



# Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 8, No. 3 2006

## In this Issue

Highlights of Bones Fest X

Russ Myers' Obituary and Remembrances

Joe Birl Inventing at 90

Bill Vits Plays Bones with his Symphony

Barry Patton on NBC Television

Minutes of Board and Membership Meetings

## Columns:

Executive Director

Editorial

Letters to the Editor

Tips and Techniques

Website of the Quarter

Recording of the Quarter

Bones Calendar

## Future Issues

The Mescher Tradition Continues

Special Issue: Reflections on Ten Years of Bones Fests

Index to Volumes 1 through 8 of Rhythm Bones Player Newsletter

## Executive Director's Column

It is with extreme sadness that I report the death of Russ Myers. Russ Myers was a cornerstone in our little bones community. He learned to play from his father, and developed an amazingly melodic style of bones playing, changing pitch in a way no one else could.

He was a founding member of the Rhythm Bones Society, a board member for several years, and the Assistant Director until ill health forced him to retire. He cared deeply about our art, and was eloquent in his description of it. He was truly a walking encyclopedia not only on bones playing matters but on a variety of subjects. In 1976, he, along with Percy Danforth, was invited by the Library of Congress to document the bones as two

of the last remaining bones players.

For me I will not only miss his bones playing prowess, which was great, but that most amazing sense of humor, and humble, gracious style of his, and perhaps most of all, his voice. He was able to attend this year's bones fest, although confined to a wheel chair, and for that I am most grateful.

The service for Russ was held on September 15th at Our Lady of the Blue Ridge in Madison VA. There was a reception immediately after at Russ and Wilma's home. Bone playing was welcome, and the Possum Hollow Band played. *Steve Brown*

## Highlights of Bones Fest X

It's hard to believe that our Bones Fest, which started out in the Cowett's back yard, has grown into an international affair with a hundred attendees. Bones Fest X, held in New Bedford, MA, combined the city's multicultural and maritime music heritage with the sass and rattle that heralds bones players the world over. Despite the heat, it seemed that everyone had a grand ol' time performing, jamming, and learning from one another.

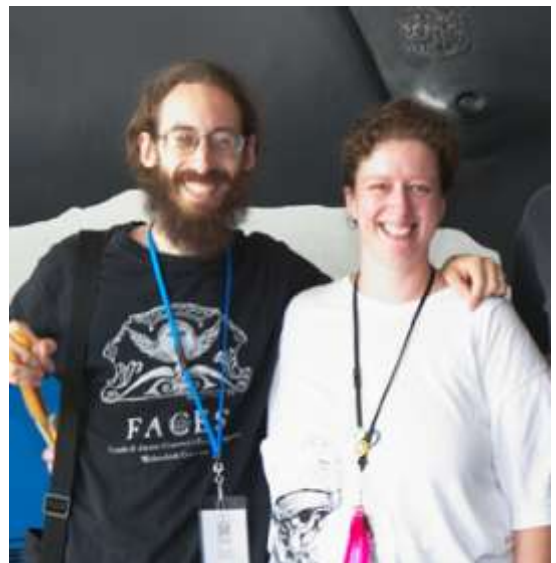
The performances this year took on a fresh tone as Al Cowett encouraged players to combine their acts with personal background or narrative. We expanded the performances into Friday night (because we had so many players).

We were very happy to see the number of bones players combining their talents as duets, trios, or larger ensembles. We were very impressed with the variety and range of techniques and musical traditions that went into everyone's playing — everything from old-time, jazz, and classical to rock-and-roll, Québécois, and sea shanties.

Of course none of this would have been possible without everyone's help and support. Al and Dan Cowett deserve special thanks for their tireless energy and expertise behind the mic and sound board. Kudos also go to the talented and patient musicians who sat in to provide live music — the Rusty String Bandits and the Publicans. Finally, we can't express the honor and pleasure we felt

seeing Russ Myers at Bones Fest X, contributing mightily (as always) to the racket, learning, and merriment. Looking back, we are grateful to have had the chance to make music with him one more time, and we will miss him terribly.

Thanks to all who made 'our' Fest so special — we'll see you next year! *Jonathan and Melissa Danforth* [Note: Jonathan and Melissa will have more to say about Bones Fest X in the special issue of the newsletter titled *Reflections*



Hosts Jonathan and Melissa Danforth. Photo by John Maciel

## Editorial

Russ Myers is the second of our Founding Members to die. Vivian Cox was the first and we miss them both.

Soon after I learned of the death of Russ, I played his *On the Road Again* CD (see review in last quarter's issue, Vol. 8, No. 1) and listened to Russ playing bones and telling bones stories. What a great legacy he left us in this CD. His band, the Possum Ridge String Band, has donated several of these CDs for our members. All they ask for is a donation. See Recording of Quarter.

There is an article on Russ in the Vol. 5, No. 2 issue of the newsletter.

Bones Fest X is over, and I spent the entire airplane trip home writing emails and organizing. Melissa and Jonathan Danforth were great hosts and will be remembered as hosting one of the most successful Fests. Their highlights article is on Page 1.

For several years, we have talked about sponsoring a bones contest. The Board has decided not to hold a contest as part of a Bones Fest as we want to keep it as non-competitive as possible such that even the least experienced bones players feel comfortable performing in front of their peers.

The Bones & Spoons Contest, held as part of the Annual Old Time Country Music Festival & Contests, was not held this year due to lack of contestants. This contest has been held continuously for the past 30 years, and several RBS members have won it. Part of the reason was that the contest was held late Sunday and many people had already left for home.

The organizer, Bob Everhart, said he would move the contest back to Saturday next year. If we want a bones contest close to home (See Steve Brown's Column in the last issue, Vol. 8, No. 2, where he talks about the All-Ireland Bones Competition seeking to host a World Bones Competition), the NTCMA contest is one with a long history. Let's support it next year or it might go away. It's a fun festival with

## Letters to the Editor

I am sorry to say that we did not have a Bones & Spoons Contest this

year. I dropped down to the Miscellaneous Contest and won second place. I do not understand it because, during the [NTCMA] festival, different bones players came in and talked to me. We had the chance to jam a bit and then they went home. It was fun and I got to play a lot.

I taught about a dozen people, both young and old, and I usually give the kids the bones that I teach them on. I ended up teaching a lady and selling her some of my best bones—some that I like to use.

That's about all from the festival. I am always at that festival since I do sound work there. It was great meeting everybody and always great working with Jerry Mescher and Bernie Worrell! Til Later! *Scott Walker*

I missed Bones Fest again this year as my symphony summer schedule got in the way. I really wanted to attend, but we did a "Music of Led Zeppelin" concert that I couldn't get out of.

I was saddened to hear of Russ Meyer's passing. He was a true gentleman of the bones and one of the last of that generation.

I enjoyed reading the newsletter especially Dave Boyles article about playing with the symphony. Thanks, *Bill Vits* [See Page 3 for an article by Bill on his symphony bones playing.]

Just wanted to let you friends know that last month I sent in Jerry's applications for bones playing to the Iowa Arts Council. I never expected to hear too soon from them; but, last Friday we heard. He has an audition this Wednesday at 10:30 in Des Moines! I have been so nervous that you'd think it was me having the audition. Once I get home from school today, we are going to Des Moines and spend the night—I don't want to take any chances on missing this audition! Hope all is well with you all. Love, *Sharon Mescher*

[New member] Rebecca Cooke attended my Bones Workshop held at the Arizona Highlands Celtic Festival in Flagstaff, AZ this summer. She comes from a musical family and is picking up the rhythm bones quickly.

I like to have bones affordable enough to give away at such a public

## Rhythm Bones Player

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event, so I built a couple hundred pairs of tongue depressor and penny versions (the Dutch Penny Bones) that I learned about from the Society newsletter. I was able to introduce about 40 people to rhythm bones in two workshops--and promoted the society and the website at the same time. So I'm doing my part to share and promote! Shake dem bones!

*Michael Satterwhite*

Bonex Fest X gave me an opportunity to meet other bones players. It was a great experience. My grandson Andy really enjoyed the interest shown to him as he is just learning to play the bones. We were looked after by all the RBS members and made to feel that we belonged to the group. Meeting bone players from different parts of the globe was super. Jonathan and Melissa Danforth must be congratulated on a first class Bones Fest. They worked very hard, We enjoyed ourselves and we are proud to be members of the Rhythm Bones

# Russ Myers' Obit

Russell Bordley Myers, 72, of Brightwood, VA died Sunday, September 10, 2006 in the University of Virginia Hospital. He was born March 27, 1934 in Baltimore, Maryland and was the son of the late David Russell Myers and Helen Bordley Myers.

He was a retired Manufacture Representative for Goodwin-Rawls Sales in Richmond, VA. He graduated from Washington and Lee University in 1956. He joined the U.S. Army in 1957 and later he became a Captain in the Army National Guard. He was a member of the 16th Special Forces Group Airborne as a Green Beret. He was a member of Our Lady of the Blue Ridge Catholic Church in Madison, VA. He was a member of the Possum Ridge String Band and the Rhythm Bones Society.

He is survived by his wife, Wilma Easley Myers of Brightwood, a daughter, Jennifer Bordley Walters, a son, David Russell Myers and seven grandchildren.

A memorial service was held at 3:00 PM, Friday, September 15, 2006 at Our Lady of the Blue Ridge Catholic Church. The family received friends at their home in Brightwood immediately following the service. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to Our Lady of the Blue Ridge Building Fund. Preddy Funeral Home in Madison, VA was in charge of

## Highlights from Russ Myers' Funeral

There were four representing the Bones Society, Ev and Val Cowett, Kenny Wolin and myself. There were a lot of people in attendance at the reception in the Meyers' home with lots of great food and wonderful live music. The band Russ played with (Possum Ridge String Band) was set up on a deck outside of the house and they were really great. They had a hammered dulcimer player, whistle, banjo, guitar & double bass (who doubled on didgeridoo!!!). They were nice enough to donate their CD's to anyone that wanted them as a

memento so we took several & we'll have one especially for the RBS archives. Some of my favorite Russ stories are recorded on that CD—most especially one entitled *Bones at the Funeral Home*—just a great story and it's wonderful that we can still hear Russ tell it!

Ev, Kenny & myself jammed on bones with the band and we had a really nice time. The great thing was they were used to playing with Russ on bones so we didn't get any strange looks as we joined in.

There was a room set up in their home with all kinds of Russ' treasures. Of course, we were immediately drawn to a table that was set up with all of Russ' bone paraphernalia - most importantly THOSE BONES!! That's one photo in particular you'll probably really enjoy [see Page 8.]

As for the funeral, it was standing room only which is a testament to the kind of man Russ was. Ev could fill you in more on what it was that was said about Russ in the beginning part of the funeral as we didn't get there right at the start of it. They had a group of singers from a Presbyterian church that joined the singers/soloist from Russ' church (it was Roman Catholic). A soloist sang a couple of my personal favorites - Ave Maria and Panis Angelicus.

I'm glad I had an opportunity to attend—it was sort of strange how I was nearby at the time and was able to go. *Teri Davies*

I think Teri described the funeral most eloquently. I was just very moved at how many people were there to attend and pay their respects to a very special person. I only wish I had met Russ earlier, but the short time I've known him (since Bones Fest 8) I am so grateful. I have often told his wonderful marching bones story, especially to some of the members here of "The President's Own." He would have been very pleased about

## Sharon Mescher Remembers Russ

As I have aged, I have come to realize that I need to listen carefully to the wise; and, then, take the time to allow those paragons of wisdom to

teach me by enhancing my knowledge, and, simply, gracing my life. If I am so fortunate to meet such people and soak up all that they offer, my hope is that I have listened closely and allowed my spirit to be changed for the good.

Wilma and Russ Myers are two such people who have profoundly been gifts to my life. Upon first meeting Russ, I thought he was a native southerner because of the prideful manner in which he talked about the South. I, also, assumed he was a Southern Baptist. Then, through a slow process, I learned that he and Wilma had lived in Virginia for years, but both were natives of other regions. The most mouth-dropping moment came when I realized he was a Catholic living in the Bible Belt!! This, still, seems somewhat strange to me.

From the first time I met Russ, I was in awe of his knowledge on every subject under the sun: world history, Catholic Church history, and bones history. I can't remember one question to which he did not know the answer. So, I quickly realized that each time we had the opportunity to be with Russ at the bones fests was a time that I had better pick his brain as much as possible so as to learn, learn, and learn. Wilma has told me the story of an encyclopedia salesperson coming to their door. As I recall, Wilma told the salesman that he/she was welcome to come in, but she was already "married to an encyclopedia." When Russ answered a question, he did so in detail --- one had to know the details in order to fully understand the answer!

How will I remember Russ? With Wilma always "there" supporting him; playing his beloved bones; telling his story; giving history lessons; and, that intoxicating, from-his-toes, belly-laugh. Fortunately, I have Russ on tape playing his bones at Bones Fest X in New Bedford, MA. These memories will forever be precious.

Russ was a gift to my life, and for this I will be eternally grateful. I can see it now: Russ is in heaven, giving a history lesson; laughing with that distinctive laugh; and certainly entertaining the angels by playing his bones! Heaven is now being blessed by the presence of the one and only, Russ Myers. *Sharon Mescher*

## Mel Mercier Remembers Russ

I met Russ Myers for the first time in 1999 while I was in the United States for a year, studying and teaching at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. I needed to find a research topic for one of the seminars I was attending at Wesleyan and I decided to see if I could find any American bone players to interview. I had been playing one-handed bones since I was a young boy in Ireland and I had a vague memory of seeing a two-handed player at a party in Toronto sometime in the early 80s (I discovered later that it was Percy Danforth). I went to seek the advice of one of my colleagues at Wesleyan, Dr. Eric Charry. I knew that Eric had spent some time teaching in Greensboro, North Carolina, and I had a notion that he may have come across some bones players there. At the time I thought it was most likely that any living bones players would be located in the southern states. Eric did indeed recall seeing a two-handed bone player at the University at one time but he couldn't remember who it was.

A few minutes after I left Eric's office he noticed an email from somebody called Steve Wixson in his inbox. Steve had written to Eric to ask for assistance in his research on bones playing in North America. In the email he mentioned two bone players that he knew of in North Carolina and Virginia: Everett Cowett and Russ Myers! Eric forwarded the email to me and it was in my email inbox before I got back to my office after my meeting with him. Some stars in the bone-playing universe must have aligned themselves for a split second and sent Steve, Everett and Russ to me – electronically! I was flabbergasted by the synchronicity and set about contacting Ev and Russ to arrange to visit with them. I subsequently wrote about that visit in the newsletter [Vol 5, No 2] but not the serendipity that preceded it. Now that Russ has sadly passed away it seems appropriate for me to mark the moment when he first came into my life.

I have been enriched by knowing him and by visiting with him and his wife, Wilma at their home in Brightwood, Virginia, and at various Bones Fests over the past seven years. In January this year my fiancé, Maura, and I spent a week visiting with the Myers during which I interviewed Russ each day and we all shared supper in the evenings. Even though Russ was very ill he was extraordinarily generous with his time and he spoke at length to me about his life as a bone player and his hopes for the future of bone playing. I will always be grateful to him for his contribution to my efforts to write about the bones. I hope he will stay close as I begin the final phase of the writing of my dissertation. Russ has inspired me as a bone player and as a writer. He was a great 'character' and one of the very best bone players of the twentieth century. I miss his friendship, laughter, and musicianship.

I feel too for Wilma in her great loss. I have never seen anything quite like the partnership and the deep caring that epitomizes her relationship with Russ. Maura and I were blessed to spend so much time with them both last January. I will never forget the warmth of welcome that Russ and Wilma extended to Maura during that visit. We both remember our time there with great affection. My own most enduring images are of Maura and Russ sitting, chatting and laughing together.

Like many of you, I saw Russ for the last time at Bones Fest in July. It was obviously a huge effort for Russ and Wilma to come to the Fest and I am so grateful to them for that. Of course I'd like to have seen Russ in his high-spec, mechanized wheelchair whizzing around Bones Fest XI next year, but I am thankful that I got to spend a little more time with him before he passed away.

I wonder who he might be regaling with his stories now, or who he might be playing bones pass-offs with? Vivian Cox? Percy Danforth? Ted Goon? Frank Brower? The big man is standing tall again, and he is in good company! *Mel Mercier*

## RBS Members Remember Russ

Russ and Wilmer Myers were two folks who attended most Bones Fests and enjoyed them all. Russ was a jolly man with a huge laugh and was well described in the 'Ode to Russ Myers' by RBS member Walt Watkins. It brings a tear to my eye whenever I read it. Thanks Walt.

Russ brought dignity to Bones Playing and was always willing to share techniques, music, stories fellowship and good food. He is the only member to receive the award of 'Fellow' from the membership. May Your Bones Be With You Russ. The Cowett family will never forget you. *Ev Cowett*

A great loss. I'm so glad I got to meet him. Thanks, RBS, for making that possible. *Ellen Stern*

Darn, I'm sorry, but I am so selfishly happy that I got to see him, speak to him and listen to him play. What a grand man. I know we will all miss him. *Andy Cox*

I am grateful for the time I spent chatting with Russ in the back of the hall during the daytime performances. Gracious and acerbic with a self deprecating laugh and the ability to put anyone at ease. His ready wit and intriguing stories will be repeated and remembered for many years to come. *Hank Tenenbaum*

So sorry to hear of the death of Russ Myers. It is sad to lose someone you admire. We will miss his talent as a Bones player. All the more reason that we carry on and promote the Bones. Kind Regards, *Tony Humphreys*

Sorry to hear about the passing of Russ Myers. Glad we had a chance to hear him play in New Bedford. We will not be able to attend his memorial service, but will be thinking about him. Best wishes...*Guy Gillette*

Russ was a great bonesman, I'll miss him. *Greg Burrows*

*(Continued on page 5)*

(Continued from page 4)

Sorry to hear about Russ. It was a pleasure to meet him at Bones Fest X and to watch and hear his bones style.  
*Dennis Riedesel*

I had a very special and touching moment with Russ and Wilma at Bone Fest X. Russ said, "I wonder if you wouldn't mind sharing your technique for changing the pitch on the bones with me as we both seem to enjoy this profound feature of the bones." I replied, "Russ, of course, but I feel it is appropriate that we both exchange each other's techniques at this time." Russ concurred and, needless to say, we bonded. *Aaron Plunkett*

## Want to Be a Guest Editor?

Want to be a guest editor for the special issue of the newsletter titled *Reflections*. This issue will highlight 10 years of Bones Fests and will include lots of color photographs. It will be a collector's item.

If you are interested, please contact Steve Wixson.

## Bones Calendar

Check out the Calendar on the [rhythmbones.com](http://rhythmbones.com) website.

**Bones Fest X. Summer 2007.**

**NTCMA AND Bones Contest.**

August 27-September 2, 2007. 31st Annual Festival and Contests. Bones Contest on Saturday of that week. For details go to [www.OLDTIMEMUSIC.BIGSTEP.COM](http://www.OLDTIMEMUSIC.BIGSTEP.COM)

## Barry Patton on NBC

Barry Patton will soon be on the Megan Mullally show on NBC national television. Barry says he's made one trip to Hollywood already and has another scheduled. He says the show will include some history of rhythm bones as well as him playing the bones. At this time he does not know the air date for the show, so check out [meganshow.tv](http://meganshow.tv) for guest schedules. The show airs at 11 AM EDT in Chattanooga.

## Ode to Russ Myers

I was glad that Russ Myers got to go to the tenth Fest. I had visited him at Brightwood a week or so before the fest and he was looking forward to the trip and the post Fest trip into Maine.

At the Fest, even though the heat got to him from time to time, he was in his element and genuinely happy.

I had hoped that Russ would have 'looked over a four-leafed clover' many more times, but it was not to be. Russ was a great bones player, one of the prime movers in the Rhythm Bones Society, and a good man. I got to know him rather well and was inspired to try to capture his spirit and essence in this poetic tribute.

He sprang from a proud family heritage,  
as the Tree on his wall does attest.

He valued his southern upbringing:  
ever true, ever gracious, be the best.

While schooling to be a good soldier,  
He marched right file with his bones;  
and played that distinctive staccato,  
for which he had become so well known.

It blew them away that day and since,  
the percussive delights he extolled.

He loved to tell that story,  
And for us it never gets old.

He served his nation when it called,  
earning Airborne Wings on his chest;  
his courage and valor distinctive;  
his leadership among the best.

He found love when he met his sweet  
Wilma,  
and their marriage: an example to behold.

The nest they made in Virginia  
was as welcoming to all as their fold.

He helped spawn the boning Society,  
by hosting the charter Fest.

He dug into boning's history  
which he intoned with a booming zest.

The art of boning, awakened,  
grows daily ever more;  
surely because of those like Russ,  
a man we do adore.

We shall miss that distinctive rumble  
his whale bones produced for him.

The prospect one plays better  
Goes from nil to mighty slim.

But, Hark!! I hear a rhythmic sound  
Growing distinctive way on high

By golly its our Russ  
at the Great Bones Fest in the sky.

*Walt Watkins 11 Sept 2006*

## New Members

We've had a rash of new members. Rebecca Cooke attended a workshop of member Michael Satterwhite, Sam Droege who found us on the internet, Lee Formicola who attended a Mystic Sea Music Festival and discovered Tim Reilly and Kenny Wolin, Dave Hare from NEFFA, Pete Hayselden from the UK who is rejoining, Ron Harvey, son of member Mel Harvey, Andy Humphreys, grandson of member Tony Humphreys, Alan Hoynes, a friend of Tony Humphreys, Dennis Rigg, who found us via a friend in the UK and Scott Walker who runs sound at times for Jerry Mescher and Bernie Worrell at the

## Joe Birl is 90 and Still Inventing

We sang happy birthday to Joe Birl at Bones Fest X—his 90th birthday was a few days later. And he is still inventing; showing us, not one, but two new things.

First, was his finger rest. He said, "What is the biggest problem people have learning how to play the bones." He quickly answered, "Keeping the middle finger on the bone."

He has placed a small circular notch on both sides of his new wooden Birl Bones in a location where the tip of the finger naturally rests. Joe says, "This notch is all many people need to remind them to keep that finger on the bones. You can also get a circular wrasp and file the notch. Try it."

Second, was a lick he played during the public performance. To me it sounded like he had cut lines into the bones such that when he moved his finger up and down the bone, it made a series of sharp sounds that perfectly matched the music.

But, that was not how it was done. All he did was moistened the tip of his finger and rub it on the surface of the bone. This is similar to rubbing the rim of a glass with a moistened finger tip producing a ringing sound.

Joe says, "For best results, remove the natural oils on the finger tip with alcohol or use some violin rosin. Again, try it out." *Steve Wixson*

# Tips and Technique Etiquette Observed By Bones Players Part 3 of 3

General: The first time you develop and sense the vibration of the bones in your hands it feels good and you just want to keep playing. However, that feeling and that sound, as fun as it is, is not so much fun for those unknowing souls around you. UNTIL YOU REALLY GET GOOD AT PLAYING AND CAN KEEP SOLID TEMPOS, PLEASE BE ADVISED THAT YOU SHOULD:

- a. Practice by yourself away from all others.
- b. Practice with recorded music when you can and nobody else is around.
- c. When you are in an audience in the presence of a band, and a great tune for bones is being played, DO NOT just whip out your bones and play along. NEVER play with or in the presence of a band unless you have been asked to join them (or are a regular member).
- d. When you are ready, find an open jam session to start your public appearance. Approach it moderately until you know "you have it".

Playing with a band: When you have been asked to play with a band (i.e. not as a regular member) the band leader is expecting to feature you either in front of the band, or as one of the instruments he expects to feature during the play of the next tune. It will usually be obvious what the leader intends.

a. When you alone are being featured, the entire band will control its play to allow you to play to the full range of your bones playing talent. When the tune ends, you are expected to acknowledge the audience with a broad smile and bow, and also acknowledge the band by gesturing toward them in your applause. You thank the leader and depart. Your excellent performance gives you no license to hang around and keep playing (unless asked anew).

- b. When you are to be featured

along with other band members, you play rhythm (light taps with your dominate hand and an occasional syncopated tap with the other hand) until the leader calls "let's hear those bones" (or some other signal he will have announced as the band plays). You then play to the full range of your talent in consonance with the rhythm and volume of the band. You return to rhythm play after one verse or chorus or when you hear the leader call for another instrument to feature. Make your participation fit the music and style of the band; it is the band's sound with you complementing the other instruments and not your dominate sound the leader is seeking. Great bones playing is when a band with you in it sounds terrific.

Playing when you are a regular member of a band: The guidelines above also apply when you are a regular band member. There are some additional points that must be observed. There is a time to play and a time to sit out. Do not try to play bones with every tune. Play only when your sound complements the beat. Vary your pattern of play. Learn to play loud when the music is up and soft when it is down; and to pause when a pause enriches the beat. Stop periodically at the end of key phrases; come back in on the chorus. When there is a soloist or group chorus, DO NOT PLAY WHILE PEOPLE ARE SINGING. Sometimes playing rhythm with singing is OK but do not do it unless you know your sound complements the general effect of the music. It is also appropriate to accent (tap, roll, tap) the end of a singer's just completed phrase if the tempo is right for the accent to give good musical emphasis to the phrase. It is OK to play a full bones complement to the start up of a tune to the point where the singing begins; then quit. It is also OK to play a full bones complement to the chorus if the chorus is unsung. If instruments are being featured between a soloist's verses or during an unsung chorus, play rhythm until you are called; quit when the singing begins anew.

When playing with other bones players: Unless you are the lead bones player, you do not play bones until

you have been given a pass signal. Once you have received the pass signal, you become the lead player. You then become responsible for inviting other bones players to join you or to pass off to another bones player (who then becomes the lead player). These rules assure that only one bones player plays at a time. When you are the lead player it is OK to invite all the bones players to join you for the last few notes of a big finish, or for a major bones accent during a song. This should be called only by experienced bones players. A pass signal is given by the lead bones player by his nodding to a specific bones player and then timing and making the pass by extending both arms toward that player while executing a both hands bones tap. The receiving bones player picks up the rhythm and begins play on the next beat. All participating bones players keep time with their feet, so that they are ready to respond when a pass signal comes their way. After you become experienced, it is acceptable to keep time with your bones using light taps with your dominate hand and an occasional syncopated tap with the other hand. Finally, each bones player has a responsibility to police other bones players who get carried away, to remind them of their bones manners when they appear obnoxious and especially if they have terrible rhythm.

When playing with cloggers: Typically, a band leader will invite cloggers to clog along with integrated play of bones players. The performance may start with a bones player. You play as a featured player for one phrase or chorus and then you give a pass signal to the clogger. The clogger dances for a phrase or chorus and leaves the stage. This is the signal for the next bones player to feature for a phrase or chorus. Another pass signal is given to the next clogger and so on until the tune ends. Most often this becomes a round robin (i.e. each participant is featured several times before the tune ends). *Walt Watkins*

## Bill Vits Plays Bones with his Symphony

Last May 12, 13 and 14<sup>th</sup> I had a chance to take the bones center stage with the Grand Rapids Symphony. I've been with the orchestra since 1979 and I often perform percussion solos on our Pops series. This past spring I was a featured soloist in "Stars of the Symphony" and I wanted the audience to see the rhythm bones in action.

I planned to start traditionally with the classic violin piece "Tambourin Chinois" on the xylophone, the cello solo from "The Swan" on the electronic theremin and then finish with a bones number on the second half.

I was at a loss for a challenging bones selection that would work well with orchestra until John Varineau, our associate conductor, mentioned a tap dance concerto by composer Morton Gould. I tracked down a recording of the piece and found that the final movement was perfect for the bones. The concerto is fully notated and is challenging for the orchestra (especially with one rehearsal!) All the tap rhythms are written out, but I embellished many sections to use my best *hot licks*.

I met and worked with Morton Gould in the late 80's and found him to be very in tune with percussion. I think he would have enjoyed the substitution of bones for tap shoes.

The final movement is fast with lots of call and response between the bones and orchestra. There are even notations in the music to look at the various sections of the orchestra, so I was able to interact and get a few laughs as well.

I wore my tails coat with a skeleton type design so my movements would be highlighted in Devos Hall (which seats 2,400 people).

The concerto was written in 1952 and has recently been performed and recorded by a new generation of tap dancers. My next dream would be to have a concerto written specifically for the bones. Composers, are you

## Minutes of Board Of Directors Meeting

Steve Brown called the meeting to order at 2:05 pm. All Board members were present. Motion was made, seconded and approved to accept the minutes of the last Board and General Membership meetings as printed in the newsletter.

Steve Wixson present a brief interim Treasurer's Report. We have \$5,742 in the bank.

Jonathan Danforth presented a preview of the Bones Fest X program.

Jonathan Danforth reported that he has updated the [rhythmbones.com](http://rhythmbones.com) website, but that no new content has been added recently.

The motion was made, seconded and approved to establish a committee to investigate making a Rhythm Bones Society historical documentary. Steve Brown appointed Jonathan and Gil Hibben to the committee and will ask Sharon Mescher to be on it.

The Board sat as the nominating committee. Motion was made, seconded and approved to re-nominate the current members.

Steve Brown gave a brief report on his Bones for Kids Committee. Steve Wixson did the same for the Bones Instruction on the Web Committee. We need new leadership.

Gil Hibben reported on his motion from last meeting about changes to the By-laws to prevent frivolous motions during a General Membership meeting. He will prepare the specific wording needed for next year's meeting.

Steve Brown began a discussion on the Society sponsoring a World Bones Championship. While this would be desirable, we do not want to change the non-competitive feeling of our Bones Fests. No specific action taken.

Ev Cowett showed the Board the framed Meritorious Service Award plaques that will present to Al Cowett and Dan Cowett for their years of service as MC and sound coordinator.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:32 pm.

Respectfully submitted, *Steve Wixson*

## Minutes of General Membership Meeting

The meeting was called to order by Steve Brown at 4:12. It was held in the main room of Gallery X in New Bedford, MA.

The Nominations Committee presented nominations for next year's officers. The floor was opened for additional nominations. The following people were elected by acclamation: Steve Brown, Executive Director, Gil Hibben, Assistant Director, Steve Wixson, Secretary/Treasurer, and as Board Members, Everett Cowett, Jonathan Danforth, Mel Mercier and Jerry Mescher

Our committees on Bones for Kids and On-line Bones Instruction made little progress this year. There was a call for both chair and member volunteers.

Dave Boyles made an informal proposal to host Bones Fest XI in Cedarburg, WI next year. There was interest by members and Dave was asked to submit a formal proposal to the Board.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:02 pm.

Respectfully Submitted, *Steve*

## Website of the Quarter

[www.crimple.demon.co.uk/fabm.htm](http://www.crimple.demon.co.uk/fabm.htm). Check out the revival of Morris Dancing and read down to the *Flag and Bones Gang* paragraph. Then check out website [www.lineone.net/~teddodsworth/fandb/flagbone.htm](http://www.lineone.net/~teddodsworth/fandb/flagbone.htm)

## Recorded Bones Music

The Possum Ridge String Band is making their CD, *On the Road Again*, with Russ Myers playing bones and telling bones stories, available to RBS members for a donation to a charity of Wilma Myers' choice. Their website, [possumridge.org](http://possumridge.org) has a photo of Russ and more details about the CD. If you are interested in receiving a copy, send a donation along with your membership renewal. See details on the enclosed Membership Renewal Form.





Above: Russ Myers (almost center in blue striped shirt) and friends from the Bones Fest X group photograph taken by John Maciel. The full photograph will be included in the Reflections issue.

Upper Right: Russ Myer's bones on display with much of his bones paraphernalia at the reception in his home following his funeral. Photograph by Kenny Wolin.

Lower Right: Everett Cowett playing bones with the Possum Ridge String Band at the reception. Other RBS members who attended, but not shown were Teri Davies and Kenny Wolin. Photograph by Kenny Wolin



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## *Rhythm Bones Society*

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*Address Correction Requested*