

## BLUEGRASS FIDDLE BASICS & HOT LICKS (Using everything you know at 90mph)

### BIRTH OF BLUEGRASS – The “Classic” Lineup comes together Dec. 1945

- Bill Monroe (mandolin & vocals), Earl Scruggs (3-finger style banjo), Lester Flatt (guitar & vocals), Chubby Wise (fiddle), Howard Watts (string bass)

### A WELL-OILED MUSICAL MACHINE – EACH PLAYER HAS HIS OR HER JOB:

- GUITARIST – big chords, strong driving off-beat strums, also flat pick “runs” & full solos
- STRING BASS – strong pizz on 1 & 3 (bass + guitar = “boom-chick” rhythm)
- MANDOLIN – short, choppy chord strums on the off-beat, also “snare drum” of the band by muting strings, also fills & solos with flat pick single note style
- BANJO – provides classic 3-finger “Scruggs style” rolling 8th note patterns, arpeggiated chords, fills & solos almost always played that way as well

### THE FIDDLER’S A MULTI-TASKER & NEEDS TO BE READY TO PLAY:

- Off-beat “chops” like guitar or mandolin (playing melodic double-stops or muted rhythmic sound); also “multi-rhythmic” chops (more complicated rhythms)
- Short solo fills behind singer (but not stepping on vocals)
- Kick-off intros, turnarounds, endings (sometimes melody, sometimes harmony)
- Full *improvised* solos – or worked out in 2 or 3 part harmony (usually with mando or banjo)
- LONG NOTES to add contrast to busy rhythms other instruments are providing
- IN ANY KEY – vocal numbers might be sung in any key (B Major, with 5 sharps, is a favorite!)
- 3rd POSITION – must feel comfortable shifting, often with double-stops
- Classic instrumentals in the BG genre (entirely different than Old-Time repertoire, although there are some tunes common to both)

### BLUEGRASS FIDDLE BASICS – for fills & improvised solo breaks

- Get yourself a good scale book, practice scales & arpeggios in all keys
- Arpeggios – building blocks for every chord or improvised melody
- Warm-up exercises (3rds, arpeggio runs, partial scale patterns, etc.) can make good fill licks
- Pentatonic scale practice – leaving out 4th & 7th notes of scale
- “Blues” Pentatonic scale – adds flat 3rd & 7th
- Mimic banjo w/3 note groups or shuffle patterns; mimic mando w/repeated notes, fifths
- Listen to recordings & learn classic “kick-off” licks – be confident & ready to play them

### BLUEGRASS FIDDLE BASICS – for “backup” chords & chops

- Listen for “classic” structure of songs – often revolving around I-IV-V chord structure
- Arpeggios are “broken” chords! Pick a chord, then find every available arpeggio note on the violin (1st position at least)...
- Then create every double-stop you can
- Listen & learn – what interval are you creating with each double-stop you play?
- Different double-stop intervals create different sounds or “characteristics” – listen for differences between playing **3rds**, **6ths** (the two classic/popular/easy to play combinations), **5ths** (straddled fingers across two strings), **4ths** (unique among all other double-stops, creates jazzy, bluesy, bluegrass sound), **minor 7ths** (jazzy & a little dissonant)
- For beginners, keep double-stop relationships simple – different chords often share some of the same notes, use those shared notes to your advantage when moving between chords with your double-stops
  - Learn the “open & first finger movement” trick
  - Composers & arrangers call these simple movements *voicing* or *voice leading*
- Learning the famous “bow chop”
- Combining chops & “mini-fills”