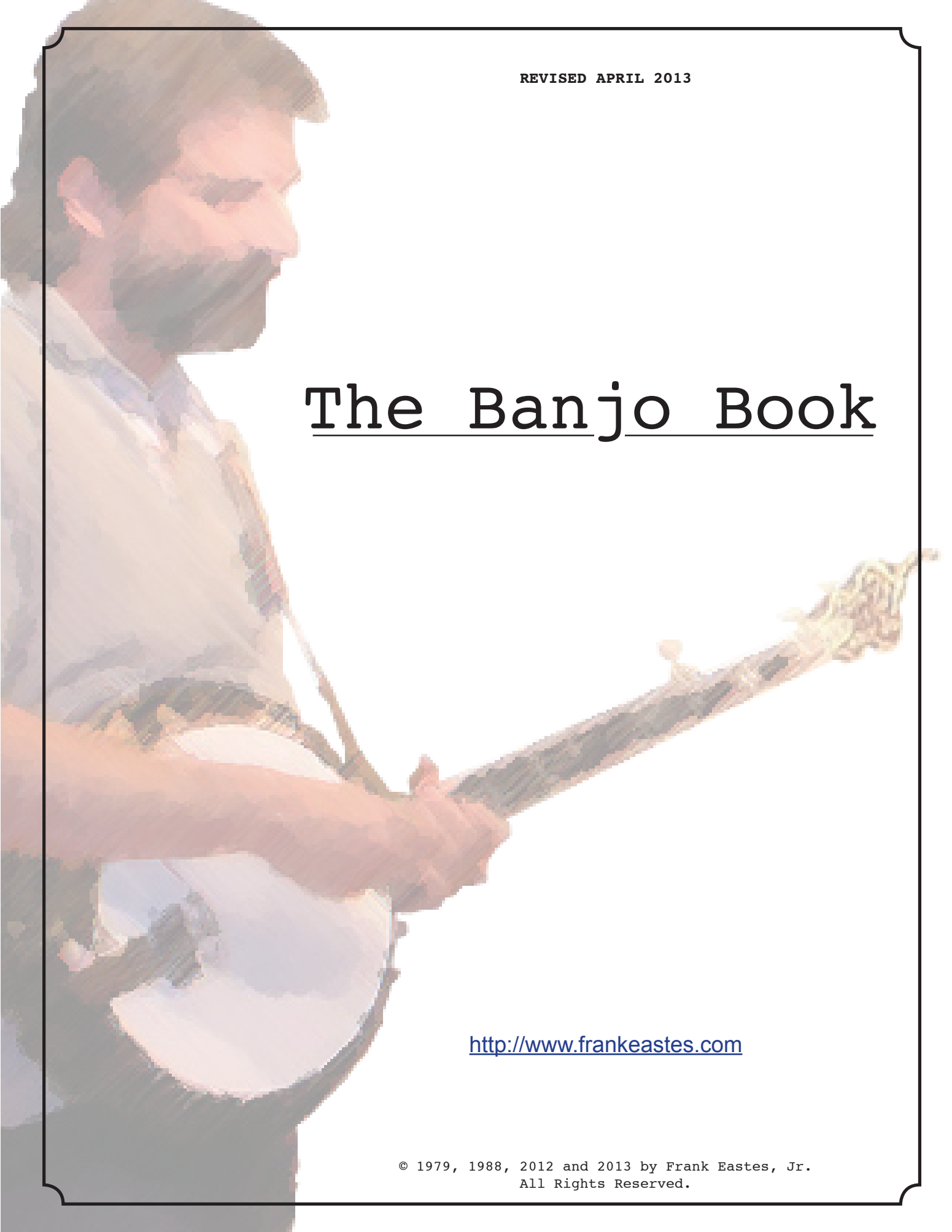


A man with a beard and mustache, wearing a light-colored shirt, is shown in profile playing a banjo. The image is a faded, artistic rendering that serves as a background for the book cover.

REVISED APRIL 2013

The Banjo Book

<http://www.frankeastes.com>

© 1979, 1988, 2012 and 2013 by Frank Eastes, Jr.
All Rights Reserved.

• FOREWORD •

The attached materials were created by me in 1979 at age 19 when I first attempted to teach banjo. I created this banjo primer because of a "gap" I perceived in some of the better banjo books around at the time. This basic tutorial is intended for the beginning and intermediate banjo player to gain a foundation from which to springboard into those other instruction books, and the intermediate player to begin on the path of music theory. The primary emphasis is on the translation of chord construction and basic theory applied directly to the fingerboard.

This book marked the beginning of my banjo journey in 1979, and I have continued to create new materials which expand on the ideas presented here. Knowing basic chord construction and understanding the fingerboard are the fundamental keys to help you along your personal banjo experience. This revision replaces all other versions and is updated with links to my new website I've created to put all of my resources into one focussed place, finally! Please visit me on the web, and share the muse. 😊

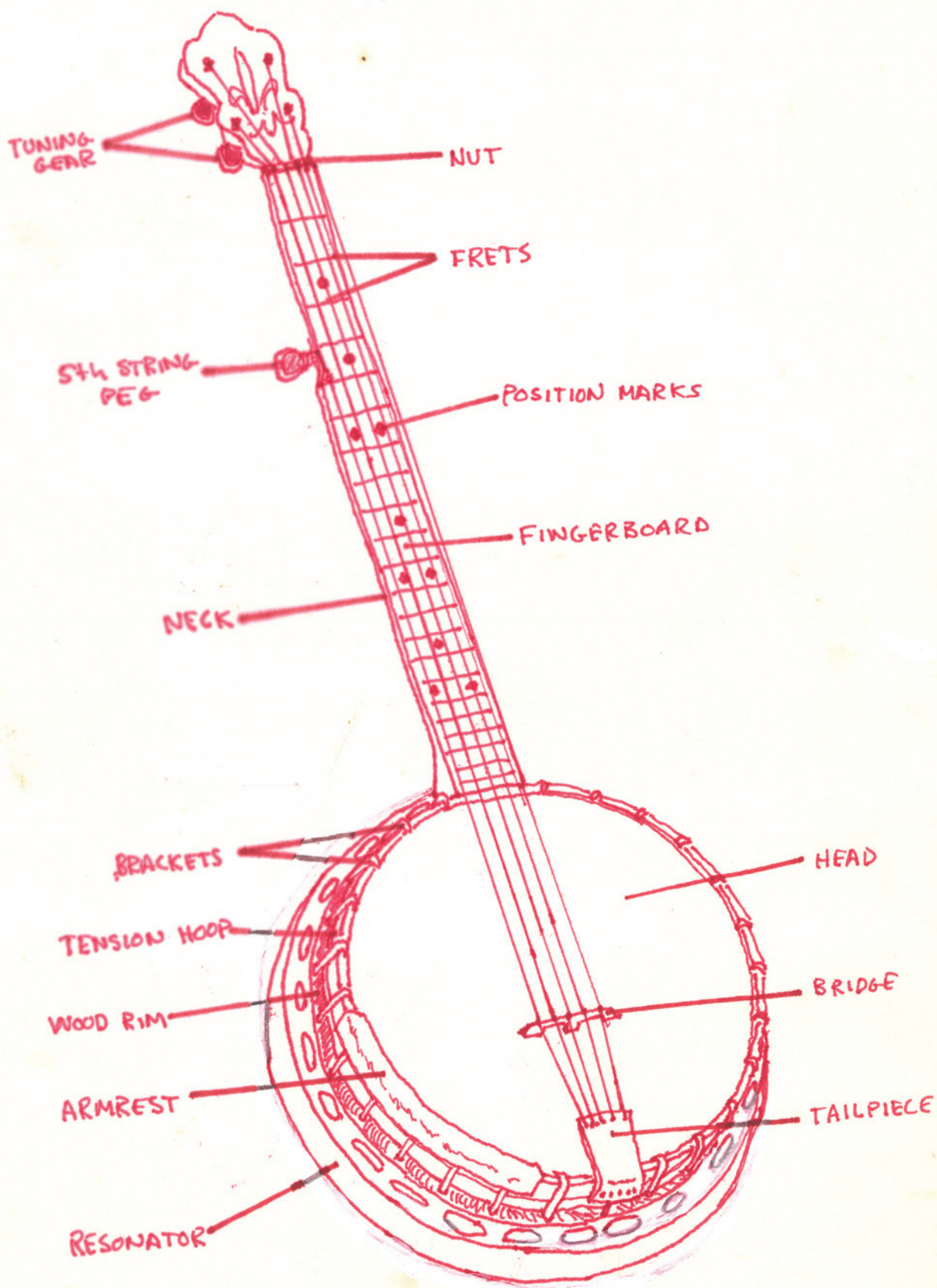
The cover image is a highly stylized copy I made from a photo by KnoxPics.Org. Used by permission.

—Frank Eastes, Jr.
Spartanburg, SC
April 2013

©1979 F. EASTES

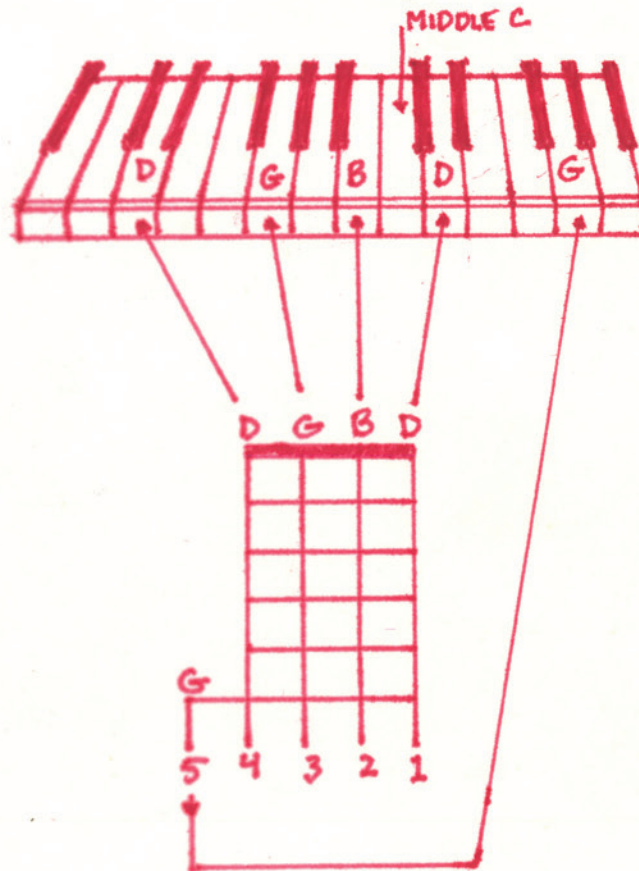
These are some simple roll exercises you can play with after working your way through this instructional booklet.

PARTS OF THE BANJO



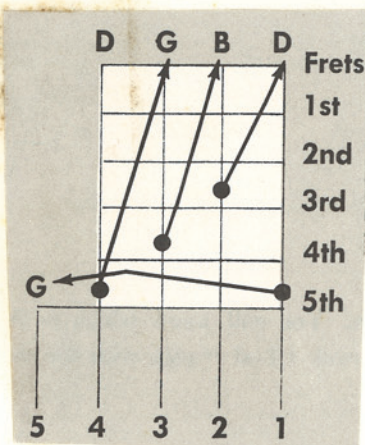
TUNING THE BANJO

IF YOU HAVE A PIANO:



IF YOU DON'T HAVE A PIANO:

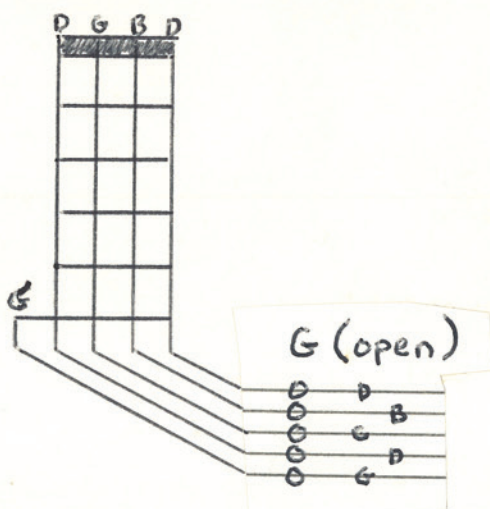
1. TUNE THE FOURTH STRING TO "D."
2. FRET THE FOURTH STRING AT THE 5th FRET, TUNE THE 3RD. STRING TO MATCH.
3. FRET THE 4th FRET OF THE THIRD STRING, TUNE THE SECOND STRING TO MATCH.
4. FRET THE 3rd FRET OF THE SECOND STRING, TUNE THE FIRST STRING TO MATCH.
5. FRET THE FIRST STRING AT THE 5th FRET, TUNE THE FIFTH STRING TO MATCH.



READING TABLATURE

TABLATURE IS A SIMPLIFIED METHOD OF NOTATION THAT REQUIRES NO PRIOR EXPERIENCE READING MUSIC. SINCE IT IS SIMPLER THAN READING MUSIC, BUT BASED ON THE SAME IDEA, LEARNING TO PLAY IS QUICKER AND EASIER.

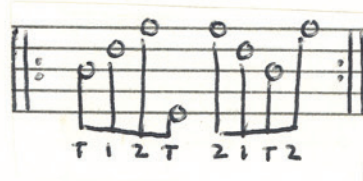
THE FIVE LINES OF THE MUSIC STAFF ARE SET UP TO CORRESPOND WITH THE FIVE STRINGS ON A BANJO:



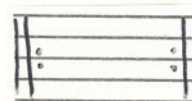
THE THUMB, INDEX AND MIDDLE FINGERS OF THE RIGHT HAND ARE USED TO PICK THE STRINGS, AND ARE NOTATED LIKE THIS:



AN EXAMPLE:



THESE



ARE REPEAT SIGNS; ANYTHING ENCLOSED WITHIN THEM SHOULD BE REPEATED.

BY THE WAY, YOU SHOULD BE USING FINGER PICKS...

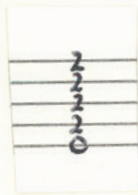
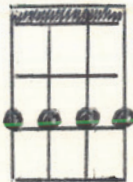
CHORDS

CHORDS ARE WHAT MAKE MUSIC MUSIC. HERE ARE A FEW:

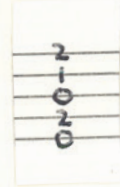
G open



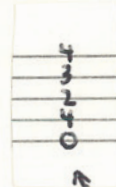
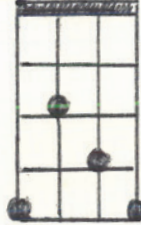
A



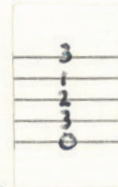
C



D

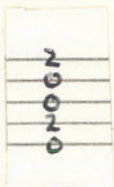
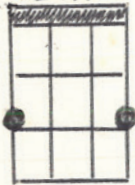


F

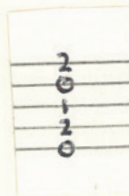


THESE NUMBERS, IN
TABLATURE, REPRESENT
WHAT FRET TO STOP.

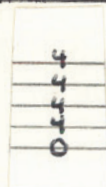
Em



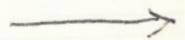
E



B

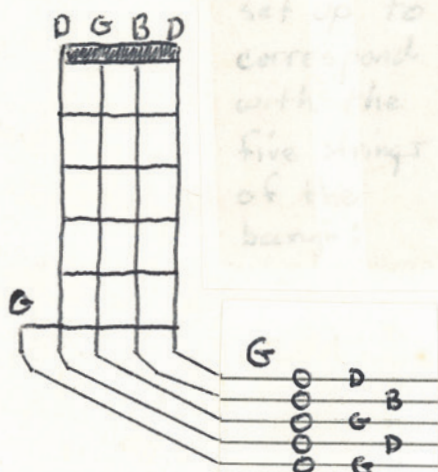


STRUM THROUGH EACH
CHORD SEVERAL TIMES
UNTIL YOUR FINGERS
BECOME USED TO MAKING
THESE POSITIONS.
NOW GO ON TO :



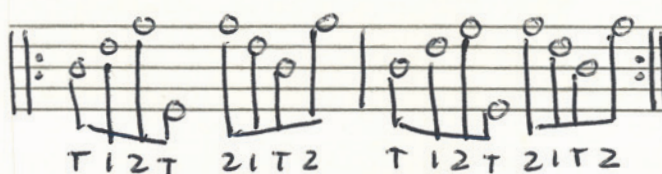
BASIC ROLLS

The five-line musical staff is set up to correspond with the five strings of the banjo:

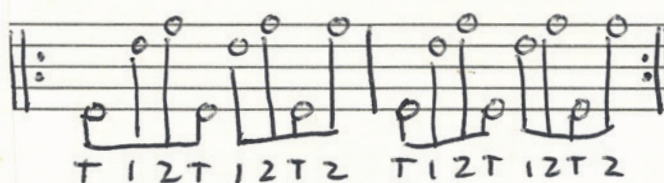


HERE ARE FOUR ROLLS USED IN SCRUGGS
STYLE BANJO PICKIN':

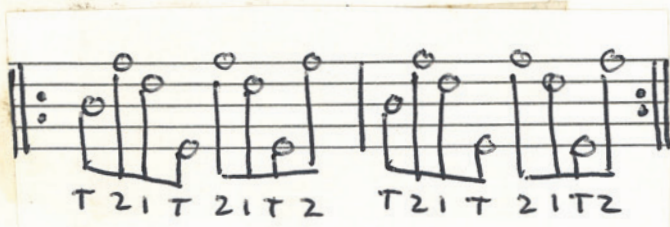
1. FORWARD-BACKWARD ROLL :



2. FORWARD ROLL:



3. BACKWARD ROLL:



4. THUMB-ALTERNATING ROLL:

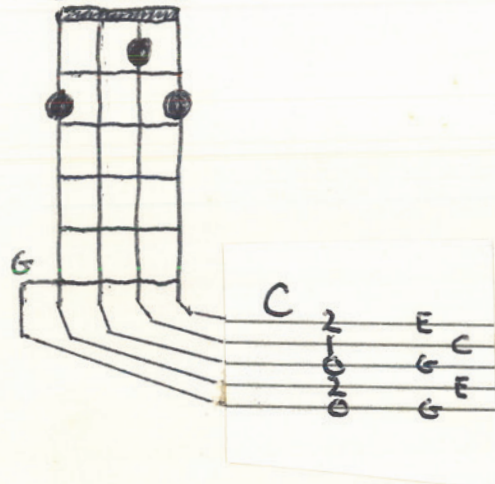


NOW THAT YOU KNOW A FEW CHORDS AND ROLLS, COMBINE THEM, STARTING ON THE NEXT PAGE :

CHORD - ROLL EXERCISES

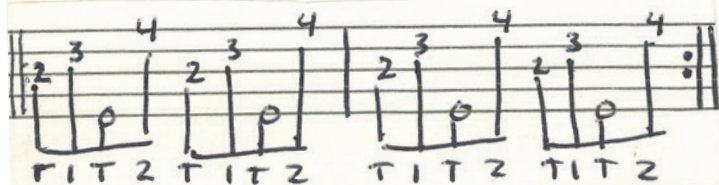
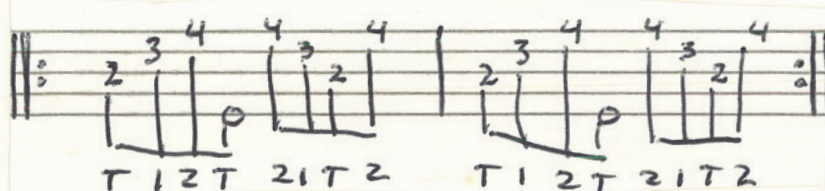
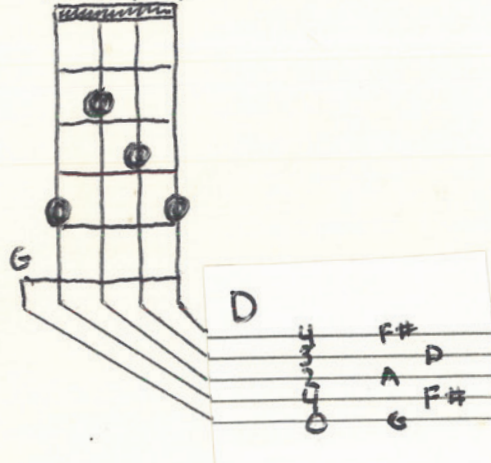
C chord

E G C E



D chord

F# A D F#



DO THE SAME FOR "F" CHORD, AND ALL NEW CHORDS YOU MAY LEARN ALONG THE WAY.....

CHORD - ROLL EXERCISE

NOW COMBINE ALL CHORDS AND ALL ROLLS, AND WORK THROUGH THIS EXERCISE:

G

T 1 2 T 2 1 T 2 T 1 2 T 1 2 T 2 T 2 1 T 2 1 T 2 T 1 T 2 T 1 T 2

C

T 1 2 T 2 1 T 2 T 1 2 T 1 2 T 2 T 2 1 T 2 1 T 2 T 1 T 2 T 1 T 2

D

T 1 2 T 2 1 T 2 T 1 2 T 1 2 T 2 T 2 1 T 2 1 T 2 T 1 T 2 T 1 T 2

F

T 1 2 T 2 1 T 2 T 1 2 T 1 2 T 2 T 2 1 T 2 1 T 2 T 1 T 2 T 1 T 2

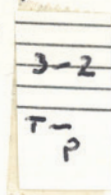
AS YOU PROGRESS, YOU WILL DISCOVER MANY NEW ROLLS AND PATTERNS AND HOW TO COMBINE AND CHANGE ROLLS IN MID-THOUGHT. THE POSSIBILITIES ARE ENOLESS.

TECHNIQUES

THERE ARE SEVERAL LEFT-HAND FINGER TECHNIQUES USED IN BLUEGRASS BANJO. HERE ARE THE MOST COMMON ONES USED:

THE PULL-OFF

TO MAKE THE PULL-OFF, STRIKE THE STRING WITH, IN THIS CASE, THE THUMB AND IMMEDIATELY PULL YOUR FINGER OFF THE STRING. USE AN UPWARD OR DOWNWARD MOTION TO ACTUALLY PLUCK THE STRING WITH YOUR LEFT HAND.

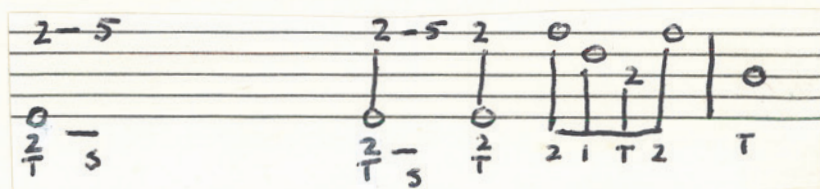


HERE IS AN EXAMPLE:



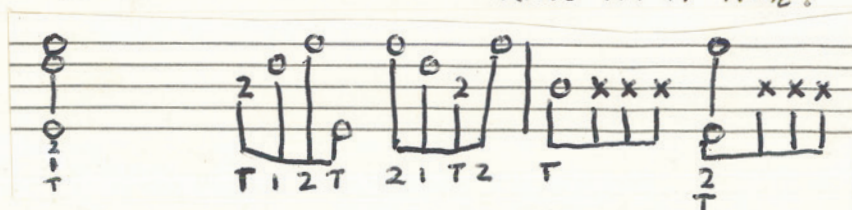
THE SLIDE

THE SLIDE IS EXACTLY WHAT IT IMPLIES. HERE ARE TWO OFTEN-USED SLIDES:



THE PINCH

PINCHING IS JUST PLUCKING MORE THAN ONE STRING AT A TIME:



TECHNIQUES

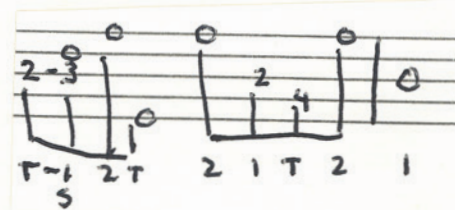
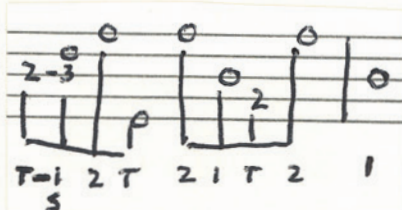
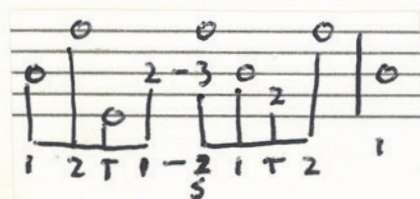
THE HAMMER-ON

THE HAMMER-ON IS WHAT IT IMPLIES. PLUCK THE STRING AND IMMEDIATELY HAMMER-ON WITH YOUR LEFT HANDS



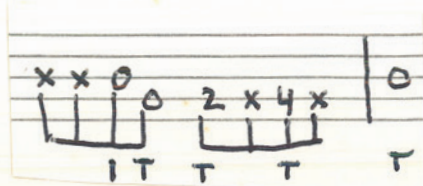
LICKS AND ENDINGS

A LICK IS A SERIES OF NOTES, A PATTERN, WHICH IS OFTEN USED TO FILL IN A SPACE OR GAP BETWEEN BREAKS OR PHRASES. AN ENDING IS SELF-EXPLANATORY. HERE ARE A FEW:

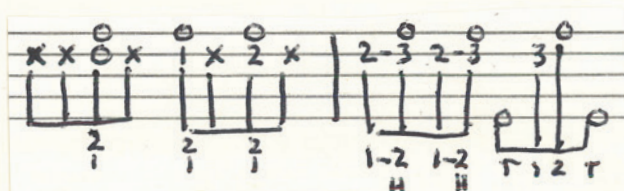


KICKOFFS

A KICKOFF IS A SHORT PHRASE THAT LEADS INTO OR "KICKOFFS"
A SONG:



(THE BEVERLY HILLBILLIES)

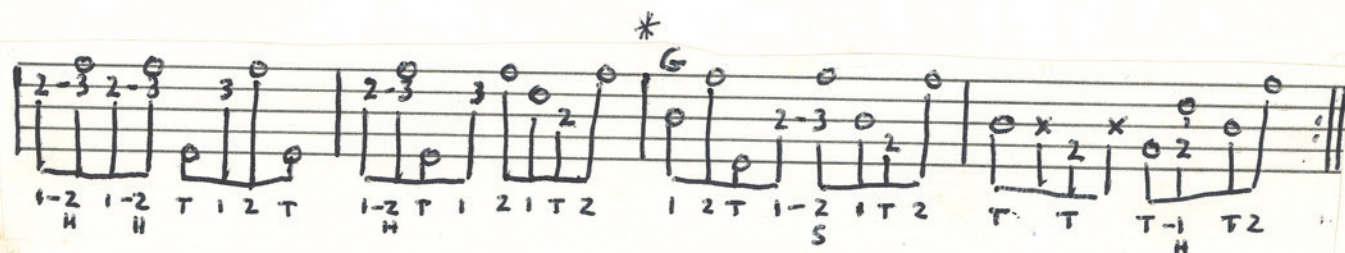


(FOGGIE MOUNTAIN BREAKDOWN)

NOW YOU KNOW EVERYTHING THAT IS THE BASIS OF PICKING A
BANJO. NOW YOU CAN GO ON TO LEARNING A FEW SONGS.

"IT TAKES A WORRIED MAN"

key of G

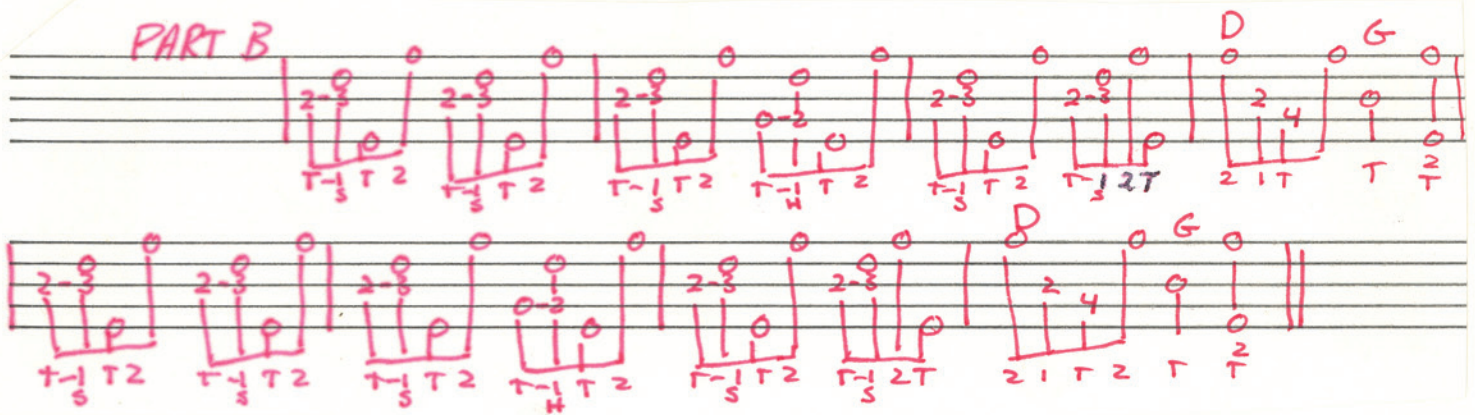
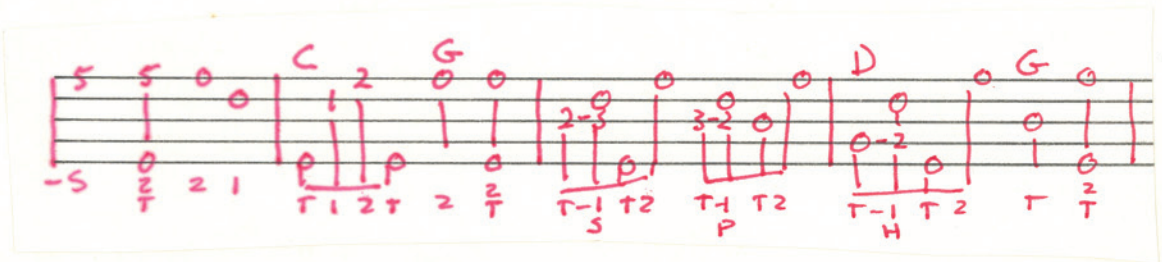
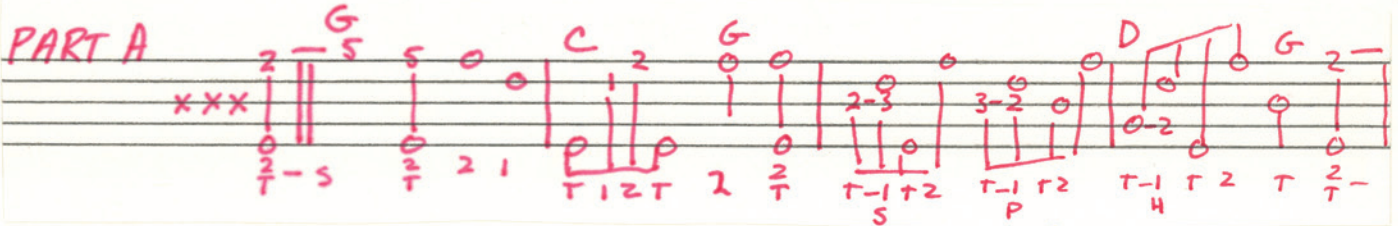


* your choice of endings

TRADITIONAL

"CRIPPLE CREEK"

Key of G



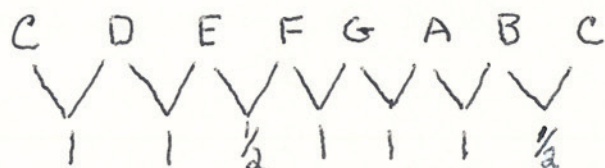
TRADITIONAL

NOW YOU ARE READY TO START IN BLUEGRASS BANJO by
Peter WERNIC.

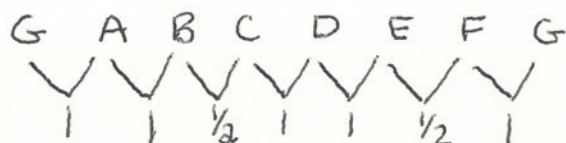
UP THE NECK & SOME THEORY

PROGRESSING A CHORD UP THE NECK IS NOT AS HARD AS IT MAY SEEM, AND KNOWING A LITTLE MUSIC THEORY WILL HELP YOU UNDERSTAND NOT ONLY WHERE A CHORD IS ON THE NECK, BUT WHY IT IS THERE IN THE FIRST PLACE. THE FIRST THING TO KNOW AND UNDERSTAND IS A SCALE, AND CONSTRUCTING A CHORD FROM THAT SCALE.

THE BASIC SCALE FROM WHICH ALL CHORDS ARE DERIVED IS THE MAJOR SCALE. IN THE KEY OF C THERE ARE NO SHARPS (#) OR FLATS (b), so LETS START THERE:



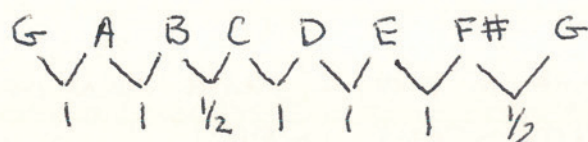
THE NUMBERS BELOW THE NOTES ARE THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THOSE TWO NOTES. A WHOLE STEP IS TWO FRETS. NOTE THAT THERE IS A HALF STEP (ONE FRET) BETWEEN E AND F AND B AND C. THESE ARE NATURAL HALF STEPS AND OCCUR WITHOUT THE USE OF SHARPS OR FLATS. NOTE THAT THIS PATTERN FOR A MAJOR SCALE (1, 1, $\frac{1}{2}$, 1, 1, 1, $\frac{1}{2}$) IS THE SAME FOR EVERY MAJOR SCALE. SINCE THE BANJO IS TUNED TO AN OPEN "G" CHORD, LETS TAKE THAT AS AN EXAMPLE:



Remembering that B AND C AND E AND F ARE NATURAL

UP THE NECK & SOME THEORY (continued)

HALF STEPS, AND ALSO REMEMBERING THE STRUCTURE OF A MAJOR SCALE (1, 1, $\frac{1}{2}$, 1, 1, 1, $\frac{1}{2}$), YOU CAN SEE THAT A "G" SCALE DOES NOT FIT THIS STRUCTURE. SINCE EVERY MAJOR SCALE MUST HAVE THIS STRUCTURE, YOU MUST CONFORM THE SCALE TO FIT:



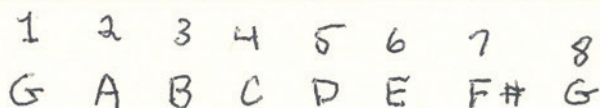
AND RAISE F BY $\frac{1}{2}$ STEP (ONE FRET) TO MAKE AN F#. SO YOU CAN SEE THAT IN THE KEY OF G, THE MAJOR SCALE OF G HAS AN F# IN IT.

HERE IS A G SCALE IN TABLATURE:



FOR ANY SCALE, THE STARTING NOTE AND ENDING NOTE ARE THE SAME, IN THIS CASE "G", AND IS CALLED THE ROOT.

IN MAJOR SCALES, AS IN MOST SCALES, THERE ARE 8 NOTES FROM ROOT TO ROOT (ONE OCTAVE HIGHER):



more

SOME THEORY

(continued)

TO CONSTRUCT CHORDS YOU MERELY TAKE CERTAIN NOTES OF A SCALE AND PLAY THEM TOGETHER. TO MAKE A MAJOR CHORD FROM A MAJOR SCALE, TAKE THE 1st, 3rd, AND 5th NOTES OF THAT SCALE. TAKING A "G" MAJOR SCALE, FOR EXAMPLE, THE 1st, 3rd, and 5th NOTES ARE G, B, AND D. A BANJO IS TUNED TO AN OPEN "G" CHORD, AND THE NOTES ARE G D G B D. YOU CAN DO THE SAME FOR ALL MAJOR SCALES TO GET THEIR MAJOR CHORDS:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C	C-E-G
D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D	D-F#-A
E	F#	G#	A	B	C#	D#	E	E-G#-B
F	G	A	Bb	C	D	E	F	F-A-C
G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G	G-B-D
A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G#	A	A-C#-E
B	C#	D#	E	F#	G#	A#	B	B-D#-F#
1	1	1/2	1	1	1	1	1/2	

BUT HOW DOES ALL THIS APPLY TO THE FINGER BOARD?



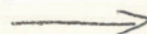
UP THE NECK (continued)

ACTUALLY, YOU DO NOT NEED TO KNOW ANYTHING CONTAINED IN THE LAST THREE PAGES TO PLAY UP THE NECK, BUT WHAT GOOD IS KNOWING HOW TO PLAY UP THE NECK WITHOUT THE UNDERSTANDING BEHIND IT? LIKEWISE, WHAT GOOD IS THE UNDERSTANDING WITHOUT KNOWING HOW TO PLAY UP THE NECK? THEY GO HAND-IN-HAND.

KNOWING THAT A MAJOR CHORD IS MADE OF THREE NOTES OF A MAJOR SCALE, AND ALSO KNOWING THAT A BANJO IS TUNED TO AN OPEN "G" CHORD, IT IS LOGICAL TO ASSUME THAT THERE MUST BE THREE WAYS TO PLAY ANY ONE MAJOR CHORD ON THE NECK. IF THE BANJO WERE NOT TUNED TO AN OPEN CHORD, THEN THIS ASSUMPTION WOULD NOT APPLY. [FROM THIS POINT ON, ALL THREE-NOTE CHORDS WILL BE REFERRED TO AS TRIADS (TRI=THREE), SINCE ALL THREE-NOTE CHORDS, ALONG WITH A MAJOR CHORD (WHICH HAS THREE NOTES IN IT), HAVE THREE POSITIONS ON THE NECK.]

THIS ASSUMPTION IS, OF COURSE, CORRECT, AND THE THREE POSITIONS FOR PLAYING A TRIAD ARE CALLED INVERSIONS. AN INVERSION IS ANOTHER WAY OF PLAYING THE SAME CHORD, BUT THE BASS NOTE (LOWEST NOTE) CHANGES, AND IS EITHER THE 1st, the 3rd, or the 5th.

SOUND COMPLICATED?



CORRECTION

February 2012

In the pages which follow I introduce the concept of chord inversions. The information I originally provided here was based on what I had been taught in private lessons when I was studying classical violin in the mid-1970s. In those days, there was no internet, only printed reference materials.

Flash ahead to 2012 ... and behold, the power of the internet!!

Within a few minutes of uploading *The Banjo Book* to BanjoHangout, I received a personal communication that my description of inversions was incorrect. That was news to me, so after checking out the links given me, I see that I do indeed name the inversions incorrectly here. Wow, a new revelation 33 years later! Clearly, I learned wrong information 35+ years ago. I do not want to pass along wrong information!

So, I have made the corrections in the pages which follow. My sincere thanks to Jack Baker for bringing this to my attention!!

For the intermediate to advanced musician, for a very scholarly explanation of chord inversions, here is a link to wikipedia.org:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chord_%28music%29#Inversion

UP THE NECK (continued)

IN FACT, IT IS VERY SIMPLE TO UNDERSTAND.

HERE ARE THE THREE INVERSIONS OF A "G" CHORD

Root Position	1st Inversion	2nd Inversion
G - B - D 1 3 5	B - D - G 3 5 1	D - G - B 5 1 3
ROOT IS BASS	3RD IS BASS	5TH IS BASS

THE ROOT POSITION OF ANY CHORD HAS THE CHORD NAME AS ITS BASS, ALWAYS.

NOW TO APPLY ALL THIS TO THE BANJO NECK. FOR ALL PRACTICAL PURPOSES, FORGET ABOUT THE FIFTH STRING OF THE BANJO (THE HIGH "G") AND CONCERN YOURSELF WITH THE FOUR LOWER STRINGS, HERE THEY ARE:



LOOKING AT THIS DIAGRAM, YOU CAN SEE THAT A BANJO IS TUNED TO A "G" CHORD, 2nd Inversion. HERE ARE THE THREE WAYS TO PLAY ANY MAJOR CHORD ON THE NECK:

Root Position	1st Inversion	2nd Inversion
 1 3 5 1	 3 5 1 3	 5 1 3 5

UP THE NECK (continued)

REMEMBER THAT THESE THREE MAJOR CHORD POSITIONS, LIKE MAJOR SCALES, ARE THE BASIS FOR CONSTRUCTING ALL OTHER CHORDS SUCH AS MINOR CHORDS, 7th's, 9th's, etc.

WHEN PROGRESSING A CHORD UP THE NECK, THE ONLY THING TO KEEP IN MIND IS THAT THE INVERSIONS REPEAT THEMSELVES:

Root Position, 1st Inversion, 2nd Inversion, Root Position, 1st Inversion, etc. KNOWING THAT A BANJO IS TUNED TO

A 2nd INVERSION "G" CHORD, THE NEXT "G" CHORD POSITION

UP THE NECK MUST BE THE Root Position. TO FIND THIS INVERSION, SIMPLY FIND THE 3rd STRING NOTE (A "G" NOTE) HIGHER UP THE NECK ON THE 4th STRING, AND PLAY THE

Root Position Form FROM THE PREVIOUS PAGE. NOTE THAT IN THIS POSITION THE BASS NOTE IS G, AND YOU ARE PLAYING A "G" CHORD. TO FIND THE NEXT POSITION

UP THE NECK, CONTINUE HOLDING THE Root Position AND GO THROUGH THE SAME PROCESS YOU DID TO FIND THE

Root Position: FIND THE 3rd STRING NOTE HIGHER UP THE NECK ON THE 4th STRING AND PLAY THE 1st Inversion form.

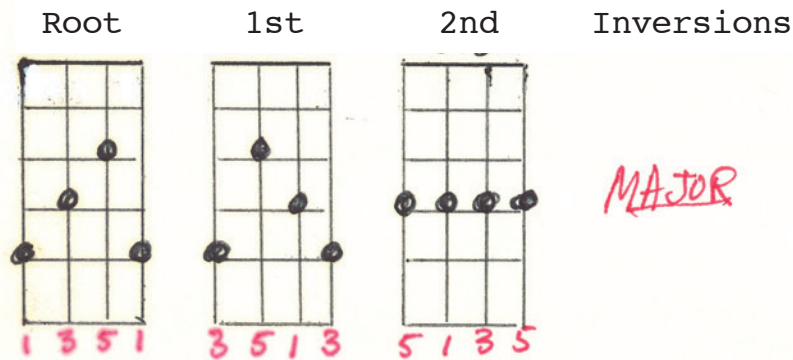
LIKEWISE FOR THE 2nd Inversion, AS WELL AS ALL OTHER CHORDS.

ONCE YOU UNDERSTAND THE BASICS OF CONSTRUCTING CHORDS, YOU WILL BE BETTER PREPARED TO GO ON TO →

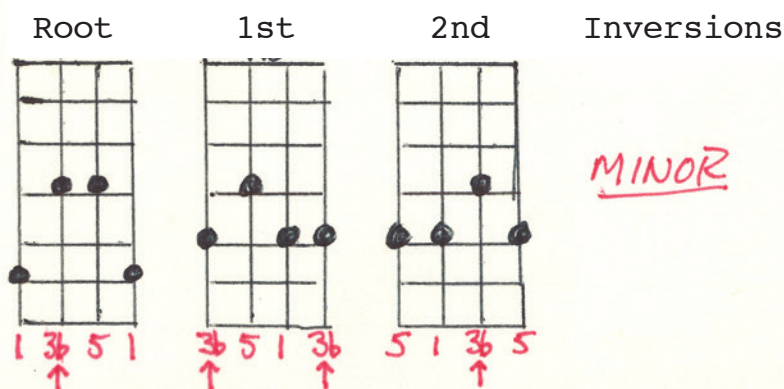
SOME MORE THEORY

ONCE YOU KNOW THE BASICS BEHIND CONSTRUCTING MAJOR CHORDS, YOU CAN GO ON TO CONSTRUCTING MINOR CHORDS, 7th CHORDS, 9th CHORDS, MINOR 7th CHORDS, ETC. ACTUALLY, THESE ARE VERY EASY TO DO.

KEEPING IN MIND THE THREE POSSIBLE INVERSIONS FROM BEFORE,



YOU CAN NOW USE THESE TO CONSTRUCT ANY OTHER CHORD POSSIBLE. FOR EXAMPLE, A MINOR CHORD IS THE SAME PATTERN AS A MAJOR CHORD, BUT YOU SIMPLY FLAT (b) THE THIRD IN EACH INVERSION. BY FLATTING A NOTE, YOU DROP IT BY ONE FRET. THUS, THE ABOVE INVERSIONS FOR A MAJOR CHORD BECOMES THE FOLLOWING INVERSIONS FOR A MINOR CHORD BY FLATTING THE THIRD:



AND AGAIN, KEEP IN MIND THAT THESE INVERSIONS ALSO REPEAT THEMSELVES, Root Position, 1st Inversion, 2nd Inversion, Root Position, etc. | PROGRESSING A MINOR CHORD UP THE NECK.

7th Chords

7th chords are a bit different from the other chords discussed. REMEMBER, THE BASIC CHORD, A MAJOR CHORD, CONSISTS OF 1-3-5 NOTES FROM A MAJOR SCALE. WHEN MAKING 7th, 9th, etc, chords, YOU ARE ADDING NOTES TO THIS BASIC STRUCTURE.

REMEMBER THE PATTERN FOR A MAJOR SCALE:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1	1	1/2	1	1	1	1	1/2

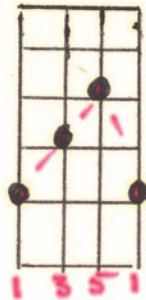
TO MAKE A 7th CHORD, YOU ADD THE FLATTED 7th NOTE FROM THAT SCALE. IN THIS CASE (A "G" CHORD), THE 7th NOTE IS "F#" YOU FLAT THIS BY DROPPING IT DOWN ONE FRET, TO AN "F."

AGAIN, YOU DO NOT HAVE TO KNOW THIS INFORMATION TO BE ABLE TO PLAY THESE CHORDS.

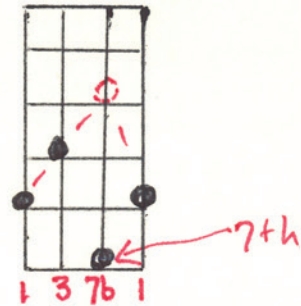


TO APPLY THIS TO THE FINGERBOARD, YOU ADD THE FLATTED 7th NOTE, AS ONE WOULD EXPECT BY THE MAJOR SCALE PATTERN ($1, 1, \frac{1}{2}, 1, 1, 1, \frac{1}{2}$), $1\frac{1}{2}$ FRET ABOVE THE "FIFTH."

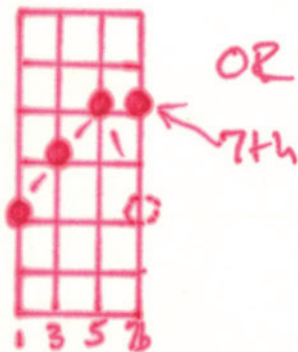
THUS,



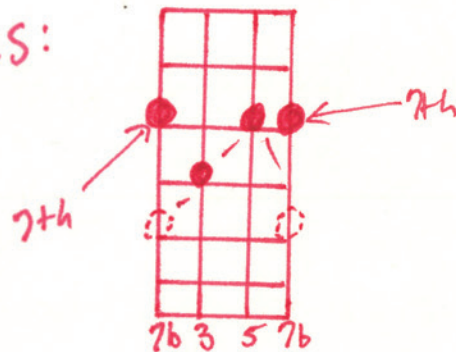
becomes



OR THIS:



OR THIS:

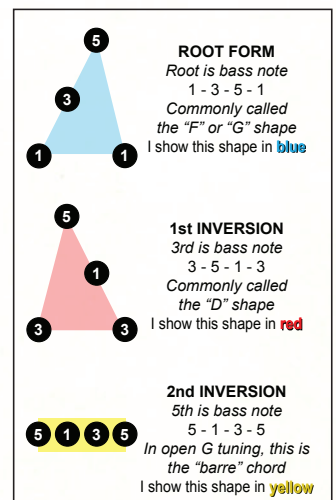


Some other handy resources I've created to help understand the 5-String Banjo fingerboard

- • • Finding any Chord Inversion on the Banjo Neck • • •
- • • Playing with Chord Shapes: 7th Chords • • •
- • • Playing with Chord Shapes: Minor 7th Chords • • •
- • • Playing with Chord Shapes: Major 7th Chords • • •
- ... and more

FREE online viewing

<http://www.frankeastes.com>



MELODIC BANJO

AT THIS POINT YOU SHOULD BE FAIRLY FAMILIAR WITH THE ROOTS OF SCRUGGS-STYLE BANJO PICKING, AND SHOULD NOW BE AWARE OF A VERY POPULAR AND VERY EXCITING STYLE OF PICKING CALLED MELODIC BANJO. VERY SIMPLY, MELODIC STYLE MEANS THAT EVERY NOTE PLAYED IS A MELODY NOTE, WHEREAS IN SCRUGGS STYLE THERE ARE A FEW MELODY NOTES AMONGST A BARRAGE OF FILL-IN NOTES.

GO OUT AND BUY MELODIC BANJO BY TONY TRISCHKA, AND START IN THIS BOOK. IT EXPLAINS THE DEVELOPMENT OF MELODIC STYLE IN DETAIL, AND CONTAINS A GREAT DEAL OF INFORMATION ON SETTING UP YOUR BANJO, ETC. ANOTHER GOOD BOOK IS BILL KEITH BANJO, BY TONY TRISCHKA AND BILL KEITH.

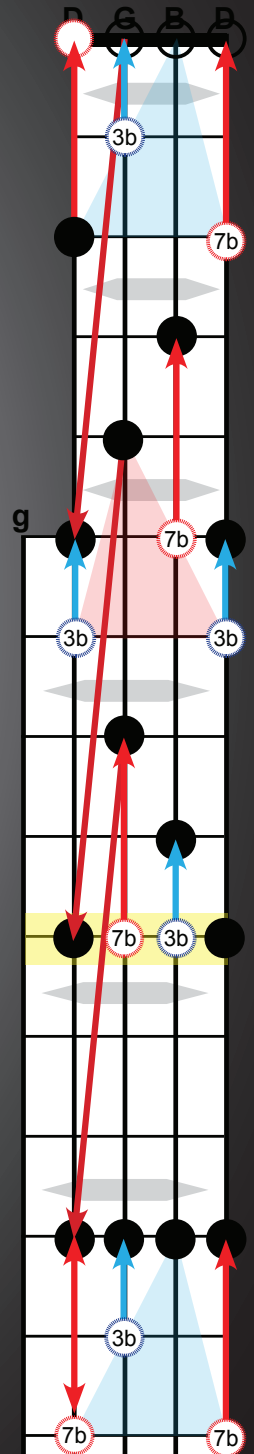
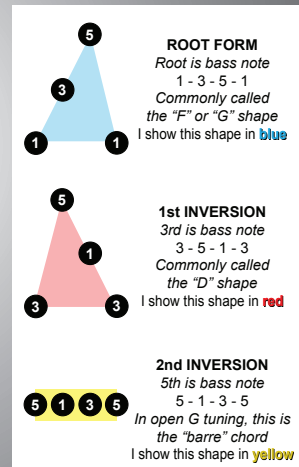
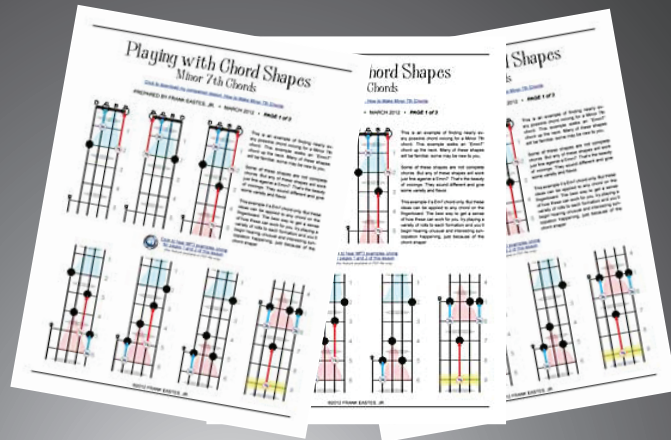
THE NEXT PAGE CONTAINS SOME OF MY MELODIC / SCRUGGS LICKS WHICH YOU MAY FIND HANDY FROM TIME TO TIME. I COMBINE BITS AND PIECES OF BOTH STYLES IN MY PLAYING AND FIND THIS THE MOST ENJOYABLE OF THE TWO STYLES. DON'T BE AFRAID TO TRY NEW LICKS AND FINGERINGS; AS YOU CAN SEE, I VERY OFTEN STRIKE THE 2ND STRING WITH MY MIDDLE FINGER OF MY RIGHT HAND, WHICH IS UNHEARD OF IN SCRUGGS-STYLE PICKING. WORK YOUR WAY THROUGH THESE AND SEE WHAT YOU COME UP WITH.

HAVE FUN!...

The Banjo Muse of Frank Eastes



Videos • Music • Free Learning Resources
Professional Design Services for Musicians



<http://www.frankeastes.com>