



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 originally released this issue with five pages, but with contributions from Dean Robinson, Skeff Flynn, and Michael Baxter, it is now the normal 8 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

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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

bones instruction? Would you be willing to help others learn our precious skill? 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 inde-

(Continued on Page 6)

Baxter's Ensemble Project 2023

My first RBS Ensemble project was *Turkey in the Straw* in 2022, and it was so much fun I wanted to make it a yearly gig. The next project was about six months in the making. Near the end of 2022, I had the idea of recording live music for the second annual RBS Ensemble video, instead of licensing a royalty-free music track. In addition to being a member of the Rhythm Bones Society, I'm also a member of the Phoenix Old Time Music Society. The group has been around for over twenty years, hosting jams and other public events, promoting old time traditional music from the US, Canada and Europe. It's the type of music that lends itself to rhythm bones.

I approached "Irish" Mike McClure, the organizer and jam master of the Society, who happens to play rhythm bones guitar, bodhran, Irish whistle, and who co-founded the group over twenty years ago. He presented the idea to the group and we ended up with nineteen musicians at our first Barn Jam in January 2023. This went far beyond my expectations, as I would have been happy if five musicians had shown up. The range of instruments was wonderful. We had five fiddlers, three mandolin players, two

hammered dulcimers, two guitarists, a banjo, accordion, Irish whistle, harmonica, bodhran, mountain dulcimer, citra, bouzouki, and upright bass. It was a great day, the weather was perfect, and the musicians really put their hearts into the jam. They played for several hours and even entertained our neighbors.

The hardest part for me was not being able to jam with them, since somebody had to film the whole thing. I have to thank my family or the extra camera phone recordings, which I used in the final production. Over the next several months we did a few small sessions with guest musicians, like "Banjo" Tom Jablinske from Arizona City, whose ancestry dates back to Krackow, Poland. Of course, he was charmed to see Annika in the video. She's had the honor of leading off the videos both times, with her stellar musicianship. The hardest part was trimming down the hours of recordings, into a musical medley for the Rhythm Bones Players. Scott Miller, Skeff and I discussed the idea of changing out the musical genre each year, to keep it interesting. Somehow that went on to become a medley, which includes Cold Frosty Morning, John Ryan's Polka, Lil' Liza Jane, Turkey in the Straw, and Cripple Creek...a nice mix of Irish, Old Time, and Bluegrass Music.

After sending off the final set list, each

Rhythm Bones Player recorded themselves playing to the music using headphones. What I requested was isolated bones playing, for a clean recording that could be synced with the music tracks. Brad Dutz went all out with two recordings at his Percussion Ranch Barn, and he steals the show by hitting everything in sight. There's Scott Miller grooving with four bones in each hand and Barry "Bones" Patton sounding like a drum core with his signature lightning-fast style. At one point Steve Litios is playing like a champ with the longest ribs I've seen, while Annika executes absolute rhythmic precision. Skeff is always on point, with his unique hand grip and ultra-tight playing. Steve Brown (who got to play with The Chieftains!) brings his energy and massive talent every time. Finally, there's Tom Connolly rolling his custom cut bones with a smile on his face...and lastly me, just trying to keep up but having a blast. After many hours of synchronizing and editing, the video is done and the response is tremendous. My favorite part of these videos is bringing together talented people from around the world. I'm truly honored to be involved. Mike

Check out the video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=z2AgTnR4mw>.





Michael Baxter



Steve Brown



Tom Connolly



Brad Dutz



Skeff Flynn



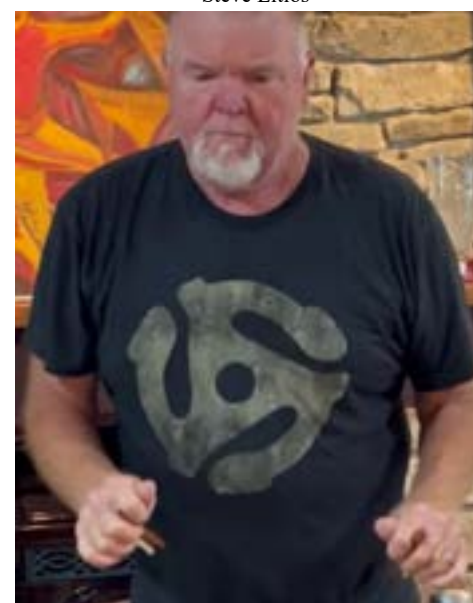
Steve Litios



Annika Mikolajko-Osman



Scott Miller



Barry Patton

(Continued From Page 3)

pendence – 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 away. 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>

Interview with David Murphy

David Murphy, bones player from Ballaugh South, Abbeyfeale, Ireland, who has won the All Ireland Bones Competition several times, recently agreed to be interviewed for our newsletter. See his photograph on Page 8.

1. Tell us a little about growing up in Abbeyfeale.

I was born in Grogeen a townland in the parish of Abbeyfeale. I was the youngest of 4 with 3 older sisters (Mary, Noleen and Joan). We moved to another townland in Abbeyfeale called Ballaugh South where my parents ran our farm so I grew up in a rural back ground. It was an idyllic childhood surrounded by family and friends. The farm is still a growing concern today as I took over the farm when I was a teenager. We grew up surrounded by Irish music, song and dance, influenced by my mother Noreen as my father passed away when we were all young.

2. How did you become interested in the bones?

We were so lucky to be neighbours with the great Patrick ‘Sport’ Murphy who is renowned for his unique style of bone playing, and I happened to be listening to him from a young age which sparked my interest in bone playing. Patrick was a great neighbour. I was lucky enough to become a good friend of his and we spent many a good night playing together. He generously gave his time playing at our house for parties and gatherings and very kindly spent time passing on his style to me.

3. Do you play any other musical instruments?

I love listening to all musical instruments but I am more into percussion.

4. What musical instrument (or instruments) do you most enjoy playing along with on bones, and why?

I like playing along with all instruments. My good friend Sean Hartnett and his brother Dave both play the accordion and we have been playing together since we were children, so I suppose the accordion would be my favourite.

5. Can you tell us about Paddy “Sport” Murphy? For many of us in the US, we don’t have access to another bones player

in our town. I can tell just from the pictures in the walls of pubs in Abbeyfeale that he was something of a local celebrity. What was his impact on your playing?

Patrick ‘Sport’ Murphy was an amazing character and oozed with confidence when he played the bones. Patrick loved to socialise and enjoyed a few pints of Guinness. He never left home without his bones and at the first hint of a tune he would always join in. Patrick also played the harmonica and the drums with a celi band but more often than not stuck with the bones. There was a pub in Abbeyfeale owned by Dan Murphy (The Failte) who regularly had famous Irish musicians from all over Ireland performing there. Each musician who played there knew of Patrick and always invited him to play on stage with them.

Patrick had a big influence on my bone playing, I was fortunate enough to be taught by him from a young age. Patrick was very knowledgeable about music and knew every tune that he played, he was famous for his ability to play the tune as if he was playing the melody not just accompanying it. We spent years going to each other houses where we would sit down and play for hours and I believe Patrick taught me everything I know but not everything he knew. When Patrick was teaching he had no fancy names for different rhythms he was playing he would simply play a 30 second rhythm and turn around and say to me ‘Do that’. In my younger years this was intimidating but I had fun attempting to imitate him. Patrick was extremely talented he had music in his soul, may he rest in peace.

6. Did anyone else have an impact on your playing?

Until the all Ireland bone competition started in Abbeyfeale Patrick was the only bone player I knew of. Once the competition started I got to know and listen to a lot of excellent bone players. It was great to see different styles and see a genuine interest in bone playing renewed.

7. Can you give us a brief description of your playing style?

I play a single handed style of bone playing, my bones are roughly 42 years old and come from the ribs of a heifer.

Due to the influence of Sliabh Lucra music (i.e. Slides, Jigs and) Polkas), which is a style of music played predominately in the counties of Limerick, Kerry and Cork, I tend to play lots of triplets, roll and rhythms which complement the tune.

8. Following up on that last question, I have noticed that you often make gestures with your non-playing hand. Can you tell us how this helps in your playing or how it became a part of your style?

I didn't actually realise I was doing that until you pointed it out but as you probably know yourself when you get into the rhythm of a tune the music seems to take over. I get lost in the rhythm and play in an automatic mode if you like, and so gestures come naturally.

9. Tell us about your experiences participating in the All Ireland Bones Competition.

•How many times did you compete?

I didn't compete in the first few years of the competition but once I started I competed for many years, it is hard to put a number on how many times I competed but I really enjoyed competing and it was always a great pleasure.

•How did you fare?

(I know you placed 2nd in 2004 and 1st in 2005, but I'm having a little trouble finding more complete information.)

I got placed 3rd a lot of times and 2nd a few more times and got placed 1st a few times but I'm not exactly sure how many of each.

•Did you typically bring your own melody players or did you use the players provided by the Fleadh?

I had multiple people playing for me over the years which consisted of a mix of my own players as well as the players provided by the Fleadh.

•Was there anything that surprised you about competing that you hadn't expected?

It was a great to listen to all the different styles of bone playing, which I wouldn't have been exposed to but for the competition. I was not familiar with double handed bone playing, I found it fascinating, I might try it sometime.

•What was the biggest thing that you learned from competing?

I suppose I learned like most things in life some days things will go your way and other days it won't but the main thing is to enjoy it regardless of the results. The part I most enjoyed was meeting bone players from all over the world and having a session with them over the Fleadh weekend.

• When did you decide to stop competing, and why?

I stopped competing after winning the Patrick 'Sport' Murphy memorial cup, the reason for this is because I would shortly be competing against some of my pupils and there is now so many fantastic bone players representing Ballaugh I feel I don't need to compete. It is so great to see how far bone playing has developed since the early days of the Fleadh by the Feale started.

10. You have coached up a number of bones players in your area over the years. Many – if not all – of them have done quite well in both the Junior and Senior All Ireland Bones Competitions. Can you tell us a bit about what you look for and what you are trying to impart?

I take a slightly different approach to teaching than Patrick and try not to frighten the life out of my students, however, I try to pass on the skills and style that Patrick instilled in me of playing the bones.

11. Would you tell us a bit about what your life and family are like in Abbeyfeale these days?

Well we have great talent in Ballaugh these days my niece's Sarah and Laura play the flute, the fiddle and piano, my nephew John plays the banjo, my daughter Jackie plays the accordion and the concertina and my son Dave plays the banjo and the guitar, my cousin Adrian plays the accordion and Brid is an accomplished tin whistle player and a great dancer, and of course I still play with my friend Sean and his brother Dave who now lives in the US but we have a great session when he gets home I am still running the family farm and I also work in Kistal as I have done for many years. My sisters and their families live close by so we are blessed to be surrounded by family, close friends and great neighbours,

12. Following up on that last question, how often do you get to play outside of the Fleadh?

Having such an extended family living close by we all get to play together on a regular basis as no family occasion would be complete without a session of Irish music. On a bank holiday weekend we are often asked to play in local pubs in Abbeyfeale. There are also many festivals in local surrounding town and villages which we also attend so trad music, bone playing, song and dance is alive and well in Ballaugh, in Abbeyfeale and in the surrounding locality.

Dean Robinson and Skeffington Flynn

How Do We Actually Play Rhythm Bones Triplets A Preliminary Study

The drawing below 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 shows a simple circular arc that rightly can be described as turning a door handle. You can hear the Tap click at number 9 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*



David Murphy (See story on Page 6)



The path of a Triplet (See story on Page 7)

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Address Correction Requested