

# Even More Triplets

By Michael Keyes



In spite of my broad hints (sigh) that triplets are not all that important, I keep on getting more requests for information on them.

If you have been reading this column, you know that I have identified two ways to make a triplet (<http://www.banjosessions.com/oct06/Keyes.html> and <http://www.banjosessions.com/dec05/triplets.html>) and shown examples from several different players. But if you are just learning to play the Irish tenor banjo you will probably be having a very hard time getting it right.

Triplets are not that hard to do, but in the context of Irish music they often sound daunting. If you are still listening hard to Irish traditional music and making a conscience effort to play it, you will have a problem doing that and putting in triplets. At this point in your development you have not subsumed the music to the point that it is a natural process to play in an Irish style (I am assuming that most readers did not grow up on Irish Traditional Music.) So not only do you have to think about the music, but you also have to think about ornamentations like triplets.

The result is the same as in any type of performance, the quality of performance is inversely proportional to the amount of thinking you have to do.

Another aspect of this problem is that triplets on a banjo are not specifically Irish. In fact if you listen to American tenor banjo players you will hear them quite often. The difference in how they are used to emphasize the music. This brings us to this month's lesson, playing triplets in an exercise that may be a little more familiar.

I have taken a Stephen Foster tune, Camptown Races, as an example. Stephen Foster was of Irish descent and a quintessential American composer. His music was played by minstrel bands, many of which had Irish musicians, and continues to be popular today. I am making the assumption that all of you know this tune because knowing the tune is essential to the exercise.

But first I am going to go over the triplet again.

A straight triplet is essentially a three note ornament, long-short-short, that can take the place of a quarter note in most tunes. The purpose of a triplet is to emphasize that part of the tune with both a rhythmic and tonal quality that give a specific character to the tune. It is not a written part of the tune although you often see it written in when tunes are transcribed. They are not the musical triplet (three notes in the time of two) seen in hornpipes rather they are an extension of the mind of the player and can be put in anytime. That last statement is subject to traditional and taste boundaries, however, and most good banjo players use them well. You will have to learn what "well" means as you progress in playing.

Here is how a straight triplet is done. I will show it slowly and then speed up until you hear the typical "treble" sound of the banjo triplet.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qgx201Gjqs>



## Dever the Dancer

Here is a nice slip jig that you can practice your triplets on once you feel comfortable with them. I am playing it on my Gold Tone Marcy Marxer cello banjo tuned G,D,A,E, an octave below the standard Irish tuning. You can play triplets on any stringed instrument if you want.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ij\\_uP-e-l44](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ij_uP-e-l44)

### Dever the Dancer

*Traditional*  
*Arranged by Michael Keyes*

Ending Note

## About the Author



Mike Keyes, a native of Franklin, Tennessee, has played tenor banjo since 1957 and over the years has learned to play five string banjo, mandolin, and guitar. He earned his way through college and medical school playing in bluegrass and dixieland bands and currently plays in the Irish band "Drowsy Maggie." He is an expert in sports performance and has written a book and over 200 articles on the subject.

His interest in Irish music started a number of years ago when effort to learn more about his musical roots led him to the discovery of session playing. Since then he has been to Ireland to learn more about the music and has taken classes and interviewed such banjo greats as John Carty, Angelina Carberry, Charlie Piggot, and Gerry O'Connor.

His medical practice is in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. You can email him at [mikeyes@charter.net](mailto:mikeyes@charter.net) if you wish to discuss some aspect of the Irish tenor banjo or go to his web site at [www.mikekeyes.com](http://www.mikekeyes.com).