

## 12. Song Introductions

There are three elements to a typical song introduction:

- To establish the rhythm (tempo) for a song.
- It might include a small bit of the song melody leading in to the song.
- It should have a downbeat note or chord run (pick up) for others to start playing.

The best song introduction is to play the last 4 or 8 bars of a song. This provides the accompanying players with all three of the key song introduction elements. Playing this type of introduction requires that the player be familiar with both the melody and the tempo for the song.

Another easy intro style is a 4 bar minor vamp – playing a minor chord 4 beats per bar.

A difficult introduction for a group is by a vocalist. This type of introduction should be avoided unless the group is well seasoned and is familiar with the song. Starting to play at the exact instant can be difficult and if not timed correctly it may confuse the group. This can result in a staggered start as the group members join in.

If there is no designated player or vocalist for an introduction then a count can be used. Typically, this is a verbal count or audible tapping of a known sequence. Most commonly the sequence is a two measure count of 1 - 2 ,1,2,3,4 the 4th is the pickup. A single measure count of 1,2,3,4 works also but sometimes the group needs the longer two full measures to get the temp set.

If the introduction player is not going to play the lead then he/she should drop back to playing rhythm or harmony. This is a basic method and one will develop an ear for this with the experience of playing with groups. There are no fixed rules and the variety of playing techniques by the group members can add “color” to the song as long as the rhythm is steady and strong.

Played introductions should be loud enough to be clearly heard by the audience and the group. A major concern associated with playing a banjo is to not beat on it. Very hard banjo playing results in both a loss of tonal quality and has a tendency for the other banjo members to play harder and the performance then becomes noisy.

Keep in mind that the sound from a banjo is directed out from the front of the instrument and the player is above and behind it so it may not sound as loud to the player as it is to the listener located in the front. It's always a good idea to ask others around you how you sound and then compensate accordingly. Sometimes the answer may surprise you so it is most important to ask the listeners how it sounds to them.