

# What's Between the Lines

## SWEET HOME ALABAMA



**S**outhern rock's preeminent band, Lynyrd Skynyrd, hit paydirt in 1974 with their Top 10 single, "Sweet Home Alabama," from the album *Second Helping*. Hot on the heels of the band's debut, *Pronounced Leh-Nerd Skin-Nerd* (which contains yet another guitar rock classic, "Free Bird"), the proud song about the South helped to catapult them to a well-deserved place in rock history. A tight, rocking outfit, Lynyrd Skynyrd featured the three-guitar onslaught of Gary Rossington, Allen Collins, and Ed King (who was later replaced by Steve Gaines) and was fronted by charismatic lead singer Ronnie Van Zant. They rode a wave of immense popularity until their charter plane went down in a

Mississippi swamp in 1977, claiming the lives of several people, including band leader Van Zant and guitarist Steve Gaines. "Sweet Home Alabama" defines the very essence of Lynyrd Skynyrd. The finely crafted arrangement of this (basically) three-chord song reveals the group's subtle, distinctive approach—what Skynyrd bassist Leon Wilkeson so aptly described as "the art of complex simplicity."

### THE INTRO AND VERSE RIFFS

The opening measures of "Sweet Home Alabama" represent one of Southern rock's finest moments. A clean-toned, honking Stratocaster (Gtr. 1) spews out the famous

point riff that supports Gtr. 1 throughout the verses. This is Lynyrd Skynyrd at its best: intricately crafted guitar parts that complement each other perfectly.

### THE INTERLUDE AND CHORUS RIFFS

In the two interlude sections (between the first and second verses, and after the main guitar solo) Gtrs. 1 and 2 whip out yet another catchy riff. Here, the basic three-chord progression is retained but elaborated upon with a more linear approach. Both guitars play in unison, with the exception of the 12th-fret, "scooped" (quick dips with the whammy bar) harmonics played by Gtr. 1.

The same basic D-C-G chord progression is used for the structure of the chorus, too, but Gtrs. 1 and 2 mold it into an entirely different riff. Stripping the note choices down to only the root, 5th, and 6th of each chord [Fig. 2], they weave a syncopated 16th- and 8th-note rhythm across a cycling two-measure pattern, with Gtr. 1 adding hammer-on and pull-off embellishments over the G chords. In the final bar of the chorus, the band accents the chords F and C on beats 3 and 4, one of the very few change-ups in the relentless D-C-G chord progression.

### THE SOLOS AND FILLS

The first guitar solo comes at the end of the first chorus and is a gem in itself. Relying heavily on G major pentatonic [Fig. 3], a scale common to Southern and country rock, it begins with a bluesy bend, then slinks and slithers its way through the four-bar section with the help of passing tones (C, B $\flat$ , and D $\sharp$ ). The longer main solo features some classic Skynyrd, rapid-fire pull-offs in bars 5 through 7, and keyboard player Billy Powell gets to exercise his chops on the outro section.

Not to be overlooked are the fills that add flavor to certain key sections of the tune. As an introduction to each chorus, the entire band plays a G major pentatonic line in unison [Fig. 4]. Gtr. 3 says some tasty goodbyes in the interlude section following the main solo, then makes another appearance between the last two choruses. These are just some of the well-placed subtleties that add sparkle and flair to this "simple," timeless piece of music. **G**

Fig. 1 Main Riff Chords

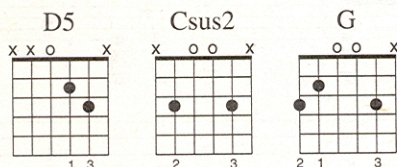


Fig. 2 Chorus Chords

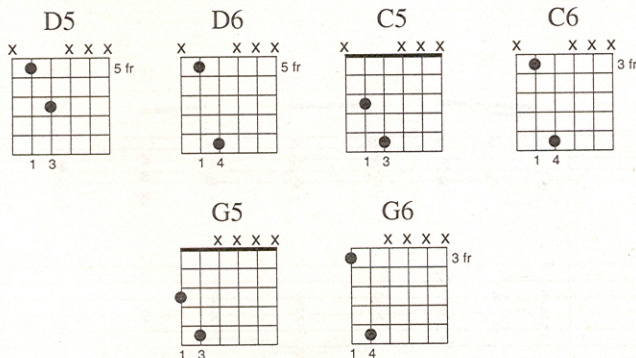


Fig. 3

### G major pentatonic

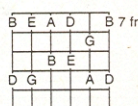


Fig. 4







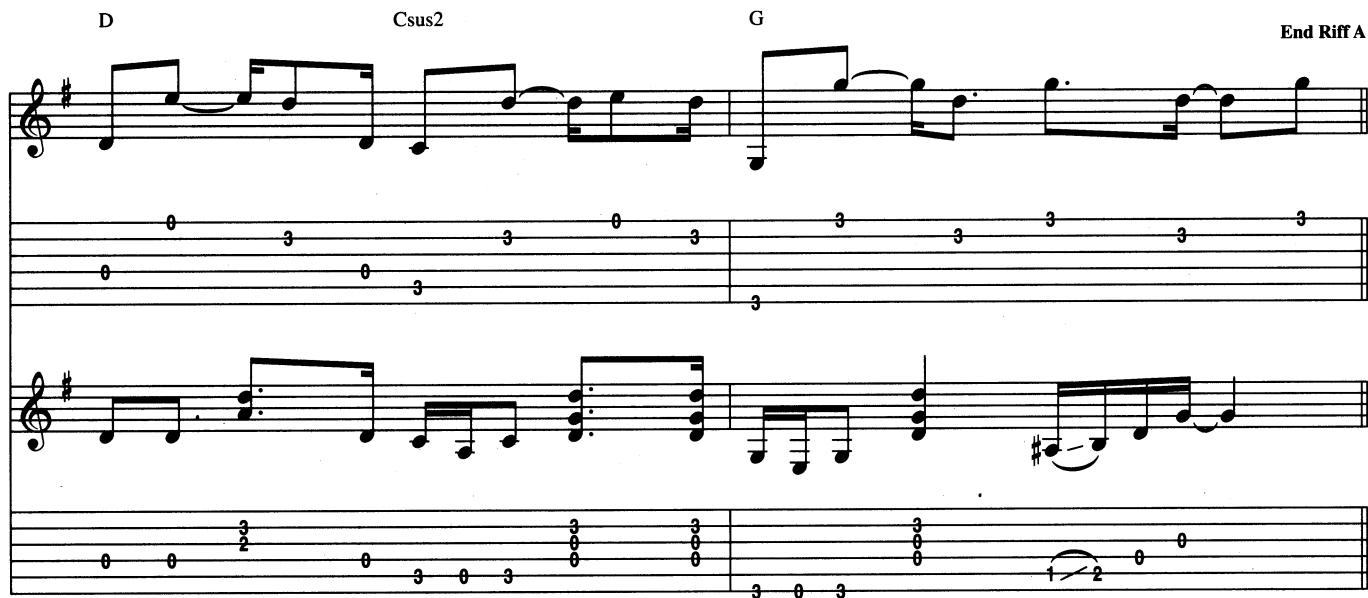
# Sweet Home Alabama

D Riff A Csus2 G

let ring throughout



D Csus2 G End Riff A



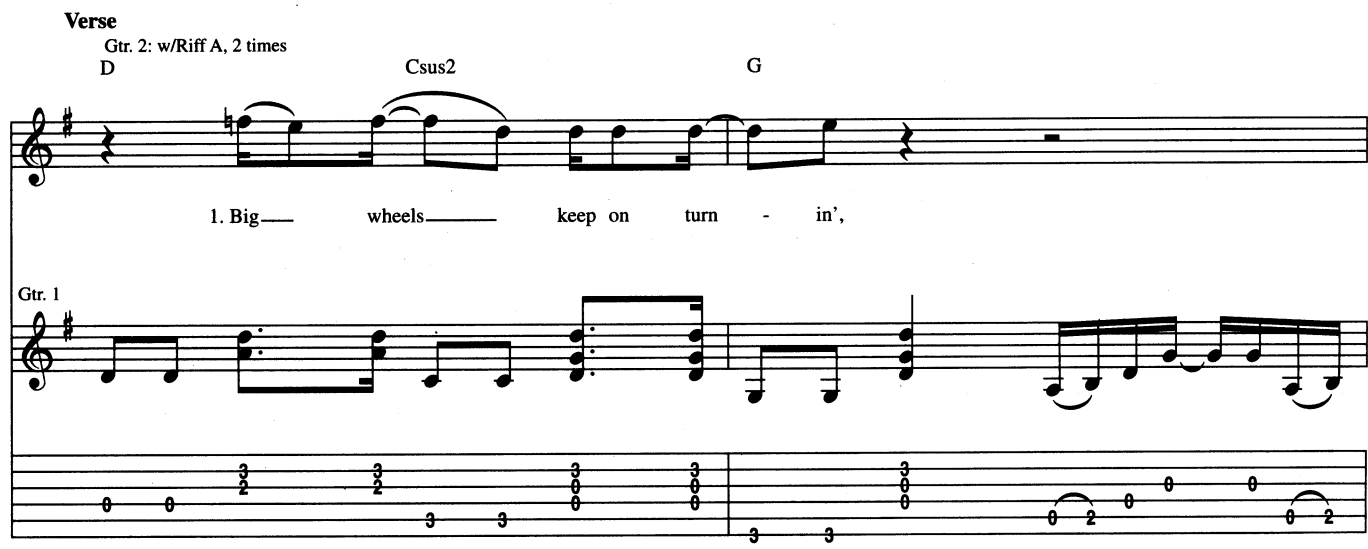
Verse

Gr. 2: w/Riff A, 2 times

D Csus2 G

1. Big — wheels — keep on turn - in',

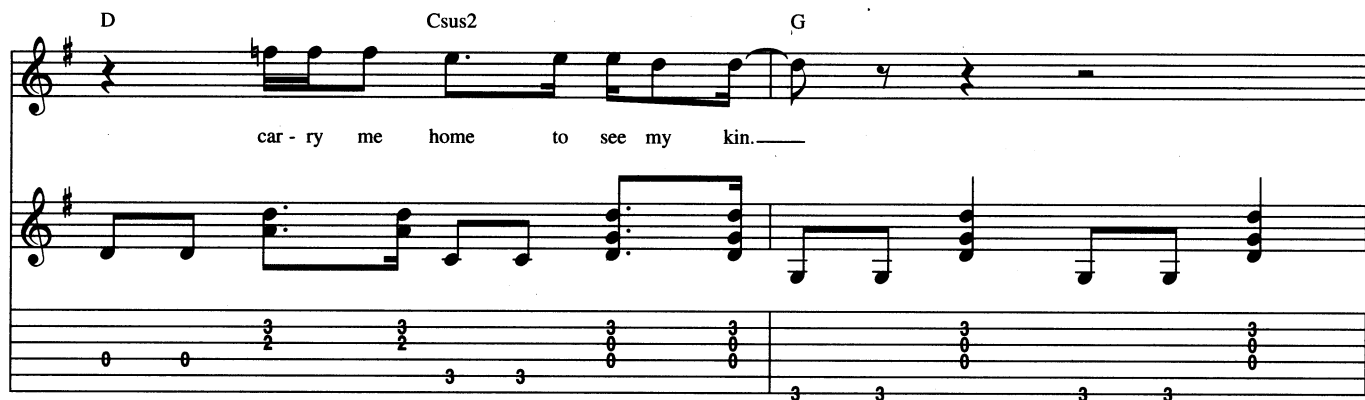
Gr. 1



# Sweet Home Alabama

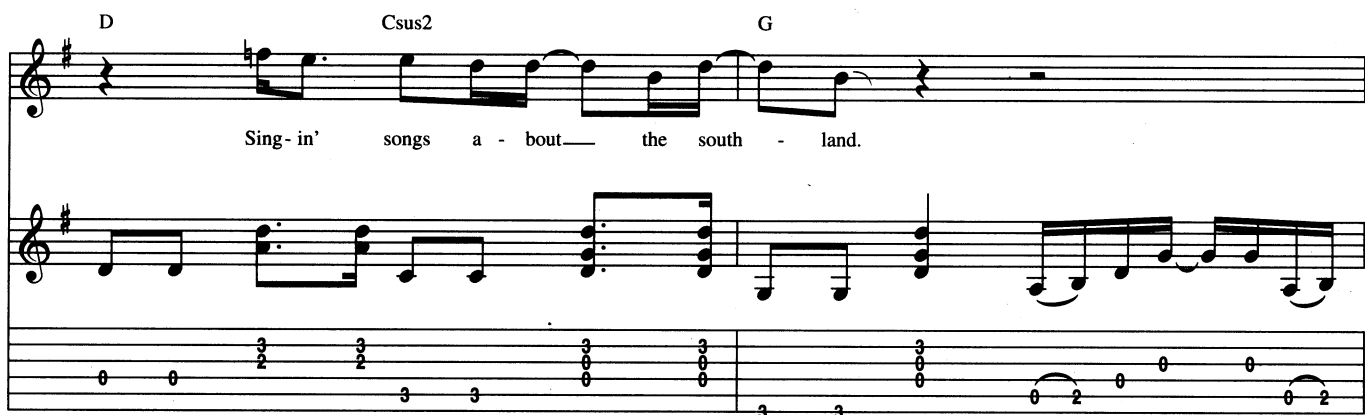
D Csus2 G

car - ry me home to see my kin. —



D Csus2 G

Sing - in' songs a - bout — the south - land.



D Csus2 G

I miss Al - a - bam - y once a - gain — and I think it's a sin, — yes.



## Interlude

D C G

Riff B1

Gtr. 2

w/bar Harm. -1/2 -1/2 -1/2



Riff B

Gtr. 1



# Sweet Home Alabama

D

C

G

End Riff B1

The first system of musical notation for 'Sweet Home Alabama'. It consists of a guitar staff (treble clef, key of D major) and a bass staff (bass clef). The guitar staff contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, and a final chord. The bass staff contains a bass line with fret numbers (7, 8, 9, 7, 7, 9, 5, 7, 5, 5, 7) and a final chord. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

End Riff B

The second system of musical notation. It continues the guitar and bass parts from the first system. The guitar staff includes a melodic line and a final chord. The bass staff includes a bass line with fret numbers (7, 8, 9, 7, 7, 9, 5, 7, 5, 5, 7) and a final chord. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

Verse

D

Csus2

G

The Verse section of the musical notation. It features a guitar staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a bass line. The guitar staff includes a melodic line and a final chord. The bass staff includes a bass line with fret numbers (7, 8, 9, 7, 7, 9, 5, 7, 5, 5, 7) and a final chord. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

2. Well, I heard Mis-ter Young sing a - bout — her.  
(Oo. \_\_\_\_\_)

Riff C

The Riff C section of the musical notation. It features a guitar staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a bass line. The guitar staff includes a melodic line and a final chord. The bass staff includes a bass line with fret numbers (0, 3, 3, 0, 3, 3, 3, 5, 3, 5, 3) and a final chord. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

Rhy. Fig. 1

The Rhythm Figure 1 section of the musical notation. It features a guitar staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a bass line. The guitar staff includes a melodic line and a final chord. The bass staff includes a bass line with fret numbers (0, 0, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 2, 0, 2) and a final chord. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

# Sweet Home Alabama

D Csus2 G

Well, I heard ole Neil put her down.  
Oo.

D Csus2 G

Well, I hope Neil Young will re-mem-ber  
Oo.

# Sweet Home Alabama

D Csus2 G

a south-ern man— don't need him a - round an - y - how.  
South-ern man— don't need him a - round.)

End Riff C

0 3 0 3 3 3 0 2 0 2 0 2

End Rhy. Fig. 1

0 0 2 2 3 3 0 0 0 0 0 2 0 2 0 2

% Chorus

D5 D6 D5 C5 C6 C5 G5 G6 G5 C5

Sweet home Al - a - bam - a,

Rhy. Fig. 2A

P.M. P.M.

7 7 9 7 5 5 7 5 5 5 X 5 7 X 5 X 5

Rhy. Fig. 2

P.M. P.M.

7 7 9 7 5 5 7 5 5 7 X 5 7 0 2 0 2 0 3 1/4

# Sweet Home Alabama

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system shows the vocal melody in treble clef with lyrics underneath. The second system shows the piano accompaniment in treble clef with 'P.M.' (Pianissimo) markings. The third system shows the guitar accompaniment in treble clef with 'P.M.' markings. The guitar part includes a fretboard diagram at the bottom of the system.

**System 1: Vocal Melody**

Chords: D5, D6 D5, C5, C6 C5, G5, C5

Lyrics: where the skies are so blue. —

**System 2: Piano Accompaniment**

Markings: P.M., P.M.

**System 3: Guitar Accompaniment**

Markings: P.M., P.M.

**Fretboard Diagram**

The fretboard diagram shows the first six frets of the guitar. The notes are: 1st fret (F), 2nd fret (G), 3rd fret (A), 4th fret (B), 5th fret (C), 6th fret (D).

*To Coda 1* 

D5 D6 D5 C5 C6 C5 G5 G6 G5 C5

Sweet home Al - a - bam - a,

End Rhy. Fig. 2A

P.M.

End Rhy. Fig. 2

P.M.

1/4



# Sweet Home Alabama

D5

D6 D5

C5

C6 C5

Gtr. 3: w/Fill 1, 2nd time  
G5

G6

F

C

To Coda 2

Lord, I'm com - in' home to you.

Gtr. 3 (slight dist.)

*f*

full.

15

12

15

Gtr. 2

P.M.

P.M.

Gtr. 1

P.M.

P.M.

Fill 1

Gtr. 3

full

1/2

T  
A  
B

8

9

10

9

8

8

8

7

7

9

7

# Sweet Home Alabama

## Guitar Solo

D

Csus2

G

Gtr. 3

First system of the guitar solo for Gtr. 3. The staff shows a melodic line with a D note, a wavy line for a bend, and a Csus2 chord. The fretboard diagram below shows the notes: 14, 15, 10, 10, 10, 8, 11, 10, 8, 10, 9.

Gtrs. 1 & 2

Second system of the guitar solo for Gtrs. 1 & 2. The staff shows a melodic line with a D note, a wavy line for a bend, and a Csus2 chord. The fretboard diagram below shows the notes: 0, 0, 2, 2, 3, 3, 0, 0, 3, 3, 0, 0.

Third system of the guitar solo for Gtr. 3. The staff shows a melodic line with a D note, a wavy line for a bend, and a Csus2 chord. The fretboard diagram below shows the notes: 10, 7, 8, 9, 8, 10, 9, 8, 10, (10), 8, 9, 7, 9, 8, 7, 9, 10, 9, 5, 0, (0).

Fourth system of the guitar solo for Gtrs. 1 & 2. The staff shows a melodic line with a D note, a wavy line for a bend, and a Csus2 chord. The fretboard diagram below shows the notes: 0, 0, 2, 2, 3, 3, 0, 0, 3, 3, 0, 0.

## Verse

Gtr. 3 tacet

D

Csus2

G

F

C

3. In Bir- ming - ham— they love the gov - 'nor, boo, boo,

Gtr. 2

First system of the guitar solo for Gtr. 2. The staff shows a melodic line with a D note, a wavy line for a bend, and a Csus2 chord. The fretboard diagram below shows the notes: 0, 3, 3, 0, 3, 3, 0, 3, 3, 0, 3, 3.

Gtr. 1

Second system of the guitar solo for Gtr. 1. The staff shows a melodic line with a D note, a wavy line for a bend, and a Csus2 chord. The fretboard diagram below shows the notes: 0, 0, 2, 2, 3, 3, 0, 0, 3, 3, 0, 0, 5, 7, 5, 5, 7, 5.