



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 2, No. 4 2000

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Executive Director's Column

To say that Bones Fest IV was an outstanding success would be a gross understatement. You had to be there to hear, see and feel the excitement. Steve and Janet Wixson were superb hosts. I thank everyone whom attended and made Bones Fest IV so memorable (see highlights below). Steve Wixson has plans to make a BFIV videotape of the event by editing the best parts of many videotapes. If you have not already done so please get copies to Steve ASAP. The original camcorder tape is preferred and will be returned. Consolidating many hours of tape into a single piece is a major task, and in this case well worth it. It will be available to all members at a nominal cost and will surely be a collector's item.

Our web mistress, Martha Cowett, is preparing a summary with pictures for the <rhymbones.com> web page. If any of you

have pictures taken at BFIV which you feel would look good on the page please send copies to her. You can either e-mail them or send hard copy and she will scan them.

As a result of the Fest the RBS has gained several new members and I welcome them. For those of you who missed the event please plan to join us in Massachusetts during the first weekend of August 2001. It is not too early to mark your calendars. Steve Brown our 2001 host is still looking for the final site and welcomes all the help and support he can get. Suggestions for location, program and activities are requested.

The Rhythm Bones Society had 92 members during the 1999-2000 year. Now is the time to renew your membership for 2000-2001. Make your check payable to the Rhythm Bones Society and send it to 1060 Lower Brow Rd, Signal Mountain, TN 37377. May your bones be with you, *Ev Cowett*

Bones Fest IV Highlights

A HAPPENING, FANTASTIC, OUTSTANDING, WOW! LIKE A FAMILY REUNION, were typical of the comments received after Bones Fest IV. I was truly impressed with the quantity and quality of the bones players and playing at this Fest. Playing before a group of non-bones players is one thing, but playing before your peers is quite another. All participants were outstanding and don't forget the food, drink and partying at the Wixson home, the motel and its Irish Pub.

The wonderful reception given us on Friday night by Steve and Janet Wixson in their lovely home overlooking Chattanooga was a real bones 'click-off'. The musical CD arranged by Steve that had something for everyone was great and don't forget his BoneDrums (bones with sensors and switches that plug into a drum module). The pure sound of the bones will never be the same. Young rockers are sure to take up the bones now.

Since all 44 participants did so well and space does not permit me to review everyone I will sin and highlight some of those that turned me on the most. I did not see all of the

performances because of other activities so don't be offended if your name is not mentioned.

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From left to right, officers Steve Wixson, Ev Cowett and Russ Myers performing together. *Photograph by Sharon Mescher*

Editorial

Happy anniversary Rhythm Bones Society and Rhythm Bones Player. As measured by the quality of bones playing at Bone Fest IV, it has been a good year.

I thank you for your kind response to the newsletter during its first year. Vol 1, No 1 highlighted Bone Fest III and the 24 year old bones contest at Avoca, Iowa. Vol 2, No 1 paid a tribute to Percy Danforth whose playing and instructional video lead many of you into bones playing. Vol 2, No 2 on Ted Goon told the story of how Ted's success as Mr. Goon-Bones resulted from developing a new style of bones playing for the popular music of his time. And Vol 2, No 3 told the story of Irish player Paddy Murphy and the importance of having 'spot-on' timing.

I hope these stories have influenced your bones playing. They have influence mine. Those of you who saw me play at Bone Fest III and then at Bone Fest IV have seen me progress from a one-handed to two-handed bones player with an experimental style. I have been fortunate to have access to all of the instructional videos on bone playing that are being reviewed for the newsletters. My goal for the coming year is to play 'spot-on' which means downloading a metronome program and practicing the fundamentals

Letters to the Editor

I was delighted by your wonderful article on my father, Ted Goon-Mr. Goon-Bones, in your Newsletter, Volume 2, No.2. I am sure he, too, was thrilled.

The article brought back fond memories of some of my childhood experiences: my dad and his musical group rehearsing in our home; the bones performance my dad put on at a high school variety show with some of my high school classmates and me playing the bones with him; and my job as shipping clerk to fill orders for bones when I was in college and he and my mom were traveling and performing at schools throughout the

western U.S. in the late 50s and early 60s.

I would like you and your colleagues in the Rhythm Bones Society to know that Ted Goon, in addition to being, I think, the best bones player who ever lived, is a wonderful man and a terrific father. Thank you so much for featuring him in your recent newsletter and giving him some pleasant flashbacks, too.

I would love to get extra copies of the Newsletter to share with my children and my father's grandchildren. They, too, love him dearly and would delight in reading about his experiences as a bones player. *Bob Goon*

Ev, What a great time I had meeting your family and all my newfound "bone brothers"! Thanks for all your efforts getting us together. Last night I had two hours in the car to try all the new bones I picked up and was in hog heaven. I really feel like I met long lost relatives. I've got tons of ideas swimming around in my head after seeing Spike, Jerry, Bart, Barry and others. Looking

Website of the Quarter

www.tinfoil.com/cm-9707.htm#0867.

This website is dedicated to the preservation of early recorded sounds. They have a CD titled Vaudeville & Minstrelsy with several minstrel tracks. You can download a 1904 wax cylinder recording by the Georgia Minstrels.

Davies Obituary

Len Davies, "The Bonesman" from England passed away in July. He was in his late 70's. Len played the bones since he was 5. A retired plastic engineer, he played across Europe, North Africa, and America. He made his own laminated plastic bones which had an excellent sound. He appeared on the English version of the TV show, 'Whats My Line'. He played on recordings by The Trunkles, Michael Roach, and Geraint Watkins. See his picture at www.fyldefolk.freereserve.co.uk/fyldefolk/l.html. *Steve Brown*

Rhythm Bones Player

Rhythm Bones Society
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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 and condensation.

Rhythm Bones Central web site:
rhythmbones.com/

Bones Calendar

August 2001. Bones Fest V, Boston area. Details in next newsletter. **September 1, 2001.** 26th Annual Bones and Spoons Contest at Avoca, IA. Contact Board Member Jerry Mescher (smescher@netins.net).

Recorded Bones Music

Member Mel Mercier has made several recordings. His bodhran and bones playing with pianist Micheal O Suilleabhain is delightful (The Dolphin's Way, CDVE1, tracks 1, 4 & 8, and Casadh/Turning, CDVE904, tracks 1, 3, and 5. Venture Records, c/o Virgin Records, Hensal House, 553/579 Harrow Road, London, W10).

(Continued from page 1 - Bones Fest Highlights)

Many of you were involved in the bones jamming sessions, but were not overlooked.

Al Cowett (Greensboro, NC) our MC arranged the Saturday program on the spot and held it all together. Dan Cowett (Greensboro, NC) handled our CD's, tapes and sound system. We thank them.

Steve Wixson playing in public with both hands for the first time was a shocker. What a year of practice can do. And what about that number *Tiger Rag* by Mr. Goon-Bones. He challenged us to play it better than he did, but I am not sure any of us did. *Spike Bones* Muhrer (Columbia, MO) will be remembered for his Riverboat performance and Bones 2000 light show with vegetarian bones. Jerry *Dr Bones* Barnett (West Des Moines, IA) was great with cowboy songs, 'The Old Chasm Trail' in particular and I liked Bill Vits (Grand Rapids, MI) for what he did with Sweet Georgia Brown and a whistling audience participating. And don't forget Jim Runner's (Spring Mills, PA) bones sounds, Russ Myer's (Brightwood, VA) 'Hot Time in the Old Town' and Dave *Black Bart* Boyles (Cedarburg, WI) wild performance playing to 'Hilarity' rag time music.

Everyone was impressed by our octogenarians Joe Birl's (Philadelphia, PA) Sousa marches, Matteo (NY, NY) on castanets, Vivian Cox (Shelbyville, IN) playing Rag time, and Ida May Schmich (St Louis, MO) dancing and playing everything. If you want to stay young play the bones.

A highlight was the video of Jerry Mescher (Halbur, IA) and his dad on the Ted Mack Amateur Hour in 1961 followed by his sister Bernie Worrell (Miami, FL) and Jerry doing a duet which was historical, great fun. John Cahill (Jonesboro, GA) in his top hat doing several old-time numbers got everyone's attention, fast and strong. Mel Mercier (Cork, Ireland) playing to Irish pipes and flute with Bodhran and bones,

Walt Watkins (Arlington, TX) with Rag time, Tom Cowett (Richmond, VA) Latin beat, Mike Ballard (San Diego, CA) Celtic, Gil

Hibben (La Grange, KY) 'Night in Barcelona', Sally Carroll and Steve Brown's Celtic selections, John Cowett's (Wilmington, NC) Rag time-country, Ann Hoffman's (St Louis, MO) Cajun Spice, John Davis who started the day off and David and Alice Kimber's (Skiatook, OK) spiritual selections for bones were also memorable. The Cowett family, Ev, Al, Tom, Martha and John enjoyed playing to Dan's 'Bonesgrass' music arrangement.

Another highlight was the appearance of Barry Bones Patton (Winfield, KN) from the *flat pickin* capital of the world doing what he does best. A great young boner, very clean, with speed left over.

The most fun however was the spontaneous boning and jam sessions. Every one got into the act and with the help from several local musicians, namely Don Sarrell, Rufus Elliott and Randy Minor who played the spoons and bones.

Martha Cowett, our web page mistress, was able to obtain resumes and pictures from many bones players for the Bones Players of Today section of Rhythmbones.com. Keep sending her resumes, pictures and updates and she will add them to the page as time permits.

The Rhythm Bones Society met following the Saturday daytime program and reelected the entire slate of officers and board members to

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Decamp Wins Avoca Bones Contest

Donnie Decamp won the 25th Annual Bones and Spoons Contest at the National Old-Time Music Festival and Contests in Avoca, IA. Four RBS members attended the contest held on September 2nd. Donnie has a flamboyant style with great arm movement, and gets paid for playing the bones. He is an occasional performer at Silver Dollar City in Branson, MO and Six Flags over Texas in Arlington, TX. There is a cash prize at the Avoca event. Next year will have at least one other RBS member competing (your editor).

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

The meeting of the Board of Directors was called to order at 4:20 pm on September 22, 2000 at the home of Steve Wixson with all members present.

The minutes of the initial membership and Board meetings were read and approved. The Treasurer's report was incomplete due to outstanding BFIV expenses, but showed that RBS broke even for the year. (Note: the Treasurer's Report is now complete and was mailed to all Board Members. Members may request a copy.)

The Board served as a nominating committee, and all members wished to continue serving to provide continuity for year 2. This slate will be presented to the membership with a request for nominations from the floor.

Steve Brown made a proposal to host Bones Fest V in the Boston area in early August. August will be an experiment, but best fits Steve's schedule and maybe the weather. Motion was made and approved.

The newsletter was discussed and will have four issues in 2000-1. There was a request for historical articles.

The Board recognized the outstanding job that Martha Cowett has done with the website.

Motion was made to study the feasibility of a RBS educational series of CDs covering the recorded history of bones playing. The motion was approved and a report will be prepared for Bones Fest V.

Motion was made to create the Frank Brower Meritorious Service Award to be awarded to individuals making significant contributions to the Rhythm Bones Society. Frank Brower was the first of the minstrel bones players. Motion was approved.

Motion was made to give the Board the authority to remove inappropriate content from the website. The specific complaint was a link to a blackface minstrel page. Motion was approved.

Respectfully Submitted, Steve Wixson, Secretary

(Continued from page 3 - Bones Fest Summary)

serve for another year. They are:

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Sister and brother Bernie Worrell and Jerry Mescher
recreate Jerry and their father's Ted Mack Amateur
Hour winning performance. *Photo by Sharon Mescher*



Barry 'Bones' Patton performing on the stage of the Mountain Opry with Mountain
Opry regulars guitarist Rufus Elliot and banjo player Don Sarrell. *Photograph by
Michael Ballard*

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On Sunday morning many of us gathered at the Wixson home
again for breakfast and to say our good-byes. Val and I stayed over
to see more of the sights in and around Chattanooga. I hope that all
of those attending Bones Fest IV got a chance to see at least some
of the area. It was a great long wonderful weekend, one I will never
forget. *Ev Cowett*

Rhythm Bones Society

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Address Correction Requested