

09. Playing Rhythm

There is a great difference between playing a guitar as compared to playing a banjo. Guitars by nature do not deal well with hard playing and therefore they aren't played hard even by beginners. Banjos on the other hand is of a drum (percussion) style construction and most players have a natural tendency to play the banjo way too hard because it seems like the thing to do. Unfortunately playing a banjo hard takes away from its somewhat limited tonal qualities. There is a natural tendency to play a banjo hard, especially if one is playing along with other banjo players. The problem is that as more banjos are added to a group the louder they are collectively and it then becomes a lot of noise. Banjos are by nature loud and it takes a little time to learn how to play it softly. My suggestion for beginners is to first learn to play chords holding the pick loosely or use a soft pick either of which will result in softer playing. It's much easier to start learning the banjo playing softly then play it harder when needed. When playing rhythm in a group, try to be aware of how loud you and the others are playing. If you can't hear the lead melody or the vocalist then the banjo players are playing too loud. A guide for this is for the rhythm players to play as if a vocalist is singing each and every song. The melody of a song must always be dominate to be heard and the rhythm is the support foundation for the melody - the rhythm should never overpower the melody.

Some rules for rhythm banjo playing:

- Play in support of the entire group, not yourself.
- Play every song as if a vocalist is singing the melody and must be heard.
- Keep in mind that the banjo is louder to those in front of you.
- If others are playing loud don't play loud also.
- If you can't hear the melody, the rhythm is way too loud.