

1st LETTER



Evaluation of Kevin's banjo playing.

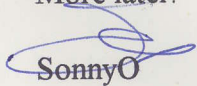
Kevin:

As far as your playing goes, you have all the right hand licks you'll ever need. You need to settle on one style of playing and concentrate on that. Learn every note exactly as that person played it, and do it that way, every time. What I'm saying is, don't put a "Cabin in Caroline" lick in "Why Did You Wander." It doesn't fit, and it will sound out of place. We played those things a certain way for a reason. You need to know and understand that reason. That can come only from hours of extensive practice, perfecting those notes in those certain songs. Then, sometime...***much later***...you will be able to mix and match those licks to your hearts content, but, by then you will understand which ones will go with the other. This stuff didn't get here over night, it took years to evolve. Don't expect it to be easy. The lick at the end of the break in "The Old Home Town" is complicated..you do that lick but you learned it from Steve Dilling, JD Crowe, or Terry Baucaum...and neither of them learned it correctly. Every note, every string **MUST** be exact. Being close only counts if you're throwing hand grenades, or horse shoes.

You've expressed interest in my playing, which is basically Earl, or I should qualify that as "early Earl." I lost interest completely in his playing after about 1957. Later, from him, I found out that he lost interest in the banjo in 56 or thereabouts. It surprised me at the time but later I knew exactly what he was talking about because it also happened to me, in the mid 80's. The only difference, I was able to disguise mine better than Earl because I had a wider style than he. (Meaning, I played what he did, *and* what I did.

You need to round up all the Earl records ('46 to '53) and learn exactly what he did and where he did it in the song. If you do this and practice it enough you'll begin to understand why he did what he did in the place he did it. You follow? Then after that, round up everything you can by me, and do the same thing. At the end, you should know why I played "Someone Before Me" the way I did, and you play it that way every time..or why the background on the last verse of "Lorena" would have been out of place on the first verse. It has to with exactly what the name background implies. Enhance the song. Make what you play add to the meaning of the song...set the mood and keep the people in your audience in that mood.

More later.

SonnyO