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Advice to Young Player, Changing Chords Faster, and Review of Price Banjo Case

In March of 06 I purchased a banjo flight case from Gary Price of Oklahoma. It was #008. In short, I really like it, the best case I've ever had.

Strong points:

- Compact and streamlined. The exterior is fiberglass, same material as a Calton, but shaped differently.
- Great protection, plenty of dense foam in the right places, fully supported peghead. The lid is graduated for extra strength.
- Travels well, gets into tight places, reasonable weight (comparable to Calton)
- Great storage, ample and well-placed. Especially nice to have two compartments on either side of the neck, both opening without moving the neck. An additional area can be optionally boxed and covered for even more capacity.
- Nice appearance. Distinctive and attractive.
- Well-balanced, easy carrying
- Good latches, well placed

Suggested additions:

- Small flapped pocket for picks, between the compartments, near the neck.
- New optional extra storage compartment toward end of the neck is recommended, since standard side compartments don't easily fit string packets or CDs. The extra compartment's lid is covered by the neck.

Wear factors after two years full-time use, well over 100 gigs, 50 flights, including to Ireland:

- One of the domed metal feet got knocked off. These are replaceable.
- The case suffered a pretty bad gouge, small chip gone, one of four latches got knocked off, typical scratching and wear.

I have no involvement with Gary Price other than to have used and liked a few of his products. I have recommended this case wholeheartedly to quite a few people, state of the art as far as I'm aware. Gary tells me Mr. Scruggs asked about getting a case after seeing mine.

<http://www.fiberglasscase.com/banjocas.htm>

Cases with 2 storage spaces (standard)

Exterior colors: White, bone, light gray

Interior colors: burgundy, royal blue, forest green

Price \$595; with 3 storage spaces \$645

Hi again Pete, I just made contact with a 17 year old young man who wants to make Bluegrass his career. I suggested he get a degree as a back up just in case things don't go as he hopes, but frankly I feel this kid will make it with no problem. He took up the banjo at 10 and is self taught from video tapes. He now plays in 3 bands. Here is a recording of him picking banjo. Please tell me what you think about his playing and if you have any advice for him. I suspect we both will be hearing this kid's name in the near future.

Ray,

I think his playing sounds great, smooth and confident.

Advice:

1. Get some of his own material, if he wants to be appreciated as more than a fine picker.
2. Develop some distinctive stylistic touches, to stand out from the many other fine pickers. This is analogous to the difference between a craftsman and an artist. The craftsman is about execution, where the artist is also a creative force.
3. Get in a band with a really outstanding lead singer, and help develop interesting material that draws people to the band. Work hard to help the band succeed as a performing and recording unit. That is the main way to make a living as a banjo player.

Great picking, for a young player especially.

Pete

Ray writes back:

[N] was appreciative of your suggestions but feels it might be a bit hard to come up with his own stylistic touches, but it will probably come along naturally over time.

Ray,

That's usually the way it works, naturally. But sometimes players are so busy copying those they admire that they don't pay attention to what might be unique factors in their own taste and approach. Certain chord progressions, certain tonal or technical aspects that can be different from player to player, are worth exploring and exploiting if the player is comfortable with them and likes them. That's what causes stylistic differences, and most people in the business know there's true value in stylistic identity.

John Hartford liked to point out: Style is built on limitations. He was certainly an admirer of good style and a great stylist himself.

I'd say about 90% of today's players are sound-alikes, and as good as N is, he doesn't sound distinctive. To make a living in this business, it takes more than just sounding "as good as" someone who came before. You have to be special in some way, and one of the very best at whatever it is that you do. Right now, something distinctive about him is how well he plays at only 17. In a few years, his age will no longer be a factor, so the sooner he develops individuality the better.

Pete

Changing Chords Faster

Bob H. writes:

I'm learning the F shape, D shape, and Barre chords up and down the neck but still can't switch chords quick enough. Is there any advice or practice drills you can give me that might help me along, and what chords should I know for the jam camp?

Bob,

First of all, at the jam camp, we get an awful lot done with good old plain G, C, and D7. After that, it's good to learn D, Em, and A. A 3-finger D is fine, no need to use the 4-finger shape that works as a movable chord shape.

The F shape is important but it's not easy. The way I tell people to practice it is to alternate repeatedly between an A chord (very different from the F shape) and the F

shape. You'll have to constantly re-form the F shape and that's the essence of what you need to practice. Change chords back and forth, and settle into a steady pace, like a rhythm. However slowly you need to do it to get the F shape RIGHT, that's how fast you should do it.

To check for correctness, don't just strum the chords, but play the strings with a slow "rake", so you can hear each string individually. If you're not getting clear tone on any string, correct your fingering until the tone is clear. Very gradually, try to increase the speed of your chord changing. Look at your left hand to see which fingers are the slowest and least accurate. Have a little talk with each problem finger, and tell it you expect it to hustle more, and be there correctly when it's time. Then watch it and see that it does just that!

Working with a metronome helps here. You could set it to 30 (a change every 2 seconds) and see if you have to move it to a slower tempo, for it to match the time your hand needs to do the job right. Once you determine the speed your fingers can do it, stay at that speed for a while, and concentrate on making it right every time. You'll probably need to rest your hand after a minute or two, as the muscles, that haven't had to work so hard before, start complaining.

After a rest, do the back and forth, A to F, some more and see if you can increase the metronome speed slightly. Glare at the problem fingers, probably the ring or pinky, and tell them to hustle. ("Get there FIRST!")

Regular work on this exercise will definitely yield results. When the F shape goes on quickly, you can change chords more quickly, with less looking needed. That's a very important skill for backup, because if you have to look at your left hand, you can't look up to see the chord changes the guitar player is doing, which you have to follow.

Keep after this problem, and it should improve noticeably in just a few weeks. Good luck, and happy jamming!

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