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The acoustic guitar is responsible for so much of the music we know and love today. Take jazz, blues and country: each of these now largely 'electric' styles was born on simple flat-top boxes in the hands of unschooled but naturally-gifted innovators. Folk has always been the domain of the acoustic guitar, but has also recently been the well from which so many great advances in playing technique have been drawn. And what about music's influence on the guitars themselves? OM and 000 styles were born of folk, while two country and western singers' desire for bigger and flashier boxes gave birth to Gibson's mighty J-200 and the fabulous Martin D-45.

We've trawled the Guitar Techniques archives to come up with top lessons in the most popular acoustic guitar styles and have analysed, tabbed and recorded studies of history's greatest acoustic guitarists. There are also original arrangements of two acoustic classics to learn. Everything is explained clearly by our excellent tutors and each lesson comes with downloadable audio files and animated tab to help you follow along. To get started, simply head over to filesilo.co.uk/bookazines/ plyha3 and download the files. Enjoy!

FUTURE

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Acoustic

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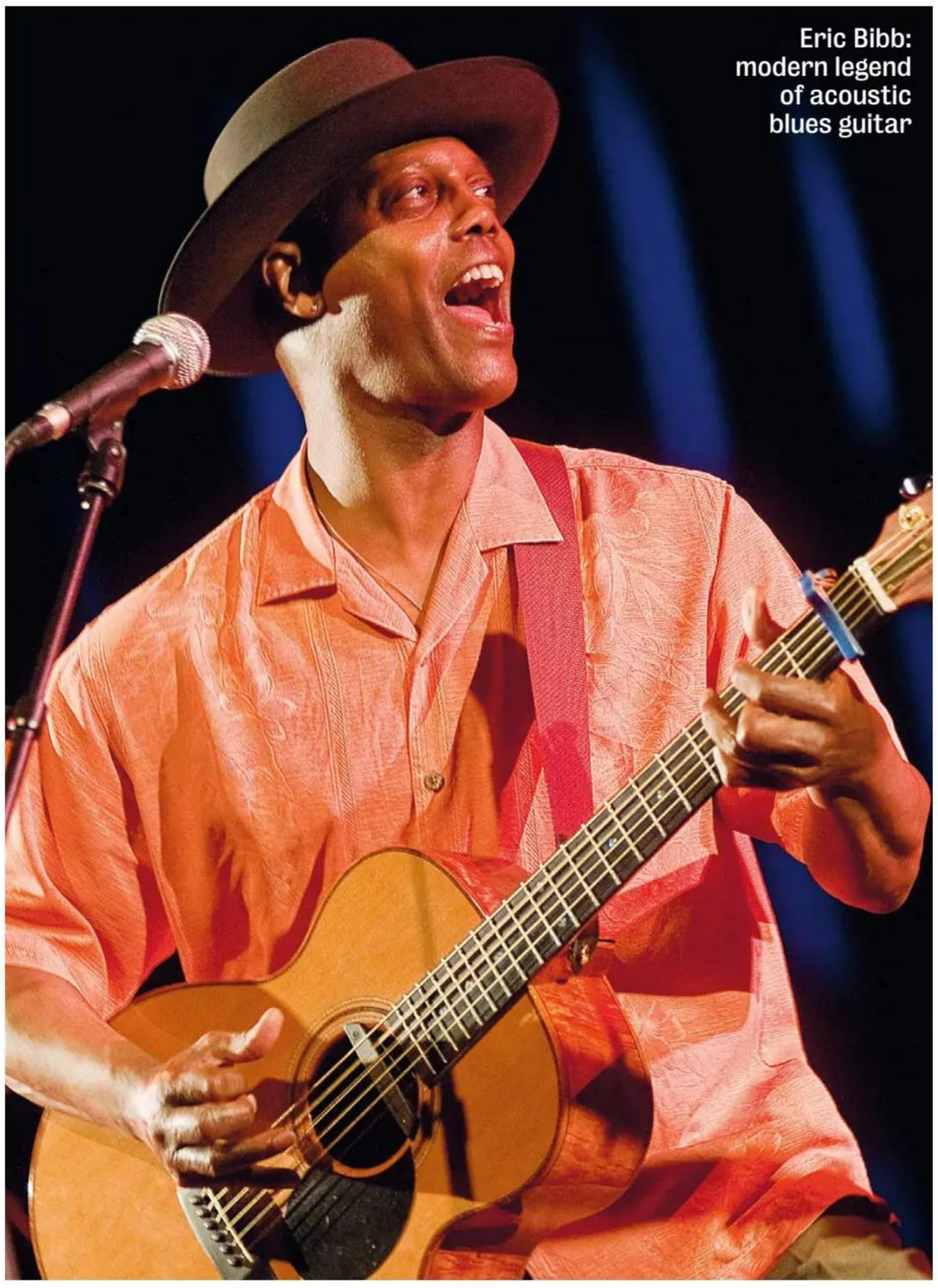
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Eric Bibb: modern legend of acoustic blues guitar



Pierre Bensusan: stunning musician and king of DADGAD

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Our tab user guide makes navigating the music simple

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Kelly Joe Phelps: Another great modern acoustic blues virtuoso

Tab User Guide

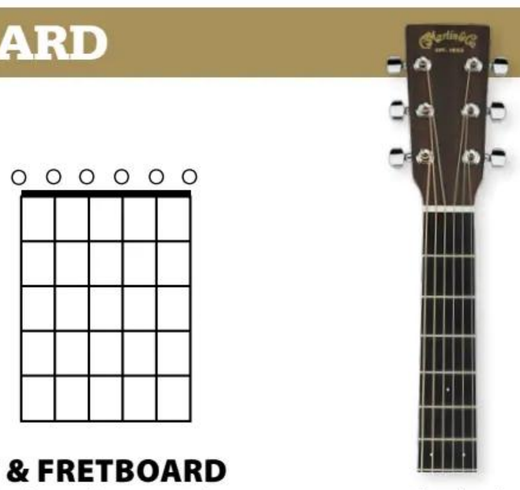
You can get more from this magazine and downloadable files by understanding our easy musical terms and signs...

RELATING TAB TO YOUR FRETBOARD



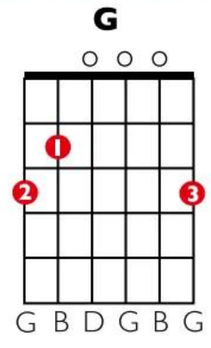
HAND LABELLING

Here are the abbreviations used for each finger: Fretting hand: 1, 2, 3, 4, (T) Picking hand: p (thumb), i (first finger), m (second), a (third), c (fourth).



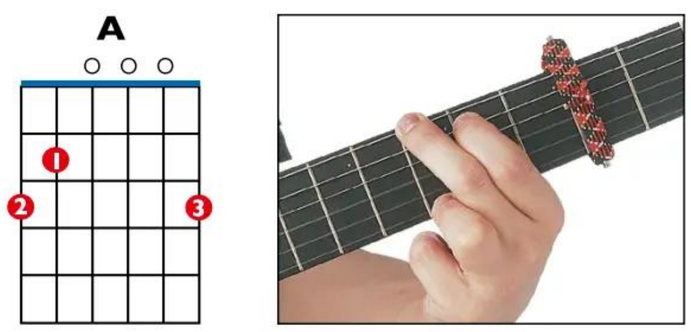
NUT & FRETBOARD

The fretbox diagram above represents the fretboard exactly, as seen in the accompanying photo. This is for ease of visualising a fretboard scale or chord quickly.



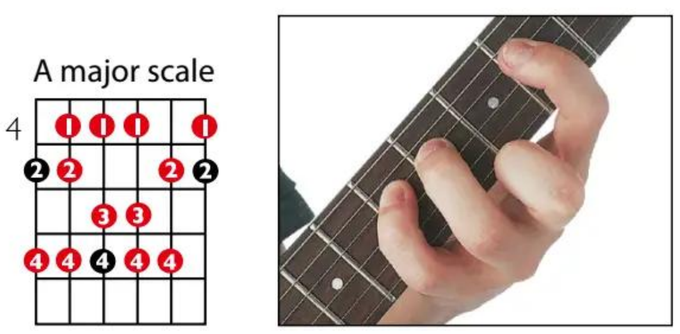
CHORD EXAMPLE

The diagram represents the G chord in the photo. The 'O' symbol is an open string; a circled number is a fretting finger. Intervals are shown below.



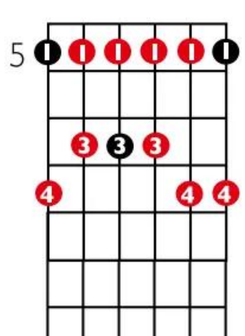
CHORD EXAMPLE (WITH CAPO)

The blue line represents a capo – for this A chord, place it at fret 2. Capos change the fret number ordering – here, the original fret 5 now becomes fret 3, fret 7 now fret 5, etc.



SCALE EXAMPLE

The diagram shows the fretting-hand fingering for the A major scale (root notes in black). The photo shows part of the scale being played on the fourth string with first, third and fourth finger of the fretting hand.



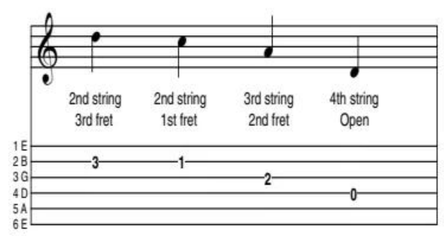
❸ = scale root/tonic

TAPPING & HARMONICS

The left box shows A minor Pentatonic scale with added tapped notes signified by 'T's. Above shows a Cmaj9 (no 3rd) with harmonics at the 12th fret.

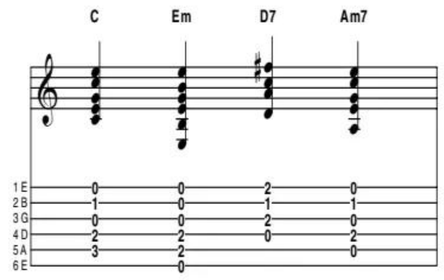
Read music

Each transcription is broken down into two parts...



MUSICAL STAVE

There are five horizontal lines for music notation showing note pitches and rhythms; these are divided by bar lines.



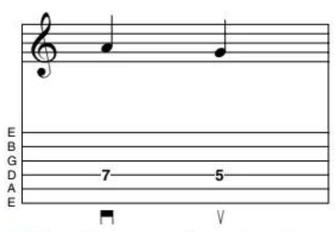
TABBING

Under the musical stave, Tab is an aid to show you where to put your fingers on the fretboard. The six horizontal lines represent the six strings on a guitar – the numbers on the strings are fret numbers. The two stave and tab examples show 4 notes and 4 chords; C (C major), Em (E minor), D7 (D dominant 7) and Am7 (A minor 7).

HOW THEY APPEAR IN WRITTEN MUSIC...

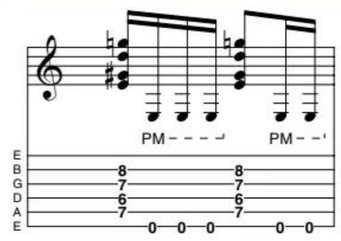
PICKING VARIATIONS AND ALTERNATIVES

Up and down picking
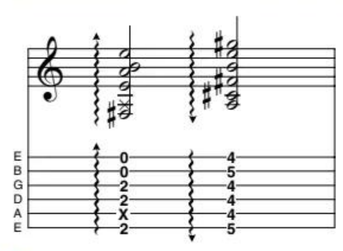


■ The first note is to be down-picked and the last note is to be up-picked.

Palm muting



■ Palm mute by resting the edge of the picking-hand's palm on the strings near the bridge.

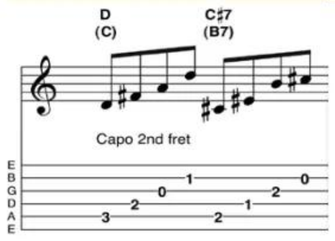
Appeggiate chord



■ Play the notes of the chord by strumming across the relevant strings in the direction of the arrow head.

CAPO

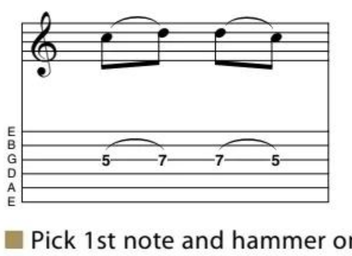
Capo applied



■ A capo creates a new nut, so the above example has the guitar's 'literal' 5th fret now as the 3rd fret.

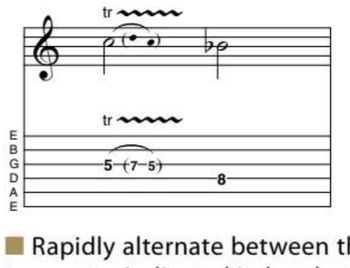
FRETTING HAND

Hammer-on & Pull-off
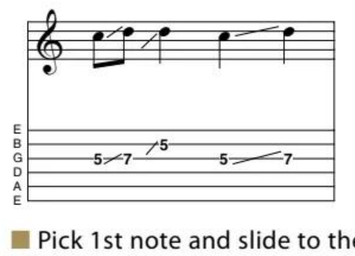


■ Pick 1st note and hammer on with fretting hand for 2nd note. Then pick 3rd note and pull off for 4th note.

Note trills



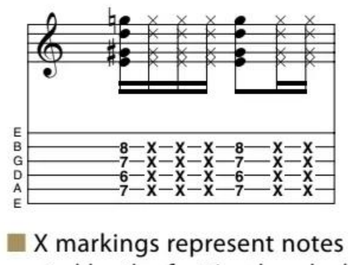
■ Rapidly alternate between the two notes indicated in brackets with hammer-ons and pull-offs.

Slides (Glissando)



■ Pick 1st note and slide to the 2nd note. The last two notes show a slide with the last note being re-picked.

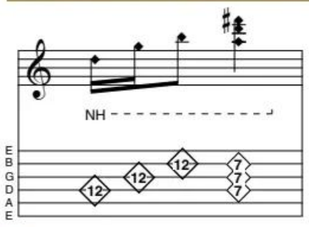
Fretting-hand muting



■ X markings represent notes muted by the fretting hand when struck by the picking hand.

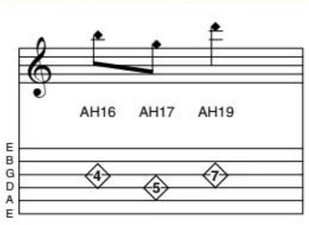
HARMONICS

Natural harmonics



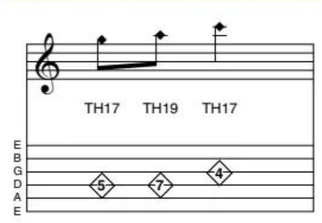
■ Pick the note while lightly touching the string directly over the fret indicated. A harmonic results.

Artificial harmonics



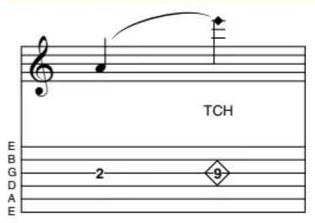
■ Fret the note as shown, then lightly place the first finger over 'x' fret (AH 'x') and pick (with a pick, p or a).

Tapped harmonics



■ Fret the note as shown, but sound it with a quick right-hand tap at the fret shown (TH17) for a harmonic.

Touch harmonics



■ A previously sounded note is touched above the fret marked TCH (eg TCH 9) to sound harmonic.

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10 Ultimate Fingerpicking Patterns

Fingerpicking is a vital technique for today's guitarist in all styles and from slow and simple to quick and complex. Here we reveal the 10 top patterns with some great chord shapes too.

Info	Will improve your…
KEY Various	✔ Finger independence
TEMPO Various	✔ Accompaniment creativity
	✔ Hand co-ordination

The world of fingerstyle guitar is so vast and verdant that it can sometimes seem overwhelming. So rich is it in various stylistic roots, from Brazilian bossa nova to the traditional folk songs of Britain that knowing where to start is a problem in itself.

So this feature's aim is to arm you with a wealth of fingerstyle essentials that cover 10 different playing styles including blues, jazz, folk, country and lush-sounding Latin.

> "This feature's aim is to arm you with a wealth of fingerstyle essentials that cover 10 different playing styles including blues, jazz, folk and country"

Patterns have been grouped roughly into 'families' of approaches, to make sense of the learning process. For example, for those new to fingerstyle it is important to begin with a good foundation – crisp note production and solid timing. The first two patterns will serve you well here as they are focused predominantly on playing single notes at a time, looking at arpeggios with no troublesome timing issues.

For the more experienced player we move on to thumb independence, introducing the idea of 'pinching' two notes together to create harmony, and explore this through a few styles including folk, country and blues.

Patterns 3, 4 and 5 are indicative of the classic playing of great American fingerpickers such as Paul Simon and James Taylor, who would have shared licks and tricks with their 60s and 70s transatlantic counterparts, Martin Carthy, Bert Jansch and Ralph McTell, as they played the folk clubs of London as well as New York.

A vital fingerpicker's technique is the ability to play self-accompanying blues grooves in the vein of Howlin' Wolf or Robert Johnson. Pattern 7 should set you on your way here. It is essential to be able to develop an independent thumb to free your creativity in embellishing the monophonic bassline with simple or more complex phrases in the way that the aforementioned masters did.

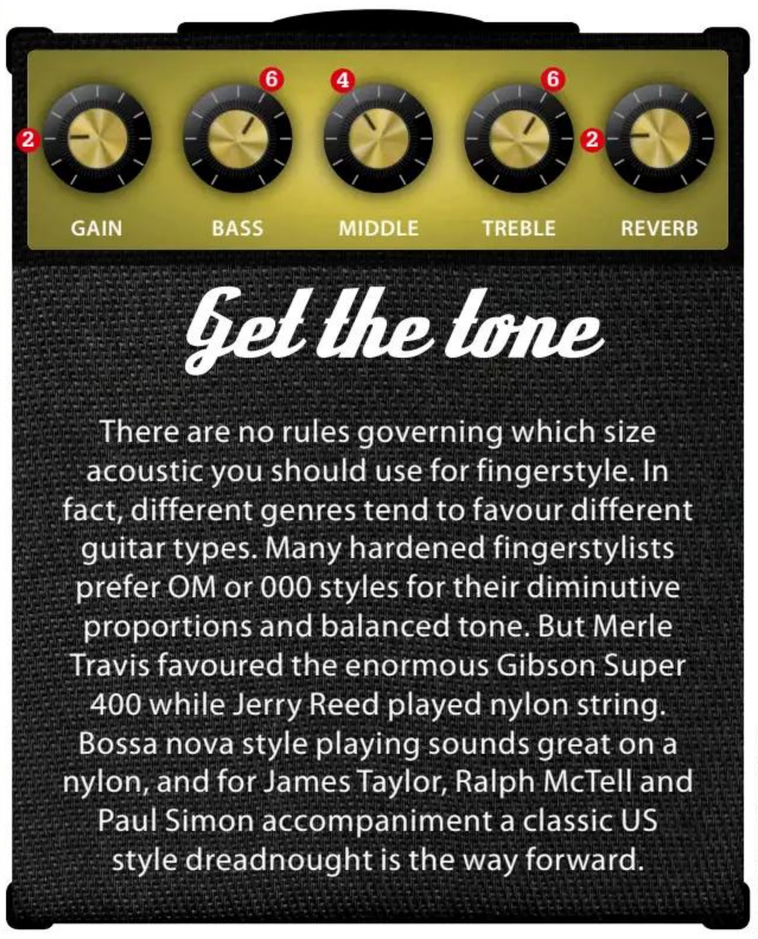
Thumb independence was second nature to country and western pickers like Merle Travis and Chet Atkins, whose light-hearted sound and consummate mastery saw them appearing on popular TV and radio shows and, in Chet's case, on countless Nashville recording sessions. Patterns 5 and 6 should set you on the right path to mastering what's now known as 'Travis picking'.

Finally, there are three patterns that follow a more chordal approach, with syncopated rhythms: pattern 9 takes a bossa nova rhythm and offsets it with a steady bass, in the style of Brazilian master João Gilberto, and the final pattern marries chords to a walking bassline, as demonstrated to fabulous effect by Martin Taylor, Tuck Andress and Joe Pass.

Fingerstyle has gone from being a specialist area to one that's used by almost every guitarist at some point. With patience and practise you will either become a more versatile and diverse player, or a specialist in whichever particular style inspires you most! **TS**

TECHNIQUE FOCUS
GETTING A GOOD TONE

Guitar students often have the right motor skills regarding note order and co-ordination, but have a poor tone due to how they address the string with their picking hand. A good, balanced tone is found by plucking the string at roughly a 45 degree angle, preferably with a combination of well-polished fingernail (for attack) and flesh (for warmth). Playing near the bridge will give a more brittle, treble-y sound, while towards the neck will yield a mellower one. Hovering over the soundhole provides a good balance of frequencies: it also frees up the soundboard to resonate better. Experiment, and notice the difference each approach brings to sound. There are standard conventions for naming the picking fingers; they are as follows and are used throughout this magazine: thumb: (pulgar – p), first finger (index – i), second finger (median – m) and third finger (annular – a). Make sure you use the correct fingers when negotiating the tab.



Get the tone

There are no rules governing which size acoustic you should use for fingerstyle. In fact, different genres tend to favour different guitar types. Many hardened fingerstylists prefer OM or 000 styles for their diminutive proportions and balanced tone. But Merle Travis favoured the enormous Gibson Super 400 while Jerry Reed played nylon string. Bossa nova style playing sounds great on a nylon, and for James Taylor, Ralph McTell and Paul Simon accompaniment a classic US style dreadnought is the way forward.



LISTENING SUGGESTIONS **The following titles are fingerpicking heavyweights: jazz legend Joe Pass's Virtuoso; folk maestro Martin Simpson's Prodigal Son; Chet Atkins's collaborative album with Jerry Reed, Me & Jerry; and by the king of ragtime, The Best Of Blind Blake. For classic fingerstyle accompaniment you can't go wrong with a James Taylor 'greatest hits', and don't underestimate Ralph McTell's delightfully pure style.**

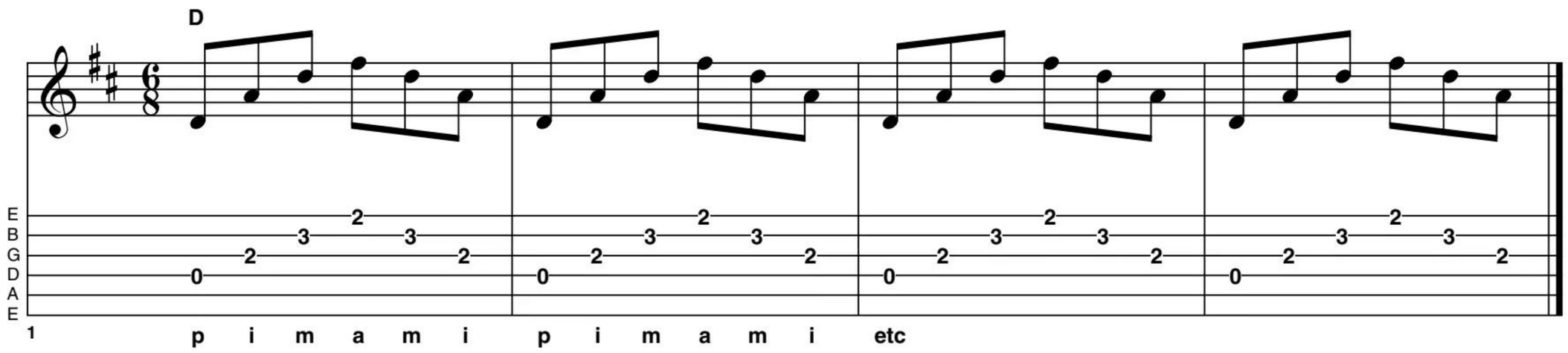
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Merle Travis:
gave his name
to a whole style
of picking

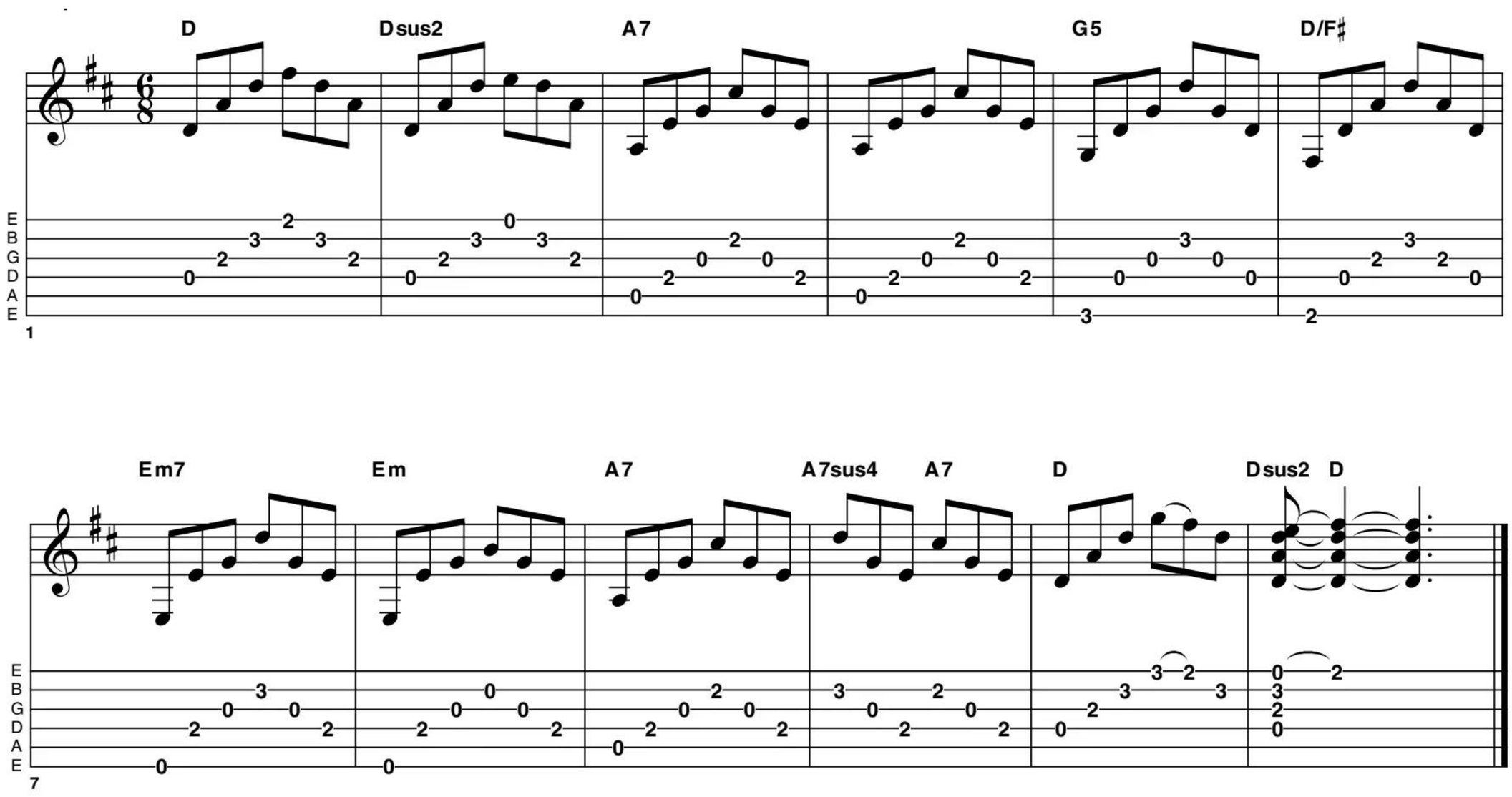
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PATTERN 1 **6/8 ARPEGGIOS**

Songs by REM, The Manic Street Preachers and others lend themselves to this style of open-sounding arpeggio with their rolling 6/8 time feel. Let those notes ring by keeping the chord shape held down but lifting your picking fingers away after plucking each note.

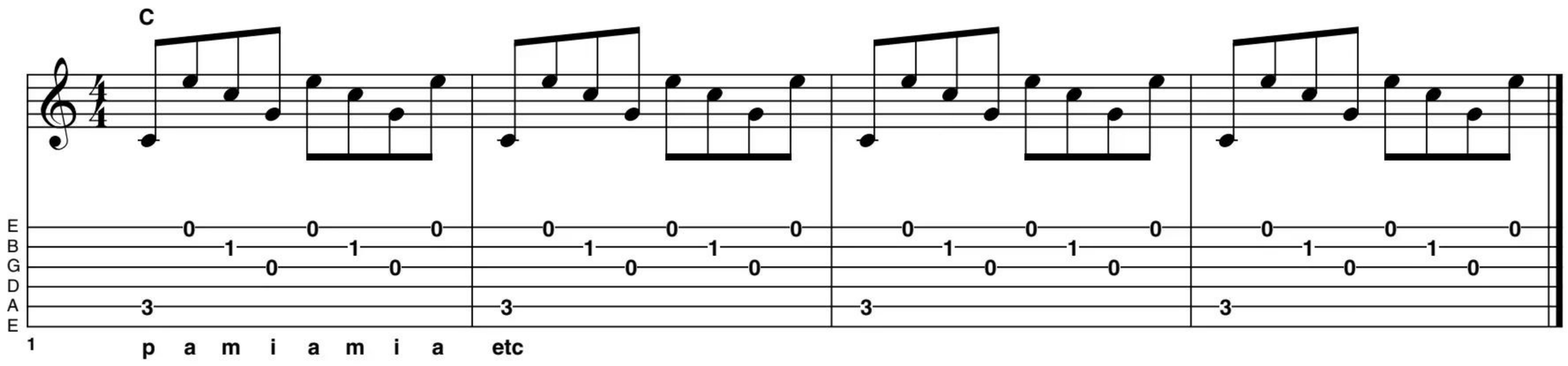


EXAMPLE 1 Although the pattern is simple enough, take care to allow all the strings to ring freely, creating that all-important wash of sound.



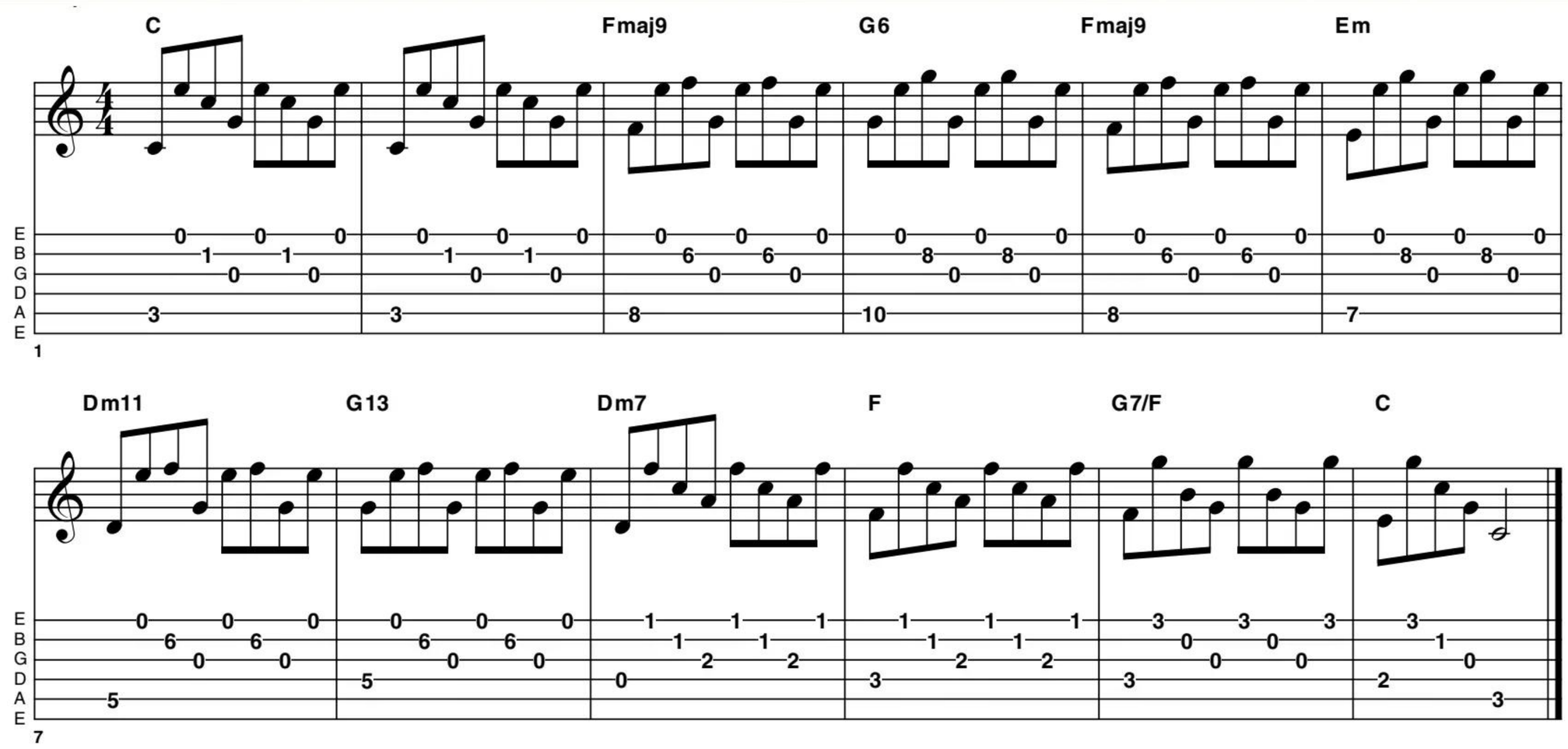
PATTERN 2 **ROLLING ARPEGGIOS**

This backward rolling pattern gives a rhythmically displaced feel that cuts across the 4/4 time feel. It's a simple technique but it brings some interest and a lovely momentum to what is otherwise a pretty basic groove – after all, 4/4 is known as 'common' time. This pattern is another that's heard in pop and rock, from Jack Johnson to John Lennon; it's also a great way to emulate piano arpeggios.



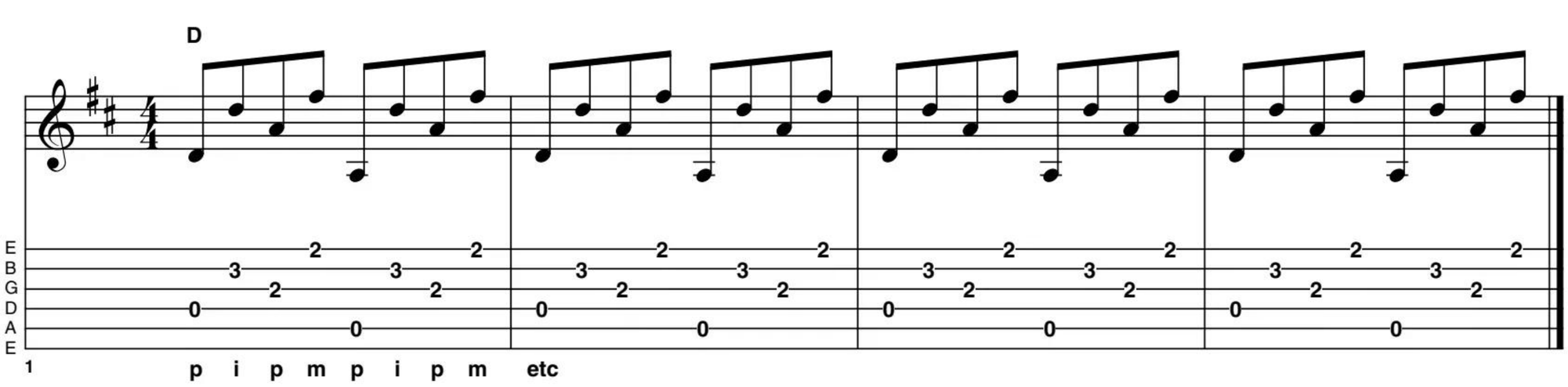
PATTERN 2 **ROLLING ARPEGGIOS** ...CONTINUED

EXAMPLE 2: Notice how by moving a C chord shape up and down the neck (bars 1-5) we can create some very pretty chord voicings – Johnny Marr excels at this.

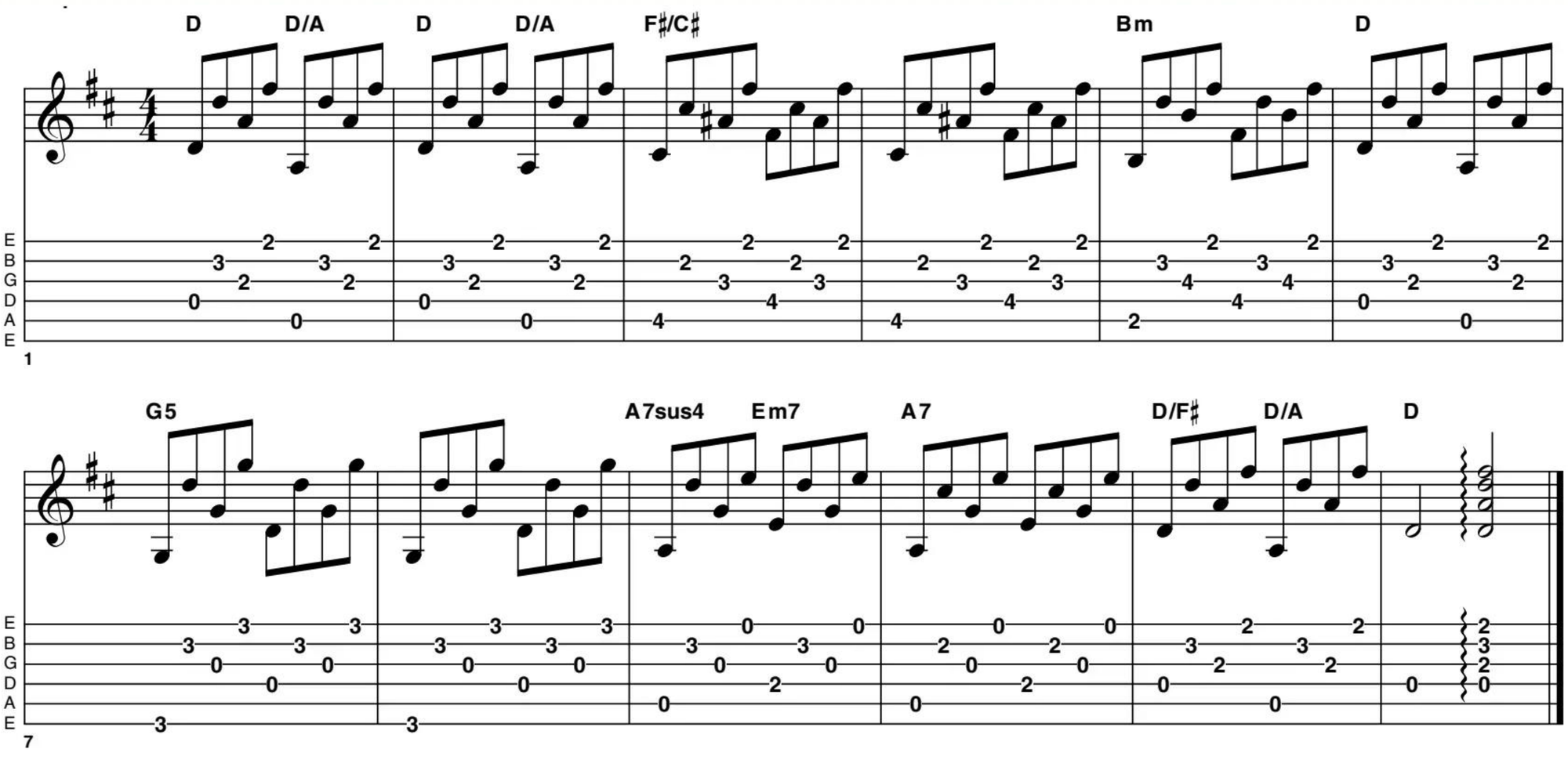


PATTERN 3 **ALTERNATING BASS**

This pattern will help get you up to speed with using your thumb on each main beat but without any awkward syncopation to trip over. Aim for an even attack between the thumb and fingers, and take heed of the i and m fingers.



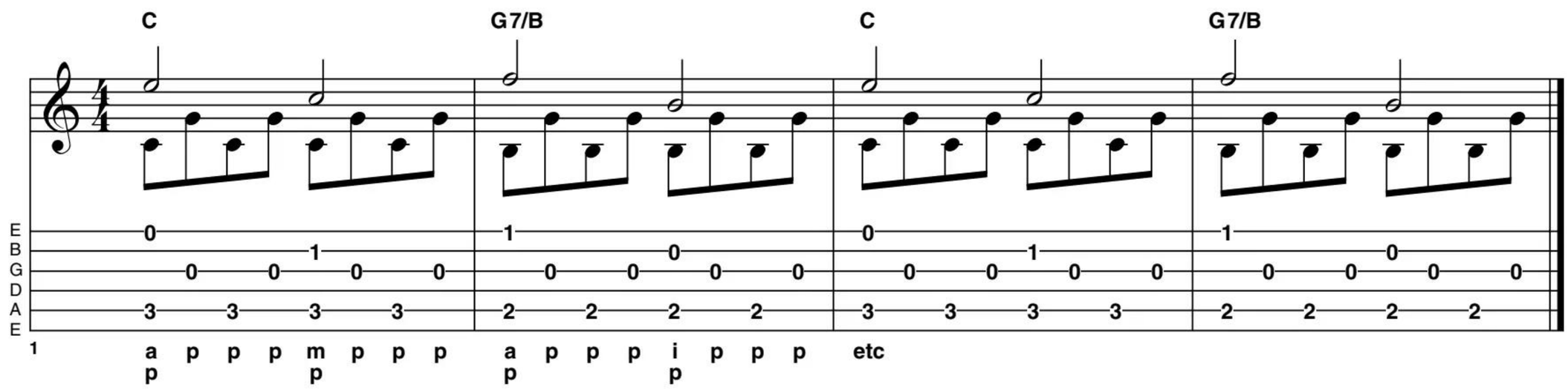
EXAMPLE 3: Alternating the bass string yields various chord inversions in which the lowest note is not necessarily the chord's root. These are written as slash chords, and add another level of interest to the overall harmony – John Lennon learnt this style from Donovan while studying with the Maharishi in India.



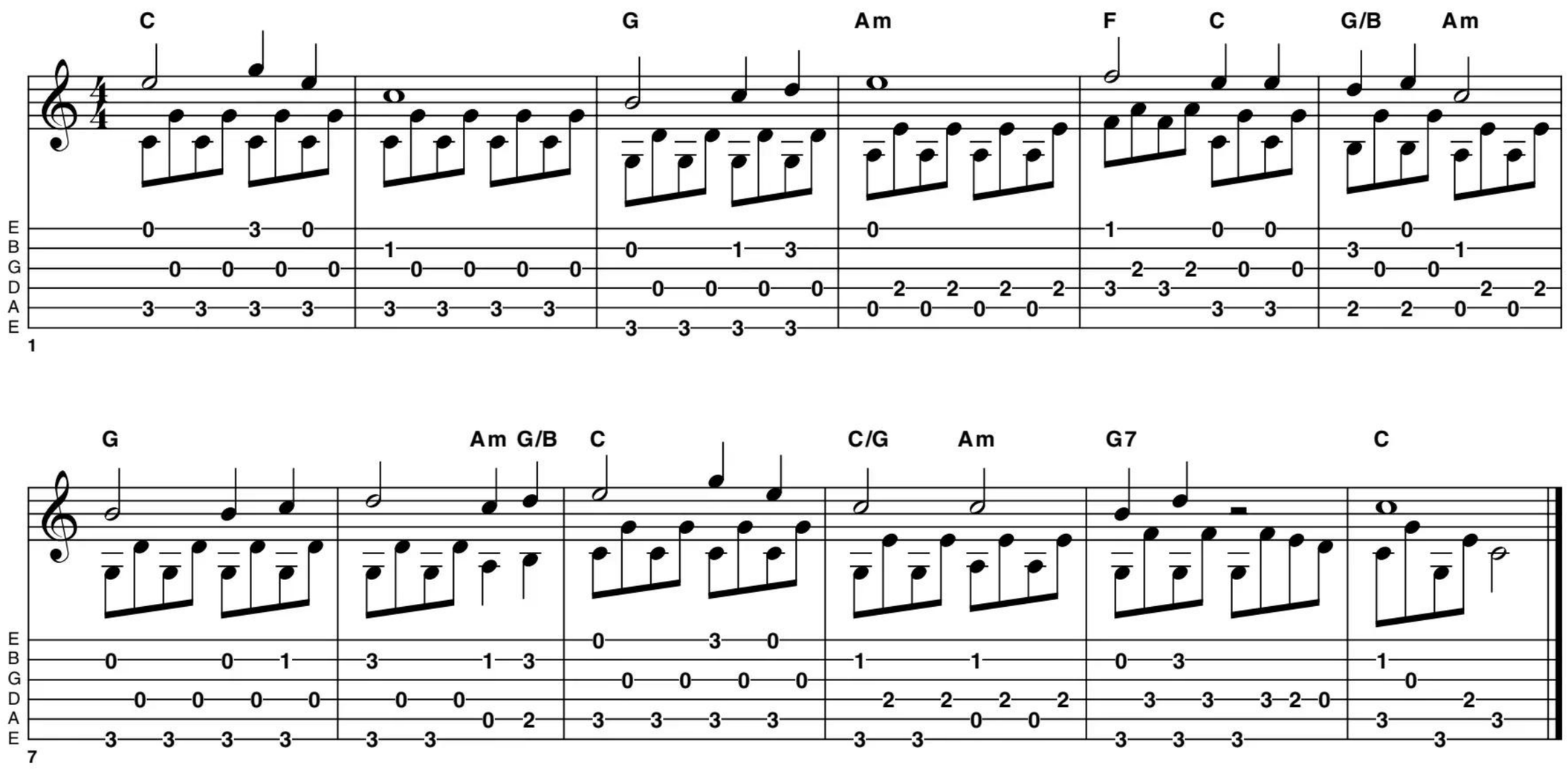
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PATTERN 4 **THE PINCH**

For this technique, you'll need to pick with the thumb alternately on its own and with a finger, 'pinching' two strings together to provide simple accompaniment in the style of Elizabeth Cotten or John Fahey – even James Taylor. Don't dismiss this simple approach as mastering this pattern fully is essential for developing trickier, syncopated ones.

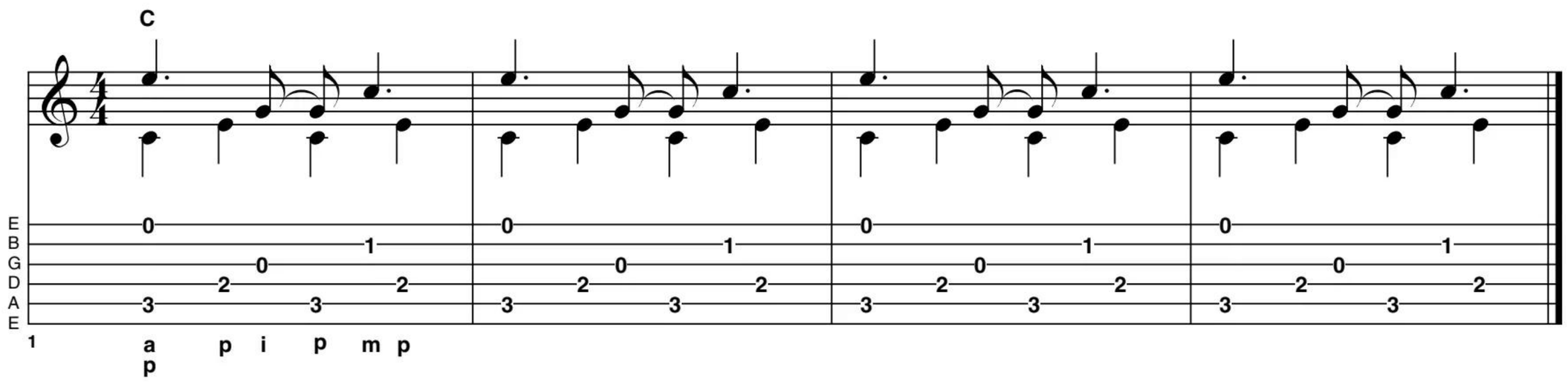


EXAMPLE 4: Your thumb plays every note having a downstem; your first and second and third fingers are assigned to the second and first strings respectively.



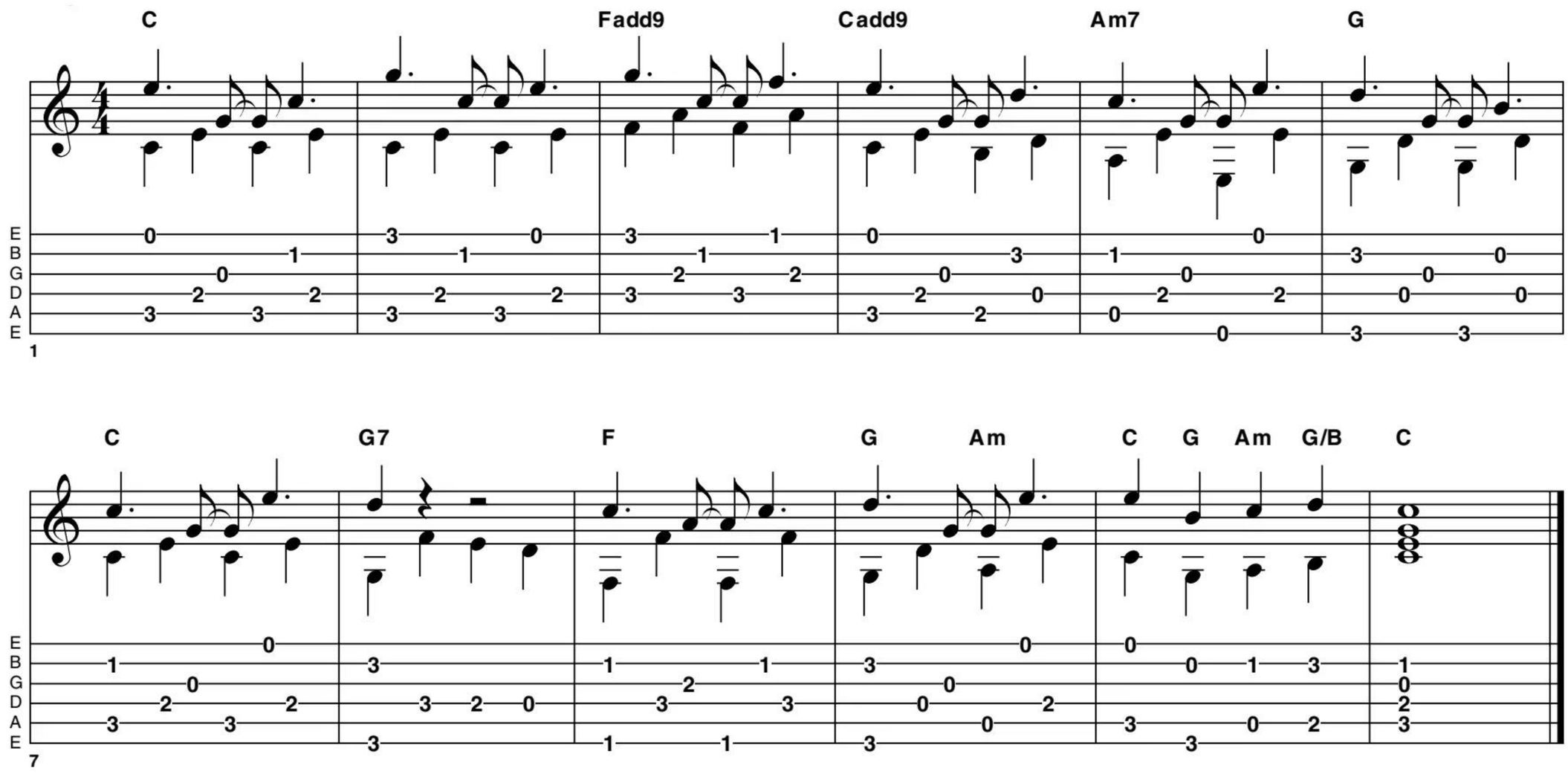
PATTERN 5 **FOLKY FINGERSTYLE**

To learn the style of Paul Simon, Ralph McTell et al, this pattern is pretty much the meat and potatoes. Often incorrectly termed 'clawhammer' (which is, in fact, a banjo technique involving only downstrokes), the style is more akin to Travis picking. Make sure the first, second and third fingers are assigned to the third, second and first strings respectively and keep a close eye on your 'rhythm guy': your thumb must maintain its metronomic duty on the bass notes!



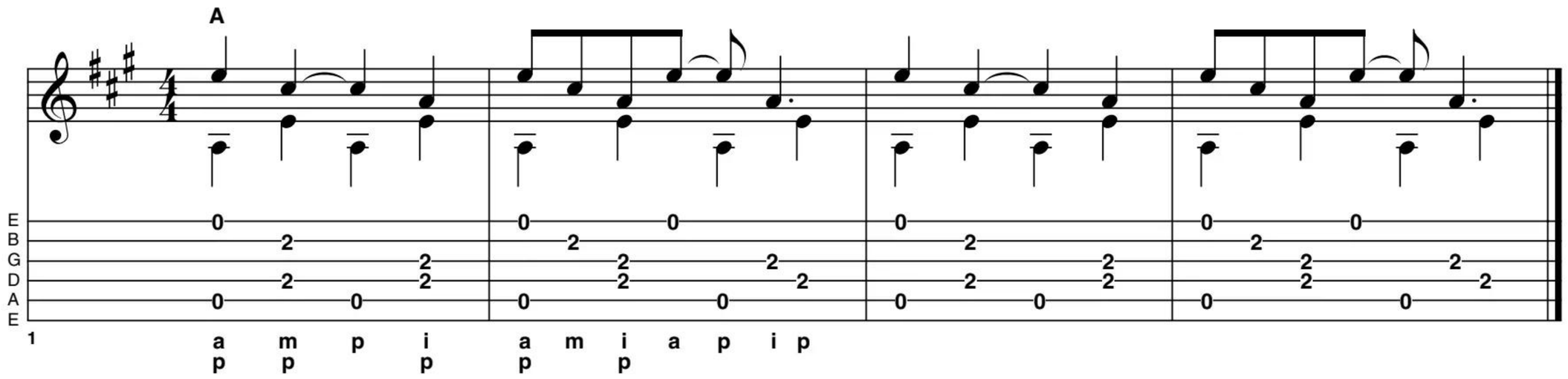
PATTERN 5 **FOLKY FINGERSTYLE** ...CONTINUED

EXAMPLE 5: A folky chord pattern that's very popular in the folk-pop vein. Alternate the bass between the fifth and sixth strings to take the pattern further.

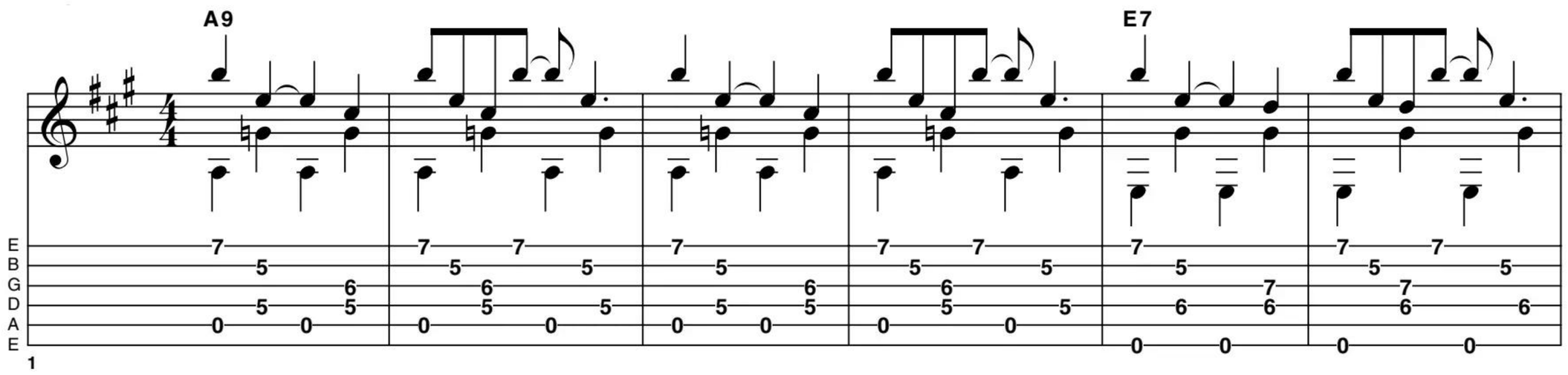


PATTERN 6 **TRAVIS PICKING**

Try this pattern, which is akin to how country and western star, Merle Travis played. So influential was his style that the term 'Travis picking' was coined to describe this technique of playing an alternating thumbed bass while the fingers syncopate a melody. Practise this pattern on an open A chord, as below, before tackling the next example.



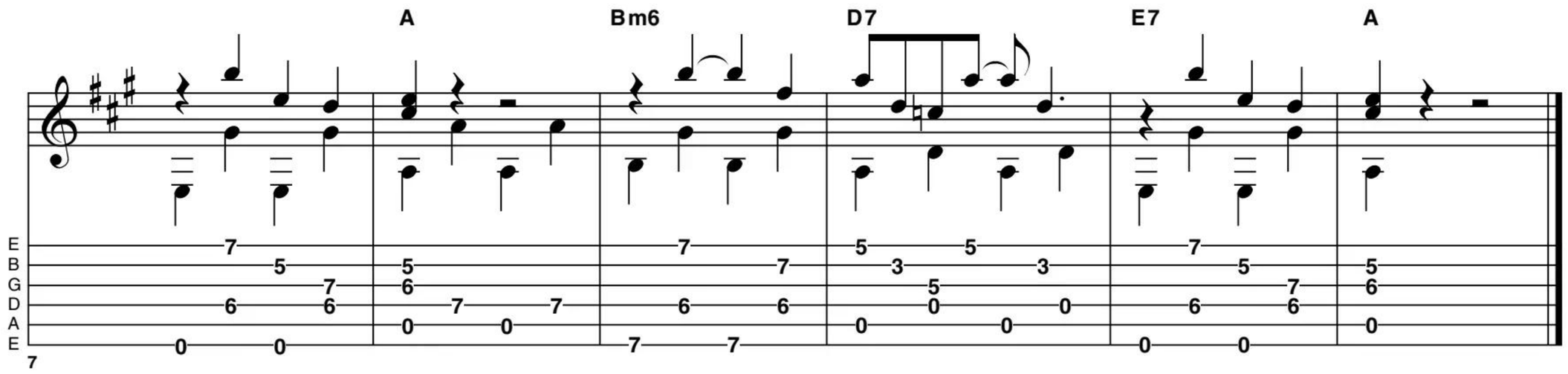
EXAMPLE 6: In truth, Travis' style was influenced by jazz as well as country, which showed in his chord voicings – some of which are here.



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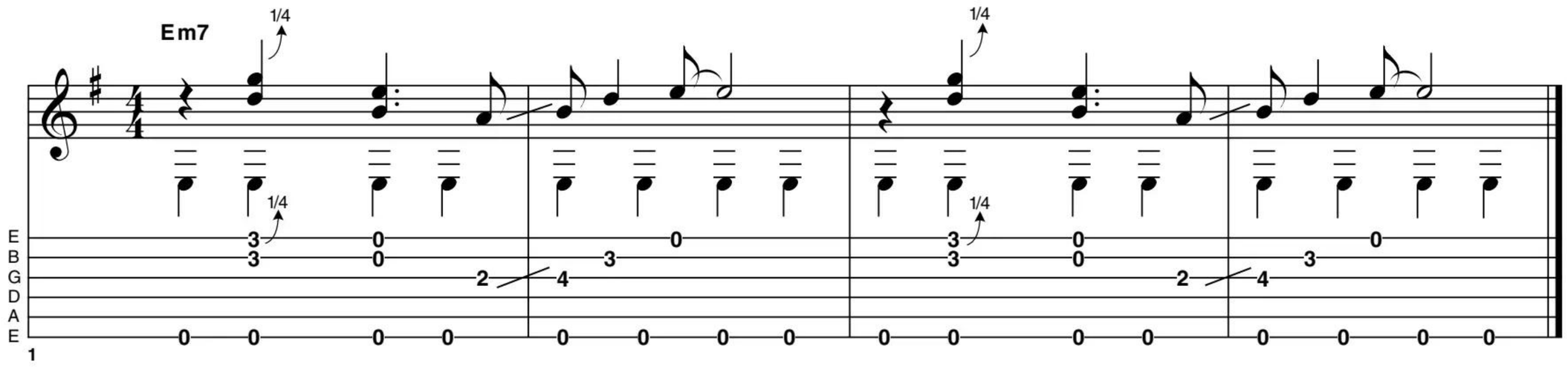
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PATTERN 6 **TRAVIS PICKING** ...CONTINUED
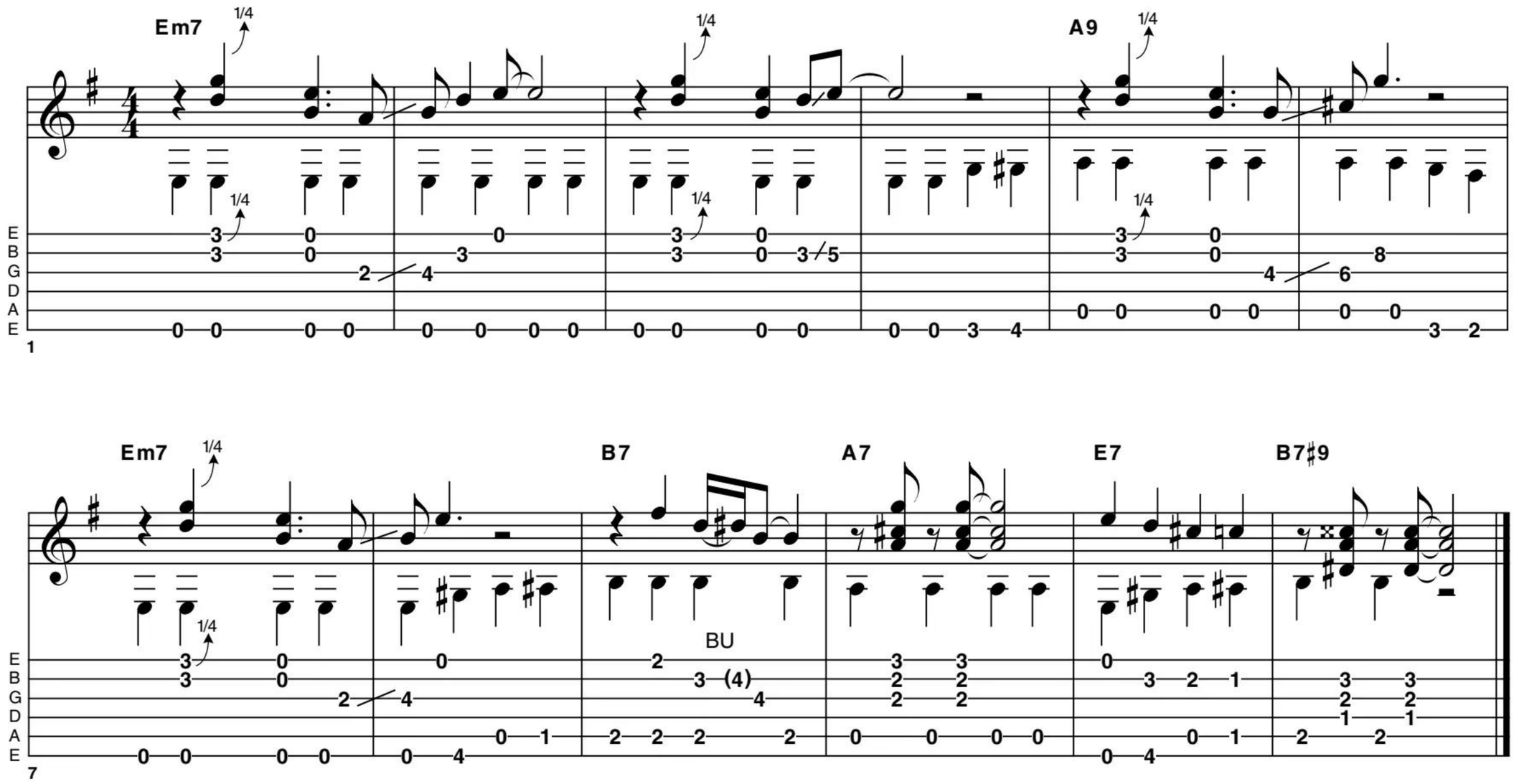


PATTERN 7 **MONOPHONIC BASS BLUES**

This blues pattern is great for practising the art of players like Big Bill Broonzy, Howlin' Wolf, John Lee Hooker and others. The tricky part is at the end of bar 1, where you slide up from the 2nd fret, because at the precise moment of arrival at the 4th fret, your thumb picks the bass note, which can feel a little counter-intuitive. Modern players like Eric Clapton, Eric Bibb, Ben Harper et al would also use this approach as the basis for their licks. When practising this, think of it as no more than a series of events that need aligning in order.

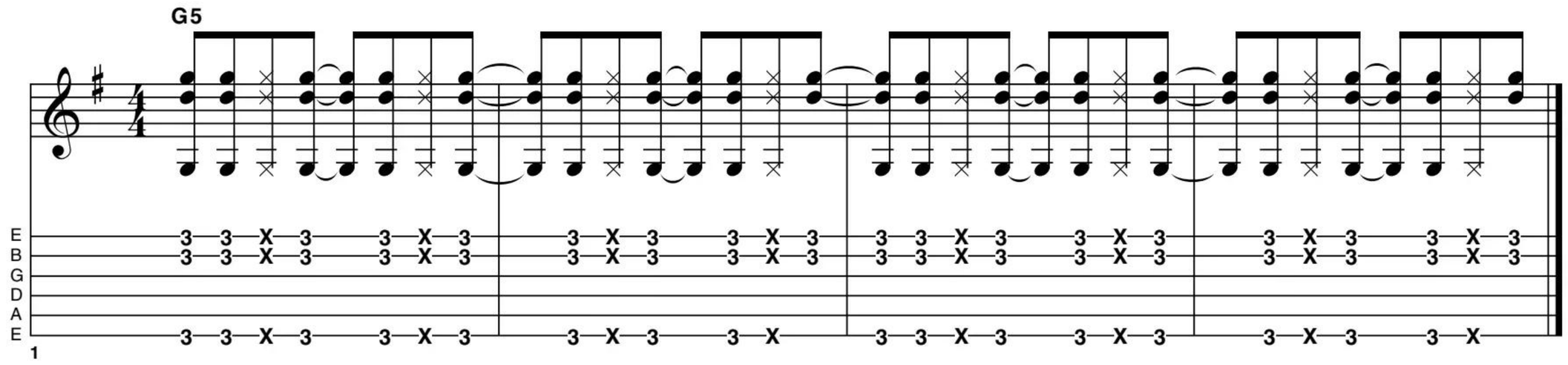


EXAMPLE 7: Here, the pattern is applied to a 12-bar sequence, implying 7th chords with passing notes in the bass to link the changes.

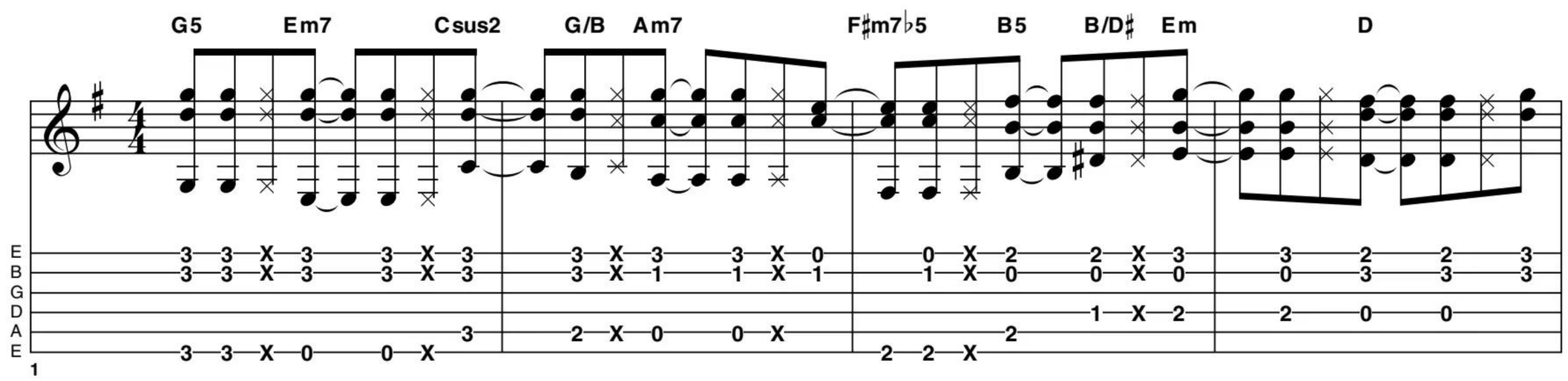


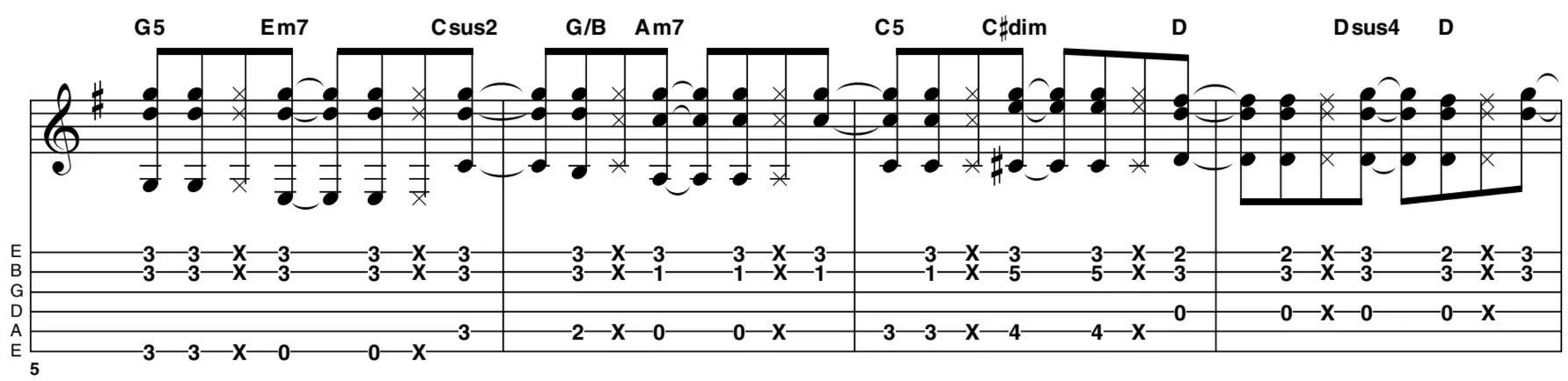
PATTERN 8 **PERCUSSIVE BACKBEATS**

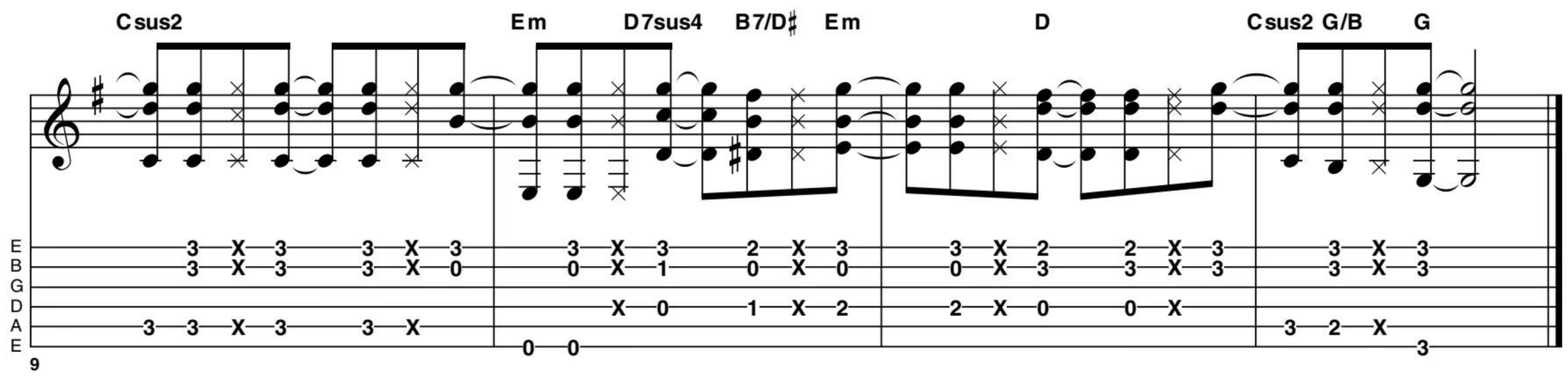
A good way to add a percussive element to a pattern is to place a picking-hand string slap on beats 2 and 4 – think of Extreme's More Than Words, or you could do it in Clapton's Change The World). This also displaces the chords to the offbeats, which adds movement.



EXAMPLE 8: This progression features a couple of diminished chords, which sound great when used as passing chords between two others whose root notes are a tone apart (eg C-C#dim-D). This can add a touch of James Taylor or George Harrison-style sophistication.



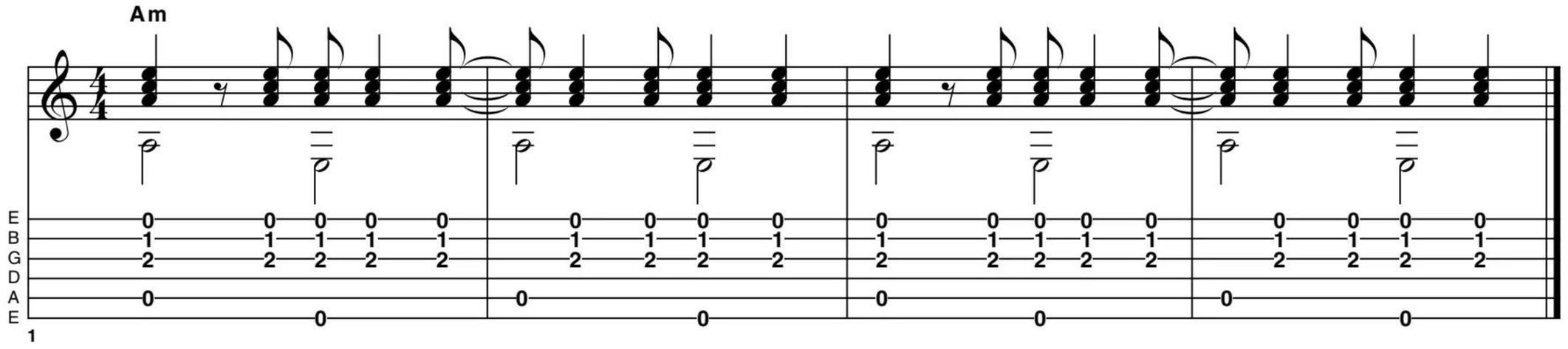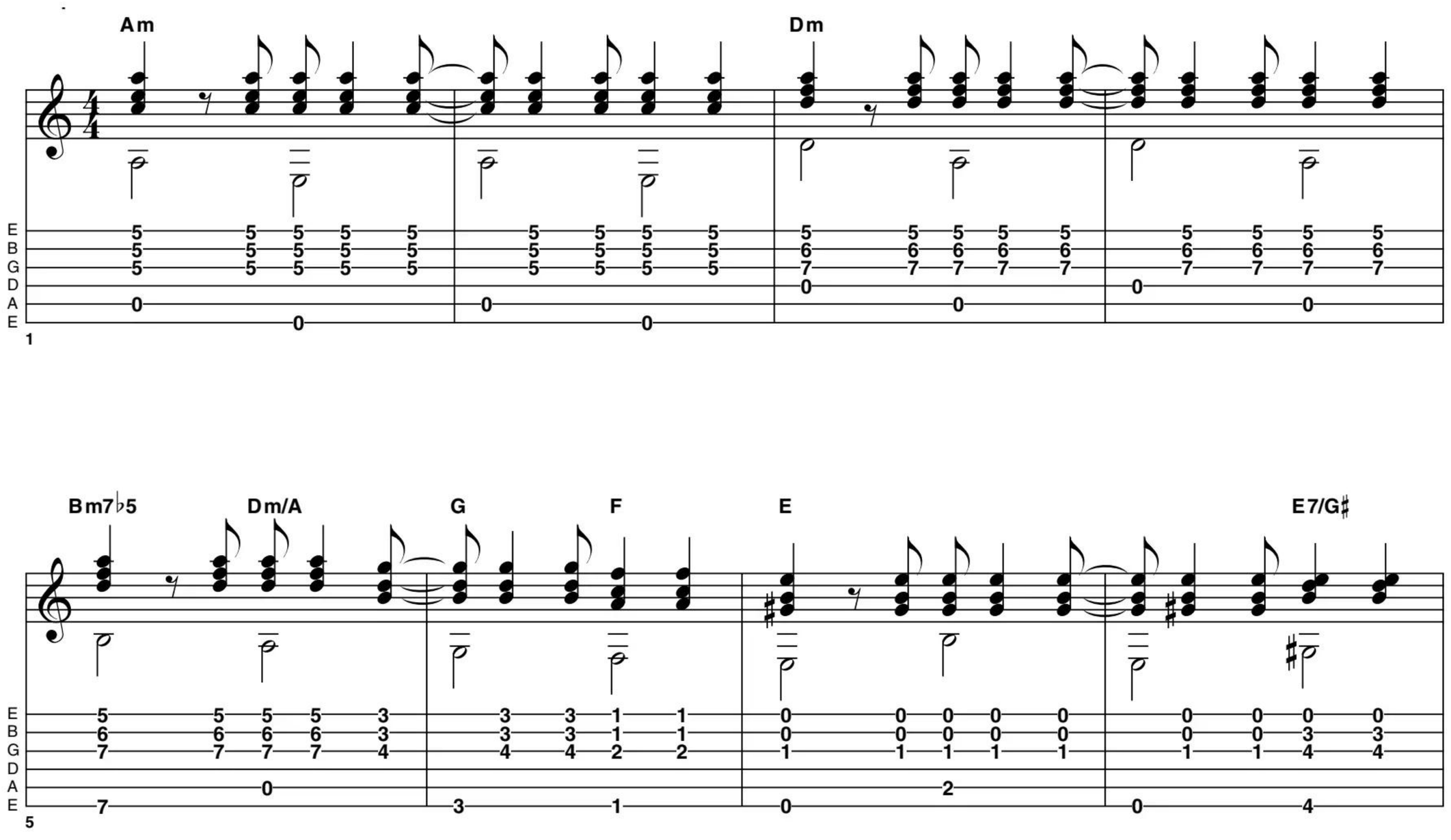




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PATTERN 9 **BOSSA NOVA**

This style, originally popularised in the superb songs and playing of Antonio Carlos Jobim and by fabulous Brazilian guitarists such as João Gilberto, is the staple accompaniment technique for soft, Latin playing. The chordal emphasis is mostly on the off-beat, with the thumb maintaining a sense of place in the bar by highlighting beats 1 and 3.

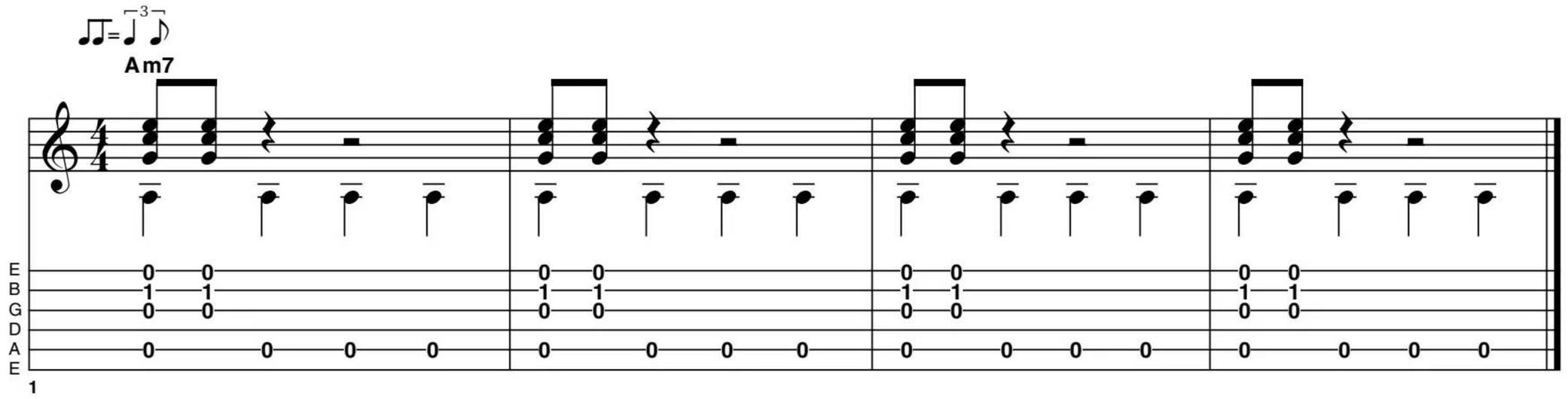


EXAMPLE 9: Notice the high-voiced chords on the top strings. These triad shapes are useful in a variety of situations and should be noted for future reference.

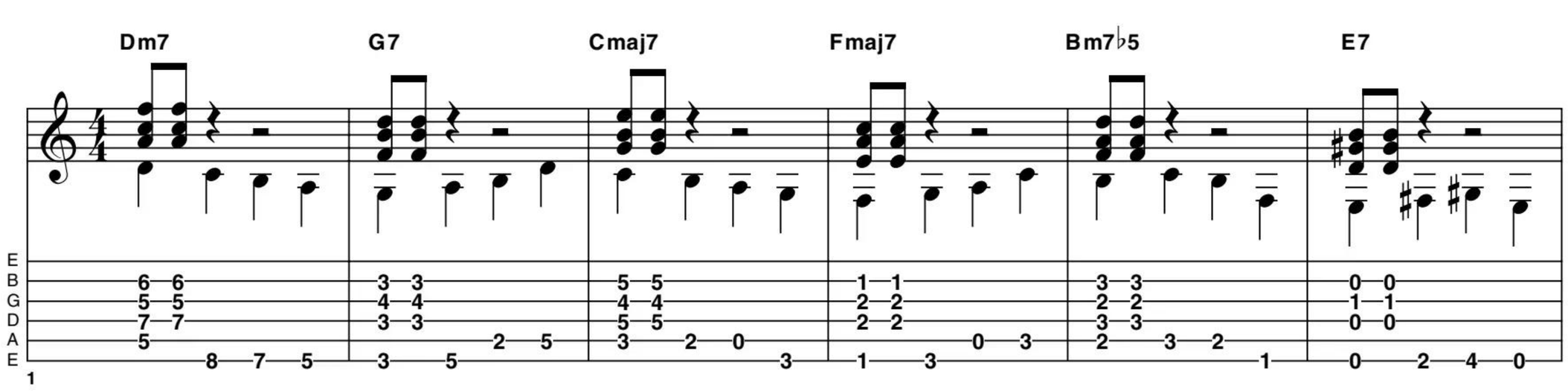


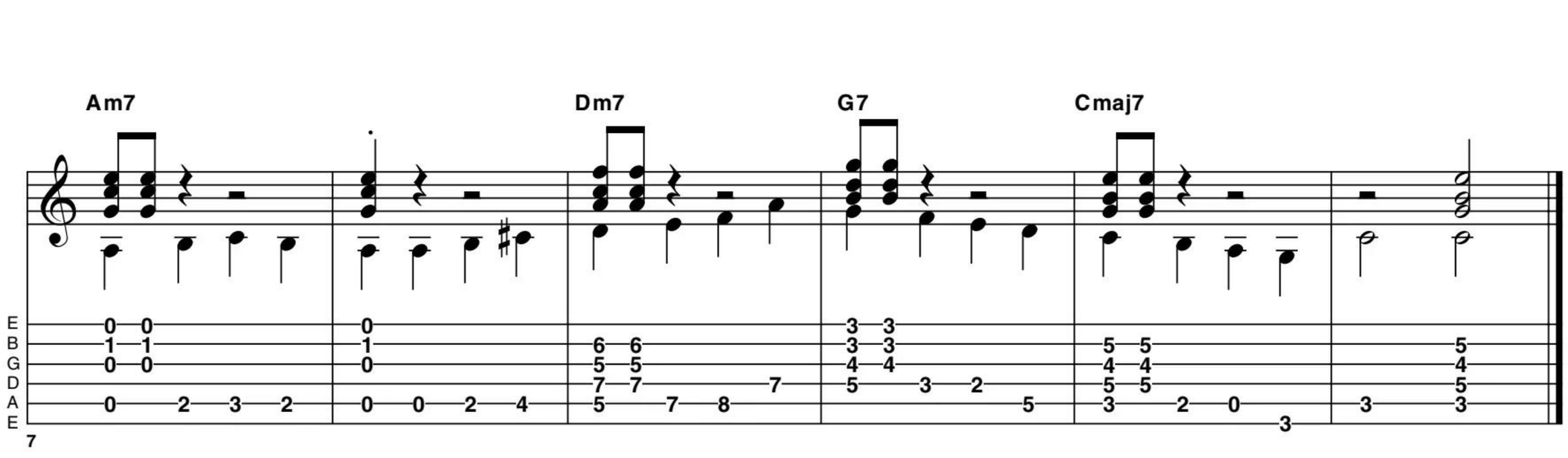
PATTERN 10 **WALKING BASSLINES**

This classic jazz accompaniment technique is a great way of providing both harmony and bass at the same time. Remember to keep the chords stabs short and sharp, and use some palm muting for the bass notes, maintaining a nice swing feel. Players like Martin Taylor and Tuck Andress are two masters of this style.



EXAMPLE 10: Try the pattern over this classic jazz progression and notice that the shapes avoid the use of open strings. The benefits of avoiding open strings are threefold: first, transposing to other keys is simpler as the shapes are moveable; secondly, muting the strings is easier; and thirdly, it assists in evenness of tone.





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Using A Capo

The capo is a gadget that everyone should have in their gig bag. Used to transpose keys, emulate different instruments or play otherwise impossible shapes – it's your new best friend!

Info	Will improve your…
KEY Various	✔ Transposing skills
TEMPO Various	✔ Fretboard dexterity
	✔ General creativity

Many guitarists see the capo as the preserve of the folk player who can't quite manage to sing in E, A, D or any other open key. But, in fact, the capo can be one of the most creative tools available to you. Over the following pages we'll see how it can bring new life to your playing, and even help you come up with ideas you may never have thought possible.

A capo can be used for several things. Raising the pitch changes the timbre of the guitar, which can give a bright, sweet tone (a capo on the higher frets can even emulate the sound of a mandolin). Also, as soon as you put a capo on the neck you lower the guitar's action making complex passages easier to play. Try a capo at the 2nd fret and see how different it feels. A favourite trick is to place a capo on a higher fret and play chords with wide stretches that would not be possible otherwise – this can be a great way of discovering new sounds, plus it can bring individuality to your playing (and may even let you create things that you could hear but not physically do). If you're in a band with two guitarists you can devise another part in a higher register, keeping you out of the way of the first guitar and adding an extra dimension to the sound – we'll be covering this and mandolin emulation in these pages too.

> "As soon as you put a capo on the neck you lower the action of the guitar making complex passages easier to play"

The article is split into three sections. Section 1 includes fast runs facilitated by lower action; the bright, sweet tone achieved by capoing at the 7th fret; and chord voicings that may otherwise be too much of a stretch to play. Section 2 is all about creating mandolin-type sounds. A mandolin is tuned at a much higher pitch than a guitar and its smaller body gives a punchy attack that can sound far removed from the mellow tones of a six-string acoustic. By using a capo high up the fretboard we can emulate the pitch of a mandolin: our example uses one at the 9th fret but you can go up as far as you can physically reach; and the higher you go, the closer you get to the mandolin sound. Mandolins are 'double coursed' (ie two of each string, similar to a 12-string guitar, but here the strings in each pair are tuned in unison). If you want to get as close as possible to this sound you could try using chorus to thicken things up and get a slight 'phasing' effect.

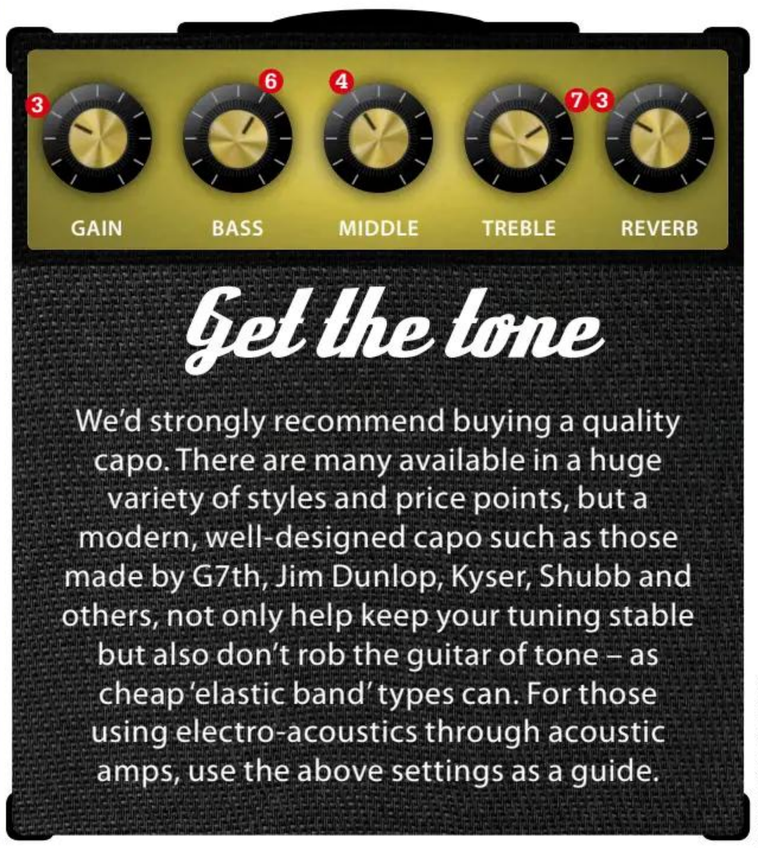
If you've ever listened to great mandolin players you will notice a few characteristics. Beyond the aforementioned punchy tone is the sheer speed at which they can play. Mandolin frets are close together (it's basically like playing upwards of the 10th fret on a guitar), and this facilitates speedy runs. Using the capo helps us achieve the speed of a mandolin player – the higher your capo, the lower the action of the strings, which makes hammer-ons and pull-offs a breeze. The capo acts like a barring finger, meaning you can play licks which would otherwise require a Herculean reach. In addition your 'open string' is effectively at the 9th fret now, clamped in place by the capo and at a higher tension than the open string which makes it feel more responsive – your picking fingers will bounce off the strings more readily than they would on open-string chords or licks.

You could play our 'pseudo mandolin' piece with a pick, which would copy the approach of a mandolin player, but we've elected to go for a picking-hand workout instead. Be warned: it's very fast, but remember the capo facilitates this. Just make sure you don't come to rely on one for all your acoustic speed needs.

Section 3 shows neat ways to come up with a part that doesn't get in the way, but really adds something to a chord sequence. A capo'd part over an existing progression gives several options: you could simply double the original part an octave higher – akin to using a 12-string; use it to create rich voicings that dress up otherwise bland chords; facilitate large stretches that would be otherwise impossible; or use it to emulate higher register instruments like mandolin, ukulele and so on. The Eagles would use many ideas like this to build their incredible arrangements.

Finally, a word about the CAGED system. This system is built around five recognisable shapes (C, A, G, E and D) that can be moved all over the neck (try playing an open chord of G, then placing a capo at the 5th fret and playing a D shape – it's the same chord but a totally different sound). Bands like The Beatles and Eagles use capos extensively to separate guitar parts and add richness and 'spread'. A capo, coupled with knowledge of the CAGED system and fretboard positions, is a powerful tool.

So, many opportunities and endless fun! **SR**



Get the tone

We'd strongly recommend buying a quality capo. There are many available in a huge variety of styles and price points, but a modern, well-designed capo such as those made by G7th, Jim Dunlop, Kyser, Shubb and others, not only help keep your tuning stable but also don't rob the guitar of tone – as cheap 'elastic band' types can. For those using electro-acoustics through acoustic amps, use the above settings as a guide.

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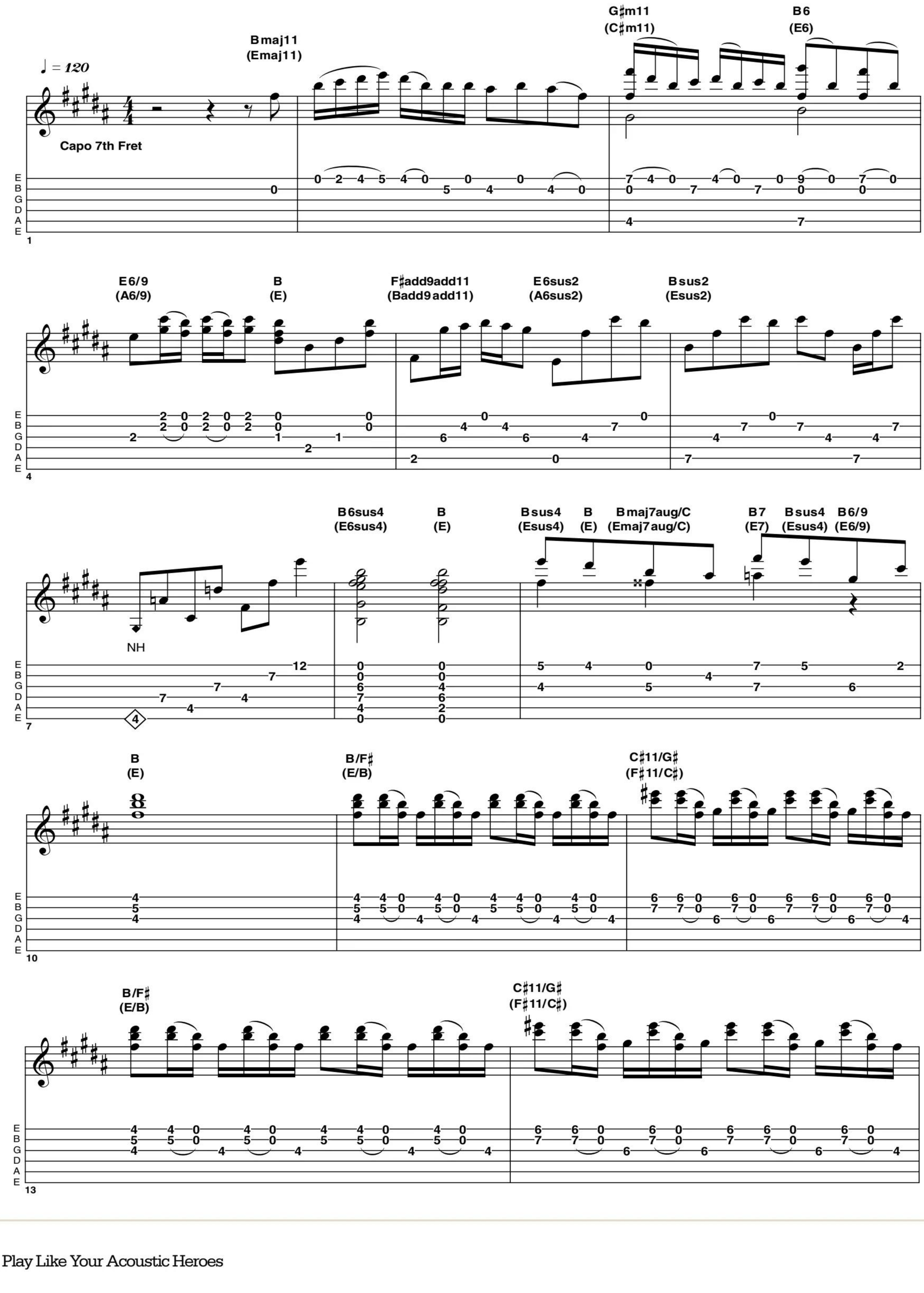


LISTENING SUGGESTIONS **Many guitarists use a capo for simply doubling parts or for altering song keys to suit their vocals – the Eagles and James Taylor, for instance. But those who really use it to its best potential include Martin Simpson and Tony McManus. Another great explorer of the capo's possibilities is Adrian Legg, who has gone so far as to employ partial capos that only fret two or three strings.**

The late Glenn Frey of those masters of the capo: the Eagles

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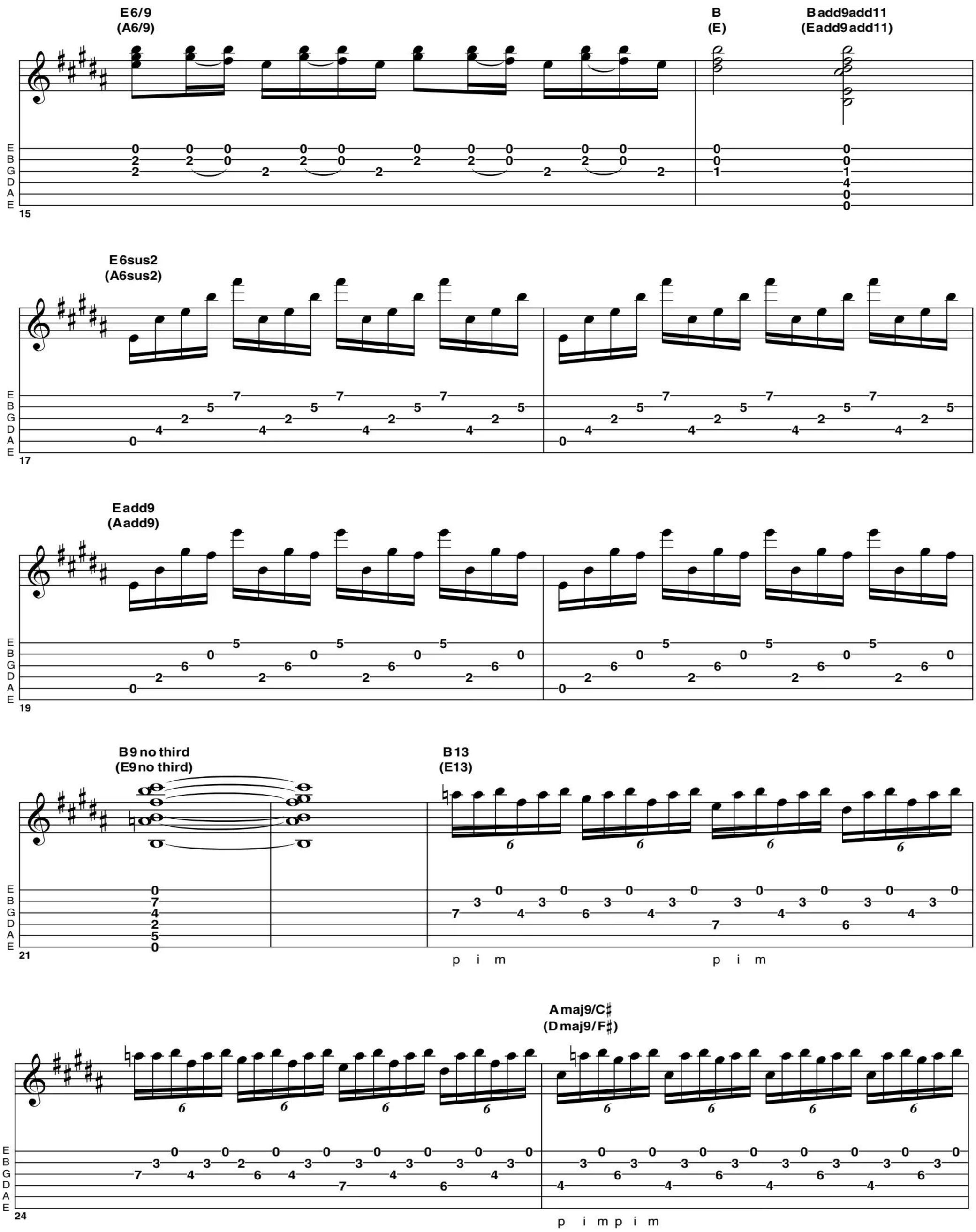
SECTION 1 **CAPO IDEAS**

[General] We present capo in the tab as the capo'd fret being an open string and then the fret numbers relate to that. So here, the capo'd 7th fret is zero fret and the 9th fret becomes the 2nd fret.
[Bars 7-8] Many new sounds become apparent when you have a capo in place – check out these harmonics for example. You can use the capo to get many different sounds that could be useful in an overdubbing or part-writing situation. Some more wide-ranging chords in bar 8.
[Bar 11] Hammering-on and pulling-off this double-stop sequence is again made easier by the fact that the capo has lowered the action for us – this would take a lot more effort without its help.



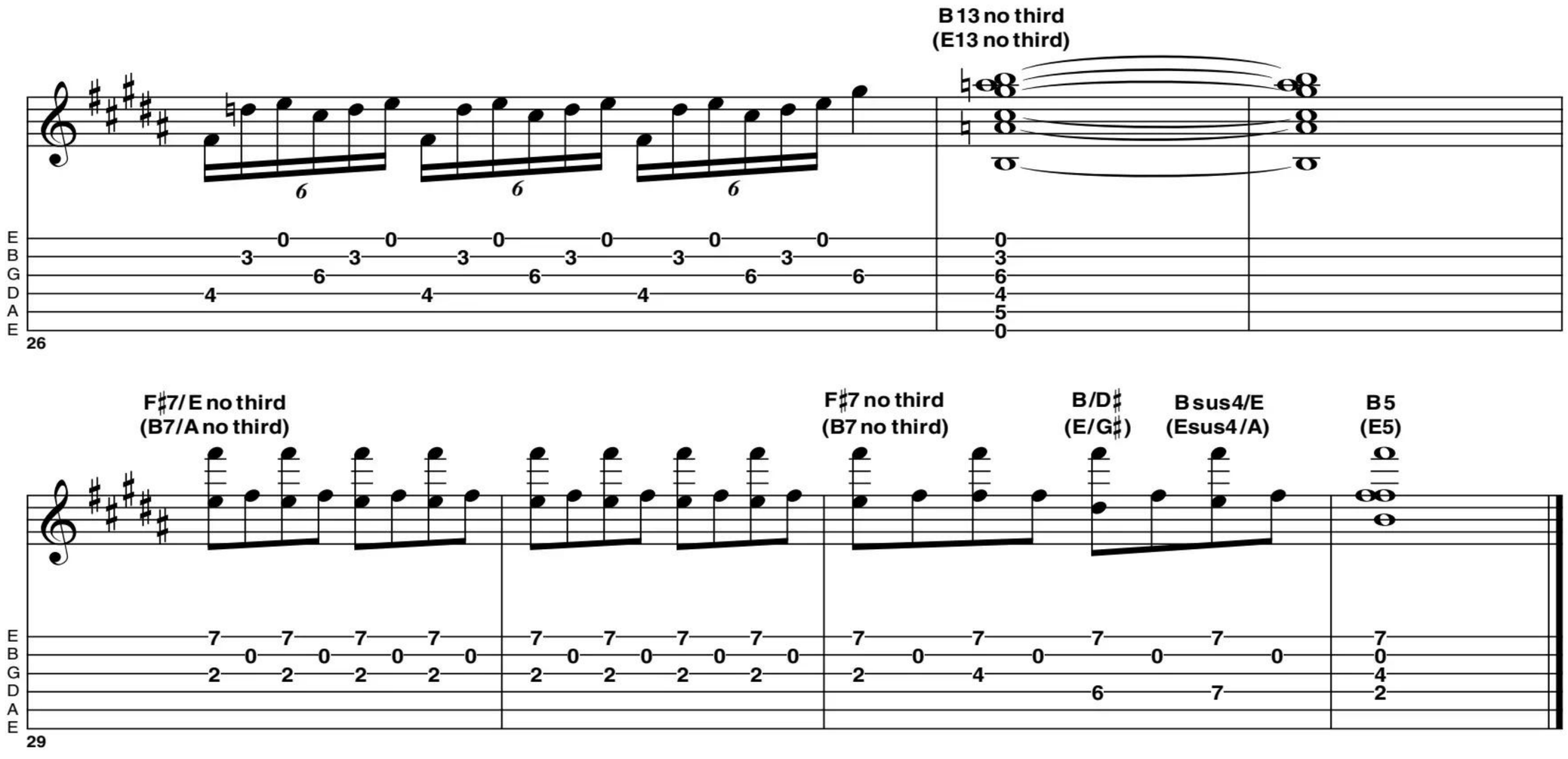
SECTION 1 **CAPO IDEAS**

[Bar 17] These chords would require a Herculean stretch without a capo, but as soon as the 7th fret is barred by our mechanical friend it gets easier and allows you to explore a whole raft of new chord ideas.
[Bar 19] More big chords. Of course, with big hands or very supple fingers it is possible to fret chords like these without a capo, but you'd better make an appointment with your physio!
[Bar 23] Not just a fretting-hand workout, try this rapid-fire sextuplet sequence to really keep your picking hand in shape.
[Bar 25] Notice how chords like this sound sweeter and brighter the higher up the neck you play them, because the capo is acting like a false nut and bringing extra brightness to the new 'open' strings. Again, it not only changes the timbre dramatically but gets rid of the need for awkward stretches.



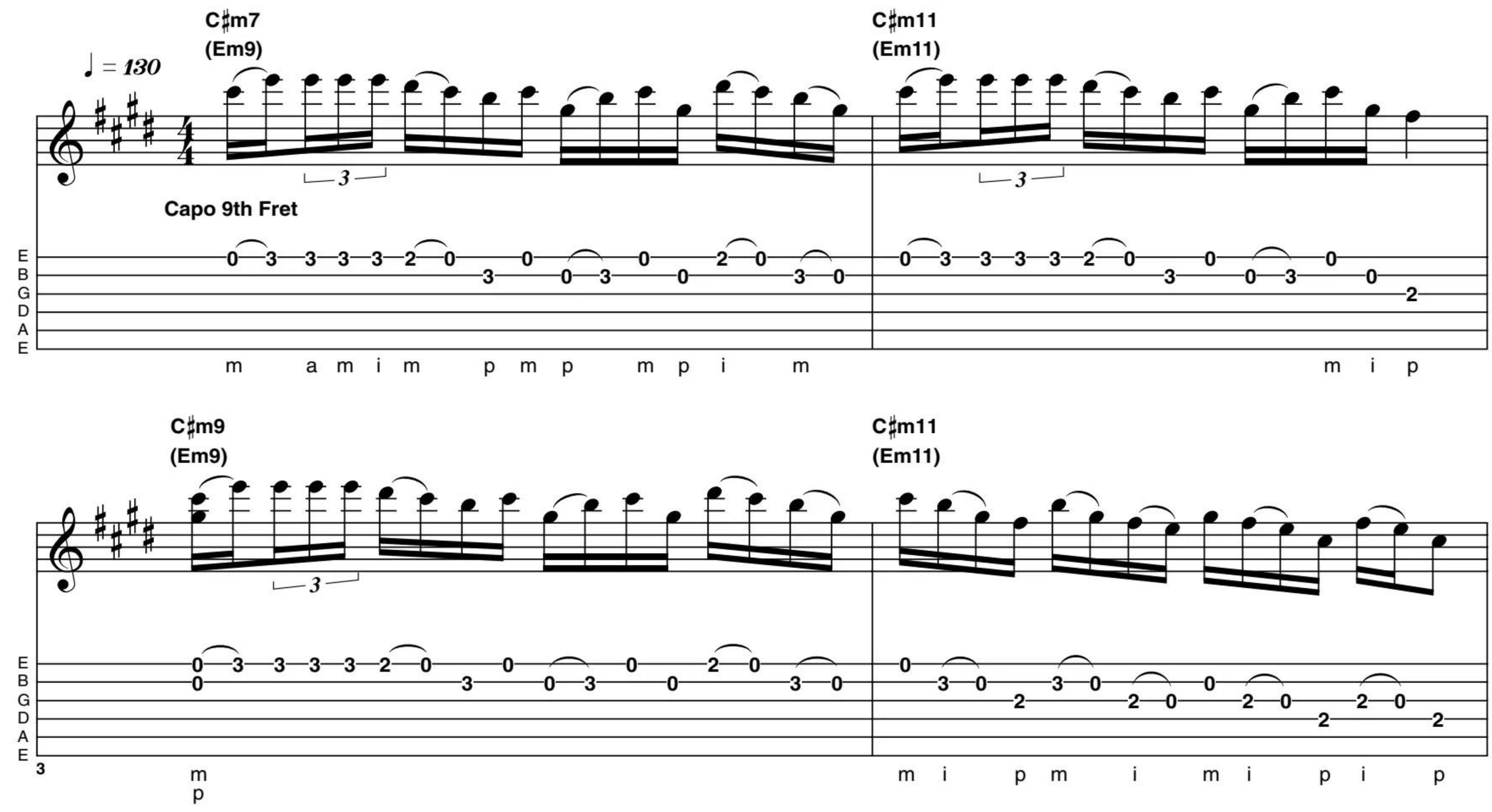
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SECTION 1 **CAPO IDEAS**
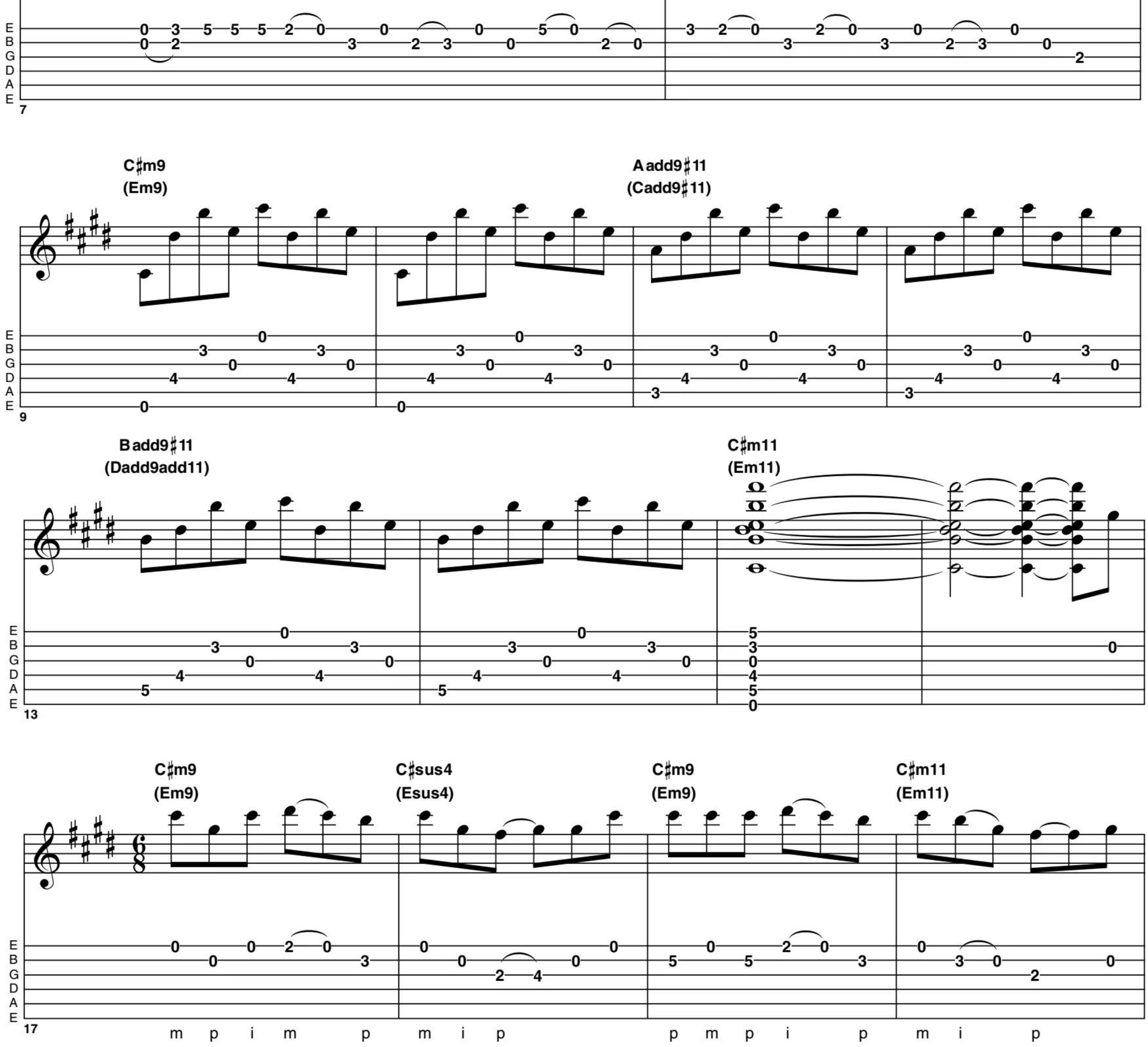


SECTION 2 **MANDOLIN SOUNDS FOR GUITAR**

[Bar 1] This triplet phrase is common in bluegrass. Often played on a mandolin it translates well to guitar - think Martin Simpson or Tony McManus. If you are using your picking fingers then a quick 'a', 'm', 'i' pattern is required, similar to classical tremolo technique but tricky as it is isolated for only one phrase. **[Bar 5]** You could play all these ideas without a capo, but with such large stretches and higher string tension is would be hard to get it sounding clean.



SECTION 2 **MANDOLIN SOUNDS FOR GUITAR**
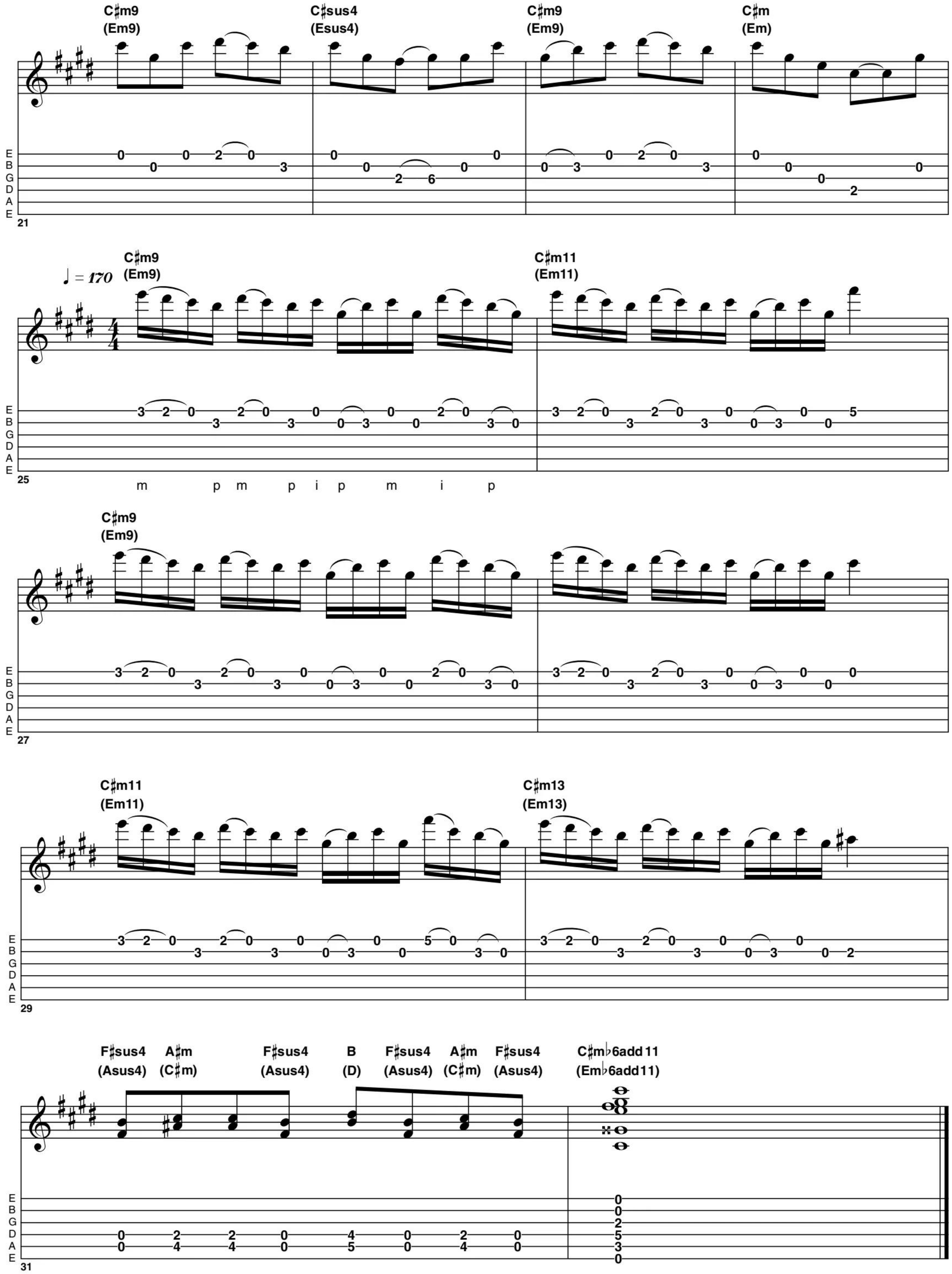
[Bar 9] Here are some really pleasant chords for you to play, and a light pause to give your fingers a breather – until we get to...
[Bar 17] ... a change of time signature to keep you on your toes. Shifting between 4/4 and 6/8 is a common feature in traditional playing and something every mandolin player would be familiar with.
[Bar 19] Big stretches in the open position; no stretches in the capo position!



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SECTION 2 **MANDOLIN SOUNDS FOR GUITAR**

[Bar 25] Back to 4/4 time and an assault of hammer-ons and pull-offs, which are easier to execute with a capo holding down one of the frets for you.
[Bar 29] Jumping from the 3rd fret on the second string to the 5th fret on the first string is potentially awkward in the open position, but again the capo relieves you of this problem by holding down one of the frets for you.
[Bar 32] This chord is straightforward in the open position but try playing it with a first finger barre at the 9th fret – impossible! Again, the capo is your indispensable best friend here.

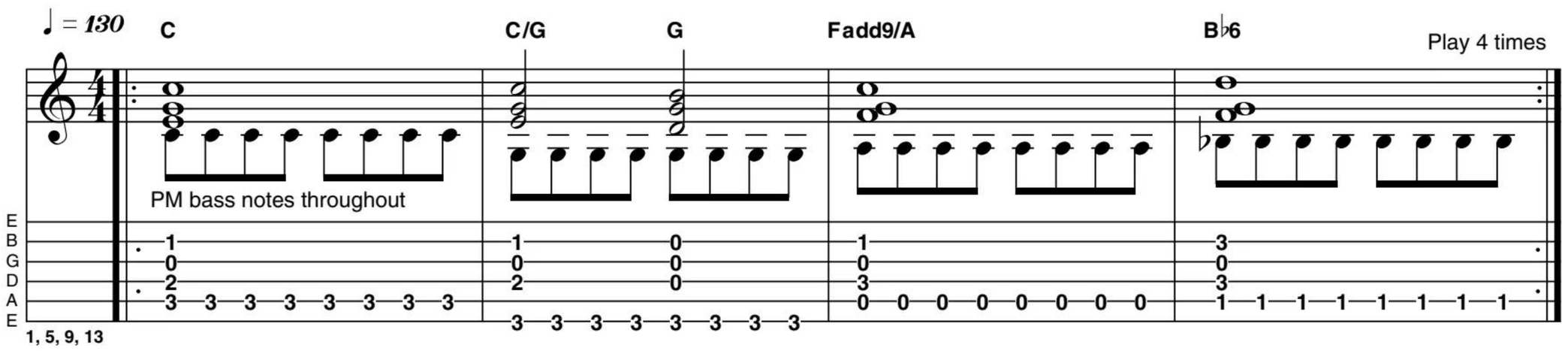


SECTION 3 EXAMPLE 1 **CAPO'D PARTS USING TWO GUITARS: GUITAR 1**

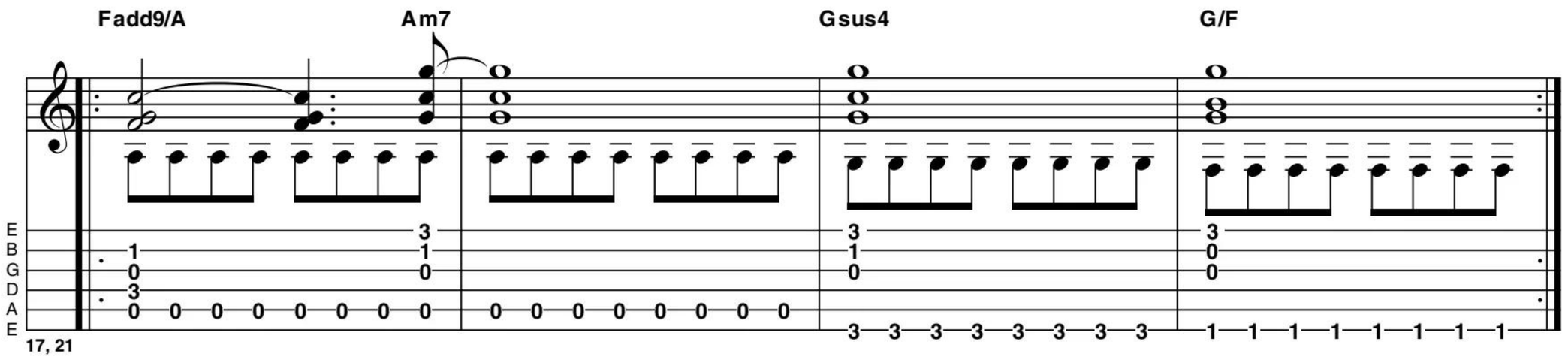
[Bar 1] Guitar 1 outlines a simple chord progression in C. The pulsing bass against the sustained chord creates a nice sense of movement and energy and is a worthy technique for any songwriter or accompanist!

[Bar 17] Just watch out for the chord played on the 'and' of part B's beat 4 in this example – it's a good exercise to focus on combining independent bass notes so will help your general technique too.

Guitar 1 - A

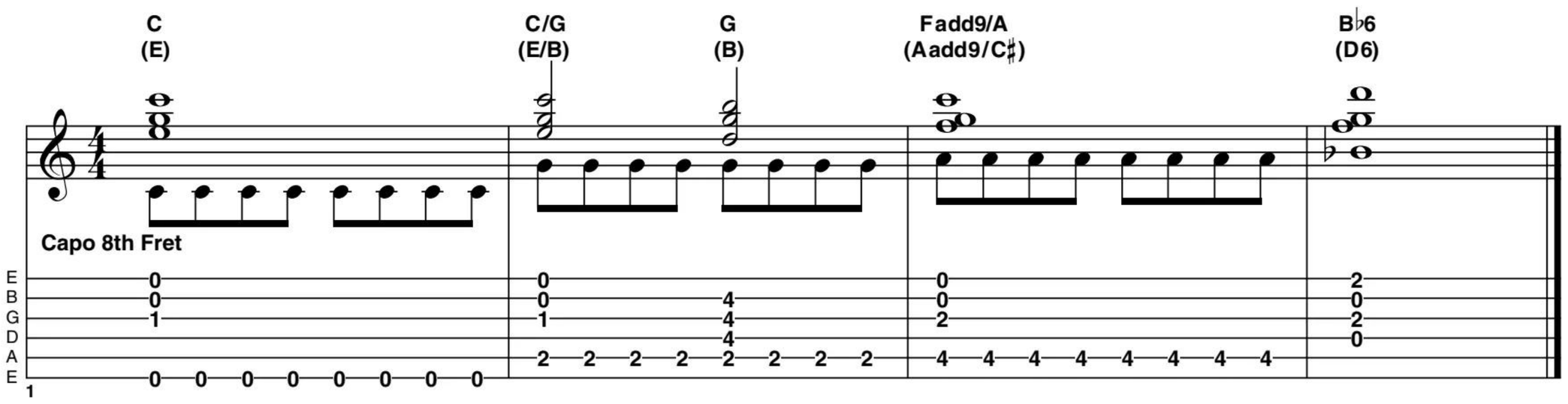


Guitar 1 - B



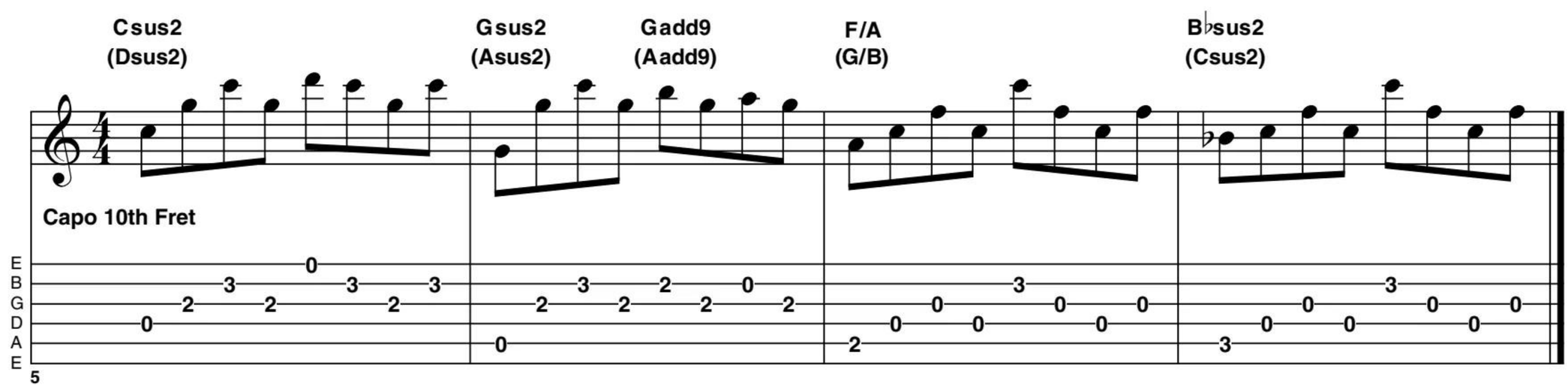
SECTION 3 EXAMPLE 2 **GUITAR 2: CAPO AT A HIGHER REGISTER**

[Bar 9] Here the capo is used at the 8th fret to play the original chords in a higher register. It's a simple approach but one that can be used to thicken up the sound of the original progression, rather than just doubling it in the same octave, which is not particularly creative.



SECTION 3 EXAMPLE 3 **GUITAR 2: INTRODUCING 'CAGED' IDEAS**

[Bar 5] This time the capo is at the 10th fret with the original chords now played within the CAGED system. This register sweetens the sound up even further and arpeggiating the chords makes the part stand out from the original rhythm part. Moving notes round within these chord shapes yields nice voicings, such as sus2 and add9. Always experiment to see which additional notes work and which ones clash – as always, let your ears be your arbiters of taste.

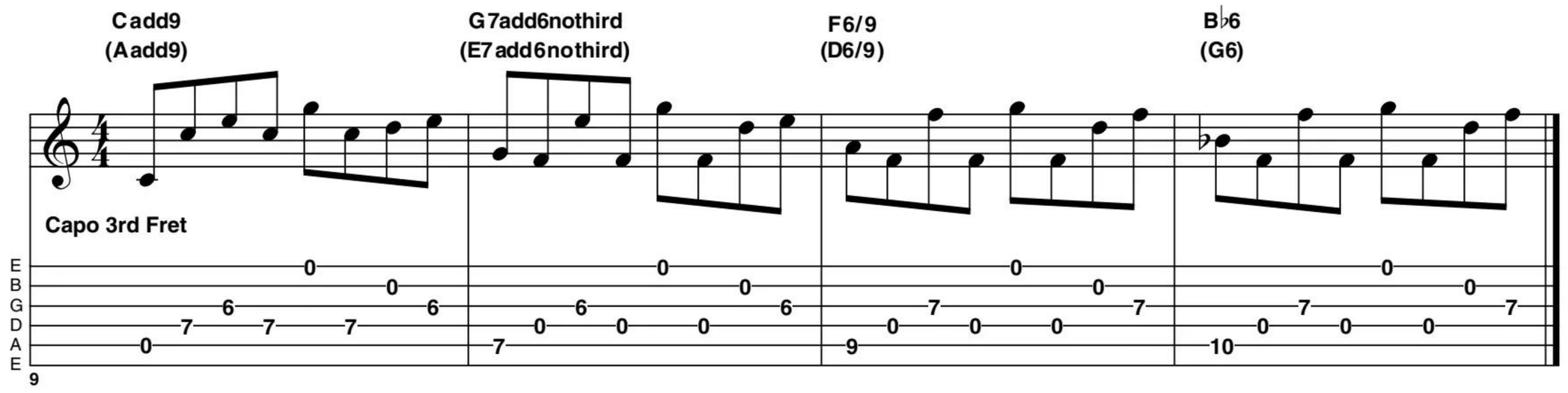


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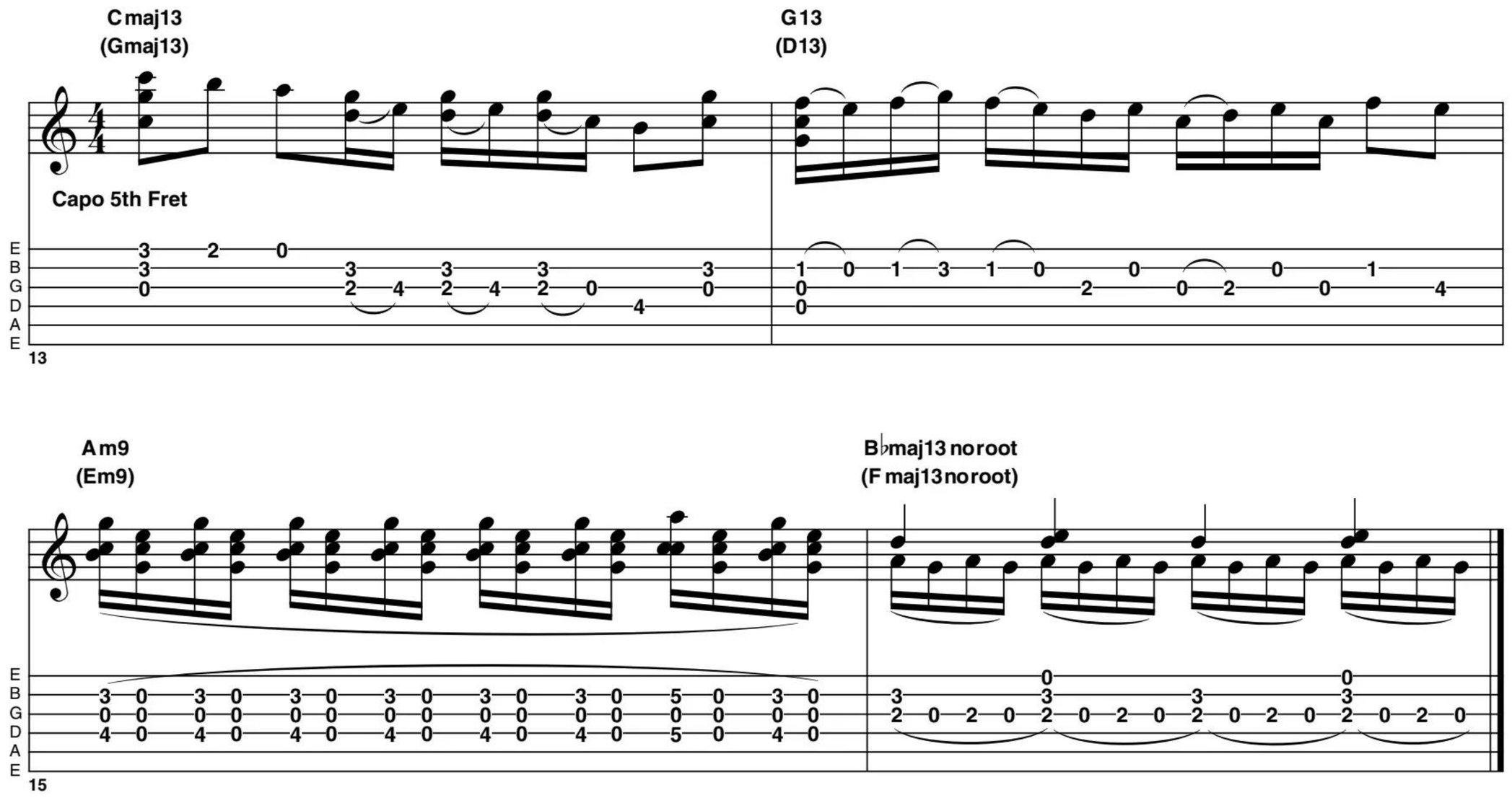
SECTION 3 EXAMPLE 4 **CLOSER PART TO THE ORIGINAL**

[Bar 9] Here the capo is at the 3rd fret so we are closer to the register in which the original part was recorded. This will serve to bolster the original part while the voicings will add extra interest to the harmony. Fingering the voicings to fit with the key of the original part would be a nightmare without a capo.



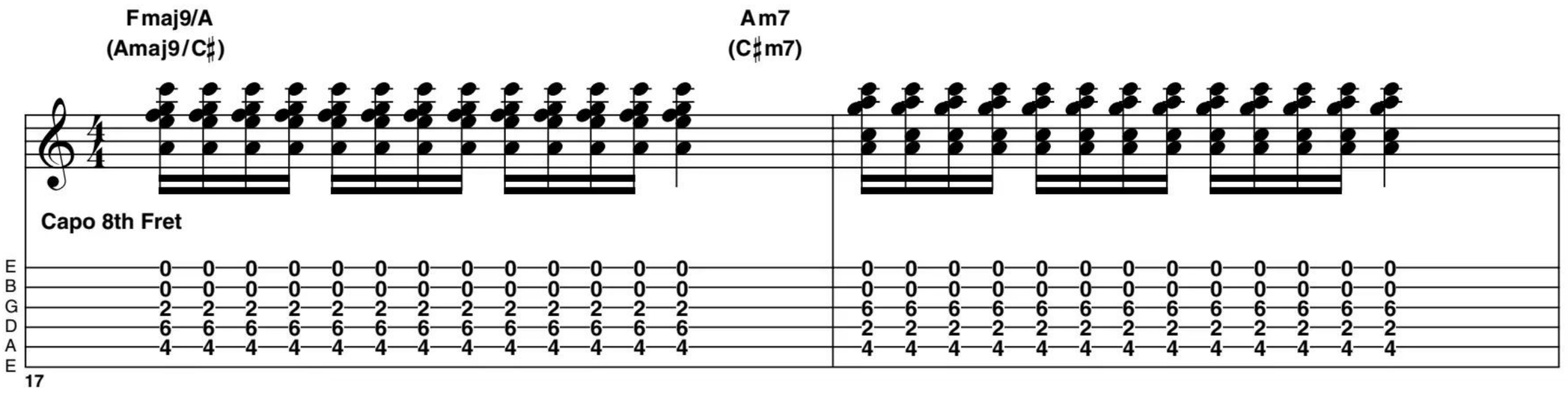
SECTION 3 EXAMPLE 5 **GUITAR 2: A MORE ELABORATE ADDITIONAL PART**

[Bar 13] Now the capo is on the 5th fret but we are focusing on the treble strings, which will give us a sound that sits nicely in the middle of the register against the main rhythm guitar. This part is more detailed and would be virtually impossible to play in the key of C without a capo.



SECTION 3 EXAMPLE 6 **GUITAR 2: LARGER STRETCHES AT HIGHER CAPO POSITIONS**

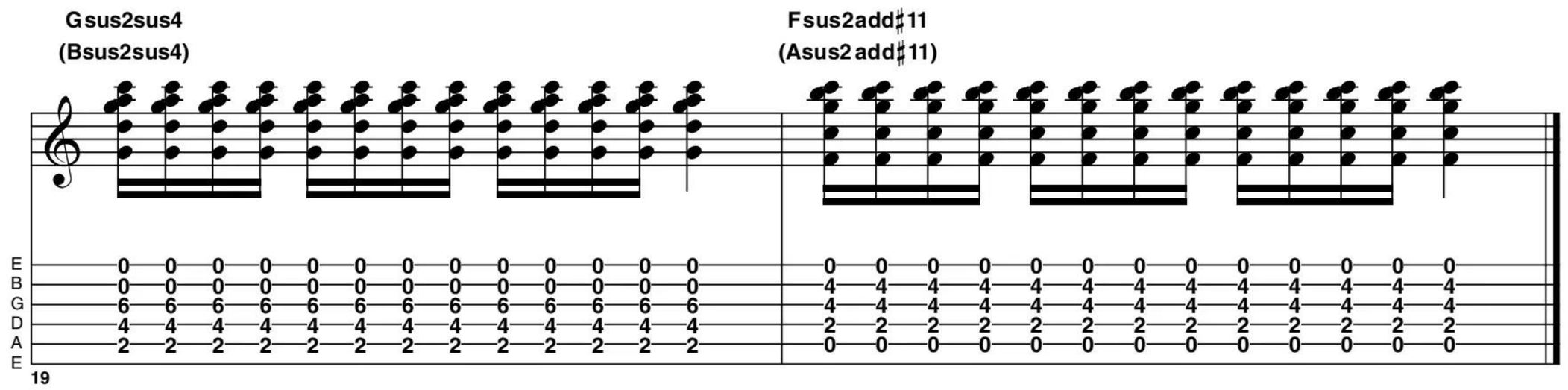
[Bar 17] Putting the capo up at the 8th fret allows us to get some larger stretches on the chords and some much more interesting sounding voicings. Some 16th-note strumming with the capo doing the work of a barring finger allows us to get some good stretches in. Again, you'd find it impossible to play this over the rhythm part without the capo taking the strain. So please don't think of this great little device as some sort of 'cheat'. It's anything but that!





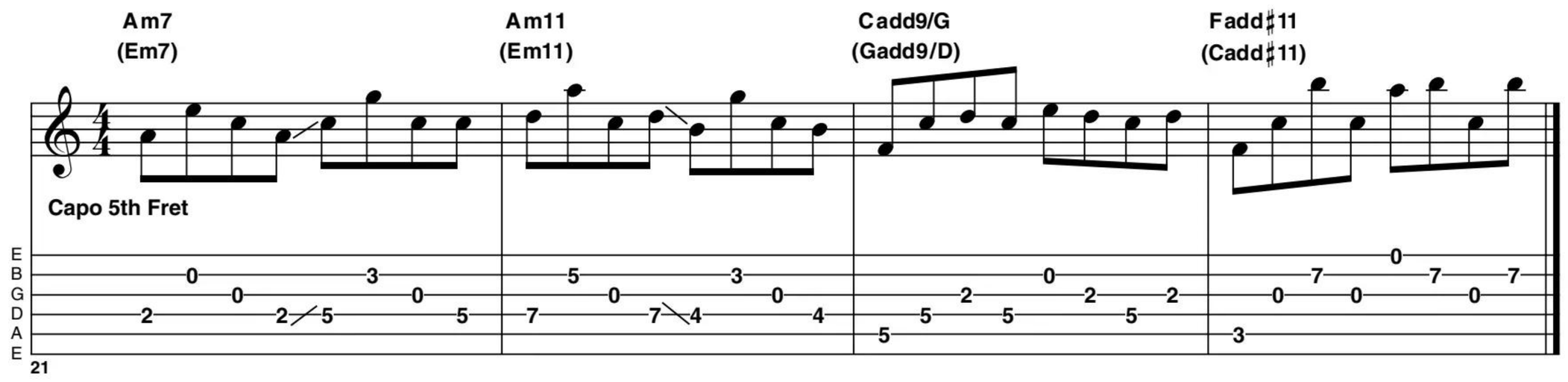
Martin Simpson: A player who's very creative with the capo

SECTION 3 EXAMPLE 6 **LARGER STRETCHES AT HIGHER CAPO POSITIONS**... CONTINUED



SECTION 3 EXAMPLE 7 **GUITAR 2: RIFFY IDEA**

[Bar 21] Greater movement in this one makes it stand out as more of a riff against the original progression. Again the capo facilitates the idea – moving this around with only your fingers taking care of barring duties would require gargantuan strength and diabolical finger stretching!



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Ragtime Guitar

A mix of African and classical music influences – playing authentic ragtime guitar can be challenging due to its complex fingerings and tricky syncopations. All limbered up and ready?

Info	Will improve your…
KEY Various	✔ Bluesy-ragtime licks
TEMPO Various	✔ Syncopated feel
	✔ Authentic repertoire

Ragtime music originated in urban African-American cities such as New Orleans and St Louis, around the turn of the 20th century. Essentially, it was a dance style performed on the piano, characterised by jaunty melodies set against a leaping bass to create strongly syncopated rhythms with an upbeat feel. It is arguably a fusion of traditional African rhythms and classical or march idioms. Although it gave way in popularity to jazz in the early 20th century it was also a notable influence on it.

The music of Scott Joplin remains the most famous and recognisable of the ragtime musicians, with The Entertainer and Maple Leaf Rag being the hits of their day. Indeed, this humble scribe fondly remembers wrestling with an arrangement of the former, as concocted by the great Eric Roche (see p87) in Guitar Techniques many years ago.

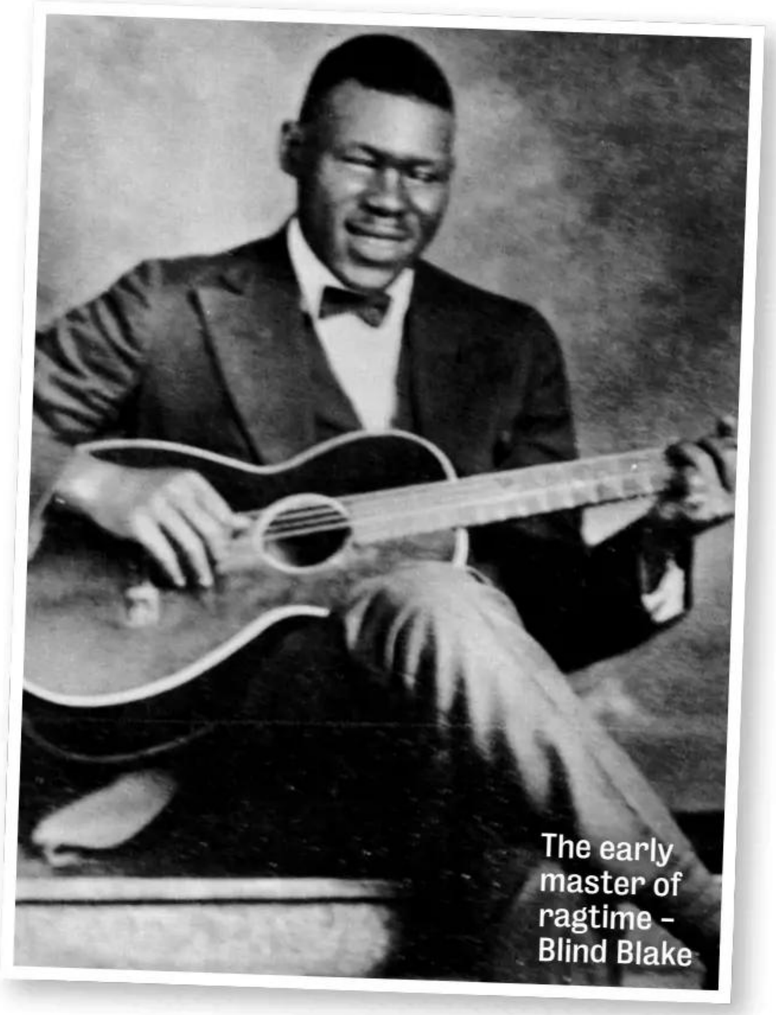
Although primarily written for piano, many early blues guitarists attempted to capture the stride piano feel by using an alternating bass technique on the beats and offsetting it with a 'ragged' (syncopated) melody. This approach informed a playing style known as Piedmont blues, which was generally lighter-hearted in feel but more technically challenging than the primitive Delta blues of, say, Robert Johnson or Charley Patton. Notable Piedmont blues figures included Rev Gary Davis, Elizabeth Cotton, Blind Lemon Jefferson and the king of ragtime guitar, Blind Blake. Although more complex in technique, many of these players fingerpicked with only the thumb and forefinger; an approach later adopted by country and western star, Merle Travis, whose pieces such as Cannonball Rag remain staples of fingerpickers today.

Although ragtime fell out of mainstream favour as jazz took a hold, a younger generation of folk, blues and ragtime revivalists such as Stefan Grossman, Tommy Emmanuel, Woody Mann and John James kept the torch alight with the mastery of modern virtuosity.

> "Blind Blake's playing stands out as some of the most challenging to emulate due to his speed, dexterity and quirky techniques"

Blind Blake's playing in particular stands out to this day as some of the most challenging to emulate, due to his speed, dexterity and quirky techniques. Unlike other ragtime players he would subvert the structure of playing bass notes on the beats by instead anticipating chord changes with a bass note on the four and (last eighth note of the bar). This created a bounce and movement that other players lacked (see Example 6 for how to do this).

While quite tricky, the following exercises should be a great workout for your picking technique. Once you are confident with each one, have a go at the full piece at the end of the feature, which pulls together all the elements you will have studied here. Ragtime guitar is a fantastic style to try, as it can really hone your technique – plus everyone loves it so you'll be the life and soul of any musical party! **TS**

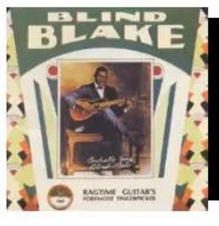


The early master of ragtime – Blind Blake



Get the tone

Any well set up acoustic guitar works fine for ragtime playing: Blind Blake can be seen playing a small bodied Stella concert guitar (in what is thought to be the only photograph of him that exists) while Rev Gary Davis used a huge Gibson J-200. Tommy Emmanuel uses medium-bodied Maton guitars from Australia – so whatever acoustic you have should do just fine! Tommy also uses heavy strings with a low action as he likes the tone afforded by the former and the speed allowed by the latter.
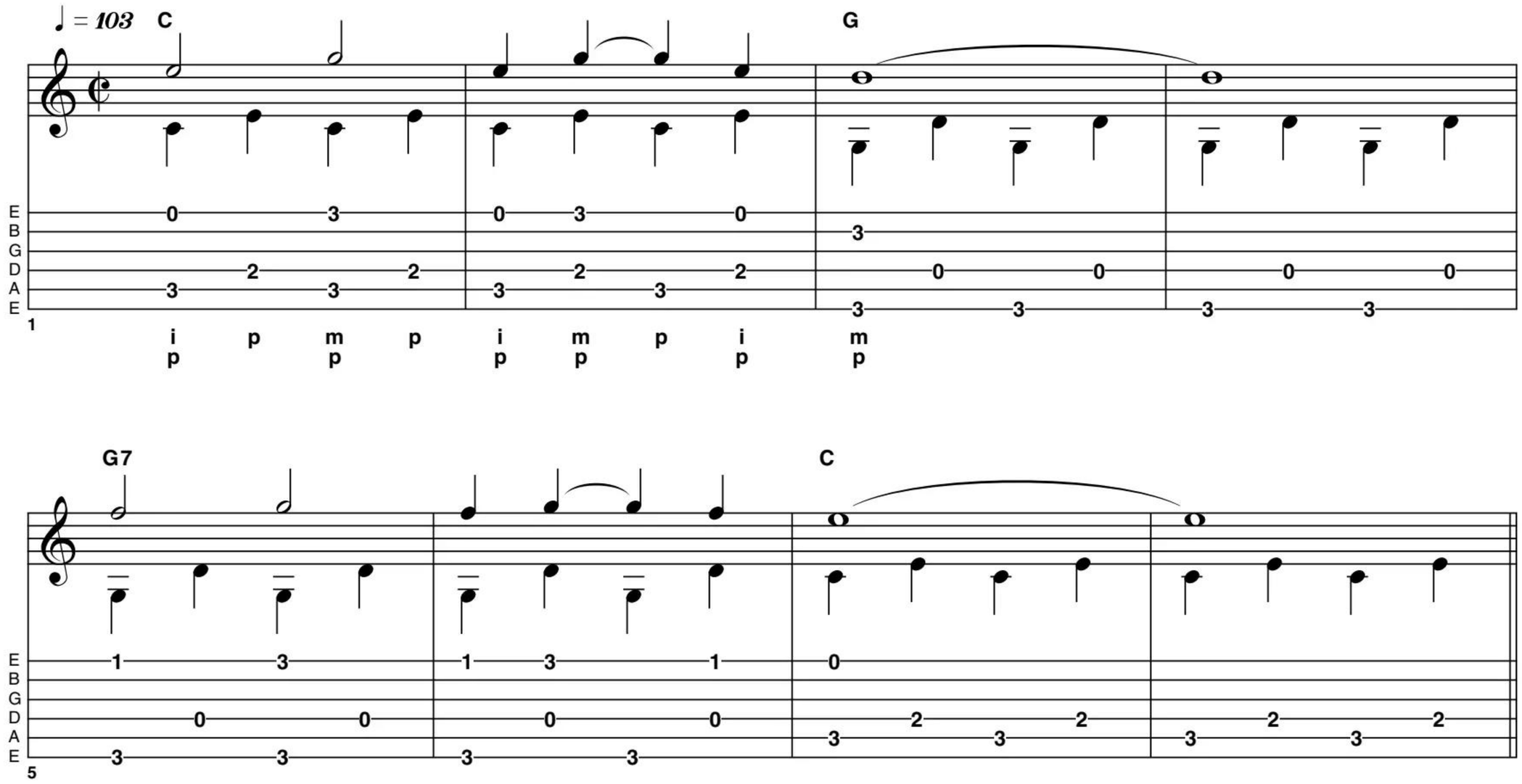


LISTENING SUGGESTIONS There are numerous Blind Blake CDs worth checking out including Ragtime Guitars (Yazoo) and The Master Of Ragtime Guitar: Blind Blake (Indigo), while a more modern approach has been taken by David Laibman and Eric Schoenberg on The New Ragtime Guitar (Smithsonian, 2012) and the 'various artists' compilation Contemporary Ragtime Guitar. And don't forget Stefan Grossman's delightfully pure style.

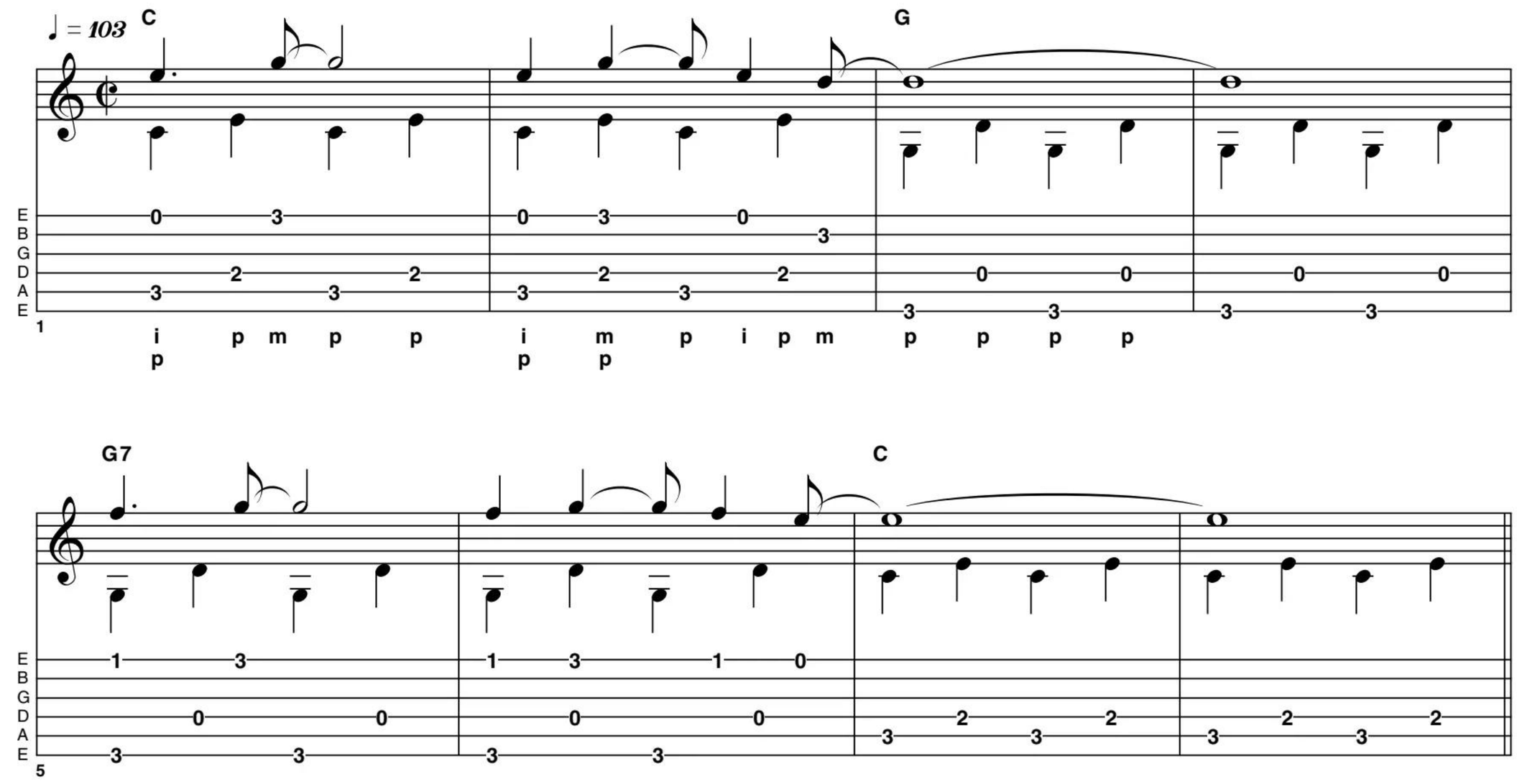
PICTORIAL PRESS LTD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

EXAMPLES **RAGTIME PLAYING**

EXERCISE 1: THE 'PINCH' Before mastering syncopation, you need to be certain you can play bass notes evenly, at the same time as melody notes. This exercise forces you to play a straightforward rhythm in which you pinch two notes at the same time. Nail this before you go any further.



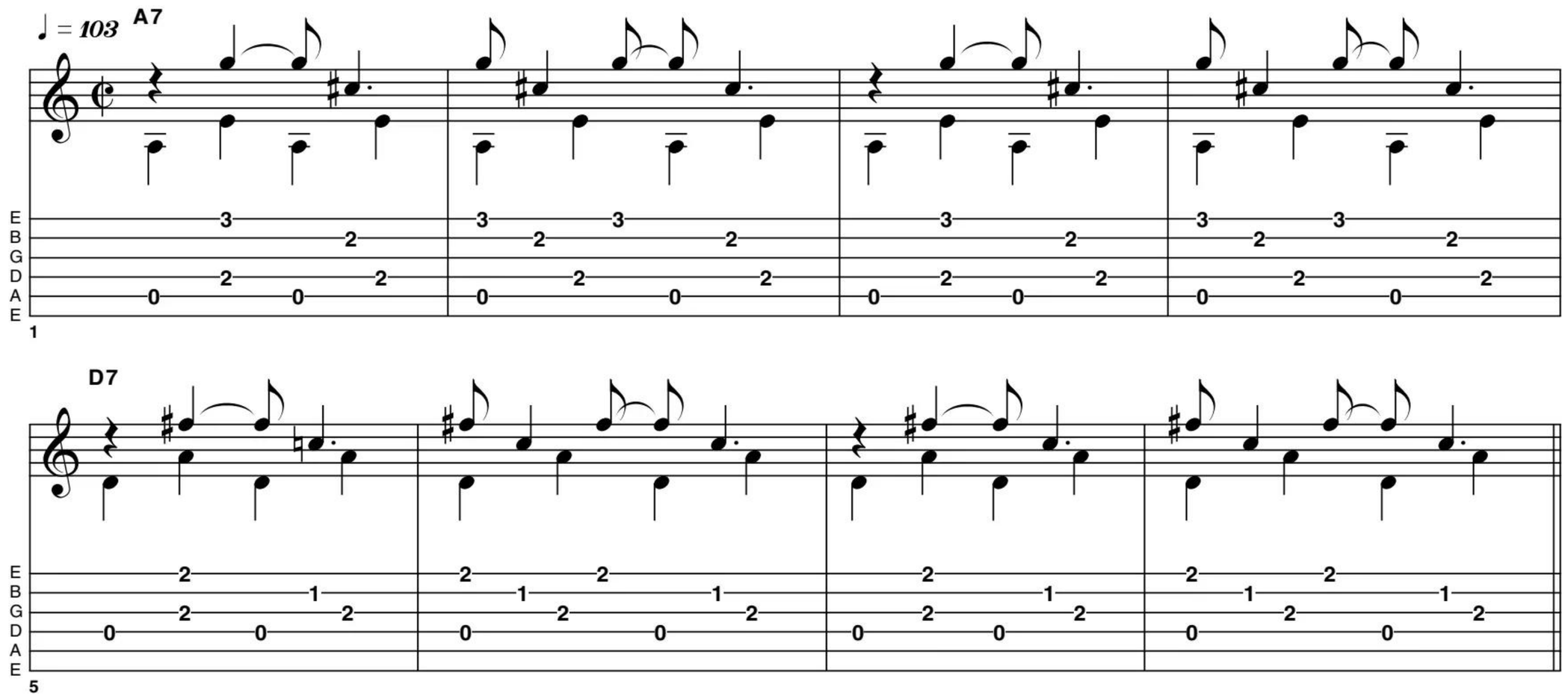
EXERCISE 2: FIRST STEPS IN SYNCOPATION A syncopated variation of the previous one. Notice how the melody is the same, but some notes are played early to slot in between the bass notes. Importantly, the bass line is identical, so watch your thumb like a hawk to make sure it behaves.



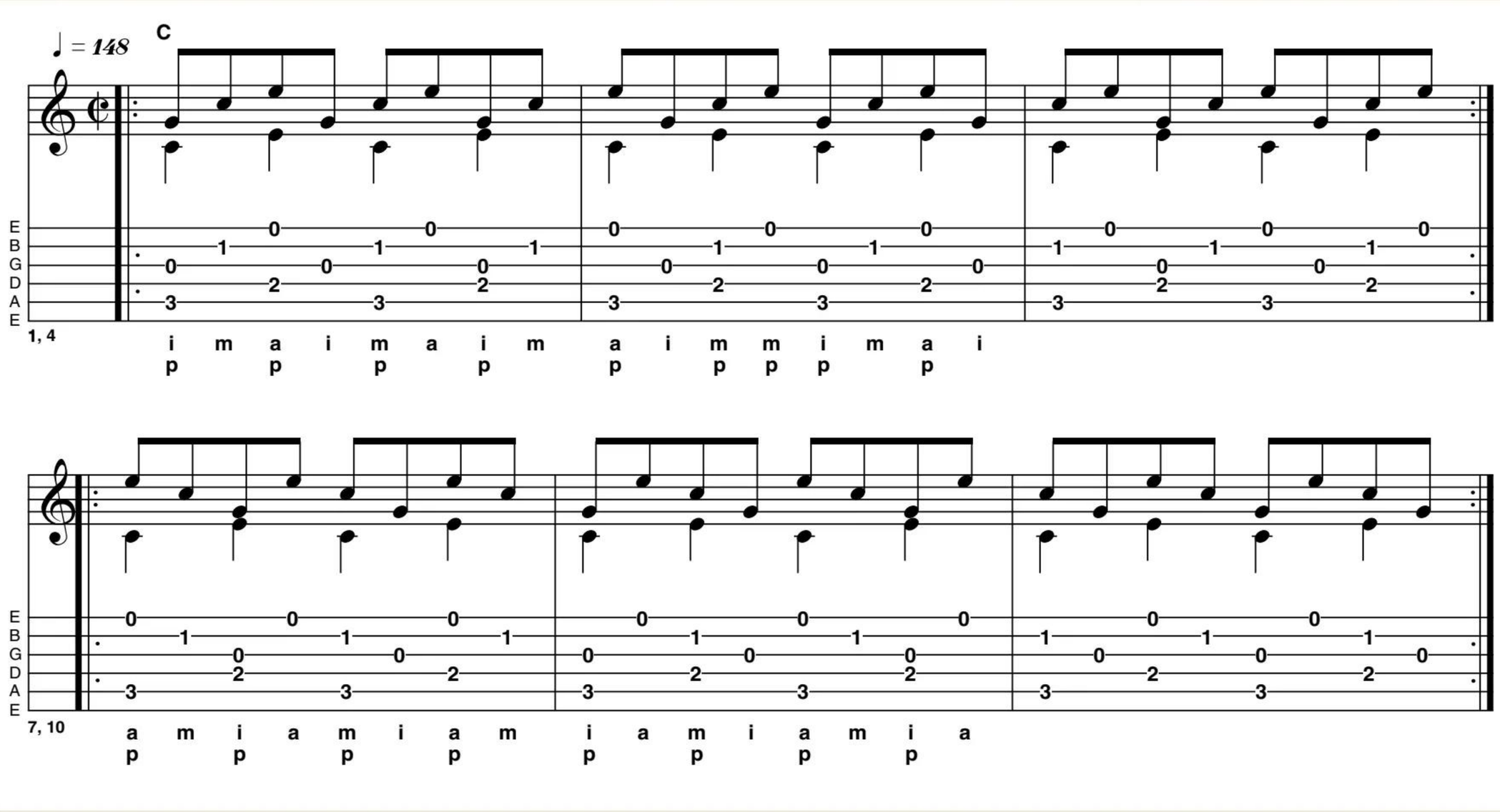
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EXAMPLES **RAGTIME PLAYING**

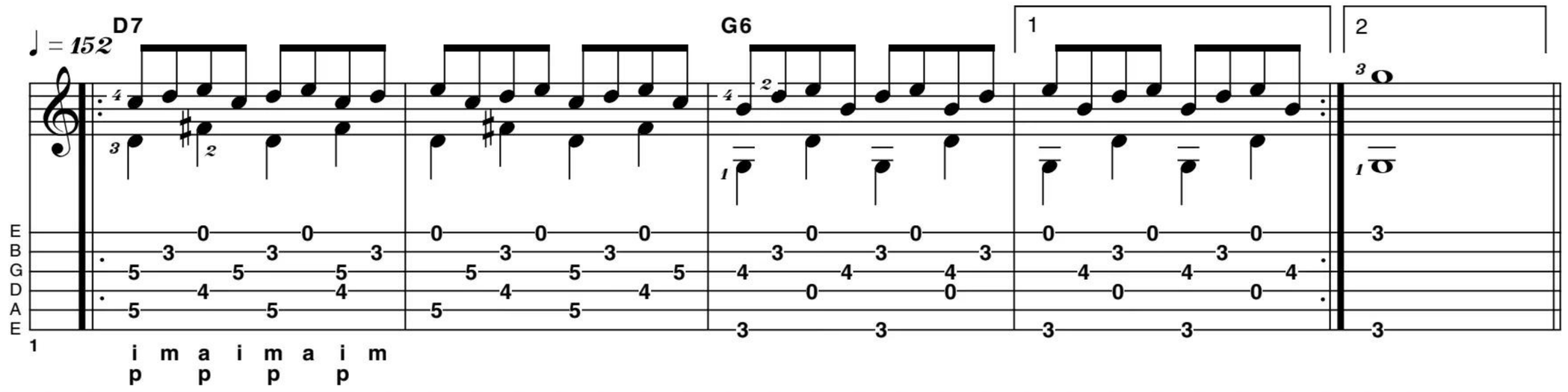
EXERCISE 3: TRAVIS PICKING This classic pattern is very much in the style of Merle Travis (check out his classic tune, Cannonball Rag). Consider it a stage further on from the previous exercises. It should be played with a quick tempo and a straight rhythm.



EXERCISE 4: THREE AGAINST FOUR An essential characteristic of ragtime is playing polyrhythms, such as a rolling three-note pattern against four beats to the bar. These next exercises will serve as a primer for mastering this technique. Once smooth, try it with a light swing feel.

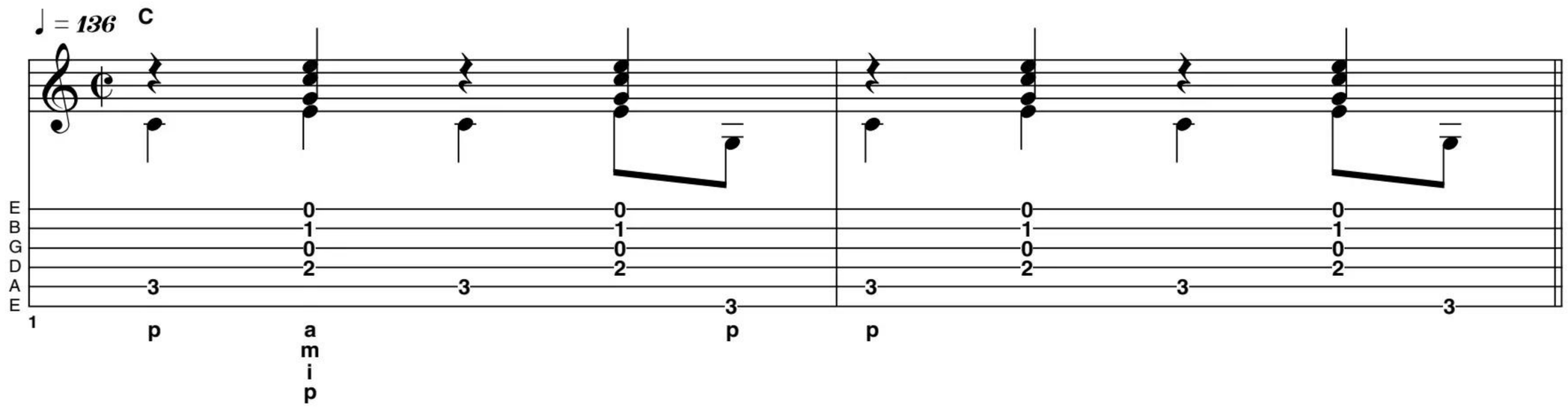


EXERCISE 5: D7 TO G6 PROGRESSION Here's the same type of exercise in context using the typically raggy chords of D7 and G6. Don't worry if you can't play these exercises immediately – it's not surprising if you're new to ragtime, especially the syncopation. Just take it slowly and it will come.

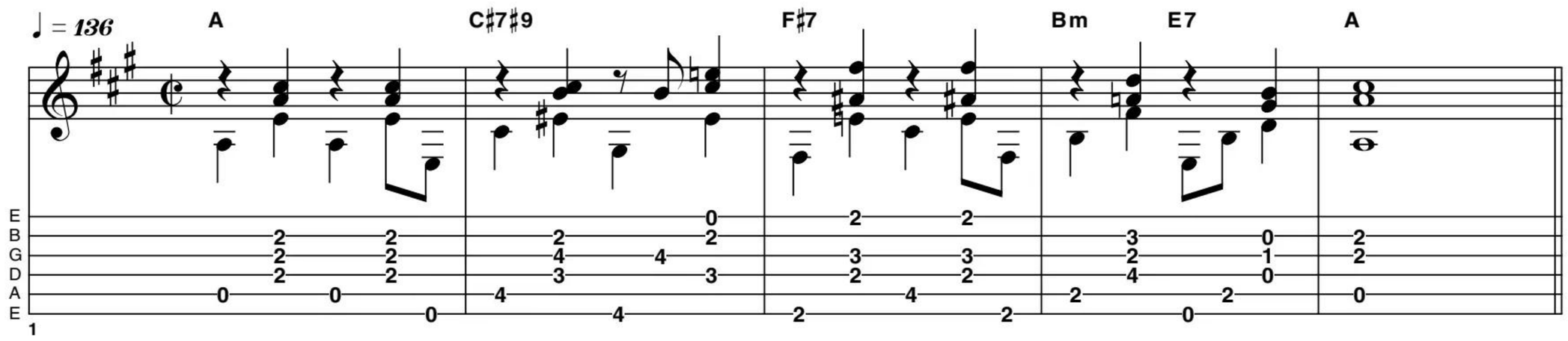


EXAMPLES **RAGTIME PLAYING**

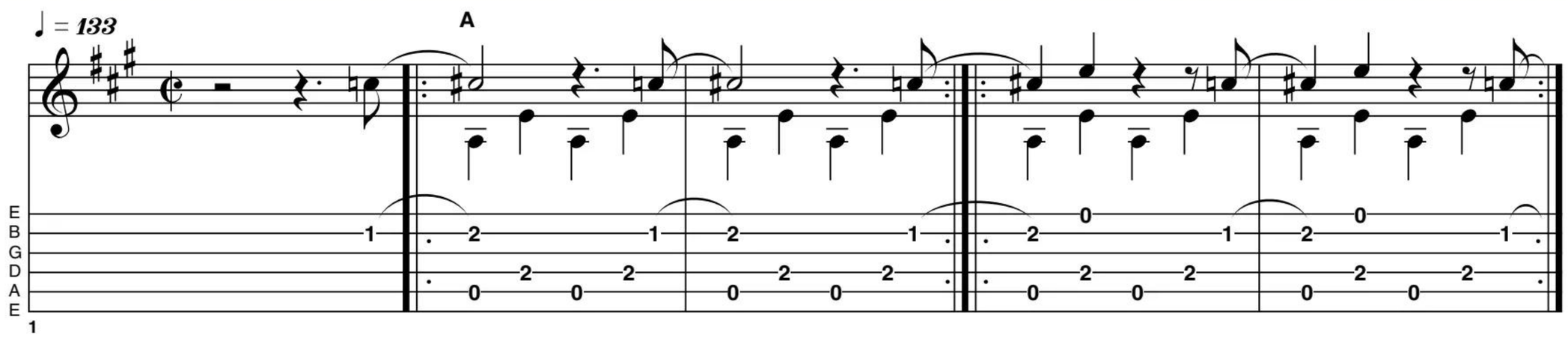
EXERCISE 6: THUMB-ROLL One of Blind Blake's signature techniques! On the last eighth note of the bar, Blake would sometimes place an extra note with the thumb on the sixth string, which he would roll over to rest on the fifth string, playing that on the downbeat of the new bar.



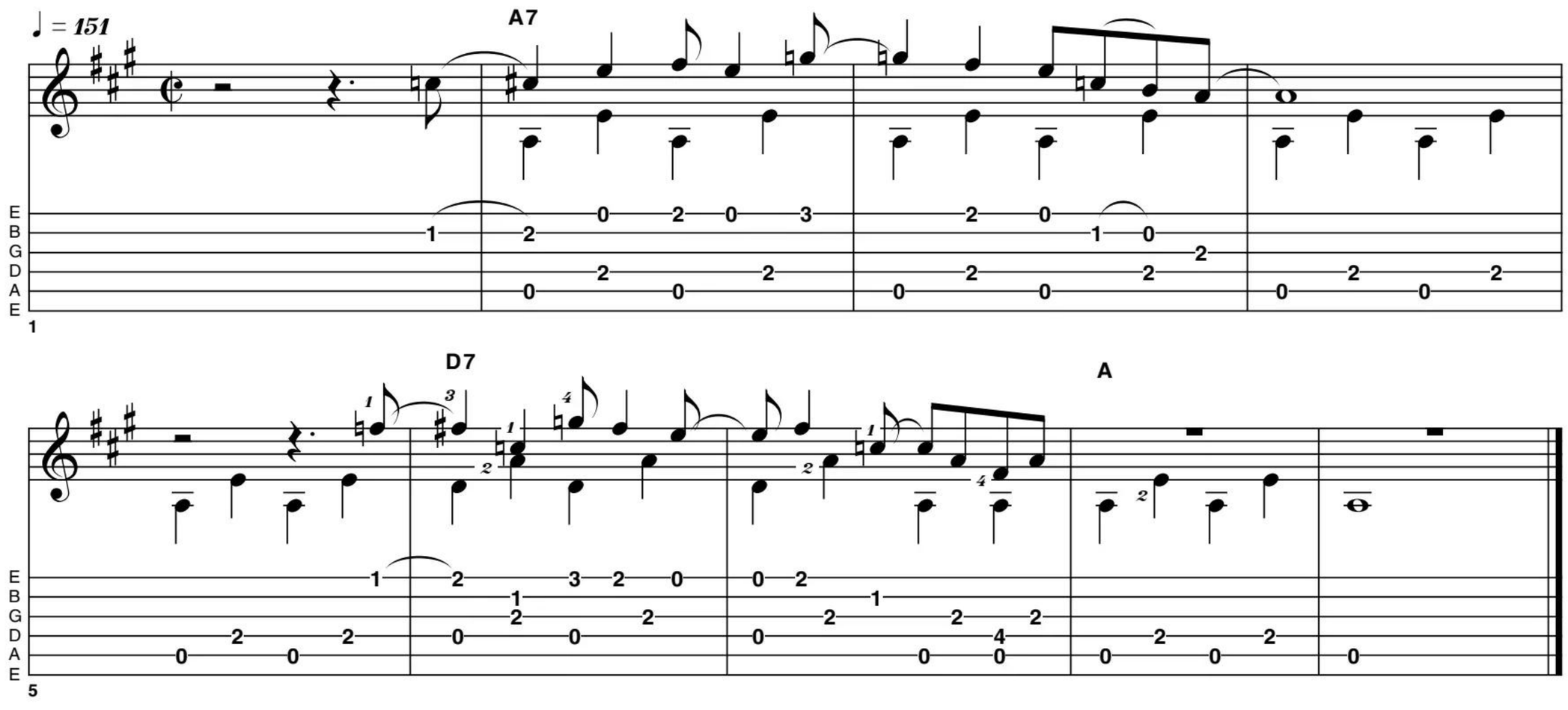
EXERCISE 7: MORE THUMB-ROLLS Here is a further example of playing Blake style thumb-rolls, within a typical chord sequence.



EXERCISE 8: PIEDMONT STYLE PART 1 A common trick in Piedmont and ragtime playing is hammering on a note while simultaneously plucking a different string. Easy in principle, but tricky when first tackled as it's a matter of unnatural co-ordination. The following drills should help.



EXERCISE 9: PIEDMONT STYLE PART 2 Taking the previous exercise a stage further, let's try putting it into context over a couple of blues changes.

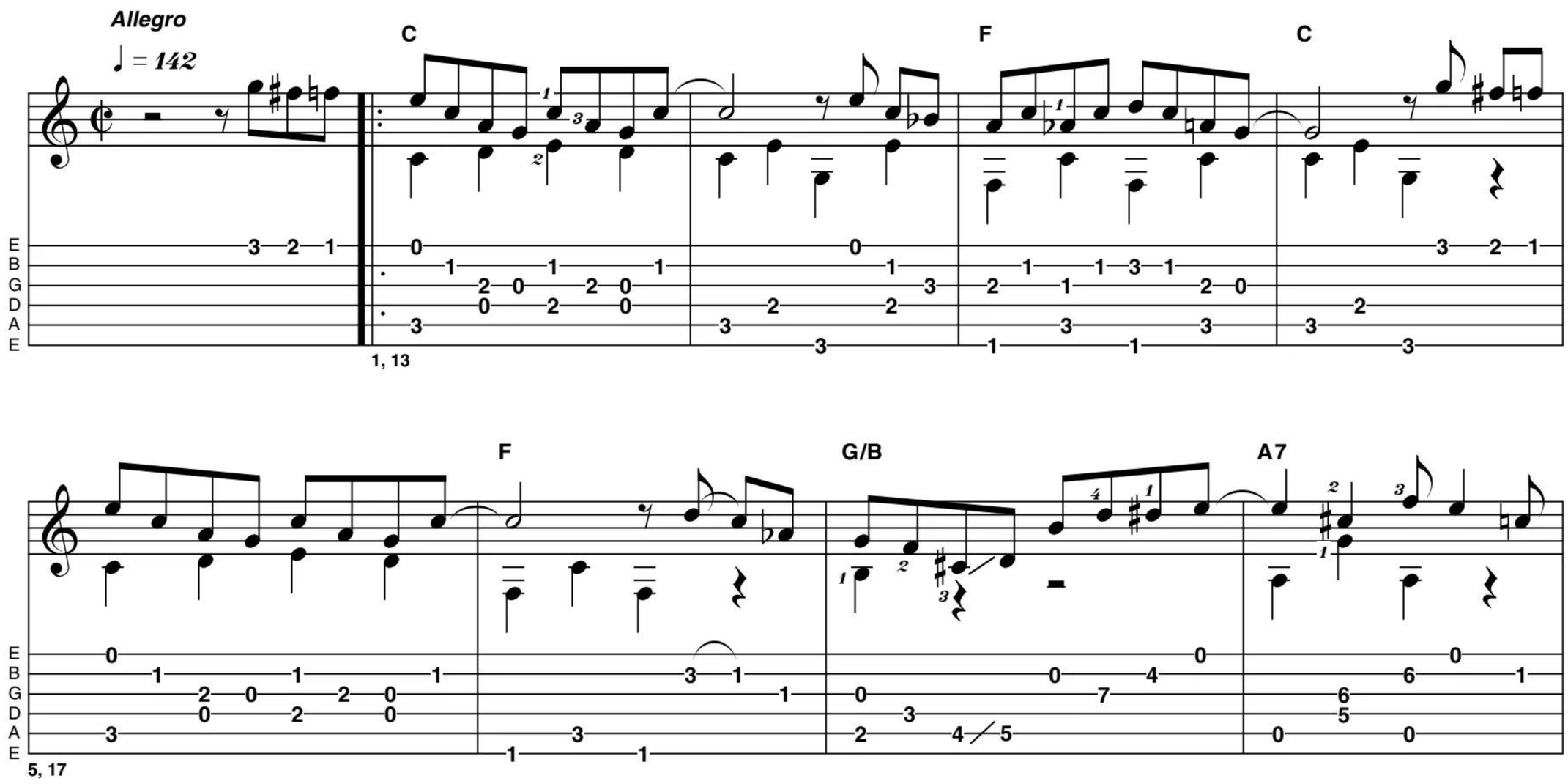


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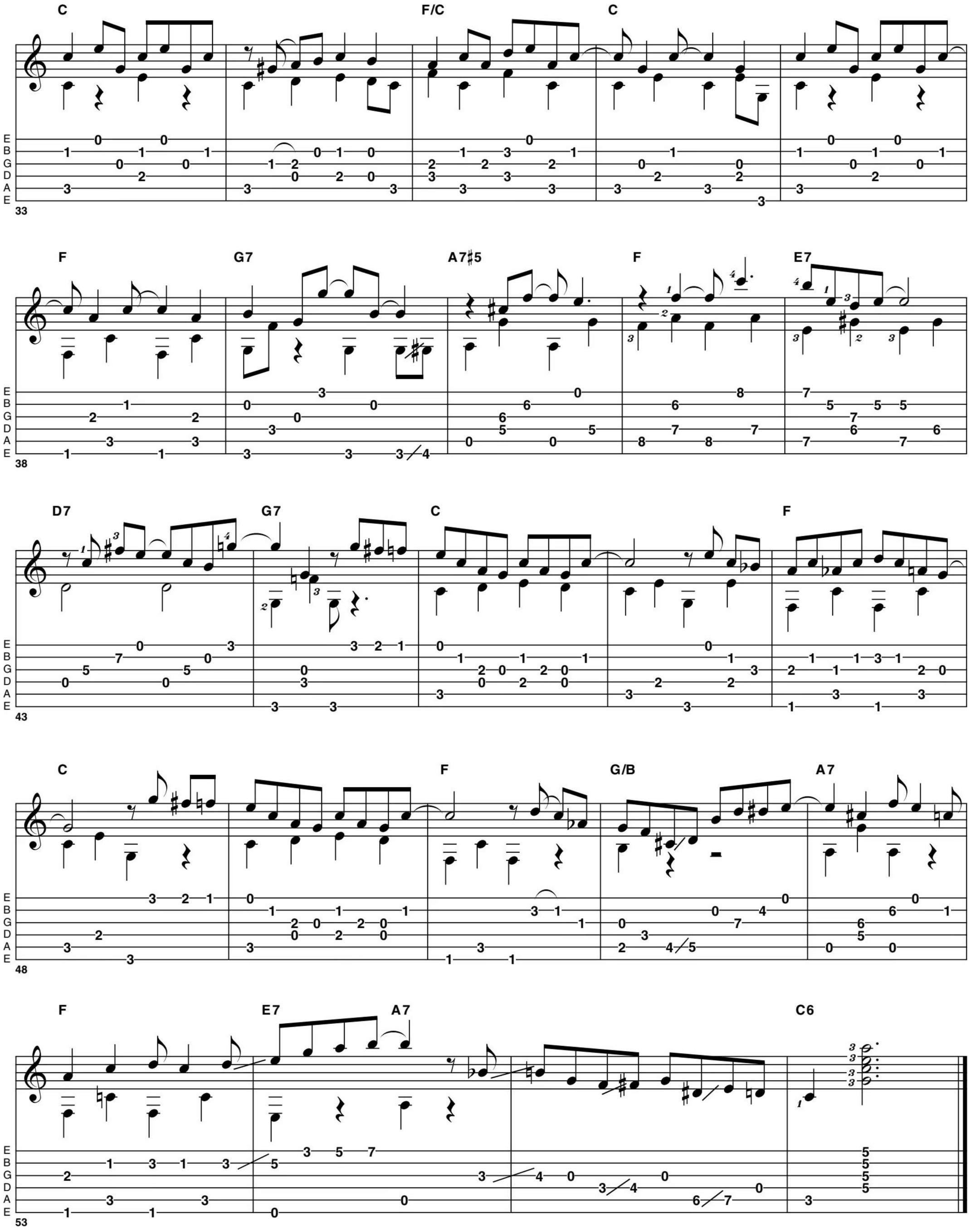
EXAMPLES **RAGTIME PIECE**

FULL PERFORMANCE PIECE Now that you've gone through all the examples, it's time to have a go at a full piece. In it I've incorporated many of the ideas we've looked at so far. It's a very satisfying party piece to play, so take your time and play it with all the exuberance you can muster.



EXAMPLES **RAGTIME PIECE**

FULL PERFORMANCE PIECE You may want to break this down into smaller sections and put them together as each extra bit is mastered.



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A hundred years of Acoustic blues

In this fascinating feature Tristan Seume takes a stylistically in-depth look at the acoustic blues greats of the last century, from Son House and Mississippi John Hurt up to Eric Bibb and Kelly Joe Phelps...

Info	Will improve your...
KEY Various	✔ Slide playing in open tunings
TEMPO Various	✔ Fingerstyle co-ordination
	✔ Blues licks repertoire

Few playing styles provide us with the same level of satisfaction as acoustic blues. In spite of the sorrowful tales the lyrics often tell, there is something deeply appealing about the image of sitting on the front porch with nothing but three chords and a beat-up Gibson, Harmony or Kay. With that in mind, for this feature, we'll be looking in depth at the tricks and idiosyncrasies of the acoustic blues greats from the likes of Robert Johnson and Blind Blake, right up to date with modern day masters such as Eric Bibb and Kelly Joe Phelps.

One classic sound identifying early Delta Blues was bottleneck or slide guitar, in which players would adopt an open tuning, typically open E or A, and move an object such as the neck of a bottle, a piece of copper tubing or even a knife up and down the neck creating rudimentary harmonies, and microtonal increments. Charley Patton, Son House and Bukka White were influential exponents of this style who used National resonators to play repetitive open- and single-finger chords interspersed with slide fills, usually with a simple bass-string accompaniment.

> "Internationally renowned artists such as Bill Broonzy would inspire and pave the way for new generations of acoustic blues guitarists"

Possibly the greatest of all the bluesmen (certainly according to Eric Clapton) was the enigmatic Robert Johnson, whom Son House strongly influenced. Johnson's mysterious demise at the young age of 27 is one of the great legends of music. Johnson made just a handful of recordings, notably Sweet Home Chicago and, of course, Crossroad Blues.

Much of the early blues fingerstyle repertoire was based on ragtime – a style borne out of classical idioms such as a leaping bass pattern offset by a syncopated melody. The most notable exponent of ragtime guitar was Blind Blake – a player with speed and dexterity that's considered remarkable even by today's standards.

In contrast to the mournful rural sounds of the Mississippi Delta, the lighter side of blues was demonstrated by figures such as Big Bill Broonzy, whose more urban, populist sound would see him perform at prestigious venues to black and white audiences alike (at a time when segregation was still rife in certain areas of America). Broonzy's sound was muscular and forceful, sometimes plucking so firmly that the strings bent sharp. He was, however, a highly rhythmic and articulate player, with songs such as Hey, Hey encapsulating his light-hearted approach perfectly.

Internationally renowned artists such as Broonzy would inspire and pave the way for new generations of acoustic blues singers and guitarists: Kelly Joe Phelps, a former jazz musician converted to the blues after listening to the old masters such as Mississippi Fred McDowell, brought the skilful touch and precise intonation of a modern virtuoso to the blues. And Martin Simpson, inspired by the likes of Big Joe Williams, switches from English ballads to authentic Delta blues with ease. Another notable contemporary figure is New Yorker, Eric Bibb, a wonderfully tasteful player with a smooth vocal style. His playing is a mixture of Travis-style alternating bass, with chord changes implied by improvised fills.

The following pages aim to demonstrate a wealth of blues ideas, with examples of slide, ragtime and self-accompanied fingerstyle, culminating in a sort of 'ultimate blues' that incorporates a bit of everything.

As ever, our aim is for you to use these examples as a launch pad for your own creativity. This is such a wonderful style to have under your fingers – even if blues itself is not particularly your thing – that everyone can enhance their breadth and repertoire by adopting some of these ideas. Check out some of the fabulous footage that's now accessible on YouTube too. Have fun! **GT**



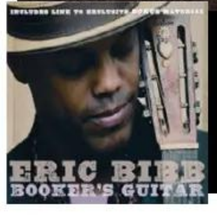
Get the Tone

Most of the early bluesmen like Robert Johnson and Blind Blake used small-bodied guitars – portable and easy to handle. I used my diminutive 00-sized Fylde Goodfellow for the recording. For slide work, steel resonators sound great, and these days, there are many good instruments in the sub-£500 range. Try a variety of slides, bearing in mind that the heavier it is, the longer the sustain will be.



Son House: One of the Delta's most legendary blues performers

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY



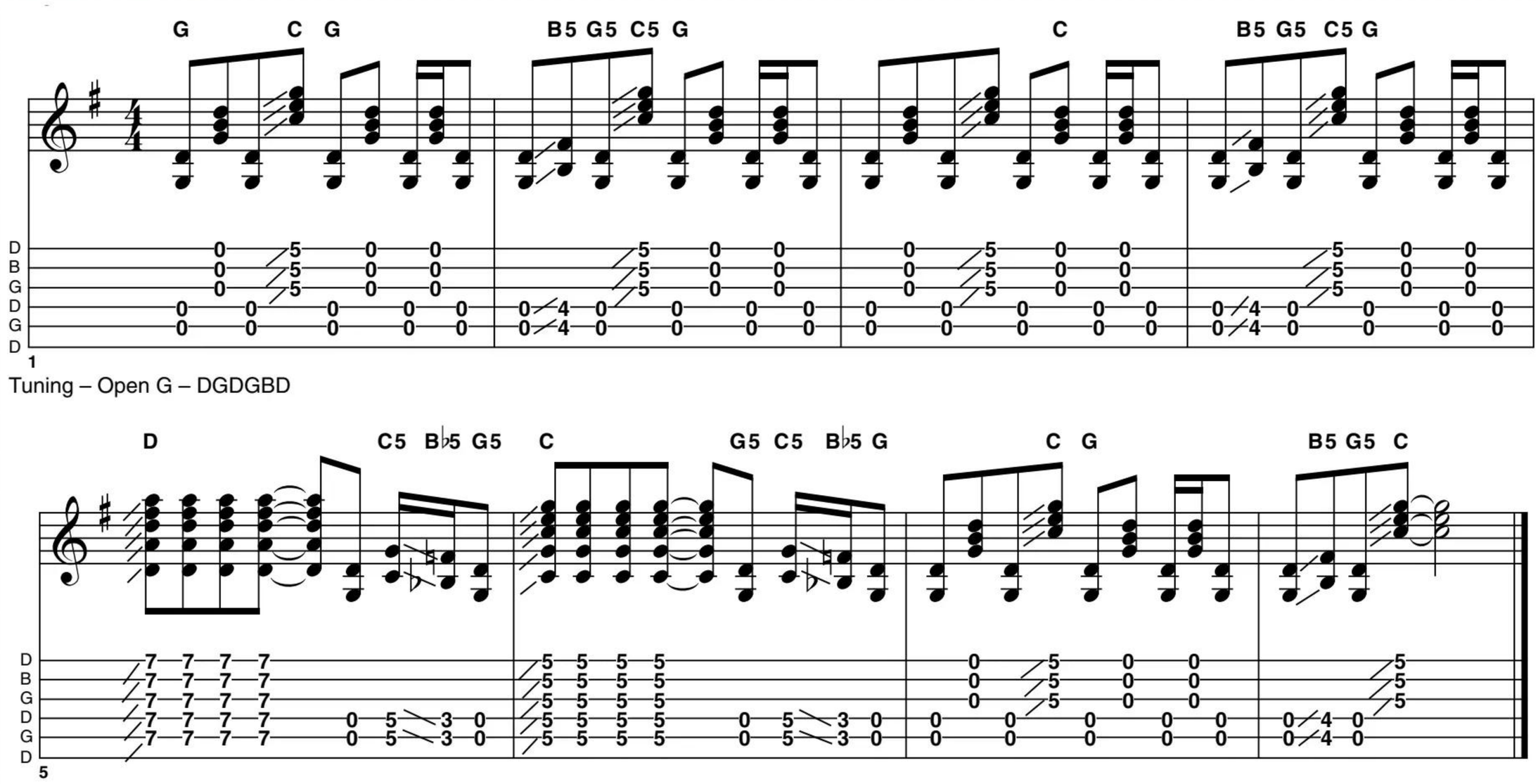
TRACK RECORD There are many great acoustic blues compilations out there but here are some of my favourites: Son House, Father Of The Delta Blues: The Complete 1965 Sessions (1992); Robert Johnson, The Complete Recordings (1990); Blind Blake, The Best Of Blind Blake (2005); Big Bill Broonzy, Trouble In Mind (2000); Kelly Joe Phelps, Shine Eyed Mr. Zen (1999); Eric Bibb, Booker's Guitar (2010)

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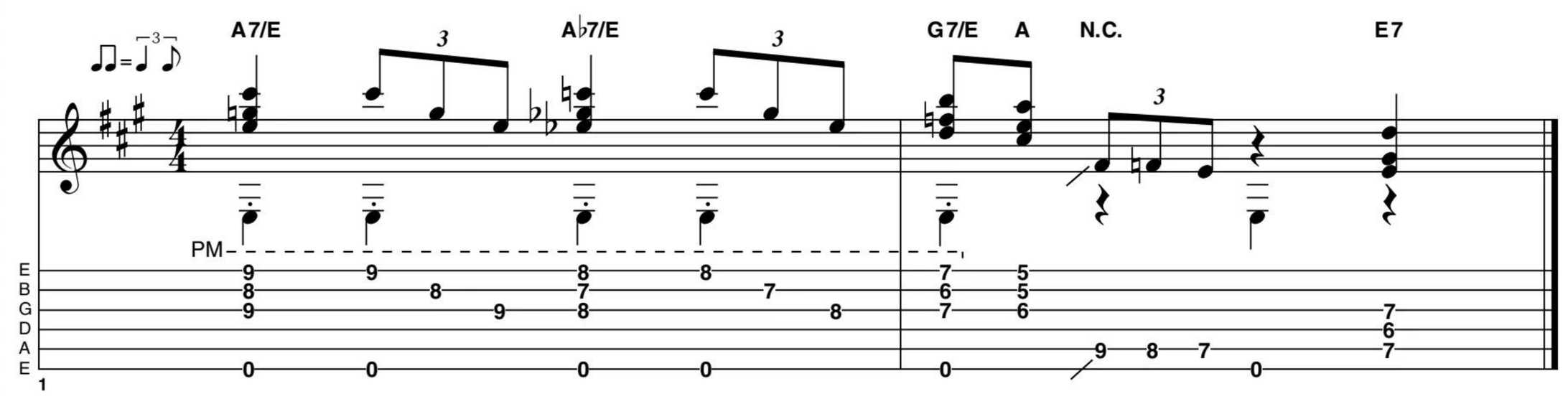
EXAMPLE 1 **SON HOUSE**

Son House's rudimentary bottleneck style was all about feel and attitude. He played with his thumb and first finger, alternately hitting the bass and treble strings using open tunings such as open G (D-G-D-G-B-D) as in this example.



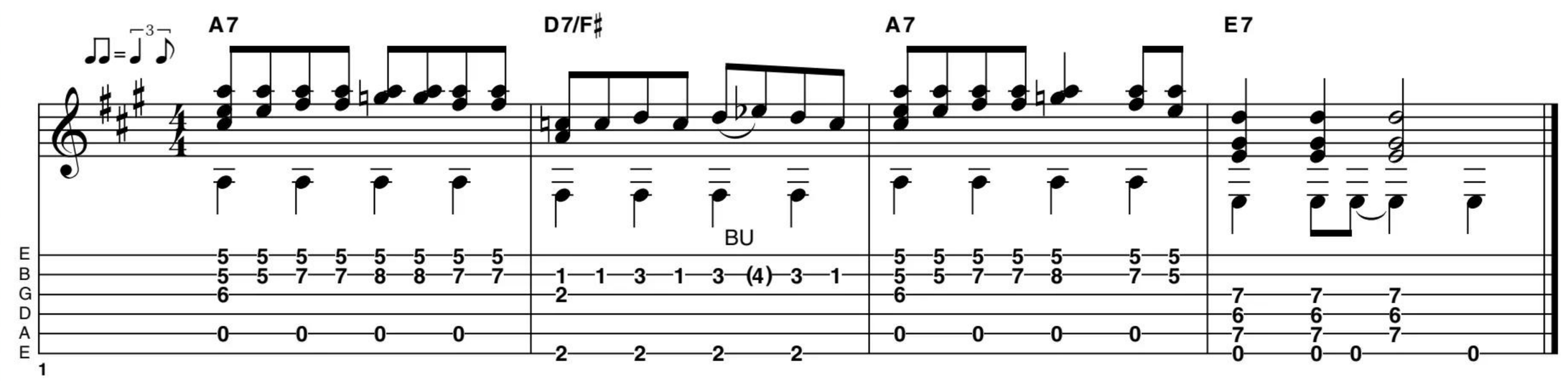
EXAMPLE 2 **ROBERT JOHNSON**

This intro lick is a classic dissonant phrase for a blues in A, using a descending dominant 7th chord shape, that resolves to an A chord. The last notes imply an E7 turnaround chord announcing the beginning of the song.



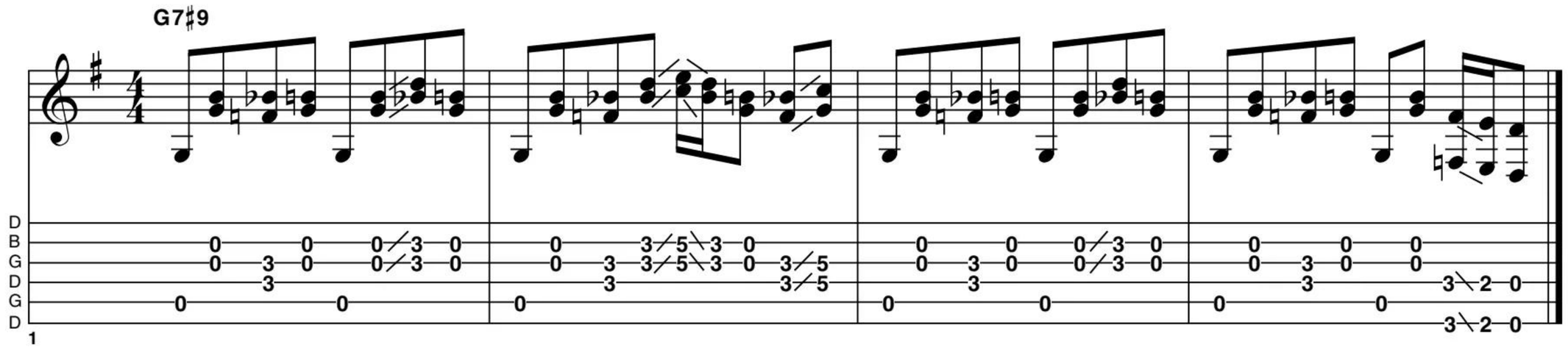
EXAMPLE 3 **ROCK AND ROLL INSPIRATION**

Following the intro idea, here's a groove that inspired the classic A5-A6 phrase so common in 50s rock 'n' roll, but placed in the upper octave with a monophonic thumbed bass. In bar 2 fret the F# bass note with your thumb by reaching over the top of the neck.
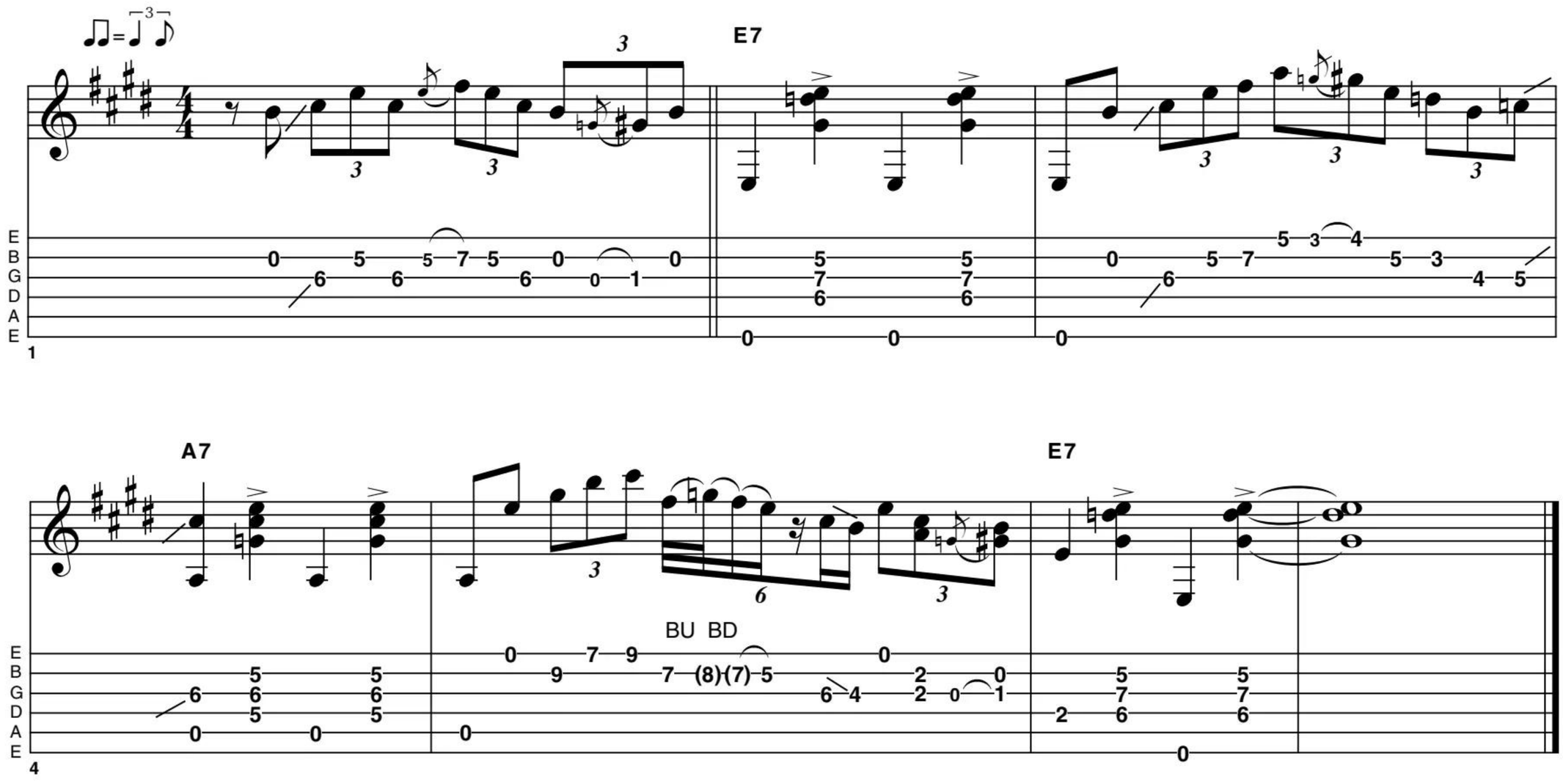


EXAMPLE 4 **MAJOR-MINOR**

Robert Johnson used open tunings for his bottleneck playing on songs like Travelin' Riverside Blues. Here's a slide riff that toys with the bluesy ambiguity between the minor and the major 3rd in G major. The tuning for this example is open (G-D-G-D-G-B-D), low to high.



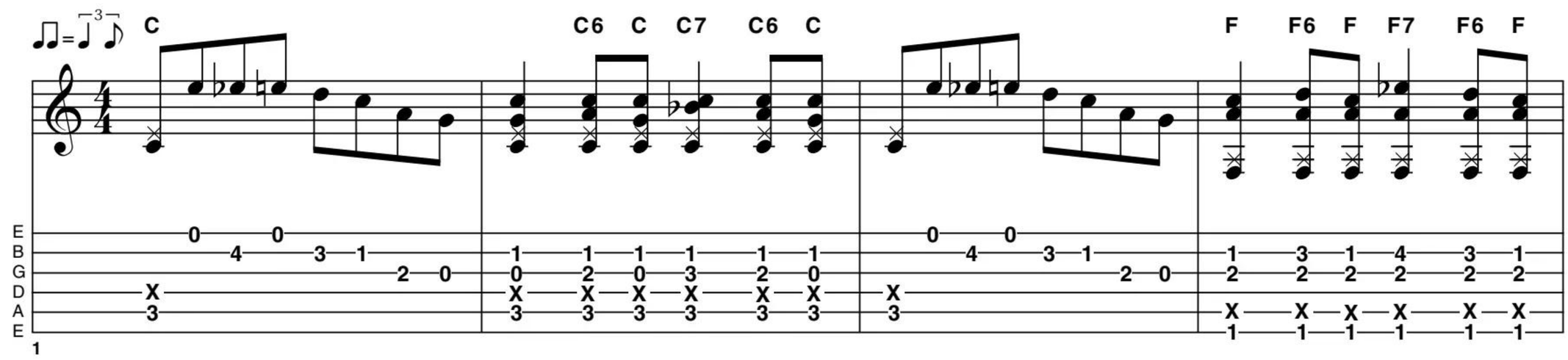
EXAMPLE 5 **LONNIE JOHNSON**

Joining up chordal passages with licks that target notes in the chord changes can add a touch of class. Listen to Lonnie Johnson, whose playing crossed over into jazz, for an object lesson in taste. Notice the piano-like hammer-ons, which add articulation and definition.



EXAMPLE 6 **BIG BILL BROONZY**

Here's a similar idea, but with a repeated melodic motif, in the style of Big Bill Broonzy. Notice the semi-muted bass double-stops; Broonzy would often play with such power as to inadvertently play two bass strings at once – but it sounded great!



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EXAMPLE 7 **BROONZY TURNAROUND**

Broonzy's light-hearted approach is shown here, with a turnaround phrase for the last four bars of a 12-bar in E major. Notice the lack of the usual V chord at the end of this phrase, giving a sense of urgency to the overall feel.

EXAMPLE 8 **MISSISSIPPI JOHN HURT**

For a more country-blues sound, in the vein of great guitarists such as Mississippi John Hurt or John Fahey, try this dropped D tuning (low to high D-A-D-G-B-E) and alternating the bass as shown here. This style re-occurs often in the playing of these bluesmen.

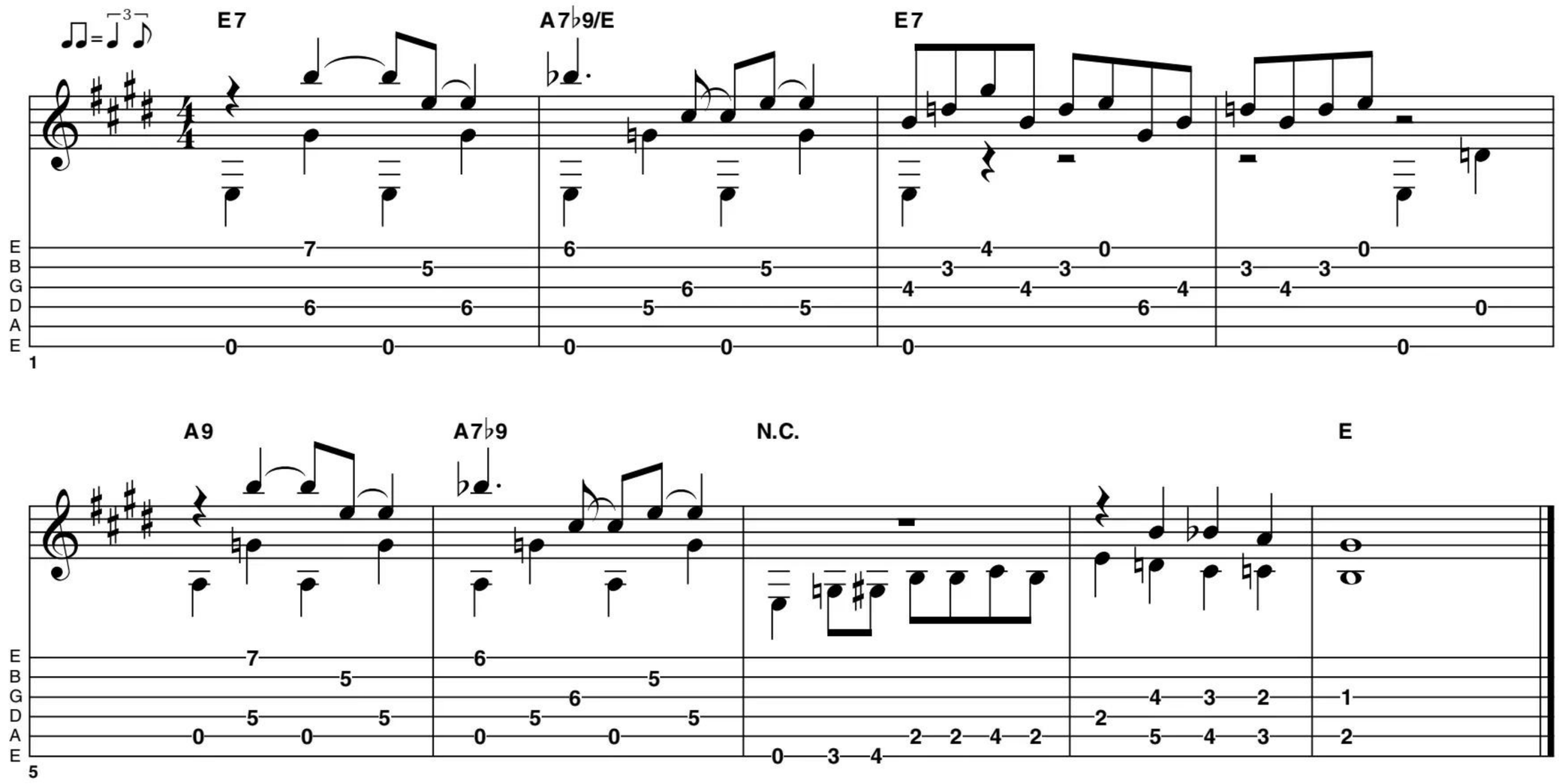


Big Bill Broonzy: He influenced many later blues musicians

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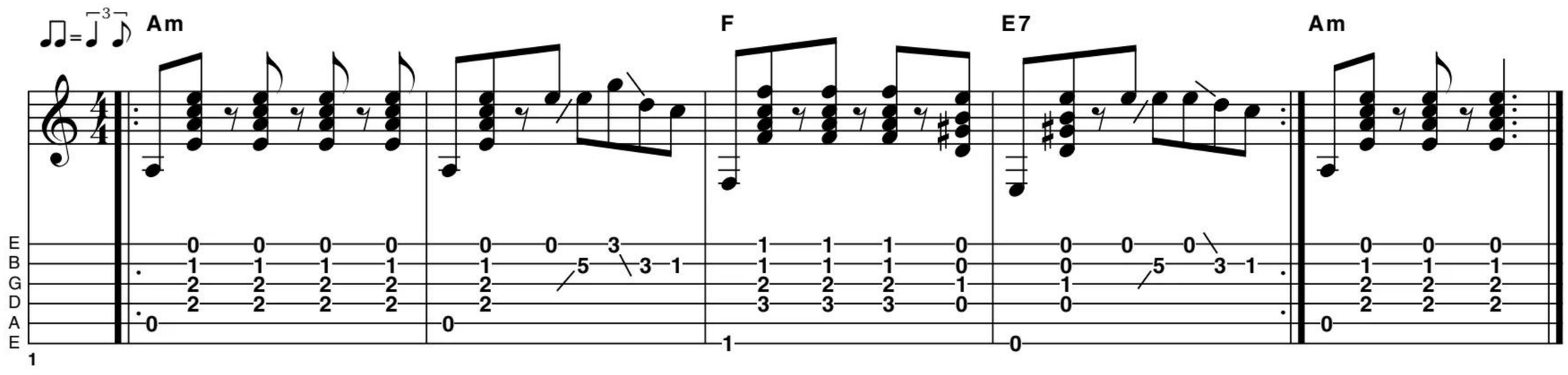
EXAMPLE 9 **DOC WATSON**

Doc Watson's take on the blues crosses over with country and bluegrass. Note the banjo rolls in bars 3-4, which arpeggiate an E7 chord. Why not try hybrid-picking this example, using a pick and your second and third fingers.



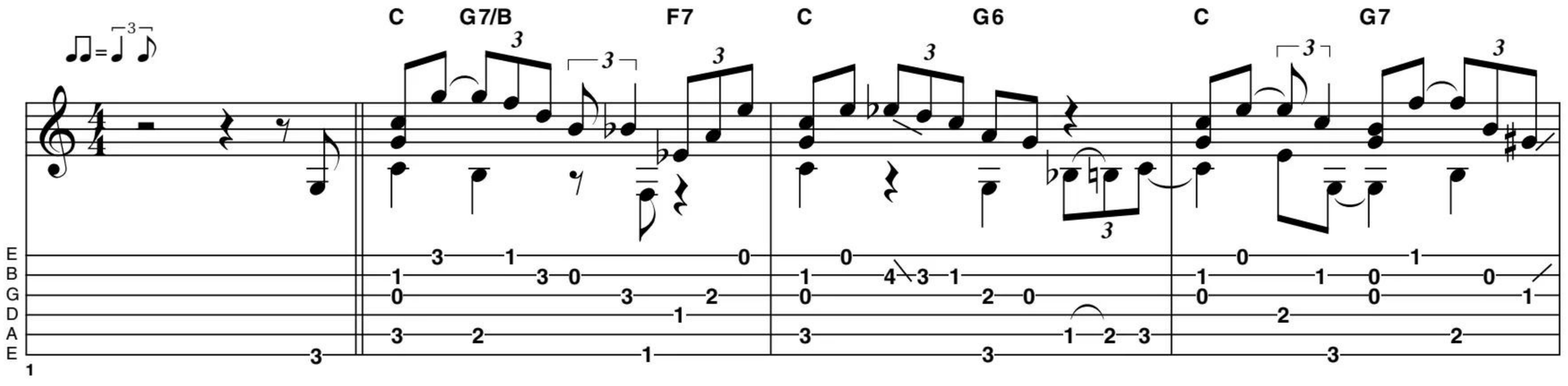
EXAMPLE 10 **JOSH WHITE**

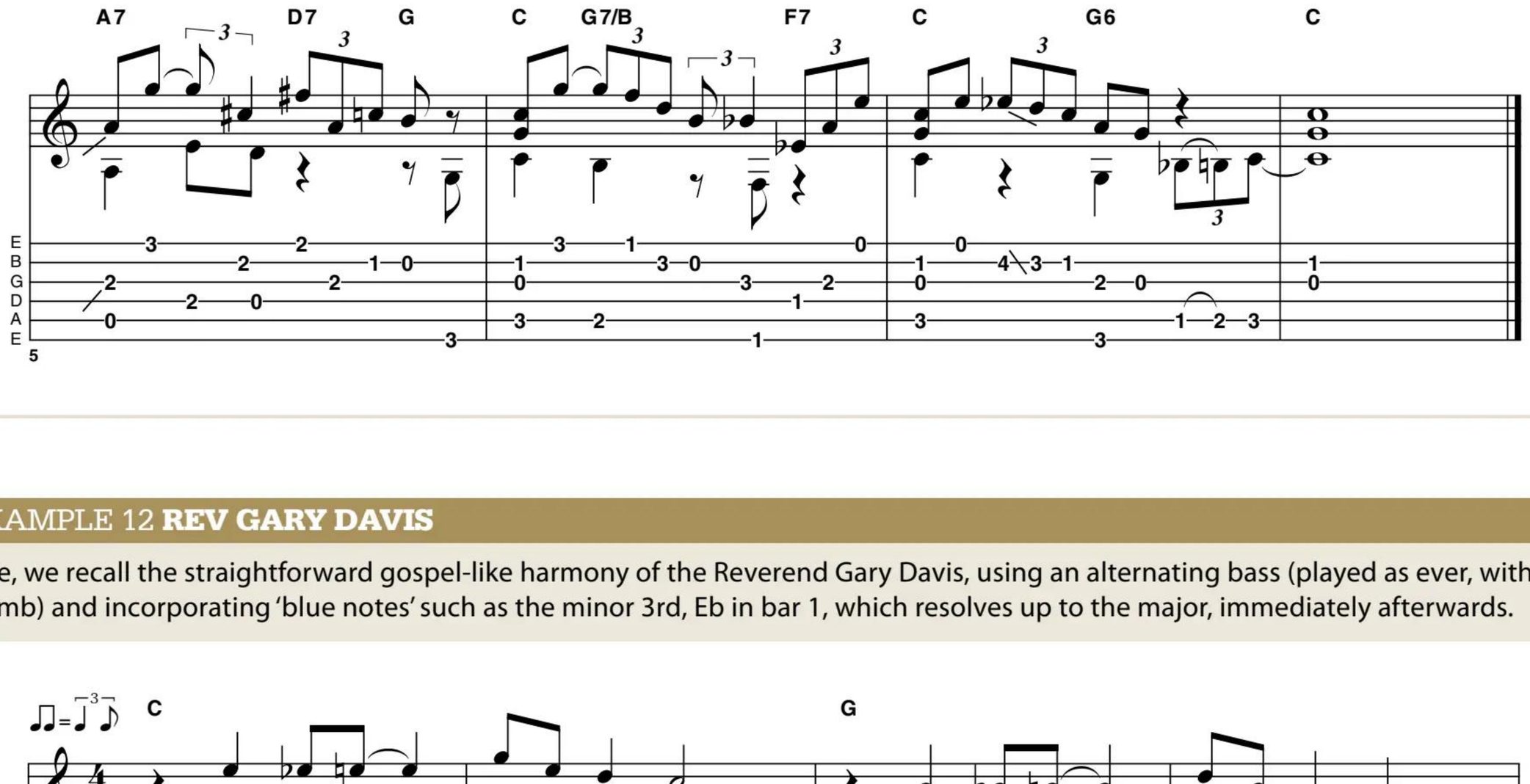
For a minor blues like this one, the impeccable Josh White sometimes played offbeat grooves, beginning with a bass note and followed by choppy chords, to give a driving feel over which he could sing his deeply narrative songs.



EXAMPLE 11 **BLIND BLAKE**

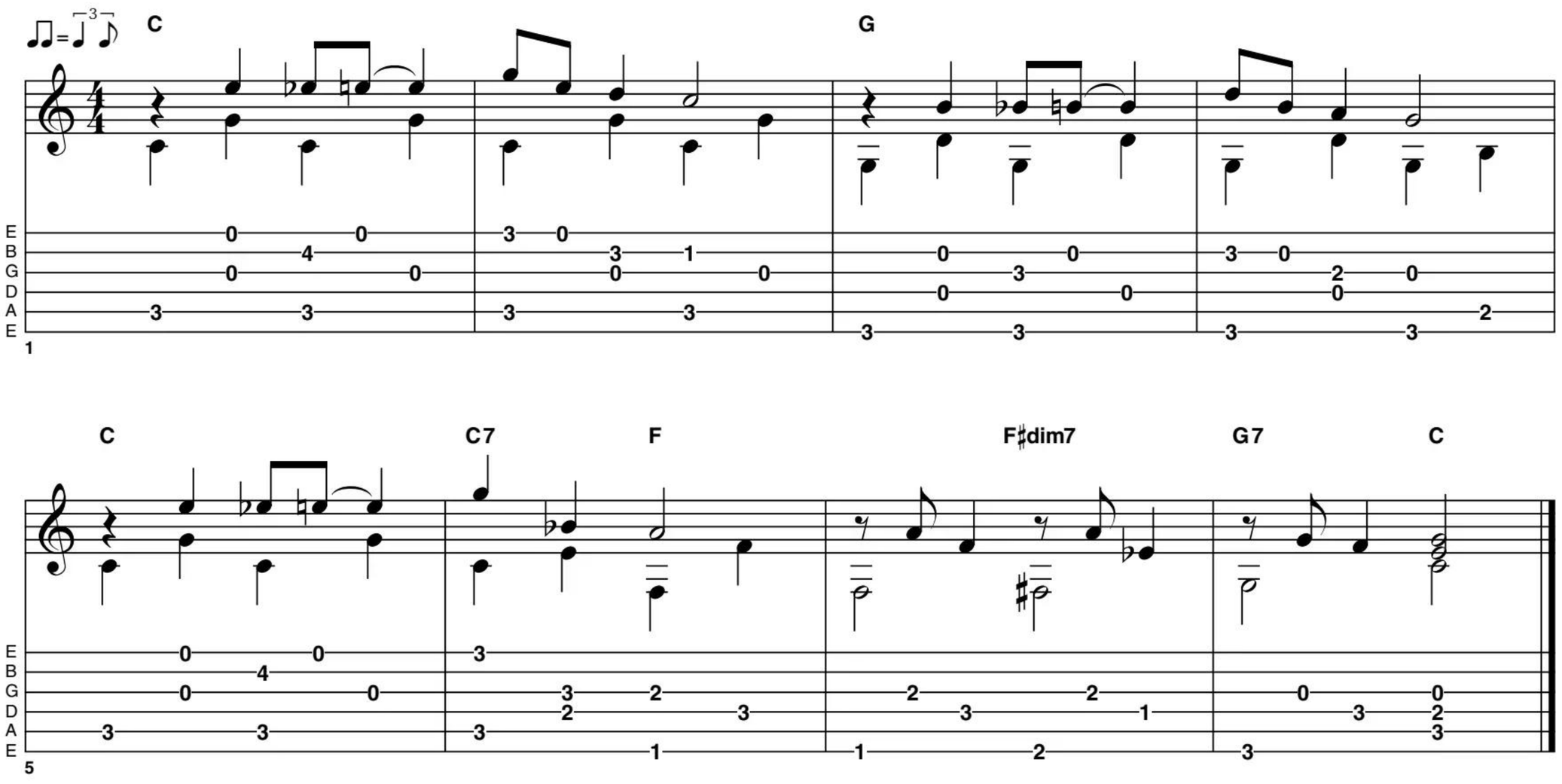
Blind Blake's style was highly individual and greatly admired. This ragtime style excerpt shows his sophisticated use of implied passing chords, and also how he would regularly pre-empt the beat by changing the chord early - which sounds very modern.





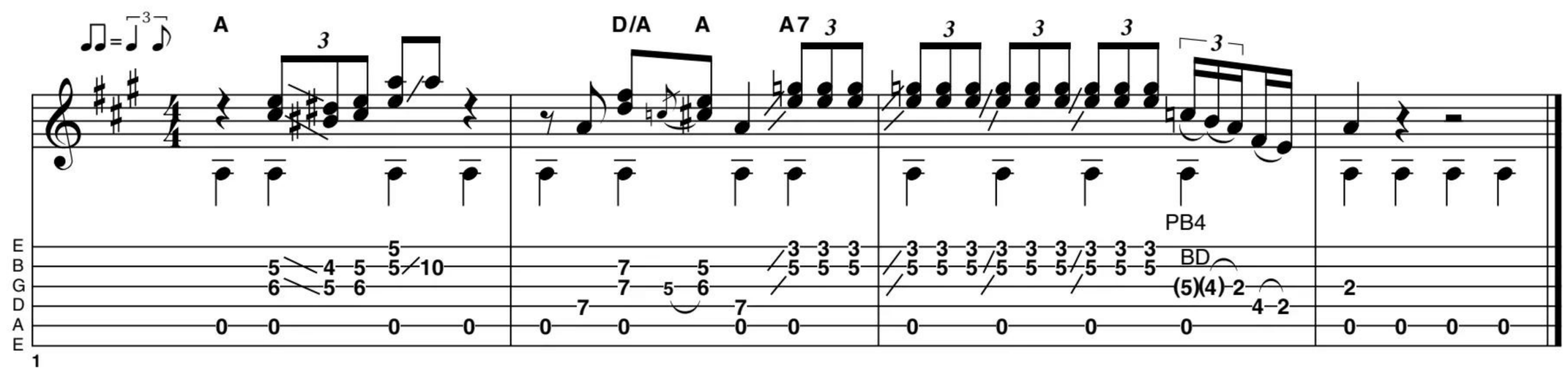
EXAMPLE 12 **REV GARY DAVIS**

Here, we recall the straightforward gospel-like harmony of the Reverend Gary Davis, using an alternating bass (played as ever, with the thumb) and incorporating 'blue notes' such as the minor 3rd, Eb in bar 1, which resolves up to the major, immediately afterwards.



EXAMPLE 13 **ERIC BIBB**

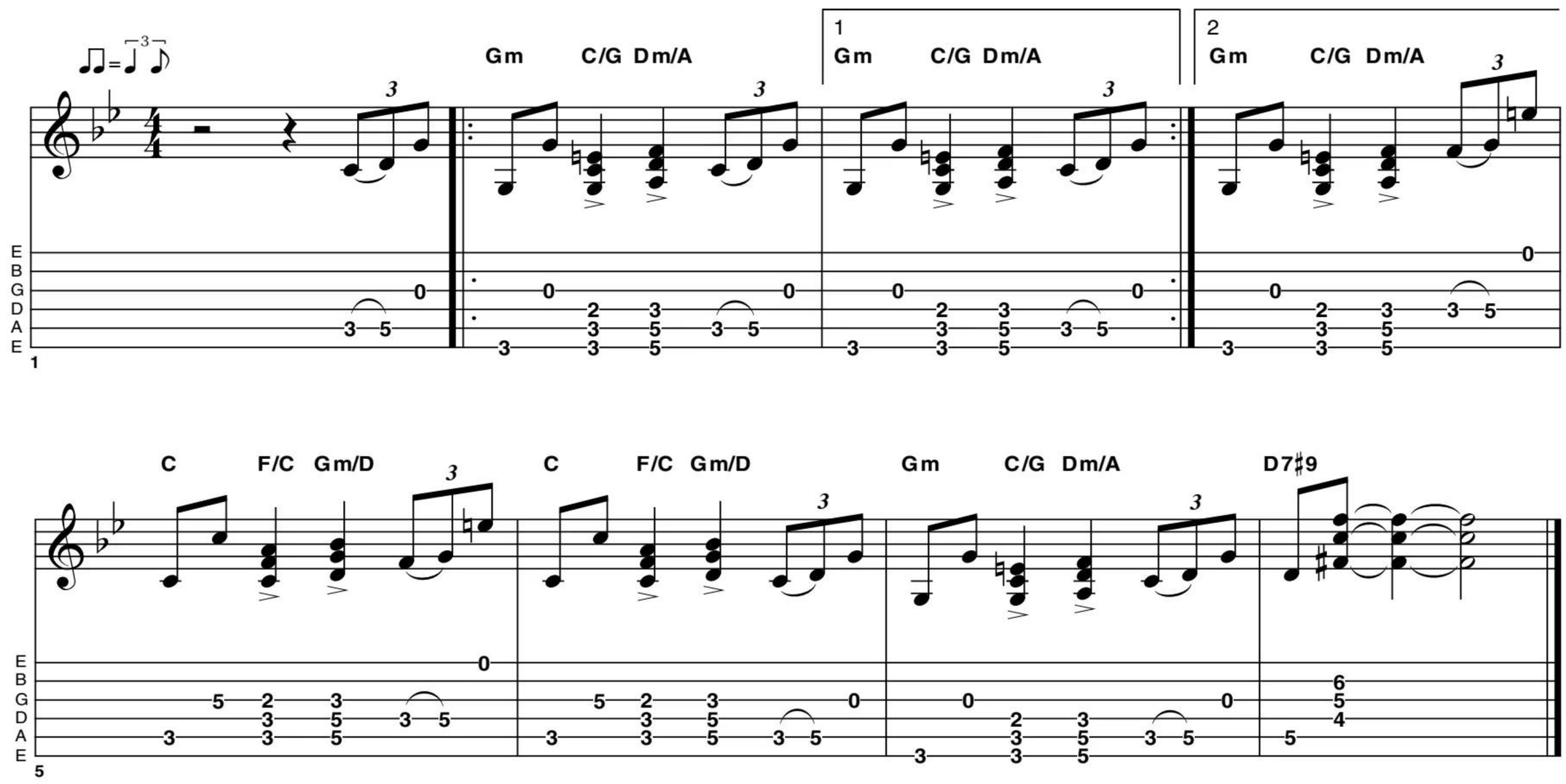
Eric Bibb's blues playing is fresh and sophisticated. This idea demonstrates his style of playing a slow, simple groove over which he sings, interspersed with Pentatonic and Mixolydian licks (R-2-3-4-5-6-b7). The tricky part is keeping the bass going through it all.



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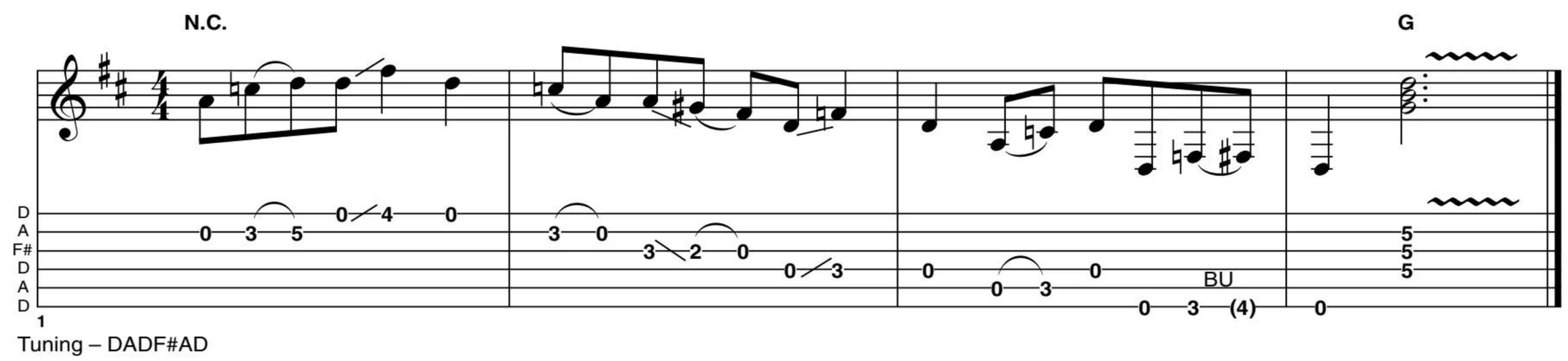
EXAMPLE 14 ERIC BIBB DORIAN GROOVE

This driving G Dorian groove (R-2-b3-4-5-6-b7) is typical of Eric Bibb's arresting solo style, which brilliantly melds the traditional with the sophisticated. Notice the unusual low-string chord voicings here.



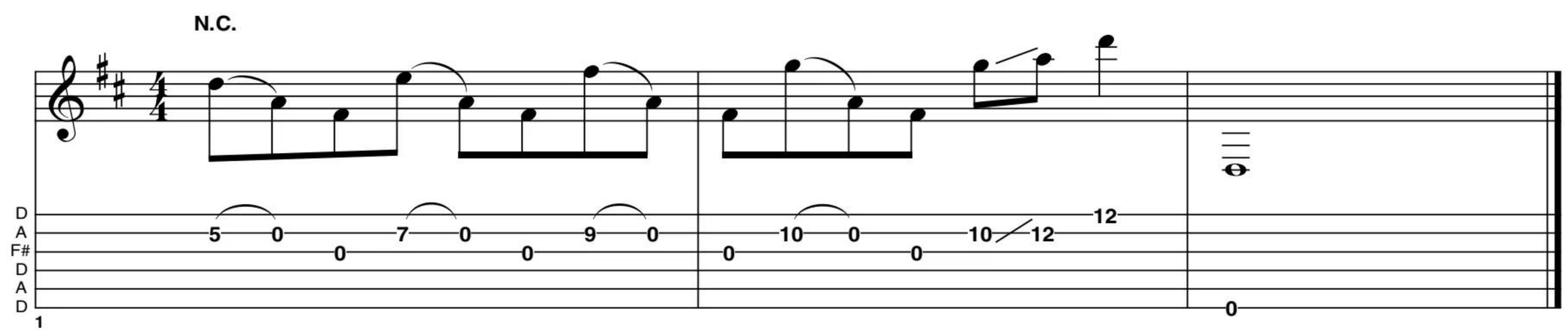
EXAMPLE 15 KELLY JOE PHELPS

Phelps is a slide guitar master, regularly playing in open D (D-A-D-F#-A-D) which is essentially the same as open E but with all the strings tuned down a tone from there. He plays licks where he switches from regularly fretted notes to notes played with the slide.



EXAMPLE 16 KELLY JOE PULL-OFFS

One of his favourite tricks is to play pulls-offs from notes played with the slide, such as in this example - be careful not to be too heavy-handed with the slide, as you don't want to push the notes all the way down to the fretwire.

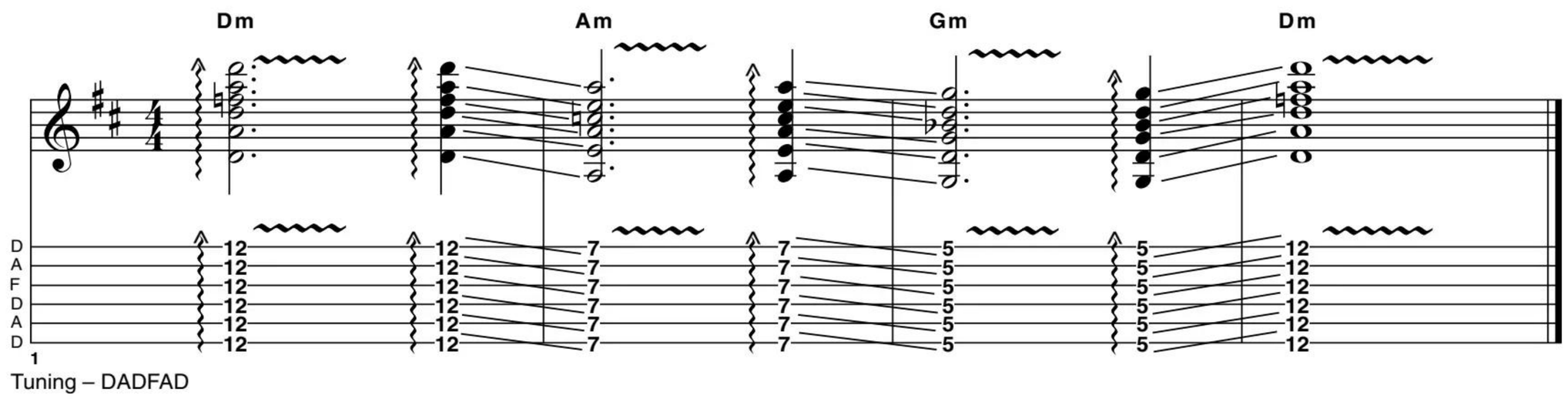




Eric Bibb: Modern, sophisticated blues singer, songwriter and guitarist

EXAMPLE 17 **MARTIN SIMPSON, RY COODER**

By lightly strumming behind the slide, providing you don't mute the strings as normal, you can create atmospheric chords - players like Martin Simpson and Ry Cooder like this technique. Use open Dm tuning here, also known as D-A-D-F-A-D.



Tuning – DADFAD
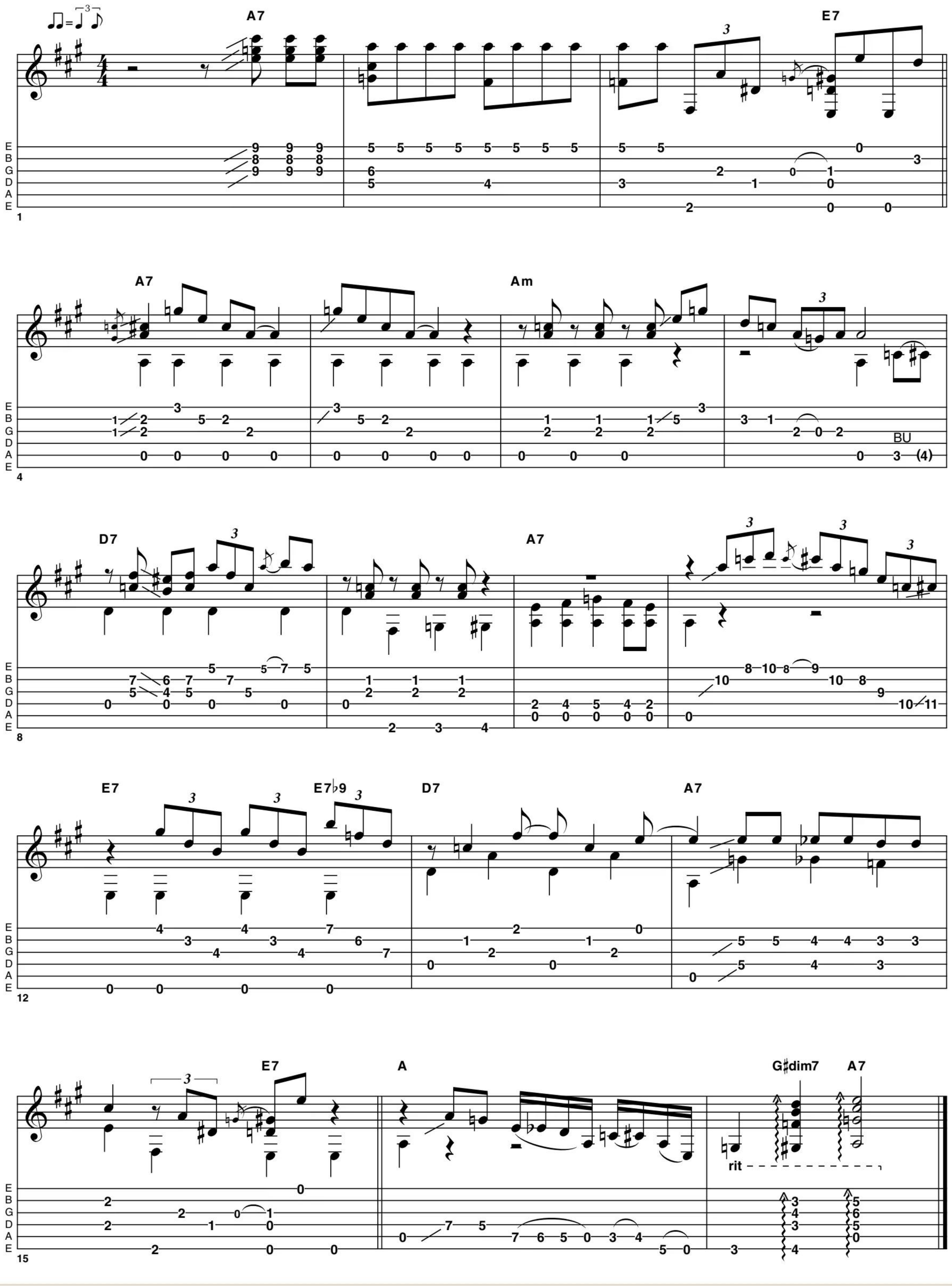
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EXAMPLE 18 **PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**

Here's a piece that I've concocted using a variety of the ideas from some of the guitarists featured in the rest of the article. When you've learnt this, why not put some of your personal favourite licks together and come up with something of your own?



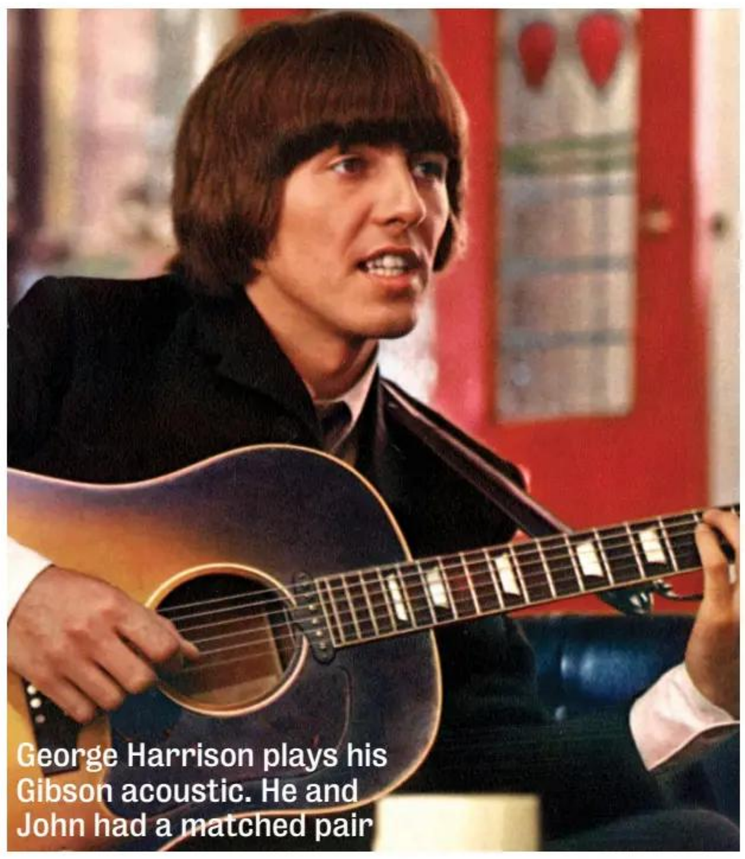


Kelly Joe Phelps: Another great modern acoustic blues virtuoso

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The Beatles' Acoustic Styles

From the beginning to the very end of their incredible career, many of The Beatles' greatest tracks were powered by acoustic guitar. We examine the styles of John, Paul and George.



George Harrison plays his Gibson acoustic. He and John had a matched pair

Info	Will improve your…
KEY Various	✔ Awareness of each style
TEMPO Various	✔ Accompaniment playing
	✔ Fingerstyle technique

While the success of The Beatles undoubtedly lies in their stunning melodies and lyrics, it's easy to forget that behind it all was an engine room featuring three guitarists with unique styles. When these styles combined with the songwriting talents of John, Paul and George, the result was music that was staggeringly well rounded. Of course, imagine the Fab Four on stage and you probably picture Paul and his Hofner bass and George and John with either Gretsch or Rickenbacker. However, at various points in the history of the group each of the three wrote and performed on acoustics. Here we aim to bring out key facets of each player's style and unique and idiosyncratic touches that meant the acoustic was a powerful writing tool in each of their hands.

> "Paul was influenced by Scottish folk singer Donovan, who showed all three Beatle pickers the classic fingerstyle"

Paul's acoustic playing often featured a 'thumb and strum' technique – he would pick a bass note with the thumb and follow this with a strum with the first finger. In this way he was able to create strong self-accompaniment patterns that covered both bass and chord duties. This may sound simple if you already have a well-established fingerstyle technique but it may be tricky to break out of the 'right' habits in order to employ this unorthodox style. One of the possible advantages of this way of playing is that the first finger strum gives a strong percussive quality to your playing, which makes for some great rhythmic dynamics (Yesterday, for example). However, Paul was also influenced by Scottish folk guitarist Donovan, who showed all three Beatle pickers some classic fingerstyle approaches. Paul's elegant, almost Baroque playing on Blackbird has been on every aspiring fingerpicker's performance wish list since it was first heard. And for good reason. The use of wide intervals (10ths) creates a full tapestry of sound that is not muddy and the combined picking of bass and treble strings makes for a great piece of fingerstyle guitar that could even have stood on its own as an instrumental.

John was more traditional in his approach, employing more of a 'p' 'i' 'm' picking pattern. Again the influence of Donovan was strong and in John's playing you will often hear the alternating bass pattern beloved of every fingerstylist – listen to Julia to hear this effect. John was also adept at fleet picking-hand patterns, again as evidenced by Julia, so if you are new to this style start slowly to build up strength and speed. Also listen to his solo performances and notice how strong the rhythmic element is – the guitar accompanies the voice but it is also the rhythm section and if that falls apart, all is lost. John can also be heard using a 'thumb and strum' approach although it seems that he would usually pluck a bass string with the thumb and then use a relaxed brush down the string with the picking hand 'ima' fingers.

George is often thought of as being the consummate guitarist within the group and without questions there is a sophistication and melodic content to his guitar parts – check out the chord progression to While My Guitar Gently Weeps (particularly the acoustic version on Anthology). George also used some great devices to make his guitar parts really stand out – not least his use of a capo at the 7th fret on Here Comes The Sun. This device gives his guitar sound a rich, sweet tone that really stands out in the mix and adds another dimension beyond simply playing in the open position. George's playing often features jazz influenced progressions and melody within his rhythm playing – listen to Here Comes The Sun for a great example of this.

Enjoy this glimpse into the styles of the three guitar-playing Beatles; hopefully, it will help when you come to learn their original parts, create arrangements of their pieces or even write your own 'in the style ofs'! **TS**



Get the tone

Each Beatle played a range of acoustic guitars. Paul used an Epiphone Texan (Yesterday) and a Martin D-28 (Blackbird). Early hits were powered by John's Gibson J160-E, and for nylon works a Ramirez A-1, with a Framus for 12-string and later a Martin D-28. George also used J160-E and a Ramirez, and on later albums a Gibson J-200 and various Martins. He was also a fan of custom-built guitars by Tony Zemaitis. The above settings are a guide for when using acoustic amps, so adjust to taste.
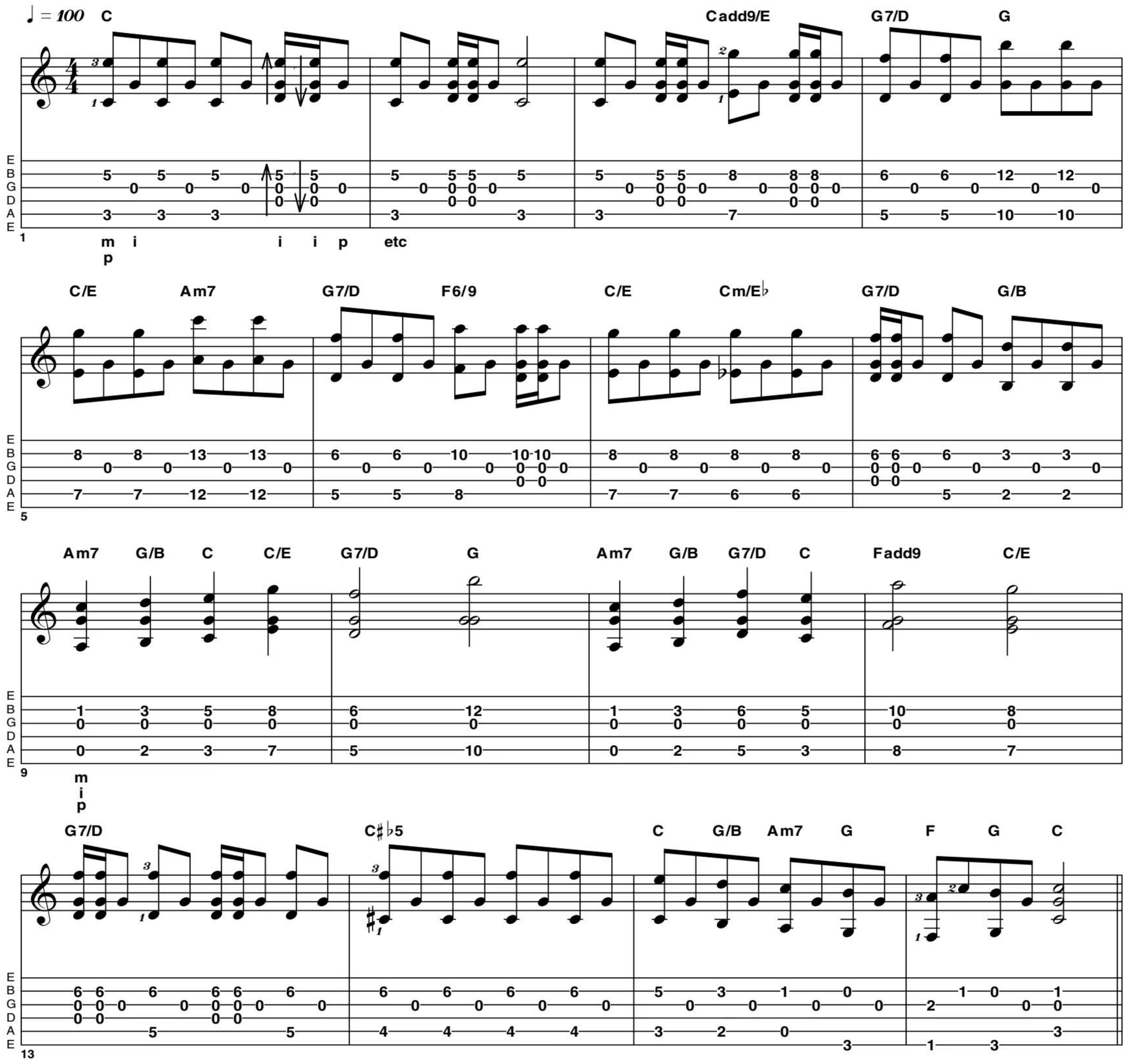


LISTENING SUGGESTIONS Everybody should listen to everything The Beatles ever did, but choice acoustic cuts include Blackbird, And I Love Her and Yesterday from Paul; Norwegian Wood, Julia and the acoustic version of Imagine from John; and for George try Here Comes The Sun, Long Long Long and the anthology version of While My Guitar Gently Weeps. Of course, each Beatle's solo career is littered with great acoustic guitar parts.

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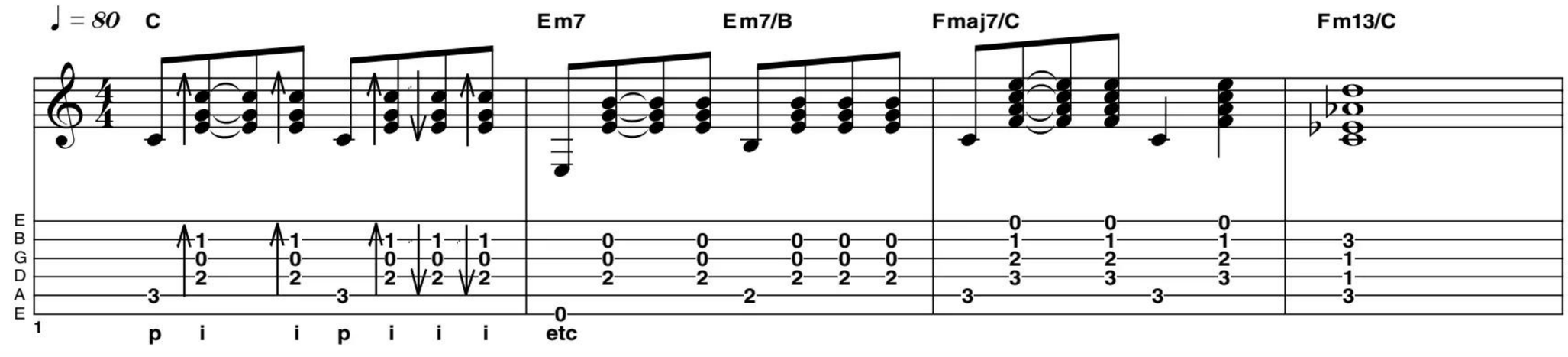
EXAMPLE 1 **PAUL STYLE**

[Bar 1] This is a study in intervals of 10ths (a 3rd plus an octave), which gave Paul a distinctive, almost Baroque sound. The fingerpicking technique allows you to pluck the bass and treble strings together and Paul would often also employ a down and upstroke strum with the picking hand first finger.
[Bar 5] The same techniques are being employed here, but watch out for some pretty big jumps up and down the fretboard at points like this. Try keeping the fretting hand fingers on the strings so you can move up and down smoothly.
[Bar 9] A slower movement here, but work to make sure all the chords are clean and the movement smooth.
[Bar 14] The dissonance here acts as a great piece of tension and release.



EXAMPLE 2 **PAUL STYLE**

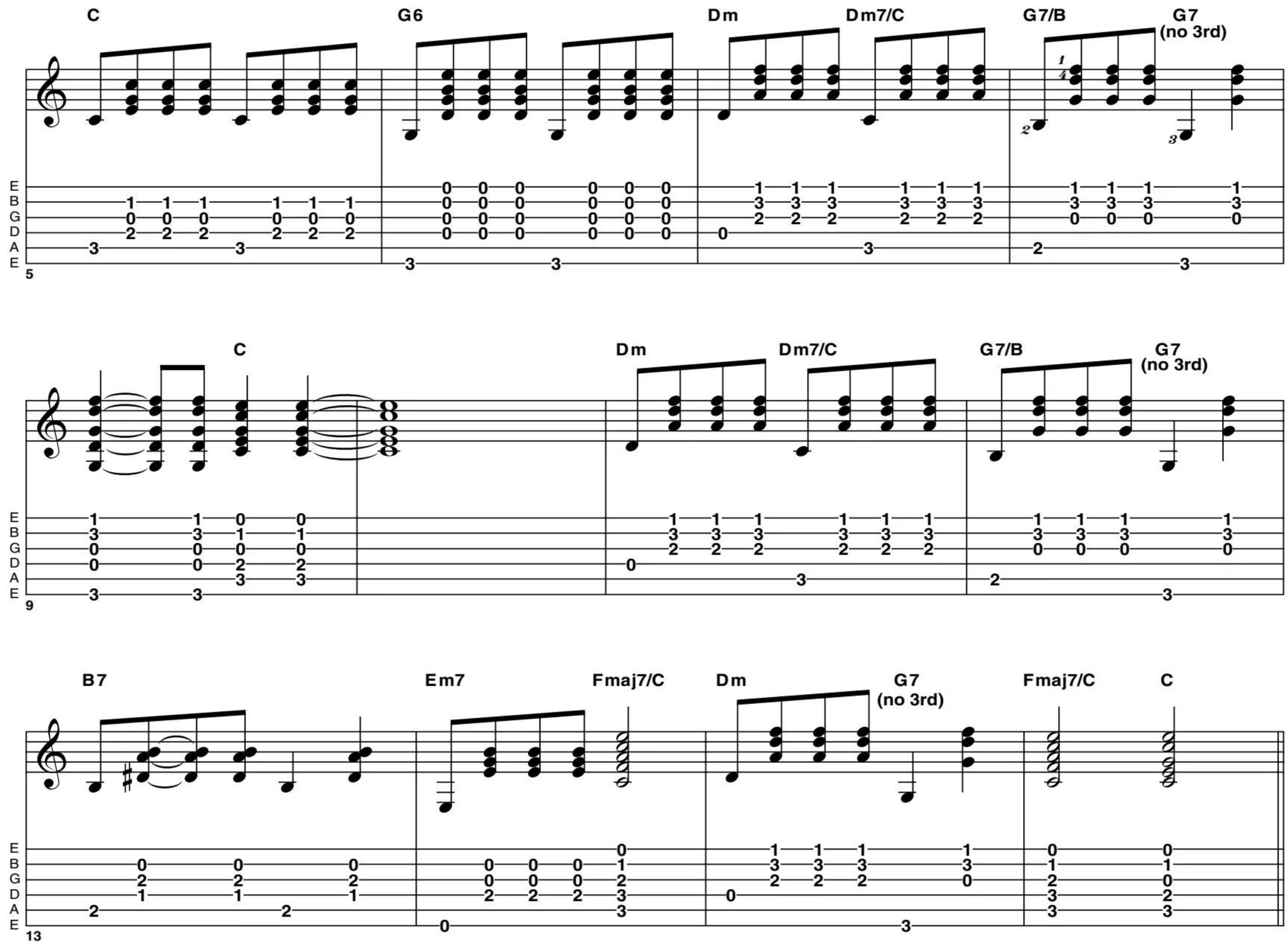
[Bar 1] Here we are focusing on Paul's 'thumb and strum' technique on a long chord progression. The thumb plucks the bass string and then the first finger is used to strum the chord with a combination of down and upstrokes (though feel free to reverse the order if it feels more comfortable).
[Bar 4] Here's another great use of unexpected dissonance as the technically 'correct' major chord (F) briefly becomes minor – again, tension and release.
[Bar 5] The rhythm is slightly different here but you can still employ the 'alternate flicking' strumming pattern with the first finger.



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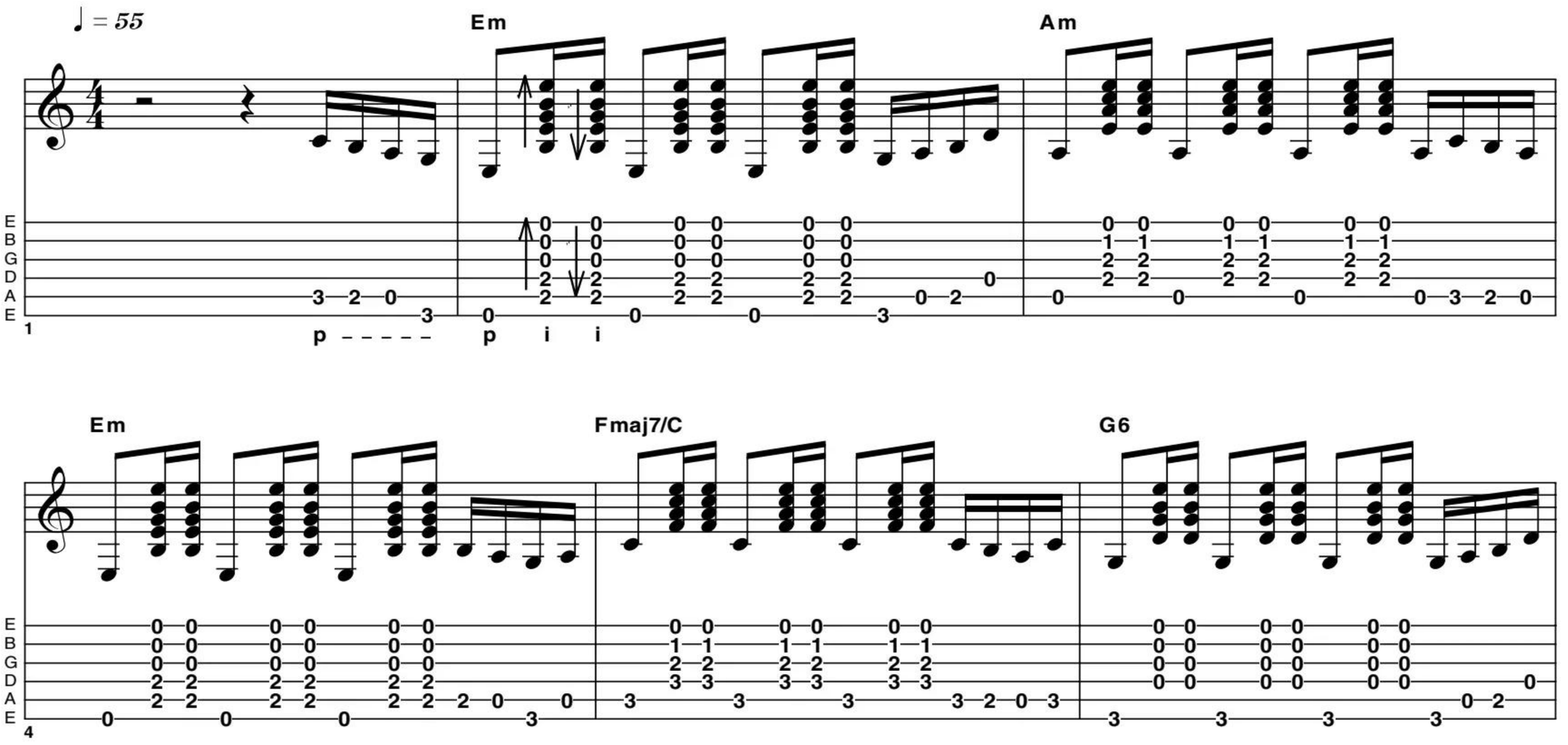
EXAMPLE 2 **PAUL STYLE** ...CONTINUED



EXAMPLE 3 **PAUL STYLE**

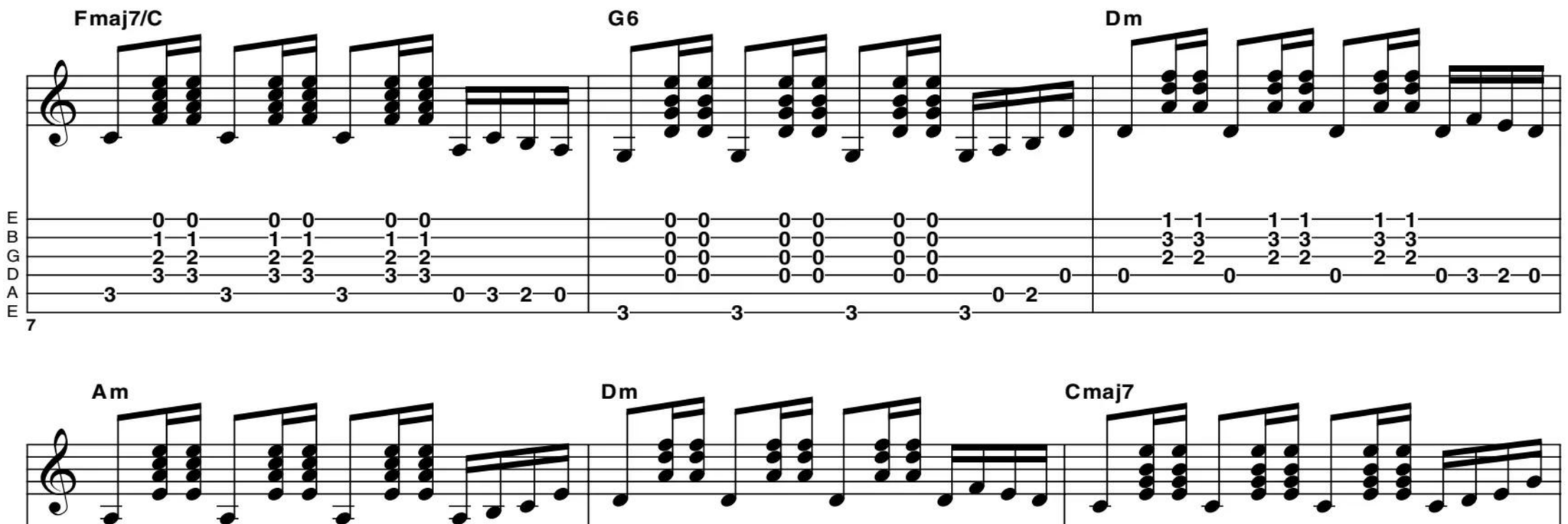
[Bar 1] Although the 'thumb and strum' technique is still in place here we now have a bass run which punctuates the change between each chord – for this example, pluck all the bass notes with the picking hand thumb, leaving the first finger free to strum the remaining strings containing the 'chord' part.

[Bar 6] Each Beatle used chords wonderfully, and even slight variations like this use of a major 6 instead of a standard major helped elevate their songwriting and give their playing more personality. Think of the final vocal harmony in She Loves You; copied by The Hollies (I'm Alive) and Roxy Music (Love Is The Drug).



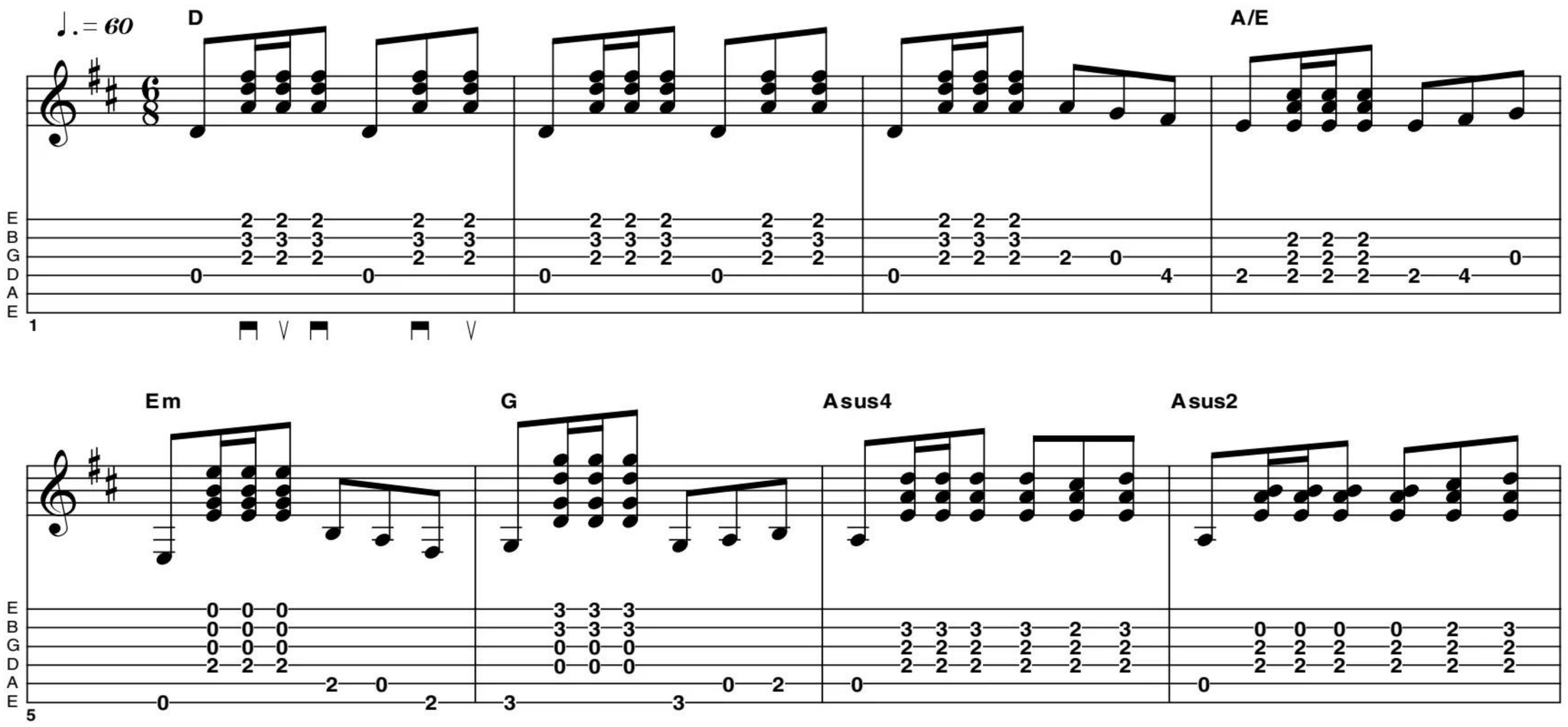
EXAMPLE 3 **PAUL STYLE** ...

[Bar 16] As before, a major 6 chord finishes things off (the note A in the chord of C is the major 6th; in the chord of F it's D, in the chord of G it's E, and so on). If these chord types aren't yet in your vocabulary then make sure you spend some time learning the shapes for both minor and major 6th chords, and get your ears used to how they sound – they will help in your own ability to work out the chords in other people's songs.



EXAMPLE 1 **JOHN STYLE**

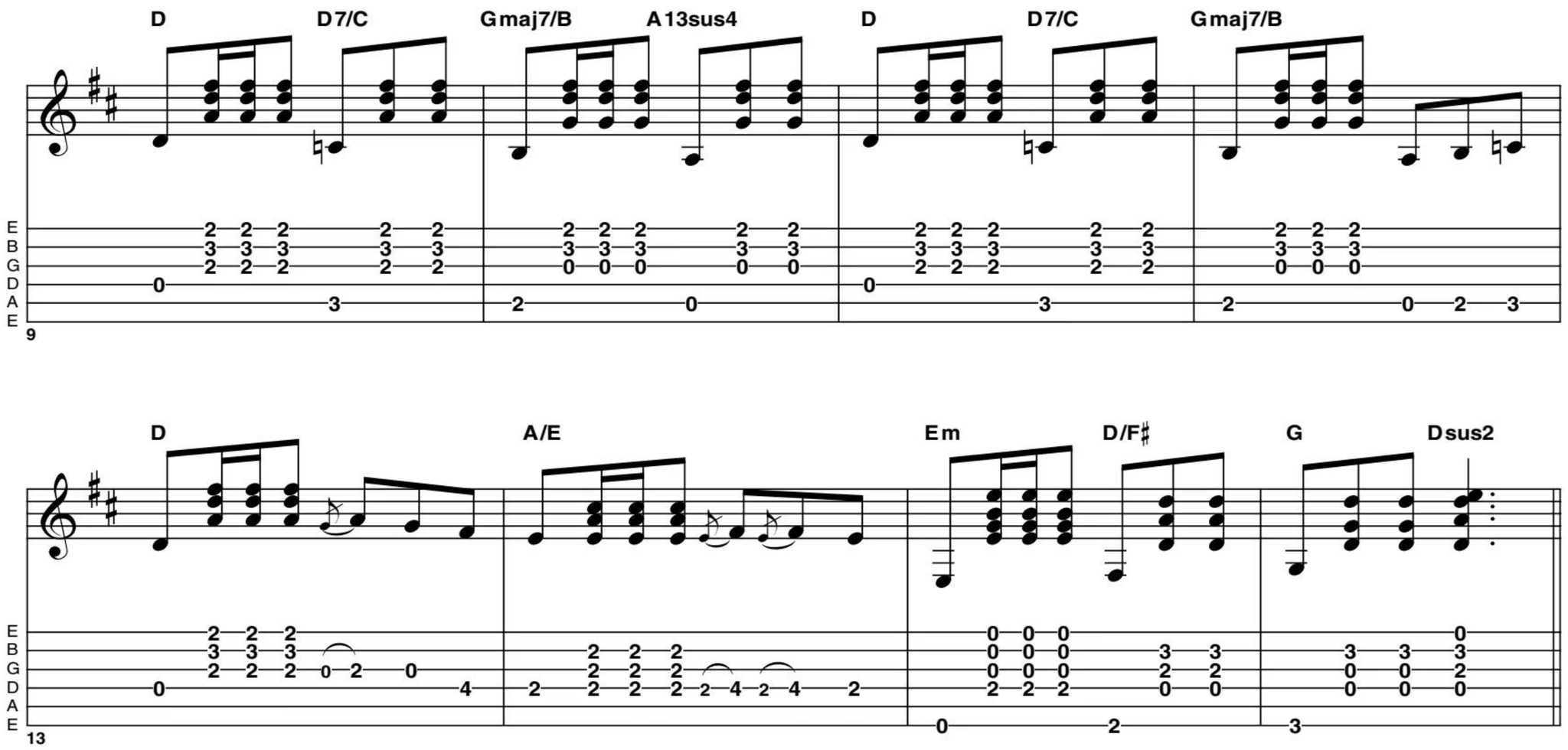
[Bar 1] The 6/8 time signature gives things a different feel and was a metre that John employed in several songs. Pick the bass notes with the thumb but this time instead of using the first finger to strum the chords you can employ a light brush of the 'i', 'm' and 'a' fingers. Just ensure that the strumming hand is relaxed so you are not too strident when you strike the strings.
[Bar 3] The runs between each chord can be sounded with the picking hand thumb throughout; just make sure that you keep the timing even when moving from strumming several strings to picking just one.



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EXAMPLE 1 **JOHN STYLE** ...CONTINUED

[Bar 7] Here we find the use of sus2 and sus4 voicings, which add another character (these chords do not feature a major or minor third giving them a 'suspended' sound). To see how distinctive this sound can be, listen to George's opening chord on A Hard Day's Night: a G9sus4.
[Bar 13] Watch out for the grace notes here – the challenge is to hardly sound them and to keep the timing in place.

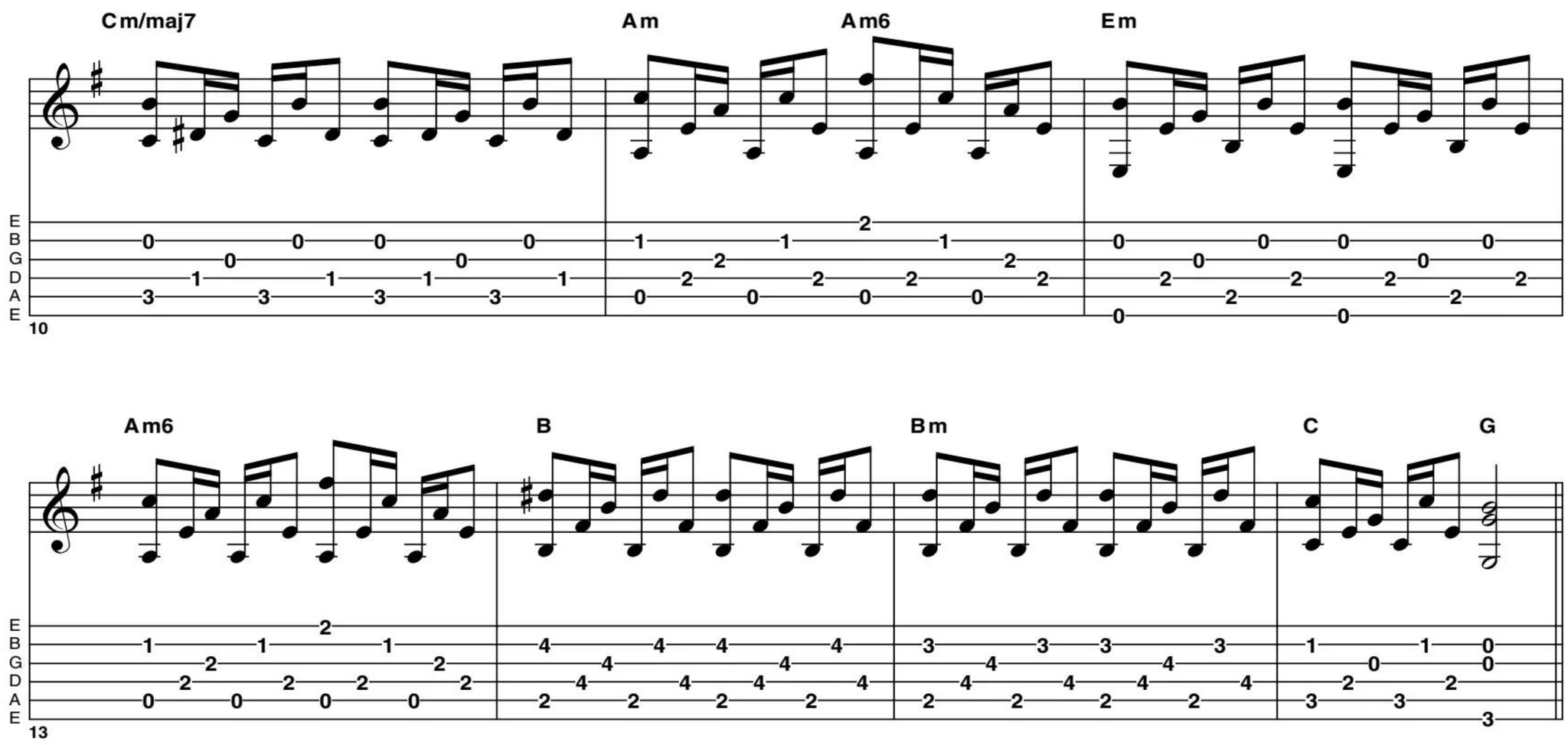


EXAMPLE 2 **JOHN STYLE**

[Bar 1] This example really highlights the influence that Donovan had on John's fingerpicking style. Clean playing and a strong rhythmic drive are the essential elements here and it's a real workout for the 'p' ,'i' and 'm' fingers.
[Bar 3] Make sure you change smoothly from the Em in the previous bar to this B minor chord; you don't actually have to use a barre at the 2nd fret but it may help to even things out if you do.
[Bar 5] Another shift from a major chord to its parallel minor, in this case a minor chord that contains a major 7th (Cm/maj7).

EXAMPLE 2 **JOHN STYLE** ...CONTINUED

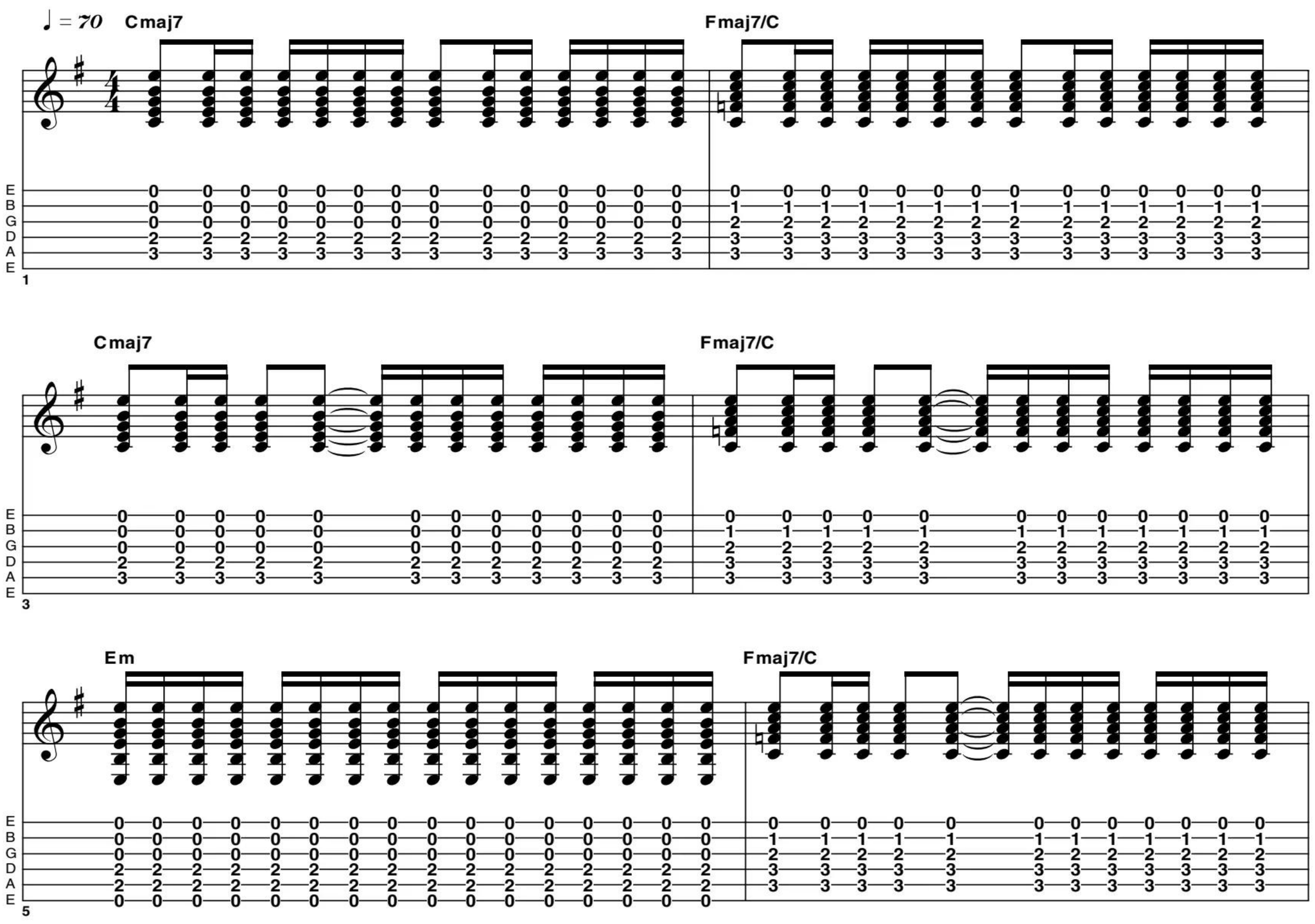
[Bar 11] All of a sudden there is a note on the first string, so I would recommend striking this one with the 'a' finger on your picking hand. John's thinking was perhaps the most unorthodox of the three guitar-playing Beatles and his playing style and chord choices underline this.



EXAMPLE 3 **JOHN STYLE**

[Bar 1] This exercise actually tips the hat to John's post-Beatles work and showcases how he would approach strumming a chord sequence. You may want to use the relaxed 'ima' strumming approach as per the earlier example. But you may also use a pick if that feels more comfortable.

[Bar 5] The chords are not a problem here but the tricky thing can be maintaining a steady 16th note rhythm (1-e-and-a-2-e-and-a) at these slower speeds, particularly if you are playing unaccompanied. George and John both honed their rhythm skills in long playing stints in Hamburg clubs.

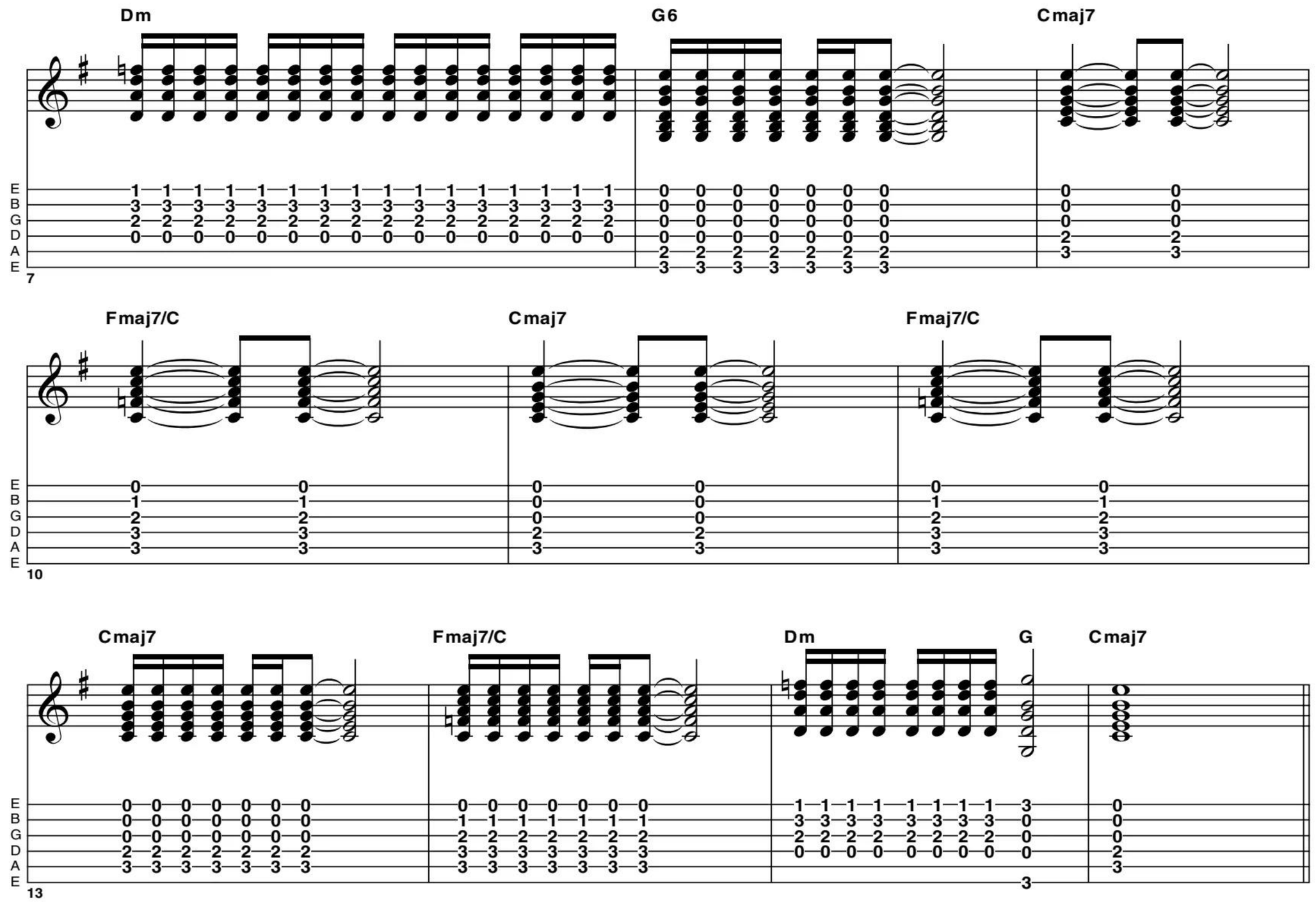


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EXAMPLE 3 **JOHN STYLE** ...CONTINUED

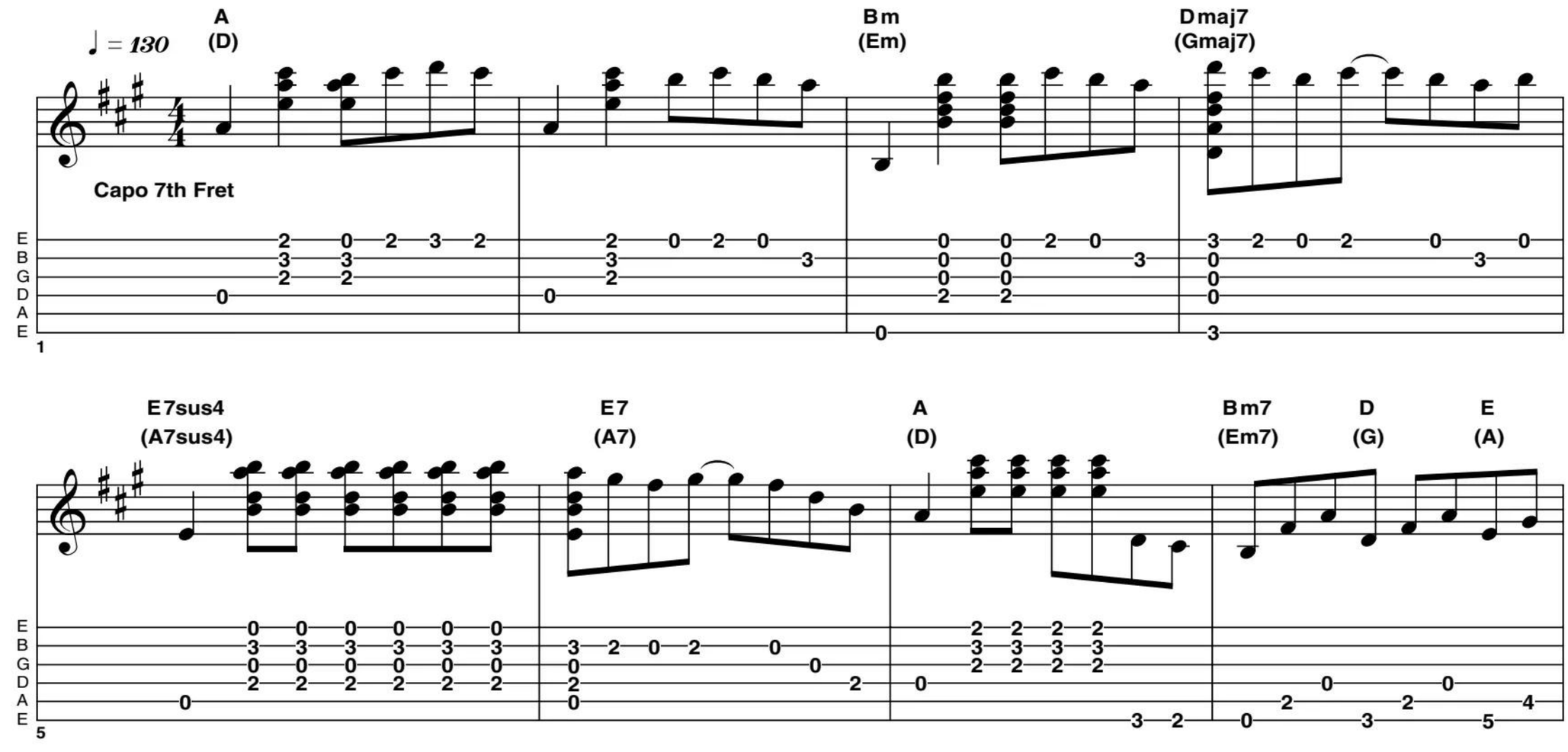
[Bar 9] And on that note here the rhythm changes, so you have to hold the chords longer – you may find it useful to count on sections like this so you don't lose the sense of where the beat is.

[Bar 16] The major 7th chords here serve to give this example a softer sound and these 'jazzier' sounding chords were a real hallmark of much of The Beatles' playing - even though they didn't use them in a 'jazzy' way.

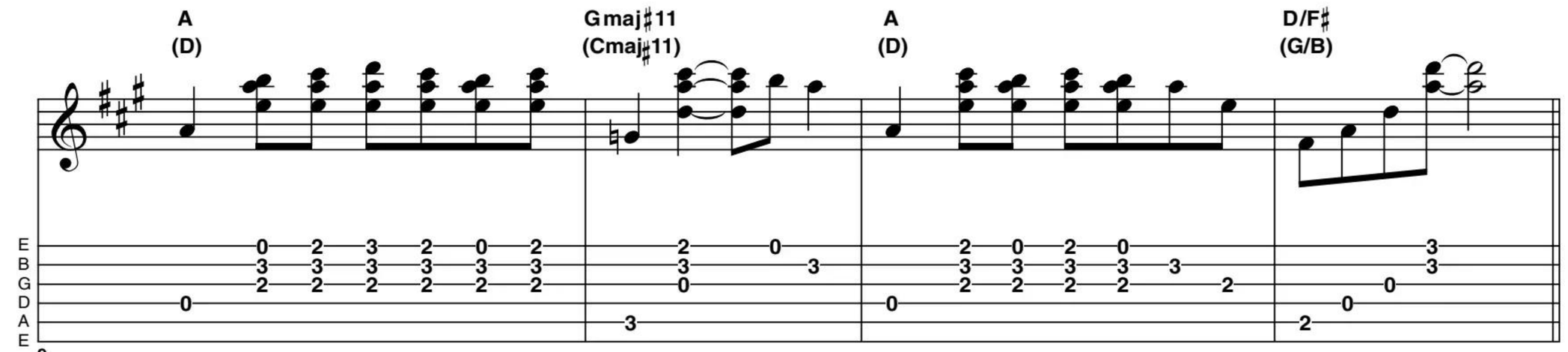


EXAMPLE 1 **GEORGE STYLE**

[Bar 1] Notice how the capo really sweetens the sound and these ideas take on a freshness and brighter character, which can really suit a tune.
[Bar 2] A characteristic George device was to play around a particular chord shape in order to maximise its melodic potential – indeed his guitar parts often feel like they are written by a 'guitarist's guitarist'!
[Bar 8] This type of idea almost serves as a riff and was a device George would use on a bridge or transition from one part of the song to another. He would also sometimes play parts like this as octaves.
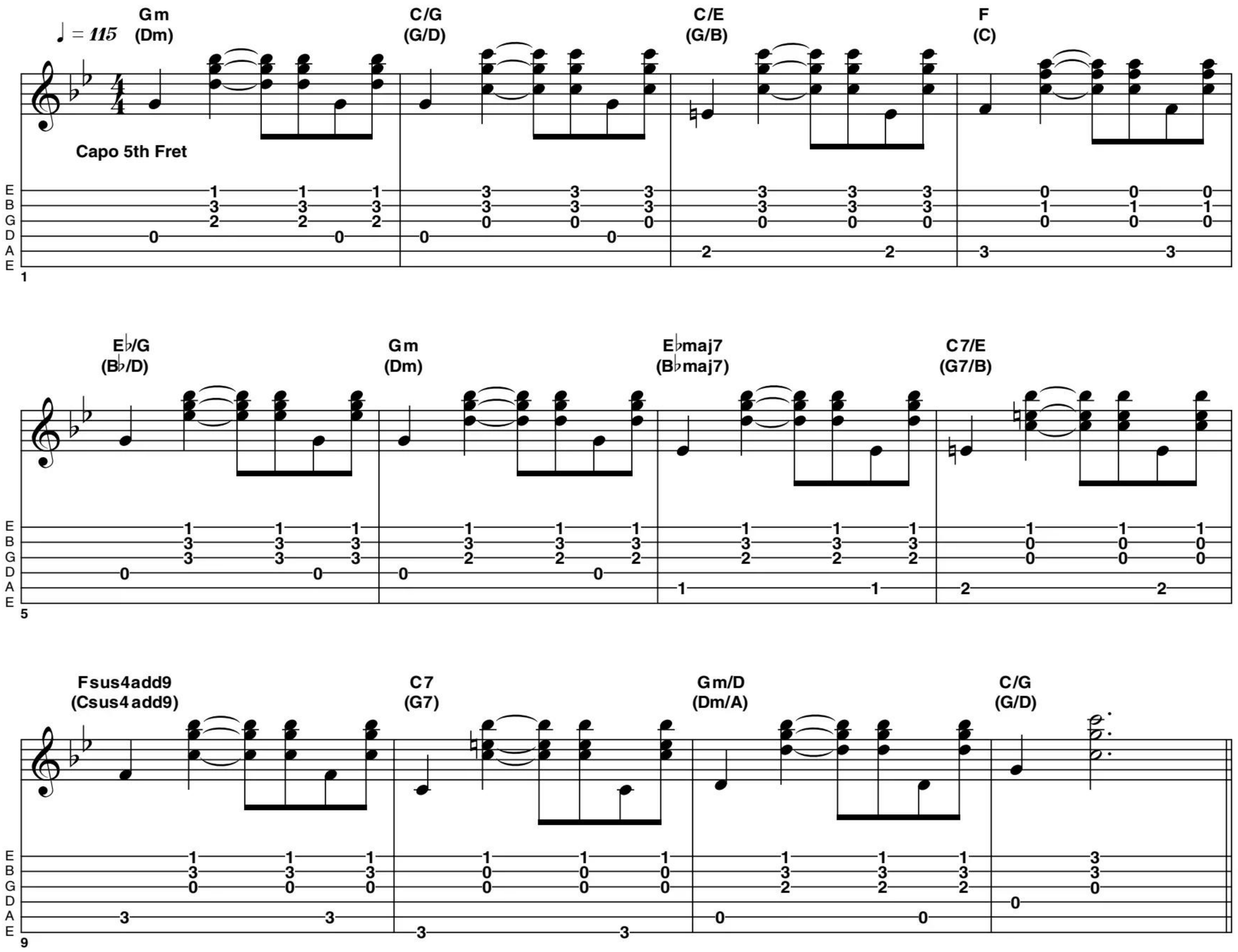


EXAMPLE 1 **GEORGE STYLE** ...CONTINUED



EXAMPLE 2 **GEORGE STYLE**

[Bar 1] You can employ a more traditional fingerstyle approach on this one. Use the picking hand thumb for the bass notes then pluck the three-note chords with the 'ima' fingers on the picking hand.
[Bar 3] Listen for the bass notes as well – the bass note of the chord does not have to be its root, something which good players and songwriters can use to their advantage, particularly on pieces that employ an ascending or descending bass line.
[Bar 5] The chords here are built from the notes of two different types of G minor scale, G Dorian (G-A-B♭-C-D-E-F) and G natural minor (G-A-B♭-C-D-E♭-F), hence the use of both C and E♭ chords in the sequence.



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Bob Dylan

This section is devoted to that great band of players who write, sing and play their own songs. Here's our tip of the hat to a true legend...



Bob Dylan: the archetypal protest singing folk guitarist

Info

KEY G
TEMPO 95 bpm

Will improve your...

- ✔ General strumming
- ✔ Rapid chord changing
- ✔ Overall timekeeping

Bob Dylan is one of a select group of musicians belonging to a pantheon of songwriting 'greats'. While Paul McCartney would sometimes bring the guitar to the fore with fleet finger work on tracks such as Blackbird, for Dylan the guitar usually plays more of an accompaniment role via simple strumming patterns – although he can play folk fingerstyle 'Travis' picking guitar with the best of 'em.

As often as not, though, his powerful rhythm playing serves to act as the engine room for his songwriting, propelling his compositions along. It's worth noting that Dylan's acoustic rhythm playing in many ways defines the American folk sound of the 60s – never intrusive but always solid and serving as a perfect backdrop to the song, its lyrics and melody.

Born Robert Zimmerman on May 24th 1941 in Minnesota, Dylan's early influences were rock and roll artists like Little Richard and Buddy Holly. It was when he went to the University of Minnesota in 1959 that he developed a passion for American folk music, drawn by its melancholy and depth. As with many folk artists of the 1960s, inspiration came in the form of Woody Guthrie (see page 81), whom Dylan befriended. Dylan was also influenced by Ramblin' Jack Elliott and lent his harmonica playing to Elliot's recordings. These associations brought Dylan to the attention of Columbia Records producer John Hammond, and Dylan released his self-titled debut in 1962. However it was 1963's The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan that began to bring him attention, laden as it was with cut-to-the-quick protest songs that would become essential listening.

We cannot avoid the controversy regarding Bob Dylan 'going electric' in 1965. Where today it seems frankly ridiculous that audiences would be so outraged about an artist plugging in, at the 65 Newport Folk Festival Bob's appearance with an electric guitar was met with vehement boos and Dylan subsequently faced staunch criticism from the folk community, many of whom he had regarded as his friends.

> "His powerful rhythm playing serves as the engine room, propelling his compositions along"

Dylan's style is simple, but if you are new to strumming then it's essential you get these techniques in place. There will be subtle touches that can make things tricky for the beginner – quick chord changes or bass notes used to connect chords can confound every guitarist's early ambitions. Even seasoned players can use a strumming brush-up occasionally.

Start off by learning this one very slowly and then try putting it altogether over the backing track. The tempo is fairly brisk and serves to illustrate that, even with simple material, getting it all in place can be a challenge. **SR**



Get the tone

Dylan has used a variety of acoustic guitars including Gibson's small-bodied Nick Lucas and jumbo-sized J-200 in the early days. Various Martin models have also figured in the line-up. Any guitar will work fine for these examples, but make sure you strum with conviction – a heavy pick will lend the harder attack most appropriate here; a thinner plectrum provides a softer tone.
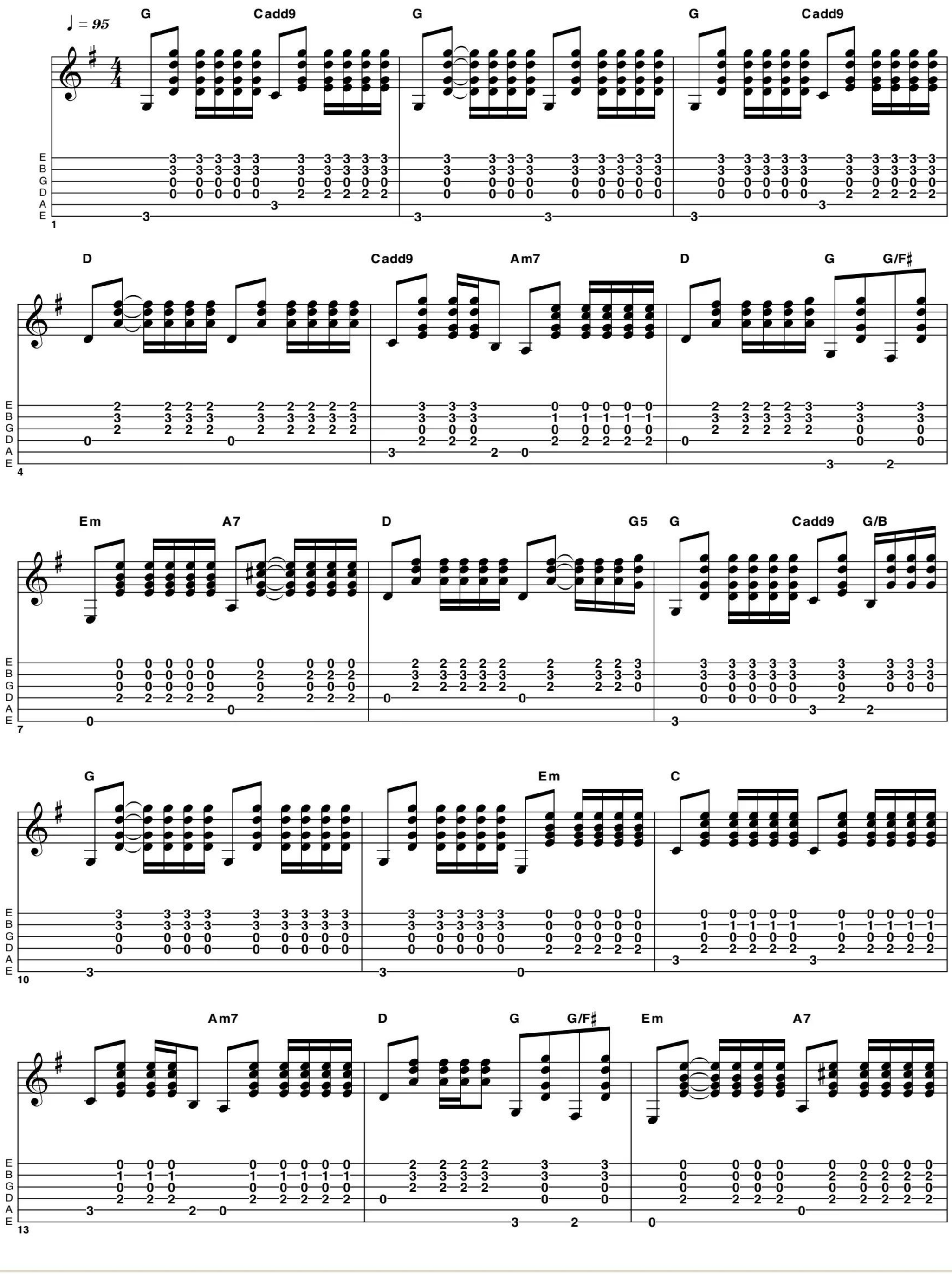


LISTENING SUGGESTIONS **For Dylan's earlier acoustic work you can't go wrong with The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan, which contains the classic Blowin' In The Wind. Follow this with 1964's The Times They Are A Changin' – his first album to contain all self-penned material. If you want to hear the Dylan influence on The Beatles look no further than the album Help! His chord style is all over John Lennon's songs in particular.**

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EXAMPLE **BOB DYLAN STYLE**

[Bar 1] When changing from the open G to the open C just move the first and second fingers from the G chord and you are left with this lovely Cadd9.
[Bar 6] Another device common to Dylan and acoustic artists of all ages is the descending bassline, in this case the G on the 3rd fret of the sixth string moving to the F# at the 2nd fret and finally to the open sixth string for the Em.

[Bar 8] One to look out for here is how we can 'anticipate' the change from the D to the G by quickly playing this fragmented C chord on the top three strings to ease our movement back into the G chord; it's all about breathing space here. Think of songs like Wonderwall by Oasis or You've Got To Hide Your Love Away by The Beatles to see how these ideas have been adopted and adapted.
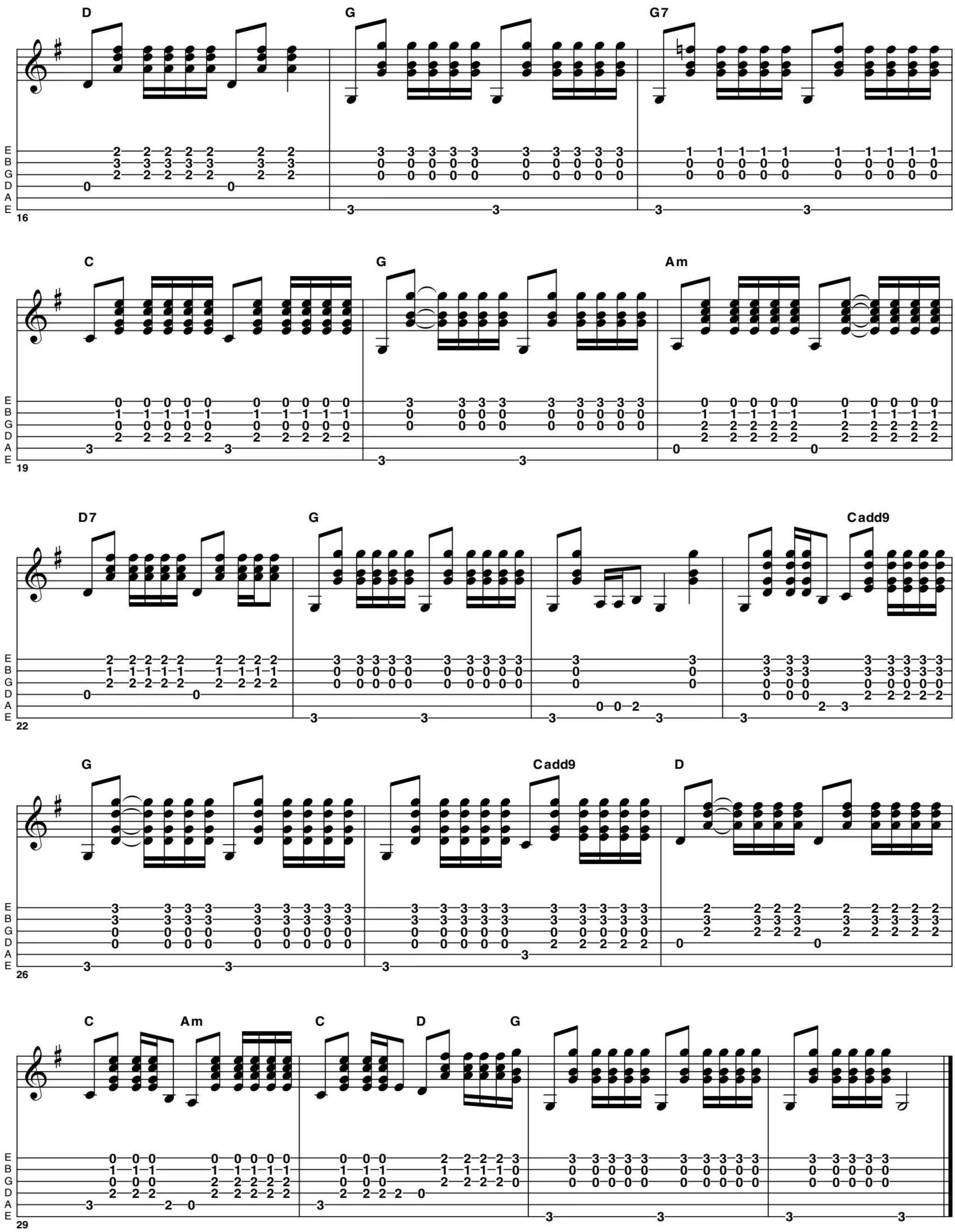


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EXAMPLE **BOB DYLAN STYLE**

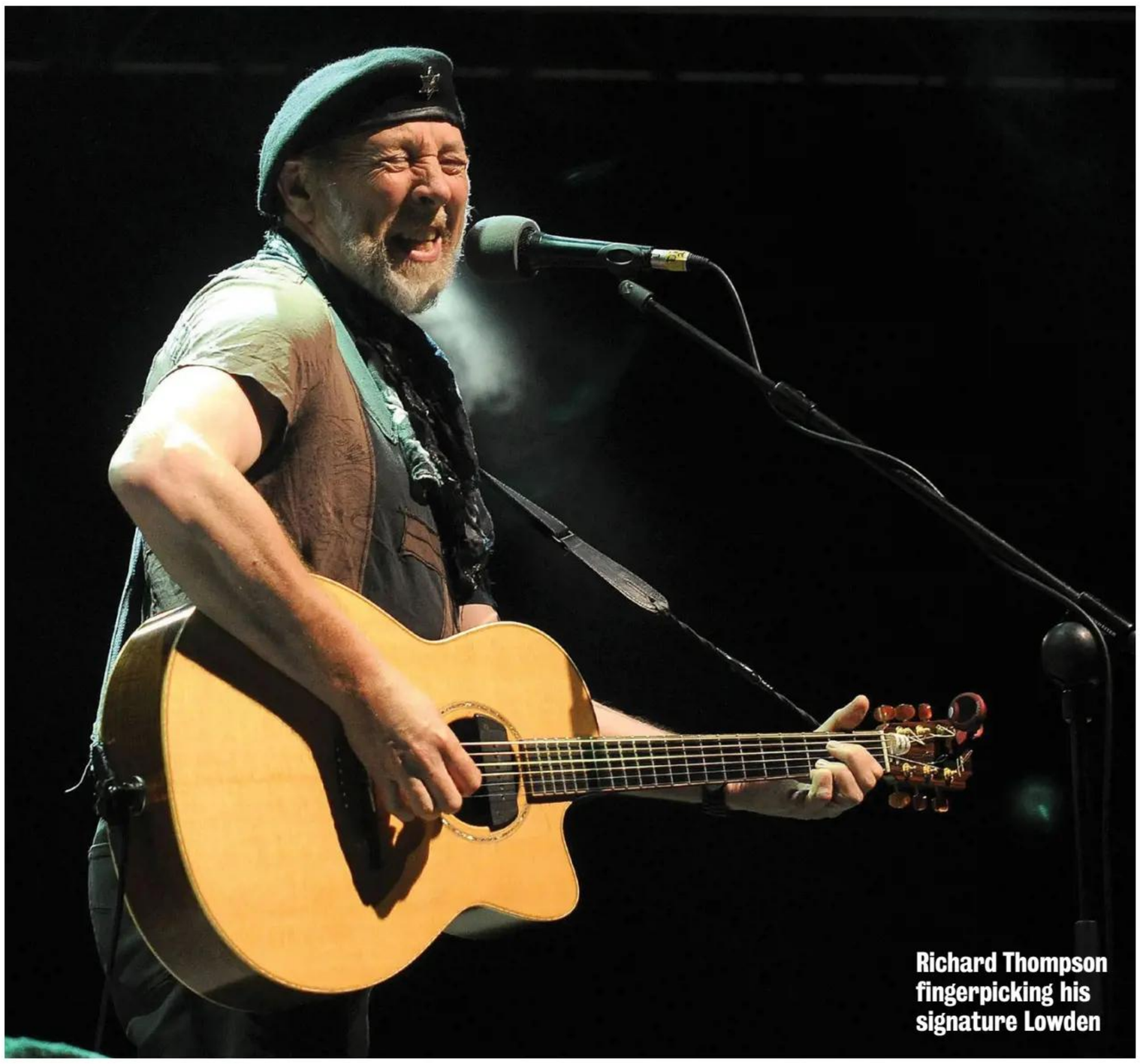
[Bar 18] This G7 chord shape is something that Dylan himself used and works well with the preceding open G. Make sure you have the correct fingering here – for G, try the third finger of the fretting hand to play the 3rd fret on the sixth string and the fourth finger to fret the first string at the 3rd fret. This will then make the first finger available to G7's F note on the 1st fret, first string.

[Bar 24] A few simple bass notes give some breathing space here; just make sure you are able to play them cleanly and in time before jumping back into the chords. You'll find it's all too easy to rush these things.
[Bar 30] Another simple bass run after the C chord; learning and adapting these runs for all the chords of the open position would be a great idea.



Richard Thompson

Fifty years of virtuoso picking and Richard Thompson is still wowing audiences with his unique and inspiring fingerstyle technique.



Richard Thompson fingerpicking his signature Lowden

Info

KEY D major
TEMPO 103 bpm

Will improve your…

- ✔ Playing in 6/8 time
- ✔ Note embellishments
- ✔ Incorporating bass notes

Growing up in 50s England, Richard Thompson was surrounded by a disparate set of influences. He absorbed the music of the legends he discovered among his father's jazz record collection: Django Reinhardt, Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington – while his tastes were also dramatically shaped by the rock and roll artists he heard emanating from his sister's radio. The early jazz influence was soon combined with the sounds of Buddy Holly and Jerry Lee Lewis meaning that the young Thompson was destined to create a unique approach to making music. Add in a burgeoning interest in blues, traditional Celtic styles plus English folk, and you have the makings of a pioneering, multi-voiced artist.

Thompson burst on to the English music scene in the late 60s via his band Fairport Convention, whose wild fusion of English folk and American blues ushered in a new sound. After finding success with Fairport he decided to go it alone and in 1972 showcased his already considerable abilities as singer-songwriter and instrumentalist on his first solo release, Henry The Human Fly. More solo works followed, mostly in collaboration with his then wife, folk singer Linda Peters – the most renowned being, I Want To See The Bright Lights Tonight (1974). The Celtic sound came to the fore with uptempo fingerpicked parts accompanying his plaintive, well thought-out lyrics. Cementing his position as an acoustic virtuoso, he explored an all-instrumental set on 1981's Strict Tempo, which focused on traditional music from the British Isles and North Africa. The release of Rumor And Sigh in 1991 introduced the world to his acoustic tour de force: 1952 Black Vincent Lightning, in celebration of a vintage British motorcycle dear to Thompson's heart.

Today, Thompson is as busy and popular as ever and a whole new generation of fingerpickers is discovering his virtuoso technique, including his not inconsiderably successful son Teddy. He often tours solo,

> "A true original, Thompson is worthy of an in-depth study if you are a fan of first-rate playing"

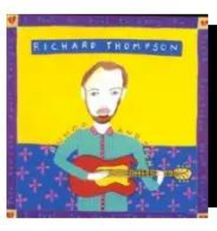
heading up festival bills, but he can also be seen accompanied by his old friend, legendary bassist Danny Thompson. His musical range is vast and goes from the English folk to wistful Celtic styles and even covers of The Who and Britney Spears.

Although often seen in an electric context it is the image of Thompson fingerpicking his trusty Lowden L27f that is most prevalent – so much so, Lowden has honoured him with a signature model. A true original, Richard Thompson is worthy of an in-depth study if you are a fan of first-rate acoustic playing. **SR**



Get the tone

Thompson is most known for playing his signature model Lowden F (Fingerstyle) model. While any guitar will work fine here something with a crisp, warm tone will help get that Celtic sound across. Use the above settings as a guide should you be plugging into an acoustic amp. These examples also sound great on a clean electric guitar tone with a splash of chorus and echo.
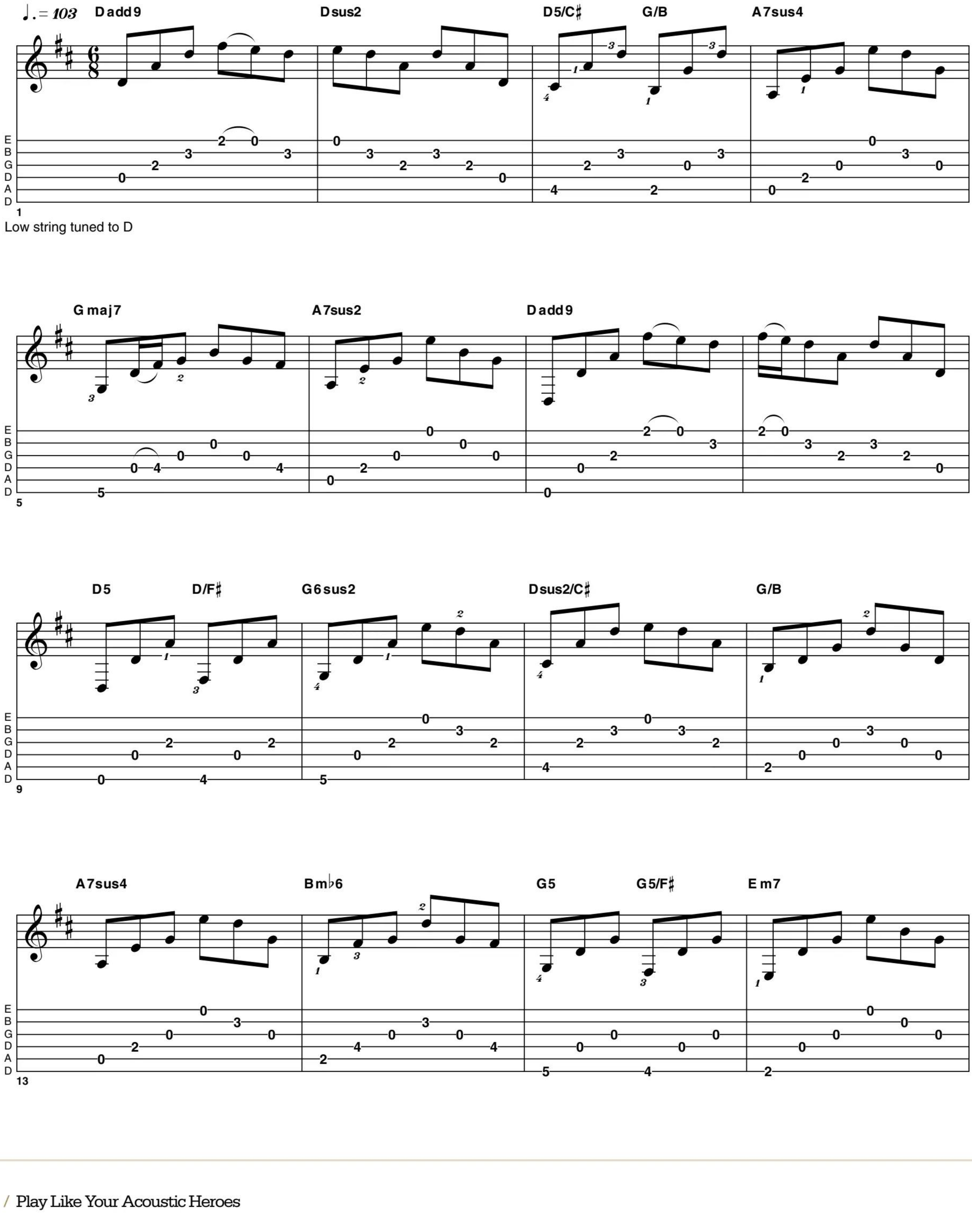


LISTENING SUGGESTIONS **Richard Thompson's breadth of work is staggering, beginning with his raft of albums with Fairport Convention and Richard And Linda Thompson – all of which contain typical flashes of genius in the writing and playing. A great starting place if you are new to Thompson's solo work is 1991's Rumor And Sigh (with 1952 Vincent Black Lightning); also check out 2005's superb Front Parlour Ballads.**

WENN LTD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

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EXAMPLE **RICHARD THOMPSON**

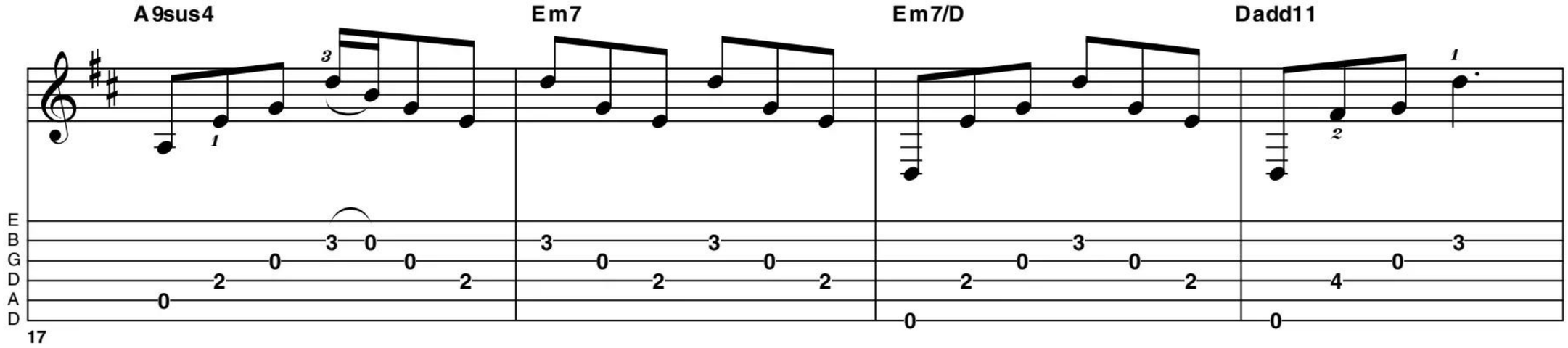
[Bar 1] The 6/8 time signature and drop D tuning are favourite Thompson devices. We are playing in the traditional folk form of a jig here, so ensure you are comfortable with the rhythmic feel before progressing.
[Bar 3] Being a self-accompanist Thompson really values the importance of bass notes, so you'll often find ascending or descending basslines being played against his chords. It is the luxury of the fingerpicker to be able to create this 'two instruments at once' illusion but it can also result in tricky fingerings.
[Bar 5] Embellishing the sequence with quick pull-offs and hammer-ons (as in bar 8) is a common feature of Thompson's style, so make sure the fretting hand is fully warmed up so you can execute these at the required speed.

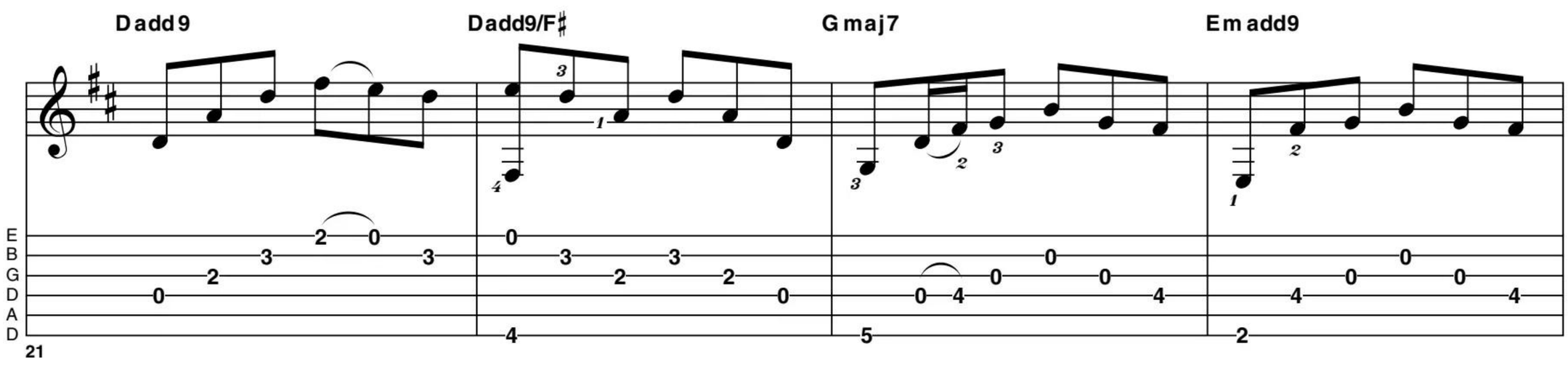


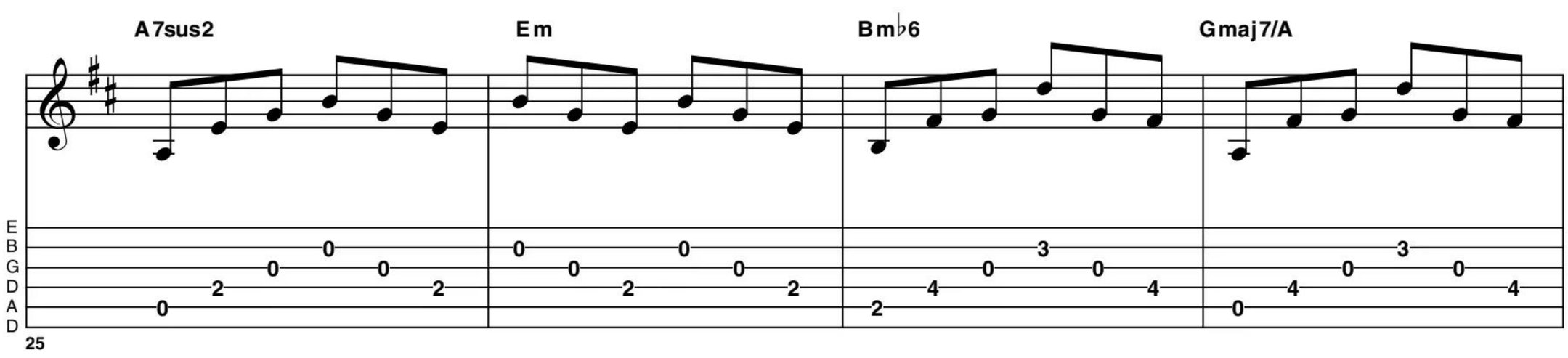
EXAMPLE **RICHARD THOMPSON**

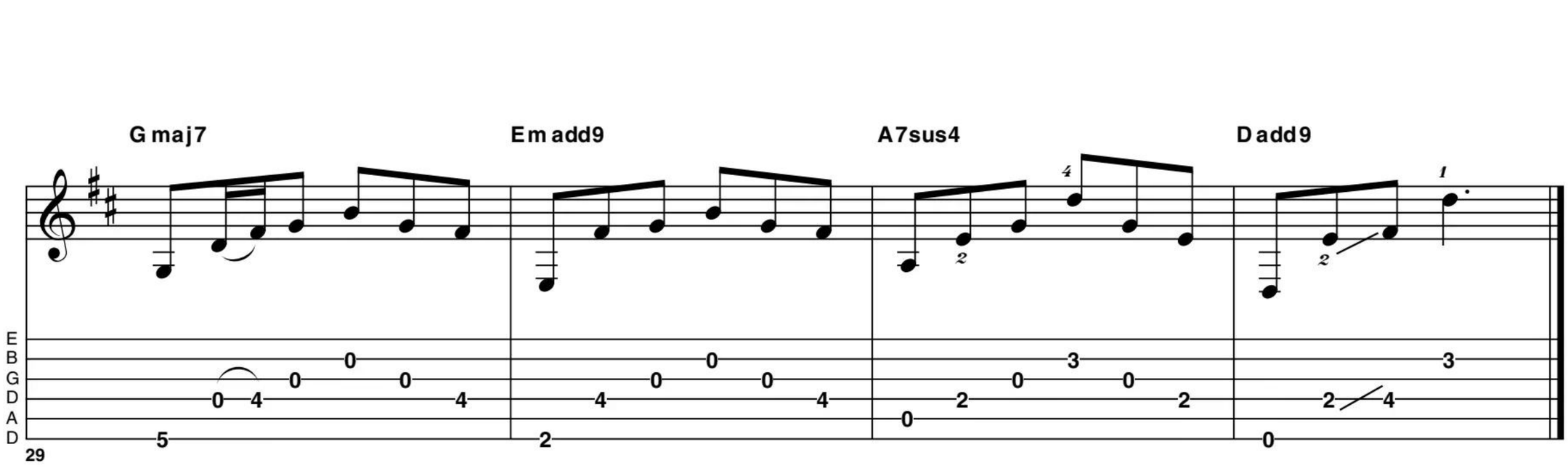
[Bar 14] As you'll have noticed, although we have a straightforward chord sequence many of the voicings are not standard shapes, they are 'enriched' by the addition or exclusion of certain notes. These rich voicings are part of what defines Thompson's style as a guitarist and songwriter.

[Bar 17] Here's another pull-off embellishment on the chord – note how these can occur anywhere in the bar, and not just on the first beat.
[Bar 22] There's a bit of a stretch to accommodate the bass note on the 4th fret here so I've included a suggested fingering, which should help.





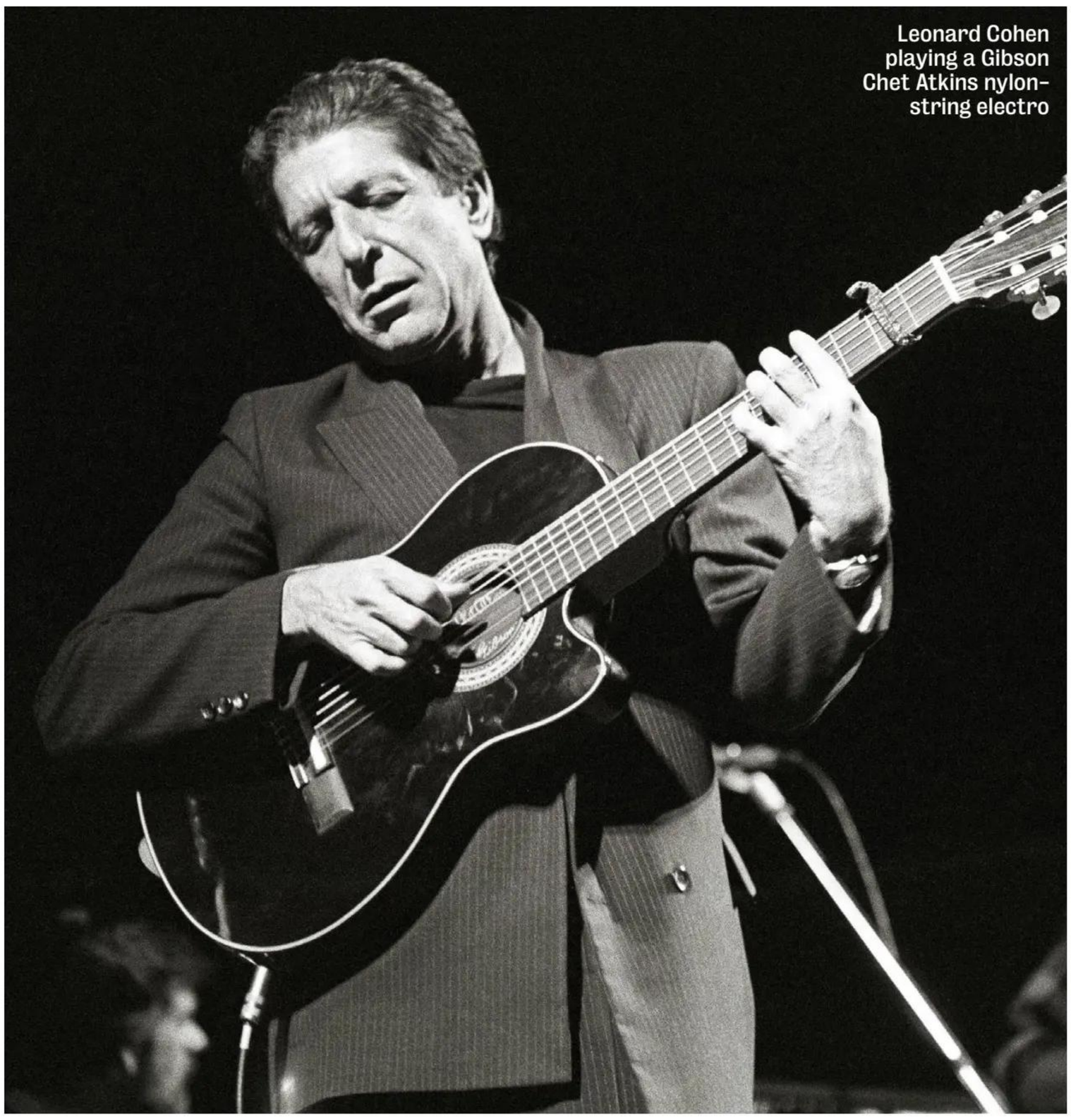




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» Leonard Cohen

Hallelujah! Stuart Ryan dances like 'a bird on the wires' to shows you the folk troubadour's fingerpicking style.



Leonard Cohen playing a Gibson Chet Atkins nylon-string electro

ROB VERHORST / GETTY IMAGES

Info	Will improve your…
KEY C	✔ Plucking rhythms in 6/8
TEMPO 50 bpm	✔ Knowledge of sus chords
	✔ Fretting barre chords

Hallelujah! It's one of those tracks that sends tingles down your spine and I, like many others, first became aware of it thanks to Jeff Buckley's staggering cover on his debut album, Grace. The composer of the track was of course Leonard Cohen and it first appeared on his 1984 album Various Positions. Although Cohen's place in the pantheon of great songwriters was already assured, the fresh exposure that Buckley's cover provided gave his career a second wind and introduced him to a whole new audience.

Leonard Cohen was born in Canada on September 21, 1934 and, unlike many folk artists of his generation, commenced his musical career comparatively late at the age of 34. Prior to finding success as a singer-songwriter Cohen had started out as a poet and novelist – indeed, listen to the rich imagery of the original, much longer version of Halleluljah and his way with words becomes immediately apparent. Cohen is in many ways the archetypal folk troubadour – gifted with a bittersweet observational lyricism and using the guitar as back-up to deep themes. His guitar style is typical of the time – simple fingerpicking patterns, basic strumming and arpeggiated chords but he will throw in interesting harmonic twists and turns so while it's not too technical under the fingers there is always something for the ear to listen out for.

Cohen moved to New York in 1967 and became a part of Andy Warhol's famous Factory crowd. Though a peripheral character, this world introduced him to various well-known artists who would go on to cover his songs, thus increasing his exposure and allowing him to develop as a solo artist and performer. His debut album, Songs Of Leonard Cohen was released on Columbia records in 1967 and James Taylor and Judy Collins covered several songs from the album. He toured extensively throughout the 1970s though faced something of a career hiatus in the 1980s – his profile grew again in the 1990s and 2000s and saw him tour worldwide again for many years. Over the decades he examined many styles and would combine his folk roots with jazz based orchestration, even working with Phil Spector on his 1977 album, Death Of A Ladies' Man.

> "Most of the time one is discouraged by the work, but now and again by some grace something stands out"
>
> *Leonard Cohen*

In this study we'll examine a typical Cohen style part in 6/8 and see how Leonard would often take his listeners on an interesting harmonic journey along the way. **GT**



Get the Tone

Cohen actually used nylon-strings, preferring the fact that they didn't hurt his fingers! In the early years he toured with a Conde Hermanos guitar followed by Ovation nylon-string models and a Gibson Chet Atkins. I recorded this on a Circa 000 steel-string but used Thomastik Infeld Plectrum strings to soften the sound down. If you have a nylon-string then use it for this month's study, otherwise any good acoustic will do.



TRACK RECORD **Cohen had a long recording career so there is much to choose from. However, to get a really broad overview try starting off with any one of his greatest hits collections or perhaps begin at the start with his debut Songs Of Leonard Cohen followed by his last album, 2016's You Want It Darker. If you like what you hear there is plenty of other great albums to fill in the gaps.**
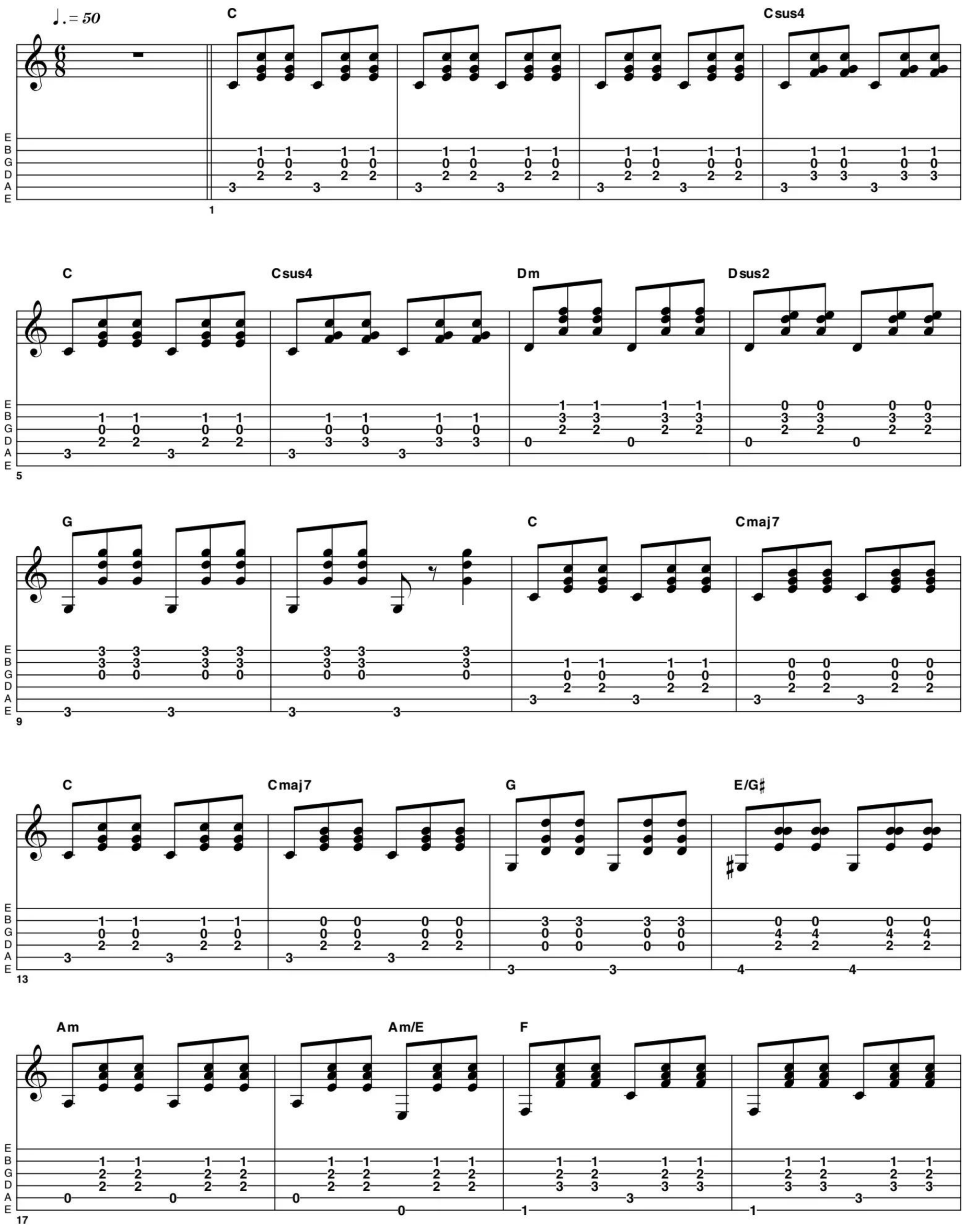
EXAMPLE 1 **LEONARD COHEN STYLE**

[Bar 1] Be sure you are comfortable with the 6/8 time signature before starting off. There are several ways to think about this but a good starting point is to count '1 & a 2 & a' with an emphasis on the 1 and 2 count. The picking pattern is straightforward but there are several options – first, you can use the thumb (p) to pluck the bass notes followed by the ima fingers to pluck the ensuing chord. Alternatively you can use the thumb (p) to pluck the bass followed by pim to sound the chord. I prefer the former pattern but either is fine.

[Bar 4] Moving to a sus4 chord here is a subtle change but a sound that Cohen himself would use. If you are new to sus4 chords then's it's a good idea to locate them in every chord in the open position – most people are familiar with the ubiquitous Dsus4 but try all the other chords to see if you really understand how these suspensions work.

[Bar 8] As with the fourth bar here some extra colour is added by way of a sus chord, in this case a sus2. Again, try locating all the sus2 chords you can find in the open position and become familiar with their sound.

[Bar 14] The major 7th chord is another classic songwriter's device; it's great for providing a softer more melancholic sound over a standard major chord and it also works well when you want to leave a chord hanging for a bar.
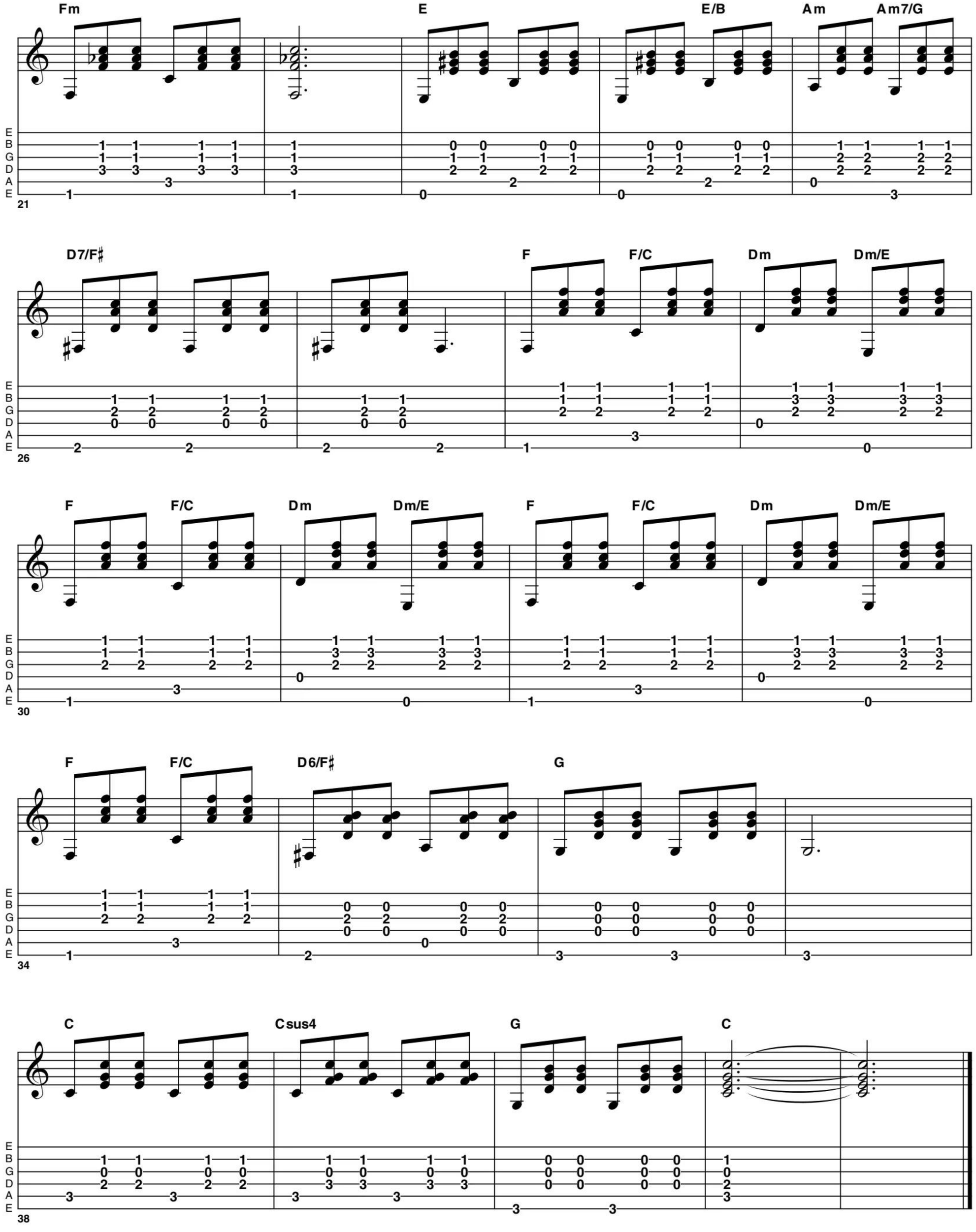


» EXAMPLE 2 LEONARD COHEN STYLE

[Bar 16] Chords with bass notes other than the root (slash chords) are fantastic writing devices and this E/G# is one such example – see how it provides a smooth bridge from the preceding G major and into the following A minor as the bass only has to move a semitone each time.

[Bar 21] Barre chords were a common feature of Cohen's acoustic playing so make sure you can fret the F with sufficient pressure to make all strings sound.

[Bar 25] Here's another example of that smooth bass line movement between chords as we travel from A minor to A minor 7, then G, D7/F# and finally F.

[Bar 29] This is another example of bass movement that songwriters like to use – the E bass note doesn't belong to the D minor chord but allows us to make a smooth transition to the F major. Although these are relatively simple examples to play, making sure they are performed perfectly is your goal.



Eric Clapton

Take a stroll down to the crossroads and uncover the more sensitive acoustic side of blues and rock legend Eric Clapton.



Eric Clapton at The Royal Albert Hall

Info

KEY E major
TEMPO 101 bpm

Will improve your…

- ✔ Blues fingerpicking
- ✔ Acoustic blues soloing
- ✔ Blues chords & repertoire

Picture Eric Clapton and the first images that come to mind are probably the long-haired, 335 toting blues-rocker of the Cream days. Or the be-suited blues troubadour cradling Blackie, his famous Strat, in one of the legendary 24 Nights at the Albert Hall. As we all know, however, he is a multi-faceted player who is equally adept on acoustic and electric guitar. As his career has progressed the steel strung flat-top has increasingly come to the fore – for an entire generation his 1992 MTV Unplugged live album with its heart-rending version of Tears In Heaven was their first introduction to this blues legend. Some would even go so far as to say they prefer his acoustic style to electric.

It shouldn't come as any surprise that acoustic guitar is at the heart of Clapton's style – it is the instrument that gave birth to the blues and he would have heard some of his earliest heroes using steel-strung flat-top guitars to accompany themselves. Although we often associate him with the electric blues of the three great Kings (Freddie, Albert, BB) and Buddy Guy, it's actually an acoustic blues legend that he cites as his main influence, Robert Johnson. In fact, the Johnson influence was so strong that many years after Cream and Derek And The Dominos he would explore his acoustic roots with an album covering Johnson songs: Me & Mr Johnson (2004), which was swiftly followed by another release, Sessions For Robert J (2004).

For this study I've elected to look at Clapton's modern bluesy style rather than his rawer, Robert Johnson-style leanings. To this end we'll find a sparse fingerpicking part followed by a melodic blues-based Clapton lead line. In essence, we are dealing with a more developed version of the classic 12-bar riff that has been used by every great bluesman over the last 70 years. This riff is also interspersed with percussive slaps on the picking hand which all help to drive the music along. The solo starts in the open position and is based around the E minor Pentatonic scale with some Clapton-esque nods to the major 3rd (G#) as well. Incidentally, if you are an acoustic blues player then knowledge of the open position is essential. As many great solos start off down here to exploit the power and volume that the open position can give before travelling to the higher frets as we do here. Given his incredible career, just one column on Eric Clapton can only scratch the surface of what he has achieved on acoustic guitar. Hopefully this study will help you as a starting point for learning more. **SR**

> "Given his incredible career, just one column on Clapton can only scratch the surface of what he has achieved on acoustic guitar."



Get the tone

Clapton tends to favour Martin guitars, specifically those with a shorter scale that makes string bending easier. Consequently, you'll see him playing his signature 000-28EC or limited edition 000-42EC.
If not these it's a genuine vintage model, or perhaps a nylon-string by Ramirez.
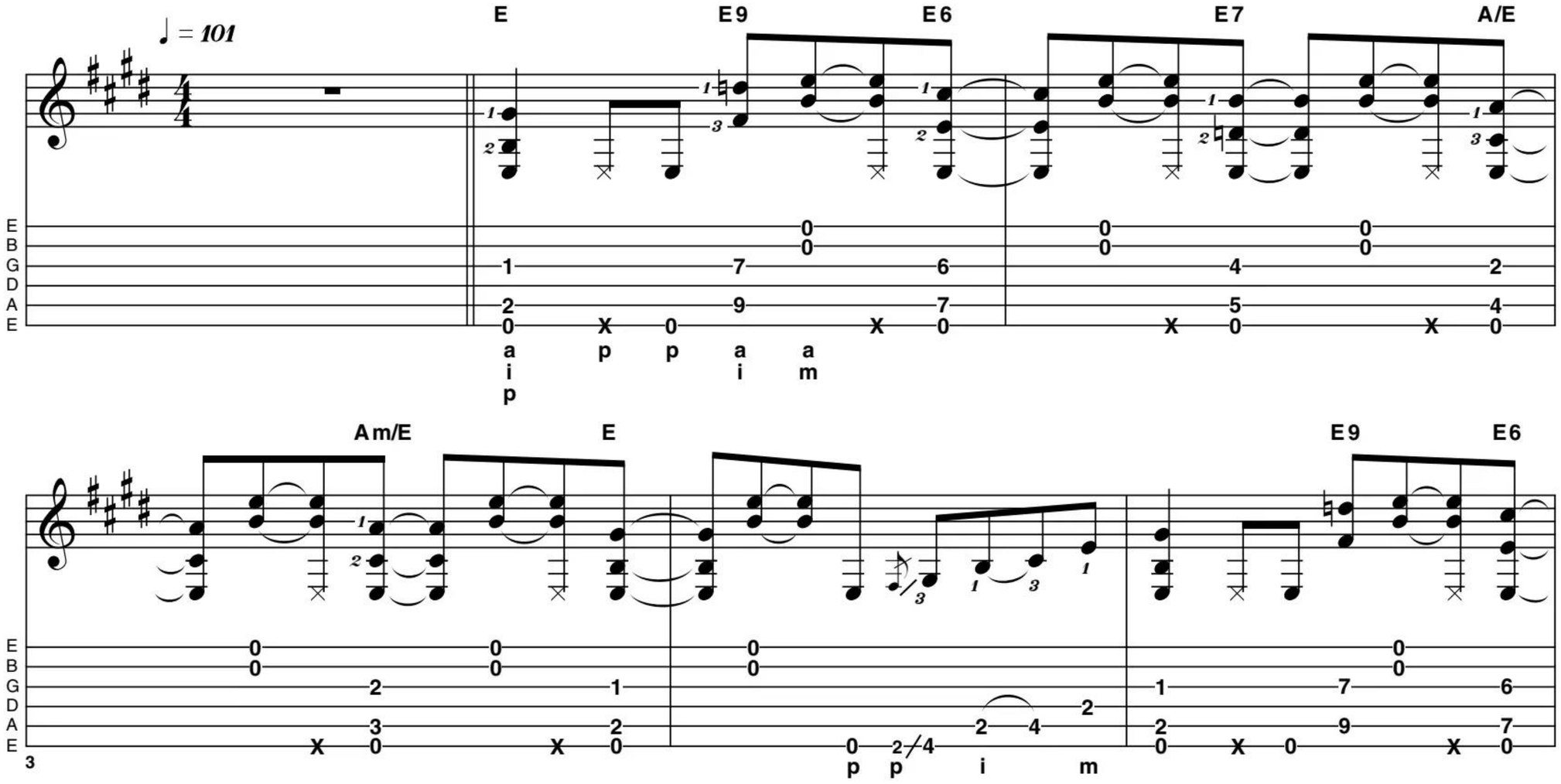


LISTENING SUGGESTIONS **For his contemporary songwriting leanings – including the heart-rending version of Tears In Heaven – the multi-platinum MTV Unplugged CD or DVD (1992) is a must. There are also several great blues tracks on here such as I'm Tore Down and Before You Accuse Me. To hear him in acoustic blues mood in tribute to his number one blues idol, check out Me & Mr Johnson (2004).**

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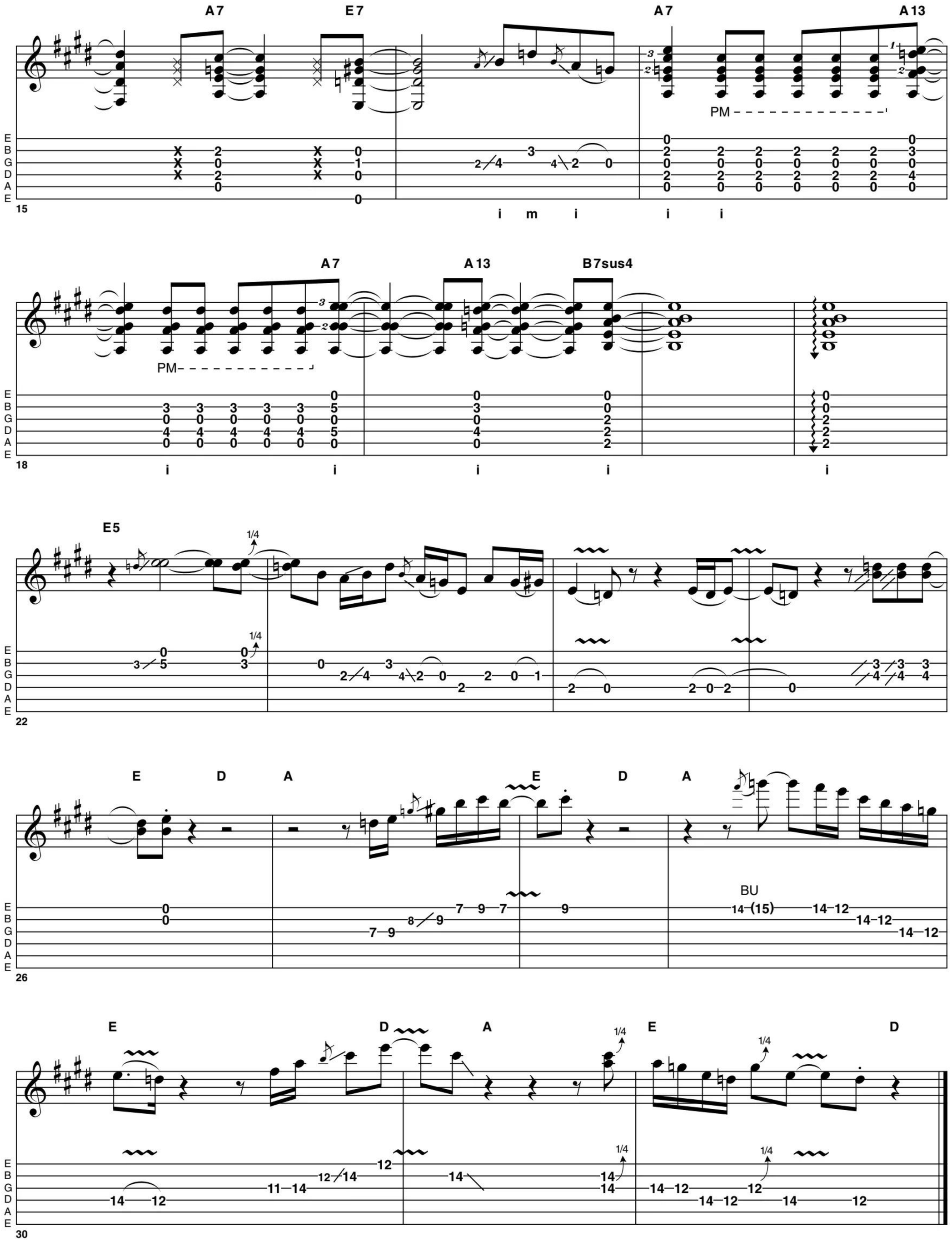
EXAMPLE **ERIC CLAPTON STYLE**

[Bar 1] Part of the success of this particular phrase is the way you leave out the notes on the fifth string at certain points. This helps to thin things out a little, though as we'll see later on you can include this string to thicken things up a little if you want (as long as it doesn't sound too muddy).
[Bar 2] The percussive slaps on the strings may seem like a challenge at first but since they are on the beat, it's less of a challenge than syncopating them (playing them off the beat). Use the picking hand thumb to strike the strings, but use your picking-hand to mute the sixth string, otherwise this will sound a note, rather than being the percussive 'slap' we require.
[Bar 8] This modern sounding B7sus4 is a great Gospel or Spanish influenced alternative to the standard B7 'V' chord that you would usually find in this location.



EXAMPLE **ERIC CLAPTON STYLE**

[Bar 16] This fill contains several classic Clapton acoustic style devices from the grace note slides into the notes to the use of the open position and pull-offs. It would work great on a slightly dirty electric too!
[Bar 23] The solo starts in the open position and, though it is based around E minor Pentatonic, notice the minor 3rd (G) to major 3rd (G#) hammer-on at the end of this bar, a classic device Eric uses in both electric and acoustic solos.
[Bar 29] Runs like this are classic Clapton but if you are new to them, then be careful. You have to deal with the speed of phrases like this while also taking into account the set-up on your acoustic – if your string-fretboard action is higher at this register then phrases like this are going to be harder to play.



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Pierre Bensusan

Alternative tunings are a mainstay of several acoustic guitar styles. Over the following pages we examine three top exponents of the art.



Pierre Bensusan: one of DADGAD's all-time masters

Info	Will improve your…
KEY D major	✔ General fingerstyle ability
TEMPO 135 bpm	✔ Playing in DADGAD tuning
	✔ Chord vocabulary

Pierre Bensusan is a 24-carat master on the fingerstyle scene. He is now so adept at DADGAD tuning that he has adopted it as an 'alternative standard tuning', completely basing his playing and composing style around it.

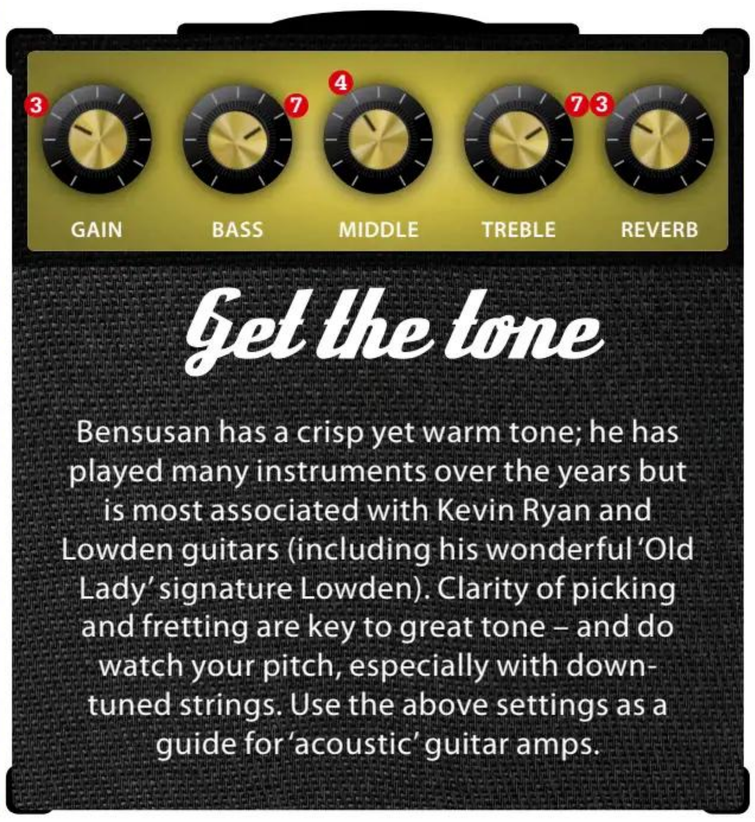
To become a DADGAD specialist to the extent that Bensusan has taken it would demand years of dedication, but you can hear in his playing how unique a voice this tuning gives him. And you don't have to be a player of Pierre's incredible calibre to enjoy the fruits of DADGAD yourself, whether as an alternative to regular tuning or indeed as a tool to kickstart your songwriting – a use that it has been put to over the years with great success.

Bensusan's writing draws influences from many different styles of music: jazz, world and especially Celtic and folk. Born in Oran, French Algeria in 1957, he grew up in Paris and came to prominence at the startlingly young age of 17 when his debut album, Pres de Paris, won the Grand Prix Du Disques at the Montreaux Festival in Switzerland. Since then he has gone on to be viewed as a member of the A list on the world acoustic guitar scene.

Bensusan's guitar style takes on the elements mentioned above and features some tricky hallmarks. In his Celtic playing, for example, you will hear florid melody lines juxtaposed against solid thumping bass strings, which can be a real challenge to maintain. Many of his own compositions feature free-flowing sections that push and pull the timing and again offer a challenge to the player. Bensusan can be quite free and jazzy in his playing (though always with a sense of where the pulse is) so sometimes it is best to relax and go for it – one of the aspects of playing solo that can really set you free.

> "You don't have to be a player of Pierre's calibre to enjoy DADGAD, whether as an alternative tuning or to aid your writing"

In this study you will encounter many Pierre Bensusan traits. Beautiful, rich chord voicings that really showcase the chordal possibilities of this tuning and long, flowing melodic lines that almost feel more like a guitar solo than a fingerstyle composition. If you are getting into DADGAD tuning, or looking to expand your playing in DADGAD further, then time spent with Bensusan's pieces and recordings will really give you a sense of what can be achieved by simply retuning four strings. **SR**



Get the tone

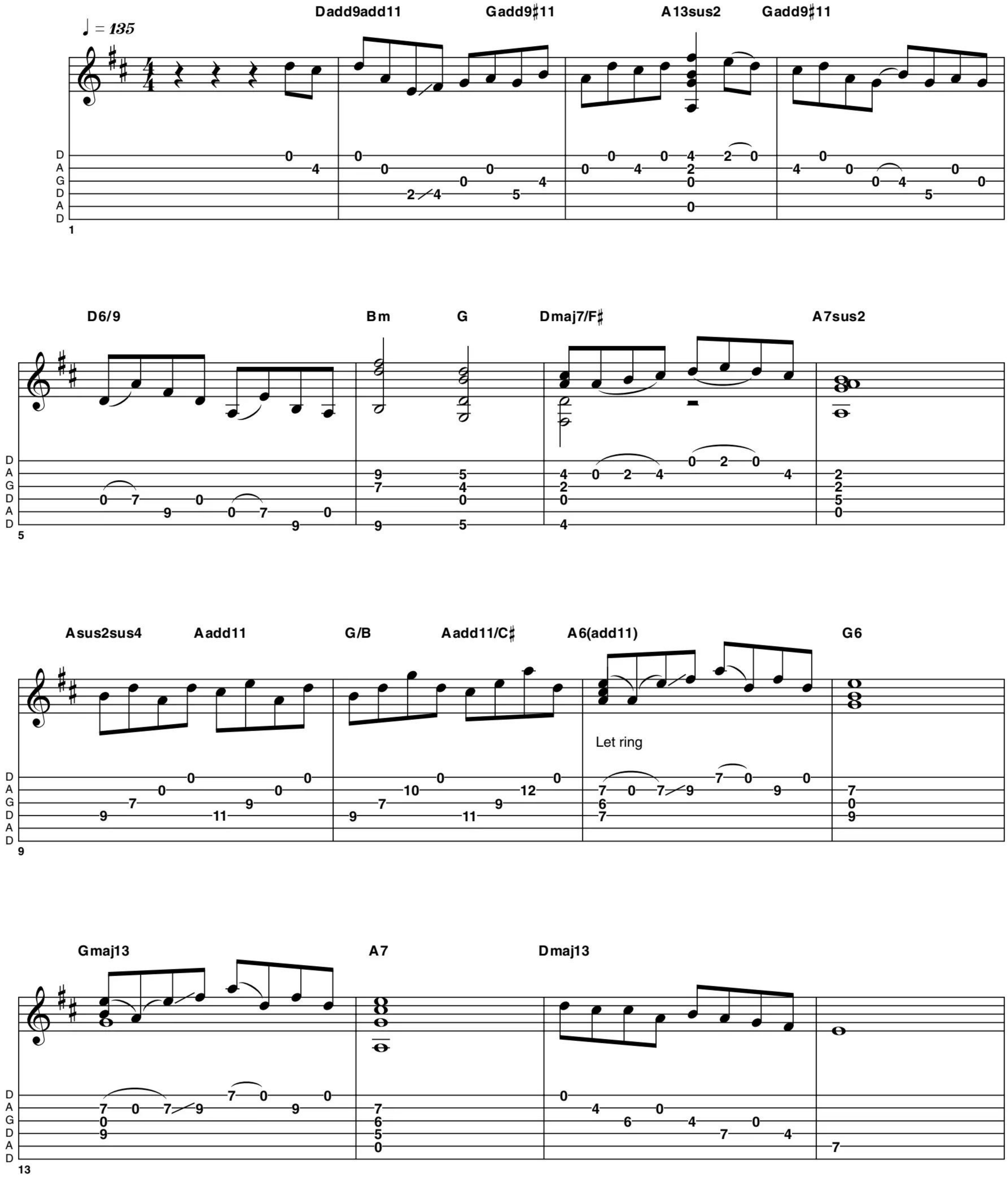
Bensusan has a crisp yet warm tone; he has played many instruments over the years but is most associated with Kevin Ryan and Lowden guitars (including his wonderful 'Old Lady' signature Lowden). Clarity of picking and fretting are key to great tone – and do watch your pitch, especially with down-tuned strings. Use the above settings as a guide for 'acoustic' guitar amps.



LISTENING SUGGESTIONS **Pierre Bensusan's albums Intuite and Altiplanos are a great place to start; Bensusan is also a vocalist, which adds an extra dimension to some of his pieces. He has also released a wealth of instructional DADGAD material in both book and DVD format, all available from his website, www.pierrebensusan.com. If you're serious about DADGAD then Pierre's music and writings are invaluable.**

EXAMPLE **PIERRE BENSUSAN STYLE**

[Bar 1] These long flowing lines are quite typical of Bensusan's playing and sometimes have quite an improvisational feel to them. This kind of exercise is great for getting your playing to be as clean as possible, so keep strings ringing and make hammer-ons and pull-offs super smooth.
[Bar 7] This chord may feel a little awkward. Some of Bensusan's more outlandish voicings will require a serious stretch, so always make sure you've warmed up your hands first before subjecting them to such stress.
[Bar 11] Often fingerstyle music contains subtleties that can be overlooked. Here you have the hammer-ons and pull-offs played against a sustained chord, something you will come across in the playing of Bensusan and others.

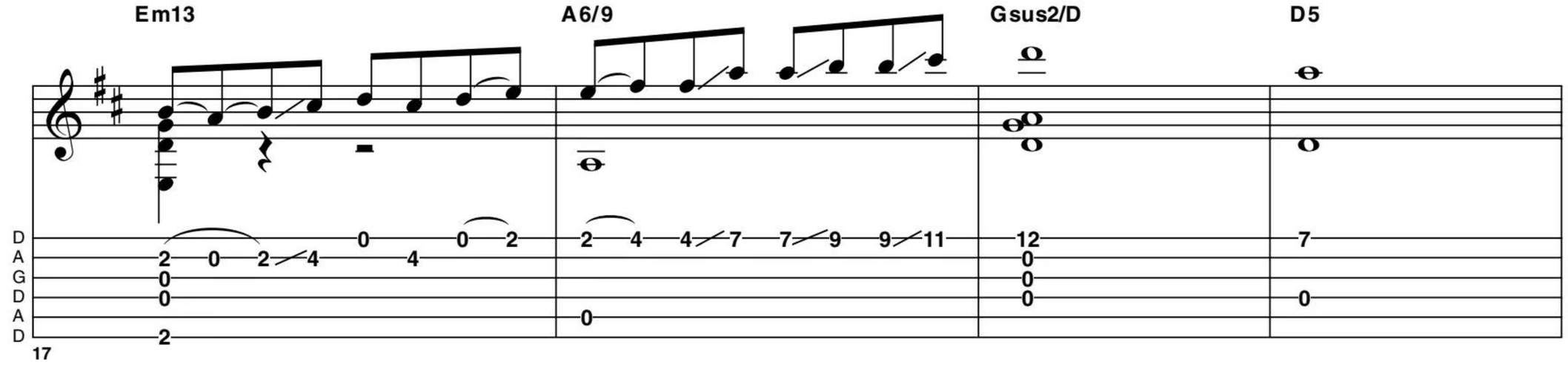


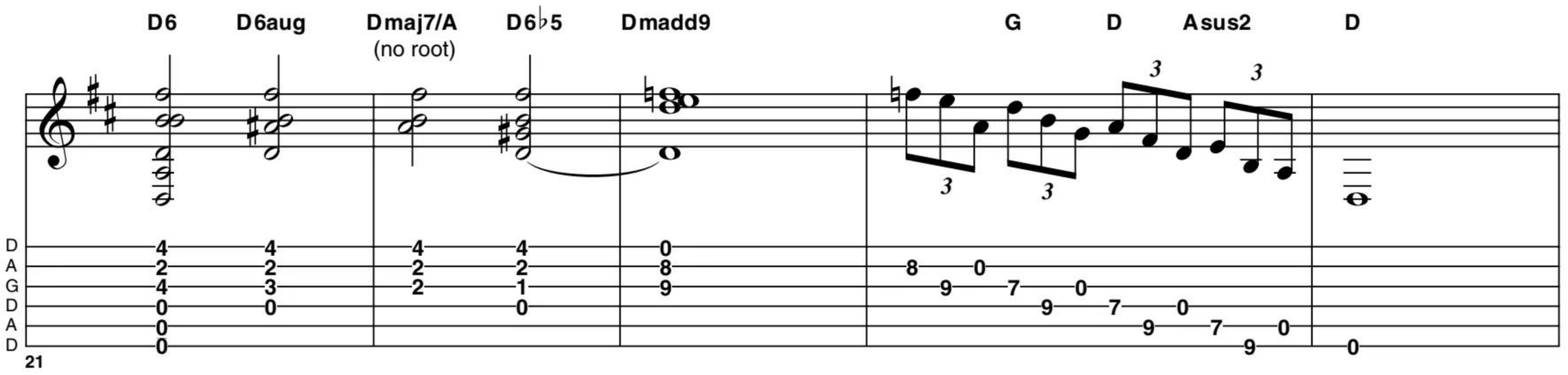
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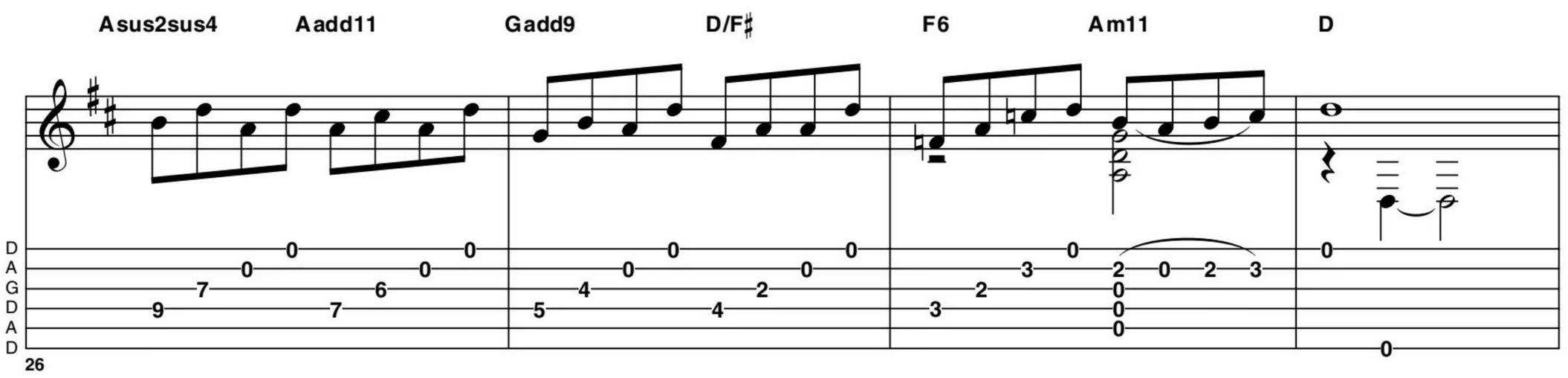
EXAMPLE **PIERRE BENSUSAN STYLE**

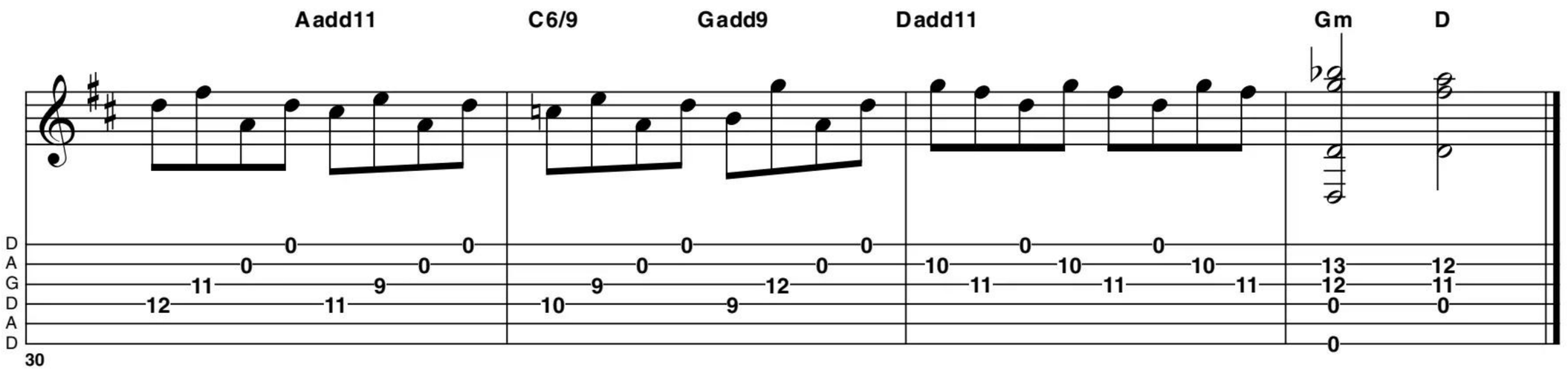
[Bar 17] Another long flowing line, this time one that travels up the fretboard on one string. A good exercise for orientating yourself with DADGAD – or any tuning for that matter – is to play scales up and down one string, this process leads you to think more like a saxophone player, and you can visualise intervallic leaps far more readily.

[Bar 21-25] Here's a sequence of ethnic-sounding voicings followed by a triplet run – fretting hand workout followed by picking hand workout.
[Bar 28] Arpeggiated chords are the hallmark of any fingerstyle guitarist, so make sure you can pick passages such as these cleanly and in time, always getting from one chord to the next smoothly.



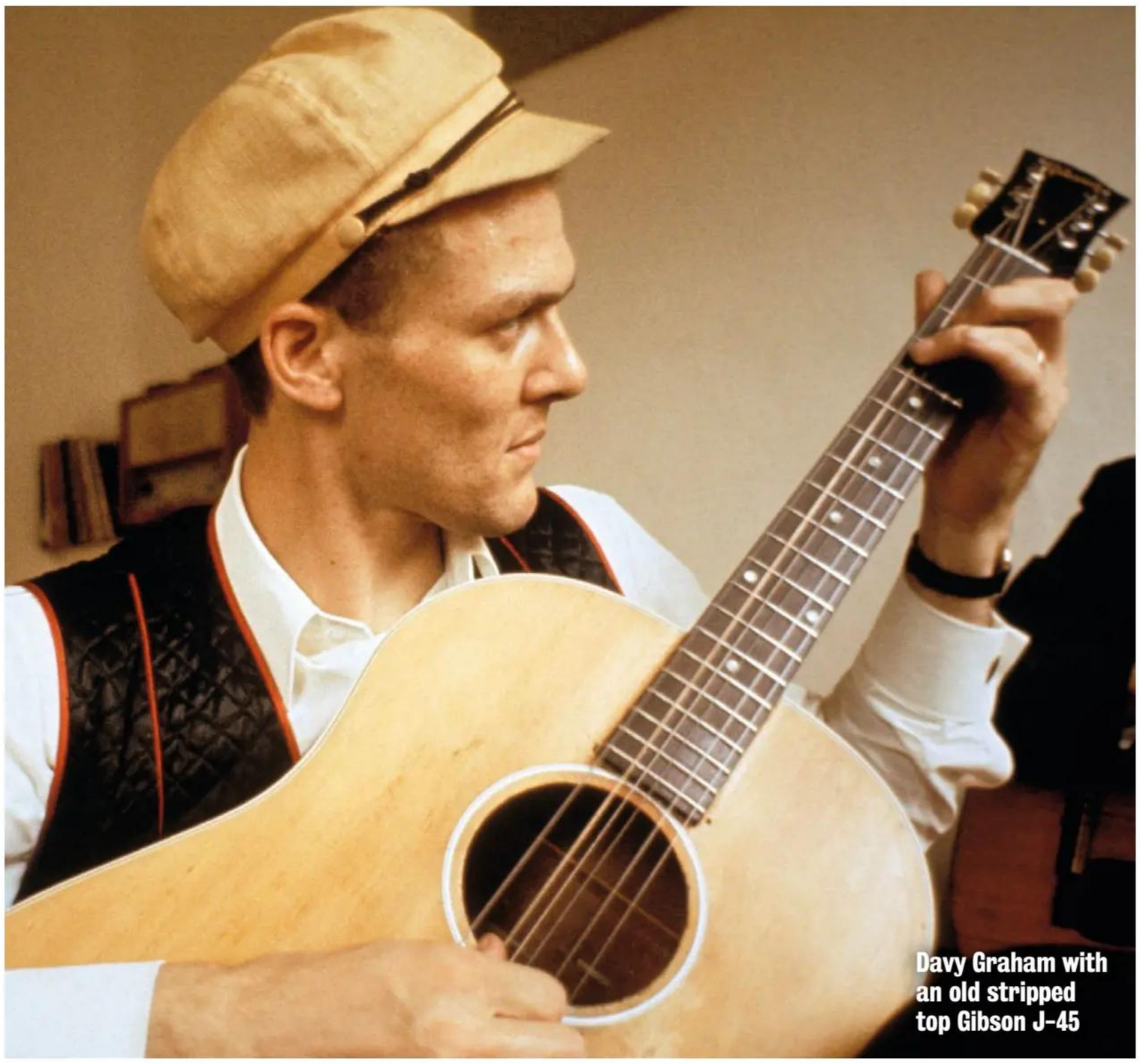






Davy Graham

Hailed as the father of DADGAD tuning and one of the most influential guitarists of all time, he can number many guitar superstars as fans.



Davy Graham with an old stripped top Gibson J-45

Info — **Will improve your…**

KEY Dm
TEMPO 155 bpm

- ✔ Playing bass with melody
- ✔ Awareness of DADGAD
- ✔ Timing with the thumb

In December 2008 the great acoustic guitarist Davy Graham died of a seizure following a battle with lung cancer. This great man is widely regarded as the father of the DADGAD tuning method, so including him here by way of a musical tribute was never in question.

As we have already seen in the feature on Pierre Bensusan, DADGAD is something of a gift for guitar players as it affords us many open 'drone' strings that we can keep ringing to fill out the sound. Couple this with the fact that the open strings spell out a Dsus4 chord (with D as the root, A as the 5th and G as the sus4) and you have a tuning that is beautifully ambiguous in its tonality. This can be great for shifting easily between major and minor keys or creating those moody Celtic sounds that don't seem to be obviously major or minor (known as 'modal' music).

Although it is clearly a fantastic tuning for the solo guitarist who may take wondrous flights up and down the guitar's fretboard, DADGAD is also widely used by rhythm players, particularly in traditional music where the possibilities are endless.

During his travels, especially in Morocco, Davy discovered that DADGAD tuning helped him emulate the droning sounds of instruments like the oud. And his playing was so stunningly different to those who first heard it, that it reached a wide audience with music fans and budding guitarists alike, helping to popularise tuning and influence many of the guitar 'greats' that came after. In fact, his influence extends to folk heavyweights such as Martin Carthy, John Renbourn and Paul Simon, but perhaps most importantly to a certain Jimmy Page.

Along with American guitarist John Fahey, Graham is credited with developing the 'folk instrumental' and his composition Anji was the Eruption (Eddie Van Halen's rock guitar show piece) of its day with every aspiring fingerstylist aiming to master it. Davy's pieces are often referred to as 'folk baroque' as they feature moving basslines against the melody.

> "Davy Graham's influence extends to folk heavyweights such as Martin Carthy, John Renbourn and Paul Simon"

However, you will also hear a strong blues and traditional influence throughout his playing.

This study features some classic Graham touches, including a descending bassline redolent of the aforementioned 'hit' instrumental, plus some typical bluesy double stops against a pulsing bass line.

While it's sad to lose a player who can be truly regarded as a legend of the guitar, let's be thankful that his music and influence lives on in the DADGAD playing of so many great acoustic players around the world. **SR**



Get the tone

Like James Taylor, Davy Graham was initially a Gibson user, his main instrument a sweet-toned J-45, stripped to reveal its natural spruce colour (as Lennon did with his J-160E). He later switched allegiance to Martin, but was also seen playing classical as well as a Taylor 12-string. A larger-bodied acoustic will give a warmer tone, but in truth any instrument with good projection is fine.

BRIAN SHUEL / GETTY IMAGES
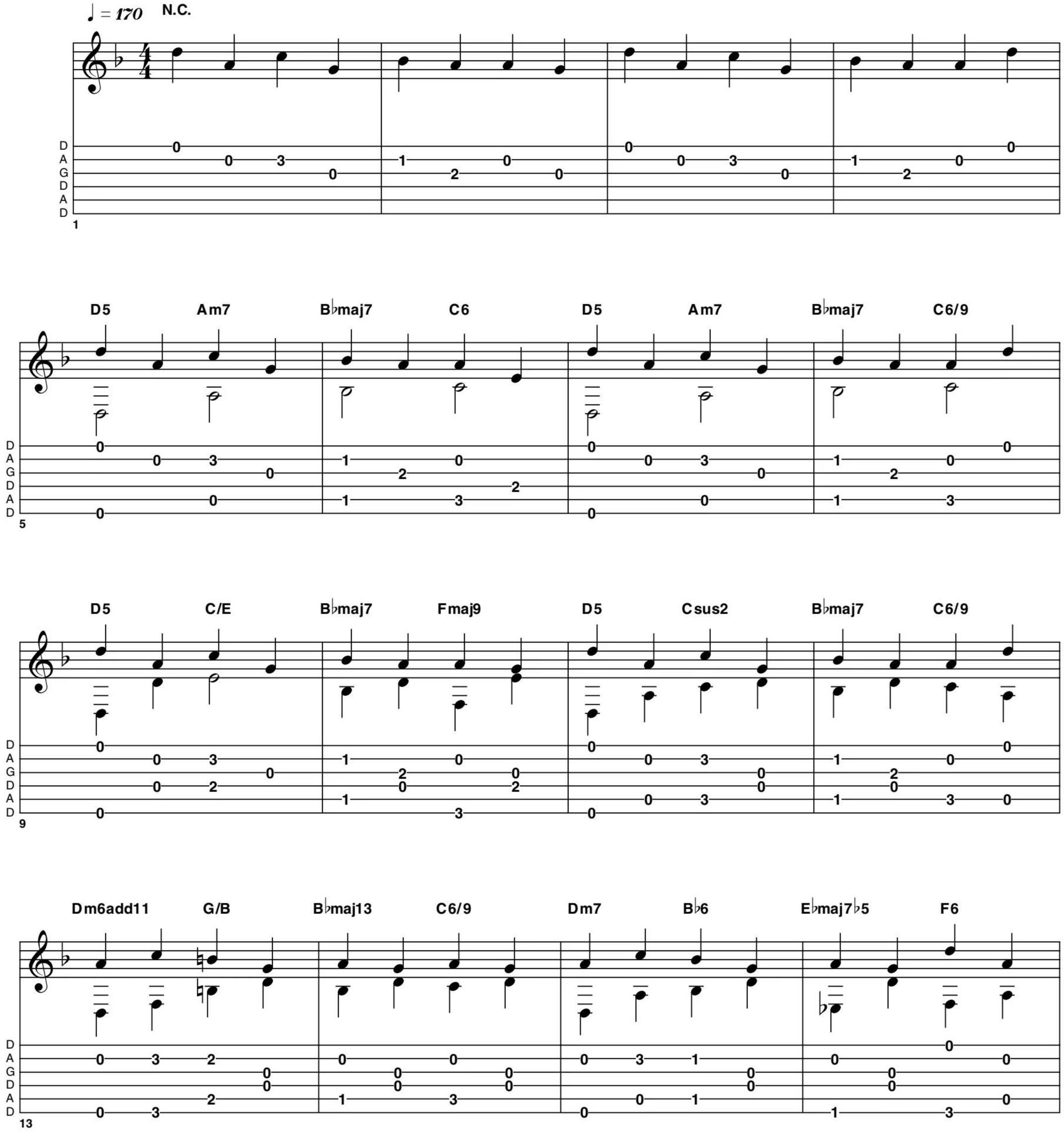


LISTENING SUGGESTIONS **Graham's early output from the 1960s is the best place to hear him in action, and you can't go wrong with Folk, Blues And Beyond or The Guitar Player. Listen to Led Zeppelin albums and you'll hear Jimmy Page's use of DADGAD (Kashmir, Black Mountain Side), while players like Gordon Giltrap, Martin Simpson, Clive Carroll and (as we've seen) Pierre Bensusan are also great exponents of the tuning.**

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EXAMPLE **DAVY GRAHAM STYLE**

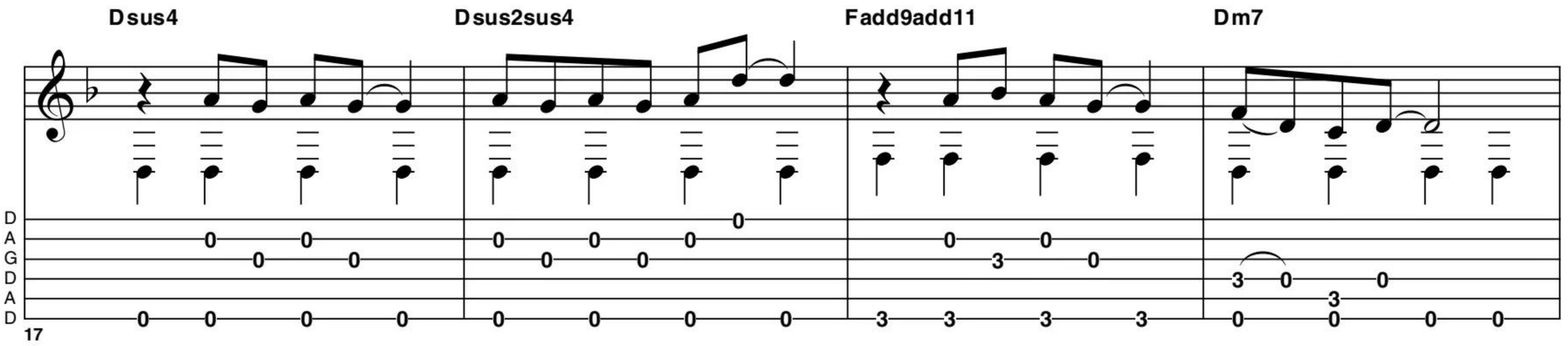
[Bar 5] After stating the Graham-style melody we add in the bass – notice how the rhythm starts sparsely but soon begins building momentum.
[Bar 9] This illustrates the 'folk baroque' style of using counterpoint: notes moving against or with each other. Now the rhythm on the bass follows the melody so there will be some rapid finger shifting.

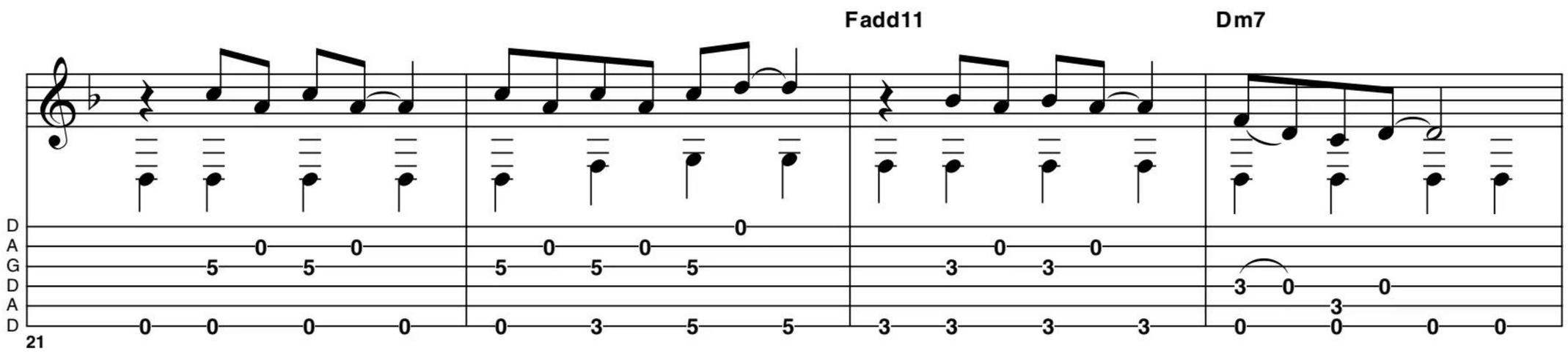
[Bar 13] The melody and bass notes keep shifting so work through each bar slowly to get a feel of where everything is. You'll hear this style of contrapuntal bass and melody in the playing of many Davy Graham acolytes – not least the great picker Paul Simon, in whose version of Davy's tune Anji, the bass notes move all over the place.

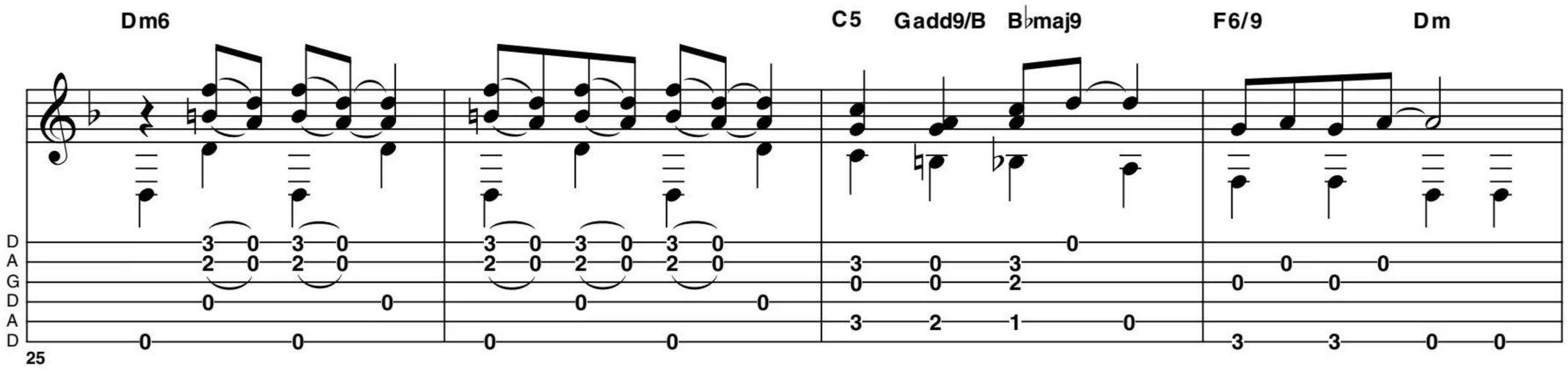


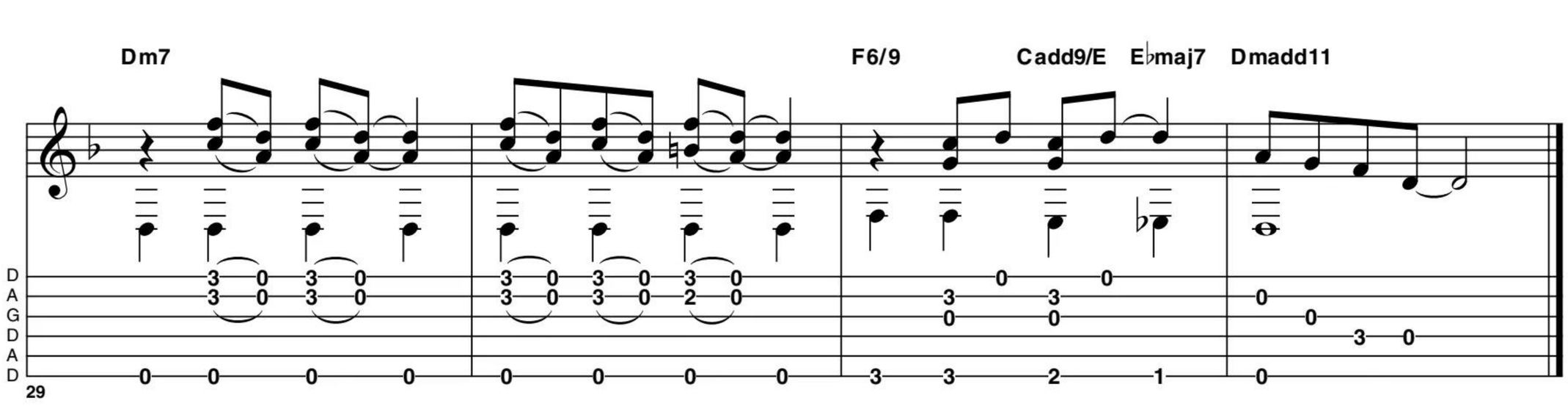
EXAMPLE **DAVY GRAHAM STYLE**

[Bar 17] This is more classic Graham as the bass relaxes into a pulsing groove without much movement around the fretboard. Now you can focus on the bluesy melody over the top and on keeping your timing solid.
[Bar 22] Look out for the moving bassline here, to keep you on your toes.
[Bar 25] The double-stops on the first and second strings showcase the influence of the blues. When playing the pull-offs to the open strings, notice how it keeps the sound clean and flowing.
[Bar 27 & 31] Take these finger-twisting bars slowly, before building up speed.









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Joni Mitchell

A paragon of the singer-songwriter's craft, Joni Mitchell has explored folk, jazz, blues and a host of tunings in her long and illustrious career.



Mitchell in concert in August 1974

Info — **Will improve your…**

KEY D major
TEMPO 83 bpm

- ✔ Strumming with muted chords
- ✔ Knowledge of open D tuning
- ✔ First finger barre chords

Born in Fort Macleod, Canada, in 1943, Joni Mitchell relocated to the US in 1965 and settled in southern California. Her talent as a songwriter was immediately obvious with classics like Big Yellow Taxi, Chelsea Morning and Both Sides Now heralding the arrival of an exciting new voice on the American songwriting scene. The aforementioned songs were quickly covered by other folk artists that served to spread her name and appeal even further. She released her debut album Song To A Seagull in 1968 with Ladies Of The Canyon (1970) and Blue (1971) following close after. During the 1970s her music took on a strong jazz influence and she began working with future jazz legends Pat Metheny, Jaco Pastorius and Michael Brecker.

As a guitarist, Mitchell has a unique approach to the instrument as virtually every song she has composed features an altered tuning. In fact, she has used over 50 different tunings during her career. Our Joni-style lesson opts for open D (D-A-D-F#-A-D), as this is one of her more accessible tunings and is also used in some of her most popular work (including Big Yellow Taxi). I've used a capo as this brightens the sound up considerably – in the early days Joni would capo up at the 2nd fret and sometimes the 3rd and 4th in order to accompany her voice. So in addition to giving the sound more clarity the capo would help her sing within her vocal register more easily and allow her to choose the chord shapes that felt best under her fingers for each given song.

Joni developed two interesting solutions to deal with the huge amount of altered tunings she has used over the years – first, and most practically, she has been using a Roland VG MIDI system since 1995, which allows her to program in all the altered tunings without actually having to re-tune the guitar. Secondly, she has a fascinating system of remembering the tunings. By way of an example she would notate this tuning as D-7-5-5-4-5 where the first letter indicates the tuning of the sixth string and the ensuing numbers tell her which

> "A capo would help Joni sing within her register and allow her to choose chord shapes she liked"

fret she would have to fret each string at in order to find the pitch to tune the next open string. Clever stuff!

Another key feature of her strumming style is the muting of strings, as we find here – she will keep a steady 16th-note (semiquaver) strumming pattern but add variety by releasing her fretting-hand fingers at points to give a percussive, muted quality. This is tricky to mimic at first as you have to really think where the accents and percussive parts are. As usual, persevere with it and you'll find a great new dimension to strumming parts. **SR**



Get the tone

Early on you can see Joni playing her Brazilian-bodied, Rosewood Martin D-28. Later she went on to electric and an Ibanez George Benson model, a Parker Fly and a custom-built acoustic by luthier Steve Klein. Most recently, she has played a Martin D-28, D-45 and a Collings D2H. These examples are perfect for acoustic; if you also play electric, a clean, chorused tone with delay.

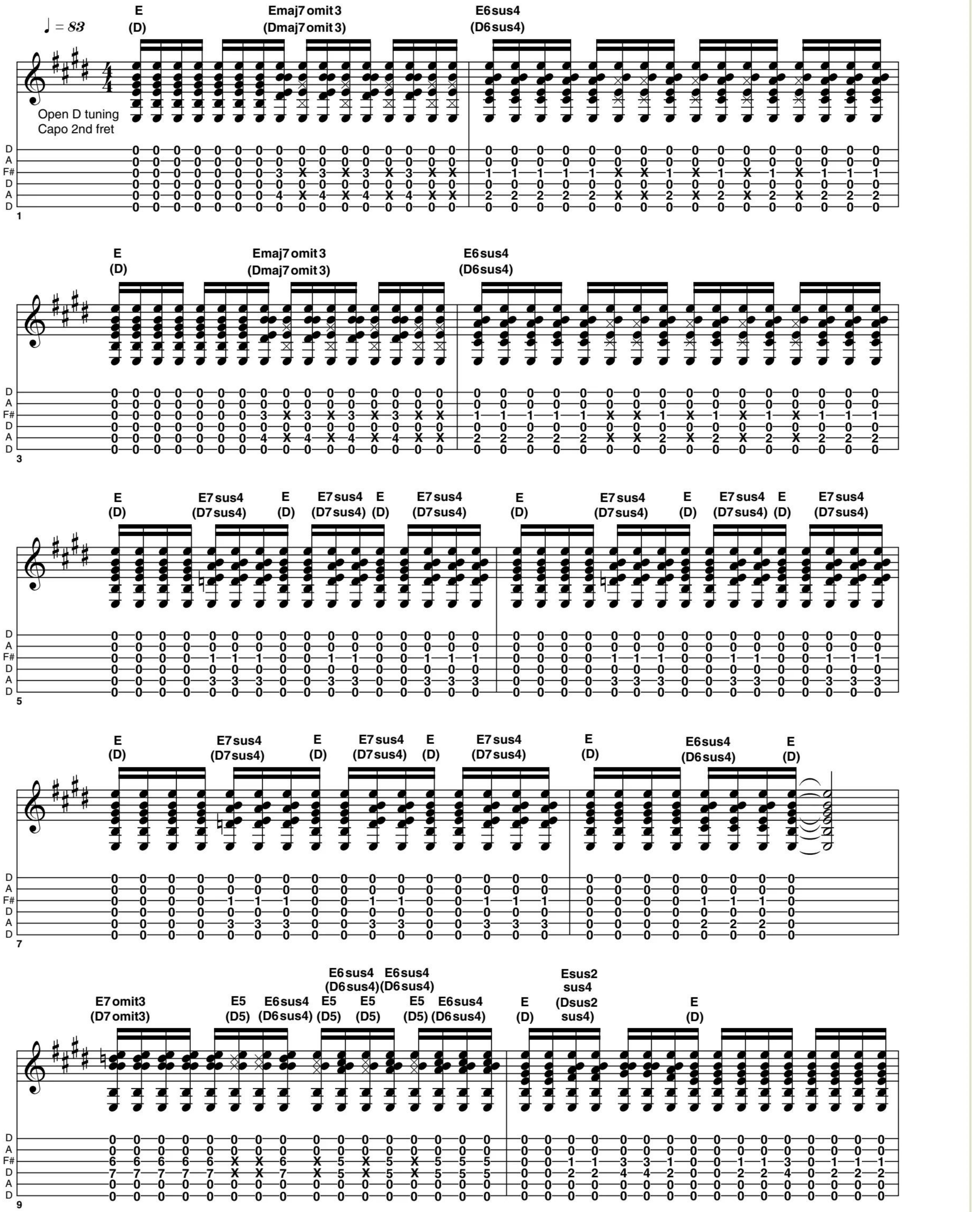


LISTENING SUGGESTIONS To hear this side of Joni's playing check out early albums such as Song To A Seagull, the often overlooked but brilliant Ladies Of The Canyon, and the legendary Blue. For more inspiration check out the live DVD Shadows And Light, which features the stellar line-up of Pat Metheny, Jaco Pastorius and Michael Brecker. Other great Joni albums include Court And Spark and the wonderful Hejira.

EXAMPLE **JONI MITCHELL STYLE**

[Bar 1] Look out for the muted notes (those indicated with an 'X'). Joni uses this technique often; simply release the pressure on the fretted notes but keep the strumming pattern going to get the percussive quality of these notes.
[Bar 5] No muted chords to deal with here but make sure you get the fretted chords in the right place as they aren't always on the beat.

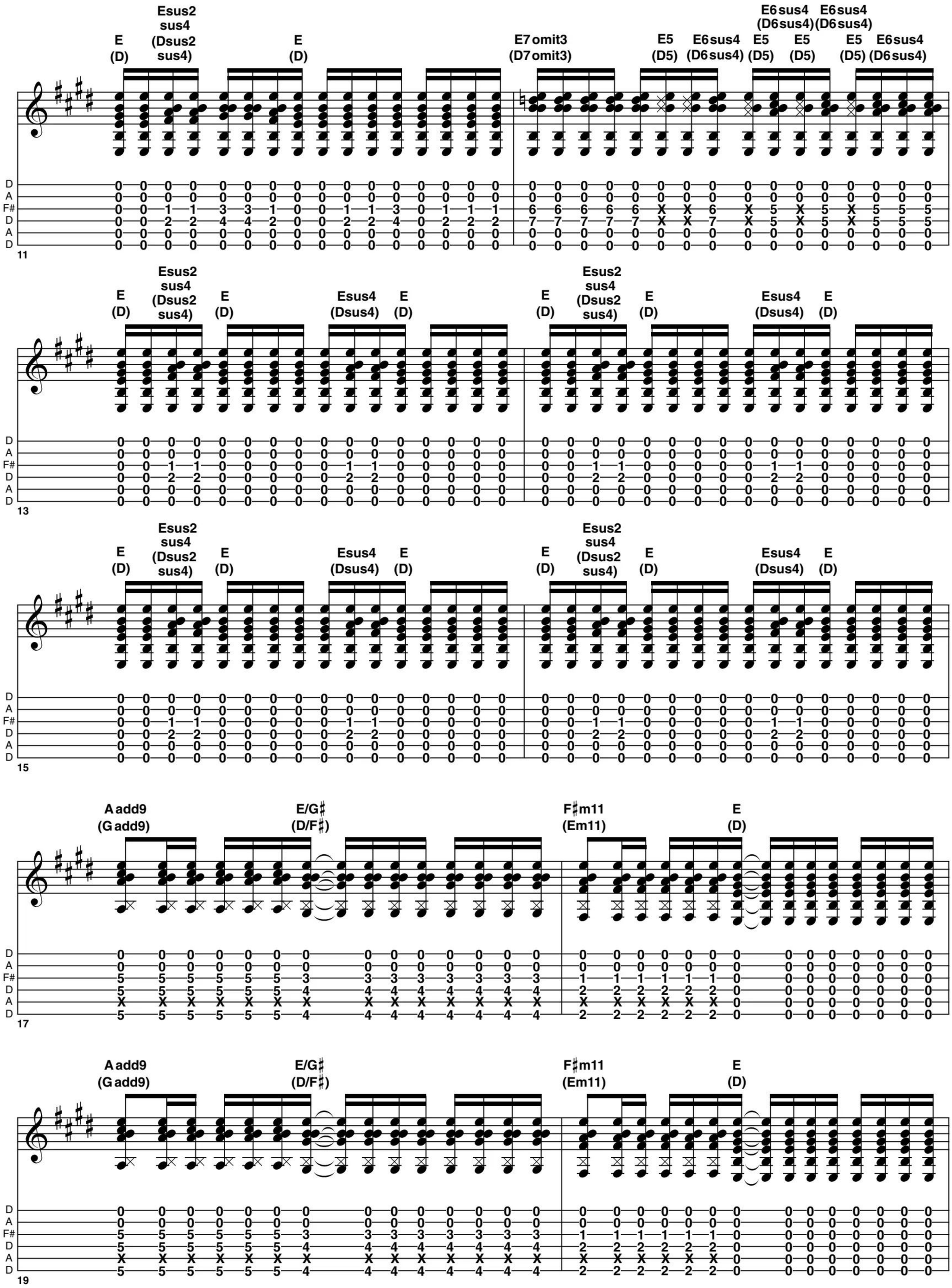
[Bar 9] Open tunings are great for creating this sort of melodic accompaniment pattern. Rather than being stuck in the open position using common 'cowboy chords', this style of playing allows the songwriter to create a really interesting part with some movement to accompany the vocal. The parts are simple but perfect to accompany a vocal such as Joni's.



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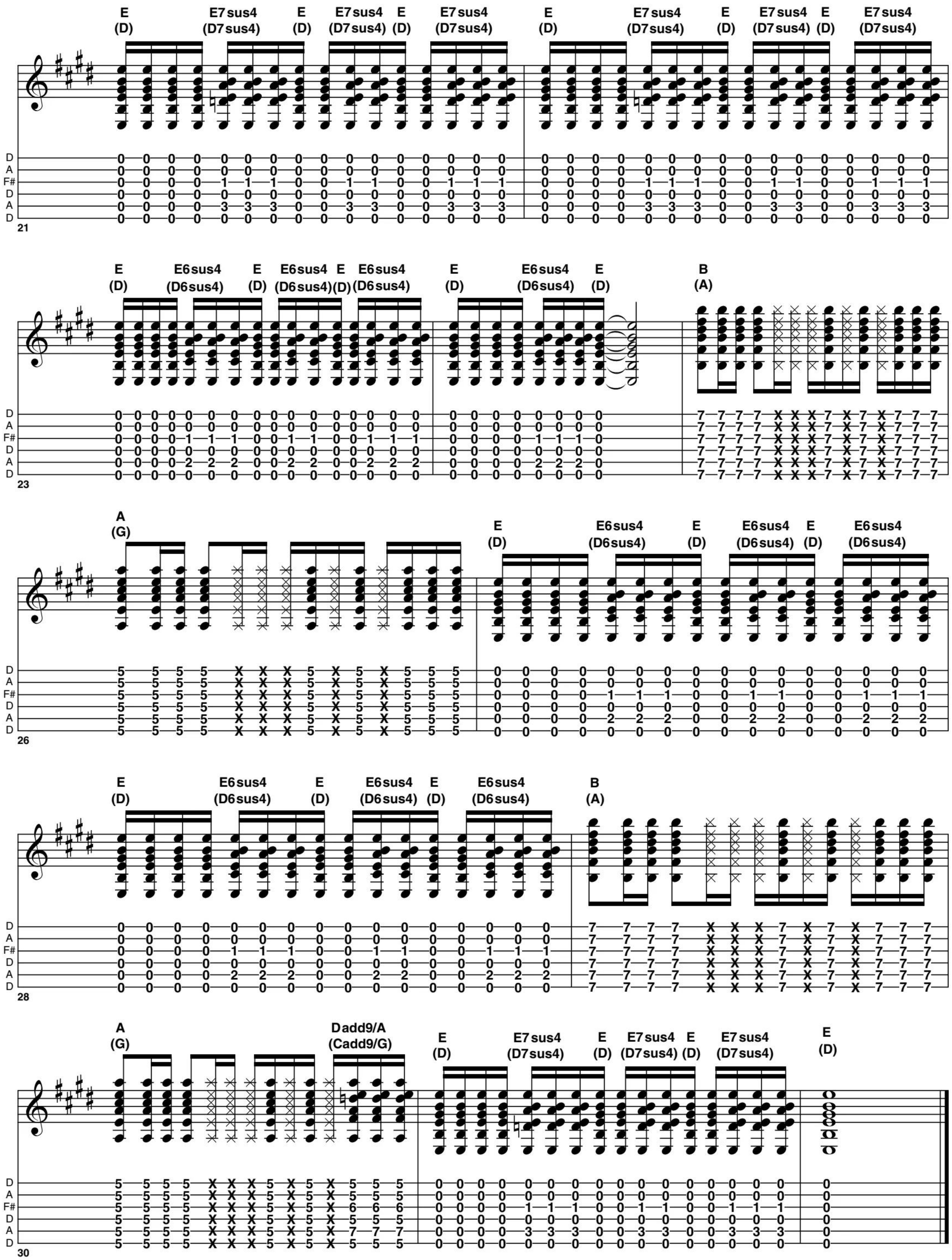
EXAMPLE **JONI MITCHELL STYLE**

[Bar 15] Again, make sure you really pay attention to where the fretted chords are played within the bar, and aim to accent these over the open strings. If you want to shift to open E tuning without changing the pitch of your strings, simply place a capo at the 2nd fret – instant open E. Of course, the capo also allows you to shift this or any other altered tuning to any key that your acoustic allows (non-cutaway guitars are, of course, more limited than cutaways).



EXAMPLE **JONI MITCHELL STYLE**

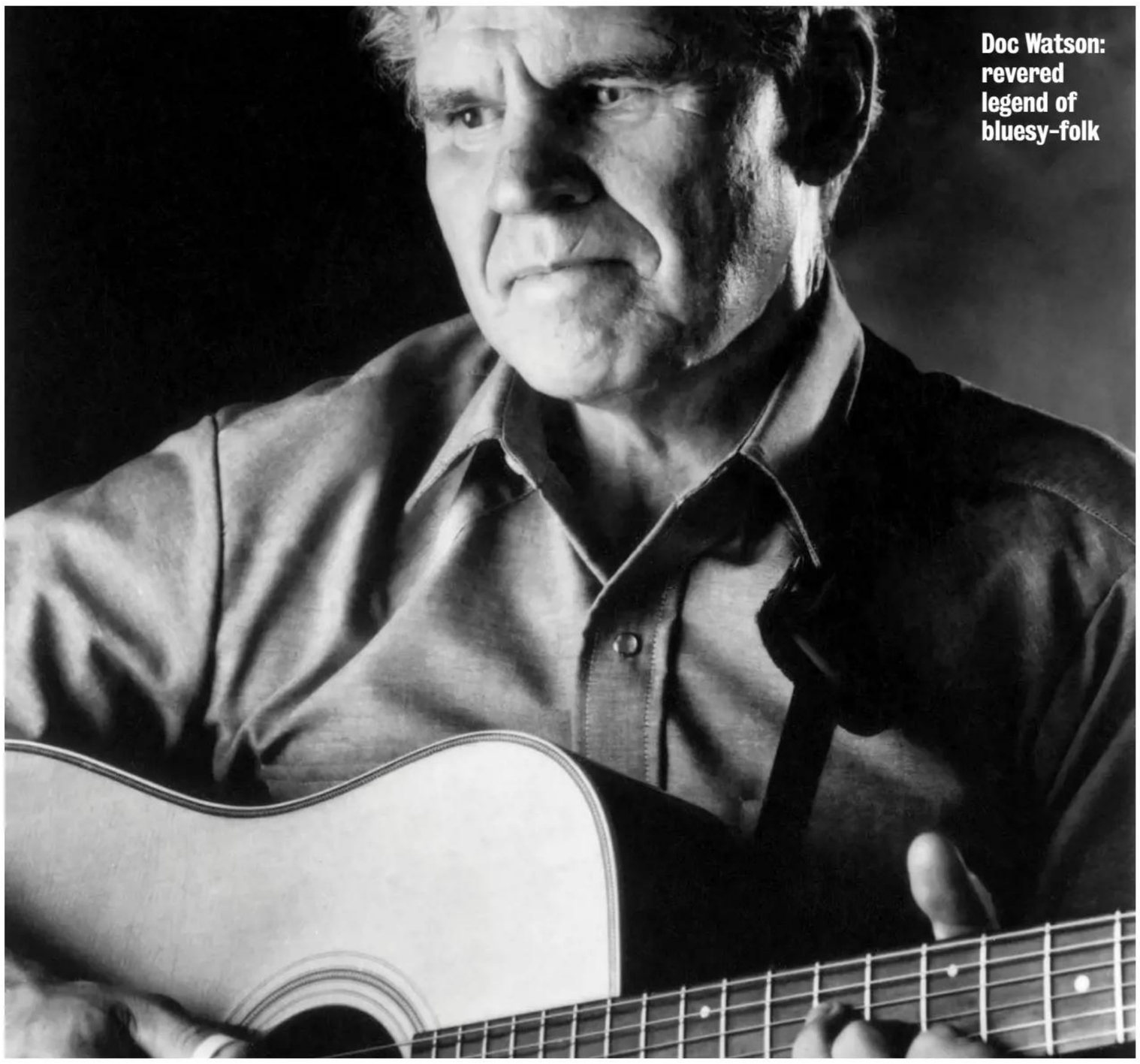
[Bar 25] Here's a first finger challenge: open tunings can allow you to use just one finger for chords. Joni had polio as a child, which affected her fretting hand. Joni's use of one-finger barre chords is clearly evident in songs like Big Yellow Taxi, Morning Morgantown, Little Green and many others.
[Bar 30] Note the change of chord at the end of this bar; this is a move not too dissimilar from another exponent of open tunings: Keith Richards.



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Doc Watson

Over the next six pages we examine a style of music that became known as Americana, with some neat picking from two cool dudes.



Doc Watson: revered legend of bluesy-folk

Info | **Will improve your…**

KEY Various
TEMPO 220 bpm

- ✔ Flat picking
- ✔ Travis picking
- ✔ General fluency

Blind country-blues and bluegrass dynamo Doc Watson died in 2012 shortly before his 90th birthday and following sharp on the heels of another pioneer of the style: banjo bluegrass legend, Earl Scruggs. In the following piece we'll look at two key facets of Watson's style – his mastery of the plectrum technique and his love of Travis picking.

Arthel Lane 'Doc' Watson was born in Deep Gap, North Carolina in 1923. He was blind from a very early age but this did not impair his ability to teach himself the guitar so, armed with a cheap Stella acoustic, he began to learn the music of his early country influences: the Carter Family (with picker extraordinaire Maybelle Carter on guitar) and the legendary 'Singing Brakeman', Jimmy Rodgers.

Watson's career began on the street corners of his home town, but it wasn't long before the young guitarist was spotted by a local western swing band. Ironically, much of his early professional career was spent playing fiddle tunes – on a Les Paul! Switching to acoustic he discovered his signature sound, but retained the fiddle tunes, simply transferring them to acoustic. Bear in mind that in the early days of country the guitar was generally used as a back-up tool, so to play fiddle melodies on the instrument was something that set Watson apart, right from the outset.

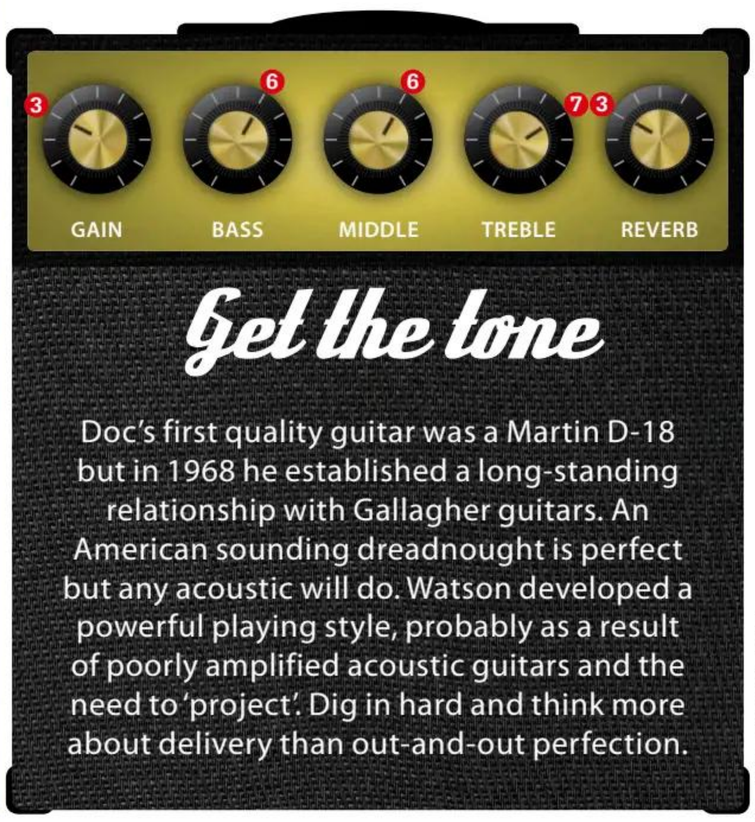
His big break came when he appeared at the Newport Folk Festival in 1963. He followed this the following year with the release of his first solo album. He began to perform as a trio with his son Merle and bassist T Michael Coleman and, even though the folk revival lost its momentum in the late '60s, Watson flourished and released many new recordings while still touring hard. He was a undoubtedly a great influence on other legendary pickers, most notably Clarence White of 'Sweetheart Of The Rodeo' era Byrds, and the great contemporary bluegrass guitarist, Tony Rice.

Watson was a skilled musician and highly-regarded within traditional American music circles. He was an expert plectrum

> "He was a great influence on other legendary pickers, most notably Clarence White of The Byrds"

player, Travis picker, banjoist, harmonica soloist and singer. His popularity never waned and each year he hosted Merlefest, an acoustic festival established in the memory of his son Merle, who died in 1985. The festival attracts up to 70,000 fans each year and is one of the most successful in the acoustic world.

There are many inspirational aspects to Doc's playing, but perhaps it's his fluency as both a flatpicker and Travis picker that marks him out from many of his contemporaries. Doc died on May 29, 2012 in North Carolina. To find out more visit www.docsguitar.com. **SR**



Get the tone

Doc's first quality guitar was a Martin D-18 but in 1968 he established a long-standing relationship with Gallagher guitars. An American sounding dreadnought is perfect but any acoustic will do. Watson developed a powerful playing style, probably as a result of poorly amplified acoustic guitars and the need to 'project'. Dig in hard and think more about delivery than out-and-out perfection.
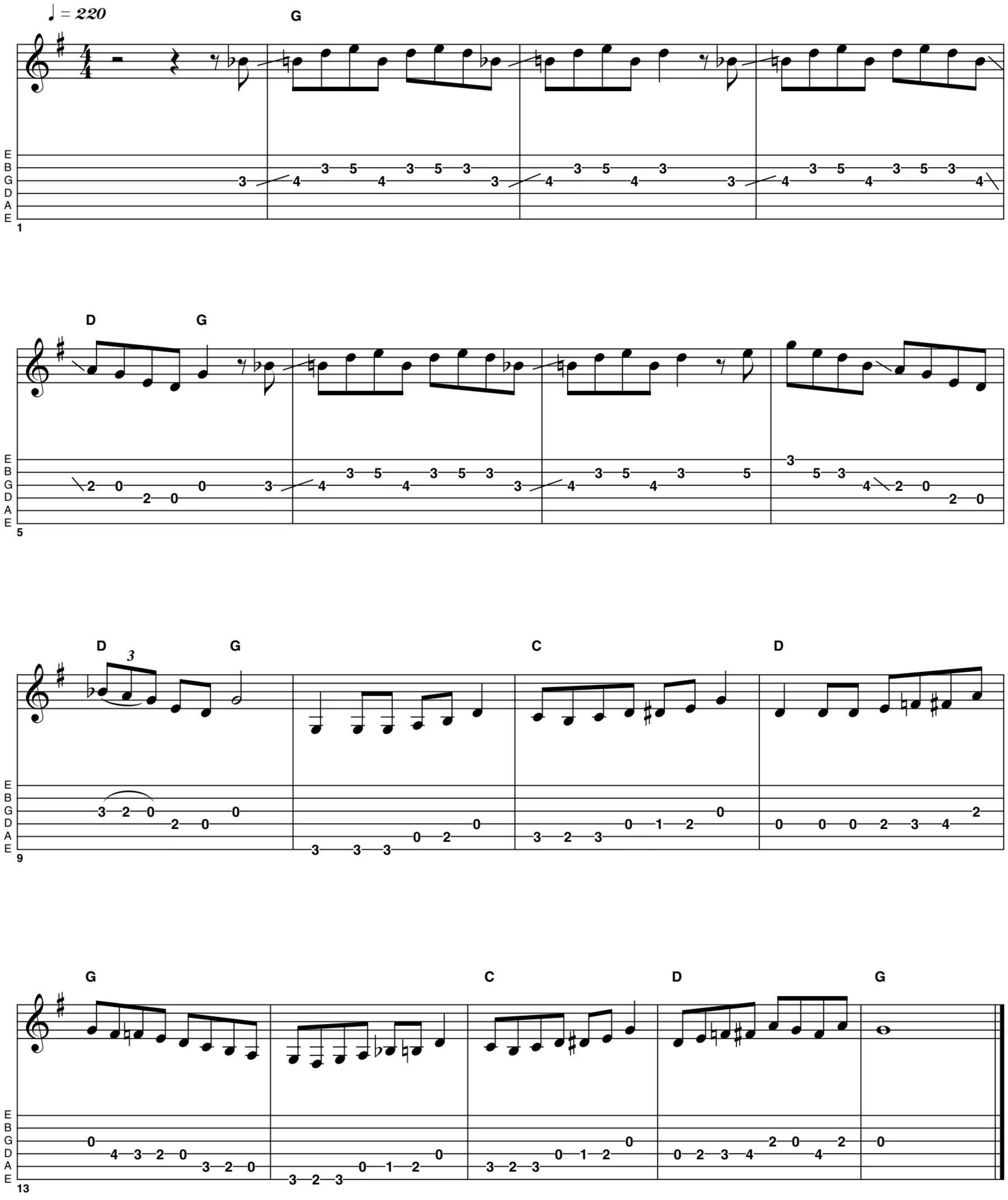
GLASSHOUSE IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



LISTENING SUGGESTIONS **For some modern tasty picking check out Doc's playing with Bryan Sutton on Whiskey Before Breakfast, from the latter's album, Not Too Far From The Tree. You can't go wrong with The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's classic 1972 live album, Will The Circle Be Unbroken; or perhaps a 'greatest hits' such as Doc's Prescription: 40 Bluesgrass Classics. There are many impressive performances of him online too, so check him out.**

EXAMPLE **FLAT PICKING**

[Bar 1] We are in flatpicking territory here, so aim for steady alternate picking and a relaxed picking hand throughout.
[Bar 9] Watch out for the triplet; you should be playing with a slight swing feel but you may find that you get locked into the constant eighth notes so the triplet feel takes you by surprise with its sudden acceleration.
[Bars 10-17] This sequence simply outlines the underlying chords but listen to masters like Doc and they throw in some unexpected chromaticism (non-scale notes), often to maintain the flow of a line.



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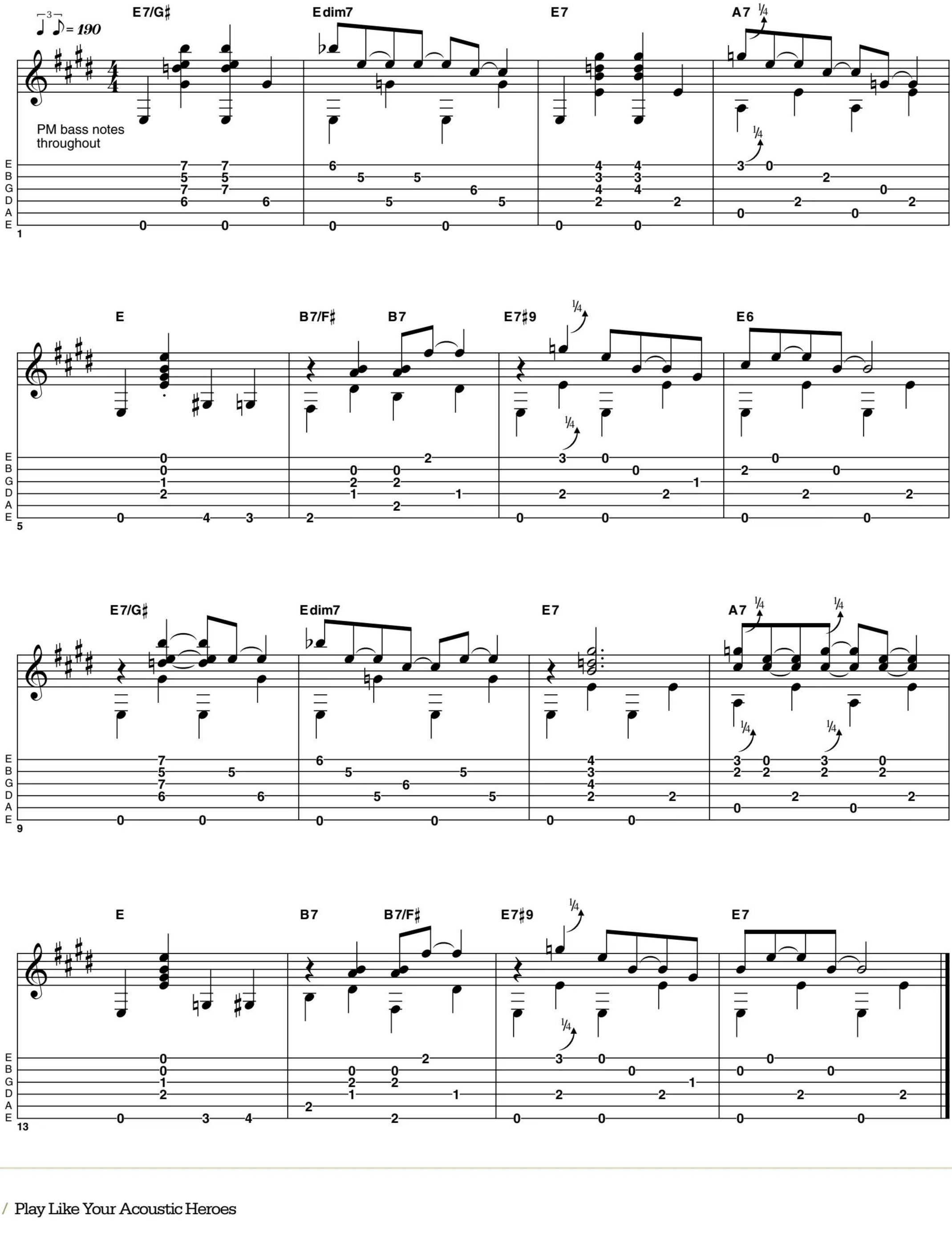
EXAMPLE **FLAT PICKING**

[Bar 1] Here is some Doc Watson-style Travis picking based on the changes to his classic Deep River Blues. Again a slight swing feel or even swagger is important to get the authentic delivery in place. Don't forget to palm mute the bass notes for a nice bit of added 'thump'.

[Bar 2] One of the hardest elements of Travis picking to get dead right is the syncopation – the notes that fall 'off' the beat. The bassline is always 'on' the beat but listen to how the melody notes often fall between it timewise.

As for technique, Doc generally used the first and second fingers (i and m) on his picking hand to pluck the top three strings, while the thumb (with a thumbpick, although this is not vital) played the bass notes.

[Bar 12] Subtle bluesy quartertone bends are another feature of Doc's style, as witnessed here. These are harder to play as the bends are on the first and second strings at the same time. This will take some strength and control, so work up to the required tempo slowly.



Woody Guthrie

His words and music fed a generation of free-thinkers and with Bob Dylan among his biggest fans his 'legend' status stands unassailable.



Woody Guthrie: his 'machine killed fascists!'

Info — **Will improve your…**

KEY G major
TEMPO 120 bpm

- ✔ Solo accompaniment
- ✔ Alternating bass lines
- ✔ Dynamics

Looking at the forefathers of acoustic folk guitar styles – where better to begin than with the grandfather of the genre: Woody Guthrie. Living through some of the most tempestuous episodes of the 20th century: the Great Depression, World War II, the rise of communism and the Cold War – certainly shaped Guthrie into the artist he became.

He was born in Okemah, Oklahoma in July 1912 and grew up in a family where singing was a well-practised tradition, from Scottish folk to American traditional songs. His first stab at a musical career came in the early 1930s when he moved to Texas, but the onset of the Great Depression meant that he was soon on the road and looking for work, guitar in hand, and it was singing and playing that helped to pay his way.

In 1937 he arrived in California and started to perform on a local radio station singing traditional songs along with some of his own. Things started to pick up pace from here as the radio show also gave him a platform to air his political views and shaped him as the social commentator we think of today. Ever the restless wanderer, Woody moved to New York in 1940 and befriended those artists we now think of as forming the great folk canon: Pete Seeger, Leadbelly, Sonny Terry, Josh White and many more. Together they made music but, just as importantly, they campaigned for the common man and his causes, thus coming to define the real meaning of the folk and protest movement that shaped the 1960s.

Woody was prolific. He not only sang and wrote his own songs but he drew, wrote poetry and novels and was also a prominent activist. He enlisted in the army during World War II and wrote many anti-Hitler songs and pro-war pieces, all of which served to rally the troops.

Returning from the war his health waned and he was diagnosed with Huntington's disease. However, while he was in hospital a whole new generation (including Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, leaders of the next wave of protest singers) were taking an interest in his music. In this way Woody was able to pass the torch onto the next generation.

> "His guitar playing features basslines that weave against strummed chords to create a sound that is full and rich at all times"

Guthrie's playing always served as an accompaniment to his voice, but was never sidelined; indeed it's lively and infectious and, as with many great blues artists, features an interesting level of complexity as basslines weave against strummed chords to create a sound that is full and rich at all times.

Woody had the warning: 'This machine kills fascists!' emblazoned onto his Gibson, defining him as the ultimate protest singer! **SR**



Get the tone

Any kind of acoustic will be suitable for this, from a small parlour style to a large dreadnought (Woody used both). The most important factors are a strong sounding bass end and clear-toned trebles so the chords and bass don't muddy up – in essence, a good sonic balance. Woody is best known for playing a 1945 Gibson Southern Jumbo and a signature model is now available.
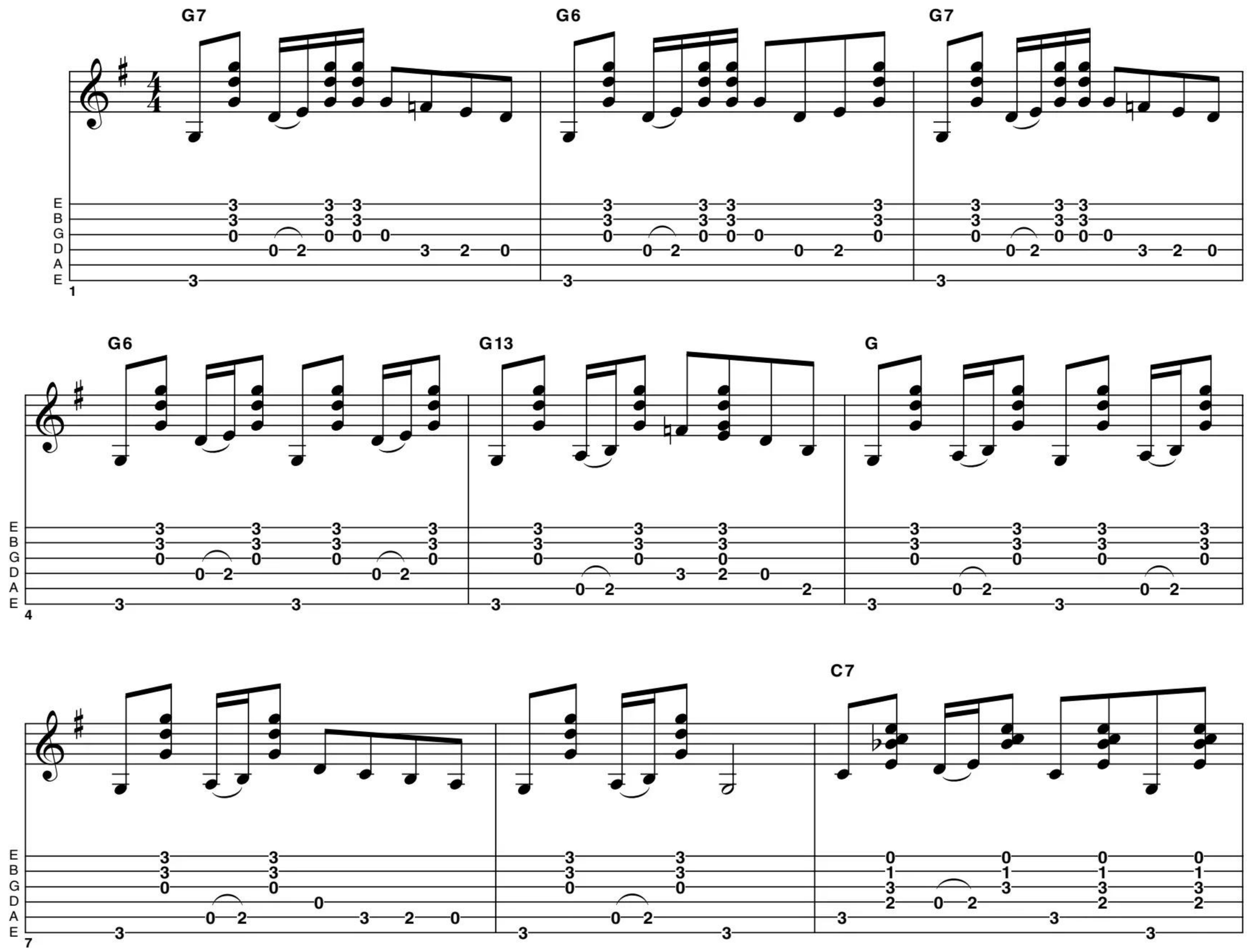


LISTENING SUGGESTIONS **Woody's tracks were often recorded in a piecemeal fashion, so it's hard to give a chronology to his releases as these days they tend to wind up on compilations. With that in mind it's probably best to start with a Greatest Hits to get an overall flavour and then delve into some of the Smithsonian Folkways recordings to really get a sense of what he was about. This Land Is Your Land remains his most famous song.**

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EXAMPLE WOODY GUTHRIE STYLE

[Bar 1] To get this style down requires a relaxed picking hand and independence between thumb and picking or strumming fingers. In the main it's best to use the thumb to pick the bass notes (sixth, fifth and fourth strings) and a downward 'flick' of the first finger to facilitate the chord on the higher strings. Also, using just one finger allows you to keep going at the required pace. Paul McCartney developed his own version of this playing style.

[Bar 3] This is typical of Woody's approach; we're based around a simple G chord shape but within it he creates variety with hammered-on bass notes against strummed chords on the top strings – very Dylan or Donovan.
[Bar 9] The bass notes here on beat 3 (the C) and beat 4 (the G) are the classic folk self-accompaniment style; the root note of the chord, C, followed by the 5th, the G. Both are 'framed' by the chord.
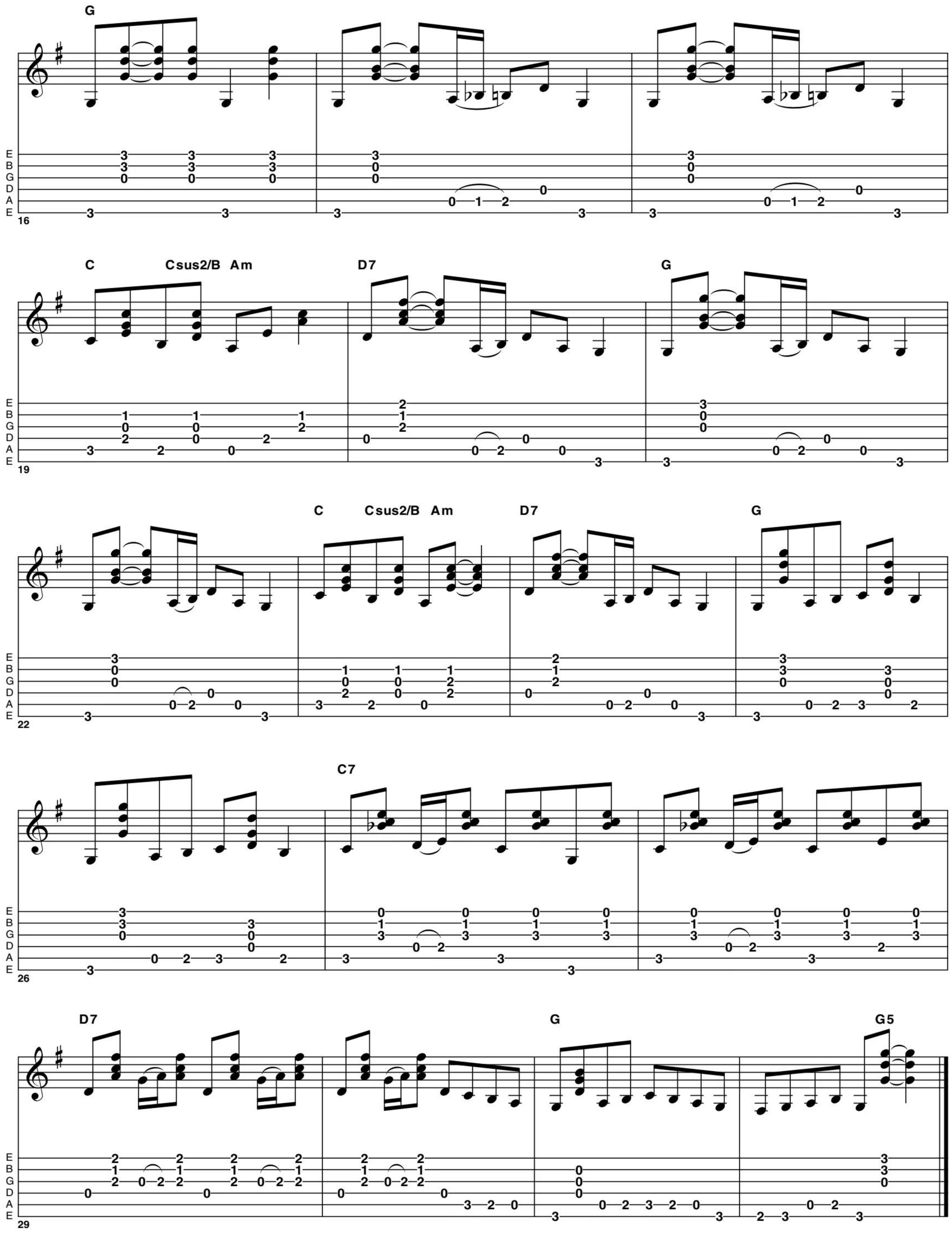


EXAMPLE **WOODY GUTHRIE STYLE**

[Bar 15] When playing in this style it's good to become proficient with bass runs – here the bass runs down from the D7 chord to hit the root of the G chord at the start of the next bar.

[Bar 17] We have a slightly different, more 'riff' based idea here, which gives some breathing space away from the more busy chord strumming section. The emphasis here should be on getting those hammer-ons clean and crisp.

[Bar 23] Again we see the use of the bassline to connect the chords, this time from C major down to A minor.

[Bar 31] And, finally, a long bass run to finish things off. The key thing here is to know your major scales in all the crucial keys in the open position – having this knowledge allows you to easily create these ascending or descending bass runs with which to connect any chords in a progression.



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Michael Hedges

The 'modern' acoustic style began in America but spread rapidly. We look at one great player from the USA, and another from Ireland.



Acoustic innovator, Michael Hedges

Info — **Will improve your…**

KEY G major
TEMPO 100 bpm

- ✔ Hybrid picking
- ✔ Tone production
- ✔ Fretting hand accuracy

Michael Hedges caused a musical tidal wave on the release of his legendary Wyndham Hill album, Aerial Boundaries in 1984. Acoustic guitarists everywhere could hardly believe what they were hearing. What was this guy doing? It sounded more like a one-man guitar orchestra!

The truth was revealed when they saw Hedges in action as he utilised all manner of sonic and percussive tricks including tunings, harmonics and the tapping of various points on his instrument to emulate percussion.

However, Hedges' approach was not all about bashing his guitar – although a quick look at his battered Martin reveals he gave no quarter in this regard. He was also a master fingerstylist and hybrid picker and it's more this side of his style that we will examine here.

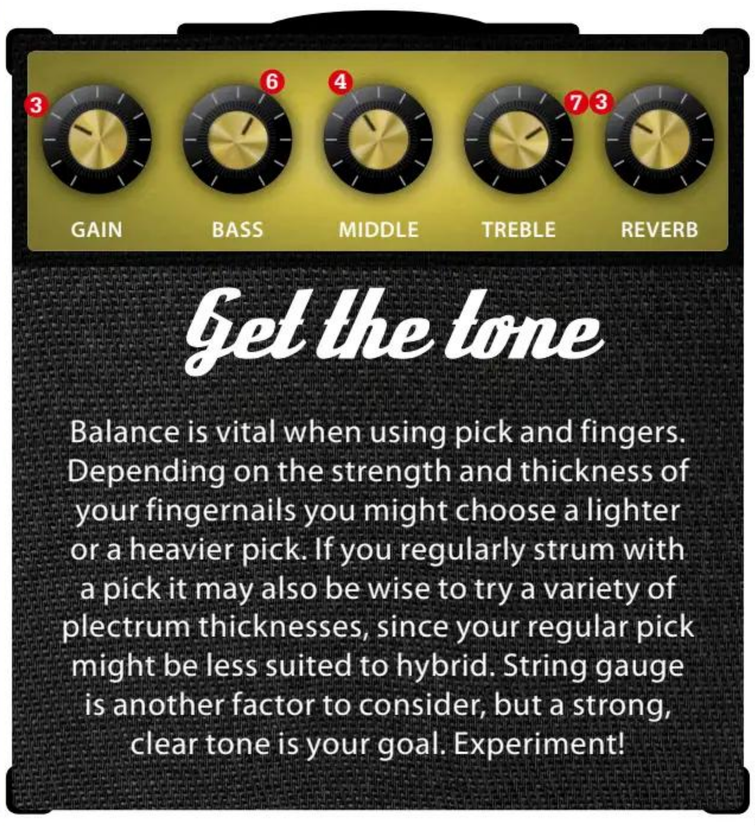
While hybrid picking (pick and fingers) is not mandatory on this composition, you may find that using the pick gives you a crisper attack and makes strumming easier. Perhaps the greatest challenges are maintaining even volume and dynamics between the pick and the picking fingers; the pick will give a harder attack, so you may want to play more softly with this while digging in more with your fingers. Being able to strum chords is a big advantage with hybrid picking, but 'plectrum only' players will find the ability to pluck on non-adjacent strings (as in the first eight bars here) to be a real bonus.

A problem when using just a pick is in crossing several strings – for example, moving from the sixth to the third, or third to first string. This is easy for a fingerstylist as each 'pima' finger is assigned to a string, but can be problematic for a pick player. Hybrid picking takes care of things by assigning the pick to the sixth, fifth and fourth strings, and the i, m and a fingers to first, second and third respectively.

> "The greatest challenge with this style is being able to maintain dynamics between the pick and the picking fingers"

The pick can actually pick any string you desire but when practising, focus on bringing pick and fingers together. Another advantage of hybrid picking is that you can go from arpeggiated chords direct to lead licks and create the illusion that you are accompanying yourself, going from chords to solos and back again.

Sadly, Hedges died when his car left the road in Mendocino County, California, and the guitar world lost yet another major innovator. Michael Hedges was just 43 years old. **SR**



Get the tone

Balance is vital when using pick and fingers. Depending on the strength and thickness of your fingernails you might choose a lighter or a heavier pick. If you regularly strum with a pick it may also be wise to try a variety of plectrum thicknesses, since your regular pick might be less suited to hybrid. String gauge is another factor to consider, but a strong, clear tone is your goal. Experiment!
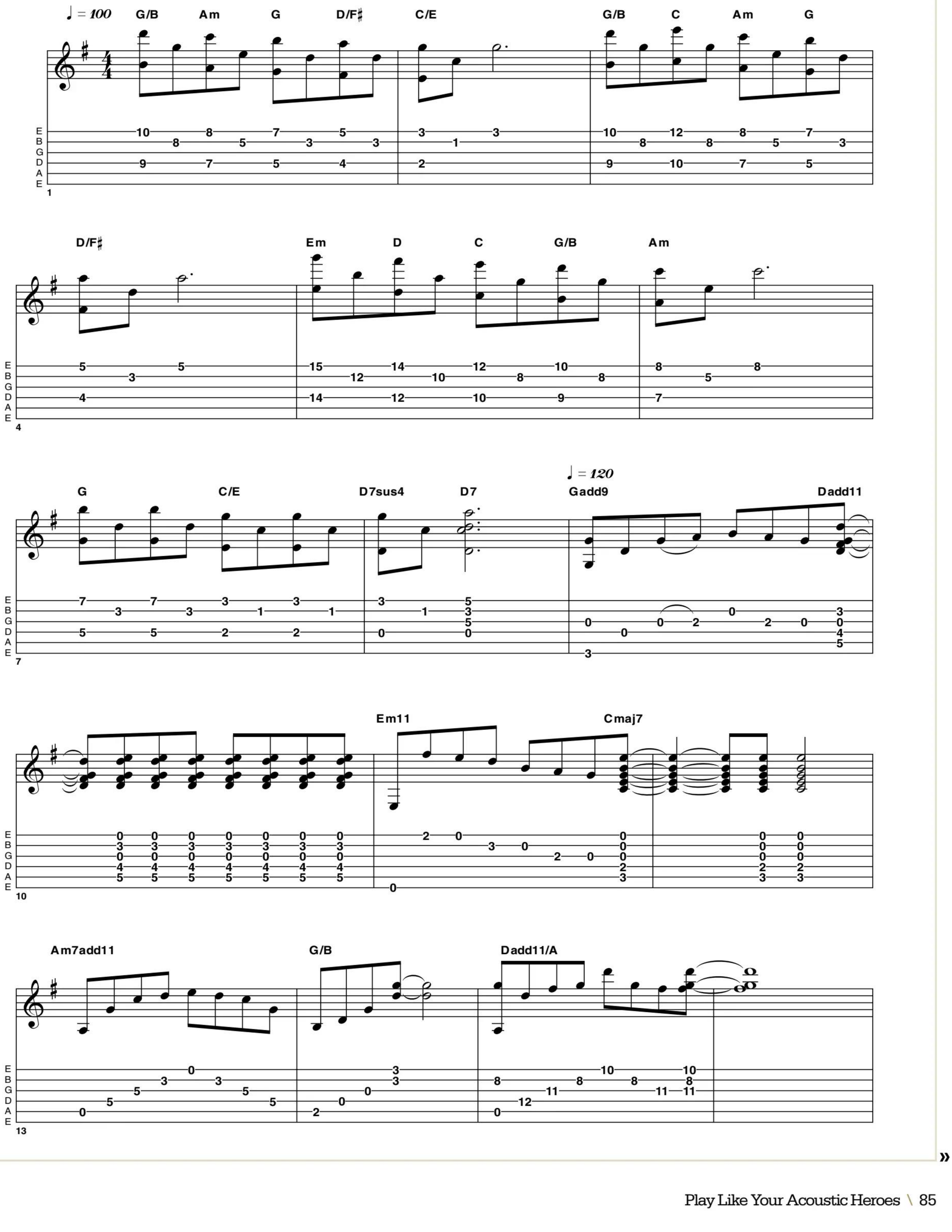


LISTENING SUGGESTIONS **It's fair to say that Michael Hedges laid down the foundations for what we now refer to as modern acoustic playing with its open tunings, percussive elements and high levels of technical proficiency. His album Aerial Boundaries on the Wyndham Hill label showcases why he was so influential. Although he died way too young, his style has lived on in players like Preston Reed, Thomas Leeb, Eric Roche and Newton Faulkner.**

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

EXAMPLE **MICHAEL HEDGES STYLE**

[Bar 1] If you're hybrid picking, use the pick on the fourth string and the 'm' or 'a' finger to pick the first string. For the notes on the second string use either the pick or the 'm' finger. These choices become instinctive with practise.
[Bar 5] Although they are just major and minor triads, the 'wider' voicings of these chords give them a very sweet sound. Electric players like Eric Johnson use these chords and every guitarist should be fluent with these positions.
[Bar 9] You can choose to put the emphasis on picking the notes with the pick or the picking hand fingers here. Try both approaches and see which you prefer (or which comes more naturally). When performing you can even switch approaches mid-song to alter the dynamics if you so desire.
[Bar 15] There's a rather big chord here – a little test for your fretting hand stretching abilities. Practise the changes slowly at first.
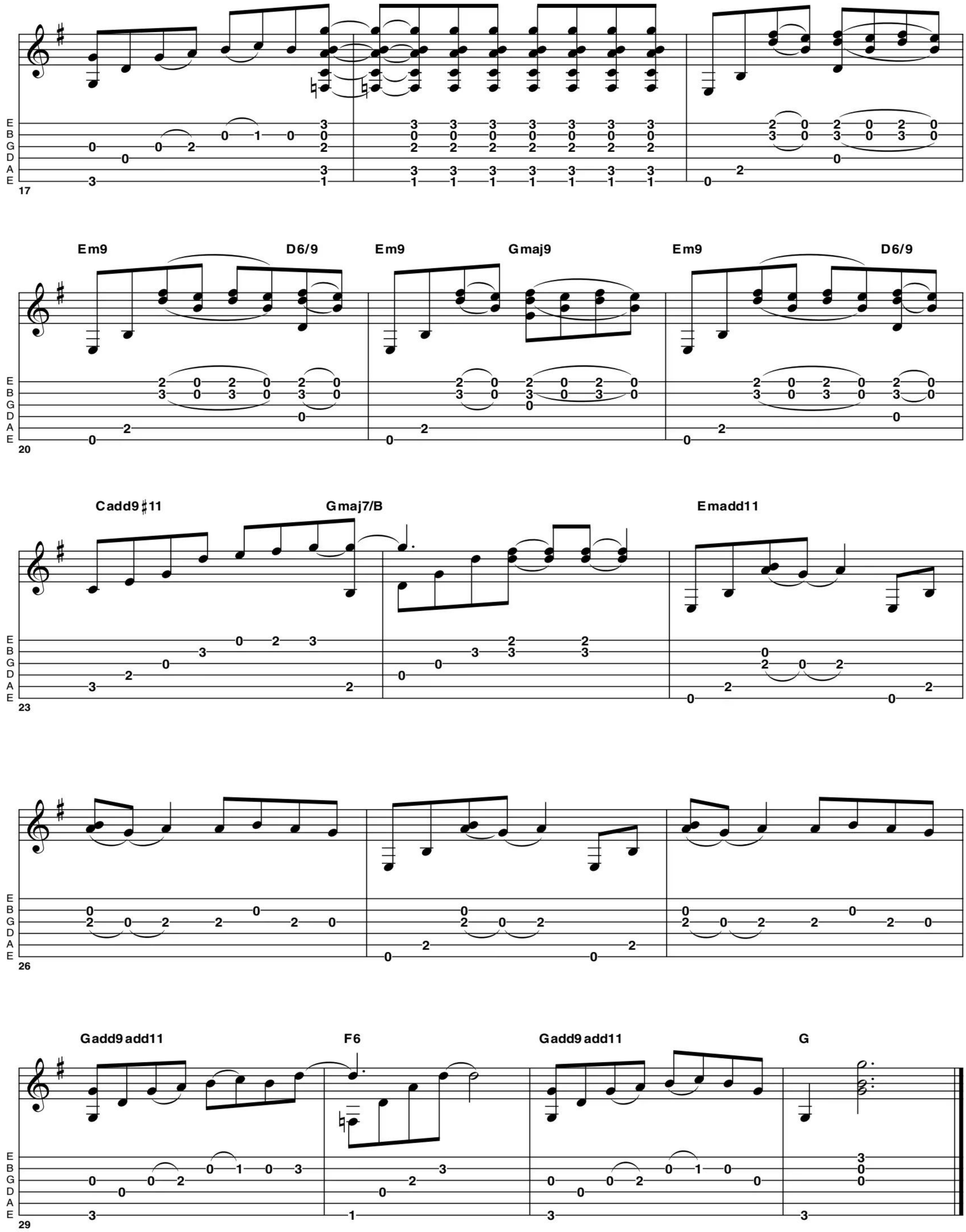


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EXAMPLE MICHAEL HEDGES STYLE

[Bar 18] The strummed Fadd9#11 is a great example of Michael's rich chord voicings: here Fmajor is dressed up with a 9th (G) and #11 (B).
[Bar 19] Here's a passage that really evokes the Michael Hedges style: make sure you can co-ordinate the hammer-on and pull-off double-stops on the first and second strings with the plucked open fourth string.

[Bar 25] When playing the notes on the second beat (third and second strings) you can either choose to pluck both notes together using the pick and 'm' finger or just pluck them both with the pick. Both notes together will give a more even sound while using the pick will give a brighter attack and more separation between the notes. It's up to you and your ears!



Eric Roche

Through his GT writing, teaching and dynamic live shows, Irish virtuoso Eric Roche helped to change the face of acoustic guitar music.



Eric Roche: a brilliant acoustic stylist and innovator

Info — **Will improve your…**

KEY D minor
TEMPO 150 bpm

- ✔ Guitar body percussion
- ✔ Two-handed tapping
- ✔ Performance dynamics

Classically trained and initially influenced by guitarists such as Michael Hedges and Preston Reed, Eric Roche developed a very personal guitar style. This featured driving percussion and 'extended' techniques such as two-handed tapping (still quite unusual on acoustic guitar at the time when he was pioneering his style) and the use of artificial harmonics.

Eric's music was always melodic and composed – in essence he wrote music rather than 'exercises', which is always a potential pitfall with any style that's built on specific techniques or stylistic traits. Beyond his dextrous fretboard (and 'rest of the guitar') skills, his personable nature and compositional flair, it was his live work that set him apart, with a huge tone that engulfed every concert hall in which he performed.

It's also worth noting that while Eric was highly proficient in percussion techniques, tapping and other styles we consider 'modern', he was also a master of conventional fingerpicking, something we urge younger players to bear in mind when they are focusing exclusively on modern styles like tapping.

It's best to view this piece as three lessons in one. The first part examines the tapping as an accompaniment approach – the fretting hand keeps a hypnotic hammer-on and pull-off sequence, while the picking hand taps out the accompanying bass notes.

The next section combines fretting hand tapping and percussion, with picking hand slapped and tapped harmonics. The percussive part (the muted 'x's) can be played anywhere on the body but the upper bout (above the fretboard end) is a good place to start. For example, you can hammer-on the 3rd fret of the fifth and sixth strings with the fretting hand fingers then quickly move the same hand over to the upper bout of your guitar where the neck joins the body, then slap the guitar for the percussive effect. With a bit of trial and error you'll soon find the areas of the body that work best for you, and the pleasingly different tones that each elicits.

> "The most important factor is that you maintain the independence between picking hand thumb and the picking fingers"

Finally, the examples contain a simpler section where you maintain a hammer-on and pull-off sequence while tapping out a rhythm on the upper bout of the guitar, this time with the nails of the picking hand for an almost 'castanets' tone.

Eric Roche died of cancer in September 2005. He may have gone, but neither he nor his music will ever be forgotten. **SR**



Get the tone

Eric favoured large-bodied Lowden guitars. Big guitars are great for this kind of playing but be careful not to hit your instrument too hard, lest you split the top. Percussive players often have re-enforced tops or stronger strutting to withstand the abuse. Experiment with different areas of the guitar body to find the dark and light percussion tones (bass and snare drum emulation, etc).
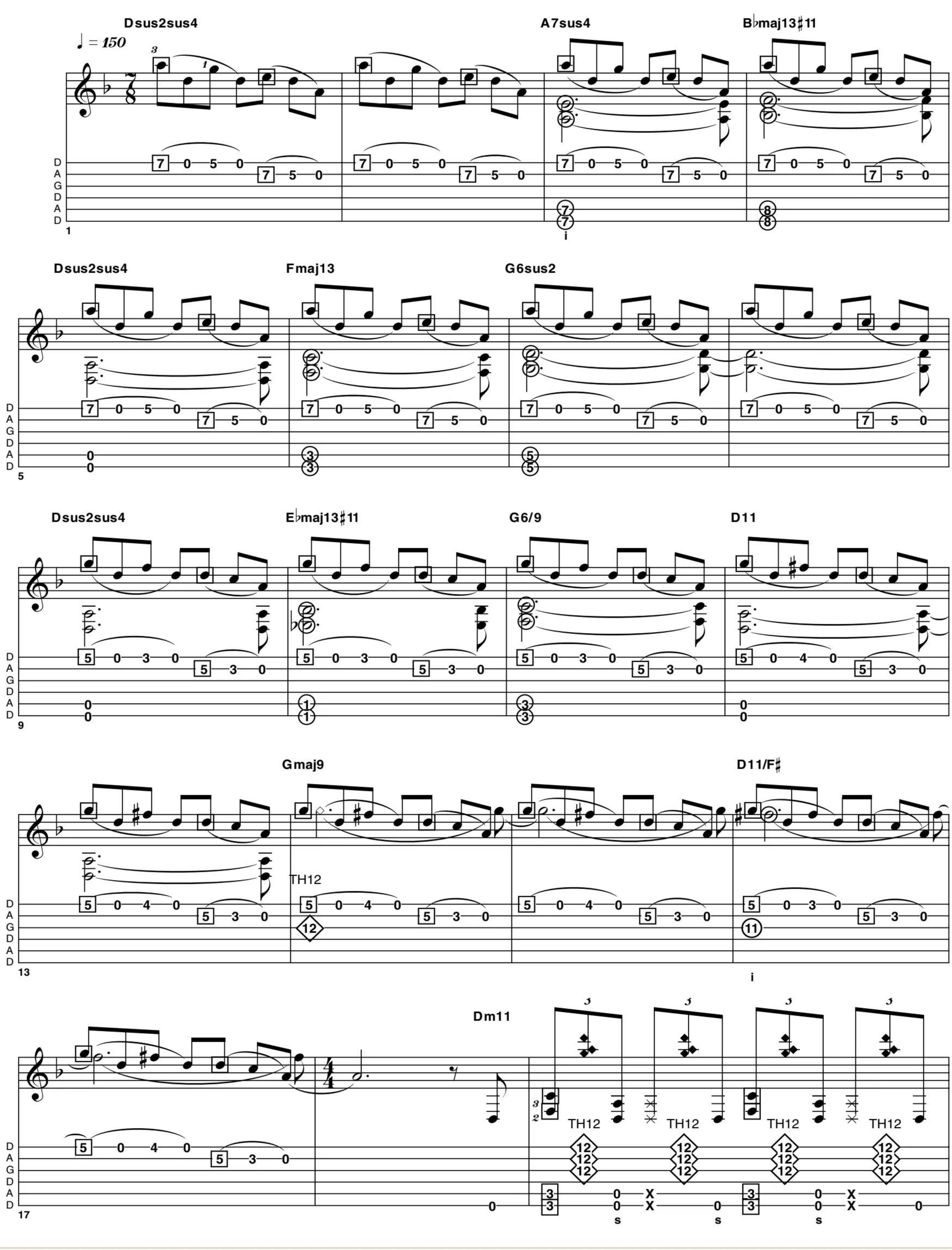


LISTENING SUGGESTIONS **It's worth tracking down as many of Eric's old columns as you can (he wrote Guitar Techniques's acoustic section for some years), as they're a goldmine of information. His recordings are superb, too: he recorded three 'must have' albums; The Perc-U-Later, Spin and With These Hands (produced by Martin Taylor), and there is also a posthumous live album, Live & Inspirational.**

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EXAMPLE **ERIC ROCHE**

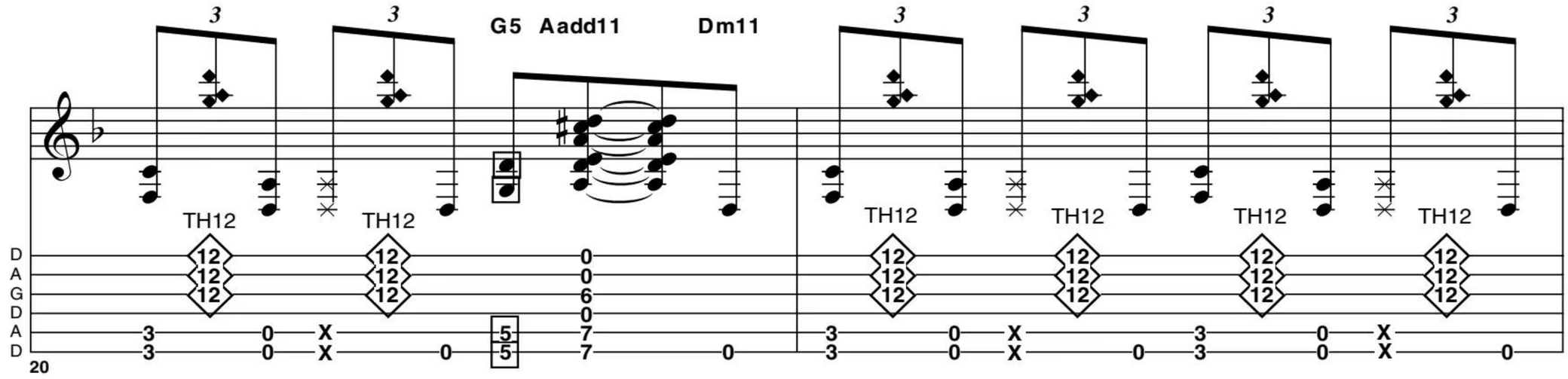
[Bar 1] Here is a repetitive hammer-on and pull-off figure. Start slowly and work on stamina and clarity. Ideally, you want to be able to keep this going for a couple of minutes without feeling fatigue in your fingers.
[Bar 3] With your picking hand (circled notes/frets) you can now tap out accompanying bass notes but watch out that these don't overshadow the melody on the top strings. This exercise is fairly simple but try adding extra bass notes in each bar. **[Bar 9]** There's a slight change in the melody so be sure that you can move the fingers in time while paying attention to the shifting bass notes. **[Bar 14]** Eric was adept at intricate techniques such as this 12th-fret artificial harmonic: either tap it with the picking hand 'i' or 'm' finger or rest the 'i' finger over the 12th fret and pluck the harmonic with the picking hand thumb. There's little room for manoeuvre with that melody on the top strings.

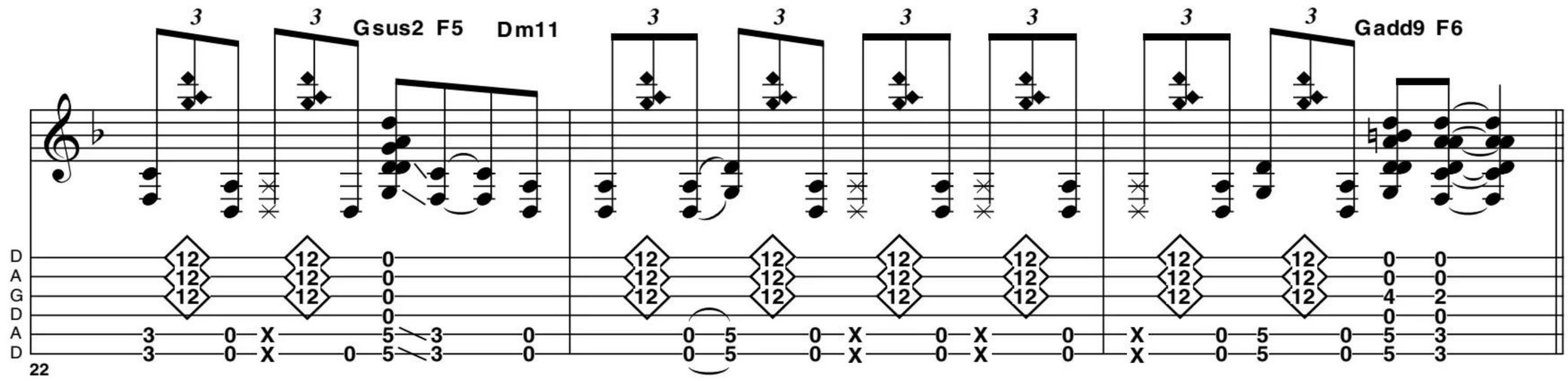


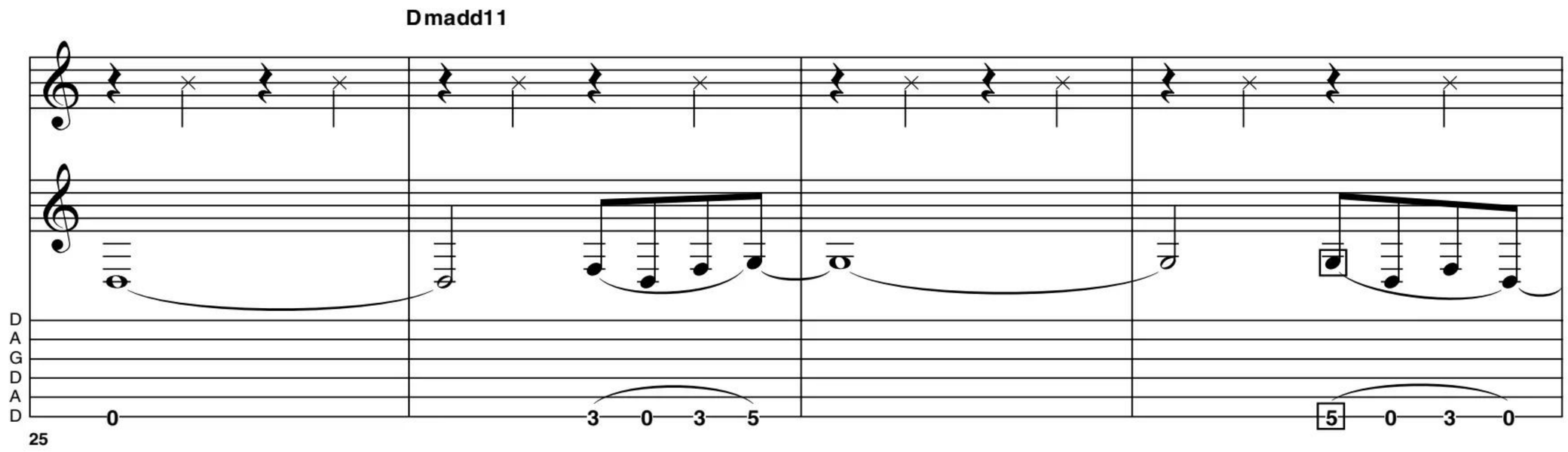
EXAMPLE **ERIC ROCHE**

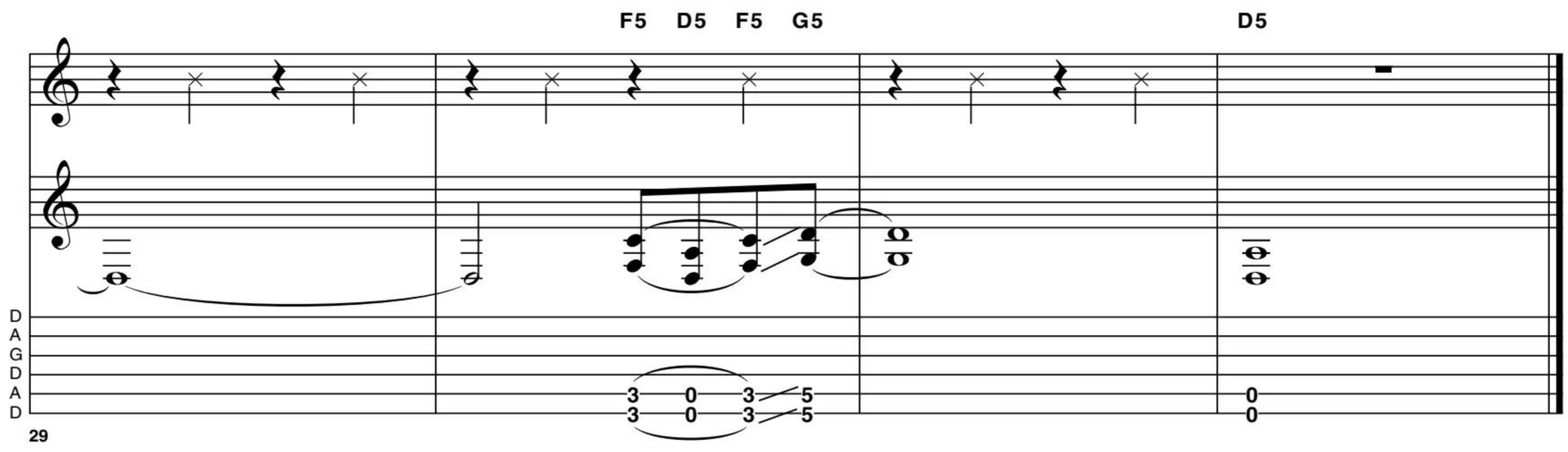
[Bar 19] This is where the fun begins! There are fretting hand hammer-ons (fifth and sixth strings), tapped and slapped harmonics with the picking hand and a percussive 'thwack' on the body of the guitar with the fretting hand. Start slowly, building up coordination, speed and accuracy. The fretting hand has to travel a fair distance from the strings on the 3rd fret to the guitar's upper bout for the percussive 'thwack', but with practise this will become second nature.

[Bar 23] Here's a reversal of the previous pattern. You now start the bar with percussion rather than the hammer-ons on the bass strings.
[Bar 26] Finally, here's a simple bass line accompanied by some percussion. Tap the fretting hand nails on the upper bout of the guitar on beats 2 and 4 while the fretting hand sounds the riff on the sixth string for that pseudo 'castanets' or 'timbale' sound. You can catch Eric on YouTube doing this type of thing live.









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Down To The River To Pray

Our second piece is a traditional Appalachian standard made famous in the Coen Brothers' hit movie, O' Brother, Where Art Thou?



Alison Krauss with Jamey Johnson

Info | **Will improve your…**

KEY E major
TEMPO 51 bpm

- ✔ Picking melody notes
- ✔ Awareness of note choice
- ✔ Fretting hand clarity

This traditional tune, associated with the Appalachian region of the United States, is well known but probably most famous for being the melody Alison Krauss sings in the smash hit movie directed by the Coen Brothers, O' Brother Where Art Thou?

The origins of the tune aren't clear, but it's most likely a slave song or spiritual written some time in the 19th century. The early version of this tune was called Down To The Valley To Pray, though at some point the lyrics were changed to Down To The River To Pray. While the origins of the tune cannot be confirmed, there is no doubt that it is a simple but beautiful melody with enough contour to work well as a solo guitar piece.

We've selected the key of E for this special arrangement, which means we have plenty of open strings at our disposal – an especially useful tool for when we move to the chords of A and B. Given that some of the melody notes are repeated, this arrangement will be a good exercise for working on some new picking hand patterns.

When playing a repeated melody on one string it's useful to use alternating fingers to get a smooth, even sound on the melody note. Many fingerstyle players will play a repeated melody note using just one picking hand finger and, while this isn't the crime of the century, it can lead to reduced fluency and uneven notes. To this end you'll find a number of picking hand fingering suggestions in the tab – of course, these are only suggestions but hopefully the logic of these choices will become apparent as you try them and become familiar with the shapes and positions.

The melody notes have been placed mostly on the first and second strings, and we use the remaining strings to add harmony – you'll notice that often the bass note rises along with a note on the third string. This is a great tactic for creating full sounding arrangements without everything being cluttered, an approach that's particularly apparent if you study the arrangements of the great Martin Taylor MBE. This 'fragmentary' approach to arranging carries all the information you need but can be less taxing for the fretting hand fingers. In addition, thinning things out also means that full chord voicings often have a greater impact when you do get to them – for example, the E major and B major chords in bars 9 and 10.

> "When playing a repeated melody on one string it's useful to use alternating fingers to get a smooth, even sound on the note"

There are infinite ways to arrange a tune like this so, once you've mastered our version, why not see how you can tweak it to suit your own preferences. **SR**



Get the tone

Players like Tommy Emmanuel love the directness and punch of a medium-sized OM (Orchestra Model) style guitar, while others including Thomas Leeb prefer the depth and power of a Dreadnought or Jumbo. There are no hard and fast rules, and if you're playing through a PA or acoustic combo you can boost or cut resonances accordingly. Use the above settings as a guide and adjust to taste.
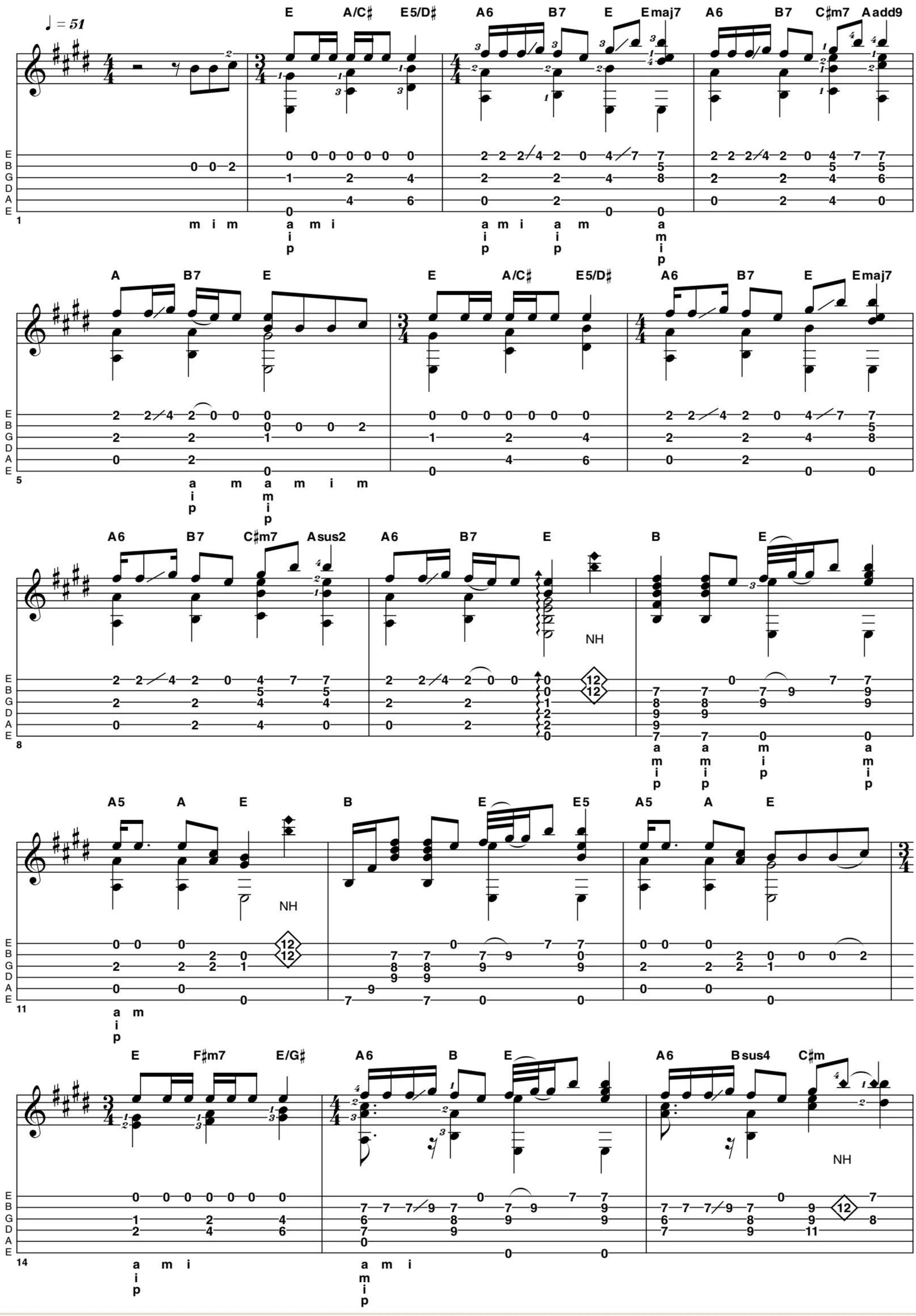


LISTENING SUGGESTIONS **Head straight for the O' Brother Where Art Thou? film soundtrack and listen to the Alison Krauss and Union Station version of this tune for a stunning rendition and arrangement. Another, perhaps surprising, album is legendary electric bluesman Mike Bloomfield's Blues, Gospel And Ragtime Guitar Instrumentals, showing the less well-known acoustic side of the 'American Clapton'.**

ZUMA PRESS, INC. / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

»

EXAMPLE **DOWN TO THE RIVER TO PRAY**

[Bar 2] Our fingering for the repeated melody note on the first string here uses an approach similar to that of a classical or flamenco guitarist.
[Bar 9] Play these as 'artificial harmonics' – lay your picking hand's first finger over the 12th fret and use your thumb or second finger to strum these two strings, quickly removing the fretting fingers to create the harmonic.
[Bar 10] These fuller chords fill things out really well, but look out for the bluesy hammer-on towards the end of this bar, making sure this phrase is relaxed – whatever you do, don't rush through it.
[Bar 14] Although the bass note and inner voice move upwards, the notes are different here with the harmony now taking place on fourth and third strings.
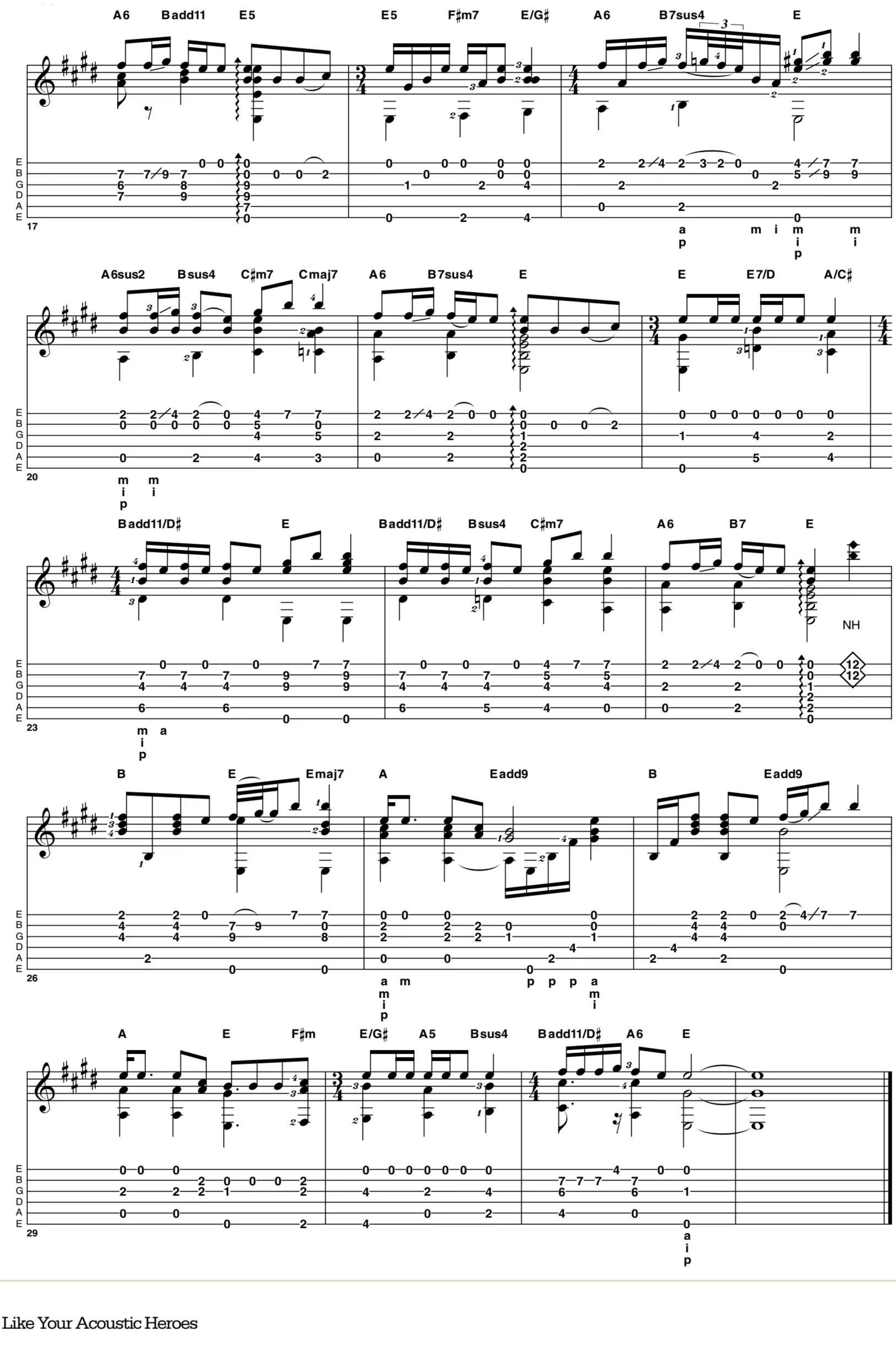


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EXAMPLE **DOWN TO THE RIVER TO PRAY**

[Bar 19] This bluesy phrase needs to be relaxed but legato (smooth). One of the challenges here is keeping the bass note on the 2nd fret, fifth string fretted down while you execute the lick around it.

[Bar 22] Another variation on the harmony, here with the bass line descending and briefly adding a 'D' – a non diatonic note (a note not belonging to this key).

[Bar 27] The Eadd9 chord at the end of this bar is well worth adding to your vocabulary – beloved of players like Tommy Emmanuel and James Taylor it offers a richer sound than a standard E major. And if this chord is new to you, why not try the minor version (Emadd9), which involves the simple removal of your first finger, leaving the third string to ring open. And it's just as lovely!



House Of The Rising Sun

We finish with a song about a house of ill repute in New Orleans, made famous by The Animals but played here in traditional folk-blues style.



Josh White: played a great bluesy version of ...Rising Sun

Info	Will improve your…
KEY A minor	✔ Travis-style picking
TEMPO 100 bpm	✔ Chord shapes and stretches
	✔ Blues-style arrangements

Think of House Of The Rising Sun and it's impossible not to hear The Animals' version. With Hilton Valentine's arpeggiated Gretsch intro chords (that *everybody* had to learn as their six-string rite of passage in the 60s), Eric Burdon's convincing vocal delivery, Chas Chandler's thumping Epiphone Rivoli bass and, of course, that unforgettable organ solo from Alan Price. However, it is actually a traditional American folk song (some even believe it to be a traditional English folk song that was taken over to the States and turned into a blues number) and has been recorded by artists as diverse as Bob Dylan and Nina Simone. Even The Beatles did a version.

One of our favourites is by the black acoustic blues man Josh White, whose heartfelt rendition takes some beating. White's 1947 recording predates The Animals by 17 years; it also sticks to the original narrative, which talks about a New Orleans brothel, not a gambling den as Burdon, Price and co had it.

For the solo acoustic guitar player, songs like this can either be a great bonus or a hindrance – a bonus as the simple melody offers many arrangement possibilities; a hindrance as the man in the street is so used to hearing that first arpeggiated A minor chord that he may look at you strangely if you do anything different.

However, it is a great one for the repertoire as its universal appeal and innate bluesiness is bound to go down well with any audience.

So how do we go about arranging such an iconic piece? Here we take two different approaches: first, we imagine how a Travis picker such as Tommy Emmanuel might do it, and then we tip our hat to The Animals' recording and use arpeggios but with more sophisticated voicings and physical stretches as a jazz guitar soloist like Joe Pass might do.

This arrangement offers a great opportunity to work on your Travis picking, as the melody notes are quite long and you can focus on putting the bassline and melody together. At

> "Josh White's 1947 rendition predates The Animals by 17 years; it also sticks to the original narrative that talks about a New Orleans brothel!"

the tail end of the arrangement you can try rolling arpeggios on some tricky chords – the fretting hand should be able to play anything that's required, so such big stretches must be overcome; make sure everything rings out so the melody can be clearly heard.

It's huge fun taking a simple song like this and re-arranging it. I hope you enjoy learning this arrangement but, as ever, use it as a springboard for creating your own ideas. **SR**



Get the tone

The guitars of the traditional bluesman ranged from cheap Stella models up to top-line American-made Washbuns and Martins. Resonator instruments by National and Dobro were also favourites due to their massive volume and projection. But tunes like these can also sound wonderful on nylon strings, so why not dig out your old beginner classical and give it a try.
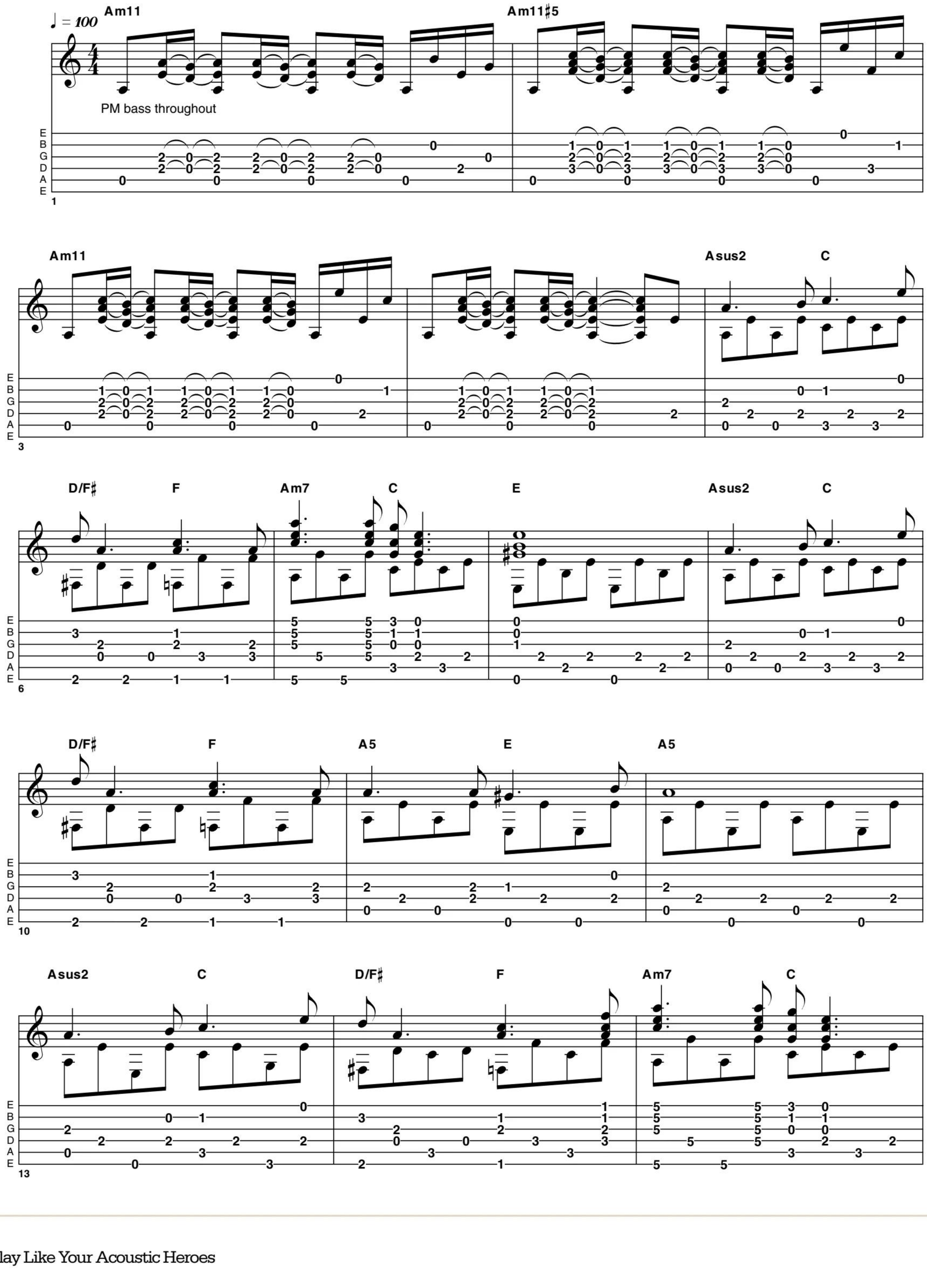


LISTENING SUGGESTIONS Everyone is probably already familiar with the version (that many people mistake as the original) recorded by The Animals, but you could try listening to versions by Bob Dylan or Nina Simone as their reading of it could give you some indication of how to adapt the melody. Josh White's much more mournful and eloquent version is on various compilations, including the CD Blood Red River.

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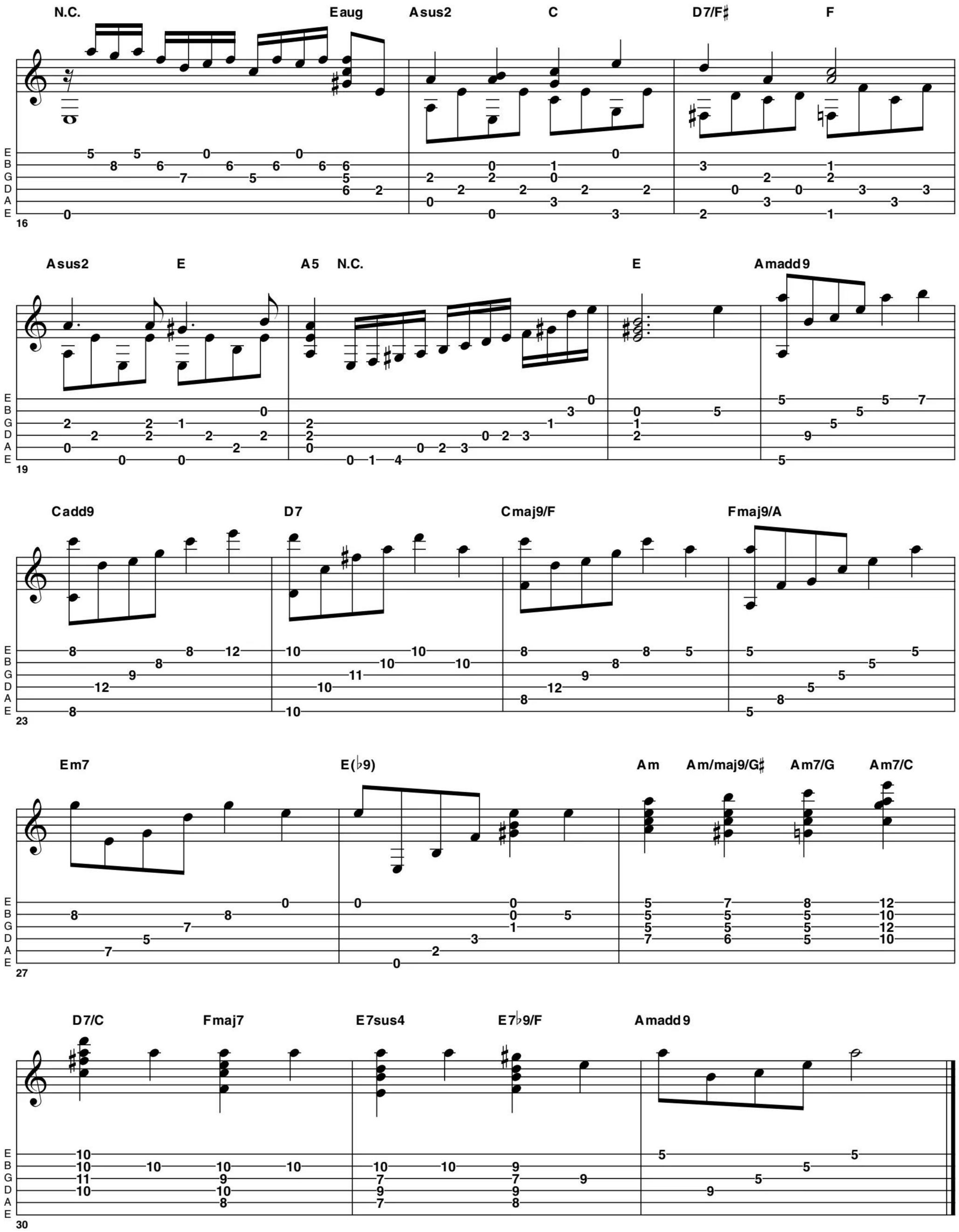
EXAMPLE **HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN**

[Bar 1] Ensure the hammered-on chords are played in time with the picking hand that's sounding the alternating bassline. Larger chords in bar 2 create even more of a challenge, so work on that fretting hand strength and timing.
[Bar 5] Here's the melody. It's syncopated in places (played off the beat) so if you are new to the technique try playing the bassline and chords separately at first to get a sense of what is going on before you put both parts together.
[Bar 7] A swift movement is required from the barred Am7 chord back to the open C chord where the melody appears at the 3rd fret. Try this slowly at first – a lower action on your guitar will certainly facilitate the barre chords.
[Bar 13] A more complex bassline to push you with your Travis picking; it's easy to get stuck in the rut of playing only one alternating bass pattern with Travis picking and this one will certainly add something to your style.



EXAMPLE **HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN**

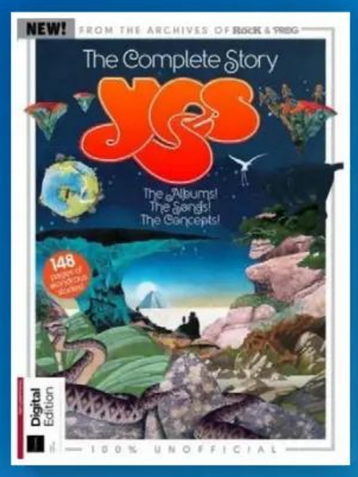
[Bar 16] Sometimes a lick like this can be a useful 'punctuation mark'. I saw Tommy Emmanuel throw in licks like this just to add some variation.
[Bar 20] Here is a 'response' lick – whereas the previous idea is descended from the first string, we now have an ascending idea from the sixth string that leads nicely to the E.
[Bar 22] This part is more influenced by Martin Taylor. Big chords and flowing arpeggios are the order of the day here, so make sure the fretting is strong and clean and the picking hand even and well-timed.
[Bar 29] This sequence featuring a descending bassline has obvious echoes but it's actually based on an old Broadway sequence that found its way into the rock arena. It's a useful device – as the top line ascends, the bottom line descends and this contrary motion idea should be in any arranger's arsenal.





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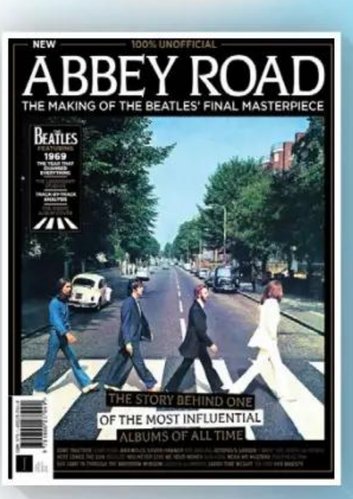
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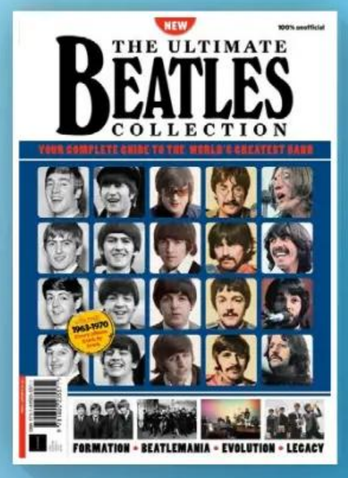








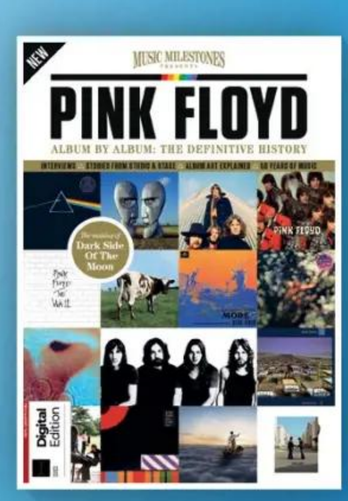






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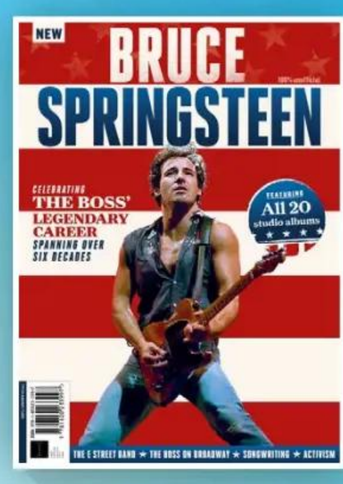






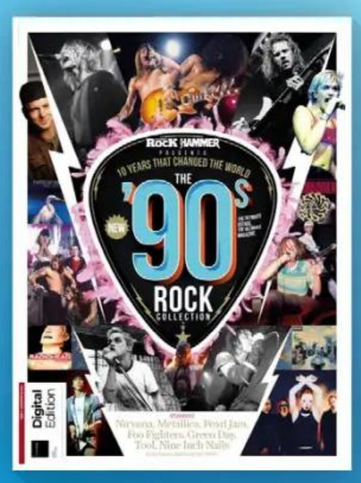


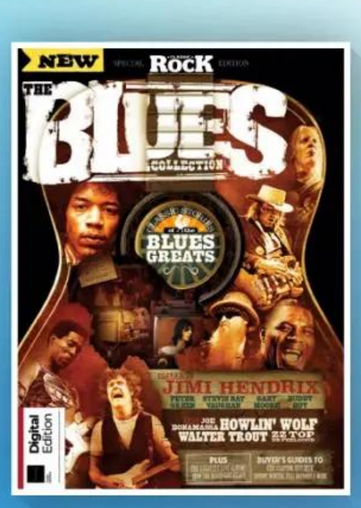




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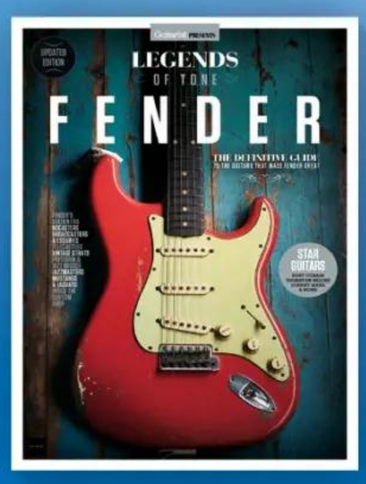












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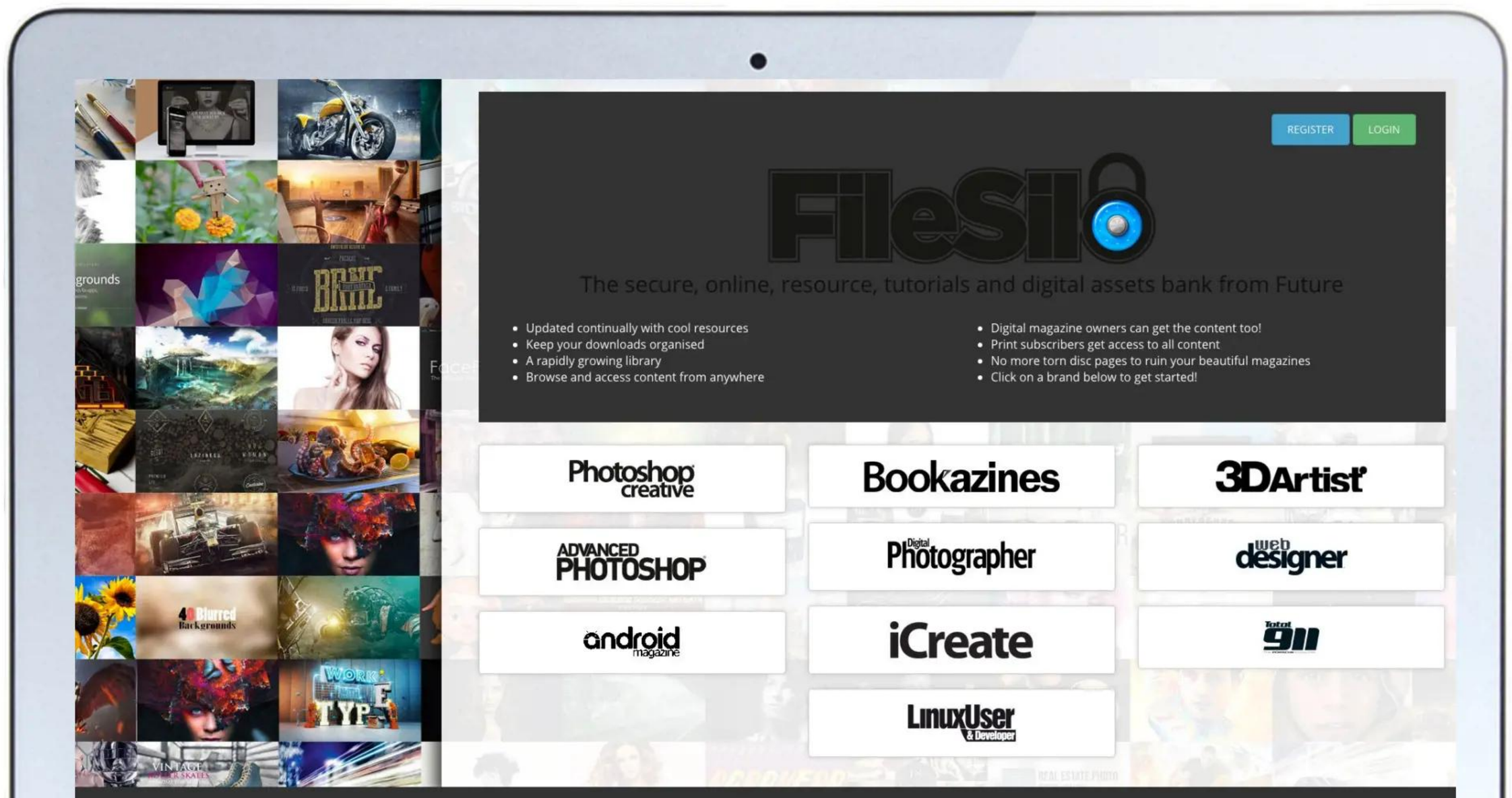
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Drawn from **Guitar Techniques** magazine, Play Like Your Acoustic Heroes aims to help you sound like over 40 acoustic 'greats'. After **fingerpicking** and **capo** lessons we examine **ragtime** and 100 years of **acoustic blues,** featuring the likes of **Big Bill Broonzy, Eric Bibb, Kelly Joe Phelps** and more. Singer-songwriters **The Beatles, Leonard Cohen, Eric Clapton, Bob Dylan and Richard Thompson** reveal their approach, while the tunings of **Joni Mitchell, Pierre Bensusan and Davy Graham** are also explored. We meet Americana legends **Woody Guthrie** and **Doc Watson**, modern percussive geniuses **Michael Hedges** and **Eric Roche** and finish with two classic tunes: **Down To The River To Pray** and **House Of The Rising Sun**.

Play Like Your Acoustic Heroes: the essential learning tool for all acoustic guitarists!

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