

The response the new “Essential Music Theory” series has been very positive for the current available Units; Mandolin, Fiddle and Dobro. More will be released as the text, lessons and recordings are finalized.

This month’s “Song of the Month” will build on the “Essential Music Theory” program with progressive arrangements of popular jamming tunes that you can use in the field and illustrate the fine art of improvising and developing your own individual style.

The song “Old Joe Clark” is a popular one at any bluegrass festival jam. It’s also a good song for beginners to learn and, because of its popularity, is a good tune to learn to improvise.

This month, we’re going to take a deeper look into this old time favorite, starting from the basic beginner’s melody and continue to develop it into an advanced, hot jamming number.

This first installment, “Old Joe Clark 1” will start at the beginning; the melody line. Each month, we will go a little deeper into the mechanics of the melody and chord structure illustrating the fine art of improvising.

Performance Notes:

Banjo: This first arrangement is based mainly on the alternating roll and a fun version for beginning banjo pickers. The arrangement is a good exercise for this roll; keeping it clean and steady. The melody is mainly on the middle G string. Notice the **BOLD** letters underneath the tablature; these are the melody notes. You will want to accent these slightly to help the melody surface above the roll pattern.

Fiddle, Mandolin, Dobro and Guitar: The melody line is rather straight forward for this first arrangement. Watch your timing and keep all the notes clean. If you’re a beginner, as soon as possible, look away from the music/tablatore. The sooner you can play without looking at the paper, the better. Play from the heart; play what you’re feeling inside and not what you’re looking at. Music is an expression from the ears to the heart to the fingers; not the eyes.

Bass: This first break is also straight forward, like the other instruments. The bass back up will alternate between the root and fifth of each chord, A, E and G.

Adjusting the Tempo:

I recorded the audio tracks at 180 bpm (beats per minute). That’s actually a little slow in real life jam for “Old Joe Clark”. Of course, when you’re first learning a tune, you will want to keep the tempo at a manageable speed.

You can adjust the temp of the play along mp3s with *Windows Media Player* in real time. (There may be a way to do this on a Mac, however, I’m only familiar with the PC)

Here's how to slow the mp3s down (or speed them up) with *Windows Media Player*:

1. Open the mp3 with Windows Media Player.
2. Right Click on the screen in a blank area.
3. In the window that pops up, select, "Enhancements"
4. Then select, "Play speed settings"

The next little window that pops up is the control for the tempo of the song.

Mouse over the slider, left click and hold as you drag the little white slider to the left to slow the tempo or drag to the right to increase the tempo.

This tempo change will be in real time and is a great way to play these audio files at a slower speed when practicing. As you get better with "Old Joe Clark", start moving the slider back to the regular position.

Next month, we will begin to build on this simple melody creating a very professional arrangement. The techniques I will be demonstrating can be used on many other songs.

Have fun!