John Renbourn

Rare Performances 1965-1995

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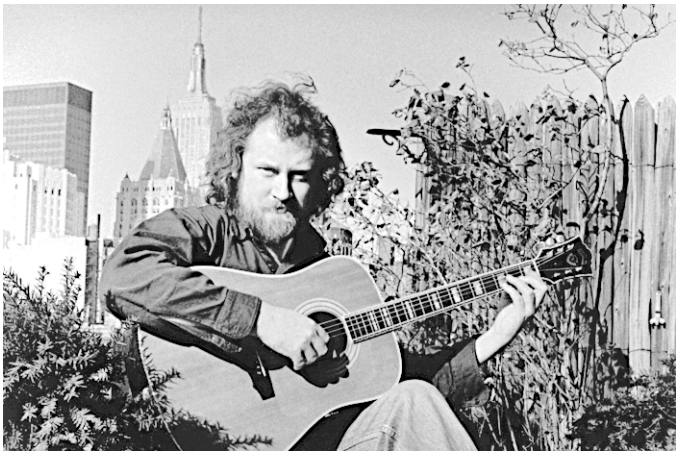


Photo by Herbert Grossman

The 30 years of performances seen in this video reveal the unfolding musical odyssey of one of the guitar's great focused eclectics, an artist who brings a distinctive and personal perspective to everything from medieval modal compositions to Celtic folk songs to American blues and jazz to the work of Africa's Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand). Given the far-flung places the guitar has taken him, it's a mite ironic that John Renbourn cites the so-called 'King of the Cowboys' as his first inspiration. "Roy Rogers was, of course, very popular," Renbourn said of his childhood in 1950s London in conversation with *Guitar Player's* Jas Obrecht. "He could shoot Indians out of trees, and that sort of thing. My first guitar was called a Wonder guitar, a pink steel-string; it went with my Roy Rogers outfit."

It takes some imagining to picture Renbourn, whose uniform has always been art school anti-dress, in a pink cowboy outfit with matching guitar! However, perhaps the same allure which drew him at age 13 to the American cowboy myth and "Happy Trails" would later lead him to the music of medieval Europe and related modal folk music. His companion in his myriad explorations would become his unique voice – a Wonder guitar indeed.

Renbourn was born in Kingston, South London, 1944. "My mum used to play piano and I did music when I was in school," he told *Goldmine's* Kenneth Romanowski. "I had to have an instrument to do music study so I took classical guitar (at age 15) and right about that time the folk thing was just starting. I went to hear Josh White and some of the American guys that were coming over in the 1950s and I liked them a lot."

Prior to his two years of classical guitar lessons at George Abbot School in Guildford, Renbourn (along with every other kid in Britain) was swept up in the 'skiffle' craze epitomized by Lonnie Donegan's 1956 international hit version of Leadbelly's "Rock Island Line." Inspired equally by Donegan's enthusiasm and Rogers' heroism, Renbourn and his Wonder guitar struggled with "a plectrum and that one *G* chord where you put your fingers down like in the photos," he told Dan Forte. (Renbourn recalls a book called *How to Play Folk Guitar* by Rory McKuen as reference for his early groping.) "This was really before there were many records available of good players," he recalled. "Then Ramblin' Jack Elliot and Derroll Adams came over and played in England and Europe, and they left in their wake a bunch of people in cowboy hats learning to fingerpick. And it was people like that who I learned from; I learned 'San Francisco Bay Blues' and 'Cocaine Blues.'"

Renbourn summed up the importance of these early experiences to *Guitar Player's* Obrecht: "What technique I have got is based mainly on the combination of trying to play folk stuff early on – like Big Bill Broonzy things – and the couple of years classical playing I did." The formal training, Renbourn told Forte, freed him to play his own way. "It was during that couple of years of classical training that I became able to do picking things," he recalled. "Just the basic limbering up exercises and using three fingers and playing arpeggios – the basic first stages of classical training. I didn't go any further than that, really, but it was enough to get me involved in playing fingerstyle folk."

By 1962, Renbourn was enrolled in Kingston Art School, where his classmates included Sandy Denny and Eric Clapton. "Art school, " Renbourn told Romanowski, "equips you to do nothing whatsoever in the world." However, he

John Renbourn & Davey Graham

told *Acoustic Guitar's* Doc Rossi, it at least provided a safe haven for woodshedding. "I did a lot of guitar playing when I was at art school supposedly painting," Renbourn recalled. "But I'm pretty sure that the kind of approach that I learned at the art school helped my approach to music, because it was a step away from the academic way of looking at music. And if you apply the way you might think if you were painting or drawing to when you are making music, then it really opens up another way. If you think of all the musicians that came out of art school compared to the number of artists – especially from the 1960s – it's astounding."

During his short-lived art student era Renbourn, having borrowed an electric guitar, played in an R&B band, Hogsnort Rupert and His Famous Porkestra, doing Jimmy Reed covers. "I really used to like playing in the blues bands," Renbourn told Obrecht, "but the finances were very difficult – it was a lot easier to look after yourself and just play the guitar." A halfhearted art student, Renbourn was soloing in clubs around Kingston before he quit school entirely and immersed himself in London's diverse music scene. That's where he first saw guitarist Davey Graham, who Renbourn calls "the first great fusionist," playing in an early incarnation of the John Mayall Band, and Bert Jansch in the unlikely role of sole accompanist to harmonica legend Little Walter Jacobs. With singer-guitarist Alexis Korner as catalyst, American electric blues had become London's

new skiffle, and bands like the Yardbirds and Rolling Stones were on the rise. By contrast, London's folk scene of the time was dominated by the cupped-ear school of a Capella singers who frowned on the guitar as a popular intrusion into a pure folk tradition. "In those days," Renbourn told Romanowski, "it was considered a very bad thing to use a guitar at all. Then a sort of weak approach came in; they said, 'It's OK to use a guitar provided it's unobtrusive.' So you had people playing these absolutely useless accompaniments..." Somewhere between the lads trying earnestly to sound like Muddy Waters and those emulating Percy Grainger's field recordings were a few who, inspired by Graham, sought to invest the traditional with new ideas of their own.

"When I first heard Bert Jansch," Renbourn recalled to Stefan Grossman, "I just couldn't figure out what on earth he was doing....I didn't recognize the shapes. I liked it, but it was something I'd never seen before." He was, he told Dan Forte, "astounded" by Jansch: "I had never heard guitar playing as good as that before," he told Obrecht. Jansch, born in Glasgow, 1943, had taken guitar lessons in Edinburgh from Jill Doyle, Davey Graham's sister. On the way back from a trek to Morocco in 1962, he stopped in London and discovered the folk scene there. "After that," Jansch recalled in 1979, "it was just a question of commuting between Scotland and London." The appearance as accompanist to Little Walter (Jansch was a last-minute replacement for a missing guitarist) which provided

John Renbourn & Bert Jansch *Photo by Brian Shuel*

Renbourn his introduction to Jansch was "quite funny," Jansch said, "because my blues playing must have been so strange to Little Walter. It was just the two of us, and he was trying to get me to play simple as possible; and of course, I tend to play quite a few lines all at the same time. He was slightly thrown." As was Renbourn, but in a positive way.

In 1964, the two began playing together informally at a Soho club called the Cousins and soon Renbourn, in need of a place to stay, moved in with Jansch. "I don't know if I influenced Bert very much," Renbourn told Obrecht, "but I certainly got a lot from his playing... I think Bert was probably one of the first people who were playing creative music on the acoustic guitar; although it was drawn from good traditional sources, it was, nevertheless, a music of his own. I found it interesting to try and work parts out with Bert..." And the two were closely kindred spirits musically. "I found it very easy to make music with Bert," Renbourn told Grossman. "He's so easygoing when he's putting some music together that it's very enjoyable. We also found that we'd frequently have bits of tunes that would, for some strange coincidence, be in harmony, or that two instrumental tunes would actually fit, or we'd have sections that would become parts of the same tune. That's more or less the way the *Bert & John* album came about."

A cult favorite, *Bert & John* followed hard on the heels of debut solo albums by both Jansch and Renbourn in 1965. "The cooperative venture consolidated their partnership," wrote R.J. Bater ("Folk Guitar in Britain: an Individual Assessment," *Guitar Player* December 1971). "The music on *Bert & John* was the expression of a composite talent unequaled, in my opinion, in the whole of the 1960s in any field of music. The degree of rapport established between these two stylistically individual musicians was frightening and the wealth of musical ideas condensed into the record, staggering. There were jazz numbers, blues, contemporary folk and a medieval-tinged tune, the presence of each different type not incongruous in the least, for all were united in a musical idiom which had its roots in any one or in any combination of these four traditions. Essentially, each piece was based on a theme which was taken up by the two

Bert Jansch & John Renbourn Photo by Brian Shuel

guitars and molded into a two-part polyphony, the individual treatments contrasting in their rhythmic and melodic characteristics according to the different backgrounds of the two players. The two melodic strains here blended, there entwined, only to separate once more to reassert their differences. The whole record pulsated with creative energy – and the instrumental medium was the acoustic guitar."

For all the critical rhapsodizing it inspired, *Bert & John* was cut under primitive conditions. "(Producer) Bill Leader used to come and set his gear up in the kitchen," Jansch recalled, "get all the leads into the hallway, and put blankets up over the windows. We even had to invite the neighbors down from upstairs to stop 'em from making noise. Give 'em a few beers and sit 'em in the kitchen."

Jansch and Renbourn, both soloists at heart, saw that their duets were well-received, and began mulling over the possibility of expanding further. "When the Cousins started to fade as a club," Jansch recalled, "John and I decided we ought to try to put a band together, because at that point there weren't any bands...with a folk-based influence. John had done a TV show called *Gadzooks, It's All Happening,* which was a stupid folk program, and he had met (bassist) Danny Thompson on that show. And of course John and Jacqui (McShee) had been singing together for years, doing gigs together. So we decided we'd start this (folk) club up (at London's Horseshoes pub, Court Road), and we'd

The Pentangle

invite Danny and Jacqui along to see how they fancied it. Danny used to be resident player at Ronnie Scott's place; he used to back the visiting American jazz stars, and (drummer) Terry Cox used to play with him. So Danny brought Terry along one day, and there you had the Pentangle."

Renbourn described Pentangle's genesis slightly differently to Romanowski: "Alexis (Korner) would sometimes come down and play at the Cousins with Danny Thompson and Terry Cox," he recalled. "So we stole them away from him.... I used to live in the same place as Bert, and we would always rehearse. The music actually evolved out of the fact that we used to play together nearly all day long. And then we'd go down to Cousins and try it out with Danny and Terry and Jacqui McShee, who I used to work with anyway, so we had a loose five-piece group that used to play in this club."

Pentangle debuted in the Fall of 1967 at the Horseshoes, appearing on Sunday evenings. By early 1968, the pub was routinely packed whenever they performed. The Horseshoes could not contain the group once its debut album, *The Pentangle*, was released in the Spring. The Summer found the quintet performing at prestigious music festivals in Cambridge and Edinburgh and at London's Royal Festival Hall. By Fall, Pentangle had launched a full-

fledged tour of the U.K. to coincide with the release of its second album, *Sweet Child*. The appearance of two albums within six months of one another speaks well both for the creative energy of the band and for its popularity. Pentangle quickly developed a devoted cult following on both sides of the Atlantic for a kind of contemporary chamber music which tastefully blended disparate musical streams. But for Jansch anyway, they were a folk group at the core. "We were the very first actual group in what we thought was the folk idiom," he said. "The jazz influence came from Terry and Danny. We never quite got into the rock thing. And the string bass made a difference – the electric bass came in the Fairport Convention and Steeleye Span era, which was just a little bit later. I think that's what made the difference in sound between us and those bands. We used to be known as the quietest band on the stage and the loudest off the stage."

The group recorded six albums and lasted nearly as many years, disbanding in 1973. "We'd all had enough by then," Jansch recalled. "We were all working too hard. We had gone around the world about five times; it was literally like three-month tours at a stretch; then a week off and another two-month tour somewhere else. Also, the manager at that time had a policy of sending us out by ourselves to do two-hour shows. We never met any other musicians, because there was nobody else on the bill. It became so insular, and you do need to play with other people and meet other people. I think that was one of the main reasons for the band to fold."

Renbourn shares Jansch's jaundiced view of Pentangle's tours. "We used to do a lot of enormous tours," he told Forte, "mostly of ridiculous, huge venues...The first time over (1969), we did Fillmore East with Canned Heat and Rhinoceros. Can you imagine that?" But he feels the band's demise was less about insularity than diffusion. "We hardly ever saw each other when we finished a tour," he told Romanowski. "We just went to our separate houses and it just disintegrated in the end. Whatever had been really close became quite fragmented."

The disbanding of Pentangle left in its wake unfulfilled contracts which made resuming a solo career initially diffi-

cult for Ren-bourn. “It was a nightmare,” he told *Option*’s Dorian Cohen. “I couldn’t record for a long time.”

“After Pentangle,” Renbourn reflected to Jas Obrecht, “I wasn’t really doing very much.” Slowly, that changed, and by 1979, informal music-making with friends had led to the birth of the John Renbourn Group. Tony Roberts, who had played flute on Renbourn’s *The Lady and the Unicorn* album in 1969, renewed a musical partnership with Renbourn when they became neighbors in Devonshire. “We started working together,” he told Obrecht, “and Jacqui started singing. We got a small band together – a ‘social band’ – and recorded *A Maid in Bedlam* for Transatlantic.” In sundry incarnations the John Renbourn Group provided a focal point for Renbourn’s music between 1979 and 1983.

John Renbourn Group

Another significant partnership emerged for Renbourn in the late 1970s. Friends since 1967, he and Stefan Grossman made the first of several albums together in 1978. “Recording with him was a little like working out tunes as I would with Bert,” Renbourn told Obrecht. Of Renbourn, Grossman said: “His playing is very English and mine is very American. I have a more rhythmic approach, and John’s is more melodic. We’re learning from each other, and that’s important if you’re going to continue to grow.”

Around 1982, Renbourn enrolled in Dartington College of Art where the 1960s art school dropout belatedly earned a general music degree. Renbourn’s return to school as he neared 40 was prompted by meeting students from the nearby college who would tell him he’d influenced them

musically. “Some lute player would say, ‘How funny it is to meet you, because you started me off playing the lute,’’ Renbourn told Grossman. “I became quite jealous of this and decided that I should go there and see what was going on at the college.” In time, Renbourn not only earned a degree but became a tutor at Dartington, a commitment which has made his tours over the past decade infrequent affairs.

Juggling an academic career with the itinerant musician’s life has presented Renbourn some unique predicaments. “I had an offer to go on tour with Doc Watson and play at Carnegie Hall,” Renbourn told Rossi. “Then I got the dates for my second-year exams, which are the heavy ones...and it was on the day I was playing Carnegie Hall. So I had to go to the principal and say, ‘Look, I’ve actually got a booking.’ So he said, ‘Well, I’m afraid this is a very important exam. Cancel it.’ So I said, ‘It’s Carnegie Hall.’ He said, ‘It’s never happened in the history of the college before.’ They had a special meeting and of course said, ‘Do it and do the exams later,’ which was nice of them.”

At Dartington College of Art, Renbourn is an instrumental tutor who gives his students both technical and historical grounding. He likes to lead them to the wellsprings which initially inspired him, even if some follow with less than wholehearted enthusiasm. “Some people find listening to Elizabeth Cotten a personal effrontery,”

Stefan Grossman & John Renbourn *Photo by Jo Ayres*

says Renbourn. But the tradition of 19th century 'parlor guitar' of which Cotten (1893-1987) was an exemplary folk exponent fascinates Renbourn. "Originally I was intrigued to find out where the blues and country fingerpicking styles came from," Renbourn said of this passion to Rossi. "And when you find this parlor stuff, you find that a lot of it was in open tunings, the same open tunings that the blues guys are supposed to have invented. The two main names for the tunings in the folk tradition are 'Spanish,' for open G (D G D G B D) and 'Vestapol,' for open D (D A D F# A D). Well, the two most popular parlor tunes of all time are 'Spanish Fandango' in open G and 'Sebastapol' in open D. These were like set pieces, and if you listen to the blues stuff, the chord shapes are pretty much the same..."

Renbourn's scholarly sleuthing led him to explore the technique as well as the repertoire of 'parlor guitar.' "If you think about guitar playing in America in the 1800s," Renbourn told *Guitar International's* George Clinton, "the repertoire and the technique would have been the same as in Europe. That is, with one or two fingers resting on the soundboard. Often no nails – remember the Sor-Aguado business of whether to use nails? Also, in America orthodox technique required the left hand thumb to go round the neck to make the bar." (Such orthodoxy was put to good use in the bass lines of Merle Travis, who likened his left hand technique to "grabbing the neck of a hoe handle.") Renbourn credits the popularization of steel strings, which offered improved intonation over gut, along with the advent of mass-produced mail order guitars in the late 19th century, with 'liberating' the guitar from the parlor. But its legacy followed the instrument out into the folk realm, where parlor tradition would be variously transformed into blues and country guitar styles featuring open tunings and sprightly bass-treble counterpoint. "If you look at this stuff," Renbourn explained to Rossi, "often it's got a regular bass pattern, and if you do play it in this style, you get picking! So it's all there, really. Folklorists don't really like this stuff because it sounds so artsy or like a bad parody of classical stuff, and classical people aren't interested in it because it's so banal-sounding."

Therein, perhaps, lies a clue to Renbourn's attraction: this music, whatever its flaws, defies neat categories and easy assumptions, not unlike Renbourn's own music. Whether drawing from sources medieval or modern, Renbourn has always been gently but insistently iconoclastic. By example he's asked, 'Why *not* play a 14th century dance tune on a 20th century steel string guitar? Why *not* play a Thelonious Monk bop blues as well?' Or, in response to British folk purists, 'Why *not* use the guitar to accompany a traditional ballad?' Today these questions need asking only rhetorically if at all, but such was not the case 30 years ago. The fact that Renbourn asked and then posed convincing answers to them opened doors for a host of further explorations of the steel string guitar's potential over the past quarter-plus century. Whether Renbourn ever performs or records any of the fingerstyle Victoriana to which his scholarly curiosity has led him, one can't help suspecting that he identifies with this music's role as a sometimes-unacknowledged catalyst. Responding to an interviewer's observation that his music of the 1960s influenced the New Age guitarists of the 1980s, Renbourn said simply: "That's interesting. I like the idea that it's gone somewhere." And he obviously likes the idea that the medium he's chosen for its delivery is equal to any message. "There's no limit," Renbourn once declared, "to what you can do on the steel string guitar. It's just a matter of adapting in it."

The Performances

Photo by Roger Perry

This collection begins in the black-and-white year of 1965. It was a time when the folk and pop music worlds would collide in the 'Dylan-goes-electric' controversy, one which led to the emergence of a 'folk-rock' hybrid and the displacement of the coffeehouse by the discotheque. So the first of two 1965 Danish television clips brings with it a charming early-1960s earnestness, a reminder of the reflective coffeehouse Soho scene from which Renbourn came. We see a 21-year-old Renbourn looking every bit the consummate art school dropout, his distinctive neoclassical style already fully developed in the year of his first album, which he cut in a basement studio in London's Denmark Street. The song, "I Know My Rider," was a popular folk-blues of the era (the Byrds recorded a version of it in 1966). The following *cinema verite* clip (shot over a bored blonde's shoulder and reminiscent in feel of Dylan's *Bringing It All Back Home* Lp cover) shows Jansch and Renbourn at home ("Bert & John") doing what they did best. (Note Renbourn's sitar in a corner.)

The excitement generated by Pentangle's unique sound is captured near the quintet's inception in two BBC (*Degrees of Folk*) performances from 1968. "Traveling Song" was actually a single, released in May 1968. "Let No Man

Steal Your Thyme," with its spacey free improvisation over the 1 chord in the solo, was one of the standouts of the group's debut album, *The Pentangle,* which drew a rave review in the October 26, 1968 *Rolling Stone*: "It's refreshing to hear the clean sound of this album," wrote Fred Dente, "not cluttered by powerful amps...One can feel a closeness to the instruments that, heretofore, was a hard task in the pop music field. It is one of the best albums one will ever hear."

Renbourn began his Pentangle stint playing a Gibson J-50 flattop acoustic, then switched to the Gibson ES-335 seen in the 1971 BBC concert clip of "In Time," a performance which epitomizes the blues-rooted string jazz aspect of Pentangle's repertoire.

If the 1973 breakup of Pentangle (and ensuing legal wrangles) kept Renbourn from recording for a time, he was nonetheless still performing, as witnessed by two 1974 BBC clips. "Blues in A" finds him returning to the idiom which first drove him to explore fingerstyle guitar. At the core of Renbourn's signature embellishments are lines strongly reminiscent of the single greatest early influence on a generation of English guitarists, from Martin Carthy to Eric Clapton, Big Bill Broonzy. "I still adore his playing," Renbourn told Doc Rossi in 1994.

"Rosslyn" is something else entirely. The hammer-ons and pull-offs connect it to blues and American folk guitar practice in general, but its more impressionistic structure points to Renbourn's influence on similar creations a few years later by French *wunderkind* Pierre Bensusan. "John Renbourn was the first English guitarist I listened to," Bensusan said in 1979, "he and Bert Jansch of Pentangle. It gave me a lot of inspiration."

For his part, Renbourn often looked for inspiration to music of the pre-industrial past. "The interest in early music was something I'd always had," he told Grossman, tracing it to his teenaged classical guitar experience. When Renbourn began exploring the Anglo-Celtic folk tradition, he discovered similarities. "I started to realize that a lot of the pre-Renaissance music used the same modal scales," he told Obrecht. "You can play early music on the steel-string guitar," Renbourn explained to *Guitar International's*

Photo by Guido Harari

George Clinton, "naturally, since many old instruments were made with wire anyway." Renbourn was already exploring this repertoire in the 1960s, both in Pentangle and on such solo albums as 1968's *Sir John Alot of...* An excellent example of his approach to it is seen in the medley (performed in Milan at *Il Lirico* in 1977) of "Trotto/English Dance." The first tune, fitting for the performance venue, is of Italian origin. "The Trotto is one of a series of lively Italian dances preserved in a manuscript in the British Museum," writes Stanley Buetens in the liner notes to *In a Medieval Garden* (Nonesuch H-1120). "Little is known about the Trotto and there are few references to it elsewhere. It is obvious from the music, however, that it was to be played and danced fast and furiously." The same could also be said of "The English Dance" which follows it. Renbourn has remarked that one advantage of playing early music is that the composers can't dispute your interpretation of their tunes. "I don't play them anywhere near as authentically as I should do," he told Bob Emerson.

"Whitehouse Blues" is an original interpretation of a song from the 'hillbilly' stringband tradition: Charlie Poole & the North Carolina Ramblers did it in the 1920s, and it's since become a bluegrass standard. Usually delivered in a rollicking manner at odds with its theme (the 1901 assassination of President William McKinley by anarchist Leon

Czolgosz), Renbourn darkens it to a lament slightly akin to Doc Watson's fingerstyle interpretation of "St. James Hospital" on his debut Vanguard album.

The two 1981 performances here of the John Renbourn Group suggest its leader was then deeply involved with Anglo-European tradition, a contrast to the American-influenced eclecticism of Pentangle. "The Fair Flower of Northumberland" is one of the traditional 'border ballads,' while the medley, "Pavane/Tourdion," reflects Renbourn's explorations of early music. Renbourn felt he could best do such work in ensembles, he told Grossman, "because things had got to the point where my guitar playing had become so elaborate that it became difficult to play all the ideas on one instrument." Along with Jacqui McShee, Renbourn's group here is comprised of Tony Roberts on all the reed instruments, John Molineux on fiddle and dulcimer and Keshaz Sathe on tablas.

The late 1970s teaming of Renbourn with Stefan Grossman was a parallel development to the duets Renbourn had created with Jansch in the 1960s. And if the John Renbourn Group of the same era was rooted in Anglo-Celtic tradition, Renbourn's penchant for American music got to come out and play with Grossman. The first example here of their musical dialogue comes from 1982 and is the whimsical "Candyman," this version based on the one played by Rev. Gary Davis. Piedmont blues authority Bruce Bastin writes: "This is an old tune, learned before World War I from Will Bonds, a founder-member of the Greenville string band in which Davis played."

Grossman relates that their two duets on jazz standards were the result of painstaking work. The source of this version of "Goodbye Porkpie Hat," Charles Mingus's homage to Lester Young, was Larry Coryell, who taught Grossman the tune as Coryell learned it from Mingus. Thelonious Monk's "'Round Midnight," seen in a 1988 performance in Sweden, was arranged by Renbourn, who showed Grossman his part as well.

Despite Renbourn's academic commitments at the Dartington College of Art, he was in Toronto in 1990, where he performed a lovely medley of hymns, "Abide With Me/Great Dreams From Heaven," the latter song known to gui-

Photo by Stefan Grossman

tarists from the work of Bahamian Joseph Spence and his admirer, Ry Cooder. The rich chordal voicing in Renbourn's arrangements reminds us that he had been studying orchestration in college. "I think the most enjoyable approach to the guitar," he told Grossman, "is to regard it, if you can, as something like a keyboard instrument, with the possibility of playing the separate parts..."

Blues-based music was never far from Renbourn's reach. Booker T & the MG's instrumental, "Sweet Potato," had been in his repertoire since the 1960s, and we hear a nice performance (a mite reminiscent in some respects of the opening one, "I Know My Rider") from Northern Ireland in 1992.

"Lord Franklin," heard in a 1993 performance, is a ballad which chronicles the ill-fated 1845 expedition of Arctic explorer Sir John Franklin in search of the Northwest Passage. From the same session we also hear "Little Niles," a bluesy entry from the bag of jazz pianist Randy Weston.

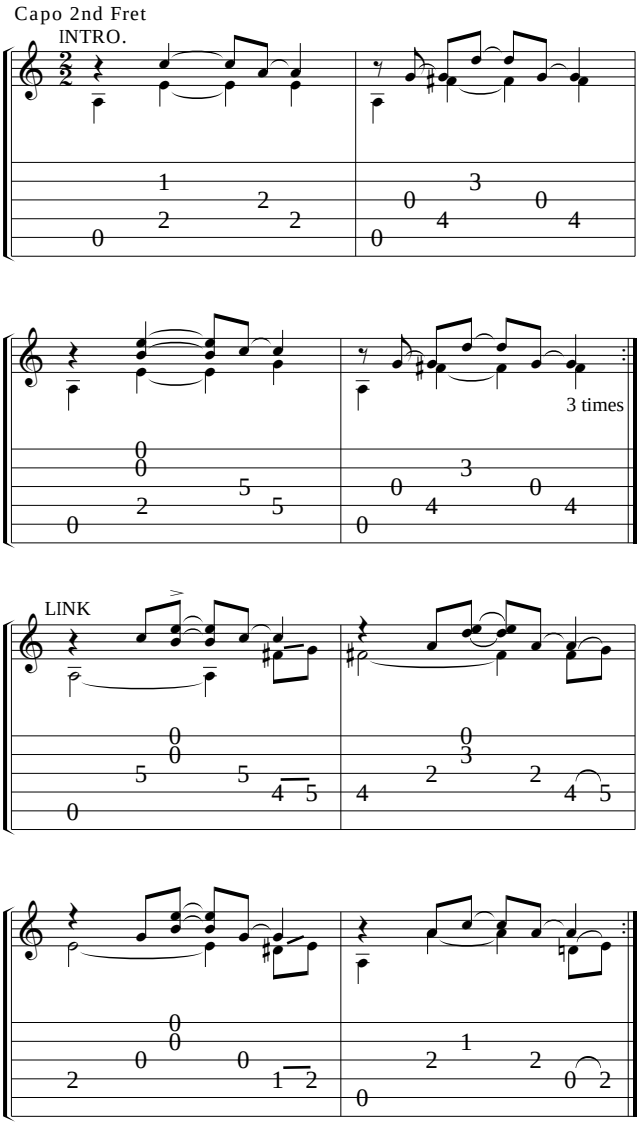
This 30 year retrospective closes with examples of three very different sides of Renbourn captured in Berkeley, California at the Freight & Salvage in 1995. "Young Man Who Wouldn't Sow Corn" is a traditional song built on a bluesy pentatonic minor scale, a familiar sound in 'high lonesome' Appalachian banjo-based songs ("Cluck Ol' Hen,"

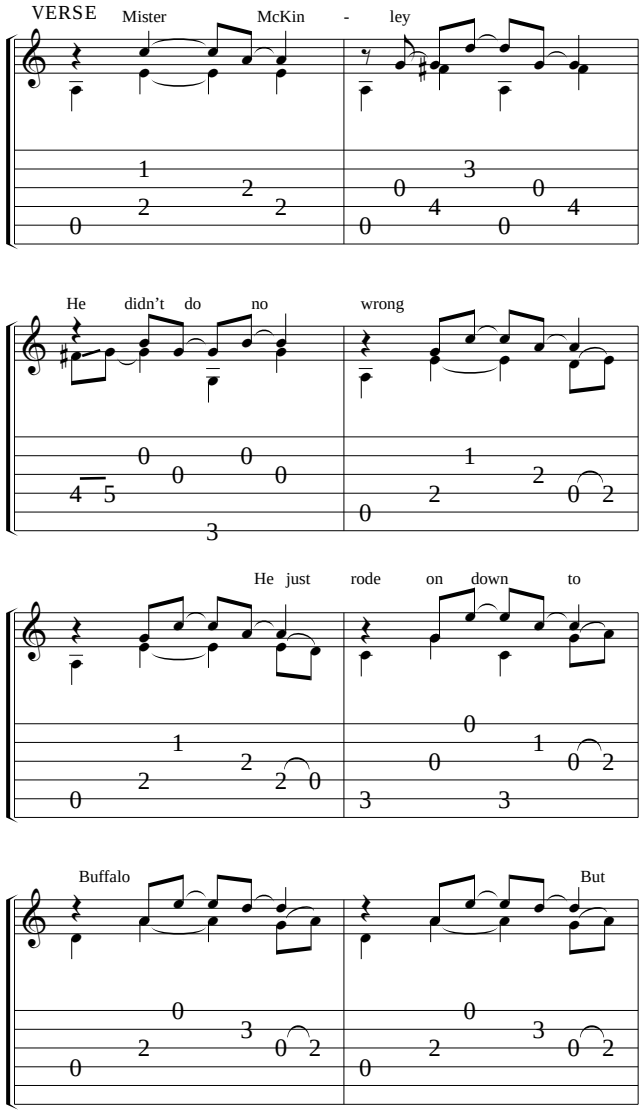
"Shady Grove"). The medley, "The Lament of Owen Roe O'Neil/Mist Covered Mountains of Home," finds Renbourn exploring stately Celtic airs. "I reached a stage fairly early," Renbourn told Dorian Cohen, "when I realized if I wanted my music to sound good, I needed to draw on folk sources that were closer to home – and, I suppose, closer to my own character." Despite that implied rejection of non-English elements in his music, this video closes with a medley from South African pianist Dollar Brand (Abdullah Ibrahim). "The Wedding" is wistful, while "Cherry" suggests a Renbourn expedition to a more balmy island than his own, be it Caribbean or Hawaiian (some of his lines hint at the slack key style). This should come as little surprise, given Renbourn's penchant for finding a Path Less Traveled (such as 19th century American parlor guitar music) and making it his own. "Pretty well what happened to me," Renbourn said of his involvement with the guitar to George Clinton, "was that I heard this beautiful new sound and tried to play music on it. And from the beginning the way I played was only the result of the music I was interested in and then adapted to the guitar...I'm not primarily a guitar player – I'm a guy that thinks in terms of musical ideas. I play the music simply because I'm interested in hearing how it will sound."

– Mark Humphrey

Photo by Jo Ayres

White House Blues

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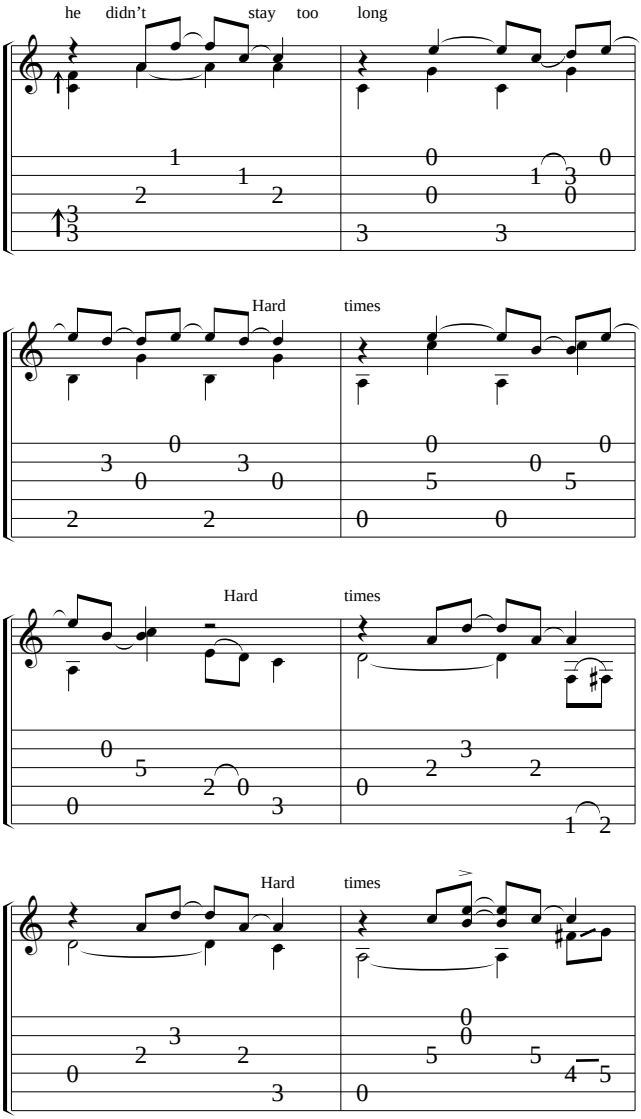
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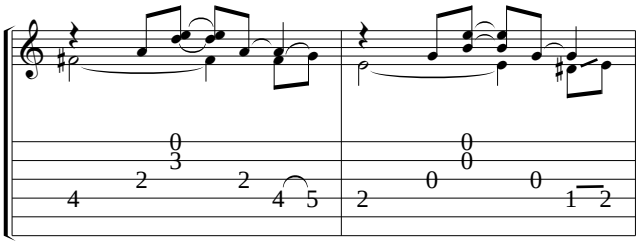
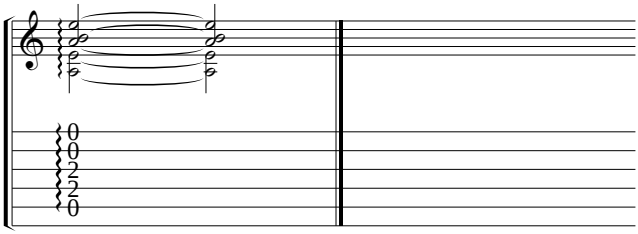
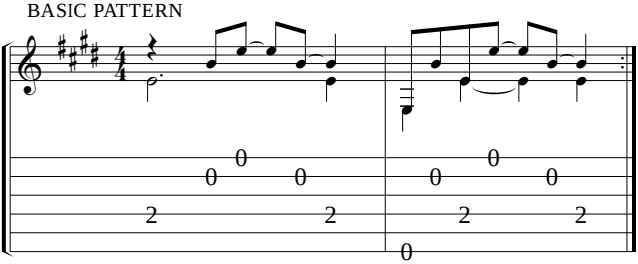
Hard times



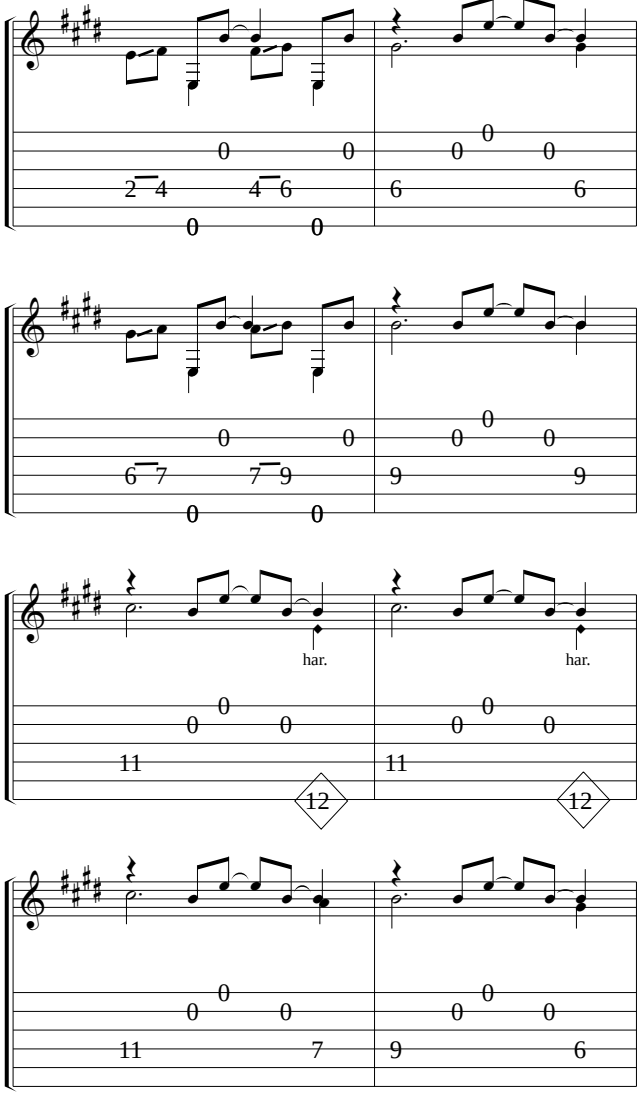


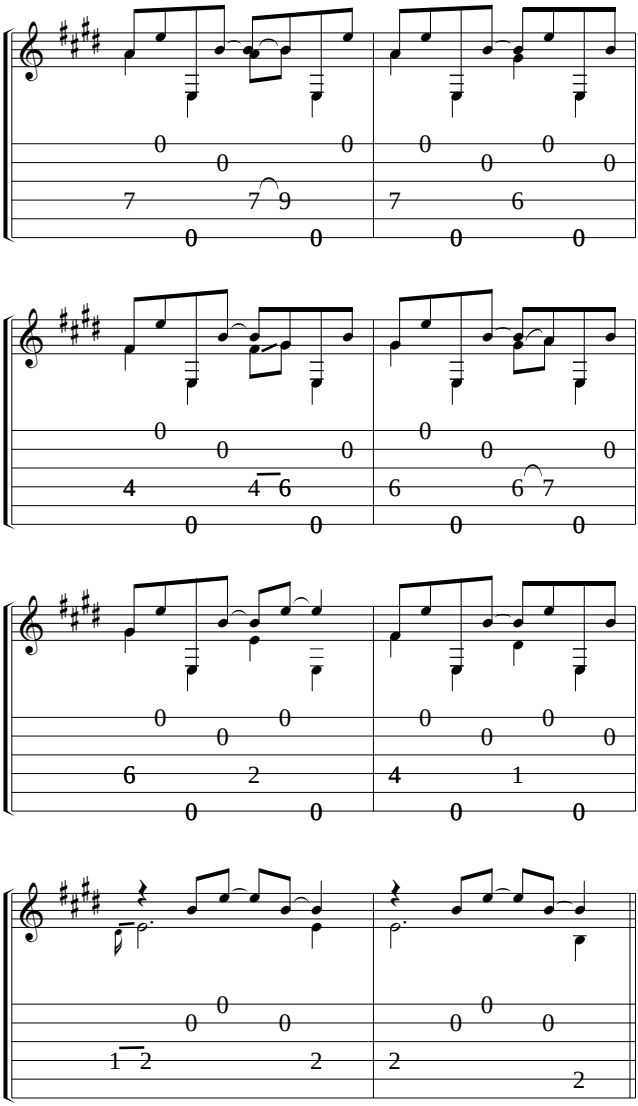
Lord Franklin

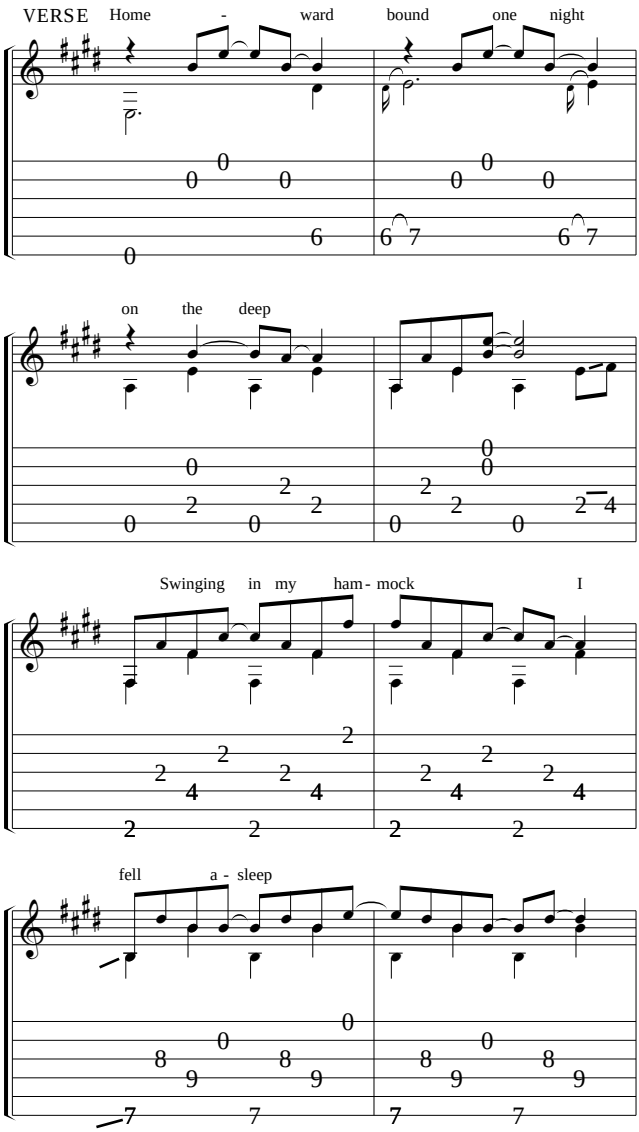
BASIC PATTERN

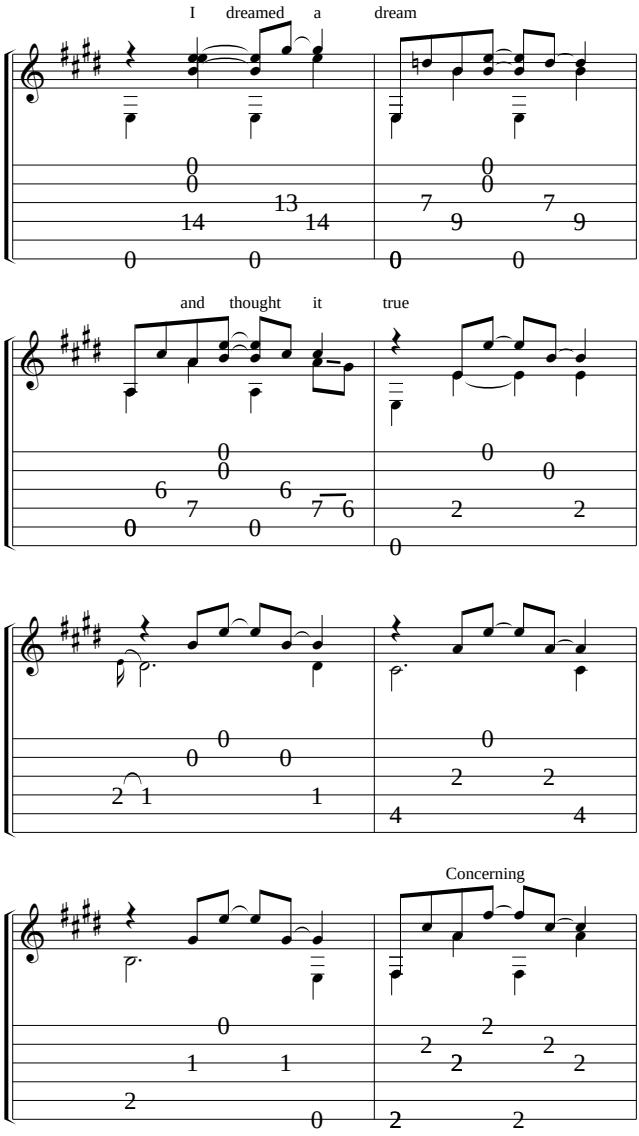


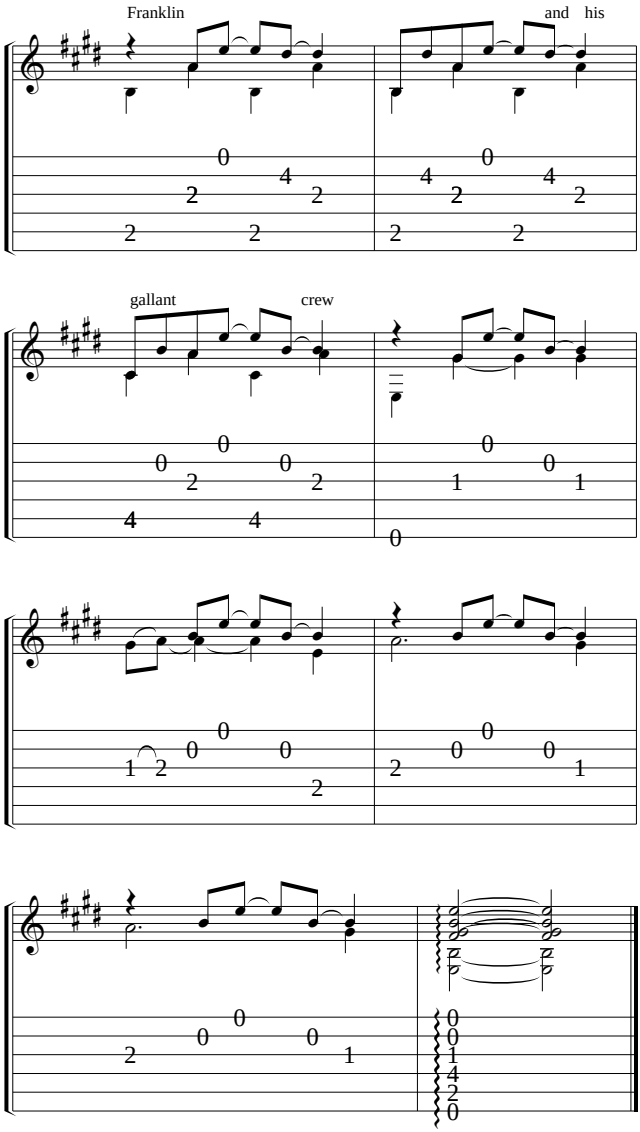
INTRO.



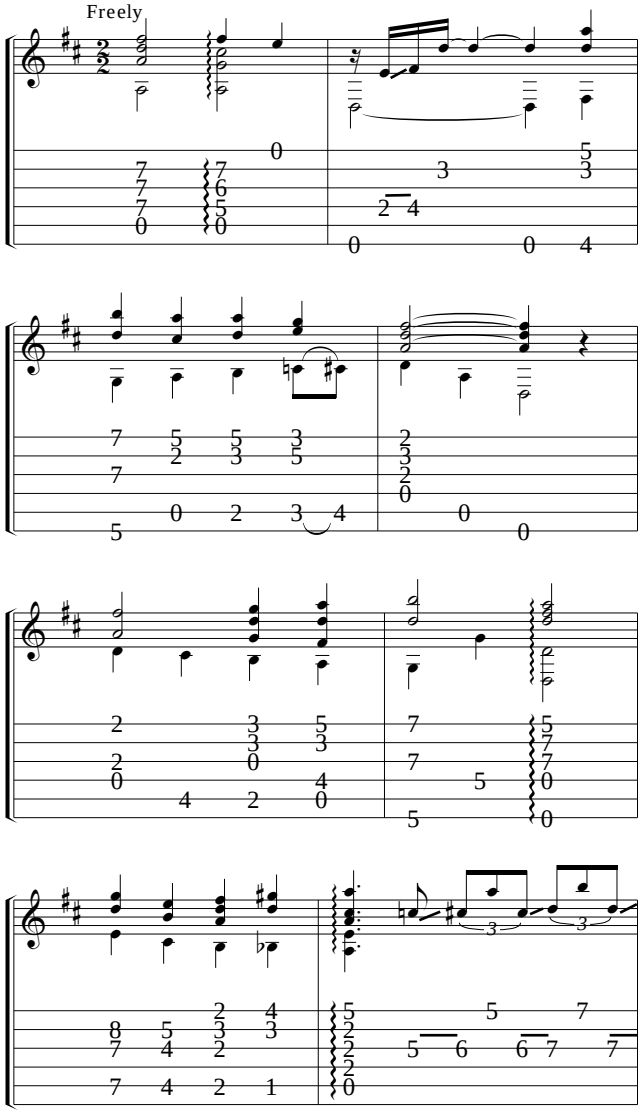


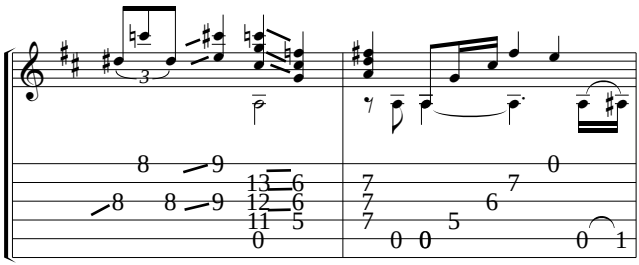

VERSE
Home - ward bound one night
on the deep
Swinging in my ham - mock I
fell a - sleep

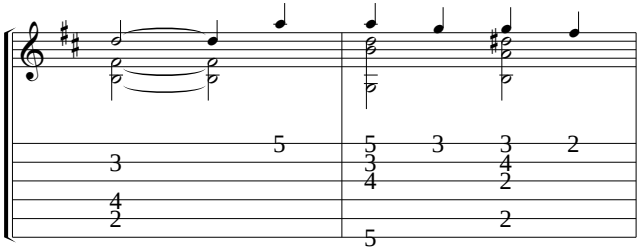

I dreamed a dream
and thought it true
Concerning

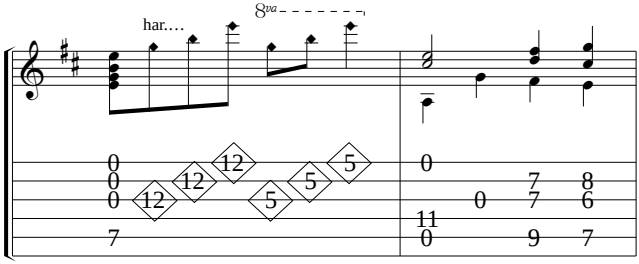

Franklin
and his
gallant
crew

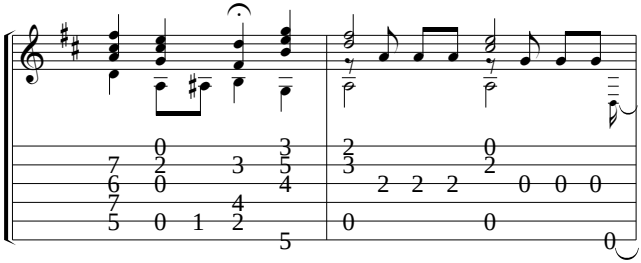
Medley: Abide With Me & Great Dreams From Heaven

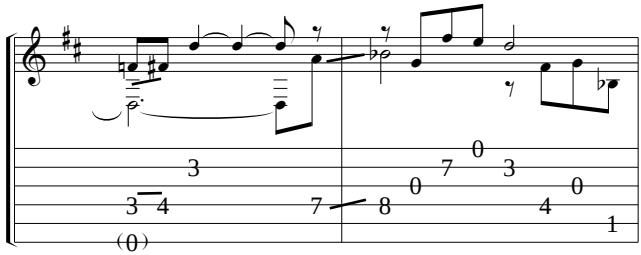


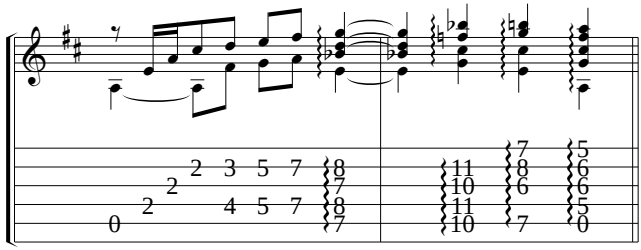


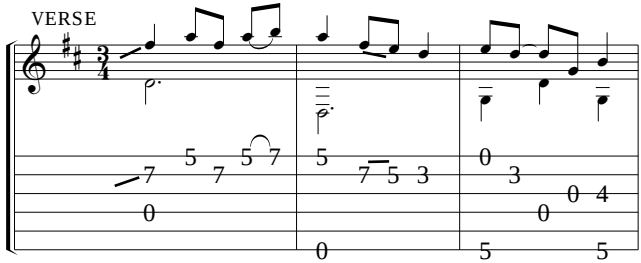


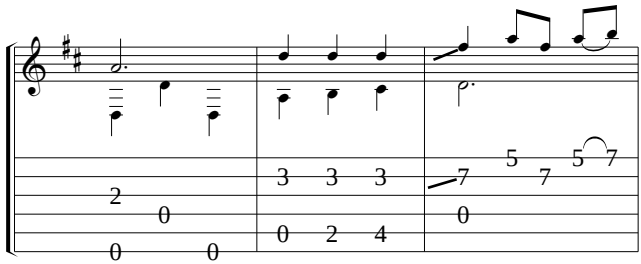

har....
8va

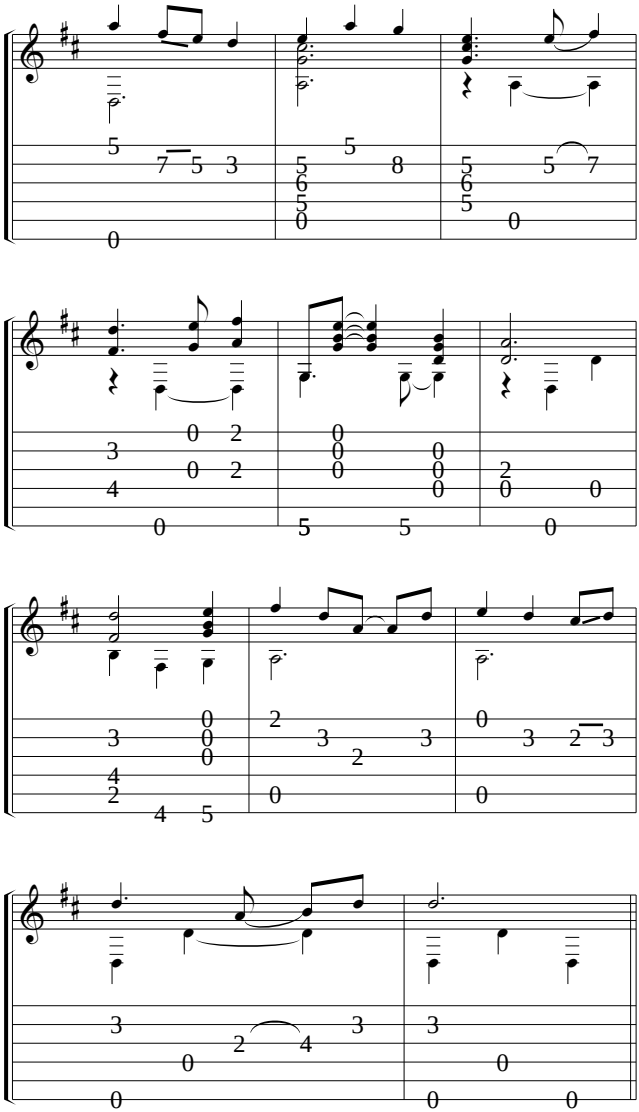


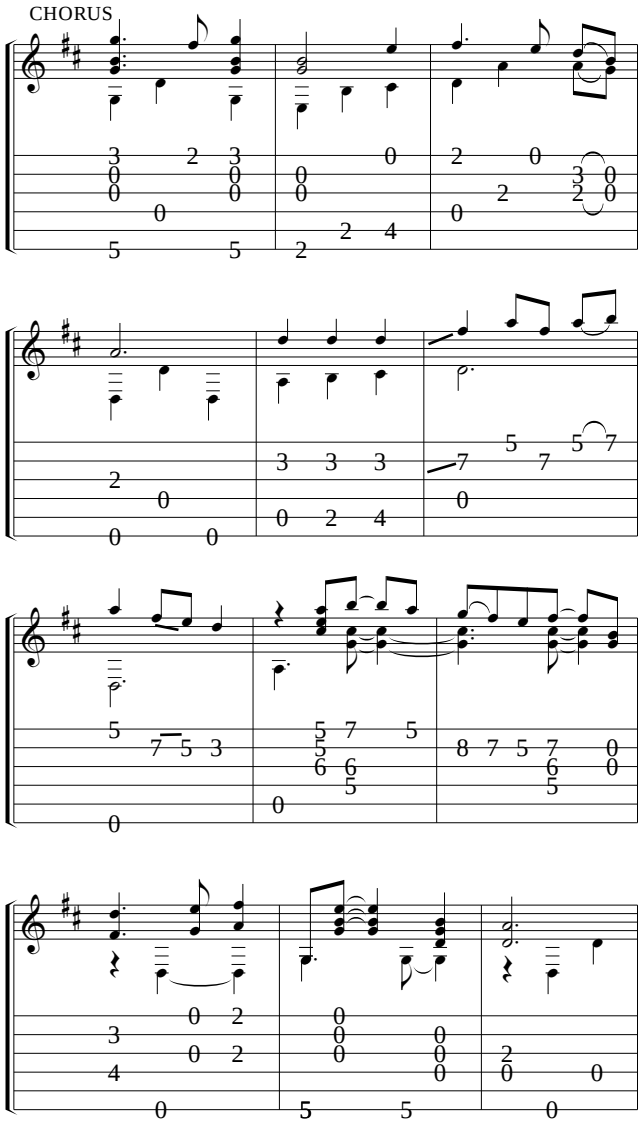


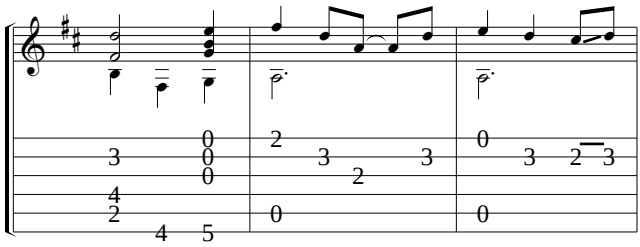


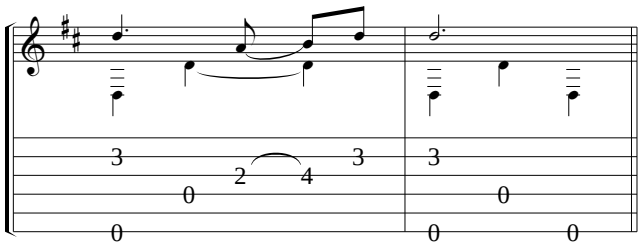

VERSE



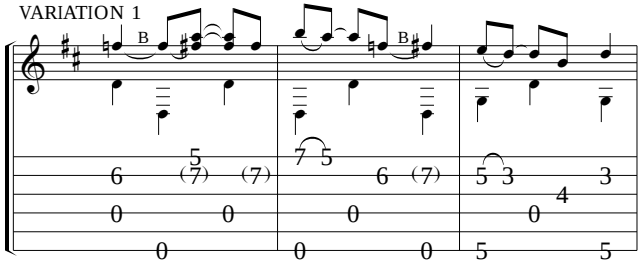


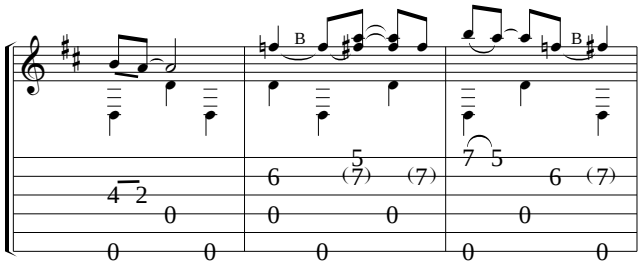

CHORUS

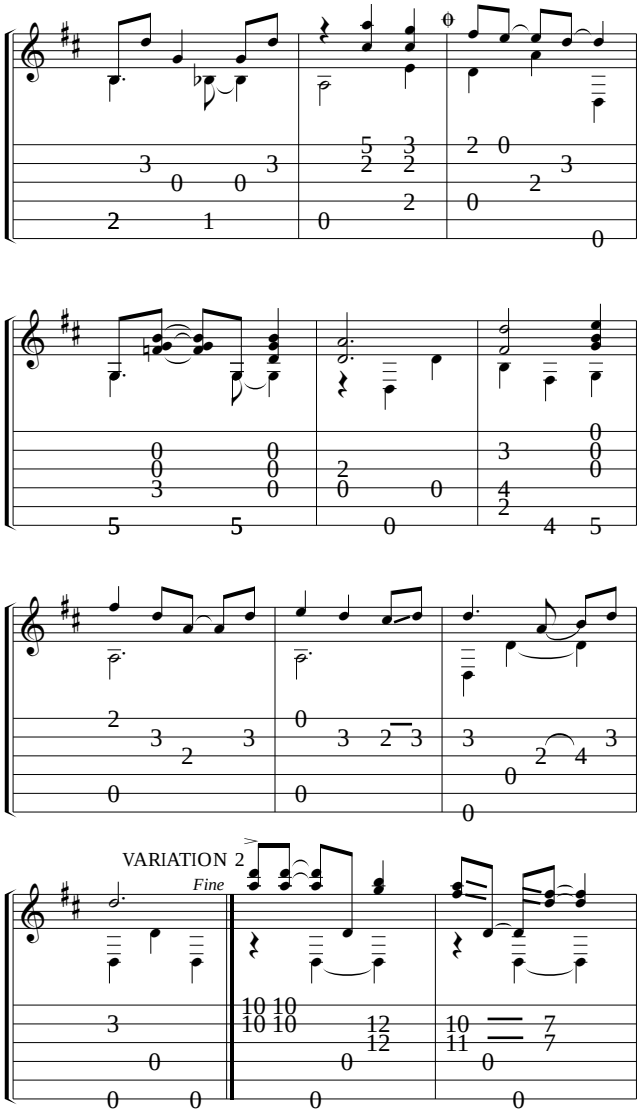


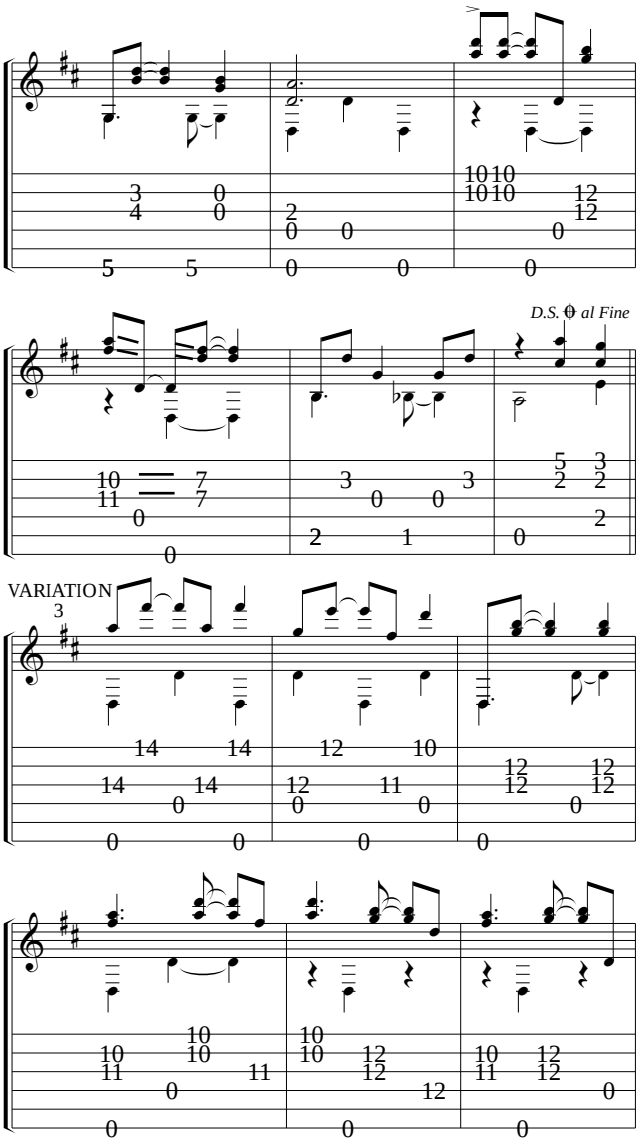


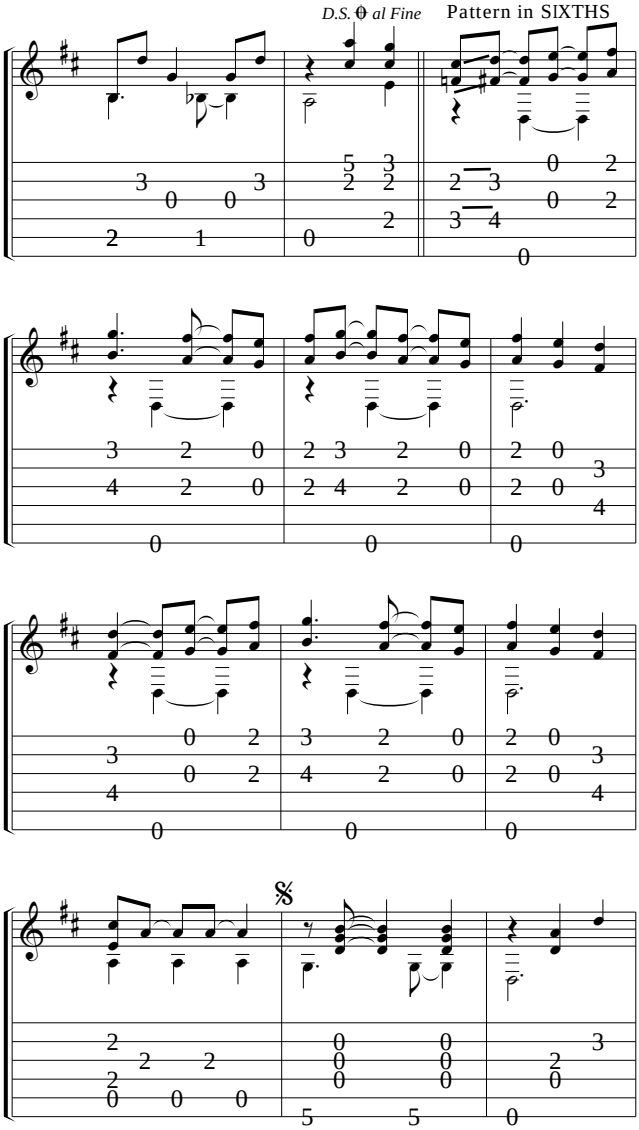
VARIATION 1

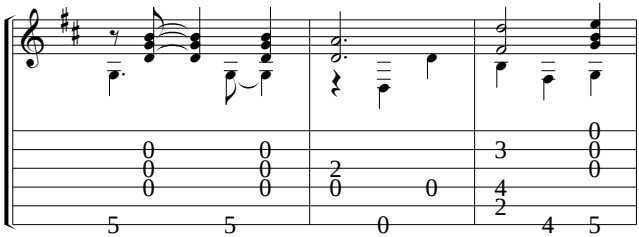


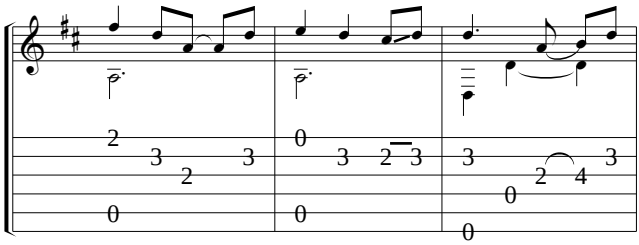


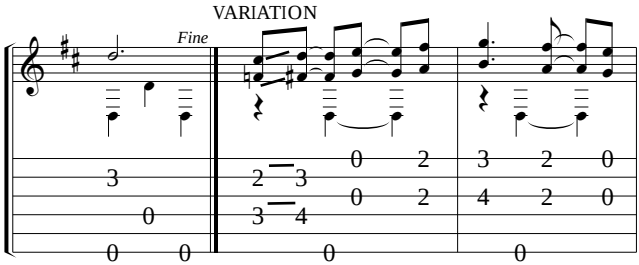

VARIATION 2
Fine

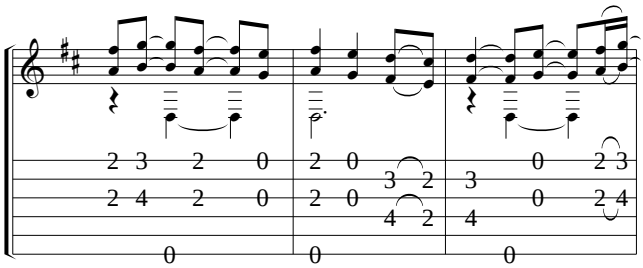

D.S. 𝄋 al Fine
VARIATION
3

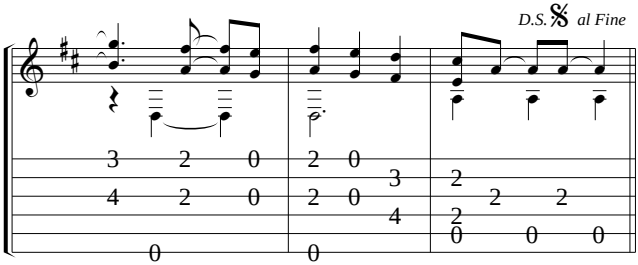

D.S. 𝄋 al Fine
Pattern in SIXTHS
𝄋



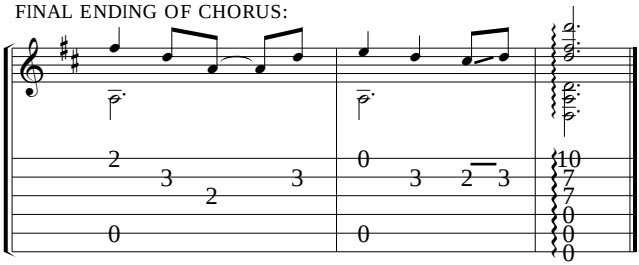



VARIATION
Fine





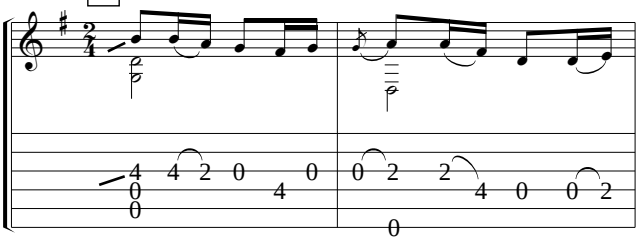
REPEAT VERSE AND CHORUS
FINAL ENDING OF CHORUS:

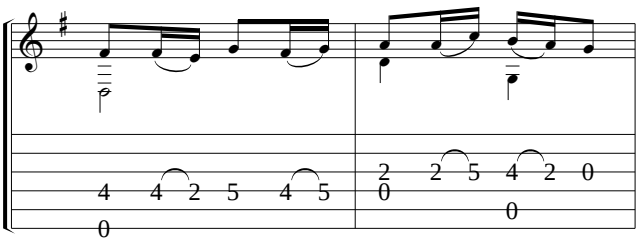


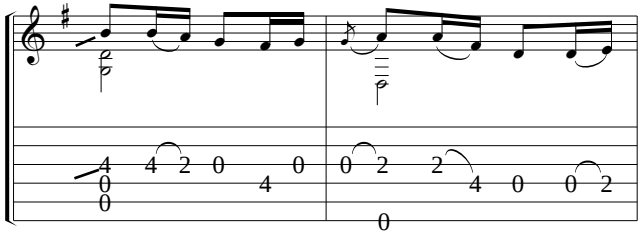
The English Dance

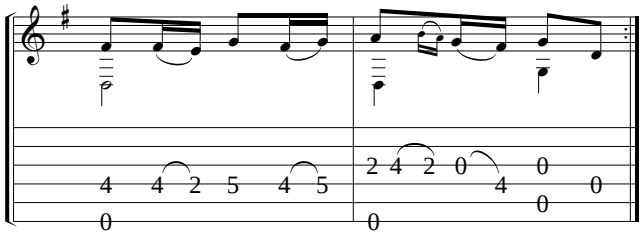
A

DGDGBD (Capo 2nd Fret)

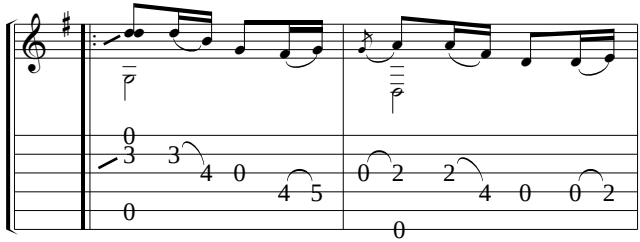


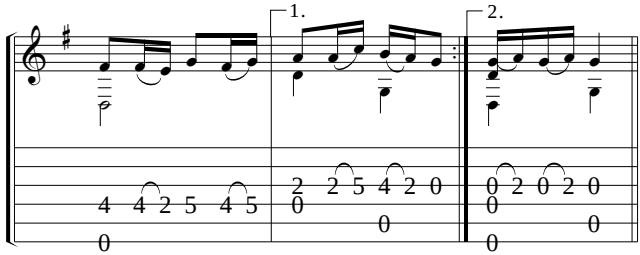




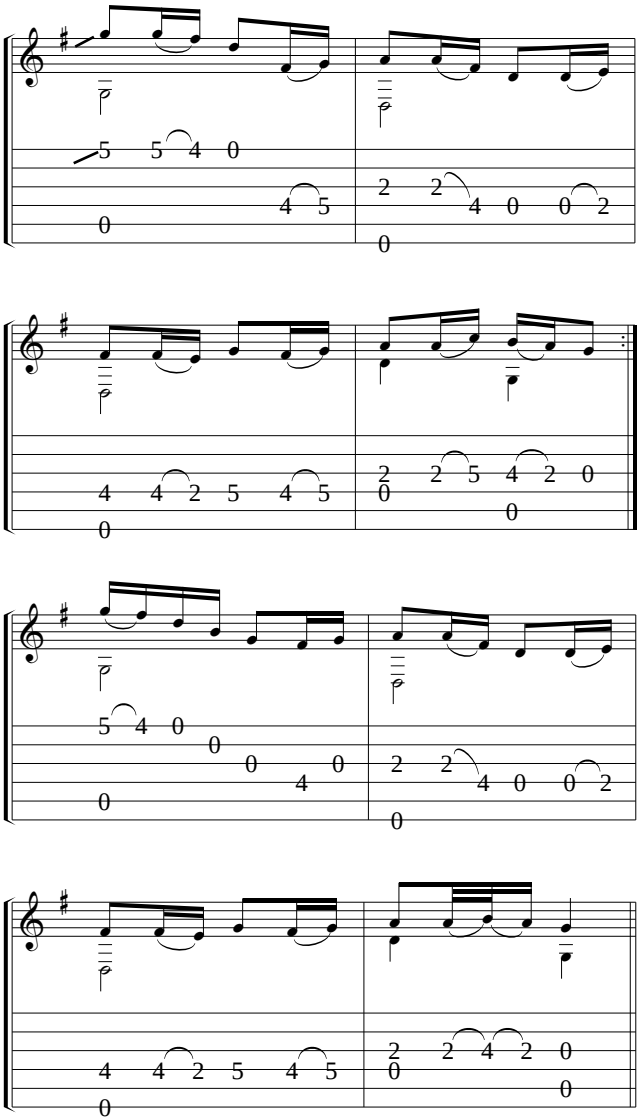


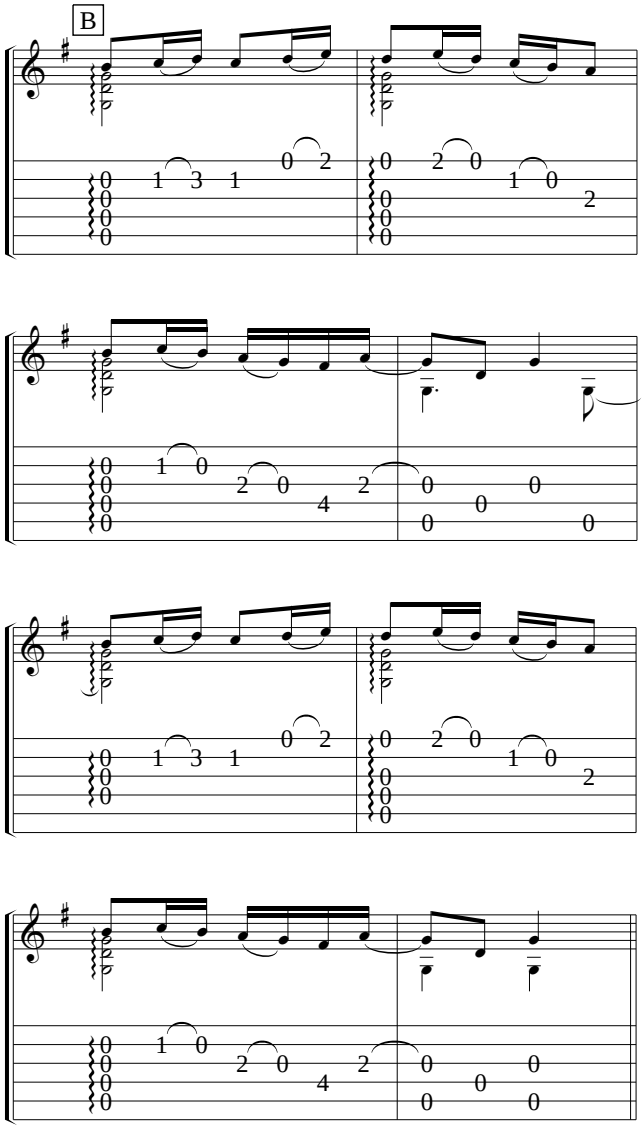
VARIATION 1

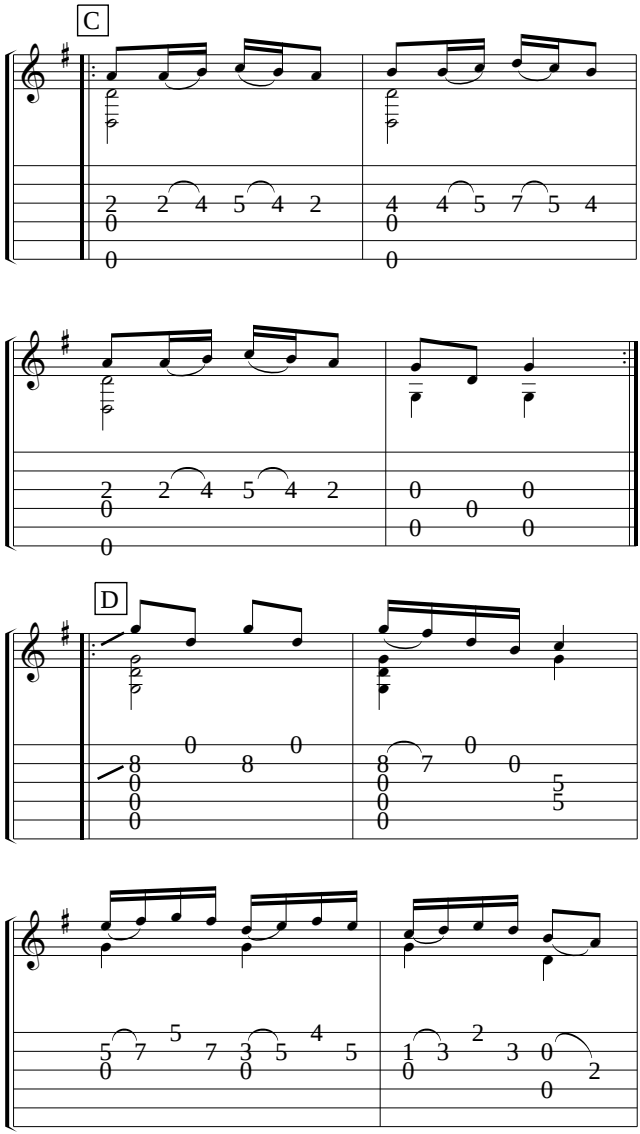


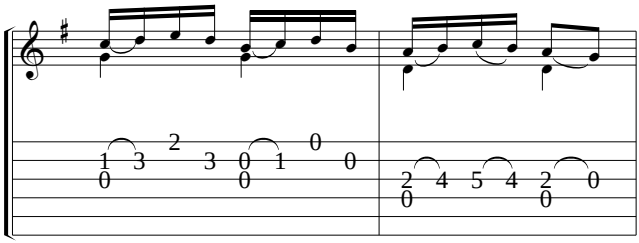


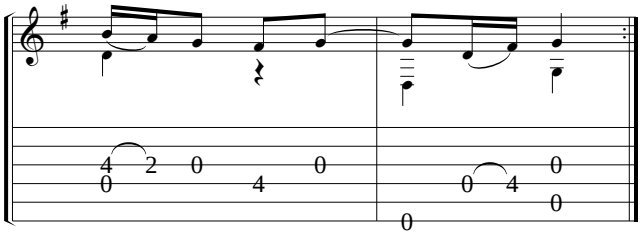
VARIATION 2

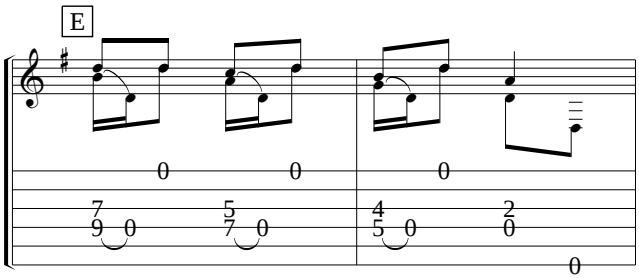


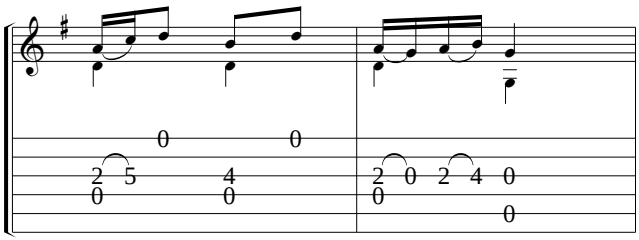

B

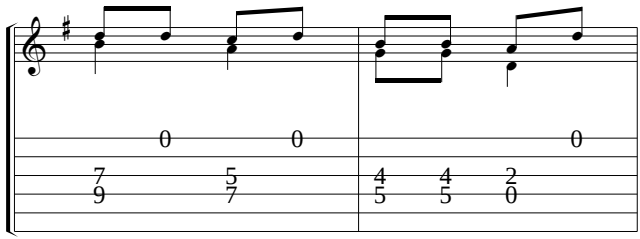
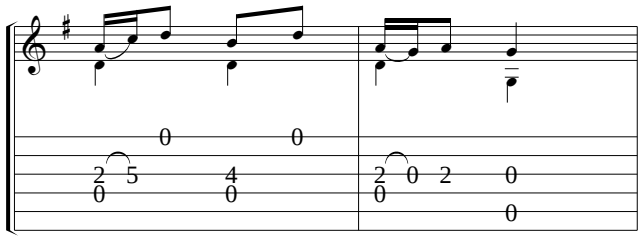
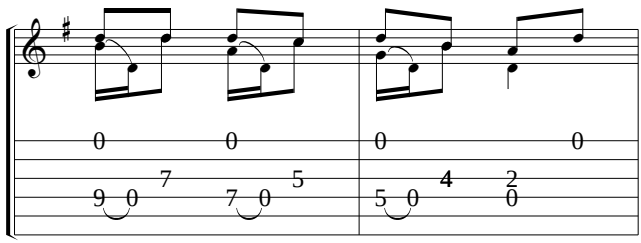
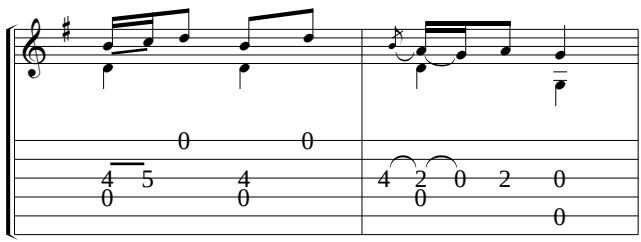

C
D

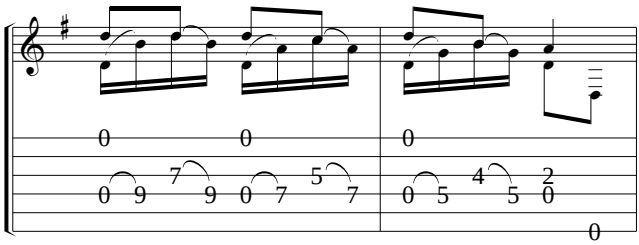


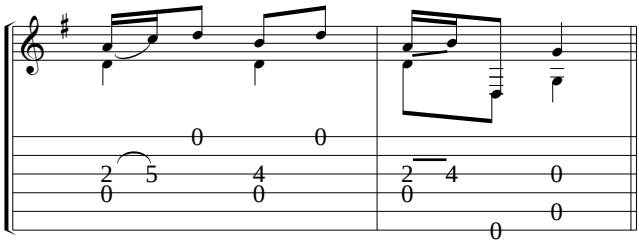



E

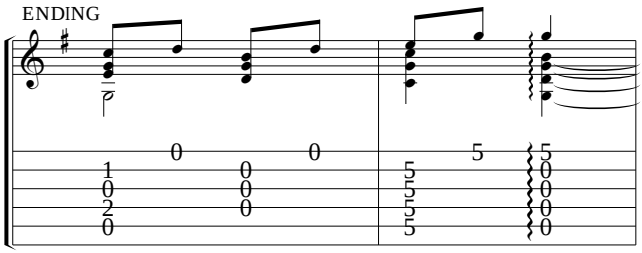


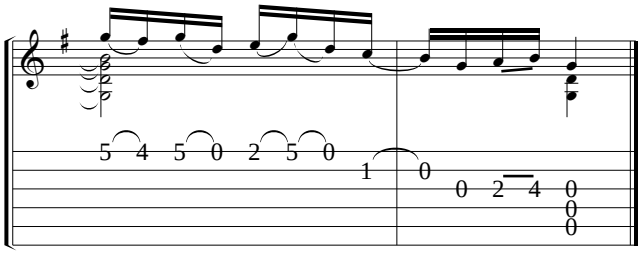









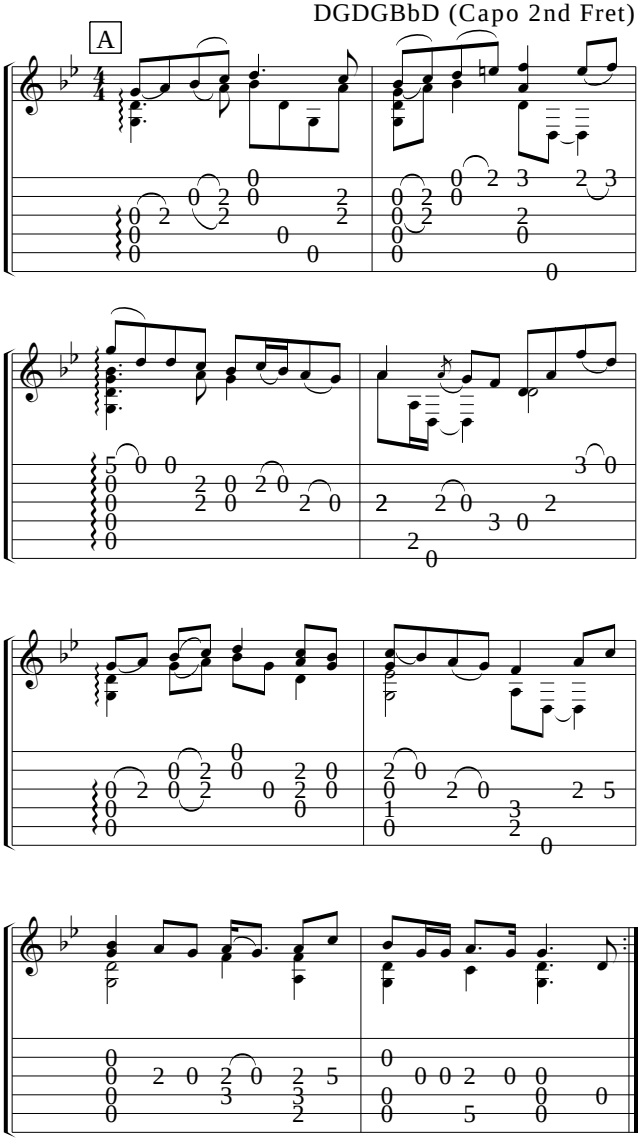
Repeat A, C, D, E, A.

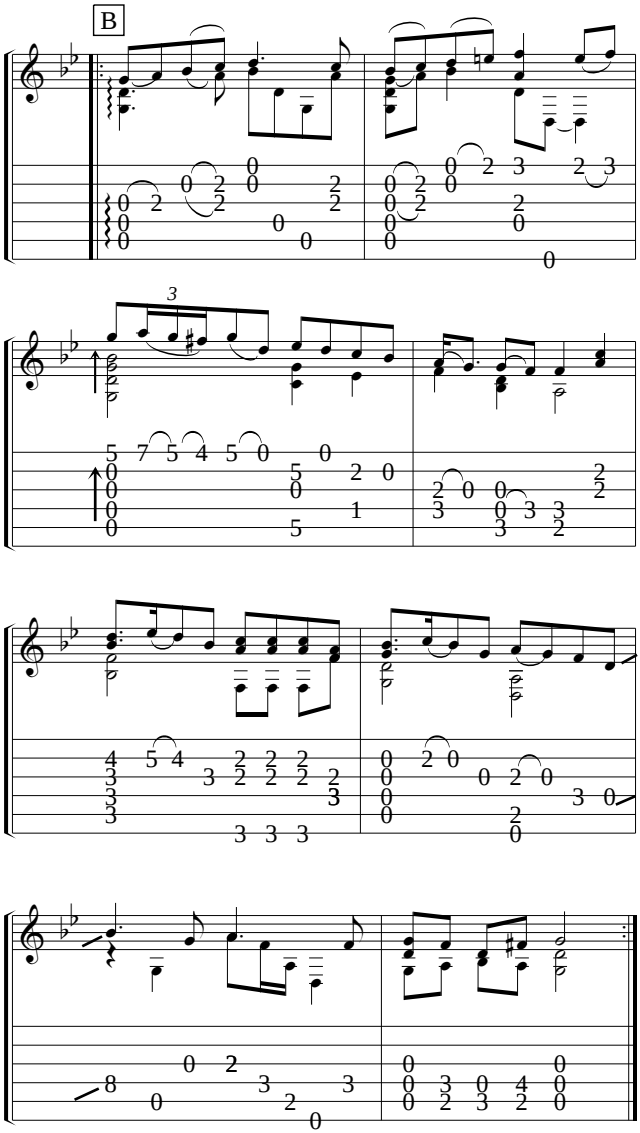




Lament For
Owen Roe O'Neill

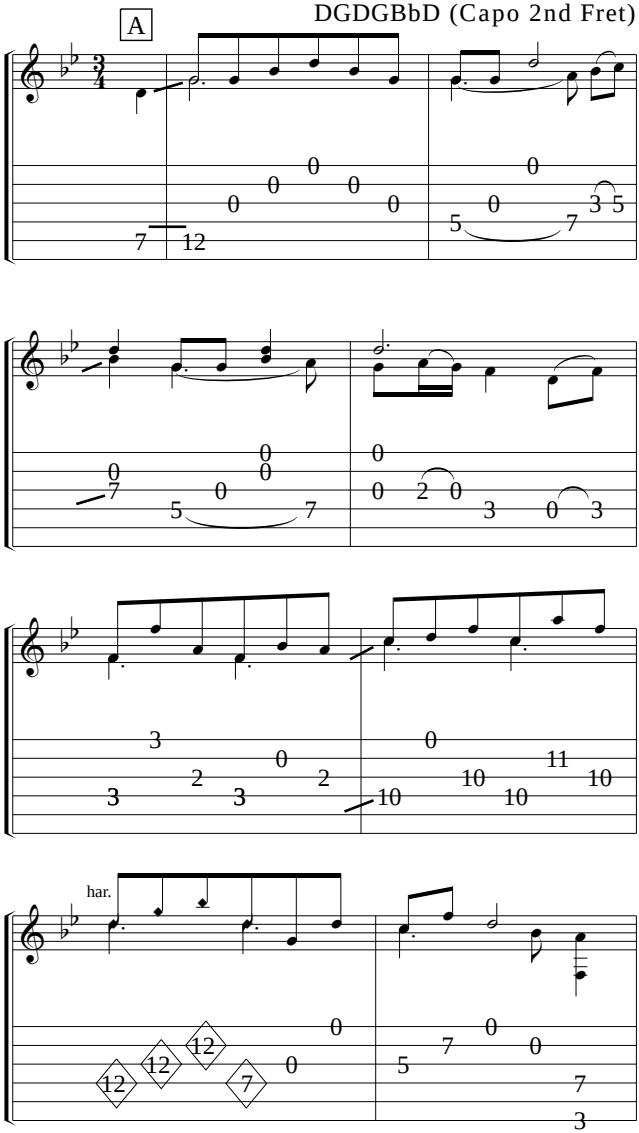
DGDGBbD (Capo 2nd Fret)

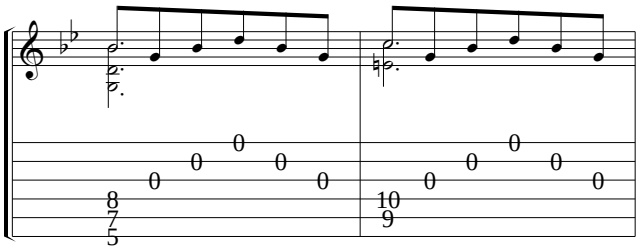


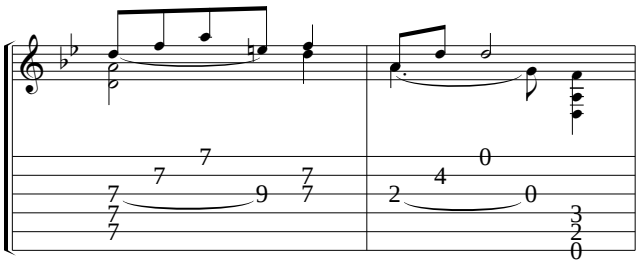

B
3

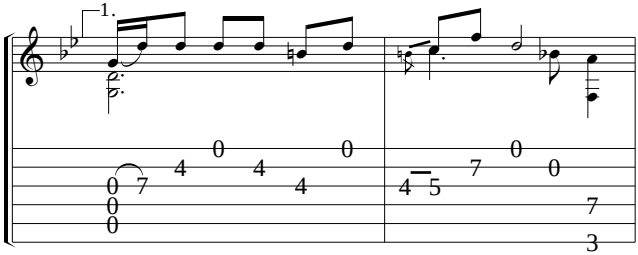
Mist Covered Mountains Of Home

DGDGBbD (Capo 2nd Fret)





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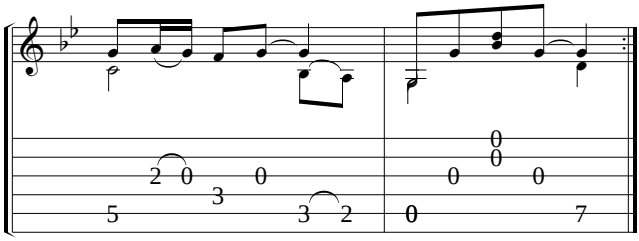
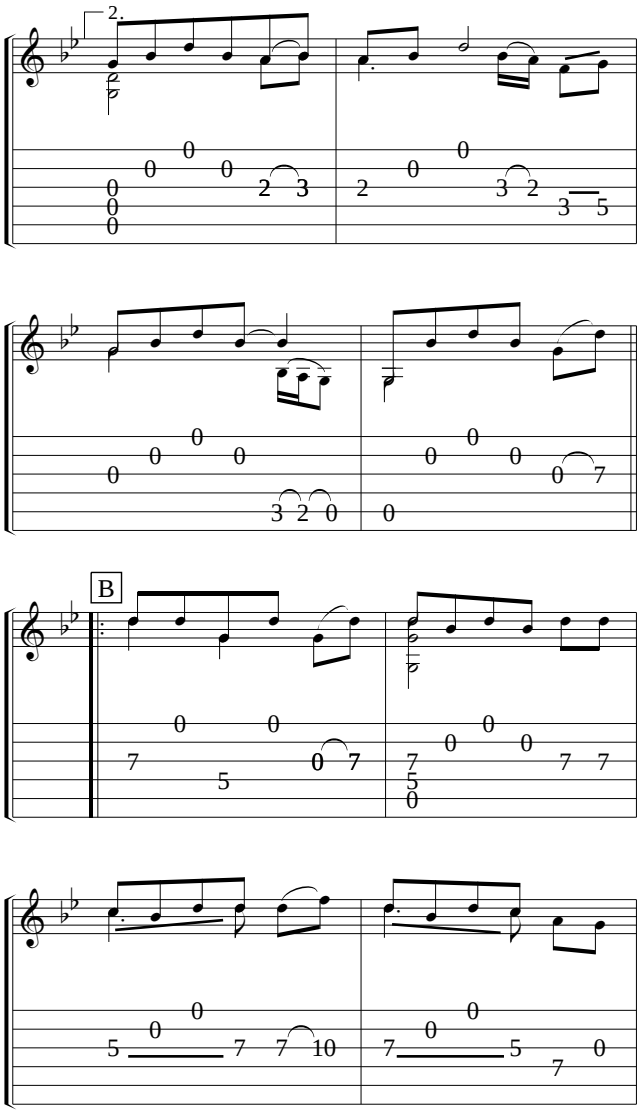
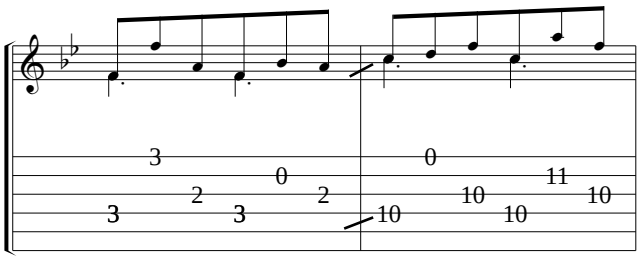
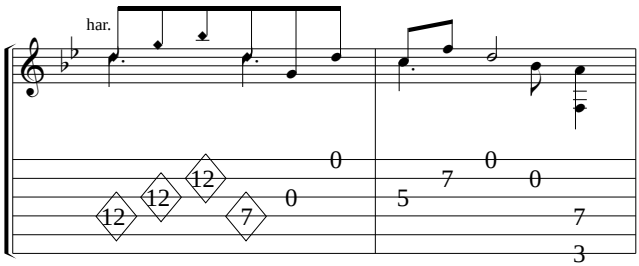
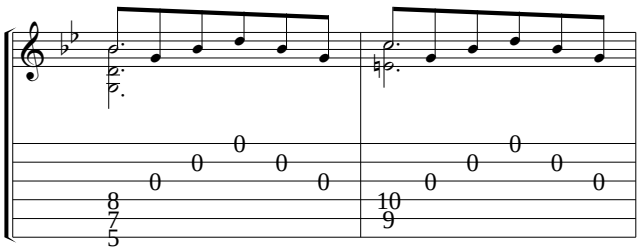
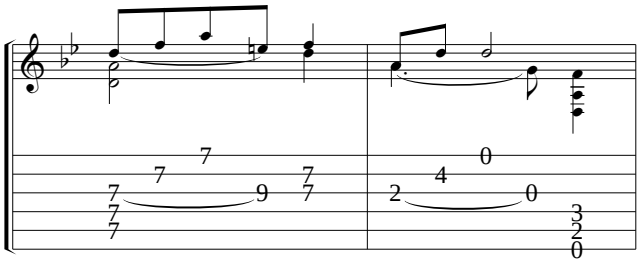


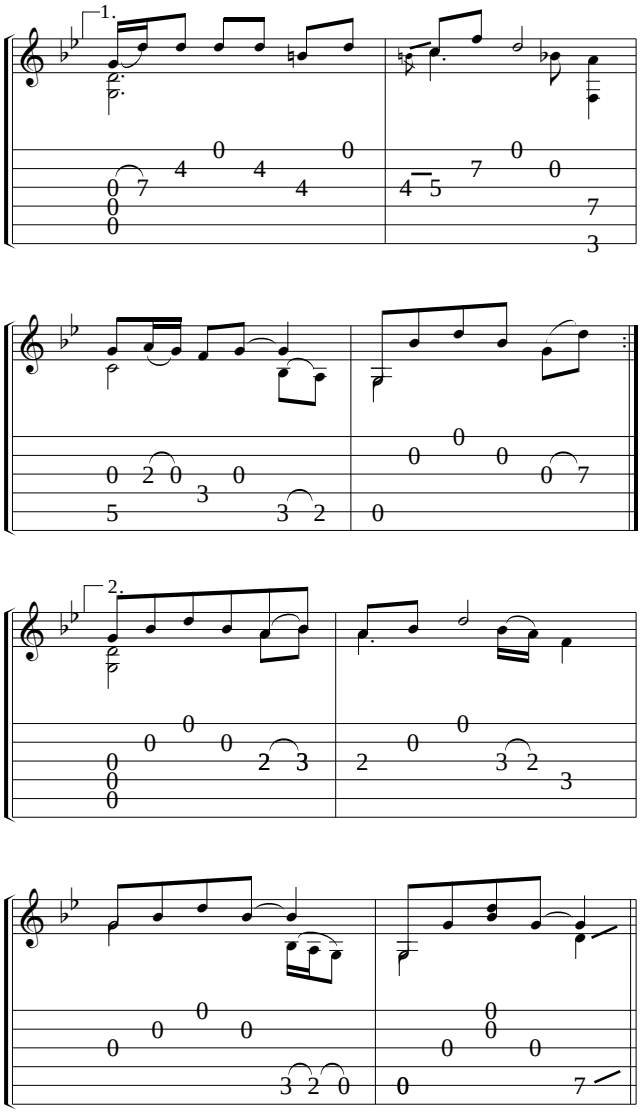

2.
B




har.

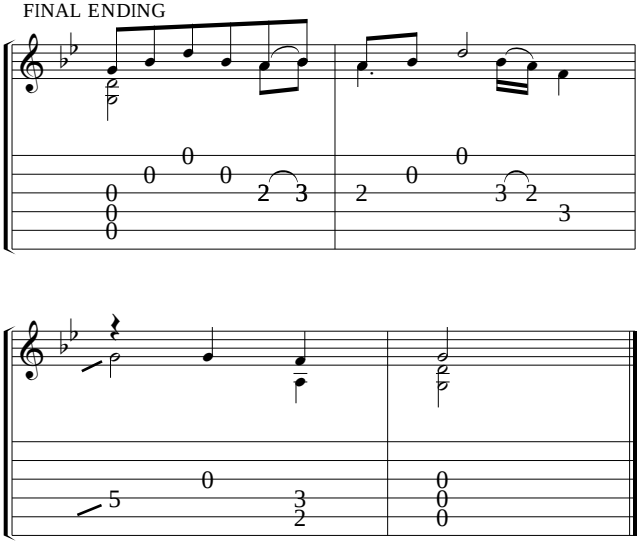




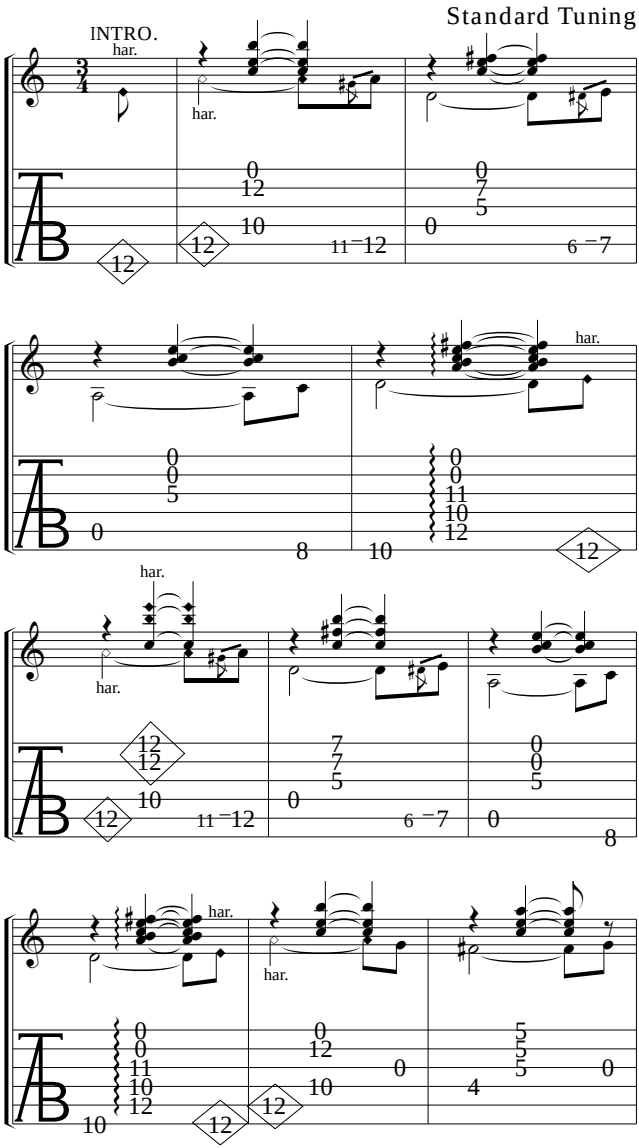

1.
2.

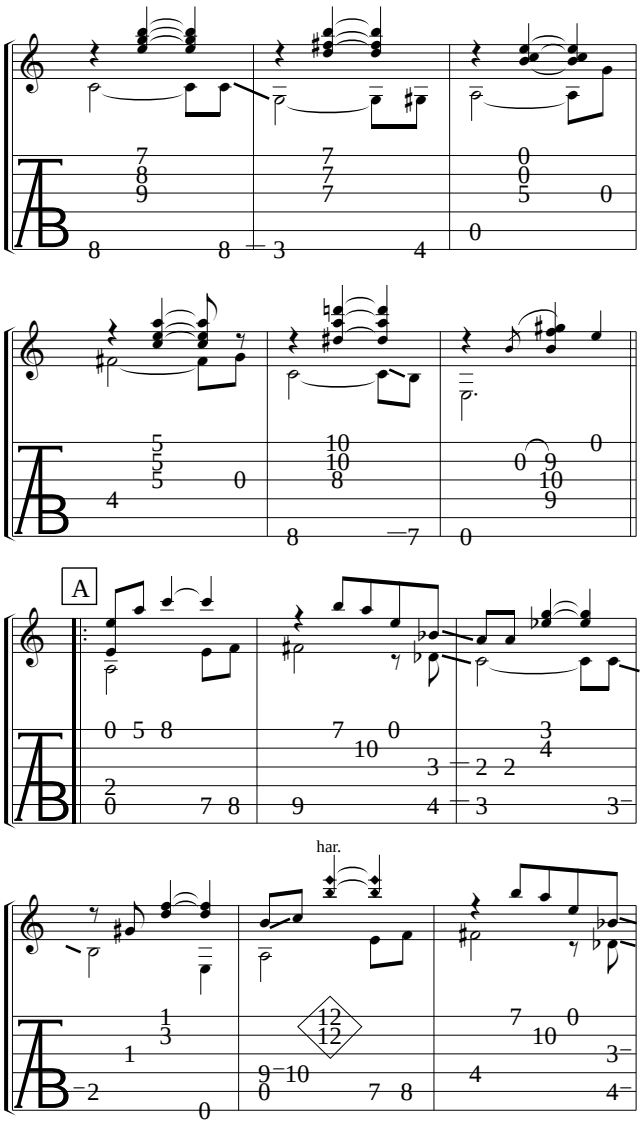
Repeat A once, then B once.

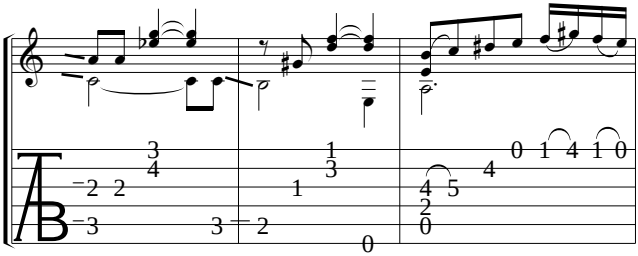
FINAL ENDING

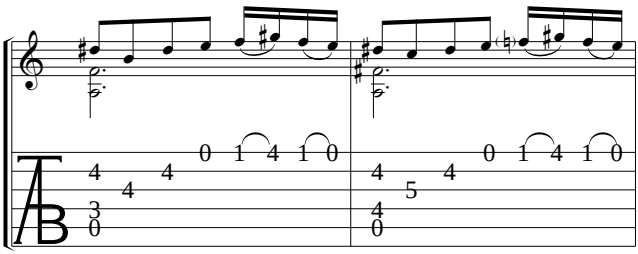


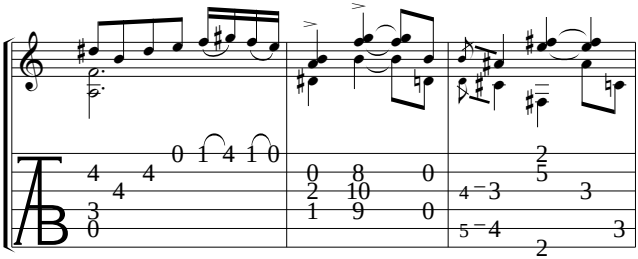
Little Niles

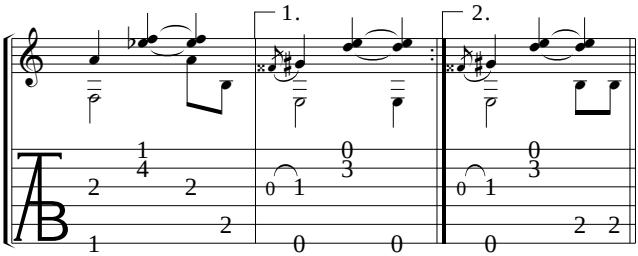


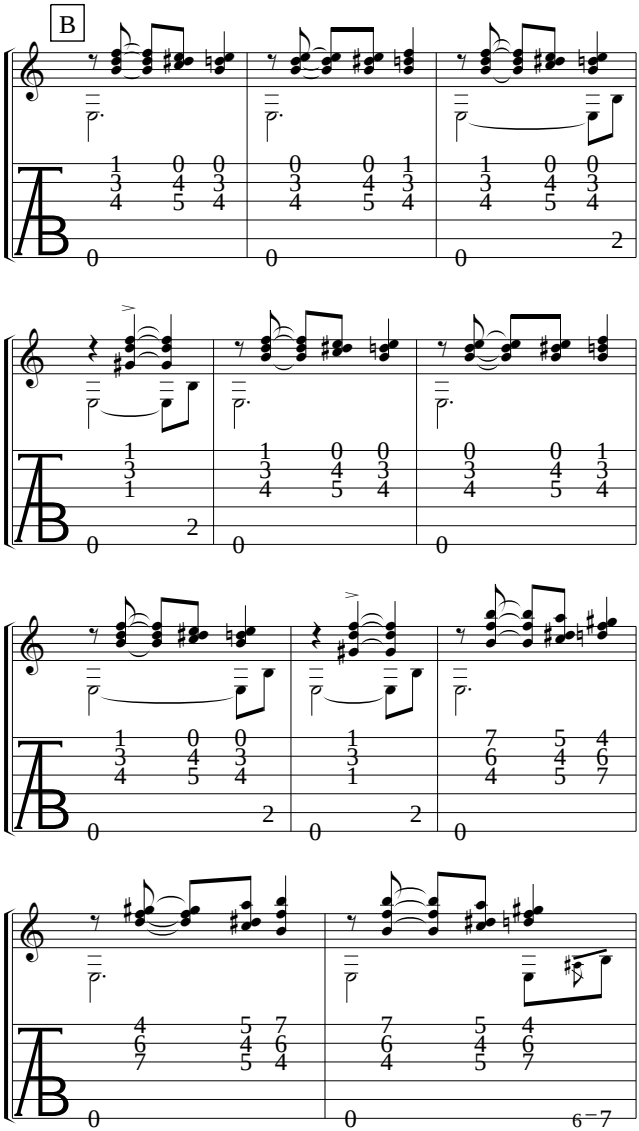

A
har.

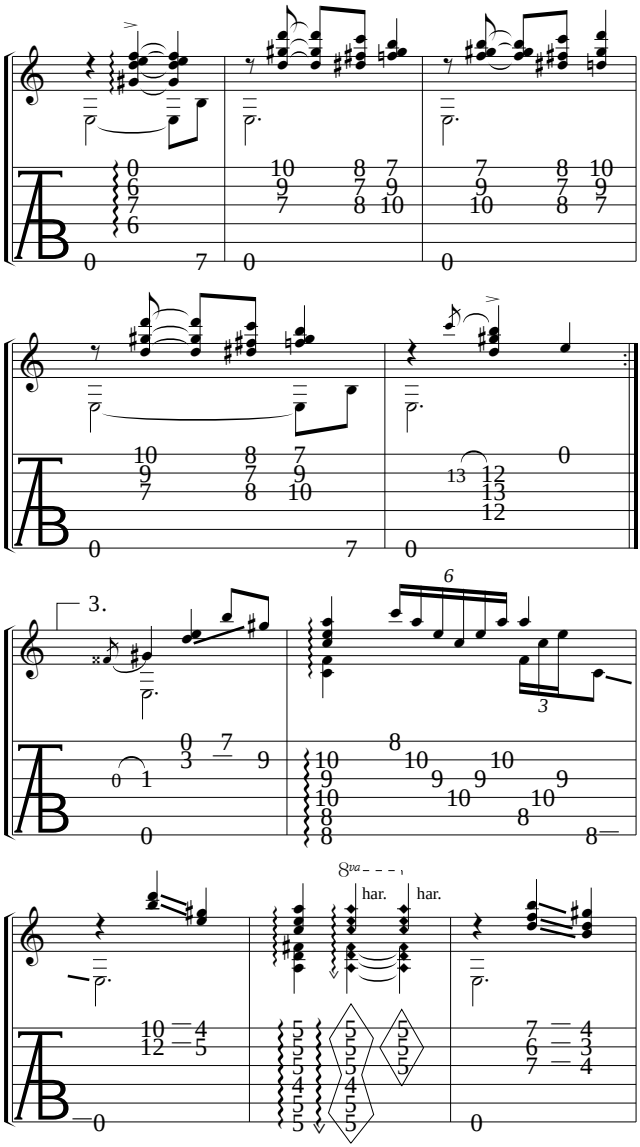


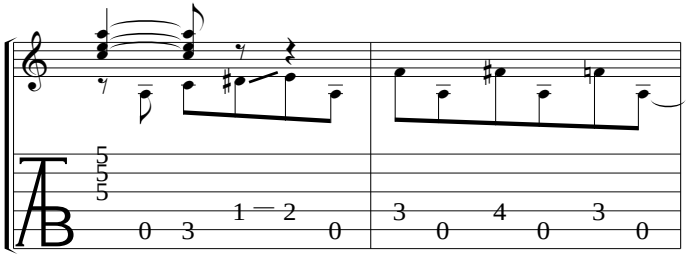





1.
2.


B


3.
har.
har.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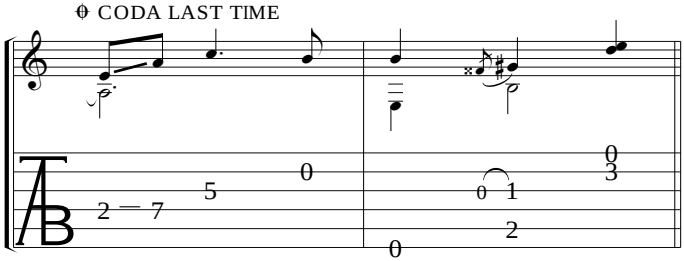
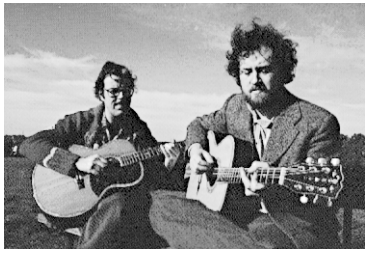
3 0 4 0 3 0


CODA LAST TIME
2 — 7 5 0
0 1 0 2 0 3

This 90 minute video captures thirty years of music by the brilliant John Renbourn. It follows him from the legendary London basement club 'Les Cousins' to his work with Bert Jansch and their group Pentangle to his traditional/medieval adventures with The John Renbourn Group and to his duet performances with Stefan Gross-man. As well as playing with others, John has also constantly been touring solo. This video chronicles his evolving growth as one of today's foremost acoustic guitar masters.



Robert Palmer writing in The New York Times said it best: "John Renbourn plays a lot of English, Scottish and Irish traditional music, and he plays it surpassingly well, with a robust sound and buoyant rhythm. But he is also an eclectic who is liable to throw in jazz pieces, revamped soul music and whatever strikes his fancy. He brandishes a haunting technique, but by and large he does not use it to daunt. His music is first of all a music of feeling."

ENGLAND, 1965 I Know My Rider, Bert & John Rehearsing ENGLAND, 1968 (w. Pentangle) Travelling Song, Let No Man Steal Your Thyme ENGLAND, 1971 (w. Pentangle) In Time ENGLAND, 1974 Blues In A, Rosslyn ITALY, 1977 Medley: Trotto/ The English Dance, Whitehouse Blues U.S.A., 1981 (w. The John Renbourn Group) The Fair Flower Of Northumberland, Medley: Pavane/Tourdion U.S.A., 1982 (w. Stefan Grossman) Candyman, Goodbye Porkpie Hat SWEDEN, 1988 (w. Stefan Grossman) 'Round Midnight CANADA, 1990 Medley: Abide With Me/Great Dreams From Heaven NORTHERN IRELAND, 1992 Sweet Potato SPAIN, 1993 Lord Franklin, Little Niles U.S.A., 1995 Young Man Who Wouldn't Sow Corn, Medley: The Lament For Owen Roe O'Neil & Mist Covered Mountains Of Home, Medley: The Wedding/Cherry

Running time: 90 minutes • B/W and Color
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