



Banjo

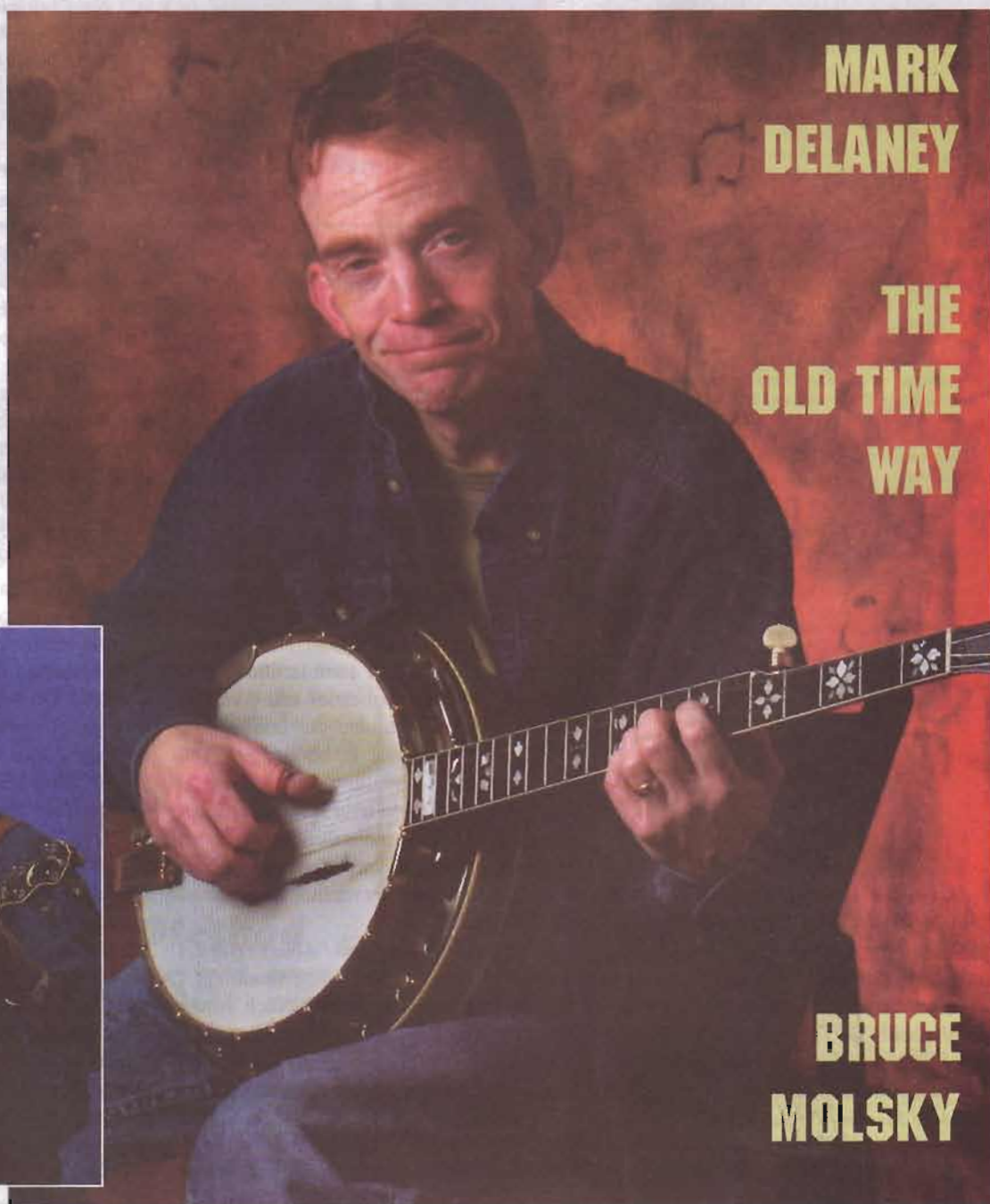
Newsletter

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**MARK
DELANEY**

**THE
OLD TIME
WAY**

**BRUCE
MOLSKY**



Mark Delaney

By Dave Schenkman

Washington, D.C. has always been a hotbed of impressive banjo players. Don Stover, Don Reno, Dick Smith, Porter Church, Don Bryant, Bill Emerson, Eddie Adcock, Ben Eldridge, Keith Arneson, and Mike Munford are some of the names that come to mind when I think of players that have lived and performed, in the area. With the release last year of his first solo CD, *Sidecar*, Mark Delaney has emerged as

Dave Schenkman: Well, Mark, let's start at the beginning. Did you come from a musical family?

Mark Delaney: Yes, my grandfather was a banjo player. He was from eastern Kentucky, and he played the clawhammer style.

BNL: I first met you many years ago, at one of Tom Mindte's picking parties. Back then you stood out from the crowd because you were a kid, and a red headed one at that. How old were you then?



photograph by Michael G. Stewart,
www.michaelgstewart.com

another great D.C. area picker.

"Emerged" is actually a poor choice of words. Bluegrass fans in the area have been privileged to hear Mark's innovative banjo playing in various group settings for many years. However, until he started playing with the New Country Gentlemen, he was generally unknown to fans in other parts of the country.

As those of us who know him will be quick to point out, Mark is also one of the nicest people in the music business. So, when *Banjo Newsletter* asked me to interview him, I immediately agreed to do so. After all, this would be an ideal opportunity to lure him down to my shop...

MD: I started going to those when I first started playing. This would have been in the early 1980s, when I was eleven years old or so.

BNL: As I recall, your father took you to those jams. I don't think he played banjo. Was he a bluegrass fan?

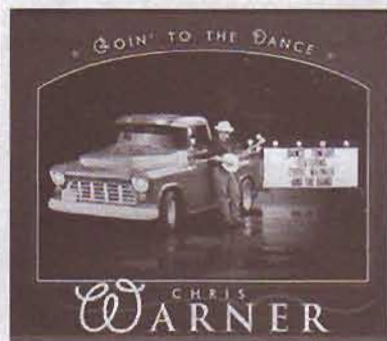
MD: No, not at first. Actually he was a big jazz guy, and he has an incredible ear for music. He wasn't a musician, but he was a record critic for *Downbeat* back in the 1950s, so he really knew music. Once I became interested in banjo, he really got into bluegrass, and within a year he knew more about it than most people.



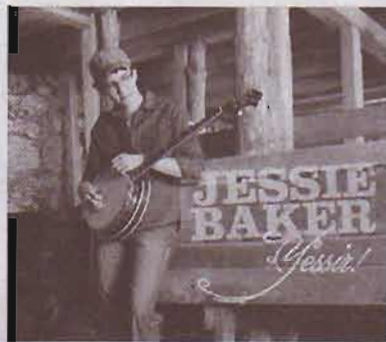
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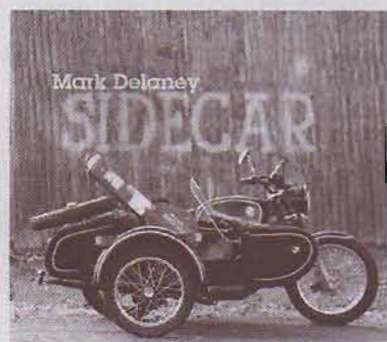
New Releases...



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Yessir!



Mark Delaney
SideCar

BNL: What attracted you to the banjo?

MD: It was two things. One was my grandfather who, as I mentioned, played clawhammer. I was just hypnotized by it. I was three or four years old, and when we visited my grandparents he would pull it out. My brothers would be outside shooting guns and things like that, but I'd just sit on the floor and listen. There was just something about it. When I was four or five I started playing piano. I took classical lessons and learned to read music. But, I was really drawn to the banjo. I was a huge Steve Martin fan. I had his records and I would stay up late when he was on the "Tonight Show" or "Saturday Night Live."

BNL: Did you ever wear an arrow through your head?

MD: No (laugh), but I would do routines and imitate him at school talent shows. The Steve Martin Brothers record came out and the first cut on the B side was *Sally Goodin*. And I said "wow, I want to play like that."

BNL: And how old were you then?

MD: I was probably nine or ten years old; it was before I started playing. I just listened to it over and over, and decided I wanted a banjo.

BNL: So I imagine you started badgering your dad?

MD: My grandfather found me a Hondo at a flea market, and that was it. I was totally into it.

BNL: Did you take lessons?

MD: Yes, there was a music store where my brother was taking electric guitar lessons, and there was a guy named Bob McCord. I'd love to run into him some day, because I haven't seen him since then. I took lessons from him for about a year and a half. He showed me how to wear my picks, how to tune, and he started me reading tab and so forth.

BNL: So you read tab.

MD: I do read it, but that's not really how I learned. It was mostly moving the record needle back and forth, and going places and watching people play. Looking back on it, what's funny is I had totally decided I wanted to play the banjo bluegrass style even before I had any bluegrass records. And then, when I started pursuing it, I found out that so many players were in the area. We'd go out to hear these groups, and at the time I didn't realize how really great these people were. So I really lucked out, being in this area.

BNL: When you started playing, who were your recorded influences?

MD: I wanted to play. My father happened to work with a man named Bill Blackburn who was a really good banjo player, and he loaned me some records. One was a Bill Keith record, one was Alan Munde, and there was a Tony Trischka record, and one of J. D. Crowe and the New South.

BNL: Well, that certainly gave you a good variety of styles.

MD: Yes. I put the albums on one at a time, but when I put on the New South, that first measure of *Old Home Place* just hit me. I thought, "I want to be that guy." Everything about it—the tone just got me. I became obsessed. I studied New South albums and played along with them for years. Then I got into Jimmy Martin through Crowe, and then Bill Emerson and Flatt & Scruggs. Dempsey Young was a huge influence to me. I wanted to play banjo the way he played mandolin.

BNL: So you actually came to Flatt & Scruggs through Crowe; that's a switch.

MD: Yes, and the reason was the tone quality. My dad had gotten me the old "Foggy Mountain Banjo" album and I listened to it, but at the time I liked the tonal quality of the new stuff, so I listened to that. It wasn't until I was 18 or 19 that I heard the original *Randy Lynn Rag* and it suddenly crashed in on me, the whole Flatt & Scruggs thing. It was "boom" and since then every time I listen to them it knocks me out of my chair. I'm a groove guy. I like to feel the tone from the right hand, and every time I hear Earl Scruggs I hear something I hadn't heard before.

BNL: You mentioned Alan Munde and Bill Keith. What did you think of them back then? Their styles were certainly a lot different than Crowe's.

MD: They *were* a lot different, and it was really over my head. I didn't understand it. The music that moved me at the time, in the piano world, was Ray Charles. I didn't follow rock and roll. My brother was into that. The band I did like was AC-DC; they blew me away. I'd hear Crowe and that drive, that Jimmy Martin drive, and it was more about the punch than the melodic stuff, at the time. I was on a quest to get that right hand thing—that timing—and it wasn't until I was nearly twenty that I saw New Grass Revival, and Bela Fleck just floored me. I had never seen anyone play banjo like

that. Then his "Drive" album came along, and that totally changed the way I looked at the banjo. I thought, "wow, there's a whole neck to this thing."

BNL: Who do you like now?

MD: Well, my favorites are still J.D., Earl and Don Stover. I still listen, and practice, to them all the time. I've been a huge fan of Craig Smith since I heard him with Summer Wages. I think he's really got it all. There are so many killer players out there right now. Aaron McDaris, Jens Kruger, Evan Ward, Kristen Scott Benson. Joe Mullins is one of my favorites. The list goes on and on. But I'd have to say Allen Shelton is one of my all-time heroes.

BNL: Is that because he has red hair?

MD: Yea, that and his big smile.

BNL: That's a pretty broad range of players. You mentioned jazz. Do you like any other kinds of music?

MD: Yes, I love old blues, swing, and from the piano world I studied Scott Joplin big time. I obsessed over him like I did over Crowe once I started listening to bluegrass.

BNL: You were pretty young when you got into Joplin.

MD: Yes, I was 8-10 years old, and it lasted into my teenage years. I was really into him. I think some of that carried over to banjo. I love harmonizing and chord voicings and that sort of thing, which is really prominent with Joplin's music.

BNL: One banjo player you didn't mention that was certainly prominent during the time you were learning is Don Reno. What did you think of him?

MD: Yes, he came from a jazz background and I love his playing now. It's funny; it was like when *Randy Lynn Rag* made me realize what a genius Earl was. That same thing happened to me with Reno when I was in my mid-20s. I had Reno and Smiley records, and Reno and Harrell, and there was something about it that just didn't move me. Maybe it was the whole tone thing. I'm a huge tone guy. Anyhow, in my mid-20s I heard this Reno song that I had heard a hundred times before, and all of a sudden it just sank in. I don't even remember what song it was. I just remember, it was his style; what he did with it. And then I got on this big Don Reno kick, and that's when I really started getting into single-string stuff, and trying to get into chords, implementing them the

way Reno did instead of thinking of them as I would with the piano. I remember telling a friend about this really great banjo player that I had heard for years, but just suddenly understood. He replied, "that's what they call maturity." (laugh)

BNL: Well, when you think about it, you do miss a lot of things in music when you first start listening to it. Then, as time goes by you can go back and reflect on it, and you'll hear different things.

MD: Oh certainly, like Bela Fleck—the stuff he did with Spectrum and the Dreadful Snakes was new when I started playing, but I wasn't drawn to it at the time. Now I listen to it and I'm blown away by his creativity, his tone, all of it within a bluegrass context. I think if it had moved me then like it does now, I would be a different player.

BNL: I consider Bela to be a real ambassador for the banjo. Whether he's playing jazz, classical, or whatever, he's showing the banjo to many people who have never really heard one before. You can be sure that some of them will become interested in learning to play the instrument.



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MD: Right. The same goes for John McEuen. He's also been an ambassador, and so was Jerry Garcia. The "Circle" album brought a lot of people to bluegrass.

BNL: How would you describe your style of playing? I assume that when you learned, it was traditional Scruggs style. How did it evolve from there?

MD: Well, when I pick up the banjo in the morning to practice, my primary focus is on tone and timing of the right hand, trying to make it fluid. It's that fine line of getting fluidity of notes without it sounding like a computer program with no accents; in other words, a combination of dynamics and fluidity. That's why I always go back to three players; Scruggs, Crowe, and Bill Emerson for the stuff he did in the late 1960s and 1970s. To my ears Emerson, even more than Scruggs, had perfected the fluidity of the right hand without losing any of the drive. For example, that roll on the Country Gentlemen's "Soundoff" album—*Cowboys and Indians* and *Yesterday*—that roll is just dynamite. That's the style I go after.

BNL: Do you practice a lot?

MD: It comes and goes. I practice every day. Sometimes I only have a half hour, but I try to do at least that. Often I practice for two-three hours.

BNL: What was the first group you were in?

MD: Hobbs and Partners. Partners Two was a well known bluegrass club in the D.C. area back then and we were the opening act for bands from Ralph Stanley and Larry Sparks to the Bluegrass Cardinals and Lost and Found. I got the job on my 16th birthday and played with them until Arnold Hobbs died. Arnold, aside from my dad, was the biggest influence/mentor I ever had. He taught me how to act on stage and how to be a band member. The most important lesson I got from him was understanding that when I perform, I'm on stage because the audience has hired me to be there. I'm on stage for them, not me, not the promoter, but the fans. That is an invaluable lesson that I try and live my professional life by. From there I went to the Patuxent Partners, Badly Bent, Good Deale Bluegrass Band and then Randy Waller and the Country Gentlemen.

BNL: That was your first "big" bluegrass gig, and I know it gave you some well deserved exposure on the national scene.

How did that come about?

MD: I was playing with Norman Wright and the Travelers, and we were in Pennsylvania playing a festival. The Country Gentlemen were there, and I had met Charlie Waller once before, when Buzz Busby died, because we had the funeral reception at my house and he was there. Anyhow, I was jamming with a friend at the festival, and we were playing old jazz and show tunes. Charlie came over and sat down and listened to us, because he loved old jazz tunes. And two months later I got a call from Charlie, wanting to know if I could fill in at a gig. Of course I said yes. So I played some shows with him, and Randy was playing in the group, and that's how I met him. After Charlie died Randy formed the new group and he called me, so I started playing with him.

BNL: How did you approach that? Did you create a different style, or did he want you to play a certain way?

MD: No, he really didn't request anything from me. His approach was the same as Charlie's. And speaking of that, when Charlie called I went over to his house. I was a nervous wreck. The only Country Gentlemen CD I had was the Rebel Records box set. So I called in sick and spent two days learning kick-offs and breaks to Country Gentlemen songs. I got there and after Charlie showed me his cars and guns he got out his guitar and said, "What do you want to play?" I suggested *Cowboys and Indians* and looked at me and said "I didn't call you because I thought you could play *Cowboys and Indians*." "I called because I liked the stuff I heard you doing in Pennsylvania. I don't want you to sound like someone else." So that's how I started, and it was the same when I went with Randy.

BNL: Well, that's a great approach. Of course the Country Gentlemen always pushed the envelope when it came to bluegrass, which is one thing I always loved about the group.

MD: Exactly. There was never a mold, unlike with Jimmy Martin and others that demanded a certain style.

BNL: Charlie was bringing a lot of non-bluegrass music into bluegrass, which was really neat.

MD: Yes, and Randy had the same attitude. We've become really close friends. I'm not playing with him any more, but he's like family. And now,

I really don't want to change my style for anyone. I enjoy playing as much as I ever did, but I'm having more fun with it because I'm comfortable with my style.

BNL: Speaking of style, what is your approach to playing a song?

MD: I'll listen to the song and try to play the song rather than play the instrument. Now some songs, like *Matterhorn*, you just have to play a certain way.

BNL: So, do you play *Matterhorn* like Emerson or like Adcock?

MD: Oh, like Adcock, of course (laughs). And with *Redwood Hill* you've got to kick it off like Emerson, because that's such a huge part of the song. But for back-up, or the second break, I just do whatever I feel.

BNL: I think some people—especially people that listen to a lot of records—lose sight of the fact that the musicians who played those songs didn't always play them the same way. A recording is just one moment in time.

MD: When I teach I always emphasize that I'm there to give technical assistance and other information. I tell them, "this is your baby; do your thing, and don't try to copy anyone."

BNL: So you left the Country Gentlemen. What then? Didn't you play with Wayne Taylor for a while?

MD: Yes, I'm playing with him now, and we just finished a CD.

BNL: What's the name of that group?

MD: Wayne Taylor and Appaloosa. Wayne's a great singer and song writer and it's a lot of fun, and rare, to play in a band where you can do two full sets and all the material is original. Emory Lester, Dave Giegerich, and Kip Martin are in the band and I'm lucky to be part of it.

BNL: But aren't you also playing with a new group now?

MD: Yes, it consists of Darren Beachley, Mike Aldridge, Tom Gray, and Norman Wright. We've been rehearsing and gearing up for 2010. The group will be called "Legends of the Potomac." It will be interesting, because it is an "anything goes" type of group, within a bluegrass context naturally. We plan to cut a CD later this year.

BNL: Let's talk about your banjos. You started out with a Hondo and, as they say, "you've come a long way, baby."

MD: I still have the Hondo.

BNL: You don't get rid of banjos, do you?

MD: No, I've only sold two banjos. One

was a Gibson J. D. Crowe model that I picked up along the way. The only other one I sold, and I wish I hadn't, was one I bought twenty years ago at a pawn shop for \$400. It was a Tut Taylor Tennesseean model, with a carved resonator. I ended up selling it to Dan Haller.

BNL: That's funny. Dan traded that banjo to me several years ago. Small world! I sold it to a customer in Colorado.

MD: Later my dad got me a style 2 Gibson with a Chris Warner neck and a tone ring, and that's the only banjo I had until I was about thirty, when I got my style 6

Gibson.

BNL: Tell me about that banjo.

MD: It's a 1934 one piece flange style 6 checkerboard that started out as an archtop plectrum. I got it from Bob Anderson. He included a letter from the lady he bought it from, giving its history. A man by the name of Russ Baldwin, who was a jazz musician, bought it new. There are pics of him on the S.S. George Washington playing during World War II, and pics of him on TV shows in the 1950s with the banjo. According to Steve Huber, the rim had originally been cut for a flathead

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ring, and some wood was added at the factory to make an archtop ring fit. I have all the parts: the original neck, archtop ring, tuners, etc.

BNL: That's a very unusual banjo. Most style 6 checkerboards had the two piece (tube and plate) flange construction.

MD: Right. When Gibson started using the one piece flange, they continued using the two piece flange on the style 6 and higher banjos because it was a better construction. If they had only known, they would have made nothing but one piece flange flatheads. I have a Burlile tone ring in it now.

BNL: I understand you became an endorser for Recording King banjos last year.

MD: Yes, I got a Deco King model.

BNL: How do you like it?

MD: It is great. I was looking to get a banjo to travel with, and when I went with the Country Gentlemen I was approached by a couple of makers. But, I didn't play anything that just blew me away, and the companies said I would have to play their banjo 100% of the time. I just wasn't comfortable with that. I had decided to just buy myself something used, and then I met Greg Rich. Greg offered me a Recording King and didn't stipulate that I play it all the time. So I asked him to send me one to try, and I told him I'd play nothing but that banjo for two months, and then let him know whether I liked it well enough to want to keep it. And that's what I did. When I first played it, I was used to my pre-war so I wasn't sure, but Jim Burlile set it up for me, and when I got it back it sounded dynamite. Music Link really hit the nail on the head with these Recording King banjos.

BNL: They are excellent banjos and, in my opinion bargains in today's market.

MD: One thing I really like about them is, I've had lots of students with starter banjos who were ready to move up to something with a tone ring. I didn't want to be an endorser for a \$3000-\$4000 banjo, when my students wouldn't want to spend that much money. With the Recording King, they can get a great banjo for not a lot of money.

BNL: Have you modified yours in any way?

MD: No, it's just the way I got it. I would love to try a Tony Pass rim in it, though. I did replace the bridge with one of Scott Zimmerman's "Z" bridges and I have to say, they are really worth the money.

BNL: Do have one other banjo?

MD: Oh yes, the Gold Star. I got it at a good time, because I was just getting ready to leave for an overseas tour and didn't want to take my Gibson. This banjo was hanging on the wall at a shop where I was teaching, and it said "Kentucky" on the headstock. Some guy had just left it on consignment. I took it off the wall, removed the resonator, and there was a "Warner String Works" sticker inside; nothing else to indicate what it was. But it had a wreath inlay and it looked like a Gold Star. I adjusted the head and put a new bridge on, and it sounded great, so I bought it. Later I talked with David Gartland at Saga and learned that they only made about 35 of them.

BNL: How do you set up your banjos?

MD: Well, I like the tone ring loose on the rim but not moving around. In other words, if you turn the rim upside down the ring will come off. I like the flange to be snug on the rim. I typically tap tune the head somewhere just shy of A. I set the tailpiece about halfway between the top of the bridge and the head. I don't put tension on the coordinator rods. I just snug the nuts and put a little bit of blue Lock-Tite on them. I want to keep the rim as round as possible. I use GHS 10-11-12-20-10 strings. I've been slowly moving down from heavy gauge strings. I used to use 11-12-14-22-11. I like Presto tailpieces, and also the clamshell—the good quality one, not the cheapies.

BNL: What about picks?

MD: I use them (laugh). I like the old Nationals. I don't know that they are actually better than some of the new ones, but I have them so I use them. They're definitely cool, just like an old Corvette is cool. I use a Dunlop large thumbpick, which I file down and shape so it has a point like a medium.

BNL: Tone-wise, what do you look for in a banjo?

MD: I don't like a thin or really bright tone. I look for that prewar flathead sound, but I do like that crisp 1950s Earl Scruggs sound. Of course, 90% of that was the player.

BNL: What about archtops?

MD: I do like archtops, but I've just never owned one. I think they get a bad rap because so often people get them and crank down the tailpiece, put on a thin bridge, and overtighten the head. They end up with a real brittle sound. But the

ones in your shop that I played are killer banjos.

BNL: When you started playing the banjo there wasn't a lot to learn from. Now it is information overload, between all the instruction books and DVDs that are available, plus the Internet. Do you have any advice for aspiring banjo players?

MD: I think my best advice is to play with other people as much as possible. I don't believe there is a better way to improve. If there isn't a jam session in your area, try to play to a band situation with CDs. Tab is great for technical information, but I wouldn't rely solely on that, because it doesn't teach you dynamics. Metronomes are great. Up until five years ago I didn't use one; I just practiced to CDs such as Flatt & Scruggs, Bluegrass Album Band, and so forth. Timing is a big thing for me, but I would fight the metronome. I would hear this "click, click, click" and I was playing at it. One day something dawned on me; that instead of playing at it, just think of it as another instrument and play to it. That completely changed how I viewed the metronome. Now when I practice I use a metronome program that I downloaded on my computer, and I have stereo speakers so it isn't just a little "tick tick" sound. I crank it up and practice with it on. It is like a drum machine, so I just pick a speed and play to it like I would another instrument. By using it I've discovered so much about my right hand—not just about keeping time, which is the most important thing, but within that keeping time you really get to hear where your fingers are, and you'll know if you have a weak finger or fast finger. I realized that my middle finger isn't as controllable as my thumb or index. I could hear it with the metronome, so I really started practicing backward rolls and that sort of stuff to get my fingers in shape.

BNL: One of the complaints I hear from customers is that regular metronomes just don't have enough volume for a banjo, and that turns them off. They just can't hear it well enough unless they put a mute on the banjo, and of course nobody wants to do that.

MD: I agree. Metronome or drum machine software is the answer. It isn't expensive, and you can find it on the Internet.

BNL: Last year you released your first solo CD. Was this a project that was in the works for a long time?

MD: No, it is something that just came up. Of course, over the years I always thought "if I ever do a banjo album..." My father suggested I do a Gershwin album. But other than fantasizing about an album, I never seriously thought it would ever happen. However, Tom Mindte is like family to me, and one day he called and said "Okay, think of what you want to do; you're going to do a banjo album." I've known Tom for a long time, and he's been one of the strongest supporters of

musicians in the D.C. area for decades. He's a good musician himself, but he supports others, especially young musicians. He's very generous with his time and resources.

BNL: I couldn't agree more. Even though Tom owns Patuxent Music, (a recording studio in Rockville, Maryland), he isn't motivated by making money.

MD: So Tom talked me into doing it and he handled all the details, including hiring all the musicians.

BNL: He certainly picked a stellar lineup.

MD: When I found out he'd hired Michael Cleveland's band, I started getting nervous. At that point I had only written a couple of instrumentals. I decided that every other cut would be an instrumental, and the rest would feature vocalists.

BNL: I've listened to the CD several times and my biggest compliment would be "it's very listenable." I've heard numerous albums that were really well done, but I had no desire to listen a second time. So for me, the mark of a great CD is that it makes me look forward to listening again. Your's definitely falls into that category.

MD: Thanks. I really do appreciate that.

BNL: Tell me about *Bird Bath*.

MD: Well, I wrote that one the night before the recording session, and *Candlewood* the morning of the recording.

BNL: How do you approach writing an instrumental? Do you start with the idea of writing one, or is it something that's kicking around in your head?

MD: That's an interesting question. I never thought of myself as a composer. I wrote one tune about eight years ago. Then, later, I started messing around with the mandolin. I'd take it with me on vacation trips because it is so easy to carry on a plane, and I wrote three of the instrumentals on the mandolin.

BNL: How long did you spend recording the CD?

MD: A day and a half. The musicians—Michael Cleveland, Jesse Brock, Barry Reid, and Audie Blaylock—were dynamite. We recorded live, and many of them were done in a single take.

BNL: You said you wrote *Bird Bath* the night before you recorded it. That's a really neat tune.

MD: Thanks. It was one of those things that just happened. I was noodling around in C and there it was. I moved it up to D and played out of C position. The second part



"Sidecar" cover

goes to an open G position.

BNL: It isn't an easy life being a full-time bluegrass musician. I know you aren't quite full-time but does being on the go so much affect your personal life?

MD: I've very lucky. My wife is really supportive. It has been a big change for me. Up until five years ago I was a weekend warrior with it. I had the same day job as a motorcycle mechanic for fifteen years, and made a good living at it. I decided to make music my number one priority. Now I have a small shop behind my house, where I restore BMW motorcycles when I'm not performing. I have regrets that I didn't pursue music professionally in my 20s. I had a couple of opportunities back then, but didn't want to walk away from that steady paycheck. When Randy (Waller) called and offered me the job with the Country Gentlemen I said, "man, I'm doing it."

BNL: Your motorcycle background explains the name of your CD: "*Sidecar*." That's a nifty looking bike on the cover.

MD: Thanks.

BNL: I think it is really great that you are following your dream and actually are doing so with both passions—banjos and motorcycles, and have been able to find a workable balance between them.

MD: Yes, I do feel extremely fortunate.

BNL: Do you plan to do another CD?

MD: I've given it some thought. If Tom is willing, I probably will.

BNL: Well, Mark, in my opinion you are one of the really "good guys" in this business, in addition to being an incredibly talented musician. I wish you success in the future.

David Schenkman is the owner of Turtle Hill Banjo Co., a specialized shop located in the Washington, DC area. The shop maintains a very large inventory of new and used banjos, plus lots of prewar Gibsons. www.turtlehillbanjo.com and www.banjoukes.com

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chords belonging to the Key of C are: C-Dm-Em-F-G-Am-Bdim - C. The 1st, 4th and 5th chords are the primary chords. Notice that these are the only major chords. These will be the chords where the licks have the strongest effect. The F chord's main function is for color (4th chord). The G chord is the 5th chord and is the most powerful chord for directing where the music will go. All of the chords work for the C chord (1st chord), and at the end of the song, this becomes evident.

recognizable just by sight. Since this is the kind of thing many of us have seen and played countless times, it is natural that we would develop the ability to get some idea of the sound of the arrangement just from looking at tablature.

Forget about it! Not gonna happen with this tune. Oh, it's comprised mainly of rolls (or pieces of rolls). There is little or no melodic and only a small amount of single-string technique here. On top of that, it's almost completely played below the 5th fret. Sounds tame enough, huh? Well, apparently there is a lot of wiggle room even when arranging a song within the strict boundaries of the above description.

This guy is all over the place! If using rolls below the 5th fret sounds like playing "inside the box," Mark Delaney finds all kinds of interesting music in the remotest corners of this box.

For one thing, his use of inside rolls (strings 2, 3, and 4) produce a unique kind of harmony as he rolls over the chords. In doing this, at times he plays a 4th string with the index finger (right hand) immediately following the thumb on the 5th string. This can take some practice if you are not used to reaching back that far with your index finger. Slides, pull-offs, and hammer-ons dot the landscape everywhere you look. And be ready for slides going both up and down the string.

On occasion, two notes on the same string are played in succession, but not often, except for a stretch in the middle of the B Part with some single-string lines moving up and down the 4th string. (Measures 39-41)

You have to be ready for anything at any time with this song. This is not to say that it will necessarily be overly difficult to play, but it will take some time to memorize since it is made up of so many seemingly unrelated pieces. But if you can manage to do it, the payoff should be well worth it. You'll certainly need to hear the recording to know how it should sound, but once you do, there's a good chance you'll want to learn this delightfully imaginative tune.

TAB of the MONTH

Mark Delaney's "Bird Bath"

Janet Davis and Steve Garner

Janet Davis: The rules we learn as a beginner are essential to getting the "right" sound for playing bluegrass music on the banjo. However, as a player gains experience, his or her ears and fingers begin to discover that these rules may be "bent" or altered to achieve some very exciting effects. This is one way a player's individual style may develop. Often these subtle "nuances" are indicative of the style of a particular artist. In *Bird Bath*, Mark frequently uses the right middle finger "inside" to pick the 2nd string. This adds a different flavor and/or color to the overall effect. Left-hand techniques are frequent and often add syncopation due to their placement within the measure. Notice, in these areas also, that the 2nd string often replaces the expected first string. Again, this changes the expected effect of a standard bluegrass pattern. Measure 7 & 10 use an "inside" forward roll. Notice how the melody flows along the 2nd string in m.7. The same string is often picked two or more times in a row with the right hand, which adds a bounce and energy to the song. These are indicated with alternating right-hand fingers, which is a common way to work along one string. However, people

also play these notes consecutively with the Thumb only. (A left-hand hammer or pull-off can be substituted for the 2nd note, although the bounce will not be a prevalent in the effect.)

This arrangement is played tuned to standard G Tuning. (Without the capo, Part A is played in the Key of C and Part B is in the Key of G.) This should be played with the capo on the 2nd fret so Part A will be in the Key of D and Part B in the Key of A.

In the recording, the banjo opens with the lead for Part A. The fiddle takes over the lead for Part B while the banjo plays back up for this section. After a shared mandolin and fiddle break, the banjo returns to play a lead break for Part A and Part B, and to end the song. *The following tab is from Mark's full A & B break (at 1:44 on the mp3). To repeat the song, simply omit the ending.*

Additional comments by Steve Garner:

If you've used tablature to play Scruggs style banjo long enough, you have no doubt noticed a great deal of similarity between arrangements of many different songs. For example, basic rolls over open G, C, and D chords with a few extra fretted notes mixed in to flesh out the melody can be pretty

Bird Bath

Final break (at 1:44 on the mp3). Standard G tuning. Part A: Key of C, capo 2 to play (Part A = Key of D; Part B = Key of A). Tab by Janet Davis and Steve Garner. Tune by Mark Delaney

A Part

G C
 Am F G C F
 Dm G F G F C G
 F G C Am F
 G C C7 B Part: G
 D Em
 (C) G D
 Em D G D
 G G7 C Part: C F
 G C (CM7)

Musical notation for Banjo, including chords (G, C, Am, F, Dm, D, Em, C7, CM7) and fingerings (e.g., 32, 10, 23, 32, 32, 23, 23, 3, 23, 2, 4, 2, 0, 1, 1).

Based on the playing of Mark Delaney
 on "Sidecar," Patuxent Records
 soundfile at www.banjonews.com