



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 8, Special Issue 2006

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Reflections on Ten years of Bones Fests

The question I am asked most often by rhythm bones players is: "In your wildest imagination, after the first Bones Fest, did you think that 10 years of Bones Fests would produce such a result"? An international organization with a paid membership of more than 100, an annual festival, a top quality quarterly newsletter (The Rhythm Bones Player), a logo, by-laws, a web page (rhythmbones.com), awards program and an opportunity to meet and play bones with some of the

worlds most wonderful people, money in the bank and many, many greatly improved rhythm bones players, and more. It is without question beyond my wildest dream.

Certain elements of each bones fest have remained the same over the 10-year span, but each fest has been uniquely different. Only Wilma Myers, Val Cowett and I have had the privilege of attending each of them. Something

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Bones Fest I photograph taken in the back yard of Everett and Val Cowett. From left to right, Carl Hedrick III, Carl Hedrick, Tom Rice, Parker Waite, Russ Myers, Mel Bryant, Fred Edmunds, Martha Cowett, Ev Cowett, Dan Cowett and Jim Alberti Hobbs



Bones Fest X group photograph taken at the Whaling Museum (yes, that is a whale skeleton in the background), New Bedford, MA. See Page 23 for naming guide. Photograph by John Maciel (Melissa Danforth's brother)

Editorial

This special issue, suggested by Mel Mercier, celebrates 10 years of Bones Fests. Who at Bones Fest I could have imagined Bones Fest X, and what a celebration of our art it was. The Bones Fest X group photograph is on Page 1 and a naming diagram is on Page 23. Mel is number 24 and I am number 21.

The quality of bones playing has improved over the years due in part to these Bones Fests. I look at myself, a one handed bones player at Bones Fest II (my first Fest) and now a two handed bones player with many more skills. I now have a reason to practice and do. My experience is shared by most, if not all, of our members.

To make this special issue really special, Sharon Mescher has agreed to be our Guest Editor. She is Number 5.

There are people to thank for the photographs in this issue. Our biggest thanks goes to Michael Ballard who shares his photographs from several Fests. Also Nicholas Worth, Ev Cowett's brother-in-law, at BFVI, Mike Carter at BFVII, Mary Lee Sweet (stills from video), and John Maciel, Melissa Danforth's brother, at Bones Fest X, me and many other members.

Guest Editorial

The diversity of each member's submitted reflections and memories is parallel to the technique of his or her bones playing – it's personal with a distinctive and wonderful flavor. But, the one common element that shines through each submission is the love for and sharing of an eons-old instrument. At the point of sharing this love, our spirits become one. This is the timeless beauty of the Rhythm Bones Society. I do feel the spirit when I am in the midst of all of you.

It has been such a pleasure and a privilege to work with Steve Wixson on this special newsletter. Where this RBS journey will lead is unknown, but that is much of the attraction for me. It is akin to dreaming of the next trip I will take to that unknown land (for example, Ireland or Germany)! I look forward to the challenges and the life-changing experiences ahead!

Sharon Mescher Bones Biography

When Steve asked that I write a short biography, I thought, "How does one compress 58 years into several paragraphs?" One doesn't.

Still, I mentally raced through the 58 years and quickly decided what to pick and choose as the most pertinent biographical info to me, today.

--- I was born in New Mexico

--- I am the oldest of six children (five girls and one boy)

--- Higher education was never an option or a choice; it was a must!

--- Other legacies from my parents: be responsible, do not use and/or abuse the good will of others, and above all, be compassionate.

For the Rhythm Bones Society the most recent details of my life centers around and focuses on the bones. This part started 20 years ago when I married Jerry Mescher, a master bones player. Fast forward to our joining the RBS in 2001. At that time I began dabbling with the instrument off and on. By January, 2006, I was making progress and was determined to play with Jerry at the next bones fest. We practiced and we did play together at New Bedford in 2006! I truly felt like a bona fide member of the RBS!

One night as I was lying in bed



Photograph of Sharon Mescher playing bones at Bones Fest X. See her with husband Jerry in the color photograph on Page 17.

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

pondering my life as a bones player, I had a light bulb moment: Jerry's and my life were more connected than I had realized! My dad, Stanton, was a classically-trained musician. He sang in and directed church and school choirs. Likewise, he made sure his children played musical instruments; sang in church and school choirs, and listened to opera and all other types of classical music! Jerry's dad, Albert, was a self-taught bones player, sang in his church choir, and eventually partnered with Jerry in bones playing.

The sad part of this story is that both fathers died at a young age – 47 for my dad and 59 for Jerry's. But, the story does not end there. Both fathers imparted a great and grand love of music to both Jerry and me. That musical spirit thrives in both of us. Because of this, I know I cannot deny this bones-playing journey with Jerry. Where the journey leads, only God knows. But, with Him in charge it can only be fulfilling, fun, and extremely adventuresome. Here's to the adventure! *Sharon Mescher*

(Reflections—Continued from page 1)

new and/or different has occurred at each of them making them particularly remarkable. I always look forward to “what will happen this time”.

At **Bones Fest I** it was meeting Russ Myers and Dr. Fred Edmunds and sharing bones playing techniques, instrument construction material, musical preferences and having fun and fellowship. Very little has changed.

At **Bones Fest II**, hosted by the Cowetts in Bur-Mil Park, Steve Wixson entered the picture and nothing has been the same since. Within 6 months he generated 100’s of e-mails and Internet searches all related to bones and bones playing. What a find. What enthusiasm. A newsletter was in progress before we had a society. And by this time Martha Cowett had established a web page for rhythm bones players called Rhythm Bones Central (now rhythmbones.com).

Russ and Wilma Myers hosted Bones Fest III, in their almost one-century-old home overlooking the Blue Ridge Mountains. It was here that the boning world opened to all of us with the arrival of “Spike Bones” Muhrer, John “Mr. Bones” Cahill, David “Black Bart” Boyles, “T” Paul Dehon, Joe Birl, Sally and Terry Carroll, Vivian Cox and Matteo the classical castanet player. It was here too that the Rhythm Bones Society was founded (see picture below). What a party and weekend to remember!

Bones Fest IV was hosted by Steve and Janet Wixson at their home over

looking Chattanooga and in a nearby Mountain Opry house. It was here that we first met Ida-May Schmich who knocked our socks off; Barry Bones Patton, who has incredible speed; Gil and Linda Hibben who very soon became an important part of the Rhythm Bones Society; the brother/sister act of Jerry Mescher and Bernie Worrell playing synchronized bones tunes; and Bill Vits from the Grand Rapids Symphony with something different.

Bones Fest V, held in a barn on Red Apple Farm in Phillipston, Ma was a real blast. It featured the Dave Reiner band and introduced us to Don Decamp, Dave Gagne, Nick Driver, Norm Conrad, Gerard Arseneault and the NH gang of three, Shorty, Ernie and Sky. A great weekend.

Bones Fest VI was held on the Guilford College campus in Greensboro, NC and hosted by the Cowett family. Performances were heard in a real planetarium. Dan Griffin, a CT rocker and Jeff Newman a TX copy of Don Decamp were great newcomers. Russ Myers was honored and designated Fellow of the Rhythm Bones Society. Brother Bones (Freeman Davis) was recognized on what would have been his 100th birthday with a special birthday cake. The Conga line was introduced by Gil Hibben as was the “pass-off” by Walt Watkins.

Gil and Linda Hibben in Louisville, KY hosted Bones Fest VII. The venue was a real antique Kentucky Theater. This fest was truly a family affair. The Cowetts, Fraziers and Hib-

bens were prominent, and the brother/sister act of Jerry Mescher and Bernie Worrell were also there demonstrating precision bones playing, and don’t forget Mary Lee and Frank Sweet in 1800’s regalia and music.

Bones Fest VIII can be characterized as the fest with the many successful workshops. It was hosted by Sally and Terry Carroll in Restin, VA. There was something for everyone: bones making, scrimshaw carving, bones playing tips and techniques and much more.

Kenny Wolin made his first appearance here. Between Kenny and Bill Vits even our old stand-by experts were learning something new too.

Bones Fest IX took us back to Chattanooga with Steve and Janet Wixson hosting again. It was almost a repeat of Bones Fest IV with many new and improved bones players. It can be noted that Steve Wixson, Mel Mercier, John Davis, and Walt Watkins are now two-handed bones players and some who could not play at all 10 years ago now play very good.

Bones Fest X was a real happening in New Bedford, MA. It was hosted by Jonathan and Melissa Danforth. And what a job they did. There were over 100 attendees. New Bedford is a multicultural community with a famous whaling museum and maritime music heritage and the Rhythm Bones Society fit right in (see Jonathan and Melissa’s article on page 16 and the picture on Page 1.) Each year the bar of excellence and innovation has been raised at the annual Fest. This is the mission of the Rhythm Bones Society. At first I thought it was due to simple practice in anticipation of the upcoming Fest, but I came to realize that it was the addition of new licks and tricks picked up from other members. Of course practice means a lot for without it nothing much happens.

The efforts of Dan and Al Cowett for sound effects and Master of Ceremonies duties were recognized at Bones Fest X. Spouses such as Val Cowett, Wilma Myers, Linda Hibben, Sharon Mescher, Jennifer Brown, and Kay Cahill who did so much to keep us all going at so many fests should not be overlooked. Thank you.

“May your bones be with you”

Ev Cowett



Rhythm Bones Society Founding members at Bones Fest III. See Vol 1, No1 for their names

Reflections From The Originator Of This Special Issue

Bones Fests have been a wonderful, surprising and enriching part of my life ever since I attended my first Fest in Brightwood, Virginia at the home of Russ and Wilma Myers in 1999.

Earlier that year I met Russ and Everett Cowett for the first time. Apart from a brief encounter with Percy Danforth in Toronto sometime back in the 1980s, Russ and Everett were the first dipterous (two-winged) rhythmbone players I had ever come across. Meeting them was quite an event for a bodhrán and bones player like myself who had been playing in a single-handed, 'traditional' style for almost thirty years at that stage. The opportunity to meet them again and to meet several others of their species was too good to miss and so I flew from Shannon airport across the Atlantic to Washington, DC and drove down to Brightwood to attend the Fest.

At that first Fest [Bones Fest III] I met the many other great bones players, including the extraordinary Joe Birl. One of the two bones that I had been playing for about fifteen years at that stage was a black plastic one which my father brought back from America where he was playing with the Chieftains. I loved the sound made by this very unorthodox combination of cow rib-bone and black hard plastic. I had been playing this set for so long that it had moulded itself to fit beautifully into my hand, between my fingers, and I knew the feel and the colour of its sound intimately. Unfortunately I had been careless over the years with the set of four plastic bones I received from my father and one by one I either broke or lost them! The last of the four had served me well right up until I attended that first Bones Fest in Brightwood but I managed to lose that too by leaving it on a stage somewhere in Scandinavia just a few days before my trip.

I was delighted to get the opportunity at Bones Fest to talk

about my own relationship with the bones and to play a little. I felt somewhat at a loss however because I didn't have my familiar pair of bones to play. I decided to tell the story of the box of four black plastic bones that came all the way from America and into our house in Blackrock in County Dublin some time in the mid 1970s.

You can imagine my surprise and delight at discovering that the inventor of those very bones, Joe Birl, was sitting in the front row listening to me on the deck of the Russ and Wilma Myers' house at my very first Bones Fest. Thanks to Joe's generosity, and that of several others, I left Brightwood that weekend with enough Joe Birl Rhythm Bones to last me a lifetime of playing!

Bones Fest and the Rhythm Bones Society have been important parts of my life since that first Fest. I have met many wonderful people there and made some dear friends. Each year brings with it a deepening of those many friendships and every year that I attend I am inspired by the wonderful musicianship of my fellow bones players. Not only do I learn many new things at every fest, the events have also been a vital part of the research for my soon to be completed dissertation.

I am grateful to all of those wonderful, generous people who have hosted Bones Fests in the past and I look forward to attending many more of these unique musical and enriching community occasions in the future.

Mel Mercier



Mel Mercier performing two-handed at BFVII

Bones Fest I September 20, 1997 Greensboro, NC

Bones Fest 1 was held on a beautiful autumn Saturday afternoon, September 20, 1997, at the home of Ev and Val Cowett in Greensboro, North Carolina. Some of the eleven bones players who participated in this fest started arriving, quietly, Friday eve-



Everett Cowett is the first to play at BFI

ning at the Comfort Inn. Earlier that morning, a group of us, including Mel Bryant and Dr. Fred Edmunds, went to Shoney's Restaurant for brunch. By 1 PM we had gathered around Ev and Val's backyard deck. The players present came from four states:

North Carolina – Ev, Al, and Dan Cowett (Greensboro); Martha Cowett (Raleigh); and Jim Hobbs (Winston Salem);

Virginia – Russ Myers (Brightwood); Dr. Fred Edmunds (Lexington); Carl Hedrick and his grandson, Carl (Fincastle); and Tom Rice (Farmville);

Texas - Mel Bryant (Houston);

Maine – Parker Waite (Sedgwick).

Soon, we, the players, were talking "a mile a minute" with each other while intermittently rattling our various styles of bones, exchanging techniques, tricks and licks. Ev showed us his workshop, tools, wood and some of the many sets of 4 bones he had made.

Then the sound system, set up by Dan, was brought to life. Each of us

had the opportunity to stand before the microphone (nervously at first) and play our rhythm bones to music we provided, or that was made available by Dan.

Russ Myers gave us chromatic glissandos accompanied by classic Dixie-land Jazz. Martha gave us driving syncopated rhythmic support of OMC's "How Bizarre". And, Ev played his classic two hand rolls.

Dr. Edmunds led us through chapters from his "handbook" played to rock music. The rest of us unleashed whatever rhythms our chosen music drove us to.

About 4 PM Dr. Edmunds announced that he was grateful he'd been able to make it to the Cowetts and he hoped the jamming would continue, but he was not feeling very well and had to go lay down. Later that afternoon the rest of us sat down to an incredibly delicious barbecue feast brought together by Val and family. With enough refreshment, the now ten players were all back up jamming until dark to whatever Dan put on the sound system.

Later that evening, back at the Comfort Inn, the talk and jamming continued. Dr. Edmunds rallied as we gathered in his room, where on his bed lay the Holy Bible and, comfortably under the covers, a bottle of bourbon.

Sunday we all headed home and over the next few months we exchanged phone calls, fax's, letters and the video that Al Cowett had made of the event. It was wonderful and fascinating to be able to see moments from that afternoon again!

Dr. Edmunds called Russ to say how disappointed he was in his own performance at the get-together. Russ assured him otherwise. We all recounted how much fun we'd had at Ev and Val's. Russ and I exchanged drawings and notes on bone shapes and materials. I sent Russ some 1 x 3/16", # 6061, aluminum flat stock to work with in his shop. I think Russ



Dr. Fred Edmunds performs at Bones Fest I

was able to bend the flat stock, but the results were not playable. He sent me a diagram of the "Irish bone" bones he had, along with the names, Sue Barber and Torry Barrand. Carl Hedrick sent photos of the event. From Ev and Val

came the wonderful "Christmas Greetings" which I have been gratefully receiving ever since!

It was the beginning!

Thank you, Ev, for what you, with Val's support, initiated that weekend. We have come to be "players" at an extended family's annual celebration, now known as "The Bones Fests".

A barbecue dinner was provided by the Cowetts followed by a business meeting where decisions were not made and an evening of spontaneous bones-playing. A video was made of the event and a copy was provided to each participant. *Parker Waite*

Ev Cowett's Opening Remarks at Bones Fest I

Here is a transcription of Ev Cowett's opening remarks at BFI.

"I thought we would start the program. I want to keep it very informal and really do three major things. Number 1 is share boning things so that we can all learn from one another. Secondly, I was hoping we could get together and do a little bit of bones synchronizing, harmonizing if you will. And third, I'd like to talk to you all about having a real big bones festival where you invite people other than just bones players. During the afternoon we can talk about that."

Well talk they did which lead to Bones Fest II. The rest is history including that informality, synchronizing [is that jamming] and the sharing of technique started by Ev at BFI.



From the left; Al Cowett, Tom Rice, Ev Cowett, Russ Myers, Martha Cowett bones synchronizing with Dan Cowett on guitar on Ev's deck.



Cowett's backyard from left, Dan Cowett, Al Cowett, Wilma Myers, Carl Hedrick's grandson, Russ Myers and Ev Cowett.

Bones Fest II September 26, 1998 Greensboro, NC

Bones Fest II was again hosted by Ev Cowett in a shelter at a local park on September. 26, 1998 from 1:00 to 3:00. Registration was not required and no fees were charged. Again the Cowetts setup a sound system. The event was followed by a barbecue in the park hosted by the Cowetts. All bones players in Guilford County attended - all 8 of them - in addition to a few from outside the state including, Carl Hedrick, Tom Rice, Russ Myers and myself. A video was made of the event.

I discovered Bones Fest II by accident as a result of a vacation trip. I bought a pair of black plastic bones in an old music store to replace a pair that I had broken. (These, of course, turned out to be Joe Bir!’s patented rhythm bones, and I would meet him at Bones Fest III.)

There was a trademark on them that I had not really noticed before and when I got back to Chattanooga, I entered it into the computer.

To my surprise, there were several pages on rhythm bones and the first was Rhythm Bones Central. I clicked on it and here is what it said.

“Welcome to Rhythm Bones Cen-

tral. Your host of this spot is Everett Cowett, a national known ’boner’ or for you sophisticates out there you may call him an ’osteonist.’ (I, on the other hand, just call him Dad.) Here is a picture of me, Martha, and my Dad, Everett, playing bones together at last year’s Bones Festival.”

There was a lot on the website including, a description of what bones are, a bit of bones history, a list of the known players and the mention of another Bones Festival. I looked up



Sister and brother Martha and John Cowett with Bill Swirin on bodhran

Ev’s telephone number and gave him a call. He, of course, invited me to the Fest. I knew that I just had to go!

I drove from Chattanooga to Greensboro and was the last person to arrive at the Fest. At that time, I was a one handed bones player and not all that confident of my playing ability. When I heard the likes of the Cowetts, Carl Hedrick, Tom Rice and Russ Myers, I was hesitant to play for the



Ev Cowett presents a certificate to Russ Myers after his history presentation.

group, but I did briefly.

After some informal jamming and talking, Ev started the program. As in all Fests since, each of us played bones to music we’d brought along.

Russ Myers gave a great talk on the history of rhythm bones. Carl Hedrick was very funny. Dan played his guitar. Ev lead the group in some synchronized rhythm bones playing.

I was juiced up when I returned home and after kissing wife Janet hello, I went straight to my computer and found almost 100 pages of bones websites. Wow, I’ve got new friends.
Steve Wixson



Ev Cowett leads the Cowett family bones players in a group performance at Bones Fest II. Ev’s wife, Val, is in this photograph and also is number 18 in the group photograph on Page 1.



Bones player and humorist Carl Hedrick

Bones Fest III

September 25, 1999

Brightwood, VA

Bones Fest III was hosted by Russ and Wilma Myers and held in their home with most of the activities on the back porch overlooking the Blue Ridge Mountains.

This was a one day fest beginning about 10 am and ending about 4 pm. Many people stayed in a hotel that was about 10 miles away. 34 bones players attended and individuals played during the day.

Lunch was purchased by attendees at an old general store next door. Sound equipment was provided by Dan Cowett. Virginia Public Television videoed the event for a special program that was broadcast by them.

Russ' dining table served as a display table for bones information.



Steve Wixson, Dave Boyles, Spike Bones, Al Cowett and Ev Cowett jam on the Myers' deck



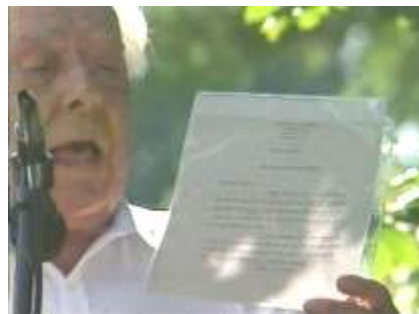
Matteo gave a beautiful castanet performance

A business meeting was held where the Rhythm Bones Society was officially organized with By-Laws patterned after the Jews Harp Guild. An election was held and the following were elected: Ev Cowett, Executive Director; Russ Myers, Assistant Di-



John Cahill performs in costume

rector; Steve Wixson, Secretary/Treasurer; and Board Members Steve Brown, Sally Carroll, Mel Mercier



Joe Birl tells the story of how he patented his black plastic rhythm bones

and Jerry Mescher. A photograph of the founding members is on Page 3. Following the Fest, the first RBS



Dave Boyles and Spike Bones' Bone-Off

Board meeting was held. The Board authorized a newsletter including the use of color with Steve Wixson as editor. Dues were set at \$20 per year. The Board authorized the purchase of www.rhythmbones.com as our official website. Chattanooga was selected as the site for Bones Fest IV.



Vivacious Vivian Cox



Female players Vivian Cox (silver hair), Martha Cowett, Sally Carroll (almost hidden) and Deborah Brower entertain as a group.

Bones Fest IV

September 22-24, 2000

Chattanooga, TN

Bones Fest IV was hosted by Steve and Janet Wixson in Chattanooga, TN (more precisely Signal Mountain and Walden, TN). A three day event was held based on comments from previous Fests that people were traveling too far for just a one day event.

The Saturday events, similar to previous Fests, were held in the Mountain Opry building in Walden. Each Friday night people gather here for country and bluegrass music. On Friday, a small group played bones for the audience and invited them to join us on Saturday night. Several of them and a few others came for that public performance.



The Cowett family performs, Martha, Ev, Dan, Al (yes he actually plays), John and Tommy



The Mountain Opry building

Here is Bernie Worrell's reflection on the Fest.

"Bones Fest IV was very special to me. Steve and Janet Wixson were fantastic hosts. Beginning with a reception on Friday night held at their home, through the Saturday performances at the Mountain Opry building, the BBQ dinner at their home, and concluding with a Sunday Brunch again at their house. What a great place to be introduced to the Rhythm Bones Society, make new friends and to share the folk instrument we love.

One of my fondest reflections was during the Saturday performances. My brother Jerry performed with our father, Albert Mescher. This was no mean feat since my father died in 1967! As you may have guessed this was not a live performance; it was a video tape of their performance on Ted Mack's Amateur Hour (see photo-

(Continued on page 21)



Jerry Mescher showing a video of him and his father on the Ted Mack Amateur Hour show



Ann Hoffman was featured on Worlds Funniest Videos television show



Michael Ballard provided many of the photographs in this Special Issue



Perky Ida May Schmich



Mel Mercier, Steve Brown and Barry Patton



Barry Patton plays the fastest rhythm bones

Bones Fest V

August 3-5, 2001

Winchendon, MA

Bones Fest V was hosted by Steve and Jennifer Brown in the Red Apple Barn in Winchendon, MA. It was a 3 day affair patterned after Bones Fest VI. Here is Steve's story.



Steve Brown starts the T-shirt tradition. Jennifer Brown is number 30 in group photo on Page 1.

“When I got back from BFIV, I started out quick, visiting the farm and making some contacts, but somewhere around March, I began to get things together. By NEFFA (last weekend in April) I had a rough draft of the flyer, had contacted hotels, had Lori Grady on board working on the flyer and booklet, and had finally settled on the Red Apple Farm. My objectives were to duplicate BFIV, with some new twists: a program book that would include contact information for participants, a T-shirt, and increased live music on Friday as well as Saturday.

It really helped that I had some connections for music. Dave Reiner was more than willing to come for the whole day with his two sons.



Nick Driver came from England



Dr. Jerry Barnett

But clearly I couldn't have done it without Jennifer who made and organized food, and worked tirelessly. Bill



T-shirt with Bones Fest V motto

Rose was invaluable in setting up the publicity and I did contact a bunch of people including many radio stations.

Saturday morning's program centered around attending bones players accompanied by Dave Reiner (fiddle) and his two sons. The evening performance invited the public (as in BFIV except a fee was charged) and Dave provided the music. Food for Saturday lunch and dinner was from Boston Market.

Sunday was an informal gathering serving coffee and donuts and ending about 2pm.

I spent more time working and missed all kinds of things - Steve Wixson's cave man outfit, and a bunch of players, especially during the day.

By Sunday I couldn't have done any more, although I was the last to

(Continued on page 21)



About one half of the attendees play at the close of the Fest. By this time the rain on the tin roof stopped and the flood subsided.

Bones Fest VI

August 2-4, 2002

Greensboro, NC

Bones Fest VI was again hosted by Ev Cowett and family at Guilford College in Greensboro, NC. This was a catered affair with: a reception on Friday night, lunch on Saturday, a banquet on Saturday night. We also had the use of several buildings on the campus.

Many of the attendees stayed in campus housing, and breakfasts were served in their cafeteria. Steve Brown remembers sharing a room with Jon Danforth. He had only connected with him the year before. They stayed up really late talking, reminiscing about grandfather Percy and other things.

(Continued on page 11)



The Board of Directors. From left are Steve Brown, Member; Everett Cowett, Executive Director; Jerry Mescher, Member, Sally Carroll, Member; Steve Wixson, Sec/Treas; and Russ Myers, Asst Director.



Walt and Joy Watkins and Joe Birl



Dan Griffith rocks the crowd



Our **Mazster** of Ceremonies, Al Cowett



Karen Singleton, Hank Tennenbaum, Steve Wixson and Danny Aldridge with cake in memory of Brother Bone's 100th birthday.



Dan Cowett (yes he actually plays the bones), Parker Waite, Steve Brown and Jeff Newman



Spike Bones performs in the beautiful planetarium auditorium at Guilford College



Hank Tennenbaum performs a bones solo



Michael Ballard-bones player and photographer



Sally Carroll



Mike Passeotti with bones and ???



Donny DeCamp



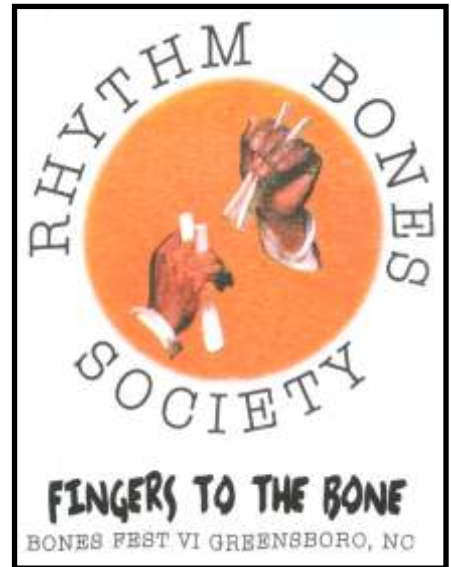
Vivacious Vivian Cox finishes her performance



Mary Lee and Frank Sweet



Steve Wixson with rhythm bones hooked up to a drum synthesizer



T-shirt with Bones Fest VI motto

This Fest had one of the best facilities as shown in the photograph at the bottom of page 10. It was a planetarium (without its projector) with terrific sound system and acoustics.

Sharon Mescher remembers being inspired by the energy of Vivian Cox and rocker Dan Griffith. Mary Lee Sweet has some nice memories of BFVI on page 19.

BFVI was Mike Hannan's first Fest. "What a treat to see and meet so many other bones players and, yes, even to realize that I was not the greatest bones player in the world - not even close! What fun I had especially at the jam session on the opening night when the most bones players I had ever seen were jamming together, having snacks and meeting other participants. I hit my best licks on the bones that night and started a very enlightening and fun weekend with a bunch of great folks. I was amazed by the number of styles employed to make rhythm with a couple of sticks!"



Martha Cowett and nephew Roux Cowett and Banjo Bandits



Composite of John Davis and good friend Will Kear (deceased) and Banjo Bandits

Bones Fest VII

July 25-27, 2003

Louisville, KY

Bones Fest VII was hosted by Gil and Linda Hibben in Louisville, KY, on July 25, 26, &, 27, 2003. The host hotel was the Holiday Inn Downtown located 3 blocks from the Kentucky Theatre where the events took place.



The Kentucky Theatre

Prior to the reception on Friday evening, Bones players who were here a day early were featured on 3 separate TV shows.

Friday night was a reception at the



Bones Market Place and reception area with Linda Hibben welcoming bones players

Kentucky Theatre where heavy hors d'ouvres were catered by Linda Hibben and sister-in-law, Sally Cochran.

Dr. Sandra Graves provided her original paintings and flower arrange-



Young Sky Bartlett, Shorty Boulet and Ernie Duffy team up for a great performance

ments to set the tone for a very welcoming reception area. There was plenty of jamming and fun for all.

Saturday morning opened at the KY Theatre with coffee and pastries and the show began...what fun!! Everyone who wanted to get up and play had the opportunity and everyone was fantastic!!



Jonathan Danforth graciously plays for others

The event was professionally videoed by dear friends, Mike and Janet Carter.

Both lunch and dinner were served at Cunningham's, a very well known Louisville restaurant, just 1/2 block from the Kentucky Theatre.

Can't forget to mention the T-shirts. Picked up 100 on the Tuesday before the Fest. Linda and I were sitting at a stop light when I discovered they spelled Louisville, **WRONG!!!** Anyway, the T-shirt company was more than embarrassed, and had another 100 printed correctly within 48 hours.

Saturday night was the public performance and it was awesome. The 200 seat theatre was packed and people were standing in the aisles. People who never heard of "Playing the Bones," were grinning from ear to ear and clapping like crazy after each performer finished.



Parker Waite



T-shirt with Bones Fest VII motto



Steve Brown received the Meritorious Service Award and then showed his championship style

Sunday morning was a brunch at Hibben's place in LaGrange, a bit of a problem for those who needed transportation from downtown, but it all worked out in the end.

A lot of bones playing and new friendships occurred over the weekend. We hope everyone had as much fun as we did. *Linda & Gil Hibben*



The mostly Oregon Frazier family surprised Norris, 3rd from left, by attending the Fest

Bones Fest VIII

August 20-22, 2004

Reston, VA

Bones Fest VIII (or "V, eye, eye, eye" as our MC, Al Cowett put it) was hosted by Sally and Terry Carroll and held by the beautiful Lake Anne Plaza in Reston, VA on August 20-22, 2004.



Host Sally Carroll dancing with her hands

It was my first Fest, which made it all the more meaningful and special to me, most of which is because it was the very first time meeting everyone and forging so many new friendships with wonderful people with the same passions for such a complex yet deceptively simple musical instrument as the bones.

The first person I met and recognized (from watching the Bones Fest VII video from the previous year in Louisville), was Russ Myers, who was in the process of buying a book in the used book store. Then I ran into this great fiddle player who I asked to jam with outside to a 7/8 tune (off a Nickel Creek album I heard), who (of course) turned out to be our very own, Jonathan Danforth. I know he's heard it several times before, but it was still an honor to tell him that his grandfather, Percy, taught me how to play during the 1979 Michigan Percussion Festival at the University of Michigan



Tim Reilly and Kenny Wolin meet

(where I bought a set of Joe Birl bones from him).

As I played for the first time, Jonathan quickly told me that I absolutely had to meet Tim Reilly, because our styles of playing were so similar. Meeting Tim and eventually becoming very close friends has made a very profound impact on my life and I'm very grateful for that.



Kenny Wolin's First Advance Workshop

On Friday, Sally added workshops to the Bones Fest tradition. Ev Cowett taught a Beginner's workshop, Jim Lande a wood bones-making workshop, while I taught an Advance Bones workshop which led to more advanced workshops at later Fests.

Hank Tennenbaum was originally slated to teach a bones-making workshop during the same time as my workshop. Fortunately, Hank was gracious enough to meet with me just prior to our Festival to teach me his craft. He's a wealth of knowledge and hope he'll be able to have an opportunity to share this with everyone.



Steve's Wixson & Brown aka Meschers

Saturday's individual performances were varied and innovative from period costumes to "tambones" (ask Spike!)

I chose to perform without any musical accompaniment because I wanted to really feature just the bare bones, so I improvised a solo based on Ravel's, Bolero.

Saturday night saw a couple of co-



T-shirt with Bones Fest VIII motto

medic performances, Bill Vits' amazing technique while sporting a leopard-skinned and tassled lamp shade on his head (a la Spike Jones), and Steve Brown and Steve Wixson (wearing a long blond wig) imitating Jerry Mescher and Bernie Worrell's brother/sister duo act.

I invited Mel and Jonathan up with me where I played a jig for the first time in my life. Because of that experience, I've been heavily delving into Irish culture and music, and playing most recently with The President's Own Irish Ensemble (we only form up once a year), playing bones in the Grand Foyer of the White House right on St. Patrick's Day. And if it hadn't been for the Bones Fest VIII, none of these wonderful experiences may have happened.

There were so many other bones players I met there that have made such an impact on me, and I hope they all know who they are. Steve Brown put it so well when he described meeting other bones players like we are all platypuses, who think we're the only ones until we meet our brethren!

Kenny Wolin



Jeff Leffert at Sunday's public performance

Bones Fest IX

July 8-10, 2005

Chattanooga, TN

Bones Fest IX returned to Chattanooga five years after Bones Fest IV. In many ways it was Bones Fest IV. The venue was again the Wixson



Steve Wixson with a castanet-like move



A great performance by Tim Reilly



Yirdy Machar wows them on Saturday night



The Bones Market Place



Olivia Lohman, Randy Sepalla, and John Perona



Executive Director and All-Ireland Bones Champion, Steve Brown, demonstrates his winning style



Scott Miller plays bones and dances



Ev Cowett and Bill Rose accompanied by Frank Sweet



Ramsey Cowett shows us how it's done



Part of Jonathan Danforth's Kid Workshop home and the Mountain Opry building (see BFIV article on Page 8.)

Members brought their musical instruments including Kenny Wolin's xylophone to Donny DeCamp's banjo

which he used to lead jam sessions on the outside deck. The food was among the best of all the Fests and included a home cooked Italian dinner.

The performances continue to get better with each Fest. Several people were interviewed on video tape. We need to preserve all of this history.

Next year will be the 10th Bones Fest. Hard to believe. *Steve Wixson*



Walt Watkins leads his pass-off with Mitch, Jerry, Walt, Bernie and Don



Top is Bones Fest IX ball cap and below is back of ball cap with Fest motto.



From left, Mike Hickey, Julie Kurtz-Kunesh, Randy Walker and Robbie Hilliard



Spike Bones with his flags and bones



Mary Lee and Frank Sweet in costume



Jerry Mescher and Bernie Worrell in sync



Kenny Wolin's surprise performance!



Gil Hibben leading all bones players on stage after his traditional conga line finale

Bones Fest X

July 28-30, 2006

New Bedford, MA

Bones Fest X was held in New Bedford, MA, with Friday night and Saturday daytime events at the Gallery X building and the Saturday daytime events at a nearby church. This was the largest Fest in terms of attendees with 89 paid plus a few guests. Melissa and Jonathan Danforth were our hosts and here is how they remember it.



Gallery X with outdoor registration tent

*Jonathan: Hey all, this is Jonathan
Melissa: and Melissa*

*J: And we'd like to welcome you to
our reminisces of Bones Fest X*

*M: It was hot, a lot of work, and
involved a whole lot of running
around, but I'd like to think it was a
success overall.*

*J: Of course it was stressful at
times (and you have the herniated disc
to prove it), but we knew it would be;
we'd had plenty of warning from past
hosts, and we'd been planning it for
more than two years.*

M: I remember how we started



Mitch Boss and his silky bones style



Gerard Arseneault, Canadian with a warm smile

making notes and plans on the long
drive back from Bones Fest VIII in
Virginia -

*J: Actually I remember you start-
ing to make T-shirt design sketches on
airline napkins while heading back
from Bones Fest VII in Louisville!*

*M: That's right - I think we still
have those! We knew we wanted the
tenth bones fest, with its roman num-
eral X, though - for the skull and
crossed bones! A piratical image
would tie in with our maritime his-*



Guy Gillette and his daughter perform together



The Mescher Tradition grows with Jerry, Bernie
Worrell and their adopted brother Mel Mercier

tory,

*J: And with the gigantic whale
bones in the whaling museum...*

*M: and we could score some really
cool pirate stuff! Seriously, though, I
know you had a more personal reason
for wanting to host...*

*J: Well, yes... many of the people
currently involved in New Bedford's
musical rebirth used to attend the old
Tryworks Coffeeshouse, where my
granddad had performed back when
he was touring a lot, and where we*



Mel Mercier organized group. From left, Aaron Plunkett, Kenny Wolin,
Mel, Kevin Kelly, Tim Reilly and Teri Davies



The Cowett family synchronizing together. From left, Martha, Ev, Tommy,
Dan and John



Gil Hibben leads the Conga Line Finale



Maestro Kenny Wolin performing another dazzling bones routine in black tux and tie.



T-shirt graphic for Bones Fest X



Tony Humphreys works his English style



Dave 'Black Bart' Boyles, Bones Fest XI host



Steve Brown presented Meritorious Service Awards to Dan Cowett for years of running the sound system and Al Cowett for years of serving as Master of Ceremonies..

were lucky enough to have our public performance almost 30 years later.

M: That was a very special evening for you. I'm not sure people really understood how moved you were to be able to bring it full circle

J: I know we didn't get to see a lot of the individual performances during the Fest, but what would you say were the highlights that you remember best?

M: Well, to start with, Bones Fest X was huge! We had over 120 people in attendance.

J: That was something we had

(Continued on page 18)



The fast hands of Sky Barlett



Jeremy Brown and father Steve play together

like that.

J: I did get a little teary...

M: That night was also the first time we were able to sit down and enjoy everyone's bones playing. Up to that point, we'd spent most of our time in the kitchen, or running for more water, or coordinating people and time.



Jerry and Sharon Mescher at Sharon's first public bones performance

(Continued from page 17)

hoped for – we put a lot of effort into publicity and into keeping the cost of the fest at an accessible level. I was definitely happy to see that those priorities paid off, and even happier to see that the Fest came very close to paying for itself.

M: I remember being amazed at just how far people traveled to get here. Bones players from the Midwest, Florida, Texas, California, and from England, Ireland, and the Netherlands, all coming to “my house”!

J: *I think that helped make the fest an especially diverse one musically, too. We had bones playing along with Irish, old-time, bluegrass, ragtime, cowboy music, Dixieland, jazz, rock and roll, sea shanties, classical, and many many other kinds of music.*

M: Another great memory was the last-minute bones performance we threw together at Café Arpeggio on Thursday night – we were able to open a lot of local ears up to bones-playing with a 10-player pass-off, and many of those came to the Saturday night performance.

J: *Some of them are now bones players! The performances throughout the Fest were something to be proud of.*

M: I felt like we were able not only to witness their musical talent, but also to learn more about them as people, to experience a small part of their backgrounds because of the music they played with. I’ve only been able to attend three Bones Fests previously, but I’ve always appreciated that connection with the performers.

J: *Bones Fests have always felt more like a family reunion to me than a folk festival or convention. That feeling, I think, really shows in the performances: open hearts, joy shared.*

M: I felt privileged and humbled that we could host an event like that. In particular, I was amazed and confounded beyond joy to learn that Russ Myers was planning on coming; to have him make this difficult journey to the festival we hosted will always be a very special and touching gesture. I know we had no control over the weather, but I wish I could have made his stay more comfortable. Finding

out later that this had been his last Bones Fest made the experience very bittersweet.

J: *Yes, he was very patient with what turned out to be just about the hottest weekend of the year in New Bedford. In fact, everyone was very understanding about the heat. Having the entire Cowett clan here was also very special. They’re our founding family – our first family.*

M: Not only were they experienced guides and a huge help in general, but they also maintained a level of energy and excitement that really helped us whenever our own flagged.

J: *There were lots of other people, of course, that we couldn’t have done without.*

M: Absolutely! To start with, there were the musicians who backed up the bones players: The Rusty Stringbandits played old-time music, the Publicans played Irish music, and Richard Horwitz played banjo with you on Friday.

J: *Steve and Jennifer Brown both went way beyond the call of duty helping us with all kinds of stuff, and so did Tim Reilly and Kenny Wolin.*

M: We’d also like to thank everyone else who helped with loading and unloading chairs and tables, with food setup, with shuttling stuff over to the hall for the Saturday night performance, and making runs to the store for us.

J: *Norm Conrad deserves special mention for doing our T-shirts at such a nice price.*

M: My brother, John Maciel, gets extra credit for taking a hundred bones players, finding space for them in a museum that was already setting up for a wedding luncheon, getting them all to face the same way with smiles on their faces, and taking a great group photo.

J: *And of course, thanks go to the Unitarian Church (where the Tryworks Coffeehouse was), to Gallery X, and to lots of folks in New Bedford who made the Fest not just possible, but fun.*

M: And last but not least, thanks to you all, fellow bones players! You all rock.

J: *We’d do it again in a heartbeat!*

M: Well, maybe not quite so immediately.

J: *True. (laughing) We’re still exhausted from Bones Fest X.*

M: But we can’t wait to see you all again soon at future Bones Fests.

J: *May your bones be with you until then!*

[More photographs on Page 24.]

Steve Brown’s Regional Bones Fests

I have held three Regional Bones Fests. The first with 8 people in my living room, the second in 2003 with 35 people in my back yard and the third in 2004 with 20 people at the Red Apple Farm (see the photograph below). They were more like Bones Fests I and II—smaller, but a lot of fun. *Steve Brown*



2004 Regional Bones Fest held at the Red Apple Farm. From left are Phil Brake, Shorty Boulet, Dave Reiner on fiddle, Eric Reiner on piano, Ernie Duffy and Dee Tatro.

Reflections From Mary Lee Sweet

Bones Fest VI. I was a struggling, one-handed bones player when by chance I found the RBS website. There was to be a Bones Fest in Greensboro. I made arrangements, and in July, Frank and I were in a hotel practicing our music when there was a knock on the door. I opened it, and a man I did not know said, "I hear a bones player in this room." It was Don De Camp. That was the beginning of my first Bones Fest.

There were many amazing bones players at Guilford College. When introductions began, the first person to introduce himself (I can't remember who it was – sorry) said that he had been playing bones since 1939! That's when I realized just how hopeless I was. I had been playing a couple of years. These people had been playing for decades! Inspiration was in the air! I had come to the right place to learn how to play this percussion doodad. As the introductions continued, I learned that there were many, many, many Cowetts! They were everywhere! They were handing out programs, announcing, performing, organizing, and handling the sound system. Truly, this was a family affair.

During one of the breaks, Hank Tenenbaum came over and introduced himself. He said, "You're from Florida, and I know this is probably a silly question, but, would you happen to know a fellow called Vgo?" Well, we do know Vgo. In Florida it's a small world, after all. Apparently he and Hank played gigs together thirty years ago. Then we met Russ Meyers, who demonstrated how to change pitch on the bones. I loved the sound of his whalebones. He really liked the sound of my cow bones, which I had bought at the Willy Clancy festival in Ireland. He wanted to know what kind of trade we could make. "No," he said, "you CAN'T have the whale bones!" I guess it wasn't a good trading day.

Of course I was an instant fan of Spike Bones, "Mr. Bones" John Cahill, Vivian Cox, Bernie Worrell, Jerry Mescher, and Jonathan Danforth, whose performances were won-

derful and whose dedication to honoring his grandfather, Percy Danforth, is admirable. I left Greensboro with wonderful memories and a two-handed bones playing style.

Bones Fest VII. I was not as overwhelmed, since this was my second time around. We got there on Thursday night and enjoyed jamming at the Irish pub. Then we got up early to be part of a television filming that host Gil Hibben had arranged.

Spike Bones and his mother were there. Spike, of course, was the ultimate showman and came up with even more outrageous ideas to show off his talents. Shorty Boulet, Ernie Duffy and Sky Bartlett, who turned 16 at the fest, put on an amazing show of bones playing which included choreographed movements to the knees, elbows and head. It was very different and fun to watch. With each performer, I learned a few new tricks. Not that I could implement them all! The entire Cowett clan was there, each with a different style of playing. Joe Birl, Bernie, Jerry, Vivian Cox, John Cahill with wife Kay, and many others, including the "ring leaders" Steve Wixson, Steve Brown, and Gil Hibben each performing their own musical treats.

This was the fest where I met John Perona. He is an amazing bones player and a truly wonderful man with an awesome musical background. His style of playing is very elegant and the silver spoons sound heavenly. One of the highlights was when Mel Mercier and Tim Reilly played together. Their bones were literally talking to each other. Jonathan Danforth's bones playing while accompanying himself whistling was a showstopper. He always finds a unique way to entertain.

The conga line ended the bones fest and surprised the guests who came to the Kentucky Theater to see the performances. Sunday we went to Gil and Linda Hibben's home for breakfast and learned that we had been hobnobbing with a celebrity. Gil is world famous for his knives and all of us Star Trek fans have been watching his weaponry in action for years! Who else is a secret celebrity bones player?

Bones Fest VIII. One of the joys of attending Bones Fests is visiting cities that are new to me. Lake Anne Plaza in Reston was a great place for a fest.

We did get a bit of rain, but no one melted. There were lots of new friends to meet. Kenny Wolin tried to turn us into bona fide polyrhythm percussionists. Jim Lande tried to teach us to make our own bones.

I met Jeff Lefferts and bought a set of baby bones from him for my brand new grandson. While boners jammed around the plaza, I videoed all the usual suspects playing the baby bones. So now I have a pair of bones for little Miles, when he is ready, with a combined rattling experience of probably 900 years.

Of course, there were Cowetts, Cowetts, and more Cowetts. All were smiling, playing, and making everything work. Bill Vits did a funny impression of Spike Jones with a lampshade on his head. Not to be outdone, the Steves – Brown and Wixson – imitated Bernie and Jerry's act! This fest gets more outrageous every year. But the most astounding thing this year was when Bill Vits rattled his bones vertically and they were hitting so fast that as they rose up into the air you could envision the wings of a mockingbird.

Bones Fest IX. Mountain driving makes me nervous, so I was glad the fest was in July. If there was snow, I wouldn't go! The fest was one of workshops. Kenny Wolin helped us with a variety of rhythms. Tim Reilly showed us how to scrimshaw and make our own bones (I'll just buy mine, thank you). Some lucky kids got to learn bones playing with Jonathan Danforth. The thing I remember most is the rocks. Steve Wixson keeps huge ones in his home! Jamming was especially memorable with the sounds echoing through the mountaintops. At the performances, I can still see Gil Hibben clicking and clacking and swaying to a Hawaiian melody. Kenny Wolin in a wig leaping and cavorting barefoot to heavy metal music definitely stopped the show. Another conga line, another morning breakfast overlooking the Tennessee Mountains, and Bones Fest IX was done. We went home wondering why the wolves wouldn't howl.

Bones Fest X. There were lots of bones in New Bedford, including whale bones at the whaling museum. So much history in such a small place.

Now the RBS has made history there, too. Jonathan and Melissa gave us a wonderful setting for a bones fest. The fun started at the hotel where we were given a "goodie bag" which contained a box of candy! Inside the bag were other interesting items, such as a pirate's eye patch.

It was great to be able to see the ship where Tim Reilly works. There was a picture of it on the wall at Gallery X. Aaron Plunkett, from whom I ordered my Irish goat bones, was there this year. He did a wonderful workshop on using bones and percussion theory. There were a couple of people from England who came, and, of course, there were Cowetts aplenty, helping out where ever they could. This year, among all the great performances, Kenny Wolin and Sky Bartlett stole the spotlight. Sky did a solo performance, which left the audience in awe. He can rattle the bones with the best of the old-timers and is beginning to leave everyone else in the dust! Kenny, in contrast to last year's wig and bare feet, appeared in a tuxedo and meticulously, crisply clicked and clacked to the music of "The Typewriter", by Leroy Anderson. *Mary Lee Sweet*

Reflections From Other Mem-

Bones Fest V - Neither rain nor threat of floods would keep bones players from enjoying the event. *Norm Conrad*

Bones Fest I -when I received the invitation from Fred Edmunds I said, "Who in their right mind would drive all the way to North Carolina to play bones? Did not go.

Bones Fest II -when I received my invitation from Everett, I said "Oh, yeah", but couldn't find North Carolina on the map and didn't go.

Bones Fest III -I really planned on going to this one, but a combination of family problems forced me to cancel out (I found Virginia on the map)

Bones Fest IV -After being elected to the board of directors, I knew I had to go and what an amazing unbelievable time it was - I was hooked.

Bones Fest V -My wife offered to

co-host bones fest in order for me not to fly off some where, and after offering, I realized I had to follow Steve and Janet Wixson's remarkable BFIV. Through the rain on the tin roof, it all worked, Nick Driver et al had a fabulous time and I slept for a week.

Bones Fest VI -Going back to college in North Carolina, sharing a dorm room with Percy Danforth's grandson, and feeling like a big bones fraternity! Bones Fest VII -hanging out with Gil and Linda at their beautiful home, pulling up to the motel and seeing 10 bones players serenading the desk clerk at 5 am! playing in the old Louisville theater; getting a meritorious service award for drinking too much Guinness in Ireland!

Bones Fest VIII -the old Reston courtyard, pretending to be Jerry Mescher, seeing Jeremy play on stage for the first time, Sky Bartlett playing like an old master.

Bones Fest IX -Jamming on Thursday night, taking over Ev's workshop for beginners, eating the most fabulous food, hanging out with Steve and Yirdy, talking with Janet in the kitchen, playing at the Opry stage again.

Bones Fest X -Thursday night jamming with Joe Birl, et al, playing at the X Gallery, walking around the whaling museum after the most amazing picture, seeing Aaron, Mel, and loads of new comers, being with Russ Myers for the last time, Mel's coming out party as one of the Meschers.

Bones fests have literally changed my life. From the early days when I didn't attend until now when it is a major event in my life, it has always had a major impact on me. Fred and Ev stirred early interest, Russ' fest made me wish I had attended, and Steve Wixson's first fest brought it all home. Bones fest has been the focal point of my development as a bones player, has given me a new pallet to paint my paintings of bones players and has given me new reason to play. I always learn something new, meet the most amazing people, and come away refreshed and reinvigorated. Each one takes on its own personality, and each one has a different cast of characters. Think about the number of times an interesting person has come, but only that one time? Barry Patton, Nick

Driver, Jeff Newman, Sandor Slo-movits, Aaron Plunkett -all once so far, but made the fest so interesting by their presence. And there's the rest of us who can't stay away. The location changes but the feeling remains! *Steve Brown*

It was my first Bones Fest, a fantastic experience, all these bones players, with their own style. Surprising about the sundries bones makers, from real bones and wood. I felt myself at home very soon in this company of bones friends. In Europe there are a few bones players, but maybe we can organize a Bones Fest in Europe (with you all together). A first-rate holiday object. *Hans Weehuizen*

Bones Fest X was my first--Thanks for the things I learned!

Since I came back I have been really working on the new skills and techniques I learned. Thanks to all who made this such a wonderful learning experience. One of the most informative things I learned was to play bones to jazz. A friend of mine plays an excellent blues guitar and at our last gig, we really had a good time grooving on the guitar and bones.

Some of the other first timers and I were talking at the Fest and we talked about the Fest being a bit daunting for first timers. We would like to see a breakout session for first timers where we could meet and display or try out our skills in a small group setting with an experienced player before we got on stage in front of most of the best bones players in the world. *Dennis Riedesel*

Bones fest IV-Chattanooga: At my first bones fest I was awed by the earthy history of the mountain opry auditorium. Steve Wixson and all the bones family made my mom & I feel right at home. I remember a strange local fellow who played really long bones in an unorthodox manner(?). I bought Black Bart's, Joe Birl's and Jerry Mescher's bones!

Bones fest VII-Louisville: I loved the Kentucky Theater and met many players. The sit down meal at a local dinner spot made me feel like a southerner again. The party at Gil's was on the "cutting edge" (he's a "sharp" guy!). I bought some Steve Brown bones!

Bones fest VIII-Reston: At Reston I found a kindred percussionist spirit in Kenny Wolin's playing and the ancestry of my teacher, Percy Danforth, in Jonathan Danforth. The Cowett family retained their title as Bones Ambassadors (at Happy Hour!). I bought some Tim Reilly bones! *Bill Vits*

Bones Fest IX - All those bodhrans on the pool table, not to mention Steve Wixson's electronic bones, were a real hoot!

Bones Fest X - Didn't realize the fest was just a few blocks from the ocean until I looked out the window on the return flight - and read the tourist handouts.

All in all, RBS and the bones fests have put me in the midst of a bunch of terrific folks from all walks of life who represent many styles and skill levels and caused my own playing to significantly improve.

Ideas/suggestions for other articles, etc to include. I would like to see articles telling about various styles and makes of rhythm bones from both the past and present. (Maybe a kind of "Antiques Road Show" for bones?)
Scott Miller

Bones Fest X was my first bones fest, which I enjoyed very much. There was so much talent there. I didn't know there were as many styles of bones playing. I enjoyed it very much. Although I had never met Mr. Joe Birl before, I had owned and played a lot of the Bakelite Joe Birl bones. It was wonderful to watch and hear him play at 90 years young. Hats off to Bones Fest X. *Melvin Harvey*

Fest IV: Gracious host, great food, chaotic jams.

Fest V: Best T-shirt; best music support of all Fests attended.

Fest VI: Terrific venue; best acoustics of all Fests; great jamming.

Fest VII: Fun venue; great host; superb bones playing.

Fest IX: Gracious host; great jamming; quality of bones play excellent.

Fest X: Hard working hosts; tech bones overkill, limited jamming; poor venue due to heat.

The Rhythm Bones Society -- priceless!! The eight years I have been associated with it have been

wholly rewarding. For 60 years I played bones one handed and thought I was the only bones player in the world. In the past 8 years I have met over 50 bones players, learned to play two handed, and have learned from other players' techniques and styles I have started to master. The association and experience I have garnered at fests have provided me opportunities to play in social and professional venues in many parts of the United States. I am grateful to the Rhythm Bones Society (RBS) and the many wonderful people I continue to meet there.

In its growth, the RBS has evolved into four quite distinctive interests: the neophytes and beginners, the Irish style of play, the technical percussionists, and traditional play. These interests are beginning to clash. It is time to try to organize fests so that each of these is accommodated fully. Further, it would serve us all well if the administrative and vending operations at fests be set up completely apart from the play of bones.

Lastly, I suggest the RBS form a Rhythm Bones Foundation (RBF) which could be used to take advantage of tax laws thus permitting the RBF to sponsor events and other activities that will subsequently permit the RBF to raise funds for the support of the RBS promotion of keeping bones playing from becoming lost from our folk lore. *Walt Watkins*

Bones Fest IV. A fest of "firsts": Meeting more great bones players at the Wixson's; playing my first triuplicate using Steve's bones!

Bones Fest V. Paraphrasing Jim Nelson: Playing the bones is a spiritual experience.

Bones Fest VI. The energy of Vivian Cox and Dan Griffin was inspiring.

Bones Fest VII. One more year to be with great people who have become friends.

Bones Fest X. I play my first bones fest with Jerry, and have just begun my journey on that "spiritual road."

For me, the most meaningful part of the Bones Fests is the gift of all the people who have become wonderful friends. I do not have adequate words

for what all of these people have come to mean to me. Also, the fests are exhilarating fun! I had not really thought about why I started playing the bones, until someone asked me, and my without-thought-answer was, "I don't want to miss out on the fun!" So, how can one not want to be a part of an organization where one meets life-long friends, has unimaginable fun, and experiences the spirit? *Sharon Mescher*

BFIV Continued

graph on Page 8.)

But we would never have had the tape if it hadn't been for the Rhythm Bones Society.

Through a series of contests my father and brother won the opportunity to audition for the Amateur Hour. They were selected for the show and performed on Father's day June 18, 1961. For more than thirty years we thought that the performance was only a memory, but then Steve Wixson managed to locate Albert Fisher who was a producer for the Amateur Hour and had access to the Kinescopes of the old show. Unfortunately, getting a recording of the show was not cheap. It turns out that the old Kinescopes are very fragile and can only be played on a special projector that moves the tape through oil. A digital copy is made and then tapes can be produced from the copy. What a surprise I got when my husband Tom gave me a tape of my father's performance for Christmas. The tape is a real treasure.

Being a part of the Rhythm Bones Society and being able to share our father's creation, both in video and in person, is a joy and a blessing!"

To learn more about our style of rhythm bones playing, read *The Mescher Tradition Continues* in RBP Vol 8, No 4. *Bernie (and Tom) Worrell*

BFV Continued

leave and cleaned up and packed the tables and chairs. It really was a tremendous amount of work, but well worth it. I glow just writing about it."
Steve Brown

The Next Ten Years

The next 10 years will be a challenge to keep the society together and bones playing exciting and relevant as we pass the mantle to a whole new crop of bone players.

The society was founded by Ev Cowett and Russ Myers, along with the inspiration of Fred Edmunds. Many of our founding members will be a whole lot older in 10 years with people like Fred and Russ already having left us.

The next 10 years will be sparked by current members taking their place while we continue to inspire newer players to come into the society.

How do we keep our instrument interesting and exciting in the eye's of the younger generation? How can we make it relevant to today's music? How do we ensure that bones playing continues long into the future? By acknowledging the past players and bringing their accomplishments into the present, and encouraging the Sky Bartletts of the world now.

It's not only bringing the instrument to the youth, its reminding the current generations of who we are. It's encouraging the elderly to remember the bones players in their history. Its reminding the baby boomers that bones were a part of their history. Its showing the younger generations that bones are a part of music now. Sow those seeds, fan those flames, keep those memories and hopes alive, and above all keep playing those bones, let bones playing ring!

Now all stand and sing a chorus of *Ain't She Sweet* while Ted Goon [See Vol 2, No 2 for the story of Mr. Goon-Bones] clacks out the beat! Is this a little too corny? *Steve Brown*

The Next Ten Fests

One way to predict the next ten Fests is to look at the first ten Fests.

Bones Fest I started it all off in the Cowett's back yard. Bones Fest II moved it to a different venue. Bones Fest III started the Rhythm Bones So-

ciety. Bones Fest IV added two days making it a full weekend event. Bones Fest V added a program booklet, T-shirt, Fest graphic and Fest motto. Bones Fest VI returned to Greensboro with the nicest facility of any Fest and began the pass-off and Bones Market. Bones Fest VII had the best match of a facility to its Fest and began the conga line finale. Bones Fest VIII added workshops. Bones Fest IX was a repeat of BFIV. Bones Fest X was the biggest Fest with the great group photograph at the Whaling Museum.

Bones Fest XI is scheduled for the same weekend as Milwaukee Irish Week giving attendees a chance to participate in both events.

There is a rhythm to all Fests with people buying in the Bones Market Place, performing to their peers, jamming anytime they can, attending workshops, passing-off, eating good food and joining the conga line finale. There is a feeling of family reunion at each Fest. These can obviously continue for many years.

Some new things members have suggested include more involvement of young bones players, kid's workshops, bigger public performances, more Regional Bones Fests, and a European Bones Fest.

In the end, it's the Fest host that creates something new with the Board worrying about it breaking even financially. So let us hope that members with great new ideas step up and host these future Bones Fests that people will remember as the best ever. *Steve Wixson*

The 10 Year Obituaries

This Special Issue of the newsletter is dedicated to the following RBS members who died during this 10 year period, Carlton Bohanan, Vivian Cox, Dan Dwyer, Carl Comer Hendrick, Will Kear, and Russ Myers.

Non members bones players who died during this period. Albert Baker, Bud Bartram, John Burrill, Len Davies, Dr Fred Edmunds, Ted Goon, George Lillard, Johnny Muise, Richard Thomas, and Don Sarrell who played the banjo for Bones Fest IV.

Bones Fest XX Prophecies

Scenario 1. I have consulted my local Gypsy fortune-teller here in The Bronx and, upon paying my special "for you, \$25" rate to her (cash only, of course), she informed me that Bones Fest XX shall be conducted thusly: It will be held in the cultural conference complex in the center of Bonesiana, a newly incorporated city nestled in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains. This will be the only city entirely governed and populated by Bones Players. There will be an audition necessary for entry of new residents, but all dues-paying members of RBS will be "grandfathered in" for instant residency status. The length of the fest will be 5 days and nights, with 3 soundstages featuring jam sessions and solo performances going 24/7.

Greg Burrows

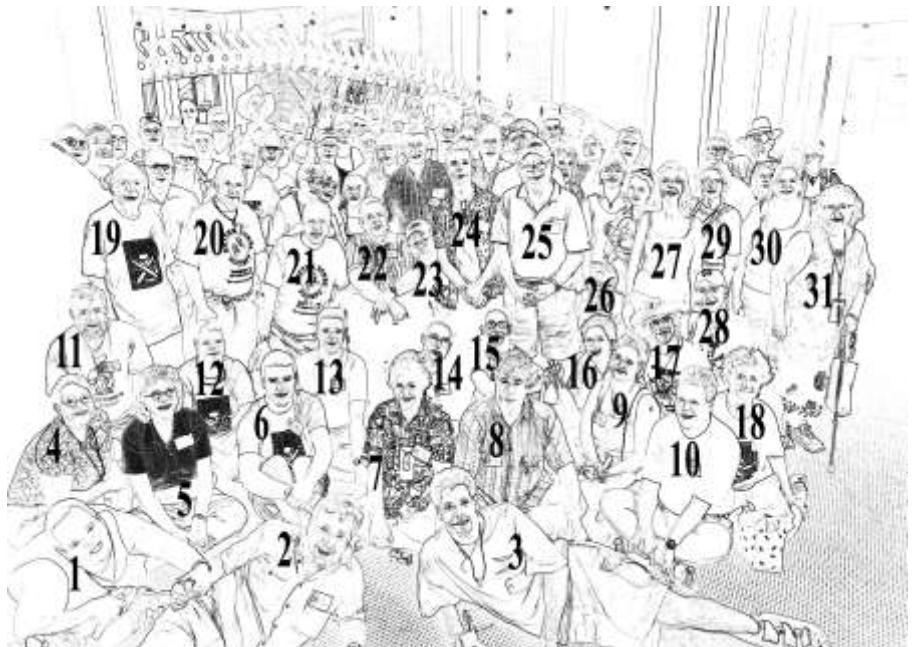
Scenario 2. Bones Fest XX will be in Chicago hosted by Spike Bones. It was moved to the big city as the size of the Fest has outgrown most other cities. Bones players from China and Thailand attend for the first time. The MC is Ramsey Cowett taking over from his father Al and most people say he is even funnier than his dad. The sound man is Dan Cowett who returns after a disastrous substitute the preceding year.

The surprise performer is Wilma Myers who, with the now famous Possum Ridge String Band, just returned from a performance on the Conan O'Brien Late night television show (David Letterman's old time slot). She is a full time performer of the likes of Vivian Cox. Mickey Hart, drummer for the Grateful Dead Band and a great bones player, is the dinner speaker.

The Fest motto is *Clone them Bones*, and the T-shirt graphic shows the earth with twenty bones radiating out like the rays of the sun. [Thanks for this idea to Jim Conner, a rhythm bones and banjo playing preacher who sang with the New Kinston Trio and wrote Grammas' Feather Bed made famous by John Denver. Jim showed up for the Friday night reception at Bones Fest VIII.] *Steve Wixson*

Bones Fest X Group Photo Naming Guide

The image below shows a number for each attendee at Bones Fest X. Find a person from the photograph on Page 1 and look up their name from the image below.



Naming guide for Bones Fest X group photograph on Page 1



Enlargement of upper left section



Enlargement of upper right section

1. Jeremy Brown
2. Kevin Kelly
3. Aaron Plunkett
4. Mary Carty
5. Sharon Mescher
6. Andrew Humphreys
7. Barb Gilmore
8. Don Gilmore
9. Martha Cowett
10. Joe Cummings
11. Richard Carty
12. John Cowett
13. Al Cowett
14. Scott Miller
15. Jonathan Danforth
16. Melissa Danforth
17. Tim Reilly
18. Val Cowett
19. Joe Birl
20. Gil Hibben
21. Steve Wixson
22. Russ Myers
23. Steve Brown
24. Mel Mercier
25. Ev Cowett
26. Shorty Boulet
27. Teri Davies
28. Kenny Wolin
29. Joy Watkins
30. Jennifer Brown
31. Margaret-Mary Maciel
32. Al Lemieux
33. Joe Giotta
34. Matt Cassidy
35. Unknown
36. Robert Goulet
37. Ernie Duffy
38. Parker Waite
39. Bill Rose
40. Dan Cowett
41. Dennis Riedesel
42. Richard Clifford
43. Guy Gillette
44. Doug Danforth
45. Tommy Cowett
46. Ceo Gaudet
47. Isabel Danforth
48. Joe E. Birl
49. Unknown
50. Liz Cassidy
51. Norm Conrad

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 52. Gerard Arseneault | 65. Robert Waddell? |
| 53. Randy Seppala | 66. Dave Boyles |
| 54. Hank Tenenbaum | 67. Rob Rudin |
| 55. Hans Weehuizen | 68. Emily Conrad |
| 56. Bernie Worrell | 69. Sky Bartlett |
| 57. Ron Harvey | 70. Cathi Gillette |
| 58. Michael Ballard | 71. Mitch Boss |
| 59. Jerry Mescher | 72. Dorci Gillette |
| 60. Mel Harvey | 73. Al Gregoire |
| 61. Joe Bernier | 74. Frank Sweet |
| 62. Tony Humphreys | 75. Annette Boss |
| 63. Unknown | 76. Mary Lee Sweet |
| 64. Walt Watkins | |

Photographs from the Bones Fest X Saturday night public performance



Jonathan and Melissa Danforth and friends welcoming the audience



Mitch Boss



Walt Watkins wows us in a costume



The audience at our Saturday night show held in a nearby church

Rhythm Bones Society

1060 Lower Brow Road
Signal Mountain, TN 37377-2910

Address Correction Requested