

The American Banjo Museum

By Joel Hooks

The weekend of September 10-13, 2009 marked the grand opening of a wonderful addition to the banjo community. The museum began as the National Four String Banjo Hall of Fame in Guthrie, Oklahoma. After adding 200 banjos to the collection, the Museum moved to Oklahoma City's Bricktown and changed its name to The American Banjo Museum.

Bricktown is a good choice for the location. It is a formerly neglected area that has had new life breathed into it. Recent redevelopment attracted new clubs and restaurants, creating a wonderful destination.



The location was not the only change: the Museum now includes all aspects of American banjo, with a focus on the four-string banjo.

The collection is quite a treat. There is more gold plate, mother of toilet seat, and rhinestones than you can shake a plectrum at. It is said "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," and this collection of four-string banjos certainly gives a fascinating view into the tastes of early to mid 20th century Americans. The carving, colors, and details of the instruments are hypnotizing. They were

built in a time when craftsmanship was something to be proud of.

If you look past the artistic embellishments, you will notice the builders' efforts to increase the volume and tone of the instruments. You can study the many variations of tone rings, mutes, and resonators. Modern builders and hobbyists could use the innovation of the past, incorporating both old and new ideas.

There were many great performances on opening weekend. I arrived on Friday; just in time to catch Debbie Schreyer's banjo history show. For those who do not know, Debbie's father Lowell wrote the book *The Banjo Entertainers, Roots to Ragtime*, a must have for the banjoist's library. The performance was top notch.

The performance hall is a replica of a Shakey's Pizza. Its intimate setting is perfect for banjo music.



I admit that I am not versed in the four-string banjo department. I am not familiar with the artists or their repertoires. Despite that, I enjoyed all the rest of the shows.

My favorite part of opening weekend was meeting a great group of people. Doug Back, the Assistant Director of the Museum and an accomplished banjoist, welcomed me. Even though he was very busy, he found time to answer my questions and discuss banjos.



Clarke Buehling was a true sport, tolerating my constant questioning over dinner.

On Saturday afternoon, while returning from lunch, fire trucks and the bomb squad greeted us. A suspicious package was found in the walkway next to the Museum. We were not allowed to enter the Museum until the mystery had been solved. Our morale remained high as we shifted the fun to a bar down the street. Debbie Schreyer and her husband Tom Owens entertained us with their plectrum and double bass banjos.

The suspicious package belonged to a hobo. It was filled with liquor bottles and dirty clothing. The authorities handled the situation quickly and professionally, and reopened the street without delay.

The future collection will likely include more five-string banjos and other banjo instruments. The Museum will soon complete their research room and café. Anyone who plays banjo or enjoys fine craftsmanship should make his or her way to the American Banjo Museum.

Speaking of history, I would like to go way back to 1868. "Tiger Jig" is found on page 17 of *Buckley's Guide For The Banjo*. It is a pretty straightforward banjo piece. Played *stroke-style*, it is written using the same string intervals as standard "C" tuning.

I like this piece because of the interesting rhythm using sixteenth-eighth-sixteenth note combinations. It gives it a nice swing. I like to play this on my "early" banjo using "Briggs' tuning," dGDF#A.

YouTube video of Tiger Jig <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekdapg-WhiU>

TIGER JIG. 17

Tiger Jig.
Buckley's Guide For The Banjo, 1868.

Transcribed by Joel Hooks

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Tiger Jig" in 2/4 time. It consists of four systems of banjo tablature. Each system contains five measures of music. The first measure of each system begins with a double bar line and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tablature uses numbers 0, 1, 2, and 3 to indicate fret positions on the strings. Rhythmic values are indicated by stems and flags above the notes. The score concludes with a final double bar line and a repeat sign.

About The Author:



Joel Hooks was born and raised in Dallas Texas. He has been interested in music his whole life. As a reenactor of the late 19th century American West, he began to study historical banjo styles about three years ago. Since then, he has built a minstrel style fretless banjo. He also plays the bones, harmonica, and has recently taken up the fife and guitar.

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