



# Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

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## Executive Director's Column

Winter has always been, for me, a bit isolating, and low energy. Settling in by the fire, dreaming of the coming festivals, and Bones Fest when we can get together and rattle the bones!

Well somewhere between a world pandemic, and a national election, we've been living like winter for what seems like months. We try and soldier on through our own trials and tribulations, through uncertainty, and with the hope that the vaccine will bring relief.

For many years this has been a time for me to plan my annual trip to Ireland to compete or judge the All Ireland Bone Playing Championship in Abbeyfeale

Ireland. The prospect of seeing old friends in the friendly confines of Abbeyfeale, my favorite bed and breakfast Park Lodge, and the many pubs has meant so much to me over the years.

However, things have changed over here in the US, and unfortunately for Ireland too. Pubs and restaurants are locked down, St.Patrick's Day festivities cancelled, and the return of sessions uncertain.

But wait! There is , on the horizon, a glimmer of hope that presents the continuation of a great tradition for bones players. In the true spirit of  
(Continued on Page 2)

## Jonathan Danforth

Jonathan Danforth in his own words.

"My grandfather is Percy Danforth who a lot of people know as a teacher or have seen his instruction video. He taught me when I as just a little kid, probably four or five or so. I never did much with them, but I could do the clack or the triplet. Most folks in my family really didn't do a lot with them - it was granddad's thing and we were real proud of him.

Around 1997 I came across a website, *Rhythm Bones Central*, that was put together by Martha Cowett as a birthday present for her dad, Everett Cowett. I was really impressed because one of the things you find in common with rhythm bones players is "I thought I was the only one until I met all these people." I knew there were some other people, but the idea of a gathering of people was pretty exciting.

"Many years ago I was at the New England Folk Festival and I saw there was someone doing a workshop on rhythm bones. I was kind of thrown cause that is kind of weird. I went to the workshop and Steve Brown was leading it. He was very happy to meet me because he considers Percy as one of his teachers as well. He was excited to meet me even though I was not 'great shakes' as a rhythm bones player, but I get by. I learned a lot from him and found out about the Society and that it was connected to this website that I discovered years earlier. And it's been all down-hill since.

"I went to Bones Fest V which Steve Brown hosted, and I have been to most every Bones Fest

since then. I have become more involved with the Society."

Indeed he has! In 2002 he took over as webmaster and served until 2014. In 2005 he was elected to the Board of Directors and served until 2014. In 2006 he and his wife Melissa hosted Bones Fest X in New Bedford, Massachusetts, and it had the largest attendance of any Bones Fest. The group photograph from that Fest is the signature photograph of the Rhythm Bones Society.

As appreciated as all that is, maybe his most appreciated contributions are at Bones Fests when he will graciously provides background fiddle music for anyone who ask him. At his first Bones Fest, he jammed, but starting with his next Fest, he provided lots of backup music.  
(Continued on Page 3)



Jonathan Danforth from his Bones Fest XXIV Workshop

## Editorial

I also mourn the passing of Joy Watkins (see Mitch Boss' Letter to the Editor). She joined RBS after Walt passed, and was a member at the time of her death.

This is kind of a special issue in that it is about Jonathan Danforth, the father of rhythm bones legend Percy Danforths' great grandson, Emmet. I am embarrassed that it took all these years for him to be profiled. His contributions to RBS include being a Board member, RBS webmaster, host with his wife, Melissa, of Bones Fest X, musician at most all of the Bones Fests, and author of several newsletter articles. AND in this issue, his fantastic workshop at Virtual Bones Fest XXIV titled *Bones in Space and Time* has been captured to share with the rhythm bones community. Jonathan, many thanks for this yeoman's work.

## Letter to the Editor

Walt Watkin's daughter, Jennifer Korjas, called me to let me know her mom Joy Watkins died on 13th of January 2021. Joy would have been 89 years old on the 16th. Rhythm bones old timers will remember Walt Watkins. He started the pass around that is a must do at all Bones Fests. Walt and I liked to play a tune together at Fests. Our wives Joy and Annette hung out together. We kept up with Joy after Walt passed away. We will miss her. *Mitch Boss.*

## Bones Calendar

**NEFFA, 2021**, with Steve Brown's Rhythm Bones Workshop. **Canceled**

**All Ireland Bones Competition**, May 2, 2021, Abbeyfeale, Ireland. Virtual this year. Read about it in Steve Brown's Editorial.

**Bones Fest XXV**. 2021, Washington DC area. Check our website to see if Bones Fest XXV, the Silver Anniversary of Bones Fests, is In-Person or Virtual.

**NTCMA Festival**, 2021, No information available.

### (Exec Director continued from Page 1)

innovation, and a sign of the times, the All Ireland Bone Playing Championship is going virtual! For the first time ever, in any bone playing contest, participants will be able to perform and be judged virtually. The Fleadh By the Feale organizing committee has announced that 10 competitors from Ireland, and 10 International competitors will be selected to compete in the senior section. In addition they are seeking competitors under 18 to also compete in the Junior section. Numbers of people have approached me about competing, but the expense of time and money have represented too much of an obstacle to overcome.

Well here is your chance! Competitors will need to submit a recording of two traditional Irish tunes, and a short introductory video to Martin O'Donohue before March 31 to gain entrance into the contest. Admissions should be submitted to [martin\\_fleadhbythefeale2019@gmail.com](mailto:martin_fleadhbythefeale2019@gmail.com). Competitors will be chosen based on the tapes, and the contest will be streamed on Fleadh By the Feale Facebook page Sunday May 2, 2021. Results will be live on the page.

All questions and inquiries can be submitted to Martin O'Donohue at [fleadhbythefeale2019@gmail.com](mailto:fleadhbythefeale2019@gmail.com). Imagine, a chance to become All Ireland Champion with out ever leaving your living room!

Hard to believe that it was 20 years ago at the New England Folk Festival that I first ran into Jonathan Danforth, my mentor Percy Danforth's grandson. Words can't describe the great pleasure I have from being friends with Jonathan over the years. Also hard to believe is that we haven't profiled him in the newsletter, though he has contributed to RBS in so many ways. Well this issue will end that oversight, and bring into focus his amazing work. Included is his amazing workshop from Virtual Bones Fest XXIV. Thank you Jonathan!

As we look toward the summer, and the possibility of an in person Bones Fest we realize this remains an uncertainty. Although it would seem hopeful that with the vaccine, and continued mask wearing and social distancing that we might return to more normal activity,

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Rhythm Bones Central web site: [rhythmbones.org](http://rhythmbones.org)

only time will tell if this is realistic.

Therefore, stay tuned to these pages for further information. Based on the success of the virtual Bones Fest last year, it would seem likely that it will be repeated for 2021. Thanks to the Board for their hard work in producing last years Fest. And a happy St. Patrick's Day, many socially distanced pints to you, and a few tunes at a virtual session!  
*Steve Brown*

### (Danforth continued from Page 1)

His Bones Fest performances are unique. When he goes up, he whistles and plays his rhythm bones. It is almost a meditation.

Board Member Sharon Mescher looks at Jonathan's Bones Fest playing this way. "One of the talented musicians that I always look forward to is Jonathan Danforth. For me, when he performs, he brings calm and peacefulness, even if for a short time. During his performance, I bask in the silent, calm, quiet that is

all around us. Thank you, Jonathan, for these memorable, fleeting moments.”

Jonathan continues to be a part of Steve Brown’s NEFFA rhythm bones workshop by playing and teaching. One of the highlights was Jonathan and Rob Rudin marching in playing bones in unison and Jonathan switching to fiddle and using his rhythm bones like a bow,

His band, The Jethros, are something of a South-Coast secret, a cult favorite. Jethros’ music smacks of Memphis, New Orleans, and Nashville, with some Guadalajara, Paris, and Podolia thrown in for good measure. This unusual lineup, combined with the catchy, dance-able, and thought-provoking songs have helped the Jethros become a sought-after and well-recognized act on the South Coast. Jonathan does play rhythm bones as his band/stage name is Boney Jethro.

“There is a song that the trombone player in my band wrote specifically to highlight rhythm bones (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UV-NopVYJCY>). It’s kind of too bad the intro was cut out which gets zanier every time we play it and makes it nearly impossible for me to keep a straight face when we do the song.

“It involves the trombonist these days going on at length about how I don’t only cycling shorts, carefully select a Bowie knife, and take down a buffalo after riding it down, in order to craft the rhythm bones which I’m about to play (which are usually, in fact, the buffalo ribs I got from Steve Brown), using all parts of the animal and donating the extra meat to orphanages. All this while I do qua-si-bones-playing-calisthenics in order not to bust up laughing. Any way I think the song is great.”

Being the grandson of Percy, he teaches rhythm bones at Bones Fests and elsewhere. “I participated in my very first official rhythm bones-playing workshop for children which was sponsored by the Acushnet Heights Neighborhood. Before I went, I picked Constance Cook’s brain for teaching tips (knowing I was supposed to take her place teaching a children’s workshop).”

By the way, Jonathan’s college degree is in Musicolinguistics, an interdisciplinary branch of cognitive science in which music, psychology and cognitive / generative linguistics overlap.

Board Member Bill Vits notes, “Jon-

athon Danforth is one of the calmest rhythm bones players you’ll ever meet. He is not about the flash and fireworks that impresses novices. He learned the basics as a child but didn’t ever intend to upstage his legendary grandfather who taught so many of us how to play. Instead he developed his musical skills (as a fiddler, vocalist, whistler) which then brought him back to rhythm bones.

“His approach is much older than his physical being and he has an intellectual calm that educates and inspires. At many Bones Fests you could hear a pin drop when he performed as Jonathon knows the value of space and silence. Percy Danforth would be so proud of Jonathon’s diversity as a musician and an ambassador of rhythm bones.

“Our organization is a Family Tree of rhythm bones players who can trace their roots to a handful of individuals. When I meet someone who also learned from Percy, one of the first things I brag about is that I know his grandson who is also a wonderful performer. The family tree continues to grow as rhythm bones playing becomes more diverse and international thanks to social media and the Internet. We are grateful for Jonathon being an eclectic performer and loving husband/father of maybe another rhythm bones playing Danforth?”

Board Member Kenny Wolin notes, “Jonathan’s playing has always stood out to me, especially at our Bone Fests, because of his contemplative and gentle approach to this instrument. Rhythm bones have a naturally bright, hard and crisp sound, and inherently great for fast rhythmic accompaniment, and yet Jonathan has a way of creating a very legato timbre to beautifully and hauntingly match his whistling performances. Coupled with his flutter technique of inverting rhythm bones and holding them from the center (fingers straight out), he’s made me rethink our instrument as more than just a limited mono-tonal rhythm machine, and more of a solo instrument in its own right. As far as “rhythm bones” innovators are, Jonathan is high on my list.

His uncle Malcolm “Mac” Danforth inherited a treasure box of Percy’s memorabilia: clippings, pictures, drawings and awards that Percy had received. One article quoted Fran, Percy’s wife, saying,

## Virtual All-Ireland Bones Competition

Looking for adult as well as bones players under the age of 18 to participate in the virtual All Ireland Senior and Junior Bone Playing Competition. At this time they are particularly in need of junior competitors, and all entries will be accepted. Do you love the jigs and reels? Can’t stop taping along to a polka? Does the prospect of playing along to a march or barn-dance excite your bones? This could be your chance!

Contact Martin O’Donohue  
[fleadhbythefeale2019@gmail.com](mailto:fleadhbythefeale2019@gmail.com)

“Percy is a musician like a bird is...but I’m a trained musician.” Mac gave this treasure trove to Jonathan.

Jonathan concludes, “If I were going to characterize a rhythm bones player including myself, I would say rhythm bones players love to have fun with their music. They typically take their music more seriously than they take themselves. I think we enjoy admiring each other more than ourselves. You will see everyone patting each other on the back not only because there are so many varieties of styles being played and so many superb players, but everyone is so encouraging to players who maybe haven’t come so far. And that is doubly important because the future of the instrument depends on new people learning it.

“The discovery of a community — which is what this really is, almost a family like community — brings a lot of joy into an instrument that I already loved a lot through my own family connection.” *Steve Wixson*

# Bones Through Space and Time

[An edited transcription of Jonathan Danforth's Workshop at Virtual Bones Fest XXIV.]

I am going to talk the about rhythm bones and how they spread, what they are, and then how we think about them. It is going to be more of a thinking session than a playing session.

I want to do something more than just the history of rhythm bones. We like to talk about how rhythm bones go back 3000 years, and how we sort of are a part of this continuing tradition of rattling. That sense of continuity is part of what I want to talk about.

**Connection** - How does playing rhythm bones make you feel?

I feel a connection with something **old!**

I feel a connection with something **exotic!**

I feel a connection with other rhythm bones **players!**

Cultural Diffusion



These are some important ideas that deal with how cultural artifacts track from people to people. Humans are complicated and do stuff for many different reasons, but every single culture in the world has music in the sense that they have pattern sound which is not a language, but usually has repeated patterns of some kind, and more specifically there is a lot of variety of what humans consider music. But ideas spread because humans spread. Humans call to each other and show each other stuff. Then they listen to each other.

So when we talk about how old rhythm bones are and how wide spread rhythm bones are, what we are talking about is the idea of these two pieces of material in one hand clacking together. This has been traded around between humans as an idea, and how we talk about that

depending on how we define rhythm bones. We already said all humans have music, and there is a lot of evidence for that. Nobody has come across people that didn't have some kind of music.

**How to Define Rhythm Bones**  
**Instrument**  
**Idiophone (shape)**  
**Concussion Idiophones (technique)**  
**Plaque Concussion Idiophones (shape)**  
**Stick Concussion Idiophones (shape)**  
**Two in one hand (hold)**  
**Between the fingers (hold)**  
**Long end pointed down toward the wrist (hold)**  
**Triplet as a rhythmic element (technique)**

Back in the 1800s when Europeans were starting to get interested in other people, even if it was in a colonial way, these two guys named Sachs and Hornbostel decided they were going to classify all the different musical instruments in the world. People still use this system called the Sachs-Hornbostel Classification System

They divided all instruments into four groups; strings, wind instruments where just the air is vibrating, membrane Idiophones where there is a thin sheet vibrating like a drum, Idiophones where there is a three dimensional something that is vibrating and when we play rhythm bones, these are Idiophones.

Within Idiophones these guys thought there are Idiophones that you hit something that vibrates with something else like a stick - think of someone hitting a cymbal with a drum stick. The thing that is vibrating is different from what you are holding in your hand - the stick.

But with rhythm bones there are two identical things or nearly identical things being hit against each other and they call those Concussion Idiophones - two like things hitting each other and vibrating.

After that they classified things by the shape of the thing being hit. They got into plaque Idiophones and stick Idiophones. Geometry is fairly precise, but humans are not so you can classify rhythm bones however you like.

Now there are a lot of things in the world that are two single things being hit together. If you think of the clave where

two cylinders made of wood are being hit against each other, but you are holding one in the left hand and one in the right hand and that's a little different from rhythm bones. It's different enough that we don't really think of those as being rhythm bones.

So one of the ways I think of the history of rhythm bones and instruments that are "like the bones" is we are holding two things in one hand and within that I think of the bones as between the fingers. We are not holding one in the palm and one some other way. We are sticking two long things between the fingers. The long end is pointed toward the wrist and I say that knowing that some of us play with one pointed up and one pointed down. But the canonical way is with one pointed down toward your arm.

And finally I think that the one thing that makes rhythm bones rhythm bones and different from other clappers is that we have triplets. That is a consequence as to how we hold them and how we move our arms. But there is this whole spectrum of precision between instruments at the most general end and something we do a triplet with at the specific end.

There are a lot of things you can hold in one hand and there are a lot of ways you can hold them. I want to look at several of these because there are a lot of amazing things, a lot of amazing instruments around the world and through time which are like rhythm bones even if they are not rhythm bones. I think there is a lot of inspiration to be taken from some of these grips and some of these techniques that we might be able to leverage in rhythm bones.

**Lozhki: A in palm, B between fingers, squeeze.**



There is one stick between the fingers, but the other one is being held against the palm. In the Russian sphere of influence; Russia Ukraine, Belarus and I don't know if these are played in Poland, the Russian word for this is Lozhki. You

could think of them as being played a little like castanets because there us a sound if a hand squeezing motion brings one spoon against another. A lot of players bring in a third spoon which can hit the other two.

**Castanets: A in palm, B pressed by fingers, squeeze.**



Speaking of hand squeezing motion, here's an instance where you have one piece held against the palm and the other being pressed towards it by the fingers.

Castanets have a really long history and in Spain there is a lot of overlap sort of conceptually between castanets and what we think of as rhythm bones, and as a folk instrument there is a lot of overlap as to how they been used historically. My understanding from reading is that a lot of the time when people play what we would consider rhythm bones they just get called castanets.

**Ghashogak, Zils: A on thumb, B on finger or fingers, pinch.**



Here is another way to hold them together. One on the thumb and one on the finger. Ghashogak are medieval, and I think have a modern decedent which is a little hard to tell from just reading from the Internet. But this is a medieval renaissance picture of them. Zils are pretty close related even though they are round.

**'ili 'ili: A between thumb and index finger, B in remaining fingers, squeeze.**

In Hawaii they use stones where one is between the thumb and forefinger and the other is resting on the fingers and you bring your fingers up a little like casta-



nets and you hit the other stone.

**Khartaal. A between thumb and hand, B in remaining fingers, squeeze.**



We like to talk about this as having an effect really similar to rhythm bones but the hold is quite different as you can see. One stick is being held sort of against the heel of the thumb and the other one is being brought up to hit with the remaining finger.

**Egyptian Clappers: A between thumb and hand, B in remaining fingers, Squeeze.**



This is a picture of some ancient Egyptian clappers that seem to look a lot like Khartaal, but holding them in the middle. If you are looking at the way people are holding the sticks where they are pointing up - if you try to play rhythm bones upside down with the long end pointing straight up in the air, you can sort of do it and I encourage you to try, but it is hard. The way we play rhythm bones relies to a certain extent on gravity pulling the loose bone down and into the tight bone. I think these are probably and usually played with the long ends pointing up.

You kind of press these together with your thumb something a little like Khartaal or a little bit like the Greek Krotola which were hinged at one end.

**Krotola/Crotola, Sumerian clappers maybe: A held in fingers, B tied or hinged to A, squeeze.**

krotola, sumerian clappers maybe?



You sort of press these together with your thumb and your finger and they make a ckack.

The Greeks have these and the Romans got them from the Greeks. All of these are like rhythm bones but not exactly like rhythm bones. And you could not do a triplet with these.

**Various clappers in China (and Korea, Vietnam, etc), (pai ban, kuai ban, etc.)**



There are a lot of clappers in Asia mostly in the historical Chinese sphere of influence, and some of them are even are played with a swinging motion of the arm - to swing one into the other. Although as far as I can understand even if you can do a triplet, the tradition of playing these in China does not involve triplets as we know them. But here again you have two pieces hit together usually with the long ends pointing down - so a little more like rhythm bones

**Orchestral whip: A held in fingers, B tied or hinged to A, swing/tap.**

Here is another set of hinged clappers used for special effects in classical orchestras or movie orchestras. If you hear the popular song on the radio that is pretty often played around Christmas time in

trial whip



the United States, there is a that has one of these in it. The sleigh ride song.

**Spoons: A between two fingers, B between two fingers, push/hit.**



Here is another concussion Idiophone that a lot of you are familiar with, but it is pointed the other way. There is not swing involved as much of hitting one against the other.

**Rhythm Bones: A between two fingers, B between two fingers, swing.**

It's like a salted (and cross fingers)



And of course our old friend. I picked Dom Flemons because he was the first link in a Google search for rhythm bones players. And I stuck a pair of Chleferly from Switzerland because they are played exactly like rhythm bones and probably derived from rhythm bones. They have a little different shape which is kind of interesting.

This is an instrument that was very wide spread though out Europe in medieval Europe and it left decedents in all kinds of places across Europe including Switzerland.

And the shape varies. If you look at what people played in Spain versus played in Brittany versus played in

England or wherever, the shapes vary but the idea and technique are similar enough. None of the references to these instruments go back further than medieval Europe in the strictest sense of having two plaques being held long ends downward, between the fingers with the triplet. It does not mean they could not be older per the available evidence

Almost all of these instruments are possible to find on YouTube if you do some searching to see how they are played.

### Identity and Exoticism (and Racism)



things spread because people like to keep things the same, and things like people like to have things different.

Next I want to talk about how musical ideas spread and why things get sort of catchy. Millions and millions of dollars get spent on what makes a piece of music catchy and there is a whole advertising industry that is partly based on that.

But how tools get spread from culture to culture is sort of dependent on a couple of things. One is actual culture movement like people move around, and ideas move with people. So that is one part.

You are going to see in a minute that there are instruments that spread as people spread. One totally irrelevant example of this is bowed string instrument - think violin and fiddle and all of the relatives across the world. As far as anyone can tell the idea of bowing strings started in central Asia and spread both to the east to China and Japan and southeast Asia and to the west to the middle East and Europe, and to the South to South Asia, India, and Pakistan.

As the people like the Huns and the Mongrels and various nomadic people ever so often would conquer these other areas, they brought instruments with them. It is very easy to associate sort of a timeline, like bowed instruments did not appear in Europe until after central Asian people made incursion and conquered places in Europe. And so it is very easy

to associate that movement of humans with the movement of this musical tool.

There are a couple of conceptual things going on that I want to mention because they relate to the questions I asked at the beginning. The thing that we do as people is relate to our identity. And if we think of ourselves as, I'll pick an example, Irish or a Southerner in the United States or a folk musician or any of these other cultural identities that we might associate with rhythm bones playing, they reinforce that sense of - this is who I am and I am expressing that by playing this instrument and that tends to let instruments stay the same and travel with people as people move around.

Oh! I was Scottish but I played rhythm bones, but now my landlord kicked me out of the country and I am moving to New Zealand which is a thing that happened quite a bit. So rhythm bones traveled to New Zealand with these Scottish and Irish exiles because they brought their own lives and identities with them.

The other thing that happens is music is a pattern and humans love to break patterns as much as they to keep patterns. We see this in all kinds of examples of how music spreads. The upper class takes on some style that previously was just music of the poor people, or the established population takes on some musical habit that was sort of an outsider phenomenon until someone realized that it was interesting because it was new. So these two things that seem to contrast are both really important when we look at how instruments spread around and how music spread around. That is going to matter later when the minstrel show, which was a world wide musical phenomenon, for better and for worse, appears.

#### A Few Patterns that have Spread

##### 1. Bamboo Clappers

China has the Oldest examples to Japan, Korea Vietnam and their Communities worldwide

##### 2. Krotala

Greece (and maybe Egypt) have the oldest examples to Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman

China has a very old established art music tradition and part of that tradition is clappers made of wood, made of bamboo and other things.

As China conquered other places, it had economical and cultural influence in places around it, and some of these instruments spread around. There are a lot of places that have clappers that are pretty easily traceable to the point where China conquered that place.

Krotalas are a similar thing There are some Greek hieroglyphics showing clappers with the hands on them, and those might have been played like these too. It is a little hard to tell how those were played.

But there are a lot of Greek illustrations of how these were played. And it is pretty clear the Romans played them in a similar way, and the Byzantine Empire had the same instrument played in the same way. And so did the Ottoman Empire.

Now you are all the way up to the 1800s. So that instrument really did have a spread of two thousand years, probably closer to three thousand years.

**Oldest direct evidence for hold + triplet seems to be medieval Europe**  
**European Renaissance: France, Spain, Germany, Poland, England**  
**English/Scottish/Irish colonial spread: U.S., Canada, Australia, N.Z.**  
**U.S. Minstrel Shows: Worldwide Phenomenon**  
**Rebirth in places in Australia and U. K.**  
**New spread to Africa and Asia with colonial cultural influence**  
**New spread with maritime commerce**  
**French Colonial spread: Quebec**  
**Combined 20th Century rebirth with focus on musical traditions**

And you have rhythm bones, and this is the very restricted sense of long things pointed down with the triplet. There is no real depiction that I am aware of for this strictest sense of rhythm bones before medieval Europe.

Now my personal opinion is that people have been hitting things together for probably as long as we have had fingers. So I am sure that somebody has played

rhythm bones before that. But in terms of the evidence that we have we do not really have much showing rhythm bones as we play them today before medieval Europe.

At that point there are references in writing and pictures especially from the renaissance all across Europe, and not just in the Roman Empire but across a much wider sphere places like Ireland and Scandinavia and eastern Europe. And because the evidence does not go back a lot before then, it is not 100% clear how or why they traveled.

The musical practices at the time involved traveling musicians - what we think of as jongleur or minstrels or things like that. So there is some possibility that is how they spread. But it is hard to tell.

The next biggest difference in the spread of rhythm bones has to do with European colonialism. The British Ilse, and for this purpose let us include Ireland, had a lot of colonies and rhythm bones show up in almost all of them. There are rhythm bones in Canadian traditions, there are rhythm bones in Australia, rhythm bones in New Zealand, and there are rhythm bones in the US. There are also rhythm bones in Quebec, and it is pretty easy to trace those back to the music from Brittany and other parts of France from which a lot of early colonists came from. I am not currently aware of any other major spread of rhythm bones from Europe throughout colonialism, but we are always learning.

In the US in particular, rhythm bones show up in a lot of places. From Appalachian music they have gone into contra dance music, they have gone into cowboy music, and they have gone into probably New Orleans music.

They have gone into the minstrel show, and minstrel shows deserve their own chapter. I'm not going to delve into too much the nature of it and how racists it was except in the sense that it was enormously popular. It was one of the earliest global musical phenomenas to the point where you see rhythm bones being mentioned again in Great Brittan, and in places you had not seen them mentioned for 100 years prior. People were playing rhythm bones again as part of minstrel shows where the British musical bones tradition had mostly died

out in some of these places.

It is easy to find references to colonial schools in Ghana and South Africa where minstrel shows were part of normal school entertainment. And we have already heard sea shanties with rhythm bones. They were such a popular instrument partly because of the makeup of the population that became sailors. Some of them came from these traditions that played rhythm bones, but also because this was the popular instrument of the day. Everybody knew about rhythm bones. So a lot of sailors played rhythm bones, and brought them with them.

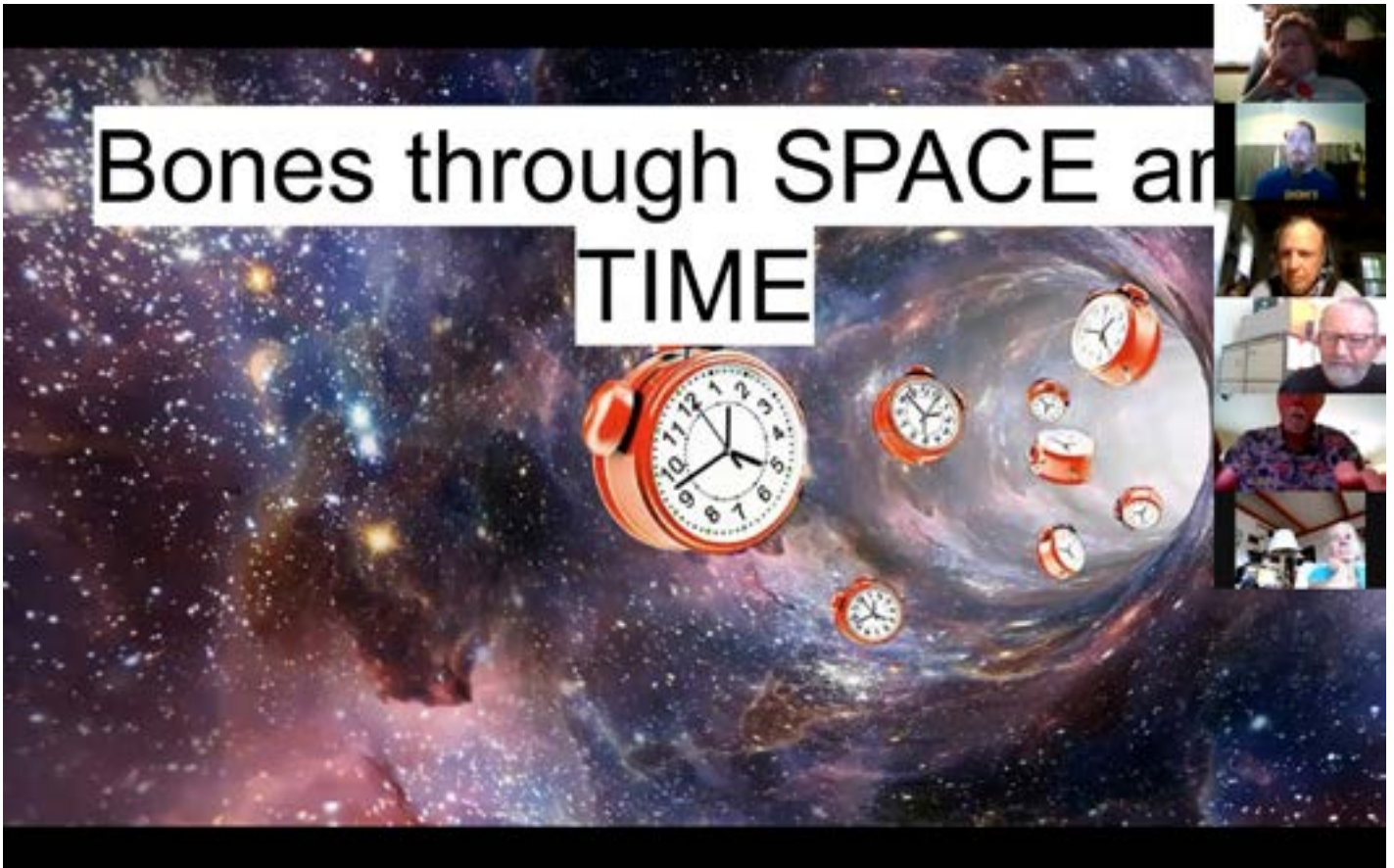
You start to see minstrel shows in a lot of whaling ports and in a lot of the old maritime sailing ports. Rhythm bones spread around the world from this and at this point we are talking about the 1700s to the 1800s.

Now we are getting into the realm of - these are the conditions from which the 20th century revival is drawing its inspiration. And that is where a lot of us learn to play rhythm bones, and if it was not from our fathers or grandfathers or grandmothers or others. Then a lot of us have learned because of social scenes which are looking toward the past in one way or another like reenactments or military reenactments or renaissance fairs or folk music festivals, and things like that. There are these cascading re-spreading of the idea of this instrument.

We have a cool instrument and it is part of an enormous human tradition of hitting things together even if some of those things are not exactly what we play today, and it is not totally clear they are. I still feel enormous continuity going back to Egypt and all that.

That is the outline of what I wanted to talk about.

[Note: The transcription was edited, but not proofed against the audio recording to find errors. There are a few places with audio glitches caused by Zoom. Do not expect an exact transcription of the workshop.]



Jonathan Danforths's Virtual Bones Fest XXIV Workshop starts on Page 4

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## *Rhythm Bones Society*

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*Address Correction Requested*