

Tony Russell informs us in his book: *'Country Music Originals: The Legends and the Lost'* that Karnes was a barber turned Baptist minister from Corbin, Kentucky (140 miles northwest of Bristol). Russell, as well as Cindy Lovell in her narrative, state that Karnes accompanied himself with a Gibson harp guitar, but Charles K. Wolfe, in *'The Legend That Peer Built'* maintains: "On some selections, it sounds as if banjoist **B. F. Shelton** also from Corbin, who travelled to Bristol with Karnes and recorded immediately before him, is playing a second guitar behind Karnes".

The lyrics of 'When They Ring the Golden Bells' were written in 1887 by French born multi-instrumentalist and jack of all trades Dion De Marbelle, and set to a tune of undetermined origin. Karnes recorded two takes of 'Golden Bells' at a marathon session during the afternoon of July 29, 1927. On the released take, Karnes offers an abbreviated (and irregularly metered) rendition of the hymn, with high register guitar strings (perhaps plucked by Shelton?) sounding above Karnes's bass lines.

Dolly Parton's 'Golden Bells' cover includes some substitute chords venturing beyond the hymn's original (mostly diatonic) harmony. Parton's six backing musicians include Carl Jackson on guitar and harmony vocals, and **Rob Ickles** on resophonic guitar. Ickles, born in California and based in Nashville, was a founding member of the bluegrass quintet Blue Highway: his prominent resophonic guitar fill-ins ring throughout the recording.

Next issue: the remaining covers on the first *Orthophonic Joy*.



A Return to My Writing Roots by Ron Hinkle

Due to the recent controversy that I instigated, I have made a difficult personal decision; I will no longer air my opinions in BMG. I hereby return to my writing roots, technique articles (with maybe a 'little bit' of opinion!). I will no longer waste valuable magazine space with opinion fluff, especially when it hurts the feelings of others; I simply do not have the stomach for it. I have started a blog site: *The Banjo Snob*:

www.banjosnob.com

Here you can read and comment on my opinions to your heart's content, and only *I* will be responsible.

This is not a recanting of anything I have said before; it is simply an admission that some things are better left said in private. It's high-time I put my playing/teaching where my mouth is, and prove that I 'deserve my opinions'. Thank you for any patience you may still have with me while I learn how to say what needs to be said.

The 'Peabody Stroke'

As a sort of a 'peace offering,' I have decided to dedicate my next technique article to none other than the great Eddie Peabody, and one of his bread-and-butter strokes; the syncopated split stroke. Emile Grimshaw covered the basic Split Stroke (page 82 in the updated *Modern Banjoists*), so it was certainly nothing new in 1925. Peabody did something revolutionary with it though; he added a tricky syncopation that has mystified and hypnotized banjoists ever since. The

syncopated split stroke was also one of George Formby's favourite strokes on the Ukulele-Banjo (slightly different from this discussion).

Eddie typically reserved it for the four-bar 'breaks' that occur in most pop tunes of the era; it should be noted that the 'hot' four-bar break was one of the first steps on the path to true improvisation in early jazz. This is a very exposed segment of music; the stroke, *done correctly*, is unexpected and exciting, and leaves the player/listener/dancer feeling that he/she is suspended in the air for four bars (ah, the magic of syncopation!).

Tricky

It is tricky to execute, and done *incorrectly* can cause the whole band (and/or the dancers) to fall apart! Rhythmic accuracy is less important in a solo act of course; just keep in mind that professional musicians will hear any mis-steps, and will think less of you for them!

The basic stroke and chords are simple enough: A down-stroke on the bass string, a stressed four-string down-stroke on the chord, an up-stroke on the damped chord, repeat. It is a very loose-wrist stroke (with no vellum contact), and care must be taken not to sound heavy-handed (it is even more exciting played softly, or start softly and crescendo, or start loudly and decrescendo).

The tricky part is in the timing. It is easy to see these three notes as a triplet (and many mistakenly *play* it so), but they are actually something much more sinister; an off-beat syncopation.

To get a ‘feeling’ for this effect (essential before you can actually play it), try this counting exercise at an easy-going tempo; be as exact and mechanical as possible, while speaking it (‘intoning’ in musician’s parlance). Stress the highlighted numbers, and tap your hand on the vellum of your banjo on the beat (you should also set a metronome to your tempo):

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & / 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & / 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & / 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & / 1

Now, let’s add in the syncopation. *At the exact same tempo as before*, tap on the numbers and intone the notes thusly; remember to stress the highlighted beats (the ‘&’s are off the beat!). I have visually separated each three-note grouping and four-beat bar; also note how the fourth bar brings us back to the down beat at the end:

1 & 2/& 3 & 4/& 1/& 2 & 3/& 4 & 1 & 2/& 3 & 4/& 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1

Next, deaden the strings with your fretting hand and play the stroke; remember, 4th string down-stroke, stressed four-string down-stroke, damped-chord up-stroke, repeat). Be sure to count! When you are comfortable with the stroke, add in the chords as shown in this example (this is from Brad Roth’s recording of *Waiting for the Robert E. Lee*):

Things to notice:

- The simple chord shapes; this is simply a descending harmonized scale with a couple of modifications. It pays to know your scales!
- All notes are straight eighth notes (not triplets!), and the three-note groupings go ‘across the bar’ in strange places; this is the syncopation at work.
- How the groupings line up with the beats (bottom line).
- The third part of each grouping is damped (the X’s); this is simply a matter of releasing your grip but maintaining contact with the strings.

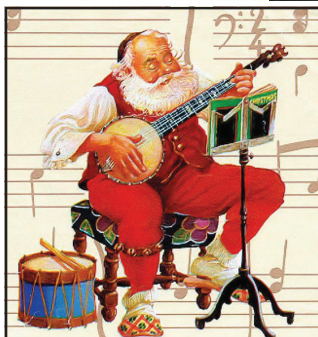
This break can also be used in *Sweet Georgia Brown*; just change the C⁷ and C⁷⁺ to A⁷.

There are countless other places you can play this — wherever you are given a four-bar break (adjusting for key and chords, of course).

By the way, you will find recordings and a video tutorial for these strokes at: www.banjosnob.com



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