Banjo

**HISTORY**

American banjos are descendants of a family of lutes from West Africa and the Middle East. Enslaved African musicians brought the instruments to the New World and further developed them here.

Most common today is the five-string banjo, where the fifth string is a short string usually tuned to function as a high drone. Five-string banjos may have an open back or a metal resonator back, and are almost always steel-strung. Banjos may be fretted or fretless, acoustic or electric, mass-manufactured or individually handcrafted.

In recordings and broadcasts of early country music, the banjo brought not only its distinctive finger-picked sounds, but also its African style. Today the banjo is popular around the world, particularly played in the three-finger style perfected by Earl Scruggs.

Adapted from the Country Music Hall of Fame® and Museum’s *Encyclopedia of Country Music*, published by Oxford University Press.
Learn More About the Banjo:

WEBSITES
The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum: CountryMusicHallofFame.org
Official Site of Béla Fleck: BelaFleck.com
Official Site of Will Keys: WillKeys.com
Official Site of Earl Scruggs: EarlScruggs.com
The Smithsonian: si.edu/Encyclopedia_SI/nmah/folkinst.htm

YOUTH LITERATURE
Appropriate independent reading for grades 7 and up. A discussion of the banjo as an instrument important in African-American music in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Includes a glossary of banjo-related terms, a banjo discography, and historical photos.
Available at Nashville Public Library, major bookstores, and Amazon.com.

Appropriate reference material for grades 5–9. A presentation of the banjo in the context of American country music history - from its mountain beginnings to its prominence in country and bluegrass music. Includes historical photos. Available at Nashville Public Library, major bookstores, and Amazon.com.

ADULT LITERATURE
Traces the evolution of the banjo from its origins as a gourd instrument to its place in American popular culture. Also offers a unique view of the American nineteenth century music industry. Includes historical photos.
Available at Nashville Public Library, major bookstores, and Amazon.com.

Through personal interviews and research, the author reveals the African-American origins of an instrument which commonly serves as an emblem of the white mountain community. Includes historical photos.
Available at Nashville Public Library, major bookstores, and Amazon.com.

An interpretation of the changing and conflicting images of the banjo as found in the culture of the United States. Includes historical photos.
Available at Nashville Public Library, major bookstores, and Amazon.com.

RECORDINGS
This album has been reissued several times on other labels.