

Bluegrass Banjo Suggested Reading

By Ben Freed (originally published in the July 2006 issue of *Banjo Newsletter*, www.banjonews.com)

Back in December of 2005 I wrote a short article entitled “*Bluegrass Banjo: Transitioning to the Next Level*”. It listed a series of pointers intended to help the beginning and intermediate player move up to the next level of ability. One suggestion was that serious students learn the classic repertoire of bluegrass banjo solos. Subsequently, a few *BNL* readers wrote to me asking what solos I would consider to make up the classic repertoire, so I proceeded to draw up a list.

The following are 100 songs and instrumentals, which, in my opinion, should be familiar to serious students of Scruggs and melodic three-finger style. It is not an exclusive or fully inclusive list and certainly not the first or last word on this subject. While there are hundreds more that could have been included in an initial repertoire, I consider this a reasonable initial “required reading” list for those working their way to an advanced level. Another way of thinking about it is that most modern professional players have probably, at one time or another, learned a version of all of these tunes.

Although some of them are from the old-time fiddle repertoire and may not have a classic or standard bluegrass banjo “break”, they are to essential to string band music to be excluded. Many tunes listed are associated with a classic solo that should be learned. All the tunes are easily available on websites and back issues of *BNL*. Take your time with them, and have fun!

Angeline the Baker
Arab Bounce *
Arkansas Traveller *
Auld Lang Syne
Back Up and Push
Ballad of Jed Clampett *
Banjo Signal
Beaumont Rag
Big Mon
Big Sandy River
Bill Cheatham *
Billy in the Lowground
Black Mountain Rag
Blackberry Blossom *
Blackjack *
Blue Ridge Cabin Home
Bugle Call Rag *
Bully of the Town
Cherokee Shuffle
Clinch Mountain Backstep *
Crazy Creek
Cripple Creek *
Cumberland Gap *
Dark Hollow
Dear Old Dixie *
Devil's Dream *
Dixie Breakdown *
Dixie Hoedown
Down Yonder
Earl's Breakdown *
Eighth of January *
Farewell Blues *
Fireball Mail *
Flint Hill Special *
Flop Eared Mule
Foggy Mountain Breakdown *
Foggy Mountain Special *
Follow the Leader *
Forked Deer
Gold Rush *
Goodbye Liza Jane *

Grandfather's Clock *
Grey Eagle
Groundspeed *
Home Sweet Home *
Hot Burrito Breakdown
How Mountain Girls Can Love
I Saw the Light
Jerusalem Ridge
John Hardy *
John Henry *
June Apple
Katy Hill
Leather Britches
Liberty
Lime Rock
Little Cabin Home on the Hill
Little Maggie *
Lonesome Road Blues *
Molly and Tenbrooks
Monroe's Hornpipe
Nashville Blues *
Nashville Skyline Rag
New Camptown Races
Nine Pound Hammer
Old Home Place
Old Joe Clark *
Paddy on the Turnpike
Pike County Breakdown *
Ragtime Annie *
Randy Lynn Rag *
Red Haired Boy *
Redwing *
Remington Ride *
Reuben *
Roanoke
Rocky Top
Roll in My Sweet Baby's Arms
Sally Ann, old-time version
Sally Ann, Scruggs version *
Sally Goodin *
Salt Creek *

Salty Dog Blues
Sailor's Hornpipe *
Shenandoah Breakdown *
Shuckin' the Corn *
Sitting on Top of the World
Sledd Ridin' *
Soldier's Joy *
St. Anne's Reel
Sweet Dixie
Temperance Reel
Theme Time *
Turkey in the Straw
Wheelhoss
Whiskey Before Breakfast
Whitewater
Will the Circle be Unbroken
Wreck of the Old '97

* *Editor's Note:* The selections with astericks are the ones I consider to be *primary* tunes. (I couldn't resist adding my two cents.) For instance, I think *Earl's Breakdown* should be given more weight than *How Mountain Girls Can Love*, etc. Also, if it were my list, I'd have somehow found room for *Black Diamond*, *Little Rock Getaway*, *Casey Jones*, *Bye Bye Blues*, and *Doug's Tune*. Other tunes I might have wanted to include are *Jesse James*, *Train 45* and *Dueling Banjos*. And I might have considered *Panhandle Rag*, *Pickaway*, *Lonesome Fiddle Blues*, *Little Darlin' Pal of Mine*, *Rickett's Hornpipe*, *Dusty Miller*, *Banjo Boy Chimes*, *Blue Ridge Express*, *Rawhide*, *Pony Express*, *Eight More Miles to Louisville*, *Bluegrass Breakdown*, and *Day-break In Dixie*. *Deputy Dalton* certainly was a standard at one time, although it comes up less frequently these days. And while we're at it, *Huckleberry Hornpipe*, and *Your Love is Like a Flower*. (It's interesting, but hardly surprising, that most of these tunes are traditional or are at least 25 years old.) So, as you can see, it's hard to restrain oneself to 100. But all in all, Ben's list is a fine selection, and useful, both for beginners, and as a starting point for those who might want to make their own list. Please send us your suggestions. —Donald Nitche