

A black and white photograph of a person wearing a plaid shirt, holding a banjo. The person's hands are visible, one near the neck and the other near the body of the instrument. The banjo has a dark fretboard and a light-colored body.

CHOOSING A BANJO

These days there are so many banjo manufacturers, models and designs to choose from, ranging in price from relatively little to extremely expensive. If you have never purchased a banjo before it can be tricky to choose one, so here are some useful tips.

The main difference between 5-string banjos is whether the resonator is present or not. The standard design includes the resonator but this can increase the price significantly. You can find a cheaper but very good quality banjo without the resonator but a much more expensive and lesser quality banjo with a resonator. The two most common types of banjo available are a 4-string and a 5-string, the latter being distinguishable by the 5th string peg on the side of the neck. The playing styles between the two instruments are very different. Generally, to play bluegrass you will need a 5-string, whereas the 4-string banjo is reserved for traditional jazz and Irish folk styles. Furthermore, the 4-string is played with a single plectrum while the 5-string features a three finger picking method using individual finger picks.

BEGINNER MODEL

If you have never played the banjo before then I would strongly recommend not paying too much for your first instrument. At this stage because you might purchase an instrument that is set up so poorly that it is physically hard to play, you may not need to invest in a banjo with the resonator and therefore could choose a cheaper open-back model instead.

INTERMEDIATE MODEL

By this stage you will know that you enjoy playing. By upgrading, you will notice a definite difference in instrument playability and performance, which will make your playing sound instantly more professional. Unless you have digressed into such styles as Frailing or Claw Hammer you should consider a resonator banjo at this point. During rehearsals with bands or jamming with friends you will need the volume produced from a resonator banjo.

PROFESSIONAL MODEL

This category of instrument can be rather expensive and will be further increased by the addition of gold plating and other embellishments. It is important that you insist you try the instrument you are looking at and in some cases you may choose to arrange a special trip to visit a dealer and spend half a day trying a few out. If it sounds good to you, then you know you have the right one.

LEFT-HANDED BANJOS

Unlike the guitar, we unfortunately can't simply string the banjo back to front to play left-handed as the position of the 5th string tuning peg would also have to be reversed. Specific left-handed banjos are available from most manufacturers.

Tablature can be read by either left or right-handed players without a need for compensation. The only confusing aspect is when written instructions refer to the right or left hand presuming that the player is right handed. In order to be accessible to both right and left handed players this book refers to the 'picking' hand or the 'fretting' hand with reference to instructions.

DIATONIC CHORD INVERSIONS

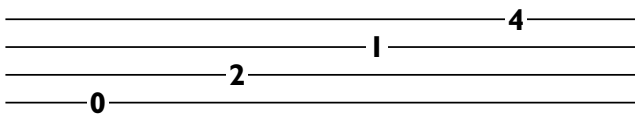
BIG CHORDS

We are fairly limited on the banjo when playing chords as we only have four main strings compared to a guitarist who has six strings, or even a pianist who has ten fingers!

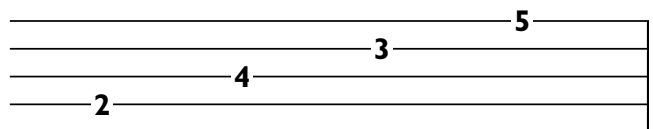
However, by playing a certain chord inversion on the first three strings, but with the 4th string playing a note from the lower inversion (creating a bass note), we are able to achieve just about the grandest chord sound available. For example:



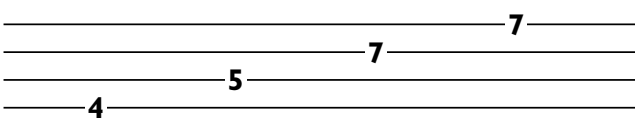
D⁷



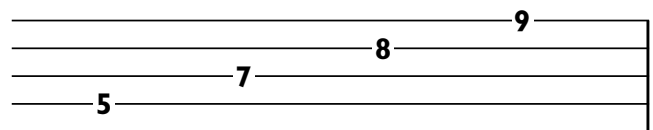
Em⁷



D⁷



G



MINA FEVER

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Words and Music by John Dowling
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This tune incorporates the percussive hit,
the 5th string drone, chords and a melody line.

Intro Song structure: **A / B / A / B / C / B / D**

