

LET'S ROLL

Reviews and Resolutions

Pete Wernick

deeringbanjos.com/rarebirdalert

The Rare Bird Goodtime Banjo

The Deering folks and I have been allies over the years, and they recently asked if I'd review one of their recent Goodtime Banjo variants.

The Rare Bird banjo was created to celebrate/promote the wonderful Goodtime Banjo and the wonderful "Rare Bird Alert" CD by Steve Martin with the Steep Canyon Rangers. I heartily recommend all the above, if you like quality.

The only difference between the Rare Bird banjo and the "regular" Goodtime banjo is the "rare bird" emblem on the peghead, not too large, not bad looking. The banjo is sold in conjunction with a nice gig bag, a good tuner, Steve's CD, and a banjo tab book for the CD (a good tab book, if not the best choice for a new-to-banjo player, e.g., Goodtime owner).

The Goodtime banjo has long been my most-recommended starter banjo. I've had one in the living room for years, and really love the thing. It's so friendly and playable and nice-sounding, lightweight, and important to some (including me), American-made.

The basic non-tone-ring, non-resonator Goodtimes I've had and played over the years have been quite consistent, other than some recent nice appearance upgrades (made at customers' request they say) and an upgrade of the rim construction: 3-ply maple replacing the former more-ply. I like the dark wood bowtie inlays, and the new peghead shape is a little classier than the former "Gumby" shape. The neck feels smooth and comfortable, the tuners work fine, the action and setup feel fine. Playing without or with picks, the tone is pleasant and even, and I truly do have a good time with these banjos! I've made up tunes on it that I later recorded. If you like banjos, they're about as user-friendly as a picker could want.

For specs and particulars, see www.deeringbanjos.com. But to cut to the chase... If you need something to "sell" you on this banjo, check out how doggone good Ned Luberecki sounds on it, on his YouTube tribute-to-Earl medley: www.deeringbanjos.com.

For a banjo that affordable to sound that good...well, it takes a great player! But even a "regular" player playing that banjo should sound pretty darned good...that is, if you like the sound of a banjo.



Band in a Box

Stay on that Learning Curve

(To the tune of *Bile Them Cabbage*!)

(Chorus)

Stay on that learning curve

Don't you lose your nerve

Stay on that learning curve

Don't you lose your nerve

Got me a computer, cost a thousand bucks

But bytes and bits they give me fits, so I left it in the box.

(Chorus)

Got me a new program, called Band in a Box

The manual's 600 pages so I left it in the box.

(repeat chorus until everyone leaves)

I am somewhat technically challenged, but I've heard so many good things about BIAB, especially the "bluegrass" accompaniment, I decided to spring for it ... about a year ago. The manual scared me off. Well, I spent about 30 minutes trying to figure it out, then I quit. If anyone wants to write in with *clear, concise, foolproof*

directions for a Mac user on how to get the bluegrass accompaniment going, please send them to me at pete@drbanjo.com, and the winning entry will get printed in this column!

New Years Resolution Time?

It's that time of year... You've just been given or invested in (choose one or more):

a) another banjo

b) more instructional material

c) gear... those fancy picks, that special head, that stuff that helps your picks stay on, a fine new James Alan Shelton strap...

All well and good, but are you really doing the most you can for the actual quality of your playing? Same news as usual: What makes the difference is time you spend with the banjo in your hands: Yes, even goofing off on the ol' five is beneficial, thank goodness. For real results, focused practice is well-known to bring efficient results, though that's easier "resolved" than "done". What's the key?

Motivation is the key. What motivates pickers? Other pickers... that is, playing with other people. When you know you'll be playing soon with other people, it just gets you practicing. Works for the pros and amateurs alike, I guarantee it!

The next question: Are you playing enough with other musicians? If no, you're like most banjo players, and items a, b, and c above will not take the place of getting out (or inviting people in) to pick. What, you're not too confident of your jam-ability? No people to jam with? I understand. Those obstacles are more typical than you may realize.

But there's help. Go to BGjam.com and look at the articles linked at the bottom of the page: "Can't find people to jam?" offers tips I've used myself, and they work. Wear your Banjo Newsletter hat or shirt at the game or the shopping mall. You just might get noticed... After all, if someone was wearing a Flatpick Guitar shirt, wouldn't you strike up a conversation? You never know when you might meet someone who becomes a picking buddy for life. Try googling "bluegrass jam [your town]" and you might be surprised how close some local jams are.

There are more would-be jammers out there than anyone knows. With a little scouting you'll find some and when things

start to click, your playing can't help but improve. Jamming is fundamental and fun!

To help this all along, we now have Wernick Method jam classes in over 30 states and 3 other countries. You can meet folks there that want to play just as much as you do, and do it together. We've gone from one class in 2010 to 39 in 2011, 65 last year, and 40 classes already scheduled for 2013. Next month I will do the first jam camp ever in Europe. That should be quite an adventure, especially as I speak only English! Will tell you about it right here.

Teachers reading this, I'd love to get you involved. Write me at Pete@DrBanjo.com Keep picking, and may your year have wonderful rewards, musical and otherwise.