

# Whiskey Before Breakfast

*A Fiddle Tune in Scruggs, Reno and Melodic Styles*

by Eddie Collins

I've selected the tune "Whiskey Before Breakfast" to demonstrate the three most common styles of picking associated with bluegrass banjo: Scruggs, Melodic, and Reno, or Single-String. Each style has its advantages and disadvantages when it comes to conveying a melody while maintaining a flow of right-hand notes. The song is in the key of D and all the versions can be played using standard G tuning without retuning the 5th string, although you may prefer to tune the 5th string to the note A in the Scruggs style solo.

**Scruggs Style solo:** The important element in this style is to keep roll patterns going in the right hand. The repetitive patterns can be memorized and usually played at faster speeds than the other two styles. The downside of the style is you can only comfortably get three to four melody notes in a measure. In fiddle tunes, such as "Whiskey," many measures contain eight melody notes, so you only get a rough approximation of the melody in Scruggs style. This solo relies mostly on holding left-hand chord forms (or partial forms) while the right hand plays rolls.

## Whiskey Before Breakfast *Scruggs Style*

G Tuning: g DGBD

The image displays three staves of musical notation for the "Whiskey Before Breakfast" solo in Scruggs style. The notation is presented as guitar tablature on a five-line staff. The first staff contains six measures of music, featuring various roll patterns indicated by letters 'i', 'm', 't', and 'r' below the notes. The second staff contains six measures, including a double bar line with repeat dots, and continues the roll patterns. The third staff contains three measures, showing higher fret positions (up to the 12th fret) and concluding the piece with a double bar line and repeat dots. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4.

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**Reno, or Single-String Style solo:** This style relies on the constant alternating of the Thumb and Index in the right hand. The Thumb tends to play the first of every two eighth notes – the note on the beat. The Index tends to play the notes in between the beats - the note on the “&” of the beat. The technique mimics the down and up motion of a flatpicking guitarist’s pick and can include up to eight melody notes in a single measure. The opening phrase can be played off of the D bar chord at the 7th fret. The down side of this style is that every note is fretted. As such, the constant lifting of the left-hand fingers can lead to a somewhat choppy sound.

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*Reno Single String Style*

G Tuning: g DGBD

**Melodic Style solo:** The guiding principal in the melodic approach is to avoid using the same right-hand finger on two consecutive quick (eighth) notes. This creates a situation in where, in order to get a higher pitched note, you may have to fret notes in higher positions on different strings than you would in Scruggs style. The upside is every melody note can be included. The sound is very fluent as you can use open-string notes. The downside is there are no set right-hand patterns that can be easily repeated. Also, when low-sounding notes are needed, you almost always have to revert to Single-String or Scruggs style, such as the last two measures in the accompanying solo.

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There are pluses and minuses to each of the three popular styles employed when playing bluegrass banjo. Many of today's players combine bits of all three styles into a single solo. You can try this by learning all three of the solos for "Whiskey Before Breakfast" and then swapping phrases from one version to another. For more on playing in the key of D without using a capo, you may want to check out on my site, "The Key of D for 5-String Banjo." Happy picking to all! Eddie Collins ([www.eddiecollins.biz](http://www.eddiecollins.biz)).

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## Melodic Style

G Tuning: g DGBD



### About Eddie Collins

Eddie Collins resides in Austin, TX, where he teaches music and performs with some of the finest musicians in Central Texas. Eddie is nationally recognized as an instructor of 5-string banjo and acoustic guitar. He contributes articles to many publications and conducts music workshops throughout the U.S.

Collins was the founder of 5-String Quarterly and has authored instruction books for both banjo and guitar. His career was highlighted as the cover story in the May 2002 issue of Banjo Newsletter. Previously, his performing career was documented on the syndicated TV show, Texas Music Cafe. As a recording artist, Rise & Shine represents Eddie's fourth work--two with his band, the High Stakes Rollers and another solo project of honky tonk country music, Guitar Slingers & Texas Music.