

HOW TO

play spoons



*A practical guide to
musical spooning.*

ABBY THE SPOON LADY

“Music... will help dissolve your perplexities and purify your character and sensibilities, and in time of care and sorrow, will keep a fountain of joy alive in you.”

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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history of spoonology

There have been spoon players since before written history. Prehistoric rock drawings and pottery as early as the 4th millennium depict dancing figures with curved blades in their hands. Spoons belong to a class of instrument called concussion idiophone. This general class of instruments includes the oldest instruments known to man. Spoons themselves are prehistoric, and you can say that there have been spoon players since around the invention of the spoon.

Many ancient cultures played spoons. Ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans all played spoons and a variation of the spoons called the rattle bones or the rhythm bones. Rhythm

bones are essentially a pair or set of three bones, usually sheep and cattle bones, placed in the hand parallel to the palm with the convex sides facing each other. The bones are placed between each finger, with one finger being used like a hinge, and the moving one's wrist so that in such a way that the bones hit each other. Egyptians, Greeks and Romans all played spoons and bones in their battle marches and some even speculate that human bones were used. During the crusades, when these armies were marching the clicking or the bones and spoons meant to their enemy that "the pagans were coming" and it was time to prepare for battle, or to even run and hide.

spoon playing around the world

Spoon playing has a place in music throughout different regions of the world, and especially in Europe. In Great Britain, the spoons are often played accompanying a fiddle during traditional music. British actor Sylvester McCoy, whom is well-known for playing the 7th incarnation of Doctor Who, was an excellent spoon player. Aside from playing spoons on Dr. Who, he played spoons during his role as King Lear. However, presently the only spoon player registered with the United Kingdom Musicians Union is British reggae singer Duncan Campbell.

French-Canadians have a spoon playing tradition. Using wooden spoons connected, and carved out of a single block of wood. Spoons in this region are often played accompanying a fiddle or accordion. Primary traditional percussion included spoons and clogging.

Greek folk music traditions also contain spoon playing. Spoons as an instrument are known as koutalakia, and are very often played within folk dance. Spoons are often used within wedding ceremonies.

Russians refer to spoons as lozhki. Some say that the spoons is the most popular folk instrument in Russia. Russian spoon playing is very different from American and British styles of playing spoons. There is a wide range of spoons tricks and techniques within Russian playing. Multiple spoons are used in a variety of ways. Sometimes spoons are often placed in each hand, or even several pairs of spoons in each hand. Some Russian spoon players can be seen sewing spoons onto the outside of their pants or shirts, to knock the spoons in their hand against.

You can find spoon playing, and variants of spoon playing, all over the world. Another example is how the Eastern Slavs used musical spoons in war, hunting ceremonies, and traditional music. China, Turkey, Ireland, Scotland, and parts of Africa all carry similar types (

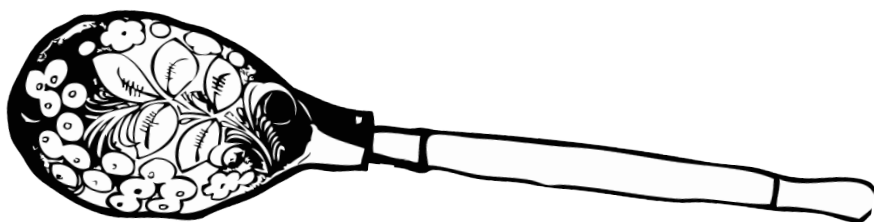


different types of musical spoons

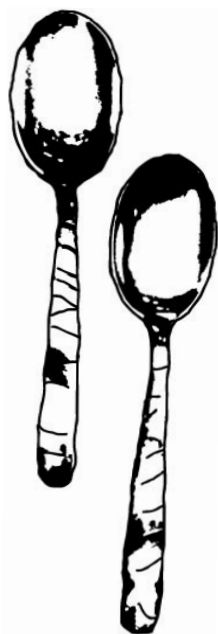
Every different material and shape of spoon makes a different type of sound.

Some folks like to play wooden spoons, and some folks enjoy playing metal ones. Some metals, such as silver or silverplate, have "bell-like" qualities to the sound they make. Experimenting with different materials is fun and educational.

The shape of the bulb of the spoon also has a lot to do with the sound it makes.



Soup spoons and dinner spoons both have very different shapes, thus sound very different. A good number of spoons are made to be like shovels, meaning that the deep part of the spoon is toward the back of the bulb. I find that if you find spoons where the contact point, or deep part of spoon, is in the center the sound becomes clearer.



My advice is to test and try out different spoons, and perhaps even try different spoons for different songs.




Picking the right spoons


Find spoons that have comfortable handles. Stay away from spoons with large flourishes at the end.




Spoons with a bowl that fits into the palm of your hand is best.

Make sure to find spoons that match.

 Bend your spoons in so that they make a good solid connection.

 Attempt to find spoons where the deepest part of the bowl is in the center, like a drum. A lot of spoons have their deepest point towards the back, more like a shovel.

 Spoons that are too lightweight can be hard to play. Find spoons with a little weight to them, but not so heavy they are hard to hold onto.



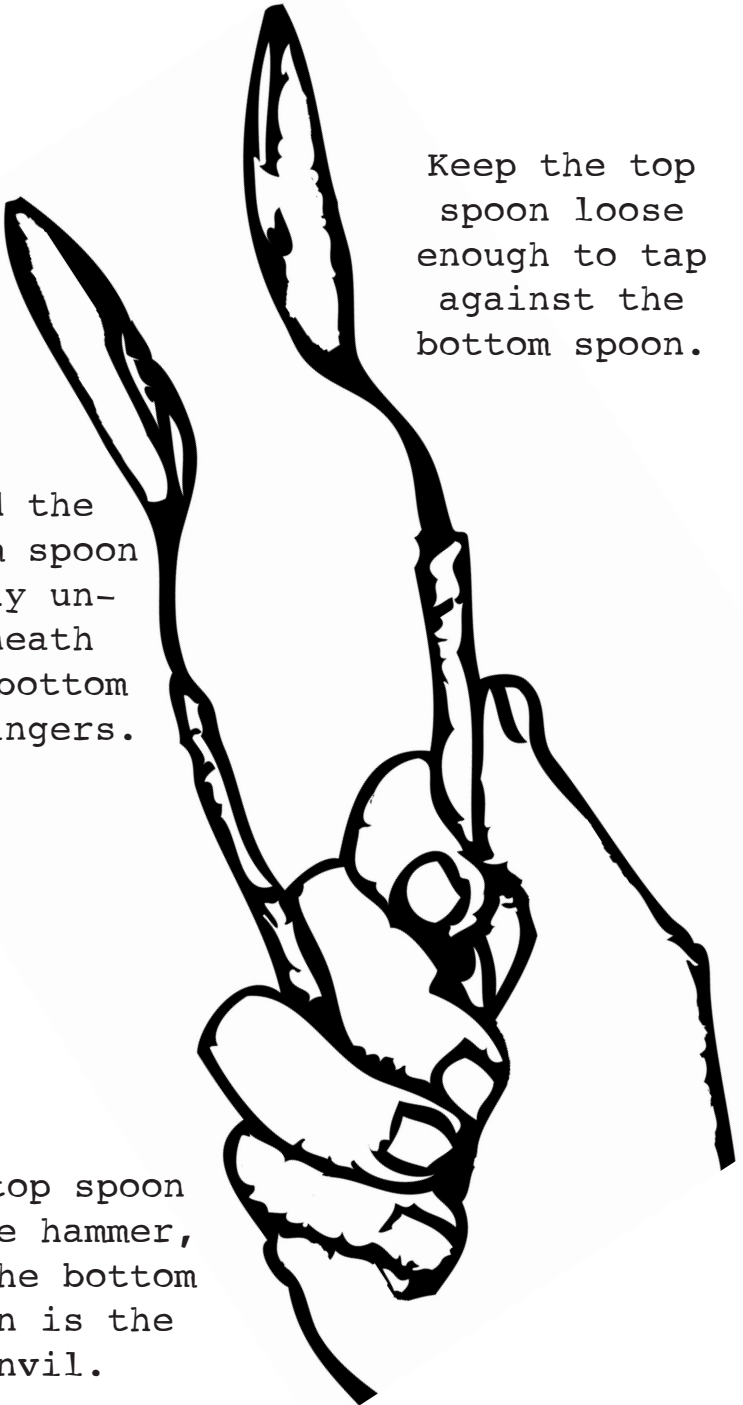
the grip

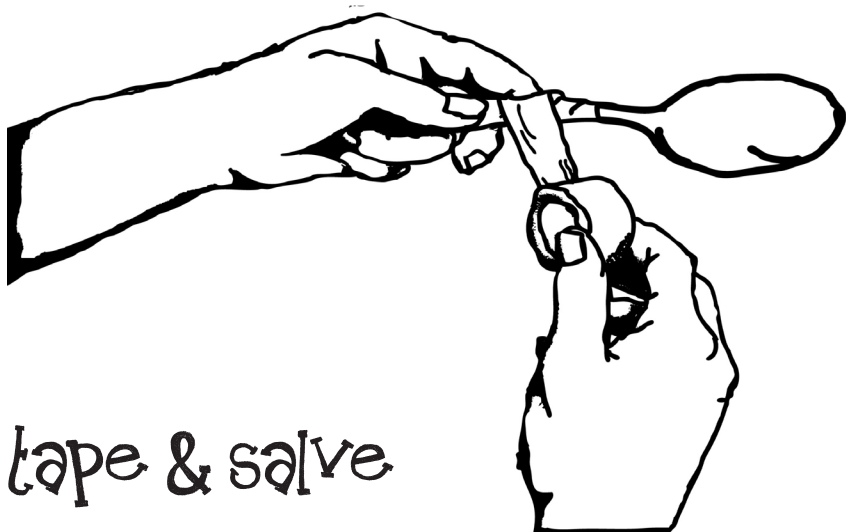
Learning to play the spoons begins with the grip you use. I tuck the bottom spoon underneath my pinky and ring finger, keeping it tight. I then place the bottom spoon underneath my thumb and on top of my pointer finger, keeping it loose enough to "flop" down, but tight enough to keep it in place. The top spoon will be slightly further out than the bottom. Remember that the key is to keep the bottom spoon firm, and the top spoon loose. Use the picture on the next page as a useful reference.

Keep the top
spoon loose
enough to tap
against the
bottom spoon.

Hold the
bottom spoon
tightly un-
derneath
your bottom
two fingers.

The top spoon
is the hammer,
and the bottom
spoon is the
anvil.



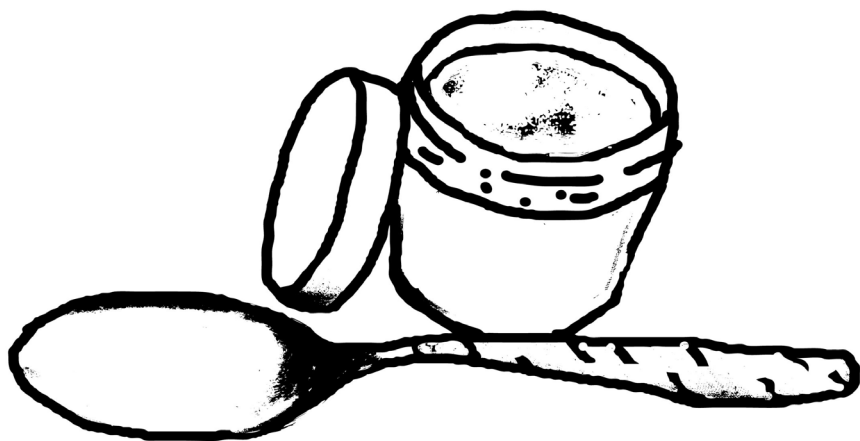


Over the years I have learned a few tricks that might make things slightly easier. Cloth for the handles, and salve to make my left hand and the bulbs slick.

I wrap cloth medical tape around the handles of my spoons. This is more for keeping them from slipping and sliding than for padding. Make sure that you do not wrap too much around the handles, as this might dampen the sound. I also change my tape

often, keeping it fresh.

On the hand opposite the one holding the spoons I place a thin amount of salve. Chapstick works well. I use a special cream that a friend makes for me, primarily made of beeswax, olive oil, and coconut oil. This makes the spoons slide a bit easier, by cutting down on the friction the spoons is placing on your fingers. If you get into playing, you will also find that this protects against blisters and callouses.



starting out

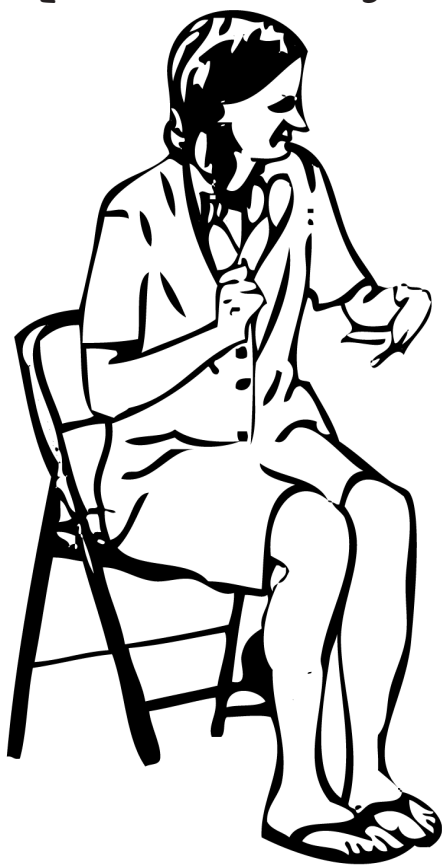
When I first started playing the spoons I wasn't very good at it. It took me a moment to physically understand the grip and the basic movements and tricks. I had to be very careful not to annoy those around me while I was first learning. I found appropriate places to play and practice, and often utilized prerecorded music to help with my understanding of basic timing.

An understanding of basics of timing can be very helpful. I always try to find the core of the beat within the song. After I identify the core or root of the beat I add to the rhythm from there. With prac-

tice you can create many complex rhythmical patterns.

Your grip is very important. There is no "right" or "wrong" way of playing the spoons. However, styles can vary from region to region and player to player. The drawing within this book is the way that I happen to play the spoons. This particular way is just what I have found to work very well for me. I'm also the only spoon player I know that uses oil on one of their hands. I've used various products through the years, but now I use a specific cream formulated for my spoon playing. Again, this is not the "right way", just the way I do it.

I encourage you to find your own style and have some fun with it. Having a good time playing music is the most important thing of all. For the most part, if it feels good and sounds good you're doing it right.



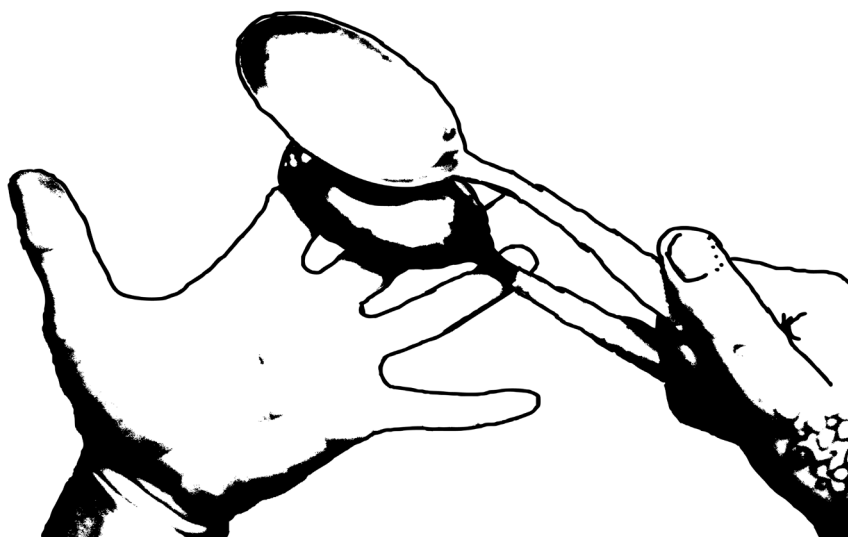
*Happiness is not a matter of
intensity but of balance, order,
rhythm and harmony.*

- Thomas Merton

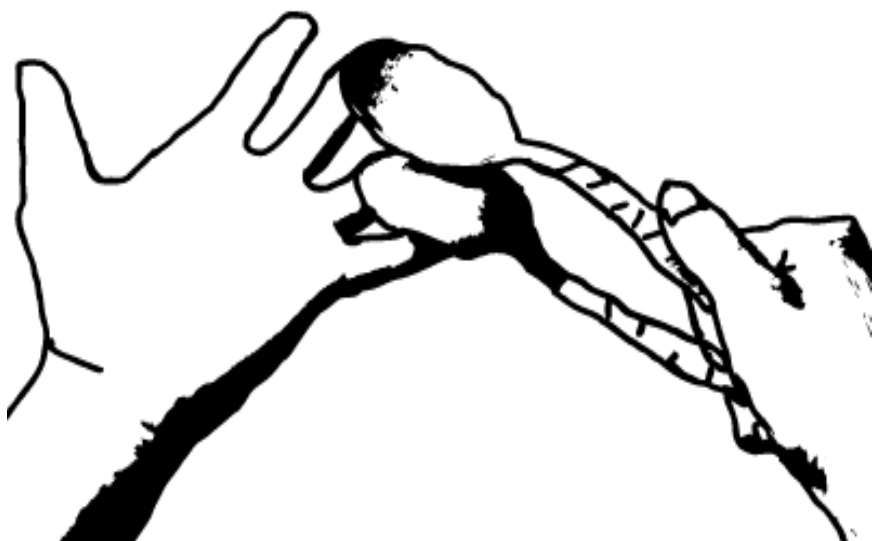


the roll

When you run the spoons down your fingers, letting the top spoon "vibrate" on top of the bottom, it creates a drum-roll sound. Remember to keep the top spoon very loose so that it can move enough to make the sound. You shouldn't have to press the spoons down on your fingers to create the sound.



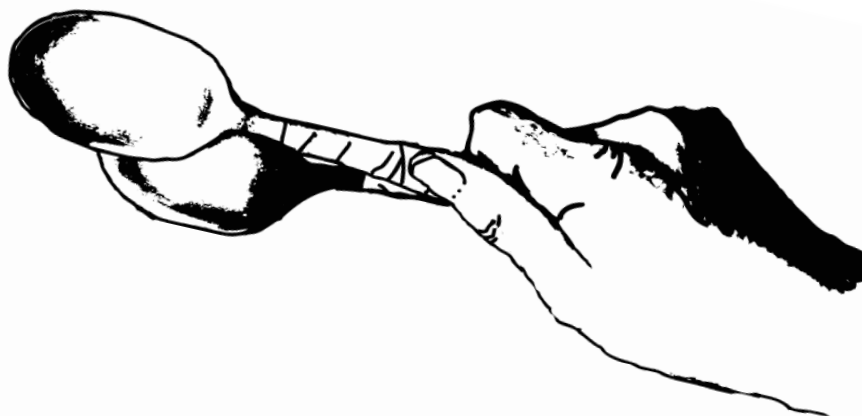
Remember to keep your fingers stiff, seperate and straight. As you get used to the motion, you will be able to create the sound whether you're running the spoons down your fingers, or running your fingers under the spoons.

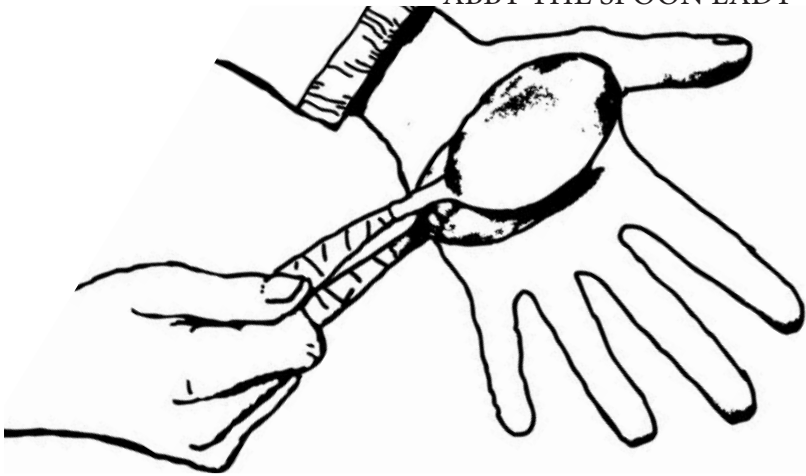


I don't ever run the spoons down the backside of my hands on my knuckles. You can hurt and bruise yourself badly playing that way. There are plenty of techniques that are less abrasive to your joints.

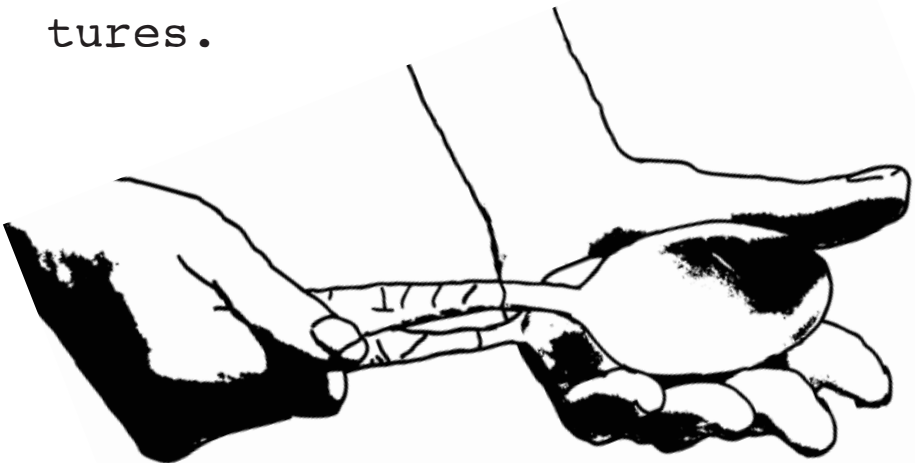
learning about airflow & dynamics

When you move the top spoon from side to side, making them hit at different spots, it also creates a different effect. Try tapping the spoons with the bulbs right on top of one another. Now try tapping them with one of the spoons slightly offset from the other, such as in the picture below. You will hear a difference in tone.





The way you cup the spoons as they hit your palm will create a difference in the volume and tone. Try hitting the spoons in your palm to create this effect. Try it with your hand open, and then try it with your palm more shut around the bulb of the spoon, as in these pictures.



spoon playing tips



Attempt to not make your family and friends too upset while you are learning. Spoons can be an abrasive instrument for beginners. Practice alone with pre-recorded music. This will help get you up to speed before joining in on your local jams.



Watch videos of other spoon players. Slow the videos down, and watch the movements. Spoon playing is easier with momentum, but try to start slow.



Don't give up.

Spoons is all about muscle memory and takes time to learn. Repetitive practice and dedication are the only way to learn advanced spoons.



Stretch your fingers, hands, arms, and even your shoulders. This will help prevent pulled muscles. If you're playing outdoors, drink plenty of water.



REMEMBER: THE TOP SPOON IS THE HAMMER AND THE BOTTOM SPOON IS THE ANVIL. Having a proper grip is very important.

notable spoon players

Artis the Spoonman

V. S. Morozov

Tran Quang Hai

Deb "Spoons" Perry

Bert Draycott

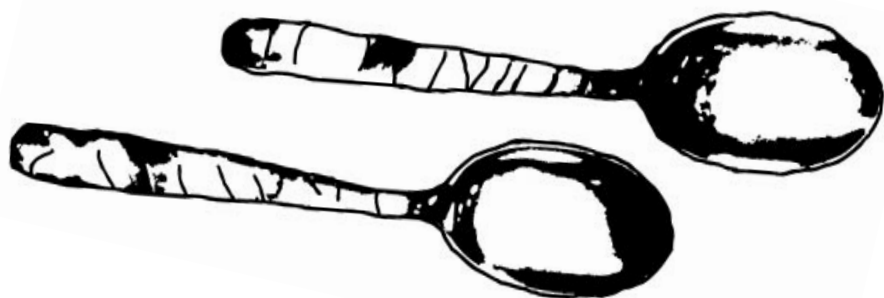
Jo May

Sam Spoons

Johnny Bongos Horgan

Jim Cruise

Abby the Spoon Lady



fun spoon playing facts

Largest Spoon Playing ensemble consisted of 1,980 participants and was organized by Dai-to Trust Construction Co. Ltd. (Japan) at the Hawaii Convention Center, in Honolulu, Hawaii, USA, on 10 August 2012.
- Guinness World Record

During the Great Depression, musicians would travel with instruments like the spoons because they were portable, inexpensive, and practical.

V. S. Morozov, who played in the Pyatnitsky Orchestra, was awarded with the title of the Honoured Artist of Russia for his musical talent playing the spoons and other folk instruments.

links and resources

Abby the Spoon Lady

Spoon Lady Music

<http://spoonladymusic.com/>

Deb "Spoons" Perry

<http://spoonsperry.com.au/>

Jo May Percussion

<http://www.jomaypercussion.co.uk/>

Jim Cruise, spoon player

<http://www.jimcruise.com/>

JUG BAND MUSIC SOCIETY

<http://www.jugband.org/>

JUG BAND HALL OF FAME

<http://www.jughall.org/>

NATIONAL JUGBAND JUBILEE

<http://jugbandjubilee.com/>

jug band music supplies

BONE DRY MUSICAL INSTRUMENT
COMPANY

<http://www.bonedrymusic.com/>

COLUMBUS WASHBOARD CO.

<http://www.columbuswashboard.com/>

THE CORNER JUG STORE

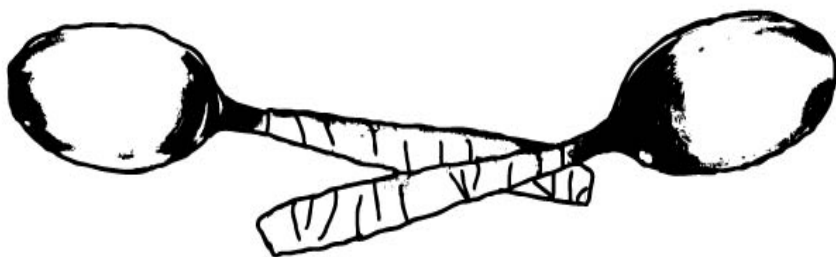
<http://www.jugstore.com/>

PLAY 'DEM BONES

<http://www.playdembones.com/>

IRISH BONES

<http://www.irishbones.com/>



I hope you have a
great time playing
spoons! Please send
me some videos of
your progress!

Abby the Spoon Lady

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