

April 29 banjo class resources

Hello banjo friends,

What a month it has been! I so appreciate you all sharing your time with me for this exploration of some of my favorite banjo music. Hopefully your heads are spinning—in a good way—and you are excited to practice our case-study material and make it your own.

Remember from the end of class tonight how I asked you to think of me as your on-call banjo friend? Whenever you have a question or concern, when you are shopping for a perfect music-camp experience or a perfect banjo, or when you are planning an old-time music festival itinerary, I will be there to help if you need me! Well, you know what else could be a good friend for you to make as you get to know this week's (and prior weeks', for that matter) tunes more deeply? The metronome, or some other time-keeping device (even a guitar rhythm track or similar) that both won't lie and won't force you to escalate your tempos too early in the learning process, that's what! Such a practice companion will likely come in handy as you work to move "Western Country" from our rather glacial in-class pace to something more jam session-friendly. Calibrate the metronome to the tempo at which you can comfortably play the more dense A part, and know that the bulk of the B part will always sound and feel slower and more spacious—and that's as it should be. It would be all too tempting to cavalierly speed up that slow-and-spacious B part first, but then you are apt to be in trouble when you return to the A part with all of its eighth-note punctuation. Similarly, consider using the metronome when you work to superimpose the decorative slides on the Galax licks in "Ducks on the Millpond," making certain that the playing hand's rhythm is in no way disrupted by the presence of these slides.

With his unparalleled sense of melody and his driving rhythm, Kyle Creed is for my taste the ultimate stringband-style banjo player. Add to those qualities Kyle's signature sweet tone, though, and you really have a special package, whether heard solo or with others. As you get to know his playing better (which I hope that you will do by listening to the rest of his online tracks from the albums linked in this month's resources, not just our case-study tunes), you will likely understand why I often ask myself when playing or arranging any kind of banjo music, "WWKCD?"

Call it "Western Country" as Kyle sometimes did, call it "Susanna Gal" or even "Susananna Gal," as it is often known in the Round Peak and Galax-area musical communities, or call it "Fly Around My Pretty Little Miss," as many old-time musicians outside of this region do, the reason why this has become such a commonly-played tune are clear: it's just that good! Here are a few takes on it that you might enjoy:

-Kyle joins his bandmates in the Camp Creek Boys for this performance from their 1967 album: <https://youtu.be/PSgFrIqp1Og?si=ewLWCZ3TwGqbLn6z>

-A really special concert performance of Kyle alongside our old friend Fred Cockerham (on fiddle here) and guitarist Bobby Patterson from the first Brandywine festival in 1974 is worth hearing in its entirety, but "Susanna Gal" is the very first tune: https://youtu.be/7eGbIsLj6c?si=VqVT8pHfZRR1o_RE

-Kyle and Tommy play fiddles together and are supported by bluegrass banjo player Ted Lundy in this 1974 field recording: <https://youtu.be/MhpsOHwGk4o?si=DA4xBj9aHq7rRHUN>

Tommy Jarrell's banjo playing never fails to impress and fascinate me with its detail, its consistency, and its distinctive character. Tell all of your old-time musician friends who know Tommy mainly or exclusively as a fiddler that his banjo work really deserves to be experienced and studied!

“Ducks on the Millpond” is a go-to tune for the Round Peak musicians, as evidenced by this cross-section of recordings and personnel (and don't let the sometimes-reversed, sometimes inconsistently-repeated parts throw you; it is the same tune that we covered!):

-Enjoy Tommy playing his singular setting of the tune with its wonderfully fretless-y A part even as demonstrated here on a fretted banjo, this track from the 1974 “Come and Go With Me” album of Tommy's banjo music: <https://youtu.be/aGPJ8ItpcoE?si=NvrB79Sgo8BJUIJA>

-Here is a fabulous undated field recording of a Galax Fiddlers' Convention jam session in which Tommy and his fiddle join Kyle Creed on banjo, Paul Sutphin on guitar, and Verlin Clifton on mandolin: <https://youtu.be/xqjx1B23ZVo?si=bTKKvsDuGdOTxw56>

-To better make out what Kyle was doing in the above recording, listen to this duet with guitarist Bobby Patterson: <https://youtu.be/c9esGVdFaOE?si=fl0sjeJ-v5aFAoyn>

-Here is Kyle once more, on stage in the banjo contest at the 1964 Galax Fiddlers' Convention, playing the tune following some fun commentary about his banjo: https://youtu.be/ipgq_MGUdP4?si=JCNyjb_qp5FmklI9

Please feel free to watch for Megan's announcements of further online workshops, and keep an eye on my www.adamhurt.com website and my Facebook page for announcements of my new Patreon channel, likely launching late this summer. Beyond that, please keep in touch if I can be helpful to you in any way, or if you just feel like sharing your banjo news—and please say hello if we happen to be at any of the same banjo camps and festivals in real life!

Cheers,
Adam