



# Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 20, No. 1 2018

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## Executive Director's Column

As we look out across the history of rhythm bones playing in the last century, we see certain individuals who are steeped in their culture and whose rhythm bones playing is infinitely connected to a specific culture and it's music. Sport Murphy of Abbeyfeale comes to mind for Irish music, Brother Bones in the big band and dance music of the 40's, Richard Thomas in the blues, and Cecil Hiatt in the country music of Oklahoma. Johnny Muise is one of those standard bearers representing the music of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. John's connection to the music and place is cemented, and as they say, you can take the man out of Cape Breton but you can't take Cape

Breton out of the man. Documenting John's contribution to rhythm bones playing is a long time ambition for me, and I hope you enjoy reading about it as much as I enjoyed going down that trail with his daughters Rose Marie Christensen, and Janine Randall.

It must be Spring, so the calendar says, but the two feet of snow on my lawn says otherwise. The New England Folk Festival is but a month away, and several RBS members are joining me at the Rhythm Bones Playing Workshop which always turns into a mini Bones Fest if you will. The festival (Continued on Page 3)

## Johnny Muise

When I learned to play rhythm bones over 40 years ago, I began a search for other bones players around Boston. The two names I heard when I began my search were, John Burrill aka Mr. Bones of Boston (see Rhythm Bones Player Vol. 3, No.1) and Johnny Muise.

Initially I had a very hard time locating Johnny as no one seemed to know where he lived or how to get in touch with him. Quite by accident I took a record out of the local library, an Anthology of New England Fiddling, and on track 14, I struck gold. It was a set of jigs by Boston Fiddler Joe Cormier and it featured Johnny Muise on 'Clappers.'

His playing had a huge effect on me, but contacting him remained elusive. Finally I had a lead, that he lived in Roslindale, a section of Boston, and looking in the phone book I got a number. I had several long phone conversations with John and even got him out to the New England Folk Festival, but never got a chance to really hear and document his bone playing story. It has taken me a number of years to finally start putting what I know of John down on paper. This article is the result of my limited experience with Johnny and an extensive interview with his daughter Rose Marie Christensen, and an extensive interview and messages with his daughter Janine Randall.

The roll of rhythm bones or 'Clappers' in Cape Breton music remains somewhat elusive. The fact that Johnny played so well and impacted so many of the musicians around him indicates to me that there

is more there to be discovered.

Johnny's history is intertwined with the culture and music of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, which has produced a fiddle style unique and strongly influenced by Scottish music.

Cape Breton Island extends above the Northern tip of the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. Somewhat isolated and inhabited by not only people of Scottish decent but people of Irish as well as French (Continued on Page 4)



Johnny Muise and his rhythm bones

## Editorial

Bones Fest XXII is just around the corner, and 37 people have already registered. Sky and Jessye Bartlett have selected an exciting location in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, and more details about the program and how to register can be found on our website (click the 'Current' Tab, then 'Next Fest'). See also the update on Page 7.

*Rhythm Bones Player*, Volume 20, now begins and there is lots of white space to fill. This is my occasional plea for articles, ideas for articles, etc., and after 19 years of publication it is getting difficult to find material. However, rhythm bones are one of the oldest musical instruments, and there are plenty of stories waiting to be told. Tell one!

A good example is the Page 1 story about Johnny Muise by Steve Brown who did a lot of research and personal interviews before writing it. He also contribute his Editorial on Page 1 and the Ronnie McShane tribute on Page 7. Thanks, Steve

At Bones Fest XX we presented a 'Meritorious Service Award' to Mary Lee Sweet for her years of videoing our Bones Fests. We also presented the first 'Community Enrichments Award' to Mitch Boss for being such a good example of a rhythm bones player. Both of these members are profiled in this newsletter.

We told the story of shanty-man Eric Hlott in a previous newsletter and put one of his recordings on our website. Well it turns out that the producer of the album with that track found out about it and contacted us. He tells us more about this unique rhythm bones player.

## Letters to the Editor

I made a few pairs of rhythm bones early this year for a lady in LA, and lo and behold as a thank you gift she sent me a set of Joe Birl bones in their original packing!

They now occupy a proud place in the corner of my attic office where I display memorabilia from my life.

I was amazed at how small Joe's bones are compared to mine. You can see the

very first pair I made in 1979 – they are about the same length as his but chunkier.

Over the years I have slimmed down my rib bones and added to their length – although as anyone who makes real bones will know – it all depends on the bone!

Joe was a fantastic influence and I wish I had had the opportunity to meet him. *Tom Connolly*



My father, Rhythm Bones Player Darrell Flanery, passed away Sept 4, 2014. He was so proud of playing The Bones, which he sort of worked out on his own. Unfortunately by the time he learned of this group, he was too frail to travel, he died at age 99. His memory is still on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADmjFTiUq8w> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Bu-So3RSFsg>.

He played them almost to the end. Thank you for keeping this group active, and the tradition alive! *Mike Flanery*

[Another Percy Danforth Tribute] Though not a face to face meeting with Percy, he was how I got started playing bones. It was at the great New England Folk Festival that I first saw Percy in one of the corridors rattling his pair of rhythm bones and where I stopped to listen and remark to myself, 'My father used to do that.'

My father was from Barbados where he said all the kids rattled those sticks and where, then in Cambridge where I grew up, he'd even rattle a couple of flat stones at the beach. At home I cut a couple of sticks and went at it and have to admit it took awhile to become quite proficient. I played fiddle and banjo with the Roaring Jelly contra-dance band at the time and got a chance to include rhythm bones with their playing jigs and reels. I also liked attending Steve

### *Rhythm Bones Player*

Rhythm Bones Society  
Volume 20, No 1  
First Quarter 2018  
ISSN: 1545-1380

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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 Players welcomes letters to the Editor and article on any aspect of bones playing. All material submitted for consideration is subject to editing and condensation.

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

Brown's workshops at NEFFA to sit up back and enhance his teaching showing people around me how to do it.

At 85, I still get a chance now and then to play along at jazz gatherings and with the Moody Street String Band.

Making rhythm bones is an addiction I find and I've dozens made of various materials. *Norman Nichols*

## Bones Calendar

**Bones Fest XXII.** June 7-10, 2018. Lincoln, NH. Sky and Jessye Bartlett are hosts. To register, go to <http://rhythmbones.org/nextfest.html>

**NTCMA Bones Contest.** August 27 - September 2, 2018, LeMars, IA. Rhythm Bones Contest will likely be on Sunday.

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itself is a cornucopia of music and dance, and a great place to wander, listen and participate. We would love to see you there.

Well one of my favorite places in the world is Franconia Notch. I have visited there since a child, and spent numerous times camping with my own family, hiking the mountains, and enjoying the scenery.

One of my favorite events in the world is Bones Fest! I've attended 16 out of the 20 Bones Fests held, and they never fail to amaze and delight.

Now we all have a chance to combine these two favorites of mine because Bones Fest XXII is coming to Franconia Notch! Bones Fest XXII has moved to June for this year, and rhythm bones players from around the country are taking over the Indian Head Motel and Conference Center located in the heart of Franconia Notch, surrounded by the White Mountains, a truly magical place.

We have had furious activity registering for Bones Fest XXII, and have easily exceeded last years total attendance with almost three more months to go!

Jessye , Sky, and Ernie are doing an amazing job organizing the fest with some great activities and performance opportunities (See Page 7).

By now you probably know about my pancake addiction and the prospect of going to Polly's Pancake Parlor in Sugar Hill is tantalizing, and having you rhythm bones players with me is the icing on the cake!

I believe this is the last news letter before the fest so make your reservations: register on line at [www.rhythmbones.com](http://www.rhythmbones.com), Jeremy would love to see you!

*Steve Brown*

## Profile of Mary Lee Sweet

I'm Mary Lee Sweet and I am a Bones Player!

I never even heard of rhythm bones until I was in my mid-50s. Then my husband Frank and I began to combine storytelling, Civil War reenacting and music performances in our spare time. He was playing the guitar, but switched to banjo, which was better suited to our

19th century venues. I needed some kind of instrument, but strings didn't agree with me. With that in mind, I went to the Red Dragon Music Sutler's tent at the Civil War Olustee Battle Reenactment in Florida. There were drums, bugles and some wooden sticks about 7 inches long. I asked what they were, and the owner said they were "bones." He gave a brief demonstration. Looked good to me. How hard could it be?

For a year or so, I worked at trying to make some kind of rhythm with those sticks. I could keep a steady beat, but nothing more. They frequently flew out of my hands and across the room. I was a struggling, one-handed rhythm bones player when by chance I found the Rhythm Bones Society website. There was to be a "Bones Fest" in Greensboro, North Carolina. I made arrangements, and in July Frank and I were in a hotel practicing our music when there was a knock on the door. I opened the door and a man I did not know said, "I hear a rhythm bones player in this room." It was Don DeCamp, and he had called me a "bones player!"

I was born in North Carolina, but grew up in Virginia. My daddy was a cotton mill man. He liked wrestling and country music. During the music season, we would go to Richmond every Saturday night to see the Old Dominion Barn Dance show with Sunshine Sue. Some of the people there were Chet Atkins, Earl Scruggs and the Carter Sisters. During wrestling season, we would go to Richmond every Saturday night to see the wrestling matches. While the country music got people to smile, tap their feet and sing along, the wrestling crowd was totally different. People became scary! They cheered, they booed and they shouted things like rip his head off, gouge his eyes, break his arm! No smiles there! But it soon became apparent that everything was fake. It was all drama to keep the audiences on the edges of their seats. Probably the best was Gorgeous George. Everyone hated him. The boos were deafening! He had dyed golden hair, a fancy cape and a valet dressed in a tuxedo who would spray the ring with perfume before George entered, because "all those hard working farmers were dirty!" I learned that both the musicians

and the wrestlers had the same goal and that was to entertain!

My experience with music was eclectic. I played the clarinet in concert and in the marching band. I danced to the popular music of the 50s and 60s. In 1958 my family moved to Tehran, Iran, where I finished high school. The music there was totally different and exotic. Of course there was the sound of the prayers being chanted five times a day.

In 1961 I returned to the states, went to college in Cortland, New York, married a Cornell engineering student, and became a teacher and a mother of three. Frank played the guitar and we attended hootenannies at Cornell when we were in college. Then we moved to Madrid, Spain. The flamenco music there combined guitar, dance and song. Next we went to Brazil, where the samba music filled the air.

In the mid 1970s we returned to United States, first to South Carolina and then to Florida where we live now. Music was something only on the radio or television while we worked and raised our family. But after the kids grew up and moved on, we came back to performing. He plays banjo and I play rhythm bones. We do 19th century songs and stories from the pages of history, and it really is all about entertaining the audiences! [www.backintyme.com](http://www.backintyme.com)



Mary Lee Sweet by Gail Carsen Photography

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extraction.

Cape Breton fiddle music though strongly Scottish also has elements of French and Irish influences, but retains its own character. Music has long been a past time of people of this region, and both fiddle music and step dancing have been common place.

Johnny Muise was born during a trip to Boston in 1923 when his parents briefly came to Boston to work in the Waltham Watch Factory. A few months later he was taken home to Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia where he spent his childhood until the age of 15.

There were strong Scottish connections, both through the language, as his Grandparents and his mother were Gaelic speakers, and in the traditional music, central to the area, and played often in homes. Soon he was learning step dancing and participating in Saturday night ceilidhs. John excelled as a step dancer and became well known in the area.

Although rhythm bones seem to be a bit of an aberration in Cape Breton music, there is some documentation that indicates that they have been played. One of the first groups to make records, the Inverness Serenaders, had a rhythm bones player, Hugh Long, and began recording in 1934. There is also mention in an Anthology of the Cape Breton Magazine, of a rhythm bones player John "Wild Archie" McLennan playing in Cape Breton, but he states he never saw another rhythm bone player and began playing on his own. Rhythm bone playing today in Cape Breton music would be relatively rare.

Johnny told me he first saw rhythm bones being played by a workman repairing a slate roof. The workman picked up two pieces of slate and played them like bones. His daughter Rose felt certain that he had learned to play from an Uncle, and his daughter Janine reported that his Uncle Alex Walker played rhythm bones. John was very percussive, having been a step dancer, and would take knitting needles and play them on the strings of a fiddle, much like the "fiddle sticks" played in Cajun music.

Conditions in Cape Breton at that time were severe. Work was limited, and making a living very hard. Johnny managed to join the Canadian Army at the age

of 15 by forging his Mothers signature. This was in 1938, and the world was on the brink of war. So as Johnny went off to war the rhythm bones came too. He and the other soldiers entertained themselves by playing music, and of course that meant rhythm bones. He served in the tank corps, and always had rhythm bones in the tank at the ready. One of his tasks was to get the mail located some distance from the tank. One day upon returning he found that the tank had been blown apart, and his bones with it! Johnny excelled in the Army, served during the Battle of the Bulge and achieved the rank of Sargent.

Johnny returned from the war just at age 20, and he had a decision to make. As his actual birth happened in the US, he could claim citizenship, but only if he did it before age 21. Opportunities for work were much higher in the US, and John made the decision to move to Boston where he was able to work as a brick layer.

Boston had a strong and active Cape Breton community. There was a strong Dance hall scene in Boston as well as a Cape Breton 'nightclub' named 'Joe MacPherson's.' It was here that John's life, as well as his musical life would change forever. It was here that he met his future wife, Mary Edmonds. Mary's Aunt, Betty Maillet, was a well-known piano player who had recorded and was a member of the Inverness Serenaders. Mary herself had learned piano and became an accomplished player. They were married in 1951.

Little is known of John's rhythm bone playing during this time, but as he and Mary's family grew they established their home in the Boston area and that included getting a piano for the home.

As is the case with immigrants from all countries, gatherings in homes and other locations is one way to stay in touch with the culture, and of course for the Cape Bretoners this means music. With the strong connection with Mary's Aunt, musicians visiting the Boston area from Cape Breton soon realized the Muise home was the place to gather for music and dance. With Mary at the piano and John on rhythm bones, nearly every musician traveling through Boston made an appearance in the Muise home.

John and Mary became good friends

with a number of musicians in the Boston area including Bill Lamey, Ron Gonnella (from Scotland) and Johnny Wilmot (Cape Breton) on fiddles, Jimmy Kelly on Banjo, and Eddie Irwin, and Mary of course on piano. Soon it became the place to gather and play music of Cape Breton to get in touch with that feeling of home. And Johnny on the 'clappers' was a central figure.

As his reputation as the best rhythm bones player in the music grew, opportunities for recording occasionally presented themselves. One of the best known of the Boston Cape Breton Fiddlers, Joe Cormier, who John often played with, asked him to record with him several times.

An examination of Johnny's playing on these recordings reveals several things. First is that he was immersed in the music. Throughout his youth it's apparent that he fully integrated that music from his listening and step dancing. Secondly his rhythm bone playing is a perfect marriage between the instrument and the music. His phrasing, pauses between sections of the tunes, and familiarity with the tune types shows his dedication to the music and respect for the music he literally grew up with. His playing displays an expertise that other musicians could truly appreciate and respect.

As the Muise home became a central figure in the Boston area for Cape Breton music, many of the sessions at the house were recorded by the family. In 2012 over 200 hours of recordings were donated to the Burns Library at Boston College. Many of these recordings feature some of the best musicians from Cape Breton, and the Boston area. Several examples of Johnny playing 'clappers' are included, and can be accessed on line.

The impact of the Muise family has been clearly documented by two tunes written in their honor by noted musicians. Frank Ferrell, noted fiddler, wrote Gacie's Birthday March in honor of Mary Muise, and Boston born Cape Breton Fiddler Jerry Holland wrote Johnny Muise's Reel for John. This tune has been recorded by the noted Irish accordion player, Sharon Shannon and Cape Breton fiddler Kinnon Beaton.

Over his lifetime Johnny played with so many musicians, it prompted his daughter to respond to the question,

“Who hasn’t he played with?” Noted players Buddy McMaster, Jerry Holland, Jerry Robichaud, JP Cormier, and Irish fiddler Brendan Mullvihill. Young phenomenon Ashley MacIssac always asked Johnny to join him on stage when he could. Young group ‘Beolach’ was one of his favorites.

Johnny Muise passed away in 2005, and his wife Mary in 2015, but their legacy has clearly been carried on by their family. Janine Randall, their eldest daughter, has become one of the most respected pianists in the traditional music communities both in Boston and Nova Scotia. She is the founder of the Ceilidh Trail School of Celtic Music where she taught piano for a number of years, and where John would spend his summers, playing rhythm bones at any invitation. John’s daughter, Rose Marie, is an accomplished rhythm bone player herself, and is keeping her father’s tradition alive.

Along with John, she attended the New England Folk Festival in 1999, and participated in the Rhythm Bone Workshop along with noted players Russ Myers, Everett Cowett, and several others. John’s Grandson Connor McGoff also plays rhythm bones.

Although it remains unclear the place rhythm bones hold, if any, in Cape Breton music, one thing is clear to me, Johnny Muise was a corner stone in the playing of rhythm bones in this music. As we discover more about how rhythm bones contributed to various musical genre’s, Johnny’s contribution remains on a par with the great players of our time, if not fully recognized. And who knows, maybe in the future we might see more people playing the ‘Clappers’ in Cape Breton music, and know that Johnny Muise helped to blaze that trail.  
*Steve Brown*

## Profile of Mitchell Boss

Mitchell Boss was born and grew up in Grand Rapids Michigan. He went into the Navy right out of High school and served in the Naval Air Force as an electronics technician during the Korean conflict. Getting out of the service in 1954, he married Annette in 1955; they had gone to high school together. He

graduated from the Kendall School of Design, now the Design Department of Farris University, and they moved South in 1958.

Mitch designed furniture for a lot of companies in the US until all the furniture business went over seas, and he ended up designing for companies importing out of Honduras, the Philippines, China, Indonesia and Vietnam. With Annette running the office they designed furniture for 50 years.

His dad showed him how to play rhythm bones only on spoons held like bones. Over the years Mitch has collected over forty sets of rhythm bones made from one thing or another. He has one set made of teak brought back from India and even a set from auto window glass (nice tingling).

Lately if he gets a chance to play, he is using one pair of Steve Browns’ rhythm bones made of shin bone and one pair of plastic rhythm bones that he got from Joe Birl. He likes rhythm bones that have a distinct sound in each hand.

Mitch says, “Beginners need all the help they can get, and I have been a beginner for seventy-four years now. No matter how long you play, every time you pick up your rhythm bones and hear that first note, you start all over again.”

“At Bones Fest XX hosted by Gerry

and Janet Hines in Homer, NY, I was given a beautiful plaque denoting how much I was welcome in the Rhythm Bones Society’s family. I hope some welcome token can be given each year to express how much we care for our members.

“Since Annette and I have retired and now live in a Retirement Community, I have only played for some community events and the band (Banjo, Piano & Sax) that I played with has succumbed to life changes and has disbanded.

“Playing with others is what music is all about. If you are lucky enough to get with a group that is how you pick up a sense of timing and togetherness that makes playing feel so good.

“Annette and I love Bones Fests, and we pouted for a week after medical problems made us miss Bones Fest XXI. You really learn how much Bones Fest means to you when you miss one.

“You know, when you get into your eighties, a lot of things can happen. That is why we rented a cabin in Lincoln, NH for Sky and Jesse’s Bones Fest XXII already in January for their June Fest! See you all there! Hope all is well with you and yours.”

[Note: To get a sense of Mitch’s humor, look at RBP, Volume 18, No 3, Page 7 for his thank you note after receiving the “Community Inspiration Award.”]



Mitch Boss performing at Bones Fest XX. (Photograph by Art Sands)

## Erik Ilott Some Memories

[Editor's Note. To fully appreciate this story, read a previous article by Pete Hayselden and listen to two recordings of Erik's rhythm bones playing on our website. To find the article, go to [rhythmbones.org/documents/RBPVol1to16.pdf](http://rhythmbones.org/documents/RBPVol1to16.pdf), and search using "Ilott" pressing enter until you get to Vol 13, No 1. There is a photograph of Erik playing with four rhythm bones in one hand and three in the other. To listen to the 'Shipshape' recording go to [rhythmbones.org/Erik-IlottShipshapeSong.html](http://rhythmbones.org/Erik-IlottShipshapeSong.html). He plays in a quite different style than we are used to hearing, but the overall recording is quite captivating. Roger Digby has also given us permission to add a track from the 'Of Land and Sea' cassette that shows more of his style. Go to [rhythmbones.org/ErikIlottLand&Sea.html](http://rhythmbones.org/ErikIlottLand&Sea.html).]

It's very easy to recall my first meeting with Erik Ilott because it was truly extraordinary.



In the Autumn of 1972 I was studying for a PGSE at Bristol University and was placed for Teaching Practice in a local school. I had been interested in 'Folk Music' for some years, but had not yet acquired a critical ear nor developed the understanding, which I now find crucial, of the difference between 'Folk Music' and 'Traditional Music', the latter now being a major interest of mine. Nor at that time had I started playing the Anglo Concertina, the instrument with which I am nowadays associated.

On my first day at the school I thought it would be sensible to spend a bit of

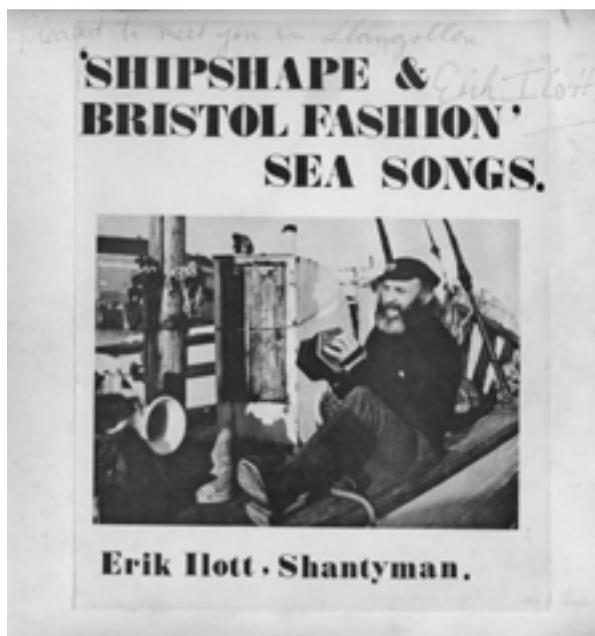
time in the school library seeing what was available in my subject area. On entering the library I found it deserted and began to find my way around. I then heard some clicking noises and following the sound, I found Erik sitting at the librarian's desk and playing the bones. He was very apologetic and explained that he was writing a book about playing the bones (I don't think it ever materialised) and was taking advantage of the library being empty to write a few sentences. I was sufficiently interested to ask more and from that developed a musical and personal friendship that lasted till his death.

Erik was an unlikely librarian - to put it mildly! The story was that the school had been short of a PE teacher, and as Erik, who lived very close to the school, had a reputation as a competitive cyclist, he was asked to fill the gap. Later he was replaced when a qualified PE teacher was found. Erik accepted this, but then someone pointed out to him that the employment legislation did not allow him to be dismissed in this way and the school was obliged to take him back. At that time there was a vacancy for the school librarian so Erik took on that role.

I learnt a lot from Erik about sea-songs and performance and he encouraged me to go out to Folk Clubs with him. The term 'Folk Music' in England covers an absurdly wide range of music and some clubs preferred to specialise. In Bristol there was a club operating somewhere every night; a Ballad and Blues club and a University Folk club, also the excellent Troubadour, and so on. One such club was The Bristol Folk Tradition which took a very hard line, insisting that every song must be traditional and performed in what they perceived as traditional style. This revivalist orthodoxy was not uncommon in those days and was soon to be strongly challenged when recordings started to be made and commercially issued of traditional singers who were still alive and singing in their local communities - real traditional music and, indeed, unaware

of any 'orthodoxy'. Erik didn't fit into the Bristol club's ethos and it was some years before the club realised that they had in Erik something close to a real traditional singer. By this time the club was also taking a gentler line. Erik, however, flourished in the other Bristol clubs and also further afield at Folk festivals and music weekends. He was shrewd enough to see what the audiences wanted and versatile enough to tailor his repertory to that end, even dressing the part on most occasions. In this respect he was close to the priority of the traditional singer, aware of the need to sing the right song at the right time to contribute to a social evening.

Erik was also a natural showman and played the 'Jolly Jack Tar' role to perfection. He felt that the concertina was a part of that image and he had a 30 button Wheatstone 'Linota' Anglo Concertina in the key of Bb. He was not a good concertina player!! in fact he only knew a very few song accompaniments (and often made mistakes - not that that troubled him in the least!). He also played 5 string banjo in a basic rhythmic style and could get an accompaniment out of an autoharp. His playing of the banjo-ukelele was more proficient, but it was his playing of rhythm bones which always made the strongest impact. Partly this was the novelty, partly it was the spectacle, as Erik maximised the visual effect; mostly, though, it was because he played them very well, with a full



handful of four bones in the right hand and three in the left. I'm not sure whether there was a reason for this or whether he had just seven bones and thought he might as well use them all. This rhythmic adjunct to his unaccompanied singing of sea shanties was his speciality and it is this for which he was best known and is now best remembered.

He did, however, have many other sorts of songs; many were songs of the sea and some of them local to Bristol. By the time I knew Erik, Bristol docks had moved to Avonmouth, because the stretch of the Avon up to Bristol was tidal and too winding for the larger ships that were becoming the norm. Bristol, however, remained a proud naval town. In the 1940s the BBC had made recordings of Stan Slade, 'The Bristol Shantyman'. Slade had been a shantyman in the days of sail and Erik learned a number of his songs. He also had songs from the rural communities outside Bristol. In fact, he sometimes did a 'Country Bumpkin' music hall routine.

In 1973 Erik and I had the idea of producing an LP which Erik would sell on gigs. The result was 'Shipshape and Bristol Fashion' which we produced and manufactured ourselves, pressing the 99 copies that were then free from tax. The LP was studio recorded in just one day and was very hit and miss. We were very lucky to have the help of Ray Andrews, an outstanding English finger-style banjo player (one of very very few!). Erik often took Ray out with him on gigs and his spectacular banjo playing was often the solid base behind Erik's singing when he chose to lay aside the rhythm bones.

Bill Leader's excellent Leader label had just started issuing LPs of real traditional singers which also included an extensive booklet about the artist and the musical context. Erik was very enthused by these LPs and wrote and produced a detailed booklet to go with the LP.

The LP sold quickly and was never reissued. Erik also privately made a cassette, 'Of Land and Sea', which also featured the singing of his wife Kate. As far as I know this has also never been reissued. He also had tracks on various compilations and was involved in 'Sounds of The Sea', a give-away from Ribena!

A few years ago, a friend alerted me

to the fact that a track from the LP was being used on the Rhythm Bones Society website. I followed this up and found that the site said that efforts to gain permission to use the track had been fruitless! This is hardly surprising as it all happened a long time ago, but I did eventually make contact and the result was the request to write a few lines about my experience of knowing and working with Erik - a request to which I have finally responded after a long long period of procrastinating! *Roger Digby UK*

## Ronnie McShane Tribute

Peadar O'Riada, son of Sean O'Riada Composer, musician, visionary who started the group Ceoltoi Cullannann which had a profound effect on traditional Irish music. Ronnie knew Sean in Dublin when he worked at the Abbey Theater, and later moved with him to West Cork, Cuill Adoh. Ronnie's bone playing can be heard through the recordings Sean O'Riada made, and was used during the filming of "Playboy of the Western World." Peadar was a good friend of Ronnie's, and as he says, "he was like an Uncle to us." Peadar is himself an accomplished musician, and at one point recorded an album with Ronnie. He was reached by telephone to comment on the recent passing of Ronnie McShane.

"Ronnie started out as the props manager at the Abbey Theater and my father was putting a group together to play for Brian McMahon's play "The Honey Spike." They wanted to have bones in it and Ronnie went down to the butcher shop and got some bones and put them up on the roof of the house to weather them. And that's how he got the really nice hollow sound to them.

"He had a very sharp beat, very clean, like my father's bodhran playing, on the beat, on the pulse. Looking back they were so definite, with the beat of the music, where as today a lot of bodhran and bones players are too complicated, ornamental, getting away from the pulse really at the expense of the music.

"If you listen to the first Ceoltoi Cullannann recording, you can hear the crispness that they bring into it between Ronnie's bone playing and my fathers

bodhran playing. If you compare it to stuff now a days, bodhrans in particular they have evolved into tonal change, greatly exaggerated. But Ronnie and my father were always on the pulse.

"That is where Ronnie sat, he used to play the banjo, and toward the end of his life, quite a lot in sessions. He was a good guy, he was my fathers PA (publicity assistant) for a while when we moved to Cuill Adoh, but my father couldn't afford to pay him and the time came when he had to immigrate and get work in England.

"He became a concierge, a doorman, and worked his way up until he became the president of the Golden Key Association, he was the first Irishman ever to do that. He returned home when he retired, and was asked to adjudicate the All Ireland Bone Playing Competition twice.

"Ronnie was an original of the species, I don't know of any other bones player before him. I have to say that Ronnie was like an Uncle to us he was a really good guy. We were very fond of him. We did do a recording together, bodhran and tin whistle but it's out of print now." *Steve Brown*

## Bones Fest XXII Update

Were getting close! Another Bones Fest will soon be upon us. Thank you to all of you who have already registered! This is likely to be a pretty busy fest, and there will be some interesting locations that we will visit. For those of you on the fence about coming, I encourage you to check out the Cannon Mountain location and the Clark's Trading post location online. As with all Bones Fests, this one will be different, but as with all Bones Fests, we are trying to create a scenario that allows for a lot of bones playing combined with some great scenery and public education about the bones. A few things I'll mention: Bring warm clothes-it could very well be 75 degrees, it may very well be 45. If nothing else it will likely be cold and windy on the top of Cannon Mountain, not that we intend to be up there too long. Don't forget that we will be interacting with the Boy Scouts and that these are the kinds of moments

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that the Rhythm Bones Society was formed for--to perpetuate the craft--, and that some patience will no doubt be required. Fortunately, in my experience, this is where all of you individual members who make up the Rhythm Bones Society truly excel! Just a heads up- please know that our Saturday night performance will likely be pretty tightly packed, but that there will be space to step back from the crowd to take a breather if you're not the crowd type. Drinks will be available for purchase at the Saturday night show. The Cabins that we have reserved at the hotel form a kind of ring with a court yard, set back into the woods, and we are hoping that this setting will work well as a communal space for folks to gather, play and generally enjoy as our own fest-related space. As we have mentioned in the reservation info, there are hotel rooms available, but I personally think the cabins are very cool.

So for to everyone who has registered, thank you. And to anyone who cannot make it, know that you will be missed! *Sky and Jessye Bartlett*



June 7-10, 2018  
Lincoln, New Hampshire

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## *Rhythm Bones Society*

1060 Lower Brow Road  
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*Address Correction Requested*