

Holding the Banjo

The Banjo is played in a sitting position with the lower part of the rim placed on the right thigh and the upper part of the lower edge resting lightly against the body of the player; and held in place by the right forearm resting on the upper edge, a short distance from the tailpiece. The wrist is raised and the hand held over the strings about two inches in front of the bridge.

Position of the Left Hand

On the position of the left hand depends the ease and agility of the fingering. To attain this, place the banjo in the position described for holding it. Rest the ball of the thumb against the middle of the neck; curve the wrist outward, with the fingers extended above the finger - board, ready to press the strings firmly, close to the frets. The left thumb as the movable pivot of the left hand fingering, is always kept on the neck of the instrument; regardless of the movement of the hand or the position of the fingers on the finger-board.

The Pick or Plectrum

The strings of the Tenor Banjo are set in vibration by striking them with a pick or plectrum; the same as used in playing the Mandolin. It is held between the thumb and first finger of the right hand; the flat surface placed lengthwise against the finger, with the thumb gently pressing it and extending horizontally, a little beyond the finger and the pick. The thumb must be flexible, and so placed on the pick, that it may be able to exert full control over the pressure; for on the pressure of the thumb, will depend the force and tonal quality of the instrument. In striking the strings, the pick touches them with the point and never with the side or edge. Whether or not the little finger should rest on the head of the instrument, has been a mooted question; but it is now generally agreed that if it touches it lightly, and moves with the motion of the hand, and *does not* remain stationary, it is allowable; especially when playing on the first and second strings. The other fingers of the right hand are slightly curved and loosely held under the palm.

Plectrum Strokes

There are only two plectrum strokes - down and up; but these two strokes are capable of many variations in their order of following each other. In playing single down strokes, the hand is held at an angle so that the plectrum after striking may fall against the next string. With single up strokes, the hand is held at the same angle as the preceding, but after striking, the plectrum *does not* touch or rest against the next string, as with the down stroke. The chief exception to this is when playing inverted arpeggios; then, the hand is turned so that the plectrum can slide from one string to another without being raised. When tremoloing single notes the plectrum touches only the strings on which they occur. The explanation of the tremolo will be found on another page.