

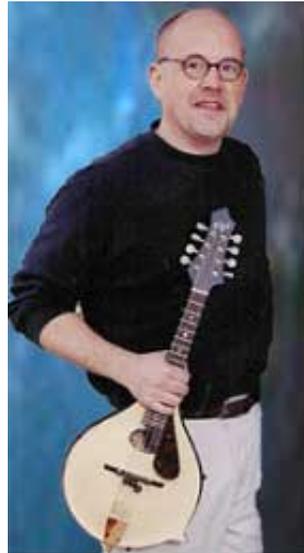


[Current Issue](#) | [Home](#) | [Back Issues](#) | [Other Mel Bay Sites](#) | [Purchase Mandolin Products](#)  
[Jazz Mandology](#) | [Latin Mandolin](#) | [What's In Your Case?](#) | [Klezmer 101](#)  
[Liberty: A Fiddle Tune in Two Different Keys](#) | [Interview with Scott Tichenor](#)  
[Sequences-Part 3](#) | [Building a Traditional Tune Repertoire](#) | [The Big River Reel](#)

## Jazz Mandology

### Line, Please...

by Ted Eschliman



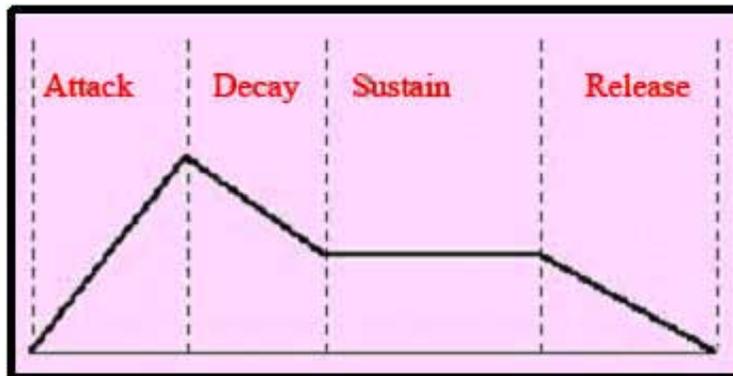
### Not to be too dramatic...

My brief stint in high school drama introduced me to that verbal request, "LINE!!..." The situation was, while rehearsing dialogue, actors in the early stages of memorizing would forget their lines, and holler out this cue. Someone backstage with a copy of the script would finish the missing words, and hopefully, the actor could continue to pick up the production with only this minor break in continuity.

This condition is a metaphor for music. Breaking the "line" reduces the aesthetic message and meaning to just "words and sentences." When the musical momentum or "line" is interrupted on a small scale, it becomes a sequence of notes, no longer "music."

## Go with the Flow.

Flow is everything. Unlike a wind instrumentalist, those of us who pick or pluck have the added burden of string decay to battle. Think of sound in terms of **Attack**, **Decay**, **Sustain**, and **Release**. The graph shows this well:



The **Attack** would be the strike of the pick, the **Decay** the natural deterioration of vibration, the **Sustain** would be the pressure from your left hand fingers, and the **release** would be when you completely lift or move the finger. It's the **Sustain** phase we want to draw attention to.

A saxophonist has the benefit of breath to change dynamics after tonguing a note. Louder, softer, a whole world of opportunity with the lungs that completely escapes the mandolinist; only one good strike of the pick and we decay until the next note starts.

## A Closer Look

Let's slow this process down and take a microscopic view of how we can keep our left hand fingers from accelerating this deterioration. In the next exercise, we will work at a very slow tempo and concentrate on one aspect of our playing at a time. Each note gets a downstroke of the pick. Don't think of anything else but sustaining one note to the next. Two things stop the vibration of the string, the release of the finger, and the start of the next pick stroke. You want to hold the string as long as you can so it "bleeds" into the next note. Control your pick to coordinate release and attack at the closest possible moment in time.

"A Lydian" Scale



Mandolin

TAB

Listen to the above: <http://tannah.net/ted/MBMp3/LPQuarter.mp3>

A good rule in music pedagogy is to isolate one from multiple distracting aspects of playing. We need a very slow, deliberate tempo. We're only using down strokes. Though we're articulating with a full pick stroke, our attention needs to be on how long the left hand finger can remain on that "sweet spot" between the frets-the maximum tone allowable by law. Keep this VERY slow for right now.

You must keep your finger "at the ready" for the next note. This may initially be a challenge, stretching vertically with the 1st to 4th finger spread, while poised to produce pressure to push downward on the fretboard! Notice the D#, which introduces (perhaps) a new sound, the raised 4th scale degree. We won't go into the theory now for those of you who aren't familiar with the Lydian Scale; I'll save that for my soon to be released Mel Bay Book, "Getting Into Jazz Mandolin (MB20835BCD)." For now let's just say we're killing two birds with one stone, introducing you to a "callisthenic" stretch for your fingers, and a new sound for your ears. (We'll get into the brain part at a later date.)

Picture a child's Merry-go-round. As it gains momentum, you can push the Merry-go-round with your hand to propel it, but if you hold your hand on it too long, you actually slow it down. Your pick should be the same concept-keep the vibration going with a clean, crisp attack. Get it out of the way, perhaps resting on the next string between notes. (Ahh, a "Rest Stroke for you Gypsy jazz fans...")

### What goes down must come up.

Now let's make the right hand a little more complicated by adding alternating **Down Up Down Up** strokes. Keep the string vibrating (be conscious of it!!!) and push the "Merry-go-round" of vibration, but don't lose the pressure in your right fingers as you ascend the scale. Even the stretch from D# to E, a string crossing, should be smooth, with no break in tone:

Listen to the above: <http://tannah.net/ted/MBMp3/LP8th.mp3>

If you've lost that feeling and tone continuity, go back to the first example and return to this. Be sure your finger pressure stays constant, imitating a wind instrument in support.

### Make it a double.

Now we complicate it with one more step, doubling the strokes, but keeping the same constant string vibration. It can only be done by finding that resonant sweet spot between the fret, and holding it until the very last moment prior to the attack of the next note. (It also helps to get a full pick stroke. I like to add a little extra wrist action.)

Listen to the above: <http://tannah.net/ted/MBMp3/LP16th.mp3>

Notice we used closed fingerings in the previous exercises. (No open strings.) You can practice the same closed fingering system starting with other fingers (2, 3, & 4). My friend, John Baxter, has a wonderful website, [www.mandozine.com](http://www.mandozine.com) which offers an exclusive peek at other Lydian fingerings. (Note: This will be in my upcoming Mel Bay book)

Check this link: [http://mandozine.com/index.php/techniques/techinfo/Lydian\\_Scale/](http://mandozine.com/index.php/techniques/techinfo/Lydian_Scale/)

Now let's apply this to a real tune. Jazz mandolin innovator Don Stiernberg has recorded a lovely version of the Ellington standard, "In a Sentimental Mood," in his latest Blue Knight Records release, "Angel Eyes," and I can't think of a better song to demonstrate this concept of line (Buy this C.D. today!).

Don's gift to us 21st century mandolinists is paving the way to more opportunity to voice our eight-stringed wonder as a wind instrument. Listen to his recordings, especially when he plays along side a trumpet or trombone. This is linear mandolin at its best! He and I have discussed our mutual dream that someday, our children will think of the mandolin as just as much a jazz instrument as a saxophone or trumpet.

We can do it, if we can only remember our "lines..."

Excerpt: In A Sentimental Mood (Duke Ellington)

The image shows two systems of musical notation for a mandolin. Each system consists of a five-line staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The first system contains four measures of music. The notes are: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), Bb4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), Bb4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (half). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-3 below the notes. The second system also contains four measures. The notes are: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), Bb4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), Bb4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (half). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-3 below the notes.

Listen to the above: <http://tannah.net/ted/MBMp3/LPIASM.mp3>

Thanks for checking in with **Jazz Mandology** again, and if this is your first visit, be sure to click on the above "Back Issues" button. There's lots more information here, just as close as your mouse.

Email your comments to [ted@jazzmando.com](mailto:ted@jazzmando.com) and check out the new and improved [www.jazzmando.com](http://www.jazzmando.com) site (revised March 2005).

**To purchase Mel Bay products::**

- \* Check your [local music store](#)
- \* Call 1-800-8-MEL-BAY (800-863-5229) or
- \* [Online retailers](#)

For a catalog: call 1-800-8-MEL-BAY (800-863-5229)  
or e-mail [email@melbay.com](mailto:email@melbay.com)



Copyright © 2002 Mel Bay Publications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.