

Banjo Newsletter / February 2018 / written by Donald Nitchie / "Callous Thumb".

Publications: Belgian banjo historian Gérard De Smaele has published "*A Five String Sourcebook*," which is a complement to his book "*Banjo Attitudes*," which Gérard published in French in 2015. The 155 page Sourcebook is in English, and is now available from his website at www.desmaele5str.be. This is a remarkable book, and one that my late father Hub Nitchie, as a librarian, would have particularly appreciated. It essentially is a reference book, consisting of, as Gerard puts it, 'references of a set of essential 5-string banjo documentary sources': lists of banjo monographs, images of antique banjo catalogs, lists of biographies and autobiographies of banjo players, a selection of essential books, periodicals, music books and methods, recordings, films, contemporary banjo builders, main documentation centers, webography, and a list of important players in 8 styles, which include Afro-American style, minstrel, classic, old-time, bluegrass, tenor and plectrum. It's not an understatement to say there is a wealth of information here, not only for serious students of the banjo, but also just ordinary players. Some of the tantalizing monographs are worth listing (the monographs themselves aren't in the book, just their titles and references):

AYERS Joe, *Early Banjo Classics: Buckley, Converse, Briggs, Rice, Tuckahoe* Music, 1990-1996;

BOLLMAN Jim, "Serial Number Dating Chart," in *Pickin'*, June 1978;

ADLER Thomas, "*The Physical Development of the Banjo*," *New York Folklore Quarterly*, Sept. 1972;

JAGFORS Ulf, "*The African Akonting and the Origin of the Banjo*," *Old Time Herald*, Winter 2003-2004;

YASUDA Mac, WASHBURN Jim, "*The Big Plink*" in *The Fretboard Journal*, n° 6, winter 2009—discussion about the Tsumura banjo collection, what became of it, and Mac's efforts to preserve the most important instruments.... etc.

"*Banjo Attitudes*" was a French monograph, published in 2015, and was originally intended to accompany the "Banjo!" exhibition, which was presented in 2003-2004 at the Musical Instruments Museum, in Brussels, and for which the author had been commissioned. In 2016, after he made a presentation of his book at the 19th Banjo Gathering, English-speaking listeners urged Gérard to translate it. However, to do it properly, he would have had to hire a translator. He elected to limit himself to gather the "most important references of the history and the meaning of the American five-string banjo."

Gerard had assistance from Greg Adams and Art Rosenbaum when preparing "*Banjo Attitudes*," and Stephen Wade and Eli Kaufman were helpful and encouraging. Art Rosenbaum had this to say about the book: 'The American 5-string banjo is many things: a physical object of material culture with roots back to Africa and farther east, and a complex and ongoing development in North America; an equally complex musical culture ranging through vernacular, classical, and popular musical idioms and histories; and connections to social, cultural, and artistic networks. One volume cannot encompass all this, but De Smaele's earlier work, "*Banjo Attitudes*," comes close. In the meantime we are lucky to have in hand De Smaele's exhaustive compendium of history, research and commentary on the banjo that will inform and nourish inquiry and interest.'