



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 18, No. 4 2016

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Reflections on 20 Years of Bones Fests

Paraphrasing the Beatles, "It was 20 years ago..." that the concept of a bones players gathering, a Bones Festival if you will, was hatched, and put into reality by Everett Cowett, his enthusiastic family, and applauded by Fred Edmund, Russ Myers, and all that attended (see the upper photograph below). They were collectively thrilled that a group of people who played the bones got together and celebrated this ancient instrument which had given them so much joy over their years.

We who have witnessed the development of Bones Fests, while sharing in their joy and enthusiasm, couldn't really feel what they experienced that first Bones Fest. They were literally doing something that hadn't been done before, and starting something that would live beyond their years. We now have a very specific picture of what a Bones Fest is, based on our experience, and expectations of what it will be, but for them, it was entering the unknown with

only their friends, family, and love of the bones to accompany them.

As the years went by, and each Bones Fest unfolded, one thing became clear, the Fest takes on a personality of its own, directed by the host, forged by the area in which it is held, and percolated by all the attendees. Whether we were eating pancakes in a nature center in Wisconsin, standing by the St. Louis Arch, playing the bones in the Alamo, BB Kings blues club in Orlando, a flash mob in Grand Rapids, an Opera House in Sheppardstown, playing for seniors in Leominster, or kids in Homer, we were taking the original vision and spreading it around the country.

For anyone who has attended a Fest, the experience leaves a distinct impression, and many come back again and again.

I know you will get that feeling from this perspective of our second ten years. Even after 16 years, and 15 Fests, I get

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Bones Fest I



Bones Fest XX. See Rhythm Bones Player, Vol 18, No 3 for the names of attendees

Editorial

Sharon Mescher, now a RBS Board Member, returns as Editor for the *Reflections on 20 Years of Bones Fests* issue of our newsletter. She edited the issue on the first 10 years of Bones Fests back in 2006, and it being Vol 18, Special Issue, is available on our website.

It is a bit hard to believe we have been around for 20 years. Rhythm bones players like Dr. Fred Edmunds, Percy Danforth, Ted Goon, Freeman "Brother Bones" Davis, and Frank Brower (all these before our time) would have been proud to be a RBS member.

And we can be proud of what we have accomplished in twenty years. There were about 100 webpages when we started and now there are at least 12,700. There have been 20 Bones Fests, and these show that the quality of rhythm bones playing has dramatically improved as demonstrated on our Saturday evening public performances. We have an outstanding website originally created by Martha Cowett, and an eight page *Rhythm Bones Player* newsletter that is housed and cataloged in the Library of Congress making it available to future historians.

Disappointments. We do not have a path to teach youth other than one on one. In Southwest Germany as part of their Easter celebration, children make rhythm bones (they are called Klepperle), learn how to play them and then compete to be King and Queen of the local parade.

We couldn't capture the flashmob at Kimball Farm and downtown Grand Rapids so maybe it would go viral on Youtube.

We have not gotten national television exposure (with the exception of Sky Bartlett who had 20 seconds when he was a contestant on the ABC Whipeout program).

We are saddened by the passing of so many players and friends since we were organized. Those who passed in our first ten years were listed in the Vol 8, Special Issue and those in the last ten years are listed in the next page. On the top of that list is Everett Cowett, the father of RBS.

And my recurring disappointment, that more people do not research, write about and share stories with our community in our newsletter

I have not included a story about myself in the newsletter since over the years I included short stories about some of my

rhythm bones experiences. In this issue, Sharon presents me in a most flattering way. It's a bit over the top, but thanks Sharon.

These reflections would not be complete without recognizing our elected leaders. The current Board members are listed in the box to the rights. Previous Board members include Everett Cowett, our first Executive Director, Russ Myers, our first Assistance Director, Mel Mercier from Irealnd, Jonathan Danforth who was webmaster for years, Sally Carroll, Jerry Mescher, Gil Hibben who also served as Assistant Director, Tim Reilly, and Sky Bartlett.

Guest Editorial

In the *Rhythm Bones Player*. Vol 8, Special, Issue celebrating the first 10 years of the Bones Fests, Ev Cowett wrote, "The question I am asked most often asked by rhythm bones players is: 'In your wildest imagination, after the first Bones Fest, did you think that 10 years of Bones Fests would produce such a result?'"

Ev's vision of "having a real big bones festival where you invite people other than just bones players" has evolved beyond our wildest imagination.

The first Bones Fest for Jerry and me was Bones Fest IV at Steve and Janet Wixson's home. Watching all those bones players have so much fun was intoxicating. Just before leaving the Fest for home, I picked up a pair of Steve's purple heart bones, and did "something." Steve exclaimed, "You did a triplet!" My response, "I did???" Wow! The spark was lit!

Once we returned to Iowa, Jerry became my mentor. He had wanted to teach me for years, but I believed I could not play them. So, because of Jerry and Steve's exclamation at his Bones Fest, I decided I just may be able to play them. Once that spark was lit, I realized that I wanted to be a partner with Jerry in playing the bones. And, without a doubt, I very much desired to join in all that intoxicating fun at every Bones Fest. No more sitting on the sidelines!

As you read the special issue celebrating our 20th year of Bones Fests you will readily intuit that this Rhythm Bones Society is rich with a diverse group of remarkable people/personalities who happen to share a passion for playing the bones.

Why do we bones players so look forward to each year's gathering? From my

Rhythm Bones Player

Rhythm Bones Society
Volume 18, No 4
Fourth Quarter 2016
ISSN: 1545-1380

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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

perspective there are several reasons. We share the love of an unusual, prehistoric instrument. Each bones player has his/her unique manner of playing. Subsequently, each of us desires to learn from one another. We can't wait to gather for those magical jam sessions where we "let go" and "make crazy." At the heart of the Rhythm Bones Society is a deep, unspoken, non-judgmental respect for each other. And, when we are together, I believe our spirits are, for another year, sated with joy. Over the years, I had shared with my family what I felt about the RBS friends and the Bones Fests. So, my sister joined us at the Sweet's Orlando Bones Fest. At the end of the first day, she told me that she understood why I loved being with the people of the RBS. She had experienced that extraordinary joyful "spirit" with an extraordinary group.

Twenty years after that first Bones Fest, Ev Cowett's vision of a thriving Rhythm Bones Society is a miraculous reality. With grateful hearts, thank you, Ev. *Sharon Mescher*

Ev Cowett's Summary of Bones

Certain elements of each Bones Fest have remained the same over the 10-year span, but each fest has been uniquely different. Only Wilma Myers, Val Cowett and I have had the privilege of attending each of them. Something new and/or different has occurred at each of them making them particularly remarkable. I always look forward to "what will happen this time."

At **Bones Fest I** it was meeting Russ Myers and Dr. Fred Edmunds and sharing bones playing techniques, instrument construction material, musical preferences and having fun and fellowship. Very little has changed.

At **Bones Fest II**, hosted by the Cowetts in Bur-Mil Park, And by this time Martha Cowett had established a webpage for rhythm bones players called Rhythm Bones Central (now rhythm-bones.org).

Bones Fest III was hosted by Russ and Wilma Myers in their almost one-century-old home overlooking the Blue Ridge Mountains. It was here that the boning world opened to all of us with the arrival of "Spike Bones" Muhrer, John "Mr. Bones" Cahill, David "Black Bart" Boyles, "T" Paul Dehon, Mel Mercier (from Ireland), Joe Birl, Sally and Terry Carroll, Vivian Cox and Matteo the classical castanet player. It was here too that the Rhythm Bones Society was founded. What a party and weekend to remember!

Bones Fest IV was hosted by Steve and Janet Wixson at their home overlooking Chattanooga and in a nearby Mountain Opry house. It was here that we first met Ida May Schmich who knocked our socks off; Barry Bones Patton, who has incredible speed; Gil and Linda Hibben who very soon became an important part of the Rhythm Bones Society; the brother/sister act of Jerry Mescher and Bernie Worrell playing synchronized bones tunes; and Bill Vits from the Grand Rapids Symphony with something different.

Bones Fest V, held in a barn on Red Apple Farm in Phillipston, MA, was a real blast. It featured the Dave Reiner band and introduced us to Don Decamp, Dave Gagne, Nick Driver (from England), Norm Conrad, Gerard Arseneault (from Canada) and the NH gang of three, Shorty, Ernie and Sky. A great weekend.

Bones Fest VI was held on the Guilford College campus in Greensboro, NC and hosted by the Cowett family. Performances were heard in a real planetarium. Dan Griffin, a CT rocker and Jeff Newman a TX copy of Don Decamp were great newcomers. Russ Myers was honored and designated Fellow of the Rhythm Bones Society. Brother Bones (Freeman Davis) was recognized on what would have been his 100th birthday with a special birthday cake. The Conga line was introduced by Gil Hibben as was the "pass-off" by Walt Watkins.

Bones Fest VII was hosted by Gil and Linda Hibben in Louisville, KY, and the venue was a real antique Kentucky Theater. This Fest was truly a family affair. The Cowetts, Fraziers and Hibbens were prominent, and the brother/sister act of Jerry Mescher and Bernie Worrell were also there demonstrating precision bones playing, and don't forget Mary Lee and Frank Sweet in 1800's regalia and music.

Bones Fest VIII can be characterized as the Fest with the many successful workshops. It was hosted by Sally and Terry Carroll in Reston, VA. There was something for everyone: bones making, scrimshaw carving, bones playing tips and techniques and much more.

Kenny Wolin made his first appearance here. Between Kenny and Bill Vits even our old stand-by experts were learning something new too.

Bones Fest IX took us back to Chattanooga with Steve and Janet Wixson hosting again. It was almost a repeat of Bones Fest IV with many new and improved bones players. It can be noted that Steve Wixson, Mel Mercier, John Davis, and Walt Watkins are now two-handed bones players and some who could not play at all 10 years ago now play very good.

Bones Fest X was a real happening in New Bedford, MA. It was hosted by Jonathan and Melissa Danforth, and what a job they did. There were over 100 attendees. New Bedford is a multicultural community with a famous whaling museum and maritime music heritage and the Rhythm Bones Society fit right in. Each year the bar of excellence and innovation has been raised at the annual Fest. This is the mission of the Rhythm Bones Society. At first I thought it was due to simple practice in anticipation of the up-coming Fest, but I came to realize that it was the addition of new licks and tricks picked up from other members. Of course practice means a lot for without it nothing much happens.

Thanks for the efforts of Dan and Al Cowett for sound effects and Master of Ceremonies duties that were recognized at Bones Fest X. Spouses such as Val Cowett, Wilma Myers, Linda Hibben, Sharon Mescher, Jennifer Brown, and Kay Cahill who did so much to keep us all going at so many Fests should not be overlooked. Thank you.

"May your bones be with you" *Ev Cowett*, First Executive Director

Obituaries This Second Decade

This issue of the newsletter is dedicated to the following RBS members who died during the last ten years, Shorty Boulet, Norris Frazier, John Perona, Mary Seel, John Cahill, Ida Mae Schmich, Ray Schairer, Joe Birl, Everett Cowett, Guy Gillette, John Davis, Dan Cowett, Bill Rexroad, Bones Fiedler, Walt Watkins, and Jerry Mescher

Non-members include, Dan Murphy who organized the All-Ireland Bones Competition at the Fleadh by the Feale in Abbeyfeale, Ireland.

Bones Calendar

Bones Fest XXI. August 24-27, 2017, San Antonio, TX, Host is Dennis Riedesel,

NTCMA Bones Contest. August 28 - September 3, 2017, LeMars, IA. Bones Contest will likely be on Sunday.

Continued From Page 1

that exhilarating feeling every time. And seeing the look in the faces of the attendees, whether it's their first or tenth, gives me the strong feeling that the original intension of those that started this event have been realized.

They say each snow flake is different and has it's own unique pattern, although I'm not going out there with a magnifier to verify, and I don't have to with Bones Fests. There's no question each varies by virtue of the hosts personality and location. What follows is my personal recollection of Bones Fest's XI to XX. Note that due to a medical emergency I did not attend XIII. My recollection is based on my participation in the planning, and feed back from attendee's.

An Unofficial History of Bones Fests

It seems like decades (because it was) ago when I received a single sheet newsletter, in red ink, from Dr.Fred Edmunds, announcing, among other things, a gathering in Greensboro, North Carolina, of people who, like myself, played the bones. I gave it a full 30 seconds of thought, when I concluded,"who in their right mind would go all the way to North Carolina to play the bones?" In retrospect, I have now traveled enough miles to cross the country several times attending Bones Fests, and I suppose it puts me in the "not in my right mind" category, but in very good company as people have traveled much further to attend one Bones Fest, and begs the question, why? So as I peruse my own experiences, and reflect on our general experience of attending Bones Fests, perhaps we can ferret out some answers to that question.

I did not attend Bones Fest one, two, and three, but I was invited to each one. What initially seemed like an odd idea, eventually became the theme to a Bob Dylan song,"Something is happening here, but you don't know what it is....Do you..." Mr. Brown? And when Ev Cowette contacted me and told me I had been nominated to the Rhythm Bones Society Board of Directors, I felt obligated, and more than a little curious, to travel off to Chatanooga to attend Bones Fest IV. There I began to understand why they were continuing, and starting to draw people from around

the country, and indeed around the world. Mateo smiled that genuine smile, and played his castanets, Dave Boyles hugged me like a long lost brother, Jerry Mescher played like I had never seen anyone play, and everyone treated me like their long lost family member who had finally come home. I left that Fest floating on a cloud, like a magic carpet, that would carry me back again and again.

I've only missed one Bones Fest since that day, and the thing that calls to me every time is what will the amazing recipe of people, place and thing be this time when we all gather to create another Bones Fest experience by interacting together, and the magic flows. It could be in the performance, like Donnie Decamp and his long lost son at V, or Ed Steakly finally meeting his bones family at 99 just before he passed, or Mel Mercier, Tim Riley, Kenny Wolin, and Aaron Plunkett performing together at X, or countless other experiences at the many Bones Fests yet to come. In this review of Bones Fests XI to XX you will read about many of those experiences where the magic blossomed. Enjoy!

Bones Fest XI held in the great state of Wisconsin in one of the most idyllic settings, including performance at the Milwaukee Irish Festival, legendary to those of us interested in Irish music. The wild night at the Irish Pub sticks in my memory.

Bones Fest XII held in St. Louis Missouri, while limited due to Obama's last minute visit to the city, provided an amazing location for a Bones Fest including the University facilities, and the very impressive St. Louis Arch!

Bones Fest XIII was a return to Louisville, Ky, sparked by the performance of our personal New Orleans style Jazz band, the Rascals of Ragtyme, and one of the most beautiful performance facilities we have had the pleasure of playing in.

Bones Fest XIV held in Alexandria,VA had it all! An amazing facility, excellent attendance, performing in the ancient Alexandria Square during a farmers market, and of course, a wedding, between our hosts, Teri and Kenny Wolin!

Bones Fest XV, deep in the heart of Texas, included multiple performances both at the Texas Folk Life Festival, and the Alamo, not to mention our dinner cruise down the River Walk! My biggest regret was not spending more time in San Antonio, a regret I am soon to remedy in August!

Bones Fest XVI in Orlando,Fla. Was a

Bones Fest XXI

San Antonio, TX

August 24-27, 2017

Host is

Dennis Riedesel

dennis.riedesel7@gmail.com

Email Dennis with
Fest ideas or to
volunteer

Put the date on
your Calendar now

true delight, from the hotel, to our Performance at Raglan Road in the Disney Complex, and BB King's Blues club. A special time for me was the gospel sing and bone along Sunday morning.

Bones Fest XVII, surely I must have been crazy to sponsor another one of these, but it all worked out, my favorite memories include the community out reach at the Boys and Girls Club, and the Senior Center, and the Worlds first Bone playing flash mob at Kimball Farms.

Bones Fest XVIII was Grand in Grand Rapids, one of the greatest jams on Thursday night at the restaurant, experiencing Grand Rapids it's self, and all that Polish food! The best Fest for beer!

Bones Fest XIX in Shepardstown,WV will always be the most historical fest from the surrounding area to the amazing old Opera House, and our great facilities at the College, great fun.

Bones Fest XX again featured an amazing facility both for workshops and performance, my most memorable moments were truly the after hours jamming at the hotel, and our cozy breakfasts together, great moments of fraternity!

I want to thank Sharon Mescher for all of her hard work in putting together this special issue, and the strong support of Steve Wixson! *Steve Brown*, Executive Director

Steve Wixson

In the special edition of “Reflections on Ten Years of Bones Fests”, (Volume 8, 2006, page 3), Ev Cowett wrote, “At Bones Fest II...Steve Wixson entered the picture and nothing has been the same since. Within six months he generated 100’s of e-mails and Internet searches all related to bones and bones playing. What a find. What enthusiasm. A newsletter was in progress before we had a society...” No truer words have been written! The “picture” has never been the same.

Steve and Janet Wixson hosted two festivals: Bones Fest IV, where began the tradition of “making it a full weekend event”, and Bones Fest IX.

Steve is the Secretary/Treasurer of the Rhythm Bones Society. He works tirelessly on the newsletter, introducing us to numerous subjects: bones players from the past and present, different types of bones from around the world, and the history of bones. When Steve sends out emails to the Board members asking for newsletter ideas, I can only speak for myself, but that is anxiety-time! The conversation in my head is on the order of, “What can I contribute? I don’t know anything!” Then, I go silent from embarrassment. During Bones Fest XVIII in Grand Rapids, the Board met to discuss old and new business. Someone complimented Steve on all the work he does for our society, and maybe he could slow down. Steve’s response was, “I can’t sit and twiddle my thumbs!” In the blink of an eye, and in unison, the Board members said, “Please, sit and twiddle your thumbs!”

Words do not do justice to convey the breadth and depth of Steve’s incomparable influence. Below is a meager list of his contributions to the Rhythm Bones Society.

Without his research we may never have known about several bones players. Ted Goon, “Mr. Goon Bones”, was a popular recording bones artist in the 1950’s. “His recording of “Ain’t She Sweet” was seventh on the Jukebox Billboard chart in 194 and sold a million, 400,000 copies...”(RBP, Volume 11, No. 11, 2009). Robert Goon, Ted’s son, sent “all kinds of memorabilia” to Steve, i.e.,

photos, news articles, recording charts, letters. He was a member of a trio that “had what appears to be the biggest catalog of recorded rhythm bones music of all time.”

Another legend was John Henry “Bones” Nobles from Texas. Charles Kuralt profiled John Henry on his “On the Road” program. He began his bones playing career after “he stumbled across a dead cow, extracted a couple of ribs, and discovered he could make music with them.” Wherever John Henry was his bones were with him. He appeared in two movies, played at parties, schools and festivals (RBP, Volume 10, No.1, 2008). As Steve wrote in his tribute to John Henry, “I wish I could have known him.”

Steve told me that his most proud contribution was his research, and subsequent article, about Frank Brower (Volume 6, No. 1, 2004). He wrote that,



Steve Wixson at Bones Fest VI with his Bone- Drums consisting of drum sensor on rhythm bones, selection switches in hand wired to a drum synthesizer

“There is not much written about Brower and even less about his bones playing.” Nonetheless, because of Steve’s persistent and never-give-up research, he wove together, “large sections of material from three articles along with other material...” Brower was born in 1823 in Baltimore. In... “1841, Brower first introduced ‘bones playing’ before an audience.... Therefore, I presume no person will dispute the right to the title of, ‘The Original Minstrel Bones Player’” to Brower. (To RBS members, this article is well-worth your reading because of Steve’s detailed research about a most interesting and important bones player.)

If anyone personifies the title, “World Ambassador of the Bones,” it is Steve Wixson. He diligently searches for the

history and knowledge of all-things-bones, experiments with all types of bones, and plays them around the world. This passion has led to articles that include topics such as the German bones called “Klepperle” (RBP, Volume 13, No. 1, 2011). Adam Klein and Steve collaborated on a detailed article titled, “Nachere (castanets) in Etruscan Paintings” (RBP, Volume 16, No. 2, 2014). The paintings of the ancient “castanets” date from 530 B.C.

At many of the Fests, Steve has surprised and entertained us with all types of bones which include: drum bones (shown in the photograph), different kinds of wooden bones, and probably the first bones made on a 3-D printer! He has shared his talent and love for the bones around the world. In 2009, he played in the theater of the ancient city of Ephesus, Turkey, and played on the Great Wall of China.

In Steve’s words, “There is a rhythm to all Fests with people buying in the Bones Market Place, performing to their peers, jamming anytime they can, attending workshops, passing-off, eating good food and joining the conga line finale. There is a feeling of a family reunion at each Fest. These can obviously continue for many years.” With Steve Wixson at the helm, there is no doubt that our society is passing on a bones legacy in a growing family.

Steve, we thank you and will be forever grateful to your passion and love for the bones and the Rhythm Bones Society. (One more thing – could you take just one moment to sit and twiddle your thumbs??) *Sharon Mescher*

It was around the spring of 1999 that I first heard the name, Steve Wixson. It was at the end of a short email, with the instructions: “What can you tell me about the bones?” After a short interaction, he was off and running. It seemed as if he was like something from a Star Trek episode where the machine is running around the universe gobbling up planets, but with Steve he was taking in vast amounts of information about the bones, processing, cataloging and moving on to the next. It wasn’t long after that, I received the Ted Goon article, and soon after that the first Newsletter about Bones Fest III. To be in Steve’s presence is like witnessing a (Continued on Page 19)

Bones Fest XI

August 16-19, 2007

Newburg, WI

“WOW!! How do they do that? What a hoot!!! I don’t believe it!!! Those people are great!!! That’s the most fun I had in a long, long time!!! Etc., etc., etc.” The accolades kept rolling in from folks who came to the evening shows. Most came with not a clue of what to expect, and left as believers in the rhythm bones.

In a few words --- Bones Fest XI, held on August 18-20, 2007, was a magical weekend!!! What made it magical? Maybe the setting (Riveredge Nature Center is a special place), the weather, the food/drink, the organization or Irish Fest? Sure



Ev and Dan Cowett with Razzmatazz on our stage at Irish Fest

all that helped to create the atmosphere needed to make the weekend special, but the true magic was YOU!!! YOU, Rhythm Bones Society people who cared enough to come from all over the country to connect, to play, to listen, to teach and

to learn. That’s where the magic came from.

Many people gave many hours to make Bones Fest XI happen...a heartfelt “Thank You” is in order for the following:

a. The Rhythm Bones Society and the Board of Directors for having the faith that we could do this and the freedom to do it our way.

b. The Riveredge Nature Center who co-sponsored the event and provided the logistical support.

c. A special mention to the following people: Kathy Gordon (brochures, forms, all printing and kept us moving), LaVonne Suring (registration), Tammy Lorge (accounting), Lynne Bergschultz (T-shirt design), Laura and Tony Kasshin

(T-shirt production), Barb Gilmore (food/drink), and all the others who volunteered in the planning, running, and clean-up for Bones Fest XI.

d. The bands, Finbar McCarthy, Razzmatazz, and Frogwater, who made Friday dinner, Saturday evening, and Sunday morning special happenings.

But the real thanks go to you, the Bones Fest participants, who took the time to come and share with each other your enthusiasm, your knowledge, your

skill, your art. Lots of factors make an event special, but the people make the magic. Thank you. Oh, yeah, on top of everything else, Bones Fest XI did even make a little money. *Dave Boyles and Don Gilmore*



Hosts Don Gilmore and Dave Boyles



Host Dave Boyles performing with his band, Razzmatazz

Bones Fest XII

October 17-19, 2008

St. Louis, MO

We raised and lowered the flag on BFXII and carried the RBS banner forward through the Arch and back again. And now, onward to BFXII!!!

It was an honor to serve with co-host Scott Miller in bringing our great Bones Fest to St. Louis, Missouri. It was a mighty big city for a wee group, but we were welcomed, honored and graciously served by the folks at the office of Mayor Francis Slay, who proclaimed this festival as Bones Fest XII Weekend. The Crowne Plaza Hotel, as well as the faculty and staff at the University of Missouri-St. Louis were just as welcoming.

Our group was small, but we carried

our bones high, and left a large historical footprint in the gateway, along-side footprints of Lewis and Clark, Mark Twain, and President Barack Obama, who stepped right on top of our riverboat cruise and arch-riverfront celebration. I am referring to the last minute cancellation of our riverboat cruise because of security concerns for the Obama/Biden political rally. What happens when you plan a party for 50, and 100,000 show up and they are not there to hear bones? I guess someone thought a boat load of bones players could be a dangerous thing. We are reminded that rhythm bones playing is a part of our history and continues on in spite of history.

In the Rhythm Bones Player newsletter, we promised that BFXII would have these four elements: 1) lots of bones playing; 2) reunion of old and new friends; 3) the teaching and learning of all things bones; and, 4) lots of bones playing. That we did,



Co-Host Spike Bones



Host Spike Bones in the middle and Scott Miller at right and the Arch



Co-Host Scott Miller

thanks to all the support, creative input, hard work and hard play by the RBS Board, its members and all the BFXII participants, and Show Me Bones Family volunteers. The bad news for all of you who could not attend is that you missed a great festival. The double good news is that, "Bones Fest XII: The Movie", will soon be coming to a DVD player near you. This DVD will not only document BFXII events but will also include greetings and boning by members who were unable to attend... As our clock strikes 12, BFXII will always be a celebration of twelve great Bones Festivals. *Spike Bones*

Bones Fest XIII

August 28-30, 2009

Louisville, KY

Once again, we had the pleasure of hosting Bones Fest XIII. First, we thank Mike Carter for suggesting the Clifton Center in Louisville, KY. It turned out to be exactly what we needed: from seminar rooms, to a fully equipped kitchen, to a beautiful stage and theater seating. The lighting and sound was superb, and our professional fest recording was great!

On Friday night, we had a catered pizza party at the Clifton center; enough pizza of various types and drinks to feed a small army! That night happened to be the birthday of Spike Bones' mother and he had a special surprise for her – a cake and a “Happy Birthday” song.

We had a wonderful selection of bones vendors, probably the largest selection we have seen to date. It was really fun

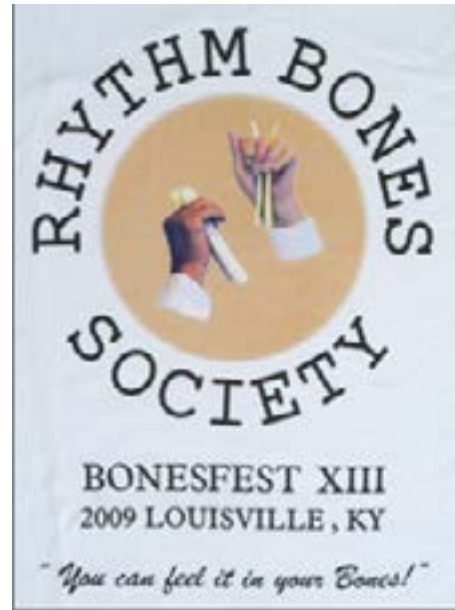
to hear everyone picking up new bones and trying them out. Some of the sounds were just amazing!

We want to thank Martha Cummings for letting us rope her into being the MC for the evening. We have to say she did one heck of a job. Her brother, Al Cowett, who was MC for many years, better watch out! Martha, you are the best!!

Steve Brown was dearly missed as he had a last minute emergency involving his son, Jeremy. We are happy to report that Jeremy is doing fine. We'd also like to take this opportunity to thank Steve Brown researching and arranging for the live music we had at this year's event. The Dixieland Band, The Rascals of Ragtime, was just awesome—they ROCKED!

Our Ceili Band was just as amazing with Jonathan Danforth on fiddle, Kenny Wolin on concertina, and Teri Davies on her Martin guitar. They were joined by local musicians Cathy Wilde on flute and whistle, and Larry Green on fiddle. Amazing how everyone who played with this group did so with precision and FUN!

A big highlight was when Kenny Wolin proposed to Teri Davies on stage. He dropped to one knee, and in front of all of us, popped the question. Teri was stunned; she said, “YES!” How cool is that?? Gil and Linda Hibben



Kenny Wolin Proposes to Teri on Stage



Hosts Linda and Gil Hibben



Bones Fest XIII Grand Finale

Bones Fest XIV July 23-25, 2010 Alexandria, VA

When I go to a Bones Fest, magic happens because talented people attend, and Bones Fest XIV was no exception. The Lyceum, steeped in its own history in historic Old Towne Alexandria, VA, was the perfect venue for the Fest. Across the Potomac River was our nation's Capitol and the home of "The President's Own" U.S. Marine Band with hosts Kenny Wolin, a member of that band, and Teri Davies, who as you will see, was moving from Buffalo to Virginia.

The Fest began on Thursday evening with a reception in the RBS Hospitality Suite in the Crown Plaza Hotel for those folks for whom two and a half days of rhythm bones playing was just not enough.

The Fest officially began Friday at 11:30 AM with a reception of food and drink, jamming, the Bones Marketplace, and people renewing old and making new friendships. In the afternoon there were two workshops. Steve Brown led one on how to play Irish music and how to join in an Irish session. Tim Reilly led one on how to play drum rudiments on rhythm bones.

Can there be a Bones Fest without a rib bones dinner? This was catered by the Red Hot and Blue Restaurant, and the rest of the evening was fun with informal performances by most everyone.



Irish Bones Jam at Farmer's Market

On Saturday, there was an Irish Bone Jam Session at the Alexandria Farmer's Market on the City Hall Pavilion Stage. One of the grand highlights was holding the largest pass-off in history, and tried to get it sanctioned by the Guinness Book of Records. Music was provided by Shepherd's Pie and some of our hosts' friends.

After lunch, there were more "Art" workshops in the Lyceum: Tim Reilly started them off with "The Ancient Art of Bone Scrimshaw;" Spike Bones led "Rhythm

Bones and the Art of Dance;" and Kenny Wolin's was "Taking it to the Next Level – The Art of 2-Hand Independence".

After a pizza dinner, we reorganized for our public performances. The doors opened at 6 PM for beginner lessons led by the Meschers and an open Bones Marketplace. At 6:30 the show began, and continued until everyone who wanted to perform did so in some kind of costume or better dress. Apart from the wedding host, Teri's greatest Bones Fest highlight was performing bones on stage for the first time with her daughter, Emily. Everyone had a great time.

Most of us went back to the hotel and jammed until the wee hours. Greg Adams and Bob Winans, both with their period minstrel banjos, played for a couple more hours. Lots more rhythm bones jamming!

According to the hosts, the highlight of the weekend happened Sunday morning. At 9 AM sharp, attendees gathered in the lobby of the hotel and waited for Gunnery Sgt. Kenneth Scott Wolin, in full dress uniform, to walk down the stairs and lead everyone to Trans-Potomac Canal Central. Music was provided by Jonathan Danforth on violin and Mary Audette on flute, playing Teri's favorite waltz, "Give Me Your Hand." The crowd hushed as Teri Davies walked down the curved stairs to the landing, where, after pausing, walked down more stairs passing through the raised bones of the Rhythm Bones Honor Guard. It was a beautiful culmination of Kenny's proposal to Teri on stage at Bones Fest XIII (to the surprise of Teri and all

(Continued on Page 16)



Hosts Teri and Kenny Wolin were married at the Fest



Bones Fest XIV Group Photograph

Bones Fest XV June 10-12, 2011 San Antonio, TX

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

On Friday and Saturday mornings, all the attendees gathered at the Alamo Courtyard to jam and play for many spectators. The Alamo staff personally thanked me for having this event.

Many of you commented about how much you enjoyed the dinner cruise. This enjoyable dinner cruise was a first for me, too. I also enjoyed the parts of the river that the tour barges do not visit so that was also a “baby book” experience



for me. I chose the Casa Rio Restaurant for two reasons: It is my favorite place to eat when I am downtown, and Steve Brown said he wanted some real Texas Chili. From the 1860’s to the 1930’s, the San Antonio Chili Queens plied their food wares from their carts on Alamo Plaza. The chili on our dinner plates was one of the Chili Queen’s recipes!

I also hope you found the Alamo and

the I-Max movie informative. If we had been in another part of San Antonio I would not have scheduled this event – but since we were right across the street...

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

A big “Thank You” goes out to Walt. Walt had contracted with a duo to play for the Friday and Saturday jam sessions. After much negotiating, we were allowed to use the hotel’s meeting rooms for jamming. The duo was wonderful and really added extra enjoyment to the jamming.

Steve Wixson and I discussed how much we enjoyed planning and executing this Fest. With Steve’s encouragement, and prediction that in 5 years I could host another Fest, I decided that I would be happy to serve once more. (And, that prediction is a reality! Dennis is hosting the Fest in 2017!)

Performance highlights that I enjoyed: The way the pattern of the notes of “Golden Slippers” is played on the Hammered Dulcimer allows for this



Host Dennis Riedesel

song to be played at a very high tempo. When Sky and Dana shifted through the gears into super (Continued on Page 16)



Dennis Riedesel on the right with the Tanner Family Minstrel Band

Bones Fest XVI

August 9-11, 2012

Orlando, FL

Our “Sweet Sixteen” Bones Fest XVI was celebrated in Orlando, Florida, at the elegant Rosen Plaza Hotel. Cuisine from gourmet to deli fare was available in the hotel, as well as a game room and a nightclub for the night owl bones players. Across the street was Pointe Orlando, with a myriad of restaurants and pubs.

Our weekend began on Thursday night when 31 bones players and guests ventured into Pleasure Island, Downtown Disney, to have dinner and play bones at the Raglan Road Irish Pub. Colin Farrell and Damien McCarthy of the house band, Creel, gave us “cead mile failte” (meaning, “a hundred thousand welcomes”) and invited RBS members to play with the band.



Some of the Performers at BB King's

The first to go were Jonathan Danforth and Skeff Flynn. They did a “talking bones face off” and wowed the crowd. Their bones danced in their hands and the call and response conversation of the bones kept us all wondering what would happen next.

Then, came the four showmen – Hank Tenenbaum, Mitch Boss, “Spike Bones” Muhrer, and “Black Bart” Boyles – who asked the band to play Bill Staines’ song, “All God’s Creatures Got a Place in the Choir”. Demonstrating four different styles of bones playing, they rocked the pub. They played low, higher, loud and they were on fire! Off the stage they came, conga-line snaking through the tables. Imagine our surprise when they boldly climbed on top of the Irish dancer stage among the dining

tables! Spike returned to the main stage, strutting gracefully while Hank, Mitch and “Black Bart” Dave turned back to back and played their bones facing the audience from all directions. The crowd roared, whistled, hooted and applauded! The band grinned in wide-eyed wonder. Everyone loved it! The three made their way back to the stage, and a foursome once again, they ended their tune to a standing ovation from about 160 people in the audience.

We finished the show with our champion “All Ireland” bones player, Steve Brown. The Band, Creel, cranked up the music and played a lightning fast set as Steve matched them note for note. It was fast and furious and everyone could clearly see how the champ won his title. Steve and the band raised the roof! The crowd was on its’ feet stomping, dancing and clapping to the rhythm of the bones. Bones Fest XVI players created an unforgettable night for all at the Raglan Road Irish Pub.

Friday was an astounding, full day of workshops, bones stories, and jamming. We spent the day in our conference room at the Rosen Plaza where music was provided by Brogan’s Blues Band and Just in Time, an old time music band. Sharon and Jerry Mescher kicked off the informal workshops by demonstrating and explaining how to hold the bones and how to make the first movements to get sounds. Sharon then asked everyone to think about and share “what you know” and “how you do it”.

Every Bones Fest is different. A Fest personality develops from the camaraderie of those who come, and you never know who will come. We were all surprised and delighted by new bones player, Jim Steakley, from Sanford, Florida. At 99 years old, he decided to learn to play the bones. His daughter, Jimi, from Alabama, brought her father to his first fest. I suggested that her father might prefer to attend the afternoon jamming and performances, but, no, her father wanted to attend the workshops so he could learn to play better. In 1948, at a West Virginia restaurant, Jim remembered seeing a coal miner play three bones in each hand. “I went to the restaurant just to hear him



Hosts Mary Lee and Frank Sweet

play the bones; came today to learn. Don’t know if I will learn, but I have the opportunity. I tried to straighten the bones, but they don’t straighten!”

Jim played the bones and Steve Brown got the audience to clap a rhythm... Jim Steakley’s opportunity to learn more about playing the bones will surely be one of the “precious memories” that BFXVI attendees will treasure. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJF3cGpxdSM>)

Throughout the day, methods were shared by Mitch Boss, Steve Brown, Steve Wixson, Skeff Flynn, Dennis Riedesel, Jonathan Danforth, Jerry and Sharon Mescher, Dave “Black Bart” Boyles, and Darryl “Spike Bones” Muhrer. Many others who shared ideas during the jams included:

- a. Hank Tenenbaum, quietly circulated and offered

(Continued on Page 16)



Bones Fest XVI Group Photograph

Bones Fest XVII

August 9-11, 2013

Leominster, MA

As I look back at my second fest, it's hard not to reflect on my mistakes as well as the successes. My biggest mistake was focusing too hard on a location that I could not get, and I wasted a lot of time trying to make it work. When I finally accepted the direction it was going, it was a real joy. My favorite moments were spread over the entire weekend.

On Thursday night I had arranged for a group of us to go to the local cable TV company and perform on the Mayor of Leominster's weekly program. We met as a group and took turns performing in front of the camera. Afterward we went to one of our favorite restaurants. As a group of about 20, we sat down together and had a marvelous dinner. With all the stress of organizing just going out the window, and the joy of getting together, the real focus, I think I relaxed for the first time that week. On Friday, we attempted to perform the first community outreach visits as part of a Bones Fest.

The first was at the Boys and Girls Club of Leominster/Fitchburg. We met at the hotel and I went with the group to make introductions and settle them in. Within minutes, Bill Vits had taken control of the audience and had their undivided attention. With the event in good hands, I ran off to the Senior

Center to set up and organize that visit. Adam Klein was already there and entranced the seniors with his voice and banjo. Seeing the events take off through our members was a real thrill for me. On Friday, I had arranged for a casual evening of jamming with a friend, Paul Luria, and Bob Goulet's band who had graciously donated their time. The evening was in great form when an old friend, Victor Albert, dropped in with his fiddle. Victor, now in his 80's, had played at my first Bones Fest. It was a great thrill for me to see him jamming with our members. At the end of the night, the entire Cowett family arrived, and that was inspiring.

Saturday afternoon we attempted the first bones playing flash mob at Kimball Farms in Lancaster. One of the best ice cream restaurants in the area, they are always crowded. In the huge tent to one side of their building, Jonathan Danforth and Frank Sweet started with a fiddle tune. Soon 40 something bones players joined in and the ice cream goers were amazed! We hung out for several hours, repeating our performance, and getting free ice cream to boot!

The Saturday night performance took on the persona that many of our Saturday night performances do --- it was marvelous!

I thank each and every attendee, the musicians, and our hosts for making it a special time! *Stephen Brown*



Host Steve Brown



First RBS Flash mob at Kimball Farm



Bones Fest XVII Group Photograph taken at the Kimball Farm

Bones Fest XVIII August 7-10, 2014 Grand Rapids, MI

At Bones Fest XVIII, 50 attendees gathered in my home town of Grand Rapids, MI. Once people had arrived at the Riverfront Hotel on Thursday, many folks went to the One Trick Pony for dinner and a rousing evening of bones playing with Sean & Seamus – guys that are dear musical friends who played “bone-friendly” tune after tune. San Slomovits surprised many with Emily & Jacob and a mini-set of their intimate music (<http://sanemilyandjacob.wix.com/sanemilyandjacob>).



Flashmob in Downtown with Celtic Kilroy

On Friday, the Fest started at the Guest House in the cheesy charm of the old Polish Hall, which made us feel right at home. At 12:30 we all converged at Rosa Parks Circle where Celtic Kilroy was “frozen” as a bronze statue with bones. A crowd of spectators started to develop at the “What is that?” sight! Suddenly, 30 bones players brought him to life and played along to Irish tunes from a hidden speaker. Steve Wixson and I enjoyed jamming with a local street musician. Yes, we played a medley including Michael Jackson’s “Billie Jean”!

After lunch, we returned to the Guest House for Stephen Brown’s clinic on beginning bones. With his logical and relaxed approach, several newbies were playing in no time. Teaching bones requires patience, humor and physical contact, and Stephen has the magic.

I did a clinic on rudimental bones and covered flams, paradiddles, doubles as they can work into our bones playing. I enjoy playing the bones at a small drum set which adds lots of possibilities.

This Bones Fest was a tribute to Percy Danforth and we were blessed to have his son, grandson, and great-grandson(!) in attendance. Another special guest was Sue Barber, who wrote and documented much of Percy’s rhythm bone history. Discussion and stories were lively and all agreed Percy would be thrilled to see our organization. Malcolm “Mac” Danforth brought an inherited treasure box of his father’s memorabilia: clippings, pictures, drawings and awards that Percy had received. We all found something in that box that excited or touched our hearts. One article quoted Fran, Percy’s wife, saying, “Percy is a musician like a bird is...but I’m a trained musician.” Mac gave this treasure trove to Percy’s grandson, Jonathan Danforth.

Friday evening we were treated to a Polish dinner, and my wife Stacey’s desserts. After the meal we still had energy to all get up and perform as a rehearsal for our Saturday night show. Jay Round and Tom Devries supplied hammered dulcimer, bass and guitar for live music while Jay ran sound and coordinated CD’s, iPhone tablets and anything with an output. For the Saturday night show we had 26 acts to coordinate.

Saturday found some second day registrants and folks jammed while we snuck in a board meeting. Randy Seppala and Ste-



Host Bill Vits

phen Brown were selling beautiful bones of all types between teaching and giving tips. At lunch time 90-year old Lew Guernsey, from Ionia, arrived in a BMW convertible. Lew knew Percy (Continued on Page 18)



Bones Fest XVIII Group Photograph

Bones Fest XIX

August 6-9, 2015

Shepherdstown, WV

Hello RBS members! I need to start out by saying that it was an absolute blessing to be able to host Bones Fest XIX. Throughout the weekend I was reminded of what an incredible community this is. I believe it was Mitch Boss who said to me “this is the only place you’ll go where everyone you meet just wants to figure out what you’re doing well.” I couldn’t agree more. We all seem to look for and to bring out the best in each other.

I should also note that there are far too many memories to fit into a single article. I will do my best to cover as much as I can, but I know that I can’t get to everything.



Stage at Shepherdstown Opera House

Bones Fest XIX officially kicked off on August 6th in the Tuscany Grille at the Clarion Hotel in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. My good friends, The Shedhoppers, did what they do best. They brought their enthusiasm and their openness and played honest renditions of a wide range of material. Their support was the foundation for a great opening night and the bones players in attendance were more than happy to jump right in, playing and even singing along.

A good bones player has rhythm, but even the best bones players seem to move on a time of their own. The phrase “herding cats” comes to mind... Friday morning was challenging. And then Stan Von Hagen gave me a gift sometime after lunch. He asked about the program for the afternoon and I could see the sincere desire to learn in his eyes. He spurred me to action...I learned a lot about hosting a Bones Fest on Friday and Saturday was better as a result. Stan was a big part of

that. I see a real difference in Stan’s playing this year over last and it’s that desire to learn that will keep him moving forward. I’m awarding him the unofficial “most improved player” award this year (I ‘unofficially’ received this award myself in 2011 from Steve Brown).

We had workshops on Friday and Saturday. During Friday’s workshop, Eric Fredenburgh would start a tune and we would send it around the room pass-off style. After each tune we would highlight accent points, recognize approaches that worked and answer questions. On Saturday, The Shedhoppers put on the workshop. Some of the main topics we covered were: adjusting volume to match the ensemble, when to embellish, and when to play simple patterns.

There are definitely two separate and distinct notions about bones playing. One is that the bones are something of a novelty. The bones should be played fast and loud with flare and showmanship for a tune...taking a lead role in the music or in the performance. The other is that the bones should be understated and supportive of the music and as such could be present throughout. This latter position is one I have mostly found myself taking.

Bones Fest XIX was dedicated to the memory of Walt Watkins and Jerry Mescher. In my welcome message for the program I said that “the connections we make and the impact we have on others lives are at least as important as the music we play”, and so on Friday



Host Skeffington Flynn

afternoon we took time to reflect on the impact that these men had on our community and to celebrate their legacy. Steve Wixson put together some excellent video presentations that served as introductions for those that didn’t know them and as reminiscence for those that did. Participants shared their favorite stories and we closed with a massive pass-off. These two Bones Ambassadors are surely missed but they live on in the vibrant tradi- (Continued on Page 18)



Bones Fest XIX Group Photograph at Shepherd University Student Center

Bones Fest XX

August 4-7, 2016

Homer, NY

Here I sit on Monday morning and Bones Fest XX is over. The 43 participants from 19 states and 1 Canadian Province have scattered back to their homes and I sit here in a partial coma. The last week has been a whirlwind of activity for Janet and me. Except for this report the paper work is done, the bills are paid and unless Steve Wixson thinks of something else this one is in the bag.

Oops, he did think of something else. I



Another Kenny Wolin Advanced Workshop

forgot to publicly thank Jim Conner for the inspiration for the BF XX T-shirts. Back at Bones Fest X he made a prophesy that the shirt would have a picture of the world with twenty bones coming out like rays of the sun. Glad he came up with that as a picture of a Cortland apple playing the bones was my first thought. Thanks, Jim.

A word about Steve Wixson. He is the background guiding hand that makes these

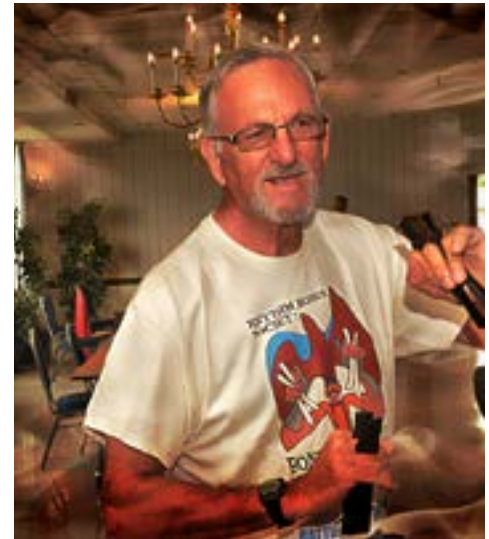
festivals come to life. The Host's guide book, time line and the periodic email that says it is time for this or that, keeps things moving along. Between his help and the advice of Steve Brown, from time to time, most of the stress was of my own making. In the last week I learned not to schedule events on too tight a time line. I also learned that dealing with a group of musicians can be like herding cats. But those cats can make a Bones Fest purr. In the opinion of everyone I spoke with it was a huge success.

The Friday morning seminars by Bill Vits and Steve Brown were enlightening and confusing at the same time. Enlightening because they both touched on aspects of bones playing I struggle with and confusing because if I live to be a hundred I will never gain the skill set of either of them. It is sufficient that I pick up a tidbit here and there to move me forward in my practice.



The Grand Finale

The Friday afternoon outreach projects were my most stressful points of the weekend as I timed things too closely after lunch and did (Continued on Page 19)



Host Gerry Hines



Lime Hollow Nature Center Day Camp Outing led by Bill Vits

Bones Fest XIV

attendees). Then it was back to the hotel for a champagne breakfast and farewells.

Steve Brown thought the new attendees were quite impressive, and there must have been 10-15 folks who had never been to a Fest. Each and every one of them was enthusiastic and charmed by the event. He was pleased to see Wilma Myers, who looked in good health, and the Cowetts, all playing together again. He was thrilled that Bob Winans had come, and he was, Steve thought, impressed with the event. Many thanks to Bob and Greg Adams for coming back to the hotel and playing tunes and informing us about the banjo, long into the night. *Kenny and Teri Wolin*

Bones Fest XV Continued

overdrive it was all I could do to keep up and I was thumping along on the beat—pity those musicians that had to fill up less and less space in between the beats!

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

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

Naturally all of the individual performances were wonderful for me to observe, but I was especially enthralled when the players formed the various combinations to perform together in twos and threes. I do not recall seeing many of these combinations in past Bones Fests so it was interesting to watch each player fit their technique into the technique of their partners. I am glad things worked out time wise so we could do more of these group performances than what we were able to do in past Fests. And while I am thinking in terms of duets and trios, it is always a highlight experience to watch the Meschers. Randy's silver spoon bones were very interesting when applied to the waltz. I can only recall Randy doing this to, "Silver Bells". After I heard him play some of the other waltzes, I thought maybe I could throw Randy a curve when I asked the band to play my favorite

waltz, "OOT PIK", but Randy's spoons were beautiful with this song.

After determining who was attending the Fest, I did not schedule formal workshops because everyone wanted to jam with Jay and Tammy and the Tanner Family Minstrels. They attended workshops as they watched each others solo performances and then watched each other during the pass-offs and picked up techniques via that method. I was also interested in those of you who played along with Gene's blues guitar. I have performed along with him in the past so I was interested in what could be done in concert with this instrument.

For an off stage event I had asked Larry to bring along his "Fiddle Sticks" fiddle. Steve Brown, Bill Vits, and a few others got to try out or see this percussive technique.

I do not know why the Alamo Staff was so interested in the bones. They had a modern set in the archives collections and brought the set out to the patio. I did not see this, but Steve Wixson told me that Dr. Winders, who led our special Alamo tour, actually played in our final group on Saturday. I was also pleased to see those who were with us, at the hotel, rattle out the triplets. Thank you, teachers; maybe we can actually get some new members. *Dennis Riedesel*

Bones Fest XIV Continued

one-on-one instruction;

b. Chuck Spano...let the non-musicians know about the importance of ending at the same time as the music;

c. "Spike Bones" explained that you have to "feel it in your bones"; he taught us a flat clap, a cup clap, and a flat cup clap to show different sounds one can achieve;

d. Steve Wixson and Dave "Black Bart" Boyles demonstrated how to keep a steady blues beat as the audience plays along with them...;

e. Steve Brown told how Percy Danforth taught two elements of play – the tap and the rattle...and added the double tap...;

f. Dennis Riedesel demonstrated the "fly swatter" technique and stressed flipping back and forth. But his unique contribution...was his lecture on the "science of playing the bones";

g. Dave Boyles performed with his washboard and bones to different types of music;

([http://youtube.com/watch?v=PBfu-](http://youtube.com/watch?v=PBfu-47OoSkA)

47OoSkA)

h. Skeff Flynn shared that a bones player should pick out the melody and accent it with the bones... Mitch Boss joined Skeff to demonstrate a duo sound: playing the same beat, different beats at the same time, and playing in tandem;

i. Steve Wixson showed different styles of play and different types of bones;

j. Jonathan Danforth played fiddle while Steve Brown gave tips on playing Irish... While Barry Brogan played a slow blues song and sang, Jonathan demonstrated how to listen for the opportunities to insert bones rhythms and how to use varied patterns of play. When a performer is singing, one should use quiet beats;

k. The Mescher Trio threw caution to the wind by playing to live music with Bluesman Barry. As Jerry, said, "...We're in dark territory here". But, when it was over, Barry declared, "It worked"!

Bones jamming, singing and stories highlighted Friday evening. The bands played and everyone rattled their bones while experienced players found new players to coach:

l. Dave Boyles started a sit-down pass-off, a traditional pass-off and a conga line.

m. Dennis Riedesel, Gerry Hines, Steve Brown, Larry Benson, Bob Gross, Ivan Browning and Mitch Boss shared bones stories.

n. Steve Wixson gave a one minute history of the bones.

o. Jonathan Danforth fiddled while the "Happiest Bones Player", Jeremy Brown, played his bones.

p. John Davis from Virginia, who has played bones for 66 years, wowed us with his expertise!

q. Larry Benson asked all bones players to back him up while he sang the old country song, "I'm My Own Grandpa".

r. Dave "Black Bart" Boyles, was the man in black – black pants, shirt, hat and a silver "washboard" tie!

s. First time Bones Fest attendee, Philip "Vgo" Terry, a Florida musical treasure, played and sang while Mitch Boss, Sharon Mescher and Dave Boyles played in their different styles.

t. Bob Gross played ukulele and sang how ukuleles are not allowed in bluegrass music because Bill Monroe never had one.

u. Hank Tenebaum, who played with

Vgo, busking on the streets of D.C., 40 years ago, rattled his bones while Vgo did the traditional ragtime, "Talking Hard Luck".

v. Dave Boyles got everyone on their feet in a conga-line leading to the exit and a good night to some while others did a bit of pub crawling. Rumor has it that one young man, after the pub crawls, spent the rest of the night dancing the Zumba with the Zumba Conference ladies at our hotel!

Saturday morning began with a very elegant, delicious, and beautifully presented catered breakfast buffet.

Back in the conference room bands played, bones rattled, Steve Brown, Hank Tenenbaum and others provided coaching, and ninety-nine year old, Jim Steakley, enjoyed practicing his bones and getting individual instruction. Many thanks to his daughter, Jimi Johnson, for bringing him. Steve Brown presented a workshop on making bones and how to choose the right bones. Then, we all headed to B.B. King's for our "Blues Bones Show".

Josh Pender, manager of B.B King's Restaurant and Blues Club at Pointe Orlando, graciously sponsored the Bones Fest XVI, "Sweet Sixteen Party" on Saturday afternoon... We presented a one hour rhythm bones performance in the bluesiest style we could muster. Blues and jazz music by Barry Brogan, Florida legend Philip "Vgo" Terry, and old time mountain blues by Just in Time, provided the rhythm and the beat for a variety of bones players. It might have been the first time a blues club featured a banjo player.

The Saturday evening program was emceed by Steve Brown, with his traditional style and grace keeping the audience's attention while bands changed and bones players rotated on and off the stage. The fast paced show highlighted:

a. Our Mescher Trio (All members of the Iowa Country Music Hall of Fame);

b. The "bone-off" between "Black Bart" and "Spike Bones";

c. The talking bones of Jonathan Danforth and Skeff Flynn;

d. The old time skills of John Davis;

e. Hank Tenenbaum, who played with Vgo's music, made it look smooth

and easy as he matched any beat played. He had bones in his shirt pocket and a bag of bones hanging from his belt;

f. Dennis Riedesel joined Spike for some talking bones;

g. Mitch Boss played "Kansas City Blues" with Black Bart and Skeff;

h. Jonathan Danforth entertaining the crowd when Steve wasn't talking and the band wasn't ready;

i. During "Alabama Jubilee", Mitch, Spike and Black Bart showed their entertainment chops: they played to the left, they played to the right, they wiggled in the middle, did a circle "round and a butt bow"!

j. Jeremy Brown, "the happiest bones player", was introduced, and his smile lit up the room.

k. Then, everyone was invited to join the traditional bones conga line. Even General Manager, Josh, grabbed a pair of bones and joined the parade...all bowed and retired from the stage to order some of the most excellent food served by B.B. King's. Memories are made of this!

l. Saturday night we told stories, played music, performed bones playing to CDs, or the bands, and got to know each other a little better. Philip Chan told us a story and played his harmonica for us. Skeff Flynn told a story and played bones, as did Mitch Boss.

m. Kathy Whisler boldly played bones while singing the ballad of "Anne Bonny". She ended with a smile that should be on a poster advertising bones playing! Frank and Mary Lee Sweet told the story of a Florida cow hunter, Bone Mizell, and sang "Camp Town Races". Larry Benson treated us to a humorous song about a medical expert, and Gerry Hines told us his example of a "moral story" about his Aunt Mary;

n. Jonathan Danforth showed us how to play with palm frond bones (suggested by son, Emmett) as he whistled a tune in his talented style. Spike took his clothes off in the dark, revealing an amazing ability to stand on one foot in his glow-in-the-dark skeleton suit. The skeleton danced, the audience applauded, and the bones rattled;

o. Skeff Flynn began with a story of spoons players in West Virginia and then played bones and sang, "Country Roads", accompanied by Just in Time.

"Dopplegangers, Mitch Boss and Steve Brown, clowning around as they played bones to the music and amused us all.

Our night ended, for the first time ever, with the music of Bob Campbell's bagpipes. He played his pipes as everyone tried their hand at a new sound and beat. Black Bart led the conga-line parade as we bid another Bones Fest adieu.

On Sunday morning, Bones Fest XVI participants gathered at the Café Matisse Restaurant and enjoyed the breakfast buffet. Those who remained were treated to an hour of Gospel Bones. Hosts Frank and Mary Lee Sweet displayed the lyrics of the songs on a screen and everyone joined them in singing and playing the bones. Frank played banjo, Philip Chan played harmonica, Steve Brown played the penny whistle, and Jonathan joined in with fiddle. Amazing Grace was requested and proved to be challenging...but as Hank Tenenbaum noted, Jeremy Brown "nailed it"!

A Special "Thank You" to:

a. All the spouses who came and joined us for shows and meals.

b. Jonathan and Melissa for bringing Emmett, great-grandson of Percy Danforth.

c. Pat Spano for designing our Bones Playing Gator T-shirt.

d. Chuck Spano for having the T-Shirts produced and playing percussion with two bands.

e. Frank Sweet who provided the sound system and served as sound man.

f. The Mescher Trio for the precision, artistry and matching outfits that make them stars.

g. Dave "Black Bart" Boyles for keeping the show moving and leading the conga lines.

h. Steve Brown for being the best emcee a Bones Fest could have.

i. Darryl "Spike Bones" Muhrer for the showmanship and star quality performances.

j. Hank Tenenbaum for one-on-one instruction to so many and for bringing his friend, Vgo, who shared so much talent with us.

k. Steve Wixson for being the man behind the curtain. He provided information, answered questions, made suggestions, listened, printed name tags and programs, helped with the fest proposal, the budget and the financial report, did

incredible things with the website and reimbursed me for out of pocket expenses.

“Thank you” to ALL of YOU who came and shared your stories, your songs and your love of playing rhythm bones. *Mary Lee Sweet*

Bones Fest XVIII Continued

and even made a set of bones on his machinery. He shared his wonderful collection of bones with me and even gave me a set of noisemaker “cheater bones”. He had never seen such a congregation of players!

Saturday saw clinics by Skeffington Flynn on bones history and beginning bones. Skeff is doing great things for the RBS, including a brochure that is now available to promote the bones. Spike Bones got the crowd loose by circling the players and encouraging participation. Celtic Kilroy gave great tips on harmonica and bones while busking. His multi/instrument energy was infectious. A quick membership meeting featured lowering our dues from \$25 to \$20.

Saturday’s dinner had more great food... while Stacey made more delicious desserts. Before you knew it, it was almost show-time and folks wandered in not really knowing what to expect.

After doing three radio and TV promotions, we had a good turnout of interested listeners. The show was fast paced and the variety of styles and techniques was astounding. All the regulars performed, but I must mention a few others. The next generation of bones players were Anika and Joseph Kooi who played the bones AND tap danced! Jack Frost cracked me up when he played a gallop rhythm and pretended to “whip the horse.” Kathy Whisler sang and played with a wonderful voice (she’s a lawyer). Jeremy Brown, the “Superman of the Bones,” closed the first half with a crowd pleasing performance to “Happy” which caused big smiles all around.

The second half featured the Mescher family, Mary Lee & Frank Sweet and more veterans of previous fests. Gerard Arseneault brought out the smiles, and Sky Barlett blew the roof as he looked like Bruce Lee with rhythm bones. Celtic Kilroy showed his musical versatility, Steve Wixson jammed with Jay on the upright bass and Spike Bones put on a mini-minstrel show. The grand finale was our conga line with all

participants on their feet.

After the show, tear down & clean up, we celebrated back at the “Danforth Suite” and said our good-byes at brunch the next morning. The RBS is healthy, happy and teaching new people to play the bones. Thank you all who traveled to GR and trusted me to host Bones Fest XVIII. *Bill Vits*

Bones Fest XIX Continued

tions they helped instill in us.

Ben Denny needs special recognition as, not only did The Shedhoppers provide music, he also stayed late, sat in on the jams, and introduced the Tin Roof Pickers, who played for the Saturday night program. Many, many thanks are in order.

Perhaps my favorite story from late night...came on Friday night. There was a wedding party at the Clarion...and the 94 year old grandmother...happened by the Morgan room. She remembered hearing her grandfather play the bones and asked if she could sit with us for a tune or two. Of course she was welcome! As she got situated Rowan jumped up and played the bones for her. As I understand it she was visibly jubilant, happily pantomiming the motions of playing the bones and tapping her foot in time with the music. Moments like this are truly a gift to everyone involved.

Speaking of Rowan Corbett, he is currently a member of the Carolina Chocolate Drops...he is doing more for bones playing than he realizes by being out in the world and playing bones in all of the venues that he does. Eric Fredenburgh said to me at one point that he was enjoying watching some of the interactions and pointed to Rowan as an example. I said, “Yeah, I love Rowan”, to which he replied, “I love Rowan and I don’t even know him!”

The public concert at the Shepherdstown Opera House on Saturday, August 8th, was absolutely the capstone of the event. Many thanks to Larry Cumbo, Nicola Larsen, Steve Cifala, and Shane Harris. I believe it was a first for a capacity crowd and actually had to turn away about a dozen people due to lack of seating. The estimate was that we had 130 people.

One of the primary concerns of the RBS is to insure the continuation of bones playing traditions. The only way

that happens is by getting young people involved. Peter Johnston learned to play from his grandfather. He then passed this on to his son, Nathaniel, who at 15 has become a formidable player.

Jeremy Brown, once again won the title of the world’s happiest bones player. For the grand finale, all of the bones players assembled on the dance floor, and The Shedhoppers and the Tin Roof Pickers launched into a chorus of “Momma Don’t Allow” (no bones playing ‘round here). We, fittingly, ended the concert with “Country Roads”.

Sunday morning began with a farewell breakfast at the Clarion. For many it was our last opportunity to connect and celebrate our fellowship. What a wonderful site to see so many of our members enjoying a meal together.

In wrapping this up, I need to recognize a few more key contributors:

a. One of these contributors was recognized during the fest – Steve Wixson... Steve is the very heart of the Rhythm Bones Society. Without his efforts I’m not sure that the RBS would exist. As part of the fest, Stephen Brown presented to Steve a gift of ebony bones that had been tooled by Jerry Mescher. What a fitting reward to recognize all that he does!

b. My drummer friend, Jon Kalbaugh, provided the sound system; 12 hours on Friday and over 8 hours on Saturday!

c. The Bones Fest XIX logo and T-shirt were composed by Marek Bennett.

d. Spike Bones provided the television we used during the remembering Walt and Jerry Session. He also pulled the audience in at the Opera House using his patented flamboyant brand of showmanship. Mary Lee Sweet once again filled the role of videographer and I look forward to seeing what she captured.

e. Tim Reilly and I talked about the passage of knowledge and traditions from the “kings to the knights” and how the “knights become the kings”.

Bones Fest is always an invigorating experience. It’s our community that makes it great. Thank you to everyone who participated in Bones Fest XIX. It really was a gift to me to be able to host this event. We all know that there are people that love us but to see it demonstrated so clearly...I’ll say it again, it’s a gift. There’s no other way to describe it. May your bones be with you. *Skeff Flynn*

Bones Fest XX Continued

not figure on an overwhelmed restaurant. A couple of phone calls to delay things a bit and everything turned out great. The folks who entertained at the senior living center had a small but very appreciative audience. Those of us who went to the day camp at Lime Hollow Nature Center had the opportunity to teach 71 campers, ages 8 to 14, to play the bones. Amazingly a few of them got it right off. Bill Vits has a way with kids and really gets in their face making them pay attention. The kids had all been on an overnight camp-out and were up until 1:30 AM (sounds like a bones jam), and were filthy and tired. With Ben Denny, Jonathan Danforth and Adam Klein on guitar, fiddle and banjo, respectively, the kids were all wide awake. The Dutch Penny Bones (invented by Dutch Kopp) were a big hit. A few of the more greedy campers figured out how to loosen the pennies but most tried to play them.

Our Friday night meal was consumed with great gusto. We had gotten 7 party sub platters from Subway. Janet and I were wondering how we were going to get rid of all that food. Our worries were in vain of course as 43 hungry bones players demolished those platters, plus the 108 cookies that came with them. Evidently bones playing is a high calorie burn!

The Friday night rehearsal show with the live band, Metku, was great entertainment for ourselves and gave us a chance to get the kinks out. Ty Marshall, who is the director of Homer Center for the Arts, sent us a sound tech, Seth Asa, who has some very real skills and made us sound like the professionals that many of our leading bones players are. Speaking of professionals, Adam Klein had only one day available to be with us and wowed us as usual with an a capella voice and bones routine. Moving into the planning of the Saturday night show we realized that a five minute time limit was going to be necessary to get all 24 acts into a 2-hour show.

Back at the London Room in the hotel the serious (OK, maybe not serious, Mitch was there) jamming continued into

the night as it did all 3 nights. These jam sessions are probably the highlight of every Bones Fest as we are not performing for anybody. We are relaxing and enjoying being with good friends and playing the bones.

Saturday morning was another outreach to the public with a beginner's bones playing class. It started with Kenny Wolin and Tim Reilly doing a "Shanty Sing" tying in the old time sailor's life and the bones. They got the audience ready for the serious (really?) teaching done by Steve Brown. Steve Wixson, acting as teacher's helper, had a friend of Janet's playing with 2 hands before the end. Either Steve is a great teacher or she is a natural. Both of those things are probably true. Several attendees bought bones from our vendors both after the class and during and after the evening show.

It is hard to pick "the" highlight of the Saturday show. Rowan Corbett and ilyAMy would certainly be on the list. The vast improvement of Stan Van Hagen, Kenny Wolin's disco routine, Steve Brown and Mitch with their usual antics, Ben Denny being backed by Ron and Marie Bruschi waltzing in the colored lights against the back wall, Bob Goulet and Lynda Bertrand displaying a French Canadian bones duel, Dennis Riedesel's bones light show. All of the acts were wonderful and different and showed off the many talents of our RBS members. I hope without mentioning all 24 I haven't hurt any feelings. I can't leave out of course our "World's happiest bones player", Jeremy Brown, whose Superman act brought down the house. At the end of the show the crowd was on its' feet in a standing ovation.

The last jam session of Bones Fest XX kept us (them) going until after 1:30 AM. I fell in a heap about 12:30. Two ladies who attended the show at Bones Fest XIX drove all the way from West Virginia to the Bones Fest XX show and stayed up until almost midnight at the jam session. They were grinning from ear to ear all evening.

Sunday morning breakfast - a bitter sweet experience. A good-bye to family for another year. If any of you get to Arizona this winter look me up and we will rattle the streets of Tombstone together.
Gerry Hines

Steve Wixson Continued

combination of a comet and the Tasmanian devil from a Bugs Bunny cartoon -- awe inspiring. It's difficult to think about what the Rhythm Bones Society would be without him: how he's influenced the structure of Bones Fests, how he single-handedly created the Newsletter and keeps it going, how he continually comes up with new ideas like the online museum, and how he never seems to run out of energy. Steve, thank you for not just everything you do, but for all you do to make us better at what we do! *Stephen Brown*

Where would our bones society be without him? From my first Internet contact and my first Bones Fest in Chattanooga, I knew that Steve Wixson loved the bones. Not only the bones, but all the interesting people that play them. He has educated and inspired me; unafraid to always share what we do. A true expert on the subject, Steve never belittles and that has set the tone for our society. When I found out he also sang Barbershop music, this also resonated as my father lived to harmonize. Thank you, Steve, for perpetuating our unique music making and connecting people who are still excited by hitting two bones together! *Bill Vits*

Time to Renew Membership

Be a part of the next decade of Bones Fests by renewing your membership for 2017. Of course, you do not have to be a member to attend a Bones Fest, but I will use any trick to get members to renew.

Our fiscal year runs from January to December, so it is time for all of us to renew.

Dues support the rhythmbones.org website, pays for the *Rhythm Bones Player* newsletter that goes in paper form to members as a membership benefit, and various projects such as the RBS Brochure and the Remember Percy Danforth Project. Newsletters are placed on our website after a period of two years. Thanks, Steve Wixson, Secretary



Bones Fest X Group photograph.. See Rhythm Bones Player, Vol 8, Special Issue, 2006, for naming diagram.

Rhythm Bones Society

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Address Correction Requested