

Hello banjo friends,

Two workshop sessions on Southwest Virginia fiddle tunes down, two more to go; since we have an even number of sessions altogether, I suppose that “hump day” may be hard to pin down, but the coming days could be considered “hump week.” In any case, I hope that you are having a good time thus far, feeling challenged but not frustratingly so, enjoying trying new things, and gaining an appreciation for the very special music of this region. Can you tell how much *I* enjoy these sessions (perhaps by how I never manage to end at anything short of the maximum advertised time, just because it’s all so exciting and so much fun that I can’t quite stop myself...!)?

The top-of-phrase “anticipation” that showed up quite a bit tonight—sound of some kind made on the final beat of a measure, with the first beat of the subsequent measure left blank so that the preceding beat’s sound is sustained and effectively tied across the bar line—is a real hallmark of Southern-style old-time fiddling, but adapting it to the banjo can be a challenge. Many clawhammer players simply square off such figures by playing the note a beat later than it sounds on the fiddle, making a rhythmic contrast when paired with fiddlers—and this approach certainly isn’t “wrong.” You may well choose to move some of our anticipated notes to the other side of the bar line yourselves, as you get more familiar with the sound and the flow of this month’s music! However, in learning ways to mimic the fiddle’s timing you are in a better position to choose your preferred approach and are no longer forced to default to square rhythms.

Here are a few fiddle-oriented recordings to help you make clearer sense of the peculiar rhythms and other unique elements of our latest tunes:

-“Rocking in the Weary Land” played by fiddler Luther Davis, from Galax, born in 1889. According to the fascinating writeup by old-time musician Mac Traynham, Mr. Davis was 95 when this recording was made! He is accompanied here by friends Alice Gerrard on guitar and Andy Cahan on banjo. We should be glad that he was willing to play the tune at all, given his spoken disclaimer at the beginning: “I don’t just exactly like it!” <https://handmademusicschool.com/macs-tune-of-the-week/rocking-in-a-weary-land/>

-“Lady of the Lake,” another example of the high-energy playing of Carroll County fiddler Norman Edmonds and his bandmates: <https://www.slippery-hill.com/content/lady-lake-1>

-contemporary fiddler Pete Sutherland (recently deceased) offers up a medley of three settings of “Lady of the Lake”—the Norman Edmonds setting being the last of the bunch—on his 1982 album “Eight Miles from Town,” seemingly overdubbed and playing all three instruments: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fIzdxYAYnY>

Happy practicing until next week—and don’t forget to make sure that our clocks are in alignment!

Cheers,
Adam