

Alfred's

Teach Yourself To Play Banjo

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MORTY MANUS

RON MANUS

**Everything you need to know to
start playing the 5-string banjo now!**



TNT 2 SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Windows

XP, Vista, 7, 8
QuickTime 7.6.7 or higher
1.8 GHz processor or faster
1.1 GB hard drive space
2 GB RAM minimum
Speakers or headphones
Internet access for updates

Macintosh

OS 10.4 and higher (Intel only)
QuickTime 7.6.7 or higher
1.1 GB hard drive space
2 GB RAM minimum
Speakers or headphones
Internet access for updates



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ISBN-10: 1-4706-1531-2 (Book & Online Video/Audio/Software)
ISBN-13: 978-1-4706-1531-4 (Book & Online Video/Audio/Software)

Audio recording performed by Scott Linford.

Cover photo courtesy of Gibson USA



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GETTING
STARTED

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE BANJO

There are four types of banjos in common use: the four-string, short-neck tenor; the four-string long-neck plectrum; the six-string banjo tuned like a guitar; and the one this book will teach you how to play, the five-string banjo.

Banjos were brought to America by West Africans who played an instrument called the *bania*. They may have adapted the *bania* from similar stringed instruments they heard the Arabs playing. The *bania* has several strings stretched over a wooden neck and hollow gourd, which acted as a resonator. Early in the development of the instrument its resonance was improved by slicing a piece off the side of the gourd and stretching an animal skin over the resulting hole. It is this skin (now usually made of plastic) that gives the banjo its characteristic bright, “snappy” sound.

The earliest American banjos that still exist date from about 1830. Soon after that an important improvement and a brilliant innovation permitted players to reach the heights of technique previously unheard of: the improvement was the addition of frets (which early banjo makers borrowed from the guitar and mandolin) and the innovation was the addition of a fifth string. Unlike the four longer strings, however, the fifth string is a short *drone* string, which means that no matter what else is being played, the fifth string always sounds the same note, either the root or the fifth of the key. One possibility is that this innovation was an attempt by American banjo players of Scottish-Irish ancestry to imitate the sound of the bagpipe*

*Bagpipes have one or more drone pipes that sound the same note regardless of what else is being played. The melody is played on different pipes, called *chanters*. The modern banjo player gets a comparable effect by playing the melody on the four long strings while the short fifth string continually sounds the same note.

which was such an important part of their musical culture. There is also evidence the fifth string dates back to the instrument's African roots.

Surprisingly, the five-string banjo was often used in the 19th century for playing classical melodies. There is much printed music from the period 1875 to about 1910 that proves that the instrument was in great demand for this purpose. (To hear what this sounded like, listen to the historic recordings of banjo virtuoso Fred van Epps, who recorded before the first World War.)

Although it had always been popular as a folk instrument, the banjo really came into its own with the beginnings of bluegrass music in the late 1920s. The basic bluegrass band consists of five instruments: fiddle, mandolin, bass, guitar and five-string banjo. (It is said that the early bluegrass musicians were using

stringed instruments to imitate the sounds of Dixieland jazz they heard on radio.)

Bluegrass soon became an independent, important and exciting part of the American music scene. Banjo pickers like Earl Scruggs, Don Reno, Bobby Thompson and many others brought the instrument to new heights of virtuosity, and innovators like Dick Weissman and the incredible Bela Fleck continue to push the boundaries of what the instrument can do.

In this book we will give you a thorough grounding in the basics of five-string banjo playing. No matter whether your interest lies in bluegrass, folk, jazz or even classical, the fundamentals of playing the instrument are the same. After completing *Teach Yourself to Play 5-String Banjo*, you'll be on your way to becoming an excellent player in your favorite musical style!

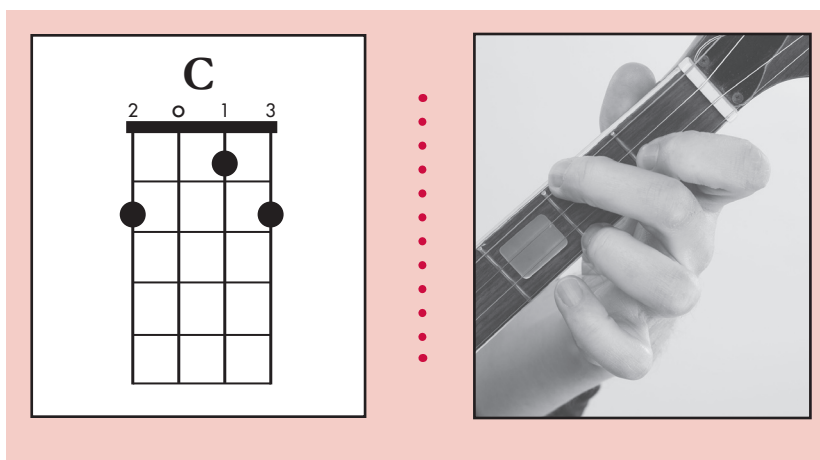


Earl Scruggs, here with his partner Lester Flatt and their band, is famous for his three-finger style of playing. He also invented the “Scruggs peg,” a device used for making quick changes in tuning of B and G strings. Photo courtesy of Country Music Foundation.

The C Major Chord

The C chord, along with the G and D7 chords you have learned, comprise a group of three chords called the **principal chords** in the key of G. Using only these three chords you can accompany literally thousands of folk, country, blues and other songs.

If a chord symbol does not have “7,” “min.” or some other abbreviation after it, it is always a **major** chord. Thus G and C are both major chords. Here’s how to play the C major chord:



Finger the C chord as shown above. Then play the strings one at a time to make each one sound clear. No buzzes or dull thunks, please! Once you can play the C chord perfectly, practice the first exercise in $\frac{4}{4}$ using Strum No. 1. Then use Strum No. 2 to play the second exercise.



Track 17



Track 18



The following exercises will train your fingers to change chords smoothly. Keep a steady beat. This is very important. If you have a metronome, set it at 60 beats per minute and play through the exercises using the basic strum (striking down on the strings with the fingernails of the right hand). When you can do this smoothly, without hesitating or missing a beat, gradually increase the tempo until you can play the exercises at 120 beats per minute (marching beat).



Track 19



Track 20



Track 21



After you can play the above exercises using the basic strum, try the two exercises in $\frac{4}{4}$ using Strum No. 1 and the exercise in $\frac{3}{4}$ using Strum No. 2.

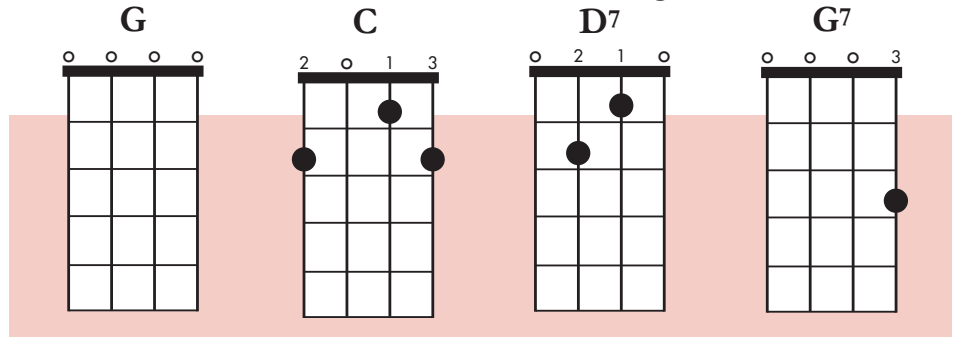
This folk classic is a perfect song on which to play Strum No. 5. Play it with good spirit and a solid beat.

This Land Is Your Land



Track 37

The chords used in this song are:



Words and Music by Woody Guthrie

Moderately

Chorus:

1 & uh 2 & uh 1 & uh 2 & uh etc. 3/0 3/2 2/0 This land is

2/1 your land, this land is my land. From Cal - i -

3/2 for - nia to the New York is - land. From the red - wood

2/1 for - est to the Gulf Stream wa - ters,

3/2 this land was made for you and me.

Verse:

G / / / C / / / C / / / G / / / G / / / D7 / / / D7 / / / G / / /
As I was walk-ing that rib-bon of high-way I saw a - bove me that end-less sky - way,

/ / / C / / / C / / / G / / / G / / / D7 / / / D7 / / / G / / / G / / /
I saw be - low me that gold-en val - ley; This land was made for you and me. (Repeat Chorus)



PULLING-OFF

A complementary technique to hammering-on is called **pulling-off**. It, too, can be used to enhance accompaniment or melody picking. Here's how to do it.

Use the third finger on the left hand to finger the first string, third fret. Pick the first string with the index finger of the right hand. This produces the note F. Now, without using the right hand, pull the third finger away from the fingerboard so that the open first string sounds. You can't just pick up the finger; you must pull it sideways so that the open string sounds clear.

Once you can pull-off on the first string, try it with various other notes, such as the second string, third fret; the third string, second fret; the fourth string, second fret. We'll use the letter "P" to mark the places where a pull-off is desired.

Try this new technique on an old square dance tune. It uses pulling-off and, in a few places, hammering-on. Also notice that the B note is played in an alternative place—the third string, fourth fret. But use the third finger to play it.



Pete Seeger, who has composed over 100 songs, uses a straightforward melodic and harmonic style. Although an accomplished banjo player, Seeger emphasized the functional supportive accompaniment of the banjo rather than its virtuosity. Photo courtesy of Country Music Foundation.

Cotton-Eyed Joe Track 52

American Square Dance Tune

No chords are used in this arrangement.

The musical notation for "Cotton-Eyed Joe" is presented in three staves, each with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. The notation includes various rhythmic values and specific markings for pull-offs (P) and hammer-ons (H). The first staff contains 18 measures, the second 18 measures, and the third 18 measures. The notation is as follows:

Staff 1: 4/0 3/0 3/4 3/0 3/4 3/0 3/2 2/0 2/1 4/0 3/0 3/4 3/0 3/4 3/0 3/2 3/0 4/2 3/0

Staff 2: 4/0 3/0 3/4 3/0 3/4 3/0 3/2 2/0 2/1 1/2 1/0 3/4 3/2 3/0 3/4 3/2 3/0 4/2 3/0

Staff 3: 1/2 1/0 3/4 3/2 3/0 1/2 1/0 1/5 1/2 1/0 3/4 3/2 3/0 3/4 3/2 3/0 4/2 4/0 3/0

This is an example of pull-offs and hammer-ons used in solo melody playing.

* This repeat sign means to go back and play again from the beginning.

** This second repeat means to go back and play again from the earlier repeat.