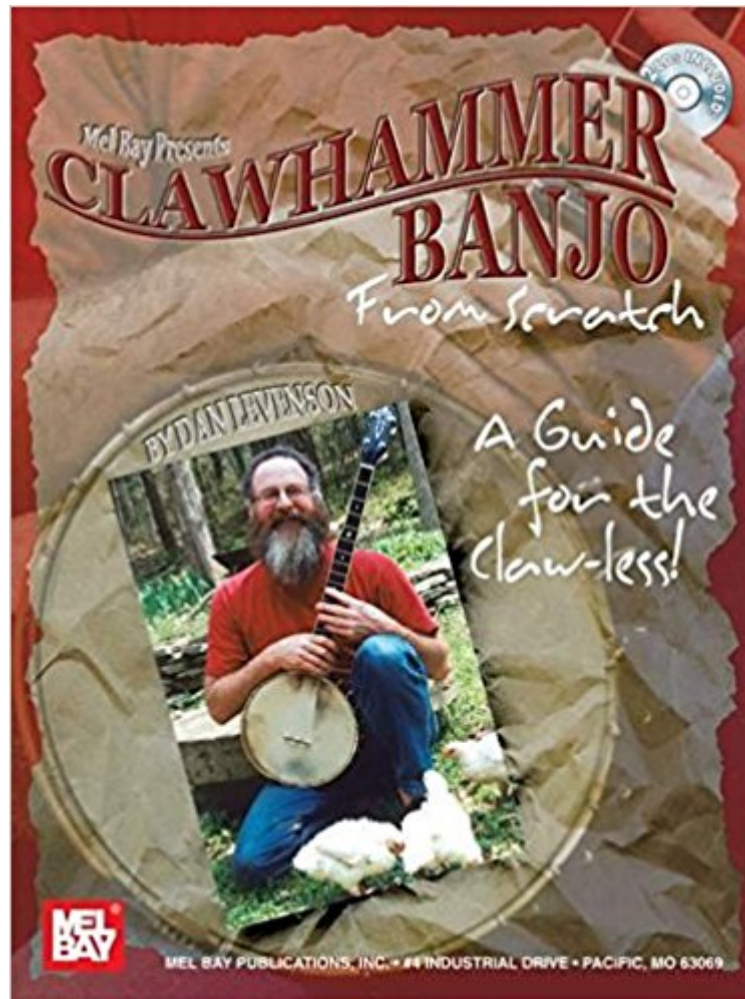


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Mel Bay Clawhammer Banjo From Scratch: A Guide For The Claw-less!



Synopsis

Southern Appalachian native Dan Levenson and Mel Bay Publications present Clawhammer Banjo from Scratch - A Guide for the Claw-less! This book teaches clawhammer banjo the way we play, not the way others say. It really begins as though you really have NO knowledge of how to play the five string banjo clawhammer style. Based on Dan's innovative Meet the Banjo program (where Dan brings 15 banjos and teaches players who may have never held a banjo), this book assumes no prior experience. Beginning at the beginning, Dan presents a brief history of the 5-string banjo then goes over the parts of the banjo, holding the banjo, right and left hand positions and his basic clawhammer strum. Even the strum is broken down into the steps of the finger and thumb. You are guided through the chords, the scale and then the individual notes of each of 12 jam session favorite tunes from scratch. Includes 2 reference CD's with all exercises, tunes (slow and up to speed), and a fiddle version of each tune.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a good beginning tutorial for clawhammer style banjo and does assume the reader has no prior musical experience, just as the author states. However, like Pete Seeger's hallowed "How to Play the 5 String Banjo", Dan Levenson starts the student off in a tuning that will present him with challenges down the road. Seeger even states in the most current edition of "How to Play..." that if he had the time to revise his book one of the first things he would change would be to start off the student in "G" tuning. While this might seem like a minor detail it's just as aggravating as the

occasional book employing non standard tablature. My recommendation for anyone (new or experienced) who wants to learn the instrument in this style would be to get Ken Perlman's "Clawhammer Style Banjo" along with the optional DVD's that follow the text. While some reviewers have faulted this book as being a little too advanced for them, the videos do a wonderful job of presenting the technical aspects in a manner that provides easy access to the more comprehensive material. Levenson's book has videos available as well but his teaching methods, while perhaps effective for some, are somewhat unique. That isn't a put down as "Clawhammer Banjo from Scratch" is a fine book, just not one you can grow with as easily as Perlman's. Most students will wind up with a number of books anyway and it's often beneficial to have the same information presented in different ways. For some, "Clawhammer Banjo from Scratch" will be just the ticket to unlocking the frailing banjo's potential. For me, it was Perlman's book and videos.

OK, I'm only about 40 pages through this book, but since I've been playing for over a year (and bought this for the tunes I don't know), I've learned that what I see in the first 40 pages is very sound advice. Levenson spends time on what might seem unimportant, arm and hand position and how you strike the strings with the "claw." This is actually very important - get it right early and all will go more easily. He also recommends getting rhythm solid with use of a metronome, and learning chords at first because if you play back up in a jam, often all you do is chord along. Correct again - I didn't learn these things until I was into playing for about 12 months, and that was a mistake - Levenson is right again, start with a solid foundation, the right posture and practice timing habits, and you'll be set up SO much better for the future. And forget the notes - start with the chords. If you ever play in a jam with others you need those chords almost more than anything else. Great advice again that I learned later than I should. This is a very solid, well thought out book from a teacher who is obviously experienced and understands what you really need to know first. It is not for a complete, totally ignorant beginner, but I'm not sure what is (Ken Perlman's is not either, and it's also a terrific book).

Although I've looked at a number of books on clawhammer banjo, this is the first I have seen that focuses on Double C and Double D tuning, tunings that in my estimation work far more efficiently for this style of banjo picking. One reviewer of this book compared this tuning to the C tuning presented by Pete Seeger, but they are very different. Using double C (or Double D) you can play in the second position, effectively giving you a longer reach, and chord patterns are far simpler than they are in G or Seeger's C tuning. Tim Jumper (The Banjo Player's Songbook) recognizes this tuning as

being one of the most versatile; also it is very close to G modal tuning, and retuning to G is also pretty easy to do. Many other books on clawhammer focus mainly on open G tuning - this is the standard tuning for bluegrass, but I don't feel that it works as well for clawhammer and fiddle tunes. Levenson's book includes CD's covering the entire book, and it is very well organized. He has many exercises to develop the student's speed and clarity, and I found it a bargain for the price. Kudos to Levenson for writing such an excellent book.

There is a major review of my delight on my page - but here again, I'll say that this took me from disillusionment into a slide down the neckboard of life -because of Dan - I actually learned to read tab - his method of notation is perfectly clear and linear - here - no overwhelming 15 notes at once) - note by note -He starts in Double C - (a tuning for the banjo) and STAYS in Double C til you have your chops in - he takes you to Double D - (yes, now you actually learn about confronting a capo, and the ease of it) and then takes you through to a bit more (perfect gradient) bouncy version, and on to a full jam kitchen sink version that you'll hear at jams -This Book KICK A88 - the excersises in the front, if you actually even do them with limited attention - you WILL find that it all applies, and becomes natural. If you are a beginner - totally - this is the RIGHT book to start with -and do yourself the favor of getting the DVD that goes through Spotted Pony, with a total introduction (covered also in book, but seeing it live in real time will blow you away -) of just what it is for you to play YOUR banjo - not someone else's idea of how you should hold it and play - So check out my page review - and check out this book -he doesn't start with the well known "bumditty" strum that seems to be well known - it is So. Appalachian style - but everything in here will build and hone you to play it or any other style, with finesse -My name is Jenny, and I'm a Banjo Addict

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