



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 8, No. 1 2006

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Executive Director's Column

What role do the bones have in music? Where does our little instrument fit in and become the missing piece in the musical puzzle? Or just the right spice added to the musical gumbo?

You might say that that depends on the music, on the nature of the music, or on the musical environment. You can play bones to almost any kind of music, and there are players who pride themselves in "being able" to play rock, Balkan, Jazz, or African Ju Ju music. Percy Danforth played with a string quartet, on occasion, and my good friend, John "Mr.Bones"Burrill, would play to cabaret music in the smoky bars of Cambridge, MA.

But where do they belong and how do they

enhance the music to bring the music to another level?

I think that depends on two things: the player and the listener. It's the players' sensitivity, approach, and skills that allow them to fit into the music, to give the music just the right musical lift. But it's the listener's perception of that, that makes it successful.

There's been a lot of talk on the rhythm bones discussion group about the role of bones playing in traditional Irish sessions, and how bone playing in general is viewed. Some have suggested that in any culture a newer instrument is accepted after a process of developing a true

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Everett Cowett—Our Founding Father

Everett "Ev" Cowett was born March 6, 1935. He was raised on a potato farm in northern Maine, an area known as "the county". The climate is frequently described as having 9 months of winter followed by 3 months of poor sledding. Winter sports activities kept everyone going in those days. Ev excelled in all major skiing events, downhill, slalom, jumping and x-country during high school and college at the University of Maine. After receiving a BS degree in Agronomy from Maine he attended Rutgers University where he was

awarded a PhD degree. His first professional assignment was professor of Agronomy at the University of New Hampshire. Life was good but when you live in ski country and cannot afford to ski a change is in order. He joined Geigy Chemical Company, a firm older than the USA and enjoyed 30 years doing Agricultural research and infrequent opportunities to play the bones.

Ev's first encounter with Rhythm Bones took

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Everett Cowett and his buffalo bones. Photograph by Joseph Rodriguez of Greensboro News & Record. Used with permission.

Editorial

I asked the Cowett kids to write the story of their dad and Dan Cowett wound up with the job. Ev is our founding father though some credit goes to Fred Edmunds (see Vol 5, No 3.) Ev served as our first Executive Director and retired from that job in 2004. He still serves on the Board. At Bones Fest IX, he was presented with a pair of real bones made by Tim Reilly, one scrimshawed with *Everett Cowett, Executive Director, R.B.S., 1999-2004* and the other with Ev's motto *May your bones be with you* (see Vol 7, No 3 for a photograph.) On behalf of our members, I say thanks, Ev.

Thanks to Russ Myers for the interesting article on the 1927 World Rattlebone Champion. I've researched the Seattle Bones Contest a bit, but have not found anything so far. Any one want to help?

Thanks also to member Robert McDowell who told us about the New Zealand photograph on page 5.

Jonathan Danforth has a preview of Bones Fest X along with the registration form for the event. Please complete and mail this form as soon as you can to help in the planning.

It is hard to believe that we are celebrating Bones Fest X. We have several new members who hopefully will attend and see this event for the first time. Won't they be amazed at the talent they will see and the fun they will have.

I am working on a short video to use to seek funding to professionally video this historic Fest. It would be great to see ourselves on national television. I wonder how many bones players we would find who thought they were the only bones players left.

Last but not least, thanks to Teri Davies for her thoughts on teaching bones to kids. Teri was one of those first time Bones Fest attendees last year and she has great praise for what she learned. Pass it on, members!

Letters to the Editor

Thanks for your kind comments and for your interest in my recordings.

The bones that I use when I record

with *Las Rubias Del Norte* and other artists are a two pair of rib bones; one is a rather heavy, short set of steer bones that I ordered from Lark In The Morning out in California, made by somebody in Texas. I tend to use those in the right hand. When played at a certain angle, they sound like wood blocks and have the most amazing tone. I'm not sure if that translated onto the recording, though we did have really good old microphones at our disposal, Neumann's with original tube power supply, I believe.

I do play wood bones, and many others. That fellow from Kansas, Tom James, whom you connected me with, sent me recently a pair of buffalo rib bones that he made himself. So you know how it goes, it's an endless quest for new sounds. *Greg Burrows* (See Greg's CD review on Page 3.)

Thanks Steve. Great to hear you're enjoying playing along with the CD. I love it! *Alasdair Fraser* [Note: I've often wondered how artists feel about bones players playing to their music. I played to Fraser and Haas' *Caliope Meets Frank* at Bones Fest IX, and afterwards told him about it in an email. This was his response. *Steve Wixson*]

I have not written an article on bones playing and I only cover it briefly in my book on improv as one of numerous topics to be covered with regard to minstrel show music.

When I was a child, spoon and sometimes bones playing was still featured in home entertainment, but I have not even seen spoon playing at parties since then, only in street busking. Aluminum is an interesting sound generator, we had a set of aluminum stroke roods or 'Moo' in the Experimental Music Studies Lab at La Trobe Uni where I taught until its closure.

Best wishes. *John Whitehead*
[John is from Australia. I asked him to write an article on 'Bones Down

Bones Calendar

Check out the Calendar on the rhythmbones.com website.

All-Ireland Bones Competition. May 1, 2006. See homepage.tinet.ie/

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

~fleadbythefeale/index.htm

Bones Fest X. July 28-30, 2006.

Hosted by Melissa and Jonathan Danforth. Details in the this newsletter, and see Page 3 for hotel information.

NTCMA and Bones Contest. August 28-September 3, 2006. 31st Annual Festival and Contests. Bones Contest on Saturday or Sunday of that week. For details go to

Website of the Quarter

www.smithsonianglobalsound.org/inscache.aspx. Smithsonian Global Sound website where you can search for a variety of music. For rhythm bones music select Idiophones, then clappers, then bones. You will get a list of songs from which you can listen to a sample or buy the music. Most of the entries are of old time blues artists Sonny Terry with his nephew, JC Burris, playing the bones. See Greg Burrows review on Page 3.

Review of the CD *Ain't Got Me No Home*

On a recent Google search, as part of my ongoing (i.e., lifelong) research project dedicated to finding more bones playing in recordings, film, and out on the street, I happened across the work of a master of the instrument whom I hadn't heard of before (though probably many RBS members know about this late, great bones player). Richard 'Mr. Bones' Thomas (1922-2002) was grew up in the Washington, DC area and remained there most of his life, and was part of a blues music scene centered around Archie's Barbershop, a place where Saturday afternoon jam sessions continue to this day (see www.acousticblues.com).

This CD was originally released in 1993. The artist is Michael Roach with bones player Richard 'Mr. Bones' Thomas and harmonica player Mike Baytop.

Ain't Got Me No Home features classic acoustic blues, solidly rooted in the African American tradition of the South and elsewhere. Michael Roach, a fine guitarist, songwriter and vocalist, harkens back to the classic sound of Brownie McGee and other folk blues masters. Mike Baytop deepens that link to tradition with his chugging and wailing sound on blues harmonica, weaving in and out of the guitar rhythm and enhancing the sound of Roach's guitar and voice.

Richard 'Mr. Bones' Thomas is featured on 3 of the record's 13 songs: *Take Me Back Blues*, *San Francisco Bay Blues*, and appropriately, *Backbone*. On all three songs, he achieves a shuffle groove that baffled me when I grabbed my bones and attempted to play along. Mixing a shuffle timekeeping foundation (think of the basic beat on, say, the song 'Just A Gigolo') with triplet roll fill-ins thrown in as part of a loose, improvisational style, Thomas makes it all sound so relaxed and easy. He provided great accompaniment that both propels the music and adds a spice, if you will—if you could isolate the bones 'track' it would be

(Continued on page 4)

Bones Fest X A Sneak Preview

We're very excited at the prospect of seeing you all at Bones Fest X here in New Bedford, Mass. New Bedford is a multicultural seaside city with lots of things to do and see if you're spending any extra time in the region. Once considered the "whaling capital of the world," New Bedford's rich maritime history is one obvious connection with bones-playing. Another less obvious but no less important bones connection is found in the musical traditions of the Irish and French-Canadian immigrants who worked the textile mills here after whaling died out. Finally, bones could once be heard in the minstrel and vaudeville shows that played regularly at the Zeiterion Theater, just a few blocks down the hill from our Fest location.

The Fest this year will be held at Gallery X, a cooperative art gallery in a restored Universalist church building. Both floors of the building are handicapped accessible, and the main room has a stage at one end. We think you'll like it, and anticipate a great time as usual, and much fun and bones-playing! Here are a few things to look forward to:

Live music! We'll have musicians from several bones-friendly traditions at the fest, including Irish, American Old-Time, and New England music.

Recorded music! We'll also have the means to play recorded music for those of you who've been practicing to a particular piece on tape or CD.

Workshops! While the exact list of workshops still needs to be finalized, some of the possibilities include bones-playing techniques, beginning bones playing, bones-making, scrimshaw, children's workshops, how to teach bones, bones history, playing bones with other musicians. Workshops begin at 3 pm on Friday afternoon.

Performances! As in past years, much of our time will be dedicated to letting us show each other our bones-playing on stage, and we'll be having a show open to the public on Saturday evening.

The registration form is enclosed

with this newsletter! (It is also available on the web site, www.rhythmbones.com). Please take a few minutes to fill it out and send it to us: *Melissa and Jonathan Danforth*, 43 Dewolf St., New Bedford, MA 02740 Hope to see you there!

BONES FEST X

New Bedford, MA
July 28-30, 2006

Book your hotel reservation early at Days Inn New Bedford
508-997-1231
Be sure to ask for the "BonesFest" special rate of \$89/night.

Don't forget to check the rhythmbones.com web site for details and updates.

Registration form enclosed

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

"Let us shake bones together!"
Moby Dick

Bones A Great Instrument A Great Lesson Plan

The first week in September ushered in a new school year for students and teachers alike. I suspect that both of these groups of individuals experience the same sense of reluctance after the Labor Day holiday is over. Students are forced to rise earlier than they would like, hand over their care-free summer days as well as their late-night hours. As for their educators, earlier morning hours and daily schedules to follow are generally no more attractive to them than they are for those placed in their care for 6 hours per day.

As a grammar school teacher, I had experienced a heightened sense of expectancy during those fading summer days. I wondered (worried?) about what changes may have occurred in my students over the course of 10 short weeks. Just like any teacher, I had many loose ends to tie up before the new school year began - I had the dreaded "lesson plan" to create! I'm one of the lucky ones though. I teach music and music is, by its very nature - fun and interesting. This year has been made quite a bit easier for me with addition of "Bones

Instruction" to my lesson plan.

Jim Lohmann of Dem Bones has supplied me with more than 100 sets of kid-size bones so far. I received a few samples in varying lengths and different wood types from Jim. After trying them out with the students for a couple of weeks, I decided on bones that were just under 7" in length and 1" in width. These seem to work well for all of the grade levels receiving bones instruction (2nd-8th grade). The cherry wood is a bit heavier than the pine, so I opted for the cherry bones. As Jim has set an affordable price tag of \$4.00 per set, many of my students have purchased bones of their own.

I am now into my 7th month of teaching the bones and it's going just great! There are so many reasons why the bones is one of my favorite instruments to teach. With them, a student learns simple through complex rhythms. Additionally, I am afforded the opportunity to integrate music with various subjects such as history, geography and world cultures. Best of all (albeit selfishly), I get to play the bones all day long! I do have one word of warning however - Yirly, watch out! I have a couple of students that are already experimenting with 4 bones in one hand!!! *Teri Davies - Music Instructor @ Trinity Catholic Academy & St. Thomas Aquinas School, Buffalo, NY*

[Editor note: After I saw Teri's photograph, I asked about her grip and here is her reply.] With regard to grip, I play with the stationary bone by my thumb (I reference it in class as "the thumb bone") and the other between middle and ring fingers - just as Mel Mercier says I should! His VHS instructional video was my only bones reference until I met you all at the Fest and I guess that's a habit I have a hard time deviating from. When I teach, I automatically use that grip and so do most of my students because of it I guess. I have noticed however, that the 'Yankee' grip seems to work better for children with smaller hands. If someone seems to be struggling with getting the bones to work for them, it then pops into my head to offer an alternate grip to try. Some of my students have come up with grip combinations that I wouldn't dream of and if it works for them, I let them have at it. If again, they're really having a hard time getting sound then I'll correct them to one of the two 'tried & true' grips. I should add here that my own daughter (she just turned 5) uses the 'Yankee' grip & mom had nothing to do with it - it just made sense to her and she can play just fine!

(CD Review—Continued from page 3)

fascinating to listen to his work by itself. Yet, it fits right into the groove of Roach's music. *Ain't Got Me No Home* is highly recommended for both fans of the bones and fans of the blues alike. *Greg Burrows*

[Previously reviewed related CDs include *Blues and Bones* with Richard Thomas on bones with Archie Edwards (Vol 2, No 2) and *Blues Professor* with JC Burris on bones and harmonica (Vol 3, No 4.) JC played bones on several CDs with Brownie McGee and his uncle Sonny Terry (Vol 3, No. 3.)]



From left to right, Teri Davies teaching rhythm bones to Mark Martinez, Kaitlyn Griffin, Ashley Trombolesi, Danny Podsiadlo and Tyler Conroy, 6th Grade, St. Thomas Aquinas School.

Tips and Techniques

Part 1 of 3: Care and Maintenance of Bones.

There are two main categories of bones: animal rib or shin bones and wooden bones.

Care of animal bones: For those who will try to make a set of animal bones, be patient as it takes at least nine months to cure newly acquired bone material. Typically you would select the large upper rib bones of a cow or steer. You do not know what you have until you have boiled the connective tissue and gristle enough for the bone to emerge. At that point it will be soft or bloody black or both. The bones must dry out and the end marrow drilled (without damaging the bone proper). That is a smelly process. Sun bleaching is best while this is going on, but keep the bones away from dogs and other meat eaters while the curing goes on. Do not use bleach to whiten the bones. Bleach makes the bones brittle and they will crack before they are cured. When the bones achieve a tawny or yellowish patina, they are cured. If the holding ends of the bones are wider than 1.25 inches, you will want to cut them to size with a band or hack saw. Typically a 1 inch width feels best. If the bone you selected is naturally just 1 inch or so, you will not need to cut them. Playing length is 6 to 7.25 inches. Cut bones will have one side with exposed marrow. Do not remove this marrow. Carefully give the cut area a light sanding and seal it with an epoxy (that is not sticky when dry). Do not let your newly cured bones get wet. Once in awhile give them a very light paste waxing. This will help the bone material hold the moisture level necessary to keep the bones from becoming brittle.

Care of wooden bones: Wooden bones come in a great variety of hardwoods and some softwoods. Most bones are made of white pine, cured, and painted. Many bones are made of walnut. More expensive bones are made from ebony, rosewood, ash, oak, rock maple, and birdseye maple. Birdseye maple is

popular because it is light weight and very hard. This gives it a pop/crack sound that goes particularly well with bluegrass. Bones that have not been painted or dipped need to have their fibers retain enough moisture to keep the bones from chipping or splitting. Oak bones, for example, respond well to having the flesh of a pine nut or hazelnut rubbed all around the ends of the bones, combined with a light waxing. Maple bones have tight fibers and respond well to a soaking in mineral oil about every 6 months. Mainly, you do not want to let your wooden bones get completely dry.

To keep bones from slipping out of your hands, use rosin on the area you grip, or on your hands. Do not throw or drop your bones or put them in a pocket you will sit on. If they break, all your effort will have been lost.

Walt Watkins

A Typical Discussion from the Yahoo Rhythmbones Group

If you are not tuning in to the discussions on Yahoo/rhythmbones, go to launch.groups.yahoo.com/group/rhythmbones/ and sign up. The following is a recent discussion to illustrate what's happening.

"Hi I'm a novice bones player and I'm going to Abbeyfeale for the festival and bones competition in May (as an observer only.) From the sounds of the complicated nuances of sessions, I think its safe to say I won't get to play at all (which is of course a major disappointment since that's why I wanted to go in the first place.) Here in the upper peninsula of Michigan, other musicians have been very generous with me. I jam with a group on Sundays at a coffeehouse (mostly bluegrass) and it's great. On the quiet songs I switch from ebony to pine bones and I never play my shin bones anymore because they are just too loud. Alas the non refundable tickets are bought and lodging reservations made—maybe I'll just have to enjoy the non bones things that Ireland has to offer ." *Gail*

"Hi Gail. As you probably know

I've been to Abbeyfeale three times and played at a few sessions there. I have had some exceptional times, and some not so good times. I was very accepted and seemed well liked at some sessions, and spoken to very sharply at one in particular. Yirry Machar tells a story of someone shouting across the session at him, "No Bones!" but later apologizing for it.

I will say that to an extent the sessions at Fleadh's might be a little different than your weekly session which has many of the same folks each time. That's not to say it can't be a bit complicated. Some of those sessions were so crowded I couldn't play because I couldn't raise my hands up far enough. There were some relatively quiet sessions, and quite loud raucous sessions. I found that I often listened for the sound of the bones before going into a pub, and would join some bones players who were playing, and each of us would take a turn playing the tune while the others listened. I had some of my best moments like that, with Dave Murphy and Paddy Donovan, each one of us taking a turn while the others listened, long into the night and morning. At each competition there are at least a few less inexperienced players, but everybody competed, and hopefully had fun.

Mel Mercier makes some good points—not everyone in Ireland is aware of the bones. I can remember talking to someone last year at the Fleadh who had come all the way from Vancouver, BC and didn't even know there was a bones competition there. If I were you I would connect with the festival organizers Maureen Murphy, Dan Murphy, Anne Marie Dennison and explain your situation to them. They may have a suggestion of which sessions might be more bone friendly, or help you to hook up with other bones players who might take you under their wing. Rules of thumb, don't play at the same time when other bones players are playing. My first year a relative newcomer would play along with Sport Murphy and I thought he was going to kill her. Hey enjoy yourself, its an amazing place, great music, good fun, wonderful

1927 Rattlebone Champion of the World

E. J. (Bones) Jensen, who claims he is the undefeated rattle-bone champion of the world, celebrated his sixty-sixth birthday here Wednesday. Jensen, of 724 Second Ave., gave an exhibition of rattling the bones Wednesday night at the Rainbow Club, 407 Fifth Ave.

"There's not much demand for rattlebone men these days," he said. "I'm a landscape gardener now. But I'm the undefeated rattlebone champion of the world. I beat the champ, Robert Wingate, at Seattle, Wash., in 1927." Jensen said several judges decided the contest on the 'basics of rhythm.'

Ebony wood. "I use four four-ounce bones made from ebony wood," Jensen said. "They're about 7 inches long.

I used to make \$375 a week in vaudeville. I was in a movie, too. I played a gypsy in the movie, *When Night Must Fall!*

I started out rattling the bones when I was about 12 years old. I used some old beef ribs. It was quite popular then. I'm no amateur. The bones are sort of a lost art." Jensen in his played the bones while wearing boxing gloves. This earned him place in Robert L Ripley's cartoon *Believe It or Not* in 1936 (see p right.)

Born in Norway, Jensen came to this country in 1900. He served the American expeditionary force 1917-18 in Siberia.

"I'm looking forward to landscaping this spring, but if rattling ever come back in style ready," he said.

[This newspaper article was to me by a fraternity brother at Washington & Lee University, received his hometown paper in mail, and the best I can come up is that this article appeared in a Moines, Iowa paper in 1954. R Myers]

(Executive Director—Continued from page 1)

identity and working toward acceptance with in the music community. You can see this with the development of the Accordion and other additions to the musical community.

But how can an instrument which has been around for literally thousands of years be considered 'new' to the culture? Although the bones have been around for thousands of years, I think they have really only been played and accepted within smaller communities.

The minstrel show paved the way for bones across the American musical landscape over the last 160 years, and has allowed the bones to find their way into a number of musical genres.

And we see today the musical envelope being expanded by some of our very own players. Kenny Wolin and Bill Vits with their respective orchestra and band, Spike Bones with Bones on Jazz, Mel Mercier with Michael O Suilleabhain, and Barry Patton playing Bluegrass with his uncle Byron Berline. All of these players have the skills, sensitivity, and approach to make the bones work in their respective musics. So where do the bones fit in—you the player can

Frank 'Grizzly' Metcalf

I read Steve Brown's last quarter article on Benoit Bourque and noted that Benoit mentioned Frank' Grizzly' Metcalf. I remembered that name from Beth Lenz' master thesis titled *The Bones in the US: History and Performance Practice*. He was one of several rhythm bones players whose style she analyzed in detail.

Quoting from Beth's thesis, "Metcalf's style is based on duple rhythms, rather than the triplet. The basis of his style is a rhythm he calls 'the Grizzly shuffle.'" She describes this as a rhythmically altered triplet where the either the first note is a quarter note and the second and third are 16th notes or the first and second are 16th notes and the third is a quarter note. She suggests practicing playing a straight triplet, then the first and then the second at the same tempo.

Benoit mentioned that Frank lived in Vancouver and it was easy to find his telephone number on the internet.

Franks was a delight to talk to. He said he developed his style for playing reels.

Frank's favorite bones are moose bones as they are perfectly shaped for playing even though this is a big animal. The best, he says, come from middle aged females.

One of the things that Beth mentioned in her thesis was Frank added a microphone (actually a Barcus-Berry pickup) and amplifier to his bones. He put a rubber band around the bones to muffle the sound. He plays two distinct sounds, the muffled one and another that sounded like a conga drum by playing on the edge of the bones. He was on a Canadian television program sort of like *What is Your Secret*, and Frank's was that he played the electric moose bones.

He played bones and spoons at the same time. He learned spoons from a traveling French Canadian troupe.

For the last seven years, he is concentrating on fiddle and banjo. In the 1980's he was playing harmonica and bones.

He was an arctic archeologist living in Yellowknife, NT, Canada when Beth wrote her thesis. *Steve Wixson*



This cartoon of EJ 'Bones' Jensen appeared in newspapers on January 26, 1936 Copyright 2006 by Ripley Entertainment, Inc..

(Ev Cowett—Continued from page 1)

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. The sound was 'out of this world,' a simple click-a-de-click, click-a-de-click, click-a-de-click-click-a-de-click-a-de-click. 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. Ev had to find out how two little pieces of wood could make such a captivating sound. He learned to click them very quickly with one hand. This proved to be a problem later on when he tried to play with both hands. The right hand was so dominant that the left hand was left out. Because of this experience Ev always teaches beginners to use both hands from the start. It is easier and more fun.

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 that the sound depended upon where the tip of the movable bone struck the stationary one. It was apparent that the diameter of the middle finger was important too. All of this suggests that if you want the best sound that you should use custom made bones that fit your hands and fingers. Forget that Ev says, just move the bones you have around

in your hands (called tuning) until you find a position and sound that you like and play whatever you want.

Ev's first public appearance as a bones player took place in his high school gymnasium/auditorium in 1950. The school held a kind of amateur night function where Edna Rand and Ester Page sang *Dry Bones* and Ev played along on bones. He does not recall much about it except that someone tried to beat him up that night.

Shortly after this Ev's mom purchased him a set of the now famous Joe Birl black Rhythm Bones. Ev played these bones until they were stolen in the early 1990's. The loss of these bones and the search for replacements lead to a whole new life for the entire Cowett family. Music stores had never heard of rhythm bones. The internet was silent on the subject except for a definition that said they were idiophones, a poor choice of words Ev thought although by now he had some doubts.

Elaine Conner came to the rescue. She thought that this instrument should be preserved and contacted Arlo Lasson, a local TV personality who hosted a program called Crossing Carolina with Arlo Lasson. Lasson arranged for Ev to appear on his program and within a few weeks Dr. Fred Edmunds, a retired MD and bones player from VA called. What a surprise. Ev had never met another bones player until then. Likewise Fred thought that he was the only bones player left on the planet. They got together at Fred's home in Lexington VA and shared their experiences.

Fred's wildest dream was to hold a bones convention with 100-200 bones players. Ev's was to have 25 bones players meet with 50 Rockettes at Radio City Music Hall and enjoy a fine after noon of clicking and dancing. They compromised and held Bones Fest I in Greensboro NC in September 1997 with 11 serious bones players from Maine to Texas. This has become an annual international event.

Every family member has given Ev full support and became active in the promotion of bones playing. Martha gave Ev a bones player web page for Christmas in 1997 (now

rhythmbones.com). Dan has been sound man since Bones Fest I, and Al was MC of each event except Bones Fest V when weather interrupted his travel schedule, John and Tommy have participated in most every Fest as bones players. Val has been a behind the scenes operative throughout. She also plays the bones when no one is listening or watching. Two grandchildren, Ramsey and Rioux Cowett, are bones players.

As children growing up, my brothers and sister took bones playing for granted as our father played all the time and encouraged us to play as well. We learned on the plastic bones at an early age and basically put them down until dad started getting serious about meeting new bones players in the 1990's. The whole thing opened up when Bones Fest came to light – and here we are now – thousands of players strong from all over the world – communicating with each other, playing and competing, and having a great time sharing new techniques.

Dan Cowett

Recorded Bones Music

On the Road Again by the Possum Ridge String Band with our own Russ Myers on bones. The other instruments include guitar, whistles, fiddle, banjo, mandolin, hammered dulcimer (the primary instrument), autoharp and voice. This is a good group and the music is fun There is also some bones history. I asked Russ about the CD and here is what he said.

"Not all the musicians in our group are on all of the tracks. My bones playing appears on ten of them [there are 31 tracks.] It's hard to believe but the personnel at the studio had not heard of the bones, so I was prevailed upon to give some insight into the matter. I did not realize these were being recorded and then incorporated into the CD (track nos. 4, 11, 18 and 26.)

Our group is non-profit, so all revenues after recording costs will be donated to local charities.

I would appreciate anyone interested in a CD send a check for \$15 to me *Russ Myers*, P.O. Box 43, Brightwood, VA 22715."



Flaxmill workers from New Zealand, circa 1906. Note the rhythm bones player seated on right side of the photograph. From Tasman Bays Heritage Trust/Nelson Provincial Museum, Tyree Studio Collection, 177650/3. Used with permission.

Rhythm Bones Society

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Address Correction Requested