

Banjos in Bath

Gradually I'm getting to grips with Bath – or maybe it's getting a grip of me! Either way we are yielding our secrets to each other. Part of my problem (which will continue for another year) is that I'm not in Bath at weekends when most of the cultural life can be expected, and for the rest of the time I've got my head down enjoying the job. Occasionally I allow myself a brief holiday, and so it was that in late June I went a few miles north to Wick, and up an unadopted and unnamed road to find, at the top in a tiny workshop converted from a piggery in deepest countryside, Phil Davidson. Some of what follows was taken from his web site, <http://www.davidsoninstruments.com/>.

Phil Davidson has been handcrafting fine instruments for twenty years, trading as "Banjo Surgery" since 1988. After a successful career in mechanical engineering he decided that his skills could be more satisfactorily utilised by making a vocation of his hobby and "Banjo Surgery" was born. The skills gained in engineering have proved indispensable in the construction of his widely acclaimed Banjo hardware, and Mandolin and Guitar tailpieces made and nickel-plated in his own workshop. He has also developed his own style of instrument, in particular the mandolin. I saw a beautiful Gibson "F" style instrument which sounded at least as well as it looked. Almost as a trademark it has a ridge carved down the middle of the back of the body. Beautiful m.o.p. and abalone inlay. He makes a wide range of flatback mandolins, and all have an ease of tonal production which belies the relatively low price. His new mandolin is developed from the Brazilian bandolin, in turn developed from a Portuguese instrument. It produces the tones Phil wants – velvet bass, silvery treble, and LOUD!

I stayed chatting for far longer than either I (or he, I suspect) intended, but it was interesting to learn about the instruments he makes and the ways he thinks about their structure. He regards the body of the instrument as basically an air pump, so all the design features reinforce this function. The internal bracing is the most important characteristic, though the wood used and the way the top is carved are also very important. Phil will make the instrument to any

specification you want. So contact him either by email as above, or write to Davidson Instruments, Unit 5, Bury Hill Farm, Wick, Bristol, BS30 5SH, or phone on 0117 937 4920.

Another virtual visit you must make is to <http://www.leonhunt.demon.co.uk/>, where you'll find an account of one of the best and most innovative bluegrass banjoists on the scene today. I've written about him before, but had not heard much of his playing. When he featured in the Bath Banjo Festival concert it was immediately obvious that although he uses many of the techniques and concepts of modern jazz his roots are essentially in English folk music. He is a truly creative musician, taking his inherited culture and developing it, rather than (as many bluegrass and other players do) accepting the culture of another country and another time and neglecting the riches to hand. Inspirational.

Cover Story

This issue the cover is taken from the original artwork for a banjo. We have three out of the four water-colour paintings which were used as samples for the decoration of Griff Thomas' plectrum banjo, made by Warwick Grover when he was based in Coventry in 1978. The design which was finally used on the banjo was the bottom one on the cover. It was done in oil and acrylic paints inside a 10" diameter circle on the back of the maple resonator. It was painted by Keith, and artist friend of Warwick's.

The butterfly is the Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*). It has been happily in flight in and around the Midlands and occasionally further afield for over 20 years. This year will see it at the Bude Jazz Festival with Ken Ingram's New Creole Jazz Band.

Thanks to Griff for supplying the cover and these notes.

Bits and Pieces

A letter from Jon Lane of Par in Cornwall prompts these notes. I had asked if anyone had a music font which could be used in the production of the BB and Jon replied that he had

found some free music software on the internet. It's called *Finale Notepad* and is a simpler version of the grown-up *Finale* which I use for preparing music for the BB. *Finale Notepad* is not only free but easier to use than *Finale* and produces just as good results. It's available from <http://www.codamusic.com>. An even better program is *Igor Engraver* which is (or was) also free from <http://www.noteheads.com> I say was, since I downloaded my copy at no charge, but have since had a message to say that the fully-featured version is now available for sale. However it is still an excellent program and doesn't cost very much. For either of these, type the name into Google or whichever search engine you use, and you'll find the site.

Another bit of software I came across recently is a chord finder for banjo or tenor banjo or guitar (each is a separate program, unfortunately). In the chord library, 17 chord types are supported with 3 or 4 different fingerings each, depending upon the chord. The Neck Window view provides additional chord look up functions. This window allows the browsing of chord fingerings over the neck and has a Name-that-Chord function which recognizes 40 different chords in standard and non-standard tunings. These user-created chord voicings may then be diagrammed in the chord editor window. It can be downloaded from <http://www.drdsdigital.com> The fully-functional version costs \$15. You send the money to the address listed in the paperwork which is downloaded with the program and get a password back which unlocks the features. As downloaded the program will give you only a very few chords.

I recently played the banjo part in Shostakovich's Jazz Suite No 1. The part itself contained no great surprises, being reasonably simple chord work in 3/4 or 4/4 time with no unusual breaks, tempos, rhythms or stop chords. The harmonies, though, would be regarded by most banjo players as weird. Perhaps at a later date I'll get around to making a banjo arrangement of the suite, just to showcase the unusual progression of harmonies. Shostakovich, you may remember, orchestrated variations on *Tea for Two* as *Tahiti Trot*. Look out

for a CD by Decca – 433 702-2. It's got all this and more. Entertaining.

A new venue for all you dedicated throwers of custard pies!! Although it's a bit late for this year (July 8th), note the Ipswich Music Day in your diaries. Their advertising features a hemi-hirsute banjo player with the lines: I say, do you think I'll get the gig on Ipswich Music Day? With a 'tasche like that and a Banjo! I don't think so . . .

'Keep £' man gets roasting

Frank Carstairs, UK Independence Party candidate [for Wokingham] was involved in an angry exchange of words with a bearded banjo player [Brent Baird]. . . Mr Carstairs went walkabout in the town's Market Place when the banjoist from the Magnolia Syncopators launched the vicious verbal assault. The pro-pound man was about to ask the Dixieland-style band if he could have a moment to chat with them and pose with the musicians for our cameraman. But before he could get anywhere near them, the banjo player leapt from his seat mid-song and hurled abuse at Mr Carstairs. He told the prospective MP: "You'd better leave while you can – still in one piece." Mr Carstairs replied "There's no need for you and your foul mouth." (Adam J Smith, Wokingham Times, 6.06.01)

Backwell Banjo Rally

September 8th

The Rally will be held again from 12 noon until 6 pm at Backwell WI hall on the A370 between Bristol and Weston-super-Mare. This Rally is specifically for finger-style banjos, other than instruments used as accompaniment, as there are other events during the year that cater for various other styles of playing. There is ample free parking, reasonably priced food and drinks available all day, trade and individual stalls selling music,

tapes, videos and instruments. Backwell has a main-line rail station only minutes from the hall and an international airport only two miles away.

The traditional after-Rally supper will be held at the Bridge Inn, Yatton, with plenty of banjo playing and hospitality. Make a weekend of the Backwell Rally and explore the wonderful scenery of the West Country. Modern suites are available at the Bridge Inn, as it is a popular hotel at weekends. Tel 01934 839100 to reserve a room. If you want bed and breakfast accommodation, contact Mike Redman on 01934 876170.

The community tunes for this year's rally will be *A Banjo Oddity*, *A Banjo Frolic* and *Whistling Rufus*. If you'd like to play a particular piece and would like support or accompaniment, please give me a call and I will do my best to arrange it. Don't forget to bring your banjos!

Please note that although this Rally is for finger-style banjo only, all musical instruments are welcome to the evening get-together at the Bridge Inn.

OBITUARY

LEN PAGE

Len was a jazz banjo player and composer. He has died, aged 73, in Westcliff on Sea after a long illness. He was a pioneer of New Orleans jazz music in this country, joining the Crane River Jazz Band in the 1950s.

Playing banjo and guitar he was joined by the likes of Chris Barber and Lonnie Donnegan. He also played with the early British bands, including those of Ken Colyer and Monty Sunshine..

Len was well known on the local jazz scene having been dug out of retirement to join Dave Claridge New Orleans Jazz Band. His extensive research into New Orleans Jazz involved correspondence with the legendary Laurence Marrero, which is currently being catalogued and archived.

R.I.P.

Mike Skiffins

The MIDLAND BANJO FEST 2001

Saturday October 6th

The Third Midland Banjo Fest will be held this year at the Queens Hotel, Burton-on-Trent, in the Main Function Room. This hotel is just 500 yards from last year's venue and 5 minutes walk from the town centre. Good beers, bar snacks and restaurant. Accommodation if required. An excellent venue. All we need is YOU!!

From 12 noon there is jamming and swapping info with stalls selling banjos, music, tapes, etc. Later in the afternoon the concert will start, which will continue whilst we still have players wishing to perform. Many thanks to those who performed last year. It made the concert a great success!

All types of banjoists and playing welcome. For any information about the concert or the venue, please contact Roger (01283 536 540) or Cliff (01283 568 217).

LETTERS

Folk Fans,

UKETopia COMES TO THE BOSTON AREA, JUNE 30

Jim Beloff, was the featured guest and host of "UKETopia", a concert that showcased the music of the ukulele. The show was held at the The Unitarian Universalist Church of Wakefield, 326 Main St., site of the Linden Tree Coffeehouse, Saturday, June 30, at 8 p.m.

"Jumpin'" Jim Beloff is the author of "The Ukulele: A Visual History" and the compiler and publisher of eight songbooks for the uke. He has recorded two CD's of original ukulele music and produced the "Legends of Ukulele" CD for Rhino Records. In November 1999 he premiered his concerto for solo ukulele and symphony orchestra entitled "Uke Can't Be Serious" with the Wallingford (Connecticut) Symphony.

UKETopia shows have been successfully held in Los Angeles for several years. With the renewed interest in the ukulele, the show is branching out. This was the first UKETopia in the Boston area. UKETopia is a delightful evening of fun for people of all ages and

covers a wide range of ukulele music; Hawaiian, vaudeville, jazz, and even the avant garde.

In addition to Jim Beloff, the night featured some of New England's finest ukulele entertainers including Joel Eckhaus, Andy Woolf, Bennett Hammond, August Watters, and the Ho'okani Pila ensemble.

Jim has published nine ukulele songbooks, a history of ukes, a uke instruction video, and two CD's.

Davis Sweet

Dear Mr Vincent,

To promote the banjo in of contemporary music, Konrad – Bayer – Gesellschaft, Wien announces a call for scores.

Call for Banjo Compositions

Deadline: 30. Sept. 2001

Konrad Bayer (1932-64) was an Austrian writer of experimental lyrics, prose and dramas, and he was an enthusiastic banjo player.

The purpose of this call for scores is to promote the banjo instrument into the area of contemporary music. "Konrad Bayer Gesellschaft Wien" is looking for banjo compositions for performance in 2002, which will take place in the baroque concert hall of "Musikhaus Doblinger Wien".

Compositions should be for

banjo (solo) or

banjo and clarinet (B) or

banjo and tenor sax

Duration: up to 5 minutes

Deadline: 30. Sept. 2001 (postmark)

Up to six compositions will be selected.

All works may be considered for future programming.

Composers should send scores, recordings (if available), bio and SASE (if materials should be returned) to:

Christoph Theiler

Vizepräsident der "Konrad Bayer Gesellschaft"

Grundsteingasse 44/1/5

A – 1160 Wien

Austria

Questions: theiler@t0.or.at

Dear Editor

I reply to Robert Warrick's interesting letter about Leonard Hussey, all I know is that the banjo was a

Windsor Zither with 22 frets, which is still in remarkable condition. The film "Shackleton" is soon to be released, the Great Man being played by Liam Nilsson.

An exhibition, culminating on September 30th, reveals all. At the two exhibition openings at Greenwich the highly acclaimed banjo player Martin Wheatley, in his role as LH, provided the banjo accompaniment, playing pre-1914 pieces to augment the flavour of the evenings.

Mike Miller

Banjo Leader – Swanee

Dear Dr Broadsheet

On reading the letter from Robert Warrick in BB174 enquiring after Hussey's banjo on the Shackleton Expedition, I immediately consulted the 18 volume set of Indexes for the Banjoists' Broadsheet (English edition), University of Scunthorpe Press, 2001, and can advise that the BB covered the subject pretty well in nos 97, 100, 101 and 104 (though without mentioning Lansing's rivetting book).

Of particular interest is the existence of Hussey's own articles published in BMG (any chance of a reprint here?) and the presence of his New Windsor zither banjo in the National Maritime Museum. Perhaps the BB could organise a party visit to celebrate its 50th birthday?

Having just read through the last 27.5 years of BB, I feel honour bound to congratulate you and your staff, however large they be, for producing so consistently informative a Banjomanic Odyssey.

Sincerely,

Gareth Jenkins

Dear Julian

Regarding my "Whyte Laydie", the previous owner thought it worth 'a lot', but you carry an ad from Alvey Turner for a tenor at £600, and he suggested over the phone that a plectrum would be likely to sell in the shop for £800. A search of Internet sites reveals there were two models, a model 2 which this is, and a model 7 which was dripping with m.o.p. and a lot more extravagant. Prices for the model 7 seem to be about \$3,000 upwards, and someone is making a living out of converting Tenors to 5 string!

I suspect that the top prices are for 5 string model 7s in the USA, and they almost disregard anything else. Is that true of banjo prices generally? They also seem to have a low regard for Clifford Essex in comparison to their home grown models. I think I can understand that, but it means that I have to take the American internet prices with more than a pinch of salt.

Best wishes
Mike Skiffins

Dear Jules

I really enjoyed the Bath Banjo Festival. It was good to meet old and new acquaintances and have a good representation from the finger-style fraternity. The concert was mostly enjoyable with a varied programme. The auditorium was an ideal place to hold the concert so that amplification was not required. Those who were unable to make the journey to Bath or just decided not to attend certainly missed a good event.

On the Sunday we managed to play our banjos at the Bell, which was at the epicentre of the street party in Walcot Street. However, the various distractions and volume of other street activities somewhat overshadowed our renditions. What a tremendous finale to the Music Festival. We will arrive earlier next year to enjoy the full day's playing on the Sunday.

I appreciate all the hard work and effort that goes into planning a banjo festival especially in a relatively new environment, and thank you for an enjoyable weekend.

Your suggestion of forming a Bath Banjo Band is an exciting idea, if only enough interest can be stirred in and around the area it may become a reality. Put my name down!

Hope you can make it to our rally in Backwell on the 8th September (*see elsewhere in this BB for more news on this event – Jules*). We have an evening session in a local pub with food, drink and plenty of banjos.

Best wishes
Mike Redman

Dear Jules

A quick line to pass on congratulations to you on the recent running and heading of the Bath Banjo Rally.

It was a lovely day at the Uni, and the company of old friends from the Reading scene made it even better: due to jet lag – Texas return the night before – I left just after your performance. But it was a happy and eventful day.

Sincerely,
Tony (LH) Moore

Dear Mr Vincent

This is just a few lines to thank you most sincerely for a wonderful day at the first Bath Banjo Festival. I appreciate all the effort you must have put into it and I for one enjoyed it very much. The venue was ideal, weather kind to us and plenty of places to play. Refreshments were plentiful and open until late – great, if a little walk to get there. This could not be helped, I'm sure. It was really nice to meet one's friends in the banjo world and socialise.

The evening concert, too, was outstanding, with all the talented performers. Perhaps Brian Masters and Keith Nichols could be persuaded to come one year? Here's to next year!

Rosemary Evered (Mrs)

Dear Julian

Thanks for producing an interesting publication for the niche world of banjo players.

One small point. Is it possible to include a discography, e.g. what records are available, where to get them, what style, review comments, etc? I know that there is some of this in the BB but it is not comprehensive.

I first bought a banjo while still at school when the Trad Jazz revival was in full force – around 1961. I had Emile Grimshaw's *Plectrum Playing for Modern Banjoists* but wish in those early days that I had had a teacher to make best use of my severely limited talent. Since then it has spent more time in the cupboard than out of it, but I did buy a new instrument in 1988, having purchased Don van Palta's tape tuition course and had a period playing with the few remaining members of the old Macclesfield BMG group in the early '80s.

My re-kindled interest arose from an idle moment surfing the net at work, starting with the word 'banjo' and also a need for a DIY sing-song as part of our and our neighbours celebrations of the millennium.

I'd be interested in playing with other amateur musicians in the Farnham area and enjoyed last year's Jazzalong weekend near Winchester and David Price's banjo weekend at Hitchin.

I'm sure other players will recognise similarities with their own relationship with the instrument!

Yours sincerely
Andy Barker

Paramount Resonator Guitars, made by Martin. 36 resonator instruments were produced, some 4-string.

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1-18T (three made, 1927)

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1-21P (plectrum model, one made, 1930)

1-28P (plectrum model, 1928-30)

Size OO

OO-18T (6 made, 1931-40)

OO-28T (one each made, 1931, 1940)

OO-17P plectrum model (one made, 1940)

Size OOO and OM

OOO-18T (five made, 1930-41)

OOO-28T (one made, 1929)

OM-28T (one made, 1930)

OM-18T (one made, 1931)

OOO-18P plectrum model (1930)

OOO-28P plectrum model (three made, 1930)

OM-18P plectrum model (1930-31)

OM-28P plectrum model (five made, 1931-32)

Size D

D-18T (one made, 1963)

D-28T (one made, 1964)

Relating these instruments to what we know about the banjo world, Orpheum was a brand of William P. Rettberg and William L. Lange, who purchased it from the New York banjo factory of James H. Buckbee (one of the top New York banjo makers) in 1897. Lange went on his own in 1921, at the same time introducing the Paramount brand. He switched emphasis in the 1930s to guitars, most (if not all) of which were made by Harmony and Martin. He is reported to have marketed some Orpheum brand guitars, but this is not certain and nothing is known of them. Lange weathered the Great Depression but went out of business in 1941 or '42. In 1944 the

Orpheum brand name was picked up by New York distributor Maurice Lipsky, who applied it to both guitars and banjos. In the 1950s, Lipsky marketed Orpheum electric archtops and little electric hollow-bodied guitars. In the early 1960s, Lipsky began to use the Orpheum name on guitars imported from Japan, but the name doesn't seem to have survived beyond the big crash of 1968.

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== TEACHERS ==

Current BB subscribers who teach banjo. Please let me know if you wish to be included in this list. Inclusion in this list does not imply endorsement by the BB.

Mike DEXTER plectrum banjo and guitar in north west Derbyshire. Tel 01663 743610

SJ HARROP 5-string and tenor banjo, guitar, dobro, mandolin, bass, pedal steel. 18 Haveroid Way, Crigglestone, Wakefield, WF4 3PG

Mike JONES tenor & plectrum banjo, plectrum guitar, jass, blues, harmony, improvisation, how to play tunes, etc. 27 Normandy Way, West Acres, Fordingbridge, Hants, tel 01425 655163

Nicholas KIRK plectrum banjo 36 Kilpin Hill, Staincliffe, W. Yorks tel 0192 440 2931

David MILES fingerstyle banjo, classical guitar, chord & harmony for vocal accompaniment 6 Millbridge Mews, St Andrew St, Hertford, SG14 1HE tel 01992 501722

Vic PARTRIDGE ALCM tenor banjo and guitar, classical and plectrum. Tel 01633 223333

David PRICE mainly plectrum banjo; occasionally finger style and tenor. Included are most techniques, especially chord-melody and all areas of jazz. Tel 01992 578617

Danielle Saxon REEVES offers tuition on banjo and guitar. All ages and level of experience welcome. tel 01384 893987 or 07947 168192, daniellesaxonreeves@yahoo.co.uk

Chris SANDS fingerstyle banjo, saxophone "Beeboles" Far Sawrey, Ambleside, Cumbria. Tel 015394 46742 or 33291

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Julian VINCENT tenor banjo, arranging & music theory. 93 Redhatch Drive, Earley, Reading, RG6 5QN 0118 961 1874, j.f.v.vincent@bath.ac.uk. Also available for teaching in the Bath area

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CLIFFORD ESSEX Popular banjo with resonator, 5th peg missing £100 tel Whacky Weekes on 01376 342983

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Ideal for the Jazz Banjo player, a chord book with charts for over 1,430 jazz favourites. Please send a stamped addressed envelope for the complete index, some sample pages and a copy of the review from the American magazine 'Just Jazz Guitar'. The price is £45 plus £5 postage. Alan Noble, 52 Branksome Drive, Nab Wood, Shipley, BD18 4BE or tel. 01274 583085.

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**The BANJOISTS' BROADSHEET
BB175**

This is The Banjoists' Broadsheet. If it is undeliverable, cross out the above address and write "Return to Sender". The sender is

JFV Vincent, 93 Redhatch Drive, Earley, READING, RG6 5QN

Carolina in the Morning

arr Gordon Dando

Banjo solo

1 C Cmj7 C6 C7 G7 Dm

5 F6 F+ F G7 G7 C

9 F B7 C A7 D7

14 G D7 G7 C Cmj7

18 C6 C7 G7 Dm F6 F+

22 F G7 G7 C C7

26 F D7 G7

29 C C6 C A7 D7 G7 C G7 C

Detailed description: This is a musical score for a banjo solo in the key of C major, 4/4 time. The score is written on a single treble clef staff. It begins with a 'Banjo solo' instruction. The music is divided into measures, with measure numbers 1, 5, 9, 14, 18, 22, 26, and 29 indicated. Chord symbols are placed above the staff to indicate the harmonic structure. The chords used include C, Cmj7, C6, C7, G7, Dm, F6, F+, F, B7, A7, D7, G, and C7. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, often grouped into triplets. There are several triplet markings with the number '3' below them. The score ends with a double bar line at measure 32.

By a Sleepy Lagoon

arranged for banjo by Gordon Dando

Eric Coates

Musical staff 1: Treble clef, 3/4 time signature. Measures 1-4. Measure 1 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 2 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 3 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 4 has a triplet of eighth notes.

Musical staff 2: Treble clef. Measures 5-8. Measure 5 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 6 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 7 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 8 has a triplet of eighth notes.

Musical staff 3: Treble clef. Measures 9-12. Measure 9 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 10 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 11 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 12 has a triplet of eighth notes.

Musical staff 4: Treble clef. Measures 13-16. Measure 13 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 14 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 15 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 16 has a triplet of eighth notes.

Musical staff 5: Treble clef. Measures 17-20. Measure 17 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 18 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 19 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 20 has a triplet of eighth notes.

Musical staff 6: Treble clef. Measures 21-24. Measure 21 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 22 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 23 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 24 has a triplet of eighth notes.

Musical staff 7: Treble clef. Measures 25-28. Measure 25 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 26 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 27 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 28 has a triplet of eighth notes.

Musical staff 8: Treble clef. Measures 29-32. Measure 29 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 30 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 31 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 32 has a triplet of eighth notes.

Musical staff 9: Treble clef. Measures 33-36. Measure 33 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 34 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 35 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 36 has a triplet of eighth notes.

By a Sleepy Lagoon

arranged for banjo by Gordon Dando

Eric Coates

1

6

11

17

22

28

35

43

49