



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

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Executive Director's Column

Bones Fest XXI is scheduled for August and the exciting news is we are returning to San Antonio! The last fest held there continues to stand out as one of the most enjoyable times, and I am so excited to be returning! San Antonio is one of the best vacation destinations in the country, and Dennis Riedesel has gone out of his way to plan activities which will not only give us all an opportunity to play for people in Texas, but also will allow us to get to know Texas and the fine community of San Antonio and surrounding towns.

This is only the second time a bones fest has been held west of the Missouri River. There are an amaz-

ing number of bones players in the West, and this is a great opportunity for those of you in the Western part of the country to attend and share your bones playing. We hope to bring a number of our regular attendee's who haven't been West before, and make this bones fest one that will truly be remembered for years to come.

I would formally like to reach out to our members in Texas, Arizona, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and especially the far west states of California, Oregon, and Washington to consider coming to San Antonio in August; the Bones will be red hot! *Steve Brown*

The Rudiments of Rhythm Bones

This article should not be interpreted as a definitive statement from the Rhythm Bones Society as to a standard for rhythm bones playing. Rather it is a discussion article to stimulate Letters to the Editor that will lead to a revised article to post on our website. You are invited to join this discussion.

This is also not an article on how to play rhythm bones. Go to our rhythmbones.org website for instructional materials.

A definition of rudiment is 'the first principles of a subject.' The subject in this case is rhythm bones, and its basic rudiments are how to hold them and how to play the Tap, Double

and Triplet.

BRIEF HISTORY

Rhythm bones are one of the oldest musical instruments most likely prehistoric. The first documentation is over 5000 years ago from China, Mesopotamia, and Egypt. Later they appear in Greece and Rome, and by Shakespeare's time, in England (he references them in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). They came to the US from Europe and in 1843 were one of four instruments (banjo, fiddle, tambourine and rhythm bones) in a band called the Virginia Minstrels that started the Minstrel era that last for 80 or so years. This was the heyday for rhythm bones as Minstrel troupes took them all over the world. As the minstrel era slowly ended so did the playing of rhythm bones around the world.

In the 1950s, Brother Bones and Mr Goon-Bones

were rhythm bones recording artists. During the last decades of the 20th Century, Percy Danforth through festival performances, workshops and an instructional video that is still sold today, kept rhythm bones alive. The Irish also were important during this time period producing many recordings with rhythm bones. In 1999, the Rhythm Bones Society was formed, and through our website, newsletter and Annual Bones Fests have done much to keep rhythm bones alive.

THE PLAYER

Rhythm bones are

(Continued on Page 4)



Rhythm Bones in the hands of Everett Cowett

Editorial

This is a different kind of issue with a Page 1 article that is a comprehensive summary of rhythm bones. Steve Brown, Bill Vits, Kenny Wolin, Tim Rielly and others have given workshops on the subject as have others in our *Rhythm Bones Player* newsletter. The legend, Percy Danfort, had a list of rudiments and what he called elements. This article tries to pull all of that information and research together in one place. This is an issue to save!

I am ready for San Antonio and Bones Fest XXI. Host, Dennis Riedesel, plans are just about complete and you can go to our website, click the Current Tab and then the Next Fest Tab for details and to register. I am practicing for it.

About the time you read this issue, the July update to our website will reveal a preview of an upgrade to our website. Rhythm Bones Central was originally developed by Martha Cowett, daughter of Ev Cowett who is the father of the Rhythm Bones Society. Jonathan Danforth later became the webmaster making his own upgrades. Now I have made my upgrade with a new homepage and the Online Museum that you may have already seen. You can make the website better by using our Contact Us Page to tell us additional features to add.

By now, most of us have seen member Dom Flemons perform with rhythm bones in the Carolina Chocolate Drops band or at least heard him on one of their videos or CDs. Dom played rhythm bones on maybe 20% of their songs. He is now out on his own performing as the 'American Songster.' I got to see his show recently and while he only played rhythm bone on his opening song, it is a terrific show from a multi-talented performer.

Letters to the Editor

May 27th I took part in the commencement parade preceding the Bowdoin College graduation ceremony. Part of the parade involves the alumni parading between the graduates (478) who are lined up on both sides of the pathway leading to the Walker Art Building where

the graduation takes place. I thought the graduates would enjoy seeing me play *When the Saints Go Marching In* with my harmonica and rhythm bones as we paraded between them. The smiles, laughs and applause that emanated from the graduates was very gratifying.

Yesterday as I viewed pictures of the Commencement on the Bowdoin website, lo and behold! there was a picture of me playing my harmonica and rhythm bones, a copy of which I'm sending along. *Claude Bonang*



[Joy Watkins, widow of the late member Walt Watkins, presented RBS with a box of Walt's rhythm bones, and asked us to give them to people he knew. Here is the note that came with them.]

Walt never saw a set of bones he didn't like. Think about my great guy when you play! He'd so love to be with you. I so miss him. Best wishes to all "Boners."
Joy

2017 All Ireland Bone Playing Championship

Spring is most definitely here, the snow's gone, the peepers are making their music, and as it has done over the last 14 years, my mind drifts off to West Limerick to the annual Fleadh by the Feale and the All Ireland Bone Playing Championship. Last year I made my debut as a judge of the Senior division, and it gave me a whole new perspective. I concluded that it is much easier on the competitors side of the table, sifting through the competitors and each of their performances is indeed a daunting task, while performing once and heading to the pub for an after contest pint is much more appealing, believe me.

Rhythm Bones Player

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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

This year the contest featured at least two firsts. This would be the first time that a woman judged the contest, which includes both Junior and Senior divisions, and it would be the first time that a citizen of Canada would compete.

The adjudicator of the contest is the well known Sligo Singer, bodhran, and rhythm bones player Cathy Jordan. Cathy has performed all over the world with the group Dervish, and her rhythm bone playing is on display in many of the tracks of the groups recordings. She has played rhythm bones for many years, and has a beautiful, purely Irish style of playing the rhythm bones, and is an excellent choice to Judge the contest. She is well familiar with Abbeyfeale, having performed at the Fleadh many times.

On the other hand this would be the first Fleadh by the Feale for Graham Hargrove, a Canadian Citizen, and professional percussionist from Toronto to Canada. Graham is a well rounded

percussionist, with baccalaureate and graduate degree's in music, and multiple years playing and perfecting his many talents playing percussion. He has been playing rhythm bones since 2011, and lists Aaron Plunkett as a major influence. He plays traditional Irish music regularly with the group Dan Stacey and the Black Swans.

The Junior or Children bone playing contest, open to those 18 and younger is held the Sunday of the Fleadh, one day before the Adult Championship.

Although numbers have dwindled, 5 contestants competed for places one through three. In third place a new comer from the Abbeyfeale area, Diarmud Murphy, no relation to Dave Murphy, multiple time winner, Dan Murphy originator of the contest, or Paudriac "Sport" Murphy, came in third, showing remarkable improvement in his playing.

Second place was Jackie Murphy, the only female contestant in either the Childrens or Adult category, equaling her place of last year. Jackie is the daughter of David Murphy, and a fine box player in her own right. First place, once again, went to John Forde, competing in his last children competition, and in very fine style. John has multiple championships since first competing at age 4. He is also a very fine banjo player.

The Championship section had nine registered competitors, although only eight competed. The standard of play was very high, and first place was hotly contested. In third place, Declan Donnohue from Tuam, Co. Galway displayed the fine style he has developed, especially on polka's. In second place Graham Hargrove from Canada, thrilled the crowd with his explosive style, giving good account to two handed players everywhere (You can view his performance at <https://youtu.be/VTRsrcumhsM?t>). In first place once again, Paddy Donovan, winning his eighth championship, with the fluid style he is noted for. As in past championships, all competitors and the judge took to the stage in the conclusion of the contest to ring out the contest in style. I would encourage all bones players to experience the contest, and the hospitality of Abbeyfeale for an unforgettable experience! After all, there is always next year! *Steve Brown*

Bones Again at NEFFA

The New England Folk Festival (NEFFA) has been the site of rhythm bones players gathering for more than 30 years. Great players of the past and present have attended and lent their hands to teaching and performing bones, including: Percy Danforth, John "Mr. Bones of Boston" Burrill, Johnny Muise, Everett Cowett, Russ Myers, Shorty Boulet, Ernie Duffy, and Sky Bartlett to name a few. This year was no exception as ten players gathered at the 73rd New England Folk Festival to assist with teaching the Bone playing workshop, and to perform. RBS members Jon Danforth, Skeff Flynn, Ari Urlbaum, Tim Riley, Bruno Giles, Adam Klien, Jeremy Brown, joined new to workshop Kyle Forstoff, and Tom Welden in an exuberant workshop and performance Saturday April 22nd at 4pm to an enthusiastic crowd of 40 or so people. Teaching and ably assisting were also Gene Joy, and Eugene Rothman who both had frequently attended the festival in the past.

The workshop ran smoothly, and numerous attendee's were able to pick up the basics relatively quickly. Attendee's included complete beginners and those with moderate amounts of experience. The performance section again reflected that great amount of diversity that exists among our players. Adam once again demonstrated his highly developed vocal style, meshing with his sophisticated rhythm bone playing. Tim Riley blasted out some reels with three fiddle players. Kyle Forstoff demonstrated a keen understanding of the Irish one handed style of bone playing. Ari Urlbaum again demonstrated why he is known as the Spike Jones of bones playing, playing literally everything under the kitchen sink, Gene Joy showed his percussive nature on the bones. Tom Weldon and his wife Anita gave a fine demonstration of his Americana music. Jon Danforth the whistling bones player showed participants how its done, and Skeff Flynn wowed the group with his rendition of "Cornbread and butter beans". After a rousing pass off with all participants, we boned off into the night, to wait for another year to NEFFA and eagerly looking forward to

San Antonio in August! I want to thank all of the participants who made the trip to Mansfield, especially Skeff Flynn who came all the way from West Virginia, Adam Klien who squeezed us in between practice and performance, and Jon Danforth who literally drove right to the festival from his vacation! *Steve Brown*

Correction and Apology to Glenn Chaplin

There was a serious error in the last newsletter, Vol 19, No. 1. The story titled Mason Dirickson should have read Glenn Chaplin. A few extra copies were printed with this correction, but most received the version with the error. My apologies to Glenn, and below is a bit more about him

"Enclosed is a photo of me with the Bones and the way I hold them (See Page 8). The various pressure that is applied to the finger holding the bottom bone allows it to swing from side to side striking both edges of the top bone giving a rapid clicking to keep up with a fast rhythm score of music." *Glenn Chaplin*

Ann Hoffman Remembered

We recently learn that Ann Hoffman died on December 30, 2016. She attended Bones Fest IV where a video from her national appearance on the World's Funniest Videos TV show was shown. At the Fest, Ann told us she was part of several musical entertainment groups over the years and enjoyed playing the folk instrument of rhythm bones. And she was a paid rhythm bones player. She enjoyed singing and especially enjoyed accompanying husband Harold as he played guitar. That video along with her performance at Bones Fest IV was the May Video of the Month on our website.

Bones Calendar

Bones Fest XVIII. August 24-27, 2017, San Antonio, TX, Host is Dennis Riedesel, See Page 8

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

(Continued from Page 1)

easy to play when compared to other musical instruments, and rhythm bones players range from beginner, intermediate to professional. They can be played softly, loudly, poorly and proficiently. Rhythm bones get a bad name when played poorly and loudly. There are not many players who play well.

MUSICOLOGY CLASSIFICATION

Rhythm bones are classified as Struck or Concussion Ideophones. Wikipedia says Ideophones are musical instruments that create sound primarily by the instrument as a whole vibrating, and most non-drum percussion instruments fall into this category. The vibration is caused by being struck with another object, and with rhythm bones it is with another rhythm bone.

MATERIALS MADE FROM

Historically rhythm bones were made from animal bones and hence bear the name 'bones.' The Rhythm Bones Society gets credit for popularizing the name 'Rhythm Bones' which clarify it as a musical instrument.

The most popular bone is the animal rib bone which has a curved shape that fits nicely between the fingers in the hand. An animal rib cage has bones of different sizes and shapes, and only some parts are selected for playing. Typically, they are cut to 6-7 inches, cleaned and dried (fresh bones are soft and do not produce a good sound).

Cow ribs are the most used animal rib as they are easily obtained from a local butcher shop. Whale bone and ivory, when they were available, were popular bones. Old Ox bones are said to be one of the hardest of bones. Rhythm bones are also made from horse, bison, etc.

Rhythm bones are made from wood as they produce a more consistent sound and are easier to produce in quantity. The sound produced is a result of the hardness of the wood and the shape of the rhythm bone. Hardwoods like ebony produce a crisp and loud sound while softer woods like pine produce a quieter sound. Rhythm bones have been made from many woods, each with a slightly different sound. Soft woods work well in an ensemble group while hardwoods work for solo playing (but see below how to quiet loud bones).

The most popular shape is that of a animal rib bone with thickness, width, curve, and length varied.

A special curve is no curve at all, that is a straight bone. Some of the discussion about how bones produce sound may not apply to straight rhythm bones.

Rhythm bones were sold in stores, and in minstrel and Sears catalogs. We have not found much information on who made these rhythm bones.

Plastic rhythm bones were produced in large quantities starting in the 1950s by Joe Birl who has maybe the only rhythm bones patent. The patent was for a notch at the top of the rhythm bones that helped keep the rhythm bones from slipping out of the hand.

This type of rhythm bones is significant as he made and sold over 200,000 of them. He embossed his trademark 'Rhythm Bones' on the bones, and later gave that to the Rhythm Bones Society to incorporate into our name.

Rhythm bones are also made out of other materials including cow shin bones, and stock aluminum to name just two.

Many two-handed players hold the same kind of rhythm bones in each hand, and want the same sound to come from each hand. To get matched pairs they like to try them out before purchasing. Some players place a mark on each rhythm bones so they can hold them in the same way each time.

Others want different sounds from each hands, and get that by not matching the type of bones in their hand or by having different materials in each hand.

WHERE TO OBTAIN THEM

Rhythm bones can be made or purchased. The best source for animal bones is a sun dried carcass in a field. Fresh bones can be obtained from a butcher, boiled, cleaned, cut to 6" to 7" in length, polished and dried. Scott Miller's online store has a nice booklet on the subject.

They can be made from wood or other materials. For wood, a router or jig is constructed to make the curved shape. They can be curved by bending. Knives and saws are also used to make curved rhythm bones.

Nowadays, rhythm bones are purchased in online stores and a list of them is on our website.

HOLDING STYLES

Arm Position. Sound is produced with

arm and wrist movement. The arms are held so that they can move freely. Some hold their hands with rhythm bones directly over their chest. Others hold their hands to the side. Others hold their hand at belt level and use gravity to give more motion to the movable rhythm bone.

Two Bones - Basic. The most popular way of holding two rhythm bones is shown in the photograph on Page 1. There is a stationary bone and a moving bone. The stationary bone is placed between the index finger and the middle finger and the middle finger is wrapped over that bone holding it again the fleshy part of the hand. The other bone is placed between the index finger and the ring finger and held loosely enough so that it moves back and forth. The ring finger is placed loosely on the bones to keep it lined up with the stationary bone.

Two Bones - Celtic. While not exclusively Celtic, this style places the stationary bone between the thumb and the index finger. This is done by tradition or to achieve a different sound. In addition some players use this style for showmanship and toss the stationary bone into the air, catch it and continue to play. In this style you can also change the pitch of the bone by moving the thumb along the stationary bone.

Three Bones. This holding style is used to get a thicker, denser sound, and visual appeal. Start with either the basic or Celtic holding style and add a third bone between the ring and little finger. The little finger is used to keep the third bone aligned with the other two bones.

Four Bones. This holding style is used to get a bigger sound and also for visual effect. This uses the Celtic holding style and adds a fourth bone between the ring and little finger. The little finger is used to keep the fourth bones aligned with the other three bones, and alignment is difficult requiring a lot of practice. The other hand can play four bones too.

Member Yirdy Machar taught a workshop on playing four bones in one hand. What he demonstrated is the ring and little finger can be active and not used just for alignment. The little finger can be used to isolate the fourth bone so that only three bones make sound. The ring and little finger together can be used to isolate the third and fourth bones so that only two bones make sound.

Top and Bottom Striking. Rhythm bones can also be held in the middle such that both the top and bottom of the bones strike each other. This doubles the rate of click production. It is used by only a few rhythm bones players. See the photograph on Page 8.

Controlling Loudness. The loudness of rhythm bones can be controlled by increasing or decreasing the motion of the arm and the snap of the wrist.

The loudness can also be reduced by using the ring finger to cross align the movable bone such that it is stuck on its edge.

Holding Problems.

For some people, holding the stationary bone firm with the first finger keeps the ring finger from being loose enough for the movable bones to move freely.

Rhythm bones do slip out of hand. This can be controlled by increasing the grip, drying hand between the fingers and applying rosin to the edges of the bones.

Accents.

The arms move in three dimensions of space which can add accents and nuances to the sound. Barry Patton's triplet roll follows the shape of a figure 8 making the sound of the triplet at the top of the figure 8 sound different than the one at the bottom of the figure 8.

THE RUDIMENTS

The Tap. This is the basic rudiment and is similar to a single drum tap. Starting with the bones vertical, the arm and hand are rotated outward to produce a single click.

The Double. This begins with a tap motion, but instead of stopping after a single click, the arm is returned vertical producing a second click. [Note this Rudiment is also called a 'Duplet,' or a 'Double-Tap,' though the word 'Duplet' in classical music has a slightly different usage.]

The Triplet. This is the sound that is unique to rhythm bones. The arm motion looks like the Double motion, but there is a slight downward motion as the arm returns to the vertical position producing three equally spaced clicks. [Note it takes practice to play a single triplet. Continuous triplets are easier to play.]

PLAYING STYLES

Traditional - one handed. This style of playing is common with Irish and Celtic players, and typically uses only

the rudiments. Irish players typically play sitting down.

Traditional - two-handed. This playing style was used by minstrel players, and is the most common playing style. Mel Mercier is an Irish rhythm bones player and when he learned to play two-handed, he saw it as a different instrument than playing one-handed.

This playing style typically uses the rudiments, and most traditional rhythm bones players play with the same kind of rhythm bones in each hand. They also tend to play the same rhythm in each hand.

Percussive. This playing style is based on the Tap. The only instructional video teaching this style is by Dr. Fred Edmunds titled 'Bones Unlimited' and it is on our website (along with Advanced Workshops by Bill Vits, Kenny Wolin, Tim Reilly and Steve Brown). Fred was also a drummer, and drummers find this style easy to play since most of the drum rudiments can be played in this style.

Ambidexterity. With practice, each hand can play a different rhythm pattern, and the combination produces polyrhythms (See Two Hand Independence workshop on our website). A player with such hand independence can play to most any kind of music.

Combination. Many players incorporate both playing styles. Traditional players add tap patterns while Percussive players add the Triplet (note you can create a triplet with taps, but it sounds different).

ELEMENTS

Elements as used in this article are useful rhythm patterns based on the Rudiments. Legend, Percy Danforth, had the list (part of which is shown below) that he used in his instructional video and workshops

Tap with both hands. Self explanatory.

Flam patterns. The Flam consists of a Tap in each hand with one quieter and slightly before the other creating a fuller sound. Either the right or left hand can start the Flam, and there are numerous variations.

Triplet roll, one hand. Continuous sets of Triplets for two or more measures. Most people are taught this initially.

Triplet roll, two hands. Self explanatory.

The seven-beat Triplet roll. Two Triplet rolls followed by a single Tap. Additional Triplets can be added before the Tap.

Quadruplet. A quadruplet fits nice with 2/4 and 4/4 music, and can be made in several ways. Aaron Plunkett combines a Tap and Triplet or Triplet and Tap in one measure to produce a sort of Traditional style quadruplet. With practice the two fuse together nicely.

Quadruplets can also be made by a run of Taps, and professional percussionist Bill Vits can do this so very fast. Alternatively they can be made with a run of Taps with left hand followed by the right hand, with a left hand Duplet followed by a right hand Duplet, etc.

Choque: Two handed players can hit two pair of bones together. This movement in castanets is called the 'choque' and for bones players it is taught by Fred Edmund in his instructional video. Kenny Wolin has some interesting variations.

Here are the names of other Percy Elements; running alternate taps, running alternate two-tap, Tap Triplet accentuated pattern, Triplet rolls with accents, syncopated accents and Tap patterns, alternate Triplet pattern, extended triplet pattern, crescendoed rolls and more.

Other rhythm patterns. A player can generate a unique rhythm pattern based on the Rudiments to play with specific pieces of music. Depending on the intricacy, it might take many hours of practice before the rhythm pattern can be played naturally.

KINDS OF MUSIC PLAYED TO

Rhythm bones can be played with most any genre of music from symphonic to folk. Most traditional players play to country, bluegrass, folk, dixieland, etc. Percussive players can play to most any kind of music.

RHYTHM BONES AROUND THE WORLD

Rhythm bones-like instruments can be found all around the world and a list of them is on our website. The Irish, Germans, Swiss and Italians deserve notice.

Irish. The use of bones in traditional Irish music by Ceoltoiri Cuallan and later by the Chieftains helped to keep the bones alive and spread their use to younger groups. The Triplet fits well with jigs and music in 6/8 time,

Germany. There is a tradition from the

1500s of playing the Klepperle during the Karneval parade. Children make them and then compete to lead the parade. The shape is different, but they are played the same as rhythm bones.

Switzerland. The same instrument is called 'Chlefeldi' and is used to teach music in school. There are Youtube videos of people performing with them.

Italy. In the Tuscany area is a pocket of players with an instrument called 'naccere toscane.' It has a different shape but is played the same as rhythm bones.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD PLAYERS

Timing. For players who know their rudiments, playing in time with the music separates the best players. The late Russ Myers and Jerry Mescher were known for their great timing.

Arranging. It is easy to play along to music using the rudiments as feels appropriate. Good players will practice their songs and arrange the patterns to support the rhythm in the music. Recording artist, Ted Good, spent as many as 40 hours arranging for the songs he recorded.

It is not all about technique - it is about performance. Some very average players can entertain an audience better than a player with the best technique.

PHYSICS OF SOUND PRODUCTION

[Note: This is a very short introduction to this subject which is worthy of much more study.]

Bar Mechanics. Rhythm bones players hold the bones at one end, so that each pair strikes each other at the other end. This creates an interesting situation where a nodal position is being forced (by holding) at the very end of the bone. This tends to force the bone to vibrate in a way such that the length is 1/4 the wavelength of the note produced. If the bone was played in say the same way as the Central American "Clave" where the stick is allowed to vibrate freely, it would tend to revert to a natural vibrational mode similar to that of a marimba bar, where the length of the bone would be 1/2 the wavelength of the note produced. So right off the top - we have a situation where the grip used tends to lower the pitch (although there would also tend to be a greater number of high harmonics) and shorten the duration of the note. It looks a little in the pictures like some

players hold the bones so that they touch each other about 1/4 of the length of the bone from the end - In which case - assuming the performers could restrict their hands and fingers as much as possible to the same part of the bone (1/4 from the end) the opposite effect would occur - that is that the note would be higher, purer, and longer in duration. *Jim McCarthy*, Percussion Clinic

TUNING

The sound produced by rhythm bones depends on many factors, type of material, between which fingers they are held, thickness of the fingers, and the position of the bones in the hand. From the brief discussion in the preceding paragraph, the point where rhythm bones contact each other contributes to the sound produced. Changing that point by raising or lowering the position of a rhythm bone in the hand changes the purity of the sound.

The above can be demonstrated with an audio program that provides a frequency analysis. Play different tunings and analyze each to find the purest sound.

This discussion applies to curved rhythm bones since straight bones strike each other at the lower end.

Subjectively, tuning is another variable to making music, and the more complex sound produced by not tuning rhythm bones may be preferred.

INSTRUCTION

To insure rhythm bones continue into the future, all rhythm bones players need to teach others, including children, how to play rhythm bones.

Video instruction is available in the form of DVDs from Percy Danforth and Aaron Plunkett and others, Youtube with many short instructional videos, and as mentioned above the Edmunds video on our website teaches the Rudiments as well as the percussive style.

A more effective teaching method is face to face, and wood rhythm bones are easier to teach. Beginning instruction includes the important how to hold rhythm bones which is easy to teach but some students find it difficult to keep the the ring finger relaxed while keeping the index finger tight on the stationary bone.

There is lots of variation in the way the Tap and the Triplet Roll are taught (usually the Duplet and the more difficult single Triplet are not taught to begin-

ners). One method starts with the student holding one bone high in the hand as if it were a drum stick and then with the bone vertical hits the teacher's hand but watching their wrist to see how it is moving. The bones are placed in playing position and the student is asked to repeat the same motion. This works most of the time.

The Triplet Roll is frequently described as the same back and forth motion used to wash a window. With the student having learned the Tap, the Triplet Roll sometimes is played after a few adjustments by the teacher.

Two members have suggested teaching sort of face to face using Skype or a skype-like conferencing program. Sounds interesting, but no formal report has been received to date.

COMPETITION

The National Traditional Country Music Association has an annual seven day music festival with ten stages, over 600 performers, over 100 stage shows, and over 30 contests including guitar, singers, dulcimer, storytelling, harmonica and rhythm bones. The rhythm bones competition began in 1976 making it the longest running such competition in modern times. For the last 20 or so years with a declining interest in rhythm bones the contest now includes both rhythm bones and spoons. One complaint about the judging is that judges are not rhythm bones players. Many Rhythm Bones Society members have won this competition

All Ireland Bones Playing Competition. This is part of the annual 'Fleadh by the Feale' festival in Abbeyfeale, Ireland. It was started in 1995 and has senior and a junior (children) contests. The judges are professional rhythm bones players. Steve Brown was the first two-handed player to win the contest. See his article on this year's event on Page 2.

Other competitions. There are references to other rhythm bones competition such as one in Seattle in 1927. A society member reported a competition for one or two years in Australia. One would assume that many of the minstrel players were really good and would have wanted to show off their expertise by competing. It will take more research to find these competitions if they existed.

HOW TO MAKE MUSIC

Music is made with Rudiments,

Elements, and Silence. It might be continuous background percussion or short or long solo breaks. The Chieftains effectively used a single triplet tap to ornament a song. The possibilities are endless.

HOW TO PLAY WITH OTHERS

Playing with others requires some discipline. First become a good rhythm bones player. It is not uncommon in an Irish Session to hear someone say “No Bones” because experience has shown them that there are few good players.

Percy Danforth liked pine rhythm bones because they were quiet and balanced nicely in an ensemble group (Yes, many rhythm bones players play too loudly).

The duo of Jerry Mescher and Bernie Worrell were headliners and were backed up with a band. They used ebony rhythm bones because they sound great and were loud.

There are many different situations where rhythm bones players can join in a group. In general, a rhythm bones player must be invited to play with an organized band. Before a performance or during a break, introduce yourself and demonstrate what you can do.

You do not need an invitation to join most jam sessions and playing a rhythm instrument may be a real asset keeping the group together. Jam sessions are part of many festivals and in many towns you can find a group of musicians sitting in a circle jamming the night away.

MAJOR PLAYERS

Frank Brower, as mentioned in the brief history above, was the first minstrel rhythm bones player. He was a dancer and circus performer, and after the Virginia Minstrel group broke up, he continued to perform with the well known banjo player, Joel Sweeney

The minstrel troupes that followed had many minstrel players, and Daddy Rice in his book *Monarchs of Minstrelsy* names many of those troupes and rhythm bones players.

Freeman Davis, known as Brother Bones, was a well known rhythm bones player, and can still be heard regularly as his recording of *Sweet Georgia Brown* is the theme song for the Harlem Globetrotters basketball team. It is played in advertising and during games possibly making it one of the most played record-

ings in history though few realize that its percussion is rhythm bones.

Ted Goon, known as Mr. Goon-Bones, was a rhythm bones recording artist in the 1950s rising to seventh on the jukebox Billboard chart with *Ain't She Sweet*. He also made and sold what he called ‘Goon-Bones.’ There is a large collection of his recordings and memorabilia on the RBS website.

Percy Danforth was a legend in the latter part of the 20th Century. He had one of the first instructional videos and it is still sold today. He popularized rhythm bones by his performances, workshops and attendance at music festivals. He was considered a national treasure and was recorded by the Library of Congress for future historians. There is a large collection of his memorabilia on the RBS website.

Member Russ Myers lived in the later part of the 20th Century and was also recorded by the Library of Congress. His signature lick was two triplets followed by two duplets performed with perfect timing.

Peadar Mercier, father of member Dr. Mel Mercier, was the bodhran and rhythm bones player for the well known Irish band, *The Chieftains*.

Jerry Mescher’s father developed a style called the Mescher Tradition where they played in beat for beat synchrony and together won a place on the Ted Mack’s Original Amateur television show (over the years there were many rhythm bones players on this show).

Jerry is the great example of a Traditional player. The basic style is triplet tap, tap, triplet tap tap, triplet tap in two measures. The measure starts with the first two taps resulting in one measure on the beat and the next off the beat. What is called the offset is the above pattern is played in right hand and a left hand tap is played following every right hand tap. When you look at Jerry by himself, there is more variation and he is faster. In Maple Leaf Rag, he starts with 4 taps, tap, duplet, tap, 3 triplets, two taps, tap, duplet, tap, and a quarter note rest. Later in the song he has two triplets, tap and a rest, repeated and then a run of 8 triplets.

Some modern day “Ambassadors of Rhythm Bones” include Barry Patton with the Byron Berline Band and Dom Flemons formally with the Carolina

Chocolate Drops. Both of the players have taken rhythm bones all over the world.

RHYTHM BONES SOCIETY

The grandfather of the society is Dr. Fred Edmunds, a drummer, who became fascinated with rhythm bones, made an instructional video titled, “Bones Unlimited,” started a newsletter to help sell his video as well as rhythm bones and in 1997, talked Everett Cowett into holding a Bones Festival in his back yard. By that time his daughter, Martha, has created a website titled, “Rhythm Bones Central” that was the first Internet meeting place for rhythm bones players.

The father of the Society is Everett Cowett who with his 5 rhythm bones playing children organized two Bones Fests in Greensboro, NC. Steve Wixson attended the second event and using his Internet experience contacted other rhythm bones players.

Also in attendance at those two early Bones Fests was Russ Myers who organized a Bones Fest on his back deck where 34 people became the founding members of the Rhythm Bones Society.

At the first meeting of the Board, the Society policies were approved, Martha Cowett’s website became the society’s website, and the *Rhythm Bones Player* newsletter was adopted.

Since that time a total of 20 Bones Fests have been held in cities in the East and Central states, 18 volumes of the newsletter published and the website enlarged. Membership has varied from about 80 to 115 members per year. In 1999, there were about 100 web pages about rhythm bones, and today there are over 13,000. The society has made an impact.

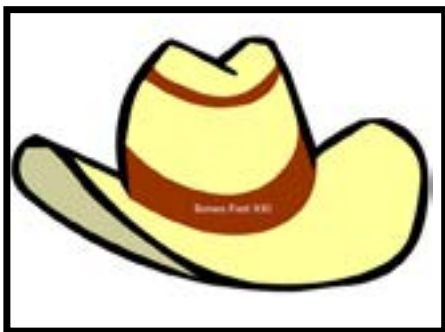
SUMMARY

Rhythm bones are one of the oldest of musical instruments, yet in the hands of a skilled performer can play the music of today. One purpose of the Rhythm Bones Society is to pass on rhythm bones to the next generation.

There is no ‘School of Rhythm Bones’ that is a correct way to play. One of the great things about the annual Bones Fest is to see what others are playing and then learning a new lick.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

There is a Bibliography on the Rhythm Bones Society’s website for readers who



Bones Fest XXI attendees receive this Cowboy Hat as part of their Registration Fee



See Glenn Chaplin Correction story on Page 3

Rhythm Bones Festival XXI

San Antonio, Texas

August 24-26, 2017

GO TO rhythmbones.org for Festival Information and Preregistration.

Bones Fest XXI: San Antonio Riverwalk Dinner Cruise; Alamo Tour; Riverwalk Attractions; Breakout Sessions; Public Performances; Airport Transportation Provided on Thursday & Sunday; Crockett Hotel--Room Reservations: This direct link will send you to the Crockett Hotel's booking engine with BFXXI pre-populated: <https://reservations.travelclick.com/14878?groupID=1721922; Group Code:RHYTHM>

Optional Pre-Conference: Wednesday, August 23, Drive through the Texas Hill-country with these tentative activity choices: Boerne, TX's Mary's Tacos breakfast; Atlatl throwing, Six Shooter & Blackpowder Shooting at a Hill-country Ranch; Dinosaur Tracks; Purgatory Road to the Devil's Backbone; Fischer House Rest Stop; Lunch & Rattle Bones in Luckenbach, TX; Tubing the Guadalupe??; Saddle-up to the bar in the cowboy capital of TX; Castroville Sweets.

Optional Post-Conference: San Antonio Vacation/Tourist Attractions; Hogg Plum Ranch Retreat: Sunday evening, August 27, through Thursday morning, August 31, with a public performance in the town's Opera House Wednesday evening; Possible Day Trip: Presidio La Bahia, Goliad Massacre Survivor Isaac Hamilton Monologue. Transportation and lodging is provided; Costs--Chip in for gas and food; Requires Thursday late morning or later flights from the San Antonio airport.

Rhythm Bones Society

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Signal Mountain, TN 37377-2910

Address Correction Requested