



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 7, No. 4 2005

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Executive Director's Column

In my recent conversation with Benoit Bourque, he mentioned a bones player he had met at a festival in Vancouver, British Columbia, named Boris Sichon. Within a few hours I was visiting Boris' amazing web site and actually watching him play the bones. Boris is a Russian immigrant living in Canada who plays an amazing array of percussion instruments. A few days later I spent a half hour or so speaking with Boris, whose enthusiasm for the bones and the RBS was truly uplifting.

Last week I received a call from a new RBS member, Melvin Harvey, 70 years young last Tuesday, who has been playing the bones for over 50 years, and is quite excited about coming to

Bones Fest next Summer. On a regular basis we see new members of the Rhythm Bones Discussion group, and although not connected to the RBS, we encourage the discussion group to visit the site, become members and attend Bones Fests.

The amazing thing to me is that we have so many more bones players out there who are discovering us, and we discovering them, for the first time. Like unmined gold they are a resource which represents potential, the potential for each one of us to be inspired by their stories and playing and grow as individuals and players. We've seen this cycle before with people like

(Continued on page 3)

Benoit Bourque - French Canadian Master

You can't help but smile when you're in the presence of Benoit Bourque. Although he is a master musician and dancer, it's his genuineness and enthusiasm for traditional music that is most impressive. Over the 30 or so years he has been performing he has been a musician, performer, dancer, teacher, and organizer of traditional dance. As part of the groups Matapat and Le Vent Du Nord, he has won both the Juno (Canada's equivalent of the Grammy award) and most recently the Canadian Folk Music Association's album of the year 2005 for Le Vent Du Nord's *Les Amants Du Saint-Laurent*. He has been an avid bones player for many years, and regularly performs bones in performance and on recordings.

I spoke with him on the phone from his home just outside of Montreal.

"So, tell me when and where you were born, and how you came to the bones?"

"I was born in Montreal, but I never really felt that I was a Montrealer because we moved when I was 6. I lived around the suburbs, mostly, and really spent all my young time north of Montreal which is the beginning of La Nodien—the most dynamic area in Quebec for traditional music.

"I came from a musical family. We played many instruments and we sang. When I turned 13, I started to do step dancing and folk dancing—to meet girls in fact. After two years I met a guy who was close to the dance troupe. He brought bones

with him, and that was the first time I saw them. I took his bones and carried them home. He had showed me the basics and I wanted to impress my dad who was a musician—not full time, but he was playing music for fun. I said, "Look at this Dad. I want to show you something very

(Continued on page 6)



Benoit Bourque avec les os (with the bones.)

Editorial

I've learned something from Steve Brown's article on Benoit Bourque. I've tried his combination of cow ribs and cow shin bones and like it a lot.

I bought several CDs lately that have great music for bones playing. In fact as I write this I am compelled to stop and go practice to them. I am back and that was fun. I try to practice every day, but don't always do it.

Our Virginia Regional Bones Fest did not work out and we will try and schedule it sometime this spring. Look for a planning email before the next newsletter.

Dutch Kopp is full of ideas and this issue presents his *Dutch Penny Bones*. Thanks Dutch and keep up the good work.

I want to thank everyone who performed on Saturday evening at Bones Fest IX. In the audience was a lady from the Chattanooga arts community and one from our small local newspaper. The first hired me for the Tennessee Folklife Festival (with my biggest paycheck ever) and that led to another gig. I am now a bone-ified professional musician. The second wrote a very nice article about me. They were both quite impressed by our performances that evening.

Letters to the Editor

I enjoy the newsletter very much. I play with an old-timers band at Prosser, WA every Tuesday. We practice in the morning and play at nursing homes, etc in the afternoon. We have from ten to fourteen in our band.

I just bought a CD recorder and will send you one of our band if I can learn how to run this modern equipment.

I'm only 90 and played the bones since I made them out of black walnut in high school in 1929. They are just about worn out. I will keep in touch. Shook, Rattle & Roll. *Robert Ver Steeg*.

[Emails about bones in movies and TV.] *The Irish R.M* was made for Irish TV by James Mitchell production for channel four in association with Rediffusoin Films, Ulster Television

and Radio Telefis Eireann. Bones by De Danann. I believe this was a TV series. I have the record.

Into The West was an Irish movie about a horse. I think it had bones in it. It was quite popular here a few years ago. If you have not seen it, get it. *Dutch Kopp*

I have a forgotten oldie on DVD, *Pot O' Gold*, which starred Jimmie Stewart. Brother Bones does a brief cameo with two tap dancers, rattling a pair of silver knives as Bing Crosby did in *Riding High*.

On a side note, it was voted as one of the worst movies of all time, I guess from a film critics' standpoint, and granted the screenplay is pretty weak. However, I find the picture very entertaining with that bubbly overacted 40s style and some stunning scenes of the ensemble cast playing wine glasses, singing rich acapella harmonies. Also a great cast singing in Brother Bones' jailhouse scene (he's a prison staffer, maybe a cook? I forget).

By the way, I found it on eBay and paid a whopping \$4 for it. I recommend checking eBay—a great movie source. *Greg Burrows*

Somersby with Gere and Foster. A little black kid does a poor bone synching job to appear to back up Joe Ayer's playing. *Gods & Generals* Bonist Bob Beeman performs *The Bonnie Blue Flag* in this one, but I don't recall if he does it on tambourine or bones. *John Dwyer*

Just as a point of reference, the "Celtic band" in Titanic is actually a real Celtic band that was in the right place at the right time and was asked if they'd be 'willing' to play in the movie. Needless to say they were not the least bit hesitant. The band is called Gaelic Storm. For more info about them and what they've done, see: www.gaelicstorm.com. *Michael Ballard* [Aaron Plunkett joined them

Bones Calendar

Check out the Calendar on the rhythmbones.com website.

Appalshop Bones Workshop. March 4, 2006. See article in this newsletter.

Le Vent du Nord. April 3-8, 2006. With bones-player Benoit Bourque.

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 and condensation.

Rhythm Bones Central web site: rhythmbones.com

Performing in schools in Washington, DC area with a concert on the 8th. See www.leventdunord.com/
All-Ireland Bones Competition. May 1, 2006. Abbeyfeale, Ireland. For information see homepage.tinet.ie/~fleadhbytheafeale.

(Continued on page 5)

Recorded Bones Music

With the title of *Rags and Bones*, I had to review this CD. It is by blues guitarist Ernie Hawkins (see www.erniehawkins.com.) Since his bio says he plays the bones, I assumed he would be the bones player, but instead it is member Guy Gillette. Unfortunately there is only one track (3) with bones. I talked to Ernie about bones and he said, "Haven't played in a long time. Learned from a guy named Pete who worked on my uncle's farm in Ruff Creek, PA. He was great, could play both hands and buck dance. Still got a pair of "goon bones." Order the CD through his website. *Steve*

(Executive Director—continued from page 1)

Kenny Wolin and Mitch Boss, who come to Bones Fests, are excited and in turn inspire us to be excited and improve our playing. We can only continue this rejuvenation by continuing to share our experiences and playing with folks and hope those untapped resources, like Boris, make their way into our bones playing world. Happy New Year and may the coming year bring us, and those unknown members, closer together to share our bones playing experiences

NTCMA Spoons and Bones Contest Winners

This article presents the winners of the World Spoon and Bones Contest hosted by the National Traditional Country Music Association. The World title might be inappropriate now that the Irish hold the All-Ireland Bones Championship in Abbeyfeale, but for many years it was the only known bones contest. Articles on both of these events can be found in previous issues of this newsletter.

Bob Everhart is the founder of NTCMA and editor of its journal, *Tradition*, where the winners' names are published, normally in the September-October issue. I ask Bob how the contest began and here is his reply.

"Well, we established our contest format building around every possible entertainment and musical instrument the pioneer who settled Middle America might have used. Bones was an early rhythm instrument, so it was a natural to add it to the competitions. Spoon playing came along later, but the methods are similar so it was also included. Over our 30-year history of hosting this international competition, we have certainly witnessed some incredibly gifted performers on the bones—so we just hope they keep on comin'."

There are several libraries that house the *Tradition* magazine. I visited the Country Music Hall of Fame Library in Nashville and found winners from 1988 to the present.

Three additional years were filled in by the New York Library for the Performing Arts. I was unable to locate winners from the early years, so there is some research left undone.

Winners are listed in order of finishing (some years listed only first place.) RBS current or former member names are followed by an asterisk. The type of instrument played by each performer, spoons and/or bones, was not listed in the journal and is therefore unknown. *Steve Wixson*

1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984. Unknown.

1985 Rick Davidson, Niya, MO
Shawn Pittman, Springfield, MO, Bob Strayer, Lincoln, NE, Elmer F. Privia, Luray, MO, Max Cooley, Jr., Louisville, NE.

1986. Unknown

1987 Jerry Mescher thinks it was Don DeCamp*

1988 Don DeCamp*, Adel, IA, Jerry Mescher, Halbur, IA, Don Hill, Oklahoma City, OK, Bill Rexroad*, Hutchinson, KS, Jimay Krew, Grandville, MI

1989 Jerry Mescher*, Halbur, IA, Bud Mielke, IA, Don Hill Oklahoma, City, OK, Harriette Anderson*, Underwood, IA, Pat Le Clair, IA

1990 Don DeCamp*, Adel, IA, Larry Peterson, Omaha, NE, Paul Loy, Murray, IA, Margretry Herrington, Woodbine, IA, Forest Archer, Walnut, IA

1991 Jack Lear, Lincoln, NE, Larry Peterson, Omaha, NE, Norvin Thomas, Mondamin, IA, Gwen Meister, Lincoln, NE, Pam Bergnam, Manely, NE

1992 Erik Smith, Hastings, NE, Norvin Thomas, Mondamin, IA, Harriette Anderson*, Underwood, IA, John Clayton, Brayyville, IA, Don E. Hill, Oklahoma City, OK

1993 Norvin Thomas, Mondamin, IA

1994 Matt Duncan, IA

1995 Don DeCamp*, Adel, IA

1996 Don Hill, Oklahoma City, OK, Jim Curley, Shawnee, KS, Jean Mehaffey, Holiday, FL

1997 Jerry Barnett*, West Des Moines, IA, Jim Curley, Shawnee, KS, Bill Shewey, Cortland, NE, Janet Burgess, Hines, OR, Dorothy

Frenning

1998 Jim Curley, Shawnee, KS, Don DeCamp*, Redfield, IA, Harriette Anderson*, ?????, Carl Bonahan, Omaha, NE, Mikki Schneider, Belton, TX

1999 Bernie Worrell*, Miami, FL, Don Decamp*, Redfield, IA, Randy Minor, ????, GA

2000 Don Decamp*, Redfield, IA

2001 Russ Myers*, Brightwood, VA, Walt Watkins*, Arlington, TX, Steve Wixson*, Signal Mtn, TN

2002 Yirdy Machar*, Denmark, John Perona*, Calumet, MI, Jim Curley, Shawnee, KS, Steve Wixson*, Signal Mtn, TN, Steve Brown*, Winchendon, MA

2003 Steve Wixson*, Signal Mtn, TN, Sadie Elliott, Lineville, IA, Carroll Gunter*, Wichita, KS, Jean Mahaffey, Holiday, FL and Bill Shewey, Cortland, NE

2004 Scott Miller*, St. Louis, MO,

2005 Bob Roscoe (spoons), Omaha, NE, Harriette Anderson*,

Website of the Quarter

Steve Brown (with his brother's help) found this interesting book titled *America's Instrument: the banjo in 19th Century America* by Philip F. Gura and James F. Bollman. It can be accessed on-line and has a number of bones player pictures from that era.

First Google part of the title such as "America's Instrument: The Banjo." That brought me to an Amazon.com entry which I clicked. Click on the second line under the picture which says "Search Inside this book." At the top of the next webpage is a Search box with the option of "inside this book." Enter 'bones' in the search box and click Go.

This gave me a two page list of book pages of photographs and text items to examine.

Joe Birl Correction

The story on Joe Birl in the last issue, Vol 7, No 3, had a reference to Brunswick, NY. It should have said Brunswick, NJ. Joe plans on attending Bones Fest X in New Bedford, MA.

Young Bones Player

Jugband played to Great Acclaim at the Lexington Educational Foundation (LEF) Trivia Bee.

The jugband was invited by the LEF Trivia BEE group (no secret jug band partisans in the committee) to open for the LEF BEE which raises funds for special educational projects in the public schools in Lexington, MA. Co-director Rob Rudin was unable to 'bee' with us, but we managed. We treated it as a seison, and played more as background music as the contestants filed into the Town Hall. When they realized MUSIC was being played, they quieted down and the jug band broke into *Midnight Special*, *Take this Hammer*, and *Stealin'*. The audience sang and clapped along. The applause was thunderous, and a picture of the band appeared in the local Minuteman weekly paper.

The jug band then went off to wow the folks of distant Boston the following weekend in Jamaica Plain (my home town) at an open house with a mayoral visitation by trolley. Initially very few people came, but suddenly, bunches of children and parents came, and we sat down and played another set. Boston school teacher Paul Sedgwick who was last seen making bones at Billie Hockett's party featuring the Mr. Bones documentary, joined us with his children and played along.

Other news is that I hope one of my great young bones players will be playing 'castanets' in a Carmen opera scene being produced by my school's new 'opera company', which dramatizes conflict and resolution within the school. The merging of opera and bones at the child level is a moment for which I am sure bones player and opera tenor Adam Klein has been waiting.

Finally, read and enjoy Jennifer Ranger's article on her experiences teaching children bones playing.

[The Young Bones Player welcomes contributions of photos and articles from teachers of our Young Bones Players and the Young Bones Players themselves. Please include photo credit and caption, and a brief

biography of yourself (and maybe where you first learned to play bones). Make sure you have publication permission for the photo. Thank You, *Constance Cook*, Editor, Young Bones

Carrying On the Tradition: Teaching Kids To Play the

As a music teacher, one of the best things ever is seeing my students, both young and old, succeed with their instrument of choice. It's especially sweet, however, to have the privilege of seeing children improving day by day with something that's not easy for them to master. Learning to play the bones can be this way for young kids whose co-ordination is still developing, but when there is much fun to be had along the way, the rewards can be really great.

Keeping a sense of humor is helpful in the initial phases of teaching bones to young children. I can't tell you how many times my own nine year old grandson (see photo on Page 8) has lost his grip and accidentally let his bones go flying across the room, much to our mutual surprise! Instead of getting too discouraged we both have a good laugh and then keep right on practicing; working to keep the bones under control, trying to keep the movements loose yet smaller and more precise than his developing co-ordination seems capable of at the time. Just when both teacher and pupil begin to wonder if this is going to work out, the big payoff comes with a quiet rolling little 'rat-a-tat-a-tat', and suddenly we're laughing again! Of course finally getting the coveted bones roll is only the beginning, and at this point bones still go flying out of small hands, but not as often, and not quite as far; progress!

Adults can learn a lot by teaching the youngsters in their life to play the bones. It's good to remember what it feels like to start from 'square one', and how impossible it all seems.

The thing is, if you can hold a kid's attention and keep him smiling through the process, success is just around the corner. Nobody that I

know, including myself, has ever picked up the bones and started rattlin' and rollin' right away, and every adult I ever taught bones to has looked really skeptical at first that they'd ever learn to play, but learn they have!

Some have even gone on to show the technique to others and then experience the process from the teacher's side, and the circle is complete as they help carry on the age-old tradition of playing the bones. *Jennifer Ranger* The Music Studio. www.SoKattywompus.com. 877-365-

Bones Workshop at Appalshop

Appalshop is an arts education center in Whitesburg, KY in the heart of the Appalachian coal fields. They produced films and audio recordings and have both a theatre company and a radio station. They have been around for more than 36 years. Check them out at www.appalshop.org

Their Traditional Music Project is hosting a *Recycled Rhythm* workshop on March 4th. They are doing a series of workshops on making music with recycled objects. This includes bones, spoons, bucket drums, etc. Also included is a percussive dancing workshop.

They are targeting teenagers and young adults who have not been exposed to traditional music. The event is scheduled from 10 am to 6 pm. Following the workshops, the leaders will give live performances.

Suzanne Savell, Traditional Music Coordinator at Appalshop, is the organizer of the event. For information contact her at ssavell@appalshop.org or 606-633-0108.

Member John Maeder discovered this event and had this to say.

"Appalshop is one of the finest organizations I've had the pleasure of associating with. I have played my bones at a few Appalshop dances in the past few months and Suzanne is very enthused about 'acoustic percussion.' I feel it is important for the RBS to be well-represented." Contact John at 276-669-3054.

Tips and Techniques

I just came back from a successful Bones & Spoons demonstration and teaching and playing for 10 days at the Kutztown German Fest. in PA. The fair is about learning and having fun.

I was a paid performer on bones and spoons and taught in the Bones and Spoons tent. I sold bones, spoons and jaw harps. I ran out of bones and spoons (gave away over 400 pairs of bones) in the first two days and jaw harps on the last day.

I wore my Rhythm Bones Society shirt and got many requests on how folks can join (see photograph on Page 8.) I hope I am better prepared next year.

Out of 300 plus students, I successfully taught ALL how to play bones using my technique on the 'Dutch Penny Bones (see below.)'

I taught blind, deaf and amputees including people that only had a few digits. I have a special way of playing and teaching bones using spoons for those who have missing digits and need modification to playing bones due to any hand or finger differences. I hope to publish more information in the future concerning these issues for the Rhythm Bones Player. *Dutch Kopp*

Dutch Penny Bones

In answer to the RBS quest to develop a low cost, mass produced pair of bones to either give away to kids (and adults) or make available to them to encourage bones playing, I have submitted the following design. Pictured to the right are my *Dutch Penny Bones* that are the most robust design, easy to make, inexpensive, and have all the features of ease to hold and play for children and adults. I have tried many designs and even given away and sold real bones including wooden bones that cost a thousand percent more and this design has the psychological pulling power to interest kids and adults alike.

As of this writing and the publication of this article in the Rhythm Bones Player newsletter, I give up all my rights to this simple

proven design which includes copyright and any patent rights. As of this writing, *Dutch Penny Bones* are now in the public domain for anyone to copy, use, make or sell for any use. I give the RBS all rights and any information in my files that contain first use of *Dutch Penny Bones* so the design cannot be contested. I only ask that any reference to these bones be referred to as *Dutch Penny Bones*.

What I have proposed is: two tongue depressors (sticks) with a penny glued on one end of each stick whereby the penny side are clicked against each other playing the bones in normal bones playing position. Using knock outs from an electrical box in place of the pennies was the idea of Echoing Heart Productions band who only uses recyclables. I use the tongue depressors from any craft store called Forster Jumbo Sticks 300 count 6"x 3/4" x 1/16" and glue one penny on each stick at the end using Gorilla Glue available from Home Depot. Follow the directions exactly. Total price for one pair of *Dutch Penny Bones* is 8 cents.



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A Reminder...

BONES FEST

X

will be held in

New Bedford, MA
July 28-30, 2006

Book your hotel reservation
early at
Days Inn New Bedford
508-997-1231

Be sure to ask for the
"Bones Fest"
special rate of \$89/night.

Don't forget to check the
rhythmbones.com web site
for details and updates,
and watch for the
registration form and
further info in the next
newsletter!

Questions?
Ask hosts Jonathan and
Melissa Danforth, via
phone (508-999-3225) or email
(bonesfest10@gmail.com)

"Let us shake bones together!"

(Calendar continued from page 2)

Bones Fest X. July 28-30, 2006.

Hosted by Melissa and Jonathan
Danforth. Details in the next
newsletter, but see above for hotel
information.

NTCMA AND Bones Contest.

August 28-September 3, 2006. 31st
Annual Festival and Contests. Spoons
and Bones contest on Saturday or
Sunday of that week. For details go to
www.oldtimemusic.bigstep.com

(Benoit Bourque—Continued from page 1)

unusual.” I start showing him the bones and he said let me try it. He took the bones and started playing, and I was amazed. I said “How come you play the bones— you never told me.” He said, “You never asked me.”

“So my own Dad was playing bones and I didn’t know because he didn’t have any in the home. His own Dad too played bones, but he died when I was young.”

“Do you know where his tradition came from?”

“No, I don’t know. When my dad was young, from what I understood, bones playing was not that much considered a musical instrument. It was a musical instrument, but like the spoons or the yoyo or the bolo— simple games you play when you’re kids. He remembered when he was a kid playing them. His friend had a pair, but was playing one handed.

“Later I started to see a few bones players here. One was Leo Boudreau. He was not very well known for the general public—he was more known from people who were doing traditional music. He was playing with a band called *Le Bousatain* and he was a two hands bones player. He impressed me the way he was playing. Later I met other players, and then I finally figured my own way to use the bones with two hands. In fact, I don’t use it as much with the left hand as the right. I do all the basics with my right hand and all the accents with my left hand.

“I thought that was the way Leo Boudreau was playing, but when finally I saw him after a year of practicing that way, he had a quite different way to play.

“The basics can be quite similar, but there are so many ways to use them. I don’t know how you play, but you know most of the players, and almost everyone of them use the basic roll of three sounds tak a da, tak a da, or taka da taka da depending if you make the pause or not. Its pretty much the basic of every bones player. Do the roll, like when you do the windshield wiper movement.

I met once a guy, I don’t know where he lived, but he’s probably in the Vancouver area. When I met him he was living in the North West

territory. His name with a nick name is ‘Grizzly’ Frank Metcalf. He’s a big, big, big guy, like a big lumberjack. His way to play is very unusual, because in one movement he starts down to up. He does four sounds in one movement, down to up: one, two, three, four; one, two, three, four. He’s the only one I’ve seen that way.

“I remember meeting Percy Danforth. He was doing the same basic thing I was doing, the three sounds, and the two sounds of the clap.

I’ve never seen anyone playing the four sound in one movement. Its typical to ‘Grizzly’ Frank Metcalf. But to do this, it’s a very hard movement. Very low to very high to his chest, it was really four sounds movement, its very interesting movement. I tried a few times and I got it sometimes, but I never really worked seriously on it.

“My experience in the bones is really the jig—tak a da, tak a da. This way to play that “Grizzly” Frank Metcalf was doing is nice because you can do reels. The are four sounds for that, tak a dee dee, tak a dee dee, and you don’t work too much because you don’t shake that much the hand. In one movement, one bar, its great.

“Most players I’ve seen play with one hand. Probably it was because Leo Boudreau had inspired me that I really started to seriously play more with two hands. I like also to introduce jazzy rhythms. I say jazzy, but also like world rhythms: three, three, two with the accent, one, two, three, one, two, three, one, two, one, two, three, one, two, three. It’s a very common thing we’ll use, you know, some times with the back up music. It’s a very interesting thing, quite easy to do when you do the accent with the other hand. Just mark the accent like a bass drum.

“I like to listen to a lot of international traditional music. I just try to understand more the polyrhythms, and I just try to integrate them in my playing. I don’t say that I’m a extremely inspired from that because my tradition is really Quebec music. I like very much Irish and other music too, but really my main music is the Quebec traditional music.”

“Are you aware of many older players in Quebec in the Montreal

area?”

“There’s not that many. I get maybe once a year, a call from a old man. They will find my name or somebody gave my name to them, and they want to play bones. It’s crazy because I have also a wife and four children, and I spend a lot of time on the road. I wish I would have more time just to jam with people, but instead I try to give them to local groups where they can play with fiddles and accordions.

In the Québec City area, Normand Legault is another very good bones player. Henri Paul Benard from the group *Suroit* is really one of the best player I met. Gilles Lapierre, who use to play in a group called *Clapotis* from Lesile de la Madeleine, QC, is with Henri Paul who comes from the same area—the best player I met in Québec.

“I don’t know how many bones players are in Montreal, but if you want to know more on that there’s a association here that has a directory about old musicians, dancers, story tellers in Quebec. I think they must have in it many bones players, and you can be in touch with them. I never tried to count how many of them play bones. The name of the organization is MNEMO, (website address mnemo.qc.ca) The director of MNEMO is also a very good bones player, step dancer, and caller—his name is Pierre Jaqtran. So you can be in touch with him. He’s a very nice guy, so he knows a lot of things. He knows mostly about the dance aspect, but you may be surprised as he knows a few things about bones playing too.”

“How did bones playing come to the French Canadian music?”

“Well definitely part of it is the Irish immigrants because they inspired a lot of our music. The first years I was doing music and dance, I thought it was a lot of influence came from the Irish, and with time I found its still a big influence, but the Scots they were a big influence, too. They were among the first settlers here— they came for the fur trade. The English people have been also a big influence.

“But also the French culture has for so many years. They have in certain areas in France, what they call ‘Claque Bois.’ Its like clacking wood, a straight piece of wood about the same size as a beef rib, but straight, not

(Benoit Bourque—Continued from page 6)

curved. The bottom of it burned to make a softer sound, and they use the same tactic as the bones. On each side of the middle finger one is fixed and they use that. It's definitely in the French culture too, probably also with the Breton—people from Brittany, but also people from other places in France.

"I've seen also bones playing in Spain. I know in the North of Spain they have Celtic music where they use castanets, and they use also the bones, both of them. I saw them in Sweden, Switzerland, as well as France and all the British Islands too. It's used so many, many places.

"Ever seen the movie, *Latcho Drom*? It's a French movie on Gypsies. It's a very good movie. It's a documentary, in fact. The music is so interesting, and there's so much music in it. I think in fact it would be a very good addition for the Bones Society because the very first images in the movie, I don't remember which country it was because the movie goes in different countries, but you have in the desert people walking beside the caravan and you see this young boy about 12, 13 years old, and he's singing. He walks with the caravan and he's playing the bones. It's something to see. It's a very nice movie, and you will see 3 or 4 times bones in the movie."

"You said the Irish probably brought the bones to Canada do you know what time period that was?"

"Well during the big famine in Ireland, in the 19th century, I think it was like 1840's, during those years. Most of them settled on the east coast in Canada. They've been a very big influence."

"Tell us about the kind of bones that you play, Benoit. Do you make your own bones?"

"Well, I do, but I use real bones, that's really my favorite sound. I do have also the wood, different kind of wood, but I really like the real bone. I use cow bones mostly. This other guy I was talking to you about, "Grizzly" Frank Metcalf uses mostly caribou bones and moose bones because they were flatter, and he was living in the north too, where it was easier for him

to get them. But I live in Montreal so getting caribou here is not the easiest thing. So I use really beef ribs.

Since a few years, I really found my favorite sound. What I do is I mix beef ribs with cow shins. The cow shins you can find in a few stores, and they don't have marrow and because the cow shin is bigger you can shape it really more the way you want. What I use is a cow shin shaped like a rib in each hand and one beef rib in each hand. The cow shin is the stationary one. I would go the other way, but when I listened I did not like the sound. The rounder bones, the beef ribs, are the movable bones. It is a sound I really love because the cow shin is a higher sound while the beef rib is a lower sound. The mix of it, I just love."

"When did you start playing professionally Benoit, was it with Eritage?"

"Yes that was my first band, I started playing with them in 79'. When I was 19. So I started playing with them mostly bones, step dancer and caller. I played about 6 years with them and then I retired because my kids were young and it was hard to have a family and always being on the road. I came back about, oh, maybe 8 years later. I always kept doing music but not full time.

My first band was really Eritage and you know I'm still very close to Raynard Ouelett, who was the accordion player. He is a tremendous player, and he's also part of the committee organizing the Canadian Folk Music Awards. He runs also a great accordion festival and he's a great accordion maker. So I'm still close with him."

"So you did do some records with Eritage?"

"Well in fact we did 3 records for the Montreal school board, but those weren't really for sale to the general audience.

"The real one was *La Ronde des Voyageurs* (www.angelfire.com/folk/singeractor/laronde.html.) It's still a very good recording. I'm still enjoying it, you know, and that was a very, very good band. I really enjoyed being in that band, as it was the learning experience for me. I developed my

bones playing while I was with them.

"I quit them in 85' because of the family. And you know I'm looking here at a record that shows a very young looking Benoit Bourque holding some bones. It is *Homage le Alfred Montmarkette*.

"I made that record when I came back with Vielle. I played on the side with that group as it was not a full time band. We did the mini show's but not outside of Quebec.

"Alfred Montmarkette was a very good accordion player from the 40's, and we put the show on for the Accordion festival. There was a CD producer in the audience, who liked the show, and said he would like to produce an album. That was many years ago—it would be about that 95 or 96.

"Yes that one has more bones playing because I was really the percussion player in it. A couple of tunes with spoons, but mostly the bones. Step dancing for some tracks too, but mostly bones."

"So did Matapat come after that?"

"Yeah, Gaston Bernard was playing with me and Vielle. He and I quit Avielle and we started with Simon LePage, the bass player, and made our first album. We were called Bourque, Bernard and LePage. When the first album came out, which was called *Matapat*, people were starting to call us Matapat—so we became Matapat. We did another album after that, *Petit Fou*, and the two of them were nominated also for the Juno."

"And then, of course, you've been in *Le Vent Du Nord*?"

"Yeah, I quit Matapat in 2002. I started playing with *Le Vent Du Nord*, and I'm still playing with them."

"Seems like this has really been a great experience for you?"

"Yeah, its been crazy. Well just to tell you, sometime we say in French "you live under a special aura." I don't know if you have a similar expression in English, but it's being in the right place in the right time.

You know, I played about 6 years with Gaston and Simon in Matapat. At the end we were going in different directions like many bands. I was home in May 2002 and told my wife that that we are going to disband soon.



Max is 9 years old, a good age to learn how to play bones (see story by Ranger on Page 4.)

(Benoit Bourque—Continued from page 7)

I met two guys from the Montreal area touring in the Vancouver area. They were playing there with their own band and we showed up at a party. We jammed together and I really had a good time playing with them. I said to myself, “if Matapat ever breaks up, I wish to play with those two guys.” You know it was

only a wish because they were already in a band.

“Two hours after I said that I got a call from the fiddler—what do you think of that? It was really amazing you know. They called me to ask me a question, regarding a festival—a really weird call because there was no reason really why they should call me. They just said let’s call Benoit Bourque to see what he thinks about that.

“When they called me at the end of summer of 2002 they were quitting their band and they wanted to start a new project. The two of them were moving to a small village which happened to be my home town—they didn’t know that I was living there. They moved to the same street, in fact, about 2 miles away from my house.

“We started playing together in September 2002, and we recorded the first CD in December. Very soon the CD came out, and we won the Juno (Canadian equivalent of the Grammy) award a few months later. So quick and crazy. Definitely this band has a very special aura—it works very well.”

“If our members want to get recordings of you playing the bones,



Dutch Kopp (see story on Page 5)

do you have any suggestions? Do you play on the most recent Le Vent Du Nord album?”

“We have two albums with LeVent Du Nord, and the best thing would be to go to www.leventdunord.com. The first CD, released in 2003, has 14 tracks and I’m playing bones on 4. I’m playing bones on four tracks also on the second one. I’m on the old Heritage records and the two Matapat

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