Domenico Scarlatti
Sonata In A Major

This month **Bridget Mermikides** looks at a piece by an acclaimed Italian musician who spent most of his working life composing and performing for Spanish royalty.

ABILITY RATING

●●●●○ **Moderate/Advanced**

INFO	WILL IMPROVE YOUR
KEY: A	☑ Cross-string trills
TEMPO: 80 bpm	☑ Two-part polyphony
CD: TRACKS 44-45	☑ Baroque repertoire

SIXTEEN EIGHTY FIVE was a great year for music, marking the birth of three great Baroque composers: the British pioneer of opera and oratorio, George Frideric Handel, the formidable German master of counterpoint Johann Sebastian Bach and the composer of this issue's piece, the great Domenico Scarlatti.

Scarlatti (1685-1757) was an Italian composer and keyboardist who, although under appreciated in his lifetime, has since drawn admiration from music lovers and composers (including Brahms, Chopin, Bartok and Shostakovich) and helped influence the evolution of Western Art music.

Although Scarlatti wrote for a range of instrumentation, it is his staggering body of 555 keyboard sonatas which have proved the most enduring, having found a home on piano and classical guitar. Scarlatti's music is remarkably progressive for its time with surprising harmonies, creative use of short structures and the adoption of Spanish folk elements within the Baroque idiom.

TECHNIQUE FOCUS
Plucking strings

There are two ways of plucking the strings in classical guitar technique: rest stroke, where the finger or thumb rests on the adjacent string after plucking, and free stroke, where the finger or thumb plucks free of the next string. For practical reasons free stroke is used the most and must therefore be mastered to good technical proficiency. It is also essential for a fluent technique to alternate - primarily the first and second (i and m) fingers. The third or 'a' finger is brought in for arpeggio playing and also to aid smooth crossing of strings where i and m alone may be awkward. This is demonstrated in a couple of areas of this month's piece.

For this issue I've created an arangement of Scarlatti's exquisite Sonata in A Major, written in a period of intense productivity towards the end of the composer's life. It translates very well to the guitar in the same key, with surprisingly little adaptation, and the Baroque style is well captured by the classical guitar. My arrangement features a technique that we haven't employed before in this series, the cross-string trill (Bars 8,10,12 and 14). A trill - the rapid alteration of two notes -is a commonly used guitar ornamentation but is performed here with the two notes on adjacent strings and a particular fingerstyle approach detailed in the tab captions. The structure of the work - which is very typical of Scarlatti's style - is in binary form: two distinct sections (A, and B starting in Bar 46) with each section repeated to create an AABB structure.

> **"Scarlatti's music is very progressive for its time with surprising harmonies, creative use of short structures and the adoption of Spanish folk elements in the Baroque idiom."**

To gain the fluency needed to execute the melody and bass-line clearly and smoothly will take some careful and patient work so, as I always say, aim to enjoy the process of practice and use the tab captions for the trickier sections.

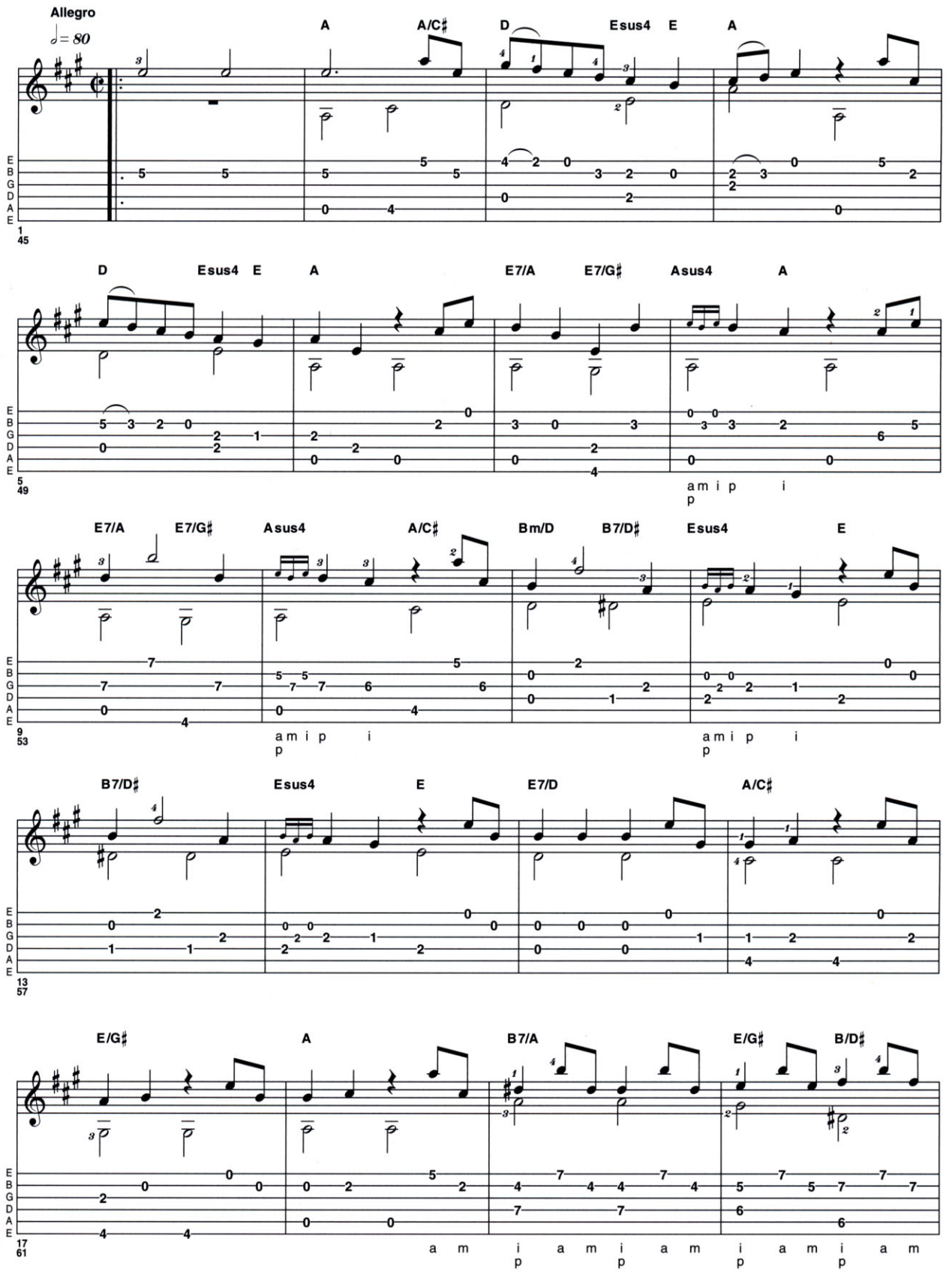
Have fun. I'll be back soon with another masterpiece arranged for the guitar. GT

TRACK RECORD For a masterful performance of our sonata try Vladimir Horowitz's album Bach Scarlatti Mozart (Sony 2003). Nancy Laufer's Scarlatti (Bella Music 2008) boasts a surprisingly effective arrangement on accordion! Andrew Schulman's The Baroque Style (Centaur 1989) features Schulman's arrangement and 8-string classical guitar performance alongside other baroque masterpieces.

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 45

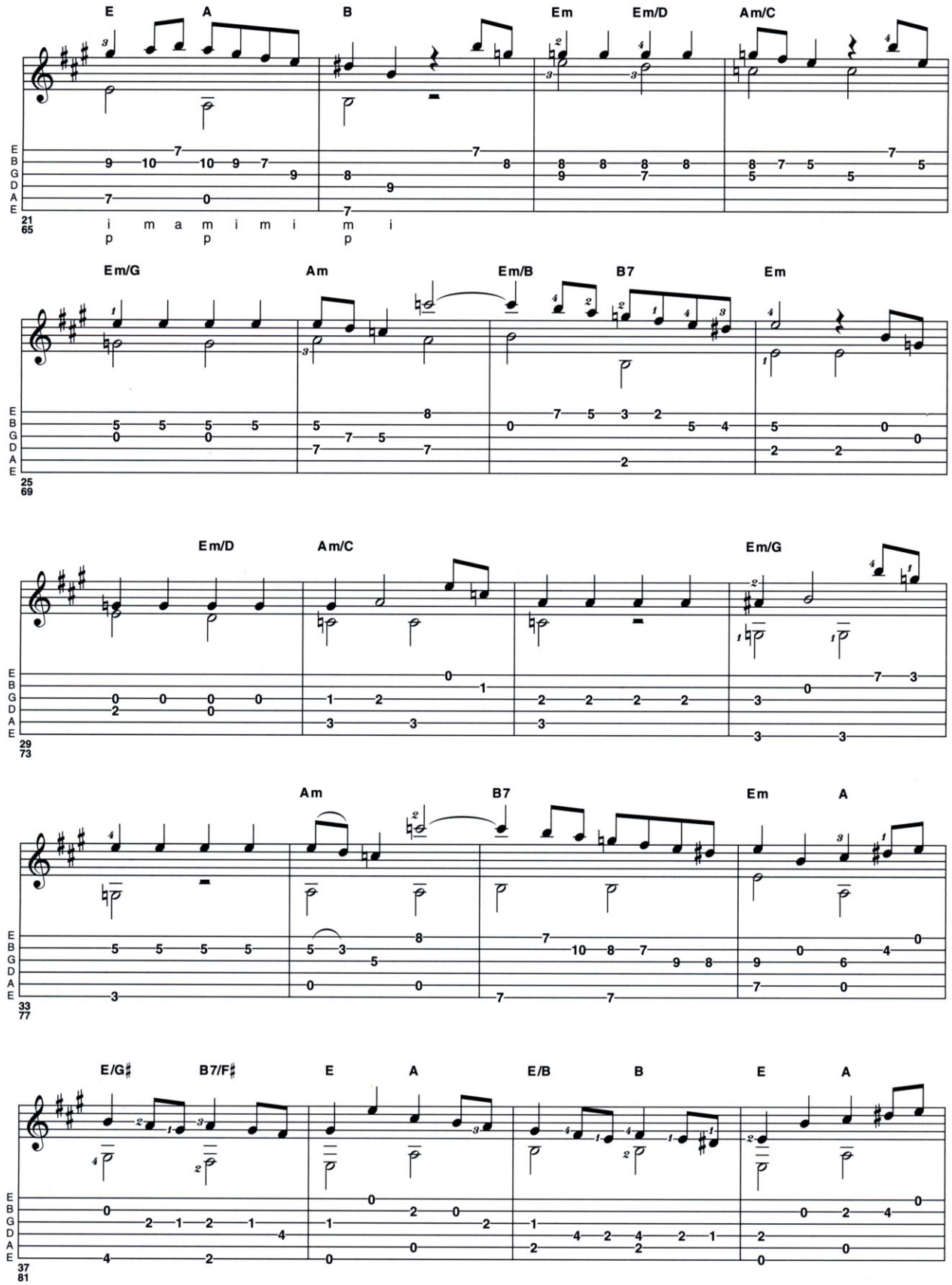
[Bars 1-8] Although this piece has four beats per bar the feel is 'in two', so the first bar containing two minims sets the feel and tempo. The content is two-part writing (melody plus bass line) throughout so the aim should be to treat the two parts individually and to give the notes their correct values. For example in bar 2 the melody note E needs to be held for three beats and it should continue to sound over the bass note C# on beat 3 and so on.
At bar 8 the first cross-string trill occurs. The first note of the trill is played simultaneously with the bass note; however, the trill should be executed with such a flourish that the melody note after the trill still sounds like the down beat. It's a tricky effect to pull off and the suggested fingering in the plucking hand is a m i p - same as a tremolo fingering. Some players prefer i m p. Either way the speed of the fingers has to be built up to a kind of reflex movement. If this trill proves too difficult and is spoiling your enjoyment of the piece simply replace it with a single upper grace note, which will do fine.



PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 45

[Bars 19-21] Throughout the piece the bass notes should be played with the thumb and the melody with alternating fingers. At bars 19 to 21 the picking hand fingering is indicated and if followed precisely will help the fluency and flow of the music. It is always worth spending some working out what picking hand fingering you are going to use in order to create a solid and secure performance.

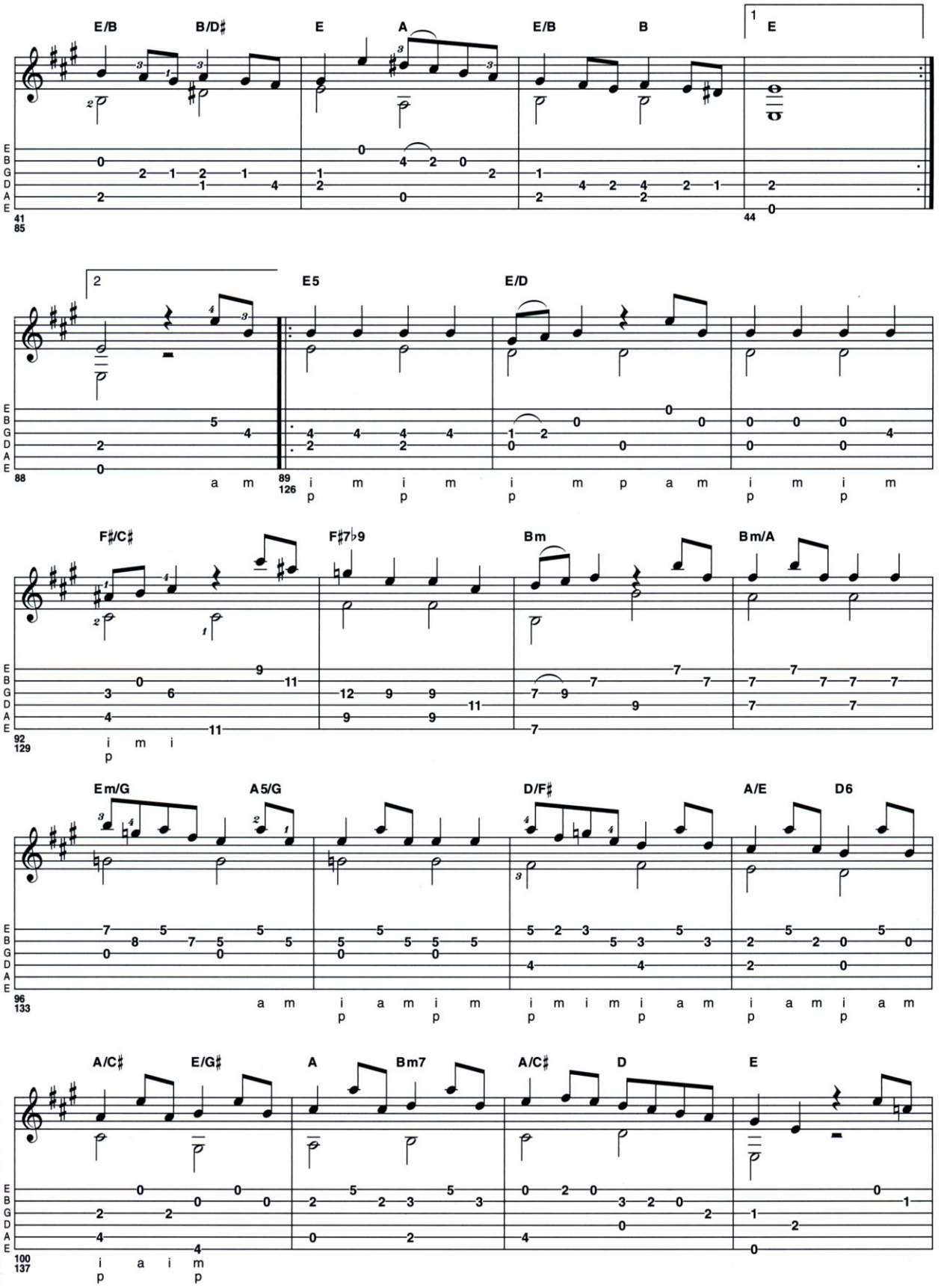


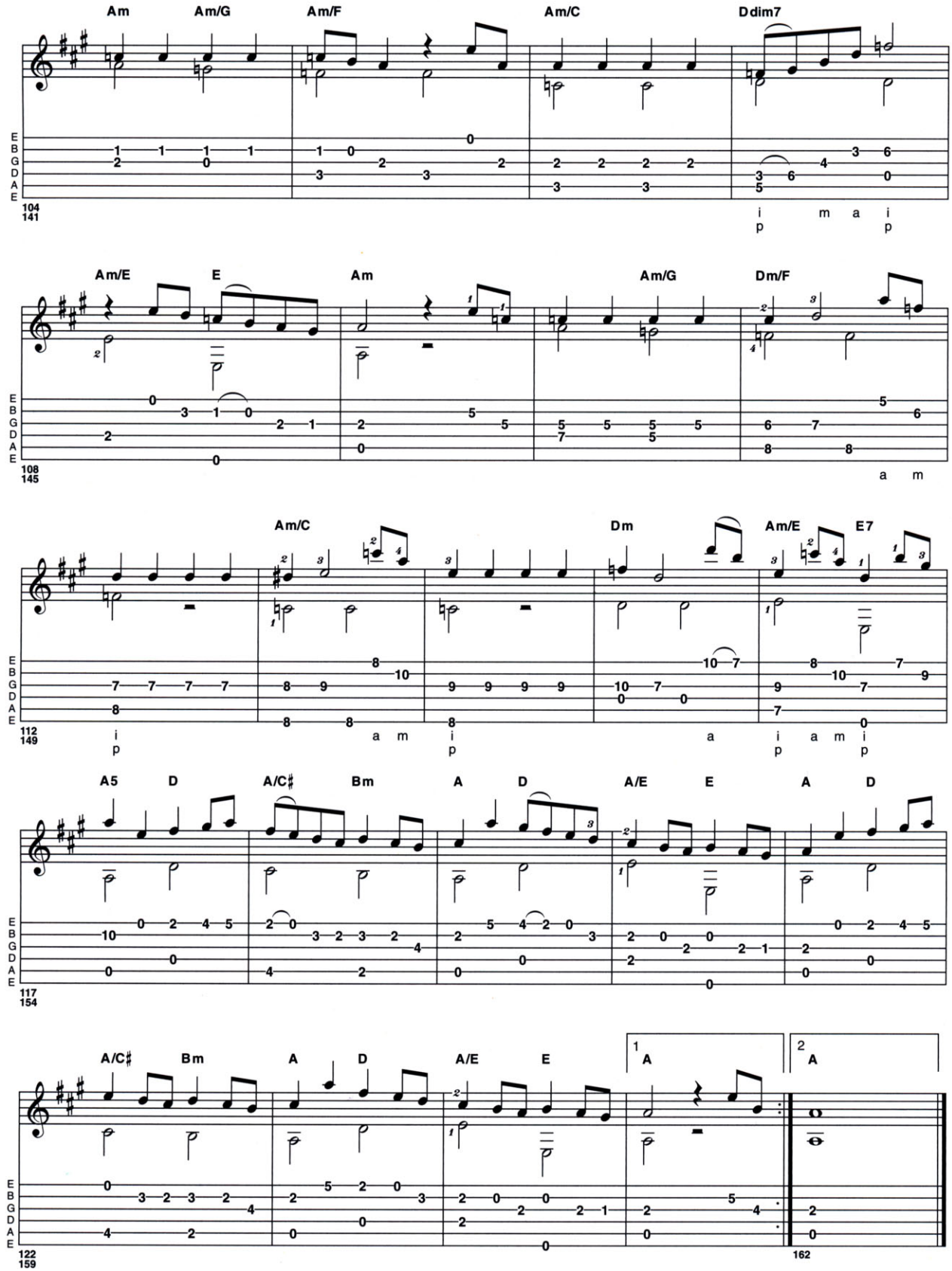
PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 45

[Bar 32 to end] At bar 32 keep hold of the bass note G - this means there is a slight stretch for the fretting hand on beat 4 when reaching for the high B note. At bar 39 the bass note B should be sustained under the melody which means some slightly awkward 'tucking in' of the first finger on the melody.

The second half of this piece is a bit easier than the first. There is some more suggested picking hand fingering to help out and the fretting hand fingering is fairly intuitive. The tempo indicated is quite steady compared to many interpretations so feel free to push the speed once the piece is secure.




Am
Am/G
Am/F
Am/C
Ddim7
104
141
i m a i
p p
Am/E
E
Am
Am/G
Dm/F
108
145
a m
Am/C
Dm
Am/E
E7
112
149
i a m a i a m i
p p p p
A5
D
A/C♯
Bm
A
D
A/E
E
A
D
117
154
A/C♯
Bm
A
D
A/E
E
1 A
2 A
122
159
162