



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

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In this Issue

Ronnie McShane

Obituary for Will Kear

Cowboy Bones

Camptown Shakers

When the Principal Plays Bones

Update on Barry Patton

When Two Members Get Together On Stage

Columns:

Executive Director

Editorial

The Young Bones bPlayer

Tips & Techniques

Letter to the Editor

Recording of the Quarter

Websites of the Quarter

Calendar

Future Issues

Chlefeli (Swiss Bones Playing)

Executive Director's Column

I want to thank all of the respondents to the recent Member Questionnaire. As your Executive Director, I think it's important that the Board understand what you want and try to reflect that in our planning. Although only 27 members filled out the questionnaire, we were pleased that we received the response that we did. I am always interested in hearing from you, if you did not fill out the questionnaire please feel free to call or send in the questionnaire now.

We had some interesting responses with 22 of the 27 respondents having attended bones fests. Informal jamming received the most responses as preferred bones fest activity with workshops only receiving 7 responses. Workshops are new

to Bones Fests and we got many more favorable responses at the Fest, so I'm not sure this is an accurate representation of how most folks experienced the workshops. I will say we will have a number of new workshops at bones fest this year and encourage your input. We also hope to encourage jamming by creating more opportunities.

Live music versus recorded music has been a topic of discussion both at Bones Fests and in the planning of them. The expense of the music and legality of using pre-recorded music has prompted some serious discussion. Interesting to note that 15 of the 27 respondents preferred live

(Continued on page 4)

Ronnie McShane

Few bones players can claim the accomplishments of Ronnie McShane. He was a member of the ground breaking group, Ceoltoiri Cualann in the sixties and performed on both radio and television extensively with them as well as recording a number of records. In addition he was a performer with the Chieftains, the most popular traditional Irish musical group of all times, recorded three records with them and toured both Europe and Australia. A personal friend of the musical icon Sean O'Riada, he lived with him a family in the West of Ireland where O'Riada recorded films and lectured at the Univ of Cork. He has performed both in mot pictures and on the World Stage, but for his performances and accomplishments remains relatively unknown outside of Traditional Music and bones playing circles. *The Companion To Irish Traditional Music* describes Ronnie's playing, "Ronnie McShane was the first bones player to perform with Ceoltoiri Cualann and O'Riada wove his and precise rhythms into the fabric of the sound with a fine sensibility to orchestral color."

When I mentioned his name to World renowned flute player Kevin Crawford recently after a concert by his group Lunasa,

he became transfixed for a moment and acknowledged him, "Ah yes, Ronnie McShane!"

But for me it was nearly 30 years ago that I became acquainted with the bones playing of Ronnie McShane. On a whim, I purchased my first Chieftains album, enchanted by the instruments on the cover, but never having heard them before. There was a pair of bones on the cover, and on the liner notes of the last track,

(Continued on page 6)



Ronnie McShane performing at the 2004 All-Ireland Bones Competition
Photograph by Steve Johnson

Editorial

Janet and I are really looking forward to hosting the upcoming Bones Fest. Over the past two years we have painted both the inside and the outside of our house and are reworking our 25 year old swimming pool. The people will be interesting and the food will be outstanding. There will be some new workshops. Details will be sent soon.

I must again report the death of a member, Will Kear. A short obituary is in this newsletter. Over the next couple of decades the world will lose a lot of bones players: people who learned to play at the end of the minstrel era which was the heyday of rhythm bones playing with thousands and thousands of people owning a set of bones. Our mission is clear; pass on the rhythm bones to the next generation. Thanks, Will, for doing part of this job.

Member Charlie Obert once mentioned bones and belly dancing together. I asked him about this and his reply is below.

New member Guy Gillette tells us about a cowboy bones player. He also sent me a CD and I made it the Recording of the Quarter. He and his performing brother, Pipp, are hoping to make it to Bones Fest IX.

And last but not least, thanks to Jonathan Danforth for his editorial assistance with the newsletter.

Letter to the Editor

My wife Cindy and I attend Renfest, the Minnesota Renaissance Festival. We were part of a group doing a short act for the Feast of Fantasy, a 2+ hour sit down several course meal with entertainment. Cindy and I were part of the belly dance act - 3 dancers, a drummer, and myself alternating on bones and jumbush, a Turkish fretless banjo played like an oud. I played bones in a percussion only piece in the act

Our piece always ended with the brass quartet upstairs playing the theme from "I dream of Jeannie", and I got in the habit of running upstairs

and playing bones with them. It was amusing.

Cindy is a dancer so we have been involved in the belly dance community here for awhile

By email, I mentioned Stephen Brown about my playing bones with middle eastern music, and I got this reply back.

"I've been playing Doumbec long before I started playing bones, and sell through the mid east drum company, interestingly enough. I've sat in with a Turkish musician playing bones, it is interesting stuff. Also there is a very good doumbec player from New York, Raqi Dansiger who is also a very good bones player, so everything is connected I guess."

Take care, *Charlie Obert*

Red Foley's Recording of Alabama Jubilee

One of the best songs for bones playing is *Alabama Jubilee* with its lyrics "Old Deacon Jones when he rattled his bones." It can be a challenge as it's normally played fast.

I have only one bones recording of it by Red Foley with Francis Craig on the bones. Craig was a band leader in Nashville and his most famous recording was *Near You*.

One day while passing through Nashville, I stopped by the Vanderbilt Heard Library. Teresa Gray, Public Services Archivist, found the following information.

"There's a biography of Craig called *Near You: Francis Craig, Dean of Southern Maestros* by Robert W. Ikard. In skimming through the book, I found a reference on page 8 that Craig was influenced by ragtime as a child and taught himself to play the bones using the remains of a beef roast. His main instrument was the piano, but he also played the violin.

"On page 112, it mentions that Craig had a "cameo" on Foley's *Alabama Jubilee* and shortly thereafter released *Play Them Bones* for Decca Records in 1952."

His rosewood bones are on display in the Vanderbilt Music Department.
Steve Wixson

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

Bones Calendar

Here are a few items from the Calendar that webmaster Jonathan Danforth keeps on the rhythmbones.com website.

May 2. All-Ireland Bone Playing Competition, part of the Abbeyfeale Fleadh. Contact Steve Brown or www.fleadhbytheafeale.com. The Junior Bone Playing Competition will be held on May 1.

June 4. Showing of documentary film on John "Mr. Bones" Burrill with food and mini Bones Fest in Lexington, MA. Contact. Steve Brown or bhockett@music-for-robin.org for details.

July 8-10. Bones Fest IX in Chattanooga, TN hosted by Steve Wixson. Registration form will be mailed soon.

August 29-September 4. National Traditional Country Music Association Festival and Contests with Bones Contest on Saturday, September

Cowboy Bones

Here is a bit of documenting 'bones playing cowboys.' We were playing in Cody, WY in the Summer of '03 and met 86 year old Montana rancher Marvin Bell. Mr. Bell was telling us about working on the Flying D Ranch in Montana in the 1930's with cowboy Paddy Ryan, who was born in the 1890's in Miles City, played the bones and taught Mr. Bell to play them. They had a "cowboy band" together and Mr. Bell was very excited about meeting a present day bones player.

An interesting aside, the Flying D today is owned by Ted Turner and he runs Bison on it.

To change the subject, I emailed Jonathan Danforth trying to find a dependable supplier of wholesale wooden bones and have not, as yet, heard back from him. Do you know of any ??? We sell "bone bones" that we make ourselves in our Camp St. Cafe & Store here in Crockett, but have a hard time keeping enough of them in stock. We would like to have wooden bones to sell as an alternative. *Guy Gillette*

Recorded Bones Music

From the twang of the guitar on the first track to the duet on the last track, *Ridin' With Dayton* opens new music for bones playing for me. New member Guy Gillette and his brother Pipp, known as the Gillette Brothers, have produced an album that is neither old time or country, it is cowboy. The renditions are fresh and Guy's bones playing is clean and crisp. I've known for a while that rhythm bones were a cowboy instrument, be it back pocket or saddlebag, and this CD proves it. My only regret is there is bones playing on only two tracks, though track 4 is near a bones solo. However, I will be playing my bones to many tracks on this CD. Check out their website at www.campstreetcafe.com/ and click on Camp St. Store for ordering information on this and other CDs. Also check out the cow bones photos. *Steve Wixson*

Camptown Shakers

Have you ever heard our CDs? They are sold at civil war reenactments and national battlefield parks like Gettysburg. We play all the time at Gettysburg, in all the taverns and civil war stuff, or just search for our web page, just do a search on the "Camptown Shakers."

We do old time music and minstrel songs to the set up of a minstrel band Jaw bone, fiddle banjo, and I play bones and tambourine. I have a different style something that I made up, sort of marching drum rhythm with bones, didn't know how to do it just played what came out, I play bones on about half the songs and tambourine on the other. We are considered one of the most authentic (gut strings and all.) You might look at George Wonderlick web page, "wonder banjos," as he makes all the instruments and a fine bone player too.

We are so busy playing gigs (we will do the Philly folk fest, and such, the dead heads love us, We would love to play live for you if possible one day, but we live up here. I would love to hear 1000 bones played to our music. Get a CD from 'Tracy at the Serenade' add, and check us out, I'm sure you will love playing along with us. *King Bennett*

Tips & Techniques

Have you heard someone play a lick and wondered how they do it. Me too and I've found a way to figure it out.

I use my computer and a free program called *Cool Edit 96*. I hook my music system up to my computer's audio or sound card (simple and Radio Shack sells the required cable.)

I record and playback the lick using *Cool Edit*. Then I highlight a short section and loop it so it plays over and over (it takes a few tries to highlight the section so it starts on the right beat.) Then I select Edit and lower the sample rate for playback which slows down the lick.

You can expand the highlighted

section so you can see the bones clicks. In my experience, at slow speed you can hear the difference between the left and right hand bones and figure out what each is doing.

After you master the lick in slow time, you can increase the sample rate until you can play it at regular speed.

Cool Edit 96 is freeware and I will have copies available at Bones Fest IX. I will also lead a workshop for anyone who would like to learn how to do this.

With this technique, you can turn most any kind of rhythm instrument pattern into a bones lick. *Steve Wixson*

Website of the Quarter

rhythm-bones.com. Member Scott Miller won the 2004 NTCMA bones contest. He would like to be a professional bones player and decided to put up a website as an advertising tool. As you will see, he has put a lot of time into the website and there is lots of good information. (Note the hyphen in Scott's web address.)

You can also check out his press kit at **rhythm-bones.com/nav/presskit-ntcmabonescontest.html**. Scott says, "I should warn you that my website shamelessly promotes me as a bones player for hire." The key word here is not shamelessly, but promote. If he or we don't promote ourselves, no one else will. Folks interested in promoting themselves might note that the press kit needs sound clips and good reproduction-quality photos, which he will upload soon.

This website is a good place to start if you are thinking about putting up a website of your own.

I recently found this story on Scott on the internet. I bet it was generated from his news release. Maybe I should send out a press release! The website address is very long, **www.stltoday.com/stltoday/neighborhoods/stories.nsf/southwestcityjournal/news/story/7B65370B88E7C67E86256FC500021741?OpenDocument** Or do a Google search on Scott Miller *Steve*

(Executive Director—Continued from page 1)

music, with 8 preferring prerecorded music, and 4 respondents checking both. 8 respondents placed live music as very important, while 13 reported live music as being somewhat important, and five feeling it was not important, and one did not respond. It is clear to me that both live and pre-recorded music have a place at Bones Fests. I think it is important to include both in the planning. The legality of pre-recorded music should not be an issue as long as we are a non-profit organization using this music for educational purposes. I have some idea's about how we can provide live music for the fests and will discuss this in the Director's Column.

Providing a bones market place at bones fests has been a personal interest of mine, and I was interested to see 25 respondents answering yes to this. I think its a good idea to encourage bones making among our members and provide a place for members to sell their wares, give our members a place to sell their personal products like recordings or instructional materials, and provide a service to the members to make products available to them. In addition I would like to see table space and advertising offered to vendors at minimal fees to help support Bones Fests.

The topic of the location of Bones Fest is an interesting one, most people want it close to their home, but don't want to sponsor it. 6 of those brave souls offered to sponsor a Bones Fest with 2 of them already having done so. I would propose to send a Bones Fest Host Guide to each of those responding who have not hosted (its not too late if you would like a Host Guide yourself, see Steve Wixson) Of the respondents offering to sponsor a fest, one is in Dublin, Ireland! Some of the suggestions for location include 7 requesting the East coast or New England, 4 Chattanooga or Tennessee 3 Michigan or the Mid West, 2 for Florida, one each for Las Vegas, Guilford College, Greensboro, NC, Louisville, KY. and New Orleans, and five were left blank. Other suggestions including, "driving distance from Washington DC" "700 miles from Quebec" and "Close to the state of

Virginia". It's clear to me that accessibility is very important, which means having a major airport close. Also I think member sponsorship is a must, that being sponsored by a member of the organization who lives in the locality.

We asked for comments about what would make bones fest more enjoyable and the most frequent reply was more jamming. I, too, noticed the lack of jamming as opposed to Bones Fest VII. Perhaps missing our unofficial Jam Master Walt Watkins had an impact on that.

Lets keep the lines of communication open. Call, write or email any of the Board with your comments. Having done it, I will say it is a monumental task to host a Bones Fest. I would like to see fests presented by Regional Committees where committee mem- bers can share in some of the responsibility. In this

When Two Members Get Together on Stage

My brother Laz and I, as the duo Gemini, played a concert for children and families with the Grand Rapids Symphony in February of 2005. They are a fabulous Symphony and the concert was in the spectacular DeVos Hall in Grand Rapids Michigan. It was a blustery winter day, with weather advisories galore, but still well over a thousand enthusiastic kids and their families were in the audience. Perfect, right? What could be better?

Well, to be able to share the stage with fellow RBS member and bones player extraordinaire, Bill Vits. Bill is the principal percussionist of the Grand Rapids Symphony and, like me, learned to play the bones from Percy Danforth in the mid 1970's.

My brother and I always include a bones number in our concerts, but on this occasion we added another tune and invited Bill out from the back of the orchestra where he usually stands, surrounded by his wide array of percussion instruments, and he and I played a bones duet, with Laz accompanying us on fiddle. We snapped, rattled and rolled the bones, we traded phrases back and forth, we

piannissimoed, we fortissimoed, and the audience loved it all and rewarded us with a huge ovation. *Sandor*

The Young Bones Player

Enjoy the story on the next page of the principal who teaches bones to his school, students and faculty included, submitted by Sandor Slomovits.

Meanwhile, 12 of my students and my principal from the Hastings School in Lexington, MA as well as a parent and traditional artists Jonathan Danforth (you all know him) and Paul Sedgewick, a bones player and banjo scholar (roped in by Rob Rudin and myself, and new to the Rhythm Bones Society) presented at the Massachusetts Music Educators Association Conference. Meet Paul at Mr. Bones Day in Lexington, MA on June 4, 2005. Be there!

Plans grow for a beginning and advanced beginner's workshop for children at 4pm on that day. I am hoping to have a jaw harp workshop too for children. (Any volunteers?). I have to relate, that thought the bones are well-loved at the Hastings, it is clear to me that the jaw harp is IT at my school. With bones a close second, of course.

Hastings students stunned the Massachusetts Music Educators Association conference in Boston at the Park Plaza Hotel this year. Students from grades 1-5 arrived at the hotel and marched through it playing bones all the while, till they arrived at the Jugband workshop. They played and demonstrated for music teachers, and helped me teach the music teachers how to play bones, as well as demonstrating jaw harp and washtub bass as well. Teachers left, some exclaiming it was the best workshop they had been too, and vowed to teach their children how to play the bones. One colleague just emailed me for music (Cotton Mill Girls, by Hedy West), and informed me that she has gotten her school custodian to build 4 stand-up washtub basses! She asked me for my bones source, and I referred her to Mike Passerotti.

Meanwhile, I am strongly

(Continued on page 5)

(Young Bones Player—Continued from page 4)

considering flying down to the Mountain Opry (BFI) to get help children's workshops off the ground at the national festival. Email me if you are interested in helping, but be warned, my email service is erratic right now!

Stay tuned (we hope) for a report from Adam Klein on his visit to the Hastings School in February, and perhaps a report from Rob Rudin or Paul Sedgwick or me on their visit to the Hastings School one Friday. Also, Rob promised to write a review of Stephen Brown's presentation on the history of the bones at the Revels Salon in Watertown, MA in February, 2005. What does this have to do with youth? One of my students was there

When the Principal Plays Bones

I taught my friend Bill Loyd to play the bones in 1979. He was a third grade teacher at Paddock Elementary in Milan, Michigan at the time. Already an accomplished musician on flute and trumpet, he quickly mastered the basics of the bones and soon became a good two handed player. Then, gifted and dedicated teacher that he was, he began teaching the bones to his students. He bought a box of tongue depressors at a pharmacy and gave a pair to each child. Once the children got the hang of the tap and roll, Bill gave them all a set of Percy Danforth bones, made by Ray Schairer. By the end of the school year, every child in his class could play the bones and the school found it necessary to institute "bones hours" — times when the bones were allowed to be played!

Today, Loyd is principal at the same school, still plays the bones and continues to teach his students to play them. Often, his graduation present to his graduating fifth graders is a set of bones.

This year, Loyd upped the ante. As an early holiday present to his entire staff of forty eight, he distributed bones at a November all school assembly concert. While my brother, Laz, played a fiddle tune, Bill and I

played dueling bones. Then he invited several teachers who were already proficient on the bones to join us on stage and we all jammed. Finally, we gave a brief tutorial to all the rest of the teachers and staff and they all joined us in a rousing snap-and-roll-along. Over fifty pairs of bones clacking away simultaneously is probably not worthy of inclusion in the Guinness Book of World Records, but it is noteworthy, and the kids in the audience will certainly remember it.

And Loyd is not done yet. He has informed all his staff, with tongue firmly in cheek, that their yearly professional evaluations will now include testing for proficiency on the

Update on Barry Patton

Barry Patton is another bones player who gets a lot of stage time performing with the Byron Berline Band. They just returned from a shoot on the HBO set for the series finale of the 1870 western show called *Deadwood* (see your program guide for times.) The shoot took four days, and he doesn't know how much air time they will get.

In April, they will be in China for a 10 city tour that includes Beijing and Shanghai playing bluegrass and western swing for Chinese audiences.

Since the first rhythm bones artifacts were found in China, maybe Barry will find some native Chinese bones players.

The band recently opened for an Amy Grant concert in Texas and will play in Oklahoma City with country stars Toby Keith, Vince Gill and newcomer Katrina Elam. I am jealous.

www.barrybonespatton.com/ is Barry's website and email him at [barry@barrybonespatton.com/](mailto:barry@barrybonespatton.com) He sells bones made from osage orange wood and a bones instructional video.

If you would like to hear the Byron Berline Band, go to doublestop.com/, click Catalog, then CDs & MP3s.

Then enjoy and play along on your bones (but note that Barry is one of the fastest bones players around and Byron plays some songs very fast.)
Steve Wixson

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

Program and
Registration
Form will be in

Obituary for Will Kear

Member William M. Kear died on March 13, 2005 at age 82. Will joined RBS in 2000 and attended most of our Bones Fests. He learned to play the bones in 1937 from a boy from Kentucky. He loved to play to country, bluegrass and bluegrass gospel music and performed the latter in his church. In his membership application he added "I love to play them."

He was recruited into RBS by member John Davis who passed on the news of his death. His obituary from the newspaper stated "he enjoyed gardening, playing the spoons/bones and maintained a lifelong ambition to

(Ronnie McShane—Continued from page 1)

Kerry Slides, it said, "For the finale of the record the Chieftains had a great wild time and were joined by an old friend, and bone man, Ronnie McShane (he was met in the street). It became a joyous reunion and a fine, ensemble piece of calculated abandon to finish off the day." The tune proved some raucous abandon, and has followed me around since that time, having had a strong influence on my playing.

But who was Ronnie McShane, this almost mythical bones player, I often asked myself. The answer would come from Ireland, when in 2003 I had the great pleasure of meeting the man in person at the All Ireland Bones Playing Competition in Abbeyfeale, West Limerick. Eventually it leads to this article you have before you.

Ronnie was reached at his home in Dublin where he lives with his wife Vera. After a round of, "Top of the morning's, Steve Wixson asked Ronnie, "Where were you born?"

"Well I was born in Dublin into a theater family. Most of my people worked in the theater, my father worked in the theater, his father worked in the theater, my mother worked in the theater, my brother and myself of course. I come from a large family five brothers and three sisters. My father played the mandolin and he taught me the mandolin. I used to play on spoons, but not the traditional way on spoons. I used to play tea spoons, and held them like bones in my hand, to accompany my father.

"The only time I ever saw the bones was in the theater, and that was when the theater used to do variety. They done the minstrel show, the black and white minstrel show, it was famous in those days. You couldn't do it now — you'd be shot. That was the first place I heard the bones, but then I used to listen to an old English or American bone player playing the bones on the radio. I used to play two slates and stuff like that, bits of slates when I was coming home from school and rattling them."

Ronnie graduated from the National School and needed to go to work, but work at that time was hard to come by

in Ireland, which left him with a dilemma.

"I didn't particularly want to go in to the theater when everyone was in the theater. I was the second eldest, and I done various little jobs around Dublin and it wasn't easy getting work. I eventually went into the Irish Army and I stayed in the Army for five years. In the Army, I used to do barrack variety, entertain with a small group around various places, in the hospitals and institutions. Stuff like that because I not only play the bones, but I'm also a banjo mandolin player. I used to have the old mandolin in the jeep when I was riding around some where, camping some where or where ever we'd be with the Army, I'd play a few tunes, stuff like that.

I never really got into the bones until I left the Army and went into the Abbey theater. Now it was the Queens theater at the time, because the Abbey Theater, the National Theater, had burned down. The Abbey Theater ensemble had moved over to the Queens and I was working in the Queens at the time. The musical director of the Abbey Theater was Sean O'Riada."

John Reidy, who changed his name to Sean O'Riada in the 1950's, was one of the most influential people in Irish music. Musician, Composer, Director, Radio and Television personality, he is credited with bringing traditional Irish music into the ensemble setting by creating the group Ceoltoiri Cualann. In addition it was he who brought the Bodhran (Irish drum) into acceptance as a musical instrument from a once a year anomaly on St. Stephens Day. Ronnie began a long standing friendship with him which started at the Abbey Theater in Dublin.

"Now there was a play coming on. The Abbey done all the National plays, *O'Casey* and all the rest. This particular play by the Kerry playwright called Brian McMahon, *The Honey Spike*, had this scene on stage of the travelers like the gypsies in Ireland. There's a tradition in Ireland, that they have a dance and they call it the wren boys. All the males dress up, straw covered their heads and everything and they'd dance

around. They normally had music and they got musicians together from around Dublin. They got Paddy Maloney (Irish Pipes), Sean Potts (Tin Whistle), John Kelly (fiddle) who has passed away now, Sonny Brogan (accordion), all the members of the original Ceoltoiri Cualann."

Ronnie was working around the theater, but was not playing music with the group at this point.

"Now at that time I was doing property master and sound effects at the Abbey. Brian Mc Mahon, who's also dead now, said, "we need a bone player. You have to have a bone player with the wren boys." So Sean O'Riada says "we'll have to have a look around."

Ronnie was listening to this at the back of the stage and relayed his experiences rattling slates and tea spoons. He soon had his first job as professional bones player.

Ronnie began performing as a regular part of the group at the performances of the Honey Spike. Soon it was to lead to more than that. Sean O'Riada was very impressed with the sound he got from the group on the stage and later on he said "lads we'll go for a pint, and we'll have a chat about it." He suggested we form a group and they eventually called the group Ceoltoiri Cualann.

"Now the amount of stuff Ceoltoiri Cualann did in those years, I was with them for nearly 14 years, was colossal, but they didn't do a lot of touring, it was all radio work we done. We had a radio program, *Fleadh Cheoil an Raidio*; we also had a television program *Reachaireacht an Riadaigh*."

Ronnie would play the bones as directed by Sean O'Riada, who would arrange and direct each member of the group.

"Now for instance, we done the back ground music for (the movie version of) the *Playboy of the Western World* with Siobhan McKenna. There's one particular character, Old Martin, and he used to have a particular rattling and sound on the bones when he came in. For instance, it took a little while to learn it, but he used to have to be bump bump bump bump rrrrrummmppp bump every

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

time he walked in, it was bump bump bump bump rrrrrmmmmpppp bump, so it was single clicks and then into a twirl, and back again into a little singles. There was another guy who had a different sound, so each member of the cast had a different sound of the bones, and I had to learn all this. All this kind of stuff Sean always taught me, taught me a lot of this."

Around this time Sean moved his family down to the *Gaeltacht* in West Cork, an all Irish speaking area. Eventually he convinced Ronnie to come down with them to make films of Irish life for the television programs. Although it was an amazing experience speaking Irish everyday, it was very difficult commuting the 200 miles one way back to Dublin to see his family. When the film business began to dry up, Ronnie moved back to Dublin, but did not want to return to the theater. He and his family decided to emigrate to London to get a job in the Hotel business.

"Now when I was in London, I used to get calls, come over and do a concert. I kept in touch with a lot of the Ceoltoiri and a lot of traditional people. I played, little bits of traditional concerts and stuff.

"Now I was working in a hotel in the west end of London. I was on nights and was the head night concierge. I finished work and was going down to get me a bus or whatever. I'm walking down street and people are just starting to come out. I bumped into Paddy Maloney and said what are you doing here. He said we're just over to do a recording in the studios. He said, "You know I'd love to have you, are you available?" That was the first record I done with the Chieftains." (Paddy Maloney is a former member of Ceoltoiri Cualann, and the leader of the Chieftains, world renowned Irish traditional group)

"After meeting Paddy and doing the record with them, Paddy contacted me again, from Ireland. "Would I like to do a tour with the Chieftains?" I said all right. This was at the time that Peadar Mercier passed away and they were down one man, obviously.

"Now the problem was they wanted a Bodhran player as well. I had to start

really learning the bodhran. I had Sean O'Riada's bodhran, which gave me a lift in it's self, having his bodhran, if you know what I mean.

"The first gig that I went to with the Chieftains was in London, the Crystal Palace. There was at least 4000 people there and on the bill was people like Eric Clapton, and stuff like that. So it was very interesting, I needn't tell you."

After touring, the Chieftains were scheduled to go back into the studio for one of their most ambitious recordings of the time. It was a recording based on *Napoleon Bonaparte*, featuring the Irish singer Dolores Keane and bodhran player Kevin Coneff. Ronnie can be heard through out the record from the opening of the *Chattering Magpie* and through the title track its self.

Playing with Paddy Maloney was a lot like playing with Sean O'Riada, Ronnie says. "Oh yeah, Paddy was very like Sean and he learned a lot from Sean. They had a very good relationship in relation to how to arrange music, and that was the secret of Ceoltoiri Cualann. They wasn't just a diddley diddley dee, Irish group, they played in the form of orchestration. Each individual had his turn, if you like, and Sean was out to bring this out."

"Then after that, Paddy said "We're off to Australia, do you fancy going?" I said I'll have a word with my boss, who lucky enough was an Irishman in London, and he said, "Yeah Ronnie, go ahead." So I went off for two weeks.

The first thing we done was the Sydney Opera House, which was absolutely amazing. We were on television. On these type of things you spend more than you make, but I really enjoyed it cause I always wanted to see Australia. Ah then, another tour come up, and we done Copenhagen, Berlin, Frankfurt, Munich. That was something really great."

It was around this time that Ronnie received a call from an old friend, Vincent Dowling, who was an Actor and Director from the Abbey Theater. Vincent was involved in a production of the *Playboy of the Western World*

on the World Stage in London.

Vincent asked Ronnie if he would be interested in doing the music for the production. It was Vincent's idea to do the entire show with just percussion, with Ronnie playing the parts as he had in the movie version. "And it came off very well, very well," Ronnie remembers.

Although Ronnie enjoyed his time with the Chieftains, he was after all, employed full time in a prestigious position at a London Hotel and could not continue to take time off as the Chieftains began to tour almost constantly.

"I done one other thing with them, their first concert on the Albert Hall in London. The strange thing about it was about a year later I was invited to go to it, and I was sitting in the audience with my wife. Paddy Maloney called me up on stage to play with them. On the stage at the time there were people like Sinead O'Connor and a lot of the Irish artists. But it was very funny me leaving the seats in the Gallery, and trying to.. The Albert hall's a big place, and trying to find the stage door and trying to get in, and eventually when I did get in past the security I walked straight in, playing the bones in me hand That was a nice entrance, you know."

Ronnie continued to work and live in London for many years, but kept in touch with the members of Ceoltoiri Cualann, although Sean O'Riada passed away in 1971. Once a year they would gather as a tribute to the man who brought them together.

"I go down every year to Cuil Aodha. Sean O'Riada's family have a little get together to remember him. We actually go into the grave yard, the members of Ceoltoiri Cualann like Eamon de Buitlear and Sean Keane. We play tunes for him at the grave. He's buried in St. Dominic's graveyard in Cuil Aodha.

"Some funny things have happened. Martin Faye has a very black sense of humor. I'm playing down there and I dropped a bone in the crowded little grave yard. Every head stone is done in Gaelic, a crowded little graveyard. I dropped a bone, "Pick it up," he said,

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

"but look around, you might find a better one."

Ronnie retired from the Hotel business several years ago and has since moved back to Dublin. He makes his own bones from rib bones he gets at the butcher, although he still has the original pair given to him by Brian McMahon during the production of the *Honey Spike*. He continues to play in local sessions, and for local charities and nursing homes.

"I'm playing this evening, St.Patricks Day, a small concert at one of the Irish clubs. We have lots of GAA, Gaelic Athletic Association Clubs, in Ireland, sponsored mostly by the government, and the Gaelic Football and the rest of it. At one of these clubs, I'm playing with a bodhran player, box player, whistle player, flute player, banjo player. Then I play every Wednesday. I also do quite a few charity things around, you know the usual. I'm not forced into it I just love it." There's no doubt about it, you can see it in his bones! *Steve Brown*

Recordings featuring Ronnie McShane: Ronnie is on one cut from *Chieftains 5, Kerry Slides* at the end of side 2. He can be heard through out *Bonneparts Retreat, Chieftains 6*. Both of these recording should be available from one of the large on line companies like Amazon.com. Although Ceoltoiri Cualann made a number of recordings, few seem to be available. The Gael Linn web listed a couple. Ossian USA has in stock *O'Riada Sa Gaiety Ceoltoiri Cualann 00282-CD*. They can be reached at www.ossianusa.com or at Ossian USA, 118 Beck Road, Loudon, N.H. 03307.



How often does a principal play bones for his school kids. Principal Bill Loyd (left) and Sandor Slomovits are shown here doing just that.



Hastings first graders teach Springfield, MA teacher to play bones. The teacher is starting her own program. Photo by Jessie Steigerwald.

Rhythm Bones Society

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