

REVIEW

Modern Banjo Ideas & Techniques With Jake Schepps, DVD

Reviewed By David Jakubiak,
www.Fretmentor.com

To become an accomplished musician, a student must devote time towards learning and understanding basic theoretical principles of music. In his instructional DVD entitled “*Modern Banjo Ideas & Techniques*” Jake Schepps does an admirable job in describing various theoretical concepts relative to the five-string banjo. Jake is quite personable and when viewing his DVD, you get the feeling you are at home with a friend who sincerely wants to help you learn to play the banjo. Jake is obviously a skilled banjo player who is knowledgeable about the banjo’s fingerboard.

Often you will buy an instructional product that is comprised of song after song without any explanation of how the measures are constructed based on theoretical concepts. In this DVD, it is refreshing to see the instructor utilize his knowledge of scales to demonstrate how a song is constructed. Goodbye Liza Jane and Shady Grove are two examples of songs, where Jake shows how thirds and sixths of the major scale can be utilized to develop licks in a practical manner. Jake does an excellent job demonstrating how scales can assist the student in building melody lines for these two songs. In addition, Jake expands on scales further by addressing modes. He explains how the Dorian mode can be substituted for the Ionian mode (major scale) and used to play a song like Shady Grove in two different Keys.

Jake is knowledgeable enough to recognize the importance of playing the banjo in different Keys. In one section, he summarizes the chord structure utilized in each Key. This is very valuable to the student who would like to improvise or to perform with others. It would have been useful, however, had some explanation of the Circle of Fifths been included, with a explanation of how beneficial of a tool it is

for playing in other Keys.

For a student struggling with how to play a song in correct time, every student will find Jake’s explanation of how to use a metronome valuable. It is not enough for a music teacher to tell a student to purchase a metronome. Jake recognizes how valuable a metronome can be in developing one’s timing and does a good job explaining how to build right hand technique the correct way.

As an instructor who has prepared similar materials, I am aware that there are always strengths and weaknesses to the way lesson plans are prepared. While this DVD has many positive aspects to it, there are some sections that could be either improved or left out altogether. At times, Jake may assume that his audience may have more basic theoretical knowledge of the instrument than they really do. In future DVDs, I would recommend that the number of topics be narrowed and expanded in more detail to make

theory more basic for the neophyte.

The production of the DVD is slightly above average. The screens are carefully split into two views; one of the right hand and another of either the entire banjo or the left hand. In the copy that I reviewed, tablature was not included. The DVD cover directs that tablature can be viewed by going online where the DVD is featured but when I went to the website, the tab link was not accessible. The menu structure could have been simplified and improved. For example, major and minor chords could have been grouped into one or two categories. Titles could have been shortened to one or two words, so the user can navigate to the correct section based on clear subject headers. For instance, the menu currently displays “the entire version of...” when it should simply display “Goodbye Liza Jane”. I was somewhat concerned that the DVD was not carefully proof read, as a menu item has a typo in main menu using the word “tunning” instead of the word “tuning”. On the other hand, the sound quality was very good.

Putting together good quality, original instructional materials, requires planning



on the instructor's behalf. This is especially true today, where many products share some redundancy in the subject matter that is being presented. In this DVD, Jake has

brought forward some unique and valuable tips and useful techniques that are worthy of consideration by many banjo students. "Modern Banjo Ideas..." is a positive addition to others on the market. While a beginner who has no knowledge of music

theory may have difficulty understanding some concepts presented here, a student with some knowledge of theory will likely find this DVD to be a good compliment to their music instructional library.

Using sixths. From "Modern Banjo Ideas and Techniques" by Jake Schepps

Available from Mel Bay, Learn Roots Music, CD Baby, and www.jakeschepps.com.

David Jakubiak has produced six books on CD for the banjo, mandolin and guitar. He has been playing banjo since 1970. Check out his site at Fretmentor.com.