

# Balkan Music

by Seth Austen

Welcome to this issue of Mandolin Sessions®. I thought it would be fun to revisit Balkan music, an exciting Eastern European folk style. Check out the December 2005 issue for our first Balkan tune. This music is characterized by its unique driving rhythms; odd meters such as 5/8, 7/8, 11/16 and others are frequently used. We'll play Ajde Jano, a Serbian song in 7/8. I often play this song for dancing. The 7/8 rhythm can also be found in other styles of music including Greek, Romanian and Turkish.

When first encountering 7/8, it can be confusing to figure out how to count the beats. It doesn't work to simply count 1,2,3,4,5,6,7. For one thing, the word seven has two syllables, so when counting numbers you can inadvertently end up with eight beats. Almost any rhythm can be broken down to smaller groups of twos and threes, thus we can divide 7/8 into two groups of two eighth notes and one group of three eighth notes. The most commonly used groupings in 7/8 or 7/16 are 3+2+2 or 2+2+3.

Ajde Jano is subdivided 3+2+2. Try counting ONE-two-three, ONE-two, ONE-two, emphasizing the ones. I recommend clapping your hands or tapping your feet every time you say one, and you'll start to get the feel for this rhythm. Some people prefer to use syllables instead of counting numbers. Many years ago a guitarist friend suggested saying Ta-ki for two beats and Ga-me-la for three. Using this method our rhythm would be Ga-me-la, Ta-ki, Ta-ki. Other words could be substituted. I highly recommend listening to this style of music as much as possible, and learning the folk dances that go with these tunes is also a great way to internalize these rhythms. After you've played this music for a while, 7/8 becomes as natural as 4/4.

Once you can count the rhythm, the next step is figuring how to pick this rhythm on mandolin, I find that using DOWN-up-down, DOWN-up, DOWN-up works well, since you always have a down pick for a down beat. This will help you express the rhythm properly. I recommend practicing this rhythm on open strings before you try the tune. In Ajde Jano, there's a few instances where the longer beat is subdivided as a quarter note followed by an eighth note. In these measures I play the quarter note down, and the eighth note up. Take it slow to begin with, and be very careful to play the right combinations of down and up picks. All quarter notes are played with down picks. I often add in double stops and drones with the melody on top. Don't play this song too fast, it's a gentle 7/8 beat.

## Ajde Jano

trad. arr. Seth Austen

The musical score for "Ajde Jano" is presented in two systems. The first system consists of four measures. The first measure is marked with a "D min" chord and contains a melody of a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note, and a guitar accompaniment of a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note. The second measure is marked with a "C" chord and contains a melody of a quarter note followed by an eighth note, and a guitar accompaniment of a quarter note followed by an eighth note. The third measure is marked with a "C" chord and contains a melody of a quarter note followed by an eighth note, and a guitar accompaniment of a quarter note followed by an eighth note. The fourth measure is marked with a "C" chord and contains a melody of a quarter note followed by an eighth note, and a guitar accompaniment of a quarter note followed by an eighth note. The second system consists of five measures. The first measure is marked with an "F" chord and contains a melody of a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note, and a guitar accompaniment of a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note. The second measure is marked with a "D min" chord and contains a melody of a quarter note followed by an eighth note, and a guitar accompaniment of a quarter note followed by an eighth note. The third measure is marked with a "G min" chord and contains a melody of a quarter note followed by an eighth note, and a guitar accompaniment of a quarter note followed by an eighth note. The fourth measure is marked with a "D min" chord and contains a melody of a quarter note followed by an eighth note, and a guitar accompaniment of a quarter note followed by an eighth note. The fifth measure is marked with a "D min" chord and contains a melody of a quarter note followed by an eighth note, and a guitar accompaniment of a quarter note followed by an eighth note. The score includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (Bb), and a 7/8 time signature. The guitar accompaniment is written on a six-string guitar staff with a capo on the first fret. The mandolin melody is written on a five-line staff.

I also play Ajde Jano on bouzouki (or octave mandolin). It's basically the same arrangement except that I use GDAD tuning on my bouzouki , thus most of the melody is played on the high string. I've included my bouzouki arrangement here as well.

# Ajde Jano

trad. arr. Seth Austen

GDAD

D min C

5

F D min G min D min

Enjoy!