Let’s Play Banjo!
Taught by Rick McKeon

This is a relaxed and fun introduction to playing the banjo!

Included On This Video Is Everything You Need To Get Started:

- Basic Roll Patterns
- Right and Left Hand Technique
- How To Play Backup Banjo
- Play-Along Jam Tracks
- And
- Some Great Banjo Solos!
Welcome

Welcome to Let’s Play Banjo! This DVD is for beginners. My goal is to teach you four things:

1. The basic techniques for right and left hand that will give you a great sound.
2. The importance of solid timing.
3. Some tunes that are pretty easy to play but still sound really good.
4. How to jam with others.

Included in this program are Jam Tracks for the songs. Here’s where you get to practice the songs slowly (100 bpm) and a little faster (120 bpm). These tracks are a lot more fun than playing with a metronome! I hope you enjoy them.

I don’t like rules because I think music should be more about having fun than following a bunch of rules. But I do have a few important principles to keep in mind.

1. **Have fun.** Don’t make work out of your practicing and playing. We have enough stress in our lives. Make music your passion, not hard work.

2. **Solid rhythm.** This is the heart of music. You can hit wrong notes now and then, and it’s no big deal. But if your timing is not rock solid, your music will never sound good. Play all exercises and songs slow at first with rock solid timing. Speed will come automatically.

3. **Play loud.** If you are afraid of disturbing the neighbors (or scaring the cat), take the resonator off the back and stuff a towel inside – or get a banjo mute. Don’t get in the habit of being a timid player. There are times to play quietly, but even then you want to play with strength and confidence.

So, let’s get started!
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Tuning The Banjo

Use Lesson #2 “Tuning The Banjo” to get your banjo in tune. Match each of your strings to what you hear on the video. Keep the following in mind:

1. Make sure you are adjusting the right tuning peg. I have made the mistake of turning the peg and wondering, “Why isn’t the pitch changing?” Until all of a sudden – SNAP! The string breaks because I was cranking on the wrong peg!
2. Strike the string **before** you turn the peg. This way you can hear if the pitch is going up or down.
3. Turn the pegs fairly **slowly**. You can change the pitch quite a bit with just a small turn. This is especially true for the 5th string.
4. After you have adjusted all of the strings, strum across all of them slowly. This will be a G chord. You should be able to hear if something is out.
5. Check the 2nd string 3rd fret against the 1st string open. Make sure they sound exactly the same.
6. An **electronic tuner** is worth the investment.

**Tuning The Banjo From String To String**

You can tune the banjo by matching the pitch from string to string:

1. 4th String 5th fret = 3rd String open
2. 3rd String 4th fret = 2nd String open
3. 2nd String 3rd fret = 1st String open
4. 1st String 5th fret = 5th String open

The names of the open strings are (from 5th to 1st) g D G B D.
How To Read Tablature

I want to encourage you as much as possible to “play by ear” so you can focus on your playing and the sound you are creating, but I have written out all of the exercises and songs in tablature for your reference. Use the tab to help you learn the song and then put it away.

A typical line of tab looks like this:

![Tablature Example]

The horizontal lines represent the strings. The 1st string is on top and the 5th string is on the bottom. Remember, the 5th string is the short one with the tuning peg at the 5th fret. The vertical lines (bars) divide the tab into measures.

The numbers on the lines tell you where to fret the string. For example, in the first measure you would hit the 4th string open, then the 4th string 2nd fret, and then the 4th string 4th fret. The letters below the notes tell which right hand finger plucks the string (T = thumb, I = index, M = middle).

All of the songs and exercises in this DVD are in 4/4 time. This means that there are four beats per measure, and a quarter note gets one beat. We would count a measure of quarter notes as, “1, 2, 3, 4.” In the tab example, the first measure is a “pickup” because it only has three quarter notes.

The second measure starts with four eighth notes. Eighth notes will be tied together to group them by the beat. In 4/4 time an eighth note gets half of a beat, so we would count a measure of eighth notes as, “1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &.”

In measure three the [S] below the first two sixteenth notes means slide.

We’ll talk more about note values and timing as we go through each song. For now, let’s get our banjos tuned up and start playing!
Basic Roll Patterns

There are a lot of different roll patterns. In this video we will cover:

1. The Alternating Thumb Roll
2. Alternating Thumb with Pinch
3. The Forward Roll
4. The Forward Reverse Roll

Practice these rolls very slowly at first. Make sure your timing is rock solid before you pick up the tempo. Use a metronome as often as you can stand it. It is a good habit to get into. Using the metronome and constantly hearing the beat starts to develop an “internal beat” where you feel the pulse of the song inside of you.
Let’s Pick Some 2-Chord Songs

Tom Dooley
Starting note: Open 4th string (D)

\[ G \quad D7 \]
1. Hang down your head, Tom Dooley, Hang down your head and cry.
2. By this time tomorrow, Reckon where I’ll be,
3. Met her on the mountain, There I took her life.
4. By this time tomorrow, Reckon where I’ll be,

\[ G \]
1. Hang down your head, Tom Dooley, Poor boy you’re bound to die.
2. Down in some lonesome valley, Hanging from a white oak tree.
3. Met her on the mountain, Stabbed her with my knife.
4. Hadn’t a been for Grayson, I’d a been in Tennessee.

Skip To My Lou
Starting note: Open 2nd string (B)

\[ G \quad D7 \]
1. Lou, Lou, Skip to my Lou - Lou, Lou, Skip to my Lou
2. Fly’s in the buttermilk, Shoo, fly, shoo . . .
3. Choose your partners, Two by two . . .
4. Cat’s in the cream jar, What’ll I do . . .

He’s Got The Whole World In His Hands
Starting note: Open 4th string (D)

\[ G \quad D7 \]
1. He’s got the whole world in His hands, He’s got the whole wide world in His hands,
2. He’s got the wind & the rain in His hands . . .
3. He’s got the little bitty babies in His hands . . .
4. He’s got you & me brother in His hands . . .
5. He’s got you & me sister in His hands . . .
6. He’s got everybody here in His hands . . .
Let's Pick Some 3-Chord Songs

Boil Them Cabbage Down
Starting note: Open 2nd string (B)

G  C  G  D7
1. Wish I was an apple, Hanging on a tree,
2. Wish I had a needle, As fine as I could sew,

G  C  G  D7  G
1. Every time my pretty gal passed, She’d take a bite of me.
2. I’d sew that gal to my side, And down the road we’d go.

Chorus:
G  C  G  D7
Boil them cabbage down, down, Turn them hoe cakes round, round.
G  C  G  D7  G
Only song that I can sing is boil them cabbage down.

Worried Man Blues
Starting note: Open 4th string (D)

G  C  G  G
1. I went across the river and I lay down to sleep, Went across the river and I lay down to sleep.
2. Twenty-nine links of chain around my leg, Twenty-nine links of chain around my leg.
3. I asked the judge, what might be my fine, I asked the judge, what might be my fine.
4. The train that I ride, is sixteen coaches long, The train that I ride, is sixteen coaches long.

D7  G
1. Went across the river and I lay down to sleep, When I woke up, I had shackles on my feet.
2. Twenty-nine links of chain all around my leg, And on each link the initial of my name.
3. I asked the judge, what might be my fine, Twenty-one years on the Rocky Mountain Line.
4. The train that I ride, is sixteen coaches long, The girl I love is on that train and gone.

Chorus:
G  C  G  G
It takes a worried man to sing a worried song. It takes a worried man to sing a worried song.

D7  G
It takes a worried man to sing a worried song. I'm worried now, but I won't be worried long.
The Major Scale for all Keys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Scale</th>
<th>Key Signature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1</td>
<td>(No sharps or flats)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W W H W W W H</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C D E F G A B C (No sharps or flats)
G A B C D E F# G (1 sharp)
D E F# G A B C# D (2 sharps)
A B C# D E F# G# A (3 sharps)
E F# G# A B C# D# E (4 sharps)
B C# D# E F# G# A# B (5 sharps – enharmonic to Cb)
F# G# A# B C# D# E# F# (6 sharps – enharmonic to Gb)
C# D# E# F# G# A# B# C# (7 sharps – enharmonic to Db)

F G A Bb C D E F (1 flat)
Bb C D Eb F G A Bb (2 flats)
Eb F G Ab Bb C D Eb (3 flats)
Ab Bb C Db Eb F G Ab (4 flats)
Db Eb F Gb Ab Bb C Db (5 flats – enharmonic to C#)
Gb Ab Bb C Db Eb F Gb (6 flats – enharmonic to F#)
Cb Db Eb Fb Gb Ab Bb Cb (7 flats – enharmonic to B)

To remember the order of sharps think “Fat Cats Go Down And Eat Breakfast.”

To remember the order of flats think of the word “BEAD” and then “Go C Flats.”
Boil Them Cabbage Down

G

Boil them cabbage down, down,

C

Turn them hoe cakes round.

G

Only song that I can sing is

C

boil them cabbage down.
Boil Them Cabbage Down
(More Lyrics)

G                      C                  G                          D7
1. Met a possum in the road, Blind as he could be
2. Once I had an old gray mule, His name was Simon Slick
3. Possum in a Simmon tree, Raccoon on the ground
4. Took my gal to the shop, To have her mouth made small

G                                    C                                  G           D7      G
1. Jumped the fence and whipped my dog, And bristled up at me
2. He'd roll his eyes and back his ears, How that mule would kick
3. Raccoon says you son-of-a-gun, Shake some Simmon's down
4. She turned around a time or two, And swallowed shop and all

Chorus:
G                              C                 G                                D7
Boil them Cabbage down down, Turn them hoecakes round
G                      C                        G                   D7          G
Only song that I can sing, Is boil them cabbage down
Worried Man Blues

It takes a worried man to sing a worried song,

It takes a worried man to

sing a worried song,

It takes a worried
Worried Man Blues (cont.)

man to sing a worried song, I'm worried

D7

now, But I won't be worried long.

(It) long.
Worried Man Blues
(More Lyrics)

G
1. I went across the river and I lay down to sleep.
2. Twenty-nine links of chain around my leg.
3. I asked the judge, what might be my fine.
4. The train that I ride, is sixteen coaches long.

C   G
1. Went across the river and I lay down to sleep.
2. Twenty-nine links of chain around my leg.
3. I asked the judge, what might be my fine.
4. The train that I ride, is sixteen coaches long.

D7   G
1. When I woke up, I had shackles on my feet.
2. And on each link was the initial of my name.
3. Twenty-one years on the Rocky Mountain Line.
4. The girl I love is on that train and gone.

Chorus:
G
It takes a worried man to sing a worried song.
C   G
It takes a worried man to sing a worried song.

D7   G
It takes a worried man to sing a worried song.

D7   G
I'm worried now, but I won't be worried long.
Pig In A Pen

I got a pig, home in a pen, Corn to feed him on.

All I need is a pretty little girl, To feed him when I'm gone.
Pig In A Pen

CHORUS:

G                             C
I got a pig, home in a pen, Corn to feed him on.

G                              D7                          G
All I need is a pretty little girl, To feed him when I'm gone.

VERSE:

G                             C
1. Dark clouds are rising, Sure sign of rain.
2. Bake them biscuits baby, Bake 'em good and brown.
3. Goin' on the mountain, To sow a little cane,

G                D7                        G
1. Get your old gray bonnet on, Sweet little Liza Jane.
2. When you get them biscuits baked, We're Alabama bound.
3. Raise a barrel of sorghum, Sweet little Liza Jane.
Hot Corn, Cold Corn

G

Hot corn, cold corn, Bring along the demijohn.

D

Hot corn, cold corn, Bring along the demijohn.

G

Hot corn, cold corn, Bring along the demijohn.

D

Fare well Uncle Bill, See you in the morning.

G

Yes sir!
Hot Corn, Cold Corn

CHORUS:

G
Hot corn cold corn bring along the demijohn,

D
Hot corn cold corn bring along the demijohn,

G
Hot corn cold corn bring along the demijohn,

D
Fare well Uncle Bill see you in the morning - Yes sir!

VERSES:

G
1. Upstairs downstairs out in the kitchen,
2. Old Aunt Peggy won't you fill 'em up again,
3. Well, yonder comes the preacher and the children are a crying,

D
1. Upstairs downstairs out in the kitchen,
2. Old Aunt Peggy won't you fill 'em up again,
3. Well, yonder comes the preacher and the children are a crying,

G
1. Upstairs downstairs out in the kitchen,
2. Old Aunt Peggy won't you fill 'em up again,
3. Well, yonder comes the preacher and the children are a crying,

D
1. See Uncle Bill just a raring and a pitching - Yes sir!
2. Ain't had a drink since I don't know when - Yes sir!
3. Chickens are a running and the toenails are a flying - Yes sir!
Three Basic Chord Forms

A = 1,3,5
A B C# D E F# G# A

F = 1,3,5
F G A Bb C D E F

D = 1,3,5
D E F# G A B C# D

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