

**Clawhammer String Band Favorites**  
Steve Parker



*Clawhammer String Band Favorites* is a new publication from Steve Parker, who is author, arranger, illustrator, banjo player, recording engineer, and publisher of this ambitious work.

The core of this book/CD (mp3) combination is a collection of more than 200 mostly old-time tunes from various sources, transcribed in clawhammer banjo tablature. There is a wealth of other material along with the tunes.

Each tab includes the tuning, capo placement, and Steve's source, next to which is the number of the source recording found in the source discography. The tablature is clear, straightforward, and easy to read. Multiple versions of some tunes are included. Tunes are arranged in sections according to tuning. The multifaceted appendix contains several indices, a short bibliography, a list of relevant websites, the source tune discography, and the CD track list and instructions. Also included are banjo tunings used in the book, some banjo scales and exercises, and a banjo chord chart. There is a further selection of tunes, too; some easy, some unusual, some seasonal, some waltzes, a couple of originals, and some he couldn't bear to leave out, I suspect!

"The purpose of this book," Steve says in his preface, "is to present banjo arrangements created to accompany commercially available recordings by musicians and groups."

Thus the source discography: once you've worked through the tablature, and played with the banjo version on the CD, you can go back to the source recording and learn to play along. Some of the sources shown are vinyl records or cassettes. Some

of these have been reissued as CDs, some haven't. If your purpose is to work your way through the book, it might take a bit of research, and/or looking through friends' collections, to find the exact sources. Some tunes can be bought from iTunes, and you can always contact Steve (see website information below) if you get stuck.

The source recordings are by and large by "young fogies" (grateful thanks always to Ray Alden for the descriptive phrase) rather than the old-timers we learned from, although Tommy Jarrell, Fred Cockerham, Benton Flippen, Kyle Creed, and the Camp Creek Boys are well represented with a total of 35 tunes. There are several Frank George tunes, too. In the younger set, Bruce Molsky and Brad Leftwich lead with a total of 32 tunes. Now-classic bands of the early '70s Hollow Rock String Band, Highwoods String Band, and Fuzzy Mountain String Band are well represented too. Others include Dan Gellert, Bruce Greene, Tara Nevins, J. P. Fraley, and the Ill-Mo Boys. Tunes from West Coast musicians Mel Durham, Kenny Hall, Warren Argo, Suzy Thompson, and the Gypsy Gyppo String Band are included too. It's an interesting cross-section, and there's something for everyone here, although I personally might have wanted to see more Mississippi and Alabama tunes. I imagine it was harder deciding what to leave out of the book than it was what to include.

Since there is such a lot of cross-referencing you might want to copy the contents page, the appendix contents page, the CD track list, and the discography pages so you can refer to them more easily. The book is sturdy and spiral bound, always a nice convenience.

As you make your way through the book, you may find your own face looking up at you. One of Steve's objectives was to include as many photos of old-time musicians past and present as he could, and these too are indexed in the appendix for easy referencing.

I'm not sure how many people will use this book as Steve intends. Learning from the tab and the moderately-paced CD is one thing, learning to play along with the source can be a different matter, as I found out when I tried "Benton's Dream." I listened to Steve's rendition on the CD several times, played through the tab, and played along with the CD looking at the tab. I found it to be a quantum leap, though, to play along with the Smokey Valley Boys, which will be a long-term project, probably not to be achieved dur-

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String Band Favorites**

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ing this lifetime. I suspect that playing with the source might turn out to be a long-term project for aspiring pickers as well (although not all source musicians play at Benton Flippen's warp speed). Meanwhile, *Clawhammer String Band Favorites* will prove a comprehensive and user-friendly resource on many levels. Steve Parker deserves our gratitude for devoting so much time and effort to this endeavor, and I recommend it for banjo players wanting to widen their knowledge of tunes and improve their technique.

Final note: The first few copies of the book sent out had some of the CD tracks listed out of order. Corrections were sent out to everyone Steve could trace, and he has posted a corrected list on his website, in case you got an early edition of the book.

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