



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

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Executive Director's Column

My little rhythm bones business has had several interesting contacts over the last few months. Professional percussionists have been contacting me for sometime, but lately I've had contact with percussionists from a variety of touring bands. Jerry Pentecost of the old Crow medicine show bought a couple of pairs from me, and is playing them as a regular part of the show. I recently gave a pair of rhythm bones to Robin Rapuzzi of Tuba Skinny, so maybe we will see rhythm bones with that amazing band.

Of course, Dom Flemons has had a great impact on the popularity of rhythm bones not only from his audience but also fellow musicians that he encounters along the tour. Ted "Mr. Goon-Bones" Goon lamented that rhythm bones never became a very popular instrument in the popular music of his 1950s day. Maybe things will change. Mardeen Gordon has

a rhythm bones rap, maybe the next step is hip-hop rhythm bones (see Mike Baytop story)!

Kenny and Terry Wolin hosted the first In-Person Bones Fest since the pandemic began, a review of it is within the newsletter. When Bones Fest began they were similar small gatherings in backyards with lots of rhythm bone playing and camaraderie. Although it was on the smaller side, it had all the ear markings of a great Bones Fest, rhythm bones players and rhythm bones playing! Thanks to Kenny and Teri for putting the extra effort into getting it together, I wish I could've been there!

Virtual Bones Fest which began to avoid personal contact during the pandemic are probably always going to be with us in some form. It does give people who live on other side of the

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Highlights of Bones Fest XXVI

THE IN-PERSON EVENT - August 6, 2022

Teri and I (photograph below) were delighted to host the first In-Person Bones Fest since 2019.

Long-term planning leading up to the event proved to be too challenging on the heels of COVID regulations and work schedule. However, we still managed to pull together an intimate one-day backyard Bones Fest gathering reminiscent of the early Bones Fest I and Bones Fest II days.

We spent the first few hours hanging out inside the house catching up. One of our first out-of-town

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THE VIRTUAL EVENT - August 7, 2022

It is often said that a Bones Fest is like a family reunion with a family that you didn't know you had. This virtual event was no different. I saw old friends, newer friends, and friends I was meeting for the first time. This event was lovely, it was intimate. Going forward, we will always include some virtual component, but it is my sincere hope that we will be meeting again, in person, in 2023.

Sandor Smolovits started off the day with a

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Editorial

Bones Fest XXVI is over and was unique having an In-Person event followed the next day with a Virtual event, and as shown on Page 1, there are two Fest Summaries, one by hosts Teri and Kenny Wolin and the other by Skeff Flynn.

Note that most of the BFXXVI attendees have a Player Profile Page in the Museum part of our website that includes links to stories and media. When you visit the Museum, check your Player Profile and email text changes, images or your media. If you are not there, why not email us your profile with images and media.

In Steve Brown's Editorial, he mentions that a virtual component will be part of future Fests so people from around the world can attend (such as Bob Vickory from Australia at Virtual BFXXV). For that to be effective we will need a large screen monitor and an audio system with enough power so virtual attendees can be seen and heard as if they were there in person. Let's make it happen.

Michael Baytop, who could have been a Founding Member of RBS, attended the In-Person event with his wife. Scott Volles talked with him and Mike told some interesting stories about himself and Richard 'Mr Bones' Thomas, who also could have been a Founding Member of RBS, that unfortunately were not recorded. I called Mike and found out more information that is now in an article in this issue. Mike, thanks for sharing. Scott, thanks for getting the story about Mike started and for most of the still photographs in this issue.

Executive Director Continued

world an opportunity to get together with us, what could be better!

And this year's Virtual Bones Fest was also a little smaller than years past, but did not lack for enthusiasm. Thanks to Skeff, Steve Wixson, and all those who put effort and energy into getting it together!

I think we all want to get back to our In-Person Bones Fest. Virtual Bones

Fests have been great, but there's nothing like sitting around a group of rhythm bones players and spending a weekend trading tips and information.

Now is the time I think that we need to really start Thinking about next year's Fest. I'm calling on all of you who might have an interest in sponsoring a Bones Fest to contact me, Steve Wixson, Skeffington Flynn, or any of the RBS Board of Directors to discuss it. There is a host guide available through Steve Wixson that will give you ideas about what it entails to host a Bones Fest. And I would love to go to an area we haven't been to before such as California, or any of the far western states, but returning to one of our previous Fest sites would also be fantastic! I would love to talk about it, feel free to give me a call. May your bones be with you! *Steve Brown*

Minutes of Board Meeting

The Board Meeting was held on July 27, 2022 using Zoom technology, was called to order at 7 PM by Assistant Director, Bill Vits with all members present except Steve Brown and Sharon Mescher.

The first order of business was to elect a replacement for Sharon Mescher who resigned from the Board. As provided by our Bylaws, the Board elected Dean Robinson to serve until the next General Membership Election.

The Assistant Director then call the Board to order as the Nominating Committee. Steve Brown asked to step down as Executive Director due to family health issues, and Skeffington Flynn was nominated as the third Executive Director. (see General Membership Minutes for nominees) The Nominations Committee meeting was adjourned.

There was a discussion of Bones Fest XXVI details.

Respectfully Submitted, *Steve Wixson*, Secretary.

Meeting of General Membership Meeting

The meeting was held on August 7, 2022, using Zoom technology as part of Virtual Bones Fest XXVI. It was called to order by Assistant Director, Bill Vits,

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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.com

noting a quorum is members present.

Steve Wixson, Secretary, moved that the minutes as printed in the newsletter be approved as written, and this was seconded and approved. As Treasurer he gave an informal report.

There was an election of Board Members for 2023. The Report of the Nominating Committee is as follows, Skeffington Flynn, Executive Director, Bill Vits, Assistant Director, Steve Wixson, Secretary/Treasurer, and Board members at Large, Steve Brown, Dean Robinson, Dennis Riedesel, and Kenny Wolin. The floor opened for further nominations, and there being none, a motion was made, seconded and approved to elect the nominees by acclimation

Skeff Flynn gave a summery of the In-Person event hosted by Kenny and Teri Wolin on the previous day.

There being no Old or New business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted, *Steve Wixson*, Secretary.

(In-Person Continued from Page 1)

Massachusetts with a back pocket full of rhythm bones and Ukulele in hand.

We were most grateful by the presence of legendary blues man and rhythm bones player, Mike Baytop (and his wife, Ernestine), who shared some great stories with us; Hank Tennenbaum, who we were very happy to see again, was on cloud nine! Mike is a founding member of the Archie Edwards Blues Heritage Foundation and learned to play rhythm bones from Richard "Mr. Bones" Thomas (who recorded "Blues and Bones" and was a crowd favorite at the DC Blues and Smithsonian Folk Festivals). Mike told us that "Mr. Bones" learned to play bones from Sammy Davis Jr. Many thanks to Kate Barfield who was instrumental in bringing Mike and his wife to Bones Fest.

Meanwhile, Spike Bones (who drove from Missouri) was giving pointers to our newest bones players (future members?) Darren, Jeff, and Aaron, with the help of our sons Aidan and Ben.

Eventually, we all adjourned to the backyard deck for some play-along tunes and songs with Ben Denny on banjo and mandolin, Justin Kline on cajon, Mary from the Shedhoppers on vocals and guitar, Skeff on harmonica and tenor guitar, Kenny on concertina, and Scott Volles on whistle. It was also great to see Mike Baytop play bones when Teri picked up her guitar and sang some blues.

A Bones Fest would not be complete without bones, so I took the liberty of smoking nine racks of ribs for dinner. In hindsight, I should have gone for the beef ribs so we could all play them after dinner:)

Afterwards, our one "formal" performance was by our very own Tim Reilly, which he pre-recorded so we could all watch on the TV. Later, some of us moved inside to the music room where Jeff and I took turns playing some ragtime music on marimba with rhythm bones accompaniment.

Another highlight was when our friend, Tam Tran showed up later with his fiddle to play a Gypsy Jazz version of "All of Me" with Aaron on piano and Ben on banjo. This was followed by Emmy singing several Jazz and Latin standards before ending the evening.

Kudos to Ben Denny for sticking around for a short, after-hours jam session with Teri, myself, and our son Ben, who was playing spoons.

We'd also like to thank Scott Volles for helping out and chronicling the event with beautiful photography. Fun fact, Scott graciously provided sound for the DC Bones Fest XIV we hosted (and got married at!) 12 years ago.

Thanks to all in attendance for making this a truly memorable event. - *Kenny & Teri Wolin*

(Virtual Continued from Page 1)
discussion of how he makes Percy Danforth bones. San met Percy Danforth in 1975, and believes that Percy made more than 30,000. San's made a few thousand himself, and currently he focuses on Oak, Cherry, Pine and Mahogany rhythm bones. He uses a CNC machine, and he is able to consistently replicate the Danforth shape using interesting materials such as salvaged floorboards and salvaged cabinet doors. His daughter now plays rhythm bones.

San delighted us with a wonderful rendition of "I've Got Rhythm." We were delighted to hear that San got to play with Percy, at 92 years of age, just weeks before he passed.

Annika Mikolajko-Osman talked about using different materials in her bones playing. She's working on her PhD and she showed off her technique of using the bones while using her mouth as a resonance chamber. What a cool way to get pitch out of an instrument that doesn't normally have a note!

Hans Weehuizen was up next. Hans is steeped in the Sea Shanty tradition. He is a maker, and has produced something in the neighborhood of 2,000 bones over the last few years. One of the biggest distinctions of Hans in his manufacturing process is that he uses a steam bending technique, as opposed to cutting, or sanding. You can find out more about Hans, his bones, and his approach to teaching, at <http://howtoplaythebones.com>

Ron Bruschi give us a sample of his tigerwood rhythm bones and others. Ron was recently at the Irish Festival in the Catskills where he received a wonderful compliment. He was told that his bones "didn't reorient the music." What

a wonderful way to say it! Ron is very conscious of volume, which is crucial to being accepted into any session.

Steve Hamilton is a percussioy-ist based out of Minneapolis, he had responses for several earlier comments, and I absolutely love that level of engagement! First, he demonstrated the mouth bow, and then showed us his Hurdy Gurdy - 1 of 4 he owns. Big welcome to Steve!

Mark Shelton was the next to offer an introduction. Mark is based in the Dallas / Fort Worth area, who's been playing since roughly 1985. Mark is a freelance percussionist that can be reached at <http://marksheltonmusic.com>

Heidi Heiss-Bynum is based out of Kentucky, and is primarily a fiddle and banjo player with an Appalachian focus. Heidi loves playing with rhythm bones players, so is delighted to join!

Ellen Stern loved San's comment about playing relaxed. 'If you can't relax, you're not going to do too well.' She mostly learns tunes on long car rides. Ellen told a story of rhythm bones players sitting around trying to guess what tune the other was playing! The important thing here is really trying to learn the tune!

Mike Baxter spoke up next. The Chieftains really inspired him. The pandemic was really the catalyst for him to put his nose to the grindstone and learn how to play!

Mike did a collective video and was absolutely blown away by the range of different techniques. And I absolutely love it! Scott Miller was apparently a reluctant participant, but turned in a great performance. This looks to be an annual feature, and I am personally grateful to Mike for his commitment to this. We look forward to creating the next one! Input is appreciated, so let us know your thoughts.

Stan Von Hagen was sporting a really cool BFXIX shirt! (Tongue in cheek, I hosted that festival.) Stan has a diverse musical background and is really excited to see global participation in our virtual festivals. One of these days we'll get together and knock out "I've Been Everywhere"!

Steve Brown was able to join. Unfortunately, he had a case of Covid.

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The In-Person Bones Fest XXVI



Host Kenny Wolin and Darren Lin



In the Backyard



Hank Tennenbaum and Host Teri Wolin



Ben Denny and jammin' on the Back Deck



Small Bones Marketplace



Spike Bones and others on back deck



Emma Davies and Aaron Green



Hank Tennenbaum talking to Mike Baytop



??? Wolin and



Bruce Strong



Jammin' to Kenny on Marimba



Kenny teaching



Play to Emma Davies singing



Scott Volles taking these photographs



Skeffington Flynn teaching

The Virtual Bones Fest XXVI



Kate Barfield



Mike Baxter



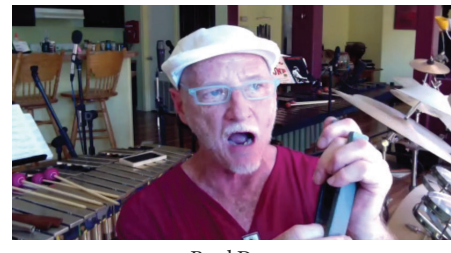
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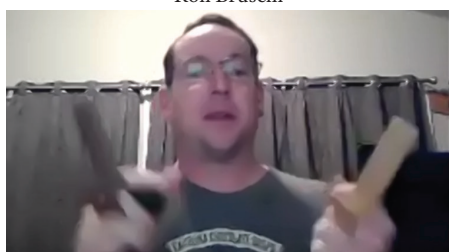
Ron Bruschi



Tommy Cowett



Brad Dutz



Skeffington flynn



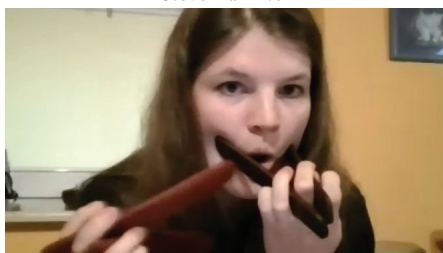
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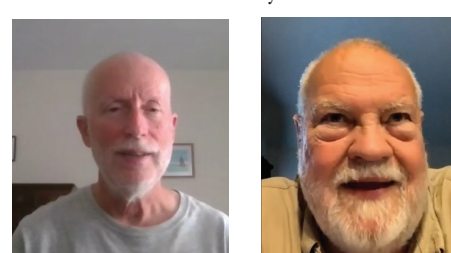
Hiedi Hess-Bynum



Mike Maise



Annika Mikolajko-Osman



Dean Robinson

Dennis Riedesel



Mark Shelton



Sandor Slomovits

Ellen Stern



Bill Vits



Stan Von Hagon



Hans Weehuizen



Steve Wixson

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Our fearless leader over the years, he immediately recognized almost everyone in attendance. His skills in relationship building are absolutely incredible.

Tommy Cowett has been with us (off and on) since Bones Fest II! He showed us several rhythm bones artifacts. As the son of Ev Cowett, his family made a lot of noise with rhythm bones. Nonetheless, he's sensitive to the notion of making things quieter.

Mardeen Gordon got her first exposure to rhythm bones from the Renaissance Fair. Needing something to do in between dances, with her husband Randy already playing the spoons, someone suggested rhythm bones. Somewhere in 1985 or so they encountered Percy Danforth at a festival and said "Oh!, that's what you're supposed to do with those!" Mardeen wasn't a fan of the oval shape of Danforth rhythm bones, so she started making her own. Mardeen started Shooting Star Bones and has been rolling ever since. Mardeen Gordon's photograph is missing due to an audio issue so Zoom did not show her.

Matt Masie heard his first rhythm bones from Tommy Hayes. He moved on to Dave Holt and Mark Shelton! It's so cool to see the connections in our community. Matt teaches 40 to 50 students per week in his role as a percussion educator. We're delighted to welcome Matt to the Rhythm Bones Society!

Dennis Riedesel's affinity for living history got him into rhythm bones. He was called to the set of an IMAX movie being filmed in the Alamo. In their downtime, folks would jam. At one of these jams Dennis found a rhythm bones player! Eventually he tracked that player down and was directed to Lark In The Morning and found a set of Percy Danforth rhythm bones along with some sort of instruction material. After a long journey of playing bones in the car, he was on his way!

Steve Wixson's father was a butcher. As best he can tell, his father learned to play the bones from a sailor. Steve started playing the bones at around 8 years old and carried his bones around in his back pocket up until about senior high. Eventually he found some Joe Birl rhythm bones in a music store and

he started Googling Rhythm Bones and associated terms. That led him to the Rhythm Bones Society (not yet formed at that time, but the founding members). Steve has been the driving engine of the Rhythm Bones Society ever since. Steve shared a fantastic video of his approach to playing a variety of different styles! Don't get him started on the hairbrush . . . unless you have time to have your mind blown!

Bill Vits immediately gave a really short master class on the mouth technique that Annika loves to employ. Bill has something of the opposite experience of a lot of us who play with acoustic players. Bill has played in a lot of situations that called for loud bones. Some great jewels from Bill . . . practice the thing you can't do, who can do the longest single stroke roll? . . .

Discussion of rhythm bones holders (See story on next page)

Kate Barfield's first rhythm bone's teacher was Mike Baytop. Kate reiterated what a good time Mike had at the In-Person Event. Kate has also studied under Hank Tennenbaum, and later Rowan Corbett. Kate plays rhythm bones patterned off something Hank found in the Library of Congress, which seems to work for her smaller hands.

My introduction (Skeffington Flynn) started with a familiar tale. When I moved to WV in 2008 I met a group of spoon playing karaoke junkies. We were asked to perform at a local elementary school in 2009. I was asked to speak to the kids, and as I was researching the history I found rhythm bones. I also took a moment to share my use of shakers with rhythm bones.

Dean Robinson, our newest Board Member, has a serious interest in Irish music and Irish percussion in particular. We were fortunate enough to be able to hang out with each other through Fleadh By The Feale in Ireland. So excited to welcome Dean to the Board.

We played a track from Tom Connelly, "Little Robin Redbreast". Tom's playing on the recording imitates the driving snow and the beat of a robin's wings.

Brad Dutz met Aaron Plunkett back in 1990, roughly, and took lessons from Mel Mercier at CalArts while Mel was working on his Master's Degree in World Music. Brad later studied with Junior

Davie. Brad worked with James Yoshizawa's father in studio sessions. When James went to Cal State Long Beach, Brad was teaching hand percussion. Brad's happy to see his pupil flourishing! Check out Brad's studio recording for the TV series 'Black Sails.' His 'Recording Rhythm Bones Workshop' is below.

Mark had a great question for Brad about how his former percussion training informed his approach. Brad responded that he essentially wanted to integrate other percussion instruments as quickly as possible. But for a young musician, Brad stressed the appeal of the rhythm bones. Affordable, portable . . .

Steve Wixson gave a guided tour of some of the improvements that have been made to the website. If you haven't visited recently, you need to stop by. Steve has taken our original website and migrated it to a modern content management system. The site is much easier to explore and the search function is excellent! Kudos Steve!

Brad Dutz Recording Rhythm Bones Workshop

This is a brief introduction to recording rhythm bones. I have recorded for forty years and just made two audio files with experimental recordings that I can email to anyone who wants it. I used four different rhythm bones, slate, rosewood Steve Brown's shin bone and metal, and seven microphones. Email me a request at braddutz.com.

Microphones. I do a whole lot with the really good Shure C6143B microphones. When I am not using them I use my favorite 'Go To' mic, the AKG 3000. Also use the AKG 451. Recently I found these Lewitt 0400 mics, and these are really cheap at \$80. They are so portable and rugged.

Bruce Carver and I have a bodhran and bones duet where Bruce used the 451 and I used the 3000. This video shows a studio recording session for the Black Sails series. (Find on his Player Profile Page.)

When recording, you don't want to play into the mic but you want to play sideways to the mic to control the accents that you are putting on the recording.

I always record stereo as it is a deeper

sound. If you have trouble with your audio software controlling the stereo output you can record the stereo as two mono channels and then you have greater control in the mixing process.

Also a good idea, if you have an ambient microphone, is to introduce just a little of the ambient mic to get the sound of the room.

San relayed that he once used balsa-wood for the stationary bone and now makes cedar bones explicitly for the purpose of showing up softer on recordings.

How to Make a Rhythm Bones Holder

Bones Fests XXVI was one of the smaller Fests, however, there were some interesting topics - one being a rhythm bones holder so you can quickly change to a different pair as you play.

Annika Mikolajko-Osman demonstrated a container filled with uncooked rice as shown in the photo below, and it is easy to grab and replace rhythm bones while playing. She also has a cloth bag holding a pair of rhythm bones that she wears on her waist like a holster.



Mark Shelton has used a peanut can that he covered the bottom and inside of the can with thin foam rubber so that the rhythm bones don't make any clanking or extraneous sound. He used another piece of foam to make a divider so he could have two set of rhythm bones in the can.

Bill Vits has taped two toilet paper rolls on a surface so he could grab them quickly, but putting them back quickly was difficult so he just tossed them.

Steve Wixson has used a 3 inch thick piece of Styrofoam punching holes where needed with rhythm bones or some tool. It can hold many pairs depending on the size of the foam. Easy to grab them, but more difficult to replace them on the fly

than Annika's holder above.

If you have another scheme, send a message using our 'Contact Us' page.

Michael Baytop

[Editor's Note: This story is written from notes by Scott Volles about a discussion he had with Michael Baytop at the In-Person Fest on August 6, 2022 and a telephone interview with Mike by Steve Wixson on August 30.]

Mike and Richard 'Mr Bones' Thomas were planning on attending Bones Fest III, but Richard developed a health issue and neither attended. If they had attended, they would have been Founding Members of RBS, and you wonder how that would have changed things as you can imagine a 'Blues' Bones Fest at the Barbershop. Who knows?

Archie Edward's Barbershop became a gathering place for 'Blues' in the Washington, DC area. You can learn about Archie and the Archie Edwards Blues Heritage Foundation at the website <https://www.acousticblues.com>. Mike is a Founder of the Foundation and President - Emeritus.]

"When I was a kid I was a street busker with my friends. We played for people at the O Street Market and in front of City Main Post Office. Money was a secondary motivation as we played for fun and to show our friends something new. We were competitive.

"If you didn't have toys, kids had to find something to entertain themselves. We made rhythm bones by breaking wooden rulers in school, scoring the wood, snapping it in two pieces, and cleaning up the edges. Ruler rhythm bones were his first rhythm bones set."

Mike talked a lot about Richard 'Mr Bones' Thomas. "You know, Richard was a character. Mr Bones was kind of quiet, but after Archie died 'Bones' came into his own. The thing was and it is kind of funny because Mr Bones was not much of a rhythm bones player until he hooked up with Archie. Richard was more of a jazz player, and it wasn't until he hooked up with Archie that he did a lot of rhythm bones playing.

"He was a great rhythm bones player. If I had any doubts about it, there was a hip-hop player who was crazy about 'Mr Bones.' 'Bones' was not crazy about

them and did not like young people very much. They made him kind of nervous with all those teenagers hanging around him wanting him to play some more. Mr Bones wasn't much of a hip hop fan, but they liked the way he played rhythm bones.

"Richard learned to play rhythm bones from Sammy Davis, Jr. They were the same age, I guess about 6 or 7. That made him say, I can do this because I am the same age as he is. At that time Sammy Davis, Jr play with his uncle and his dad in a group called The Will Maston Trio.

When Sammy and Mr Bones played rhythm bones there were still black-face minstrels, but Mr Bones did not play in minstrels and did not see rhythm bones as a minstrel instrument.

Actually, Mr Bones played all kinds of music. If it had a rhythm to it he could play it including Hip Hop and Blues.

"He really wasn't a Blues player, but Archie knew Richard was a crowd pleaser. Archie knew how to bring the rhythm bones player out of Mr Bones and not everybody can do that. He was a showman, and Archie knew how to press the right buttons for Mr Bones.

"Archie was the lead player when the two of them were together. It tickled me. Archie would say "Come on Bones, Come on Bones, and he would say afterwards "where are they, I don't know where he is going."

"Rhythm bones are normally an accompanied instrument, and Archie would put Bones out in front and leave him there. That's what it was, they were a funny pair, and they were real funny because they weren't trying to be funny, just trying to get through the song.

"It was then just Archie and Bones and later on I became part of the group. Archie realized that if I was part of the group, Archie would not have to pay me separate. We were the Trio, The Legendary Blues Trio, that's what it was. Then I told him that he would have to pay me from his part of the money.

"After that we were billed as Archie, Bones and myself. Then there was Eleanor Ellis, and we had one cut on a Verve record. Then Mr Bones and I backed everyone up, like Michael Rhodes and Eleanor Ellis. I was playing the guitar. Or

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harmonica. Just something that Mr Bones could play rhythm to.

“Everyone was dying off and we started playing together. There was always a third person with us, but we said, just the two of us, what the heck. To me, Richard was the star of the show anyway, and I thought we didn’t need anybody else other than to back Richard up. I always thought he was the star of the show anyway.

“I remember one time seeing Taj Mahal and his group, and I got Mr Bones to play with them and Mr Bones took over the show. He and himself just took over the show. Oh I know, Jay Summerour showed off the showmanship of Mr Bones.

“There was a period of time when there were several contemporaries of Richard. I loved JC Burris. I explained to Mr Bones that JC Burris played the both harmonica and rhythm bones. In fact one of the song we wound up doing was a JC Burris tune. The first time that Mr Bones heard it, he said, “that guy is playing my song.” Richard didn’t listen

much to rhythm bones playing, but he was a player.

“I learned to play rhythm bones from Mr Bones. I did a lot of listening and watching, and I had the opportunity to play with him where he corrected my mistakes. I realized that he and Archie were diamonds in the rough, and they kind of beat me into shape. I got to see them in performance and just being themselves.”

“I met Dom Flemons, who I knew of from his group before the Carolina Chocolate Drops, at Common Ground where I was teaching a rhythm bones class that Dom and Hubby Jenkins were in.”

His wife, Ernestine, noted, “Michael and I used to work at the Library of Congress. I worked in the American Folklife Center for 34 years, and we had a

lot of people come through and present programs on the Mall. Mike worked there for 31 years in the Law Library and Contracts.”



Michael Baytop at Bones Fest XXVI. See story on Page 7.

Rhythm Bones Society

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Address Correction Requested