

Building Blocks to Bluegrass Jamming Created for the Five-String Banjo Using the "Cut n Paste" Method - Vol. 1 by Wil Huckabay

(Interview with Wil Huckabay about his new book - Angie Sumpter)



Wil Huckabay and "Ole Blackie"

Why did you want to learn the banjo?

When I was 14 years old we were going to a Bible study every Saturday night and there was a guy playing banjo and a guy playing guitar there. I thought the banjo was a really neat instrument and bluegrass was a neat genre of music and I wanted to learn the banjo. But that wasn't the motivating factor for me at the time. One of the only things my dad bought me was an Alvarez banjo. I took that banjo to the Bible study right after I got it and the guys said "hey, everybody Wilbur has a banjo. Play something for us Wilbur like *Banjo in the Hollow* or *Tom Dooley*, play *Dixie Breakdown*." Of course, I said "I don't know anything; I don't know how to play." And they all had a fun time at my

expense, especially the banjo player, which I highly respected. So I made a vow to myself that day, purely out of revenge, "buddy I'm going to blow you out of the water someday." So my motivating factor to learn the banjo was revenge. But you know what? Revenge is one of the most powerful motivators. I don't recommend it but it worked for me.

Did you have a teacher?

The banjo player at the Bible study eventually showed me a few songs like *Banjo in the Hollow*. From then on I never had an instructor. We didn't have the fancy tools that's available today where you can slow songs down on the computer. I had an Earl Scruggs LP which I had to turn down the slow version and try to figure out what he was doing. Then I went to bluegrass festivals and

Cut n Paste-continued

started trying to absorb everything I could from anybody. And that's really how I learned. There was very little in instructional books back then, too.

How did you come up with the "Cut n Paste" method?

It was an epiphany really. I was at work and I was writing out some tablature for an upcoming bluegrass workshop at San Jac College. It occurred to me what I was doing was putting together a series of four beat licks, one right behind another, so they would fit together in different chord progressions. And I realized "my gosh that's how we subconsciously put together licks when we're jamming with people." So I thought wouldn't it be cool to put a series of simplified 4 beat licks together in G, C, and D where people could just learn those licks and marry them together in a chord progression to play in a song. The more and more I started playing with that idea the more it made sense.

So "Cut n Paste" means what?

"Cut n Paste" means you literally cut licks out and arrange them to follow a chord progression in a song to create a break to the song. All the licks I use in the book are printed out on perforated sheets of card stock to make it easy to cut out and arrange in the order you want to follow the chord formula of the song. At the workshop at the College we had all the students cut out the G, C, and D licks and arrange and paste them with a glue stick on a blank sheet of paper to create their own break to the song "Blue Ridge Cabin Home."

We had maybe 20 or more students there and a good 15 of them played their "cut n paste" version and not one of the breaks was the same. That was really the catalyst that vaulted me into writing the book because I saw from that workshop how this really works.

One of the students said "Your giving away your secrets. You mean this is how you people walk into a jam session and start playing a song you don't even know but it sounds like you've played it before." I said "you're exactly right. That's how a more progressive banjo player can walk into a jam session and pick it up like he's been playing with these guys forever." The difference is our encyclopedia of licks may be a little larger than others but the concept is exactly the same. Another student said "the light bulb just came on." And that's what I hope and wish that "Cut n Paste" does for everyone.

So when using the "Cut n Paste" method you don't play a melody break?

"Cut n Paste" is not about melody. It's about learning to survive, contribute and participate in a jam. Being able to play a break or "fake a solo." If you listen to the "Cut n Paste" breaks I play on the CD which comes with the book, I play them behind the voice and they work perfect for backup, too.

What level student would benefit from your book?

Any level really. It is meant for the student who already knows the basic forward/reverse, alternating, and foggy mountain rolls. This book is for the more basic beginner student to be able to survive in a jam. We will eventually be coming out with a "Cut n Paste-Vol. 2" that will have more intricate licks, including melodics.

Cut n Paste-continued

You've been using this method with your students for the past 6 to 8 months. Have you seen your students participating more in jams since they've been using this method?

We have a Slow Jam Class once a month and I started implementing the "Cut n Paste" method into the class with wonderful results. In the last jam class we broke the class up into 3 different groups. Each group was to come up with a "cut n paste" break to a song they didn't know the title to at the time. All they knew was the "chord formula" to the song. Each group played their break and I sang and played the guitar. The song it was "Nine Pound Hammer." They all did a beautiful job and none of the breaks sounded the same. The students were really excited about it. I've also been incorporating it into my student's lessons because that's what it's all about. I could teach them different songs all day long but the goal is to eventually get them to where they can walk into a jam and play.

Do you also find that by using the "Cut n Paste" method it helps the student to hear the different chord changes better?

Absolutely. Some of the "Cut n Paste" licks have 7's in them. A 7th chord will always indicate movement, so we use those and show the students how to use the "cut n paste" licks to indicate this movement and hear it. There are several examples of that in the book.

How should someone approach starting to use the book? Should they learn all the breaks at one time or should they take just the simple breaks first and use them with the songs in the book?

First, you need to understand how "Cut n Paste" works which is relatively simple and once you work through the book you'll understand how easy it is. We make the statement in the book; you don't have to memorize all the licks in the book before your ready to enter a jam. Pick your favorites - two or three G licks, two or three C licks and two or three D licks. This will give you enough armament to walk into a jam session. As you progress, start memorizing a few more. That way you add to your arsenal.

So learning the "chord formula" to the song first is very important before you can "cut n paste" the licks into the song.

Yes. There's several different ways to learn the chord formula. It's always a good idea and imperative to learn the guitar players chords - G, C and D for instance. The chord formula is based on the number of downbeats. For example, as you tap your foot, that is a downbeat. The bass player hitting a string is a downbeat. Then if the bass player is in G or the guitar player is playing a G chord and your foot taps 4 times before he goes to a C chord that's 4 downbeats which equals 1 "cut n paste" G lick.

When you work through the book and play the example breaks along with the CD which includes a playalong section for each song, you'll see how easy and fun this method can be. Once the student has the concept they can start plugging in other licks and learn the break in a different way.

Cut n Paste-continued

There's a lot of books on the market teaching backup and books with licks, how is your book different from those?

The books your referring to teach you the licks but they don't teach you how to use the licks. "Cut n Paste" not only teaches you the lick - it shows you how to plug it into a song. That's how you learn to play the banjo. It's great to know all these wonderful licks but if you can't use a single one of them because you don't know where they fit then they're useless. "Cut n Paste" teaches you how to fit licks into a song to create your own breaks.

I know Pete Wernick has endorsed your book. How awesome is that?

That excites me because Pete Wernick is one of the greats. For him to not only be pleased with the book he wants to list it in his library of recommended books for building jam-related skills. For him to give an endorsement tells me as one of our students said in one of the last jam classes "we've hit a homerun" and at least now we're on the right track.

Do you find when someone learns this method they're able to participate in jams more quickly?

Absolutely. I've seen banjo players who play and enter jams and all they can do is vamp or maybe they know one little lick but don't know where to put it in the song versus someone who uses the "Cut n Paste" method who has an arsenal of simple licks and knows how to use them in a song they've never played before.

from Angie - "I've been using Wil's "Cut n Paste" method for about 8 months now. I'm proud to say I'm one of his "guinea pig" students. It's amazing how easy it is to learn and fun, too. I've been in more jam situations this year than I ever thought I would be and it's only due to this method.

I went to one of Pete Wernick's jam camps earlier this year before I started learning "cut n paste." If I had known this method before going I would have been much more prepared for the camp.

Thanks Wil for being such a patient teacher for us "middle-aged newbies" and giving us "Cut n Paste."



**Building Blocks for Bluegrass Jamming
for the 5-String Banjo Book/CD
"Introducing the Cut n Paste Method"
by Wil Huckabay**

[Click here for a sample "Cut n Paste" exercise & sound byte](#)