# BANJO À CINQ CORDES

Description de quatre banjos anciens acquis en 2021 pour le MiM par les Amis des Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire de Bruxelles









S.S. STEWART 'Thoroughbred' Philadelphia, PA, ca. 1898

A. CAMMEYER 'Vibrante Royal' London, UK, 1928

PARAMOUNT plectrum 'Style C' New York, NY, ca. 1924

BACON & DAY 'Silver Bell' – No. 2 Original 5-string neck Groton, CT, 1927



VEGA 'Whyte Laydie' and 'Tubaphone'... (un souhait parmi d'autres...)

Gérard De Smaele Janvier 2023 Ce document décrit et documente les banjos achetés fin décembre 2021 à Gérard De Smaele par les Amis des Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire de Bruxelles, ceci en vue de les introduire dans les collections du Musée des Instruments de Musique, qui est un département des MRAH. Le 9 juin 2022, les Amis des MRAH ont été conviés à une récéption pour la remise officielle de ce don au MiM.

Une version provisoire de ce texte a été imprimée et remise au MiM en mars 2022. Cette première épreuve a été revue et imprimée en décembre 2022. Celle-ci comporte 457 pages et sera à son tour relue et mise en page en janvier 2023. Des annexes les plus volumineuses, seul le lien internet a été conservé, ce qui justifie le nombre moins important de pages de la version finale. Il est à noter que de nombreux scans ont été refaits, échangés ou améliorés. Il n'est pas exclu que cette dernière épreuve soit encore amendée : voir la date annoncée sur la page de couverture.

Le présent fichier est accessible au MiM, ainsi que sur les sites suivants :

- Gérard De Smaele
- Dépôt légal de la KBR
- Internet archive

Remarque importante:

Pour l'impression papier, il faudra toutefois tenir compte du fait que les pages sont à l'orientation portrait, à l'exception des pages 52 à 54, ainsi que des pages 177 à 185 qui sont à l'orientation paysage.

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Janvier 2023

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Ces quatre banjos proposés au MiM en 2021 ont finalement été acquis pour le musée par les Amis des Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire.

Un numéro d'inventaire leur a été attribué :

Banjo à 5 cordes. S.S. Stewart 'Thoroughbred'. Philadelphia PA, ca. 1898.

2021.0108.001

Banjo plectrum à 4 cordes. Paramount 'Style C'. New York NY, ca. 1924.

2021.0108.002

Banjo à cinq cordes. Bacon & Day 'Silver Bell' No. 2. Groton CT, 1927.

2021.0108.003

Zither-banjo à cinq cordes. A. Cammeyer 'Vibrante Royal'. London UK, 1928.

2021.0108.004

Pour chaque banjo conservé au MiM, une fiche descriptive sera prochainement rédigée et ajoutée sur 'Carmentis', le catalogue en ligne des MRAH : http://www.carmentis.be/

ou

https://archive.org/details/cover-carmentis-projet https://www.desmaele5str.be/dossiersArchives

Ces instruments sont liés à de grandes personnalités, musiciens et facteurs qui ont jalonné l'histoire du banjo au 19° et au début du 20° siècle. Ils sont à la croisée de leurs chemins, tant aux États-Unis qu'en Angleterre :

- les musiciens Alfred Farland, Vess Ossman, William Bowen, Alfred Cammeyer, Harry Reser, Fred Bacon ou Frank Bradbury;
- les fabricants et concepteurs Samuel Swain Stewart, Alfred Farland, Rettberg & Lange, Fred Bacon et David Day.

Eux-mêmes ont été en relation avec les Frères Dobson, J.H. Buckbee ou A.C. Fairbanks, C. Essex, et la Vega Company : d'autres facteurs, icones de cette passionnante aventure musicale.

# PRÉSENTATION GÉNÉRALE

À chacune de mes participations à la 'Banjo Gathering' (Arlington MA en 2005, Charlottesville VA en 2015, Bristol VA en 2018), nombre de ceux qui s'étaient rendus à Bruxelles après la clôture de notre exposition, s'étaient étonnés de n'avoir trouvé aucun banjo exposé au MiM et en étaient repartis fort déçus. C'est une situation générale, constatée ailleurs, même dans les plus grands musées d'instruments de musique, ceci en dépit du fait qu'ils peuvent par ailleurs conserver en réserve de riches collections de banjos. Je pense par exemple au National American History Museum à Washington, au Metropolitan Museum of Art à NYC, au Musée de la Cité de la musique à Paris...). Ces institutions se sont entretemps rachetées par leurs sites internet.

Bien que le banjo occupe une place importante dans l'histoire de la musique populaire du 19° siècle à nos jours – celle des États-Unis, mais finalement aussi la nôtre –, il est à remarquer que le Musée Instrumental de Bruxelles était, il y a une quarantaine d'années, particulièrement pauvre en cette matière. En témoignent *Les instruments de musique dans l'art et l'histoire* de Roger Bragard (Éd. A. De Visscher, 1973), ainsi que le *Catalogue descriptif et analytique du Musée Instrumental* de Charles Mahillon (édité à Gand, en 1880), dans lesquels il n'est soit pas, soit mal présenté (ce qui est excusable vu l'époque). C'était, entre autres choses, faire l'impasse sur les travaux de l'ethnomusicologue Français André Schaeffner sur la musique des Afro-Américains, publiés dans la revue *Le Ménestrel* dès 1926, ainsi que sur le *Banjo, Mandolin and Guitar Movement* qui fit tant d'adeptes à partir de la fin du 19° siècle.

Depuis le 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, le banjo à cinq cordes, avec sa chanterelle caractéristique, sera aussi un des piliers de la musique traditionnelle du Sud des États-Unis. Plus tard des versions hybrides à quatre cordes, privées de cette corde plus courte, seront un des aspects distinctifs des débuts du jazz¹. À la grande déception des amateurs, tant belges qu'étrangers, ces banjos sont encore sous-représentés dans les collections du MiM et n'ont pas encore trouvé leur place dans les salles permanentes du musée. Ces musiques ont pourtant connu un retentissement international, et il serait souhaitable de combler ce manque. D'autre part, nul ne peut nier que le banjo soit entré dans l'imaginaire collectif et mériterait un minimum de commentaires explicatifs. De la part d'une grande institution officielle, le public est en droit d'attendre un juste aperçu de cet instrument. Pourtant très riche, l'histoire du banjo est trop souvent ramenée à des clichés simplistes et réducteurs.

Rappelons encore que le banjo est un instrument d'origine africaine, une ancestralité qui sera à nouveau mise en évidence lors de exposition 'Les musiques noires dans le monde' montée à Dakar (Sénégal, 2010), ensuite à Saint-Denis (Réunion) et à Johannesbourg (Afrique du Sud). Enrichie, cette exposition rebaptisée 'Great Black Music' sera présentée à la Cité de la musique à Paris en 2014, et finalement chez nous, aux Halles de Schaerbeek en 2020-2021. Avec le mouvement 'Black Lives Matter' ce lien historique a immanquablement rejoint la brûlante actualité.

Depuis les années 1980, le Musée des instruments de musique de Bruxelles n'est cependant pas resté sourd à mes suggestions et a marqué depuis lors deux jalons importants :

- La publication de *Banjo à cinq cordes : histoire et informations pratiques à propos de la documentation* (G. De Smaele, 1983) : une des toutes premières monographies consacrées à ce thème,
- La mise sur pied en 2003-2004 de l'exposition *'Banjo!'* au MiM. Avec la mise au jour du *'banza haïtien'* (voir le *Science Connection*, # 65, août-septembre 2021) cette exposition fut fort remar-

<sup>1</sup> Le banjo américain original présente cinq cordes, tandis que les instruments hybrides, tels que le ténor et le plectrum n'en ont que quatre. Ils ont évolué dans des contextes musicaux distincts les uns des autres, parfois antagonistes sous certains aspects. Il y a donc lieu de ne pas les confondre. Voir entre autres : G. De Smaele, *Banjo Attitudes*, L'Harmattan, 2016 ; ainsi que les dossiers déposés au MiM.

quée à l'international. Elle a aussi pu compter – avec le soutien financier de l'Ambassade des États-Unis à Bruxelles –, sur la présence de personnalités prestigieuses dans ce domaine : Mike Seeger (demi-frère de Pete Seeger, fils du musicologue Charles Seeger et de la compositrice Ruth Crawford Seeger), Tom Paley (un revivaliste de premier plan), Bob Carlin (un musicien et un historien incontournable), Ulf Jagfors (qui a redécouvert l'akonting), Daniel Jatta (joueur sénégalais d'akonting), et plus tard Clarke Buehling (un des meilleurs spécialiste actuel du banjo 'minstrel' et 'classique' (dans le cadre du festival des Midis-Minimes)<sup>2</sup>.

Rappelons aussi que dans le cadre de cette exposition, le MiM avait fait l'acquisition de plusieurs instruments : des facsimilés de banjos primitifs et un 'mountain banjo' de facture récente (cfr infra).

Des années plus tard, des textes de Saskia Willaert apparaîtrons dans la littérature scientifique (Laurent Dubois, Harvard University Press, 2016; Robert Winans, University of Illinois Press, 2018). Pour ma part, ce seront diverses publications parues en France chez L'Harmattan et chez Frémeaux & Associés:

#### http://www.desmaele5str.be/publications.html

J'ai continué par la suite, dans la mesure de mes possibilités, à apporter au MiM un maximum de documentation sur le sujet : une copie digitale de ma discothèque (plus de 12.000 titres), le pdf de plus de 2000 partitions du banjo dit 'classique', la copie digitale de plus de 60 catalogues de fabricants anciens..., mais aussi des documents originaux (archives, catalogues...) ainsi que quelques instruments :

#### https://www.desmaele5str.be/dossiersArchives.html

À présent, on peut affirmer que le MiM dispose d'une bonne base de documentation sur le banjo à cinq cordes.

À l'issue de cette laborieuse initiative, et pour compléter ses collections, il me semble que le moment soit venu pour le MiM de faire l'acquisition de quelques instruments à partir desquels on pourrait relire l'histoire. Ils devraient être particulièrement représentatifs : quant à leur structure, ainsi qu'à leur utilisation dans divers contextes musicaux, à différents moments de son évolution.

Pour terminer, j'espère dans un futur proche, arriver à ce que les archives de Derroll Adams (Portland/Oregon, 1925 – Anvers, 2020) – un artiste Américain ayant vécu plus de 30 ans en Belgique et dont la carrière eut un retentissement significatif en Europe –, aboutissent enfin au MiM. Il est aussi attendu qu'une partie des archives et des collections de Pete Stanley (Londres, 1937 – 2020) – un important banjoïste anglais –, soient léguées au MiM. Ce sont là des projets dont je surveille attentivement l'évolution.

Gérard De Smaele Le 17 septembre 2021

#### Annexes:

Gérard De Smaele. « En amont de l'exposition 'Banjos !' au MiM » et « Du banjo au MiM !». *Le Canard Folk.* Juillet 2020 et mars 2021.

Gérard De Smaele. « Vers les origines du banjo. » *Science Connection*, # 65, août-septembre 2021, pp. 38-45.

http://www.belspo.be/belspo/organisation/publ\_science\_nl.stm http://www.belspo.be/belspo/organisation/publ\_science\_fr.stm

<sup>2</sup> Lien vers la page 'Exposition' de mon site

# Bases pour constituer une collection de banjos Orientations, idées, suggestions Critères pour le choix des instruments

Rassembler des instruments qui soient représentatifs :

- d'une époque : primitif, 19<sup>e</sup>, 20<sup>e</sup>, 21<sup>e</sup>
- d'un style de jeu et du répertoire : minstrel, 'classique', old time, bluegrass, jazz (ténor, plectrum)
- des types de banjos et des modèles existants : *minstrel, regular, banjeaurine, piccolo, cello, tenor, plectrum, mandolin, guitar, zither...*
- d'une personnalité : Alfred A. Farland, Fred Van Eps, Harry Reiser (plectrum, ténor), Pete Seeger, Frank Proffitt, Dwight Diller, Earl Scruggs, Derroll Adams...
- de la production en Europe, voire en Belgique : Marius est à ma connaissance l'unique marque qui serait belge à vérifier (modèles ténor et mandoline), mais ne devrait pas être un premier choix. L'Angleterre fut par contre très prolifique.

#### Objectifs possibles:

- Constituer un noyau de base pouvant être développé par la suite
- Reconstituer la famille du banjo orchestra
- Établir le lien avec l'Europe : Boucher venait d'Allemagne, Ashborn d'Angleterre...
- Retracer l'évolution organologique du banjo, de son répertoire et des styles de jeu
- Mise en évidence des aspects esthétiques, décoratifs : marqueterie, sculpture, gravure des parties métalliques
- Représentation des grandes marques : la fratrie Dobson, S.S. Stewart, Fairbanks, Cole, Vega, Bacon, Bacon & Day, Orpheum, Paramount, Gibson...
- Montrer les instruments originaux les plus copiés par les luthiers contemporains
- Montrer des instruments emblématiques présents dans les grandes monographies : Akira Tsumura, Cecelia Conway, Phil Gura et James Bollman, Jim Mills...
- La provenance est aussi une voie intéressante à suivre pour un musée.

#### Tenir compte de ce qui est accessible :

- Sur le site MIMO
- Dans les institutions publiques : MET (NYC), American History Museum (WDC), Ferrum College (Ferrum, VA)...
- Dans les collections privées : James Bollman, American Banjo Museum (Oklahoma City, OK), K. Wilson (Leeds, UK), Günter Amendt (Düsseldorf, DE), Bill Michal (US), Shawn McSweeney (Toronto, CA), E. Kaufman (Buffalo, NY)...
- Chez les marchands et les experts qui alimentent le marché : Bernunzio (Rochester, NY), Elderly (East Lansing, MI), Gruhn (Nashville, TN), Mandolin Bros (Staten Island, NY), J.A. Turner (London, UK)...

En complément on pourrait aussi envisager d'élaborer une collection virtuelle...

# **Propositions**

Pour commencer, voici la liste des banjos acquis par le MiM lors de la préparation de l'exposition de 2003-2004 :

- Gourd banjo, 'The Old Plantation', Pete Ross inv. 2004.008
- Gourd banjo, 'Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences', Pete Ross inv. 2004.007
- Gourd banjo, tension réglable de la peau, Bob Thornburg inv. 2003.028
- Gourd banjo, 'tacked head', Bob Thornburg inv. 2003.029
- Mountain banjo, Lowell Jacobs

On y ajoutera ceux que j'ai donnés au MiM en 2011-2012 :

- Banjo mandoline (zither type) inv. 2012.031
- Banjo Mandoline (ordinary type) inv. 2012.030
- Star fretless inv. 2011.240
- Windsor zither banjo inv. 2011.323
- Scruggs tuners cam type inv. 2012.047 et 2012.049 absents sur 'Carmentis'?
- Keith Tuners démonté inv. 2012.048
- Framus 'Derroll Adams' inv. 2019.005

À voir sur le site 'Carmentis':

https://www.carmentis.be/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=RedirectService&sp=Scollection &sp=SfieldValue&sp=0&sp=0&sp=3&sp=Slightbox\_3x4&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F Je ne retrouve cependant pas ces instruments sur le site 'MIMO':

https://mimo-international.com/MIMO/search.aspx?SC=DEFAULT&QUERY=banjo#/Search/(query:(ForceSearch:!f,Page:0,PageRange:3,QueryString:banjo,ResultSize:15,ScenarioCode:DEFAULT,ScenarioDisplayMode:display-mosaic,SearchLabel:",SearchTerms:banjo,SortField:Author\_sort,SortOrder:0,TemplateParams:(Scenario:",Scope:",Size:!n,Source:",Support:")))

... et rien concernant la documentation, le dossier Framus...!

Voici donc le lien vers mon site personnel:

http://www.desmaele5str.be/dossiersArchives.html

Autres instruments conservés au MiM:

- Minstrel banjo
- Banjo ténor...

Je vous propose ci-dessous des banjos disponibles pour le moment. Ce sont des instruments représentatifs de l'histoire du banjo dit classique. On les retrouve parmi ceux joués dans les cercles amateurs, comme le rallye de l'*American Banjo Fraternity*. Ils sont en bon état et ont été acquis dans de bonnes conditions de prix, en vue d'un éventuel transfert au MiM. Je suis prêt à les céder au prix coûtant, tenant compte des sommes investies, des taux de change au moment de l'achat, des taxes acquittées et des divers frais d'expédition. Je recherche pour le moment un **Bacon & Day**, ténor, avec pédale de sourdine, que j'aimerais ajouter à cette liste. J'ai récemment contacté M. Dupont, un collectionneur belge qui nous avait beaucoup aidés lors de notre exposition.

Idéalement, j'aimerais dans le futur, selon les opportunités qui se présentent, pouvoir y ajouter d'autres instruments, tels que :

- un Boucher, un Ashborn;
- un Dobson;
- un Fairbanks 'Electric', un 'Whyte Laydie';
- un Vega 'Tubaphone';
- un Bacon 'Professional' avec internal resonator;
- un Bacon & Day 'Silver Bell', tenor;
- un Clifford Essex 'Professional', 12"; ou un 'Concert Grand';
- un Gibson 'Mastertone' original à cinq cordes ;
- un banjo *long neck*, emblématique de Pete Seeger et du *folk revival* ;
- Etc...

Le banjo Gibson à cinq cordes est représentatif du *bluegrass*, avec un style de jeu appartenant essentiellement à la période de l'après-guerre 1940-1945, et pour lequel il constitue toujours le modèle de référence. Son prix actuel des *prewar instruments* est, malheureusement pour nous, devenu prohibitif, approchant et dépassant parfois même les 100.000 dollars (voir les articles et les catalogues déposés au MiM).

Les S.S. Stewart, Dobson, Fairbanks, Cole, Bacon, Vega... ont été conçus durant l'ère classique (ils sont initialement prévus pour être montés en boyau ou en cordes de soie), et correspondent au premier âge d'or de la fabrication du banjo. Après une période de déclin, les banjos à cinq cordes seront redécouverts dans les années 1960, voire un peu avant. Les 'revivalistes', se tournant vers les origines de la 'country music' les remettront en service (généralement montés avec des cordes métalliques³). Nous sommes alors en plein *folk revival*, un courant qui se répandra aussi en Europe, passant aussi par le Belgique... Les Windsor, Clifford Essex, Dallas... sont quant à eux de parfaits exemples du banjo classique anglais.

Depuis le 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, la production du banjo à cinq cordes, suivie dans les années 1920-1930 de celle de ceux à quatre cordes, fut très abondante aux États-Unis et en Angleterre. Avec ses 6, 7, voire même 8 cordes, cette dernière avait pour un temps poursui sa voie propre voie.

Il est bien entendu que l'on pourra toujours ajouter d'autres marques importantes telles que : Buckbee (qui a produit des dizaines de milliers d'instruments sous divers noms), comme Converse et Victor... ainsi que J.A.Turner, Cammeyer ou Grimshaw pour l'Angleterre. Les divers banjos primitifs (gourd banjos) et *home made banjos* fabriqués par des musiciens traditionnels ruraux du Sud des États-Unis ne manquent certainement pas d'intérêt, comme ceux de Frank Proffitt Sr.

La production de banjos depuis les années 1960 fut également fort abondante. Les facteurs contemporains sont encore fort nombreux : au moins 200 aux USA. Ils se montrent particulièrement habiles et créatifs. Nombre d'entre eux – comme Doug Unger, Bart Reiter, Mike Ramsey, Kevin Enoch... sont toujours guidés par la tradition. Ces luthiers tirent encore leur inspiration des modèles anciens. En ce domaine notre époque assiste à un nouvel âge d'or, récemment mis en valeur par la Smithsonian Institution :

- Craig Evans / Smithsonian : http://www.northamericanbanjobuilders.com

Le banjo à cinq cordes présente de nombreuses facettes. Si l'*American Banjo Museum* – initialement fondé autour d'une collection de ténors, expose des centaines de banjos, il est cependant encore loin de

<sup>3</sup> Sur les instruments les plus anciens, cette adaptation présente un risque de déformation du manche, comme si on montait un jeu de cordes métalliques sur une guitare classique. Dans les années 1920-1930, les manches des banjos ont été renforcés en vue d'un plus fort tirant des cordes.

tout nous révéler...

Tout cela pour dire qu'il y a encore place pour introduire d'autres suggestions, et que dans le futur, de belles opportunités seront certainement encore à saisir. On devrait éventuellement prévoir un budget pour pouvoir les saisir.

#### Voir:

- *Mugwumps* (Mike Holmes / Stu Cohen): <a href="http://www.mugwumps.com/AmerInstMkr.html">http://www.mugwumps.com/AmerInstMkr.html</a> (voir la liste des '*Banjo Makers*' établie par Stu Cohen, in *Mugwumps*, July 1972.
- Richard Jones-Bamman. *Building New Banjos for an Old-Time World*. University of Illinois Press, 2017, 288 p.
- Copies de catalogues anciens. MiM, 2021.
- Voir aussi le site 'The Vintage Banjo Makers':
   <a href="http://www.vintagebanjomaker.com/a-be/4594323352">http://www.vintagebanjomaker.com/a-be/4594323352</a>

### Proposition concrète de Gérard De Smaele, septembre 2021 :

- A. CAMMEYER, 'Vibrante Royal' # 5362-267
  - London, 1928
  - Origin: Keith Wilson Leeds, UK September 2019
  - Reference: John Alvey Turner Catalog, ca. 1950
  - Near mint condition all original skin head
- 1. PARAMOUNT, 'Plectrum Style C' # 2651 c. 1924
  - William Lange, New York NY
  - Reference: Paramount Catalog
  - Origin: Lowell Levinger / Vintage Instruments, California march 2021
  - Excellent condition
- **2. S.S. Stewart, 'Thoroughbred'** # 50592 c. 1898
  - Origin: Kevin Enoch Beltsville MD, USA, February 2020
  - Reference: S.S. Stewart Catalog
  - Near mint condition
- **3. BACON & DAY 'Silver Bell' No. 2** # 24282 1927 original 5-string neck
  - Origin: Philip Alexander London, UK, August 2021
  - Reference: B&D Catalog, 1928
  - Good / Exellent condition
- **4. VEGA 'Whyte Laydie'** ou un 'Tubaphone'; un Bacon 'Professional', un Weaver, des Clifford Essex...: une petite liste de souhaits pour le futur...

# LE CANARD FOLK - JUILLET 2020

# En amont de l'exposition « Banjo ! » au MIM et de la découverte en 2003 du "Banza haïtien"

Je terminais mes études en éducation physique à l'Université de Louvain, et pratiquais le banjo depuis 1966, lorsque je fis ma première entrée au Musée Instrumental, place du Sablon à Bruxelles. Qui en 1975 aurait pensé que l'intérêt éveillé à l'époque par cette fabuleuse collection, aboutirait quelques années plus tard à la publication d'une monographie sur le banjo à cinq cordes. Qui aurait imaginé que plus de 25 ans plus tard une exposition thématique serait inaugurée au MIM par Mike Seeger (préouverture en octobre 2002) et par Bob Carlin, Tom Paley, l'Africain Daniel Jatta.. (ouverture effective en octobre 2003), des musiciens comptant parmi les plus prestigieux représentants du genre. Le banjo s'étant essentiellement répandu en Amérique du Nord, ne fut-il pas pour le moins inattendu que cette exposition nous mène, presque à son insu, à la découverte à Paris - lors d'une banale recherche sur le site internet de la Cité de la Musique - d'un prototype primitif d'une insigne rareté : le « banza haïtien » 1. Ce spécimen est aujourd'hui considéré par les spécialistes comme le chaînon manquant entre les banjos primitifs de la fin du 18e siècle et ceux construits pour les professionnels blancs qui se produiront plus tard sur la scène du minstrel show2. Avec le « Consalvi » conservé au Museum of Fine Arts de Boston<sup>3</sup>, ce banza comptera désormais parmi les banjos historiques les plus exceptionnels de ceux conservés par les musées et les collections privées.

L'ami qui m'avait emmené au Musée Instrumental était un flûtiste à bec, un futur professeur d'éducation physique, qui décrochera par la suite un prix au Conservatoire Royal de Bruxelles. Il m'initiait patiemment (parfois pendant les heures où nous étions censés participer aux cours) à l'histoire de la musique classique, plus particulièrement à la musique ancienne de la fin du moyen-âge, de la renaissance, à l'univers baroque, à Mozart... Il m'avait entretemps aussi emmené à Liège chez le luthier Bernard qui, en plus de ses violons, possédait une petite collection de vielles à roue. Dans les années 1960-70, le folk revival avait remis en lumière des instruments passés dans l'oubli, qui n'étaient pas sans liens avec ceux de la scène traditionnelle française ou belge. En 1975, de retour d'un long voyage aux États-Unis, je repensais souvent à ce musée, d'autant plus que le banjo y était tout simplement ignoré. La publication de l'ouvrage du Professeur Roger Bragard -l'ancien conservateur-, Les

illustrée sur le banjo à cinq cordes. A l'issue de mes recherches, le texte définitif étant trop volumineux, il en résulta l'édition de deux volumes bien distincts<sup>4</sup>. De surcroît, cette monographie sera la première en date, bien vite rejointe par les publications de grands chercheurs et collectionneurs, à commencer par le « Red Book » d'Akira Tsumura, et le catalogue de l'exposition « Ring the Banjar », en 1984, sorti quelques mois plus Toujours pour le banjo, j'étais reparti aux Etats-Unis en 1983, et avais eu la chance de tenir en main les instruments de James Bollman -en partance pour l'exposition au M.I.T. mentionnée ci-dessus-, ainsi que de pouvoir parcourir la documentation de Mike Holmes à New Bedford, Massachusetts. Nouveau départ en 1998, pour me rendre chez Pete Seeger et participer ensuite, près de Frederick, à la Maryland Banjo Academy, une rencontre de banjoïstes organisée par la revue Banjo Newsletter, animée par de nombreux musiciens professionnels<sup>6</sup>. Un large espace avait été réservé aux

instruments de musique dans l'art et l'histoire (A. De Visscher, 1973), illustrait essentiellement les collections

exposées au Musée Instrumental, mais n'accordait au

incomplète, qui avait besoin d'être actualisée. On se

relativement peu documenté, même aux USA. Bien que

Europe, seul un banjo-mandoline, instrument hybride

qui avait connu une certaine vogue chez nous avant la guerre de 1940-45, y était illustré. Pour y remédier, l'idée me prit de vouloir rencontrer Monsieur René De

Maeyer, le successeur de Roger Bragard. C'est ainsi que

je fis, en 1978, ma première apparition dans les locaux

administratifs du musée, situés rue aux Laines.

Imaginant une nouvelle édition, j'y vins avec une

proposition de texte et fus dans la foulée présenté à

d'Europe, bien connu pour ses travaux sur l'épinette, l'accordéon et la cornemuse. L'agenda de publication du

Bulletin du Musée Instrumental ayant accusé quelques

créneau libre, me proposa de rédiger une monographie

numéros de retard, René De Maeyer, disposant d'un

Hubert Boone, spécialiste des musiques populaires

banjo qu'une mention sommaire et pour le moins

le jazz et le banjo ténor se soient tôt répandus en

rappellera qu'à l'époque le banjo était encore

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Paris, Cité de la Musique, inv. E.415. https://collectionsdumusee.philharmoniedeparis.fr/doc/MUSEE/0157295

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Cette nouvelle fut relayée dans : Laurent Dubois. The Banjo. Harvard University Press, 2016; ainsi que dans Robert Winans et al. Banjo Roots and Branches: New Explorations. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018. Voir aussi le site « Banjology »: https://sites.duke.edu/banjology/the-banjo-in-haiti/the-haitian-banza/

 $<sup>\</sup>label{lem:https://collections.mfa.org/objects/485783/banjo?ctx=2} $$2\text{c0c4df-f1fa-427c-8156-1885f4902dfc&idx=0}$$ 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Banjo à cinq cordes: histoire et informations pratiques à propos de la documentation (Bruxelles : Musée Instrumental, 1983, 97 p. et *The Brussels Museum of Musical Instruments Bulletin*, Fritz Knuf, Vol. XI, 1/2, 1981, sic.) ; et *Banjo à cinq cordes : point de vue organologique* (Fauroeulx : Gérard De Smaele, 1984, 73 p.).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Banjos: The Tsumura Collection. Tokyo, New York, San Francisco: Kodansha International LTD, 1984, 168 p.; Robert Lloyd Webb, James Bollman. Ring the Banjar! The Banjo in America from Folklore to Factory. Cambridge, Mass: The M.I.T. Museum, 1984, 101 p.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>"Banjo Bash At Buckeystown", *The Maryland Banjo Academy 1998*: Eddie Adcock, Bruce Molsky & Rafe Stefanini, Tony Trischka, Leroy Troy, Mike Seeger, John Rossbach, The Reno Brothers, Ken Perlman, Michael Miles, Reed Martin, Bill Keith, Mark Johnson, Casey & Murphy, Henry, Jack Hatfield, Tom Hanway, Bob Flesher, Bela Fleck, Bill Evans, Bill Emerson, Tony

exposants, parmi lesquels se trouvaient les luthiers Bob Flescher et Georges Wünderlich, qui étalaient leurs reproductions de *minstrel banjos*<sup>7</sup>, ainsi que Bob Thornburg et Pete Ross, qui proposaient des gourd banjos d'inspiration plus ancienne. A l'époque, l'intérêt pour de tels instruments était encore un fait relativement récent<sup>8</sup>, toujours limité à un nombre réduit de spécialistes. La gamme de Pete Ross, luthier à Baltimore, formé par son mentor Scott Didlake (1948-1994), se résumait à deux modèles : de beaux facsimilés, copies conformes des banjos représentés dans « The Old Plantation » et « Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences », une aquarelle et une peinture datant de la fin du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle<sup>9</sup>. J'étais pratiquement le seul Européen présent à cette MBA, sans oublier le chercheur Ulf Jagfors, un suédois qui avait commencé à mener au Sénégal, vers la fin des années 1990, de patientes investigations sur les origines africaines du banjo, remettant en lumière, avec l'aide de Daniel Jatta, l'akonting (ou ekonting), un instrument de l'Ouest Africain. Ce dernier est un des présumés ancêtres africains du banjo à cinq cordes, déjà évoqué dans How to Play the Five-String Banjo, la célèbre méthode de Pete Seeger, dont la première édition remonte à 1948. Mike Seeger et Bob Carlin étaient aussi présents à la MBA.

Depuis la sortie de mon livre au Musée Instrumental, notre connaissance de l'histoire du banjo évoluait à grands pas, mais ce n'est qu'en 1998 qu'avait débuté la Banjo Collector's Gathering<sup>10</sup>, qui atteindra cette année sa 23e édition<sup>11</sup>. Entretemps, j'étais retourné à la MBA de 2000, au Merlefest Festival à Wilkesborough NC en 2001, au festival de Union Grove VA en 2002 et en 2003, et aussi vu l'exposition « The Banjo: The People and the Sounds of America's Instrument », pour y voir (revoir) les instruments de James Bollman au National Heritage Museum de Lexington, Massachusetts, ainsi qu'assister au concert donné dans ce même musée pour les participants du Banjo Camp North, organisé en 2002

Ellis, Dwight Diller, and Cheick Hamala Diabate...

par Mike Holmes le fondateur de la revue Mugwumps.

Le MIM fut inauguré à l'automne 2000. Lorsqu'en **2001** le musée -toujours en déménagement et qui voulait écouler un stock d'invendus de mon livre- m'invita, par l'intermédiaire de Monsieur Ignace De Heyser, à monter une exposition sur le banjo, mes souvenirs des MBA de 1998 et de 2000 étaient encore frais<sup>12</sup>. En plus de nombreux contacts glanés depuis les années 1970, j'avais en poche de nouvelles cartes de visite. Mon premier réflexe fut de faire appel à Pete Ross, Bob Thornburg, George Wünderlich, Ulf Jägfors et Mike Seeger<sup>13</sup>...

Ayant, de par mes occupations professionnelles, conscience de certaines réalités pratiques liées aux expositions, après avoir établi une première liste d'instruments et de prêteurs, on eut tôt constaté que les frais de convoiement et d'assurance risquaient d'occasionner des frais inattendus. Mais, étant donné que l'on assistait aux États-Unis à l'émergence d'un renouveau de cette branche de la lutherie, avec une grande variété de copies de banjos anciens, on pouvait sans crainte de faillir baser notre exposition sur cette renaissance, un objectif qui pour diverses raisons n'aboutit finalement que partiellement. Cette production contemporaine était à même de couvrir toutes les étapes de l'évolution organologique du banjo. Toutes variétés de banjos confondues, près de 200 facteurs sont de nos jours répertoriés aux USA14.

Bien que peu mise en valeur à l'époque, la partie historiquement la plus remarquable de l'exposition jaillit d'une vitrine montée à la demande de Mia Awouters par Saskia Willaert -conservateurs au MIM- qui sans en prendre toute la mesure avait débusqué le « banza haïtien ». Ulf Jagfors et Pete Ross, de nouveaux acteurs de l'histoire du banjo, que j'avais mis en contact avec le musée, réagiront promptement face à cette importante découverte. L'émergence de cet instrument aurait pu, bien entendu, se produire dans de toutes autres circonstances, mais la chance en avait décidé autrement.

"The instrument proper to them is the Banjar, which they brought hither from Africa..." Thomas Jefferson.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Wûnderlich avait choisi comme modèles ceux conservés à l'American History Museum de Washington DC.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Les « Tennessee Banjo Institutes », avaient été organisées en 1988, 1990 et 1992 à Cedar of Lebanon dans le Tennessee. Les CDs *Minstrel Banjo Styles* (Various artists, Rounder CD-0321) et *Southern Banjo Styles* (Mike Seeger, Smithsonian Folkways) étaient respectivement sortis en 1994 et en 1998..

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> "The Old Plantation". Aquarelle anonyme attribuée à John Rose (1752-1820), datée des années 1780, probablement en Caroline du Nord. Conservée au Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia; "Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences" ou "The Genius of America Encouraging the Emancipation of the Blacks", 1792. Peinture sur toile de Samuel Jennings (°ca.1755, actif de 1789 à 1834). Conservée à la Library Company, à Philadelphie.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> «The Banjo Gathering, Bristol, Va. ». Le Canard Folk, février 2019. [aussi Banjo Newsletter, January 2019: https://banjonews.com/2019-01/the\_banjo\_gathering\_by\_gerard\_de\_smaele.html]

 $<sup>^{11}</sup>$  Réunion reportée à 2021 en raison de la crise sanitaire.

 $<sup>^{12}</sup>$  A propos de cette exposition, voir : *Banjo Attitudes*, 2015, pp. 10-15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Mike Seeger, Pete Ross, Georges Wünderlich et autres personnalités, furent d'ailleurs visitées en mai 2003 pour le tournage du documentaire « A Banjo Frolic » (Frémeaux, 2008), qui passera en boucle dans l'exposition.

Il est à noter que ce projet était en réalité tout à fait novateur et d'actualité. Voir à ce sujet les DVDs de Craig Evans, distribués par la Smithsonian: https://folkways.si.edu/conversations-with-northamerican-banjo-builders/smithsonian Voir aussi : Richard Jones-Bamman. Building New Banjos for an Old-Time World. University of Illinois Press, 2017, 288 p. Soit dit au passage, l'exposition « The Group of Seven Guitar Project », quoique dédiée à la guitare, vue au Musée McMichael à Toronto en 2017, a elle aussi démontré le dynamisme créatif des luthiers contemporains. Elle pourrait servir d'exemple pour une prochaine exposition de banjos https://mcmichael.com/event/the-group-of-sevenguitar-project-summer-2017/

Notes on the State of Virginia, 1785.

Les origines africaines du banjo américain sont multiples. Il est à remarquer qu'avec son passé colonial et son Musée Royal d'Afrique Centrale, la Belgique conserve une collection de 8.000 instruments de musique<sup>15</sup>. Plusieurs de ces luths et harpes primitifs présentent des similitudes avec le banjo, et certaines de ses techniques de jeu de la main droite. De tous ces instruments, l'akonting, rencontré au Sénégal<sup>16</sup> par Ulf Jagfors, se rapproche probablement le plus de l'ancêtre que nous recherchons ; tout en sachant que le banjo américain reste essentiellement un produit du nouveau monde, synthétisé hors d'Afrique, catalysé par les modalités de la mise en œuvre de l'esclavage dès le 16e-17e siècle, à partir d'éléments d'origines diverses : africains et ensuite européens. Cette fusion est une des plus passionnantes de toute l'histoire de la musique contemporaine. En dehors du « créole banjo », conservé à Leiden<sup>17</sup>, nous devions jusqu'à présent nous contenter de descriptions anciennes tirées de récits de voyages 1 et de rares illustrations<sup>19</sup>. Le « banza haïtien » ne manque pas de nous rappeler à son tour les abondantes interconnections entre musiciens Noirs et Blancs aux États-Unis.

Idéalisé/détesté, le pays de l'Oncle Sam est ce qu'il est, marqué de tant de contradictions! Le dépeindre en quelques lignes nous amènerait sur la pente hasardeuse des simplifications hâtives et des raisonnements à l'emporte-pièce. Même si l'influence afro-américaine fut déterminante dans la plupart des musiques populaires américaines<sup>20</sup>, et sans que des attitudes racistes ne soient -à première vue- particulièrement tangibles sur le site des festivals de *old time* et de *bluegrass* organisés

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https://www.africamuseum.be/fr/research/collections\_libraries/human sciences/collections

 $^{16}$  Ulf Jägfors. "The African Akonting and the Origin of the Banjo."  $\textit{Old Time Herald},\ IX/2,\ Winter\ 2003-2004,\ pp.\ 26-33.$ 

<sup>17</sup> Le créole bania, un banjo-gourde ramené de Surinam, daté de v. 1770 et conservé au Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde à Leyde, aux Pays-Bas. Ce dernier est muni de quatre cordes, dont une plus courte : voir Stedman en note 19.

Dena Epstein. "The Folk Banjo: a Documentary History." *Ethnomusicology*, September 1975, pp. 347-371.

19 Les exemples les plus connus sont : une gravure insérée dans le récit de voyage en Jamai que de Sir Hans Sloane, édité en 1707; une figure dans le récit de voyage du capitaine Jean-Gabriel Stedman (1744-1797) en offre aussi une représentation intéressante : Voyage à Surinam, et dans l'intérieur de la Guiane, contenant la relation de cinq années de courses et d'observations faites dans cette contrée intéressante et peu connues ; avec des détails sur les Indiens de la Guiane et les Nègres, tome second, Paris, Chez F. Buisson, 1799, 440 p; seconde édition anglaise en 1813, 297 p. Voir : https://archive.org/stream/narrativeoffivey02sted#page /296/mode/2up.

 $^{20}\,^{\rm w}$  Great Black Music". Exposition à la Cité de la Musique. Paris, 2014. Le banza haîtien y était exposé.

dans le Sud des États-Unis, force est de constater que le public qui les fréquente est à peu de choses près exclusivement composé de Blancs. Jusque récemment, il en a été de même pour les musiciens. Même si la country music, commercialisée par les firmes de disques et la rádio a, dès les années 1920, établi une sorte de clivage entre la « race music » et la musique traditionnelle blanche. Même si le Sud a été le théâtre des pires ségrégations raciales, on se rappellera que les acteurs du folk revival n'ont eu de cesse de lutter pour les droits civiques, et de dénoncer inlassablement les discriminations, notamment celles restées culturellement et profondément enracinées dans les mentalités du Sud. Depuis l'époque de ma publication de 1983, mais aussi depuis celle de l'exposition de 2003-2004, l'importance des musiciens Afro-Américains dans l'histoire du banio est de mieux en mieux reconnue et mise en valeur<sup>21</sup> Après Horace Weston, après les Gus Cannon, Lucious Smith..., Otis Taylor, Nate et Joel Thomson..., des musiciens contemporains comme Rhiannon Giddens, Don Flemons (The Carolina Chocolate Drops), et plus récemment Jake Blount<sup>22</sup>, nous remémorent les origines afro-américaines du banjo, un instrument dont l'histoire est pour le moins complexe et controversée. D'aucuns, à la recherche de leurs racines, en sont même revenus au banjo-gourde. En ces temps toujours difficiles, puisse-t-il encore demeurer un moyen de fraternité entre les communautés, et un vecteur de progrès de la justice sociale. En fin de compte, les recherches sur l'histoire du banjo nous ramènent souvent à de grands débats de société. Tout ceci reste finalement d'actualité, indissociable de la vie politique, de la vie de tous les

jours. Le « banza haïtien » n'y échappe pas.

Peter Seeger nous chantait...Witch Side Are You On...



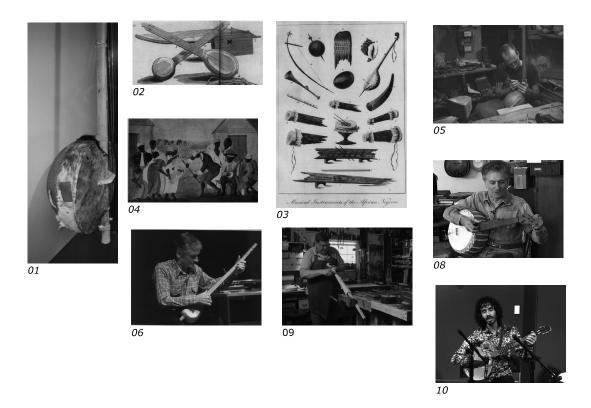
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Gérard De Smaele site : desmaele5str.be

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Voir: Cecelia Conway. African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia. A Study of Folk Traditions. Knoxville TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995, 394 p.; Rex Ellis. With a Banjo on my Knee: a Musical Journey from Slavery to Freedom. Danbury CT: Franklin Watts, 2001, 160 p.

 $^{22}$  Jake Blount. Spider Tales. Free Dirt Records, DIRT-CD-0097, 2020.



- 01. Caisse d'un akonting. Collecté au Sénégal par Ulf Jagfors dans les années 1990. Le manche est rond et les cordes de longueurs inégales. Longueur totale env. 120 cm. Exposition « The Banjo: The People and the Sounds of America's Instrument », à Lexington, Mass. Photo: Gérard De Smaele, 2002.
- 02. « Strum Strumps ». Banjos gourdes. Gravure tirée du livre de Hans Sloane, A Voyage to the Islands of Madera, Barbados, Nieves, . . . and islands of America, London, 1707.
- 03. « Creole bania ». Planche extraite du livre de Gabriel Stedman, Voyage à Surinam, et dans l'intérieur de la Guiane..., Paris, 1799, et London, 1813. Un instrument semblable, conservé à Leyde, aux Pays-Bas, a été exposé au M.I.T. en 1984 et au MIM en 2003-2004.
- 04. « The Old Plantation ». Aquarelle anonyme attribuée à John Rose (1752-1820), datée des années 1780, probablement en Caroline du Nord. Env. 30,5 x 46 cm. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. Inv. NW0159.
- 05. Fac-similés de banjos, construits par Pete Ross d'après « The Old Plantation » et de « Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences ». MIM, inv. 2004.007 et 2004.008. Longueur 94,50 et 102 cm. Instruments joués par Mike Seeger lors du concert de préouverture de l'exposition « Banjo ! », à Bruxelles, en octobre 2002.
  Cette prestation fut enregistrée par la VRT-Klara, pour l'émission « Een oor op de wereld » produite par Paul Rans.

Photo: Cécile Bertrand (MIM).

 Pete Ross sur la facture d'un modèle d'après « The Old Plantation », dans son atelier à Baltimore, Maryland.

Photo extraite du documentaire A Banjo Frolic.

Photo: G. De Smaele- P. Ferryn, mai 2003.

07. « Banza haïtien ». Banjo gourde collecté par Victor Schoelcher avant 1840. Entré au Musée du Conservatoire national de musique en 1872. Inv. E.415. Longueur 88 cm. Pete Ross en produira plusieurs fac-similés.

Photo : site internet de la Cité de la Musique, Paris.

- Banjo gourde construit par Clarke Buehling. Joué par Mike Seeger, chez lui à Lexington, Virginia, lors du tournage du documentaire A Banjo Frolic. Le manche imite ceux des banjos de Boucher. Photo: G. De Smaele- P. Ferryn, mai 2003.
- 09. George Wünderlich dans son atelier près de Frederick, Maryland. Façonnage d'un manche pour la copie d'un banjo Boucher conservé à l'American History Museum à Washington DC. Photo extraite du documentaire A Banjo Frolic. Photo: G. De Smaele- P. Ferryn, mai 2003.
- Jake Blount. Concert pour la « Banjo Gathering ». Bristol, Virginia, 2018. Photo. Gérard De Smaele

# Agenda

#### Vérifiez auprès de l'organisateur si l'activité qui vous intéresse a bien lieu!

- 18/9 WOLUWE-St-PIERRE, Maison Vénitienne, 250 av.Parmentier, 20h30-24h : barna (à confirmer) (barna.balfolk@gmail.com)
- 2/10 NAMUR, le Cinex, r. St Nicolas (entrée r.Ponty) : 20h atelier, 20h50 bal avec **EÄ**, 22h30**-**24h avec **Manäcken** www.folknammusiquetrad.be.
- 9/10 JETTE, l'Armillaire, c.cult., 145 bd. De Smet de Naeyer, 20h : 5ème bal folk du Rayon Vert *0498/637 597*, lerayonvert@skynet.be.
- 10/10 ALLEUR, c.cult. d'Ans, pl. des Anciens Combattants : 20h15 initiation, 21h bal avec LA MACHINE, puis jam possible www.rzf.be.

IXELLES, le Fanal, 6 r.Joseph Stallaert, 17h: tanchaz (bal hongrois) www.carpathia.be.

- MONCEAU SUR SAMBRE, salle communale, 8 r.A.Camus, 14h : bal du Quadrille 1900 de Baulers animé par **Brigitte Van Keer** 0486/83 36 57, quadrille1900baulers@gmail.com.
- 17/10 WOLUWE-St-PIERRE, Maison Vénitienne, 250 av.Parmentier, 20h30-24h : barna (à confirmer) (barna.balfolk@gmail.com)
- 29/10 BRUXELLES, Art Base, 29 r.des Sables, 20h : concert a capella par Kongero (Suède) www.art-base.be.

# Stages

#### Belgique

- Accordéon et nature (Joachim Loneux) 10-14/8 à Lontzen 0498/68 43 39, www.accordart.be.
- Massembre (ex-Borzée) 10-11/10, 13-14/2/21. Pour tous rens Luc Larue 0492/ 93 19 17, 084/41 24 03, Faœbook "We folk" ou site www.wefolk.be.
- Stages de la Gaumette à Martué : www.lagaumette.be
  - accordéon diat (Marinette Bonnert) 25-27/10

# **LE CANARD FOLK - MARS 2021**

# Du Banjo au MiM!

Passé, présent et avenir d'un vieux banza haïtien – Le Canard Folk, mars 2021. Notes complémentaires à propos de mon article dans le C.F. de juillet 2020. G. De Smaele, 09.12.2020.

Suite au présent article et à celui du C.F. de juillet 2020, Belspo -dont dépend le MiM-, en laissera bientôt paraître un troisième <sup>1</sup> : http://www.belspo.be/belspo/organisation/publ\_science\_fr.stm

Ces trois volets sont des approches complémentaires. Entretemps, l'exposition « Great Black Music » est passée par Bruxelles. Rappelons aussi que le Musée National de l'Histoire et de la Culture Afro-Américaine s'est ouvert officiellement à Washington en 2016, tandis que le Musée National de la Musique Afro-Américaine a été inauguré en septembre 2020 à Nashiviile, en face du Ryman, le temple de la *Country Music* <sup>2</sup>.

Des récits épiques des griots mandingues à la plainte mélodique des bluesmen du delta du Mississippi, des bouges de La Nouvelle-Orléans aux clubs de Manhattan, des rythmes yoruba à la naissance de l'afrobeat, des mélopées du maloya à la samba, des faubourgs de Kingston, où apparurent le ska et le reggae, jusqu'aux terrains vagues du Bronx où surgit le hip-hop: la voix, le souffle, les rythmes, l'âme indomptée de millions d'esclaves déportés a généré une constellation musicale d'une richesse inouïe.

Quatre cents ans de terreur raciale n'ont pas empêché une immense explosion de créativité et de liberté. La saga des musiques noires façonne la culture populaire mondiale, et transcende toute conception ethniciste ou nationaliste : elle est tout à la fois africaine, américaine, caribéenne, européenne. Traversant les siècles et les continents, elle a laissé à chaque génération son lot d'émotions et de mémoires marquées par un refrain indélébile, une vibration ou un groove inimitable. Recréée spécialement pour les Halles de Schaerbeek, l'exposition Great Black Music retrace cette formidable épopée culturelle.

Marc Benaïche

Commissaire de l'exposition « Great Black Music », Paris, 2014.

https://collectionsdumusee.philharmoniedeparis.fr/exposition-great-black-music.aspx

Présentation de l'exposition aux Halles de Schaerbeek. Du 06.10.2020 au 20.12.2012 https://www.halles.be/fr/ap/386-great-black-music

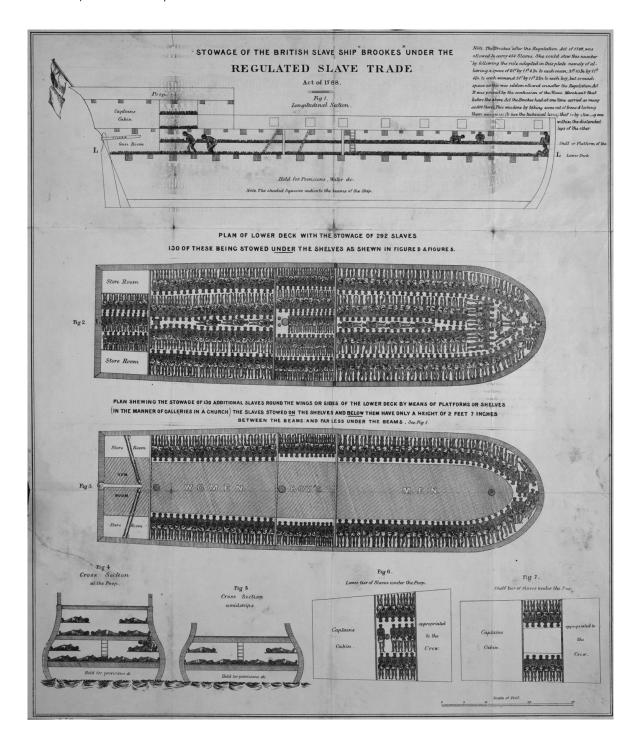
A droite, le banza ramené en France en 1841 par Victor Schœlcher Exposition « Great Black Music ». Paris, Cité de la Musique, du 11 mars au 24 août 2014 http://www.greatblackmusic.fr Photo : Gérard De Smaele.



¹ Programmé pour apparaître dans le n°65. Science Connection Magazine est l'organe de la Politique Scientifique Fédérale. Les 10 institutions scientifiques fédérales -la KBR, les Archives du Royaume... ainsi que les Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, dont le MiM est un département-, sont regroupées sous la tutelle de Belspo: http://www.belspo.be Au fil de l'actualité le sujet est devenu sensible. Actuellement, avec la réappropriation du banjo à cinq cordes par de plus en plus de musicien-ne-s Afro-Américain-e-s, l'instrument est probablement à un tournant de son histoire. Le moment est opportun pour aborder la mise en valeur du 'banza haïtien' dans le contexte actuel, de reconnecter l'histoire avec l'actualité.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://nmaam.org/mission-vision/ - https://ryman.com

Ci-dessous : un navire négrier anglais et son plan de `stockage' des captifs. Le Brookes, construit à Liverpool en 1781. Gravure de 1789.



Schælcher en Martinique <sup>10</sup>. On a reproché à cet anti-esclavagiste de représenter le paternalisme de la France et d'être arrivé un peu tard pour annoncer la fin de ce système d'exploitation par son gouvernement, alors que la population locale en avait déjà décidé elle-même -par la révolte- bien avant cette déclaration. De nos jours, son banza haïtien pourrait bien devenir le symbole des luttes d'une nation mais aussi l'emblème d'une musique, qui dans les années à venir, et dans les mains de descendants d'Africains, sera portée à se repositionner et à se transformer. Cette musique folk traditionnelle a un riche passé derrière elle, tant musical qu'humain. Elle le doit à sa constante adaptation aux circonstances de son époque. Les musiciens américains savent aussi regarder leur passé bien en face. Les choses changent et continueront à changer si on continue à s'y accrocher <sup>11</sup>.

G. De Smaele https://www.desmaele5str.be/dossiersArchives.html



En août 2020, manifestation du mouvement 'Black Lives Matters'. Protestation contre l'injustice raciale et commémoration du 57e anniversaire de « I Have a Dream », le discours de Martin Luther King à Washington DC, prononcé le 28 août 1963 sur le Mall, soutenu par J.F. Kennedy. Photo: Eman Mohammed pour le The Wall Street Journal.



Avec Rhiannon Giddens et Don Flemons, Jake Blount est un des grands représentants du 'black banjo' contemporain.
Voir : Paul Ruta. «Black Musicians' Quest to Return the Banjo to Its African Roots.» in The Smithsonian Folklife Magazine, November 23, 2020 (ainsi que lien en note 7). https://folklife.si.edu/magazine/black-banjo-reclamation-project-african-roots

<sup>10</sup>Rodolphe Solbiac. La destruction des statues de Victor Schœlcher en Martinique : L'exigence de réparations et d'une nouvelle politique des savoirs. Paris : L'Harmattan, 2020, 272 p.

https://folklife.si.edu/magazine/black-banjo-reclamation-project-african-roots
Dans cet article provenant de la Smithsonian/Folkways (Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Center), on parle du luthier Pete Ross, venu au MiM avec ses banjo gourde en 2002. Il est intéressant de noter que les bureaux des Smithsonian/Folkways Records sont juste en face de la Maison Blanche. Il suffit de traverser la National Mall. C'est aussi dans ce parc que se déroule chaque année le Smithsonian Folklife Festival : https://festival.si.edu

A Washington, les Afro-Américain représentent près de 50/100 de la population. Voir aussi, par exemple, le programme de la `Folk Alliance International Conference', dont la justice sociale a toujours été un des thèmes privilégiés: https://member.folk.org/

# **SCIENCE CONNECTION AOÛT-SEPTEMBRE 2021**



William Sidney Mount (1807-1868). Young Man Playing the Banjo (The Banjo Player), 1856. Huile sur toile, 96 x 73 cm. Avec l'autorisation du Long Island Museum of American Art, History & Carriage, Stony Brook, NY. Don de Mr. et Mrs. Ward Melville, 1955. Cat: 0000.001.0011 Photo: LIM

Affiche de l'exposition Banjo! I nauguree au MIM en octobre 2003. Le banjo représenté ci-contre est de ceux fabriqués à Baltimore vers le milieu du 19e siècle par William Esperance Boucher (°Hannovre, 1822-1899) pour les acteurs du minstrel show, une forme de spectacle qui devint très populaire, qui se répandit jusqu'en Europe. Avec un système de tension réglable de la peau, ce facteur d'origine allemande fut le premier à faire évoluer l'instrument de type primitif - dont la peau était clouée sur une gourde ou une calebase - vers sa forme moderne et 'européanisée'. D'abord fabricant de tambours, Boucher fut aussi le premier à répandre ses banjos à l'échelle commerciale. Il sera par la suite suivi par J.H. Buckbee, S.S. Steward et d'autres gros producteurs. Le banjo est l'instrument emblématique des Etats-Unis. Toujours très présent sur la scène musicale, on y dénombre encore actuellement plus de deux cent facteurs, principalement actifs dans le Sud et dans l'Est de son territoire ; particulièrement dans les états du Maryland, de la Virginie de la Caroline du Nord du Kentucky du Tennassee.

# VERS LES ORIGINES DU BANJO

Mise au jour du 'banza haïtien' par le MIM

Dans les années 1830, c'est dans le cadre du *minstrel show* que des musiciens blancs grimés au noir de fumée, 'européanisent' l'instrument primitif des Afro-Américains et s'approprient le banjo. Le cinq cordes devient alors la norme à partir de laquelle s'ensuivra toute une évolution. Sa forme la plus élaborée et la plus récente sera celle du banjo de *bluegrass*, dont la caisse est la même que celle des banjos ténors et des banjos plectrums fabriqués dans l'entre-deux guerres

mondiales pour les orchestres de jazz et la musique de danse. Entretemps, de la fin de la guerre de Sécession au premier conflit mondial, on en avait fait un instrument de concert et de salon, dérivé de la guitare classique ; alors qu'au même moment il devenait un pilier de la *country music* du Sud des États-Unis, une tradition musicale aux profondes racines anglo-saxonnes, commercialisée dès les années 1920 grâce à la radio et au disque, et remise à l'honneur lors du grand

folk revival des années 1960. Dès le départ elle sera aussi collectée, conservée et étudiée par des ethnomusicologues et autres sociétés savantes. Dans ces mêmes années 1920 ces enregistrements (field recordings) entrent à la Bibliothèque du Congrès qui avait créé 'the Archive of Folk Culture' en 1928.

Dessin éloquent de l'artiste Art Rosenbaum (°1938). Tiré de sa méthode The Art of the Five-String Banjo (Oak Publication, 1968). Au cœur du folk revival, ce fut un grand retour vers le banjo traditionnel du Sud.

Art Rosenbaum fut, avec Pete Seeger et ensuite avec Mike Seeger et John Cohen...,
un des piliers de la renaissance du banjo à cinq cordes aux Etats-Unis.

Crédit : Art Rosenbaum. Avec l'autorisation de Art Rosenbaum.



When you want genuine music - music that will come right home to you like a bad quarter, suffuse your system like strychnine whisky, go right through you like Brandreth's pills, ramify your whole constitution like the measles, and break out on your hide like the pin-feather pimples on a picked goose - when you want all this, just smash your piano, and invoke the glory-beaming banjo!

# Voici le banjo!

Le procédé est ancestral et sa portée universelle. La caisse d'un banjo est constituée d'une structure circulaire sur laquelle une membrane se trouve tendue. Les propriétés acoustiques d'un tel assemblage produiront une sonorité vivifiante, qui soulèvera, et qui marquera, quel qu'il soit, l'esprit du public. Ainsi, le banjo est entré d'emblée dans l'imaginaire collectif, créant au passage ses propres mythes et

clichés, défiant parfois la réalité historique, voire musicologique. Esclaves des plantations du Sud des États-Unis, American cowboys, Route 66, country music commerciale, jazz naissant... sans oublier les anciennes traditions musicales des Southern Appalachian Mountains, le bluegrass... composeront son terreau le plus fertile.

Pour les initiés, l'année 2019 sera cependant marquée par la célébration du centenaire de la naissance de Pete Seeger (1919-2014), que la Smithsonian Institution honorera d'ailleurs par l'édition d'un bel ouvrage, accompagné d'un ensemble de six CDs. (2) C'est finalement justice pour celui qui aura enrichi d'innombrables enregistrements le catalogue de la maison Folkways (3), fondée voici plus de 70 ans à New York par Moses Asch (1905-1986), père du label non commercial Smithsonian/Folkways : une éminente institution officielle dont les États-Unis peuvent s'enorgueillir. Pete Seeger (fils du musi-

cologue Charles Seeger, et demi-frère de Mike et de Peggy Seeger) fut un immense banjoïste, responsable avec Earl Scruggs (1924-2012) du nouvel essor et du renouveau du banjo à cinq cordes. Que les revues de presse actuelles et les présentations à l'emporte-pièce de notre instrument ne nous fassent pas oublier les positions héroïques de cet artiste, inquiété par le maccarthysme dans les années 1950,

et qui accompagnera le pasteur Martin Luther King lors de la marche vers Washington de 1963. Dans la foulée du grand folk revival des années 1960, combien de jeunes américains, suivant l'exemple de celui qui leur montrait le chemin, n'ont-ils pas, banjo en bandoulière, bravé la société de l'après-guerre. La première version commercialisée du banjo à cinq cordes, par W.E. Boucher à partir des années 1840. Exposition The Banjo in Baltimore and Beyond, BMI Museum, Baltimore, M.A., 2014. Coll. P. Szego. Photo : Gérard De Smaele.

Baltimore était à la croisée des chemins des troupes du minstrel show. Preuve d'un intérêt marqué pour l'histoire et la signification du banjo à cinq cordes, plusieurs expositions thématiques furent montées aux Etats-Unis dans les années 2000. En 2005-2006, la Corcoran Gallery, à Washington DC, a utilisé cette même peinture (The Banjo Player) pour l'affiche de Picturing the Banjo, un évènement consacré aux représentations du banjo dans les arts <sup>(1)</sup>



Catalyseur de divers éléments organologiques issus des côtes occidentales de l'Afrique, inauguré dans le nouveau monde, le banjo commence malencontreusement son histoire avec la déportation de millions d'esclaves. Le *minstrel show*, les 'lois Jim Crow', la ségrégation, ainsi que la brûlante actualité, sont là pour nous rappeler que les racines de ce riche instrument, qui se répandit dans toutes sortes de genres musicaux - que ce soit la musique populaire des États-Unis, le jazz, la variété -, sont enfouies dans un infâme substrat. Le retentissement international de la *folk music* ou de la *black music* ne devrait nous le faire oublier, car le banjo à cinq cordes est aussi le reflet implacable du cheminement de la société américaine, dévoilée en toute sincérité et sous ses multiples facettes.

Tout comme l'âme humaine, le sujet est inépuisable, voire épineux, pétri d'un mélange complexe de bien, de mal et d'innombrables contradictions. Les stéréotypes collés au banjo sont des raccourcis, ses images des représentations lacunaires enfouies dans l'inconscient de l'expérience collective, mais gageons que cette brève présentation soulèvera un coin du voile, pour inciter le public à renouer avec l'histoire et les lancer sur la voie de la découverte de l'étonnant cordophone qu'est le banjo : un instrument aux expressions variées, des instrumentistes prestigieux, mais aussi des hommes et des femmes d'une confondante authenticité.









- 1. Vue sur l'exposition Banjo ! au MIM. Les deux premiers instruments sont 2. le 'creole banjo' et le 'banza haïtien'. Ce sont les deux plus anciens spécimens de banjos primitifs connus à ce jour.

  Photo: Patrick Farma 2003
- 3. Id. De dr. à g.: Première vitrine: 'banza haïtien', luth-harpe, 'Old Plantation banjo' (fac-simile de Pete Ross), 'Liberty Banjo' (fac-simile de Pete Ross); 'gourd banjo' moderne et 'grain measure banjo' (fac-simile de Bob Thornburg). La seconde vitrine présente des instruments typiques du second tiers du 19e siècle, utilisés dans le cadre du minstrel show. Photo: Patrick Fernn. 2003
- 2. Id. Vitrine de prédécesseurs africains du banjo, assemblée par Saskia Willaert (MIM). A gauche, un akonting, étudié par Ulf Jagfors au Sénégal dans les années 1990, actuellement considéré comme un possible ancêtre africain du banjo. Cet instrument possède trois cordes de longueurs inégales. La plus courte est chanterelle ou bourdon. Sa technique de jeu en down picking ressemble étrangement à celle du banjo à cinq cordes traditionnel du Sud des Etats-Unis. Daniel Jatta (Gambie, ca. 1960) en fit la démonstration au MIM en 2003.
- 4. Id. Dans la vitrine plate de gauche, des banjos à cinq cordes sans résonateur, dont la caisse est ouverte. Dans celle de droite, ce sont des banjos avec résonateur, tels que ceux utilisés dans le bluegrass (5 cordes), ainsi que dans le jazz (ténor et plectrum : à 4 cordes ; banjo-guitare : à 6 cordes).

Dans son domaine de Monticello, en Virginie, Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) possédait pas mal d'esclaves, qu'il put dès lors observer en première ligne. La citation ci-dessus, extraite de ses *Notes on the State of Virginia*, est fréquemment mentionnées par les historiens. On l'associe souvent à *The Old Plan-*

tation (Music and Dance in Beaufort County), une non moins célèbre représentation picturale du banjo, une aquarelle anonyme, finalement attribuée à John Rose, un autre 'propriétaire' d'esclaves qui l'aurait réalisée en Caroline du Sud vers 1785.



Music and Dance in Beaufort County (nouveau nom récemment attribué à The Old Plantation) Aquarelle anonyme attribuée à John Rose (1752-1820), datée des années 1780, orobablement en Caroline du Nord. Env. 30,5 x 46 cm. L'observateur attentif remarquera un détail de la plus grande importance : une corde du banjo représenté est plus courte que les autres. Marc l'autrisation de Albh Aldrich Rokefeller (MK At Museum Colonial Williamsburg Virginia Inv. NW0159

Mountain fretless banjo' à cinq cordes (on notera que la cheville de la cinquième corde est démontée), construit en Caroline du Nord par Frank Proffirt (1913-1965) en 1961, offert en 2018 à l'American Folklife Center (Library of Congress, AFC2018/008). La peau est revêtue de la signature de nombreux grands noms du folk revival, dont ceux de Frank et Anne Warner, Pete Seeger, Burl Ives... Cet instrument artisanal d'un style particulier, est un lointain rappel de l'influence des Afro-Américains sur le banjo joué par les musiciens blancs.

Photo: G. De Smaele, 2018.

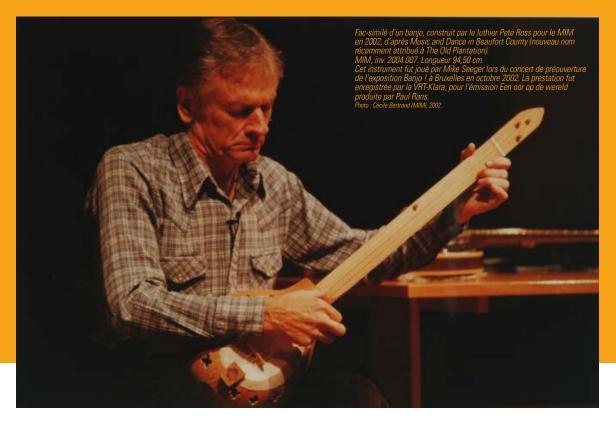


Le banjo est manifestement un instrument de musique d'origine africaine qui, suite au contact d'Afro-Américains avec des musiciens blancs, et à sa diffusion dans le minstrel show, s'est incroyablement popularisé aux Etats-Unis à partir des années 1830. Comme le démontrera bien Dena Epstein (1916-2013), la première chercheuse américaine à avoir recensé les sources littéraires

anciennes relatives aux origines du banjo (in Ethnomusicology, 1975), ce lien avec l'Afrique est une porte ouverte sur l'histoire de l'esclavage. Témoin direct de cette réalité, notre instrument en relatera toutes les souffrances.

The instrument proper to them is the Banjar, which they brought hither from Africa...

Thomas Jefferson, 178



Chez nous, bien que l'arrivée de l'internet ait pu faciliter notre accès à l'information, le banjo est encore peu et mal connu. On en ignore souvent les différentes configurations, les nombreux styles et techniques de jeu, et surtout son abondante documentation. L'instrument occupe une place importante dans l'évolution de la musique

populaire des Etats-Unis. Il est prodigieux de se rendre compte qu'une exposition thématique ait pu se tenir au MIM en 2003-2004, rehaussée de la participation d'artistes comptant parmi les plus éminents représentants du genre : Mike Seeger, Bob Carlin, Tom Paley, Daniel Jatta, et plus tard Clarke Buehling (au Brosella Folk Festival

et au Festival des Midis-Minimes). Dans la foulée, le MIM avait pointé du doigt le 'banza haïtien', offrant à la communauté scientifique une pièce maîtresse de l'histoire du banjo.

# Les banjos primitifs

Bien que documentés dans la littérature ancienne, les banjos d'avant 1830 sont d'une insigne rareté. Le plus ancien connu à ce jour est le 'creole bania', ramené du Surinam vers 1775 par Gabriel Stedman (un natif de Termonde, 1744-1797). Cet instrument est conservé au Musée d'ethnologie de Leyde (inv. 360.5696). Il offre des similitudes avec celui re-

présenté dans une publication de Gabriel Stedman (Paris, 1799 ; Londres, 1813).

Avec leur manche plat et leur chanterelle, les 'strum strumps' illustrant un autre ouvrage de Hans Sloane (London, 1707), nous rappellent directement le banza haïtien retrouvé à la Cité de la Musique à Paris, dont on ne connaissait pas encore d'instrument témoin avant notre exposition.



Les luths africains primitifs, dont le Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale conserve de nombreux spécimens, présentent selon leurs lieux d'origine de nombreuses particularités. Le banjo, dont le manche traverse de part en part la caisse de résonance, et dont le chevalet repose sur une peau tendue, se rapproche de l'akonting (ou ekonting), un instrument à cordes de longueurs inégales toujours joué en Afrique de l'Ouest. On notera cependant une différence fondamentale quant à la forme du manche qui, contrairement au banjo, est ronde. Bien qu'aucun instrument

de facture africaine n'ait été retrouvé sur le continent américain (Brésil, Caraïbes et Antilles également), cet akonting que l'on retrouve au Sénégal, en Gambie ou en Guinée-Bissao, fut étudié et remis en valeur par le chercheur suédois Ulf Jagfors qui viendra au MIM avec Daniel Jatta pour le présenter lors de la journée d'étude organisée au MIM en 2003. On le considère actuellement comme l'ancêtre le plus proche du banjo.

# Le banza haïtien

En 2003, lors de la préparation de l'exposition *Banjo!*, Saskia Willaert, spécialiste au MIM de l'Afrique et du Moyen-Orient, fut chargée de monter une vitrine mettant en évidence les liens entre le(s) type(s) de construction du banjo afro-américain et de

ses précurseurs africains. Lors de la préparation de cette exposition, la mise en évidence du 'banza haïtien', provoqua un vif émoi dans la communauté des spécialistes. Une description circonstanciée de cette 'découverte' sera par ailleurs disponible dans plusieurs publications scientifiques, ainsi que sur internet (cfr. infra : Orientations bibliographiques).



Akonting présenté ici par le 'Sin Jam Bukan de Fasul', un groupe de l'ethnie Jola du sud du Sénégal, originaire de Mlomp.

#### Orientations bibliographiques :

- Banjo ! Catalogue de l'exposition présentée au MIM, du 16 octobre 2003 au15 février 2004. Mia Awouters, Claire Chantrenne, Saskia Willaert, Gérard De Smaele et al. Préface de Anne Cahen-Delhaye. Bruxelles : Musical Instruments Museum, 2004, 92 p. (disponible en français, néerlandais et anglais).
- Conway Cecelia. African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia. A Study of Folk Traditions. Knoxville, Tennessee:
   The University of Tennessee Press, 1995, 394 p.
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- De Smaele, Gérard. Banjo Attitudes. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2015, 238 p.; A Five-String Banjo Sourcebook. id., 2019, 206 p.
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#### Sources audiovisuelles :

- G. De Smaele, P. Ferryn. *A Banjo Frolic*. Frémeaux & Associés, DVD-FA5179, 2008 (Caboose Productions 2003).
- Banjo, 1901-1956. Le banjo américain à cinq cordes. Frémeaux & Associés, CDFA5179, 2008.
- Seeger, Mike. Southern Banjo Sounds. Smithsonian/Folkways, CD-40107, 1998.
- Trischka, Tony. World Turning. Rounder, CD-0294, 1993.
- En preparation: The Old 'Classic Banjo' from the Wayne Adams Collection. Frémeaux & Associés, annoncé pour 2021 ou 2022. A 3 CD box and a booklet.

#### Sur internet :

- Banjology : https://sites.duke.edu/banjology/the-banjo-in-haiti/the-haitian-banza/
- The Banjo Project : http://banjo.emerson.edu
- Gérard De Smaele : www.desmaele5str.be et www.desmaele5str.be/dossiersArchives.html

#### **L'auteur**

Personnalité pour le moins atypique, Gérard De Smaele est un licencié et agrégé en éducation physique (sciences du mouvement), sorti de l'UCL en 1975. Épris de banjo et devenu professionnel, il a écrit plusieurs ouvrages sur le sujet. Au fil du temps, de ses voyages et de ses rencontres aux USA, il sera considéré comme le spécialiste belge du banjo à cinq cordes, et sera le protagoniste d'une exposition présentée au MIM en 2003-2004 (voir Le Canard Folk: juillet 2020 et mars 2021). De 1988 à 2013, il occupera le poste de restaurateur d'œuvres sur papier au Cabinet des estampes de la KBR. De la Bibliothèque royale, depuis la fenêtre de son atelier - ironie du sort! - il put observer l'avancement des travaux d'aménagement du Musée des instruments de musique, qui avait édité son premier titre en 1984. Il travaille depuis 2011 au transfert au MIM de sa documentation sur le banjo.



Gérard De Smaele (g.) et Mike Seeger (dr.) lors du workshop donné après le concert de Seeger au Musée Royat de Mariemont, le dimanche 6 octobre 2002. Photo: Patrick Fernn 2002

#### Remerciements

- La direction de la KBR pour avoir, entre 2001 et 2003, libéré Gérard De Smaele de ses obligations afin de lui permettre de travailler sur la préparation de cette exposition.
- Le Service culturel de l'Ambassade des Etats-Unis à Bruxelles pour le financement des prestations de Mike Seeger et de Bob Carlin au MIM, ainsi que celles de Clarke Buehling au Brosella Folk Festival et au Festival des Midis-Minimes. Aussi pour le financement du projet A Banjo Frolic.

#### Notes

- (1) Leo G. Mazow et al. *Picturing the Banjo*. The Pennsylvania University Press, 2005, 179 p.
- Pennsylvania University Press, 2005, 179 p. (2) Pete Seeger : The Smithsonian-Folkways Collection, Smithsonian-Folkways, 2019; Etienne Bours, Pete Seeger : un siècle en chansons. Au bord de l'eau, 2010, 212 p.
- (3) On y trouvera des banjoïstes incontournables tels que Fred Cockerham, Pete Steele, Frank Proffitt, Roscoe Holcomb, Dock Boggs, Clarence Ashley et Wade Ward, qui nous ramènent à toutes sortes de réalités sociales.

# **BANJO S.S. STEWART À CINQ CORDES**

# S.S. STEWART 'Thoroughbred' - # 50592 Philadelphia; Pennsylvania, ca. 1898



Catalogue S.S. Stewart. Philadelphia: S.S.S, 1896.
Collection G.DS.
Gérard De Smaele



Akira Tsumura, initialement collectionneur de banjos à quatre cordes, s'est par la suite aussi intéressé aux modèles à cinq cordes. En 1993, *1001 Banjos* (Kodansha International), son monumental ouvrage de 905 pages, (illustré de 3000 photos), sera son apothéose. En 1978, désireux de mettre en valeur sa



The Tsumura's Playing Cards II. [5-cordes]
Collection G. De Smaele.

collection et ses recherches, il avait déjà sorti un luxueux double jeu de cartes illustré de banjos ténors et plectrums. Cette publication sera bientôt suivie d'une autre série de cartes montrant cette fois d'anciens banjos à cinq cordes. La première partie de ces cartes est consacrée à S.S. Stewart. On y retrouvera le 'Thoroughbred' et le 'Special Thoroughbred'. Ces jeux de cartes sont accompagnés d'un livret. Banjo Playing Card I & II¹ [sic] représentent les deux âges d'or de la fabrication du banjo.

D'après l'article d'Elias Kaufman (voir p. 34), ces modèles de banjos représentaient le meilleur de ce que la marque pouvait offrir. Ceux vendus à plusieurs fois son prix ne présenteraient qu'une différence d'ornementation, parfois très sophistiquée, que l'on retrouve sur les luxueux 'Presentation Banjos'.

<sup>1</sup> J'ai acquis ces jeux de cartes en 1983, à New Bedford dans le Massachusetts, lorsque j'étais en visite pour quelques jours chez Mike Holmes, l'éditeur de la revue *Mugwumps*. Depuis lors je n'ai jamais descellé les emballages, me contentant de regarder ces cartes chez d'autres qui n'avaient pas résisté à la tentation.



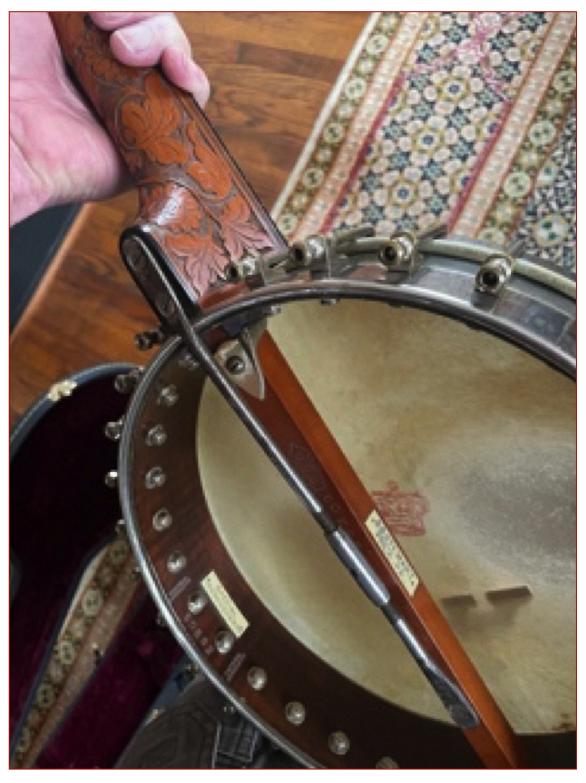


La série complète des cartes à jouer d'Akira Tsumura.

Elles illustrent les deux âges d'or de la fabrication du banjo : les *five-string open back banjos*, de la fin du 19e siècle et du début du 20e siècle ; les *four-string resonator banjos* que sont les ténors et plectrums de l'entre-deux guerres mondiales. Les banjos modernes de *bluegrass* sont des hybrides qui combinent le manche des uns et les caisses des autres.

Collection G. De Smaele.

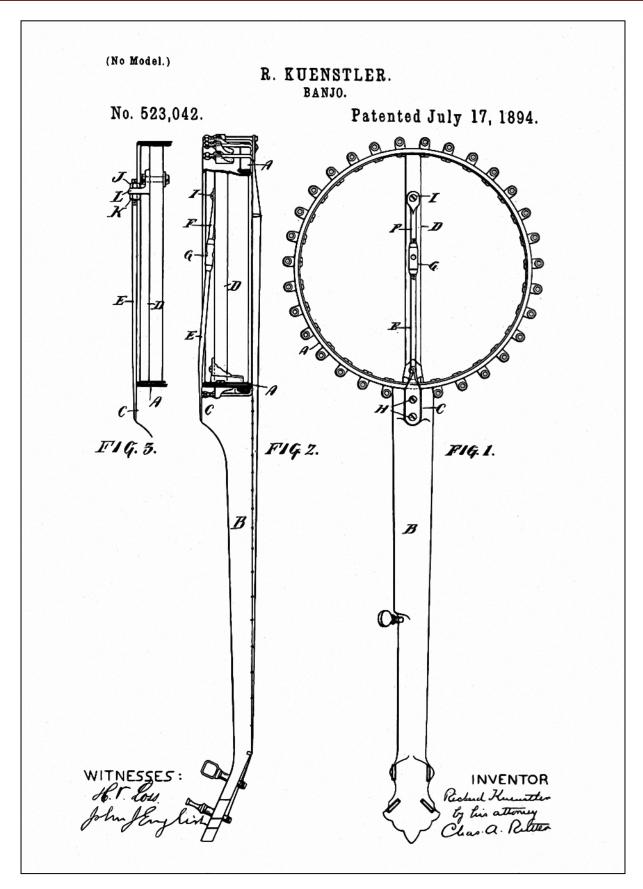
# Le 'Steel Neck Fastener and Adjuster' breveté par Richard Kuenstler en 1894



Voici notre exemplaire, équipé du 'Steel Neck Fastener and Adjuster', un élément distinctif des banjos S.S. Stewart à partir de novembre 1896. Cette invention fut protégée par brevet en 1894 (Richard Kuenstler, le 17 juillet 1894), voir page suivante. Le dispositif sera exclusivement monté sur les banjos S.S. Stewart², d'une valeur de \$20,00 ou plus. Voir plus loin le catalogue de 1896, p. 19.

Photo: Kevin Enoch.

<sup>2</sup> On le retrouvera également bien plus tard, légèrement modifié, sur des banjos de Fred Van Eps.

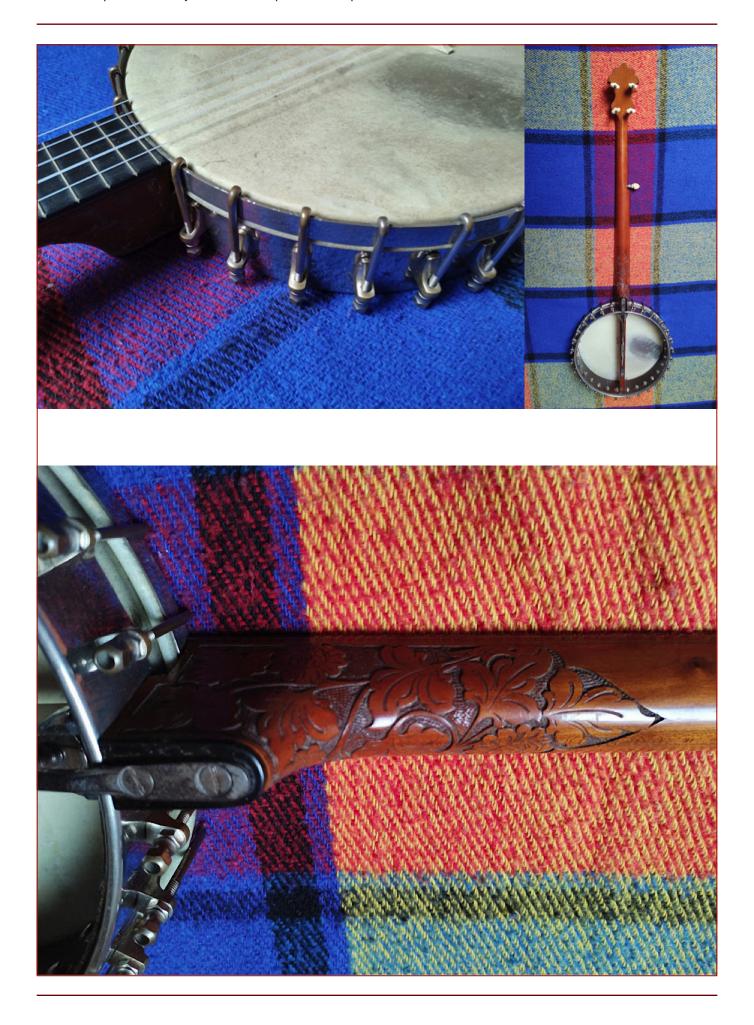


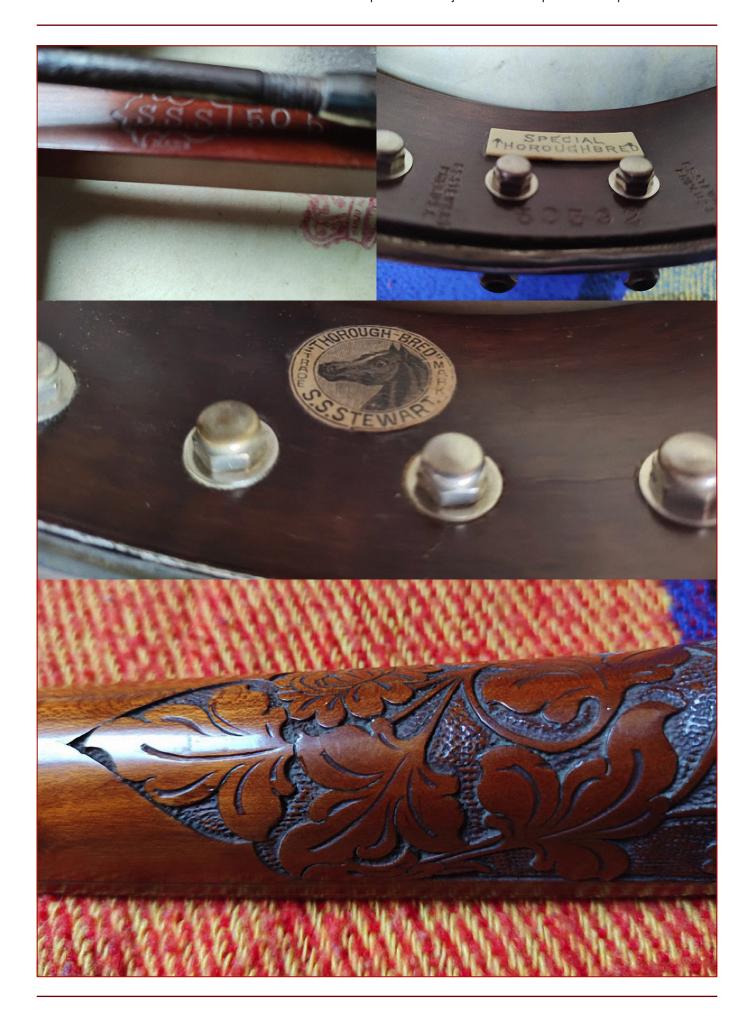
Google Patent :

 $\underline{https://patentimages.storage.googleapis.com/58/32/1c/5efa030e01ed0c/US523042.pdf}$ 

# Photos de l'instrument







#### Introduction

Samuel Swain³ Stewart (1855-1898) – voir plus loin pour sa biographie – aura fabriqué à Philadelphie, entre 1878 et 1898, au-delà de 25.000 banjos. Si ces instruments ne sont plus tellement joués par les musiciens actuels, ils n'en restent pas moins de précieux témoins du passé. Ils nous ramènent directement aux premiers instruments du style dit classique du banjo à cinq cordes, la configuration prédominante à l'époque. En plus d'une facture toujours soignée, certains d'entre eux présentent des décorations très élaborées. Les modèles de présentation, avec leurs fines marqueteries, leurs gravures, leurs motifs sculptés, sont toujours fort recherchés des collectionneurs.

S.S. Stewart put compter sur le soutien des meilleurs instrumentistes de son temps, tels que George Gregory, Emory Hall, William Huntley, l'Afro-Américain Horace Weston... ainsi que du fameux A.A. Farland – le 'Paganini du banjo' – une des grandes stars du *classic finger style*<sup>4</sup>. Ces personnalités, mises en valeur dans le S.S. Stewart Banjo and Guitar Journal<sup>5</sup>, ont 'endorsé' la marque et contribué à sa réputation. Sylvester Ossman (1868-1923) – connu pour ses nombreux enregistrements sur cylindres – jouera lui aussi sur un S.S.Stewart.

https://archive.org/details/linfantamarchforthebanjogregory

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CysJEaYINjw

L'Infanta March de G. Greogry (1893), joué par Fred Van Eps en 1912.

De par sa capacité de production, de par les idées<sup>6</sup> qu'il défendait à propos de l'instrument et de sa fabrication, de par ses éditions musicales – qui jusque-là étaient restées fort réduites – et par la large diffusion d'une revue bimensuelle, Samuel Swain Stewart reste un des personnages incontournables de l'histoire du banjo au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle.

Après la Guerre de Sécession, la J.H. Buckbee Company<sup>7</sup> (active de ca. 1865 à 1897) – qui à New York deviendra le fabricant de banjos le plus prolifique des États-Unis<sup>8</sup> – sera son principal concurrent. Mais, bien que lui aussi fort productif, Stewart – tout comme les Frères Dobson – s'était donné pour objectif de faire évoluer et d'élever le banjo vers une musique plus raffinée que celle du *minstrel style*. Bien qu'il ait lui aussi été amené à produire en masse<sup>9</sup>, l'ensemble de sa production demeurera d'excellente qualité. Elle se revendiquait même d'être – sans aller jusqu'à les nommer –, supérieure à celle d'autres fabricants.

S.S. Stewart était par ailleurs un gestionnaire avisé, et dans les dernières décennies du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle le banjo représentait, en plus de son intérêt culturel, une intéressante opportunité commerciale. Parallèlement à lui et à J.H. Buckbee, d'autres, notamment Cole et Fairbanks, à Boston MA, ont développé d'autres

<sup>3</sup> On trouve aussi 'Swaim'.

<sup>4</sup> Voir sur le site 'Classic Banjo.ning', et au MiM dans The Banjo and it's Players (N. Howard, 1959).

<sup>5</sup> Voir *The S.S. Stewart Banjo, Mandoline & Guitar Magazine*, ainsi que les copies de méthodes, la Collection Phil Spear et le dossier 'Banjo classique' : déposés au MiM en 2020 et 2021.

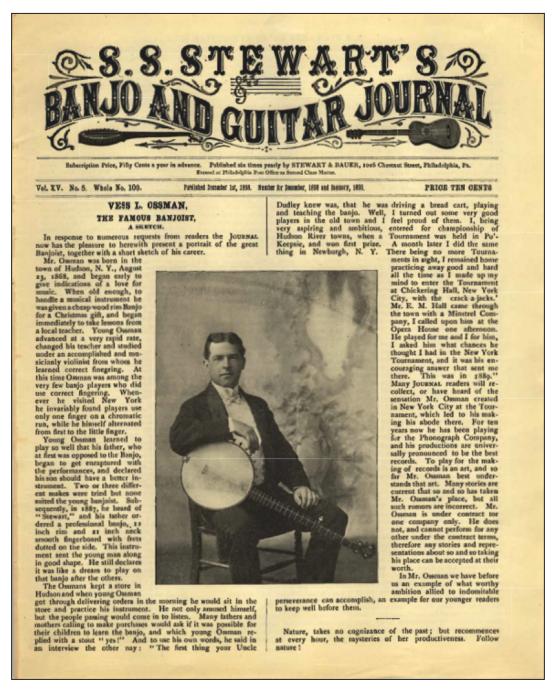
<sup>6</sup> On reprochera plus tard à Stewart d'avoir démenti les origines africaines du banjo (voir *The Banjo Philosophically*, p. 1 – voir annexe 1, p. 43), sans pour autant en apporter la preuve.

<sup>7</sup> John Henry Buckbee I (1837-1890), le fondateur, auquel succèdera son fils J.H.B. II (1867-1942).

<sup>8</sup> Bacon Reginald. *Chauncey Richmond and the 'Old Buckbee*.' Variety Arts Press, 2018. Frank Converse, H. Dobson... ont fait fabriquer leurs banjo chez J.H. Buckbee.

<sup>9</sup> Ses banjos vendus sous la marque Acme, étaient distribués par Sears and Roebuck. Une partie de sa production relève de la production de masse, rejoignant ainsi J.H. Buckbee, orienté vers la grande distribution.

idées et concepts. En vue de plus de puissance sonore, le *tone ring*<sup>10</sup> métallique fut la prochaine étape de l'évolution du banjo, une voie ouverte par Dobson, qui ne fut pas suivie par S.S. Stewart, préférant quant à lui en rester au *clad metal rim*, qu'il considérait comme étant un ultime aboutissement. Samuel Swain disparut prématurément en 1898, à l'âge de 43 ans, laissant derrière lui une entreprise qui se trouvait face à de nouveaux mouvements, auxquels il fallait s'adapter. Confrontés à divers problèmes, ses fils et George Bauer (qui s'était associé avec Stewart), ses continuateurs, ne survivront pas très longtemps à l'inéluctable évolution de l'instrument et de son marché : une issue évoquée plus loin (p. 18) dans l'article d'Elias Kaufman.



Vess Ossman (1868-1923) et son S.S. Stewart. Différents diamètres de peau ont été disponibles. Celui-ci est probablement un 11 ½" ou un 12".

<sup>10</sup> Pour les termes techniques, voir par exemple : G. De Smaele, *Banjo à cinq cordes : point de vue organologique,* 1984. <a href="https://www.desmaele5str.be/pdf/banjo5CordesOptimise.pdf">https://www.desmaele5str.be/pdf/banjo5CordesOptimise.pdf</a>

#### Publications musicales de Stewart<sup>11</sup>

Afin de conforter sa réputation, de promouvoir ses idées et son entreprise, S.S. Stewart fut l'éditeur d'abondantes publications. De nombreuses références sont citées dans son catalogue de 1892 et dans *A Five-String Banjo Sourcebook* (Gérard De Smaele, 2018). Sachons toutefois que toutes ces publications musicales sont écrites en 'A notation'. L'ABF en a réédité une partie, prenant soin de les transposer en 'C notation'. Rappelons que le banjo 'classique' fut jusqu'au début du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle monté de cordes en boyau et accordé un ton et demi plus bas que le banjo moderne.

STEWART Samuel Swain. Sketches of Noted Banjo Players. Philadelphia: S.S. Stewart Banjo and Music Depot, 1881.

STEWART Samuel Swain. The Banjo Philosophically: its Construction, its Capabilities, its Place as a Musical Instrument, its Possibilities, and its Future: a Lecture. Philadelphia: S.S. Stewart, 1886<sup>12</sup>.

[reprint by Creator Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2012, 214 p.]

STEWART Samuel Swain. The Banjo: A Dissertation. Philadelphia: S.S. Stewart, 1888.

[reprint by Creator Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2012, 214 p.]

STEWART Samuel Swain. The Black Hercules, or The Adventures of a Banjo Player.

Philadelphia, S.S. Stewart, 1884, 30 p.

https://urresearch.rochester.edu/institutional Publication Public View.

action?institutionalItemId=1933

[novel based on the life of Horace Weston]

Stewart and Bauer' Bulletin. Philadelphia – published in 1902.

S.S. Stewart's Banjo & Guitar Journal (The). Philadelphia PA: S.S. Stewart – published from 1882 to 1901. https://urresearch.rochester.edu/institutionalPublicationPublicView. action;jsessionid=D52B 45973CDFB4A96458EE1042DB9F61?inst itutionalItemId=2330&versionNumber=1.

STEWART Samuel Swain. The Minstrel Banjoist. Philadelphia PA: S.S. Stewart, 1881.

STEWART S.S., "Observations on the Banjo and Banjo Playing." S.S. Stewart's Banjo and Guitar Journal. 1892.

https://archive.org/details/Observations

STEWART Samuel Swain. Rudiments of Banjo Playing. Philadelphia: T.A. Bacher, 1879.

STEWART Samuel Swain. S. S. Stewart's collection of music for the banjo. Philadelphia PA: S.S. Stewart, 1879.

STEWART Samuel Swain. The Banjo as an Art. Banjo Music Arranged and Performed by S.S. Stewart, the Favorite Banjo Virtuoso. Philadelphia PA: S.S. Stewart, 1880.

STEWART Samuel Swain. The Banjo by Ear. Philadelphia PA: S.S. Stewart, 1880.

[un des rares exemples d'utilisation de la notation en tablature pour le banjo au 19e siècle]

STEWART Samuel Swain. *The Banjo Player's Handbook and Complete Instructor*. Philadelphia PA: S.S. Stewart, 1881 (1880).

STEWART Samuel Swain. Stewart's Universal Banjo Instructor: A Book for the Million. Philadelphia PA: S.S. Stewart, 1882.

STEWART Samuel Swain. Complete American Banjo School: Complete in Two Parts. Philadelphia PA:

<sup>11</sup> Voir le catalogue S.S. Stewart de 1892. Copie accessible au MiM et sur internet. On pourra avantageusement consulter mes dossiers sur le banjo classique : *The Spier's Collection, The Five-Stringer, The S.S. Stewart Journal, Copie de catalogues anciens, Copie de méthodes...* 

<sup>12</sup> Copie déposée au MiM, 2021. Voir aussi pp. 43 et suivantes.

#### S.S. Stewart, 1883<sup>13</sup>. [une méthode largement diffusée]

STEWART Samuel Swain. The Concert Banjoist: A Choice Collection of Banjo Music by S.S. Stewart and other Composers. Philadelphia PA: S.S. Stewart, 1884.

STEWART Samuel Swain. Stewart Short-Hand Banjo Method, Philadelphia PA: S.S. Stewart, 1885. [notation en tablature]



POSITION OF HOLDING THE BANJO FOR STAGE PERFORMANCE ADOPTED BY MANY PLAYERS, KEEPING THE INSTRUMENT AWAY FROM THE BODY.

Page 2 de la méthode de S.S. Stewart, la première édition est de 1883.

<sup>13</sup> Copie déposée au MiM, 2020.

#### Elias Kaufman. "S.S. Stewart." The Five Sringer # 181, Winter-Spring 1997-98.

#### S.S. STEWART

Samuel Swaim Stewart (1855-1898) banjoist, manufacturer, composer, publisher was one of the most colorful and important figures in the history and development of the banjo. Although he began on violin, he soon became interested in the banjo and studied with several teachers including George C. Dobson. In 1878, Stewart set up a teaching studio in Philadelphia and also began making banjos. Although there was little that was innovative about his instruments, he took existing ideas (such as the fullspun rim) and built very fine banjos using the best materials and careful craftsmanship. He also began publishing banjo music. Although banjo methods were published beginning in the early 1850s, there was very little published banjo sheet music before 1878.

In 1882, Stewart began the publication of S.S. Stewart's Banjo and Guitar Journal. Through the magazine and other advertising he aggressively promoted his wares and ideas. He made heavy use of endorsements from prominent performers and teachers. Stewart pushed for reading music in the classic style of the A.B.F. and mocked ear players. His instruments and methods were also promoted as being scientific and up to date, combining modern manufacture with high quality materials and workmanship. He developed a large line of Instruments varying in size (to suit the individual player and their physical attributes) and in decoration. His basic instrument cost about \$20, a handsome sum if you realize that a laborer then made a dollar a day or less. The Thoroughbred model banjo was \$40. This featured an ornate, mother of pearl, inlaid peghead, a carved heel, a high quality cherrywood neck and his best rim. According to Stewart, this was the best instrument he (or anyone else) could make and any Stewart over that price was just a matter of decoration. You could pay up to two or three hundred dollars for fancy carving, engraving, pearl work, gold plating, jewels and the like.

Stewart also helped pioneer and support banjo orchestras. He claimed to have designed and built the first banjeaurine to be used for lead in the orchestras. Stewart also built fivestring piccolo and cello banjos that he touted as being essential for these amateur organizations. By the 1890s most colleges had such orchestras.

Although exact figures are not available, it appears that from 1883 to about 1890 Stewart was making about eight or nine hundred banjos a year. In the period 1890 to 1898, the factory produced almost two thousand banjos a year. This does not include the Acme Professional banjos that he made for Sears Roebuck in the 1890s.

By the mid 1890s, Stewart had a large, successful, varied and profitable business. He suffered from Bright's disease (an old term for kidney disease). In early 1898, he took George Bauer, who had been involved with other companies in the manufacture of guitars and mandolins, as a partner with a one year contract. Stewart died of a stroke on April 6, 1898. Bauer ran the company for a few more years, but soon had serious disagreements with Stewart's widow and two sons. Either due to incompetence (or, as alleged, fraud) the company was bankrupt in 1901 and Bauer acquired it. He continued to run it as Stewart & Bauer for at least another decade. The sons teamed up with Joseph Stern in New York to make the S.S. Stewart Sons (4S) banjos. His oldest son, Fred Stewart, was an A.B.F. member and attended one of Alex Magee's New Rochelle concerts in 1949 to 1950.

In honor of the hundredth anniversary of Stewart's death, we will be playing music written and published by Stewart at the Spring 1998 Rally. On the opposite page we have reproduced some pictures that appeared, mostly, as advertising, In Stewart's Journal. The cuts showing the manufacture of a banjo are from 1888.



#### Samuel Swaim Stewart

https://classic-banjo.ning.com/page/player-biographies



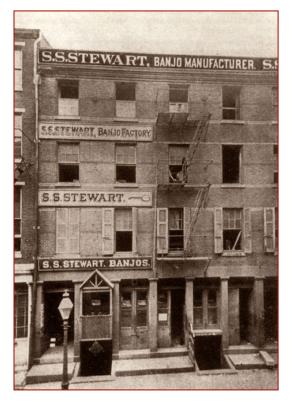
S.S. Stewart was born in Philadelphia, January 8, 1855. His father was in the patent medicine trade, merchandising \*"Swaim's Panacea"\*, a cure-all developed in the 1820s and promoted by Stewart's maternal grandfather, William Swaim, whose success was due, in part, to his extensive use of print media advertising, a measure that Stewart would adopt and exploit for his own purposes.

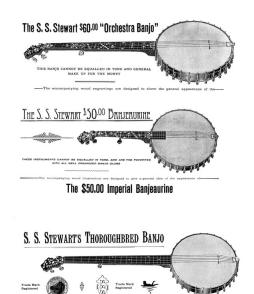
Young Samuel first studied the violin and showed great promise. He also loved to tinker, constructing toy fiddles or guitars, studying and repairing old broken violins and researching their history or construction. After attending a minstrel show, he put aside the violin, began playing the banjo and took several lessons from George C. Dobson. Soon he was performing in public. His interest in history and instrument building transferred to the banjo, and he pondered how its design and construction might conform to the uniform standards evident in the classical European instruments.

In 1878 Stewart opened a single room studio to provide banjo lessons. He also performed publicly and began to make banjos. By late 1879 he relocated to larger premises and was soon printing promotional brochures that espoused the importance of reading proper notation and learning a more refined caliber of music than was commonly heard on the banjo to that point. He adapted and arranged European classical music to the banjo for that purpose. Stewart's life-long effort to elevate the banjo from the Minstrel stage and Music Hall to the salon had begun.

In early 1882 he began printing his journal, initially as an advertising medium to promote his banjos, music publications and objectives. Each issue would include essays on the banjo and its construction, endorsements of his products and two or more pieces of music. Content was tailored to banjoists (customers) from novice to expert. The journal's circulation grew rapidly to a national level and Stewart began accepting unsolicited, but paying, ads for others music goods, instruction and related business announcements.

Stewart's banjos offered no acoustic innovation, but were considered by him to be an improvement on the same style of banjo manufactured by others before him, built to Stewart's very high standards of design, construction and rigorous quality control. By the mid-1880s, he was confident his design had perfected the banjo in its most sophisticated form. He took out no patents, claiming that would entail assigning his secret refinements to a public document.





He championed the use of full spun silver rims that had been developed by others (Wilson and Farnham, between 1867 and 1875, and later improved by Clarke), and judged by Stewart to sound best. His were either German silver or plated brass, spun over wire rings at either end of a maple hoop. His necks were select, slender, one piece cherry, with Stewart's distinctive peghead and heel shapes. Higher-grade instruments featured fingerboards and pegheads with progressively more ornate, geometric shell inlay patterns. The highest grades had still more shell, peghead and heel carvings, and engraved rims with parquetry inlay. His instruments played and sounded very well for their time. Coupled with his promotional efforts, Stewart's products sold briskly and he was becoming known as a leading manufacturer. In the fall of 1886, Stewart bought multi-floored premises on Church Street to house his growing enterprise of instrument making, music publishing and promotion. In 1888 he purchased

additional floor area to consolidate his Church Street holdings.

Stewart's great innovation, begun in the mid 1880s, was in making banjos of various rim size and neck length, each with a distinctive tonal range or voice, suitable for ensemble playing and analogous to the range of instrument sizes within the classical violin family. Out of this, the banjo orchestra was born, comprised of regular banjo, the very popular banjeaurine, piccolo and cello banjos at its core, with other additions available. He published sheet music arranged for each voice and promoted the orchestra in his journal. Banjo orchestras began to form and then flourish within the US, Britain and Canada, often performing in dinner jacket at higher social venues. Stewart's concept of a family of banjos received wide acceptance. The orchestra further elevated the banjo's status within the upper echelons of society, while at the same time creating a new sales market for his goods.

By 1891 Stewart had 15 employees producing an estimated 250 banjos a month. He continued to promote his products and his ideals through his journal, trade newspaper ads and shows, concert affiliations and catalogues. He championed performers devoted to classical banjo music, such as Farland and Gregory, promoting them heavily and receiving their endorsements of his products in return.

During this decade, however, competitors like Boston's A.C. Fairbanks were adding innovative metal rings to their rims that dramatically improved the banjo's tone and projection. With Stewart's unwavering faith in the full spun rim, now a clearly inferior product, his position as a leading maker began to falter.

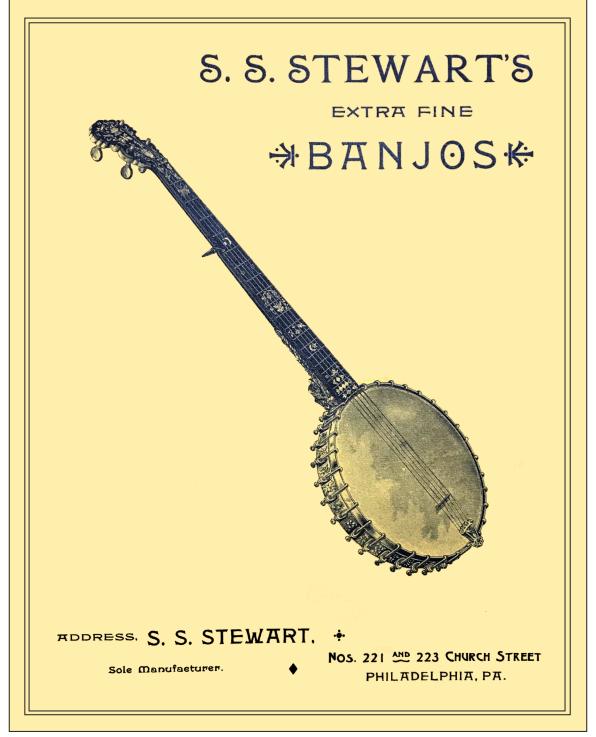
In January 1898, Stewart formed a partnership with George Bauer, guitar and mandolin manufacturer. Stewart's banjo works were moved to Bauer's location and the Church Street premises were retained for Stewart's extensive publishing operation. On April 6, 1898, Stewart suffered a fatal stroke. There is speculation that his demise was induced by a heated exchange between the volatile Stewart and his new business partner.

Stewart's two sons continued the business with Bauer until about 1901, when the partnership ended amid much legal acrimony. The sons marketed S.S. Stewart's Sons Improved "4S" banjos, actually made by New York jobber Jos. W. Stern & Co., and continued publishing the journal, until the business failed around 1904. Bauer continued to sell the "Original S.S. Stewart Banjo" until about 1910.

S.S. Stewart's legacy rests as much in his many efforts to elevate the banjo in society during the \*"classic"\* era, as it does in the many hundreds of his well crafted and often ornate banjos that survive to this day.

### Le catalogue S.S. Stewart de 1896

Modèles - Famille de l'instrument



Dans les années 1880, S.S. Stewart inventa la 'banjeaurine' et introduisit par la suite, en plus du 'regular banjo', une série de modèles à cinq cordes pour la création d'orchestres. Avec le 'piccolo banjo' et le 'cello banjo', ils formeront une famille calquée sur celle du violon ou autres instruments. Ces orchestres fleuriront un peu partout. S.S. Stewart encourageait la lecture musicale et s'était donné comme objectif d'élever le niveau de respectabilité du banjo, l'éloignant ainsi de ses origines modestes et afro-américaines.

À cette époque le banjo devint aussi un instrument de salon.

Nous disposons de deux catalogues anciens :

S.S. STEWART. S.S. Stewart's extra fine banjos. Philadelphia PA, 1896, 56 p. Facsimile. Silver Spring MD: Mugwumps Instrument Herald, 1973.

[the complete 5 string classic banjo family: piccolo, banjeaurine, cello, bass].

S.S. STEWART, Catalogue and Pricelist. S.S. Stewart's Celebrated Banjos, Banjo Music, Instruction Books, Strings and Fittings. Philadelphia PA: S.S. Stewart, c. 1892, 72 p.

Quelques S.S.S furent exposés au MiM en 2003-2004 (Cat. N° 27 à 30), dont un 'Special Thoroughbred'. Les modèles plus anciens de la marque étaient 'fretless':

#### https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41WEiwwdRP8

Démonstration par Rob MacKillop sur un S.S.S 'Orchestra 2 – Champion' – c.a. 1890

#### Quelques références":

JOHNSON Robert. "Stewart Banjos." Relics, III/4, December 1969, pp. 10-12, 24.

GRUHN George. "S.S. Stewart's Thoroughbred." Frets, April 1985.

HOLMES Mike. "Identifying S.S. Stewart Banjos." Mugwumps.

#### http://www.mugwumps.com.sss\_date.htm

KAUFMAN Elias. "S.S. Stewart Banjos, 1." Mugwumps, II/3, May 1973, pp. 3-5.

KAUFMAN Elias. "S.S. Stewart Banjos, 2." Mugwumps, II/4, July 1973, pp. 15-16.

KAUFMAN Elias. "S.S. Stewart Banjos, 3." Mugwumps, II/5, Sept. 1973, pp. 3-5.

KAUFMAN Elias. "S.S. Stewart." The Five-Stringer, # 181, Winter-Spring, 1997-1998.

KAUFMAN Elias & Madeleine. "The Cello Banjo." *The Five-Stringer*, number 197, Winter-Spring 2008, p. 19. [S.S. Stewart]

KAUFMAN Elias & Madeleine. "The Piccolo Banjo." *The Five-Stringer*, number 199, Spring 2009, pp. 14-19. [S.S. Stewart]

SHARPE A.P. (Albert Percy). "Samuel Swain Stewart and his Banjos." B.M.G., September-October 1969.

On ajoutera bien entendu les publications de Phil Gura, James Bollman, Karen Linn, Akira Tsumura.

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THE PRICES OF BANJOS IN THIS CATALOGUE ARE NET; but when the full amount is sent with order, a discount of 5 per cent. from list prices of Banjos will be allowed.

DO NOT MUTILATE Those who mutilate or destroy this book are informed that duplicates will NOT BE SUPPLIED FREE. TEN CENTS, cash or stamps, will be required to secure a new copy.

HOW TO ORDER Remit by P. O. Money Order, Express, Bank Draft, or Registered Letter.
When Banjos are ordered C. O. D. a deposit must accompany the order to insure attention. Strings, etc., and other light articles may be sent by mail, in which case the money for same must accompany all orders.

Twenty-four hours' examination will be allowed responsible parties on Banjos sent C. O. D.

The prices named here are NET-not subject to discount.

If you are perfectly responsible and will send evidence of that fact, you will not be required to pay a dollar in advance of receiving the Banjo, Mandolin or Guitar you order.

#### The Special Thoroughbred Banjo.

Those specially interested in this style Banjo, should write for our large supplementary sheet describing this instrument. The pages are too large to be included in this catalogue, and contain one of the largest and finest half-tone pictures of **Alfred A. Farland**, the wonderful Banjo Artist, ever produced. We also mail a very fine illuminated colored engraving of Mr. Farland with his Stewart Thoroughbred Banjo, to any one sending a two-cent postage stamp, with a request for the same.

The "Scientific Banjo Boom" is now on, and the modern Banjo is destined to become the leading musical instrument of the day.

For a condensed account of the wonderful musical success of this truly marvelous performer, get a copy of Stewart's book (130 close pages) "The Banjo;" cleth binding, 50 cents; stiff bristol cover, 25 cents.

Farland's National School for the Banjo teaches this artist's original method of right and left hand fingering; price \$1.00. Stewart's American Banjo School, price reduced to \$1.00; contains a vast amount of general instruction for the Banjo, with many photographic engravings, wood cuts and diagrams. These books should be owned by every Banjo student and performer.

In addition to the various styles of Banjos herein enumerated, Stewart manufactures a number of special styles to order, some of which are very elaborate and elegant instruments, costing \$150.00, \$200.00 and \$250.00.

The style Banjo "20th Century" is not fully represented by illustration in this list. The price is \$39.00, and may be described as follows: 11 inch rim, 19½ inch neck, 22 frets (3 octaves). This Banjo is intended to take the place of the 11 inch "Special Thoroughbred," for those who must have an instrument at a lower price.

The \$15.00 "Amateur" Banjo is also mated with a \$15.00 "Solo Banjeaurine" to meet the requirements of Amateur Banjo, Mandolin and Guitar Clubs.

A recent innovation is also found in an \$18.00 "Amateur," finished a little fancy to catch the eye.

#### Fancy Banjos.

Banjos tastefully ornamented with pearl inlaying are very attractive to look upon, and nearly all expensive instruments are now-a-days finished in this manner.

But the purchaser should bear in mind that such work may appear well to the eye, and at the same time be flimsy and liable to do the instrument more harm than good. Many cheaply-made banjos are sold at far too high prices, and prove unprofitable bargains in the "long run." For instance, a thin ebony veneer is stamped out to fit pearl designs, which are set into such cuttings, and the veneer then glued fast to a thicker piece of dyed wood, and the entire strip made to resemble a solid ebony fingerboard. This is an inexpensive process of making a gaudy "fingerboard," but the work does not withstand the wear and tear of use. On the other hand, if a thick strip of ebony is used for a fingerboard, and the same inlaid before it is glued to the neck, the work is almost sure to warp sooner or later.

There is really no such thing as an "ebony finger-board" for a banjo, if the instrument is properly constructed, for the veneers as well as the ebony strip are glued to the neck in the rough, and only after a long period of seasoning should the upper surface of ebony be inlaid. This is done in the Stewart Banjos, from the finest quality of Japanese Mother of Pearl Shells, carefully sawed, filed and set into the wood by hand. Should a slight change in the wood occur, it may be buffed off and made level, but the cheap style of inlaying cannot thus be trued up without great danger of the pearl or metal inlayings dropping out.

An entire volume might easily be produced upon this subject, but enough at present.

It is a matter of some regret that so many musical instrument jobbers, without study and with but small concern for the interests or welfare of the only Native American instrument, the Banjo, have undertaken its manufacture, after the workers in the field of its progress have made the instrument popular and in demand. Such "Commercial Banjos" may find a more or less ready sale, but only the fittest will survive the tests of time.

#### "Fake Discounts."

Many of our readers may have noticed that a \$30.00 Stewart Banjo or Banjeaurine, is listed in the catalogues of some of the Jobbers as a \$50.00 instrument.

This is evidently the result of "force of habit;" the musical instrument trade finding it a more or less convenient policy to leave plenty of room for discounts. Now, what benefit is it to the purchaser to receive 40 per cent. discount on a \$50.00 instrument, if he discovers that he is getting only a \$30.00 instrument after all? In times past people must have enjoyed being humbugged hugely.

#### Repairing.

Avoid trusting your Stewart Banjos to incompetent or irresponsible parties for repairs. Stewart's only factory is as represented in this book. We cannot be held responsible for repairs or other work done elsewhere. When Banjos are sent here for repairs, always box them properly and prepay Express charges, being careful also to enclose the sender's and owner's name and full address.

Those who are interested in Banjos, and who desire further information on the subject, should obtain such books as the following named: "The Banjo Philosophically" (will be mailed free upon receipt of stamp); the Banjo and Guitar Journal, a bi-monthly periodical adapted to the use of Banjo, Mandolin and Guitar players, and pupils; price, 10 cents per copy, or 50 cents a year, in advance; also, a book of over 130 pages, "The Banjo," in stiff paper cover, 25 cents; cloth cover, 50 cents.

Stewart's American Banjo School reduced to \$1.00, contains a number of cuts and illustrations and much musical instruction.

In writing, be careful to be explicit and to the point. Write name and address as plainly as possible on every letter in order to avoid mistakes.

# Address, S. S. STEWART BANJO MANUFACTURER

Nos. 221 and 223 CHURCH STREET, PHILADELPHIA, PA.

# A FEW OBSERVATIONS.

The prevailing ignorance in the music trade in regard to the banjo of the day, and the fact that many dealers take no interest in the instrument than to the extent of their actual cash profits on sales, renders it difficult for a manufacturer to satisfy buyers who must purchase their instruments through music dealers.

It is not an uncommon occurrence for a manufacturer to have a banjo returned to him with the remark that "the rim is down below the hoop and you cannot play on it beyond the tenth fret," when, in fact, all that the instrument needs is that the head should be properly drawn down by use of the wrench which accompanies each instrument.

Upon being informed that such is the case, the dealer indignantly demands to know why the head has not been pulled down before the banjo is sent out.

Now, as stretching the head is a very important matter in a banjo, it stands to reason that were the head to be placed at the time of constructing the banjo so that the hoop (which acts as a strainer to the head) should be on a level with the edge of the rim, in a little while, when the head has so stretched as to become somewhat loose and flabby, it would become necessary to draw the hoop down below the edge of the rim in order to get the head in any proper playing condition. Then the "boot would be on the other leg," as the old saying is, and the dealer would, in many cases, indignantly ask why the head was not put on tight in the first place—or put on so that it could not stretch and render it necessary for the "rim to stick up above the hoop."

It is simply impossible to put on a head, in ninety-nine cases in a hundred, so that it can be "pulled down" with the hoop on a level with the edge of the rim at once and remain tight; and it is necessary that the head should always be tight and firm.

No two heads have precisely the same stretching capacity, and those who demand that their banjos should be so made that the top of the hoop will at once be placed on a level with the top of the rim, must have their wishes gratified at the expense of their instruments. They must be content in a few weeks to put up with a loose, flabby head, and have the tone of their instrument thus greatly impaired, or else must be ready and willing to replace the head by a new one every three or four weeks.

There is an old saying, "of two evils choose the lesser," and the purchaser of a new banjo, which is demanded within a limited time, must take his choice as to which he prefers—whether he is willing to allow the head a reasonable time to stretch, or whether he prefers that the hoop should, in a little time, be drawn down below the rim with the constant stretching of the head (which is bound to take place whether he desires it or not); or, on the other hand, an impaired tone caused by his instrument having a loose head.

Experienced players and students who have carefully read *The Banjo Philosophically* will understand that these remarks are intended for the inexperienced and uninitiated novice. A player of a few years experience has generally made himself master of these details,

and for such players we can only say that they always wisely prefer the heads put on their banjos with the hoop as far up as possible, in order that as much of the stretch may be got out of the head as possible before the hoop is drawn down level with the top of the rim.

It may occasionally happen that the head will stretch but very little, and the hoop almost refuse to screw down at all for some time; but this simply denotes an extraordinary good head, and seldom happens except during an extremely cold and clear spell. In the murky weather of the summer it is extremely rare to find a head that will not greatly stretch.

A banjo, although not a living, breathing animal body, is nevertheless sensitive to changes in the atmosphere, and, moreover, often-times resents being illy used and knocked about.

A living animal body is constantly taking on and throwing off matter—as the old gives way new takes its place. Air, light, food, sleep, etc., are the elements which repair wasted vitality in the living body; but the banjo has no digestive organs nor organs of respiration, and hence, when it is disabled it cannot recuperate of itself.

We offer these remarks simply to show some of our slow thinkers that it is not prudent to knock their poor banjos about and then expect them to do good work.

We knew a man not long ago who purchased a fine banjo and was so used to knocking himself about that he took it for granted that the banjo had the same powers of assimilating food as he himself had. In other words, when he got tired out he slept all day and then took plenty of good food and drink. So, after knocking his banjo about all night, he went to bed and slept his fill, and when he was in a humor for more fun he thought the banjo should be in the same humor, but not so.

After several hours in a hot room it had been suddenly plunged into a bath of damp air, and then regaled with a resting-place by the heater for twenty-four hours longer. No wonder that the neck had sprung and the ebony cracked—the poor banjo having no power of locomotion of its own, was compelled to remain where its master placed it, and that master not possessing good solid "horse sense," had inflicted upon that instrument woes which were beyond endurance.

The greater number of purchasers of banjos have no practical knowledge of the instrument, and a large per cent. of these really do not know when a string is false and when it is true. Some time ago we were sent for to call at a house in a fashionable neighborhood and endeavor to ascertain what was the matter with a banjo. The trouble was that the instrument had a false string upon it, but the owner would scarcely believe this because they had tried two or three different strings with bad results. But such was the fact nevertheless.

If you must use your banjo as a snow shovel, do so; only don't wonder if it sounds dull afterwards

## S. S. STEWART'S

EXTRA FINE

## **⇒BANJOS**★

for Presentation, &c.

PRICES: \$100.00, \$125.00, \$150.00

AND UPWARDS.

THE Banjo from which this fac-simile illustration is made, costs with Fine Leather Case,

\*-\$125.00-\*



Briefly described it is as follows:

11½ inch rim, 19 inch neck. Rim of
nickel-plated German Silver and maple wood;
metal part of rim handsomely chased, wood
(inside of rim) finished in mosaic. 30 gold-plated
brackets, etc.

The neck is very elaborately carved and handsomely inlaid with pearl.

## S. S. STEWART'S

EXTRA FINE

**⇒BANJOS**★

for Presentation, &c.

PRICES: \$100.00, \$125.00, \$150.00

AND UPWARDS.

This cut represents a back view of the \$125 BANJO.

The tail piece and pegs are of ivory; the pegs are capped with gold on ends, and set with garnets.

The neck is one of the finest pieces of carving and inlaying ever done on a Banjo.

These instruments are finished with RAISED FRETS only, on account of the elaborate and delicate pearl inlaying. Price of this style, including finely Embossed Leather Case,

\$125.00.

ADDRESS. S. S. STEWART, .

Sole Manufacturer.

NOS. 221 AMD 223 CHURCH STREET PHILADELPHIA, PA.

## The S. S. Stewart Special Thoroughbred Banjo, Price, \$40

As used by A. A. FARLAND, the Banjo Virtuoso

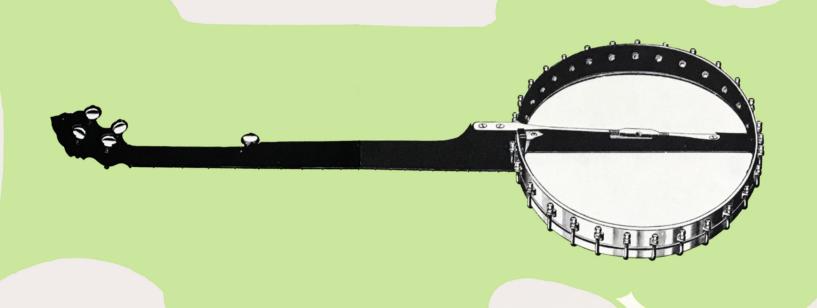


Manufactured only by S. S. STEWART, Nos. 221 and 223 Church Street, Philadelphia, Penna.

(Over)

## The S. S. Stewart Special Thoroughbred Banjo, Price, \$40

As used by A. A. FARLAND, the Banjo Virtuoso



Size: 10½ inch rim, 2½ inches in depth, 19 inch fingerboard, 22 frets (3 octaves)

o 11

"""

19½

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Finished similar to the \$60.00 "Orchestra" in appearance,

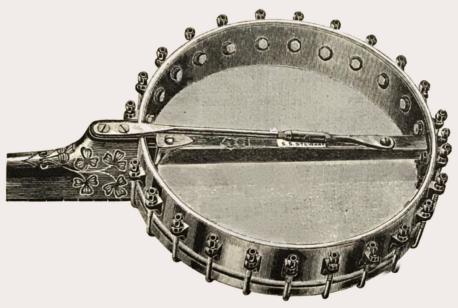
Price, \$60.00

(Over

## S. S. STEWART'S

EXTRA FINE

## **⇒BANJOS**除



THE accompanying engraving presents a view of the new Steel Neck Fastener and Adjuster, now being used on the Steward Banjos, and which is placed on every Banjo and Banjeaurine of Stewart's manufacture listed at \$20.00 and upwards, from November 1st, 1896.

The appliance is the invention of Richard Kuenstler, and is protected by letter-patent, issued July 17 1894, and can be used on the Stewart Banjos only.

The neck is strengthened and held in position, and can also, to a certain extent, be adjusted simply by inserting a small rod of steel (a French wire nail will answer) through the hole in the turnbuckle and giving the screw a half turn. This Adjuster counteracts the strain of the banjo-head, which is apt at times to disturb the set

of the fingerboaed, as all experienced players are aware. The appliance also lends additional strength and security to the neck—strengthening the instrument at one of its weakest points. It is light, is made of the finest steel, nickel plate, and adds to, rather than detracts from, the appearance of the instrument.

## W. J. Stent's "American Banjo Glub"

+; Of Sydney, New South Wales, Australia



THIS ORGANIZATION, AWAY OFF IN AUSTRALIA, USES THE STEWART BANJOS EXCLUSIVELY: YOU WILL NOTICE THEM IN THE ENGRAVING

The S. S. Stewart Banjos are widely known, they have a great reputation for fine musical qualities and endurance.

An article does not acquire such a reputation unless it possesses superior merit.

The Stewart Banjo has all the merit it is credited with and is constantly being improved, as the science of banjo playing advances.

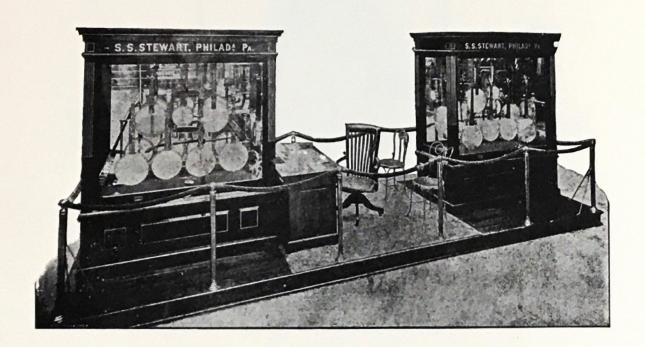






## THE CELEBRATED S. S. STEWART BANJOS

## AWARDED MEDAL AND DIPLOMA



### At World's Columbian Exposition

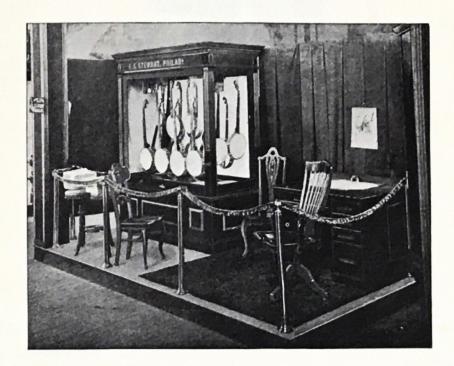
CHICAGO, ILLS, 1893

The Cotton States and International Exposition

ATLANTA, GA., 1898

# Exhibit of Stewart Banjos

AT THE COTTON STATES AND INTERNATIONAL EXPOSITION



Atlanta, Ga., 1895

Also at the Philadelphia Bourse, 1896

# S. S. Stewart's Strings for Banjo, Mandolin and Guitar

Gut Strings for Banjo, single string.  Per set,
STRINGS FOR BASS BANJO (Used in Banjo Clubs)
Set of five,
GUITAR STRINGS
A, on silk,
Gut first strings,
Gut second and third strings, each,
Gut second and time strings, each,
MANDOLIN STRINGS
Per set of eight,
E, or first, per pair,
A, or second (spun), per pair,
A, or second (plain), per pair,
D, or third, per pair,
G, or fourth, per pair,
"STEWARTS SPECIALTY" TWISTED SILK BANJO FIRST STRINGS

Price, 10 Cents Each, or Fifteen Strings for \$1.00

Perfectly True in Tone, and are not Affected by Moisture like the Gut Strings.

## Banjo, Mandolin 🕫 Guitar Orchestras

BY THOS. J. ARMSTRONG

The increasing popularity of banjo, mandolin and gritar clubs, has attracted the attention of everybody. A few years ago, only a limited number of these organizations were in existence, but now, quite a lengthy list could be compiled. Every college throughout the land has its little band of interesting musicians; and nearly every community has its diminutive orchestra to make their social existence more attractive. This being the case, it is but natural to suppose that accurate and methodical rules for forming these organizations have been sometimes carelessly observed. Too often has the material at hand been utilized to fit the urgent demand for forming a club. Thus we find it a difficult matter to meet two different organizations having the same instruments and the same number of members. One baujo club may consist of five members, each man playing a regular banjo, and another club may have the same number of men, but two of them have banjeaurines, two have regular banjos and one a guitar. The club that has five regular banjos will not sound as well as the club made up of two banjeaurines, two banjos and guitar; but these five young men wanted to form a club, and as each one already owned a banjo, the club was organized at once. Such a club will also have considerable difficulty in obtaining suitable music, for the best they could do would be to render publications, issued in the duet form.

The modern banjo club sprang into existence when Stewart invented his banjeaurine. All previous attempts to establish a banjo orchestra were dismal failures; and all subsequent attempts to organize one without banjeaurines have had very little success,—musically. The banjeaurine is the violin of a banjo orchestra, and music for such organizations cannot be properly rendered, unless the club contains, at least, one of these instruments. Omit the banjeaurine and it is like discarding the violin in our theatrical or concert orchestras. It contains the principal melodies in all publications for banjo, mandolin and guitar combinations, and all other instruments, which the club may add, are for embelishments to those melodies, and harmonizing the same. Its third string is tuned to the middle C on piano.

First and second banjos tune their third strings to G below this middle C on piano.

Piccolo banjos tune an octave higher than first or second banjos.

Bass, or 'cello banjos tune an octave lower than first or second banjos.

Mandolins and guitars tune their A to A on the piano.

In tuning without piano, it is best to tune mandolins and guitars first. After getting these in unison, tune the third strings of first and second banjos in unison with the third string of guitar. Then tune piccolo banjo an octave higher than first banjo. Then tune the banjoaurine. Its open first, second and third strings must sound the same as the first, second and third strings at the fifth fret on first banjo.

In describing the above tuning, it is of course supposed, that if the performer gets the proper pitch for one string, he can tune all other strings on his instrument. It will be noticed in the above tuning that the banjeaurine plays in different keys from all other instruments in the banjo orchestra. When its part is written in E. major, the regular banjos play in A major. When it plays in A major, the regular banjos are in D major. The reason of this state of affairs is on account of its high tuning. It is tuned a fourth higher than the regular banjos and naturally its music must be placed in keys a fourth lower than the regular banjos.

Copyright 1895, by S. S. Stewart.

A diagram is here given, showing the major or minor keys for banjeaurine and those keys which correspond and chord with all other instruments in a banjo orchestra; such as piccolo banjo, first and second banjos, guitar, mandolin, bass banjo and piano.

#### MAJOR OR MINOR KEYS.

c	D	E	F	G	A	В
F	G	A	Bb	C	D	E
F	G	A	Вь	C	D	E
F	G	A	Bb	C	D	E
Аь	Вь	C	Db	Eb	F	G
Ab	Вь	C	Db	Eb	F	G
Аь	Bb	C	Db	Eb	F	G
F	G	A	Вь	C	D	E
	F F F Ab Ab	F G F G Ab Bb Ab Bb	F G A F G A Ab Bb C Ab Bb C Ab Bb C	F G A Bb F G A Bb F G A Bb Ab Bb C Db Ab Bb C Db	F         G         A         Bb         C           F         G         A         Bb         C           F         G         A         Bb         C           Ab         Bb         C         Db         Eb           Ab         Bb         C         Db         Eb           Ab         Bb         C         Db         Eb	F         G         A         Bb         C         D           F         G         A         Bb         C         D           F         G         A         Bb         C         D           Ab         Bb         C         Db         Eb         F           Ab         Bb         C         Db         Eb         F           Ab         Bb         C         Db         Eb         F

It will be noticed in this diagram that the keys taken by piano are the same as those taken by mandolin and guitar. It follows then that a club wishing piano parts added to their music, must have these parts written in keys that will correspond to those instruments. Numerous publications can be had for one or two regular banjos with piano accompaniment, but such parts for piano will not chord with other instruments in a banjo orchestra. When the melody is taken by the banjeaurine, the piano part will not chord with it, because it is written in keys that suit a regular banjo. Thus far there has not been sufficient demand for publishing piano parts in harmony with the banjo orchestra. Many banjo selections, published for banjo and piano, have been arranged for the banjo orchestra on account of their popularity; but in all such cases the piano part, that harmonized with a regular banjo, playing the melody, will not chord when such melody is played upon a banjeaurine. If the club has a pianist, and wishes to use this piano part, he must transpose the printed music a fourth higher. Take for instance, a piece of music written in E major for banjo, its accompaniment for piano will be in G major. If this selection is played upon the banjeaurine, which is tuned a fourth higher than a banjo, it is not a very difficult matter to understand that the piano part will not go with it. The pianist must, therefore, transpose his part from G major a fourth higher, which is C major.

Another mistake a great many young amateurs make is to attempt to play banjeaurine parts on a regular banjo and make them harmonize with other printed parts in a full club arrangement. This cannot be done except the performer uses a capo d'astro at the fifth fret on his instrument, which is not very satisfactory.

A glance at the diagram of keys given above, will show that when the banjeaurine plays in C major, the guitar, mandolin and piano must play in A flat major, and the piccolo banjo, first banjo, second banjo and bass banjo must play in F major.

When the banjeaurine is in D, the piccolo banjo, first banjo, second banjo and bass banjo are in G, while guitar, mandolin and piano are in B flat.

When the banjeaurine plays in E, piccolo banjo, first banjo, second banjo and bass banjo are in A, while guitar, mandolin and piano are in C, and so on throughout all keys.

For the benefit of young clubs the following collection of impossible, but often attempted duets, trios, etc., has been placed here. DON'T play the banjeaurine or solo part of a club piece on a regular banjo and expect the second banjo part to chord with it.

DON'T play the banjeaurine part of a club piece on a regular banjo and expect the guitar, first banjo or any other part to harmonize with it.

DON'T try to use a banjeaurine with the piano when the music is written for banjo and piano.

DON'T expect too much when you have only first and second banjo parts at hand.

DON'T expect too much when you have only mandolin and guitar parts at hand. The banjeaurine part is what is wanted.

DON'T play any duet, trio, quartette, etc., from any banjo orchestra arrangement, unless you use a banjeaurine to play the solo part.

DON'T play the banjeaurine part on a piccolo banjo. The other parts will not chord with it.

DON'T play the first banjo part on a banjeaurine. The other parts will not harmonize.

DON'T use a piano part with your banjo orchestra, unless you are positive it is written in the proper key.

#### THIS IS WHAT YOU MUST DO.

If you wish your club to be a musical success, these simple rules must be observed, in playing all publications for the banjo orchestra.

You must play the solo or banjeaurine part on a banjeaurine.

You must play the first banjo part on a regular banjo.

You must play the second banjo part on a regular banjo.

You must play the piccolo banjo part on a piccolo banjo.

You must play the mandolin part on a mandolin.

You must play the guitar part on a guitar.

You must play the bass banjo part on a bass banjo.

And you must use a banjeaurine to play the solo part in any combination you wish to form.

Sometimes, in the absence of guitar or second banjo, the pianist may "vamp" or make up a part from the printed guitar part. As this part is in accord with piano it is not a very difficult thing to do; although it is far better to have a regular piano part written when it is used in a banjo orchestra.

The following will be found very useful for forming duets, trios, etc., out of all publications for banjo clubs. All of these different combinations can be used with advantage by young clubs, whose membership and instruments are limited.

#### DUETS

Banjeaurine Second Banjo Banjeaurine Guitar

#### TRIOS

Banjeaurine	Banjeaurine	Banjeaurine	Banjeaurine
Second Banjo	Guitar	Mandolin	Mandolin
First Banjo	First Banjo	Guitar	Second Banjo
	QUART	ETTES	
Banjeaurine	Banjeaurine	Banjeaurine	Banjeaurine
Guitar	Mandolin	Mandolin	Piccolo Banjo
First Banjo	Guitar	First Banjo	Guitar
Second Banjo	Second Banjo	Guitar	1st or 2d Banjo

#### QUINTETTES

I Second Banjo

		Acutificities.
2	Banjeaurines	1 Banjeaurine
	Guitar	1 Mandolin
	First Banjo	1 First Banjo
1	Second Banjo	1 Guitar
		I Second Banjo
2	Banjeaurines	2 Banjeaurines
1	Mandolin	I First Banjo
1	Guitar	1 Guitar

1 Second Banjo

1	Banjeaurine
1	Piccolo Banjo
1	First Banjo

1 Guitar 1 Second Banjo 2 Banjeaurines 1 First Banjo 2 Guitars

	SEXTETTES	
2 Banjeaurines	2 Banjeaurines	z Banjeaurines
I First Banjo	1 Mandolin	1 First Banjo
2 Guitars	I First Banjo	3 Guitars
r Second Banjo	2 Guitars	
2 Banjeaurines	2 Banjeaurines	2 Banjeaurines
r First Banjo	1 Mandolin	2 First Banjos
1 Piccolo Banjo	1 First Banjo	2 Guitars
2 Guitars	1 Guitar	
	1 Second Banjo	
	SEPTETTES;	
3 Banjeaurines	2 Banjeaurines	3 Banjeaurines
I First Banjo	1 First Banjo	1 First Banjo
1 Second Banjo	1 Second Banjo	1 Second Banjo
1 Mandolin	1 Mandolin	1 Piccolo Baujo
1 Guitar	2 Guitars	r Guitar
2 Banjeaurines	3 Banjeaurines	2 Banjeaurines
I First Banjo	1 First Banjo	2 First Banjos
1 Mandolin	3 Guitars	1 Second Banjo
3 Guitars		2 Guitars
	OCTETTES	
3 Banjeaurines	3 Banjeaurines	3 Banjeaurines
1 First Banjo	1 First Banjo	1 First Banjo
1 Second Banjo	1 Maudolin	r Piccolo Banjo
2 Guitars	2 Guitars	1 Second Banjo
1 Bass Banjo	1 Bass Banjo	2 Guitars
3 Banjeaurines	3 Banjeaurines	3 Banjeaurines
2 First Banjos	1 First Baujo	2 Mandolins
3 Guitars	1 Piccolo Banjo	3 Guitars
	2 Second Banios	

The above are some of the agreeable combinations that can be used from publications issued for the banjo orchestra. Many more could be given, but it is unnecessary. Enough has been given to guide the young club in making up its members. It will be seen that it is not a good plan to have too many second banjos in a small club. It would not sound very well to have three second banjos in a club of six members. If the printed parts for second banjos are printed in the "divided accompaniment" form, with bass banjo playing all bass notes, it is a different matter. This is explained in a work by the writer, entitled "Divided Accompaniment." In all such cases the harmony is taken by the second banjos on their lower strings, and all bass notes are given to the bass, or 'cello banjo.

1 Guitar

This is vastly superior to our present mode of writing second banjo parts, with both bass and harmony for the same instrument. But there is no alternative for a publisher of banjo music. Young clubs must be encouraged, and as very few of them possess a bass banjo, a second banjo part is published having both bass notes and chords for the accompaniment. This is wrong, because the harmonies being taken on the high strings of the second banjo, are too high and brilliant for accompaniments, sometimes completely hiding the principal melody of a composition. This is vividly illustrated when a second banjo player uses too much force and plays too loud.

When the accompaniment is written in the divided form, as mentioned above, this difficulty disappears. The bass banjo then takes all bass notes one octave lower than second banjo, and the harmonies belonging to the accompaniment are played on the lower strings of second banjo.

The guitar on account of its low basses, makes a fine accompaniment for the club. The bass and harmonies are far better on the guitar than on the regular banjo. It is well for all young clubs to remember this, and use guitars for seconds instead of banjos.



L'actuel bâtiment de ce qui fut la maison S.S. Stewart à Philadelphie. Vu en 2015. Collection G. De Smaele.

### Notre exemplaire

Notre exemplaire porte le numéro de série 50592. Il a été fabriqué vers 1898, année de la disparition prématurée de S.S. Stewart. Il est conforme au catalogue de 1896.

#### http://www.mugwumps.com/sss date.html

C'est un très bel exemplaire, en fort bon état, qui m'a été vendu par Kevin Enoch, considéré dans son domaine comme un des meilleurs luthiers des États-Unis, dont les banjos seront utilisés par des personnalités telles que Mike Seeger ou Bob Carlin.

Les banjos S.S. Stewart sont encore parfois utilisés pour la musique *old time*. On leur monte alors des cordes métalliques, mais il faut y prendre garde car ces cordes peuvent à la longue déformer le manche. On sait en effet que ces banjos étaient à l'origine accordés une tierce mineure plus bas que les banjos actuels. On constatera aussi que le manche est construit en une seule pièce et n'est pas prévu pour ces tensions supplémentaires<sup>14</sup>. On verra d'ailleurs par la suite que les manches des banjos seront mieux renforcés : *two pieces neck, three pieces neck, truss rod* de Gibson...

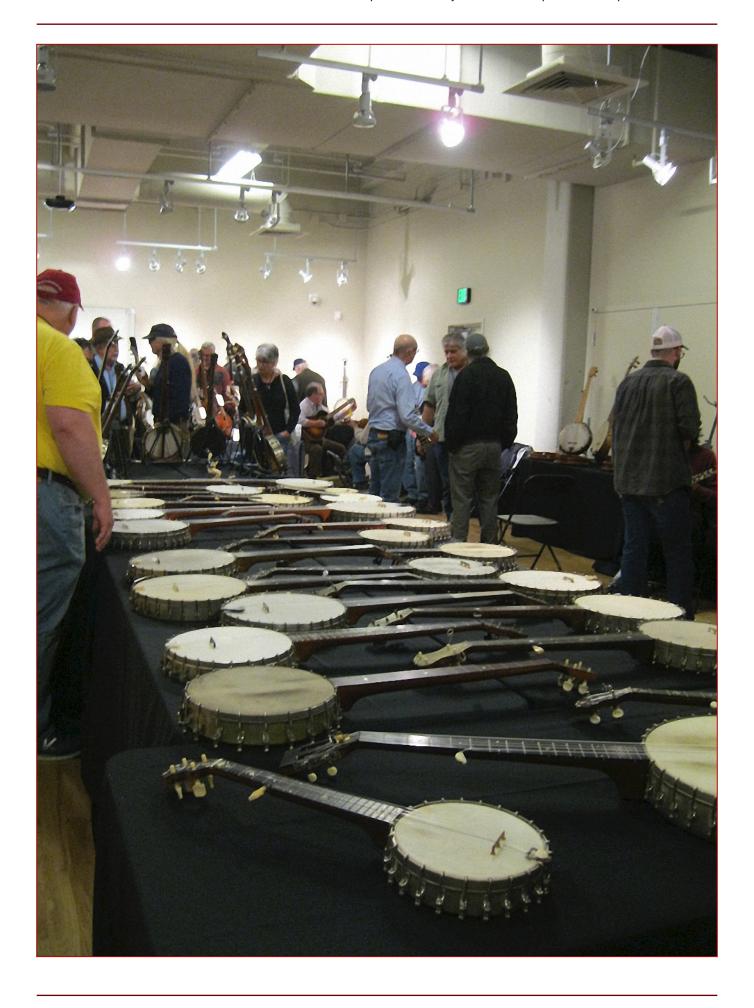
Kevin Enoch y a monté un jeu de cordes en 'nylgut'. C'est un choix personnel, mais on pourrait préférer le boyau, le nylon ou les cordes synthétiques pour harpe ou luth.

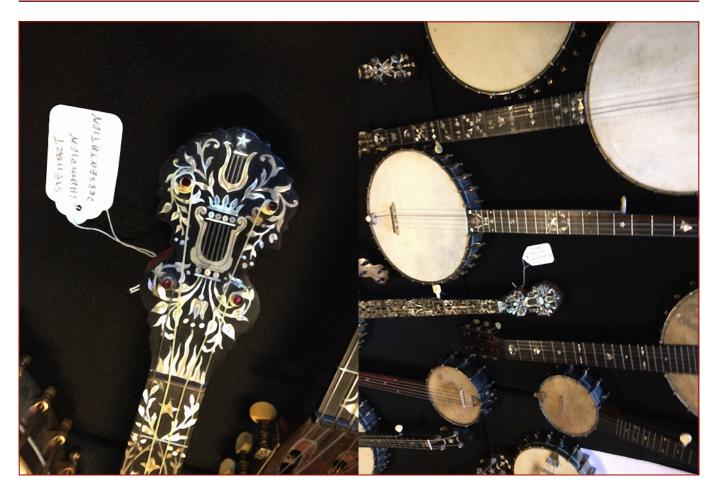
On devrait aussi remplacer le chevalet actuel par un modèle à deux pieds, dans le style de ceux les plus couramment utilisés sur les banjos classiques de l'époque. Sachons que la clientèle de Enoch se porte principalement sur la *old time music* et le *down picking*, ce qui suppose un montage et un réglage spécifique.



Les anciens ateliers S.S. Stewart, 221-223 Church Street à Philadelphie. Les bâtiments de Stewart sont ceux dont la façade est peinte en gris. (Photo prise en 2011, source internet)

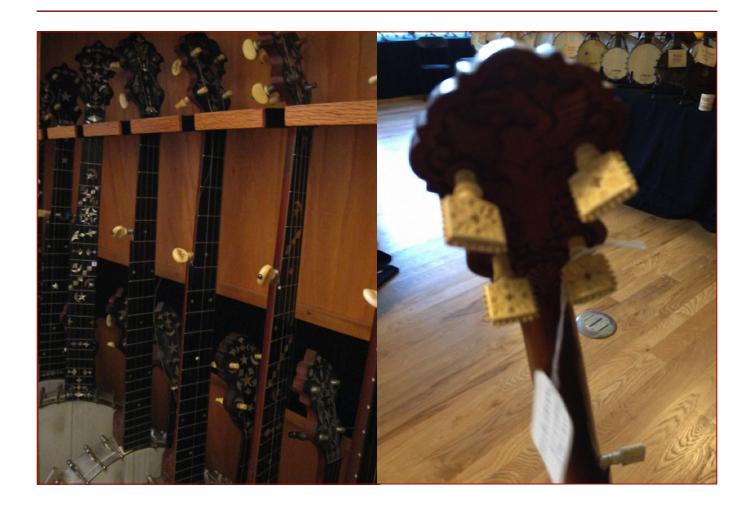
<sup>14</sup> Les manches des S.S.S. sont en cerisier. Plusieurs fines lamelles de bois peuvent se trouver en dessous de la touche, ce qui est une première forme de renforcement.





Un exposé sur les banjos S.S Stewart fut présenté lors de la *Banjo Gathering* de 2018, au *Birthplace of the Country Music Museum*, à Bristol VA, une ville située sur la frontière entre la Virginie et le Tennessee. Avec la découverte de Jimmy Rodgers et de la Carter Family, les *Bristol Sessions* de 1927 sont restées célèbres dans l'histoire de la *Country Music*. On avait demandé aux collectionneurs de venir avec leurs S.S. Stewart : toute la gamme y était, en passant par les 'fretless', le 'cello banjo', la 'banjeaurine', le 'picolo banjo', et même la 'banjorette'.

Photo: G. De Smaele.





Dans ces vitrines sont entreposés une cinquantaine de banjos S.S. Stewart.

Dans les années 1950, ils se trouvaient à vil prix.

Collection Kaufman, Buffalo NY.

Photo: G. De Smaele, 2017.



Bascom Lamar Lunsford (1882-1973)<sup>15</sup>, alias '*The Minstrel of Appala-chia*', tient ici un banjo dont le cheviller fait fort penser à un S.S. Stewart 'Thoroughbred'. Il jouera plus tard sur un Gibson, que nous avons vu à l'Université de Asheville NC (au Berea College) lors du tournage du documentaire *A Banjo Frolic* en 2003.

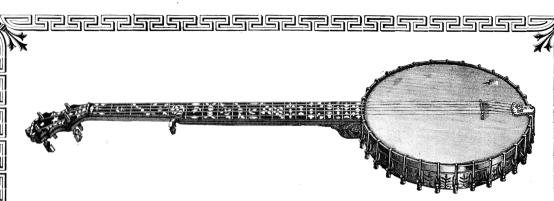
Samatha Bumgarner (1878-1960) et Bascom Lamar Lunsford ont fortement inspiré Pete Seeger. Il les découvrit au *Mountain Dance and Folk Festival* de Asheville NC, dans les années 1930. Ce fut pour lui une révélation suite à laquelle il délaissera définitivement son banjo ténor. Contrairement à la plupart des musiciens traditionnels du Sud, qui achetaient par correspondance des banjos bon marché, Lunsford avait la possibilité de s'offrir de meilleurs instruments.

Photo: Pete Seeger, How to Play the Five-string Banjo, 1962, p. 46.

<sup>15</sup> Ce musicien traditionnel fait partie de l'*Anthology of American Folk Music* de Harry Smith (Folkways Records, 1952). Nombre de ses enregistrements sont conservés à la *Library of Congress*, et à la *Columbia University*, dont certains réalisés par Alan Lomax.

#### Annexe 1. S.S. Stewart, The Banjo Philosophically, 1886

(voir dossier MiM, 2021)



# THE BANJO PHILOSOPHICA

Its Construction. Its Capabilities. Its Evolution.

Its place as a Musical Instrument.

Its Possibilities and its Future

## LECTURE

Ry S. S. Stewart.

ALSO AN EXPOSITION OF THE "HARMONIC TONES" AND THEIR PHILOSOPHY.

price. 10 cents.

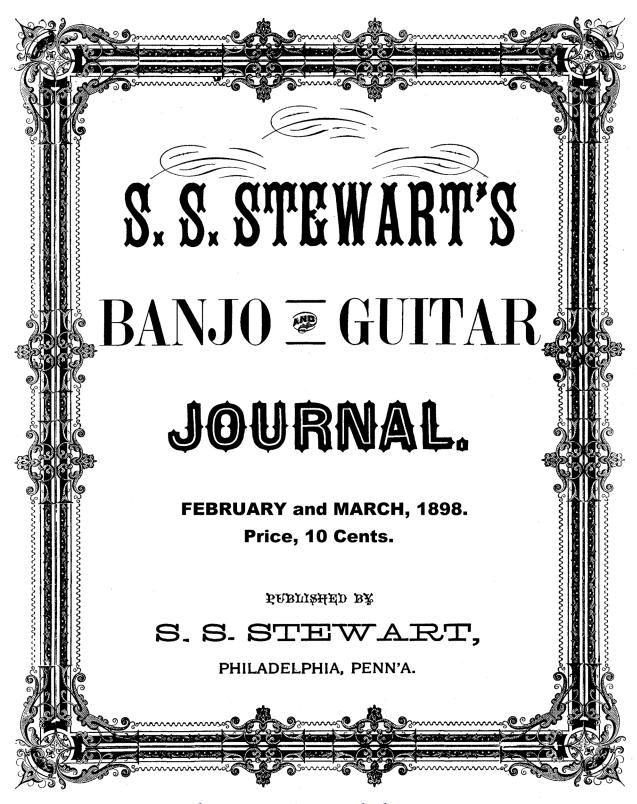
PHILADELPHIA:

Published by S. S. STEWART, 223 Church St.

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<sup>1</sup>5P5P5P5P5P5P5P5P5P5P5P5P5

## **Annexe 2.** *The S.S Stewart Banjo and Guitar Journal* (voir dossier MiM, 2021)



Cliquez ici pour ouvrir le document clic droit : ouvrir le lien dans une nouvelle fenêtre

## ZITHER BANJO À CINQ CORDES

Alfred Cammeyer Model 'Vibrante Royal' # 5362-237 London, 1928

# The "Vibrante Royal"

Acknowledged to be the world's finest Zither Banjo. Finished in a variety of rare and beautiful woods, this instrument has long been recognised as the highest achievement in Zither Banjo design. As played by Bernard Sheaff and other rank artists.

#### Specification:

ARM—In selected fine woods, Satin, Rose, Cuba Mahogany, "27¼", scale, beautifully engraved, large pearl inlays, highest class machine, ivory nut.

Box—Veneered, in handsome design, to match arm; with Amboyna handings ans inlays on back and purflines at edges. Hoop (9½") in Gun Metal, with interior recessed flange.

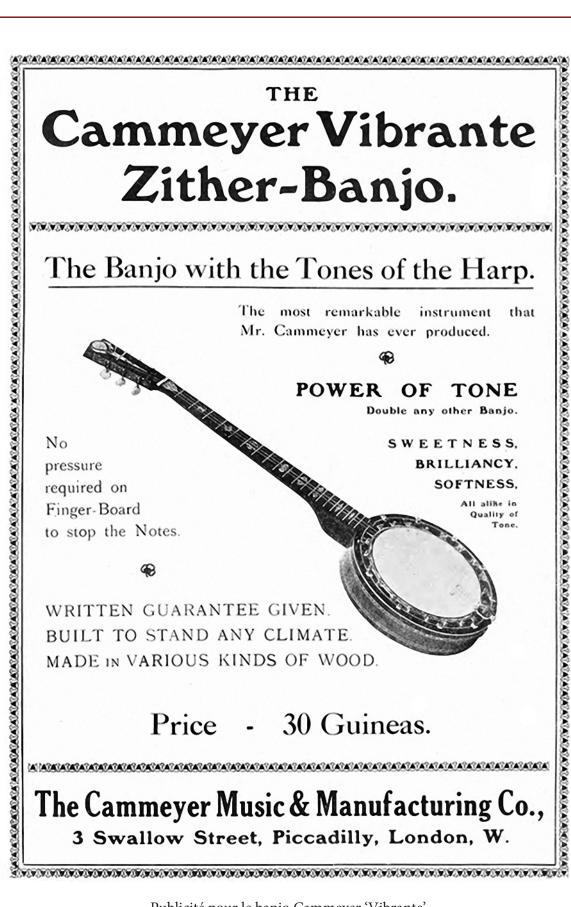
Finest selected White Calf Vellum.



Truly the choice of the connoisseur

The 'Vibrante Royal' Zither Banjo.
in *John Alvey Turner Present The Sidney Young Handmade Banjos, Banjolins and Banjo Ukeleles.*Catalogue de John Alvey Turner. London: non daté. [probablement des annés 1950]

Collection Gérard De Smaele







Publicité pour le banjo Cammeyer 'Vibrante'. Essex-Cammeyer Banjo and Zither-Banjo Tutor. London, n.d. (Cfr. seconde partie)





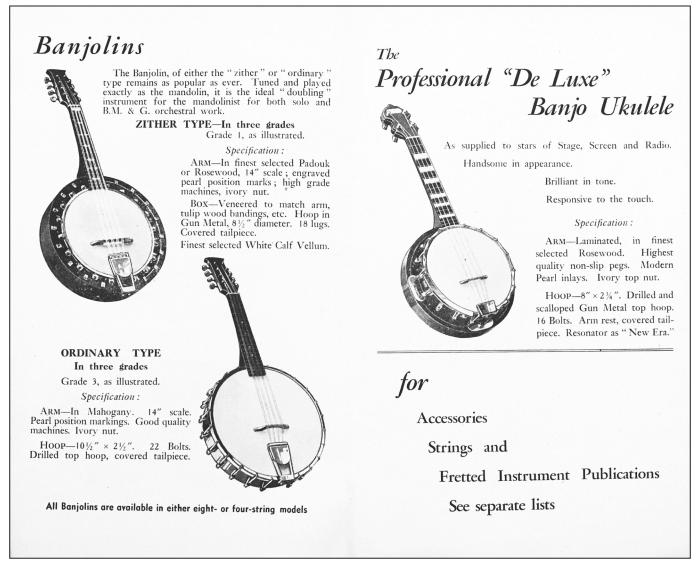
Divers bois sont utilisés, dont l'érable, l'ébène et l'amboine. Sillet en ivoire.



Notre *zither banjo* à cinq cordes, modèle 'Vibrante Royal'. A. Cammeyer. London : 1928. Collection G. De Smaele.

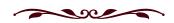
### Introduction générale

### Première partie : L'instrument



Dans ce catalogue de chez John Alvey Turner, ca. 1950, on différencie très nettement les caisses de banjos : celles du « *zither type* » et celles du « *ordinary type* » <sup>1</sup>.

Le banjo tel qu'il apparaît en Angleterre a ses particularités propres. Avant d'aborder "Zither Banjo. What is a Zither Banjo?", l'article d'Elias Kaufauman qui sera présenté plus loin, il serait utile de prendre note des quelques remarques et notions préliminaires exposées ci-dessous.



<sup>1</sup> Les deux banjos mandolines qui ont accompagné mon don au MiM, de 2011-2012, illustrent bien ces deux modalités de construction de la caisse, la seconde étant la plus répandue sur les instruments considérés comme de bonne qualité. MiM, inv. 2012-030 et 2012-031.

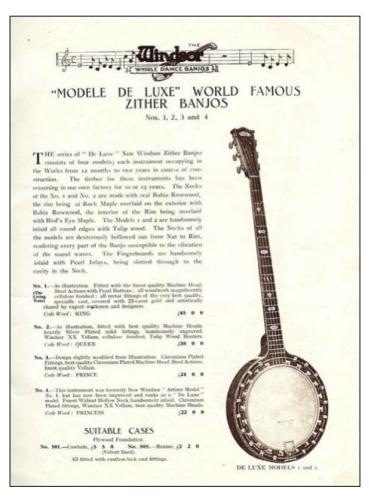
En 2011, j'ai donné au MiM un zither banjo de la marque Windsor<sup>2</sup> (inv. 2011-323), qui offre une vue très claire de l'intérieur de la caisse, ainsi que sur son mode particulier d'assemblage et de construction. Le catalogue de ce fabricant accompagne le dépôt au musée, en 2021, de la copie digitale et imprimée d'une série de catalogues anciens de banjos. Rappelons aussi que des catalogues originaux plus récents ont également été déposés en 2011-2012 (voir note 1).

Le Cammeyer 'Vibrante Royal' dont il est ici question, est l'un des plus parfaits exemples de zither banjo qui soit. Il est le complément idéal du Windsor conservé au MiM³, les deux instruments dialoguant l'un avec l'autre.

Je vous en propose une présentation en deux parties : l'une réservée à l'instrument proprement dit, l'autre à la musique pour laquelle il est destiné.

Musicalement, le répertoire du zither banjo - qui connut ses heures de gloire en Angleterre durant les quelques décennies ayant précédé la seconde guerre mondiale -, présente un richesse trop souvent ignorée du grand public. Cammeyer ayant touché une clientèle huppée, a contribué à élever cet instrument jusqu'aux marches de la haute société, forçant ainsi la 'respectabilité'. Du fait de ses origines modestes - sur lesquelles se fonde d'ailleurs sa plus grande richesse –, le banjo à cinq cordes put paraître, aux yeux de certains, comme quelque peu roturier, et à l'instar de Samuel Swain Stewart, déjà actif à Philadelphie dans le dernier tiers du 19e siècle<sup>4</sup>, cette mise en valeur était d'ailleurs elle aussi recherchée par son concepteur.

De nos jours, bien que le style classique du banjo connaisse un certain regain d'intérêt<sup>5</sup>, le zither banjo semble être tombé – du moins pour le public non informé –, en désuétude. Il mériterait cependant une bien meilleure attention.



Catalogue Windsor, Birmingham, années 1930. Voir : *Don au MiM en 2011-2012* (2018), et *Copies de catalogues anciens* (2021).

<sup>2</sup> Voir le dossier établi en 2018. Cet instrument est aussi brièvement présenté dans ma publication de 1983 (Bruxelles : Musée Instrumental, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> Nous verrons aussi que la bibliothèque du musée possède également un exemplaire dédicacé de *My Adventure-some Banjo* (London, Cammeyer, 1934, 335p.), les mémoires du concepteur du zither banjo.

<sup>4</sup> Voir les copies du S.S. Stewart Banjo, Mandolin and Guitar Journal, déposées au MiM en 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Soutenu aux États-Unis par L'American Banjo Fraternity et la revue *The Five-Strnger*; en Angleterre par la British BMG Federation, la revue *BMG Magazine*, la Clifford Essex Ltd Co. et le site 'Classic Banjo Ning'.

## 1. Les caractéristiques de l'instrument.

Bien qu'on le retrouvera sous différentes configurations – mandoline, guitare, ténor et plectrum, ukulélé –6, le 'zither banjo' est d'abord à prendre comme un des variants anglais du banjo à cinq cordes. Au départ, l'instrument, qui ne s'est d'ailleurs pas répandu aux États-Unis, est exclusivement destiné au « *finger style* », dit « classique », jamais joué au plectre. Une de ses principales caractéristiques est sa cinquième corde, dont la mécanique ne se trouve pas fixée perpendiculairement au manche, mais au niveau du chevillier. De là, elle emprunte un fin tunnel aménagé sous la touche, pour en sortir au niveau de la cinquième barrette. Pour de simples raisons de symétrie, beaucoup de ces zither banjos ont fait appel à des mécaniques pour guitare classique, dont une reste libre. Visuellement, ceci peut créer la confusion avec un manche de banjo-guitare, qui lui est presque identique. Le sillet n'a pourtant bien que quatre encoches et une largeur qui lui est correspondante, tandis que le chevalet et le cordier sont clairement prévus pour accueillir cinq cordes.





En haut : l'orifice d'entrée et de sortie du tunnel emprunté par la cinquième corde. Du côté de cette corde, on notera aussi un léger rétrécissement du manche, du sillet à la quatrième barrette.

<sup>6</sup> Cammeyer n'a bien entendu pas produit ou vendu que des zither banjos. Sachons aussi qu'avant l'essor du banjo ténor et plectrum, les banjos à cinq cordes n'avaient, à peu d'exceptions près, généralement pas de résonateur. Bien qu'il y eut des cas particuliers, comme le Dobson présenté p. 14, le résonateur ne s'est réellement répandu à partir des années 1920, comme un moyen – conjointement avec le plectre et les cordes métalliques –, d'amplifier le son.



Six mécaniques pour guitare pour un banjo à cinq cordes. La seconde reste libre.

Cette configuration (le tunnel) s'est fort répandue en Angleterre. Pete Seeger – qui à l'époque ne connaissait peut-être pas très bien le zither banjo –, la mentionne d'ailleurs dans son *How To Play the Five-String Banjo* (Beacon, NY: 1962, 3rd ed., p. 63)

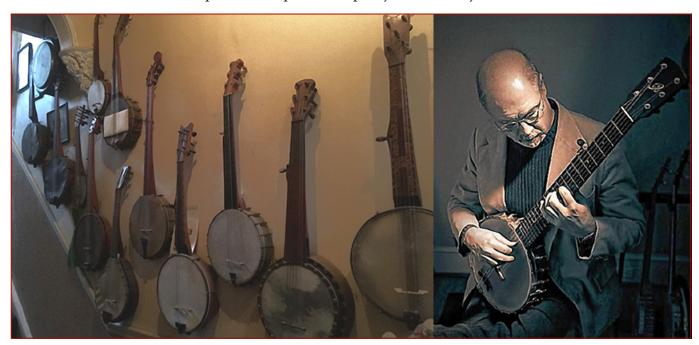
"If you know anyone traveling to Europe and back, good 5-string banjooes are manufactured in both West Germany and England. In London see Clifford Essex Ltd., 8 New Crompton St. W.C 21,. European banjoes put their 5th string peg at the tip end of the neck, in the center of the other four. The 5 string ducks into a hole at the 5 th fret, goes through a small tube, and emerges just beyond the nut."

Du milieu du 19° siècle à 1940, la production anglaise de banjos à cinq cordes fut très importante<sup>7</sup>. On y a recensé un nombre important de petits ateliers, mais également de plus grosses entreprises, comme celle de Dallas et de Clifford Essex à Londres, ou de Arthur Octavius Windsor, établi à Birmingham, actif des années 1890 à 1940, année de sa destruction lors d'un raid aérien de l'armée allemande.

Au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, le *minstrel show*, et ensuite le *classic finger style*, s'y étant bien implantés, l'Angleterre produira, en plus du cinq cordes, un grand nombre de banjos : d'abord des *fretless*, puis des modèles courants équipés de barrettes. Jusque dans les années 1880-1890, Ils sont souvent

<sup>7</sup> Voir: le site 'Vintage Banjo Makers' – <a href="http://www.vintagebanjomaker.com/blog/4594323629">http://www.vintagebanjomaker.com/blog/4594323629</a> et les publications de A.P. Sharpe: *The Banjo Makers*, dans la revue *B.M.G. Magazine*, et *The Complete Guide to the Instruments of the Banjo Family* (1966).

à 5+1, 6+18, voire des 6+2, et même jusqu'à des 7+2 cordes9, des instrument – des plus rares ou inconnus aux USA – qui ne sont quasiment plus joués de nos jours10.



À gauche : quelques banjos anglais à 5+1 et à 6+1 cordes. Ca. 1850-1875.

Collection Pete Stanley, London 2019. Photo : G. De Smaele.

À droite : Michael Nix. Banjo à 6+1 cordes.

<a href="https://michaelnixmusic.com">https://michaelnixmusic.com</a>

Alfred Davis Cammeyer (Brooklin / USA, 1862-Derbishire / UK, 1939), considéré comme l'inventeur du zither banjo, est un Américain établi en Angleterre en 1888. Il y restera jusqu'à la fin de sa vie (voir plus loin pour une courte biographie). Les premiers banjos de William Temlett Snr. (UK, 1841-1903) – à qui on a parfois attribué la primeur de cette invention¹¹ – n'avaient pas de cinquième corde passant sous la touche (et son système de *suspended head* que nous verrons plus loin n'était pas entièrement métallique comme sur les vrais zither banjos). Cette « *tunneled fifth* » n'est certainement pas à mettre au crédit de Cammeyer, car on la retrouve sur deux instruments plus anciens conservés au Metropolitan Museum de New York : l'un attribué à Hercules McCord et un autre à Benjamin Bradbury¹², qui sont des facteurs américains.

<sup>8</sup> Voir le catalogue de S.S. Stewart (copie MiM, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> C'est ce qui m'avait d'ailleurs particulièrement marqué en découvrant en 1980 à Londres la collection Reuben Rubens, ainsi que celle de Pete Stanley en 2019. Voir l'important article de Robert Winans et Elias Kaufman : "Minstrel and Classic Banjo: American and English Connections." American Music, vol. XII/1, Spring 1994, pp. 1-30.

Aujourd'hui, seul l'Américain Michael Nix semble encore le promouvoir. Son répertoire est strictement classique. Il était présent à la Banjo Gathering à Bristol VA en 2018.

Il a déposé en 1869, en Angleterre, un brevet pour un banjo avec résonateur. Selon E. Kaufman (*The Five-Stringer* # 201), il serait plus exact de le considérer comme étant un précurseur du zither banjo.

<sup>12</sup> Entré au MET en 1996, soit après la parution de mon ouvrage au Musée Instrumental, en 1983.





Deux banjos américains conservés au Metropolitan Museum de New York: Hercules McCord, ca. 1859 (inv. 89.4.2676)<sup>13</sup>, et Benjamin Bradbury, ca. 1885, (inv. 1993.111). À droite, celui de Bradbury présente 10 cordes formant cinq chœurs, ainsi qu'une caisse de zither banjo, modèle breveté en 1882 (patented August 15, 1882, no. 262564<sup>14</sup>), soit d'avant le départ de Cammeyer pour l'Angleterre. Tous deux ont recours au passage de la cinquième corde dans un tunnel.

Voir plus loin l'article d'Elias Kaufman.

Il reste important de noter que cette configuration de la cinquième corde n'est pas la seule à permettre de différencier le zither banjo du banjo 'ordinaire'<sup>15</sup>. Le talon du manche de ce dernier est directement appliqué sur le fût (appelé *rim*<sup>16</sup> ou *shell*), sans jamais y être collé<sup>17</sup>; contrairement au zither banjo, dont le manche est fixé sur la face externe du résonateur, laissant la peau comme en suspension dans la caisse de résonance. Sur le zither banjo, le support de cette peau est quant à lui toujours entièrement métallique. En d'autres termes, le *tension hoop* ainsi que le *rim* sont en métal. Ce dernier est relié au résonateur par une série de crochets, bien visibles sur le Windsor du MiM (voir photos p. 13).

<sup>13</sup> Voir G. De Smaele, Musée Instrumental, 1983. – Dans son article, E. Kaufman parle d'un brevet de 1883. Lequel?

<sup>14</sup> Voir: https://patentimages.storage.googleapis.com/3c/4a/fa/c3dc424b61a271/US262564.pdf

D'après Keith Wilson (mails reçus en 2021) – Anglais et grand collectionneur de banjos de cette origine –, A. Cammeyer n'aurait jamais eu de catalogue et se serait contenté d'annonces publicitaires pour assurer la promotion de ses instruments, notamment dans sa revue *The Banjo-World*, mais aussi dans *Keynotes, The B.M.G. Magazine* et autres publications. On trouve sur le marché des instruments portant l'inscription 'Cammeyer Patented, mais je n'ai jusqu'à présent pu identifier aucun brevet attribué à Cammeyer. Comparés au 'Vibrante Royal', ces instruments sont d'une présentation plus sobre, ce dernier représentant le modèle le plus luxueux de la marque. D'autre part je n'ai pas encore pu établir la différence qu'il y a – si elle existe vraiment – entre le 'Vibrante' et le 'Vibrante Royal'.

<sup>16</sup> La caisse d'un banjo ouvert, dit « open back » est constituée du rim ou shell, sur lequel la peau est tendue (voir G. De Smaele, Point de vue organologique, 1984). Sur les banjos fermés ou resonator banjos, on applique un résonateur amovible. L'ouverture de la caisse est l'espace entre le rim et le fond du résonateur. <a href="https://www.desmaele5str.be/pdf/banjo5CordesOptimise.pdf">https://www.desmaele5str.be/pdf/banjo5CordesOptimise.pdf</a>

<sup>17</sup> Ceci reste vrai, même sur un banjo ténor ou un banjo de *bluegrass* équipé d'un résonateur. Sur ces banjos, il existe différents systèmes de jointures, permettant de pouvoir séparer plus ou moins facilement le manche de la caisse. (voir G. De Smaele, 1984).



Intérieur de la caisse d'un zither banjo Windsor, Birmingham, ca. 1920-1930. Cet instrument conservé au MiM permet d'examiner la configuration particulière du zither banjo, tel que décrit dans l'article d'Elias Kaufman (voir plus loin). La peau est tendue sur un fût entièrement métallique, et se trouve comme en suspension dans la caisse, sans que le talon du manche y prenne appui. Des crochets permettent de fixer l'ensemble au résonateur.



Talon du manche. MiM, inv. 2011.323. Photo G. De Smaele.





Exemples de la fixation caisse-manche sur des banjos *open back* de construction classique<sup>18</sup>. Habituellement, le talon du manche s'appuie directement sur le « *rim* ». Ceci vaut aussi pour les banjos avec résonateur (comme les modèles ténor et ceux du *bluegrass*). Le manche reste donc amovible, éventuellement lors du remplacement de la peau.



Comme pour le Windsor illustré à la p. 8, le manche de notre Cammeyer est fixé sur la face externe du résonateur. Ces deux parties sont rendues indissociables.

Un S.S. Stewart de la fin des années 1890 et un Bart Reiter moderne, copie Fairbanks. Coll. G. De Smaele. Voir aussi le banjo Star, offert au MiM en 2011-2012. MiM, inv. 2011-240, proche du S.S. Stewart.



Caisse de notre Cammeyer.

Il est important de noter que sur un zither banjo, la peau et son support sont comme en suspension dans la caisse. Le talon du manche de ce dernier ne touche pas le *rim*, mais repose directement sur le bord du résonateur. La tension de la peau se règle par le dessus. On dit alors que c'est un « *top tension* ». Lors de son remplacement, on doit commencer par démonter les 10 crochets de fixation vissés sur le bord du résonateur. Le diamètre de la peau d'un zither banjo (celui-ci est de 9 ½") est inférieur à celui d'un banjo courant (le plus souvent autour de 11"). Il est censé moins réagir aux variations hygrométriques.



Pour information, ces caisses, proches du zither banjo (les photos appartiennent à deux instruments différents) sont celles de banjos Henry C. Dobson, la première version d'un résonateur, brevetée en 1867 (US Patent # 66.810<sup>19</sup>). Ce sont aussi des « *top tension* ».<sup>20</sup> Photo : G. De Smaele, Banjo Gathering, 2018<sup>21</sup>.

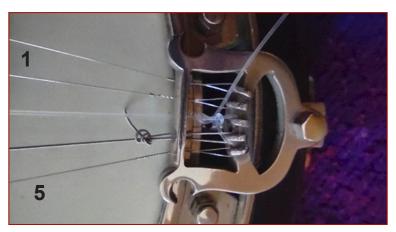
Voir : <a href="https://www.si.edu/object/dobson-five-string-banjo%3Anmah\_605684">https://www.si.edu/object/dobson-five-string-banjo%3Anmah\_605684</a>

<sup>19</sup> https://patentimages.storage.googleapis.com/91/4c/c3/4246a794718447/US66810.pdf

<sup>20</sup> Voir James Bollman and Phil Gura, America's Instrument (1999).

<sup>21</sup> Sur la photo de gauche, en arrière plan, l'historien Robert Winans.

Une autre grande spécificité du zither banjo relève du choix des cordes : les cordes 1, 2 et 5 (la plus aigue) sont métalliques, tandis que la 3 est en nylon et la 4 (la plus basse) est en soie de nylon et filée. A l'origine, la 3 était en boyau et la 4 en soie et filée, alors que le *regular banjo* à l'époque était entièrement monté de cordes métalliques. Ce fait, ajouté aux autres caractéristiques structurelles du zither banjo, lui confère une sonorité particulière. Il favorise le jeu de notes plus longues, impossibles à obtenir sur un banjo ordinaire, et favorise le jeu en *legato*. Cette sonorité propre au zither banjo, conviendra parfaitement aux compositions de Cammeyer. Elle requiert aussi une technique de jeu adaptée à l'instrument (voir seconde partie). Pour le musicien, le choix entre ces deux types de banjos – ordinaire vs zither – sera aussi une affaire de goût personnel...



Le cordier à cinq cordes de notre Cammeyer. La corde du milieu est en nylon, la basse est en soie de nylon et filée, les autres sont métalliques.



Jeux de cordes. Clifford Essex, London, 2021. http://www.cliffordessex.net/index.php?\_a=viewCat&catId=33 Voir aussi: https://www.andybanjo.com/trolleyed/13/24/29/115/145/index.htm

Pour rappel, il est à noter que l'accordage standard modene du banjo classique est gCGBD, tandis que la plupart des pièces composées par Cammeyer utilisent le gDGBD, aussi appelé *elevated bass*.

## 2. Elias Kaufman. "Zither Banjo? What is a Zither Banjo?"

in The Five-Stringer, # 201, Winter-Spring 2009-2010.

#### 4 ZITHER BANJO? WHAT IS A ZITHER BANJO?

This is probably the most common question sent to our ABF website. The simple answer is that it is a variant of the five-string banjo. A "full" answer is a bit more complex.

#### **HISTORY**

The central figure in any consideration of the zither banjo is Alfred Davies Cammeyer (ADC). Cammeyer was born in Brooklyn, N.Y. on March 17, 1862; he died in England on December 22, 1949. He studied the violin as a boy and took up the banjo at age 14, interested in its possibilities for chords and harmony. He was a classic player and developed a rather refined style that primarily featured classical music from the repertoire of the piano, violin, etc. Wanting a more sustained tone, and while still in New York, he developed an unusual closed back banjo that used a combination of steel and gut strings (but more on this later).

The 1880s were when society took up the banjo. Even opera stars would learn to play a little and accompany their singing for their own amusement. ADC became something of a fashionable entertainer. He claimed that the celebrated opera diva Adelina Patti suggested that he would be appreciated in England. So he traveled to London in 1888 and became a hit. He played at many private soirees and entertainments for royalty, as well as recitals and concerts. He remained in England for the rest of his life. Cammeyer said that he started composing music for his "zither banjo" at the suggestion of Sir Arthur Sullivan (of Gilbert and Sullivan). Over a period of almost 40 years, he wrote about 200 works for banjo. Some of these were published under the pseudonyms of Douglas Ames and Harold Drew.

It was Cammeyer's playing, compositions, and manufacturing that initially established the popularity of the zither banjo. Another major contribution to its success was the nine hundred or so records made by Olly Oakley using a ZB.

Circa 1892, Cammeyer teamed up with William James Clifford Essex, and they formed the music firm (manufacture, publishing, and teaching of banjo and other fretted instruments) of Essex and Cammeyer. They started the journal Banjo World in November 1893. (Cammeyer was apparently having zither banjos made several years prior to their partnership.) In the summer of 1900, Essex and Cammeyer parted ways. Cammeyer took over the business under his own name and kept the Banjo World. He retired in 1939.

#### PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ZITHER BANJO

As mentioned, the zither banjo is a variant of the five-string banjo (the latter is usually called the ordinary or regular banjo in Britain). The features of the true zither banjo are:

Five strings.

Guitar-type geared roller tuners. Most ZB use two regular guitar sets and thus appear to have six strings. However, only five of the tuners are used.

The fifth (thumb) string, instead of winding onto a peg at the side of he neck, is tunneled (through a tube) from the peghead and under the fingerboard to an opening at the fifth fret.

The ZB appears to have a resonator, but this is actually a back with heavy deep sides attached directly to the neck.

The ZB does not have a true rim over which the head is stretched. Instead, there are two metal rings that clamp and tighten the head. The inner ring is like the rim of a regular banjo and the outer is the tension hoop. There are usually a half dozen or more brackets with flanges that screw into the sides of the inner head ring and the top of the wooden sides. The rings sit inside the back and the flanges rest on the top of the back and are held by the screws of the flanges into the top of the "rim" of the back (see the diagram on pg. 5 opposite). The instrument is top tension, and the head is tightened by bolts that connect the two metal rings holding the head.

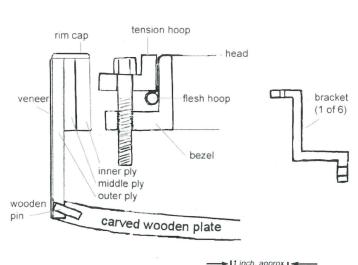
Most ZBs have 7¾ to 8¾ inch diameter heads, though Cammeyer's top model, the Vibrante, had a 9 inch diameter head. The string length is usually about 26 inches, but the Vibrantes are just over 27 inches.

The true Cammeyer stringing uses light steel first, second, and fifth strings. Originally the third string was gut and the fourth metal wrapped silk. These days, nylon banjo third and fourth strings are found. Cammeyer also used a rather thick (but light) bridge, with one side of the blade tapered to the top. This bridge presumably was selected to give a more mellow tone.

Very finely crafted ZBs were made by Cammeyer and Essex and several other makers. However, thousands and thousands of cheap imitations were produced by jobbers in Britain and Germany. The rim style of the ZB was eventually also used on a myriad of cheap mandolin banjos, tenor banjos, ukulele banjos, etc. These are the ZB equivalents to the banjos cranked out by Buckbee and others for cheap sale through large retail outlets.

(Continued on page 6)

5





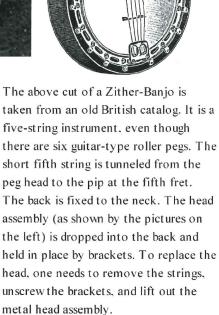




Middle: Head assembly of a Cammeyer Zither-Banjo. Below: Disassembled restraining hoop, flesh hoop, and inner hoop. The inner hoop is equivalent to the rim on a regular

banjo.





The diagram and pictures on the left are courtesy of Tim Smith. More detailed px. of a 1914 Cammeyer Grade 2 ZB are at Tim's website:

# 6 (Continued from page 5) ZITHER BANJO STYLE of PLAYING

Cammeyer had a very delicate touch and produced a very clear, singing legato tone, especially on the first and second strings. These contrast with the third and fourth strings that produce a fuller tone. Playing his compositions properly requires a sustained clear touch that is difficult to achieve. Part of the trick is also to hold the notes long enough with the left hand to let them sing. In the Cammeyer style, the ZB is not as loud, strident, or assertive as the usual banjo. Emil Grimshaw noted that the strings of the zither banjo must be vibrated "with great delicacy of touch." A parallel is the exquisite tone and sustain obtained by the top classical guitarists, who spend years cultivating their technique. Most people using steel-strung ZBs produce a rather horrible, jangling, nasal tone.

#### ORIGIN OF THE NAME ZITHER BANJO

Most people assume the name was chosen because the ZB can reproduce the singing quality of the zither. However Cammeyer himself, writing for the British journal BMG in 1949, related how the name came to be. At age 18, he was entranced by a tune he heard from a Hungarian zither player. Cammeyer arranged this for banjo and was engaged to play it for two nights with an orchestra at concerts in Long Branch, New Jersey.

The first night reception was most favorable but on the second night I was half-way through my solo when, without warning, "Bang!"—and the vellum of my instrument had burst. The conductor tapped his music stand and stopped the orchestra. He looked down at me with a wry smile and with a wave of his hand indicated me to leave the stage. I moved to the front and quietly crept away, exposing my damaged instrument to the audience which created a wave of laughter which drowned any applause. As I reached the exit I muttered to myself, "... and that's the zither banjo!" I clung to the name of "zither banjo" and used it from that day.

The question has often arisen as to who first made/invented the zither banjo. William Temlett began making banjos in London in 1846. In November 1869, he was granted a patent for a closed back banjo. It did have an internal "suspended soundboard" (the phrase used by Temlett), and on this basis, he claimed to have been "the pioneer of the zither banjo." But his early instruments did not have the metal work, the tunneled fifth, or the geared guitar tuners. Moreover, the backs of Temlett's early instruments were easily removable, and the true zither banjo has the back bolted to the neck. Although some writers assert that he also used the

name zither banjo before Cammever, I have been unable to substantiate this. A.P. Sharpe, in his series on banjo makers, says that Temlett initially called his banjo the "suspended soundboard banjo." It was only after Cammeyer introduced his zither banjo in England that Temlett called himself "the pioneer of the zither banjo." The often seen claim that Temlett's patent shows he invented the closed back banjo is ridiculous. There are numerous American patents prior to 1869 that show closed back banjos: L. Brown in Oct. 1865, G. Mein in Aug. 1866, and H.C. Dobson in July 1867. Though G. Teed's (of NYC) 1862 patent does not clearly show a back, he seems to have been making closed back banjos by the mid 1860s. There is a good chance that closed back banjos were not uncommon in the 1860s, and the various US makers thus did not think this idea patentable. I think the best that can be said for Temlett's claim is that his instruments were among the forerunners of the zither banjo. David Wade suggests that these closed back banjos could be considered proto-zither banjos. But since Cammeyer made his first zither banjo in the 1880s in the US, it is unlikely he knew of Temlett. It is certain he had seen closed back Dobson instruments. As to the tunneled fifth string, I have found no patent for this, but Hercules McCord's June 1883 patent shows a fifth string that runs in a groove along the side of the banjo neck and is tuned at the peghead.

To complicate the issue further, I know of a banjo made by Benjamin Bradbury with five doublecourse strings and head suspension and metal work almost identical to a Cammeyer zither banio. I believe this instrument is now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC. Bradbury patented a short neck, double-strung, five-course banjo in Aug. 1882. The patent does show head clamping hardware and the rod that runs inside the rim of better zither banjos. The latter looks like a metal dowel rod. We do not know who made Cammeyer's first zither banjo(s). Since Cammeyer and Bradbury were both in Brooklyn, there is a possibility that they were connected. A zither banjo requires a lot of special hardware, and it is unlikely that Cammeyer made his own.

# POPULARITY of the ZITHER BANJO in BRITAIN

Cammeyer's great virtuosity and wonderful compositions attracted followers. He had many hundreds of pupils in the 1890s. Essex and Cammeyer catered to a very high-class crowd. Their premises were located in Piccadilly in a rather posh commercial district. Their teaching rooms were elegantly appointed. I am given to understand they charged a guinea (about \$6 at the time) a lesson. This (Continued on page 7)

was a workingman's weekly salary. E&C had so many students that they had to hire other teachers. They also gave large concerts several times a year. In addition to the top fretted instrumentalists, they would feature orchestras made up of their pupils.

Olly Oakley (1877-1943), the most recorded English banjoist, used a zither banjo and early on took some lessons from Cammeyer. Writing in 1937, he said: "The zither banjo(s)...quaintness of tone, when played well, intrigued me from the very first time I heard the instrument played." He was gifted with "astoundingly hard nails" that he used to play more robust solos, as well as slow and delicate pieces. Oakley was a lightning player, and while he could produce the legato zither banjo sound, his tone was usually brightly ringing and "popping." He is supposed to have made his first recordings in 1898. His last were in 1930, at which time he was forced to retire because of severe arthritis in his hands. Oakley recorded about 900 sides (some numbers he recorded many times). He was also a very popular Music Hall entertainer, led dance orchestras, and accompanied singers. In his act, he would walk onstage playing a medley of the popular numbers of the day. Although his use of the zither banjo was a bit unorthodox, he put the instrument before the public.

John Pidoux (1875-1953) recorded over 100 zither banjo solos in London from 1903 to 1915. These recordings and his many fine published compositions also helped popularize the zither banjo. Similarly, in 1914, Oakley and Cammeyer recorded six duets. Six of Cammeyer's compositions were recorded with his prodigy/partner Bernard Sheaff in 1925. These were sold initially by the Vocalion Company, but later issued on several other labels

under pseudonyms.

There is another element to the popularity of the zither banjo in England. Much of the country has a moist, often humid, climate due to the effect of the Gulf Stream. This humidity plays havoc with skin heads and gut strings: the former sag and the latter stretch. The small diameter of the zither banjo head results in less sag, and the wire strings are not affected by the dampness (other than rusting). So the zither banjo presented fewer day-to-day, and even hour-to-hour, maintenance problems. Gut strings were often not true, and frayed and broke easily.

There is a very fine zither banjo website: http://www.zitherbanjo.org/ run by ABF member David Wade and Nick Bamber. If you search YouTube for "Oakley Banjo," you can find the 1914 recording of Cammeyer and Oakley playing Chinese Patrol, as well as several Oakley recordings. Hearing Oakley's ringing rendition of Whistling Rufus some 47 or so years ago kindled your editor's interest in the classic banjo.

The easiest way to hear a dozen or so Cammeyer compositions is on the Black Tie Banjo CDs that are still available from Geoff Freed. See page 20 of this issue for details.

#### FALL RALLY REPORT (Ctd. from page 1)

My Heart on the chord harmonica. Bill is now a member of the Windy City Harmonica Trio. (You can see them on YouTube.) Bill claims that, "The other two guys are the real pros. I just get to tag along and play bass." Becky Schneider, in addition to playing the Dobson programs, was very active accompanying others and leading the charge in informal playing. We don't say enough about Gail Verbridge, whose piano and cello banjo playing really helps lift and steady our group and informal sessions. It can be argued that Ed Swingly and Al Wersinger (pupils of Drew) should share the prize for most improved. They both did some fine work in the round-robins and orchestra.

Although David Thorne is shy about playing solos, he always joins in our orchestra. He and Maureen have been doing some balalaika playing of late. It may not be banjo, but it is fingerstyle. As usual, JoAnn and Norman Azinger (respectively ABF treasurer and executive secretary emeriti), were with us. Norm is one of the bulwarks of our orchestra cello section and also produces some nifty solos and accompaniments. We were glad Joan Dickerson appeared after missing a few Rallys. Joan maintains a banjo website with some interesting material on classic banio: http://justbanjos.homestead.com/ Frank Rossi, the genial editor of the Resonator, and his wife Rita were in Punxsey too. Although the Resonator is a magazine for pick-played banjo clubs, Frank enjoys banjo in all its forms.

The Rally even made some (very small) waves outside the ABF. Subscribers to the Punxsutawney Spirit, the local newspaper, knew all about our gathering. The Saturday edition featured an article on the Rally with two large color pictures on the front page and two more in the back. Finally, to show we are not completely behind the times, if you go to "magslazerblast" on YouTube you can see Bill Morris and also a few banjo numbers from the Fall Rally.

Whether you come to a Rally to play, learn, or just listen, you are always welcome. We hope to see you at a Rally in the near future!

#### Rally Attendees

Wednesday Oct. 21, 2009 Drew Frech Paul and Rosemary Heilman Eli and Madeleine Kaufman (Continued on page 8)

## 3. Provenance et description de notre exemplaire.

Notre zither banjo est un Alfred Cammeyer à cinq cordes, model 'Vibrante Royal', numéro de série # 5362-237, London, 1928.

Ce bel exemplaire provient de la collection privée de Keith Wilson, conservée dans la banlieue de Leeds. Le collectionneur possède les registres de vente de la maison Cammeyer, ce qui nous a permis de le dater avec précision.

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Registre de la Maison Cammeyer. Collection Keith Wilson, Leeds, UK. Nous ne connaissons pas de catalogue provenant de chez Cammeyer. Cependant, le texte suivant est assez explicatif et montre bien le lien entre Cammeyer, Clifford Essex (son premier associé), Sydney Young (son luthier et chef d'atelier) et Johnn Alvey Turner:

When Clifford Essex and Alfred D. Cammeyer dissolved partnership in 1900, Cammeyer took over the workshops (established in 1896 at 13 Greek Street, London/Soho) for the production of Cammeyer instruments. These were mainly zither-banjos but some banjos (and later, plectrum banjos and tenor banjos) were made. The man in charge of the workshops was Sidney W. Young who was responsible for the designs of the famous 'Vibrante' and 'Vibrante Royal' zither-banjos and the 'New Era' banjos bearing the Cammeyer name.

When Cammeyer retired from business in 1939, Sidney Young took over the workshop at Richmond Buildings, Soho, and continued to make instruments under his own name up to the outbreak of World War II. After the war he established a workshop at 70 New Oxford St., there he worked in conjunction with John Alvey Turner Ltd. until his retirement in 1963. When Cammeyer died in 1949, Mr. Young acquired the stock of Cammeyer parts and timber and from these produced many 'Vibrante' zither banjos but these instruments do not carry the facsimile signature of Alfred D. Cammeyer, which first appeared on Cammeyer instruments after July 1st, 1900 and was attached to all his instruments until the date of his retirement.<sup>22</sup>

Notre exemplaire porte sur le talon de son manche l'estampille reportant la signature autographe d'Alfred Cammeyer (voir photo p. 23), ce qui permet de le dater d'avant 1939. D'autre part, le collectionneur possède les registres du fabriquant, attestant que l'instrument portant le numéro de série # 5362-237 fut livré en janvier 1928.

Notre instrument correspond assez exactement à la description faite dans le catalogue de John Alvey Turner (London, années 1950), qui me fut remise par Doug Parry (ancien propriétaire du magasin) vers 1980.

Cette double page provenant de ce catalogue oppose les deux types de banjos vivement recommandés en Angleterre (les américains ayant développé leurs propres idées) pour le 'classic style': le 'zither banjo' et le 'ordinary banjo'<sup>23</sup>. Ces deux modèles sont la quintessence du banjo classique anglais. On les retrouve joués parmi les meilleurs représentants actuels de ce style: Derek Lillywhite, Geoff Freed, Chris Sands et Robert McKillop... (voir seconde partie).



Signature de Cammeyer estampillée sur le talon du manche.

<sup>22</sup> Voir le site '*The Vintage Banjo Maker*': <a href="http://www.vintagebanjomaker.com/cammeyer/4594323388">http://www.vintagebanjomaker.com/cammeyer/4594323388</a> - <a href="http://www.vintagebanjomaker.com/cammeye

<sup>23</sup> Voir les copies de catalogues anciens, MiM, 2021.



Catalogue de chez John Alvey Turner, London, n.d. (probablement des années 1950)

En Angleterre, le zither banjo a été produit sous plusieurs marques importantes : W. Temlett, (voir note 4), Abbott, Clifford Essex, Dallas, Windsor<sup>24</sup>... Certaines des plus belles réalisations étaient présentes dans la collection du Japonais Akira Tsumura et sont bien illustrées dans son ouvrage *1001 Banjos* (Kodansha International, 1995, pp. 114-130). Deux beaux exemplaires furent également exposés au MiM en 2003-2004<sup>25</sup>.

On peut cependant considérer que les instruments de Cammeyer sont parmi les plus représentatifs du genre, et que le modèle 'Vibrante Royal' en est un des aboutissements. Après le départ à la retraite de Cammeyer, son zither banjo continuera encore à être produit, à Londres, par son luthier et chef d'atelier Sydney Young, distribué ensuite par la maison John Alvey Turner.

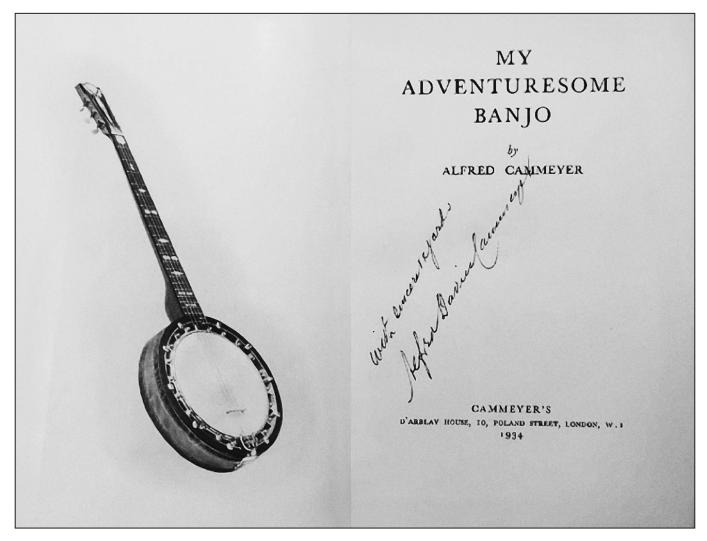
<sup>24</sup> Voir dans les copies de catalogues anciens déposées au MiM en 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Voir le catalogue de l'exposition : Bruxelles : MiM, 2003, n° 37 et 38. [Cammeyer et Dallas]

## 4. Mémoires de Cammeyer.

My Adventuresome Banjo, London, Cammeyer, 1934.

MiM, inv. 78.44.2.6 – CAMM – 1934 [K]



Dans ses mémoires, A. Cammeyer relate ses contacts et ses rencontres avec le gratin de la société anglaise de son temps. L'ouvrage conservé au MiM est accompagné d'un programme de concert donné le samedi 12 décembre 1936 au Wigmore Hall de Londres, une prestigieuse salle de spectacle située à Londres. D'autres concerts ont été donnés au Royal Albert Hall...

Bernard Sheaff (1902-1951), un élève et disciple de Cammeyer, est aussi connu pour avoir été son partenaire de scène attitré.

# CAMMEYER RECITAL

Saturday Evening, December 12th, 1936 WIGMORE HALL

#### PART I

No. 1. VIBRANTE BANJOS

a. Sound of the Drums

b. Bantams Patrol

ARTHUR STRUTT AND ALFRED CAMMEYER

No. 2. Miss HILDA BERTRAM will entertain at the Piano

No. 3. VIBRANTE BANJO

a. Caprice Accidental

b. Laughing Water

c. Danse Melange\*

d. Danse Bizarre

#### ALFRED CAMMEYER

No. 4. Aloma Hawahans a. Pua Carnation

(arr. Cramer)

b. Hula Medley

MISS BABS RANDALL AND ERIC CUDDEN

No. 5. VIBRANTE BANJOS

a. Humoresque

b. Valse Joyeuse

ARTHUR STRUTT AND ALFRED CAMMEYER

No. 6. Miss BERTRAM will again entertain

No. 7. VIBRANTE BANJO

a. Hurry, Little Children

b. Two Country Dances

c. Valentine (Gavotte)\*

d. Valse Parisienne

ALFRED CAMMEYER

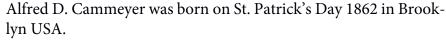
#### INTERVAL

THIS PROGRAMME! GRATIS! ALL CAMMEYER COMPOSITIONS MARKED \* UNPUBLISHED

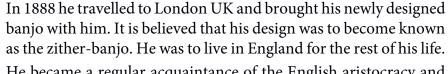
### 5. Biographie succincte d'Alfred Cammeyer (1862-1949)

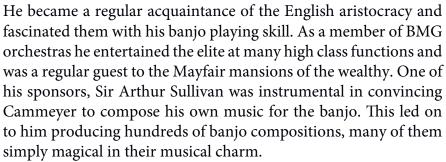
Voir le site 'Classic-Banjo.Ning': https://classic-banjo.ning.com/page/player-biographies

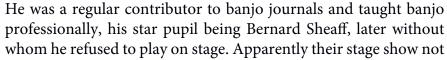


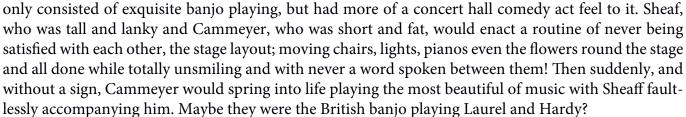


Cammeyer was a true businessman from an early age. He originally learned to play the violin but rejected the instrument as he felt that it was limited in that chords and harmonies were not possible. He took up the banjo and also experimented with banjo construction until he found a design that produced a tone and touch that he found suitable to suit his style of playing.









In 1893 Cammeyer went into partnership with Clifford Essex to produce a range of 'Essex and Cammeyer' Zither banjos to Cammeyer's design. The instruments were originally out sourced to the likes of Weaver, Temlett and Windsor et al. but later manufactured in house in their own workshops. This partnership ended in 1900, but Cammeyer continued manufacturing instruments from the same workshops, now labeled as 'Cammeyer' banjos. Some of his finest instruments, such as the Vibrante and Vibrante Royal, are still in great demand today.

In 1939 Cammeyer retired to Derbyshire, UK to live in a house provided by another of his wealthy patrons, The Honorable Arthur Stutt. It was there that in 1949 Cammeyer died.

He left a great legacy of fine banjo compositions and arrangements. Most of his compositions are written in 'elevated bass' to D and many are simply charming pieces. It is a delight that they are now being played again and recorded for us by members of this site.



## 6. Quelques configurations atypiques de la cinquième corde.

Si la cinquième corde fixée au niveau du cheviller fut courante en Angleterre avant 1900, et dans une très moindre mesure aux USA (par exemple chez S.S. Stewart et chez Schall), cette configuration réapparut de manière très marginale par après, sur des banjos plectrum. En voici deux beaux exemples : sur un Bacon & Day et sur un Gibson. Quelques contemporains, dont Nechville ont remis la « tunneled fifth » au catalogue.

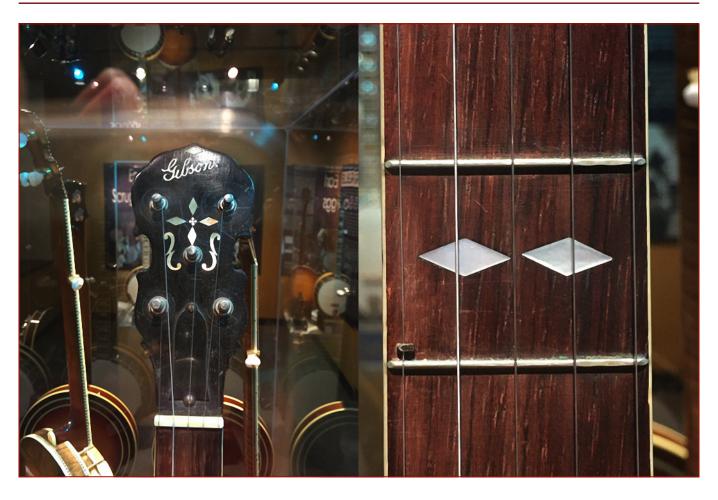




Bacon & Day Silver Bell 'Montana Special', #21-132. Groton, CT, 1926.

Banjo plectrum atypique. Ici la cinquième corde est la plus basse.

Mis en vente par la maison Bernunzio en 2020.







Voir notice page suivante

#### Banjo Gibson PB3, # SN 9120-1. Kamamazoo, MI, 1929.

Modèle très atypique de cinq cordes, d'une insigne rareté, qui pourrait être confondu avec un plectrum. Le manche a pourtant bien cinq cordes, toutes attachées au cheviller, mais une cinquième corde plus aigüe. Son manche est un peu plus large que celui d'un plectrum courant. La cinquième corde, la plus aiguë, passe sous un *railroad spike* installé en cinquième position, un procédé communément utilisé comme capodastre de cinquième corde, en 7<sup>e</sup> et en 9<sup>e</sup> position.

Collection de l'*American Banjo Museum, Oklahoma City*, OK. Photo : G. De Smaele, 2019.





#### Banjo Nechville 'Galaxy - Phantom', Bloomington, MN.

Tom Nechville, parmi les facteurs les plus innovants du marché actuel, a repris cette ancienne idée de la « tunneled fifth »

Photo: catalogue sur le site actuel du fabricant, 2021<sup>26</sup>. https://www.nechville.com/glxyseries.php

#### 7. Références et sites web.

- 'The American Banjo Fraternity': http://banjofraternity.org
- 'The B.M.G. Magazine': https://classic-banjo.ning.com/page/bmg-magazines
- *'The Cadenza'* <a href="https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/the-cadenza#/?tab=navigation">https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/the-cadenza#/?tab=navigation</a>
- Alfred D. Cammeyer. "The Story of the Ziter-Banjo." B.M.G., December 1949.
- *'Classic-Banjo.Ning'*: <a href="https://classic-banjo.ning.com">https://classic-banjo.ning.com</a> [Courtes biographies de musiciens, partitions, enregistrements originaux]
- Kaufman Elias. "Zither Banjo? What is a Zither Banjo" in *The Five-Stringer*, # 201, Winter-Spring 2009-2010.
- *Schlomo Pestcoe's Website'*: https://creekdontrise.com/acoustic/zither\_banjo/shlomo/shlomosenglish\_zither\_banjo\_article.htm
- Albert P. Sharpe. The Complete Guide to the Instruments of the Banjo Family: full details of each instrument, scale length, tuning, number of frets, etc., together with illustration, enabling anyone to identify all the instruments of the banjo family, invaluable to the enthusiast and dealer. London: Clifford Essex Music Company / New York Mills Music, 1966, 35 p.
- Bernard Sheaff. "The Zither Banjo. Some Hints on the Right Hand." *Rythm*, vol. 1/3, November 1927, p. 32.
- "The Split Second Fret on the Zither Banjo" et "Why Do Windsor Banjos Have a Split Second Fret" Voir 'The Zither Banjo Website'.
- 'The Vintage Banjo Maker': <a href="http://www.vintagebanjomaker.com/blog/4594323629">http://www.vintagebanjomaker.com/blog/4594323629</a>
- Robert Winans, Elias Kaufman. "Minstrel and Classic Banjo: American and English Connections." American Music, vol. XII/1, Spring 1994, pp. 1-30. http://grimshaworigin.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/WinansAndKaufman1994.pdf
- Windsor & Taylor. *How a Zither Banjo is Made*. Birmingham: Windsor & Taylor, 1896, 50 p. [bien que j'aie contacté Glen Morris, un collectionneur spécialisé en banjos Windsor, il ne m'a pas été possible de localiser un exemplaire de cette publication.]
- Robert White. "Banjo or Zither Banjo?" B.M.G. August 1951
- 'The Zither Banjo Website': http://www.zither-banjo.org.uk/pages/white1.htm

#### Voir aussi:

- Catalogues anciens de facteurs anglais : Clifford Essex, Dallas, J.A. Turner, Windsor...
- Consulter les livres et articles de : Alfred Cammeyer, Gérard De Smaele, Phil Gura & James Bollman, Mile Holmes, Norman Howard, Elias Kaufman, Karen Linn, A.P. Sharpe, Akira Tsumura, Bob Winans...
- Revues anglaises anciennes: The BMG Magazine, The Banjo World, The Cadenza (USA), Keynotes...
- Revues courantes: The B.M.G. Magazine (UK), The five-Stringer (USA), Banjo Newsletter (USA)...

## Seconde partie : la musique

Méthode, revue et partitions de A.D. Cammeyer pour le zither banjo

February, 1902.

THE BANJO WORLD

# CULTIVATION OF THE RIGHT HAND

(EXERCISE)

By ALFRED D. CAMMEYER.



The Banjo World. February 1902. Revue fondée à Londres par Clifford Essex et Alfred Cammeyer, en 1893. Photo : site 'Classic-Banjo.Ning'

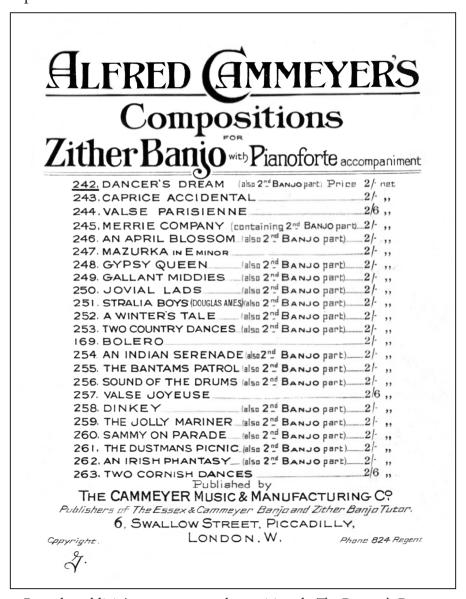
- *The Banjo World*. Revue fondée à Londres par Essex et Cammeyer, en 1893.
- Clifford Essex and Alfred D. Cammeyer. *Banjo and Zither Banjo Tutor*. London: The Cammeyer Music and Manufacturing Co., n.d.
- Une série de partitions d'œuvres écrites pour le zither banjo par A.D. Cammeyer : All Alone, Adante and Waltz, Blue Eyes, Chinese Patrol, Dance Bizarre, Dancer's Dream, Española, Une Pensée, The Yeoman's Call.



(John Pidoux – 1875-1954 – est un célèbre joueur de zither banjo)

#### Introduction

En Angleterre – qui tôt deviendra une seconde patrie pour le banjo à cinq cordes –, les talents musicaux d'Alfred Cammeyer (1862-1949) furent reconnus et appréciés. En une cinquantaine d'années de carrière, de 1888 à 1939, il influencera profondément les goûts musicaux de ses contemporains. En plus de ses cours, de ses concerts et de la vente de ses instruments, il composera aussi plus se 200 pièces musicales, publiées par ses soins.



Page de publicité accompagnant la partition de *The Dancer's Dream*.

Photo: 'Internet Archive'

Ces œuvres constituent un répertoire spécialement adapté à la sonorité particulière du zither banjo. Bernard Sheaff (1902-1951) fut son plus proche élève, tandis que Olly Oakley (1877-1943) fut à son tour séduit par la sonorité de l'instrument. Avec près de 900 enregistrements à son actif, il devint un musicien de studio des plus en vue en Angleterre, et contribuera lui aussi – dans un autre registre – à la notoriété du zither banjo. Originaire de Birmingham, Oakley devint représentant des banjos Windsor, qui étaient fabriqués dans cette même ville<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Voir le zither banjo Windsor donné au MiM, ainsi que la partition de *Racoczy* (London : Turner Banjo Budget), illustrée d'une photo de Oakley portant ce même instrument (dossier banjo classique (juin 2021).

En plus de Sheaff et de Oakley, d'autres musiciens anglais ont enregistré au zither banjo, parmi lesquels le célèbre John Pidoux (1875-1954). On peut en retrouver dans le dépôt de la copie de ma collection d'enregistrements, déposée au MiM en 2020. D'autre part, le site 'ClassicBanjo.Ning' propose de courtes biographies de ces musiciens, des enregistrements originaux et des partitions. Celles qui sont reprises plus loin proviennent de la collection Phil Spear, confiée au MiM en 2011-2012.

Documents numériques disponibles sur le réseau Intranet du MiM \museum.local\Group\Biblio MiM\BIB\RESERVE PRECIEUSE\Don Gérard DE SMAELE\Sheet music dvd

En plus de Sheaff, de Oakley et autres Pidoux..., cent trente titres de A. Cammeyer, provenant de cette collection, riche de 2226 titres, sont disponibles en pdf, avec accompagnement pour le second banjo ou pour le piano.

https://classic-banjo.ning.com/page/player-biographies

https://classic-banjo.ning.com/page/recordings

#### Voir:

- Alfred Cammeyer (1862-1949)
- Ernest Jones (1882-1959)
- Alfred Kirby (1876-1949)
- Olly Oakley (1877-1943)
- John Pidoux (1875-1954)
- Bernard Sheaff (1902-1951
- Jan Wien (b. 1901)

Des enregistrements plus récents réalisés par Derek Lillywhite (UK, ca. 1925-2017), Geoff Freed (US, b. ca. 1960), et Rob MacKillop (UK, b. ca. 1955) ont bénéficié d'un matériel de studio moderne, mis au service des qualités peu communes de ces interprètes :

- **Derek Lillywhite**. *Banjo Reminiscence*. Rounder Records 0095, 1980. [enregistré en 1977] https://classic-banjo.ning.com/page/recordings https://www.discogs.com/fr/Derek-Lillywhite-With-John-Malone-Banjo-Reminiscences/release/4434706

Les titres de la face B du LP sont interprétés au zither banjo<sup>28</sup>. Lillywhite utilise un 'Vibrante Royal' de Sydney Young, de ca. 1949, identique au nôtre :

Prelude in C Minor (White), Catrina (Lillywhite), Mooning (Lillywhite), A Dancer's Dream (Cammeyer), Down Devon Way (Cammeyer), Cornish Dance #1 (Cammeyer), Bolero (Cammeyer).

- **Geoff Freed** *At Home* et *Centennial Souvenir*. Black-tie Banjo BTB-1101 et BTB-1102, 1996 et 1998<sup>29</sup>:
- G. Freed joue sur un Cammeyer 'Vibrante' de 1916. *in 'At Home'*:
- Española, Une Pensée, Gavotte in F, Serenade, Dancer's Dream, Cigarette Polka, Dinkey, It's Monday Night (de Cammeyer) Gypsy Love (B. Sheaff).

Pour la face A, Lillywhite utilise un enviable Weaver 12" de 1889. Les deux instruments ayant servi pour ce disque correspondent parfaitement au banjos – 'zither type' et 'ordinary type' –, repris dans le catalogue de J.A. Turner (voir première partie de ce dossier, p. 24).

<sup>29</sup> Son premier CD, 'A Summer Night', de 1995 – produit confidentiellement – est malheureusement introuvable.

in 'Centenial Souvenir':

All Alone, Laughting Water, La Belle Polka, Miniature II, Caprice Accidental (de Cammeyer).

- 'You Tube' offre d'excellentes vidéos de l'Ecossais **Robert MacKillop**, interprétant des œuvres de Cammeyer sur un zither banjo fabriqué par Temlett et sur un autre de J. Abbott Snr :

Etude in C Major, A Fireside Idyll, An Irish Phantasy, Idyll in F, Cornish Dance #1 and #2, All Alone, Banjo Polka, Blue Eyes, Albumblatt, Ballad #1 (by Cammeyer): <a href="https://robmackillop.net/zither-banjo/">https://robmackillop.net/zither-banjo/</a>

La technique de jeu du zither banjo n'est fondamentalement pas différente de celle d'un autre banjo à cinq cordes. Cependant, la longueur des sons et le mélange de cordes métalliques et de boyau – ou de nylon –, nécessite une attention toute particulière. L'ouvrage de Essex et de Cammeyer mis à part – qui met en évidence les caractéristiques propres à la technique de jeu du zither banjo –, aucune méthode n'est spécifiquement dédiée à cet instrument. Seuls quelques articles, parus dans des revues spécialisées en parlent, les grands débat étant ceux de l'attaque des cordes et de l'utilisation des ongles de la main droite<sup>30</sup>. Cammeyer avait quant à lui fondé avec Essex la revue *The Banjo World*, qui tout en restant un périodique plus généraliste – dans la mouvance du '*B.M.G. movement* de l'époque' –, cible le zither banjo avec plus de précision (voir ill. p. 2).

- CAMMEYER Alfred D. The Cultivation of the "Hands" for Playing the Zither Banjo and Banjo; With Illustrations and Exercises. London: The Cammeyer Music and Manufacturing Co., s. d. [1903].
- ESSEX Clifford, CAMMEYER Alfred. *The Essex and Cammeyer Banjo and Zither-Banjo Tutor*. London: The Cammeyer Music and Manufacturing Co., s. d.

Le titre d'autres méthodes mentionne le zither banjo, mais ne leur sont par pour autant spécialement destinées :

- ELLIS Herbert. Advanced School for the Banjo & Zither Banjo. London: John Alvey Turner, n.d. <a href="https://www.classic-banjo.com/files/TUTORBOOKS/Ellis\_Studies\_for\_Banjo.pdf">https://www.classic-banjo.com/files/TUTORBOOKS/Ellis\_Studies\_for\_Banjo.pdf</a>
- LEONARDY Salvatore. Méthode théorique et pratique pour banjo ou zither banjo à cinq cordes. Paris: S. Léonardy, 3rd edition, 1914. [on en trouvera un exemplaire à la KBR]

Jusqu'en 1900, avant de poursuivre chacun leur propre chemin, Essex et Cammeyer furent des associés. Ensemble ils ont écrit une méthode qui décrit bien les différences à observer entre le banjo à cinq cordes et le zither banjo.

Cette méthode est accessible sur le site « Internet Archive » :

#### https://archive.org/details/essexcammeyerbanjoandzitherbanjotutor

On y trouve notamment des indications concernant le choix des cordes, la position correcte de la main gauche et de la main droite...

*The Banjo World*, la revue fondée par Cammeyer et Essex (London, 1893-1921), traitera aussi de la technique de jeu du zither banjo.

https://archive.org/details/BanjoWorldVol1No1Nov1893

<sup>30</sup> Bernard Sheaff. "The Zither Banjo. Some Hints on the Right Hand." Rythm, vol. 1/3, November 1927, p. 32. Voir les revues anciennes : *The Banjo World, Keynotes, The Cadenza, B.M.G.*; ainsi que des parutions plus récentes du *B.M.G.*, sans oublier *The Five-Stringer*.

*Keynotes* publiera des articles de Bernard Sheaff, disciple et partenaire musical de Cammeyer ; la revue *B.M.G. Magazine* également. Olly Oakley<sup>31</sup> sera un grand partisan de l'usage des ongles pour pincer les cordes<sup>32</sup> : une position qui ne fut pas spécialement partagée par l'ensemble des adeptes du « *classic style* ».

## Un choix d'œuvres de Cammeyer pour le Zither Banjo

Elles sont – rappelons-le – extraites de la collection de Phil Spear.

Cammeyer utilisait beaucoup l'accord en sol, dit « elevated bass » ou « high bass ».

La quatrième corde passe ainsi du C (c tuning) au D (g tuning).

Certains titres font partie des disques de Derek Lillywhite et de Geoff Freed (voir introduction).

Pour certains titres, des tablatures transcrites par Alan Middleton – qui fut élève de Bernard Sheaff –, sont disponibles chez Clifford Essex, qui en est le propriétaire.

http://www.cliffordessex.net/index.php?\_a=viewCat&catId=24

All Alone

https://youtu.be/3lbnXoJzGm8 (a aussi été enregistré par G. Freed)

Adante and Waltz

Blue Eyes

(+ tablature de l'introduction – copyrights Clifford Essex) https://youtu.be/AM63UeDIFgQ?list=RDhtW\_DqFJoog

Chinese Patrol

Dance Bizarre

Dancer's Dream

https://youtu.be/zID\_NvFt3mI

(aussi enregisté par D. Lillywhite et par G. Freed)

Española

(voir enregistrement par G. Freed)

Une Pensée

(voir enregistrement par G. Freed)

The Yeoman's Call.

Cliquez ici pour télécharger l'ensemble des partitions avec l'accompagnement clic droit : ouvrir le lien dans une nouvelle fenêtre

<sup>31</sup> Olly Oakley, Joseph Sharpe de son veritable nom. Il enregistrera aussi sous le nom de Fred Turner et de Will Natkins.

<sup>32</sup> Voir note 4, l'article de Bernard Sheaff.

# "All Alone"

Tune 4th D.

ALFRED CAMMEYER.

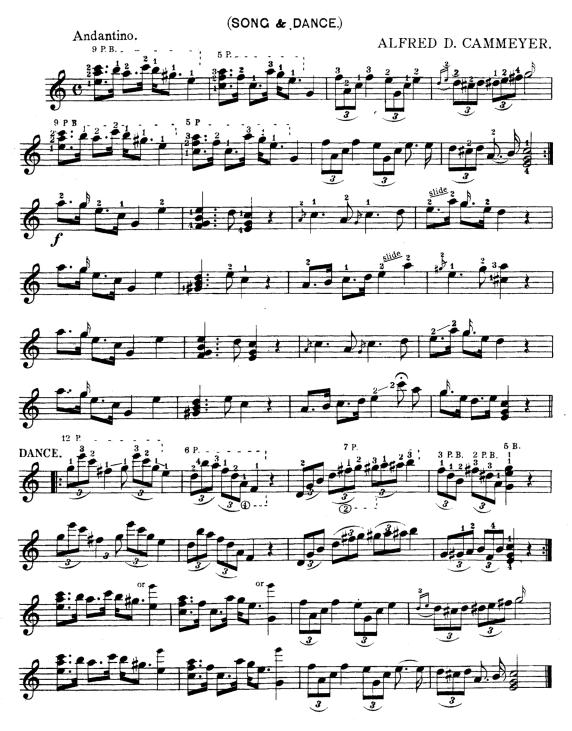


# ANDANTE AND WALTZ.





# BLUE EYES.



# CHINESE PATROL.

#### ALFRED D. CAMMEYER.





Chinese Patrol.

The"Darkie's Dream" played by everyone. 2/-

### DANCE BIZARRE.

Banjo Solo.





### THE DANCERS DREAM.



## ESPAÑOLA.



## UNE PENSÉE.

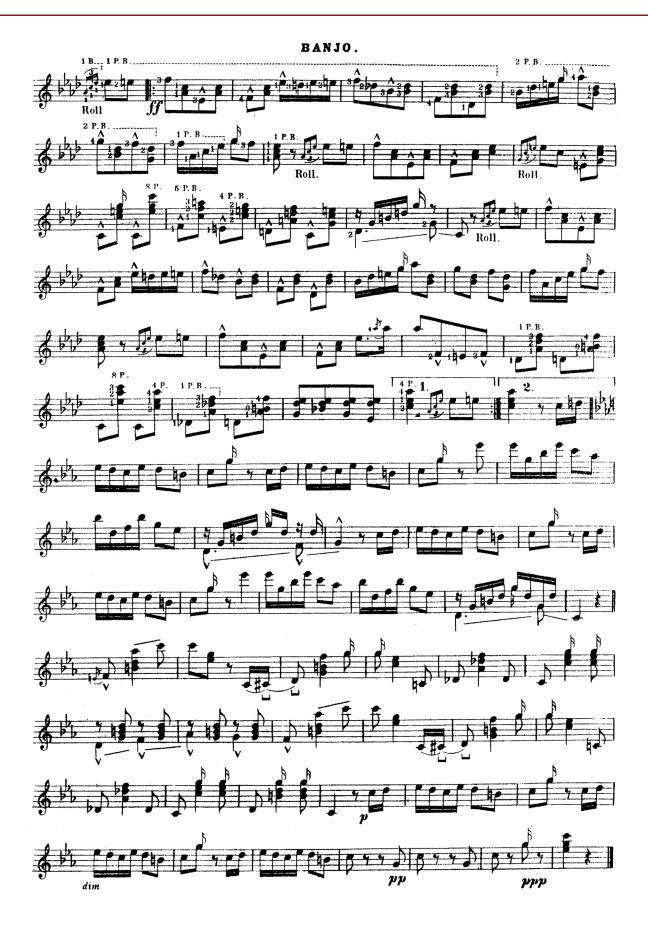
#### ALFRED D.CAMMEYER.





### THE YEOMANS CALL.





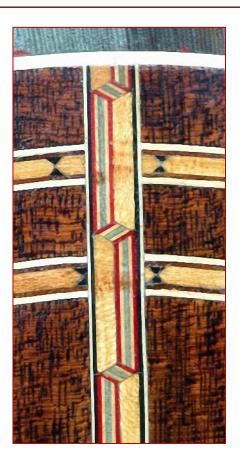
### **BANJO PLECTRUM À QUATRE CORDES**



Paramount
Plectrum 'Style C' – # 2651 – ca.1924
William Lange, New York NY
Catalogue Paramount, New York: Wm. Lange, 1920s.
Collection Gérard De Smaele

Photos publiées sur le site 'Banjo Hangout' lors de la mise en vente de l'instrument en 2020.

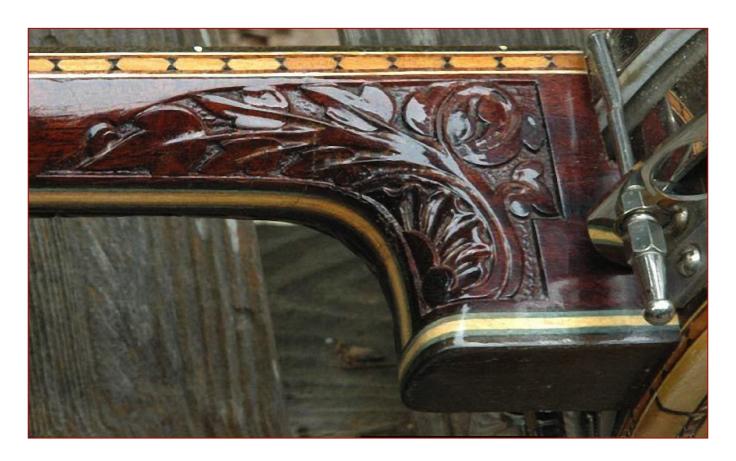














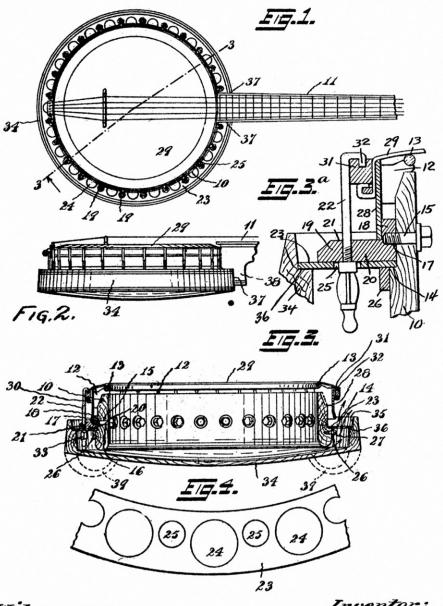
Aug. 25, 1925

W. L. LANGE

1,550,826

SHELL RESONATORS FOR BANJOS

Filed Dec. 14, 1921



Witnesses: L. C. Badeau J. J. Permey Inventor: William L.Lange, By his Atty, Iffichast,

#### Introduction

#### Des banjos à quatre cordes.

Depuis les années 1830 – dans le sillage de Joel Walker Sweeney (1810-1860, Appomatox VA) – alors que le 'minstrel show' prenait son premier envol, le banjo comptait cinq cordes. Cette cinquième corde, la plus aiguë de toutes, était aussi plus courte que les autres et jouxtait celle la plus grave, rejoignant ainsi ses prédécesseurs afro-américains. Ces caractéristiques de la cinquième corde nous ramènent bien entendu aux origines africaines de l'instrument.

Pour le non initié, les techniques de jeu développées à partir d'une telle configuration – elles aussi d'origine africaine – ont toujours été entourées une part de mystère. Le public s'est cependant attaché à la sonorité particulière du banjo, provenant de sa table d'harmonie, constituée d'une membrane tendue sur une forme ronde. Ainsi naîtront des banjos hybrides qui, tout en préservant le timbre de l'instrument, seront joués au plectre. Accordés en quintes ils seront ainsi assez facilement accessibles aux violonistes et aux mandolinistes. D'autres comme John Saint Cyr (1890-1966) – qui accompagnait Louis Armstrong (1901-1971) à ses débuts – lui préfèreront le manche de la guitare. Toutes ces mutations verront le jour dès la fin du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle.

Dans le années 1920, les *roaring twenties*, éloignés de la 'country music' du Sud ou du *classic style*, les orchestres de dance et de jazz seront très en vogue, offrant de nombreux débouchés et des emplois bien rémunérés à un grand nombre de musiciens. Ces ensembles se produiront à travers tous les États-Unis, faisant aussitôt des émules en Europe. Pour leur section rythmique, ces orchestres avaient besoin d'instruments à la sonorité puissante, ce qui entrainera de nouvelles conceptions de la caisse de résonance des banjos : elles seront fermées à l'arrière par un fond, appelé *resonator*. Leur poids pouvant dépasser les cinq kilos, sera la conséquence du fort épaississement du *rim* et du *tone ring*<sup>21</sup>. Joués au plectre ils rivaliseront en puissance avec le piano. À ce stade, le banjo et le piano (cadre métallique et caisse en bois) ont certainement des points communs. "Piano volume and harp quality tone" était d'ailleurs un fort argument de vente de la firme Paramount, inscrivant cette sentence sur la page de couverture de son catalogue des années 1920 (cfr.infra, p. 19).

La crise économique des années 1930 ralentira la production de ces banjos, tandis que l'évolution du goût et de la sonorité du jazz, ainsi que l'amplification électrique de la guitare, mettront fin à cette mode. Entretemps, le 5 cordes était sorti de piste. Il ne renaîtra qu'après la guerre, en devenant un des éléments emblématiques du *folk revival* des années 1950-1960. Ce mouvement de renouveau de la musique traditionnelle du Sud des États-Unis, fut enclenché par le succès commercial rencontré par *Tom Dooley*, une ancienne chanson populaire reprise par le Kingston Trio, après l'avoir entendue interprétée par Frank Proffitt, un banjoïste traditionnel collecté un peu plus tôt par les Warner... Le banjo à cinq cordes était aussi l'instrument de prédilection de Pete Seeger, la figure du proue de ce 'revival'.

En attendant, les années de l'entre deux guerre auront été celles d'un second âge d'or de la fabrication du banjo, une longue parenthèse privilégiant cette fois principalement les versions à quatre cordes. Les plus prodigieuses productions de cette période, empreintes de luxe et de raffinement, constitueront le cœur de la 'Tsumura Collection'², partiellement préservée au Japon – après une obscure affaire pénale et une amorce de dispersion – au musée des instruments de musique de Hamamatsu. Elles seront aussi le point de départ de la collection de l'industriel et philanthrope Jack Canine (ca. 1940-2020), noyau

<sup>1</sup> Pour ces termes techniques, voir : G. De Smaele, *Banjo à cinq cordes : Point de vue organologique*, 1984. Accessible au MiM ou sur mon site internet.

<sup>2</sup> Les banjos Paramount sont bien entendu largement représentés dans *1001 Banjo*, la monumentale monographie d'Akira Tsumura (Kodansha International, 1993).

de *l'American banjo Museum*, un musée privé fondé à Guthrie OK, actuellement localisé à Oklahoma City<sup>3</sup>.

#### Voir: <a href="https://americanbanjomuseum.com">https://americanbanjomuseum.com</a>

Si les banjos à cinq cordes n'étaient plus prisés durant cette période, ils resteront malgré tout encore proposés en option dans tous les catalogues des grandes marques. C'est ainsi que la firme Gibson, proposera ses modèles 'Mastertone' en version à cinq cordes. Ces instruments sont depuis les années 1940, restés les références incontournables du banjo du *bluegrass*<sup>4</sup>. Les Gibson *flathead tone ring* – tels qu'utilisés par Earl Scruggs (1924-1912) et Don Reno (1927-1984) – avec manche original à cinq cordes sont en fait peu nombreux (de l'ordre de 150, dont il n'en subsisterait que la moitié). Leur cote n'a fait que monter, pour atteindre aujourd'hui des sommets historiques. Les joueurs de banjos à quatre cordes leur préfèrent cependant le *arch top tone ring*, qui sont beaucoup moins rares. Sachons aussi que les pourtant prestigieuses autres marques de banjos à quatre cordes – Paramount, Bacon & Day, Vega, Epiphone... – n'intéressent généralement pas les musiciens de *bluegrass*. En dehors de Gibson, ces *resonator banjos* font peu l'objet de conversion en cinq cordes. Rappelons-nous que le MiM a exposé lors de son exposition un Gibson RB75 de 1934<sup>5</sup> avec ses deux manches : le ténor original et la copie de ce manche en version 5 cordes, appelé *conversion neck*. C'est aussi dans cette optique que les catalogues des maisons spécialisées (voir don au MiM en 2011-2012), offrent toutes les matières et pièces nécessaires à ces réalisations<sup>6</sup>.

Lors du tournage du documentaire *A Banjo Frolic*<sup>7</sup>, le banjoïste et collectionneur Reed Martin a expliqué comment il est possible de transformer le manche d'un plectrum en un cinq cordes. Le procédé – heureusement marginal – est désigné sous le nom de *neck spliting*.

Bien que fort ressemblants entre eux, il est important de savoir que ces nouveaux banjos à quatre cordes seront de deux types bien distincts. Les premiers sont accordés en quintes<sup>8</sup>. Ce sont principalement des banjos ténors et des banjos mandolines. Les second sont des banjos à cinq cordes privés de leur cinquième corde. Ces derniers sont appelés 'plectrum banjos'. Bien que joués au plectre, ils sont aisément accessibles aux joueurs de 'five string'.



Bill Keith (Boston, 1939-2015), l'une des grandes personnalités du cinq cordes et du *bluegrass style* moderne, explore sans plectre le plectrum Pietsch 'Mastervox' #7 de Sean Moyses, un banjoïste européen renommé quant à lui dans cette spécialité.

Photo: Sean Moyses.

#### http://www.pietsch-banjos.de/pbc/index.php/en/pietsch-banjo-photos/pietsch-mastervox-custom-no-7.html

- 3 Voir les photos déposées au MiM en 2020.
- 4 Roger Siminoff. "The Gibson Banjos. 20 Golden Years: 1918-1938." Frets, January 1981, pp. 25-29. (deposé au MiM)
- 5 Cat. MiM, n° 66, p. 81.
- 6 First Quality Banjo Company, Liberty Banjo Company, Luthier's Mercantlie, Pearl's Work, Stewart MacDonald.
- 7 Frémeaux & Associés, 2010. La séquence devait être ajoutée en bonus lors de la publication par Frémeaux & Associés (2010), mais a finalement été ignorée. Patrick Ferryn en a conservé les épreuves de tournage. En résumé, l'opération consiste à déposer la touche, à scier le manche au niveau de la cinquième barrette et à couper en deux la partie inférieure. On recolle ensuite les deux parties en y intercalant une épaisseur de bois. Le tout est réassemblé... Cette opération n'est pas toujours possible. De plus, elle modifie irrémédiablement l'instrument, ce qui n'est pas le cas des *conversion necks*.
- 8 Il existera cependant plus tard d'autre accordages et d'autres variantes.

Pour de plus amples informations, on peut toujours s'en référer à mes publications chez L'Harmattan, ainsi qu'aux dossiers déposés au MiM.



Une collection de plus de 30 manches de Gibson à quatre cordes des années 1920-1930.

Ils proviennent de banjos convertis en 5 cordes après la guerre 40-45, pour être utilisés par les joueurs de *bluegrass*.

Trois manches de plectrums dépassent de l'alignement des ténors.

Collection de Jim Mills, musicien et négociant, Raleigh NC, 2010.

Photo: G. De Smaele.

#### Musiciens9

Bien que le banjo à cinq cordes et ceux joués au plectre appartiennent à deux mondes musicaux différents<sup>10</sup>, le banjo plectrum reste d'abord un *regular banjo* privé de sa cinquième corde, gardant le même nombre de barrettes – 22 –, le même diapason et le même accordage : gCGBD et gDGBD devenant CGBD et DGBD<sup>11</sup>. Alors que de nombreux musiciens aient à la fois pratiqué le ténor et le plectrum, ces deux instruments différents sous ces trois aspects. La configuration de leurs caisses de résonance et les cordes métalliques étant leurs points communs.

Durant l'entre-deux guerres, pour suivre la mode ambiante et préserver leur emploi, d'éminents joueurs du cinq cordes 'classiques' sont passés du *finger style* au *plectrum style*. D'autres comme Fred Van Eps (1878-1960) – un des plus importants de son époque – sont devenus guitaristes. Il en fut de même de Fred Bacon (1887-1848), un musicien réputé à l'échelle nationale, un élève de A. Farland qui après avoir fabriqué des cinq cordes deviendra un des plus prestigieux facteurs de modèles à quatre cordes. On retrouvera même le célèbre Bill Bowen (1880-1963) recruté par la firme Paramount pour promotionner ses *plectrum banjos*<sup>12</sup>. Quant au tout grand banjoïste classique Alfred A. Farland (1864-1954), ce seront des problème d'arthrite à la main droite (probablement dus à un excès de pratique) qui l'amèneront à jouer au plectre sur son cinq cordes, transformant son *Carnaval de Venise*<sup>13</sup> en un morceau de bravoure<sup>14</sup>.

#### https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nzDDmQDrRg

Contre toute attente, le banjoïste classique Frank Bradbury (1896-1981) s'intéressera lui aussi au banjo

- 9 La biographie des joueurs de plectrum connus comme banjoistes classiques est publiée sur le site 'classicbanjo. ning': <a href="https://classic-banjo.ning.com/page/player-biographies">https://classic-banjo.ning.com/page/player-biographies</a> Voir aussi l'index de la revue *The Five-Stringer* et le *Banjo Players Biographies* de Norman Howard (1959), deux sources déposées à la bibliothèque MiM. On y ajoutera bien entendu la revue *B.M.G. Magazine* accessible sur le site mentionné ci-dessus.
- 10 Au 5 cordes, il y a bien entendu le *minstrel style* et le banjo 'classique', mais aussi tout ce qu'englobe le *folk style*.
- 11 Voir le dossier sur le banjo classique remis au MiM en 2021. Rappelons que pour le style dit 'classique' le cinq cordes continuera à être monté de cordes en boyau ou en soie, puis en nylon.
- 12 Voir ci-dessous, catalogue Paramount, p. 10.
- 13 Voir le coffret Banjo 1901-1956, Frémeaux et Associés, 2009.
- 14 Ce sera aussi le cas de Ted Shawnee qui jouera le cinq cordes au plectre. Voir : *Banjo-istics*, Americana Recording Company, s.d.

plectrum et en publiera quelques arrangements. Ils sont ici joués au plectre sur le quatre longues cordes d'un *regular banjo*<sup>15</sup>, par Rob McKillop :

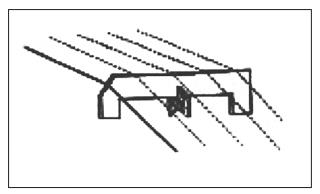
#### https://youtu.be/R1gXA7Bq9HA

#### https://youtu.be/IkUTtaWMMRA

Voir aussi le site "Tenor and Plectrum Banjo" de Rob MccKillop : <a href="https://robmackillop.net/tenor-banjo/">https://robmackillop.net/tenor-banjo/</a>

En Angleterre, bien que le cinq cordes 'classique' résistait un peu mieux face à la nouvelle tendance, le plectrum et le ténor devinrent là aussi prédominants<sup>16</sup>. Joe Morley (1867-1937) résistera à cet appel, mais ce ne fut pas le cas d'Emile Grimshaw (1880-1943). Ce dernier, après avoir publié une des meilleures méthodes de banjo 'classique' (dans laquelle il introduisit un chapitre supplémentaire sur le *plectrum banjo*<sup>17</sup>), sortit *Plectrum Playing for Modern Banjoists*<sup>18</sup>. Cette méthode sera plus tard réactualisée par Roy Burnham et plus récemment rééditée par Ron Hinkle et Clem Vickery. Cette dernière édition est accompagnée de 4 CDs et de tablatures<sup>19</sup>. La publication de Grimshaw est restée un ouvrage fondamental sur ce sujet.

http://grimshaworigin.org/miscellaneous-grimshaw-individuals/the-complete-banjo-works-of/



Au départ, le banjo plectrum ne fut qu'une simple déclinaison du cinq cordes 'classique'. Un chevalet adapté permettait même de le jouer le cinq cordes au plectre, sans utiliser la cinquième corde. Illustration tirée de la méthode d'E. Grimshaw.

Toujours en Angleterre – à l'inverse de Farland cité ci-dessus et en dépit de la notation de sa musique, écrite pour le cinq cordes –, Frank Lawes (1894-1970), surnommé 'The Fithless Frank', sera réputé pour jouer de son cinq cordes en *finger style*, mais sans se servir de la cinquième corde.

Voici les premières mesures de la partition de *Tattoo*, une composition d'Emile Grimshaw (copyright Clifford Essex Music Company, Ltd.). Des joueurs de cinq cordes en étaient arrivés à jouer des œuvres du répertoire 'classique' du cinq cordes (*finger style*), au plectre sur le *plectrum banjo*. Insistons une fois de plus que contrairement au *classic finger style*, l'usage du plectre est associé à celui de cordes métalliques.

<sup>15</sup> Chez Gibson, les modèles sont désignés par une abréviation : TB (*tenor banjo*), PB (*plectrum banjo*) et RB (ou *regular banjo* à cinq cordes) suivie du nom ou du numéro du modèle. On aura par exemple le TB 'Florentine', le TB-75, le RB-800...

<sup>16</sup> Voir: Fingertricks et Banjo Cocktail (Neovox Tapes).

<sup>17</sup> Voir les deux exemplaire originaux offerts au MiM en 2021.

<sup>18</sup> London: Clifford Essex Co. Ltd., 1938, 60 p. (first edition)

<sup>19</sup> http://www.cliffordessex.net/index.php?\_a=viewProd&productId=1132

Quant à *I Like to do Things for You* (voir p. 17) l'arrangement laisse l'exécutant libre de choisir son style d'interprétation : 'finger or plectrum style'.





Titre arrangé par Emile Grimshaw. On peut jouer au choix *finger style* ou au plectre. BMG Magazine, Septembre 1930.

Collection John Field: <a href="https://classic-banjo.ning.com/page/bmg-magazines">https://classic-banjo.ning.com/page/bmg-magazines</a>

Dans le passé, deux grands banjoïstes se sont particulièrement distingués au banjo plectrum. Ce sont **Harry Reser** (1896-1965)<sup>20</sup> et **Eddie Peabody** (1902-1970)<sup>21</sup>.

Reser – qui représentera successivement les banjos Paramount<sup>22</sup>, Vega et Gibson –, est encore actuellement considéré comme un des plus grands virtuose de toute l'histoire du banjo à quatre cordes. Très doué, il fut à la fois guitariste, pianiste, violoniste et banjoïste. Il pratique avec la même aisance le cinq cordes 'classique', le ténor et le plectrum. Soliste plectrum virtuose, ayant laissé derrière lui de nombreux enregistrements, il s'est cependant aussi fort distingué au banjo ténor, instrument pour lequel il sera reconnu par ses pairs comme un maître absolu. En 1975, le label Yazoo a édité *Banjo Crackerjacx*, 1922-1930 (Yazoo), une compilation de ses anciens disques réputés être exécutés au ténor. Mais dans le cas de Reser, il n'est pas toujours facile de distinguer le ténor (communément utilisé comme un instrument rythmique) du plectrum<sup>23</sup>.

Quant à Eddie Peabody, c'est un artiste qui a rencontré un très large succès populaire. Il se distinguera par ses talents d'homme de scène, mis en valeur lors de ses nombreuses apparitions sur scène et à l'écran. D'aucuns doutent de son apport à la valeur artistique du banjo. C'est une question personnelle de sensibilité... La fierté de cet extraordinaire animateur était de n'avoir jamais donné un show auquel un enfant n'aurait pu assister.

#### https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDMRPtRq44g

Pour terminer la comparaison du cinq cordes avec le plectrum, Will Keys (1923-2005)<sup>24</sup>, un musicien traditionnel originaire du Tennessee, utilisait un banjo plectrum Paramount auquel il avait ajouté une cinquième corde<sup>25</sup>. Comme mentionné plus haut, nous sommes ici dans un tout autre monde, qui est celui de la musique traditionnelle. Par chance, son banjo est aussi un Paramount 'Style A', fort semblable à celui que je vous propose ici<sup>26</sup>.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I029KWCeWNM

<sup>20</sup> W.W. Triggs. The Great Harry Reser. London: Henry G. Waker, 1978, 200 p.

<sup>21</sup> Lowell Schreyer. The Eddie Peabody Story. Mankato MN: Lowell Schreyer, 2000, 97 p.

<sup>22</sup> Voir ci-dessous dans le catalogue des années 1920, p. 6 et 33.

<sup>23</sup> Voir: W.W. Triggs. "Crackerjax." In *B.M.G.* Vol. 72/#844, August 1975.

Nous avons eu le privilège de pouvoir le rencontrer et de le filmer au festival de Union Grove, NC, de 2003, lors du tournage du documentaire *A Banjo Frolic* (Frémeaux & Associés, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> À en croire la couverture de son disque, il semblerait qu'Archibald L. Camp, un vétéran du banjo 'classique' ait, quant à lui, modifié un Paramount 'Style A-Tenor' (19 barrettes) de la même façon : Folkways Records, FG-3525, 1965. <a href="https://folkways-media.si.edu/liner\_notes/folkways/FW03525.pdf">https://folkways-media.si.edu/liner\_notes/folkways/FW03525.pdf</a>

<sup>26</sup> Voir ci-dessous, dans le catalogue Paramount des années 1920, p. 9.

#### Sources audio

Dans le dépôt au MiM de la copie digitale de ma collection d'enregistrements<sup>27</sup>, on trouvera diverses compilations d'enregistrements anciens de banjo à quatre cordes :

- A Banjo Cocktail, Neovox tapes, 5 cassettes (Harry Reser, Len Fillis, Mario De Pietro);
- *Finger Trickx*, Bygone Days, BYD7701 (Eddie Peabody, Harry Reser, Emile Grimshaw, Eugene Earle, George Morris, Pete Mandell...);
- Harry Reser, Crackerjax, Yazoo Records, 1975;
- La collection de Lucas Ross : une copie est consultable à l'*American Banjo Museum*, *Oklahoma City*, en Oklahoma.

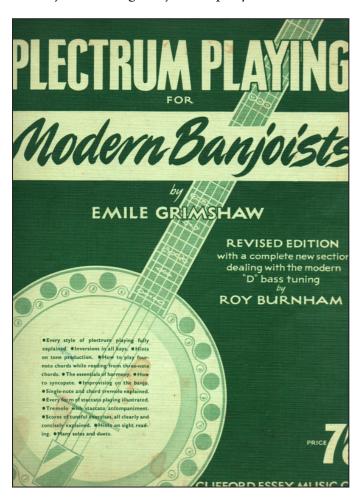
Actuellement, Sean Moyses, Cynthia Sayers, Ron Hinkle, Clem Vickery, Buddy Watcher, Rob MacKillop, Ken Aoki...

http://www.seanmoyses.net

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cynthia\_Sayer

Revues courantes: The Resonator, BMG Magazine...

Fabricants modernes: Ome Banjos, Deering Banjo Company, Pietsch...



Edition revue par Roy Burnham de la méthode d'Emile Grimshaw. London : Clifford Essex, s.d., 61 p.

#### Le catalogue des banjos Paramount des années 1920.

La firme Paramount de William L. Lange, dont je vous livre ci-dessous quelques pages du catalogue, date du milieu des années 1920<sup>28</sup>, du second âge d'or de la fabrication du banjo. Cette maison a cependant des antécédents beaucoup plus anciens. En effet, à la suite de la fermeture des ateliers de John Henry Buckbee – une entreprise qui vit le jour dans les années 1860 et qui à partir des années 1870 produira sous différents noms des dizaines de milliers de banjos à cinq cordes –, Rettberg et Lange alors associés vont reprendre cette affaire en 1897. Ensemble ils sortiront les fameux banjos Orpheum. Lorsque ce partenariat prit fin, William Lange continuera seul et développera une fructueuse entreprise basée à New York, ce dont témoigne ce volumineux catalogue.

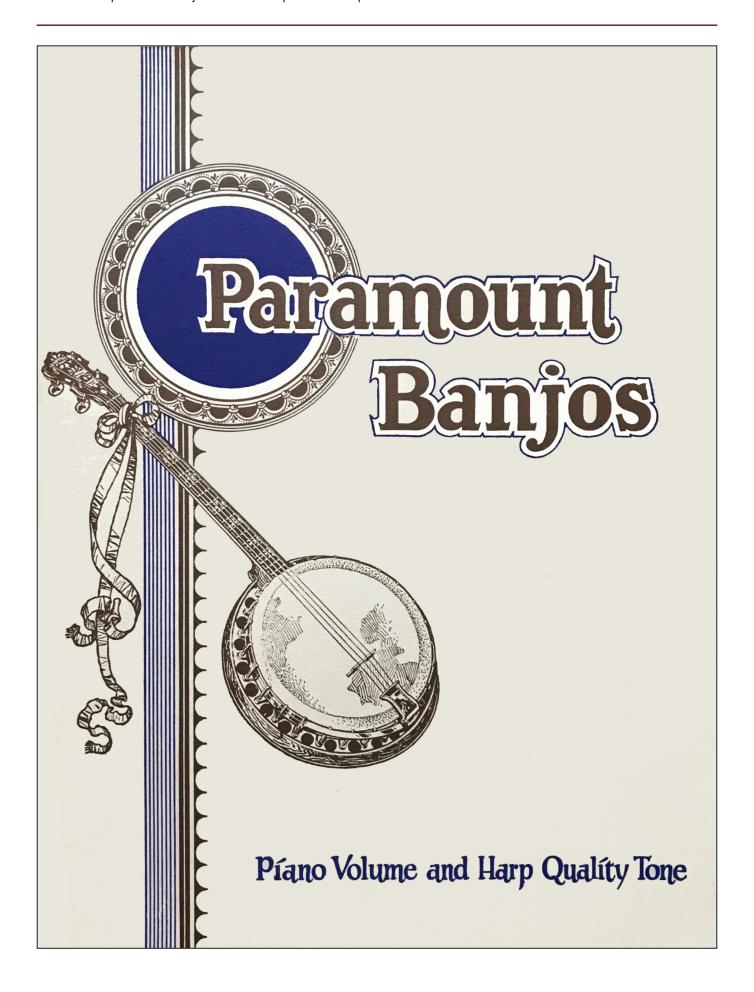
C'était en quelque sorte la vitrine de l'entreprise, plus de la moitié des pages étant réservées à la présentation de musiciens et de formations ayant fait le choix d'un Paramount : ténor, plectrum, mais aussi à 5 cordes. Il est intéressant de noter qu'une page soit réservée à des femmes. Shirley Spaulding (1899-1991)<sup>29</sup> une banjoïste classique fort appréciée de son temps, est mentionnée comme ayant été l'élève de William 'Bill' Bowen.

http://cylinders.library.ucsb.edu/search.php?queryType=@attr+1=1020&num=1&start=1&query=cylinder12116

https://archive.org/search.php?query=creator%3A%22Shirley+Spaulding%22

<sup>28</sup> Voir au MiM dans Copies de catalogues anciens, 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Voir dossier Norman Howard, 'The Banjo and its Players', MiM, 2021.





PAUL WHITEMAN AND HIS ORCHESTRA, on Concert Tour  $$\operatorname{Michael}$$  Pingitore, Banjoist



HARRY F. RESER'S BROADCASTING CLICQUOT CLUB ESKIMOS
HEARD OVER FIFTEEN RADIO STATIONS WEEKLY
USING FIVE PARAMOUNT BANJOS



VINCENT LOPEZ AND HIS ORCHESTRA, on Concert Tour Frank Reino, Banjoist



Price, \$130.00

THIS style Paramount Banjo has a white maple rim and neck, pearl position marks, and pearl scrolling in the headpiece. All wood parts are polished in natural color with the new process "Wearforever" finish. The metal parts are heavily nickel plated and highly polished. Page Geared Pegs.

Style A is also made in the 5-String Banjo and the 4-String Plectrum Banjo at same prices. (Banjo-Mandolins are made to order only.)

## Prominent Stars Exclusively Paramount

WILLIAM D. ("Banjo Bill") BOWEN, through his masterful knowledge of banjo technique, gained as an outstanding five-string player for many years, has now become one of the country's best plectrum artists. Mr. Bowen enjoys the reputation in banjo circles of being a thorough musician and arranger of the highest rank. He is an artist of long experience in concert and orchestra work. His exhibition on the plectrum banjo at the Fretted Instrument Concert at Aeolian Hall, New York, and in recording for Okeh,

has won high praise from the keenest critics. "Banjo Bill" is also the author of several banjo solos and has arranged many popular numbers for the banjo. As a teacher he has developed many wonderful players, including Shirley Spaulding, considered by many the best woman banjoist in the country.



### THE HICKS BROTHERS "Bob" and "Duke"



These two sterling artists. R. Halman ("Bob") and Melville ("Duke") Hicks, have been forging rapidly to the forefront and receiving glowing praise on their tour of the East, Middle West and South on the B. & K. circuit, which includes 800 of the most elite motion picture theatres in the country. Each of B. & K. circuit, which includes 800 of the most elite motion picture theatres in the country. Each of the Hicks brothers is an able exponent of both the tenor and plectrum banjo and they are exceptionally fine technicians. Billed as "Paramount Banjoists" they use Paramount Banjos exclusively and have four of these instruments in their act. They work in a very unique and attractive setting, which depicts the largest Paramount in the world, a brilliantly lighted replica of the Paramount banjo (eighteen feet high and eleven feet in diameter), contrasted against a black background. "Duke" and "Bob," seated inside the rim, issue forth rapturous banjo music. The brothers, who will be remembered in Keith vaudeville, have been called upon for broadcasting engagements in all of the principal cities and were selected as a special act to open the elite Oriental Theater in Chicago in conjunction with Paul Ash's Orchestra. They are exclusive Paramount artists and recently stated, "We have settled upon Paramounts for all our work, being convinced of the superiority of both plectrum and tenor for tone, carrying power and facility of expression."



## TENOR BANJO

Style B



Price, \$150.00

STYLE B Paramount Tenor Banjo has an American black walnut neck and rim. The position marks are of heavy fancy cut pearl. The headpiece is inlaid with heavy pearl panels. All the wood parts are polished with the new process "Wearforever" finish, and the metal parts are heavily nickel plated and highly polished. Page Geared Pegs are used.

This style also in 5-String Banjos and 4-String Plectrum Banjos at same prices. (Banjo-Mandolins are made to order only.)





#### MICHAEL PINGITORE

This famous banjoist with Paul Whiteman's Concert Orchestra has demonstrated the artistic possibilities of the Paramount banjo to many thousands of listeners throughout the United States and Europe. He has played a Paramount banjo exclusively since the first appearance of the instrument and is as enthusiastic in his praise of the Paramount today as he has ever been. A wonderful exemplification of the Paramount tone and carrying power is found in the great Whiteman Concert Orchestra.

The complete ensemble contains about thirty pieces with just one banjoist, Mr. Pingitore. Through the full volume of this great ensemble, the lone Paramount can be distinctly heard. On concert tours and in phonograph recording, Mr. Pingitore's playing on the Paramount has long been considered a supreme triumph. His inborn love of the banjo's vibrant music is the inspiration of true artistry.

#### JOHN CALI

Among the famous broadcasting and recording orchestras with which Mr. Cali plays a Paramount banjo are the well known "Ambassadors," heard on Victor Records, The Anglo-Persian Rug Broadcasters and the renowned Ipana Troubadours. He has made records for practically all of the leading record companies. Mr. Cali is widely recognized among connoisseurs of musical talent as ranking close to the top among the country's greatest banjoists. This artist uses the Paramount alone in all his work because of its particular quality of tone, which reproduces distinctly and with ringing clearness on the records and over the "air."

#### HARRY F. RESER

Mr. Reser is without question one of the world's most brilliant artists on the plectrum and tenor banjo.

His recordings of banjo solos are a rare treat enjoyed by thousands. Mr. Reser's wonderful broadcasting performances as Director and soloist of the popular Clicquot Club Eskimos have made the wizardry of his music known to a vast appreciative audience in every part of the country. Besides his broadcasting activities Mr. Reser is Director of ten phonograph recording units.

This artist insists that Paramount banjos only must be used in his broadcasting and recording organizations, it being his conviction, born of experience, that Paramount tone is supreme for this work. Mr. Reser's keen imaginative sense is responsible for many innovations of technique and stroking that give his music a vigor and dash which make it stand out.



### TENOR BANJO

Style C



Price, \$185.00

THIS style has a San Domingo solid mahogany neck and rim, with original designs of white pearl, engraved. The headpiece is most artistically inlaid and engraved. The heel and back of peg head are hand carved. New process "Wearforever" finish in dark antique color, rim to match. The neck, rim and acousticon are inlaid with contrasting woods in harmonius colors. All metal parts are heavily nickel plated and highly polished. Page Geared Pegs.

Style C also made in 5-String Banjos and 4-String Plectrum Banjos at same prices. (Banjo-Mandolins are made to order only.)



### FOUR-STRING PLECTRUM BANJO



THE Four-String Long Neck Plectrum Banjo has become a very popular instrument. Carefully chosen San Domingo solid mahogany used in neck and rim. These parts have original designs of engraved white pearl. The heel and back of peg head are carved by hand and the neck, rim and acousticon are beautifully inlaid with constrasting woods which harmonize in color. New process "Wearforever" finish in dark antique color. The metal parts are heavily nickel plated and highly polished. Page Geared Pegs.

Made in all styles and models illustrated under Tenor Banjo at same prices as tenors.



SAMUEL PRINCE VAUDEVILLE



WALLY WALDRON (TEACHER)
LOS ANGELES, CAL.



BOB QUAIN (ROY INGRAM'S ORCHESTRA) LOS ANGELES, CAL.



"SHORTY" COOK (MURRAY'S VENETIAN ORCHESTRA). LOS ANGELES, CAL.



LOU STEPP (GREEN MILL GARDENS)
LOS ANGELES, CAL.



REX FINNEY LONG BEACH, CAL.



WILLIAM WORSLEY SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH



GEORGE WILCOX (EGYPTIAN TEMPLE DANCE ORCHESTRA). RIVERSIDE, CAL.



THE Paramount Five-String Banjo has solid San Domingo mahogany neck and rim, with original designs of white pearl, engraved. It has artistically engraved and inlaid headpiece and hand carved heel and back of peg head. The wood parts, including neck, rim and acousticon, are inlaid with constrasting woods in harmonius colors. The metal parts are heavily nickel plated and highly polished. Page Geared Pegs are used. New process "Wearforever" finish in dark antique color.

Price, \$185.00



# Paramount

### **ACCESSORIES**

The Upright Banjo Holder is a most useful and practical accessory, combining seven features of efficiency:

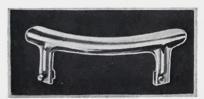
- 1. The Holder maintains the banjo constantly in playing position.
- 2. It relieves the player of the weight of the instrument.
  3. Improves the tone by holding the banjo clear of the
- body. 4. Insures freedom and relaxation for rapid execution.
- 5. Adjustable to any height or position by three simple thumb screw adjusters.
- 6. Ball casters permit of easily moving the Holder out of the way when not in use.

7. It is demountable and compact for transporting.
The Upright Holder is firm and strong, made of highly tempered, nickel plated steel with felt cushioned arms for gripping the banjo.

Price, \$18.00



This Paramount Arm Rest is now standard equipment on all Paramount Banjos. It is specially shaped and designed with edges smoothly rounded for comfort. Sold separately and can be affixed to any standard banjo. Price, nickel plated, \$2.00



### HARRY F. RESER'S MANUAL of TENOR BANJO TECHNIQUE

In this manual, Harry F. Reser gives the beginner or skilled player who wishes to perfect his technique the benefit of banjo knowledge which has brought him to distinctive fame and great earning power. There is no more able authority on banjo playing in the country than Mr. Reser The book throughout is readily understandable and easy to follow and contains a special section devoted to features or "breaks."

Price, \$3.00



Protect your instrument with this non-tippable Banjo Floor Stand, Worth its price many times over in insurance against breakage or marring of the banjo. A collapsible and compact two-piece stand of sturdy steel with padded arms. It folds quickly for carrying and is almost impossible to tip over, due to the low center of gravity and balanced construction. Invaluable for the player who doubles

#### Price, \$4.00

The Paramount Banjo Foot Rest is an almost indispensable article in a player's equipment. It is securely built and designed to promote the comfort of the player, maintaining the knee at an even elevation and relieving foot tension. It saves using the banjo case or other devices and has been tried, tested and proven effective. Made to fit into banjo case.

Price, \$6.00



SELF INSTRUCTOR for the TENOR BANJO By MICHAEL PINGITORE

Mr. Pingitore has written into this instructor the fine points of stroking and technique that have brought him recognition as one of the greatest of banjoists. The book is elemental enough for use by beginners and yet contains a great amount of information that is invaluable for the professional player. The intricacies of the "Circle" and "Figure Eight" strokes made famous by Mr. Pingitore in the Paul Whiteman Orchestra, are fully explained.

Price, \$3.00



### **STRINGS**

"The String with a Ring"

 $S_{\text{come}}^{\text{TRING}}$  problem, at first very serious, now over- occurring during the height of rendering important passages. It was not an easy task by any means; therefore, relieved of the embarrassment of string breakage Paramount strings far ahead of all makes.

Quality of wire, correctly gauged to thickness Paramount strings are rightfully deserving of the for the proper tension at pitch, together with maintrade of the most critical performers, who will be taining absolute strength to avoid breakage, puts



#### TENOR BANJO STRINGS

A or 1st	Radio Steel Silver Plated .							\$7.20 Gross
D or 2d	Radio Steel Silver Plated .							7.20 Gross
G or 3d	Compound Spun with Silver	Plate	d W	ire on	Rad	io Stee	el	
	and Quality Silk			•				21.00 Gross
C or 4th	Radio Steel Spun with Silver P	lated	Wire					21.00 Gross

#### PLECTRUM BANJO STRINGS

D or 1st	Radio Steel Silver Plated								\$7.20 Gross
B or 2d	Radio Steel Silver Plated								7.20 Gross
G or 3d	Radio Steel Spun with Si	lver l	Plate	Wi	re .				18.00 Gross
C or 4th	Compound Spun with S and Quality Silk	ilver	Plate	d V	Vire on	Ra	idio Sto	eel	
•	and Quality Silk					. `			21.00 Gross
G or 5th	Radio Steel Silver Plated								7.20 Gross

Each Paramount String is put up in a weatherproof envelope.

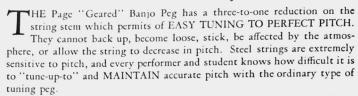
THE MOST VALUABLE ACCESSORIES IN THE HISTORY OF THE BANJO

### THE PAGE "GEARED"

INVENTION OF ROBERT R. PAGE (U. S. PATENT OCTOBER, 1926)

#### and the Improved

#### Paramount Semi-Automatic Adjustable Tailpiece



Being "three-to-one," the button can be turned THREE TIMES AS FAR as the ordinary peg to attain THE SAME DIFFERENCE IN PITCH. They do not rely on friction, but turn in a free, easy manner THROUGH A TRAIN OF GEARS. The housing is small, of neat design, beautifully finished, and adds to the attractiveness of any instrument.

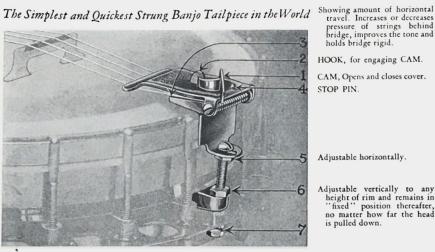
Their use eliminates the necessity of "trying to keep your instrument in perfect tune." Try a set of these pegs and realize the advantage of having your instrument in perfect pitch AT ALL TIMES.

Used and indorsed by the World's Greatest Banjoists.

#### **PRICES**

#### (PER SET OF FOUR)

HEAVILY NICKEL PLATED, CELLULOID BUTTONS	\$12.00
QUADRUPLE SILVER PLATED, CELLULOID BUTTONS	16.00
QUADRUPLE SILVER PLATED, PEARL BUTTONS	24.00
QUADRUPLE GOLD PLATED, CELLULOID BUTTONS	20.00
Quadruple Gold Plated, Pearl Buttons	28.00



HOOK, for engaging CAM.

CAM, Opens and closes cover. STOP PIN.

Adjustable horizontally.

Adjustable vertically to any height of rim and remains in "fixed" position thereafter, no matter how far the head is pulled down.



#### HOW IT OPERATES

Turning CAM (1) unlocks COMBINATION COVER and PRESSURE BAR, which springs open automatically. The looped end of string is placed on the string-button, the lid closed and locked.

Solidly constructed and beautifully finished throughout, it will add greatly to the appearance of any banjo. HEAVILY NICKEL PLATED.....\$3.00

Quadruple Silver Plated. Quadruple Gold Plated. 6.00

#### REGULAR EQUIPMENT ON PARAMOUNT BANJOS



## Paramount

#### CASES AND ACCESSORIES

PARAMOUNT cases are made especially for Paramount Banjos, of the very best materials in Veneers, heavy Keratol covering, and genuine Silk Plush linings. Double string pockets and neck support. Well padded to give the instrument a perfect suction fit; absolutely no shake or rattle while carrying. "Koverite" Silk Plush flap.



For Tenor Banjo, \$24.00 each. For Banjo and Plectrum Banjo, \$25.00 each

Paramount Bridges are hand made of very old hard maple, acoustically perfect. Ebony saddle for string notches.



Plectrum Banjo, 4 Strings . . . \$0.75 each Banjo, 5 Strings . . . . . \$0.75 each



Tenor Banjo . . . . . \$0.75 each

#### KEYS-DIE CAST BRASS



Nickel Plated 500 Each

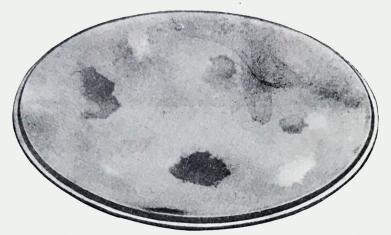
#### PARAMOUNT HOOKS AND NUTS



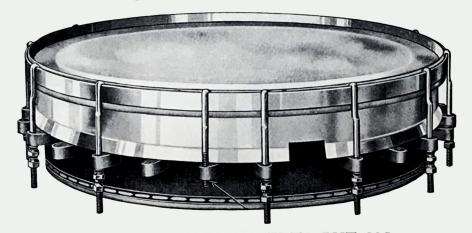
Nickel Plated . . . . . . \$2.40 doz. Silver Plated . . . . . 6.00 doz. Gold Plated . . . . . . 9.60 doz.



## HEADS STRETCHED, READY TO PUT ON SELECTED FOR STRENGTH AND TONE



II-inch Standard Size will fit all Paramount Styles Jos. B. Rogers, Jr., Best Make. Price, \$6.00 Each



#### INSTRUCTIONS—HOW TO PUT ON

PARAMOUNT stretched and tested heads are all shaped and complete with flesh ring. In putting these on follow instructions catefully. Remove tailpiece and strings from the Banjo, and take out the neck. Remove all the hooks and nuts from the rim, marking the tension hoop before you remove it, to get it back in the same position and avoid denting. The hooks also will then be in their original position upon replacing.

upon replacing.

Take off the broken head and flesh ring. Wipe the nickel parts with a clean cloth to remove any dirt or foreign matter. The heads are marked (Tail), indicating that part of the head to be placed on the rim at the tailpiece. Lay the tension hoop on head lightly, place a long hook and nut at

each side of the neck-hole of rim, don't put on any pressure with key, just set enough to hold the hoop in place, proceed to place the balance of long hooks on every other bracket lug until you have them all on about hand tight, as per illustration. Take key and adjust the long hooks all around and evenly until you have the head set enough to put the regular hooks and nuts back, bearing in mind that these hooks must show about four threads through the lugs, to avoid stripping the nuts. Place all these short hooks and nuts through the previously omitted lugs; after all are on remove long hooks, replacing them with the regular hooks. The head is then on perfectly and can be tightened gradually until the tone is satisfactory.

Under no circumstances are these heads to be put in water. They must and will go on dry.

Long Hooks and Nuts for Heading (per Set of 12), \$3.00 Set.





#### ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT

THE value of this equipment is indescribable. Its advantages in connection with keeping the Banjo in perfect sounding condition fill a long-felt want. Rainy weather, seashore resorts, parks, or any outdoor conditions are absolutely defied. With this equipment your Banjo head will always be dry and crisp as it should be. It eliminates the necessity of tightening the head every time the weather conditions change, thus saving expense of breakage and, most of all, the worry connected with playing under all conditions. It may burn

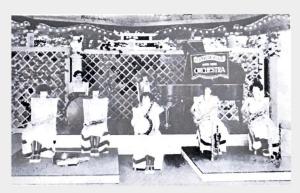
steadily for twenty-four hours and more without the slightest injury to any part. The equipment is complete and can be used in any 110-volt lamp socket of either alternating or direct current. A pull connection at the Banjo rim can be connected or disconnected instantly.

With this equipment the Banjo is placed in an enviable position among musical instruments, all of which are more or less affected by damp weather conditions.

PRICE COMPLETE, \$8.50



GERTRUDE ELLIS ORLANDO, FLA.



GERTRUDE ELLIS' ORCHESTRA ORLANDO, FLA.



BESSIE DE LANO
CALIFORNIA FOUR IN VAUDEVILLE



LOTTA ROBISON CHICAGO, ILL.



MARGARET DICKEN
BAB'S LADIES ORCH SEATTLE



CLARA WILCOX, TEACHER LOS ANGELES, CAL.



HELEN JOHNSON
Tom Brown's Music Co. CHICAGO



CLAIRE EVANS, Evans Orch. SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH



JULITA FAY LOS ANGELES, CAL.



MARIE HAGG, SOLOIST LOS ANGELES, CAL.



ROSE WEBB LOS ANGELES, CAL.



RUTH HARRISON EN ROUTE



ISABELLE BLOCK'S BANJO QUINTETTE LOS ANGELES, CAL.



ETHEL GROH WILKES-BARRE, PA

## The Home of the Paramount

The World's Proven Best Banjo



Famous the World Over for its Piano Volume and Harp Quality Tone

#### Notre exemplaire

Il provient de Californie, vendu par Lowell Levinger, qui me l'a cédé au début 2021, suite à une annonce publiée sur le site 'Banjo Hangout' en 2020 :

PB – 00404 1924 Paramount Style C Plectrum Banjo EXC.<sup>30</sup> This is a fine example with good strong sound and great playability. Good neck, frets, etc. and wonderful condition. Nice old skin head. The dove pattern fingerboard inlay is Paramount's most beautiful in my opinion. The Cupid or Ludwig Van Beethoven on the first fret is a pleasureable puzzlement. And the high grade mahogany used in the neck and the maple capped rim and the resonator are beautifully accented by the colorful marquetry used throughout. Original Page tuning pegs. A label proudly states "Piano Volume – Harp Quality Tone". No lie. Original Paramount double pocket blue lined hard fine condition. Fancy headstock inlay. Carved heel. Lovely volute. (Don't ya just love volutes?) Original tailpiece and .... it's wired for .... light. (Perhaps you noticed) The serial number on the rim matches that on the dowel. The shell case in pretty nice shape.

Price: \$1795.00 - SOLD.

Annonce publiée pour la mise en vente sur le site 'Banjo hangout'.

http://www.lowelllevinger.com/news/

Notre exemplaire correspond parfaitement au modèle Plectrum 'Style C' décrit dans le catalogue Paramount des années 1920. Toutes les parties sont originales – sauf peut-être l'appui du bras –, avec les mécaniques 'Page', le cordier breveté par Paramount et la configuration particulière de la caisse. Le chevalet n'est pas d'origine, mais la peau porte bien la marque 'Rogers'. Elles étaient préformées et pouvaient ainsi être remplacées à sec. On en retrouve jusqu'en Europe où elles sont mentionnées dans le catalogue Clifford Essex de 1928<sup>31</sup>. Ces peaux réputées ont aussi trouvé place sur les banjos Gibson de l'époque. Les premières peaux synthétiques n'apparaîtront que vers la fin des années 1950.

Notre exemplaire est muni de l'*electrical equipment* dont la fonction est de retendre une peau relâchée par l'humidité ambiante, sans devoir actionner les tendeurs, ce qui représente un risque lorsque l'air redevient plus sec, causant si on n'y prend garde une surtension et l'éclatement du parchemin.

En regardant l'illustration du catalogue, et pour avoir examiné d'autres exemplaires, j'ai la nette impression que cette pièce n'est pas originale. J'ai par ailleurs retrouvé ce même dispositif sur un banjo Fred Van Eps plus tardif (voir photos p. 146).

La caisse (l'étui) est conforme au catalogue. Elle était proposée en deux tailles : d'une part pour le long manche du plectrum et du cinq cordes, et d'autre part pour le manche plus court du ténor. La nôtre est un peu trop juste pour un plectrum. La pointe du cheviller frotte contre la paroi. Cette caisse était manifestement destinée à un ténor.

<sup>30</sup> EXC. veut dire 'Excellent condition'.

<sup>31</sup> Voir, dossier Catalogues anciens, MiM, 2021.



Electrical equipment. (comparer avec le catalogue 'Metropolitan' de 1935, p. 172, et avec le catalogue Gibson de 1926)



Intérieur de la caisse d'un banjo Fred Van Eps. Voir aussi le catalogue *Metropolitan* de 1935, p. 172



Même *open back banjo* que les deux photos précédentes. ABF Rally, 2017. Photo G. De Smaele.







Mécaniques 'Page' originales.



Cordier breveté par Paramount. Il s'ouvre pour pouvoir accéder aux points d'ancrage des cordes et permet d'ajuster l'angle d'inclinaison du cordier sur la peau.

#### Notes sur le banjo Bacon & Day 'Silver Bell', ténor

Bien que pour l'instant je ne sois pas encore réellement à même de vous le proposer, il me semble opportun d'en faire une première présentation générale. L'introduction de notre banjo plectrum décrit comment et pourquoi les banjos à quatre cordes sont apparus.

Les ténors ont habituellement 19 barrettes, tandis que les banjos irlandais ont un diapason plus court, avec 17 voire 19 barrettes. Ils sont bien entendu toujours joués au plectre et l'idée de départ est de les accorder en quintes. Cependant plusieurs variantes ont cours :

Le ténor standard (19 barrettes, mais aussi parfois 18) s'accorde comme le violon alto en CGDA et parfois en BbFCG; le ténor irlandais (17 barrettes) s'accorde en GDAE; un *guitar tuning* en DGBE est aussi courant. D'autres variantes d'accordages sont aussi utilisées.

S'il existe d'évidentes similitudes entre le banjo plectrum et le cinq cordes, la technique de jeu du banjo ténor est cependant complètement étrangère à ce dernier. Parce qu'à une certaine époque il était quasiment le seul modèle à être répandu, les célèbres joueurs de cinq cordes que furent Pete Seeger et Bill Keith, comme beaucoup d'autres, ont abordé l'étude du banjo par le ténor. Après avoir rencontré Samantha Bumgarner (1978-1960) et Bascom Lamar Lunsford (1882-1973), Pete Seeger se convertit au 5 cordes. Il en fut de même pour Bill Keith, après la découverte des enregistrements de Earl Scruggs. Ce choix fut irréversible : celui d'un autre monde, d'une autre musique, d'une conception, d'une autre technique de jeu.

Parmi les nombreuses marques de fabricants du banjo ténor, Gibson, Vega et Bacon & Day sont actuellement les plus recherchée. Elles le sont également pour le 5 cordes.

Fred Bacon (1871-1948) faisait partie – avec A. Farland, V. Ossman, F. Van Eps –, des tout grands virtuoses du banjo à cinq cordes 'classique', mais devint aussi un de ses plus grands fabricants. Il finit par s'associer avec David Day pour la production des fameux Bacon & Day, les banjos les plus chers jamais vendus sur le marché. Ces instruments furent majoritairement des plectrums et des ténors, équipés de cordes métalliques, produits à une époque où le 5 cordes était tombé en désuétude. N'empêche qu'il se retrouvera, monté en cordes de boyau, dans les mains de Bacon, mais aussi de Frank Bradbury. Il fut aussi récemment utilisé par Aaron Lewis, un excellent banjoïste 'classique' contemporain.

#### https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Lo0VfMOo w

Lewis joue ici sur un modèle tardif produit par Gretsch<sup>33</sup> après la disparition de Fred Bacon.

Cette association avec David Day, inscrit la marque dans une prestigieuse lignée, prenant racine au 19e siècle avec A.C. Fairbanks, continuée ensuite par Vega.

Avant les Bacon & Day ténors, les banjos Bacon et les Bacon 'Professional' étaient déjà bien connus<sup>34</sup> du monde du cinq cordes 'classique', et font aussi partie des instruments recherchés par les collectionneurs. Ils ont fait l'objet de nombreux articles parus dans *The Five-Stringer*<sup>35</sup>.

Une biographie succincte de Fred Bacon et de D. Days est publiée sur le site 'classic-banjo.ning'. On trouvera d'autres indications dans le *The Banjo and its Players* de Norman Howard (1959)<sup>36</sup>.

- 32 Voir Dossier banjo classique, MiM, 2021.
- 33 On trouve actuellement des copies de ces banjos réalisées par la Ome Banjo Company (Boulder, Colorado), et par Pietsch en Allemagne.
- 34 Voir les copies de catalogues déposées au MiM en 2021.
- Voir le dossier *The Five-Stringer* déposé au MiM en 2020 (Bacon, Bacon & Day, Fairbanks, Vega).
  Voir aussi : Paul Heller. "Fred Bacon and the Early Days of the Bacon Banjo Company." *The Old Time Herald*, vol. 12/8, December 2010 January 2011. Copie déposée au MiM avec celles des catalogues anciens, 2021.
  Voir aussi : *1001 Banjos* de Akira Tsumura ; *America's Instrument* de James Bollman et Phil Gura.
- 36 Copie déposée au MiM en 2020.

#### Fred Bacon

#### https://classic-banjo.ning.com/page/player-biographies



Frederick J. Bacon (1871 to 1943) was one of the leading banjo soloists in America. He was taught to play the instrument by one of the finest exponents of the five-string banjo, Alfred Farland, and by the age of 16 was working across America as a professional banjo performer.

In 1908 he began teaching from a studio in Forestdale, Vermont from where he established 'The Bacon Manufacturing and Publishing Company' even though, at the time he did not manufacture anything! The first banjo that he offered for sale, 'The Bacon Professional' was being manufactured for him by the Vega company of Boston.

Bacon never played in the UK so we have few written reviews and only have available his professional recordings, but they show what a really brilliant performer and arranger he was. He produced numerous compositions for banjo, but regarded the banjo as a solo

instrument so many do not have piano accompaniments available.

By 1922 Bacon had set up 'The Bacon Banjo Co.' in Groton to manufacture his own instruments: 'To incorporate the ideas of tone and workmanship of the president, Fred Bacon'.

Many of his banjos were sold under the name B&D or Bacon and Day, from the name of his chief designer David L. Day, but in fact there never was a Bacon & Day company, all the banjos being made by the Bacon Banjo Company.

In the 1920s US banjoist Cliff Spaulding attended a New York Guild banjo convention where Fred Bacon was playing and demonstrating banjos from his manufacturing company. Mr. Spaulding commented to Fred that the banjo he was playing sounded superb and asked if he could buy one like it. Bacon replied: "All my banjos are for sale and to ensure that you get this exact banjo, step out of the room and make a secret mark on it and I will make sure that you get it". Bacon was a business man through and through!

Bacon continued manufacturing banjos until 1939 when his company was sold to the Fred Gretsch Mfg. Co. of New York. Four years later Bacon died at the age of 72 years.

#### **David Day**

#### http://www.abmbpd.info

Although his name is firmly planted in banjo lore as the "Day" in "Bacon & Day" banjos, David Lucien Day brought each of the banjo companies he worked for to the forefront of the banjo making industry. In a manufacturing career that spanned nearly 60 pivotal years of the banjo's evolution in America, David L. Day is arguably the most influential individual in the vision, design, manufacturing and distribution of the modern banjo.

Prior to the beginning of David Day's banjo making journey in 1883 as the first employee of the Fairbanks & Cole Company in Boston, the concept manufacturing banjos was a new and uncertain business. As Fairbanks & Cole introduced heretofore unseen innovations in banjo design and manufacturing, their young errand boy, David Day – with an inordinate amount of innate curiosity and engineering aptitude, was learning his craft.



After Albert Fairbanks and William Cole parted ways in 1890, David Day spent the next five years with A.C. Fairbanks & Company, where he was allowed to develop masterful skills as a banjo designer and maker while doubling as the company manager in Fairbanks' absence. When Fairbanks sold the business which bore his name in 1895, Day was not only kept on, but promoted to general manager of the new A.C. Fairbanks Company. Under David Day's superb design, engineering and management skills, the A.C. Fairbanks Company created some of the finest banjos which were come out of the Classic Era of the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Most notable of David Day's contributions during this period is the development of the venerated Fairbanks Whyte Laydie. Named after a fabled sailing vessel, the Whyte Laydie design modified the already successful Fairbanks Electric tone ring system with the addition of an ingenious bracket band which eliminated the need to drill holes through the banjo's wooden body. With instruments

constructed of light, naturally finished woods and elegant inlays engraved by Icilio Consalvi, the Whyte Laydie, introduced in 1901, was accepted as the outstanding banjo of the new century – and remains a highly prized model among contemporary players and collectors more than 100 years later.

After a fire destroyed the A.C. Fairbanks Company in March of 1904, the remains and company owned patents were quickly purchased by the Vega musical instrument company of Boston. Realizing how important he had been to Fairbanks' success, David Day was hired as the new Vega vice president and general manager. While Vega continued to manufacturer previous models and designs under the Fairbanks name, David Day was busy readying a new innovation in the Vega Tubaphone tone ring. Introduced in 1909, the Vega Tubaphone models were instantly acclaimed by banjo players and the Tubaphone tone ring remained a staple of every professional grade banjo made by Vega for next sixty years. Although David Day and Frederick Bacon had been friends since 1895, their professional association was cemented in 1905 when the Vega Company was secretly contracted to manufacture banjos under the Bacon name. As Bacon's reputation as a banjo maker grew, it stood to reason that he would seek the man he considered to be the "foremost authority on the manufacture of banjos"... David L. Day... to run his business when he actually began making banjos on his own. Beginning in 1922, with a perfect marriage of their combined skills in banjo playing, engineering, designing, manufacturing, promoting and distributing, Bacon and Day manufactured what many consider to be the finest banjo design to come out of the jazz age of the 1920s and 30s – the B&D Silver Bell.

After a hurricane forced the closure and sale of the Bacon Banjo Company of Groton, Connecticut in 1938, David Day – by then president of the company – retired to a life of relative obscurity until his death in 1956. During the previous six decades however, the genius of David L. Day was largely responsible for the banjo's evolution from a simple manufactured instrument of the late 1800s to countless examples of modern banjo making perfection which exist today.

#### Le catalogue Bacon & Day 'Silver Bell'

Groton, Connecticut, 192837





FREDERICK J. BACON, (Standing) DAVID L. DAY (Seated)
New London, Conn.

In the October issue of the Jacobs Orchestra Monthly appeared a splendid article written by that well-known writer and musical authority—
Geo. Allaire Fisher, Vice-Pres. of the Oliver Ditson Co., Boston, Mass., on "Banjo History in the Making." It was evidently inspired by the beautiful exhibition of Silver Bell Banjos which he saw at the Exhibition Rooms of The Bacon Banjo Company at the time of the Convention of the National Musical Industries Chamber of Commerce, held at the Commodore Hotel, New York City, in June.

From his extended article we quote — "Wandering down to the eighth floor, I found myself in the rooms of The Bacon Banjo Company, Inc., of Groton, Connecticut. This well-known and successful firm specializes, as their name implies, on the banjo family of instruments. Fred Bacon, the president of the firm, was playing on a Silver Bell five-string banjo when I came in and I had no inclination to do anything except listen until he got through. Fred is one of the pioneers in banjo manufacturing and performance, and is probably able to coax more good music out of a five-string banjo than any other man living. He was a big hit at the Tuesday night banquet program. He and David L. Day, the vice-president and general manager of The Bacon Banjo Company are responsible for the designing of the Bacon instruments and for the undoubted excellence of their tone and the established success of the Company, etc."

#### BYD STORES

#### Jorville Creviere

JORVILLE CREVIERE, Banjoist of the Break-O'-Day Orchestra, La Crosse, Wis., writes, "We are now playing an indefinite engagement at the Winter Gardens, La Crosse, Wis. I was more than pleased with my first Silver Bell Banjo, but my new No. 6 B & D Ne Plus Ultra has all banjos beat, regardless of price.

"I have tried all prominent makes of banjos, and will put mine to a test with any of them. Purchased both of my instruments through your distributors, W. J. Dyer & Bro. of St. Paul, Minn."





#### Caddie Carr

Enroute

THIS talented and versatile young Artist who is under the management of Schuberts, will finish up her vocal studies in Europe this summer. She has a wonderful concert voice and also sings the popular "Blue and Mammy" songs, playing the accompaniment on her B & D special Silver Bell Banjo.

Besides her singing and playing she is a finished dancer. We trust many of our readers will have a chance to see and hear her in person later on.

At the opening, a short time ago, of the Bankhead Hotel, Birmingham, Alabama, one of the South's newest and latest hotels, she was especially engaged to come from New York to render a program.

She was coached in her banjo work by the well known instructor, M. J. Scheidlmeier of Pittsburgh, Pa.



### B & D Silver Bell Banjos

Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.



We can picture your extreme pleasure and enthusiasm with either of these wonderful instruments.

To those who appreciate the higher ideals of the banjo maker's art, these styles are submitted for their critical approval.

Pat. Pending

#### Styles No. 2 and 3 B & D "Silver Bell" Banjos

Made in Tenor, Plectrum and Regular Banjos

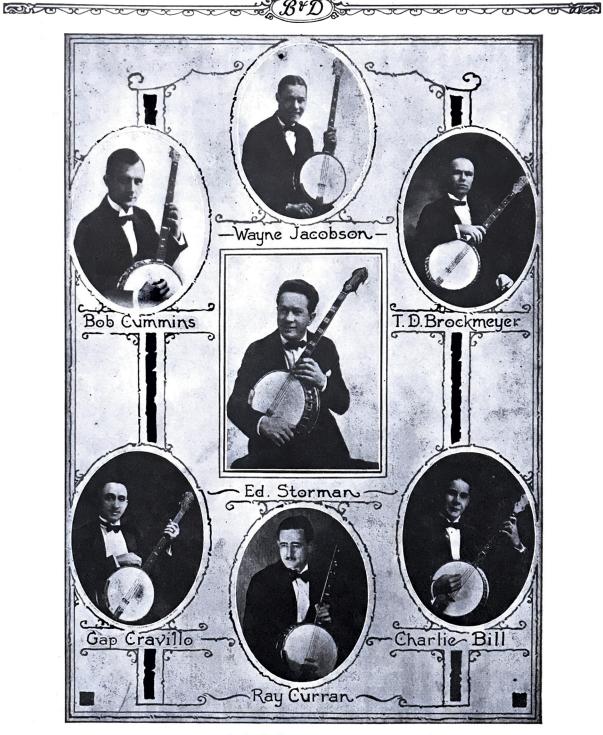
DETAILS OF STYLE No. 2. Metal parts silver plated in satin finish, heel of neck hand carved. Wood parts, curly maple in dark antique shaded Permanent finish. For those wishing a silver plated finish of metal parts, this instrument meets their requirements. Other details of construction same as Style No. 1 Silver Bell Banjo.

DETAILS OF STYLE No. 3. Gold plated metal parts, heel of neck handsomely hand carved, ivoroid bound peg head. Other details same as Style No. 2 except that all metal parts are gold plated instead of silver plated.

EQUIPMENT — of Style No. 2 and 3. Planet gear pegs which give quick and accurate tuning (four to one ratio). Patent pressure tailpiece Bestone Arm Rest, Selected Rogers head, Bacon Webfoot bridge, B & D Super Strings, also our latest improvement the B & D Soft Pedal Mute with which instant control of Loud and Soft tones as desired. Metal parts are silver or gold plated as applying to whether being style No. 2 or No. 3.

FINISH - All wood parts beautifully shaded, smooth, Permanent finish.

PRICE of Style No. 2 B & D "Silver Bell" Tenor, Plectrum (4-string) or Regular (5-string) Banjos . . . \$185.00
PRICE of Style No. 3 B & D "Silver Bell" Tenor, Plectrum (4-string) or Regular (5-string) Banjos . . . 250.00
All metal parts finest quality gold and silver plate with non-tarnishing finish.



St. Louis Silver Bell Banjoists

1. Bob Cummings, Les Karbach Castle Ballroom Orchestra. 2. Wayne Jacobson, St. Louis Night Club. 3. T. Dewey Brockmeyer, St. Louis All-Star Dance Combination. 4. Gap Cravillo, Alton. 5. Ray Curran, Ted Jansen Orchestra. 6. Charlie Bill, Lou Chartrand Cinderella Ballroom Orchestra. 7. Ed. Storman, now with the Art Kahn Orchestra of Chicago, Ill.



#### Charles Rothermel

Chicago, Illinois

 $\mathbf{M}^{\mathrm{R.~ROTHERMEL}}$  has been a student of various musical instruments, the Guitar, Mandolin, Tenor-Banjo, 'Cello and Saxophone.

Reading five different instruments at sight is an accomplishment of this splendid artist.

He writes, "The Bacon Silver Bell Tenor-Banjo is the most nearly perfect instrument I have ever had the pleasure of playing. It has a marvelous tone, more than sufficient volume, and greatest of all is remarkably easy to play. I would not consider playing a job on any other banjo now that I know what can be done on a B & D Silver Bell Banjo."

A new Style No. 9 "Ne Plus Ultra" (\$900 00) Silver Bell Banjo is now being given a thorough test before delivery to Mr. Rothermel.



Frank C. Bradbury
Hartford, Conn.

With His New \$600.00 B & D Silver Bell Banjo

MR. BRADBURY, through his compositions and magazine articles is a recognized authority on matters relating to the Banjo. In addition, with his concert and orchestra work, radio broadcasting and teaching he may well be considered a leader.

Press notice from the Radio Review of the Springfield Union, Nov. 9th, '26, reads—"Last night's leading event for us was the broadcast by Frank Bradbury from WTIC. Mr. Bradbury plays the Banjo with the greatest facility and gets more music out of his instruments than anyone we ever heard."

Les B&D 'Silver Bell' à cinq cordes sont (tout comme les Gibson de la même époque) de parfait exemples de banjos hybrides : caisse de banjo ténor ou plectrum associée à un manche à cinq cordes. Ils réalisent la fusion de deux aspects différents de l'instrument. Avant de se lancer avec David Day dans la production de banjos à quatre cordes, Fred Bacon avait été un des grands noms du banjo 'classique', réputé à travers les États-Unis. Ses 'Bacon FF Professional' sont des cinq cordes, encore très estimés de nos jours, tant par les banjoïstes 'classiques' que par ceux de la musique *old time*. Ce fut longtemps le choix préféré de Bob Carlin, venu jouer au MiM en 2003<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> Voir les copies de catalogues anciens, ainsi que le catalogue original de Bart Reiter, déposés au MiM en 2021 et en 2011.



#### "Montana"

The Famous Cowboy Banjoist

"MONTANA," the best known and most picturesque figure in the Banjo World. Famous for his clean, hard picking, volume and quality of tone, also his wonderful appearance; acknowledged the most attractive and immaculately dressed man in the whole show game. When he steps upon the stage and begins to play, one can hardly believe that it is only one man with only one Banjo. That Banjo is a "MONTANA SPE-CIAL" built by the Bacon Banjo Company.

"MONTANA" plays the Bacon Banjo exclusively, does not own any other make of Banjo and never has since he joined the Bacon boosters five years ago. At that time he saw Dave L. Day take charge of the Bacon factory, and knowing that no

other man in the world could build a Banjo like Dave Day, a Banjo that he could get that fortyfour calibre kick out of that he wants in his act, he had to follow Day.

At a dinner recently attended by 500 Banjo fans, "Montana" in his speech said, "As long as Bacon and Day build them I will play them." He says he can get a greater variety of effects and different tones out of a Bacon without any resonator, mute or attachments of any kind, than he can on all the other banjos he has seen or heard with the aid of all the known improvements.

The way he uses exclusive Bacon attachments adds more wonderment to his act. This clever artist declares that to hear a Banjo from the audience as the player is doing his act upon the stage



of some of these wonderful large theatres we have today is a real demonstration and frequently the managers of these large theaters come back on the stage to ask "MONTANA" what kind of a Banjo he is using, stating that they never heard one with such wonderful tone, carrying power and still so musical and entertaining. This generally happens after all the other Banjo acts have been in there ahead of him. The audience never gets enough of this wonderful Banjo in the hands of this wonderful performer, "MONTANA," The Bacon Banjo Buster-he certainly rides a Bacon.

"MONTANA" was not originally a cowboy, but has had considerable experience on his uncle's ranch at Fort Benton, Montana, near Great Falls.

There when a boy he learned to shoot, ride, rope and pick a Banjo. He is not only a wonderful performer on the Banjo now, but he spins a rope, is a crack shot with a rifle and an expert with a Colt's six-shooter.

"MONTANA" is an amiable fellow to meet, and no amateur or professional Banjoist ever comes to the stage door without being well received and enlightened on any point he asks about in connection with the Banjo. He has the name of having aided and started on the road to success many young Banjo enthusiasts.

The highest skill and craftsmanship of banjo making experts and designers is at your service.





#### Roy Smeck

"A PRODIGY OF THE STRINGS"

 ${f R}^{
m OY}$  SMECK is one of the best known musical artists before the Public today and has crowded a remarkable record of achievements into the past three years.

In the beginning his only teacher was the phonograph, yet in the short space of time, he has mastered eight different string instruments — tenor banjo, regular banjo, mandolin, guitar, steel guitar, ukulele, harp-guitar and octochorda. In addition to his playing the various instruments, he also has an excellent voice.

Mr. Smeck has made records for the Vocalion, Columbia and Okeh companies. He was chosen the Premier artist for the Vitaphone, the new talking pictures, and is now appearing personally in the largest picture houses in the country.

He was twenty years of age when he first began to be interested in the stringed instruments, the banjo being his first choice and the others having been taken up later on. The banjo is the instrument which he features mostly and he plays his own arrangement of Rachmaninoff's "Prelude in C sharp Minor."

To attain his present position, constant practice has been his motto and many hours each day are devoted to it.

He has two rules, and one is: "The better the instrument is made, the easier it is to learn." The other: "If you're interested in an instrument, you can learn to play it."

Very few of us can hope to attain Mr. Smeck's record. But what he has done should be an encouragement and inspiration to every beginner. He does not attribute his success to unusual talent, but to his interest in music and the time he has given to its conscientious study and practice.

The Metronome — April 15th, 1927.



Sam O. Carr

M. CARR is one of the rising generation of Banjoists. He was with the Art Landry Orchestra for several years, this Orchestra being nationally known for its Victor Recording.

In a telegram he says,—"Contracted as Banjo Soloist in West Coast Inc. Houses, opening at Warfield Theatre, San Francisco, Cal." Mr. Carr has a Style No. 6, Ne Plus Ultra "Silver Bell" Banjo, and with his teaching and playing has created considerable banjo enthusiasm in San Francisco and Oakland, Cal.





## "Blackface" EDDIE ROSS

Enroute

"Blackface" Eddie Ross and his famous African Harp, which is none other than a B & D Silver Bell Banjo, is known the world over for his clever banjo playing (a style all his own) and he is without a doubt the dean of blackface comedians.

In a recent letter to Messrs. Bacon and Day, he says—"My Silver Bell Banjo has tremendous



volume and is the easiest banjo I have ever played on. Most all of the other big banjo makers have tried to interest me in their banjos, but my old ———— was good enough for me until I tried one of yours and then I knew I must part with the "old friend" that had given me such faithful service for nineteen years."



#### Polly Watson Band

Stockton, Cal.

Polly Watson's Band is one of the most popular in California. Broadcasting over KWG, playing the Roseland and Cinderella Ballrooms, also manages the California Theatre Orchestra. His Band has appeared at various West Coast Theatre houses and have been featured in many towns within a radius of 150 miles.

He is a splendid type of modern orchestra leader who knows what he wants and knows how to get it. Malign Langstroth is the Banjoist of this splendid organization and uses the B & D "Silver Bell" Banjo.

THE B & D SOFT PEDAL - gives instant control of Loud and Soft Tones at your wish.



## The Modern Player Demands B & D Equipment

#### Mandolin or Mandolin Banjo Strings

E or 1st Plain Steel		10c	Each,	6	for	\$0.50
A or 2nd Plain Steel .		10c	Each,	6	for	.50
D or 3rd Spun Steel		20c	Each,	3	for	.50
G or 4th Spun Steel		20c	Each,	3	for	.50
Complete Set (2 of each)						1.20

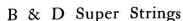
#### Plectrum Banjo Strings

1st	or 5th	Plain	S	teel			15c	Each,	4	for	.50
2nd	Plain	Steel					15c	Each,	4	for	.50
3rd	Plain	Steel					15c	Each,	4	for	.50
3rd	Spun	Steel					30c	Each,	2	for	.50
4th	Spun	Steel					30c	Each,	2	for	.50
Con	nplete	Set wit	th	Spun		3rd					.80
Con	nplete	Set wit	h	Plain	1	3rd					.70

#### Tenor Banjo Strings

					5			0				
A or 1st								10c I	Each	, 6	for	.50
D or 2nd								10c 1	≤ach	, 6	tor	.50
G or 3rd		•	•	•		•	•	20c I	Lach	, ,	ior	.50
C or 4th												
Complete	Set											.60

E BACON BANJO CO. IN





# A Quality String Strongest and Best Toned Choice of Orchestra and Professional Players.

Prices for gross lots quoted on application.

## Never-False Gut Strings are absolutely true

#### Banjo

5-string, including B & D Super Spun Silk 4th Per set of 5	\$1.75							
Ukulele								
Including B & D Super Spun Silk 3rd								
Per set	\$0.75							
Guitar								
E-B-G Each	\$0.45							

B & D Webfoot Tenor and Plectrum Banjo Bridges



On notera que le jeu de corde du ténor et du plectrum sont métalliques, et que celles du cinq cordes (classique, tel que pratiqué par Fred Bacon) sont en boyau.

Comme mentionné précédemment, Le banjo Bacon & Day à cinq cordes, monté de cordes métalliques et joué avec des onglets de doigts, aurait pu concurrencer le Gibson pour le *bluegrass*. Ce ne sera jamais le cas. Earl Scruggs, qui fut le maître incontesté de ce style, ainsi que ses suiveurs, ont unanimement préféré le 'Mastertone'. Il reste encore aujourd'hui la principale (si pas la seule) référence pour ce style. Dans le catalogue Bacon & Day, on constatera que les banjos sont équipés d'une pédale qui repose sur la jambe du musicien. Elle actionne une sourdine. Bien qu'elle puisse être présente sur des banjos à cinq cordes de cette époque, elle n'a de réelle utilité que dans le cas des banjos joués au plectre.





Knee mute actionnée par un levier.
Banjo Bacon & Day, exemplaire probablement tardif produit par Gretsch.
Collection Jérôme Casanova, Paris.
Photos: G. De Smaele, 2021.





Le catalogue Paramount des années 1920 ne mentionne pas cette sourdine. Celle-ci est actionnée par une tringle émergeant à la base du manche, et agit par dessous le chevalet.

Collection Jérôme Casanova, Paris.

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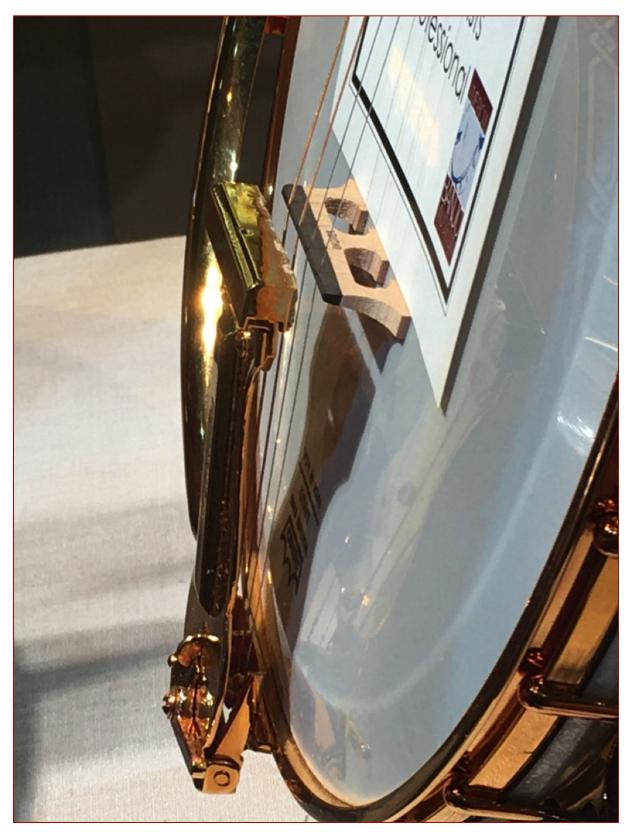
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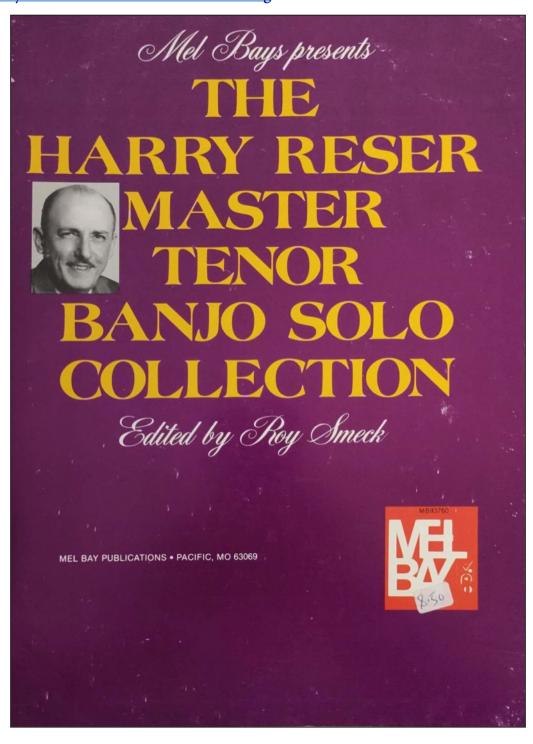
STYLE "LEADER"



Idem. *American Banjo Museum*,Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Photo : G. De Smaele, 2019 (Voir photos déposées au MiM en 2020)

#### Lollipops, par Harry Reser:

 $\underline{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lIbFkOhOTHg}$ 









## FIGA

#### **JULY/AUGUST 1996**

The Official Publication of the Fretted Instrument Guild of America



## Harry Reser

A Centennial Tribute

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> UPCOMING EVENTS

Ici, Harry Reser joue sur un Gibson 'Mastertone'.

Il est fait mention de Toots Thielemans à la page 33 de l'article reproduit ci-dessous. Voir p. 178.

# The Great HARRY RESER by W. W. Triggs

knowledge. In fact, it was at the age of nine that his parents, now fully realizing the benefits to be gained, sent him to Louis Hein and Albert Fischer of Dayton, where he studied the violin and celle he studied the violin and celle he had already started. He remained with them until he was fourteen. It was this early training under two first class tutors that later was to result in his perfecting the art of the banjo music like no other musician has since or is likely to do again.

Harry Reser was born in Piqua, Ohio on Friday January 17th, 1896, one of two children by William G. Reser and Alberta Wright (nee Wright). He had a sister, Ruth, and was also a first cousin to Orville and Wilbur Wright, the inventors of the airplane. An actual fact. Reser's Christian names were Harrison Franklin, and the last name may have been abbreviated to Frank, especially when one refers to Perfect recordings 14207, 14234 and 14240 which are by Frank Harrison's Banjo Band, another pseudonym, this time using his Christian name in

At the age of two years, he moved to Dayton, Ohio, where he led a normal child's life although his musical talents were fast becoming apparent it was discovered that young Reser had something called "perfect pitch". Only then did his parents realize that they had a child prodigy on their hands. Years later he recalled, "of course, being a kid, and playing for various minor concerts and recitals naturally gave me somewhat of a hero feeling, but I was never able to get the attitude of a great many people whom I often heard talking prodigies, juvenile wonders and any number of equally mysterious things in connection with my playing. It never seemed in the least remarkable or extraordinary that I played at the age of eight."

At about this time, he was learning the piano and also embarked upon systemized training in music which was to cement together permanently his natural genius and forthcoming theoretical Reser commented, "Perhaps the most important discovery that I ever made was the money my parents had invested in my musical training had to be earned. It didn't just happen like the ripening of wild fruit or the blossoming of wild flowers. I learned further that regardless of the amount of talent or genius with which one is endowed, the opportunity to earn and do worthwhile things in life does not come knocking at your door begging to be seized."

So, Reser had to earn a living and as a start, at the age of sixteen, he answered an advertisement in the press for a position and it was the piano which got him his first job in a summer resort at Rhea Springs, Tennessee. On April 8th, 1916, when he was just over 20, he married Grace Tharp at Newport, Kentucky. She was a girl who he had first known at school and many happy years were to follow together with two daughters, Betty Jane and Geraldine Mae.

After his second summer at the Rhea Springs, Reser was seeing more and more that the banjo was the up and coming thing and therefore should be learned as quickly as possible from his point of view. He obtained one and quite quickly, had worked assiduously at it until a sufficiently high standard had been attained to enable him to at least supplement his piano playing with it and thus improve his chances of earning a responsible living.

Between 1917 and 1920, he was back at (The Great Harry Reser continued on page 22)

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(Continued from page N

Dayton with a new addition to his musical repertoire, playing at the local amusement parks and ballrooms, one such venue being the Bott Dancing Academy. In the summer of 20, he entered into the dance band world by joining an outfit under the leadership of Paul Goss; they did not tour but just played one location. He was now playing banjo (plectrum) more regularly.

Soon he realized that no matter how good one might be at his chosen profession or vocation, there always is a little room for improvement (in Reser's case it was only a little room). Accordingly, he left the band and moved to Buffalo, New York, to play at the Hippodrome. This he did for some time and

played violin, not neglecting to continue improving on the banjo, of course, although he did not play it professionally at this point in time. At the back of his mind, Reser always had the notion to try New York itself, and now felt that the time was ripe. By this time he had adopted the Tenor Banjo because of the extra effect it had for playing with bands; it cut through much more than the plectrum banjo and because of his violin training and expertise, he had no difficulty in making the switch. He managed to get some useful experience by playing the banjo with his own band at the Iroquois Hotel after finishing up at the Hippodrome.

Just after Christmas, 1920, he entered New (The Great Harry Reser continued on page 2):



A moment in banjo history captured as the Eskimos, chased by fans (not unlike the Beatlemania that hit the city forty years later)
make a run for it after a mid-1920's appearance in New York City

(Costinued from page 22)

York City seeking engagements, and, though the initial ones, was in demand.

"Word got around that I could read music, and that was something rare at the time." Bands that required his services included Ben Selvin, Bennie Krueger, Sam Lanin, Nathan Glantz, Mike Markel (for whom he played saxophone, this being one of

the instruments he "picked up" on his travels) and many others. For most, he continued to be engaged on and off for a number of years. He also played sax with the Six Brown Brothers Sextet and marimba with the Marimba Band.

In the early autumn of 1922, having already broken into the recording field and made half a dozen

or so records, he was seriously considering starting his own band to make a name for himself as a definite entity in the studios. The result was that a contract was drawn up with Okeh and Reser's first band came into being, called the Okeh Syncopators; this was September/October 1922. However, shortly after the start of this new venture, he had to temporarily suspend activities in that quarters as Paul Whiteman hired him to go on tour with the band to the U.K.

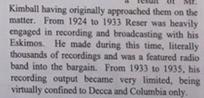
Whiteman was in need of a player who could combine rhythm work with expert solo work, and as he usually employed the best musicians in the business, his choice in this field naturally fell on Reser. Pingatore was a first class rhythm player although still not up to Reser's standard, but Reser as a soloist stood completely alone. The show in which the band was .... "BRIGHTER LONDON"

at the London Hippodrome, and fifteen musicians came over to appear on the stage during the course of the performances. The opening night was on Wednesday, March 28th, 1923, and as well as the London booking the show also went to Brighton, running for 593 performances in all.

On August 13th, 1923, their engagement having terminated, Whiteman and the band

boarded the S.S. Leviathon and returned to the United States where Mike Pingatore resumed his post with the band.

In the autumn
of 1923, after
returning from the
tour and getting
back to work, it was
then that the N.B.C.
approached him
with their idea far a
musical program
featuring banjos, as
a result of Mr.



Reser and an early 1930's version of the Eskimos

Whenever Reser was asked about his recording days, he said he always had to dig quite hard into his memory, especially as far as the twenties were concerned, This was because the recording sessions were not anything particular for him. He was paid a flat fee for each date, and without the incentive of so much as a record royalty, he was only interested in grinding out the dates as fast as they could possibly be booked. In

(The Great Harry Reser continued on page 26)



# RESER ORCHESTRAS OF THE 20'S AND 30'S

The Original Eskimos, 1925. Note the variety of unusual Paramount banjos

A circa 1931 version of the Eskimos. This photo was taken on the set of a Vitaphone movie short the band was making at the time.





Harry Reser photographs in this magazine appear through the courtesty of Wayne Phillips, Gerry Armstrong and International Banjo Magazine

An enlarged late 1920's Eskimo Orchestra. Notice the more modern (for the

FIGA NEWS

A leter 1930's Reser dance orchestra. Notice his banjo on a stand in playing position in front of the microphone, which was his common practice.

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(Continued from page 23)

fact, he kept no permanent record of the sessions he did, and never bought his own records.

In April 1936 when to all intents purposes the Eskimos really became disbanded, we recounted how the personnel changed, as did the

name of the band, and also that a spring tour had been booked, in addition to the one in 1934. The new band engaged on a considerable amount of onenighting, and played more or less protracted dates. traveling. coupled with being featured on N.B.C. radio also. continued until 1939 and he played just about all over the country.



A newspaper photo shows the Eskimos performing atop a double-decker bus in New York City

"The decline of the banjo might have been stayed further but the low average of musicianship among players prevented that. The average player did not know how to cope with the situation so the banjo died a premature death. Is that what is going to happen to the guitar?

"Again in my estimation, a. change in the music cycle and a low average of player ability are responsible for the elimination of the guitar from some well-known combinations. As it is almost a necessity to have at least four brass and four saxes in arranging for and playing scored swing, many leaders have decided to keep the reeds and brass intact and dispense with the guitarist who may be pounding out a muffled rhythm that can't be heard ten feet from the band stand. Granted that the leader has the right to choose his own instrumentation, I still maintain that a guitarist who plays intelligently, reads music, not just symbols, has a basic understanding of harmony, can

improvise attractive backgrounds for vocal solos, and in general stand out in the composite appeal picture of his unit, will make it very difficult for the said leader to employ a brass man in his place

"Let us all resolve to get busy now and raise the plectrum guitar to the level of a solo and rhythm

instrument that cannot be dispensed with, no matter what the coming changes in music cycles. Let's not allow 'player carelessness' to be the reason for the exit of the guitar as in case of the banjo I but study and really master the instrument."

wrote Harry Reser in 1939. Little did he know or realize - and yet maybe he did - just how the

guitar would be played today by some members of the "pop"scene, although he lived long enough to see much which must have made him raise his cyebrows. His article shows an acute understanding of what was needed and what had to be done, and the basic principles of his argument are just as valid today, if not more so, as they were then.

It was shortly after January 1939, that Reser decided to leave New York, together with his family, and move to Miami, Florida. This was the start of the travelling "bug' which was to assail him at regular intervals until his death. In Miami he conducted the stage band at the Olympia Theatre and also had a radio show. After three years, however, he felt the need to return home again to New York. Once more he plunged into the world of hotels, night clubs, dance halls and radio broadcasts as featured soloist with many groups

(The Great Harry Reser continued on page 27)

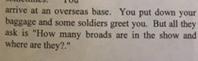
(Continued from page 26) and artists.

He continued in New York into 1944 when he returned to Miami, playing at various hotels etc., and 1947 sees him back again in New York where he had a year's recording contract for Cliquot.

Once again he went to Miami before finally returning to New York during 1948 at which time he had a very successful trio, playing all the seasonal places such as Saratoga Springs and Syracuse.

Just about 1951/2 he went on a U.S.A./U.S.O. tour of all the radar sites on the East Coast, something he loved doing, playing for audiences of servicemen. He also entertained them in the local New York hospital. He said "It kind of humbles you sometimes. You

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During 1952 he broadcast from Boston on their local station for the Cliquot Club Eskimos, once a week for a year, arranging and playing. In 1953 he spent two years at C.B.S. and also did two shows, one being the George Skinner show with Bob Eberly and Mort Lindsay the conductor. The other was the Robert Q. Lewis show (who in 1977 was in Los Angeles with a show).

1954 saw him on a U.S.O. tour of Japan and in 1956 he made his "Happy Days" L.P. before departing on another U.S.O. tour to France and Germany. He reported to his friend, Horst Lange, "I had a U.S.O. unit of three people playing U.S.A. military installations - I didn't get to Berlin!" He

arrived back at his home and set out for Alaska. He also took in Korea about this time.

Between these tours, and on into the early sixties, he played a few Broadway shows (he enjoyed these as they were close to home), among which were "Kiss Me Kate", "Carnival" (this lasted two years and he featured guitar, violin and banjo). and "Sophie"



a logical step for Reser to become actively engaged in this particular sphere. He became featured banjoist on Sammy Kaye's "Music from Manhattan" show which was put out at 10 o'clock every Saturday night on that A.B.C. network, and it was on this program that he played many of the other instruments on which he was also very proficient. It was, of course, the tenor banjo on which he was chiefly employed with the Sammy Kaye show, always having a regular spot to display his expertise. He would quite often play requests from listeners too.





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(Continued from page 27)

Reser said of this show, "Like Lombardo and Welk, Sammy has the very thing I never had a form of sticking to good solid melody. It keeps him popular year in and year out." He greatly admired the Kaye style because of this, and would

have been the last to admit that his own popularity was equal to Kaye's if not greater in his own heyday. As far as "solid melody" was concerned, he had turned out some of the finest stuff ever in this respect, over a great many years.

In August 1959, he made his second L.P., "The Vamp", as well as

playing mandolin for the Jackie Gleason album. He continued to tour and play dates, and the next major event we come to is in June 1962 when he made his third and last L.P., "Banjos Back To Back". Also about this time, he was commissioned to write some tutors for Music Publishers Holding Co. (Warner Bros.), ostensibly those which were handled by the Remick Music Corp. At the end of 1963, the "bug" bit him again and had was planning to take his wife on a tour of the Far East. His daughters having married, there were now only two of them of course. Places on the agenda included Japan, Hong Kong, Bangkok and Singapore.

Whether or not at this time he knew that rehearsals for the show "Fiddler On The Roof" were going to start in July 1964 is uncertain. Nevertheless, start they did and Reser was engaged together with twenty-seven other musicians. For this particular job, he switched from the banjo back to guitar, the instrument he first learned to play. He also featured mandolin and lute

The show opened on September 22nd, 1964, at the theatre on 45thStreet, west of Broadway. Reser-

never missed a performance, and maintained the same high level of attendance as with the Cliquox Club Eskimos on the radio In May 1965 he made a short tour of Europe with his wife and Geraldine

On Monday, September 27th, 1965, he

showed up at the orchestra pit to check instrument music well before the rest of the orchestra. At 8:00 p.m. he collapsed and died in the pit where other early arrivals found him He was 69 years of age. His body was removed to Bellvue Morgue at 8:20 p.m. and at 8:30 p.m. the curtain rose with the

audience completely unaware of the tragedy which had taken place. (This story represents excerpts of W. W. Triggs book, THE GREAT HARRY RESER, available at \$47.00, "Gnomebillan D", 29, Middulmead, Stratton-on-the Fosse, Nr. Bath BA3 4QH, Sommerset, England)





A rare snapshot of Reser and his orchestra on stage in the late 1930's



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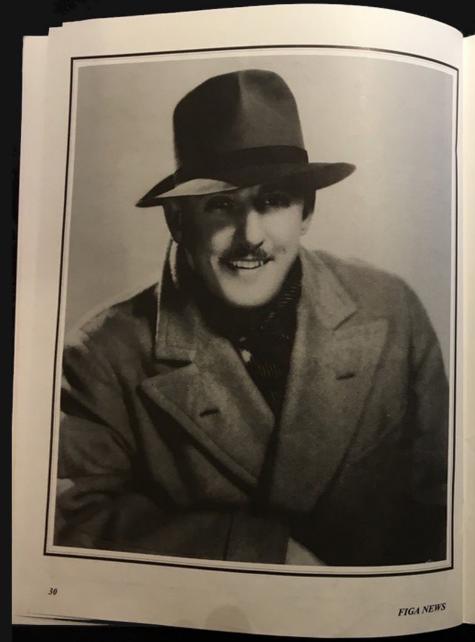
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My Dad...

## Harry Reser

As we commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Harry Reser, we are treated here to a rare glimpse into the personal life of this musical legend. This interview with Gerry Armstrong, Harry Reser's daughter, was conducted on May 31, 1982 VINTERNATIONAL BANJO Magazine's assistant editor Randy Morris and editor Pat Terry, Jr., and is reprinted here with their permission.

Randy: Pat and I are both very happy that you consented to do this interview and talk about your dad.

Gerry: I'll tell you one thing - Pat has gotten me into things that I never knew existed. I'm in a room now with more momentos, pictures and scrap books you wouldn't believe it! He forced me into the trunk! (laughter)

Randy: Well, that kind of thing is very interesting to all of us. I'm about the same age as Pat is - I'm 30 - and I've been listening to Harry Reser records since I was a kid, which for a kid growing up in the 50's was kind of unusual.

Gerry: I would say so!

Randy: But, I used to go to the Salvation Army store and buy old records because they were just interesting to me. I found some Harry Reser records and really liked the sound of them a lot. I've gotten to the point now where I've got a pretty good size collection.

Gerry: Oh, that's interesting.

Randy: It's amazing how much he accomplished in a lifetime and still had a family too!

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Gerry: I would say! Yes.

Randy: Can you tell us a little about your family?

Gerry: I do have an older sister. She's married to a colonel in the Air Force who's been retired. And that's all. I have no brothers.

Randy: I remember asking Pat this question because his dad plays the banjo too, and although he was a little younger, he played the banjo during the same period. What did you think about growing up as the daughter of a musician? Did it seem any different than the other kids?

Gerry: Digging into all of these momentos and things it brings out some thoughts. Both my husband and I realized, as we dug deeper in, why I have some of the feelings that I do. One of them was, for instance: I was sitting at our house one day and there were people staring at me. I guess it was like driving through Beverly Hills and see the star's homes. But, I felt I was being looked at. It's probably difficult for you to comprehend, but at that time it was like being the daughter of Maynard Ferguson or something. And that was unusual because I never wanted people to know who I was.

Another thing, I don't know that my father ever made a graduation of mine, and frequently as musicians do, worked through holidays. So, usually my mother would pack my sister and I up to where he was appearing and had our Christmas in the hotel room with the tree and so forth. So, that was a little

(My Dad. Harry Reser continued on page 32)

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(Continued from page 31)

Randy: I know that feeling well. I've worked every New Year's Eve since I was fifteen! (laughter)

Gerry: You may not work all year but you'll work at New Year's Eve!

Randy: Well you know, somebody of your father's caliber probably had more work than he knew what to do with.

Gerry: Yes, he did. That's right.

Randy: From the pictures you sent it seems that he really liked to do the U.S.O.

Gerry: It was his love. He really enjoyed that. I found some things here that he frequently performed at an Army hospital near New York City. He was very aware of the veterans. I think the happiest part of his life was with the U.S.O. tours - and he made several. He went to the Alaska command, to Greenland, Europe and Japan. He was the leader of the troop and was there with Joe Dimaggio and Marilyn Monroe. He always

got a good response from the soldiers because as he said, "there's always somebody who played the banjo."

Randy: The standard joke about doctor's kids is that they never look at them because he does it for a living. Did your father ever bring much music around the house?

Gerry: No, not really. Neither my sister nor | play, except for piano a little bit. He only had one play, except to grandchild, Bruce, who is a musician in Las Vegas, Fm happy that Bruce is following in my Dad's profession. The fact that he is one among twelve or so conductors in Las Vegas is in itself something am proud of. Bruce plays saxophone and woodwinds currently at the Flamingo Hilton

Speaking of playing a different instrument than my dad's - the following anecdote sums up Bruce's feeling about that. He was on the road with the King Family (Alvino Rey and the King Sisters).

Alvino is a dear friend of my father's and asked Bruce why he didn't play the banjo. He said, "If you were Harry Reser's grandson, would you play the banjo - or another instrument?!" (laughter)

During his prolific period he would say to my mother, "Why don't you take the girls and go to a movie?" just so he could be alone and have peace and quiet so he could think. But I'd have to say that he never brought much music home.

Randy: Well, I can understand that. I'm sure the recording

sessions that he did so many of in the 20s and 30s took place at different hours of the day.

Gerry: Life was a constant change. Sometimes he would go right from one session to another. What is your instrument, Randy?

Randy: The instrument that I play the most right (My Dad . Harry Reser continued on page 33)

now is the piano. The instrument that I played the longest and have a deep and abiding love for is the longest lo although they are incredibly difficult, I still manage to get through them in some fashion! (laughter)

Gerry: You're not the first one I heard say that!

gandy: Your dad's accomplishments are still very remarkable 50 or 60 years later. I think we're just now entering a period of some younger players who have very good and thorough musical backgrounds and technical backgrounds who can even begin to approach the abilities that your dad had. And apparently it was all just natural to him.

Gerry: He always said that he was born with it and he always said that he couldn't take credit for it. He was just born a musician. He had absolute pitch. As a matter of fact, my mother used to play banjo occasionally and many times he'd be in another part of the house and he'd say "Grace, that should be a B natural not a C", or something like that. - and she'd say, "I give up!" (laughter) You could swallow and he'd tell you what key you were in!

And the ability to play came with him but he came with a lot more of it than other musicians, if you know what I mean. His violin teacher, when he was a young boy, told my father that if he would practice he would be a great violinist. But my father never practiced from one lesson to the next and yet he could always pick it up and play.

Randy: Did your dad have a preference for any particular type of music?

Gerry: He loved popular music. Of course, in that era everybody played classical and concert music. But, when he was in Buffalo with the Symphony at the Hippodrome Theater, he made most of his money after hours playing with a little group. He loved the music.

He always was a current person. Anything that happened and that he'd already done, that was it, and he'd move on to the next exciting new thing. He loved "pop" music.

Randy: I'm sure that's kept his edge as a performer all those years, staying with new things that came

Gerry: As a matter of fact, he was at the Steel Pier (at Atlantic City, New Jersey) when Ben Pollack had in his band Harry James as a young boy. My father was playing at the Steel Pier too, and he said, "Now there's a remarkable trumpet player."

Randy: Even though your dad had many tenor banjos solos recorded in the 20's that people are so fascinated with, he also played plectrum banjo a lot. Did he ever express a preference for one over the

Gerry: Not to my knowledge. What ever was required! He was also a great guitar player. I think "Toots" Thielmans can agree with the statement!

Randy: As a record collector, I've tried to find recording of him playing the guitar. Do you know of any?

Gerry: He recorded some things on tape, playing for his own fun. There was an album that he made and he was reluctant to identify himself as a guitar player because of the banjo background, and he's on it as "Mr. Guitar", and if you find some records that have "Mr. Guitar" in quotes it's very likely him. At that time he was so connected with the banjo.

Randy: Can you tell us the story about your father's toupee? I understand that he didn't like wearing it very much.

Gerry: He hated it! He never, ever wore it. He never had much hair anyway. But, when he went to play with Sammy Kaye he had to wear it. Sammy Kaye had a thousand face lifts, you know! And everyone in his orchestra had to have their hair. (laughter) During publicity photos or anything Sammy would say, "Be sure to have that toupee on", so everyone would look "youthful!"

Randy: You sent us a picture of the Jimmy Rogers TV show. That's kind of interesting because that was (My Dad. Harry Reser continued on page 34)



Performing at a U.S.O. show in Formosa - 1955

(Continued from page 33) country-type music. Do you know what Harry's involvement with that was?

Gerry: I think that background was that Jimmy admired my father so he had him appear with him on his show.

Randy: Apparently in the picture, it looks like they're sitting in front of a bunch of giant chord diagrams from a banjo book. Maybe Harry was giving him a lesson! (laughter)

I've talked with people who worked with or met your dad. One guy lives down in Miami and played bass for him in the theater. He was a fine plectrum player himself, and Harry used to always ask him, "Why don't you bring your banjo down here and well do some duets?", and the bass player's comment was, "I wouldn't open my banjo case in the same state with you around!" (laughter)

Gerry: That's funny, because that was the same comment that Arthur Godfrey laughingly made when my father suggested that they played together on his show - and he wouldn't let him on his show! (laughter) Pat: I noticed in some of the photos you sent, especially the ones your dad playing for the U.S.O., that he was playing a Vega banjo. What was his connection with the Vega? Was that before he endorsed Gibson?

Gerry: Yes. He was with Paramount at first, then with Vega, and then Gibson. I have some correspondence indicating that the Vega Company disappointed him very much as far as using him in their publicity. He felt that they didn't support him as a Vega guitar user. But, he had a very wonderful relationship with the Gibson Company and the people there. He did go back to Vega subsequently, but switched back and forth. He played a Vega back in the late 50's, but I would say his longest run was with Gibson.

Pat: I noticed on one of these pictures that there are two control knobs on his banjo. Did he use a pickup to electrically amplify his banjo?

Gerry: Yes, he did. There was a very interesting article he was quoted in the late 30's on how (Continued on page 5)



instruments were going to be electrified. He really was a forerunner of that.

Pat: Do you think that might have been an offshoot

Pat: Do you think that might have been an offshoo of electric guitar?

Gerry: I don't know. He did a lot of things himself. He was a little inventive, and experimented in electronics. It's probably his fault what happened to the world of music! (laughter) But, he was always electronically minded.

Pat: Did he have any formal training in electronics?

Gerry: No, not really. He was a very curious man; always interested in the latest thing. I can see where his mind went to that. He saw that instruments would eventually be electrified, so he did it. Pat: Looking back, what are some of the fond memories that you have of your father?

Gerry: My fond memory of my father is that he had a terrific sense of humor. He was always a very up person; he was not a downer at all. He was fun to be with and travel with. I gave him his only grandchild, so that was great. And I have some wonderful tapes of him and my son playing, and so forth. I just always look at him with joy and think that he was a wonderful person. It was wonderful to be his daughter.

Pat: His joy and happiness reflected in his music, didn't it?

Gerry: Yes, I think so. In preparing for this interview, you really gave me a job. Everything is spread out here in this room! But, I've enjoyed it

(My Dad. Harry Reser continued on page 36)



Jimmie Rodgers Television Show - August 18, 1959

FIGA NEWS

(Continued from page 35)

because I've read articles and opinions about him that have just born out my feelings about him.

He was a very quiet man. He didn't blow his own horn, and everyone seemed to know that he was a great talent without telling anybody - which he never did. It's been very nice reading about him again. And I realize that he wasn't a bitter man. He had accomplished all he wanted to. He just looked back at life contentedly, and that was great. So, I have to thank you for having me dig back and finding out about him all over again.

Randy: Is there anything else that you would like to add about your father for this interview?

Gerry: Well, as far as factual information, I guess Bill Triggs got it all. I don't know what I could add to it other than as far as I'm concerned, he was the greatest father in the world - not just the greatest banjo player.

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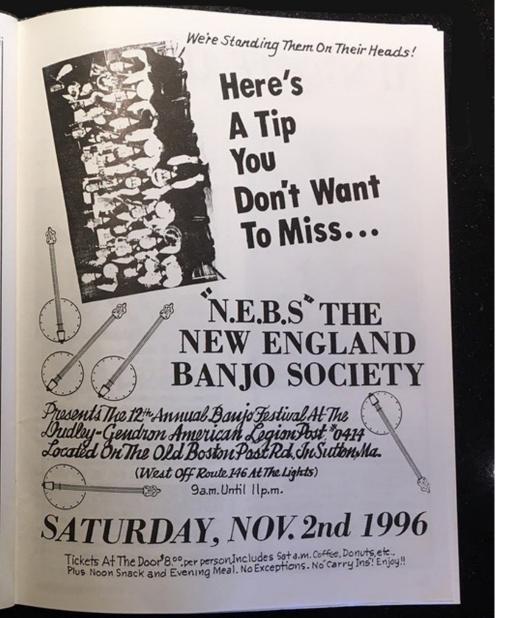
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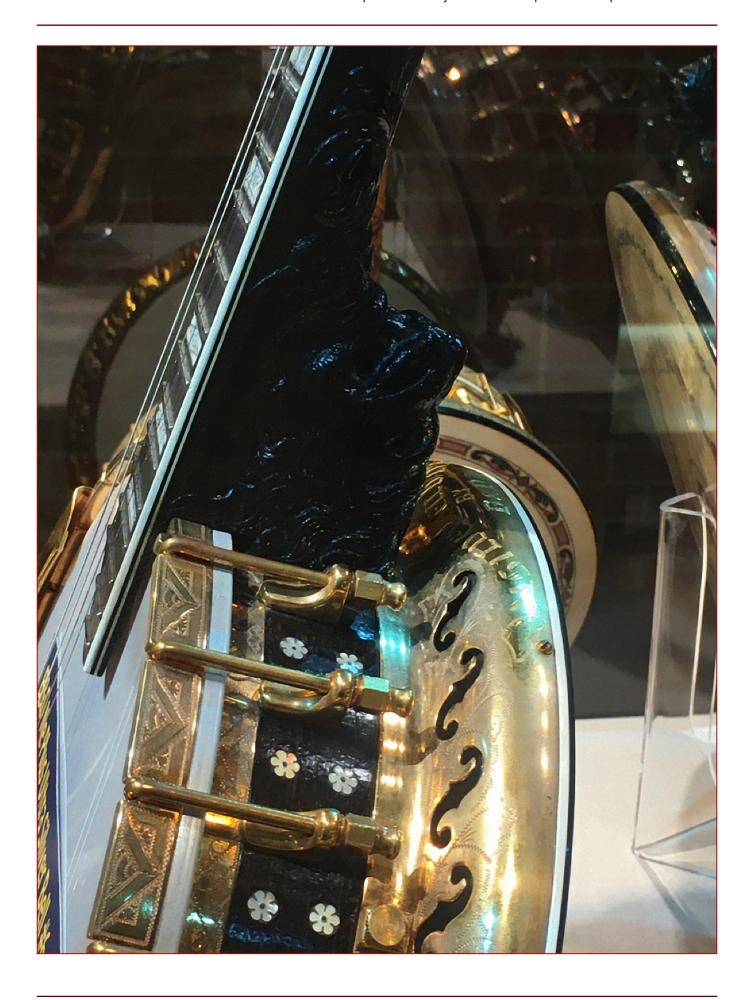
Twenty years ago the cover of FIGA Magazine featured The Happy Mandolins of Fresno. News items included: Fourteen year old Scotty Plummer was appearing as a headliner on the "Bob Hope" show April 7, 1976. - Charlie Tagawa reporting news from the Peninsula Banjo Band presenting their fourth annual Banjo Jubilee in Palo Alto. The show had a bi-centennial theme. Richelieu presented Don van Palthe with the famous "Bi-centennial Model" plectrum banjo. - Lowell Schreyer's Banjo World discussed the full-length fifth string on the banjo. - Elizabeth Veilleux newspaper article about Walter Kaye Bauer was excerpted touting the accomplishments and character that is Walter. - Ernie Peisker discussed uneven forces upon the banjo bridge and the resulting tilting. - The Providence Mandolin Orchestra gave its first concert on April 25. - The Takoma Mandoleers played a week long series of concerts at the Kennedy center.





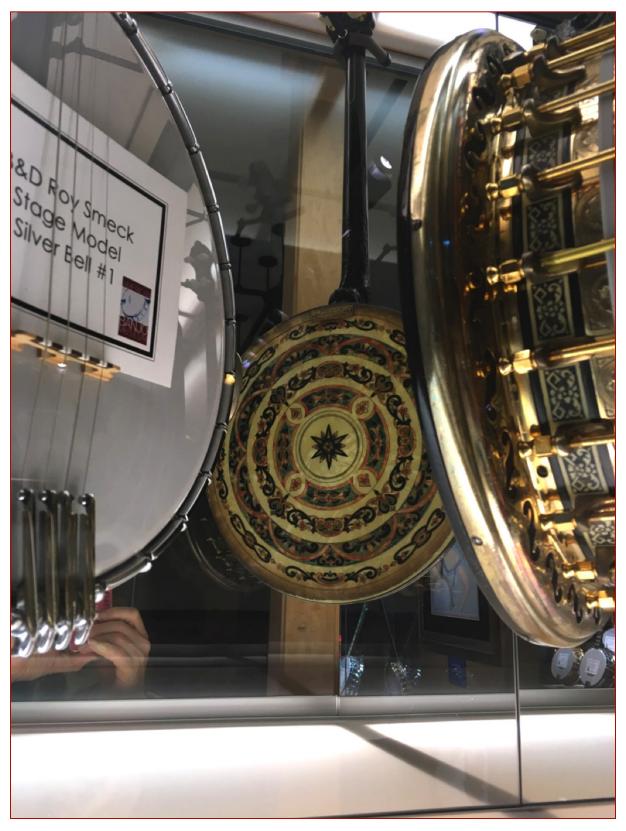








Cordier 'Oettinger' typique des banjos Bacon & Day. Adolph J. Oettinger étant un partenaire de la Vega Company. Ce même cordier sera aussi présent sur les banjos Vega de la même époque. (voir aussi le dossier Framus, MiM, 2019)



Banjos Bacon & Day 'Silver Bell' exposés à l'*American Banjo Museum*. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Photo : G. De Smaele, 2019.



Les Bacon & Day à cinq cordes hauts de gamme, avec manche original à cinq cordes, sont assez peu courants.

On peut se rendre aux Rallyes de l'ABF pour en voir et en entendre.

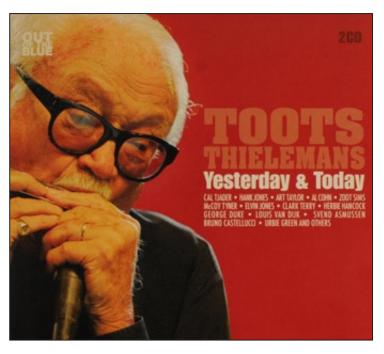
Photos : G. De Smaele, 2017.

#### Remarque: Toots Thielemans<sup>39</sup> – la musique nord-africaine – Wiet van de Leest

En août 2021, la RTBF a diffusé sur 'Auvio' *Toot'Suite*, un documentaire sur Toots Thielemans (Fred Van Besien, David Lachterman et Richard Wandel, 1984). On le voit notamment en présence de Charlie Parker (1920-1955). À la séquence suivante [*time code* 22:25], il joue accompagné par Harry Reser (1896-1965) au banjo plectrum [22 barrettes], instrument dont il est largement question dans ce dossier.



https://www.rtbf.be/culture/musique/detail\_toots-thielemans-l-incroyable-destin-d-un-ketje-debruxelles?id=10828265



## https://www.discogs.com/fr/Toots-Thiele-mans-Yesterday-Today/release/3932853

Pour le titre *Dynamite* (1/6), Thielemans est accompagné au banjo par Harry Reser.

La biographie de H. Reser, établie par W. Triggs (London: H.G. Waker Ltd, 1978), mentionne l'enregistrement de quatre titres de Toots Thielemans avec Harry Reser, à New York, pour le label MGM, le 6 décembre 1952: Dynamite, I'll Be Yours, Jazz Me Blues, Smoke Rings.

Pour terminer, n'oublions pas de signaler que la banjo ténor s'est très fort implanté dans la musique traditionnelle nord-africaine, et de nous souvenir également de son utilisation en Belgique par Wiet Van de Leest, un des membres fondateurs du groupe **RUM**, un trio

de musique traditionnelle flamande qui connut ses heures de gloire dans les années 1970 : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2n8FElUtMPg

<sup>39</sup> Gérard De Smaele. En marge de l'exposition "Toots Thielemans 100' à la KBR." *Le Canard Folk*, juillet 2022.

#### Notre exemplaire

Il provient de chez Phil Alexander, un marchand établi à Londres, dernier successeur de la maison créé par John Alvey Turner, précédemment voisine du British Museum. Les activités de ce commerce ont repris dans le quartier de Camden. Turner et Clifford Essex étaient jusque dans les années 1970 restés les deux seuls marchands spécialisés en banjos en Europe.

C'est un rare Bacon & Day 'Silver Bell' n° 2, à cinq cordes, portant le numéro de série # 24282. Il date de 1927. Il est entièrement original et est conforme à la description du catalogue de 1928.

La base de données établie par Polle Flaunoe – <a href="http://www.acoustudio.dk/BD">http://www.acoustudio.dk/BD</a> and <a href="Bacon\_database.">Bacon\_database.</a> <a href="http://www.acoustudio.dk/BD">httml</a> and <a href="Bacon\_database.">Bacon\_database.</a> <a href="http://www.acoustudio.dk/BD">httml</a> and <a href="Bacon\_database.">Bacon\_database.</a> <a href="http://www.acoustudio.dk/BD">http://www.acoustudio.dk/BD</a> and <a href="Bacon\_database.">Bacon\_database.</a> <a href="http://www.acoustudio.dk/BD">http://www.acoustudio.dk/BD</a> and <a href="Bacon\_database.">Bacon\_database.</a> <a href="http://www.acoustudio.dk/BD">http://www.acoustudio.dk/BD</a> and <a href="https://www.acoustudio.dk/BD">Bacon\_database.</a> <a href="https://www.acoustudio.dk/BD">https://www.acoustudio.dk/BD</a> and <a href="h

La structure du Bacon & Day est encore de nos jours – avec Gibson et Vega – la première référence pour les banjos à quatre cordes. Voir les catalogues actuels de Ome et de Pietsch.

Si les cinq cordes de Gibson ont la faveur pour le *bluegrass*, les Bacon & Day sont toujours, à l'instar de Fred Bacon et de Frank Bradbury, un premier choix pour le *classic style*. Aujourd'hui, avec le CD *Mozart of the Banjo*, c'est Aaron Lewis qui nous le rappelle :

https://aaronjonahlewis.com/

#### Photos de notre exemplaire.









Photos: P. Alexander, 2021.



Bacon & Day 'Silver Bell' Banjo Club, 1925. ABF's 50th Anniversary Calendar, 1998.

#### Bibliographie:

- Emile Grimshaw. *Plectrum Banjo Playing: A Modern Method*. London: Clifford Essex, s.d. (années 1920).
- Emile Grimshaw. *How to Excell on the Banjo*. London: Clifford Essex, s.d. (années 1920), 51 p. [voir le dossier sur le banjo classique remis au MiM en 2021]
- Rob MacKillop. "Tenor and Plectrum Banjo." <a href="https://robmackillop.net/tenor-banjo/">https://robmackillop.net/tenor-banjo/</a>
- Paramount Banjos: Piano Volume and Harp Quality Tone. New York: William L. Lange, ca. 1925, 80 p. [catalogue de vente]
- Harry Reser. Banjo Crackerjacx, 1922-1930. Yazoo Records L-1048, 1975
- William W. Triggs. The Great Harry Reser. London: Henry G. Waker, 1978, 200 p.
- Ron Hinkle. *The Plectrum Banjo Beyond Chord Melody*. Huntsville AL: BMC Music, 2011, 110 p.
- Banjo! Bruxelles: Musée des Instruments de Musique, 2003, 92 p. [catalogue de l'exposition]

#### En marge de l'exposition "Toots Thielemans 100" à la KBR



#### Liens entre Toots Thielemans, Harry Reser et un banjo plectrum Paramount conservé au MIM

par Gérard De Smaele

Jon Tilmans Trio (sic.). *The Jazz Me Blues*. MGM Records 11289, s.d. (1952). Ce trio est composé de T. Thielemans (hca), D. Hymans (org) et de H. Reser (bjo). (Exemplaire destiné à la promotion)

Nous avons d'une part les banjos à cinq cordes et d'autre part ceux à quatre cordes (1), qui font respectivement partie de contextes et d'univers musicaux bien distincts. Les premiers, d'origine plus ancienne, se rapportent au domaine du *minstrel banjo*, du banjo dit 'classique, de la musique *old time* du Sud des Etats-Unis et du *bluegrass*; les seconds nous ramènent vers le *jazz* traditionnel et la musique de dance de l'entre-deux guerres. Sans vouloir nous répandre dans une analyse plus approfondie, il nous a semblé intéressant de relater un fait -que d'aucuns considèreront peut-être de nature anecdotique- relatif aux débuts de la carrière de Toots Thielemans (2) (Bruxelles, 1922 – Bruxelles, 2016) aux États-Unis : celui d'une brève collaboration, peu mise en évidence, entre notre compatriote et Harry Reser (Piqua, OH, 1896 – New York, NY, 1965), un des plus illustres joueurs de banjos à quatre cordes -ténor et plectrum- de l'histoire de ces instruments. Elle se rapporte, semble-il, aux tout premiers enregistrements réalisés par Toots Thielemans aux Etats-Unis, en 1952.

Harry Reser fut, et demeure encore plus de cinquante ans après sa disparition, une des personnalités les plus marquantes du banjo à quatre cordes. On pourrait le comparer à un maître de la stature d'un Django Reinhard (1910-1953), né lui aussi en Belgique et qui rappelons-le a débuté sa carrière de guitariste au banjo-guitare.

Avec la ferme intention d'introduire quelques banjos significatifs au MiM, j'avais ces dernières années acquis quatre instruments (3). Le choix de l'un d'entre eux avait clairement été motivé par son lien avec Harry Reser, dont la photo se retrouve en bonne place dans plusieurs catalogues et revues des années 1920-1930 (4). Le plus ancien d'entre ces documents provient de la firme Paramount (5), la manufacture de William Lange, implantée à New York après avoir succédé à Buckbee, le plus gros producteur de banjos des années 1860 à 1890 (6). La photo de Reser y est accompagnée de la notice suivante : « Harry Reser is without question one of the world's most brilliant artist on the plectrum and tenor banjo ». D'autres photos et commentaires élogieux se retrouvent dans le catalogue de ce fabricant. Plus tard, le catalogue Gibson de 1930-31 le présentera en ces termes : « Harry Reser [...]. Considered by many to be the world's premier banjoist."

L'American Banjo Museum (implanté à Oklahoma City, OK) -initialement focalisé sur les banjos à quatre cordes de l'entre-deux guerres- met particulièrement bien en évidence les noms de Harry Reser et de Eddie Peabody (1902-1970) un autre as du plectrum.

D'autre part, les travaux de l'Anglais William Triggs (7) soulignent à leur tour l'importance de Reser. Pour se faire une idée sur le personnage, il suffit d'écouter une sélection de ses meilleurs titres enregistrés dans les années 1920, réédités en 1975 sous le label Yazoo Records, et actuellement accessibles sur internet. Son imposante discographie (plus de mille titres) fut enregistrée sous son propre nom, mais aussi sous divers pseudonymes (8). Sur la pochette de la compilation éditée par Yazoo, l'artiste est représenté avec le banjo Paramont 'plectrum', ce qui avait clairement orienté mon choix. Acquis par les Amis des Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire en 2021, cet instrument a récemment été intégré aux collections du MiM (9).







Catalogue Paramount des années 1920

La rencontre entre le Belge Toots Thielemans (1922-2016) et le banjoiste américain Harry Reser (1896-1965), représente probablement un épisode méconnu de la carrière de ces deux musiciens prolifiques.

Après un premier voyage en 1948, Thielemans est retourné s'établir durablement aux USA fin 1951. Six mois après avoir obtenu sa Green Card, le syndicat des musiciens lui délivrera enfin l'autorisation de gagner de l'argent avec sa musique (10). Aucune date n'est mentionnée sur le label des disques du Jon Tilman's Trio en 1952 (avec le pianiste-organiste Dick Hyman et le banjoïste Harry Reser): *Dynamite, I'll Be Yours, Jazz Me Blues et Smoke Rings* (11). Le premier de ces titres est repris dans *Yesterday & Today*, une compilation éditée en 2012 (12). Bien que la date du 6 décembre soit avancée par W. Triggs, elle a sans doute été confondue avec celle de la parution d'une annonce parue dans l' hebdomadaire américain *The Billboard Magazine*, alors qu'une mention du même trio apparaissait déjà dans le numéro du 26 juillet 1952.



The Billboard Magazine:

A gauche : mention de *Smoke Rings* et de *The Jazz Me Blues*. Ed. du 26 juillet 1952, p. 42.

A droite : annonce de *Dynamite* et de *I'll Be Yours*. Ed. du 6 décembre 1952 (la date avancée par

Triggs), p. 20. A consulter dans :

https://worldradiohistory.com/Archive-All-Music/Billboard-Magazine.htm



Par ailleurs, une éloquente photo apparaît dans Toot'Suite, le documentaire sur Toots Thielemans réalisé en1984 par Fred Van Besien, David Lachterman et Richard Wandel (13).



Toots Suite, documentaire de 1984 : Toots Thielemans, Dick Hyman (un brillant pianiste de jazz, né en 1927) et Harry Reser, en 1952

Apparemment, ces disques sont peu connus, et ne révèlent certainement pas tout du talent de Reser. Ils ne sont d'ailleurs pas repris dans la dernière compilation des premiers enregistrements de Toots Thielemans, sortie chez Frémeaux & Associés en 2022 (14).

Il est à noter que Toots Thielemans avait déjà auparavant travaillé en Europe avec Benny Goodman, et enregistré en 1951 en Suède avec le banjoïste Sven Fred Gunnar Stiberg (1914-1992). Van Eps (1878-1960), le grand virtuose du banjo à cinq cordes dit 'classique' (15) , reconverti à la guitare, a aussi enregistré aux USA avec Benny Goodman, tandis que son fils Georges Van Eps (1913-1988) -un éminent guitariste, inventeur d'une guitare à sept cordes qui fut produite par Gibson- fit lui aussi plus tard, également partie de son orchestre.

Aux États-Unis, le folk revival prit son grand envol en 1956. Les années précédentes, des personnalités comme Alan Lomax (1915-2002) et Pete Seeger (1919-2014) -tête de proue de ce mouvement-, avaient pour leur part très sérieusement pavé le chemin. Toots Thielemans les a-t-il côtoyés ? Nous sommes ici dans un domaine différent du jazz, mais non pas sans liens entre eux. De surcroit, ces deux genres musicaux uniront finalement leurs forces pour soutenir la défense des civils rights. Le 28 août 1963, tous se retrouveront côte-à-côte dans le sillage du révérend Martin Luther King, lors de la marche vers Washington...

Étant un joueur de 5-cordes, cette ébauche d'article sort de mon principal centre d'intérêt. Il n'a par ailleurs aucune prétention 'scientifique'. Elle vise simplement à porter à la connaissance du public que le musicien célébré cette année à la KBR -presque sous mes pieds (voir note 2)- a commencé sa carrière discographique aux USA par une collaboration tout aussi prestigieuse que les autres, qui du point de vue d'un banjoïste, mérite toute notre attention. C'est aussi le lien qui explique comment un banjo plectrum Paramount 'Style C' a pu finir sa course dans les collections du MiM. Dommage qu'il n'ait pu trouver sa place dans l'exposition. Son histoire n'en est pas finie pour autant !



 $\mbox{\tt \# Harry Reser}\xspace$  [... ]. Considered by many to be the world's premier banjoist."

Gibson's Catalog. Kalamazoo, MI: Gibson, 1930-31, p. 7. [Plus cher que le 'Florentine' -\$ 450.00-, le 'All American' -\$ 550.00- était le modèle le plus élaboré de la marque : une somme rondelette pour l'époque ! Les banjos haut de gamme de Bacon & Day (16) ont atteint jusqu'à deux fois ce prix, mais il semblerait que Reser ne les ait jamais utilisés.]



Le banjo plectrum Paramount 'Style C'. New York, ca. 1924, une marque endorsée par Harry Reser dans les années 1920. Acquis pour le MiM par les Amis des MRAH.



Harry Reser à la Une du BMG Magazine. Vol. LIII / 613, May 1956. Il tient ici un banjo Vega à quatre cordes

#### Autres sources à consulter

Harry Reser's Discography:

https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/mastertalent/detail/106771/Reser\_Harry

Harry Reser:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry\_Reser

Harry Reser's Manual of Tenor Banjo Technique. New York: Robbins Music Corporation, 1927.

Harry Reser, Paramount Banjo Method. New York: Paramount, ca. 1924.

Gerry Armstrong. "My Dad Harry Reser." In F.I.G.A., July-August 1996, pp. 30-36.

Marc Danval. Toots Thielemans. Racine / Lannoo, 2006.

Thielemans, Jean Baptiste, dit 'Toots' (1922-2016):

https://wallonica.org/blog/2019/08/27/thielemans-jean-baptiste-dit-toots-1922-2016/

William.W.Triggs. "The Great Harry Reser." In F.I.G.A., July-August 1996, pp. 20-28,

William.W.Triggs. Harry Reser: Tenor Banjo Legend: 26 Virtuoso Solos for Tenor Banjo. Pacific, MO: Mel Bay Publications, ca. 2006.

#### **Notes**

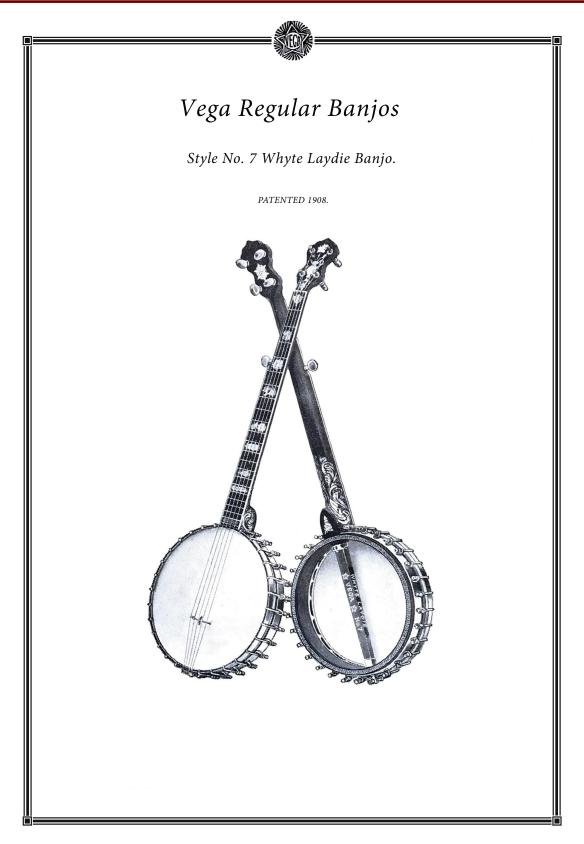
- (1) Le ténor (19 barrettes), accordé en quintes et le plectrum (22 barrettes), accordé comme un cinq cordes, sont des banjos joués au plectre. De 1920 à 1940, ce seront les principaux modèles du second âge d'or de la fabrication du banjo, ce que montent clairement les catalogues de vente des grands fabricants de cette époque (voir note 3).
- (2) Pour la petite histoire, j'ai travaillé 25 ans Place du Musée à Bruxelles, dans l'atelier de restauration du Cabinet des estampes de la KBR, à l'étage situé juste au-dessus des Appartements de Charles de Lorraine, où l'exposition 'Toots 100 : The Sound of a Belgian Legend' se déroule actuellement, du 22.04 au 31.08.2022. Le comité organisateur de cette exposition n'a malheureusement pas souhaité s'attarder sur Harry Reser.
- (3) G. De Smaele. Banjo à cinq cordes. Description de quatre banjos acquis pour le MiM par les Amis des MRAH. 2022 ; Notices 'Carmentis' provisoire des banjos conservés au MiM. [documents Internes]. Voir aussi les catalogues des maisons Gibson (1930-31, 1932, 1937) et Vega (voir : Dépôt d'une série de copies de catalogues anciens déposée au MiM en 2021), ainsi que les revues éditées par ces mêmes manufactures.
- (4) dans les années 1920-1930 : *The Crescendo* (The Vega Co.), *Mastertone* (The Gibson Co.), *The Voice of Vega*, ainsi que *The Silver Bells News* (The Bacon Co.)...
- (5) Paramount Banjos. New York: William L. Lange, 1920's, 80 p.
- (6) Reginald Bacon. Chauncey Richmond & The Old Buckbee. Newburyport MA: Variety Arts Press, 2018, 224 p.
- (7) William W. Triggs. The Great Harry Reser. London: Henry G. Waker, 1978, 200 p.
- (8) Voir les rééditions par Neovox Tapes, les collections de l'Université de Santa Barbara et celle de Lucas Ross déposée à l' American Banjo Museum.
- (9) MiM Inv. 2021.0108.002. Voir: G. De Smaele. Notices Carmentis provisoires des banjos conservés au MiM. 2022; Banjo à cinq cordes. Description de quatre banjos acquis pour le MiM par les Amis des MRAH. 2022. [documents internes]
- (10) Catalogue de l'exposition Toots 100: The Sound of a Belgian Legend. Bruxelles, KBR, 2022.
- (11) Références discographiques: MGM Records 11289 [52S226 et 228] et 11373 [52S227 et 229] ; disques 78t/m, 10".
- M-G-M -'Mighty Good Music'- est en fait le sigle de la société Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer, dont MGM Records était un département.

La section de la musique de la KBR conserve ces deux disques : MGM Records, *Jon Tilmans Trio*, New York. Fonds Toots Thielemans : Toots V/1/15 Mus., V/4/1 Mus., V/4/2 Mus. La fiche de son catalogue OPAC ne mentionne pas Harry Reser.

Les archives de MGM ne renseignent pas de date. Voir : https://www.78discography.com/MGM11000.htm W. Triggs mentionne la date du 9 décembre 1952 pour le MGM 11373, et 'Much has to be learned about the above' pour le MGM 11289.

- (12) Yesterday & Today (Out of the Blue, 2012) est une compilation d'enregistrements de Toots Thielemans, dans laquelle on retrouve le titre *Dynamite* (1/6), une de ses compositions, pour laquelle il est accompagné au banjo par Harry Reser.
- (13) La Fondation Toots Thielemans n'ayant pas répondu à mon appel, il m'est actuellement impossible de vous livrer plus de détails à propos de cette photographie.
- (14) Olivier Julien. Soul Station: The Complete Toots Thielemans, 1952-1961. Vincennes: Frémeaux & Associés, FA5812, 2022
- (15) Gérard De Smaele. The Wayne Adams' Old 'Classic' Banjo Collection. Frémeaux & Associés, FA518, 2022
- (16) Voir le catalogue de l'exposition 'Banjo!'. Bruxelles, le MiM, 2004

### A.C. FAIRBANKS ET VEGA



Catalogue Vega, 1923. Collection G.DS. Gérard De Smaele



Vue intérieure de la caisse. Les deux types de *tone ring* :
À gauche : Fairbanks 'Whyte Laydie', n° 7, ca. 1903 ;
À droite : Vega / Fairbanks 'Tubaphone', n° 3, 1910.
Les souliers des tendeurs sont fixés à un cerceau métallique et ne nécessitent pas le percement de la paroi de la caisse. Ce système fut breveté par David Day¹.
Photo : site web de Elderly Instruments, East Lansing, Michigan.



Fairbanks 'Electric', n° 2, 1892. C'est l'ancienne version du 'Whyte Laydie'.

Cette caisse de type *clad metal rim* est de faible épaisseur et est recouverte d'une feuille de métal. Elle est percée de trous pour permettre la fixation des souliers des tendeurs.

<sup>1</sup> Sous la houlette de David L. Day (1865-1956) l'instrument évoluera vers sa forme moderne. Acteur essentiel de l'industrie du banjo, sa longue carrière, commencée auprès de Fairbanks & Cole en 1883, s'étendra sur 55 années : de Fairbanks à Vega, et finalement en association avec F. Bacon jusqu'en 1938. Les Bacon & Day seront un point culminant du second âge d'or de la fabrication du banjo. De 1905 à 1912 Vega – repreneur de Fairbanks –, avait également été impliqué dans la production du célèbre 'F.F. Professional' à résonateur interne de Bacon. On doit à David Day de nombreuses mises au point et innovations.

#### Introduction

Au début du 20° siècle, vers la fin du premier âge d'or de la fabrication du banjo à cinq cordes 'classique'², et avant la grande vogue des modèles à quatre cordes, les banjoïstes se trouvaient confrontés à des salles de plus en plus grandes. Ne pouvant pas encore disposer des procédés modernes d'amplification, qui n'apparaîtront que dans les années 1930, les musiciens se retrouvaient avec des moyens acoustiques limités. Durant cette période de transition, avant la grande expansion des banjos à quatre cordes – avec résonateur et joués au plectre –, les 'Whyte Laydie'³ et les 'Tubaphone' furent considérés comme les instruments les plus aboutis de cette époque, conciliant belle sonorité et puissance sonore.

Pour rappel, la collection du japonais Akira Tsumura, ainsi que celle de l'American Banjo Museum, se sont d'abord concentrées sur les banjos à quatre cordes de l'entre-deux guerres mondiales. Par contre celle de James Bollman sera exclusivement dédiée aux banjos à cinq cordes du premier âge d'or<sup>4</sup>. Chez lui, l'accent sera mis sur la production de la maison Fairbanks une firme qui après un incendie en 1904, sera finalement absorbée par Vega. Au fil du temps, cette association de la Vega Company avec le banjo se prolongera finalement sur plus d'un siècle<sup>5</sup>.

En dehors des considérations sur l'exceptionnelle qualité du décor de certains Fairbanks et Vega 'de luxe'6, les 'Electric', les 'Whyte Laydie' et les 'Tubaphone'7 demeurent, pour leurs qualités acoustiques, hautement appréciés des musiciens. Des décennies plus tard, lors de l'éclosion du grand *folk revival*, Vega était aux États-Unis restée une des rares maisons à encore proposer des banjos à cinq cordes. Les anciens 'Whyte Laydie' et les 'Tubaphone' seront recherchés et ensuite abondamment copiés par les luthiers nés de ce *folk revival*. Beaucoup de modèles à quatre cordes et de banjos-mandolines des années 1920 et 1930 seront quant à eux convertis en cinq cordes. On les retrouvera, montés de cordes métalliques, sur la scène de la musique *folk* et *old time* traditionnelle. Pete Seeger (1919-2014), qui a inspiré des générations de revivalistes<sup>8</sup>, en sera un des premiers exemples. Cependant, si de nombreux anciens Gibson subirent le même traitement, ce sera surtout pour en faire des instruments destinés à la scène du *bluegrass*.

Bill Michal's Collection: <a href="http://www.banjoonmyknee.com/ws12.html">http://www.banjoonmyknee.com/ws12.html</a>

- 2 Voir le dossier 'Banjo Classique', MiM, 2021.
- 3 Ce banjo sera peu après commercialisé en Angleterre par Clifford Essex, mais peu de temps par après cette maison sortira son 'Concert Grand', un modèle semblable un peu plus massif, très apprécié des banjoïstes classiques. Il sera vendu avec ou sans résonateur. Celui-ci est escamotable.
- 4 Voir les publications de Akira Tsumura et de James Bollman & Phil Gura. Cfr. *A Five-String Banjo Sourcebook* (L'Harmattan, 2018).
- 5 Elias Kaufman a écrit une série d'articles de référence sur Fairbanks et Vega, parus dans *The Five-Stringer*. Voir au MiM les n° 123 à 131, 133 et 135 à 137. Voir aussi les copies de catalogues anciens (dépôt en 2021, et page 216). Mike Holmes a aussi publié des articles de référence dans la revue *Mugwumps*, dont il fut le fondateur.
- 6 Voir au MiM l'article de Shawn McSweeney, paru dans le *Fretboard Journal*, # 24, de janvier 2012 ; et le banjo décoré par Icilio Consalvi (1865-1951) conservé au Museum of Five Arts de Boston : <a href="https://collections.mfa.org/objects/485783">https://collections.mfa.org/objects/485783</a>
- 7 Le tone ring 'Electric' fut introduit par Fairbanks dans les années 1890, le 'Whyte Laydie' en 1901. Le 'Tubaphone' en 1909, après le reprise de Fairbanks par Vega. Ce dernier sera par la suite associé à des manches ténor et plectrum. Finalement le 'Vegaphone' sera équipé d'un résonateur et d'un multi piece flange. Son stade ultime fut le 'Vegavox', un des grandes références du banjo ténor et plectrum.
- 8 Voir : <a href="https://banjonews.com/2014-03/the\_seeger\_long\_neck\_americas\_third\_banjo.html">https://banjonews.com/2014-03/the\_seeger\_long\_neck\_americas\_third\_banjo.html</a>. Pete Seeger est connu pour son *long neck banjo*. C'est un montage semi-artisanal dont la caisse provient d'un ancien Vega 'Tubaphone'. La firme, ainsi que d'autres, a finalement commercialisé ce modèle dans les années 1960. Voir : G. De Smaele, « Le *long neck* » de Pete Seeger, *Le Canard Folk*, juin 2014.



#### Pete Seeger's Banjo

Perhaps the most recognizable and iconic banjo of all time this is Pete Seeger's banjo with his handlettered slogan: "This machine surrounds hate and forces it to surrender." An inscription on the inside reads: "This banjo head played at Nov. 11, 1969 Peace Rally in Washington D.C. — and a million other places. It made some pretty good music, if I say to myself. Pete Seeger, Bacon N.Y. 1984"

The head came to Old Town School via the collection of the Peace Museum. It is attached to a 1962 Pete Seeger model Vega long-neck banjo - identical to the one Pete owned - which is generously loaned to the School by faculty member Skip Landt. Thanks, Pete! Thanks. Skip!

Banjo Vega 'long Neck', 1962, modèle '*Pete Seeger*'<sup>9</sup>. Exposé à la *Old Town School of Folk Music* de Chicago. Photo : G. De Smaele, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Un *long neck* semi-artisanal ayant appartenu à Pete Seeger a été exposé lors de l'exposition *Bob Dylan* à la Cité de la Musique à Paris, vue en 2012, tandis qu'un autre Vega l'a été lors de l'expo « Folk City » au *Museum of the City of New York*, vue en 2015. Ces instruments sont vraiment emblématiques du *folk revival* aux États-Unis.

## PICKIN June 1978 Vol. 5, hos

A HISTORY OF

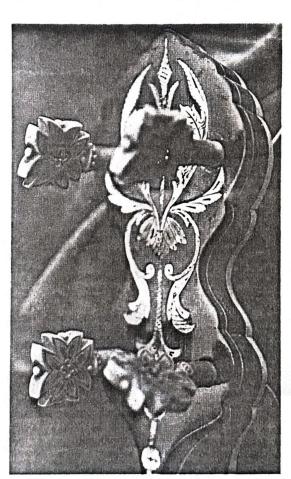
# Fairbanks

by Jim Bollman, Dick Kimmel, and Doug Unger

Banjos built by the A. C. Fairbanks Company around the turn of this century are considered to be among the most beautiful musical instruments ever constructed. During that period the oldworld craftsmen still existed: banjo builders worked at a slow pace carefully constructing rims and necks that were aesthetically pleasing as well as functional. In addition, the "modern banjo" had been developed with a tone-ring of brass that enhanced the instrument's tone. Invariably, conversations among banjo players will turn to these fine old banjos. Classical violinists revere their Strads, Guarneri, and Magginnis. Bluegrass musicians espouse their favorites: prewar Martin Dread-noughts, Gibson F-5 mandolins and Mastertone banjos. But the old Fairbanks and Vega Whyte Laydies, Tubaphones, and Electrics, which serve as standard equipment for the old-time banjo player, stand alone as examples of what the great craftsman could construct from metal, wood, and engraved pearl.

At the present time historical information, particularly about the early years of Fairbanks and Cole, Fairbanks, and Fairbanks-Vega is

scant at best. A few newspaper and trade journal articles, obituaries, advertisements, etc., as well as Christine Merrick Ayars' book Contributions to the Art of Music in America by the Musical Industries in Boston 1640-1936 provided the bulk of the factual data for this project. Further insight was gained from the examination and cataloging of more than 500 banjos built by these companies.



Reverse of peghead, Electric #16153

Albert Conant Fairbanks

Christine Ayars' book offers the following brief biography: "A.C. Fairbanks started alone as a banje manufacturer about 1875. He was a player of the old fivestring banjo with long neck and side peg.\*

"Around 1880 he took in William A. Cole as a partner in Fairbanks and Cole. When the latter left about 1888 (note: the correct date is 1890) the company was changed to A.C. Fairbanks and Company. In 1892 it was simply A.C. Fairbanks. When it was incorporated about 1893 it became A.C. Fairbanks Company, Inc. In March 1904 the company had a disastrous fire. A few months later (note: actually weeks) The Vega Company took over its business and employees."

Despite the dating inaccuracies, Ms. Ayars gives us a good idea of the chronology of the various companies. More information about A.C. Fairbanks can be gleaned from his obituary printed in the Boston Sunday Post on Oc-

tober 12, 1919:

"Mr. Fairbanks was born at Sterling (Mass.) on September 5, 1852. With his parents he moved to Sudbury in 1866 and to Boston in 1868. He worked in the Quincy market

for a year and then from 1870 to 1879 he engaged in the sy ringe business. In 1880 he began the manufacture of ban jos, mandolins, and guitars.

"He served in the City Council of Somerville in 1893 and

\*1875 seems to be a guess. We only know that he started some time between 1875 and 1880

was re-elected in 1894. For the last 13 years he has been associated with the Waterproof Paint Co. of Watertown (Mass.), the past few years as its president.

"He was the first vice-president of the Fairbanks Family of America. He was a member of the Boston Bicycle Club, the Engineers Club, the New England Railroad Club, the Chamber of Commerce, the Sons of the American Revolution, and Soley Lodge of Masons."

Fairbanks was said to have suffered from insomnia. Being a compulsive wood carver and painter, he would often work late into the night carving elaborate designs into the furniture he made. One massive table, which took seven years to complete, was totally carved with fanciful shapes. Using only jackknives, Fairbanks whittled an amazing assortment of pen holders, umbrella handles, and trick carvings such as long, fancy chains. A beautiful jewelry box made for his wife shows inlaying and carving characteristics of the electric model banjos of the early 1890's. Albert Conant Fairbanks died on October 10, 1919 at the age of 67.

#### Fairbanks and Cole

In 1880 Fairbanks entered into a partnership with a well-known Boston music teacher and banjoist, William A. Cole. Cole traveled widely as a member of the Imperial Club, performing on the banjo and presumably doing much of the promotion for the Fairbanks and Cole banjos. A.C. Fairbanks took care of the technical and manufacturing ends of the business along with Cole's brother, Frank. The manufacturing facility remained at 121 Court St., whereas William Cole kept a music studio at 178 Tremont St.

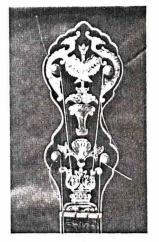
The quality of the Fairbanks and Cole banjos was much improved over Fairbanks' first efforts. In fact, there developed an intense rivalry between Fairbanks and Cole, and S.S. Stewart about whose banjos were better. Fairbanks and Cole went as far as offering a large cash reward if anyone could produce a better sounding banjo. Stewart was incensed at this and later claimed that Fairbanks and Cole refused to meet his instruments in head-on competition. In any case, both companies capitalized on the publicity of this claim. Certainly, both Stewart and Fairbanks and Cole made some of the best banjos of the 1880's.

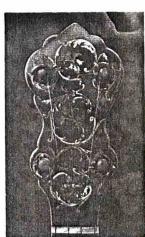
Fairbanks and Cole produced a wide range of banjos in size and style with prices ranging from \$10 to \$100. During the first years of manufacture the banjos usually had no model designation. The banjos were identified only with the manufacturer and serial number stamped on the wooden dowel stick in the rim. Upon occasion a banjo would even leave the shop with no identifying marks whatsoever. In the mid to late 1880's a few of the better grade (Imperial, Expert, and Clipper) were labeled also by model on the dowel stick. An 1889 catalog lists six models: Class A, Expert, Standard, Champion, Acme, and Imperial, each offered in a variety of grades. The least expensive was the Class A which was offered in nine grades ranging in price from \$10 to \$30. The \$10 No. 40, Class A, was made with a rim either of rosewood veneer or spun with German silver, and included dot inlays, 20 brackets, and a walnut neck. The fingerboard, tuning pegs, and a tailpiece were all made of ebony. The \$30 No. 600, Class A, had 32 brackets, a mahogany neck, and carved ivory pegs. One of the top models, a gold-plated Expert with 34 brackets, rosewood neck, and a fancy inlaid fingerboard, was listed for \$90.

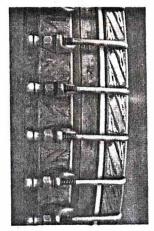
Through serial numbers, it is believed that Fairbanks and Cole produced more than nine thousand banjos from 1880 to 1890. This is assuming that all serial numbers were used and that few instruments were made without serial numbers.

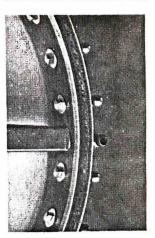
In 1890, Fairbanks and Cole joined with William E. Cole and Charles A. Sanborn, both organ makers by trade, to form "Fairbanks, Sanborn and Cole" manufacturers of bicycles. William Sanborn, like Fairbanks, was a man of varied interests, dealing in real estate, watches, and diamonds, as well as organs and bicycles. Cole apparently dropped out of this partnership in 1891 and the company name changed to Fairbanks, Sanborn and Co. By 1892 William Sanborn had taken control of the bicycle business. For several more years the business remained at the same address as Fairbanks, Sanborn and Co. (145 Columbus Ave.) under the name William E. Sanborn Co. But Fairbanks had not lost his interest in bicycles, for around 1894 he sold his interest in the Fairbanks Banjo Company and started his own bicycle company, The Fairbanks Wood Rim Co. at 5 Appleton St.

It was in 1890 that Fairbanks split with Cole in the banjo business. Each man then started his own company. Little is known about the dissolution of the Fairbanks and Cole









(Top, I-r) Electric #16153; custom grade Tubaphone Deluxe #25349; (Bottom) custom grade Tubaphone Deluxe, rim; high grade Fairbanks Electric, detail of inside rim

Company except that the split between the two principals was less than amicable. A fragment of a letter probably written by Fairbanks to a Mr. John Abbot (possibly Cole's attorney) on June 25, 1891 lists several grievances and replies to some accusations made by Cole and Abbott. The text is as follows:

Dear Sir,

In reply to yours of the 24th will answer three clauses in order:

1st—The advertisement in the N.Y. Clipper ought to have been changed before. I intended having it done some time ago and no doubt it would have been better for me had I done so: still I think I have a legal right to continue it but do not wish to.

2nd—The sign in the doorway simply reads "Fairbanks and Cole Banjos." These I make and have a legal right to make, still I intend putting up a new sign soon.

3rd—The new sign may be conspicuous but simply says "The Fairbanks and Cole Banjos" & c Room 5. The whole trouble arises from the fact that Mr. Cole has come the "Sneak act"—selling at a good handsome sum his whole interest in this business, name and c, and then remaining in same building on a technical numbering using No. 179 in place of 178. He should be able to stand alone with this advantage. I shall certainly look to the technical legal standing of the case and can without doubt give Mr. Cole all the law he wants..." (The second page is missing.)

It is interesting that the billhead of this letter written by Fairbanks in 1891 lists "Electric" (made only by Fairbanks) and "Imperial" as well as "Fairbanks and Cole Banjos." Perhaps A.C. Fairbanks and William Cole were both reluctant to give up the name "Fairbanks and Cole" which they had worked so hard to promote for ten years. By 1890 both men started their own separate companies with sales offices next door to each other.

#### Cole Banjos

Cole kept his 179 Tremont address until 1906 when the location was moved to 286 Washington St. He introduced his famous Eclipse model in the early 1890's and received a patent for it on January 30, 1894. Pre-1894 Eclipse models were stamped "patent applied for" on the dowel stick. These instruments, particularly the more expensive grades, exhibit very fine workmanship. Especially noteworthy are the carefully engraved inlays and heel carving. One of the most popular Eclipse models had an engraved man-in-the-moon face and a shooting star inlaid on the peghead. Cole also invented a system of two bridges for the five-string banjo—one small bridge placed directly behind



A.C. Fairbanks enjoying his favorite pastime (circa 1900)

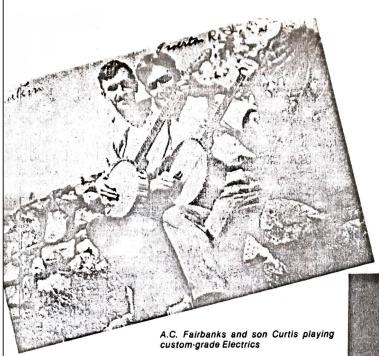
the main bridge. This was advertised heavily, but did no become very popular. Many roundback mandolins and few guitars were manufactured by Cole as well as an array of five-string variants such as the piccolo banjo and bajeaurine. In the latter years of the company, open-backet tenor and mandolin banjo models were made for the Ditse Company. William A. Cole died in 1909. His brother Francontrolled the company before selling the firm to "Noke and Nicolai" in 1919. Cole's last address, from 1911 of was 3 Appleton St.

#### Fairbanks Banjos

After the dissolution of the partnership in 1890, Fairbanks recycled serial numbers to number one (or close to it as did Cole. Fairbanks had experimented with some early bizarre tone ring designs during the Fairbanks and Colyears. The "Electric" tone ring models that he introduce in 1890 were among the most successful and popular it design of all open-backed banjos ever produced. The Electric tone ring, which had nothing to do with electricity, wa a flat hoop of brass scalloped on the top or bottom. The version with the scalloped top holding a round brass hoop proved most successful and was later to be used on Whyte Laydie model banjos. We've only seen a very few banjo built by Fairbanks after leaving Cole that were not Electrics. Among these, Fairbanks introduced the "Columbian" model around 1892, obviously intended for display at the Columbian Exposition the following year.

Many instrument manufacturers, no doubt including Cole, exhibited their products at this giant fair. In addition to the Electric and Columbian models, Fairbanks made some instruments bearing both the Fairbanks and the Fairbanks and Cole stamps on the dowel sticks. Nine of these banjos have been cataloged, all fairly plain, low-grade instruments with serial numbers indicating that they were





after the dissolution of the partnership remains an enigma. The models and grades of the Fairbanks banjos during the 1890's are the Electric (Special, Imperial, and Curtis) in grades 00, 0, 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6, the Columbian, Regent, Senator, and Special (the cheapest line) in grades 0,1,2,3,4, and 5. In addition to these banjos, flat-top, twelve-fret guitar (the style of the era) and roundback mandolins were added to the Fairbanks line under the "Regent" name.

The Boston Directory states that Fairbanks left the city in 1896 and "removed to Tonowanda, N.Y." Fairbanks family genealogy lists this date as 1895. In Tonowanda he apparently built one of his bicycle rim factories before moving on to Bradford, PA. Around 1900 he returned to Boston to work for the Waterproof Paint Company. Meanwhile, the banjo company bearing his name became incorporated and moved operations to 27 Beach St.

#### David L. Day

The technical void in the banjo company after Fairbanks' departure was apparently filled by David L. Day. Day had joined the Fairbanks and Cole Company in 1883 as a boy. He remained with the Fairbanks Company well into the Fairbanks-Vega years. He was responsible for the introduction of the famous Whyte Laydie and Tubaphone models introduced in 1901 and 1909 respectively. Day also holds the patent for the bracket band assembly which eliminated the need for shoe bolts inside the rim. This type of construction was said to improve the tone of the Whyte Laydie banjos on which is was first used.

Fred Bacon was certainly well aware of Day's abilities as a banjo craftsman. From about 1905 to 1912 Vega constructed the Bacon FF Professional banjos. In September of 1922, Day left Vega to join Bacon Banjo Company as vice-president, general manager, and as sales manager. (Day's former position as sales manager of Vega was later taken over by Herbert J. "Bert" Fandel, a well-known tenor banjoist who started with the A.C. Fairbanks Company in 1898.) Day was listed as "one of the foremost authorities on the manufacture of banjos in the country today" in an October 1922 issue of *The Crescendo*. Bacon banjos were marked "B and D" for Bacon and Day by the 1930's.



A.C. Fairbanks (circa 1885) cabinet photo

Curtis Fairbanks

#### Manufacture for Other Companies

Vega's manufacture of banjos for a competitor such as Bacon had precedent from the 1890's. Gad Robinson, a well-known Boston banjo teacher, had instruments with his own name made by the Fairbanks Company. We have also seen a Robinson banjo made by the Gatcomb Company. The Robinson banjos had an all-metal rim with a rather strange tone ring, somewhat reminiscent of the Electric tone ring. The Fairbanks Company also made banjos with the "Stetson" name. These banjos, constructed around 1890, had wooden rims but were clad with metal in-

side and out. Some of these banjos were extremely ornate. Besides the Robinsons and Stetsons, Fairbanks made a line of inexpensive banjos, guitars, and mandolins for J.W. Pepper, a large music company in Philadelphia. The 1896 Pepper catalog shows a line of about a dozen "Premier" banjos made by Fairbanks listing from \$5 to \$20. These instruments probably were meant to compete with Stewart's second-grade banjos, cheaply constructed and inexpensively priced.

Vega-Fairbanks also constructed banjos for William Schmick, a prominent musician and teacher from Cam-

den, NJ. We have recently examined a Fairbanks-made banjeurine bearing the stamp "H.C. Barnes, Boston." Barnes was a large music house, which was bought out by the Elias Howe Company in 1898. This practice of manufacturing goods using "house" brand names is as commonplace today as it was at the turn of the century.

In addition to the brand name products, Fairbanks or Fairbanks and Cole, made some totally unmarked banjos in the late 1880's or early 1890's. These instruments have long thin peghead shapes, uncharacteristic of either company, but otherwise similar to the signed banjos of the period.

#### Construction and Aesthetics

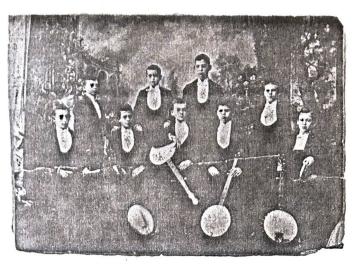
The earliest Fairbanks instrument we have seen has the serial number #243 penned inside the rim. This banjo is an extremely crude instrument with cheap trade hardware, inlaid wooden flush frets and celluloid dots for position markers. The neck is attached by two long screws going through the rim and into the heel of the neck. The name stamp reads "A.C. Fairbanks-Maker, Boston." Other banjos from the late 1870's show a marked improvement, especially in hardware. Several of these banjos have fancy two-piece nuts which thread separately onto each hook. The hooks were held to the rim by large pointed shoes. One banjo has some pearl inlay on its rim, while another has strange fingerboard inlays that somewhat resemble animal tracks. These instruments of the 1879's became, in a sense, the prototypes for the later Fairbanks and Cole banjos.

The instruments of the Fairbanks and Cole years

(1880-1890) continued to improve stylistcally. Rims spun with metal, carved ivory or bone tuning pegs and tailpieces, laminated wood necks, graceful double pointed shoes and ball-end nuts, and ornate inlay patterns of wood and pearl all added to the beauty of Fairbanks and Cole's better-grade banjos. Inlays on the early banjos were on the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 13th, and 17th frets which confuse today's pickers. These fret numbers were gradually changed during the mid 1880's. Aesthetically the Fair-

Cover to Fairbanks & Cole Banjo Method book (circa 1887)



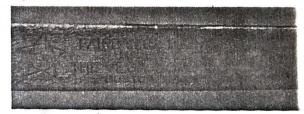


A.C. Fairbanks son Curtis (from center), a produ banjo player.

banks and Cole banjos were fairly balanced, but still gallittle indication of the delicate beauty of the instruments the 1890's.

Artistically, the Fairbanks banjos of the 1890's and ear-1900's were superior to anything that preceded them. The most elaborate and beautiful regularly produced banjowere the Fairbanks Electric No. 5 and Electric No. 6, lat superseded By the Whyte Laydie No. 7. The necks of the instruments were inlaid with engraved pearl patterns after classic ornamentation designs popularized in the 181 century and "art nouveau," which was the new design style developing in France during the 1890's. "A nouveau" differed from the classical styles through its use of a more flowing and asymmetrical use of plant forms.

Vega-Fairbanks dowel stick

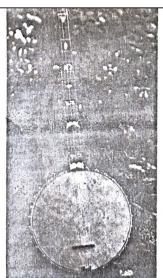


Fairbanks-Vega combined both styles on the earl Tubaphone No. 3, which had a classically symmetric flowerpot design inlaid into the peghead and a commo nouveau design motif on the neck. The same blend of style was seen on the Whyte Laydie No. 2 with the classic "Grifin" on the peghead and the star and diamonds down the neck.

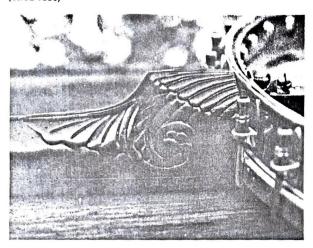
The most creative pearl work was on the Fairbanks bar jos of the 1890's. Here, more nouveau design was used wit less reliance on accepted classic patterns. Nouveau desig was seen in the carving of the heel of the neck, which usually took one of four basic styles. The pearl engraving was of excellent quality. Many custom Electric models were made throughout the 1890's. Some instruments had the owners' initials inlaid into them; others had engraved in lays in floral and stylized animal shapes. Among thes were lions' heads, winged griffins (eagles), dolphin-lik creatures and even a crane standing in a marshy pond with a snake in its beak.

By 1902, shading was accomplished through engraving different depths. Each instrument built during this period was unique. Even two banjos of the same model and stylenger of the same model a

Electric



Early Fairbanks Electric with Cole shaped heel (circa 1890)



with consecutive serial numbers had subtle differences in the design and shading of the engraving. It is interesting that during this period the only banjos rivaling the beauty of the Fairbanks instruments were the Eclipse banjos made by Cole. The Fairbanks banjos by this time were far superior in tone. The tone quality of these banjos, espe-

cially with the Whyte Laydie and Tubaphone tone rings, has set the standard for all open-backed banjos made since then.

The most beautifully proportioned instruments were built from 1900 to 1910. These banjos showed evidence of aesthetic considerations in regard to the size and depth of the rim as it related to the width, depth, and length of the neck. The rims became a standard 2½ inches deep with a diameter of 10½, ". 10½, ". 11½, ". The Fairbanks Company's attention to detail was exemplified by

such things as the peghead sizes (four different sizes were seen on the Whyte Laydie No. 2 models alone), beautiful graphics marking the model and style on the dowel stick, and the high quality hardware.

#### The 1904 Fire

By 1904 the company was primarily manufacturing the elaborate Whyte Laydie No. 7 and less elaborate Whyte Laydie No. 2. The Electric banjo had joined the Regent, Senator, and Special line of inexpensive models. At that time the company was located in the Sherburne building on Washington St. On the morning of March 4, 1904, fire broke out in the building. The following is a report in the March 5th issue of the Boston Post:

"\$45,000 Fire on Washington St.

"Fire and water ruined the six story building numbered 783 to 790 Washington St. yesterday morning and entailed a loss which will probably exceed \$45,000 to the block and contents. The building is owned by R. Sherburne.

"Fearing the spread of the fire to adjacent business buildings on the Washington Street side to dwellings in the

rear, four alarms were ordered.

"The blaze was discovered before 7 o'clock in the Fairbanks banjo and mandolin shop on the fifth floor. By 8 am the firemen had the fire drowned out but the fifth and sixth

floors were gutted."

The Boston Globe gave a somewhat different account of the fire starting on the 4th floor occupied by the American Tailoring Company. Whichever account is true, the Fairbanks Company was unable or unwilling to continue. The Vega Company, of 62 Sudbury St., which produced guitars, mandolins, and zithers, but no banjos, started negotiations to buy the Fairbanks Company. On March 21st the bill of sale was signed by Frank A. Dodge and David Cummings, apparently both principals of the Fairbanks Company at the time of the fire. Vega bought the company for \$925 and for one more dollar bought the rights to four still-current patents. David Day was a witness on this document.

#### Vega Instruments

Christine Ayars supplied the following history of the Vega Company in her book:

"This business was founded in 1881 as a cooperative enterprise by Julius Nelson with five or six other men, among them C.F. Sundberg and a Mr. Swenson, who had worked in Pehr R. Anderberg's guitar shop in Somerville (Mass.). Julius, a fine cabinet maker, was foreman of the guitar and mandolin factory. Gradually Julius and his

brother Carl, both of whom came from Sweden to the United States at an early age, bought out the interests of the others who continued as workers in the company, which was then called Vega, meaning star. Carl Nelson became the office and sales manager.

"In 1904 the Nelsons took over the A.C. Fairbanks and Company which made only banjos (author note: actually Fairbanks had also made some guitars and mandolins), while the Vega Company had made only guitars and mandolins. After the union of the

The Whyte Laydie

THE SENSATION OF THE BANJO WORLD)

HAS ARRIVED.

THE SENSATION OF THE BANJO WORLD)

HAS ARRIVED.

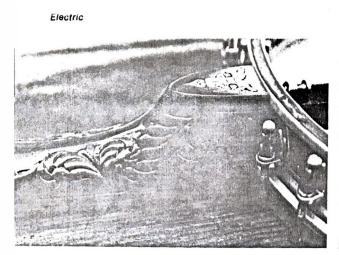
CLIFFORD ESSEX,

The House of the Starty, Mandolm, and Statter.

15a. GRAFFON ETREET BOND BTREET LONDON W

Cover page to an English magazine announcing the in-

troduction of the Whyte Laydie to England (April, 1905)





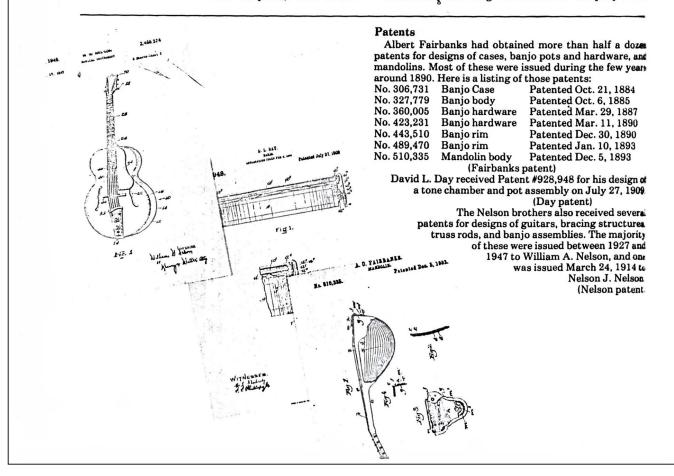
Late Vega Whyte Laydie No. 1

companies, the latter made all three kinds of high-grade fretted instruments, under the direction of David L. Day, from the Fairbanks Company, as sales and general manager, until 1922, when he went with the Bacon Banjo Company. In 1905 the Nelsons absorbed the plectrum instrument making of Thompson and Odell and added to this about 1909 the brass instrument manufacturing business of the same concern. This was done under the name of Standard Band Instrument Company established in 1884 at 62 Sudbury St.

"As the result of the taking over of the business of these companies this is the only firm in Boston making simply brass and fretted instruments. The present head of The Vega Company, now located at 155 Columbus Avenue (Boston), is William Nelson, the son of Carl Nelson. "This company's business is primarily manufacturing, of

"This company's business is primarily manufacturing, at which about 60 per cent is in fretted and plectrum in struments and 40 per cent brass instruments. They make all kinds of brasses except French and Bass horns and more models of trumpets than any other manufacturer is this country, a total of about 1,000 a year. Their trumpets trombones, and fretted instruments are exported as well as sold all over the United States. To date they have manufactured over 96,000 banjos, 40,000 guitars, 40,000 mandolins, and 30,000 trumpets..."

Immediately following the Fairbanks Company's fire.













Pegheads (I-r) Vega Tubaphone No. 3, Flowerpot on F-V Whyte Laydie No. 7 #26853 (standard on early Tubaphone No. 3 models), Griffin on Whyte Laydie No. 2 #22862, Electric #16125, Griffin on reverse of peghead.

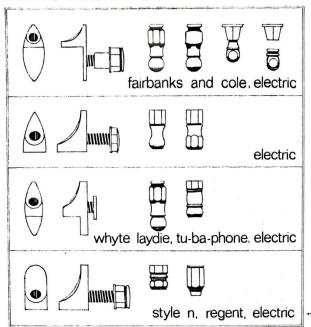
the Vega Company made banjos, which to the untrained eye were identical to those produced by the Fairbanks Company. The metal plate on the dowel stick identifying the manufacturer as the Fairbanks Company was not changed until 1910 when it was replaced by "Fairbanks Banjo made by The Vega Company" stamped on the dowel stick. (The Fairbanks name remained on the banjos until

1922-1923 after Day had moved to the Bacon Company. The rims gradually became thicker and the cutting an engraving of the inlays less precise. The Tubaphone bank which was introduced in 1909, is considered to be the law instrument produced by Fairbanks-Vega which was stated to be stated to be the transferred to be transferred to be the transferred to be tran

As early as 1912 Fairbanks-Vega was manufacturing



#### fairbanks shoes and nuts



tenor banjos, mandolin banjos, and guitar banjos. The fancy Whyte Laydie No. 7 was sharing its position as top-of-the-line with the Tubaphone No. 9. Both models were identical except for the tone ring and a few minor variations. A version of the Tubaphone called the "De Luxe" became the undisputed top-of-the-line costing \$300 around 1910, which was twice the cost of the standard No. 9. The Whyte Laydie No. 2 and the Tubaphone No. 3 were the intermediately priced models, with a number of models (Imperial Electric, Regent, Senator, Special, and Little Wonder) filling the inexpensive line.

By 1923 the catalogs were pushing the Tubaphone, referring to it as having "the clear crisp tone quality and great carrying power of the Whyte Laydie," but as being "more

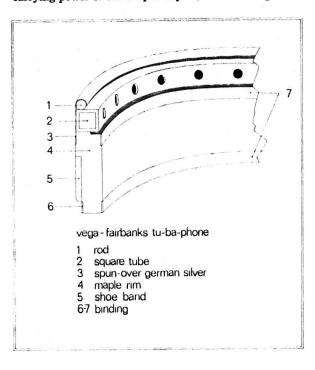
resonant, especially in the upper register." In that catavarious models were made as five-strings, plectrums, mdolin banjos, tenors, or guitar banjos. Letter designation were used for most of the tenors and mandolin banjos came in Style K (the cheapest model), late Wonder, Style L (Whyte Laydie), and Style (Tubaphone), and Style X (the tenor Tubaphone version the No. 9). Vegaphone models, actually tenor Tubaphone with resonators, were produced in five grades labeled P fessional, Soloist, Artist, DeLuxe, and Moderne.

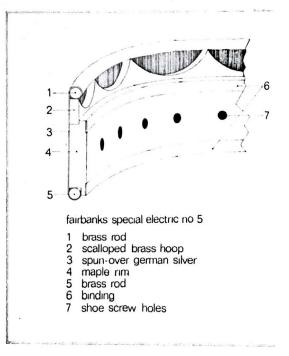
By the late 1930's when Ms. Ayars wrote her history, to popularity of the banjo had waned. A small but steady mand for banjos kept the company alive through to 1940's and 1950's. The folk boom of the early 1960's help stimulate banjo sales somewhat and marked the emergence of the five-string as a desired item. In Most 1970, the C.F. Martin Organization bought Vega and continues to market banjos under the Vega name. Martin the recently introduced a line of Dutch-made medium-prizeguitars under the Vega name and has reintroduced to Tubaphone to its Vega banjo line.

Today the old Fairbanks and Vega banjos have concluded several phases: as prized new instruments, as digatherers lying in almost total obscurity in attics, a finally, as treasures to be rediscovered by musicians and be valued both for their beauty, their heritage and the quality of tone.

Jim Bollman is co-owner and manager of The Music Empon in Cambridge, MA. He has been studying and collecting Bost made banjos for the past ten years. Dick Kimmel is a frequent a tributor to Pickin, and has played Fairbanks and Vega basince the late fifties. Doug Unger is an art professor at Kent St. University in Ohio. He builds and restores Fairbanks style ban for The Music Emporium.

The authors wish to thank those who supplied information their banjos and others for assistance on this article: Stu Co and Sharon Davis of The Music Emporium; Mike Longworth the C.F. Martin Organization; Lois Unger, Nancy Kimmel, to Oster, Bill Nelson (former head of the Vega Company), Emma. Francis Fairbanks, Lucy Howell, Allen Hart, and especially Dr Kaufman.





Serial No.	Model	Approx. Const. Date	Rim Size & Scale Length (in inches)	Serial No.	Model	Approx. Const. Date	Rim Size & Scale Length (in inches)	Serial No.	Model	Approx. Const. Date	Rim Size Scale Ler (in inche:
16971	J,R	1897	11 x 21%	18741	EO	1899	10% x 26	20602	(E)	1901	1014 x 25
17021	SE	1898	11 x 27	18829	S	1899	N.A.	20638	SE1	1901	101% × 2
17026	E,0,H	1898	10 1/2 x 25	18833	J4	1899	11% x 25%	20803	WL2	1901	1034 x 26
17031	SEI	1898	101/2 x 27	18852	S1	1899	10½ x 26	20824	EO	1901	10% x 25
17468	J4	1898	10 1/2 x 24 1/6	18906	E	1899	N.A.	20847	WL7.H	1901	N.A.
17607	SE5,H	1898	1034 x 27	18939	SE	1899	10% x 191%	20848	WL2	1901	(Rim Only
17635	SE	1898	10% x 27	19124	SE5,H	1900	101% x 27	20885	S1	1901	10% x 25
17663	Н	1898	7% x 151/2	19237	S1	1900	11% x 26%	20957	J2	1901	1034 x 26
17664	SE5,H	1898	N.A.	19363	J4	1900	N.A.	21237	S1	1902	1034 x 19
17791	SE5,H	1898	10% x 27	19369	SE1	1900	101% x 27	21245	S1	1902	1034 x 26
17817	R	1898	11 x 27	19370	SE1	1900	N.A.	21339-Neck			-
17869	SE5,H	1898	1034 x 27	19379	J1 ·	1900	10'% × N.A.	21340-Rim	WL7,H	1902	111% × N
17875	SE	1898	104 x 27	19430	SE6.H	1900	1034 x 26	21389	WL2	1902	1034 x 26
17963	SE5	1898	11 1/2 x 28%	19589	SE1	1900	11% x 27	21416	WL7.H	1902	N.A.
18026	J4	1899	11 x 26 ¼	19599		1900	10% x 26	21427	WL2	1902	11% x 271
18058	EO, 0	1899	101/2 x26	19649	SE1	1900	10½ x 25	21509	WL2	1902	N.A.
18159	SE5,H	1899	11 x 27	19736	SE5.H	1900	10¾ x 26	21528	H	1902	N.A. x 251
18169	EO	1899	101% x 27	19746	JO	1900	10 x 25	21598	WL2	1902	101% x 27
18245	E	1899	10 1/2 x 26	19899	E1	1900	10% x 26	21622	E	1902	11 (Rim 0:
18289	EO	1899	10% x 27	19910	E6.H	1900	10% × 27	21715	R	1902	N.A.
18322	SE5	1899	10% x 27	19925	IE		N.A.	21785	WL2	1902	N.A.
18388	EO	1899	10% x 26	19929	IE6,H		11 x 27	21879	WL7.H	1902	1034 x 26
18394	E	1899	10 14 x 20	19962	SE6.H		12 x 28	21961		1902	10% x 193.
18504	EO	1899	10% x 27	19972	IE.H	1900	10% x 25	22002	WL2	1903	10 % (Nec
18537	SE	1899	101/2 x 26	19993	S(E)1		10 x 25				Missing)
18575	EO	1899	N.A. x 27		-(-/.			22003	WL2	1903	101% (Nec
18578	E0	1899	10% x27	Whyte Lav	die introduce	d		12000			Missing)
18600	SE	1899	10% x 27	20107			1034 x 1934	22042	WL2	1903	11 1/2 x 27'
18603	IE	1899	10 x N.A.	20149	S1		10 x 25%	22066	WL2	1903	N.A.
18637	SE5,H	1899	10% x 26	20234	IEO		1034 x N.A.	22097	WL2	1903	10¾ x 26
18718		1899	10% x 27	20370	J2		10% × N.A.	22116	(E)	1903	10% x (Bo.
18719		1899	10¾ x 25	20559	J1 ·		N.A.	1	(-/	.000	Missing)
18730	SE5,H	1899	10¾ x 27	20596	S1		10¾ x 27	22139	SE1	1903	10% x N.A

## d.w. griffiths/workingman's banjo

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#### Serial Number Dating Chart

Compiled by Jim Bollman

The following serial number dating chart has been assembled using several known production and purchase dates of instruments: introduction of specific models such as Electric, Whyte Laydie, and Tubaphone, with their approximate dates and earliest known serial numbers; and "guesstimates" related to stylistic changes in particular years, such as the 22-fret necks started in 1896.

The serial numbers were then spread through the interim years for which there were no "hard" dates. Thus, the dates in the chart are approximate, at least up until 1953, the last year for which Vega and Martin, have accurate company records.

Production figures and dating information of the pre-Fairbanks & Cole banjos (1875-1880) are, at this time, purely speculative, since only one serial number (#243) has been cataloged and only several have been seen. Fairbanks & Cole production figures are assumed to total about 9,500 units (serial #9221 is the highest seen so far). Production was simply allocated evenly over the span 1880 through 1889. The dating should be thought to be accurate only within a year or so. This is true for the Fairbanks chart as well. For instance, production dropped off severely after the 1904 fire. We know that the serial numbers were around 23,000 at the time of the fire and were about 25,000 in 1909 when production reached normal levels.

We do not know how quickly production was restored, so the dating figures for the 1904-1908 period are merely guesses. Also, there was a marked increase in production about 1922 and a marked decrease in the early 1930's which reflect the boom and bust of the tenor era. Dating is somewhat confused because of these rapid fluctuations. Also, in several instances the chart was "rigged" to fit in some "soft" or speculative dates given by original owners—dates penned on heads and inside rims, etc.—where credibility is somewhat doubtful.

So far, only two Fairbanks banjos have been examined with serial numbers between 4,000 and 9,000, and none between 10,000 and 14,000. It is assumed that most of these numbers were never assigned to actual instruments. Perhaps they were left open to account for instruments made for other companies.

This question will probably only be solved when a much larger sampling of banjos has been made.

Rim Size &

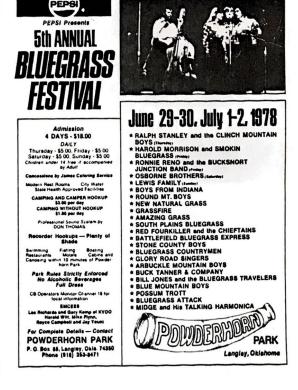
#### A.C. Fairbanks Early Period (1875-1880)

0/0-1000)

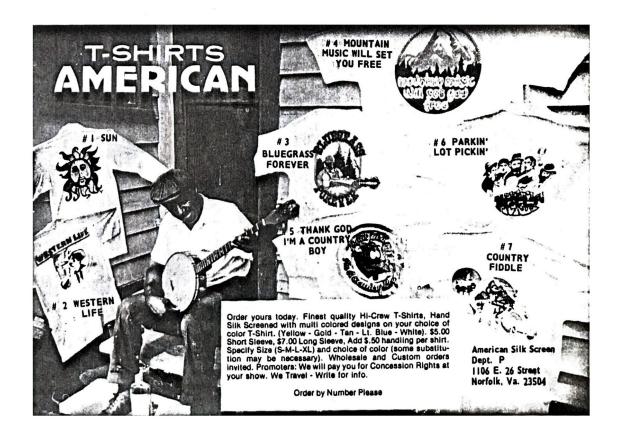
Seria No.		Scale Length (in inches)			
	Production jos unknown,	figures of Fairbanks early stick stamp	ban-		
243		Wood Flush Frets, Primitive Hardware	11 x 24 1/2		
None		Fretless, 2PC. Ball nuts,	11¼ x 27		
None		Ivory Frets, 2PC-Ball Nuts.	12 x 27 ¾		

'Contemporary or Traditional... The Best Bluegrass Sound Around."





Serial No.	Model	Approx. Const. Date	Rim Size & Scale Length (in inches)	Serial No.	Model	Approx. Const. Date	Rim Size & Scale Length (in inches)	Serial No.	Model	Approx. Const. Date	Rim Size & Scale Lengt (in inches)
22275	WL2	1903	11 x 27	23490	WL7,H	1905	111% x 28	24802	WL2	1908	101% × 26
22284	WL7,H	1903	11% × 28	23499	WL7,H	1905	111% x N.A.	24846	WL2	1908	104 x 254
22285	WL7,H	1903	11 x 27	23548	WL7,H	1905	10% x 25%	24848	WL2	1908	1034 x 26
22312	WL2	1903	101% x 27 1/2	23560	WL2	1906	N.A.	24863	WL2	1908	111% x 27
22371	WL2	1903	101% x 1934	23551	WL7,H	1906	11 x 27	24923	WL2	1908	101% x 27
22485	WL(7),H	1903	10¾ x 25%	23675	J2	1906	N.A.	24935	WL2	1908	N.A.
22498	WL2	1903	11 x (Neck	23698	WL2	1906	1034 x N.A.	24947	EO	1908	10 x 25
			Missing)	23725	WL2	1906	1113/ x N.A.	24957	WL2	1908	1034 x N.A
22630	WL2	1903	11 x 27	23778	WL2	1906	11 x 27	24963	WL2	1908	N.A.
22710	R	1903	101% x 26	23818	WL7.H	1906	N.A.	24973	WL2;MB	1908	7% x 134
22716	WL2	1903	10% x 26	23857	WL7.H	1906	1034 x 26				
22760	WL7,H	1903	11 x 27	23900	R	1906	10 4 x 26	Tubaphon	e introduced		
2782	WL7,H	1903	101% x 27	23969	JO	1906	N.A.	25083	S1	1909	10% x N.A.
2795	WL7,H	1903	N.A.	24092	WL2	1907	11 x 27	25086	WL2	1909	104 x 194
2840	WL7,H	1903	11 x 27	24135	WL7.H	1907	11 x 27	25088	WL2	1909	101% (Nec
2842	WL2	1903	11 x 27	24169	WL2	1907	11 x 27				Missing)
22862	WL2	1903	10 4 x 26	24195	WL7.H	1907	N.A.	25139	TUB3,H	1909	111% x 28
2870	WL2	1903	N.A.	24337	WL2	1908	N.A.	25184	IEO	1909	N.A.
2897	WL2	1903	10 14 x 26	24350	WL2	1908	N.A.	25203	J4	1909	10% x N.A.
				24389	WL2	1908	10% x N.A.	25213	IEO	1909	10% x 2619
March fire, Vega takeover			24412	S1	1908	10% x 26	25260	TUB3,H	1909	11½ x 28	
3071	WL2	1904	10% x N.A.	24413	S1	1908	10% x 26	25321	WL2	1909	11 x 27
3150	J4	1904	N.A.	24430	EO	1908	1034 x 26	25327		1909	14% x 291/2
3199	WL2	1904	N.A.	24431	IEO	1908	101% x N.A.	(None)			15% x30%
23201	IEO	1904	10½ x N.A.	24438	WL2	1908	1034 x N.A.	25349	(TUBD),A,	H 1909	10¾ x 25¾
23203	WL7,H	1904	N.A.	24481	WL2	1908	N.A.	25353	TUB3,H	1909	11½ x 28
23255	WL2	1905	104 x 26	24529	WL7.H	1908	11 x 27	25365	WL2	1909	11 x 27
23263	R	1905	10% x 191/2	24559	WL2	1908	10'% x 25%	25383	WL2	1909	10¾ x 26
23320	WL2	1905	101% x N.A.	24567	A,H	1908	12 x 28	25496	WL7,H	1909	N.A.
23344	WL7,H	1905	11 x 27	24595	R	1908	101% × 26 1/2	25528	WL7,H	1909	11 x 27
23408	WL2	1905	N.A.	24607	WL2	1908	1034 x 26	25533		1909	11 x 27
23427	R	1905	11% x N.A.	24643	WL2	1908	10% x 26	25567	TUB9,H	1909	11 x 27
23489	WL7,H	1905	101% × 27%	24655	WL2	1908	10% x 19%	25668	WL2	1909	N.A.



Serial No.	Model	Approx. Const. Date	Rim Size & Scale Length (in inches)	Serial No.	Model	Approx. Const. Date	Rim Size & Scale Length (in inches)	Serial No.	Model	Approx. Const. Date	Rim Size & Scale Length (in inches)
25670	TUB3,H	1909	101% × 27	28473	IE,T	1912	10¾ x N.A.	41357	WL,GB	1921	N.A.
25674	TUB3,H	1909	10% x N.A.	28598	L,MB	1912	N.A.	41500	WLR,T	1921	111% x 21
25702	TUB9,H	1909	11½ x 28	28652	WL2	1912	101% x 27	41530	WLR,T	1921	101% x N.A.
25744	TUB3,H	1909	1034 x 25%	28674	R	1912	101% × 27	41622	L,MB	1921	10% (Rim Only
25750	WL2	1909	101% × 27	28737	J2						
						1912	10¾ x 26	41955	TUB3,H	1921	111% × 27%
25764	WL2	1909	11 x 27	28930	WL2	1912	10¾ x 26	42324	WL2	1921	101% × N.A.
25770	WL7,H	1909	N.A.	29029	WL7,H	1913	101% x 27	42547	M,T	1921	11½ x N.A.
25809	IE0	1909	10¾ x 26	29086	TUBS, MB	1913	N.A.	42874	TUB3,H	1921	101% x 27
25824	J2	1909	10% x 26	29375	L,GB	1913	(Neck only)	43794	TUB,T	1921	11½ (Rim Only
25828	WL7,H	1909	10¾ x 26	29488	TUB3,H	1913	N.A.	44071	Q,MB	1921	N.A. (Neck
25910	WL2	1909	10% x 27	29551	R	1913	101% x 26		4,5		Only)
25942	J2	1909	10¾ x 26	29767	M,T	1913		44334	TUB9,H	1921	101% × 27
25980	R						111% x N.A.				
		1909	10% x 26	29808	L,MB	1913	N.A.	44701	WL7,H	1921	101% × 27
25986	WL2	1909	N.A.	29993	M,T	1913	111% x 21	44969	TUB3,H	1921	10'% x 26
				30492	J5	1914	N.A.	45175	L,T	1921	101% × N.A.
F-U stamp				30532-Rim				45235	WL,MB	1921	N.A.
26023	5 String	1910	N.A.	30535-Stick	WL2	1914	11 x 27	45608	K,MB	1922	10% x N.A.
	Plectrum			30891	M,T	1914	10¾ x 20%	45667	WL7.H	1922	11 x 27
26036	TUB3,H	1910	101% × N.A.	31462	TUB3,H	1915	101% x N.A.	45774	J2	1922	N.A.
26056	R	1910		31488		1915	10% (Rim Only)	45892	F,T	1922	10 1/4 x N.A.
			10¾ x 26		MB			46333	TUB3,P	1922	11% x 27
26115	IEO	1910	10¾ x 26	31700	K,MB	1915	N.A.				
26124	TUB3,H	1910	N.A.	31711	L,GB	1915	11% x 25	46435	M,T	1922	N.A.
26185	J0	1910	10¾ x 26	32290	TUB3,H	1916	N.A.	46442	TUB9,X,T	1922	11½ x N.A.
26205	WL2	1910	101% x 27	32486	X,MB	1916	10% x N.A.	46696	M,T	1922	(Neck Only)
26210	WL2	1910	101% x 27	32508	N,T	1916	N.A.			465-	x 21 ¾
26223	TUB3,H	1910	101% x 27	32532	K,MB	1916	N.A.	46825	J2	1922	10¾ x 27%
26288	WL7,H	1910	N.A.	32850	WLR	1916	N.A.	47585	WLR,T	1922	111% x N.A.
26290	WL2	1910	N.A.	33282	N,T	1917	101% × N.A.	47612	WL2	1922	N.A.
26295	WL7,H	1910	11 x 27	33374	WL7,H	1917	11 x 27	47959	J2	1922	10½ x 26½
26327	WL2	1910	11 x 27	33582	K, MB	1917	10% x 14%	48234	TUB9,H	1922	11 x 27
26330	R	1910	101% x 27	33536	M	1917	10%(Rim Only)	48393	TUB9,H	1922	11 1/2 x 28
26346	S	1910	10% x 26	33670	WL2	1917	11 x 27	48465	M,T	1922	11% (Rim Only
26364	R	1910	10% x N.A.	33762	M,T	1917	10% x N.A.	48692	M,T	1922	11% x N.A.
26475	R	1910	N.A.	33882	WLR, T	1917	N.A.	48937	WL,MB	1922	N.A.
26598	WL2	1910	101% × N.A.	34273	TUB9,H	1918	11½ x 28	48971	M,T	1922	1113/1 x N.A.
26603	WL2	1910		34322	WLR,T	1918	101% x N.A.	49102	Q,MB	1922	N.A.
			N.A.	34414	TUB3,A			49213	L,N	1922	10%(Rim Only
26604	TUB3,H	1910	N.A.			1918	11½ x 28	49722	(WL)	1922	101% (Rim
26618	WL2	1910	10¾ x 26	34425	J2	1918	10¾ x 26	49122	(AAC)	1922	
26635	S	1910	10% x 26	34539	M,T	1918	111% x N.A.	40770	TUDO U D	1000	Only)
26658	TUB9,H	1910	12 x 28	34759	IE,P	1918	10¾ x 26	49779	TUB9,H,P	1922	11% x 26%
26808	S	1910	1034 x 261/2	35017	M,T	1919	10% x 1934	49840	M,T	1922	11% x 21
26853	WL7,H	1910	101% × N.A.	35032	WL(2)	1919	101% × 27%	49921	WLR,T	1922	111% (Rim
26855	WL2	1910	11 x 27	35157	WL2	1919	101% × N.A.				Only)
26858	WL7,H	1910	N.A.	35246	Ε	1919	N.A.	49952	(TUB3),H	1922	11% x 28
26863	WL7,H	1910	(Rim Missing)	35282	R	1919	104 x 26	49970	WLR,T	1922	104 x 194
20000			x 27 34	35404	L,MB	1919	N.A.	50017	TUB, GB	1922	111% x 25%
26016	C1	1010		35489	1411 0	1919	10¾ x 26	50018	WL2	1922	N.A.
26916	S1	1910	N.A.	35932	WL2 J3T,H	1919	11½ x 20½	50219	M,T	1922	101% x 19%
26918	TUB3,H	1910	101% x 27							1922	
26945	WL2	1910	101% x 27	35986	WL2	1919	101% x 27	50467	R		111% x 27%
26999	R	1910	N.A.	36151	J2	1919	(Neck Only)	50664	M,T	1922	111% x N.A.
27027		1911	10% x 25%	36481	E,GB	1919	12 x 25%	50720	WL2	1922	N.A.
27029	TUB3,H	1911	N.A.	36779	TUBD	1919	101% x N.A.	50773	TUB3,H	1922	101% x 27%
27032	TUB9,H	1911	111/2 x 27 3/4	36847	E	1919	(Rim Only)	51279	M,T	1923	10% x 19%
27033	WL7,H	1911	101% x 27	36867	TUB9,H,P	1919	1113/ x N.A.	51362	TUB3,H	1923	11 x 26
27105	WL,MB	1911	N.A.	36929	WLR	1919	(Neck Only)	51367	TUB3,H	1923	101% x 27
27158	Н	1911	10'% x 26	37009	K, MB	1919	10% x 13%	52320	M,T	1923	11% x 20%
27219	WL7,H	1911	11½ x 28	37026	TUBX,H,T		111/2 x 201/4	52364	WLR,T	1923	N.A. x 19%
27250	R	1911	101% x 26	37162	TUB3,H,J		N.A.	52666	TUB9,H	1923	111/2 x 28
27337	H	1911	N.A.	37829	E,	1920	10¾ × 26	53049	(TUB)	1923	N.A.(Rim Only
		1911	N.A.	37857	WLR,T	1920	10 % × 20	53090	L,T	1923	11 1% × 20%
27399	R (I) MB			37949	TUB3,H	1920	N.A.	53340	TUB9,H	1923	101% × 27
27477	(L), MB	1911	N.A.	38130	E	1920	10'% × 27	53480	TUBD.H	1923	N.A.
27497	c	1911	10% x 26					53664	TUB9,H	1923	N.A.
27621	S	1911	11 x 26 ¼	38467	J2	1920	10% x 25 %				
27651	L,MB	1911	10% x N.A.	38857	WL(2)	1920	11% x 28	53871	WL2	1923	N.A. (Neck
27762	MB	1911	10% x N.A.	39012	X,T,H	1920	12 x 21		T1150	4000	Only)
27954	(WL7)	1911	11 x (Rim Only)	39086	(L),MB	1920	N.A.	54006	TUB9	1923	11% (Rim Only
27991	(WL2)	1911	N.A.(Rim Only)	39942	M,T	1920	N.A.	54138	WLR,T	1923	10%(Rim Only
28062	Ř	1912	N.A.	40071	WLR,T	1921	10% x 20	54147	WLR,T	1923	10%(Rim Only
28092	WL,MB	1912	N.A.	40206	TUB3,H	1921	10% x 27	54775	S	1923	101/2 x 26
28288	TUB3,H	1912	N.A. x 27	40268	WL2	1921	11 x 27	55264	M,T	1923	111% x N.A.
20200								55392	M,T	1923	111% x N.A
28321	L,MB	1912	10% x N.A.	40286	TUB3,H	1921	N.A.				
28412	TUB3,H	1912	101% x 27	40364	L,T	1921	10% x 191%.	55672	TUB9, H,T		101% x N.A.
28465	TUB9,H	1912	11½ x N.A.	40407	X,MB	1921	10¾ x 14	55784	TUB9,H,P	1923	N.A.(Neck Or



# THE GREAT HUDSON RIVER REVIVAL

June 17 & 18 — 11 A.M. to Dusk CROTON POINT PARK

Balfa Freres Dorothy Carter
Martin Carthy and The Watersons
Angel Luis Catala
Elizabeth Cotten Arlo Guthrie & Shenandoah Ario Guttirie & Sheriando
John Jackson
Louis Killen
Rev. Kirkpatrick
Kate & Anna McGarrigle
Utah Philips
Leon Redbone
Pete Seeger
Des Smith Dan Smith Tahuantinsuyo Jay & Lyn Ungar Bill & Livia Vanaver Big Drum Nation Dance Co. **Greengrass Cloggers** Marlboro Morris & Sword Thunderbird American Indian Dancers Alternate Energy Asian Music Balkan Dancing Boats Cajun Cooking Crafts Ethnic Food Italian Dancing Jewish Music and much more



Serial No.	Model	Approx. Const. Date	Rim Size & Scale Length (in inches)	Serial No.	Model	Approx. Const. Date	Rim Size & Scale Length (in inches)
Vega stan	ıp			73075	WLR,T	1927	N.A.
55834	WLR,T	1923	111% × N.A.	73394 74153	L,T (TUB)	1927	N.A.
5937	N,T	1923	111% x 21	74356	VP	1927 1927	N.A. (Rim Only) N.A.
5958 6313	M,T	1923	101% (Rim Only)	74383	TUB3,H,P	1927	101% × 27 %
6656	M,T L,T	1923 1924	N.A. (Rim Only) N.A.	74467	WL2	1927	11 x 27
7213	TUB9,T	1924	111% × N.A.	74714 75487	WL7,H	1927	101% x N.A.
7385	WL2,P	1924	101% × 27	75575	M,T VA,P	1927 1927	101% (Rim Only 101% x 27
7415	TUB3,H	1924	101% x N.A.	76149	VP,T	1927	101% × 23
7490 7684	TUB9,H WL,GB	1924 1924	N.A. x 27	77178	L,T	1927	101% × N.A.
7705	L	1924	111% x N.A. 10 (Rim Only)	77222	VO T	1927	111% (Rim Only
8179	R,P	1924	11 x 27%	77297 77381	VP,T VA	1927 1927	11 x 23 N.A.
8199	M,T	1924	101% x N.A.	77710	VP,T	1927	11 x 23
8312	M,T	1924	10'% x 21	77799	E,GB	1927	N.A.
18957 18982	N,T WL7,H	1924 1924	101% x 19% 101% x 27	77858	L,T	1927	111% x 21
8997	WL2	1924	N.A. x 27	78244	M,T	1927	N.A.
9090	V	1924	111% × N.A.	78371 79025	TUB,X,T WL2	1927 1928	101% x N.A. 101% x 26%
9107	TUB3,H	1924	111% x N.A.	79162	L,T	1928	N.A. x 21
9322	L, MB	1924	10¼ x 13¾	79369	WLR,T	1928	111% × 20%
59402 59452	M,T	1924	101% x N.A.	79414	N,P	1928	101% × 26 %
60980	(TUB), MB TUB9,X,T	1924 1924	10% (Rim Only) N.A.	79647	WLR	1928	101% x N.A.
1459	TUB9,H	1924	N.A.	81070 81209	L,MB N,T	1928 1928	10 x 13 % M.A. x 21
31508	WL2	1924	N.A.	81371	TUB9,H,X	1928	101% (Rim Only
62248	L,MB	1924	10¼xN.A.	81913	WLR,T	1928	101% × N.A.
2419	M,T	1925	111% (Rim Only)	82192	VP,T	1928	N.A.
64179 64339	TUB3,H E,GB	1925 1925	10'% x 27% 11'% x 25	82616	L,T	1928	11 x 21
4499	L,T	1925	11 x 21	83384 83569	VA,GB,H	1928 1928	12 x N.A.
64933	WLR,T	1925	111% (Rim Only)	83827	VP,T WL2	1928	10¹% x N.A. 10¹% x 27
64973	(TUB)	1925	N.A. (Rim Only)	84124	(TUB9),H,		11 x 21 1/2
65986	L,T	1925	N.A. x 21	84269	VP	1929	101% x 2614
66266-Sti 66268-Rir		1925	1113/ - 27	84869	VP,T	1929	101% (Rim Only
66297	WL2	1925	11'% x 27 11'% x N.A.	84948	VP,T	1929	101% × 23
66642	F,T	1925	101% x 21	86095 87896	M,T VS,P,H	1929 1929	111% x N.A. 101% x 27
67186	S	1925	11 x 27	89729	WLR,T	1930	10'% x 23
67436	TUB3,H,P	1925	N.A.	89737	WLR	1930	101% × N.A.
67518 67614	(V) TUB9,H	1926 1926	N.A.(Rim Only) 11% x 28	89894	(TUB3),H	1930	N.A.
57619	TUB9,H	1926	N.A. (Neck Only)	90103 91441	VP,	1930	N.A. (Rim Only)
67892	S	1926	N.A.	91550	(V),T VS	1930 1930	11 x N.A. N.A.
8243	WL2	1926	101% × N.A.	91700	R ·	1930	N.A.
8760	WL2	1926	11'% x 28	92168	VD,H	1930	101% × N.A.
69137 69954	N,T M,T	1926 1926	N.A. 11'% (Rim Only)	92258	(TUB),GB	1930	111% x 25%
70118	TUB3,H	1926	11 x 27	92801	WLR,T	1930	10'% x 23
70134	(TUB), MB	1926	N.A.	92959 93844	(TUB),H,T VS,P	1930 1930	N.A.
70183	TUB9,H	1926	11 x 26%	94383	VP.	1930	101% x 26 % N.A.
70533	F,T	1926	101% x N.A.	94715	(WL),T	1930	N.A.
70762 70892	TUBD,H,T IE	1926 1926	N.A.	94716	WLR,T	1930	N.A. (Neck
0032		1920	11%(Neck Missing)	95374	N,T	1021	Missing)
71211	L,T	1926	101% × 21	96836	WL2	1931 1931	101% x N.A. N.A.
1449	(L),MB	1926	10% (Rim Only)	97112	VX1	1931	N.A.
1699	WL7,H	1926	10'% x27%	97277	(TUB)	1931	101% (Rim Only)
'1854 '1857	WL2 WL2	1926 1926	N.A. x 28 1,1 1 % x 28	97962	(Bass Banjo		N.A.
1999	M,T		P1 1% x 21	98314 A-102178	K,MB	1932	N.A.
2204	WL7,H,P	1926	10'% x 27	A-129091	Pro II		N.A. N.A.
			933—present)		ımbers — prin	tar's arre	
listed	by starting	serial	number °	10522	1963		
98150		0 1943		10130	1964		
	1934 9853		98990 1954	125641	1965		
98220	1935 9857	0 1945	99067 1955	126772	1966		
	1936 9860		99213 1956	127682	1967		
	1937 9864		99428 1957	128565 129120	1968		
	1938   9867 1939   9871		99582 1958 99717 1959		1969		
	1940 9874		99717 1959 100022 1960	C.F. Martin	takeover in A	Aay	New Series
	1941 9878			129683	1970		M1 1972
20100		ינפו ט	100560 1961	130049	1971		411 1312

Rickin'

Ces photocopies m'ont été remises par James Bollman, lors d'une visite en 1983 et se sont un peu dégradées avec le temps.



# A HISTORY OF THE FAIRBANKS BANJO COMPANY (CONTINUED)

The Vega Company, which in 1904 purchased the A.C. Fairbanks Company, had an interesting history. According to C.N. Ayers the business was founded as early as 1881 as a cooperative enterprise by a group of men who had worked for the guitar maker Pehr F. Andberg. These men, all of Scandinavian background, included Julius Nelson, C.F. Sundberg, a Mr. Swenson and several other people. Julius Nelson and his brother Carl eventually bought out the interests of the others. About 1889 they named their guitar and mandolin company Vega ("star"). According to Bill Nelson, Carl's son, the family legend is that the fivepointed Vega star, used as the company symbol, represented the five original partners. This company may have manufactured instruments for the trade in the early days; that is, its instruments may have been made for others and not carried the name Vega. Until

(Continued on page 8)

<sup>1</sup>Most of the information given here about the origins of the Vega Company and its subsidiaries was obtained from Christine Merrick Ayers' "Contributions to the Art of Music in America by the Musical Industries in Boston, 1640-1936," New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1937. Using information from dated advertisements etc. we are able to be more precise than Ayers about some dates and other facts.

### COME TO THE SPRING RALLY MAY 18, 19, 20, 1978

The crocuses are finally up, so it's time to start preparing for our Spring Rally. The American Banjo Fraternity Rally begins on Thursday May 18th and will continue till the small hours of Saturday May 20th.

As always there will be much five-string banjo playing and many banjo conversations. On Friday and Saturday evenings all those who wish to can join in a banjo round-robin. On Saturday the round-robin will follow our twice-yearly banquet; on Friday it will be the warm-up for some coffee and cake served to everyone when the regular musical program is finished.

Time is running out so make your plans now to attend the Spring Rally May 18-20, 1978 at the Green Gables Motor Inn, 900 South Main St., Lewistown, Pa. 17044. Their phone number is (717) 248-6701.

See you there.



#### FAIRBANKS RIM CONSTRUCTION

Thanks to Jack Werner's drafting talents we are able to print these excellent drawings of various Fairbanks banjo rims.

The left-hand figure at the bottom of this page shows a cross section of the typical full-spun, metal-clad rim that was used by S.S. Stewart and many other manufacturers of the late 19th century. This same style rim was used on many of Fairbanks' lower priced models, such as the Special No. 1, No. 2, and No. 4, as well as (at times) the Senator and Regent models.

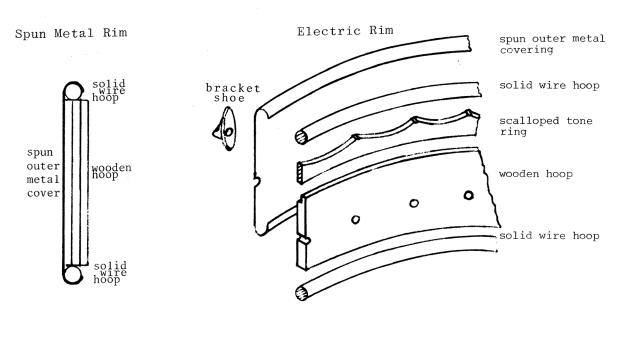
The other figure at the bottom of this page shows an exploded view of the basic, full-spun A.C. Fairbanks Electric rim. This model was marketed from 1890 until at least 1916. It can readily be seen that except for the addition of the scalloped tone ring under the top metal hoop, the structure is essentially the same as that of the rim on the left. The outer metal covering on both styles binds the rim components together.

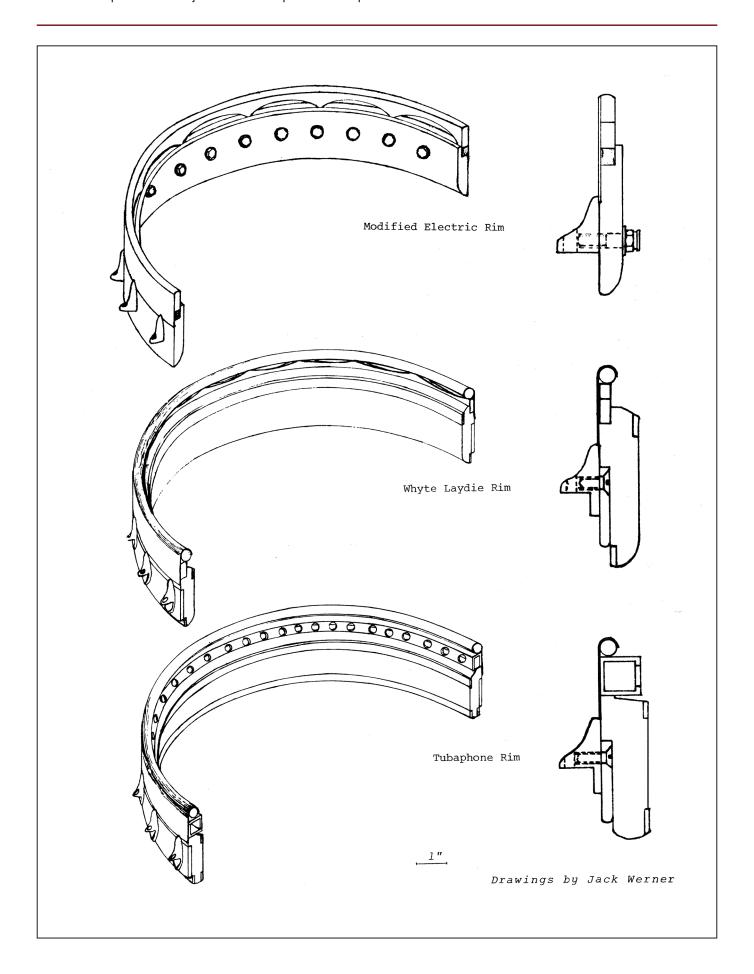
The top figures on page 7 show the modified Electric rim. This was first marketed in 1894-95 and was still being cataloged in 1908 as the "Imperial Electric Rim". Unfortunately the company was not consistent and at times banjos with the regular Electric rim were stamped "Imperial Electric". In this modified Electric rim there is no upper solid wire hoop. A scalloped ring with the points

down and the top rounded is attached to the outer metal covering. The scalloped ring sits on a solid 3/16" steel bar.

The middle figures on page 7 illustrate a typical early Whyte Laydie rim. As with the Electric, the solid wire hoop sits on the scalloped tone ring. Notice that the spun outer metal covering only extends halfway (or less) down the outside of the rim. Unlike the typical Electric rim, it is possible after removing the head to separate the scalloped ring from the rest of the assembly. The other significant feature of the Whyte Laydie rim is that the bracket bolts do not extend through the heavy wooden rim. The heads of the bracket bolts are countersunk into the sturdy bracket band that slides onto the wooden rim and is held in place by the brackets against a shoulder cut into the wood. Note that the curved inner surface of the lower part of the wooden rim was found on only the earliest Whyte Laydie banjos. The imitation tortoise shell strips on the edges of the wooden rim were purely decoration.

The bottom figures on page 7 show the construction of the Tubaphone rim as illustrated in the original patent drawings. The construction is similar to the Whyte Laydie except that a square metal tube with holes drilled on the inside is substituted for the scalloped ring.





FAIRBANKS HISTORY (cont. from page 1)
Vega acquired Fairbanks in 1904,
it was primarily involved in the
manufacture of mandolins and guitars

About 1905 the Nelsons joined with Adolph J. Oettinger and purchased the stringed instrument and accessory business of Thompson and Odell. This part of the Vega Company was known as the Musicians Supply Company. By 1908 Vega had also taken over the brass instrument business of Thompson and Odell. This division was called the Standard Band Instrument Company. It is possible that the Nelsons may have had some interest in Thompson and Odell prior to their purchases, as both Vega and Thompson and Odell shared a common address at 60-63 Sudbury Street, Boston from about 1900 on. By 1908 the Vega Company had four divisions or departments. As listed in a catalog of that era these were:

Dept. A, The Vega Company - Violins, mandolins and guitars, cases, strings, sundry articles. Dept. B, Standard Band Instrument Co. - Cornets, trombones, drums, clarinets, saxophones, etc.

Dept. C, The A.C. Fairbanks Co.-Banjos and mandolins, strings, cases and sundry articles.
Dept. D, Musicians Supply Co.-Violins, 'cellos, strings, cases, bows, etc.

Although not mentioned in the department listings, this catalog also contains eight styles of Fairbanks Regent guitars, most of which were available in three different sizes.

Oettinger soon bought out the

interests of the Nelsons in Dept. D and the Musicians Supply Company was completely separate from Vega by 1915.

David L. Day continued with the Fairbanks company after the purchase by Vega. Day was sales and general manager in charge of fretted instruments.

As mentioned previously, there seems to have been little change in the banjos made before and atter the Fairbanks fire of 1904, but the number produced was actually not very great. It seems that Fairbanks never made more than 500 or 600 banjos a year between 1901 and 1909. Because of the fact that between 1904 and 1909 the Vega Company was in a state of flux, it seems likely that they were content to let the banjo business continue as before. Banjo advertisements continued to feature endorsements and to stress the quality and tone of the Whyte Laydie. Of course, you could still send for the latest set of halftone photographs showing the artists who used and endorsed the Whyte Laydie Banjo. (Similar sets of photos of artists endorsing Vega guitars and mandolins were also av-

In August 1909 the A.C. Fairbanks Company advertisement announced, "Something New - TUBAPHONE BANJO - You must know it is the Fairbanks, ready about September 1st". The September advertisement in The Cadenza mentions "the Improved Whyte Laydie Banjo - The Tubaphone-It's a comer". However, the circular describing the Tubaphone was not available until the beginning of November 1909.

EJK (To be continued in the next issue)

The American Banjo Fraternity FIVE-STRINGER Elias and Madeleine Kaufman, editors 82 Brant Street, Buffalo, New York 14226

L'ensemble de la revue *The Five-Stringer* est consultable au MiM (Don en 2021). Les articles sur Fairbanks/Cole/Vega publiés par Elias Kaufman et James Bollman (Pickin', 1978) ont été imprimés et assemblés dans un dossier consultable au MiM (2023). (voir également page 197 note n° 5) En résumé, c'est vers la fin de l'ère du banjo dit 'classique' (approx. 1870-1920) et du premier âge d'or de sa fabrication, que la firme VEGA avait repris à Boston la célèbre maison Fairbanks. Quelques années auparavant, son fondateur Alfred Conant Fairbanks, fort de son expérience dans la sélection, le cintrage et l'assemblage du bois – opérations mises en œuvre pour la fabrication des caisses de banjos –, s'était reconverti dans la production de jantes en bois pour bicyclettes<sup>10</sup>. Boston était un grand centre de production de banjos, et jusqu'au moment de la disparition de Fairbanks, en 1919, les banjos sortis des ateliers de la Vega Company continueront à porter le nom du fondateur de la marque, mais à partir des années 1920, seul le nom de Vega subsistera. En dépit de la guerre, des aléas de l'évolution des goûts et de la mode, la marque survivra jusque dans les années 1970<sup>11</sup>, une décennie durant laquelle les banjos furent fabriqués à Nazareth, en Pennsylvanie, par la C.F. Martin Guitar & Co<sup>12</sup>. Après une longue éclipse, le nom renaîtra à nouveau grâce à la Deering Banjo Company qui pérennise encore toujours la fabrication de ces instruments tant appréciés depuis plus d'un siècle.

Entretemps, la maison Fairbanks avait dès le départ été très novatrice, laissant sur place les anciennes conceptions auxquelles s'était accroché Samuel S. Stewart. Les nouveaux *tone rings* métalliques des Fairbanks, plus lourds, plus massifs, avaient comme principal objectif la recherche d'une plus grande puissance sonore.

De nos jours, Ome, Mark Platin (Wildwood Banjos), Bart Reiter<sup>13</sup>, Pietsch (en Allemagne), ou des artisans tels que Doug Uger, pour ne citer qu'eux, en reprenant les concepts de Fairbanks et de Vega, répondent encore à la demande des musiciens.

Pete Seeger, Art Rosenbaum, Dick Kimmel, Ken Perlman, Reed Martin, ainsi que d'innombrables autres revivalistes jouent sur d'anciens instruments ou sur des copies de ces marques. Ce sont aussi souvent des modèles à quatre cordes originaux convertis en cinq cordes. Les manches des instruments anciens ont en principe une structure suffisamment rigide que pour supporter la tension de cordes métalliques. À l'origine, les ténors et plectrums des années 1920 étaient d'ailleurs prévus à cet effet.

Du côté des banjoïstes classiques, notre contemporain Geoff Freed, a utilisé un 'Whyte Laydie' converti en cinq cordes, montés en cordes de nylon, pour réaliser ses enregistrements. Tout comme pour le revivaliste Reed Martin, ce sont des autoproductions de grande qualité, malheureusement peu distribuées dans le commerce. On peut les retrouver au MiM dans le dépôt de la copie de ma collection de disques.

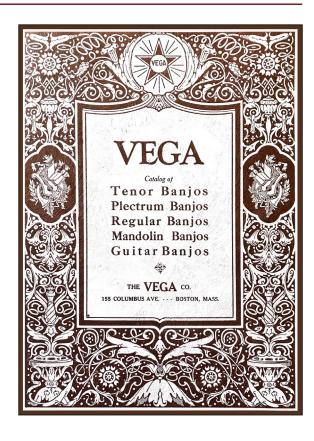
<sup>10</sup> La bicyclette à transmission par chaîne a été inventée en Angleterre en 1885. Vers 1890, l'arrivée du pneumatique l'a rendue plus sûre et plus confortable. On assistera dès lors à sa spectaculaire expansion. Aux États-Unis, c'est le fameux *bicycle boom* des années 1890. A.C. Fairbanks était un fervent cycliste qui fort de son expérience dans le cintrage et l'assemblage du bois, finira par remettre son entreprise dans les mains d'autres et s'orienter dans la production industrielle de jantes en bois, profitant du même coup de cette embellie commerciale. Ses sites de production de jantes seront installés aux USA, mais aussi en Europe, où il équipera notamment les cycles de la marque Raleigh. En attendant il aura, avec ses *tone rings* et ses caisses de résonance, posé (avec David Day, voir note 1) les bases du développement du banjo moderne. Si Gibson deviendra la marque la plus recherchée des joueurs de *bluegrass*, les Fairbanks et les Vega produits à Boston, deviendront des provenances des plus prisées pour la musique *old time*, occupant avec S.S. Stewart, Orpheum, Schall, Washburn, Farland, Bacon... des places de choix au cœur des grandes collections de banjos à cinq cordes.

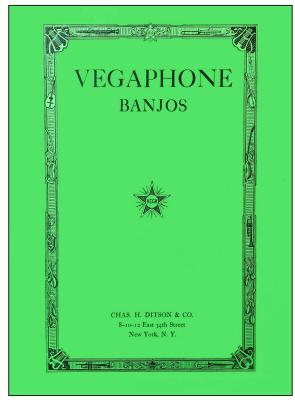
<sup>11</sup> Alberto Vazquez. "The Vega Instrument Company, 1889-1970." *Mugwumps*, vol. 1/3, pp. 5-6; vol. 1/4, 1973, p. 4. Voir aussi les revues *Voice of Vega* (1915-1920) et *The Crescendo* (1926-1933). https://urresearch.rochester.edu/institutionalPublicationPublicView.action?institutionalItemVersionId=32603

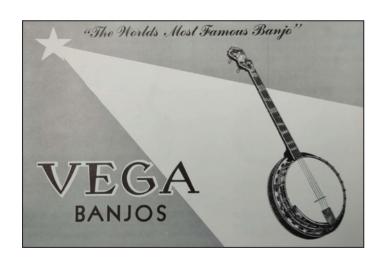
<sup>12</sup> Voir le catalogue original déposé au MiM en 2011-2012.

<sup>13</sup> Voir les catalogues déposés au MiM en 2011-2012.









Couvertures de catalogues dont la copie est accessible au MiM : Vega de 1908 et de 1923, 'Vegaphone' non daté, des années 1920, et Vega de 1930. Dans le catalogue de 1908, 'The A.C. Fairbanks Co.' est encore mentionnée comme étant un département de la Vega Company.

### Vega Banjos

### Imperial Electric Banjo

Patented 1908



By the insertion of the metallic truss between the wood rim and the steel wire, binding these three parts together and spinning over them a fine quality of German silver, when the head is in place a sympathetic vibration is produced otherwise not obtainable. The result is a volume of tone that is at once powerful and sweet of a full round quality which is very noticeable, especially in the higher register.

Imperial Electric Rim, half mahogany and half nickel plated, finished inside in ebony, 28 nickel plated brackets, improved notched top hoop, with 28 nickel plated Bessemer steel hooks, handsome mahogany neck, heavy ebony finger-board inlaid with pearl, 22 raised frets, patent keys and No-Knot tailpiece. Size; 19-inch neck, 10¾-inch rim.

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Vega Style C. Heavy maple rim with solid metal top, 28 Bessemer steel nickel plated hooks, nickel plated notched top hoop, seasoned white maple neck with ebony strip through centre to prevent warping, heavy ebony fingerboard celluloid bound, pearl inlaid positions and peg head, engraved, Sure-Grip tail piece, patent keys, best grade Rogers Head, size 19-inch neck, 10¾-inch rim.

# Vega Whyte-Laydie Banjo

Style No. 2

Patented 1898 Patented 1908

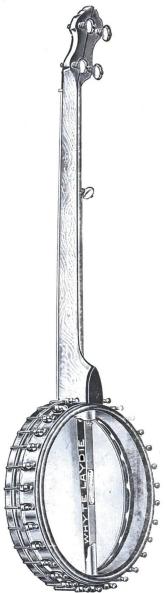
#### Sensation of the Banjo World.

In this model we have an instrument that is guaranteed to be the finest banjo yet produced. The combination of wood and metal has been calculated so finely that the wonderful tone quality and great carrying power produced is a marvel to all. Added to this is the elimination of boring holes through the rim for brackets, a pronounced benefit in tone and artistic construction and a distinct advance in the development of the banjo.

### Description of Whyte-Laydie Banjo No. 2

22 FRETS, 3 OCTAVES

Combination Electric Truss and heavy sectional maple rim, 28 nickel plated brackets ingeniously fastened to outside band on rim, 28 Bessemer steel hooks, heavy top hoop, notched for hooks, seasoned white maple neck with narrow ebony strip through centre of back to fingerboard, making neck absolutely rigid and not liable to warp, ¾ in. ebony finger-board bound with celluloid, the 22 frets being inside of binding, thus making a smooth outside finish. Neat pearl designs engraved. Patent keys, No-Knot tail-piece. French polished maple neck and rim finished natural. Sizes; regular, 19-inch neck, 10¾-inch rim. Professional, 19¾-inch neck, 11-inch rim.



Whyte-Laydie No. 2

## The Vega Tu-ba-phone Banjo

#### "De Luxe"

IN THIS splendid instrument we have produced the most beautiful and elegant conception of what can be made in the banjo line. As its name implies, it is a work of art. We will be pleased to mail photographs of this instrument to those seriously interested.

NECK. Choice seasoned curly maple with black veneer running full length through centre to finger-board. This gives the neck greater rigidity and prevents warping. Very choice ebony finger-board and peg head with fancy veneers underneath, back of peg also veneered with ebony and fancy veneers underlaid. Finger-board, fiberloid ivory bound and inlaid with beautiful and original pearl designs, handsomely engraved. Peg head, fiberloid bound and inlaid with pearl Dragon design finely engraved. Back of peg head and heel inlaid with artistic engraved pearl designs. Neck elaborately carved at the heel.

RIM. Extra heavy sectional maple rim with combination square tube and metal head rest. Inside and outside edges bound with imitation tortoise shell and fancy marquetry. Bottom edge inlaid with alternate green and white pearl triangular lines, giving a very rich and artistic effect. Very finest selected calf-skin head.

Fatent keys with gold plated metal parts and beautiful mother of pearl tips. Top hoop filed out so that the 28 Bessemer steel flat hooks present a smooth finish and do not project above the upper edge. Twenty-eight brackets fastened ingeniously to annular band around outside of rim. This does away with boring holes through rim and binding with bolts and nuts as in the ordinary banjo. In this way the full benefit of the rim is secured. The top hoop and bracket band is handsmely engraved and heavily gold plated. The flat hooks, nuts and brackets, square tube and spun top are quadruple silver plated. Gold plated and engraved combination Sure Grip and Unique tail-piece which holds the bridge securely and increases volume of tone 30 per cent.

To\_lovers of the banjo wishing an\_exclusive instrument that will satisfy the most critical, we present our TU-BA-PHONE Banjo "De Luxe."

### The "De Luxe" Tu-ba-phone Banjo

# There are Ideals in every line of effort

The player must have an incentive and inspiration to greater effort under ideal conditions to fully develop his Musical Ideals.



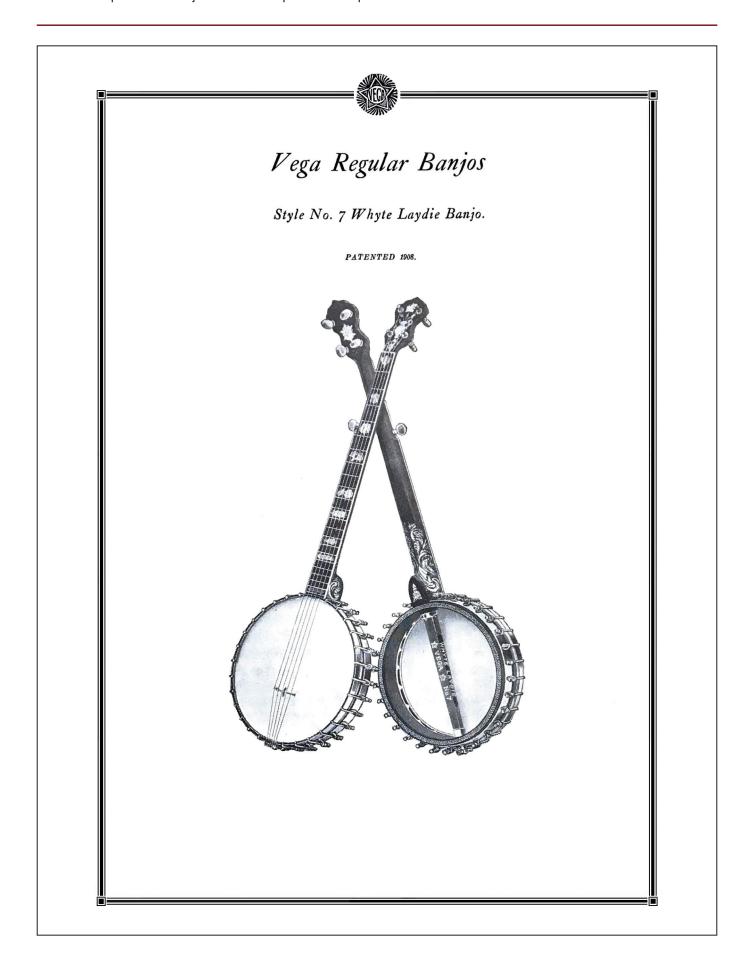
The Vega Instruments with their reserve power and strength take care of the needs of the player, never mind how strong the tone demanded.



There is Tone Value to the Vega with which every player should become acquainted. To know and realize that Vega Construction is the easiest way to advancement means that your future Musical Prosperity is assured.

List Price of TU-BA-PHONE Banjo "De Luxe" ....... \$300.00

Net Cash Price ....225.00





### Vega Regular Banjos

Style No. 7 Whyte Laydie Banjo.

PATENTED 1908.

THE patented features of construction of the No. 2 Whyte Laydie Banjo as described and illustrated on the preceding pages are also embodied in the No. 7 Whyte Laydie Banjo. This instrument for tone, workmanship and artistic construction is the finest that can be made for the money. To those wanting the best it can only prove to be a pleasure and delight.

NECK. Choice seasoned curly maple, hand carved, reinforced with black strip extending through to center of fingerboard to prevent warping, 3-16 inch genuine ebony fingerboard, bound with fiberloid, 22 nickel silver frets giving a range of three octaves, back of peg head veneered, extending down the neck, fingerboard, back and front of peg head and heel piece inlaid with fancy pearl designs, hand-somely engraved, antique finish, French polished.

RIM. Extra heavy seven lap laminated maple rim, combination patent Electric Truss Top and patent bracket, same as on No. 2 White Laydie Banjo described on next preceding page, 28 ball end nuts, brackets and steel wires, nickel plated, heavy brass notched top hoop, nickel plated, bottom edge of rim inlaid with fancy colored marquetry, inside and outside edges fiberloid bound, antique finish.

TRIMMINGS. Sure Grip tail piece, Non slip Banjo pegs, Grover patent, with beautiful pearl buttons and gold plated metal parts, true strings, selected Rogers head, waterproofed, fitted with square brass wire to prevent slipping.

Size.  $19\frac{3}{4}$  inch neck, 11 inch rim.

Do you realize what great changes have taken place in the instrumentation of the modern dance orchestras? During the past five or six years the Banjo has come rapidly to the front and its wonderful penetrating crisp tone quality has the snap and pep necessary to meet the musical demands that the modern dance orchestra requires.



# Vega Plectrum Banjos

Style No. 2 Whyte-Laydie.

PATENTED 1908.



Four String Orchestra Banjos

THESE Banjos are made up in WHYTE LAYDIE and TU-BA-PHONE styles having regular long Banjo neck without short fifth string. Eleven or twelve inch rim.

Prices same as regular Whyte Laydie and Tu-ba-phone Banjos.



## Vega Mandolin Banjos



(Four Strings.)
Style K.



Style K Mandolin Banjo.

STYLES. Any style of the eight string Mandolin Banjos as described and illustrated on the following pages can be had in the single or four string Mandolin Banjo. The eight string instrument is used more by Mandolin players. Although it has more volume of tone it does not cut through so much as the single string in a dance orchestra. An orchestra of seven or eight pieces should have two Mandolin Banjos, or one Tenor Banjo at least.

### Style K Mandolin Banjo. (Eight Strings.)

N ECK. Mahogany neck, extension ebony fingerboard, 19 nickel silver solid frets, filed and stoned to the correct level, then rounded and finished by hand to get a perfect fingerboard, pearl position marks, French polished.

RIM. Laminated maple rim with nickel plated steel wire set in top for head to stretch over, 22 brackets, hexagon nuts and steel wires, nickel plated, nickel plated grooved top hoop, bottom outside edge rim bound with fiberloid, mahogany finish.

RIMMINGS. Nickel plated machines and adjustable tail piece, selected calf skin head. Compensating bridge, strings adjusted to easy action.

Size. 10 inch rim, 7 inch neck.



# Vega Tenor Banjos

Style N Tenor Banjo.



HE Vega Tenor Banjo has single strings and is tuned to the Viola or Tenor pitch, one fifth below the strings of the violin or mandolin, the strings of the Tenor Banjo being A, D, G and C. The Tenor Banjo has a larger head and longer neck than the Mandolin Banjo and its tone quality is about three times greater. Some players call the Tenor a "Cello" Banjo, it is, however, tuned one octave higher than the string Cello. The Tenor Banjo takes the lead part in the modern dance orchestra, playing first violin parts. It is just the same as if you broke the first string on a violin or mandolin and had to use the A, D, and G strings. When the notes are above E and F on the A string they are usually played one octave lower on the D string. The C string is not much used. Some orchestra leaders are using the Tenor Banjo as a Harmony instrument by playing it in full chord form.

Style N Tenor Banjo.

N ECK. Mahogany neck, 3-16 inch ebonized fingerboard, 17 nickel silver frets, pearl position marks. French polished.

R IM. Heavy laminated maple rim, nickel plated spun nickel silver top over large steel wire for head to rest on, 26 brackets, hexagon nuts and steel wires, nickel plated, heavy brass groove top hoop, nickel plated, bottom edge of rim, hand ebonized and bound on outside edge with fiberloid, mahogany finished.

TRIMMINGS. Patent pegs, No-Knot tail piece, set of Vega Tenor Banjo strings. Rogers calf skin head, waterproofed, fitted with square wire to prevent slipping.

Size.  $12\frac{3}{4}$  inch neck,  $10\frac{3}{4}$  inch head.



# Vega Tenor Banjos

Style Little Wonder.

A SK yourself this question: Am I treating myself right by wasting time and energy on an inferior instrument when a Vega gives me so much better results with less effort? Just think what it means to the student and player who owns a Whyte Laydie or a Tu-ba-phone Banjo, the moment a tone is struck there is a responsive and musical tone quality produced that delights the ear of the Artist and Musician. Their wonderful carrying quality of tone has made these celebrated in-struments stand in a class by themselves. So long as you are paying the price why not have Vega Equipment to show for it? Some spend their money and do not get a permanent benefit. Can you afford not to have the Standard—The Vega Banjo?



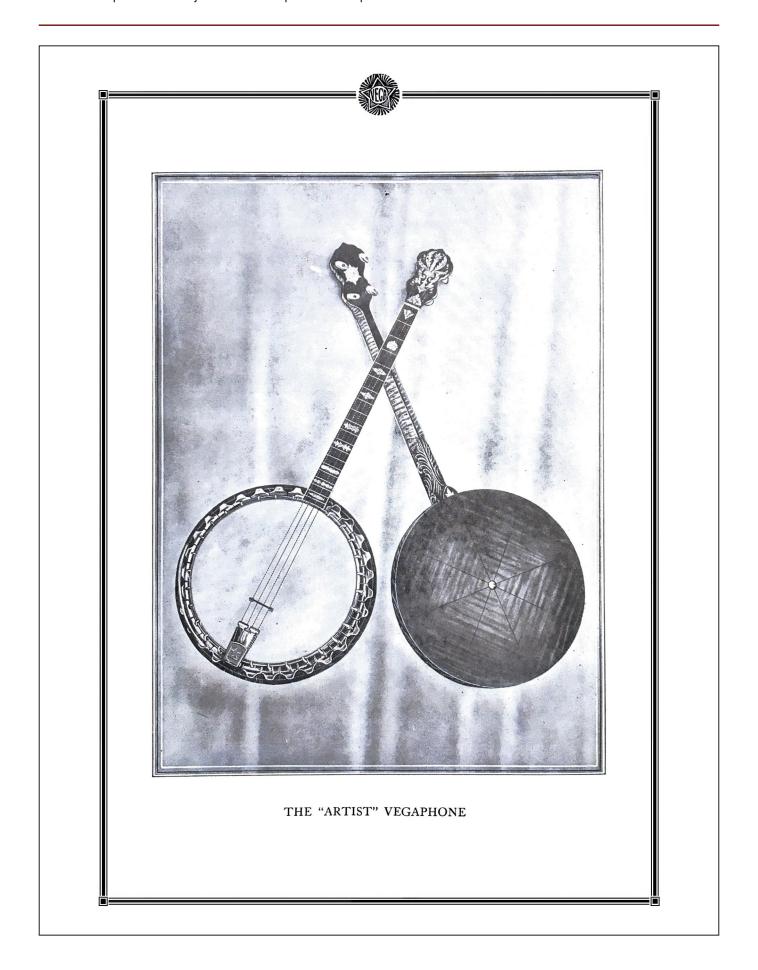
#### Style Little Wonder Tenor Banjo.

N ECK. Seasoned white maple neck, reinforced with black strip through center of neck extending to fingerboard, 3-16 inch ebonized fingerboard, fiberloid bound, 17 nickel silver frets, pearl position marks, natural finish, French polished.

R IM. Extra heavy six lap laminated maple rim, nickel plated spun nickel silver top over large steel wire for head to rest on, 28 nickel plated brackets, hexagon nuts and steel wires, notched heavy brass top hoop, nickel plated, bottom edge of rim hand ebonized, outside edge bound with fiberloid, natural white maple finish.

TRIMMINGS. Patent pegs, No-Knot tail-piece, set of Vega Tenor Banjo strings, Rogers calf skin head, waterproofed, fitted with square brass wire to prevent slipping.

Size. 124 inch neck, 104 inch rim.





### THE "ARTIST" VEGAPHONE

#### TENOR BANJO

N addition to the perfection of construction and tone with the new features to be found in all three styles of Vegaphone Banjos the "Artist" is hand carved, engraved, inlaid, and heavy gold plated on exposed parts. This gives a beautiful appearance suitable for those skillful players who are on the stage and in select dance orchestras appearing constantly before the public. In large halls and all public places requiring a large volume of tone the Vegaphone Banjos will excell, due to their brilliancy, powerful tone, and carrying power.

The "Artist" is designed for the true artist who desires the best possible instrument in construction and tone with an extra fine appearance.

### $\mathcal{N}_{eck}$

Choice curly maple hand carved neck with a black veneer thru center of neck to prevent warping. A genuine ebony fingerboard 3/16 inch thick bound with white fiberloid, and nineteen nickel silver frets. The fingerboard, back and front of peg head and heel piece are inlaid with beautiful engraved pearl designs. The wood is in antique shaded finish and French polished.

#### Rim

Seven lap laminated maple rim with the patented Tu-ba-phone top and bracket band with 28 brackets, wires and ball end hexagon nuts. Detachable flanges on each bracket for regulation of the resonator. Heavy notched hoop and all exposed metal parts gold plated and hand burnished. The bottom edge of the rim is inlaid with fancy colored marquetry and bound with fiberloid. Wood finished to match the neck, and French polished.

### Resonator

Curly maple five ply laminated shell and rim. Natural wood finish with an eight sectional design on the back inlaid with black wood. The side is bound with figured fiberloid tortoise shell.

### Trimmings

Gold plated and engraved Grover Presto tailpiece. Grover new perfected Banjo pegs with pearl buttons. Best grade Rogers calfskin head waterproofed and fitted with a square brass wire to prevent slipping. Vegaphone strings and ebony top bridge also a nickel arm rest.

All exposed metal parts heavy gold plated and hand burnished, complete with Perfection plush lined case.

**Artist Vegaphone** 

List \$312.50

Selling Price \$250.00





Vega 'Earl Scruggs de Luxe', 1960.

Avec ses *Scruggs tuners*<sup>14</sup>, tels qu'ils apparaissent dans la méthode de Pete Seeger et à la Une de *Sing* Out (Vol. 12/3, April-May 1962). Après avoir 'endorsé' la marque Vega, Earl Scruggs (1924-2012) est retourné chez Gibson.

American Banjo Museum, Oklahoma City, OK. Photo: G. De Smaele, 2018.