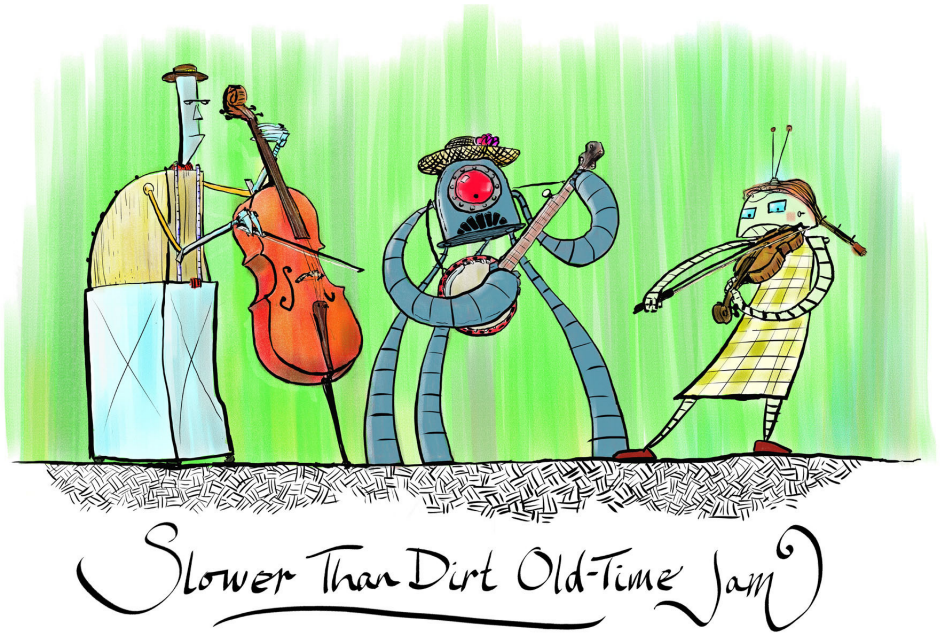

Slower Than Dirt Tunebook

This tunebook contains a core repertoire of tunes to be played at the Slower Than Dirt slow/beginner old-time jam in Seattle. Tunes from this book will be played at every Slower Than Dirt jam; which ones will be announced in advance each month on the related mailing list and web site.

Tools used in the preparation of this tunebook include abcm2ps, EasyABC and LaTeX. The idea came from Paul Hardy's tunebooks at `http://www.pghardy.net/concertina/tunebooks/`, and assistance with ABC formatting came from Pete Showman and his South Bay Old-Time Jam transcriptions. There is a GitHub repository of files at `https://github.com/rjl20/abc-tunebook` containing the source code for this book.

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In practice, thanks to the murky state of copyright as it applies to music, this doesn't mean an awful lot. **The license applies to the transcriptions only, not to the underlying compositions.** If you want to do something with sheet music you find here, you're still on your own for making sure it's legal for you to do it. Some tunes we think are in the public domain might not be. If it turns out that we didn't get permission from a composer or publisher to include a transcription of their tune here, our transcription being CC-licensed doesn't mean that you can print our transcription in your book. It just means that we won't be the ones coming after you for royalties and/or penalties. Even if we do get permission from a composer to publish one of their tunes here, that doesn't necessarily mean you can record it on an album or perform it in public without paying them a royalty.

If you'd like to use transcriptions or text from Slower Than Dirt but are unable to comply with the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, please use the contact form at `http://slowerthandirt.org/contact/` to let us know what you'd like to do.

If you are a composer or musician whose intellectual property is being used here without permission, please let us know by emailing `copyright@slowerthandirt.org` we'd really like to know when something that we think of as "traditional" is actually a recent composition, so we can get permission and give appropriate credit or remove the tune as necessary.

Neither of the founders of Slower Than Dirt is a lawyer. None of this is legal advice. For a canned rant about how the Copyright Act of 1976 outlawed folk music, talk to Josh using either of the contact methods above.

Why a tune book?

Some people will tell you that sheet music has no place in old-time. These people are wrong. I can think of a few tunes popular in jam sessions and at square dances right now which are almost certainly out in the world because someone found them in an old manuscript, tried them out, and liked them enough to keep playing them. With no recordings and nobody passing the tune along through direct transmission, these tunes would be lost if they hadn't been written down and then read and reinterpreted later.

That's not what this book is for. But it's not axiomatic that old-time and sheet music are at odds.

Some people will tell you that you can't learn a tune from sheet music, because the essence of a tune is in the nuances of the performance–the subtle details and variations that sheet music can't capture. They're not wrong, exactly, because it's true that it's very difficult to capture much of the nuance of a performance in standard notation. But I think they misunderstand what sheet music is for, what a musician's relationship to sheet music is. A musician is not a machine for turning sheet music into sound. We have actual machines for that. When I'm reading a new-to-me tune from sheet music, I'm bringing my understanding of what this kind of music usually sounds like, or how I like it to sound, with me. I am *interpreting* the sheet music, not *executing* it. I'm probably not going to play the tune the way you learned it from Uncle "Vern" Hotchkiss, but this isn't an imitation contest; that's ok.

On the other hand, there is definitely a danger to thinking that any particular book's version of a tune is authoritatively "how the tune goes", or in always trying to play it exactly how it appears, note for note. Once you've learned a tune, sheet music can be a useful reminder of how the tune goes if you get lost, but learning a tune involves making it your own. Play it how it sounds in your head, not how it looks on the page. (If you're at a jam, make sure to pay attention to whether how it sounds in your head works with how the tune leader is playing it.) If you're reading it off the page every time, think about whether you're actually learning and playing the tune, or if you're making yourself into a machine for turning sheet music into sound. There's nothing wrong with sight-reading, but part of the point of this jam is for people to learn and practice a new way of learning.

So what is this book for? Learning music by ear is a different skill than learning from sheet music. And most jams, including Slower Than Dirt, aren't really teaching sessions, where a tune gets broken into parts and taught phrase by phrase. When you're a beginning musician and haven't yet picked up the skill of learning a tune on the fly, going to a jam where you don't know any of the tunes can be frustrating. So this book contains a core repertoire from which some number of tunes will be picked each month and definitely played at the Slower Than Dirt jam. If you want, you can practice some of them at home in advance and know that you'll be able to play along.

Some of the transcriptions in this book attempt to capture the essence of an individual performance, while some of them are stripped down to what I consider the bones of the tune. We may not play a tune exactly as it's written here at the jam, so you can think of this book as more a cheat sheet than Holy Writ. How I lead a tune at the jam will at least resemble the version here, though, so at least you won't run into the problem of "oh, this is the other tune with that name".

On learning by ear

I don't know how other people do it, but I can tell you what worked for me. I listened to a ton of old-time music. Constantly. On the bus, walking around, at home while catching up on facebook: all the time. For months. If I wasn't doing something else that required attention, I was probably listening to old-time music on headphones. I wasn't necessarily paying a lot of attention to the music, but it was a constant presence.

The first few months got me used to some of the musical conventions of old-time. I started being able to identify phrases or riffs I'd heard before in other tunes. I started being able to predict what general shape a tune might have. What those first months of listening got me was a basic understanding that I didn't get by growing up with that music all around me in my community. It got me familiarity.

Eventually, instead of listening to the entire collection on shuffle, I picked a dozen tunes I liked and put them in a playlist, and listened to nothing but them for a month. I must have listened to those dozen tunes a hundred times. Each. But by the end of that month, I could hear those tunes in my head. I could hum along. I hadn't set out to learn the tunes, at least not in a way I understood as intentional learning. But I knew those tunes. Not that I could play them on an instrument, but humming them was the important part.

Once you can hum a tune, you can compare what's happening with your instrument when you play it against what's happening in your head. It can be frustrating to know how a thing ought to work but not to

be able to make it happen, but that's a mechanical issue with your instrument and gets better with practice. Once I could hum the tunes from my playlist, and actually kind of play a couple of them on the fiddle, I picked another dozen tunes and made a new playlist and repeated the process.

I did this four or five times, listening only to a dozen or so tunes at a time until they were in my head enough that I could hum or whistle them. And patterns started to emerge. There were phrases that appeared across tunes, little ornaments that could be stacked in different ways to produce different effects. I started hearing the pieces the tunes were built from. It was like slowly discovering the shapes of a lego set. I could start swapping different blocks in and seeing how they worked. Meanwhile, I was practicing playing tunes from earlier in the cycle, building the actual fiddling skill.

I don't think I'm a particularly good fiddler still, but I think I may now be fairly decent at picking up a new tune, as long as it's in an idiom I've been immersing myself in. I'm not going to pick up a Cajun tune as quickly, or a Brazilian choro piece. For Appalachian and midwestern old-time, though, I can identify the building blocks of a tune I haven't heard before and assemble them in my head, rather than trying to take in a whole tune all at once or note by note. What I'm getting at is that, for me at least, "playing the fiddle" and "learning new tunes" are almost completely separate skills. I can't say that what's worked for me will work for you, but I do think that the critical piece is being able to hear a tune in your head before trying to play it on an instrument. Whatever gets you there, do that. And do it a lot, because just like learning the physical skill of playing an instrument, it's something that takes practice.

Tunes By Key

Key of A

Boatman 2
Boil Them Cabbage Down 3
Cripple Creek 4
Little Billie Wilson 7
McClanahan's March 8

Key of A Dorian

Abe's Retreat 1
Cluck Old Hen 4

Key of A Mixolydian

Old Joe Clark 10
Red-Haired Boy 11
Sandy Boys 12

Key of D

Angeline The Baker 1
Arkansas Traveler 2
Bonaparte Crossing the Rhine 3
Johnny Don't Get Drunk 6
Lily of the Valley 7
Mississippi Sawyer 8
Needle Case 9
Soldier's Joy 13
Spotted Pony 14
St. Anne's Reel 14
Swannanoa Waltz 15

Key of G

Golden Slippers 5
Jeff City 5
Nail That Catfish to a Tree 9
Possum up a Gum Stump 10
Red Wing 11
Seneca Square Dance 12
Shove That Pig's Foot... 13
Tombigbee Waltz 15
Turkey in the Straw 16

Tunes By Title

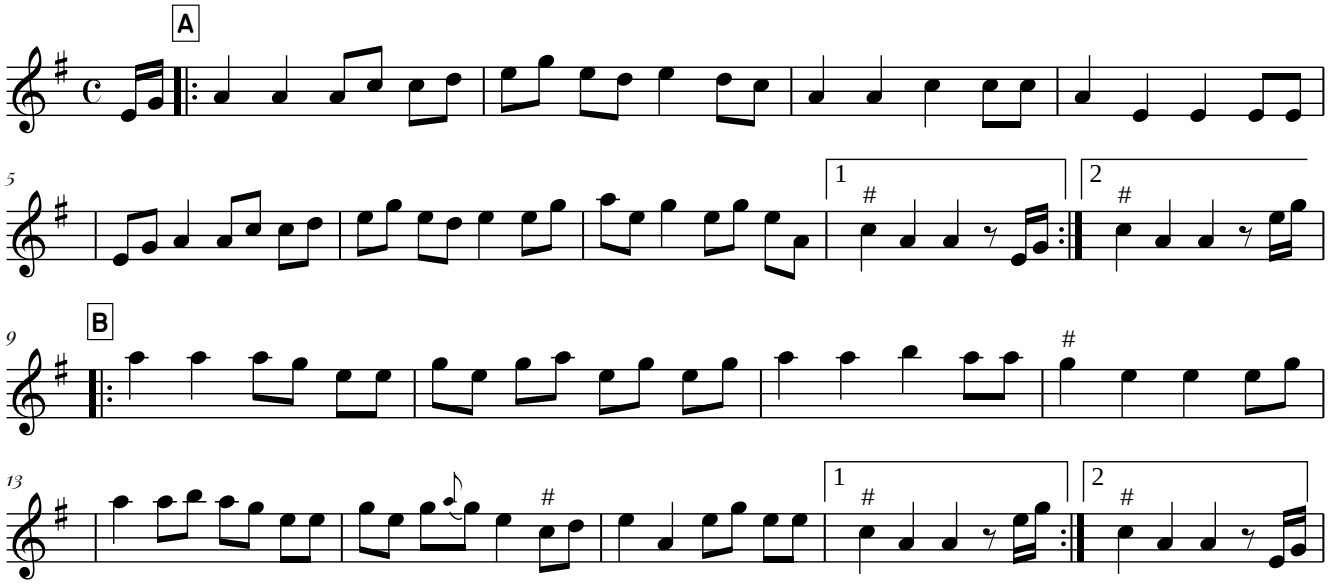
Abe's Retreat (A Dorian) 1
Angeline The Baker (D) 1
Arkansas Traveler (D) 2
Boatman (A) 2
Boil Them Cabbage Down (A) 3
Bonaparte Crossing the Rhine (D) 3
Cluck Old Hen (A Dorian) 4
Cripple Creek (A) 4
Golden Slippers (G) 5
Jeff City (G) 5
Johnny Don't Get Drunk (D) 6
Lily of the Valley (D) 7
Little Billie Wilson (A) 7
McClanahan's March (A) 8
Mississippi Sawyer (D) 8
Nail That Catfish to a Tree (G) 9
Needle Case (D) 9
Old Joe Clark (A Mixolydian) 10
Possum up a Gum Stump (G) 10
Red-Haired Boy (A Mixolydian) 11
Red Wing (G) 11
Sandy Boys (A Mixolydian) 12
Seneca Square Dance (G) 12
Shove That Pig's Foot... (G) 13
Soldier's Joy (D) 13
Spotted Pony (D) 14
St. Anne's Reel (D) 14
Swannanoa Waltz (D) 15
Tombigbee Waltz (G) 15
Turkey in the Straw (G) 16

Key: A Dorian

Abe's Retreat

The Battle of Bull Run

from Dwight Diller

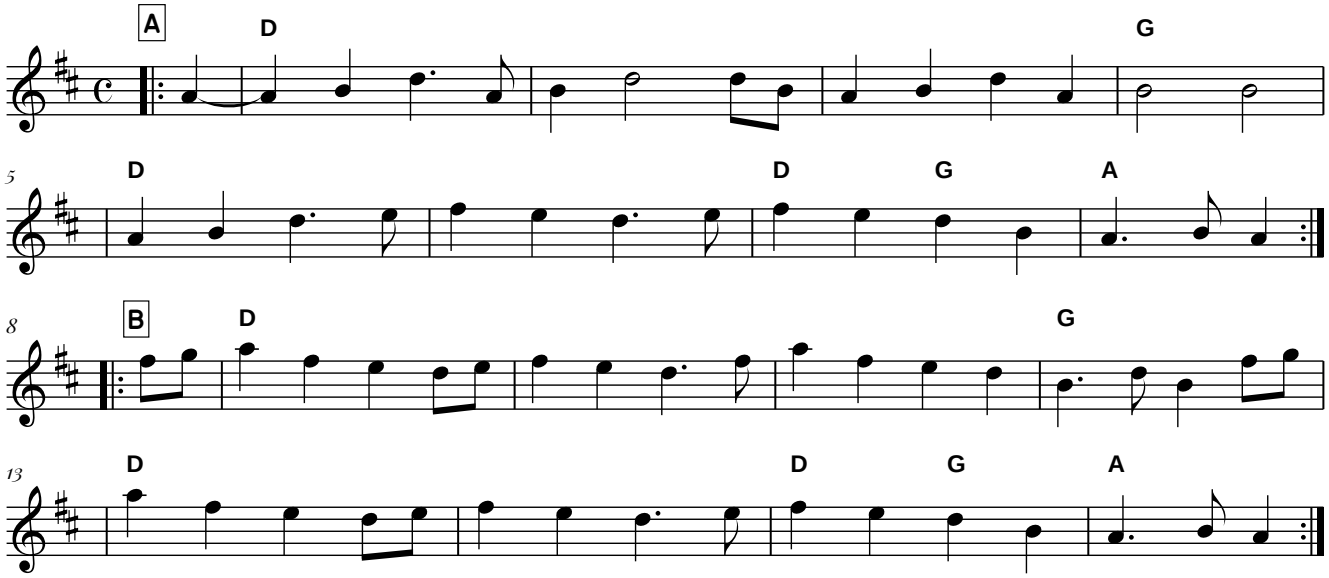


Aural Source: Dwight Diller, http://youtu.be/G6mQKPkQ8eE

Note: # notes marked with a hash above are kind of half-sharp, or slide from natural towards sharp.
Fiddle in cross-A tuning for drones and octave shifts. Standard tuning works, but isn't as fun.
This performance is all about the rhythm, so definitely watch the video.
NB: Dwight is playing it in cross-G; I've set it in A.

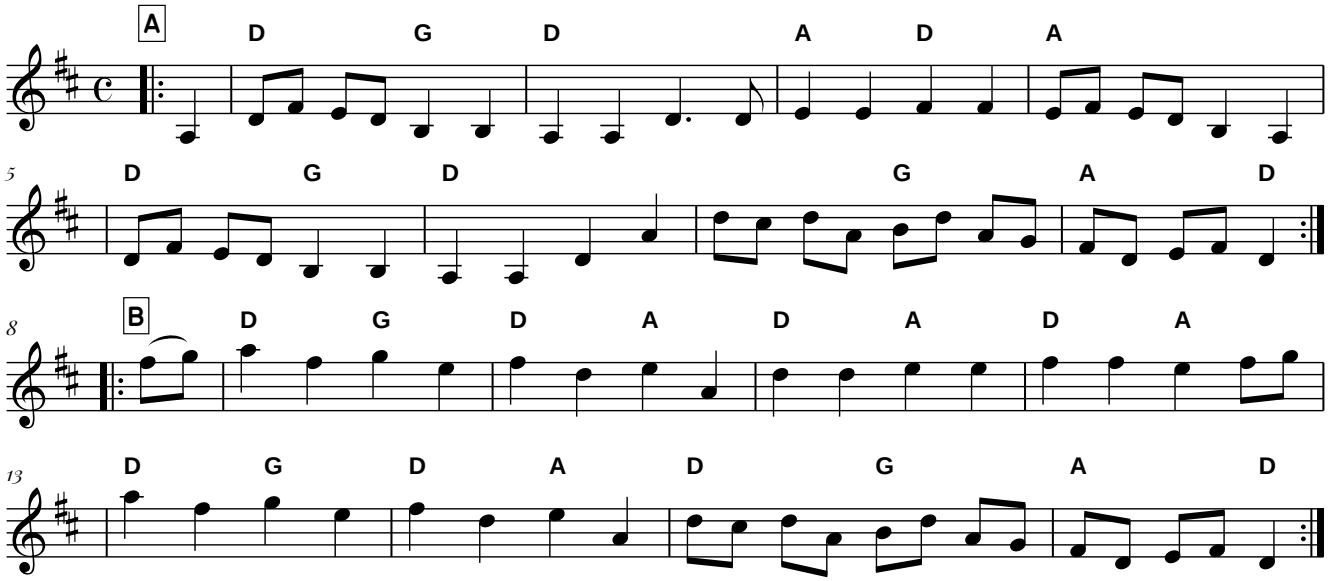
Key: D

Angeline The Baker



Key: D

Arkansas Traveler

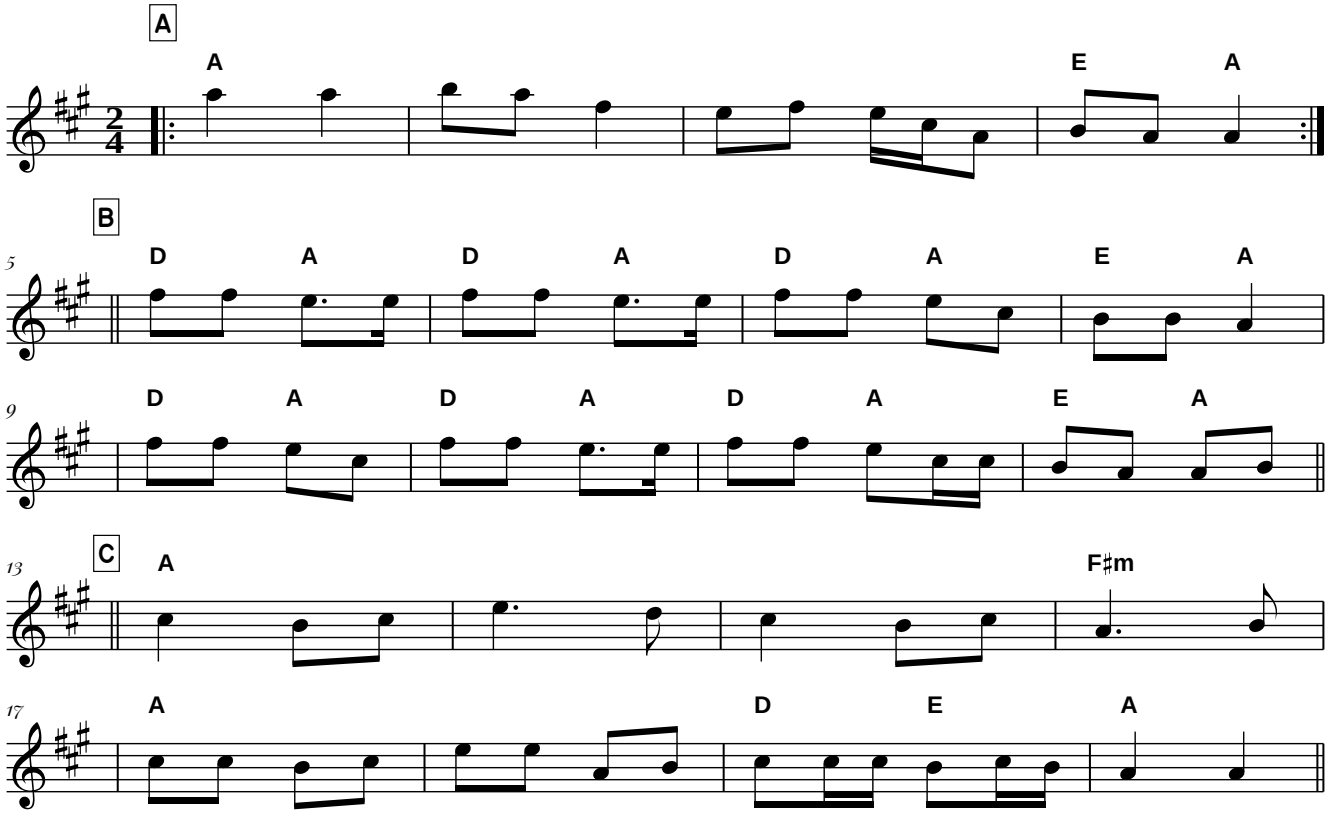


Key: A

Boatman

Dan Emmett (1843)

Dance, Boatman, Dance

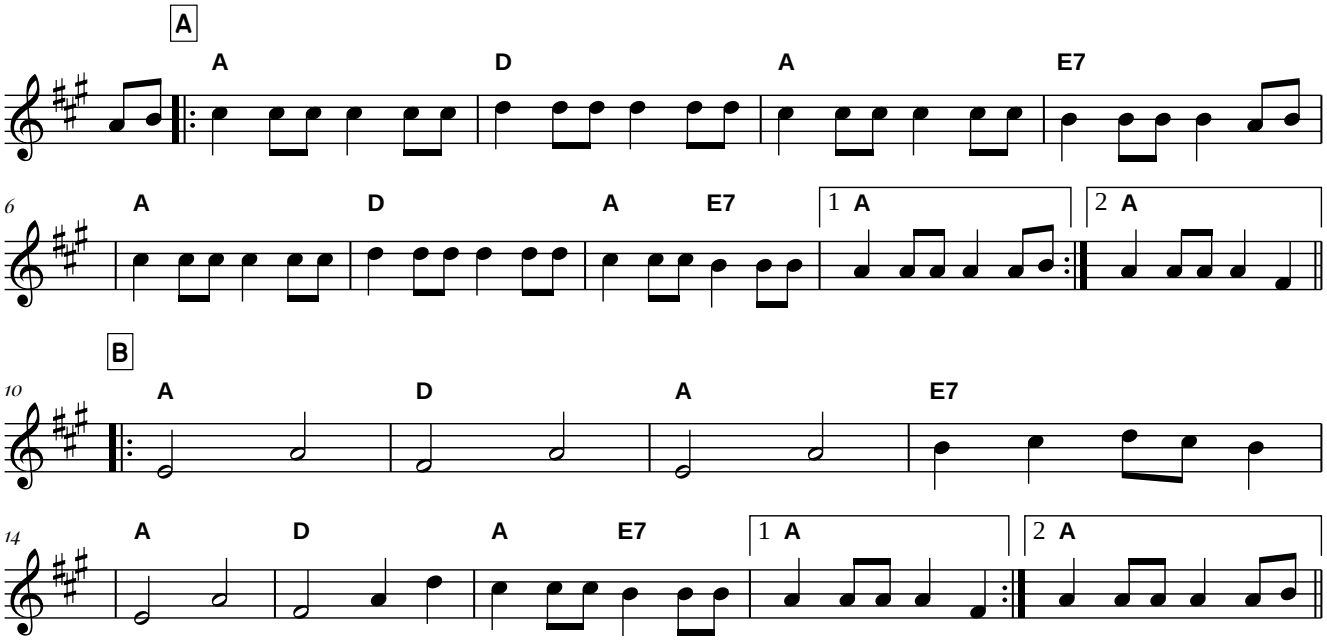


Aural Source: https://youtu.be/8lhS9xpyblI

Key: A

Boil Them Cabbage Down

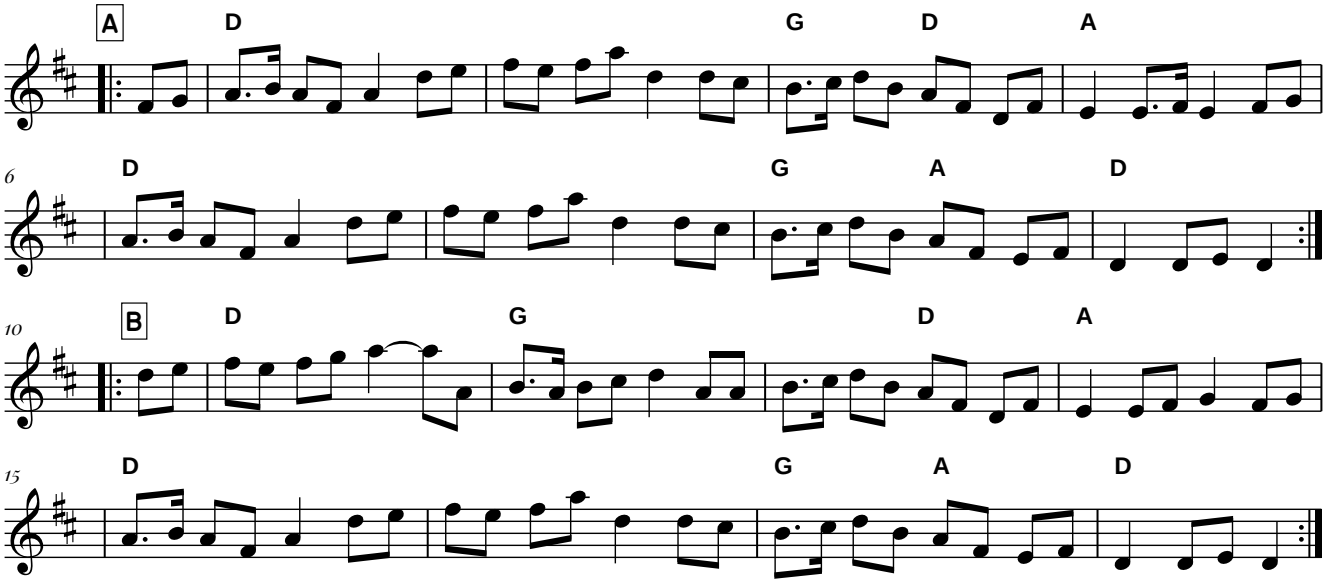
Bile 'Em Cabbage Down



Aural Source: Sarah Comer

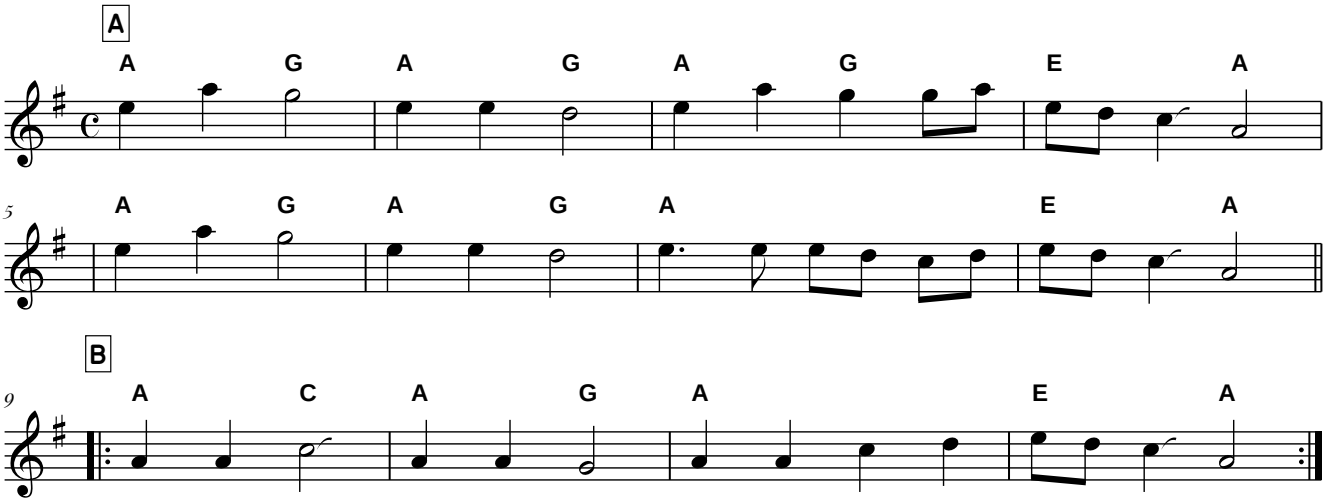
Key: D

Bonaparte Crossing the Rhine



Key: A Dorian

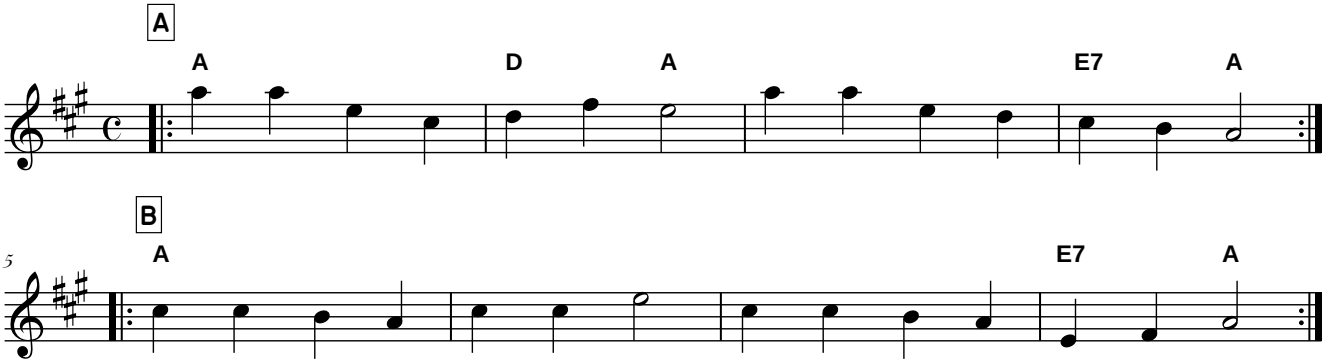
Cluck Old Hen



Aural Source: Sarah Comer
Note: The Cs with upwards slides indicate a kind of half-sharp, or slid up C.

Key: A

Cripple Creek

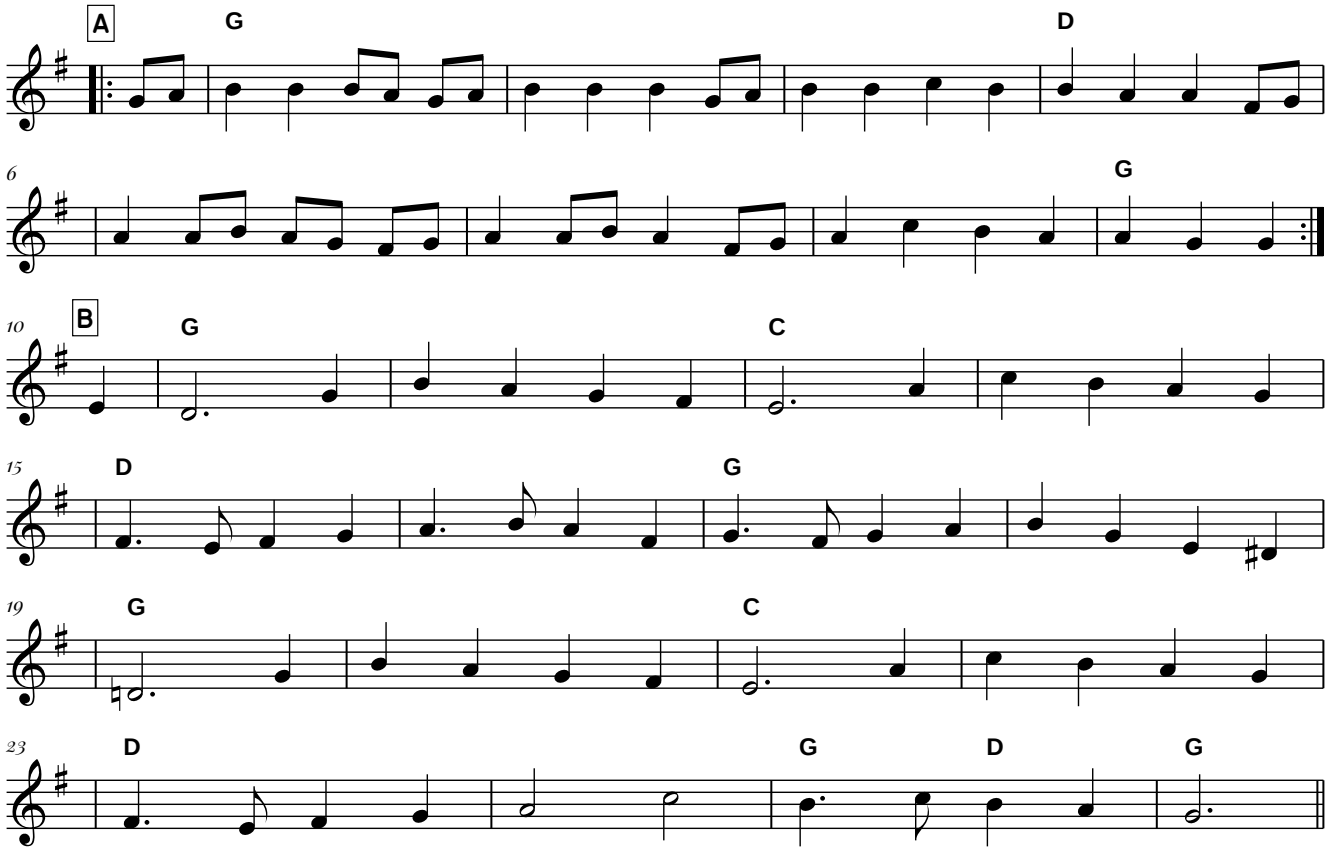


Note: There are a ton of melody variations for this tune. This is just one of them.

Key: G

Golden Slippers

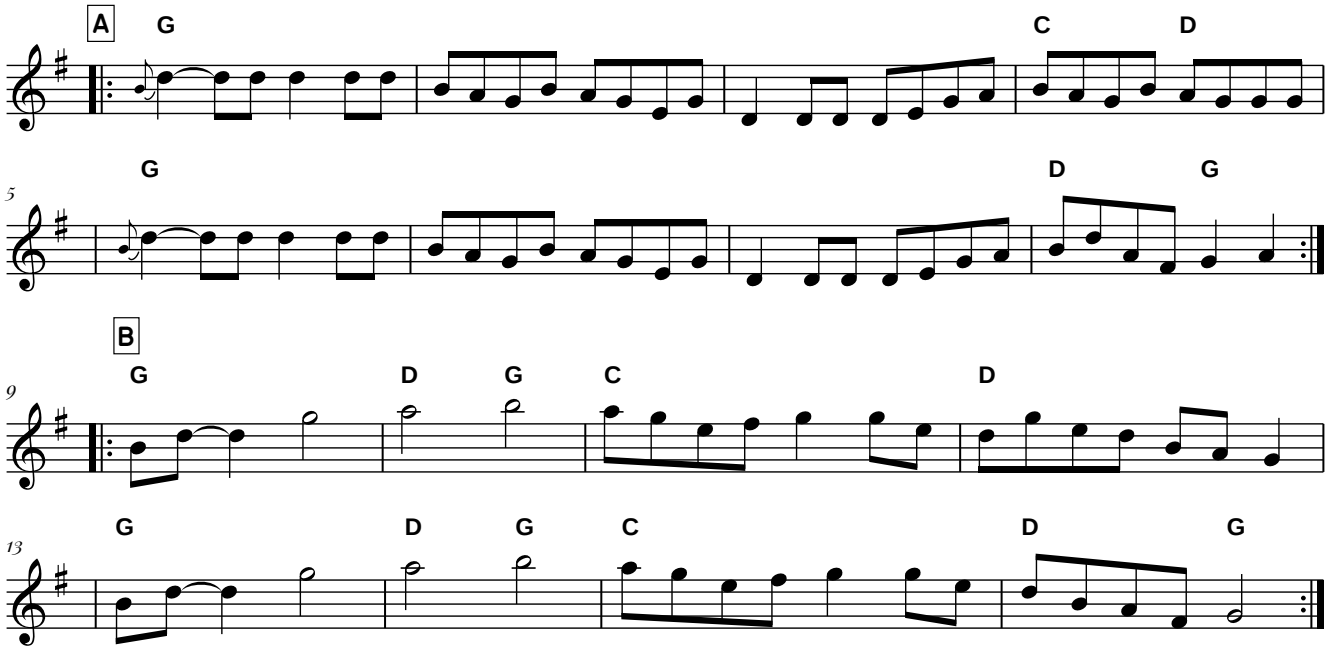
James A. Bland (1879)



Key: G

Jeff City

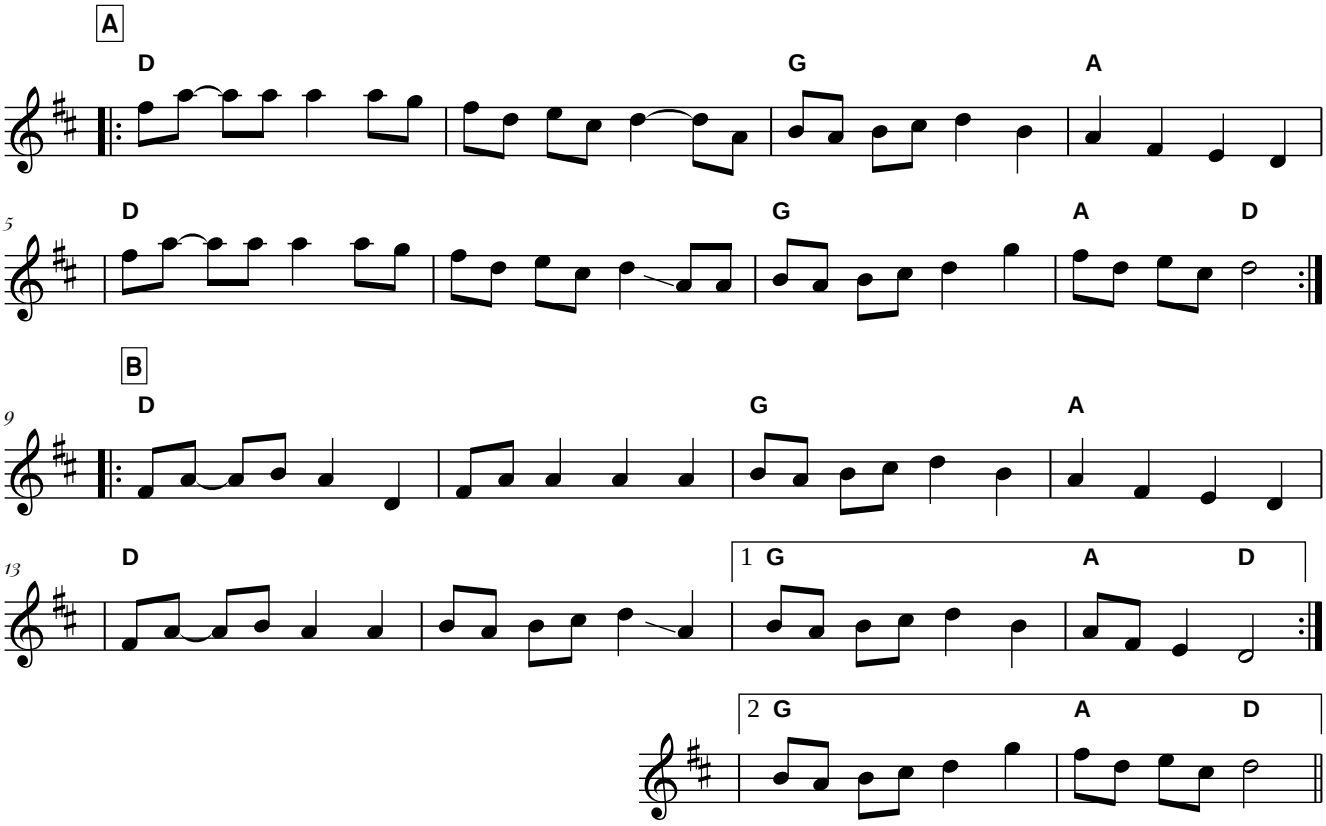
from Bill Katon



Aural Source: Caleb Klauder Country Band, Subdued Stringband Jamboree 2015

Key: D

Johnny Don't Get Drunk

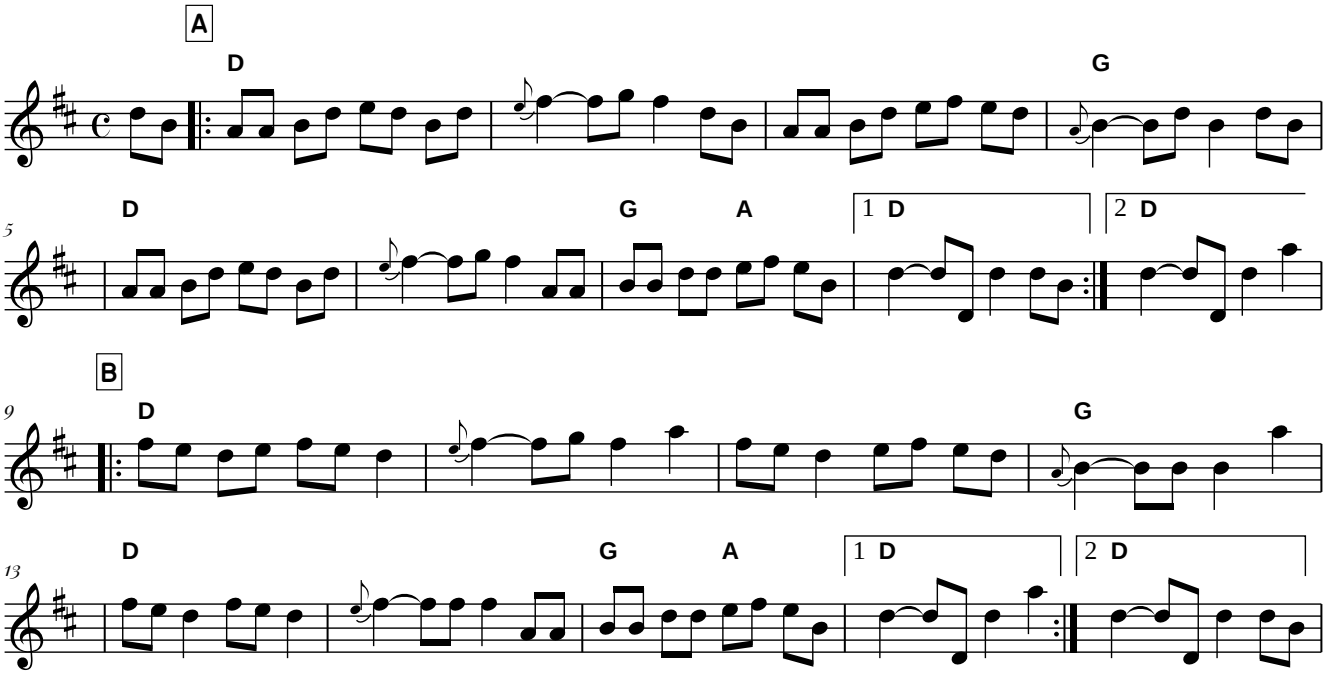


Aural Source: Rachel Eddy, https://youtu.be/2WvaeilpcRc

Key: D

Lily of the Valley

from Luther Davis

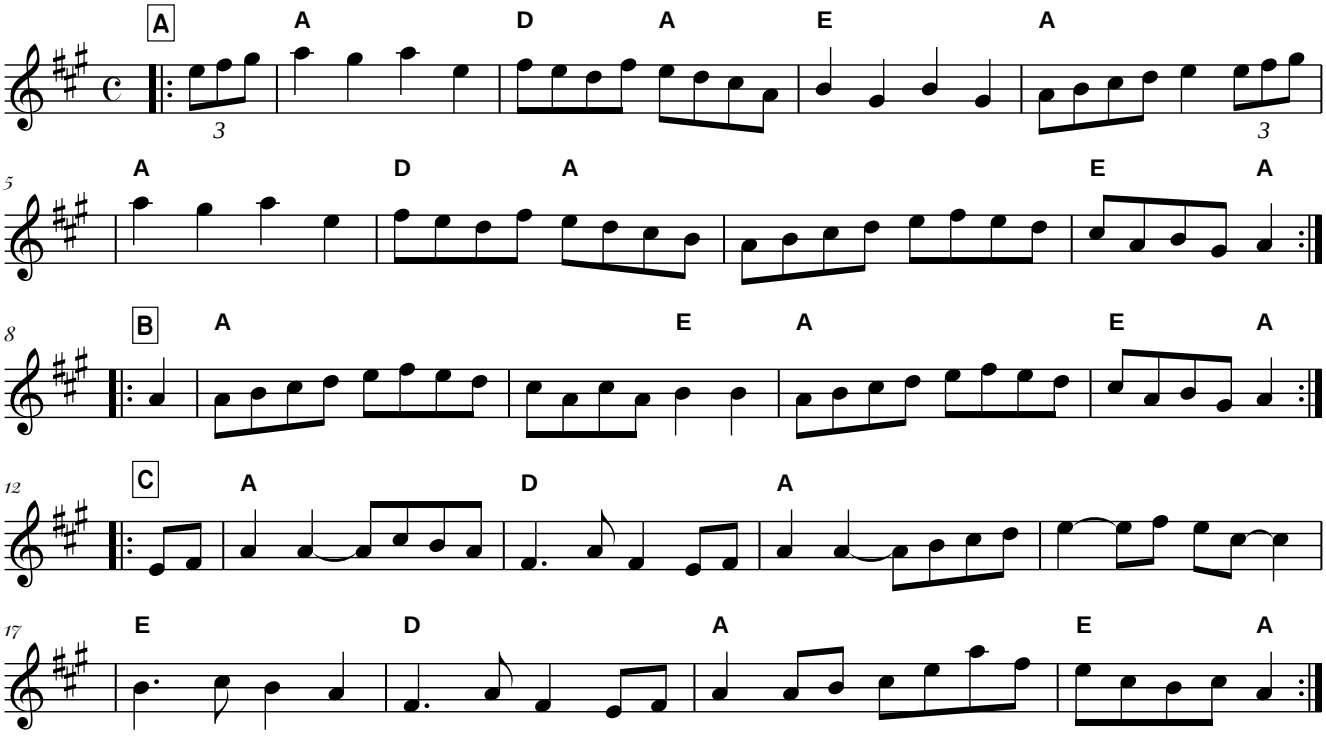


Aural Source: Get Up In The Cool Podcast, with Cameron DeWhitt and Adam Hurt
http://www.camerondewhitt.com/getupinthecool/adamhurt
Note: Adam says this comes by way of Dan Gellert.

Key: A

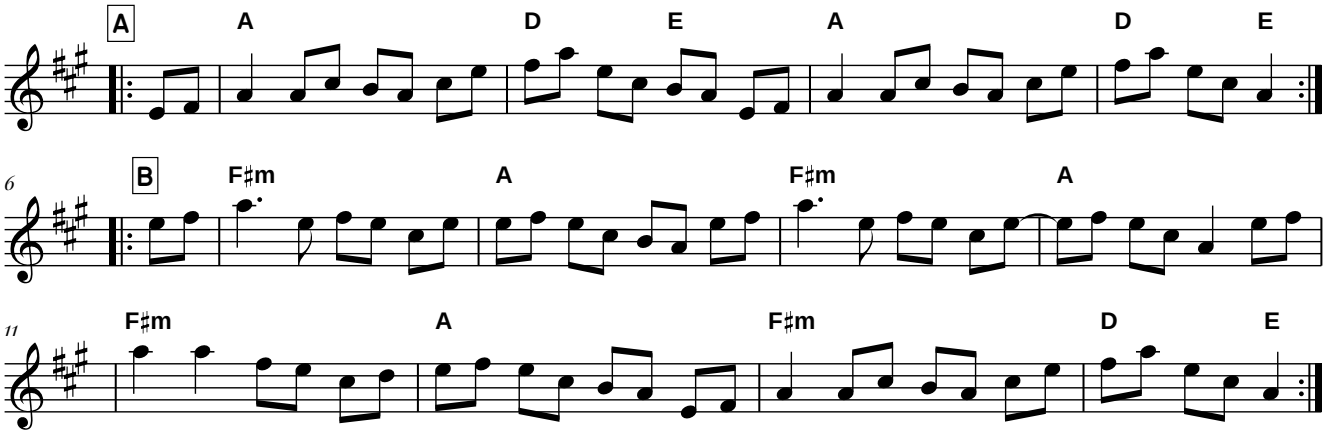
Little Billie Wilson

Billy Wilson



Key: A

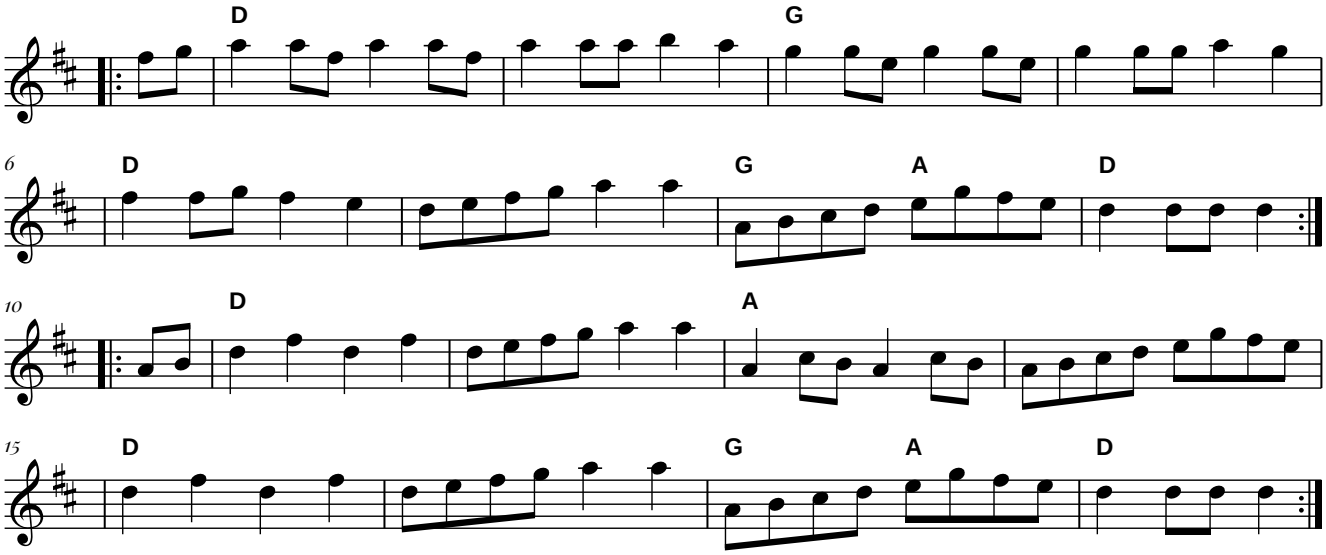
McClanahan's March



Written Source: Sarah Comer's second-Sunday jam

Key: D

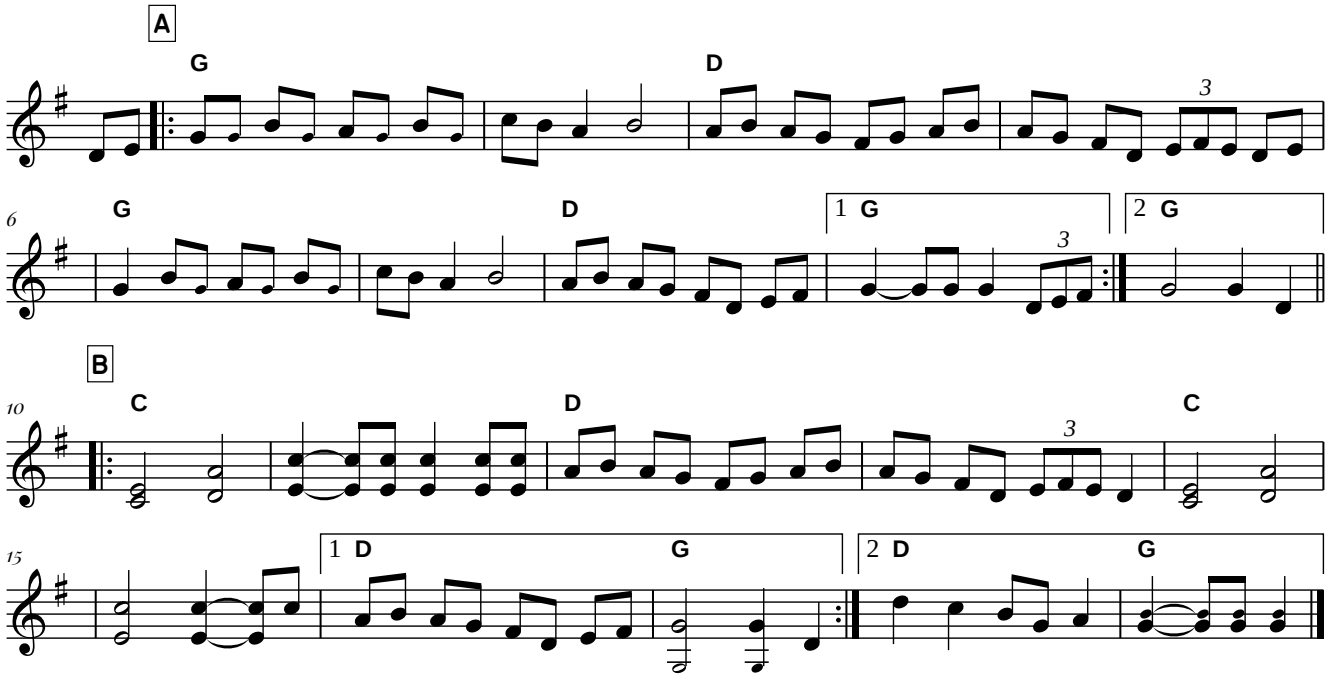
Mississippi Sawyer



Key: G

Nail That Catfish to a Tree

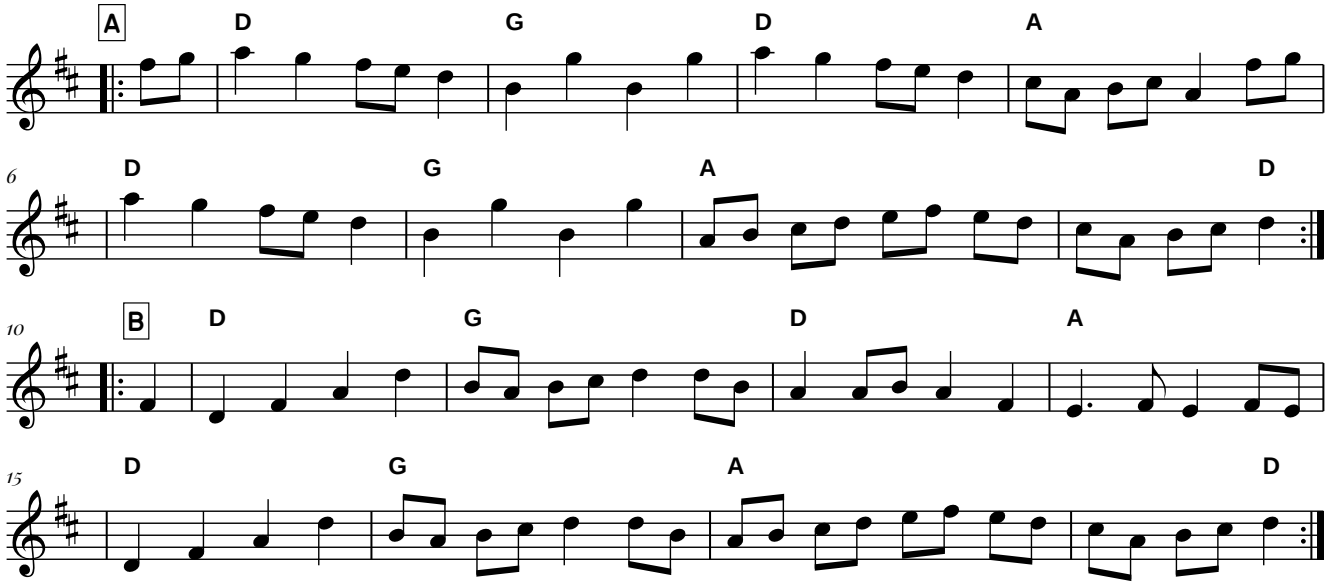
Steve Rosen



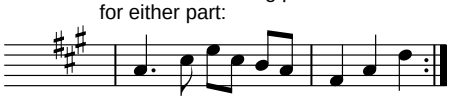
Aural Source: Steve Rosen, http://nailthatcatfish.tripod.com/catfishmed.mp3
Note: See http://nailthatcatfish.tripod.com/nailthatcat.html for T-shirts and more.

Key: D

Needle Case

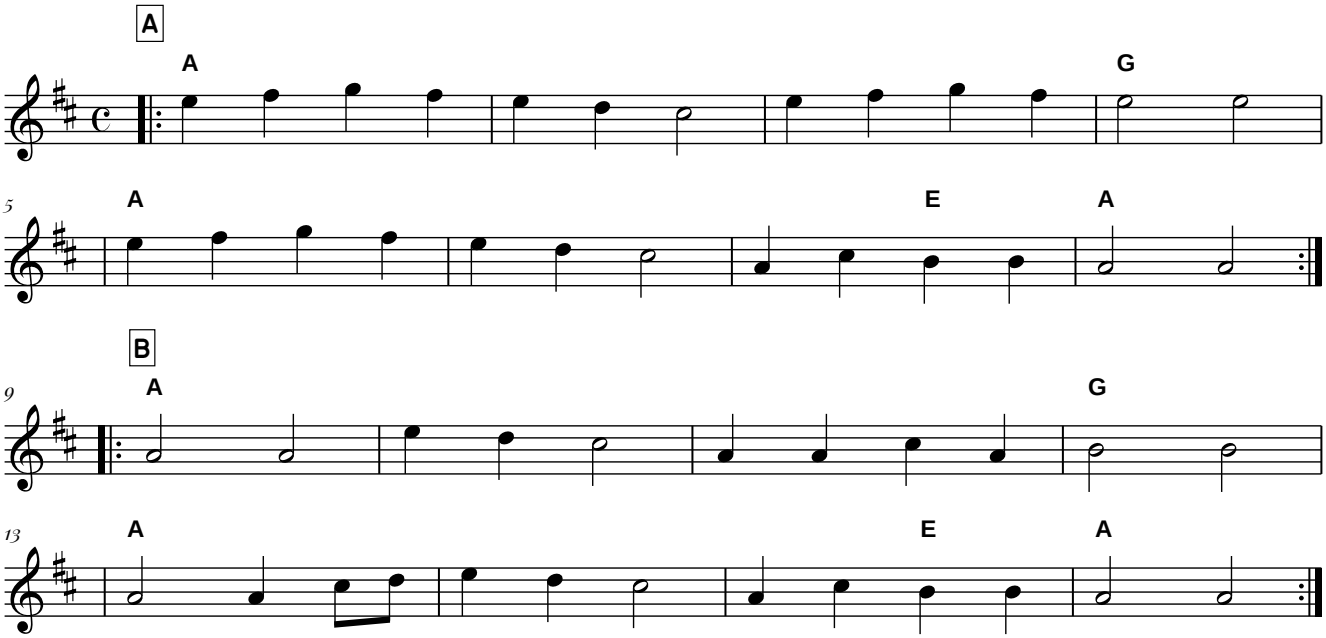


An alternate ending phrase for either part:



Key: A Mixolydian

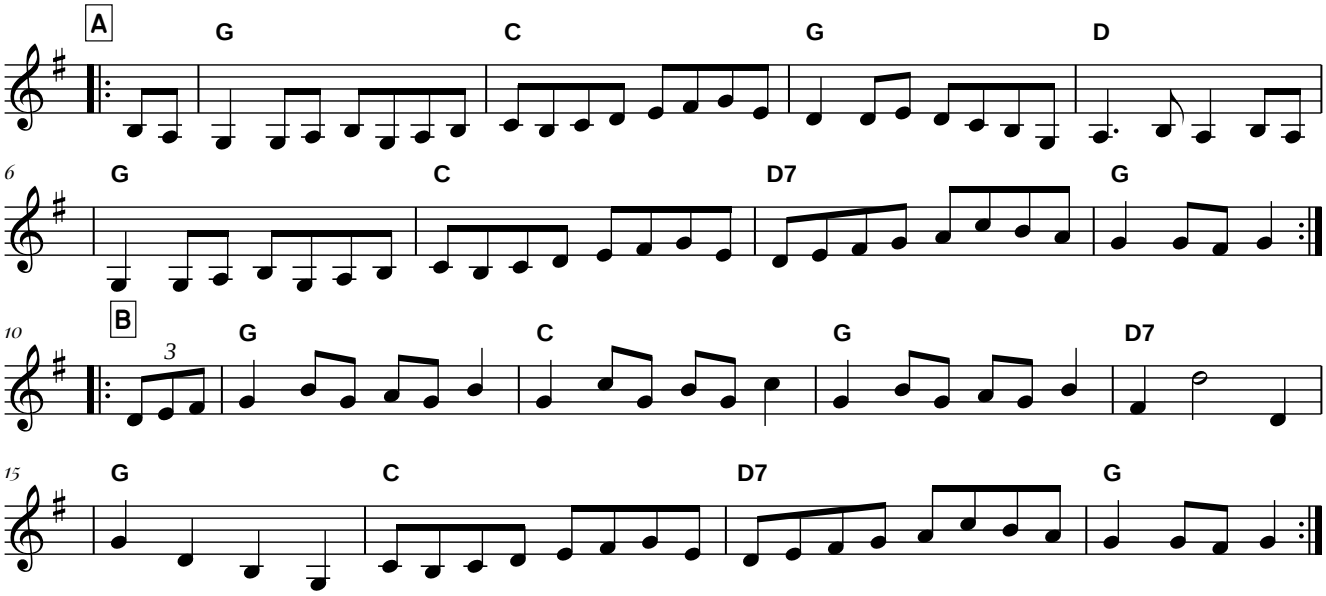
Old Joe Clark



Aural Source: Sarah Comer

Key: G

Possum up a Gum Stump

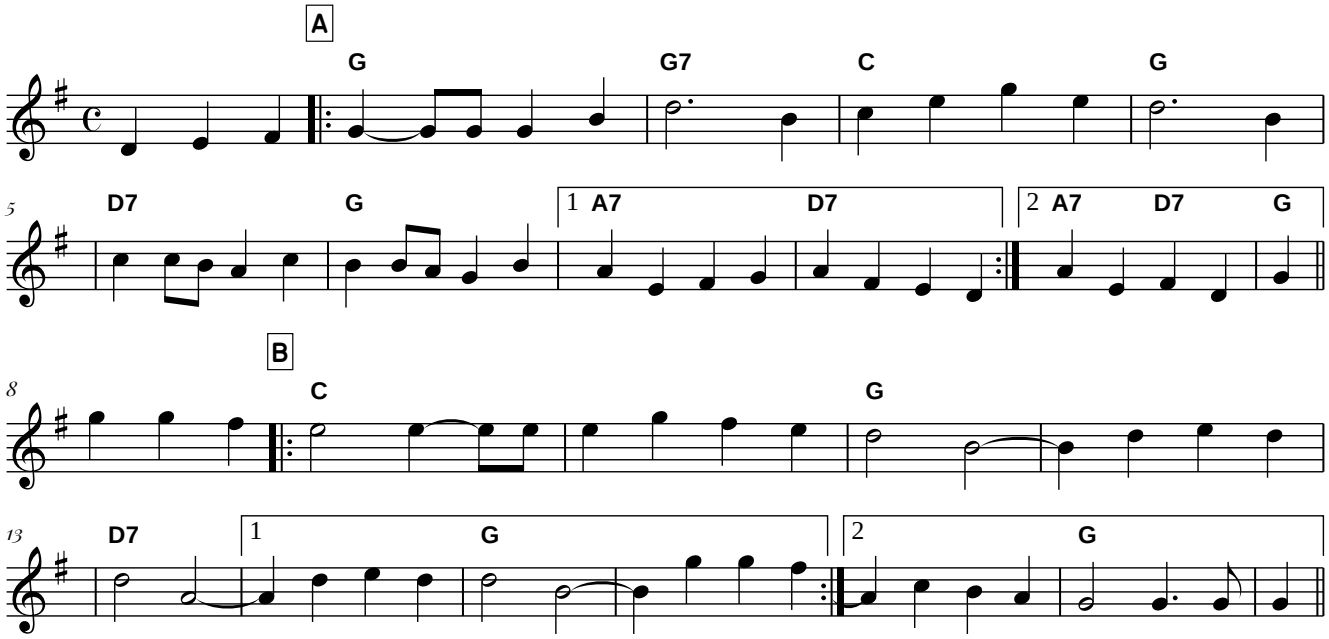


Key: G

Red Wing

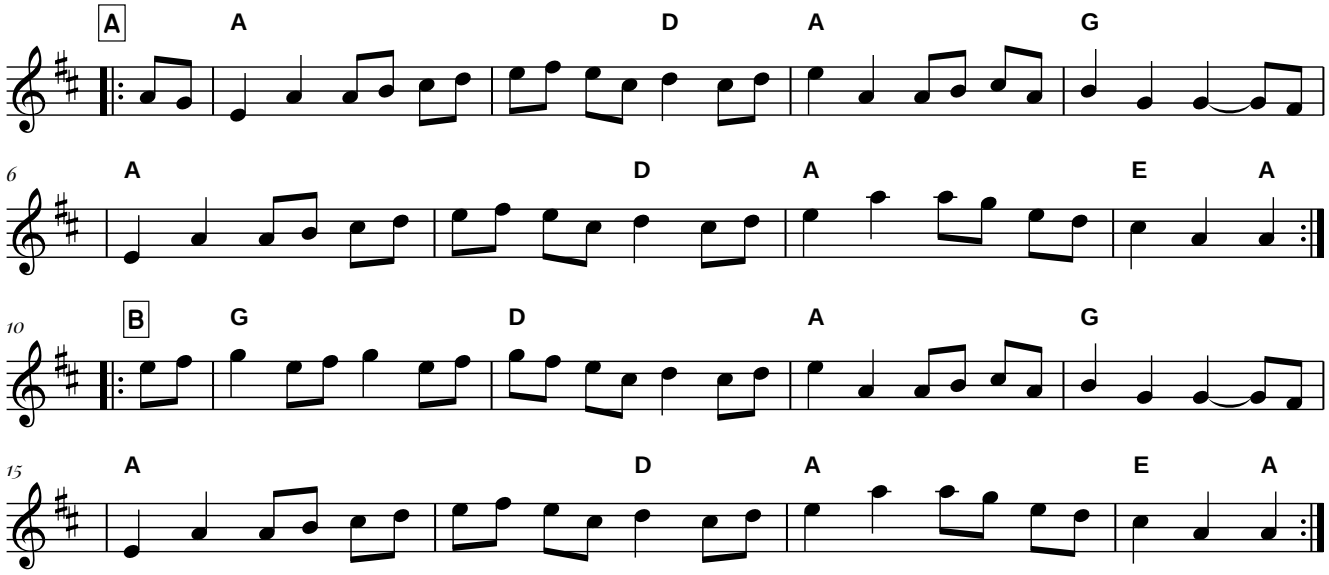
Union Maid

Kerry Mills (1907)



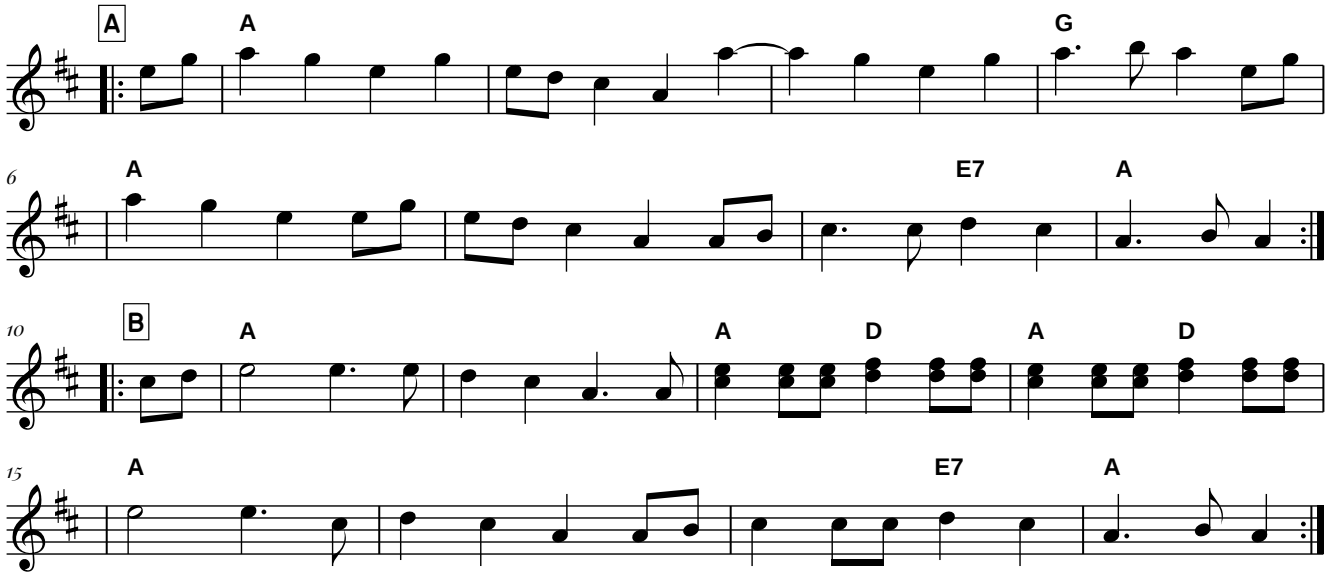
Key: A Mixolydian

Red-Haired Boy



Key: A Mixolydian

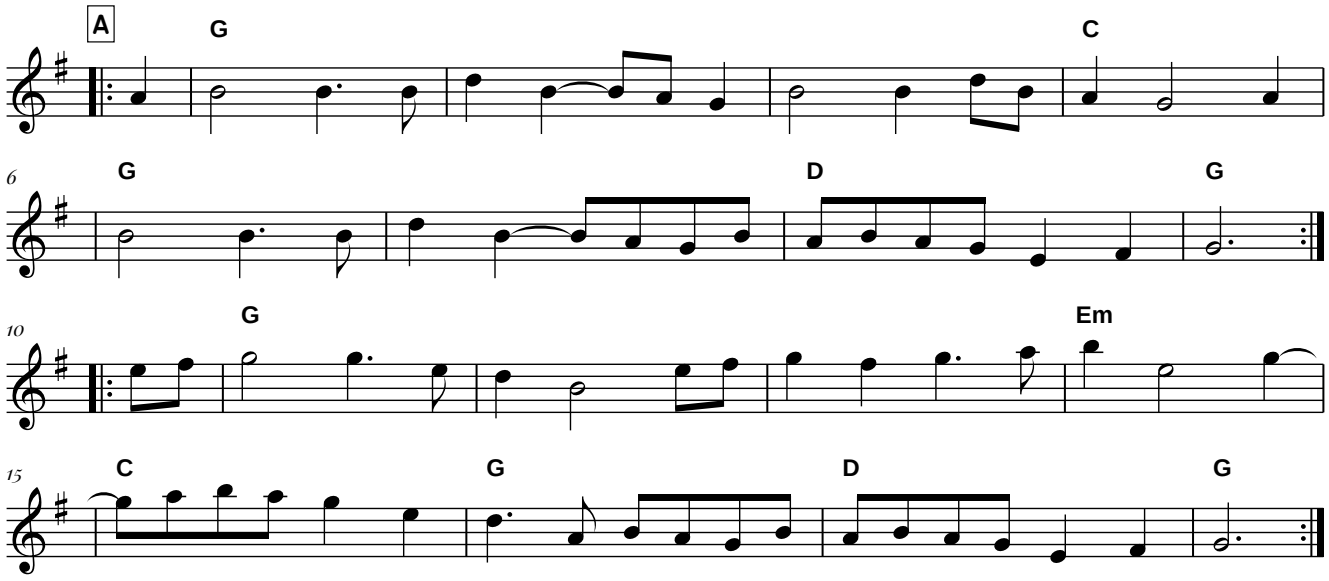
Sandy Boys



Key: G

Seneca Square Dance

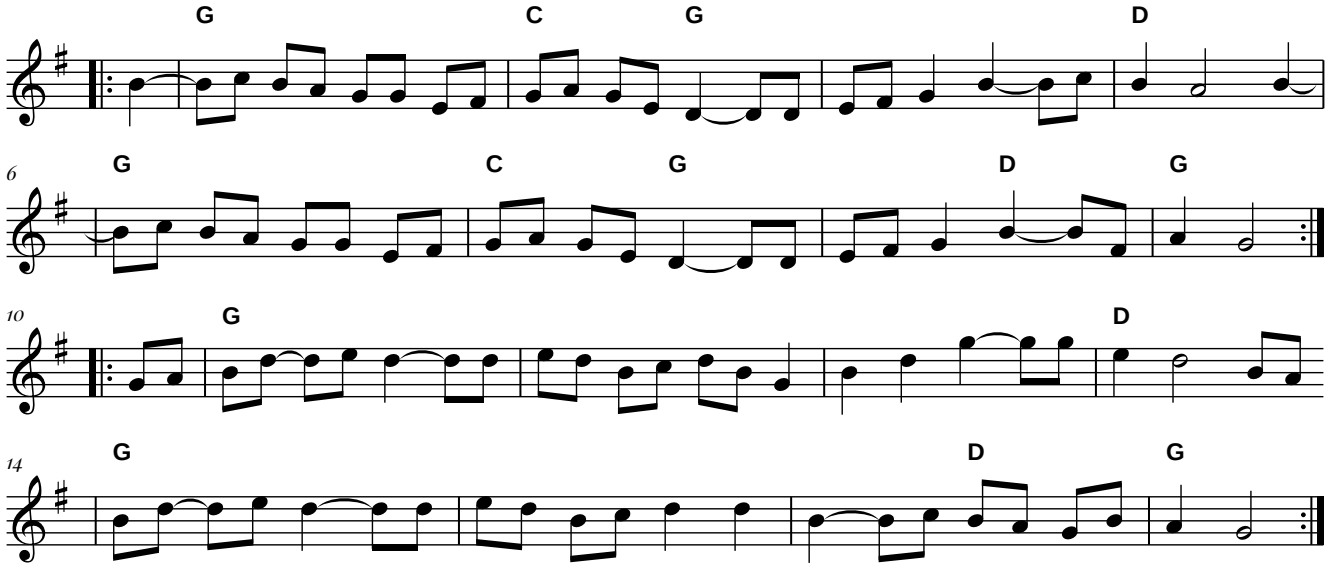
Waiting for the Federals



Swing the eighths
Key: G

Shove That Pig's Foot...

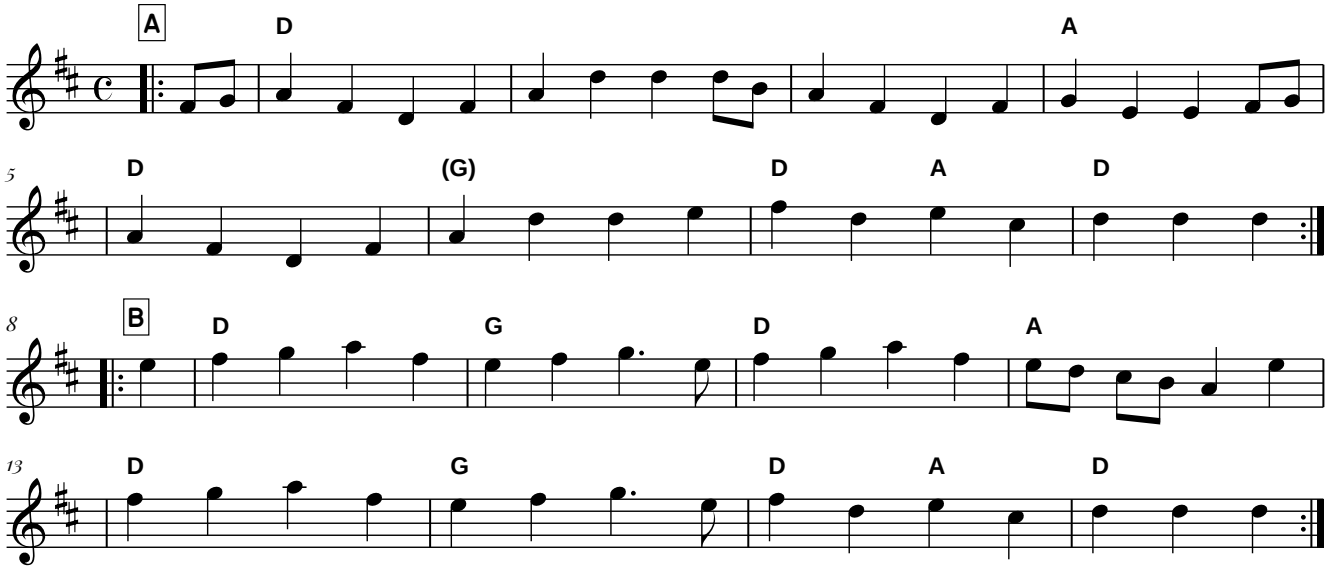
... A Little Further in the Fire



Aural Source: Bruce Molsky, https://youtu.be/vBIjR39WYfM

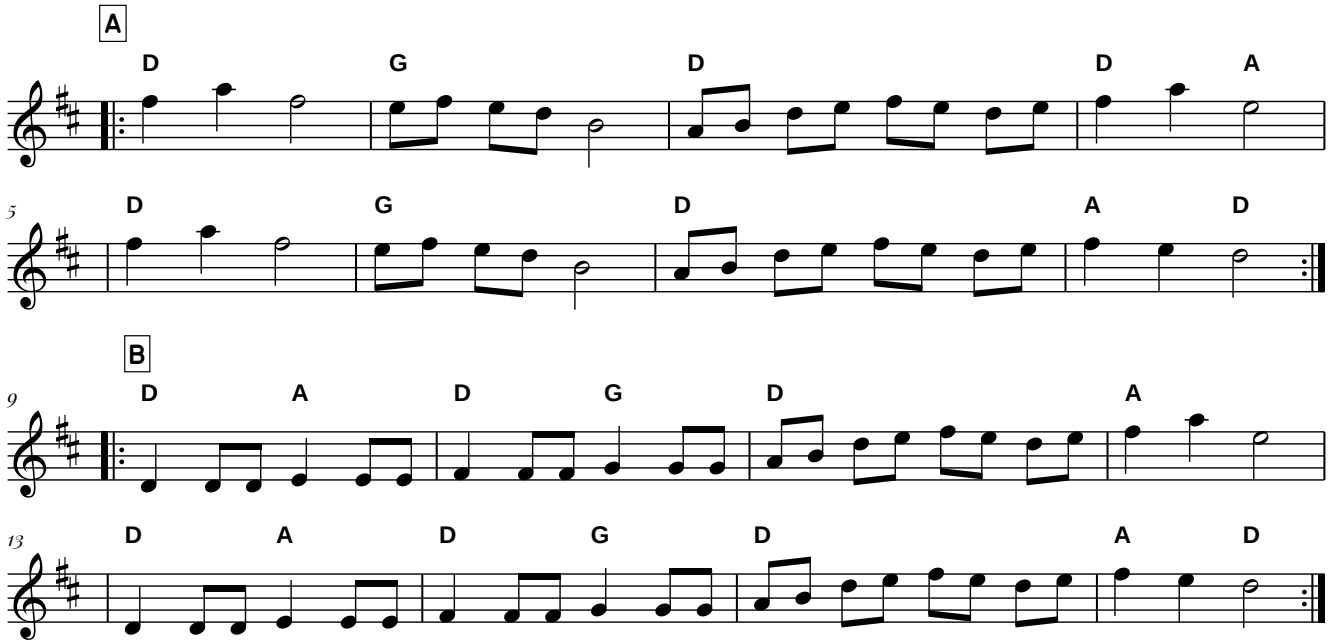
Key: D

Soldier's Joy



Spotted Pony

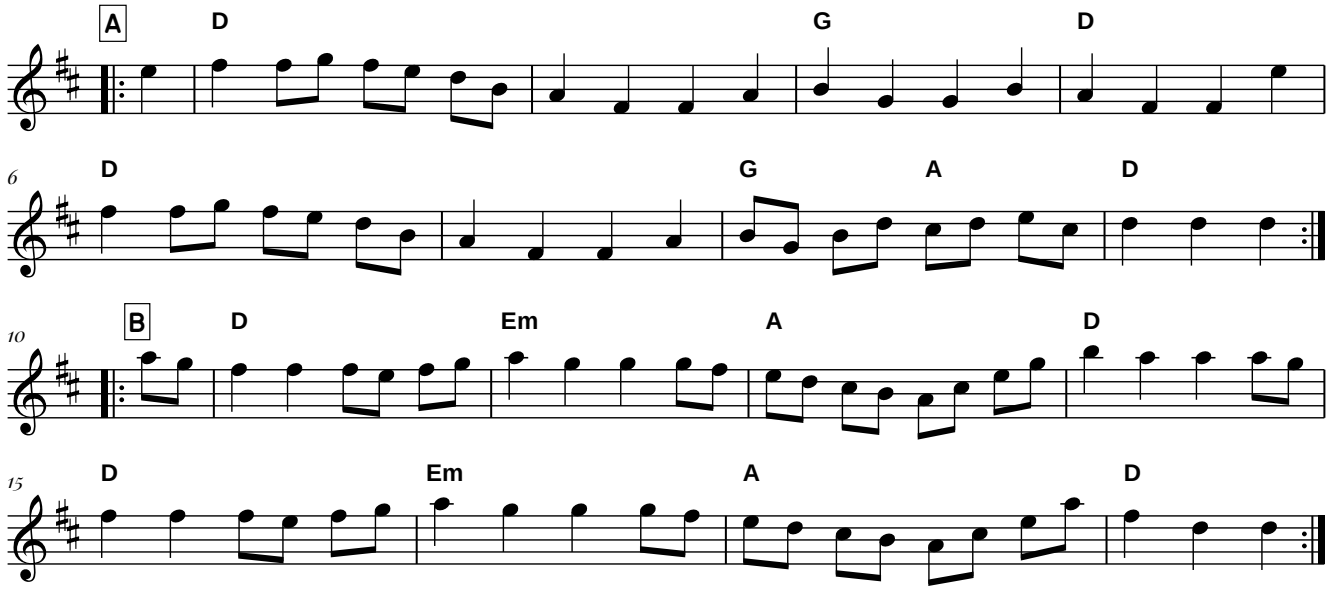
Key: D



Note: Most people play this in the opposite order, with the A and B parts swapped.
That is how it appears on older recordings where the tune is called "Snowshoes".

St. Anne's Reel

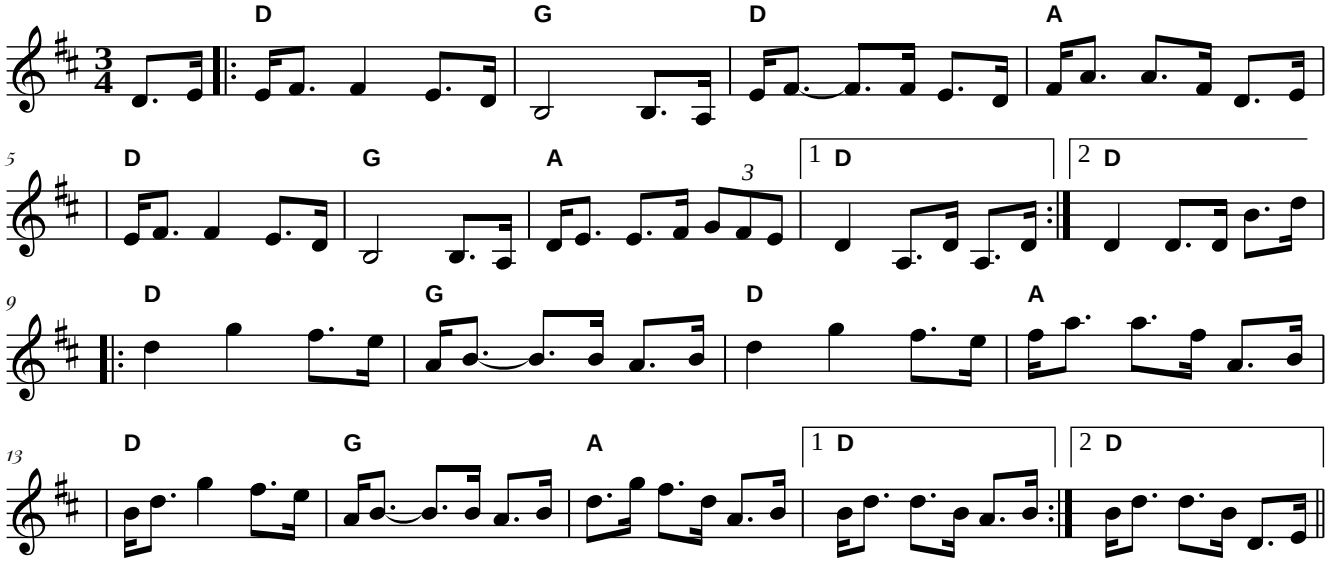
Key: D



Swannanoa Waltz

Waltz
Key: D

Rayna Gellert

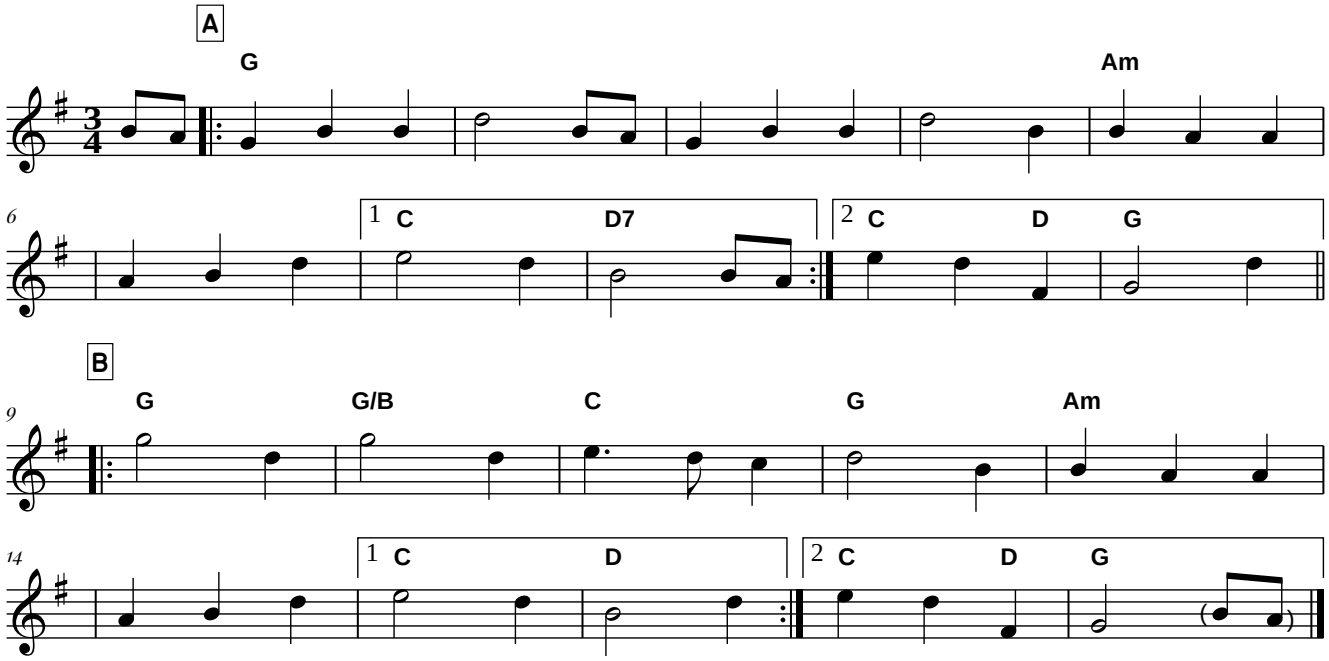


NB: Dotted pairs should be played in triplet time.

Aural Source: Rayna Gellert, Ways of the World
https://youtu.be/BrNdEIFrIp4
Note: In the original, the fiddle is tuned ADAE with drones and double stops throughout.

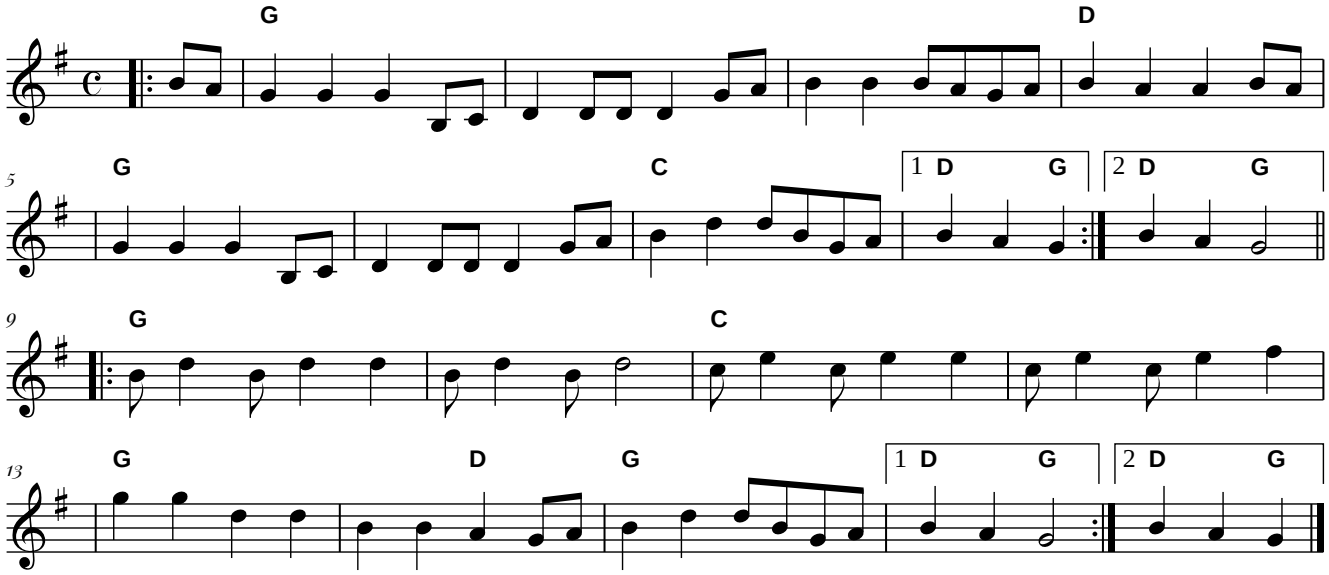
Tombigbee Waltz

Waltz
Key: G



Key: G

Turkey in the Straw



Written Source: Sarah Comer, Dusty Strings dance band class.