

Flatpicked Guitar

Paul Kovac

Intro to Flatpicked Guitar.

Basics of Rhythm

- a. pick direction
- b. punching the bass notes
- c. tone
- d. leaning on 1&3 or 2&4

Knowing the Melody

- a. breaking the melody into phrases
- b. establishing a key & chord set
- c. songs vs. tunes

Quarter Note Lead (Mother Maybelle)

- a. Banks of the Ohio
- b. Rosewood casket
- bb. Spinning wheel
- c. hammer-ons, pull-offs & slides
- d. playing out of the (open) chord position

Open chord double stops

- a. key G- degrees of the scale exercises
- b. worried man blues

Jumping to eighth notes

- a. exercises
- b. the pulse

Closed Double Stops

- a. the three shapes
- b. linking shapes up & down

The "D" shape

- a. freeing your fingers/ proper position
- b. fiddle tunes

Flatpicking Exercises

- a. minor key exercise
- b. exercises

These pages do not attempt to be a manual for how to play the guitar, just some of what I think is important when trying to figure it out for yourself, and to serve as a physical reminder of what we did in our classroom at Swannonana 09. -pk

BASICS OF RHYTHM

PICK DIRECTION

For this class, we'll assume that we'll be playing with a flatpick, and that the songs will be in 4/4 or 3/4 time.

Remember that chords and notes are generated by placing your fingers in certain places on the fingerboard, but most of what sounds good, comes from what you are doing with your pick hand. The pick generates rhythm, volume, tone, phrasing, style, etc., so it's very important to focus on a strong skill set with your pick hand.

As rhythm players, you probably know that we play a lot in 4/4 time, which usually means the old "boom/chuck", bass note, followed by a strum of the chord. The bass notes of the measure are played on 1 & 3, and the strum on 2 & 4, all played with down strokes. To play 1-2-3-4 with all down strokes, your hand must come back up to go down again. Those up strokes are the &'s, 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &, and that's the basis of flatpicking, the numbered beats are played with down strokes, and the &'s are played with up strokes, ALWAYS, unless otherwise noted.

PUNCHING BASS NOTES

Now because we're rhythm guitar players, we're pretty used to playing the "boom-chuck" roll. Rhythm guitar is a subjective expression, some players like to lean more on the Chuck side, and some players leaning towards the Boom side. An experienced player knows when to lean one way or the other throughout the course of a song or tune. I think of the guitar's roll as that of the border collie, where you do what's needed to make the song come alive or stay together, and to keep the flock in order. Leaning on the bass notes

tends to open the song up, and makes more room for the fiddle or vocals, banging the back beat (2 & 4) tends to push it right along.

LEANING ON 1 & 3, or 2 & 4

A good way to practice this is to play a song in "boom/chuck" fasion, then try only playing the bass notes, next pass through, hit the back beats, then a combo. Try singing a song you know, mainly playing the bass notes while the lyrics are being sung, and when a line ends and before the next one starts, bang a couple back beats. You'll notice how playing with these dynamics bring the focus to the singing and does not distract.

NOW...THE BIGGEST THING IS:

Regardless of wether you are leaning one way or the other, your pick hand MUST continue going down & up, down on the numbered beats, and up on the &'s.

TONE

Just like a good golf or tennis swing, good picking requires follow-thru. That's why there are pickgards on your guitars. When you pick the bass note, strike your pick through the string, so that your pick ends up somewhere near you pickgard, same for the strum beat. To get that swinging, free feeling sound, imagine your pick a hammer, and the strings a nail. When you pound a nail, you hold the hammer loose in your hand, so all the impact of the hit does not go right back into your hand. You throw the weight of the hammer at the nail. And on the guitar, that's how to make your playing bounce as well, by throwing the weight of your hand (with the pick being the head of the hammer) at the strings. Practice with this concept in mind.

Good tone is elsusive, but it's whats seperates you from the pack, so it's worth working on. A simply played solo with great tone and rhythm is always welcome in a jam.

KNOWING THE MELODY

Knowing the melody is essential to your success. It's why you'll sooner be able to play *Mary Had a Little Lamb* or *Row Row Row Your Boat*, than a song or tune that's new to you. If the melody is in your head, you'll save many torturous hours of learning through other methods.

Do as much as you can to learn the melody to a song or tune before you start working it out on your instrument. That means finding a reputable source (or two) to learn it from, either in person, on a CD (or preferably several CD's) or from the author if it's not a Trad. or PD song or tune. Find the right key for it, and sing (hum, whistle, etc.) it, get it in your head, even if you have to break the melody into phrases, get a good grip on it first, and learning it on your instrument will be a lot easier and faster.

ESTABLISHING THE KEY & CHORD SET

Finding the right key and chord set is a good first place to start. Keys are established by: the range of the singer (if it's a singing song), or by the traditional key if it's a fiddle tune (...Cripple Creek's always in A). Once the key has been figured out, then you have to decide how to proceed on the guitar. You can just play the chords to the chosen key. You can capo, and play a different set of chords, but still be in the right key. The choice is yours. You may choose to capo because you are unfamiliar with the chords of the weird key, or maybe there's another guitar player playing the open chords, so you capo to create a different sound. Figure out where and how you want to proceed before jumping in.

People do have different vocal ranges, so it doesn't hurt to be able to play a singing song with a couple different chord shapes, then with a capo, you are able to cover most keys if the need arises.

QUARTER NOTE LEAD (Mother Maybelle)

The style we've all come to accept as the Carter Style, is a great way to play the melody with solid rhythm, using down-stroked quarter notes and it's the link to down-up flatpicking.

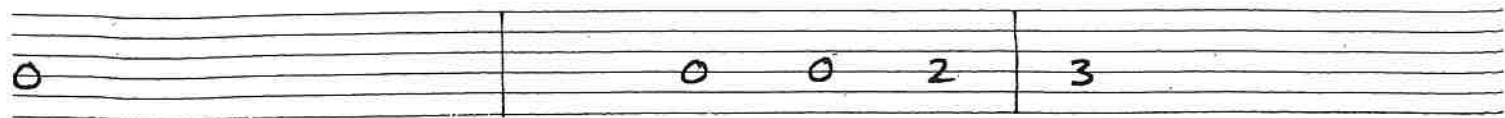
Most of the melody notes are played out of a chord shape, often around the bass register, making the higher register always ready for a chord strum. Perfect really. So, it's just like playing good "boom-chuck" rhythm, but instead of the strum every other time, you play the melody with down-stroked quarter notes (up to 4 per measure) and fill in with strums.

There are many fun ways to use hammer-ons, pull-offs and slides in the Carter Style, because of the use of open chords. We'll play these in class so keep your recorder running.

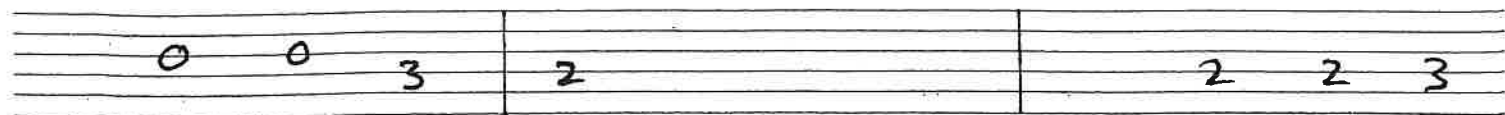
We'll learn these songs by ear, but here they are written out just in case.

Banks of the Ohio
Little Rosewood Casket
Old Spinning Wheel

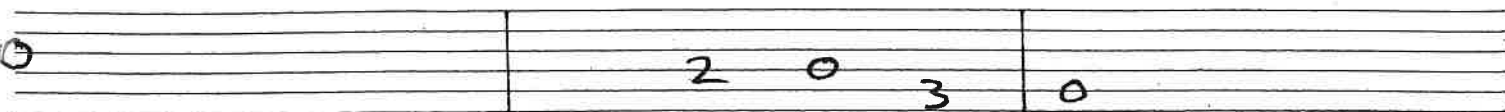
C

G⁷

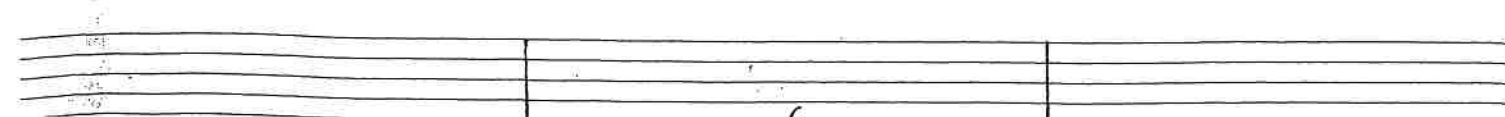
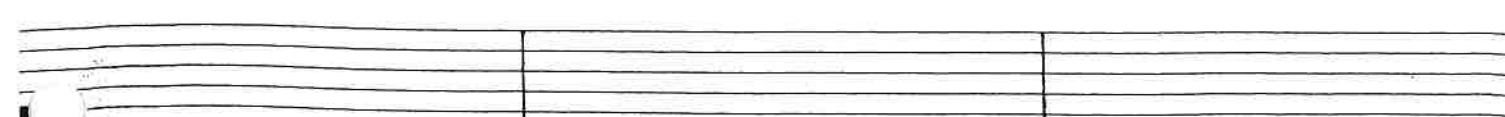
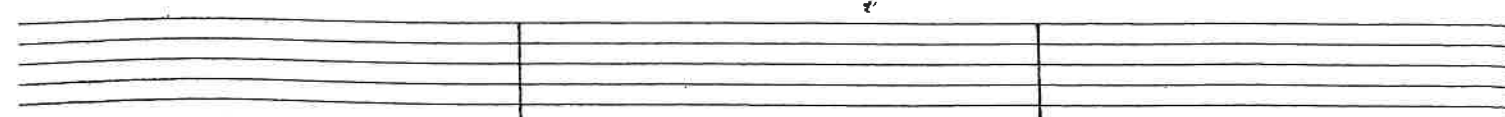
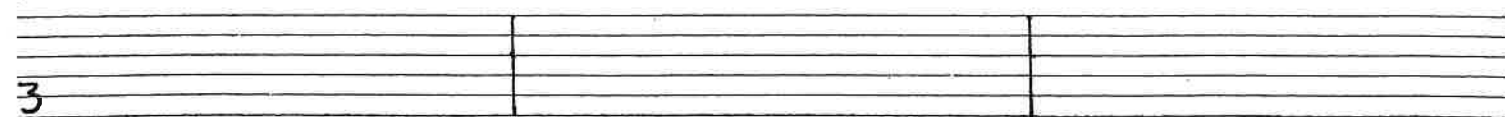
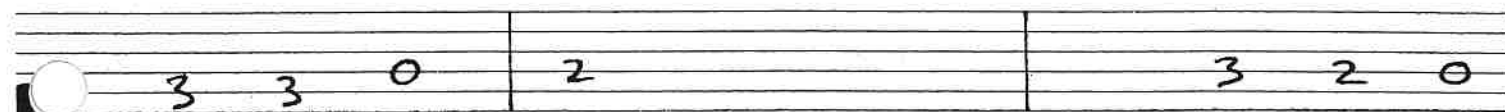
C



F



C

G⁷

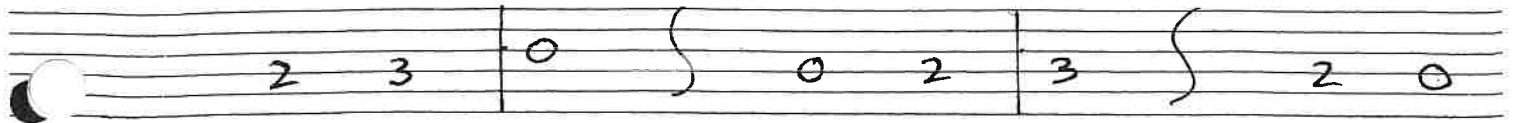
C.

LITTLE ROSEWOOD CASKET

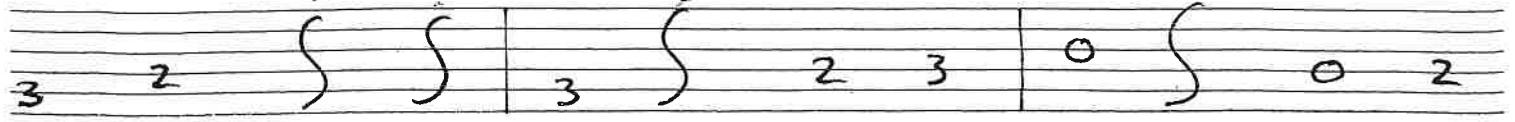
KEY C

C

G⁷

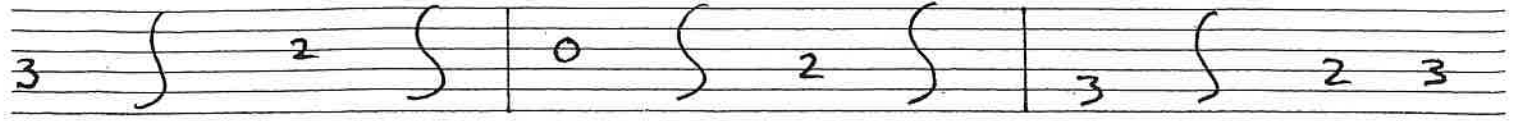


C



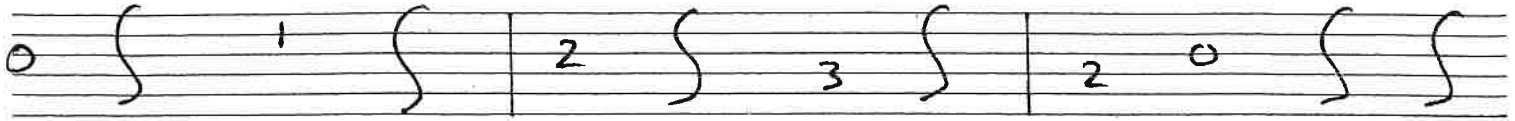
F

C

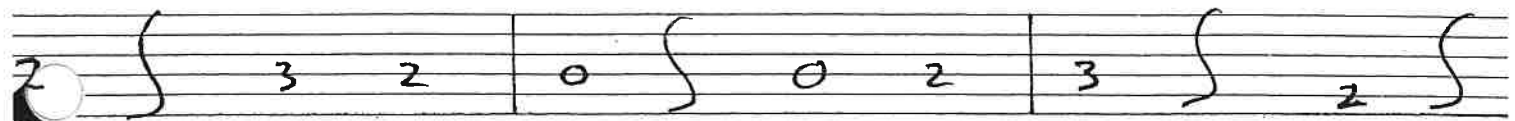


F

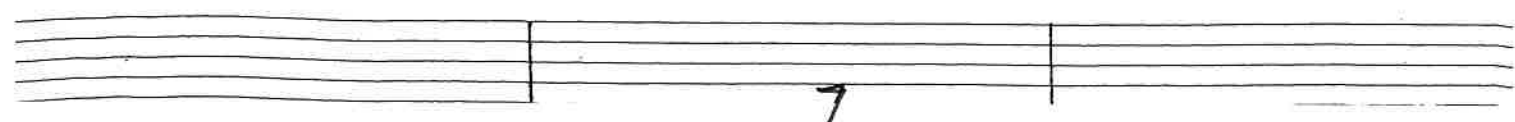
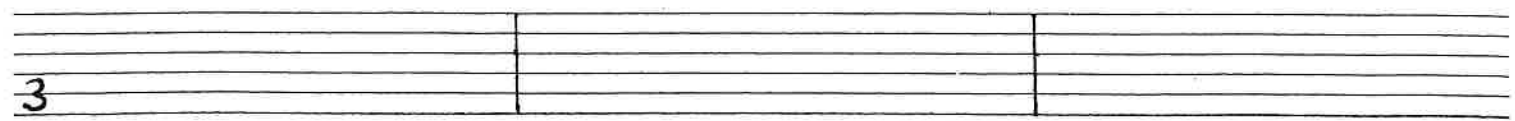
C

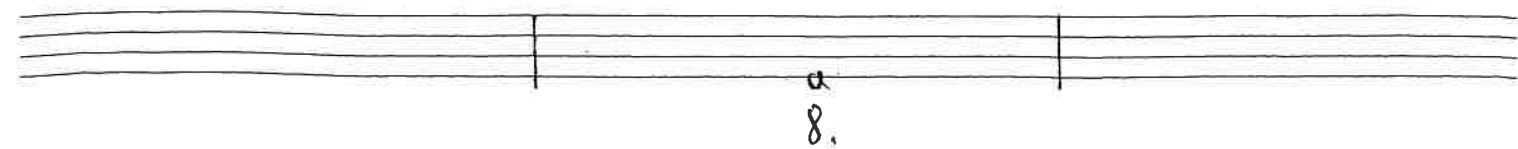
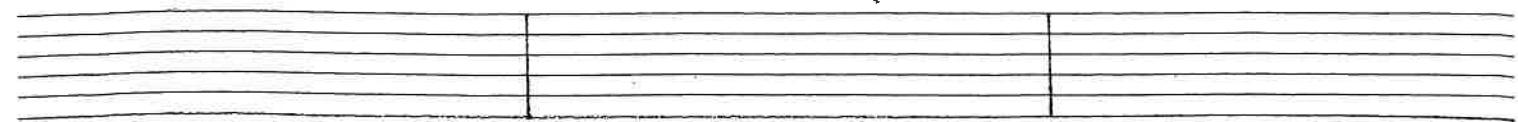
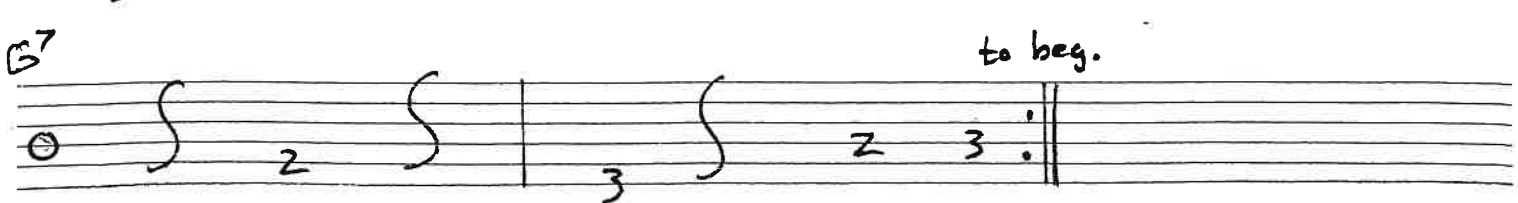
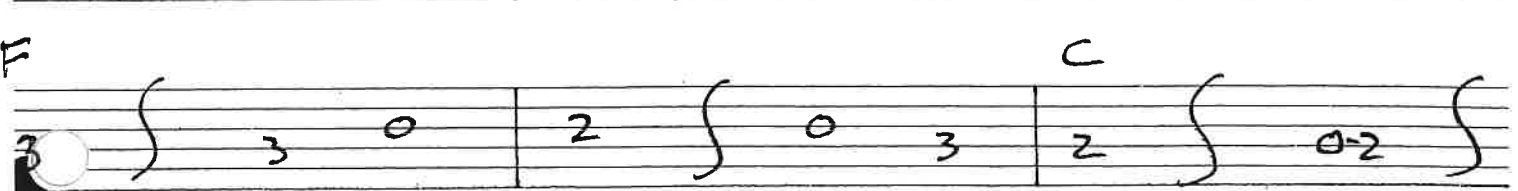
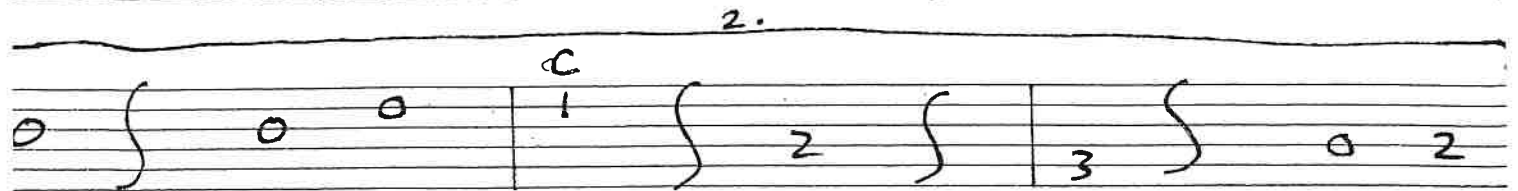
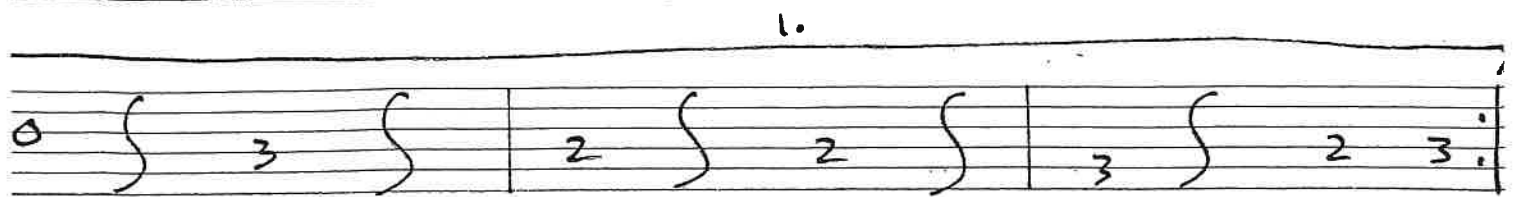
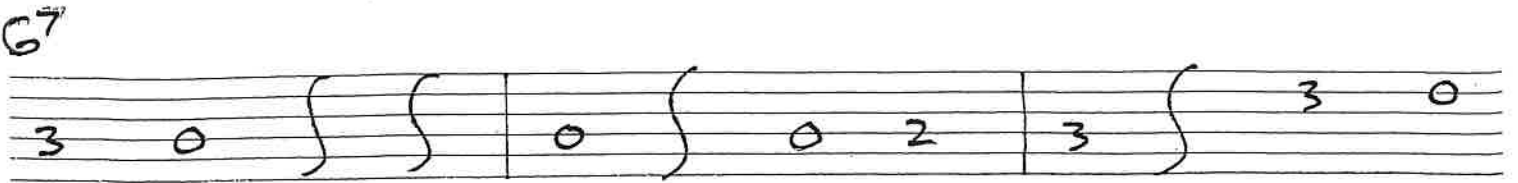
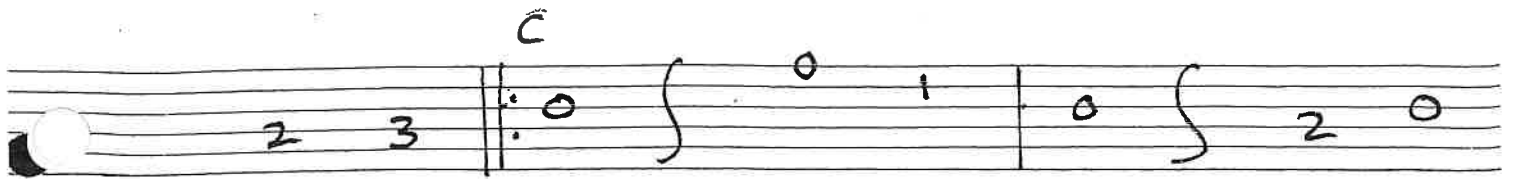


G



C





KEY OF G - SLIDES

G is a good key for guitar. That's why some lead players prefer to capo up to play in A, Bb, B or even C, than to relearn their fingerboard, but the better you know it, the faster you'll learn to play.

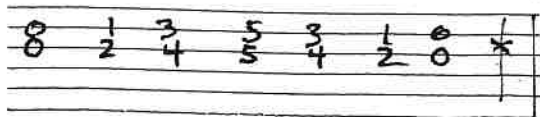
Sliding is an effective way to create melody. Try sliding your 5th. string from the second fret, to the fifth fret, where it matches the note of the 4th. string, open. Now do it with rhythm. Do the same on the 4th. string, sliding it from 2 to 5, where it matches the open G.



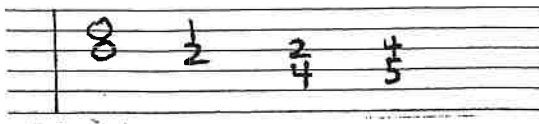
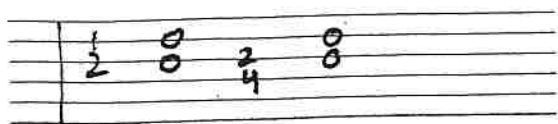
OPEN CHORD DOUBLE STOPS

A double stop is a fiddle term for playing two notes of a chord at the same time. They are partial chords. Playing double stops is a great way to play melody, make your solo sound full and toneful, and there's always room to embellish a double stop solo with a bass run or a flurry of eighth notes here or there. By learning how double stops connect to each other, you are also learning good note and finger positioning, which if your fingers are in the right spots, then playing more advanced music is a little easier.

Here are four double stops that harmonize the first 4 steps of the G scale (forward and backward), the building blocks for countless songs. Try every childhood nursery rhyme you can think of using them.



Here are a couple exercises things to practice



Now let's try to put some of these exercizes together and play a song.

WORRIED MAN BLUES

Key G

Handwritten musical score for "Worried Man Blues" in Key G. The score consists of four systems of two staves each.

System 1: The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains the notes 2, 2, 1, followed by a double bar line. Above the staff is a "G" chord symbol. After the bar line, the notes are 2, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5. Below the staff are the numbers -5 and -5. The second staff contains the notes 3/4, 3/4, 3/4, 1/2, 0, 0, 2, 0.

System 2: The first staff contains the notes 3/4, 3/4, 3/4, 1/2, 0, 0, 2, 0. Above the staff is a "G" chord symbol. The second staff contains the notes 0, 0, 2, 0.

System 3: The first staff contains the notes 3/4, 1/2, 0, 2/4. Above the staff is a "G" chord symbol. The second staff contains the notes 0, 0.

System 4: The first staff contains the notes 2, 2, 1, followed by a double bar line. Above the staff are the numbers 1. and 2. with arrows indicating first and second endings. The second staff contains the notes 0, 0.

If playing in the Key of G, there are many songs that you can play by connecting these and other double stops to form the melody, but you *have to know the melody*, you cannot just assemble the building blocks. The melody is the blueprint.

JUMPING TO EIGHTH NOTES

If you're doing it right, your pick hand is moving down and up eight times per measure, but up until now, you've mainly been striking strings or double stops on the down strokes. Real flatpicking is a mosaic, mostly of eighth notes, picked both down and up. It's a skill needed to play fiddle tunes note-for-note, as their melody is usually notier and more complex than a singing song.

One stepping stone way to get started is to learn a simple fiddle tune (Soldier's Joy, Old Joe Clark, etc.) played with down-stroked quarter notes, then double each note, down - up. That's it. That's flatpicking, in a nutshell. You can probably improve on that melody, but at least your hand is picking both directions.

It takes a lot of practice for your pick to feel as good, strong, even and accurate picking up as it does picking down. They must be even, no difference.

To practice, I take a phrase from a tune, say the first three notes of Old Joe Clark, and play each one for a measure of eighth notes, over and over, until they start to groove, then 4 eighth notes on each note, then two, all in steady rhythm. You can pick any scale or phrase, just strive for evenness.

Playing eighth note solos is a departure from the safety of playing out of the chord shape. It's hard to flatpick more complex things and retain the shape, as in Mother Maybelle's style, or even Merle Travis or Chet Atkins style.

When flatpicking, you always need to remember what the chords to the song are at any given time, and what chord shape you are playing out of but often you are not holding the chord down, even though your hand will be in position to play it if needed.

Versions of fiddle tunes on guitar are readily available on CD's, videos, & books. I try to always learn my fiddle tunes from a fiddler, that way I don't sound like somebody's record, and learning from a different instrument removes the copy cat option, and makes you use your ears a little bit more.

THE PULSE

I like to play my fiddle tunes on guitar with a pulse. I feel it is the difference between a tune that just lays there, and one that gets up and dances. The pulse is not absolute, all the time, but I must say, it's usually in my playing of fiddle tunes, except where the melody requires something different.

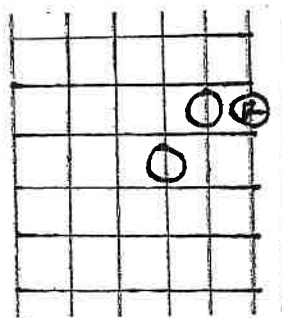
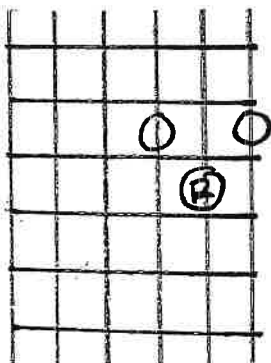
The pulse is simply accenting the 2 & 4 beats of each measure. If you practice playing with a pulse on simple things like scales, short phrases, double stops, then when you venture into more complicated melodies, the pulse will be on whatever note gets played on the 2nd. or 4th. beats. It's kinda like the melody notes get funneled into this rhythm machine, and certain ones get an accent.

Try it with a G scale, playing each note for a full measure each (8 notes).

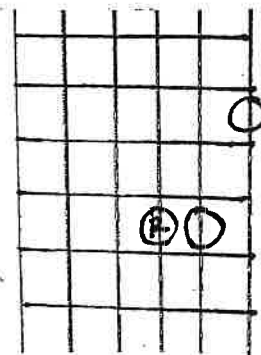
CLOSED DOUBLE STOPS

Closed double stops, I love 'em. With just a few combos, you really can create song melodies that sound great as you expand your knowledge of the finger board.

Let's start by looking at 3-note chord shapes played on the first three strings, the "D" shape, "F" shape and the "Bb" shape (I never know what to call this last one).



12.



Each of these three shapes are a triad, and produce a different chord depending on where you place them. It's good to know which note of the chord is the root (marked with an R). You could play the same chord in three different places on the fingerboard with these three different shapes.

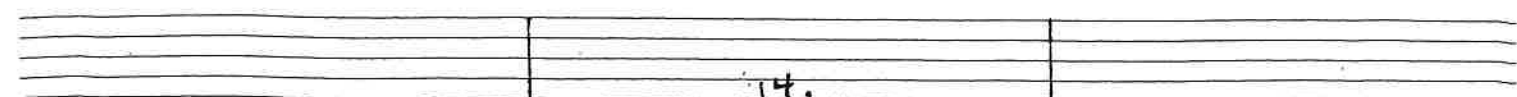
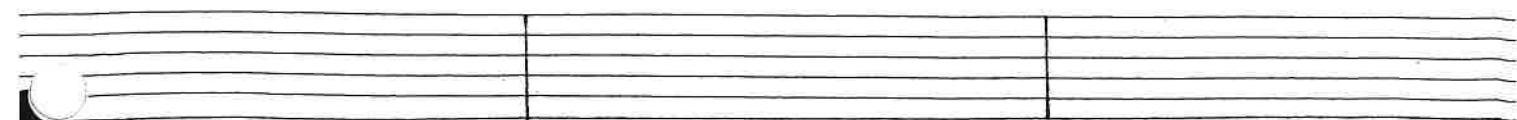
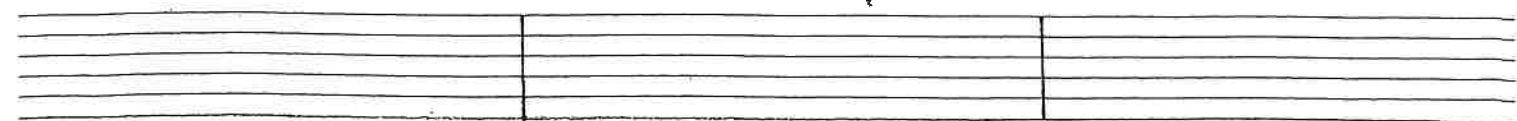
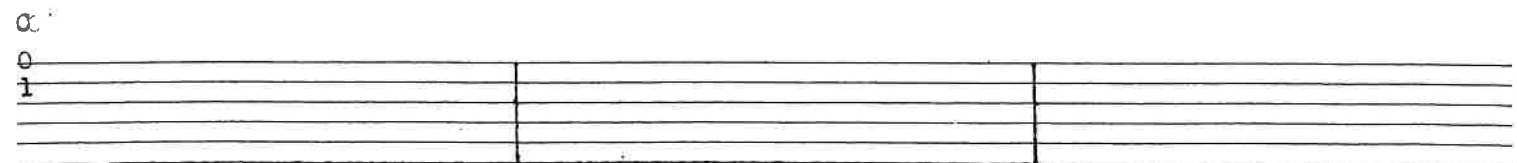
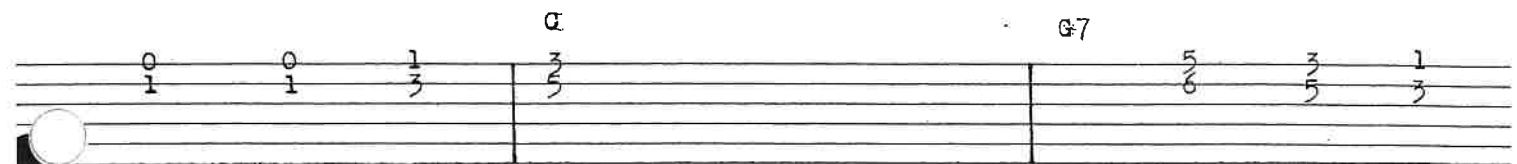
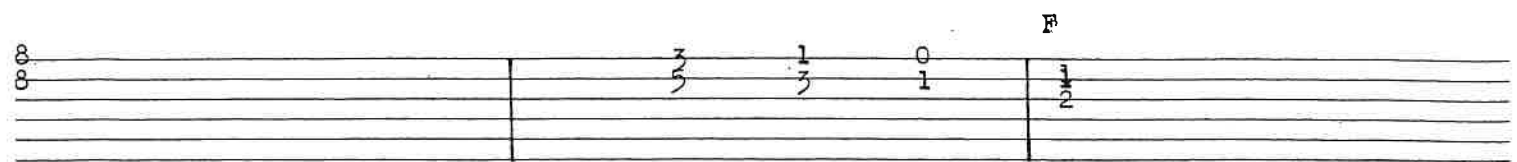
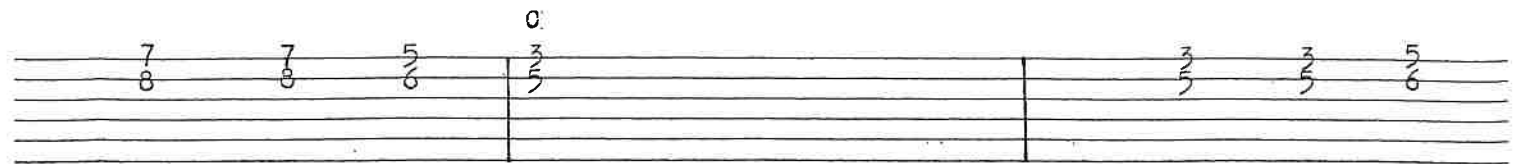
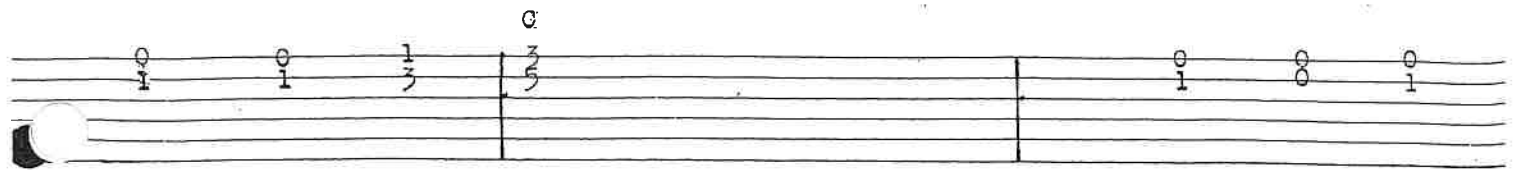
I often go about playing a melody by sliding these double stops around, sometimes with the same chord, sometimes changing chords depending on the song. This is easier to demonstrate than to put into writing, but here are a few exercises that we'll cover in class.

Handwritten musical notation showing two exercises on a five-line staff. The first exercise shows a D chord (2/3, 3/5, 5/7, 7/8) and a G chord (3/3, 7/8, 10/12). The second exercise shows a C chord (3/3, 8/8, 12/13) and a D chord (2/3, 5/7, 10/10).

Just like we played Worried Man Blues, let's try applying these shapes to come up with a higher version of Banks of the Ohio. Here are the shapes you'll need.

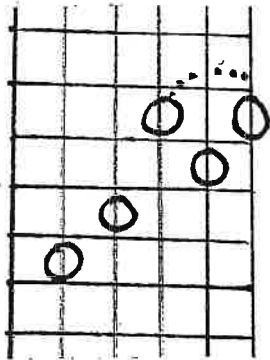
BANKS OF THE OHIO (double stops)

key C



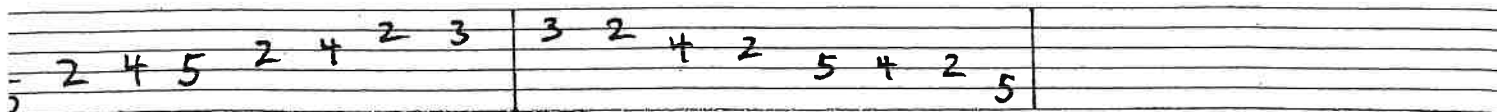
The way these shapes link up with one another is pretty endless, so get a grip on how they apply to a few songs before you venture off into the center of the fingerboard and into weird keys.

THE "D" SHAPE



When breaking away from open chords in the first position, sometimes you have to give up the old way of doing things and reconfigure your fretting hand with a new chord shape. This closed, major chord shape, though a handful, puts your fingers in perfect position to play melody, double stops, and solos. It's great for flatpicking fiddle tunes in the key of D, way better than "C" capoed up, and because it's a closed shape, the knowledge transfers up the neck.

You may as well start with a D major scale, up and down.



These are five fiddle tunes I play out of this shape:

- Forked Deer
- Whiskey Before Breakfast
- Little Brown Jug
- Soldiers Joy
- Susanna Gals

Keep your recorders going as we'll play through some of these tunes in class.

FLATPICKING EXERCISES

Here is a minor key exercise in Am.

Am

Dm

E

Am

Here is a flatpicking bass run exercise in C.

C

G

C

I like this "crossing over the strings" exercise.

D G A

+ 2 4 4 2 4 2 2 | 5 4 5 5 4 5 4 4 | 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2

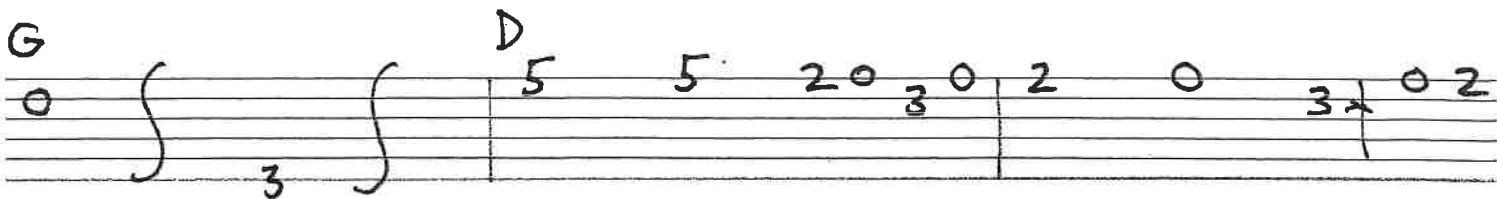
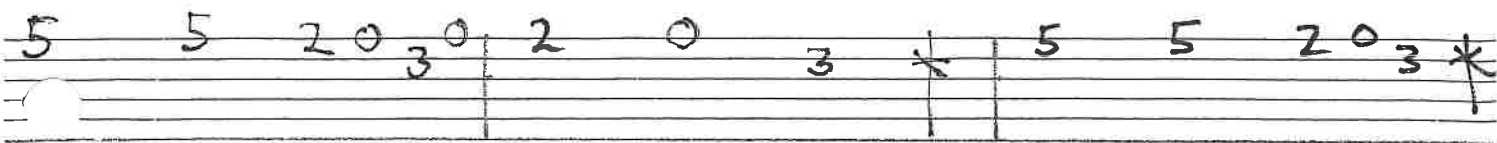
D

0 2 3 4 2 4 2 | 3 |

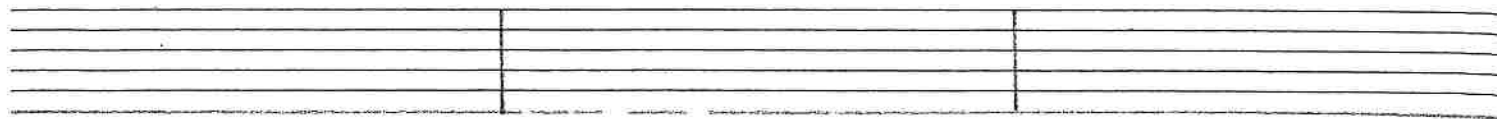
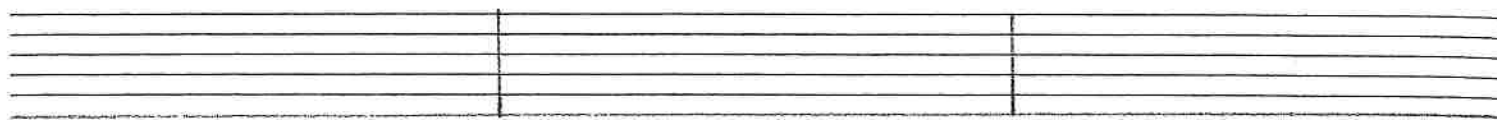
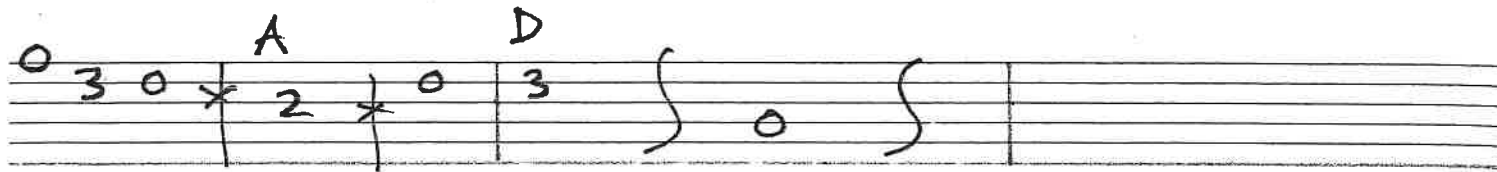
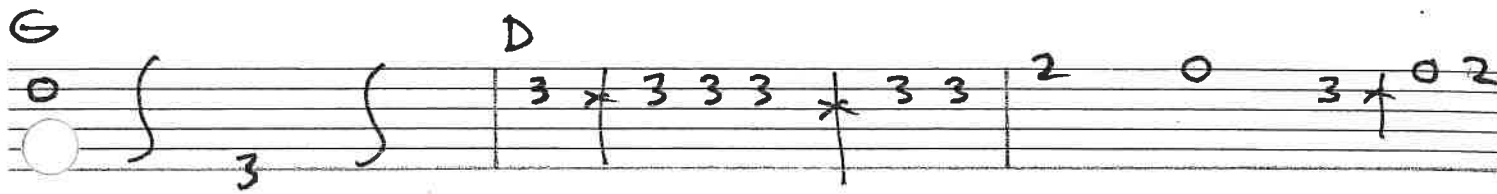
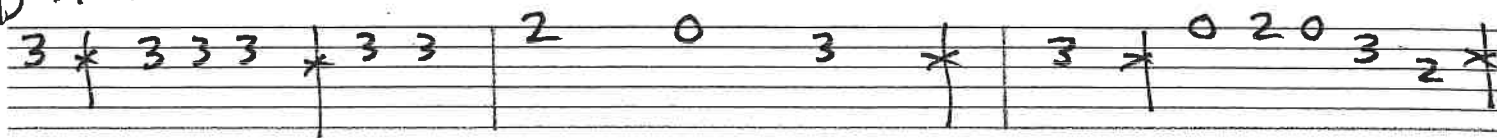
D Pt. I.

Sugar Hill

Key D



D Pt. II



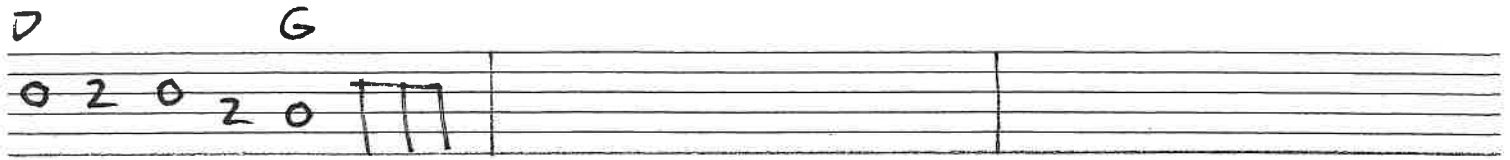
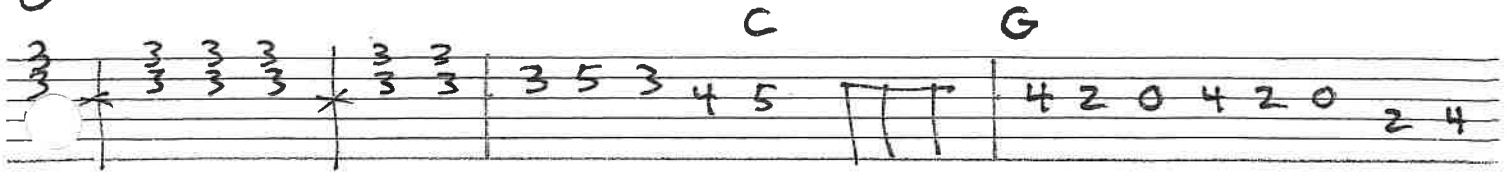
Key C

19.

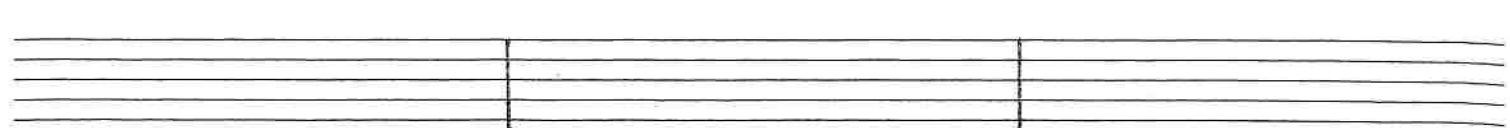
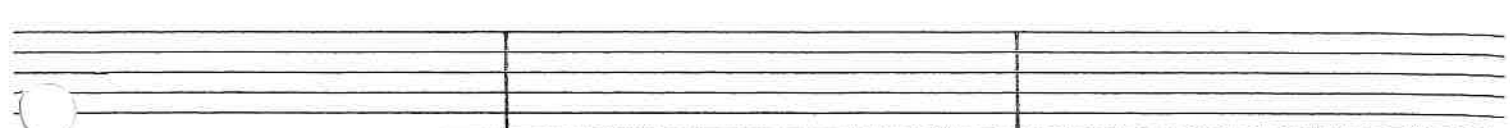
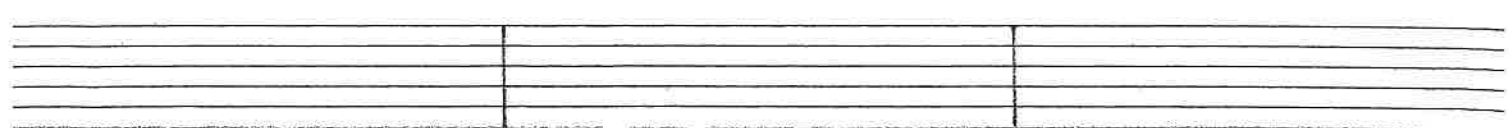
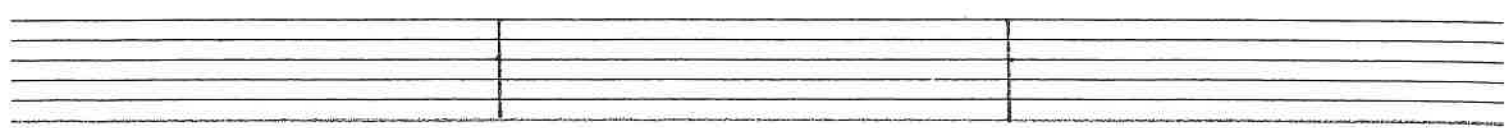
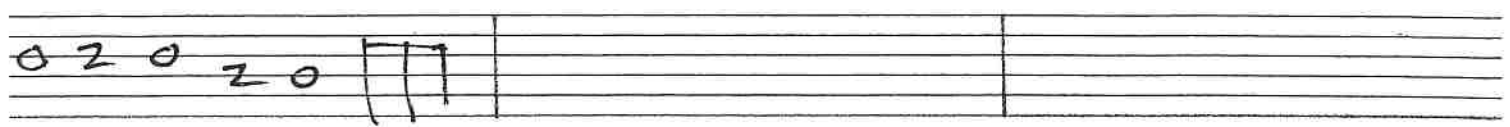
Cotton-eyed Joe

key G

G Pt. I

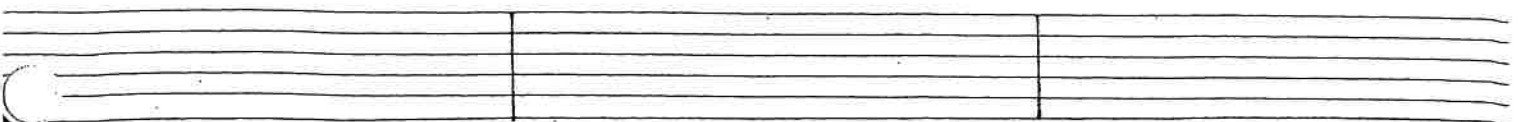
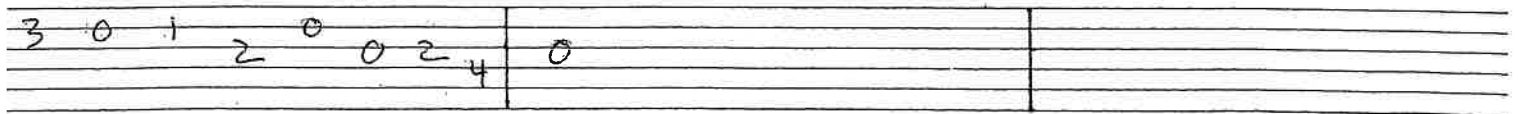
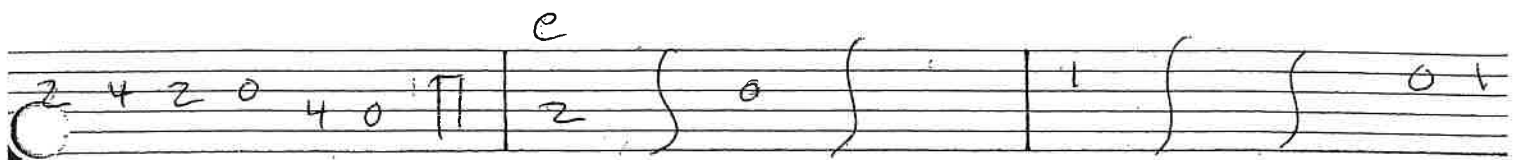
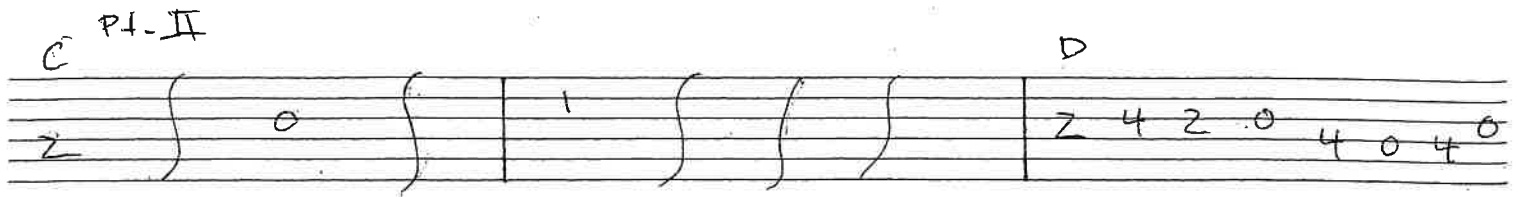
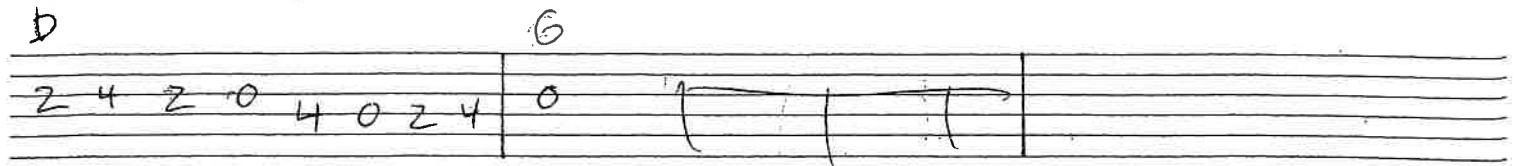
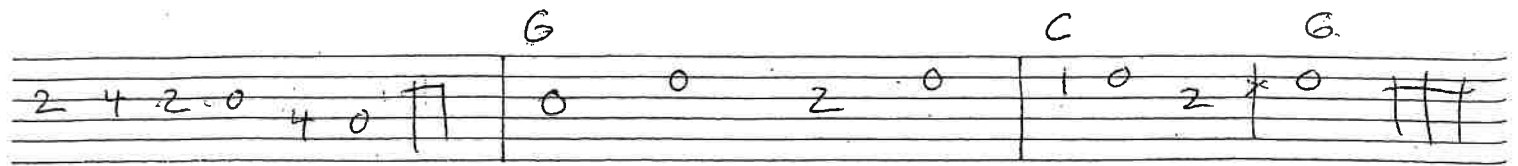


G Pt. II

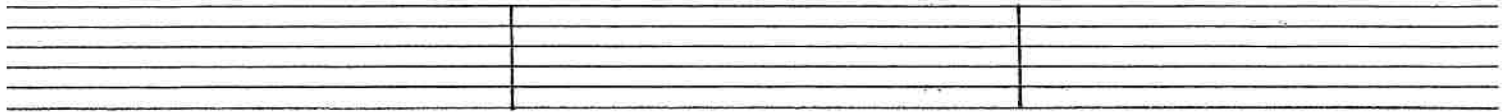
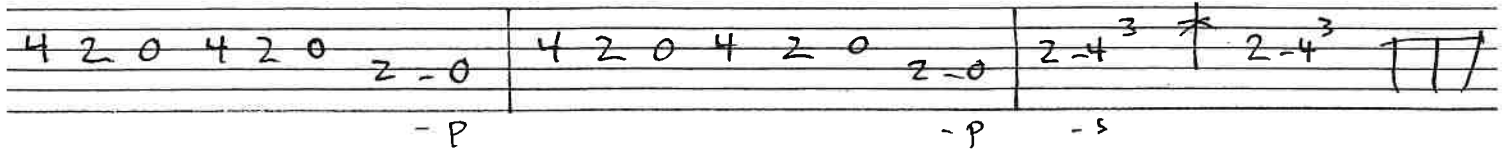
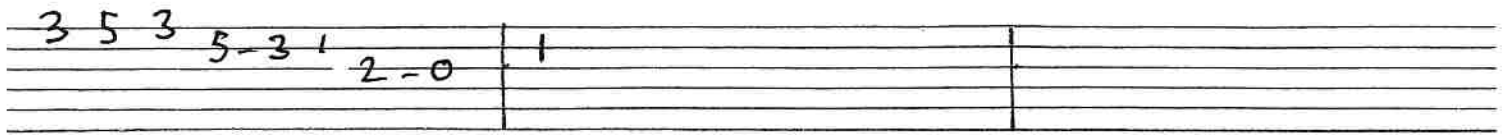


P+I.

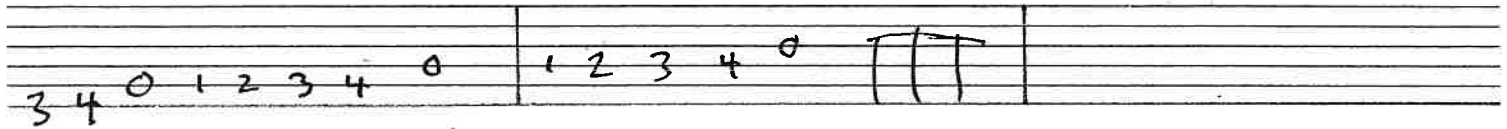
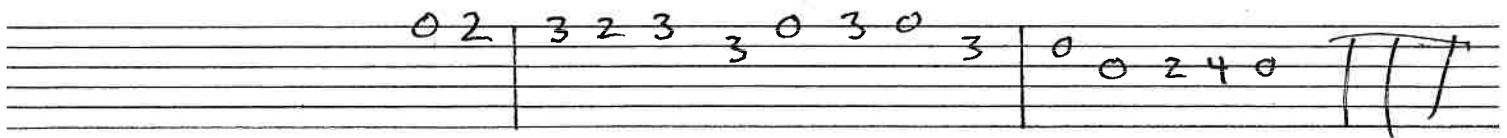
Cattish



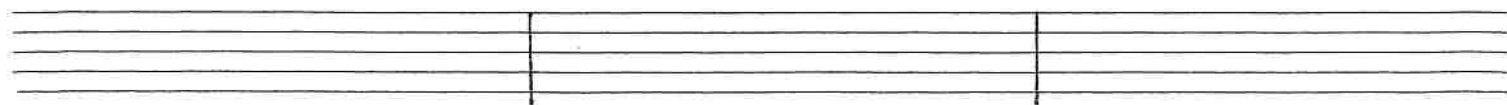
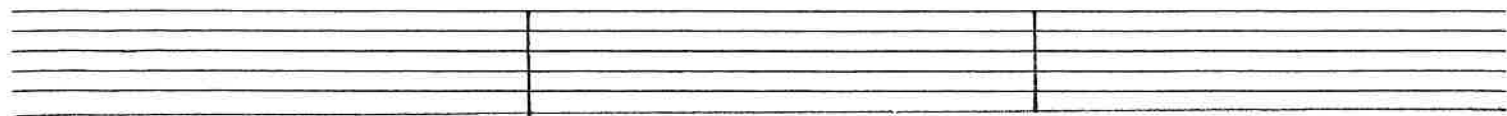
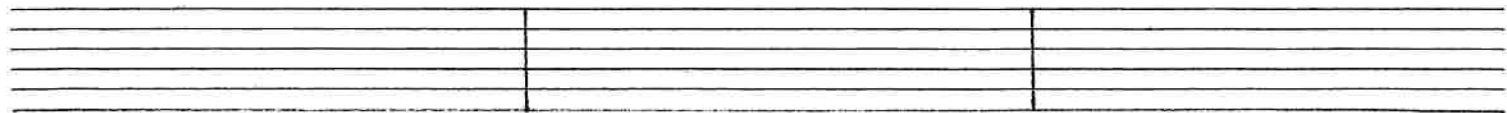
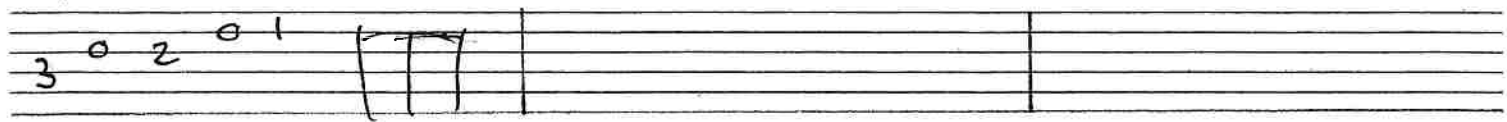
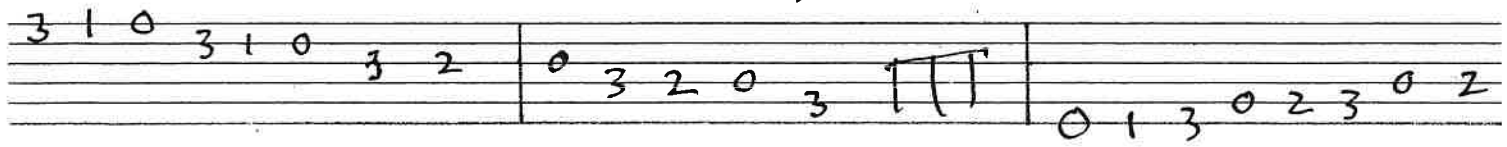
Doc Watson (From Down Yonder)

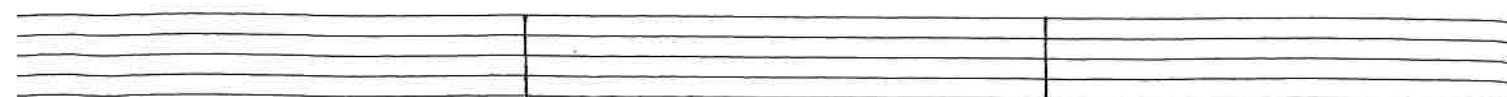
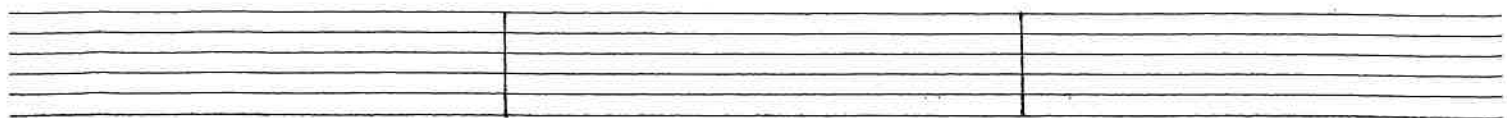


Double tag in G



Double tag in C





1	2	3	4	5	6	7
G	G [#] / _{A^b}	A	A [#] / _{B^b}	B	C	C [#] / _{D^b}
A	A [#] / _{B^b}	B	C	C [#] / _{D^b}	D	D [#] / _{E^b}
B ^b	B	C	C [#] / _{D^b}	D	D [#] / _{E^b}	E
B	C	C [#] / _{D^b}	D	D [#] / _{E^b}	E	F
C	C [#] / _{D^b}	D	D [#] / _{E^b}	E	F	F [#] / _{G^b}
D	D [#] / _{E^b}	E	F	F [#] / _{G^b}	G	G [#] / _{A^b}
E	F	F [#] / _{G^b}	G	G [#] / _{A^b}	A	A [#] / _{B^b}
F	F [#] / _{G^b}	G	G [#] / _{A^b}	A	A [#] / _{B^b}	B