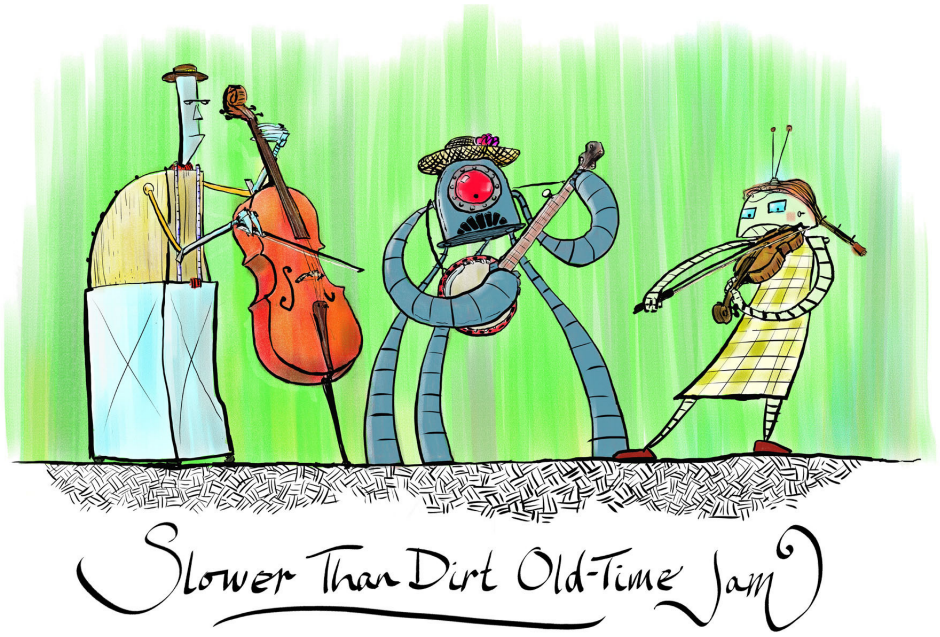

Slower Than Dirt Tunebook

This tunebook contains a core repertoire of tunes to be played at the Slower Than Dirt slow/beginner old-time jam in Seattle. Tunes from this book will be played at every Slower Than Dirt jam; which ones will be announced in advance each month on the related mailing list and web site.

Tools used in the preparation of this tunebook include abcm2ps, EasyABC and LaTeX. The idea came from Paul Hardy's tunebooks at `http://www.pghardy.net/concertina/tunebooks/`, and assistance with ABC formatting came from Pete Showman and his South Bay Old-Time Jam transcriptions. There is a GitHub repository of files at `https://github.com/rjl20/abc-tunebook` containing the source code for this book.

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In practice, thanks to the murky state of copyright as it applies to music, this doesn't mean an awful lot. **The license applies to the transcriptions only, not to the underlying compositions.** If you want to do something with sheet music you find here, you're still on your own for making sure it's legal for you to do it. Some tunes we think are in the public domain might not be. If it turns out that we didn't get permission from a composer or publisher to include a transcription of their tune here, our transcription being CC-licensed doesn't mean that you can print our transcription in your book. It just means that we won't be the ones coming after you for royalties and/or penalties. Even if we do get permission from a composer to publish one of their tunes here, that doesn't necessarily mean you can record it on an album or perform it in public without paying them a royalty.

If you'd like to use transcriptions or text from Slower Than Dirt but are unable to comply with the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, please use the contact form at `http://slowerthandirt.org/contact/` to let us know what you'd like to do.

If you are a composer or musician whose intellectual property is being used here without permission, please let us know by emailing `copyright@slowerthandirt.org` — we'd really like to know when something that we think of as "traditional" is actually a recent composition, so we can get permission and give appropriate credit or remove the tune as necessary.

Neither of the founders of Slower Than Dirt is a lawyer. None of this is legal advice. For a canned rant about how the Copyright Act of 1976 outlawed folk music, talk to Josh using either of the contact methods above.

Why a tune book?

Some people will tell you that sheet music has no place in old-time. These people are wrong. I can think of a few tunes popular in jam sessions and at square dances right now which are almost certainly out in the world because someone found them in an old manuscript, tried them out, and liked them enough to keep playing them. With no recordings and nobody passing the tune along through direct transmission, these tunes would be lost if they hadn't been written down and then read and reinterpreted later.

That's not what this book is for. But it's not axiomatic that old-time and sheet music are at odds.

Some people will tell you that you can't learn a tune from sheet music, because the essence of a tune is in the nuances of the performance—the subtle details and variations that sheet music can't capture. They're not wrong, exactly, because it's true that it's very difficult to capture much of the nuance of a performance in standard notation. But I think they misunderstand what sheet music is for, what a musician's relationship to sheet music is. A musician is not a machine for turning sheet music into sound. We have actual machines for that. When I'm reading a new-to-me tune from sheet music, I'm bringing my understanding of what this kind of music usually sounds like, or how I like it to sound, with me. I am *interpreting* the sheet music, not *executing* it. I'm probably not going to play the tune the way you learned it from Uncle "Vern" Hotchkiss, but this isn't an imitation contest; that's ok.

On the other hand, there is definitely a danger to thinking that any particular book's version of a tune is authoritatively "how the tune goes", or in always trying to play it exactly how it appears, note for note. Once you've learned a tune, sheet music can be a useful reminder of how the tune goes if you get lost, but learning a tune involves making it your own. Play it how it sounds in your head, not how it looks on the page. (If you're at a jam, make sure to pay attention to whether how it sounds in your head works with how the tune leader is playing it.) If you're reading it off the page every time, think about whether you're actually learning and playing the tune, or if you're making yourself into a machine for turning sheet music into sound. There's nothing wrong with sight-reading, but part of the point of this jam is for people to learn and practice a new way of learning.

So what is this book for? Learning music by ear is a different skill than learning from sheet music. And most jams, including Slower Than Dirt, aren't really teaching sessions, where a tune gets broken into parts and taught phrase by phrase. When you're a beginning musician and haven't yet picked up the skill of learning a tune on the fly, going to a jam where you don't know any of the tunes can be frustrating. So this book contains a core repertoire from which some number of tunes will be picked each month and definitely played at the Slower Than Dirt jam. If you want, you can practice some of them at home in advance and know that you'll be able to play along.

Some of the transcriptions in this book attempt to capture the essence of an individual performance, while some of them are stripped down to what I consider the bones of the tune. We may not play a tune exactly as it's written here at the jam, so you can think of this book as more a cheat sheet than Holy Writ. How I lead a tune at the jam will at least resemble the version here, though, so at least you won't run into the problem of "oh, this is the other tune with that name".

On learning by ear

I don't know how other people do it, but I can tell you what worked for me. I listened to a ton of old-time music. Constantly. On the bus, walking around, at home while catching up on facebook: all the time. For months. If I wasn't doing something else that required attention, I was probably listening to old-time music on headphones. I wasn't necessarily paying a lot of attention to the music, but it was a constant presence.

The first few months got me used to some of the musical conventions of old-time. I started being able to identify phrases or riffs I'd heard before in other tunes. I started being able to predict what general shape a tune might have. What those first months of listening got me was a basic understanding that I didn't get by growing up with that music all around me in my community. It got me familiarity.

Eventually, instead of listening to the entire collection on shuffle, I picked a dozen tunes I liked and put them in a playlist, and listened to nothing but them for a month. I must have listened to those dozen tunes a hundred times. Each. But by the end of that month, I could hear those tunes in my head. I could hum along. I hadn't set out to learn the tunes, at least not in a way I understood as intentional learning. But I knew those tunes. Not that I could play them on an instrument, but humming them was the important part.

Once you can hum a tune, you can compare what's happening with your instrument when you play it against what's happening in your head. It can be frustrating to know how a thing ought to work but not to

be able to make it happen, but that's a mechanical issue with your instrument and gets better with practice. Once I could hum the tunes from my playlist, and actually kind of play a couple of them on the fiddle, I picked another dozen tunes and made a new playlist and repeated the process.

I did this four or five times, listening only to a dozen or so tunes at a time until they were in my head enough that I could hum or whistle them. And patterns started to emerge. There were phrases that appeared across tunes, little ornaments that could be stacked in different ways to produce different effects. I started hearing the pieces the tunes were built from. It was like slowly discovering the shapes of a lego set. I could start swapping different blocks in and seeing how they worked. Meanwhile, I was practicing playing tunes from earlier in the cycle, building the actual fiddling skill.

I don't think I'm a particularly good fiddler still, but I think I may now be fairly decent at picking up a new tune, as long as it's in an idiom I've been immersing myself in. I'm not going to pick up a Cajun tune as quickly, or a Brazilian choro piece. For Appalachian and midwestern old-time, though, I can identify the building blocks of a tune I haven't heard before and assemble them in my head, rather than trying to take in a whole tune all at once or note by note. What I'm getting at is that, for me at least, "playing the fiddle" and "learning new tunes" are almost completely separate skills. I can't say that what's worked for me will work for you, but I do think that the critical piece is being able to hear a tune in your head before trying to play it on an instrument. Whatever gets you there, do that. And do it a lot, because just like learning the physical skill of playing an instrument, it's something that takes practice.

About "potatoes"[1] and "boom-chuck"

Often a fiddler will start a tune with "potatoes", or four beats of introductory shuffling. It usually sounds like (has the rhythm of) "one and-a two and-a three and-a four", leaving space at the end for a pick-up into the tune. This should give you a sense of three things: what key the tune is in, what speed it's going to be played at, and its rhythm. Listen for what notes are being played: if it's just one note, it's probably the root note of the key the tune is in. If it's two notes, it'll probably be the root and fifth (D and A for the key of D) or root and third (D and F♯) of the key.

The tempo is set by the longer notes—the "one", not the "and-a". Each of those corresponds to one beat, and which note length corresponds to a beat is dependent on the time signature of the tune. Most of the tunes in this book are in "cut time", or $\frac{2}{2}$, which means that there are two half notes per measure, each of which is one beat.[2] If you're playing guitar backup in a "boom-chuck" style, each beat gets a boom and a chuck, with the boom (the bass note) on the beat and the chuck (the strum) in between.

Rhythm is a little trickier, but listen to how regular the notes are. Is the "and" the same length as the "a", or is it longer? If it's longer, the tune is probably going to feel a little bouncier, and if it's the same length it's probably going to feel a bit more driving. If there's no "and-a", then they might be starting off a jig (of which there are none currently in this book) or something else which doesn't sound right with the usual shuffle intro.

If you're starting off a tune, keep those in mind when playing the "potatoes". If you aren't sure what key a tune is in, the chord it ends on is usually (but not always) a safe bet. Try to feel the speed of the tune as you want to play it before you start playing; maybe tap your foot for a bit and hum the tune to yourself to make sure it's where you want it to be. Then you can start the "potatoes". Keep tapping your foot, though, and make sure you're starting the tune where it wants to start. If there's a pick-up, start it before the "one" of the first measure, not right on the "one", and if there's no pick-up, start right on the "one", not where the final "and" would go.

That's a lot of words which probably over-complicate things, so to summarize: listen for the beat.

[1] For the story of why they're called "potatoes", see `https://tinyurl.com/why-potatoes`

[2] You might reasonably think that $\frac{2}{2}$ is the same as $\frac{4}{4}$, because there are the same number of quarter notes in a measure of both, but in $\frac{2}{2}$ there are two beats—where you would tap your foot—per measure, and in $\frac{4}{4}$ there are four.

Tunes By Key

Key of A

Boil Them Cabbage Down 3
Buffalo Girls 4
Clayhole Waltz 5
Cripple Creek 6
Little Billie Wilson 10
Soldier's Return, The 18
Sweet Marie 21

Key of A Dorian

Abe's Retreat 1
Cluck Old Hen 6
Cold Frosty Morning 6
Mace Bell's Civil War March 11

Key of A Mixolydian

Old Joe Clark 13
Pretty Little Shoes 14
Red-Haired Boy 15
Sandy Boys 16

Key of D

Angeline The Baker 1
Arkansas Traveler 2
Eye of the Beholder 7
Freda 7
Johnny Don't Get Drunk 9
Lily of the Valley 10
Mississippi Sawyer 11
Needle Case 12
Rose Waltz 16
Soldier's Joy 18
Spotted Pony 19
St. Anne's Reel 19
Swannanoa Waltz 21
Wind That Shakes The Barley, The 22

Key of G

Barlow Knife 2
Bound to Have a Little Fun 3
Girl I Left Behind Me, The 8
Hollow Poplar 8
Jeff City 9
Nail That Catfish to a Tree 12
Possum up a Gum Stump 13
Rat's Gone To Rest 14
Red Wing 15
Seneca Square Dance 17
Shove That Pig's Foot... 17
Susi's Waltz 20
Tombigbee Waltz 22

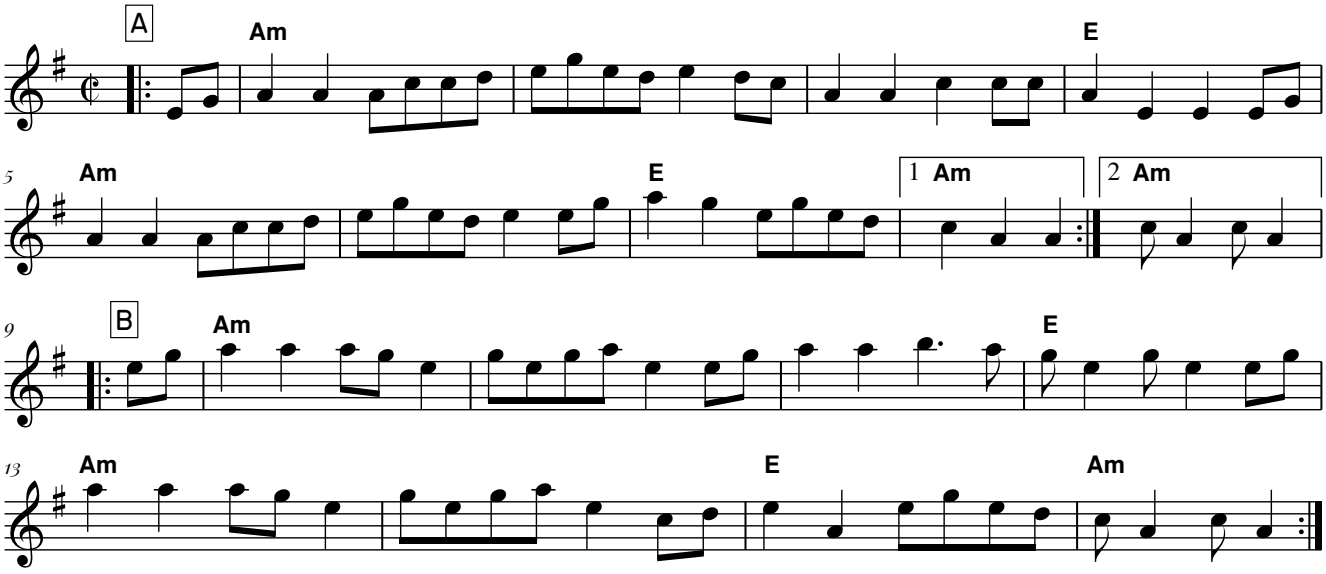
Tunes By Title

Abe's Retreat (A Dorian) 1
Angeline The Baker (D) 1
Arkansas Traveler (D) 2
Barlow Knife (G) 2
Boil Them Cabbage Down (A) 3
Bound to Have a Little Fun (G) 3
Buffalo Girls (A) 4
Clayhole Waltz (A) 5
Cluck Old Hen (A Dorian) 6
Cold Frosty Morning (A Dorian) 6
Cripple Creek (A) 6
Eye of the Beholder (D) 7
Freda (D) 7
Girl I Left Behind Me, The (G) 8
Hollow Poplar (G) 8
Jeff City (G) 9
Johnny Don't Get Drunk (D) 9
Lily of the Valley (D) 10
Little Billie Wilson (A) 10
Mace Bell's Civil War March (A Dorian) 11
Mississippi Sawyer (D) 11
Nail That Catfish to a Tree (G) 12
Needle Case (D) 12
Old Joe Clark (A Mixolydian) 13
Possum up a Gum Stump (G) 13
Pretty Little Shoes (A Mixolydian) 14
Rat's Gone To Rest (G) 14
Red-Haired Boy (A Mixolydian) 15
Red Wing (G) 15
Rose Waltz (D) 16
Sandy Boys (A Mixolydian) 16
Seneca Square Dance (G) 17
Shove That Pig's Foot... (G) 17
Soldier's Joy (D) 18
Soldier's Return, The (A) 18
Spotted Pony (D) 19
St. Anne's Reel (D) 19
Susi's Waltz (G) 20
Swannanoa Waltz (D) 21
Sweet Marie (A) 21
Tombigbee Waltz (G) 22
Wind That Shakes The Barley, The (D) 22

Key: A Dorian

Abe's Retreat

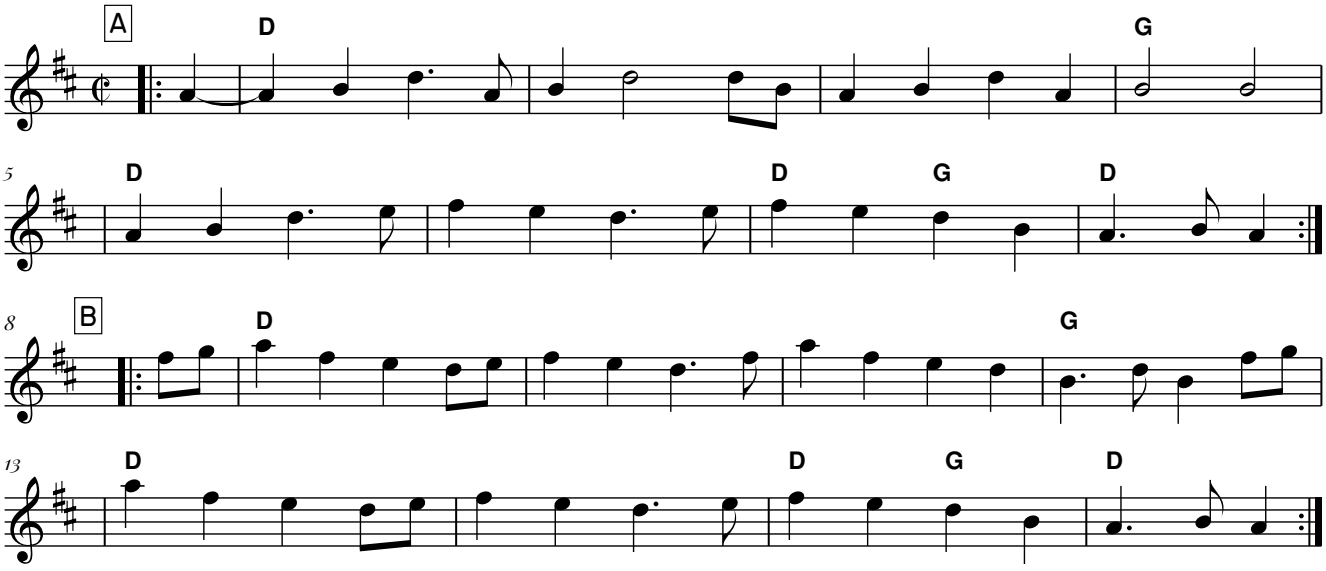
Battle of Bull Run



Aural Source: Dwight Diller, mostly, but bits from all over
Note: Good in cross-A tuning

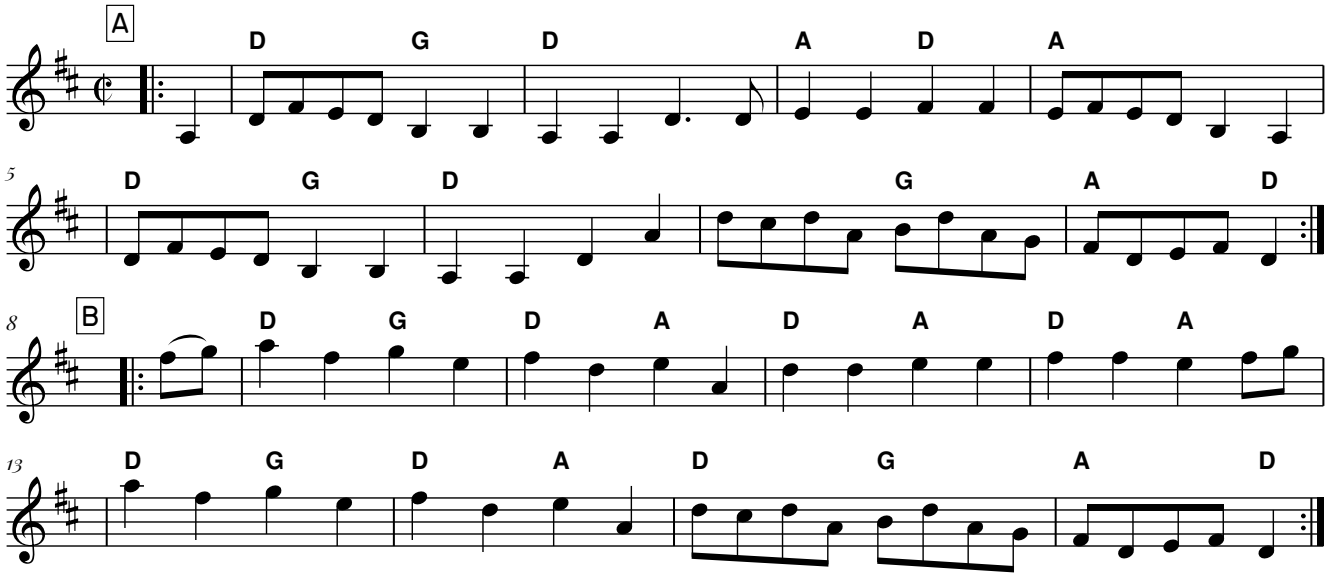
Key: D

Angeline The Baker



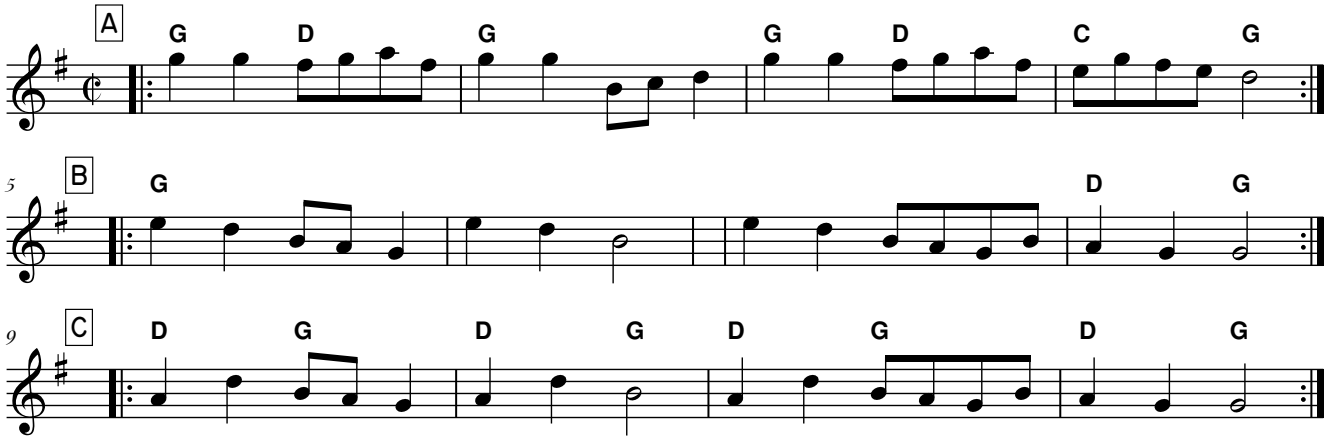
Key: D

Arkansas Traveler



Key: G

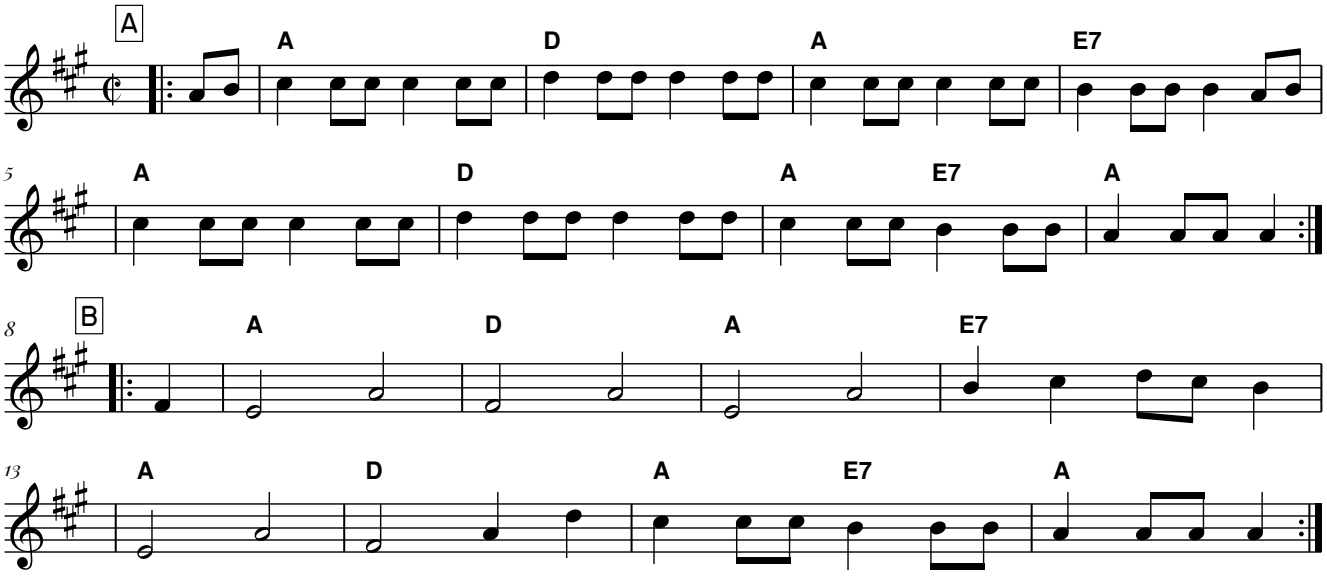
Barlow Knife



Written Source: Appalachian Fiddle (Krassen), p.25
Note: Chords from Complete Tractor (Silberberg)

Key: A

Boil Them Cabbage Down

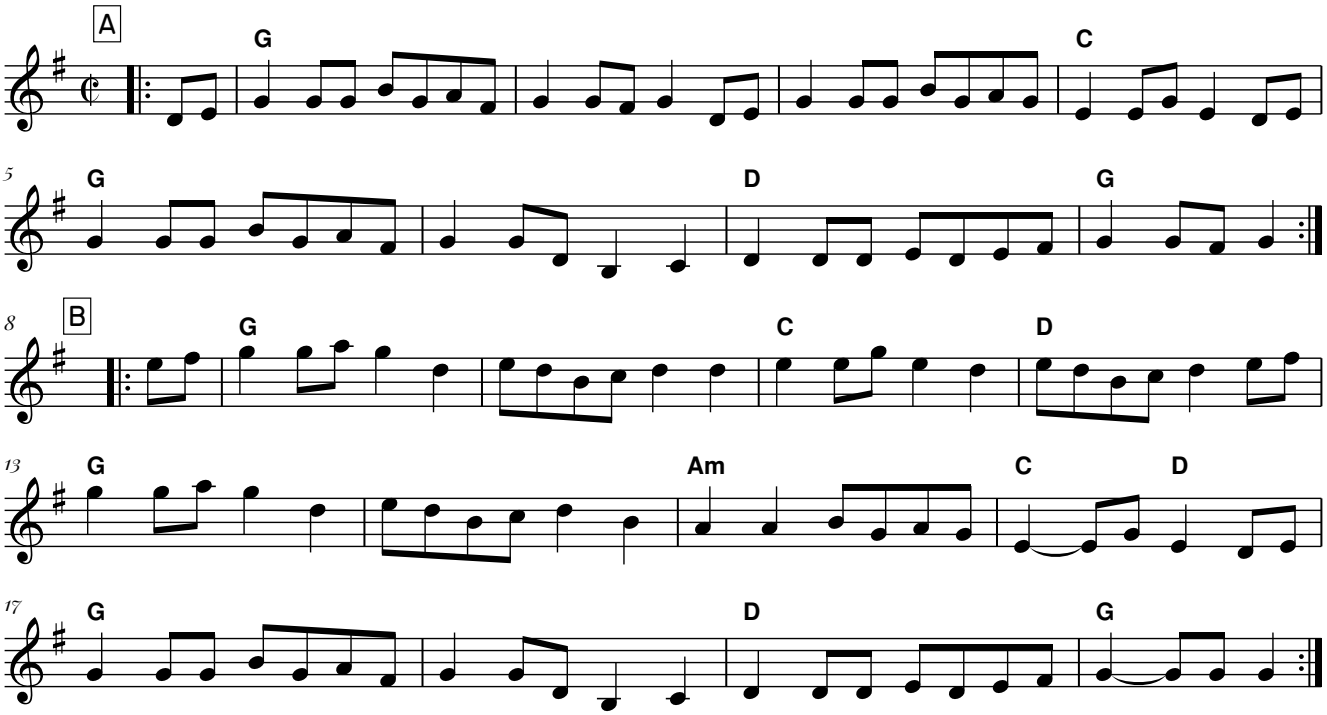


Aural Source: Sarah Comer

Key: G

Bound to Have a Little Fun

from Gusty Wallace, KY



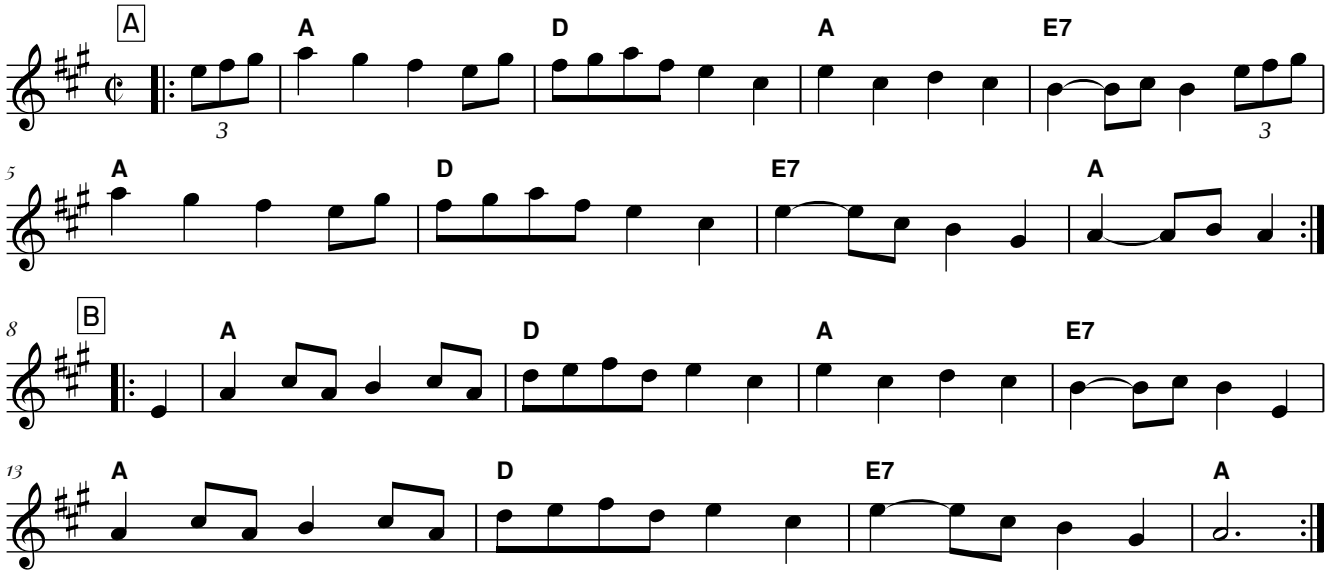
Aural Source: Canote String Band Class, http://stringband.mossyroof.com/BoundToHaveALittleFun.mp3

Key: A

Buffalo Girls

from John Hatcher, MS

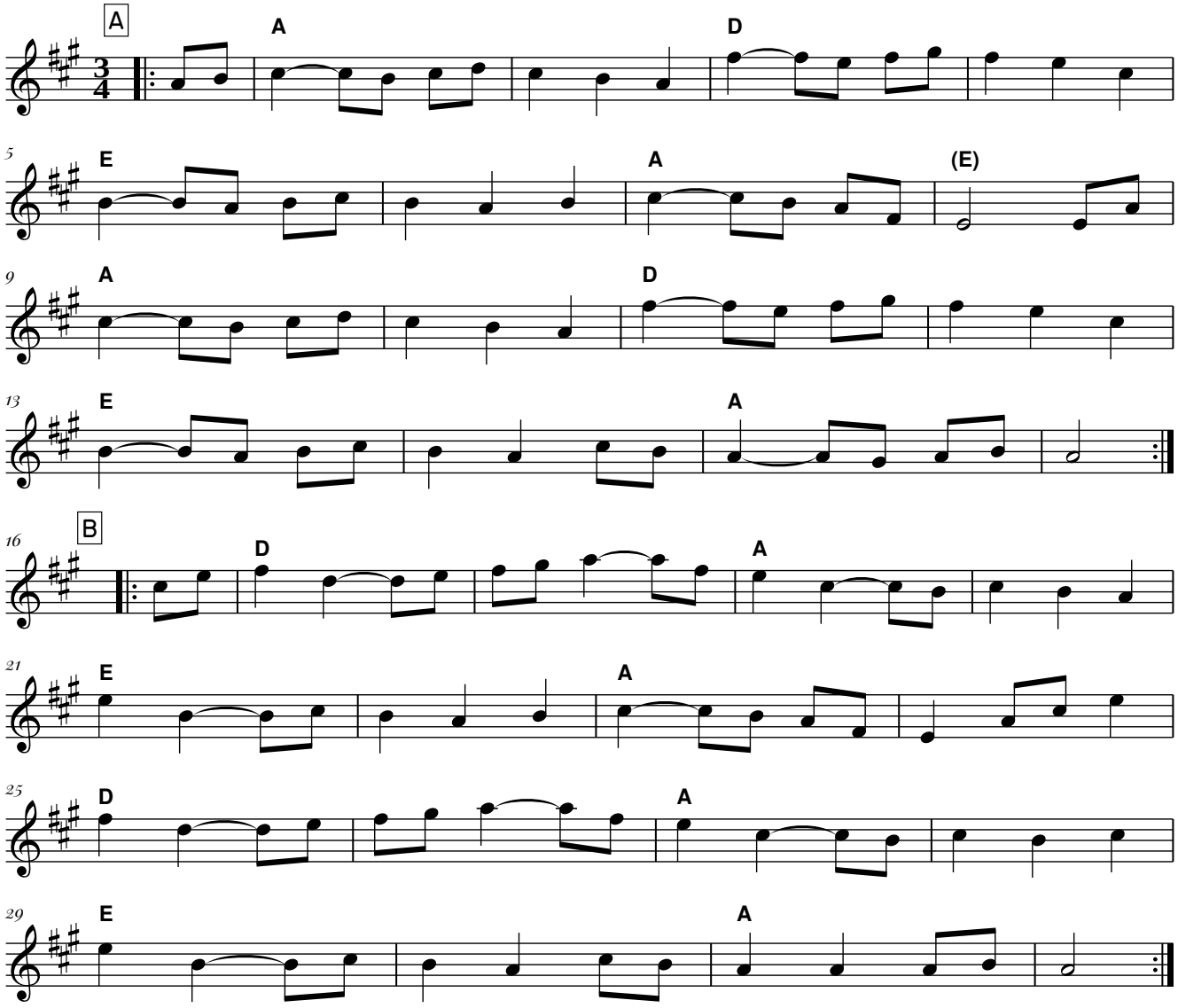
Old Time/Mississippi Buffalo Gals



Note: Good in cross-A tuning

Clayhole Waltz

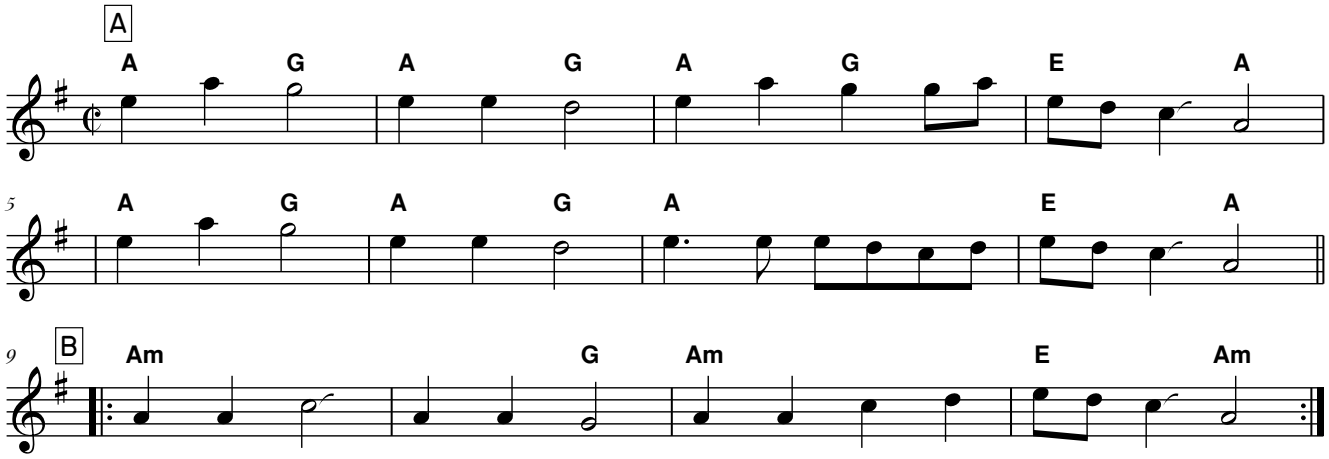
Waltz
Key: A



Aural Source: Tony Mates, Wedgwood Ale House Jam

Cluck Old Hen

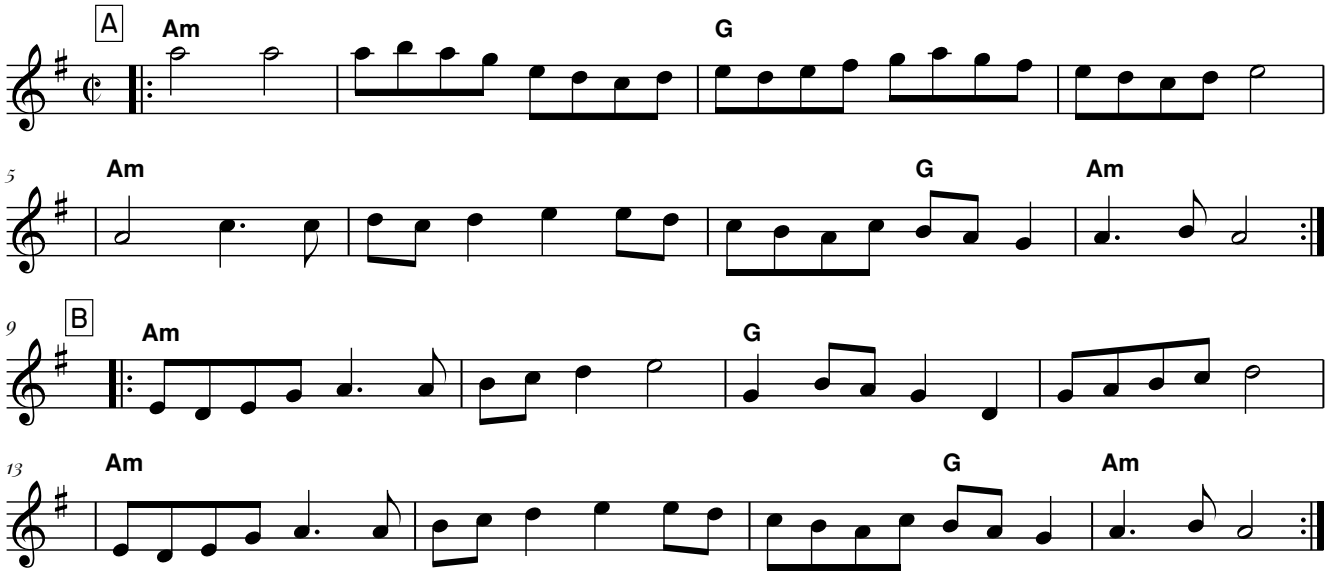
Key: A Dorian



Aural Source: Sarah Comer
Note: The Cs with upwards slides indicate a kind of half-sharp, or slid up C.

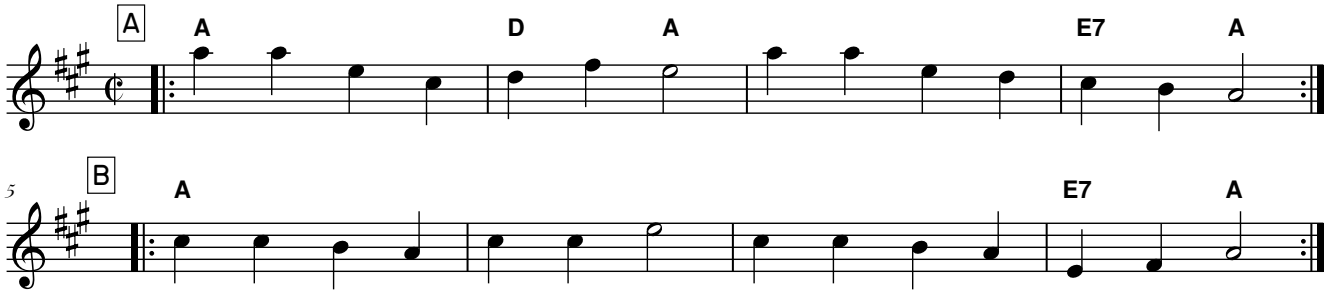
Cold Frosty Morning

Key: A Dorian



Cripple Creek

Key: A



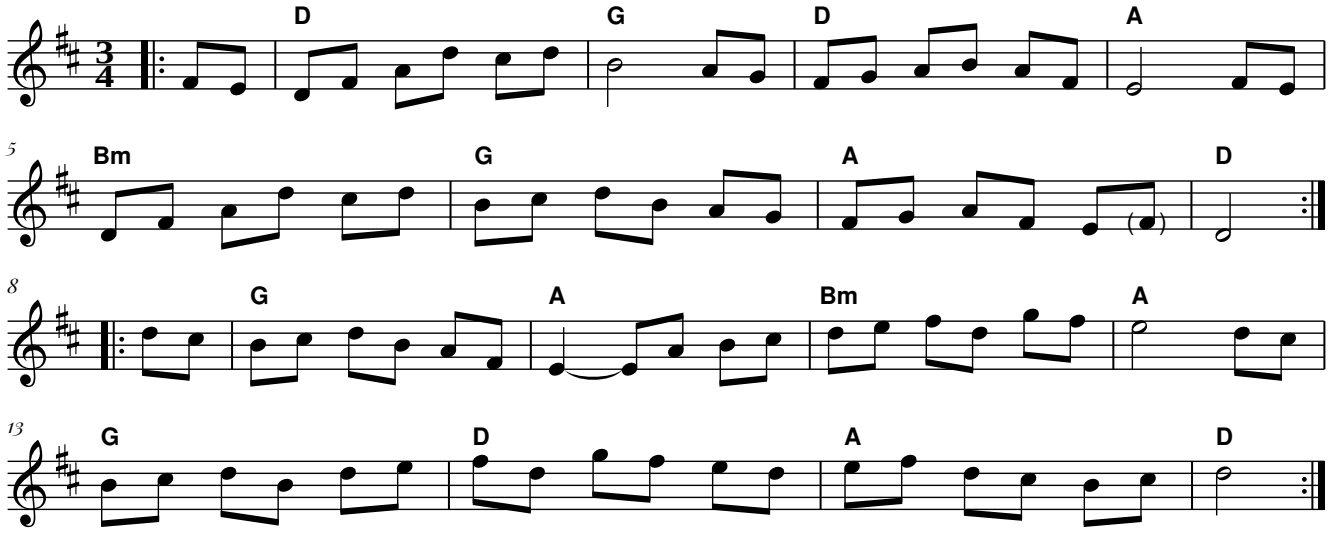
Note: There are a ton of melody variations for this tune. This is just one of them.

Eye of the Beholder

Waltz

Jim Childress

Key: D

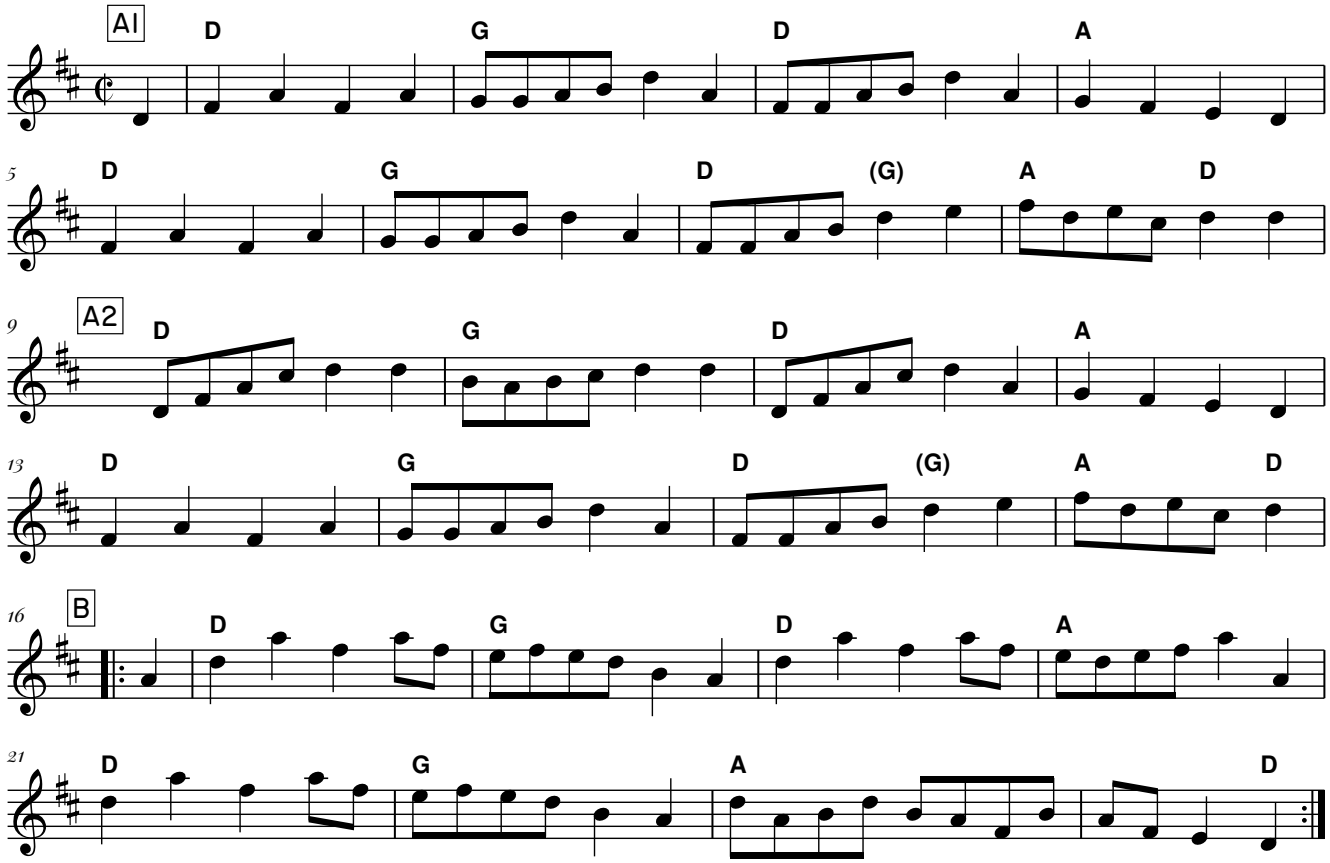


Aural Source: Palmer and Greg Loux, Cameron DeWhitt
https://getupinthecool.fireside.fm/49
Original: Free Union, © 2014 Jim Childress
https://store.cdbaby.com/cd/jimchildress
http://jimchildress.weebly.com/free-union.html

Freda

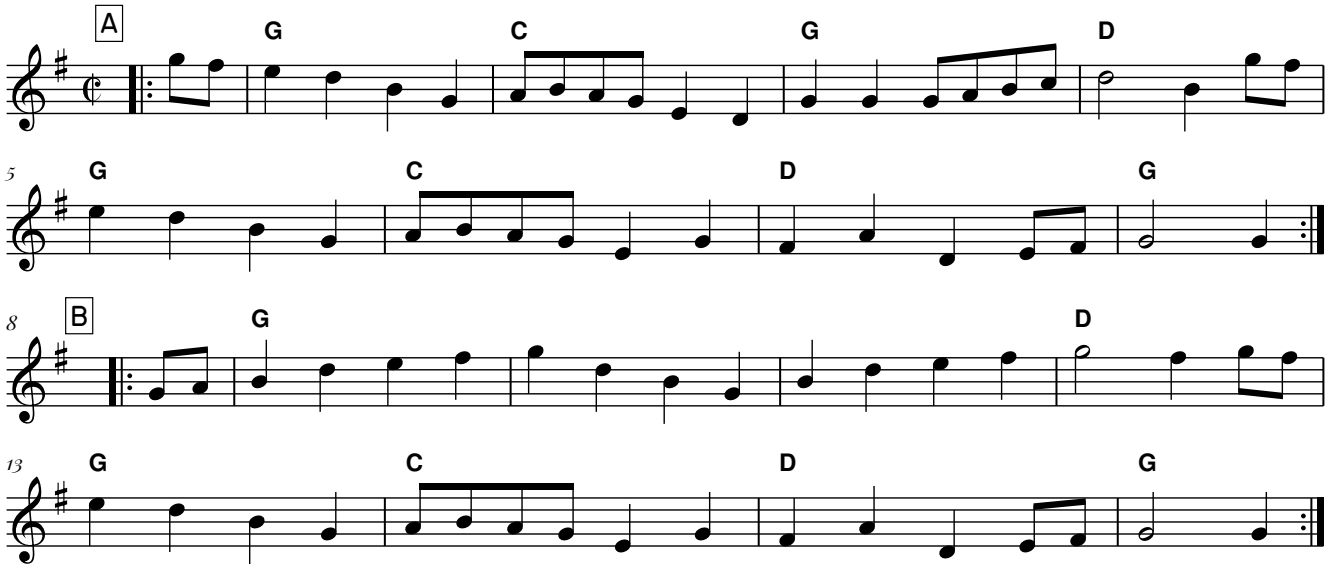
Key: D

Kenny Baker
from Carthy Sisco



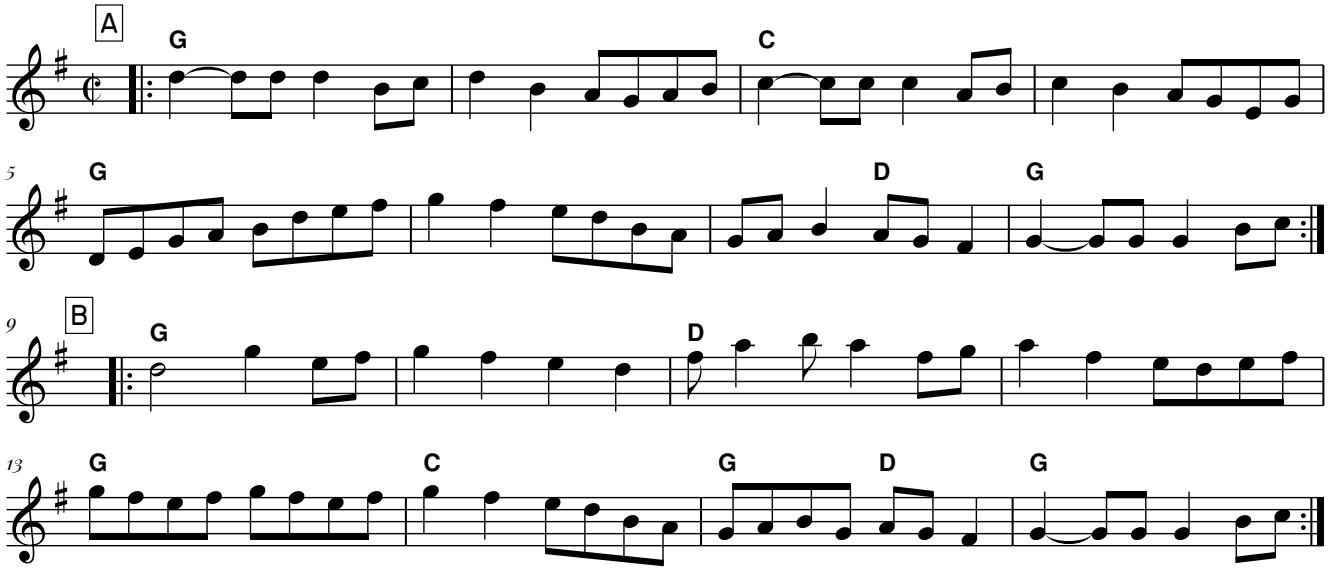
Key: G

The Girl I Left Behind Me



Key: G

Hollow Poplar

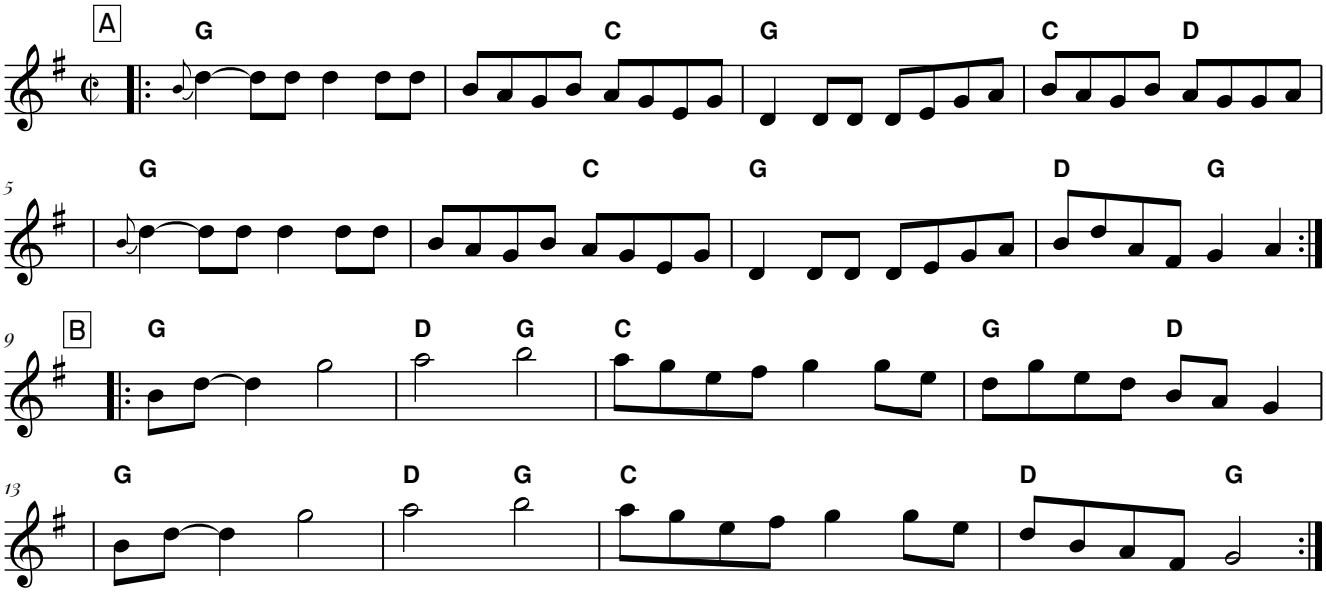


Aural Source: Wedgwood Ale House Tuesday jams

Key: G

Jeff City

from Bill Katon

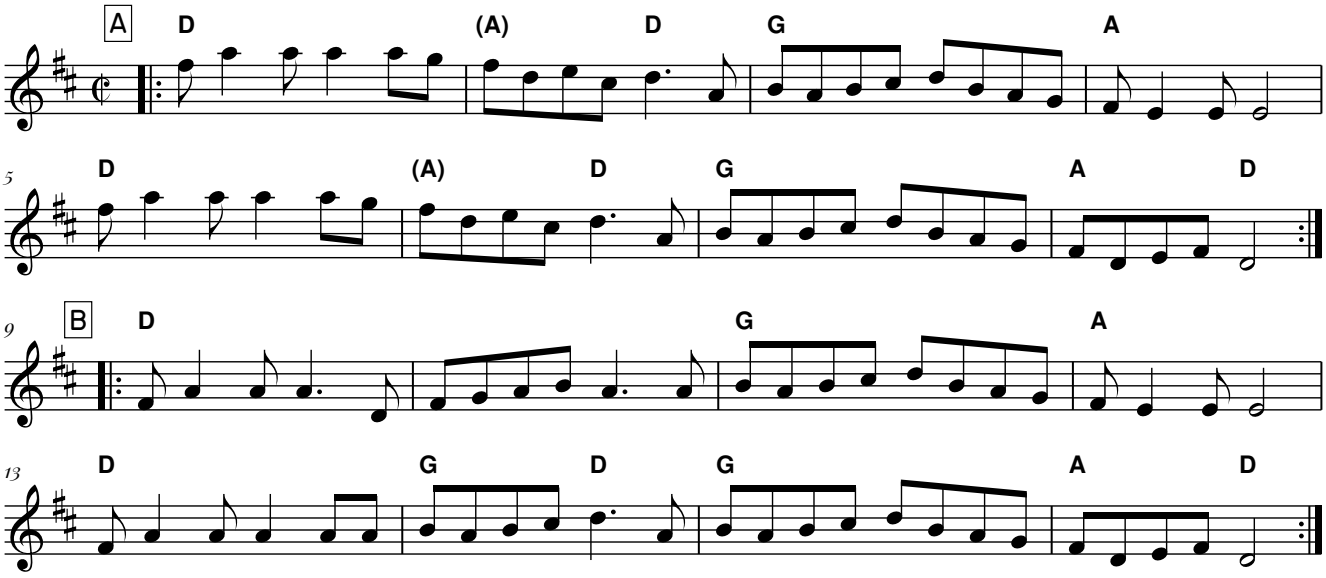


Aural Source: Caleb Klauder Country Band, Subdued Stringband Jamboree 2015
Note: I think most people play this with the parts in the other order. I like it this way.

Key: D

Johnny Don't Get Drunk

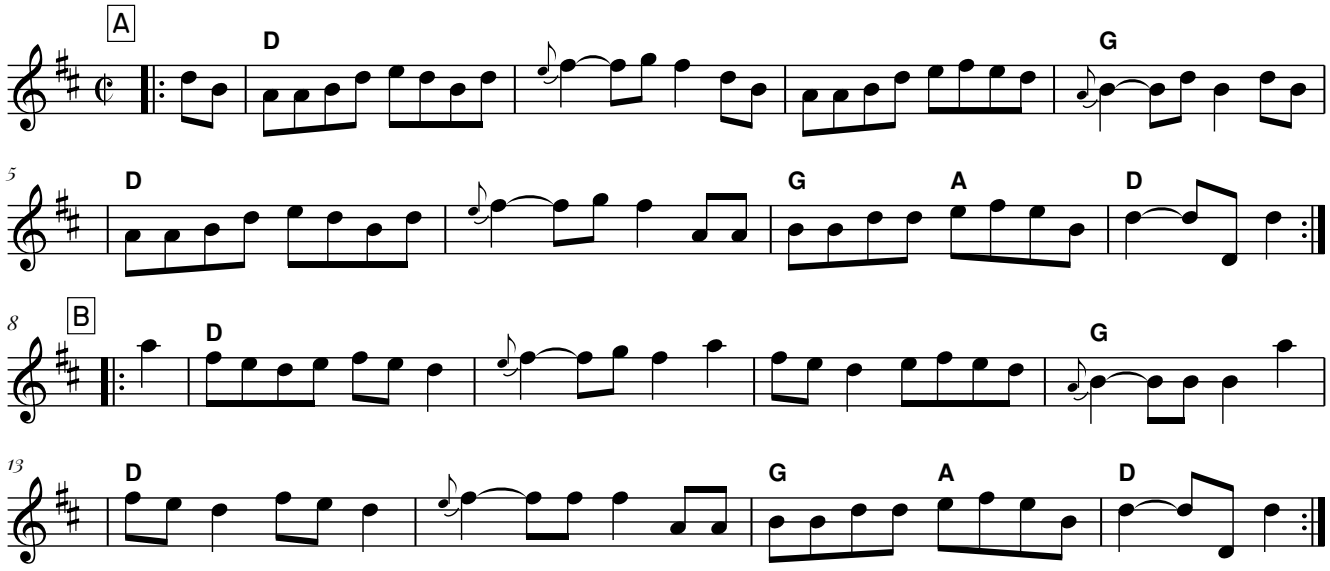
Johnny Don't Come Home Drunk



Key: D

Lily of the Valley

from Luther Davis, VA

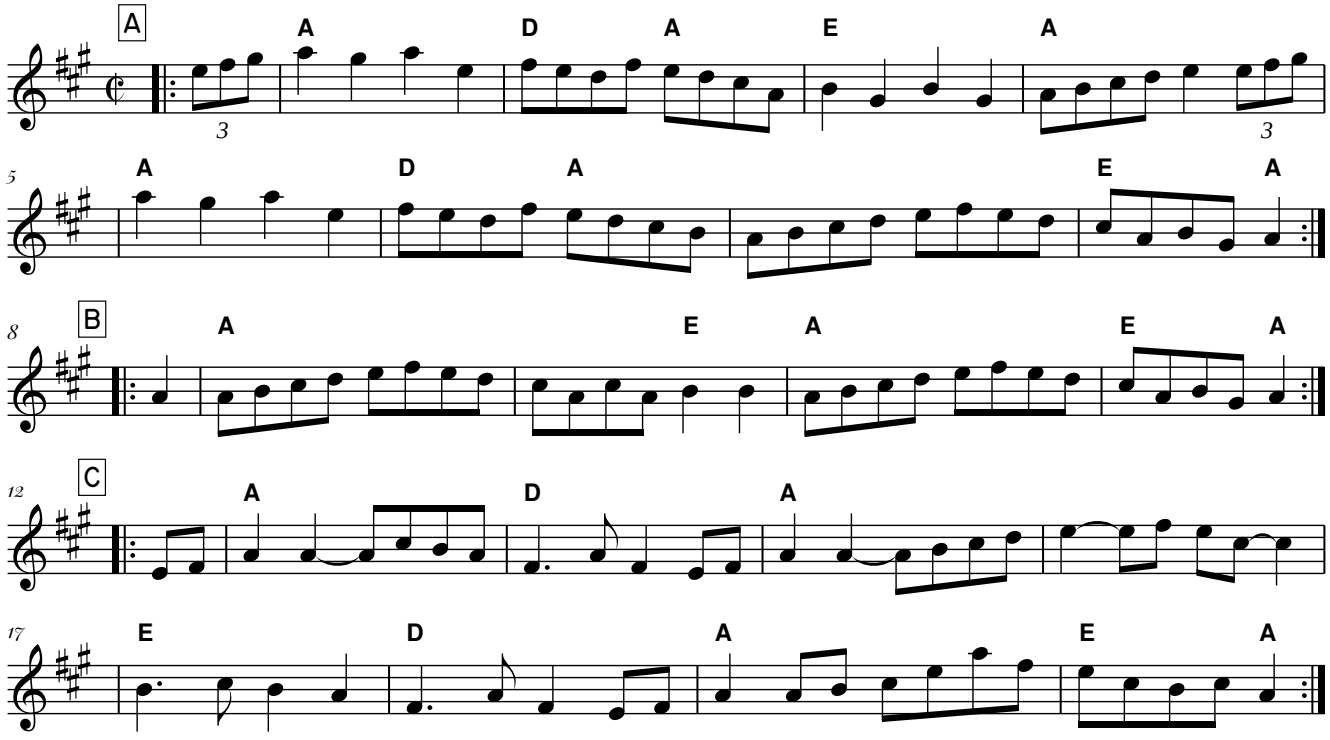


Aural Source: Get Up In The Cool Podcast, with Cameron DeWhitt and Adam Hurt
http://www.camerondewhitt.com/getupinthecool/adamhurt
Note: Adam says this comes by way of Dan Gellert.

Key: A

Little Billie Wilson

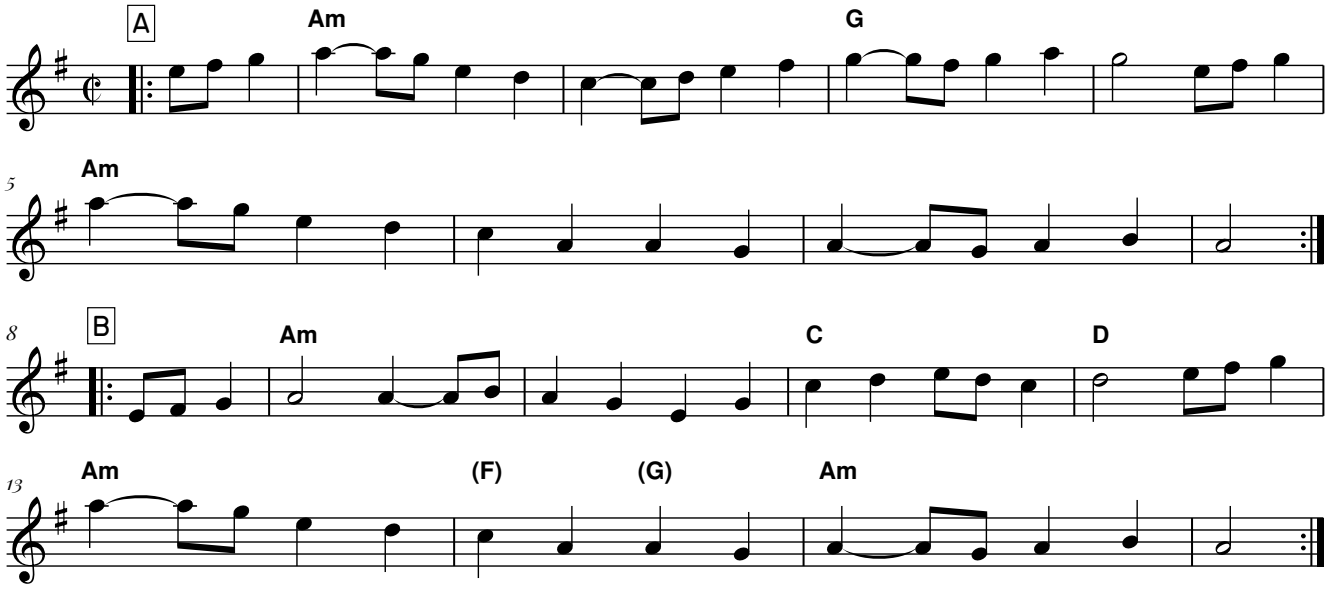
Billy Wilson



Key: A Dorian

Mace Bell's Civil War March

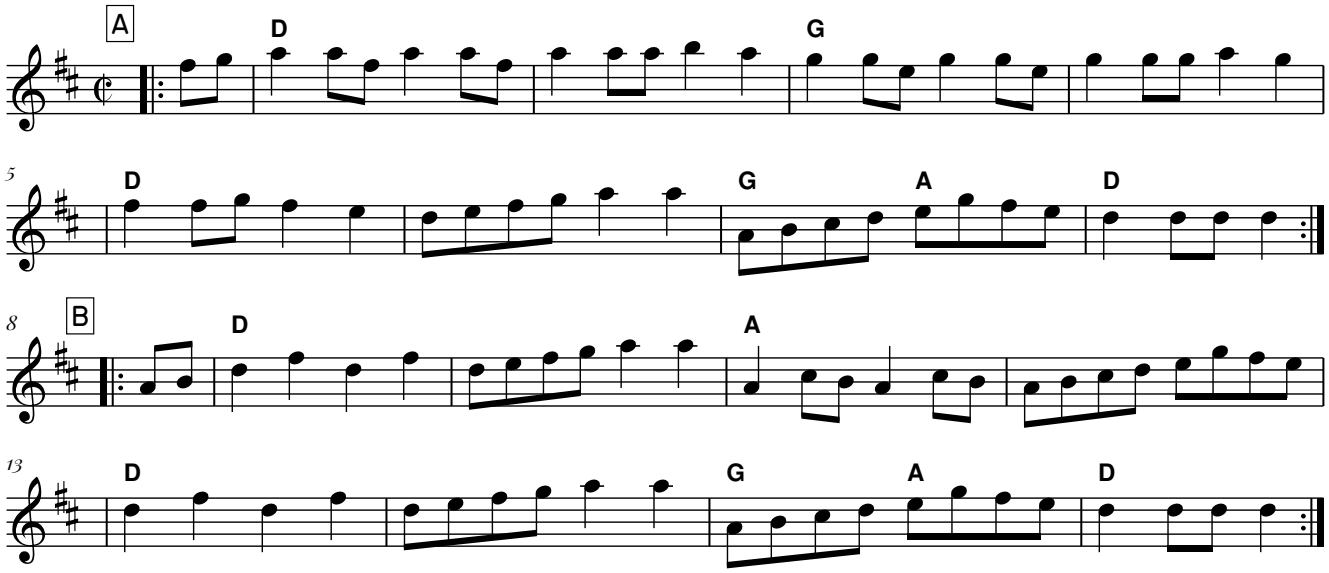
from P.T. Bell



Aural Source: Howard Rains & Tricia Spencer
Note: Very similar to "Bonaparte's March" or "Napoleon Crossing the Alps"

Key: D

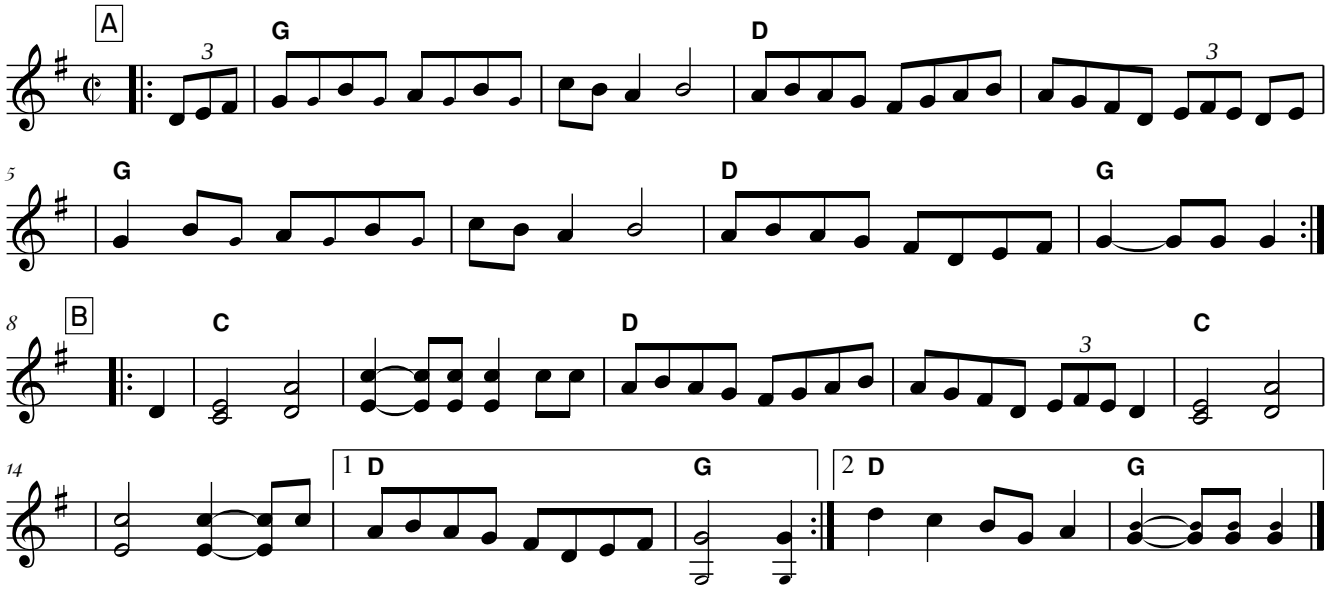
Mississippi Sawyer



Key: G

Nail That Catfish to a Tree

Steve Rosen

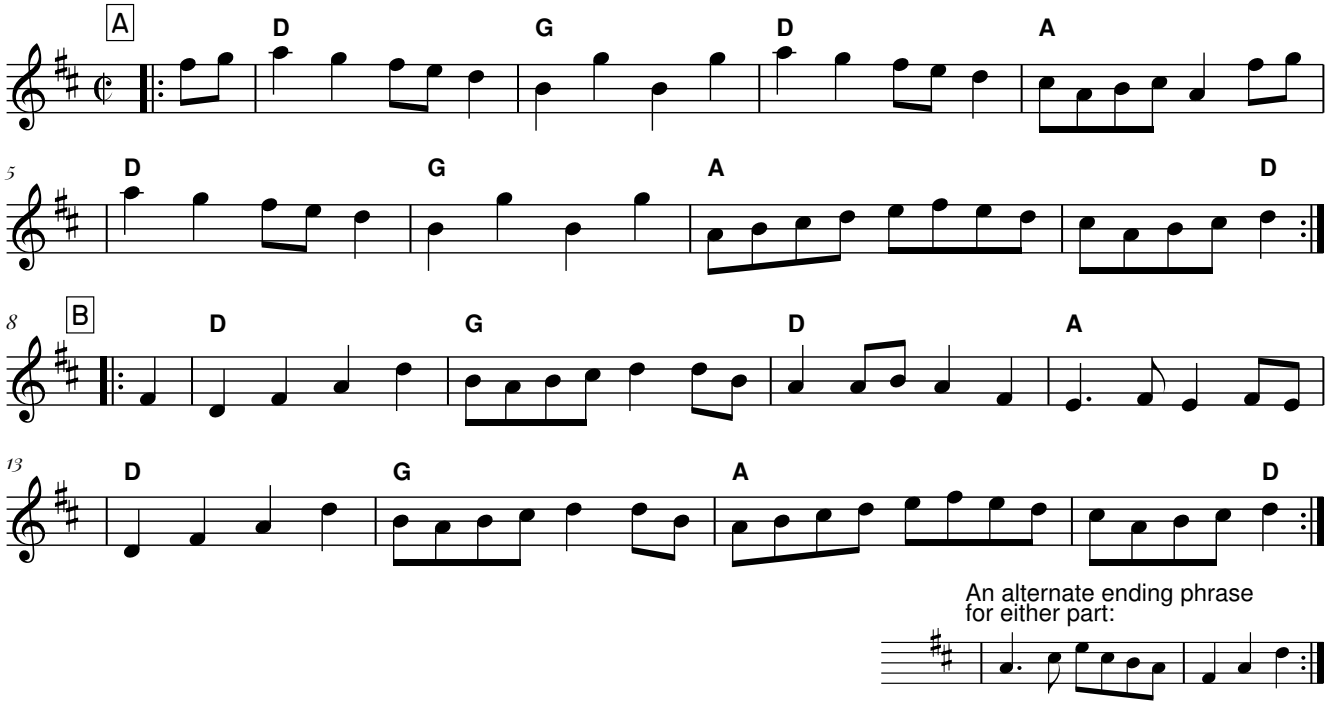


© Steve Rosen

Aural Source: Steve Rosen, http://nailthatcatfish.tripod.com/catfishmed.mp3
Note: See http://nailthatcatfish.tripod.com/nailthatcat.html for T-shirts and more.

Key: D

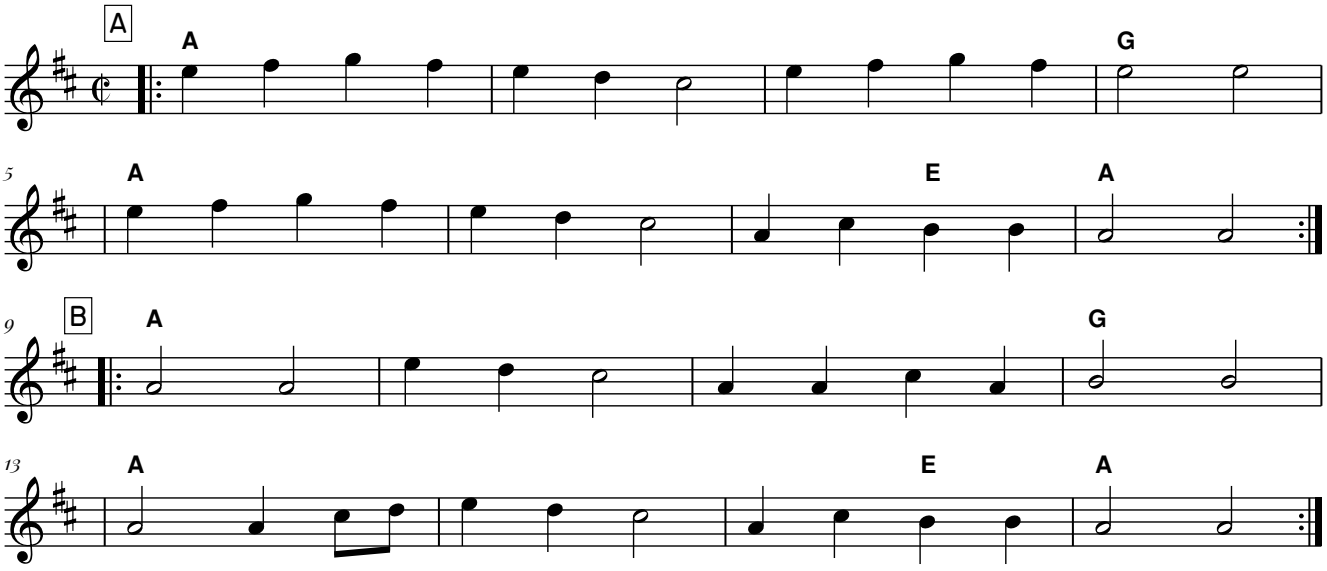
Needle Case



An alternate ending phrase for either part:

Key: A Mixolydian

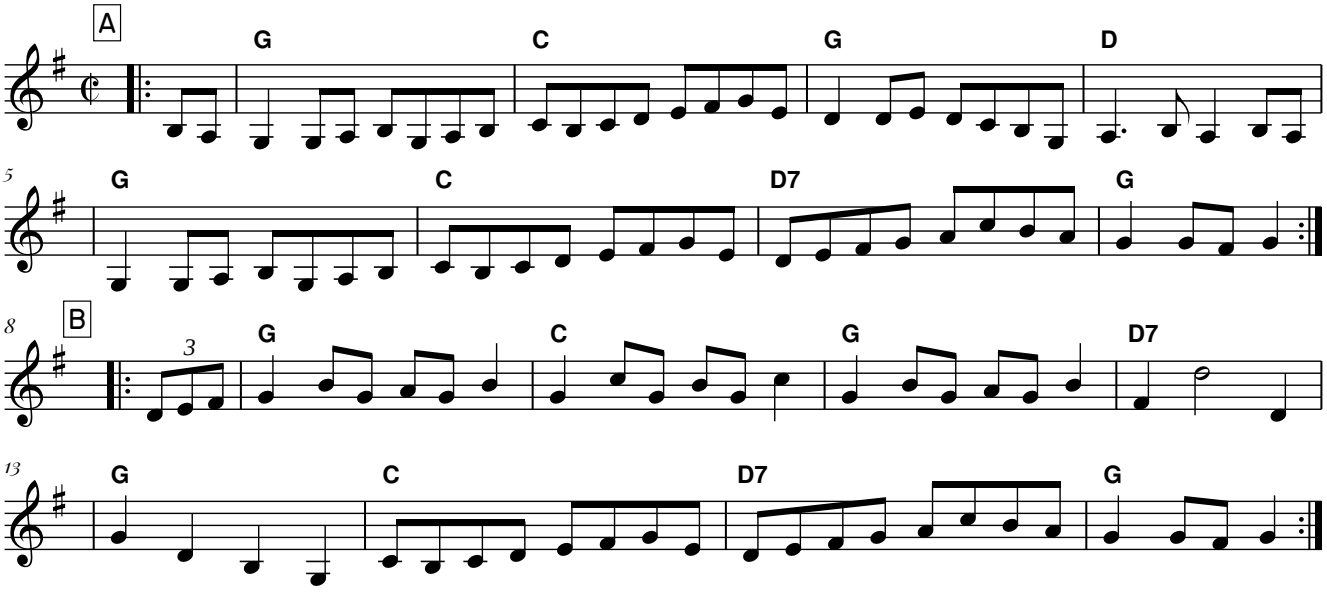
Old Joe Clark



Aural Source: Sarah Comer

Key: G

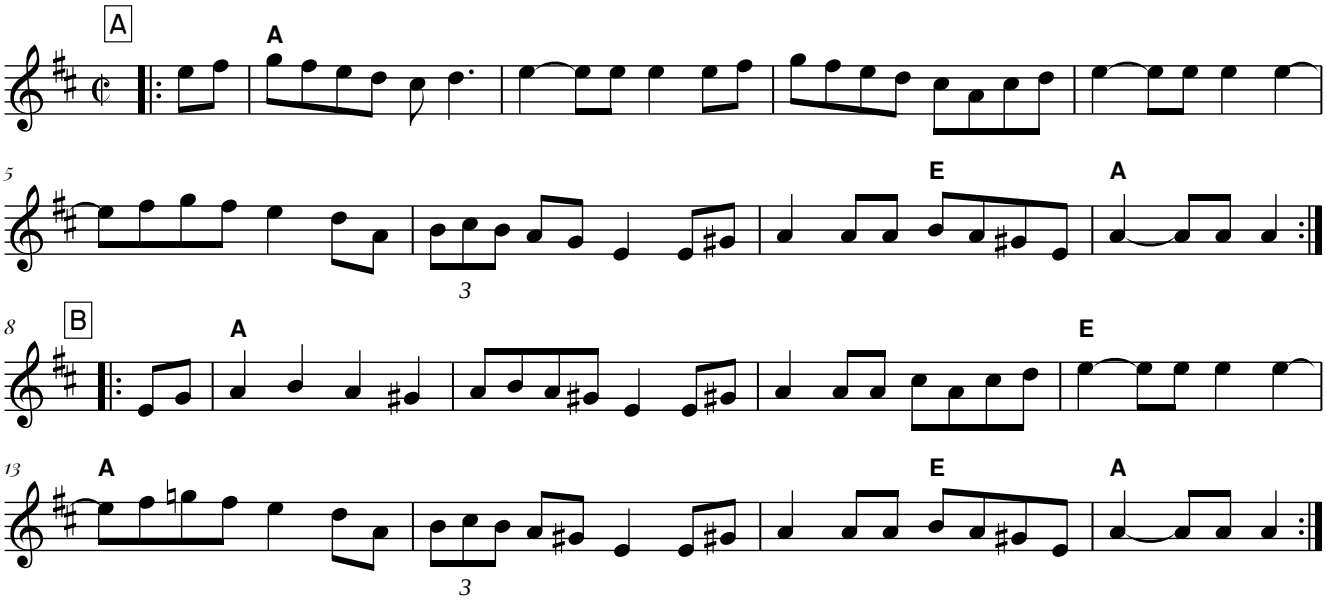
Possum up a Gum Stump



Key: A Mixolydian

Pretty Little Shoes

from Ward Jarvis, WV
via Jeff Goehring

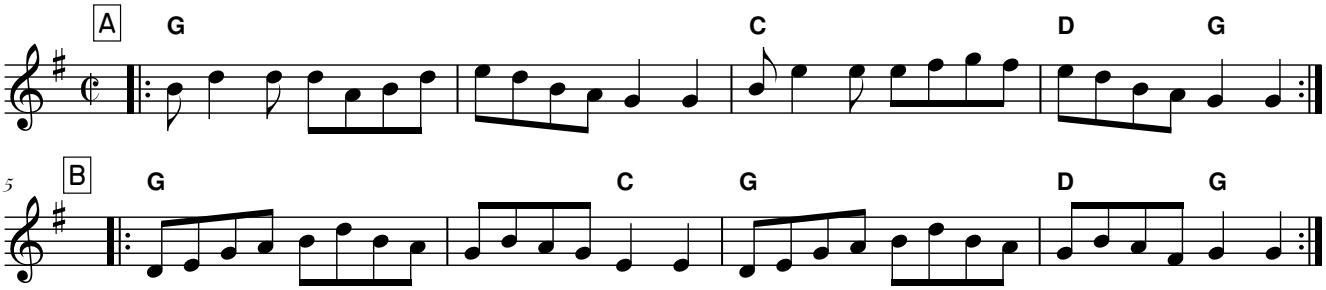


Aural Source: Judy Hyman et al., The Floyd Radio Show Podcast, October 5, 2019
Note: Good in cross-A tuning, watch out for second part mostly in A major

Key: G

Rat's Gone To Rest

from George Hawkins, KY



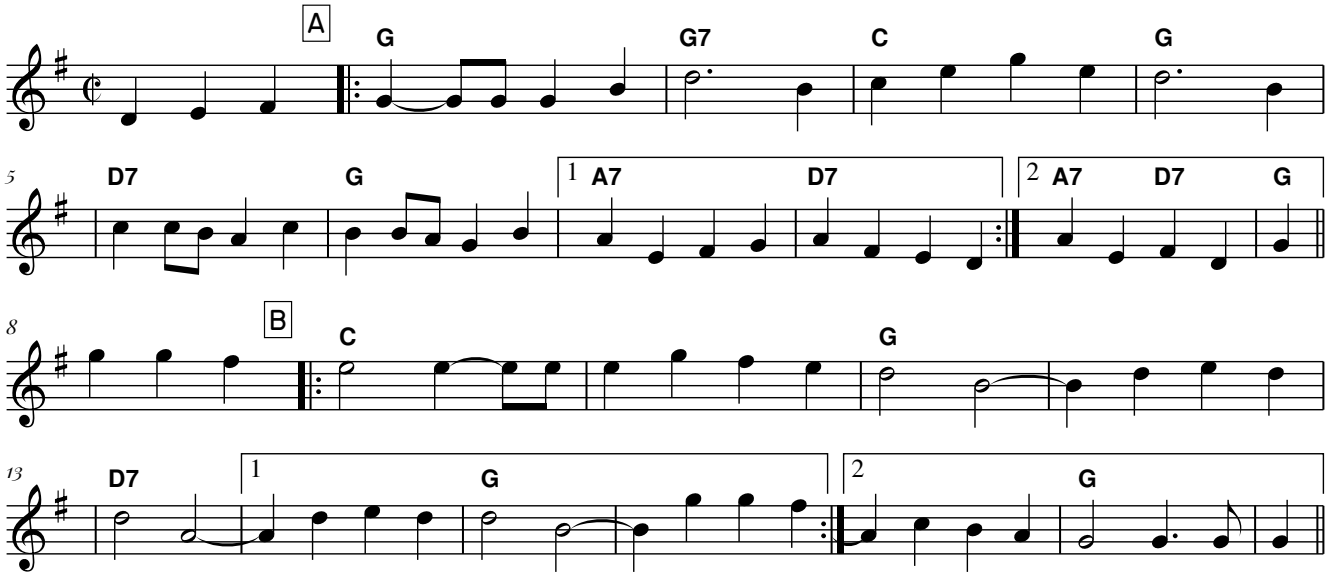
Aural Source: https://www.slippery-hill.com/recording/rats-gone-rest

Key: G

Red Wing

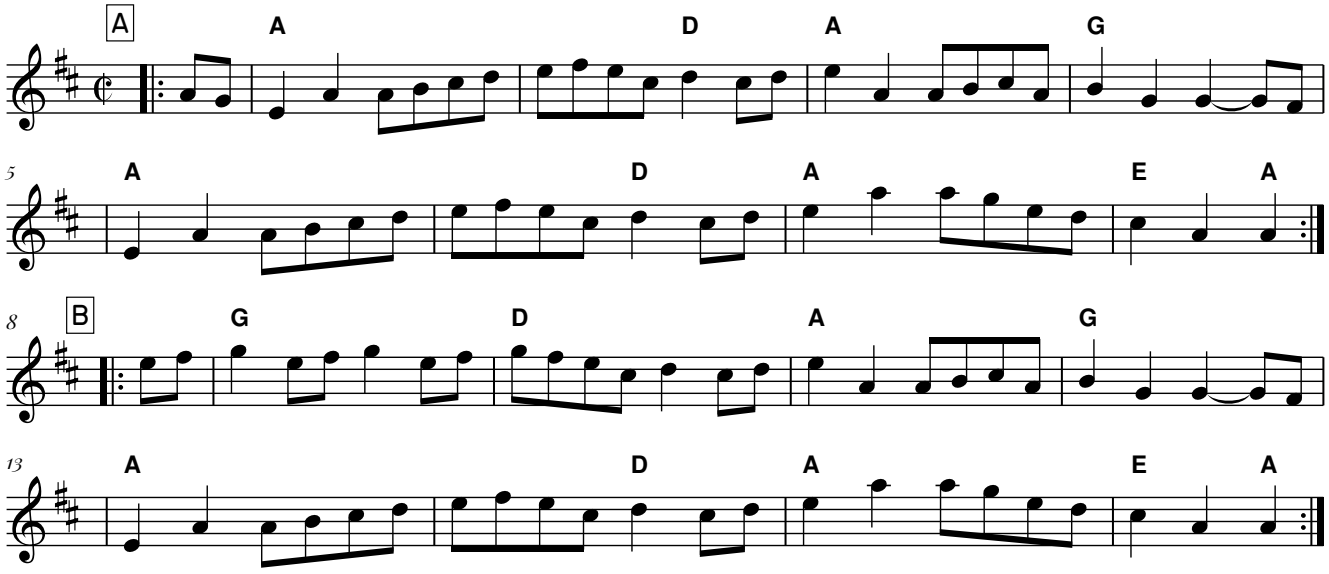
Union Maid

Kerry Mills (1907)



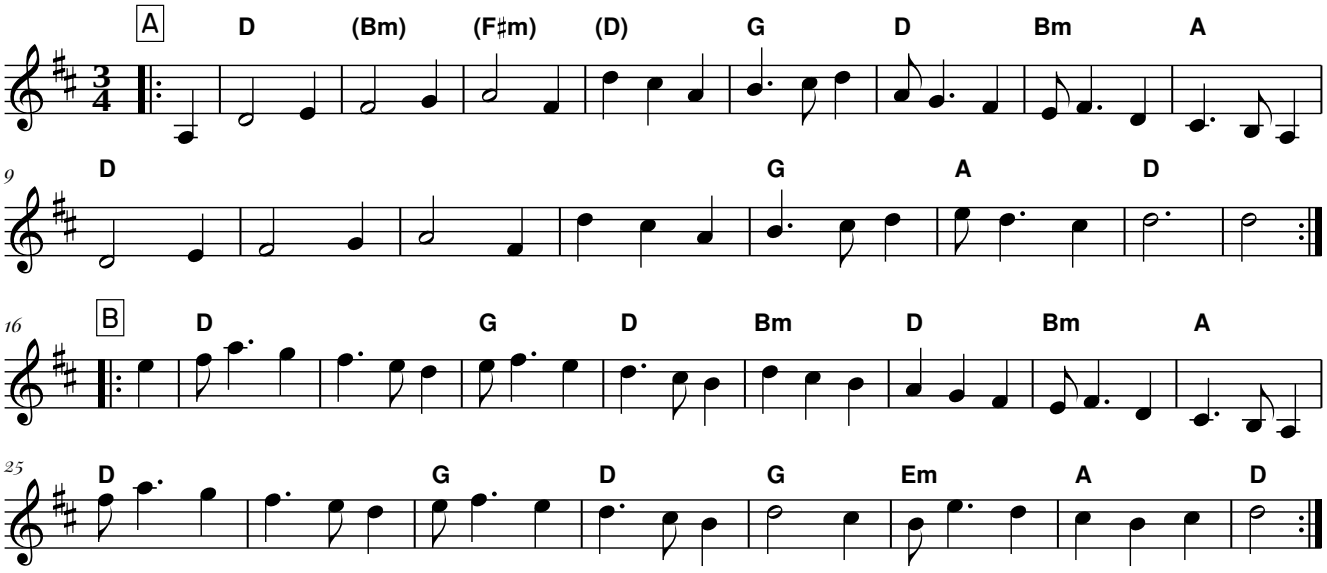
Key: A Mixolydian

Red-Haired Boy



Key: D

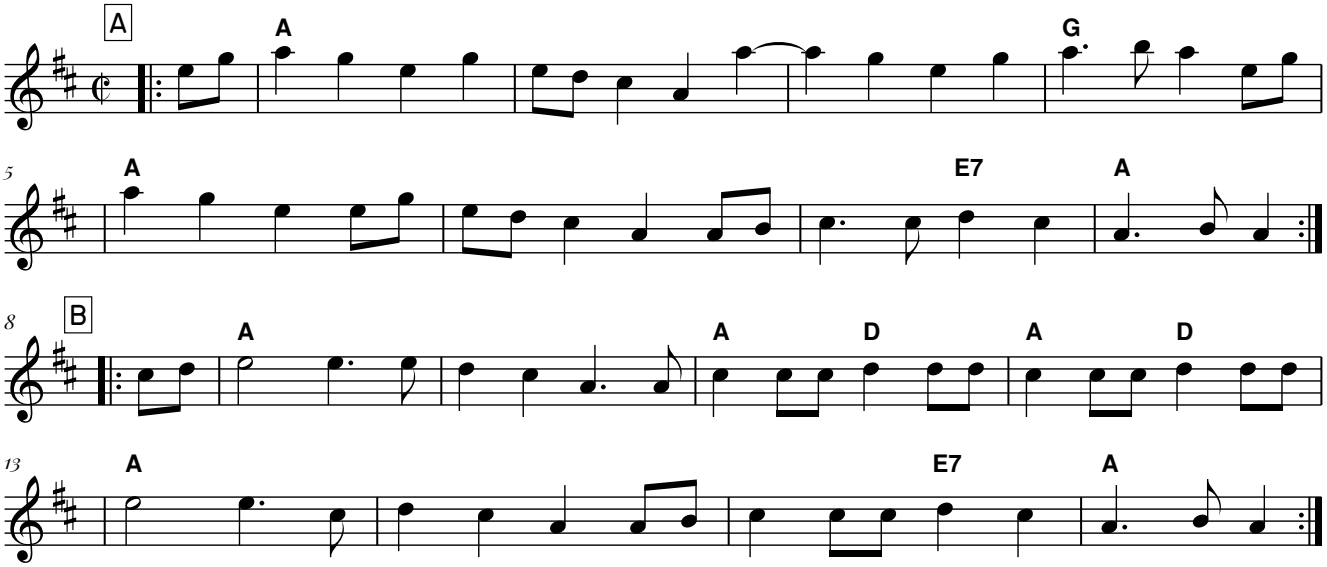
Rose Waltz



Aural Source: Sarah Comer
Note: From Stuart Williams, not the one Benny Thomasson or Bob Walters played.

Key: A Mixolydian

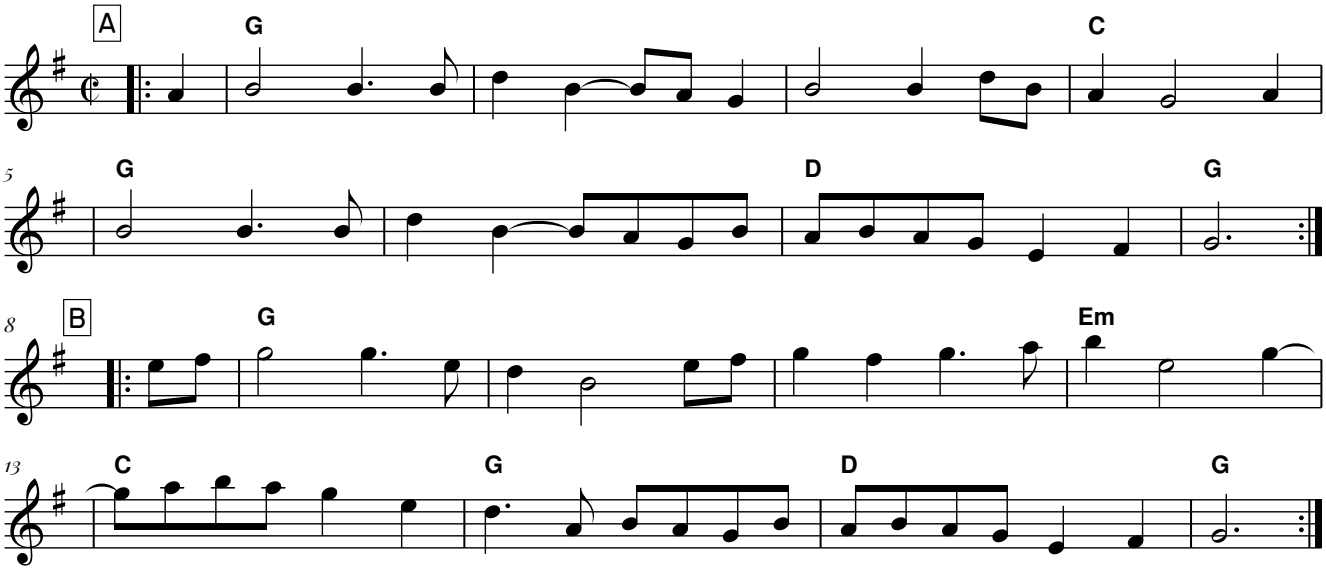
Sandy Boys



Key: G

Seneca Square Dance

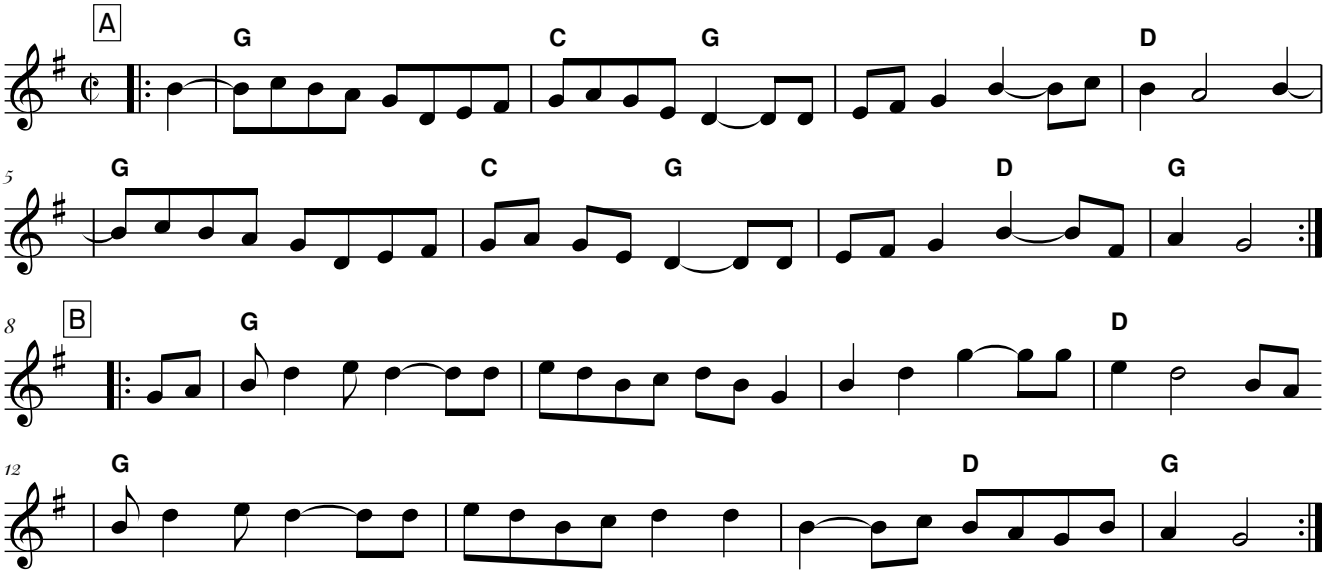
Waiting for the Federals



Swing the eighths
Key: G

Shove That Pig's Foot...

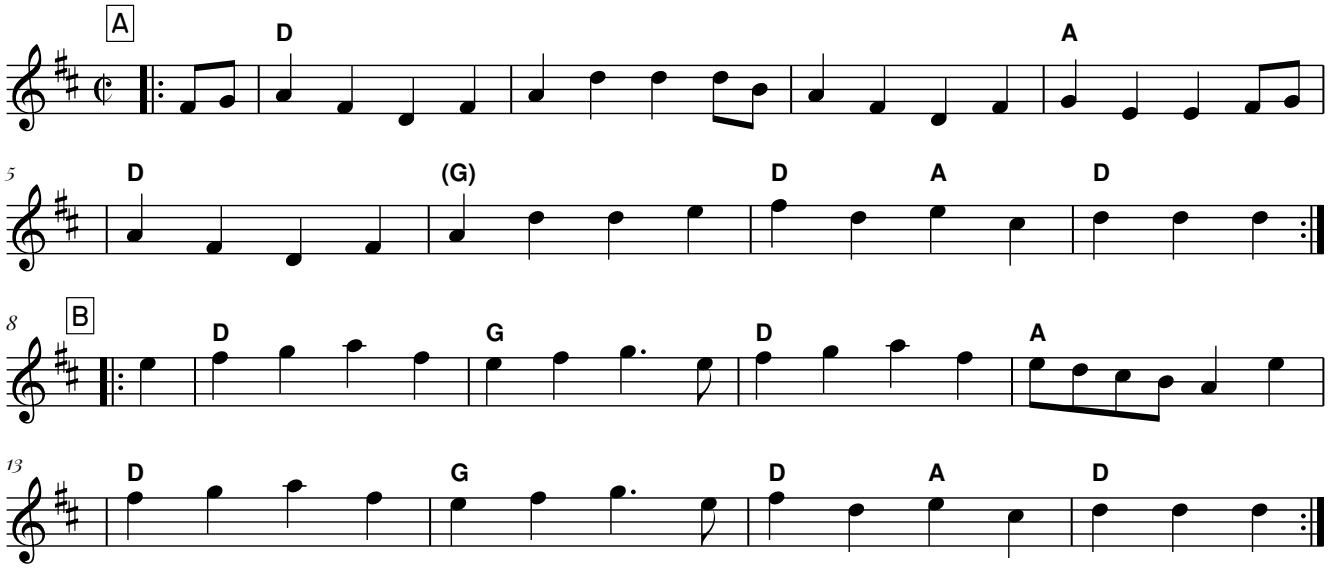
...a Little Further in the Fire



Aural Source: Bruce Molsky, https://youtu.be/vBIjR39WYfM

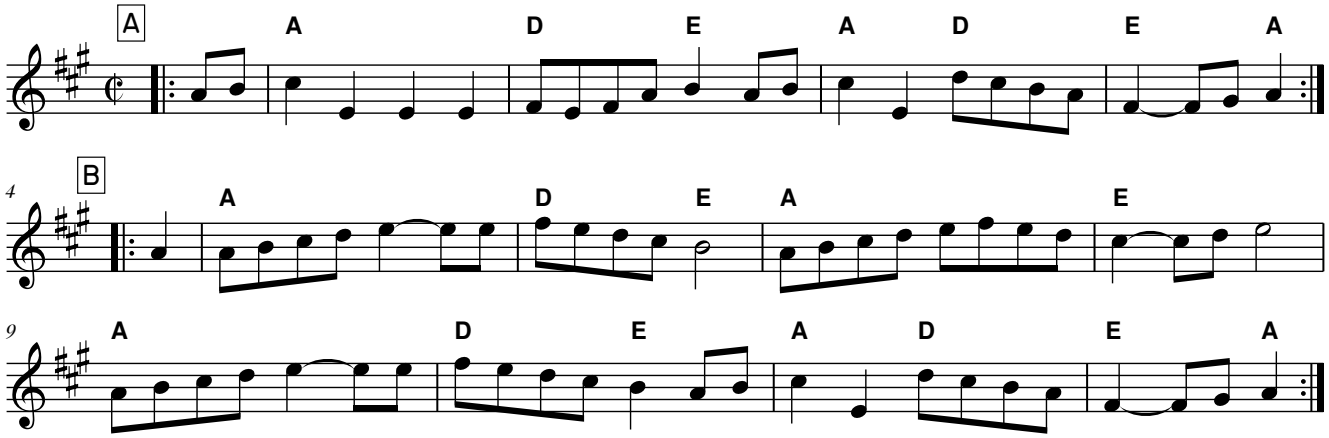
Key: D

Soldier's Joy



Key: A

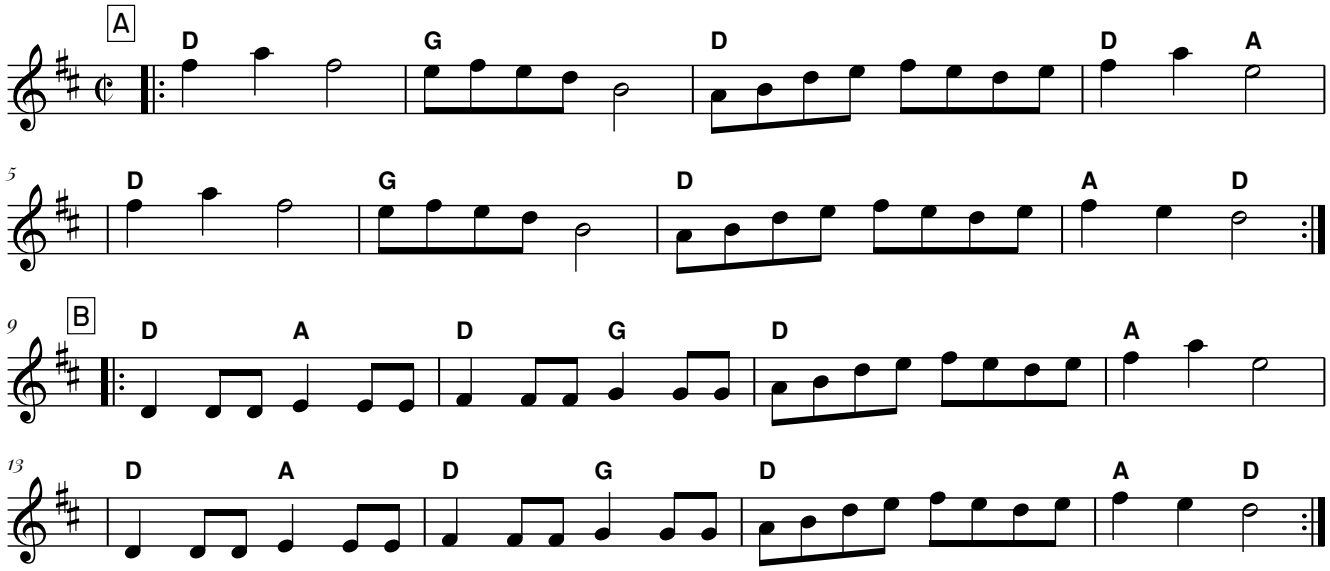
The Soldier's Return



Aural Source: Tim Eriksen, https://youtu.be/8tVlXaF7fGo
Note: Good in cross-A tuning

Spotted Pony

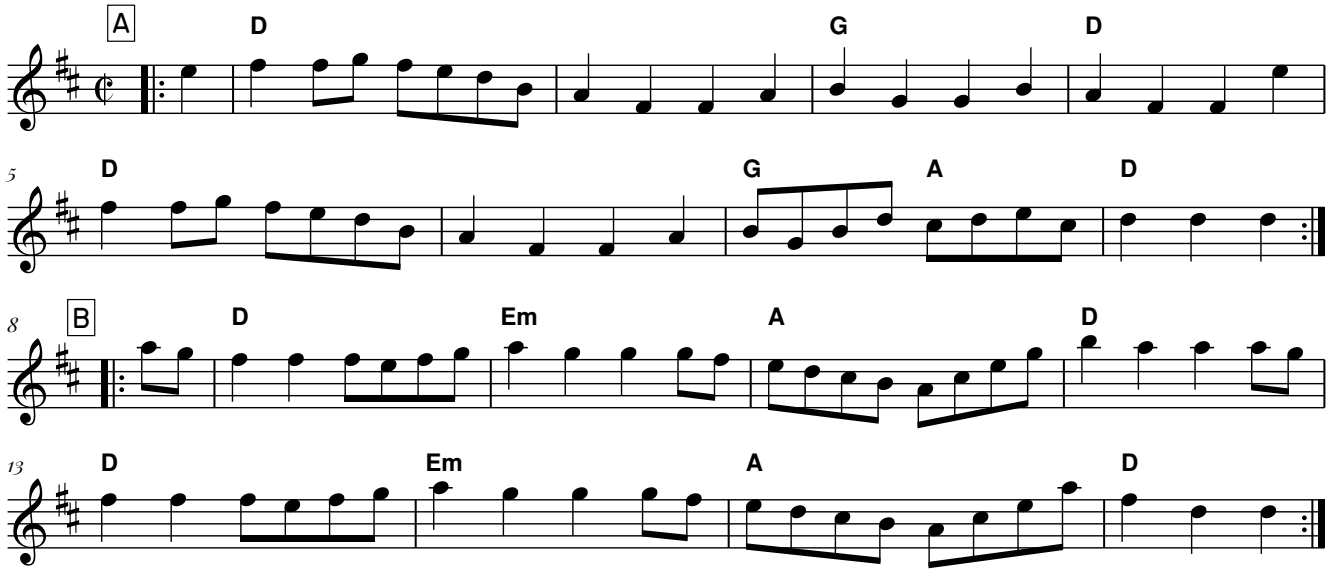
Key: D



Note: Most people play this in the opposite order, with the A and B parts swapped.
That is how it appears on older recordings where the tune is called "Snowshoes".

St. Anne's Reel

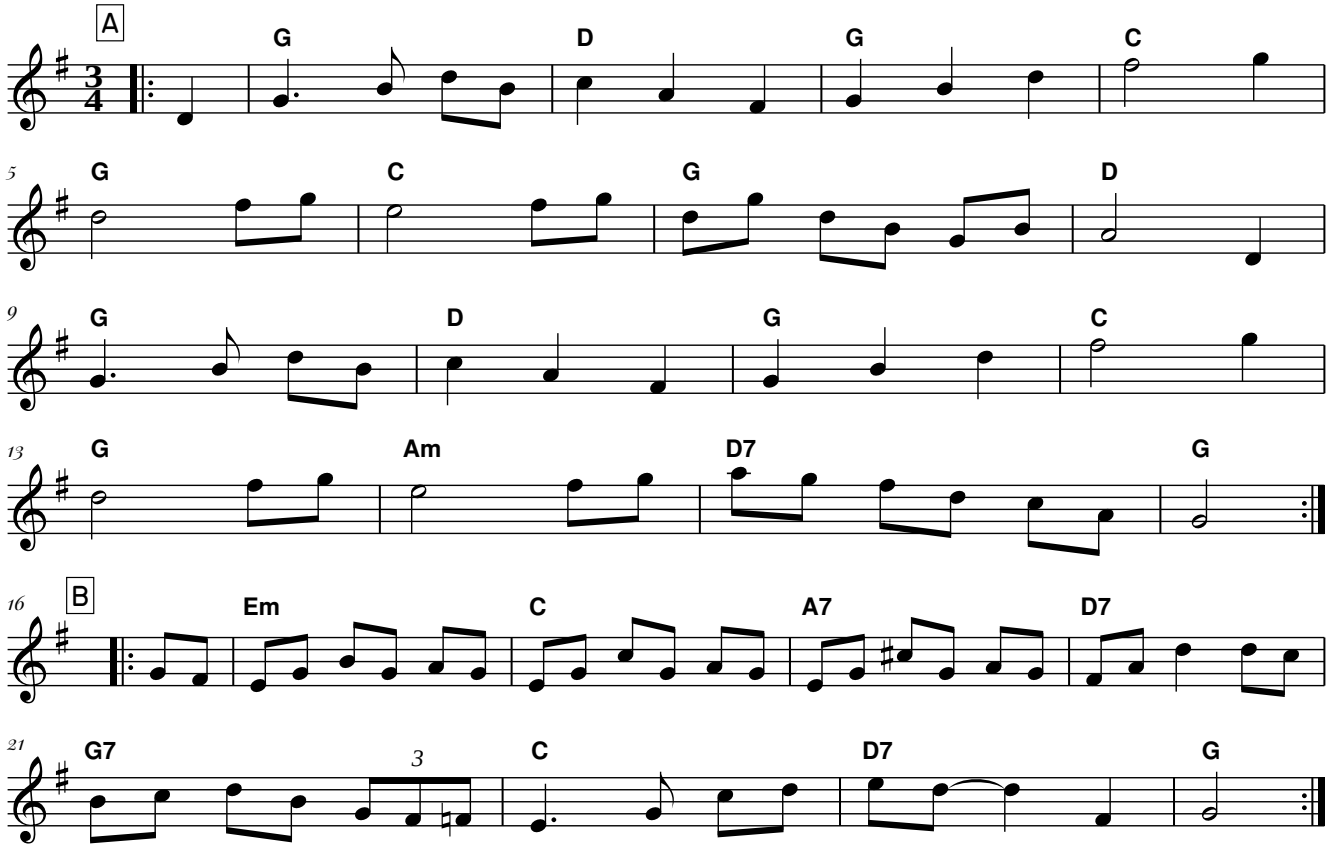
Key: D



Susi's Waltz

Waltz
Key: G

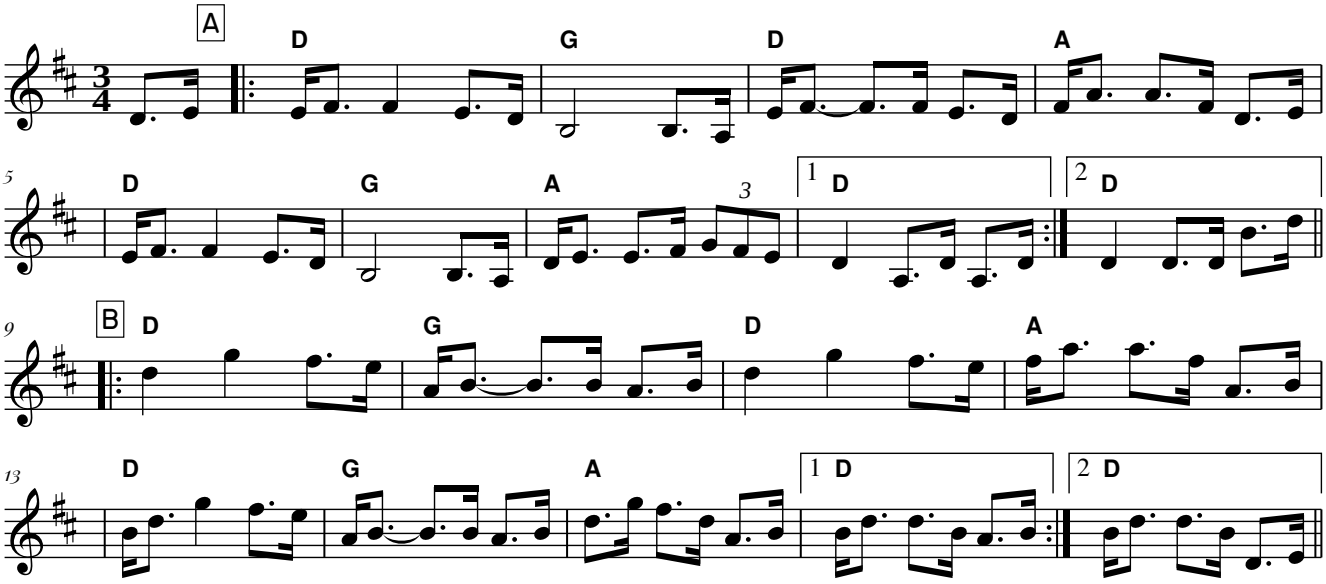
© 1988 David Cahn



Swannanoa Waltz

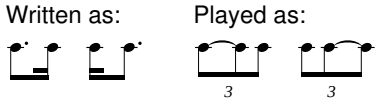
Waltz
Key: D

Rayna Gellert



© Rayna Gellert

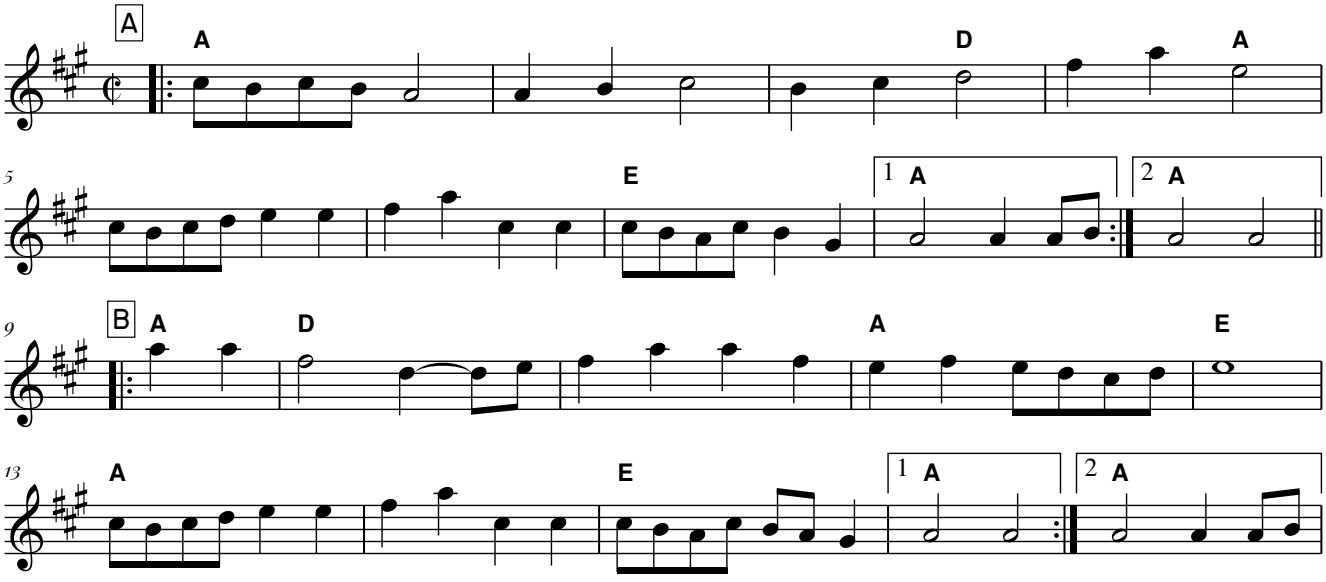
Dotted pairs should be played in triplet time:



Aural Source: Rayna Gellert, Ways of the World
https://youtu.be/BrNdEIFrIp4
Note: In the original, the fiddle is tuned ADAE with drones and double stops throughout.

Sweet Marie

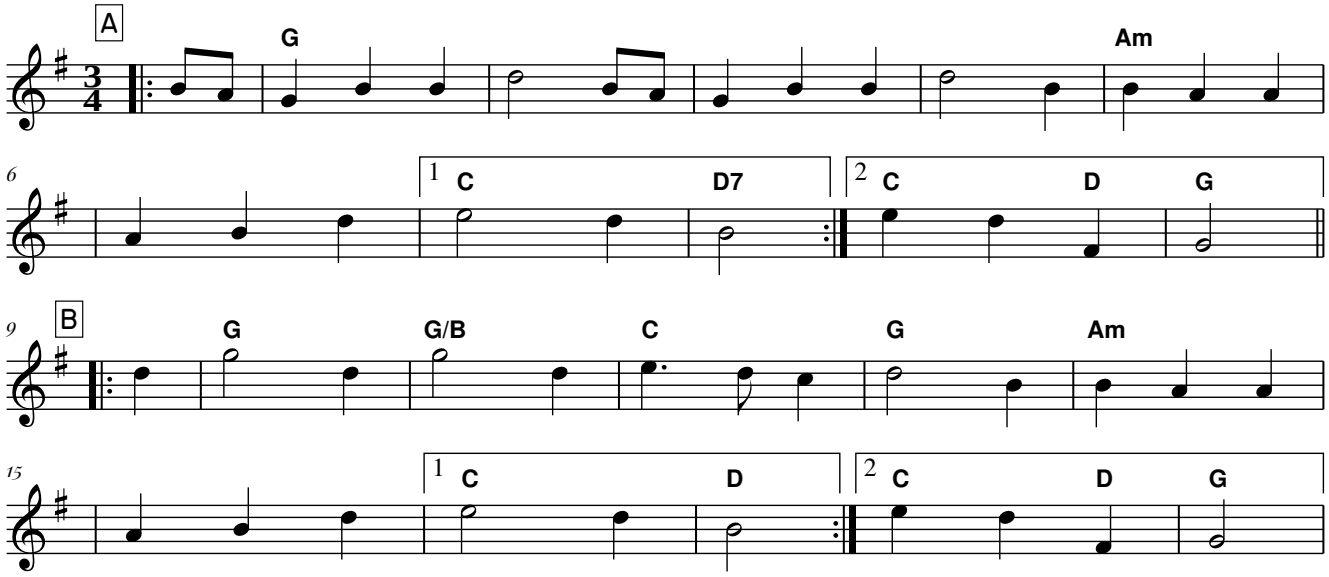
Key: A
Crooked



Aural Source: https://youtu.be/SpsNW2OjFHU
Note: Good in cross-A tuning; watch out for the extra half measure at the beginning of the B section.

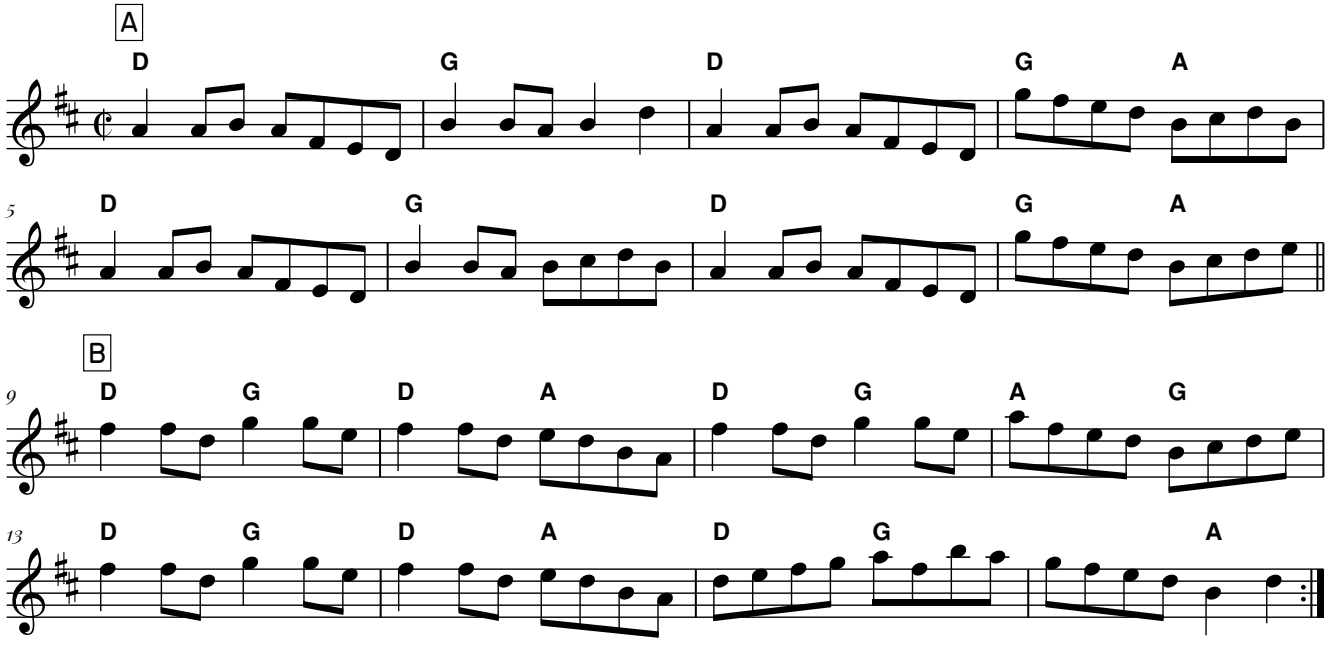
Tombigbee Waltz

Waltz
Key: G



The Wind That Shakes The Barley

Key: D



Aural Source: Franklin George