



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 25, No. 3 2023

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Executive Director's Column

The Cacophony in Campton was a huge success in my book. Sky and Jessye were the ultimate hosts. Their Dole Mill location was absolutely amazing! It's astounding to me to see what the Bartlett's have built in their community.

The Dole Mill features a video arcade, a "Made in America Shop". Jessye, (an accomplished fiddler and instructor) has multiple spaces inside to give music lessons, including the "Dancehall" - which is as fine a venue for Bones Fest workshops as I have seen. They even had space to accommodate a ragtag crew of bones players to stay for the weekend (hotel options were available as well for those who didn't want to "rough it").

Family connections were on full display over the weekend. John Archibald and the greater NH community hosted us on Friday night at their barn. A wood fired pizza oven provided sustenance for all in

attendance and there was ice cream for dessert!

Steve Brown mentioned to me after the event that there didn't seem to be a whole lot of pass offs at this year's Bonesfest. I didn't think much of it during the event, but he's right. Don't get me wrong, they happened from time to time, they just weren't the feature that they so often have been in the past. There's probably not much use in speculating as to why this was, but I'm guessing the sheer joy of being back together again in person after a few years absence had a lot to do with it.

This is something we as a community need to take note of. The pass off is probably one of the best tools we have for sharing our unique individual takes on our instrument. It allows us to hear each other, to see each other. Most importantly, it's a way (Continued on Page 2)

Highlights From Bones Fest XXVII

Firstly and foremostly, thank you to every person who put in the time, effort and expense to come to Bones Fest this year. It is amazing that so many folks (35ish) made it; the rhythm bones community is a marvel to behold. For anyone who did not make it - and as a sweet reminiscence for those who did -, I will recap the events.

Thursday night about half of the attendees made it to appetizers and humble jamming at a local restaurant (formerly the old popsicle stick mill) where we had a small private room to ourselves. After that Jessye and I met a few folks back at the Dole Mill who were staying the evenings with us.

On Friday morning we started at about 10am with workshops and jamming, ate lunch and then back to workshops up until the Miniature Golf tournament. It was a close game but ultimately Gerry Hines pulled ahead and won the grand prize of a bag of Bones Coffee. I have no doubt there is still much celebrating in the Hines household.

That evening we headed over to the White family's house for wood-fired earth oven pizza and ice cream in their barn, along with some more jamming. Some folks ended up back at the Dole Mill for continued jamming until around 12am.

Saturday started off with workshops that went

until a communal lunch, after which we all took our group photo at the Campton Dam. Jessye took a large group on a hike up Rattlesnake trail in Holderness and they got to do some rattling on a mountain overview looking out over all the Squam lakes. While they hiked, the rest of us either visited, played or napped. I did all three.

Our next and last planned event was the

(Continued on Page 2)



Sky and Jessye Bartlett Performing on Saturday's Show

Editorial

I come back from each Bones Fest (and I've attended every one except Bones Fest I) with renewed energy, ideas, memories, and photographs and video to process. This issue has Highlights from BFXVII and the story of Skeff Flynn's 2023 trip to the All Ireland Bones Competition. There is also a Highlights video soon to be Posted on our Homepage.

Speaking of energy and ideas, the 25th Anniversary of the Rhythm Bones Society is on September 20, 2024, and while we may not have BFXVIII on that date, we will do something virtual on September 20th so the whole world can celebrate. You can help make it special emailing to us your ideas.

Editorial Continued

to draw each other together. It's a way to celebrate each individual as well as the collective as a whole. The pass off is also an excellent hands on teaching tool that helps us sharpen our listening skills, as well as our playing.

So, let this serve as a reminder to us all (myself included). The pass off is important whenever and wherever bones players gather! We all get excited and it's easy to abandon the pass off from one tune to the next. It's up to all of us to remember how important it is and to make sure we pick it back up if we get away from it for too long. Even if it doesn't seem important in the moment, I assure you it is. The pass off was essential to my development as a rhythm bones player, and we should be mindful of how important it might be to the next generation!

It was very encouraging to see so many new faces. Great to see Spike Bones' son, Trueman Muhrer-Irvin, if only on Thursday night. Jax and Vicki Petroski were a welcome addition. Erin and Diane Sharkey got in there as well. "Gerry's Angels" included so many new and long time rhythm bones players, and spouses. Roscoe Oswald and Paul Sedgwick were incredible additions, adding harmonica, rhythm bones enthusiasm, reclaimed school chair bones, and amazing banjo playing. I was ecstatic to have Mary Gunderson King with me, and judging from the requests for her accompaniment, the attendees were as well. Please

forgive me if I have missed anyone.

There are players who were missed as well. Those still with us and those that have passed on. I thought Kenny's memorial to Bill Vits was an excellent tribute to the ones that couldn't be with us. So, celebrate the ones who are with us now. Cherish these moments. The future is bright my friends. I look forward to seeing you soon!

Your friendly neighborhood bones player, *Skeff Flynn*

Highlights Continued

Saturday night performance at the Campton Historical Society building where we subjected the locals and some family members to our unique abilities. After the concert, most everybody came back to the Dole Mill and jammed until pretty late. I was told 1 AM, but I didn't make it past 11 PM, so I neither confirm nor deny. Sunday was a very relaxing goodbye as many folks had no need to hurry home, so we were able to visit and such until well past noon. Jessye and I had the added treat of getting to share dinner with Dennis Riedesel that evening. I had the Salmon.

A few notable things, highlights etc.

Kenny Wolin was able to attend this year. Not only is that a highlight in and of itself, but he also brings much in the way of ability both as a player and teacher. This allowed us to have some higher level workshops that stretched our brains and, if nothing else, left us in a state of sublime humility.

He was also good enough to have prepared an "In Memoriam" performance for Saturday night. I was especially grateful for this as I received many questions about how we might handle incorporating the memory of lost friends into the weekend. I cannot imagine anything better than Kenny's performance for that. Post performance comments confirmed it was a unanimous view.

Ron, Ernie, Dennis, Steve B, Gerry and Paul all volunteered to handle some workshops and for that we were and are grateful. It takes a lot of pressure off of a host to have people willing to step up and help in that manner. I enjoyed every one of the workshops.

John Archibald got a hole in one on

Rhythm Bones Player

Rhythm Bones Society
Volume 25, No 3
Third Quarter 2023
ISSN: 1545-1380

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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

Hole #9 - a never-before accomplished feat, even if he did accidentally jump the ball over the brick wall to do it.

I very much appreciated everyone's patience at the public performance with regard to limited time. I thought everyone was very professional with self-awareness and sensitivity to the crowd. This was not much of a "performers" fest as some have been, so thank you to everyone for still being so reasonable with your one good opportunity to shine during the weekend, and I really do apologize if you were hoping for more; everyone certainly deserved more. And along with that, thank you all for your exceptional performances. I thought the quality of the show was A+. Special thanks to Steve Brown for finding the Conga line song last minute and for Gerry for rallying his angels (in full-festive headdress) and providing them an opportunity to play on stage.

As always the missing faces were sad, whether due to passing or just an

absence. There are too many to list and I'd be bound to forget a few so I won't try. Maybe we can just wrap them all up in the absence of Jeremy Brown: I think his smile is big enough to help a person see past anything.

It was an incredible Fest, and as always, it was not because of location, host, venue or any such thing. It was amazing because 35(ish) people all showed up with great attitudes, great musical abilities, and a genuine desire to make the weekend work. You all made so many wonderful, lasting memories for myself and so many others.

I will close with the words from a thank-you note we received from one of the Saturday night concert-goers: "We had an honest-to-goodness good old time, and are so thankful to have been there, in that venerable old building, toe-tapping, and finally Conga-line dancing and clapping with some of the finest, friendliest, and Talented (yes, with a capital T!) folks I've met! That rare experience in Campton Lower Village is one of my favorite memories of magical times!"

A BFXVII Reflection

Jennifer and I were so excited to be able to attend another Bones Fest, and looking back on this year's bones fest I thought there were a number of interesting distinctions from other Fests.

First of all I thought the mill building was an excellent location, and the ability to serve as a sort of dorm was perfect. Although I didn't stay there, I could see the camaraderie in the people who did, and how relaxed everyone was.

Secondly, I thought it was a Fest in which there were a number of beginners who gelled together, and really added to the camaraderie of the event.

One interesting point that seemed to be missing from this Fest in comparison to other Fests was the lack of pass offs. I'm not really sure why that was but in the many opportunities to play people seem to be playing all at the same time. All in all it was a wonderful time, so good to see people again! *Steve Brown*

All Ireland Bones Competition 2023

Travel

I was delighted to be able to return to Ireland for the Fleadh By the Feale to compete in the All Ireland Bones Competition of 2023. I was lucky enough to be able to attend in 2022 as well. As such, I will share a few thoughts on travel.

There are essentially 3 airports to look at if you want to visit Ireland. There may be one or two that I am not aware of, but these are your best bets: Dublin, Shannon, and Cork

When I flew over in 2022, I was able to get my flight on reward miles. That meant that my ticket was free, I just had to pay taxes and fees, but my itinerary was convoluted, and my travel times were long. I flew out of Dulles (IAD), near Washington, DC, but I had a layover in Amsterdam on the way there, and a layover in Paris on the way back. This was obviously an inexpensive option, but again, the travel times were long. In this case, I had more time than money, so that was fine with me.

The Cork airport is absolutely lovely! It's easy to get in and out of, and we would think about it as a mid-sized airport in the US.

This year, I flew into Dublin. I was flying out of Dulles (IAD) again and was able to get a very reasonably priced flight that flew directly from Dulles to Dublin, and the same was true on the return flight. Total flight time for me on this trip was between 6 and 7 hours.

My brother flew into Shannon in 2022, and joined me on the last few days of my trip. Shannon is close to Galway and may be more desirable if you are not renting a vehicle. I was able to pick him up at the airport.

Ireland has an excellent bus system, and I encourage you to check it out. (there are others in RBS who are more knowledgeable than me on this front). That said, both in 2022, and in 2023, I rented a vehicle. My primary impetus behind this decision was to be able to go where I wanted, when I wanted. I also thought it would be good to have somewhere to put my stuff when I was in between lodging.

I should also note that in 2022, I had

a very flexible itinerary spread out over roughly four weeks, so flexibility was far more important to me than it was in 2023. However, having gotten used to driving in Ireland, I was much more amenable to renting a car again in 2023, even for a shorter itinerary. In addition, my primary use of the rental cars was to get from town to town. Once I arrived and settled into my lodging, I generally left my vehicle parked until it was time to move to the next town.

Here are some things to note about driving in Ireland. First, you are almost certainly going to be driving a manual transmission (aka stick shift). Many of you may balk at this, but the vehicles available for rental that use an automatic transmission are generally more expensive, and larger.

It is my position that you want the smallest possible vehicle that will fit your needs when you are driving in Ireland. I was in a session in 2022 in Galway, talking to a young woman who had moved to Belfast from New Jersey. She said, "driving in Ireland is like playing a constant game of chicken", I don't disagree.

On my 2022 trip I was driving a Fiat 500. It was big enough to fit myself, my brother (when he finally joined me), and both of our suitcases. It was perfect! When I booked my vehicle for this year's trip, the vehicle advertised was a VW Polo or similar. What I got was a Dacia Jogger. I should have returned to the desk immediately to return the car. The Dacia Jogger is a Romanian manufactured station wagon that literally has 3rd row seating! It's bigger than a Subaru Outback! Needless to say, I had many white knuckle moments navigating through roads designed before the advent of motor vehicles;

This brings me to another point. If you are capable of driving stick shift, don't worry about shifting on the left. You'll pick it up quickly. After all, the pedals are in the same position. Driving on the left side of the road is also something that you will quickly acclimate to. Roundabouts are actually helpful, as they will challenge you to shift appropriately, and worst case scenario, you just go around the roundabout again.

Here is something that you don't hear all that often, though I am fairly sure

Photographs From Bones Fest XXVII



The Mountain Fare Inn



Thursday Night Reception



The Bartlett's Dole Mill Building



Main Venue with Individual Introductions



Kenny Wolin's Advanced Workshop



Paul Sedgwick's Workshop



Gerry Hines' Beginner Workshop



Ron Bruschi's Workshop



Dennis Riedesel's Workshop



Jamming at the Dole Mill



Friday Dinner (Main Course was Pizza)



Scott Volles Interviews Steve Brown



Campton Historical Society



The Grand Finale Cogo Line at the Campton Historical Society Building

Photographs From The Saturday Night Public Show



Michael Ballard with Shannon and Jessye



Steve Brown



Ron Bruschi



Jonathan Danforth



Ernie Duffy (on rt) with Sky and John Archibald



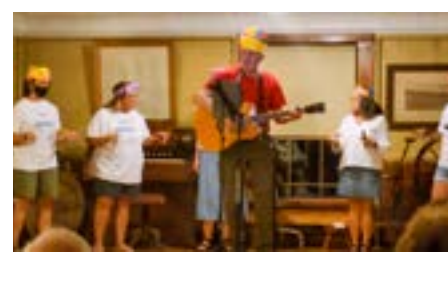
Skeff Flynn and Mary Gunderson King



Bruno Giles



Gerry Hines



Gerry Hines & His Angels (Beginning Students)



Roscoe Oswald with Mary



Dean Robinson with Jessye



Jim Runner with Mary



Paul Sedgwick



Stan Von Hangen with Skeff



Kenny Wolin

that Steve Brown warned me about this. Most of the vehicle damage that happens with American tourists driving on the left hand side of the road happens to the passenger side of the vehicle. It's fairly easy to realize when you have a vehicle driving toward you in the right lane, you should move to the left lane. What is less obvious is we have a tendency to drift.

If you are going to drift, your natural tendency will be to drift left, or to the center (which for Americans means drifting left). If you drift left when you are sitting on the right side of the vehicle, you may hit a curb, or a shrub, or a wall, or whatever, since you can't see how close you are getting to the left edge of the road from your right hand seat. When driving in Ireland, I had a mantra: drive left, drift center. It served me well, as I had no issues driving, even if there were times when my knuckles were white.

Preparation I really felt in both my 2022 and 2023 trips that I wanted to get in as much practice with Irish musicians as I could before the Fleadh. In 2022, that mostly meant going to Galway. In 2023, I had a few more options, as I now had connections with players and places.

Don't forget your etiquette! The very first thing you want to look for are places that have traditional Irish sessions. From there, if you can determine if they are open sessions, that will go a long way. Not all sessions are open, and you don't want to step on someone's gig.

Next, you want to make sure that you have permission to join the session. Ask who the session leader is and talk to them. Tell them that that you are interested in joining the session on bones and that you will be respectful. Next, follow through! If someone thinks you are playing too loud, try to play quieter.

The bones are not universally accepted in Irish Trad, and there may be folks that turn you away outright. I was in a session in Cork (in 2022) with some well known players – who accepted me in the session – when someone sitting at the bar asked me to play softer. I talked to the piper about it after I had made adjustments and he said to me – “you know, he's not wrong, it's nicer with the softer bones”.

Having made some connections in 2022, it was much easier going in 2023. I spent time in Dingle, Galway, and Doolin, before heading on to Abbeyfeale.

I would guess that I was in sessions for at least 4 hours a day (with one possible exception) before I made my way to Abbeyfeale. All the while I was taking notes. If you aren't familiar with the Irish repertoire it can be helpful to take note of tunes you like so that you can call on them later when working with musicians during the Fleadh.

What to expect at the Fleadh

When you get to Abbeyfeale, the pace tends to slow down a bit. There is typically a welcome session on Thursday night. This starts at about 9pm. It's at this point that I should probably talk about the Irish approach to food. They typically front load their calorie intake. So, have a big breakfast, maybe you eat something for lunch, and have an early dinner. In Abbeyfeale you won't have many choices for food after about 6 or 7pm. It's possible in a late session they may offer some sandwiches to the musicians, but I wouldn't count on this – just be grateful when it happens.

On Friday evening there is typically a street busking competition. This is really great fun! All sorts of little folks, separated into groups by age, playing music on the streets of downtown Abbeyfeale. It's wonderful to see the support the community has for traditional music and the way they pass it along to the kids!

If you've been lucky enough to make some friends on Thursday night, you might find yourself participating in one of the marches of the Wren Boys down to the square. If you're not familiar with the Wren Boy tradition, I highly suggest you look it up. Great stuff!

Of course, there will be sessions afterwards, starting at 9 or 10 pm. And that is sort of a theme in Abbeyfeale. There will be afternoon sessions on Saturday and Sunday, but it really gets cooking at about 9 or 10 pm. Keep an eye on the schedule and figure out who you want to see and/or play with. If you're feeling ambitious, you might be able to do some morning or day trips during the Fleadh.

Surprise Invite to Dave Murphy's

One of the greatest honors of my 2023 trip, was being invited out to the home of the great Dave Murphy. Dave has taken the All Ireland Bones title enough times that he's decided to give other folks a chance. And of course, he's trained some of the best bones players in the world,

such as his daughter Jackie Murphy, John Ford, Adrian O'Leary and others – all of whom have placed in the All Ireland Bones Competition in recent years.

Dean Robinson, Kyle Forsthooff, and myself, were all invited to Dave's house on the Monday of the competition. All of the aforementioned bones players were present, along with family and friends. It was a wonderful afternoon of music, fellowship, and not to mention a wonderful lunch provided by Dave's wife. We had probably the most beautiful weather that Limerick will see this year and most genuinely, a good time was had by all. I have nothing but gratitude to Dave and his family for a wonderful afternoon.

Junior Bones Competition

It was a great honor to be asked to judge the Junior All Ireland Bones Competition this year. I really felt as though it was a tip of the cap to me, and I really took it seriously.

There were five competitors in the Junior Bones Competition this year. They were: Chloe Quille-Drummond, Feidhlim Watters, Amber McDonald, Tessa Marie O'Donnell, and Iarla Dunford

I am reminded of a story from Steve Brown when he was first asked to judge the junior bones competition. He told me that he was excited to finally see the judging criteria. When the moment came, they handed him a blue composition book, like one you would have used to take exams at school. Excitedly, he opened it up to see that it was blank. At this point, he turned to someone on the stage and asked if they had a copy of the judging criteria. Their response, “You're the adjudicator, you should know.”

So that tells us that there isn't any set guide. Each adjudicator needs to devise their own set of criteria for what they are looking for. I'll start by talking a bit about what I was looking for. I broke it down into four parts:

Rhythm - essentially a pass/fail - is the player in time?

Variation - did the player play the same thing the whole time or did they mix it up?

These first 2 are objective and measurable. Now we move on to the subjective categories.

Technique - How clean were they? Did they do anything beyond taps and triplets? For example, Amber had what I

call a running double.

How well did they back the tune - This is perhaps the most subjective.

I scored the competition as follows:

1st - Amber McDonald

2nd - Iarla Dunford

3rd – a tie between: Tessa Marie O'Donnell, Chloe Quille-Drummond, and Feidhim Watters

So when we look at our top 2 competitors, I thought Iarla had really clean technique, and impressive triplets. They both had variations in how they played both tunes. Amber had a running double - and she was the only junior to do it. You could make the argument that Iarla's playing was so smooth that it canceled out Amber's advantage in terms of technique. Iarla's triplets were really smooth – great playing! Ultimately I thought Amber was more sensitive to the melodies. She accented the tunes quite nicely. And of course, she was no slouch in her technique! Her attention to the tunes is what gave her the edge in my mind.

On to our third place competitors. All were good in terms of rhythm and timing. According to my notes, Chloe and Tessa had very little variation. Feidhim had some on the second tune. I didn't really get a sense that either Feidhim or Chloe were backing the tune, more just playing the pulse or subdivision. Tessa seemed to be the best in terms of accenting the melody. There really was very little separation between the three, all played very well!

Someone said to me once, in Irish bones playing there are only two elements: to roll, and to stop. I personally disagree, but I understand the philosophy. I think Iarla is a good example of a player who takes this approach and does it well. That said, if this is the approach, the stops become incredibly important. The stops become the way that you accent the melody. In Irish music, the melody is primary. My feeling is that bones players should be playing the melody (in a sense). Bodhran players are really the only ones who can get away with playing the pulse or subdivision - and I know bodhran players who would disagree. They would say that you have to know the tune to play it properly.

I would also note that playing in sessions is very different than competing. In a session, variation is far less important

than consistency. Also, I would advise any juniors (or seniors), that when they are competing, they should do a few clicks and rolls once the microphones are live, but before the tunes begin, just so they can get an idea of what things sound like on the stage. I know that for me personally, the volume of bones coming back at me in 2022 was jarring and had an effect on my performance.

Senior Bones Competition

Here is what is expected from you if you are participating in the All Ireland Bones Competition. You are required to play a jig, typically 2 times through. Then you are expected to play two reels, one going into the other without stopping, again, playing each two times through. Finally, you are expected to play a tune with a different time feel. That means anything other than a jig or a reel. For myself, I chose a polka this year. Dean, I believe, chose a slide. But it could be anything.

One of the interesting things to consider when competing in the All Ireland Bones Competition is who your musicians will be. For example, this year and last year both Dean Robinson and I opted to use local musicians we had met in sessions – Micheal and Liam Broderick. While this and last year both James Yoshizawa and Kyle Forsthoff opted to use the players provided by the Fleadh.

When choosing musicians, either approach is acceptable. Here are some thoughts on both. If you can connect with local players, or bring your own, you have some opportunity to practice. Both Dean and I were able to work out the tunes we wanted to play, and to get at least one run through with our melody players before the competition. If you are using the players provided by the Fleadh, you will probably not have the opportunity to practice, and it is possible they may not know the tunes you want to play.

Dean and I were lucky enough to make friends early. Micheal and Liam were incredibly accommodating and worked with us both on our competition sets. In 2022, Micheal basically crafted the set for me. In 2023, I had a better

idea of what I wanted to play, and so he worked up the tunes that I was asking for (I mean he knew them anyway, but what a kindness!). They extended the same cooperation to Dean. It was a big relief to us to know that our melody players knew what we wanted to do, and that we had at least one run through with them before the competition.

The 2023 competitors were (please forgive any miss-spellings): Sarah O'Donoghue, William Murphy, Dean Robinson, Jackie Murphy, Skeff Flynn, John Ford, Paddy O'Donovan, Darren Roach, Sean McNerney, David Murphy, Kyle Forst-off, and Adrian O'Leary

The adjudicator was the great Junior Davey! 5 time All Ireland Bodhran Champion and 2 time All Ireland Bones Champion. All of the competitors represented themselves admirably. I won't go into depth on my personal analysis, but rather will let you see for yourselves. You can view the 2023 All Ireland Bones Competition here: https://fb.watch/lz6MpEv_Ps/

The results for the 2023 All Ireland Bones Competition were; 1st - Sarah O'Donoghue, 2nd - John Ford, and 3rd - Skeff Flynn.



Adjudicator Junior Davies, Melody Players Micheal and Liam Broderick, and Skeff Flynn

Closing Thoughts

Ireland seems to me to be a magical place. Music seems to be in the air and only needs someone to grab it. I found the people to be incredibly welcoming, and very receptive. It is my hope to go back again, and again. Please let me know if you have any questions about going across the pond, or any interest in the competition. *Skeffinton Flynn*



BFXXVII Group Photograph

From left: **Standing;** Paul Sedgwick, Bruno Giles, Michael Ballard, Kenny Wolin, John Archibald, Steve Brown, Ron Bruschi, Erin Sharkey, Marie Bruschi, Dean Robinson, Emmett Danforth, Bruce Strong, Dennis Riedesel, Gerry and Janet Hines, Sky Bartlett, Scott Volles; **Sitting;** Roscoe Oswald, Jessye Bartlett, Jaqueline and Vicki Petroski, Diane Sharkey, Becky Shannon, Mary Gunderson King, Skeff Flynn, Jim Runner, Jonathan Danforth, Ernie Duffy; **Front;** Tina Smith, Don Joy, Stan and Janet Von Hagen.



Rhythm Bones Society

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Address Correction Requested