



## Best of the Best

**Kevin Slick** | Posted on March 1, 2026 | [Reviews](#) | [No Comments](#)



Dr. Ted Olson, professor of Appalachian studies at East Tennessee State University, has compiled an album of previously unreleased tracks from banjo master Carroll Best, who played an essential role in the evolution of the melodic banjo style in the 1950s. Best referred to his technique as “fiddle style,” which certainly fits, as it was the playing of fiddle tunes where the banjo plays the melody note for note, where he gained notoriety.

The variety of material, as well as the instrumentation on the album, is exciting. There are recordings from radio broadcasts, studio tracks that feature a full band, and others where the banjo is front and center with a subtle guitar or bass backing. “Fisher’s Hornpipe” and “Twinkle Little Star” are two that show off his beautiful, flowing melodic style with this small band format. No less a banjo expert than Tony Trischka lists Best among better-known melodic banjoists such as Bobby Thompson and Bill Keith.

It appears that all of these players developed their styles independently, which is rather amazing given the similarities that can be heard. As the lo-fidelity sound of some of these recordings suggests, they were on radio or live shows, and in the era before easy access to just about anything ever recorded, it’s quite possible that if you lived outside of western North Carolina, you might not have heard Carroll Best.

Fortunately for us, this album brings together twenty-three performances that open up a treasure chest of melodic banjo from one of the pioneers of that genre.