



# Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

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## Executive Director's Column

Hello good people! I am very excited to post my first Executive Director's column!

We are at something of a crossroads. Personally, I would like feedback on how to guide the RBS. How many of you play Irish music? How many of you play Old time? How many of you just play to whatever is on? Ragtime? Klezmer? Something else? I would be interested to find out, and we may put up a survey sometime soon. Please understand that you, the person reading this, shape what we do as the Rhythm Bones Society. In lieu of a survey (which again, may be forthcoming) feel free to send us your thoughts via the "Contact Us" page on our website.

It has been a long time since we have been able to meet in person, at least in the way we are accustomed. We had a one day in-person Bones Fest this past year. Kenny and Teri Wolin were fabulous hosts, and a good time was had by all! This year we

can look forward to a FULL ON BONES FEST in New Hampshire!!! We're talking Thursday evening to Sunday morning! Many thanks to Sky and Jessye for putting this together. It looks like an amazing program and registration is now open and can be found on our website.

The All Ireland Bones Competition is just around the corner and I am very much looking forward to seeing fellow RBS Board Member Dean Robinson over in Abbeyfeale. It should be noted that this is the 20th anniversary of former Executive Director, Steve Brown, winning his first All Ireland Bones Competition!

The Fleadh by the Feale Committee is exploring a new approach to engaging international participation in the All Ireland Bones Competition. They are considering holding a virtual competition (Continued on Page 2)

## Junior Davey

[Junior Davey is a percussion legend, a five times All Ireland Bodhrán champion and two time All Ireland bone playing champion. He is a left-handed bones player with a sensitive yet driving style.

Here is Junior's story in his own words on how he discovered the bones. At the end of the article is a short history of his deep family musical tradition. *Tom Connolly*]

My journey in relation to the Bones started back in 1988 when a friend of mine Paul Murray gave me a set of ebony ones. Paul couldn't work them and I really didn't know what they were at that time. The following year I heard Johnny (Ringo) McDonagh playing the Bodhrán/Bones with his band Arcady and I was hooked in respect of both instruments.

I felt at the time it was mandatory to learn both so I did emulating Johnny's approach on both. There was some beautiful Bones playing on the Star Spangled Molly album by De Danann especially with the song My Irish Molly so I listened to this regularly to perfect the phrasing.

The Bones I play today are made from the shin of a cow. They have a lovely clear resonance and in my humble opinion are the best. When teaching them I always emphasise the importance of the grip as this is the secret to Bones playing perfection. My favour-

ite rhythm is the reel where I like to experiment with pitch changes and syncopation. My least favourite rhythm is the jig as I have my own approach but prefer the West Limerick style that my good friend David Murphy uses. In respect of this it's a work in progress Watch this space!!

For a complete beginner to the Bones I would suggest a lot of patience and perseverance as it's not a quick fix by any (Continued on Page 3)



## Editorial

I apologise for this newsletter that has only five pages. I got behind working on a project for my Barbershop Chorus Christmas Benefit Show followed by my grandkids giving me a Portuguese Water Dog for Christmas. They originally planned on an older dog that would be docile, but this one showed up in the Rescue Center and they got it. Traits include high intelligence and need for exercise both of which take my time if I am going to have a well behaved dog. But I'm not really complaining as she has a great personality.

Our Executive Director, Skeffington Flynn, writes his first Editorial starting on Page 1. Recently he visited his family in Houston and my house being about half way, I invited him to spend the night. We talked about many rhythm bones subjects including online instruction. He remembered a conversation with Kate Barfield at the In-Person Bones Fest XXVI on this subject, and had the idea that RBS could make online instruction a part of our website introducing prospective students to teachers. I contacted Kate about writing an article about her recent experience, and it appears in this issue. The Board will discuss this and if you have thoughts on the subject send me an email via our 'Contact Us' page.

On his return trip, he arrived about midnight where the outside temperature was about 65 degrees, and we sat on my deck and continued the previous conversation while cotton candy like clouds floated by occasionally blotting out the near full moon. Nice visit.

Our new Board Member, Tom Connolly, invited Junior Davey to write a profile that starts on page 1. Tom, I am sure, will make sure that Irish rhythm bones players continue to be well represented in our newsletters. The profile begins on Page 1.

## Letter to the Editor

I just wanted to give a short report on my son, Jeremy Brown, the happiest rhythm bones player. Jeremy has been home now for over six months, and the return to home has been very good for him. He's had a few medical problems

over the months, including urinary tract infections, Noreau virus, and one bout of aspiration pneumonia. Generally he's doing really well, and we are so thankful for all the help and support we get. With the good weather, we have taken Jeremy out several times and he's especially happy when he plays rhythm bones and we put on music outside. His CNA Rebecca Stone is helping him play rhythm bones. Below is a picture of Jeremy out in our driveway playing rhythm bones with a big smile. Thank you to everyone who has given support and is concerned about him. *Steve Brown*



**(Exec Director Continued From Page 1)** for international participants at a suitable time before the annual Fleadh, which takes place over the May Bank Holiday weekend. They are applying for funding from the Irish Arts Council with the intention of providing the winner (or possibly winners) with some sort of travel voucher to help cover the costs of going to Abbeyfeale to participate in the in-person competition. To aid in their application, they have asked the Rhythm Bones Society to survey our members to get a sense of what level of interest exists. Please take a moment to complete a brief survey, which can be found on our home page.

In this newsletter, Kate Bartlett shares her experiences of online bones instruction. This seems delightful to me and joins well with my own experience of learning to play the bones off of YouTube videos. What are your thoughts on online bones instruction? Would you be willing to help others learn our precious skill?

### *Rhythm Bones Player*

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The Rhythm Bones Player is published quarterly by the Rhythm Bones Society. Nonmember subscriptions are \$10 for one year; RBS members receive the Player as part of their dues.

The Rhythm Bones Players welcomes letters to the Editor and article on any aspect of bones playing. All material submitted for consideration is subject to editing and condensation.

Rhythm Bones Central web site: [rhythmbones.com](http://rhythmbones.com)

Your RBS board members have talked about putting together an online teaching resource. We envision making a list of teachers available. Are you interested? What would you like this to look like?

Again, you, dear reader, have the ability to shape what the RBS does. Please feel free to send comments through the "Contact Us" section of our website.

I genuinely look forward to seeing as many of you as can make it in New Hampshire this September. Until then, may your bones be with you, and rattle on!

Your friendly neighborhood rhythm bones player, *Skeff*

## Bones Calendar

**Bones Fest XXVIII**, September 7-10, 2023, hosted by Sky and Jessye Bartlett, in Campton, New Hampshire. See registration information on Page 4.

## **(Junior - Continued From Page 1)**

means.

To conclude the nicest compliment I got about my Bones playing was it resembled Michael Flatley's dancing which will do me anytime."

Below is a lovely family musical history from the booklet of one of Junior's CDs "A Sound Skin"

Junior Davey is a wonderful musician, deeply rooted in the musical tradition of south Sligo. Not only is he a compelling performer and a truly exciting bodhran player, he is also an inspirational and experienced teacher. Junior is very fortunate to be part of the Coleman country, which is the area of south Sligo, north Roscommon and north-east Mayo, which contains the village Killavil, close to which legendary fiddler Michael Coleman ( 1891-1946 ) was born. The area has a strong and rich tradition in music for more than 150 years.

The musical capital in south Sligo is the village Gurteen. Junior Davey was born in Clooneigh, a townland of Gurteen, on the 12th of October 1966. Junior is the son of Annie and Andrew Davey. Clooneigh has been the native soil for the Davey's for generations. Junior's grandparents on his father's side, Dominic and Margaret Davey, settled in Clooneigh and built the first of the three Davey-farmhouses there. Dominic was a fiddle player and his wife Margaret played the accordion. Their home was a great meeting place for music and dance in the locality.

As a young man Dominic had worked as a cook in America and got access to a lot of the recordings of Michael Coleman, which he brought back to Clooneigh together with a gramophone. Junior's family on his mother's side was also steeped in music. Many of them were great lilters and avid followers of the music. Juniors' uncle, Ned Keane from Culfadda, was a recognised handstriker in the local area. Handstriking is the old hand style bodhran playing, which is very common and distinctive in south Sligo. The strongest musical influence on Junior has obviously been his father Andrew, who was an authority in the Sligo fiddle playing.

Andy had a lifelong association with local fiddlers like Joe and Sonny Duffy and Fred Finn. He is also associated

with Sligo-flautists like Peter Horan, Harry McGowan and especially Seamus Tansey. Tansey used to be the local postman when Junior was a baby. Every day after having delivered the mail, Seamus and Andy played a few tunes in the kitchen, so Junior was exposed to music at a very early age.

[Steve Brown notes, At the heart of Junior Davey's contribution to traditional Irish music, is his teaching, and his amazing ability to communicate to the youth. In the years he has been teaching he has taught multiple all Irish champions, that he was the primary instructor. And at the heart of his teaching, is the human being that he is. His ability to zero in and connect with his students is without equal.

He has a huge heart! I remember the day that my friend, Raymond Henry, and I spent being ferried around Gurteen to a number of primary schools and the reception Junior was given at each one. He's truly a hero! And make no mistake about it, he is a true champion of rhythm bones, through his work, many children, not only have learned rhythm bones, but excelled. Fair play to you Junior!

Junior has a number of recordings available, most of which feature him on bodhran, but also features rhythm bones on a number of tunes. He has two solo recordings, Skin and Bow, and Sound Skin. He also produced a tribute to his father., Andrew Davie, Sligo, fiddle, master. In addition, he provided support on to Caramel Gunning CDs, and a solo recording by Luke Daniels. Junior was also part of the group called Mischneach, which means courage in Irish. There are also many YouTube videos featuring Junior on both bodhran and rhythm bones.]

## **My Experience With Rhythm Bones Instruction Via Zoom**

During the Pandemic, I had the opportunity to receive remote instruction in the Rhythm Bones with two masters – James Yoshizawa (located in Los Angeles, CA) and Rowan Corbett (located in College Park, MD). We worked exclusively through Zoom. Teaching Rhythm Bones is often a hands-on experience – so I was surprised how much I gained from my

remote Zoom lessons.

I am a mid-level Bones player with no formal musical training. I wanted Bones lessons to improve my skills and improve my ability to play with others. I sought lessons that were not too expensive – and both of my teachers offered reasonable rates. However, I am not computer savvy. My response to any Zoom glitches was "uh oh!" Luckily, both of my teachers were able to walk me through computer access and sound problems.

My Teachers: Rowan Corbett and James Yoshizawa.

Rowan Corbett is the current bones player for the Carolina Chocolate Drops – he is a master of the craft. Rowan is delightfully practical – he looks at how you are holding the Bones and how you execute moves, to give you helpful feedback to improve your game. Prior to the Pandemic, he sat across a table – reaching out to correct me. Once we were meeting through Zoom, he would have me hold up my hand so that he could watch specific moves via the computer screen and provide practical advice. This worked surprisingly well – largely due to Rowan's ability to diagnose problems. In the lesson, he would set up music and then suggest that I play – so he could see how I might approach a song. Then I would ask him to do the same – it was always great to see what he would do with the same song. Rowan also gave me wonderful tips on how to incorporate the Bones into jam sessions and how to approach solos. He helped me through multiple hurdles with my playing – always focused on the most practical outcome. I highly recommend Rowan – especially for someone who may be struggling with specific limitations. Rowan suggests that anyone who is interested in lessons to contact his email address at: rowancorbett@gmail.com

James Yoshizawa is a multiple winner of the All Ireland Bones Competition, classically-trained musician and Bones master. I saw James playing in the link above – I was impressed with the fluid ways he bounced off his right and left hand, so I contacted him. Since we are located on different coasts, remote lessons were the only option. My original goal with James was to learn hand independence – a skill that I am still working

on. This goal expanded to consider how I might play the Bones with multiple types of music – like Ragtime. James might offer a phrase from Ragtime, then we would consider how to use the Bones to best highlight what I heard. James’ advice reflected his considerable musical training which helped me think about how to use the Bones for both percussion and augmenting the melody. He was patient with my lack of musical training – James could breakdown complicated musical concepts into bite-size pieces that I could use. Folks with professional training will enjoy dipping into James’ serious musical knowledge – but even a neophyte (like me) will benefit greatly from his astute observations. To get in touch with him, try this link: <http://www.jamesyoshizawa.com/>

**Pros and Cons:**

No surprise, the biggest problem with Zoom is sound lag. When you play something for a remote listener, s/he will hear a gap between the music and one’s playing. Both of my teachers were skilled at compensating for this lag – including using their imagination to “hear” my playing in real time. But it helps to be aware of this ongoing problem.

The greatest benefit with remote learning is the ability to have lessons with people who live far way. You can access the skills of teachers who would otherwise be unavailable. This is a huge boon for a Bones student – you are learning an obscure skill, so multiple perspectives are very helpful. Both Rowan and James were able to diagnose problems with my playing – even if they only had the images/sounds via a computer. Each of them made Zoom lessons a pleasant and inspiring process at a reasonable cost. I highly recommend both teachers and wish you great success if you decide to pursue their expertise. *Kate Barfield*

Rowan Corbett:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLazWX8uxPU>

James Yoshizawa:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-Lo2wmkzcOA>

## How Do We Actually Play Rhythm Bones Rudiments A Preliminary Study

The above drawing is from a manuscript by Percy Danforth describing the path of a triplet. Many years ago I remember seeing a video showing exactly how the triplet is produced. I can’t find it now and if anyone knows of it please let me know so I can give credit where credit is due.

When we teach a beginner how to play a triplet they are told its like turning a door knob or the back and forth motion of an automobile window washer.

To see a different approach look at Dom’s Flemons instructional video on our ‘Learn How to Play Bones’ page. He starts with a downward motion.

I decided to do experiments to see exactly how I produce a triplet. While these experiments used my style, I expect the same is true with most rhythm bones players.

I set up a video camera to capture a triplet run, and I placed a mark on my middle finger close to the second knuckle. Each frame from a single triplet from the triplet run captured by the video was extracted and the position of the mark recorded on a two-dimensional graph. When the dots are connected the path of the hand playing a triplet is shown in Figure 3 on Page 8, and there is a slight downward motion at the furthest point outward. Now that I can see it I can feel it. You can hear the Triplet clicks at numbers 3, 7, and 10 in Figure 3.

This experiment was repeated with the Tap and the Double, and they show a simple circular arc that rightly can be described as turning a door handle as shown in Figures 1 and 2. You can hear

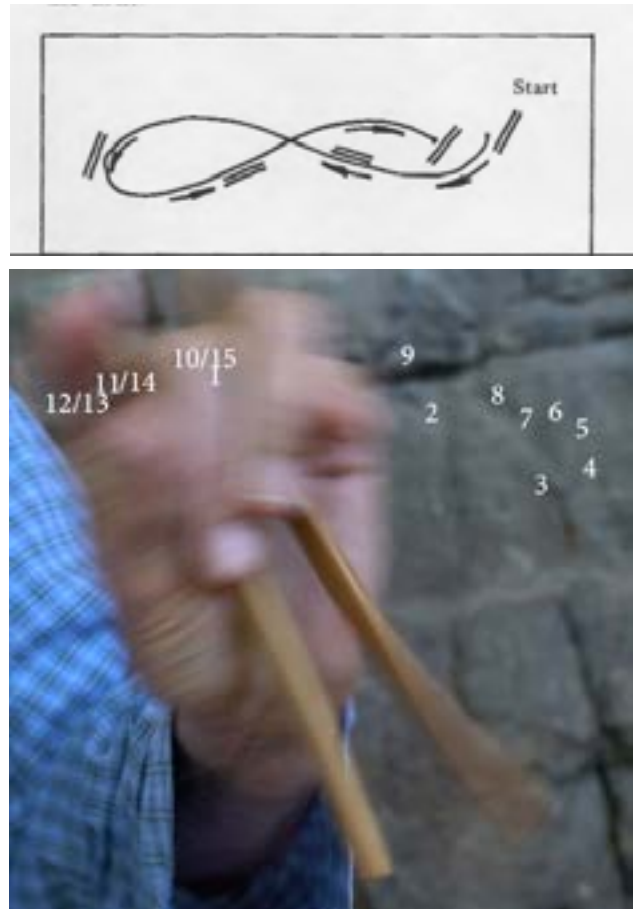


Figure 2 - The path of a Double

the Tap click at number 9 in Figure 1 above and the Double clicks at 6 and 12 in Figure 2 on Page 8.

I will repeat the experiments with a camera with a higher frame rate, and hopefully that will give data to analyze using Newtonian physics. Who knows, maybe something practical will come out of it. *Steve Wixson*

## Bones Fest XXVII Registration Information

We are so excited that almost half of the number of people we hoped would attend Bones Fest XXVII on September 7-10 in Campton, New Hampshire, have already registered. Registration is simple, just go to the RBS Homepage ([rhythm-bones.org](http://rhythm-bones.org)), click on the Post “Registration is Open for Bones Fest XXVII,” view the preliminary program, fill out the questionnaire, and click on the Pay Button to pay the Registration Fee. You can reach out to Sky and me if you have any questions: [skybartlett@yahoo.com](mailto:skybartlett@yahoo.com). *Jessye Bartlet*



Figure 1 - The path of a Tap (see Page 4)



Figure 3 - The path of a Triplet (see Page 4)

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*Address Correction Requested*