



History of the Banjo

The banjo traveled to America from Africa with the slaves. Particularly West Africa. The instrument they brought with them was called the Akonting. The Akonting is the folk lute of the Jola people, found in Senegal, Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau in West Africa. It is a banjo-like instrument with a skin-headed gourd body, two long melody strings, and one short drone string, akin to the short fifth "thumb string" found on the five-string banjo.

The banjos of Western North Carolina before the Civil War were made of goatskin, gourd bodies, and materials found around the home. This instrument was often played by both black and white musicians living in the Appalachian Mountain region. The banjo quickly became a staple musical instrument in Southern homes. As it gained in popularity it began to evolve in structure.

Today the two most popular banjos are the resonator banjo (Bluegrass Banjo), and the open-back banjo (Old Time Banjo). Musicians from North Carolina's western piedmont and mountain region, Earl Scruggs, Charlie Poole and Snuffy Jenkins, are recognized as the creators and popularizers of modern banjo styles.

Other Resources

[Bill Evans History of the Banjo](#)

DIY CAN JO

Materials:

2"×1" hardwood board
Can of Spam, or any tin can
1/4"×2" bolts (2)
1/4" washers (3)
1/4" nuts (3)
Eye bolt with nut 3/8"×2" bolt
22 gauge picture wire or guitar string
Saw/Drill
Yard stick
Hot glue
Safety Glasses



Instructions:

STEP 1

Cut and measure

Cut a piece of your board to about 36" long. Measure 3/4" from the bottom and then 2-1/4" from the bottom, making points in the middle of the board.

STEP 2

Measure and drill

Measure another point 1" from the top and mark it in the center of the board. Now drill the 3 points you marked. Make sure to use a backer board to avoid drilling into your table.

STEP 3

Drill your can

After cleaning out your can, measure a point 3/4" from the bottom and another point 2-1/4" from the bottom, and then drill them. Drill a small hole in the center of the bottom of the can.

STEP 4

Add the bolts

Place your two 1/4" bolts through the board and into the can. Secure them using 2 washers and 2 nuts.

Screw the eye bolt into the top of the stock. If it's hard to turn the screw, thread a screwdriver through the eye for extra leverage.

STEP 5

Secure the bolts

Secure the eye bolt with a nut on the bottom and then hot glue the 3/8" bolt across the board about 1" from the eye bolt.

STEP 6

Make the string

Using your guitar string or wire, thread a knot onto the string. Twist the wire tightly together to keep the nut on.

STEP 7

String the canjo

Cut enough wire to reach the length of the guitar plus an extra foot. Thread a washer onto the wire and then thread the wire through the hole in the bottom of the can. When you reach the top, thread the wire through the eye bolt.

STEP 8

Tie the wire

Make a few loops of wire around the side of the eye bolt, then thread the wire through the loops and pull it tight to tie it on.

STEP 9

Tune the canjo

Wear Safety Glasses

This is the dangerous part! We are going to tighten the string so it will make a tone, but overtightening can break the string and make it whip around. Wear safety glasses.

Tighten the wire while plucking periodically. When it begins to sound the way you like, you've got it. Cut off the extra wire and your canjo is complete!

Video Resource:

[Canjo Part 1](#)

[Canjo Part 2](#)

[Canjo Part 3](#)

[Canjo Part 4](#)