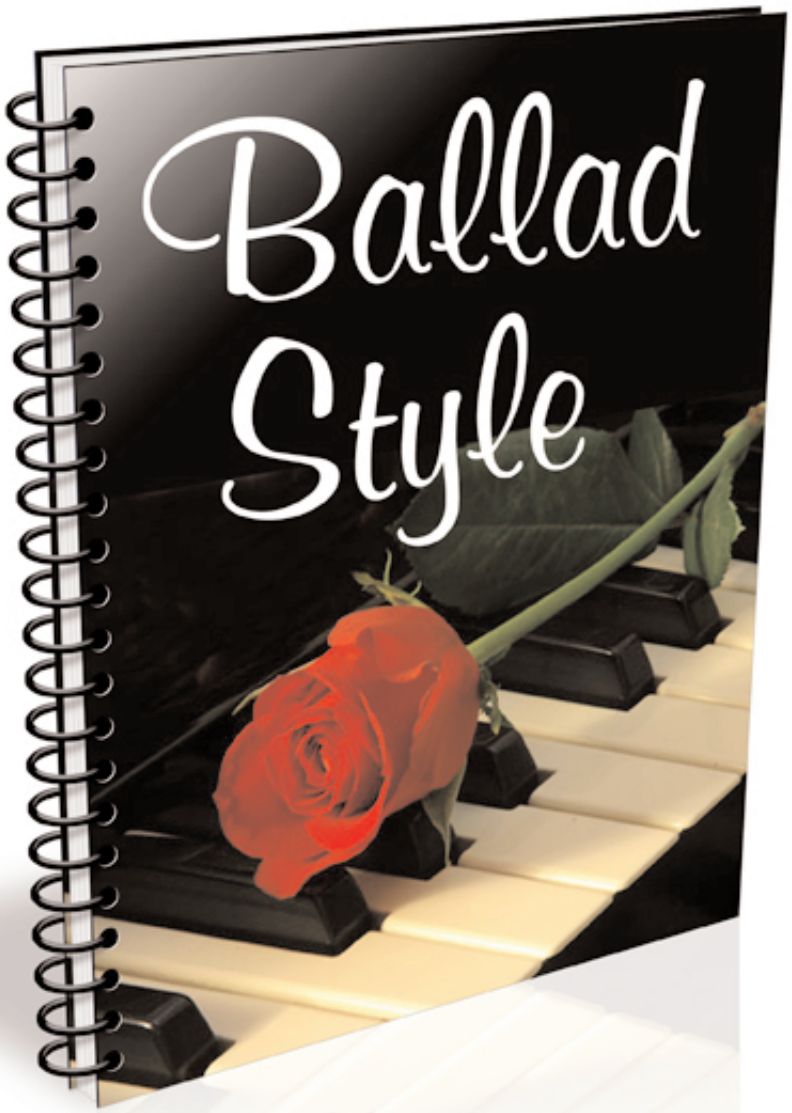
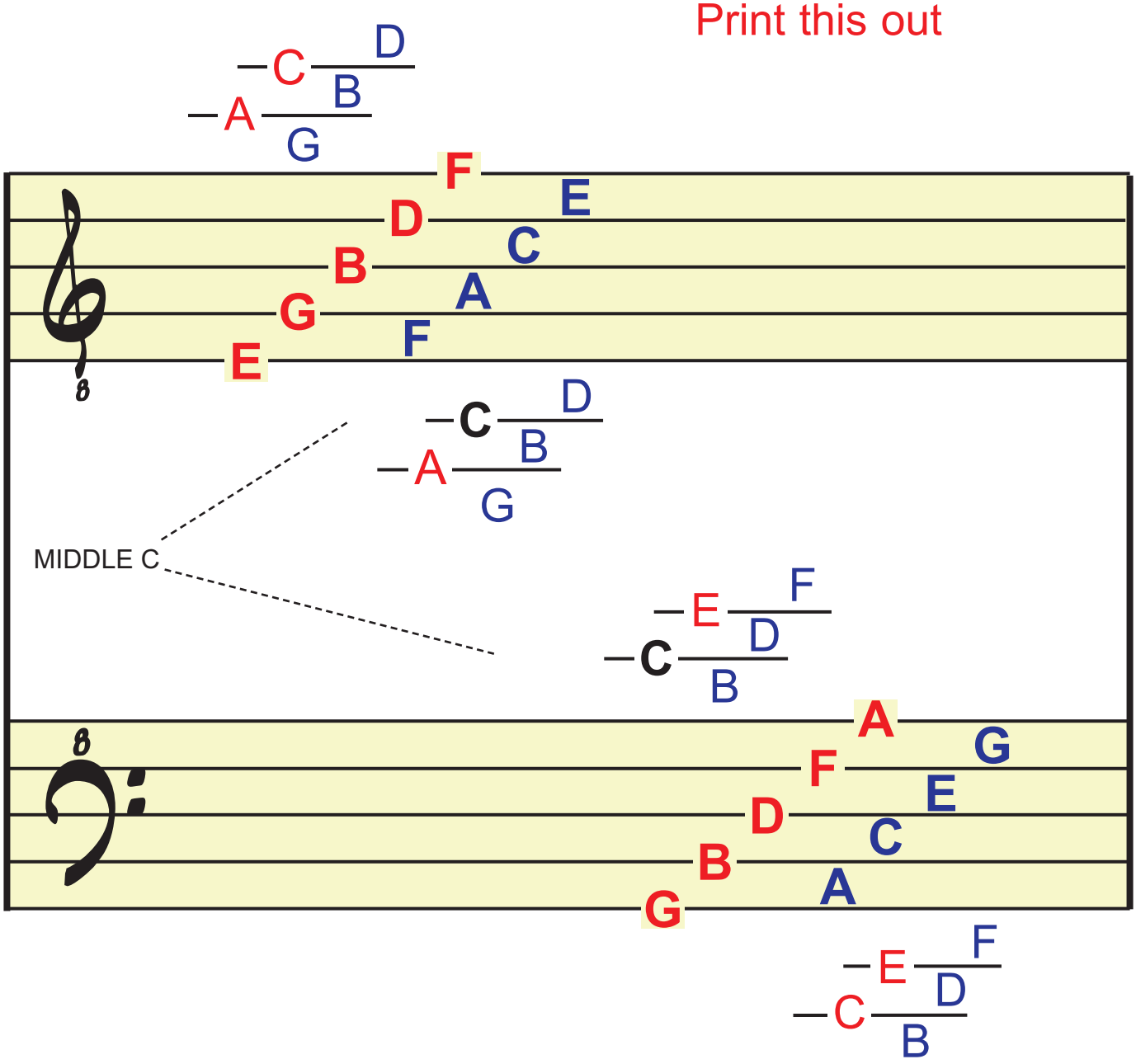
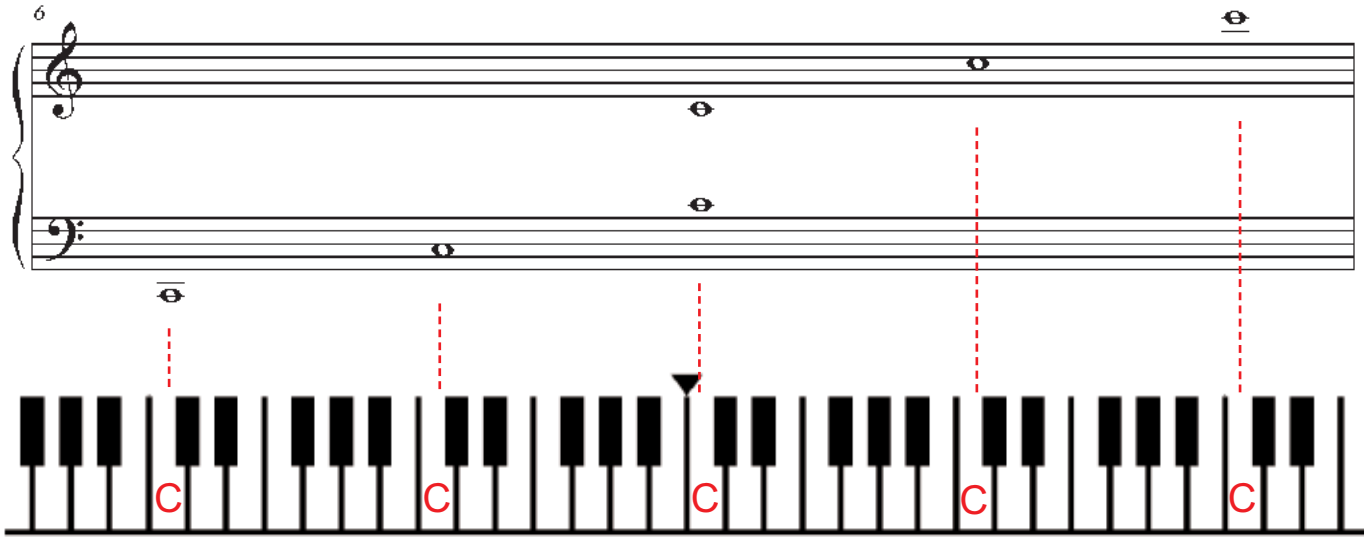

Ballad
Style

NOTE FINDER

Print this out



The position of the C's



DEVELOPING A BASIC BALLAD STYLE

GETTING THE FEEL OF IT

BALLAD STYLE

GETTING THE FEEL OF IT

Believe it or not, the EASIEST way to learn Ballad Style is to IMPROVISE before you learn any actual tunes. The reason for this is that is is quite difficult to remember the notes of actual tunes but it's a lot easier to play around and experiment with chord notes and special scales and patterns

Here's how we're going to approach learning BALLAD STYLE..

BALLAD STYLE PROCESS

1. Learn a simple LEFT HAND pattern that can be applied to any chord.

2. Put this pattern into a sequence of chords.

3. Learn the PENTATONIC SCALE - a magic 5 note scale that will sound GREAT over ALL your chords no matter what order you play the notes in!

4. EXPERIMENT with the magic scale - NO RULES!

5. Learn a more structured approach to playing Ballad style using various patterns and chord tones

6. Apply what you have learned to ACTUAL melodies.

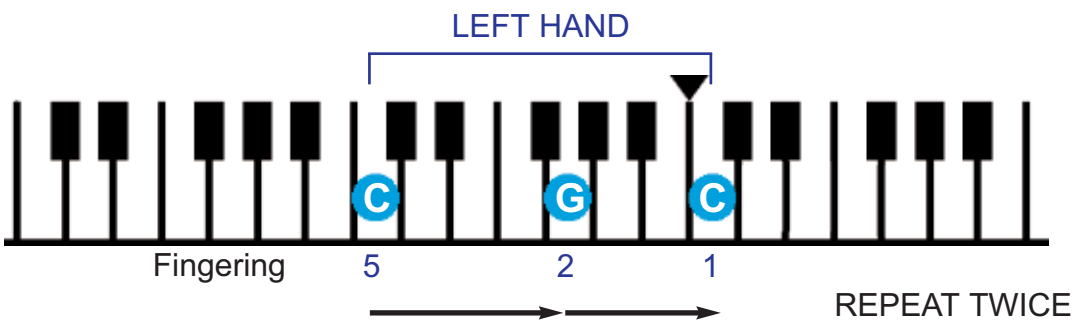
BALLAD STYLE

EXERCISE 1 - getting the FEEL of it!

PLAY VIDEO

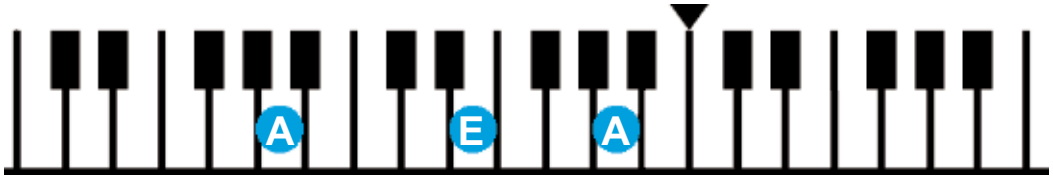
Play the following sequence of notes (based on the chord of C) ONE note at a time from the low C up to the G up to the high C (hold the high C note for two beats)
Keep the sustain pedal down throughout

C



Now move the whole pattern TWO notes left based on the chord of Am

Am



Then two notes left again to F

F

Then two notes left again to G

G

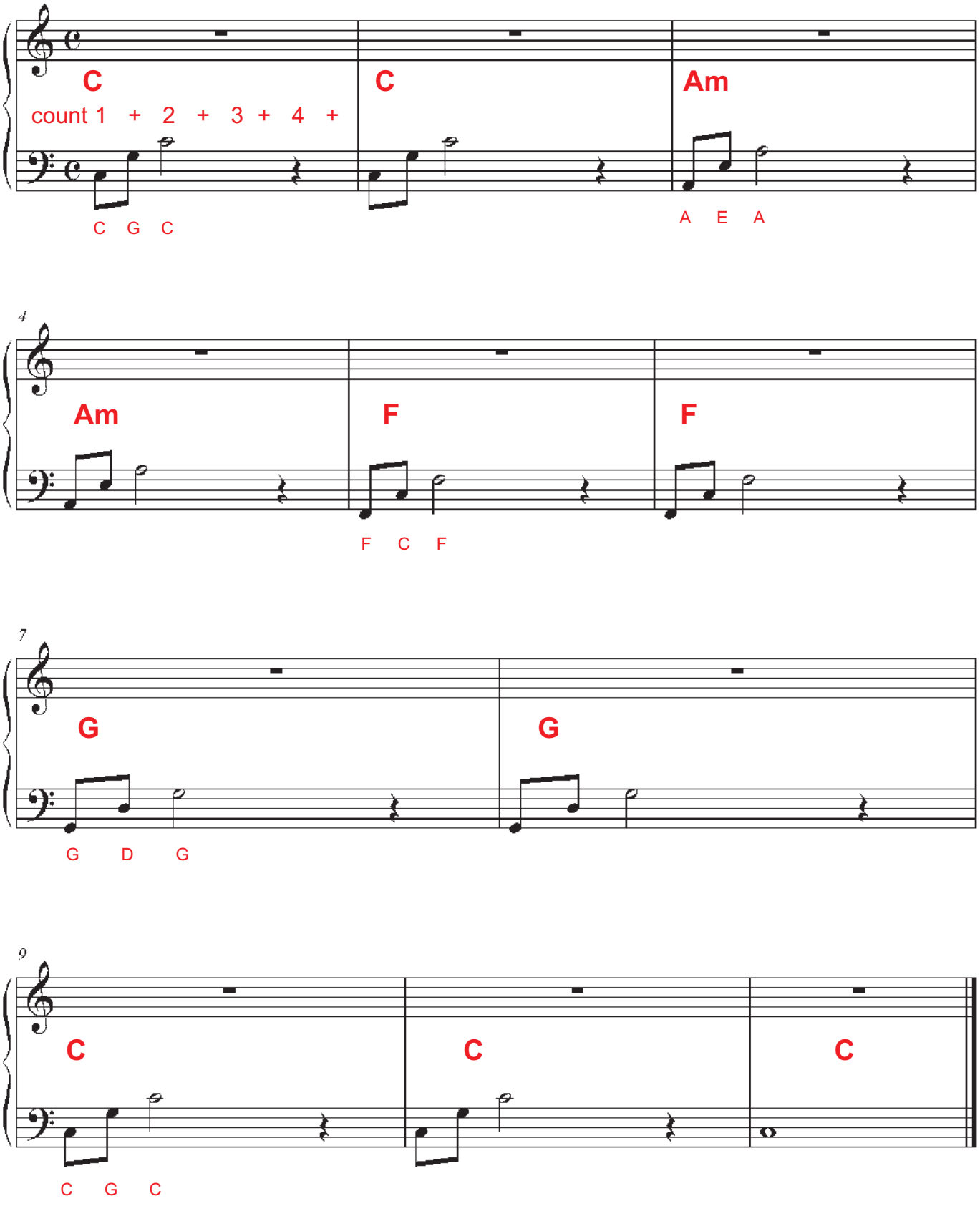
Play each sequence TWICE
So - 2 x C, 2 x Am, 2 x F, 2 x G and back to C

(Keep the sustain pedal down through each sequence
Lift it and replace it BETWEEN chord changes)

BALLAD STYLE

EXERCISE 1

In Musical Notation



BALLAD STYLE

EXERCISE 2

THE MAGICAL PENTATONIC SCALE

OK - you have the Left Hand sorted - what about the **RIGHT HAND**?

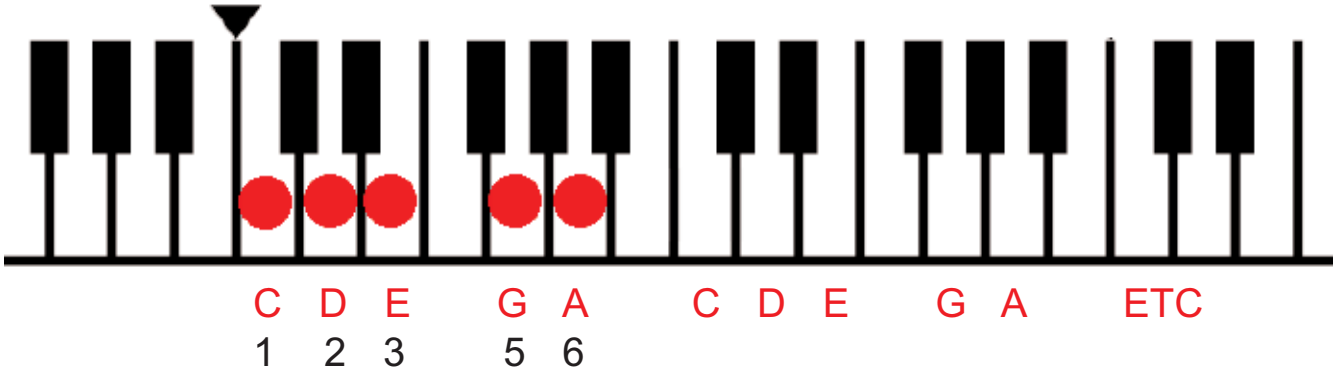
You are now going to learn the EASIEST and most useful scale of them all

The 5 note PENTATONIC SCALE.

This scale has been around since the dawn of time. The beauty of it is it sounds GREAT over a WIDE variety of chord changes (in the relevant key).

It's construction is simple. You play the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 6th of the major scale. (leave out the 4th and 7th)
So if you were playing chord changes in the key of C your C PENTATONIC scale would be as follows

C PENTATONIC SCALE (Right Hand)

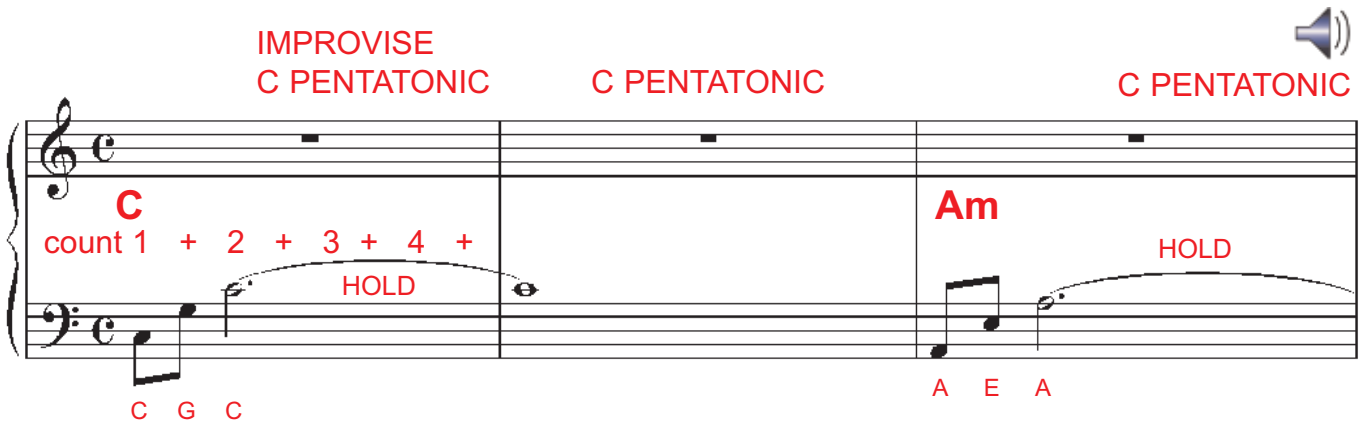


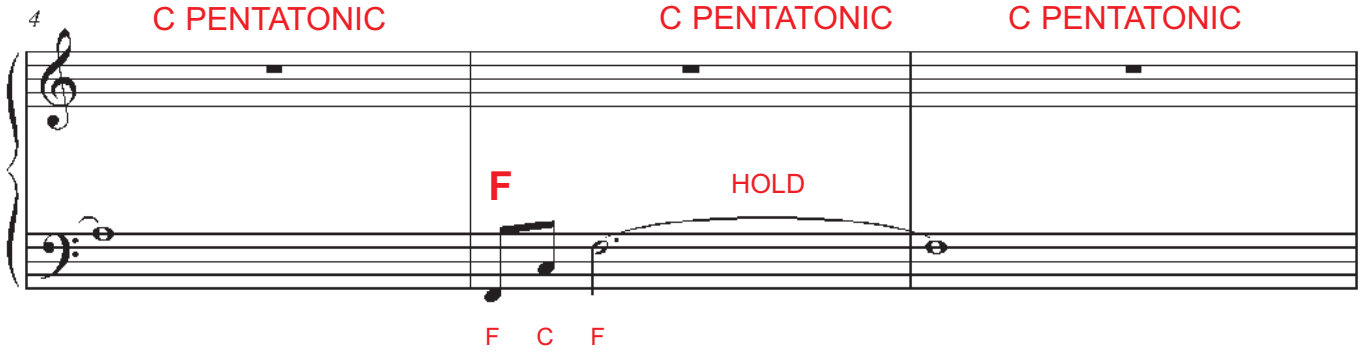
On the following page you are going to play the same left hand chord changes as in exercise 1 but this time play ANY notes of the C pentatonic scale in the second half of each bar.
Don't be shy - try all kinds of variations - try running up two or three octaves -

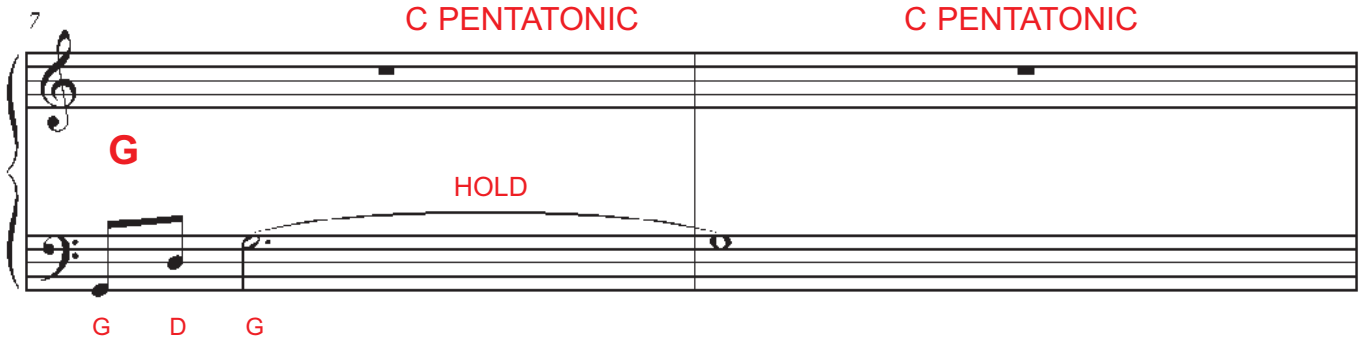
To give you more time to experiment with the RIGHT HAND only play each chord change ONCE but hold it for TWO bars

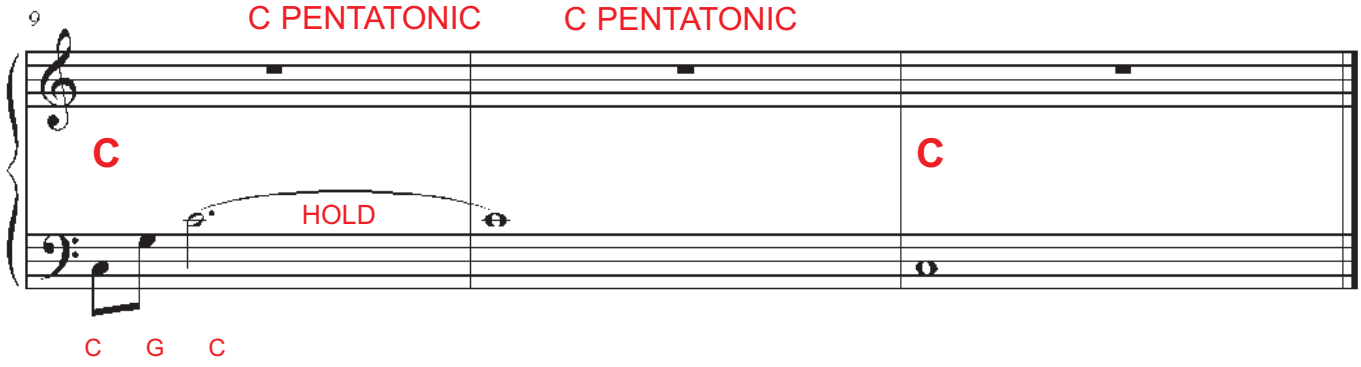
BALLAD STYLE

EXERCISE 3









BALLAD STYLE

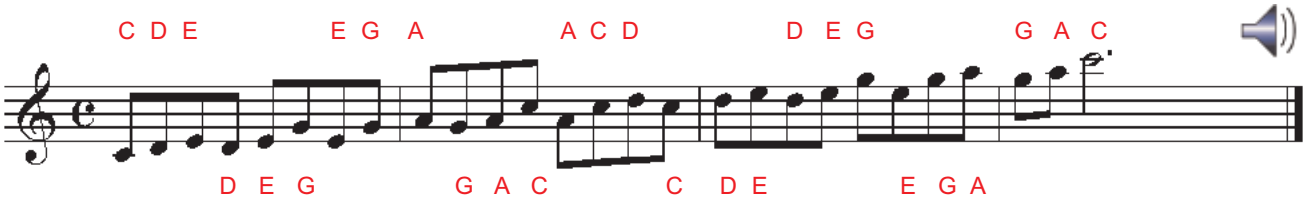
PENTATONIC PATTERN IDEAS

PLAY VIDEO

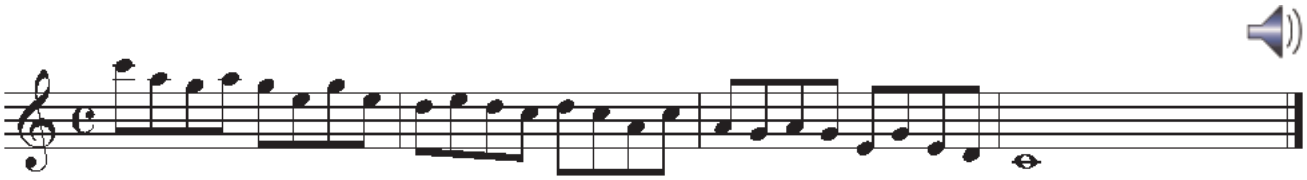
If you prefer a more structured approach try the following patterns that use only the notes of the PENTATONIC scale. (Use ANY fingering)

1. Straight up and down

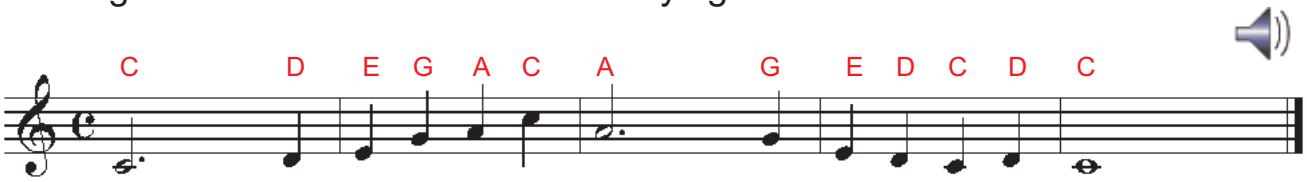
2. Three steps forwards - one step backwards



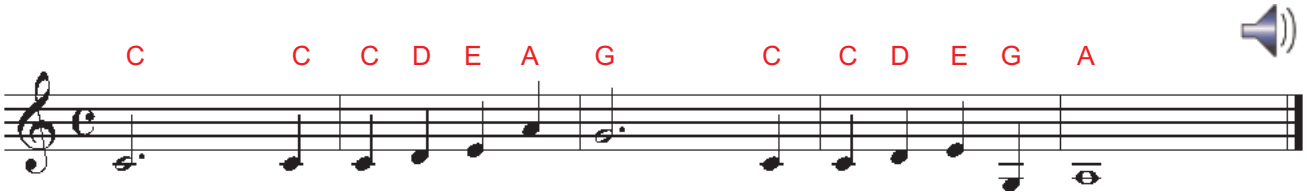
3. As above but in reverse



4. Using the scale notes in order but varying the note duration



5. Using the scale notes in RANDOM order and varying the note duration



DEVELOPING A BASIC BALLAD STYLE

A STRUCTURED APPROACH

BALLAD STYLE
A STRUCTURED APPROACH

Hopefully you have had some fun improvising with the PENTATONIC scale over your simple three note LEFT HAND pattern.

Now let's look at various ways in which you can make your playing more musically structured and hopefully more exciting.

USING THE CHORD CHANGES TO GUIDE THE RIGHT HAND

In the previous examples you were able to use ONE scale over the four chord changes. This works very well but obviously has it's limitations.

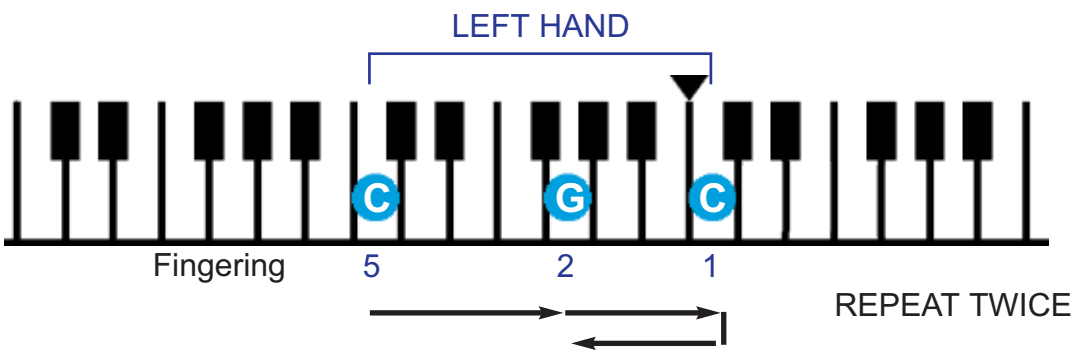
We are now going to use each chord change to help us determine which notes will sound best in the Right Hand. This will give us more choice and will bring more structure to our arrangements.

BALLAD STYLE

A VARIATION ON THE THREE NOTE LEFT HAND PATTERN

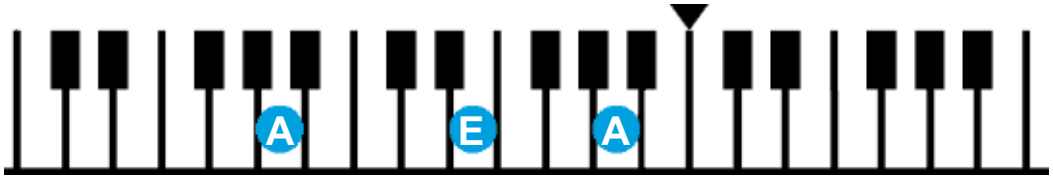
Play the following sequence of notes (based on the chord of C) ONE note at a time from the low C up to the G up to the C **and back down to the G** (4 notes in total)
Keep the sustain pedal down throughout

C



Now move the whole pattern TWO notes left based on the chord of Am

Am



Then two notes left again to F

F

Then one note right again to G

G

Play each sequence TWICE
So - 2 x C, 2 x Am, 2 x F, 2 x G and back to C

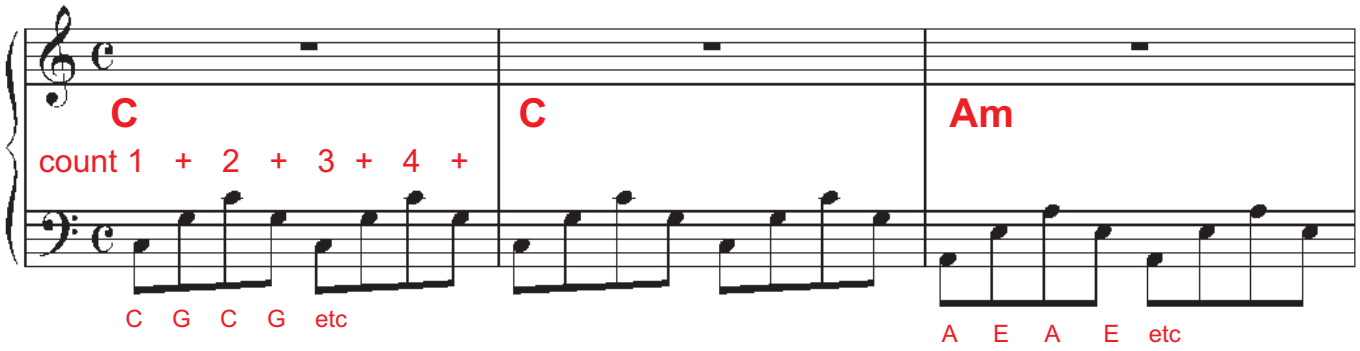
(Keep the sustain pedal down through each sequence
Lift it and replace it BETWEEN chord changes)

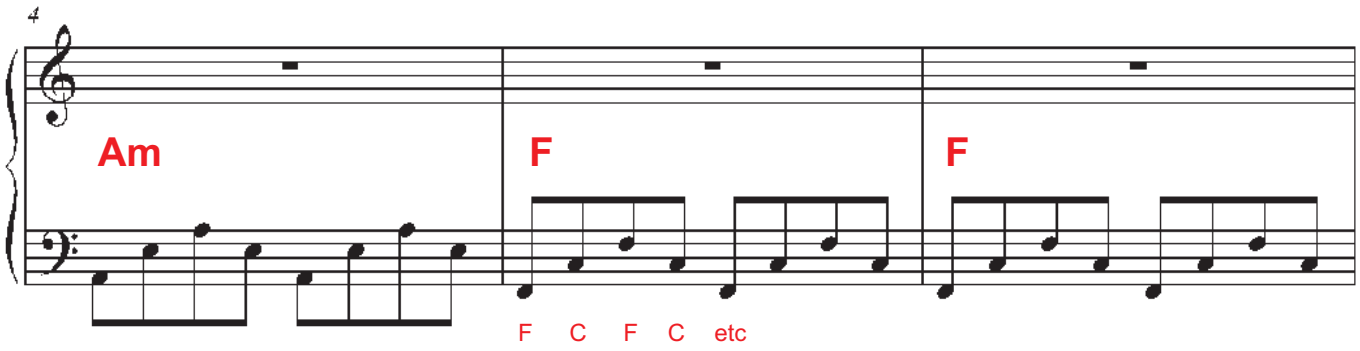
BALLAD STYLE

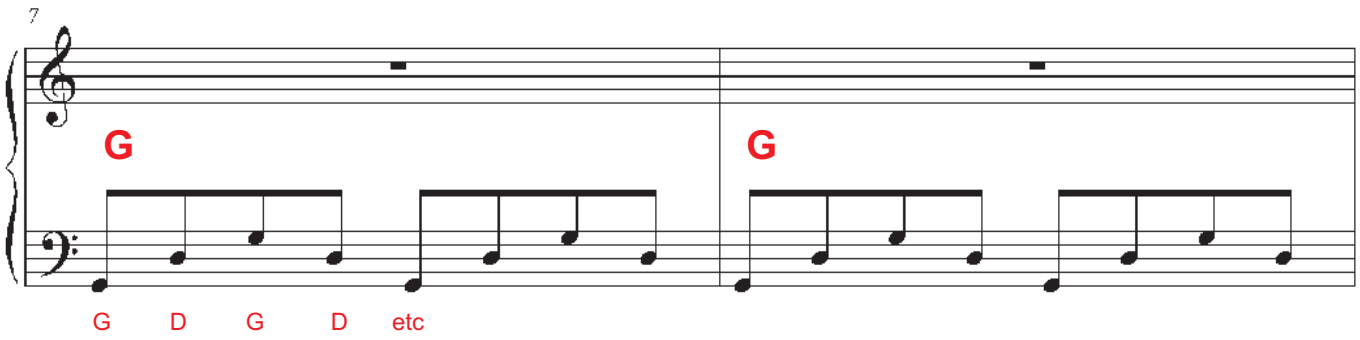
EXERCISE 1

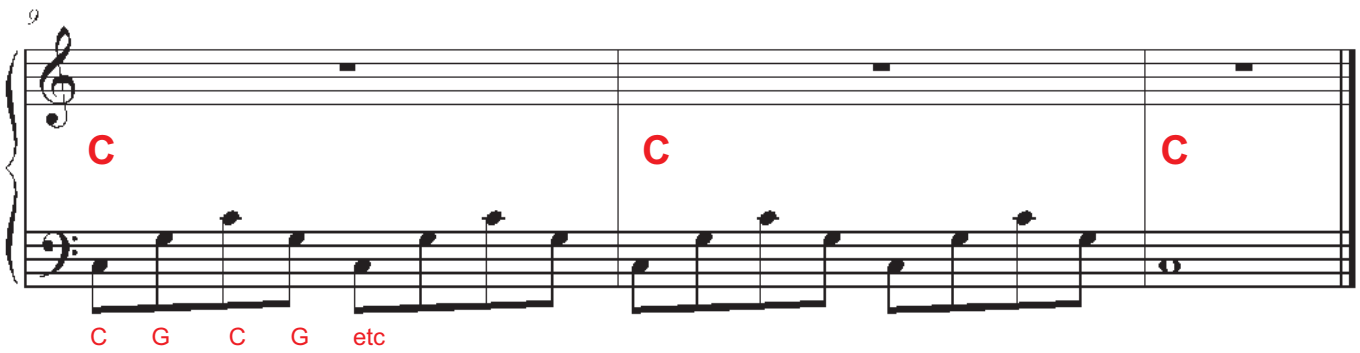
In Musical Notation

Left hand plays 8 half beats per bar









TAKE NOTE!

At this stage you can either read on
and learn to IMPROVISE
over your LEFT HAND patterns

OR

You can jump ahead to page 29
and learn how to apply the
Left Hand Rhythm
in 3 EASY STEPS
to an ACTUAL tune
(Auld Lang Sang)

You can then return to here and
learn to Improvise..

Decisions...decisions?..

BALLAD STYLE

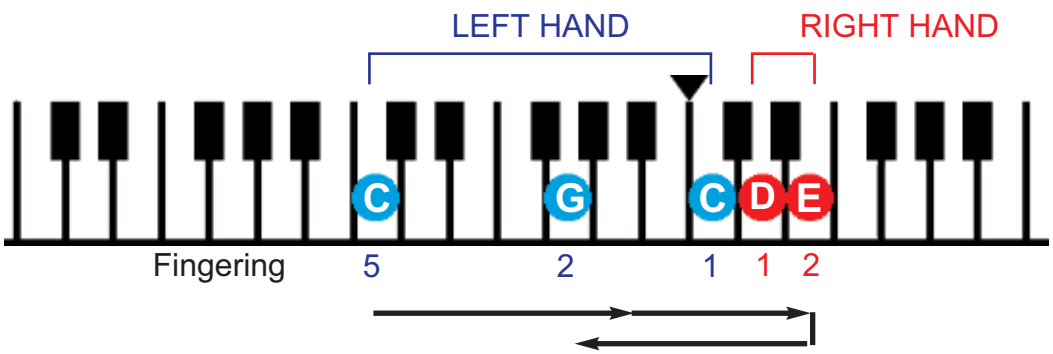
EXERCISE 2 Adding Right Hand notes

PLAY VIDEO

Play the following sequence of notes (based on the chord of C) ONE note at a time from the low C up to the E and back down to the G (8 notes in total)

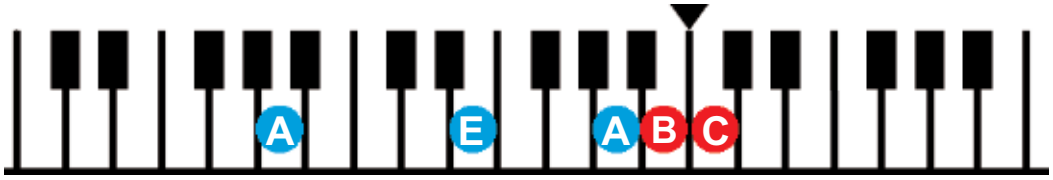
Keep the sustain pedal down throughout

C



Now move the whole pattern TWO notes left based on the chord of Am

Am



Then two notes left again to F

F

Then one note right to G

G

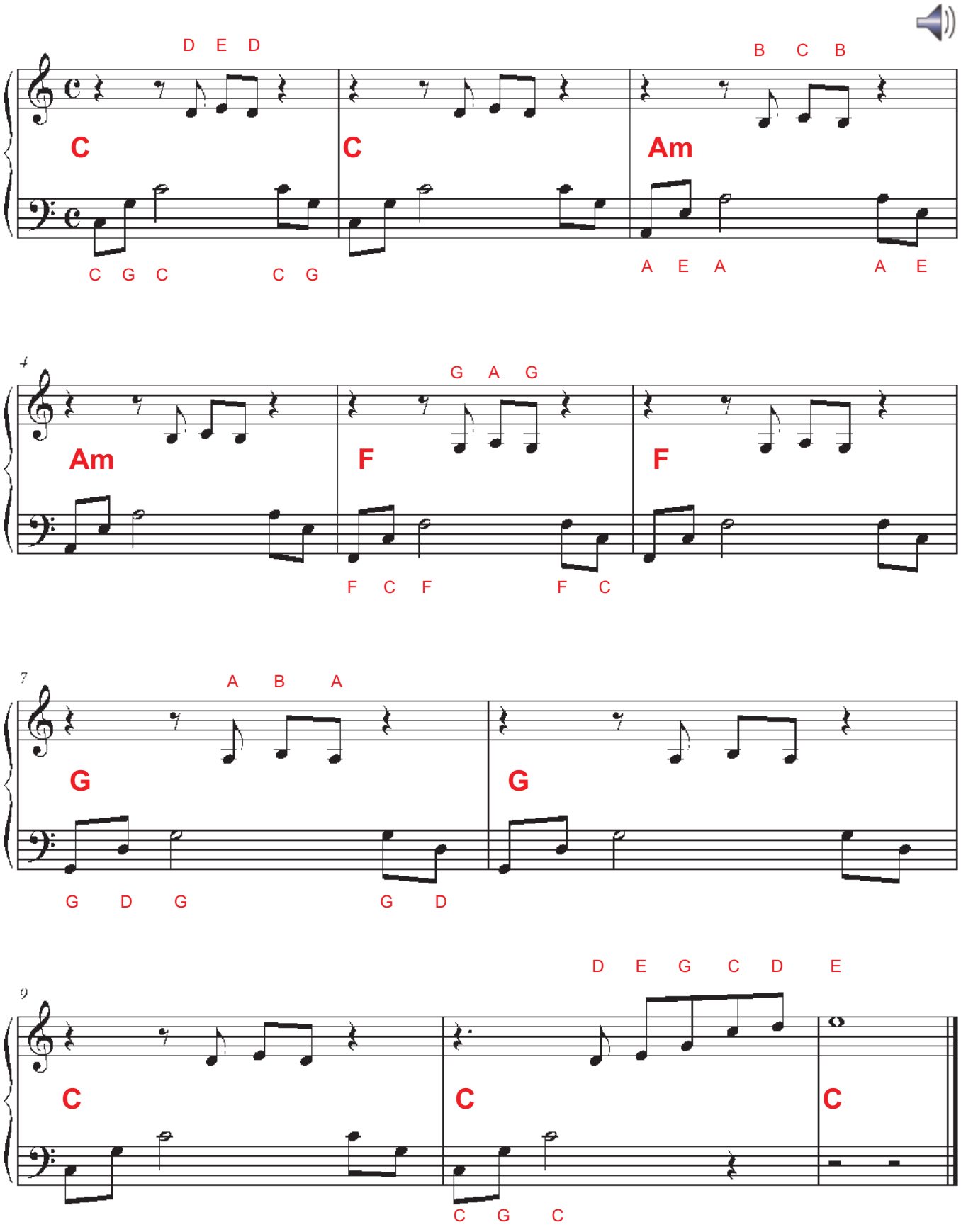
Play each sequence TWICE
So - 2 x C, 2 x Am, 2 x F, 2 x G and back to C

(Keep the sustain pedal down through each sequence
Lift it and replace it BETWEEN chord changes)

BALLAD STYLE

EXERCISE 2

In Musical Notation

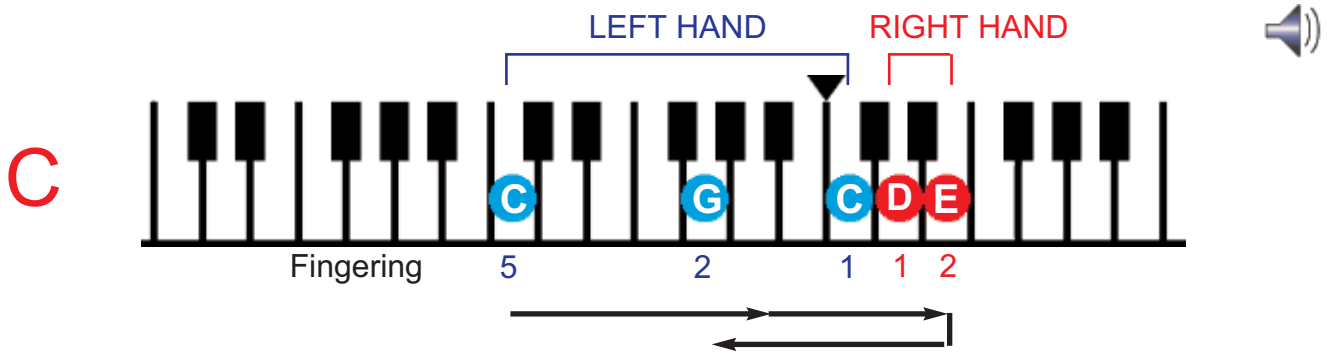


IMPROVISING BALLAD STYLE

IMPROVISING BALLAD STYLE

The easiest way to begin improvising is to VARY the structure or rhythm of SAFE notes (usually chord tones with the 2nd as a passing note).

Let's return to the last sequence you played. (page 15)

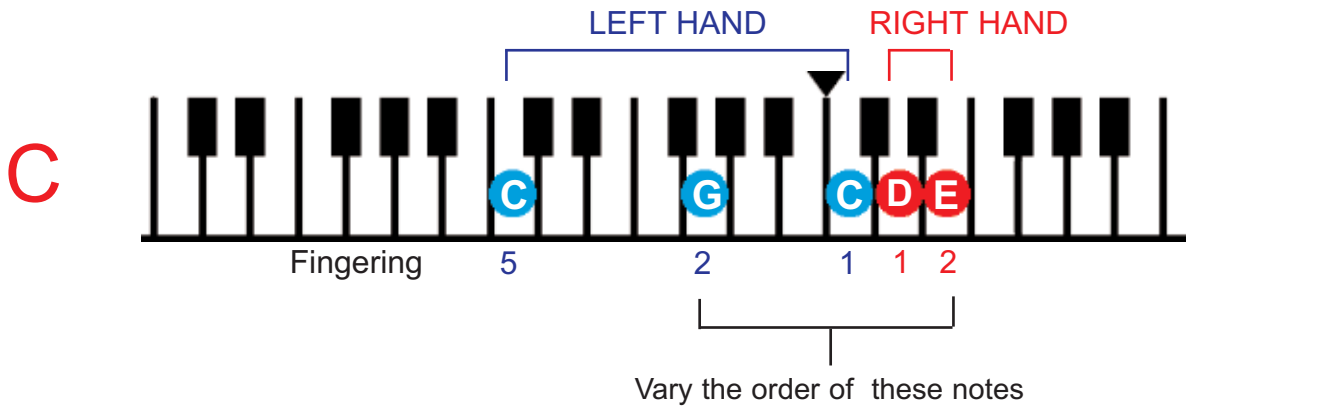


Do you remember you played it in a very structured way starting from the bottom note all the way to the top and back down again.

EXERCISE 3.
Play the sequence repeatedly again but now and then experiment with the order in which you play the 4 higher notes (G - C - D - E)

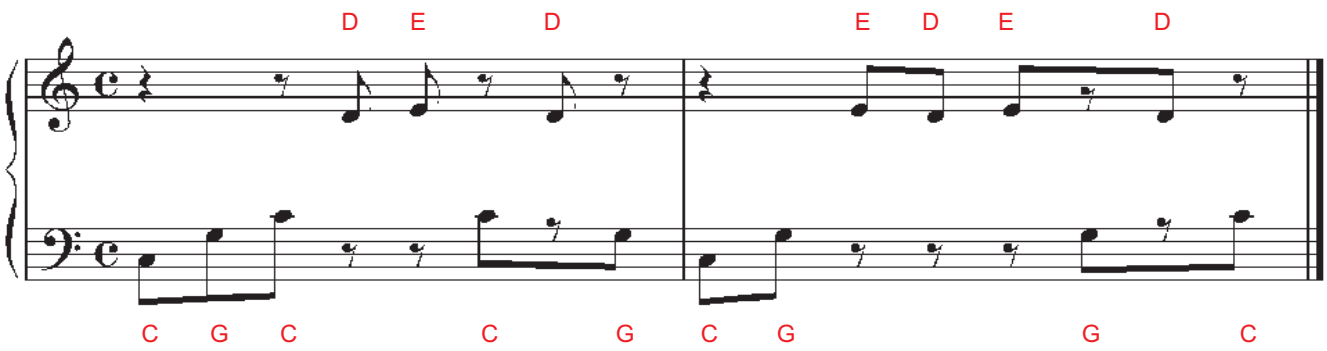
Imagine you are tapping out a variety of gentle rhythms on a set of Bongos.
If you want to - practice by tapping your fingers on the table.

Make sure your variations all fit into the underlying four beats (or 8 HALF beats) per bar



PLAY VIDEO

EXERCISE 3. Example in musical notation

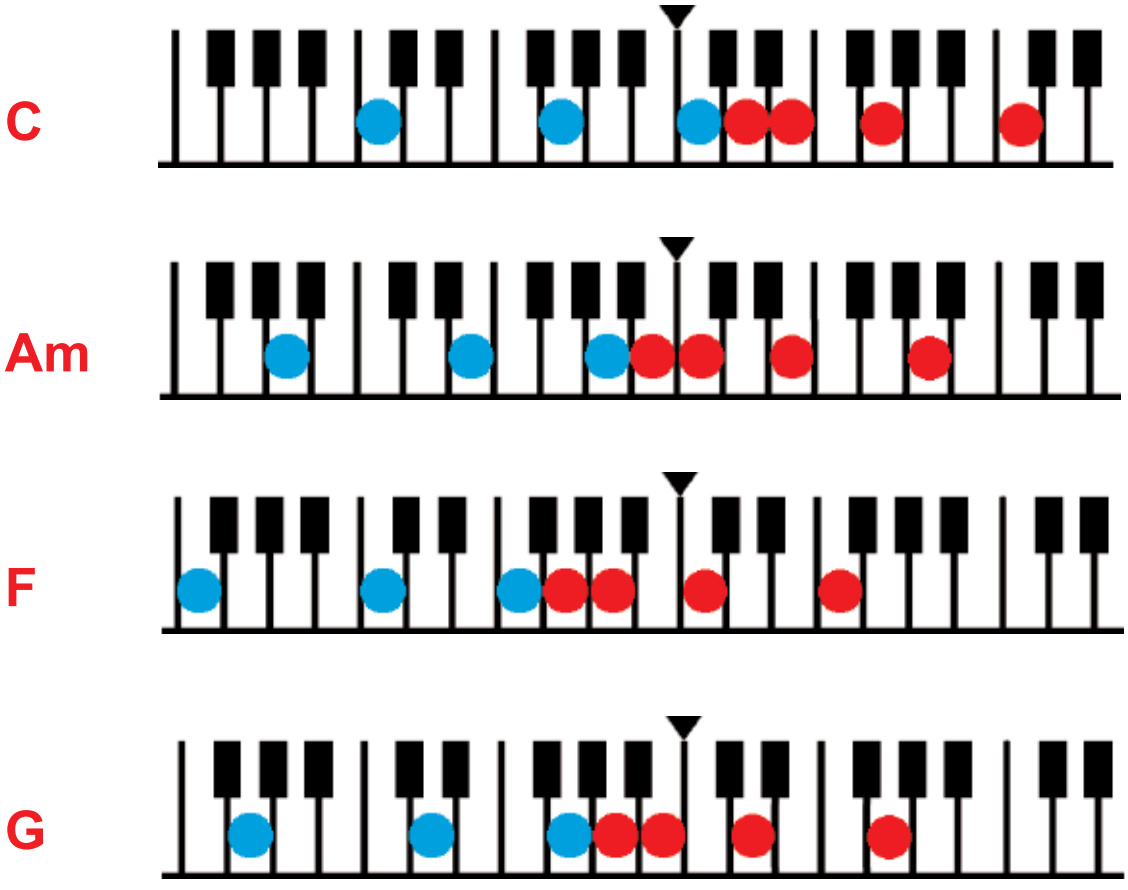


Now transpose this exercise to the chords of Am, F and G

PLAY VIDEO

EXERCISE 4. Expanding the range of notes

Obviously, the more notes that you know will work, the more variety you can bring to your improvisations. Let's add a few more chord tones.



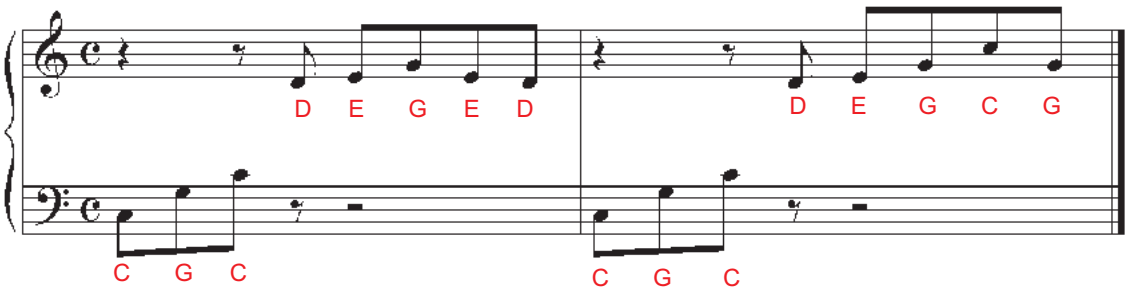
Experiment with these extra chord tones - there are a few ideas on the following page to help get you started.

IMPROVISING BALLAD STYLE

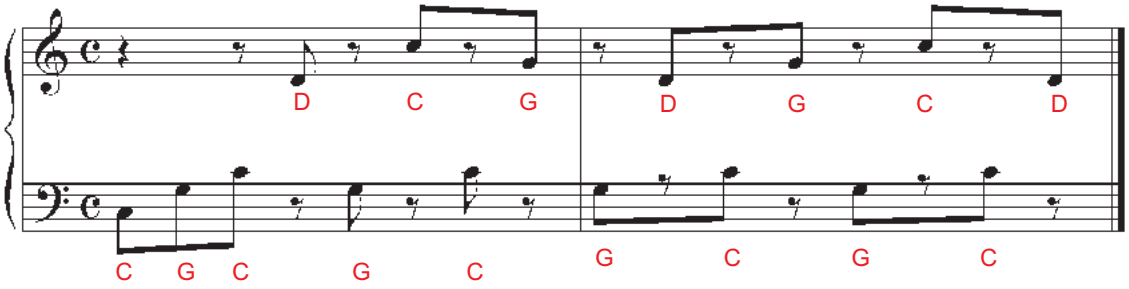
EXERCISE 4

Ideas using the extra chord tones (for the C Chord)

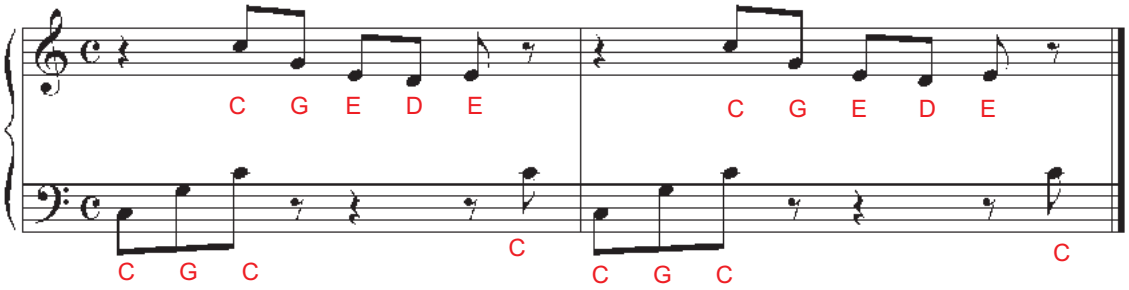
1. STRAIGHT UP AND DOWN



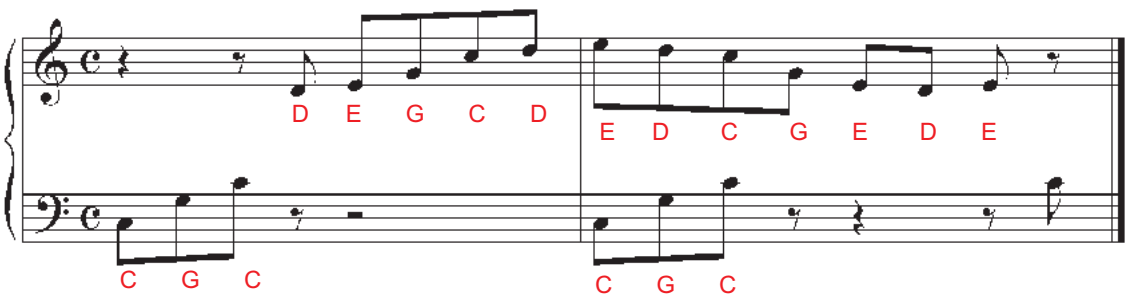
2. FREE STYLE - (Like a Butterfly - ANYTHING goes!)



3. DOWNWARDS MOTION RIGHT HAND



4. UP AND DOWN BY ADDING AN EXTRA D AND E



IMPROVISING BALLAD STYLE

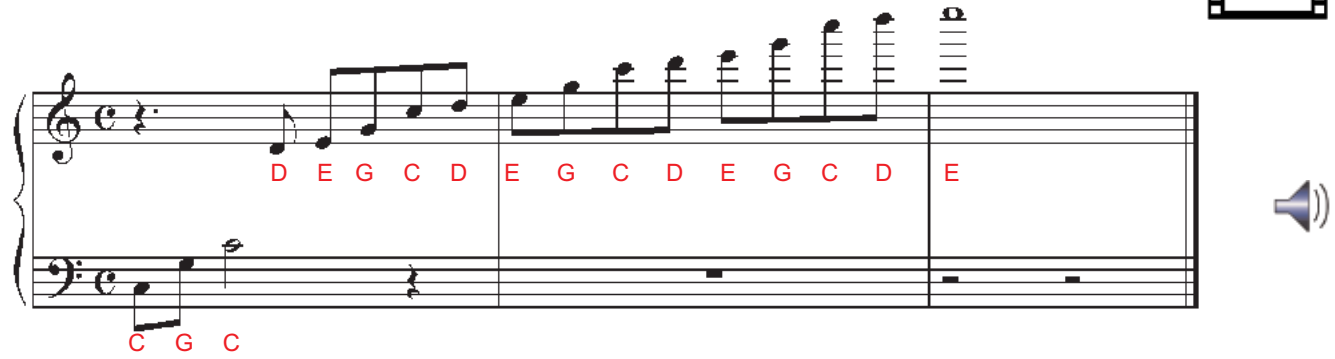
EXERCISE 5. MOVING BEYOND THE ‘SAFE’ NOTES

When you feel comfortable using your ‘safe’ note in a variety of ways - experiment further by adding in more variety or more notes.

1. RUNS

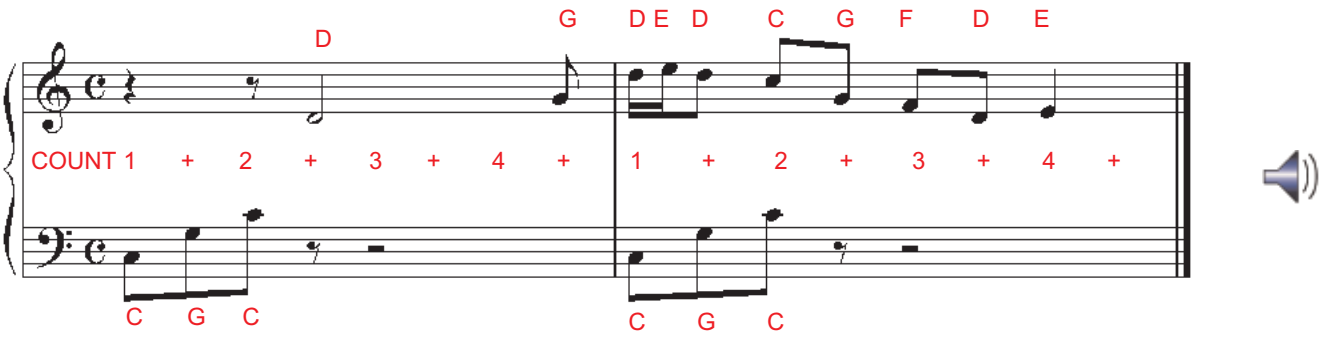
Simply continue your ‘safe’ notes up the piano for two or more octaves

PLAY VIDEO



2. VARIATION IN NOTE DURATION

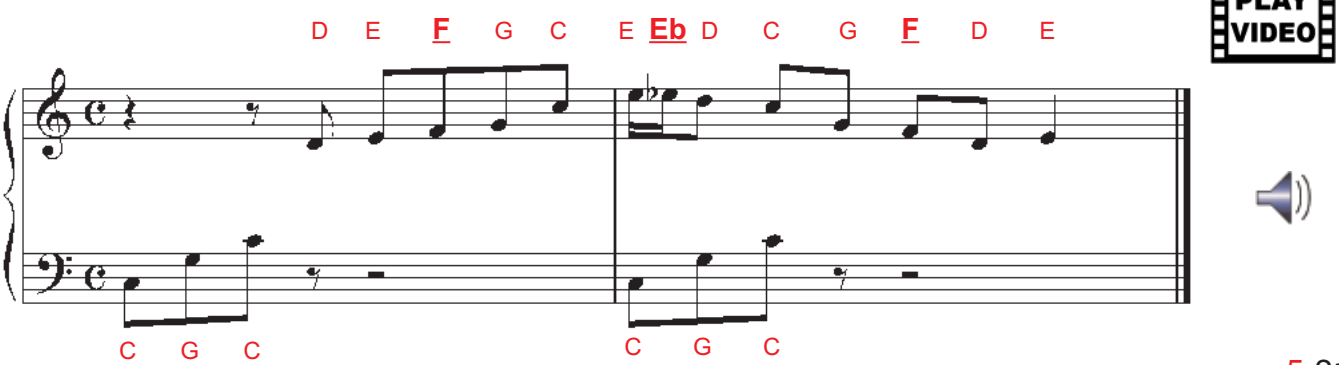
Up to now the examples have all used 8 half beats per bar. Try to vary the duration of the notes. Make use of periods of silence or use quarter notes to add little moments or excitement.



3. PASSING NOTES

These are notes that are used ‘outside’ of chord tones either to add ‘colour’ or to connect chord tones in a more interesting way.

PLAY VIDEO



IMPROVISING BALLAD STYLE

4. DOUBLE UP ON NOTES WITH THIRDS, SIXTHS OR OCTAVES.

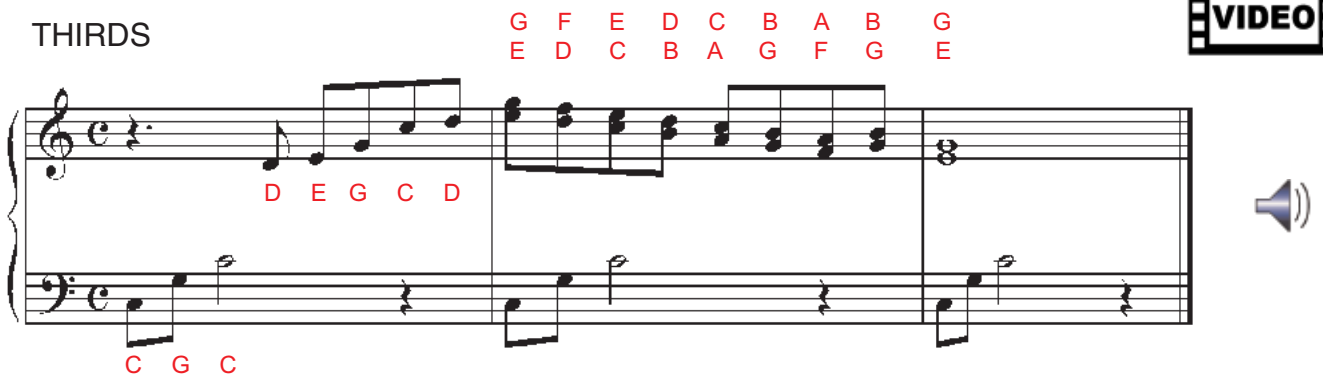
If you add another note to each melody note it creates a nice ‘ringing’ sound. Add the extra note BENEATH the melody note (the top note is the one our ears pick out).

Stick to notes of the key you are playing in (ie the white notes in C major).
A ‘third’ is a note three scale tones away (ie C - E or D - F)
A ‘sixth’ is a note six scale tones away (ie C - A or F - D)

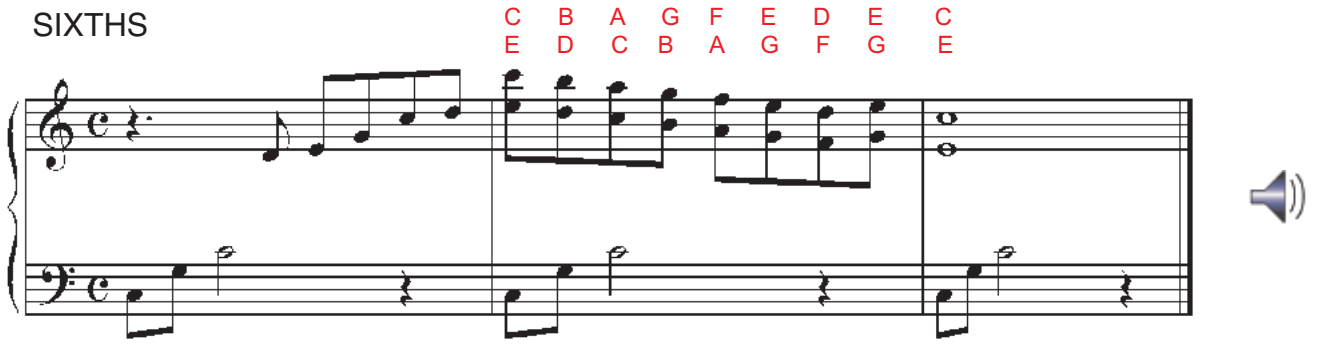
We use Thirds and Sixths or Octaves because they work more consistently with more notes in the scale. However, they don’t ALWAYS sound right with every tone - use your own judgement.

PLAY VIDEO

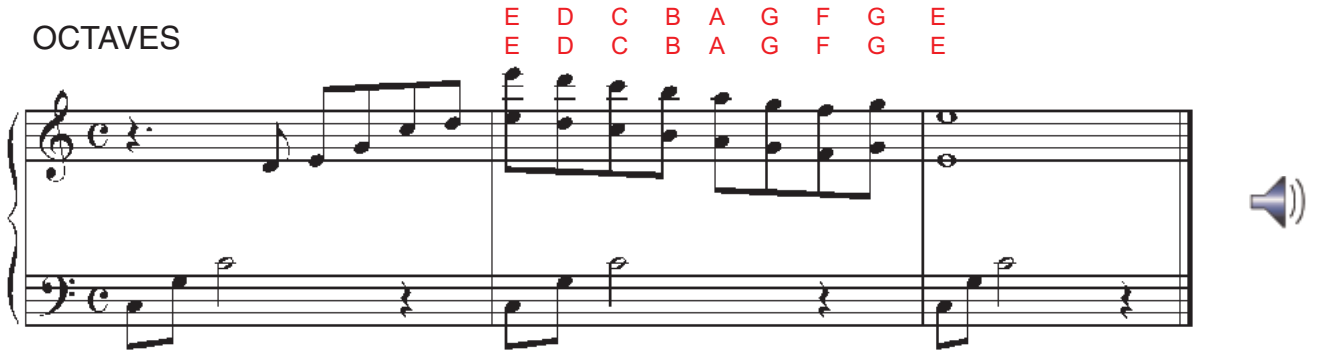
THIRDS



SIXTHS

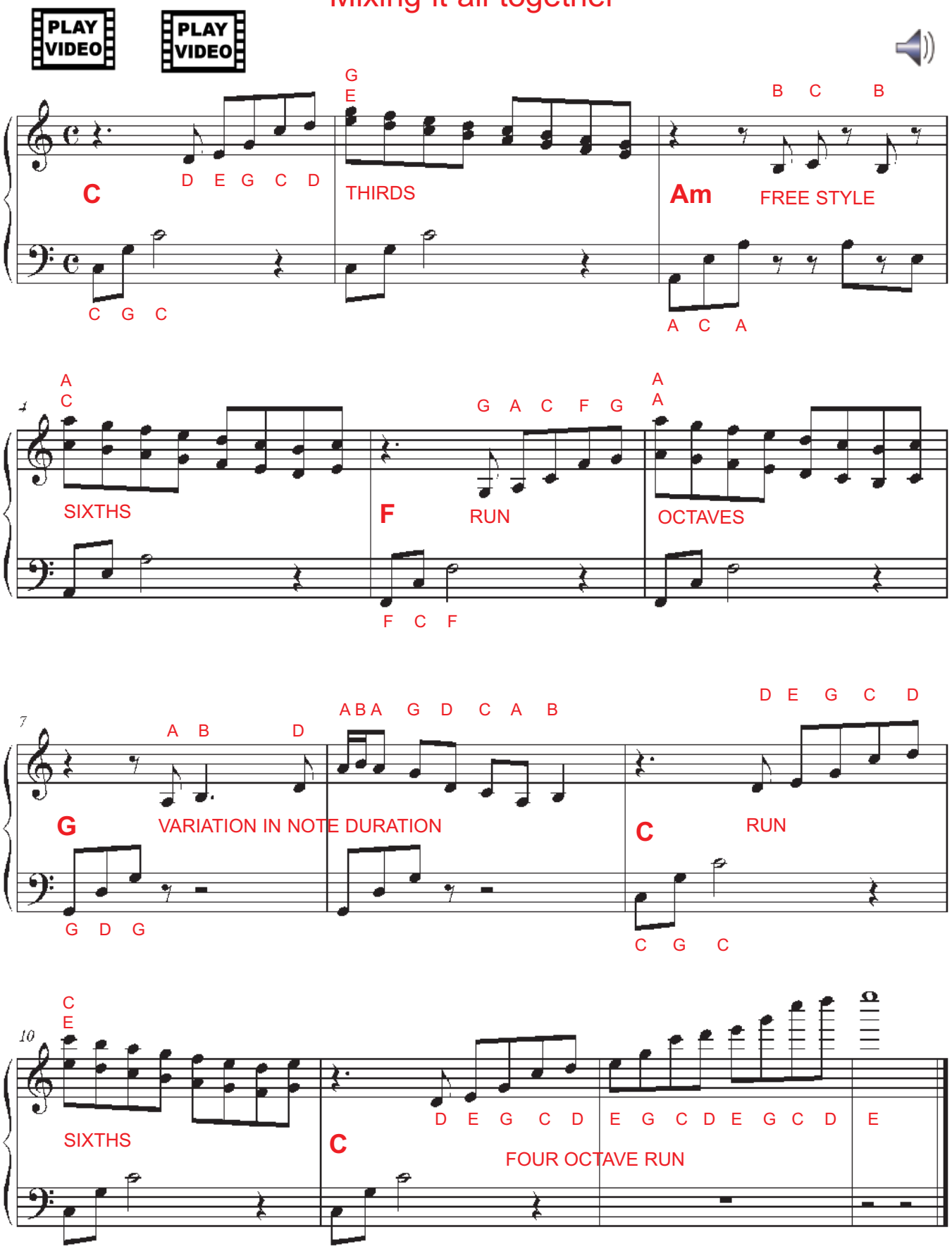


OCTAVES



IMPROVISING BALLAD STYLE

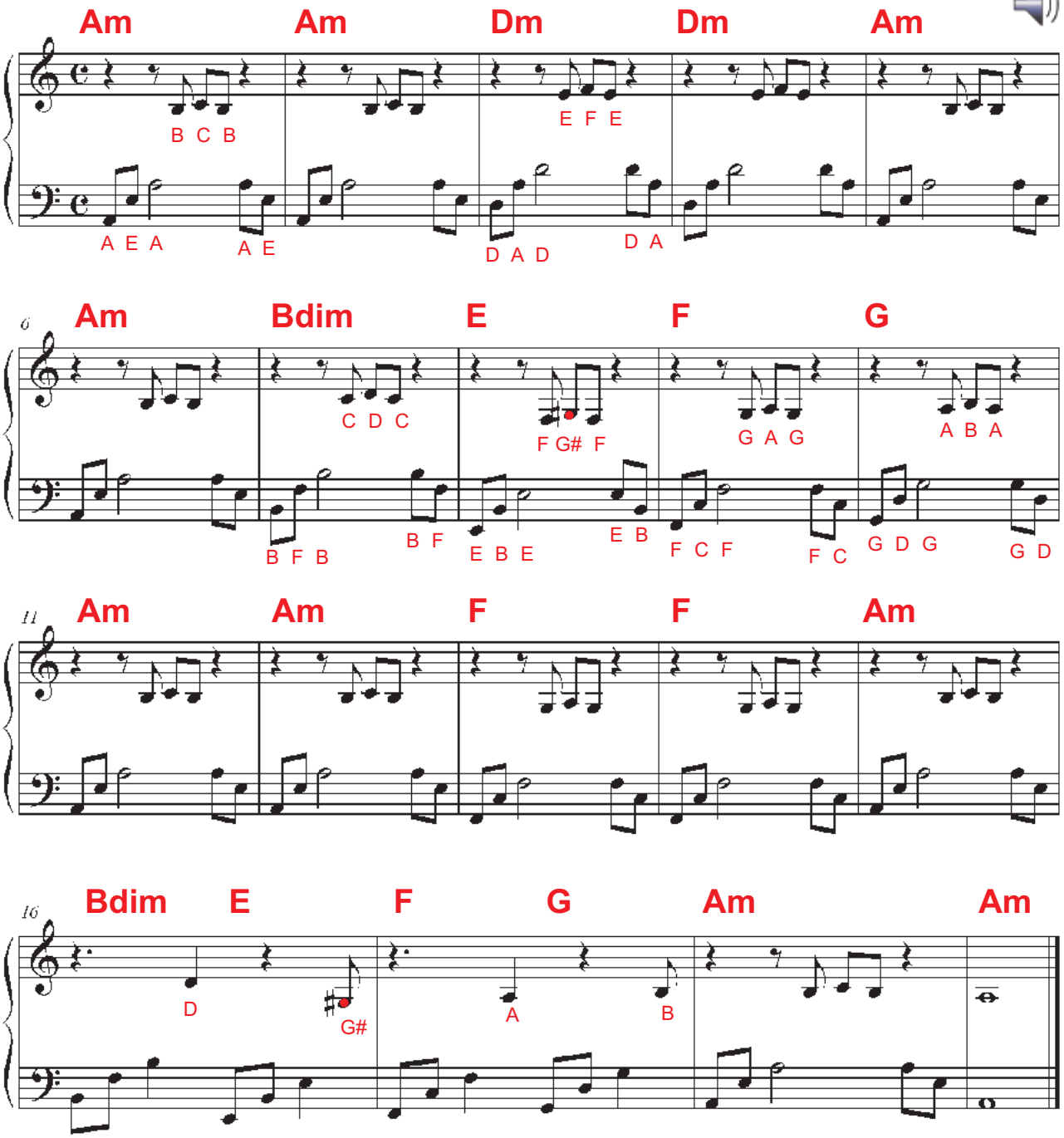
Mixing it all together



IMPROVISING BALLAD STYLE

Practice Progression 1 in A minor.

Use the formula from page 15



FOR IMPROVISATION

NOTES (Apart from chord tones) THAT WORK BEST WITH EACH CHORD

For Am or any other chord use the notes A B C D E

For E use the notes E F G# A B C D

For F or G use ANY WHITE NOTE

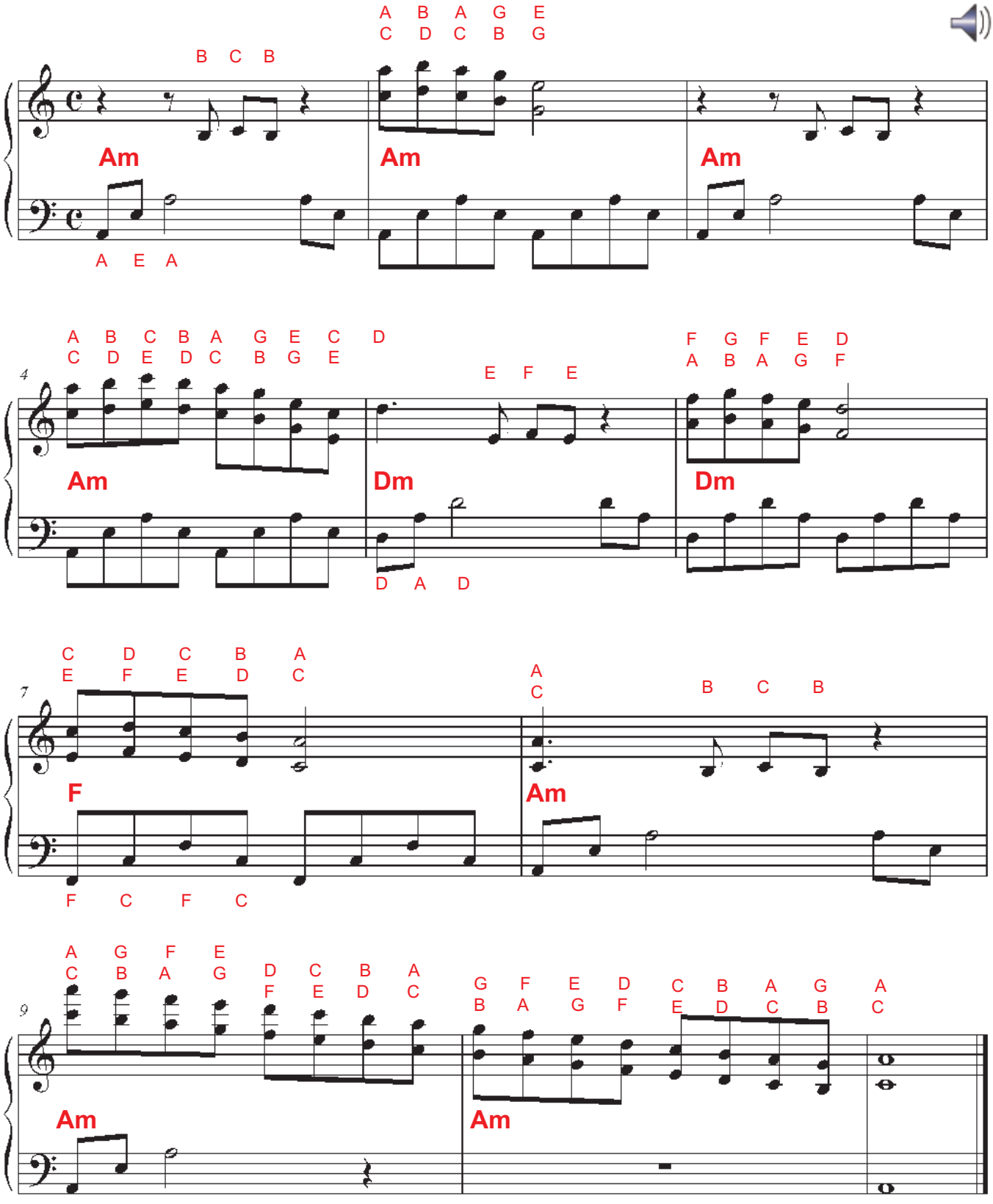
IMPROVISING BALLAD STYLE

Practice Progression 2 in A minor.

FLYING IN THE AIR

A SIXTHS exercise In the style of the Snowman

PLAY VIDEO

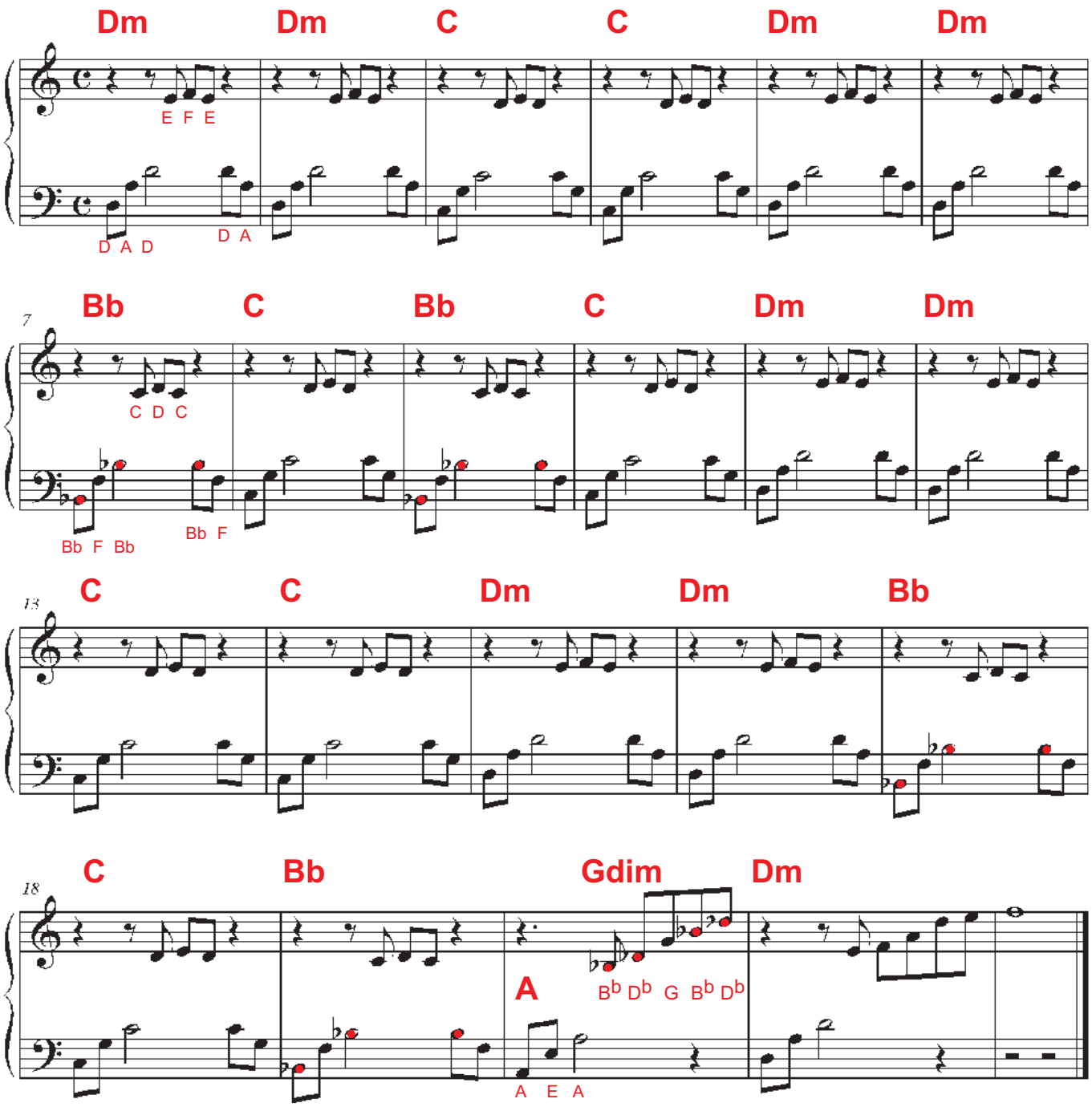


IMPROVISING BALLAD STYLE

PLAY VIDEO

Practice Progression 3 in Dminor.

Use the formula from page 15



FOR IMPROVISATION

NOTES (Apart from chord tones) THAT WORK BEST WITH EACH CHORD

PLAY VIDEO

For Dm or any other chord use the notes D E F G A

For Bb use the notes D E F G A Bb

For C use C D E F G A

For Gdim use G Bb Db E or D E F G A Bb Db

HOW TO CREATE MELODIES & IMPROVISE

Most song melodies are based on **WORDS and SENTENCES**. Songwriters rarely write a melody and then add words to it later, they usually start with a mixture of lyrics, chords and melody.

A melody or an improvisation is like a **CONVERSATION** - listen to people talking - you could almost hear it like a song.

"Hi Joan, how are you"	(fast and upbeat)
"HENRY - I never thought I'd see you again!!	(shocked, loud, snappy)
"I've been unwell"	(sombre, slower)
"I'm sorry to hear that"	(sympathetic)
"I'm ok now"	(more upbeat again)
"That's great, how's the kids'	(optimistic)
"DIDN'T YOU HEAR"	(tension)
"WHAT?"	(worried)
etc	

Can you see the **variety** contained in even a short conversation. The different lengths, different volumes, different speeds, different pitches - you might hear a woman with a high voice and a man with a low voice, the tension, release, excitement, anger, boredom, sadness, joy, some people talk too much, some just grunt words

Use these ideas when you are creating melodies or improvising. Don't just play random notes. Do you TALK randomly? Ask **questions** in one phrase and **reply** in the next phrase.

To begin with stick closely to the **CHORD TONES** to form your phrases. So if you are playing Em7 chord in the left hand play around with the same chord tones in your right hand adding the odd 'in-between' note to liven it up. As you progress you can be more daring but work up to that.

Play some ballad style left hand patterns and create a CONVERSATION with your RIGHT hand notes. Play it nice and slow. **THINK** about what you are doing, IMAGINE two people talking, it could be two lovers, or an argument, or just someone talking to themselves about a lost love or a past regret.

Learn from Beethoven

Newcomers to improvisation often play too many random notes because they imagine that if they just played one or two at a time it would sound like they had nothing to ‘say’.

But if you look at some of the world’s greatest composers they OFTEN used just ONE or TWO phrases as the basis of some of their finest compositions.

Think about Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony.
Everyone knows that famous opening phrase
‘Da da da Daah - da da da daah’

If you really listen closely you will discover that he repeats this basic pattern a seemingly ENDLESS number of times. It’s clearly what you DO with the pattern that counts.

The next time you listen to some improvisation notice how often patterns are repeated either in an ascending or descending way and they sound GREAT!

PREDICTABILITY and UNCERTAINTY

The best songs tend to have a balance between predictability and uncertainty. It’s nice - at times - to be able to guess where the song is going to go next . This can make us feel part of the creation of the song but If the song becomes TOO predictable it can become boring. It’s exciting to be led in another direction now and then. This keeps our interest.

Think about this when you are improvising or writing melodies. Don’t be afraid to be predictable or repetitive but try to maintain interest as well even if that means using ONE riff in an amazing variety of ways like Mr Beethoven!

APPLYING THE BALLAD STYLE TO MELODIES IN 3 EASY STEPS

BALLAD STYLE (PLAYING MELODIES)
IN 3 EASY STEPS

PLAY VIDEO

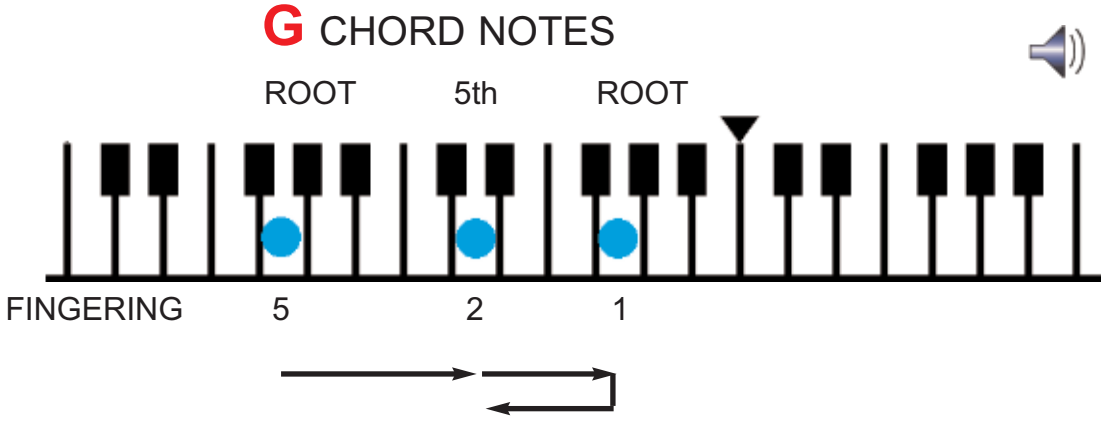
STEP 1 The LEFT HAND

A very easy LEFT HAND ballad style.

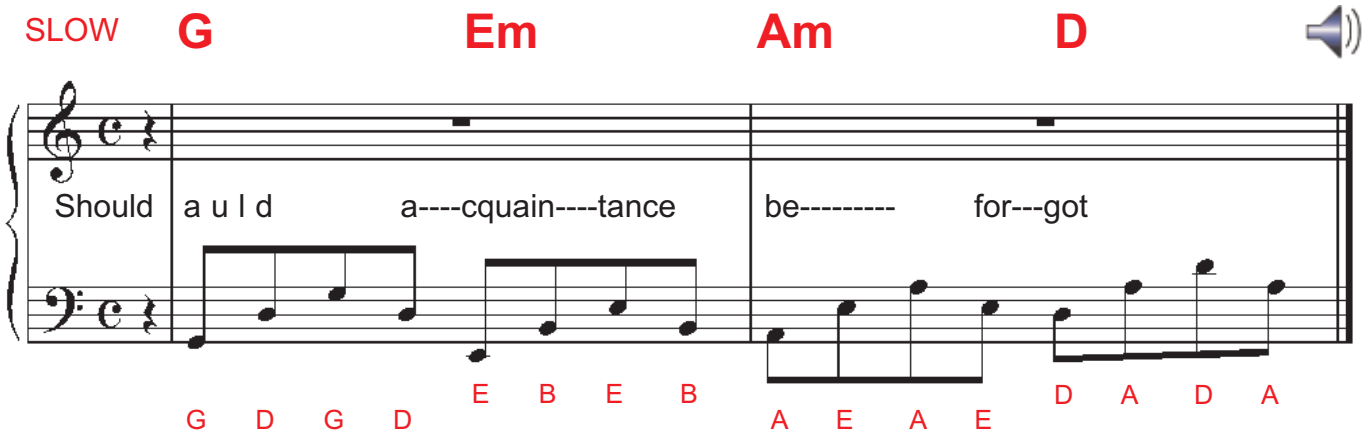
In ballad style there is generally more movement in the left hand so that an underlying ‘full’ sound can be created as an accompaniment to the right hand melody. This left hand sound is generally constructed of chord notes.

Try this pattern based on the chord of G

Play the low G first - then the D - then the higher G - then the D - Repeat



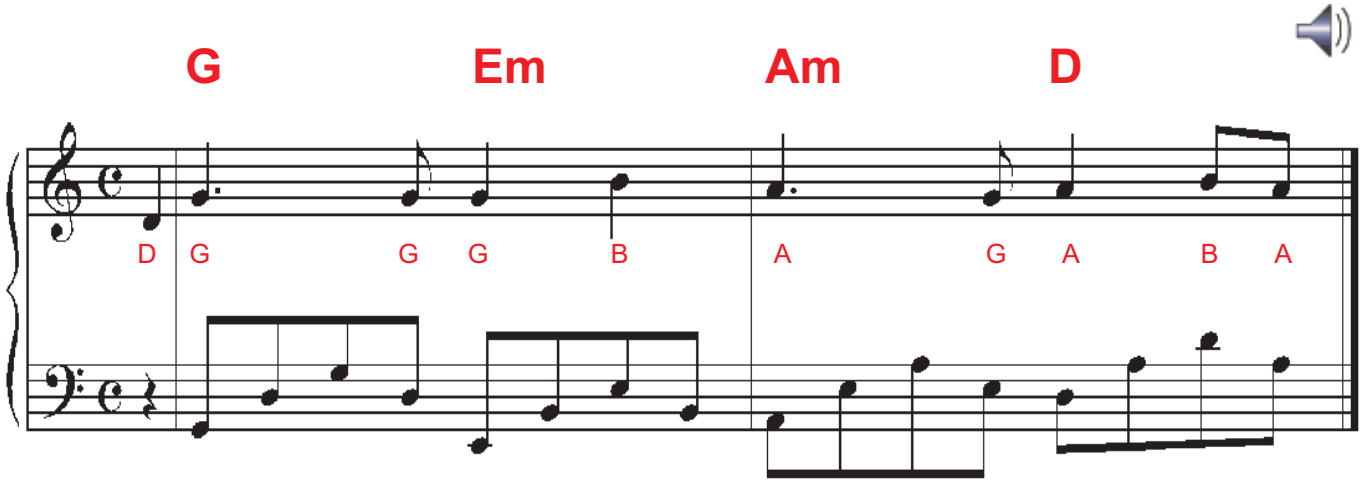
Now transpose this pattern into the first four chords of Auld Lang Sang



Remember that in ALL chords (except the ‘B’ group of chords) the ROOT and 5th have SAME coloured keys (see page x) which makes this extremely easy to play

BALLAD STYLE (PLAYING MELODIES)

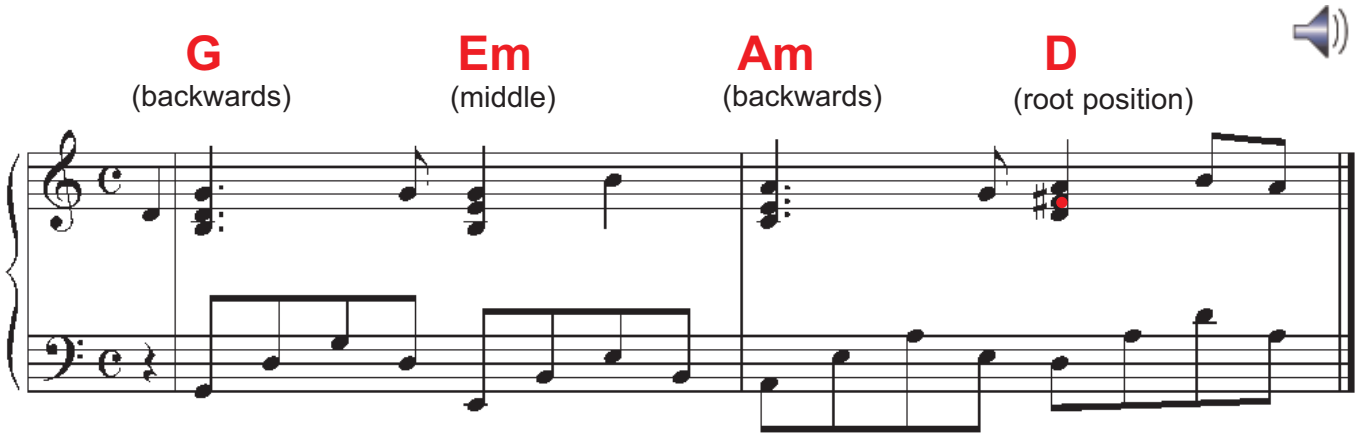
STEP 2 Add the RIGHT hand MELODY line



STEP 3 Add some RIGHT HAND CHORD NOTES beneath the MELODY line

What you just played sounds good but the overall sound is a bit ‘thin’.
This time see if you can add some RIGHT hand chord notes BENEATH the melody at the points where the chords change.

You add them UNDER the melody because our ears always pick out the TOP note of a chord more so than the other notes.

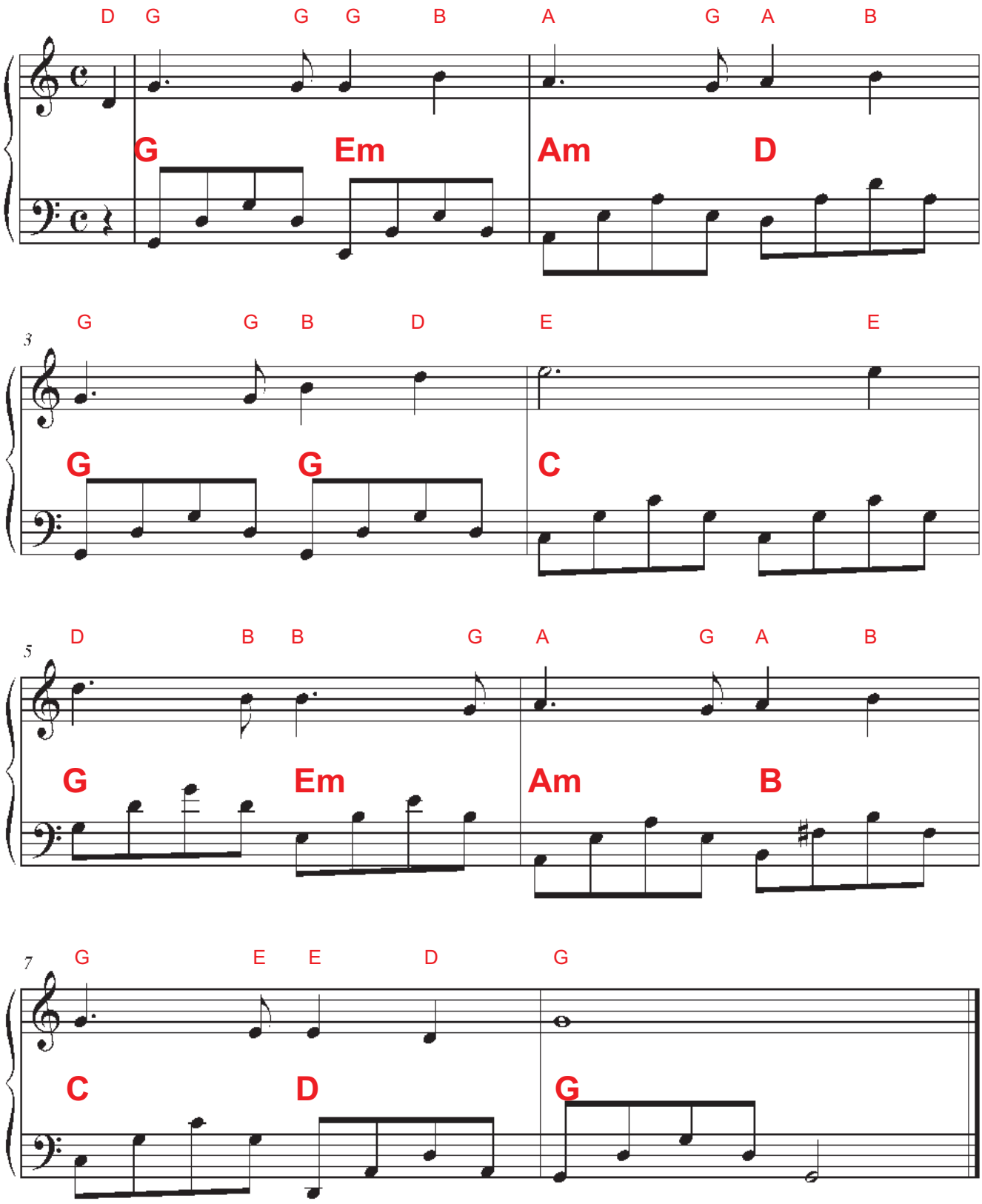


Got the idea? Now try it with the whole tune
First play the tune with single melody notes in the right hand

BALLAD STYLE (PLAYING MELODIES)
AULD LANG SANG

Putting it all together - part 1

(The whole tune without added chord notes)



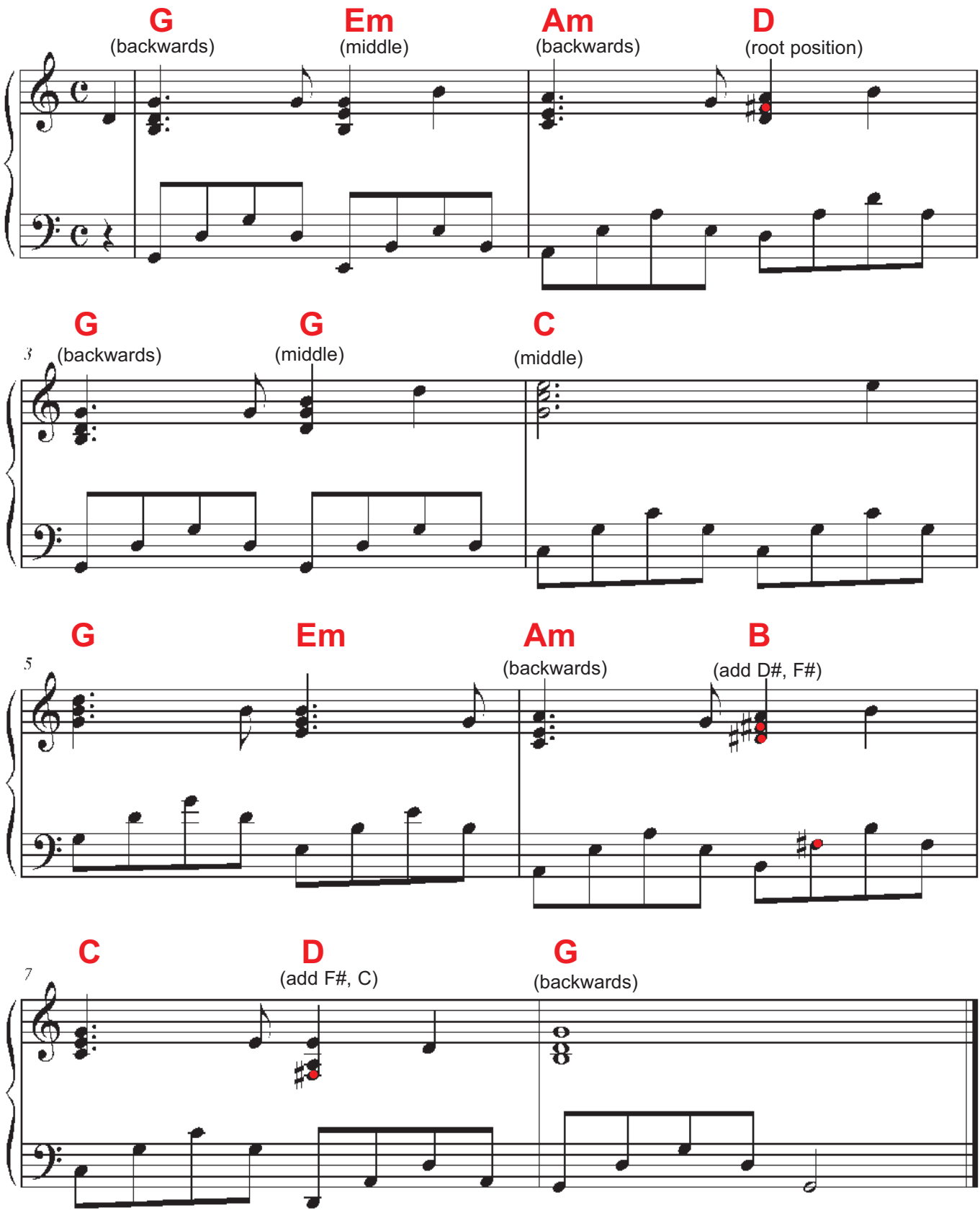
PLAY VIDEO

BALLAD STYLE (PLAYING MELODIES)
AULD LANG SANG

PLAY VIDEO

Putting it all together - part 2

(The whole tune WITH added chord notes)

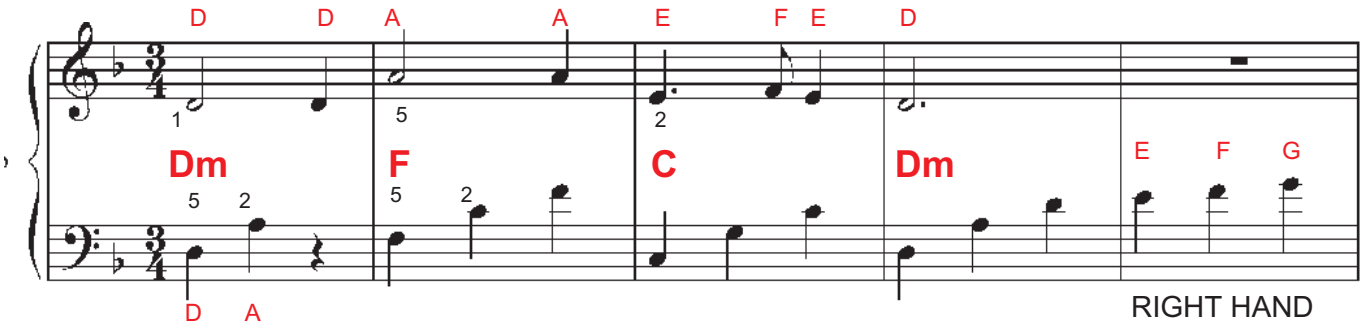


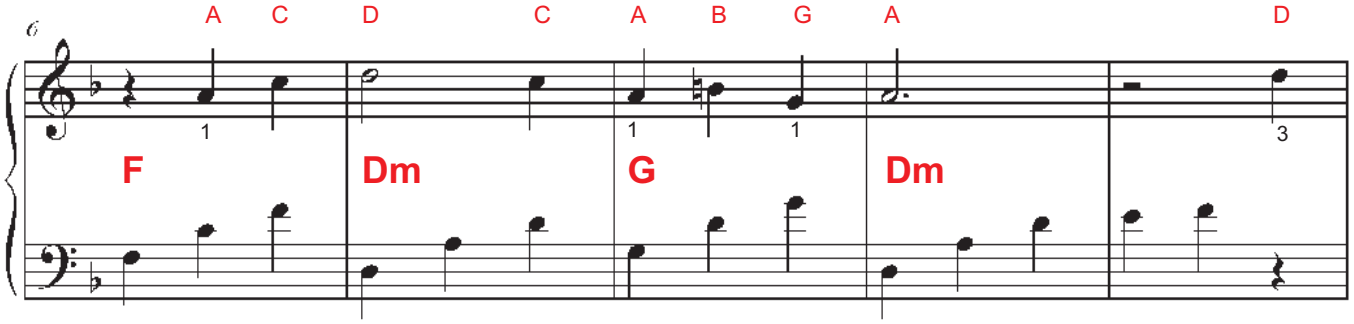
APPLYING THE STYLE TO VARIOUS SONGS

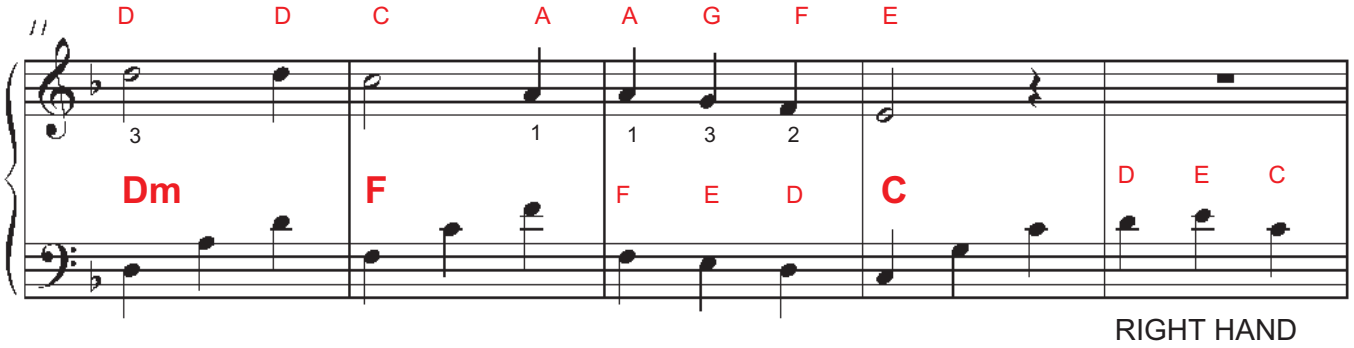
SCARBOROUGH FAIR #1

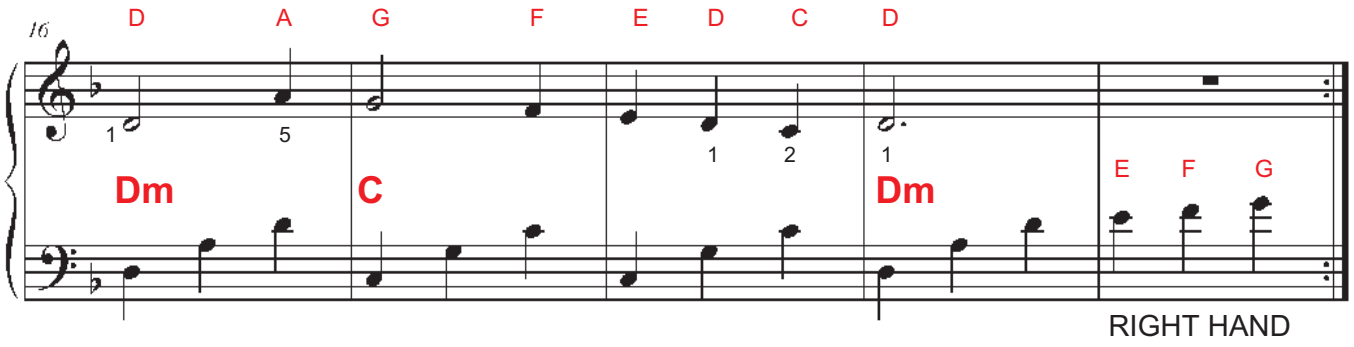
(‘thin’ melody line)

Note that this tune is THREE beats per bar





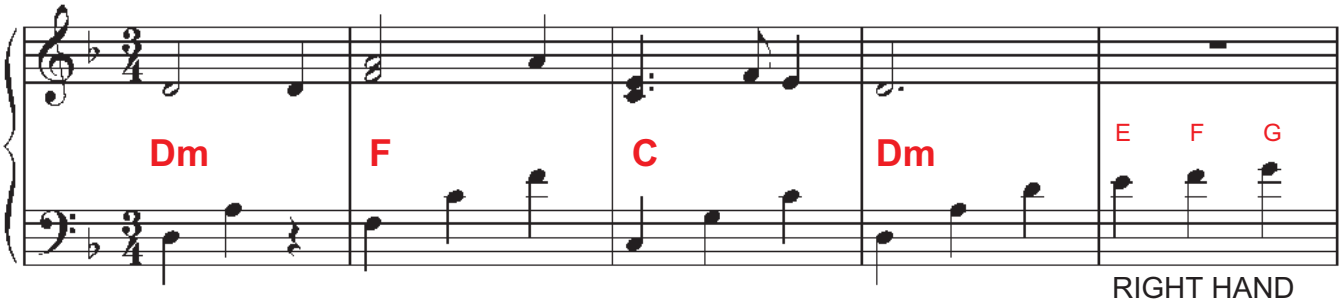




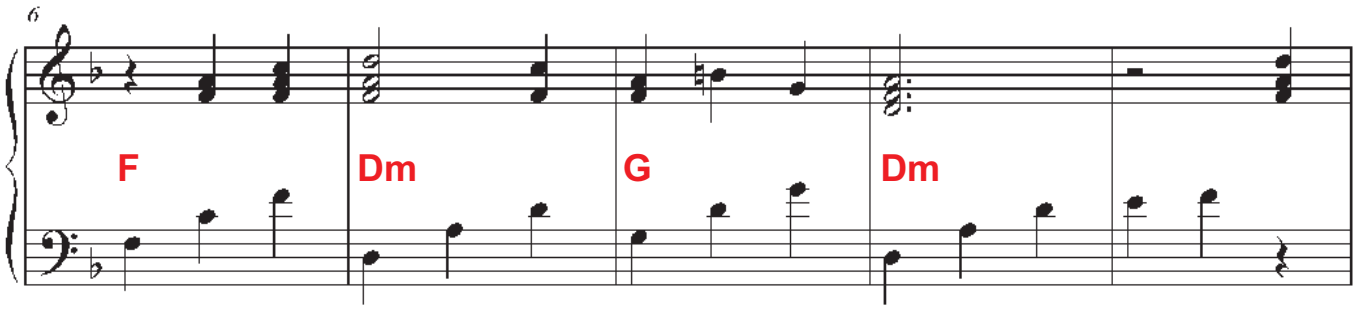
PLAY VIDEO

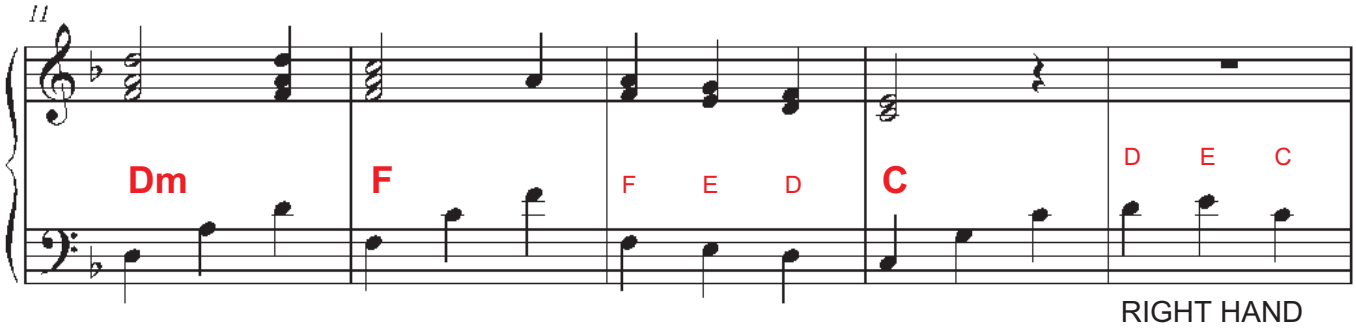
SCARBOROUGH FAIR #2

(melody line with added chord notes)

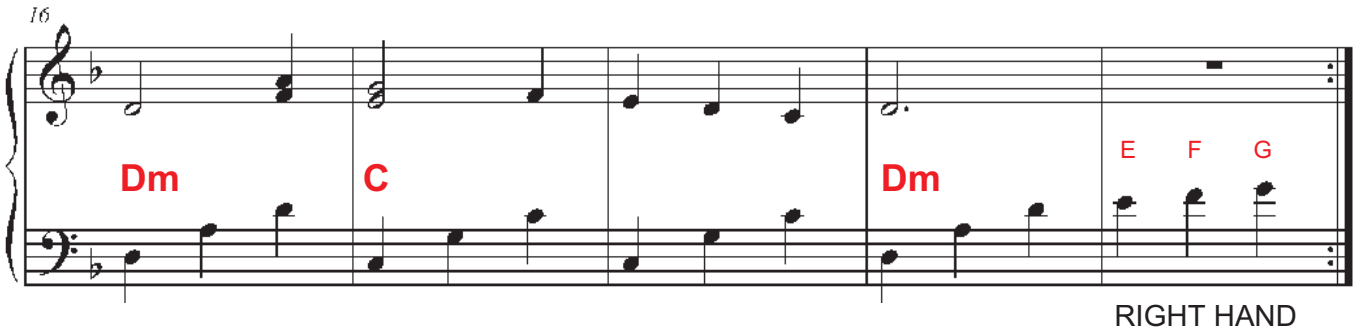


RIGHT HAND





RIGHT HAND

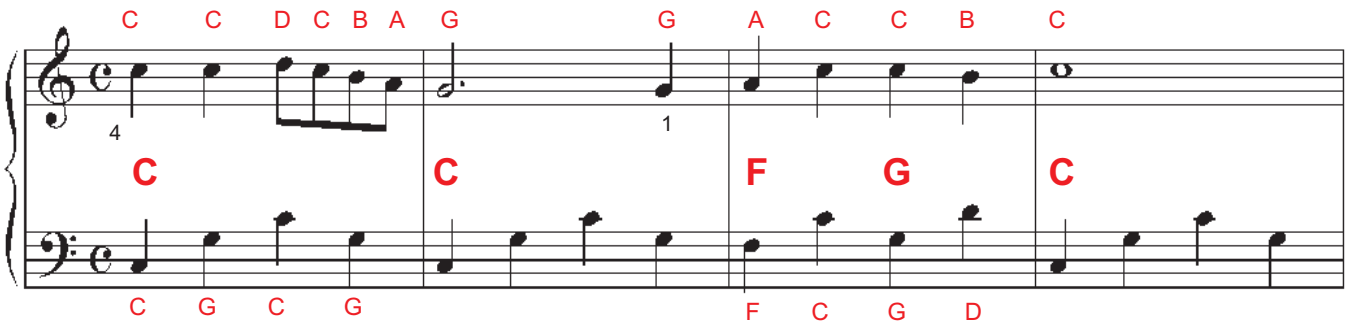


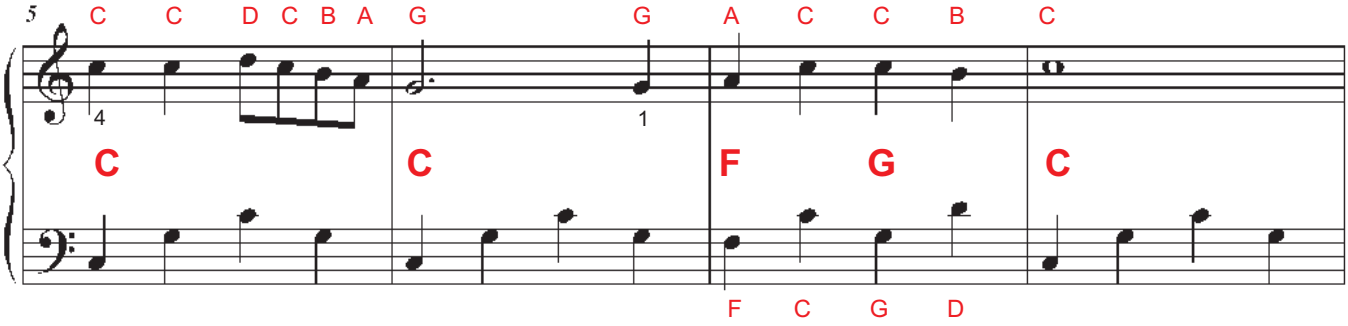
RIGHT HAND

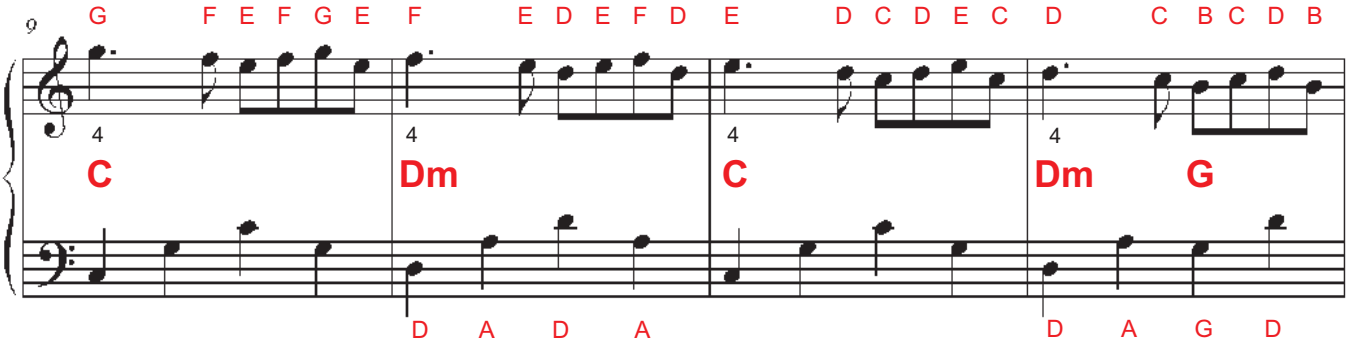
DING DONG MERRILY ON HIGH #1

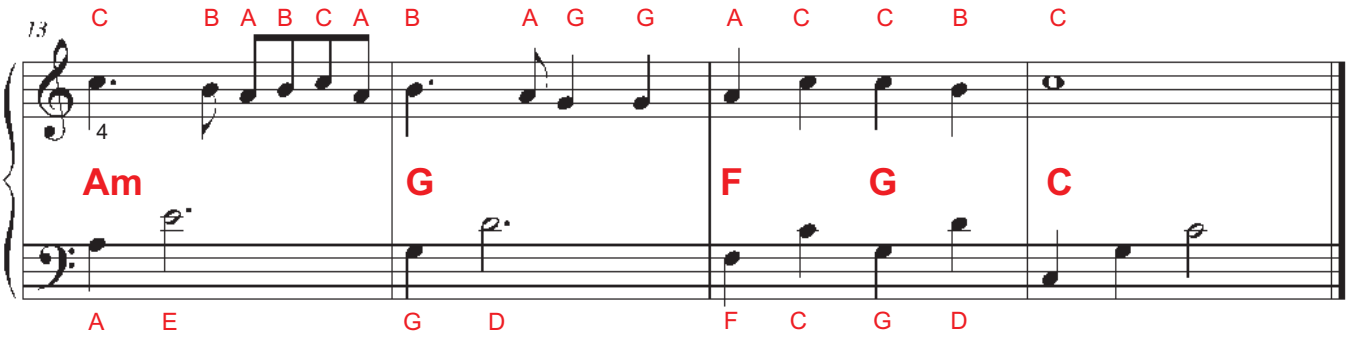
('thin' melody line)

This is GREAT fun - and really EASY - roll on Christmas!







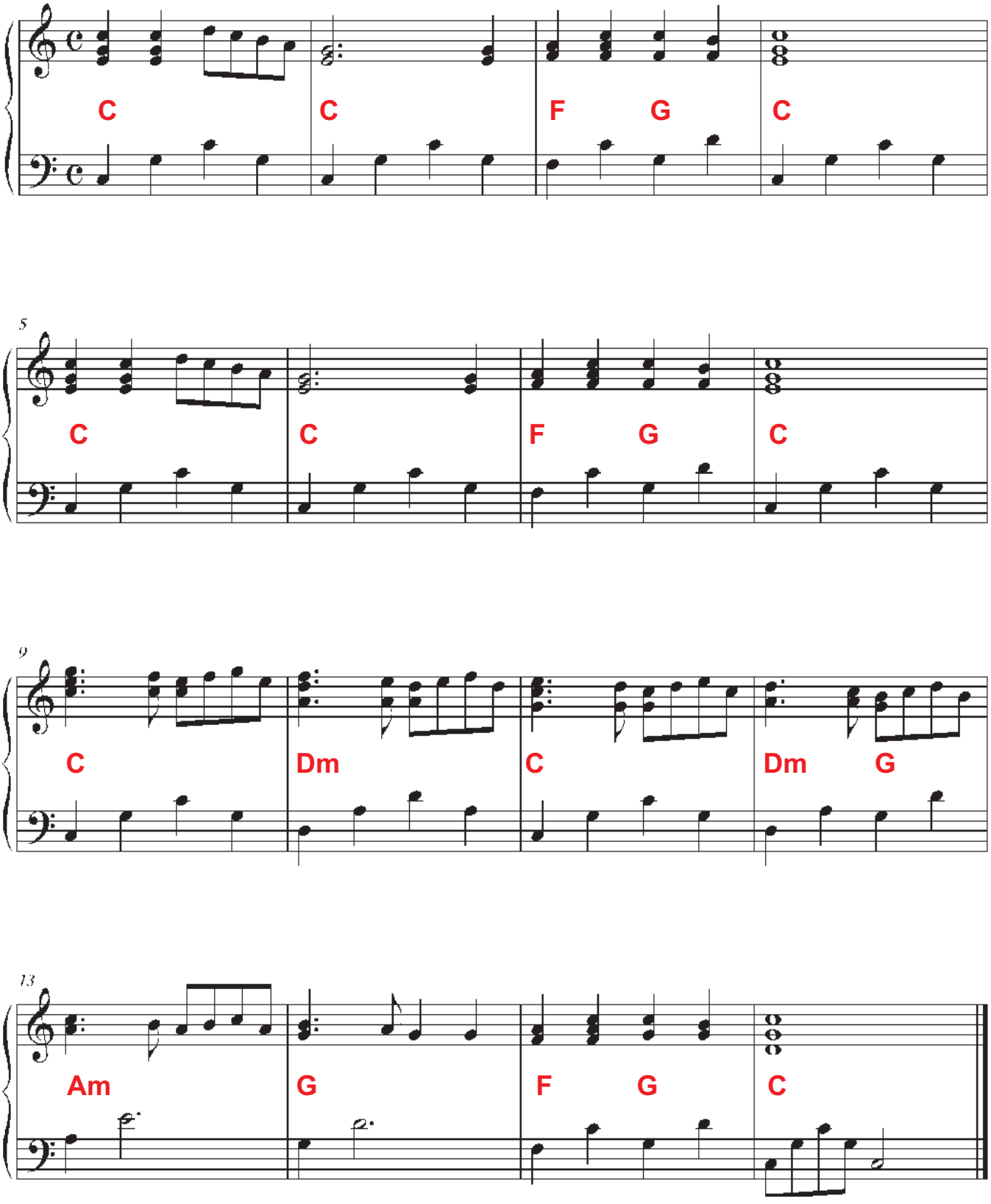


DING DONG MERRILY ON HIGH #2

(melody line with added chord notes)

PLAY VIDEO

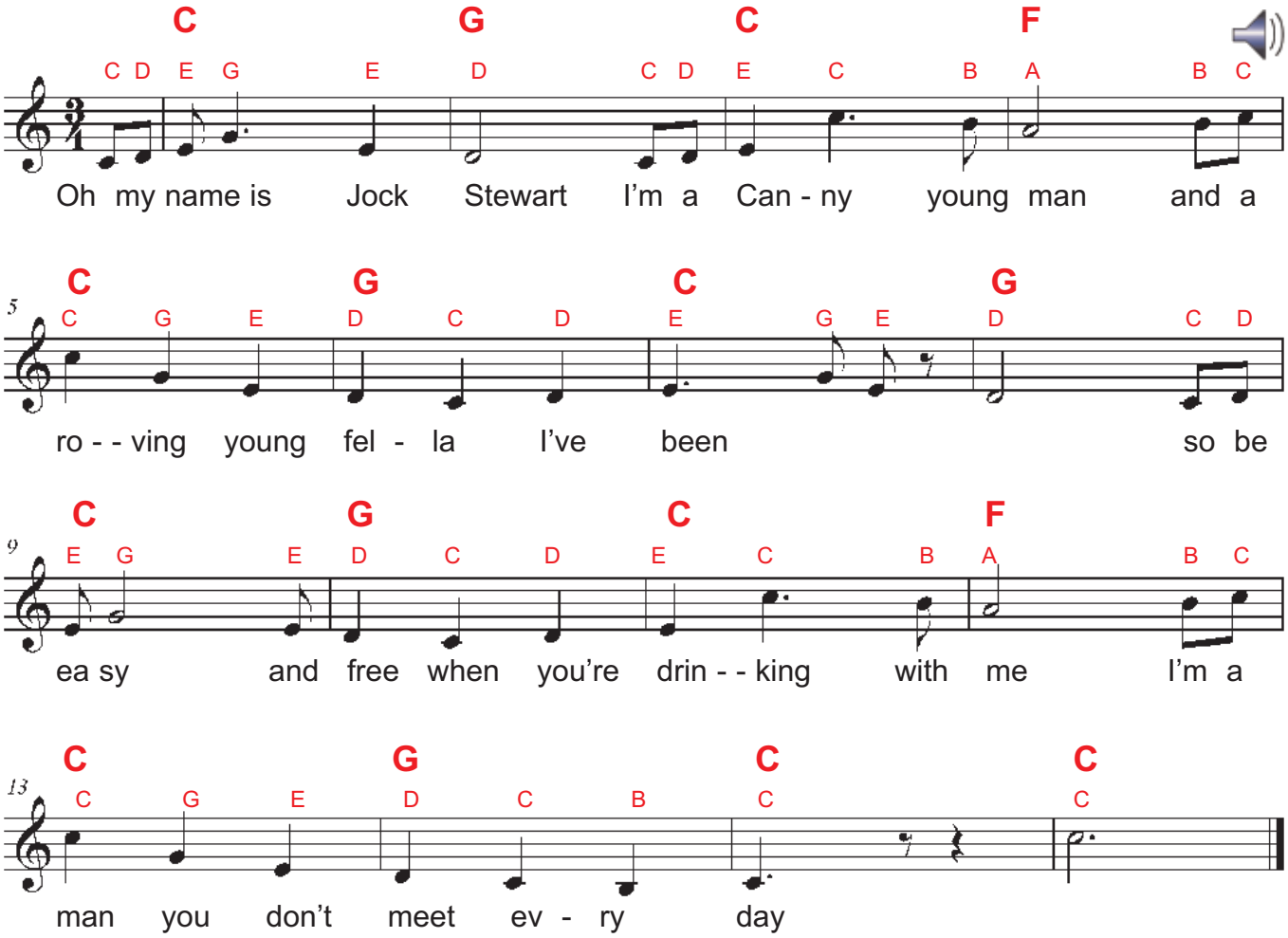
Try it again but this time with some chord notes added UNDERNEATH the melody in the right hand



JOCK STEWART

An Irish tune sung by the Pogues

This is a great song to learn because the melody line works in easily with the chord shapes in the right hand. Get to know the melody first then build up to playing it ‘ballad style’ over the next few pages. Note it is THREE beats to a bar.

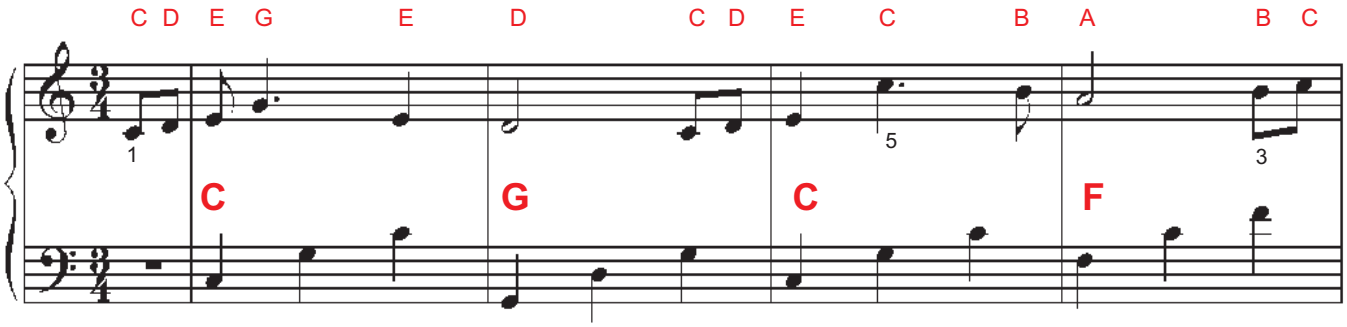


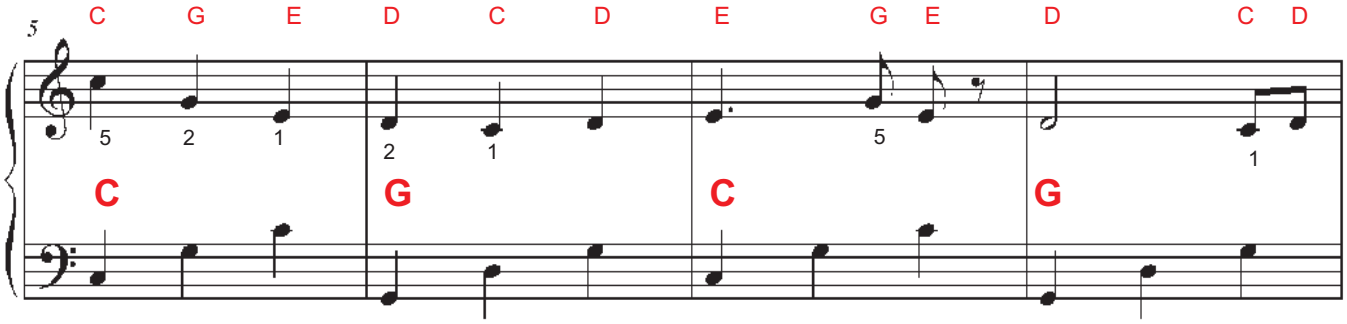
I have acres of land - I have men at command
I have always a shilling to spare
So be easy and free - When you’re drinking with me
I’m a man you don’t meet every day

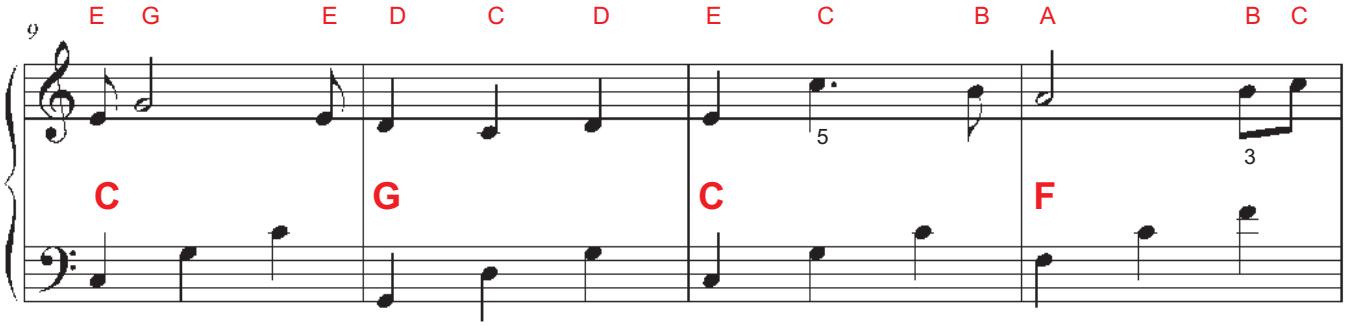
So come fill up your glasses - Of brandy and wine
Whatever it costs I will pay
So be easy and free - When you’re drinking with me
I’m a man you don’t meet every day

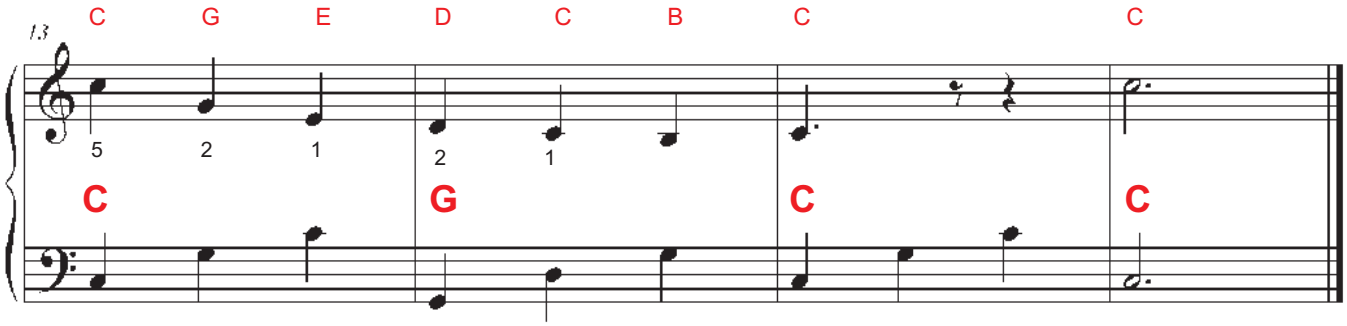
Well I took out my dog - And him I did shoot
All down in the county kildare
So be easy and free - When you’re drinking with me
I’m a man you don’t meet every day

JOCK STEWART
(‘thin’ melody line)





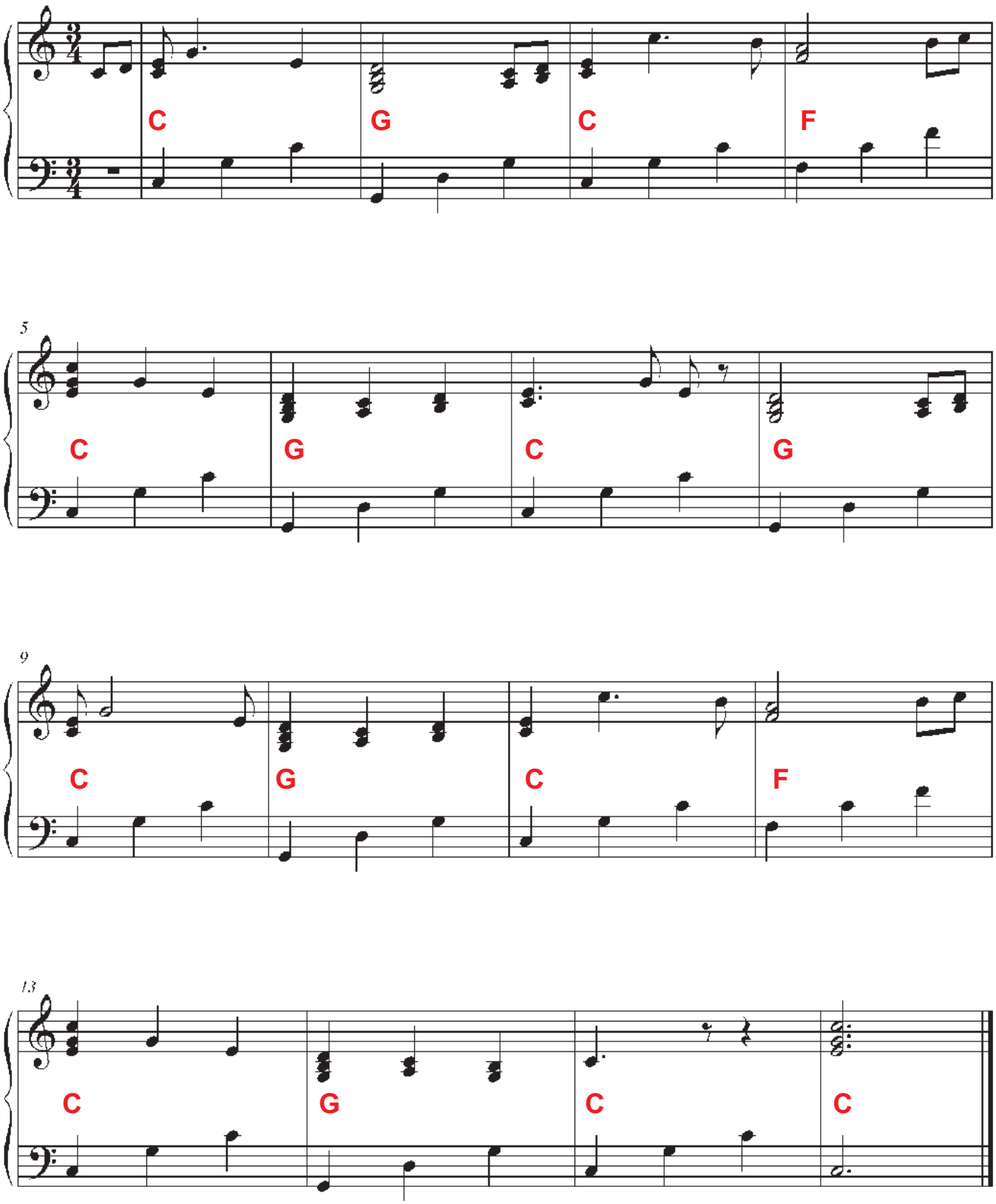




PLAY VIDEO

JOCK STEWART

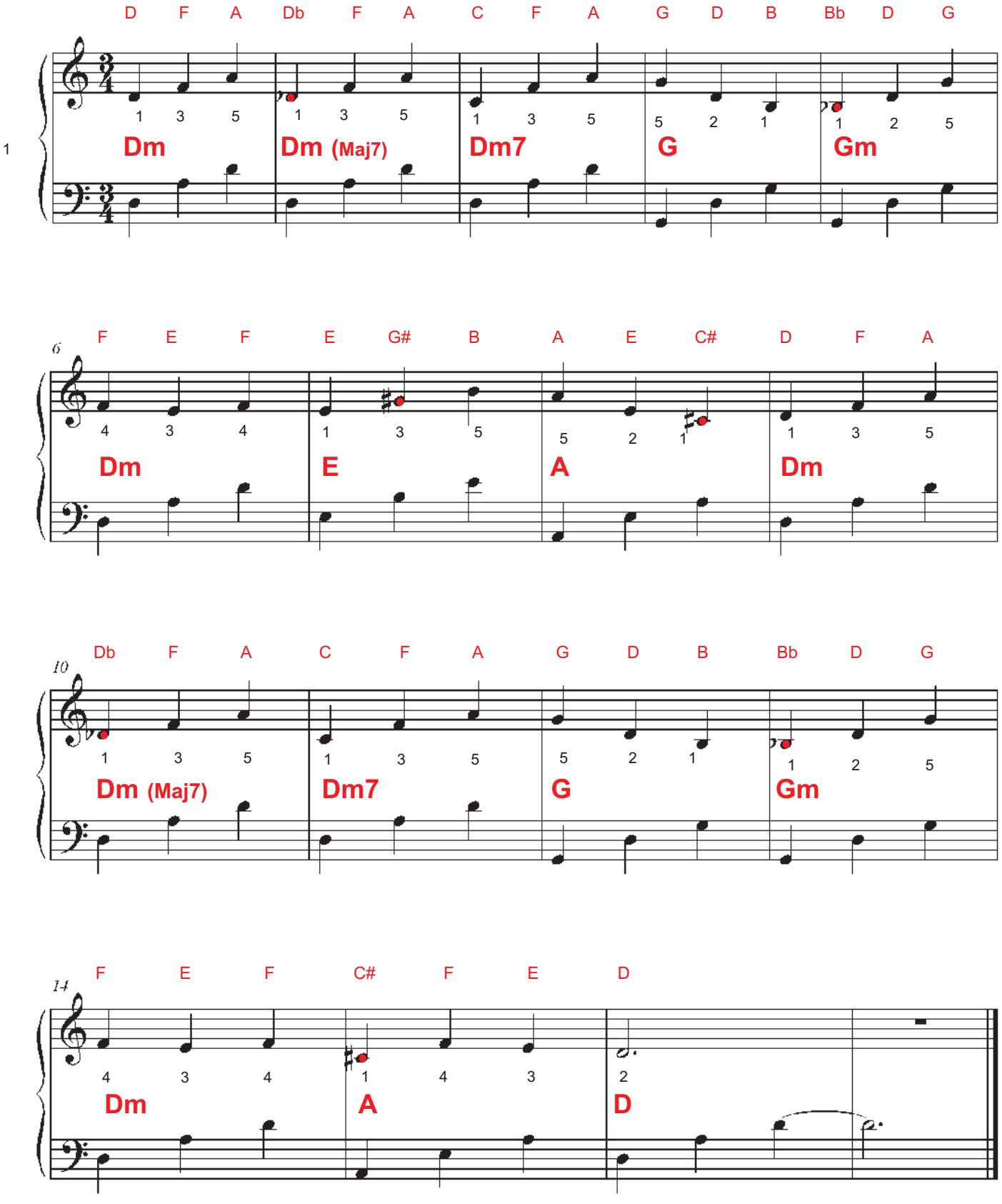
(Melody line with added chord notes)



CHIM CHIMINESQUE

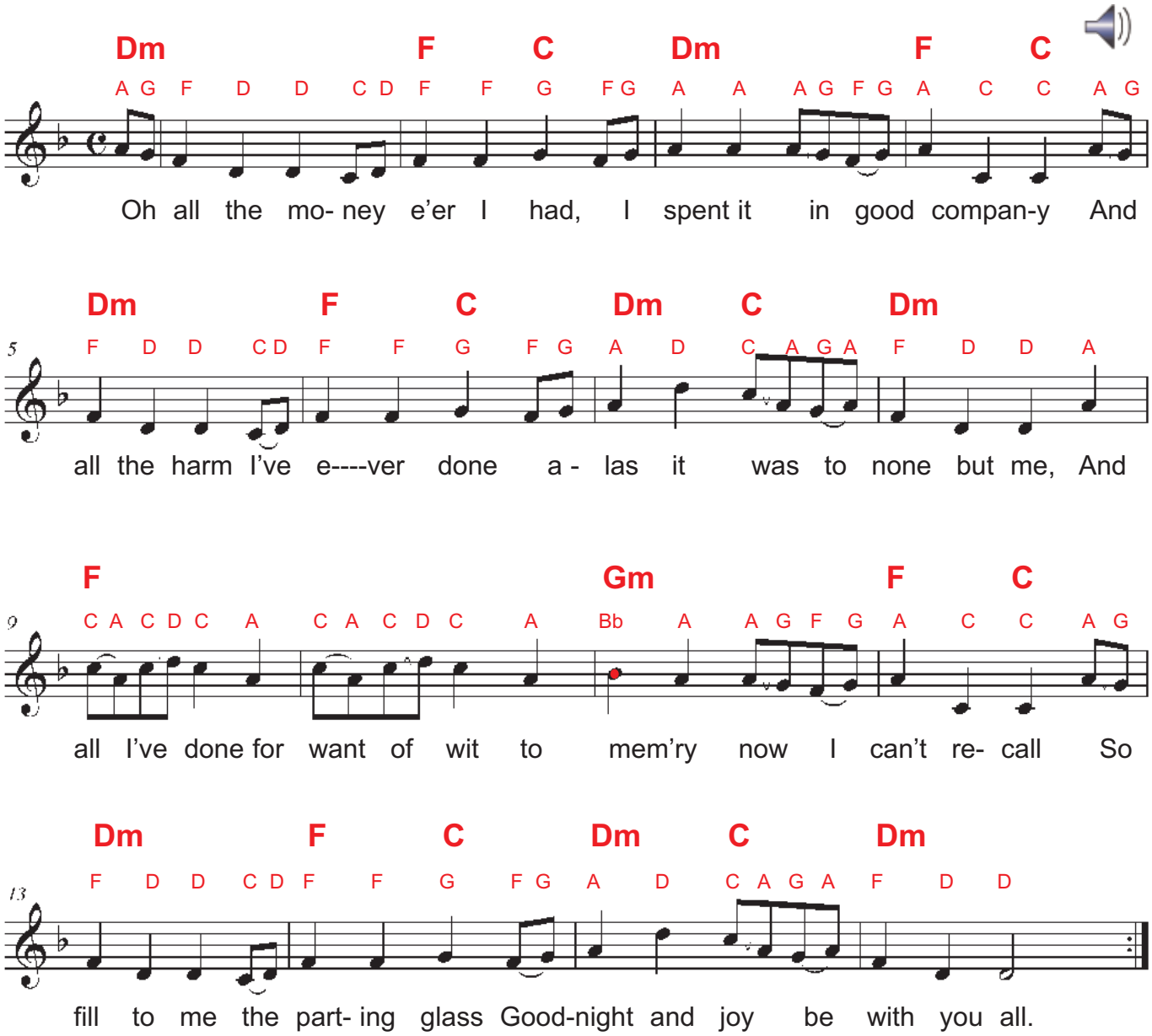
PLAY VIDEO

Notice how the melody is almost entirely made up of chord notes



THE PARTING GLASS part 1

A beautiful Irish tune



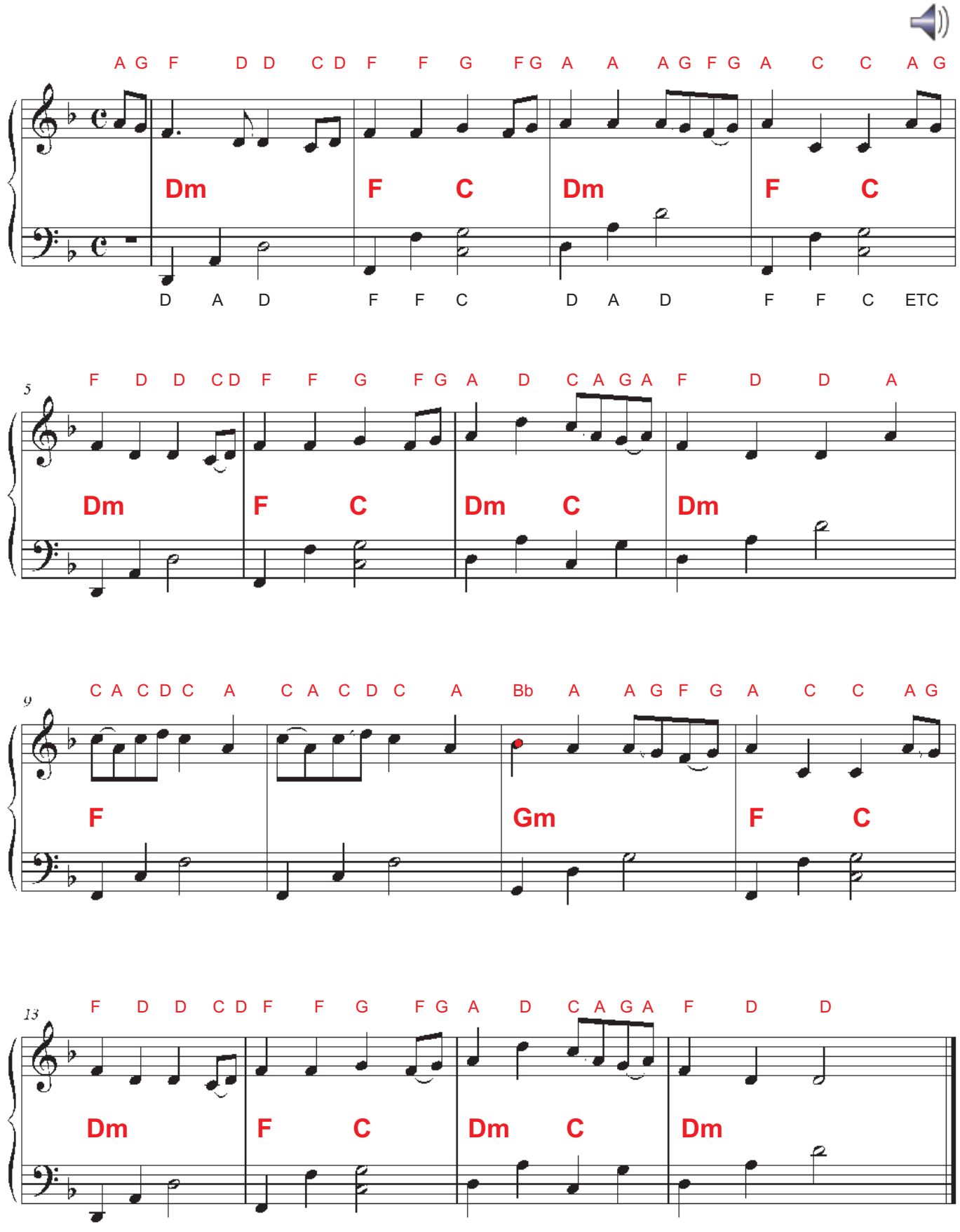
Oh, all the comrades e'er I had, they're sorry for my going away,
And all the sweethearts e'er I had, they've wished me one more day to stay
But since it falls unto my lot, that I should rise and you should not,
I gently rise and softly call, good night and joy be with you all

If I had money enough to spend, and leisure time to sit awhile,
There is a fair maid in this town, that sorely has my heart beguiled.
Her rosey cheeks, and ruby lips, I own, she has my heart in thrall.
Then fill to me the parting glass, good night and joy be with you all

THE PARTING GLASS part 2

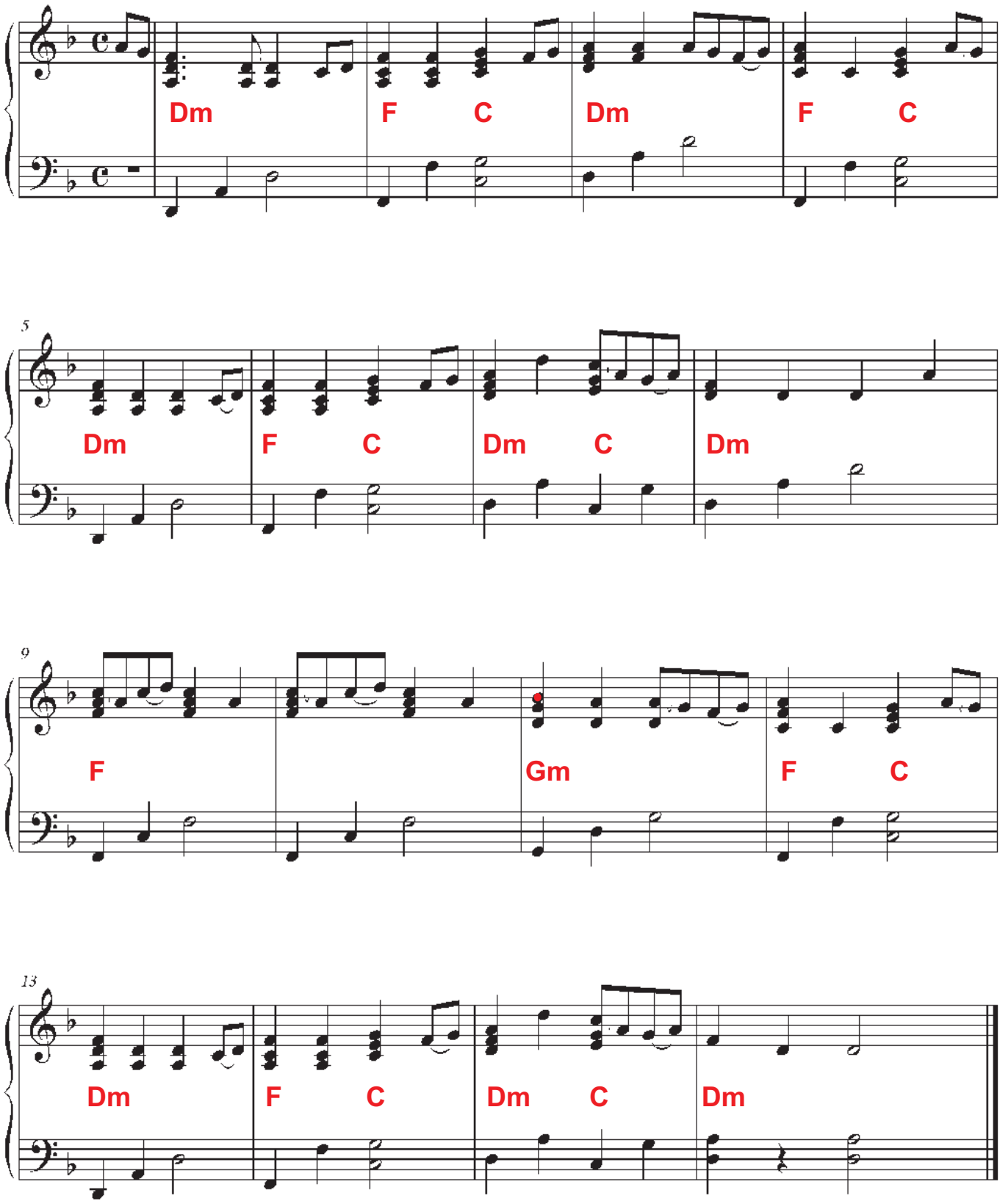
(‘thin’ melody line)

Study the left hand carefully this time. Notice that very often the third beat is HELD for two beats.



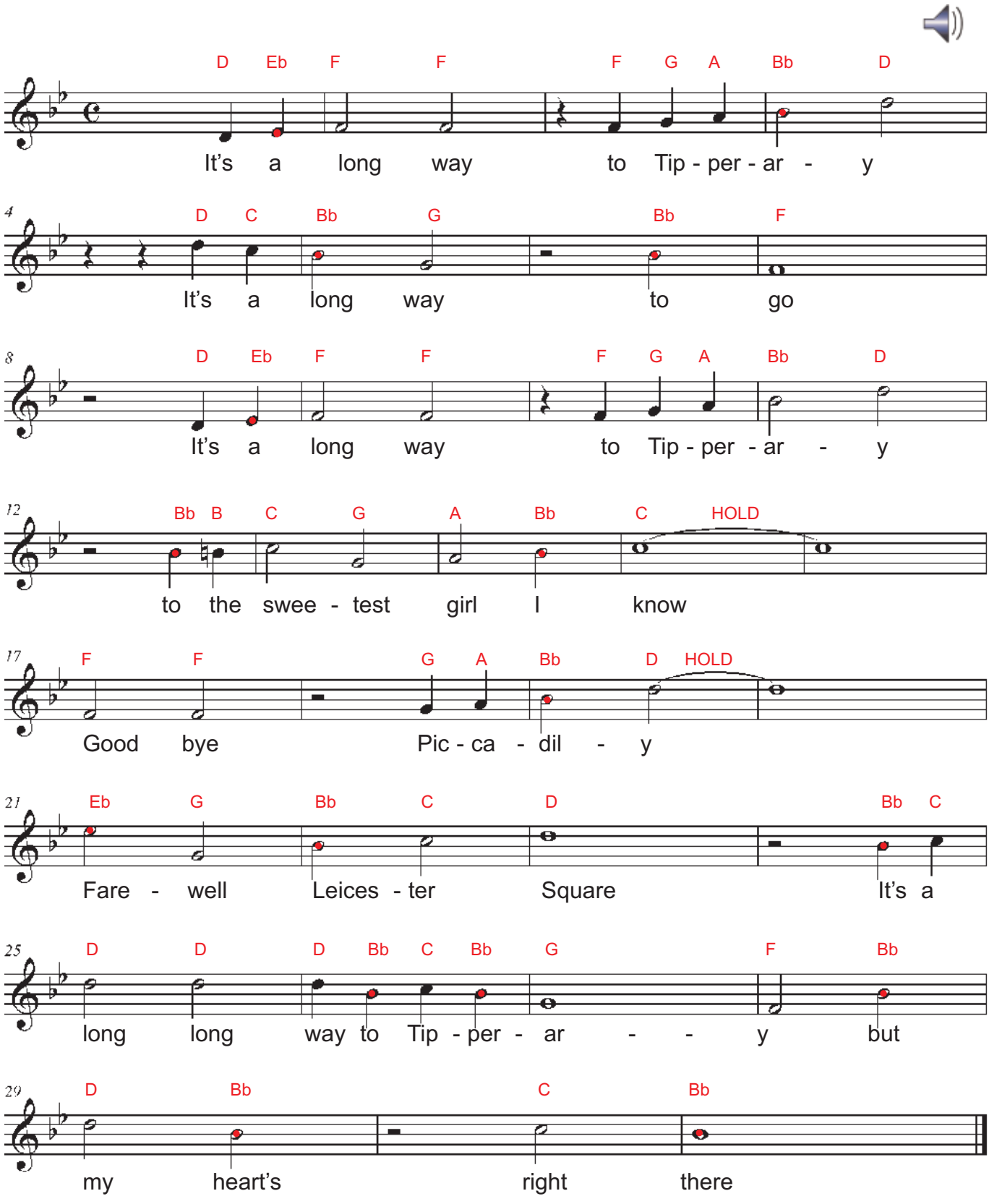
PLAY VIDEO

THE PARTING GLASS part 3
(Melody line with added chord notes)



IT'S A SOULFUL WAY TO TIPPERARY

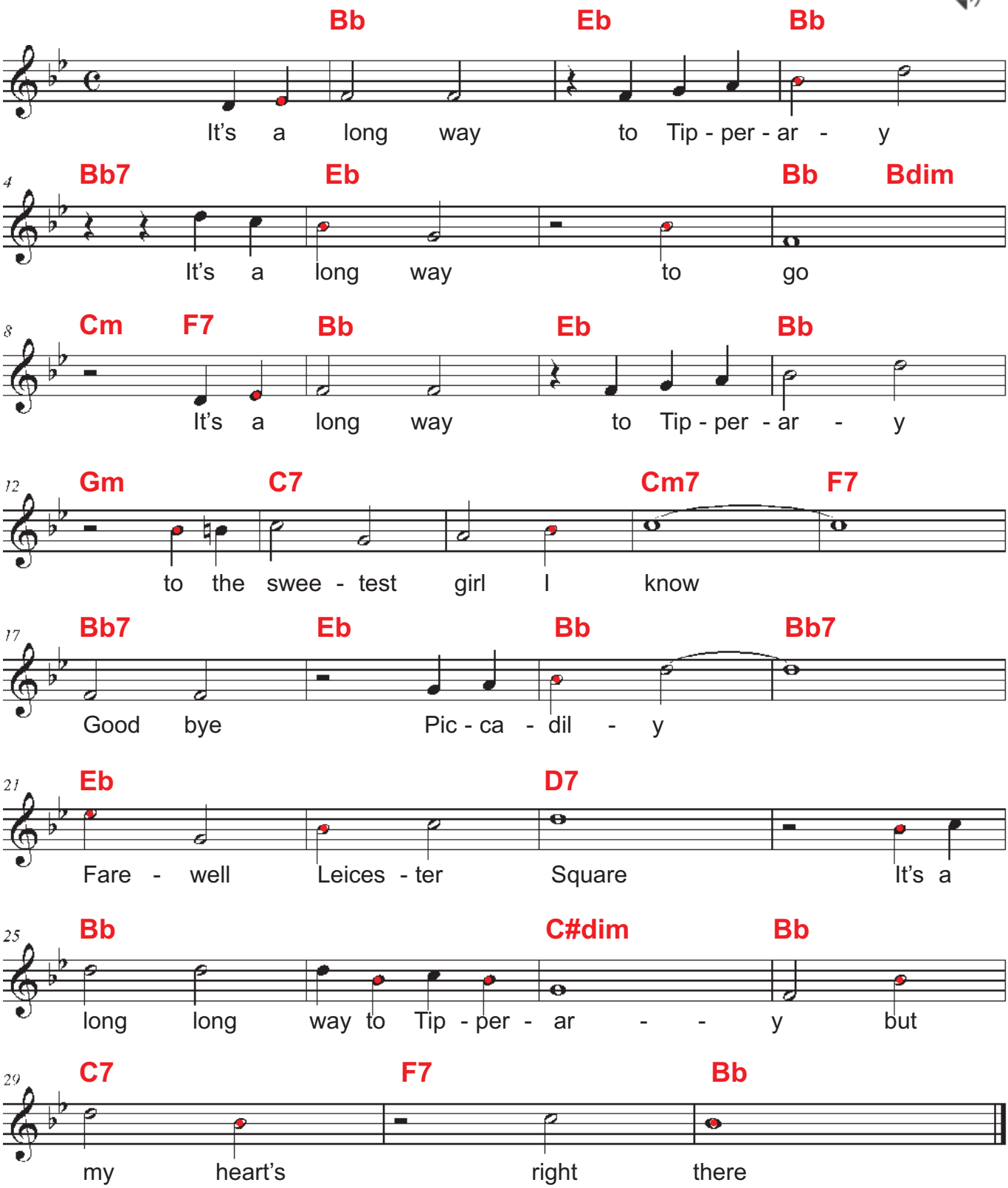
This is usually played in an "Oom Pah" kind of way but it is also rather beautiful if played as a slow soulful ballad. Imagine a soldier sitting missing home.



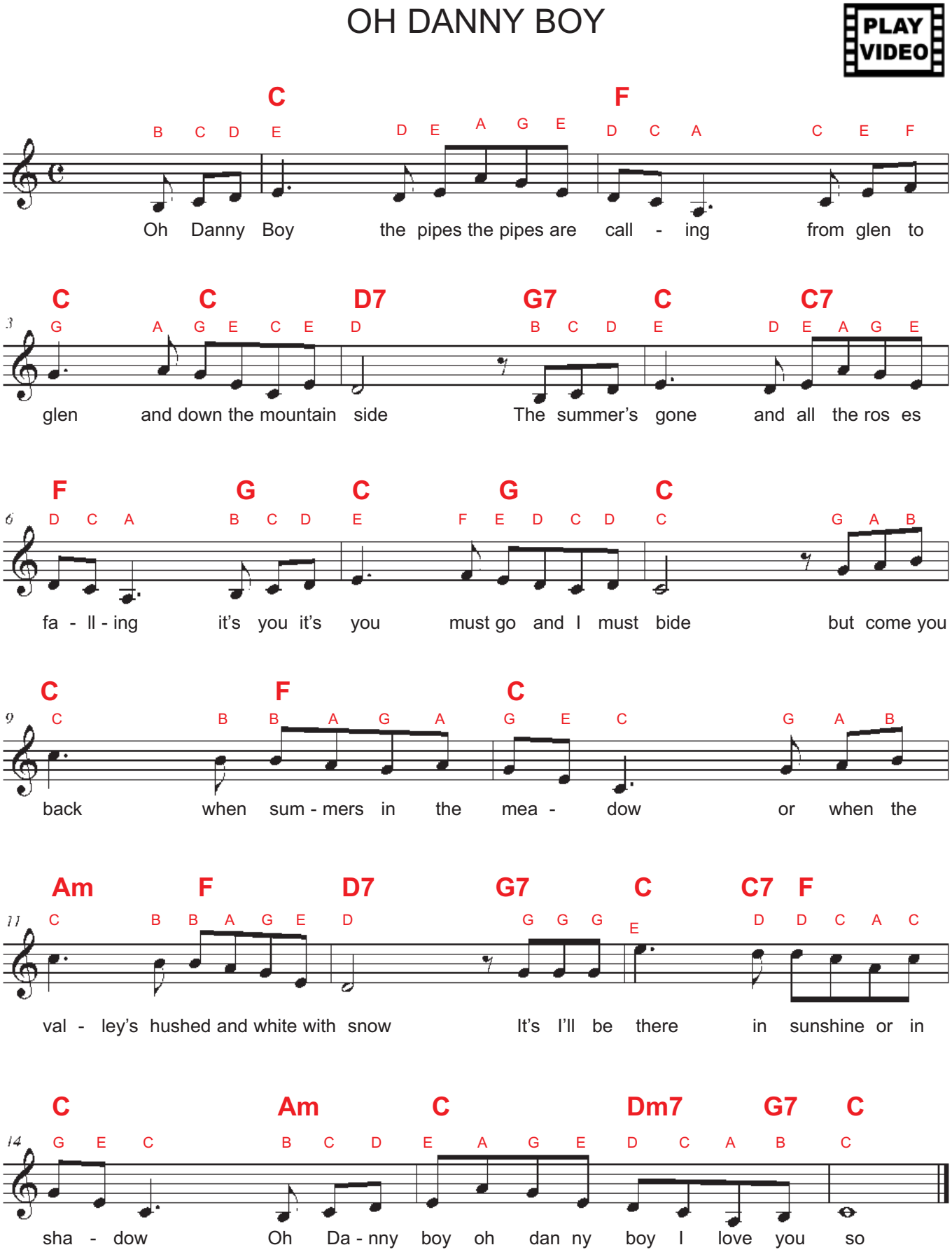
IT'S A SOULFUL WAY TO TIPPERARY

PLAY VIDEO

CHORDS



OH DANNY BOY


PLAY VIDEO
C F
Oh Danny Boy the pipes the pipes are call - ing from glen to
C C D7 G7 C C7
glen and down the mountain side The summer's gone and all the ros es
F G C G C
fa - ll - ing it's you it's you must go and I must bide but come you
C F C
back when sum - mers in the mea - dow or when the
Am F D7 G7 C C7 F
val - ley's hushed and white with snow It's I'll be there in sunshine or in
C Am C Dm7 G7 C
sha - dow Oh Da - nny boy oh dan ny boy I love you so

OTHER EASY BALLADS THAT SOUND GREAT

There are lots of beautiful ballads but some are easier to play than others. The following selection are easy enough to play but sound great with the minimum amount of effort.

BALLADS

The Last Thing On My Mind - Tom Paxton - Bb

How Are Things In Glocca Morra - (from Finian's Rainbow) - F

Beauty And The Beast - (Disney) - F

With A Smile And A Song - (Disney) - C

Love Is A Song That Never Ends - (Disney) - G

Someday My Prince Will Come - (Disney) - F

Oh Danny Boy - C

Moon River - Mercer/Mancini - C

Love Me Tender - Elvis - G

Can't Help Falling In Love - Elvis - F

Are You Lonesome Tonight - Elvis - C

Where Is Love - Oliver - C (lovely ahh..)

Killing Me Softly With His Song - Dm7

Unchained Melody - G

All I Have To Do Is Dream

The Godfather (Love theme) - Am

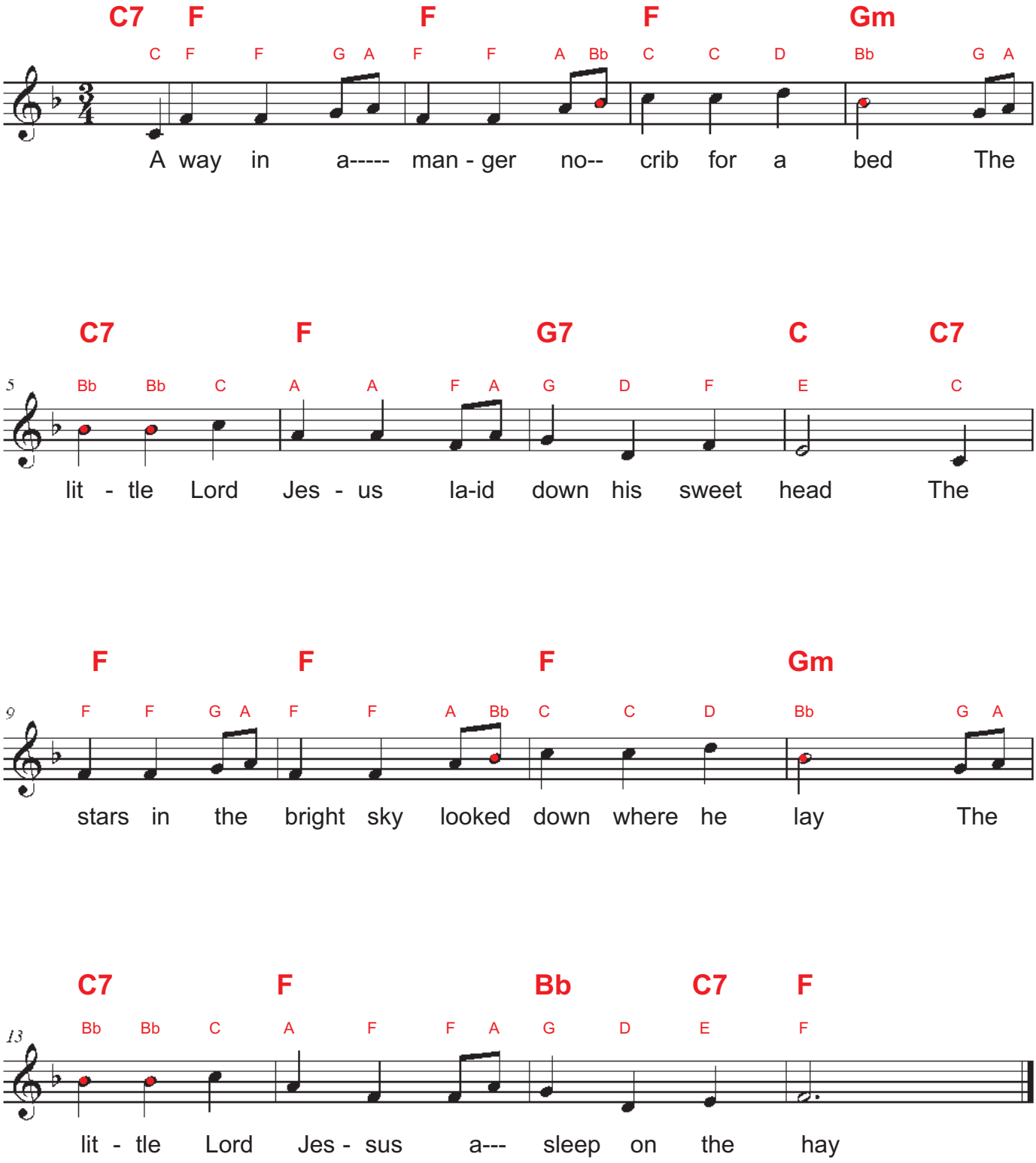
The Godfather (Waltz) - Am

The Homes Of Donegal - Paul Brady

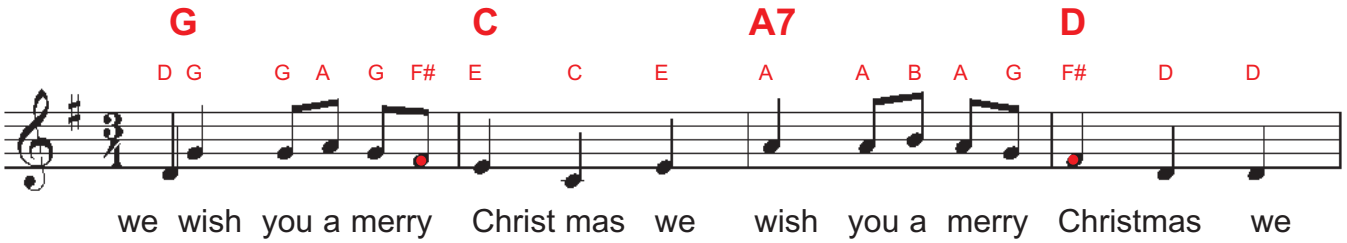
You may get these at www.sheetmusicdirect.com or www.musicnotes.com

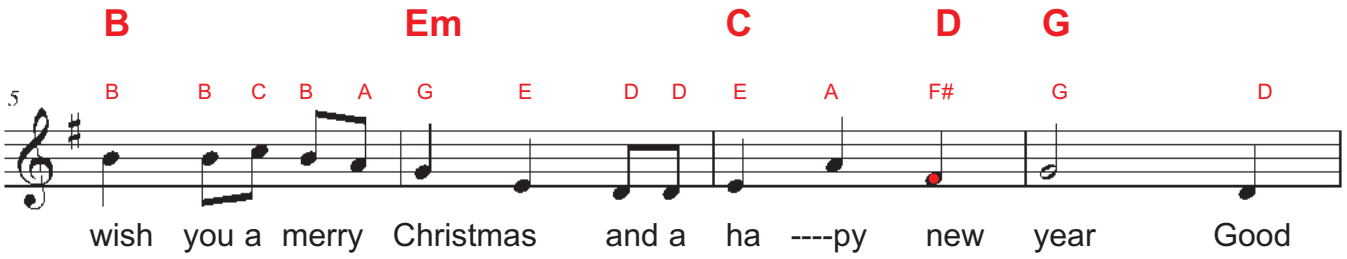
SOME CHRISTMAS SONGS TO PRACTICE ON

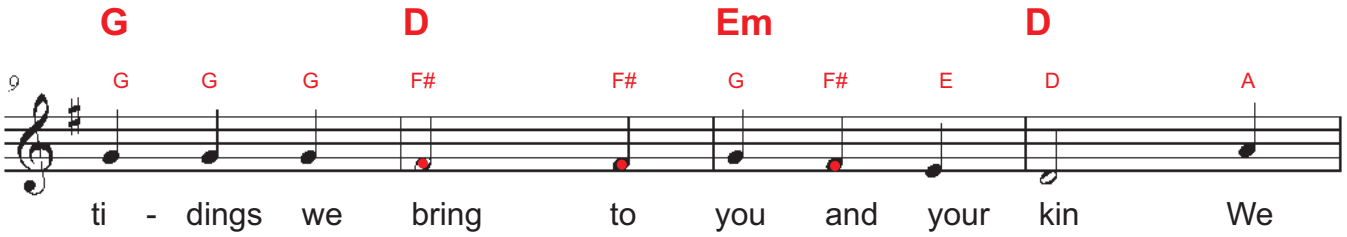
AWAY IN A MANGER

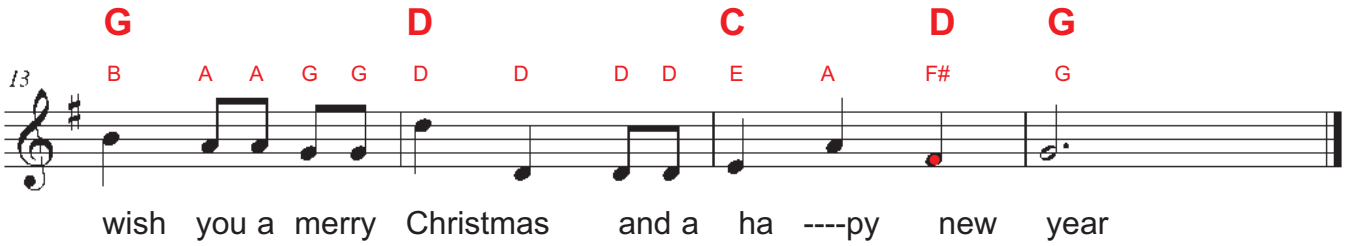


WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS

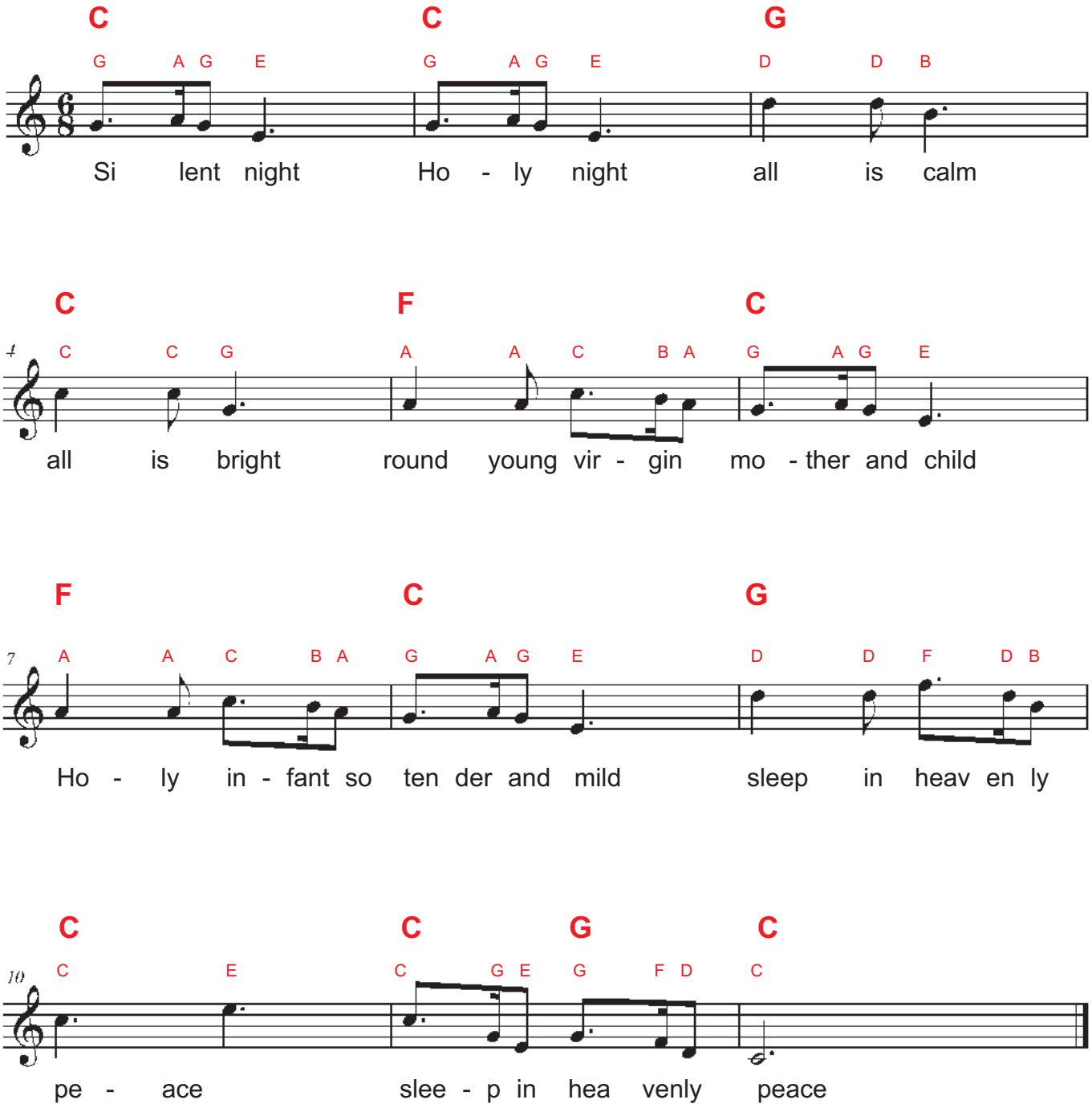








SILENT NIGHT



BALLAD STYLE

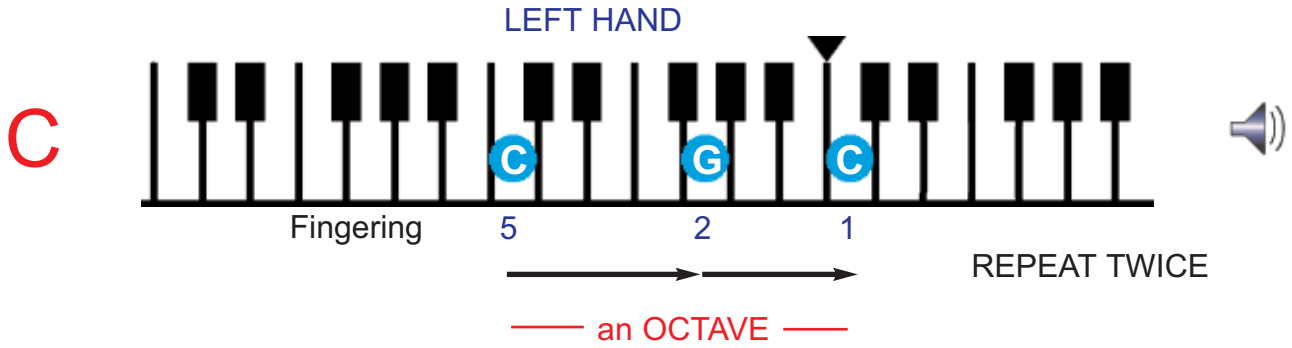
EXTENDING THE LEFT HAND

EXTENDING THE LEFT HAND
THE 10ths BALLAD STYLE

PLAY VIDEO

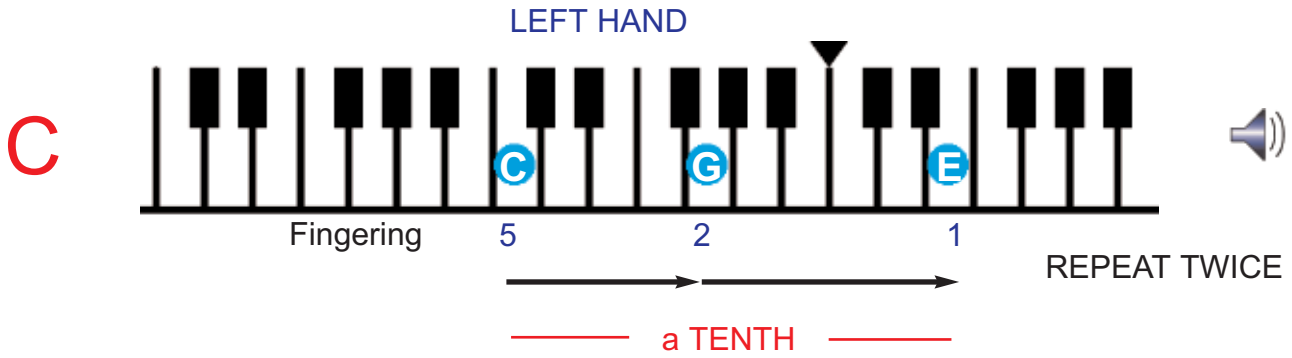
Take a look again at the first Ballad Style pattern you learned in the left hand

Remember you play one note at a time - the low C then the G then the high C



You can see that the left hand stretches from a low C to a C an OCTAVE higher.

You can make this sound much nicer if you stretch even further to an E note TEN notes up from your low C note as follows..



Note that you are now using all three notes of the basic TRIAD chord

ie - The chord of C is C - E - G

You are playing the C first then the G and lastly the E (!st - 5th - 3rd)

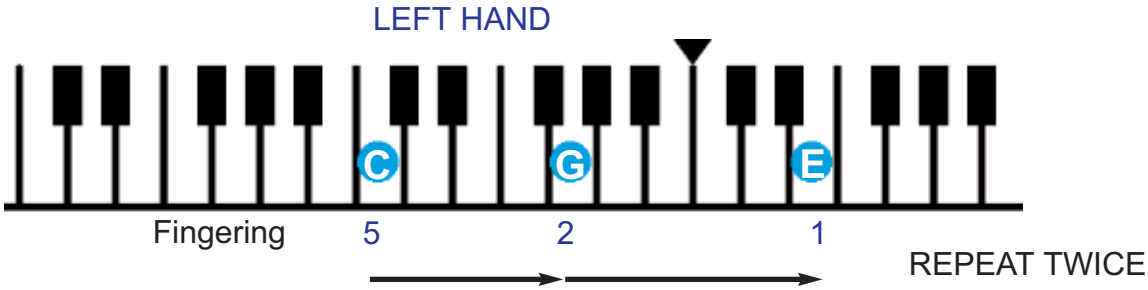
Now we need to TRANSPOSE this pattern to the chords of Am. F and G

THE 10ths BALLAD STYLE

The I - VI - IV - V sequence

Let's apply this new pattern to the familiar chord sequence C - Am - F - G

C



Now move the whole pattern TWO notes left based on the chord of Am

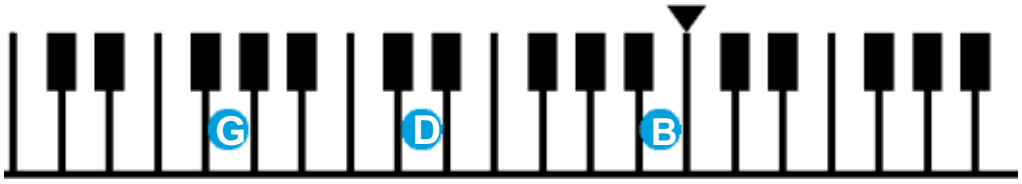
Am

Then two notes left again to F

F

Then two notes left again to G

G



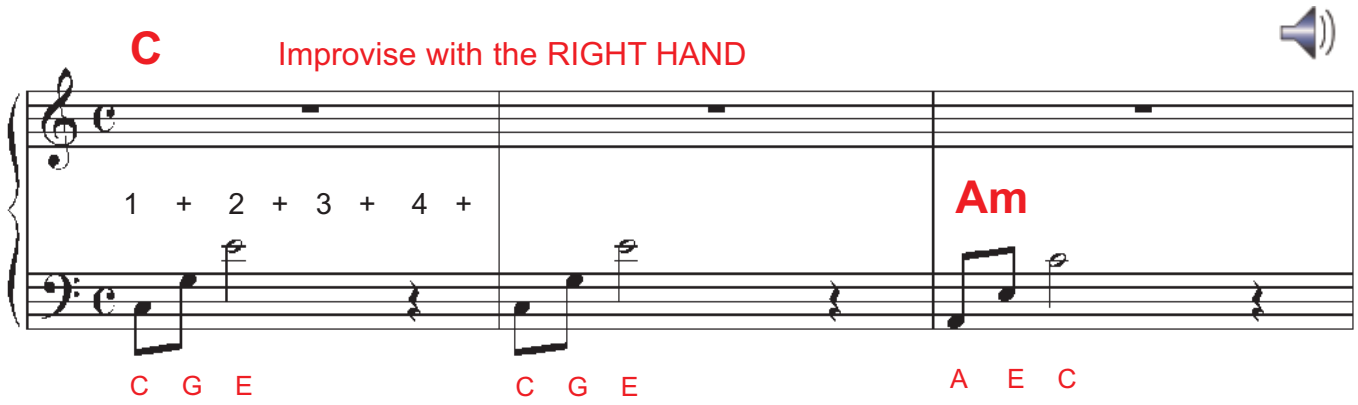
Play each sequence TWICE
So - 2 x C, 2 x Am, 2 x F, 2 x G and back to C

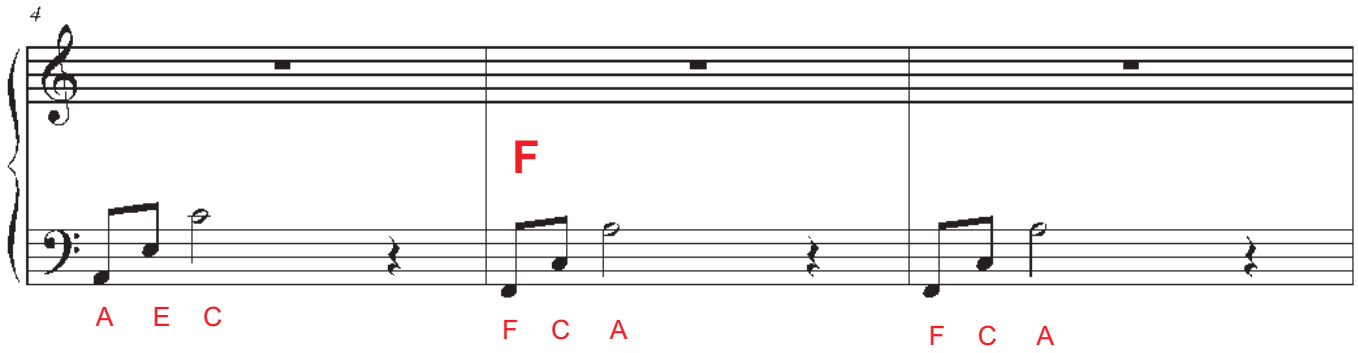
(Keep the sustain pedal down through each sequence
Lift it and replace it BETWEEN chord changes)

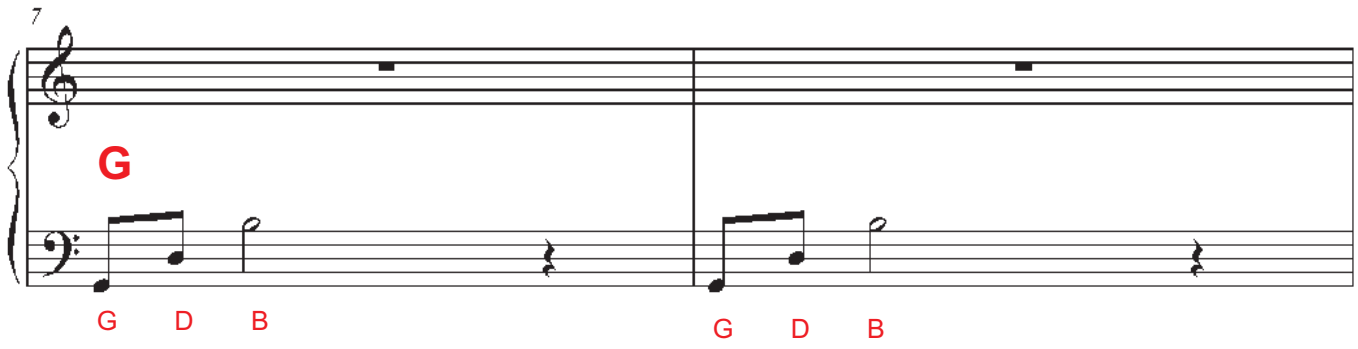
THE 10ths BALLAD STYLE

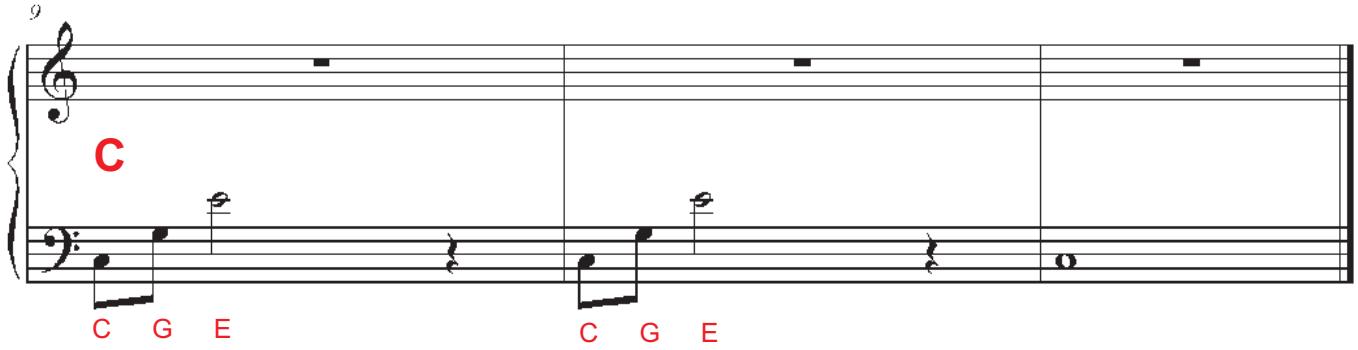
The I - VI - IV - V sequence

(In musical notation)









THE 10ths BALLAD STYLE

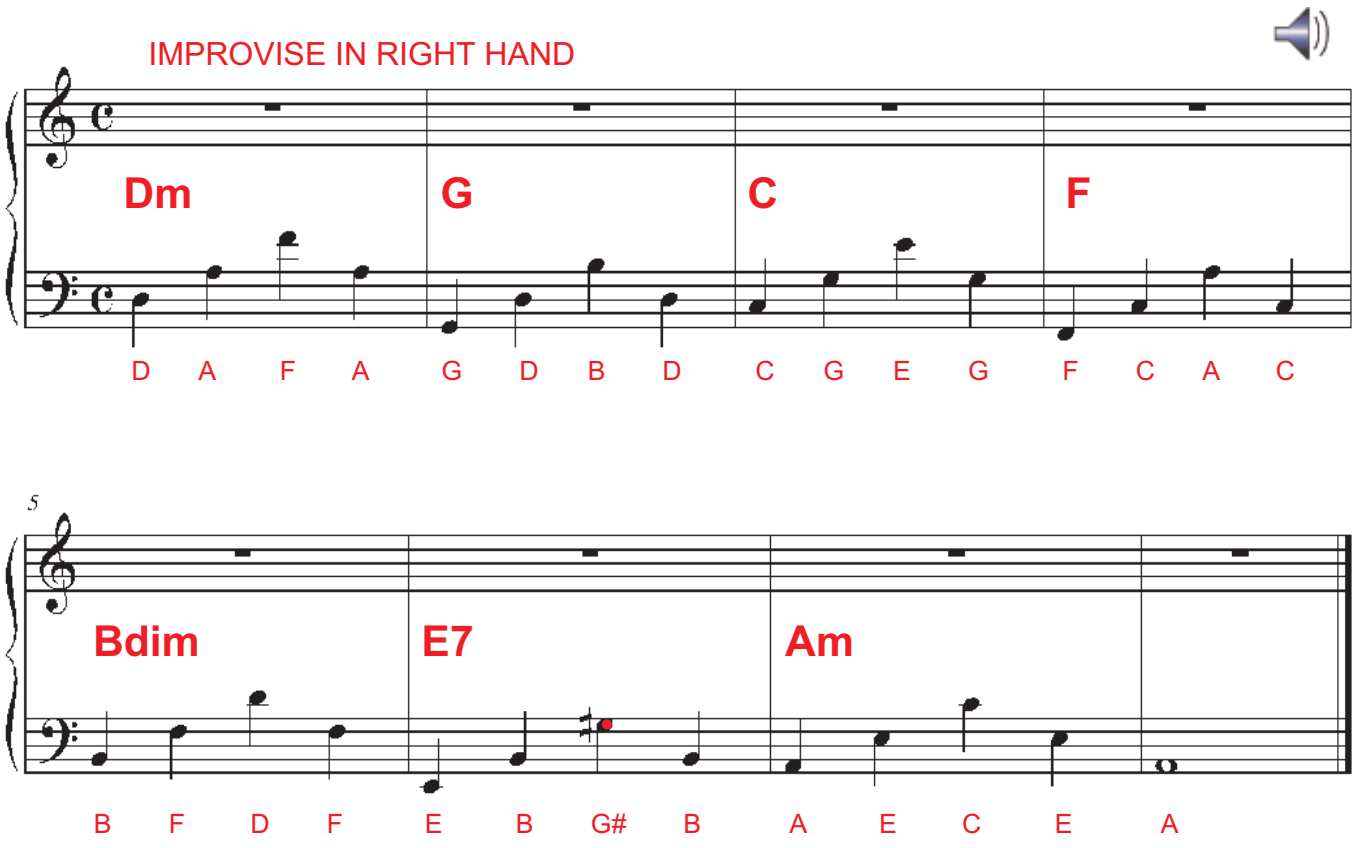
A Cycle of Fifths Exercise

In Book 4 as part of your chord practice I explained about a very common occurrence in music called the CYCLE OF FIFTHS. This next chord sequence is based on the cycle of fifths and is great practice for your TENTHS ballad style.

Improvise a melody in the RIGHT HAND. You can use ANY white key but watch out for bar number 6 which uses an E7 chord. The chord of E7 has a G# note in it so the RIGHT HAND has to use a G# note also (instead of G).

PLAY VIDEO

CYCLE OF FIFTHS BALLAD



THE 10ths BALLAD STYLE

Stride style variation

Another great way to use the tenths style is to play the top two notes TOGETHER

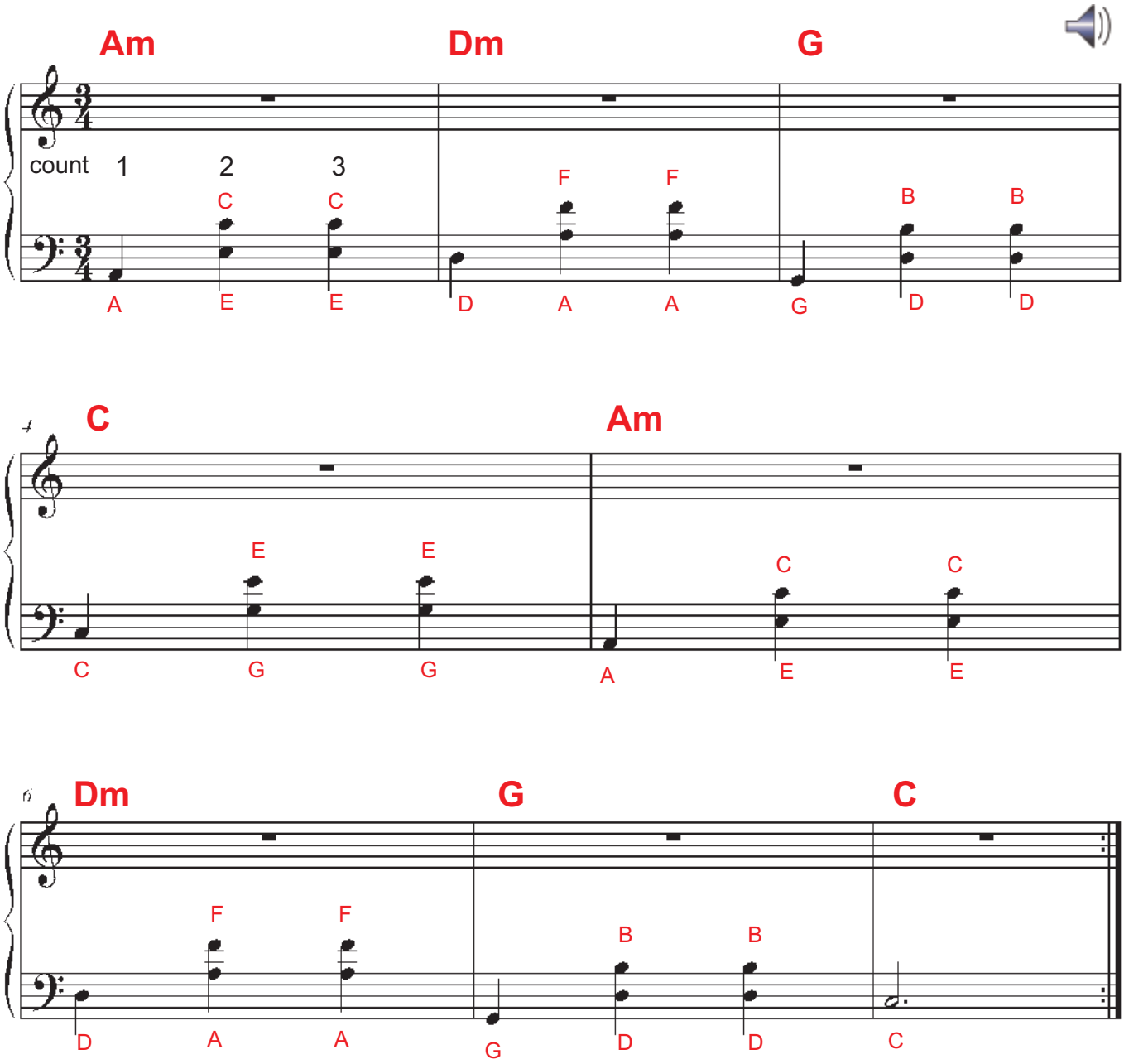
So you hit the bass note then play the next two notes at the same time.

Try the following Waltz chord sequence (3/4 time - 3 beats per bar)

IMPROVISE a melody with your RIGHT HAND.

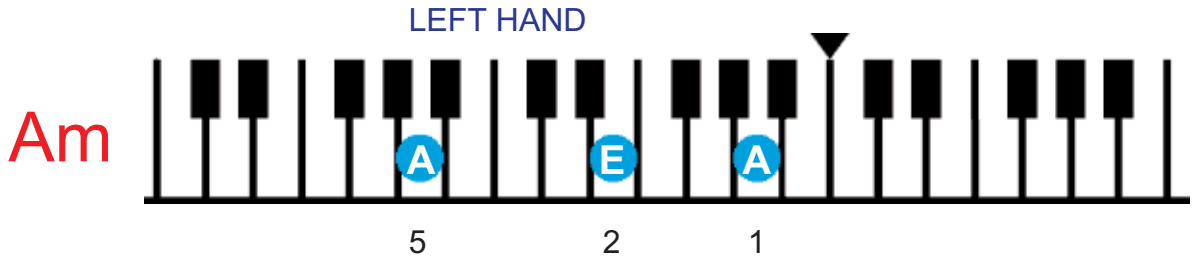
PLAY VIDEO

TENTHS WALTZ

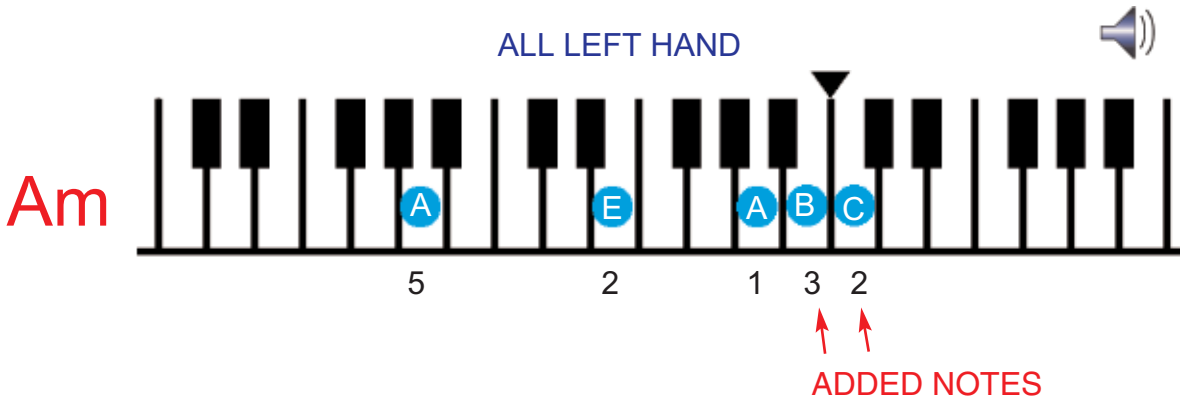


MOVING BEYOND THREE NOTES
GREENSLEAVES

Look again at the first three note left hand pattern you learned

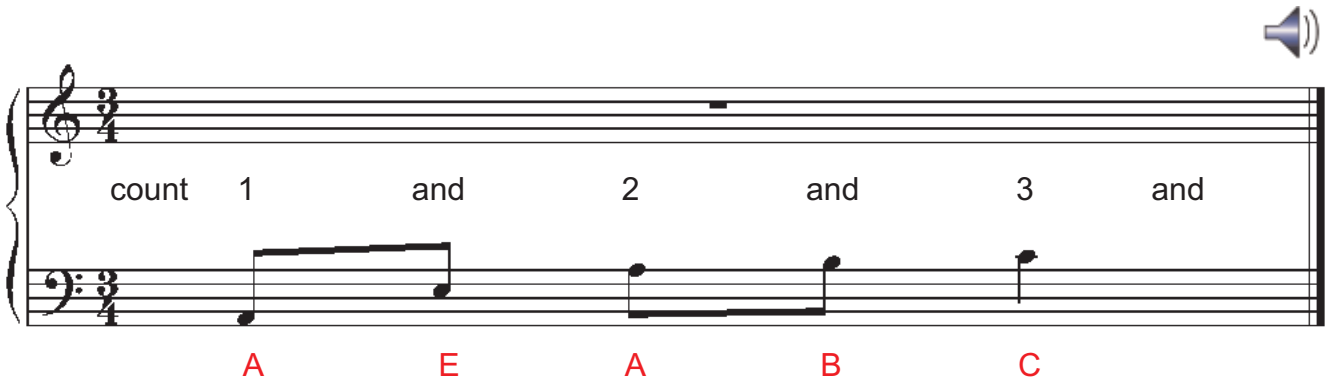


Play it again but this time add TWO EXTRA NOTES to the end of the pattern. ADD THEM WITH YOUR **LEFT HAND** by crossing your 3rd and 2nd fingers over your thumb. You play FIVE notes in total like a bass run.



Here's what it looks like in musical notation,

Note that you play this in 3/4 time (3 beats to a bar or 6 half beats to a bar)



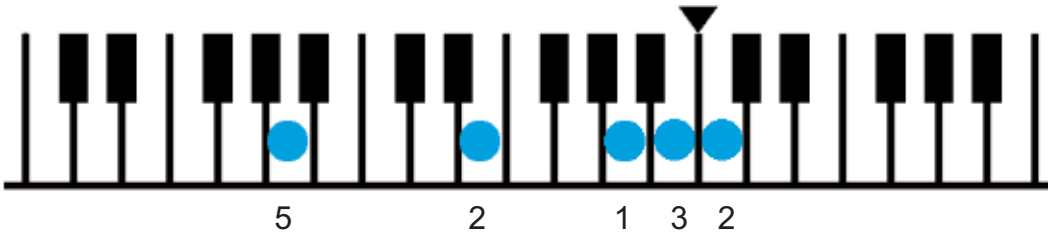
Now transpose the pattern to the chords of G, F E and C in preparation for the song GREENSLEAVES.

MOVING BEYOND THREE NOTES

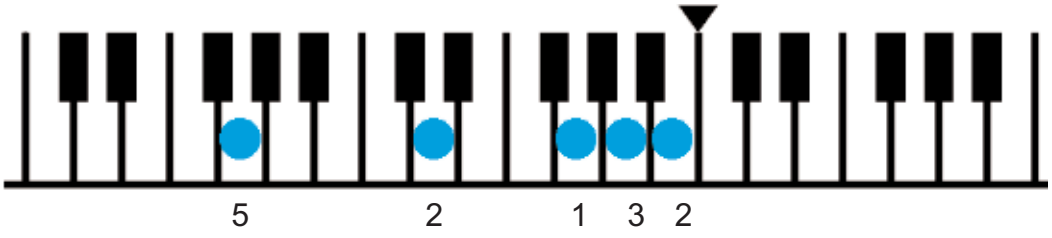
LEFT HAND patterns for GREENSLEAVES

PLAY VIDEO

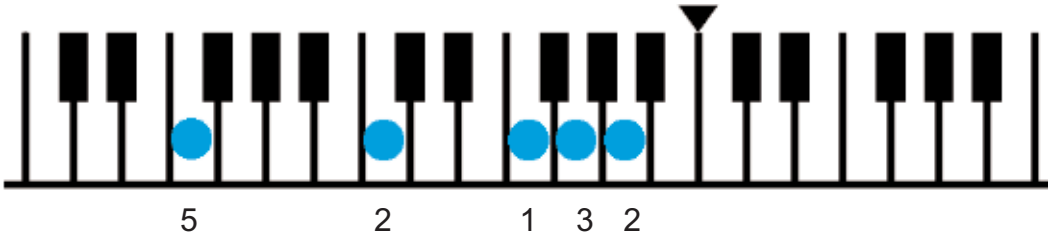
Am



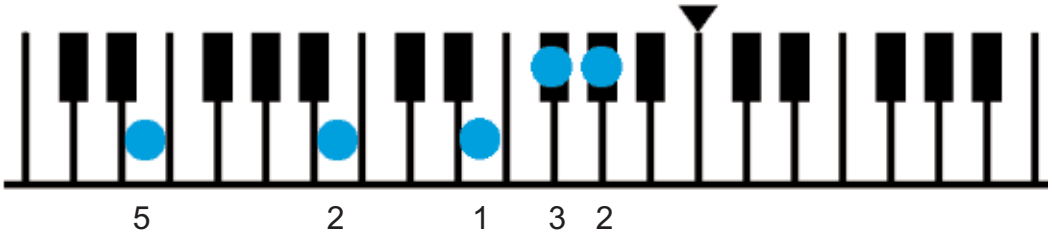
G



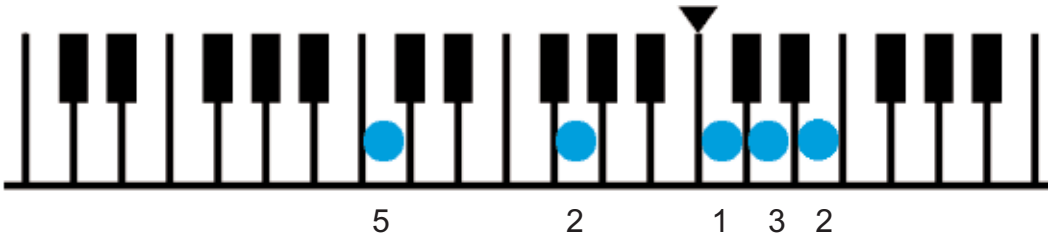
F



E



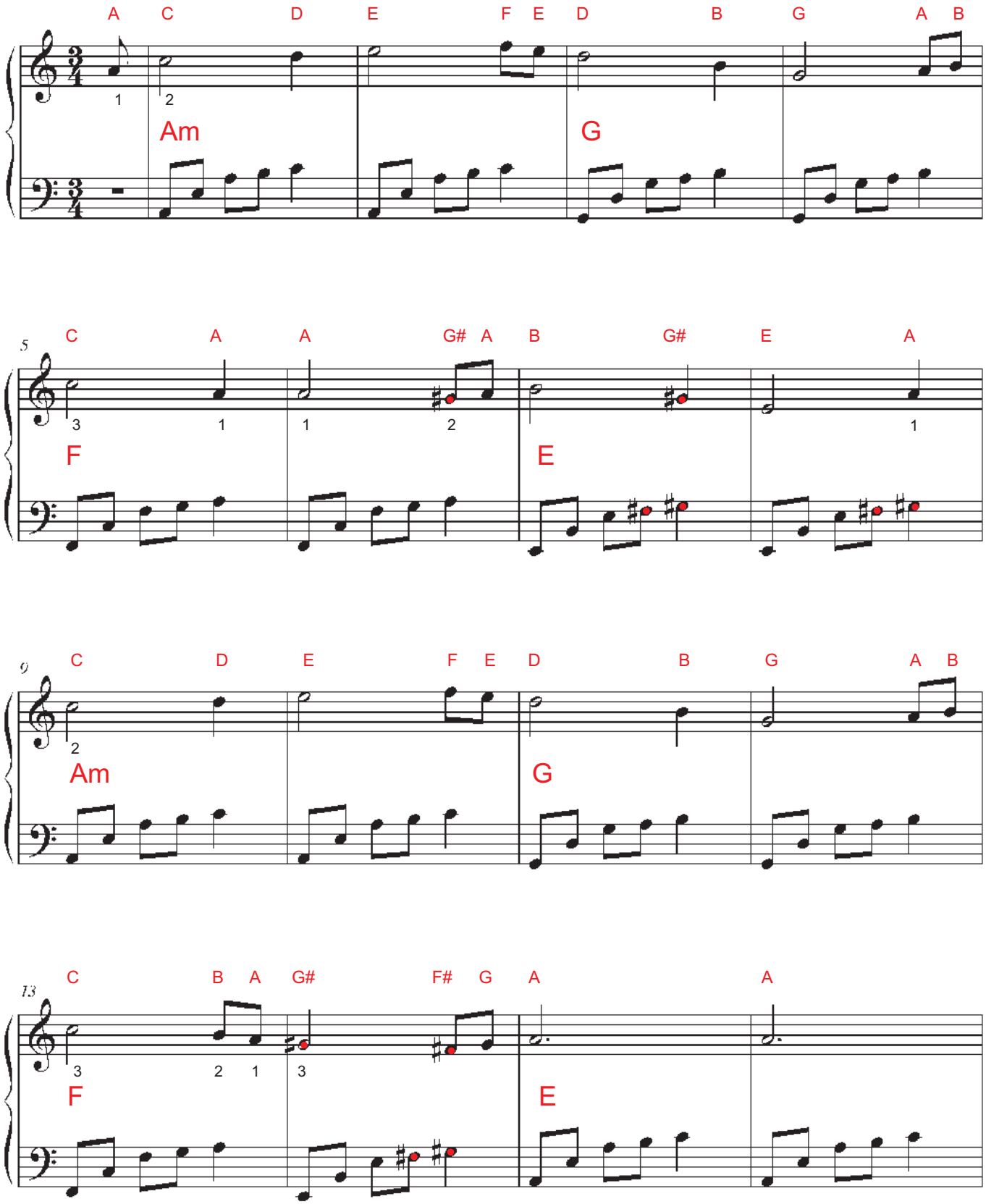
C



EXTENDING THE LEFT HAND

GREENSLEAVES

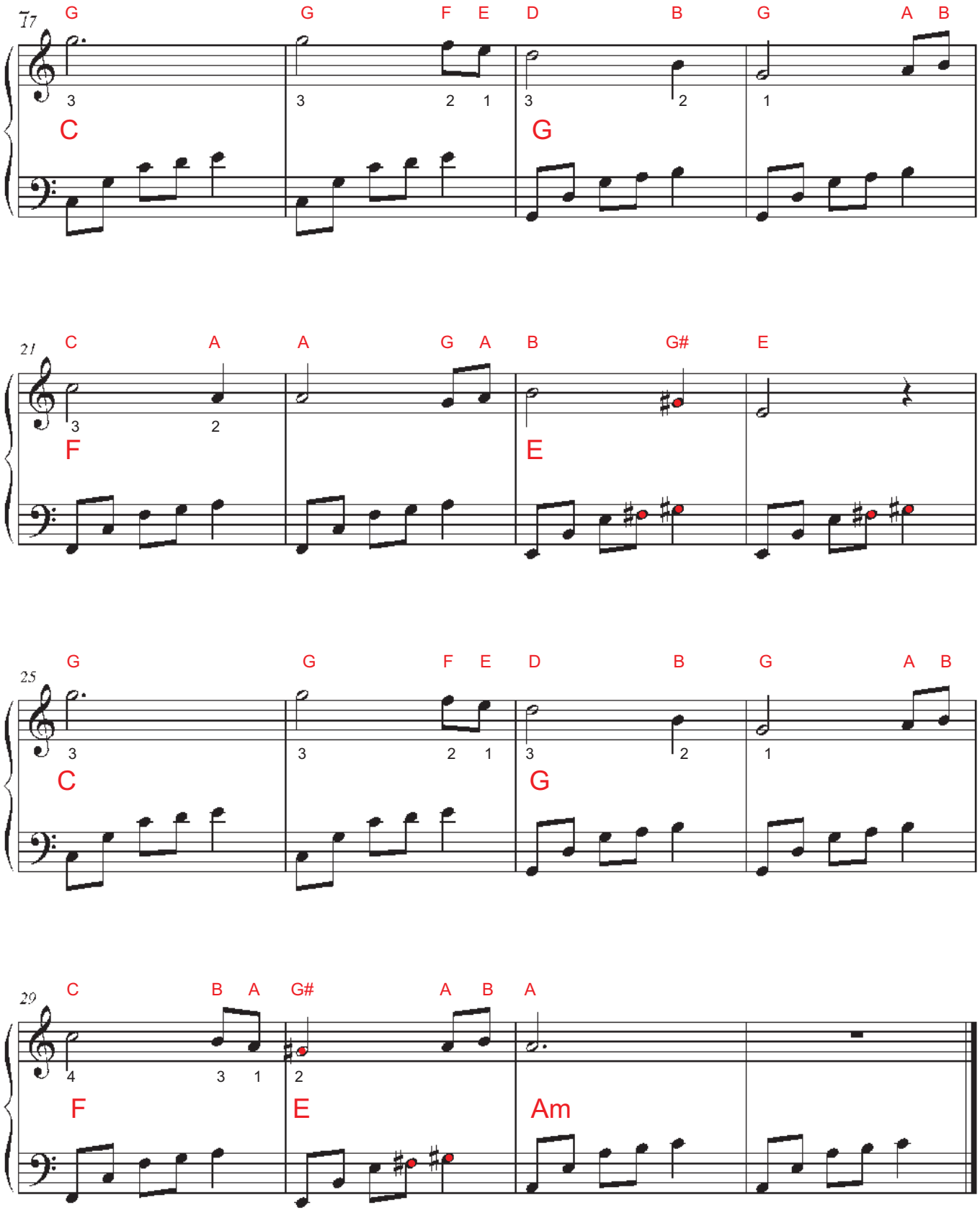
PAGE 1



EXTENDING THE LEFT HAND

GREENSLEAVES

PAGE 2

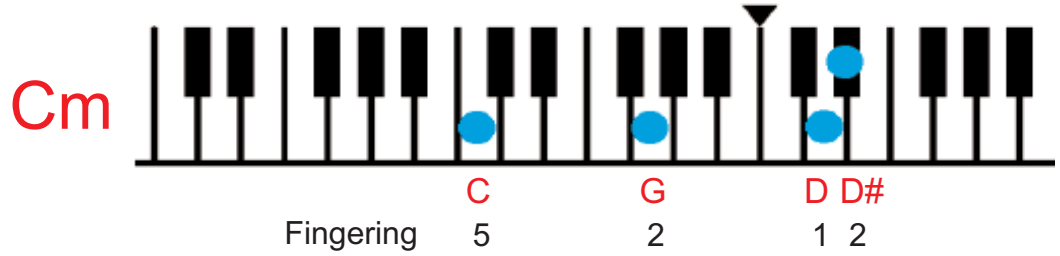


EXTENDING THE LEFT HAND
A JAZZY LEFT HAND MINOR PATTERN

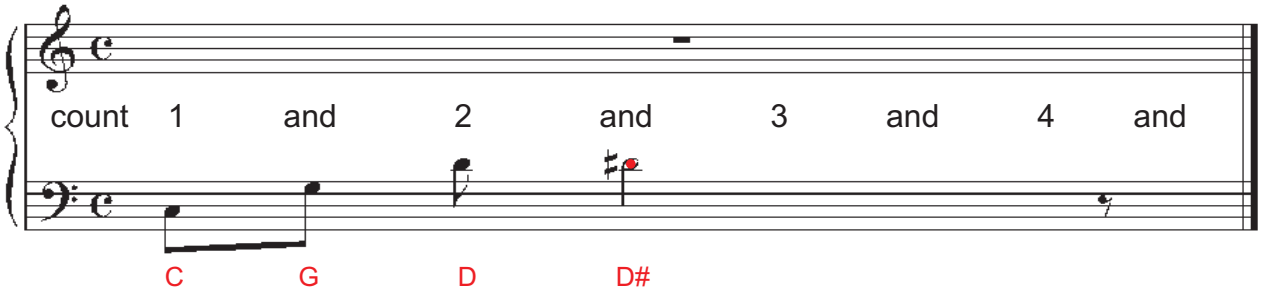
PLAY VIDEO

Let's try a different extended left hand pattern. This time you will play FOUR notes. Try the pattern with Cminor first of all.

Play each note separately from the C to the G to the D to the D# back to the D



Here's how it looks in musical notation. Listen carefully to the rhythm.

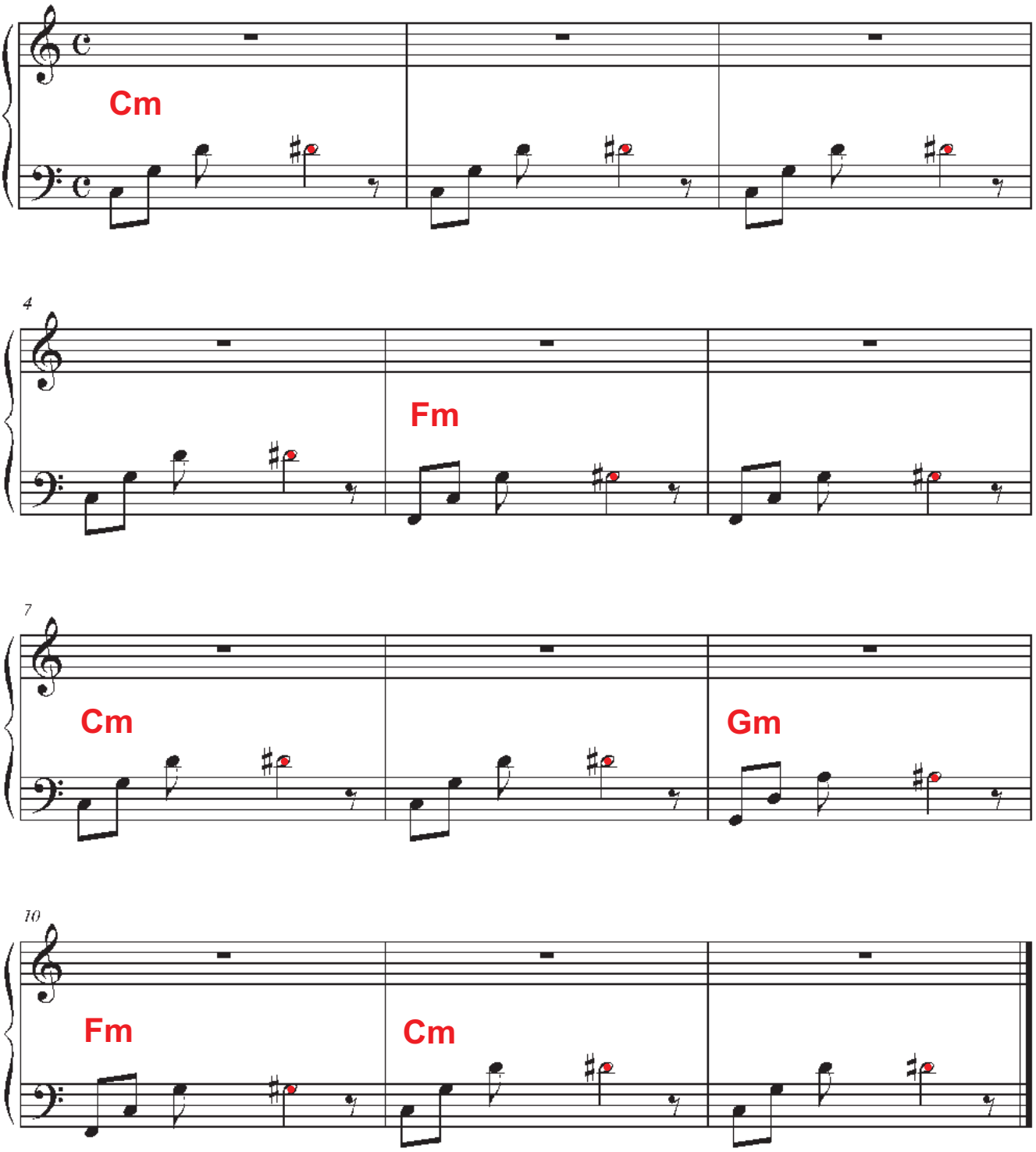


Now transpose the pattern to the chords of F minor and G minor and try the progression on the following page

EXTENDING THE LEFT HAND
C MINOR JAZZ 12 BAR BLUES

PLAY VIDEO

Improvise in the RIGHT HAND using the following Cminor / scale



You can now try
Book 6