

## HOW TO HOLD THE BANJO AND PICK WHILE PLAYING

Place the banjo on the fatty part of your right leg after you have the right foot braced, as explained in the previous paragraphs.

The top of the instrument, or the peg head of the banjo, should be placed in a line with the top of the shoulder. Tilt the instrument slightly back so you can get a full view of the entire fingerboard.

The correct position of the left hand is a natural one and should feel comfortable to you no matter what combination of chords or what position you are playing.

Always place the thumb underneath the neck and parallel to the frets. This will, or rather should, throw the fingers so that the tips point slightly downward. The best way to judge the correct position of your fingers is to have them parallel with the direction of your eyesight as it watches the left hand.

Never let the left elbow get more than four or five inches from the body when playing anything of a technical nature, i.e., single-note passages of varying speeds, as this throws the fingers out of alignment. When playing chords, however, don't keep this admonition in mind as it is often necessary, due to the barré (two, three, or four notes stopped with the same finger on the same fret), to bring the elbow out from the body in order to get more power and leverage to the hand.

Lay the banjo down for a while and let us thoroughly study the pick. This little instrument of torture is responsible in a great degree for your success.

In a previous paragraph I told you what the pick should be made of and how to take care of it.

- (A) Notice if your pick is bowed in the middle. If it should be bent slightly, place your thumb on the concave or bowed side.
- (B) Imagine a line drawn across the middle of your pick and place your thumb across the pick and parallel to the line you have pictured.
- (C) When you have held the pick with the thumb and first finger of the right hand, and placed your right thumb as explained in paragraph (B), drop the first finger of your right hand to a point as low as the position of your thumb and grip the pick.
- (D) Your first finger and thumb if properly placed will form a perfect right angle.
- (E) Do not press the side of your finger to the pick. Use the flat underside always.
- (F) By following the above rules you will find that the knuckle of the thumb bends in while the first finger is kept on a straight line.

### *DON'T CHEAT—ALWAYS HOLD YOUR BANJO AND PICK ACCORDING TO THE ABOVE INSTRUCTIONS*

By this time you are saying, "When do we start playing?" Now, don't be impatient and want to trade the banjo for an umbrella. It's not as easy as some of the "five lesson" fake schools picture it. If it were possible to master the banjo without any work or study, there would be more players than people to perform to. However, I think you are serious and want to play well. That being the case, here goes.

Just a minute—I think it will sound much better if you tune up. If you have a piano in your home you can make short work of this by striking the note (C) below middle (C). You will find this note to be the seventeenth white key from the left side of your piano. After you have tuned your 4th string to this tone, which, by the way, is the heavy wrapped string nearest to you, select one of the following methods to tune your other strings:

Carefully note the following questions, and I will put your banjo in excellent playing condition.

- (A) Do your strings go to the right pegs, as shown in the diagram.? THEY SHOULD, AND THE PEGS SHOULD BE WELL TIGHTENED TO AVOID ANY SLIPPING.
- (B) *Are you sure you have the correct gauge strings on the instrument and in their proper place?* IF NOT, IN YOUR LETTER TO ME, MENTION THE FACT AND I WILL SEND YOU A PROFESSIONAL SET OF TESTED STRINGS WITH DIRECTIONS WHERE TO PLACE THEM.
- (C) *How high are your strings from the lower end of the fingerboard?* THEY SHOULD BE ONE-EIGHTH OF AN INCH HIGH FOR BEGINNERS AND THREE-SIXTEENTHS OF AN INCH HIGH FOR PROFESSIONALS, THE DIFFERENCE IN HEIGHT BEING INFLUENCED BY THE MATURITY AND STRENGTH OF THE FINGERS.
- (D) *How tight do you keep the "skin" or head of your banjo?* IT SHOULD ALWAYS BE KEPT VERY TAUT. A FLABBY HEAD PRODUCES A SOGGY TONE AND DOES NOT DO JUSTICE TO YOUR BANJO REGARDLESS OF THE MAKE. PULL YOUR HEAD TIGHT UNTIL THERE IS JUST A VERY SLIGHT "GIVE" WHEN YOUR THUMB IS PRESSED ON IT.
- (E) *Is your bridge the correct height?* IF YOUR STRINGS DO NOT MEASURE UP TO THE SPECIFICATIONS OF PARAGRAPH (C) YOUR BRIDGE NEEDS REPLACING. SEND ME THE EXACT HEIGHT OF YOUR BRIDGE, TOGETHER WITH THE EXACT HEIGHT OF THE STRINGS AT THE FINGERBOARD.\* AND I CAN REPLACE THE ONE YOU HAVE WITH ONE OF THE CORRECT MEASUREMENTS.

## THE PLECTRUM OR "PICK", AS I SHALL CALL IT

The pick, in my estimation, is the main factor in the present style of playing. The material, shape, etc., are very important when making this statement.

I believe that there is but one practical material for picks, and that is genuine tortoise shell.

If you cannot buy the correct size picks of this material, a good grade celluloid pick will do. If you are handy with tools, search for a piece of tortoise shell to work down to size. Bend it between the thumb and fingers to test its thickness and pliability.

I find that a thin piece of shell with just a slight "give" answers the purpose better than a heavy piece with no resiliency.

After finding the right thickness of shell I pattern it down to a size slightly larger than the diagram shown below.



I then work it down to a very smooth playing edge, as the part that strikes the strings must be very smooth. This is absolutely necessary, as any roughness will cause the stroke to be retarded.

I always roughen the top of the pick with a knife blade. This enables me to keep a firm grip on the pick regardless of the strain.

It is useless to try and play with a pick that has chipped or rough edges.

\* At the 18<sup>th</sup> Fret

# The Correct Position for the Right Hand

The following pictures will give you a graphic idea of my instructions under the heading of "HOW TO HOLD THE BANJO PICK WHILE PLAYING."

Let us study these illustrations and determine what effect each method would have in your search for correct technique.

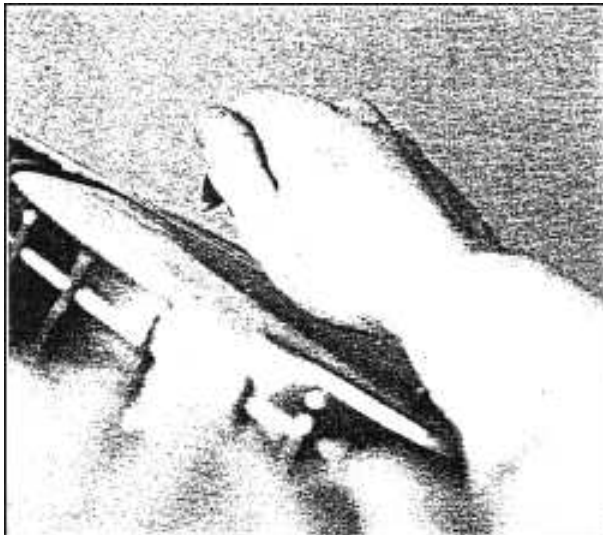
## (1) INCORRECT POSITION.

Notice that the hand is cramped and that the muscles in the back of the hand are distended. At no time in the ordinary course of playing are the muscles and chords of the right hand (correctly developed), under a strain.

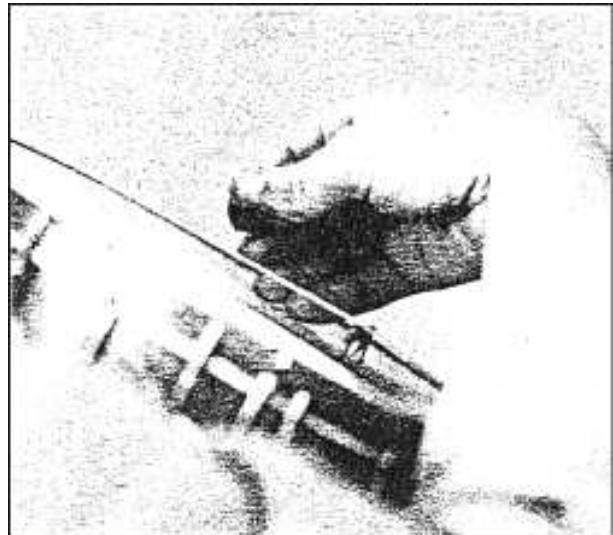
Notice that in illustration No. 1 the plane of the hand is in a straight line with the rest of the forearm. A moment's examination of this fact will make it apparent that the only pivot point available under this condition would be the elbow. Another moment of reflection will convince us that it is impossible to get sufficient speed from the elbow to answer the needs of the technique to be studied.

EVERY FAULT THAT CAN BE ASCRIBED TO AN IMPERFECT TECHNIQUE, CAN BE TRACED BACK AND BLAMED TO AN IMPERFECT POSITION OF THE RIGHT FOREARM, WRIST, AND HAND. DISREGARD ALL FORMS OF THIS INCORRECT STYLE AS IT IS INJURIOUS TO YOUR FUTURE SUCCESS.

(1) INCORRECT POSITION



(2) CORRECT POSITION



## (2) THE CORRECT POSITION.

Notice the high arch of the wrist. In using this correct position of the hand and wrist you transfer the motion of the stroke from the stiff forearm to the pivot bones of the wrist.

Note that the flat side of the pick strikes the strings. If you are holding the pick correctly as shown in the illustration it will be impossible to strike the string with the edge of the pick.

Many players complain that the edge of their pick becomes rough and ragged. This is caused by the steel string constantly coming in contact with the sharp edge of the pick. The minute the edge of your pick loses its smooth surface and polish, take a small file and retrue the edge. If the edge is worn and rough the string will catch in the pick and retard your stroke.

Notice that the third and fourth fingers rest on the head. *THIS IS CORRECT AND PROPER.* By resting the finger on the head you acquire an accurate guide for the height of your pick from the strings.

In playing a fast passage very little pick is used and therefore the third and fourth fingers will be stiffened in order to keep the pick point from making too deep a "bite".

STUDY THIS METHOD OF CONTROLLING THE PICK. USE IT WITH EVERY EXERCISE PLAYED. THIS IS ONE HABIT THAT CAN "STICK" WITH YOU AND NOT HARM YOU.