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# PICKINGS

ISSUED FOR BANJO, MANDOLIN AND GUITAR ENTHUSIASTS

No. 8

JUNE 1935.

ISSUED BI-MONTHLY.

## THE BANJO QUARTET

Any banjoist with enthusiasm and initiative can produce excellent results and incidentally give himself and others many happy hours by forming a banjo quartet. This may consist of three banjos playing first, second and third parts and a bass-banjo, or a tenor-banjo might be used with advantage instead of the third banjo.

The first banjo should play the lead which can occasionally be reinforced by the third banjo or tenor-banjo; the second banjo should play principally rhythmic off beats, and the bass-banjo should provide the fundamental bass notes. When a melody occurs in a low register it is advisable to let the bass-banjo play this part exclusively while the first banjo plays counter melody or inverted accompanying chords.

The advantage of using a tenor-banjo in preference to a third plectrum banjo is that although both instruments are able to sustain a counter melody, the tenor-banjo is the better instrument for playing rapid elaborated passages in the high register.

If a member of the quartet has sufficient ability and is so inclined, he can make interesting experiments in arranging parts for the combination. On the other hand, there is plenty of published music available for the banjo quartet. All the orchestrated numbers in the Emile Grimshaw & Son catalogue are available for the smaller combination of players. In conclusion, it might be of interest to mention that although the bass-banjo is usually tuned an octave below a tenor-banjo (in fifths) the instrument can be strung and tuned an octave below the banjo tuning if that should be preferable for the person who has to play it.



## COMMONLY USED CHORDS

The player who wishes to improvise an accompaniment to a song or solo, or provide a rhythmic part in the dance band, will find his task much easier if he knows something about the chords he plays.

In addition to knowing the various chords by name he should be able to distinguish them by their sound: practice will, moreover, enable a player to actually hear in his mind the effect of any written chord.

The best way for a beginner to understand chords thoroughly is to hum a simple tune and at the same time provide accompanying chords on his banjo or guitar. It will be found that "Swanee River" (for example) can be played throughout by using only three different sorts of harmony: tonic, sub-dominant and dominant-seventh. The student should note very carefully how these different harmonies vary. For example: a tonic chord always sounds complete in itself and is almost always used to begin or end a composition. The sub-dominant chord also consists of three different notes but does not sound conclusive. The dominant-seventh has four different notes and sounds definitely incomplete in itself. The effect of this chord is as though it were urgently asking to be followed by the tonic chord to bring about a complete and satisfactory ending. This will be readily understood if they are sounded consecutively.

If a player will hum the tune of "Swanee River" and if he has a fair sense of hearing and musical fitness, he should with little difficulty be able to use

these three chords and change the harmony at the proper place as required.

When he thoroughly understands them, he should take the same tune and learn how it can be improved harmoniously by using the dominant-seventh chord of an adjacent key. If for instance he is playing in the key of "C", he might introduce the dominant-seventh chord in the key of "G".

Then later he should take the same melody and think how he can make still further improvements by the use of the augmented-fifth and the diminished seventh chords.

This is an excellent means of learning to discriminate between the musical effects that are produced by various chords. The knowledge thus gained will be found useful in every possible way whether it be reading music, writing, playing, composing it, or merely listening.



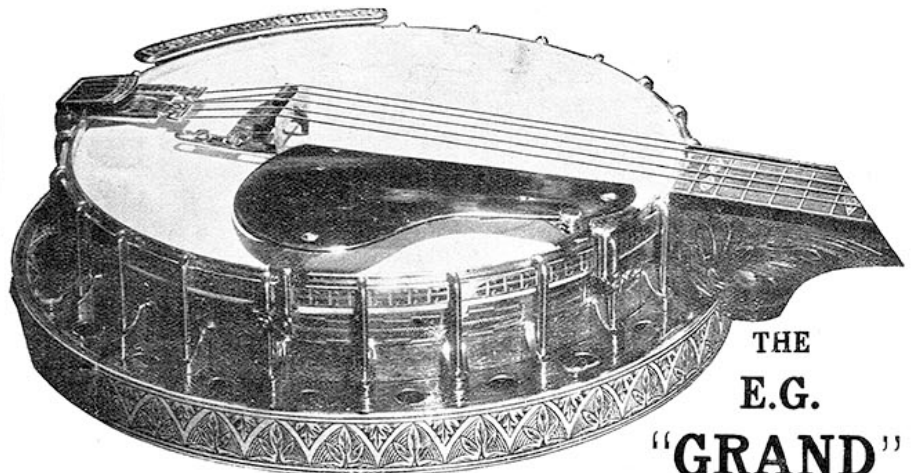
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vellum at hand in case of a sudden breakage. A vellum that is fitted on a banjo may last for years or, even if it is of the very best quality, it may break within a week. As the stretched vellum acts as the soundboard of the instrument it must be kept fairly tight, otherwise both quality and quantity of tone will be lost. Care must however be taken to keep it from sudden heat or chill or from damp.

It is no longer necessary to pay excessive prices for vellums of American manufacture. The "Superex" banjo vellum is the best obtainable and costs only 12/6d. for one of eleven inch diameter ready stretched on a wire. This vellum, which is obtainable only from Emile Grimshaw & Son, will be forwarded immediately to any address post free if cash is sent with order.



### IS YOUR GUITAR TEACHER COMPETENT?

by Terry Usher

Instructor Namelock Bros. Ltd., Manchester

The complexity of modern guitar playing presents a problem with which the teacher of the regular Spanish guitar did not have to cope. If he is to gain and retain the confidence of his pupils, the teacher must now not only be familiar with all styles of playing, but must be able to demonstrate them competently.

It is not always realised what this entails nowadays. The advent of the plectrum guitar, and its well-merited popularity, opened to guitarists new fields, which they were not slow to explore. The up-to-date guitar teacher plays and undertakes to teach the styles of Eddie Lang, Nick Lucas, Carson Robison or Carl Kress—each quite individual both in solo and accompaniment work. He also teaches the type of solo and arrangement popularised by Emile Grimshaw, again a style on its own.

Further, and perhaps most important, he specialises in a course designed to produce competent band guitarists, who, in addition to being able to read and play from harmony symbols in four and six-string chords, can do accompaniments to vocals and take a solo chorus when required. Not so important nowadays, but still required, is the ability to teach regular Spanish (finger style) playing. Whilst this style has been quite rightly subordinated to modern plectrum playing, it has a charm of its own, and will never lose its devotees.

There is a mistaken notion prevalent amongst potential plectrum guitarists that the instrument can be quickly mastered by "short cuts" in instruction methods. It is time this fallacy was exploded. There are no short cuts to competence. A player can learn to play chords from harmony symbols in an amazingly short time, but he will never progress any further without a legitimate technique acquired from thorough instruction in theory and practice. To my mind this involves learning to play solo style in the

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keys of C, G, D, A, E, F and B flat, and the mastery of major and minor scales in all positions. The pupil should know all four and six string chords and all their inversions, also how to play arpeggio passages in close harmony, with "passing notes," to all chords in every key, enabling him to construct stylish accompaniments to vocal numbers.

In conclusion, a teacher's chief aim should be thoroughness, his greatest asset, enthusiasm: given these, his pupils cannot fail to make satisfactory progress.



### THE NUT

Although a dictionary defines the word "nut" as "a kernel enclosed in a hard shell"; "a piece of metal pierced with a thread to fit on a bolt" or "a dressy, self-conceited young fellow", fretted-instrument players will probably define the word as a piece of metal, bone, ebony or other substance slotted to hold the strings in position between the tuning pegs and the first fret.

It is not generally realised that the nut can be an important cause of irregularity in the adjustment of a fretted-instrument. The most common fault is that the slots are left too high, thus causing not only an unnecessary amount of difficulty in pressing (or stopping) the strings but also making the stopped notes at the first fret out of tune.

If, on the other hand, the slots are too low, the open strings will jar against the first fret.

Moreover, the grooves should be carefully shaped for the size of the strings they are intended to receive and they should be sloped downwards at the back so that the strings rest only on the front playing edge. If a string rests on a flat surface the tone will be dull and the string may jar or buzz.

A carelessly slotted nut is the most common fault of the cheap banjo or guitar that is manufactured principally for sale in the small music shops, but it is also to be found in higher priced instruments, especially so when the actual maker is not himself a player.

Players should examine the nuts on their own instruments. There are probably many hundreds who are playing out of tune and exerting their left-hand fingers needlessly just because of a defective banjo, mandolin or guitar nut which could be put right in about ten or fifteen minutes.

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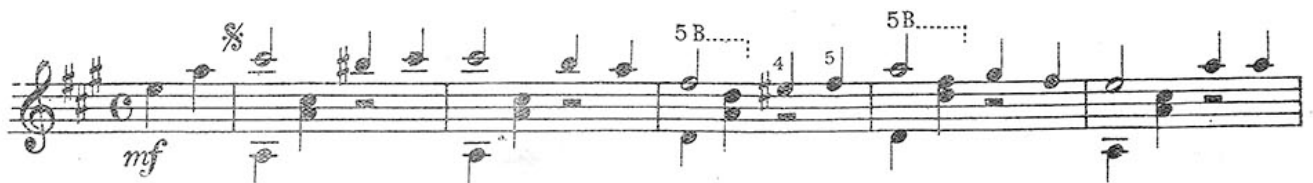


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## THE LOOSE WRIST

To obtain the best results from any fretted-instrument, the player should see that both wrists are held loosely. The right hand of the plectrist should be held with the wrist slightly arched and perfectly free so that as much movement as possible is made from the wrist and not from the elbow.

This important essential of good technique is invariably overlooked by players who are self-taught. Many mandolinists, for example, who have not given the matter any thought will naturally tremolo from the elbow joint while the wrist is held stiff and flat.

Rhythmic strokes on a plectrum played guitar or banjo are impossible unless the wrist is kept perfectly free. I see that the pianist of Roy Fox's Band is also convinced that loose wrists are important in piano playing, for he wrote in a recent issue of the "Melody Maker":

"When you are having your first piano lessons, you are (or should be) taught that a loose and flexible wrist is the primary and most important necessity. I can still remember hours, and even days on end, during which time I did nothing but move my wrists up and down in undulating fashion with the tips of my fingers just barely touching the surface of the keys".

It is equally important that the left wrist of a fretted-instrument player should also be held loosely. The neck of the instrument should never be allowed to drop too low between the thumb and first finger of the left hand and it is wrong to hold the left hand in one fixed position with the thumb always on the side of the neck.

Instead, it is better to keep the left wrist perfectly flexible and allow it to take any position that seems most convenient for greater facility of fingering. Undoubtedly there are many guitarists at present experiencing difficulty in fingering certain chords who would play with greater ease if they would maintain a perfectly loose left wrist and allow it to move freely to whatever position seems most desirable to allow the fingers to stop the strings.

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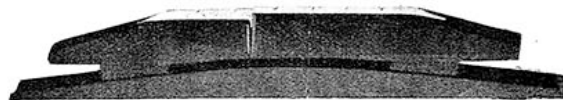
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