

# Playing Jigs

By: Michael Keyes

About a year ago I took an Irish mandolin class from Roger Landes where the question of "How do you play Jigs?" came up. Roger (who started out as a banjo player) was adamant that the picking pattern should be Down Up Down, Down Up Down (DUD DUD) at all times unless there were some special circumstances that dictated otherwise. Since then I have heard a variety of opinions, including one from Kieran Hanrahan who insisted that DUDUDU was just as good on the banjo and in addition it saved you from tendinitis (per John McGann.)

I know why Kieran Hanrahan is an advocate the DUDUDU form; First, banjos are loud instruments that don't need a lot of energy to get them going. As a result, you can use a thin pick and still have good tone. In addition you can impart enough energy on the upstroke to emphasize the fourth beat in a jig. But he is only one (very talented) banjo player. I decided to ask several other banjo teachers what they thought.

Gerry O'Connor is know to all of us as a teacher and performer. He is also a student of the banjo and typical of the elite level of players, not only has his own specific ideas about how to play jigs (he uses a heavier pick for example), but was willing to go into those details. Here is his reply from my email:

**Hi Michael,**

***I would use DUD DUD. The consecutive down hit marks the tempo and dynamic of the 6/8 rhythm of jigs. Of course there will be times when a smooth passage might not need to be played in such a regimented fashion but a lot depends on how the musician interprets the tune. Rhythm is important in banjo playing especially in a group where it can have a lovely hypnotic effect. In fact if you were to be really precise, in 6/8 jigs the first DUD is strong ,the***

***next DUD is weaker, then the Next DUD is strong followed by the next DUD weaker (and so forth) so one is getting a sort of wave like quality to the jigs. So, you are breaking the 6 note bar up into strong and weak.***

***Hope this makes sense, The emphasis is on the 1 of each 6 notes and repeated almost like a bodhran player (a good bodhran player, that is.)***

**Regards**

**Gerry O C**

Ken Fleming, who Mick Moloney considers to be the most under-rated banjo player in the country, had this to say:

**Hello Mike,**

***Mick certainly had an influence on my playing early on. He always was an encouragement. I prefer the DUD DUD. I feel it is the best style for accentuating the lilt by attacking the strings slightly harder on the down pick. This is easier for me than picking harder on the up pick. See you at the O'Flaherty Retreat!***

**Regards,**

**Ken**

Mick Moloney told me the same thing in this interview (excuse the noise, it was at the Milwaukee Irishfest 2007.)

**Mick Moloney Interview mp3**

Download the mp3:

MickJigInterview.mp3 <http://BanjoSessions.com>

**Mick Moloney Interview Video**

Download the video:

MickMoloneyIrishfest2007.mov <http://BanjoSessions.com>

And finally, Randy Gosa of Ce', who teaches banjo in Milwaukee again said that same thing. Here is a video of him playing the Cordal Jig.

### Cordal Jig Randy Gosa Video

Download the video:

CordalJigRGosa.mov <http://BanjoSessions.com>

## The Cordal Jig



So why should a banjo player use DUD DUD when DUDUDU is just as easy and the sound is similar? Because DUDUDU does not convey the lilt of the music as well. Jigs are dance music and the dancers will respond much better to music that matches what they are doing with their feet. When you hit that first and fourth beat with a little more emphasis, they are landing their feet at the same time. Try it yourself by tapping out the first and fourth beats as you sing a jig.

The best way to learn to play jigs is to start very slowly. Roger Landes had us start out by only playing down beats in this pattern 1|34|61|34|6, etc. as we tapped out the six beats with our foot. Later on we played one string that way to a slow jig. After we became a little more comfortable with the double down stroke,

we added the upstroke. We then practiced playing one note over and over again until it became easy to do. For some of us that was several days, but it eventually came.

Then we played jigs very slowly and gradually sped up.

The mental changes that DUD DUD brought on were amazing. I started hearing jigs in a new way and play them differently too. Unlike reels, jigs are complex in that the emphasis is constantly changing each bar and the resulting music is very compelling.

Here is a composition I wrote to help you practice your jigs.

# Security Jig

Michael Keyes

D C D C

D C Am

Am G Am

1. G Am 2. G Am

## Resources

Gerry O'Connor ([www.gerryoconnor.com](http://www.gerryoconnor.com)) has several Mel Bay books and a CD-ROM out in addition to being a world class musician.

Randy Gosa teaches at the Irish Fest Music School ([www.irishfest.com/morethanafestival/schoolofmusic.htm](http://www.irishfest.com/morethanafestival/schoolofmusic.htm)) and plays in the band Ce' (<http://cemusic.net/>)

Ken Fleming is the director of the O'Flaherty Irish Retreat ([www.irishtradmusic.org/retreat/](http://www.irishtradmusic.org/retreat/)) and a wonderful banjo player.

Roger Landes ([www.rogerlandes.com/](http://www.rogerlandes.com/)) is the

founder of Zoukfest and a still a closet banjo player.

Kieran Hanrahan ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kieran\\_Hanrahan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kieran_Hanrahan)) is the host of an RTE radio program and another wonderful banjo player.

John McGann (<http://www.berklee.edu/faculty/detail.php?id=1052&type=department&value=SG&skip=0>) teaches at the Berklee College of Music in Boston and is a Mel Bay author.

The Milwaukee Irishfest can be found at [www.irishfest.com](http://www.irishfest.com)



## 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 "Maggie's Misfortune." 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, Charlie Piggot, and Gerry O'Connor.

His medical practice is in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin where he practices Psychiatry. 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).

