



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 25, No. 4 2023

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I am often amazed by the efforts and creativity of our Secretary and Treasurer Steve Wixson. He's been cranking out Newsletter content for quite some time now and this edition is no exception. I am impressed at least in part because I understand how challenging it is to do. I dealt with some serious writer's block trying to put together this editorial. Some of my early attempts went something like this:

The end of the year is always a time of reflection for me. I remind myself to be grateful for all that I have. I mean there are children out there who don't even have rhythm bones!

The Holiday season often leaves me with a profound sense of gratitude. I find myself thinking of the less fortunate among us who don't even have jam sessions!

As we head into the New Year, let's pause to reflect on the poor souls who don't even have ideas for the

RBS newsletter!

Johnny Cash said "it takes a lot of imagination to write a song". I thought I might try my hand at it in hopes of sparking some content for my editorial.

Yes and how many times must a man turn his wrist, before he can produce a triplet? The answer my friend is clacking in the wind, the answer is clacking in the wind. Yes and how many trees must a man chop down, before he can make a set of bones? The answer my friend is one.

Needless to say, Johnny was right and my effort was less than successful:

Then I realized that as cheesy as my early starts to this editorial were, I was on the right track. I do have a lot to be thankful for. 2023 saw the return of (Continued on Page 2)

Jim Connor, Bones Playing, Banjo Player

Jim Connor was born and raised in Gadsden, Alabama, and is described as a song writer, composer, vocalist, and instrumentalist on the banjo, guitar, harmonica, and rhythm bones. His most famous song is *Grandma's Feather Bed* made famous by John Denver. Banjo legend, Earl Scruggs, says "Jim is the finest living traditional banjo player, and perhaps the best that ever lived." The banjo is important to his rhythm bones career in that it has taken him around the world where he has played rhythm bones. That story is told on Page 4 in this newsletter.

Jim was Ted Goon's newspaper delivery boy in the 50s in Gadsden, Alabama, and he learned to play rhythm bones from Ted 'Mr. Goon-Bones' Goon. Ted was an important rhythm bones player in and around the 1950s, and we have a large exhibit in our Online Museum that documents his playing and recording career (<https://rhythmbones.com/goon-bones-exhibit/>). His recording of *Ain't She Sweet* rose to #7 on the Billboard Jukebox Chart.

Unless otherwise noted, text in quotes was taken from an interview with Jim in November 2023.

"I heard Ted play rhythm bones early in my banjo years, and learned how to hold them and do my arms and learned his style. I can't even remember the

years – in the early 60s. I think he had another job and was not a full-time rhythm bones musician at that time. (Continued on Page 2)



Jim Connor with banjo and rhythm bones (Gadsden Times)

Editorial

I am embarrassed. Several years ago Jim Connor attended Bones Fest VIII, and due to circumstances including rain, he did not get to perform. We learned of Jim from the late Tom Raisbeck. At that time I knew he played rhythm bones, but I did not know about his impressive career. I know now and his story begins on Page 1.

I am excited to be a part of the planning for the 25th Anniversary of the Rhythm Bones Society. Back in 1999, you could find about 100 Internet pages of rhythm bones information. Just now I Googled “rhythm bones” and found about 20,000 pages. We have made a difference, and it is time to celebrate.

Though not official, there will be two celebrations, the first at Bones Fest XXVIII (see Page 8 for preliminary details), and a world wide virtual celebration on September 20, 2024, our actual anniversary date (an idea from Jonathon Danforth). The Board welcomes with open arms ideas, like Jonathan’s, to add to the celebration.

Tom Connolly wowed us with his story titled, ‘An Irish Bones Story.’ Now he is back with a fun piece on Page 6.

At the Board Meeting at BFXXVII, Facebook was discussed and Skeff Flynn took administrative control. Check out his Facebook story on Page 7.

(Continued From Page 1)

the in-person Bones Fest in Campton, NH. Randy “DaBonesMan” Seppalla is actively organizing Bones Fest 2024 in Clarksdale, MI. The Rhythm Bones Society is looking forward to recognizing a major milestone in 2024, celebrating 25 years as an organization. Our Facebook page is once again thriving as a way for bones enthusiasts to connect and may even help bolster our membership, as new folks seem to be joining all the time. (More on this on page 7.)

The Cacophony in Campton was an absolute blast! Our hosts Sky and Jessye created a wonderful atmosphere in a beautiful setting. Many familiar faces were able to join us along with several welcome new editions. If you missed it, or if you just want to reminisce, you can read more about it in *RBP*, Vol 25, No 3.

Bones Fest XXVIII will be in Clarksdale MI in May of 2024. I was fortunate enough to attend in 2019 and can say that we are in for a treat. The Shack Up Inn is the perfect venue for workshops, jamming and fellowship. The town of Clarksdale welcomed us with open arms and has spent the past few years asking Randy when we’re coming back. More details can be found on page 8, and registration should be open around the time you are reading this, so hit the website and reserve your spot. Randy has lots of local connections, including great caterers! It’s worth noting that the registration fee includes a good number of meals.

The Rhythm Bones Society turns 25 in 2024. How should we celebrate? There is talk of a virtual event on September 20th, the actual date of our anniversary, which sounds great to me. A few thoughts have been discussed for commemorative items. Your input will help ensure we come up with a fitting tribute, so if you have an idea, please send it our way.

2023 provided lots of opportunities for me to play rhythm bones. I returned to Ireland to participate in the All-Ireland Bones Competition. My partner Mary and I continue to lead a weekly jam session, The Shedhoppers. We’re performing regular duo gigs as Tangled Woods as well as participating in Old Time and Irish sessions in our area and generally doing whatever we can to share the gift of music with friends both new and old.

And that’s just it. Music generally, and for us, playing rhythm bones specifically, really is a gift. It is something to be shared. I’ve connected with a few folks this past year who told me that they had relatives who played the bones, but hadn’t seen or heard anyone play them in years. Truly a gift for me to be able to help them remember their loved one in this way. What a wonderful thing we have this organization to bring us together in music and fellowship. I really am grateful for you all.

At Bones Fest this fall I was talking to Mary and Vikki when Rosco came along and chimed in, “what are we doing, starting a cult?” As I look back on 2023, I realize that there are less fortunate folks out there who don’t even have cults! I’m glad I’m not one of them.

Happy New Year. Your friendly neighborhood bones player. *Skeff Flynn*

Rhythm Bones Player

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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

(Jim Connor Continued)

“He would teach anyone who wanted to learn and would spend time with them. The first group I was in was the Gadsden Guys, and several of them learned to play rhythm bones from Ted. He was very nice and I knew his family a little bit. My wife and I visited him not long after we were married, and she remembers us just sitting around with me playing the banjo and Ted playing his Goon-Bones.

“I first started picking up pieces of wood, big old pencils and different kinds of spoons, soup spoons and big old serving spoons and playing with them. I have bone and wood rhythm bones, and all and each provide distinctive soundings and rhythms. But nothing is better than a good set of wood bones. My rock maple ones are rich sounding, and I occasionally use persimmon and cow-rib rhythm bones. I carry my favorite wood rhythm bones in my banjo case or left pocket everywhere I go.

“I had several ‘Goon-Bones’ from



Ted Goon lost most of them in the 50 years or so I've been traveling on the road. I've got one set around here in some box, and it is stamped with 'Goon-Bones' on the side, and I would not take a million bucks for it. I leave my original 'Goon-Bones' stamped set at home (see the photograph below).

"Frailing on a banjo makes your hands the shape to play rhythm bones. The right hand frailing made it seem natural to put two rhythm bones in there. I learned how to ease up them to make a high tone and pull them down to make a lower tone.

"I had a scholarship to go to Harvard so I did 4 years up there. I just messed around with my major and didn't have enough classes and I didn't get a degree. We were playing on all our holidays and all during our time at Harvard in a group called the Charles Valley River Boys. I don't remember playing much rhythm bones with them, but I think I did a few little numbers.

"Then Richard [Lockmiller] and I hit the road. We were a duet with Capitol Records, and we were together during the 60s. We recorded and I can't remember if there were any rhythm bones on our records. They weren't a substantial part of our show, what they were was a novelty to us.

"As a novelty, I'd bring the rhythm bones out and play on some up-tempo number. I'd play the banjo and put the rhythm bones in my right hand and pick the banjo with my left hand and play the

rhythm bones. I would strum an open chord on the banjo that was appropriate, and I wouldn't play all the chords with my left hand cause I couldn't do it. Maybe we'd do it as part of the encore. It was part of the show, but just a novelty.

"When I was on road I played rhythm bones as I would get tired of playing the banjo with the same old sound.

"I took Dave Guard's place in the Kingston Trio. We didn't play anything in the regular show with rhythm bones that I remember, and I don't think we ever recorded anything with me on rhythm bones. I did play them as a novelty sometimes for an encore. I'd say, "I've got some bones in my pocket." I'd pull them out and the Kingston Trio crowd had never seen them before. So that was just something extra.

"When I was in John Denver's band, I tried to teach John how to play, but he wasn't interested in pursuing them. I always carried them with me when I toured with him, and I remember playing them at parties. We'd be jamming at parties and I'd get bored and I'd pull the rhythm bones out. But I don't remember playing them on his show at all.

"I did not meet many rhythm bones players when I was on the road, but I've taught many people.

"I'm a 70 year experienced rhythm bones player, and I played rhythm bones



Still photograph from a YouTube video of a Jim Connor concert. What is that in his back pocket?

all over the world. The audiences loved rhythm bones.

"More recently, I shook 'em at several concerts during John Denver week in Aspen, CO. I played rhythm bones in Holland and Belgium on John Denver's Memorial Concerts with the John Adams' Show. I play rhythm bones a time or two in each of my solo concerts."

Jim has made several contributions to the *Rhythm Bones Player* newsletter. In the special issue covering the first ten Bones Fests, in the Bones Fest XX Prophecy section he wrote, "The Fest Motto is 'Clone them Bones,' and the T-shirt graphic shows the earth with twenty bones radiating out like the rays of the sun. Gerry Hines remembered that prophecy and used it to make the T-shirt graphic for Bones Fest XX.

Jim sent us this poem titled 'Bones Forever' printed in the newsletter.

Long live bones and may your tribe increase
 May the rhythm of the bones bring you peace!
 May your spouse or friend put up with you
 As the music of the bones sees you through
 Friends of the bones are everywhere
 Some ride the road, some fly the air
 And we all know when on earth we're through
 There'll be a set of heavenly bones waiting for you.

"I place my hand over my heart in memory of having Ted Goon on my paper route in Gadsden, Alabama when just a kid and yet had enough sense to listen and learn direct from the master!

"By the way, my composition *Grandma's Feather Bed* is a good un' to play rhythm bones with... naturally!

"Maybe someday you can see me play the banjo, rhythm bones, harmonica and sing at the same time." Jim and his wife, Cindy, hope they can make it to Bones Fest XXVIII. *Steve Wixson*



Ted Goon's 'Goon-Bones' rhythm bones made from northern Michigan maple

Jim Connor Biography

Below is a brief overview of Jim Connor's music life.

1938 - Born in Gadsden, AL

1943 - Learns harmonica from his granddaddy

1946 - Mrs. Morris encourages writing

1948 - Adds a 5th string to a banjo ukulele

1949 - Learns rhythm bones from Ted Goon

1956 - 1971 - Studies old-time banjo style from Arthur Kirkendall

1956 - The Gadsden Boys

1960 - Harvard College and part of folk revival

1962 - Richard and Jim, his first commercial group, hit the road

1966-67 - USO Tour

1968-72 - Kingston Trio

1974 - ? - John Denver Band

2018 - Inducted into Alabama Bluegrass Hall of Fame

Over the years hundreds of live club, festival and theatre appearances throughout the world.

On tour with many famous artists, and Jim has three Platinum and eight Gold records to his credit.

Has played in 68 countries on 4 continents.

He has been described by master banjo artist/singer, Earl Scruggs, as "the finest living traditional banjo player, and perhaps the best that ever lived."

What follows is from an interview with Jim in November 2023 plus words extracted from online interviews. Unless otherwise noted quotation marks are quotes from Jim.

Early Music Life

"I had piano lessons starting in the first grade given by my mother, and I had a cousin, Marylin, who started playing the 4 string ukulele. The reason I bring that up is because of the four strings, it kind of interested me. I learned some ukulele chords and decided to get me a banjo ukulele. I had seen them in newspaper pictures so I went to the music store in Gadsden, and bought me a 4 string banjo ukulele. I was strumming around and liked the sound.

First banjo

"Then someone told me you only have

4 strings and you are supposed to have 5. So I started looking at banjo players on TV and the Grand Old Opry.

"I was just a pre-teen kid. I took my pocket knife and bored a hole in the side of the banjo neck and put a stop and added a 5th string. I started diddling around and played in local talent shows where they would give a prize. I played my banjo, but didn't win anything.

Harmonica

"My granddaddy taught me to play the harmonica when I was 5 or 6 years old. He also taught me to play the harmonica without moving it in my mouth.

"In one talent show I put the harmonica in my mouth and along with the banjo won a gallon of ice cream. I was so excited and I guess that's what started me off. I was about 10 years old.

"Every since my granddaddy taught me how to play the harmonica, I've always had one in my left pocket, and still do. For almost 80 years, I carried a little harmonica ready to pull it out hoping it was in the right key. I must have lost 30 or 40 of them over the years. I played solo harmonica on occasion including a couple of award winning Linda Ronstadt albums

Arthur Kirkendall

"I never met a really good banjo player until I finished high school. I was in college in my home area and went to a fiddler's convention where you had a contest for all the various instruments where the prize was \$15. I met a man there who played the banjo and it was melodic to me. His hands looked like they moved like a ballet dancer on the fret board and the banjo. He was playing the old-time style. This was on Sand Mountain, Alabama, not far from where I lived.

"He was an old man, and I asked him if he would teach me how to play. He said just come to my house, and I did and had my first lesson. His name was Arthur Kirkendall, and he had learned from his uncle, Roe Kirkendall in 1896 when he was a little kid. Roe had learned it from an African slave. That's the source of the old-time style as I know it. I studied for 15 years with Mr. Kirkendall until he passed away in 1978. I can play bluegrass a little bit, but I love and stick with that old-time style. You play with your

fingertips if they are strong enough."

Here is a bonus, a banjo lesson from Jim on his old-time frailing style - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8sZYIY-sYio>

Harvard

"When I applied to Harvard, my entrance essay was about my grandmother, and I think that tipped the scale for my scholarship."

The '50s and '60s saw Harvard Square at the core of a massive folk revival, a musical movement that largely began with a ragtag group of college students from Boston including Jim and ultimately it became a nationwide phenomenon.

Richard and Jim:

"My first commercial group was 'Richard [Lockmiller] and Jim,' and we were regulars on Birmingham TV and at the Lowenbrau House in Homewood branching out to the top East Coast folk clubs including the Gaslight and the Bitter End. We toured Europe and made a recording in England that led to a contract with Capitol Records. We also made two appearances on ABC's 'Hootenanny.' Richard was the best rhythm guitarist I have heard or played with." Here is one of their recordings: https://www.lp2cd.com/time/120611/richard_and_jim--watermelon_hangin_on_the_vine.mp3

USA Tour

Jim Connor performed more than 300 USO Shows during 1966-1967. Known as the Jamboree Show and during the holiday season as the Holiday Jamboree Show, Jim performed eight months doing two shows a day, around the globe. Here's a letter from one of those soldiers.

"Jim, I know you don't remember me, it's been about 53 years. You were in Wiesbaden, Germany, and I believe you were performing at the Service Club. After your performance we went down stairs and jammed. What fun, and how nice you were for giving us the opportunity to jam with you. Oh! I remember "Richard and Jim" recordings. Do you still have the D-45?"

Kingston Trio

"They were Nick Reynolds, Bob Shane and Dave Guard, and I would jam with them on occasion. Several years later I took Dave Guard's place as the banjo player, and was with them for 5 years." You can preview songs on our album

‘The Best of the New Kingston Trio including the first recording of *Grandma’s Feather Bed* (see below) at <https://music.apple.com/us/album/grandmas-feather-bed/478184727?i=478185079>

John Denver

“I met John Denver about the time I left college and before he changed his name to John Denver and started writing songs. He heard my song *Grandma’s Feather Bed* (see below) and years later as he’s beginning to be a superstar, he recorded the song on his biggest selling album ever ‘Back Home Again.’ He asked me to join him in performances and that led to about 60 concerts covering most of his career.” Here is John Denver singing the song with the Muppets: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gH_tYxY8AKE

Songwriter and Composer

“I had a third grade teacher, Mrs. Morris, who really encouraged me. I would finish my homework or tests early and write things on the edges of the paper to pass the time. She read them and eventually asked me to write a poem for the class. She had me stand up and read it and the class applauded. That was the beginning of my writing career.

I visited my grandma who had the feather bed and she was so much fun. She sang old time songs and told stories that she learned from her grandmother when she was a child. I remembered many of them, and later discovered people wanted to hear them as Folk songs.

“I wrote hundreds of songs and the first song published was *Grandma’s Feather Bed* (see below). That gave me a publisher though most of my songs were never published.”

I could not find a list of the songs Jim published, but this link lists the credits for just one of his albums: <https://www.discogs.com/release/21839608-Jim-Connor-Personal-Friend-Of-Arthur-Kirkendall-Monk-Daniel-And-Cluny-Rakestraw>

Here is a song sung the day he wrote it called *Ten Pounds of Possum*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPLyanP-F1kw&t=68s>

His composition *Sand Mountain Symphony* is recognized as one of America’s Landmark Musical Compositions. It has 24 movements, some orchestrated, and here is the finale titled *The Mist*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43udjrTKrlw>

Grandma’s Feather Bed

I got lonely on the road and I’d often write letters home. I wrote a letter, more like a poem, to my grandmother and tucked a copy away in my banjo case. Years later, I found the letter and decided to turn it into a song.

One day in 1968, I was practicing the song and John Denver walked in and said he liked the song. I made him a cassette recording, and as fate would have it, John lost it

I ran into John from time-to-time and was invited to his house for a barbecue. I played the song for John’s producer, Milton Okun, and my song was recorded with me playing banjo. “John loved *Grandma’s Feather Bed*, and would play it at all his shows and all his appearances.” It has been covered by at least 22 artists, and I still get royalties from that song.” Here is Jim telling the story of the song and then singing it: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wIZdf4pupl4>



The Vegavox Deluxe Banjo

“This banjo, the Vegavox Deluxe Special, was made for me in 1968, the last year before the Vega Banjo Company was sold to the to Martin Guitar Company. I wanted a custom made Vegabox Deluxe because it has the high head and the high, wide resonator.

“They made this banjo for me because at the time I was in the Kingston Trio and we endorsed Vega so they could use our name to advertise their banjos. They made banjos for several different members of the group for just the cost of the parts, and this banjo was made for me for \$600. I asked them how much they would have sold this banjo for and they said \$10,000.

I wrote out how I wanted the neck inlaid, carving on the heel and inlaid with mother of pearl and little ivory lines. It is gold plated. It is one fret longer making it a G-flat banjo, but I tune it in G as I like the way the strings sound.

“About the end of the first year that I had this banjo, it was stolen in Greenwich Village. Someone broke into my little car, a Volkswagen, and when I came out of the club where I was playing there on the sidewalk was all stuff that was in my car, suitcases, guitar case, and my other banjo. 35 years later a friend saw it on Ebay and I was able to get it back and it looked like it had never been played.”

Here is Jim telling stories and playing tunes on his Vegavox banjo: <https://www.facebook.com/JimConnorBanjo/videos/1688144698120473/>

Sand Mountain

Dill Production from Birmingham, Alabama produced a movie about the rich heritage where Jim lived. It is titled, “Music in Their Bones: The Music & People of Sand Mountain” and it was shown on TCM and PBS. Jim plays on this trailer starting at about 1:30): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVe-7v4IVMJJ>

As I reflect on this article, Jim’s music life was built on the shoulders of people of Sand Mountain, Alabama; piano, his mother, harmonica, his granddaddy, old-time songs, his grandma, rhythm bones, Ted Goon, banjo, Arthur Kirkendall, song writing and composing, Mrs. Morris, and there were others. A fertile place to call home, and he still lives there.

References:

This link is a wonderful overview of Jim’s life in his own words: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Semg0dEFPp0>

Here is Jim from an earlier video telling stories and playing several instruments: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTuFBwuEiUQ>

Here is a story about Jim from the The Aspen Times: <https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=ATW19760101-01.2.35&e=-----en-20--1--img-tx-IN%7ctxCO%7ctxTA-----0----->

Additional material for this article came from the Ft. Payne Times-Journal, Gadsden Times, Sand Mountain Reporter, Steve Celuch Podcast, Colorado Historic Newspapers. *Steve Wixson*.

It's the Action that Matters, Not the Size

Is there a “perfect” size for a pair of rhythm bones? Is there a “normal” size? Is there a specific curve or an ideal weight? Should they be narrow or thick, or tapered? Should the marrow be hollowed out of rib bones? Should one bone be heavier so that the other bounces more easily against it? Are smaller bones better for smaller hands? I made my first pair of rhythm bones in 1979, and it is still the only pair I have made that I have not agonized over the length and thickness and weight.

Back then a musician friend Joe “Strokes” Stephens told me about the bones and when I went to the local butcher I told him what Joe told me. I asked him for beef rib bones, about 5 ½ or 6 inches long, with a bit of a curve and a good thickness so I could hollow out the marrow for a nice sound. The butcher had never heard of rhythm bones either and kindly offered to cut a few samples from different parts of the rib for me to experiment with but, with a confidence that belied my total ignorance, I said one pair would do and I marked out two ribs for him to cut.

If I knew then what I know now I would have taken him up on his offer because one thing I do know for sure about making rhythm bones is that they all turn out different. They are different to what I expect when I start making them, and they behave very differently as I clean, dry, sand, polish and balance them. They all feel different in the hand and they behave differently depending on where and how you hold them.

I usually make a few pairs together. I get full beef ribs, boil them, match them up into pairs and choose where to cut them. But I almost always end up swapping partners a few times during the process. And then if I am satisfied I go back to them a few days later and change my mind again. I only really know that a pair of rhythm bones is good when I ask my wife Bríd to try them out.

For over forty years as I have tried to make the perfect pair of rhythm bones I've found that each pair turns out to be unique even when I carry out the exact same process and use the same dimen-

sions. I learned a lot from Steve Brown when I met him first. I read Scott Miller's booklet on how to make rhythm bones, and I have even done a diagram of a beef ribcage numbering the bones according to Scott's advice that I give to the butchers as a guide. I have tried to copy Joe Birl's famous Bakelite rhythm bones, and Steve Brown's beautiful shin rhythm bones. Yet, I often find that random bone sizes and shapes produce beautiful sounds. Some of the nicest rhythm bones I have made were from butchers who were trying to do me a favour by cutting them and shaping them as they saw fit. One pair I made recently were in my bin at least twice as “scrap” before I changed my mind and rescued them.

The smallest pair I ever got was from a West Yorkshire man called Stephen Thorp, whose grandfather Charlie Thorp played them during the 1st World War. The largest pair I ever saw was owned by a man in Padstow in Cornwall who was MC of their famous Obby Oss festival. They were probably eleven inches long and two inches wide at the base. He lost them and asked me to make replacements, which I did, but he found his own again in the meantime.

To my surprise those large bones were actually very easy to play, but I did have to change technique – once I got them swinging, I just let their momentum do the work and let them “fall” against each other rather than clicking. They reminded me of rhythm bones I read about years ago that were made from horse ribs and were so large because there was no amplification in the music halls in the USA at the time. The tiny World War One bones on the other hand (if you'll pardon the pun) were quite a workout to play!



I have made rhythm bones from Italian water buffalo, which turned out to be very big and flat with a surprisingly “soft” texture. I also made a few pairs

of goat rhythm bones from shins, which are thin but very hard and “clicky”. I am still looking for goat ribs (for more than 10 years!) and I suspect they will also be quite hard. As well as various types of wood (elm, pine, and even cheap deal) I've tried aluminum and copper. This year I even saved the thigh bones of the Christmas goose, and I will try them out in the New Year.

And after all that here are the seven things I have learned about the size of rhythm bones:

Rhythm bones players preferences vary hugely.

Nice looking rhythm bones are no good if they don't play well.

Some ugly rhythm bones play beautifully.

Lots of lengths, widths, curvatures and weights can produce great action.

Even rhythm bones made to a standard pattern from non-bone material have individual characteristics.

There are many different opinions of the same pair of rhythm bones.

The bones decide.

And if I were forced to choose the most important physical characteristic, it would be the action.

I hope you had some fun reading this article. *Tom Connolly*

Dom Flemons' New Instructional Video

Dom Flemons has a new Rhythm Bones Instructional Video. Check it out at <https://www.facebook.com/watch?v=2619785601517000>. It will soon replace his earlier video on the ‘Learn To Play’ Page on our website.

Bones Calendar

Bones Fest XXVIII, May 2-5, 2024, Clarksdale, MS, the birthplace of the Blues. Randy Seppala host.

Rhythm Bones Society 25th Anniversary Celebration. September 20, 2024. In the planning stage, but possibly a world wide one day affair using Zoom teleconferencing.

RBS's Facebook Page

I'd like to take a moment to talk about our Facebook group. Over the last year, one of the goals of the Rhythm Bones Society was to revitalize our Facebook group. We have done this in splendid fashion. You can find the group here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/818901525412905>. Or you can search on Facebook for Rhythm Bones Society, you'll most certainly find it.

Our hope was to create a forum where rhythm bones players could interact with one another. So far, it seems to be doing well. We have beginners asking questions. Rhythm Bone makers give us glimpses of what they are working on. Collectors ask for help in identifying the source of the bones they're playing. Some share family histories, stories of rhythm bones players who came before us. And of course, there are videos of actual rhythm bones playing! There are even videos from recent Bones Fests!

I know not everyone is on Facebook or is a fan of the platform. If we can find a way to replicate this on a more accessible platform we will, but sometimes it just makes sense to use the tools that are in front of you. For the moment, this seems to be working.

The Board has shown a high level of engagement in the group. Kenny Wolin, and Tom Connelly's Irish Bones, have contributed volumes! Stephen Brown has been active in the comments. I have commented or replied to many posts, and have posted a bit of my own playing as well. And that's the whole point, isn't it? We are the Rhythm Bones Society, and a Society is a community. We need each other, and this is a virtual place for us to hang out. Let's grow it.

To hang out in person, mark your calendar's for Bones Fest XXVIII! We'll be in Clarksdale, Mississippi, May 2-5, 2024. Your registration fee includes something like 6 meals, so don't let the sticker shock deter you!

I am so excited that Bones Fest will be in Clarksdale, Mississippi this year! Mary and I have already booked our air travel. *Skeff Flynn*

Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting

The meeting was called to order on September 9, 2023 at 12:21 PM in the Doll Building in Campton, NH by Executive Director, Skeff Flynn. All members were present except Tom Connolly.

The Nominations Committee was called to order, and all current Board Members were nominated for 2024.

Bones Fest XXVIII was discussed. Attendees will be asked the month they prefer and if anyone wants to host it. Randy Seppala has expressed interest in hosting it again in Clarksdale, MS.

The 25th anniversary of RBS was discussed, and we need program ideas and commemorative gift ideas. (Note: after the meeting, Jonathan Danforth suggested a virtual event on September 20, 2024 so the world can celebrate our 25th anniversary).

Facebook has become more active. Several Board Members have become administrators and have actively been posting and/or responding to community conversations.

Printing the RBP newsletter was discussed and the Board wants to keep a paper copy as a membership benefit.

ASCAP has announced a new Festival License that would almost triple our yearly cost. All or most of the background music played at Fests is live and in the public domain, and we are not sure how a volunteer society like ours can do the research required to know how much to pay. The motion was made and approved to create a RBS Youtube Channel and see if their copyright tools will tell us if we are using copyrighted songs. Dean Robinson made a motion to table this discussion until the next Fest, and it was approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:36PM.
Respectfully Submitted, Steve Wixson,

Minutes of the General Membership Meeting

The meeting was called to order on September 9, 2023 at 1:44 PM in the Doll Building in Campton, NH by Executive Director, Skeff Flynn.

Motion was made and approved to accept the minutes from the last meeting as

printed in the newsletter. Steve Wixson gave a brief Treasurer's Report.

Steve Wixson presented the results of the Nominations Committee with all current members nominated for another year. The floor was opened for additional nominations, and there being none a motion was made and approved to elect the nominees by acclamation. Those elected were Skeff Flynn, Executive Director, Kenny Wolin, Assistant Director, Steve Wixson, Secretary/Treasurer, and Board Members, Steve Brown, Tom Connolly, Dennis Riedesel, and Dean Robinson.

Bones Fest XXVIII was discussed, and no one volunteered to host it. Randy Seppala wants to hold it again in Clarksdale, MS, and the Board will ask him for a formal proposal.

Steve Wixson announced that the 25th Anniversary of the Rhythm Bones Society is September 20, 2024. Attendees were asked for program and a commemorative give ideas. Skeff Flynn also asked how many people might attend a Fest in Ireland, and 16 responded yes.

Sky and Jessye Bartlett were thanked for hosting Bones Fest XXVII.

ASCAP has a new Festival license that will increase our cost. The Board is studying this and will advise.

Ernie Duffy thanked the Board for serving in 2023.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:01PM.

Respectfully Submitted, Steve Wixson
Secretary

Minutes of the Board of Directors Zoom Meeting

The meeting was called to order by Executive Director, Skeff Flynn, on December 5, 2023 at 7:15 PM using Zoom teleconferencing. Those attending were Steve Brown, Tom Connolly, Skeff Flynn, and Steve Wixson.

The Board received a proposal from Randy Seppala to hold Bones Fest XXVII again in Clarksdale, Mississippi. There was a general discussion about the Fest.

The motion was made, seconded and approved to hold Bones Fest XXVII, our 25th Anniversary Fest, in Clarksdale, MS on May 2-5, 2024 with a Registration Fee of \$130 (which includes 5 meals).

Respectfully Submitted, Steve Wixson

BFX XVIII Preliminary Information

“SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL dem bones at the Crossroads, deep in the heart of the Mississippi Delta.” Bones Fest XXVIII will be based once again at the Shack-Up Inn and Chapel on the old Hopson Plantation off historic blues Hwy 49 just outside of Clarksdale, Mississippi. If you attended BFX XIII in 2019 you already know what an ideal venue Shack-Up is for such an event. For the past five years people have been constantly asking me “When is Bones Fest coming back to town?”

On May 2, 3, 4 & 5 Bones Fest XXVIII will celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Rhythm Bones Society in Clarksdale, Mississippi the “Home of the Blues.” Some are calling it the Blues Bone Fest, but all types of bones related music are welcome and certainly encouraged.

I am happy to host another Fest at this unique place near my winter home on Hwy 49 South. Clarksdale has much to offer musically, historically and culturally and the town is always ready to open it’s doors, nationally and internationally, with it’s own home grown blend of Southern hospitality to the many visitors that come here seeking the blues. Come get you some.

Randy “DaBonesMan” Seppala (Fest graphic is an acrylic creation by Randy)



Rhythm Bones Society

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Signal Mountain, TN 37377-2910

Address Correction Requested