Flatpicking Guitar Magazine

Free Monthly Lesson - July 2016

Clinch Mt. Backstep

By Dr. Ralph Stanley
Arranged by Mickey Abraham

Hello and welcome once again to Flatpicking Guitar Magazine's free lesson portion of our monthly newsletter. As I'm sure you all know by now, we recently lost a legend in the bluegrass community. Ralph Stanley's voice and banjo playing were seminal to the origins and development of bluegrass music. His vocal contributions such as "Oh, Death" will send a shiver down your spine while his three finger banjo roll will make you stand up and shout "Son!" I'd like to dedicate this month's lesson to Dr. Ralph Stanley.

"Clinch Mt. Backstep" is perhaps Ralph Stanley's most well known instrumental tune. Although originally composed and played on the five sting banjo this tune makes one great flatpicking guitar tune. In addition to it's driving bluesy melody "Clinch Mt Backstep" features a rhythmic hook. In the tune's B section there is a measure of 2/4 that makes the tune unique. I suggest to not count the meter change but rather listen to the tune to hear how the measure of 2/4 flows perfectly with the melody. Once you hear it you will not notice the meter change. It will just sound like the melody to "Clinch Mt. Backstep."

Included in this lesson are two versions of the tune. The second pass incorporates more chromatic passing tones and a few Tony licks. Although I stayed pretty close to the melody the entire time "Clinch Mt. Backstep" is perfect for soloing over. The majority of the tune is one chord, G (really A, but we guitar players play this song with our capo at the second fret). Once you get the melody under your fingers try playing the G blues scale over the changes. All your favorite bluegrass G licks will fit as well!

I hope you enjoy working on this arrangement of Ralph Stanley's famous banjo tune. As always should you have any questions or comments on this e-lesson just drop me a line at michabraham@comcast.net

Clinch Mountain Backstep

Clinch Mountain Backstep (con't)