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SOLO GUITAR: FINGERSTYLE

Charlie Byrd, Joe Pass, Laurindo Almeida, Guy Van Duser, Chet Atkins, Carlos Barbosa-Lima, Leo Brouwer, Marcel Dadi, Eric Schoenberg, Lenny Breau, Ralph Towner, Andrew Schulman and many other guitarists perform and record their own fingerstyle arrangements of folk, popular, and jazz melodies.

With the musical and guitar playing skills developed through studying the material in this book, and with the sheet music of a favorite song, a guitarist can create an individual fingerpicking solo style arrangement. The widespread availability of sheet music offers a diverse range of songs for the creative arranger and player to explore.

The Classical Heritage

Even if guitarists are interested and skilled in only the techniques of contemporary music, they should not overlook the wealth of helpful material in the repertoire of the classical guitar. The following overview places the classical guitar in perspective for the contemporary musician.

Monophonic, Polyphonic, and Homophonic Music

Musical styles fall into one of three categories: monophony, homophony, and polyphony. Unaccompanied melody, or monophony, is the oldest form of music. Monophony is found throughout the world's folk music.

Polyphonic music is a combination of several simultaneous melody lines in which each voice has an independent and equal existence. Polyphony reached its zenith in the eighteenth-century Baroque counterpoint of J. S. Bach.

Homophonic music is composed of several voices in which a single melody line enjoys supremacy. The subordinant voices support the melody and form chords. These chords establish a pulse or follow the melody. Most nineteenth-century classical music is homophonic. The sonatas and symphonies of Beethoven, the operas and quartets of Mozart, and the masterpieces of Chopin are known for their great themes or melodies.

The early nineteenth century witnessed the first significant period of composi-

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tion and virtuoso performance on the six string guitar. Naturally, the nineteenth-century guitarists — Sor, Carcassi, Aguado, Giuliani, and Tárrega—wrote in homophonic style, melodies with accompaniments. *Etudes* by these composers are available at music stores. Each etude offers an exercise in guitar technique and a lesson in arranging melodies and chords.

Blues, Stride, Ragtime, and Rock

The guitar became popular on an unprecedented level in the 1950s and 1960s. The first generation of rock and roll, the folk boom, the Beatles, and quantum advances in the technology of sound recording and amplification spurred widespread interest and participation in guitar music.

As guitarists began to explore the roots of folk and popular music, they discovered players from earlier eras who had developed new techniques and styles of guitar playing. The synthesis in the 1930s of blues, stride, and jazz idioms by the Reverend Gary Davis, Willie Johnson, Mississippi John Hurt, and others inspired guitarists to transpose ragtime piano pieces and traditional fiddle and banjo tunes to the guitar. The tradition of creating original arrangements of popular songs on the guitar continues to the present day.

Creating an Arrangement

The experienced guitarist can sometimes play an arrangement of a melody by sight or by ear. If necessary, follow each step in the process. As you gain experience you can omit some of the steps or perform them solely in your mind.

Steps to Creating an Arrangement

Confine the melody to the treble strings so that a bass line and intermediate voices can be added below it. It is easier to combine a melody with bass lines and chords if some chord notes fall on open strings. Transpose to a key that uses at least some open strings. There are usually several good choices of keys.

1. Write down the melody and chords.
2. Analyze the melody and chord progression.
3. Transpose to an appropriate key, if necessary.
4. Add a bass line to the melody.
5. Harmonize the melody in thirds, sixths, or tenths.
6. Fill in the space between the bass line and melody with harmonies implied by the chord progression.
7. Use extensions and alterations of chord synonyms and substitutions to create new harmonies.
8. Where possible, add melodic licks and fills based on the melody, chord changes, or popular recordings of the song.
9. Vary the texture and density of the arrangement.

In this section, the steps to creating an arrangement are illustrated with the famous "Ode to Joy" theme from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and a solo guitar arrangement of "Georgia on My Mind." Figure 20–1 shows sixteen measures of the Beethoven melody in the original key.

The roots of the chords are written below the melody on the first beat of each chord change. Bass notes in this arrangement fall on open strings. Play bass notes with the thumb and melody notes with the index and middle fingers.

The key of D is very appealing because of the open string root notes. On the other hand, D may not be the best key when harmonies, inner voices, and chord substitutions are used. The only way to tell which key is the most satisfying is to write and play arrangements in several keys.

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Ode to Joy: Melody with Simple Bass

by Ludwig Van Beethoven

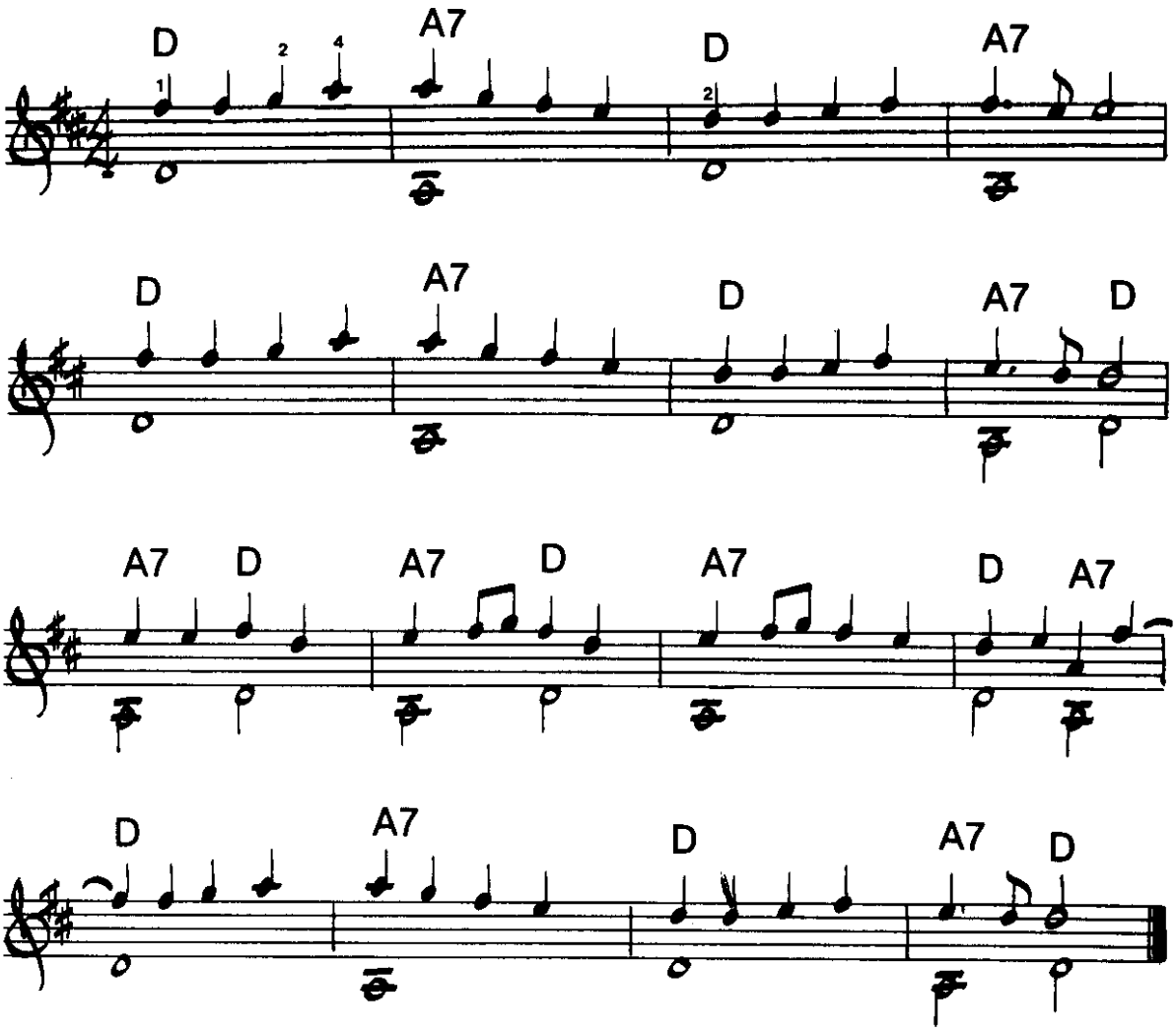

Figure 20-1

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Ode to Joy: Melody with Simple Bass (Tab)

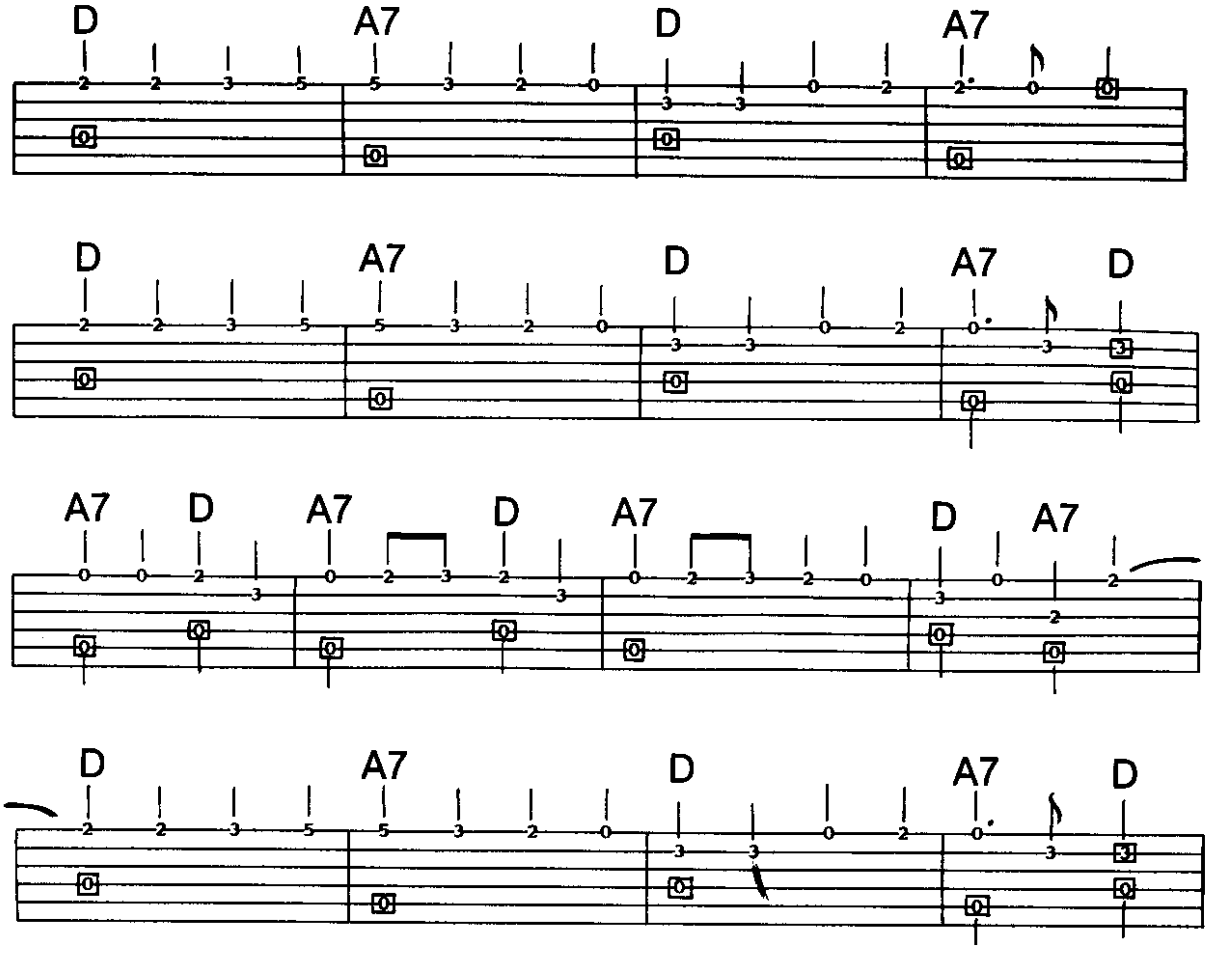

Figure 20-2

Harmonizing the Melody

Use the patterns of major scales harmonized in 3rds, 6ths, and 10ths. Keep the melody line as the highest voice in a harmony. Figure 20–3a shows four measures of the melody transposed to C and harmonized in 3rds. Figure 20–3b is the melody in 6ths. The measures in *c* contain 10ths, 6ths, 3rds, and other intervals.

Choose harmony notes which enhance the chord changes. Avoid changes between harmonies which distract from the melody; the harmony should follow the contour of the melody. Avoid harmonies which conflict with significant notes in the accompanying chords.

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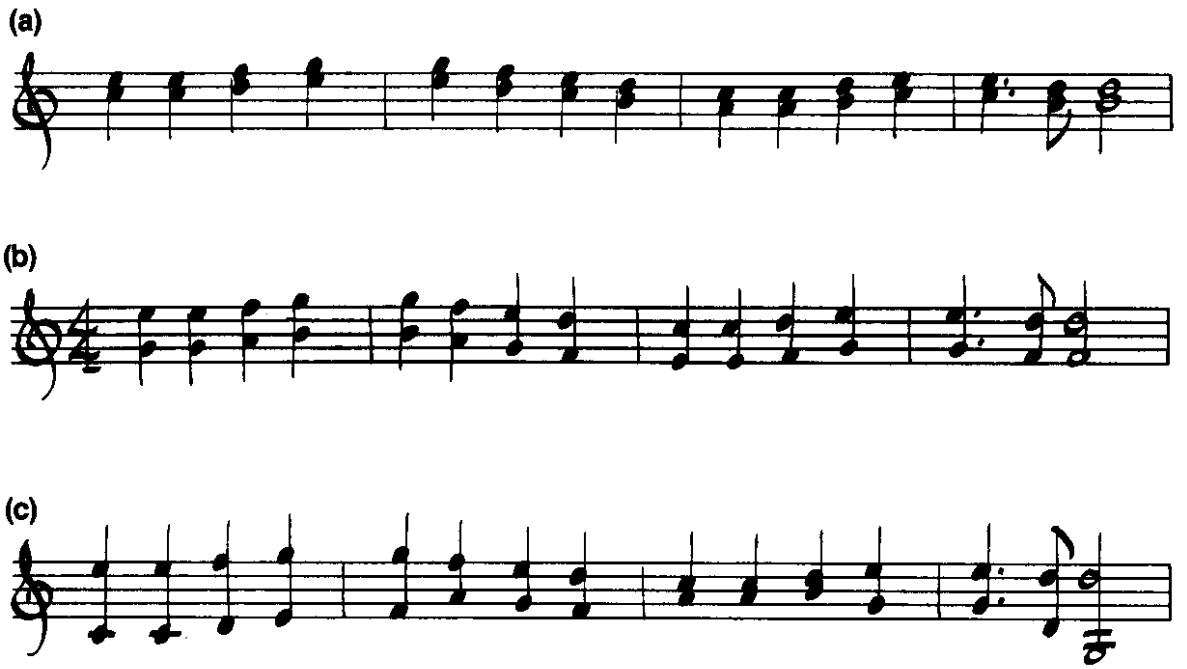
Melody with Mixed Intervals



Tablature

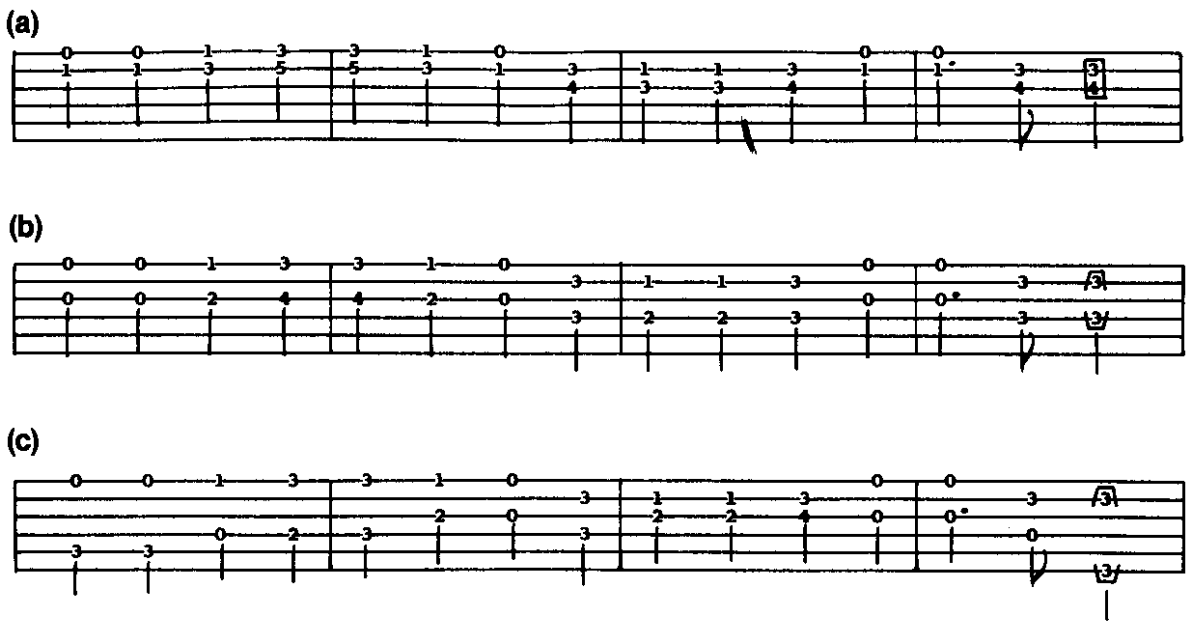


Figure 20-3

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The Bass Line

Next to the melody, the bass line is the most important voice in an arrangement. The bass line supports the melody and outlines or hints at the chord changes. The bass voice should refer to the melody and chord changes and still enjoy its own internal musical logic.

A bass line consisting of repeated root notes, or which follows every melody note with the same interval, soon becomes tedious to the ear. The following concepts are used in the arrangement in C major in Figure 20–4.

1. *Parallel motion,* bass lines that rise and fall with the melody, as in measures 1 and 2.
2. *Contrary motion,* bass lines that move opposite the melody, as in measures 3 and 14.
3. *Ascending and descending scale fragments,* as in measures 13 through 15.
4. *Lines that fall on chord tones* (very common).
5. *Chromatic scales,* as in measure 10.

The bass line begins by harmonizing the melody in 10ths. A descending C major scale passage begins on the second beat of the second measure, and turns into a four note chromatic scale starting on the second beat of measure three. The last three beats of measure four comprise an arpeggio of the G major triad.

The first ten bass notes are repeated starting at the fifth measure, with a change in rhythm. Measure 7 begins with two C chord notes. The short scale passage in measure 7 begins on the open sixth string and forms diatonic thirteenths with the melody.

Arrangement with Picking Patterns

Figures 20–6 through 20–9 show an arrangement of the Beethoven theme using three fingerpicking patterns. As with accompaniments, picking patterns are made more interesting by adding bass lines and bass runs.

The arrangement is written with note durations doubled to make reading easier. The melody is sometimes syncopated by delaying it half a beat, as in the first and third measures, or by striking it half a beat early, as in the ninth measure.

In the first four measures, the melody is harmonized in various intervals while the thumb plays alternating bass patterns. A chromatically ascending bass line starting on open string E begins in the fifth measure and turns into a diatonic bass run in measure eight.

The alternating bass in measures 10 through 13 follows an irregular pattern. Play the bass notes separately to hear its logic.

The descending bass line in measures 13 and 14 echoes the ascending line in measures 6 and 7. Measure 15 is a calypso picking pattern wth syncopated bass notes.

The counterpoint bass line in measures 21 through 24 is adapted from the oboe and clarinet parts in the Beethoven score.

D.C. al coda at the end of measure 23 is an indication to return to the beginning. Repeat from the first measure until the brackets after measure 6, then skip to the coda at the end of the piece.

"Georgia on My Mind"

Each measure of this arrangement uses a concept or technique that can be applied to the entire song or to other melodies. The arrangement can be simplified by playing only the bass and melody notes. The arrangement can be further simplified by playing the melody and only the first bass note under each chord. In the first eight measures, with a few exceptions, the first bass note under each chord is the root of that chord.

The song is structured in groups of eight-measure phrases. The progression and melody in the first and second eight bars are essentially the same. The seventh

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Melody and Bass Line

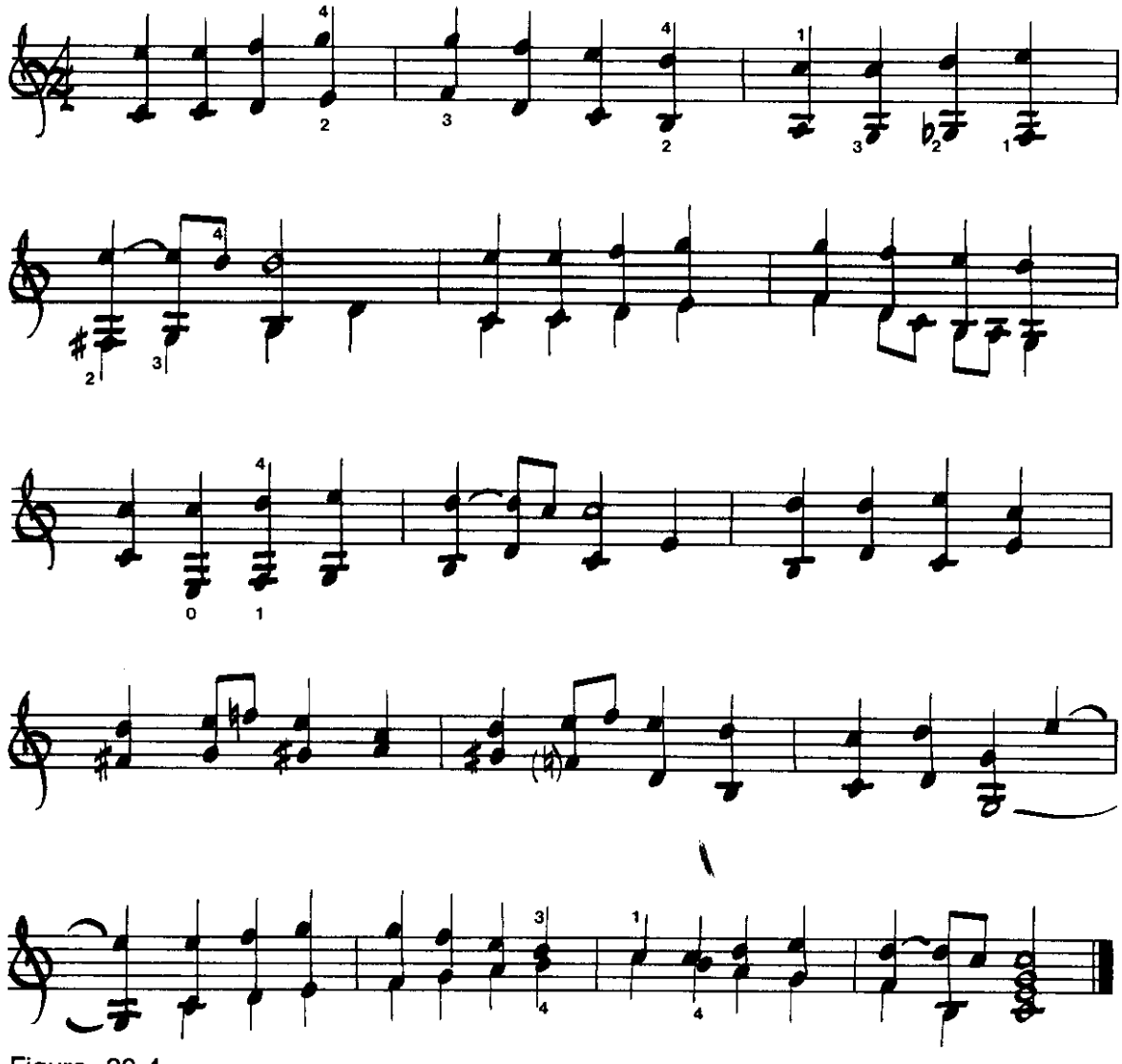

Figure 20-4
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and eighth measures of each verse is a two bar *turnaround,* a musical breathing space used to prepare for repetition of the melody. Measures 17 to 24 are a *bridge* with new melody and chords. The last eight measures have the same chords and melody as the first eight, except that an improvised melody and harmony hint at the theme. In some measures chord names are simplified to make the music more legible. These are the highlights of the arrangement:

Measures 1—4: Melody is harmonized in sixths and thirds; bass line plays mostly chord notes.

Measure 5: Color tones added to C chord; parallel movement of voices.

Measure 6: Chromatic bass line comes from chord progression.

Measure 9: Bass line on the sixth string is in opposite direction to the bass line in measure 1.

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Ode to Joy (Bass Line Arrangement, Tab)

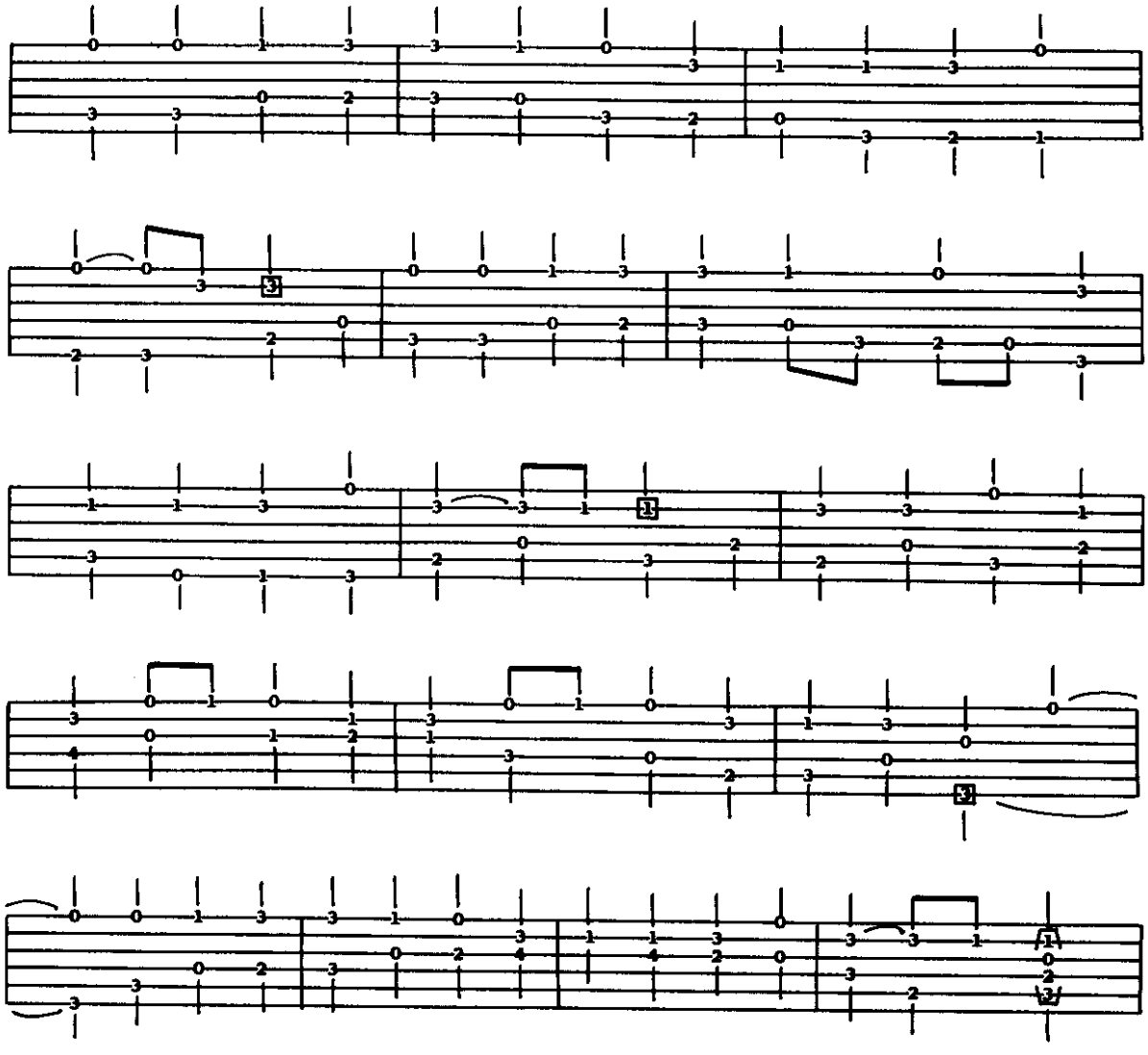

Figure 20-5
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Measure 10: B♭7 is a tritone substitution for E7.

Measure 13: A variation on measure 5.

Measure 14: The flat 9th in the bass voice of the last chord creates a short chromatic scale.

Measures 15 and 16: The chords of the turnaround can also be arpeggiated. Chromatic sixths lead into the bridge.

Measures 17 — 21: Sustain the melody notes as long as possible.

Measure 22: The harmonies here and in measures 5 and 13 are interchangeable.

Measure 26: The two chords are the same shape.

Measures 29 and 30: Treble voice is an improvisation which outlines the chord changes.

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Three Finger Picking Arrangement

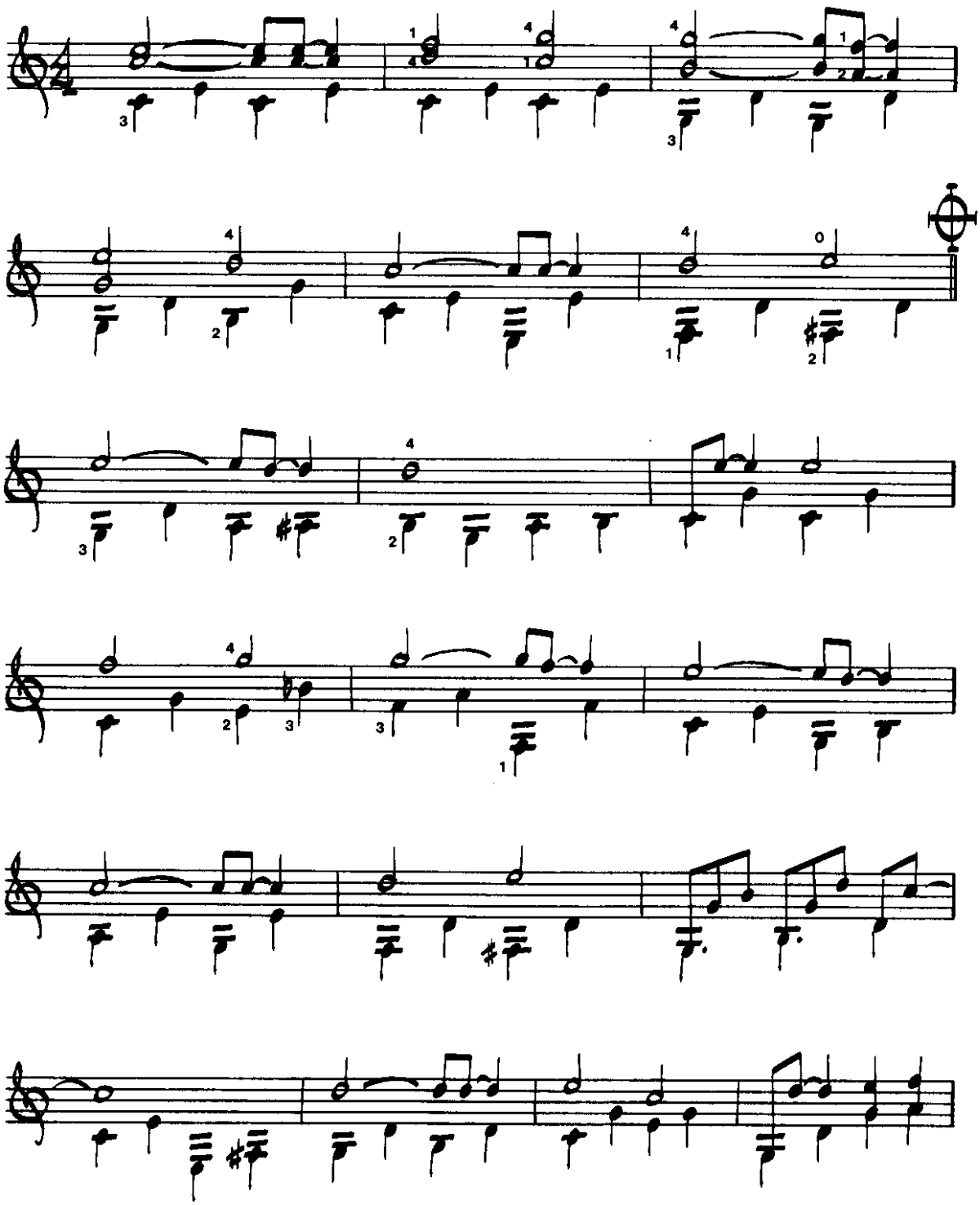

Figure 20-6
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Three Finger Picking Arrangement (Continued)

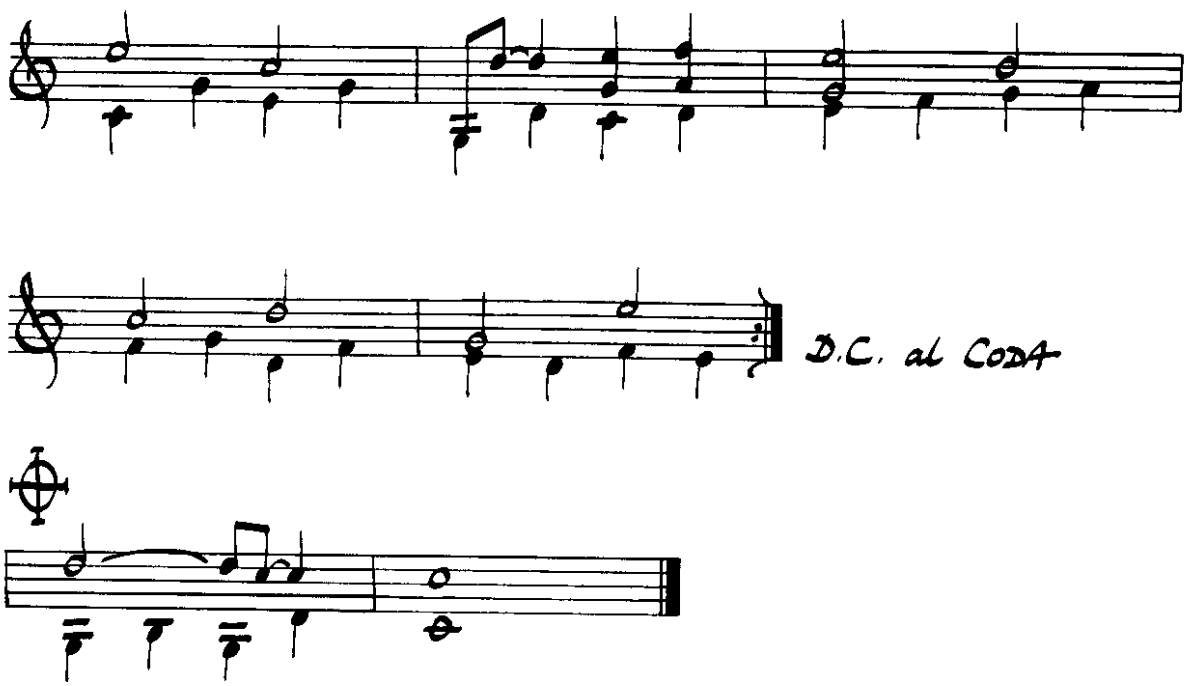

Figure 20-7

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Ode to Joy (Finger Picking Arrangement, Tab)

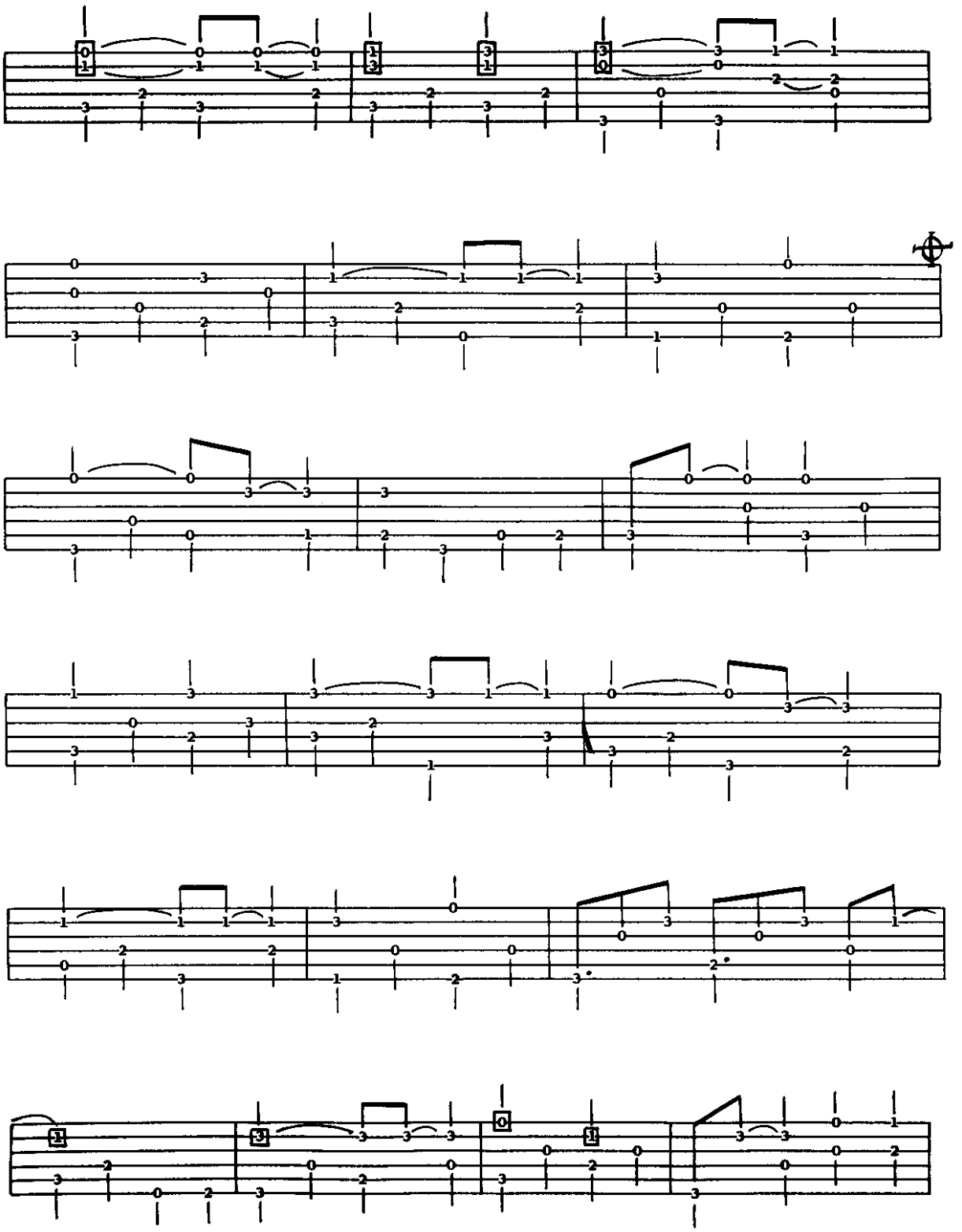

Figure 20-8
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Three Finger Picking Arrangement (Continued, Tab)

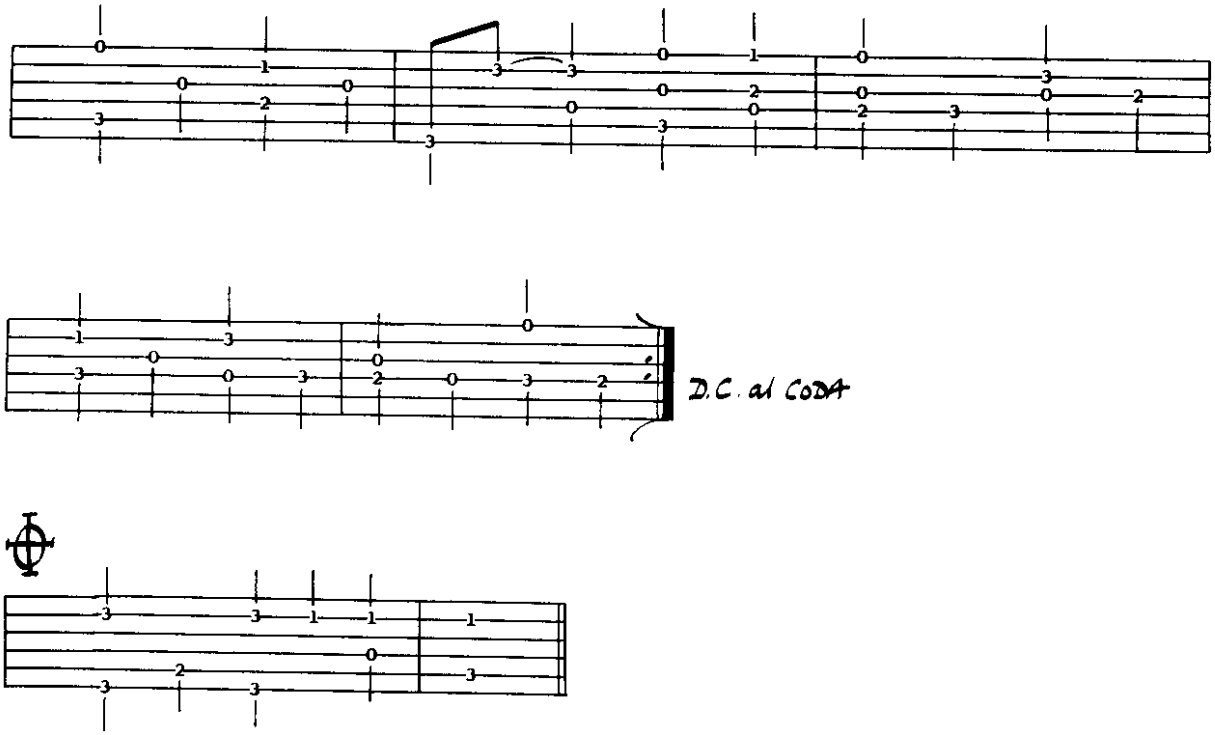

Figure 20-9

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Georgia On My Mind

(Finger Style Solo Arrangement)

Arranged for guitar by Barry Pollack

Music by Hoagy Carmichael, Lyrics by Stuart Gorrell

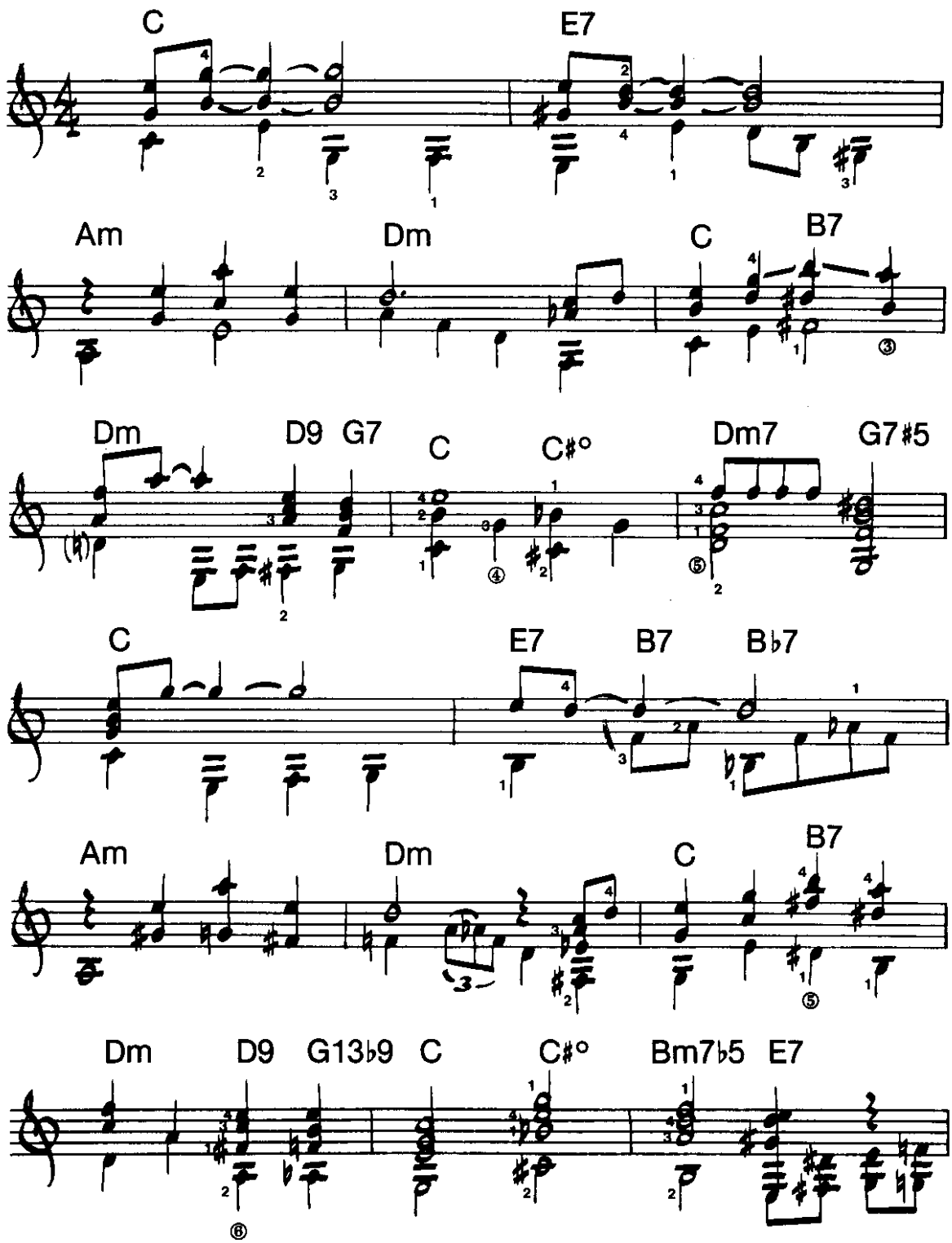

Figure 20-10

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Georgia on My Mind (Continued)

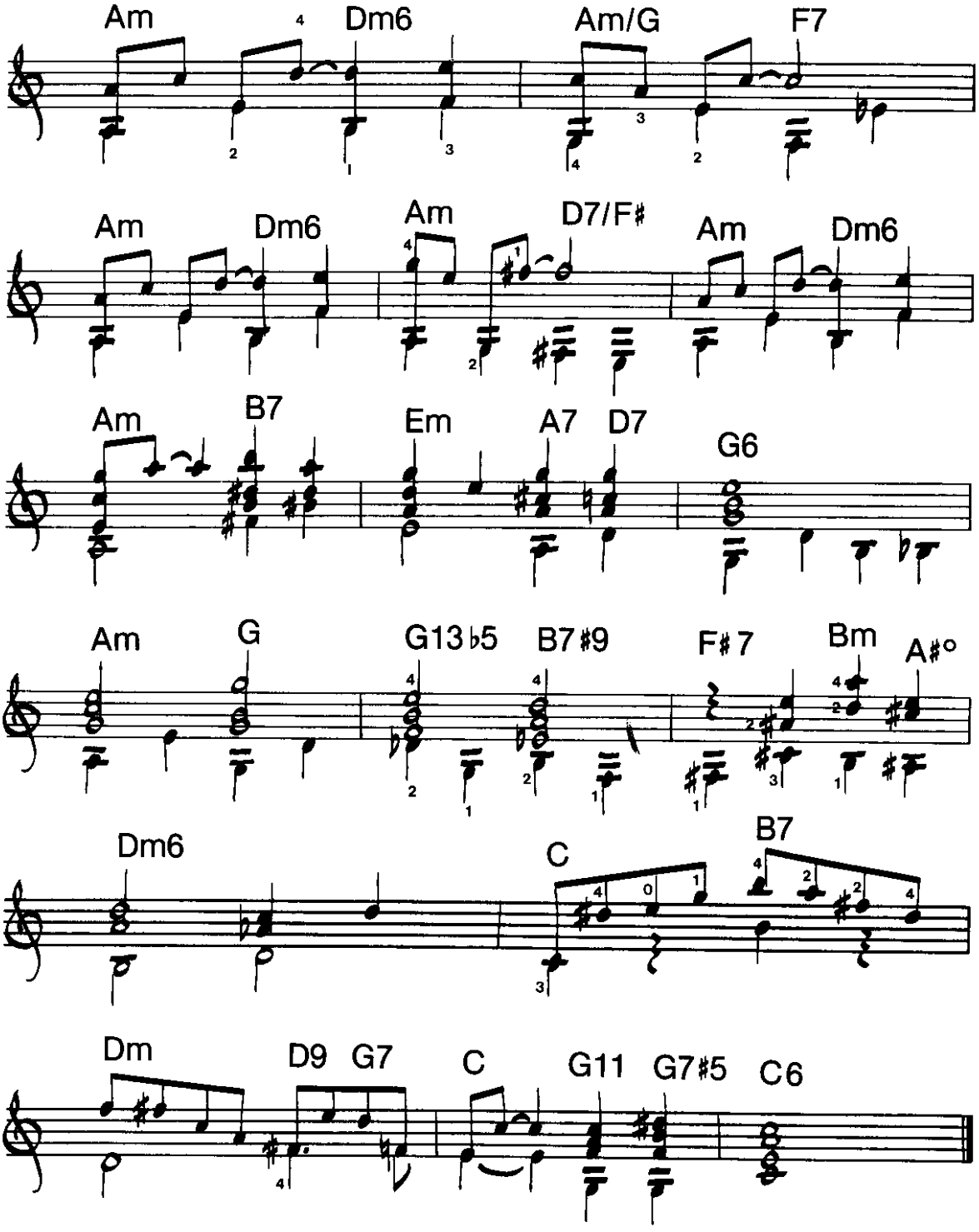

Figure 20-11

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Georgia On My Mind (Tab)

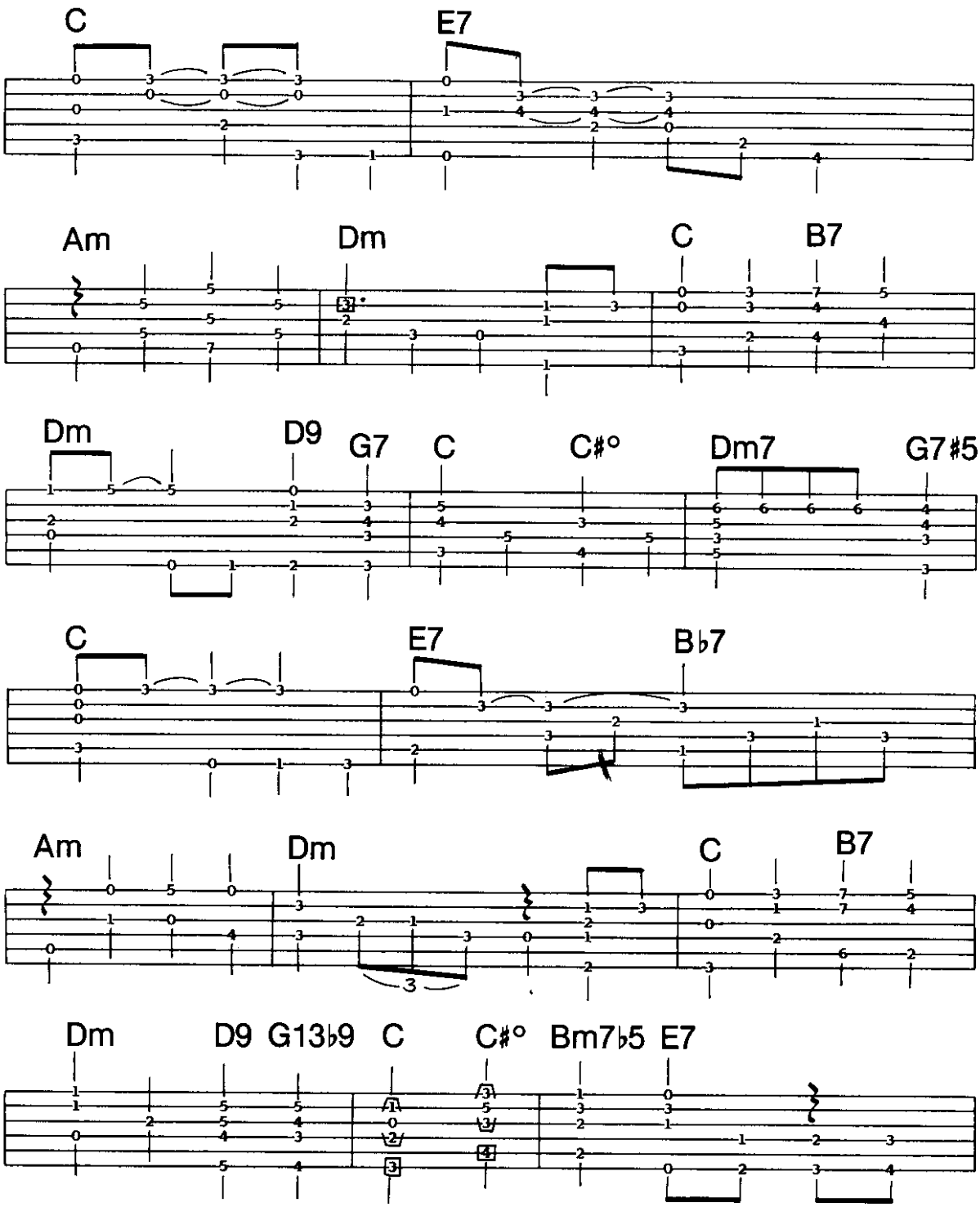

Figure 20-12

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Georgia on My Mind (Continued, Tab)

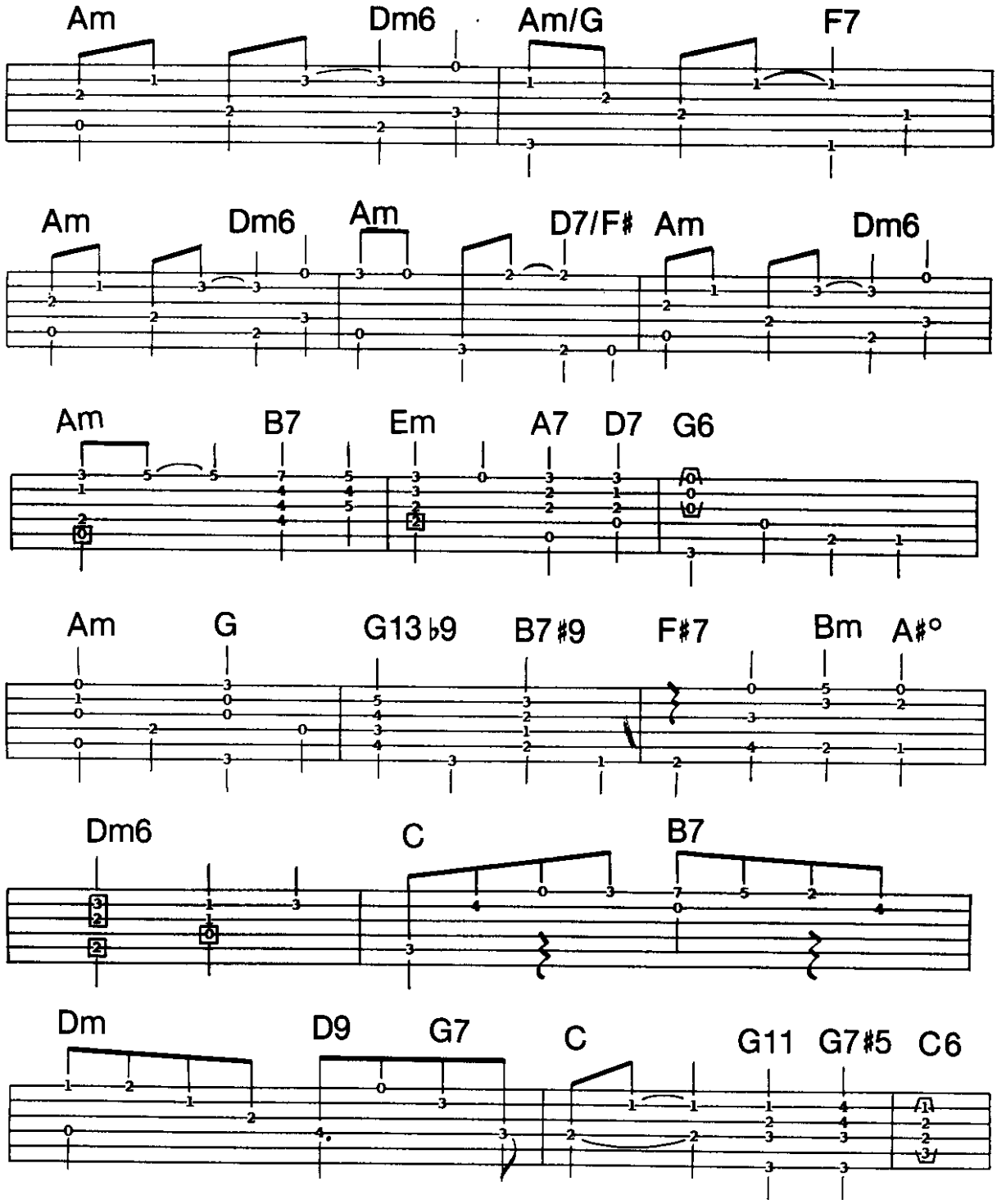

Figure 20-13

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