

Hello banjo friends,

What a dreamy month it has been--for me, at least!--exploring these compelling tunes with all of you. I so appreciate your keen attention and participation in class, your thoughtful correspondence after class, and your time overall. These large-group Zoom workshops are admittedly quite different from in-person group workshops, but I have become a big fan of the format over these past couple of years and aim to continue periodically offering such workshops as long as there is interest. Please let me know if there are ANY adjustments that I can make for the next round that you feel would improve the experience.

Biddy strikes me as the right note to end on, as even though it is a fiddle tune that I adapted to the banjo, its open-string-oriented layout is so very banjoistic (I'm allowed to use that fake word among like-minded people, even if spellcheck objects, right?). That abundance of open strings will make for a wonderfully playable tune, too, once you become more familiar with its melody and aren't having to calculatedly consider where it is headed next. Remember that the open strings are wonderful points of reference for getting fretted notes well intonated on fretless banjos; just listen to the sustain of one type of note--open or fretted--against the sustain of a subsequent note of the opposite type, and adjust your finger placement as necessary to achieve a sweet- rather than sour-sounding interval.

As you smooth out Biddy on your banjos, enjoy these renditions from a cross-section of old-time musicians:

-fiddler Edden Hammons, from Pocahontas County, West Virginia, recorded in 1947. His stately fiddling is frustratingly overshadowed on this track by crashing and poorly-tuned guitar playing, but to the best of my knowledge it is the only primary-source recording available, so we must take it as it is: <https://www.slippery-hill.com/content/biddy>

-fiddler Stephanie Coleman, my source for the tune, plays so beautifully here in the final round of competition at the Clifftop festival in 2013, where she had the audience spellbound—and ultimately won third place: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmvSc3VrdM8>

-fiddler Clare Milliner with Walt Koken on banjo in a recent video; this tune also appears on their terrific “Just Tunes” album from 2003. They reverse the parts from the orientation that we learned: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKP-4GMtDrl>

-the Foghorn Stringband, featuring fiddler Sammy Lind, from their 2007 “Boombox Square Dance” album. The parts are again reversed from the way that we learned it, and the chord progression treats it as a D-major tune rather than an A-modal tune (as it seems to more often be treated), giving it a curiously bright harmonic sensibility: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtsQtAwt7w>

Please keep in touch! I love continued correspondence with workshop participants as material becomes more familiar and understood in different ways from when it is very fresh. Whenever questions or thoughts come up with which I could be helpful, I'm only an email away. Many thanks for spending this month with me!

Cheers,
Adam