



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

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Executive Director's Column

BONES FEST V! Live music by three bands, a professionally printed program, BFV t-shirts, the barn on Red Apple Farm, many new boners who thought that they were the only bones players left on earth, and a real minstrel show by Norm Conrad. And don't forget the rainstorm on the tin roof and all the food and drink we tried to consume. All of the old boners were at their best and learned a lot from the new faces. We missed Carl, Matteo, Vivian, Mel, Mike, the Cowett kids, David, Barry, Tom, Bill and many others who could not be there for many reasons. A weekend to remember and it is not over yet. Watch for a complete summary of the event in the next issue of the RHYTHM BONES PLAYER and a video, which is in production as I write.

I want to thank all of you who participated which made this a wonderful experience. A very special thanks to Steve Brown (and wife

Jennifer) who put it all together. What a great effort. Thanks to Jerry Mescher our substitute MC and wife Sharon for program coordination, Lori Grady for the design of the t-shirts and program, Norm Conrad for t-shirt production and sound system for CDs and tapes and all the musicians who encouraged a great deal of spontaneity to our play. Dave Reiner and sons Eric and Andy contributed the sound system and played jigs, reels, marches, polkas, rags, Irish, bluegrass and much more all day long. They were sensational. And last but not least to the folks at the Red Apple Farm who were great hosts behind the scenes. Can BFVI top this?

The fiscal year for the Rhythm Bones Society is October to September of the following year. Now is the time to renew your membership for 2001-2002. See the insert in this newsletter for details.

May your bones be with you, *Ev Cowett*

Matteo and Castanets (Woods That Dance)

Matteo has honored the Rhythm Bones Society by attending and performing at Bones Fests III and IV. Matteo is a world class dancer and castanet player and founder of the Foundation for Ethnic Dance whose purpose is to document, preserve, teach and perform authentic forms of indigenous dance representing many countries of the world.

Matteo has written a small, marvelous book on the castanets titled *Woods That Dance* (published as *Dance Perspectives* 33, Spring 1968). In it he tells the story of castanets beginning with a history of dance and the idiophone (defined as an instrument of naturally sonorous material that produces the desired sound when two or more pieces of it are struck together). Scholars have postulated that dance is the oldest of the arts with dance being inseparable from rhythmic accompaniment.

Bones players share the history of the idiophone, and Matteo includes a brief section on rhythm bones as a type of castanet. Bones must certainly predate castanets, but no one can dispute that castanets are the more refined,

precisioned and sophisticated.

Castanets range in size from a few centimeters

(Continued on page 3)



Matteo with castanets in dance position
(Matteo photograph used with permission)

Editorial

Bones Fest V is over and it was a great success. As in previous years, the highlights will be presented in the next issue of the newsletter.

The feature article is about Matteo and castanets. I have been practicing castanet rhythmic patterns on the bones and they sound good. They are also excellent exercises for practice in becoming a better bones player. I discovered I could produce the castanet quadruplet with a little extra arm swing. The article describes Matteo's notation system for castanets that could be adapted to bones playing. In a humorous mood, I asked Matteo "Are bones a type of castanet or are castanets a type of bones?" He, of course, said bones are a type of castanet. What do you think? Matteo is a member of the Rhythm Bones Society. Matteo, thanks for your support.

On the back page is a rap song I

Letters to the Editor

Dear Steve,

I was standing in front of my bones booth at the New England Folk Festival having just given a workshop for 50 or so people, ably assisted by Norm Conrad, Tim Rielly, and Rob Rudin, trying to sift through the folks with questions, when I was approached by a young looking guy with a beard and pony tail. I was mid conversation with Jan Cornish discussing John Burrill's meeting with Percy Danforth at that festival in 1985. He pointed to his name tag which read, "Jonathan Danforth" and I laughed, "Not related to Percy I'm sure" I remarked. "He was my Grandfather" he said. "Wow!" After regaining my composure, we settled into long reminiscences of Percy. It was a real treat! He is living in Fall River, Ma. and does play the bones a bit, but it is not his main instrument. He intends to attend Bones Fest V! We never know what (or who) is just around the corner! *Steve Brown.*
(Editor note: Jonathan is our newest member joining while at Bones Fest

V.)

Dear Ev,

My father in law, aged 101, learned to play the bones when he was a boy. He has led an adventurous life in India and South Africa among other places. He was blinded by a gas attack in the First World War. He now lives in a special home for elderly people with sight impairment, and he still entertains the residents with performances on his ebony bones, which he claims he inherited from his grandfather.

I was thinking it would be nice to give him a recording of music played on the bones. His taste for music stops around 1930. Can you recommend any recordings of old and traditional music played on the bones, and where might acquire them? Thanks a lot, *Louis van den Berg (Editor note: Read more about Cliff Wood on Page 3 of this issue. Send me recording recommendations and I will forward them to Cliff.)*

Dear Steve,

I enjoyed the Vol 3, No 1 issue of the newsletter. Don't know if I can be at Bones Fest V as I'll be in seminary beginning in July for a 3 year Master of Divinity program. I'm looking forward to being a (perhaps unique) banjo picking, harmonica blowing, bones playing, yodeling (and all at the same time, no less!) pastor. It'll have to be a somewhat different kind of church, 'eh?

I'm a 52 year experienced bones player, having learned from Ted Goon in Gadsden, AL when I was his paperboy in '49-'50. I too have not heard about Frank Brower. His exploits in the front page column are impressive, but I vote for the award to be called Ted Goon Meritorious Service Award; as Ted Goon is by far the most known and noteworthy of modern bones players as well as perhaps the most well known in all history. He had top ten USA chart songs playing the bones in his inimitable style! 'Nuff said.

I played the bones in Holland and Belgium in April on John Denver's Memorial Concerts with John Adams' Show. They loved the bones. Maybe someday you can see me play the banjo, bones, harmonica and sing at the same time. (sic) Cheers, *Jim Connor*

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Editor

Steve Wixson
wixson@chattanooga.net

Executive Director

Everett Cowett
evcow@aol.com

Web Site Coordinator

Martha Cowett
mccowett@mindspring.com

Board of Directors

Steve Brown
Sally Carroll
Everett Cowett, Executive Director
Mel Mercier
Jerry Mescher
Russ Myers, Assistant Director
Steve Wixson, Secretary/Treasurer

The Rhythm Bones Player is published quarterly by the Rhythm Bones Society. Nonmember subscriptions are \$10 for one year; RBS members receive the Player as part of their dues.

The Rhythm Bones Player welcomes letters to the Editor and articles on any aspect of bones playing. All material submitted for consideration is subject to editing and condensation.

Rhythm Bones Central web site:
rhythmbones.com/

Bones Calendar

September 20, 21 and 22, 2002.

Bones Fest VI, Location not yet determined. Details in next newsletter.

September 1, 2001. 26th Annual Bones and Spoons Contest at Avoca, IA. Contact Board Member Jerry Mescher (smescher@netins.net).

Recorded Bones Music

Sonny Terry's Washboard Band. Legendary blues artist Sonny Terry with Brownie McGhee and J. C. Burris playing RBS member Joe Birl's patented bones. Custom Disc FA 2006, Smithsonian Folkways Records, Dept. 0607, Washington, DC, 20072-0607, USA telephone 800-410-9815, website address is www.si.edu/folkways.

(Continued from page 1 - Matteo) and Castanets to the size of a man's large hand, and generally are made from granadillo wood. Castanets are made to fit the individual with the best castanets being the ones that are best for you. As with bones, castanet tones mellow and grow with age.

The two pieces of the castanets are held together by a cord and suspended from the thumb. The sound is produced by striking the tips of the fingers against one piece causing it to strike the other piece. Castanets are normally smaller than bones, and can produce faster sounds

Matteo has two instructional videos titled, Castanets in America, Part I-Basic Technique and Part II-Intermediate and Advanced Techniques. Part I presents the history of the castanets, describes the parts of castanets, shows how to hold and perform the basic elements of castanet playing. Part II presents more complex rhythm patterns including the *master combination*. Both videos show Matteo and Carola Goya, a brilliant performer, dancing and playing their castanets to illustrate the techniques. The videos also present Matteo's students in performance.

Castanet basics are similar to bones basics. The right hand tap has the Spanish name of *Ti* and the left hand tap is called *Ta*. The castanet roll is like a bones triplet followed by a tap but executed with two hands. One hand does a triplet or more frequently a quadruplet with all four fingers rapidly striking the castanet. The other hand finishes with a tap. The right hand roll is called *Ria* and the left hand roll is called *Rai*. Performing a tap with both hands at the same time is called *Tok*, and striking one pair of castanets against the other is called *Choque*. Bones player and teacher Dr. Fred Edmunds frequently used a *Choque*-like sound when he performed.

Matteo developed a notation system called *Castanotation* to help the student learn the complex castanet rhythm patterns. Each of the basic elements described above has a symbol, for example a large dot for *Ti*. These symbols are grouped

within standard musical measures to describe the desired rhythmic pattern. It is very compact and easy to learn.

Matteo makes and sells castanets as well as the videos mentioned. They can be purchased from Matteo

More on Cliff Wood from Letter to Editor

Cliff has one and a half sets of bones. The half set, which he inherited from his Grandfather, has quite a history. In 1919 Cliff was still serving in the army, although his sight was even then severely affected by the gas attack at Arras the year before. He had refused to apply for a discharge on medical grounds, because he knew that would mean he would never get a job back in civilian life. In June 1919 he was stationed in Oberkastel on the Rhine. The Peace Treaty was finally signed that month, and his battalion was ordered to Bonn, about a day and a half's march up the Rhine. It was a boiling hot day, and as the battalion made its way, the soldiers began to flag from the heat and lose the step. Cliff stuck his hand into his pocket and came up with his ebony bones. Click clickety click he went, and the battalion duly picked up the step. The Colonel was up in front of the column on his horse, and he rode back down the column to find out what this clickety click was which had suddenly got his tired troops marching like good 'uns. Looking down from his horse he saw Cliff marching along with his rifle slung over his shoulder and his bones clicking away in his hands. It would be nice to record that the Colonel rewarded Cliff with a smile or a word of encouragement, but this was the British Army, First World War. The Colonel wheeled his horse round and cantered back to the head of the column without as much as a backward glance. That night as the company bivouacked in a deserted and ruinous old hotel, the order was given to 'Break out the rum.' Ironically, Cliff didn't get any. Because his sight wasn't too good he had been given the post of Permanent Orderly Corporal. That meant he didn't count as a fighting man, and so there was no rum for him,

no matter how much of an inspiration he had been on the march. To make things worse, as he slept that night a thieving Tommy rascal crept up and pinched a pair of his precious ivory bones from the pocket of his greatcoat. And that's why he only has half a set of ebony bones. The bones he plays now are made of wood. He found them a few years later in a music shop in England, and has kept them with him ever since.

Cliff now lives in Pocklington House, a home for elderly people with impaired sight. He celebrated his 101st birthday in March. Although he is 100% blind now, he refuses to carry a white stick (or a stick of any kind, for that matter.) From time to time he entertains the residents and staff with musical performances on the bones. He likes to accompany military marching music. Charlie Kunz, the pianist, is another favorite, and he can still get them going with his rhythm. *Louis van den Berg*

Need Buffalo Ribs to Make Bones

Several years ago a friend of mine in the state wildlife department came across the parched bones of a buffalo out on the Kansas prairie. He gathered up several of the bones and gave them to me to use in making rhythm bones, which I did. I made two pair with them, but still have enough bone left to make more.

If anybody out there has the sincere desire, the wherewithal, and the tools to turn these buffalo bones into rhythm bones, then I will give them to the first one who asks. No charge. Well, maybe you could throw in \$5 for postage. Contact Bill Rexroad, 300 Crescent Blvd., Hutchinson, KS 67502 or e-mail to rexroad1@webtv.net (be sure to put in the 1.)

Website of the Quarter

<http://histoire.org/antiquite/egypte/bastet/musique/musique4.html>. Egyptian music and percussion with a picture of Egyptian bones. Text in

The Legend of 'Mr. Bones'

(Done in rap style accompanied by the bones)

This is the legend of Mr. Bones,
Who rattled when history was carved in stones,
Down through the ages in ritual and play,
Elder teaches youth - I learned that way!

China and Egypt and later Rome,
Great Britain, America all were called home,
The Irish with one hand, the rest using two,
Playing reels and polkas, and bluegrass too.

The Minstrels added Mr. Tambourine,
In blackface they played with faces unseen,
And hundreds of thousands learned how to play,
Yet only a handful is left today.

Ole Mr. Bones is how he's known,
But he does have a real name of his own,
He's a minstrel, soldier, cowboy, physician,
Butcher, farmer, and working musician.

I hope you're enjoying my rhythm and rhyme,
The story's not over, but I'm near out of time,
Bones are for gals and I'll name just a few,
Ms Bones, Mrs Bones and Missy Bones too.

We've all joined together in a so-ci-e-ty,
To save rhythm bones for eternity,
So the first to the last of humanity on earth,
Hear the sound of the bones' ongoing rebirth.

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**Rhythm Bones Society memberships runs from
October through September of the following year.
It is time to renew your membership.
Please see the insert in the newsletter for details.**

Rhythm Bones Society

1060 Lower Brow Road
Signal Mountain, TN 37377-2910

Address Correction Requested