Ramble To Cashel

Celtic Fingerstyle Guitar

featuring Martin Simpson, Pierre Bensusan,
Duck Baker, Pat Kirtley, El McMeen,
Tom Long & Steve Baughman

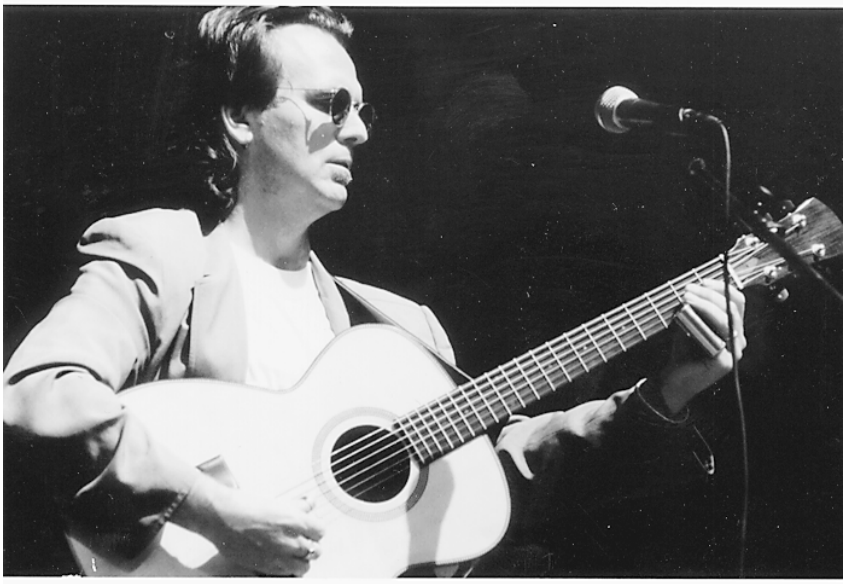
Volume One

RAMBLE TO CASHEL
CELTIC FINGERSTYLE GUITAR

Fingerstyle guitar has a short but noble history as regards Irish music, which began with the interest in American folk music during the English folk revival. It may seem strange, but a primary influence on young English musicians who would go on to develop an approach to the guitar viable for their folk music was blues legend Big Bill Broonzy. The powerful drive of Broonzy's thumb on the bass string was imitated by the likes of Martin Carthy and Nick Jones with excellent results.

The Scottish guitarist Davey Graham took all the aspiring pickers of the late 1950's London scene by storm. Davey combined an advanced knowledge of the instrument and a restless musical intelligence to create a style of solo playing that was far more developed than his peers. Davey's style reflected American influences like New Orleans guitarist Snooks Eaglin or jazz pianist Bobby Timmons, but he put these things together in his own way, and his influence on other guitarists was enormous. English players like Carthy, Jones, Richard Thompson and John Renbourn, Scots like Bert Jansch and Archie Fisher, and, later, Europeans like Pierre Bensusan all based aspects of their playing on the way Davey approached things. Davey's repertoire ranged beyond American influences and his own musical heritage to include classical tunes, pop tunes, and pieces reflecting his fascination with Moorish music. It was an attempt to find a way to play the last on guitar that led him to develop the D-A-D-G-A-D tuning, which is by now the predominant tuning for Irish guitarists in groups, as well as a standard option for soloists.

Duck Baker



Martin Simpson

photo by Anna Grossman

It is worth noting that most of the work of adapting Irish and Scottish music to fingerstyle guitar has been done by players whose repertoires include many other kinds of music. John Renbourn, whose arrangements of Irish tunes are very significant, also plays blues, jazz, and renaissance music. Dave Evans, whose early recordings featured primarily his own songs and tunes, tried his hand at arranging the compositions of harpist Turlough O'Carolan (1670-1738) in the late 1970's with spectacular results.

Another English guitarist who learned a great deal from American traditions was Martin Simpson, who was first recognized on the English folk scene in the seventies for his work with the great singer June Tabor. Nor should this be seen as an unworthy endeavor for a great guitarist. Davey's work with Shirley Collins and Renbourn's with Jacqui McShee are examples of the fact that a good accompanist is filling a role just as challenging as that of the soloist. Martin's work in that capacity ranks with the best, and, as he demonstrated from the start, he is a top caliber soloist as well. One trick that Martin took from his knowledge of American music is his adaptation of clawhammer banjo technique to the guitar. You get a taste of this on his version of "Shepherd's Delights". For all his technical prowess, however, Martin's greatest strength may be the rich sound he gets on the instrument, something that is at least as demanding as high-tech fingerings. This can be heard to good advantage on the slower pieces here.

The guitarist to really exploit both D-A-D-G-A-D and the Graham/Carthy approach to melody over monotonic bass was the Frenchman Pierre Bensusan. Pierre added moving bass lines and atmospheric chord forms to the mix, and his careful

photo by Anna Grossman

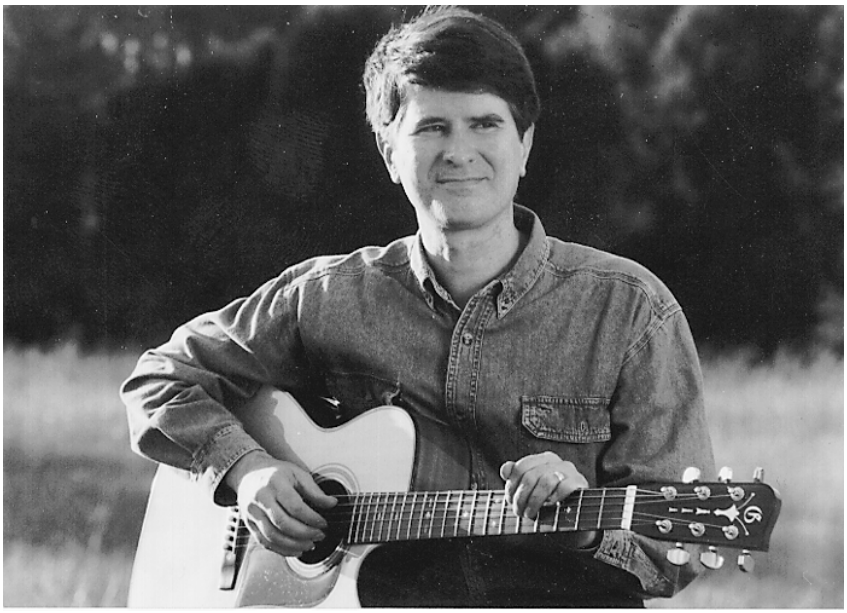
Pierre Bensusan

study of traditional masters like Seamus Ennis and Willie Clancy has made him a very idiomatically accurate player. Pierre's interests are not limited to traditional music; he is an excellent composer for the instrument and has adapted tango and musette as well. He also, like Davey, has been known to incorporate north African elements in his music, which is Pierre's case is logical; he was born in Algeria. As a teenager he played mandolin in a band led by bluegrass banjo legend Bill Keith, and had worked out the basis of his virtuosic style before turning twenty. When Eric Schoenberg introduced me to Pierre in 1976 he called him "the best fingerpicker in Europe". Pierre commented later, "I should have kick him". Certainly Pierre is the most influential guitarist for the succeeding generation of players; his arrangement of "Merrily Kissed the Quaker" has been imitated countless times.

My own interest in playing Irish music was kindled by tunes I had encountered in the repertoire of old timey American fiddle and banjo players like Franklin George and John Summers. I met multi-instrumentalist Art Rosenbaum in 1975, and he showed me several American tunes as well as things like the Scot Skinner march "The Duke of Fife's Welcome to Deeside". On a Kicking Mule tour of England in 1976, Art managed to find an Irish pub ("The White Hart", at Fulham Broadway) not far from Stefan Grossman's house that became a favorite spot for listening to live music. I remember returning to America from that trip with a satchel full of Irish and Scottish records.By 1980 I had many good friends in the London Irish community and had managed to arrange enough tunes to make a record devoted to this music, "The Kid on the Mountain". My ongoing involvement with Irish music includes working in a duo with a fine fiddler from County Galway, Keiran Fahy.

Pat Kirtley is another southern boy who got into Irish tunes by way of the mountain music of his native Kentucky. Pat grew up wrestling with the Merle Travis/Chet Atkins/Jerry Reed repertoire, and is by now one of the outstanding contemporary tunesmiths of that proud tradition. People tend to forget when discussing alternate tunings that Atkins made excellent use of all the obvious ones and some not-so-obvious ones as well, but Pat got in the habit of playing in open G because he found it enabled him to play with bluegrass musicians. He first heard Irish music played on the guitar by a fine San Francisco picker, John McCormick. Pat's technique has helped him win some fingerpicking contests, including the prestigious National Championship at Winfield, Kansas, but he is even more impressive as an arranger/composer. Here he is heard playing two Carolan pieces and a couple of originals. It's interesting to see how well he adapts his compositional style to the idiom.

Tom Long grew up in the sixties in Southern California with interests that included basketball and surf music. On a trip to shoot hoops in Hawaii he chanced to hear a couple of slack key players, and Tom was further exposed to fingerpicking on a radical local radio station, KYMS. His interest in tunings stems from sneaking time on his brother's guitar which was always left de-tuned to discourage the curiosity of Tom, whose response was to tune creatively. Experience in rock and blues bands actually reinforced his predilection for tunings, for blues as well as Led Zeppelin pieces (like Jimmy Page's cover of Bert Jansch's "Black Waterside".) He became increasingly serious about fingerpicking as the 1970's passed, and eventually quit playing in bands. The use of D-A-D-G-A-



Pat Kirtley

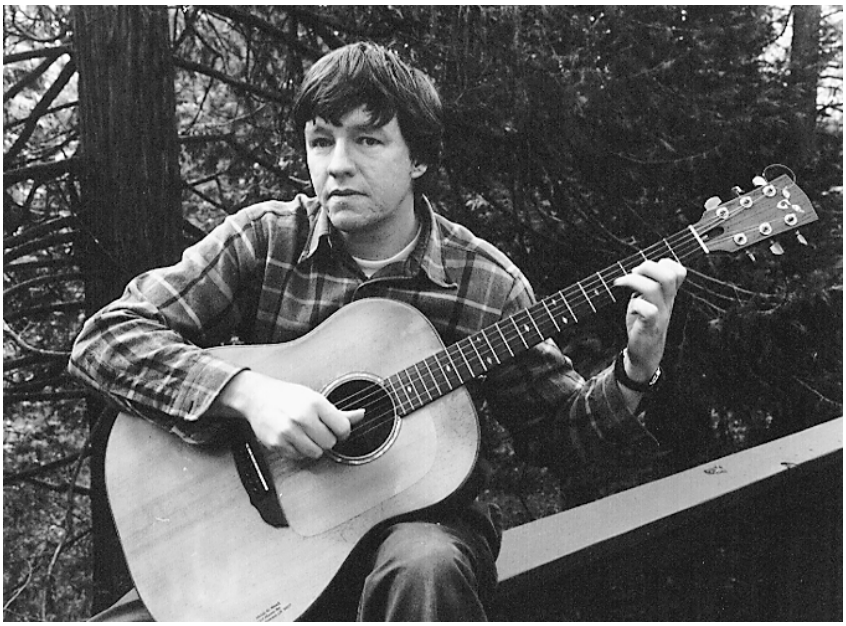
photo by Leslie A. Smith

Tom Long

D for Irish tunes seemed very logical when Tom first heard Pierre's playing, and he quickly moved from adapting other guitarists' arrangements to listening to records of traditional players and working from O'Neill's "Music of Ireland".

El McMeen has a repertoire that is heavily weighted towards slow airs, which he plays with great sensitivity. He began playing the guitar during what Utah Phillips calls the "folk scare" of the 1960's, and his approach reflects a long involvement with choral music. Certainly his delivery of the melody and his phrasing are almost vocal, and his strong sense of structure and harmony owe to this experience as well. El is particularly good at finding new things to do with familiar tunes, as he shows here. Certainly no Irish song has been done to death more than "Danny Boy"; bringing it come back to life is a challenge that El meets with aplomb. "The Star of County Down" is one of those melodies that may have originally been English but is certainly known by the Irish version. The codas of both arrangements are especially noteworthy. The tuning El uses, C-G-D-G-A-D, was invented by Dave Evans.

Steve Baughman grew up in Malaya and the Philippines, where his exposure to Irish music or even traditional American music was limited. He did fortunately get his hands on a Doc Watson record as a teenager and also became interested in bluegrass banjo, which was his primary musical interest by the time he moved to California at age eighteen. Steve was inspired to work on Irish tunes after hearing Pierre on record, but other influences, including some early classical training, can be heard in his playing. A notable aspect of his sound is his unique sense of dynamics, which has been influenced by Clare fiddler Martin Hayes. Steve also cites Scots fiddler Alisdair Fraser as an important inspiration. Steve employs a variety of

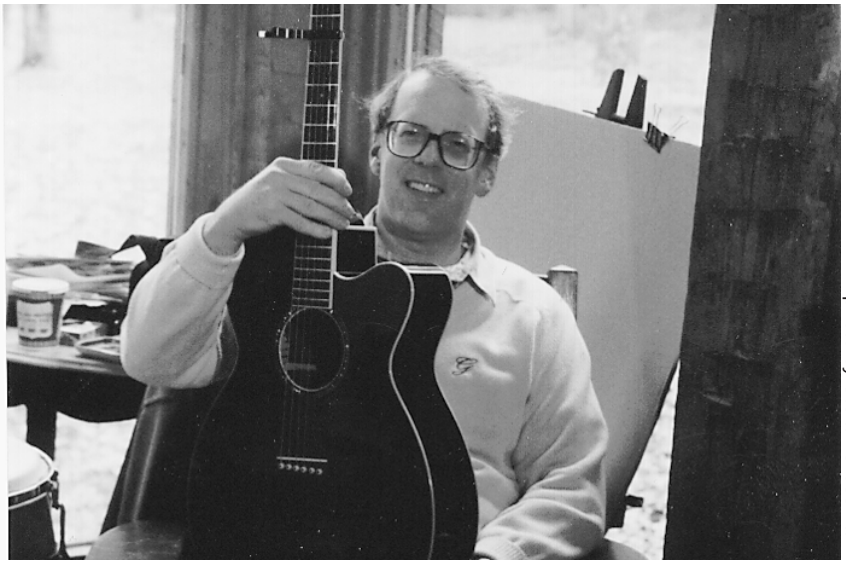


Steve Baughman

unusual tunings for seldom heard tunes: here he uses C-G-D-G-C-D for “O’Carolan’s Ramble to Cashel” and “Cullen Bay” and E-A-B-E-B-C# for “Bony Crossing the Alps”.

The process of applying fingerstyle techniques to Irish and related musics is still in its infancy. No more than a few hundred tunes have been arranged for fingerpicking at this writing, from a repertoire of tens of thousands. But there is a special kind of excitement that goes with any new venture, and I think some of that comes through on this video. I hope it proves enjoyable to you.

– Duck Baker

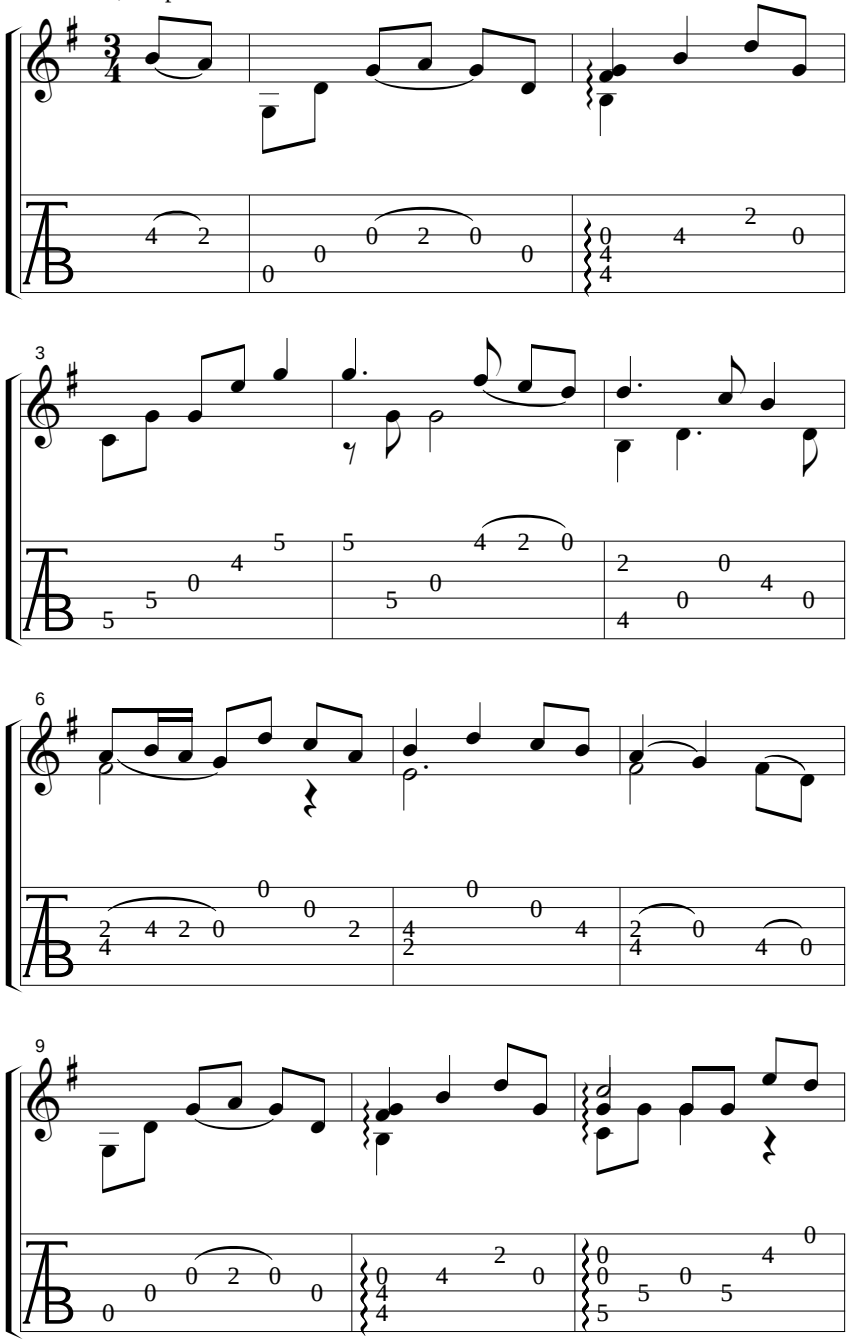


El McMeen photo by Stefan Grossman

Believe Me If All These Endearing Young Charms

CGDGCD, Capo 3

Trad. arr. M. Simpson



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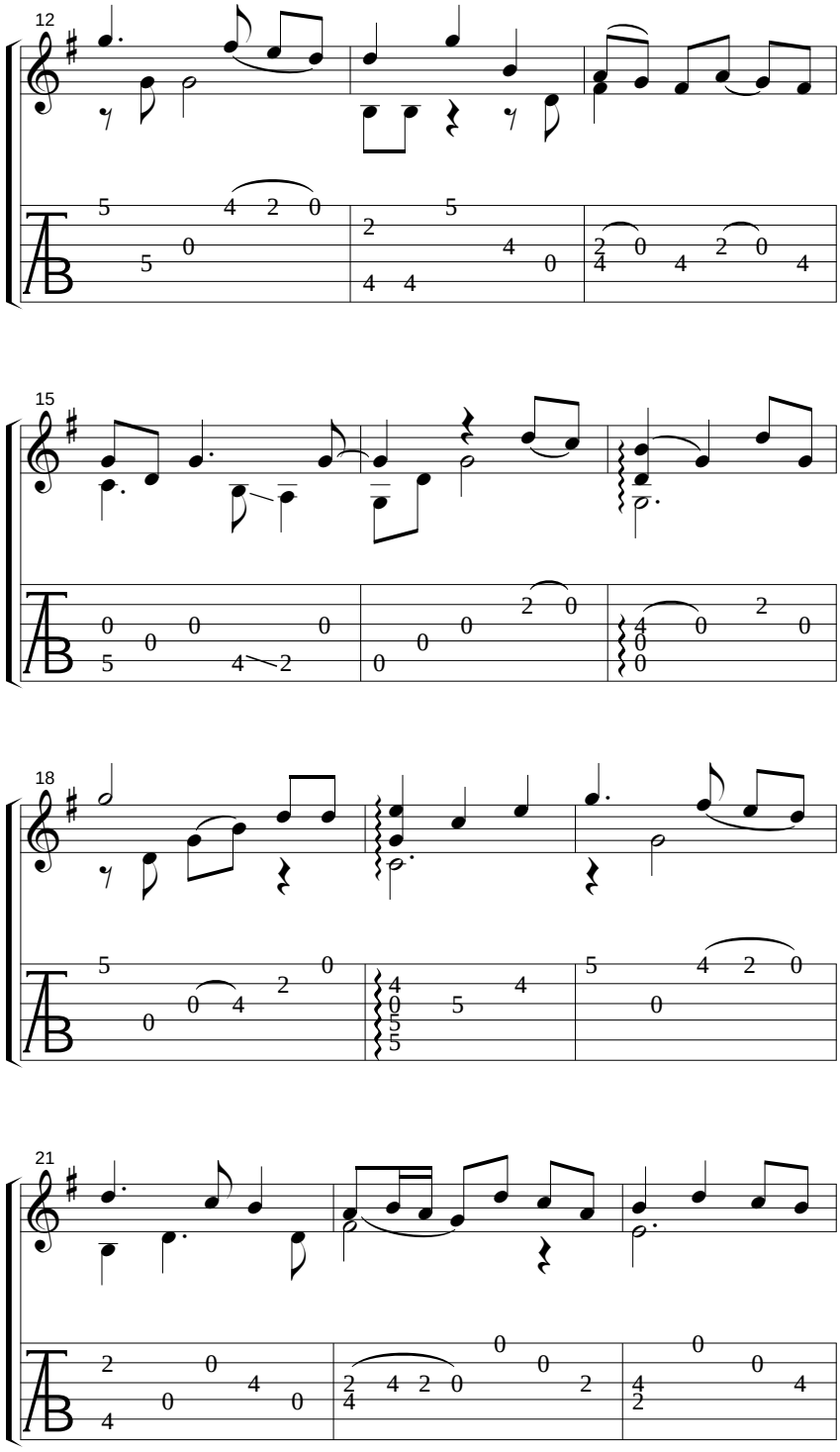
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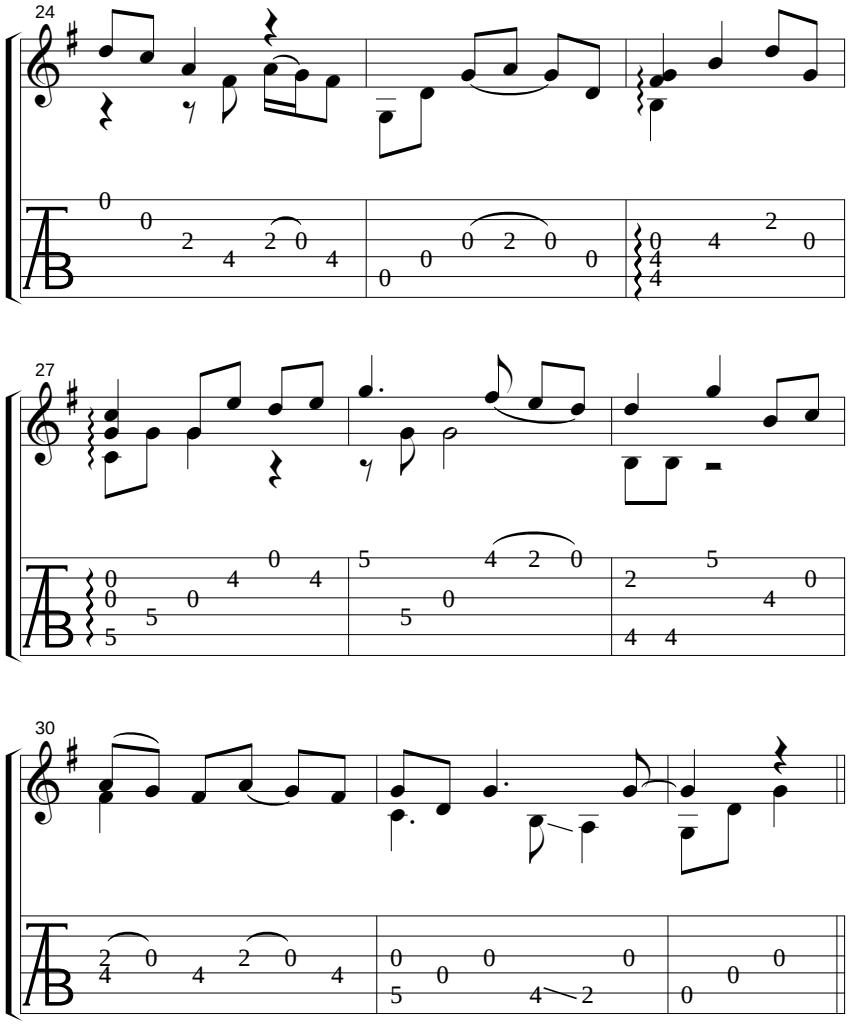
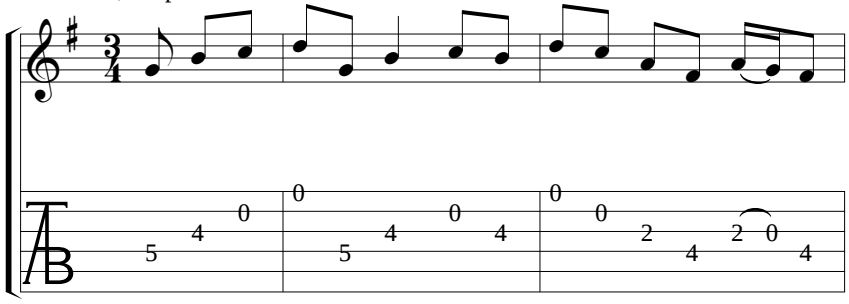


WATERS OF TYNE

CGDGCD, Capo 3

Trad. arr. M. Simpson



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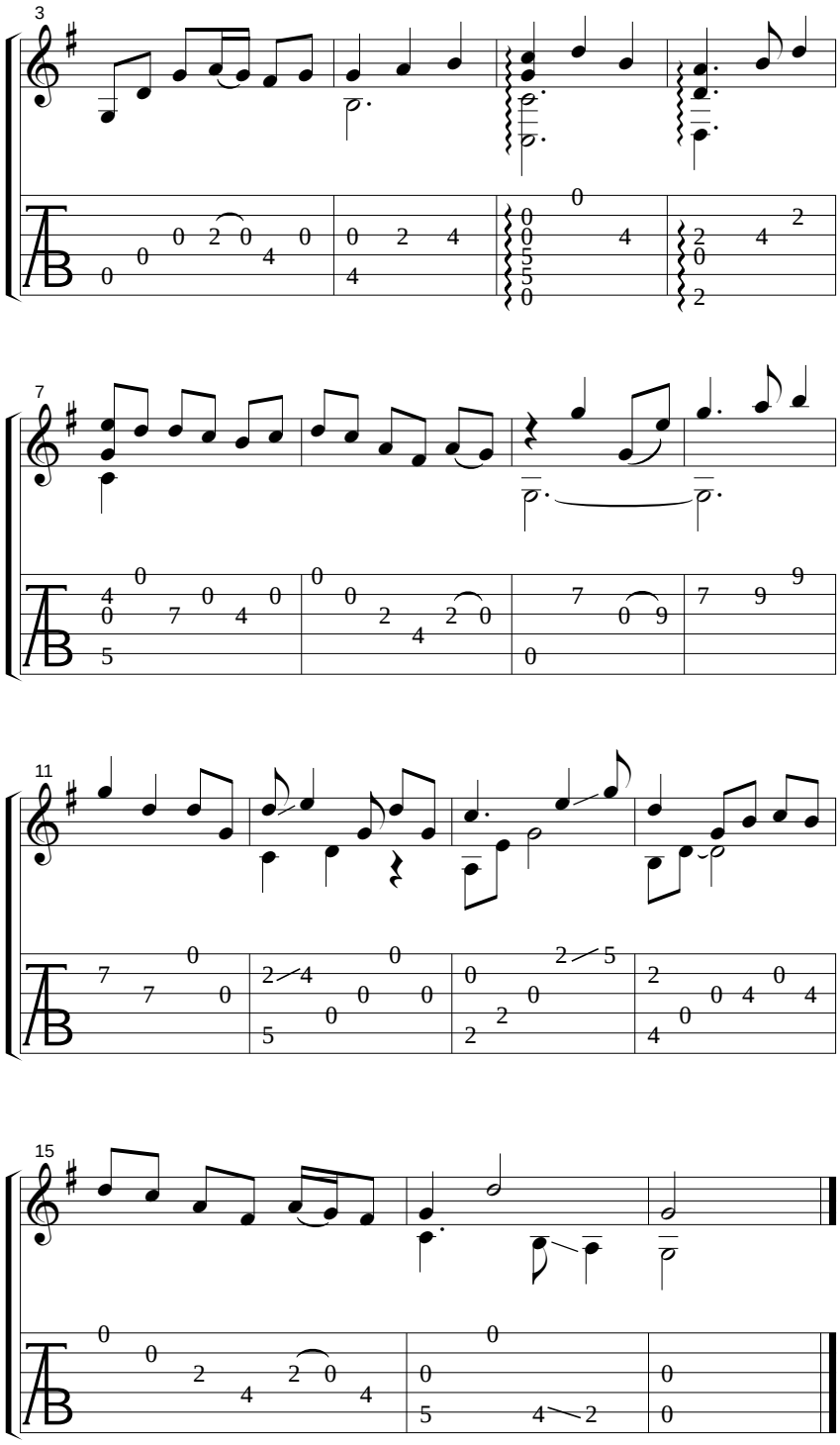
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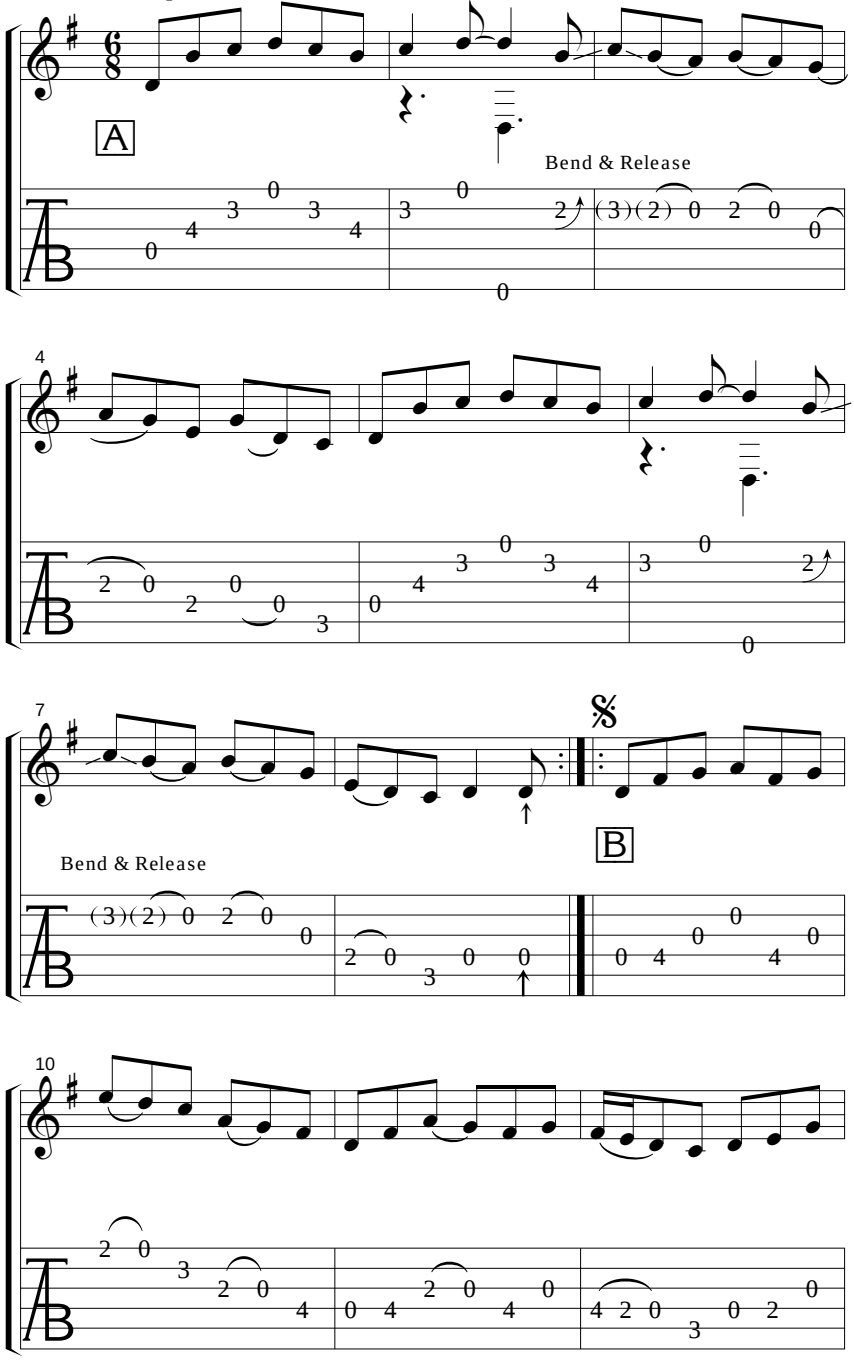
SHEPHERD'S DELIGHT

DADGAD, Capo 5

Trad. arr. M. Simpson



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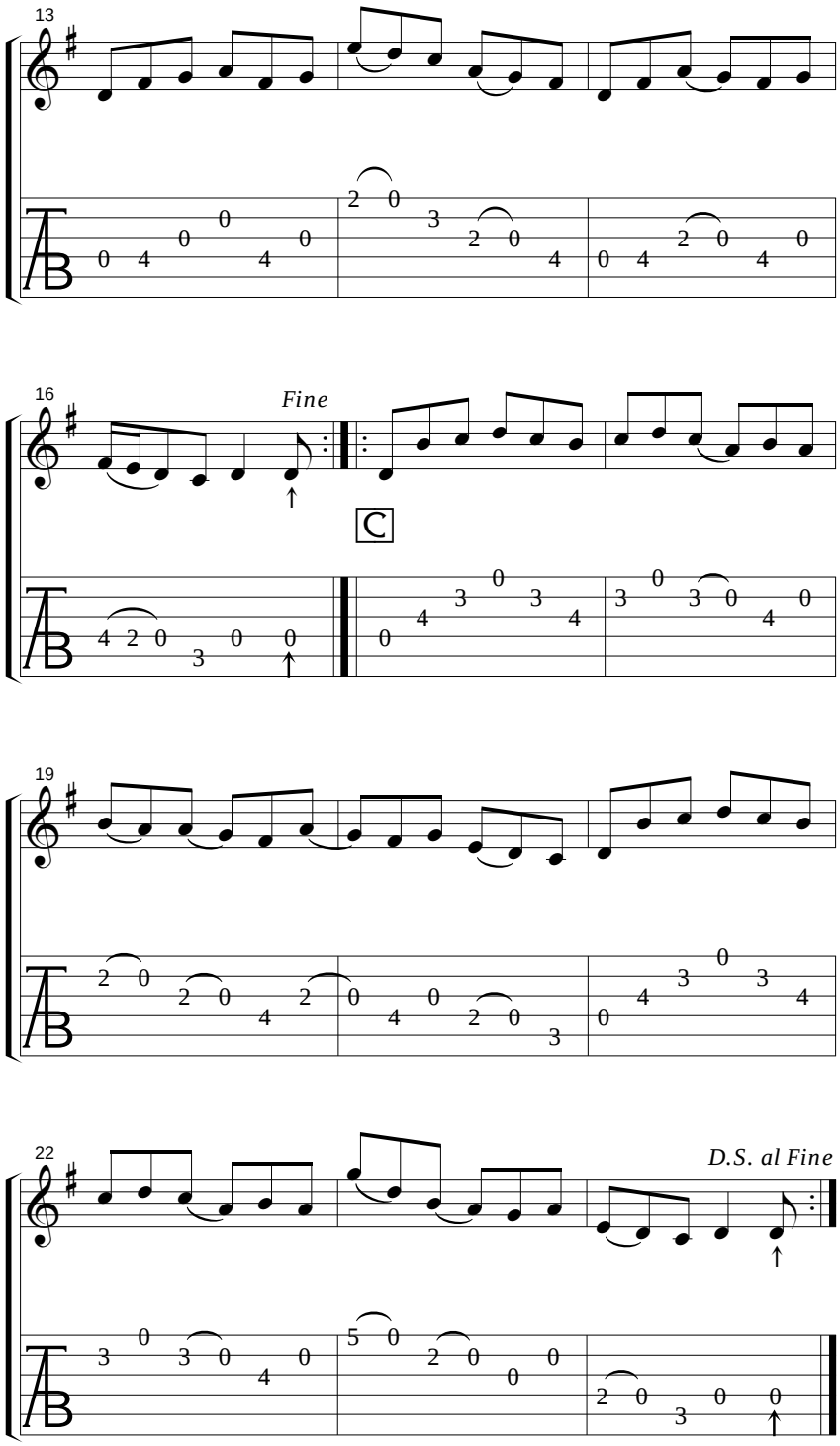
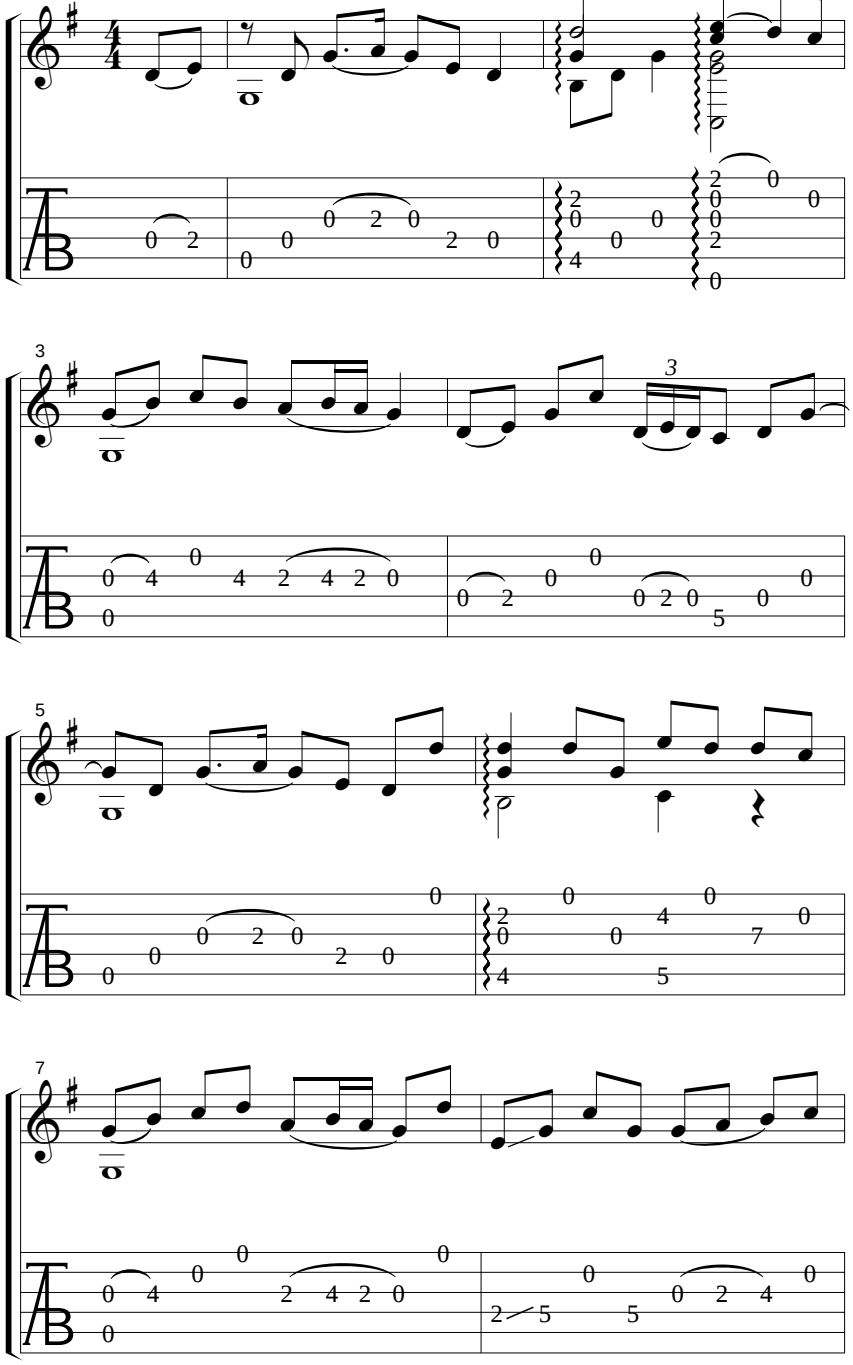


PLAY ABCB, ETC.

LOWLANDS OF HOLLAND

CGDGCD, Capo 3

Trad. arr. M. Simpson



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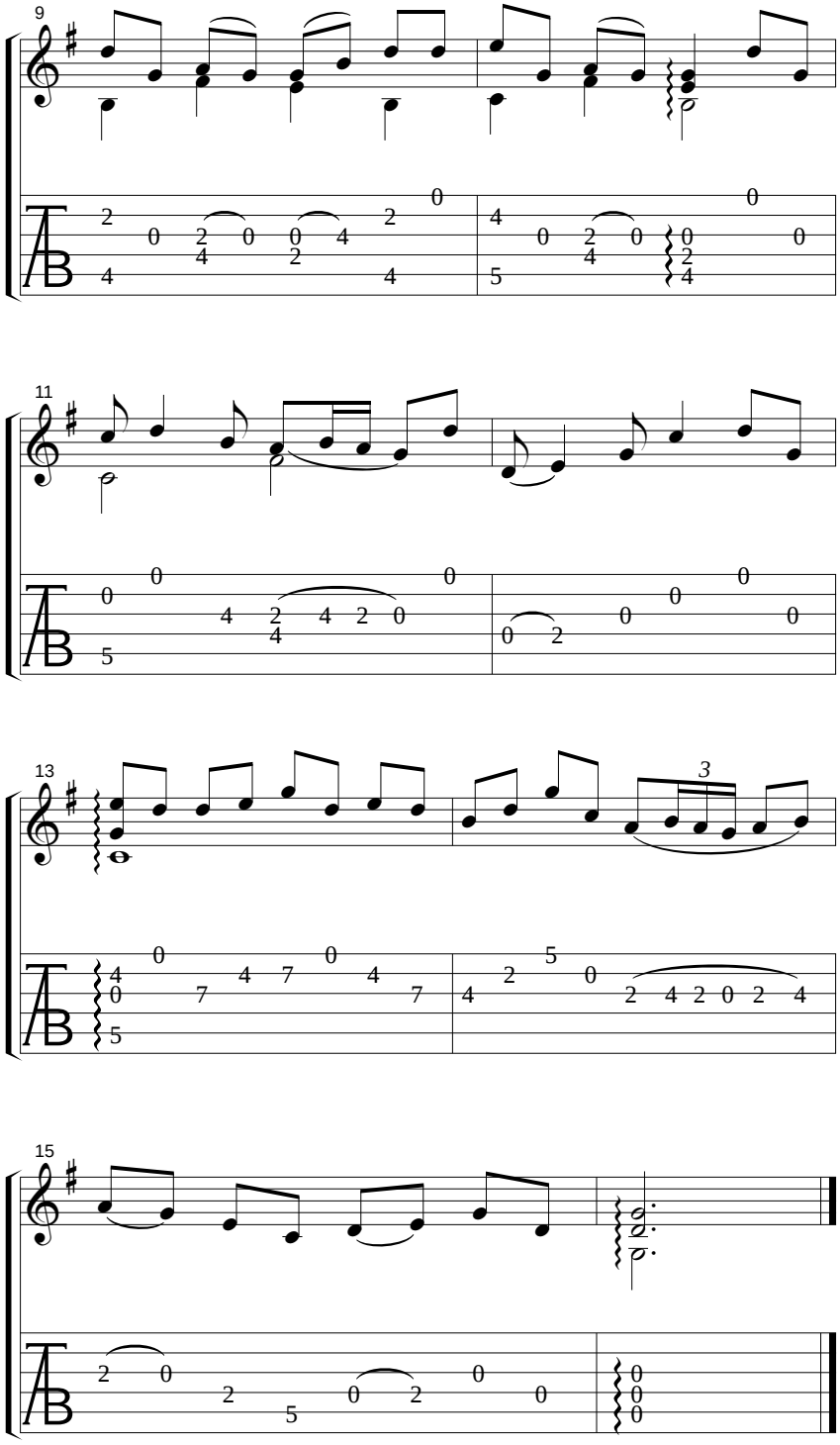
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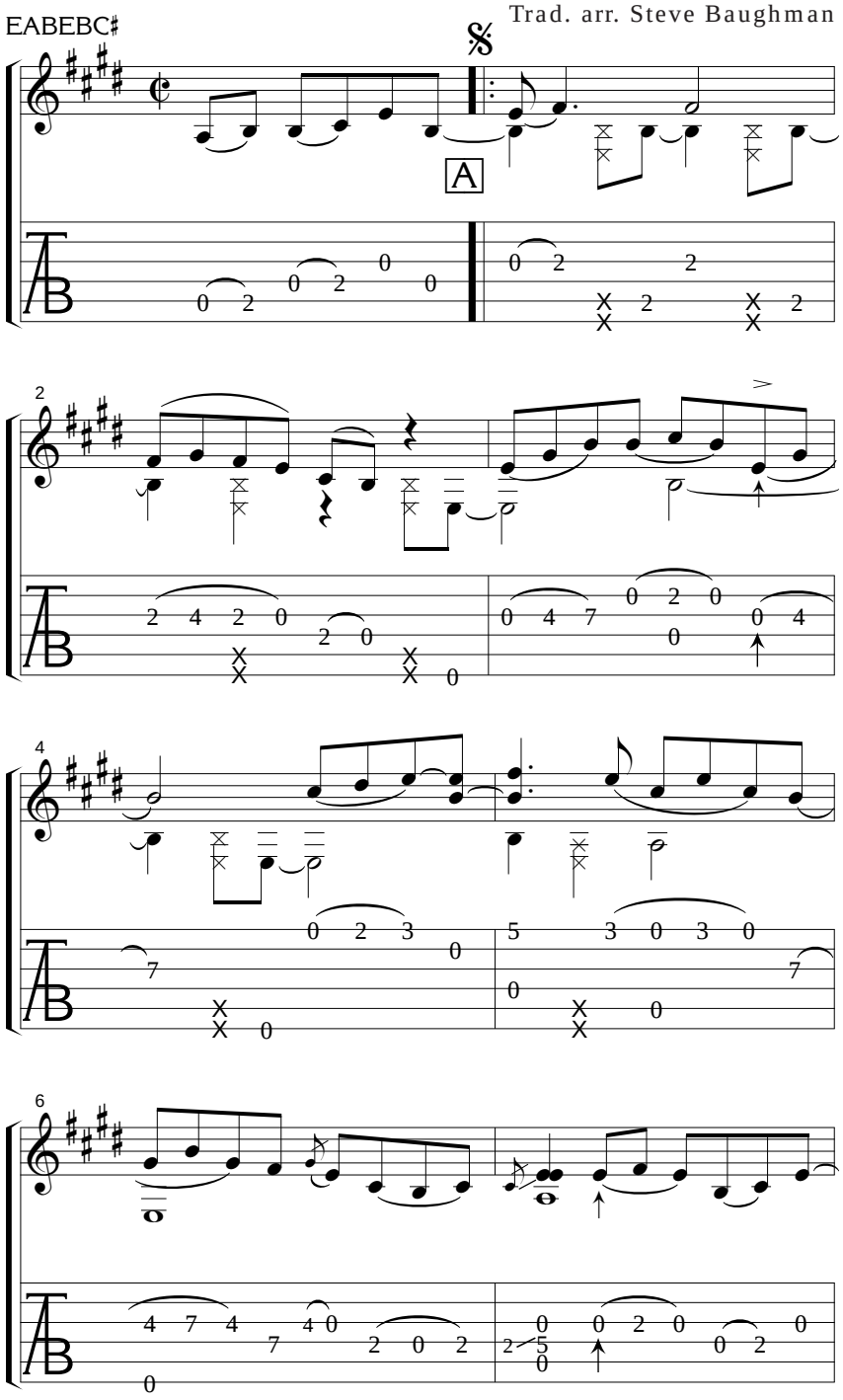

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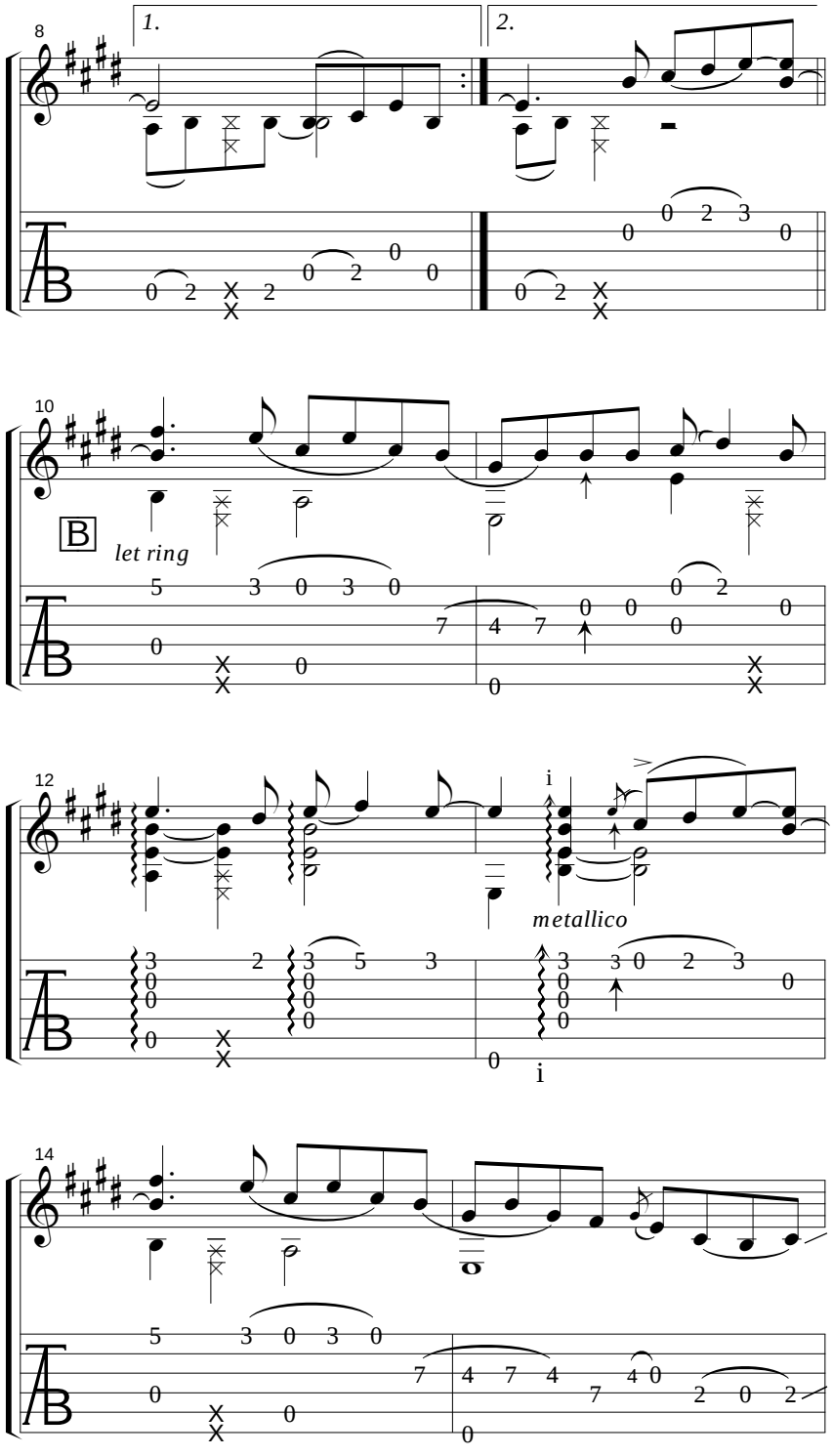
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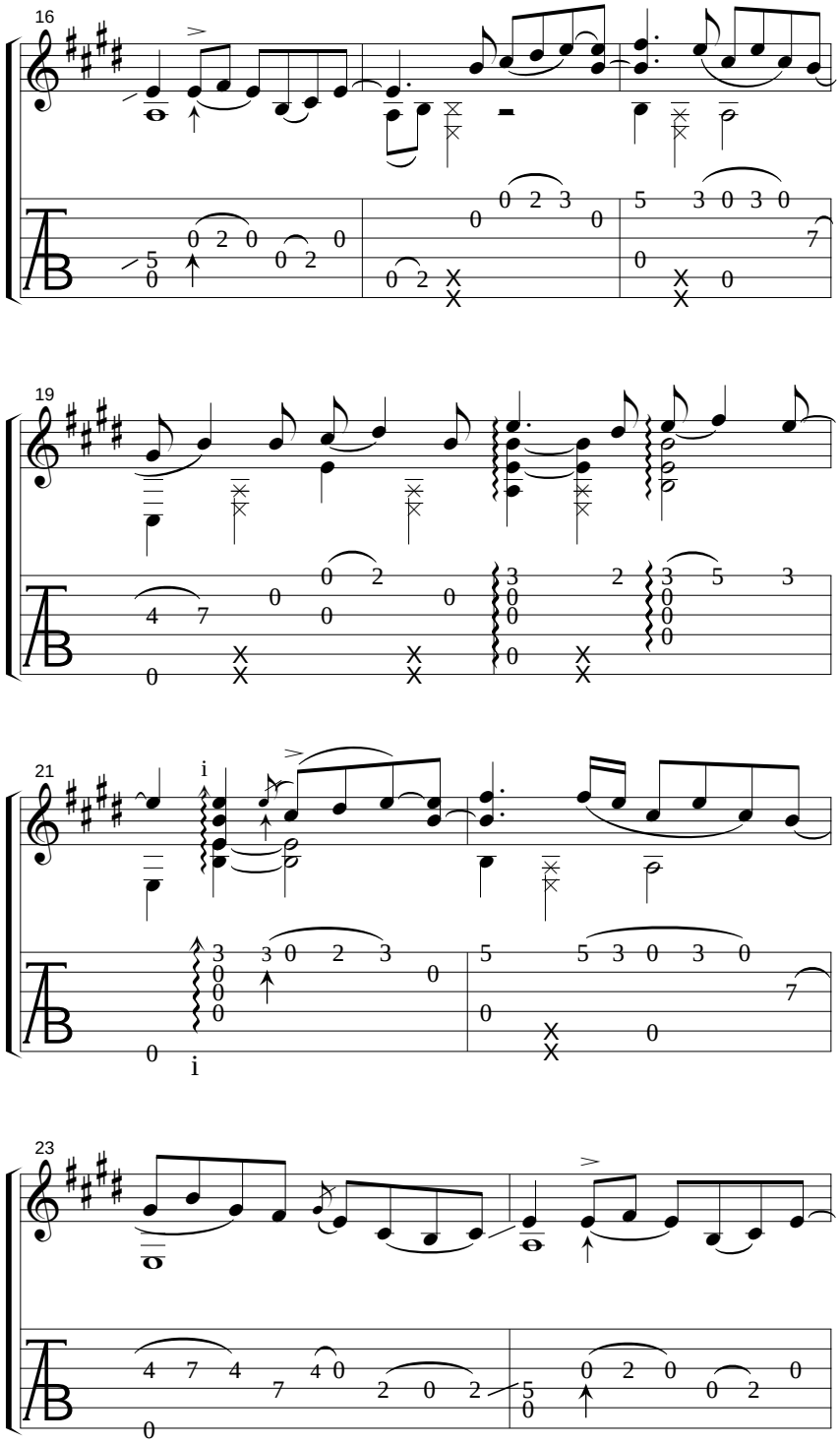
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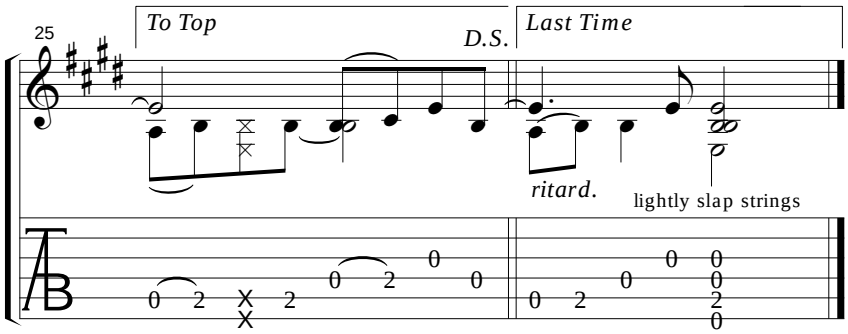
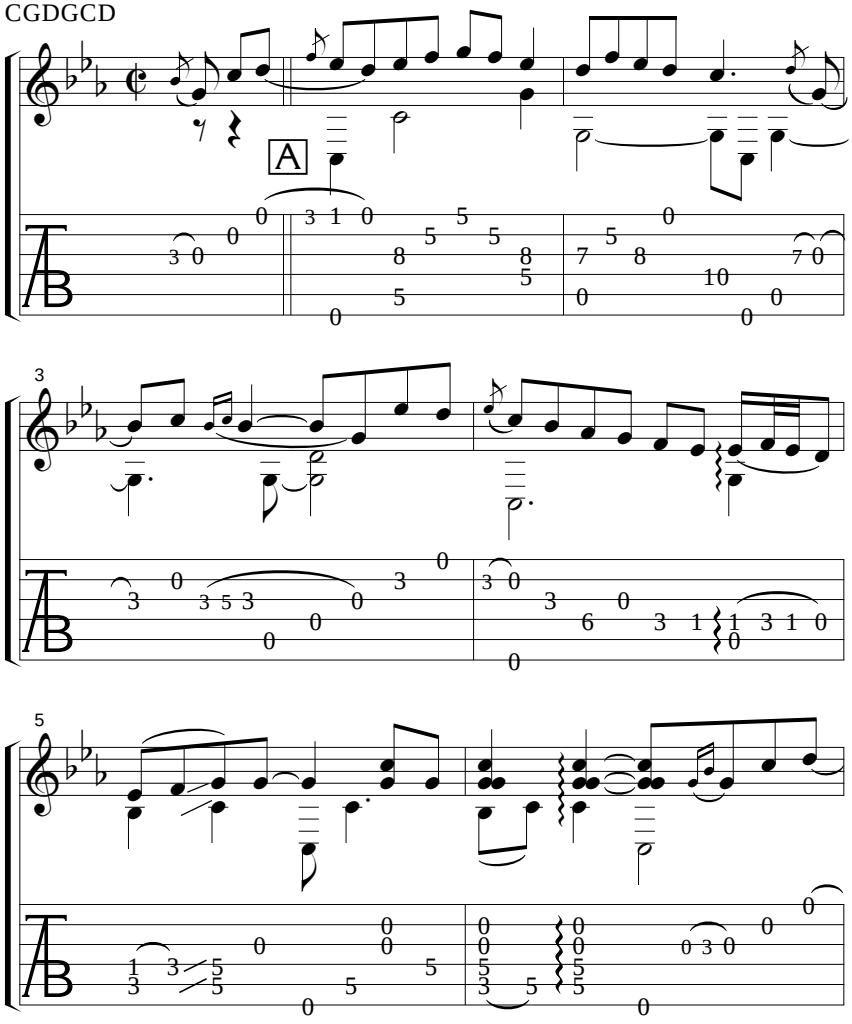


O'CAROLAN'S RAMBLE TO CASHEL

O'Carolan arr.Steve Baughman

CGDGCD



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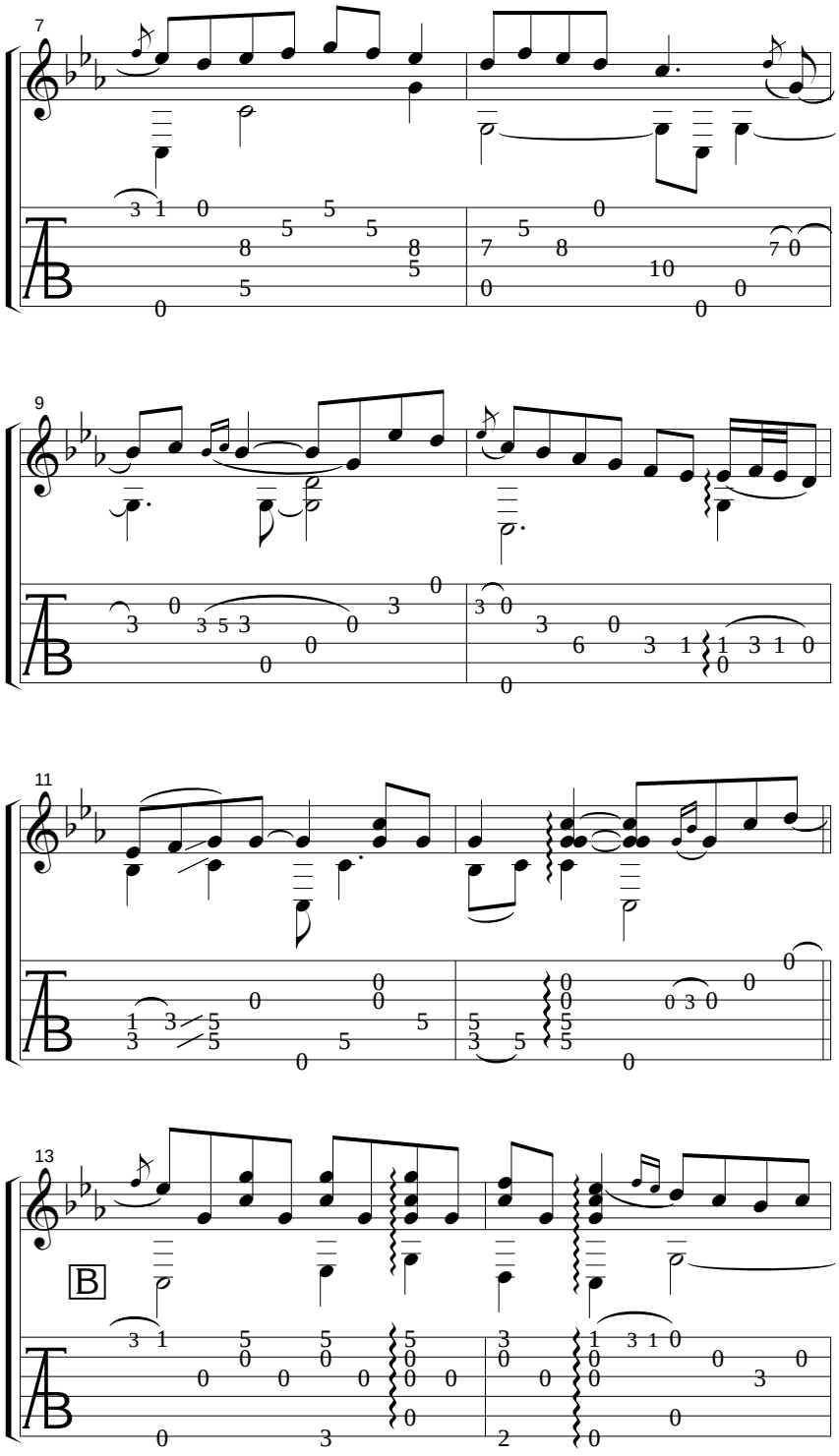
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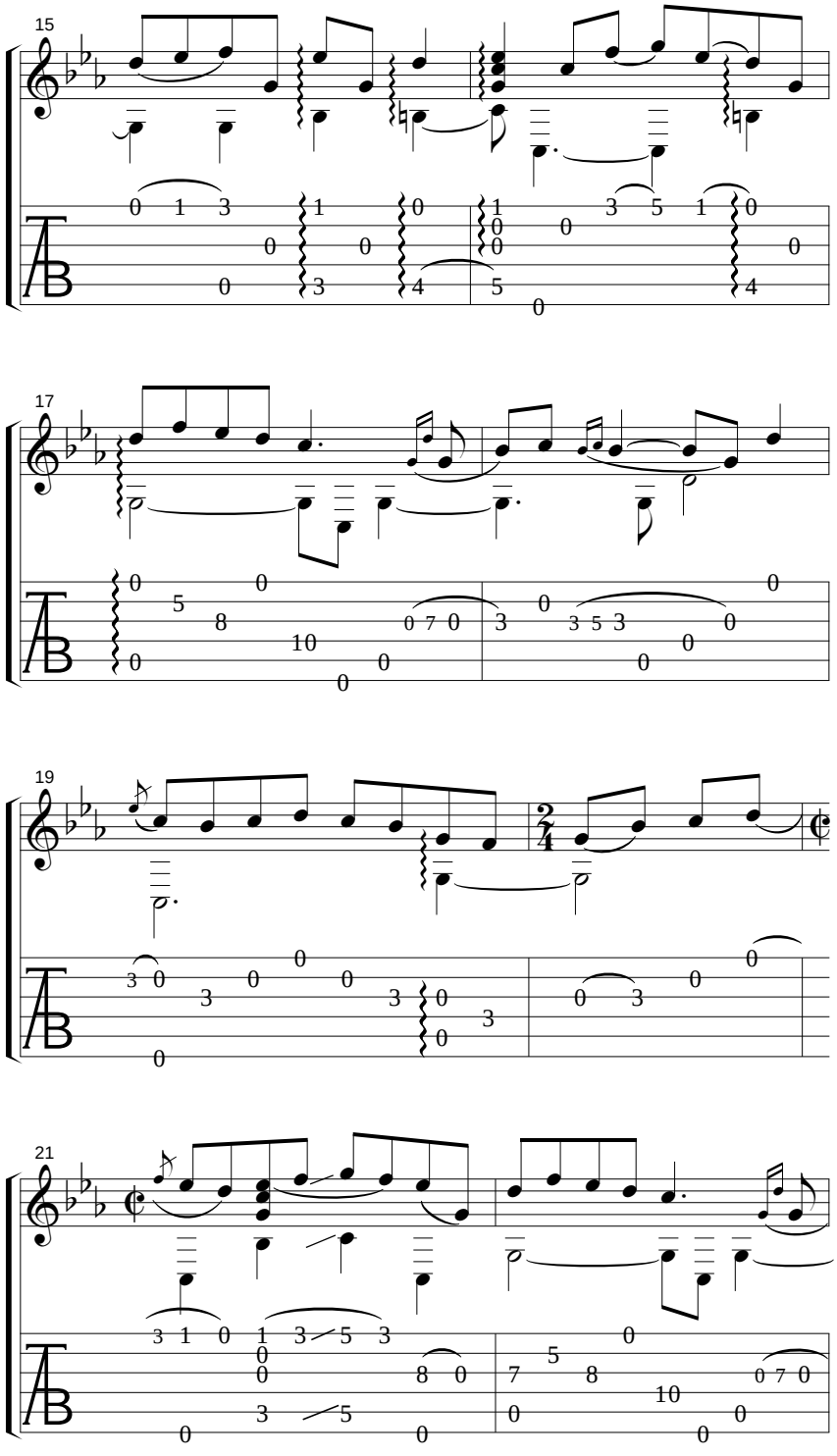
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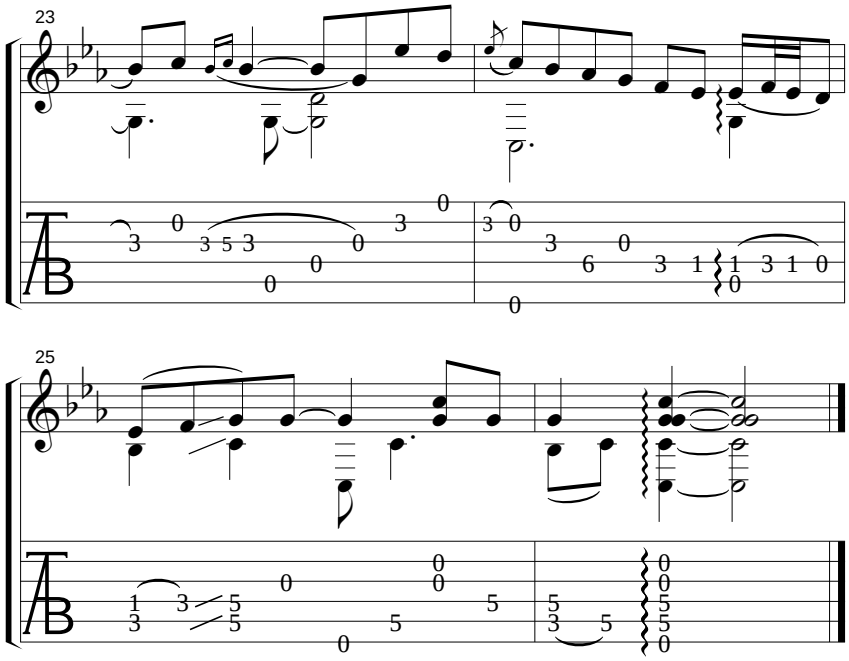
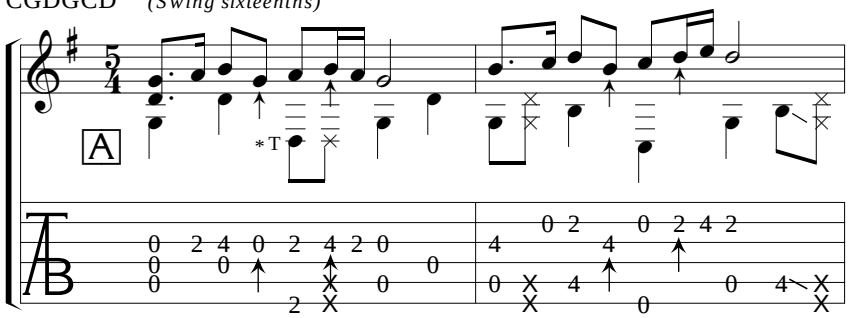


CULLEN BAY

Duncan arr.Steve Baughman

CGDGCD *(Swing sixteenths)*



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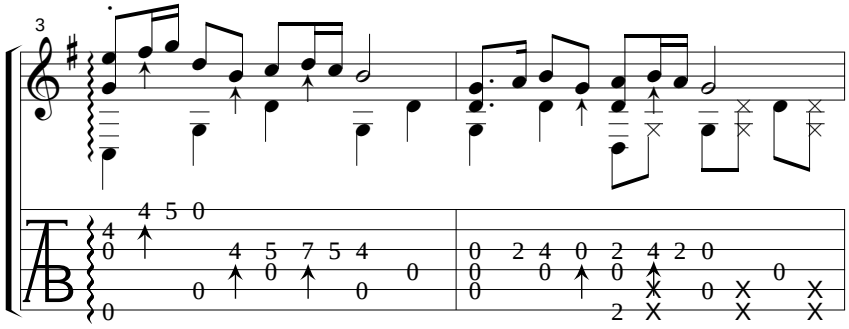

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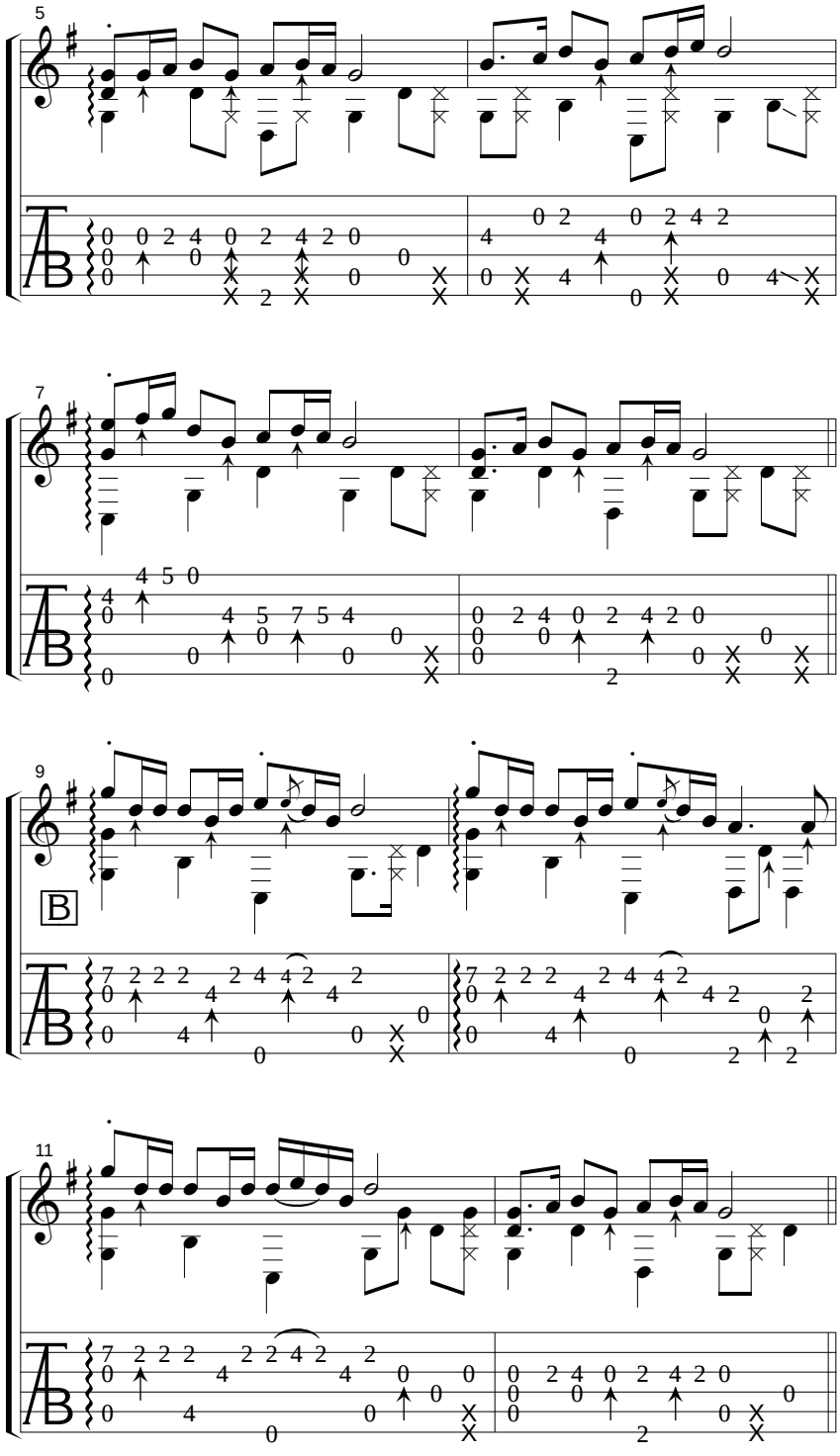
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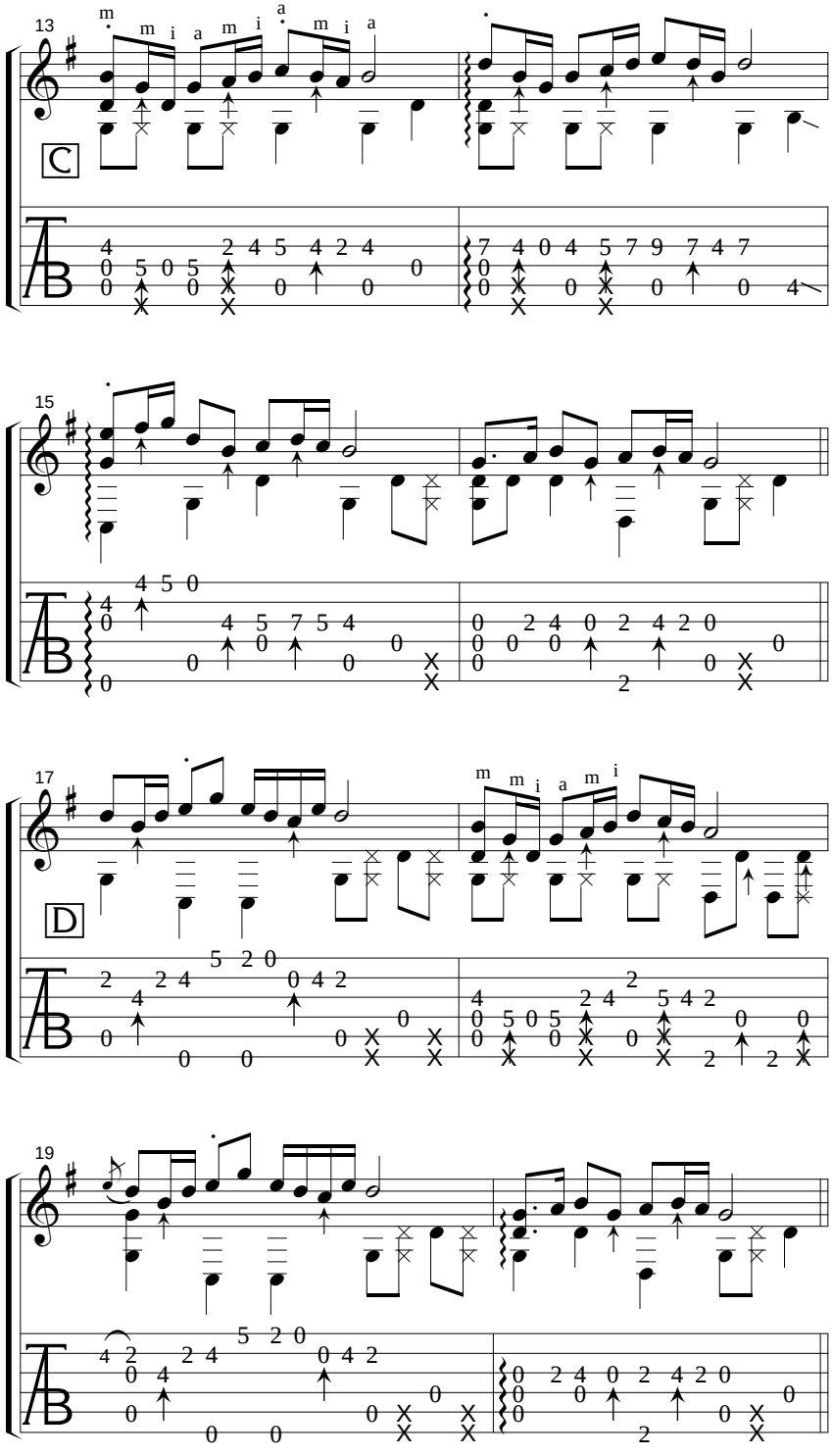
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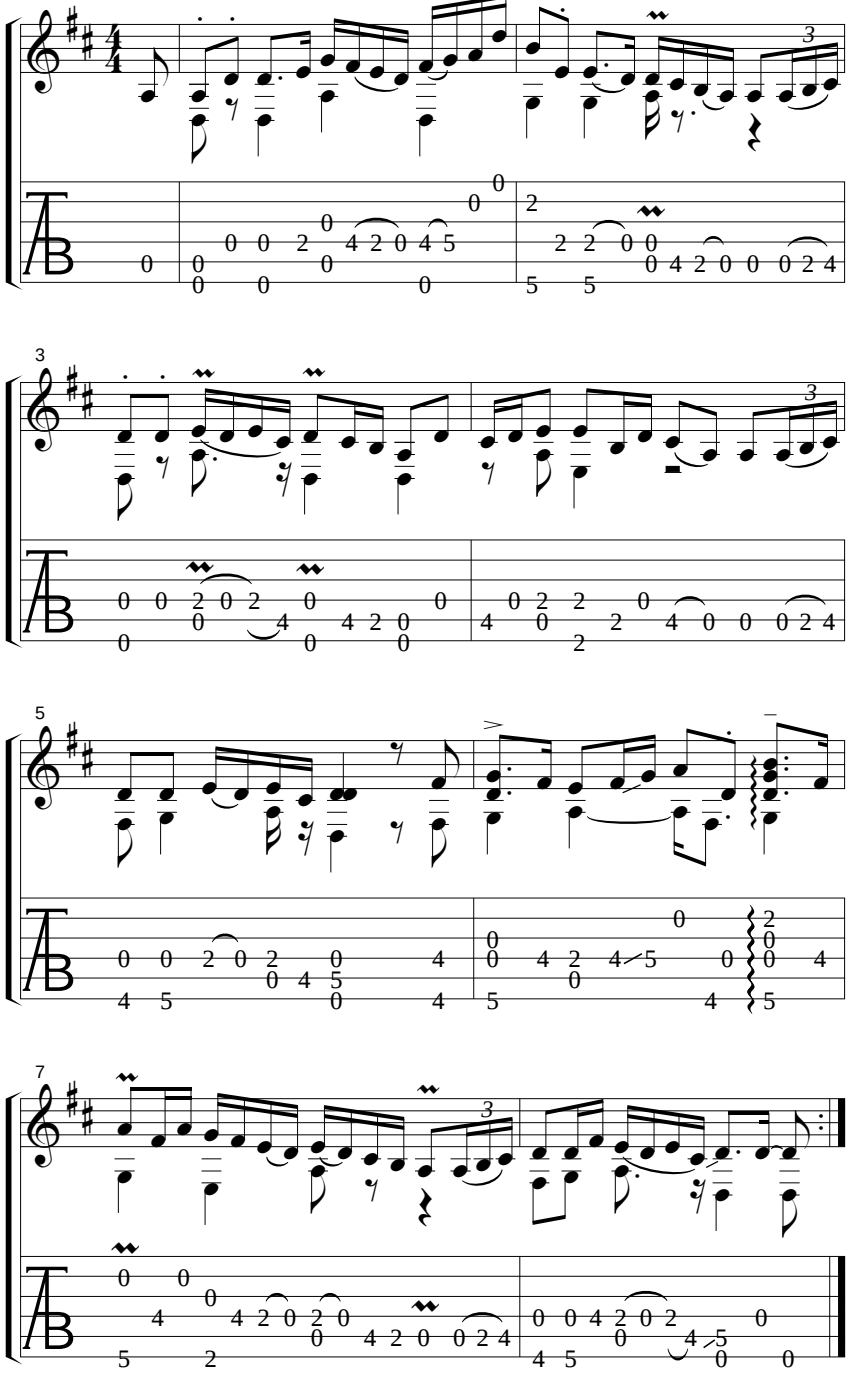
MURTAGH MCKANN

DADGAD, Capo 3 — O'Carolan arr. P. Bensusan



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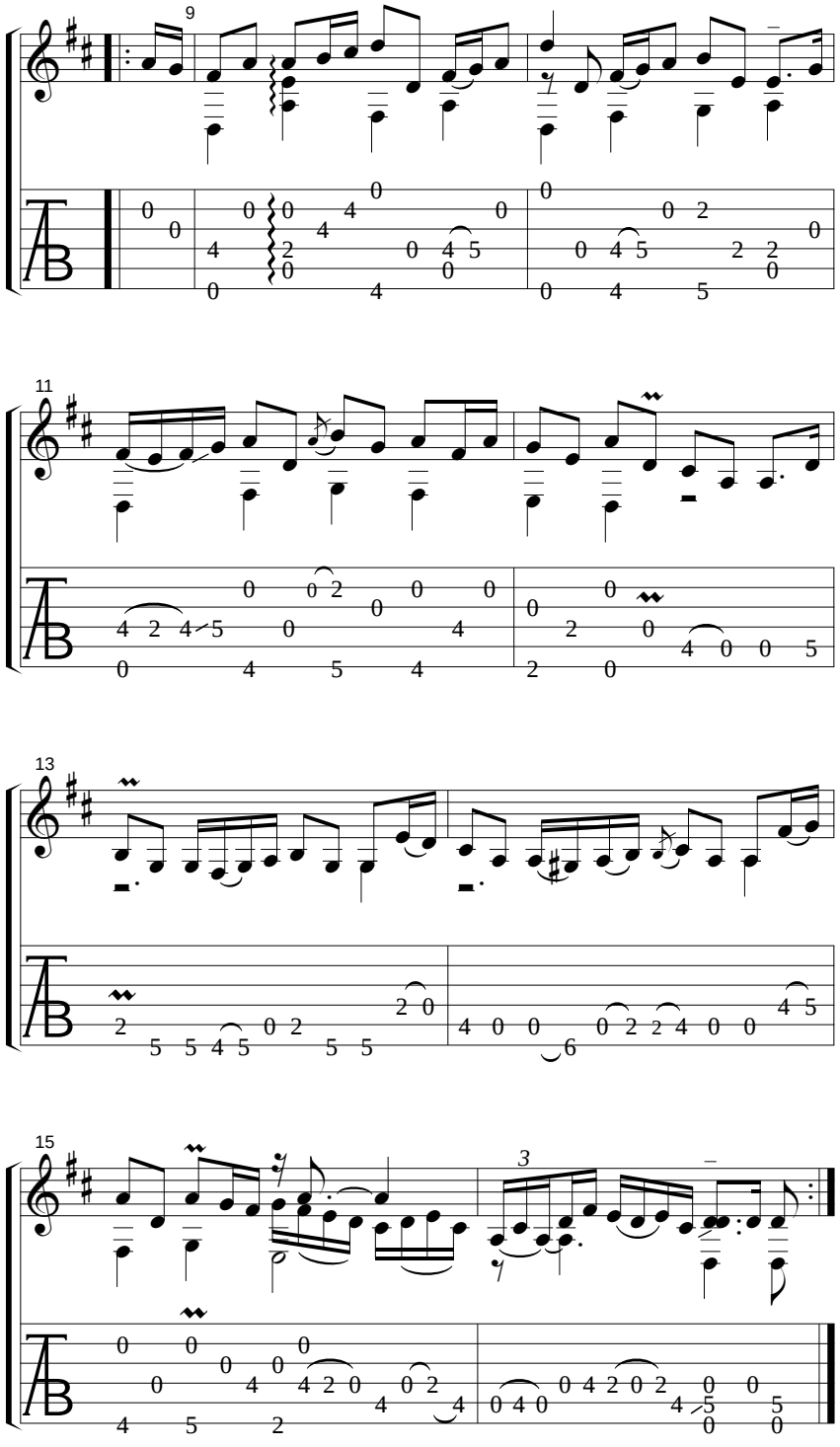
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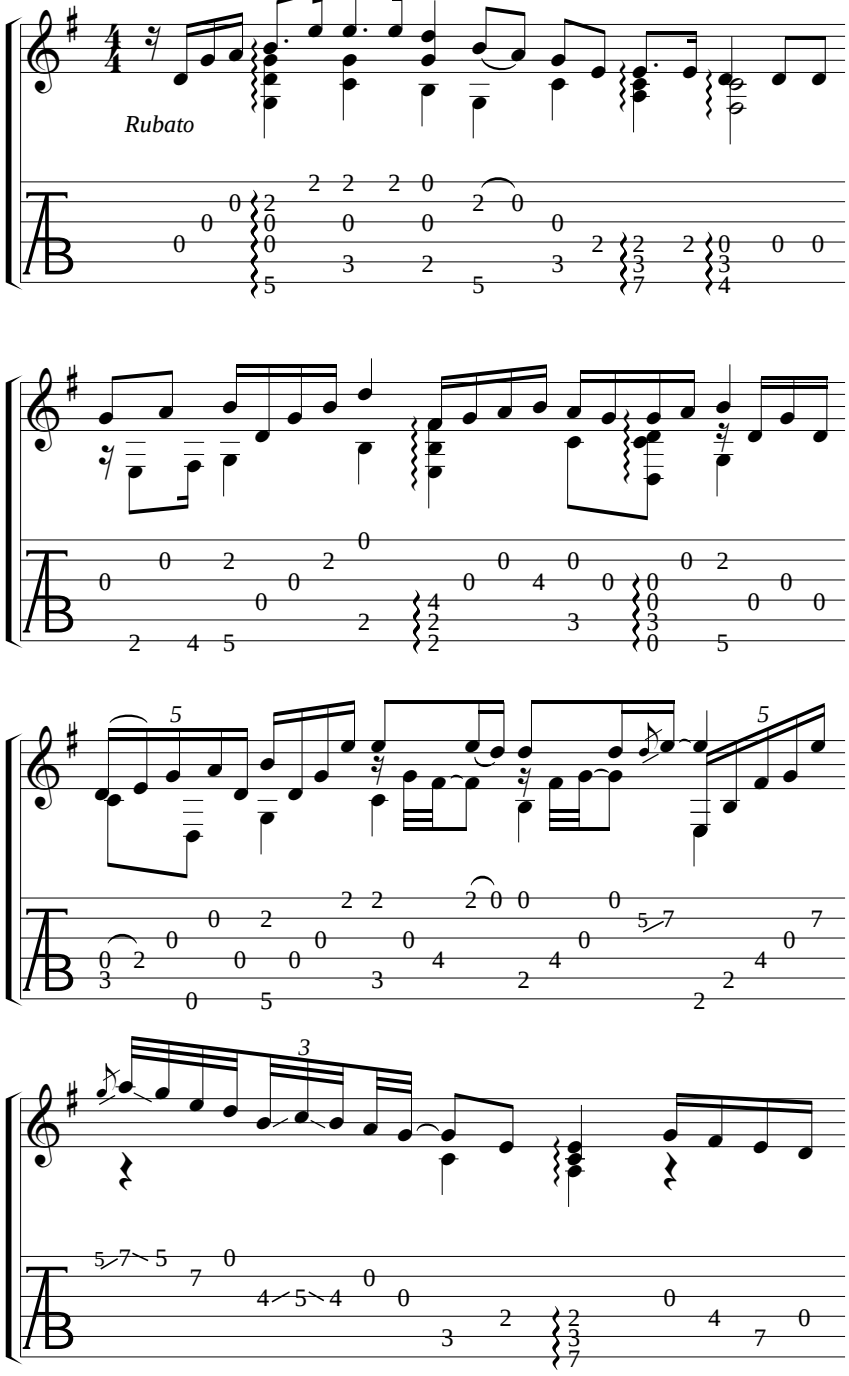
FLAMORGAN AIR

DADGAD, Capo 2

Trad. arr. P. Bensusan



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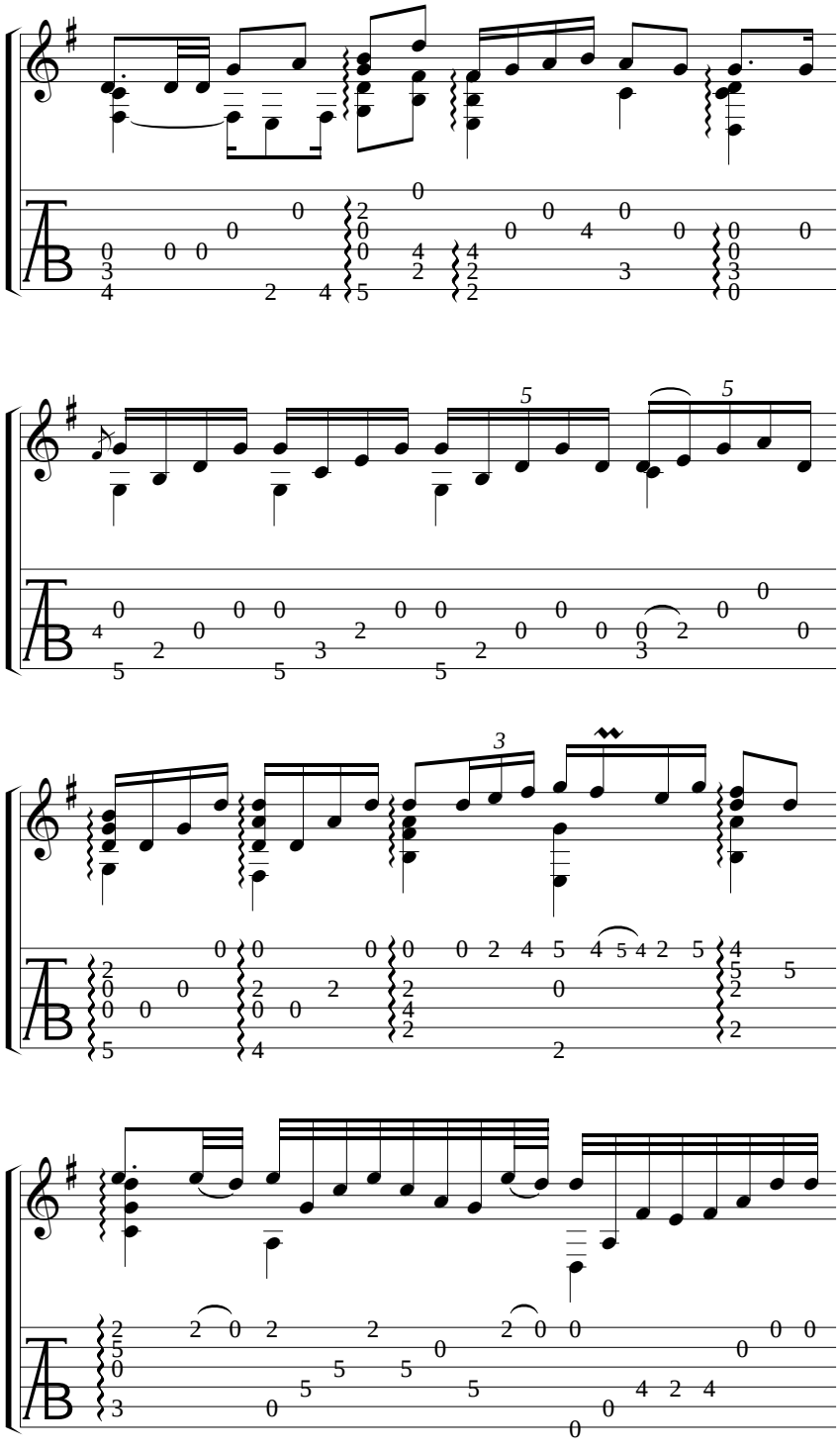

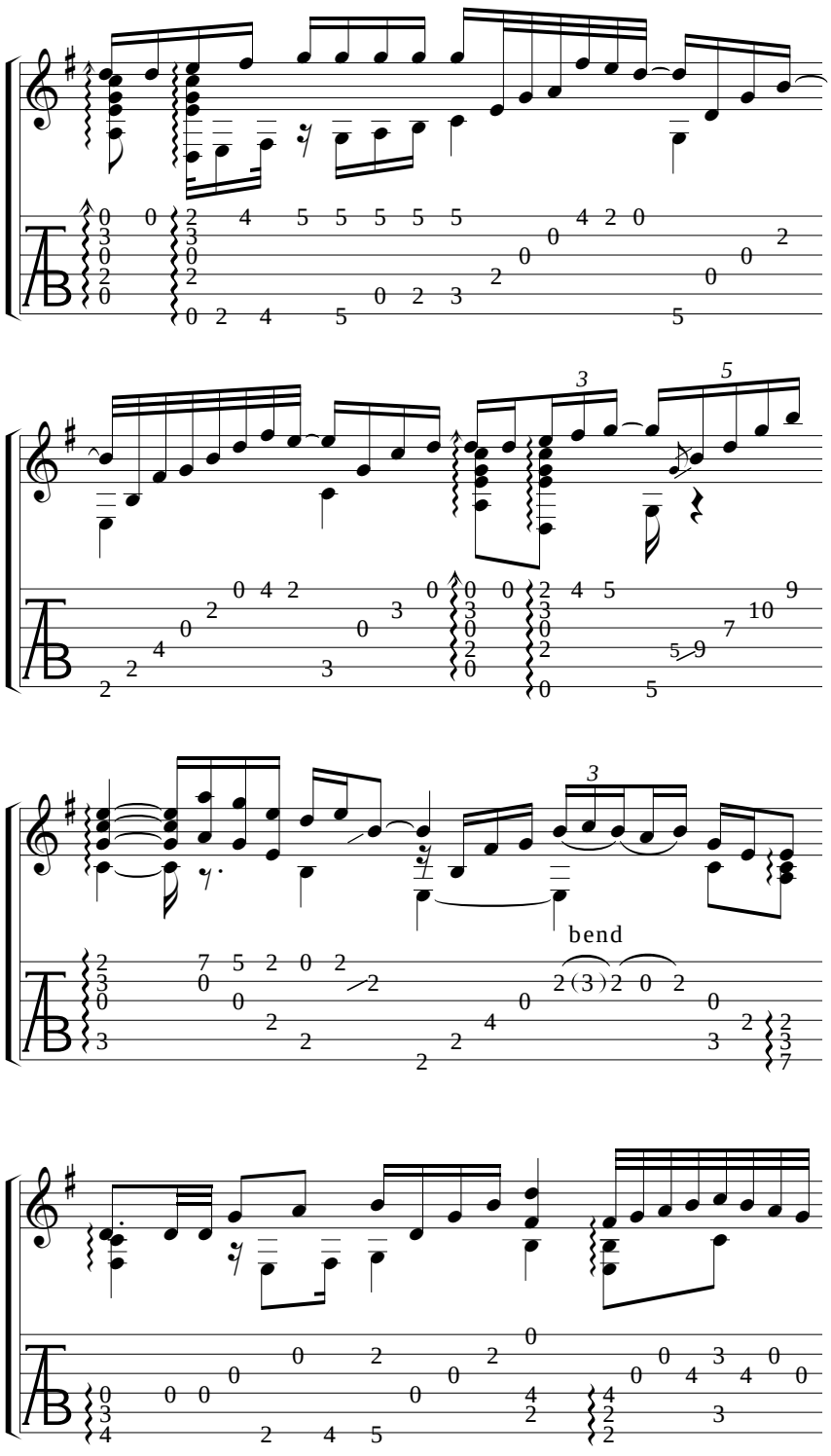
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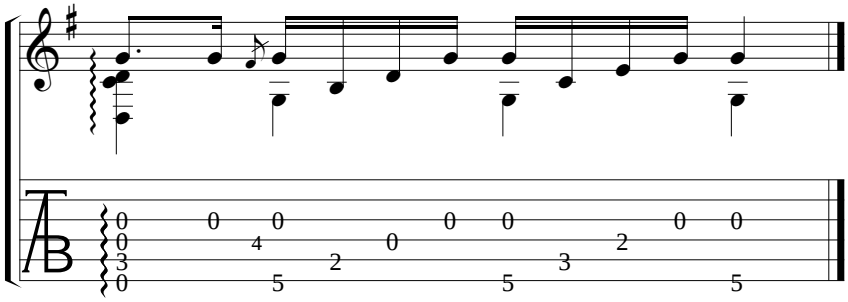
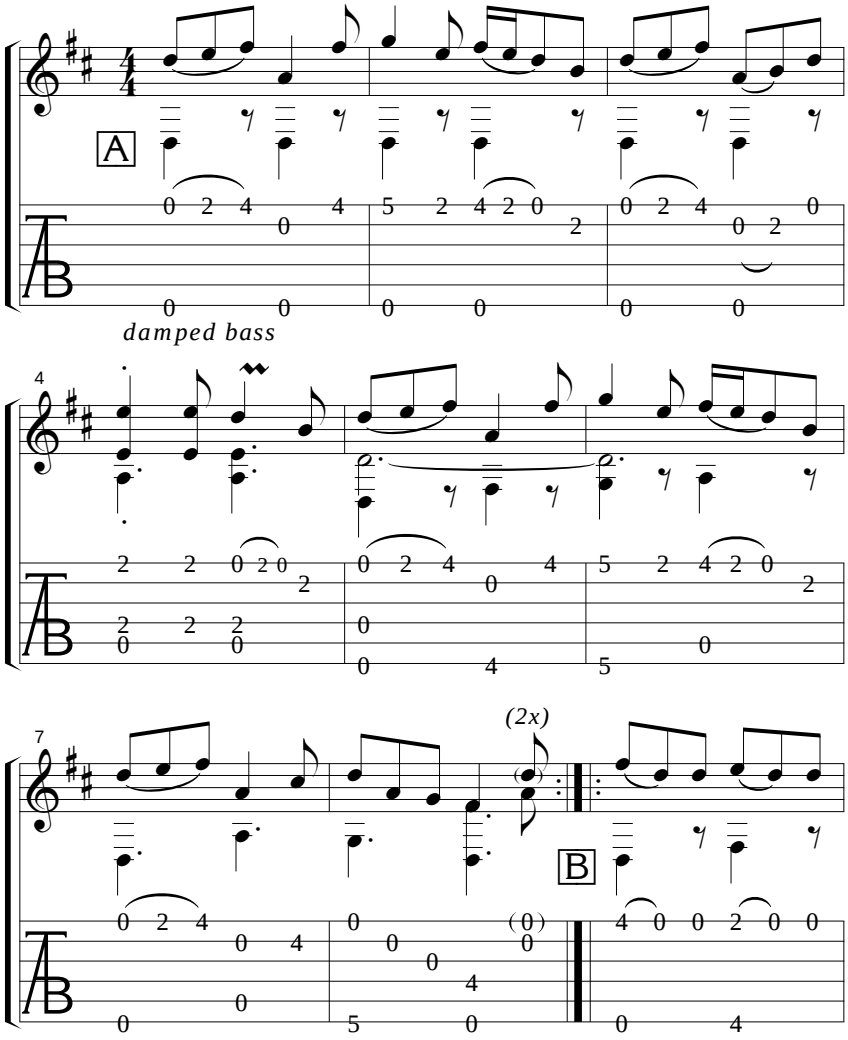


MERRILY KISSED THE QUAKER

DADGAD, Capo 2

Trad. arr. P. Bensusan



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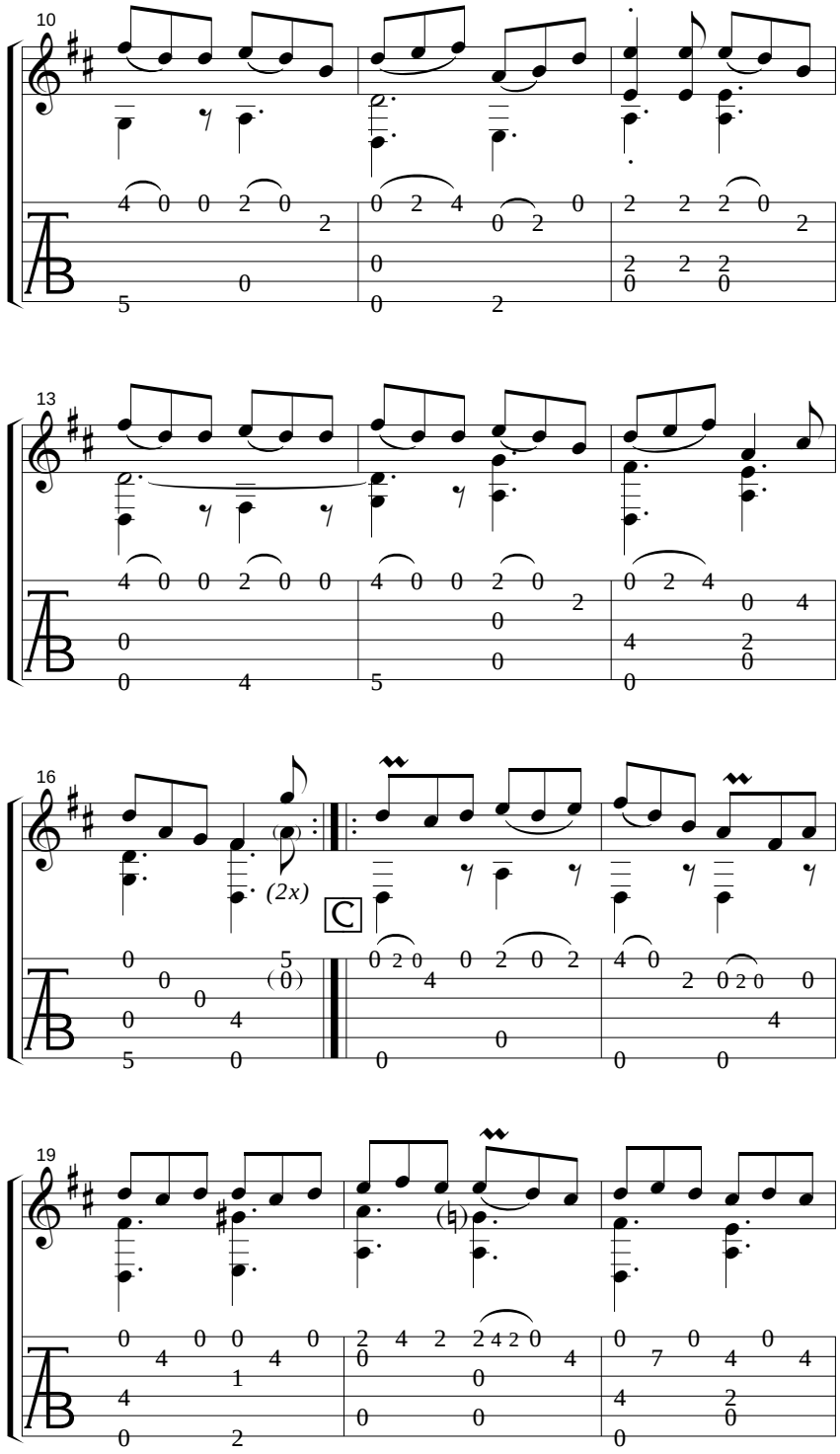
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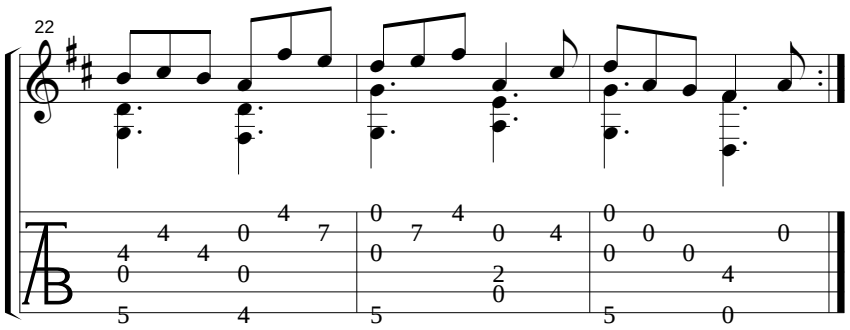
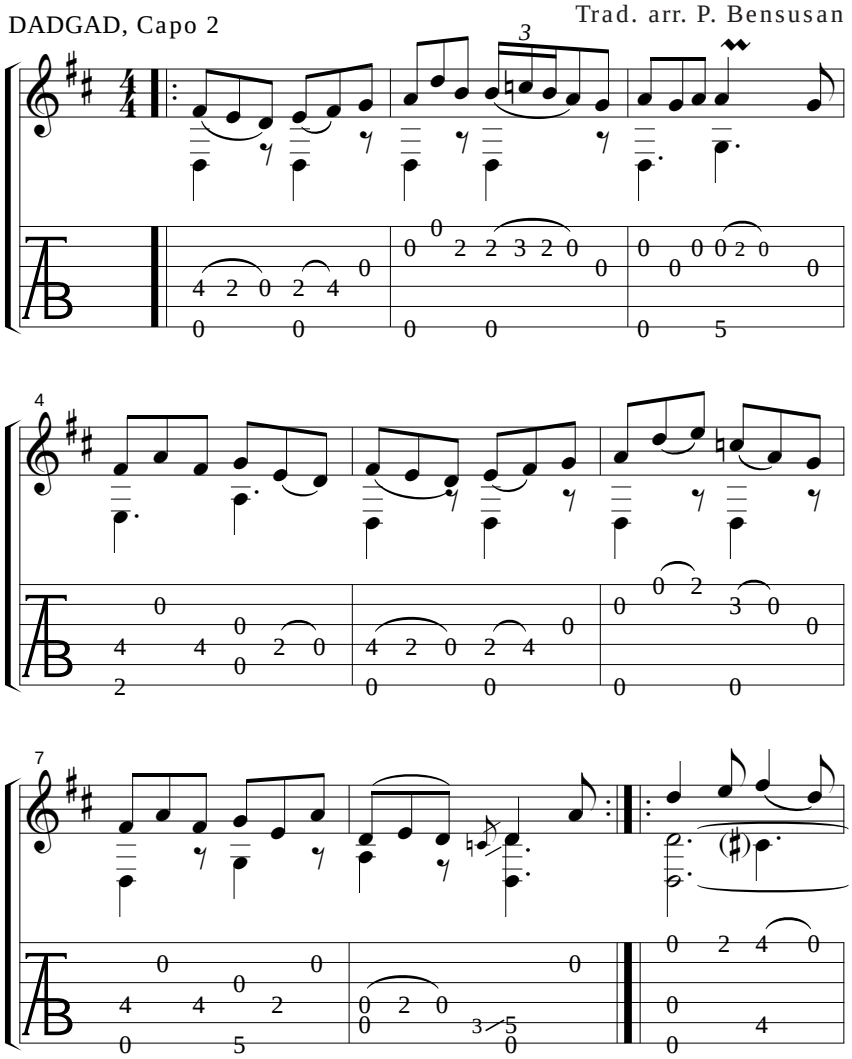


CUNLA

DADGAD, Capo 2

Trad. arr. P. Bensusan



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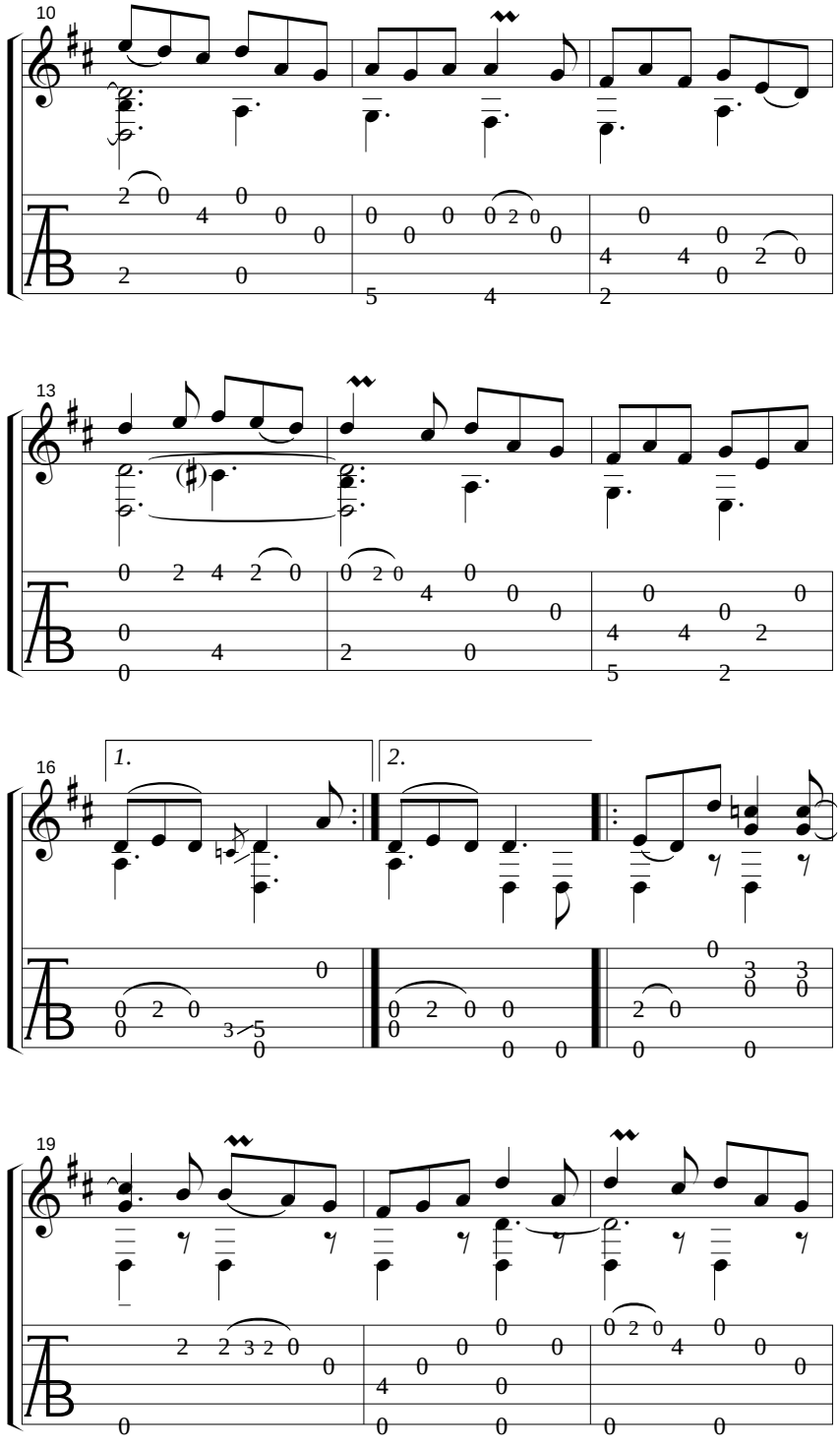
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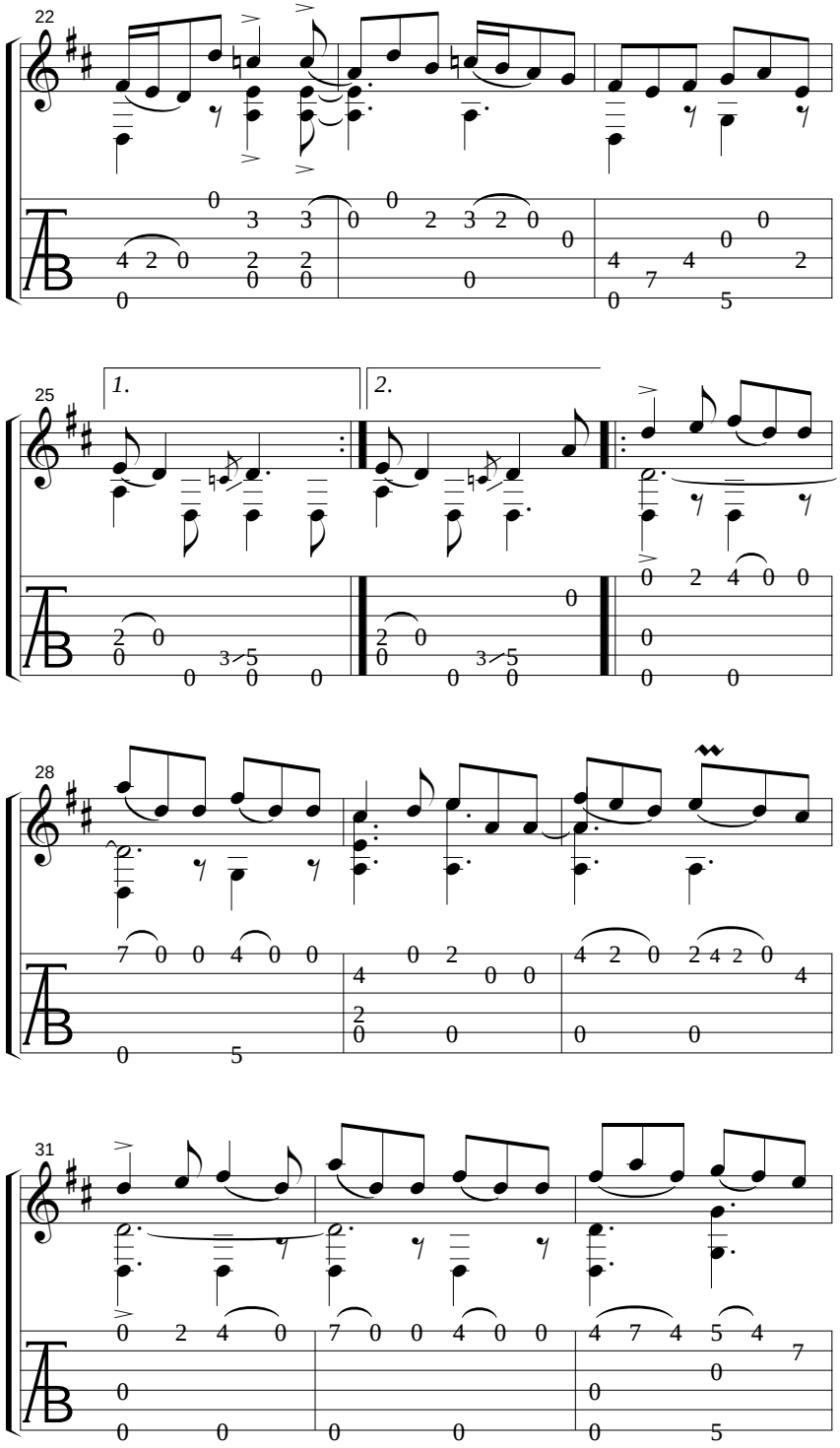
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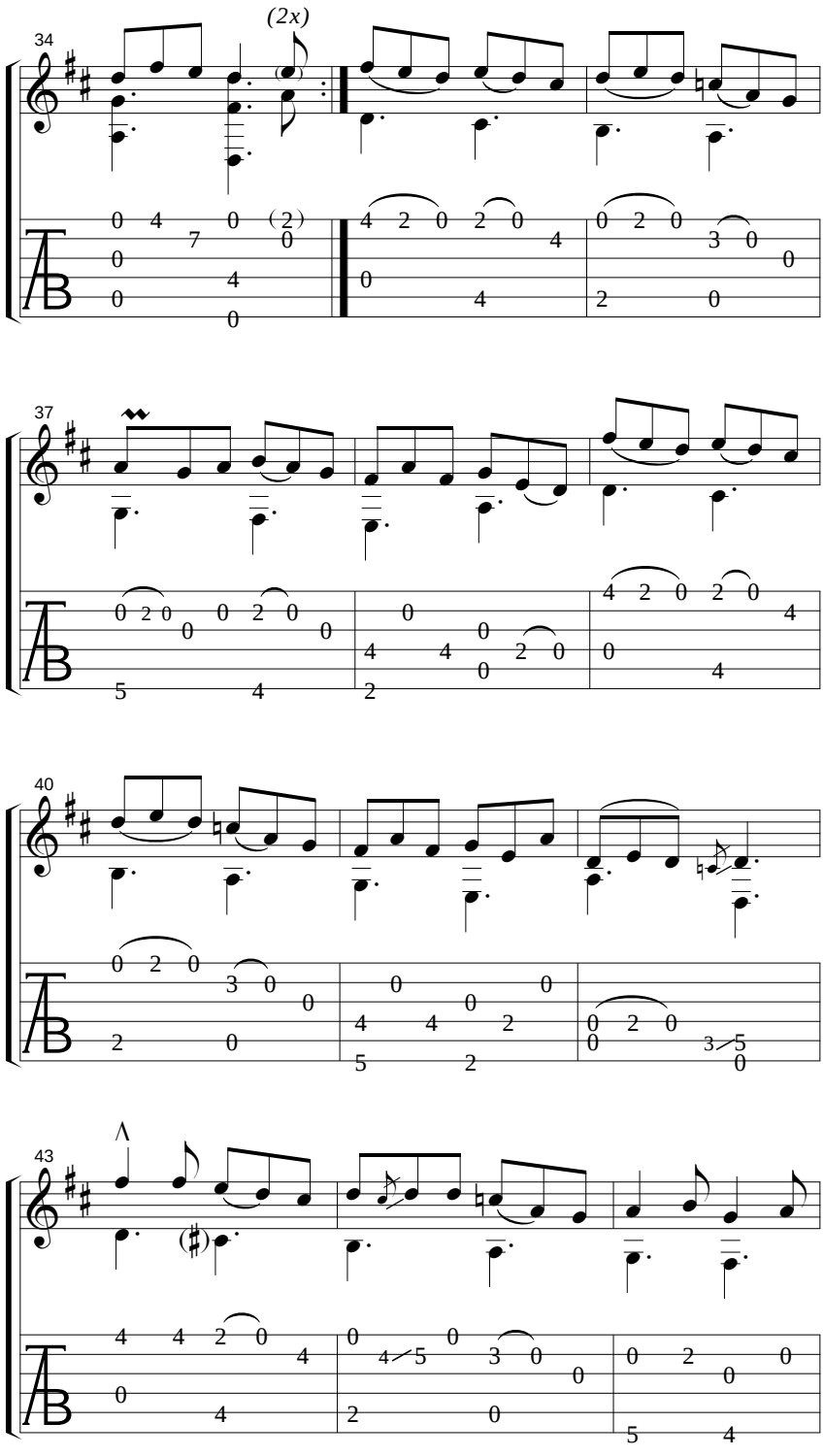
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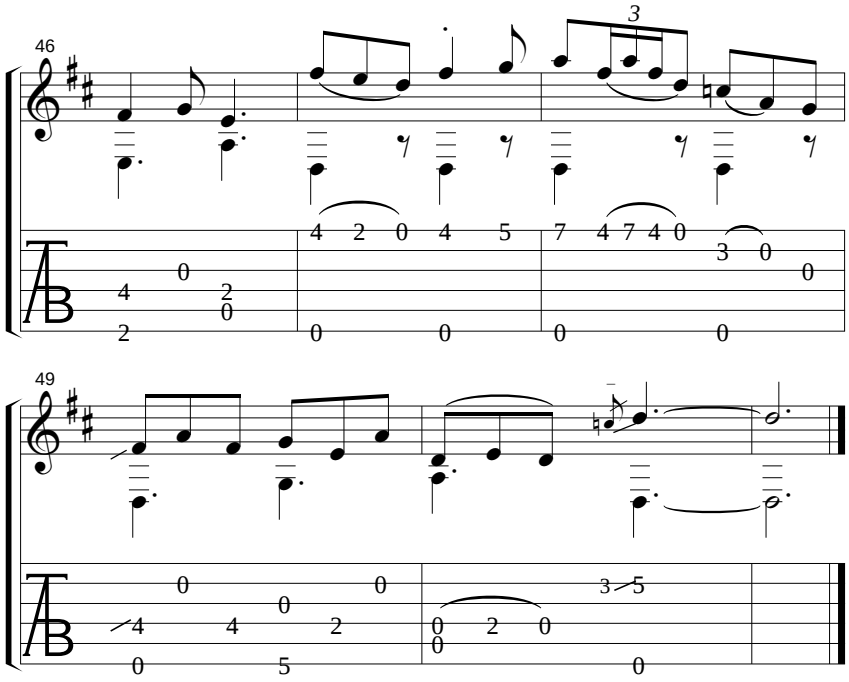
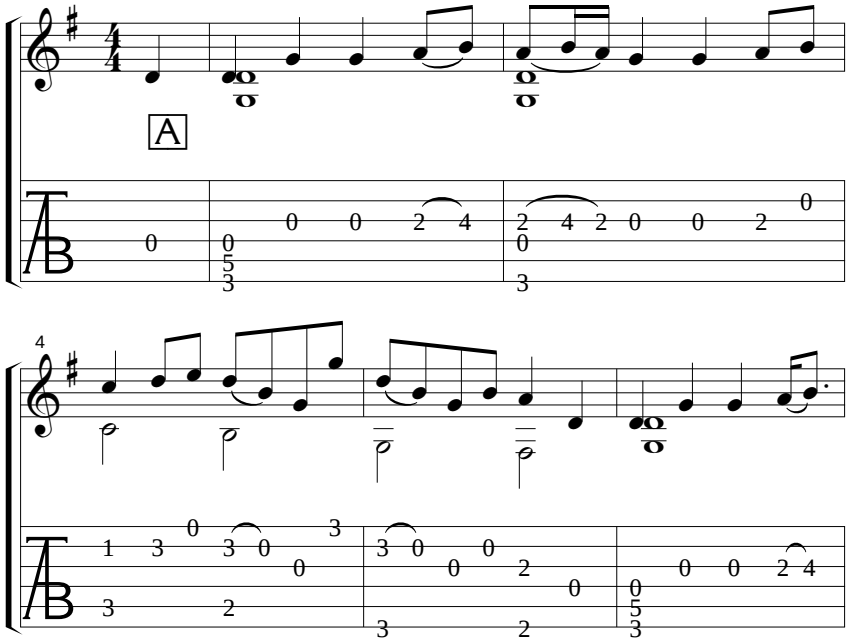


THE DUKE OF FIFE'S WELCOME TO DEESIDE

Standard: EADGBE

Trad. arr. Duck Baker



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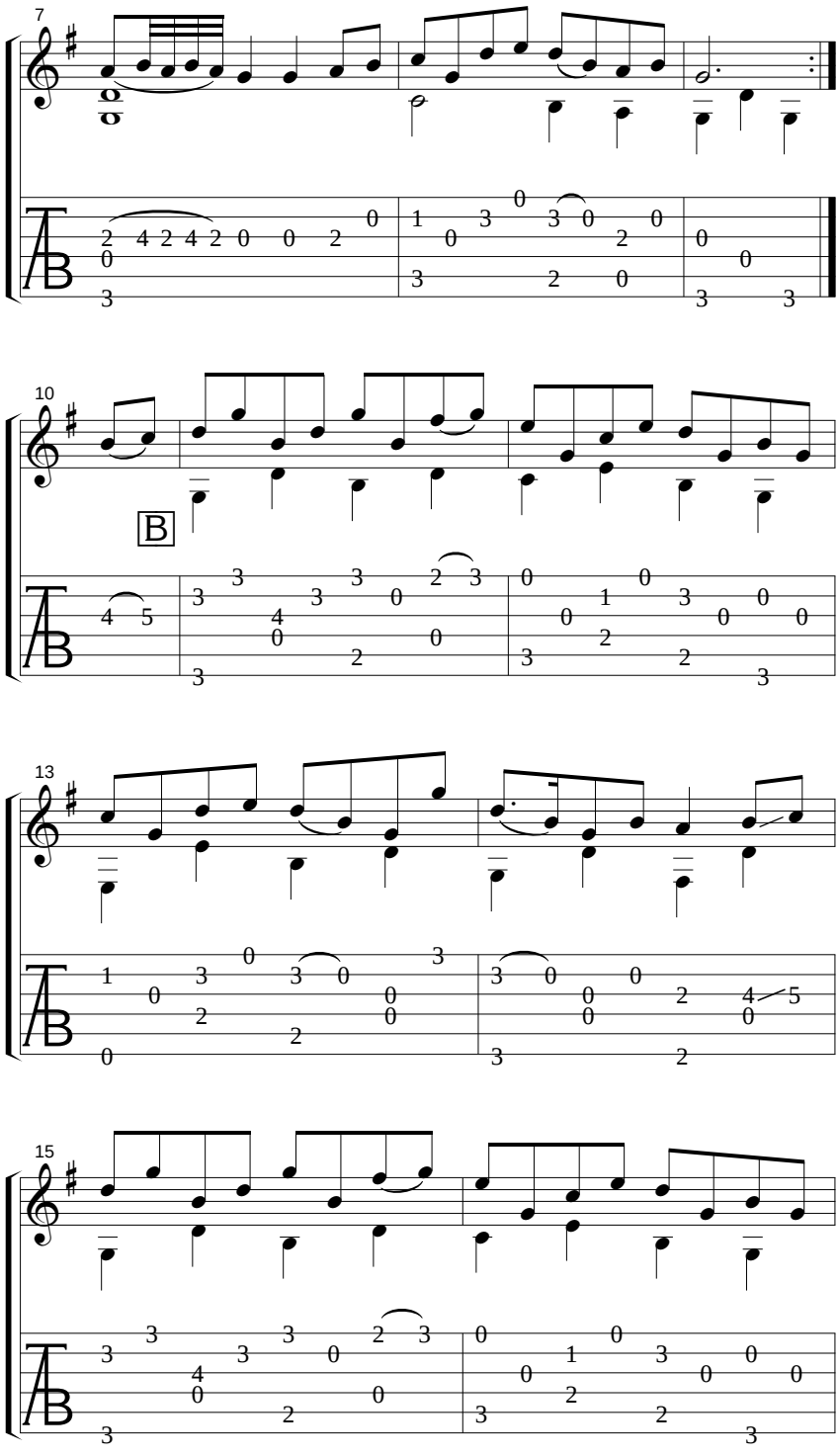
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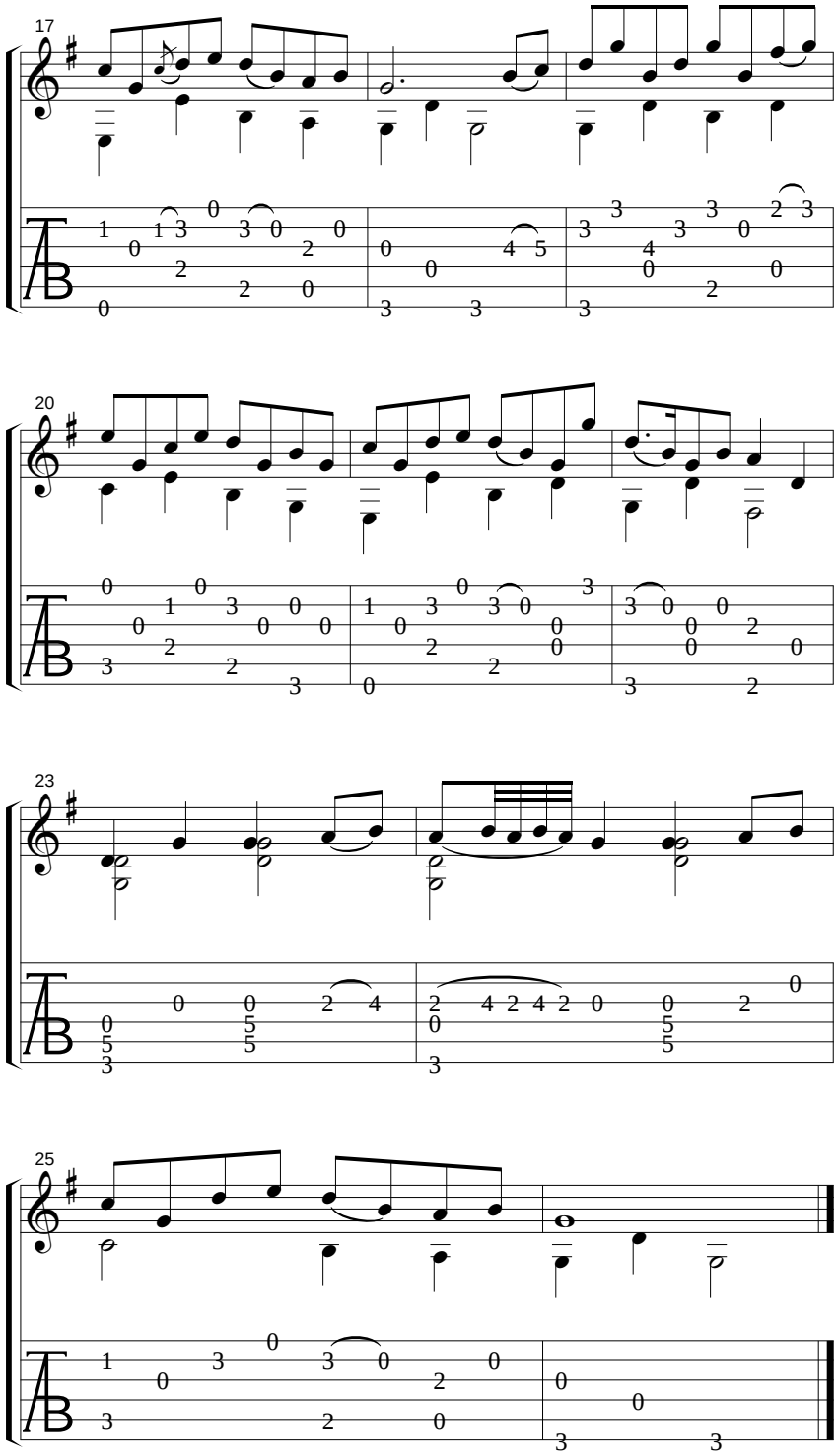
10
B
13
15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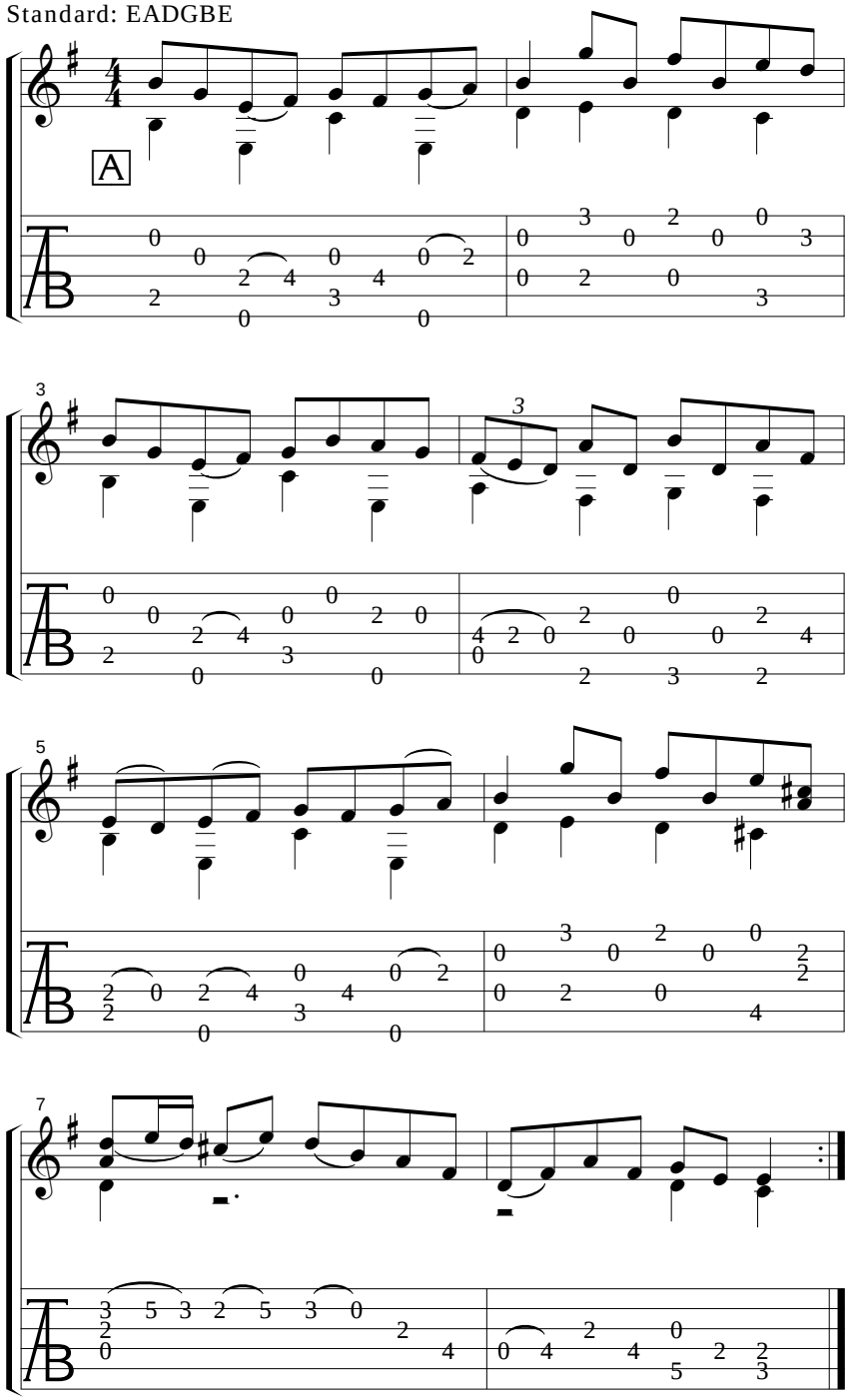
23
25

THE GOLDEN KEYBOARD

Trad. arr. Duck Baker

Standard: EADGBE



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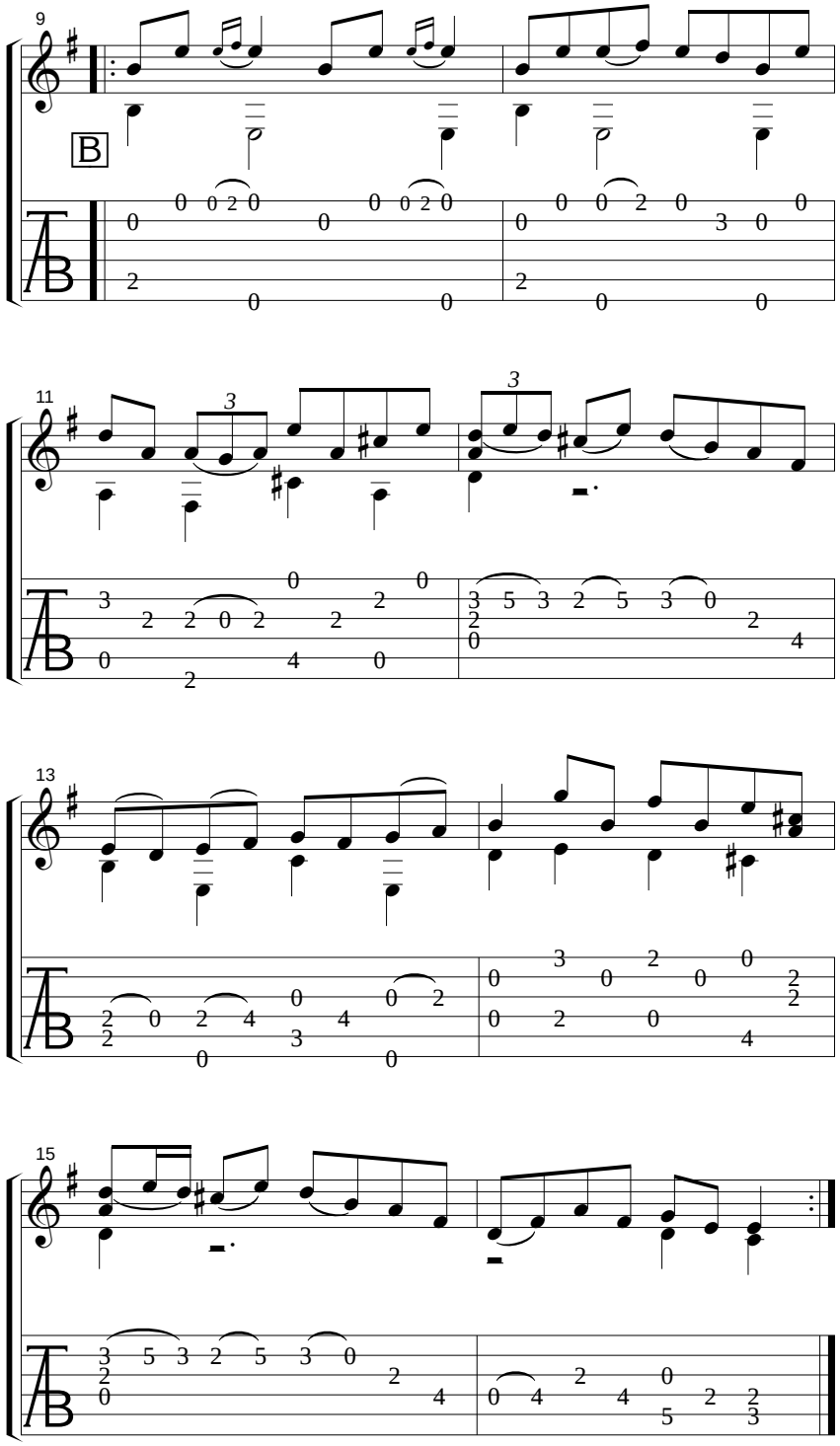
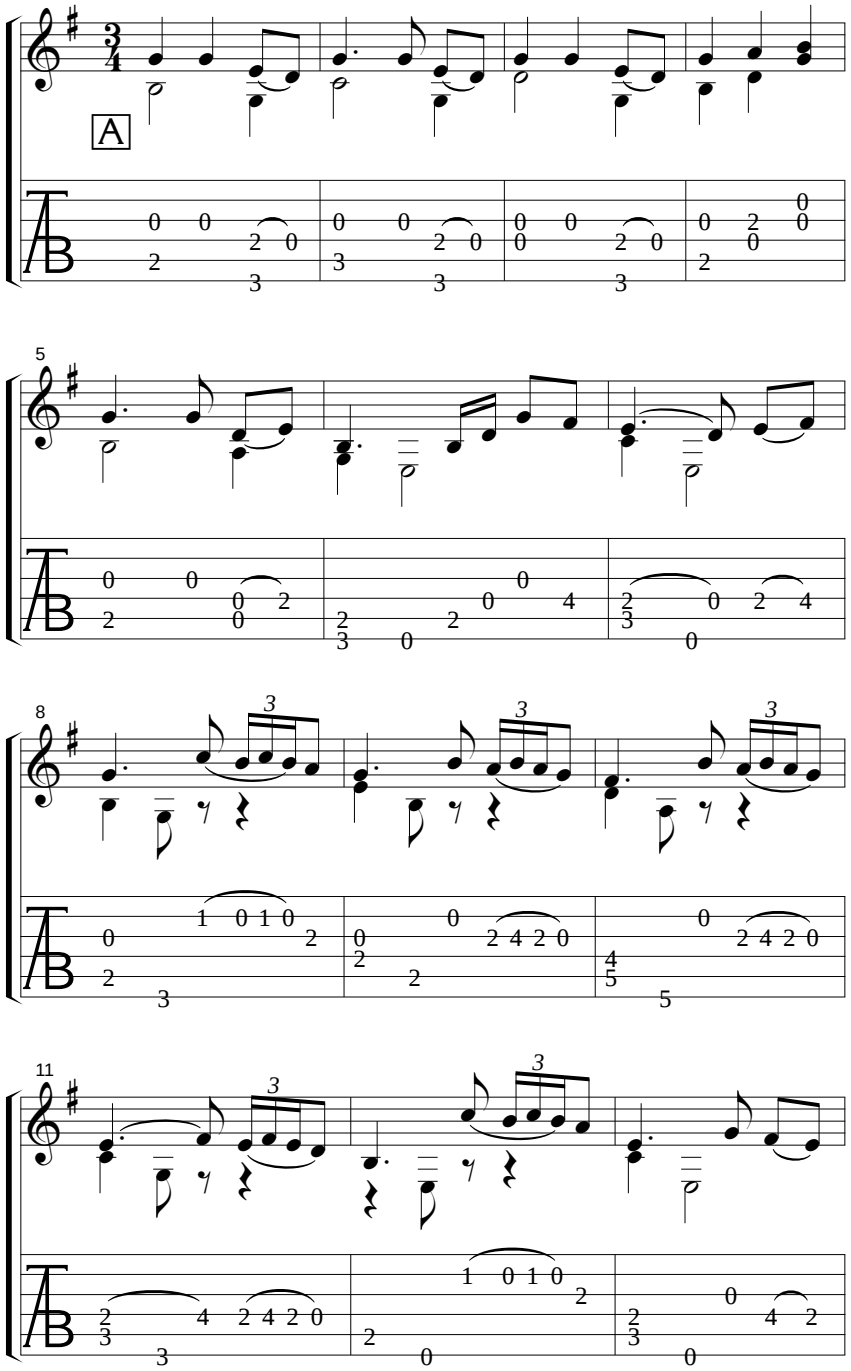

9
B
11
3
3
13
15

The Faerie Queen

Standard: EADGBE

Trad. arr. Duck Baker



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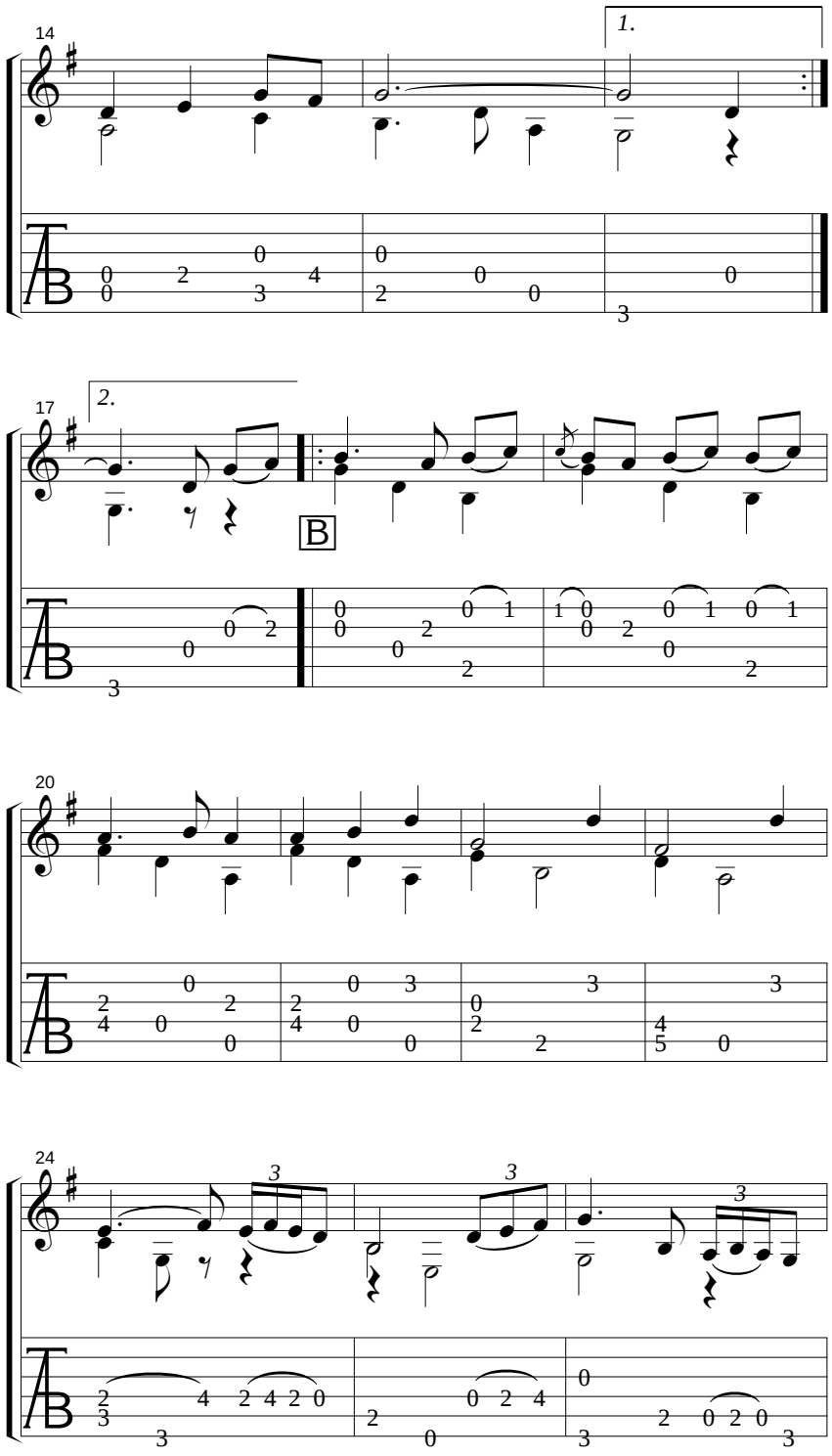
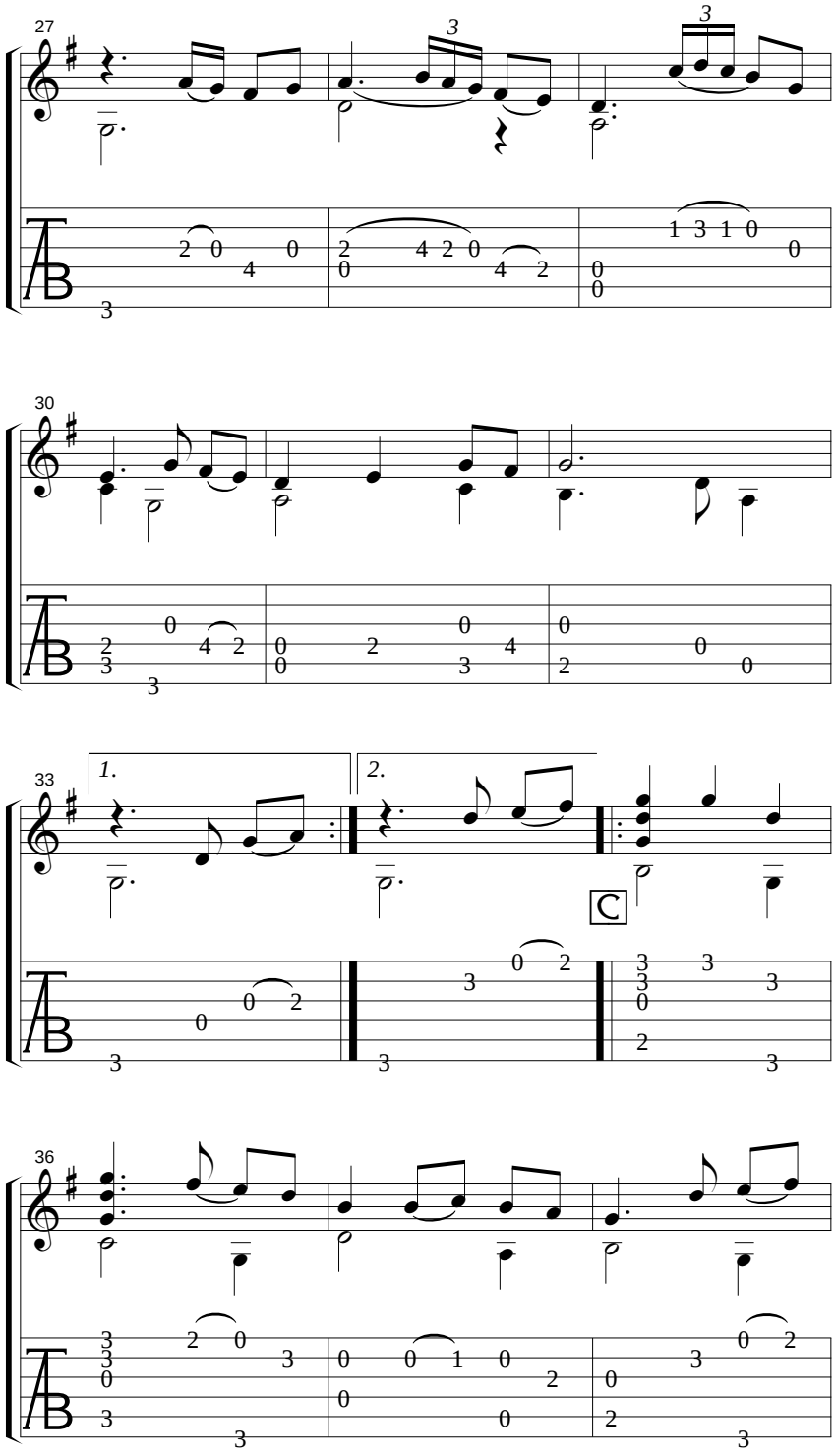

14
1.
17
2.
B
20
24
3
3
3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3
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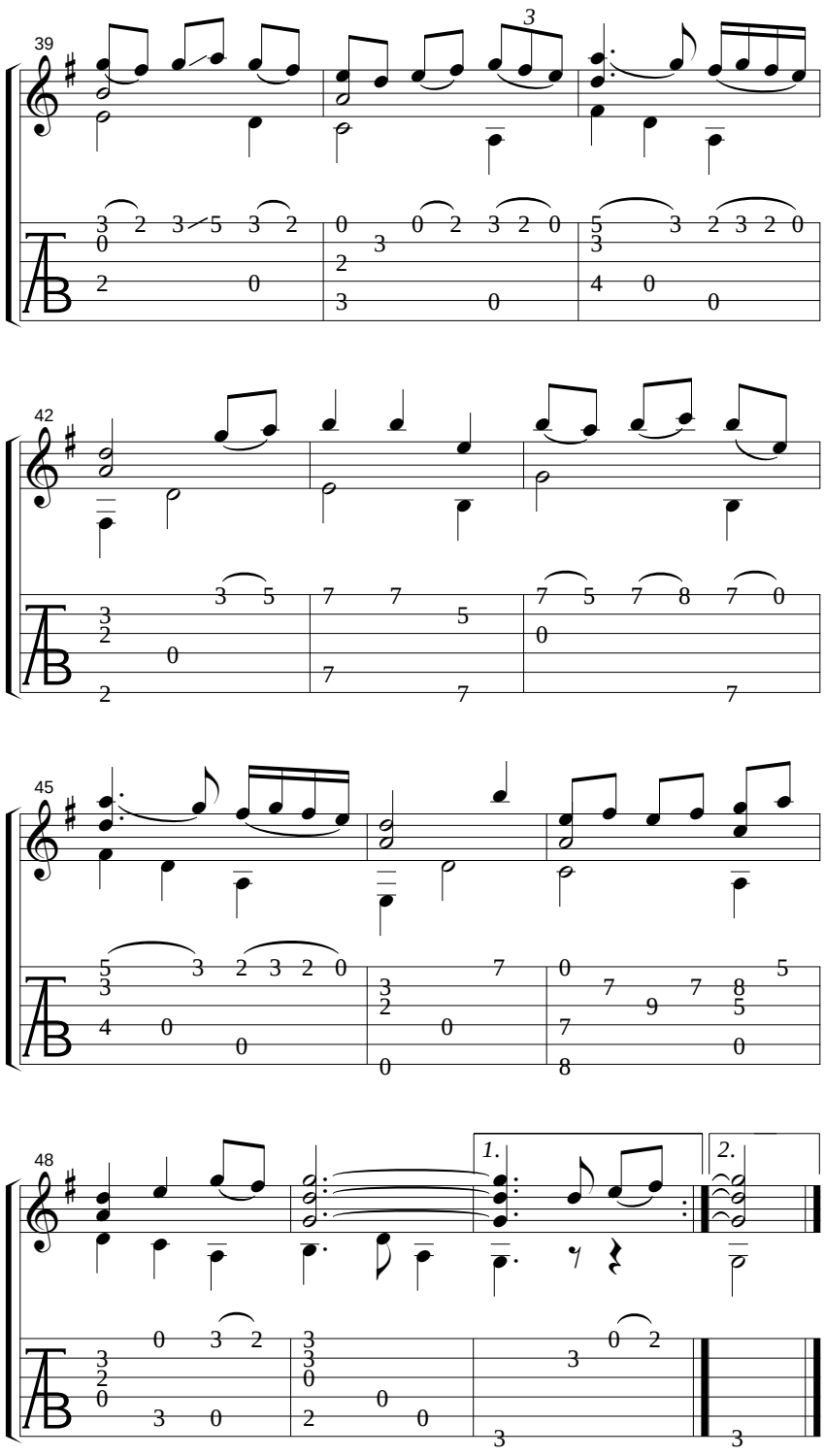
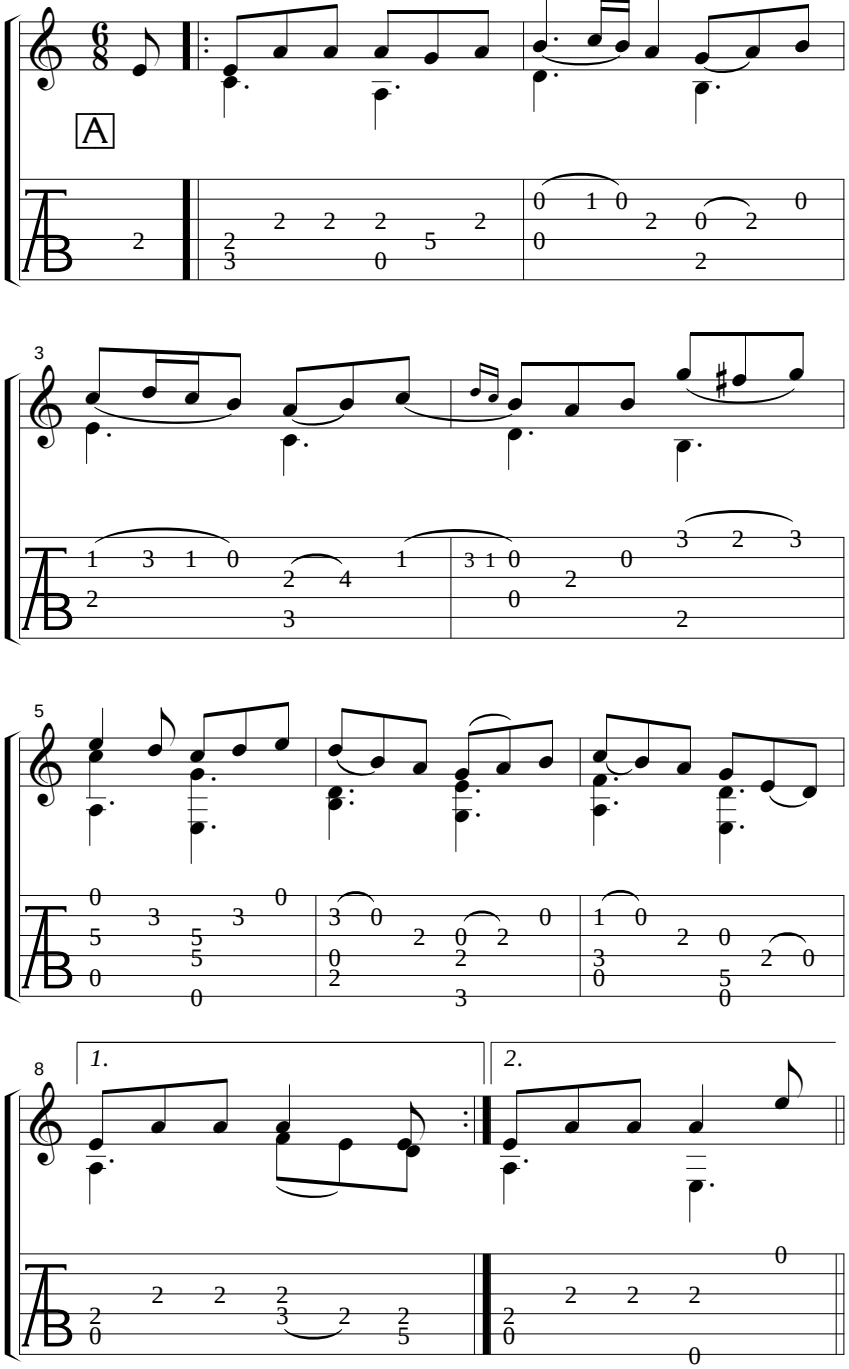
33
1.
2.
C
36


39
3
42
45
48
1.
2.

PLANXTY KELLY

Standard: EADGBE

Trad. arr. Duck Baker



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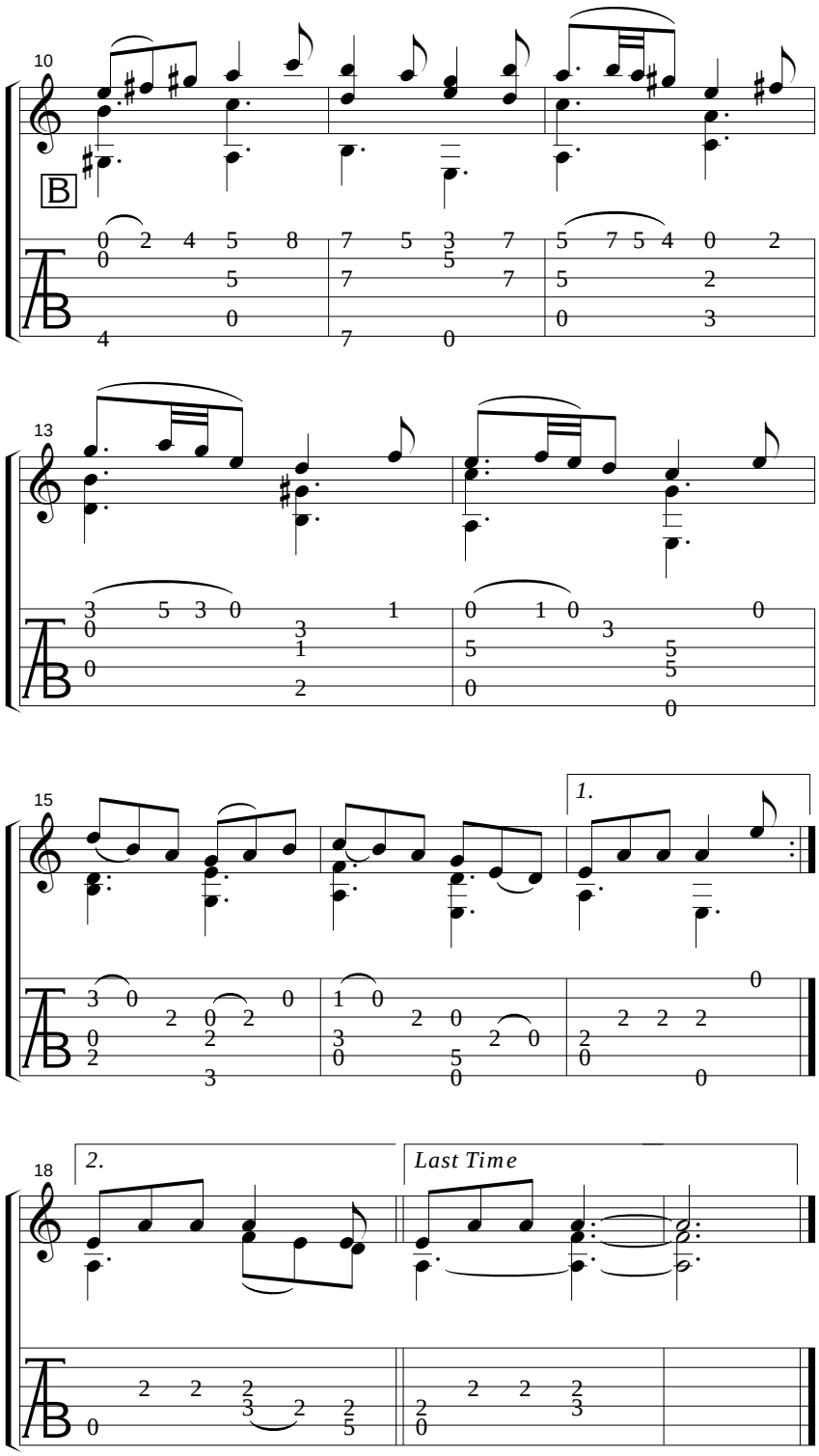
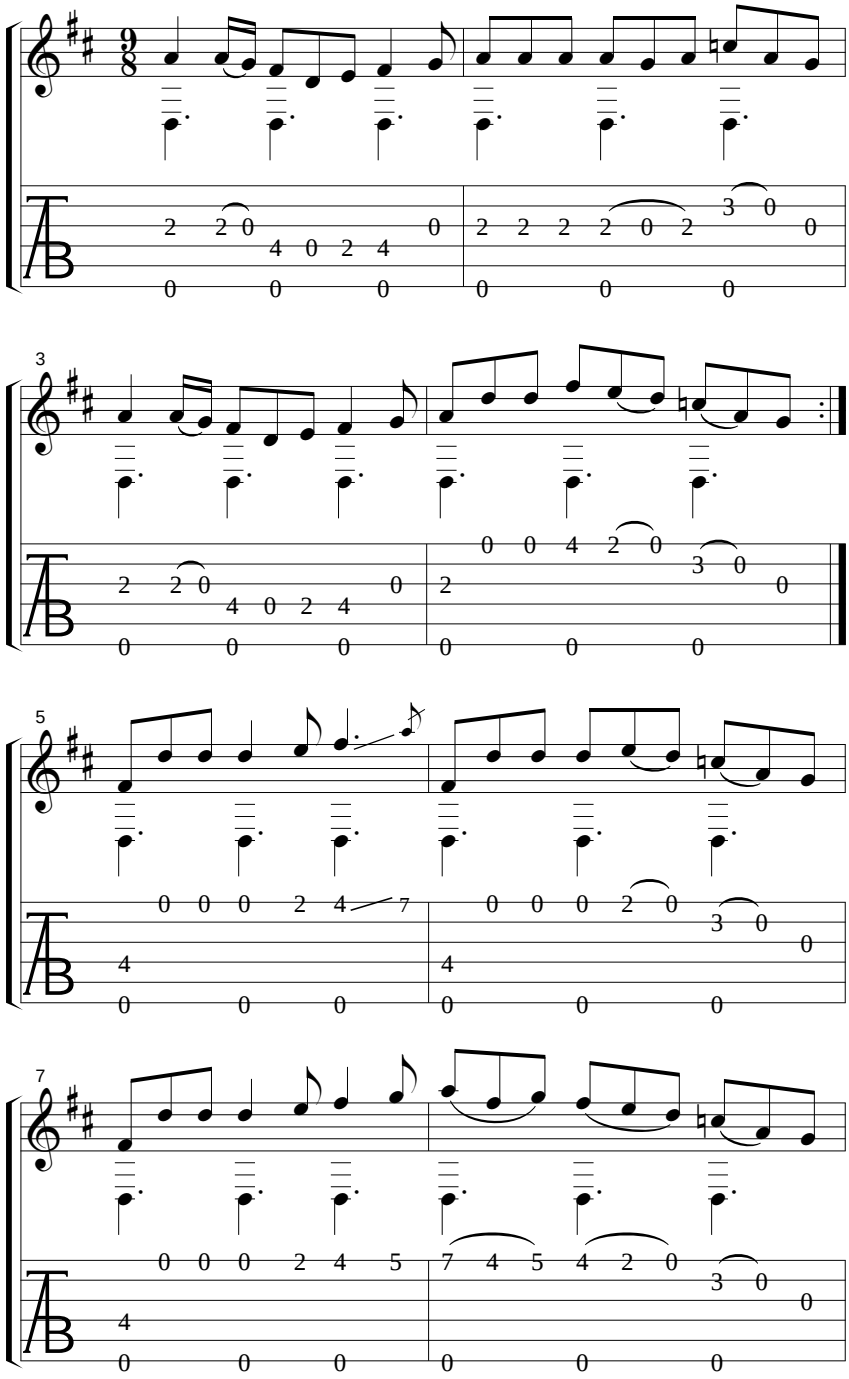

10
B
13
15
1.
18
2.
Last Time

HARDIMAN THE FIDDLER

DADGAD, Capo 2

Trad. arr. T. Long



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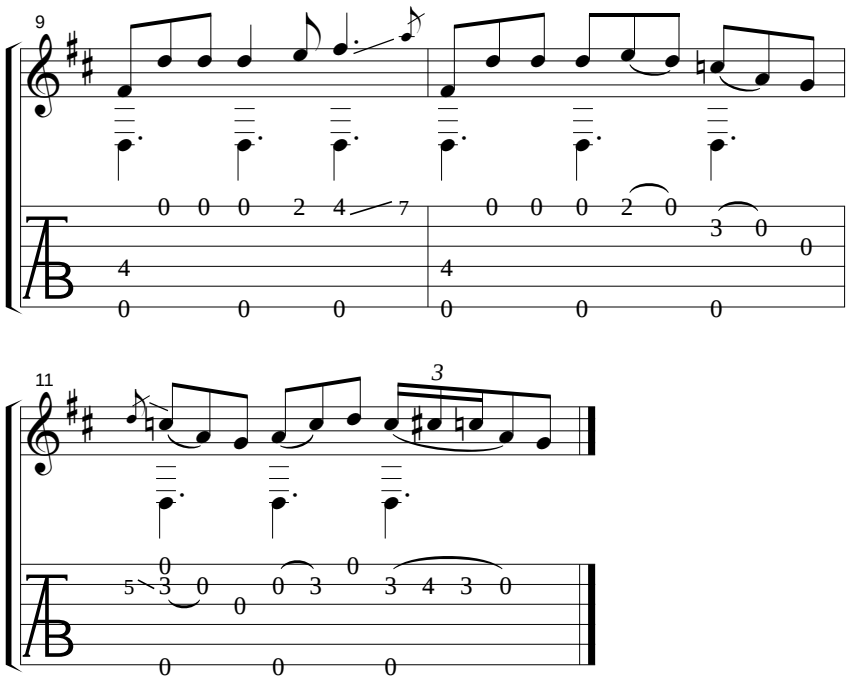
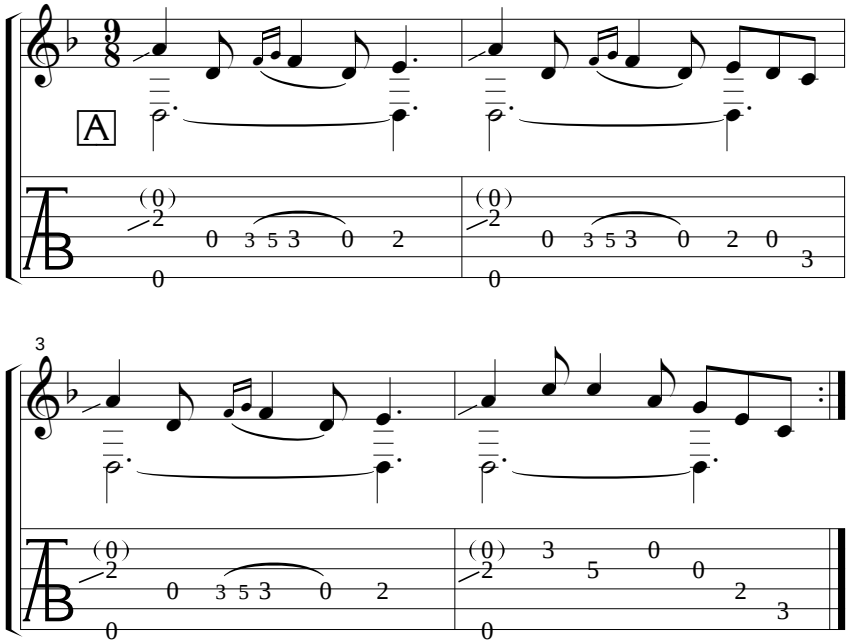


THE BUTTERFLY

DADGAD, Capo 2

Trad. arr. T. Long



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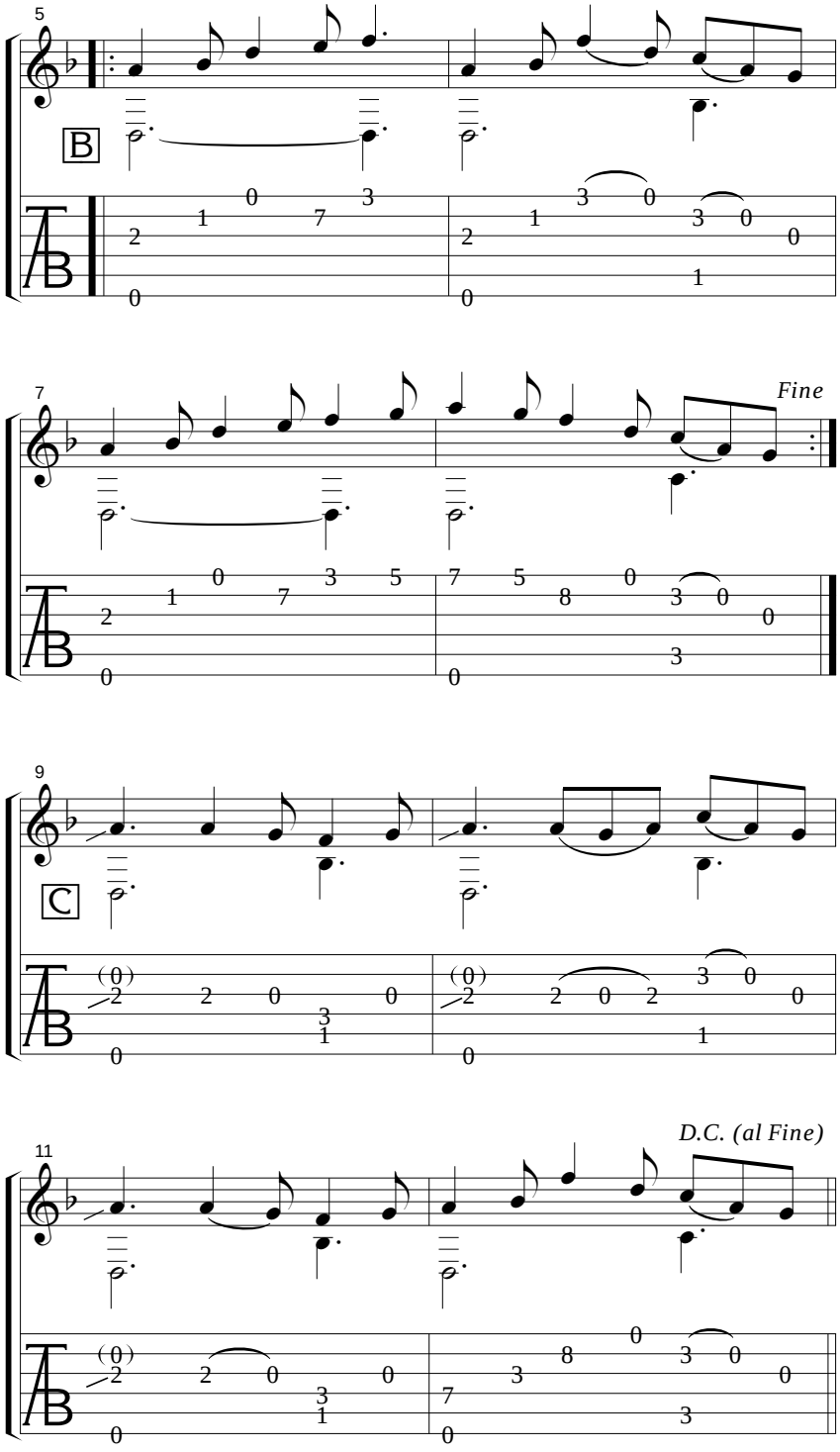
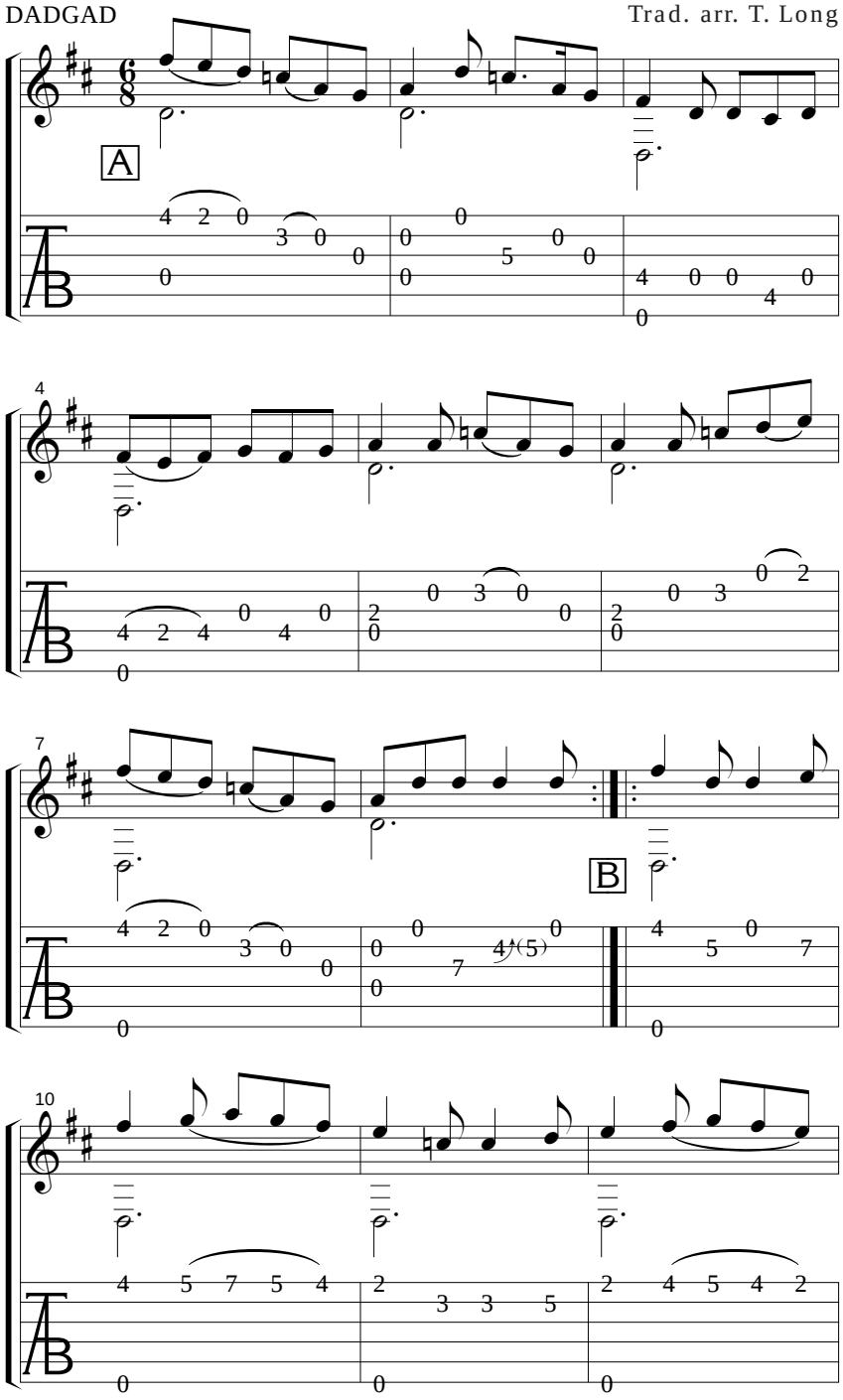

5
B
7
Fine
9
C
11
D.C. (al Fine)

BANISH MISFORTUNE

DADGAD

Trad. arr. T. Long



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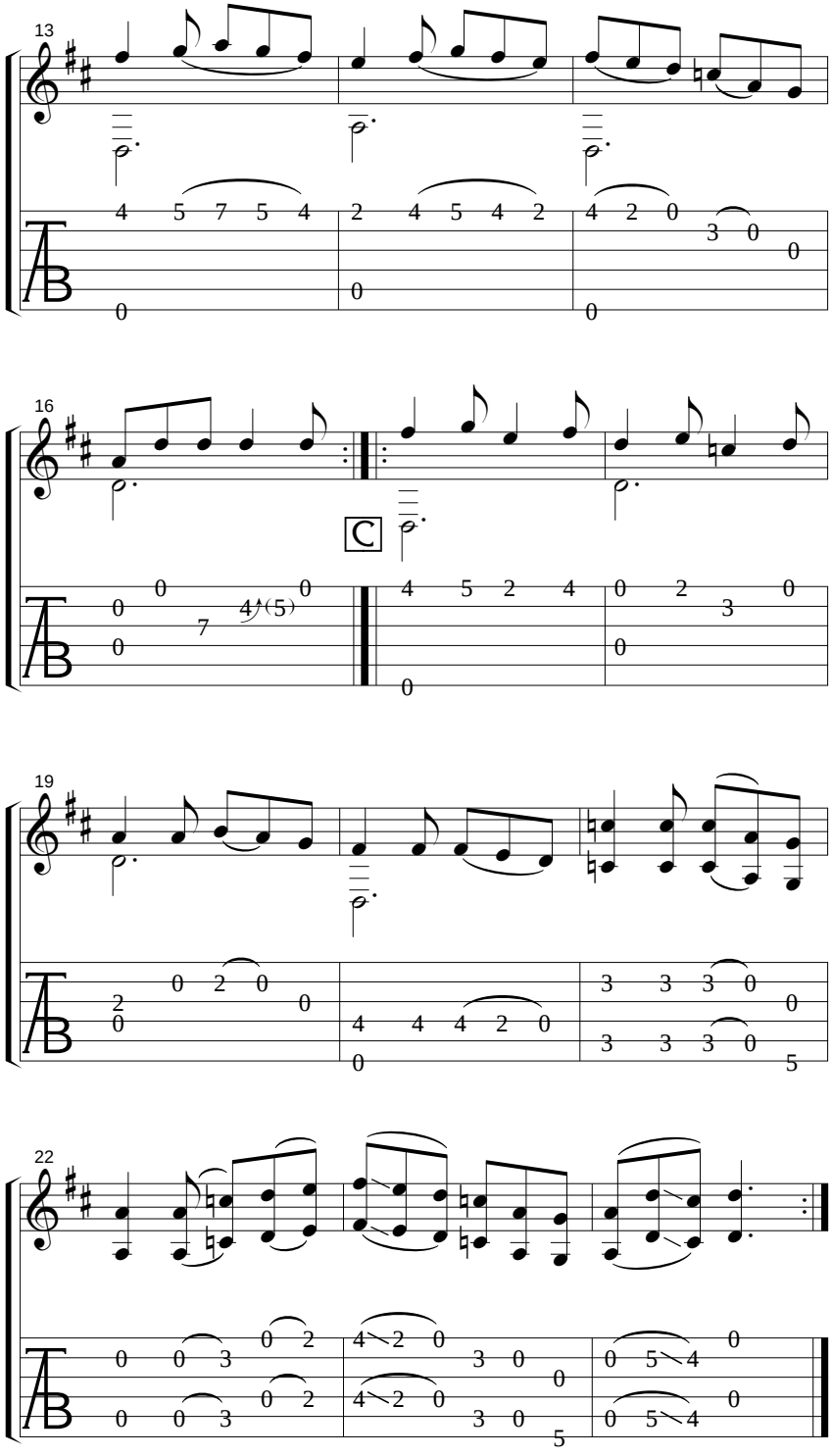
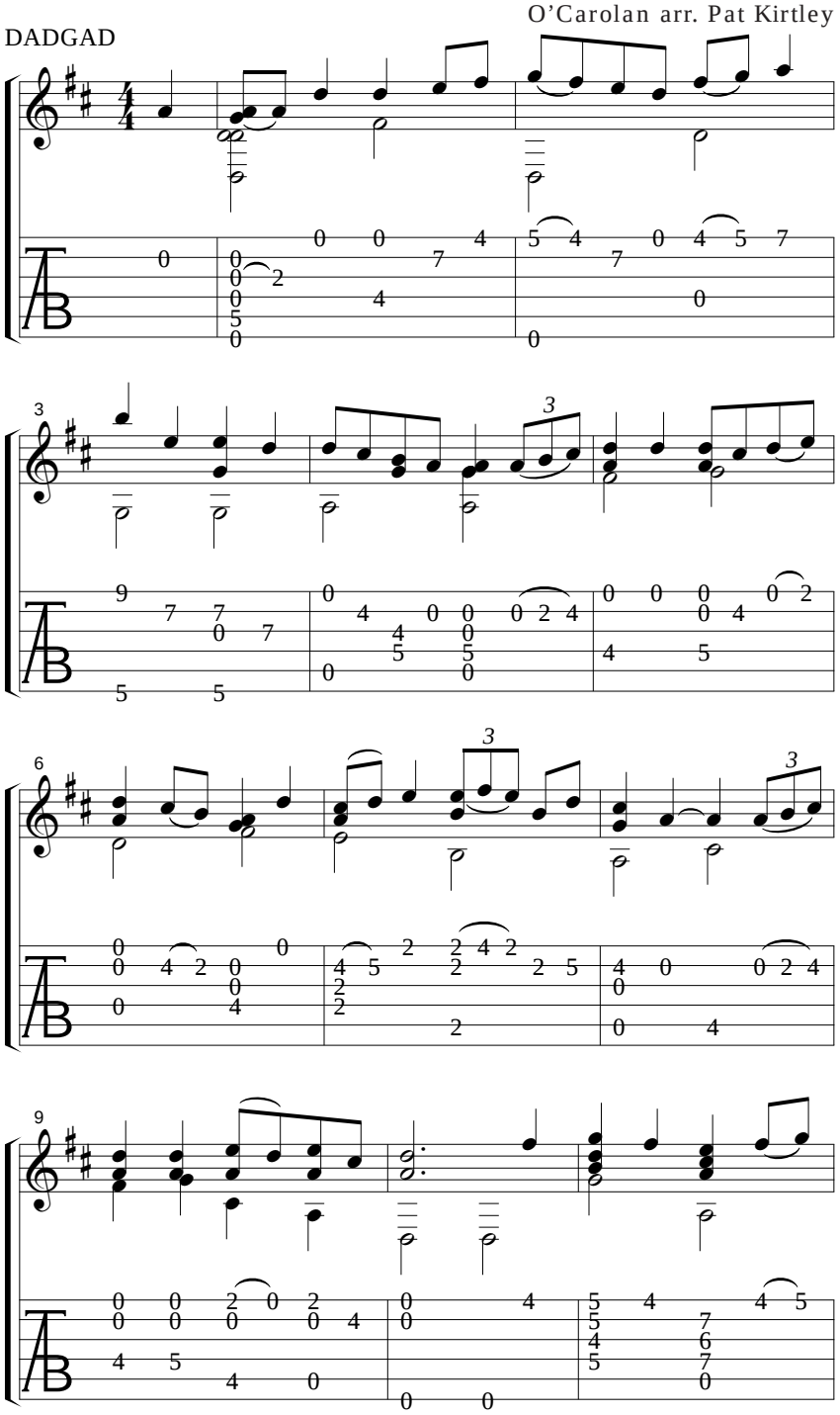

13
16
C
19
22

Morgan Magan

O'Carolan arr. Pat Kirtley

DADGAD



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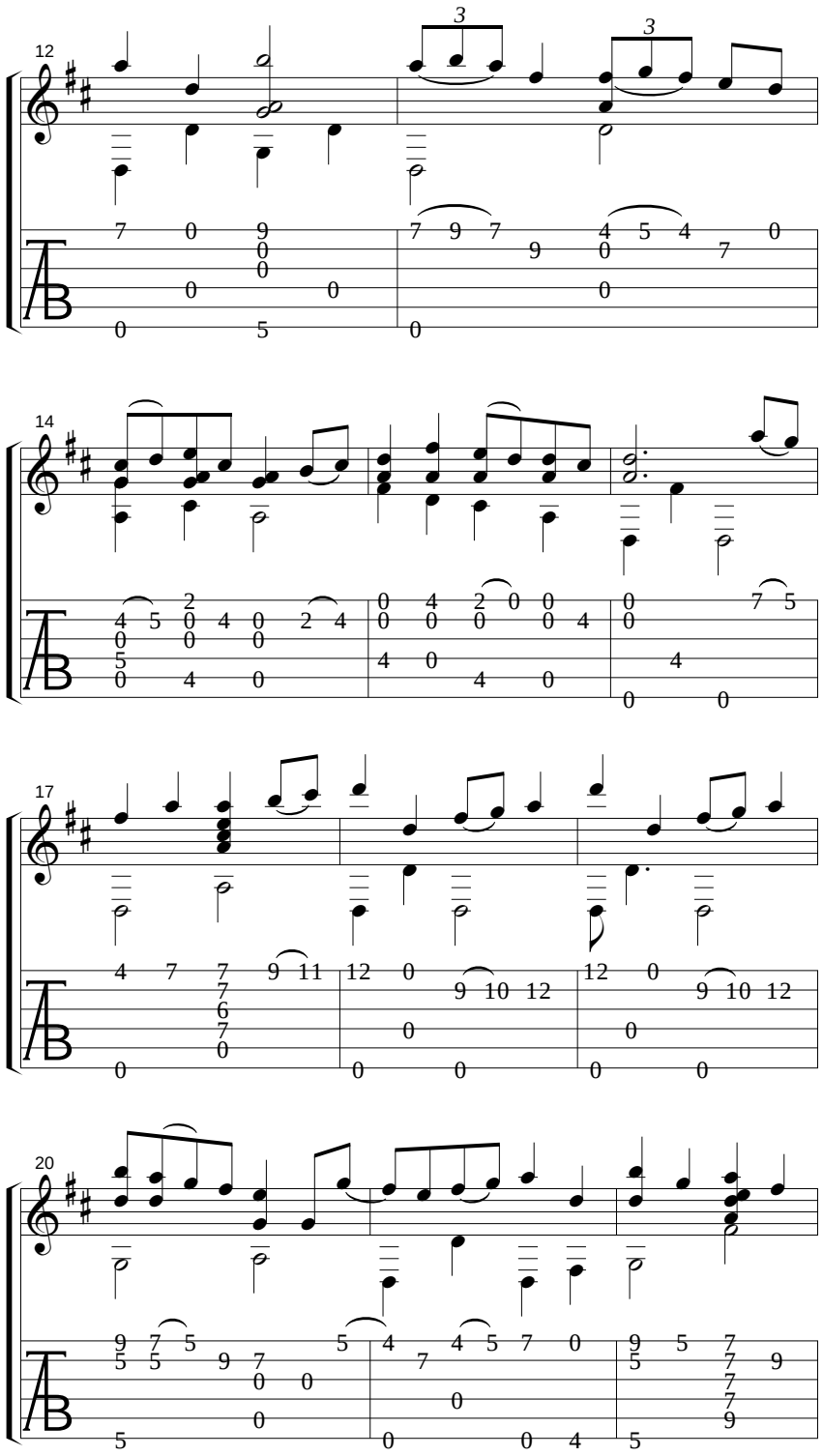
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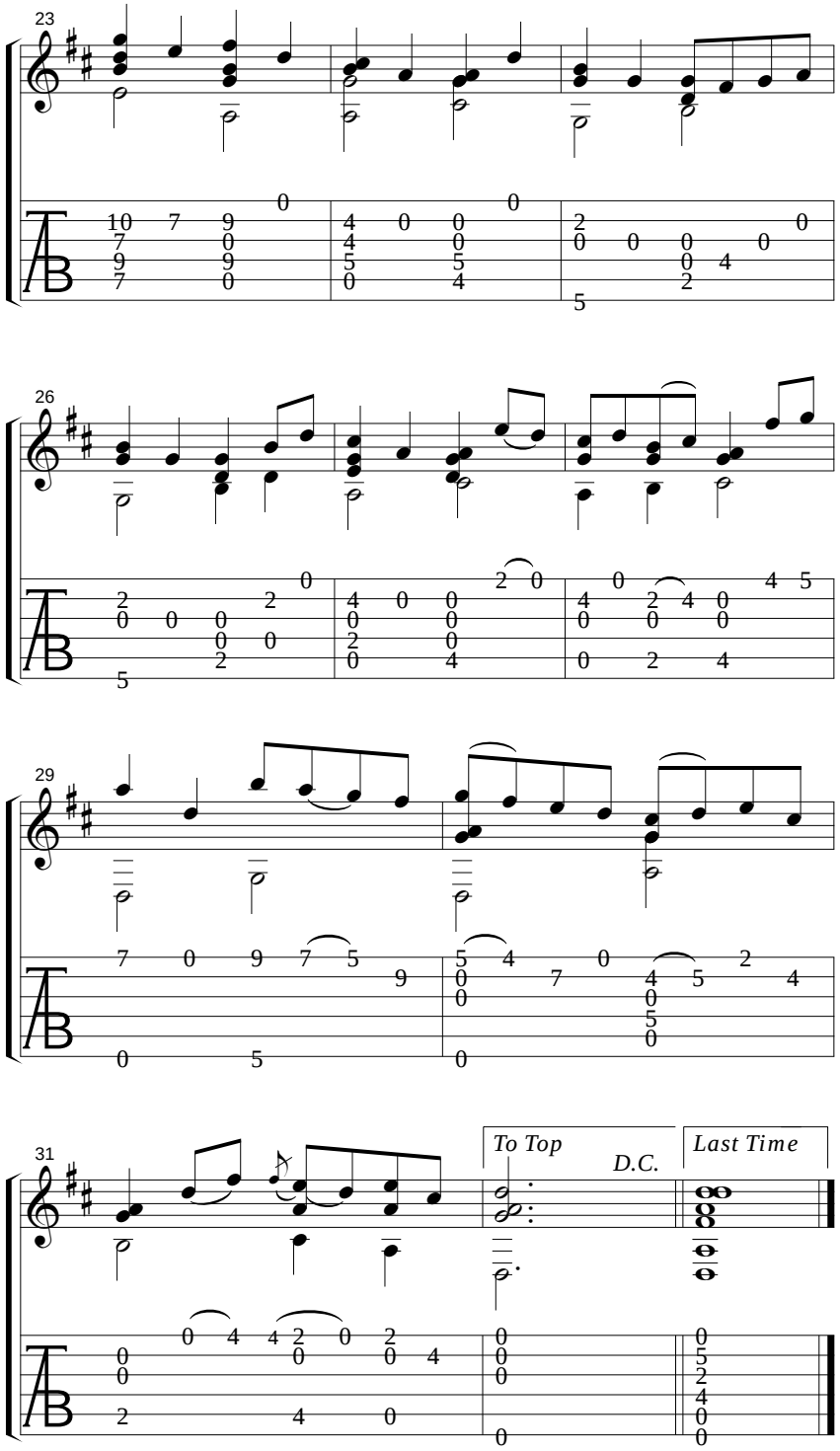
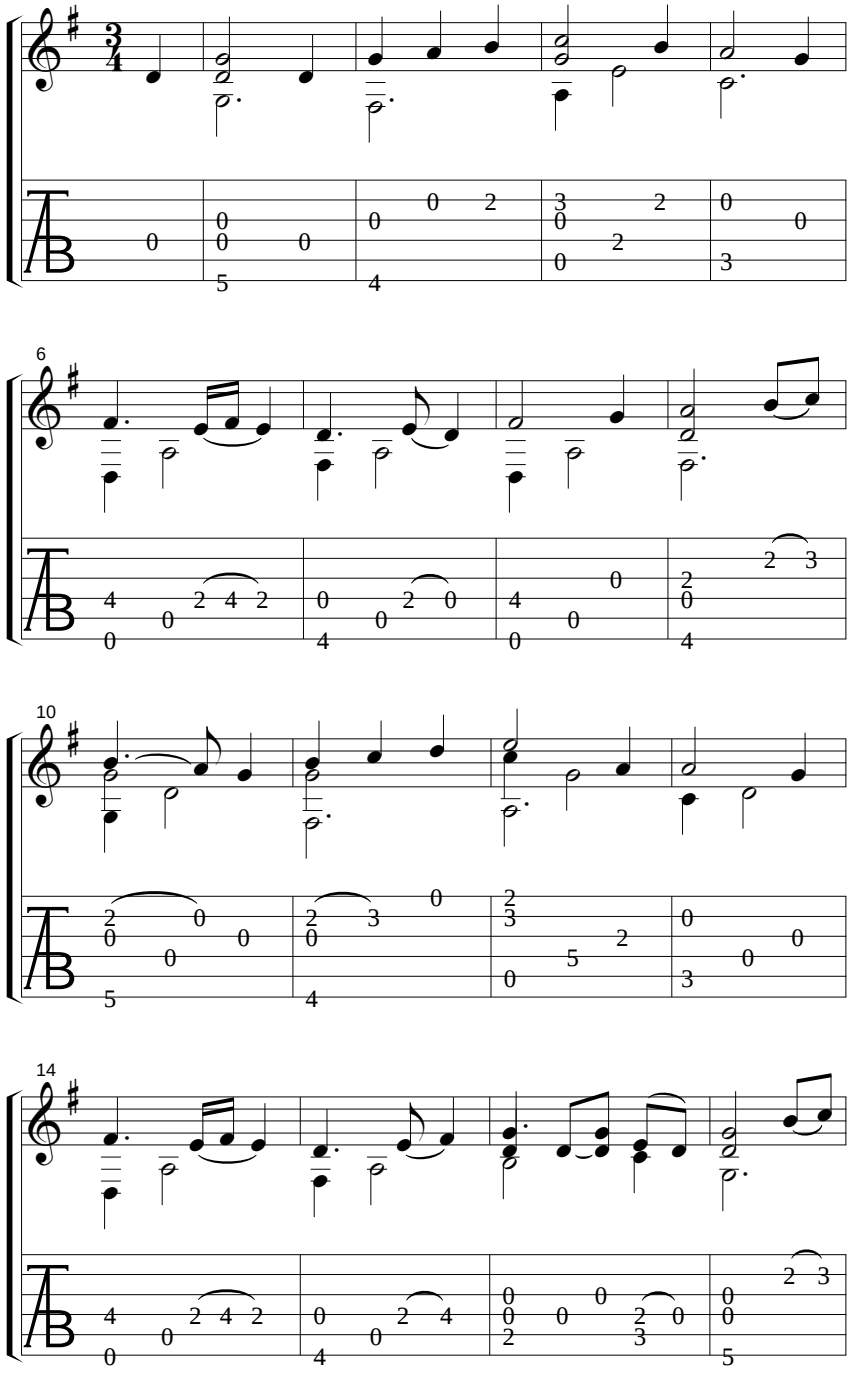

23
26
29
31
To Top
D.C.
Last Time

FANNY POWER

DADGAD, Capo 2

O'Carolan arr. Pat Kirtley



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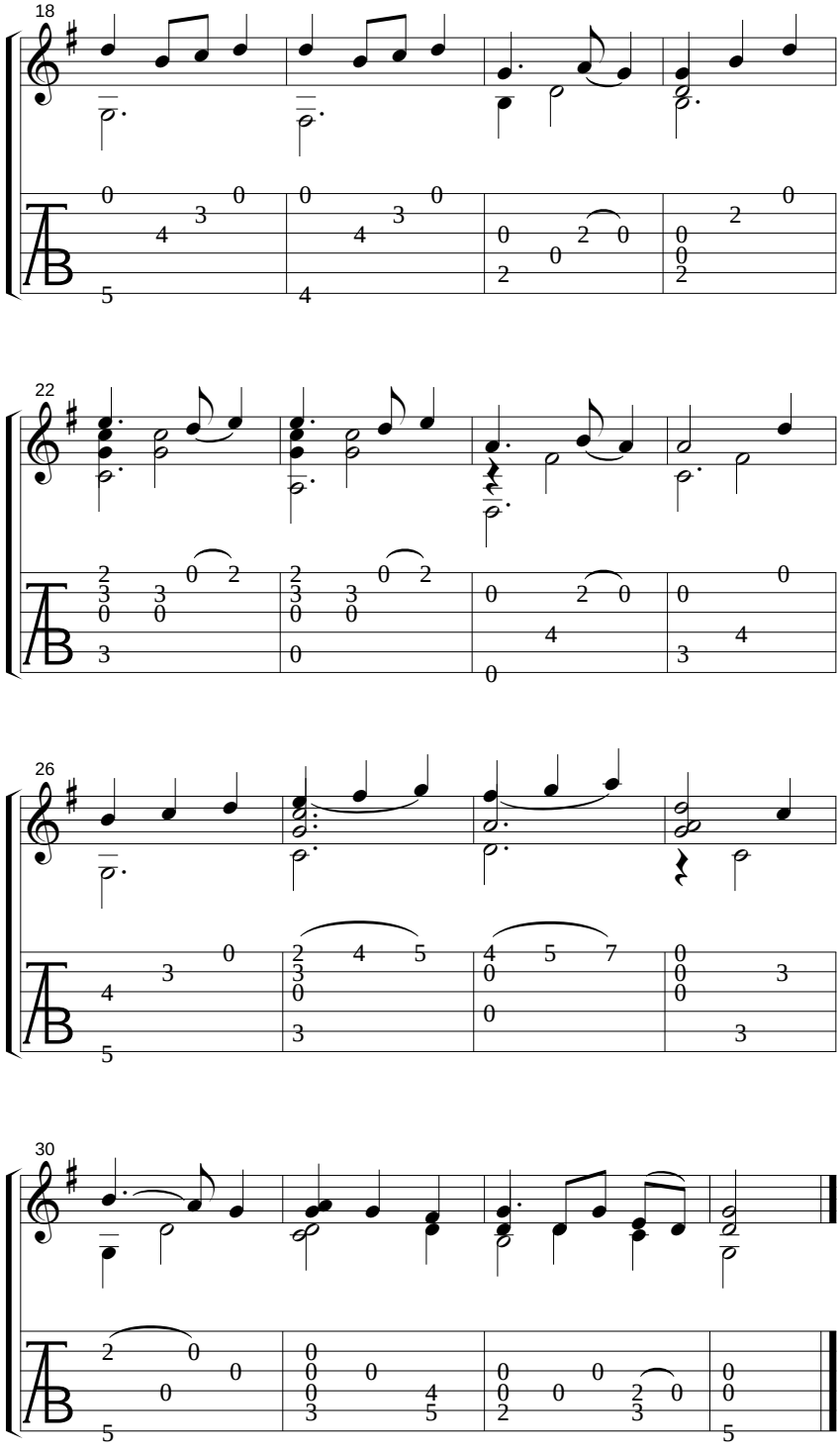
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26
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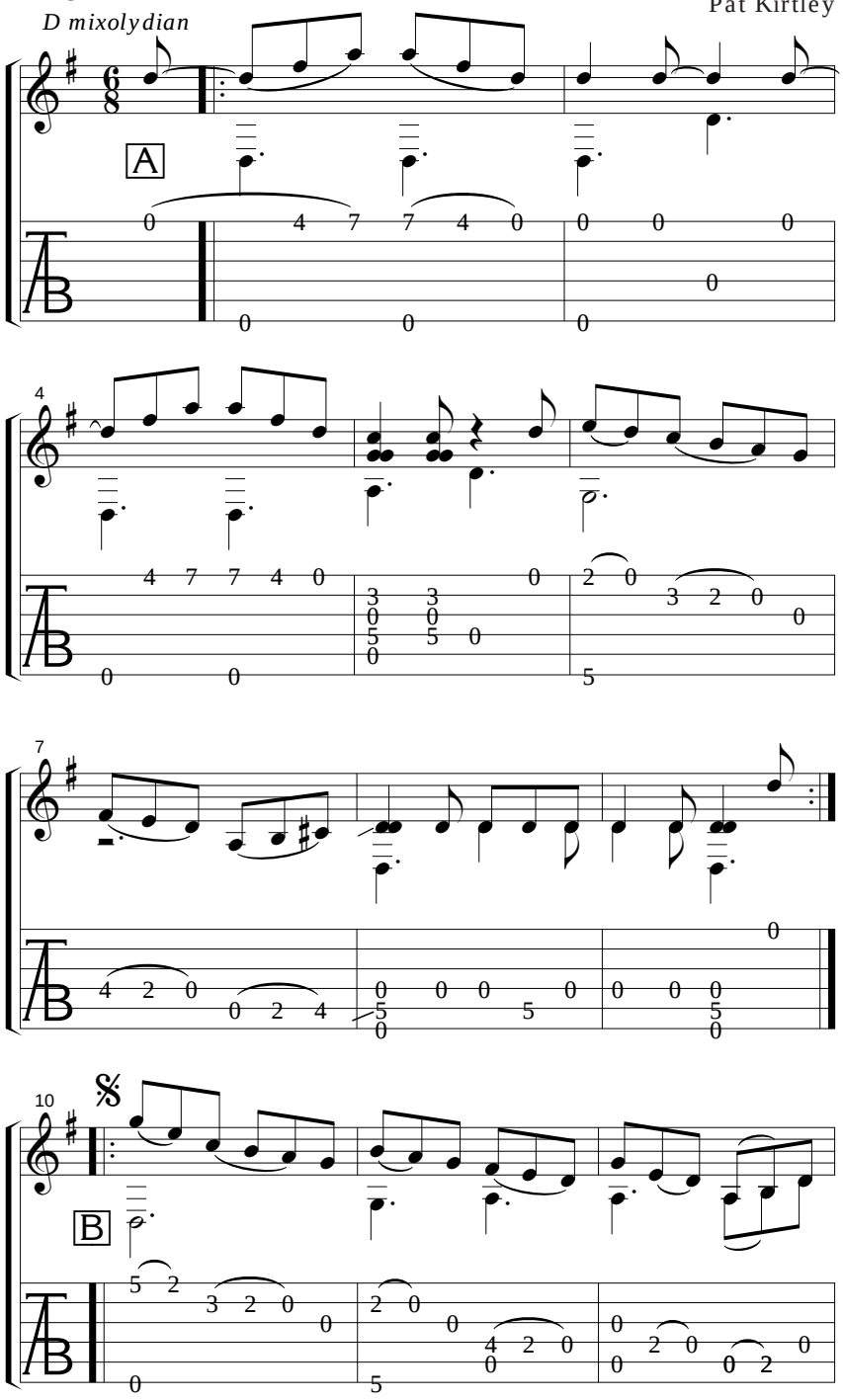
CHASE THE WEASEL

DADGAD

D mixolydian

Pat Kirtley



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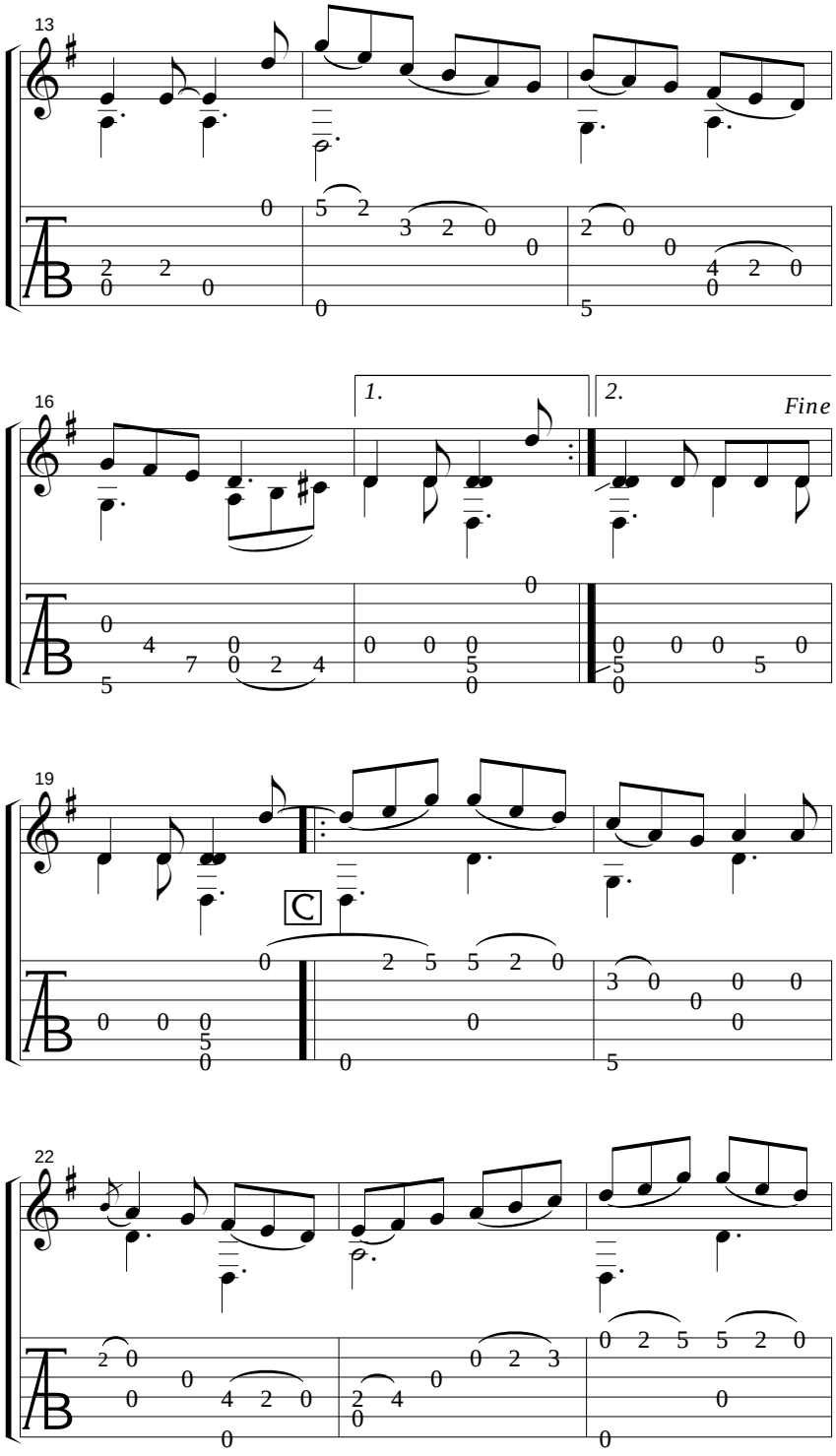
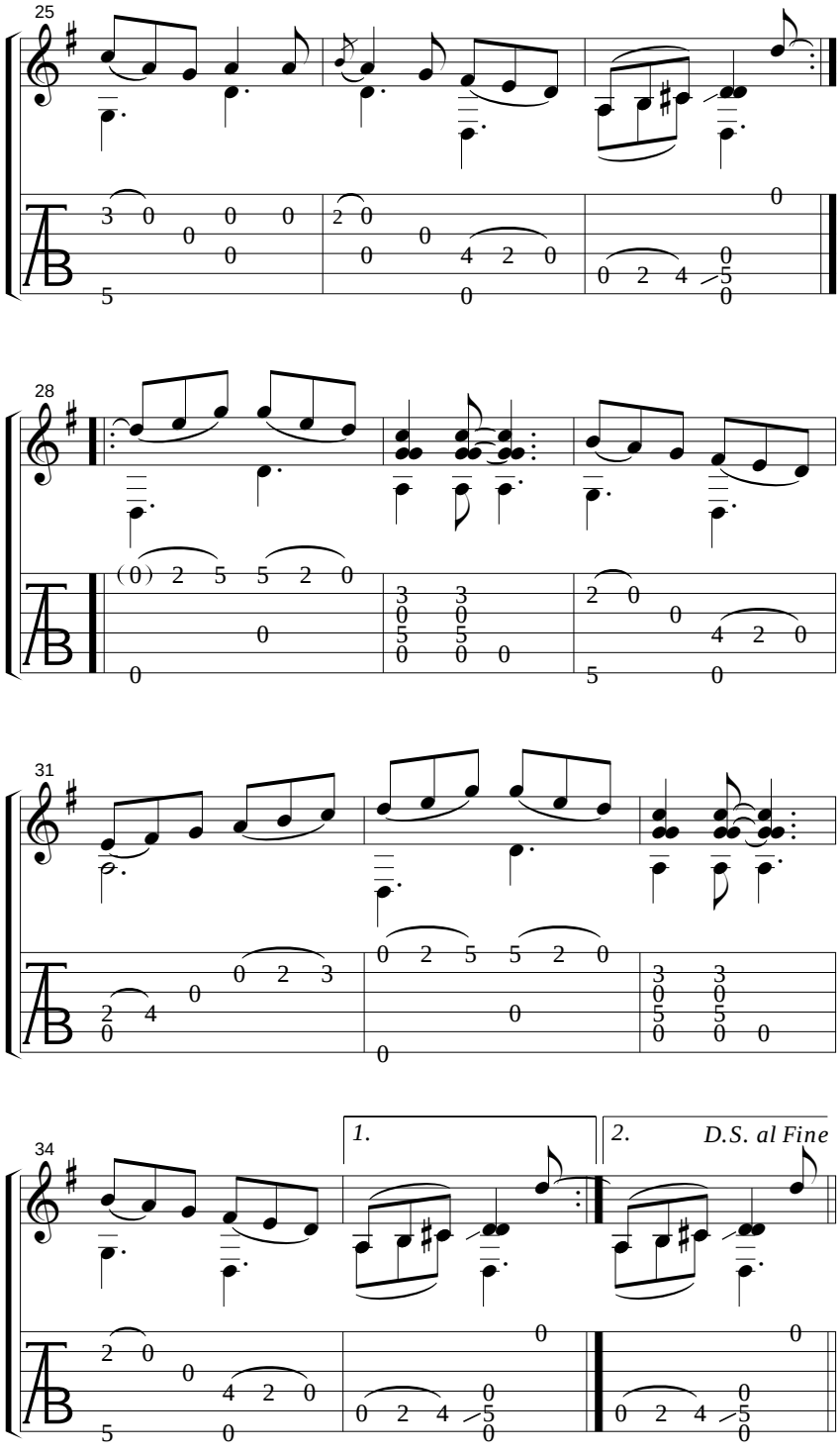
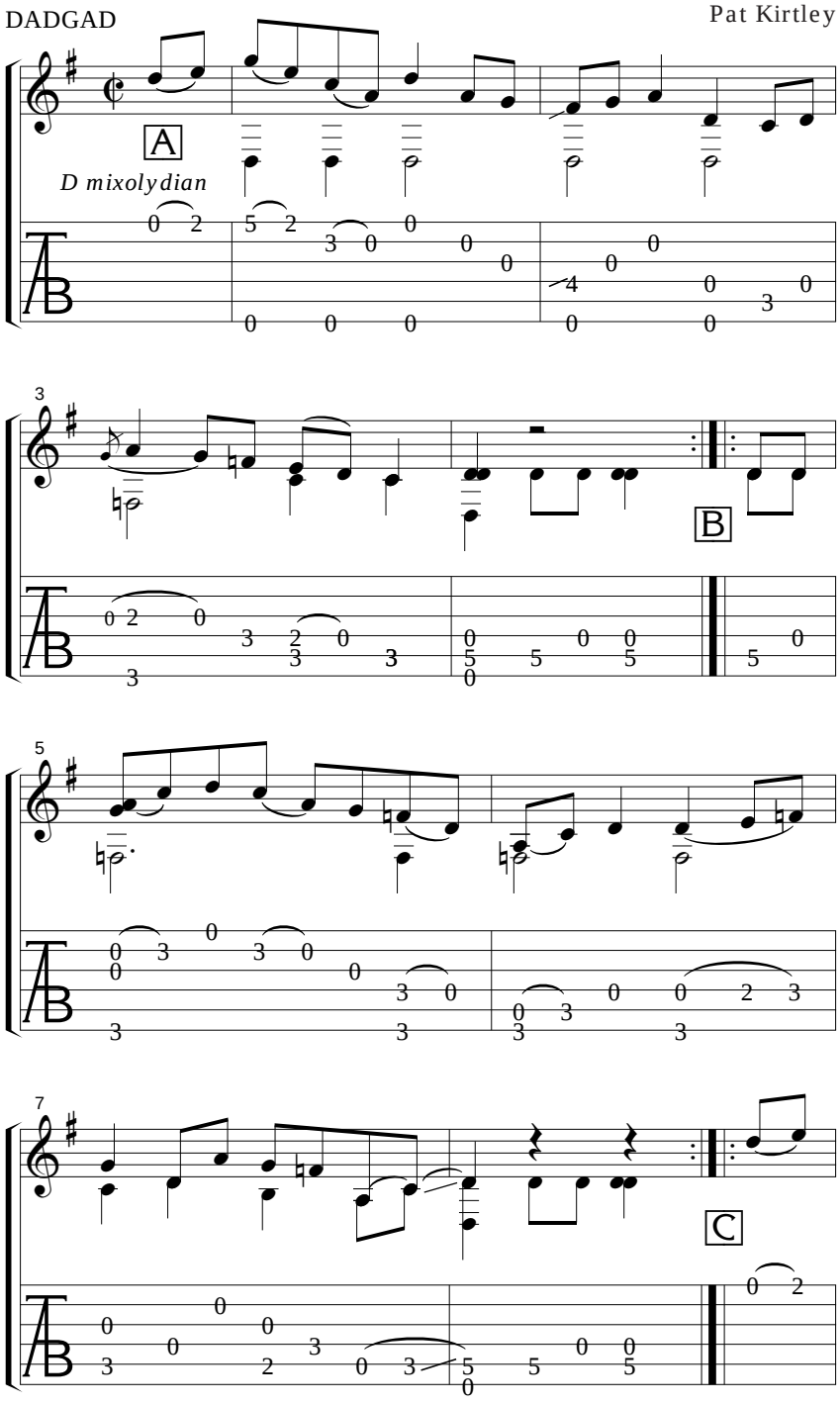

13
16
1.
2.
Fine
19
C
22


25
28
31
34
1.
2.
D.S. al Fine

FINN MACCOOL'S REEL

DADGAD

Pat Kirtley



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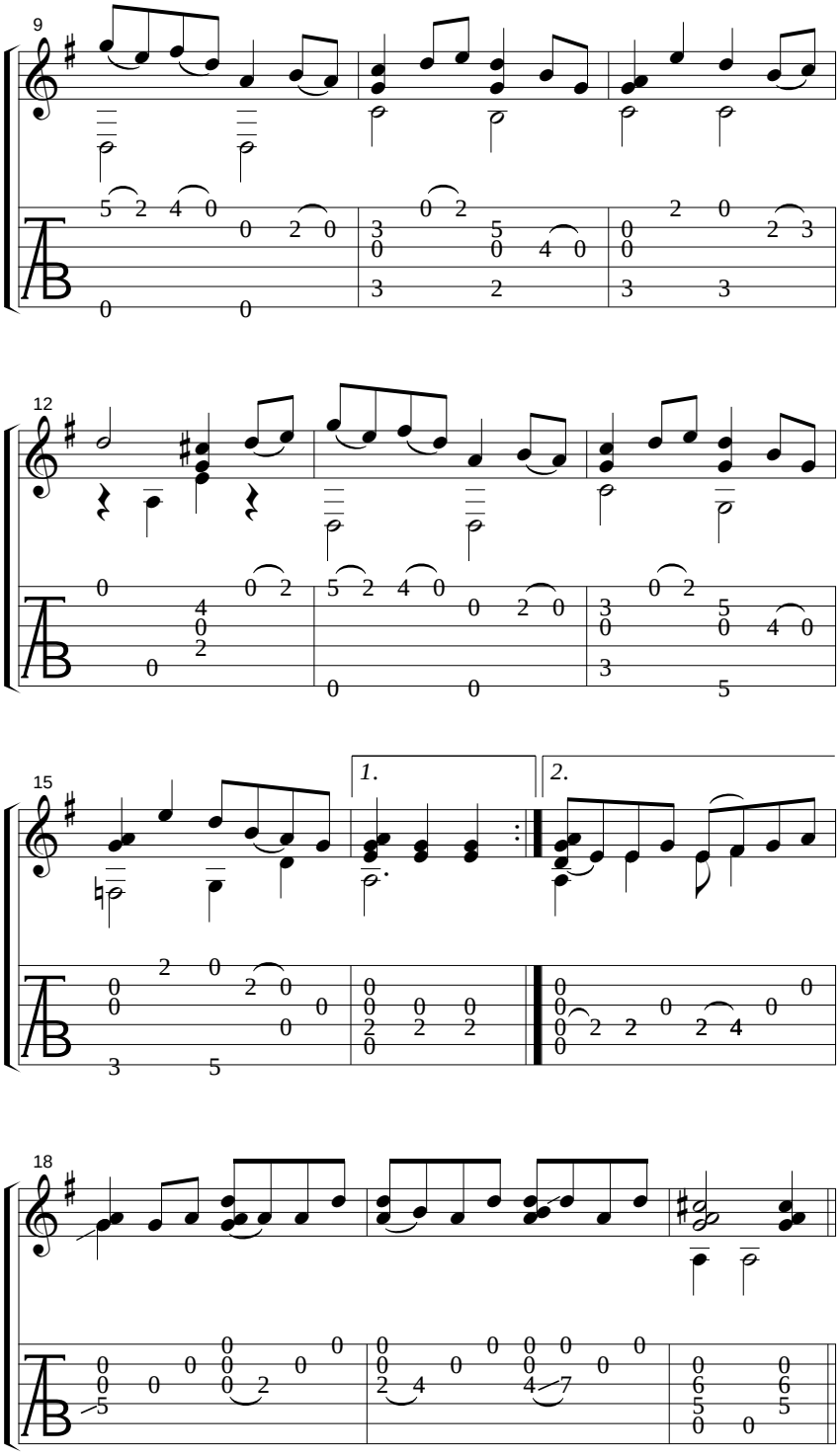
9
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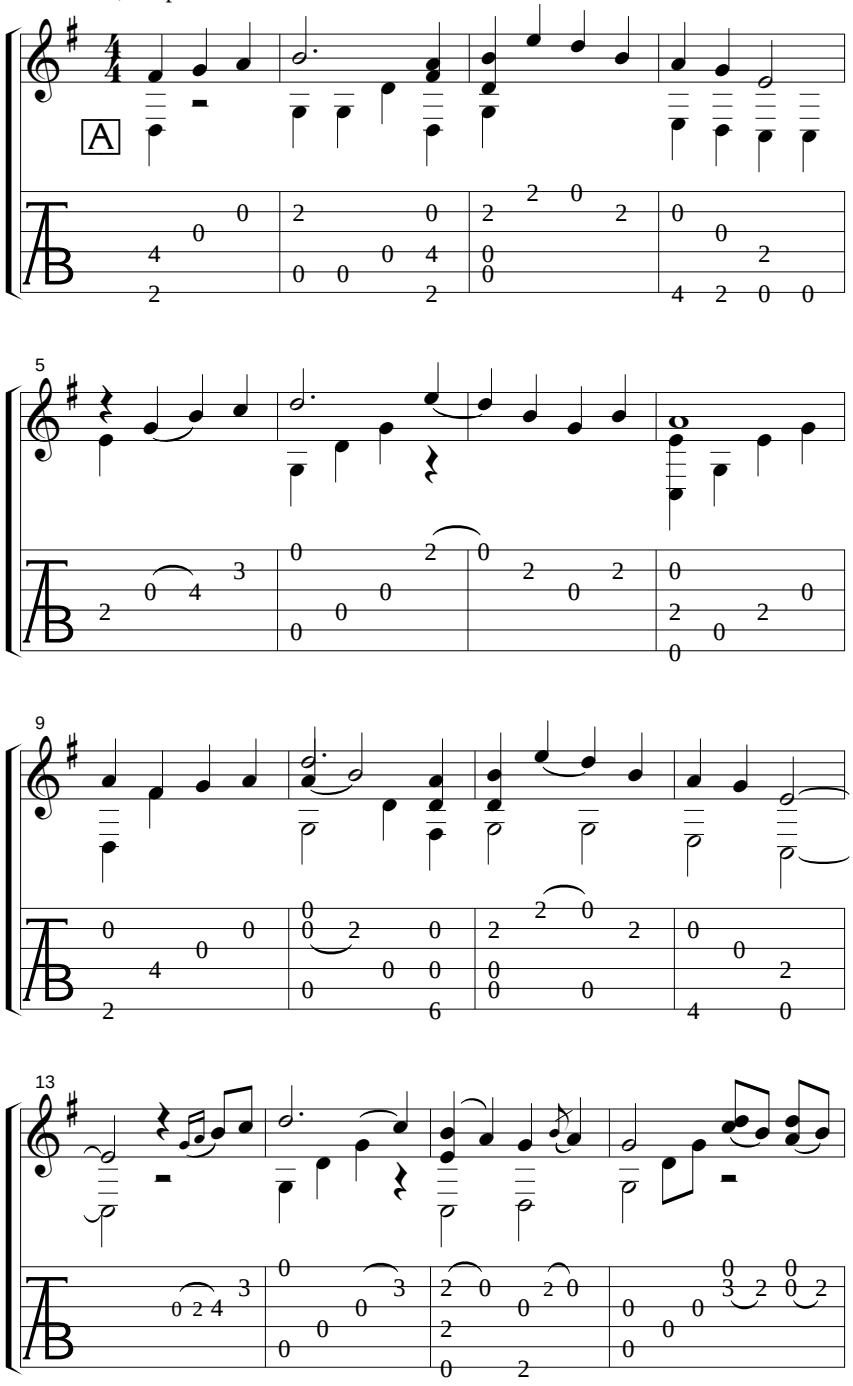
18

DANNY BOY

CGDGAD, Capo 2

Trad. arr. El McMeen



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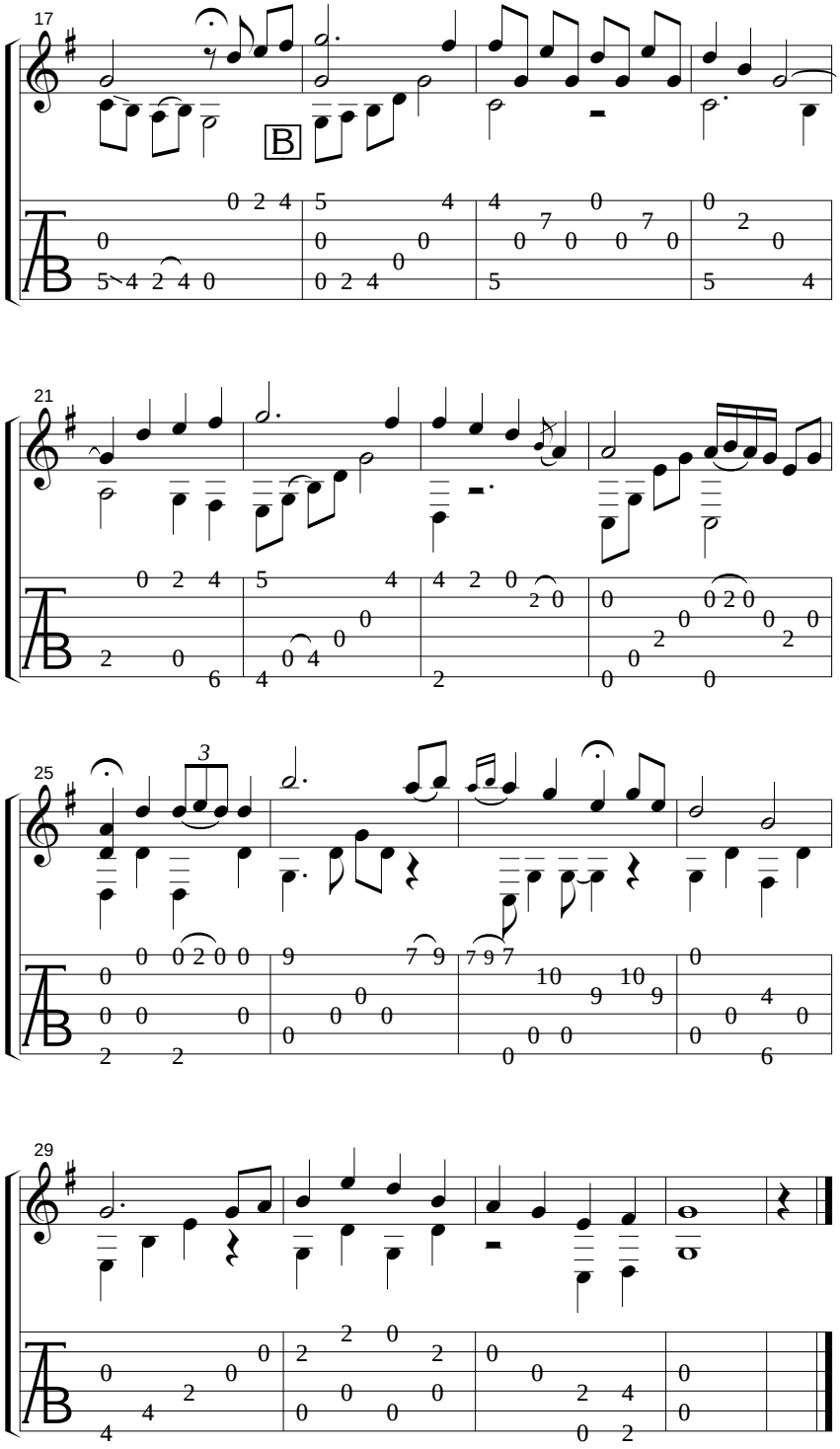
17
B
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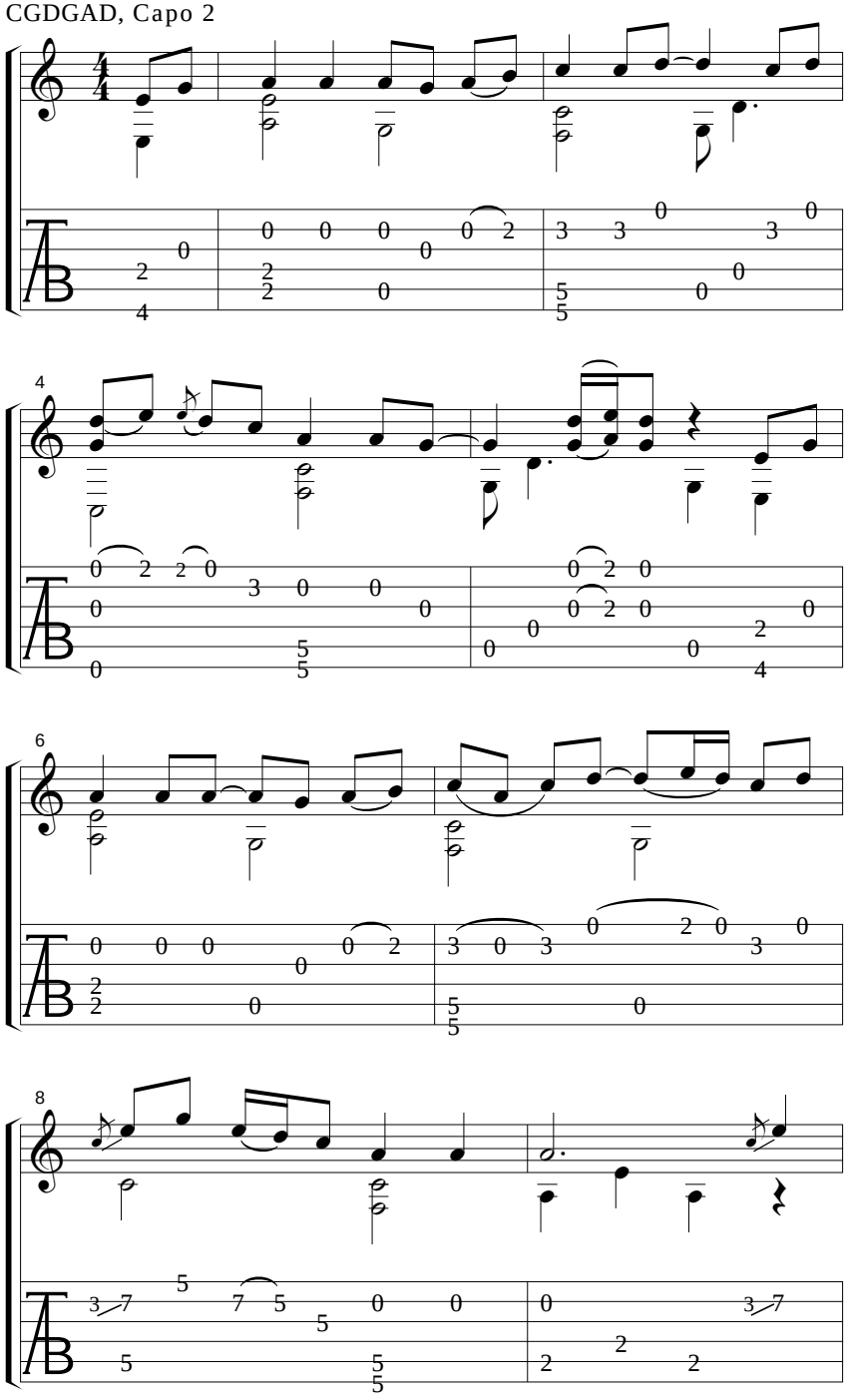
3
29

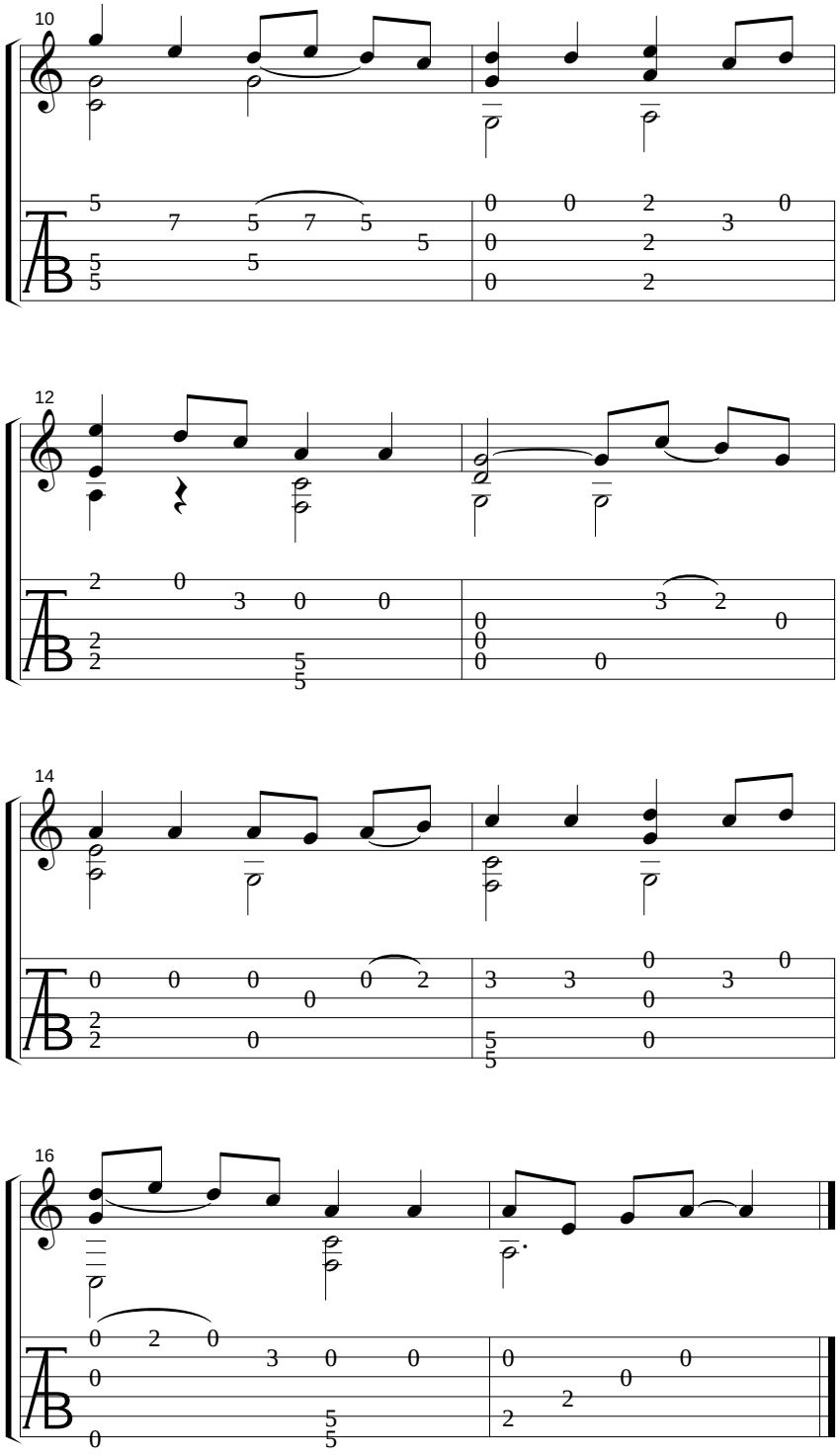
STAR OF THE COUNTY DOWN

Trad. arr. El McMeen

CGDGAD, Capo 2



Arr. © 1994 El McMeen's Piney Ridge Music


10
12
14
16

MARTIN SIMPSON
- Medley: Believe Me If All These Endearing Young Charms & Waters of Tyne
- Shepherd's Delight
- Lowlands of Holland

STEVE BAUGHMAN
- Bony Crossing The Alps
- Ramble To Cashel
- Cullen Bay

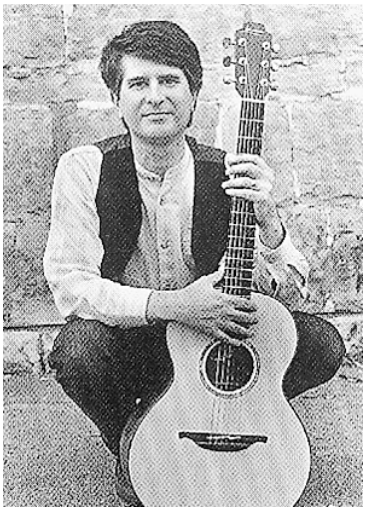
PIERRE BENSUSAN
- Murtagh McKann
- Flamorgan Air
- Medley: Merrily Kissed The Quaker & Cunla

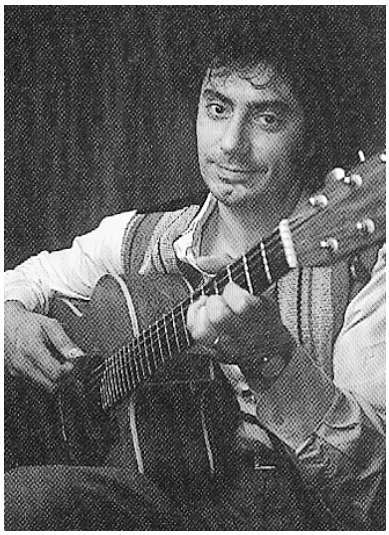
DUCK BAKER
- The Duke of Fife's Welcome to Deeside
- The Golden Keyboard
- The Faerie Queen
- Planxty Kelly

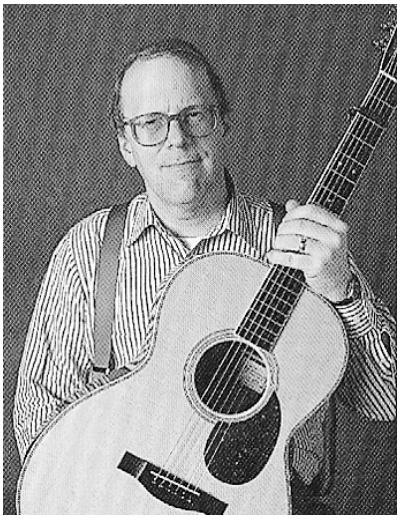
TOM LONG
- Hardiman The Fiddler
- The Butterfly
- Banish Misfortune

PAT KIRTLEY
- Morgan Magan
- Fanny Power
- Chase The Weasel
- Finn MacCool's Reel

EL MCMEEN
- Danny Boy
- Star Of The County Down







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