



# Old-Time Times

August 2005

A Publication  
of Your  
Nashville  
Old-Time  
String Band  
Association  
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UPCOMING  
ASSOCIATION  
EVENTS



Thursday  
August 4  
Slow Jam  
6:30 to 8:30 PM  
Stratford High  
Cafeteria



Thursday  
August 11  
Regular Jam  
6:30 to 8:30 PM  
Stratford High  
Cafeteria



August 28  
4<sup>th</sup>-Sunday Jam  
2 to 5 PM,  
Hosted by  
Ron & Cynthia  
Whitlow

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## \*\*\*EVENTS\*\*\*

### Tennessee

#### **NOTSBA Performance Band at Carnton Mansion**

Monday evening, August 29, 5:30-8:30 pm. If you would like to join us in this performance, please join us for rehearsal and preparation sessions. The first was held July 28. Also, see the article in Playing in a Band elsewhere in this newsletter. Contact Don Kent, 868-9951, for information about other rehearsal times.

### West Virginia

#### **Appalachian String Band Music Festival – Clifftop!**

Held August 3-7 in Clifftop, West Virginia, and one of the premier old-time events of the year. For more information, call Pat Cowdery at 304-558-0220 Extension 130, or visit the Festivals & Contests page at our NOTSBA Website, [www.nashvilleoldtime.org](http://www.nashvilleoldtime.org).

### Virginia

#### **70<sup>th</sup> Annual Old Fiddlers' Convention**

Held Monday through Saturday, August 8-13, at Galax, Virginia, and yet another of the top events for the year. For more information, call 276-236-8451, or visit the Festivals & Contests page at our NOTSBA Website, [www.nashvilleoldtime.org](http://www.nashvilleoldtime.org).



#### **Directions to the Fourth Sunday Jam**

If you need directions to the home of Ron and Cynthia Whitlow, you can call Ron at 373-7914 or email him at [rnwhitlow@comcast.net](mailto:rnwhitlow@comcast.net). □

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## Five-Fingered Music Theory: Chord Sequences

~Phil Sparks

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If you play guitar, banjo, mandolin, or just about any other stringed instrument, you might be familiar with chord sequences. You might know, for example, that in the key of C, you will use the C, F, and G chords, and that the minor chord (the relative minor) that goes with that key of C is A minor (Am).

But then again, you might not know those things off the top of your head.

If you are just learning or having trouble remembering which chords go with which keys, there is a five-fingered solution to your problem.

Just open your left hand with the palm facing you and the fingers extended. Call your thumb “number 1,” call the pointing finger “number 2,” middle finger is “number 3,” ring finger is “number 4” and your pinky finger is “number 5.”

Now if you are playing in C, then call your thumb C and move up the scale, calling the pointing finger D, your middle finger E, the ring finger F, and your pinky finger G.

Ah ha! The key of C (your thumb) uses C, F, and G, the 1, 4, and 5 fingers, the 1, 4, and 5 chords. All chords for all keys follow this pattern.

But what about the Am? Alas, to find the relative minor chord, you will have to imagine one additional finger just beyond your pinky. It is “number 6,” and it gives you the relative minor chord for the key represented by your thumb.

NOTE: Keep in mind that music notation goes from A to G and back to A again. There ain't

no H, not even in old-time music.

OK, here's your final exam: What chords, including the relative minor, are used in the key of G—QUICKLY! (Yes, you may use your fingers.)

Picture:

G (your thumb) G=1, A=2, B=3, C=4, D=5, E=6

Answer:

G, C, D, and Em (the 1, 4, 5, and 6m chords)

How about the key of D?

Answer:

D, G, A, and Bm

How about the key of A?

Answer: A, D, E and F#m

If you said that the relative minor for the key of A is Fm, you followed the system, but came up with the wrong answer. The correct answer is actually one fret or one half-step higher than Fm. That's because the system isn't perfect. Your fingers (unlike a piano) can't show you where the sharps (the piano's black keys) are. You'll just have to remember the F#m in the key of A.

Similar problems plague five-fingered music theory as it is applied to the keys of B, E, and F, but old-time musicians rarely if ever use these keys, so who cares! We use A, C, D, and G. Five-fingered music theory will serve you well if only you keep that pesky F#m chord in mind.

The other day, I heard someone say, “The way Joe plays that tune, you need a four chord. The way I play it, you don't.”

Now you know what they were talking about.

When Nashville session musicians write chord sequences, they don't write  
G G D G G C D G

Instead, they write it as

1 1 4 1 1 5 4 1

That allows them to shift keys instantly if, for example, a singer wants to use a higher or lower range.

Many old-time musicians are perfectly satisfied with

G G D G G C D G

That's because we almost always play our tunes in a certain key. For example, "Soldier's Joy" is always played in the key of D, and "June Apple" is always played in the key of A.

A few tunes can be played in one of two keys. "Cherokee Shuffle" and "Sally Ann," for example, are commonly played in either D or A. As a result, you sometimes see their chord sequences given in both keys.

Back to the main point: You can use five-fingered music theory to tell which chords are used in which keys and which chords are the 1, 4, and 5 chords—and you can do all that in only seconds. Happily, your hand, unlike lists or charts, is hard to lose or leave at home.

**NEXT MONTH** we'll use five-fingered music theory to help beginning fiddlers find double-stops. □

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## Playing as a Band

*Editor's Note:* The following recommendations were developed by David Cannon and Don Kent. They describe preparing to play for public performances.

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### 1. Practice, Practice, Practice

To play well together you have to practice together. You must know the tunes and play them with intensity. If you don't know the

tune well, play quietly during a jam. While playing for a performance if you don't know the tune, don't play it. To goal is "playing tight," with impeccable timing.

You have to be able to recognize whether you are adding to the music or taking away from it. Coming into a tune after the first two or three notes will cause the tune to sound ragged. If you come in at the beginning of the next part you will be making the music better by adding to its intensity. Good starts are important.

### 2. Be aware while playing

You must know when to come in and when to stop. A good musician will, while playing, be actively listening to those around him/her. This will promote a good performance.

Know the parts of the tune you are playing. Does it have 2 or 3 parts? Are the parts played AA/BB or AA/B or otherwise? Unawareness of tune parts is one of the most frequent, but avoidable, foul ups. Is the tune crooked with parts of varied length?

Listen to those playing around you and make sure you are playing the same thing they are. You aren't playing the A part while everyone else is playing the B. Listen to make sure that your tone and volume is balanced.

### 3. Jam vs. Performance

There is a difference in playing for a jam and playing for a performance. When we play for a jam we play for ourselves. When we play for a performance we play for the folks that are paying us. A performance can be either a formal performance, or playing background music. Playing can be onstage, or amongst the audience. P.A. systems will occasionally be used.

#### 4. Dress for the Occasion

Dress appropriately for the event. If the crowd is dressed up in coat and tie we don't need to show up in blue jeans. We should find this kind of information out when we book the event.

#### 5. Play List

A tune list is a crafted thing. When there is a tune list for a performance it should be followed. When done right, the tune list is designed to compliment the event. It is counter productive to lobby for special tunes at the event itself. There is risk in the group playing a tune that hasn't been planned or practiced. If even one player doesn't play it well, we all could be embarrassed.

#### 6. Good is better than more

It would be better to have 4 people playing well together who know the music rather than 12 people who do not.

For most of the events we play it doesn't matter what level of tunes we play. It does matter "how well" we play them. It is better to play Soldier's Joy well than Tennessee Mountain Fox Chase poorly.

#### 7. Performance and arrangements

All of the details pertaining to the performance should be worked out before the event. When should we arrive, setup and leave? What are the directions, date and time. What will be the structure of the event? Is there free parking and where? Do we bring chairs, furniture, equipment, snacks, and refreshments? What is Plan B for inclement weather? Covered area/shady area, or windbreak? What would be appropriate dress, etc?

#### 8. Group Leader

Having one person designated as the group leader prior to, and at, the event to make necessary decisions will help to smoothly implement the program. This could be an officer, such as President, an experienced performer, or the event organizer. Irrespective of whom the group leader is, on certain matters of music performance, it is wise to at least consult with an old time veteran or two about the planned event.

#### 9. Keeping Perspective

Generally, we folks, NOTSBA, play for our own enjoyment. Most of us have never played music professionally. We share a love for old-time string band music. By practicing playing as a band, we can improve the level of our "fun" at jams and performances. □

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### A Penny Learned

~Ed Gregory

If you are interested in quickly and cheaply building your collection of legally downloaded song files, you might consider the free 14-day trial of the new Rhapsody song service.

It works a lot like Apple's iTunes and other pay services, but the only time you pay for a specific song is if you download a version that can be copied onto an external MP3 player.

You can listen to individual songs or complete albums as streaming media or you can download them for play on your computer only in an encrypted file in the Windows Media Player "WMF" format.

You can search for tunes by name, by artist, by album, or by keyword. The free trial lasts 14 days. After that, it's \$9.95 a month for the basic service.

With Rhapsody, so long as you are listening

on your own computer, you get unlimited listening time and unlimited downloads that you can play on your computer.

The streaming media and encoded downloads are great for the listening audience, but I've heard complaints from songwriters and artists that the rates paid for these Internet services are terrible. That's a topic for another article, perhaps.

Using Rhapsody to download versions of the songs that you can export to an MP3 player costs about the same as the downloading MP3s from other legal music download services, where downloading 15 songs costs about the same as buying a 15-song CD.

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### Please Contribute to Your Newsletter!

If you have information you want to submit, or if you have ideas for improving the newsletter, contact Ed Gregory.

If you are willing to review a CD or a book, contact Ed Gregory.

If you have a tidbit on picking, learning tunes, caring for instruments, etc, please submit it for the "A Penny Learned" article.

**HELP!!!!** If you know about an upcoming old-time music event, don't assume that we already know about it. If it's not posted on our Web site ([www.nashvilleoldtime.org](http://www.nashvilleoldtime.org)), we need the information desperately. *Please help us keep our old-time community informed.*

You can reach Ed at:

[edgregory@nashvilleoldtime.org](mailto:edgregory@nashvilleoldtime.org)

or

615-990-5566

or

Ed Gregory

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*The submission deadline for September's newsletter is Friday, August 26.*

## Classified Ads

Rules: All ads must somehow relate to old-time music and our activities (YES: acoustical instruments, tuners, cases, camping gear, etc. NO: electrical instruments, cars, homes, pets, etc). Ads will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis as space allows. If you want an ad to run in more than one issue, you must resubmit it each month. If your item sells, you are invited, but not required, to make a small donation to Notsba.

These rules will be revised as experience dictates.

**FOR SALE: Reduced!** Plastic fiddle. It is set up with ebony pegs and nut and a 4-fine-tuner tail piece and includes a case and a bow.

This fiddle is ideal for rough camping and hiking. It will even double as a walking stick or canoe paddle ☺, \$100. Contact Phil Sparks, 615-797-4356 or [kpsparks@msn.com](mailto:kpsparks@msn.com).

**WANTED:** A Tubaphone tenor (4-string) banjo. If you have just the pot, that's OK. Contact Phil Sparks, 615-797-4356 or e-mail [kpsparks@msn.com](mailto:kpsparks@msn.com) with your price. (One of our Ohio friends needs this item.)