

Recording of the Quarter

The CD that Yirdy Machar mentioned in his Letter to the Editor in last quarter's newsletter arrived today, and it is one of the best rhythm bones CD that I have heard (and I've heard some good ones.) There are rhythm bones on all but two tracks and those have spoons. One track has one of the best rhythm bones solos I've heard. There is variety in textures and rhythms that are most entertaining.

The CD is titled *BoneZone in Session*, and BoneZone is the name of his new group. The www.folkshop.dk website, where you can order the CD, describes them as four young Danish musicians who have joined forces with Scottish singer and bones-player Yirdy Machar. The liner notes describe BoneZone as a musical playground where tradition meets new ideas without changing its original form. I say it's a CD that most rhythm bones players will enjoy.

The other band members are Jonas Fromseier on banjo and mandolin, Christopher Davis Maack on fiddle, Rasmus Zeeberg on guitars and mandolin and Steffan Sorensen on double-bass and piano. They are Danish, but they play Irish and Scottish music.

Yirdy attended Bones Fest IX and taught a workshop on how to play with four bones in each hand (See the Tip & Technique column to the right) He also opened the Saturday night public performance and set a great tone for the evening. He attended the National Traditional Country Music Festival and won the World Bones & Spoons Contest. He is an outstanding rhythm bones player, and plays a variety of instruments. Hi is an entertainer.

There is a bonus track not described on the liner notes. It begins with rain and thunder followed by a music box and Yirdy on rhythm bones. Again a quite nice track.

Go to www.folkshop.dk to order the CD. For English text click on the British flag in the upper left corner. Scroll down until you see the Bone-Zone CD. Click on Add to Basket and follow instructions. *Steve Wixson*

Tips & Techniques Playing Eight Bones Simultaneously or *The Full House*

Firstly, I start by describing how the bones are held 1:) 2:(3:(4:(, i.e., the thumb-bone held with both ends pointing towards you, and the other three bones the opposite way with both ends pointing away from you)(((. This is especially important if your bones (like mine) are not identical.



I have also set small notches on the top of each bone i.e.: v, vv, vvv, vvvv which assures that the bones are always held in exactly the same position every time. You can also mark them, at least one set with a felt marker to distinguish left from right hand.

I have always kept my set that are marked in this way separate, and used only for playing the "Full House". They are Nick Driver Musical Bones which are perfectly suited for this style of playing. Unfortunately they are not available any more. Any other shin bones or wooden ones would suffice as they are generally thinner and normally of an even thickness.

One of the techniques I suggest in my workshops is that you make a small notch on the outside edge of each bone. This is made so you can feel that your fingers are in the correct position (one on each bone). The bones are then released individually by taking the relevant finger off the notch. Starting by holding the first three bones firmly (like the thumb bone in normal playing) i.e. index, middle and ring fingers placed on the notches and slightly pressing them into the palm of your hand so you are

actually playing one bone (under your little finger) against three (stationary) bones. This will give you quite a "light" sound.

The next finger is also removed



from the notch giving you a "rounder" sound with two playing on two bones. The removal of the small, middle and



index fingers gives you what I call "The Full House" effect with the three bones simultaneously playing on the thumb bone.



This is best practiced using rhythmic runs for example: tick/tick/tickity-tick/tickity-tickity-tick and repeating them while changing finger-pressure alternatively, 1-3, 2-2, and 3-1. Running this sequence gives you a nice run-up to a crescendo in the piece you are playing. The real *Full House* is when you achieve the same with both hands playing all eight bones at the same time.



Good Luck, Happy Practicing, and "MAY THE LIGHT SHINE THROUGH YOUR BONES". As Aye, Yirdy 'MacBones' Machar

Review of the Film *Bones*

Bones is a documentary film about John Henry 'Bones' Nobles who is the subject of the feature article beginning on Page 1. It was produced and directed by Carol Munday Lawrence who as an African American artist and independent film maker creates works to empower and celebrate her people.

I spoke with Carol via telephone about her film. She was a producer and wanted to direct a film. A friend of hers in Beaumont, Texas suggested Bones, and she went there to meet him. She quickly discovered he was a real visual character and would be a good subject for a film..

She invited folk/blues musician Taj Mahal to join the project and they went to Beaumont and shot the film. Carol said, "It's a real funky little film, you know, and it's totally unpretentious. It's full of music. I think you will like it."

The film opens with Bones leaving his home and driving through his neighborhood playing bones. The scene changes to three guys and Bones playing dominos and talking about bones and things.

Bones' daddy made 50 cents a day and could not afford a musical instrument. Bones says, "I had a beat in me" and bones was one way he let it out.

The next scene show Bones buying fruit at an outdoor market. He starts playing and gets one man to dance. He then teaches a couple of people how to play the bones.

At one time he was a sort of foot doctor and the next scene shows him working on the foot of a friend and

talking about life. He comments about himself, "Everything I do is unique."

One of his daughters remembers that he played bones all of his life. All of his children and many grandkids play the bones.

He then goes fishing which he had done every Tuesday for thirty years noting that when he was a kid he used bent straight pins—a hook was a luxury.

He then drives to the airport again playing his bones. A plane lands and Taj Mahal exits the airplane. They introduce themselves to each other and then drive to Bones' house where he is introduced to Bones' family.

They play a song together and Bones plays a great combination of taps, duples and triplets. He also occasionally uses his other hand to slap the bones together (Bones play bones one-handed). They play a second song together and it is better than the first with Bones playing a nice break.

Taj Mahal tells Bones that one of the things that he's been doing in his life is trying to preserve some of these traditions. He says, "I've heard about people like you, but this is my first time [seeing a bones player]."

The scene moves to the backyard where Bones is barbequing some of his homemade sausage. His family of children and grandchildren are gathered. There is eating, playing and talking going on. Taj Mahal brings out his guitar and they collaborate on third song, Stagger Leaf.

Originally a 16mm color film, it is now packaged as a video about 30 minutes in duration. It was illegally bundled with a film titled *Blues Like Sunshine in Rain*. I found the film *Bones* in a few libraries. A six minute except with the three songs is now illegally showing on Utube. Carol holds the copyright to the film, and it may be possible that she will re-release it. I hope we can show it at Bones Fest XII. *Steve Wixson*

Review of the Film *SNO-LINE*

This is a 1989 B-movie shot in Beaumont with John 'Bones' Nobles in a unique role.

It tells the story of small time New York racketeer trying to setup a drug operation in a Texas Gulf Coast town. About 20 minutes into the film, there is a brief cameo of Bones dressed in his colorful African clothes playing bones as the camera pans from a boat to the shore.

About one hour into the film the lead character, played by Vince Edwards, travels to the deep bayou to make a deal with the local drug lord. As the scene begins there is the faint sound of rhythm bones in the background. Bones is then seen playing his rhythm bones around the characters as if he is invisible to them. He speaks a few words that are difficult to understand. A gun fight breaks out and the New York guys leave and Bones' bones playing fades out. He plays solo bones to no music. This is a rather unique and interesting scene from a music point of view.

He gets on-screen credit as the character 'Bones.' This film in video format is available on the internet. *Steve Wixson*

Dave Boyles Makes the Front Page

Dave Boyles, member and Co-Host of Bones Fest XI, made the front cover of Milwaukee's *Lifestyle Magazine: Northshore*, March 2008 edition. He is shown in a headshot wearing a grey derby hat. The article on Page 68 titled "The Bluegrass is always greener" shows him with rhythm bones and washboard. It profiles his career and civic jobs, and then his music. Bones was his father's instrument of choice, and, he says, "I almost got obsessed by it." He added the washboard and plays with Liza Edgar and Razzmatazz. "I played on the circus train for 10 years. We played so many different venues because we were unique," he said. "Through all the things I've done, I've always stayed close to the music."

Again a big thanks to Dave and Don Gilmore for hosting Bones Fest XI.