

PREFACE

Years ago when I first attempted to play the tenor-banjo, I was a well-schooled violinist and I quickly discovered that although my fingers were thoroughly trained, violin methods of fingering did not apply.

I then turned to the method of fingering for the cello, which has larger stretches and is tuned exactly an octave lower than the tenor-banjo. I found that the general principles worked better but the method used was not ideal yet. Through years of study and practical application both in my own work and in my teaching, I developed the ideas represented in this series of studies, which are for the first time made available in printed form, through the energy and initiative of W^m J. Smith. He is showing faith enough to give me "carte-blanche" in presenting the material, the use of which has been so successfully exemplified in the teaching at my own school for the past eight years.

The need for such a series of studies has been evident to my tenor-banjo teachers, Manuel Smith, Otto Genovese, Edwin Schwinn, and Dr. F. Miller, etc., and myself for a long time. We have combed and culled the market for practical material and have even been reduced to writing out exercises by hand and having the pupils copy them. Many of the original exercises and adaptations from works for piano, violin and other instruments are available here for the first time.

The production of these studies is very timely. The tenor-banjoist gets no credit nowadays for merely "playing chords". That is taken as a matter-of-course. The outstanding players do more than play "chords". Single-string, "fill-ins" - "breaks" - "embellishments", "runs" - "hot variations", etc., are hailed as a sign of superiority. The time when a banjoist could "get by" with playing chords by symbols, is passing.

It therefore "behooves" us all to develop what the old-timers used to call "Digital Dexterity". To properly develop the fingers, it is necessary to go through these studies (or similar ones.) While valuable for themselves alone, since these studies will teach note-reading, rhythm, etc. Consider the following: When we change from one three- or four-finger chord, to another; we demand of the fingers to do three or four different things at the same time. How can we really expect efficiency until we train each finger to do one thing at a time? Training the fingers through the medium of the exercises herewith presented will be a great help in the playing of chords speedily and accurately.

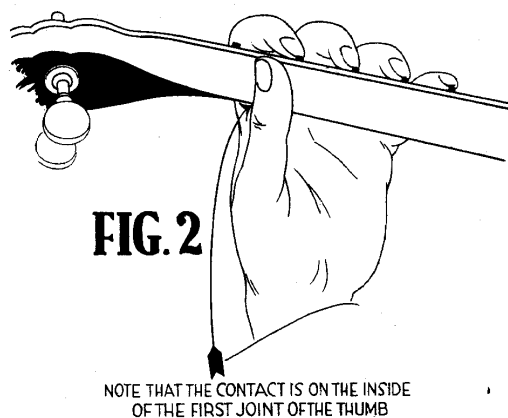
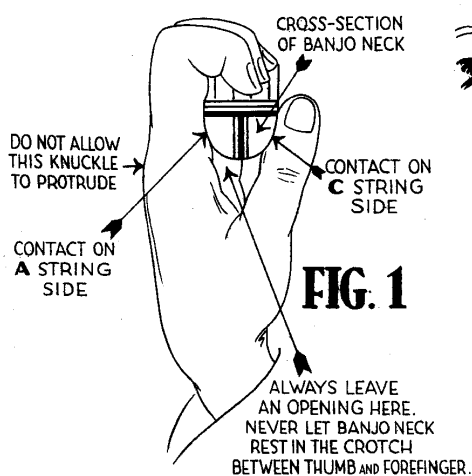
The studies in this volume are limited to Left Hand Technic - and in this book ("Daily Left Hand Studies, Vol.1, for Tenor-Banjo, Op. 312") time division problems are eliminated by using exercises with even time divisions only, that is, all $\frac{1}{8}$ th notes or all 16th notes, etc.

The second volume will contain exercises with uneven time-divisions, mostly in duet form. Picking problems (right hand technic) will also be handled in another volume though exercises that follow may be used to good advantage as illustrated.

The later issues in the series will show how to take any chord formation and "fill in", using original ideas of the performer.

DAVID BEREND.
New York, 1930

SHOWING CORRECT LEFT-HAND POSITION



Two of the main differences met with in playing the tenor-banjo from the playing of the bowed string instruments, (violin, viola and cello) is first the frets and second the absence of the need for the vibrato. Consider Figure I.

This shows the normal and best position of the left hand for tenor-banjo.

The hand should touch the neck at two points.
 ① The base of the fore-finger, below the last wrinkle (nearest the palm). (Note: for chord playing this may vary), and ② at the inside of the first joint of the thumb. (Note: usually a soft callous should form at this point).

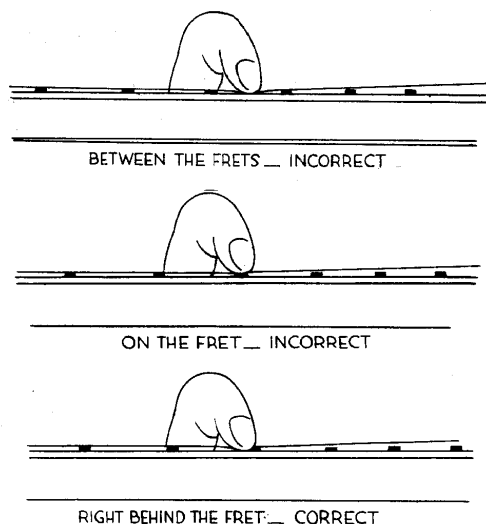


FIG. 3

Underneath the neck there should at all times be an open space. The reason for this is very easily seen. Place the fingers as in Fig. II. - the four fingers in the normal position on the C string

so that they hold down the following notes simultaneously.



Note that the pressure is on the side of the thumb, if the pressure were on the ball of the thumb it would tend to turn the fingers away from the finger board.

"Lock" the first joint of the thumb. When the thumb is bent the support is uncertain and tends to stiffen the other fingers. Now, holding the hand as in Figure II move the thumb away. You will immediately feel that the fingers have nothing to press against and movement can only be secured by the contraction of the last joints of the fingers. The long and strong muscles of the forearm cannot be properly brought into play. So be sure to always leave an opening below the neck and have the pressure come at the 1st joint of the thumb.

The support on the A string side of the neck is of paramount importance. It is possible because that side of the hand does not have to be removed, as in violin or cello playing to permit the vibrato, that "quivering" of the tone produced which makes those instruments sound so close to the human voice. We can therefore develop speed, accuracy and technic in a small fraction of the time required on "bowed" instruments. Keep this contact at all times. The "point of contact" at the A string side is "below" the fret played by the first finger. Do not "tie up the first finger in a knot". This would tend to slow up the action and cause it to become "stiff." This "point of contact" will vary with different hands. For longer fingers it would be closer to the "nut" - and vice-versa.

As the fingers travel across the neck going to the higher strings, the position should be approximately the same. Do not attempt to place or "work" the fingers at right angles to the strings. They should normally act at a diagonal to both the strings and frets.

One more important consideration. The ends of the fingers should fall exactly behind the frets. See Fig. III.- See Page 27.

Even though the fret defines the tone and it is not necessary to place the fingers exactly and accurately on the spot as in violin or cello playing; placing the fingers as in the 1st picture, causes "muddy" tones and "buzzing" and necessitates the use of more pressure. Also, do not err in the opposite direction and place the fingers directly on the fret, (see 2nd picture). This would make the tone very dull as the vibrations would be stopped right at the start. Placing the fingers as in the lowest picture involves the use of the least amount of pressure and gives the clearest tone. Using less pressure, of course, makes it possible to play faster and more accurately.

The string vibrates directly from the fret and it should be bent slightly behind the fret, just as it is at the "nut", to produce a clear tone.

Do not use too much pressure. Enough pressure should be used to cause the ends of the fingers to barely "whiten" under the fingernails.

The "positions" idea as used for violin does not apply to the tenor-banjo. Our unit of musical conception (on the banjo) is the "perfect fifth" - (Seven half tones), because that is the distance between the open strings, (on the piano it is the octave). On the violin we need only three fingers on each string in the normal or "first" position to play enough tones to reach the next open string, the fourth finger is a "spare" and is used to play the same note as the open string above. On the tenor-banjo the four fingers are needed to play the same number of tones as three fingers on the violin and we are normally two frets (and one finger) "short".

When the fourth finger is correctly used on the violin it helps to obviate the necessity of changing strings. Therefore we find it necessary to change strings more often on the tenor-banjo.

It is a question as to whether it is easier to change strings with a plectrum (pick) or a violin bow. It would depend on the particular passage. However, I think it is first necessary to develop the ability to play as large a distance on the same string as a violinist does. To do this we must be able to use two more frets than can be reached with the hand in the normal position, that is, F# and G, on the C string; C# and D, on the G string, and G# and A, on the D string. We would then be able to play passages smoothly without too much changing of strings.

The "position" idea as applied to violin is almost impossible on the tenor-banjo. Positions first of all, are very necessary on the violin to develop (and retain) intonation (playing in tune). This we don't need on the banjo because of the frets. Another reason for the use of the positions on the violin is for facility in "reading" and fingering. For instance, in the odd positions on the violin: (the first, third and fifth), the odd fingers, (first and third) would play notes on the lines; and the even fingers, would play notes on the spaces of the staff. That is why violinists prefer these positions and find it easier to play them. It is readily seen that this is not true on the tenor-banjo and therefore positions do not help. Next, the positions are used to enable the violinist to stay in one spot and play a complete, connected scale or passage across the strings. A violinist can place his hand in the "third position" and by using the four fingers on each string, play a complete scale across the strings.

This is not possible on the tenor banjo since the fingers cannot stretch over enough distance (except on the highest frets) to play that part of the scale needed, (a perfect fifth - $3\frac{1}{2}$ tones) on one string. We can accomplish this by a sort of "double shift" of two frets.

To develop the ability to cover the distance on any one string, that would take us up to the next string, in a scale movement (diatonic or chromatic), we have to be able to cover two more frets than the normal reach of the fingers. The next note will be on the string above two frets lower.

We must therefore learn to "slide", "skip", or "jump" or "shift" two frets, up or down, quickly and accurately. Shifting, i.e. changing position, is not difficult and I find that students take to it readily with proper study and method.

When we wish to reach a note (or fret) on any string that is beyond the compass of the fingers in the normal position it is necessary to slide the whole hand. There are a number of important points to consider.

First - Do not change the relative position of the thumb and fingers. Slide the hand as one piece, bodily, even if the movement is only for one fret. Do not change the "shape" and "form" of the hand and fingers.

Always, if possible, slide one or more of the fingers. Don't slide with all the fingers off the string.

Always think of four fingers as "covering" four frets. Don't attempt to "stretch" (at first) always slide the hand. Think of the neck as a keyboard. The pianist or organist at his keyboard does not attempt stretching (unless he has to "hold down" one or more notes) he moves his hand along the keyboard.

On all the exercises which follow the movement of the hand in sliding is shown by diagonal lines: / equals "up," (toward the bridge); \ means "down" (toward the string saddle or nut).

The following are first steps for developing the ability to slide. This can be done very early in a banjoist's course of study, because the effort of playing in tune as on the violin or cello, is unnecessary because of the frets.

ALL THE EXERCISES IN THIS VOLUME ARE ABOUT THE EQUIVALENT OF "1st POSITION" ON THE VIOLIN (except in the few spots where the notes are about F on the "A" string).