

Banjo

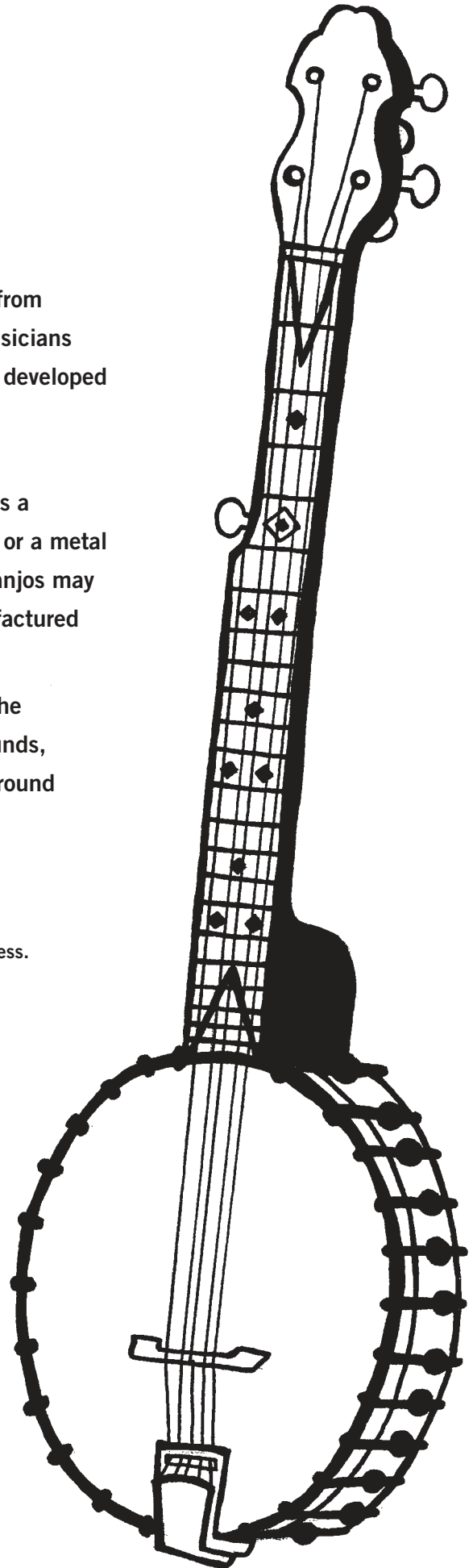
HISTORY

American banjos are descendants of a family of lutes from West Africa and the Middle East. Enslaved African musicians brought the instruments to the New World and further developed them here.

Most common today is the five-string banjo, where the fifth string is a short string usually tuned to function as a high drone. Five-string banjos may have an open back or a metal resonator back, and are almost always steel-strung. Banjos may be fretted or fretless, acoustic or electric, mass-manufactured or individually handcrafted.

In recordings and broadcasts of early country music, the banjo brought not only its distinctive finger-picked sounds, but also its African style. Today the banjo is popular around the world, particularly played in the three-finger style perfected by Earl Scruggs.

Adapted from the Country Music Hall of Fame® and Museum's *Encyclopedia of Country Music*, published by Oxford University Press.



Learn More About the Banjo:

WEBSITES

The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum: CountryMusicHallofFame.org

Official Site of Béla Fleck: BelaFleck.com

Official Site of Will Keys: WillKeys.com

Official Site of Earl Scruggs: EarlScruggs.com

The Smithsonian: si.edu/Encyclopedia_SI/nmah/folkinst.htm

YOUTH LITERATURE

Ellis, Rex M., *With a Banjo on My Knee: A Musical Journey from Slavery to Freedom*. Children's Press, 2001.

Appropriate independent reading for grades 7 and up. A discussion of the banjo as an instrument important in African-American music in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Includes a glossary of banjo-related terms, a banjo discography, and historical photos.

Available at Nashville Public Library, major bookstores, and Amazon.com.

Handyside, Christopher. *Country: A History of American Music*, Helnemann Library, 2006.

Appropriate reference material for grades 5–9. A presentation of the banjo in the context of American country music history - from its mountain beginnings to its prominence in country and bluegrass music. Includes historical photos. Available at Nashville Public Library, major bookstores, and Amazon.com.

ADULT LITERATURE

Bollman, James F. and Phillip F. Gura. *America's Instrument: The Banjo in the Nineteenth Century*, University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

Traces the evolution of the banjo from its origins as a gourd instrument to its place in American popular culture. Also offers a unique view of the American nineteenth century music industry. Includes historical photos.

Available at Nashville Public Library, major bookstores, and Amazon.com.

Conway, Cecelia. *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study of Folk Traditions*, University of Tennessee Press, 1995.

Through personal interviews and research, the author reveals the African-American origins of an instrument which commonly serves as an emblem of the white mountain community. Includes historical photos.

Available at Nashville Public Library, major bookstores, and Amazon.com.

Linn, Karen. *That Half-Barbaric Twang: The Banjo in American Popular Culture*, University of Illinois Press, 1994.

An interpretation of the changing and conflicting images of the banjo as found in the culture of the United States. Includes historical photos.

Available at Nashville Public Library, major bookstores, and Amazon.com.

RECORDINGS

Fleck, Béla, *The Bluegrass Sessions: Tales from the Acoustic Planet, Volume 2*, Warner Bros. 47332 (1999).

Flatt & Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys, *Foggy Mountain Banjo*, Columbia CS 8364 (1961).

This album has been reissued several times on other labels.

Jenkins, Snuffy, *Snuffy Jenkins: Pioneer of the Bluegrass Banjo*, Arhoolie 9027 (1998).

Various artists, *Masters of the Banjo*, Arhoolie CD 421 (1994).

Various artists, *Minstrel Banjo Style*, Rounder 321 (1994).



SUPPORTED BY:



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