

TUNE OF THE WEEK – 12/7/12

SKATING ON THE HARBOURFRONT

Sometimes new tunes have an immediate old-time appeal. Skating on the Harbourfront by Chris Coole is such a tune. I luckily discovered it when a BHO friend recently posted it on a video. Written in 2006 using Cumberland Gap tuning (fDGCD), it's been a fun one to learn and share, and contacting Chris via BHO has enhanced it for me. It portrays outdoor ice skating well—graceful, smooth, crisp.



Chris on the ice



The ice on Chris!

Chris wrote the song as a Christmas gift for his father, a past avid hockey player who still skates. Here's the story of the tune in his own words via our email interview:

How did you come to write the tune?

I was a little tight in the money department around Christmas 06, and decided that it would be nice (and economical) to write everyone in my family a tune, record them and give the discs as Christmas presents.

I wrote a whole whack of tunes in the course of a couple weeks. It was a great exercise, in that because I wasn't writing for a "real" album I was really free with the writing. I was writing tunes, that had I been putting on one of my albums, I might have thought were too simple. I was just trying to capture simple feelings.

I was quite happy with the results and it re-taught me that when you're writing, it's best to go with instinct and not over-think things. Sometimes you need to let things be simple. What you don't write is as important as what you do. For every great tune, someone had to decide to stop writing it at some point. Think of all the great simple melodies that would have been messed up if whoever writing them hadn't had the courage to stop writing and just let them be simple.

Were all the tunes written in this format, with an A and B part?

Yes, from what I remember...mostly I write A/B

Was this the only one in Cumberland Gap tuning?

Yes, I think it was. I was just getting into that tuning around that time.

Were you in that tuning and just happened upon the melody or was it in your head first?

I probably just found it while messing around. That's usually how it works for me.

Do you consider it old-timey or another style?

I would let the listener decide. Old-time has probably had the greatest influence on my music, but it's hard to say what makes something "old-time". I think each person might have a different take on that...which is fine.

Why do you think it's been learned by many players?

I guess it's a pretty tune and it sounds nice played solo, that probably helps...again, you'd have to ask the people who've learned it.

Are the guitar chords F, Bb, C, Dm?

That sounds about right.

Do you ever capo when you play it?

No, but you certainly could. If you were playing it with other folks, it might be easier to play it in G (capo on the 2nd fret)

How long have you played clawhammer banjo and how did you come to learn it living in Toronto?

I've played for 21 years this Christmas. I just fell in love with the music in my late teens, learned mostly by ear from records. Once I met Arnie Naiman, I picked up alot from him. There was a local folk musician named Rick Fielding that taught me how to do basic frailing. I became really obsessed and just sort of went for it.

Are there many opportunities to play in your area?

Yes, there is a very active old-time scene in Toronto.

Do they draw a lot from the repertoire of our "mountain music?"

Yes, for sure.

Does your father play music, too, or like a particular type of music?

No he doesn't play, but loves all sorts of music.

You can learn more about Chris on his website: www.chriscoole.com He's a Banjo Hangout member and teaches banjo as well.

Here's a sound clip from the Old Time Banjo Festival CD: [Chris Coole's Skating on the Harbourfront](#)

Chris's tab and some notes: *Bar five (first bar of the b part) the fingering is ring finger on the 7th fret of the g string and index on the 5th fret of the high D...use your baby finger for the 7th fret of the high D. Then move that same position down for bar 6...on bar 7 index handles the G string, middle plays the high D on the third fret and I think ring plays the high D at the 5th fret*

A couple of photos of Chris to clue you in on the weather and Canadian scenes that inspired the tune (no, those aren't fangs, they're icicles):

And finally, the Banjo Hangout video and MP3 recordings to already enjoy:

[Travis Brink and Andy Bond video](#)

[Dusty Elmer](#)

[Andrew Smith](#)

Here's an [MP3 link to my site](#). And here's a video: [Janet B's Skating on the Harbourfront](#). Hope to hear others give this engaging tune a try.