

# hot banjo licks

newsletter #2 - september 2006

## Why Play Exactly Like Earl?



Before anyone thinks I've committed the unpardonable sin by asking the above question, let me explain what that means. First, let's get the disclaimers and formalities out the way by saying the Earl Scruggs IS THE MAN and there's probably no one better or who will ever come along and dethrone him, and if you don't play a pre-war Gibson (with all original parts) you don't really have a banjo. Okay, okay, so I'm being a little sarcastic, but aside from it all how many times have you encountered an obscurantist who says, "If it ain't Earl, it ain't bluegrass?" Over the last thirty years, I have heard an uncountable number of people casting judgments on banjo players for not playing like Earl. Thankfully, however, the number of Earl obscurantists do not make up the majority in the world of bluegrass banjo players.

This is a real touchy issue and it seems that no matter how many times you tell the world, I LOVE EARL, AND HE IS THE MAN TO STUDY IF YOU WANT TO PLAY THE BANJO, you're left feeling like some people don't really believe you, especially if they hear you play a two measure chromatic lick. Blasphemeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeemer!!!!!! I have always taught my students that Scruggs had a touch and attack on the banjo that is hard to mimic and duplicate. No doubt, he is the man, and I will always give him the crown for what he created and refined. His method is foundational in order to properly learn even the more bleeding edge styles of banjo playing. This is also true for all those who aspire to flat pick the guitar like Tony Rice or Bryan Sutton. First, learn the down and dirty rhythm of Jimmy Martin and Lester Flat, and you'll have a proper foundation for all the progressive music you desire to play. In other words, you need to have a starting place (reference point) and Earl laid it down first.

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## Why Play Exactly Like Earl? *Continued...*



I've said before, and I will continue to say, that all the professional banjo players I have spent time with pay great tribute to Scruggs, but it's interesting that none of them sound like him. Sure, they can play all the notes Earl played, but it's clearly not Earl. They play incredibly great stuff, but it's still never going to be "exactly" like Earl. Jim Mills mentioned this to me last week when he said we can try to play like Earl but "there's only one Earl, and none of us will play like him." The question in all of this is "does it really matter?" Can you imagine how boring it would be if every single banjo player on the globe could play note for note for like Scruggs, and with the exact tone and attack? This would be a dream world for the musically myopic obscurantist, but it would only help to stifle the growth of bluegrass music to have a banjo style NEVER evolve. Such an attitude, if practiced consistently across the board, would have kept us in horse and buggies and steam engines. Those who want the bluegrass world to remain true to Monroe, Martin, and Flatt & Scruggs, need to keep in mind what progressive, radical innovators they were in their day. Would it have been reasonable for Earl to give up his quest to develop his three-finger style for the style of Uncle Dave Macon or String Bean? I agree, it would not be reasonable by any stretch of the imagination.

Earl is the guy to build from, but do yourself a great favor and develop your own voice and touch on the instrument. Don't beat yourself up for NOT having the exact same touch, feel, and attack of Earl. He is the blueprint, but feel free to modify the design to fit your needs and inner creativity. Learn to feel the music in the deepest regions of your soul. Make the music your own as you practice integrating your emotions and heart into everything from the story lines of the music to the pulsing rhythm. When you learn to integrate your emotions into the music it makes it easier to play with feel, and feel is an extremely important ingredient for learning how to play down and dirty, great banjo. The best way to develop your own voice on the banjo (besides practicing) is to watch other players (professionals, especially) and incorporate their experience and knowledge into your own ideas and ear. Listening to other styles of music is also a great way to get new ideas for approaching the finger board of your banjo (of course, much of this will depend on one's level of experience). The bottom line is to keep yourself teachable and always willing to grow. For all you newbies to the banjo world, I would encourage you to start with Scruggs because he is the solid foundation. As you grow in your skill, however, don't make the mistake by thinking that you have to be a clone of Earl. This is a false notion we all need to avoid. Just for the record, I still pull out my collection of Flatt & Scruggs cds and listen to Earl slam that banjo. His playing still puts a chill my spine, and a pool of drool on my floor. Keep playing and play hard.

*David L. Russell*

## What do you think?

Agree with Dave? Think he's full of it? Please let us know. We will print your response in the next newsletter and those that make us feel honored you took the time, we will put them all in a hat and draw for a couple free CDs!

Click Here to Email Dave..... [Dave@HotBanjoLicks.com](mailto:Dave@HotBanjoLicks.com)



# lick of the month



## L.O.M. - A Lick in the Key of G

Here is an interesting little lick you can throw in at the end of almost any classic bluegrass number. Try using while playing the song "Will You Be Loving Another Man"

	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0			
3-4		3~		3~		3~	0	2-3	0			
SL		CH		CH		CH		SL	2			
	0						0					
t	i	m	t	m	i	t	i	m	i	t	m	t

**.Mp3 File**  
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**.WAV File**  
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## Banjo Tip of the Month

Instead of paying an arm and a leg for a "fancy" banjo strap pad, go to your local Walmart, Kmart or Meijers and pick up a seat belt wrap! They're GREAT, economical and come in all sorts of fun colors and even some are fluffy, fake lambswool or have soft padding. They velcro wrap around any banjo strap and add instant comfort to your playing!

- Sherri C., Redford, MI

Send us your hot tips... [Tips@HotBanjoLicks.com](mailto:Tips@HotBanjoLicks.com)



# subscribers... only



## 9 Pound Hammer Tab

A long time ago, actually about 23 years ago, Sherri and Dave were friends and she was talking banjo lessons from him. (Hard to believe that 3 year olds can learn to play the banjo... ha ha ha...) All fun aside, they started to work on a set of tab books, even back then in the old days! Everyone called Dave, Hound Dawg Russell, for some odd reason, and we got to work on the Hound Dawg Banjo Tab book back when computers took up a whole room and everything was done by hand in the printing/publishing business.

Well, needless to say, we were like oh, in our late teens, and it just didn't happen. Sherri lugged the tabs around for a few years, 20 to be exact, from Michigan to Ohio to California and back and somewhere along the line, they got lost. When we got back together a few years ago... we always wanted to do some tabs for folks... and here is the first one! 9 Pound Hammer... ready for you to learn and pick along with the recorded tracks. We've even had Greg Fusion, a great guitar buddy of ours, come in and lay down a little background rhythm for you!



**Free Download**

Good only for 30 days!

**CLICK HERE!!**

The Zip File includes several audio tracks for you to listen to, play along with and learn about playing this month's tab.



*Dave and his brother really love the Hot Banjo Licks Newsletter*

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# 9 Pound Hammer

G TUNING - Arranged by Dave Russell

**G** **C**

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1 1 1 2 3  
0 0 0 3 3-5 0 0 3 0 0 0  
i t t t t i m t i m t m t m t m t i t i m t i m

**G** **D** **G**

2 0 2 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0  
1 0 0 0 2-3 0 0 2 0 2 0 2 0 0 2-3 0 2  
t i m t m m m t i m i t m t i t i i t i t m t i m i t m

**C**

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 2 2 2  
0 0 2-3 3 2 0 0 3 0 3 0 1 1 1 1 1  
i t i m t i t m t i t i m t i m t i t m t i m t m i t i m t i m

**G** **D** **G**

2 2 2 0 0 0 0 0 0 0  
1 2 0 0 2-3 0 0 2 0 2 0 2 0 0 0 3-2 0  
t i t m t m t m t m t i m i t m t i t i t i t i t m i t m t

# what's new at HotBanjoLicks.com

## Endings Volume 1 is ready!

Well, it's taken us just a  
little longer than we wanted,  
but it's well worth the wait!

50 great endings to spice up your playing!  
No more just playing "shave and a haircut"!  
You'll have more endings than  
you can shake a stick at!

Some simple, some more difficult, a few funky, a few melodic,  
and a few that are \$10 endings all by themselves!

You'll scare the womenfolk and send your jamming buddies running for the hills when  
you lay a thumb into a few of these beauties without warning!

**They won't know what got into you!  
But we will... and we won't tell your secret!**

Click **HERE** to go straight to the website and see this newest Hot Licks series!

[www.HotBanjoLicks.com](http://www.HotBanjoLicks.com)

## Funky Licks is Next!

Dave's already got the lava light on and some  
blues playing on the CD. He's the master of the  
funky banjo around this place and he's pouring his  
rock and roll, bluesy heart into the grass he loves!

**COMING SOON.....**





**HotBanjoLicks.com provides the banjo player with economical CDs and PDF e-books of the licks you want to learn and incorporate into your own style of playing.**

*Different volumes include:*

**G Licks • Kick-offs • Endings  
Back Up Licks • Tag Licks • Melodic Licks**

Hot Banjo Licks are designed for the intermediate banjo player that is looking to spice up their playing with more creative sounds to help develop their own style. Buying lots of tab books just to get that great kick-off or a tag lick can be expensive. Each of our Hot Banjo Licks collections offer you 50 great licks with an e-book of the tabbed lick as well as audio recordings of each lick played cleanly and at a medium rate for practice. All for one great low price!

Mix and match the different collections, buy just the ones that you WANT! If you only want endings, then buy just the endings volume that suits you!

And you can download them NOW! No waiting for the mail, it can be even the middle of the night or half way across the world! Or purchase them as convenient CDs mailed to you. Either way, you're ready to add the spice you've been looking for to your playing!

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*Be sure to sign up for our Lick of the Month newsletter! It's free! You'll get a new lick and audio recording as well as tips and information on playing the banjo! Check out the website for more information.*

**[www.HotBanjoLicks.com](http://www.HotBanjoLicks.com)**