

Introduction

All traditional American music, including country and jazz, started out as an aural art form, where people learned how to play instruments by listening to friends and family members play in social gatherings. To properly get a clear picture of this music's culture and the way the music should be played is through listening to recordings(a lot!) and using your ear to learn.

You'll find that by using your ear to learn, while more difficult than using tab at first, will lead to faster memorization, internalization, and eventually improvisation. Your ear and musical sensibility will develop at a very fast rate, and playing with people will be extremely enjoyable, because you'll have a mature ear, and you won't be reliant on tablature.

The two parts to learning a song by ear, with minimal tablature use are:

TRANSCRIPTION

and

INTERNALIZATION

In this guide, we'll get into both of these skills in detail, so you know exactly what you need to do to get the most out of learning new music.

TRANSCRIPTION

Transcription is the practice of picking out melodies using your ear and your instrument. Many people say you should write your transcriptions down, and while there is truth to that, it's more important to memorize what you learn, which is what we will be covering in this guide.

1. Using the slowest solo banjo recording, find the notes of the melody. Take it one note at a time, and slowly piece each note together. This is the most time-consuming part of learning songs, so be patient. The goal is right and left hand accuracy - not speed. Transcribing is incredibly important to your development because you are learning where each note lays on the neck and you are using your ear. You're learning how to walk. Just like any skill - with practice and patience, you will get better at it.
2. Play along with the slow recording. First do phrases you're working on, then play the entire piece. Use your ear to determine if everything you're playing is exactly the way the recording sounds.

Using the tablature: Tabs are often misused by students to learn entire song melodies. **The correct way to use them is as a reference for right hand and left hand fingerings.**

INTERNALIZATION

Once you feel like you've got the song memorized, it's time to get inside the music, or **internalize**. You will not need the tab during this step. **You should only begin internalization once the entire melody is transcribed and memorized.**

Internalize using **three different accompaniment methods.**

1. **Solo (no accompaniment)** - Play the song by yourself. Be aware of your time, rhythm, and note clarity.
2. **Metronome** - Set the metronome at 80 beats per minute(bpm) and play along. This will force you to play in time with even 8th notes. Don't get discouraged if you can't do it at first - this takes practice as well. Once you feel comfortable at 80bpm, move the tempo up 10 clicks and try the song at that tempo, get comfortable, and continue in that fashion.
3. **Recording** - Play along with slowed down recordings of your favorite artists playing these songs, or play-along tracks(tracks made for practice).

Conclusion

Transcription and Internalization take practice, so despite your initial frustration, keep with it. Play around with different tempos. Really slow and really fast tempos are going to be more difficult to play with than medium. It's good to get a good idea of what different tempos feel like. Keep in mind, **if you can't play the song slow, you won't be able to play it at faster tempos with control or precision.** Familiarize yourself with each song by finding different versions and listening a lot.

Keep a daily log of your practice. Log the song and what metronome setting. If you practice daily, you'll see results in your playing within a matter of days!

If you have any questions, please contact me at **www.bennettsullivanmusic.com.**

Thanks!
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