



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 6, No. 4 2004

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Executive Director's Column

We've had our first snow of December and very cold temperatures this week in New England. Winter is my time to practice for the Spring and daydream about Bones Fests, past, present, and future. Bones Fest IV was my first Bones Fest and what a remarkable time it was. Just traveling to Tennessee and seeing Steve and Janet's amazing house was a great experience. But clearly the highlight of the experience was the people. Meeting Jerry Mescher, Barry Patton and Steve Wixson for the first time, not to mention hanging out with Russ Myers and Ev Cowett, I was truly in heaven. I remember being in that little old building they called the Mountain Opry and seeing each bones player

getting up to introduce themselves and play a bit, it just knocked me out. But there was one performer who stood out amongst the others; it was Vivian Cox. She had so much enthusiasm and could she play. I had never seen a woman her age play bones, never mind how good she was. And the light in her face when she talked, played, and watched bones players! She was such a dear to talk with, open and accepting of everyone. At bones fest VI she told the hilarious story of going out to her usual performance at the Boggs-town Inn, after changing outfits between sets, and forgetting to put her skirt on, and standing there in her slip on stage! I will

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Midwinter Musings on Bones Fest VIII

In the middle of winter, at least in New England, we bones players don't go on picnics, we don't see parades, and we don't play Frisbee. Instead, we practice playing the bones!

When we're not actually playing, we spend time wistfully thinking about Bones Fests gone by and the people we get to see once a year. At least, this is how it seems to me, snowed into my New Bedford house by what is being called the worst snowfall in twenty years. Thinking about last summer's good times makes a winter of chilly isolation pass more quickly.

Last summer, as I'm sure you all remember, was Bones Fest VIII, and was hosted by Sally and Terry Carroll. The idea that we've been doing this (as a group) for eight years running is pretty impressive. Bones Fests really started off as a backyard barbeque, and we've made a point, through the years, of trying to keep them fairly informal and more in the nature of a family reunion than a "real" convention. Of course as the Rhythm Bones Society has grown over the intervening time (more than 100 members as of this writing), that family feeling has gotten harder and harder to balance with the challenge of simply dealing with that many people (and especially that many bones-

players!) at once.

I mention this just to emphasize how much of that family feeling I found at this past year's Bones Fest. From the start, I saw people helping to set things up, to make signs, and to help people find various places. Our venue was the Lake Anne Plaza in Reston, VA (not far from Washington, DC), a collection of shops built around a brick courtyard. I myself hung out at the registration desk, so that I could see all the friends arriving that I hadn't gotten to speak with

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Bones Fest VIII hosts Terry and Sally Carroll

Editorial

As is the custom, this issue has the highlights of Bones Fest VIII hosted by Sally Carroll and her husband, Terry. The article was written by Jonathan Danforth. Another great Fest with new and old faces present.

It is with great sadness that I report vivacious Vivian Cox has died. A short obituary, a letter from her husband and a few member letters mark her passing. Her obituary notes that she was a member of the Rhythm Bones Society. This saddens me more than deaths of some closer acquaintances. Though I knew her personally only through our Bones Fests, there was something about her that made me feel close. As Ev Cowett says, there is a family reunion atmosphere at our Bones Fests. I will miss her. Her story was told in Vol 4, No 1. In it she said, "You see, I have joined an ancient and proud fraternity that stretches all the way back to mankind's prehistoric beginnings." She has now met them and I bet she is taking them a lick or two.

I recently experienced the downside of competition. Competitions encourage people to practice and become great players. However, this contest was influenced by a very talented performer who over the years had great influence in accrediting judges for the event. He has a style and this style, however great it is, was unconsciously adopted by the judges. The result, today, is that all contestants have adopted this winning style and all sound great, but alike.

One of the best things about our Bones Fests is that there is no approved style and every bones player has something unique that we all enjoy listening to. If everyone sounded similar, I doubt that our

Letters to the Editor

This is to let you know that my wife, Vivian Cox, passed away Sept 10th. She gave her retirement performance at the Boggsstown Inn and Cabaret July 7th and they had a big party for her. She was the happiest

when on stage rattling the bones and was looking forward to the festival this year.

I will continue a membership to the Society so let me know when dues are due. Keep sending the newsletter to me. Sincerely, *Edward Cox*

Vivian was the first woman I ever saw play the bones. The fact that she was a woman was quite beside the point, though. She was a terrific player. And more. She was an entertainer in the best sense of the word. When I saw her last year at Bones Fest, her charm lit up the stage. She made me smile. And afterward, in person and later by email, she was just as lively, energetic and good natured. I consider myself lucky to have known her, even so briefly and slightly. She was inspiring and I'll remember her fondly. *Sandor Slomovits*

I feel honored to have met her. She taught more than playing bones. Anyone that had the opportunity to talk with her and see her perform had the rare pleasure of entering another era, a bygone era of troupers. For her, the show was everything. Her legacy to us: the show goes on.... *Hank Tenenbaum*

Two reflections. She Encouraged Children. Vivian was sitting in the row ahead of us at Bones Fest VII in Louisville. My 7-year-old was excited by the bones show and rattled away behind her. I was afraid the clattering was a nuisance. Suddenly Vivian turned around, flashed a great big smile, and with a twinkle in her eye told the brand new bones player how wonderful he was.

Vivian Played My Bones. Vivian Cox was one of the first RBS members I met at Bones Fest VII in Louisville. We were chatting in the auditorium Friday night when I mentioned that I left my bones back at the hotel - and had just bought a couple sets of ox shin bones from Steve Brown. Of course she had to try them. *Scott Miller*

Free Spirit: A Joy Forever. Always a smile on her face; ever a twinkle in her eye, Vivian Cox was one of those people you felt you had known all your life the moment you first met her.

Rhythm Bones Player

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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

Her warmth and enthusiasm just spilled over; and she entertained with gusto!! My life was enriched just having known her. She was a first rate bones player, a real credit to the craft. I place her among the best who play bones. May her spirit carry on; may she continue to spread her joy in heaven. *Walt Watkins*

I reached Parker Waite yesterday. He recently returned from Belgium where he had a hip replacement done. He says he's able to do things he hasn't in a long time. He looks forward to a pain-free future and coming to the next bones fest. I wonder if this might make a nice letter to the editor with Parkers address if people want to send him a card? Just a thought. *Steve Brown* [Parker's address is in the new RBS Membership Directory.]

(Executive Director continued from page 1)

truly miss her, and wish I had more time to experience her enthusiasm.

I want to thank each of you who filled out a questionnaire and encourage those of you who haven't to do so and send it in. This is your organization and your Bones Fest. We want to make sure we hear your opinion as we make decisions and plan for the future. Watch this space for further discussion on the results.

In October, ten or so bones society members got together for a "Regional Bones Fest" (see article below). A great substitute for the yearly gathering, it was great to see old friends and enjoy each others playing. We would like to encourage each region to think about hosting their own. A great way to keep us together and playing bones. *Steve Brown*

Second Regional Bones Fest

It was a rainy, and cool October day, as 10 or so Rhythm Bones Society members made the trip out to the Red Apple Farm in Phillipston, MA to share in that brother/sisterhood we call playing the bones. Present were Tim and Dee Tatro, Phil Brake, Norm and Emily Conrad, Jon and Melissa Danforth, Jon Hodgkin, Al Liemeux, Bill and Thomas Rose, Ed Roseman, Ernie Duffy, Shorty and Shirley Boulet, Jeremy Brown, and your humble reporter.

Undaunted by the weather and bolstered by the Reiner Family Band, each of us took our turns playing individually and in groups of two or three. Talk flowed like wine at an Italian wedding, as we caught up on bones activities, and shared tips and other information.

We tried a new activity, bones and juggling duets courtesy of Ed Roseman juggling and bones played by several folks. Al played washboard, and John dragged out the concertina, while shorty, Ernie, Dee, and many others clacked away on the bones.

Lunch was provided by the Farm, as well as salads to share by Dee Tatro, and Shirley Boulet. We feasted on fresh pheasant, grilled to perfection by Bill Rose.

Around 2 pm several members of the general public arrived, and watched while bones, piano, and fiddling could be heard around the barn.

Several members dropped in to the local King Phillip bar for a pint and spirited conversation afterward. All agreed it was a good tune up for the

Vivian Cox Obituary

Vivian Cox, 83, of Blue Ridge, died Friday, September 10, 2004 at her home.

Born July 31, 1921, in Rush County, she was the daughter of Roy E. and Rena (Miller) McAhren. She married Edward Cox on February 28, 1942, and he survives.

Other survivors include three sons, three daughters, two brothers, two sisters, eight grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

She retired in 2004 after 19 years as an entertainer at Boggstown Inn Cabaret.

Mrs. Cox was a member of Blue Ridge Christian Union Church where she was a member of the Ladies Aid.

She was also a member of the Rhythm Bones Society.

RBS Membership Directory

Bones players want to contact each other and RBS has received many requests for a Membership Directory. The Board at its BFVIII meeting voted to publish one. Since some members may not wish to have all of their personal information included, the Board directed that members be contacted and allowed to specify that certain information not be included. This contact information was included in the questionnaire sent with the dues renewal letter in the last newsletter.

The new directory is included as an insert in this newsletter. Since this is the first printing, there will be errors and an updated version will be distributed later. It is being sent only to current 2004-5 members though it includes 2003-4 members who may not yet have renewed their

Recorded Bones Music

It's not often that we can review the works of one of our members.

Recently I received a CD from member Dave 'Black Bart' Boyles titled *Lisa Edgar & RazzMaTazz Live*. This is a Dixieland band that Dave has played with for years.

The liner notes state "They are a festive, funny, foot-stomping combo performing music from the Gay Nineties to the Roaring Twenties. This friendly, talented and exuberant band blends Ragtime, Dixieland and honky-tonk tunes giving their audiences plenty of opportunity to join in the singing and antics."

Dave plays rhythm bones on the CD. He has not attended the last few fests, but those of you who attended the early Fests will remember Dave's musical antics and his Bone-off with Spike Bones. There is rhythm bones playing on most every track of this very entertaining CD.

Again from the liner notes, "Dave learned bones from his West Virginia dad—the bones are beef ribs which are boiled, bleached, shaped and polished to a high shine. An old Irish tradition, playing the bones was later made popular by vaudeville performers. Dave plays standing up and dancing with the bones in both hands, a washboard (his trusty cymbal attached) a stick tambourine in his shoe and a shaker in his hop pocket. 'The Bone Man' has been with the band since 1985: he also plays with bluegrass and Celtic musicians—and even rock bands. Dave is a charter member of the Rhythm Bones Society and teaches at Milwaukee's Irish Fest where he is known as 'Professor Bones.'

Black Bart is the name that Dave sells his real bone bones. When you buy a set of Bart bones you receive a short pamphlet titled 'Responsibilities of a Bones Player.' It has good advice for the new bones player, but all of us can get something from it. Several people thought it should be read by more people and Dave gave us permission to reprint it (see Vol 4, No 4.)

To purchase a CD, contact [David Boyles, 7208 Andover Rd, Cedarburg, Wisconsin 53012. Price: \\$15 plus a](#)

The Young Bones Player

As editor of the Young Bones Player column, I suggest to the Rhythm Bones Community that at the next National Festival that an effort is made to involve the children in the neighborhood. Experienced teachers of children could offer a workshop as part of the festival or concurrently, at a local library (or at another convenient site). With area press beforehand, children would attend.

If there is ever a Rhythm Bones Festival in New Bedford, MA, I would try to bring my students, and Jonathan Danforth is certainly starting to build a movement there. Others can certainly use Jonathan's project as a model for something in their own hometown: Something like what he did could happen earlier in the year at the next festival site. See his report below and a photograph on Page 8. While you are there, see my photograph also..

To the teachers of children, send your bones teaching events to Jonathan Danforth to be posted, so that all may know. And to the rest of you closet teachers of bones to children, send me your thoughts. If you know a child who plays bones, interview him or her today, and send me the results.

For the record, I have just started to teach my own students (450), and they are WOWED. Also, I am happy to confirm that a presentation of Bones and Jugband in Elementary School will be offered in March, 2005 in Boston, MA at the Massachusetts Music Educators Association Convention, and Adam Klein will be visiting my school in Lexington, MA in February to teach bones, opera and traditional music. Email me if you are interested in joining us at any event.

Enjoy Jonathan's story, a lone bones teacher among 60 or more. *Constance*

Jonathan Danforth's Children's Workshop

I participated in my very first official bones-playing workshop for children this fall. The workshop was sponsored by the Acushnet Heights Neighborhood Improvement

Association, coinciding with the last Farmers' Market of the year in Clasky Common in New Bedford, MA. The workshop was the brainstorm of one of the farmers, Ed Silva, a friend of mine who enjoys folk music.

Pam Maloney, one of the people in charge of the Neighborhood Association, got a local lumber yard to donate a bunch of wood and cut it to shape; we ended up with 500 pairs of bones, which I then sanded down so the kids wouldn't get splinters. The bones were made of white pine, 3/4" by 1/4" by 6". This made for bones that were small enough for young hands to grasp easily, and cheap enough to be given away for free. They were straight rather than curved (which always makes bones harder to play for me), and were light enough to be a little harder to play (although this also made them soft enough to deal with in quantity).

I tested my teaching chops by giving lessons to kids at the Farmers' Market the week before the real thing. I found that determination was more of a factor in learning to play than either age or dexterity—but even those who didn't get the rattle in those first ten minutes (and many did!) still responded with enthusiasm. The workshop the following week (October 30) was rainy, but still fairly well-attended. The kids were all in costume for other Halloween-related parts of the day, so I and my wife Melissa got to teach bones to dragons, robots, princesses, and sumo wrestlers. After about an hour of teaching in batches of 5-10 kids, we all paraded around the park with bones and costumes. We had originally had a steam calliope scheduled to play with us, but that didn't work out, so we simply rattled along with the rhythm of our feet, and occasionally a round of a song like "Yankee Doodle" or "This Old Man" (which were all I could think of as marching music on the fly).

All in all, about 60 kids and Melissa and I had a great time making music in New Bedford. I left the celebration to attend the New England regional Bones Mini-Fest in northern Massachusetts hoping that I had made a difference-- and was proved right on

Halloween, when kids came up to my door and said

"Trick or — hey, you're the bones guy! I'm still practicing!" *Jonathan*

Bones For Kids

The Young Bones Player column and the youth-oriented articles have a very great feel. I have a couple of kids who have seen me perform in church and are now my students. I have given them the last of my Joe Birl black plastic bones and need to find some small, inexpensive bones **that sound good** to give to really interested kids (I give a set of cut-in-half paint stirrers to most anyone. Most stores will give me a bundle when I tell them what they will be used for.)

I wonder if we could get someone to work up a special order of a thousand or maybe 10,000 sets of kid bones. We might write a grant or seek donations. Of course, it might take a bit of research to design the smaller bones correctly. If you have any thoughts, please talk to me or a Board Member. *Steve Wixson*

Website of the Quarter

www.motherearthnews.com/arc/905. This is *Mother Earth News'* website. Recently they updated their on-line archives and Jonathan Danforth discovered this old article from the March/April 1982 (#72) issue.

The article is titled *Playing the Bones* and was written by Pam Gross. There are photographs of member David Holt demonstrating how to hold and play the bones, so he must have been a contributor to the text.

There are instructions on how to make real bones, how to hold them, and how to produce the tap and the triplet. Then a few comments about playing to music.

This is not the most definitive description of rhythm bones playing, but not a bad place to send someone who wants a quick overview. *Steve Wixson*

Ken Wolin Bones Fest Workshop Follow Up

Greetings fellow bones players!

I just finished my tour with "The President's Own" U.S. Marine Band, and wanted to follow up on my Bones Fest Workshops with a brief recap of what we worked on before the holidays. After the New Year I'll be sure to summarize seven weeks on the road playing bones across the country.

My first workshop was snare drum rudiments applied to the bones and quad rolls. Teaching the rudiments would require a more hands-on approach, so I will focus this article on the quad roll (which is the basic technique I use to execute most of the standard rudiments of North American drumming.)

In the workshop we talked about breaking away from the triplet feel (tri-pe-let, 1-2-3, or PI-napple) in favor of the gallop feel ("RHY-thm bone" or "tippy-toe"). Begin by playing a 3-tap triplet with one hand. Now accent the first tap hard, then snap your wrist back and stop. I can't stress enough that this is not a continuous motion like the running triplets that has the tendency to become so ingrained. Make sure you speak loudly "RHY-thm bone" or "tippy-toe" while you practice this, it really helps.

[If any of you heard my improvisation of Ravel's Bolero rhythm, I play this exercise as a Latin groove by shifting the down beat to the upbeat and improvising with my opposite hand.]

Work on the for a while so you can freely go back and forth between the triplet feel 4 times in a row ("tri-pe-let, tri-pe-let, tri-pe-let, tri-pe-let" followed by the gallop feel 4xs ("RHY-thm bone, Rhy-thm bone, Rhy-thm bone, Rhy-thm bone")

The next stop begins with you opposite hand, which is your downbeat or foot-tap hand. Speak the word TA-ke-ti-na (thank you Greg), Wat-ter-mel-on (thank you Dutch) or 1-e-&-ah, 2-e-&-ah as you single tap each downbeat (tap on the word Ta, Wa, 1 or 2).

Next add you 3-tap hand, but for

now just single tap on the second part of the one word you find most comfortable to say (add a tap on the 2nd syllable, ke, ter or e);

Ta-ke-ti-na Wa-TER-melon 1-e-&-ah
R L - - R-L - - R-L - -
or

L R - - L-R - - L-R - -

The last step is filling in the rest of the pattern by changing the second tap to the 3-tap gallop stroke previously worked on until you have a roll, or running 32nd notes.

Another exercise is to drop-out your 3-tap hand every other word (ta-ke-ti-na, ta..., ta-ke-ti-na, ta...; or 1-e-&-ah, 2..., 1-e-&-ah, 2...)

Yes this did me a long time to work up, and no I can't play the roll as well with my opposite hand. However, this technique opened up so many new possibilities which I'd like to share with you in future installments.

Feel free to contact me with your feedback. Thanks, *Kenny Wolin* (9825 Lakeporte Drive, Burke, VA 22015, ekwol@verizon.net, 703-426-2743.

Tips & Techniques The Rub

I just would like to "Rub Bones a Little" and reply to the wonderful *Tips & Techniques: Back to the Basics* article in RBP, Vol 6, No. 3, 2004.

I would like to introduce another movement for bone playing and yes it's the rub. I employ this rub by holding bones in conventional ways and with the ring finger, rub that bone with the stationary bone held by the index finger. It's quite effective when using rough surface bones and playing into a microphone. You will notice when you try the rub you also will get a snap initially, which gives a hollow sound.

To use this technique effectively try grooving vertical lines in the bones at the surfaces where they hit. I have also glued different materials and inlays of aluminum, brass etc. Just using a single obtrusion on each bone works well too. Great for Cajun and zydeco playing. This rub board, wash board effect and the initial rub snap are two new sounds you have in your arsenal now. *Dutch Kopp* Look me up

Mark Your Calendar
And Plan to Attend

Bones Fest IX

We're Going Back to
Chattanooga and the
Mountain Opry Building

July 8-10,
2005

Three Days of,
Fun, Food,
Fellowship and
the Best Bones
Playing in the
World

Preliminary
Details in this
and the Next

Bones Calendar

July 8-10, 2005. Bones Fest IX. Chattanooga, TN hosted by Steve and Janet Wixson. Preliminary details in this newsletter.

August 29-September 4, 2005. NTCMA annual Festival with Bones and Spoons Context on September 3rd

.Don't forget our big 30th annual old-time music festival in Missouri Valley, Iowa. Over 600 performers on ten "sound" stages, including celebrities like Rex Allen Jr., Porter Wagoner, Cal Smith, Gordon Lightfoot, and many, many more. Visit our website: <http://www.oldtimemusic.bigstep.com> *Bob*

Results of Survey Questionnaire

Here are the results of Steve Brown's questionnaire sent with the last newsletter. Look for Steve's analysis in his next Editorial.

28 questionnaires were returned and the results are presented below:

1. Attended a previous Fest. Yes 85%, No 15%
2. Enjoyed the most. Informal jams 81%, individual performances 51%, public performances 55%, workshops 30% and family reunion environment 48%.
3. What type of music to perform with, live 79%, CD 44% (note some people checked both boxes)
4. How important is live music, very 29%, somewhat 48% and not very 25%.
5. What would make the Fest more enjoyable; if I could go to all of them (distance), get to know people better (name tags on Friday), good sound system, park car and walk to all activities, everything in one place in the same hotel, live band that can play many types of music suitable for bones playing, no major down time, local guided tour, scheduled organized jams (pass-offs, open jams), better food and food options, wine and beer, place to hang out afterwards, and late night jam sessions.
6. What previous activities to include in future Fests, all, most, more informal jamming, time to talk to people, historical display, bones marketplace.
7. What workshops? Beginners, beginner for spectators, intermediate, making bones, none, advanced-technical, from a video, rhythm percussion, how to perform with a band, and bone duets with other types of percussion
8. Bones market place. Yes 100%
9. Would you host a Bones Fest. Yes 32%, no 68%.

10. Where to hold Bones Fests. Within 700 miles, New England, Chattanooga, Las Vegas, Greensboro, close to Virginia, Louisville, Michigan, Florida, Ireland, Minnesota State Fair, east coast, mid-west, New Orleans, Washington, DC, and anywhere.
11. Best date for Bones Fest IX (see table below.)
12. Any known conflicts for this Fest. School starts late August.
13. Exclude from Membership Directory. Street address 7%, telephone number 11% and email 3%.
14. Newsletter ideas 25%
15. Other Comments for the Board 42%

Summary of Best Fest Dates in the format of yes/prefer/no in percent.

June 3-5, 81/7/11
June 10-12, 85/7/7
June 17-19, 84/4/7
June 24-26, 84/6/4

July 8-10, 81/15/4
July 15-17, 74/15/11
July 22-24, 70/19/11
July 29-31, 74/19/7

August 5-7, 78/11/11
August 12-14, 81/11/7
August 19-21, 74/11/15
August 26-28, 70/11/19

Preliminary Musings on Bones Fest IX

Several people have asked me to host Bones Fest IX and Janet and I accept. Since we hosted Bones Fest IV, we have some experience and hope to put on an even better Fest.

The results from the questionnaire are interesting and will be used by me and the Board to plan the event. One thing is obvious, people want more time to jam and hang out. Our preliminary thoughts are to again use our home for a Friday night reception, Saturday night dinner and Sunday morning brunch (with the brunch following the success of the Hibben's brunch at Bones Fest VII.) Sally

Carroll's workshops were so well received that they will be scheduled again. We will open up our house after scheduled events so people can relax, play more bones, play a little pool and cool off in our swimming pool. (Last one out please lock the door.)

Based in the questionnaire, the date favored was July 8-10, so that is the date for Bones Fest IX. This has the advantage of allowing people to combine with the 4th of July holiday long vacation.

We will return to the Mountain Opry Building with all of its old time charm and note that it is now air conditioned, a requirement for a July event.)

We are thinking about making a multi-channel recording the Fest with the possibility of releasing a Bones Fest Live CD. This will require lots of work and possibly copyright releases for the songs included. For a non-profit group producing a small number of CDs, copyright releases might not be that hard to obtain and reproduction fees might be reasonable. But who knows. It also might be time to professionally video the event with the intent of producing a DVD to release to Public Television Stations for broadcast.

Both live and recorded music will be used. At this time, I am thinking that we can provide our own live music as many members play another instrument. I might organize some locals for Saturday night.

Constance Cook would like to interest local youth to join us for some sort of a workshop on Saturday. If a few people show up early on Friday, we can visit a few close-by schools, play a few tunes and invite students to the Mountain Opry building. After their workshop, we can invite them up on the stage for their first performance.

There is plenty of space for a Bones Market Place and the requested historical display.

As with Bones Fest IV, we can invite the regular Friday night Mountain Opry audience and others from the Chattanooga area to join us for Saturday nights festivities.

Obviously this is all preliminary and if you have ideas to make the fest better, contact me by phone or email.

(Highlights—Continued from page 1)

in a year. As more and more members gathered, little groups of passers-by started forming to see what this strange noise was all about. I would estimate that a couple dozen ordinary people learned the basics of how to play the bones, before the Fest even began! Some of them, I believe, even bought sets of bones from members who had brought their wares to sell.

The Fest got going with some food and jamming over at the Reston Used Book Shop. We were graciously accommodated by the store owner, Bud Burwell, who took the noise and the chaos right in stride, even when a sudden downpour forced us all to squeeze everything into the smaller indoor space. As I heard more than one person say, you can't have a *real* picnic without a little rain, let alone a real festival. Well, we got our share of rain that day and the next, not all at once, but enough to keep us indoors much of the time.

The next highlight for me was the workshops. Workshops had been attempted before in an impromptu way, but this was the first time we had ever tried to get a bunch of real workshops organized, so that everyone could have something to learn or teach. Kenny Wolin deserves particular mention here since he taught workshops during all three days of the Fest (read Kenny's follow-up article on page 5.) Ev Cowett and Jim Lande also taught the beginners' and bones-making workshops, respectively. Response to the workshops in general was very positive, and I'm sure we'll be doing more of them in the future.

As with every Bones Fest, most of the time was spent listening to our members take a few minutes to show what they could do with the bones, no matter what their level of expertise, musical style, or performing experience. Rather than look at each member's performance, as has been done in this newsletter in the past, I'd like to give a few thoughts about the performances taken as a whole.

First of all, it must be said (and in fact was said by many) that each year at Bones Fest raises the bar on excellence and innovation in bones-playing. The mission of the Rhythm

Bones Society is to continue, promote and improve the playing of the rhythm bones, and we as a group of players are certainly doing just that, as anyone who attends these Fests can tell you. As usual, the variety of performance was impressive—who would think, with an instrument as obscure as ours is, that you'd hear so many styles of music, played in so many ways—some performers played with the Fest band (the Anthem Music band), some played to music they brought with them, some played with other members or even accompanied themselves. In some performances, the bones were backing up other music, and in others, the bones themselves had the spotlight.

The good humor of the performances stands out in my mind. Several of the acts were comedic, including Bill Vits' Spike Jones tribute, as well as Steve Brown and Steve Wixson's loving send-up of Jerry Mescher's and Bernie Worrell's amazing brother-and-sister act. In between numbers, we were usually laughing either at MC Al Cowett's introductions or at Mel Mercier's wit from the back of the room.

Every year, there's some pattern in the performances that stands out to me, and becomes what amounts to a theme for the year in my mind. At Bones Fest VII, in Louisville, that pattern was the number of family-related acts that were playing there. This year what struck me was the level of innovation in technique and the sharing of ideas and licks. We were gifted this past year with an increased number of percussionists. By this I mean people who have mastered a number of rhythm instruments in addition to playing the bones. Besides all the usual styles of playing (old-time, Irish, vaudeville tunes, and so on), I noticed that there was what amounted to a new style of playing, which incorporated elements and rudiments used in the playing of other instruments. Now, obviously, we've had plenty of fantastic percussionists in the gang up until now, but this year I have to say we reached some kind of critical mass, and there seemed to be a lot more "percussionism" (if you'll pardon the phrase) in general use.

Kenny's workshops certainly helped me notice this, but there were a lot of performances where you could see that people were thinking outside the traditional confines of bones playing. I would see people comparing variations in the hallway, or back at the hotel under the gazebo (where we also got to see Mel's incredible dexterity with pretzel sticks). That is extremely encouraging, in the sense that it means that we're talking not only about preserving a set of traditions, but also about growing and expanding into new ones.

Sunday's public performance in the back yard of the Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Herndon (next door to Reston) took everyone's efforts to pull off, but was terrific, precisely because of everyone's help. Steve Brown deserves special mention for MC'ing the show, and Steve Wixson for bringing out his CD player so that people could play their bones backup music after the band had finished. A fair number of folks showed up from the local area, and were rewarded for sticking it out to the end by sets of Joe Birl's patented Rhythm Bones, raffled off as prizes.

To me, this scene illustrated the Fest: after a number of performances, Steve's CD player, which had to be manually spin-started like an old airplane propeller, finally died completely—but no one stopped rattling! We ended the Fest with members playing bones along with a variety of instruments and singing, continuing the tune that had been playing, while dancing the (now traditional) conga line around the lawn. I remember thinking at the time that that moment was a perfect symbol of the Fest, or indeed of any Bones Fest: hard work, technical difficulty, good music, good fun, and most of all, good people. *Jonathan Danforth*



The power of peer teaching! First grade boy teaches a friend to play bones in Constance Cook's general music class in Lexington, MA. Photo by Constance.



Jonathan Danforth in a kid's workshop. See his article on Page 4.

Rhythm Bones Society

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Address Correction Requested