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# Banjo: An Illustrated History



## Synopsis

(Book). The banjo is emblematic of American country music, and it is at the core of other important musical movements, including jazz and ragtime. The instrument has been adopted by many cultures and has been ingrained into many musical traditions, from Mento music in the Caribbean and dance music in Ireland. Virtuosos such as Bela Fleck have played Bach, African music, and Christmas tunes on the five-string banjo, and the instrument has had a resurgence in pop music with such acts as Mumford and Sons and the Avett Brothers. This book offers the first comprehensive, illustrated history of the banjo in its many forms. It traces the story of the instrument from its roots in West Africa to its birth in the Americas, through its coming of age in the Industrial Revolution and beyond. The book profiles the most important players and spotlights key luthiers and manufacturers. It features 100 milestone instruments with in-depth coverage, including model details and beautiful photos. It offers historical context surrounding the banjo through the ages, from its place in Victorian parlors and speakeasies through its role in the folk boom of the 1950s and 1960s to its place in the hands of songwriter John Hartford and comedian Steve Martin. Folk, jazz, bluegrass, country, and rock the banjo has played an important part in all of these genres. Lavishly illustrated, and thoughtfully written by author, broadcaster, and acclaimed banjoist Bob Carlin, this is a must-have for lovers of fretted instruments, aficionados of roots music, and music history buffs.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 258 pages

Publisher: Backbeat Books; Ill edition (May 1, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1495011240

ISBN-13: 978-1495011245

Product Dimensions: 11.2 x 0.9 x 8.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.9 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 21 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #191,431 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #24 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Instruments > Strings > Banjos](#) #81 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Folk & Traditional](#) #15098 in [Books > Humor & Entertainment](#)

## Customer Reviews

"This unassuming instrument arrived in the American South with West African slaves in the 1600s and lifted the spirits of countless plantation gatherings right up till the time that thoroughly uncivil war

put an end to legal enslavement. The more recent path the banjo took to celebrity status in American country music is the fascinating story detailed in *Banjo: An Illustrated History*. All the important types and makes of the instrument are detailed, including the marvelous work being done by today's craftsmen, but the stunningly rich photographs are what will steal hearts." --Foreword

Reviews"Carlin (*The Birth of the Banjo*), a performer and columnist at numerous banjo publications, has put together another excellently researched tome about the banjo in the form of a coffee-table book. With a title that perfectly describes its purpose, the book's photographs are beautifully printed on quality paper, making clear the natural beauty of the instruments. One hundred banjo family pieces are described, starting with the zither banjo, banjorine, and cello banjo transitioning to the more contemporary tenor banjo, banjo-mandolin, and banjo-ukelele. An exploration of the instrument and its performers are set through a time line of its roots in Africa, arrival in America, and finally its spread through Western culture, especially Australia. This work is exquisitely laid out in ten chapters. Among the progression of the history are inserts of banjoists in context to the culture and time of the given section. Carlin includes lesser-known but important banjoists and manufacturers who influenced the product's transformation. VERDICT This title is for anyone with an interest in banjo history regardless of prior musical knowledge and experience." --Library Journal"

"*Banjo: An Illustrated History* is a major achievement and should be accorded a prominent place on every banjo player's bookshelf or coffee table. It just may inspire an entire generation; those who already play banjo will want to learn more about it, and those who have never even thought about the instrument may well feel the urge to take it up." --Banjo Newsletter

BOB CARLIN (Lexington, North Carolina) is an author, researcher, radio and record producer, and one of the best-known banjoists performing today. With over a hundred articles for music magazines such as *Fretboard Journal* and *Bluegrass Unlimited* and numerous books, instruction manuals, museum catalogs, and album notes to his credit, Carlin is truly an expert on banjo history. Carlin writes a regular column for the banjo bible, *Banjo Newsletter*.

This is a beautiful book made better by thoughtful and thorough text. It will satisfy historians of American music as well as those who are focused on the instruments themselves. Bob Carlin has occupied a seat at the center of the banjo world for many years, and his knowledge and expertise are evident on every page. It is all made better by spectacular photography. We don't normally have "coffee table" books out on display at our house, but since most of our friends are musicians we're making an exception with this book. It is well worth the price for anyone with an interest in banjos.

GLAD TO HAVE IT IN MY LIBRARY. IT SHOULD HAVE MORE TEXT, BUT THEN, THE LAST BANJO BOOK I BOUGHT (BANJO BY LARAUNT DUBOIS) NEEDED MORE PICTURES. SO THEY BALANCE.

Good history book but has few illustrations of production banjos.

Certainly not comprehensive, but well done for what it represents.

A truly great book by one of the clearest thinkers, most serious historians, most underrated players in the banjo world,. This may seem like a coffee table book, but it is so seriously thought out, so wonderfully organized. As I paged through it the first time, even though I know Bob and know the relentless intellectual energy he devotes to everything he does, I kept expecting aspects of banjo history, and significant contemporary builders, players, historians, collectors, that might be neglected, instead they are highlighted, wonderfully described. What I like is also the personal touch, where Bob highlights not only the greats of banjo history but the great often unrecognized figures of today's banjo world. This book belongs in every home

Beautiful pictures and great information

There was a great number of missed possibilities, both from an historical perspective and from a contemporary. Historically, a whole chapter could have been written about the Kingston Trio generally and Dave Guard specifically with respect to both the influence the Trio had on generations of banjo players and purchasers. And Dave Guard, in his four years with the Kingston Trio, went from novice to genius player whose style is still being studied and copied today. In contemporary banjo playing, the greatest player in the world is Jens Kruger, who plays any and all styles and writes any and all styles from bluegrass and folk to jazz and orchestral. I know choices had to be made for both inclusion and exclusion, but those I just mentioned are like leaving out Abraham Lincoln in a list of great American Presidents.

A superb production in every way. (Somewhat under priced!)

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