

Welcome to the first issue of the MandoUniversity Newsletter! In the newsletter will be discussions, tips, and ideas that you can use to improve your mandolin playing. If you enjoy this publication and find it useful to you please let me know. If you would rather not receive it let me know that too.

I am not completely sure where the topics of this newsletter will go and I hope to be guided by your questions and comments. Much like my experience with teaching mandolin students in person, I think this newsletter will be a learning experience for me too.

*Bradley Laird*

## A Fortunate Series of Events

Contemplate this chain of events. When your pick contacts the string it flexes slightly from the impact, begins to push the string out of its way, and a millisecond later snaps to the other side of the string, you have set in motion a complex series of events that would confound even the most illustrious physicists! Your pick causes the string to begin a set of vibrations that race through the bridge, soundboard and body of the mandolin and, unless you play in an airless vacuum, the air around the mandolin is sympathetically set in motion in a set of waves that radiate outwards ultimately coaxing eardrums to wiggle and tickle some tiny nerve endings. This tickling induces nerve impulses which bolt towards the listener's brain and the electro-chemical reactions start in an endlessly complex way. And the owner of that brain would just simply swear that they just heard some fool pickin' on a dad-burned mandolin!

This entire series of events happens extremely quickly. It does take a measureable amount of time to get all these actions accomplished (more if the sound must travel through lots of air) but, for practical purposes, it happens so fast that it is almost like your pick is directly connected to the brain of the listener. With that pick you can stimulate the listener's brain. You can stir it, blur it, poke it, stroke it, tickle it, amuse it, confuse it, abuse it, and tease it. It's all in your power! You don't really play the mandolin. You play the listener's mind!

The complex timing of this entire sequence is probably more difficult to understand than "where babies come from" or "how to drive a VW bus to Mars." But, luckily we don't have to worry much about precisely what is happening. We just need to know that it happens. And when notes happen is of utmost importance for successful and positive manipulation of the listener's brain!

Let me put the real point in plain, schoolbook language. Music is as much about when things happen than it is about what happens. Ask any drummer. He can beat on a trash can or a snare drum and still make music. You can beat on a 'tater bug' or a Loar and still make music. But, no matter what you do, if you don't beat on it with good timing, good music will fail to emerge.

Which musical tones you create all have their importance too, but without a sense of timing they lose their musicality. Time is the space that the notes move through. Mess up the timing and you mess up the notes.

Imagine that you are hired to paint the lines in the parking lot of a new shopping center. Your Acme line-painting machine is purring like a kitten and you are laying down beautiful, rich yellow stripes. The boss comes over (they like to do that) and looks approvingly at the quality of your painted lines. Then he says "Your lines look great, but I still have to fire you!"

Your lines were painted nicely. But you screwed up the spacing. Some of your parking spaces are 2 feet wide, some 8 feet wide, some 5 feet wide. Other than that they looked fine! Didn't you measure? The spacing of your painted lines (or your mandolin notes) is one of the primary ways you will be judged.

Play any two notes. How did they sound? Were they perfect? How can you know unless they are compared to some time reference—either a band chugging along or a metronome. If your two sample notes were played at the right time they were good ones. If they were played out of whack in relation to the desired grid of time they were no good. Bummer.

The left hand has its role in timing too. The left hand, most of the time, is working slightly ahead of the right. The fingers of the left hand sometimes initiate notes on their own (when hammering, sliding, or pulling off), but most of the time it is fair to say that sound production is result of right hand action and, therefore, that good timing is the result of good right hand action.

*That was an excerpt from my upcoming book "Mandolin Training Camp" which is coming out soon.*

## Mandolin Tuning Tip

When tuning to a pocket electronic tuning machine, tune only one of each pair to the tuner. Then tune the other string to the first by ear. The display precision of most tuning machines are not good enough to get the two strings exactly in tune. Your ear can do it if you learn to listen to the beating pulses which slow down as the two strings get closer to the same frequency.

# Salt Creek - A Jam Session Favorite

Here is the popular tune Salt Creek. (a.k.a. Salt River or Saline Tributary as I like to call it.) It is one of those "must have" tunes that needs to be in every mandolin player's arsenal since it is played so frequently in jam sessions. The tune is organized like most fiddle tunes in an AAB structure.

The first version of the tune sticks pretty close to the melody as I know it. But, it is my opinion that this tune (and many others!) is continually undergoing an evolution as it moves from one player to the next. I first learned Salt Creek on the banjo from another banjo player. It was a few years later that I heard it on a Tony Trishka album with someone I can't recall playing mandolin. My idea of what the tune really was changed a bit then. Then later I heard Monroe do it and my idea of what the "real tune" was changed some more. Everytime I hear someone else do the tune

I hear variations and elaborations and evolution. I am not saying that I am either for or against the evolution of a tune. It is inevitable. I do think it is good to explore old, near-original versions when possible. Somebody must've written this thing at some point and you might find in older versions some very interesting bits of the tune which have been lost in the handing down process. On the other hand the tune offers a great chance to improvise over the chords and toss in some "wilder" stuff. Since it has become such a jam session mainstay it seems that nearly anything goes with this tune these days. The second version here is more typical of the kind of solo I might take on it on my second time through. You will find some interesting blues scale licks played in 2nd position that you can borrow and use elsewhere. And try that 3rd position pentatonic lick in the 6th measure from the end. It is easier if you move from 2nd to 3rd position on the last note of the measure before by playing the 5th fret with the index finger.

Traditional  
Arr. by Bradley Laird

The tablature is organized into six systems, each with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The notes are represented by numbers 0-7 on the strings, with 's' for slides and 'h' for hammer-ons. Chord names are placed above the staves.

- System 1:** A (0 00 0 00), D (2024 5 55), G (20 0 20 0), E (20 0 00), A (00 0 00), D (2024 5 02).
- System 2:** G (3532 020), E (420 0 00), A (0555 5 55), A (7555 0555), G (0333 3 33), G (5333 0333).
- System 3:** A (0555 5 55), G (7555 0 02), G (3 2 0), E (4456 000), I (0 00 0 00), IV (2040 5 55).
- System 4:** VIIb (20 2 5 54), V (245 0 20), I (57 00 0 00), IV (2 24 5 03), VIIb (5853 030), V (530 0 00), I (5 0 00).
- System 5:** I (0356 0 00), VIIb (5305 30), I (79 55 5 99), I (975 5 55), I (000 0 00), I (0356 0 03).
- System 6:** VIIb (5305 30 3), V (0 653 0 00), I (0 00).

If you have any questions or comments be sure to write me:

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