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Gibson Mastertone: Flathead 5-String Banjos Of The 1930s And 1940s



Synopsis

(Reference). While Gibson produced literally thousands of banjos prior to WWII, only a handful were made in the now most desirable configuration: the Original Flathead Five-String Mastertone. Since Earl Scruggs helped to make them the most sought-after banjos in the world over 60 years ago, these instruments have amassed a cult-like following. These particular banjos featured a completely innovative design when the Gibson Company introduced them around 1930. They have since become the benchmark in design, sound quality, and just sheer power among banjo players. They have therefore also become the inspiration for nearly every successful 5-string banjo that has been manufactured for the past five decades. Like Martin Dreadnaught and Fender Stratocaster guitars, the Gibson Mastertone Banjo has achieved an exalted status: It is appreciated far beyond its utilitarian purpose as a musical instrument, and considered a truly original American art form. The Mastertone design and style are instantly recognizable by musicians and music lovers around the world, even if imitated by other manufacturers. Of the 130 or so Original Flathead Five-String Mastertones known to exist, 19 of the absolute best are featured here. The Scruggs, Reno, Jenkins, Crowe, Osborne, Huber and Mills banjos are shown in all of their glory, with details of their known histories and provenances, as well as never-before-seen photos, bills of sale, factory shipping ledgers, and other ephemera relating to these rare and highly desirable instruments.

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Customer Reviews

This book shows detailed photographs and descriptions of the famous pre war Gibson five string banjos that collectors and Bluegrass players have desired for over fifty years. Mr. Mills' enthusiasm

for these instruments is apparent in how he has researched each instrument. The beautiful color photographs (with detail and close ups) illustrate what Mr. Mills describes as he goes through the factory details and history of each banjo. Mr. Mills writing style is as if he is talking directly to the reader over a cup of coffee and his love and respect for these fine examples of instruments as art objects becomes quite convincing! If you reading about the history of the Gibson banjo, viewing great photography of rare instruments and the ephemera that goes with them, this book will make a great addition !

Jim Mills is one of, if not THE, leading expert on Prewar Gibson banjos. Every instrument has a story and Jim Mills relays the journey of each of these banjos in detail. It's a history lesson and premier photodocumentation of the most famous and interesting banjos that have come to surface from the prewar era. I also learned a lot about prewar banjo specs from this book. I would recommend it to anyone who is interested in bluegrass or wanting to learn more about the banjo in general.

I just got interested in the banjo recently and even more recently decided to buy this book even though it's a little pricey. From the reviews here, it looks like no one has commented on the book in a couple of years--maybe the banjo craze is dying off? I would have bought the book sooner, but I was a little put off by the two less than 5-star reviews. I guess the book could have been written and edited and formatted a bit more professionally, but it's really not that bad. I was expecting a cut and paste job or something resembling a high-school yearbook and was pleasantly surprised to find a fairly attractive and well-written book. More importantly, the information contained here is what really counts. As a newcomer to banjo lore, it's been a real pleasure to read and look at the pictures. Any niggles about the details pale when you consider where else would you even FIND this kind of information? If you have any interest in playing, collecting or just learning about the legendary "pre-war flathead Mastertones" get it--you'll like it.

Just received this product today. I have read some of the information contained and it is very well written and easy to understand the terminology used in this book. Jim Mills is not only a great wealth of information, but even better as a musician (banjo player). I really enjoy listening to his playing abilities. If you are a banjo player or banjo instrument lover, this book is an excellent book to have in your library. I would highly recommend this book.

I am glad Mr. Mills took the time/effort to record these various Gibson banjos for history.....the photography was excellent.....and the stories of each banjo was interesting.....I only wish that he would do a volume two...maybe even include some better post war models.

Jim Mills has written a wonderful book, and has done a wonderful service to the banjo and vintage instrument world. It contains great lots of information about these wonderful instruments, and has magnificent photography to reveal their presence. It tells unique stories of some of the wonderful original RB banjos that have graced our musical world. But most of all, as soon as you begin reading this book, you will find yourself captivated by the unobscured life passion that Jim has for these instruments and stories. It reads as if he is talking to you, and I appreciate this refreshing and attractive angle- including his profound knowledge and interest in the subject.

Mills knows a lot about prewar Gibsons. This book only covers the original 5 string versions which are the most rare but much of the information relates to tenors as well. Since there are very few publications that cover prewar Gibsons in any detail, the information here is valuable and the book will be useful for many people. It is a shame that the photographs are marginal and the production values, typography and text composition are not very professional either. It would have been worthwhile for the author to do a better job on the photos and to have a professional edit and format the text.

This is a "must have" for all lovers of the five string banjo. Highly recommended to anyone that plays or listens to bluegrass music. Information about the key musicians is presented as well as their instruments. A++ with a "smiley" face !!

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