



# Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

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*In This Issue:  
Rhythm Bones  
From Annika's  
PhD Thesis*

*About Annika  
Mikołajko-Osman*

*Interview with  
Bonnie Rideout*

*Bonny Rideout  
Scottish fiddler*

*Interview with  
Cathy Jordon*

*About Cathy  
Jordon*

*Interview with  
Monika Sullivan*

*Raquel Danziger*

*Columns:  
Executive Director*

*Editorial*

## Executive Director's Column

Hello good people!

We've just passed the summer solstice and it's my favorite time of year (and not just because that means I get to celebrate another birthday). The days have gotten to their longest point, and the weather has gotten warmer. Along with that comes the promise of adventure, the promise of excitement, along with relaxation. There is the promise of getting to do the things we all like to do!

The top of that list for me is . . . Bones Fest!!! This year we'll be heading to Natick, Massachusetts, where Bruno Giles and Steve Brown will be hosting what is sure to be an incredible gathering. These two gentlemen are some of the finest and most genuine people I know. They also happen to be exceptional stewards of our rhythm bones playing traditions.

Bruno has been a steady presence in the RBS for more than a decade. I'm fairly sure it was Steve

Brown who pulled him in, but it's Bruno's serene spirit that stands out to me. Bruno is a veteran of the Massachusetts drum circle scene. He's an excellent harmonica player as well, sometimes combining rhythm bones and harmonica together in an homage to the players that have come before us. His connections to the world of percussion in Natick, combined with his unflappable demeanor, make him an ideal host. I can't wait to see him.

I don't have to tell anyone except our newest members that Steve Brown was our Executive Director for more than two decades. Similarly, he has been leading workshops at the New England Folk Festival for at least that long. He is a multiple All Ireland Bones Champion. He is a renowned rhythm bones maker, selling rhythm bones to players all (Continued on Page 2)

## Rhythm Bones From Annika's PhD Thesis

Rhythm bones are really an extraordinary instrument. Happily more and more composers are interested in using them in their compositions. I'm very delighted that only in the last few months two pieces of new music for chamber ensemble - including rhythm bones - have been premiered. It was a piece by Zofia Dowgiałło "Blessed are the Righteous" for chamber ensemble and piece by Michał Dorman "Canzona" for viola, cello, voice and rhythm bones, which I had the pleasure of performing. Rhythm bones were also used in the performance of "Shakespeare's Sonnets," the latest play by Małgorzata Warsicka with music by Karol Nepelski. The play entered the permanent repertoire of the KTO Theatre in Krakow after its premiere. It is a love story told through music with lyrics taken from William Shakespeare's sonnets. The play features 4 actor-vocalists, an actress-vocalist-multiinstrumentalist and a musical ensemble consisting of drums, bass guitar/contrabass and electric guitar. In one of the songs, the composer included rhythm bones part in the part of my voice, too. Today, however, I would like to talk about another piece, that was presented during the Special Concert Contemporary Vocal Works Differently, i.e. involving the singer in stage actions

and instrumental playing which was an artistic part of my PhD. Below is a brief description of this composition, a fuller version of which was included in my doctoral dissertation.

The piece I would like to tell about is song evocation by British composer Tim Ellis's written to a poem by Federico Garcia Lorca. The composer first encountered the work of this poet in the early 1980s and, on impulse, acquired Poema del cante jondo and a Spanish dictionary, which he did not yet know at the time. The poems sparked the composer's imagination even (Continued on Page 2)



*Annika Mikołajko-Osman, PhD*

## Editorial

Stories about five women rhythm bones players came together for this unique issue of the *Rhythm Bones Player*. Dr. Annika Mikołajko-Osman shares the rhythm bones section of her PhD Thesis (the second PhD thesis on rhythm bones). Bonnie Rideout shares stories about her relationship with legend Percy Danforth. Cathy Jordan shares her experience judging the All-Ireland Bones Competition and her rhythm bones playing with the band Dervish. Monica Sullivan taught Cathy how to play rhythm bones and there is a story about her. Raquy Danziger is a drummer who also plays rhythm bones. These stories cover classical, folk, Celtic, and world music showing the range of genres possible with this prehistoric musical instrument. Thanks to Annika, Bonnie, Cathy, Monica and Raquy for sharing their stories. And to Annika, me, Tom (twice) and Steve Brown for writing the stories on digital paper.

**(Exec Director continued from Page 1)** over the world. On more than one occasion I have found myself marveling at a pair of rhythm bones in a stranger's hand and saying, "yup, those are Steve Brown Bones" Most importantly, he is a rhythm bones ambassador. Steve welcomes everyone into our shared passion.

So be sure to register for Bones Fest XXIX. Book your hotel. Plan your trip. It has often been said that a Bones Fest is like a family reunion with a family you didn't know you had. Well, now you know. I can't wait to see you, family!

This issue of the newsletter features strong female rhythm bones players! We have a contribution from Annika from her doctoral thesis. It is absolutely wonderful to see rhythm bones included in academic literature. As you all know, most of our history is passed down via oral tradition. When bones are included in academia, future generations will have an easier time finding sources. It's really encouraging to see Annika lead a charge for rhythm bones to be included in academic art music in Poland. (I thought about adding quotation marks in there at some point. Please understand that we're talking about GOOD music first, and aca-

demia second. It's just that academia has a way of recording things that folk music often does not.)

At the same time, we continue the oral tradition with an interview with Bonnie Rideout. Bonnie is a renowned fiddle player, as you will read in the following pages. She was also close with Percy Danforth, perhaps the most important Rhythm Bones Ambassador in the 20th century. I can say with certainty that if Percy hadn't spread his passion for rhythm bones as enthusiastically as he did, I would not be playing today. The same may be true for many of you reading this. I also would not have had the pleasure of becoming friends with his grandson Jonathon Danforth (current RBS member and former Board Member).

Steve Brown contributes an article on Raquy Danzinger. Raquy plays the rhythm bones in tandem with the darbuka. It's really interesting to see the rhythm bones used in a non-western context. Any time that we see rhythm bones applied to music that we don't traditionally associate them with is exciting to me. The more applications for rhythm bones, the better!

So, stay cool my friends. I hope to see you in a few weeks in Natick. Until then, "may your bones be with you!"

Your friendly neighborhood bones player, *Skeff Flynn*

**(Annika continued from Page 1)** before he attempted a translation. As the composer himself said: 'There was a life that jumped off the page for me and demanded that I create music for it'. Work on the piece took time to finally take shape in 2014. The piece was created for a charity concert for people battling cancer. It was an extremely close subject for Tim, as he had lost a loved one to cancer the year before. Tim Ellis (born 1954) comes from a military family, and as a result he was introduced to many cultures as a child, whose music influenced his work (England, Singapore, China, Yemen). He studied composition at the Royal Northern College of Music under Anthony Gilbert and Peter Maxwell Davies. His work includes both

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instrumental and vocal pieces written to texts in various languages

The piece was written for piano, soprano and rhythm bones. The composer originally intended to use castanets. However - due to the greater articulatory and timbral possibilities - the composer and I decided to change the instrumentation. The rhythm bones I played during the concert on 9.12.2023 were commissioned especially for this event. They were handmade from beef rhythm bones by Steve Brown. In the performance of the piece, in addition to the soprano and rhythm bones (Annika Mikołajko-Osman), the pianist Olga Miriam Michałowska also performed. The performance you can see when you click <https://youtube.com/watch?v=gyl2sHXhwRs> or you can scan the QR code to the left.



The text of the piece is taken entirely from the poem *Tierra seca* from the

aforementioned collection *Poema del cante jondo* by Federico Garcia Lorca. The collection was written under the influence of an interest in folk songs, six months before the cante jondo competition organised by the Arts Centre in Granada in June 1922 on the very

Tierra seca, tierra quieta de noches inmensas.	Dry land, solid land full of vast nights.
(Viento en el olivar, viento en la sierra.)	(Wind in the olive grove, wind in the mountains.)
Tierra vieja del candil y la pena. Tierra de las hondas cisternas. Tierra de la muerte sin ojos y las flechas.	An old land of lamps and sadness. A land of deep cisterns. A land of death without eyes and a land of arrows.
(Viento por los caminos. Brisa en las alamedas.)	(Wind on the roads. Wind on the avenues.)

initiative of Federico Garcia Lorca and Manuel de Falla. 'Cante jondo' means 'deep singing' and is a style of Andalusian songs whose themes are mostly related to pain and despair. By some, cante jondo are considered the only true flamenco.

In his piece, Tim Ellis has taken inspiration from this style of work, but superimposed it on contemporary harmony with extended tonality. In the voice part we find a reference to the roots of the cante jondo through the use of the pectoral register in the soprano and the use of Sprechgesang bringing the singing closer to speech (a reference to *prosa cantada* - as Andalusian songs were sometimes called).

The piece, like the poem, has four parts. We can distinguish the individual parts on the basis of the text (stanzas), agogic changes, as well as recurring motifs and rhythmic phrases. The composer used successive polymetry

in the piece, which was dictated by the characteristics of the Spanish language and the arrangement of syllables in the poem. The accented syllables in the individual words always fall on the strong part of the bar.

The rhythm bones further emphasise the Andalusian origin and, together with the piano part, create polymetric structures that allude to the characteristic rhythmic figures of flamenco. Numerous rhythmic motifs appear in both the rhythm bones and the piano part, audible as *accelerando* or *ritenuto*, but this is, in fact, a rhythmic procedure by the composer - a dissection of increasingly minor or longer rhythmic values.



Figure 1. *evocación* - the 'accelerando' motif

In Figure 1, parts I and III speak of the earth - 'tierra', while parts II and IV represent the wind - 'viento'. Each pair has a similar structure and motifs. The 'tierra' parts are characterised by an earth motif (cf. fig. 2), 'accelerando' motifs, a predominance of singing over Sprechgesang technique and common melodic and rhythmic motifs in all parts.



Figure 2. *evocación* - earth motif

In Figure 2, the earth motif appears every time the word 'tierra' appears. It is constructed from a sixteenth-note quintuplet, in which only the fifth sixteenth is sung, and two half notes. With the melodic changes later in the piece, the rhythmic character of this motif and its second-septimeter sound is retained.

In movements II and IV, the character of the wind was achieved by the composer through descending and ascending motifs of four thirty-two notes and an eighth notes in the piano part (cf. fig. 3). An additional timbral effect was achieved in these movements through the use of the sustain pedal in the piano for the entire duration.



Figure 3. *evocación* - wind motif in the piano

In Figure 3, parts II and IV are written entirely in the Sprechgesang technique with a gently rising and falling melodic line - also reflecting the character of the wind. Part II also features rhythm bones with short rhythms of several minutes - as a sound carried by the wind.

The link between words and music is quite strong in this piece - both in terms of prosody of speech and its meaning. Although the piece was written for soprano its scale is quite small and the tessitura is quite low for this type of voice. The highest note is G5 and the lowest is B♭3. This is a deliberate effort by the composer to exploit the sound of the chest register (especially in stanza III which speaks of depth and death).

The performance problem in *evocación* is therefore primarily the ability to play the castanets (or rhythm bones), and to master the Sprechgesang technique. Apart from that the piece is technically comfortable, despite its strong emotional charge. Playing the rhythm bones allows the singer to make a stage creation and it is also a visual reference to Andalusian musical traditions. *Annika Mikołajko-Osman*, PhD

## About Annika

Dr. Annika Mikołajko-Osman is a coloratura soprano, soloist, chamber musician, multi-instrumentalist, pedagogue, graduate of the Academy of Music in Cracow, Poland at the Faculty of Artistic Education and Rhythm and the Faculty of Vocal and Acting, graduate of the Academy of Music in Katowice and postgraduate studies in Culture Management at Jagiellonian University.

In 2025 she defended her doctoral thesis at the Krzysztof Penderecki Academy of Music in Cracow, which was devoted to vocal contemporary music from the borderline of instrumental theater.

She made her debut on the stage of the Kraków Philharmonic in Claude Debussy's opera "Pelléas et Mélisande" conducted by Gabriel Chmura.

As a soprano, she primarily performs



contemporary music. She has premiered numerous works by composers from around the world. Among others, she was a soloist in the world premiere of Michal Dorman's "Dodi li va 'ani lo", Mariusz Kramarz's "Little Mass" in G Major, Julia Schwartz's "Lamento" for soprano, tenor saxophone, piano and conga, and Karol Osman's "Hortus Nocti" for soprano and orchestra.

For more than 10 years, she has been conducting original musicianship workshops and teaching piano improvisation and singing. She teaches both in institutions for children and young people as well as at the university level.

Dr. Annika Mikołajko-Osman also actively participates as a speaker at scientific conferences and publishes scientific articles in the field of musical art.

In an effort to spread maritime culture, Annika published in 2017 a book "Shanties and their musical-educational character among sailors in the era of great sailing ships".

In her activities, she also strives to popularize the rhythm bones to which she has devoted a lot of musical projects and scientific articles. She has played rhythm bones since 2012. She trained her skills using all available sources of books and films. From 2013 she was (as a rhythm bones player) a member of a shanty duo, which appeared at several editions of the International Sailing Song Festival "Shanties" in Krakow. She is also a member of "MozarTap & Bones" with which she performs as part of events promoting American tap dance with playing rhythm bones. Annika also premiered various pieces composed or arranged for rhythm bones by composers from all over the world. She also gives rhythm bones lectures and workshops.

You can find a page dedicated to rhythm bones on her website at <https://en.annikamikolajko.com/rhythm-bones/>. Here is an interesting sample at <https://youtube.com/watch?v=wpTYV7BPvEU>

## An Interview with Bonnie Rideout

This is a transcript of a telephone interview on June 19, 2016 with Bonnie Rideout about Percy Danthorth. 'S' is for Steve Wixson, and 'B' is for Bonnie.

S. How did you meet Percy?

B. I was a freshman in college and was fiddling and went out to the Wheatland Festival. My guitar player, Charlie Wilkey, said you've got to meet this guy, he's like an institution out here. His name is Percy Danforth. I said is this the son of a band teacher? Charlie knew his son, Mac, who was a band director with a crew cut and was a strict teacher. I figured Percy was going to be this strict military guy. Turns out he had fluffy white hair and was the most loose, gentle person you would ever want to meet.

I went over and he was doing his bones demonstration, so we sat around and watched. Charlie introduced me to him and we played a tune right there on the spot for his demonstration. He had a real good time playing with me, so we invited him over to our picnic table at the end of the night when everyone was jamming. And we just struck up the most amazing relationship that started from there. He kind of adopted me into his fold like he did to so many people, like a little granddaughter. Wheatland for me was 1982.

I met his wife, Fran, who was an amazing person and composer, and they were living in a Senior place.

He asked me if I would like to join him when he played for seniors. He just reached out to everybody. It didn't matter what age you were. Every person to him was a special, unique miracle, and it didn't matter if it was a little wide-eyed six year old or playing a really top notch professional. We partnered for the seniors together. And he was so proud when he played with the symphony.

I used to go over to his house, and he gave me a lot more lessons. I used to practice where I lived on campus at UofM while going to Music School. I had to walk to the North Campus, and I practiced the bones while I was walking so I'd get good at it - 45 minutes every day. I kept practicing and got good enough to play with him. We'd do little sets together with me playing the fiddle and then we would do bones back and forth.

So then he asked me to go with him to the Wheatland Festival to play with him next year, and then I went to Wheatland every year with him. I drove with him in his big car. I remember one time coming back late at night and he was driving

about 20 or 25 miles per hour. This car pulled up and it was a group of guys that had been to the festival, and they didn't know it was Percy driving. They just pulled up right beside him on a two way road. One guy rolled down the window and said "Hey do you need some help." They noticed it was an old guy and they thought he was drunk.

I think my favorite Percy story is at the festival, and it was something you always looked forward to, going to the Festival. It was run by wholesome people (all vegetarian food everywhere). They had been sprout sandwiches. We got our little food coupon that the festival gave us and walked from booth to booth for lunch. Percy would look at the food and say "I don't want that. No, I don't want that." He gets to the very end he just looked at me said "I want a hot dog." That became our joke for ever when we'd go to any concert or festival. He'd say I wonder what the food there's going to be and I know he'd be wanting a hot dog. That is the kind of person he was. He was very funny and super generous with his time. Anybody who wanted a lesson - he wouldn't charge them anything - he was just that kind of guy. Always accessible, always available.

He sold his own bones. I still have all my Danforth bones that he signed for me. He always signed his name on them for people. I have the soft wood, the hard wood, the whole thing. I play bones on my shows though I am retired from touring.

He was really special and people embraced him. And someday the footage that that my dad took of Percy and that sits in his basement will come to light.

S. Tell me about Fran

B. She was a trained musician and composer. She was more frail and died before Percy. She stayed home while he went gallivanting around. She published some works and played piano beautifully. A very musical family. Mac was a great musician.

S. What were the best festivals you went to?

B. Wheatland by far. I'll look around and see if I can find some pictures. When you drive 40 miles per hour to Wheatland it takes 5 hours and you have a lot of time for talking.

S. San Slomovits took Ray Shairer's

tools and is continuing to make Danforth Bones.

B. Fantastic. I really like the soft wood ones because they are not as penetrating when you play with acoustic instruments. They are hard to microphone because you are moving around.

I like sound of the pine ones and I remember him saying hold on cause we'd be tuning and he tune to us. And the whole audience would laugh. Actually he did tune. He knew his bones so well - the design was great. He'd always say fun things from the stage and make people laugh.

S. What was his most challenging piece of music or style of music?

B. He used to tell me about it and I never saw him. One of the highlights was I think it was the Philadelphia Orchestra, and he was filling in. I think that was really challenging, but I don't know what he played. He could have been doing Philip Sousa, but I don't know. I remember he had a terrific time with the percussion section teaching them the bones when they were on break. But it's a good thing to follow up on. I don't know if there is a recording of him.

I found it difficult, and Percy was so good at it, to playing bones slowly in triple time especially like the waltz. It's really easy to play to fast stuff. He had such control.

I remember him setting up his little stand and putting his tape player on. Playing along and drawing people in. He would pass out test bones to everybody to give them a little lesson. That was his stick. Everybody would try and at the end of the session if they wanted to buy a set, they could. Then everyone would turn their bones back in. He would sell some. By the end of the day at these festivals there would be people walking around trying it. He reached out to people that way.

When I was with him I would play with him in place of the tape recorder. It would be a 15 minute set, and it drew more people in since it wasn't just a tape recorder. I just made sure that I played different rhythms for him to show jug tune, triple time and other rhythms.

The Strathspey is conducive with Scottish fiddling with what they call the Scottish Snap. a sixteenth and a dotted eighth. It takes a guitarist a certain

amount of time to figure it out what the Strathspey is - it's not an easy thing for a rhythm player to play along with. With the combination of him and Charlie Wilkey, a great rhythm guitar player, it was probably the most challenging thing because Percy had never heard a Strathspey before. So it was kind of neat to be able to teach him something, but it only took about 10 minutes.

S. His son Mac said Percy never made any real money from bones.

B. It was never about that. He was just so passionate - he had a mission that was to get the bones recognized as a musical instrument and get people playing it. He had no ego. He didn't care whether he played on stage with Joan Baez or someone (She was at Wheatland once, well known but not famous yet). It didn't matter who he was playing with. He would go into schools, nursing homes, or anywhere to get the name out. He'd call me up and say are you busy this weekend. I'd say I have to work until then. He would say "I'll pick you up from work then, and bring your fiddle."

S. His son Mac said he had three occupations, Architect, Engineer, and Teacher, and teacher was by far was his favorite profession.

B. I did go to a couple of schools actually, but those were during the week though, usually classes. He was really good at getting kids all fired up but not out of control. He was a born teacher. He loved being a teacher and he smiled with his eyes. He literally had twinkly eyes, and kind of a mischievous look that he would have. He touched kids that way, but everybody that way.

S. Did he play with well known musicians, Joan Baez?

B. Yes, she was at Wheatland once and he played with her. She was somewhat known, but not yet famous. There would be headliners that would come to Wheatlands and they would invite Percy up on stage with them. He was an institution there and everyone knew Percy. He was invited on stage a lot. I'm pretty sure Marcy Marxer met Percy at Wheatland, but maybe not. He played a lot of festivals, but Wheatland was his big one with people coming from all over.

S. Philadelphia Festival supposedly had a rule where you could only be invited 3 times and Percy came 7 times.

B. Percy was one of the guys that did it so much that people would ask him to join them on stage because it was just so unusual. He'd fit in with anybody. He could play any style and could fit in with them. And he would listen. They would start and if he hadn't played with them before he would just stand and listen until it came around again and then he would just jump in. He would get the rhythms and just fall right in. He always blended well and did not stick out.

S. [Steve read a list of festivals he attended.]

B. He got around. He would do little things happily in Ann Arbor, the Art Fair, and the Ark. *Steve Wixson*

## Bonny Rideout Scottish fiddler



On stages from Scotland's Edinburgh International Festival to America's Kennedy Center, Bonnie Rideout's unique style of Scottish fiddling has charmed audiences across the globe. Bonnie has been featured on the BBC, CBS, NPR's Performance Today, Morning Edition and The Thistle and Shamrock. In addition to authoring seven music books for Mel Bay Publishing Company, Bonnie has recorded over fifteen solo albums and appeared as a guest musician on dozens of CDs with Sony, BMG, Time Life, Ryco Disc, Dorian, Rounder Records, and Maggie's Music. In 2003, she incorporated her own record label, Tulloch Music, Ltd. Her A Scottish Christmas CD became a New York Times "Top Ten Holiday Best Seller". Its success prompted a touring show that has sold out halls across North America for over a decade. Over a million viewers have attended

her North American concerts, which in addition to her holiday shows include RANT, Caledonia, and the Bonnie Rideout Scottish Trio. Her popular recording, *Gi'Me Elbow Room* received the National Parent's Choice Gold Award. In 2007, the Mel Bay Publishing Company credited Bonnie as one of America's top ten most influential traditional fiddlers of the 20th century. Three of her recordings received GRAMMY nominations and she has been active with the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS), having served on the Board of Governors for the Washington D.C. branch.

Ms. Rideout is the only American to hold the honor of representing Scottish fiddle music at the prestigious Edinburgh International Festival. She is the first woman to hold the national Scottish fiddle title and the youngest to have garnered the U.S. Championship, winning it for three consecutive years. Bonnie discontinued competing to become an adjudicator and professional recording artist and has maintained a consistently high profile in the Celtic music scene for almost thirty years.

## An Interview with Cathy Jordan

I caught up with Cathy Jordan again on the phone in June 2025 to hear more of her thoughts and musing about rhythm bones. I asked her about different types of rhythm bones she had seen and played, her style of playing, and we also chatted about the bodhran and some random things!

Cathy has very definite views on rhythm bones – she regards them as an instrument to accompany and embellish the music and loves to hear rhythm bones played “...with the music, under it, not before it or behind it.” She also believes they are better played sparingly, not with every tune, because they have such a strong presence and can dominate easily.

I mentioned Steve Brown's oft-quoted view that I first heard from him in 2011 – “...rhythm bones are like salt and pepper with a meal – a little taste is lovely!”

The last time we spoke was in 2023 as part of the article “An Irish Bones Story” that appeared in Volume 25, No.2 of the

*Rhythm Bones Player* where Cathy told me about her first pair of rhythm bones. She made them with a friend, Monica Sullivan (see story below), an excellent Sligo bodhrán and rhythm bones player.

Herself and Monica went to a butcher and picked out the bones they wanted, brought them home and after weeks and months of boiling and baking, ended up with a unique pair (see picture) that Cathy loves playing. She talked this time about how the right-hand bone fits very comfortably in her hand, her thumb snug in the curve.

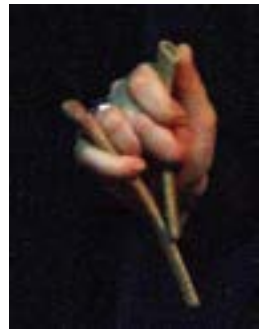
Cathy learned on this pair with two fingers between the bones. Most players I know just have one, but Cathy felt it gave a much richer hollow sound and I agree.

I learned with one finger between the bones and I had to change my grip after an accident in 2002 and I found the same thing – you can get deeper richer “clacks” with two fingers between the bones.

Cathy has had many pairs of bones over the years. She owns a pair of whale bones that she told me she got from a Danish bones player, who was originally from Scotland. (I think that has to be the renowned Yirdy Machar! If you read the *Rhythm Bones Player* Volume 4, No. 4 2002 you will see a wonderful article by Yirdy recounting the lead-up to his winning of the Bones/Spoons contest at the Old Time Country Festival in Avoca, Iowa that year).



Cathy said she finds the whale bones quite heavy and a bit long. She likes to play different types of bones for recording, for stage work, and for sessions, but is always



happier when the bones suit her. With her inimitable sense of humour she remarked that playing strange bones was like wearing someone else's underwear! I do agree with Cathy – I find that I am happy playing some pairs of bones for some songs/tunes and then have to change to different pairs when the music changes. Different pairs of bones I mean of course!

Cathy once had a pair of bones she loved, that were made for her by Sligo musician Stephen O'Dowd <https://www.stephenodowd.com/>, who is a son of the well-known Seamie O'Dowd [http://www.seamieodowd.net/seamie\\_odowd\\_website\\_2020\\_003.htm](http://www.seamieodowd.net/seamie_odowd_website_2020_003.htm).

Stephen melted down some old milk cartons (made from non-toxic plastic) and molded a pair of bones that Cathy says sounded great. Unfortunately, these unusual bones were lost in the bowels of Airport security along with other bones and all the band's bodhrán sticks when she was on tour a few years ago.

After that Cathy got a new pair of bones and didn't really like them – until she tried three fingers between them. Now that is the way she often plays.

Cathy was the judge this year at the Abbeyfeale Bones Competition which she was at pains to point out is actually the World Competition. “Abbeyfeale was great!” said Cathy “The singing was lovely. When they start playing the slides and polkas though you have to hang on for dear life!”

She has a few stories about Abbeyfeale over the years, one of which is not really publishable here – look me up if you see me at a Bones Fest in future and I will tell it to you!

I asked Cathy what criteria she used when judging the Bones Competition at Abbeyfeale and she said she looked for 1. Style – including an understanding of the music; 2. Timing – technique – tech-



nical excellence; and 3. Drive – did the player “drive the music on.”

We finished up talking about the bodhrán. While I like some of the synthetic ones I see these days, Cathy is a staunch believer that goatskin is the best. She mentioned to me that she had just received a copy of Fintan Vallely’s latest triumph of research “Beating Time - The Story of the Irish bodhrán” published in hardback just yesterday June 25th by Cork University Press.

I am going to get a copy – the publicity blurb says: “Rather than mythicising the bodhrán as the oldest Irish music instrument, Beating Times points to the idea that it should perhaps be celebrated for being the newest. Its rapid emergence and transformation is as remarkable and astonishing an ascent in universal popularity and international acceptance as has been the worldwide rise of the guitar in all music.”

I think that is a fabulous statement that is much truer to the bodhrán’s history and impact than the common belief that it is an ancient Irish instrument.

“The book is just beautiful, with amazing pictures and stories and meticulous research” said Cathy “And maybe you should do something similar for the bones!”

Now isn’t that a good note to end on?  
*Tom Connolly, June 24, 2025*

## About Cathy Jordan



Cathy Jordan, shown above playing in the Stone The Crows pub in 1992, was born in Roscommon, Ireland, and has been a professional singer with traditional group Dervish for nearly 30 years. She is a self-taught guitar, bouzouki, and bodhrán player, and learned rhythm

bones from Monica Sullivan.

She has led Dervish as front woman through thousands of concerts in hundreds of cities in nearly 40 countries and has 18 albums under her belt. Among the most notable performances were The Great Wall of China and the biggest rock music festival in the world - Rock in Rio to over 250,000 people. Here is a performance, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TltdLMWXmu8>

As a songwriter, she has written songs with internationally renowned Brendan Graham, best known for the most successful song of the twentieth century, *You*



Fresh from saving a nest of owlets from the ravages of farm machinery, Monica Sullivan kindly called on a Friday evening to tell me her rhythm bones story.

Monica befriended Cathy Jordan’s sister Rose a number of years ago, and was the one who taught Cathy Jordan how to play rhythm bones.

Monica was brought up in Ballymote, County Sligo, where her parents ran the train station. It was relatively remote, which some of the backpackers passing through did not realize. These lucky souls were often welcomed by Monica’s parents to spend the night in their sleeping bags in the waiting room, and were given a good breakfast the next morning to sustain them for the next part of their journeys.

When Monica was around 11 or 12, one such traveler, a German who she thinks was named Ebi Ironberd, became quite taken with her older sister Mary, and the feeling was mutual. Over the next

three years Ebi returned to Ireland often and went to the Fleadhs, becoming an expert flute, bodhrán and rhythm bones player. He taught Mary and their brother Hugh the bodhrán, and taught Monica rhythm bones. So Monica learned rhythm bones, in an Irish style, from a German musician!

The local butcher in Ballymote conspired with Monica to create rhythm bones with the resonant clacking tone she prefers. The process involved burying the bones for up to six months, leaving cartilage and marrow intact, then boiling and baking them. She told me that when drying them out on the kitchen range it was a bit of an olfactory challenge that the rest of the family gamely put up with! The picture shows Monica’s first and still favourite pair. Rib bones are most definitely Monica’s favored bones.



She believes her style is unique, and she can get quite flamboyant when she gets into the groove! Monica recalled with great fondness her Donegal born mother who was a brilliant award winning Irish step dancer, right up to the end of her days, and it is from her mother that Monica believes she inherited her love of rhythm.

In time, Monica’s parents moved to the main train station in Sligo town. With six children, her parents wanted more job security as there was some economic pressure on the smaller train stations – and they also wanted the greater social cultural and educational opportunities not available rurally.

Monica and her sister Mary contrived to get themselves in free to the local Trades Club, by declaring themselves musicians, Mary had her bodhrán in a kit bag (that I believe her parents thought was gear for the Martial Arts classes they were supposed to be attending!) and Monica had her bones. They played there often, in the company of Seamié O’Dowd and many others.

An extensive world traveler, Monica has had some interesting rhythm bones-related experiences. Last year she in the Alkurtoğlu Restaurant in the village of Hamsiköy in the province of Trabzon, Northern Turkey, she used spoons, held like bones, to show people the basics of rhythm bones playing. Monica was amazed and charmed by how quickly the locals learned, and how the rhythm of bones transcended language and culture so beautifully.

A few years ago while living in India for 18 months Monica went on a guided camel trip across the Thar desert with two Australian girls, each girl perched on her own camel with a driver sitting behind. She described how each night the drivers would dig out depressions in the dunes so as they slept they were sheltered from the wind. One night around the campfire one of the guiding party started playing a percussion instrument “that looked like a pot turned upside down”. Monica immediately joined in with her rhythm bones, and they were intrigued and curious, wanting to know what animal the bones were from. Monica told me how she gave a detailed description of the donkey, forgetting how sacred the cow is in India. Next day she realized she had really upset her driver as he kept trying to nudge her off the camel into the sand!

Isn't it wonderful how our simple instrument is responsible for so much joy, so many stories and so many connections in the world! View Monica in Northern Turkey teaching rhythm bones playing, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/Z30Lz-kPpgpM>. Tom Connolly June 27, 2025.

## Raquy Danziger

Although rhythm bones are known around the world there certainly are areas where they are practically unknown. One of these areas is the middle east. There is a strong history of playing spoons, for example in Turkish music, but very little evidence of rhythm bone playing. Enter Raquy Danziger multi-instrumentalist, world renowned percussionist, who also plays a violin like instrument the Kamanche, and is an accomplished artist, and to our surprise and amazement she plays rhythm bones! Raquy has led a life full of music and



travel. She has lived in Israel, New York, and Turkey, and traveled extensively including India. Her story is one of a love of music and the world, being open to possibilities, and integrating music with her love of people. Rhythm bone playing is a relatively small part of what she does, but she has carried rhythm bones around the world and spread her joy in playing them where ever she goes.

Multi-instrumentalist Raquy Danziger was born into a family of classical musicians; her father was a music professor and played the bassoon, and her mother was a classical violinist. Her first instrument was the violin, and there are family pictures of her playing the violin in diapers! At 9 years old she started on classical piano, doing recitals, and accompanying musicians in the school, as well as playing for musicals. It was here that her love for accompanying other musicians was forged. She loved supporting other musicians, and making them sound better. She was very serious with the piano throughout her high school years, but didn't really know what she wanted to do with music, or where she belonged.

All of this changed when she traveled to India, and saw an advertisement for drum lessons. She began taking lessons on the Indian Dolak, a double headed drum well known in Indian folk music. Studying Indian rhythms is like “putting sound to math”. She loved everything about it, sitting on the floor, the more casual nature as opposed to western classical music, and she found, she loved to drum!

Returning to Israel she began to be exposed to the regional drum, the Darbuka. She began falling in love with the Darbuka, the sound of it, and the Middle Eastern rhythms. She was practicing all of the time, and so inspired with the drum. As she absorbed herself in Dar-

buka playing it quickly led to many gigs accompanying many musicians in Israel. Her background of being an accompanist allowed her to be sensitive to the music and supportive of the musicians.

Around this time she began taking percussion lessons in Israel from Ukrainian musician Boris Sichon (who we met at Bones Fest XXIV). She began studying various drums with him but he soon introduced her to rhythm bones. His style was flamboyant in nature, and included a lot of body movement. “He's just like a fireball!” It was from Boris that she learned rhythm bone playing technique, and soon was developing her own approach to the instrument. “I just had them with me all the time.”

During this time she was going to a concert by the World musician Ross Daly. While waiting outside the theater, she pulled out the rhythm bones, as many of us do, and began to play and improvise. On his way in, Ross Daly saw her and invited her to accompany him in the concert. He loved the rhythm bones and suggested she come to Greece where he was running a music school. She stayed there at the school, teaching and playing music and was amazed that people lived like that, playing music, not working a day job, and living a different life style.

Although the Darbuka was her main instrument, she began incorporating rhythm bones into her performance. Often dancing while playing them and doing solo's, and call and response with other instruments. She recorded a video entitled “The Wish” in which she portrays a character she called, “the bones ninja,” whirling and dancing while playing rhythm bones.

Today Raquy travels around the world, sometimes living in Israel, Turkey, or the United States. She teaches regularly and has an online Darbuka school where she offers regular classes both live and recorded. She recently returned to New York where she performed at the reunion of her former group, Raquy and the Cave men. She discovered Islamic style Illumination painting while living in Istanbul, and has developed an intricate and original style. And she still plays rhythm bones and loves the bones! Here are a couple of her videos. <https://youtube.com/watch?v=2LM7HyeSxk4> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1hoRz-Aa2o> (bones at 3:32-4:04) Steve Brown