



1903 - The Oldest Fretted Instrument Magazine In The World - 2020



# B · M · G

**BANJO**

**MANDOLIN**

**GUITAR**

No 897

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**Pete Stanley**

*Music in this issue*

**Mandolin:** Flottes Mädél (Vorpahl); **Tenor Banjo:** Free For All (A.J. Weidt); **Guitar:** Only A Stone's-Throw From Heaven; **Mandolin:** Kentucky Mandolin; **Banjo:** Rickett's Hornpipe; **Plectrum Guitar:** Teaching the Angels To Sew; **Ukulele:** Ginger Nut; **Clawhammer Banjo:** Jenny Lind Polka  
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2020

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No. 897
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Spring 2020
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We have a very full issue to herald the arrival of the new decade, with 21 pages of news, tuition, stories, history and information and nine pages of music. Thank you to all our regular contributions for their great contributions.

It is with sadness that we report the deaths of two fascinating characters from the BMG community—Pete Stanley and Reuben Reubens. Pete and I were near neighbours in London in the late 1970s and I had the pleasure of playing a number of gigs with him at the Almeida Theatre in London where, for some time, he had a resident spot. A little known fact about Pete is that he played with Bryan Ferry on *'I Forget More Than You'll Ever Know'*. Pete was truly a pioneer of bluegrass in the UK. His daughter, Saro, told me that the memorial concert to be held in May will be by invitation and that many of Pete's former musical colleagues, including Wizz Jones, Roger Knowles and Brian Golbey, will be attending. Reuben Reubens was an inveterate collector and amongst his many collections were more than 800 pre-1900 banjos, including some real rarities. You can see tributes to Pete and Reuben on page 24. We offer our sincere condolences to both their families.

Our music supplement features a treat for tenor banjoists, *Free For All: A Syncopated Scrap*, which comes from Bill Somerville's extensive collection of tenor banjo music. Also included are R. Vorpahl's mandolin solo, *Flottes Mädel* and a lovely piece for plectrum or fingerstyle guitar arranged by Bert Bassett. Maurice Hipkiss will be back with a brand new piece for steel guitar in the Summer issue.

Finally, remember to follow us on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/cliffordessex>) and on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/cliffordessex>) and to recruit some new readers to the magazine. We're depending on you!

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## FROM A BATH CHAIR

May I thank all of my many banjo and kindred instrument friends for their

kind and good wishes for my enjoyment of the Festive Season, so rapidly fading from my mind as the harsh winds and rain of winter lash against the windows of my Derbyshire home. Thank you also to those who were good enough to remember my birthday on the 8th January, a birthday which I share with Elvis Presley who, unlike me, shook the musical world so long ago now.

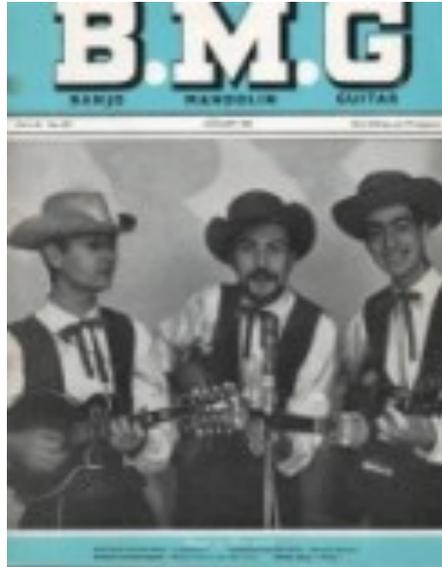
First, I have the sad duty to announce the passing of one of the most individual and entertaining banjoists whom it has been my pleasure to meet in the last fifty or more years, Pete Stanley.



Pete was a pioneer of the frailing and bluegrass banjo techniques in the UK and remained a master of both styles and was also an inspirational banjoist to players of the banjo in all styles over many years.

My first recollection of Pete Stanley was seeing his picture on the front cover of B.M.G.

magazine in January 1963. He was playing with the Mangurian brothers, Dave and Rob, in those days, the trio going under the name of *The Tennessee Three*.

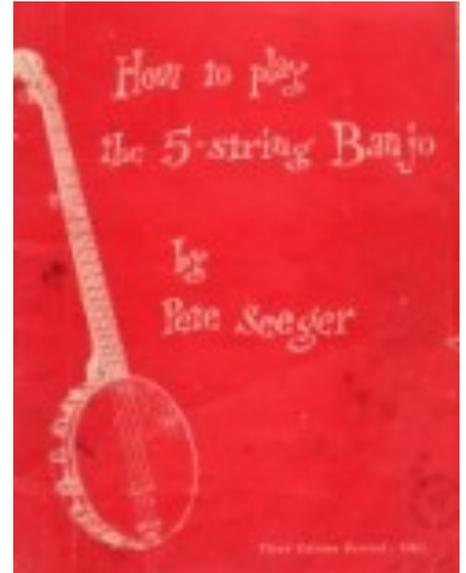


I had been playing the banjo in the classic style for about two years at this time and I was intrigued by the sound of Earl Scruggs who was featured on the TV programme *The Beverly Hillbillies*.



I tried to copy what Scruggs was doing but with little success. Pete Stanley was by this time already becoming a well-known Bluegrass banjo player. I floundered along until I bought Pete Seeger's pivotal banjo instruction book, *How to Play the 5-String Banjo*, which I still have in my collection. This book showed me and millions of others the basic bluegrass moves and added another string to my bow.

by Richard Ineson



I saw Pete perform at various music festivals and other venues over the years and often had a chat with him about things banjorial. He partnered various well known bluegrassers in his time – Wizz Jones, Roger Knowles, Brian Golbey and others. He also made several records amongst which was one which I still have: *16 tons of Bluegrass*, and he made numerous appearances on radio and TV.

Pete also made and repaired musical instruments and like many musicians liked to take on 'authority' occasionally.

He decorated the outside walls of his house with metal hub caps which had been shaken from cars going over the 'speed humps' outside his house at too high a speed. His local council told him to remove them, which, after some protest, he did, but left those on the side of his house in place.

Pete Stanley, a good man, an inspiration and a wonderful banjo player and performer, 1940-2020.



## On the cover: Pete Stanley, 1937-2020

### A tribute from Gérard de Smaele

On January 2nd, we learned of the death of Pete Stanley. He had Parkinson's and dementia and since my visit to him in June 2019, his health had continued to deteriorate. Pete was not only considered among the best five-string banjo players in Britain, but was also a historian and luthier. He dedicated his lifetime to the banjo.

After being taught by Peggy Seeger, he later became an adept at both the clawhammer and bluegrass style; unusually, he played bluegrass banjo with his fingernails, without using fingerpicks. Since the 1960s, he has played all over London, England and throughout Europe, performing with Wizz Jones, Rodger Knowles, and Brian Golbey among others. He became a popular figure on the UK folk and country music scene, punctuated by numerous appearances on the BBC. His instrument of choice was also English—the Clifford Essex ‘Concert Grand’, of which he owned three fine specimens.



**Pete's doorstep. (Photo: G. De Smaele)**

In addition to his teaching, Pete enrolled at the London College of Furniture on a musical instrument course. There he learned how to build musical instruments and after that became a renowned banjo maker. Very curious about the history of the instrument, he made several copies of minstrel banjos, one of which (a Sweeney-style) was exhibited at the Musical Instruments Museum in Brussels in 2003-2004. He also kept at home a large collection of old English banjos: a bunch of 7 strings, but also several ‘Tunbridge Ware’ dating from the middle of the 19th century.

In later years Pete also travelled to the United States and performed his unique style to American audiences. I still remember with emotion the energy and the good mood of a concert given in Brussels at the end of the 1970s. Pete was a strong character. He loved London and spent his whole life there, never owning a car, but tirelessly collecting hubcaps from those who passed by his door too quickly!

He leaves behind him more than ‘Sixteen Tons of Bluegrass’ and two children: Saro and Glenn.

A commemorative concert will be held this year, on the 16th of May, at Cecil Sharp House, London.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jtKymM29YLM>

### Reuben Reubens—banjo collector extraordinaire

We also heard recently of the death at 80 of one of the world's greatest musical instrument collectors, Reuben Reubens. Reuben collected over 800 pre-1900 banjos and his collection included some incredibly rare pieces. The BBC made a short, affectionate film about Ruben, describing him as a ‘terrible banjo player but a top-notch banjo collector. You can see the film at: <http://bit.ly/2va9LW1>. There is also a nice tribute to Reuben in the Antiques Trader Gazette <http://bit.ly/2P3Ari0>.

Reuben was always an inveterate collector. At six he collected keys, coins and old shoes. He later moved to pistols, electric motors (300 when he sold them.) Ultimately, much of the collection was sold to another collector, Akira Tsumura. He went on to collect cookers made between the 1840s and 1900. He sold this collection for a loss at Christie's auction rooms in London. The Independent newspaper featured his collection in September 1992: <http://shorturl.at/bvxKW>. It has been suggested that Tsumura ran into tax problems and sold many of the banjos from his collection. Bernunzio Vintage Instruments (Rochester, NY)



**Reuben Reubens**

acquired 120 open-back banjos in October 2007.

Some of Ruben's banjos ended up in museums, including the Kendall Whaling Museum (Sharon, Massachusetts) which has a unique scrimshaw-decorated whalebone banjo.

Reuben is often cited as ‘Ruben’ and there is no truth to the rumour that he was really called Ruben Greene (the name of a stallholder in Portobello Road market, London, in the mid-70s). Ruben Greene is still alive and well. Another story is that Reuben was, for some time, a bus conductor and would stop the bus when he spied a banjo in a junk shop window en route!

We offer our sincere condolences to Reuben's son and daughter.