

# PERFORMING BLUEGRASS WITH OTHERS

## *Part II: Developing a Bluegrass Repertoire*

*David Jakubiak, [www.fretmentor.com](http://www.fretmentor.com)*

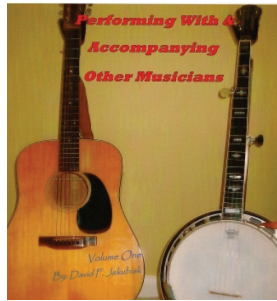
In the May 2009 BNL article entitled “Performing Bluegrass With Others – Part I”, I discussed some of the issues that banjo students face when learning how to play bluegrass with other musicians. Performance anxiety, timing issues, playing in different keys, using a capo correctly, rhythm and back-up technique are some of the areas of concern. In Part II of this article, I will explain what a teacher can do to establish a performance class that would assist a variety of students who want to experience playing music with others.

Approximately five years ago, I prepared a series of instructional books on CD upon which I could teach students how to play bluegrass music together. The books on CD are entitled “Performing With and Accompanying Other Musicians”. Due to the success of the first couple of classes, a second volume was created and a third volume is planned for the future. Each CD takes significant time to produce, since multi-instrumental tabs and sound files are prepared for the songs that are featured. Since I perform, play and teach mandolin and guitar, in addition to the banjo, I have the opportunity to create standard tabs for each instrument. Due to the similar tuning between the fiddle and the mandolin, standard notation is also prepared for the fiddle player.

The performance class is not an open jam, nor is an open jam encouraged for this setting. Instead, the course is structured so that each of the students will work on approximately 12 traditional bluegrass tunes. The materials include songs in various keys, so a banjo student is not going to play everything in the key of G. For instance, they will also learn to play a

song in the key of C or D and they will learn how to capo the instrument and play in different keys to complement a mandolin player, fiddle player or vocalist.

When preparing an instructional CD, it is important that the student has sound files in both slow and standard speeds. While I prepare the sound files for a single instrument, I also will record duets or allow a section for an



instrumental break by the banjo player or other instrumentalist. In this manner, the banjo student (as well as others) can learn the tabs, has a reference file to listen to, and has the opportunity to practice at home to the slow and faster sound files. Midi files, while useful, are not well accepted by the



beginners. The majority of students want to hear exactly what a song sounds like in relationship to the tablature that they are learning. However, if a midi file is the only option that you have, then something is better than not having a sound file at all.

A certain level of advertising is required to attract the necessary students to this class. For example, I recently posted a new release on media internet site, which was then selected by the local newspaper for publication on the front page. Alternatively, flyers are sometimes posted at local music stores who are willing to cooperate. Information is also posted on the web and at the studio. In addition, I have held separate introduction classes on each instrument at local community education programs at the local high schools.

A combination of these advertising methods will help to promote a client base upon which to build a successful class.

Since my classes attract anywhere from 30-35 students, a space large enough to hold the class is vital. I have negotiated for rental space of an entire music studio. This arrangement is ideal,

since it allows for a large group to be split into five smaller groups that will be located in separate rooms. Previously, I arranged to conduct this class at the band or choral room of a local high school. This is another nice alternative, although most of the students agree that the studio offers a more intimate setting.

In Part III of this article, we will take a look inside the bluegrass class, learn a little about the students, and examine how the instruction helps them to play bluegrass music with others.

*David Jakubiak has produced six books on CD for banjo, mandolin and guitar. He has been playing banjo since 1970 and has over 40 years of experience in playing, performing and teaching music. Check out his site at [www.fretmentor.com](http://www.fretmentor.com)*