



# Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

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## In This Issue:

*A Trip to Australia & New Zealand*

*Ronnie McShane Obituary*

*Preliminary Bones Fest XXII Information*

*An Interesting Note From the Library of Congress*

*Update From Nick Driver*

*A Lifelong Affair With Traditional Percussion*

*Playing in a Session Can Be Political*

*Report on BFXX Sea Music Workshop*

*Civil War Comes to Hillsborough Middle School*

*Columns:*

*Executive Director*

*Editorial*

*Letters to the Editor*

## Executive Director's Column

Ronnie McShane, bones player with the Chieftains, Ceoltoiri Chullanan and good friend of Sean O'Riada passed away on October 28, 2017 due to complications with Diabetes. Ronnie was a great character, and his bone playing was featured on the Chieftains recordings #5, and Bonneparts Retreat. Ronnie was the first bone player I heard when I purchased Chieftains 5 in 1975, and it sent me on a quest to find the bones, ultimately leading me to Percy Danforth.

But it wasn't until my first trip to Ireland in 2003 to compete in the All Ireland Bone Playing Championship, that I met Ronnie in person. By coincidence he was staying at the same bed and breakfast that I was, and when the landlady introduced me to him, it took me totally by surprise.

Ronnie's playing on those records had a major impact on me, though he remained an elusive, almost mysterious character, in an age where finding out information was much more difficult than it is today in the age of the smart phone and vast internet.

On that day in 2003, we spent several hours together, talking and playing the bones, and when I won the contest that year, he was my biggest supporter. Eventually I interviewed Ronnie for the RBS Newsletter, spending an hour on the phone with him on a St. Patricks Day, him in Ireland and me in my cellar, hearing all about his life, growing up in a theater family in Dublin, working as a consierge at a 5 star hotel in London, and touring with the Chieftains

## A Trip to Australia & New Zealand

Bucket List - a movie starring Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman and a concept. For my wife, Janet, and myself it was a long awaited vacation to Australia and New Zealand. It was a cruise from Sydney to Melbourne and Hobart, Tasmania and then a circle trip to several port cities in New Zealand including Wellington. We arrived a day early to visit with a few rhythm bones oriented Bush Music Club members and had lunch with RBS member John McInnes in Wellington, NZ.

RBS had known about the Bush Music Club in Sydney for years and one of their members, Bob Bolton, had given us a drawing of a person's hands holding a pair of rhythm bones to use as a temporary logo (to see it go to [rhythm-bones.org/documents/RBP-Vol1to16.pdf](http://rhythm-bones.org/documents/RBP-Vol1to16.pdf) and look in the upper left corner). To my great disappointment Bob was unable to join us due to health issues as were several out-of-Sydney members.

After a day visiting the Blue Mountains outside of Sydney, I went to the home of Dale Dengate to meet with a few

BMC members for a light meal and an evening of stories and playing.

In the group as shown in the photograph below was Dale Dengate, Sandra Nixon, BMC's secretary, Wally Bollinger, Sharyn Mattern, BMC President, Ann and Frank Maher.

Their website ([bushmusic.org.au](http://bushmusic.org.au)) describes them as the oldest folk club in Australia and, arguably, one of the oldest folk clubs in the English speaking world. They have been actively promoting Australian folk (Continued on Page 6)



*Bush Music Club of Sydney members, Dale Dengate, Sandra Nixon, Wally Bollinger, Sharyn Mattern, and Ann & Frank Maher*

## Editorial

The front page story is about my trip to Australia and New Zealand where I met with local rhythm bones players. I don't have a sense that I discovered the real presence of rhythm bones down under (Australia a big country), but rhythm bones are alive with the people I visited.

There is a nice update from Nick Driver that provides a bit of insight about his former rhythm bones maker business.

Wow! Look at the note from the Library of Congress on the opposite page. We can all take pride in it especially those who have written articles or made another contribution. Our twentieth year of publication is just around the corner.

My wife's parents lived in the Ozarks, so I was pleased to hear of Steve Green and have him write his story of a lifelong interest in traditional Percussion.

## Letters to the Editor

Bones Fest XXI was everything we hoped it would be, though we didn't really know what to expect. We had heard in advance that the registration numbers were low, and at first we were a little bit disappointed that only twelve RBS members showed up. But we immediately felt so welcome and comfortable with everyone that it seemed almost like a reunion of a family we didn't know we had. It was an intimate gathering of like minded people sharing their love of rhythm bones, with each other and with the dozen or so lucky people who happened upon one of our performances.

I really enjoyed seeing the many different styles of very talented bonists, and everyone's collections of bones made of all sorts of materials. Even better, we got to try playing all of them, and everyone shared their techniques and tips freely.

Jamming with a bunch of rhythm bones players can be a cacophony of clacking, but when everyone has such mastery of dynamics and rhythm, whether we let each other take a solo or played all together, the rhythms flowed and blended with complexity that allowed us all to hear each other's unique style.

It was truly the most fun we have ever had playing rhythm bones. I think we are

hooked. *Mardeen Gordon*

In Sept. of 2016 Ann and I attended Dick and Rose Coffin's Annual Anniversary Lobster Party in Falmouth at which The Don Roy Trio always provides the musical entertainment, and I make my usual guest appearance playing my rhythm bones. Pam Rhodes, who was my lab assistant at the Univ. of Southern Maine during the time that I served as a biology lab instructor after having retired from BHS in 1987, recorded my performance with her iPhone. I'm sending along the two links to it should you wish to view them. <https://youtu.be/kVy6gnt-fk8> and <https://youtu.be/ePIUmNHlIPM>

By the way, Dick's father, Robert Peter Tristram Coffin, was a Pulitzer Prize winning poet and a professor at Bowdoin for many years. Dick and I were childhood friends.

Several years ago Don Roy organized the Fiddle-iceous Orchestra of Maine and will be having four concerts this



October. Don invited me to make a guest appearance playing my rhythm bones with two of the songs that they'll be playing.

The concerts went well. When Don Roy introduced me I mentioned that during intermission I would provide a free lesson to anyone who would like to learn how to play the bones for which many took advantage of the opportunity. However, despite me showing them ex-

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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](http://rhythmbones.org)

actly how to hold them, not one of them was able to make them click properly. I guess its harder than it looks how to play them. As a result of the prolonged standing ovation at the conclusion of the last tune on the program, Don Roy had the orchestra and guest performers join together for an encore.

My picture was on the poster advertising the concerts, a copy of which I'm sending along. Warm regards, *Claude Bonang*

Hi. As you know, Nick Driver has made great contributions to maintaining the tradition of bones playing. [see article on next page]. Do you happen to know whether it is still possible to buy the bones he made? I had recently been thinking maybe I should get a couple pairs of them. *Bonnie Dixon* [Let me know via our Contact Us Page if you can help Bonnie. See Bonnie and Nick perform at [rhythmbones.org/video/Nick-Driver&BonnieDixonVideo/](http://rhythmbones.org/video/Nick-Driver&BonnieDixonVideo/)]

**(Executive Director From Page 1)**

in Australia. He was a gracious, lovable character who I will never forget, and it was through his efforts that the bones were elevated to a place in prominence by Sean O’Riada, and later Paddy Moloney. RIP dear friend!

For many years I have longed for a Bones Fest in New Hampshire. This would be a state where bones players Shorty Boulet, and Cecil Rivers lived, where the bones could occasionally be heard at folk festivals and contra dances, and where ethnic music from Canada, Cape Breton, and Ireland have survived for a number of years.

It seems my dream is about to come true, as Jesseye and Sky Bartlett, with assistance from Ernie Duffy, are busy organizing Bones Fest XXII in the heart of the White Mountains, Franconia Notch!

I have visited the Notch since a child, and Jennifer and I have made a number of trips their with our kids over the years, and it truly is a magical place. With amazing natural wonders like the Flume, and the Basin, all in the shadow of some of the highest mountains in the Northeast, I always get a thrill from being there. And now the bones will be played in that amazing place!

An even more prospect is the Bones Fest attendee’s staying in adjacent cabins at the Indian Head Motel and Resort, playing and celebrating to our hearts content! The details are included in this newsletter, don’t miss this extraordinary event! *Steve Brown*

## Ronnie McShane Obituary

Ronnie McShane former bones player with the Chieftains and Ceotoiri Chualann passed away October 28th in Dublin, he was 84. Ronnies' playing had a profound impact on me when I first heard his playing on Chieftains 5, and later on Bonneparts Retreat. I met him at the All Ireland Bone Playing Championship in Abbeyfeale, Co. Limerick in 2003, and we instantly became good friends. I was able to see him several more times, and interviewed him for the Rhythm Bones Society's Newsletter. He was a great character, and a real gentleman. RIP Ronnie! *Steve Brown*

## Bones Fest XXII Preliminary Information

Bones Fest XXII will be in Lincoln, NH on June 7-10, 2018. Lodging will be in the cottages at the Indian Head Resort in Lincoln, NH where room rates for the given weekend would be \$80-\$90/night per cottage, each sleeping up to 4 people. The cottages are individual structures all located right next to each other in a small “village”, allowing us to all be near each other and have a communal lawn area to grill, hang out and play bones! For those who prefer regular hotel rooms, the Indian Head Resort offers these as well at a slightly higher price. For more information about the cottages, visit: <https://indianheadresort.com/indian-head-cottages/>

Registration fees is \$75.

A tentative schedule is as follows:

Thursday:

7:00 PM – Reception at a local bar/eatery with a separate room for us to play (appetizers & finger food included with registration)

Friday:

8:00 AM – Breakfast in conference room at the Indian Head Resort (included with registration)

9:00 AM – Workshops

12:00 PM – Take gondola up to the top of Loon Mountain to eat lunch (included with registration), take a photo shoot, and play on the top of a mountain!

6:00 PM – Dinner on your own in Lincoln OR join us at the cottages where we will be grilling dinner (included with registration)

7:00 PM – Jamming at the Indian Head Resort Conference Room until the last man stands!

Saturday:

9:00 AM – Breakfast at Polly’s Pancake Parlor (included with registration) and jamming/workshop

12:00 PM – Perform at Clark’s Trading Post for regular day guests and do a special performance for and interactions with the Boy Scouts. For more information about Clark’s, please visit: <http://www.clarkstradingpost.com/>

5:00 PM – Dinner on your own in Lincoln

5:30 PM – Doors open at concert ven-

ue for preparations

7:00 PM – Concert!

Sunday: Good-byes ☐

## An Interesting Note From The Library of Congress

The American Folklife Center is proud to be a repository for the *Rhythm Bones Player*. We recently re-cataloged the newsletter with full subject classification.

Todd Harvey

Serials Coordinator

American Folklife Center

Library of Congress

101 Independence Ave., SE

Washington, DC 20540-4610

## Update From Nick Driver

I was reflecting that it was back in 1977 that I launched my impassioned drive to get bones playing back on the map and found Percy doing much the same thing across the pond, we became very close friends and even had a wonderful meeting. The business I set up used a number of outworkers demand was so great, especially from specialist music stores all across the world. On wooden bones alone I would buy massive logs of rosewood from the importers to be converted into planks and then into bones. Cured cows shin bones came from Argentina in large crates to produce the thousands of polished bone bones that I marketed. I did TV shows and radio with my musician friends to promote the bones, did the album recording, wrote articles, advertised extensively and researched and wrote the first tutor, which is still in print. It all now seems so very long ago and then your Society started some twenty or more years later and flourishes and does so much for the instrument which is wonderful. I am aware of how much you and others put in to running things. I hope all goes well for you, especially your health, My best wishes, *Nick*

## A Life Long Affair with Traditional Percussion

In the Ozark Mountains of northern Arkansas, traditional Old Time music and dance have always been easy to find. My own earliest dance memories are from my paternal granddad's front room in the 1950's, where square dances and polkas were danced with gusto. My memories of the square dances at my grandad's house are shadowy, but more distinct are later reminiscences of aunts telling of how I was under foot all the time.



That part of the country felt that percussion had a place in any good time, and dancers “jigged” in time with the music as they moved through the figures of the square dance. I didn't know it at the time, but what I was seeing and hearing was the local form of the traditional percussive dance they call “flatfooting” back East in the Appalachians. The percussion was not limited to the dancers, though, as a band would often have someone

playing the “bones.”

Folk from “off,” which is anywhere that is not the Ozarks, call them rhythm bones, but around the mountains here, they are just bones. Up until the 1980's, most folk had an elder family member, often “grandad,” who played. Nowadays, I suppose that would be a great grandparent. I think this is where my love of percussion started, sunk its roots in my brain, and has flourished ever since. As a child, playing the bones was beyond me, but there were other ways to keep the beat of the music. Probably around age 6, to my parents chagrin, I discovered the fascinating rhythm possibilities of whacking the furniture with sticks in time to polka music! Ah, the dubious pleasure and pride of having children interested in percussion. I enjoyed those dances and gatherings during my childhood, but somewhere in my later teens I discovered the wider world.

Thinking of those years, I will skip over the late 60's, the 70's, and early 80's, as life style experimentation and mullet haircuts share the attribute of being of most interest at the moment and to one's self. Those years do further this story, however, by virtue of being the backdrop for a return to my interest in Old Time music, dance, and percussion.

When traditional music again entered my awareness in the mid- 80's, I embraced it like a returning prodigal. To my surprise, there were people all over the country who played this kind of music, danced the dances, and sang the ballads. And what was really a trip, others wanted to learn how! Somewhat later I met my wife, who is a gifted singer in the ballad tradition. She formed her own group “Sugar on the floor,” [www.sugarsingers.com](http://www.sugarsingers.com), and together we formed “Ozark Foot Song,” [www.ozarkfootsong.com](http://www.ozarkfootsong.com). Ozark Foot Song relishes everything percussive, and bones are included in a lot of what we do.

As you'll understand by now, for me, percussion exists inextricably entwined with Old Time music and dance, and has as many expressions as there are body parts and simple tools. Seated foot percussion, most identified with the Quebecois musicians and singers, exists in every culture, as seldom will you find a traditional instrumentalist who can play without keeping the beat with at least

one foot. Then, at some point, the down beat becomes a heel strike, and in the manner of the camel's nose in the tent, the toe will tap the offbeat. It's downhill from there, as younger folks, say 80 and below, start experimenting with using both feet to add other rhythms and embellishments. This useful juxtaposition of hands and feet is a wonderful thing and we should not take it for granted. As it turns out, this anthropomorphic arrangement is a marvelous gift from the great architect, as a bones player who has both hands and feet, and I suppose, a chair, has infinite possibilities for their art!

I now make my own bones, which I suppose we all do if there is enough calcium in our diet. For percussion, though, I use various species of wood, having found that the sound can be quite different by design and species. In general, shorter length and harder wood gives the higher the pitch. Of those I've used, ebony is far and away the loudest, and has the most bell-like tone. Next would be white oak, followed by cherry, maple, red oak, and way down the list, pine. One might think, then, that ebony is the go-to wood, but that would be like always playing the loudest snare drum for all venues. In fact, my ebony bones are a bit too loud for front-room jams. When I play with both hands, I currently use longer (10 inch) cherry bones in my left hand, and shorter (6.5 inch) white oak bones in my right. The cherry gives a slightly deeper and hollower sound, which is nice for sounds around the basic beat. The white oak has a crisper sound, feathers well, and is great for triplets and other accents.

For several decades I've taught workshops and performed around this country and out of it, and I've run into some interesting folks. In England in 2015, at the Whitby festival, I met Bert Draycott, world champion spoons player. Now, I haven't been to any spoons competitions, or bones competitions, for that matter, but Bert is top notch. In his 80's when I met him, we shared a concert spot, and after that went to a gathering at a local pub. He was still going strong in the wee hours when I staggered home!

Some years before that, I had followed my nose to Ireland, and found the Willie Clancy Festival in County Clare. Many of the folk luminaries of the Ireland

music scene regularly play there, and the combination of being a Yank, a traditional percussive dancer, and playing the bones got me a concert spot one evening. I was more than a little intimidated to follow several of the musicians from the Chieftains on the program!

It was on the flight back to the US that airport security decided that my bones constituted a risk to airline safety! I was used to explaining that the two well rounded sticks of wood were a percussion instrument, but a very stern man saw through my words to deadly possibilities should they be allowed on an airplane. As my explanation fell on deaf ears, he fixed me with the TSA gimlet gaze, and asked "would you like to voluntarily relinquish these?" By that time I had an audience of his TSA comrades, and a backed up line of irritated travelers, so I ventured a tremulous "yes?" With what I'm sure was a practiced monotone, he said, "that was the correct answer," and let me through.

Concerts, road trips, and plane flights notwithstanding, I have the most fun at the local jam sessions around Fayetteville, AR, the nearest city to my hilltop home. The old time music scene loves to get together for jam sessions, and I'm attracted to them like a moth to a flame. By way of the school of hard knocks, I've learned that less is more when presuming to add percussion, whether flatfoot percussive dance, body percussion, or bones to a musical jam session. The Irish have a genre of jokes that demonstrate the kind of cynical attitude musicians may have about percussion, particularly pertaining to the Irish bodhrun, an open sided drum. To wit, "How does a gentleman play the bodhrun?" Answer – "He doesn't." Ouch, I mean, are our manners that bad?

Jam session etiquette is basically the same as school-yard etiquette from the 2nd grade, a feature it happens to share with national politics. On the grade school playground, the wise child joins a play group, especially if it's a circle, from the outside, and quietly. Playing there quietly, you demonstrate that you understand and respect the existence of the group, and eventually someone will ask something about what you are doing with those sticks. That is your invitation to move closer. Techniques that serve well at jam sessions are feathering your

sound (to spare nearby ears), an absolutely solid down beat, and a discernably different tone to the off-beat. The occasional rattle of double beats or triplets should be there and gone, leaving the musician's ears wanting more. It is a sad bit of cosmic unfairness that most music does not really need much beyond that. Now don't misunderstand, as you can see from my concert video bits of adrenaline fueled tomfoolery, I love syncopated triplets with overhand cast-backs as much as the next fellow. But those are for percussion jams, percussion concerts, and tune/song arrangements with your own music group. When we join musical jams, we are the accompaniment, the point of which is to contribute to the ensemble sound. Percussionists are in the back row. Alas, life is not fair! *Steve Green*

## Playing In a Session Can Be Political

Some years ago I saw an ad for open sessions advertised in the DC City Paper at Nanny O'Briens on Connecticut Avenue. The ad indicated a session on Saturdays for more experienced players and a Sunday session for less experienced players. Both were listed as 'open'. Figuring I had sat in with a number of luminaries on the local and national scene I headed up to Connecticut Avenue for the Saturday session. I started playing on a tune and was promptly told by the leader this was a 'closed session' and required that the players have a certain level of expertise. Figuring I had played for years at the Ben Bow with Jesse & Terry Winch (Celtic Thunder), and taught Karen Seime Singleton bones at the Ben Bow and sat in with DeDannan at the Birchmere there shouldn't be a problem. Not so, said the leader and was told the Sunday session was open, Saturday was reserved for 'experienced' performers. So I left. Two weeks later I figured I would show up again and see if this 'leader' was still obtuse. As I started to play the so called 'leader' was about to bust my chops when Rowan Corbett came in and greeted me. He asked if I would come sit by him so we could trade some licks and compare technique. At that point the 'leader' left me alone and I played until the session ended. I never went back to this session and any session I know he

is associated with I make it a point to avoid. This session leader is well known and, like me, has also played at the White House. *Hank Tenenbaum*

## Report on BFFX Sea Music Workshop

The emphasis of this workshop was to work on our singing and playing the bones at the same time through authentic sea shanties and forecandle songs of the 19th century.

Tim Reilly and I broke down the shanties (work songs) into different categories depending on the various heaves and hauls needed to operate various ship-board equipment (i.e. Halyard, capstain, bunting, pumps, etc). These were all sung in a call-and-response manner.

We also performed forecandle, or recreational songs, accompanied by all of the attendees, ending with a rousing version of Spanish Ladies (as mentioned in Melville's Moby Dick, Chapter 41).

There is a vast repertoire of this aural tradition, but we tried to emphasize bone friendly pieces, some of which are as follows:

- Fuba-Wuba John (opening warm up song)
- Haul Away Joe
- Johnny Come Down To Hi-Lo ("...I put that jawbone on the fence and I ain't Heard nothing but the jawbone since")
- Reuben Ranzo
- Haul Away For The Windy Weather
- Strike The Bell
- Old Balena

When demonstrating the bones to people who have never seen them before, it's a nice option to have a little ditty to sing as an accompaniment (to the bones, of course!).

You can discover more shanties (also spelled "chanteys") by a quick YouTube search for Stan Hugill, who was a sea music historian and the last true working Chanteyman. Between Stan and the X-Seamen's Institute, that's about as authentic as it gets.

(Honorable mention to Steve Wixson also discovered a rare album from Bristol by Erik Illott who sings and plays the bones on most of the tracks).

Remember, in the words of Stan Hugill, a strident voice is much preferable over a pretty one! *Kenny Wolin*

traditions for over 60 years and will continue to do so well into the future.

Sandra Nixon said, "The Bush Music Club was founded in 1954 to collect, publish and popularize Australia's traditional songs, dances, music, yarns, recitations and folklore and to encourage the composition of a new kind of song - one that was traditional in style but contemporary in theme.

"Once upon a time most Australians lived in The Bush, which was anywhere outside the cities and their suburbs. Now most of us live in cities

"In the early 1950s people across Australia started looking for traditional songs and tunes, in reaction to the increasing Americanization of our culture, and some of them founded the Bush Music Club.



Sharyn Mattern and Frank Maher with Bones Fest IX Ballcaps

"American culture came to Australia with the 19th century gold rushes and increased after the Civil War when many Minstrel Shows arrived. The radio and movies brought more American influences and we have a lot more now.

"Here is more on the people in attendance.

"Frank joined the Bush Music Club (est. 24th October 1954) in it's first year. Ann came to Australia from Manchester (UK) in 1960 and they married in 1964. Frank has been singing since he arrived at BMC and played bones, lagerphone and bush bass (tea chest with stick and cord.) He now concentrates on bones which he plays one-handed. Ann has been playing the lagerphone since she joined BMC. Both sang and played on records in the 1960s, Frank is still singing, but Ann no longer sings on her own or leads songs, she just sings along. See a photo of Ann with the lagerphone in 1964 plus lots of different lagerphones. <http://bushmusicclub.blogspot.com.au/2015/01/the-lagerphone.html>.

"Wally and his twin George joined the Bush Music Club in the 1970s and have caused confusion ever since because they look very alike (though are not identical). Wally is an expert on percussion - bones and lagerphone. George is an expert on playing and repairing concertinas and accordions. Wally turned up at a concert given by a concertina player and I said hello George!

"George was at another concert where a lagerphone needed playing and after a look of sheer horror when it was handed to him, gingerly moved it a few times, then did a credible job!

"Dale Dengate is an artist, singer, songwriter, retired teacher, and bones player. Dale's late husband John was a brilliant songwriter, poet & performer, famous across Australia - also an artist, singer, guitarist & a retired teacher. Information about Dale & John is at [http://bushmusicclub.blogspot.com.au/2012/06/talks-from-bmcs-2012-national-folk\\_04.html](http://bushmusicclub.blogspot.com.au/2012/06/talks-from-bmcs-2012-national-folk_04.html).

"Sharyn Mattern is President of BMC, a concertina player, dancer, choir singer, and now a bones player due to a quick lesson by Steve Wixson on top of all of Wally's unsuccessful attempts in the past.

"Here is some information on folks who could not attend. Ralph & Helen live way outside Sydney, Helen Romeo several hours south, down the coast and Ralph Pride several hours south, but inland. Ralph & Bob Bolton were friends from their teens (if not earlier?) and even shared a pair of bones way back in the 1960s when they were learning (see blog article, Part 2, below).

"Helen plays concertina, bones and spoons, and also teaches bones and spoons to young musicians 8-16 years

"As for me, Sandra, I'm a retired librarian, and was elected as Secretary of Bush Music Club about 20 years ago and am the self-appointed Librarian, Archivist and photographer. I've been taking photos in the folk scene of most of that time, but will never be a professional like Bob.

"I appointed myself Librarian and Archivist when Bob Bolton retired and the Boltons sorted out BMC archives from their collections and I took them on. When Bob stopped attending festivals, I

made sure to photograph all BMC events.

"I love singing, but can't hold a tune on my own so attend every singing session I can. I also run two folk clubs, one in BMC and the other elsewhere."

The meeting had been arranged by Sandra Nixon, and you can read about my visit from their point of view by going to this link - <https://bushmusicclub.blogspot.com.au/2017/12/visit-by-steve-wixson-of-rhythm-bones.html>. When you visit this website you will see their blogging has a long and rich history.

Here are a few BMC blogs about rhythm bones.

Bones - Part 1. How to make (1958) & play (2017) the bones. (May 2017). <https://bushmusicclub.blogspot.com.au/2017/05/how-to-make-1958-play-2017-bones.html>

Bones - part 2 - Collections of Bob Bolton & Ralph Pride (July 2017). <https://bushmusicclub.blogspot.com.au/2017/07/bones-part-2-collections-of-bob-bolton.html>

Bones - Part 3 - Singabout Article in Mulga Wire no. 101, February 1994 (Oct 2017). <https://bushmusicclub.blogspot.com.au/2017/10/bones-part-3-singabout-article-in-mulga.html>.

There was also a short article in *Rhythm Bones Player*, Vol 16, No 1, 2014 on the BMC and rhythm bones written by Bob Bolton.

Let us hope the Rhythm Bones Society has the staying power of the Bush Music Club making it to the 2060s with maybe Sky Bartlett as our Executive Director.

### **John and Marion McInnes Visit.**

After a morning of on/off bus touring the beautiful city of Wellington, New Zealand, John picked us up downtown and took us to their lovely home about a half hour drive from the city center. Their house is nice and their yard is a botanical garden that isolates them from their neighbors. Plants of all kinds flourish in New Zealand and their backyard.

His wife, Marion, is a retired general practitioner and John considers himself a writer. You can learn more about John at his website - [johnmcinnes.weebly.com](http://johnmcinnes.weebly.com).

Marion has always played the piano. In the 1980s they lived with some other people, and most of them were musicians who played various instruments. John

decided he would like to be a part of that so he began collecting percussion instruments and learned to play them.

Then he said, "I joined a band called 'The Famous Plumerton Bush Band and it was a bush band.

A bush band is a sort of a Celtic band that has gone bush. It's Australian music from the outbacks that are called 'the bush.' They were people in the outback with Celtic background, and they have written quite a bit of music too. This band played mostly Celtic music. We went around Wellington playing dances, cheoli's and that sort of thing.

I went along with some of my percussion gear. Then I discovered someone there had a pair of rhythm bones, actually two pair of ebony bones that they could not play. I think his father has passed



John McInness' rhythm bones with thick end

them down to him. The man said to take the bones and learn how to play them because you are the percussionist. So I did, but I started thinking you obviously hold them in the middle and play both ends.

By the end of the 90s the Internet was coming in so I began to look up bones. and I found Mel Mercier's Bodhran and Bones instructional video (I've still got it). I watched the way he play and learned to play like him. So the way I play is copied exactly off the Mel Mercier video.

It's more flexible that doubled ended and allows me to do more. Sometimes I've pick up a pair in my left hand, but basically I am one handed like most people around here. And Mel only played one handed (Steve pointed out that Mel plays both ways now and considers them two different instruments).

When I play in a band or sometime Marion and I go on our own where we play retirement and rest homes and places like that, I also always play at least one tune with the rhythm bones because people love them even though some people have never seen them before. So that is how I got into bones playing.

You hardly ever see anyone playing rhythm bones here, however, I am too busy to go to folk festivals where I might find more players.

We also have a group who plays in church once a month with fiddle, double bass, piano and my percussion.

One of the reasons I have these instruments is cause some of them are very light. I will often play rhythm bones in a church service and have developed a way of playing that has a light sound that is behind the melody and the bass. That why I have some rhythm bones that are almost paper thin. They are so light but they are making a genuine rhythm bones sound. These were made at my specification and you can see they have a thin end and a thick end (see photograph). I did that cause it gives a range of sound. As you move the bones up and down you can get a great variety of where they are hitting - many different sounds but they are all light.

So they are made to my design, not made by me, but a man from Christ-Church. They are more clackers than ringers."

John has purchased Shooting Star

bones from Lark in the Morning. He also bought some bone bones and lent them to someone who never returned them. He makes animal bones drying them on his tin roof. He sometimes plays three bones in one hand. John will also quiet them by playing them on the edge and will also turn the stationary bones 90 degrees.

When he first learned, he would take them on dog for walks and people said they could be heard all over the neighborhood. John has been called down by some band players because the ring was too loud.

John then gave me a pair of these bones (check out the photo) John, I'll take these to the next Bones Fest. In return, I gave John one of the left over Bones Fest IX ballcaps. *Steve Wixson*

## Civil War Comes To Hillsborough Middle School

An era gone by was recreated at the Hillsborough Middle School Wednesday December 20 by the Hardtacks, a musical ensemble specializing in mid 19th century music from the Civil War and Antebellum periods. Of course what discourse on music of this era would be complete without playing the bones! During the day, classes would rotate in to the Computer Lab where they would be treated with songs and music which represented the music and instruments of this time period. All done with the fiddle, banjo and bones providing the authentic music of the day. Students particularly liked the banjo and the bones, and could sign up for a hands on bone playing workshop during their free period from 11:45-12:35. And sign up they did, when 30 or so students arrived at the workshop all taking their turn at the bones. A truly enthusiastic group, soon a number of students were producing taps and rattles, and playing along with the music. As the day progressed it was clear, the bones had made a real impression on the young students. A concert was held in the evening where the students and their parents could listen and try their hands at the various instruments provided. It's always exciting to see the young folks get involved in the bones, with many looking to try their hand at them in the future! *Steve Brown*



Steve Green and Ozark Foot Song (see story on Page 4)



Marion and John McInnes playing together in their music/percussion room (see story on Page 6)

## *Rhythm Bones Society*

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*Address Correction Requested*