



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

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Executive Director's Column

I first met Walt Watkins at my first Bones Fest, in 2000. He was full of enthusiasm for the bones, and life in general. Although he had played the bones for many years, he put all of his energies into playing two handed and improving over the coming years. He became a real stand out in Bones Fest performances, and his duets with Mitch Boss were a highlight of the Fest for me. It was Walt that brought us the "pass off," and it was Walt that made playing to Dixieland Jazz so popular at Bones Fests. Beyond the bones, he was a rock solid, wise man who could cut through the frivolities of life and get to the heart of the matter. He was always a warm, grandfatherly figure to me and I will miss our Bones Fest chats and his friendship.

It is mid March, and the snow is still piled high

in the drive way. The St. Patrick season is now past, and they keep saying Spring is just around the corner. I'm always amazed at these gigs how many people gravitate toward the bones, and how I find my self explaining them at least once during each performance. They have an Irish connection for sure, but not overtly so, and people just love them! It made me think, is there some way each of you as Bones Society Members, can bring the bones to public attention, volunteer at a nursing home, or a school, contact the local library or historical society, play a couple of tunes at the local open mic or coffee house. You might be surprised at the response, and we're one step closer to making sure the bones don't slip into obscurity. *Steve Brown*

Walt Watkins Has Passed On

I first got to know Walt Watlins at Steve Wixson's Bones Fest. I was new and kind of disconnected. Walt had started the pass-off and I was just standing on the side-lines. Walt made me join in and that is when I first felt at home in the Rhythm Bones Society. We always played together some at Fests and even sent each other CDs we liked so we could practice to play together at Bones Fests. I loved the guy; he would do anything for you. Walt was a Colonel in the Army [See obituary on Page 4], a take charge kind of guy and a great friend.

Some of you bones-rattlers will remember the many pass-off led by Walt. It was important to Walt that the traditional way of playing bones is kept alive. Like Walt, some of us old geezers grew up on Dixie-land type music. The Fire House Five Plus Two CD that we all played at Bill Vits' Grand Rapids Bones Fest was from a pass-off recording from Walt. We first played it at Black Bart's (Dave Boyle) Bones Fest in Wisconsin. Walt loved rag-time, jazz, polkas, and blue grass, or 'anything with a good beat and rhythm.'

Besides his joyful bride Joy and his family, I don't think Walt loved anything more than playing the rhythm bones. After his first stroke, I talked to him and he said, "Well, I can still play with one hand like a Irishman."

Ernie Duffy will bring Walt's recording to

Bones Fest XIX at Skeff Flynn's place in West Virginia. I put this in because Walt would like promoting our next Bones Fest.

Walt played bones for seventy eight years. He said, "I learned to play from my father and I learned to play two-handed from Don DeCamp and Jeff Newman." He played Six Flags over Texas, the Texas Heritage Festival, Silver Dollar City, MO, the Texas State Fair, The Underground Wonder Bar in Chicago, and the S&W Club in Grapevine, Texas. In 2001, he came in second after Russ Meyer at the Twenty~Six Old Time Country Music (Continued on Page 4)



Walt Watkins performing at Bones Fest XIII in Louisville

Editorial

It is with great sadness that we report that long term member Walt Watkins has passed on (the 'pass-off' is a performance technique Walt introduced where a group of people jamming take turns by passing control of the jamming from one person to the next.) Walt and his lovely wife, Joy, attended 10 Bones Fest and maybe the most memorable was in Louisville shown in the photograph on Page 1.

As you will read in the remembrances recorded in this newsletter, Walt was a most loved rhythm bones player. Thanks for Mitch Boss for the lead article.

By coincidence, Sharon Mescher contributed a story about Donny DeCamp. In addition to performing with his unique style of rhythm bones playing and playing his banjo at Bones Fests, he was a friend of Walt's and they played together at Six Flags Over Texas. Read about that relationship in Sharon's article.

The Video of the Month for January was Anika and Joseph's Saturday evening performance at Bones Fest XVIII. In it they play rhythm bones both solo and together and tap dance solo and together and then toward the end play rhythm bones while tap dancing. They got a standing ovation.

History records many rhythm bones players who played and danced at the same time - the first minstrel rhythm bones player, Frank Brower, is a good example. A few years ago I got inspired to try and took a six week tap dancing class. where I learned some basic tap steps. However, when I tried to put them together with my rhythm bones playing - it didn't work. Congratulations to Anika and Joseph and others who can do this.

Several years ago, my wife and I had the opportunity to visit China in a trip sponsored by our Tennessee Aquarium. I visited a museum of ethnic musical instruments and returned with the photographs on Page 1 plus a document on Chinese Folk Percussion written in Chinese. Following a plea for help, a symphony friend of Bill Vits, Larry Herzberg, translated the article and the result is on Page 6. It included more that rhythm bones, and I included it all.

Letters to the Editor

If this was the Fest I introduced you to Karen Seime-Singleton then I was at XIII and only remember that Walt Watkins was pleasant gentleman to chat with and trade lies with. Looking forward to West VA. *hankbones (Hank Tenenbaum)*

Here is a video of me at my camper at last year's Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, KS. *Jean Mehaffey*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOQibXW3OGQ>

Bill Rexroad Obit

Former member William Rexroad died at age 81 on May 6, 2014. Bill was active when our society was first organized writing several articles for the new Rhythm Bones Player newsletter.

Bill was a self-taught rhythm bones player, and was inspired late in life to take it up from a lingering memory of

having seen a rhythm bones player in his childhood. Bill played real animal bones that he made himself.

Music was Bill's pastime throughout his life. He played in symphony orchestras for 50 years, including 33 years in the Hutchinson Symphony. He played in bluegrass bands, old-time bands and was a performing artist with the Kansas Arts Commission. In addition to his music, he toured the central United States for several years as a storyteller, and was a stage manager, emcee, and workshop presenter at national festivals. He used rhythm bones in his storytelling/music performances. Children in particular were delighted with his story about playing the bones, then seeing a demonstration of the art.



Rhythm Bones Player

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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

Website Updates

There has been some good recent update to our homepage. As mentioned in the editorial in the left column, The January Videos of the Month was Anika and Joseph Kooi. The February Video of the Month was Celtic Kilroy's Busing Workshop along with the first announcement of the Timeline project, and there is a progress report on Page 3. The March homepage update got delayed therefore it will become the April homepage update. For those who attended Bones Fest XVIII and met Jack Frost for the first time - the Video of the Month is his performance on the Ted Mack Original Amateur Hour. The Photograph of the Month is of Walt Watkins and when you click on it it takes you to one of his Bones Fest performances.

Timeline Project Update

A lot of progress has been made on the Timeline Project. Over 500 entries have been made of people, recordings, movies, NTCMA Bones and Spoons winners, All-Ireland Bones Competition winners, Minstrel bones players, books, articles, performances, rhythm bones instruction, miscellaneous items, rhythm bones, etc.

Soon the first reports will be placed on our website for review and there is a lot to review. We have no criteria for the Importance Ranking and therefore the current rankings are temporary. There are likely typing errors, lots of omissions but at least there is a structure that can be built upon.

This is also a plea for you to submit entries to the Timeline database. This project has the potential to be a major contribution to the history of rhythm bones. *Steve Wixson*

The Jethros 'Shake Your Bones'

There is a song that the trombone player in my band wrote specifically to highlight the bones. Well, now a friend of the band who has a history of making great videos of our playing has posted a version of it at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UV-NopVYJCY>.

It's kind of too bad they cut out the intro, which gets zanier every time we play it and makes it nearly impossible for me to keep a straight face when we do the song.

These days it involves Rick (the trombonist) going on at length about how I don't only cycle shorts, carefully select a Bowie knife, and take down a buffalo after riding it down, in order to craft the bones which I'm about to play (which are usually, in fact, the buffalo ribs I got from Steve Brown), using all parts of the animal and donating the extra meat to orphanages. All this while I do quasi-bones-playing-calisthenics in order not to bust up laughing.

Anyway. I think the song is great.
Jonathan Danforth

Remember Percy Project Update

There has been one significant thing to report about for the Remember Percy Project. A DVD arrived from the Library of Congress with a long interview of Percy. The source was an open reel video that required special conversion equipment and cost us \$284 to convert. There was no guarantee as to what the quality of the converted video would be, but it is great. A short segment will be the Video of the Month in a future homepage update. *Steve Wixson*

Bones Fest T-shirts Ball Caps For Sale

The following ball caps and t-shirts were left over from previous Bones Fests. If you want one send a check for \$15 which includes shipping to RBS, 1060 Lower Brow Road, Signal Mtn, TN 37377.

BFIX (Chattanooga); several baseball caps

BFXIII (Louisville w/RBS Logo); 2 - M, 4 - L, 2 - XL

BFXIV (Alexandria); 5 - L

BFXVII (Leominster); 2 - S, 2 - M

BFXVIII (Grand Rapids); 3 - 2XL, 1 - 3XL

Bones Fest XIX Preliminary Information

The fest hotel is the Clarion. <http://clarionshepherdstown.com/> Ask for the Rhythm Bones Society to get the reduced rate of \$94.

Most of the fest will take place at the Shepherd University Student Center. We have the Storer Ballroom which should be more than ample for our needs as well as one other meeting room so that we can do some breakout sessions. We have space in the student center from 9 am to 10 pm on Friday and from 9 am to 6 pm on Saturday.

<http://www.shepherd.edu/scccweb/>

The public performance on Saturday night will be held in the Shepherdstown Opera House - <http://www.operahouse-live.com/>. I will put something together for their web site shortly - they are happy to promote our event and have their own set of followers so maybe we'll be able to pull some extra exposure that way.

So . . . it's coming along. Let me know via our Contact Us Page if you have questions. *Skeff Flynn*

Bones Fest XIX



August 6-9, 2015

**Shepherdstown,
WV**

Skeff Flynn, Host

(Continued from Page 1)

World Bones and Spoons Contest.

Walt learned of the Rhythm Bones Society from Joe Birl. Walt used Joe's patented black plastic bones when he played inside.

I liked to watch Walt perform, he had such ease and confidence and he knew he could play with the best of them. On his application to join the Rhythm Bones Society he wrote, "I have yet to meet anyone who plays better than I-do." Wow, the last time I felt that way was when I thought I was the only rhythm bones player in the world.

Colonel Walt Watkins had a sense of loyalty and duty to whatever he cared about. He cared about us and we will miss him. *Mitch Boss*

Colonel Walter Watkins Obituary

Colonel Walter L Watkins passed away in Arlington, TX, on March 4, 2015. He was the son of Paul Watkins and Rose Mullinix Watkins, born and raised in Damascus, MD, on February 28, 1929. He met the love of his life, Joy Ann Hahn, at the University of Maryland where he graduated in 1951.

He was a career Army officer with three wartime tours of duty. Shortly after being commissioned a second Lieutenant in 1952 he was ordered to Korea and joined the 1st BN, 32nd Inf, of the 7th Infantry Division. He was on the front lines on the mountain called Old Baldy when his first child arrived. After the war ended he and Joy reunited and he served with XVIth Corps in Sendai, Japan.

The family returned to the States where he served with the 3rd Infantry Regiment Honor Guard in Washington, DC. Col. Watkins served two tours in Germany, the first with the NCO Academy in Ulm in 1959 followed by command of a company in the 4th Armored Division in Heilbronn. He became the Operations Officer of the Division located in Crailsheim, Germany. His next assignment was at Ft. Benning, GA, with the communications department where he participated in the support one of the nuclear tests in Nevada in 1962. He served on The Infantry Center team de-

veloping the training support program for the newly formed Air Assault Division in 1963. Orders sent him to Vietnam in 1964 as Senior Advisor to the Vietnamese Armor command. Upon return he attended the Army Command and General Staff College at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas and then joined the Army General Staff at the Pentagon. In 1969 he rejoined the 4th Armored Division, commanding the 4th Battalion 35th Armor, Illesheim, Germany, followed by service as G3 of the Division at Göppingen. In 1972 he returned to Vietnam.

His last station was at Ft. Knox, KY, where he served as Chief of Staff of the 2nd ROTC Region and then Director of Support at the US Army Armored Center. He retired in 1978.

His decorations include the Legion of Merit with Oak Lea Cluster, the Bronze Star Medal, the combat Infantryman's badge and the Army General Staff Badge.

Walt loved people and never met a stranger. He was interested in all those he met and before long they would tell them their stories. He was interested in genealogy and traced his lineage as a 13th generation American to the settlers at Jamestowne. He and Joy traveled many places learning about their family history, meeting unknown relatives along the way. He enjoyed meeting and visiting with Joy's relatives in Sweden and England and felt perfectly at home with them. Traveling to other countries was a highlight of their sixty-two year marriage.

He loved working with numbers and was meticulous in keeping track of all the Texas Rangers games. Another love was rhythm bones, meeting and playing with other bones players. He and Joy were members of the Kimbell Museum and enjoyed Bass Hall events.

His love for his wife and family knew no bounds. In addition to his wife, Joy, he is survived by his children Dr. Jeffrey Watkins (Barbara) of Bemidji, MN; John Watkins (Gwen) of Chattanooga, TN; Dr. Julie Platt (Michael) of Punta Gorda, FL; James Watkins (Sharman) of San Jose, CA; and Jennifer Korjus (Michael Szymanski) of Fairfax, VA. Six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren survive to carry on his legacy: Ian Paul

Watkins (Mi-Hyang) with Sophia and Sean; Ben Niehoff (Elizabeth); David Platt; Paul Watkins; Gregory Watkins and Chelsea Watkins. Also a sister, June Shook, niece Diana Klaube and special friends, Dot and Buz Hensel and Ilse Däubler of Germany.

He was predeceased by his parents and brother, Kenneth.

A memorial service was held at Wade funeral home on Saturday, 21 March 2015. Interment will follow at a later date at Arlington National Cemetery.

Mescher's Tribute to Walt Watkins

At the Orlando Bones Fest, Walt was in charge of his famous Pass-off. Several of us attendees formed a semi-circle around the CD player. I was standing between Walt and Mitch Boss. Before starting the Pass-off, the three of us decided to play together when it was our turn. Of course, I felt privileged to play with these two bones-playing giants! And, it was simply fun to be in their company. After the three of us finished our turn at playing, Walt turned to me and "hit the nail on the head" by saying, "We can't do that again. It sounded like noise." (I had thought the same as we played, but I was not going to say anything!) But Walt did express his opinion, and he was on target! It did sound like noise. Mitch and I agreed with him, so we played separately the next time around.

My experience of Walt was that he was forthright, honest, and willing to express his opinion without apology. Because of this, I had immense respect for him. I looked forward to visiting with Joy and Walt at the Bones Fests. And, I loved participating in his Pass Off which was always a treat.

We will miss Walt, his leading the Pass Off, his forthrightness, and we will think of him fondly. *Sharon and Jerry Mescher*

My Friend, Walt Watkins

When Walt came to Six Flags he could play with only one hand. I think it was the left hand. He came in and followed me around. I showed him what I could

do. Oh, man, all he could talk about was how wonderful I was. So, we worked with him, and the next year when we came back to Six Flags, he got a pass to come in. And, you know, they hired him.

He started playing on stage, and they paid him! I thought that was pretty nice. I think he beat me there when it comes to playing with both hands. He could do the same with either hand. I never could get the left hand to work like the right one.

I believe we played for four or five years at Six Flags. I tell you what: you'll never find a nicer guy to be around. I told Joy, his wife, the same thing; I don't know how she ever got a better guy to be with. He was always smiling. He was just a lot of fun to be around because he wasn't no guy that wanted to argue about anything.

We had a lot of fun playing at Six Flags; we played on a lot of stages. You know he's the one that brought up the Pass-off. I think he started that at Louisville with Jeff, me, Jerry, and Russ.

I miss the guy already. But we did have a good time. And he impressed a lot of people with what he did. He was darn good. That's all I can say. *Donny DeCamp*

Don DeCamp Master Rhythm Bones Entertainer

[Donny's story is from a telephone conversation with Sharon Mescher]

I've played the bones a long time. I didn't learn from anybody, and I never saw anybody do it.

Where did you pick them up?

My mother, when I was 17 years old, I don't know why, said, "Don, why don't you see if you can play the bones like your grandpa?" I said, "Bones, what's that?" She kinda held her hands up and showed me how he did it with his hands.

We lived right by a lumber yard. I got a couple of sticks over there and tried putting them in my fingers somehow and fooling with them. When I got so I could fool with them a little bit with my right hand, my mother said, "Your grandpa did it with both hands." So I went back to the lumber yard, and got another two pieces of wood, and found out that the left hand

was dumber than a rock! It wasn't near as easy with the left hand as it was with the right. I don't do as many things with the left as with the right hand. My response was, "Nobody can tell that you don't do as many things with the left!" Laughing, Donny exclaimed, "I don't want them to tell!"

By the time I was twenty we went around to the dances a lot and I played with a dance band ... but I never did nothing to them to speak of until I went to Avoca. At Avoca I won the bones contest. I got some trophies and plaques... I didn't pay much attention (to the trophies). I just thought I was pretty lucky that I could play them that good.

Then I went to Le Mars and won the bones contest once up there. At Le Mars, Donny met Buddy Boswell, from Edgerton, Missouri, who came to the Le Mars festival to perform with the "Union Mill 'Opry". Buddy asked me if I would like to come down and play on his show. So I went down there 2 or 3 times and played on his show." While I was there, a gal that played on the stage talked to me and told me..."you ought to be in Silver Dollar City." I responded, "What's that? I didn't even know what it was." The lady told Donny she would get him some tickets, and he could play on stage with her group, "Green Side Up."

In 1986, Rex Burdette, who hired people to entertain at Silver Dollar City, approached Donny and asked him, "How would he like to go to work at Silver Dollar City?" When Donny showed up to perform, he went to Rex's office. Rex told Donny to do what ever it is he did. Donny asked, "Well, how do you know I can do it?" Rex said, "We'll find out." Later, Donny found out that there were people who scouted out all the performers, and watched the response of the audiences. That is how performers were hired. It's obvious that the audiences loved Donny's performances as he played at Silver Dollar City for 22 years.

In the meantime, Rex Burdette worked with a Jeannie Adams. Someone gave Adams' phone number to Donny telling him to call her because "I bet you could play at Six Flags over Texas." Donny called her, and she hired him on the spot. Donny played at Six Flags for 15 years. After that, Donny says, "I came home,

relaxed, and said that was about it. That's 37 years playing at Silver Dollar City and Six Flags over Texas. I was having fun; getting paid a little."

Walt Watkins found out that there was a bones player playing at Six Flags. He came over to see me. When I wasn't playing, Walt and I sat in the camper and talked. He played with only one hand. Walt told me, "I've heard a lot about you; I've got to learn how to do that with the other hand." He did, and he is doing good! He played for a couple of years and was hired by Six Flags.

There was another young guy, Jeff Newman, who came to Six Flags. He learned to play from Donny, and Six Flags hired Donny, Walt, and Jeff to play with cloggers. As Donny says, "We had fun. Walt and I had good times at Six Flags.

My last year playing at both places was in 2008."

Donny was "born in a little town by West Des Moines, but it does not exist anymore." His dad was a mechanic and shoe cobbler. His son Larry was the only one that played rhythm bones. His other children played spoons and were on the Bill Riley Teen Talent Show in Des Moines. On his mother's side, "the family played musical instruments: grandpa played the fiddle; grandma played the banjo."

When I got to really know what I was doing, my mom looked at me one day and said, "Don, you know I just thought dad could play the bones... he couldn't play anything like you do!" I never saw any one play them, so I had to pick up a style of my own.

After going to a couple of the Bones Fests, Sky Bartlett approached Donny and said to him, "I've got to learn what you do." As Donny said, "Sky picks up fast." Walt told Donny, "I can see a Don De Camp there." Walt was so right.

Wherever Donny performs, people flock to watch him because he is an entertainer: he plays his unique style of rhythm bones, he jokes with the audience, laughs at himself, and simply exudes fun. So, if you are fortunate to be around Donny for any reason, be prepared for a rocking, bones-playing, belly-laughing, good time. *Sharon Mescher*

Tribute to Walt Watkins

In 2001, I attended Bones Fest V at the Red Apple Farm in Massachusetts. That was the year that I first met Walt Watkins.

Walt was one of a handful of people who had kept the art of bones playing alive. In the early days the group from the Rhythm Bones Society was an aging group so, even though I was in my late 40s, I felt like a youngster!

Since that time I have attended several Bones Fests. I tell people that first you meet fellow bones players, then you gather as friends and finally they seem like family. Walt was like family to me. He was one of the faces I hoped to see as I made my plans to attend an upcoming Bones Fest.

Walt brought a lot of music CDs with him and he would always find us a room to jam. He welcomed anyone to join in. Several years ago the way people would jam would be having many people playing at the same time so you really couldn't hear any one person. So one year Walt came up with the idea of a pass off. To do the pass off a circle would be formed and one person would start playing as everyone else listened. During a musical break, the play would be "passed off" to the next person. Sometimes it took several tries to get it right, but Walt was diligent and gave everyone their chance to play. For those who knew Walt and were around in those early days of learning how to do the pass off, they remember that he used his military skills in directing this process!

I talked to Walt about a month ago after hearing that he had had a stroke. I wanted to wish him well in his recovery. He told me that he was encouraged because he could still play bones one-handed. I also wanted to remind him of the impact he had in growing the RBS. A great example of one of the things he should be remembered for was from the Grand Rapids Bones Fest. Walt sent me a lot of his music and I brought it with me. During one of our jam sessions we started a pass off circle while playing song after song of Walt's music. In the circle there were new faces, old friends,

beginners and pros; all smiling and tapping their toes as the circle got wider. Many people made the comment "Great music!" We were accomplishing what the RBS wanted to do....making friends, becoming family.

Good job, well done, Walt. I will miss you! *Ernie Duffy*

Chinese Folk Percussion

Peng Ling "Peng ling"("struck together bells"), also called "Peng zhong", in ancient times were known as xing"("stars"). At the time of the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589 A.D.) this musical instrument was already in existence. The "peng ling"("struck-together bells") are made of copper and come in pairs tied together with a cord, with the sound made by striking the two together. They are often used in a musical ensemble and in accompanying Chinese opera as a rhythm instrument. (Note: The National Palace Museum has a pair from the Six Dynasties period in its collection).

Pear Flower Slices ("Li Hua Pian")

Pear Flower Slices were first popular among the people of Shandong Province (a northeastern Chinese province). When the farmers would sing, they would hold two pieces of broken slices of the metal ends of their plows used in farming and strike them to set a rhythm, so the original name was "Plow End Slices"(a homonym with "Pear Flower Slices", which is pronounced the same but is more poetic). After it developed from folk singing to be used in artistic performances, "Pear Flower Slices" came to be made of two semi-circles of iron or copper. When performed, they are held together in the left hand and struck to produce a sound. They are a percussion instrument used in ballad singing, as a clapper to accompany storytelling, to accompany Beijing "qin" (Chinese zither) performances, etc., as an important accompanying instrument.

Sabayi The "sabayi" is a Uighur (Turkish people of Xinjiang Province in northwestern China) percussion instrument. Originally the sabayi was made by stringing a small number of iron rings on a pair of ram horns. The sabayi that is popularly used now is made of two

parallel pieces of hard wood in place of the ram horns, with two big iron rings inserted in the middle part of the wooden sticks. On the iron rings are placed a small number of small iron rings. When used in performance, the wooden sticks are held in the right hand and shaken or struck with the left hand or both shoulders, to make them sound. They are often used to accompany singing and dancing.

Pat Boards Pat boards (pai ban), also called Sandalwood Boards or Zhuo Ban, are often simply called "ban" (boards). They are made of the wood of purple sandalwood, redwood, or yellow willow. Each pair of pat boards is made of several wooden boards.

During the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.) the pat boards were already in use. At the time of the Tang Emperor, Xuan Zong, in the "Pear Garden" theatrical house music ensemble he formed, one performer named Huang Pan-Zhuo became famous for performing skillfully on the pat boards. (Footnote: according to the writings of one Tang dynasty writer, in recording the talents of the performers of the time, there was no musical score for the pai ban player to follow. The Tang Emperor, Xuan Zong, ordered Huang Pan-Zhuo to create musical scores for it. Huang drew two ears on paper and, when asked by the emperor what the ears signified, Huang replied that wherever the ears appeared, the beat was to be heard).

In the Tang dynasty, the biggest pat boards had nine pieces and the smallest had six pieces (footnote #2 just gives the name of the book that is the source of this information), with a cord stringing them together on the top, and on the bottom they could be freely separated or brought together. In performance, the two hands are used to hold the two outermost pieces of wooden boards, separating them and bringing them together so that they strike the boards in the middle in order to make them sound. The pat boards often in use today are comprised of three pieces of rectangular wooden boards divided into two sections, front and back. The front section is comprised of two wooden boards, fastened together with a thin silk thread on top and bottom. The bottom section is only one board. The two sections are joined together with a cloth tie/band. In performance the board in the back is held in the left hand,

and using the place where it protrudes in the front of the bottom of it you strike the back of the bottom of a piece of the back of the wooden boards of the front section, with the front and back knocking together to produce a sound. (the original is as complicated and convoluted as my translation!)

The pat boards are a percussion instrument often used to accompany Chinese opera and in instrumental ensembles. The pat boards are often used with board drums and played by the drummer.

Bangzi (wooden clappers) Bangzi (wooden clappers) originated in approximately the 17th century and became popular with the rise of local “wooden clapper” operas. The clappers are made of wood, with two sticks of hard wood of unequal length. The long stick is round in shape and the slightly smaller one is rectangular. When performed, the left hand holds the square-shaped one, and the right hand holds the round stick of hard wood. The two are struck together to produce a sound. The tone color is high, level, and hard (firm), and is the principal accompanying instrument for “clapper opera”.

Popular in the south of our country (China) is a type of rectangular southern clapper. Hollow in the middle, they are struck with thin slips of reed or bamboo, and are mostly used in musical ensembles.

Bamboo slip boards Bamboo slip boards in ancient times were called “jianzi” (“bamboo slips”). Bamboo slip boards are used in performances involving the chanting of folk tales. They are made of two long pieces of bamboo, held in the left hand and struck to produce a sound. The bamboo slip boards used in Henan song performances are made of two sticks of red wood. When performed, they are held in the right hand and struck together. This kind of bamboo boards is often used by the singer, who sings while striking these in accompaniment.

Bamboo boards Bamboo boards are made of two tile-shaped bamboo boards approximately 6-7 inches long and 2 inches wide. They are strung together with a cord, which can allow the boards to be freely brought together or separated at the bottom. When performed, they are held in one hand and struck together to produce a sound.

Besides this, there are ones comprised of five or six small bamboo boards of approximately three inches in length and one inch in width, popularly called “suizi.” They are strung together with a cord at the top with a piece of copper strung between each of them, and which can be freely separated or brought together at the bottom. When performed, they are held in one hand and stuck to produce a sound.

The bamboo boards and “suizi” are sometimes used together. The singer himself plays these while singing and they are used to create atmosphere and to enhance emotions. They are important accompanying instruments in artistic storytelling performances in Shandong, Tianjin, Sichuan, etc.

Wooden Fish Wooden fish in the beginning were used in Buddhist worship ceremonies and used to accompany the chanting of the Buddhist sutras, but gradually evolved from religious sings to become a folk instrument. The wooden fish are made of wood and shaped like a fish, and are struck with a small mallet. Wooden fish come in all sizes, to produce higher or lower tones. Some are used in a set to produce 5 or 7 different tones, and some can be performed in a set with 12 different tones. When performed in an ensemble, sometimes two wooden fish are used, one large and one small.

Translated by *Larry Herzberg*

Harold ‘Doc’ Edgerton was a Bones Player

As a graduate student at the University of Nebraska, I was well aware of one of our famous graduates - Doc Edgerton (April 6, 1903 – January 4, 1990).

Doc grew up in Nebraska and received a bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering from University of Nebraska. He attended Massachusetts Institute of Technology and received a Sc.D. degree in electrical engineering with a thesis using stroboscopes to study motors. He is credited with moving the stroboscope from the laboratory to everyday use in a wide variety of fields.

Early on he was inspired to photo-

graph everyday objects using the stroboscope and many of those photographs can be viewed on the Internet.

He was also instrumental in the development of sonar and side-scan technology, and his equipment was used by Jacques Cousteau in searches for shipwrecks.

But Doc was also a rhythm bones player and is remembered as such by his son, Bob Edgerton.

"After the war (WWII) when my father came home from his night reconnaissance work in Europe, I was listening to the "Ted Mack Amateur Hour" on the radio and heard some rhythm that sounded like tap dancing. I asked my father if he knew what was happening. He said it was a bone player. He went to our basement where we had two power tools, a wood lathe and a band saw. He sawed out two pieces of wood and showed me how to play the bones.

"He had learned as a young person and nearly drove his parents crazy playing the bones around the house. I learned from him how to play the bones at least with the right hand. I have learned that excellent bone players like Percy Danforth and others usually play them in both hands at the same time doing different patterns in the different hands, and I got to see Percy play solo rhythm bones with a modern dance team.

"My son, Eric, has learned to play the bones from me. We have yet to teach this skill to his son, Quinn.

"Originally bones were made from rib bones, but now are often made from birch, pine, ebony, ivory, or some boney material. My father made so many pairs over the years so that he could teach others how to play and give them a set of bones that he had made. I ended up with quite a collection some of which are shown in the photograph on Page 8." *Steve Wixson*

Bones Calendar

Bones Fest XVIII. August 6-9, 2015, Shepherdstown, WV, Skeff Flynn, Host. Preview in this issue on Page 3

NTCMA Bones Contest. August 31 - September 6, 2015, LeMars, IA. Bones Contest will be on Sunday.



Sample of Chinese Folk Percussion from Museum in China.
See story on Page 6.



Closeup of the middle row from above photograph



Some of Harold 'Doc' Edgerton's rhythm bones. See story on Page 7.

Rhythm Bones Society

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Address Correction Requested