

Bluegrass Mandolin for the Complete Ignoramus!

by
Wayne Erbsen



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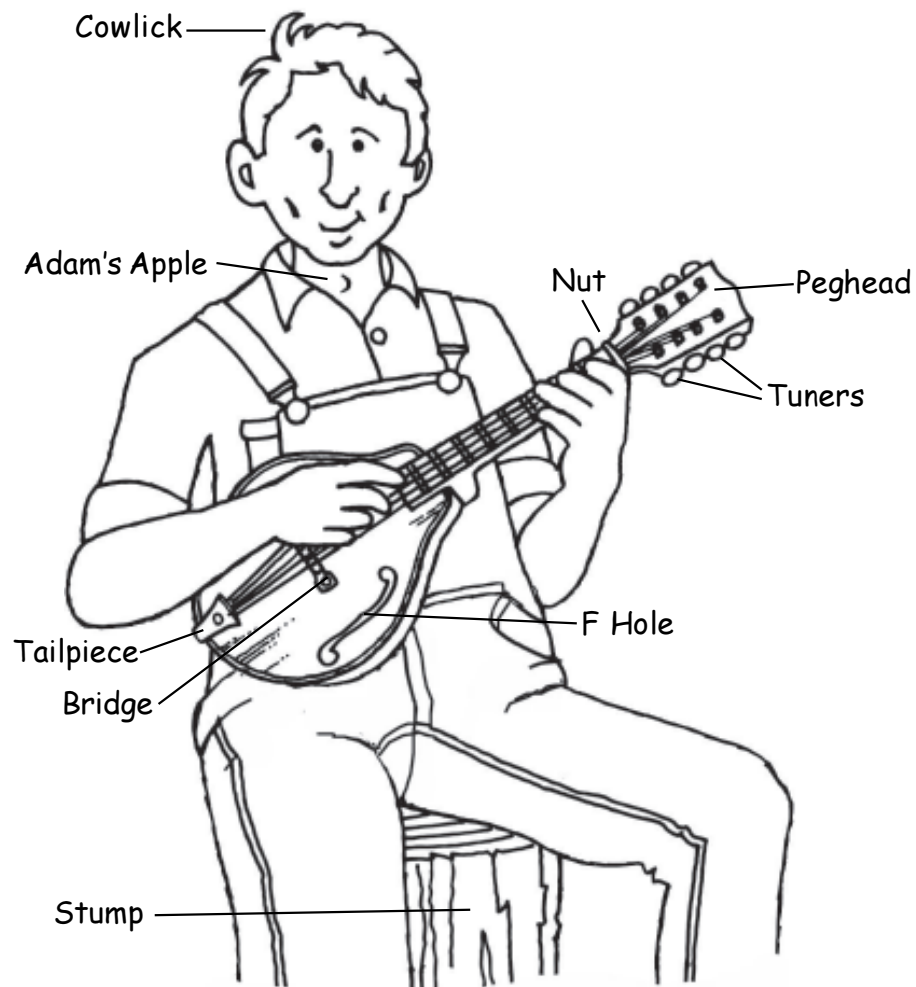
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Photo by Martin Fox

Parts of a Mandolin(ist)



Tablature or "Tab" for Ignoramuses

If you are a true and total beginner who doesn't read music, I have good news: all the tunes in the book are written out in an easy-to-read tab system that I invented. A line of tab will be right above a corresponding line of music, so if you sorta read music, you can look at both the tab and the music.

Take a look over at page 13 and almost half way down you'll see an example of the tab. It consists of four horizontal lines which represent the four pairs of strings on the mandolin. The E, or highest string, is found toward the top of the page and the G, or lowest string, is toward the bottom of the page. You'll notice that each string is marked on the left with its name. A letter on the string tells you the name of the note to play on that string.

TIMING: The timing in the tab matches the timing of the music. If you don't read music, no problem! Here's all you need to know. Each line of tab is divided into measures, which are the spaces between the "fence posts." At the beginning of the first line of music it will say 2/4, 3/4 or 4/4. The number on top tells you that each measure will either get two, three or four beats. Each beat is one tap of your foot (down and up). In the example below, look at the first line of the Carter Family song, "Keep on the Sunny Side of Life." The first two notes are both eighth notes. Your foot would go DOWN on the first eighth note and UP on the second. Then you'll see two notes with a single vertical line attached to it. Those are quarter notes and they each get one beat. For each quarter note, your foot would go DOWN-UP. In measure two, there are two pairs of eighth notes, so your foot would go DOWN or UP on each note. In measure 3, you'll see a D note with two lines attached. The two lines tell you it's a half note and gets two beats. This D note connects with a tie to a D note in measure 4, so the D note would get a total of three beats, or three DOWN-UPS with your foot.



G
C
G

E											
A	2										
D	4	D	E		G						
G											

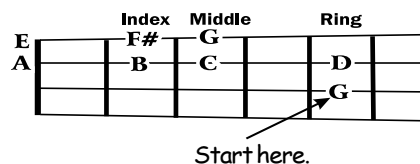
1 2 3 4

There's a dark and a troubled side of life. There's a

Above the tab is a "G" and a "C" which are your chords. Take a look at page 15, to find vital information on playing the chords. On page 78 are simple rhythmic chord positions to play while you are singing and strumming the rhythm.

The Key of G

The G scale will be your new best friend. Start the scale with the G note on the D string with your ring finger. (D string at the 5th fret).

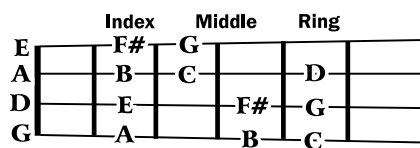


The G Scale G, A, B, C, D, E, F#, G

	Ring Finger	Open A	Index Finger	Middle Finger	Ring Finger	Open E	Index Finger	Middle Finger
E								
A		0	2	3			2	3
D	5							
G								

E						E	F#	G
A		A	B	C	D			
D	G							
G								

Here is the complete G scale, starting on the open G string. Play it forwards and backwards.



	Open G	Index Finger	Middle Finger	Ring Finger	Open D	Index Finger	Middle Finger	Ring Finger	Open A	Index Finger	Middle Finger	Ring Finger	Open E	Index Finger	Middle Finger
E															
A					0	2	4	5	0	2	3	5		0	2
D															
G	0	2	4	5											

E													E	F#	G
A					D	E	F#	G	A	B	C	D			
D															
G	G	A	B	C											

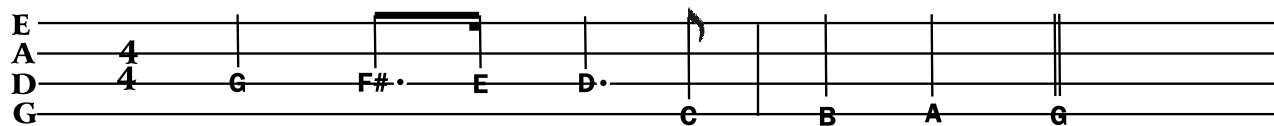
NOTE: Attached to each note in lines one and two, above, is a vertical line that tells you that each of these notes is a quarter note that gets one beat. It makes no difference if the line is attached to the top of the note (as in the G on the far left) or hanging down from the note (as in the G on the far right.)



Your First Tune!

Let's put your G scale to work. Begin by playing the G scale (near the top of page 13) BACKWARDS, starting with your ring finger on the G note that you'll find on the fifth fret of the D string. Play it over and over until you can play the scale backwards without looking at the book. Now, you'll play these same notes, but this time change the timing to sound like the first line of "Joy to the World."

Since you already know the tune, don't even look at the confusing tab or music below. Just play the first line of "Joy to the World" so it sounds right to your ears. When you can do that, play it starting on the E string at the third fret and again, play the scale backwards. When you get it sounding right, play it for a family member or friend and see if they can tell the name of the tune you're playing. If they can, you have arrived. If not, keep practicing!



Joy to the world, the Lord is come.



Order of the Tunes to Play



For your convenience, the tunes in the book are arranged alphabetically within each key (G, A, F, C and D). The tunes that are the easiest to play tend to be the ones you've heard before, so feel free to play them in any order that works for you. Having said that, let me add that if you're a true Ignoramus, I would strongly point you toward these tunes to start with: "Down the Road," "Amazing Grace," "Shady Grove," "In the Pines," and "Cripple Creek."



Photo by Wayne Erbsen

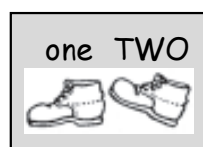
Molasses Making in North Carolina



Mandolin Chords

Each song in the book includes chords that are written above the tab/music. For example, on page 19, you'll see a "G" near the beginning of line one of "Angel Band." What is a "chord?" It's nothing more than several notes are played at the same time and sound good, or harmonize, with each other. When you just want to accompany a song, you can simply play the chords. You can find the most common chord positions on page 78. When you're learning the chords, be sure to make your fingers go to the chords **ALL AT THE SAME TIME**. To practice this, go to a chord, then pick up your fingers about 1/4 of an inch, and set them back down totally at the same time. Practice, practice. Get into the habit of making your chords all at the same time right away. If you procrastinate on this, this bad habit will come back and bite you later. **OUCH!**

THE CHOP: Mandolin players have a unique way of playing chords, which is called the chop. The chop merely consists of striking down with a single brisk whack on the strings. The trick is knowing **WHEN** to chop.



The Monroe Brothers

Tap your foot while saying "one" on the **DOWN** and "TWO" on the **UP**. Say the "TWO" a little louder than the "one." When you get this down cold, tap your foot, but this time only say the "TWO." Now go dig through your CD collection, and put on a nice snappy bluegrass song. Tap along with the rhythm and when you get that coordinated with the recording, say "TWO" when your foot comes up. Now you're ready to try it on your mandolin. You'll want to play the chop only on the **TWO**. So tap your foot, go to a G chord, and smack, whack, or chop down on the strings only on the **TWO** beat. Now you've got the chop where you want it.

PLAYING CHORDS WITH THE MELODY. When you're first playing the melody of a song, you can ignore the chords written above the lines. After you're comfortable playing the melody, you can play partial chords as a harmony to the melody notes. For example, look at "Angel Band," on page 19.

In measure number 1, the first melody note is a "D" and above that is a G chord. Instead of just hitting the "D" note by its lonesome, you can play any note of a G chord that's on a string next to the "D." So, you've got two choices. You can play the G string open or the A string at the second fret. The easiest, and best sounding choice would be to play the open G string with the D melody note. There! You're playing harmony.

Some of the songs in the book include one or several numbers after the chords. These numbers represent harmony chord positions which you'll find on pages 76-77. Any time you play a note, you can also play a harmony of that note. The Harmony Chord Positions page show you some harmony note possibilities. A black dot on the chords indicates the 5th or 7th fret. An x means that you don't play that string.



Amazing Grace

No hymn can rival "Amazing Grace" in popularity. The composer of the lyrics was John Newton, who was born in England in 1725. When he was nine, his mother died, and he was shipped off to sea as a cabin boy. He later deserted the British navy and was whipped and put in irons. Rising through the ranks, he eventually became captain of a slave ship. During a violent storm, Newton found solace in God and he later left the sea to become an ordained minister of the Church of England. After composing the lyrics to "Amazing Grace" in 1789, Newton set the words to an anonymous tune that often appears in old hymn books as "New Britain" or "Harmony Grove."

	Index		Ring	
A	B		D	
D	E		G	

It's a good thing for us that John Newton named this classic hymn "Amazing Grace" because it comes at the front of the alphabet, and it's easier to start pickin' on a tune you already know and love.

The first thing you should notice about "Amazing Grace" is that it's in 3/4, or waltz, time. That means there are three beats per measure and the rhythm sounds like "ONE, two-three, ONE, two-three." Before you start, take a look at the chart on the top right hand corner of this page. This handy diagram will tell you exactly which notes will be used to play "Amazing Grace." Notice that we'll be using our index finger to play B and E and our ring finger to play the G and high D. Let your middle and pinky fingers rest for now.

ICE COLD LICKS: First, play the unadorned melody as written on the facing page. Remember that every note with a single vertical line attached to it gets one beat. If there is a double line, that note gets two beats. If there's a dot after a note, it gets half again the value of the note preceding it. For example, measure 7 will get three beats because it has a dotted double line.



WARM LICKS: After you can play the simple melody of "Amazing Grace," you're ready to juice up the rhythm a little. Of course, this isn't the kind of tune you want to go crazy with, so please try to restrain yourself. "Amazing Grace" is the perfect tune to try the Tremolo, which is the "mother" of all mandolin licks. (See page 73). You can use the Tremolo on any of the notes EXCEPT the 8th notes (which are tied together like the B and G in measure 1.)



Harmony Notes

All the melody notes of "Amazing Grace" are on the D or A strings. To play the harmony of any melody note on the D string, simply play the G string open along with the melody note. For melody notes on the A string, you'll find the harmony by playing the D string open.



Key of G

Amazing Grace

Tempo: Respectfully Slow

Chorus

G **C** **G**

1 2 3 4

E A D G

A - maz - ing grace how sweet the sound that

5 6 7 8

E A D G

saved a wretch like me. I

G **C** **G**

9 10 11 12

E A D G

once was lost, but now am found, was

D **G**

13 14 15 16

E A D G

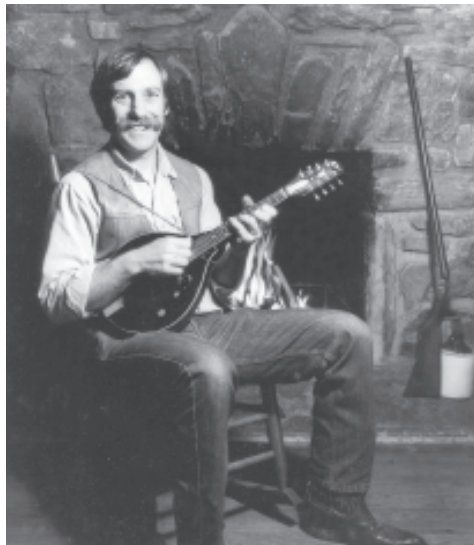
blind but now I see.

Note: The chords (G, C & D) are optional when you're new at playing the melody. Later on, you can add harmony chord positions (p. 76). For example, in measure 7 you can play the D6 harmony chord position. How do you figure out which harmony chord to play? Pick a harmony note that's on a string next to the melody note.



Tune & CD Index

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Dig a Hole in the Meadow	61	 C	 80
Don't This Road Look Rough & Rocky .	22	 G	 25, 26, 27
Down the Road	24	 G	 28, 29, 30, 31
East Virginia	26	 G	 32, 33, 34
Handsome Molly	28	 G	 35, 36, 37
House of the Rising Sun	48	 Amin	 64, 65
In the Pines	67	 D	 89, 90
I've Been All Around This World	62	 C	 81, 82, 83
I've Just Seen the Rock of Ages	50	 A	 66, 67
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Shady Grove	42	 G	 53, 54, 55
Soldier's Joy	70	 D	 92
Wildwood Flower	64	 C	 84, 85, 86
Will the Circle Be Unbroken?	44	 G	 56, 57, 58



Wayne Erbsen

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