

Clarification of Terms: *Beyond Chord Melody, Volume II*

“Modern Jazz”

I may have gotten a bit carried away in my promotion of “modern” jazz for the plectrum banjo. I realize a lot of older banjo players—and younger players wishing to be “authentic” to the 1920s—*do not like* the idea of Modern Jazz on the banjo and have no interest in playing it. I don’t want that term to be a turn-off. Let me offer a better, more-truthful explanation of my intentions:

“Developing the physical/musical ability to play *all genres of Pre-Modern Jazz* (pre-1940s) and *Modern Jazz* (Bebop forward) by using modern techniques and educational methods. Learning to wiggle the fingers in *any* manner will serve you well in *any* genre of music.”

Formalized jazz education didn’t really take off until the modern era. The increased use of scales and chromaticism in jazz was a direct result of the Bebop era (1940s). These easily-learnable aspects of jazz provided educators with a more-structured approach to “teaching” what had previously been seen as a “natural” art form (you either *have it* or you *don’t*; what good is “education?”). You don’t have to *like* Modern Jazz to *learn* from it! The obvious modern methods used in this book are:

1. **Modal Theory:** using Modal scales and arpeggios as a physical framework to develop technique, knowledge, and an “ear” for jazz, regardless of which genre you choose to specialize in.
2. **Chromaticism:** While pre-modern players certainly used chromatic notes and lines, Charlie Parker standardized and popularized them with his “Bebop scales” and “chromatic alterations” (he is credited with their innovation). As follow-on players imitated him—and jazz continued to evolve *after* him—it became increasingly chromatic. Again, these things make jazz easier to learn.
3. **Extended Harmony:** 9ths, 11ths, and 13ths are taken for granted today (and used in all genres of jazz), but basing single-note improvisation on them was another recognized innovation of Charlie Parker. They are easily learned through the use of Modal Arpeggios. Knowing how to use them will not “ruin” you for older jazz! Indeed, they will open the door to many different kinds of music, and make you a better all-around banjoist to boot.

One of my tenor banjo students sent me a link to an interesting online article ([6 Surprisingly Modern Solo Techniques from Louis Armstrong • Jazzadvice](#)). The author argues that Louis Armstrong—in his 1920s recordings—was more “modern” than most of us realize. He analyzes his solo on *Basin Street Blues*, and points out several instances of chromaticism and extended harmony.

The few song examples I used in the book are pre-modern, because that’s the music *I* prefer to play! I simplified the harmonic approach as well; a modern *ear* takes work and study to fully develop, but when it comes to *wiggling your fingers* (the main emphasis of this book), *jazz is jazz!*

One more point: Beyond *copying* a historic genre or artist note-for-note (how it was done before formalized education became a big thing), “authenticity” to an era is greatly assisted by a working knowledge of what *makes* the music authentic or not! It requires the player to *refrain* from using techniques outside of the genre—which of course means *knowing what they are*. One can be “educated” in Modern Jazz and still play Trad authentically! Some of the best Trad players I’ve known are also very good at more-modern styles.

I hope this clarification helps. I would hate for you to miss out on the great things in this book just because of a dislike for Modern Jazz!