

Bill Evans

bill@billevansbanjo.com

www.billevansbanjo.com / www.youtube.com/BillEvansBanjo

Right hand tips and other stuff

- Keep wrist arched, either high (like J. D. Crowe) or low (like Earl).
- Set as a goal to keep both the ring and pinky fingers down on the head; try keeping ring finger down only for a while if you have trouble at first keeping both fingers on head.
- Imagine the hand and arm as stationary, let the movement come from the fingers but don't sweep fingers out more than needed: be economical.
- Let the primary movement from index and middle fingers come from the joint closest to the hand – as if you were pushing down on the strings or if you were scratching a bug bite on your leg.
- Don't venture too far from the bridge for lead playing.
- Strive for power and tone; don't worry about speed.
- I repeat, don't worry about speed.
- Strive for great sound from individual notes first, then roll patterns.
- Get good fingerpicks and thumb picks; experiment with pick angles and amount of bend to fingerpicks. Try striking string far down surface of pick – near the hole.
- Play roll patterns evenly; don't bounce or accent.
- Work with a metronome to check rhythm and to increase speed.
- If you're having trouble figuring out a lick from tab, play the right hand only first, then add the left hand.

Practice tips

- Use tab as a resource but strive to memorize a *sound* rather than a visual image; ears first, eyes second. Be able to hear every note in your head.
- Keep a log to measure progress; write down metronome settings.
- Practice at a speed where you're in control of your technique; use a metronome to gradually increase speed.
- Don't practice mistakes! Our brains remember the last thing that we did better than whether or not we wanted to play a particular lick!
- Follow the "1/3 rule": spend 1/3 of your time working on fundamentals, 1/3 of your time on new skills, 1/3 of your time on maintaining what you already know. Follow this whether you have 30 minutes or 3 hours to practice.
- You can't cut corners – make every note and every left hand technique count; think about where you want to be in six months to a year; make your progress sure and steady.
- Learn as much of Earl Scruggs' playing, note-for-note as you can, both lead and back-up.
- Be patient in learning how to improvise and create solos on the spot; try at home first.
- Have fun! Don't forget about back-up and jam etiquette.

Three Finger Roll Patterns & Variations

Bill Evans

bill@billevansbanjo.com

Alternating thumb

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

5 Forward-Reverse

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

9 (switching fragments)

Cumberland Gap

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

13 Forward (3 + 3 + 2)

(2 + 3 + 3)

t i m t i m t m t i m t i m t m t i m t i m t m i/t m t i m t i m t

17 C Changing roll to fit the chord

t m t i m t i m t i/t m t i m t i m t t m t i m t i m t t m t i m t i m t

21 The "Lick" Roll

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

25 Foggy Mountain

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 m t m t i m t

29 Backward

Middle Leading

Index Leading

Melodic/Arpeggio

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

Bluegrass Banjo Jam Survival Skills / Bill Evans
bill@billevansbanjo.com

Things to bring....

- **Your banjo, your capo, a strap, a tuner, and maybe a songbook (but not a banjo tab book), portable recording device optional**

Things to know (beginners)...

- **How to get and keep your banjo in tune.**
- **How the guitar player makes G, C, and D chords.**
- **How to use the capo to play in various keys.**
- **How to make your chords, beginning with G, C and D or D7 and how to use them with the capo to play in other keys.**
- **How to make movable major chord shapes (barre, F and D positions) and how to vamp.**
- **How to use simple roll patterns to create a basic accompaniment.**
- **How to change chords and keep roll patterns going, without interruption.**
- **How to teach others a song that *you* can play (“Cripple Creek”).**
- **How to feel comfortable not looking at your instrument while playing, so you can look at others.**
- **How to make room for other banjo players in a jam.**
- **How to find others in your local area who play at your experience level.**
- **Repertoire: learn basic banjo and bluegrass standards and song form (AABB song structure, verse/chorus, etc.). Sit in on a local jam group and keep a list of what they play, get recordings and listen creatively!**

Things to know (intermediates)

- **How to follow chord progressions in the keys of C and D.**
- **How to make minor and 7th chords.**
- **How to more effectively communicate in a jam.**
- **How to play the same song at different tempos.**
- **How to kick off and end a song.**
- **How to transition into and play a banjo solo in the middle of a song.**
- **How to play forward roll down the neck backup.**
- **How to play up the neck backup (“In The Mood” lick, D shape licks)**
- **How to use G, C and D licks to begin to create your own solos.**
- **How to use fill-in licks to enhance your backup.**
- **How to “hear” chord progressions.**
- **How to move from jams to bands.**
- **How to accompany waltz time and slow songs.**
- **Repertoire: learn more standards! Get familiar with melodic style and start learning fiddle tunes.**

Bill Evans / Playing Better From Memory

bill@billevansbanjo.com / www.billevansbanjo.com

www.youtube.com/BillEvansBanjo

- **Listening is key to improving your memory.** Listen to great recordings as often as you can – in the car, in the house. Take a few minutes each day and listen analytically to one classic recording, taking note of the role of the banjo from beginning to end. **The more melodies and songs you know, the better your memory will be!**
- Listen to the tune in a few different versions before trying to learn to play it, using iTunes, Pandora, Spotify or YouTube to access recordings.
- Learn the form of the tune and the chord progression first, then dive into the melody (even being able to sing it) before tackling a lead or a tab.
- Look for patterns of repetition in the form of the tune. The third phrase of the first section of a fiddle tune often is a repetition of the first phrase, for instance. Many vocal tunes have choruses that begin with a different chord progression and melody from the verse but then end by returning to melodies and chords from the verse. Look for these patterns.
- Take new tunes one section, phrase or even measure at a time, memorizing the *sound* rather than visualizing the tab in your mind. Practice using looping techniques, playing what you're working on over and over again to perfect and memorize it. You'll be amazed at how much more quickly you'll master a tune by breaking it down (rather than playing a tab from beginning to end, over and over again).
- If you're learning by ear, listen for familiar licks and roll patterns and take note of the chord progression. How do the licks and rolls relate to chords and melody of the song? Are you hearing licks you already know from playing other songs?
- If you're a new learner, you may want to memorize up to a dozen classic banjo tunes (such as "Cripple Creek," "Cumberland Gap," "Fireball Mail," "Foggy Mountain Breakdown," etc.) to get a true bluegrass sound and to start to understand the vocabulary of bluegrass banjo. Later on, when you are comfortable inserting licks and creating variations, you can create variations. At first, you may also want to memorize back-up patterns and licks as well, which you can then insert into many different songs.
- Relate your favorite licks to melodic phrases. All you then have to do is remember the melody and the lick will emerge automatically.
- Memorizing melodic and single-string tunes is just plain difficult. It can take a *long* time to get comfortable playing tunes in these styles up to speed. Remember to practice these songs at a speed where it's sounding good and you can successfully play the entire tune without interruption. Then repeat – lots of times until it's automatic!
- What's worked for you? Let's share ideas!

Bill Evans / Building Speed

bill@billevansbanjo.com / www.billevansbanjo.com

www.youtube.com/BillEvansBanjo

- The key to playing well at faster speeds is playing well at slower speeds! Remember this **always!!!**
- Playing faster is easier if you're using the best playing and fingering techniques possible. Strive for great tone and accurate rhythm first and let speed come later.
- Increase speed gradually – use a metronome, a computer app like the Amazing Slow Downer or Audacity or bluegrass backing tracks available on line. As you play through the various tempos that a metronome can provide, you'll get used to playing different tempos, which is crucially important when accompanying singers.
- Play roll patterns, use looping techniques and play songs you know well to experiment with gradually increasing speed (in other words, it's difficult to play fast something you don't know well yet – try speed building techniques with songs you already know).
- If you're kicking off a song, make sure you know your intro well and rehearse counting in (whether you actually count out loud or count in your head).
- Get comfortable taking solos in the middle of songs, entering with your intro in the right place.
- Use the appropriate techniques for different speeds; don't be afraid to simplify your arrangement in order to play it as fast as you need to in a jam or band setting. Pinches and quarter notes come in handy when those tempos increase!
- If you're learning mostly from tab, make sure that you listen to different versions of the song to understand the chord progression, arrangement, order of sections, etc. The better you know the song you're playing, the more you can concentrate on speed and rhythm.
- Strive for great sound from individual notes first, then roll patterns, then licks, then sections of songs, then entire songs!
- Get good fingerpicks and thumb picks; experiment with pick angles and amount of bend to fingerpicks. Try striking string far down surface of pick – near the hole.
- Drill roll patterns evenly; don't bounce or accent. You can add this later if you wish.
- When playing in jams and bands, listen to all of those around you. Follow the musician with the best rhythm, being careful to “lock in” your tempo with those around you.

The Essential Earl

Licks and techniques you need to know if you've going to be a convincing Scruggs-head

G tuning, tab by Bill Evans
www.billevansbanjo.com, bill@billevansbanjo.com

1. Favorite fill-in lick

0 0 0
0 2 3 0 2 0 0
t m t i m i t m i
h/s p

2. All-purpose melody lick

G

2 3 0 0 3 2 0 0
t i m t m i t m t
h/s p

3. Forward roll fill-in lick

0 2 3 3 2 0 0
i/t t m t i m t i
h p

4. Foggy Mt. licks

2 3 2 3 0 0 2 3 2 3 3 2 0 0
i t m t i m t i t m t i m t
h h p

5. Earl's Breakdown lick

2 3 2 3 2 0 2 0 0
i i i t m i
h h p

6. I'll Never Shed Another Tear lick

2 3 3 2 0 0 0 0
i/t m t i m t i m i/t
h p

7. Flint Hill Special C lick

0 2 1 0 2 2 0 1 2 0 0
t i t m t i t m t
p

8. C and D backup licks

D

1 2 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 4 3 2 3 4
i m t i t i t m i m t i t i t m

9. D forward roll with open 1st string

2 4 2 2 0 0 0 0
t m t i m t i m t
s

10. G forward roll backup lick

2 5 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 2
t i m t i m t i m t i t m

11. Great solo ending lick

0 2 3 3 0 3 2 0 0 2 3 0 0
t t m t i m t i m t m i
h p s

2 12. G up the neck basic lick

8 9 11 9 8 9 8 8 9 8 9
10 11 10 12 10 12 11 12 11 12 11 12
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
i/t m t i m i t m i t m t i m t i/t m t m t i m t i m t m t i m t

13. D up the neck basic lick

14. Up the neck Foggy Mt. licks

14 15 15 17 15 17 15 20 20 21 20 21
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
i t m t i m t i t m t i m t

15. Foggy Mt. chokes

G 1/2 1/2 1/2 1/2 1/2
10 10 0 10 0 10 10 0 (11) 10 0 8 8 9 8 9
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
i t m t i m t i t m t i m t i t m t i t m t

16. Salty Dog Blues fill-in lick

12 14 12 14 11 12 14 11 12 14 11 8 8 9 11 9 8 9 0 0 0
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
m m m m i m i m i i/t m t i m i t m t m t m t

17. Six White Horses lick

C 10 8 9 8 10 8 9 10 10 9 8 10 10
10 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
t m t t i i t m t m t i m t m

18. Jump up lick

G 5 9 7 9 8 12 12 11 12 8 8 9 7 8 8 8 9 7 9 5 0
5 5 9 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
t m t m t t i m m i i i t t i i i t i t m t

19. Lonesome Road Blues C/C7 lick

11 12 11 12 11 11 12 12 11 12
10 10 10 10 0
i m i t m i t i m t m i t m t

In The Mood Exercises

Tabs by Bill Evans
bill@billevansbanjo.com, www.billevansbanjo.com

Two measure "In The Mood"

C

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

One measure "In The Mood"

3

C

t i m t i m t m

Mixing one and two measure phrases

4

G

D

G

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

Adding 3rd string slides

8

C

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

Using 4th string slides

10

G

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

Changing from F to D shapes

12

G

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

7th chords with fretted fifth string

14

D

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

D Shape Back Up Licks

Tabs by Bill Evans
bill@billevansbanjo.com

A Basic patterns

8 G D

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

B Mixing D shape patterns w/In The Mood

5 G C

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

C Earl's D backup variation w/In The Mood

9 G C

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

13 D G (Up the Neck Fill-in Lick - learn it!)

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

D Earl & J. D. variations (watch RH fingering!)

17 G G

t/i t/i i t i t t i m t i t i t t/i t/i i t i t t i t t i t i t i t m

E Shifting from F to D shapes

21 G D

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

F Using D shape licks down the neck

25 D G

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

Melodic Banjo Exercises

Bill Evans
bill@billevansbanjo.com

G major scale ascending & descending

r i/m m i p i m i r/p i r/p
 0 7 0 5 0 5 4 7 4 5 0 5 0 0 4 0 7 0
 i t i t m i m t m t m i m t i t i t i t i

G major scale ascending & descending (one and a half octave)

r i/m m i m r i t p t i m i m i r/p i
 0 7 0 5 0 5 4 10 9 12 9 10 4 5 0 5 0 7 0 4 0
 i t i t m i m t m i t m t m i t m i m t i t i t i

G major scale ascending & descending (two octaves)

r i/m m i m i p m i r p p r m i p m i i r i r
 0 7 0 5 0 5 4 10 9 15 14 17 17 14 15 17 9 10 7 9 0 5 0 7 0
 i t i t m i m t m i t i m t m m t m i t m i t i t i t i

D major scale & A mixolydian ascending & descending

i r r m m i m i r P r i m i m m/r r/p r i
 0 2 4 0 7 6 5 4 10 9 12 9 10 4 5 0 6 0 7 0 4 2 0
 t i t i t i t m i/t m t i m t m t m i t m i m t i t i t i t

C major scale ascending & descending (starts on D)

i m r i/m i m i m t P t i m i r i r m i
 0 2 3 0 7 5 0 5 3 10 9 12 9 10 3 5 0 5 0 7 0 3 2 0
 t i t i t i t m i/t m t i m t m t m i t m i/t m t i t i t i t

G major scale, alternate fingering

r i r i m i p i m i r i r i
 0 7 0 5 9 7 10 9 9 10 7 9 0 5 0 7 0 4 0
 i t i t m t i t i m t m i t i t m t i t i t i t i

Single String: Right Hand Exercises

Bill Evans
bill@billevansbanjo.com

Thumb - index alternation

Musical notation for the 'Thumb - index alternation' exercise in 4/4 time. The exercise consists of two phrases. The first phrase has four measures: the first two contain a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0-0) with fingerings *t i t i t i t i*, and the last two contain a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0-0) with fingerings *t i t i t i t i*. The second phrase also has four measures: the first two contain a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0-0) with fingerings *t i t i t i t i*, and the last two contain a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0-0) with fingerings *t i t i t m*. A double bar line is placed after the second measure of the second phrase. The exercise concludes with a final measure containing a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0-0) with fingerings *t i t i t i t i*.

Thumb - index crossovers

Musical notation for the 'Thumb - index crossovers' exercise in 4/4 time. The exercise consists of two phrases. The first phrase has six measures: the first three contain a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0-0) with fingerings *t i t i t i t i*, and the last three contain a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0-0) with fingerings *t i t i t i t i*. The second phrase also has six measures: the first three contain a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0-0) with fingerings *t i t i t i t i*, and the last three contain a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0-0) with fingerings *t i t i t i t i*. A double bar line is placed after the second measure of the second phrase. The exercise concludes with a final measure containing a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0-0) with fingerings *t i t i t m*.

Alternating thumb patterns (T-I-T-M)

Musical notation for the 'Alternating thumb patterns (T-I-T-M)' exercise in 4/4 time. The exercise consists of two phrases. The first phrase has four measures: the first two contain a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0-0) with fingerings *t i t m t i t m*, and the last two contain a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0-0) with fingerings *t i t m t i t m*. The second phrase also has four measures: the first two contain a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0-0) with fingerings *t i t m t i t m*, and the last two contain a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0-0) with fingerings *t i t m t i t m*. A double bar line is placed after the second measure of the second phrase. The exercise concludes with a final measure containing a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0-0) with fingerings *t i t m t m*.

Forward roll patterns

Musical notation for the 'Forward roll patterns' exercise in 4/4 time. The exercise consists of two phrases. The first phrase has four measures: the first two contain a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0-0) with fingerings *t i t i m t i m*, and the last two contain a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0-0) with fingerings *t i t i m t i m*. The second phrase also has four measures: the first two contain a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0-0) with fingerings *t i t i m t i m*, and the last two contain a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0-0) with fingerings *t i t i m t i m*. A double bar line is placed after the second measure of the second phrase. The exercise concludes with a final measure containing a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0-0) with fingerings *t m*.

6/8 time using forward rolls

Musical notation for the '6/8 time using forward rolls' exercise in 6/8 time. The exercise consists of two phrases. The first phrase has four measures: the first two contain a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0) with fingerings *t i m t i m*, and the last two contain a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0) with fingerings *t i m t i m*. The second phrase also has four measures: the first two contain a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0) with fingerings *t i m t i m*, and the last two contain a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0) with fingerings *t i m t i m*. A double bar line is placed after the second measure of the second phrase. The exercise concludes with a final measure containing a sequence of eighth notes (0-0-0) with fingerings *t m*.

Single String: Left Hand Exercises #1

Bill Evans
bill@billevansbanjo.com

Open position

m i 0 2 0 1 0 2 4 5 4 2 0 1 0 2 0
t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i

First position, pinky leading

i r p i r p i r i m p m i r i p r i p r i
0 2 4 5 2 4 5 3 5 4 5 7 5 4 5 3 5 4 2 5 4 2 0
t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i

Second position, middle leading

i m p i m p i r i m p m i r i p m i p m i p m
4 5 7 4 5 7 5 7 5 7 9 7 5 7 5 7 5 4 7 5 4 7 5
t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i

Second/third position, index leading

i m p i m p i m p i m p m i p m i p m i p m i
5 7 9 5 7 9 7 8 10 9 10 12 10 9 10 8 7 9 7 5 9 7 5
t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i t i

Moveable Banjo Chord Positions

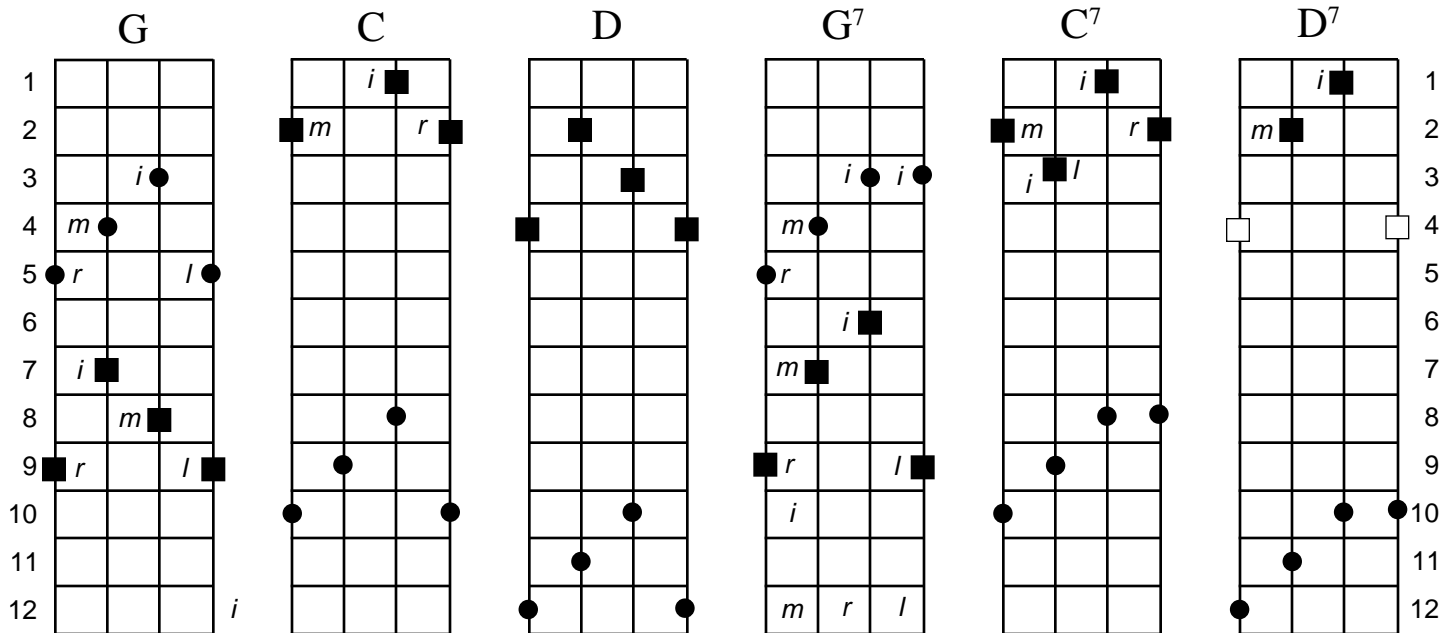
(G tuning)

F-shape: •

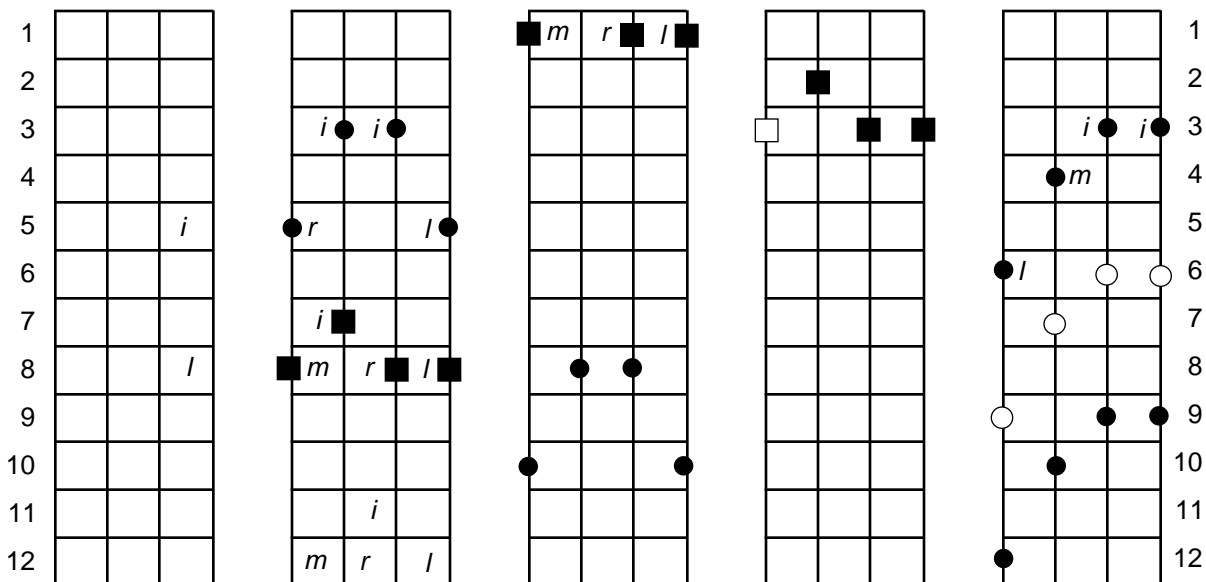
D-shape: ■

Barre-shape: □

□ not necessarily fretted, but may be.



Other Barre 7ths
(C⁷ shown)



Analytical listening requires that you develop your sense of awareness of elements of basic musicianship along with knowledge and understanding of the language and customs specific to the style. Below are questions that will help point your ears towards things you should be noticing.

When studying a song start by listening to the overall performance of a few times. Then focus in on particular elements. Listen to a single instrument through the whole song. Then do the same thing with each of the other instruments.

I. Overview and form

- What is the song form?
- What key?
- What meter?
- Is the tune "crooked"? (odd phrases with extra or missing beats or bars)
- What is the order of events in terms of verses, choruses and solos?
- What kind 8th note feel?
- Intro – How many bars and what does it consist of?
- Ending - What kind of ending does the band play? Is the ending generic or specific to the tune? Is it derived from or related to something else from the song?
- Are there stops or kicks that are integral to the form and always part of the song or are they specific to this band's arrangement?

II. Accompaniment

Backup fills and accompaniment

- Fiddle
 - What is the general approach to the fills? Filling in the holes, pads or playing continuous running lines. How are long and short sounds (8th notes) combined? Notice any double-stops, shuffle, funky chop, rests?
 - Listen for dynamics and articulations, slides & pitch alterations.
 - What bow speed and weight is required to produce the sounds you hear.
 - Transcribe the notes and then examine how they relate to the melody or chords.
- Banjo
 - Traditional vocabulary or non-traditional concept?
 - Sound – Hard edged and aggressive or more mellow, muted sound? Dynamics?
 - Where and why are low register rolls, upper register licks, chop or rests played?
 - Rhythmic feel – Straight or bouncy? On top of the beat or laid back?
 - Techniques derived from other instruments like steel or piano?
- Mandolin
 - Basic techniques used – Chop, sustained chords, tremolo? How are they combined?
 - Details of the "chop" – Dry rhythmic chop or sustained chords? All down strokes or are upstrokes mixed in? If sustained chords and chop are combined, where do ringing chords occur? Any downbeat chords? Rhythmic variations? Details of dynamics, accents, etc.?
 - Note choices – Chord voicings, harmonic embellishments & tensions?
 - Are backup techniques like melodic fills or cross-picking included?
 - What is the approach to melodic fills? Analyze content the same way you do fiddle.
 - Are the fills improvised, standard fills for the tune, part of a band arrangement, or just generic licks for the tempo and meter.
- Bass
 - Notice note choices – All chord tones? Non-chord tones as connecting notes?
 - What register(s) are used and how does this relate to or influence the band sound and overall shape of the arrangement.
 - Describe the timing, durations, and articulations.
 - Rhythmic embellishments or walkups – Where are they played and what are the notes & rhythms?

- Sound – Clear pitches, muffled “thump”, mic or pickup, natural or “larger than life”?
- Guitar
 - Strum patterns – Does the player emphasize bass runs? Are there clear rhythmic tendencies? Upstrokes on chords? If so, are they played as a continuous rhythmic pattern or just in used certain spots? If the latter, where and to what effect?
 - Notice the relationship between vocal phrasing and guitar dynamics, tonal emphasis, accents, licks and rhythmic content.
 - Do bass runs center around strong beats or are some rhythmically syncopated?
 - What are the chord voicings? Notice whether chords include or omit 3rds.
 - Details of timbre resulting from pick angle, speed of strum, location on the strings? Warm or bright tone? Real tone and dynamics or larger than life via close mic placement and “studio magic”?

III. Overall band sound

- Dynamics
 - Are there noticeable dynamic variations or is the music basically mono-dynamic?
 - Identify places where momentary dynamic shifts occur.
 - Are there places in arrangement where the full band gets noticeably louder or softer
- Density
 - Do all the instruments play all the time?
 - Are individual instrumental techniques used to increase or decrease overall density in the band sound? Do variations in overall density reinforce or emphasize something of significance in the song, or are they just used to build energy or excitement.

IV. Vocals

Stylistic elements and tendencies

- Vocal sound
 - Head vs. chest voice
 - Belting
 - Falsetto
- Rhythmic elements
 - Time feel on top of the beat or laid back?
 - Anticipations and delays?
- Articulations
 - Accents
 - Swallowed words
 - Alteration of vowels
 - For vocal ease
 - Result of regional speech
 - Treatment of consonants
- Melody
 - What is the basic melody vs. somebody’s interpretation or misinterpretation?
 - Embellishments
 - Grace notes
 - Melismas
 - Passing tones
 - Pitch alterations
 - Flattened major thirds
 - Slides and inflections
 - Blues

Harmonies

- How many vocal parts are there?
- What is the stacking of parts?

- Are harmonies sung only the chorus or on the verses too?
- Do harmonies successfully avoid any doublings?
- Are all lines harmonized or are some phrases or pickups sung only by the lead?
- Lyrics
 - What is the meaning of the song?
 - Are the lyrics intelligible?
 - Does rhythmic emphasis take precedent over the meaning of the words?
 - Do the words include phrases that require knowing some regional vocabulary or history?

V. Solos

- Which part of the form is used for breaks?
- If the song is crooked do the solos stick to the same phrase structure?

Content and stylistic elements of solos

- Melody based solos – Identify vocabulary and techniques used for embellishment of the basic melody
 - Notes can be analyzed using any combination of traditional melodic analysis and terms associated with improvisation studies.
- Rhythmic tendencies of solos
- Instrument specific licks and techniques
- Content of lead-ins and tag licks
- Vocabulary or quotes of licks from classic solos or influential players
- Blues licks
- Pentatonic scale ideas
- Improvisation based on playing over the chord structure
- Ideas that draw on other styles of music

V. Impressions

- Do the players appear to have solid roots? Is the playing stylistically clear and cohesive or do things sometimes sound out of context?
- Does the playing show a degree of creativity and individuality or is it nothing more than stock licks and patterns? Do creative elements still sound “tasteful”, meaning do they stay within generally accepted “boundaries” of the style.
- Are the players listening and focused on trying to enhance the overall band sound and make each other sound good or are they busy showing off?
- Are the solos melody-based and expressive or are they just a series of flashy licks?
- Does the arrangement and individual playing support or reinforce the message of the song or is it purely generic rhythm parts played behind a vocal that could be about anything.
- Does the music have emotional impact?
- Do you sense that the players are interacting with each other and having fun or are they just mailing it in.
- Does the band sound well rehearsed? Over-rehearsed?
- Does the arrangement allow for some degree of spontaneity or is it too restrictive?

Bill Evans' List of Essential Bluegrass Banjo CDs

Bill Evans bill@billevansbanjo.com
www.billevansbanjo.com
www.youtube.com/user/BillEvansBanjo

Earl Scruggs

The Essential Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys 1945-1949 (2-CD boxed set, Columbia C2K 52478)
The Mercury Sessions - Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs (included in boxed set)
Foggy Mt. Banjo - Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs
Foggy Mt. Jamboree - Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs (County SSC-CD-118)
Live At Carnegie Hall - Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs
Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs 1948-1959 (Bear Family 4-CD boxed set, contains many of the above CDs)

Don Reno

Don Reno, Red Smiley and the Tennessee Cut-ups 1951-1959 (4-CD King boxed set)

J. D. Crowe

The Bluegrass Album Band/Compact Disc (w. Tony Rice, et al) (all six volumes, but especially Vols. 1-3)
J. D. Crowe and the New South (Rounder 0044)
Live in Japan - J. D. Crowe and the New South (Rounder 0159)
Jimmy Martin and the Sunny Mountain Boys (Bear Family 5-CD boxed set with Emerson, Munde)

Sonny Osborne

The Osborne Brothers 1956-1968 (Bear Family 4-CD boxed set)
The Bluegrass Collection - Osborne Brothers (CMH)
Hyden - Osborne Brothers (Pinycastle)

Other CDs of note...

Five String Time, Purely Instrumental (w/Johnny Warren) - Charlie Cushman
Right Hand Man & Adams County Banjo - Tom Adams (Rounder 0282)
Live at the Ragged Edge - Tom Adams and Michael Cleveland (Rounder 0539)
Ralph Stanley Plays Requests (or The Best of Ralph Stanley, Rebel)
A Tribute to Jimmy Martin, The King of Bluegrass - Various (J. D. Crowe, Kenny Ingram) Koch
Drive - Bela Fleck (Rounder 0255)
Tales from the Acoustic Planet, Vol. 2: The Bluegrass Sessions - Bela Fleck (Warner Bros.)
Things In Life - Don Stover (Rounder)
Something Bluegrass... - Bill Keith (Rounder 0084)
Bill Evans Plays Banjo / In Good Company / Fine Times at Fletcher's House - Bill Evans (Native and Fine Records)
Bound to Ride & Hide Head Blues - Jim Mills (Sugar Hill 3883)
Blue Ridge Express & Festival Favorites Revisited - Alan Munde
Leading Roll - Sammy Shelor (Sugar Hill 3865)
Double Banjo Bluegrass Spectacular, The Early Years - Tony Trischka (Rounder 548)
Live At The Cellar Door, Old Train - The Seldom Scene (w. Ben Eldridge) Rebel
The Stanley Tradition: Tribute to a Bluegrass Legacy (featuring Craig Smith) (Doobie Shea 1001)
Noam Pikelnny Plays Kenny Baker Plays Bill Monroe - Noam Pikelnny
Fair Weather, The Company You Keep - Alison Brown