



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 18, No. 1 2016

In This Issue:
Bone Dry Musical Instrument Company

Bones Fest XX Preliminary Information

Ted 'Darkie' Duckett

Fun With Ernie

El Watson-Present at the Beginning

Woody Guthrie Played Rhythm Bones

Poem: We Have Always Sung

Nick Driver on Whale Rhythm Bones

Columns:
Executive Director

Editorial

Letters to the Editor

Bones Calendar

Website Update

Executive Director's Column

Have you ever thought about how the bones have changed your life? Not to get too philosophical on you, but I think back to that day in 1978 when I started playing the bones, and look at the path that I have taken it's pretty amazing. I realize I'm probably not a good example by virtue of the fact that the effect the bones have had on my life has been truly overwhelming. Just from the outset, I have traveled all over the country, as far west as Texas, as far south as Florida, and as far North as Wisconsin, and multiple states in between. I have met the most amazing people, and made the bonds of friendship which will endure as long as I'm alive. I have been privileged to play the bones on television, radio, on records, and in video, and have reached countless people through out the country and across

the world! I have been to Ireland seven times, and each time played the bones in numerous settings, including competing in the All Ireland Bone Playing Championship five times! Bone playing has enriched my life beyond my wildest expectation.

But lets take my son Jeremy, a person who has Down Syndrome, who's speech, and physical abilities are significantly impacted, who can not read, drive a car, will never get married or have children. The bones have made such an incredible impact on his life beyond that which words can express. He has made such amazing connections with people, at festivals, Bones Fests, and any time he picks up the bones. The bones (Continued on Page 3)

Bone Dry Musical Instrument Company

This store began as a pipe dream in the summer of 2005.

That's when the idea first popped into my head. It happened while I was checking out the "Bones Marketplace" during Bones Fest IX in Chattanooga, Tennessee. I thought to myself, "Wouldn't it be great to find a place like this that sells musical bones all the time?" That's how Bone Dry Musical Instrument Company got started. So on March 31, 2007, after nearly two years of research and planning, the online shop opened its doors for business. Being the first and only professionally hosted e-commerce shop specializing in rhythm bones we instantly saturated the market.

As you can imagine, the market for rhythm bones is highly specialized and teeny-tiny. So to help keep the store afloat we added additional products that might appeal to bones players. Among the first additions were bodhran beaters (made from old fiddle bows), and vintage washboards. Then we added washboard accessories such as tin cups, cow bells, and thimbles. Today, in addition to serving bones players, we are expanding our selection of hard-to-find rhythm instruments that might interest a broader scope of traditional folkroots musicians, and jug bands.

Besides our original online store, you can find selected products on eBay, and more recently at

Amazon. We are the largest distributor for most of our main suppliers and also produce several proprietary product brands. A few product lines have expanded beyond the folkroots community. Our customers now include a fair number of vintage car enthusiasts, museums, clowns, string musicians and ballet dancers (but that's another story).

Around 20% of our sales are global. At last count, our international customers represented 62 foreign countries. (Continued on Page 3)



Scott Miller and his Website

Editorial

This issue continues stories about rhythm bones store, and because he is a member, Scott Miller gets Page 1. Nick sent a photograph and brief story about whale rhythm bones (see Page 8). I bought my first Nick Driver shin bone rhythm bones from Hobgoblin.

You can now register for Bones Fest XX. Many will remember Bones Fest X hosted by Jonathan and Melissa Danforth with the great group photograph at the Whaling Museum. We had our largest registration at the Fest and a large turn out for the Saturday night public performance. Bones Fest XX is a milestone and will be another great Fest. Hope to see you there.

I met Ramblin' Jack Elliott at the Woody Guthrie Center while attending a high school reunion in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Turned out that weekend was the Grand Opening of the center and the reason that Jack was there. Jack told me that he and Woody played together toward the end of Woody's career. He doesn't have much to say about Woody's rhythm bones playing, but documents that Woody played them occasional on stage.

I don't know if you can tell from this newsletter, but it is getting harder to find content. I invite you to submit articles, and remember that while this is a small newsletter it is housed and cataloged by the Library of Congress making stories available to future researchers.

There are a few subjects where I would love some help. I found a reference that said someone in the Will Maston Trio played rhythm bones, and that trio included Will Maston, Sammy Davis and a young Sammy Davis, Jr. We've also not had much on Civil War rhythm bones and minstrel rhythm bones players.

In Vol 8, No 1 Page 6 (newsletters are online, click Resources Tab) there is a story about EJ Jensen being the 1927 'Rattlebones Champ of the World.' The contest was in Seattle, and the Seattle Public Library did not have anything about the contest and if there is anything in old newspapers someone would have to search through microfilmed newsletters from 1927. It might lead to other rhythm bones player stories.

Mel Mercier Appointed Chair at Irish World

Musician, composer and academic joins UL from UCC, where he was Head of School of Music and Theatre.

The University of Limerick has announced the appointment of Professor Mel Mercier as Chair of Performing Arts at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance.

Mercier, originally from Dublin, completed a BMus at University College Cork in 1989, and a Master of Fine Arts in World Music at the California Institute of the Arts, Los Angeles, in 1991. He was awarded a PhD from the University of Limerick in 2011.

From 1992 to 2016, he was a member of the Music Department at UCC. He was appointed as the first Head of School of Music and Theatre there in 2009 and promoted to Professor in 2015.

Commenting on his appointment, Mercier said:

I am inspired by the Academy's commitment to artistic practice and its progressive approach to education in the performing arts, and I am very much looking forward to working with its students and staff as it develops its artistic and educational vision into the future.

A renowned performer on bodhrán and other percussion instruments, Mercier has performed, recorded and collaborated with Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin and many other musicians. Throughout the 1980s he performed in Europe and the USA with John Cage and the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. He is also director of the Cork Gamelan Ensemble, which released its debut album *The Three Forges* in 2015.

In 2012, Mercier was nominated for a Tony Award for his score for the Broadway production of Colm Tóibín's *The Testament of Mary*. He is currently working on several projects, including co-devising a new play with writer Pat McCabe and director Pat Kiernan for the 1916 Centenary.

Dr Sandra Joyce, Director of the Irish World Academy, said:

Mel's formidable reputation as a performer, composer and academic resonates deeply with the ethos and

Rhythm Bones Player

Rhythm Bones Society
Volume 18, No 1
First Quarter 2016
ISSN: 1545-1380

Editor
Steve Wixson
wixson@epbf.com

Executive Director
Stephen Brown
bones@crystal-mtn.com

Web Site Coordinator
Steve Wixson
webmaster@rhythmbones.com

Board of Directors
Sky Bartlett
Steve Brown, Executive Director
Skeffington Flynn
Sharon Mescher
Bill Vits, Assistant Director
Steve Wixson, Secretary/Treasurer
Kenny Wolin

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

vision of the Academy and he will undoubtedly bring great energy to the role. We are looking forward to the development of new pathways and collaborations according to his many and diverse interests. [First published in *The Journal of Music*. journalofmusic.com]



(Continued from Page 1)

It was back in 1843 that Dan Emmett and the Virginia Minstrels (the group that started the blackface minstrel craze) brought the banjo and two-handed bone playing to England, Scotland, and Ireland - in that order. The minstrel craze soon spread to virtually all English-speaking countries. So not surprisingly, the vast majority of our international orders come from Canada, the UK, Ireland, and Australia.

Our online store might look big and fancy, but we are just a small home-based business. The inventory is warehoused on shelves in the hallway by the front door and also down in the basement. Also downstairs is the workshop. Upstairs is the photo studio and additional storage. Ironically, the shop has grown to a point where I am buried under a mountain of administrative tasks and can no longer get much "real" work done. (Career Opportunity Alert: Are you an ambitious copywriter with art & design skills and enough entrepreneurial drive to handle the reins of a small but growing e-commerce rhythm instrument business? Then drop me a note explaining why the heck you want to market rhythm instruments to folkroots musicians and jug bands.)

The best way to buy musical instruments is to try them first-hand. But in the world of musical bones that is rarely possible. So the prime goal of this online store is to make your shopping experience the next best thing to being there. We do our best to create product pages with ample photos and helpful information. And we are probably the one and only shop that makes a special effort to closely match pairs (and sets) of bones from our inventory. Our greatest challenge is to eliminate any surprises when you open the box. The store won't always succeed in that effort. But it does strive to reach that goal. As customers on our Live Testimonials page suggest, we have managed to achieve some success at providing the most satisfying musical bones shopping experience anyone can offer.

We love serving the world community of bone players and hope you will visit our little online shop soon. If I can answer any questions for you, just give me a holler. *Scott Miller* bonedrymusic.com

Editorial (Continued)

have increased his self confidence, self worth, and given him a place where he truly performs! And he glows when he plays, and impacts so many people we could not began to count. So bone playing has enriched his life beyond our wildest expectation! So I ask you, How have the bones changed your life?

Ah, the high Holidays of Irish music are upon us, and a very Happy St. Patrick's Day to you! And in that vein, did you ever think about going to Ireland? Well the All Ireland Bone Playing Championship will be held on the May Bank Holiday Weekend, this year being April 29th to May 2nd. It is without a doubt the best, most comprehensive bone playing contest in existence today (have to admit my biased here too!), the week end it's self has so much to see and do from the Busking competition on Friday night, to the Celebrity concert on Sunday, and many pub sessions in between. If you have an interest in Irish music, there's none better!

This year the New England Folk Festival will be held in Mansfield, Mass the week end of April 15th to the 17th, and is a real participatory festival, with dance and opportunities to play for all. I'll be doing a bone playing workshop on Saturday, and would love to see you. And yes Jeremy will be there, exhibiting his most amazing smile! *Steve Brown*

Bones Fest XX Preliminary Information

Bones Fest XX will take place in the central New York village of Homer on August 4-7, 2016. Homer is a small town that abuts the city line of Cortland a city of about twenty thousand. The venue for the Fest will be the Homer Center for the Arts. Housed in an old brick church building constructed in the 1890s. They have a 400 seat theater and a large meeting room which we will use for most gatherings. We will stay in Cortland at the Ramada Inn located just off Interstate 81. The closest airports are Syracuse (30 miles) or Ithaca (20 miles). A full breakfast is included in the \$89 per night

cost of the rooms. Friday we will have supper at the Center for the Arts and a casual show for our own entertainment. Our Saturday night show will be billed as a fund raiser for the Arts Center (www.center4art.org). Saturday before the show we will have a supper at the Homer Elks Club. Central NY's Finger Lakes country is a great place to vacation, Cayuga Lake near Ithaca and Cornell has 25 wineries and many microbreweries all around the lake. Greek Peak Adventure Center is nearby plus several museums etc. *Gerry Hines*

BONES FEST

XX



August 4-7, 2016

Homer, NY

Gerry Hines, Host

Registration and Preliminary Information
in this newsletter

Ted 'Darkie' Duckett

New Forest Bones Player and Step Dancer

This photograph, taken during the late 1950s or early 1960s at the Bold Forester at Marchwood, is of the late and gifted New Forest bones player and step-dancer Ted 'Darkie' Duckett, who lived for a large part of his life a mile or so away at Hanger Corner on the Beaulieu Road. Although well known locally, he came as a young man from Wootton Bassett, Wiltshire, and married the daughter of Bert Doe, who had served in the cavalry compound at Denney Lodge before the widespread rehousing of all New Forest Gypsies in the new housing estates built at Hythe, Thorney Hill and Totton after the Second World War.



His lifelong ambition to perform on a London stage was not fulfilled until late in life, when he represented the Hampshire tradition at an annual National Gathering of the English Folk Song and Dance Society at their London headquarters. Prior to this he had appeared on BBC South television and at festivals and concerts, including Bournemouth Winter Gardens and Southampton Nuffield theatres, where - as always - he stole the show. He was also featured on the Forest Tracks record *First Tracks*, and in a BBC documentary on the Christchurch Folk Festival, where his great skill as a bones player is preserved.

Ted had been a Mummer in his youth, playing the role of Happy Jack, and as a dancer and bones player had often taken part in competitions, and 'never been beat'. He died after his wife at Netley View, Hythe, and is succeeded by his daughters.

Some memories by Dave Williams

First Meetings

Although I had gone to school with his children, Joe and Ivy, and knew of Ted by reputation, I first met him at a family party of my childhood friends the Surplice family of Marchwood. Ted had been invited by the father, Vince, who was a great champion of the common man and community life, sometime Labour Parish Councillor, regular campaigner for and supporter of Labour attempts to gain New Forest seats, and onetime Welterweight champion of the Army, in which he had served as a farrier during the Great War. Surplice family parties were really quite exciting, as I remember them: lots of physical and boisterous games like 'The Queen of Sheba', 'Nelson's Eye', and the like, eccentric diversions such as hypnotising the chickens (yes really, and - rest assured - without harm!), feats of derring-do on big swings off trees in the garden in the names of famous motorcycles (all five sons and Vince had them at one time), and occasionally diving through open ground floor windows to practice newly learned judo rolls!

Ted was well able to acquit himself in such company despite his small stature, and as well as dancing and playing the bones, displayed the odd feats of strength like lifting large men off the ground with his teeth, using a scarf round their waists! In this exhilarating company a young lad like me from a comparatively sheltered environment could not help but be suitably impressed!

Early Musical Days - "I ain't never been beat!"

My real awareness of Ted's great musical skills came during the mid-1950s when, with Vic Wilton and other friends, I used to play music every Thursday at the Bold Forester. On occasion, we would be joined by the man who, in retrospect, provided a somewhat eccentric percussion element to our then principally American fare. All this was to change with the invasion of the village by a great number of men in blue pinstripe suits who had come to build the SEB power station, and one evening as we played in one room of the pub, we heard music coming from another which was thereafter to turn our heads. It was played by McAlpine's ganger on the site, the late Peter 'Paddy' Keane of Ennis,

on anglo concertina, who, with Michael Morrisroe (originally from Roscommon and now Langley) on concert flute and others, who played there regularly until the project was complete.

Ted was in his element here, especially when any of the number chose to dance a step or two. Not for Ted the restrained wait until the other had finished, but a tap on the dancer's shoulder, a pointed finger in the direction of his own feet as if to say "Like this!", and he was on his way to victory, even in his Wellington boots! For Ted the dance and any performance was very much a competition in which he could and did prove himself best, and as old age and infirmity overtook him, it had a noticeably quieting effect on his normally confident self.

The Bones Championship - "I had him on the doubling"

On one occasion a bones competition was organised in a Southampton Jazz Club at the Portswood Hotel, between Ted and Len Danks, a Southampton teacher who was really not a bad player. On the evening of the event, the Bold Forester's coachload of supporters came into town with Ted, descended the stairs into the murky depths to witness the contest, drink town beer and cheer on their man. Lots were drawn, Len went first and chose to play Whistling Rufus, accompanied by Southampton policeman Pete Beasley on piano. Len was flash enough to whistle at the same time, which drew cries from the Duckett camp of "Play fair! Play the bones straight! No whistling!" and other demands felt necessary at the time. But, as it transpired, without need: Ted stepped up in his turn, asked the pianist to "Play any music, Sir", and to Maple Leaf Rag proceeded to play like a man possessed, with all the breaks in place as if personally schooled by Scott Joplin. He won hands down (or, more appropriately, 'hands up'!)

Ted's success was self-endorsed and proclaimed with a proud and confident "I had him on the doubling!", which was and will be indelibly engraved forever in all our memories.

BBC - Bob Wellings and "the varnish off the ship's bottom".

There are many stories which have been ascribed to Ted, few I suspect being true, but there is one I remember hearing

from 'the horse's mouth', and the occasion of its telling. Ted had agreed to take part in an early BBC South TV programme, in which he was to talk about playing the bones and dancing and play to my accompaniment. Bob Wellings was the interviewer, and having run through a series of questions with Ted, including one which was to trigger him to 'look at the camera with the red light on and play', the programme rolled into action. At the appointed time and cool as you like, Ted leant over to Bob on camera and said, "Here, what camera was it you said I had to look at?" That was a real test for the whole studio on its first night of 'professional' action, and there were lots of sweaty palms to prove it!

That wasn't the only line to floor Bob during this baptism of fire. He asked why the bones were black and, having told him they were made of whales teeth, Ted quietly and with steely eye added, "it was the varnish off the ship's bottom, Sir!" I confess I loved every minute of it!

Mummers - "too much acting"

The late Eric Jones-Evans was a local doctor who divided his time between matters medical and being a well-known character actor. He also wrote for the Hampshire Magazine and had documented the East Boldre Mummers play he had seen in the mid-1920s at the Royal Oak at Hill Top. This was to become the vehicle for a rival team, which on a couple of occasions featured the good doctor himself and Ted in his original boyhood role of Happy (Little Johnny) Jack.

Ted's own play was very interesting in that it had no action at all, but merely a sequence of introductory lines from each character who then 'did a turn'. By comparison, although not as heavily laden as some, the East Boldre play does have a little verbal and physical interplay. Ted was never impressed by this - he always said there was "too much acting" and if we were to "get the hat round and visit other places" we'd have to cut it out!

The Winter Gardens and Nuffield Theatre - knowing one's place!

Bournemouth's 'Sinnermen and Sara', enjoyed a considerable wave of local popularity which led them at their height to stage a concert at the Bournemouth Winter Gardens. [Dave Williams' original article stated that the 'Sinnermen and Sara' modelled themselves on the

Settlers / Seekers style groups then popular on the folk scene. However, Annie Christopher, alias Sara, tells me that 'We were considered to be MGM's answer to the Seekers and our style had been set long before we hit the fame trail. The Seekers actually lived and worked from Bournemouth for a while, which was our home base. We had been firmly established in our own style before they ever arrived' - Ed.] Being of fairly broad outlook, they asked me, as compere, if I could recommend any suitable supporting and contrasting performers for the evening. I suggested a couple of then very young and charismatic Morris dancers, Geoff Jerram and Robin Plowman, and Ted Duckett accompanied by George Skipper on piano accordion. Past experience had told me that Ted would 'rise to the occasion' and this he did with a vengeance. His performance, enhanced by his usual show of sartorial elegance, took the audience by storm and he relished every minute of the applause. The killer came when the promoter gave me instructions for the 'planned encore' - Ted and the others were to come on at either end of the stage for their bows, the centre stage position reserved for the principals of the show, but this was not for Ted, who strode to the centre front, both hands and sets of bones raised in triumph to the biggest round of applause of the night!

He had shown very similar style at an earlier concert by Rory McEwen at Southampton's Nuffield Theatre, at which Ted shared a supporting spot with Peter Roud, a colourful harmonica player from Romsey. Both looked at one time as though the only thing to remove them would be a big hook! I have found this kind of upstaging of stars by unknowns to be rarely enjoyed by promoters, and suspect this was no exception, but it was clearly enjoyed by Rory and the audience as well as the performers in question!

On another occasion, Mike Seeger and Alice Gerrard were guests at a local concert for which Ted was again providing support. When the finale arrived, Mike graciously gave him prominence - an honest, reasonable and gentlemanly gesture.

Latter years - 'the glittery'

Toward the end of his life, and following the death of his wife, Ted suffered

from poor health, including, I suspect, chest and heart problems, compounded by rapidly failing eyesight, this giving him what he called 'the glittery'. This proved not to be good for performances where stage or other lighting could aggravate the situation. This was the case in a couple of his last public appearances, which were nonetheless high points to him. He represented Hampshire at the EFDSS National Gathering in London accompanied by George Skipper, who commented that Ted had played very well as always, but had sadly, and due to 'the glittery', walked into a lamppost outside, which shook him up a little.

The BBC television lighting for the Christchurch Folk Festival, at which Ted later played, accompanied by the High Level Ranters, must have proved equally trying, but he triumphed over it as one would expect.

One flash of the 'old' Ted was for me the highlight of that or the previous festival, and is something I will always remember as typical of him, even though he was not well. He was the special guest at a Reading Clog Dancer's workshop on New Forest step dancing, at which, having declined to dance due to ill health, he was to comment on the dancing of another dancer providing examples of his style of stepping. The lot fell to Ian Dunmur, who no sooner had started to dance than Ted walked to the centre of the floor and, with that characteristic style, pointed to his own feet as if to say, as I had seen so many times in the past, "Like this!", or, more likely, "Pick the bones out of that one!"

All those that were privileged to see and hear him, be it in home, pub, club, festival or theatre, can honestly say that they had been party to something special. I certainly was, and was always at great pains to tell others what they had missed! Tales of learning the "seven Lancashire steps", dancing on a 12 inch board in competitions against other dancers "put up" by other communities of "my people", the almost unfulfilled promise made in his youth of dancing "on the stage in London", and the knowing look and twinkling eyes as he either broke into a dance or played the bones, two and four in hand, without flaw but with ever more complex rhythms. I treasure them all. I eternally live (Continued on Page 6)

(Continue from previous page)
in hope, but doubt if we shall ever see
his like again. *Dave Williams* Musical
Traditions Internet Magazine, August 15,
1997,

El Watson—Present at the Beginning

In Bristol TN/VA there is a museum
which bills itself as “The Birthplace of
Country Music”. It’s claim to that billing
resides in the fact that, in 1927 and 1928,
the producer Ralph S. Peer, working for
the Victor Talking Machine Company,
held a series of sessions to capture South-
ern Appalachian music and its makers
in the Tri-Cities area (Bristol—John-
son City, TN—Kingsport, TN). These
became known as “The Bristol Sessions”
and served to introduce several soon-to-
be famous country stars—among them:
The Carter Family (Maybelle, Sara and
A.P. Carter), Jimmie Rodgers (The Sing-
ing Brakeman}, Ernest Stoneman (The
Stoneman Family), and many others. In
all about 142 recordings (of which 116
were issued) were made over those two
years.

One of these music makers was El
Watson (Mr. El). He was a bones, har-
monica and guitar player and the only
African American involved in both the
1927 and 1928 sessions. As noted in “The
Bristol Sessions, The Big Bang of Coun-
try Music” (the book which accompanies
the 5 CD album) very little is known
about him. He is the featured artist and
composer on two songs: Narrow Gauge
Blues (a train imitation on the harmon-
ica) and Pot Licker Blues (harmonica
and guitar). He also recorded with The
Johnson Brothers—former vaudeville
musicians—on at least four other songs:
A Passing Policeman (bones), I Want To
See My Mother (Ten Thousand Miles
Away) (bones), Two Brothers Are We
(bones) and The Soldier’s Poor Little
Boy (harmonica). Two other African
American musicians—Steven Tarter and
Harry Gay (banjo, mandolin and guitar)
recorded in the 1928 sessions.

Mr El went on to record for Victor
and Columbia records in both Johnson
City and New York. The Discography of
American Historical Recordings ([http://
adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/talent/in-
dex](http://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/talent/index)) lists several other songs attributed to

him: Bay Rum Blues (arranger, harmon-
ica and bones), Sweet Bunch of Daisies
(arranger, harmonica and bones) and One
Sock Blues (composer, harmonica and
bones). All were recorded in 1928.

All of the Bristol Session songs can
be heard at The Birthplace of Coun-
try Music Museum (an affiliate of the
Smithsonian Institution). There is an
interactive exhibit where nearly all of
the 142 recordings can be audited over
earphones along with accompanying text
and information on the musicians, the
recording and release dates (if known),
photographs (if available) and discus-
sion of the cultural backgrounds of the
performers. There are some very well
done exhibits as well including a note
about bones as a percussive instrument
together with a copy of William Sidney
Mount’s lithograph—The Bone Play-
er— a detail of which is close to that of
the Rhythm Bones Society’s logo. The
museum is well worth a visit for anyone
interested in early country music as well
as to note that a bones player was part of
this birth. *Stan Von Hagen*

I have found two more You Tube re-
cordings of El Watson playing bones.

The Johnson Barothers “A Passing
Policeman” ([https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=sqoDgIUo-2o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqoDgIUo-2o)) and

“I Want To See My Mother”
([https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=MgRqh4SRs8s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgRqh4SRs8s)).

Woody Guthrie Played Rhythm Bones

[Editor’s note: the following is a tran-
scription of a telephone conversation.]

“Woody Guthrie played rhythm bones
with me on stage sometimes toward the
end of his career during the years 1951 to
1953. I was performing with my guitar in
Marin county, jut north of San Francisco,
and we were playing some of Woody’s
favorite songs. One of them was one he
sang and played on the mandolin - Whis-
tlin’ Rufus [Jack sang it without words]. I
was in my late teens at that time. Woody
was slowing down as he was getting sick.

“I don’t know if there are any tapes as
he had a Webster/Chicago (Webco) tape
recorder and recorded a lot of stuff when
we played music together in the morn-

ings.

“I can’t remember what kind of bones
he played, but he played two-handed. I
never learned to play the bones.

“There was a guy out here in Califor-
nia, Artis the Spoonman, who I remem-
ber fondly and he would sometimes walk
up and play a song with me. That was
probably 30 years ago.” *Rambling Jack
Elliott*

[To hear Jack play, watch .youtube.
com/watch?v=X-5IDAK5_9Q or search

We Have Always Sung

The bells of ancient temples sound

In my wide eyed dreaming

Runes

Chants

Rhythm

Bones struck

Keeping time through the ages

Twisting the words into patterns

That have existed

Before the first wailing man-child

E’re drew breath

The eternal stars

Notes on black velvet sheets

I draw the sound of light

With each sleeping breath

And expell it

In measured stanzas

Of dreams

Of chords

And rhythms

Of burning

Hopeful

Life

By Ellenodale, Seeker Magazine,
Vol. 3, Issue 5, May 1997. Reprinted
with permission and with this postscript.

“When I was writing the poem, I was
imagining the birth of music, and the
subsequent use of rhythm in poetry...how
it must have been taken from the natural
world. To me, both music and poetry
are ways to express our lives. Bones
made sense to me as a metaphor of both
life and the natural world. To use them
to express rhythms for the first songs/
poems simply seemed right.”

Fun With Ernie

Ernie Duffy approached me one day to ask if I would like to play bones with him at a local inn. It would be a one-hour session, bones and canned music, nothing else. We would be in close quarters with about one or two dozen VIP guests, not as back ground music, but as a point of focus, a show.

Stop and think about the situation for a minute, small room, 18ish people, adults, who don't know what the bones are. One entire hour made up of 3 minute songs with bones playing along. No gags, no smoke or lights. Nothing but bones, myself and Ernie. Seemed like a recipe for disappointed guests to me. Most people like a bones song or two. A few minutes, then the novelty will wear off for 95% of people and you might be left with a couple people who are genuinely interested and want to see more.

Of course I happily agreed to join Ernie, confident that if there was a path to success he would find it. Most of my thoughts caught up in the fact that there was no such path. We arrived at the inn around 6pm. We were introduced as the entertainers for the night. If I recall correctly we were then treated to enjoy dinner with the rest of the guests. I remember it being amazing food.

Then dinner was over. I was doubtful of our success. This was a mistake on my part. For the first fifteen minutes Ernie stood up front, by himself, explaining what the bones were, where they came from, who we were, how we learned, why we play, I was in awe. It was like he wasn't talking about us, he made us and our instrument sound so cool.

Then it was on to some playing, I don't remember what we played first, I just remember the crowd loved it. Well after that first song the questions came on like a flood, how do you do that? Why do you hold them that way? Why do you two sound different? Ernie then spent the next fifteen minutes giving an in depth explanation for each question, all eyes and ears were on Ernie. A crowd of adults, acting like a room full of children, their questions seemed to never end, and they found satisfaction in every new piece of information.

While Ernie was doing all of this I was canvassing the room showing people how to hold the bones and passing pairs around. Well finally the crowd seemed satisfied enough to let us play another song, bear in mind at this point we are about thirty-five minutes into a sixty minute "show" and we've played one song. After that we settled into a pretty regular routine. We'd play a song then Ernie would tell some fantastic tale of our adventures at bones Fests or some other music festival we might have played, making everybody wish they too could play the bones, if at least to share in our crusades.



All of this went on just as gracefully as could be, Ernie taking questions unless they were directed to me, Ernie and I playing songs together, sometimes solo. Ernie and I were having the time of our lives, as Spike Bones will tell you, "bones players LOVE attention." But like all performances ours to had to end, and it did. Almost three hours after it had begun!

I sometimes wish people would ask me what the most impressive piece of bones playing I had ever seen was. Because for me the answer is simple and fun to recount. It was Ernie Duffy playing at the Inn on Golden Pond, where he had an audience of adults wide eyed and glued to their seats in a small room for three hours, using nothing but an Ipod, rhythm bones and a few stories.

To some the bones are viewed as a two-minute parlor novelty. That of course is sad to me. To some the bones are viewed as a sit in the back and try to not be heard accompaniment instrument.

That is important but it still does not speak to their whole potential. When I think of how far the bones can go and what the upper limits of their popularity can and could be I think of Ernie Duffy

. Ernie invested in my early playing to an extreme amount, bringing me with him to most every bones gig he went to for more than a decade. And then to see him perform like that, clean yet fancy and robust playing style combined with a stage presence that puts people at ease and invites questions and comments. It all makes me realize how lucky I am to have someone who cares so much and does so much as a friend and mentor.

If you need help or inspiration in regards to spreading the bones gospel be sure to take a few pages from the book of Duffy. *Sky Bartlett*

Letter to the Editor

I believe I've created a small technique that incorporated within my style of playing the bones, If I am the first creator of this "small" technique, can you help me put a name to it and make it official that I am the creator of the technique, Go to rhythmbones.org/video/DonroMaddocksLick.mp4 to see this lick. *Gordon Maddocks, Bristol, England*

[Editor note. Donro's lick looks like he is using a spoon technique with rhythm bones. I wonder if other spoon licks would work with rhythm bones. Kenny Wolin has done some related licks.]

Bones Fest XX Registration Open

You can register for Bones Fest XX by going to our website and clicking the News box or the Current Tab and then Next Bones Fest. It will also be announced in the monthly email. A Registration Form will be attached to the April RBS email. You can pay by check, but please send in this form even if you pay by Paypal as the form contains information that our Host can use to finalize the program.



Nick Driver on Whale Rhythm Bones

I hope this ticks your bones...a picture of the early whale bone that must date from the mid 19th century. Whale bone is unique as a material for bones playing as it has a natural cellular structure which makes them lighter than cow shin bone and also means they have a more

hollow sound. It is the perfect materials and when whale products were used for so many things during the whaling times, a common materials choice for rhythm bones. I have, though, only seen one small pair made from whale bone other than these. Such things seldom survive. Best wishes, *Nick Driver* [For a story about Nick, search the online newsletter on our website.]

I had a visit from Sky Bartlett as he was on a Wild West tour. He met me in Tombstone and played with the Silver King Minstrels for the afternoon. We had a great time of it. He stayed overnight with us and I took him on a Jeep tour of the mountains. I have enclosed a picture of Sky, Johnny Bones and me, 3 bones players on the streets of Tombstone.
Gerry Hines

Rhythm Bones Society

1060 Lower Brow Road
Signal Mountain, TN 37377-2910

Address Correction Requested