

AMERICAN DANCING - SCRIPPS STYLE

DESIGNERS COLLABORATIVE



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FOLKWAYS FA 2314

## AMERICAN BANJO— SCRUGGS STYLE

JOE STEWART	Shortenin' Bread Cacklin' Hen
SNUFFY JENKINS	John Henry Big-Eared Mule Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star
OREN JENKINS	Spanish Fandango Cripple Creek Shout Lulu Down the Road Old Hen She Cackled
JUNIE SCRUGGS	Sally Anne Sally Goodin
PETE ROBERTS	Irish Washerwoman
DON BRYANT	Turkey in the Straw Jenny Lynn
SMILEY HOBBS	Rosewood Casket Pig In a Pen Cotton Eye Joe Train 45
J. C. SUTPHIN	Don't Let Your Deal Go Down I Don't Love Nobody
EUGENE COX	Wildwood Flower
VERONICA STONEMAN COX	Lonesome Road Blues
DICK RITTLER	Cindy
KENNY MILLER	Ruben's Train Come Back Little Pal
BOB BAKER	Ground Hog
Also: LARRY RICHARDSON, MIKE SEEGER, ERIC WEISSBERG	

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# AMERICAN BANJO

## TUNES & SONGS IN SCRUGGS STYLE

Introduction by Ralph Rinzler

During the fifteen year period from 1930 to 1945 the five-string banjo was used rarely in commercial country music. In 1945, however, a well known mandolin picker and lead singer in Kentucky, Bill Monroe organized a different type of band from those already in existence. His new-found banjo picker, Earl Scruggs had developed a style of three-finger picking which enabled the banjo to play the lead or melody. Three-finger picking was used in the twenties by such well-known recording artists as the Carolina Tar Heels and Charlie Poole, but at that time it was used for backing hardly ever for lead. Scruggs worked with Monroe for a short time before he and Lester Flatt, then Monroe's guitar picker, organized a band of their own. Before long this type of music was becoming popular in the South. The banjo, along with many of the "old-time" songs, had been revived and numerous "bluegrass" bands, patterned on those of Scruggs and Monroe, were soon doing performances and making recordings for well-known companies. The term "bluegrass" refers to that section of Kentucky where Bill Monroe originally lived and where the music was most popular at the outset. It was applied to this music by disc-jockeys and is descriptive of a band usually consisting of a guitar and bass, used for backing, and one or two fiddles, a banjo and a mandolin used for lead or solo playing. The songs themselves, if not actually folk or "old-time" songs, generally are closer to that tradition than to the modern tradition of popular Tin Pan Alley or hill-billy songs.

Regardless of the term one might choose to designate a particular style of five-string banjo picking, only the most general idea of a technique can be conveyed by any term. The most significant fact about any style is the person who is using it, for, as is evi-

dent in this recording, any number of people may use a style tagged as "three-finger picking" or "Scruggs-style" and each one of these pickers creates a distinctive style within a style. About the only means whereby one can group together a number of seemingly heterogeneous styles under one term is by determining how many fingers the picker is using and just what he is doing with them.

One of the most popular old-time banjo styles is called beating, frailing or thumbing the banjo. The basic strum consists of a combination of both picking individual strings and strumming whole chords. Another well-known method, consisting of picking without any strumming, makes use of the thumb and one other finger (usually the index finger). This generally is called "double thumbing" or "two-finger picking", the first term referring to the thumb's fairly regular alternation between one of the first four strings and the fifth or drone string. There are also various "three-finger" styles which were used by "old-timers", but, with the exception of three pickers in this recording, the styles represented here are modernized versions of three finger picking, based on the style as it was developed and popularized by Earl Scruggs.

The only stylistic element which the fifteen banjo pickers in this recording have in common is that they all use three fingers, (the thumb, middle and index fingers) to pick the strings. J. C. Sutphin's style is an excellent example of the old-time, pre-Scruggs type of three finger picking. Sutphin learned the two pieces which he plays on this record from the aforementioned singer and instrumentalist, Charlie Pool (v. Folkways Anthology of American Folk Music, Volume I, number 20) who made many fine recordings for Columbia during the '20's. Neither his style of playing lead ("I don't love nobody") nor his style of playing backing ("Don't let your deal go down") is as smooth and as incisive as that of the pickers who have benefitted from the Earl Scruggs development of three-finger picking.





J.C. SUTPHIN

Though there is a noticeable difference between their styles, both Junie Scruggs (Earl's older brother) and Snuffy Jenkins (as well as Earl himself) patterned their playing after that of Smith Hamett, a locally famous picker who played in music contests and festivals around the Carolinas during the '30's. It is interesting to note that the outstanding elements of the two styles are the two elements which Earl has combined in his unique style. These two significant elements in three-finger style are: (1) a strong rhythmic accent and a smooth continuous flow; and (2) a strong accent upon those notes, in the continuum, which belong to the melody. Junie, like his brother, has succeeded in adapting his style to the melody which he is playing so that there is never any question about what the tune is, but in order to do this he often has to interrupt the continuity of his picking, and his is a rhythmically erratic style. Snuffy, on the other hand, has mastered a style which, though it is less halting, sacrifices the particularly strong rhythmic and melodic accent, thus rearranging the melody, in some cases in order to maintain the regular flow of notes which makes his a smoother sounding style than that of Junie Scruggs. Earl Scruggs has succeeded in retaining the strong rhythmic and melodic accent without sacrificing the smooth and driving flow of notes. Although he himself is not represented on this record directly, the styles of the remaining twelve pickers (omitting Sutphin, Junie Scruggs and Snuffy Jenkins) are based either directly or indirectly on his style and are to varying degrees illustrative of the successful combination of these two elements in the three-finger style of banjo picking.

#### The Performers

Joe Stewart was born in Knoxville, Tennessee in 1927. He has been playing music since the age of seven, and plays the banjo, fiddle and guitar equally well. He has picked the banjo with Bill Monroe and with other "bluegrass" bands. This recording was made at New River Ranch, Rising Sun, Maryland. "Shortenin' Bread", "Cacklin' Hen".

Snuffy Jenkins, raised in Southern, North Carolina, is now living in Columbia, South Carolina where with his band, "Snuffy Jenkins and the Hired Hands", he is active in T.V. and radio shows as well as in personal appearance dates. He learned to pick from Rex Brooks

and Smith Hamett, two men "from around home", about 1930. Since 1935 he has been working for radio station WIS in Columbia. He is accompanied on the guitar by a friend. "John Henry", "Lonesome Road Blues", "Big-eared Mule", "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star".

Oren Jenkins, born in Harris, North Carolina in 1932 got his first banjo lessons from his uncle, Snuffy, but soon developed a style quite different from that of his uncle. He has made several commercial recordings with Jim and Jesse McReynolds and picks the guitar as well as he does the banjo, although it is the banjo that he plays on his recordings. Verne Jenkins, another uncle, accompanies Oren on the fiddle in four of these recordings. "Spanish Fandango", "Cripple Creek", "Shout Lulu", "Down the Road", "Old Hen, She Cackled".

Junie Scruggs, like Snuffy Jenkins, was influenced by Hamett and Brooks. He tells us that these two men used to "pick the two Sallies" ("Sally Anne" and "Sally Goodin") about the way he performs them here. Both his father and his sister picked the banjo, frailing style; Junie being older than Earl, learned to pick before his brother did, and played for fiddle contests during the '30's. He was kind enough to record these two pieces despite the fact that rarely during the past twenty years has he picked the banjo. Mike Seeger plays the guitar accompaniment. "Sally Anne", "Sally Goodin".

Larry Richardson was born in Galax, Virginia in 1925. His father used to frail the banjo, but Larry started by using a flat pick. He has been picking three-fin-



LARRY RICHARDSON



ger style for nine years, and has played and recorded with Bill Monroe and other bands as well as his own. Many songs which he has written have been recorded by other groups. In addition to the five string, Larry picks the guitar and the mandolin. Mike Seeger plays the guitar accompaniment.

Pete Roberts, eighteen years old, was born and raised in Arlington, Virginia. After picking the banjo for two and a half years, he won the Warrenton Banjo Contest in September, 1956. He plays the fiddle, guitar mandolin and bass and is a collector of old-time hill-billy records and a "disc-jockey". Mike Seeger accompanies him on the guitar. "Irish Washerwoman".

Don Bryant is in his early twenties and has already made a name for himself by picking banjo with "The Foggy Mountain Boys" as a substitute during the winter of 1955-56 when Earl Scruggs was recovering from an automobile accident. He has worked with other well known "bluegrass" bands and won the Warrenton Banjo Contest in 1955. He is accompanied on the guitar by Pete Roberts. "Turkey in the Straw", "Jenny Lynn".

Smiley Hobbs, born in Johnson Country, North Carolina, about 30 years ago, now lives in Manassasi, Virginia. He plays the fiddle, mandolin, guitar and banjo equally well and has worked with many "bluegrass" bands. He has been picking the banjo for only two years. Tom Morgan accompanies him on the guitar and does the vocal on "Rosewood Casket". Pete Roberts is on the mandolin and Mike Seeger the bass. "Pig in a Pen", (Vocal by Smiley), "Rosewood Casket", (Vocal by Tom Morgan), "Cotton-eye Joe", (Vocal by Smiley), "Train 45".

J. C. Sutphin was born about seventy years ago in Pulaski, Virginia. He plays a standard five-string banjo picking with the left hand and fretting with the right without retuning the instrument. He also plays a fine-sounding old-time fiddle. Hazel Dickens, Mike Seeger and Bob Shanklin accompany him on the bass, mandolin and guitar respectively. "Don't Let Your Deal Go Down", "I Don't Love Nobody".

Eugene Cox was born in Winchester, Virginia twenty-four years ago, and now lives in Carmody Hills, Maryland. In 1956 he won the banjo award at the Gambrills Music Festival. He also picks the guitar. Veronica Cox accompanies him on the guitar. "Wildwood Flower".

Veronica Stoneman Cox is about twenty years old. She is one of the thirteen children of Ernest and Hattie Stoneman, well-known recording artists of the twenties (v. Folkways Anthology of American Folk Music, Volume III, numbers 64 and 65.) She took second place in the banjo contest at the Gambrills Music Festival, second only to her husband, Eugene who accompanies her on the guitar in this recording. "Lonesome Road Blues".

Dick Rittler was born in Baltimore about seventeen years ago. He has been picking the banjo for two and a half years and also picks the mandolin and guitar. Bob Baker is the guitarist and lead-singer on this recording; Bob Shanklin accompanies on the mandolin, Hazel Dickens on the bass, and Mike Seeger on the banjo (frailing). "Cindy".

Kenny Miller was born near Rising Sun, Maryland in 1940. He has been picking the banjo for two years and also plays the fiddle. During the past year he

has picked the banjo with both Bill and Charlie Monroe and has also played regularly at New River Ranch, Rising Sun, Maryland. Mike Seeger is playing a second banjo part on "Ruben's Train"; "Please Come Back Little Pal" is a double recording with Kenny doing both banjo parts. Kenny's mother plays the guitar accompaniment on "Ruben's Train". "Ruben's Train", "Please Come Back Little Pal".

Mike Seeger was born in New York City in 1933 and brought up in Chevy Chase, Maryland. He has been picking the banjo for four years but has been playing three-finger style for two and a half years. He also plays the fiddle, mandolin, guitar and harmonica. The lead singer and guitarist in "Ground Hog" is Bob Baker. "Ground Hog".

Eric Weissberg, born in New York City in 1939, has been picking the banjo since the age of ten. For the past two years he has been playing three-finger style. He also plays the mandolin, guitar, fiddle and bass. Ralph Rinzler accompanies him on the guitar and Mike Seeger on the mandolin.



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