

## REVIEW

**Make Up Your Own Banjo Solos, Vol. 2: What to Play When It's Your Turn To "Take It."** Keys of D, C, F and G (Up The Neck). By Pete Wernick, DVD, 2009, Homespun (www.homespun.com)

Review by David Jakubiak

When I first started out, there were only a couple of decent books on learning how to play bluegrass banjo. I still have one of the first ones I bought: "*Bluegrass Banjo*" by Pete Wernick (Oak Pub., 1974). Two years later Pete would join with Tim O'Brien to establish the band Hot Rize. So Pete Wernick is no stranger to performing and teaching the five-string. His comfort level and personality as an instructor are apparent in his new Homespun DVD, "*Make Up Your Own Banjo Solos Vol. 2.*"

In the December 2009 BNL, Pete's "*Make Up Your Own Banjo Solos*" was reviewed. In this latest DVD, Pete summarizes the first video as showing the principles on how to find melodies and work them into breaks. The primary focus was in the Key of G and was spent on the first few frets of the neck. Pete says the purpose of this second video is for students to learn how to play breaks in keys other than G, or up the neck in G.

As a teacher and performer myself, I cannot over emphasize how important it is for a banjo player to learn how to play in various keys. When you start

jamming with a fiddle or mandolin player, or a singer, you soon learn that others have learned various songs in the Key of D or even in E or F. When a fiddle tune in D is introduced, you can either jump in and play along or put your banjo in the case and call it a day. If you are currently stuck playing in the Key of G, then this DVD is right for you. Pete starts his instruction in the Key of D, with demonstrations of songs such as *Roll in My Sweet Babies Arms*, *Down in the Valley to Pray*, *Angeline The Baker* and *Country Blues*. Throughout these selections, Pete teaches a common theme: How to utilize partial chord positions effectively with roll variations to build a melody line. A banjo player can use filler licks sometimes, but the best thing to do is to hunt down the melody and shape your rolls around it. Pete correctly points out that one of the problems with playing in the Key of D is that you have to deal with playing melody lines on the first string. Whereas Scruggs rolls start with the thumb either on the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th string, the first string offers few options for roll variations, unless you start with the middle finger. Pete explains that it's always nicer for banjo players to play a melody line on the 2nd or 3rd string because there are more ways to play melodies as opposed to the 1st string.

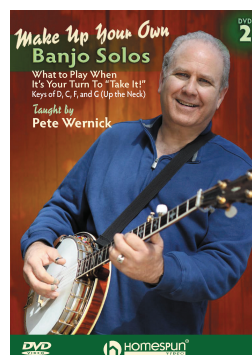
Pete talks about playing filler licks that can be incorporated into a song as back-up. He first introduces how to play a D6

chord and later plays this chord with a variation of a forward backward roll (4, 3 and 2 instead of strings 2, 3 and 1). By using this roll, you can play some filler licks within a song, such as his excerpt of *Soldier's Joy*. He summarizes by saying that while filler riffs are useful to back-up, sometimes you can play filler licks and generate a lead with some if not all of the melody line. In addition, using the roving ring finger allows a banjo student to play useful riffs in the Key of D.

Naturally, playing in the Key of D requires the use of what I refer to as the Position 2 chord form (commonly known as the D position). In *Down in the Valley to Pray*, Pete shows how to construct a melody line while using forward and backward scales with rolls. He often emphasizes using an MIMT roll to accommodate a melody line that starts on the first string. Another valuable pointer Pete provides is changing your left hand fingering within a diagonal D position.

Discussions about playing in D would not be complete without demonstrating the use of a capo. In *Colleen Malone*, Pete indicates that a banjo player has an option to played in of D or capo on the second fret to play in the Key of E. While seasoned players may be aware of this, it is my experience that beginners can be confused with how to initially use the capo. In summarizing the Key of D, Pete explains that performing bluegrass is not an exact science and emphasizes his philosophy "if it sounds good, it must be good." He encourages a student to feel free to explore the variations of playing riffs in a given position

Throughout the DVD, Pete offers useful advice on banjo technique. Performing "blues" on the banjo has always been a favorite topic and genre of mine. Pete demonstrates the use of pentatonic scales in D. He identifies the flatted third and flatted seventh notes in the lower part of the banjo, and offers various riffs with rolls that provide a blues feel. In *Country Blues*, Pete provides a great tip of playing the



### Roll in My Sweet Baby's Arms Filler Solo with longer passing chord sequence, D to G to C

As played at (1:50:10)

Tuning: gDGBD

Sheet music for the "Roll in My Sweet Baby's Arms" filler solo, showing a longer passing chord sequence from D to G to C. The music is written for a five-string banjo in gDGBD tuning. The sequence includes chords G, D, C, Bm, Am, F, Em, Dm, and G, with various roll patterns and fret numbers indicated.

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fifth fret. Next, Pete expands on this roll with up-the-necks hammers-ons that are similar to those done in open G forms.

In *Ain't Gonna Work Tomorrow*, Pete changes to C tuning and provides Scruggs-style signature licks that would be useful in this key. I would have liked to see Pete explain about the back-up chord forms in the C. Yet, those who have never played in C tuning will find this section a good introduction to alternate tunings.

One tune that uses a standard jazz (I–vi–ii–V) chord progression is *Don't Let Your Deal Go Down*, played in the Key of F. You can find this song in an early Flatt & Scruggs' recording. By learning a song in this particular key and chord progression, you will add a tune to your repertoire that has a unique sound.

Finally, Pete extends his Key of C and D techniques to the Key of G, by moving up the neck. Pete talks about a “pallet of colors” in chord structure (for instance, using various 6th, 7ths, 9th, or flatted thirds) to help enhance your filler solos, back-up and melody-based solos. So the Key of G is not neglected in this DVD. In fact, while revisiting *Roll In My Sweet Babies Arms*, Pete applies some excellent passing chord sequences and secondary chord variations that progress from a G (I) to a C (IV) chord.

This DVD's format is similar to many on the market today. An accompanying tab booklet is on the CD and the tab is clearly written. Some instructional videos have accompanying rhythm players, and this might have been useful. A vocalist, for instance, would have been especially useful in enhancing and demonstrating some of the melody line development on Pete's banjo. However, this should in no way deter a student from using these videos for instructional purposes. Another minor issue I had in viewing this video is that some of the editing could have been improved to allow for smoother transitions in areas that required modification.

For those students who are struggling to play in different keys, this is a useful instructional DVD and will be worth your time, at the very least in gaining some useful licks for playing in other keys.

*David Jakubiak has produced seven books on CD for banjo, mandolin and guitar. His latest project, “Fretmentor's Acoustic Holiday—12 Christmas tunes for banjo, mandolin (fiddle) and guitar” is now available. Check out his site at [www.Fretmentor.com](http://www.Fretmentor.com)*

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individual notes of an F chord while others are playing within a D chord. He explains the similarity of the F chord's flatted third and seventh of a D chord. Pete summarizes his blues discussion by saying there are many possibilities to having a bluesy sound without having to do too many variations with your left hand. Just the use of different tunings and configurations of chord positions than most people typically use can offer a different sound than is usually found in bluegrass banjo.

This DVD, however, does not stop with the Key of D. Pete addresses playing the Key of C out of an Open C chord with the song *New River Train*. He uses what can be termed as “double stop technique” while playing a *Foggy Mountain* roll, to move from an open C chord to the bar C on the