Salty Dog Chasing It's Tail

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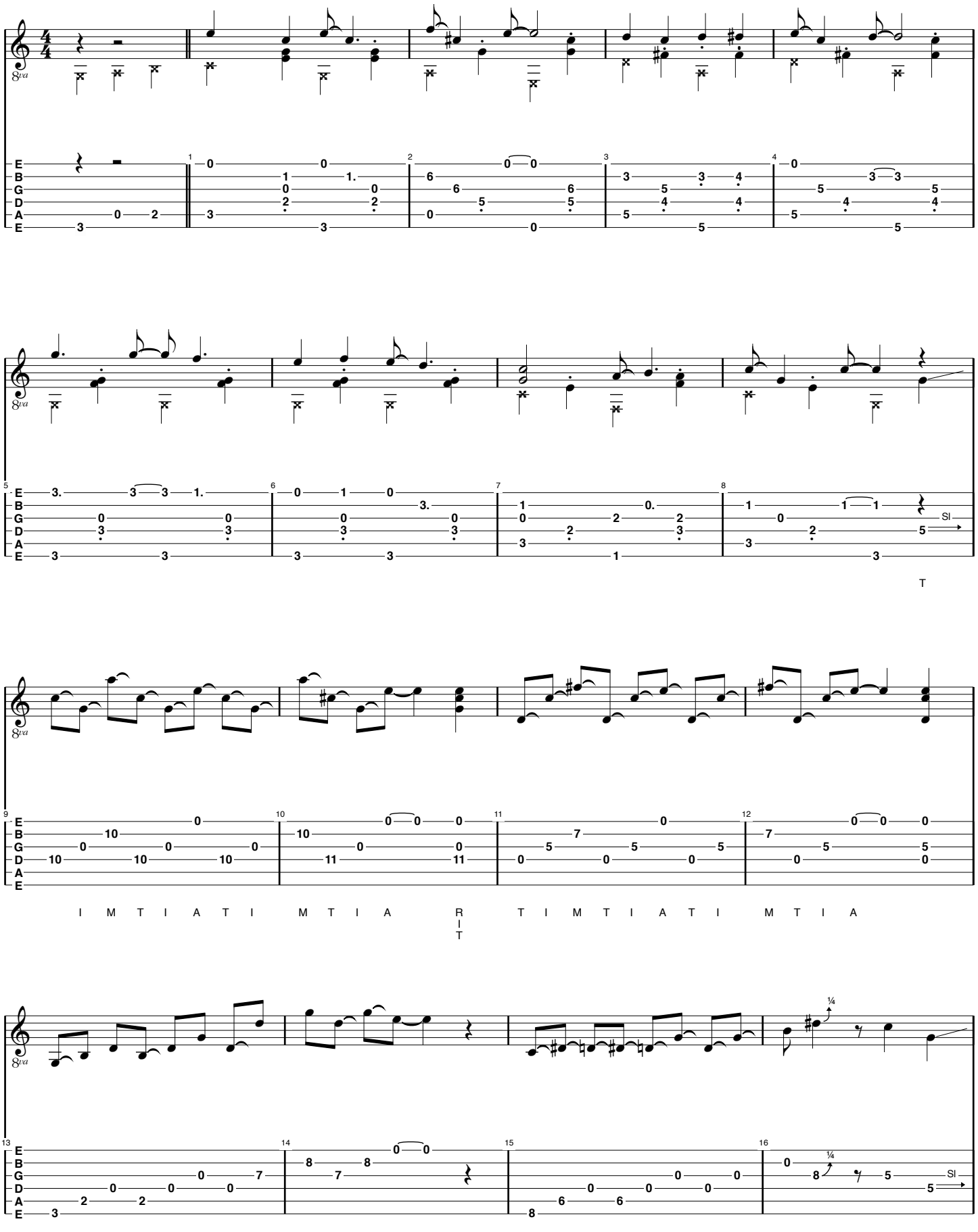
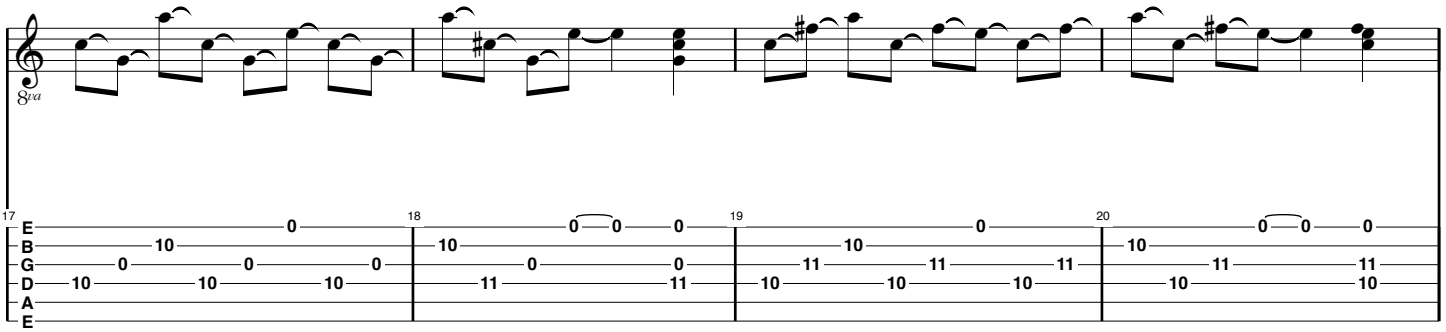
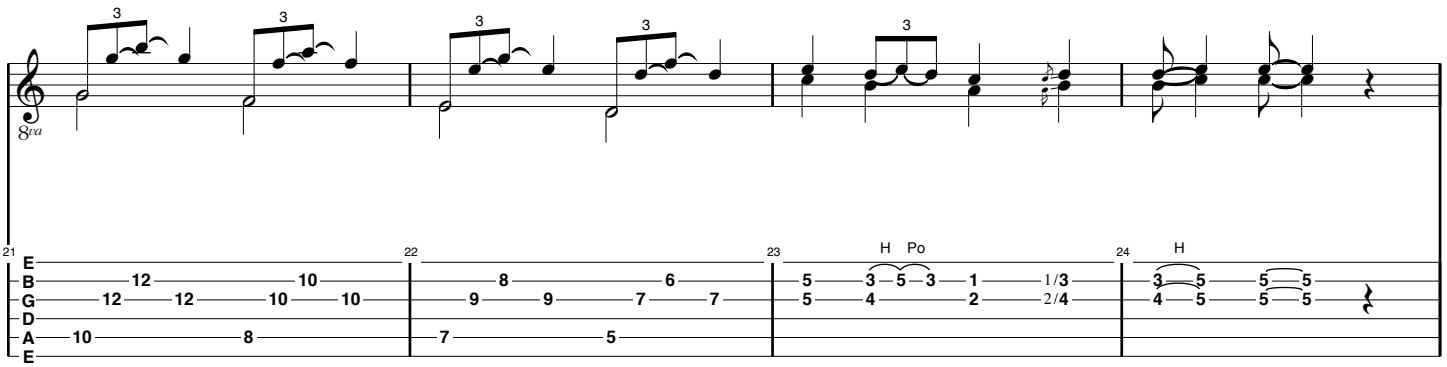
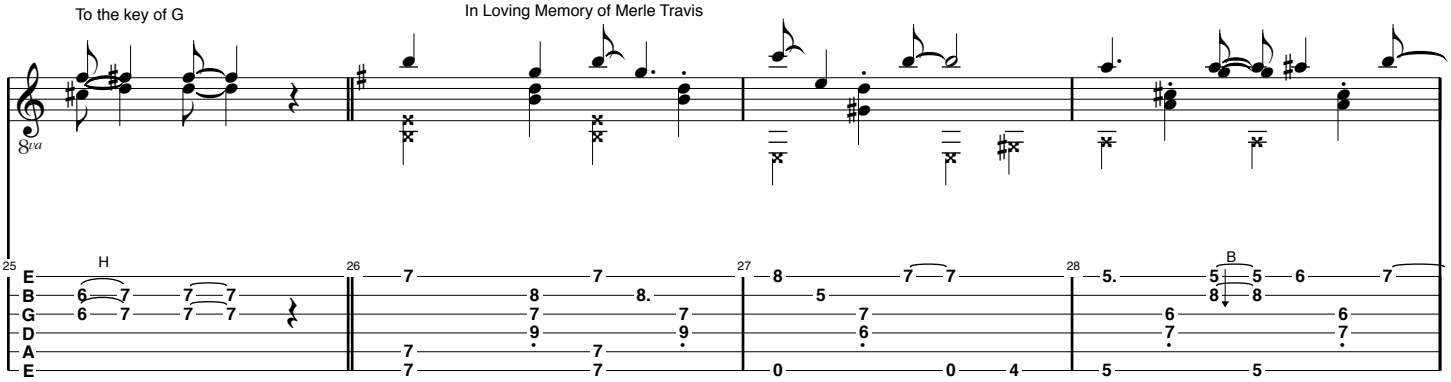
Arranged and TablEdited by
michaeljoyce@hotmail.com;
Inspired by the recording "Down Home"
by Chet Atkins

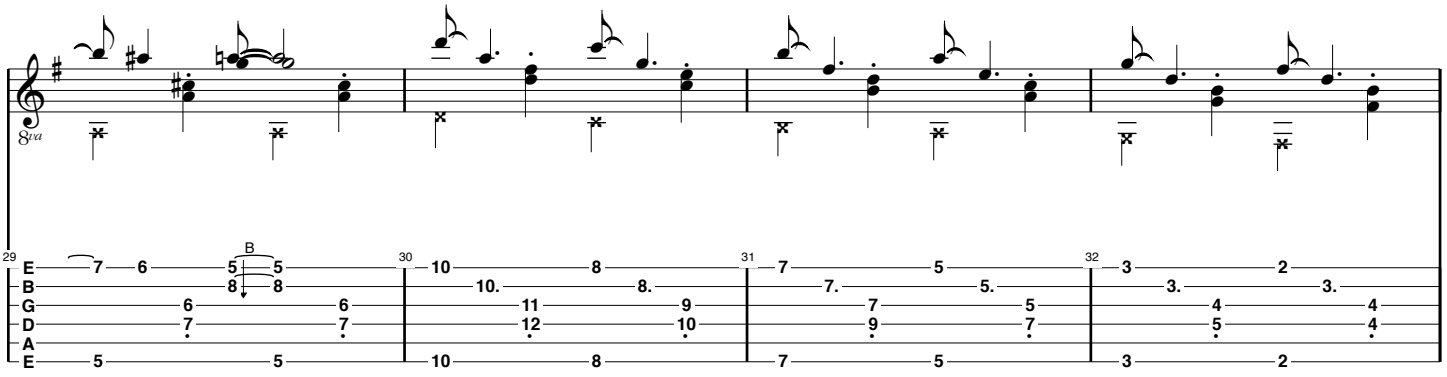
We start in the Key of C

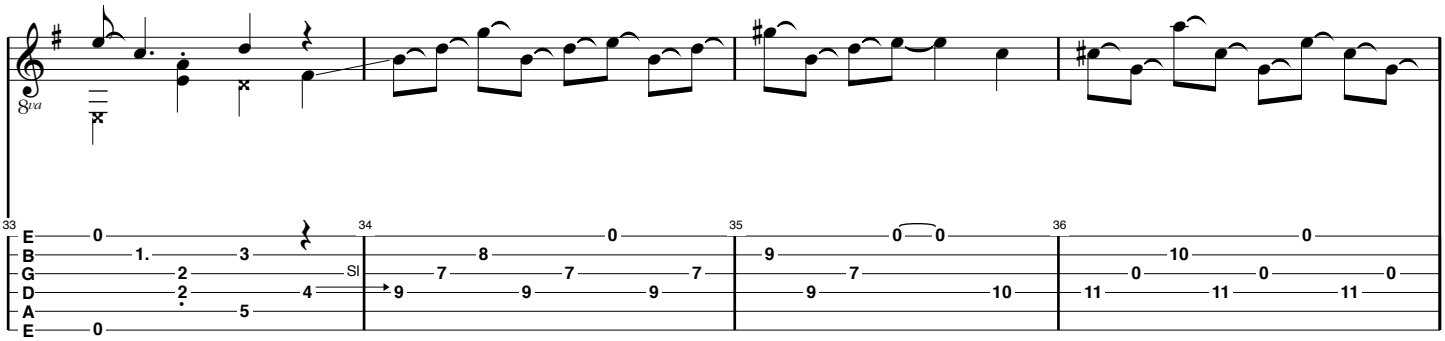




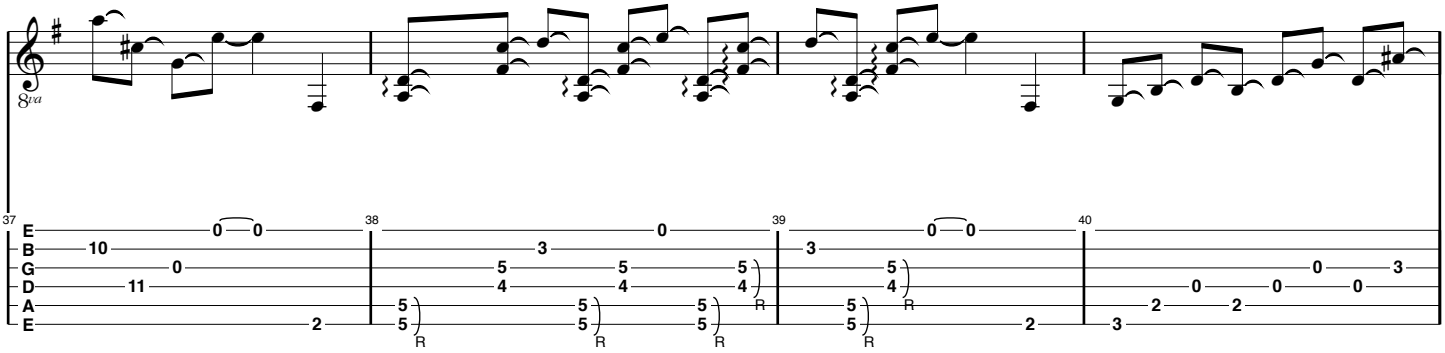

H
Po
H

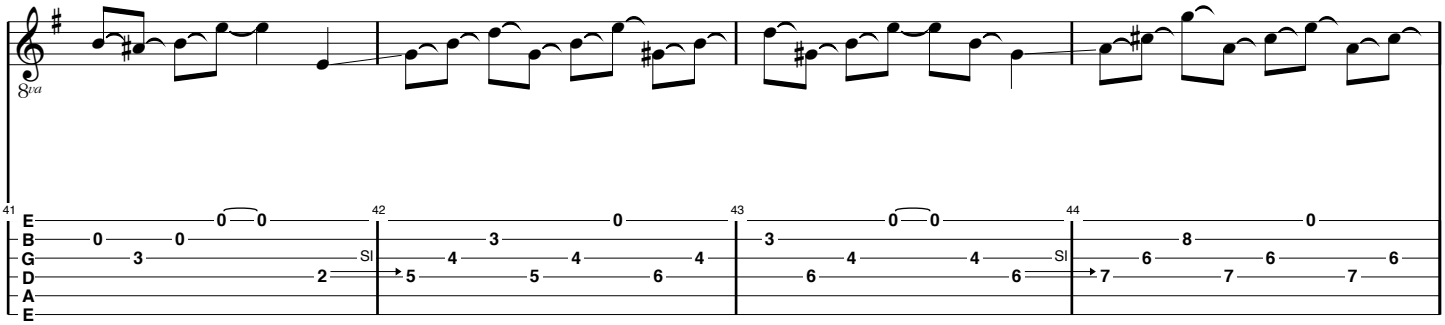

To the key of G
In Loving Memory of Merle Travis
H
B

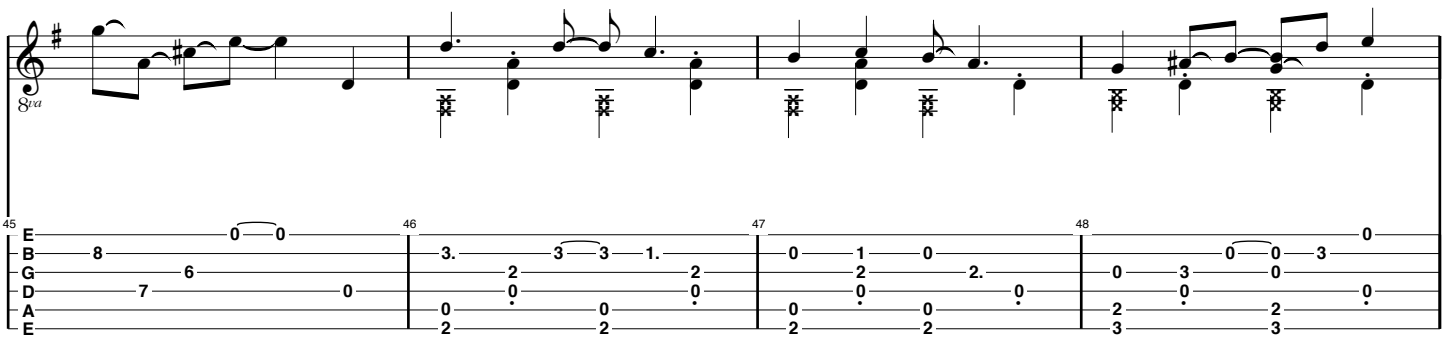

B

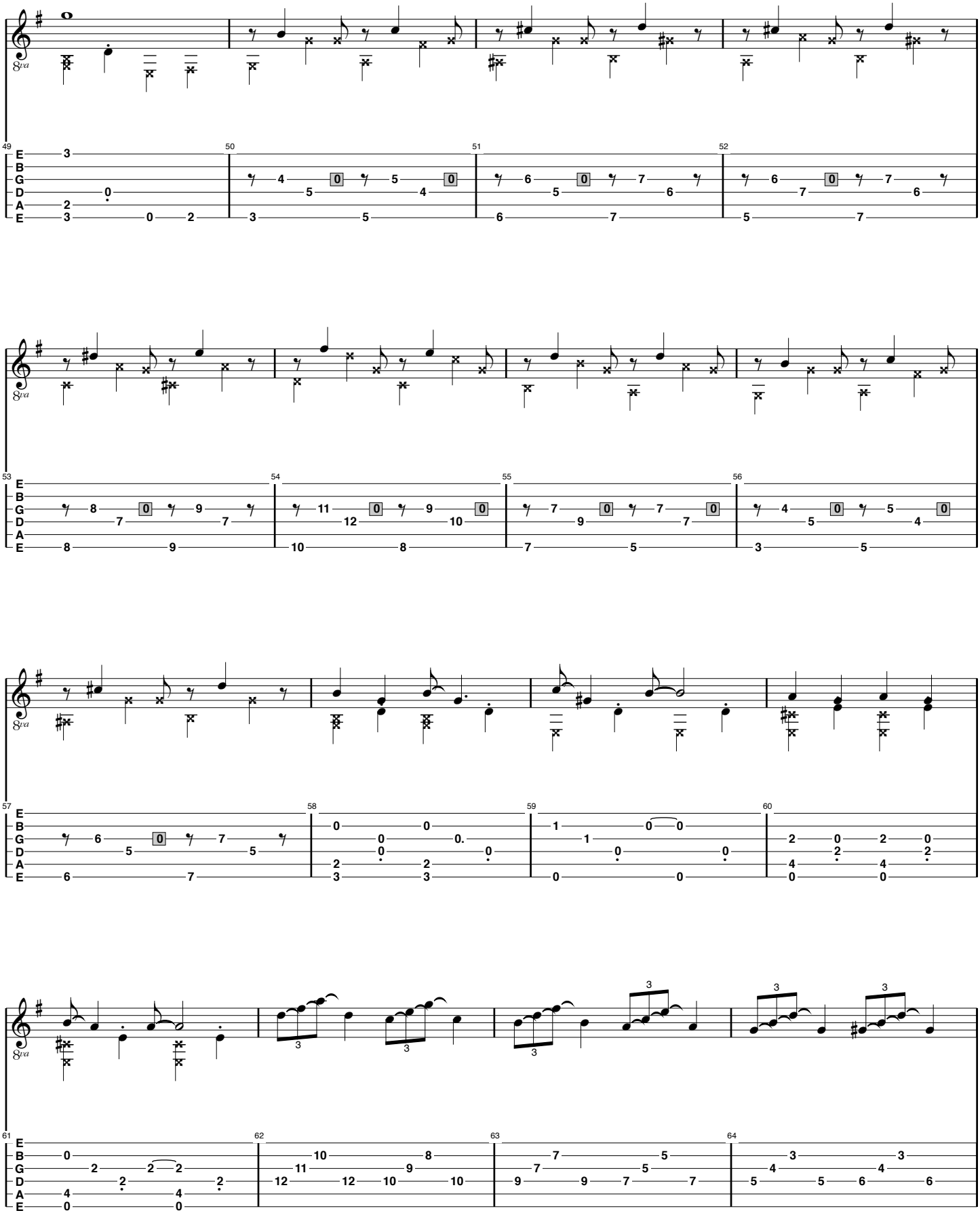


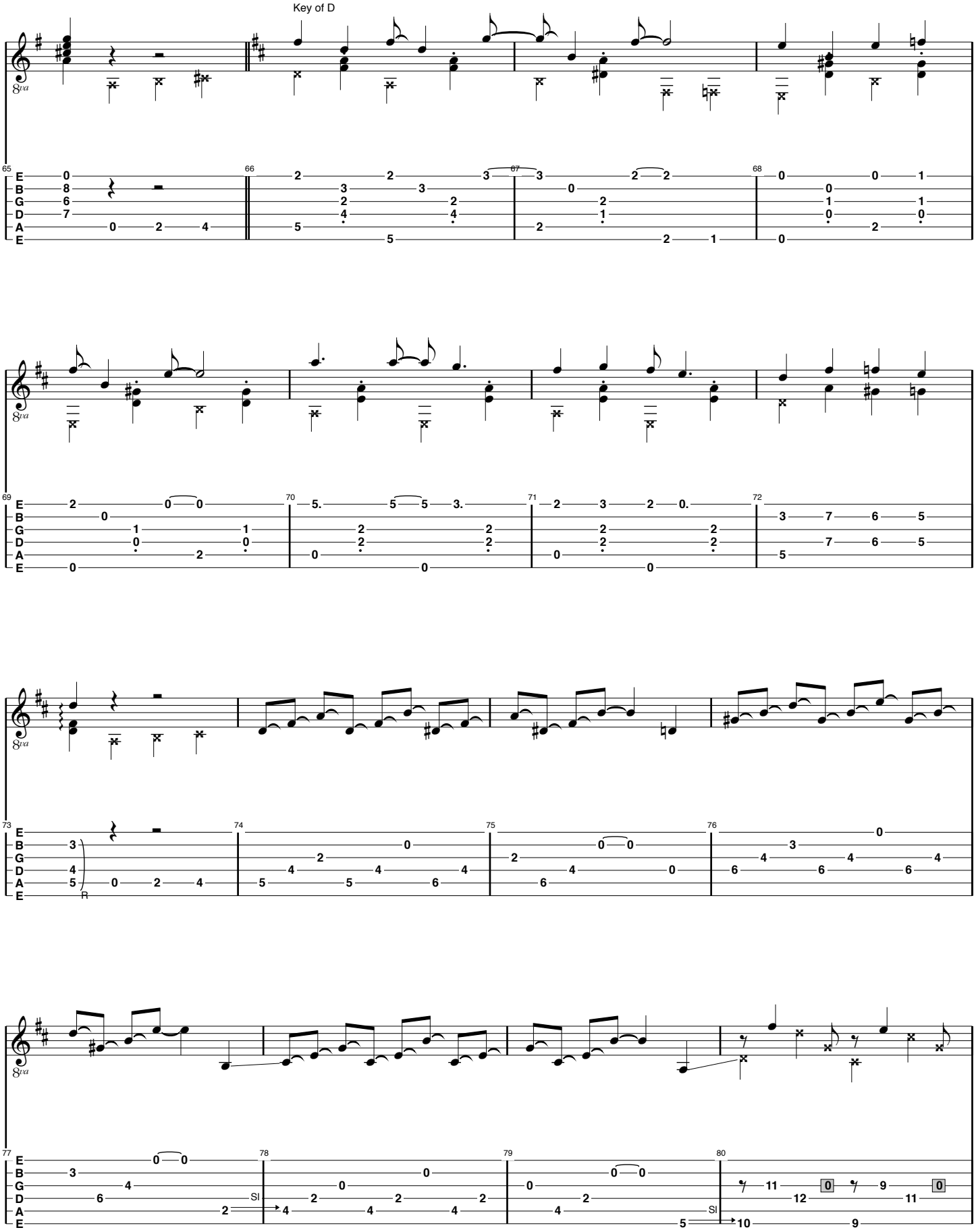
Merle's "Double Shot" Lick










Key of D
8va
65
66
67
68
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72
73
74
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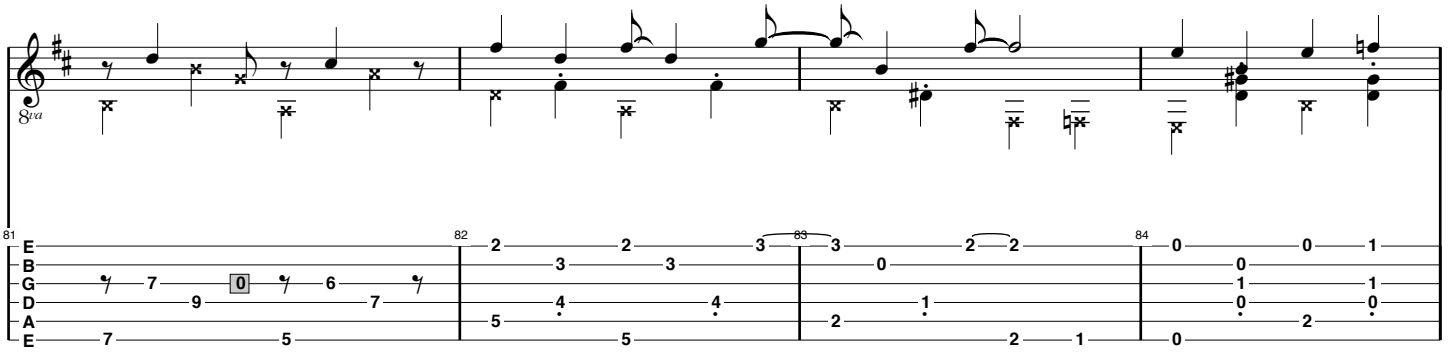
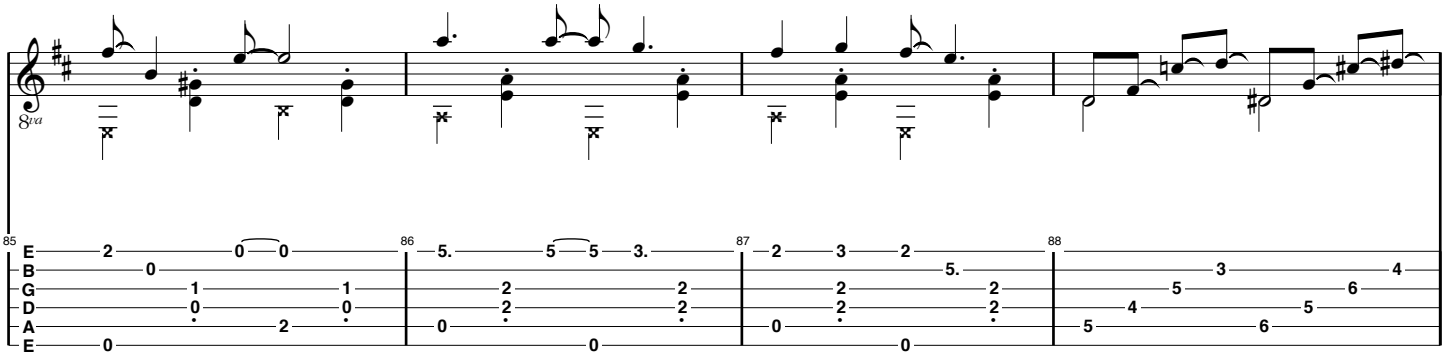
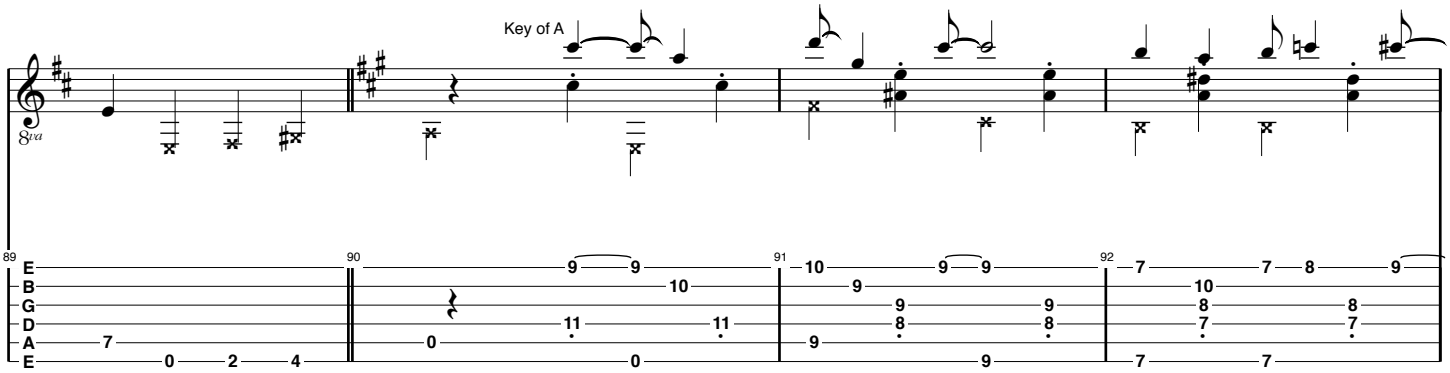
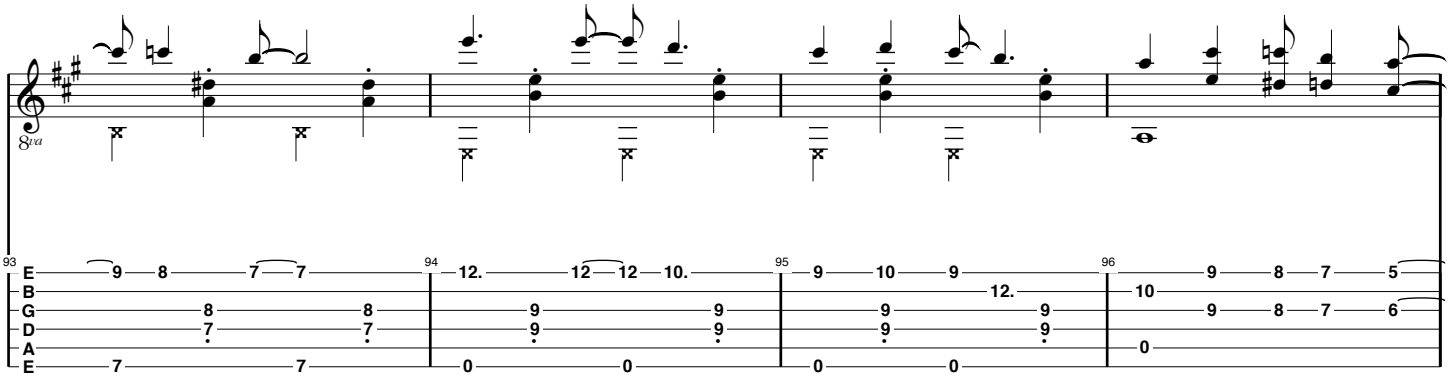
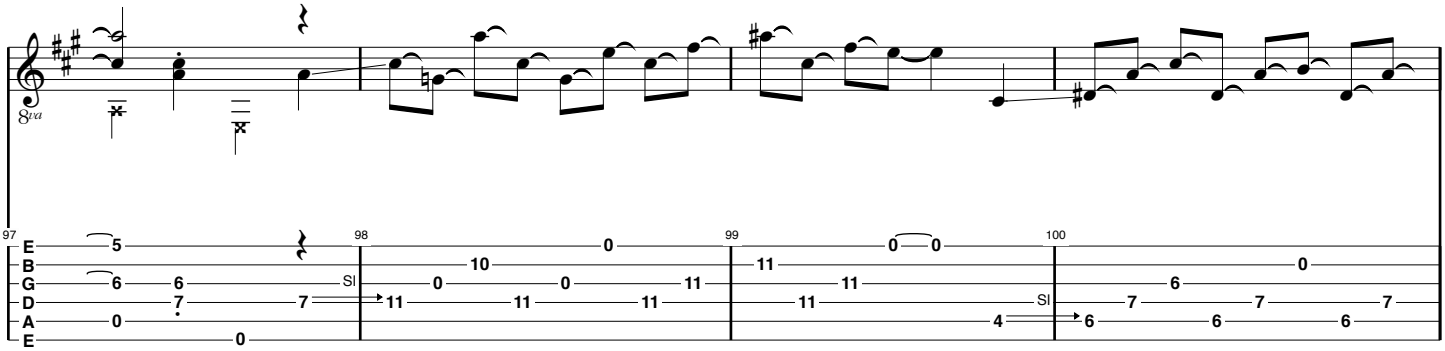
76
77
78
79
80
R
Sl
Sl

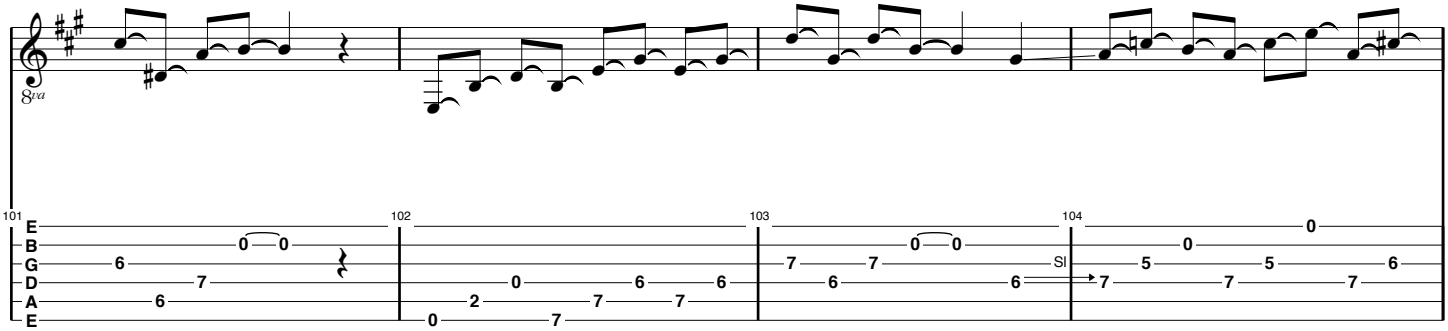


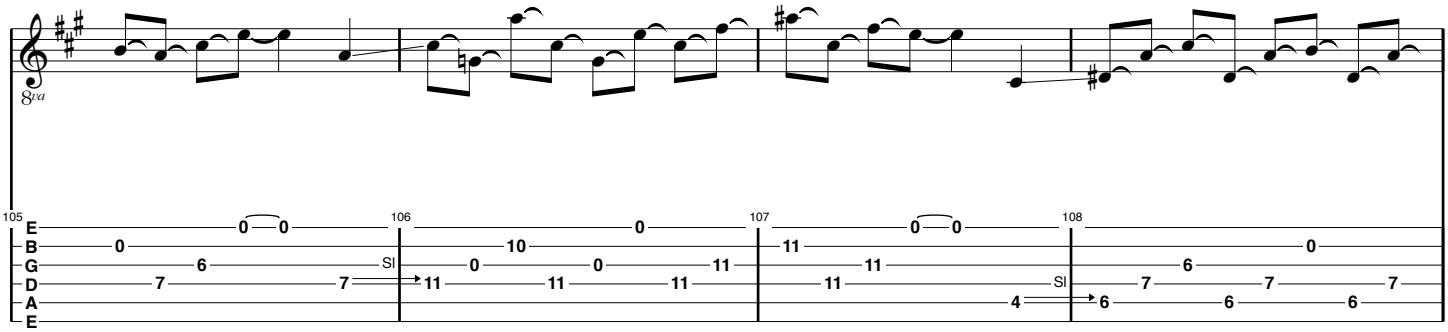


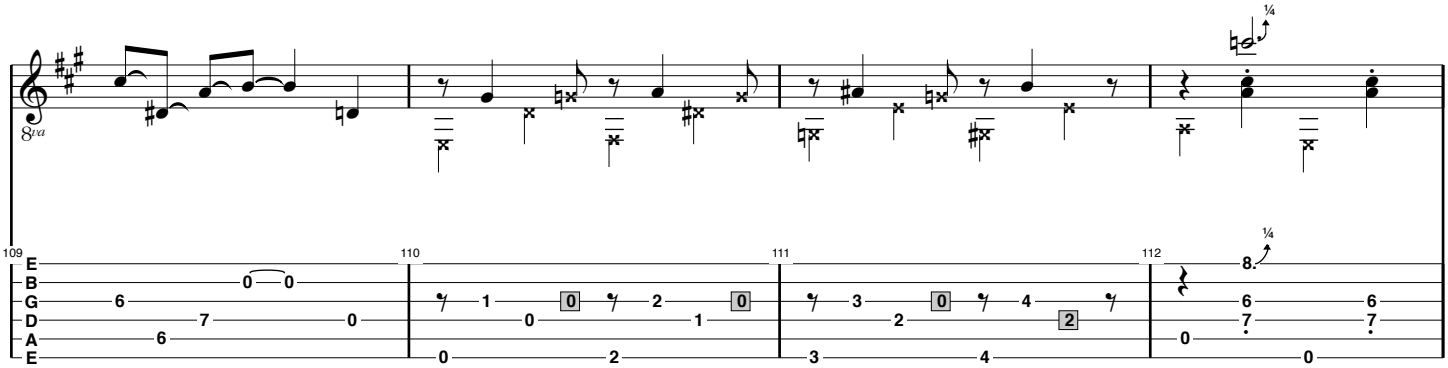

Key of A

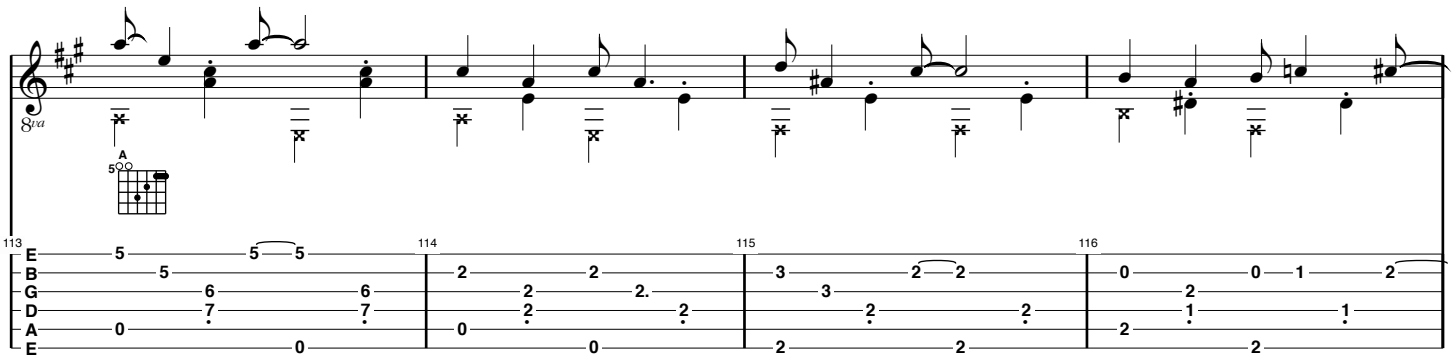


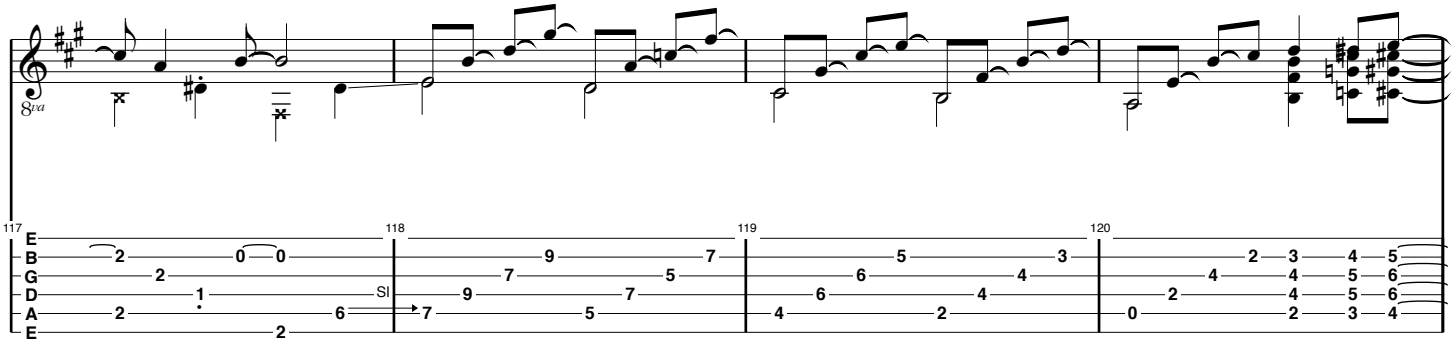


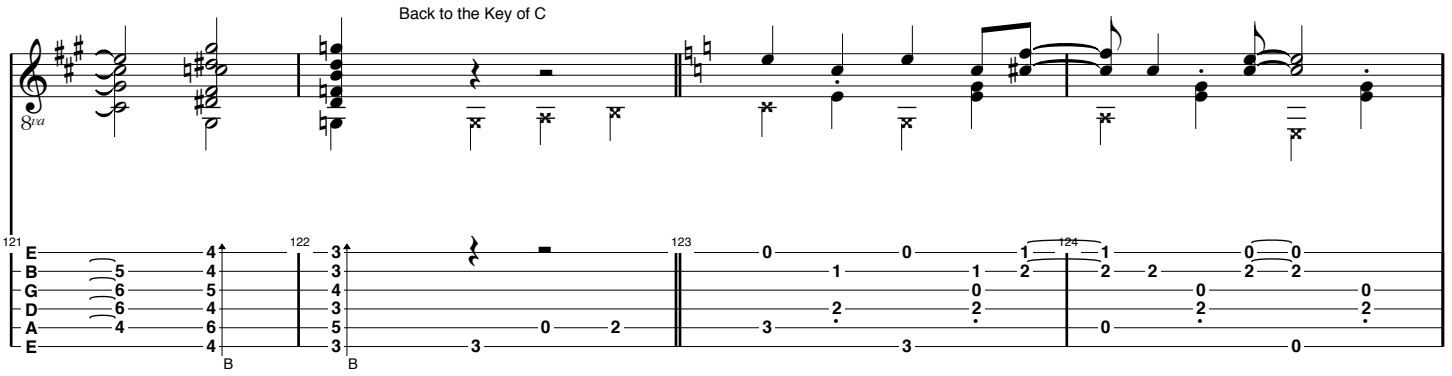


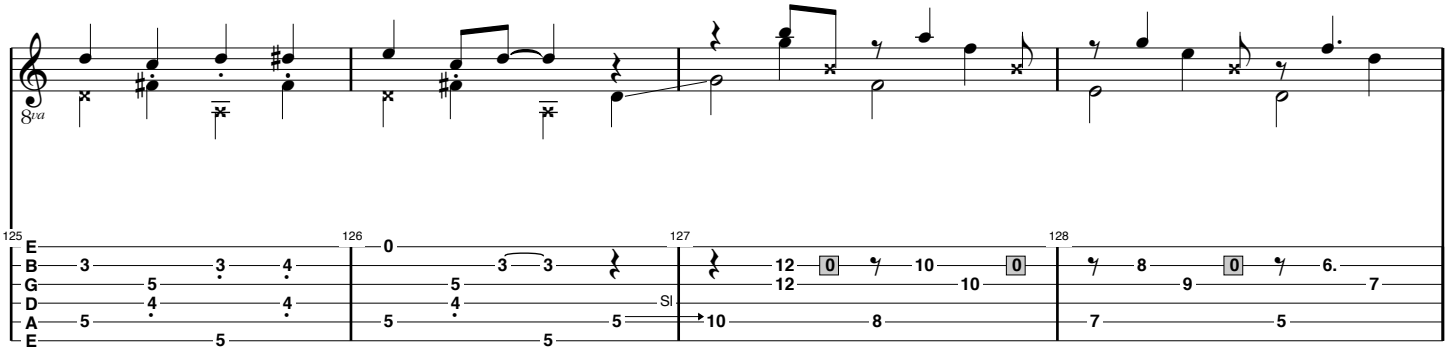


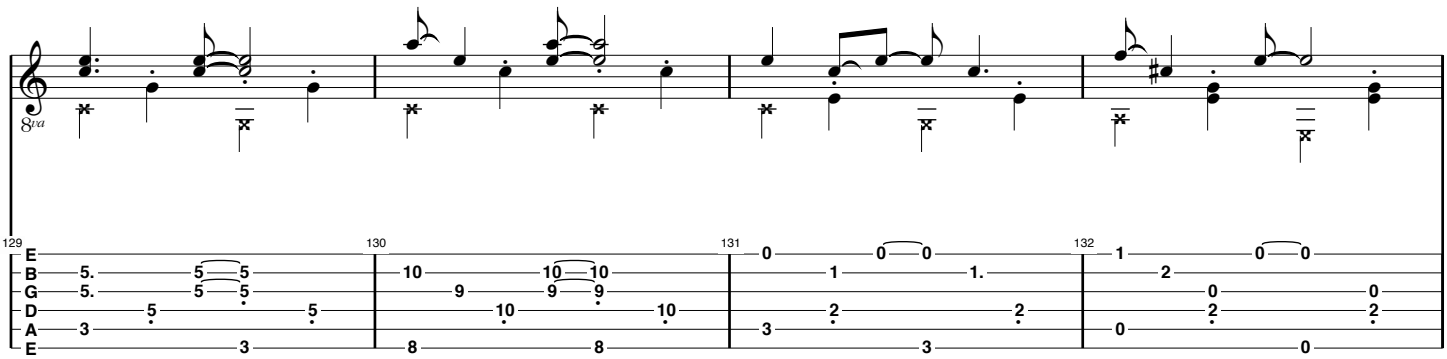


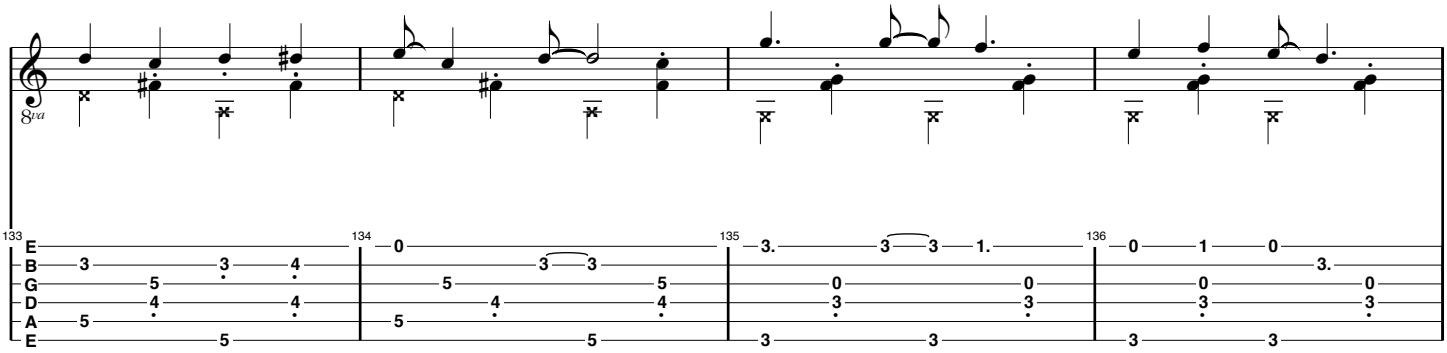

A
113
114
115
116

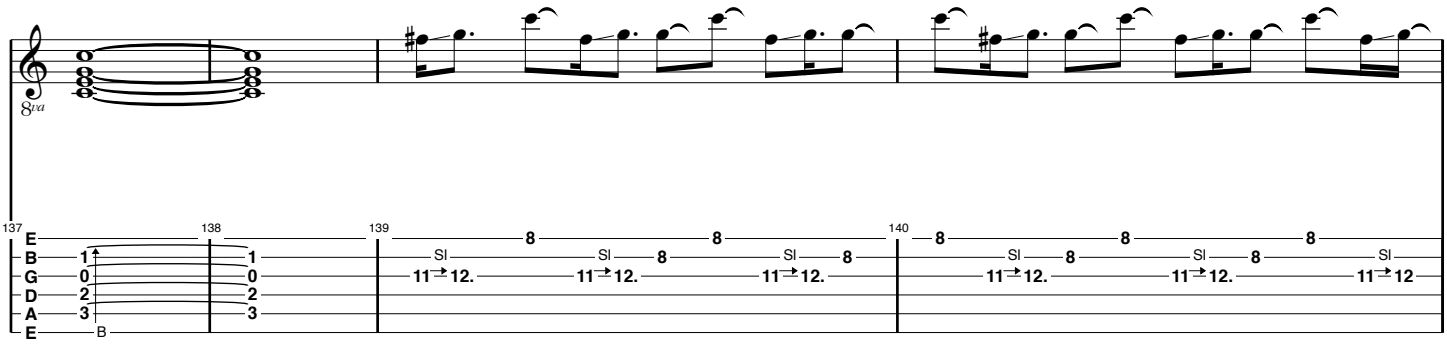

117
118
119
120
SI

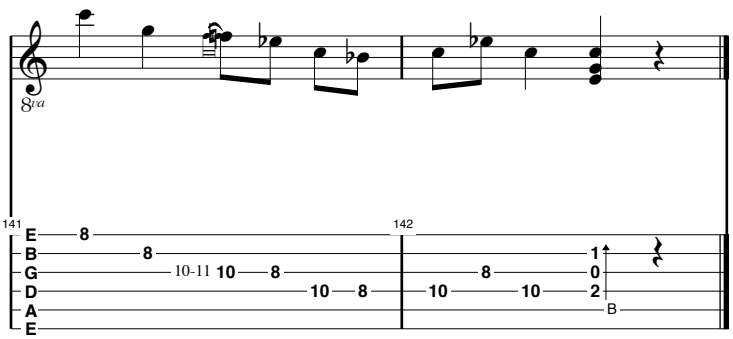

Back to the Key of C
121
122
123
124
B
B


125
126
127
128
SI


8va
129
130
131
132
E
B
G
D
A
E


8va
133
134
135
136
E
B
G
D
A
E


8va
137
138
139
140
E
B
G
D
A
E
B
SI
11 12.
11 12


8va
141
142
E
B
G
D
A
E
10-11
B

The tune has been recorded by a number of different musicians and most give their names as the creators. Fact is, that the tune is truly an old folk song that has its roots in the Scots Irish music brought to the Southern US in the 1800's. The expression itself "salty dog" is accepted as coming from the British Royal Navy, as many colorful expressions.

In the 1920's, black musicians recording on "Race Records" had many varieties of this tune. Bessie Smith had a great version that was essentially VI7 - II7 - V7 - I, instead of starting with I. Probably the best known version that inspired a host of others if not all afterwards was the 1949 recording from a startup Bluegrass band called Flatt and Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys.

This arrangement is a study in thumblick guitar styles and can be played solo, but I've added a bass and rhythm guitar part. These parts were created rather than transcribed from any version and were meant not to detract from the lead part. The student can mute the lead part and use these sections as his backup if so desired. To keep the interest, I've added a number of key changes, mostly backpeddling on the circle of 4ths: C - G - D - A - C. There isn't a lick on this arrangement that isn't found in the playing of Chet Atkins, Merle Travis, and most any fingerstyle guitarist. Except for the parts in C which are adapted from Chet's recording, the rest are my attempts at arranging in other keys using the guidelines defined by Chet's version.

Playing Notes

Measure 3: The starting chord appears to be an A7+5. So that makes a conflict with the bass note (an E) on the 2nd beat. The conflict is a 5th versus an augmented 5. I actually saw Chet Atkins play this tune once and he used the open position. Since this arrangement is not meant to be a strict transcription, I avoid this conflict by playing at the 5th position. This particular chord can be seen in Chet's 1964 video in Olso, Norway of the Wildwood Flower.

Measure 8: The third beat has an F chord. Note that there is an open 2nd string. Now this chord could be called an Fb5, or an F added #11. But I think it's too easy to say, it's just an F chord with a B melody note. Call it whatever you like.

Measure 10: This is the start of a forward roll built on partial chord forms and open strings. As most of these forms are not really used as rhythm chords, I don't think we gain more than to realize the harmony the chord is used in. I've referred to the forms as "C Harmony", etc. , as the form can be used against a number of different chords.

Forward rolls are actually adapted from the method that is believed to be created by Kennedy Jones from West Kentucky. He played with just a P and I finger and to get the three pattern, he played P - P - I - P - P - I. The p played the 4th and 3rd strings, but the I finger alternated on the 2nd and 1st strings. There are numerous videos of Merle Travis and a couple of Mose Rager doing that roll in that style. Later Chet Atkins played it as a P - I - M - P - I - M pattern. There are also many videos of Chet playing the roll like that. I have played those rolls for many years as P - I - M - P - I - A. This is another technique from classical training call "The Minimum Movement" principle. Each finger is dedicated to a string, and no finger has to dance back and forth. It's a technique that is learned as easily as any arpeggio movement, and for my playing it's a little more accurate.

Remember the objective is the End - beautiful music, not the Means - technique.

Measure 11: To me, the most accurate righthand fingering is to use P - I - A. This comes from a classical guitar adage "Skip a string, skip a finger". I realize that this is somewhat of an unusual concept, and that most will want to play it as P I M. That's the way Chet played it.

Measure 27 and throught the G part: The Section in G was an Hommage to Merle Travis. To get Merle's sound, I had to use chords Merle might have used. For example, normally I would have used an A7 form in Measure 29 similar to Measure 3, but that wasn't common in Merle's playing. Not all the licks are found in Merle's recordings, but the section in G is undeniably Merle's.

Measure 29: Since Merle only used his P and I fingers for 99% of his playing he got multiple notes by brushing his first finger up the strings. It's a little different the first time one tries it, but not very difficult to learn and a nice tool to add to the tool box.

Measure 39 and 40: In Merle's Back Home Album, he plays a tune Long Lost John. While doing a forward roll over a full six string chord, Merle says "Double Shot Lick, Charlie!" I've also seen Mose Rager and Ike Everly play this very Western Kentucky lick, but surprisingly few guitarists ever use it. It only took me about 30 years to figure it out, so I've got too much "sweat equity" in it not to use it from time to time. Play it like Merle, Mose, and Ike as a P - P - I - P - P - I.

Measures 41 and 42: This lick was clearly adapted from one of Chet's early signature licks.

Measures 51 through 58: This is the famous Merle Travis "gallop". Merle played it as a P - I - P - I. but Paul Yandell once told me that Chet played it as P - M - P - I. The secret is to lift one's left hand on the down beat of 2 and 4 but maintain contact with the string. This gives that deaden sound to the sort of opened 3rd string.

Measures 63 through 65: This is another lick made famous by Chet and not really a Merle lick. It makes an interesting key change to D so I've used it. I don't think Merle would mind.

Measures 67 through the key of D: This key plays almost as intuitive as the key of C but we can use some other chord forms. I've included it to illustrate transposition changes.

Measures 75 and 76: The "B Harmony" stretch form is the hardest chord to make, but as it involves a one-finger movement from the D6 chord, it's not as hard as just jumping into it. If you just can't make the stretch, substitute the B harmony chord found in the Key of A section.

Measures 81 and 82: This looks like something from the key of G section, but a closer look shows that it's based on the D being the I chord and not the V chord. Therefore, we have a C# min as the next chord after the D (instead of a C Major).

Measure 91: I show in the chord diagram for the A7 chord an open 3rd string (G), but it's not in the measure. On beats 2 and 4, play a sweep and note the difference. It's really a nice difference and one that we can use in addition to the way it's written.

Measure 101: This B harmony form can be substituted for the stretch chord found in the Key of D section.

Measure 111 and 112: Here's another "gallop" with a different chord progression.

Measure 113: This measure is 100% pure Merle.

Measure 119 through 121: Here's the V - IV - iii - ii chord progression in A, but this time with a P I M A arpeggio as a little interest builder.

Measure 124 through to the end: This is an adaptation of Chet's last parts from his recording as we go back to the starting key of C.

Ending: This is not how Chet actually played the ending. After transcribing his actually ending, I noted that a backward arpeggio (P M I P M I) would keep the same syncopation and it would become an hommage to the 5-string banjo of Earl Scruggs who has done more to promote this tune than everyone else combined.

This arrangement is meant as a teaching work rather than a performable piece. It's clearly a backporch tune, and clearly one that one can't help but feel good while playing. Good luck!

Mike, 22 April 2008