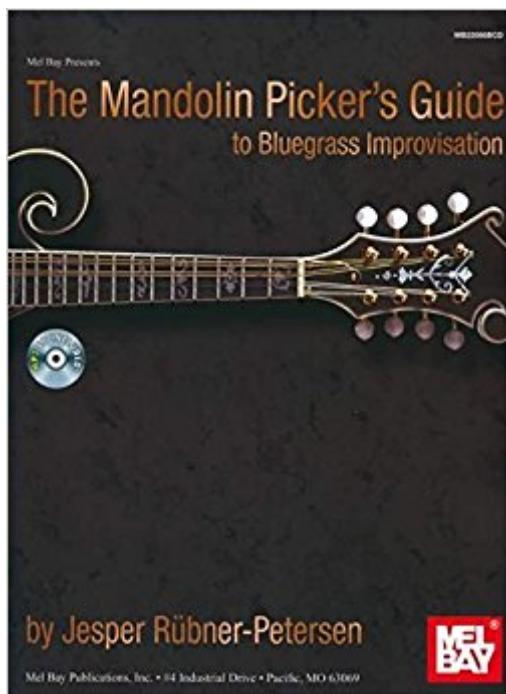


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# Mandolin Picker's Guide To Bluegrass Improvisation



## **Synopsis**

A new book on improvisation is now available for bluegrass mandolin players. Based on the concept of learning by playing, this 200 page book covers a wide range of improvisation tools and how to implement them in your playing. A large number of examples are presented in both tablature and standard notation, so that a theoretical background is not required. The small amount of theory needed is simply presented and easily learned step by step. A series of exercises designed to help the player develop improvisational skills are included in the book. As an instruction tool, the book can easily be combined with the instructor's individual philosophy or by a student wishing to study alone. The subject matter is varied in difficulty and can be used by both the beginner and more advanced player as an instructional guide and reference book. The major-themes in the book are: The pentatonic sound, scale and major-chord based improvising with any Bluegrass-Tune, Double-stop improvisation, Minor chords and Keys, The blues sound, Melody oriented improvisation, How to use: Monroe Style, Cross picking, Hot licks, how to simplify a lick, and more. MP3 CD accompanies book featuring all examples.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Hi mandolin-pickers! I'm Jesper Rønner-Petersen and I was born on the 8th of July 1969 in Aarhus/Denmark, where I grew up with Bluegrass and Acoustic Music because of my banjo-playing father. At the age of 12 I started to play the guitar and as soon as I was ready to grab a couple of chords I luckily got the chance to play in different Oldtime and Bluegrass Bands. Besides playing

bluegrass, I've always tried to be open about new influences and decided to follow the jazz program at the "American Institute of Music" in Vienna, Austria, which I completed in March 1993. Staying at the A.I.M. opened up my eyes to harmony and theory and the understanding of improvisation. Around 1994, after years of intensive guitar playing, I bought myself a mandolin in order to try out a second instrument - a purchase which changed my life. In July 2000 the destiny of love made me move to South Germany, where I also started my professional career as a guitar and mandolin teacher. At the same time, I started teaching at Beppe Gambetta's Summer-Workshop, the International Workshop Musique Acoustique in Belgium, the Mandolin-Workshop at the New Acoustic Gallery and other local workshops. Over the years, while traveling around doing concerts and workshops, I often was asked questions about improvising and how to do it. After some research, I figured out that the demand of improvisation knowledge seemed to be international and so came the idea about writing an improvisation book to my mind.

In the two years I've been studying bluegrass mandolin, this is the best book I've found so far. This book is perfect for the beginner/intermediate student. This is unlike most books in which they try to teach you some technique through playing songs. You'll find some songs later on in the book, but the emphasis is on technique rather than learning songs. This book is more like a textbook for the mandolin student and starts with some basic theory and then moves into pentatonic scales and on from there. In each chapter there are exercises and even assignments. I've only begun to scratch the surface of the book, but I can tell this is going to be a long-term project and I've decided to move through it slowly and really learn the techniques and theories (especially as an adult coming to music theory for the first time). Meanwhile, my instructor and I have decided to use this as the textbook for our lessons. I can learn the techniques from this book and then he will reinforce them and build on them in our face-to-face lessons. I have every reason to believe this will pay off over the long run.

Leave it to a Danish mandolinist to create what may be the most comprehensive and useful guide to bluegrass improvisation out there. If you've gotten to the point where you can sightread music or tab in first position and are comfortable alternate picking at ~76 bpm, this is \*the\* book that will take you the rest of the way. Most books on bluegrass mandolin are slim volumes that focus more on playing licks, perhaps teaching you a few pentatonic scales and throwing in a bunch of songs, without actually making a serious effort to show you how to apply the scales. This 200-page book, on the other hand, is one of the few that actually deconstructs the art of improvisation and develops an

entire pedagogical approach that includes multiple ways of building solos, ample musical examples and even assignments for practice. The early chapters contain an excellent approach to applying pentatonics, and the later chapters cover monroe style, double stops, cross picking, exotic scales, reharmonization, you name it. The material is well-graded, so that you proceed in small manageable steps with plenty of advice about how and what to practice. It's obvious that Jesper Rubner-Petersen put a lot of effort into codifying his approach and creating incremental exercises, and the quality really shows. I imagine that if you really give the material the practice time it deserves, you could spend a year or two working through everything. I've also never seen a book treat harmony in bluegrass in a serious way. There is plenty of discussion of passing tones, blues scales, and what to play over those minor and modal tunes. The accompanying cd is in mp3 format (great decision) and contains 292 examples. It appears everything is in the key of A at a very reasonable ~76 bpm. I do wish they had stereo-separated the mandolin so that you could hear just the guitar while practicing, but they did include 4 tracks of just guitar chords at the end of the cd for practicing. I also would have appreciated some exploration of other keys, at least the most common ones. I've only recently started working through this book, so I'll report back later once I've spent some more time with it. But my initial impression is that this book goes far beyond the quality and depth of material of your usual Mel Bay method book.

Probably the most impressive single title I have come across from Mel-Bay. Note that there are two definitions of a "solo" when it comes to mandolin music: DEFINITION #1: The "turn" the mandolin takes in bluegrass music. Bluegrass music is hard to define, but one thing that seems to characterize it is that all the instruments take a turn and playing a solo. This solo can be almost anything, as long as it's in keeping with the key, the rhythm, and the feel of the song. DEFINITION #2. Most mandolin books are nothing more than cheat-sheets: i.e., single-note melodies. But to make them sound convincing when playing by oneself, you'll have to learn how to flesh out these bare melodies with double-stops, triple-stops, four note chords, etc., to "put some meat on the bones." In music theory this is known as "harmonizing." Well, this book does a superb job of teaching you how to construct a solo as per definition #1. In fact, I've never seen better. It does make some progress toward getting you to make a solo as per definition #2, but not much. (It shows you how to harmonize using thirds, basically.) Overwhelmingly the book concerns itself with single-note solos. Note that the book does not teach one how to read music, but all of the standard musical notation in the book has TAB below it.

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