MEL BAY'S

GETTING INTO.....

FINGERSTYLE GUITAR

by JONATHAN ADAMS

CD Contents

1 Study 1—Jonathan Adams [0:39]
2 Study 2—Jonathan Adams [0:43]
3 Study 3—Jonathan Adams [0:39]
4 Study 4—Jonathan Adams [0:39]
5 Study 5—Jonathan Adams [0:41]
6 Study 6—Jonathan Adams [0:45]
7 Two at a Time—Jonathan Adams [0:26]
8 Thumb Study—Jonathan Adams [0:49]
9 The Box—Jonathan Adams [0:17]
10 Alternating Bass—Jonathan Adams [0:16]
11 Echoes in the Canyon—Jonathan Adams [0:37]
12 The Capricious Caddis—Jonathan Adams [0:44]
13 Pathways—Jonathan Adams [0:49]
14 Rain Song—Jonathan Adams [1:18]
15 Windsong—Keith Gehle [0:50]
16 The Goodtime Rag—Jonathan Adams [1:04]
17 Yellow River Blues—Keith Gehle [1:15]
18 Dance of the Gypsy—Jonathan Adams [1:24]
19 Dusk—Jonathan Adams [1:56]
20 Bridget O'Malley—traditional [1:23]
21 Minuet—J.S. Bach [1:43]
22 Für Elise—L.v. Beethoven [0:44]
23 Romanza—traditional [2:10]
24 Anniversary Blues—Lyman Golden [0:46]
25 Just Chet—Lyman Golden [1:06]
26 Etude in A—M. Carcassi [2:23]
27 Molly Malone—traditional [0:23]
28 Scarborough Fair—traditional [1:26]
29 Gymnopedie #1—Erik Satie [3:25]
30 House of the Rising Sun—traditional [0:32]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

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Dedication

To Andrew and Catherine Adams (Mom and Dad), for introducing me to the guitar and their encouragement and support of my music. To my wife, Jennifer, for her love, patience and invaluable musical advice and support.

—Jonathan Adams

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fingerstyle guitar
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ble of Contents

Special Thanks 2
Dedication 2
Introduction 4
What is Fingerstyle? 4
Fingering Notes 5
Theory Basics 6
Greensleeves 9
Seating and Position 11
Right-Hand Technique 14
Study #1 21
Study #2 22
Study #3 23
Study #4 24
Study #5 25
Study #6 26
Two at a Time 28
Thumb Study 29
Alternating Bass 30
The Box 30
Echoes in the Canyon 32
Left-Hand Technique 34
Pathways (guide finger study) 38
The Capricious Caddis 40
Practice 43
Music 45
Rain Song 50
Windsong 53
The Goodtime Rag 54
Yellow River Blues 57
Dance of the Gypsy 60
Dusk 62
Bridget O'Malley 66
Minuet 68
Für Elise 70
Romanza 72
Anniversary Blues 76
Just Chet 78
Etude 80
Molly Malone (melody) 82
Molly Malone (with accompaniment) 83
Scarborough Fair (with accompaniment) 84
Scarborough Fair (melody) 86
House of the Rising Sun (melody) 87
House of the Rising Sun (with accompaniment) 88
Gymnopedie #1 (melody) 90
Gymnopedie #1 (with accompaniment) 92
About the Author 96

Introduction

Greetings, fellow guitarists, and welcome to this introduction to fingerstyle technique. This book will provide an overview of fingerstyle techniques for the guitarist who may not be familiar with the classical/fingerstyle technique or who just wants to learn more. No matter what style of guitar you play, whether it be blues, rock, country or jazz, you have probably encountered some form of fingerstyle playing along the way.

In the first few chapters we will discuss some basic techniques and how to approach these techniques while developing good habits and correcting or avoiding the development of bad habits. The later sections will focus on some basic repertoire from the classical and fingerstyle traditions and will implement the techniques learned in the previous chapters.

Of course, this book is only intended to provide an overview of the techniques discussed, and hopefully spur your interest in this style of playing. For further *in depth* instruction please contact a *fingerstyle* or *classical* guitar teacher in your area.

What is Fingerstyle?

So what the heck is "fingerstyle" guitar anyway? Well, fingerstyle guitar is a more than just a *style* of guitar playing. In actuality the fingerstyle technique encompasses many different styles of guitar, from fingerstyle blues and jazz, to country, folk, pop and of course the grandfather of them all, the classical guitar. Fingerstyle guitar is an approach to playing the guitar in which many believe the instrument's greatest potential is achieved, unlike other styles of guitar which focus on either only the melody (lead guitar) or harmony (chords). The guitarist who employs the fingerstyle technique has the ability to play melody and harmony simultaneously, thus achieving a fuller sound. Some listeners have remarked that this almost sounds as if there are two guitars playing at once! In the scope of this book we will concentrate on some of the basic techniques as well as the musical theory behind fingerstyle guitar compositions. You may even want to try your hand at a composition of your own. Let's start with some of the basics of music theory and the ideas behind the fingerstyle technique.

Fingering Notes

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ Refers to the string on which the note is to be played. One indicates the high E. Six indicates the low E.

1 2 3 4 Indicates the finger to be used on the left hand.

p i m a Indicates the finger to be used on the right hand.
p=thumb, i=index, m=middle, and a=ring.

A slur mark between differing notes indicates a hammer-on or pull-off.

A line between notes indicates a slide.

Theory Basics

As you know, the fingerstyle guitar technique allows the player to play the melody, bass lines and chord changes simultaneously. In order to understand how the single note melodies and chord changes work together you should have at a least a basic understanding of how chord harmony works.

If you aren't familiar with music theory let's talk a little bit about the basics.

I like to think of the major scale as the *building block* of the tonal system. So where does the scale come from? Well, the scale is determined by a series of whole steps (2 frets) and half steps (one fret).

The formula is always the same no matter what key you choose. Here is the formula for a major scale. For the purpose of simplicity we will start with the C major scale. w=whole step and h= half step. C major scale formula= w w h w w w h. This formula is the same for all major scales. *Remember E to F and B to C only have half steps between them; all others will have a sharp before the next letter. If you are confused about this, I have also included a chart outlining the musical alphabet. (See figure A)*

(fig. A The musical alphabet) A A♯ B C C♯ D D♯ E F F♯ G G♯ A

		w	w	h	w	w	w	h
(C major Scale)	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C

Now let's try the key of D.

		w	w	h	w	w	w	h
(D major Scale)	D	E	F♯	G	A	B	C♯	D

So these are the notes that will make up the key of D. We will now use the notes to build the chords for the key of D. The smallest number of notes that can make up a chord is three. This is also known as a triad. Building these chords or triads is easy. We just need to stack the notes in a specific order. Here's how we'll do it.

The first chord is D so we start with the first note D. Now we need the other two notes to form the triad. We get these by picking *every other note.* For example the chord of D major consists of these notes: D F♯ A. The second chord in the key would be: E G B, which forms the chord E minor. Continue this process for the other chords of the key. When you are finished you will have all of the chords for the key. Now input that information into a chord chart, which should look something like this:

I	**ii**	**iii**	**IV**	**V**	**vi**	**vii°**
D	E	F♯	G	A	B	C♯
F♯	G	A	B	C♯	D	E
A	B	C♯	D	E	F♯	G

In the previous chart, the upper case Roman numerals are major chords and the lower case numerals are minor chords. The last chord is diminished. This chord pattern is also the same for every major key. So, the first chord is D major (which consists of the notes D F♯ A), the second chord is E minor (E G B)…etc.

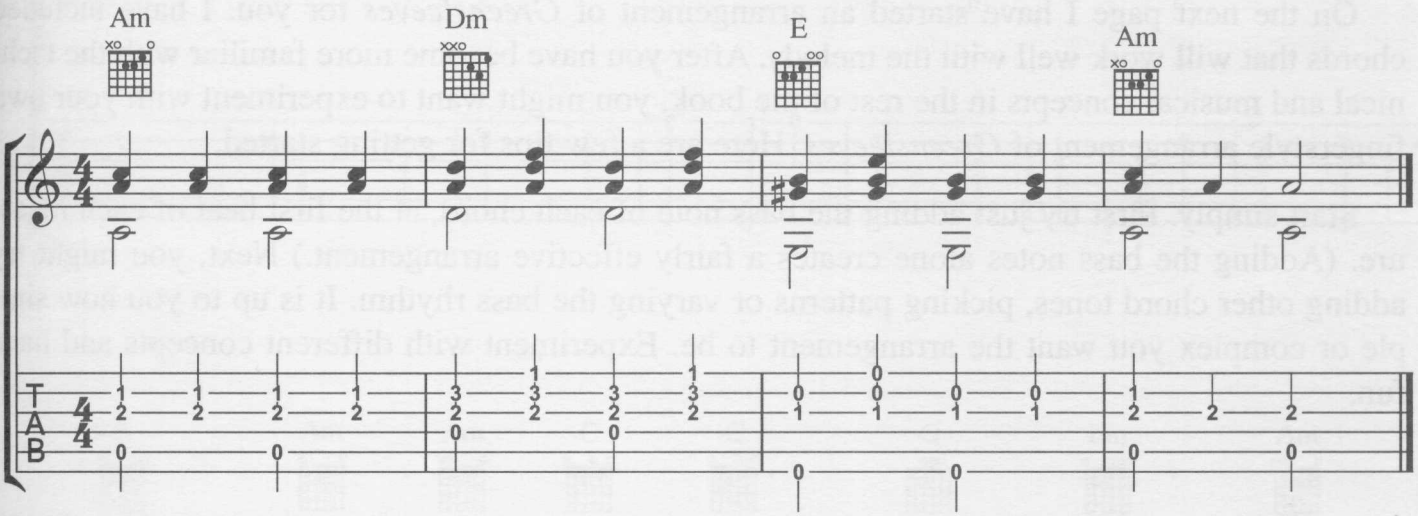
To add extensions to the chords (i.e. 7ths, 9ths etc.) all you need to do is add one more note extending from the triad. For example a D major seventh would be:

D F♯ A C♯

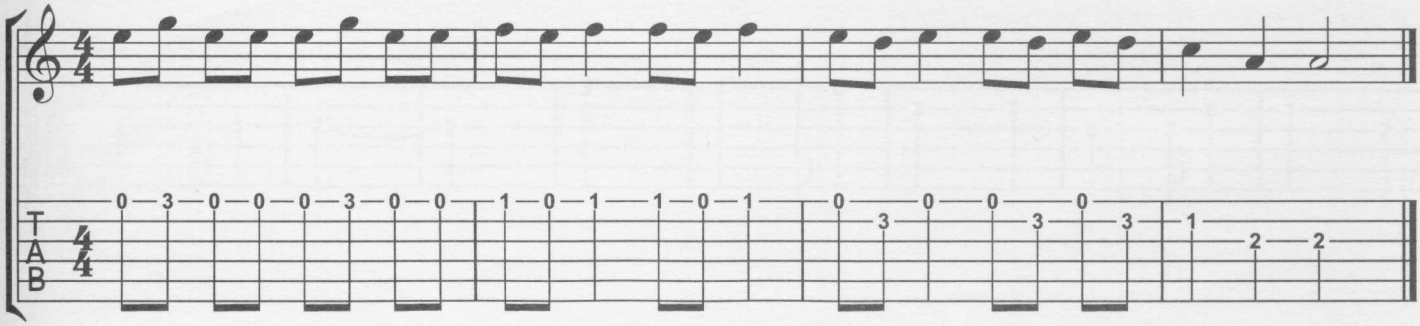
What does this have to do with the fingerstyle guitar? Well as I said earlier, the fingerstyle guitar technique allows the player to effectively play the melody and the harmony at the same time, thus achieving a full sound with only one instrument. It is important to understand at least the rudiments of music theory so that you can understand how the melody (scales) and harmony (chords) work together. Of course, this is a very basic overview of how the melody and harmony work together. There can be an infinite amount of complexity in these relationships. Music often moves from *key* to *key* and so these relationships can be in a constant state of change.

Let's take a brief look at how these elements might work together in a fingerstyle composition. For this example I will separate the three elements of the composition: the bass line, the melody and the harmony.

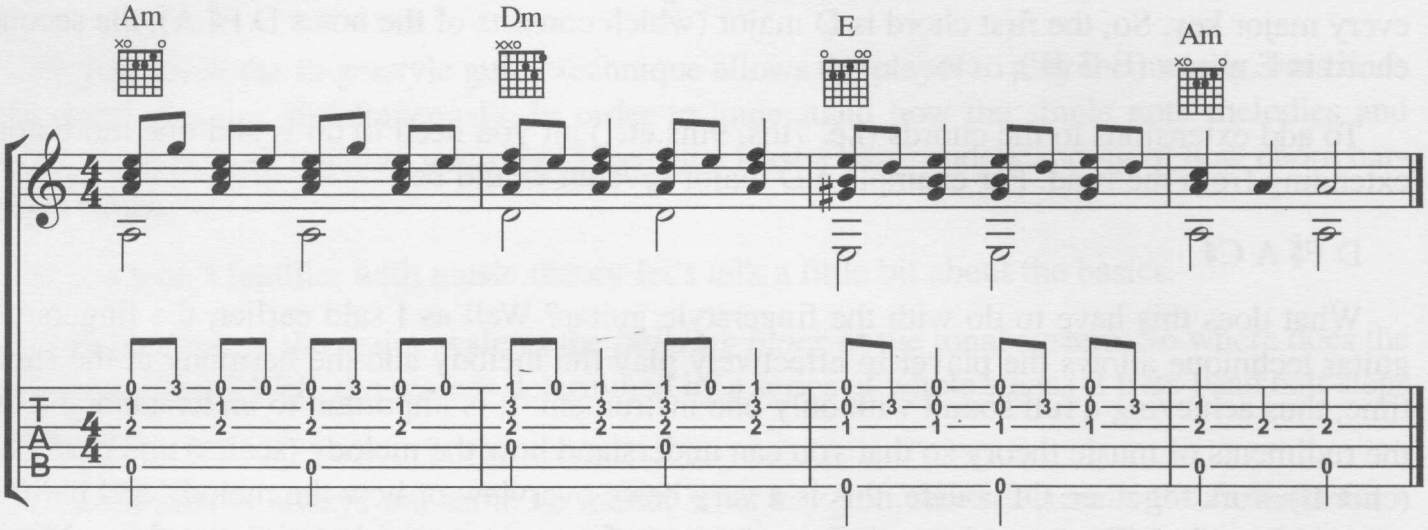
First I'll compose a short chord progression and bass line. The bass line is simply the root note of each chord.



Then I'll compose a simple melody to go along with the chords.



Now combine the two parts.



This is a very basic overview of the elements of a fingerstyle piece, but I hope that it will provide some understanding of the thought process involved with interpreting or composing your own music.

Try your hand at combining some melodies with the chords to create a fingerstyle arrangement of your own. Remember, you don't have to use all of the notes of the accompaniment chord. Sometimes one note is all that is needed to imply a chord change.

On the next page I have started an arrangement of *Greensleeves* for you. I have included chords that will work well with the melody. After you have become more familiar with the technical and musical concepts in the rest of the book, you might want to experiment with your own fingerstyle arrangement of *Greensleeves.* Here are a few tips for getting started.

Start simply. First try just adding the bass note of each chord, at the first beat of each measure. (Adding the bass notes alone creates a fairly effective arrangement.) Next, you might try adding other chord tones, picking patterns or varying the bass rhythm. It is up to you how simple or complex you want the arrangement to be. Experiment with different concepts and have fun.

Don't wrestle with the guitar! By *wrestling* I mean bending at the waist or lowering the left shoulder excessively in order to reach the higher positions or difficult reaches. This is a common problem and can cause major problems during the performance of a piece. Many times it can throw your entire positioning "out of whack" and it can be difficult to recover. While some body movement may be required in certain situations it should not throw your positioning out of balance during performance.

I once heard of a guitarist who, while in college, had to practice in his small dorm room. Because the room was so small, the guitarist had to sit in the corner with the headstock of the guitar resting against the wall. Although this was a minor inconvenience, the guitarist soon found that, because the headstock was *anchored* and held in a static position on the wall, that the accuracy of his playing was greatly improved! This same *anchoring* concept can be applied to the classical position by letting the base of the guitar rest on the player's chair. (see fig. 1B) By adding the *secure* resting point of the chair the guitar will be held much more securely and will allow for greater accuracy.

I also prefer to use this concept with respect to the use of the standard guitar strap.

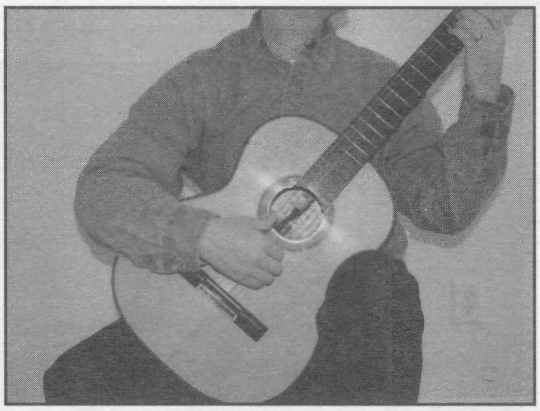


fig. 1B

1. The classical position- This is the most common position and is probably the best model to look at for understanding the core principles that need to be adhered to when considering the seating position. *(see fig 1B)* In this position the player is seated with their left leg raised with a footstool. This allows the guitarist to prop the guitar up with the neck at an angle. This angle allows for the best access to the entire guitar neck with the least amount of body movement. This angle also allows for the proper positioning of the elbow, wrist and hand. Failure to achieve the proper position for the elbow and wrist will make some chord positions and left hand stretches extremely difficult and in some cases impossible!

2. The classical position with strap- This position is basically the same concept as the classical position, only instead of using a footstool or some other device to hold the guitar in position I use the standard guitar strap. I began using this position a few years ago and I feel it is the best because it allows the player to achieve the *anchored* feeling that I described above while also allowing the player to move with the music and not be so rigid. *(see fig. 1C)*

fig. 1C

3. The folk position- This is probably the most common seating position for non-classical guitarists. This position is fine in most cases as long as the basic principles of proper hand position are adhered to. In order to better facilitate the proper hand positioning and put the guitar in a better position it is usually best to cross the right leg over the left. Notice that when you do this it raises the guitar neck by a few inches. This allows the player to achieve better hand positioning. The drawback to this style of seating is that when the player tries to access the higher positions they must lower the left shoulder and change body positions in order to achieve the proper hand positioning. As we discussed earlier this has the potential to alter the guitar's position and throw things "out of whack" for the rest of the piece. Because most folk guitar music is played in the lower and middle positions of the guitar neck this usually is not a problem. *(See fig. 1D)*

fig. 1D

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fig. 1D

Right-Hand Technique

The aspect of technique that is probably the most obvious difference in the "finger" style of guitar playing is the use of the right-hand fingers, as opposed to a pick, to pluck the strings. There are some basic principles concerning the fingerpicking technique that I would like to cover in this section. The beginnings of the fingerpicking technique can be somewhat frustrating to a guitarist who has already learned using a pick. In some ways it can be like starting over with the guitar. If you have been playing the guitar for some time, you may have already tried playing a fingerstyle piece with your own makeshift technique (as I did in the beginning of my fingerstyle explorations). I hope the following principles will help give you some insights into the most efficient use of the right hand.

First let's talk about the basic set-up of the right hand. The standard position of the *fingerstyle position* is this: The index, middle and ring fingers are placed on the first three strings of the guitar. The thumb can rest on the low E. *(see fig. 2A)*

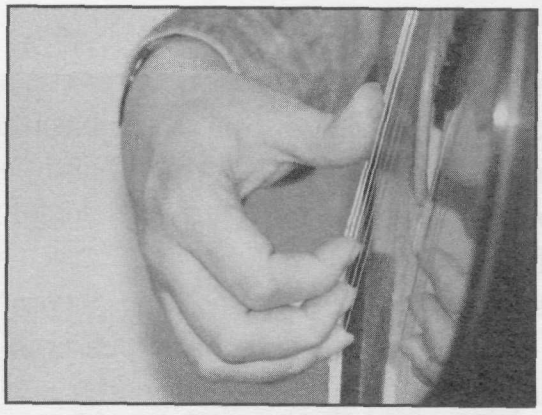


fig. 2A

This is a general position in which the fingers handle the upper notes and the thumb handles the bass notes. There are many variations in patterns, positions and effects in which the thumb may be used to pick the higher strings or the fingers are used to pluck the bass strings, but this is the basic position or *home base* of the right hand.

The shorthand notation used to refer to the fingers of the right hand are as follows:

Thumb= p, index= i, middle=m and ring finger= a. These commonly used letters are derived from the Spanish names for the right hand fingers and have become a common way to refer to the fingers in fingerstyle notation. *(see fig. 2B)*

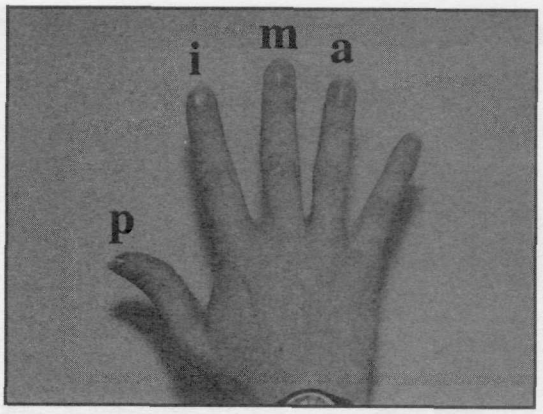


fig. 2B

Now let's talk a bit about the contraction of the fingers or *picking* technique. The main stroke that I will cover is called the *free stroke* because the fingers are able to freely contract to the palm. Although it would seem obvious to simply pick the desired string from the basic position, there are some basic principles to take into account for obtaining the best tone and volume from the guitar. First and most importantly is the position of the hand and wrist from the basic position. The wrist must have the proper amount of arch to allow for the proper follow through of the fingers. The wrist should have some curvature outwards probably putting the wrist a few inches from the soundboard of the guitar. *(see fig. 2C)* This will allow for the proper follow through of the fingers, which is my next point.

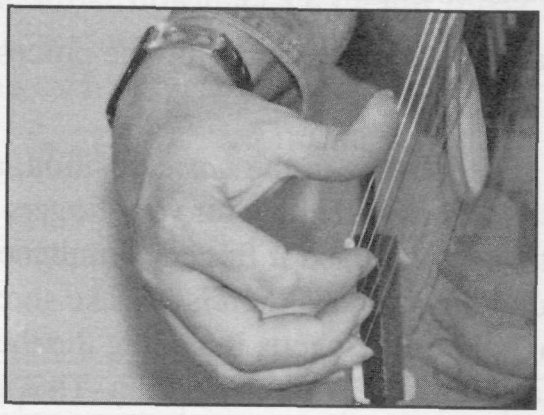


fig. 2C

In order to achieve the most consistent tone and volume you should take care to contract the right hand fingers from the large knuckle joints. *(see fig. 2D)*

Contract the fingers from the large knuckle joint for the best tone and volume.

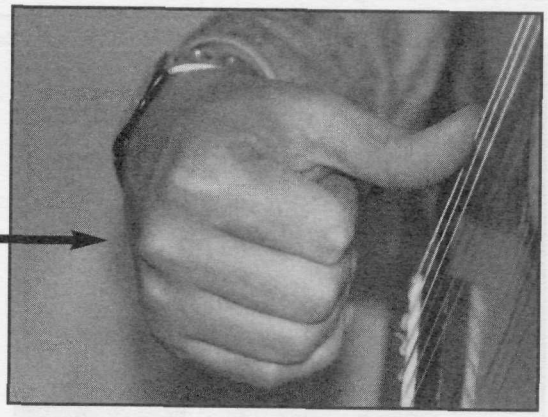


fig. 2D

A common mistake is to use the smaller joints too much. *(see fig. 2E)* This will result in a small *thin* tone.

Don't pluck from these joints unless you are going for a thin tone.

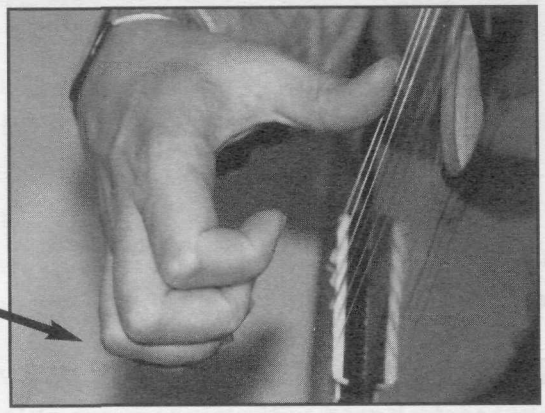


fig. 2E

In order to try and explain to you what it *feels like* to contract from the larger knuckles, let's try a couple of exercises that will illustrate this feeling.

1. **a.** Hold your right hand out in front of you with your palm parallel to the floor.

   b. Relax your hand and wrist, but support your right hand wrist with your left hand so that it remains parallel to the floor and doesn't slump too much.

   c. Now simultaneously contract the right hand fingers (from the large knuckles) so that they slap into your palm and make a sort of "one-handed clap."

This is the basic feeling that you should have during the process of finger picking. Now let's try this with the guitar.

2. Place your hand on the guitar strings in the *basic* position, as we described earlier. Make sure to arch your wrist sufficiently. This will allow for your fingers to follow through to the palm. Now practice rapidly contracting the *i, m* and *a* fingers simultaneously so that you achieve the same feeling that we described in the previous exercise. Make sure that the fingers stay *inside* of the thumb. Now try contracting all of the fingers, including the thumb. At the completion of this stroke you hand should be in an almost "fist-like" position. This is the fingerpicking stroke in a nutshell. You should always strive for this follow through whether the fingers are plucked together or separately. *(see fig. 2F)* Once again, make sure that the index finger stays to the inside of the thumb. You should never allow your thumb to dip behind the index finger in any fingerpicking pattern. This is a common bad habit and should be avoided at all costs! *(see fig. 2G)*

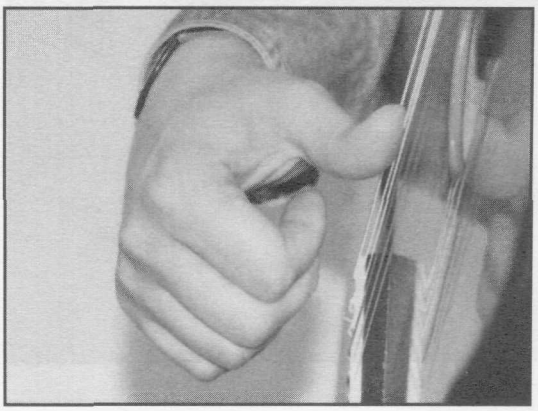


fig. 2F

Make sure that the thumb DOES NOT fall behind the index finger during the picking stroke

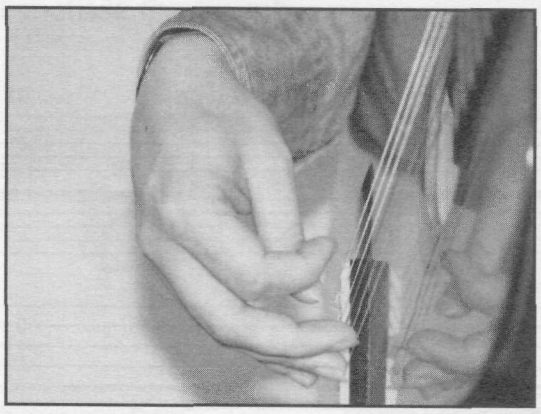


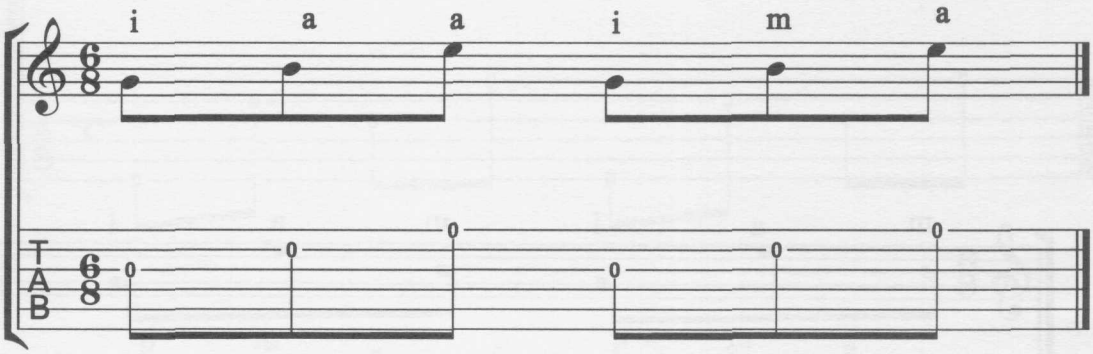
fig. 2G

As I mentioned before, the stroke we have just covered is widely known as the *free stroke.* The other basic picking stroke is called the *rest stroke.* The rest stroke has this name because after plucking the string the finger comes to rest on the string above the plucked string. This stroke is similar to the way a bass player plucks the strings with the fingers. The rest stroke normally only employs the index and middle finger for the picking. In this stroke, the fingers are held much straighter than for free stroke and the fingers are contracted from the large knuckles at the palm.

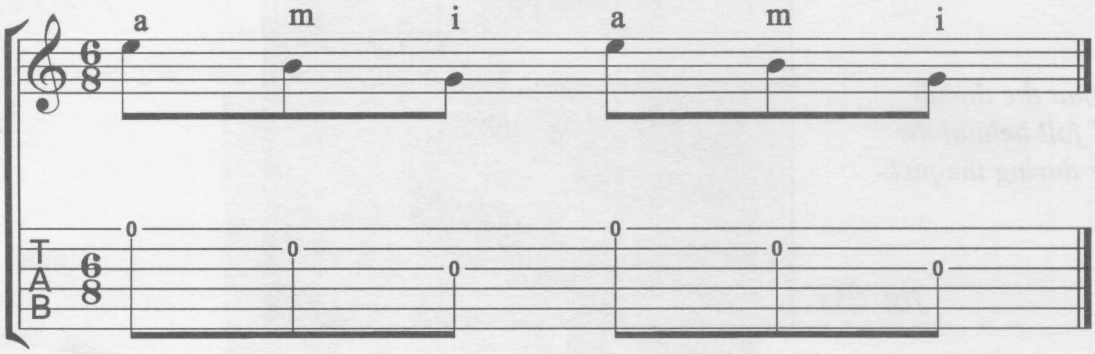
The rest stroke is not used nearly as much as free stroke, and I would say that I probably only use it in a small percentage of the music that I play. It is best used for scale passages and emphasizing certain melody notes. The pieces in this book mainly utilize the free stroke.

Now that you have the basic stroke down, let's try a few finger picking *patterns* with the free stroke. Here are a few patterns that will use only the *i, m* and *a* fingers. The thumb will stay anchored on the low E string in each of these patterns.

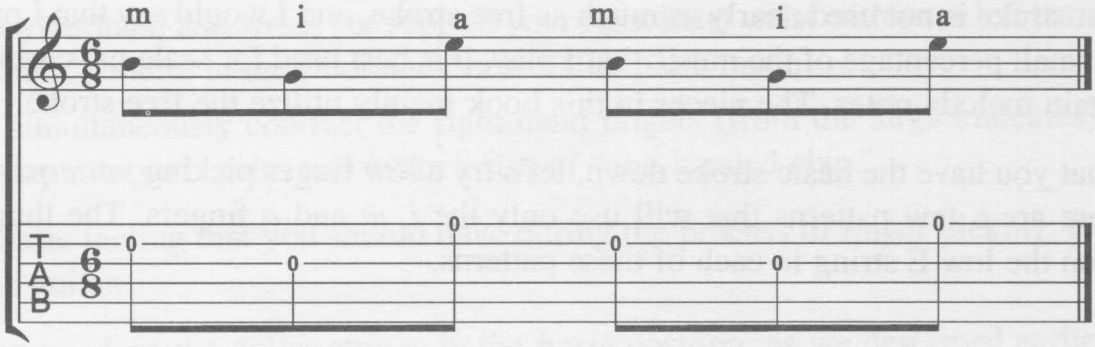
i m a



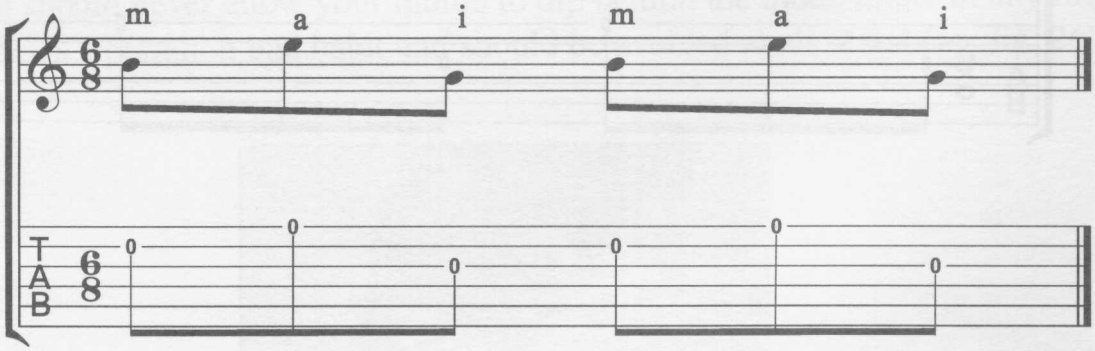
a m i



m i a

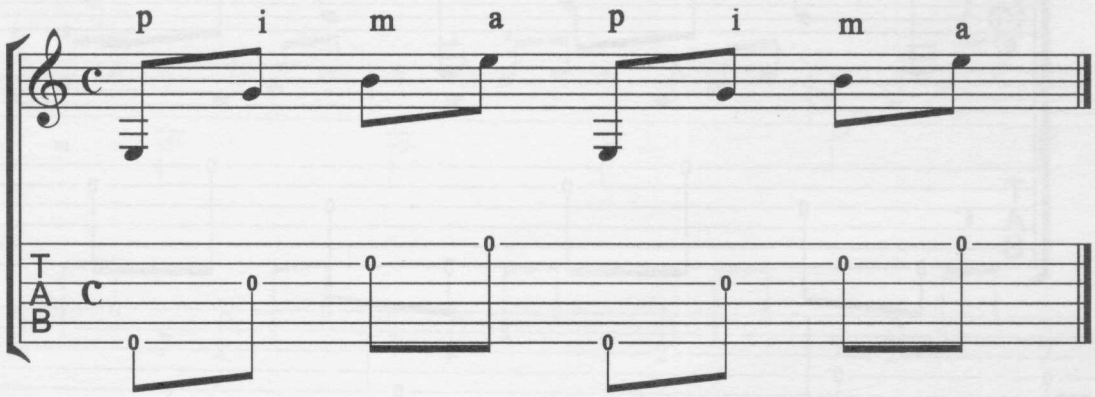


m a i

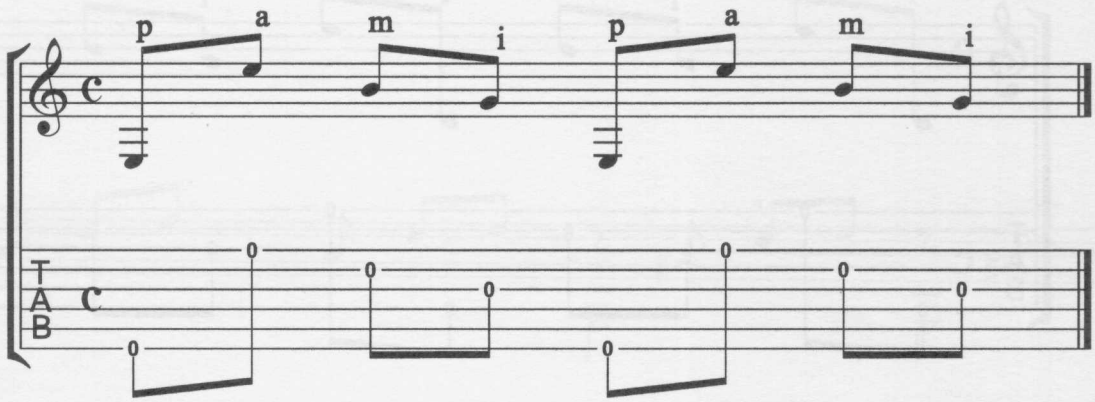


Now try a few patterns that include the thumb.

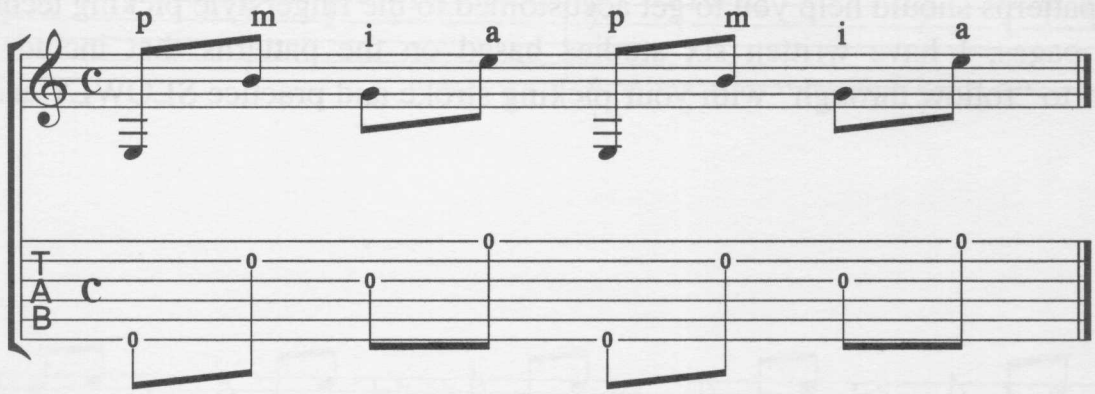
p i m a



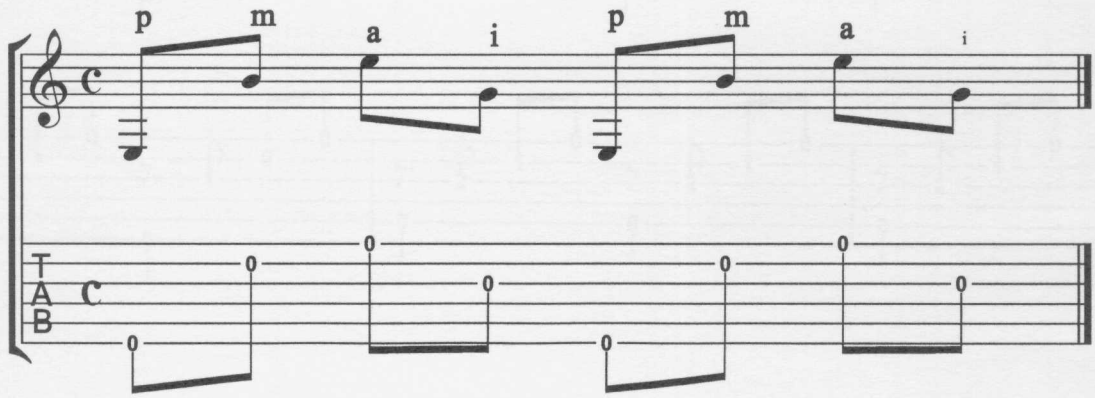
p a m i



p m i a



p m a i



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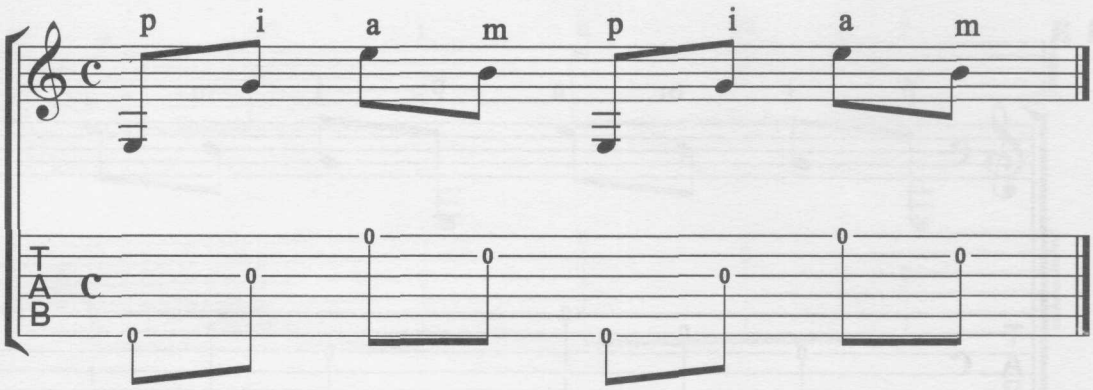

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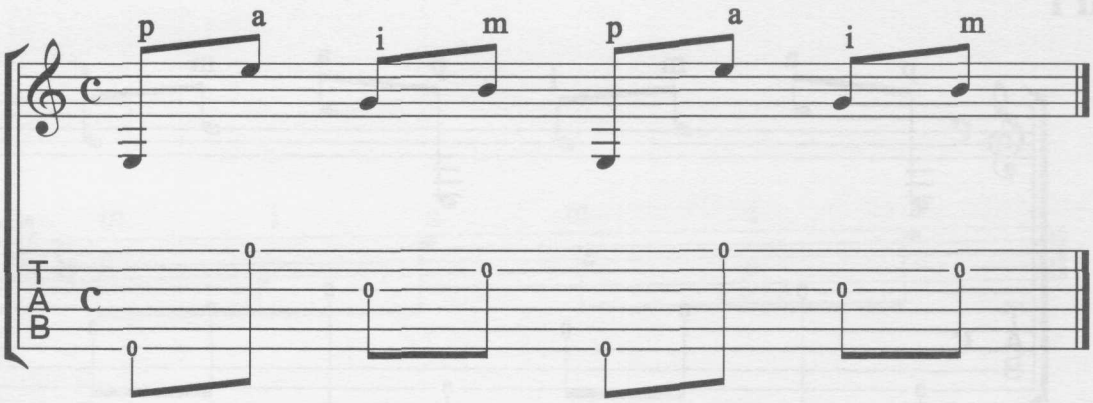
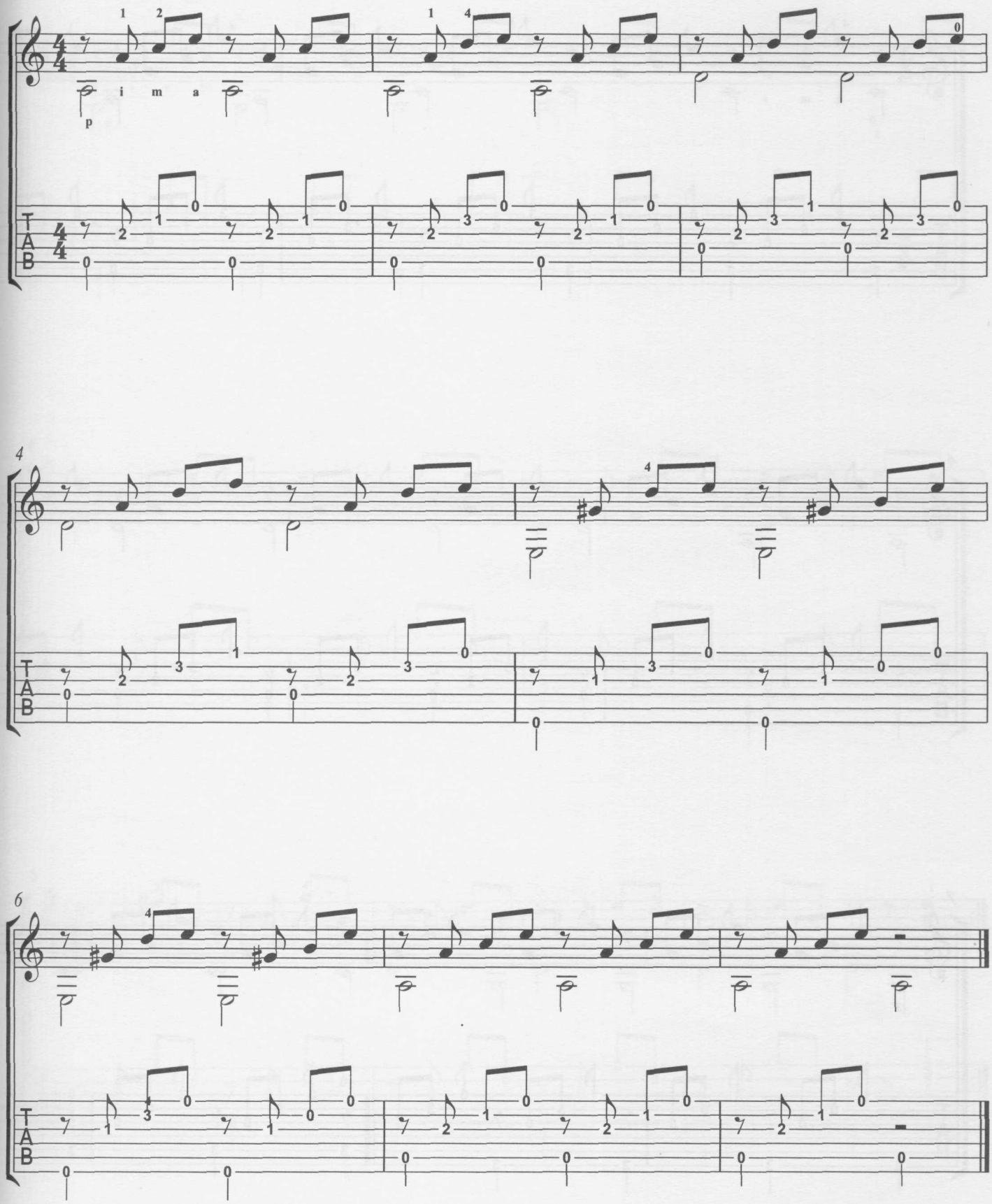


These patterns should help you to get accustomed to the fingerstyle picking technique. In the following pages, I have written six studies based on the patterns that include the thumb. Remember to "follow through" with your picking stroke and practice SLOWLY and accurately.

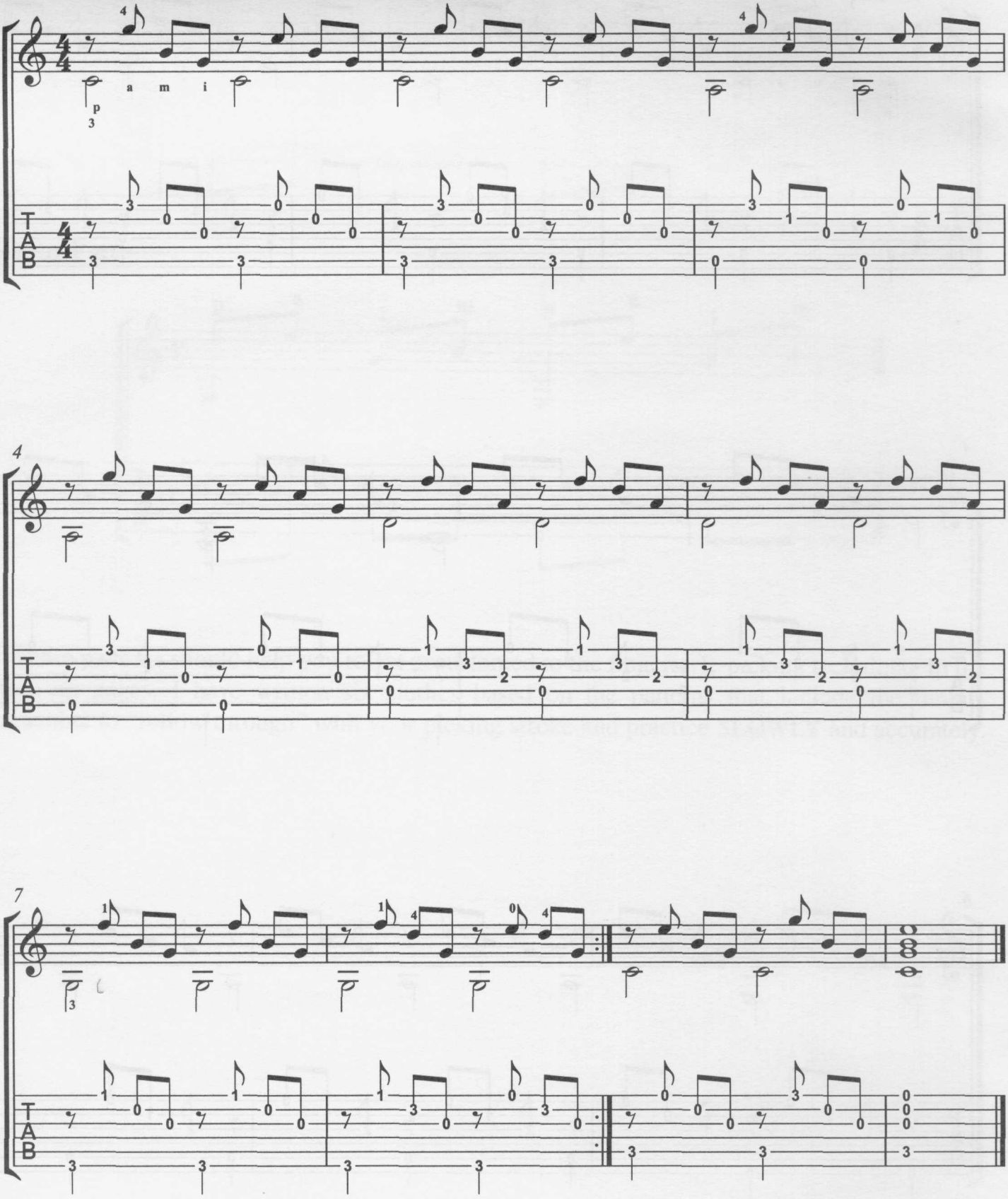
Study #1

Jonathan Adams



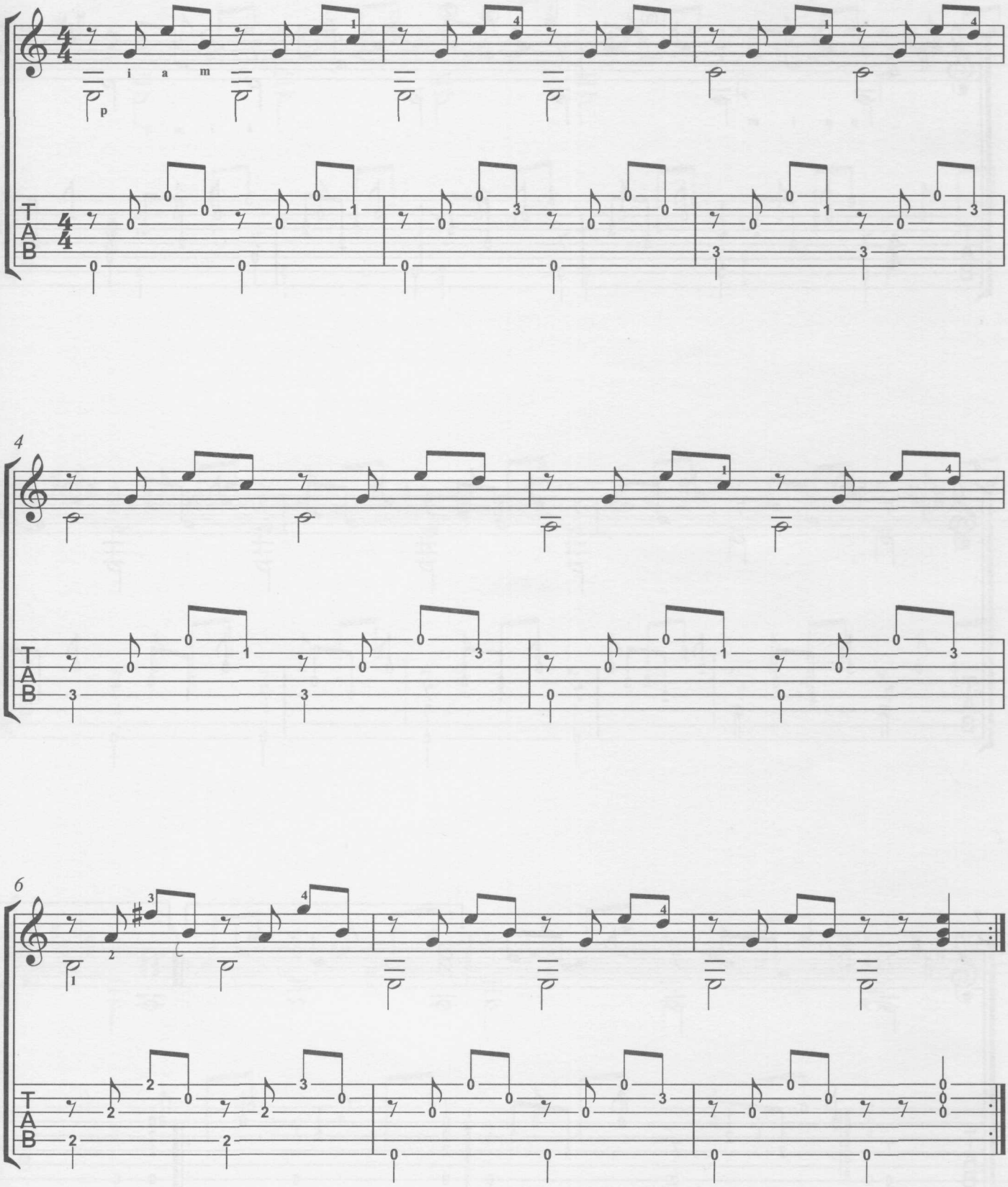
Study #2

Jonathan Adams



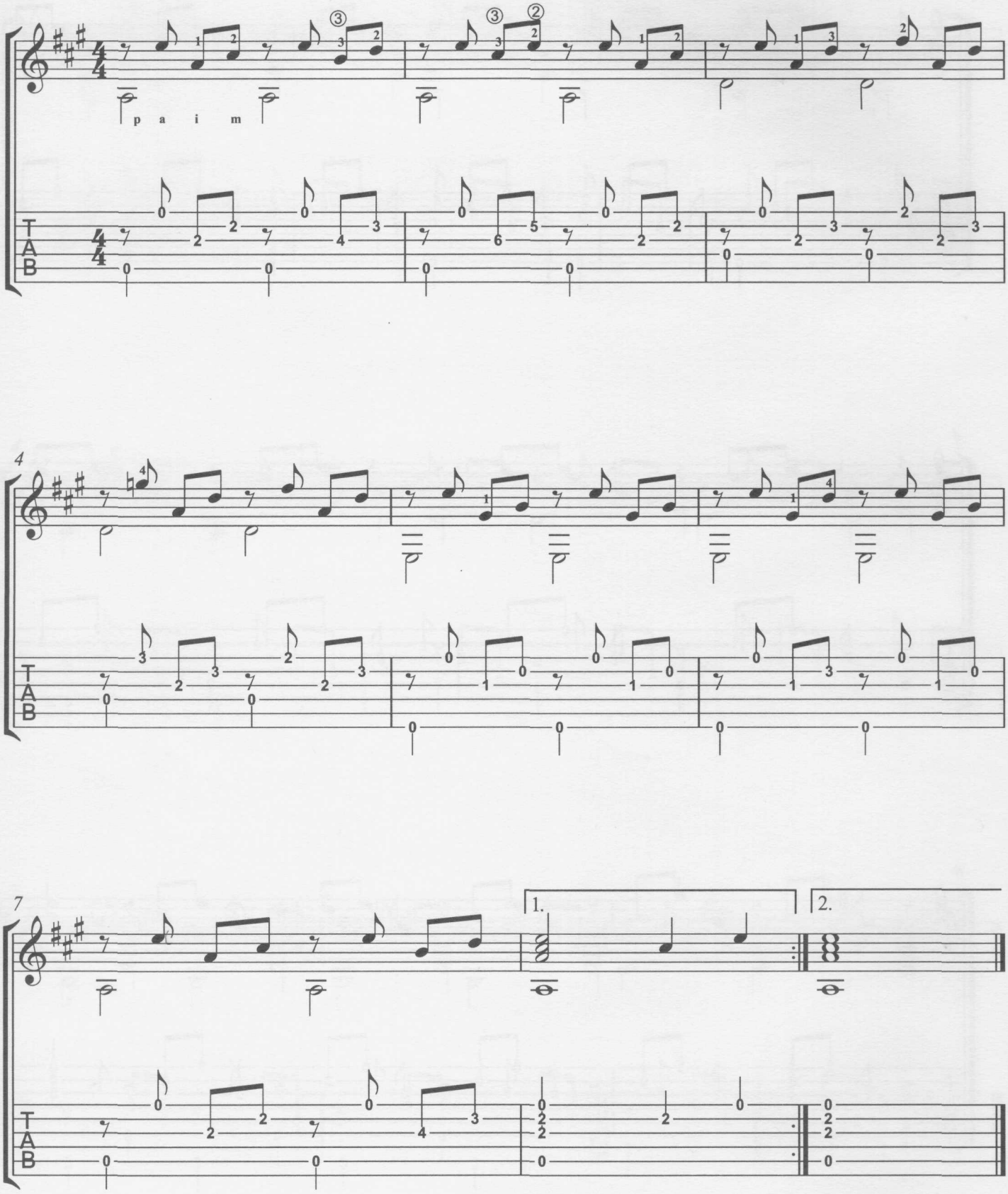
Study #3

Jonathan Adams



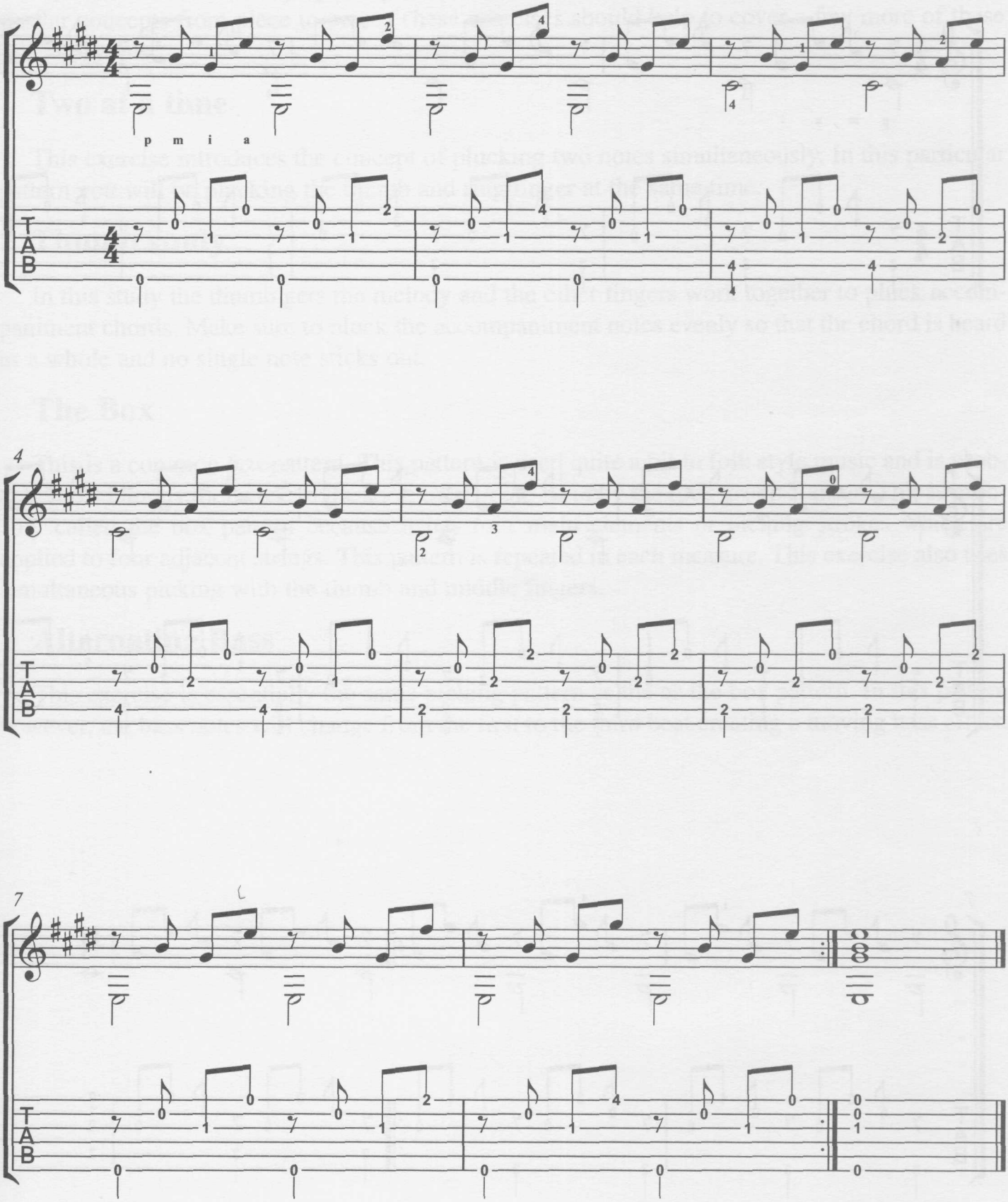
Study #4

Jonathan Adams



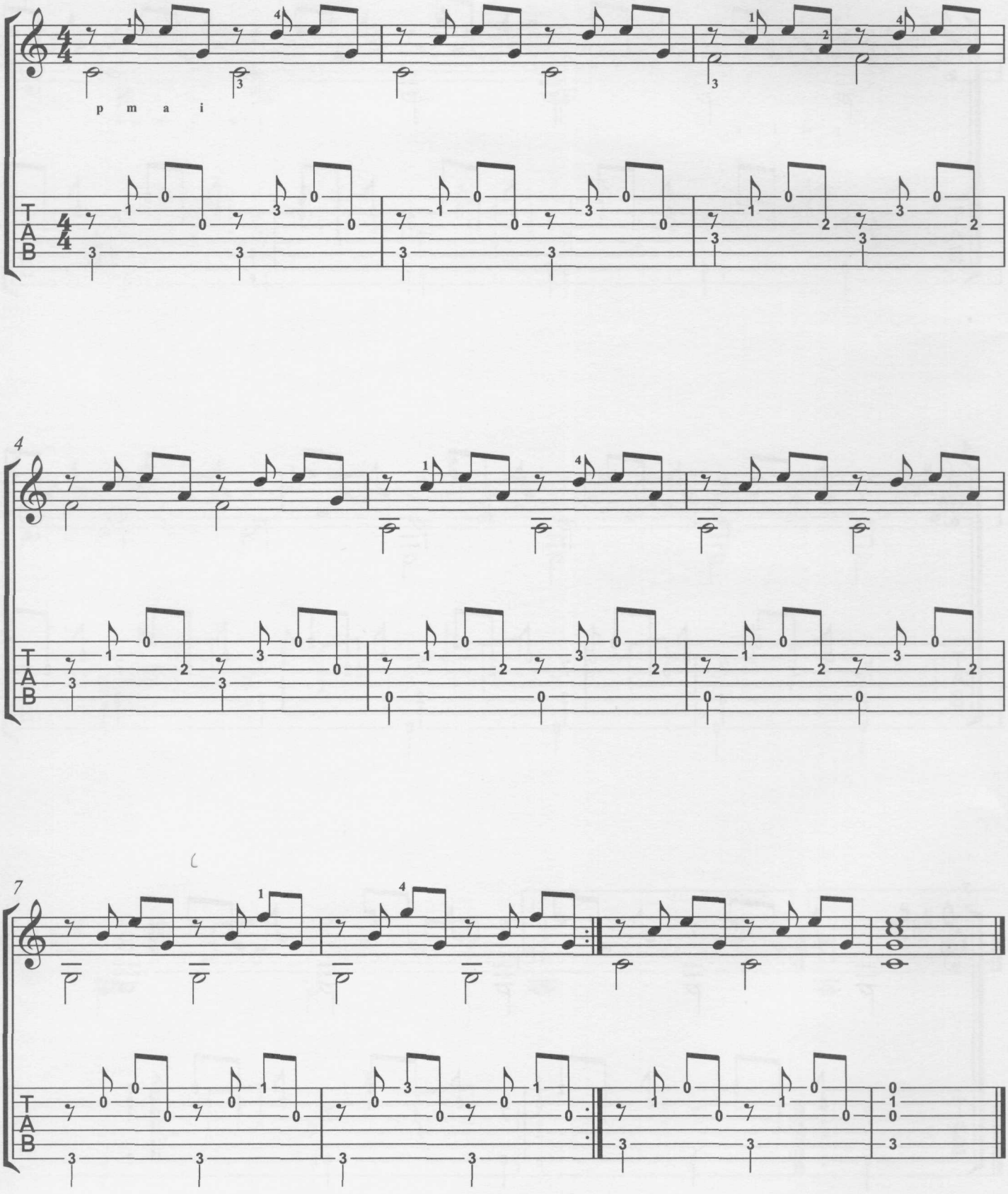
Study #5

Jonathan Adams



Study #6

Jonathan Adams



More Patterns

The next few exercises will cover some other common variations in fingerpicking patterns. While the variations in fingerpicking patterns can be virtually limitless, you will notice many similar concepts from piece to piece. These exercises should help to cover a few more of these basic concepts.

Two at a time

This exercise introduces the concept of plucking two notes simultaneously. In this particular pattern you will be plucking the thumb and ring finger at the same time.

Thumb study

In this study the thumb gets the melody and the other fingers work together to pluck accompaniment chords. Make sure to pluck the accompaniment notes evenly so that the chord is heard as a whole and no single note sticks out.

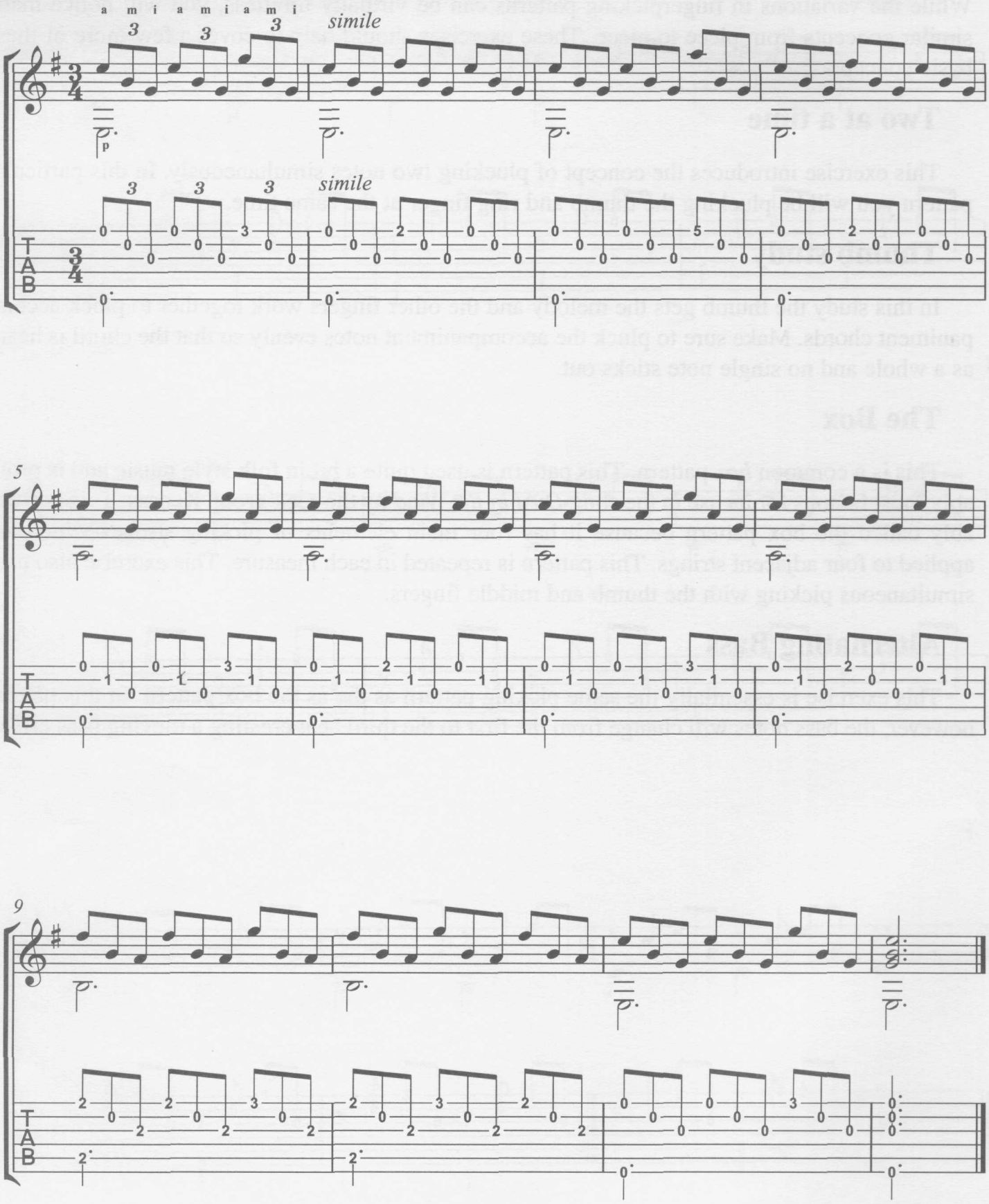
The Box

This is a common *box* pattern. This pattern is used quite a bit in folk style music and is probably most famous for its use in the song *Dust in the Wind* by the rock group Kansas. This is probably called the box pattern because it has four main elements or picking strokes which are applied to four adjacent strings. This pattern is repeated in each measure. This exercise also uses simultaneous picking with the thumb and middle fingers.

Alternating Bass

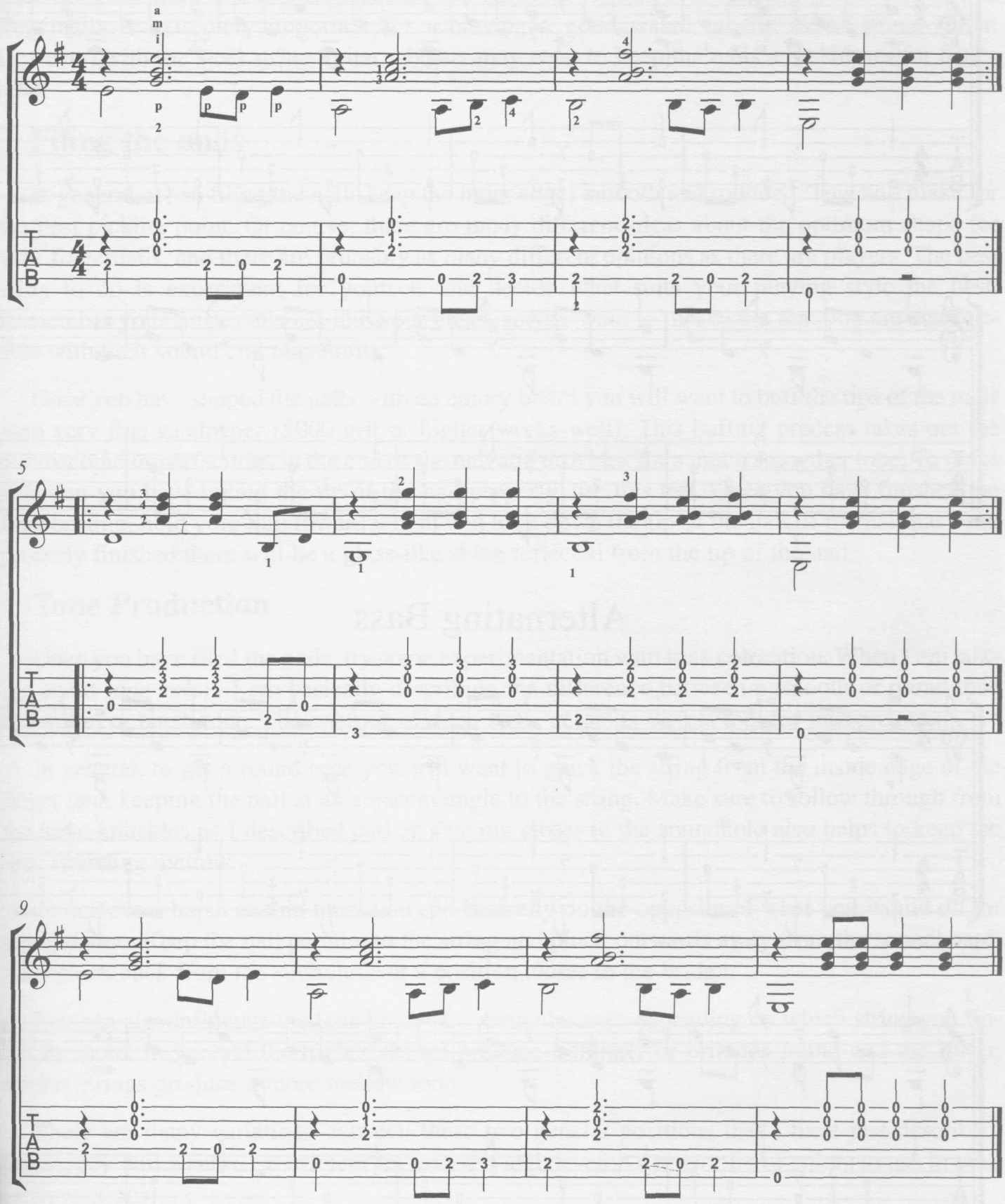
This exercise is essentially the same picking pattern as the as the box pattern. In this pattern however, the bass notes will change from the first to the third beat creating a moving bass effect.

Two at a Time

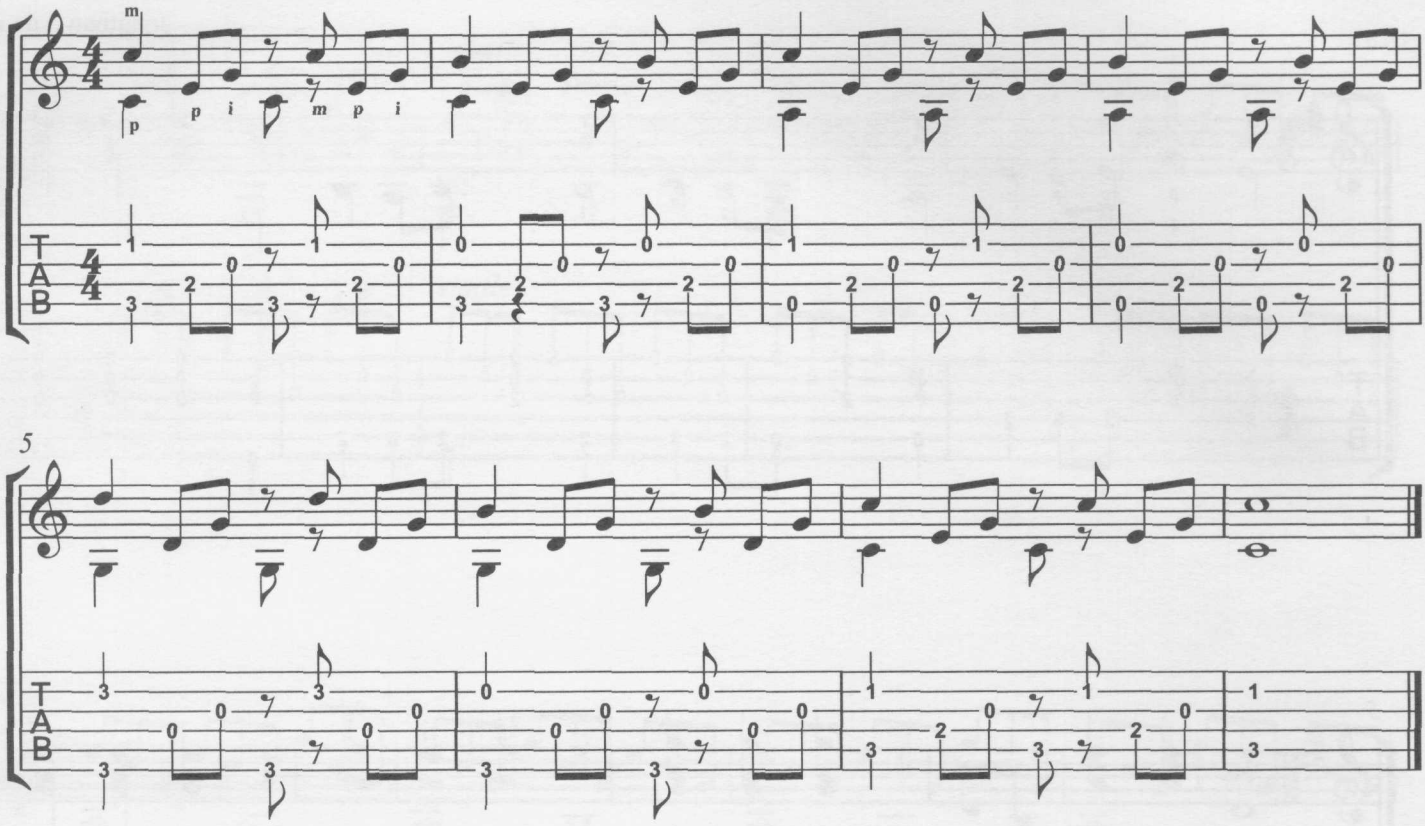


Thumb Study

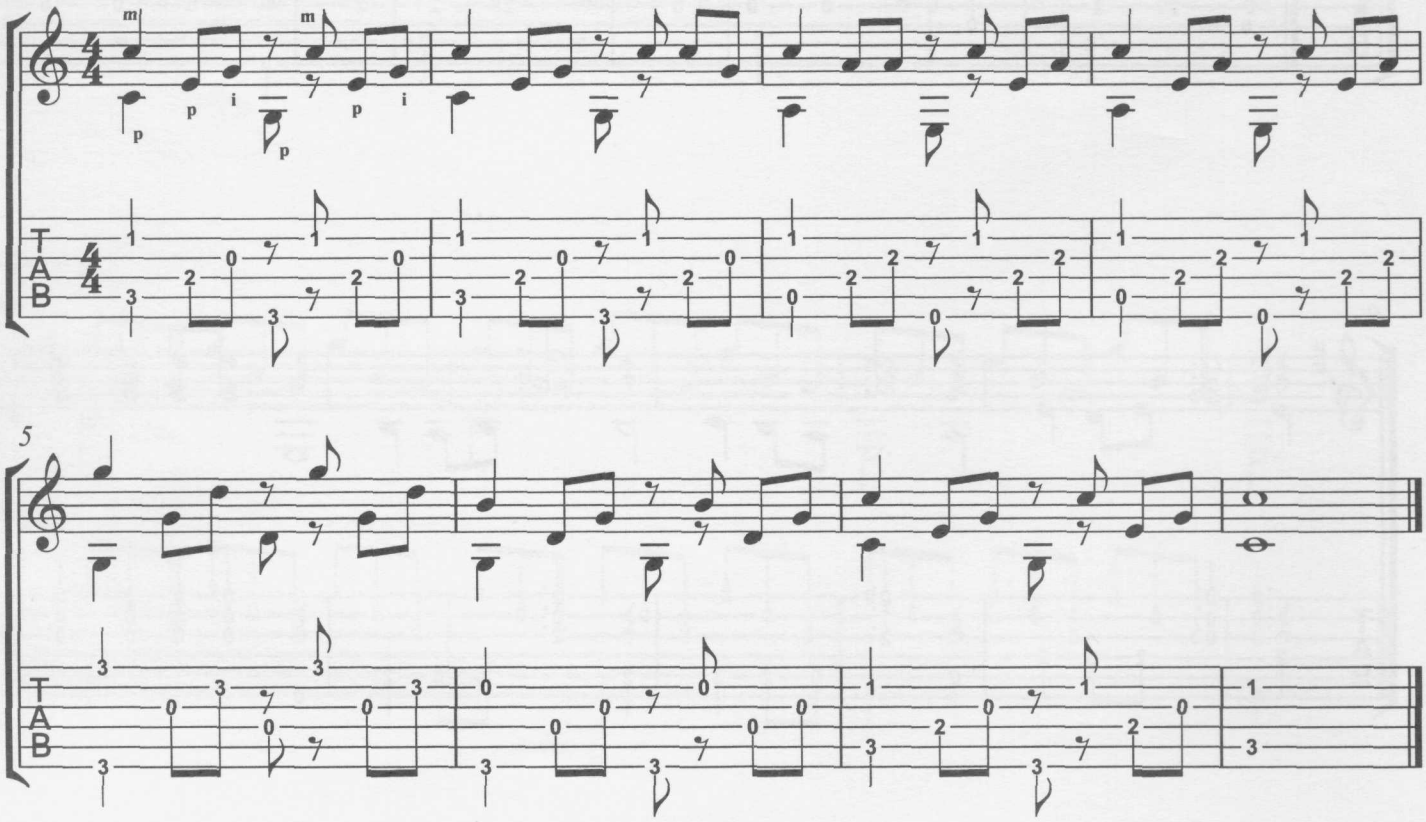
Jonathan Adams



The Box



Alternating Bass



Use of Fingernails

In classical playing, and much of fingerstyle guitar playing, the fingernails on the picking hand are often used as a tool for affecting the tone and volume of the plucked notes. The use of fingernails is extremely important for achieving a good sound on the nylon string guitar. However, with the steel string guitar, players may want to keep the nails a bit shorter for better tone.

Filing the nails

In general, when filing the nails keep the inner edges smooth and rounded. This will make for the best picking point. Of course, there are many different ideas about the optimum shape for your fingernails, and there are probably as many different opinions as there are players. The best thing to do is experiment for yourself and decide what suits your playing style the best. Remember your fingernails are like your picks, so you want to make sure that you are comfortable with their sound and playability.

Once you have shaped the nails with an emory board you will want to buff the tips of the nails with very fine sandpaper (5000 grit or higher works well). This buffing process takes out the microscopic imperfections in the end of the nail and provides for a much smoother tone. To make sure that you have buffed the tip of the nail properly, use this test. Once you have finished the final buffing, hold your nail toward a light and look down the tip of the nail. If the nail has been properly finished there will be a glass-like shine reflected from the tip of the nail.

Tone Production

Once you have filed the nails, try some experimentation with tone coloration. When I am talking about *tone colors* I am basically describing the difference between a smooth or round tone and a thin or harsh tone. The contrast of these basic colors is a great tool for interpretation.

In general, to get a round tone you will want to pluck the string from the inside edge of the finger nail, keeping the nail at an adjacent angle to the string. Make sure to follow through from the large knuckles as I described earlier. Playing closer to the soundhole also helps to keep the tone sounding mellow.

To achieve a harsh or thin tone, you can basically do the opposite of what you would do for a round tone. Keep the nail parallel to the string and pluck outwards away from the soundboard. Also pluck back from the soundhole at a position closer to the bridge.

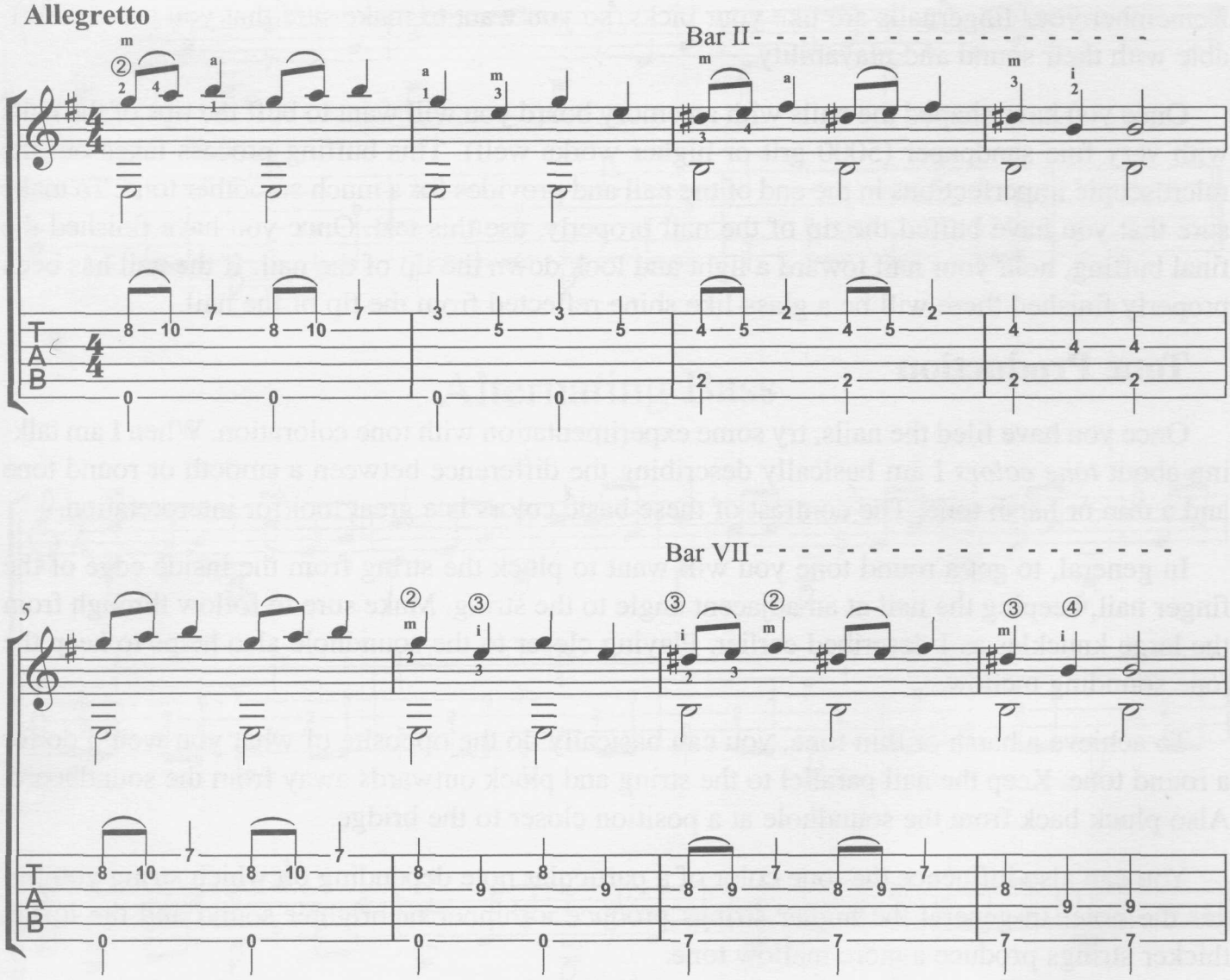
You can also influence the tone color of a particular note depending on which string you finger the note. In general the higher strings produce a thinner or brighter sound and the lower, thicker strings produce a more mellow tone.

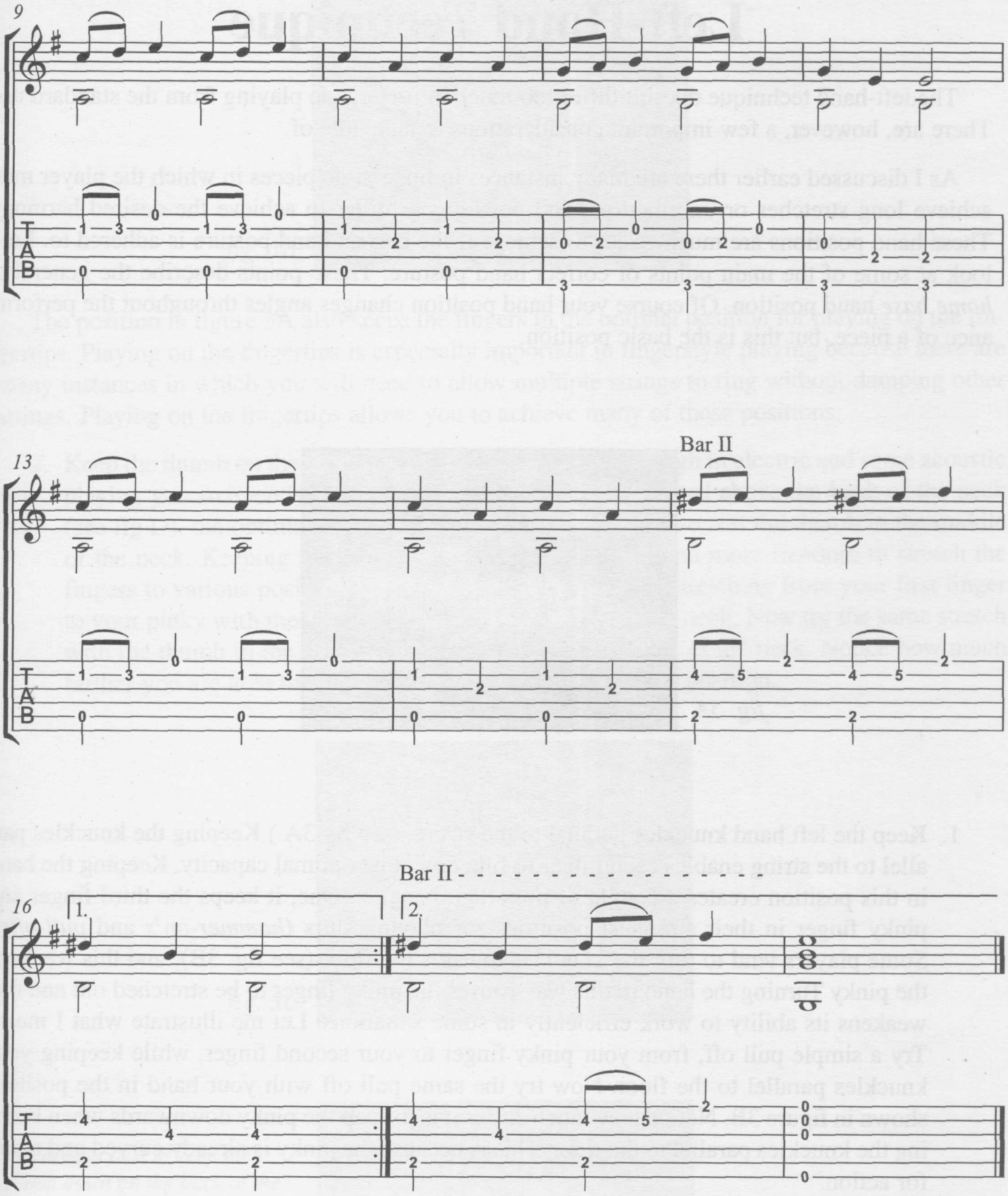
There are many variations between these two general positions that I have just described. Again, you will want to experiment for yourself and develop a repertoire of colors to use in your interpretations.

The following piece works well as a study for experimenting with various tone colors. Remember, it is completely up to you as to how you would like to vary the tone of the various

phrases. There is no right or wrong with regards to how you would like to color the piece. However, I have fingered the left hand in the opening phrases in order to bias the first phrase to a brighter or thinner sound and the second phrase to more mellow sound. I have done this by placing the brighter passages on the thinner, higher strings (lower position) and the mellow passages on the thicker, lower strings (higher position). If you want to change the colors in the phrases you will also want to change the fingering. Try experimenting with several different options and then record yourself to see which ones you like best.

Echoes in the Canyon




9
13
Bar II
16
1.
2.
Bar II
T
A
B

Left-Hand Technique

The left-hand technique doesn't differ too much in fingerstyle playing from the standard use. There are, however, a few important considerations to take note of.

As I discussed earlier there are many instances in fingerstyle pieces in which the player must achieve long stretches or unorthodox hand positions in order to achieve the desired harmony. These hand positions are much easier to achieve if the correct hand posture is adhered to. Let's look at some of the main points of correct hand posture. These points describe the general or *home base* hand position. Of course your hand position changes angles throughout the performance of a piece, but this is the basic position.

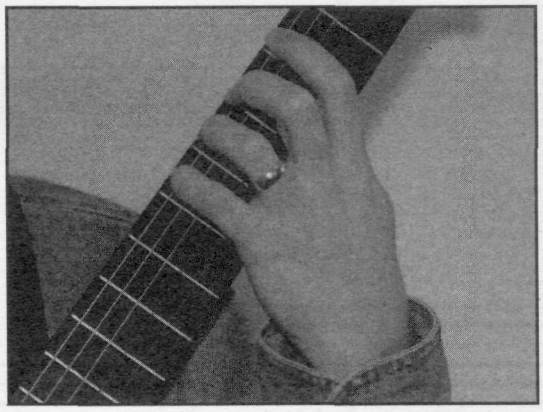


fig. 3A

1. Keep the left hand knuckles parallel to the string. (see fig 3A.) Keeping the knuckles parallel to the string enables each finger to function at its optimal capacity. Keeping the hand in this position creates a couple of important benefits. One, it keeps the third finger and pinky finger in their strongest positions for playing slurs (*hammer-on's* and *pull-offs*). Some players tend to turn the knuckles towards the floor (see fig. 3B), and this weakens the pinky Turning the hand in this way causes the pinky finger to be stretched out and this weakens its ability to work efficiently in some situations. Let me illustrate what I mean. Try a simple pull off, from your pinky finger to your second finger, while keeping your knuckles parallel to the floor. Now try the same pull off with your hand in the position shown in figure 3B. Notice how much easier it is to snap the pinky downwards when keeping the knuckles parallel to the floor. This is because the pinky is already curved and ready for action.

fig. 3B

The position in figure 3A also keeps the fingers in the optimal position for playing on the fingertips. Playing on the fingertips is especially important in fingerstyle playing because there are many instances in which you will need to allow multiple strings to ring without damping other strings. Playing on the fingertips allows you to achieve many of these positions.

2. Keep the thumb on the back of the neck (see fig C). Although in electric and some acoustic playing you frequently see players with their thumb perched above the back of the neck (see fig D), the optimal position for fingerstyle playing is to rest the thumb in the middle of the neck. Keeping the thumb in this position allows you more freedom to stretch the fingers to various positions. To experiment with this, try stretching from your first finger to your pinky with the thumb perched over the back of the neck. Now try the same stretch with the thumb in the middle to lower portion of the back of the neck. Notice how much farther you are able to stretch with the thumb in the lower position.

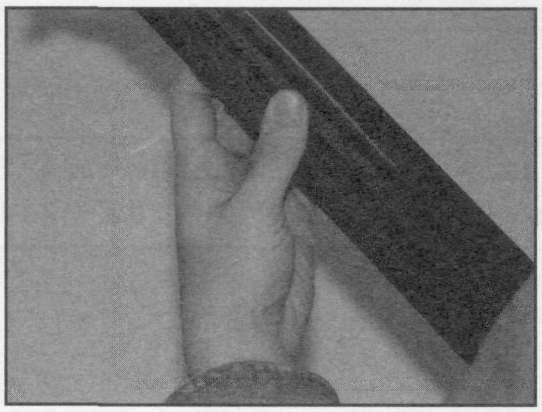


fig. 3C

It is always best to keep the thumb down on the back of the neck. A common bad habit is to perch the thumb above the back of the neck as shown here.

fig. 3D

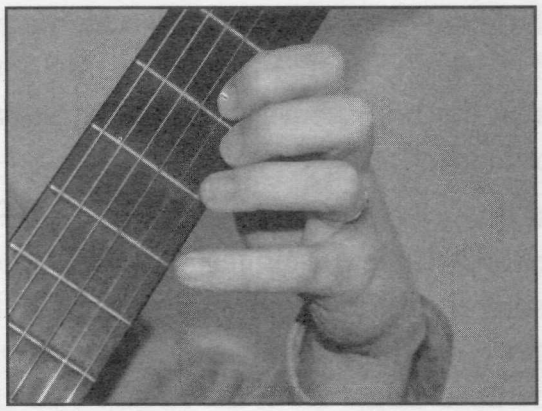


fig. 3B

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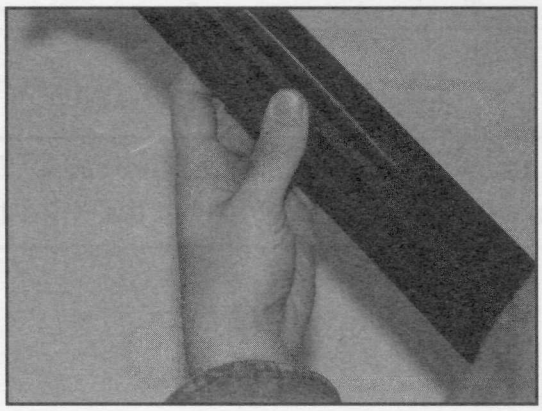


fig. 3C

It is always best to keep the thumb down on the back of the neck. A common bad habit is to perch the thumb above the back of the neck as shown here.

fig. 3D

3. From chord to chord there are often situations in which a player can use a common finger or a guide from one chord to the next. I will point this out in more detail in the explanation of the pieces later in the book, but I will briefly explain what I mean by illustrating with two common chord shifts.

Guide Finger- Let me first illustrate the guide finger principle with a simple shift from the D major chord to the A major chord. Since the fingerings of the chords are important in this illustration use the fingerings described in the chord charts (see fig. E). Notice that in the fingering for the D chord the third finger is on the second string third fret. Now shift from the D chord to the A chord without lifting the third finger from the string. This is the *guide finger principle.* By keeping the finger on the string, the shift is much more accurate than it would be if you lifted all of the fingers into the air from the D chord and the re-placed them for the A chord. This is an extremely simple example, but you should take care to use this concept whenever you can. It can be especially useful when long shifts from one chord to another is required.

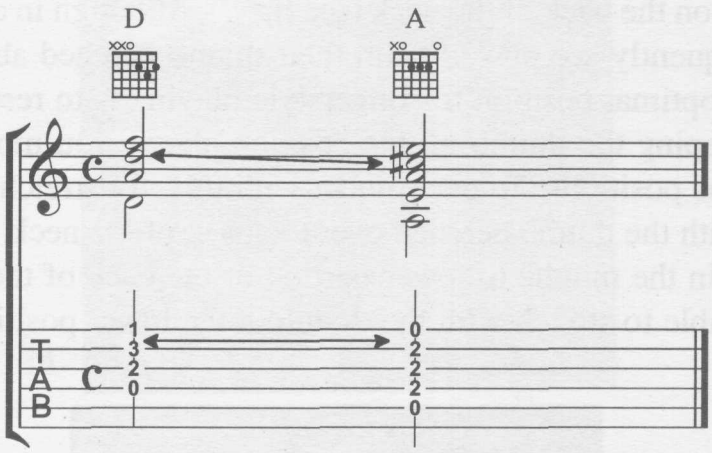


fig. 3E

The arrow shows the path of the *guide finger.*
In this case the guide finger is the third finger.

Pivot finger- The *pivot finger principle* is essentially the same concept except there is no shifting involved. Let's briefly take a look at this same concept using another simple chord shift. For this example I will use the chords F major and A major. See the chord charts for the fingerings. *(see fig. 3F.)* First form the F chord. Now we will change to the A chord, but take care not to remove the second finger from the string as the second finger is the pivot finger. This example is a also extremely simple, but take care to always use a *pivot finger,* if possible, as this will help to improve left hand accuracy.

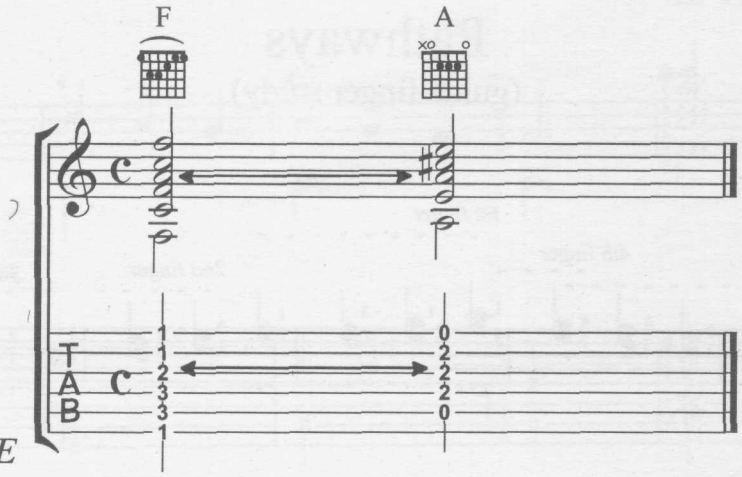


fig. 3E

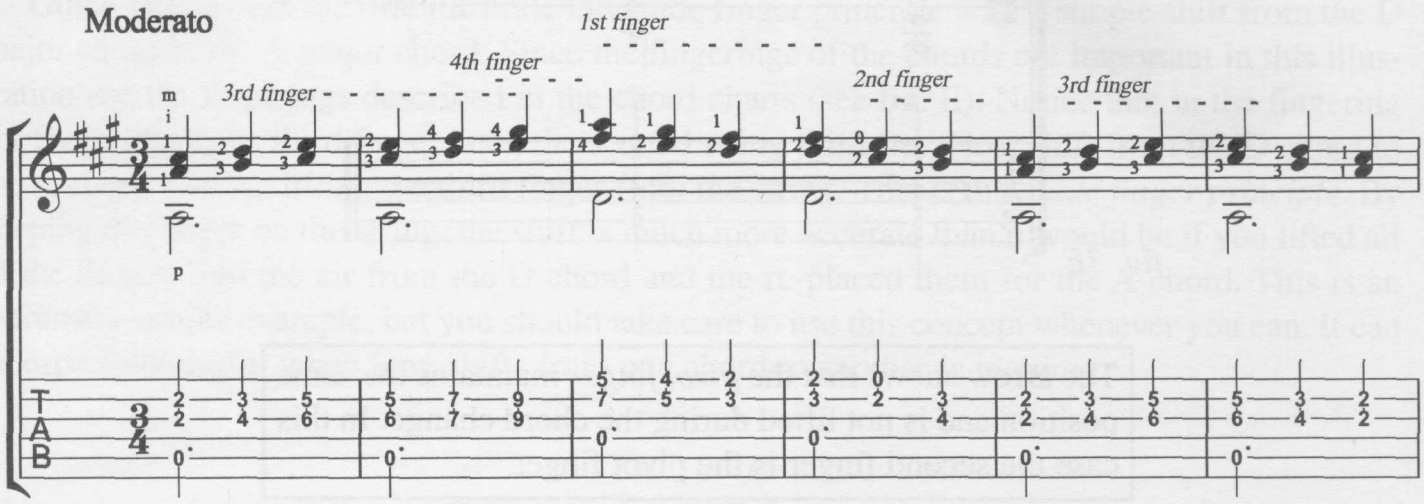
The arrow shows that the *pivot finger* maintains the same position and is not lifted during the chord change. In this case the second finger is the pivot finger.

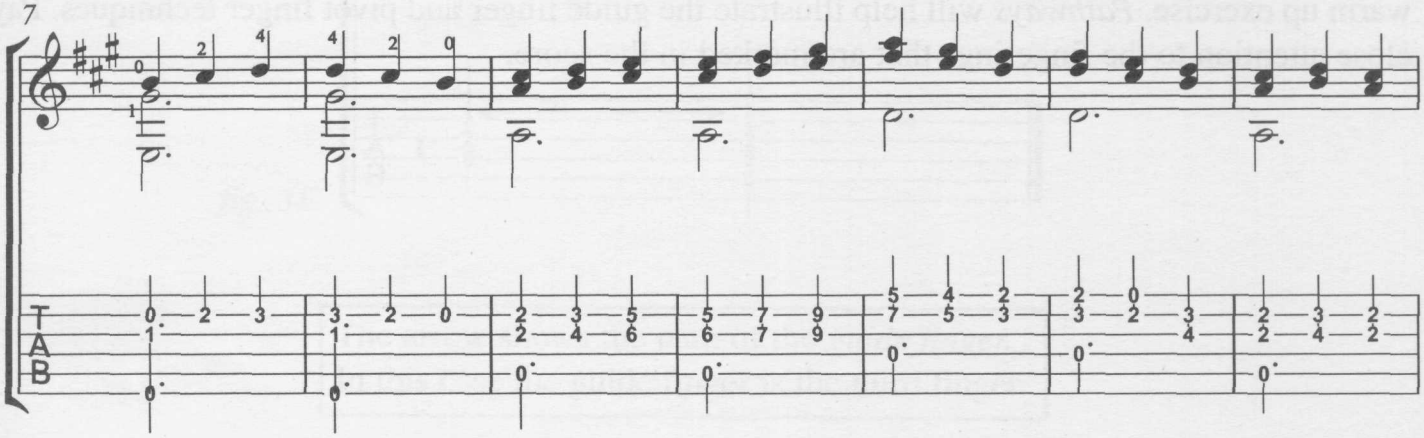
I have included two short studies that will help you to practice the slurs, as well as the guide and pivot finger techniques. The *Capricious Caddis* is a slur study and also works great as a warm up exercise. *Pathways* will help illustrate the guide finger and pivot finger techniques. Pay close attention to the fingerings that are marked in the score.

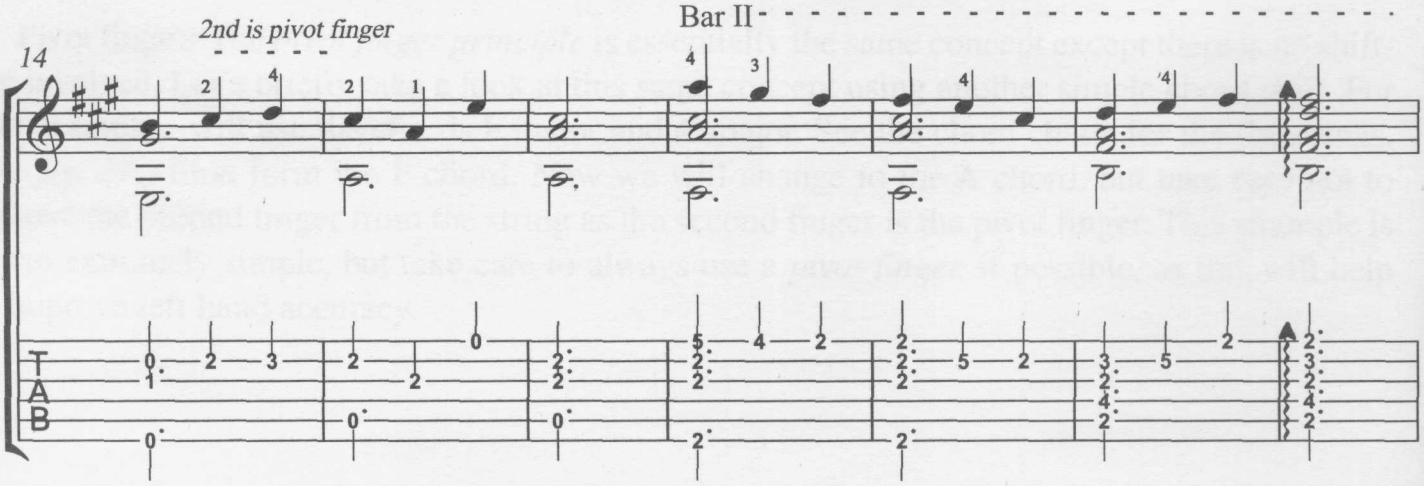
Pathways

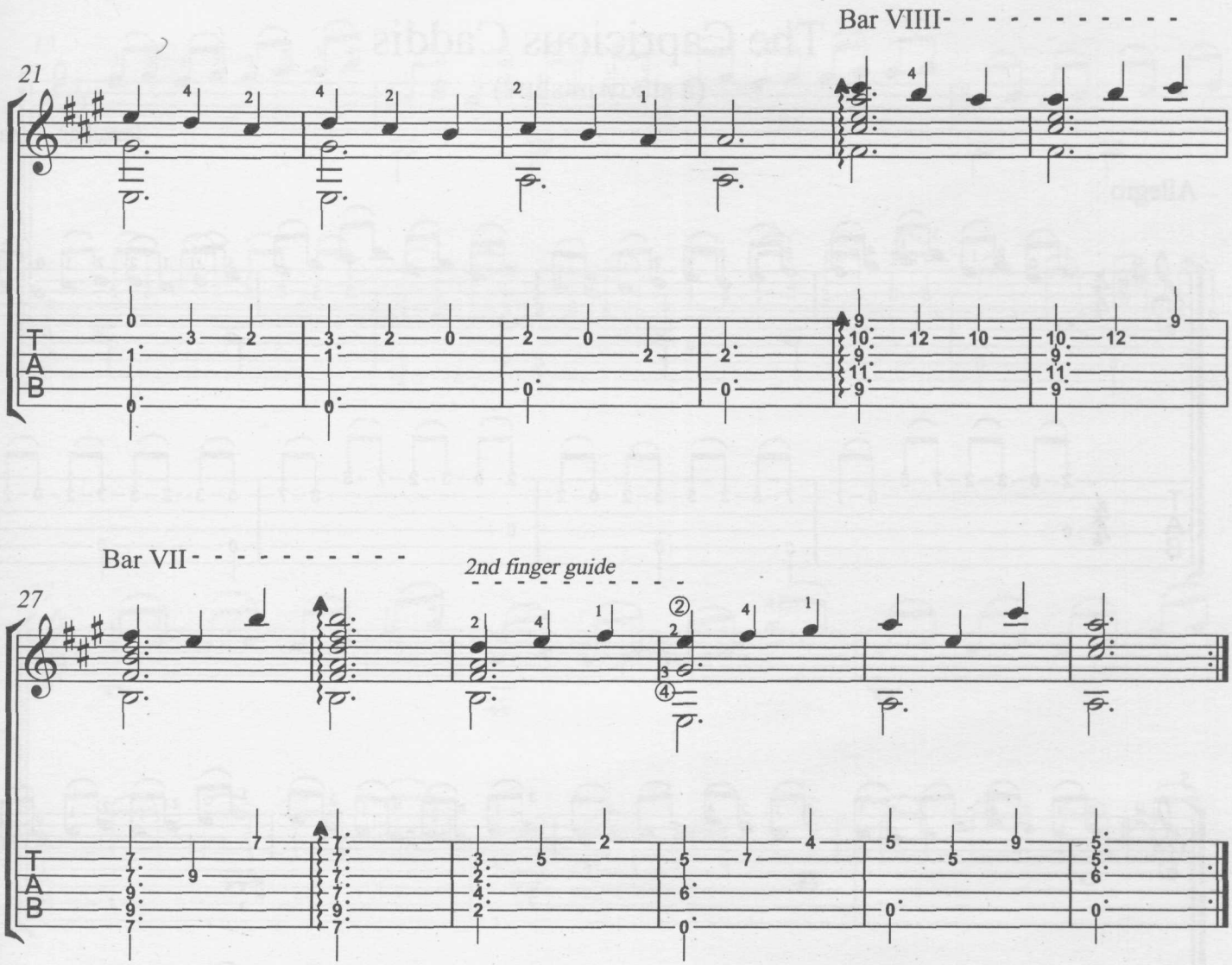
(guide finger study)

Jonathan Adams








Bar VIIII
21
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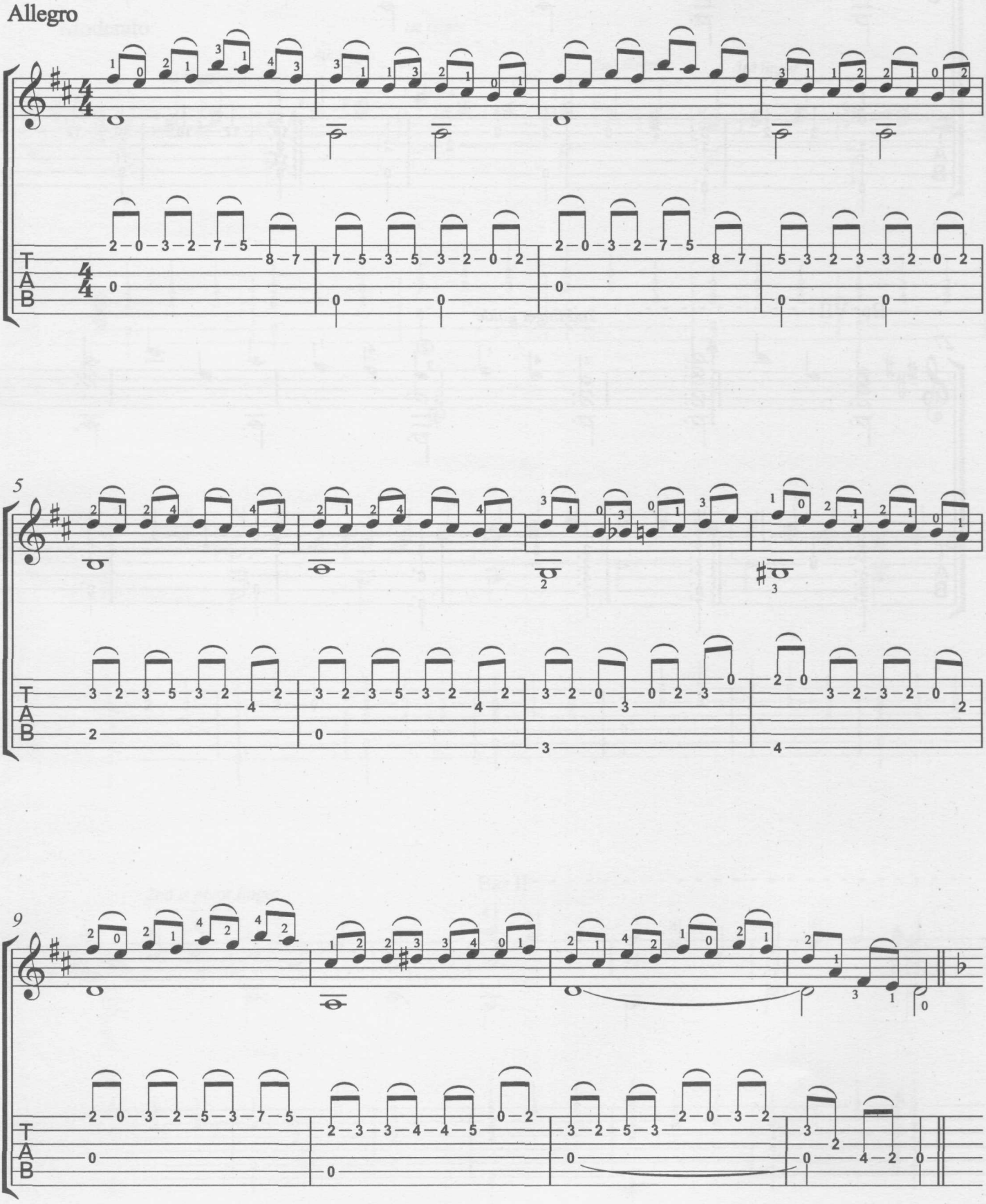
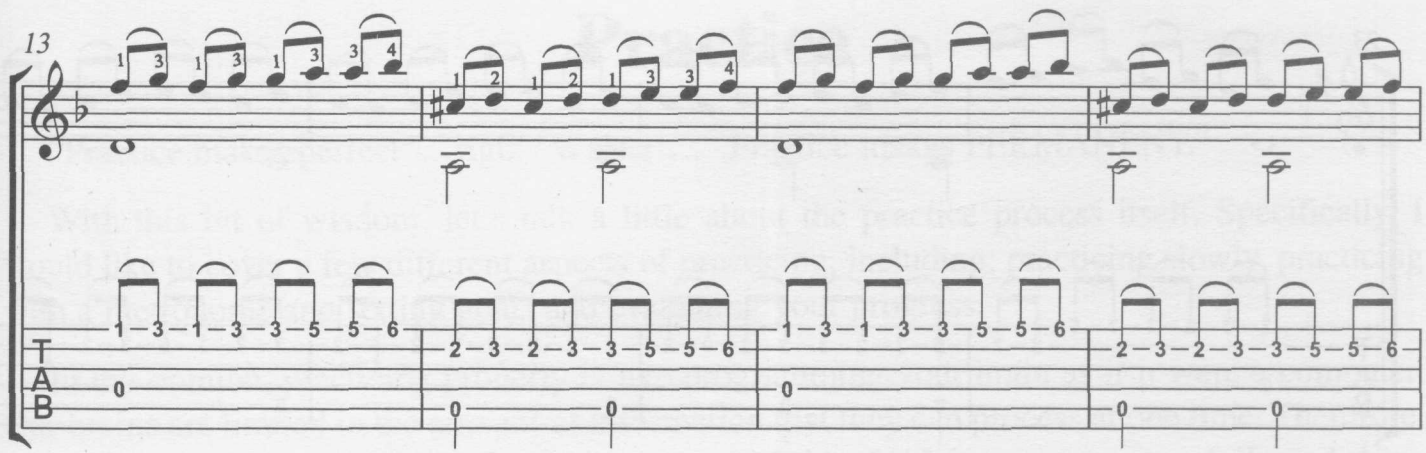
A
B
Bar VII
2nd finger guide
27
T
A
B

The Capricious Caddis

(a study in slurs)

Jonathan Adams

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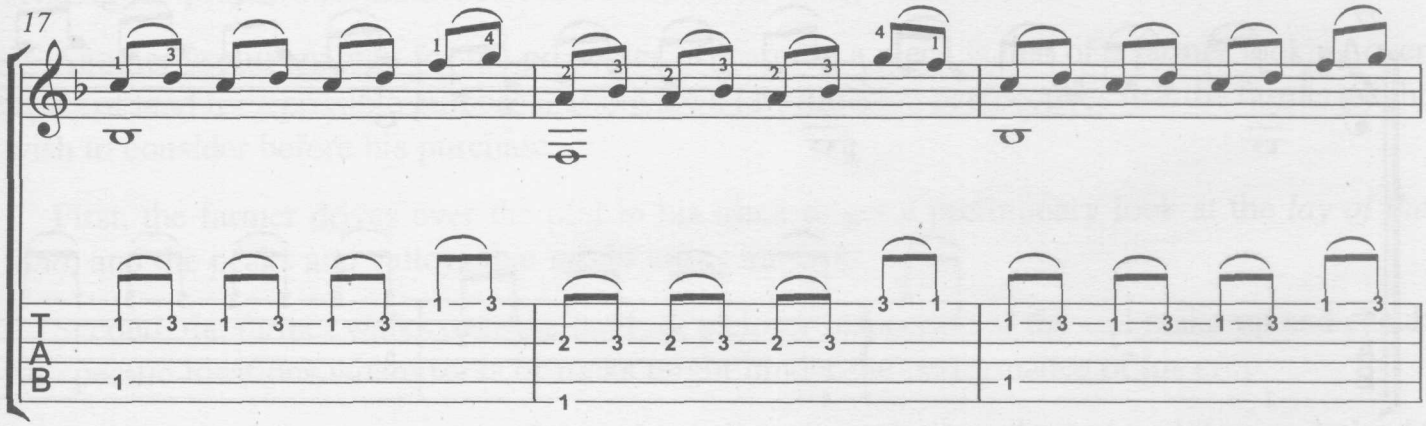
17
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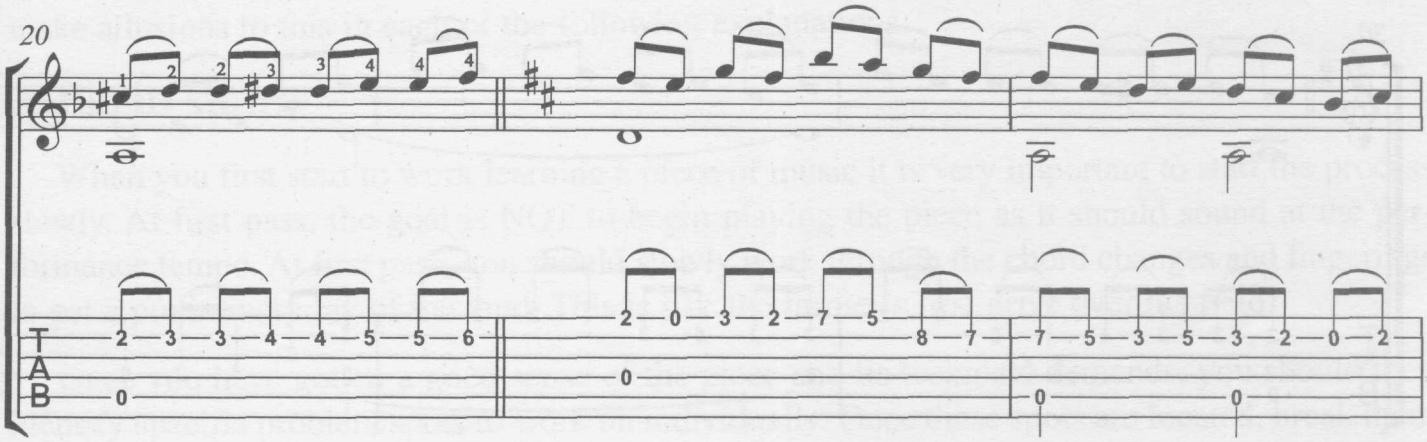
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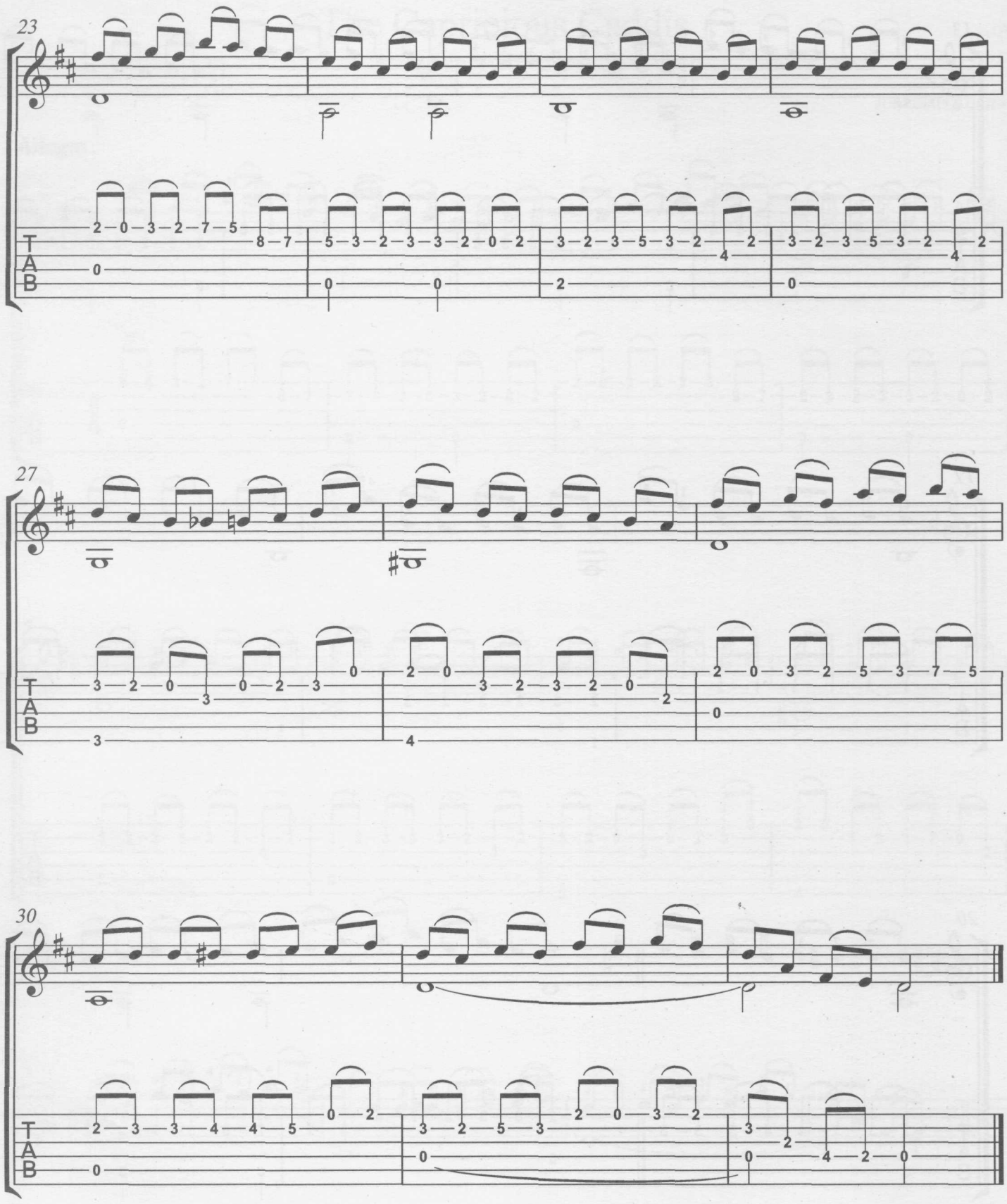

23
27
30
T
A
B

Practice

"Practice makes perfect"...right? Wrong!... "Practice makes PERMANENT."

With this bit of wisdom, let's talk a little about the practice process itself. Specifically, I would like to cover a few different aspects of practicing, including: practicing slowly, practicing with a metronome and setting goals and evaluating your progress.

In my opinion, practicing properly is like programming your brain as if it were a computer. Our brains are limited in the amount of information that they can process at one time. Therefore, when you practice, you should take care to *enter* each *bit* of information very carefully and slowly so that the information is stored properly into your musical *program.* No matter whether you are practicing or playing you brain is storing information for later use. That is why we should take care to make sure that at the outset of learning any piece of music to make sure that we are sending the proper information to our *Central Processing Unit*...the brain.

Another useful analogy for the processes of learning a piece is that of a farmer looking over a plot of land for a possible purchase. There are a few different perspectives that the farmer might wish to consider before his purchase.

First, the farmer drives over the plot in his truck to get a preliminary look at the *lay of the land,* and the peaks and valleys that might affect his crop.

Second, the farmer walks over the land for a closer inspection of the soil make-up and check for specific locations where roots or rocks might hinder the performance of his crop.

Third, the farmer flies over the field in his helicopter and views the entire plot as a whole. At this point the farmer is taking note of the land's overall beauty and searching for problems that he may not have noticed from the closer perspectives.

Each phase of the farmer's inspection is analogous to a phase of the learning process. I will make allusions to this in each of the following explanations.

Begin slowly

When you first start to work learning a piece of music it is very important to start the process slowly. At first pass, the goal is NOT to begin playing the piece as it should sound at the performance tempo. At first pass, you should slowly work through the chord changes and fingerings to get a preliminary lay of the land. This is like the farmer's first drive over his field.

Once you have gotten a good sense of the piece and its technical demands, you should then identify specific problem spots to work on individually. Once these spots are located, break them down into specific components that can be practiced methodically, one at a time. After these spots are *learned* by the fingers you may be ready to gradually speed up the practice tempo of the piece. Working on the problem spots is represented in the "farmer" analogy by his walk over his field.

Next you should begin to work with a metronome to gradually increase the tempo of the piece.

Use a metronome

There are a few different ways that you can use the metronome to achieve your goals. One way to achieve an even articulation and develop rhythmic consistency is to set the metronome click to the smallest common note. For instance, in the pieces *Romanza* or Matteo Carcassi's *Etude* you would use the click as though it were equal to the eighth note. (*Romanza* and *Etude* are in the repertoire section in the back of the book.) Doing this will force you to do a few different things. Mainly it will help you to practice more slowly, because even though the clicks will be faster, you will probably be playing the piece at a much slower speed than you would for a performance. Again, you should always begin by practicing as slowly as you can possibly stand to. This will require a great deal of concentration. Many times I have my students play a piece with the metronome at a very slow speed and they often complain that it is harder to play the piece at the slower tempo. This is harder because it forces you to concentrate on articulating each note in exact time with the metronome, but if you take time to develop this discipline you will notice a big difference in the evenness and accuracy of your playing. This evenness and accuracy is crucial to developing a a clean playing style.

Another complaint that I often hear from students is that practicing this way seems to be too mundane and "robotic." I like to compare this type of practice to programming your "technical and musical computer." At this point in your development of the piece you are not yet striving for the most musicality, but you are putting the musical information into your brain in small organized bits. Although this seems at first to be slower, you will be surprised at how much faster you will actually learn the pieces without developing inconsistencies and bad habits. Once you have taken time to do this step, then you will be ready to add more musical ideas, speed up the piece, and develop more of a *flow* with the rhythm. Developing this flow would be like the "flight over the field" in the farmer analogy.

Once you have achieved consistency with the metronome at the smaller setting, you may want to slow the click down, but now make it equal the quarter note. Doing this will make the click slower, but will make your performance speed increase. Continue to increase the speed in small manageable increments until you have reached your desired performance tempo.

Set small goals and make practice fun

Set small goals for yourself and make certain challenges into a game. For instance, if there is a certain passage that is giving you trouble, you might want to try the following game.

First, pick a tempo (using the metronome) at which you can play the passage perfectly every time.

Once you have established this tempo, speed the metronome up by three clicks. The object of the game is to play the passage perfectly five times in a row. If you make a mistake, even on the last time, you must start over. After you succeed at playing the passage perfectly five times in a row, speed the metronome up by a few clicks and try again. continue this process until you bring the problem spot up to speed with the rest of the piece.

Record yourself

Once you feel that you are bringing the piece into the last stages of development, take some time to record yourself. You don't need any professional recording equipment. Any cheap recorder will do. You just want to get a rhythmic sense of the piece and the contour of the phrases and dynamics. Recording yourself is a great way to analyze your own playing and will help to mold your sound into what you want it to be.

To sum it all up

Make sure to spend your practice time working on the spots that you need to improve. Don't waste your time playing through the sections that you already play well. Once you have worked out the problem spots, then you can perform the piece and take time to enjoy it. Don't confuse practice time with playing time. Once you develop the discipline to identify and solve problems more quickly you will be able to spend less time practicing and more time playing.

I am reminded of a quote by a famous concert violinist who was asked how many hours he spent practicing the violin each day. To the interviewer's surprise the violinist replied, "None…I already know how to play the violin." While this is not the case for most of us mere mortals the point is well taken. Always practice with the goal in mind of creating beautiful music.

Music

I have compiled a few pieces here that will help to explore some of the techniques covered in this book. I have included sheet music and tablature along with fingerings for the left and right hand (in the standard notation section). Be sure to follow these fingerings carefully, even if you are reading the tablature. Following these fingerings carefully will make these pieces easier to play.

In most cases I have just included these fingerings at the beginning of the pieces to get you started on the right track. I didn't include the right-hand fingering for every note because in many cases these fingerings can be subjective. You should, however, be able to easily deduce the fingerings of the unmarked passages by studying the marked passages.

Refer to the recordings of the pieces for additional ideas concerning tempo, dynamics and phrasing.

Rain Song

This is a simple, somewhat *new age* sounding piece that I have composed for this book. The piece is based on a simple fingerpicking pattern: p i m. The melody line is contained in the bass which is played by the thumb. You will want to emphasize these notes. The tempo should be kept as even as possible.

Wind Song

Wind Song by Keith Gehle also uses the p i m pattern and has a similar feel to *Rain Song*. These two work nicely to complement each other and sound good when performed together as a pair.

The Goodtime Rag

The Goodtime Rag has a sort of ragtime feel to it and is a lot of fun to play. The finger pattern is fairly simple and stays the same throughout. The main challenge is to keep the right hand in a static position. Because there are not many opportunities for planting the right hand, so you must take care to keep the right hand in a consistent position over the strings.

Yellow River Blues

Yellow River Blues by Keith Gehle focuses on the common twelve bar blues pattern and is great fun and challenging to play. The piece incorporates finger picking patterns as well as introducing some advanced techniques such as "walking" bass lines and some blues licks.

Dance of the Gypsy

This piece has a somewhat modal, eastern European flavor. The melody here is also in the bass. However the main point of this study is to work on contracting the i m and a fingers evenly and consistently. Make sure to keep these notes at the same volume so that none of these accompaniment notes stick out. You can achieve this by making sure to follow through from the large knuckles of the right hand.

Dusk

I originally wrote this simple tune as a study for my guitar students. The main melody is harmonized in sixths and provides a good opportunity to practice the *follow through* with the right-hand picking stroke. You will also want to practice resting the thumb on the unused bass string after you have plucked the proper bass string. For instance in the opening theme of the piece, after you have plucked the open A string you can rest the thumb on the low E string while executing the next chord. This will help to provide stability and a *reference point* for your right hand. Any time you have the opportunity to rest an unused finger (on the right hand) on an unused bass string it will help to provide a secure feeling. You will probably need to think about this consciously in the beginning, but eventually it will become second nature.

Bridget O'Malley

Bridget O'Malley is a simple, yet beautiful folk song from the Irish Celtic tradition. When I first heard the melody played by a friend on the mountain dulcimer I smelled a guitar arrangement in the works. Starting with the melody, I set out to frame it in an accompaniment that would highlight its lyrical, vocal quality. I used an alternate tuning to achieve the desired harmonies for the arrangement. The low E is tuned down a whole step to D and the A string is tuned down a whole step to G.

The melody consists of four main phrases, with each one being stated twice. Consequently, the performer must take care to vary it slightly each time in order to prevent boredom on the part of the listener. In general the first statement should be played in a more straight forward fashion, saving the bulk of the rhythmic and dynamic variation for the final pass.

In addition to the harmonies, there are some interesting moving bass lines to take note of. It is often tempting to emphasize a moving line, or even mistake it for the melody. In this particular arrangement, however, the moving bass is generally occurring over a single melodic note. Be careful not to obscure the tune by placing too much emphasis on the moving bass.

In order to better understand the lyrical nature of the piece, you may want to try the following exercises: First, play through the melody line on the guitar to get a basic idea of its contour. While doing so, develop some basic ideas on phrasing. Second, sing or hum through the melody, paying careful attention to the points of the phrase where breaths and pauses seem appropriate. By now you should be getting an idea of how you want to shape the phrases. Third, play the melody and record yourself, using even the most primitive recording device. (I use a Sony hand held recorder from Wal-Mart. It cost about $30 and works great!) Next, listen to your recording and make sure that you are happy with your interpretation. Don't get discouraged: it may take a few tries and revisions to achieve your ideal melodic "sculpture." Finally, incorporate your ideas into the entire piece, recording yourself again to check your work.

Minuet

This familiar piece by J. S. Bach uses the counterpoint technique. This basically means that Bach employs independent lines to harmonize with each other as opposed to using a chord accompaniment. Take care to follow the fingerings carefully as it will make the piece easier to play.

Für Elise

This entertaining piece was originally written by Beethoven for the solo piano. This simplified arrangement still provides quite a challenge for the fingerstyle guitar.

Romanza

This is probably one of the most popular standards of the classical guitar repertoire and one that I often use to introduce students to the fingerstyle playing technique. The first half of the piece, written in E minor, is relatively simple. In some cases only one finger is required to articulate the melody notes. The second half, written in E major, is a bit more difficult and contains some tricky stretches and barre chords.

Take care to keep your index finger absolutely straight when executing the bar chord. This will help to keep the notes crisp and clear. The middle knuckle is probably the most important to keep straight, even the slightest bend can cause the strings to buzz. Also follow the left-hand fingerings carefully as they will set you up for the transitions into the barre chords. Here are a few examples:

In the third beat of measure six make sure that you use the fourth finger on the eighth fret. Using the fourth finger here will help you get set for an easy transition into the bar for the next measure.

The shift from measure 20 to 21 is a good spot to employ the *guide finger* technique that we covered earlier. In this case I use the second finger, which is free on the last beat of the previous chord, to skim along the third string to its position on the eighth fret, for the B chord. At the same time that you are sliding up from the lower chord straighten out your index finger to prepare for setting the bar in measure 21. Of course all of these moves happen in a split second, which is why you should be sure to practice very slowly and increase your speed in small increments. It is always best to use a metronome to gauge your progress.

This piece employs a standard picking pattern throughout which makes the right-hand part relatively simple to learn. Right-hand stability can be maintained by resting the thumb on an unused bass string after the initial pluck. For instance, after plucking the E bass-string in the opening beat, rest the thumb on the A string while completing the rest of the measure. Using this concept throughout the piece will help to create a feeling of stability and control in the right hand. In order to help yourself get used to the feeling of keeping the thumb *planted* on the unused bass string, you may want to practice the piece without striking any of the thumb notes, but keep the thumb resting on the bass string throughout.

Anniversary Blues

Although the *Anniversary Blues* is based on a standard blues progression, this piece does have some very interesting and challenging technical demands. The main technical challenge of the piece is in its use of simultaneous slurs (The use of slides and pull-offs at the same time). You will notice the first instance of this between the measures two and three. Notice that the lowest pitch is a pull-off (down a half step) while the top two pitches slide forward (up a half step). Be sure to follow the left-hand fingerings carefully. The key challenge with these slurs is making sure that they are, in fact, simultaneous. A good way to practice this is to use your metronome and listen to make sure that the slurs occur precisely on the beat. You might also want to isolate the instances where the slurs occur and practice them separately as an exercise.

If you are having trouble with the simultaneous slurs, you also have the option to play the slur passages without the simultaneous pull-offs and slides. You can simply pluck the notes to each chord separately.

Just Chet

Chet Atkins was one of the most talented and influential guitarists of the twentieth century. Chet has had a wide ranging influence on many styles of guitar playing, but his influence is probably felt the strongest in the fingerstyle world. *Just Chet* was written as an homage to Chet's wonderful playing style. Although you will notice familiar chords and progressions in this piece, you should take care to focus on the individual bass and melody lines. The individual lines function independently and work together to form the whole. This was one of the trademarks of Chet's style and often caused listeners to exclaim that it sounded as if two guitarists were playing at once! Before you tackle this piece as a whole, you might want to play through the melody

and bass lines independently. This will help to familiarize your ear with the individual sound of each line. Notice that all of the note stems for the melody are pointed upward and the stems for the bass point downward.

In regards to the right hand, this piece can either be played with the standard right-hand technique or using a thumb pick on the right hand. Using a thumb pick enables you to "collapse" the wrist and use the lower portion of the palm to dampen, or palm mute, the lower bass strings. This technique creates a "walking" or "acoustic bass" effect in the lower line. This also serves to make a greater contrast between the bass and the melody.

This piece also introduces a barring technique in which the third finger of the left hand is used to bar several strings at once. This occurs on the the fourth beat of measure eight. Use the third finger to press down the fourth, third and second strings. Although you only need to fret the C-flat on this beat, barring the strings at this point will set you up to slide down to the next chord.

Etude in A

The etude in A also follows a relatively static picking pattern with the right hand. Although it is fairly simple, this is a gorgeous piece of music and provides great enjoyment for players and listeners alike. Take care to make sure that the melody really *sings* and that the accompaniment pattern isn't overpowering. The melody notes are also quarter notes and have upward stems on them as well.

Duets

In addition to being a wonderful vehicle for creating guitar solos, perhaps the most widespread use of the fingerstyle technique is in its use as an accompaniment style. The following duets join single line melodies with fingerstyle accompaniment. Feel free to change the accompaniments or add your own variations.

Molly Malone

I used a simple *block chord* accompaniment with this traditional tune from the British Isles.

Scarborough Fair

I'm sure that most of you are familiar with this famous English folk tune. The accompaniment pattern remains the same throughout.

Gymnopedie #1

This simple and elegant tune contains some beautiful chord voicings. Although this piece is from the classical repertoire, it has been widely covered and even appeared on an album by the pop group *Blood, Sweat and Tears.* The harmonies employ voicings that are now widely used in jazz music.

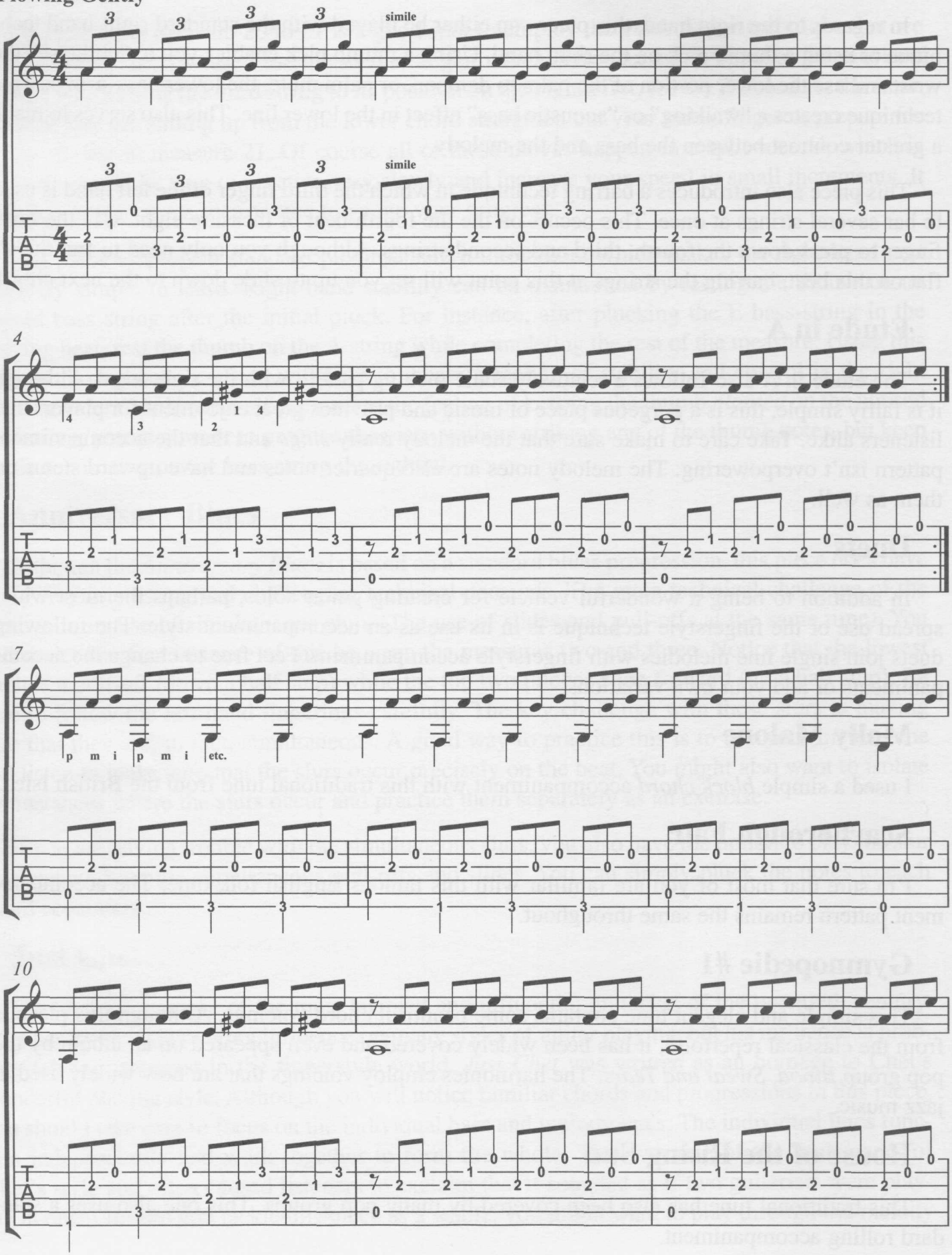
House of the Rising Sun

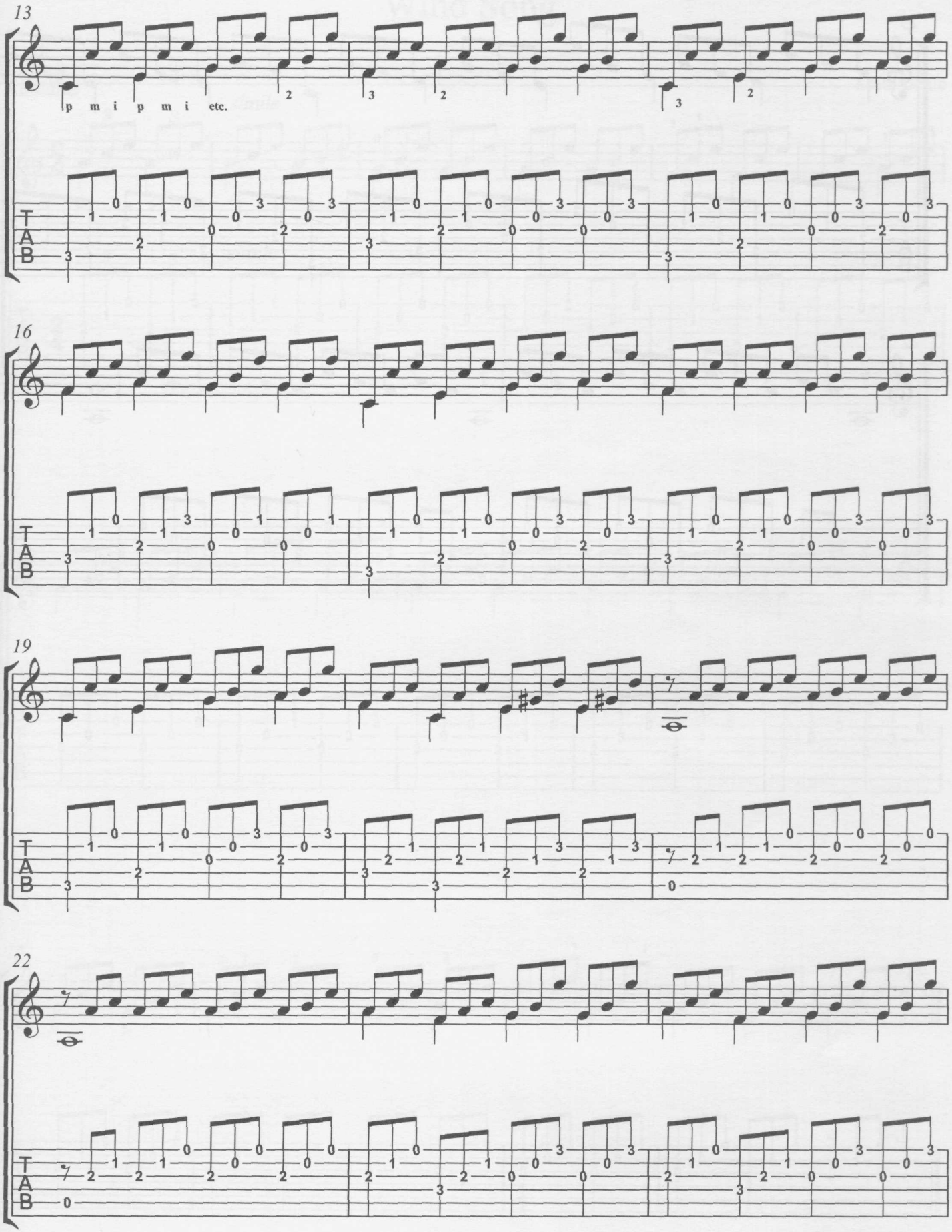
This traditional tune has also been covered by many pop groups. This one also uses a standard rolling accompaniment.

Rain Song

Flowing Gently

Jonathan Adams




13
p m i p m i etc.
16
19
22
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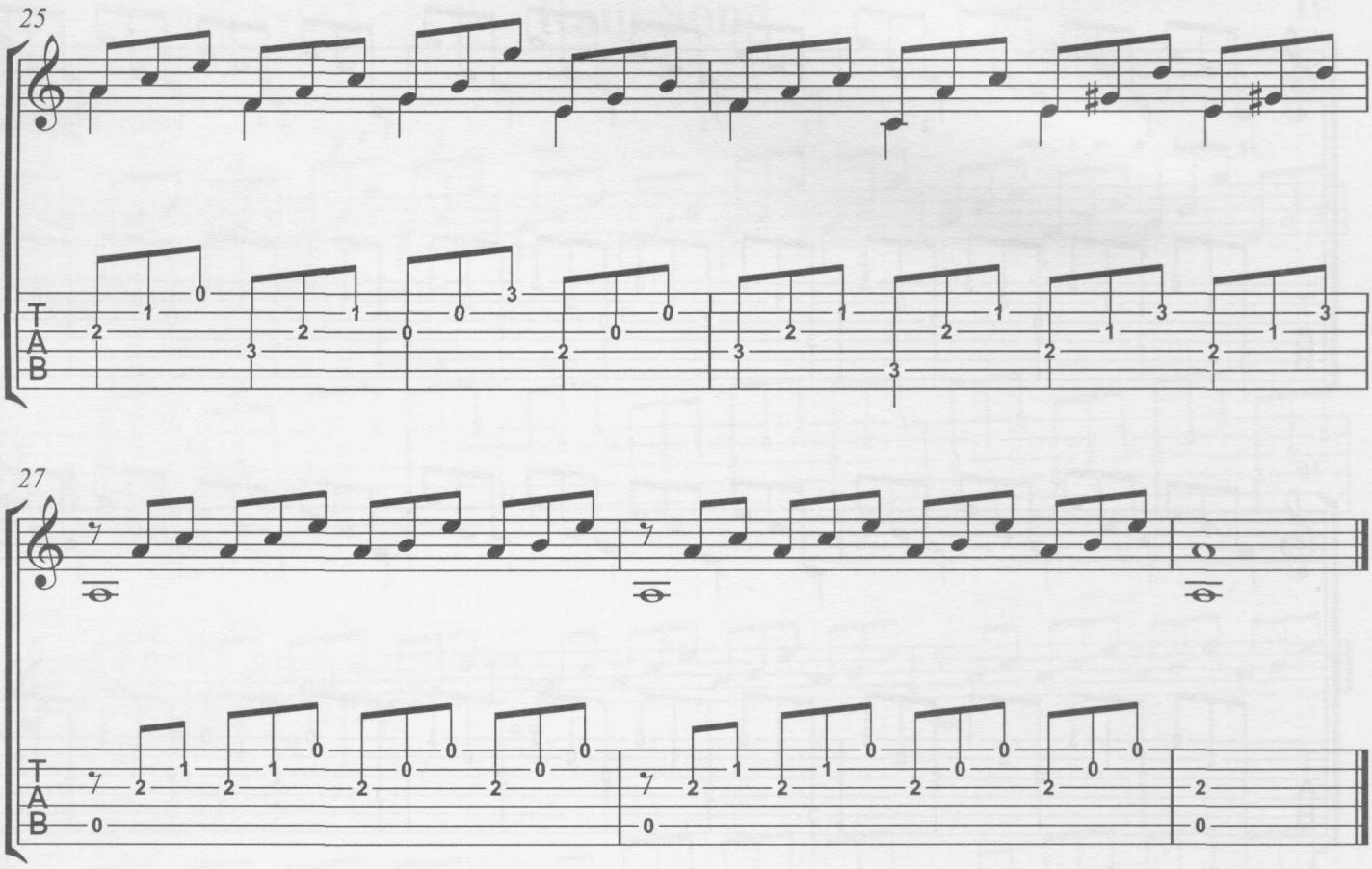
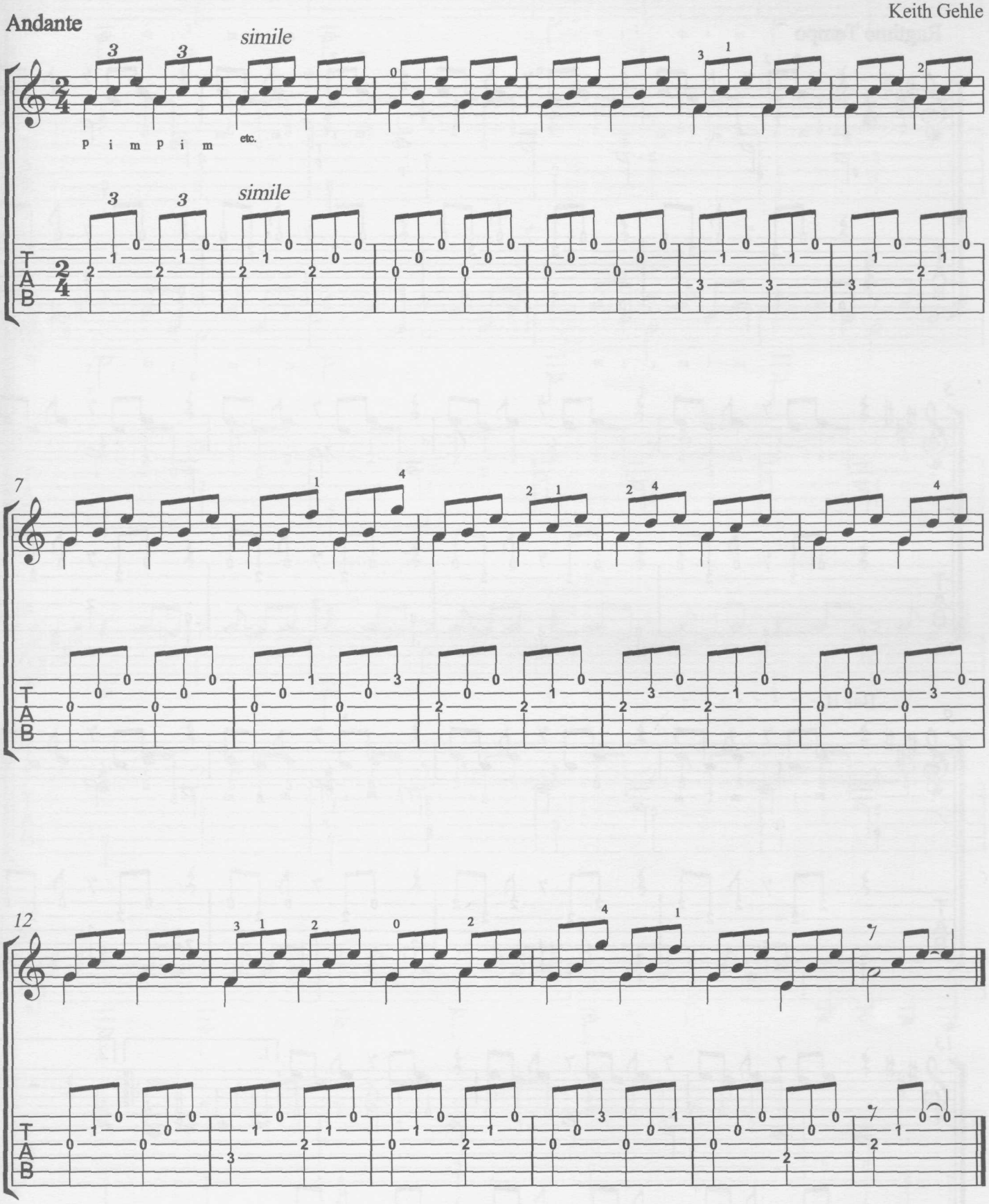

25
T
A
B
27
T
A
B

Wind Song

Keith Gehle



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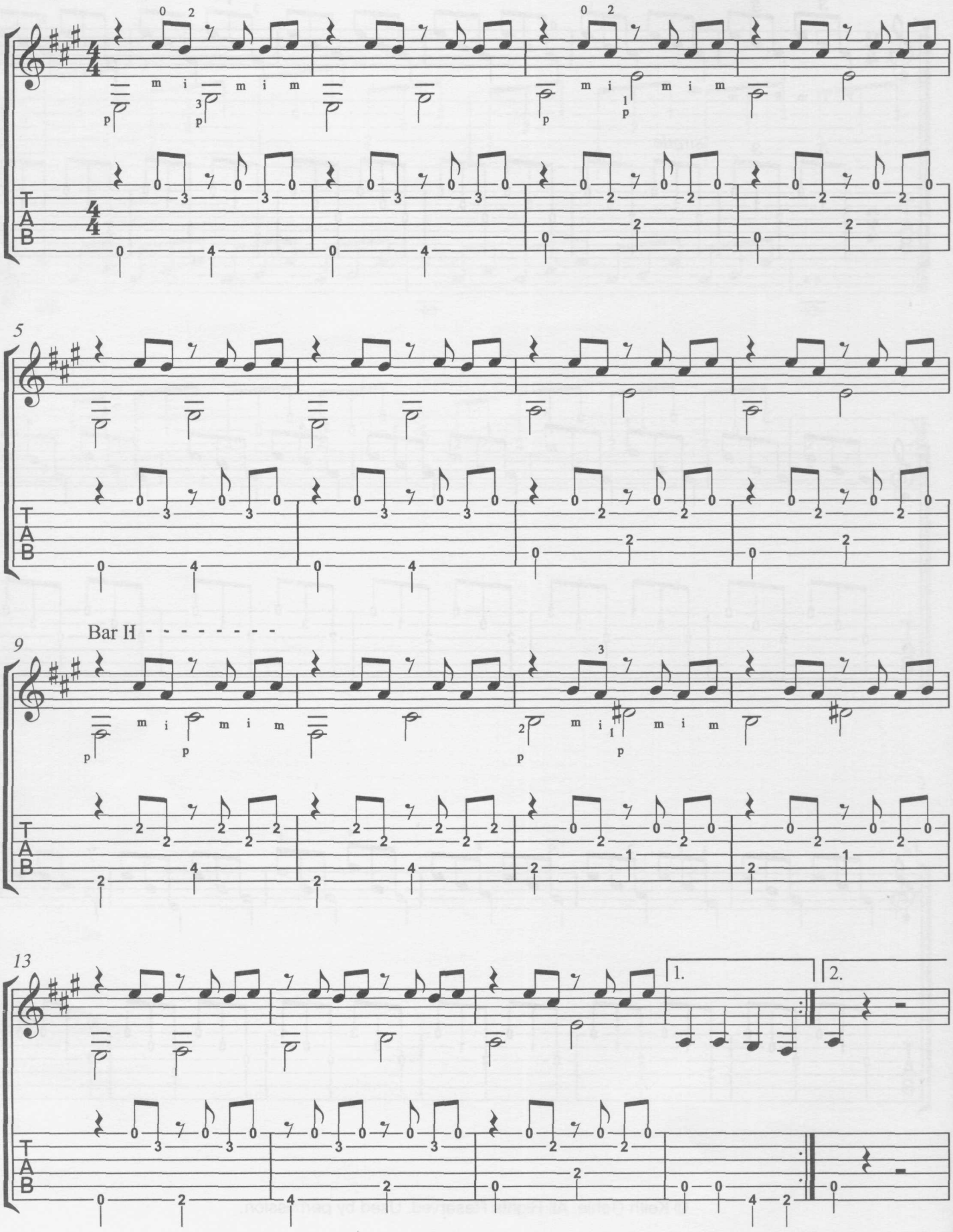
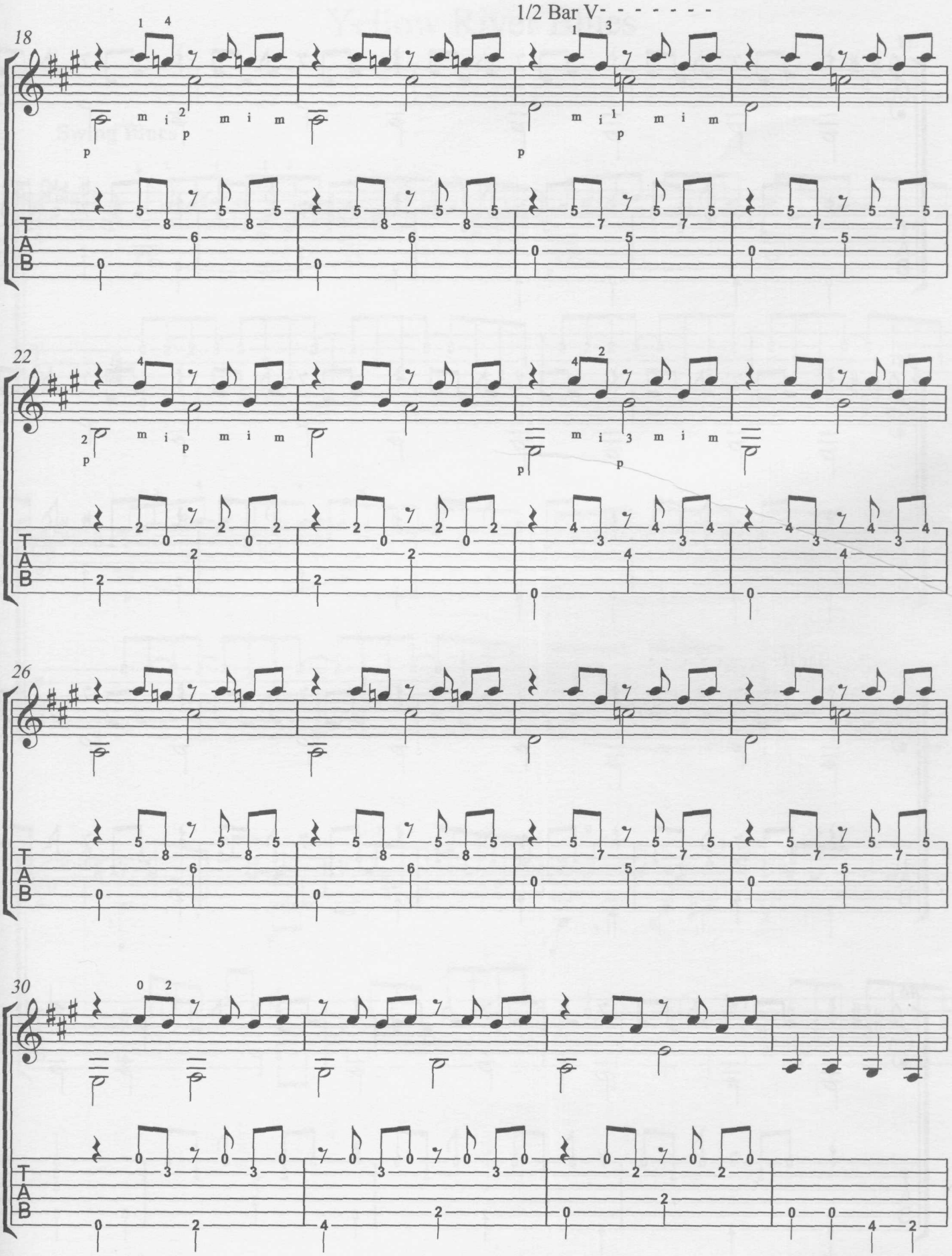
The Goodtime Rag

Jonathan Adams

Ragtime Tempo




1/2 Bar V- - - - - - -
18
22
26
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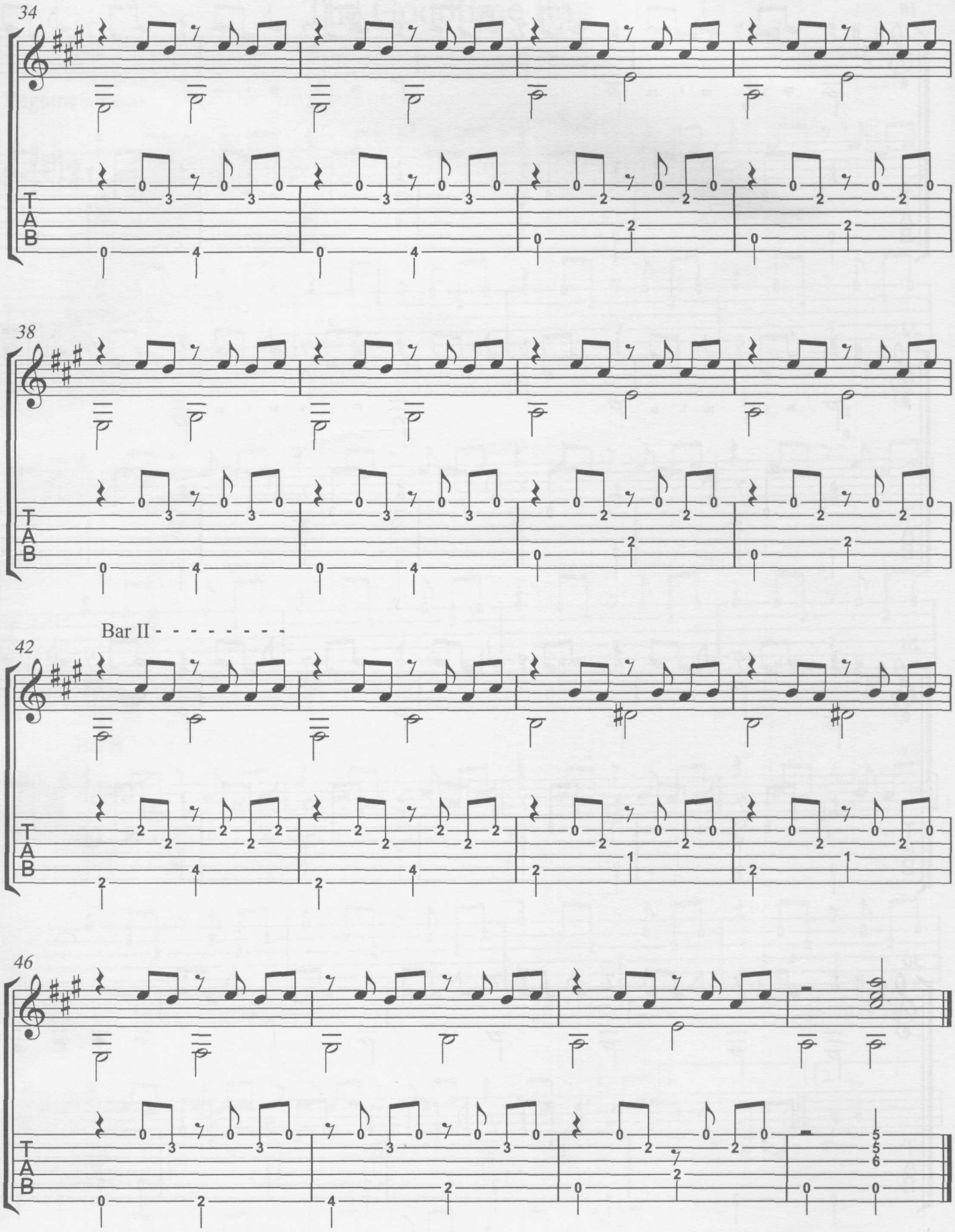
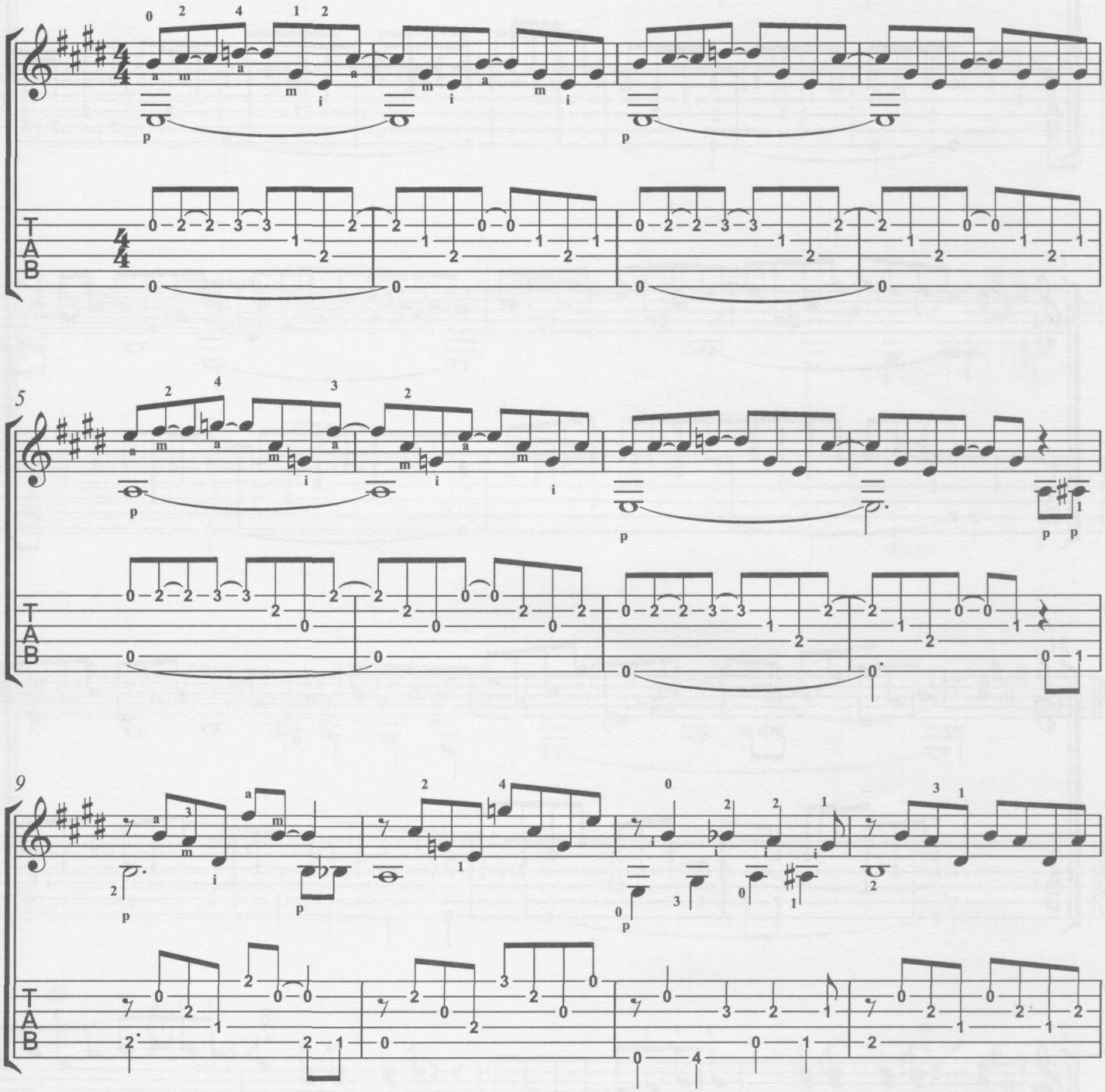

34
38
Bar II - - - - - - - -
42
46
T
A
B

Yellow River Blues

Keith Gehle

Swing Blues



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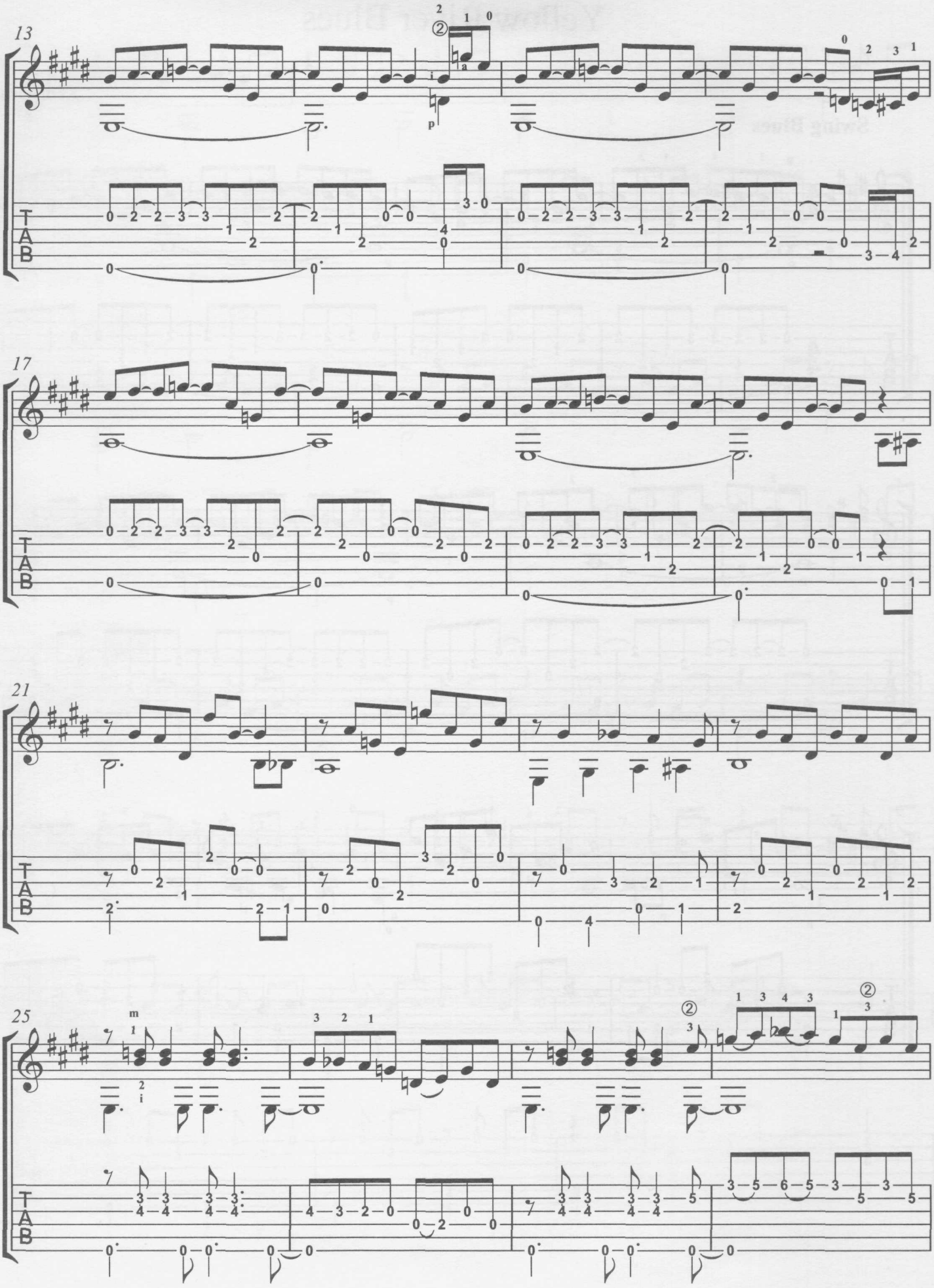
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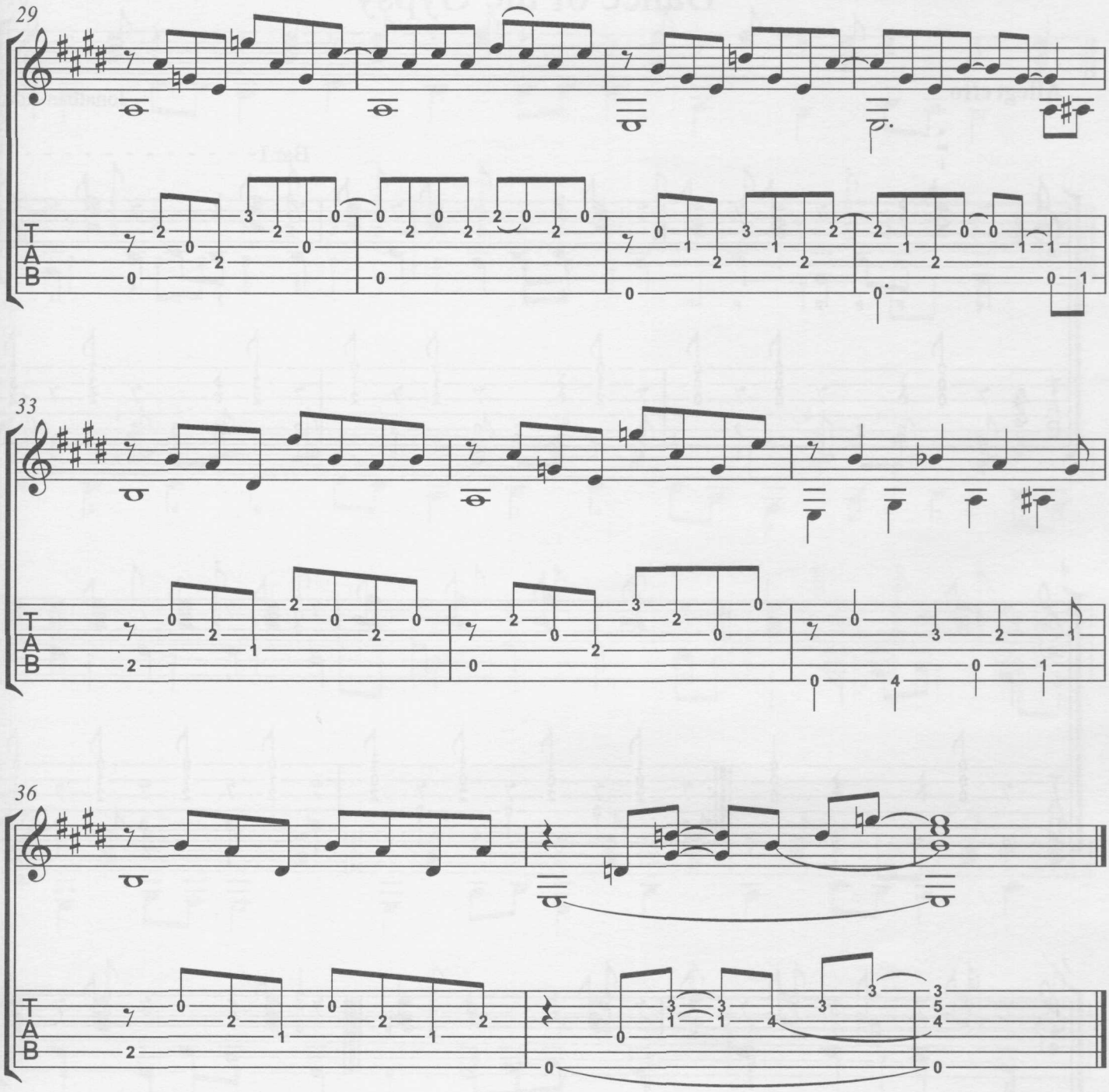
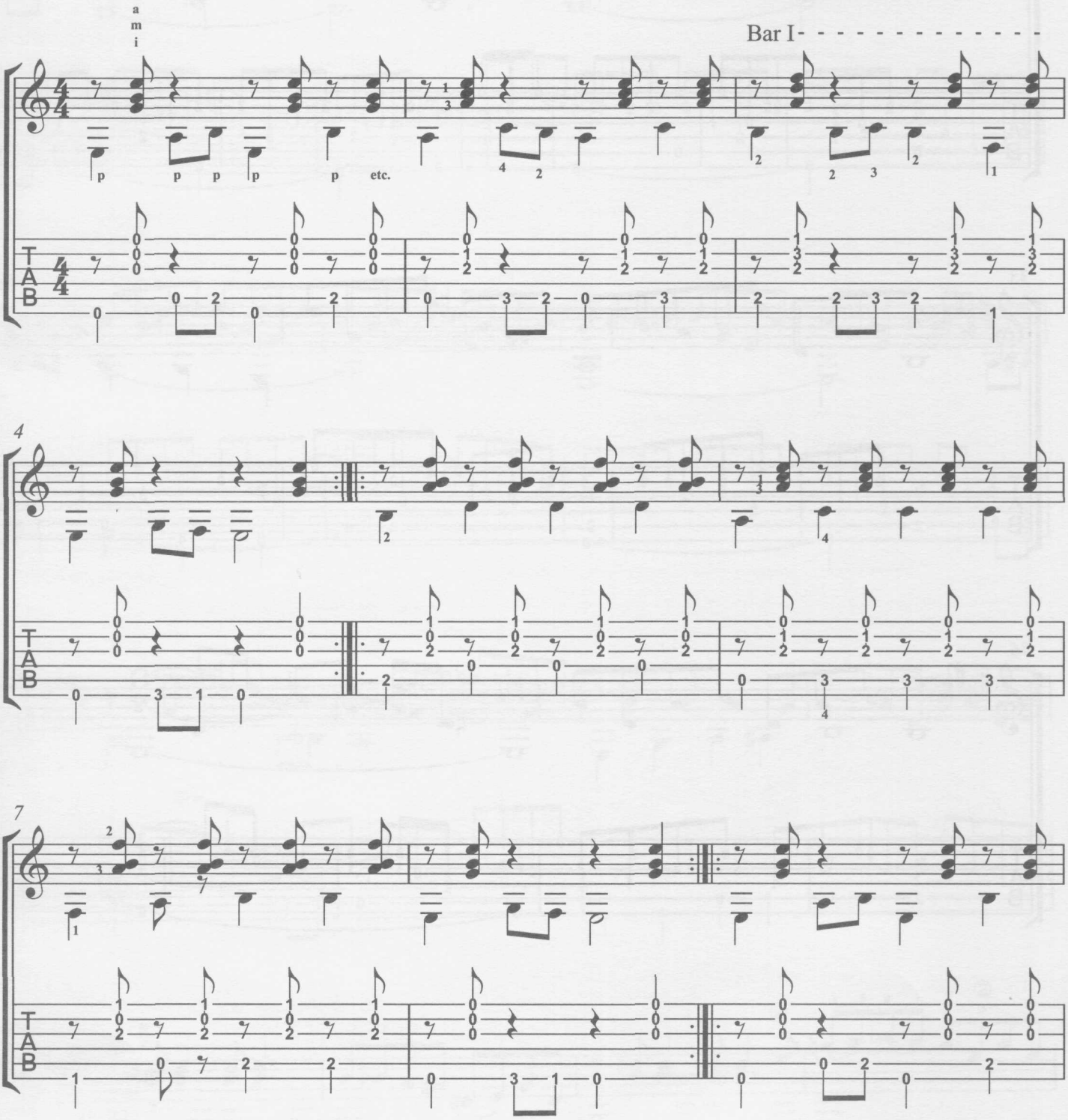
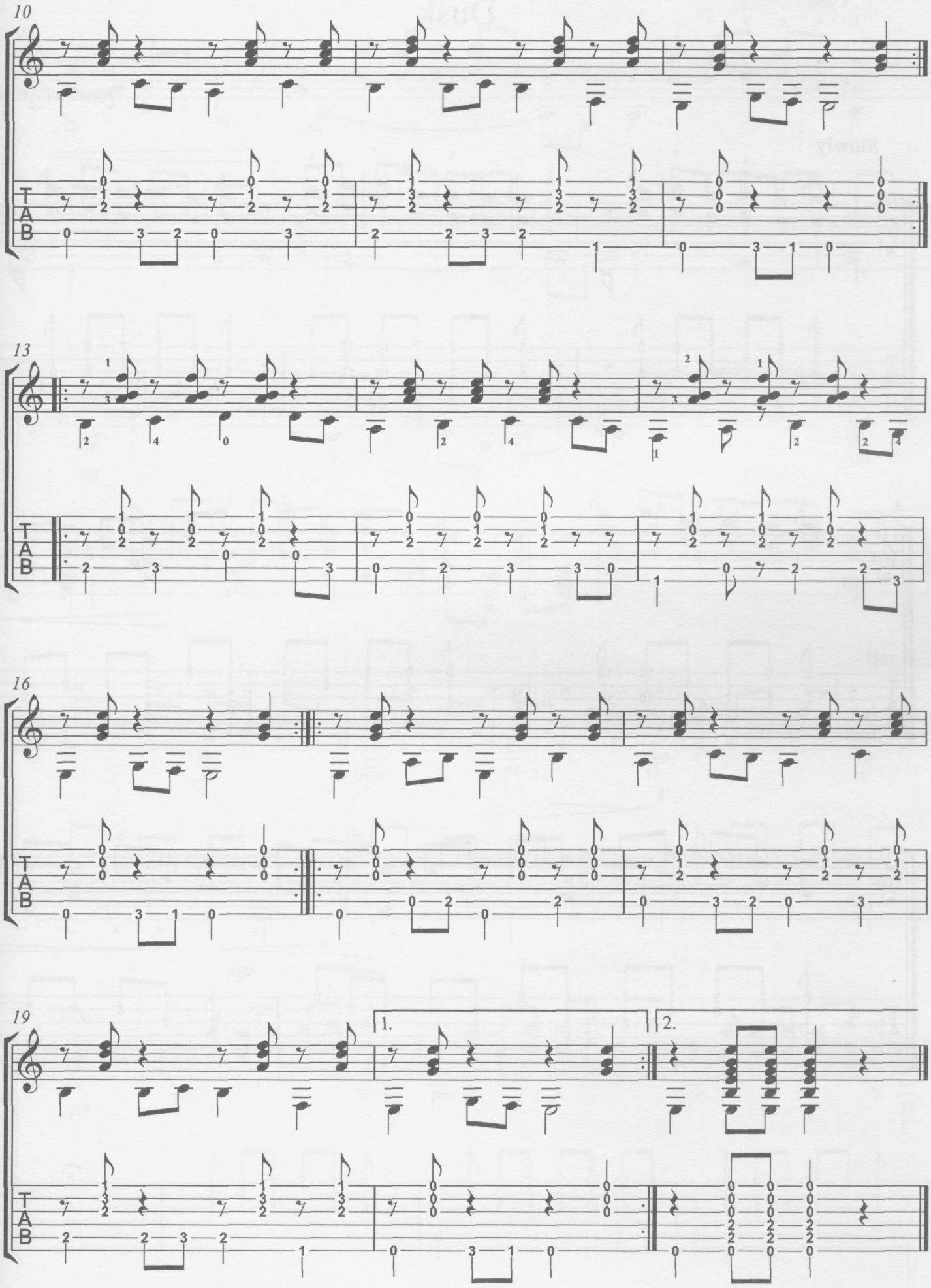

29
33
36
T
A
B

Dance of the Gypsy

Allegretto

Jonathan Adams

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2.
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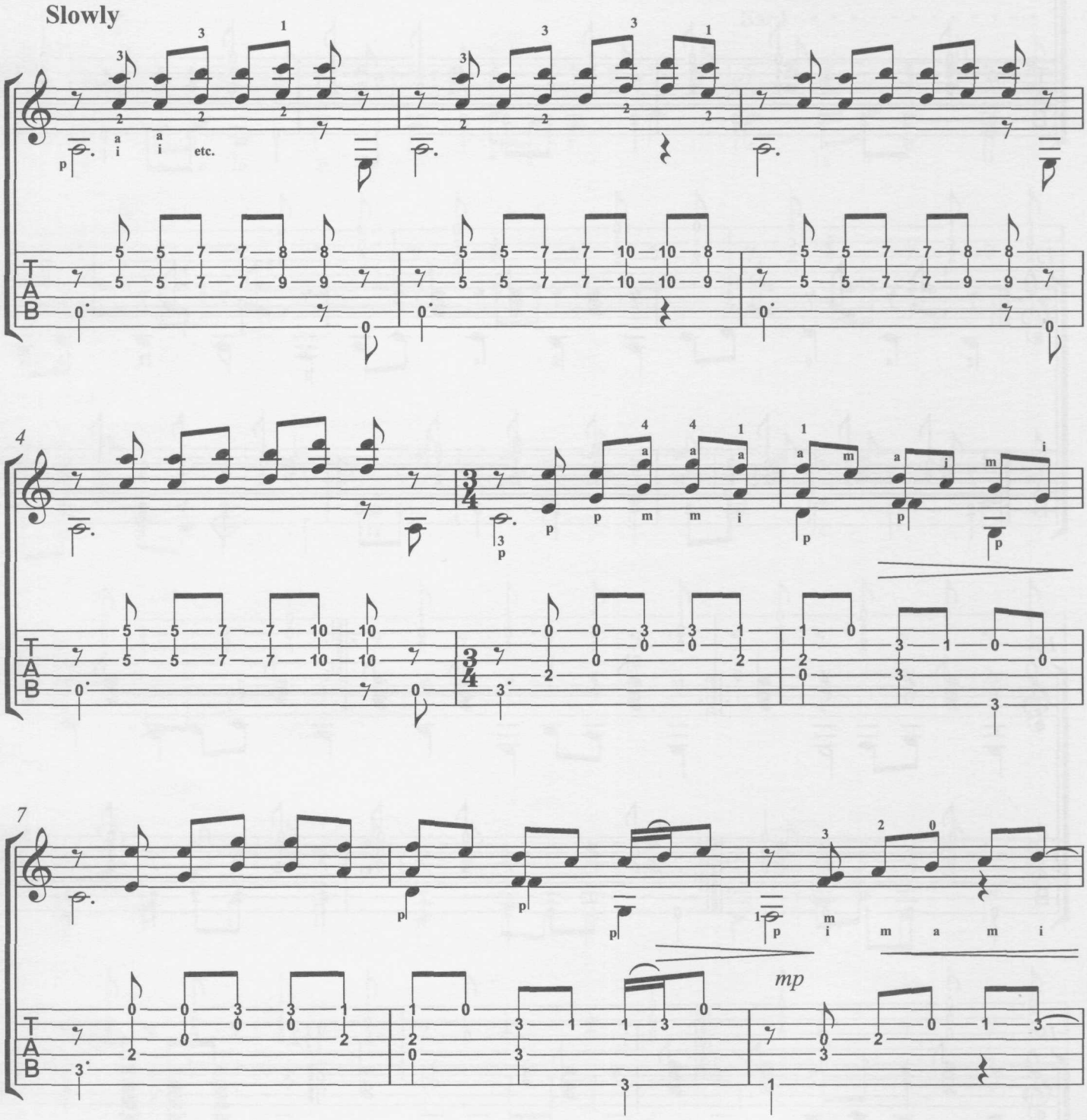
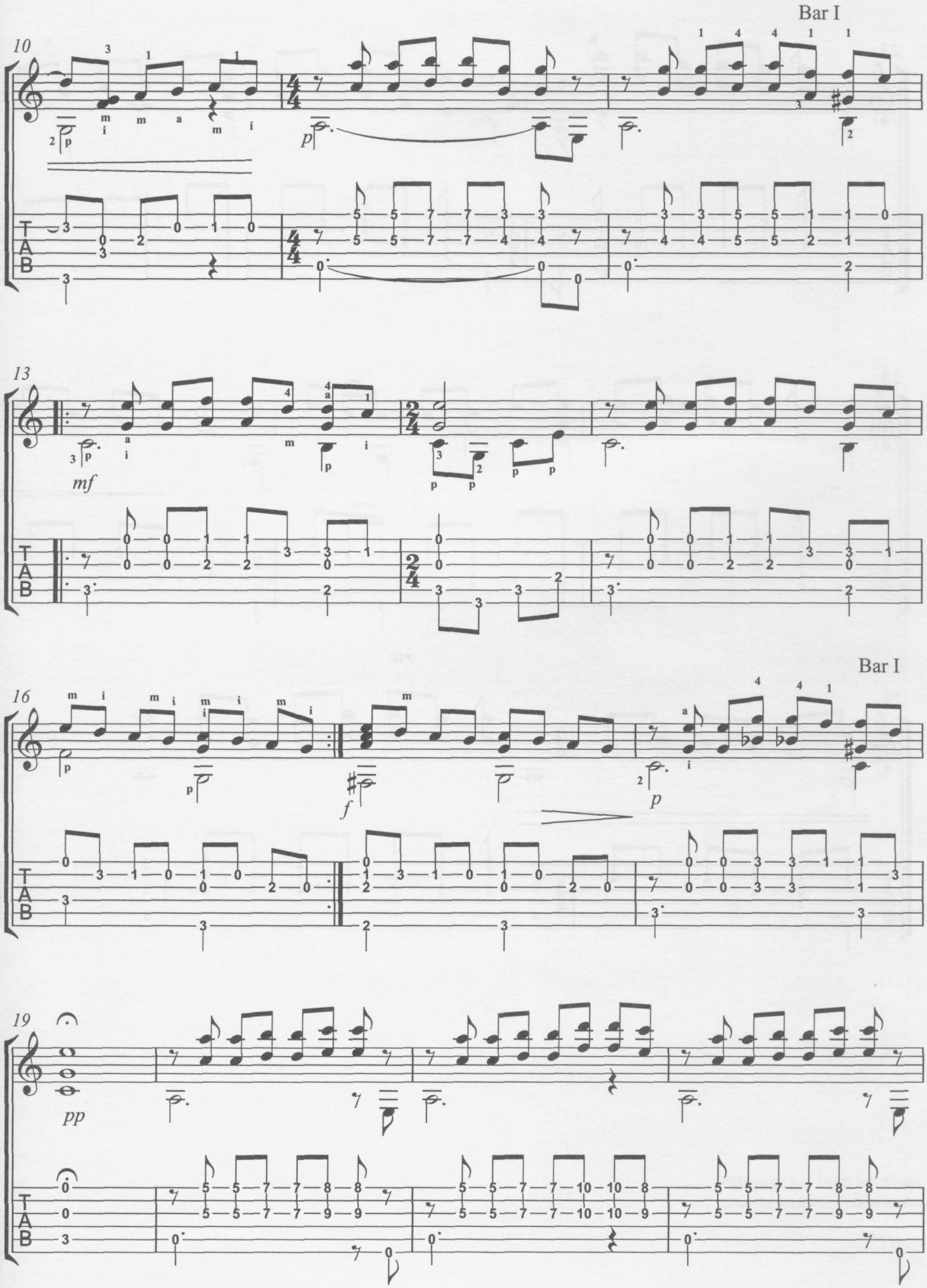
A
B

Dusk

Jonathan Adams




Bar I
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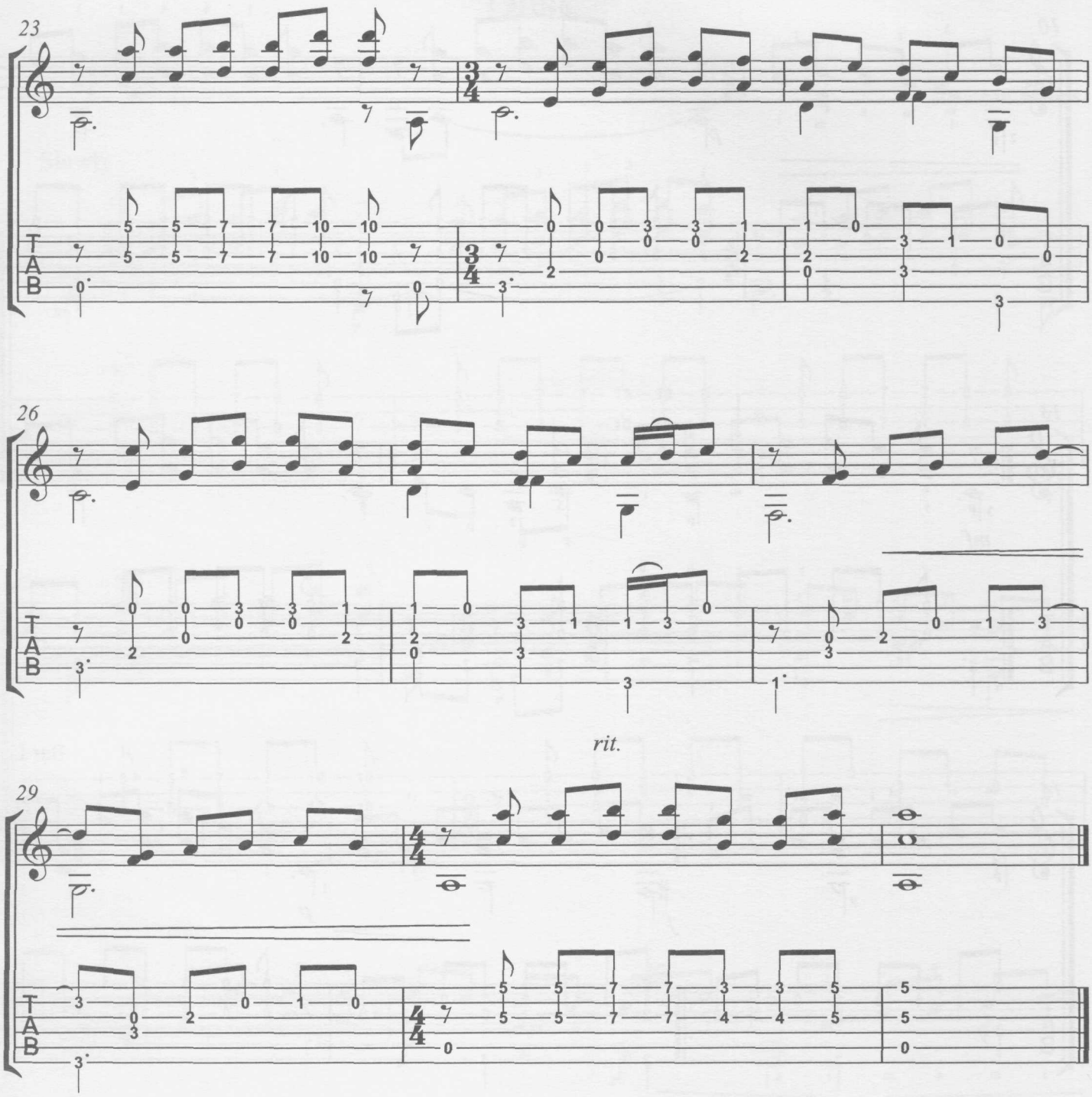
mf
Bar I
16
f
p
19
pp


23
26
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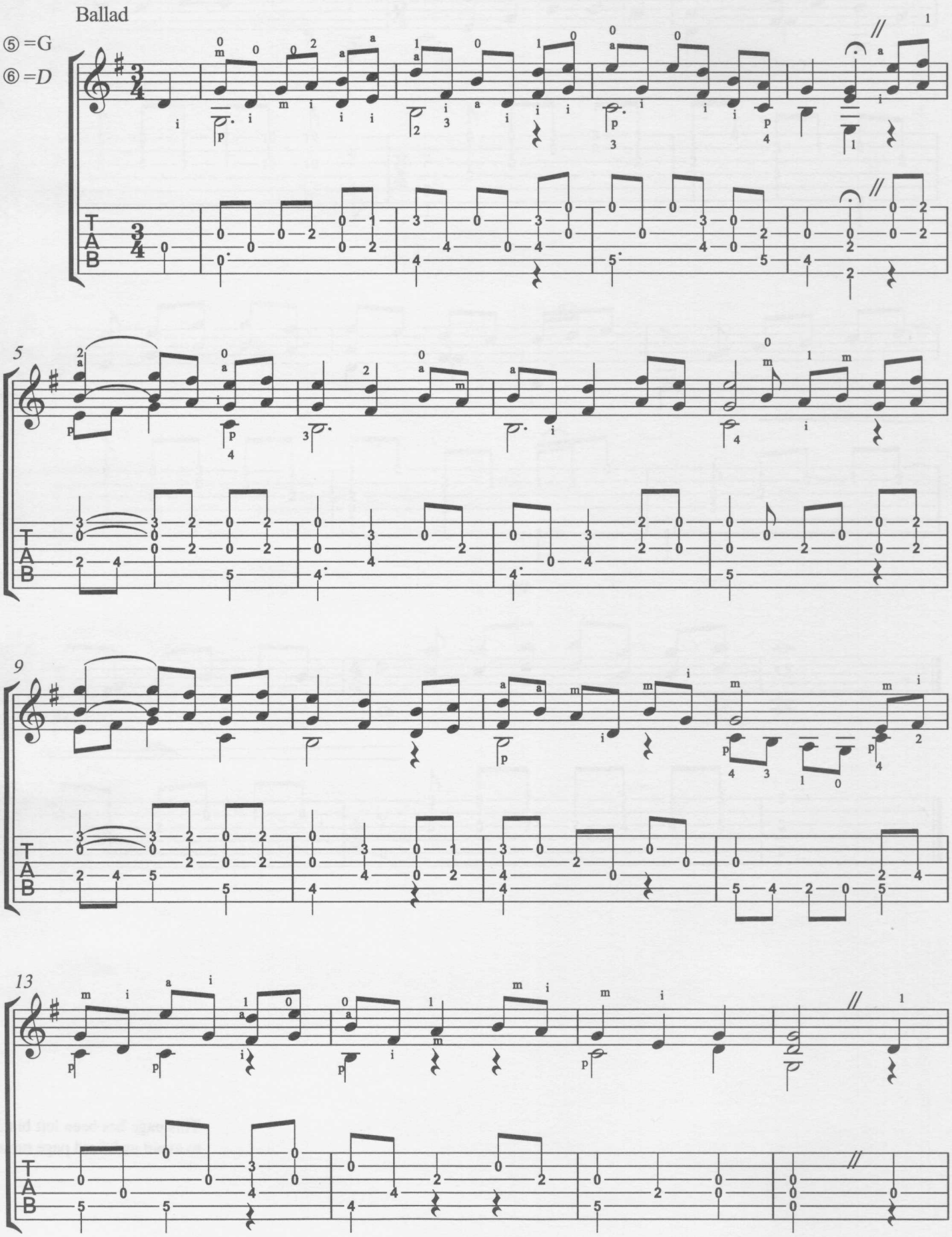
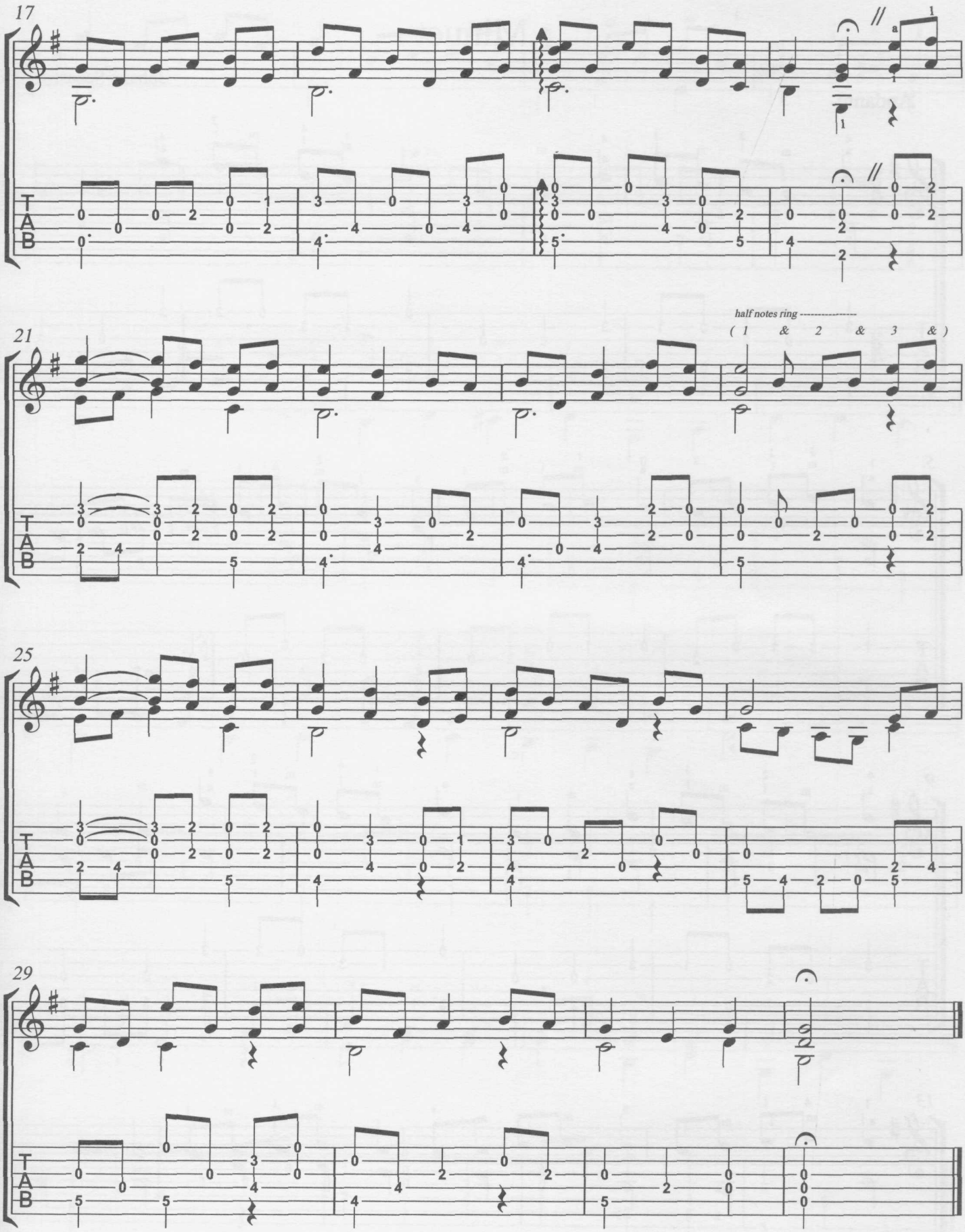
29

Bridget O'Malley

traditional Celtic
Arr. Jonathan Adams

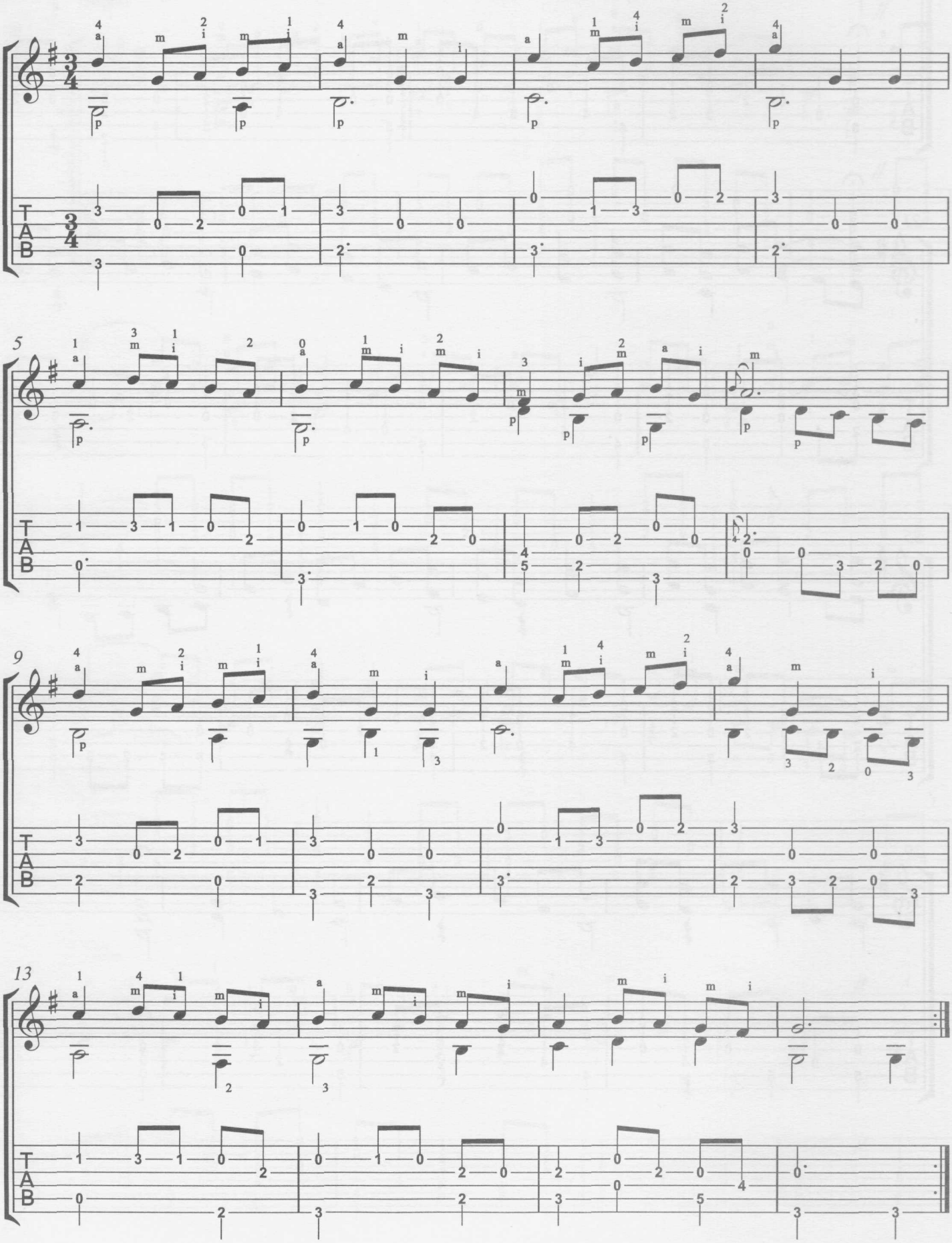


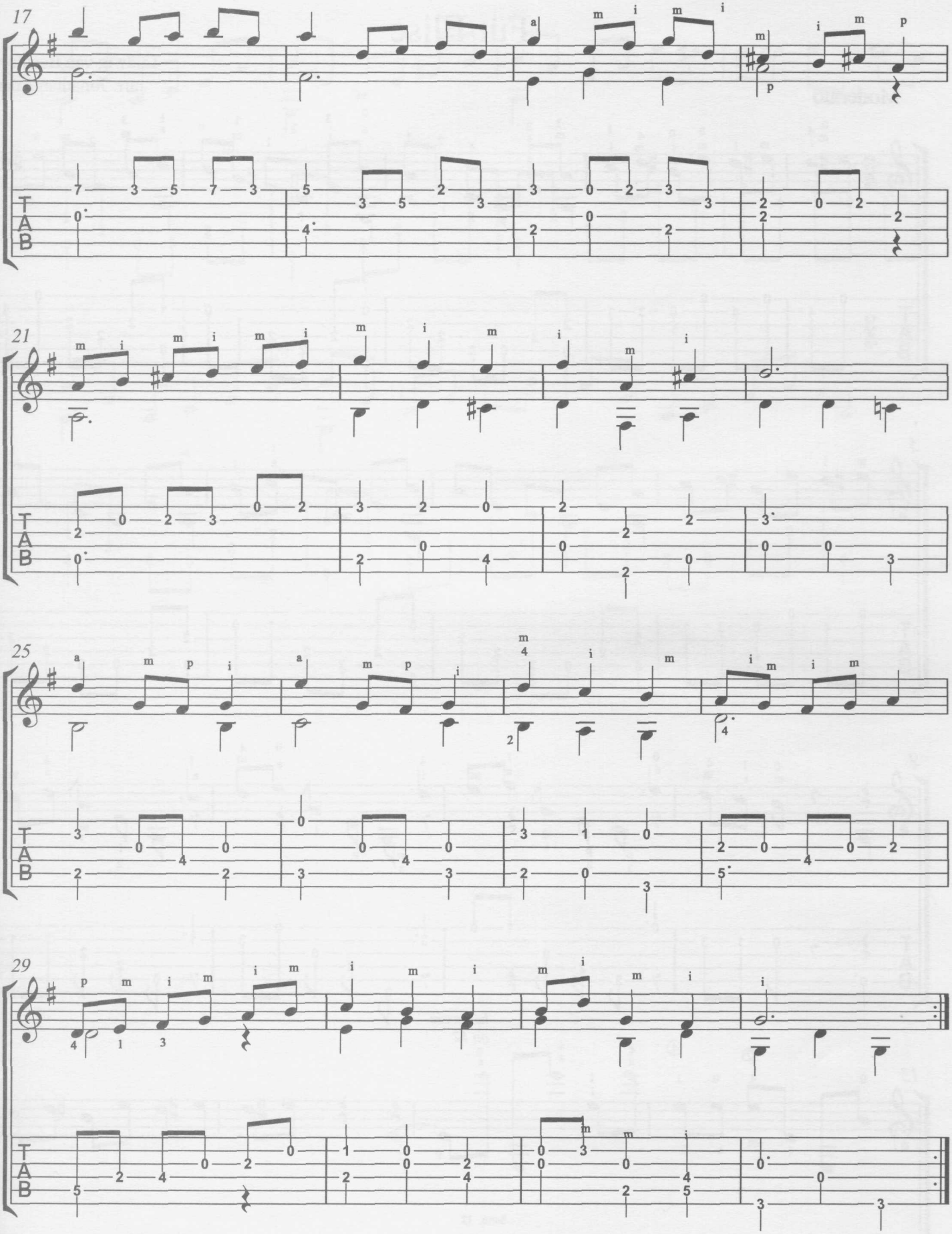

17
21
half notes ring
(1 & 2 & 3 &)
25
29
T
A
B

Minuet

Johann Sebastian Bach

Andante

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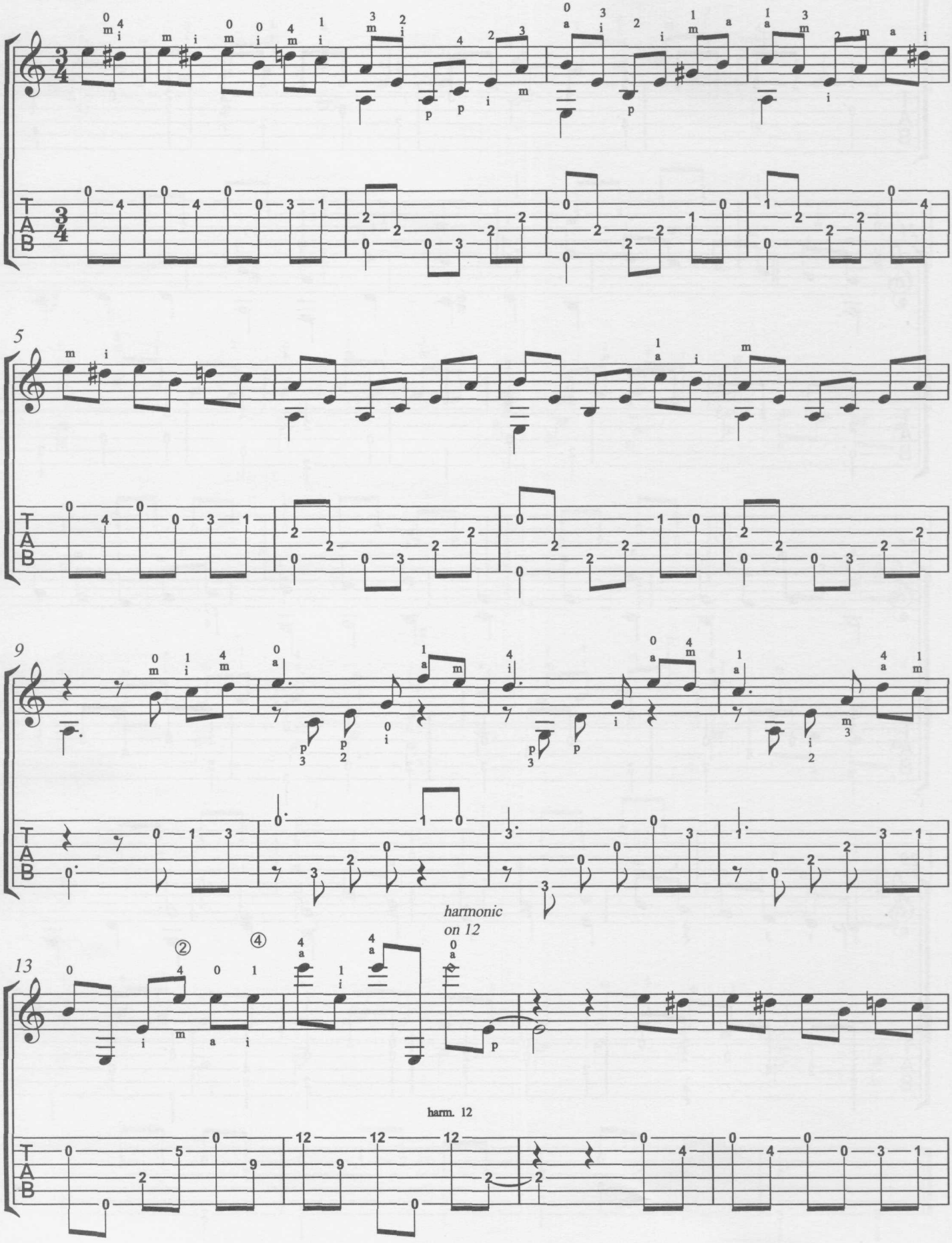
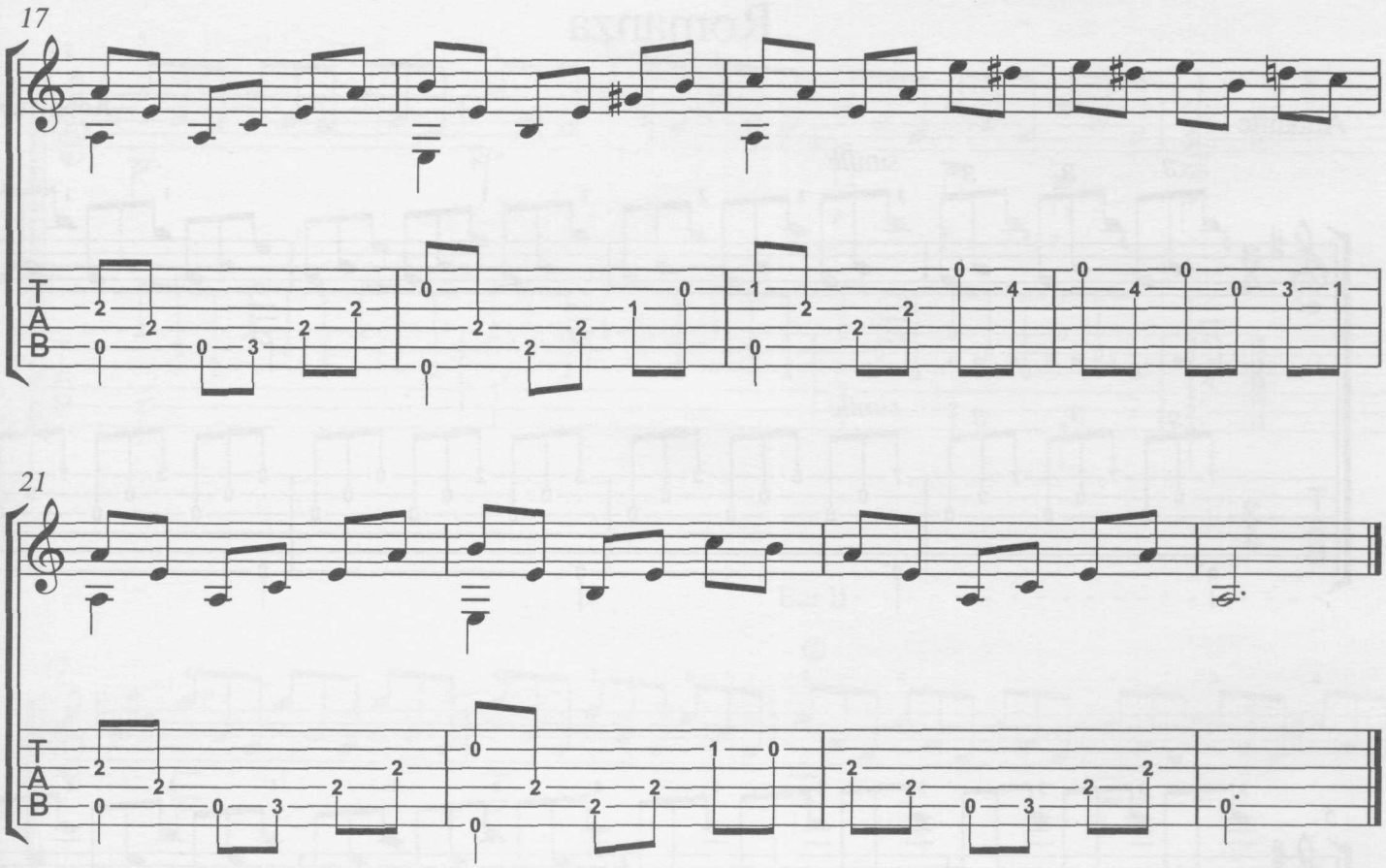
T
A
B

Für Elise

Ludwig van Beethoven
arr. Jonathan Adams




17
T
A
B
21
T
A
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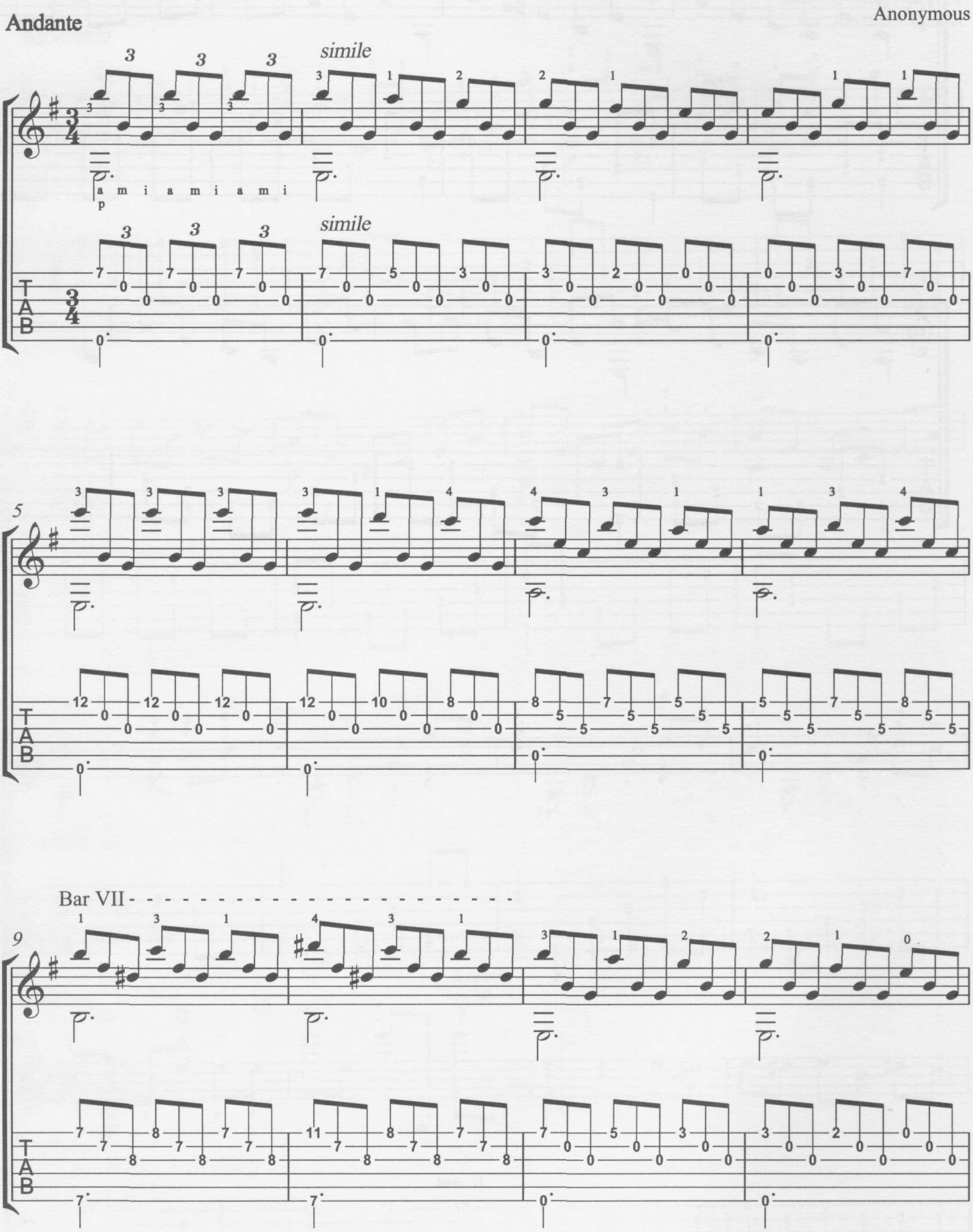
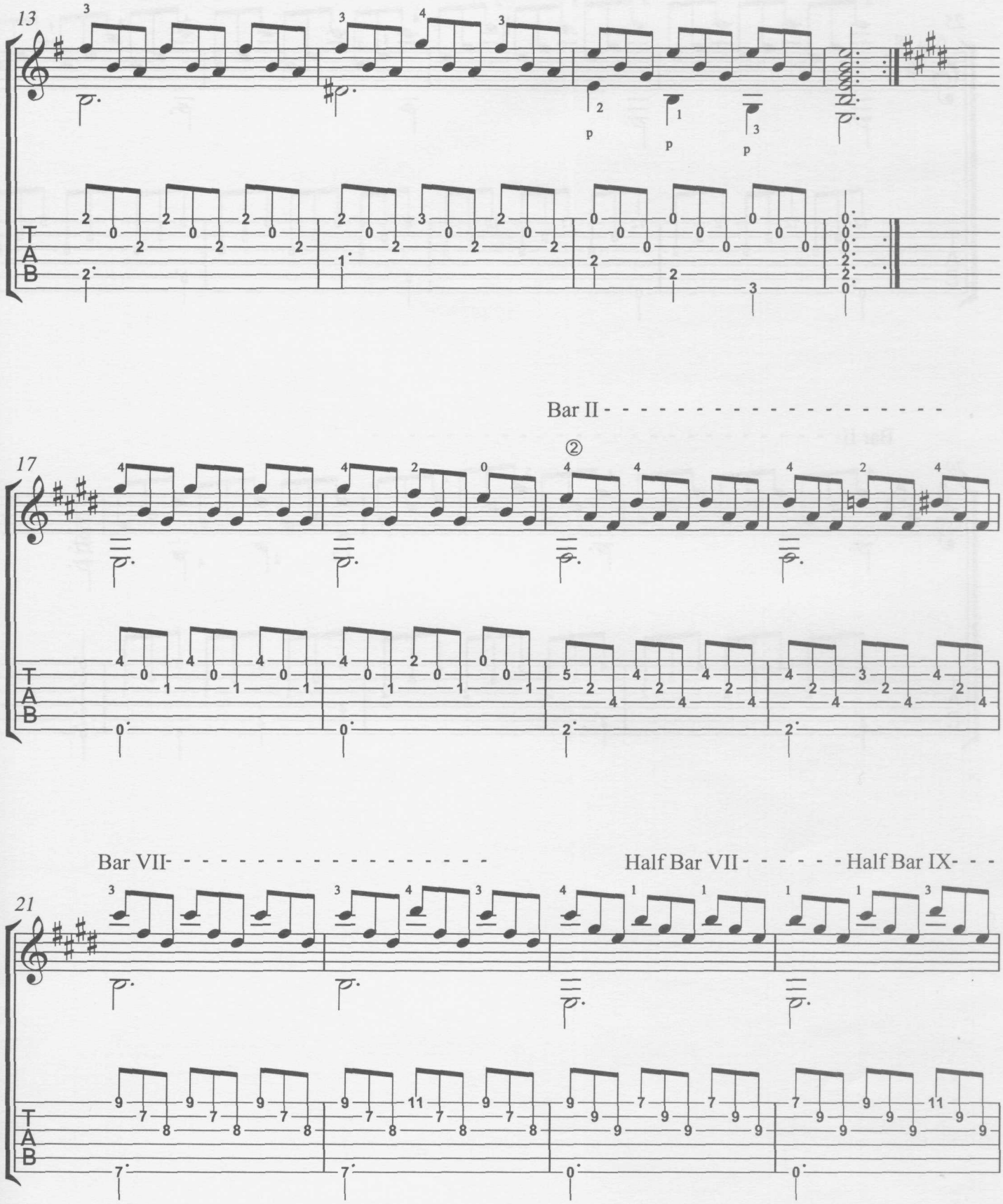
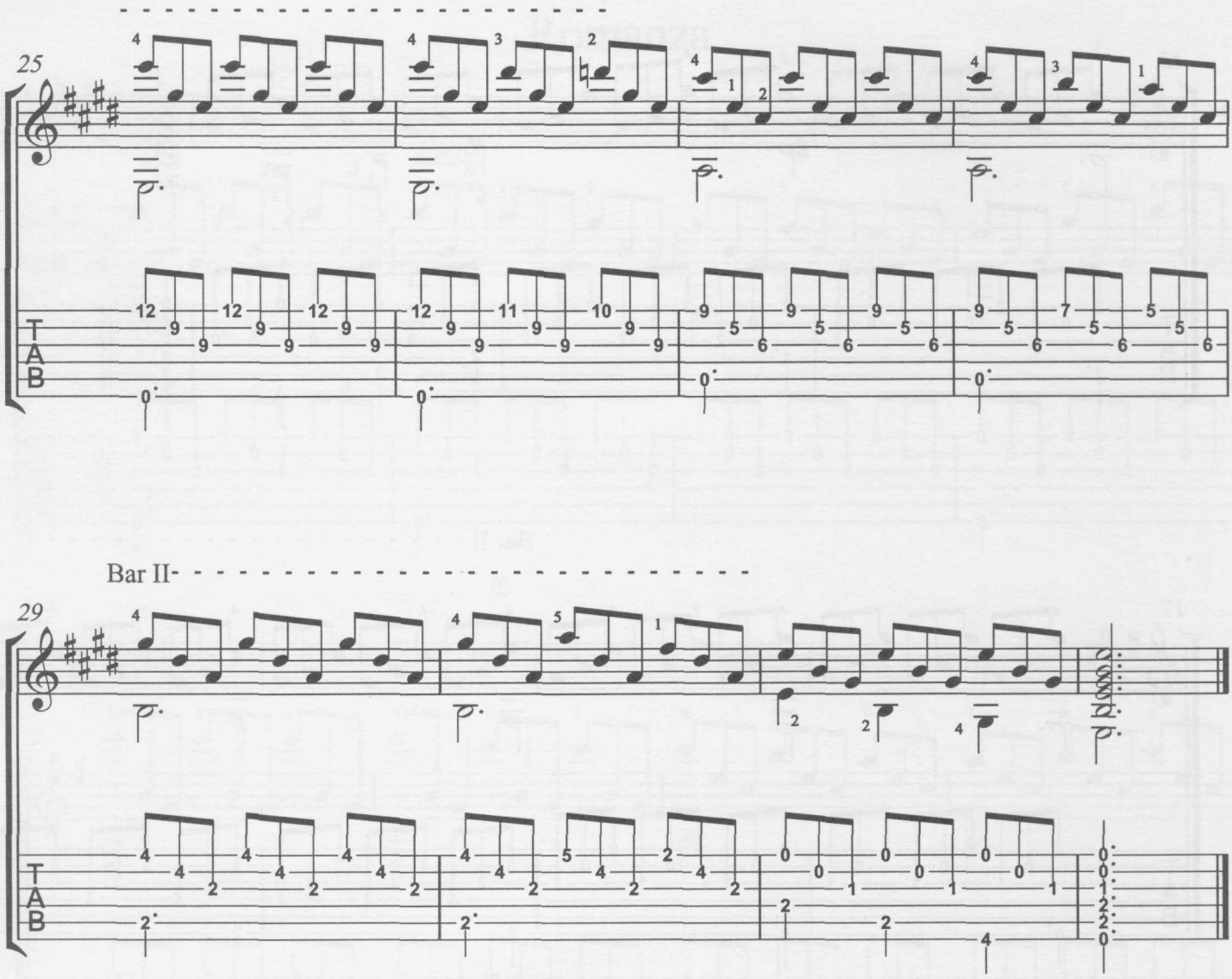
Romanza



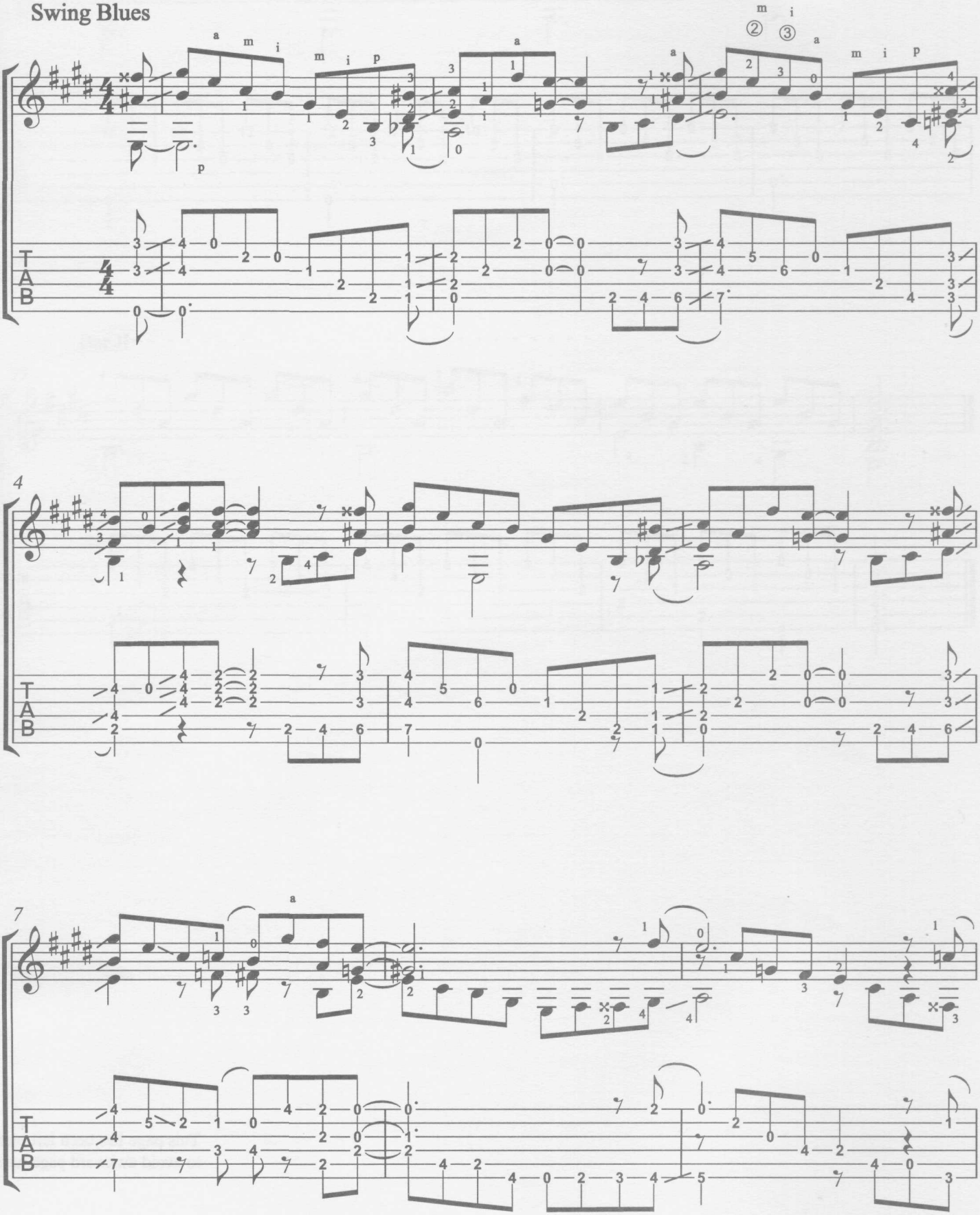

13
17
Bar II
②
21
Bar VII
Half Bar VII
Half Bar IX
TAB


25
Bar II-
29
T
A
B

Anniversary Blues

Lyman Golden

Swing Blues



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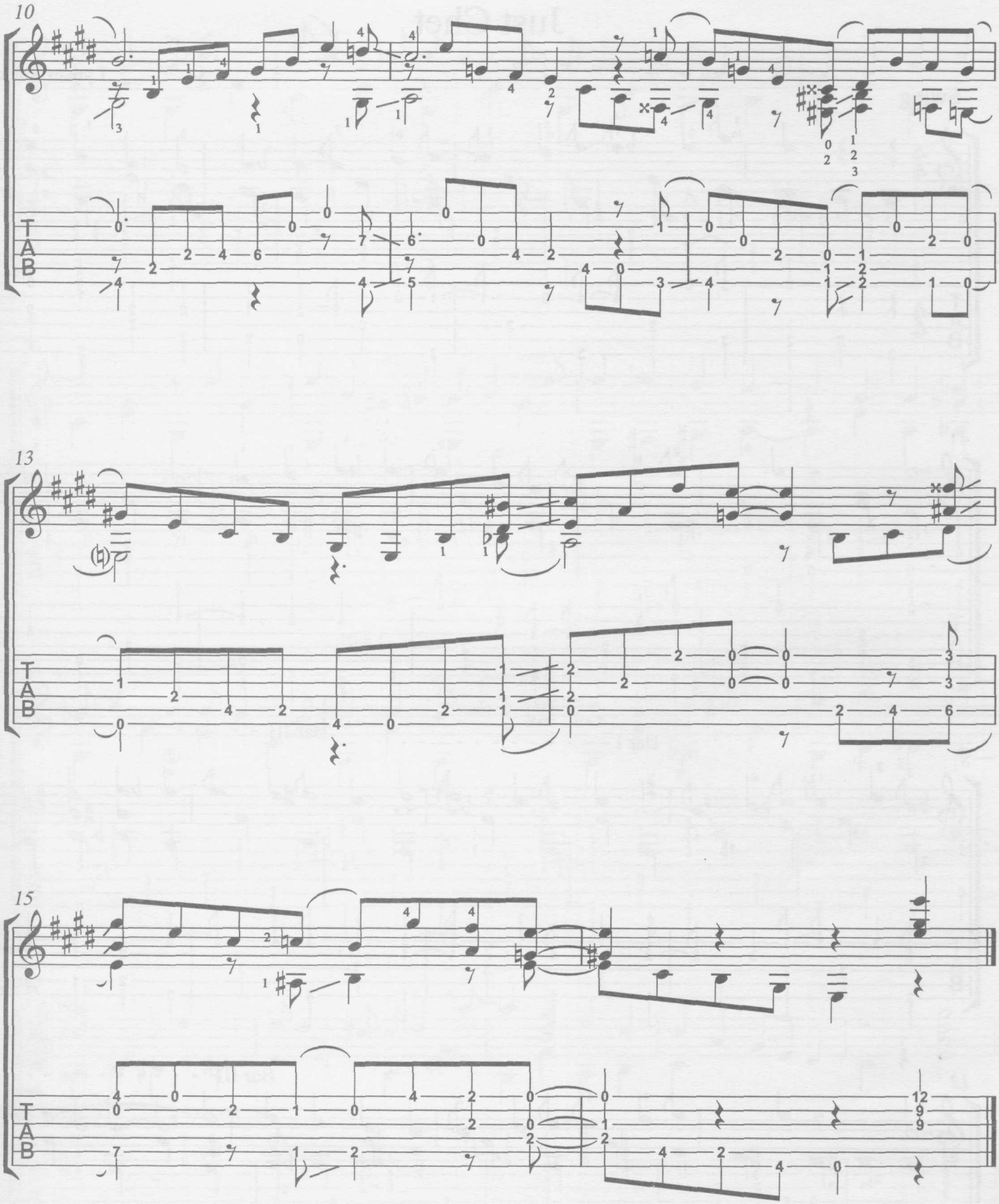
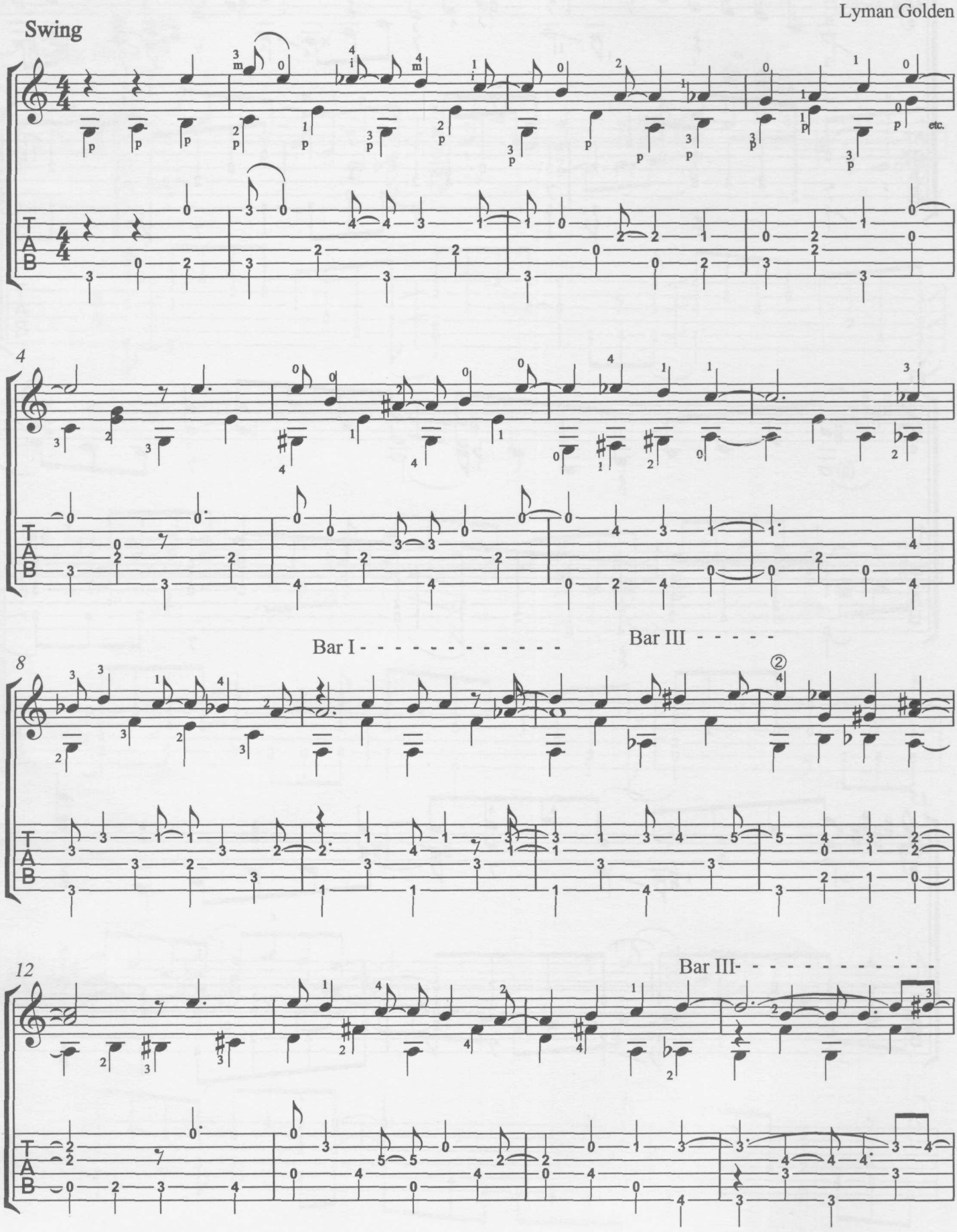

10
13
15
T
A
B

Just Chet

Lyman Golden



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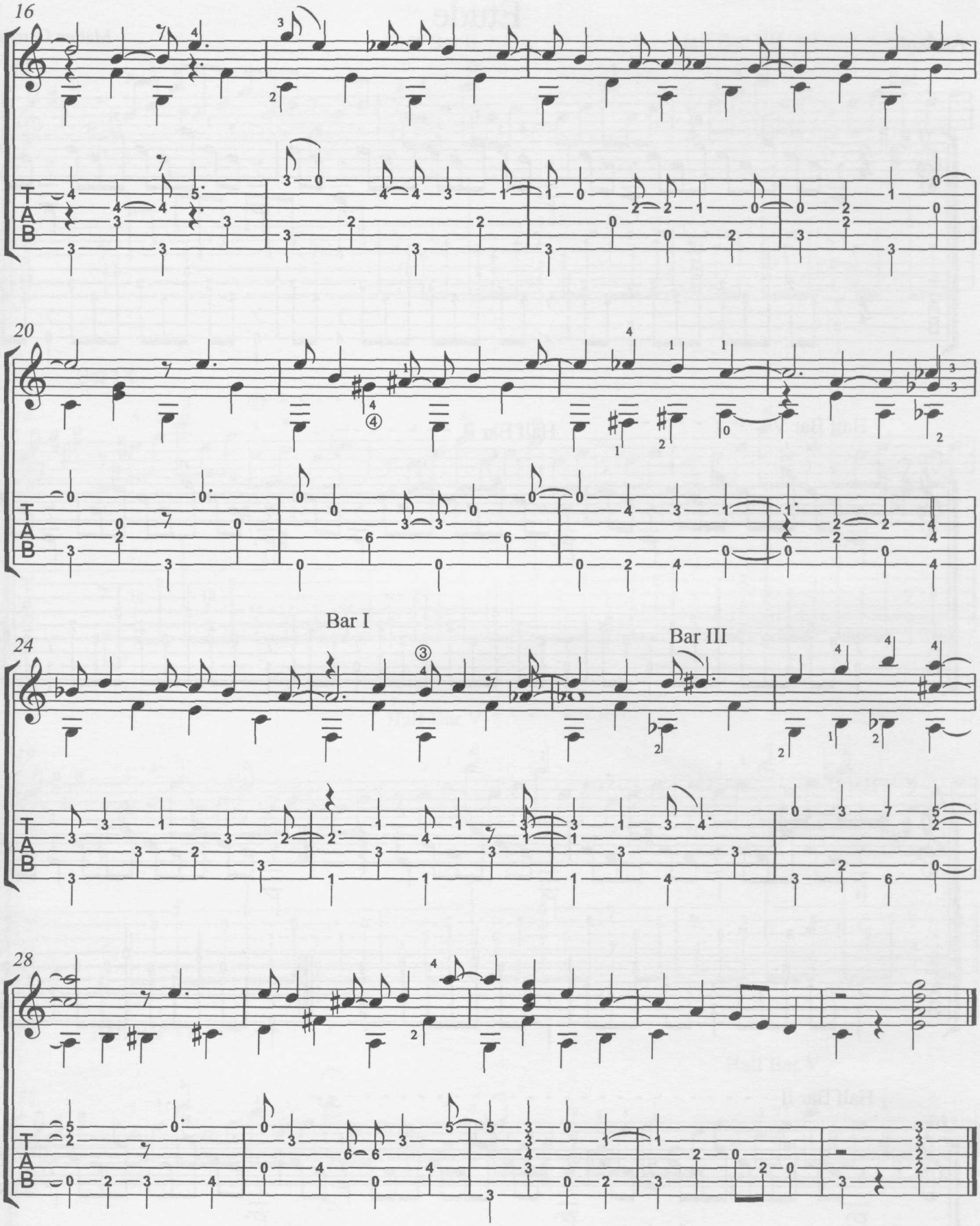
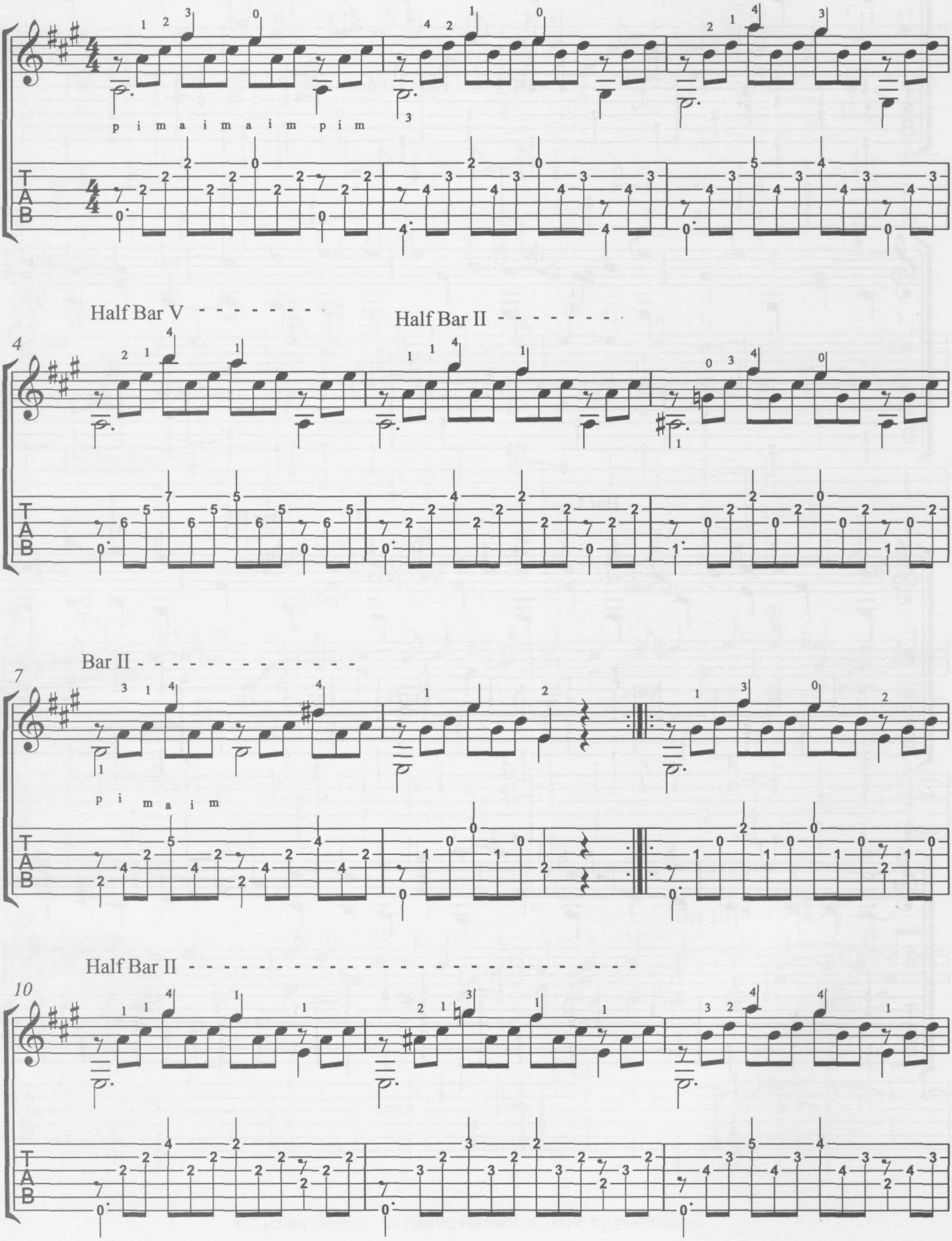
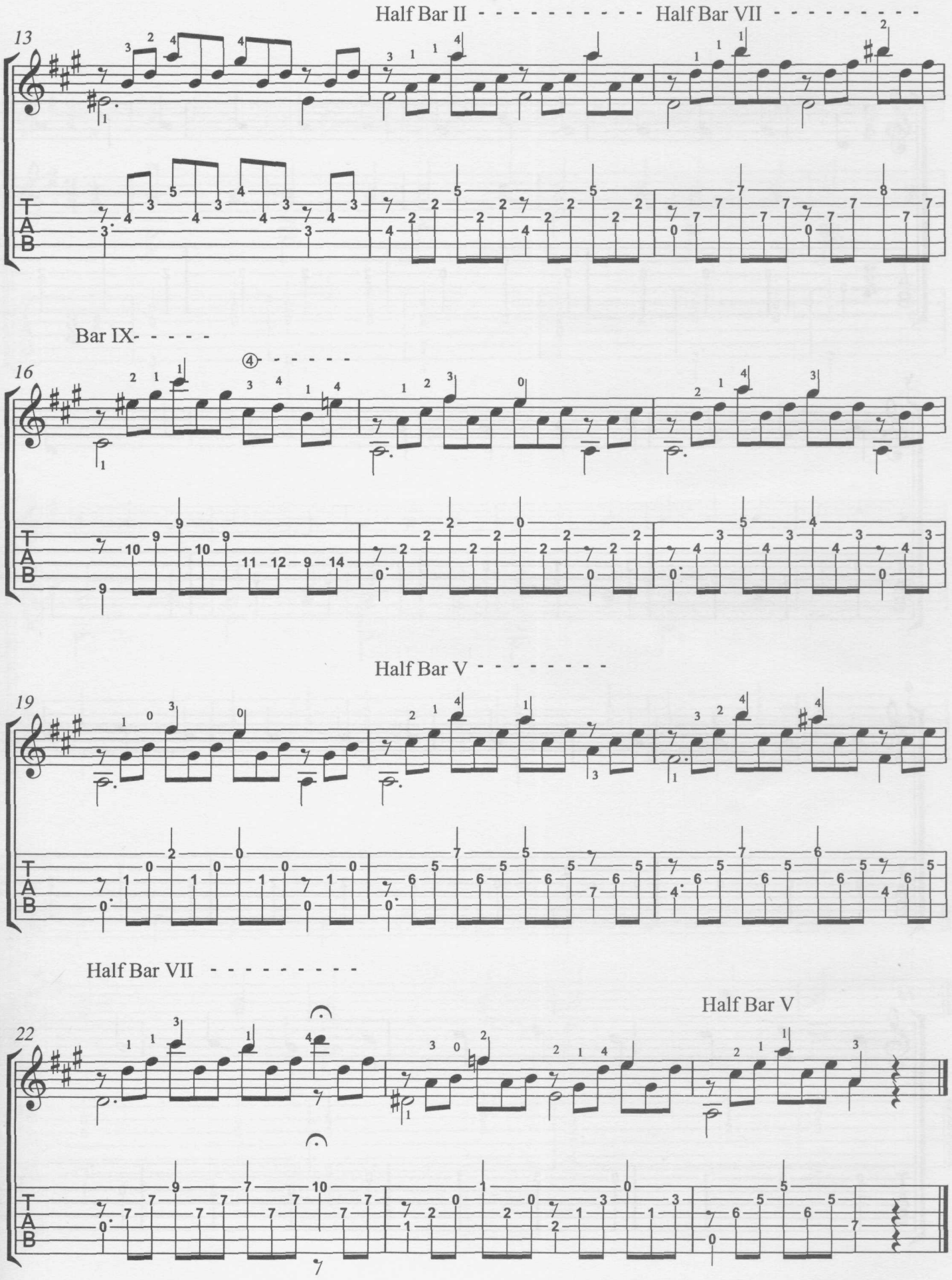

16
20
Bar I
Bar III
24
28
T
A
B

Etude

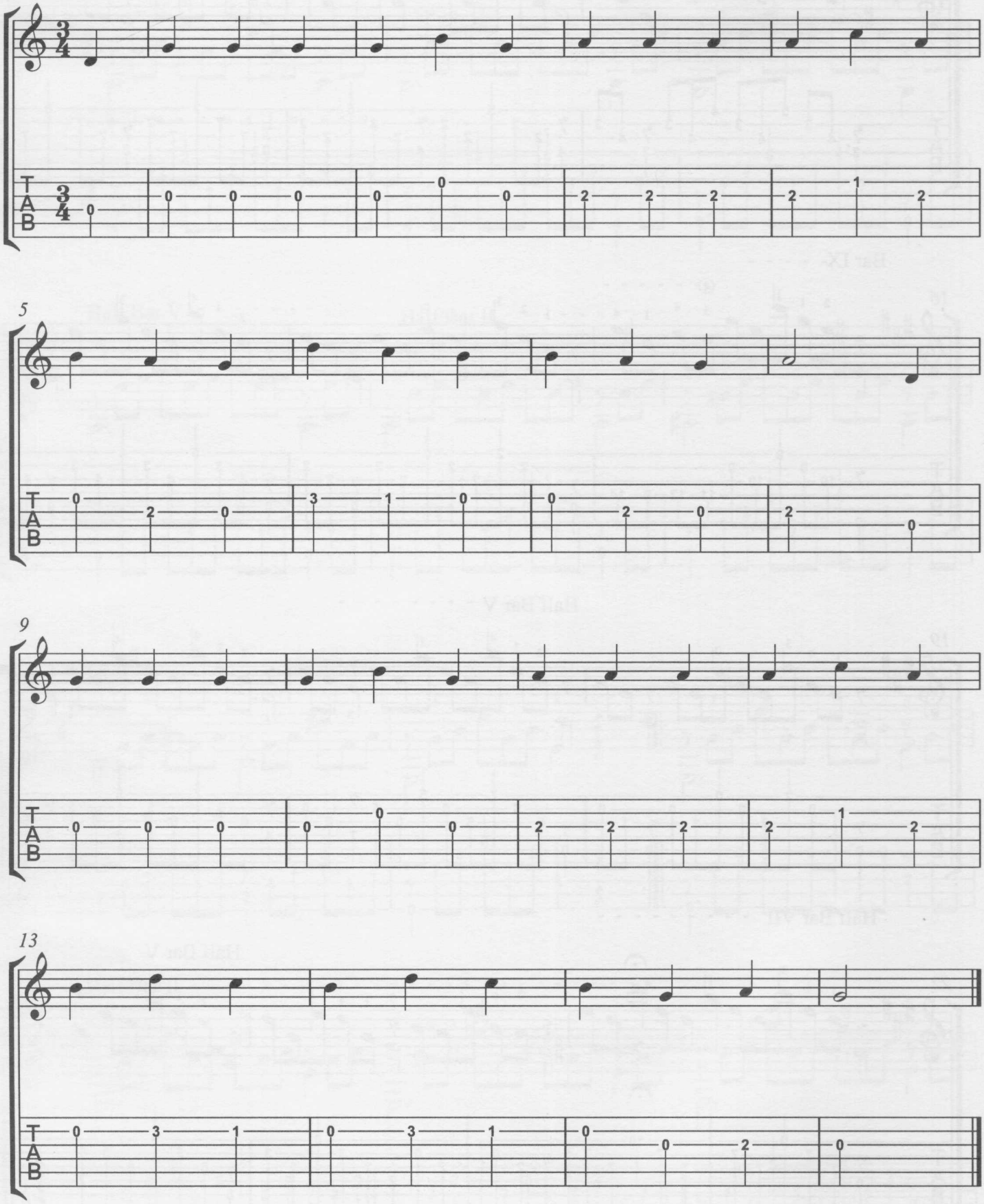
Andante

Matteo Carcassi

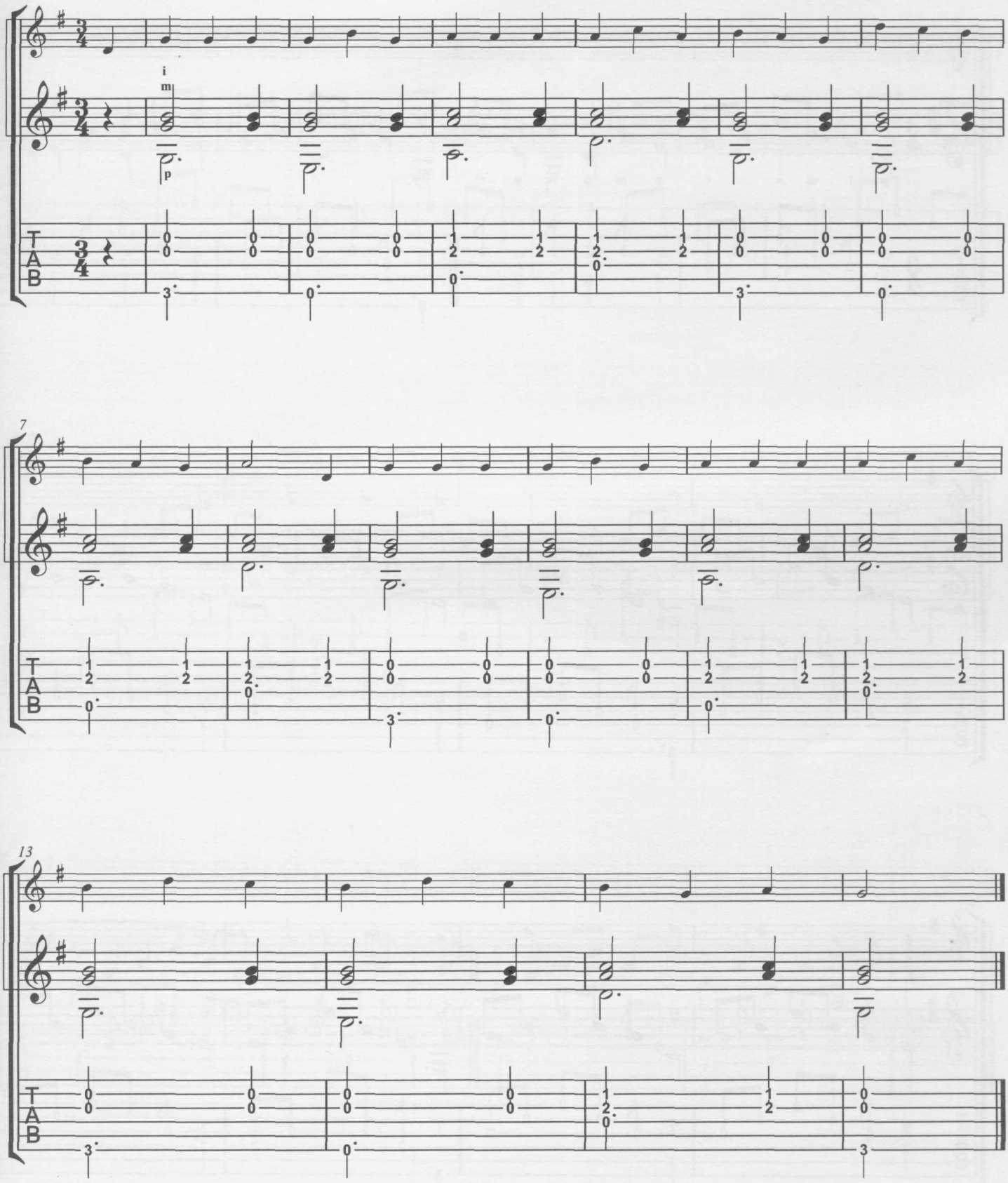



Half Bar II
Half Bar VII
13
Bar IX
16
Half Bar V
19
Half Bar VII
Half Bar V
22
T
A
B

Molly Malone

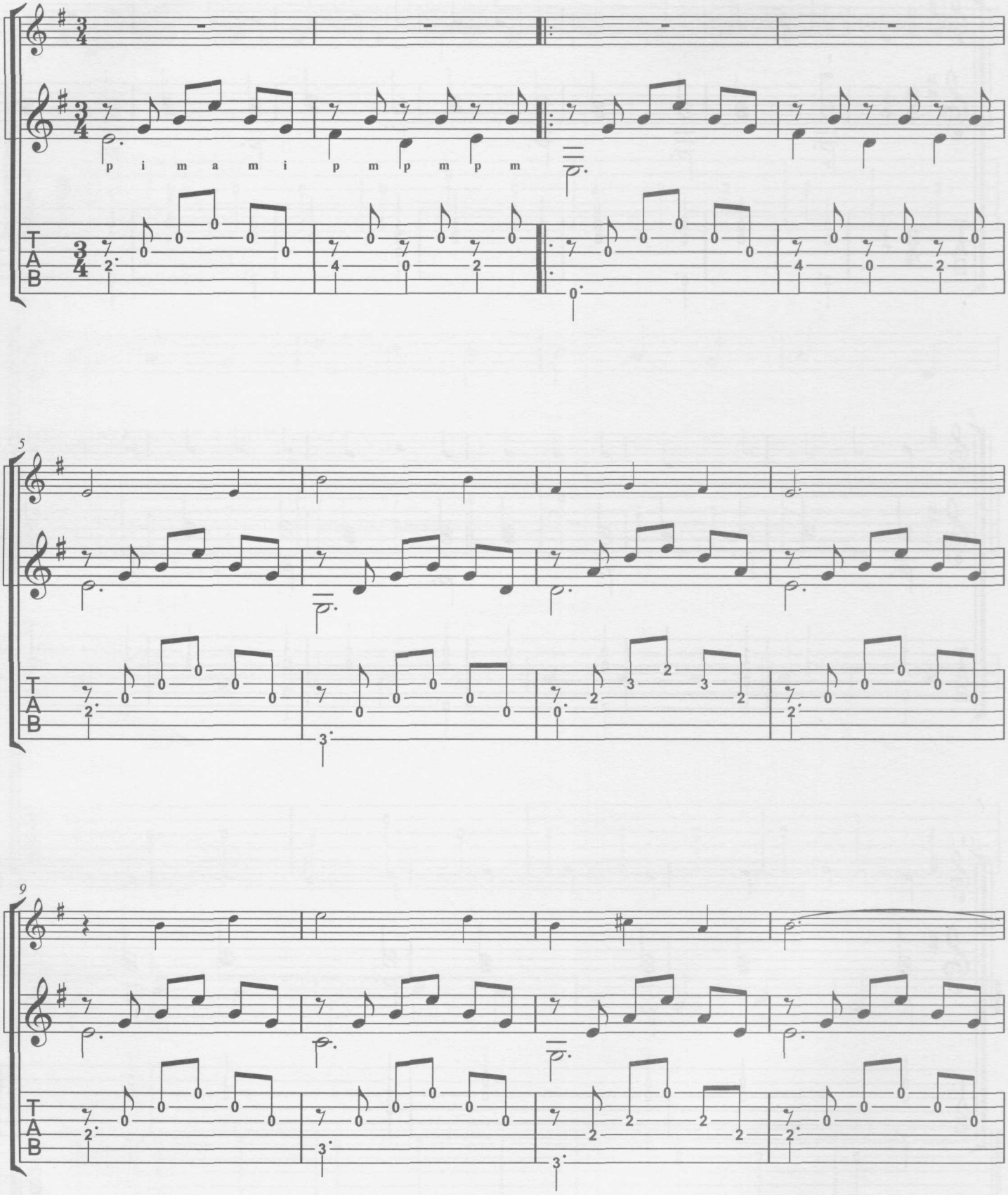


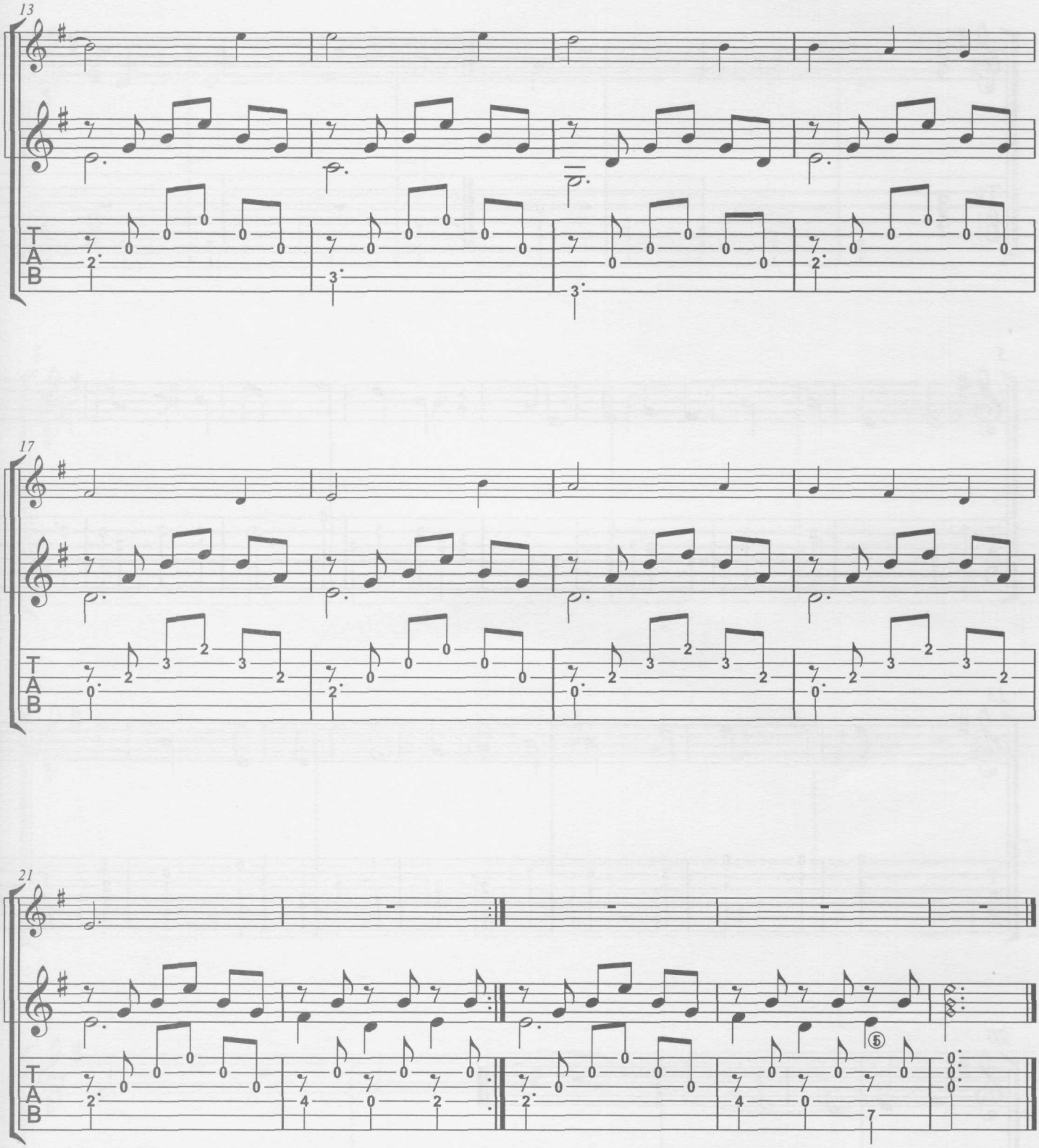
Molly Malone



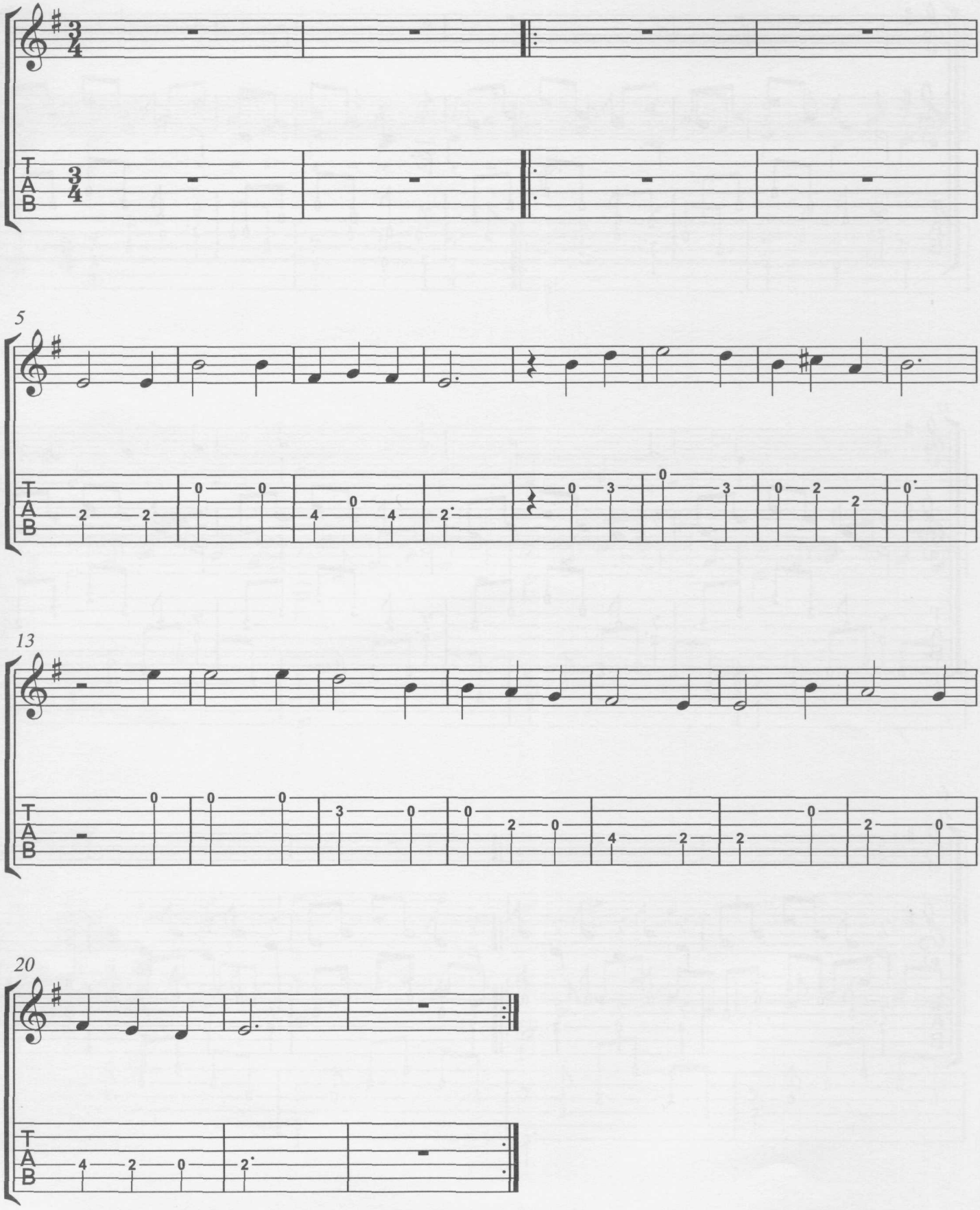
Scarborough Fair

Traditional
arr. Jonathan Adams



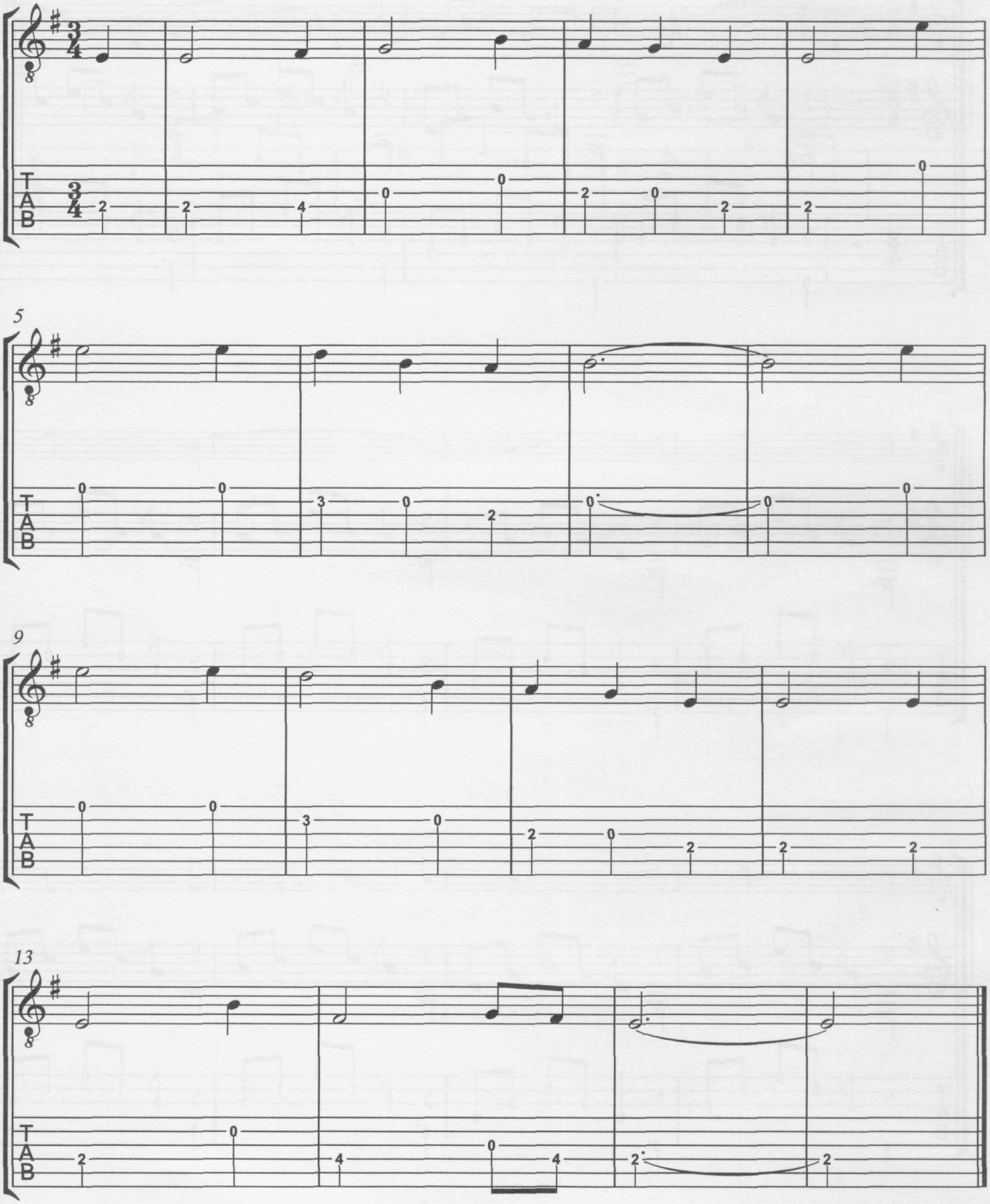

13
17
21
T
A
B

Scarborough Fair



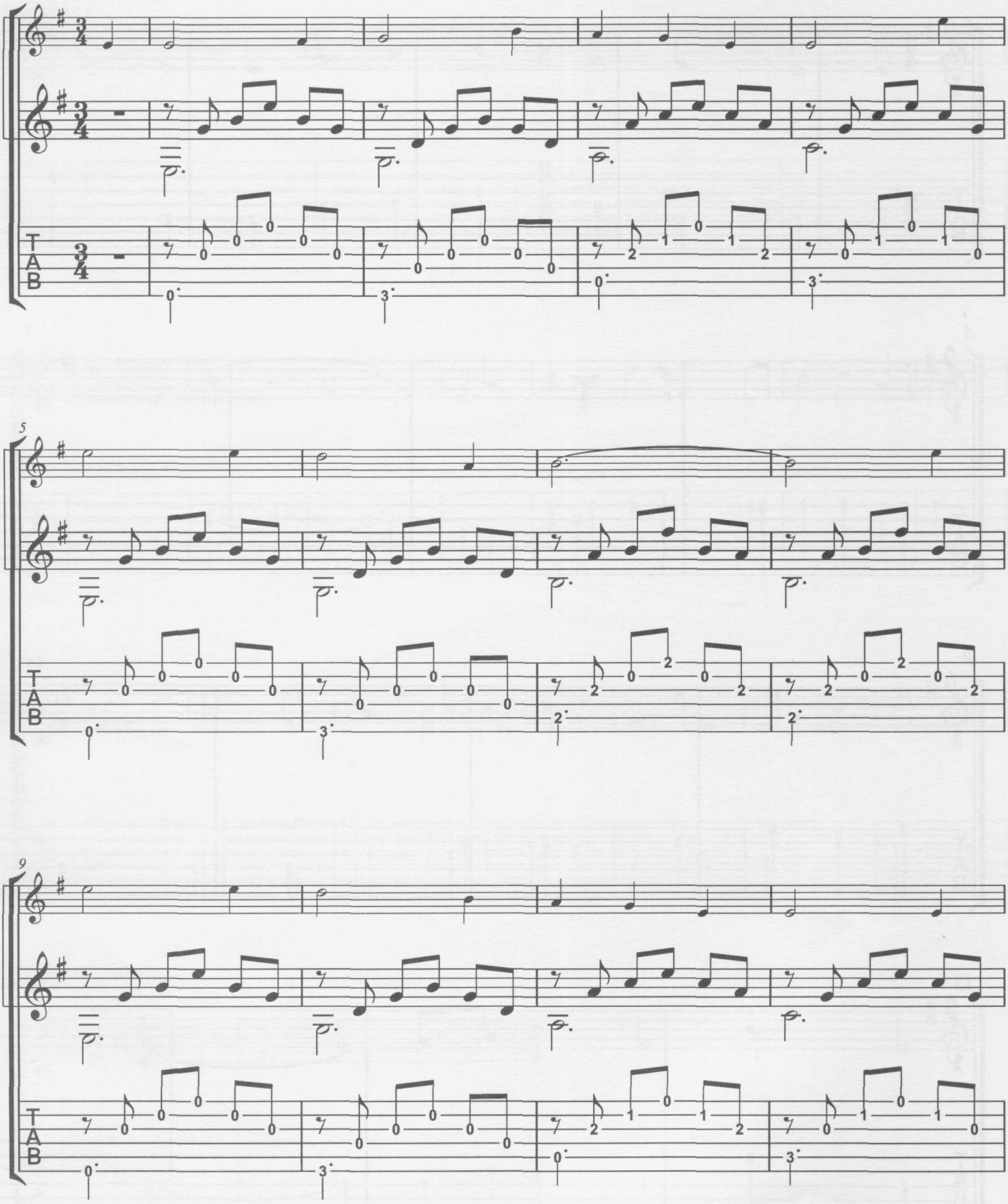
House of the Rising Sun

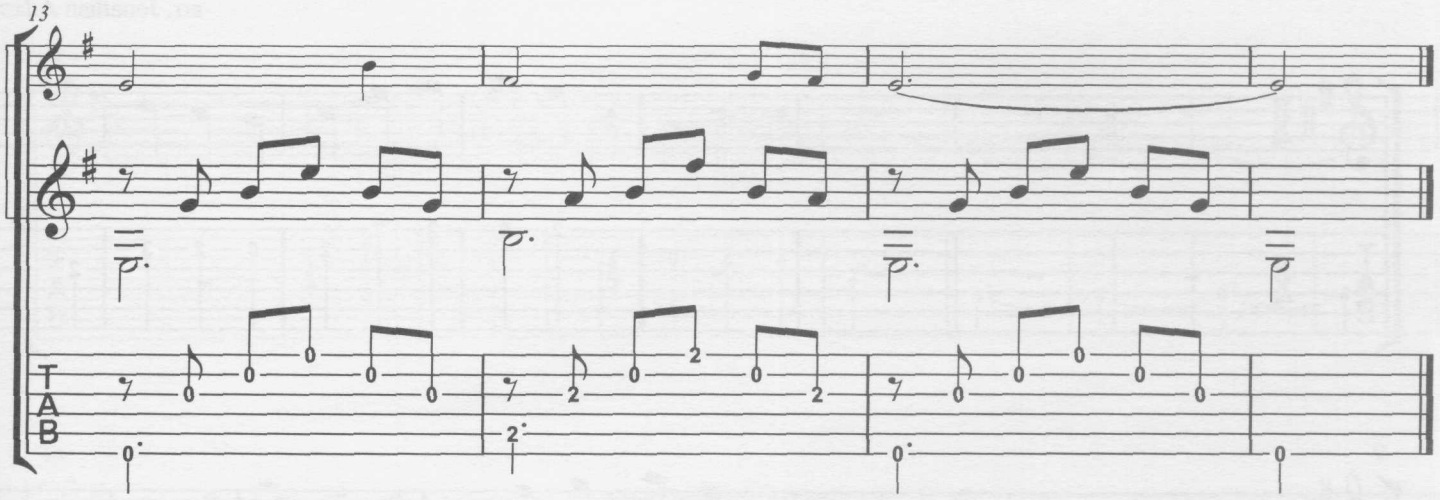
traditional
arr. Jonathan Adams



House of the Rising Sun

Traditional
arr. Adams

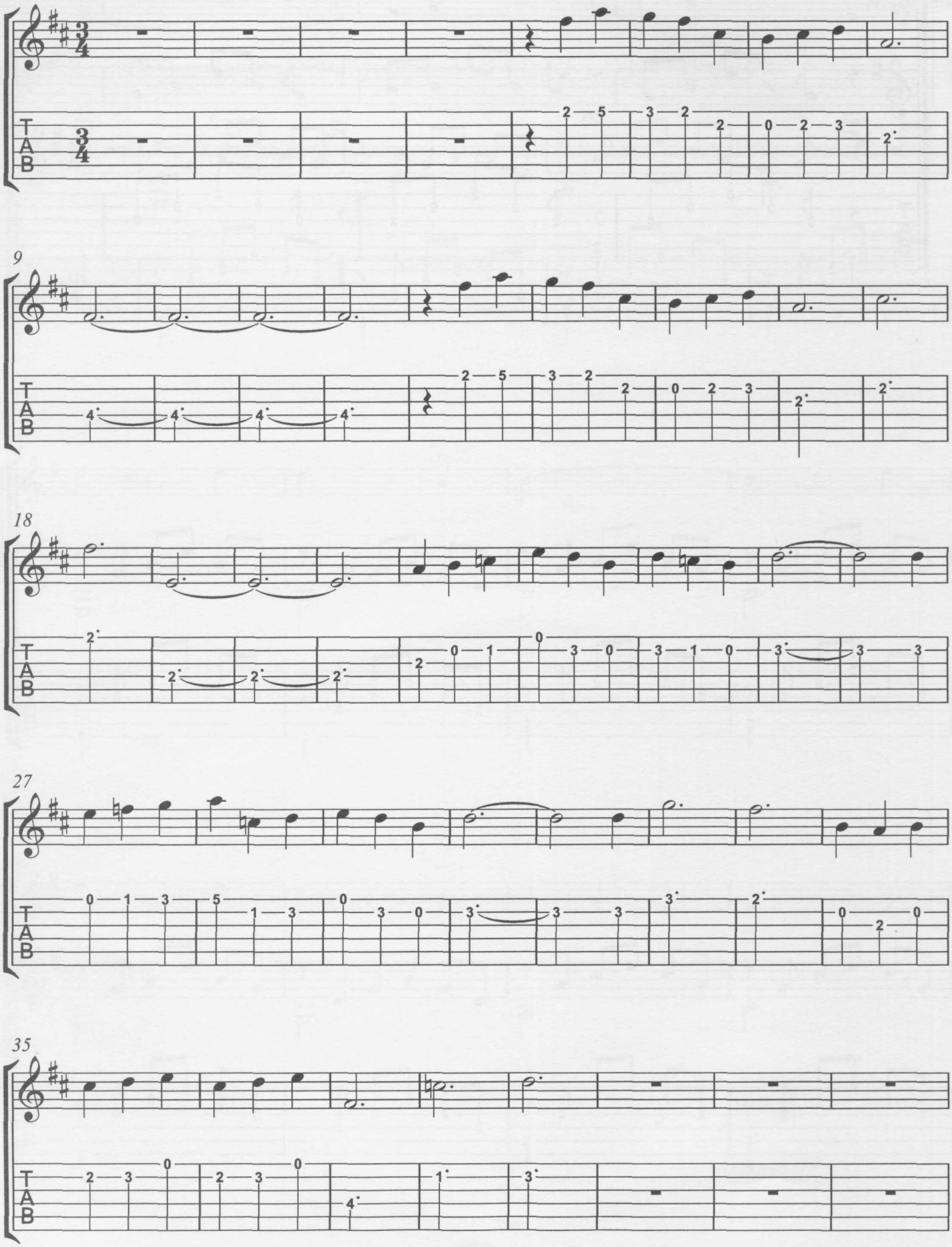


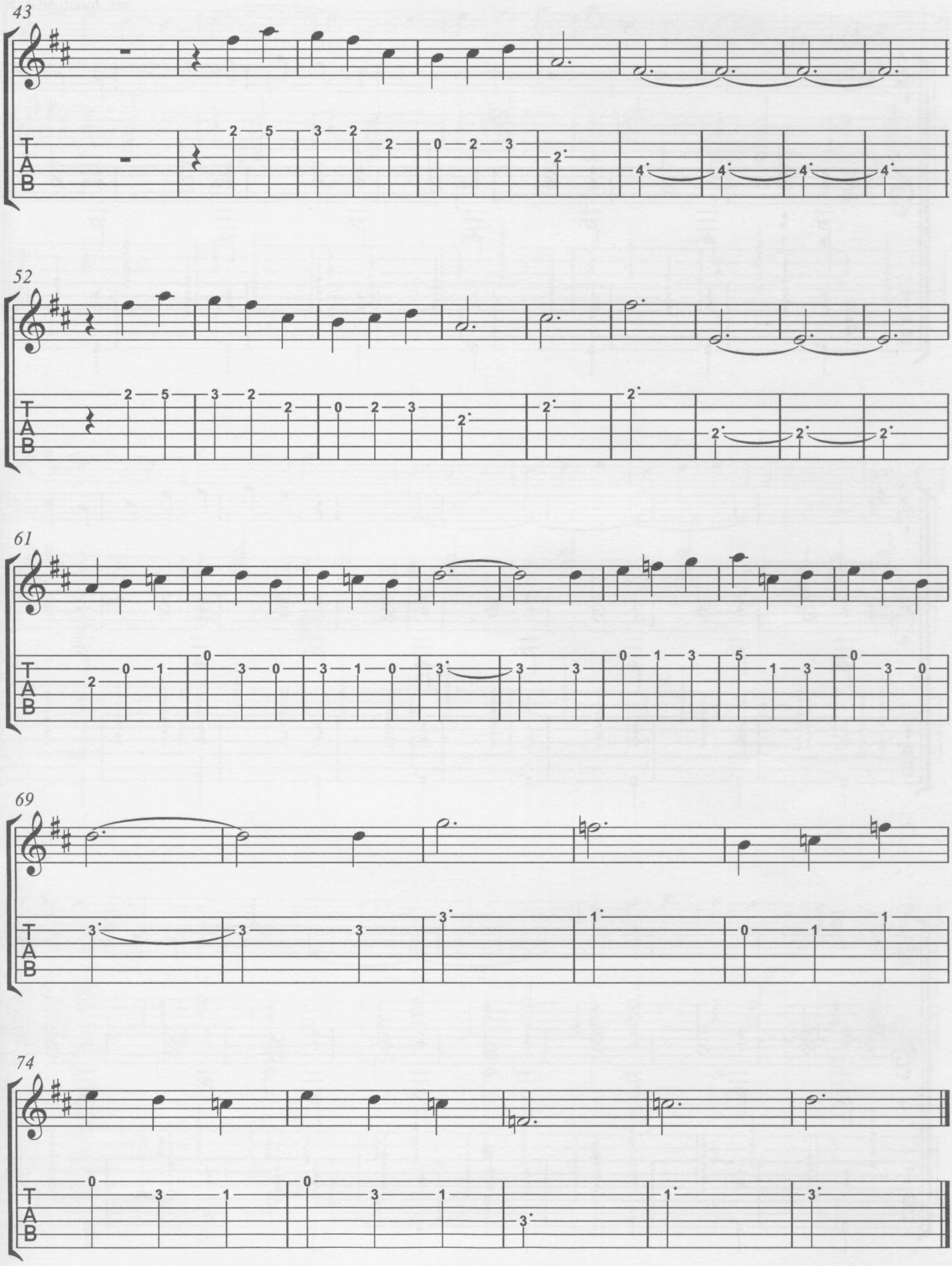

13
T
A
B

Gymnopedie #1

Erik Satie

arr. Jonathan Adams

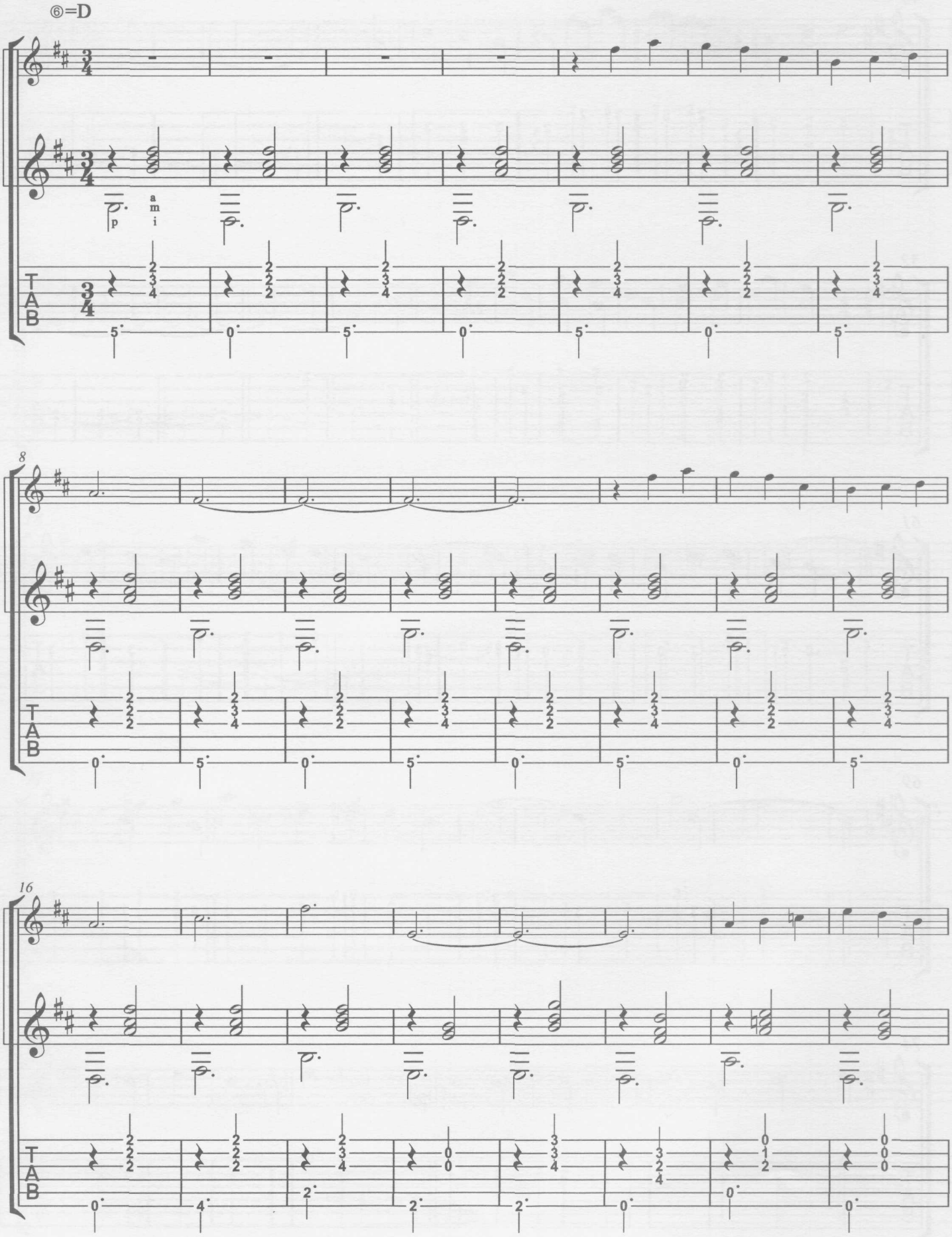


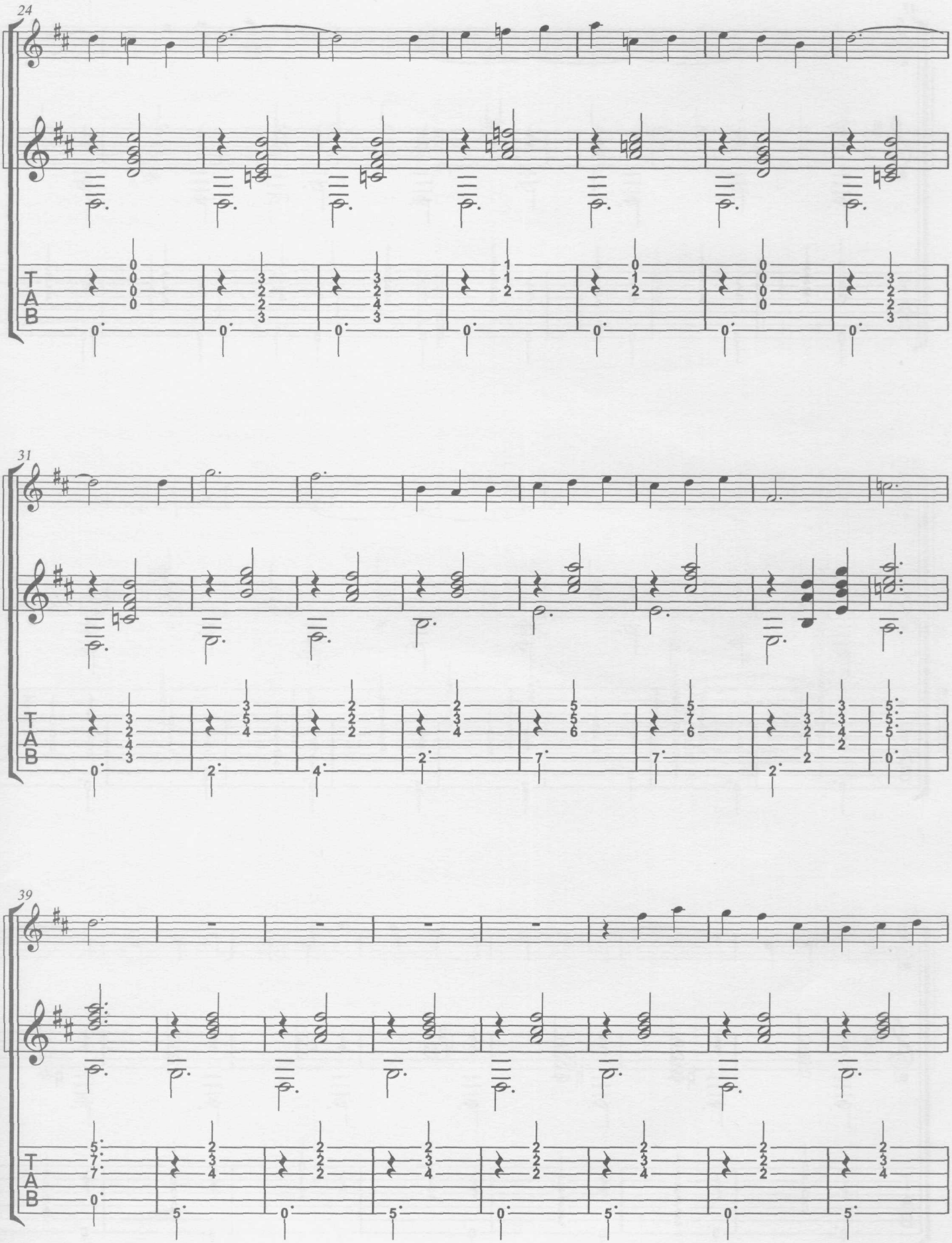

43
52
61
69
74
T
A
B

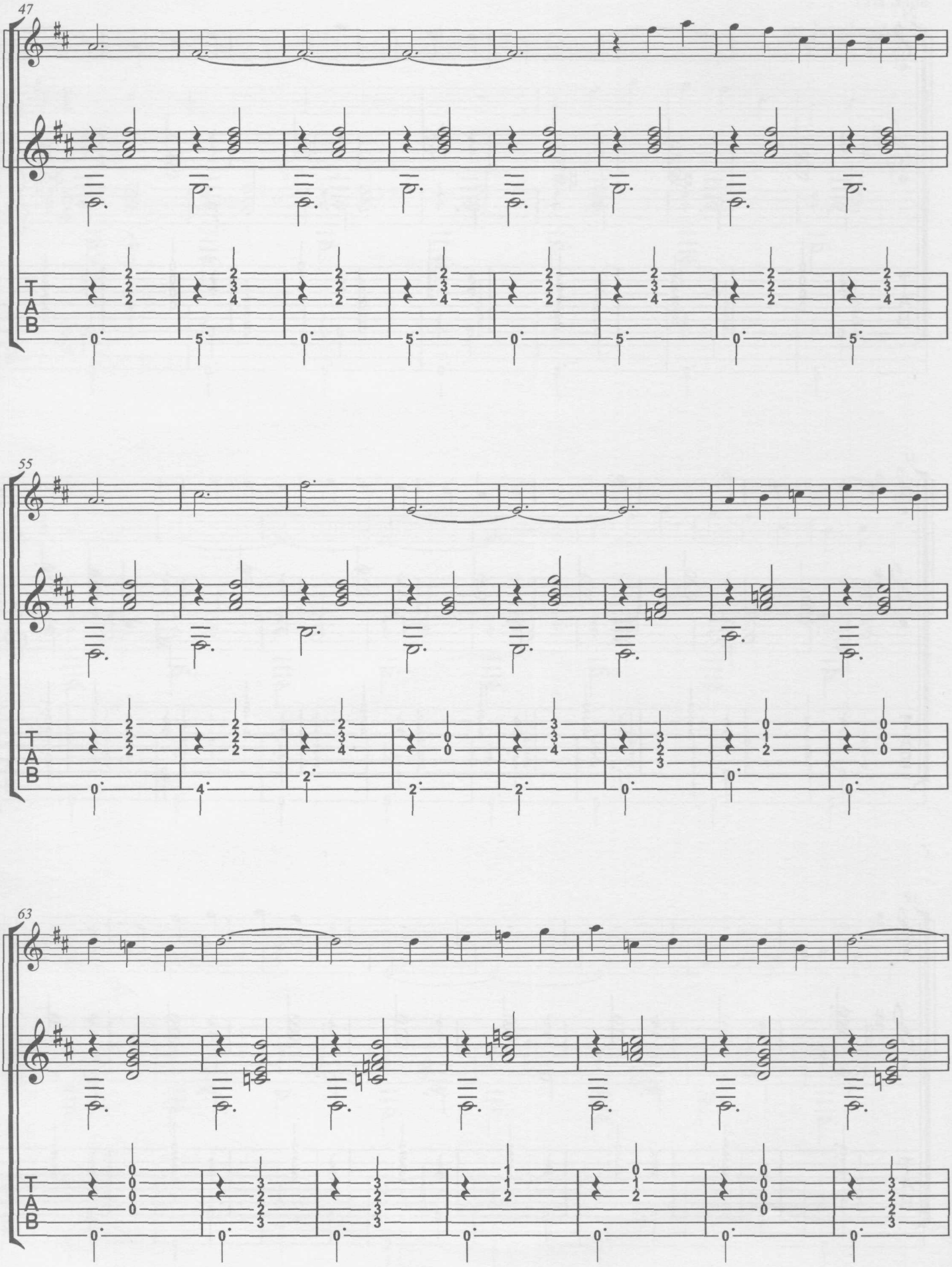
Gymnopedie #1

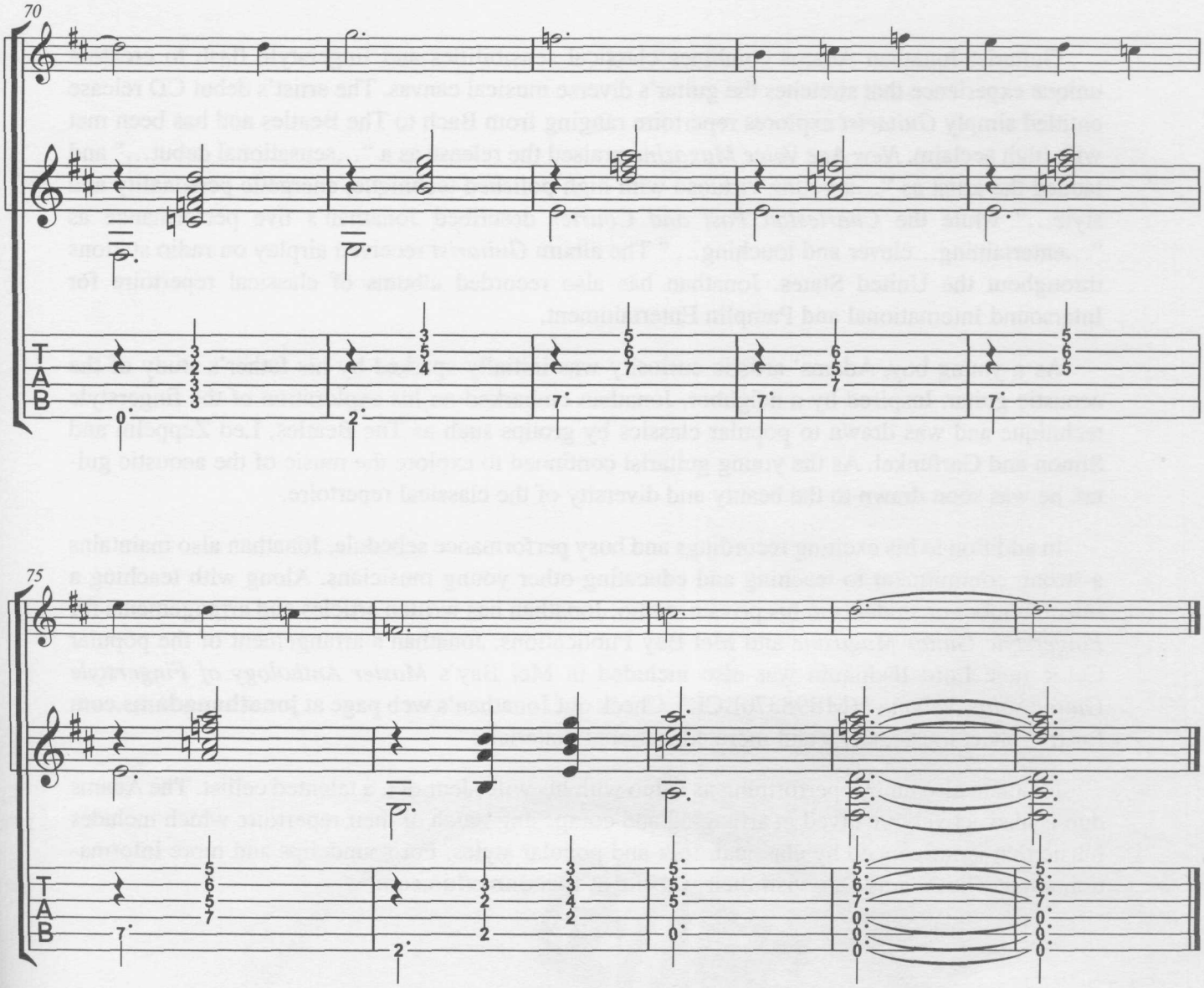
Erik Satie

arr. Jonathan Adams




24
31
39
T
A
B

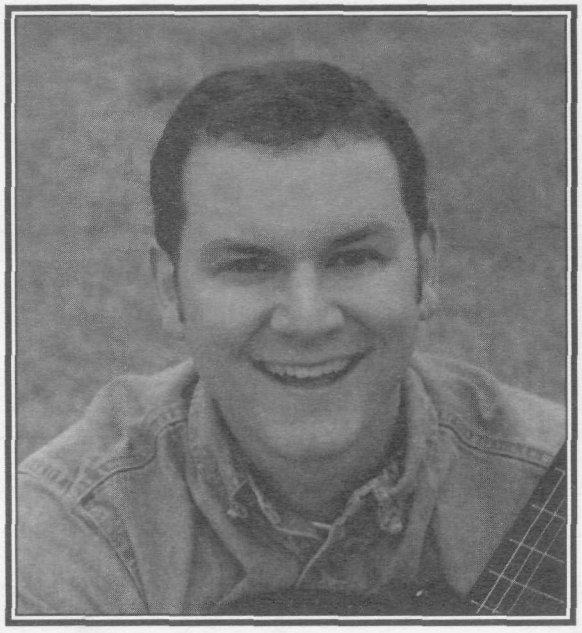

47
55
63
T
A
B


70
T
A
B
75
T
A
B

About the Author

Guitarist Jonathan Adams combines classical sensibilities and fingerstyle flash to create a unique experience that stretches the guitar's diverse musical canvas. The artist's debut CD release entitled simply *Guitarist* explores repertoire ranging from Bach to The Beatles and has been met with high acclaim. *New Age Voice Magazine* praised the release as a "...sensational debut..." and lauded the artist as "...a young virtuoso with high polished technique, energetic personality and style..." while the *Charleston Post and Courier* described Jonathan's live performance as "...entertaining...clever and touching...." The album *Guitarist* received airplay on radio stations throughout the United States. Jonathan has also recorded albums of classical repertoire for Intersound International and Pamplin Entertainment.

As a young boy, Adams' artistic curiosity was initially sparked by his father's study of the acoustic guitar. Inspired by a neighbor, Jonathan embarked on his exploration of the fingerstyle technique and was drawn to popular classics by groups such as The Beatles, Led Zeppelin and Simon and Garfunkel. As the young guitarist continued to explore the music of the acoustic guitar, he was soon drawn to the beauty and diversity of the classical repertoire.

In addition to his exciting recordings and busy performance schedule, Jonathan also maintains a strong commitment to teaching and educating other young musicians. Along with teaching a select number of students in his private studio, Jonathan has written articles and arrangements for *Fingerstyle Guitar Magazine* and Mel Bay Publications. Jonathan's arrangement of the popular Celtic tune Lord Inchiquin was also included in Mel Bay's *Master Anthology of Fingerstyle Guitar Solos, Volume I* (MB98370BCD). Check out Jonathan's web page at **jonathanadams.com** for free sheet music, CD's and more educational materials.

Jonathan also enjoys performing as a duo with his wife, Jennifer, a talented cellist. The Adams duo is also actively involved in arranging and composing much of their repertoire which includes music that is influenced by classical, folk and popular styles. For soundclips and more information about The Adams Duo visit their website at **theadamsduo.com.**