



## A Lesson with Peter Ostroushko

by Mike Keyes

Peter O (he has a pronunciation guide on one of his CDs, but it doesn't seem to help) is a shy diffident man who happens to be a musical genius. When asked why he is a professional musician, he points out that he has a great instrument and a love of music so why not play for a living?

Recently I had the opportunity to host a workshop with Peter and Danny Gotham sponsored by the Fondy Acoustic Music Alliance (better known as FAMA, I serve on the board.) There is no better way to spend a Sunday afternoon than picking the brains of two powerful musicians.

Most of you know Peter as the former music director of A Prairie Home Companion and as a consummate musician and composer. He was born into a family of mandolin players in Minneapolis and decided to be a professional musician very early on. His only flaw seems to be that he is a Twins fan.



Peter loves to teach. His style is to work with the students and frame his teaching around what the students ask for. In a short workshop this usually leads to basic concepts (as opposed to a master class) and Peter obliged by discussing what he considered to be the most important aspect of mandolin playing, the right hand. Not that this is unusual, every other great player that I have had the pleasure of listening to (Andy Statman, Roland White, John Carty, Roger Landes, Gerry O'Connor, etc.) says the same thing: the right hand is the key to good mandolin or banjo playing. There are three parts to this video:

Video Rt hand, one two and three

[RightHandPart1.mov](#)  
[RightHandpart2.mov](#)  
[RightHandpart3.mov](#)

He also talks about tremolo.

[MP3 Tremolo](#)

The students also asked about how he accompanied a tune. The original question had to do with the Bill Monroe chop, but Peter pointed out that there were many ways to back up a tune and that these variations add a lot to a tune.

[Video backing up](#)

In addition he discussed diminished and augmented chords.

[Mp3 backup and chording](#)

Lastly he and Danny played "Choro" as played by Jacob do Bandolim. You can find the sheet music for this tune on Peter's web site at <http://www.peterostroushko.com/choro.pdf>.

## Resources

Peter Ostroushko's web site is at <http://www.peterostroushko.com> and you really need to go there. Not only does he have a lot of tunes and sheet music, but he gives his favorite recipes all for free. "Death By Cilantro" is superb.

Danny Gotham is a teacher and musician out of Chapel Hill, NC. His web site is [www.dannygotham.com](http://www.dannygotham.com). He too is an incredible musician who, as he puts it, is a "musical mutt" capable of playing any style well.

FAMA is my local acoustic music association and I am proud to be a board member. Our web site is <http://www.fondyacoustic.org/> and we have a jam every fourth Sunday. Come on in if you are in the area.

Go to the mother ship <http://www.melbay.com> and type in "choro" or "Brazilian" and you can find the best collection of Brazilian music around.

---

## About the Author

**Mike Keyesa** 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 mandolin started a number of years ago when he played in the Jacksonville band, Sounds of Bluegrass (taking Red Henry's place) and he has played bluegrass and Irish music on the mandolin ever since. He also writes a periodic column about Irish tenor banjo at [www.banjosessions.com](http://www.banjosessions.com) for Mel Bay.

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 this article or go to his web site at [www.mikekeyes.com](http://www.mikekeyes.com).