

Review by Bob Buckingham

There are over 200 tunes included in this spiral bound book, with the tabs cleanly laid out and easy to read, and with an accompanying CD with an mp3 file for each tune. There are also nearly thirty banjo exercises and scale studies. Tunes are sorted by tuning so you can dive in and play away without retuning. (This means, however, that they're not sorted alphabetically, so you have to look in the Index under each tuning to find a particular tune. But, not a big deal.) The tunings are the usual ones; some examples include *La Bastringue* and *Sopping the Gravy* in D, *Lost Girl* and *Indian Squaw* in G, *Half Past Four* and *Walk Along John to Kansas* in A. There are two tunes in C, *Texas Gals* and *Wagoner One Step*. Old G is represented by *Barlow Knife*, *Ebenezer*, *Last Chance*, *Sandy River Belle* and *Wild Horse at Stony Point*. There is a great selection of modal tunes including *Growling Old Man* and *Kitchen Girl*.

As you can perhaps tell, many if not most of the current string-band standards are represented, along with some surprises. With over 200 tunes, there are some additional fun things, including a couple of waltzes (*Black Hills Waltz* and *Peeler Creek Waltz*), rags like *Peacock Rag* and *Pig Ankles Rag* (sic), and songs like *Hava Nagila* and *I'll Fly Away*. If that's not enough, how about some Christmas carols, like *Jingle Bells* and *We Wish You a Merry Christmas*? Three quarter time and the syncopation of ragtime do not lend themselves to the clawhammer style but these arrangements will provide some insights on how to manage with these styles of tunes.

The tabs are not hard to play, even with some phrases that are rich with hammer-ons and pull-offs. As Stephen says in his introduction, "These arrangements are meant as a starting point...once you have listened to a tune and played it for a while, start to add your own licks... One need not be wedded to any tab...to be a banjo player is to be a music arranger." But learning an arrangement does have its merits, and these are solid versions of the tunes; each version worked out has a resemblance to the tune by that name.

As any experienced banjo player will know, the fiddler may or may not know the same version that you do and it is

incumbent on the banjo player to shape his version to the fiddler's version. Take *Falls of Richmond*. In the D part Parker has the banjo going to the 10th fret of the first string. That places the melody solidly in the Ionian mode or major mode. His cited source may play it that way. Other fiddlers will milk the Mixolydian aspects of this tune so the banjo player will have to go to the 9th fret for the more minor flavor of the tune.

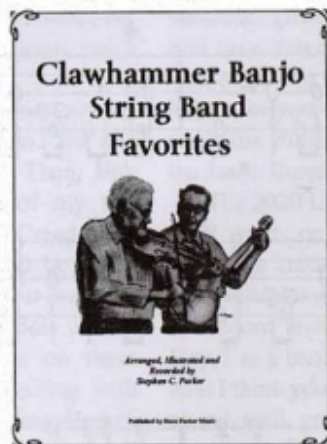
There are photos throughout the book of a wide range of banjo players, from Roscoe Holcomb to Dwight Diller and a young Nancy Sluys. There are several hundred photographs and drawings in all, and your favorite banjo player is bound to be in there, somewhere along with many prominent fiddlers.

The CD contains mp3s of all of the tunes played through slowly by the author. It also contains a PDF with information about what is contained on the CD.

The introduction explains how to read tab and the basics to the clawhammer style. The explanations will make perfect sense to players but might be lost on a true novice.

Additionally there is a discography, a bibliography and a list of useful websites and an index of tune sources. Although this is not an instruction book, there are useful exercises and scales to broaden the users knowledge of the instrument. Having a firm grasp of the scales and basic techniques makes for a richer experience while serving to empower the player to realize their goals. Of course one need only practice these techniques until they bear fruition.

There is chord chart for different tunings, banjo scales in G and double C tunings with each note initially identified by its location in the tab. Then the scales are played with hammer-ons, pull-offs and slides, and double thumbing. Chordal scales are identified by degree of scale and played in the bum ditty pattern up and down the neck for each tuning. Picking exercises identify the different time patterns encountered in playing the arrangements in the book as well teaching the user left and right hand techniques that will make



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**Clawhammer Banjo String Band Favorites** by Stephen Parker. Tab book and CD, 2010. \$35. [www.ragtime-resource.com/](http://www.ragtime-resource.com/)

playing the arrangements easier.

This is a satisfying book with lots of good tunes and solid information. If you are at all serious about learning old-time or expanding your repertory, this book is a definite plus for your library. Stephen Parker is the author of other tune books for mandolin and fiddle. Go to [www.ragtime-resource.com/](http://www.ragtime-resource.com/)