

Hello banjo friends,

After tonight's class, can you now see why, when Megan and I decided to offer another round of gourd banjo music-themed workshops, I knew that Bowback HAD to be included? It's just such a special tune, and I'm so excited to share it with you for the first time that I have taught it in a group setting.

I want to pass along an axiom of sorts about "crooked" tunes--that is, those tunes that have an unusual number of measures, or measures containing an unusual number of beats, or both--that I have heard many seasoned old-time musicians express: after a certain period of time spent with one of these tunes, its structural irregularities will no longer stand out as tricky or strange; that will simply be how the tune GOES, and your musical ear and analytical mind will no longer perceive its irregularities as such.

While you are still getting to know this tune, though, do take note of the spots that seem shorter than they should be, and use your ear along with the tab to better understand the context for the truncations; I promise that they aren't randomly placed! This thoughtfulness will hopefully override your instinct to square up the crookedness.

If you struggle with the mechanics behind the syncopation, particularly in the A part's opening phrase, remember to try counting beats as you play or read from the tab: 1-and-2-and-3-and-4-and across a 4/4 measure. Any note that occurs on a numbered beat will be a finger-strike (and a ghost stroke does count as a finger-strike); any note that occurs on the "and" of a numbered beat will be something other than a finger-strike (thumb, pull-off, hammer-on, slide). In the very first measure, there really are THREE ghost strokes on three adjacent beats! Keep your playing hand moving through those syncopated spaces, the better to not use a finger-strike on an inappropriate beat, rather than freezing your hand in space until the next note sounds.

At the moment, Bowback is a criminally underplayed tune, so I can only share my single source for it--but this situation is slowly improving, as you all will soon be playing it, too:

-Here is Chris Turpin playing the tune on a recent home recording. Chris plays a fretless mountain banjo in an old-time fingerstyle, and he uses a tuning related but not identical to ours (scroll down to track 3): <https://christurpin.bandcamp.com/album/the-fox-chase>

Please drop me a line if I can help you get more comfortable with this compelling tune, answer any banjo questions that you may have, or otherwise be of assistance!

Cheers,
Adam