

# ***BLUEGRASS BANJO***

***VOLUME 1***

***BY JAY BUCKEY***



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On the cover: a 1999 Gibson, Earl Scruggs Model, at Kaenna Point, island of Oahu, Hawaii,  
USA

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The play-along audio tracks for this book are a download on this page:  
[www.jaybuckey.com/play\\_along.htm](http://www.jaybuckey.com/play_along.htm)  
Detailed download instructions are provided on that page.

Passwords for the files:

Banjo Volume 1: 7b595f54q6

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# ***FORWARD***

**Bluegrass Banjo Volume 1** is a revision of the **Virtual Band Bluegrass Method** by Jay Buckey, first published in 1998. This original work was released for Banjo, Guitar, Fiddle, Bass, Dobro and Mandolin.

This project is, in some ways, similar to the original release. The song selection and audio recordings are similar. However, the text has been updated with more detail and expanded instruction. **Bluegrass Banjo** is a welcome update of the original release. The text has been expanded, more exercises have been included, helpful comments, chord diagrams, performance notes, professional tips, suggestions, recommend listening, internet links and other helpful references are also included to round out this material into a **Master Collection** of great bluegrass music.

There are several Volumes in the Bluegrass Banjo series.

The power of this program is with the audio recording. The audio tracks are a separate download at [www.jaybuckey.com](http://www.jaybuckey.com). Page three of this book has the link and password for these files. [www.jaybuckey.com/ebook.htm](http://www.jaybuckey.com/ebook.htm) has more details about these files and how to use them in your practice.

These songs have been tested with my local students and they have chosen the speeds, 100 bpm for starting out when practicing the solos, then 150 bpm as a step up. The complete arrangement, including the other instruments and vocals (if there are lyrics) is at the fastest tempo, often times, 200 bpm.

In real life, these songs are often played faster than 200 bpm. However, to keep things in perspective and to make sure you develop solid technique and timing, I have purposely kept the recordings at a manageable tempo.

A complete list of other materials can be found at [www.jaybuckey.com](http://www.jaybuckey.com)

# ***BEFORE WE BEGIN***

The design of this series is to help you get a real feel for bluegrass on the Banjo and play along with others in a group setting. The recordings are designed to help simulate an actual performance with a band on the stage. Included in the tablatures are the solos, in a variety of levels, the back up portions, both chords and that all-important, 'noodling around' during the vocal breaks. You will share the solos and back up with the other main bluegrass instruments, Fiddle, Dobro, Guitar, Mandolin and Bass. The Banjo is pushed to the far right of your stereo so that you can tune it out and be the banjo player in the band..

The first part of this book is set up to help a complete beginner get a quick start on the Banjo. The video tutorials (available separately at [www.jaybuckey.com](http://www.jaybuckey.com)) will walk you through this first part. It is very helpful. Following this start up section, you will find the **Song Section**, which has been laid out in a very professional manner. Vocals, solos, chords, backup, and everything you need to play in a real band.

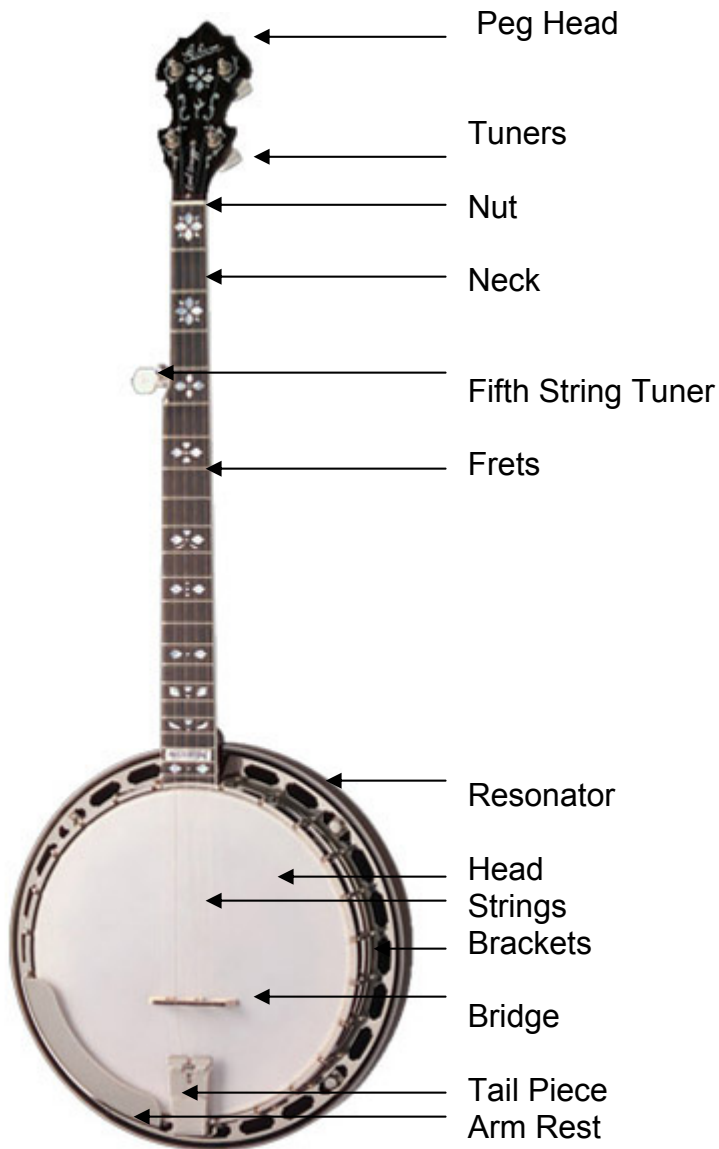
The *Table of Contents* has all the material and songs listed. The audio tracks will have a number listed after the title; this is the speed in Beats Per Minute. This way, you can work on the slower versions to get a good feel for the solos and then gradually move to a faster pace. These are not necessarily the actual speeds of the songs in actual performance. Most Banjo pickers play very fast, but remember, you are just learning and there is no need for lighting fast solos. You want to get your picking to sound clean and in good time. *Speed is a by-product of accuracy.*

Good luck!



# ***GETTING TO KNOW YOUR INSTRUMENT***

Below are the parts of the 5-string banjo that you should be familiar:

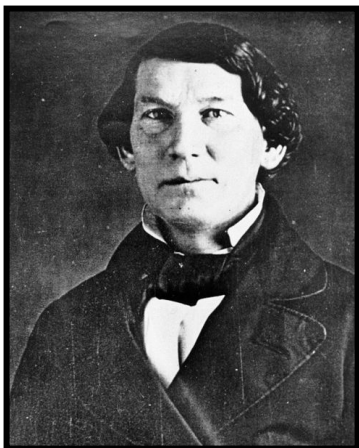


# *A 'BRIEF' HISTORY OF THE BANJO*

The roots of the 5-string banjo can be traced back to Africa. Original examples sometimes being called the "gourd banjo".

One very compelling African banjo predecessor is called the "Akonting." It is a spike folk lute played by the Jola tribe of Senegambia. The name banjo is commonly thought to be derived from the Kimbundu term *mbanza*. Some etymologists derive it from a dialectal pronunciation of "bandore", though recent research suggests that it may come from a Senegambian term for the bamboo stick used for the instrument's neck.

In contrast to the 4-string banjo, the fifth string, also called the 'Thumb' string, gives the bluegrass banjo its unique appearance and style. Of special interest is the origin of this string. In the past, some banjo books have credited this addition to Joel Walker Sweeney. He wanted an instrument similar to the banjar played by African Americans in the American south, but at the same time, he wanted to implement some new ideas.



He worked with a New York drum maker to replace the banjar's skin-covered gourd with the modern open-backed drum-like pot, and added another string to give the instrument more range or a drone. This new banjo came to be tuned gCGBD; somewhat higher than the eAEG#B tuning of the banjar. However, a painting done long before Sweeney's supposed invention of the fifth string, called *The Old Plantation*, shows African American slaves playing a banjo that has what appears to be three long strings and a short, thumb-plucked string. In part because of that painting, modern scholarship now believes that it was the *bass string* that Sweeney added, not the "thumb string".

In bluegrass music, which uses the five-string resonator banjo exclusively, it is often played in *Scruggs style*, named after Earl Scruggs, melodic or Keith style from the innovative playing of Bill Keith, or three-finger style with single string work, also called Reno style after Don Reno. In these styles the emphasis is on arpeggiated figures called, 'Rolls' played in a continuous eighth-note rhythm.

The focus of this series is mainly based on the style of Earl Scruggs. There will be Melodic versions of some of the songs but I prefer to use the Melodic Style sparingly and more as an embellishment preserving that characteristic 'Bluegrass' sound of Scruggs Style Rolls.

If you would like to read more about the banjo, it's history, those players that have made a significant impact on it's popularity and other interesting facts and folk lore, you may want to check out some of these interesting references on the Wikipedia web site:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bluegrass\\_music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bluegrass_music)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_banjo\\_players](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_banjo_players)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prewar\\_Gibson\\_banjo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prewar_Gibson_banjo)



# ***TYPES OF BANJOS***

There are two main types of banjos, the **4 String** and **5 String**. The later is what you need to play the material in this book. If you have a four String Banjo, you will want to look around for a five String. You really cannot successfully convert a four String to a five. The neck will not effectively accommodate this extra string.

When shopping for a banjo, I always recommend going easy on the price if you are just starting out. You can really spend some serious money on a nice instrument, up to several thousand dollars. Therefore, to be safe, I would recommend buying a basic instrument at a garage sale, or pawnshop if it is cheap enough. You can find deals with online auctions too. However, you will find most of these instruments, although cheap, are not playable and will take some time and money to bring them up to a decent standard. They usually do not sound that great either, and will end up as another 'canoe paddle' hanging in your garage. Another problem if you go too cheap is that you may not be able to find anyone that knows how to set them up. This will be another hidden cost.

As a suggestion, especially if you are a green beginner, I could recommend Deering Banjos, 'Goodtime Banjo' WITH THE RESONATOR. You DO NOT want an open back banjo for bluegrass music. The open back banjos are best for old time claw hammer style music.

Here is a link to this instrument: <http://www.deeringbanjos.com/goodtime.htm>

These banjos are a few hundred dollars or so. The economy can be fickle and so are prices. Like everything else, they can change over night, they usually go up and not down, so you will want to investigate the current pricing on these by going to the link above. Also, there may be other fine instruments that would be good for starting out. It would just take some investigation. But, at the time of this writing, I have been using and recommending the 'Goodtime'. My banjo of choice is Gibson and Stelling. Many students ask me for a recommendation for starting out and this is a good banjo to do just that, without breaking the bank.

A very good banjo will set you back about \$4000+. No kidding! Get ready for some sticker shock when you decide to go that route. You may need to 'butter up' your Significant Other to merit the purchase, but the extra money spent will be well worth it if you are going to continue your banjo picking.

Generally, a better banjo is heavier with a better Tone Ring. This is the part inside of the Pot Assembly. It looks like a drum. This Tone Ring is generally made of brass and adds volume and sustain to the overall tone and gives it a good projection.

When it comes to purchasing a fine banjo, you almost cannot go wrong with a Gibson banjo, they are a great investment. However, not all of them sound the same. To be safe, you

should play them first before purchase. I would NEVER recommend mail order for something of that price. I always drive my cars first before buying. The same goes for banjos.

There are several other great banjos out there; *Stelling* is one of the finest to come down the pike and deserves special mention. One of my students bought the *Red Fox* by *Stelling* and it is every bit as good as my *Earl Scruggs Gibson*. Again, you should play these in person *first* before purchase to make sure you like the style and tone.

There are many different brands of banjos and makers. Some of them are very nice too. From time to time, folks will send me an email asking 'what do I think of the Boogey Creek banjo' (I made that name up), or another obscure instrument. In all honestly, I probably will not know since there are so many out there. The main thing is that you like the sound of the instrument and it plays well for you. A good instrument will keep your interest and you will enjoy playing it for years to come. The more banjos you can play, the more informed your choice will be. The one thing about a high quality banjo is that they will hold their value over time and in the case of the classic names like, *Gibson* will have good appreciation. You will not lose money on the purchase of a great instrument.

A good place to find a quality banjo is at a major bluegrass festival. There you will find vendors and luthiers with their custom instruments for sale. Not only will you find a great selection, but there will be other banjo pickers there trying them out! It is good to hear the banjo played from the front, so you can judge how it projects its tone. Often times you can get a better deal at a festival than at a music store. Plus, the atmosphere is top notch and your fellow banjo pickers may have some good suggestions on picking, set up, and how to convince your 'Significant Other' they will benefit, when you spend \$5000 on a banjo! Observe what the pros and hot pickers are playing at these events and if you like their sound, then this is the banjo that you will want to consider. To find these events, just do a search on the Internet for bluegrass festivals that will have music vendors.

One other thing about banjos; EVERYTHING ON THIS INSTRUMENT NEEDS TO BE TIGHT FOR IT TO PROJECT THE BEST TONE AND VOLUME.

Check the brackets as see if any are loose. If they are, they can be tightened from the inside of the pot assembly. Look at the head and see if it is 'sinking', especially around the bridge. If so, it needs to be tightened. You can also press firmly with your fingers and see if the head bounces like a trampoline. If it does, it needs to be tightened. Tightening a banjo head is not hard or a big deal. It is a lot like tightening the lugs on the wheels of your car. However, it's surprising how many dealers will let a banjo that has loose 'wheel lug nuts' drive out of their shop. If your banjo has a nice, tight head and all the metal parts are firm and nothing is rattling, great! Also, be aware that over time, weather and humidity changes, they will all need to be checked again, just like the tires on your car. Banjos require preventive maintenance. If you purchase your banjo at a bluegrass festival, the vendors there will usually have their instruments in tiptop shape. This is another plus over buying from your general music store downtown that stocks only electric guitars, basses, and drums.



# *LEFT-HAND PLAYERS*

From time to time, I get a 'south-paw' that wants to pick the banjo and prefers to reverse the strings on the banjo and play it backwards. I prefer to call the 'regular' banjo as, '*standard*', not right-handed.

Why?

Have you ever seen a left-handed piano? I do not think you will. The piano is '*standard*' with the notes to the left being the lowest and the notes to the right being the highest. When a left-handed player plays the piano, they simply learn to play the standard piano like everyone else.

How about a car? Have you ever seen a left-handed car? If you are in England, you will drive on the left side of the road, if you are in the USA, it will be the right side, regardless if you are left-handed or right.

If you decide to reverse the banjo to pick with your left-hand, you will need to buy a specially made instrument because of the fifth string. One company that makes them, to my knowledge is *Deering*, but for now, I would recommend learning with a standard banjo if you can. They will be cheaper, and you will be able to find a greater selection of instruments.

Unlike a Guitar or Mandolin, a five string Bluegrass Banjo has a unique neck shape. The next time you are at a music store that has a 5 string banjo in their display, note that at the fifth fret, where the fifth string begins, the neck will have more wood added for this string AND the tuning peg. A five-string banjo neck, unlike the four-string banjo, is not straight and smooth all the way down. (There are a few hybrids out there that have eliminated that fifth string gear altogether).

Can you reverse a standard five-string banjo neck? I suppose it is possible. You could do an Internet search for some ideas or help in doing this. There are always folks out there that like to tinker with this kind of thing. I considered once, adding a fifth string to a four string banjo, but after measuring the width of the neck with the added string, there just was not going to be enough room, so I scrapped the idea altogether.

However, if you have a nice banjo with a good pot assembly, you may look into having a luthier custom build a neck to fit the pot and then save the old neck in case you ever decide to sell it. In this case, you would only be unbolting and re-attaching the new neck.

However, the bottom-line for you lefties: try to play the '*standard*' banjo first, so that you will have more options and choices. If that does not work, then look for a reversed necked banjo.

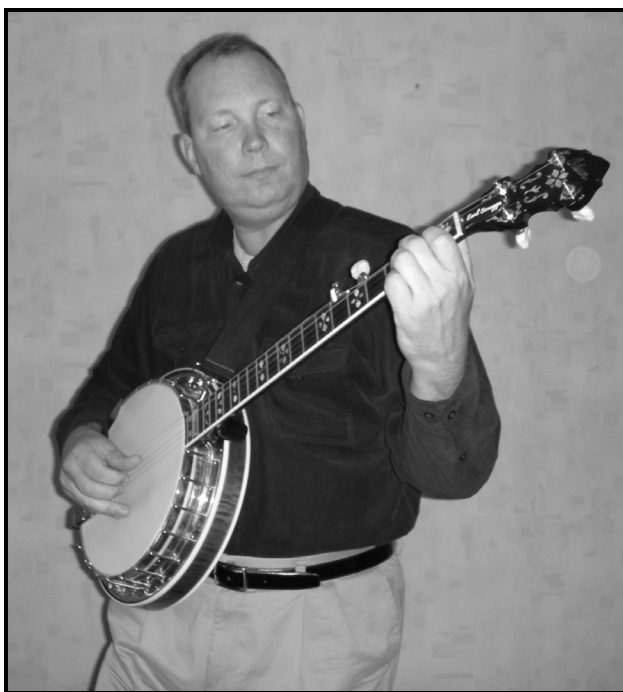
## ***HOLDING THE BANJO***

A good banjo is a heavy instrument. I like to practice sitting down, balanced between my legs. You can also stand, but you will need a strap to help hold it up. I use a basic guitar strap and it works just fine, but there are other, fancier straps you can use. If you decide to go with a regular banjo strap, you may want to use one that is rather wide at the shoulder. This will spread the weight of the instrument more evenly across your shoulder, so you will not fatigue too soon.

Some of the better banjo straps will weave around the brackets and 'cradle' the instrument keeping it nicely balanced. I have used all kinds of straps and now just use a basic guitar strap.

I wear my strap around the neck like guitar players do. Some banjo pickers sling the strap over their right shoulder. That is just a matter of preference.

The best position for the strap is just tight enough to hold the banjo in place while it sits in your lap. You want the bulk of the weight of the instrument in you lap. So, adjust the strap to hold the banjo in place without the neck sliding towards the floor. The strap should be adjusted, so you can take your hands away from the banjo, and it will sit comfortably in your lap without moving. This way, you will not be fighting to keep it balanced, and your right and left hands will be able to move freely and smoothly.



## *LEFT HAND POSITION*

Your left-hand thumb should be behind the neck, resting lightly and allowing the palm to be open. The palm should not be resting on the back of the neck. When moving the left-hand to a higher position, I like to lightly rest the first knuckle of the Index finger on the leading edge of the bottom part of the neck to keep contact with it. Try not to bend your wrist too sharply and keep your hand and fingers relaxed.

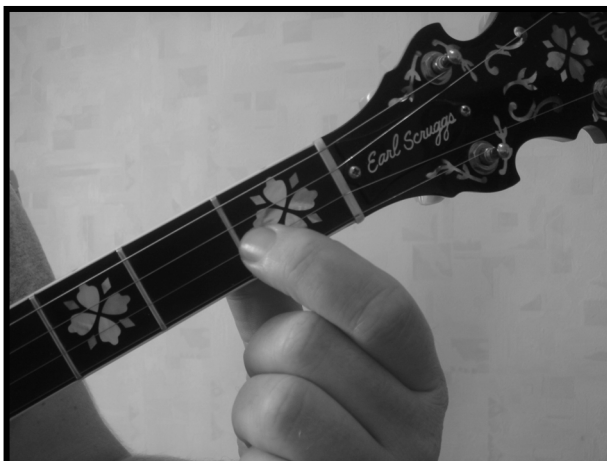


The left-hand fingers should curl around the fingerboard and come down on the strings with direct pressure on the tips. Keep your nails short so they do not interfere. For the best tone and clean sound, you will want to press the string firmly with the fingertip **JUST BEHIND THE FRET, NOT ON THE FRET**, since this will give the note a muffled sound. **TOO FAR BACK FROM THE FRET** will give a buzzing sound. The string needs to touch the fret firmly without obstruction for the cleanest, clearest sound.





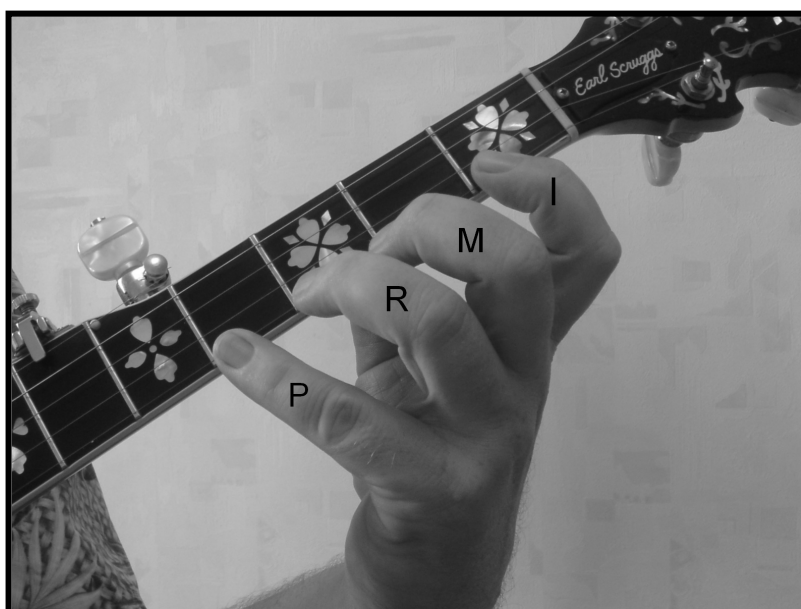
The Index finger is too far from the fret.



Just right!

## ***FRETTING THE NOTES***

The left hand fingers will be labeled, Index = I, Middle = M, Ring = R and Pinky = P when describing which finger is being used in difficult passages on the recordings. These markings will be in CAPITAL LETTERS above the tablature.



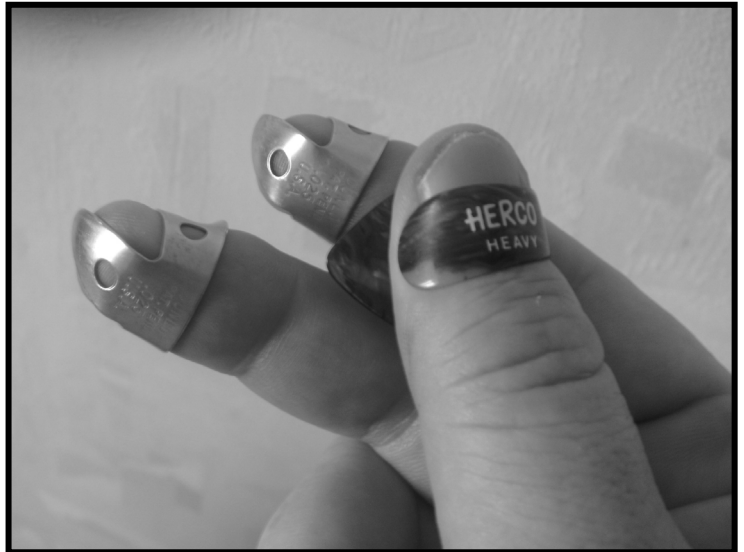
# *THE RIGHT HAND*

To get that crisp, bright sound that is so characteristic of the banjo, you will need to wear some finger picks. These come in all sizes and flavors. Usually, bluegrass banjo pickers use metal picks on the Index and Middle fingers and a plastic pick for the Thumb.

I have experimented with different brands and styles over the years and you will want to do the same to see what feels the best for you. I have settled on heavy gauge metal Dunlop picks (.025) for the Index and Middle fingers and a plastic thumb pick made by Herco (Heavy). It resembles a standard guitar pick with a piece of plastic that will wrap around your thumb.

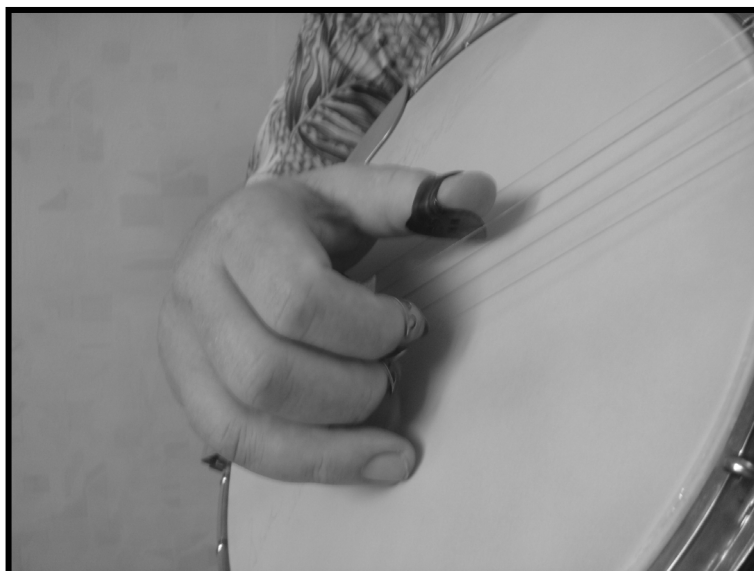
A problem with metal finger picks is that if they are too light, the edges will cut into your fingers and start to hurt after a couple hours of playing. The same goes for the thumb picks. Some thumb picks are really heavy and tight and will give you 'purple thumb' since it cuts off the circulation to the tip.

I have found the Herco to be 'just right'. I once saw Chet Atkins playing with one of these and thought, 'If Chet uses it, it must be A-OK!' I was right. They are like wearing a worn pair of slippers. This pick like most plastic picks can be adjusted by running hot tap water over the edge and re-shaping it. The only drawback with the Herco pick is that they will wear down quite often if you play a lot, so you should keep several in your case.



If your local music store does not carry these picks, I have posted some links on my web for these and other hard to find banjo items.

The placement of the right-hand on the banjo is important for speed, timing, and accuracy. Generally, I like to rest the right-hand pinky and ring finger together lightly on the top of the banjo head about an inch in front of the bridge. This will give your right-hand more stability and control.



I also like to keep the thumb slightly ahead of the Index finger. The motion of the thumb is towards the floor and the Index and Middle fingers will pull up on the strings towards the ceiling. These three fingers form a 'claw shape'. By keeping the thumb slightly ahead, it and the Index finger will not interfere with each other.



When the left hand moves to the higher positions on the neck, you will get a smoother and more sustained tone by sliding your right-hand closer to the neck.

In this new position, you will want to continue to keep the thumb slightly ahead of the Index and keep the Ring and Pinky fingers resting lightly on the banjo head.

The middle of the forearm should be resting on the armrest for added support.

# ***TUNING YOUR INSTRUMENT***

I have always told my students: ***'IF YOU CAN'T PLAY IT RIGHT, PLAY IT LOUD!'***

And: ***'IF YOU PLAY IT LOUD, PLEASE PLAY IT IN TUNE!'***

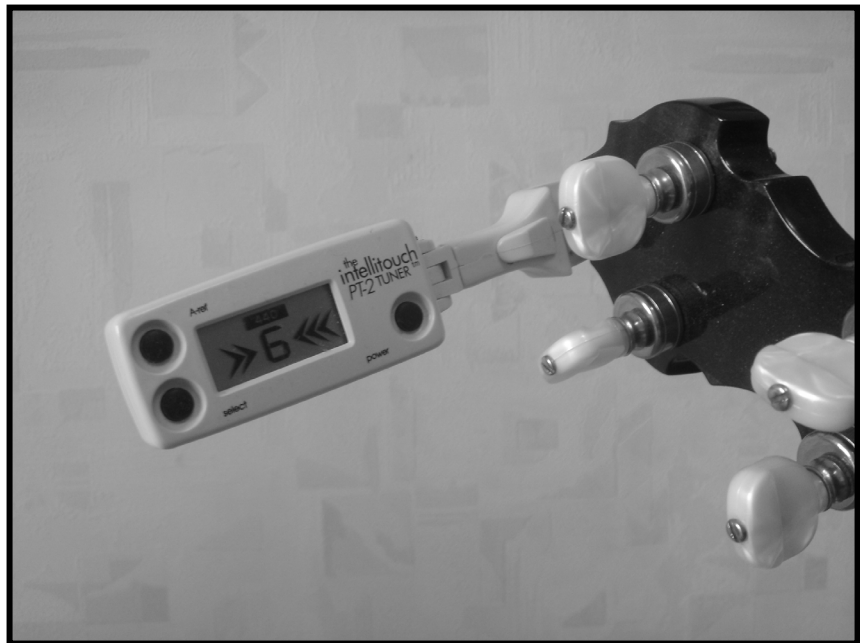
Keeping your banjo in tune is very important. You will not only sound better but other players just might invite you to play with them again!

There are ways to tune the banjo to itself, to a piano, or another instrument like a guitar. However, in this modern computer age, you should pick up a digital tuner. They are not that expensive these days, they will be more accurate than your ears, and they fit much better in your case than a piano. Chances are the players at the music festivals, picking in the campgrounds, are also using these electronic wonders and everyone will be in tune, when you step in to jam along.

In addition, the recordings for this book are in standard tuning, so, if you are in tune with the electronic tuner, you will be ready to play with the audio portion of this method. For this reason, I have not included a separate track on the audio portion of this program for tuning. You should be using an electronic tuner.

There are many variations of these tuners. My favorite is the *Intelletouch* tuner, which looks a little bit like a mobile phone. It attaches directly to the peg head of your instrument and detects the vibrations.

There are other tuners that use a combination of lights or meters and everything in-between. When you are at a bluegrass festival, ask other pickers what they are using. In the end, chose one that fits your budget and style.



The strings on the banjo are tuned, from closest to the floor: D, B, G, D, and G for the high fifth string.

To remember these names, I use the phrase; '**Good Dog Good Bad Dog**' or you may want to make up something else that will help you remember the string names. Be creative!

This tuning is called, '**G tuning**' and when the strings are strummed open, that is, with no left-hand fingers touching them, they will collectively sound out a *G major chord*.

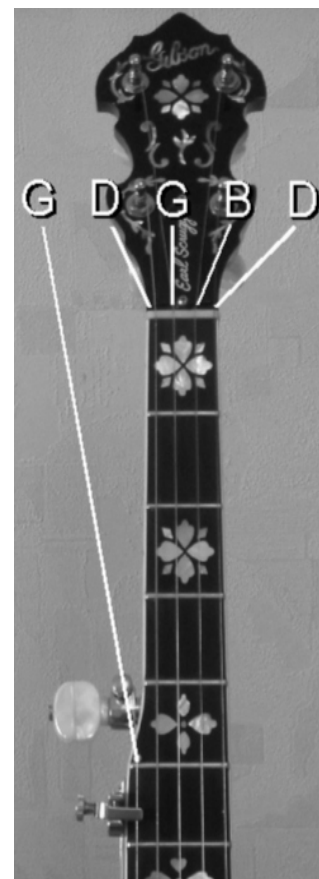
There are other tunings that you will learn, like C tuning, D tuning, D minor, G minor and more. These are very effective in old time music giving the banjo a unique open sound creating new chord shapes and such. These will be covered in detail, as we need them. For now, G tuning will be the best to start with and is the most popular for bluegrass music.

I try to make most of my arrangements in G tuning to avoid having to make many adjustments between songs.

I remember when I was a kid, learning the violin, I was having a hard time getting my instrument into tune. In those days, all we had was a pitch pipe (which I would not recommend, if you can even find one these days), or a strobe tuner that used vacuum tubes in the classroom. It was archaic but it was the cat's meow back in those days.

One day, I just could not seem to get my violin into pitch, it just did not sound right. My teacher was getting a bit impatient, so she took the instrument to tune it for me and she could not get it into tune either! Upon inspection, my strings were getting too old and they simply needed to be changed. When I got the strings changed, it not only tuned better, it sounded and played better too!

Be sure you have a new set of strings on your banjo. They will sound the best, get and stay in tune better too. Usually strings are sold by the 'gauge'. That is, the width of the string. The two main choices for the Banjo are Light Gauge and Medium Gauge strings. You may find the Medium Gauge stays in tune better for you and they will be a little louder. If you are a 'heavy' picker, you will want to go this route. Light Gauge strings work well too, but the Medium seems to have more 'meat' and is my preference. You will need to experiment to see which suits you the best.



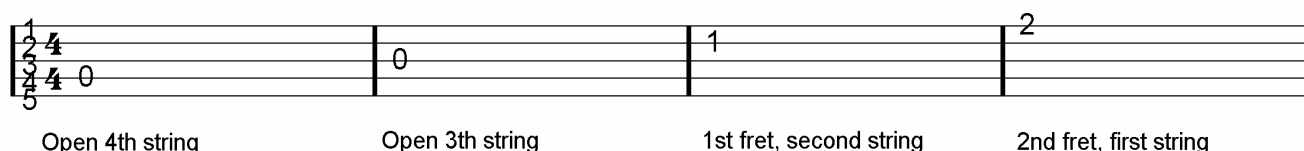


# UNDERSTANDING TABLATURE

**Tablature** is an old system of writing music on paper that was used centuries ago by lute players. Tablature, or '**Tab**' for short, is written on five lines called a **Staff**, with each line representing the strings of the banjo.

The top **line** represents the first string, D, the one closest to the floor when you are holding the instrument, the next line below that represents the second string, B, the third line would be G, then the fourth line, D and finally the bottom fifth line would be the highest pitched string, G.

In a way, this may look confusing to a beginner, the top line on the paper being the bottom string. Tablature is written this way. You will get used to this format as you practice. Nearly all banjo books and music available use tablature exclusively. A few will use standard music notation like what is found in Piano music, however, if they do, they usually include the tablature in parallel below the notation. Personally, I can read both but, like most pickers; still favor tablature for the banjo.

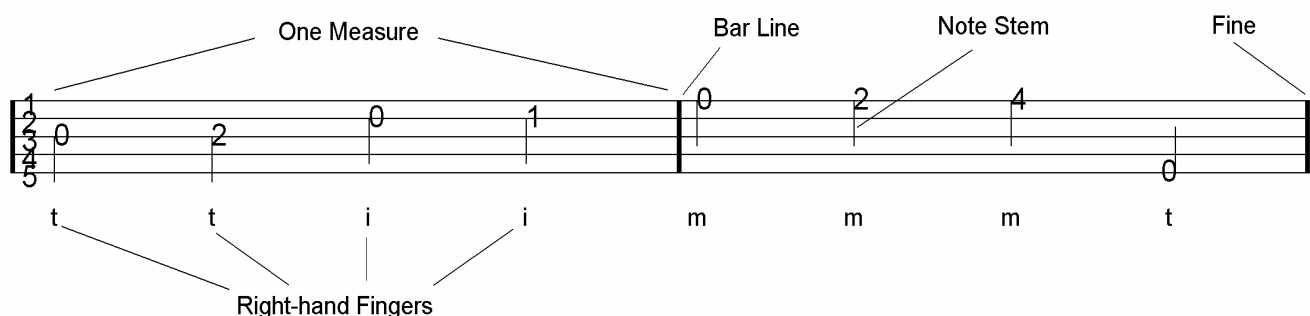


The string numbers are found at the far left of the staff. The two vertical '4's', just to the right, are called the **Time Signature** and are found at the beginning of a song. This will be explained a little bit later on. The numbers that are placed on the lines tell you which fret to hold down with your left hand.

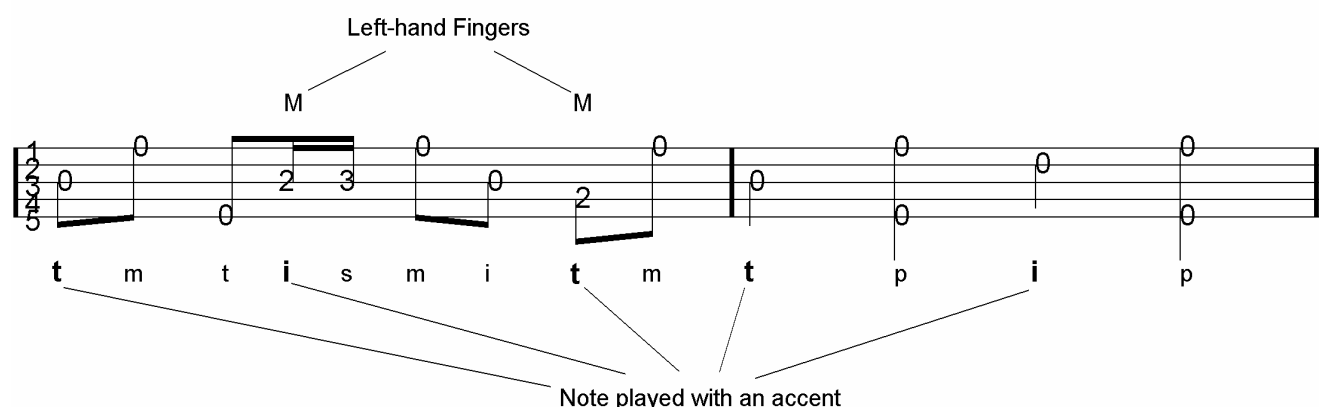
If there is a zero on a line, this string would be played Open, that is, no left-hand fingers would be touching the strings. If there is a One on the line, then you would press on that string just before the first fret. If there is a Two, you would do the same but press the string just below the second fret. A three would indicate the third fret, four for the fourth fret and so on until you run out of frets on the neck. Many banjos have 20 or more frets. If there are two numbers, one on top of the other, this means to play them at the same time.

The staff is divided into equal sections with vertical **Bar Lines** called **Measures**. A measure has a specific number of beats. Some banjo books and arrangements by other composers use the **2/4** time signature. This would mean that in every measure, you would count, 'One, two, one, two'. This is a **March rhythm** and is accurate for bluegrass. However, I have found that my students can read music faster in **4/4** or **Common Time** due to the lack of fast looking notes, like the 16<sup>th</sup> and 32<sup>nd</sup>. When playing in 4/4 time, you would simply count 'One,

two, three, four' and the tablature looks cleaner. 2/4 is accurate, but I find 4/4 looks cleaner and is much easier for a novice to understand.



At the end of a song, there are two vertical lines close together, one thin and the other thick. This is called, **Fine** (pronounced, 'feenay) and means 'The End' in Latin. The lines touching the numbers are called **Stems** and are the timing marks that tell you how long to hold a note. This will be explained in detail a little later.



Beneath the numbers, you will see letters that represent the fingers of the right-hand: t = Thumb, i = Index and m = Middle. There are some other letters that you will come across like p = pull off, h = hammer-on, s = slide and b = bend. These will be referring to the left-hand techniques. These will also be explained in detail latter on.

Sometimes, you may be wondering which left hand finger to use to note on the strings. To identify those, I use capital letters for these, I = Index (left-hand), M = Middle, R = Ring and P = Pinky.

The hallmark sound of bluegrass banjo is the roll pattern that gives it that drive. When you are first learning this instrument, the melody can get lost quickly and your listeners will be lost too. So, what you need to do is accent, or play certain notes a little bit harder so that the melody will pop out and be more recognizable. On the tablature, these notes will be indicated with **bold letters** on the right hand markings.

# CHORDS AND DIAGRAMS

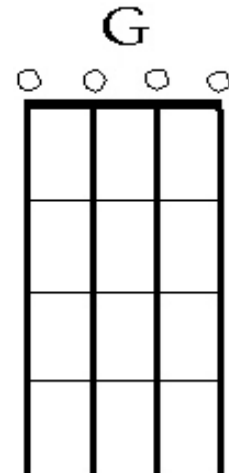
A **Chord** is defined as a 'series of notes played in unison that harmonize together'. One note by itself is generally for the Melody. Two notes played in unison are called '**Double-stops**'. These are popular with fiddle and mandolin players, but they are not chords. A Chord is a combination of three or more different notes played in unison that gives the song overall Harmony and texture.

There are literally thousands of chords and their variations. Fortunately, bluegrass can be played very effectively with just two or three different chords. This feature attracted me to bluegrass music. Although the chord progressions are simple and limited, the lead and solos can be very complex and exciting. This makes for a nice contrast.

Chords will be introduced as you need them in this series. You should know how to read a '**Chord Diagram**'. These diagrams are much like a road map that illustrate the banjo fingerboard and finger placement in a graphic representation. A Chord Chart can be found at the end of this book.

We will tune our banjo to the standard bluegrass G tuning. So, when you play all of the strings 'open', that is, with no left-hand fingers touching the strings, you will hear a **G chord**. The G chord can be illustrated in a Chord Diagram. The vertical lines in the graph represent the strings, as you would be looking directly at the fingerboard with the neck in a vertical position like in the illustration on page 8. The horizontal lines represent the frets. The thick, dark line at the top represents the Nut of the banjo. This is where the strings touch the neck just before being attached to the tuning pegs.

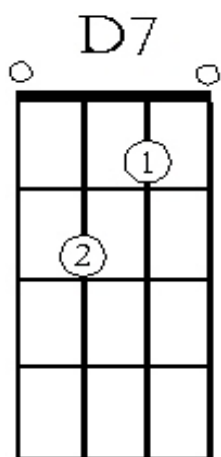
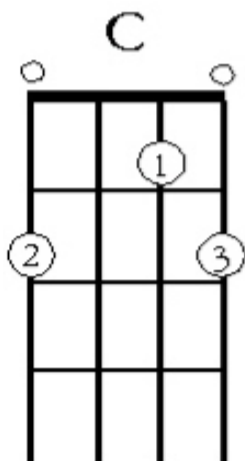
The circles, or zeros above the nut indicate that each string is to be played 'open', that is, no left-hand fingers should be touching the strings. The fifth string has been left out intentionally, since it is usually played open unless indicated.



Most songs can be played with only three basic chords. Our first few songs will be in the Key of G and use these three basic chords, G, C and D7.

Now, look at the chord diagrams for the C and D7 chords.

This time, unlike the Open G Chord, you will need to use two or three fingers on the left-hand to form the chord. These finger positions are indicated by the circles on the strings with the numbers inside. These numbers refer to the Index = 1, Middle = 2, Ring = 3 and Pinky = 4 fingers. This is the standard numbering for the left-hand fingers.



To play these two chords effectively and cleanly, you will want to curl the fingers around the neck so that you can put solid pressure on the fingertips. I also like to angle my fingers slightly to get good contact on the string. Also helpful, is to angle the neck of the banjo slightly away from you giving your left-hand a natural angle for the fingers. Be careful not to touch more than one string with each finger and keep the tips close but not on the frets for the cleanest sound.

A comprehensive chord chart can be found at the back of this book.

# CAPOS AND MODULATION

**Modulation** is a technical word for changing the key of a song, either higher or lower in pitch. To make this change easier, we can use a small device called a 'capo' that clamps onto the neck of the banjo, artificially squeezing the strings down onto a higher fret thereby raising the overall pitch of the song without having to learn any new chords, notes or rolls.

Some have called this device a 'cheater' since you really do not have to think very hard to make these changes. Other instruments that use the capo are the guitar and Dobro. The mandolin and fiddle generally do not have these in their bag of tricks.

I have written an extensive article on the capo for the banjo compared to the Guitar and Dobro on my web site that you will find very informative [www.jaybuckey.com](http://www.jaybuckey.com)

A few songs will use this device to change keys. When it is necessary, I will indicate this on the sheet music as 'Capo 2' or 'Capo 4' and so on. This simply means that you will play the song in the regular way, but you will need to put the capo on the neck at the indicated frets.

There will be more on this later as needed.

The banjo has a special problem when it comes to using the capo. Unlike the Guitar and Dobro, where the strings all start at the same point, the banjo has the fifth string at the fifth fret. When you capo the first four strings, you will generally need to capo this fifth string also. How do you do that? There are three possibilities:

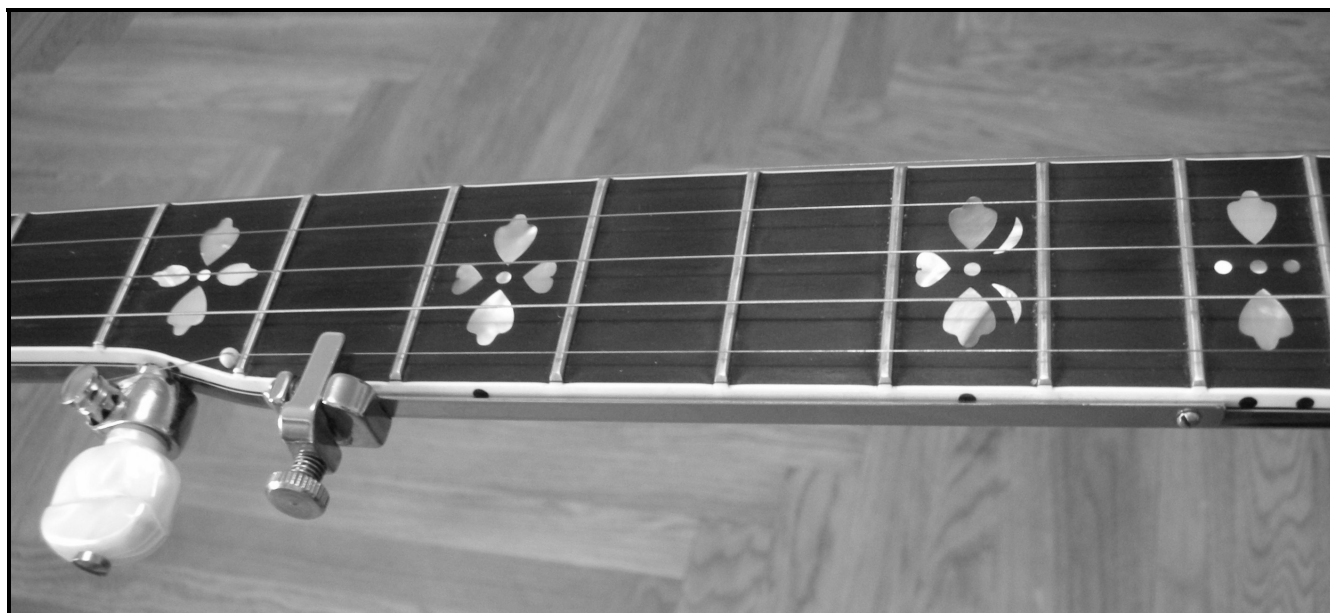
**Option #1: Install miniature railroad spikes**, the kind you find for model railroad trains, at specific frets, 7, 8, 9 and 10. I would recommend a pro to install them for you. Most professional pickers use these, and I have used them, but I do not like them. Why?

- If they get loose and pop out, you are out of luck. They will leave a hole in the fingerboard that cannot be reused.
- I have a tendency to catch my fingers on them when playing in the higher registers
- When you bend the fifth string to hook under the spike, you will be putting the string out of tune and need to retune it again, which is just another problem to deal with.

If you are handy with tools, and are not fearful of damaging the neck of your precious instrument, you may find this URL reference helpful:  
<http://members.tripod.com/banjoist/spike.html>

**Option #2: Install a Sliding Fifth String Capo.** This is my preference. Why?

- The Fifth String Capo is relatively easy to install. Only two small screws hold it in place. See photo.
- When it clamps down on the string, you can adjust the 'finger' to the appropriate amount of pressure so that the string WILL NOT GO OUT OF TUNE unlike the railroad spikes. This is very important if you are a beginner. It is hard enough, when you are first starting out to learn how to tune your instrument, and then have to retune the 5<sup>th</sup> string all over again, ESPECIALLY if you have a friction peg for the 5<sup>th</sup> string. I would always recommend a banjo with a geared fifth string tuner. Many times, I have changed my student's friction peg for the gear variety, which eliminates a lot of trouble for the novice from the beginning.



**Option #3: Have someone push down on the fifth string as you play.** This is not very professional but I have had someone do that for me once in a pinch. It drew some raised eyebrows but, hey, this is hillbilly music!

# ***RHYTHM AND TIMING***

Have you ever been to a large bluegrass festival? If not, you should go to one soon. You can find these events near your area by doing a search on the Internet. If you are in a remote area where bluegrass is not that popular, you may want to take a vacation and go to one. At many of these events, many camp out in tents, trailers, RVs or stay in hotels. To get the most from a bluegrass festival, you should camp out at the event. You may not get much sleep since some will play all night, but the music is why we go to these events!

You need to see bluegrass played live and up close to truly understand, and get the feel for it. When you are at a bluegrass festival, you will hear a variety of professional groups and a host of pickers in the parking lots and on the campgrounds.

One of the things you will notice at these events is that not all the groups are top notch. Some are awesome others can be quite mediocre. The question is, 'why?' Generally, it is the timing of the tune that makes a group sound professional or not. They could also be out of tune, but more often than not, it is the result of bad timing.

Music is based on three elements, the **HARMONY** (chords), the **MELODY** (singing parts and solos) and **RHYTHM** (guitar strums, mandolin chord chops, bass line and banjo rolls). **IF THE RHYTHM OF ONE OF THESE INSTRUMENTS IS OFF, EVEN BY THE SLIGHTEST AMOUNT, THE SONG WILL 'SWIM' AND SOUND OFF.** Good musicians have impeccable timing. It is as if they have an internal clock inside of them that keeps them on time. Of course, each musician needs to listen carefully to the rest of the band to make sure they are together.

The rhythm of the band is like a car engine. If all the cylinders are in proper timing, then the engine runs smooth, it is peppy when driving, does not hesitate when you step on the gas to pass another car, and you will get your best gas mileage. However, if one of the cylinders is firing too early or late, it will mess up the timing of the vehicle, causing it to run poorly, the engine will shake, your mileage will be poor, and so on.

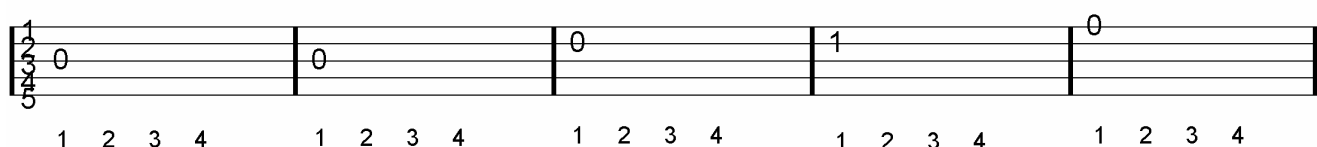
If one picker in a group is a little bit off, the 'musical engine' will be out of time and the audience will know it.

This is why it is so important to play along with the recordings included with this method, when you are practicing alone, to make sure you develop solid timing early on. When I first started to play the banjo, I did not have special recordings for this but had to rely on vinyl records. They worked OK, but to have structured recordings is the best. When you get to the song section, there will be multiple recordings, slow and faster, to make sure you are keeping proper time. I have recorded the songs and exercises to a steady *click track* to make sure you will be right on time throughout the piece. In the old days, we used to use a **metronome**. They are still handy little devices, but play-along audio tracks are the best, since they will simulate the feel of actually playing in a band.

To understand timing, let us look at some **Examples** on the tablature and then compare these with the audio recordings.

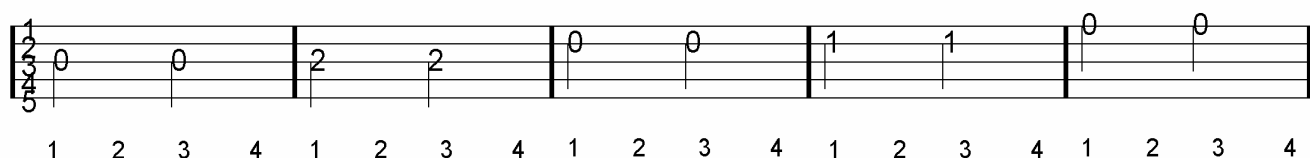
Not all notes are held for the same length. The longest note in a measure is called a **Whole Note** and will receive four counts. You will simply pick it and count to four. To keep things simple, for now, I am playing each note with the right-hand thumb on the recordings

Example 1

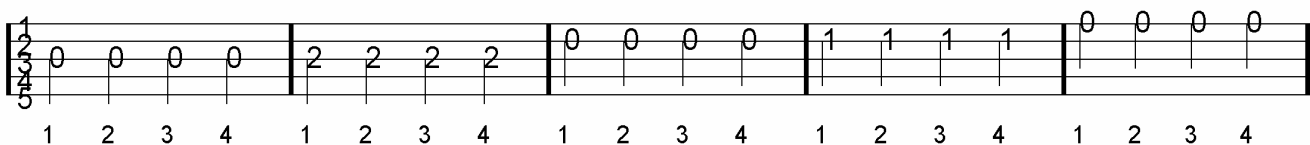


The **Half Note** will be held for two counts and has a stem attached to the number. Pick the note on count '1', let it ring for count '2', pick the next note on count '3', then let it ring for count '4'. You can tap your foot for each count if it helps. Listen to the recording to get a feel for this.

Example 2



Example 3



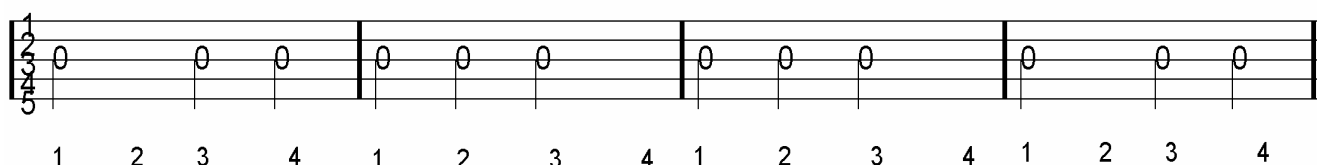
The Half Note is twice the speed of the Whole Note. The next faster note is the **Quarter Note** and it receives one count and is, again, twice as fast as the half note. Follow along with the tablature below as you listen to the audio recording of Example 3:



Some of my students have asked how they can tell the difference between the Half Note and the Quarter Note since they look the same. The easiest way to tell the difference is to notice the *spacing between the notes*. The Half Note will have more space (time) between them, the Quarter Note will be closer together. If there were a combination of these notes in the same measure, then the Half Note would have more space following it.

Look at the tablature below. The first measure has a Half Note followed by two Quarter Notes. There is more space following the Half Note because it is held longer. In the next measure, it is just the opposite, there are two Quarter Notes followed by one Half Note. How about the next couple of measures? How would you count those? Measure three is two Quarter Notes followed by a Half Note, and the final measure is a Half Note followed by two quarter notes.

Clear as mud? ☺



If you are still with me on this, let us continue. If not, take a break, drink some orange juice to clear your mind, and then come back later and review this. If this Timing stuff is new to you, it will sink in over time, but it needs to be explained and covered thoroughly, if you are going to sound like a professional.

OK, enough said, are we ready to move on?

The good news; we are almost ready to start picking bluegrass. The bad news; banjo music is played faster than the Quarter note.

Bluegrass banjo music is played with a combination of Quarter and Eighth Notes. The **Eighth Note** is only a half beat long and is twice as fast as the **Quarter Note**. The Eighth Note can be indicated in the tablature by a horizontal bar line connecting two Eighth Notes together. If they are by themselves, there will be a Flag attached to the stem. For most of our music, you will see these Eighth Notes paired together with the stem. The stem acts like 'musical parentheses' ( ). The two Eighth Notes paired together will indicate one count.

To count these pairs of Eighth Notes, we will have to add the word 'and' between them. I like to use the '&' symbol. As you will remember, our measures only have four counts, so to have these extra notes; we will have to add '&' between the beats.

If you were to tap your foot on the down beats, that is, the counts, 1, 2, 3 and 4, you would say or think ‘and’, when your foot comes up.

See Example 4 and follow along with the audio recording to get the feel for this new counting technique.

Example 4

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

At times, a section of a song will be repeated, like Example 5.

Example 5

1st Ending

2nd Ending

1.

2.

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

Repeat Sign

Or...

1.

2.

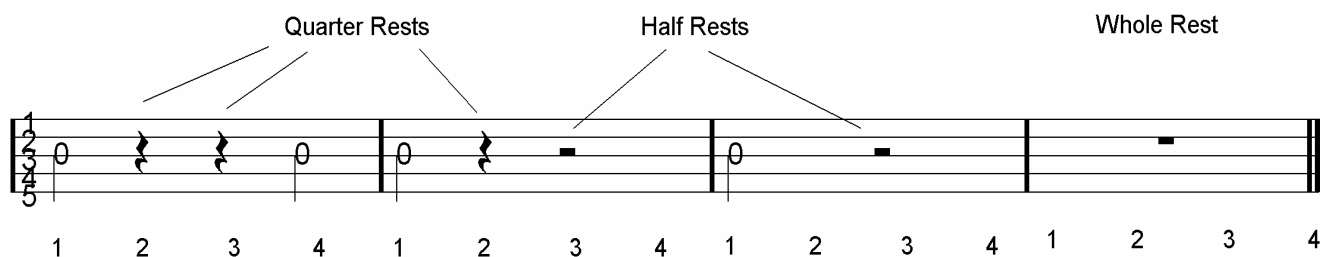
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

Second time, repeat to here instead of the beginning

The repeat is indicated by two vertical bar lines, one thicker than the other with two dots in front if it. This music symbol is called the Repeat. When you play up to this sign, you will repeat back to the beginning, OR to another Repeat sign facing in the opposite direction. Also, when you are repeating a specific section, the last measure of the section may not necessarily need to be played. If this is the case, it will be indicated by a 1<sup>st</sup> ending and a 2<sup>nd</sup> ending.

What this means is, you will play the song through the 1<sup>st</sup> ending, repeat back to the beginning of the song, then when you reach the 1<sup>st</sup> ending the second time, you will SKIP OVER IT, AND PLAY THE SECOND ENDING.

The song is repeated but the last measure is changed. This saves writing out a lengthy song, perhaps saves turning a page and helps to memorize the tune.



When no notes are played, there is a **Rest** written in the tablature to fill the space. A measure must always have four counts in 4/4 time. If there are no notes, then we use a Rest to fill the vacuum. In Example 5, the rest is a Quarter Rest (the crooked line) and will receive one count. There are a couple of other rests you may see in the music, the **Half Rest** (two counts, which looks like a box sitting on a line) and the **Whole Rest** (four counts, which looks like a box hanging on a line). These correspond to the Half Note and the Whole Note.

There are notes that are twice as fast as an Eighth note, these are called, **Sixteenth Notes**. In most cases, these will be special Left-hand techniques called **Hammer-ons**, **Pull-offs** and **Slides**. These are indicated in the tablature with two horizontal bars.

The first staff of the musical score for 'The Entertainer' is shown. It contains a sequence of notes, including some beamed sixteenth notes. A label 'Sixteenth notes' points to a specific group of notes in the staff.

There will be times when you will have multiple staves running together. These are to be read simultaneously. Often times, the top line will be the lead vocal line and beneath it will be the banjo backup. Below is an excerpt from ***‘Cabin in Caroline’*** from ***Volume 2*** to illustrate:

32

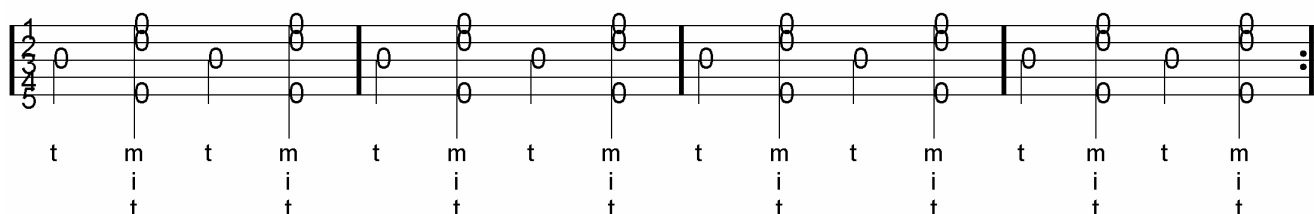
# BASIC RHYTHM IN THE RIGHT HAND

The heart of banjo picking is centered in the right hand. It is very important to be steady and very, very even, which is why it is important to learn your songs slowly. The next exercises are **Basic Rhythm Studies** to control the right hand. The Basic Rhythm is the foundation of good back up behind the vocalist. Let us start by working with the open G chord, so we can concentrate on it.

In Exercise 7, you will begin by playing the third string open with the Right-hand thumb on count 1, then, on count 2, you will need to *SIMULTANEOUSLY* play the fifth string with the thumb, first string with the Middle finger and the second string with the Index. This is sometimes called a 'Pinch' since it resembles pinching the strings.

Example 7

G



The tablature notes are stacked on top of each other because they are played at the same time.

On count 3, play the third string open again with the thumb and finally on count four, you will do another pinch. The following three measures will be the same. At the end of that line, you will repeat the process all over again.

THE IMPORTANT THING TO REMEMBER IS TO KEEP THE TIMING AND RHYTHM STEADY. DO NOT GO FAST THEN SLOW AND ESPECIALLY AT THE END OF THE MEASURE, KEEP GOING WITH OUT A BREAK IN THE TIMING.

As before, listen carefully to the recording and play along with it so you will develop the feel for this rhythm.

When you feel comfortable with the G chord and can keep the Basic Rhythm going, it's time too add a new chord to the mix. This time, let us add D7. In Example 8, we will start with the G chord as before, but only play two measures, then as smooth as possible, add the D7 chord without missing a beat. It can be quite challenging the first time you try this, but with regular practice, you will get a good feel for this chord change.

### Example 8

Let's move on to the other chord we know, C. With these three basic chords, G, C and D7, you will be able to play a zillion songs.

Using the same Basic Rhythm, we will now add C to the mix in Example 9. When you feel comfortable with these chord changes, try this Basic Rhythm and these three chords with the song, ***Roll In My Sweet Baby's Arms***, which is also found in the ***Song Section***.

### Example 9

The image displays two musical staves for guitar, each with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 12-measure scale run. The first staff is labeled 'G' and the second 'D7'. Both staves use a 5/4 time signature. The notes are: G (1st fret), A (2nd fret), B (3rd fret), C# (4th fret), D (5th fret), E (6th fret), F# (7th fret), G (8th fret), A (9th fret), B (10th fret), C# (11th fret), and D (12th fret). The picking pattern is indicated by numbers 1, 2, and 3 above the notes. The first staff has a capo on the 5th fret, and the second staff has a capo on the 4th fret. The first staff is labeled 'G' and the second 'D7'. Both staves use a 5/4 time signature. The notes are: G (1st fret), A (2nd fret), B (3rd fret), C# (4th fret), D (5th fret), E (6th fret), F# (7th fret), G (8th fret), A (9th fret), B (10th fret), C# (11th fret), and D (12th fret). The picking pattern is indicated by numbers 1, 2, and 3 above the notes. The first staff has a capo on the 5th fret, and the second staff has a capo on the 4th fret.

# ROLL PATTERNS

The Hallmark sound of bluegrass banjo is based on '**Roll Patterns**'. These are various, short combinations of Right-hand picking patterns in counts of eight, 'Eighth Notes'. Earl Scruggs popularized this style of playing and it is commonly referred to as the '**Scruggs**' style, or '**3 Finger**' style. The melody can be difficult to find in these rolls, so the notes with **BOLD** LETTERS are the notes that the melody is often times found. These should be played just a little louder than the other notes, so that the melody will stand out.

These are the five standard roll patterns with some variations:

## Example 10

### Forward Roll:

### Backwards Roll:

t m t **i** m t **i** m t m t **i** m t **i** m m i t m i t m i m i t m i t m i

### Forward-Reverse Roll:

### Alternating Roll:

t i m t **m** i t m t i m t **m** i t m t i t m t i t m t i t m t i t m

### Foggy Mountain Roll:

**i** m **t** m t **i** m t **i** m **t** i t i m t

Of course, there are many variations on these. Take the Forward-Reverse roll, as an example. By starting the thumb on the fifth string instead of the third, we can come up with a completely different sound and feel.

One of the best tunes to start a beginning banjo student is '**Banjo in the Hollow**' in the Song Section. It uses the **Forward-Reverse** roll almost exclusively. The only difference is the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> fret notes that have been added on the first and second strings for the melody. Take a moment to look at the tablature to this song. It is on page 66. Listen to the recording a few times to get the feel for it.

Do you see the **Forward-Reverse Roll** in the first three measures? It is the same as we just played in Example 10, but there are a couple of new notes, the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> frets.

When first learning it, you will want to take a couple measures at a time and memorize the positions of the left hand, so you can get away from the tablature. Only use the tablature to get the feel for the song, and then get away from the paper as soon as possible.

In Exercise 11, we will be putting the **Basic Rhythm**, the **Alternating Roll** and the **G, C and D7 chords** together for an interesting mix and more practice. Take your time and practice slowly and evenly with the play-along audio tracks.

Example 11

**G** **C**

t m t m t i t m t i t m t m t m t i t m t i t m

**D7** **G**

t m t m t i t m t i t m t m t m t i t m t i t m



# LEFT-HAND TECHNIQUES

To complete the overall bluegrass sound, we will now add some nifty **Left-Hand Techniques** to give our arrangements some zip and zing. There are several but we will concern ourselves with only three basic, but essential techniques.

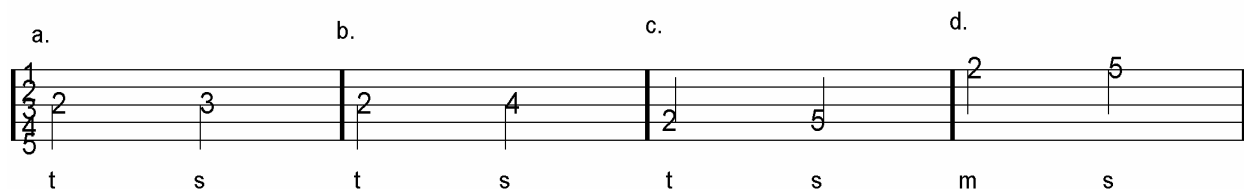
## THE SLIDE

The **SLIDE** is played like two separate notes, but you will only need to pick the string one time with the right hand, then the left hand will execute the second note while the string continues to vibrate. Take care to make sure that both notes, the picked note and the slide, sound clean. You will want to hold the first note for just a split second, then slide the left-hand finger quickly to the next position while the string is still vibrating.

Do not rush the notes and keep continuous pressure on the string with the left hand middle finger. Also, be sure to start the note with the finger of the left hand close to, but not on the fret. If your finger is too far back from the fret, either the sound will die quickly, or there will just be a 'thud' with the first note.

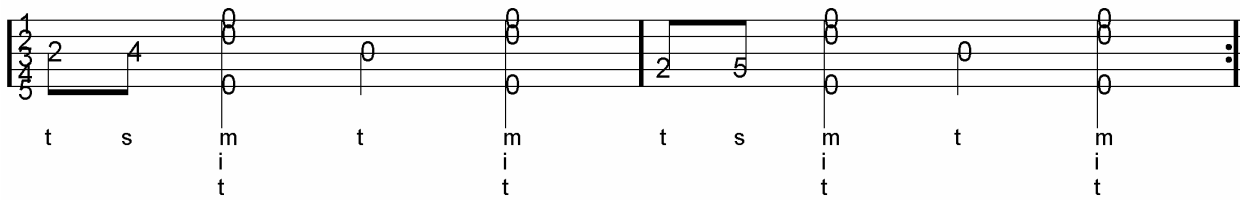
In the tablature, there will be an 's' under the note indicating the slide. Exercise 12 demonstrates some of the most common slides.

Example 12

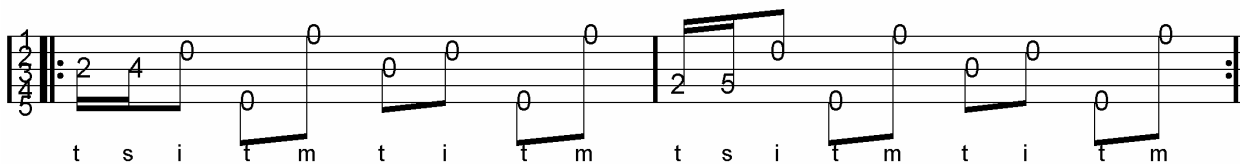


Try the following examples using **Slides**, the **Basic Rhythm** and **Roll Patterns** in Exercises 13, 14 and 15. When you feel comfortable with them, try out the song, 'Good Night Ladies' on page 93.

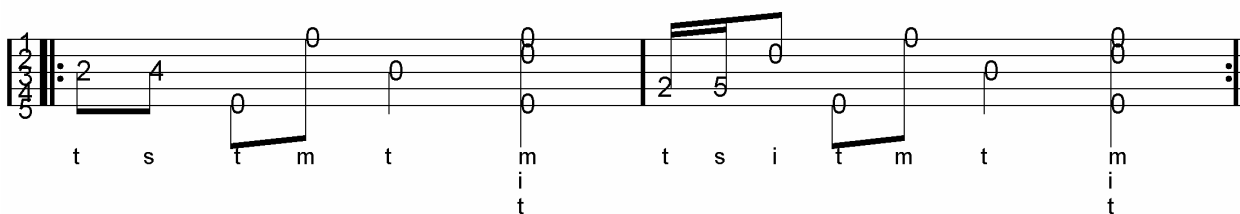
Example 13



Example 14



Example 15



## THE HAMMER-ON

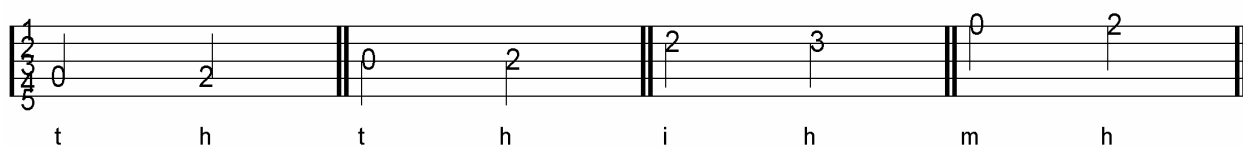
**'Hammer-on'** means that a note is sounded by picking the string with the Right-Hand, then the Left-Hand middle finger comes down on to the string with enough force and velocity to make a new note sound without picking the string a second time. It is indicated in the tablature with an 'h' under the note.

The Hammer-on works just like a hammer hitting a nail. You need to smack the nail head hard enough with the hammer to drive it into the board. If you come down on it too softly, nothing will happen. The same principle applies to the **Hammer-on**. If your Left-Hand finger strikes the string too softly, there will be little or no sound or second note.

If your strings are too high from the fingerboard, it could also cause a problem.

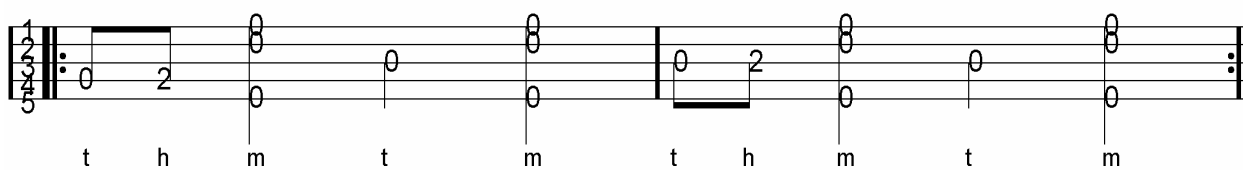
Here are some standard Hammer-ons in Example 16.

Example 16

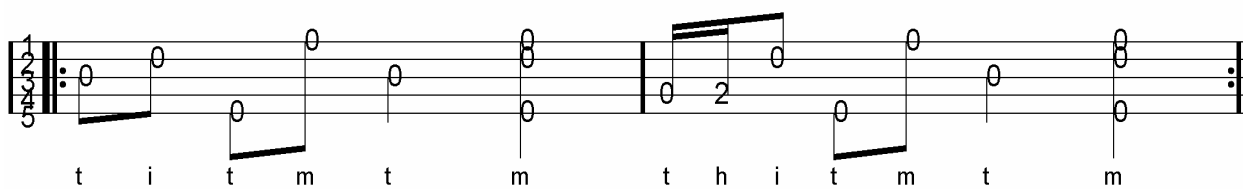


Practice the Hammer-On with the Basic Rhythm and Rolls that we have played before:

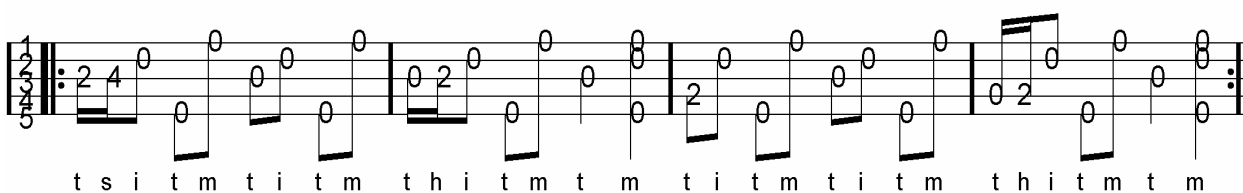
Example 17



Example 18



Example 19



# THE PULL-OFF AND PUSH-OFF

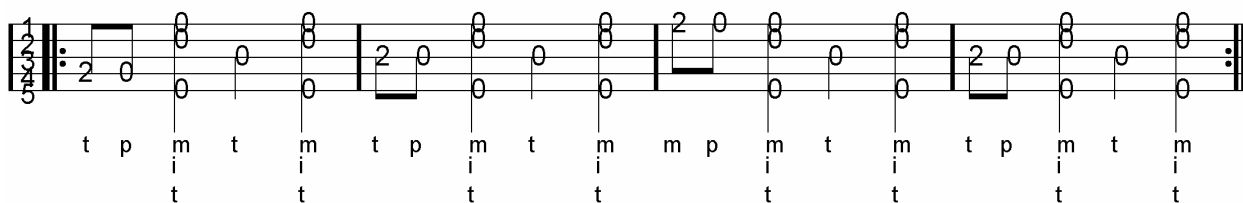
The **Pull-Off** and **Push-Off** will be the last techniques you will need to play traditional bluegrass style banjo. You will get a lot of mileage from the **Slide**, **Hammer-On**, **Pull-Off** and **Push-Off**. The Pull-Off and Push-Off are indicated in the tablature with the letter 'p'.

Both of these Left-Hand techniques are similar but with one, you 'pull' the string and the other you 'push' it. Which do you use? Generally, if the note that I am playing is on the first or second strings, I will use the Pull-Off. If the note is on the third or fourth strings, I will use the Push-Off.

To get the best sound, you will want to catch the string under the flesh of your fingertip and pick it with the Left-Hand finger. By snapping the note with the Left-Hand finger, you will get a nice, sharp sounding note without having to pick it with the Right-Hand. With these techniques, you will actually be picking with both hands! It might sound complicated, but you will soon get the feel for this technique and add it to your arsenal of professional sounding banjo tricks.

Use Example 20 to get some practice in using the Pull-Off and Push-Off.

Example 20



## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

One of the most popular banjo tunes to come down the pike that just about every beginning banjo picker learns is ***Cripple Creek***. It would be hard to write an instructional method for the banjo and leave it out. It is a fun tune with happy lyrics fits the banjo perfectly. Is it possible to play a sad song on the banjo?

Let us look at the second part of the tune, **Part B**.

When you are first learning a song, look at the Roll Patterns. Do you see the predominant pattern with Part B of Cripple Creek? This is the Alternating Roll that we worked on in Example 10. You will also notice that the Left-Hand techniques, the Slide, Pull-Off, and Hammer-On, are all used in these four measures.

Listen carefully to the recording to get the feel for this song and the slower tracks to hear each individual note. The complete arrangement is on page 73. When you practice this tune, try to play along with the recording. You may want to record yourself and see if you are playing the notes evenly and cleanly.

## Cripple Creek, Part B:

Part B:

Part B.

**G**

1 2 3 4 5

2 3 0 0 2 3 0 0 2 3 0 0 2 3 0 0 2 0 0 0 2 0 0 0

t s i t m t s i t m t s i t m t m t s i t m t p i t m t h i t m t m t

**D**

**G**

1 2 3 4 5

2 3 0 0 2 3 0 0 2 3 0 0 2 3 0 0 2 0 0 0 2 0 0 0

t s i t m t s i t m t s i t m t m t s i t m t p i t m t

# MOVABLE CHORDS

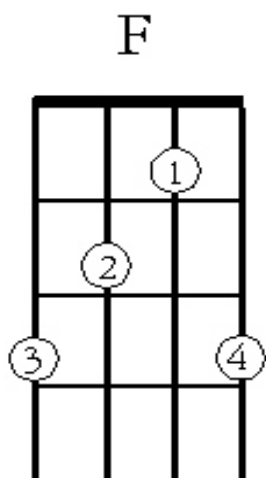
A challenging part of playing banjo is the **Backup** behind the vocals. It is often neglected but just as important as learning solos. The ultimate goal to play music should be to play with others in a group situation.

We have gone over a couple of chords, G, C, and D7. These are '**open**' chords since they incorporate open strings. A more professional chord is the '**closed**' chord where all of the strings (except the fifth) have a finger on it. The nice thing about closed chords is that they can be moved to a new position on the neck for a new chord, without changing the fingering!

There are three basic chord forms to learn, the '**F Position**', **D Position**, and **Bar Position**.

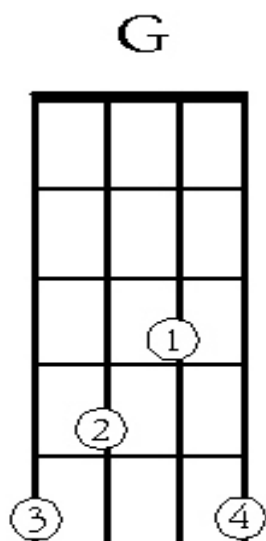
The '**F Position**' chord is based on 'F' and at the lowest possible place on the neck that this chord can be formed; will make an 'F Major Chord'. These are many fingers to put in use, but it will become easier with regular practice.

Be sure you keep your right hand fingers curled and touch only one string at a time. In addition, keep the fingertips close to, but not on, the frets for the cleanest sound. This is easier if you bend your wrist slightly. Although it is called a Closed Chord, the fifth string is not fretted but ignored. For now, we will be thinking of four string chords.



The really nice thing about Closed Chords is that once you have the first one down, in this case, F, you can slide this chord to a higher position without changing the fingerings for a new chord.

For example, the G Major Chord would be two frets higher using this same 'F Position' chord.



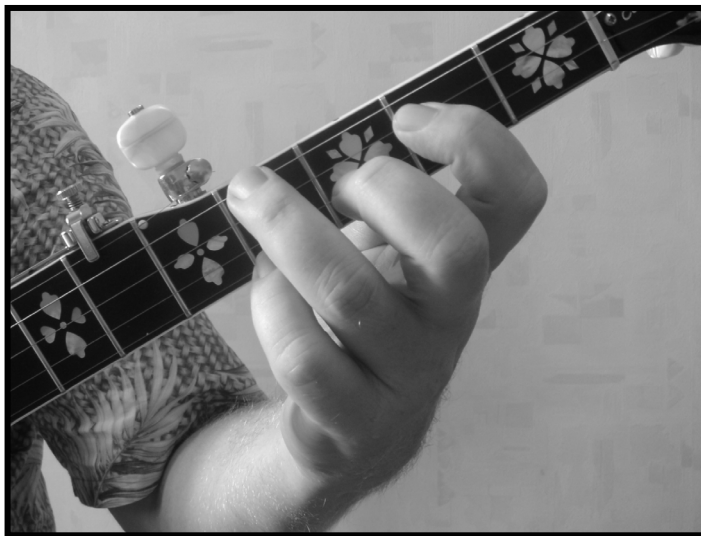
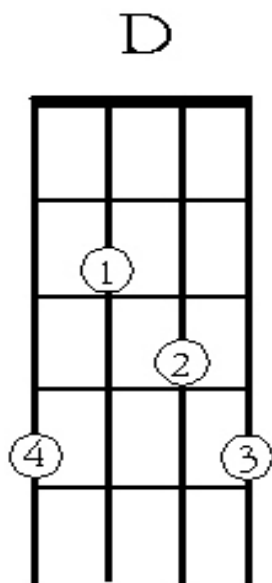
The other chords in F Position would lay out like this:

F = 1<sup>st</sup> fret, G = 3<sup>rd</sup> fret, A = 5<sup>th</sup> fret, B = 7<sup>th</sup> fret, C = 8<sup>th</sup> fret, D = 10<sup>th</sup> fret, E = 12<sup>th</sup> fret, and at the 13<sup>th</sup> fret, you would have another F chord an octave higher.

When the Left-Hand moves further up the fingerboard, this is referred to as a 'Position'. The F Chord would be '1<sup>st</sup> Position'. The G chord in the example above would be '3<sup>rd</sup> Position'. If we played the A Major chord using the same form it would be called, '5<sup>th</sup> Position' and so on. Wherever the first finger is played, THIS is the 'Position'.

The frets that we skipped are the sharps and flats. For example, the second fret would be F# or Gb, the 4<sup>th</sup> fret would be G# or Ab and so on. We will not need these chords anytime soon, but it is good to know where they can be found.

Like the F Position Closed Chords, the **D Position Closed Chords** are based on the 'D' Major Chord. It is also moveable.



The D Position Chord is also moveable. D = 2<sup>nd</sup> fret, E = 4<sup>th</sup> fret, F = 5<sup>th</sup> fret, G = 7<sup>th</sup> fret, A = 9<sup>th</sup> fret, B = 11<sup>th</sup> fret and C = 12<sup>th</sup> fret.

The frets we skipped are the Sharps and Flats as described above. Later on, a complete chord chart will be provided for your reference.

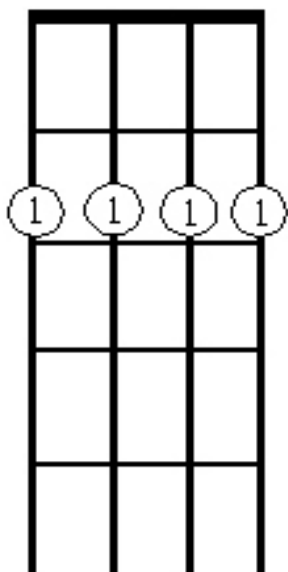
There will be many songs that will alternate between this D chord form and the G chord form. For many beginners, this is a tough switch. Here are some tips to keep this transition smooth:

1. When moving from either the G form to D form, or vice versa, DO NOT lose contact with the strings. Most of my new students will lift every finger slowing down the change and often times, missing the string altogether. So, when you switch to the next chord, only release some of the pressure keeping the fingers in contact with the strings. Then, slide all of the fingers as a unit along the strings like a railroad car on the tracks. When you get to the new position, push down for the new chord.
2. The third and fourth fingers are the same for both G form and D form chords, so that will be one less thing to think about. However, you will need to change the Index and Middle fingers. What I do to keep this switch smooth is to keep both of these fingers close together; touching each other, then as my hand moves down (or up) to the next chord; I switch these two fingers at the same time, while still touching each other. Somewhat like a single finger.



The third closed chord form is the '**Bar Position**' and it gets its name from the shape of using the Left-Hand first finger as a bar across the strings. In the lowest position, this will be an A Major Chord.

A



The A Position Chord is also movable:

A = 2<sup>nd</sup> fret, B = 4<sup>th</sup> fret, C = 5<sup>th</sup> fret, D = 7<sup>th</sup> fret, E = 9<sup>th</sup> fret, F = 10<sup>th</sup> fret and G = 12<sup>th</sup> fret.

The frets we skipped, again are the Sharps and Flats as described above.

### Example 21

[illegible]

# *FILL-IN LICKS*

When you come to the end of a song or banjo solo, there may be a measure or two where the singer will pause before coming back in with the next verse. To fill this void, the banjo will add a measure or two of a Fill-In Lick which is, more or less, just chord noise. In many ways, it is like saying, 'And Uh....' on the banjo. It is not a melody, just chord noise to fill in that empty spot in the song.

In the old days of bluegrass, the band would often times stand around one microphone. As the singer would finish the verse, he would back away from the microphone and the banjo would step up to pick the solo break. When the banjo picker finished the solo, he would back away from the microphone, the band would shift positions like a little dance, and the vocalist would step up and start the next verse.

The gap in time during this shift required some kind of fill-in, so the banjo picker usually adds a Fill-In lick, or two, to smooth out that transition. Fill-In Licks can also add variety and interest to the banjo solo.

A word of caution however:

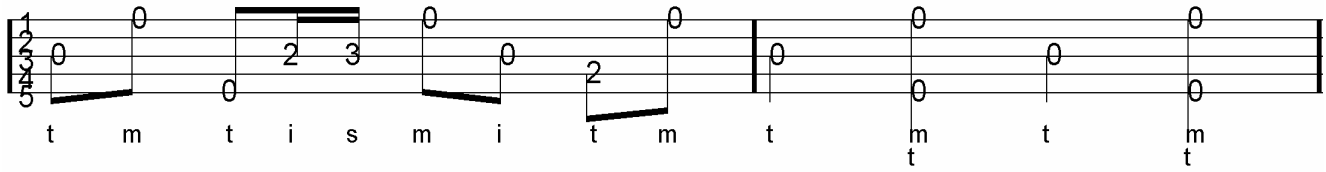
**DO NOT RELY ON A BAG FULL OF HOT LICKS TO CREATE YOUR SOLOS.**

I have seen and heard many players just use licks to create their solos and the melody gets lost in the mix. The banjo is a 'melody-starved' instrument, especially if you are using Scruggs style rolls throughout the solo. Always endeavor to keep some melody in the mix and use Fill-In Licks sparingly.

Below are some useful licks for the G and D chords you will find in the Song Section of this book. More will be provided, as your solos expand and become more professional.

Example 22

**G Lick #1**

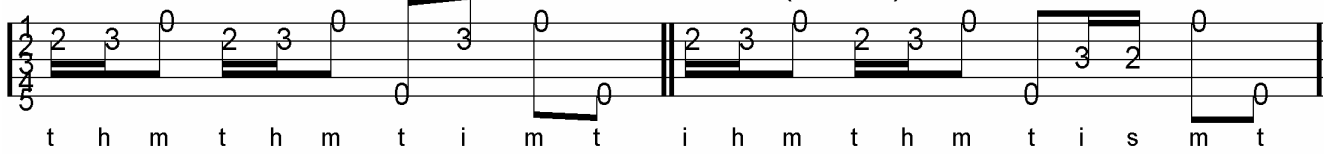


1 2 3 4 5

t m t i s m i t m t m t m t

Detailed description: This musical notation is for a guitar lick in G major. It consists of two measures. The first measure contains a quarter note G (open), an eighth note A (2), a quarter note B (3), an eighth note C (4), and a quarter note D (5). The second measure contains a quarter note E (open), an eighth note F# (2), a quarter note G (open), an eighth note A (3), and a quarter note B (4). The fret numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 are indicated above the notes.

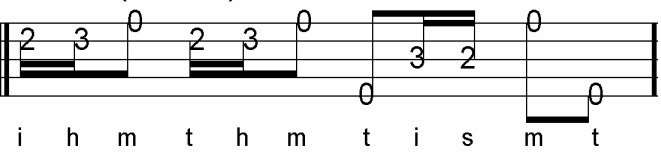
**G Lick #2**



1 2 3 4 5

t h m t h m t i m t

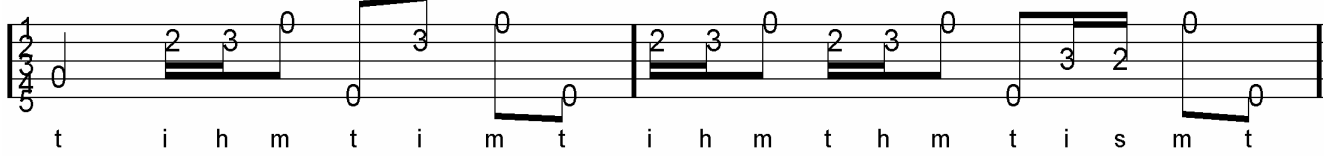
**G Lick #2 (Variation)**



1 2 3 4 5

i h m t h m t i s m t

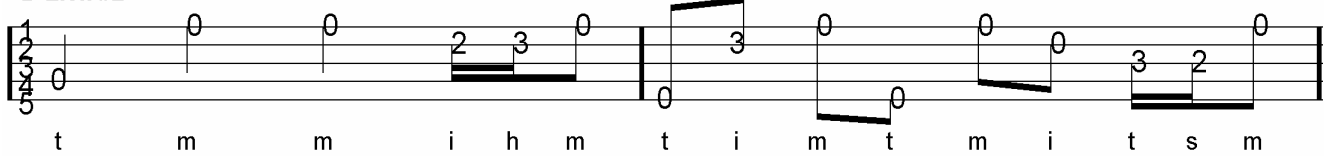
**D Lick #1**



1 2 3 4 5

t i h m t i m t i h m t h m t i s m t

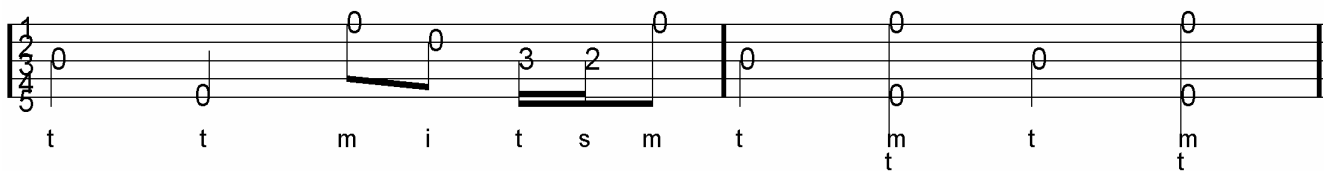
**D Lick #2**



1 2 3 4 5

t m m i h m t i m t m i t s m

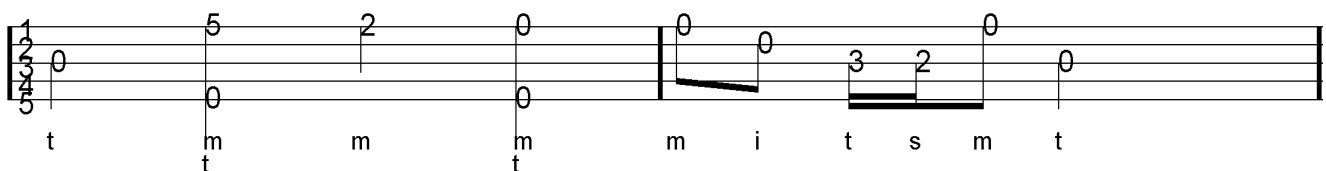
**G Lick #3**



1 2 3 4 5

t t m i t s m t m t m t

**G Lick #4**



1 2 3 4 5

t m m m i t s m t

# MELODIC STYLE

For a nice variety in a solo, I like to include a **Melodic Style** break or at least a portion of the solo in the Melodic Style. Instead of using **Roll Patterns**, the **Melodic Style** uses more melody than actual scales. I prefer to use these scales sparingly, mainly as a little sparkle to the overall sound to grab my audience's attention. Too much of a good thing can tire the ear of your listeners.

Songs like, **Banjo in the Hollow**, **Blackberry Blossom**, **Cripple Creek** and **Feuding Five Strings** all incorporate this interesting style. These will be illustrated in the Song Section of this book.

To get proficient with this style, you will want to learn your scales in various keys. The G Scale is the first place to start. Below are some basic exercises that will make you more familiar with these scales. Be careful of the fingering on both hands.

Example 23

The G scale:

The G scale extended:

The 'Circular' G scale:

# ***THE SONG SECTION***

All of the preceding material should give you a good start and basic understanding of Bluegrass Banjo. There is MUCH more to cover, but we will get into this, as we need to.

**The Song Section** of this book will now give you some nice, professional examples of Bluegrass Banjo in a group setting.

These arrangements include the actual banjo solos you will hear on the recordings, plus the vocal line, where there are lyrics. Where indicated, you will see the actual Back-Up as heard on the recording. Some of this material may be a bit daunting as you first start out, but if you take your time, listen to the recordings, over, and over, and over again, it will all make sense and be a great deal of fun to play, as these songs feel more natural under your finger tips.

Included with the faster tunes, are slower, then medium and finally a faster version of the tune, complete as it would be played on stage. These final tempos are NOT necessarily the actual speed you may hear these songs when played live. I have tested these songs over and over again with my personal students, and the majority agrees on these tempos to learn and be able to play along effectively with the recording. In actual performance, you can kick up the speed a notch or two if you like.

I have watched some notable performances, in particular those of *Ricky Skaggs* and his band *Kentucky Thunder*. They have smoked songs like *Cripple Creek* and *Shady Grove* at over 300 beats per minute!

As each song is introduced in this series, I will precede it with **Comment and Performance Notes**, a 'mini lesson' that will cover passages that are more difficult and questions you may have.

I hope you have as much fun working out these great songs as I had in arranging and putting this **Master Collection** together.

Have fun!

*Jay Buckey*

# ***'ROLL IN MY SWEET BABY'S ARMS'***

This is a classic bluegrass song you will hear many times over at any bluegrass festival and especially in the campgrounds. I have found it to be a nice 'ice breaker' when you meet folks for the first time. You may not know each other's names but everybody knows, '***Roll in my Sweet Baby's Arms***'!

If you have never played this song, you will want to listen to the recording a few times through to get the feel. It uses the basic three chords that we have already gone over, G, C and D. In addition, many of the ***Fill-In Licks*** will also be found here. As you look through the tablature, you will notice there are some extra numbers at the top of the staff, generally, every four measures. These numbers are for reference purpose only.

Something to take special note of is the back up portion on the ***Chorus*** and the ***Verse***.

## ***Performance Notes:***

1. The ***Chorus*** of this and many other songs is usually a highlight of great singing. Normally, two or more voices will harmonize this line. There is usually a lead with a higher tenor and a lower bass. These three voices, more or less, form a major chord and are a real treat when executed well. The audience loves this part of the tune, therefore the banjo needs to lay back a bit so as not to compete with the singing. If you do not try to steal the show, you may just be invited to play again with the band! So, the backup for the Chorus will be fairly straight forward with only back up chops using the ***Movable Chords*** we covered earlier.
2. Now, the ***Verse*** of the song is a different matter. Generally, there is only one vocalist, doing the lead honors. However, the banjo as well as the fiddle, mandolin, Dobro or guitar, may throw in a few Fill-In licks and such as the singer pauses to take his breath. AGAIN, caution is needed. YOU DO NOT WANT TO STEAL THE SHOW AND THUNDER OF THE SINGER! A great performance is the cooperation of all in the band. Just like a great sports team, they work as a unit to make the score.
3. A classic example of *professional back up*, and I KNOW you have heard this lick, is the two-measure passage on measures 36 and 37. This is a Closed G Major Chord, just like the one we played earlier but 12 frets higher. Since this lick only uses the first three strings, you will not need to fret all four strings, just the first three. I use fingers, 1, 2 and 4 on the recording. This lick comes fast so you should keep your eye on the 15<sup>th</sup> fret, where the first finger will fall, DO NOT watch your left hand move up the neck.

# Roll In My Sweet Baby's Arms

[www.jaybuckey.com](http://www.jaybuckey.com)

Arrangement by Jay Buckey

Key of G

Solo:

Traditional

1 **G**

t s i m t m i t s m t i t m t i s m t i m t i s m i t m t m t m t

5 **D**

t s i m t m i t s m t m t i s m i t m t i s m t i m t i s m t h m t i m t

9 **G** **C**

i t i m i t m t s i t m t s i t m i t i m i t m t h i m t m i t m

13 **D** **G**

t i h m t i m t i h m t h m t i m t i m t i s m i t m t i m t m i t s m

Chorus back-up:

18 **G**

Roll in my sweet ba - by's arms.

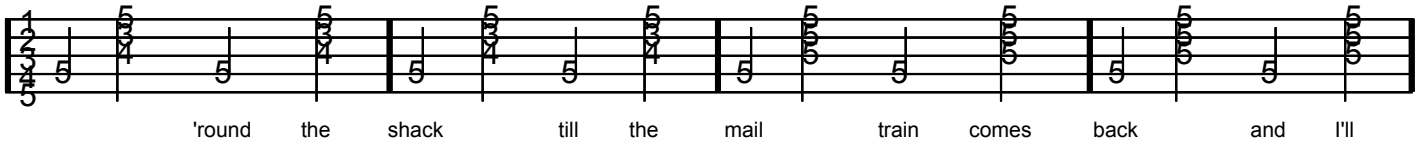
22 **D**

Roll in my sweet ba - by's arms. I'll



C

26



'round the shack till the mail train comes back and I'll

D

30



roll in my sweet ba - by's arms.

G

Verse back-up:

G

34



Where were you last Sat - ur - day night,  
Ain't gon -- na work on the rail - road.

D

38



while I was locked up in the jail?  
Ain't gon - na work on the farm.

C

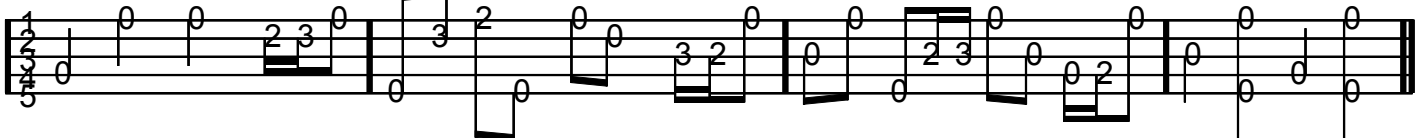
42



Walk - ing Lay 'round the the streets with an - other mail train comes man back would not  
Lay 'round the the shack till the mail train comes man back and I'll

D

46

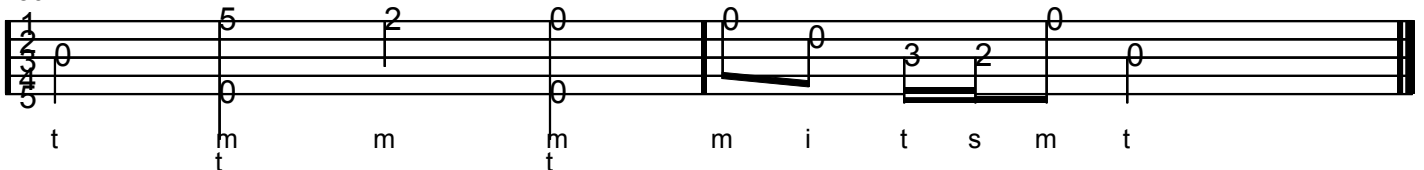


even roll in my go sweet my ba - by's bail.  
roll in my go sweet my ba - by's arms.

G

Ending:

50



t t m m t m i t s m t

# 'MY HOME'S ACROSS THE BLUERIDGE MOUNTAINS'

This song is a *Two-Chord-Wonder*, one of those few good tunes that only use two chords and a very straightforward melody. There are some new techniques introduced however, to add to your banjo picking style.

## **Performance Notes:**

1. Although the rolls are familiar, you will want to accent those notes that have a **BOLD LETTER** under the tablature. This is the melody and without these accents it can get lost fairly easily. You may need to listen to the audio tracks and the vocal line to get a feel for it, start with the slower recordings to get you timing solid, then add those accents. In time, you will automatically put these accents in, without even thinking much about them.
2. During the **Vocal Back-Up**, starting specifically on measure 19, you will see a variation of the Basic Rhythm. The last two counts of that measure, the pinch will be broken up. To play this, I use the Right-Hand thumb for the 5 on the fourth string, then, Index for the 3<sup>rd</sup> fret on the second string, then I pinch the 5/4 combination on that last beat with my Middle and Thumb. The feel of this measure is more like a 'bounce'. You will see it repeated a few times throughout the backup. You will be using the closed position G and D chords.
3. The **Ending** has a nice little twist too. The 2 to 4 slide (measure 33) needs to be very clean. Be sure you are keeping pressure on the string as you slide up to the fourth fret. You do not want the sound to die out, but that fourth fret note should keep ringing.
4. The final part of the Ending is a **Brush** with that squiggly line symbol (Measure 34) There are two ways to execute it:
  - You can use your thumb, as shown in the tablature to Brush through all the strings with a guitar-like strum.
  - Alternatively, you can go in the opposite direction (Reverse-Brush) using a combination of the Middle and Index fingers. I like this the best and is the way I played it on the recording. Keeping the Index and Middle fingers close together, move them over the strings, starting with the first through the fifth in a sweeping, circular motion moving both fingers at the same time all the way through the fifth string. By using two fingers for the Reverse-Brush, it will give your banjo the sound of 10 strings!

# My Home's Acrosss The Blueridge

[www.jaybuckey.com](http://www.jaybuckey.com)

Arrangement by Jay Buckey

Key of G

Traditional

1 **G**

t s i m t m i t m t t m t i t m t i m t m i t m

4

t i t m t i t m t m t i m t i m t t m t i t m

7 **G**

t t s i m t i m t s m t i m t i m t s i m t m i t m

10

t t m t i t m t i m t m i t m t i t m t i t m

13 **G**

t m t i m t i m t t m t i t m t m t i m i t m t m t i m t

Vocal back-up:

17 **G**

My home's a - cross the blue - ridge moun - tains. My  
How can I keep from cry in'?  
Oh, how I hate to leave you.

21 **D**

**G**

home's a - cross the blue - ridge moun - tains. My  
How can I keep from cry in'?  
Oh, how I hate to leave you.

25

home's a - cross the blue - ridge moun - tains. My  
How can I keep from cry in'?  
Oh, how I hate to leave you.

28

**D**

tains. And I'll never get to see you any -  
in' when I never expect to see you any -  
you when I never expect to see you any -

31 **G**

Ending:

"brush"

more. more? more.  
t t s m t  
t

# 'KENTUCKY WALTZ'

Bill Monroe recorded "Kentucky Waltz" for Decca Records, March 17, 1951

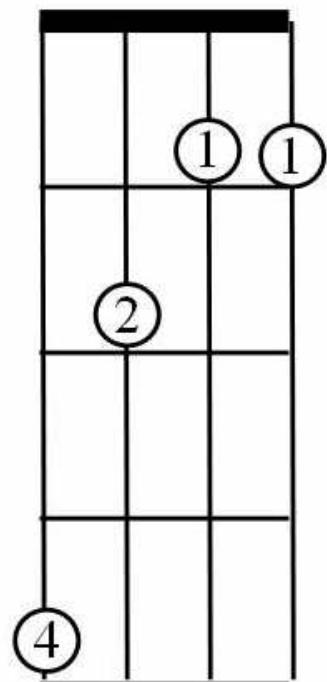
The **Waltz** is a specific dance form counted in three. Rather than the standard 1, 2, 3, 4 per measure that we have been using, we will now count this song as 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3 and so on.

In this arrangement are some new, professional techniques that really make this song a stage showcase.

## **Performance Notes:**

1. **Modulating** to a new key will be something new. The song starts out with the fiddle playing the lead in the Key of D, which is very popular and easy for the fiddle. At the end of the fiddle break, we will be modulating, or changing the key to G. Why do we do that? Often times, it has to do with the singer. Some vocalists have limited range. When I arranged this song, I found my singer "Ginger Litvinoff" sounded the best in the key of G, so that is where I put her voice. (*A complete listing of singers, photos, equipment, instruments and just about everything else you may want to know can be found on the FAQ pages at [www.jaybuckey.com](http://www.jaybuckey.com)*)
2. The **Diminished Chord** is introduced for the first time. See measures 6, 26, 39 and 59. This chord has an unusual sound with a certain 'tension' that helps move from one chord to the next and adds interest to the harmony section. Most average players do not use chords like this, but this chord and many others like it, are very effective and helpful to make your arrangements sound more professional.
3. I have included the chord diagrams for this song, since there are many changes and new chords that you may not be familiar with at this time.

D#dim

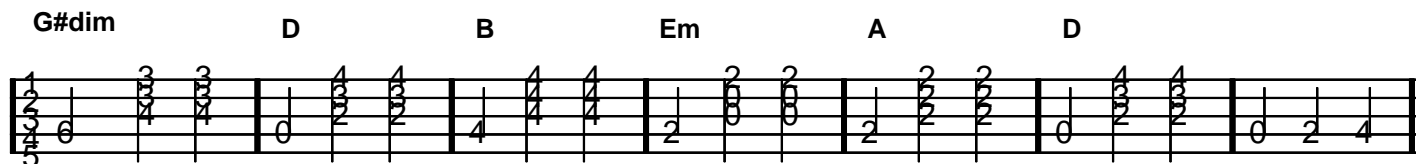


# Kentucky Waltz

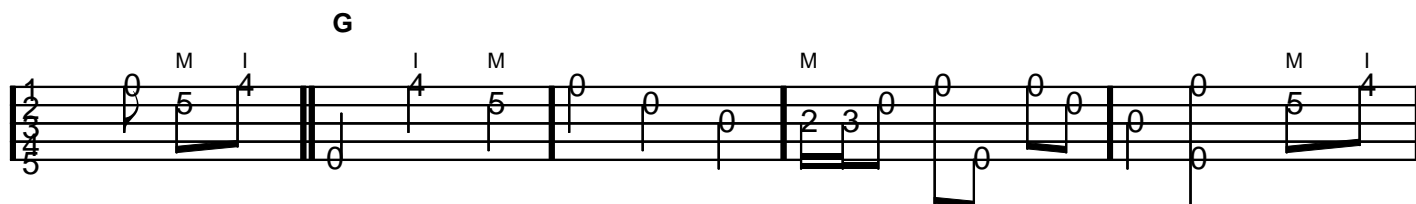
Fiddle intro (key of D)

Key of D, then G

Back-up chords:



This part is in the key of G:



m i m t m i m i t t s i m t m i t m i m  
We were waltz - ing that night in Ken - tucky beneath the

**G#dim** **Am** **D** **Am**

t m i m i t t i m t m m i m i m  
beau - ti - ful har - vest moon. And I was the

**D** **Am** **D**

i t t t i m t m i t m t t t t t i m m  
girl that was lucky, but it all end - ed too

**G** **D** **G**

m t m i m t m i m t m i m i t t s i m t m i  
soon. As I stare here a - lone in the moon - light,

**C**

t m i m t m t m t m t i m m i t i m  
Oh, I see your smil - ing face. And I

**C#dim** **G** **E**

t t m m m t m m m m  
long once more for your em - brace in that

**A** **D** **G**

m m m m t m i t  
beau - ti - ful Kentuc - ky waltz.

## ***'FEUDING FIVE STRINGS'***

This song is excellent to play along with a friend or, if you are a teacher, your students. It is reminiscent of the song, 'Dueling Banjos' from the movie, 'Deliverance'. The song was arranged and performed for the movie by Eric Weissberg and Steve Mandel and was featured on the movie's soundtrack. It was originally composed by Arthur "Guitar Boogie" Smith and Don Reno as Feuding Banjos in 1955. <http://www.donreno.com/bio.htm>.

If you are a banjo teacher, this is a great song to play along with your students since you can throw the melody line back and forth between you and your students. What I like to do is play the guitar part live with my banjo students. Of course, they will need to practice the song with the audio tracks at home first, but it is very rewarding to play it together, live, like a mini jam session.

### ***Performance Notes:***

1. Watch the Left-Hand fingerings carefully at measures 9 through 18.
2. The 'mini chords' at measures 21-23 can be played with the pinch or a brush with a thumb/index finger combination.
3. Part B, starting with measure 37 offers some nice practice with the Alternating and Forward-Reverse rolls.
4. Measure 43 is a very fun walk up the neck. Be sure to keep the Index and Middle fingers close together and in contact with the strings. Only lift the pressure a little bit when shifting up the strings to a newer position.
5. Part A (variation) starting at measure 53 is more or less the same as the first version with the exception of more notes. Again, be careful of the Left-Hand fingerings.
6. The final Part B (variation) starting at measure 89 really lets it all hang out. Many of the Fill-In licks that you have been working on are highlighted here. Measure 97 is one of my favorite Earl Scruggs licks based on a C7 chord, followed by a nifty Melodic G Run.
7. The Ending is also a classic. At measure 111, you will want to bend the 11 note slightly with your third finger. Listen to the recording for this effect.
8. Measure 113 is a classic, A7/D7 tag. To get this smooth, be sure to leave your Pinky down on the first string.

Try playing this tune on a camping trip, especially at night in the woods ☺



# Feudin Five Strings

[www.jaybuckey.com](http://www.jaybuckey.com)

Arrangement by Jay Buckey

Key of G

Traditional

Part A:

1 **G**

t t i i m i t t t i i m i i

7 **C** I R I M I M I

t t i i m i i

13 **G** **D** I R I M I M I

t t i i m i i t t i i m i i

19 **G**

m m m m m m m m m m m i i

25

m i i t i t t i i m i i t i t t

31

t t t i t i t t t t i t

Part B:

**C** **G**

37

t i t m t i t m t i m t m i t m t i t m t i t m t i m t m i t m

**D7** **G** M I M I M I

41

t i t m t i t m t i m t m i t m t i t m t i t m t i t m t i t m t i t m

**C** **G**

45

t i t m t i t m t i m t m i t m t i t m t i t m t i m t m i t m

**D7** **G**

49

t i t m t i t m t i m t m i t m t i t i s m i t m t m t m t

Part A variation (solo 2):

**G**

53

t m t m t m t m t m t m t

**C**

59

I I R I I I M I P I M I I

t m t m t m t m t m t m t

**G** **D**

65

I I R I I I M I P I M I I

t m t m t m t m t m t m t m t m t

**G**

71

m m m m m m m m m m m m m m m

i i i i i i i i i i i i i i i

t t t t t t t t t t t t t t t

77

m i i t i t t i i m i i t i t t

83

t t t i t i t t t t i t

Part B variation:

89 **C** **G**

t i t m t i t m t h i m t m i t t m t i t i s m i t m t m t i s m i t m

93 **D** **G**

t m m i h m t i m t m i t s m t i t m t i t m t i t m t i t m

97 **C7** **G**

t m i t m i t m i t m m i t m i t m i t m i t m i t i t i m

101 **D** **G**

t m m i s m t m i t m i t s m t m t i s m i t m t m t m t

Ending:

105 **G**

s t i m t m i t s m t t s i t m t s i t m t s i t m t s i t m t p i t m

110 **D** **G** **A7** **D7** **G**

t i t m t m m i t m t i m i t m t i t i t m t i t m t m t

## ***'CRIPPLE CREEK'***

This song is a classic. No banjo book would be complete without it. I remember first hearing this played on the TV show 'Hee Haw'. Buck Owens and Roy Clark would sit on some bales of hay and the rest of the cast would join in around them. Roy would play a quick verse of this tune and then they would tell a quick joke. I did not know the name of the song until I heard it on a scratched up vinyl LP by **Earl Scruggs** called, '**Foggy Mountain Banjo**'. It is available in CD format now and should be a definite addition to your banjo CD collection.

I have worked out several arrangements that you can work with.

### ***Performance Notes:***

1. You will need to place a **Capo** on the second fret to play it in the standard Key of A. This arrangement, like many banjo songs, is in the Key of G. The fiddle and vocals are usually played and sung in the Key of A.
2. Measure 1 is a '**Pickup**' measure and is incomplete. So, you will count '1, 2, 3, then on '4', pinch the fifth and first strings, and slide the 2 to the 5 on the next count of '1' in measure 2. It takes a little practice, so listen to the recording to get the feel for it.
3. Measure 34 is reminiscent of the song, Banjo in the Hollow. This variation uses the same rolls, but the Left-Hand fingering is a little different.
4. Part B of Solo 3 uses D Tuners. Sometimes these are called Keith Pegs from the invention of Bill Keith. These special pegs replace your second and third tuning pegs on the banjo. There are special screws on the sides to allow you to 'tune' and 'detune' your banjo while playing. The effect is like a pedal steel guitar where the strings are loosened and tightened to get that unique sound.
5. A Harmony banjo part is at measure 76. You do not hear two banjos playing together in harmony very often. Since this is a very popular banjo tune, you may want to try working up this harmony part and use it the next time you are at a jam session with another banjo picker.
6. You can use the same ending from Banjo in the Hollow for this song. A nifty ending with D Tuners is illustrated at measure 93

# Cripple Creek

[www.jaybuckey.com](http://www.jaybuckey.com)

Arrangement by Jay Buckey

Key of A, capo 2 and play in G

Solo 1:

Part A:

1 **G** **C** **G** **G**

m t s m i t i m t m m t t s i t m t p i t m t h i t m t m t

6 **C** **G** **D** **G**

s m t m i t i m t m m t t s i t m t p i t m t h i t m t m t

Part B:

10 **G** **D** **G**

t s i t m t s i t m t s i t m t m t s i t m t p i t m t h i t m t m t

14 **D** **G**

t s i t m t s i t m t s i t m t m t s i t m t p i t m t h i t m t m t

Vocal back-up:

18 **G** **C** **G** **D** **G**

I've gotta gal and she loves me. She's as sweet as she can be.  
Cripple Creek's wide and Cripple Creek's deep. I'll wade ol' Cripple Creek 'fore I sleep.

22 **C** **G** **D** **G**

She's got eyes of darkest brown. Makes my heart jump all around.  
Roll up my britches to my knees. Wade ol' Cripple Creek when I please.

26 **G** **D** **G**

Going down Cripple Creek, going in a run, going down Cripple Creek to have a little fun.

30 **D** **G**

Going down Cripple Creek, going in a whirl, going down Cripple Creek to see my girl.

*Solo 2, Melodic Style:*

*Part A:*

34 **G** **C** **G** **D** **G**

t i m t m i t m t i m t m i t m t i m t m i t m t m t

*Part B:*

38 **G** **D** **G**

t i m t m i t m t i m t m i t m t i t m t m t

*Solo 3:*

*Part A:*

42 **G** **C** **G** **D** **G**

m t s m i t i m t m t t s i t m t p i t m t h i t m t m t

47 **C** **D** **G** **D** **G**

s m i t i m t m t s s i t m t p i t m t h i t m t m t

*Part B with D tuners:*

51 **G** **D** **G**

i t m i t m i t m t m i t m i t t t m t

55 **D** **G**

i t m i t m i t m t m i t m i t t t i



Part A:  
59

[illegible]68 **G**

72

t s i t m t s i t m t i t m t t i m t m i t m t i t m t m t

# Harmony Banjo Part

## Part A:

76 **G** **C** **G** **D** **G**

m s m i t t i m t m t m t s i t m t p i t m t i m t i m t

81 **C** **G** **D** **G**

s m i t t i m t m t m t s i t m t p i t m t i m t i t m

## Part B:

85 **G** **D** **G** **D** **G**

t s i t m t s i t m t s i t m t t m t s i t m t p i t m t i m t i t m

89 **G** **D** **G** **D** **G**

t s i t m t s i t m t s i t m t t m t s i t m t p i t m t i m t i m t

## Ending (with 'D Tuners')

93 **G**

t t t i m t m i t m t m i t i m i t i m i t i m t

# ***EIGHT MORE MILES TO LOUISVILLE'***

There is a Theme Park in Anaheim, California, USA called '**Knott's Berry Farm**' that is not too far from Disneyland. One section of this park is called, 'Frontier Land' and has many buildings and amusement rides patterned after the Wild American West. One of my favorites was the '*White Water Rapids*' where you ride in this fake log and get very wet.

Anyway, as you stand in line waiting your turn to take this ride, they have small speakers in the trees with a banjo picking this song. The recording was from an album by Eric Weisberg, the banjo picker that played the original recording of *Dueling Banjos* for the movie, '*Deliverance*'. It is a great album with many classic bluegrass banjo songs. Of course, that was many years ago and that recording has probably been replaced with some 'rap' music. ☺

This song has been credited to Grandpa Jones and has a Civil War feel. The first arrangement is straightforward and is good practice with the **Alternating Roll**. The second break is patterned after the way Weisberg played it in the recording at **Knott's Berry Farm**.

## **Performance Notes:**

1. The first solo is based almost entirely on the Alternating Roll. There are no surprises, BUT you will need to put some emphasis on the melody notes as indicated with the **bold type**.
2. The Back Up, starting with measure 17 is not that easy for the beginning banjo picker. It will take some time to nail down.
  - a) TIP ONE: Keep your Left-Hand fingers close to the strings at all times. Minimize your movement without lifting them to far off the strings. Usually, I release the pressure just enough to glide into the next chord position. THINK: ECONOMY OF MOVEMENT
  - b) TIP TWO: The closed C Chord in measure is also a little tricky. Again, we are looking for economy of movement. I leave my fourth finger on the first string and lay the third finger down flat across the fourth, third and second strings in a somewhat 'rocking' motion. (Watch the video for a visual explanation).
3. Starting with measure 33 is a solo based on the playing of Weisberg. He places some interesting accents that make the break come alive. Be careful not to 'gallop' with the notes. Keep them even, although some are accented.
4. Do not rush the 4 to 5 slide at the end of measure 45. Pick the 4 solidly, hold, and then slide quickly to the 5, maintaining enough pressure to let the 5 continue ringing. This is one of my favorite slides and is very 'bluegrassy'.

# Eight More Miles To Louisville

[www.jaybuckey.com](http://www.jaybuckey.com)

Arrangement by Jay Buckey

Key of G

Solo 1(easy):

1 **G**

t i t m t i t m t i t m t i t m

5 **D7**

t i t m t i t m t i t m t i t m

9 **C** **G** **D7**

t i t m t i t m t i t m t i t m

13 **G**

t i t m t i t m t i t m t i t m

Back-up:

17

G D G C G D G D

traveled more to can o'er miles be pic - this and a country Lou - is - wide ville will that a seeking come in - fortune to my fair. view. all. I've A

21

G D G C G D

been Eight Mine humble down miles down little on in two this Lou - hut coast old is - for lines, road ville, two, I've and I'll she's we'll traveled never long never every more and want where. blue. tall. roam. From I But The

25

C G D

Portland knew she's place some the that's East day kind right and that that for Portland I'd you our come can't love West back, find site and I a is back knew it ramb - ling those along from through blue the the grass line, start. land. hills. I'm I'm Where

29

G D G C G D G

going Eight on gently more my now miles way flows to a to this the place Lou - is very Ohio that's is best, ville day that the to by a old home win her place home town her called town of my and mine. heart. hand. Lou - is - ville.

Solo 2 (harder):

33 **G** **D**

i t t t t s i m t i m t i m t i m i t i m t i m t i t m

**G** 37

t t i m i t m t s i m t i m t i m t i m i t s m t i m t m i t

**D** **C** **G** 41

t i t i m i t i m t h m t i m t i s m t i m t i s m t i m t m i t

**D** **G** 45

t m t i m i t s m t m t i m t i m i t i

**G** 48

m t i m t i t m t t i m i t m t

# 'BLACKBERRY BLOSSOM'

It's rare to find a picker in the field that doesn't already know this one, so it will be a good tune to learn and put in your back pocket. It is a standard 'fiddle tune' but plays very well on the banjo.

## **Performance Notes:**

1. In solo 1, the Forward-Reverse Roll is featured. Measure 1 can be a little tricky to play smoothly. If you use one finger for each chord position, you may sound a little jerky between transitions. Therefore, what I like to do is use two different fingers as indicated in the tablature. The Ring finger for the 12<sup>th</sup> fret notes and the Index for the 7<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> fretted notes. This is indicated in tablature on the top of the staff with the letters, 'R' and 'I'.
2. The new chord, 'B' is introduced in measure 12.
3. The back up part is a challenge. Just take it slow and work out a measure at a time. Generally, as your Left-hand fingers become more accustomed to these new chords, it will get easier.
4. Beginning with measure 25, we have a new chord form for Em and then B7. Both are similar in their shape so that will make it a little easier to move from one to the other. When switching between these two chords, lift the fingers just enough to slide them into the next chord without actually leaving contact with the strings. Picking up 4 fingers and then plopping them down again is too much extra work and energy, plus you take the chance of missing the strings altogether.
5. Solo 2 in measure 33, is a real masterpiece using the **Melodic Style** to create a solo that is very close to the fiddle's original melody line. This break would be great for competition or a hot jam session in the campgrounds.
  - a. As before, keep your Left-Hand fingers low and in contact as much as possible with the strings to keep your sound smooth and flowing.
  - b. If you have small hands, the '7' in measure 50 will be nearly impossible to reach. If that is the case in your situation, you can simply leave it out altogether and just play the 3<sup>rd</sup> string open. The seventh fret note is only for better continuity in the melody line.

Have a 'berry' nice time working this one out!

# Blackberry Blossom

[www.jaybuckey.com](http://www.jaybuckey.com)

Arrangement by Jay Buckey

Key of G

Solo 1:

Traditional

Chords: G D C G C G A D

t i m t m i t m t i m t m i t m t i m t m i t m t i m t m t

Chords: G D C G C G D7 G

t i m t m i t m t i m t m i t m t i m t m i t m t i t m t m

Chords: Em B

t i m t m i t m t i m t m i t m t i m t m i t m t i m t m i t m

Chords: Em C G D7 G

t i m t m i t m t i m t m i t m t i m t m i t m t i t m t m



*Back-up:*

[illegible][illegible]

25

Em B7

29 **Em** **C** **G** **D** **G**

29 **Em** **C** **G** **D** **G**

*Solo 2:*

**G D C G C G A D**

33 M I I R I R M I P I P I I M I

t i m t i t m i t i t i m i t m t h i m t t i t i m t i m t m m i

**G D C G C G D G**

37

t i m t i t m i t i t i m i t m t h i m t i t i m t i t i m

**Em B**

41 M I I R

t h m i m m i t m i m i t p t h m i m m i t i m t m i t m

**Em C G D G**

45 R I M I M I R

t h m i m m i t m i m i t p t i m t m i t i m t i t i

*Ending:*

**G D C G C G D G**

49 M I M I M I M I M I R

m i t m i t i m t m i t m m i t i m t i m t i t m t

# ***'WABASH CANNONBALL'***

The *Wabash Cannonball* is an American folk song that is thought to have originated sometime in the late nineteenth century. It was further popularized by Country Music Hall of Famer, Roy Acuff, when he recorded the song in 1936. It is also one of the primary fight songs of Kansas State University, as well as one of the signature songs of the University of Texas at Austin's band. The song is part of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame's 500 Songs that Shaped Rock and Roll list.

There are many theories of the origin of The Wabash Cannonball. One plausible theory by Utah Phillips states that The Wabash Cannonball came about when hobos somewhere imagined a mythical train called the "Wabash Cannonball" and created the lyrics and music to go with the myth.

Another theory states that the song is based on a tall tale in which Cal S. Bunyan, Paul Bunyan's brother, constructed a railroad known as the Ireland, Jerusalem, Australian & Southern Michigan Line. After two months of service, the 70-car train was traveling so fast that it arrived at its destination an hour before its departure. Finally, the train took off so fast that it rushed in to outer space, and for all is known, it is still traveling through space. When the hobos learned of this train, they called her "The Wabash Cannonball" and said that every station in America had heard her whistle.

These days, Wabash Cannonball is a standard in the Bluegrass repertoire and is one song that just about everybody knows and plays on stage and in the campgrounds. It's familiar melody and easy tempo make it a good one to memorize and slip into your back pocket.

## ***Performance Notes:***

- 1) The solo for this song is straightforward with no surprises. Measures 10 and 11 are reminiscent of a portion of Cripple Creek you learned earlier.
- 2) The back up portion has some special considerations. Measure 18 is a standard 'Thumb, Pinch' basic rhythm that we have gone over in Example 21. Measure 19 will break up that rhythm slightly. On the third count, the Thumb will play the 4<sup>th</sup> string by itself, the Index will play the 2<sup>nd</sup> string on the upbeat (the 'and' of three), then the Thumb and Middle finger will do a pinch on the 4<sup>th</sup> count. So, measure 19 will be counted like this, '1, 2, 3, and 4'.
- 3) Measure 33 uses a 'Single String' style picking technique, where the Thumb and Index will alternate playing the last 6 notes. This is similar to the way a guitar player uses a flat pick. See the Video for a visual explanation of this measure and technique.

# Wabash Cannonball

[www.jaybuckey.com](http://www.jaybuckey.com)

Key of G

Arrangement by Jay Buckey

Solo:

Traditional

1 **G**

t m t m t s i m t m i t m t s i t m t p i t m

4 **C** **D**

t i m t m i t m t m t t i t m t s i t m t m t

7 **G**

t i m t m i t m t t i m i t m t m t t m t

10 **C** **D**

t s i t m t s i t m t s i t m t p i t m t i m t m i t m t m t t i t m

14 **G**

t s i t m t m t i t m t i t m t t m i t s m t

Vocal back-up:

18 **G**

Listen to the jingle, the rumble and the  
East-ern came to states are dan - dy, so west - ern peo - ple  
She came down from Bir - ming - ham one cold Dec - em - ber  
Here's to Daddy Clax - ton, may his name for - ev - er

21 **C** **D**

roar, as she glides along the wood - lands, through  
say, day. As From New York to St. Louis sta - tion you and  
stand, and always in - to the re - mem - bered in could  
the

24 **G**

hills and by the shore. Hear the mighty rush of the  
Chicago the by the way. From the hills of Min - ne -  
hear the peo - ple say, "Here's a gal from Ten - nes -  
courts throughout the land. His earth - ly days are

27 **C** **D**

engine, hear the lone - some ho - boes call, "You're trave - ling through the  
so - ta where the rip - pling wat - ers fall. No chan - ces can be  
see, and she's long and she's tall. They'll She came down to  
over and the cur - tains around him fall. They'll carry him home to

31 **G**

jun - gle on the Wa - bash Can - non - Ball."  
tak - en on the Wa - bash Can - non Ball.  
Bir - ming - ham on the Wa - bash Can - non Ball".  
vic - tory on the Wa - bash Can - non Ball.

Ending:

35

t i h m t i m t i p m t m t i t p m t t m i t p m t i t m t

## ***'BOIL THE CABBAGES'***

I think it was a song like '***Boil the Cabbages***' that kept my parents from enjoying bluegrass. It was too 'Hicksville' for their taste. They preferred ***Lawrence Welk*** or ***Nat King Cole***.

If you are a teacher, this is a good tune to get your students to play together with others. I took a couple of fiddlers, a mandolinist and banjo student to a local bluegrass festival. This was going to be their first shot at playing live with other folks and they were nervous about it. However, I had a plan. We played this song a few times together in the shadows until we felt good with it, then with our instruments strapped on, we cruised through the campground until I found, what I felt, was an average group, not too good, but not too bad either. We were just a group of beginners and did not want to push our luck. Tip: only play with those that will just tolerate your playing.

We stood nearby the group, politely waiting for the group to finish their song and then I asked, 'Do you fellows know, 'Boil the Cabbages?'. 'Yeah, we just played it but, we'll do it again'. Perfect! So we played with them and it went really well. THEN someone in that group said, 'Hey that was really good! What else would you like to play?' 'Well, we can't stay, we have to be somewhere else very shortly'. Actually, that was the only song we were prepared to play. So, we cruised around until we found another group and asked if they knew 'Boil the Cabbages' and we did the same with them. After that, I left my students on their own and they cruised the rest of the night in the campgrounds playing that one song but making a lot of new friends and gaining a lot of confidence in playing with others.

***'Boil the Cabbages'***, although a silly tune is still a classic for beginners and very well known in jam sessions. Kids like it a lot especially for the lyrics.

### ***Performance Notes:***

1. The 'jump' to the 5<sup>th</sup> fret C chord in measure 2 can cause your timing be a little off. Be aware not to have a pause between the end of measure one and the beginning of measure 2 with this bar C chord.
2. The backup part starting with measure 17 has no surprises and is very similar to Example 21 that we worked on earlier.
3. Solo 2, starting with measure 25, is in the Melodic Style again. The jump to the 7<sup>th</sup> fret in measure 28 is a little tough. You could use your 1<sup>st</sup> finger for it but it may sound jerky and your timing may be a little off. I use my Pinky to cover those three 7<sup>th</sup> fret notes. If your hands are small, you may want to experiment with another alternative.

# Boil The Cabbages

[www.jaybuckey.com](http://www.jaybuckey.com)

Key of A, capo 2 and play in G

Traditional

Scruggs Style Break:

Arrangement by Jay Buckey

1 **G** **C** **G** **D7**

t s i t m t p i t m t i m t m i t m t s i t m t p i t m t i m t m i t m

5 **G** **C** **G** **D** **G**

t s i t m t p i t m t i m t m i t m t s i t m t p i t m t m t m t

9 **G** **C** **G** **D7**

t s i t m t p i t m t i m t m i t m t s i t m t p i t m t i m t m i t m

13 **G** **C** **G** **D** **G**

t s i t m t p i t m t i m t m i t m t s i t m t p i t m t m t m t

*Back-Up Chords:*

17 **G** **C** **G** **D**

Boil the cab - bage down, bake those hoe cakes brown. The  
 Once I had an old gray mule, his name was Si - mon Slick. He'd  
 How that mule would kick, he kicked with his dying mon breath. He  
 Took my gal to the black - smith shop to have her mouth made small. She

21 **G** **C** **G** **D** **G**

on - ly song that I could sing was boil the cab - bage down.  
 roll his eyes and back his ears and how that mule would kick.  
 shoved his hind feet down his throat and kicked him - self to death.  
 turned a - round a time or two and swal - lowed shop and all.

*Melodic Style Break:*

25 **G** **C** **G** **D**

m i t m i t m i t m i t m i t m i t m i t m i t m i t m i t

29 **G** **C** **G** **D** **G**

m i t m i t m i t i m t m i t m i t m i t m i t m i t



Backup for the Fiddle break:

G C G D

t t i m t i m t h i m t m i t m t t s i m t i m t t m t i t m

G C G D G

t m t s i m t i m t h i t i m t m t h m t i s m t i t i m i t p m

G C G D

t t s i m t i m t i m t i p m t p m t t s i m i t m t t m t i t m

To second banjo break:

G C G D G

t t m t i t m t i t m t i t m t t m t i t m t m t i m t

## 'GOOD NIGHT LADIES'

This is a very well known American folk song that is fun to play and sing around a campfire.

There are no special considerations on this; it is very straightforward with a good exercise of the ***Alternating Roll*** with a few slides.

Because of its simplicity, you will be able to accent the melody notes better.

This song is simple and short.



This is a typical campground jam session as shown here at the *Huck Finn Jubilee*, June, 2004. This is one of the finest music festivals in America.

<http://www.huckfinn.com>

# Good Night Ladies

[www.jaybuckey.com](http://www.jaybuckey.com)

Arrangement by Jay Buckey

Traditional

Key of G

1 **G**

t s i t m t i t m t i t m t i t m t s i t m t i t m

Good night la - dies. Good night

**D7** **G** **C**

4

t i t m t i t m t s i t m t i t m t i t m t i t m

la - dies. Good night la - dies. We're

**G** **D7** **G**

7

t s i t m t i t m t i t m t m

going to say good - night.

## WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

This brings us to the end of the **Bluegrass Banjo** Series. The last several hundred pages should have given you a good start in understanding how bluegrass music is applied to this fine instrument. I hope, within these pages you have found some inspiration and learned some tunes and techniques that have improved your musicianship.

When I was growing up, I started playing the Guitar and then my father wanted me to play the violin. I really did not like that instrument; it just was not a 'cool' thing to play. The Guitar was great, and I could play it for hours. Sometimes, my 'punishment' was; *'No guitar until your homework is done'*, or my folks would say, *'No guitar picking until you take out the trash'*.

Playing Guitar was addictive for me.

I remember my violin teacher in fifth grade always telling me what songs, exercises and scales to practice when I went home. I just dreaded that word, PRACTICE! And honestly, I really DID NOT practice the violin. I am amazed at how well I did in orchestra, then later picking up bluegrass fiddle having never really practiced it. I still do not practice it! However, I did learn something from all of this; *if you really like your instrument, you will not need to be reminded to play it regularly*. In my case, it was the guitar. I just could not put it down.

Some of my students will come up with excuses for not practicing. Usually they will say, 'I'm too busy with work (school, etc)', or 'I don't have time', or something similar. Yes, we are all busy, but one thing that really helps, is to leave your instrument where you can see it, then pick it up for even a few minutes to go over some material. Your 'practice' time does not need to be a full hour straight, just a few minutes at a time will do. If you really love your banjo, you will find the time to play it and will put it somewhere on the top of your list of priorities.

HOWEVER, MAKE SURE THOSE FEW MINUTES ARE QUALITY MINUTES. THE ULTIMATE PRACTICE SESSION SHOULD BE ONE HOUR A DAY.

When you play your banjo, your practice time (one hour) should include these three things:

1. **Review** (20 minutes) Go over material that you have been working on, and see if you can finally get away from reading the tablature. Try to play from memory and try to 'see' the song in your mind. A BIG help is the *play-along recordings* that come with this book. I like to set up my practice tracks on my computer. I do not use a CD or stereo anymore. I have all my music in mp3 format in my computer for convenience, and then I set up the tracks on the computer, which is hooked up to some nice speakers. Try to play with these tracks without the tablature. This will help you get a better feel for the music; you will start seeing the music in your mind, and feel it in your hands. When you are at an informal jam session out in the campgrounds, it is usually too dark to see sheet music. All the picking will come from the heart.

2. **Learn new material** (20 minutes) Be careful not to bog yourself down with just one song otherwise you may burn out. If there is a certain lick or passage that you cannot get, let it rest. Take a break and do something non-banjo like walk the dog or make a sandwich. Sometimes, I find if I am trying to learn something difficult, I will work on it just before bedtime, then, the song, or what ever it is that I wanted to learn rolls around in my head all night and it is still there in the morning. It actually works; try it!
3. **Goof Off** (20 minutes) You read that correctly. Play around with your instrument; experiment a little, try something new. This is how great musicians come up with fresh ideas and new styles. Make playing the banjo fun. You may want to watch some of the free videos of banjo picking, bluegrass and other music related stuff that I post on my webs. These free videos will give you incentive and inspiration. You will see these at [www.jaybuckey.com](http://www.jaybuckey.com)

You will want to look for others that share your passion for bluegrass. All of the arrangements and books that I create are like small pieces to a very large puzzle. If you can find a mandolin player, that is using this same book but for their instrument, you can easily play the same songs together. Find the other players, a Guitar, Bass, Fiddle, Dobro, Bass, and you will have a new band! It happens all the time and I constantly get letters from those that have done just that by using my arrangements.

So, where can you go from here?

I continue to write more material for the banjo all the time. In addition, I encourage you to visit my web site, [www.jaybuckey.com](http://www.jaybuckey.com) where you will find more music for the banjo including many free arrangements every month. As new material and projects come on-line, they are announced on the 'What's New' page at [www.jaybuckey.com/whatsnew.htm](http://www.jaybuckey.com/whatsnew.htm) .

In addition to these, be sure you take time out to attend a bluegrass festival. To see and hear this music played live will give you enthusiasm to stick with your music.

You can do a search on the Internet for 'Bluegrass Festivals' and see which ones are closest to you. The love for this music continues to grow around the world with more festivals constantly added to the list. Even if there is no festival near your hometown, why not make it a point to go as a family on a short trip. Or, maybe take a festival in as part of your family vacation?

If you have children, you ABSOLUTELY need to give them exposure to this music LIVE. This could be the catalyst that gets them enthused and develop the desire to play music.

Good Luck and Happy Picking!

*Jay Buckey*