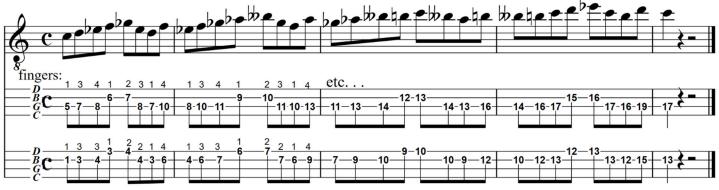
Plectrum Banjo Challenge Part 2

Here is the challenge again (now with TAB and finger indications):



Challenges:

1. Can you read it?

The double-flats were unavoidable: I could have "spelled" the B*bb* enharmonically as A, but that would have been technically incorrect (as part of a "C⁷" chord—spelled C-E-G-B, with modifications for the various Jazz 7th chords). If I respelled the other two chords (Eb Dim and Gb Dim), I would have ended up with even more double flats. Diminished chords are a spelling challenge for sure!

The point is, TAB shows everything, with no concern for spelling rules; reading standard notation is understandably daunting, especially with weird chords. Because of this, *music theory* itself is often seen as "over my head"; it doesn't have to be. I know *I* still have a tendency to "tune out" and avoid things like this, which of course means *I learn nothing*; TAB has been *my* savior!

There are already countless books and on-line lessons *filled* with patterns like this (in standard notation—no TAB); why am I bothering to write yet another book? Because it needs to be applied to the plectrum banjo! I hope that the combination of standard notation and TAB will lead you to a greater music reading ability—that being one of the best ways to learn about, well. . .music! The most-important result though is *being able to play it*, regardless of how you get there.

2. Can you figure out the fingering?

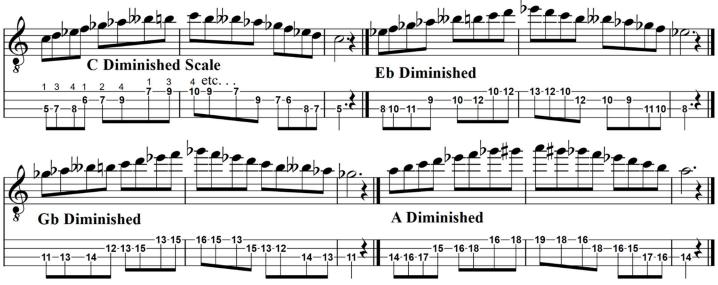
Here's where TAB really shines: There is no easier, more-effective way to show where to put your fingers, especially in an exercise like this where there are several options. I have shown what I consider to be the two best options (not only where to play the notes, but which fingers to use for the greatest efficiency). I encourage you to experiment and find all the other possibilities for yourself; you may find one that works better for you. Of course, in actual use, you'll probably only use a fragment of it, in which case your fingering needs to flow smoothly from the previous chord/lick and into the next (voice leading).

Exercises like this are wonderful tools of discipline and consistency-through-repetition—no different than any other targeted physical workout (your fingers are attached to *muscles* in case

you hadn't noticed!). Practice this and gradually pick up your speed until you no longer have to think about the fingering—until you can just "let it happen."

3. Can you tell what scale/chord/chord type it uses?

It *implies* a C Diminished chord, but this lick is actually *based on* a C Diminished *scale* (and Eb, Gb, and A Diminished scales). This scale has *eight* notes, therefore one of the seven named notes has to be used twice (I chose Bbb and B natural). The type of scale used *always* has a direct bearing on what type of chord results—thus the importance of learning scales; a *scale-based* skill/understanding will beat a *chord-based* skill/understanding any day for playing jazz (the difference between chord melody thinking and jazz thinking). The scale should always be your first-line reference. Here are those complete scales:



4. Can you play it?

If you can read it, you should be able to play it! Though I read *okay*, it is a slow, painful process for me (I am an *ear* player by nature and stubborn habit, not an *eye* player). With my ingrown aversion to standard notation, it would have been very frustrating for me to figure out where to play the notes in *this* exercise. I probably would have lost interest before getting there—showing how my prideful reliance on natural skills *used to* hold me back! TAB has literally made learning and improvement *possible* for me! Call it a "learning disorder," I don't care.

Some see it as a crutch, but it is a legitimate, centuries-old notation system that *really works*. If this is a crutch, please show me more! I would rather *learn* and *improve* than stick my nose in the air and say *"it's beneath my dignity to 'cheat' like that*." Sure, I wish my reading chops were better—and that I could get by without TAB—but wishing got me nowhere for too many years.

As far as actually *playing* it is concerned, it is quite simple; just *looks* daunting.

5. If you can play it, does it sound "hip" or just plain "weird?"

This is purely subjective of course; it is certainly "different" from what we normally play! Having the ability to play it and hear it should have a positive training effect on your fingers *and ear*. The

goal for exercises like this is for it to become "normal" (if not "liked"), to stretch your ear to new dimensions, and to lead you to increasing musical open-mindedness. When you can hear and especially *sing* this accurately and on pitch, you will have improved your musicianship *and* your voice (and thus your ear). Twisty, weird-sounding exercises can do wonders for that!

6. Do you think this exercise was worth your time?

If you are truly interested in improving as a banjo musician, *anything* that stretches your fingers/ ear/mind should be considered to be worth your time! Sometimes it just takes a bit more information to help it make sense, and lure you into at least *trying* it. If it is something you have never done, well then, *it's something you've never done—and therefore should*! Don't think in terms of "improving what you already do"; think about learning something you have *never done before* (and I guarantee, there will always be plenty of *that*!). Otherwise, you just spend your precious time practicing your mistakes and digging yourself deeper into your frustrating rut.

I tried for decades to learn to improvise jazz (the nail) using only my chord melody skills (my hammer) and questionably-good looks; *it doesn't work!* Can you say "square peg in a round hole?" My eventual goal *is* to learn to improvise jazz (*learn* to *improvise*: The ultimate oxymoron!), but even if I never accomplish that, working these kinds of exercises is why I have been improving so much over the last several years. It takes a lot of work to teach *this* old dog new tricks, but it *can* be done (and *is being* done)!

In conclusion: If you had never played or heard a Diminished scale and its non-intuitive sound before (or a similar "out-there" thing), do you think you could have just *spontaneously invented something based on it?* Sure, there are great jazz musicians who can do just that (possibly without even knowing what it is), but they more than likely *pre-learned* these things (at least the scale, in this example). They are basing their *unconscious* improvisations ("letting *it* happen") on stuff that their fingers and head *already consciously-know how to do* ("it")!

The untrained "out of thin air" savants that everyone raves about (and wishes they were like so they wouldn't have to work so darn hard) are exceedingly rare; don't compare yourself to them unless *you are one!* There is no need to be embarrassed by *that* shortcoming.

The moral of this story? The more things you *pre-learn*, the more will be *available* to you in the heat of the moment. I guarantee that the vast majority of top jazz musicians do this (or at least *did* when they were starting out)—certainly more than don't. That is the value of learning and internalizing scales, arpeggios, and patterns, and of studying/copying the great works of those who came before us (the premise of my book). This is no different than working on your golf or tennis swing; relying on natural skill (and osmosis, *I guess*) will only get you so far.

Yes, of course you want to someday work *past* this type of learning, and get to where you can just "let it happen." Unless you are a savant though, you're just going to have to bite the bullet for now and *get to work*.

I hope you'll join me on my quest to "take over the banjo world!"