

Alfred's

Teach Yourself To Play Banjo

MORTY MANUS
RON MANUS

**Everything you need to know to
start playing the 5-string banjo now!**

TNT²

In addition to video lessons, the companion DVD includes Alfred's exclusive TNT 2 software which allows users to customize the audio tracks in this book for practice. Use it to slow down tracks, isolate and loop parts, and change tempos and keys.

To install, insert the DVD into the disc drive of your computer.

Windows

Double-click on **My Computer**, right-click on the DVD drive icon, and select **Explore**. Open the **DVD-ROM Materials** folder, then the **TnT2** folder, then the **Windows** folder, and double-click on the installer file.

Macintosh

Double-click on the DVD icon on your desktop. Open the **DVD-ROM Materials** folder, then the **TnT2** folder, then the **Mac** folder, and double-click on the installer file.

TNT 2 SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Windows

XP, Vista, 7, 8
QuickTime 7.6.7 or higher
1.8 GHz processor or faster
1.1 GB hard drive space
2 GB RAM minimum
DVD drive for installation
Speakers or headphones
Internet access for updates

Macintosh

OS 10.4 and higher (Intel only)
QuickTime 7.6.7 or higher
1.1 GB hard drive space
2 GB RAM minimum
DVD drive for installation
Speakers or headphones
Internet access for updates



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CONTENTS

Getting Started	32
A Short History of the Banjo	3
The Five-String Banjo	4
The Hands	5
Picks	5
Tightening the Head	5
Holding the Banjo	6
Tuning Your Banjo	6
Tuning to a Piano or Other Keyboard	7
Tuning to a Pitch Pipe	7
Tuning to a Tuning Fork	7
Tuning by Ear	7
Using an Electronic Tuner	7
Caring for your Banjo	8
Buying a Used Banjo	8
Starting to Play Chords	9
Playing the G Chord	9
Playing the D7 Chord	11
Getting Acquainted With Music	12
● MINI MUSIC LESSON: Ties	14
Down in the Valley	14
● MINI MUSIC LESSON: Eighth Notes & Rests	15
Go Tell Aunt Rhody	15
● MINI MUSIC LESSON: Pickup Measure,	
Dotted Quarter Note	16
Cockles and Mussels	16
Clementine	17
Strum No. 1	18
● MINI MUSIC LESSON: D.C. al Fine	19
Tom Dooley	19
Strum No. 2	20
Old Paint	20
The C Major Chord	22
When the Saints Go Marching In	23
On Top of Old Smokey	24
Oh! Susanna	25
Strum No. 3	26
Strum No. 4	26
Worried Man Blues	27
The G7 Chord	28
Jesse James	28
She'll be Comin' Round the Mountain	30
Red River Valley	31
Strum No. 5	32
Skip to My Lou	33
Strum No. 5 (continued)	34
Hand Me Down My Walkin' Cane	34
This Land is Your Land	35
● MINI MUSIC LESSON: The Arpeggio	36
Strum No. 6	36
The A7 Chord	36
Aura Lea	37
Strum No. 7	38
The Cowboy's Dream	38
Strum No. 8	40
New River Train	41
Strum No. 9	42
Daisy Bell (A Bicycle Built for Two)	42
Melody Playing	44
Goodnight Ladies	45
My Home's Across the Smoky Mountains	46
Lolly Too Dum	47
● MINI MUSIC LESSON: Hammering-On	48
Come and Go with Me	49
● MINI MUSIC LESSON: Pulling-Off	50
Cotton Eyed Joe	50
Strum No. 8b	51
The Old Gray Mare	51
Bluegrass	52
Bluegrass Roll No. 1	52
Black Eyed Susie	53
Bluegrass Roll No. 1a	53
Old Joe Clark	54
Bluegrass Roll No. 2	55
Little Maggie	55
● MINI MUSIC LESSON: C Tuning	56
The Wabash Cannonball	57
Home on the Range	58
Strum No. 10	59
● MINI MUSIC LESSON: Transposition	60
The Capo	61
What to Do About the 5th String	61
Chords in G Tuning	62
Chords in C Tuning	63
Fingering Charts	64

GETTING
STARTED

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE BANJO

There are four types of banjos in common use: the four-string, short-neck tenor; the four-string long-neck plectrum; the six-string banjo tuned like a guitar; and the one this book will teach you how to play, the five-string banjo.

Banjos were brought to America by West Africans who played an instrument called the *bania*. They may have adapted the *bania* from similar stringed instruments they heard the Arabs playing. The *bania* has several strings stretched over a wooden neck and hollow gourd, which acted as a resonator. Early in the development of the instrument its resonance was improved by slicing a piece off the side of the gourd and stretching an animal skin over the resulting hole. It is this skin (now usually made of plastic) that gives the banjo its characteristic bright, “snappy” sound.

The earliest American banjos that still exist date from about 1830. Soon after that an important improvement and a brilliant innovation permitted players to reach the heights of technique previously unheard of: the improvement was the addition of frets (which early banjo makers borrowed from the guitar and mandolin) and the innovation was the addition of a fifth string. Unlike the four longer strings, however, the fifth string is a short *drone* string, which means that no matter what else is being played, the fifth string always sounds the same note, either the root or the fifth of the key. One possibility is that this innovation was an attempt by American banjo players of Scottish-Irish ancestry to imitate the sound of the bagpipe*

*Bagpipes have one or more drone pipes that sound the same note regardless of what else is being played. The melody is played on different pipes, called *chanters*. The modern banjo player gets a comparable effect by playing the melody on the four long strings while the short fifth string continually sounds the same note.

which was such an important part of their musical culture. There is also evidence the fifth string dates back to the instrument's African roots.

Surprisingly, the five-string banjo was often used in the 19th century for playing classical melodies. There is much printed music from the period 1875 to about 1910 that proves that the instrument was in great demand for this purpose. (To hear what this sounded like, listen to the historic recordings of banjo virtuoso Fred van Epps, who recorded before the first World War.)

Although it had always been popular as a folk instrument, the banjo really came into its own with the beginnings of bluegrass music in the late 1920s. The basic bluegrass band consists of five instruments: fiddle, mandolin, bass, guitar and five-string banjo. (It is said that the early bluegrass musicians were using

stringed instruments to imitate the sounds of Dixieland jazz they heard on radio.)

Bluegrass soon became an independent, important and exciting part of the American music scene. Banjo pickers like Earl Scruggs, Don Reno, Bobby Thompson and many others brought the instrument to new heights of virtuosity, and innovators like Dick Weissman and the incredible Bela Fleck continue to push the boundaries of what the instrument can do.

In this book we will give you a thorough grounding in the basics of five-string banjo playing. No matter whether your interest lies in bluegrass, folk, jazz or even classical, the fundamentals of playing the instrument are the same. After completing *Teach Yourself to Play 5-String Banjo*, you'll be on your way to becoming an excellent player in your favorite musical style!



Earl Scruggs, here with his partner Lester Flatt and their band, is famous for his three-finger style of playing. He also invented the “Scruggs peg,” a device used for making quick changes in tuning of B and G strings. Photo courtesy of Country Music Foundation.