

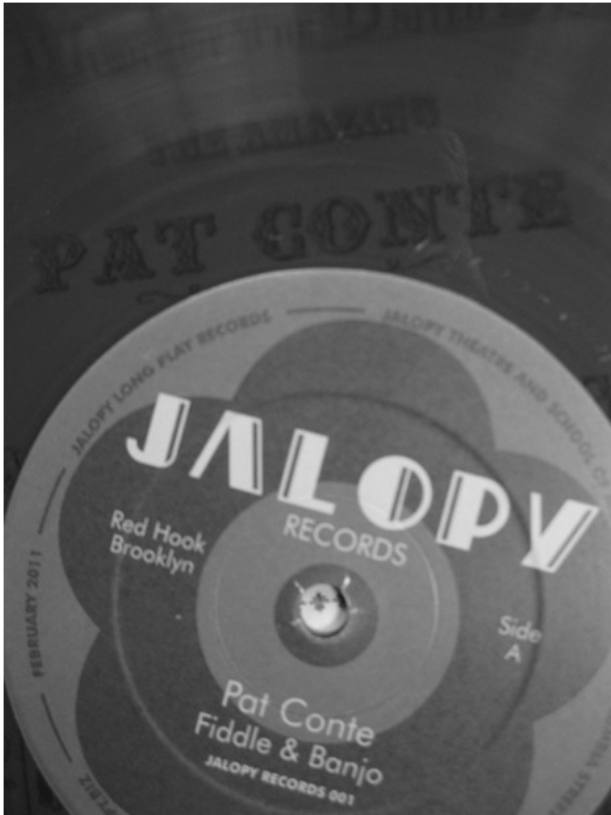
# News

Nashville Old-Time String Band Association : NOTSBA

[www.nashvilleoldtime.org](http://www.nashvilleoldtime.org)

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Post Office Box 160038 Nashville, Tennessee 37216



## A Rebirth in Brooklyn: Pat Conte and the Jalopy Theatre

By Jim Hornsby

Pat Conte is amazing. In fact this entire vinyl LP project from Jalopy Records is amazing.

It is entitled *The Amazing Pat Conte plays American Songs with Fiddle and Banjo*, and it is the first in a series from Jalopy Records to be called *Folk Music of the United States*.

Jalopy Records is a relatively new division of the Jalopy Theatre and School of Music in Red Hook, Brooklyn, New York, and this album is their first production. Pat was chosen for it “because of our deep respect for Pat as a musician, scholar and man.”

Collectors will appreciate the LP format. The classic red vinyl disk and informative 12 page booklet with Pat’s liner notes make a fun package, and the combination tells you a lot about the music and its history.

The tunes chosen for this LP hearken back to a time when America was young; when the instruments and tunes from numerous cultures were interacting and combining to produce a new, unique music. Pat takes us on a tour of that early music, and points out its

timeless beauty.

He is a remarkable musician, playing remarkable tunes on remarkable instruments. Joe Hickerson, former director of the archive of Folk Song/Culture at the Library of Congress, recognizes Pat as “one of the premier interpreters of traditional songs, tunes and styles.”

There aren’t many musicians who can sing and play the old songs, and of those who can, fewer yet can accomplish it using vintage instruments. Pat can do all that and play harmony and counter-melody as he sings. The effect is stunning. His instruments talk and sing along with him, and wherever that is found in music, it is a rare and wonderful thing.

Best wishes from Nashville to Pat and all the folks at Jalopy Theatre ([www.jalopy.biz](http://www.jalopy.biz)), and thanks for this great musical treat.

## REVIEW

### Earth Tones by Adam Hurt

CD Ubiquitone 003 [www.adamhurt.com](http://www.adamhurt.com)

Review by Timothy Jones

A solo banjo recording comes with a striking challenge: How do you maintain listener interest with simply a single instrument—with no supporting bass, fiddle, or vocals? Add the limitations of a fretless instrument made from a skin head and gourd and the challenge gets even more acute. The result might not seem a likely candidate for a short list of compelling CDs.

Adam Hurt, known by many players for his clawhammer workshops, festival contest wins, and ground-breaking CDs, thought twice himself. As he notes in the interview accompanying this review, the prospect of an album's worth of solo gourd banjo tunes left him "a bit overwhelmed."

Part of the daunting feel had to do with finding particularly suitable tunes. Given the challenge of accurate intonation the higher the hand positions move up the neck of a fretless banjo, he determined to lean on tunes that "incorporated plenty of open strings, which of course are typically more reliable when played on a fretless instrument." Still, that limitation didn't keep Adam back from a remarkable reach up the neck (the equivalent of the fifteenth fret!) on one tune, "Flannery's Dream."

Technical issues aside, what about achieving variety enough to keep listeners, well, *listening*? Would a CD devoted to solo gourd banjo *work*? Hurt wondered if the attempt would end up "one-dimensional."

Turns out he needn't have worried.

Several things come together to make the CD a standout accomplishment. First is his technical prowess. A clean attack accompanied by a rock-steady rhythm and remarkably accurate intonation gives the tunes a solid feel. From the first, "Fortune," (which includes a repeated slide from what would be the first-string second fret to the fifth fret), you can immediately sense a master's touch. In *John Riley the Shepherd* (traced in Adam's online liner notes to Art Stamper) Adam uses every trick you can imagine to find his way around the fretless fretboard: from perfect-pitch slides to alternate-string pull-offs.

But it's more than technique that makes this recording a gem. Adam's interpretation of traditional tunes sounds both authentic and fresh. One can hear in his presentation of the Kyle Creed-inspired traditional *Stillhouse* not only echoes of his Round Peak mentor, but his own artful nuances. Somehow Adam manages to make a great tune sing with new melodic power.

And the range of geographical sources gives a variety and pacing: six from Kentucky, five from North Carolina, and one from West Virginia. There is the haunting "Flannery's Dream," a crooked-rhythm Kentucky-based tune. His take on the Marcus Martin version of *Fire on the Mountain* has a lilting, loping rhythm that beautifully complements the tune's natural melodic interest. Surry County, North Carolina, a kind of capital of the Round Peak style so familiar to Adam, gets represented again by a Tommy Jarrell-based take on *Rye Straw* that has a rollicking drive.

Throughout there is a lyric quality, a melodic sensitivity, and deft phrasing that all give the tunes a sense of breathing comfortableness. And the David Hyatt gourd banjo that Adam uses for each tune itself has a pleasant richness, with a good separation of notes and warmly dark tones. The tunings listed in the liner notes may seem odd (eAEAB) until one realizes that they simply represent more standard tunings lowered for the benefit of a nylon-strung instrument's needing a bit less tension.

But there is something less tangible than all of these attempts at explaining why the CD simply *works*. A musicality and sheer command of what makes tunes connect to the listener echoes throughout the twelve cuts on this project.

It might have seemed like a risk to try, given the limitations, but somehow the result is a powerful work that transcends the limits of the gourd banjo or the simplicity of a single instrument. Something indefinable happens and the music rings in the mind after the CD stops spinning.

## **Todd Wright Banjo Specialty Jam, March 31, 2011**

Todd led a two-hour banjo intensive designed for beginners as our March installment of the fifth-Thursday specialty series. We learned two tunes, "Cumberland Gap" and "Fly Around My Pretty Little Miss."

Todd succeeded in having us play beyond our undeveloped abilities, and gave us much to practice for a good many months.

Todd has a relaxed and comfortable teaching style that inspires openness and acceptance in the students, and I realized I had an absence of anxiety in a situation that could have had me pulled up and wide-eyed with the realization of what I do not know and cannot do. Though he introduced a good number of the basic concepts and skills that are necessary for the playing of OT banjo (the basic stroke, double thumbing, slides, pull-offs, hammer-ons, playing high

melody on the first string, and more), Todd did it in a gentle almost ambient sort of way, suggesting, showing, having us repeat each new element several times, and then having us try them all again later. Todd pointed out that each thing he showed us and had us try is a learned skill, so our fumbling and missing was only natural given that these are lessons to be taken home, worked on, and mastered by striving over time with persistence and dedication.



Todd Wright, fourth from right, in front of the mantle and facing the camera, teaching slides to most of the group attending the banjo workshop in March.

pics: MLD

Todd filled in a bit of his own history with the banjo in talking some about having been fortunate to fall in with and be mentored by an older musician early in his own life. Todd imparted to us the respect and gratitude he feels for the riches given him by those experiences. When I later e-mailed Todd to get a little more information about his early playing years and his mentor, he replied:

"I was fortunate to learn directly from the great old-time banjo player Ralph Ford (he and everyone else pronounced it "Rolf"?...). In the rural mountain community of Grassy Fork, Tennessee, Ralph was the first call for a square dance, pie supper, cake walk, house party, you name it. He and Leona Black along with Haskell Williams made up the Grassy Fork String Band. When Leona became too feeble to play, I was called on to take over the fiddling. I played with the GFSB from 1973 until Ralph passed away in 1985. My duties in the string band were to play the fiddle, but at the same time I was watching, listening, and absorbing Ralph's banjo playing.

Ralph called his style of playing "rappin' the banjo," and I think that's a little hint on the clawhammer technique—curl your hand up like you're about to rap on the door (or table), keeping your wrist loose, knock or rap on the strings. Don't worry about hitting the banjo head, you will develop more control as you develop your style. Just try to produce a loud, clear tone.

Ralph had a very rhythmic style, not too notey, well suited for dancing. And did we ever play for some dances! Some of the best were at the Sunset Gap Community Center in Cosby, Tennessee, where we would have 50-60 dancers come down out of the mountains of eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina. We would play 4 to 5 hours, each dance tune lasting 20-30 minutes or more. Now that's the way to get your bow arm or frailing lick in shape.

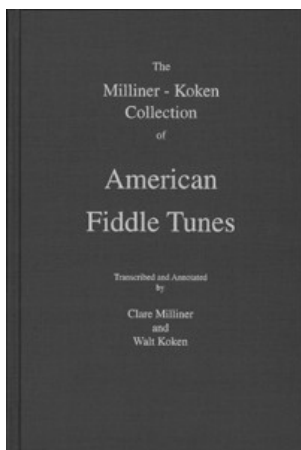
Ralph learned to play before radio & TV came along, and he taught me the same way, all by oral transmission. I'm not sure that he could write much, as he joked that he never even saw the path to the school, but he was always patient, always ready to help anyone with an interest in the old music."

Throughout the evening, Todd answered questions and let us know of the floating nature of some "facts" and "information" inherent in pursuits like learning instruments within particular genres. At the same time, he was able to impart that the skills do develop over time and that we are all capable of developing as banjo players with time and effort.

Todd has talked about the possibility of starting some group banjo lessons. If you have interest, it is probably good to urge him on with this idea.

The evening was a pleasure. Todd gave us a skillful introduction to playing old-time banjo. Many thanks for this wonderful contribution to our group.

~Mary Lou Durham



## ***The Milliner-Koken Collection of American Fiddle Tunes***

This new collection is truly a labor of love, a work of immense proportions carried out over a great many years, a comprehensive collection of source versions of old-time tunes. There is much information, in addition to the tunes, that gives the history of those who carried this music out of the unrecorded past to our present. Here is what the authors, musicians Clare Milliner and Walt Koken, have to say:

"This is an essential resource and reference book for anyone interested in the tunes and the history of American fiddle music.

Whether you read music or not, this book is filled with vital information to enhance your appreciation and enjoyment of Old Time Music.

Everyone is invited to check out sample pages and/or place orders at: [www.mkfiddletunes.com](http://www.mkfiddletunes.com).

The book is large and heavy, so there are several shipping options....It's taken us quite a few more years than we had anticipated! Look for our ads with unsolicited comments from recent purchasers in the *Old Time Herald*, *Bluegrass Unlimited*, *Fiddler Magazine*, and *Sing Out!*

888 pages total. Over-size format, easy to read, cloth hard bound in sewn signatures, lies flat, library/heirloom quality, acid free paper.

1404 tunes in musical engravings, arranged alphabetically in 741 pages.

Ten page introduction with explanations and examples.

Main index arranged by title, with references to source recordings and cross references to similar tunes and titles.

Key index arranged alphabetically by key.

Tuning index arranged alphabetically by fiddle tuning.

Artist index arranged alphabetically by fiddler, showing what tunes are included by that artist.

Artist profiles section with brief bios of the 347 fiddlers/bands represented in the book.

A majority of these fiddlers were born before 1900.

Also a comments section with interesting information about the tunes and fiddlers."

This will be a very valuable must-have resource for many of us! ~MLD

### **The fine print:**

We appreciate the significant grant funding from TAC that helped bring our wonderful presenters to *Breakin' Up Winter XVI*.

**NOTSBA's Purpose:** ...preservation and promotion of old-time string band music by bringing together persons interested in old-time music...and by reaching out to the community through public performances, workshops, seminars, festivals, and other public outreach, informational, and educational activities.

The opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the editor or the *Nashville Old-Time String Band Association*. NOTSBA is a volunteer organization. While we strive for accuracy, we do not label as "official" any content found here. Have an idea for an article? **Please e-mail me at [mldurham1@juno.com](mailto:mldurham1@juno.com)**



# ☆ Scheduled Jams ☆

## Important Note: Changes in our Jam Schedules

- The Tune Workshops have started moving around to different Thursdays.
- **Throughout May, and June, the Tune Workshop will be held at Buchanan Log House on the *SECOND* Thursday.**
- For July, August, and September, they will move back to Mansker's Station and will be held on the *THIRD* Thursday.
- Finally, for October, November, and December, the workshops will be at Church of the Advent on the *FOURTH* Thursday.

In other words, the jams will continue to be held where we currently hold them, but the Tune Workshops will move around to different Thursdays—to give more people an opportunity to attend. To avoid confusion, please pay close attention to this, the “Scheduled Jams” section of our newsletter, and see May's schedule below. ~PS

## May 5, 2011, First-Thursday Performance Group Practice

Buchanan Log House is our identified home. We have the first Thursday designated as our practice for the performance group here. If you are a member of NOTSBA come and practice for the several times each year we foray out to places like the Nashville Zoo, Mansker's Station, and events at the Buchanan Log House. We practice from 6:30-8:30 PM.

## May 12, 2011, Second-Thursday Tune Workshop

6:30-8:30 PM, at the **Buchanan Log House**, 2910 Elm Hill Pike. For the next two months, Kelsey Wills, who you may remember from Breakin' Up Winter, will teach. Kelsey is a student at MTSU and a dedicated OT fiddler. She'll take us through “Tiddle Took Todfish,” “Possum's Tail Is Bare,” “Paul David,” and “Cuckoo's Nest.” Come on out and meet Kelsey if you've not met her already, and prepare to have some fun with new tunes. Recording is encouraged.

## May 19, 2011, Third-Thursday Regular Jam

We meet 6:30-8:30 PM at **Mansker's Station Frontier Life Center** (Visitor's Center), 705 Caldwell Drive, Goodlettsville. Please plan to join us for a regular jam. All old-time players are welcome to this open jam.

## May 22, 2011, Fourth-Sunday Jam

This month's Sunday afternoon jam is from 2 PM until around 5:30 or 6 at the home of Mary Alice and Mickey Bernal, in Inglewood, just north of East Nashville. 1307 Sunnymead Dr, Nashville 37216, 615-509-0471

### Directions:

**From the south:** Take 65 or 40 or 24 to the Ellington Parkway North exit (47A) just north of LP Field. Take the exit and stay to the right, cloverleafing around to Ellington Parkway. Take the 4th exit —Hart Lane, and go right. In about 1 mile, Hart Lane will T into Gallatin Road. Take a left at the stoplight. Go about 1 mile, and you will see SUNNYMEADE DRIVE on your right only. (Landmark: a bright yellow, defunct Mexican restaurant is across the street) It is between 2 churches. Take a RIGHT. (If you get to ARDEE, you've gone one street too far.)

☉ Go all the way down SUNNYMEADE, and you will hit the only real cross street, Kennedy Avenue. Go straight onto the dead end, and we're the 3rd house on the left (with all the flowers). Park along the street—please do not block any driveways.

**From the north/east/west:** Take Briley to Gallatin Road South. Go south about 1.5 miles and you will see the stoplight at ARDEE. Take a LEFT at the next street, SUNNYMEADE DRIVE. From there, follow directions at the circled star bullet above.

Come around to the backyard—we'll be in the basement with the doors open (if the weather permits). Please bring a chair and a side dish. We'll provide something from the grill! It ought to be a goodin! ~MAB

## May 26, 2011, Fourth-Thursday Regular Jam

**Church of the Advent** provides space for NOTSBA to host a regular jam in the Youth Room of their Annex. From 6:30 to 8:30 PM we're banging and sawing away, and we welcome all old-time players of all skill levels to this open jam.

## Other Area Old-Time Jams

☉ **The Fiddle and Pick** has open old-time jams on the first and third Tuesday evenings of each month in Pegram. Come on out. Gretchen and company welcome music lovers of all ages and skill levels. [fiddleandpick.ning.com](http://fiddleandpick.ning.com).

☉ **The 5 Spot** has a **Wednesday Night Old-Time Jam** each week. This homey tavern/music venue located in East Nashville has been hosting an OT jam for years now. Have a fine brew and play a few tunes. It's on Facebook.

☉ **Mansker's Station** has a **second-Monday Jam** starting at 6:30 PM in addition to the NOTSBA third-Thursday jams they host. It's in Goodlettsville, just north of Nashville. If you have questions, call Laura at 615-720-8829.