THIS ART WE CALL MUSIC —
APPROACHING THE CLASSICS

By Dr. Tim Lake

When I began to organize my notes in order to study for my doctoral qualifying exams, I was overwhelmed by the fact that I would be held responsible for the entire history of music during the course of two examinations, one written and one oral. Fortunately, I have discovered an atavistic talent for organization that has given me a newfound sense of security knowing that, if this music business does not work out, I could make somebody one hell of a secretary. Therefore, I decided to study for fifty days in a row only breaking to teach and play 'good' gigs. The gig situation was so bad that I turned down more jobs than I worked. Somehow I just couldn't handle the culture shock of studying the glorious music of great composers like Mozart and Beethoven only to play that night for a bunch of drunks whose idea of a great musical evening is hearing *Rocky Top* played over and over again while they watch a football game and a baseball game simultaneously on two completely separate big screen televisions. Secure in my own little cocoon, sheltered from the reality of the 'real world' of music, I commenced to totally immerse myself in the study of music for fifty days. With the pressure of my qualifying exams hanging over my head during every waking moment, I could not shake one overpowering feeling. One might assume that I would ask myself how I had gotten into the predicament of a laborious fifty day study regime locked away from family and friends. Quite to the contrary, however, my reoccurring thought concerned just how lucky I was to be able to revel in the beauty of this art we call music and just how immense a field was this art we call music, and if I tried with all my heart, I might make the world a little better place by being a true and humble servant of this art we call music.

The more I studied, the more I realized just how ignorant I was, but the more I realized how ignorant I was, the more I studied. Hence, I slowly became smarter, and wiser, and more humble than ever. The classic music of the masters is such a great example of the highest in human achievement. These composers and their music were still relatively new to me because I wasn't exactly raised attending orchestra concerts and piano recitals. As a matter of fact, my youth was so far removed from the world of music that when one of the guys on my junior high basketball team asked me what kind of music I liked, I couldn't think of any. I began my exploration into what we call 'classical' music in the seventies by purchasing a recording of a different composer each month for a dollar after a minimum $10 purchase at a local supermarket. I purchased these 'classical' records, so I could listen to some music that I would not try to analyze. The music seemed so complex that I could not keep up with it, so I just gave up and tried to relax. Little did I know that one day I would be struggling to understand something as far removed as the mysteries of the sonata allegro form in the concertos of Mozart.

Although classical music has been played on the banjo for quite some time, I still find it interesting to note the novelty in which it is perceived by most listeners. People will come

up to me after a performance and say, "I didn't know that you could play that on a banjo." My first encounter with classical music on a banjo was with John McEuen's version of Muzio Clementi's *Opus 36* from the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's Uncle Charlie Album which I later recorded on my Only In The Movies album (PAD 35437CD/CT). A short time later I discovered a little know Rounder Record album called A Banjo Galaxy, The Classic Banjo of William J. Ball, L.R.A.M. Ball's three finger banjo style is referred to as classic banjo which stylistically has strong ragtime influence and includes original compositions by Britain's banjo virtuoso Joe Morally. Ragtime music was viewed by the Europeans as one of America's original contributions to classical music, but it is important to realize that this banjo style is called 'classic,' not 'classical' banjo. Classic banjo is a fingerstyle technique that was very popular in the 1880's and declined in popularity through World War I. The scholar in me would like to see the music of composers such as Clementi referred to as 'classical' and the music of Scott Joplin, Joe Morally and others referred to as 'ragtime' in order to more clearly delineate genre. Scott Joplin is by far the most popular ragtime composer thanks to the movie *The Sting*. I recorded his famous theme song entitled *The Entertainer* on Only In The Movies.

A good place to begin a study of classical music is with the music of the Baroque era which lasted from 1600 to 1750. Remember that scholars have categorized epochs in music to aid in categorization for teaching purposes. It is doubtful that J.S. Bach referred to himself as a Baroque composer even though we scholars chose to close the era with his death. The list of historical eras in western music is as follows;

Medieval 450 — 1450

Renaissance 1450 — 1600

Baroque 1600 — 1750

Classical 1750 — 1800

Romantic 1800 — 1900

Twentieth Century 1900 — 2000

J.S. Bach lived from 1685 to 1750, during the Baroque era, and wrote music that works out very nicely on the 5-string banjo. I have recorded a medley of Bach's *Jesu Joy Of Man's Desiring* and *Minuet In G* on Only In The Movies. I would recommend pieces such as his Two Part Inventions as good places to begin. John Bullard plays some of these Two Part Inventions on a wonderful banjo recording of music from this epoch entitled The Classical Banjo. Eric Weissberg also plays Baroque music on one of my favorite albums entitled *Vivaldi's Favorites*. Bach's contribution to music is so far reaching because of two books that he published in 1722 and 1744 entitled *The Well Tempered Clavier*. In these books Bach systematically wrote a series of preludes and fugues that examined the entire 24 key tonal system in chromatic order. He began with C major, then C minor, next C# major, then C# minor and so on. 'Well tempered' refers to the concept of equal tempered clavier tuning which made it possible to use all tonalities. This is the same system that I have been introducing in these articles in which tonality is divided into 12 major keys and 12 minor keys. Now lets examine the harmonization of minor keys.

How Music Works

Diagram 1:

Harmonization Of Minor Scales

i7	iif7	III7	iv7	v/V7	VI7	bVII7/vii°7	i7
Am7	Bf7	Cmaj7	Dm7	Em7/E7	Fmaj7	G7/G#°7	Am7
A#m7	B#f7	C#maj7	D#m7	E#m7/E#7	F#maj7	G#7/Gx°7	A#m7
Bbm7	Cf7	Dbmaj7	Ebm7	Fm7/F7	Gbmaj7	Ab7/A°7	Bbm7
Bm7	C#f7	Dmaj7	Em7	F#m7/F#7	Gmaj7	A7/A#°7	Bm7
Cm7	Df7	Ebmaj7	Fm7	Gm7/G7	Abmaj7	Bb7/B°7	Cm7
C#m7	D#f7	Emaj7	F#m7	G#m7/G#7	Amaj7	B7/B#°7	C#m7
Dm7	Ef7	Fmaj7	Gm7	Am7/A7	Bbmaj7	C7/C#°7	Dm7
D#m7	E#f7	F#maj7	G#m7	A#m7/A#7	Bmaj7	C#7/Cx°7	D#m7
Ebm7	Ff7	Gbmaj7	Abm7	Bbm7/Bb7	Cbmaj7	Db7/D°7	Ebm7
Em7	F#f7	Gmaj7	Am7	Bm7/B7	Cmaj7	D7/D#°7	Em7
Fm7	Gf7	Abmaj7	Bbm7	Cm7/C7	Dbmaj7	Eb7/E°7	Fm7
F#m7	G#f7	Amaj7	Bm7	C#m7/C#7	Dmaj7	E7/E#°7	F#m7
Gm7	Af7	Bbmaj7	Cm7	Dm7/D7	Ebmaj7	F7/F#°7	Gm7
G#m7	A#f7	Bmaj7	C#m7	D#m7/D#7	Emaj7	F#7/Fx°7	G#m7
Abm7	Bbf7	Cbmaj7	Dbm7	Ebm7/Eb7	Fbmaj7	Gb7/G°7	Abm7

In order to better understand 'Diagram 1: Harmonization Of Minor Scales,' please refer to the November issue of Acoustic Musician and the Minor Scale chart. Remember that the notes that comprise the Minor Scale chart are derived from the natural minor scale. To create a natural minor scale we took the rule 1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7 8 and plugged it into the major scale. Hence, an A minor scale was 1=A, 2=B, b3=C, 4=D, 5=E, b6=F, b7=G, and 8=A. We often use two other types of minor scales: harmonic and melodic. A harmonic minor scale is created when we leave the seventh scale degree natural to produce a half-step or leading tone between the seventh and the eighth scale degrees. Therefore, the rule for a harmonic minor scale is 1 2 b3 4 5 b6 7 8. Hence, an A harmonic minor scale is 1=A, 2=B, b3=C, 4=D, 5=E, b6=F, 7=G#, and 8=A. The rule for an ascending melodic minor scale is 1 2 b3 4 5 6 7 8, essentially only altering the major scale by flatting the third scale degree. A melodic minor scale descends as a natural minor. An A melodic minor scale is comprised of 1=A, 2=B, b3=C, 4=D, 5=E, 6=F#, 7=G#, and 8=A. It is important to realize that the variations found with these three types of minor scales (natural, harmonic, and

melodic) account for more variety in the harmonization of minor keys. 'Diagram 1' lists the chords that we find diatonically in all minor keys and includes the possibility of the either a dominant seven (V7) or minor seven (v7) on the fifth scale degree and a diminished seven (vii^{o}7) or dominant seven (bVII7) on the seventh scale degree. Now you can understand why the diminished seven chord (1 b3 b5 bb7) is actually created from the harmonization of harmonic and melodic minor scales. Make sure that you practice playing all major and minor key harmonization's on the banjo. Play the root of the chord as the lowest note then strum the rest of the chord. Now you will hear the sound produced by harmonizing each key and undoubtedly be inspired by newly found musical possibilities that are only limited by your own creativity.

A half-diminished chord (iif7) is found in the harmonization of minor scales as the diatonic chord based on the second scale degree. As I mentioned in the previous article, the half-diminished seven chord occurs diatonically as a viif7 in major key harmonization and a iif7 in minor keys. It is indeed curious that rarely does this chord receive mention in most chord books. The definition is 1 b3 b5 and b7, so the notes that comprise a B half-diminished seven chord (Bf7) are 1=B, b3=D, b5=F, and b7=A. A half-diminished seven chord is more commonly referred to as a minor seven flat-five chord in jazz and pop circles. For example, a very beautiful and typical progression in the key of A minor might be Bm7(b5) to E7(b9) to Am7. This progression is essentially a iif7, V7, i7 in key of A minor.

I want to mention the importance of understanding common rhythmic notation as a fundamental in our musical language. Banjo players are always speaking of the importance of rhythm and timing in regard to the playing of great performers. If fact, I mentioned these aspects of performance in the first article. However, I am continually amazed at the frequency to which I find students who have not memorized the names of basic rhythmic values such as whole, half, quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes. I have actually had students who would not memorize these rhythms and consequently I had to refuse to teach them. Believe it or not, I had a student who could not play the notes to *Sally Goodwin* in time and would not believe me when I tried to stress the importance of his understanding rhythmic notation. Without this comprehension, he could not understand me when I told him what he was doing wrong. Regretfully, I doubt that he will ever get it right unless he changes his attitude.

Ludwig van Beethoven's famous *Für Elise* can provide us with a good example of the language involved in the transmission of musical thought. I recorded this piece on my 'banjo concerto' compact disc and I'm sure those of you who called the answering machine of Acoustic Musician have noticed this tune prior to leaving your number. I would describe the first few measures of the piece as being in the key of A minor, with a half-step, eighth note melodic figure from D# to E in the treble clef and an eighth note arpeggio accompaniment outlining an A minor chord beginning in the bass clef. Hence, a musician who understood this terminology could actually discuss this beginning and have a good idea of how it would sound. The language of music communicates the sound in a way that expedites the learning process and the understanding of how to actually perform the piece.

A concerto is traditionally a three movement composition for orchestra and solo instrument that flourished during the Classical era of music. You should remember the Classical era as the one that gave us the genius of Mozart and Haydn. Indeed, the concertos of Mozart are viewed as some of the finest ever written and often provide the measurement for young composers. As I previously mentioned, I wrote a concerto for 5-string banjo and orchestra entitled *An American Concerto For 5-String Banjo And Orchestra* that tries to provide the same orchestral foil for the banjo that others do for more conventional instruments such as

violin and piano. When referring to a concerto, please do not call it a symphony which is an entirely different work for orchestra that is usually comprised of four movements and does not showcase a solo instrument. Concertos attempt to examine the entire range of emotion that may be communicated through the talents of a virtuoso performer and his instrument while featuring interplay with the entire orchestra. When composers write concertos they not only write the music for the solo instrument, but they write all the music for every instrument in the orchestra. Some musicians assume that I only wrote the banjo part for my concerto, so I am quick to point out that the real achievement is arranging the music for the entire orchestra.

While banjo concertos are not common, I found reference to one in Tony Trischka's "Melodic Banjo" book. Composed by Earl Robinson (the composer of "Joe Hill" and other American classics), it was performed by Eric Weissberg and the Boston Pops Orchestra under the direction of Arthur Fiedler in 1967. I am not familiar with an available recording of this concerto and it is for this reason that I decided to release on Padraig Records the premiere of my concerto by the Atlanta-Emory Orchestra with myself on banjo under the direction of Jere Flint. As a banjo performer and composer, I think that it is very important that we begin to establish repertoire that embraces the entire spectrum and history of music. The influences in my banjo concerto range from the sixteenth century counterpoint of Palestrina to the twentieth century style know as minimalism. It is very important that we banjo players study the work of the masters and compose our own concertos in order to attain equality within the family of instruments on the banjo, America's original contribution to that family. In this way, we can do our very best to dissuade the stereotypical misconceptions that give rise to generalized misinformation manifested in newspaper articles such as the one I recently read saying that a fellow in Atlanta "may be the world's only classical banjo player." This statement is made even more inaccurate because that same newspaper previewed my banjo concerto in April, 1993. These sorts of uncorroborated statements by an otherwise respected journalist in a nationally respected paper make us all look bad. By using the word 'all' I do not refer to all us banjo players. Rather, I refer to all us Americans who might not know enough about our own cultural heritage to find the folly in such inaccuracies. Is it any wonder that advertisers find it easy to manipulate such an uniformed American population? If music matters at all in the overall framework of who we are as a people, then I say that the banjo matters equally in this equation. If mandolin concertos are important to the cultural heritage of Italy, then why shouldn't banjo concertos be of equal value to American culture. It is, therefore, my hope that there will be many more banjo concertos so we banjo players can aspire to the same heights as any other musician with the full dynamic range of possibilities within this art we call music. In this manner, we will not only have the ability to entertain, but we will be able to educate and elevate the audience through this art we call music.

Some say that I take music too seriously, and I readily admit that might be true. I am frustrated by the role of music in the marketplace and the fact that in many cases musicians are required to be less than they can be in order to cater to the whims of the general public. In other words, if the music industry only follows the path directly relating to bottom line record sales, then the consumer could and sometimes does dictate the music that the musician will play. I am hard pressed to think of another field in which this is true. We don't tell our physicians how to treat us. We are willing to allow lawyers, architects, and other professionals to perform in the manner in which they were trained. Why is it true that the purchaser of musical services often insists on hiring the best only to turn around and tell them what to play? Justified by the fact that we are paying him, this practice would be analogous to hiring Michael Jordan to play basketball and making him play the popular playground game 'HORSE'. It would be far wiser for the purchaser of musical services to allow the musician to perform to the best of his ability and thus elevate, educate, and

entertain the listener. In this manner, the musician will function as an integral member of the community, sharing equal importance with other professions by making our society more vital and endearing through his knowledge of this art we call music. Our responsibility as musicians should simply be to strive for excellence in our craft by emulating the best from the history of music, whether it be Ludwig van Beethoven, Duke Ellington, or Bill Monroe, and by hard work and dedication strive to be faithful servants for the greater good of mankind through this art we call music.