

# Rhythm Bones Society



regional Fests 9#4 & 9#3  
What is a R Fest 17#4

bylaw date change 10#3  
new look 12#4  
LOC letter 19#

Organized on the back porch of the home of the late Russ Myers and his wife Wilma on September 23, 1999, 34 people signed the By-Laws creating of the Rhythm Bones Society (RBS), a organization whose purpose, as stated in the first issue of the newsletter, is "to preserve, educate, communicate and foster development of rhythm bones sounds and music." Seven rhythm bones players were elected to the Board of Directors to lead this new society (see the following pages for short biographies of current and former Board Members.)

A bones festival was the vision of the father of RBS, Everett Cowett (read it below and also see Vol. 8. No. 1.) Annual Bones Fests began in 1997 organized by Ev Cowett at the urging of who might be called the grandfather of RBS, Dr. Fred Edmund, maker and seller of rhythm bones and a great instructional video. The chapter titled 'Bones Fests' provides a review of each Bones Fest.

What do you give a father who doesn't want anything? For Martha Cowett, it was the Rhythm Bones Central website now with the address [rhythmbones.org](http://rhythmbones.org). This website is the source of much information about rhythm bones, and is where many people were and are introduced to the Rhythm Bones Society. (REF RBS a Vision 11\*4)

At the first Board of Directors meeting, the Rhythm Bones Player newsletter was authorized with Steve Wixson as Editor. Articles have been authored by a large number of people with occasional reprints from other sources. To date, there have been 87 quarterly volumes published, and this book is in essence an index to those newsletters.

RBS celebrates its 25th Anniversary in two years.

State of Rhythm Bones in 1999. 100 web pages  
State of rhythm bones 25 years later. (get latest Google number)  
Quality of play way up.

There is way of knowing how many rhythm bones players there were in 1999 (or in fact today.) The number could be in the low tens of thousands, and these were taught by the last generation of minstrel bones players. Many of these people are late in life and will be gone in a couple of decades.

Recognize the awards: Honorary meritorious service, etc.

#### Founding Members

Included in this Book: Al Cowett, Ev Cowett, Dan Cowett, Matteo, Dave Boyles, Steve Wixson, Joe Birl, Vivian Cox, Spike Bones Muhrer, Russ Myers and Tommy Cowett, John Cahill, Sally Carroll, Parker Waite, John Cowett, and Mel Mercier.

Not included in this Book: Charlie Breeland, Kevin Dunn and Deborah Brower. Tom Rice, Bonnie Chase, Ed Cox, Terry Carroll.



## Sky Bartlett

Board Member (2015-2016)

Story: [RBP, 649](#)

Host [BFXII: RBP, 585](#)

Primetime tv: [RBP, 375](#)

It was 20?? years ago this year that I learned to play rhythm bones. I learned from Ernie Duffy, a close family friend. He had learned to play from Shorty Boulet a few years before. I had the advantage of a teacher in Ernie. Ernie had to learn from Shorty via pure observation and will power. Once I got the hang of it Ernie would take me to square dances and let me play along with him and Shorty. That was the key to continued effort - playing in public. (see on-line newsletter, Vol 18, No 1 for more details)

Ernie brought me to my first Bones Fest (and many more), his second I believe. Part of the fun was that Ernie hadn't learned to play very long before I did, meaning that we got to learn a lot of things together or at nearly the same time. This allowed us to develop a similar style of playing that allows us to sound, what I believe to be, greater than the sum of our individual playing. Check us out at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jp4sVvDfdUQ>.

I've had twists and turns, stylistically speaking, with rhythm bones. I've tried to imitate as many players as I could over time. But I always come back to the fact that the high quality triplet is the magic of rhythm bones. That's about where Ernie was at when I first saw him play, high quality triplets. It's funny to think how hard we worked on triplets and stopping and starting, things that seem so natural now.

I've been influenced and awed by too many people over the years at Bones Fests to even think about listing anyone, but what a list it would be. The talent of the rhythm bones community never ceases to amaze me. Sky Bartlett

Sky had a primetime appearance on the ABC television show 'Wipeout' described in Volume 14, No 1 that is online on our website.

Sky and Jessye met a BF. Got married

Sky and Jessye hosted bfxiii



## Stephen Brown

Board (1999-2002)

Assistant Director (2002-2004)

Executive Director (2005-Present)

Winchendon, MA, USA

Player, teacher, maker, seller

All-Ireland: [RBP, 81](#)

Chieftains: [RBP, 309](#)

Sligo: [RBP, 336](#)

Kids letter: [RBP, 549](#)

Youtube video: 19\*1

Steve Brown learned to play the bones from Percy Danforth in 1978. Over the last thirty years he has performed the bones and other percussion instruments in a variety of settings including festivals, concerts, coffee houses, and work-shops. He has been a featured lecturer at the MFA in Boston, won the All Ireland Bone Playing Championship in 2003 and 2004, and is currently on staff at the Boston branch of the Comhaltas Music School. Here is the story of how he got to perform with the Chieftains.

The Chieftains were at the very beginning for me, not only of traditional Irish music, but of rhythm bone playing itself.

It was a warm spring afternoon when I wandered into a Cambridge record store nearly 35 years ago, and purchased a Chieftains recording with the bones on the cover. Although I've had many experiences with the music since then, I've never gone far from those early recordings, and I've been trying to replace some of my favorites on CD, having initially purchased them on vinyl.

So you can imagine the effect my phone call with Paddy Maloney had on me, just the presence of him alone was very moving, but when he invited me to come down to Symphony Hall in Boston in March, 2009 to sit in with them, I had everything I could do to contain myself.

Six long months separated that phone call and the eventual performance, and it was a bit of a roller coaster experience. The world of professional musicians, and I say professional on a rather high level, is so very different than mine, I can tell you. Thousands of miles of traveling, and hundreds of people all working together to make it work. Sometimes it's easy to get lost in those many layers that separate the performers from the everyday people, and it was amongst those layers that I found myself for several months. Very busy people, unreturned phone calls, and very strange reactions to my standard explanation, "I play the bones". Although the Chieftains, and Paddy Maloney himself are well familiar with the bones (see the Chieftains article in Vol 10, No.3), many of the people who work with him and around him have no idea of some of the intricacies of traditional music, of which rhythm bones would be one.



## Everett Cowett

Father of Rhythm Bones Society  
Executive Director (1999-2004)  
Board (2004-2009)  
Founding Member

Greensboro, NC, USA

Story: [RBP, 159](#)

Host BFI,II,IV: [RBP, 191](#)

Remembered: [RBP, 413](#)

Everett “Ev” Cowett was born March 6, 1935. He was raised on a potato farm in northern Maine, an area known as “the county.” After receiving a BS degree in Agronomy from Maine he attended Rutgers University where he was awarded a PhD degree.

Ev's first encounter with Rhythm Bones took place during the early 1940's on his family's potato farm in northern Maine. Francis and Darrell Fisher, kids about 8 -10 years old and nearest neighbors came walking in to the barnyard making an unusual clicking sound. They both had two wooden sticks about 6 inches long and one-half inch wide placed one on each side of their ring finger. As they turned their wrists the sound of the sticks was captivating. Ev was hooked after less than a minute. Ev just had to learn to do that. The kids told him that their uncle Louie had taught them the trick and that he was great with 6-inch rulers.

The sound was too much. The only tool available to Ev for bone making was a jackknife. Every farm boy carried one in his pocket in those days. Whittling seasoned hard wood proved to be difficult. Green wood was easy so Ev made many pairs of bones from green wood and let them dry for several months before he ever knew what they would sound like. Beech, birch and maple were the woods of choice.

Ev thought that the sound might be generated from the end of the moveable bone so he made many mallets to test the theory. It wasn't until 1995, more than 50 years later, that he discovered



## Sally Carroll

Board Member (1999-2005)  
Founding Member

Host BfVIII: [RBP, 119](#)

We met Sally Carroll at Bones Fest III and at that time she had played rhythm bones for about 6 months and was already a good rhythm bones player. During the first membership meeting she as a beginning player seems just right for the Board of Directors providing a perspective that none of the other, older, members had.

Sally and her husband Terry went on to host Bones Fest XIII and introduced workshops that have continued to the present.

Sally's introduction to bones playing was at the Mystic Seaport Museum. A woman was sitting near a featured sea chantey singer doing this marvelous thing! Sally approached the woman, Alison Reilly, and was shown the bones and given a demonstration. Since it was obvious to Sally that she had to learn to do this, it was fortunate that Alison's husband, Tim Reilly, makes real bone bones. Some weeks later her bones arrived and she began practicing, mostly with Irish, Scottish, other Celtic music, and early reggae. She plays at sea chantey singalongs.



## Martha Cowett

Webmaster (1999-2002)

A Reflection: [RBP, 59](#)

Emcee BFXIII: [RBP, 293](#)

For me each Bones Fest has had some significant outstanding event, typically it was some player that just blew my doors off and brought Bones playing to a new height. Bones Fest IV, although the playing was terrific, was a bit different. At one point I was asked what did I enjoy the most or find most impressive. With only a moment or two of thought I stated, rather biased, my nephew Ramsey's playing was the most impressive.

Then I went home and thought about it and I have come up with something different. For me the most significant part of this Festival was all of the one on one stories I heard from the participants of the festival on how playing bones has touched, changed, and affected their lives. How playing the bones really makes a difference in their lives and how connecting with this group and this instrument is now a significant part of their life -and IT'S ALL IN A GOOD WAY! I am blown away, truly. I want to thank everyone who participated at the fest and shared their story with me. Thanx! Martha Cowett



## Jonathan Danforth

Board Member (2005-2012)  
Webmaster (2002-19??)

Need to profile Jonathan

BFX Host: [RBP, 175](#)

Jethros: [RBP, 471](#)

Youth Workshop: [RBP, 122](#)

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



# Dr Fred Edmunds

Grandfather of Rhythm Bones Society

19?? - 1997

Lexington, NC, USA

Player, Teacher, Maker, Seller

Story: [RBP, 79](#)

Fred's Newsletters: [RBP, 84](#)

Fred's Online Lessons: [RBS](#)

Video: [RBP, 11](#)

Fred Edmunds was hoping for something as big as the yo-yo or Hula-Hoop—something that would create a nationwide craze, but he became happy just to pass his beloved art of playing rhythm bones to the next generation. “It would be a shame to let a musical instrument that has been around for 5,000 years fade into complete obscurity.”

A retired physician, Edmunds first came across rhythm bones when he was 15 years old. A man was selling them and gave the young Edmunds a demonstration. Fred brought a set right then. He says they were easy to play. “Once you can hang on to them, you can play.”

Edmunds researched rhythm bones and found out that in America they started fading in popularity after the Civil War.



# Skeffington Flynn

Board Member (2011-Present)

Story: [RBP, 481](#)

There's a story that gets told in my family about when I was a toddler. I had a Red Flyer wagon and I was putting cans from the pantry into it. In between making additions to my haul, I had a pot, and a spoon, that I was banging on the back of the pot while shouting, "I'm making a lot of noise, I'm making a lot of noise!" Well here we are a little over 40 years later and I suppose I'm still the same person, making a lot of noise. My choices of instrument, and my technique have evolved, for sure, but I'm still doing my best to make a lot of noise.

I grew up in Baltimore, Maryland. My first real instrument was the trombone which I played in 4th and 5th grade. I typically walked home from school and I remember that trombone case being about the same size as I was. This might have put into my mind an early notion to find something more portable,

Like a lot of kids, I took piano lessons after that. My father, Charles Robert Flynn, was a musician as well. My parents didn't want me to be a junior, so they named me Charles Skeffington Flynn, and they called me Skeff from the very beginning. To this day, when someone calls me Charles, I know they are reading my name off of a form. Most of the time that means that they want money, so I'm in the habit of saying "No, he's not home right now, can I take a message?" As for the piano lessons, they didn't quite inspire me, but they did help me along my musical journey.

At the age of 15 I decided I wanted to learn how to play the bass guitar. All the credit goes to my mother for supporting me. We went to Bill's Music in Baltimore and found a suitable instrument, one that I still have and play to this day. (<https://www.facebook.com/VforVelcrOhm> - some tracks even feature bones!) I remember that I didn't like the color, or that I wanted a different instrument, but it turns out that Mom had it right.



## Dr. Mel Mercier

Board Member (1999-2013)

Founding Member

birth

??, Ireland

Story: [RBP, 43](#)

Honored: [RBP, 99](#)

Wedding: [RBP, 221](#)

Congrats Dr Mel: [RBP, 357](#)

Thesis: [RBP, 362](#)

Chair: [RBP, 502](#)

Mel Mercier is a special friend to the RBS, and, as one of the best bones players in the world, it is an honor to have him as a member of the Society and on our Board of Directors. He is a performer, teacher, composer, arranger, producer and student. Mel's legacy is through his father, Peadar, who was part of the seminal Irish group, Ceoltoiri Cualann, organized by Sean O Riada who some credit as starting the modern era of bodhrán and bones playing. Some of the Ceoltoiri Cualann musicians, including Peadar, went on to form the now famous Chieftains.

Here is what Mel says about his early bones playing days. "Something in me always hesitates for a moment (in disbelief) when it hears me saying that I have been playing the bones for about thirty? years now! I don't know exactly when I began to play but it was certainly in my early 'teens if not before. My earliest bones-playing recollection sees me sitting in the bathroom of our house



## Gil Hibben

Board Member (2002-2004)  
Assistant Director (2005-2011)  
?-Present  
LeGrange, KY, USA  
Player

BFVII Host: [RBP, 87](#)  
BFXIII: [RBP, 293](#)

Bones Fest VII was hosted by us, Gil and Linda Hibben, in Louisville, KY, on July 25, 26, & 27, 2003 at the Kentucky Theatre. This historic theatre was a great place to hold a Bones Fest with great acoustics and side rooms for jamming and practicing. Bones players who were here a day early were featured on 3 separate TV shows, all very early morning news programs.

We also had a very good article in the Louisville Eccentric Observer which caters to the arts community...the result of the combined publicity brought quite a few people to the Kentucky Theatre for the Saturday night performance. Friday night was a reception at the Theatre with heavy hors d'ouvres catered by Linda and her sister-in-law Sally Cochran.

Former member Dr. Sandra Graves provided her original paintings and flower arrangements to set the tone for a very welcoming reception area. There was plenty of jamming and with the stage this was one of the best jam scenes we have had. Steve Brown received the Meritorious Service award and then showed off his winning All-Ireland style. He is indeed a champion.



## Jerry Mescher

Board Member (1999-2009)

b/d

Halbur, IA, USA

Player, Maker, Seller

Story: [RBP, 477](#)

Tradition Continues: [RBP, 183](#)

Mel remembers: [RBP, 479](#)

Jerome 'Jerry' Mescher was born on March 6, 1941, the son of Albert and Ann Mescher. He attended catholic schools. He hobbies were restoring tractors, flying his 1947 Piper Super Cub, and building airplanes. Jerry served in the National Guard and was an American Legion member.

As a boy Jerry began learning to play the bones by imitating his father, Albert. With a pair of wooden bones carved out of an old peach crate he practiced alone for several years, mostly by playing along to polka music on the radio in the kitchen. Eventually Albert and Jerry started to practice together in the parlor and by the time Jerry was in his late teens they had built a strong musical relationship. They developed a unique style of duet performance in which they accompanied the player piano or gramophone recordings with beat-for-beat, unison renditions of Albert's bones arrangements.

When he finished high school, Jerry decided to work on the farm with his father rather than go to college. They continued to play music together and farm together until Albert passed away in 1967. Jerry took over the farm after his father died and worked it with his mother for almost twenty years before she died in 1985. In 1986, he married his wife, Sharon, and they continued to run the 160-acre family farm.

An elegant, musical, generous and hard-working man, Jerry loved to share his gifts and his story with all those he encountered throughout his life. In Ireland we often use the phrase *Ní Bheith a Leithéid Arís Ann* (We shall never see his like again) when someone dies, and this is certainly true of Jerry. Another saying that is often used to end an epitaph is *Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dilís* (May his dear soul be at the right hand of God), which conjures up a comforting image of Jerry in the Heavens. However, given the man he was, it is also tempting to imagine Jerry, reunited with his father, entertaining the souls of the departed, reminding themselves and their celestial audience of the earthly pleasures of embodied music making, and carrying on the Mescher Bones Tradi



## Sharon Mescher

Board Member (2011-Present)

Halbur, IA, USA

Story: [RBP, 192](#)

Reflections Editor: [RBP, 191](#)

Reflections Editor: [RBP, 525](#)

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 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.



## Russ Myers

Assistant Director (1999-2002)

Founding Member

19??-19??

Brightwood, VA, USA

Story: [RBP, 71](#)

Obituary: [RBP, 177](#)

Memorial: [RBP, 265](#)

Memorial Dedication: [RBP, 285](#)

CD: [RBP, 217](#)

**memorial**

Russell Myers places a set of bones between the fingers of each hand and flips on a recording of "I'm Looking Over a Four-leaf Clover."

For three minutes, the 67-year-old Madison County man clackety-clacks out a beat to the old song, much to the delight of his audience. Somehow, he even manages to change pitch on his percussion instruments, taking his music up an octave on the second verse.

Myers holds the title of World Champion Bone Player, an honor he won in September at the Old Time Country and Bluegrass Festival in Avoca, Iowa.

His goal is to make sure this art does not die out in America.

"Ninety-nine percent of the people in this country don't even know there is such a thing as bone playing," Myers says. (REF 5\*2)

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



## Dennis Riedesel

Board Member (2016-Present)

Story: [RBP, 250](#)  
BFXXV Host: [RBP, 349](#)  
BFXXI Host: [REP, 561](#)  
News article: [RBP, 566](#)

I have been involved with the mountain man and living history hobby since 1984. We participated in all the activities in the mountain man rendezvous camps and marched in all of the battles at the living history reenactments but as we got older our bodies no longer allowed us to participate as we had in our younger days.

So we had to find a way to be involved in the reenactment camps but not march in the field. Since many of us played musical instruments during the evening hours' get together around the campfires, three or four re-enactor friends of mine researched whatever information they could find on the old medicine shows. They were able to keep the format of the old medicine show intact and we were familiar with the "Authentic Americana Folk Music" genre, however, the jokes were not funny! Something happened with the set up of the joke and the punch line that seemed to be funny for the 1800's audience but we did not see any humor at all. So we started with the problems the City Slicker had with the Country Bumpkin's homonyms and double enterers in the Arkansas Traveler skit and, during the years of performing the show, the homonymic gags have changed.

Our group is called the Dr. E. T. Bushrod and Tanner Family Medicine Show (see photograph on Page 8.) We perform throughout Texas at festivals and other civic events as well at many re-enactments. The Tanner Family is a motley collection of individuals: Rosco (AKA Dr. Bushrod) on mandolin; Unkle Jimmy on spoons and dancing jack; Tiny (that's me) on "one string bass banjo", bones and mouth-bow; NotNo on tambourine; Banjo Joe on banjo; Bisket on washboard; Little Lucky Tater on tambourine (and, yes, his son's Tanner name is Spud); Peach on penny whistle;



## Bill Vits

Assistant Director (2011-Present)  
Board Member (2010-2011)

Story: [RBP, 381](#)

Symphony: [RBP, 181](#)

Clapper Gift: [RBP, 480](#)

Natalie McMaster: [RBP, 431](#)

Born in the Chicago area in 1957 (which Bill Vits now realizes coincided with the birth of rocknroll and the plastic drumhead), his Dad was transferred to Nashville, TN as a salesman for Mirro Aluminum Company. His earliest memories recall being sent home from religious preschool for calling another child a liar. The next day he returned and successfully called the child a prevaricator.

At 6, Bill started piano lessons with a very hip lady, June Wolfe, who could read a book while playing background jazz in the strip clubs of Printers Alley. One day he heard her son playing drums in his bedroom and he asked if he could have drum lessons. Bill promised he would practice more than watching TV, which was easy when you only had 3 channels. Jim Wolfe was the funkiest white kid who played with all the area soul bands. The first record he gave Bill was "Green Onions" by Booker T. and the MG's. He would stack 45's on Bill's record player and play along with Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, Beatles, Stones and Bill's favorite, James Brown.

Jim got Bill involved with Vanderbilt's Blair Academy of Music where he started lessons with Farrell Morris, who was a Nashville studio and orchestral percussionist. This lead to Bill becoming the youngest member (11 years old) of the Nashville youth symphony playing along side high school players.

Once again, Bill's Dad was transferred and they moved to Indianapolis. His mom found the Paul-Mueller Percussion studio and Bill became a student of Erwin Mueller. The drum set took a back set for a while as Bill worked on his marimba and timpani playing. Jazz band and marching band led to him becoming drum major. His summers were filled with music camps at Ball State University.



## Tim Reilly

Board Member (2013-2015)

Story: [RBP, 601](#)

Workshop: [RBP, 439](#)

I was born in East Lyme, CT, in August 1963. I liked drums when I was younger and started taking drum lessons in 7th grade, probably because of the Bicentennial. My teacher, Rob Impelleterri, was a star drummer in the high school band and he realized I was a very enthusiastic student. I went from basic rudiments to book studies and reading drum music, which is very different from reading tonal music. I was learning to read classical percussion charts and also drum set parts, so I was very saturated with my lessons. This was in 2-3 years of study, an hour every week.

Then when I was in high school I was in the marching band during fall and spring and concert band in winter. This gave me an appreciation for reading music arrangement and memorization. That was the awesome thing about East Lyme High School's band in the 1970s-1980s: everything was practiced, memorized, and produced a state champion and East Coast championship marching band.

I took that enthusiasm with me to community college by trying to write parts, going to see my younger brother and watching the drum line, visiting our old drum instructor, Gary Ribchinsky, and trying to stay connected to it. I gradually drifted away about 1985 while I was attending Central Connecticut State University, and I didn't play much at all for a couple of years. I got a job at Mystic Seaport Museum in fall 1987 and I heard rhythm bones first in spring 1988, played by Rick Spencer, a staff musician there. I decided I wanted to really try to play that instrument and see what I could do with it.



## Steve Wixson

Secretary/Treasurer (1999-Present)

Newsletter Editor (1999-Present)

Founding Member

Story: [RBP, 529](#)

Ireland: [RBP, 146](#)

3D Printer: [RBP, 423](#)

In the special edition of “Reflections on Ten Years of Bones Fests”, (Volume 8, 2006, page 3), Ev Cowett wrote, “At Bones Fest II...Steve Wixson entered the picture and nothing has been the same since. Within six 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...” No truer words have been written! The “picture” has never been the same.

Steve and Janet Wixson hosted two festivals: Bones Fest IV, where began the tradition of “making it a full weekend event”, and Bones Fest IX. Steve is the Secretary/Treasurer of the Rhythm Bones Society. He works tirelessly on the newsletter, introducing us to numerous subjects: bones players from the past and present, different types of bones from around the world, and the history of bones.

When Steve sends out emails to the Board members asking for newsletter ideas, I can only speak for myself, but that is anxiety-time! The conversation in my head is on the order of, “What can I contribute? I don’t know anything!” Then, I go silent from embarrassment. During Bones Fest XVIII in Grand Rapids, the Board met to discuss old and new business. Someone complimented Steve on all the work he does for our society, and maybe he could slow down. Steve’s response was, “I can’t sit and twiddle my thumbs!” In the blink of an eye, and in unison, the Board members said, “Please, sit and twiddle your thumbs!”

Words do not do justice to convey the breadth and depth of Steve’s incomparable influence. Below is a meager list of his contributions to the Rhythm Bones Society.



## Kenny Wolin

Board Member (2011-Present)

Story: [RBP, 641](#)

On tour: [RBP, 497](#)

On tour: [RBP, 172](#)

White house: [RBP, 322](#)

Kennedy Center: [RBP, 92](#)

Workshop: [RBP, 123](#)

I grew up just a few blocks from the Detroit border-line in Oak Park, Michigan. In 4th grade I wanted to play the trumpet, but my mom thought I would drop out of band after a year just like my older brother and sister. To save money she pretended that I was gonna need braces so, instead of trumpet, I could either choose drums or violin (knowing I'd choose the former). At the time, my parents were pretty relieved that it only cost them a pair of drumsticks and a drum pad, but little did they know how that one pair of Bunken 2B sticks would change my life.

The next few years I was taking private drumset lessons until 7th grade when that all changed. My new teacher was Sam Tundo from the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. He co-owned a store nearby called "Percussion World" with Norm Ficket (DSO). Sam got me back on the drum pad doing a lot of heavy rudimental-style playing, but once he introduced me to the marimba I was like a duck to water and couldn't stop practicing. Which reminds me, my mom likes to joke about whenever I got in trouble she couldn't just send me to my room because that's where all my instruments were!

Anyway, that same year I played a xylophone solo at the 1979 Michigan Percussion Festival in Ann Arbor for the first time in public for Charlie Owen during his masterclass. Charlie later became my role model. He was the timpanist and marimba soloist with "The President's Own" Marine Band during the 30s-50s, then became Principal of the Philadelphia Orchestra, and THEN taught at the University of Michigan.

After Charlie's masterclass I decided to stay for the next one, which just happened to be led by Percy Danforth! I can't begin to tell you how amazing it was to see and hear the bones for the first time and be taught by Percy himself. After his workshop I begged my mom to buy me a pair of Joe Birl Rhythm Bones directly from Percy.