

Self-Assessment

Music is, to me, one of the most personal forms of self-expression there can be. When I play music, with whatever instrument I have in hand at the moment, I feel a great sense of connection with the world. I also feel a great amount of vulnerability, because music exposes me for what I am, and for what I happen to be feeling at the moment. As a shy, overly-sensitive kid, just playing in public was an ordeal, but I've learned to embrace and sometimes—in my more connected moments—even express the vulnerability. Therefore, I am constantly evaluating myself based on the music I produce. I have probably taken myself way too seriously during my musical career, but that's just the way I am in everything I do.

I feel it's important to understand yourself in relation to your music. I—thankfully—have gradually learned that what I feel about myself usually has little relationship to what others feel about me, but self-evaluation is still a high priority for me. And so I hope it is for you. I want you to humor me on this: I want you to evaluate yourself as a learner based on these four categories—"1" being the least and "5" being the most. Go ahead, do it now before reading on—don't worry, I won't look; it's strictly for your own amusement and amazement:

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
1. Musical Knowledge	—	—	—	—	—
2. Physical Ability	—	—	—	—	—
3. Desire	—	—	—	—	—
4. Self-Confidence	—	—	—	—	—

Write down your answers and refer back to this occasionally during your studies. And please, do use this as an indicator of what aspect you need to work on.

This is my way of introducing an important subject I want to talk to you about. Raise your hand if this is you: You buy a new book, saying "This is the one—this is the book that will *transform* me!" You get a little ways in—maybe a chapter or two—and you haven't yet felt the promised miracle, so your interest level starts to taper off. Pretty soon, the book goes on the shelf with the rest of the dust-collectors (or on eBay), and you're right back where you started. *Well, I don't want this book, or any other book for that matter, to do that to you!* You're better than that: You're a good-lookin' banjo player after all (as we all are)!

One of the most frustrating things about music is this; it takes more than just the casual reading of a book to improve; it takes a lot of *work*! Even when you've "learned" something (be very careful with that word), you won't get what you *can* out of it until you've really worked on it *and* incorporated it into your own playing. I'm telling you this for your own good. I know I would have benefited greatly from having a task-master teacher hovering over me, but instead, circumstances and stubbornness—my own—have led me to be my own teacher. And I haven't been a good student.

I wouldn't want to lie to you and say that the material in this book is easy. I will say that if you *do* approach it on a casual basis, your fingers will still get a workout and you will improve. To truly get something from this though, you've got to buckle down and really work on it. What I'm saying here is true for anything worth doing of course. Since I've started taking my own work seriously, I've found that I'm better able to learn—more willing to take those books down off the shelf, blow the dust off, and finally get to work on them. I'm actually finding a new eagerness to practice and improve, and it's pretty liberating. And so, yes, I do take this seriously, and I want you to as well. In your continuing self-assessment, you should be brutally honest, and decide, "Just what *do* I want to achieve here?"

If I was there in person as your teacher, I would want you to promise me that you'll stick with it through thick and thin. Since I'm not, I want you to promise yourself. This book will only be as effective as you let it be, and I sincerely hope it is transformational. *I know that writing it has been one of the most transformational things I've ever done.*

What's my part of the bargain? In my eternal gratitude for your purchase of this book, I will tell you that you should always feel free to contact me with questions/suggestions/complaints. My email address always has been and always will be banjoplayer1@yahoo.com, no matter where in the world I may be. If you find a mistake or make a suggestion that I use, I will put your name in the Acknowledgements section for my next edition. If you provide me with an email address, I will send along any amendments I make through the years. Since I already consider this book to be a collaboration, it will be exciting to see and pass on (and give credit for) things that you may learn from it.