

TOTW Snowdrop

Snowdrop has been popular since Kirk McGee (1899 – 1983), a talented banjo player, recorded it for Mike Seeger and Folkways in a 1957 album called "[Look Who is Here: Old Timers of the Grand Old Opry](#)" and again in 1964 in "The McGee Brothers and Arthur Smith." Some people think Kirk is credited for writing it, but apparently it's an older tune. It's said he learned the tune from a Black man named Jim Sapp in Kirk and Sam's father's shop near their hometown in Franklin, Tennessee. Some say the tune may go back to the minstrel era, and if you know more, please do share.

As I learned in Stephen Wade's book [The Beautiful Music All Around Us: Field Recordings and the American Experience](#), Snowdrop can be thought of as a fandango with its use of ascending and descending chordal sounds and its movement up and down the banjo neck.

Stephen actually visited Kirk McGee and shared the experience with me: "On the first of the occasions that I visited with Kirk, I played it for him. It was the first truly lyrical instrumental I had ever learned, and receiving his blessing for it meant so much to me. I play it at the close of "Catching the Music" as the credits roll (Kirk appears in the film) as well as having recorded on my 1990 *Dancing Home* album. I recently recorded it again and it appears on my forthcoming album..." The album has come out since Stephen and I last communicated, called "Hands on the Tune" and you can hear Snowdrop on Track 4 in a medley with Spanish Fandango.

Here's the link for [Catching the Music](#), a delightful 1987 documentary by Stephen about passing on banjo music. Stephen calls the banjo a "musical mule" and wrote that "the banjo is a metaphor for America-- brought here via slavery, shared with mountain whites to make a new music for us all." A short description of Kirk McGee appears at 15:37 and a clip of Kirk describing Uncle Dave Macon is at 35:20. Afterwards is some of Kirk's musical history, including talk of his father's country store as a learning spot and Kirk's experience as a Grand Old Opry performer. If you go to the end of *Catching the Music*, you'll see Stephen playing Snowdrop.

I've had fun arranging Snowdrop and offer it in three tunings for clawhammer. In addition, my husband, Kit, AKA Plinky, and I recorded together with my 3-finger picking and his mandolin, though I didn't tab it. We learned it listening to a Bob Flesher CD.

For now, suffice it to say that I enjoy hearing and playing Snowdrop and hope you'll be encouraged to try it, too, and post more of your favorites.