

# Bluegrass Jamming

on

# Mandolin

by

# Wayne Erbsen

Photo by Jim Scancarelli



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## Instructional Audio CD

Tucked into the sleeve on the inside front cover is an instructional audio CD that's essential for learning all the tunes and licks in this book. On the CD I recorded a whopping eighty-one cuts so you can hear everything played at a nice slow tempo to help you learn by ear and be able to jam along. Throughout the book watch for illustrations of an old gramophone with numbers inside it. The numbers correspond to the tracks on the CD. The mandolin is balanced to the right and rhythm guitar is on the left. You can monkey with the balance knob to give you more mandolin and less guitar, or vice versa. It wouldn't hurt my feelings one bit if you turned the mandolin completely off and just used the guitar track to back up your mandolin pickin' and jamming. As a bonus, if you open the CD on your computer, you'll find Word files containing all the lyrics to the songs that are in the book.



# Come into the Jam Circle!

**H**owdy there, stranger! We're glad you came to our bluegrass jam. Grab your instrument and join the jam circle. You can take this chair right here, next to me. That's a fine looking mandolin you have there. Can I get you some iced tea and homemade cookies?

In your dreams this is the cordial welcome you'll receive when you go to your first jam. Who knows? They might throw you out on the street! While I'm kidding about that, people are people and frankly, some bluegrass musicians are just a little "off." Some of them seem to have the tact and social finesse of a bear trying to extract the contents of a jar of Skippy Peanut Butter. Don't mind them -- they mean well. After you win them over, they'll be your lifelong friends and will give you the shirt right off their backs. Come to think of it, in some cases, that might be a horrifying sight!

## Who This Book is For

This book is for people who already have their feet slightly wet, or at least "moist." It will give you the essential tools to jam with other musicians, and will be a great benefit even if you only play by yourself in your closet. If you know a few tunes and a mandolin chord or two, you're perfect for this book. On the other hand, if you know absolutely nothing about the mandolin, you can still get a lot out of it. First, however, I would encourage you to try my beginning book, **Bluegrass Mandolin for the Complete Ignoramus!**

## Are you Qualified to be a Jammer?

In this book, we're going to make things real simple. There's only two things you'll need to know: 1) Your alphabet from A to G. 2) How to count from 1 to 7. That's it. Is this simple enough?

## What You'll Get Out of This Book

After you've digested this book, you'll be fully equipped to stride confidently into any bluegrass jam. You'll know how to pick out the melody of thirty-one traditional bluegrass tunes and be able to follow the chords to many common bluegrass songs. You'll become adept at playing both fills and harmony and you'll learn many skills of improvisation.

**Bluegrass Jamming on Mandolin** will also be very helpful

if you already play the mandolin, but are stuck playing tunes the same way over and over. It will give you the swift kick in the pants you so desperately need and want.



Photo courtesy of Jim Garber

# How to Read the Tab

**B**y now, you've noticed that the songs in the book are written out both in standard musical notation and in some strange tablature or "tab." You're absolutely right in thinking the tab is strange. In fact, the tab is unique to my series of instruction books. Once you get used to it, you'll forsake all other forms of tab. Instead of using numbers to represent the fret that you play on a particular string, my tab tells you the name of the note you play on a string.

**Why This Tab?** The reason my unique tab is so helpful is that it will force you to learn the names of all your notes on the mandolin. That's good. You'll find in a jam the numbers you've learned from other books or from the Internet are all but useless. Why? Let's say you're in a jam and you're playing an unfamiliar song. Without warning the song goes to a B chord and you're trying desperately to think of something to play. How about a B note? You'll never find the B with the number system, but you will if you know where to find all the notes on your mandolin. I can give you examples all day long of why you should learn your notes, but you're just gonna have to trust me on this one.

## "How Do I Learn Where All the Notes Are?"

You'll find four of the common scales on page 86-87. Make it your business not only to learn all these scales, but to know where to find each and every one of those notes on your mandolin. You can do it, I know!

**Anatomy of the Tab:** Below is the anatomy of the tab of "Pig in a Pen," with all the "body parts" labeled. As you can see, there are two beats, or two foot taps, in each measure. The two Gs in measure 1 are each 8th notes. The first one gets a DOWN tap with your foot, and the second G gets an UP tap. The B in measure 1 is a quarter note, so it gets a DOWN UP with your foot.



## Pig in a Pen

**Chorus**

E String

Chord → G

Quarter Note

Eighth Note

D Note

Measure Number

Scale Number

Half Note

1 1 3 1 6 5 1 2 3 4

I got a pig at home in the pen, corn to feed him on,



# Black-Eyed Susie

The roots of this southern Appalachian tune go back to the days of slavery in the Old South. It was first recorded as a fiddle and guitar duet by Gid Tanner and Riley Puckett on March 6, 1924. (NOTE: The diagram above tells you what notes you'll be using to play this song. The A and D on the left are "open" or unfretted strings.

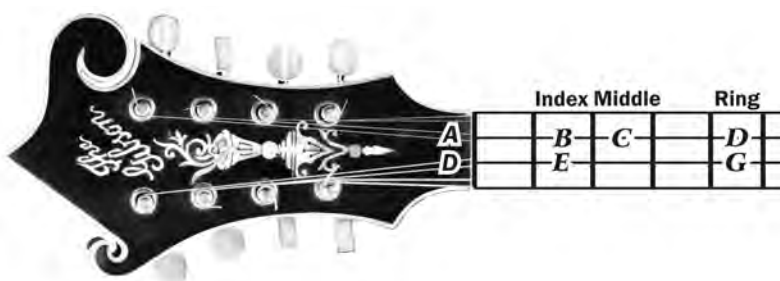


Diagram showing the fretting positions for the strings (E, A, D, G) and the corresponding notes (G, C, G) for measures 1, 2, and 3. The fretting positions are indicated by numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. The notes are G, C, G. The fretting positions are indicated by numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

**Simplify:** Even though this tune is based on a simple melody, we can still take our little pen knife and trim away excess melody notes. For example, instead of playing two eighths and a quarter note in measures 1, 2 and 3, you can simply play one half note for each measure. Remember that a half note gets two beats (or two DOWN-UPS with your foot).

With the melody simplified down, we can then add to it. "Why would we want to do that?" Because in bluegrass music when it's your turn to take a break, you might not want to play the melody "straight," or note-for-note. Instead, you might want to improvise on the melody. Only when you leave out notes can you add back something else.

**Hot Lick #1:** Here's a little right-hand rhythm that I call "Get Out of Town," because that's what the rhythm sounds like. You can use it on zillions of bluegrass songs. It looks hard, but trust me, it's really not. The little arrows tell you the direction of your pick. If you listen to the CD you'll find it's easy as pie. For starters, let's use it once in each of the first three measures in our simplified version of "Black-Eyed Susie," above. Instead of playing a half note in each measure, simply play your hot lick rhythm once. In measure one you'll play the rhythm with a D note, in measure two, you'll play it with the C, and in measure three, you'll play it with the B note.



Diagram showing the fretting positions for the strings (E, A, D, G) and the corresponding notes (G, C, G) for measures 1, 2, and 3. The fretting positions are indicated by numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. The notes are G, C, G. The fretting positions are indicated by numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

**Hot Lick #2:** After you've played Hot Lick #1 on the D, C and B notes, you can do the same thing on two strings. As you play the D note, also play the 1st string at the third fret, a G. When you play the C note, also play the 1st string open, an E. And when you play the B note, again play the 1st string at the third fret, a G. The two strings you're playing are chords. The first pair is a G, the second pair is a C and the third pair is also a G.



Key of G

# Black-Eyed Susie



Sheet music for "Black-Eyed Susie" in the key of G. The music is arranged in three systems, each with a guitar chord chart and a corresponding melody line. The lyrics are written below the melody line.

**System 1:**

- Chords: G<sub>1</sub>, C<sub>2</sub>, G<sub>3</sub>, D<sub>4</sub>, G<sub>5</sub>
- Lyrics: I got drunk, I got boozy, I went home with Black-Eyed Susie. Black-Eyed Susie's

**System 2:**

- Chords: C<sub>6</sub>, G<sub>7</sub>, D<sub>8</sub>, G<sub>9</sub> Chorus, B<sub>10</sub>
- Lyrics: long and lean, prettiest girl I ever seen. Hey! Black-Eyed Susie,

**System 3:**

- Chords: D<sub>11</sub>, G<sub>12</sub>, D<sub>13</sub>, G<sub>14</sub>, G<sub>15</sub>, G<sub>16</sub>
- Lyrics: Ho! Black-Eyed Susie. Hey! Black-Eyed Susie Ho!

I got drunk, I got boozy,  
I went home with Black-Eyed Susie.

Black-Eyed Susie's long and lean,  
Prettiest girl I ever seen.

Hey! Black-Eyed Susie,  
Ho! Black-Eyed Susie,  
Hey! Black-Eyed Susie  
Ho!



Courtesy of Katie Lundy Golding

All the songs in the book are arranged alphabetically for each key. The songs that will be the easiest for you to play are probably those that you're already familiar with. Feel free to play the tunes in any order that suits you.

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Courtesy of Jim Garber



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