



# Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 2, No. 2 2000

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## Executive Director's Column

Interest in bones playing and the Rhythm Bones Society continues to grow. We now have over 70 paid members of the society with many more anticipated. The web page has been updated and given a new address (see article on page 4). Check it out. If you know of any bones player who has not joined the society please give them a call and encourage them to become a member.

Over the weekend of March 24-26 Virginia Public TV aired a special program on 5 TV stations which included a sketch filmed at Bones Fest III. Everyone who had the privilege to see the program was impressed. They did a great job. Copies can be obtained from Virginia Public TV for \$24.

Plans for Bones Fest IV to be held on September 22-24 in Chattanooga, TN are well underway. Steve Wixson, Program Chairman, has everything under control. There is much to do and see in Chattanooga. Some of us are going early and staying late. All registrants will receive a package of information about this

beautiful area.

Although plans are not finalized it appears that we will have a reception with light food and great music on Friday evening September 22 at Steve Wixson's home. This will give us a chance to get to know each other, make plans and form carpools for the weekend. Saturday the 23<sup>rd</sup> will be spent at the Mountain Opry house. Everyone will introduce himself or herself and demonstrate their bones playing technique, not to exceed 3 minutes. Two bones playing workshops are planned. One for beginners and a second for advanced players. Lunch and dinner will be provided.

After a BBQ dinner on Saturday night a special program will be presented by the more experienced bones players. Please contact Steve if you would like to present something special. On Sunday morning we are all invited back to Steve Wixson's home for coffee, donuts and more jamming music. At this time it appears that Bones Fest IV will be a truly international event. Don't miss it! Ev Cowett

## Ted Goon - Mr. Goon-Bones

Ted Goon, Mr. Goon Bones, was a recording artist during the late 1940's. He had many hits and rose to seventh on the Jukebox popular music charts. There were thirty or so Mr. Goon Bones clubs where people who owned authentic Goon-Bones gathered to exchange ideas and practice their bones playing.

I found Ted while surfing the internet. I telephoned him and after preliminary conversations recorded a two hour telephone interview. I was exhausted after the interview, and I wonder how Ted at age 88 felt. He sounded exhilarated, and played bones to illustrate his ideas.

Ted Goon was born in 1911 and at age twelve heard bones played at a tent minstrel show. He says "it was the most beautiful and sensational sound I'd ever heard.". He queried his father only to discover his father knew about bones. He carved Ted a set and showed him the basics. Ted made better bones and developed enough ability by his senior year to

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# Editorial

This issue features my article on recording artist Ted Goon, known as Mr. Goon Bones. Ted says he achieved success as a bones player because he developed new techniques for the music of his time. If that is true, then his story is a lesson for us on how to preserve bones playing for our next generation. I mean have you tried to play the bones with all of the music that comes from the radio and television. Our youth like that music.

I am impressed with the 'tap' development seen slightly in Percy Danforth's and almost entirely in Dr. Fred Edmunds' instructional videos and the ambidexterity demonstrated by Aaron Plunkett (read a review of Edmunds' instructional video on Page 3). There is need and plenty of room for all of us to contribute. Let's try some of that more difficult music at Bones Fest IV. Any comments?

Martha Cowett writes about her web site and its new name. Part of your dues go to pay for this new name.

One purpose of the Rhythm Bones Society is to educate. What better way to do that than for the Society to produce a Bones CD. We can talk about it at Bones Best IV, and if there is enough interest we can set guideline for the music that should be included. Bring along a favorite bones recording, and maybe it will be included. We have to negotiate copyrights, but as a non-profit organization recording companies are likely to give us permission to use their works. Who knows, with bones popularity on a fifty year cycle, a bones album might catch on. *Steve*

## Letter to the Editor

Dear Boners,

Spring 2000 - time to be bone-again. I remember the weekend I spent with Percy Danforth at a university in La Crosse, Wisconsin. That weekend I went along as Percy's go-for, chauffeur and assistant. We discussed everything from music to his life as an architect. If anyone is interested, I will share some of our conversations.

I made my first appearance as a bones player in 1978 as Dr. Bones soon to be changed to Spike Bones when I discovered the theatrical character Mr. Bones of the 1800's. I have performed everyday since.

I request a spot on the Bones Fest IV program. *Spike Bones*

(Ted Goon—Continued from page 1)

play in the high school jazz band.

Ted went to college with the goal of getting into business. His hobby became golf, not bones playing. World War II comes along and Ted's right leg gets banged up forcing him into a long period of hospital rehabilitation. He knew his golf days were over, and needing a hobby he sent for his musical bones.

By this time bones had died out, and new music had come along. He needed a starting point to continue playing the bones, but for a time couldn't find one. But he lucked out at an old library where he found a definition of rhythm that was what he was looking for. Rhythm: a pattern of beats or accents repeated uniformly. He says it again: "Rhythm: a pattern of beats or accents repeated uniformly."

During his hospital stay to the enjoyment of his fellow patients, he practices becoming ambidextrous "to get the maximum ability to create patterns."

After the war he got readjusted into business, but this time could not forget the bones. He practiced to records, gave free performances at service clubs, churches, and the like which seemed to be appreciated. And there was a demand for bones at a reasonable price.

Ted started experimenting with different woods and plastics using professional sound equipment to evaluate the sound. He never revealed the wood he chose until now—maple from a section in northern Wisconsin. The shape and length came from his research on bones playing in England in the 1400's. He planned on making a fortune selling bones, and trademarked his bones as *Goon-Bones*.

Ted knew that to get into that market he would also have to get into the recording business. One night while on business, he stopped into a nightclub and heard an organist who was "unbelievably clever with his instrument." Ted proposed he would pay all expenses and split the royalties, and the two were in business. He selected *Sheik of Araby* and worked 80 hours on an arrangement.

While waiting for his Goon-Bones trademark, Ted was approached by a small recording company but told them it would be three months before his trademark would be issued and he would

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## *Rhythm Bones Player*

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

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

Rhythm Bones Central web site:  
<http://www.rhythmbones.com/>

## Bones Calendar

June 24, 2000 Bones Workshop at California Traditional Music Society Festival, Molly Bennett and Michael Ballard teachers. ([www.ctms-folkmusic.org/](http://www.ctms-folkmusic.org/))

August 28-September 3, 2000. National Traditional Country Music Festival and Contests including 25th Annual Bones and Spoons Contest on September 2nd and a Bones Workshop the following day, Avoca, Iowa. Contact Jerry Mescher ([smescher@netins.net](mailto:smescher@netins.net)) or the RBS at the address on Page 4.

September 22 & 23, 2000. Bones Fest IV. Chattanooga, TN. Contact Ev Cowett ([evcow@aol.com](mailto:evcow@aol.com)) or the RBS.

(Ted Goon—Continued from page 2)

be willing to record. One month later he heard *Sweet Georgia Brown* on the radio by Brother Bones. They had found another bones player and rushed a record to the market. Later Ted got to know Brother Bones, and learned that he did not receive a dime on that record. Brother Bones was first to have a hit bones recording.

The *Sheik of Araby* sold 400,000 copies when 200,000 was a hit. In those days the other side of the record, the B side, went along for the ride. Ted selected *Ain't She Sweet* and experimented with an exaggerated off beat and a new device called an echo chamber. Billboard magazine reviewed it, and said it was a virtual monstrosity. Later a disc jockey in St. Louis

## Recorded Bones Music

Blues 'n Bones, Master of Piedmont Blues by Archie Edwards with Richard "Mr. Bones" Thomas playing the bones. Mapleshade 56292. Archie's barber shop in Washington, DC was a collecting place for Blues musicians. Original and traditional songs with lots of

## Bones Websites

<http://www.nexuspercussion.com/>  
Nexus is an exciting percussion group from Canada. Russell Hartenberger is their bones player.

## David Holt

RBS member David Holt is a Grammy Award and four time Grammy nominee. He is known for his folk music and storytelling recordings, his numerous programs on TNN, Folkways on PBS, Riverwalk on public radio and for his popular concerts performed throughout the county. He has been collecting stories and traditional mountain music for over thirty years, many of which are included in his recordings and books. Ev Cowett has David's *Folk Rhythms* instructional video on spoons, washboard, bones, paper bag and hambone and says it is great. Visit David's web site at [www.davidholt.com](http://www.davidholt.com)

played it and it exploded selling one and a quarter million copies. A distributor in St. Louis ordered 200,000 *Goon-Bones*, but Ted was unable to produce them at a profit. Ted did sell about 20,000 sets of four bones with an instruction book during his career.

Ted signed with Mercury and made several other recordings. He was getting pressure to go on the road, and after two years gave up recording to stay with his family. Eight years later after his children were grown, Ted and his wife, who operated his professional sound equipment, went on the road for two years entertaining in high schools and small colleges and for a half year on a military tour to Alaska, South Pacific and the Orient.

Ted tells a story about the actor William Holden who was a goon bones player. Holden invited Ted and his wife over for lunch to discuss a joint partnership for recording and selling bones using a company Holden found in India that could make bones inexpensively. First Holden wanted to see Ted play bones, and Ted played to Tiger Rag. Holden looked sick as he assumed Ted dubbed all of those clicks and now realized that he could not be a recording partner. Ted never heard from Holden again.

Ted put his bones up except for an occasional demonstration for friends and family. When we recently contacted him, he said he was hesitant to get involved with bones again, but after thinking about it wanted to contribute something if he could. He says "It was a wild ride while it lasted. My hobby got way out of hand."

RBS sent Ted videos of Bone Fests I, II and III, and he was impressed with the talent displayed. Ted issues two challenges to us. First to develop new techniques for today's music which he says he can't understand. Second to play Tiger Rag better than he did. Tiger Rag will be played at Bones Fest IV as will his other recordings that still sound great.

Ted gave RBS a cassette of nine of his recordings, a copy of his instruction manual, two sets of Goon-Bones, copies of the covers of two of his hit recordings, and other materials. Those items plus a copy of his

recorded interview and a transcript of it will be turned over to the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress so future historians can view them. We will keep a copy for our informal library. *Steve Wixson*

## Dr. Fred Edmunds' Bones Instruction Video

The book and video start out with learning to hold the bones. Dr. Edmunds is quick to point out that this is the main difficulty people have playing the bones. From there he progress into very elementary rhythms, accents and pickup notes. He next moves on to triplets and quadruplets showing several methods of performing each. Following these rudimentary, mechanical, and developmental chapters, He starts mixing things up and showing some possibilities for creative expression on the bones which is where the value of his method lies. Finally he delves into the "off-beat," (syncopation) and ends the course with several showy licks.

The video is most helpful to see hand motions and how a particular passage should sound which could save countless hours of trying to figure something from just the book, particularly where accents and syncopation are involved.

Fred Edmunds was a percussionist. He was an excellent drummer along with being a bones player. Nothing irritated him more than to see bones playing as a never-ending series of triplets with the occasional quarter note thrown in-between them, he believed there is so much more to being an accomplished bones performer. I would highly recommend his course of study if you are curious to find what lies beyond the typical "click a de ick a de ick a de click" to quote the good doctor. Syncopation and accents mixed with the rolling of triplets and quadruplets is where it was for him.

This bones method is demanding and you need to bear with it in the order things are presented. Master one section before moving on to the next. If your perseverance and drive holds together, and a little creativeness kicks-in, you can become one of the great bones artists. *Tom Rice. Editor Note: After Dr. Edmunds' death, his widow sold his materials to Jim Meyer, 612-557-6866.*

## Web Site Gets New Name

'Dem Bones 'Dem Bones, 'Dem Rhythm Bones. Welcome to Rhythm Bones Central! Your host of this spot is Everett Cowett...

For a man who has just about everything he needs and the means to get what he wants what else can a daughter give her father for Christmas other than a web page of his most favorite hobby. That is how it happened, Rhythm Bones Central was created. I figured it would be fun for him; almost a novelty item and perhaps it would even entice him to get on that computer he just bought himself for no good reason and help him learn how to use it. Who knew it would actually do all that and really make a difference in so many peoples lives.

The purpose of the Bones page (other than the above mentioned stuff) is to educated folks on Bone Playing and to bring Bones Players out of the closet and off back porches together. So far it has worked better than I had

ever expected. Many old hobbies have been rekindled, new hobbies have been created and the best thing; many good and lasting friendships have been formed.

Those who have search around the site have seen that it is divided into eight sections: Introduction, History, Bones Players of Today, Rhythm Bones Festivals, Where to Buy, Clicks and Clacks and Rhythm Bones Society. My personal favorite section is Bones Players of Today. In this section I have posted small personal biographies and pictures of Bones Players who are proud enough to offer up the information. I love to get new names and post them. If you are not on there and would like to be please send me an email with your information and a picture. If you would prefer you could even send me your information and photo snail mail and I will scan your picture for you –no charge!

The page is being updated as often as I get to it, which I will tell is not often enough. However, don't let that discourage you from sending me more information that can be shared on the web. I will post it eventually, I

promise! I am so pleased with its progress. My personal goal for the page is to expand the Clicks and Clacks section, a miscellaneous catch all of the other stuff about bones playing section, so that it will be more topical, current and even perhaps have a chat section. But that is all to come in due time.

The page certainly would not be what it is today had there not been feedback and participation so; I want to thank all of those folks who have responded to the page regarding the content, Thank you! You have helped to make it a better site. I would like to encourage all of you who have not done so yet to submit a brief 3-5-sentence paragraph about yourself and picture to Bones Players of Today. And finally, I would like to encourage all of you who have not seen the site to go to a computer (most public libraries have at least one you can get on for free and they will help you...) and check it out! Thanx! Martha Cowett, Web Mistress @ <http://www.rhythmbones.com> Email: [mcowett@mindspring.com](mailto:mcowett@mindspring.com). Street address: 1822 New Garden Rd

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*Address Correction Requested*