now just a memory, but what a memory. Although it took some hard work, and perseverance through the difficulties, it was more than worth it!

One last thought, have you thought about sponsoring a Bones Fest in your area? In order for these things to continue, we must stand as a community and carry it forward. How about it? *Steve Brown*

Report on NTCMA Rhythm Bones Contest

When we arrived at the Le Mars festival, we were pleasantly surprised to learn that previous winner Joseph Kooi's sister, Anika, had taken up the bones six months prior. Now, she and Joseph play together. They not only play the bones, but, at times will tap dance as they play. The bones contest was held and here are the results: 1st place, Joseph Kooi; 2nd place, Anika Kooi; 3rd, Jeff Ostis. *Sharon Mescher*



Rhythm bones printed on a 3D Printer (see Page 3)



Stan Von Hagen rhythm bones (see Letter to Editor)



Mary Lee and Frank Sweet



Adam Klein

Rhythm Bones Society

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Address Correction Requested