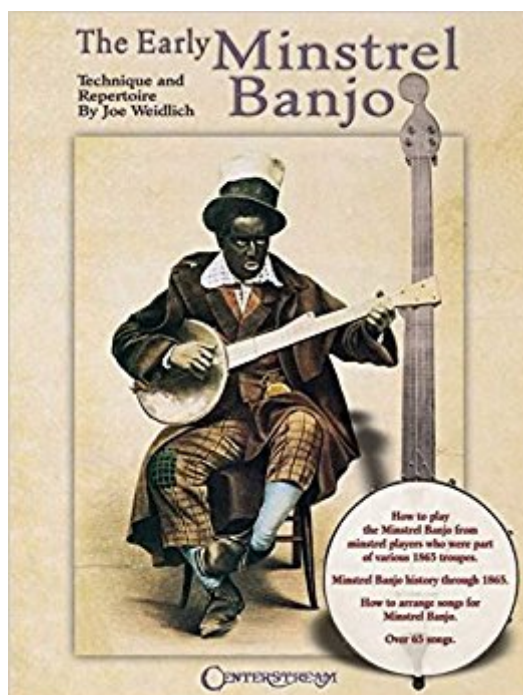


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# The Early Minstrel Banjo: Technique And Repertoire



## Synopsis

(Banjo). Featuring more than 65 classic songs, this interesting book teaches how to play the minstrel banjo like players who were part of various popular troupes in 1865. The book includes: a short history of the banjo in the US in the antebellum period, including the origins of the minstrel show; info on the construction of minstrel banjos, evolution of the lower-pitched minstrel banjo tunings, and idiomatic techniques peculiar to the minstrel banjo; chapters on each of the seven major banjo methods published through the end of the Civil War; songs from each method in banjo tablature, many available first time; info on how to arrange songs for the minstrel banjo; a reference list of contemporary gut and nylon string gauges approximating historical banjo string tensions in common usage during the antebellum period (for those Civil War re-enactors who wish to achieve that old-time "minstrel banjo" sound); and an extensive cross-reference list of minstrel banjo song titles found in the major antebellum banjo methods.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I am delighted with this book. I was already somewhat familiar with the history, the music, and the times, and I am incessantly curious - so this was a great choice for me. Once the author got interested in the subject, he's stuck with it like a dog and a bone, collecting information and scraps darn near compulsively. And he can write lucidly. I happen to learn to play by watching, listening, and trying to mimic, and I have a far ranging curiosity. There are some low star reviews out there, and I suspect they are not wrong: if you're looking specifically for a tune book, or a book to guide

your learning step by step - this may not be it. The book's depth and width would likely not be efficient for pursuing the single goal of learning to play the tunes. I was also pleased how the author handles the national embarrassment of the long lived "minstrel" movement in the US. He neither excuses it, nor indulges in breast-beating for the sins of the fathers. He accepts that attitudes were different, he understands those attitudes were part of an oppressive system and a willful ignorance of the extent to which humans truly were created equal, and when it is part of the story it's right in there - the facts of the matter. This has been a problem with some other productions on the banjo. In fact, at times it is clear just how far minstrelsy was removed from the music of the plantation hands. The performers were not southerners, nor did their urban audiences have experience of rural music. In fact, he points at times to a strong Irish influence, despite the shuck and jive titles given the tunes and the supposed reproduction of "authentic" song and dance by the men in makeup. (Always men - no woman had any business on the stage any more than a black man did). In the end, the book is chock full of stylistic notes, best guesses on tunings and instruments, and covers the same basic tunes in a number of different ways as the genre evolved. Either for a read, or for a more advanced adviser on performance, this is a wonderful book.

I bought this book and am totally lost. It clearly has huge potential but why are the tunings of each piece not mentioned? Every tab I have ever seen describes how the banjo is to be tuned for that particular piece such as, "gDGBD" being the most common. However these are not anywhere to be found in the book. How is one to know how play the tune? Have I missed something? It must be in the book but I can't find it. Page 19 gives a general account of certain tunings in the 19th century but that doesn't help you when you come to a tune say on page 200. I must be missing something because no one would write a book of TABs and not mention what tunings they are supposed to be in. That would be like asking someone to spell a word when they don't know the alphabet. Can anyone help me?

This is a great book. There is one tune to a page, so it's nice and big and easy to see the tab. The tab isn't all messed up with ornaments. Occasionally, there is a little dot over a note that tells you that that note is played with the index finger. If there's ever doubt about a 'thumb' note, an "X" signifies this. I have learned many tunes from this book. They come from different sources thru the years, some are easy, some are harder,, none are impossible. You use minstrel banjo tuning throughout. You'll be in the key of G or D. If you tune higher, you'll be in A or E. dGDF#A is the proper tuning. Many pages are devoted to the different authors who notated these tunes in the

1800's and what makes them unique. I skipped that at first, I jumped in learning the tunes, like I said, there aren't many embellishments to clutter up the pages. This author's other books contain some of the songs in this book, but this is the big daddy. If you have a minstrel banjo you need this book. If you have a minstrel banjo but don't read tab, you must teach yourself. You'll want to get all the notes right. The timing of the notes is pretty easy to understand, and the tab system is easy as 1 2 3 and sometimes 4. This is the Minstrel Bible.

The book is a real treasure for the old-time banjo enthusiast, equally satisfying those looking for history, theory or practice. I learned much from the ample background information provided on the development of the banjo and the minstrel era music. Detailed explanation of the composers' various left and right hand playing techniques was very informative and helpful but, for my taste, finally became somewhat lengthy and "academic" (my reason for giving only four stars). Of course, I particularly loved the many, many minstrel music songs being presented in excellent tablature (arranging them must have been a lot of painful work!), plus the extra-bonus of adding the Briggs' songs also in standard notation. A warning: solid experience in clawhammer style is essential for getting immediate access to play these minstrel songs, but I think a mere bluegrass banjoist will hardly come across this book. In summary: a fine book written by an obvious expert of old-time banjo music.

As an amateur musician and musical history enthusiast, I must say that Mr. Weidlick's book is a fascinating, ADVANCED look at the banjo's musical past... I think the reviewer, Mr. Thiebolt, has some built-in assumptions of his own about the book which do not necessarily reflect the reality of what the book really is. I do not see anywhere where the author claims that this work is an instruction book or primer for Banjo 101. It seems pretty obvious that this is a detailed historical view of specific banjo work of the time, and clearly it is an ADVANCED LOOK at the strumming of the time. It's also painfully obvious that Mr. Thiebolt just doesn't get it- either musically or literarily, which in his own review he admits is beyond his comprehension. For real banjo players who know music, this is an interesting in-depth piece of banjo history, and a good how-to on replicating some of the licks of that era... CJ,III

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