# DanceTrance Reel

A collection of original compositions
for contra dancing

By David Atcher

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(Cover photo by Suzie Gallagher of my wife, Kathleen Gallagher Everett and I at the DanceTrance Weekend in Lexington, Ky, June 2008).

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**Introduction**

On a very snowy March 7, 2018 I attempted to write the introduction to my contra dance tune book. Two hours later I whimpered to my wife, Kathleen, "I have writer's block- Help!". She came to the rescue, offering to write this intro for me on the following terms-she would do it if I finished her project, installing the wood trim in our dining room. I immediately decided to give this writing thing another go. "Tell the reader why you are putting out a book of original tunes", she suggested. So I'll begin there.

Turning 65 has stirred up thoughts of mortality and prompts the question, "What will be my legacy?". Putting my tunes together in a book to leave behind to my children and descendants and possibly to other young musicians is part of my offering. I have wondered, while learning tunes like "Soldiers Joy" or "Whiskey Before Breakfast", who is the person that composed those enduring tunes? I would have liked to know. And certainly another aspect is the thrill of seeing a group of musicians and contra dancers enjoying your creation, truly a pleasurable experience. I've had enough requests for sheet music throughout the years to know there will be some takers for this collection.

I'm not sure where my own tune writing comes from and it seems to be a mysterious process for many. Sam Bartlett and Keith Murphy, great tune writers of our age, acknowledge there is no formula and tunes come in different ways. Some seem to write themselves, as though the melody is being channeled into the instrument and one's fingers are being drawn to the fingerboard rather than being placed by volition. In the "notes on tunes" I mention a few of the processes I use, or the processes that seemed to use me. And there is joy and satisfaction in arranging musical sounds in a meaningful and communicative way, creating something that did not exist before and that could be defined as a "work of art".

A key moment in my tunesmithing career came in the mid 1990's after I had composed a few tunes but kept them to myself. I had met a good fiddler, Eve Podet, when she showed up at a pick-up band I was leading, and I asked if she would be interested in starting a contra dance band. We added a bass player(Richard King), a keyboard player(Bob Frankenhoff) and a percussionist (Deb Frankenhoff). Eve's husband came up with the name "Cornpone". She and I would practice together separately from the band to discover which contra tunes we both knew and could play well. I remember casually mentioning during one of our evenings that I had composed some tunes, and she got me to play "DanceTrance" on the mandolin. The tune had been composed in my office at Eastern State Hospital in Lexington, KY, where I kept a banjo and mandolin to ease the boring waits for action or the anticipation of waiting for the next emergency. She liked it very much, and we taught it to the band at the next group practice-and they liked it, too! We played it at our next dance and I remember being nervous before the tune was played and exhilarated when it was well received and the caller announced that it was my composition. More affirmation came when some of my tunes were recorded by other musicians and when I would hear about other bands having played my compositions.

I want to acknowledge the following people involved in the creation of this book.

Eve Podet, who first acknowledged me as a competent tune writer and encouraged me to compose. Richard King, Bob and Deb Frankenhoff of my band , Cornpone(now named Footbridge) who continued to play my tunes and were always asking for more. My children, Clay David Atcher, who's opinions on tunes I valued and Nancy Tamesen Atcher Diedrichs, who teamed up with me to write tunes and who was the inspiration for melodies. Tom Cunningham, fellow tunesmith, who was always encouraging and honest. Elise Melrood, Nathan Wilson, and Angela Scharfenberger, with whom Tom and I combined to

form the band "Intellectual Property", which only played our original tunes. Lauren McDonald, with whom I currently play, who checked the correctness of the musical notation. Keith Murphy and Sam Bartlett have inspired me and Keith provided some practical advice on putting together a tune book. Cary Ravitz, dance composer extraordinaire, who helped bring this book to fruition. I also want to acknowledge the Lexington Traditional Dance Association and its members, past and present, who for 30+ years provided a canvas for artistic, creative and self expression in music, dance and calling and were always welcoming of my new tunes. And I would be nowhere without the love, support and tolerance of my wildly talented contra dancing wife, Kathleen Gallagher Everett, who has given me valuable advice on tunes, edited this compendium, has inspired many of my tunes and has patiently tolerated the 1,000 repetitions it sometimes takes to bring a tune to life.

**Notes on the Tunes**

**Amnosia**

Written in my home in Lexington, Ky, I composed this on banjo, purposefully trying to have an A part melodic line with a broad range and interesting chord changes, as my keyboard player at the time, Bob Frankenhoff, liked tunes with lots of chord changes and different chording possibilities. My band at the time, Cornpone, consisted of bright musicians with eccentric senses of humor. While on some humorous tangent, someone invented "amnosia", and defined it as "the state in which a person forgets something smells terrible and picks it up to smell again". "Use it or lose it", I thought, and the tune was named.

**Argumentative Jig**

This jig was composed in anger and frustration on Christmas Eve in 2003 after a spat with a girlfriend at the time over how to spend time at Christmas with each of our children and relatives. The disagreement left me at home alone, so I picked up an instrument to help my mood. To me, the A part was the prelude to an argument. The high parts of the B part represented a woman's voice and the low parts a man's. It was quite cathartic, and left me smiling after was finished.

**Back To Old St. Croix**

St. Croix is one of the American Virgin Islands and the location of one of my all time favorite vacations, George Marshall's Tropical Dance Vacation. The week is in February and is 7 days of evening contra dances, and delicious catered dinners and usually draws from 100 to 140 contra dancers from the US, Canada and Europe. Also included is warmth and sunshine, beautiful beaches, very friendly local peoples. At the writing of this tune I had been to the week 7 times and at the writing of this note, I've now been 21 times. The tune itself I think came as I was trying Reggae rhythms on the mandolin, perhaps influenced by some steel drum bands I had heard during the annual Jump Up celebration.

**Badinage**

While noodling on the mandolin during my "Compose using syncopated notes" period, this one made musical sense and I liked it. The B part has that old familiar rock feel to it and is easy to play. I think I was reading "Madame Bovary" at the time (I had retired and was planning to read some of the classics, or re-read the ones I skipped through in high school) and had been looking up words I didn't know. This word, brought to us via France, seemed to describe the conversation the notes were having with each other in the tune.

**Bob's Jig**

I've had this tune laying around unnamed until I started to put together this tune book. I decided to name it for Bob Frankenhoff, keyboardist and bandmate for around 15 years and a lover of tunes with lots of chords.

**Buckingham's Reel**

This tune was composed on the banjo. One of my ways to elicit a new and interesting musical phrase is to listen to old rock tunes. I was trying to play along with Fleetwood Mac's "Never Going Back Again" with Lindsey Buckingham's great syncopated fingerpicking guitar back up and this is what came out. Great tune for a dance with a bouncy B part.

**Castles of Clay**

In 2002, I took my son Clay with me to George Marshall's Tropical Dance Vacation in St. Croix. This tune was composed that week on mandolin and named for the sand castles that Clay had built on one of the many beautiful beaches there, on a day when we were the only ones there. The Caribbean music influenced the feel of this tune.

**Daisy Et The Corncob**

I was at a backyard party at the home of the fiddler of our band at the time, Eve Podet. We were sitting around, jamming and I introduced this tune on the banjo, but it was untitled. Shortly before this tune was played, Eve had suddenly jumped up after observing her dog, Daisy, eating corncobs out of the garbage can. She chased her off and put a lid back on the can. So when the tune was over and I said it had no name, Eve said, "How about Daisy Et The Corncob?".

**Dancetrance Reel**

I consider this my first hit. For many years, I worked at Eastern State Hospital in Lexington Kentucky as an inpatient psychiatrist and kept a banjo and mandolin in my office for my own therapy. As in most hospitals, there would be a crisis followed by hours of boredom, so I would play quietly to keep myself from the anticipatory anxiety of the next crisis. I didn't consider myself a tune writer at that time, but this one kept coming out of the mandolin and was fun to play. I played this shyly for the fiddle player in my band, Eve Podet, one evening when we were rehearsing and she declared it to be good. We taught it to the band and it was the first of my tunes ever played at a contradance. I named it after our dance weekend. It was played once by the band Coincidance on Jay Ungar's radio show "Dancing On The Air".

**Deb's Dream**

This came from noodling on a mandolin in the old beat-up lounge chair in my living room in Lexington, using syncopated picking and trying out different notes until a sensible melody emerged that had some interesting changes. It's named for Deb Frankenhoff, good friend and longtime percussionist in our band, Cornpone. Eventually we had too many personnel changes, and we retired the name Cornpone and became Footbridge, but Deb remained the rock solid percussionist holding us together.

**Eileen and Abe's Wedding**

This waltz was composed for Kathy's sister, Eileen Gallagher and her husband, Abe Nuchman, my fishing buddy and fellow single malt scotch enthusiast, for their wedding on July 8, 2006.

**The Emigma Jig**

Composed on mandolin, playing jig rhythm with an almost blank mind, this tune emerged. I played it for my band and they liked it and they asked what key it was in. I had not written it out yet and told them E minor. We started to play it but something was not right. After about 3 tries, I blurted out that it was in A minor, the correct key. Richard King, the bassist in the band said "David, this tune is a real emigma", and thusly it was named.

**Eve's Farewell**

I thought I'd try to compose a tune in B major, to broaden my musical horizons. This was done on mandolin, the Breedlove A style I had purchased from The Mandolin Brothers store on Staten Island, New York. It was a great store for acoustic instruments which unfortunately went out of business after several decades. Mistakingly hitting the D natural instead of D sharp caused a melodic line that landed me in B minor, making it unique amongst the many tunes with which I'm familiar. This tune lingered without a name until our long time fiddler, Eve Podet, decided to leave the band after about 8 years. I very much missed her and playing together and named this tune for her.

**Farewell To Rhinebeck**

Composed on mandolin on Kathy's front porch on Chestnut St. in Rhinebeck, New York, on one of the many times I did not look forward to leaving her during our long-distance relationship. This tune lingered in my trove for a long period, but occasionally my band would try out some of my tunes. Bob Frankenhoff played piano in Cornpone, and his wife Deb played percussion. Bob took this tune to another band he played in and they liked it and played it for a contradance. The next time we were together, Bob played a recording of the tune from that dance. It sounded very good, especially with Deb playing the snare drum, which gave it a Civil War march feel.

**The Firewoman of Zachariah**

This tune was composed on a tenor banjo. I was trying to play the 60's hit "Pipeline", which I thought would work as a contradance tune, when the first phrases of the melody came out. After a little more experimenting the tune ripened and was harvested. It had no name till years later when I was in a relationship with a National Park Ranger in Appalachia. One of the ways she made extra money was to go to wildfires out west to help the firefighters. Her actual job was to welcome the firefighters back to the base camps with Gatorade, cookies and a big smile. She lived in Zachariah, a small unincorporated town in Wolfe County, Ky. There is a recording on Pigtown Alley's 2012 CD "Pigtown Alley".

**Flight of the Termites**

My band Cornpone had a gig playing the Lexington contradance sometime in 2010. I had composed this tune on the banjo, but it had no name. When we came in for the sound check, a large number of termites were emerging from the walls, many taking flight, most likely a courtship and mating activity. The alarmed organizers at first didn't know what to do, but then came up with an idea. As I chuckled and watched, there were three vacuum cleaners going, sucking up the poor little beasts, some from midair. So I would not forget the scene and to commemorate the ingenuity of the vacuum wielding people, I named this tune after that incident.

**Freddy's Reel**

One of my favorite rock bands was Queen and at the center of that band was musical savant Freddy Mercury, who unfortunately died too young from AIDS. One of his brilliant tunes was "Another One Bites The Dust", with that plaintive driving bass throbbing under Freddy's vocals. One day while listening and tapping my foot to it I realized it could be a contra tune. I composed a melody that went well with the bass line, slightly modified for a 32 bar tune. Nathan Wilson, long time friend and extraordinary bass player absolutely kills this tune; it's been a favorite novelty tune for dancers for many years.

**The Gloaming**

This tune comes from a period of time when I was becoming more proficient at improvising on the mandolin. I was exploring the pentatonic scale in A minor, one of my favorite chords, and was more confident in my ability to improvise. One winter day I sat down and looped an Am progression on my trusty old Roland JW 50 synthesizer. Starting the melody on the upbeat felt right and the tune wrote itself in minutes. "Gloaming" is a word I learned from my wife Kathleen and this tune took form during that time of day.

**Half Century Waltz**

My daughter Nancy showed early interest in music and began playing recognizable melodies on a toy keyboard when she was 4-5 years old. She began piano lessons with a friend of mine, Donna Boyd, who was instrumental in beginning contra dancing in Lexington, Kentucky in the late 1970's. She was kind, patient, enthusiastic and very good with children and Nancy took lessons from her for 6 or 7 years. Her style was to teach children tunes they wanted to play and I still remember Nancy excitedly telling me about a new tune she had heard and Donna was teaching it to her. The song was 'California Dreaming" by the Mamas and the Papas. Donna also liked to include parents in the recitals, and Nancy and I played several together, usually contra dance waltzes or reels(I would play fiddle). Seems like we were a hard act to follow, so Donna started having us play last at the recitals. Anyway, when Donna's fiftieth birthday rolled around, we presented her with this waltz, framed, with calligraphy done by Nancy's grandfather. She was moved to tears.

**Heart of Ashes**

I composed part of this waltz in the late 1990's and never could find a satisfactory B part until about 3 years ago, when I listened to a recording of it on my computer that I had completely forgotten. I had named it when first composed, and the name came from my then early teen daughter Nancy. We were grilling in the back yard and I had started the fire using a small chimney filled with newspaper and charcoal briquets, and ashes were rising from it and floating back down. One of them landed on Nancy's arm and she exclaimed "Look Da, a heart of ashes!" and there on her forearm was a near perfect small heart. There is a recording of this waltz on Tom Cunningham and Kate Sanders' CD, "Remembering Sue".

**Homer Ledford's Reel**

Homer Ledford was an extremely talented luthier and instrument repairman who live in Lexington Ky. His specialty was Appalachian lap dulcimers, of which he made thousands, some of which are in the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C. and he made other instruments, including banjos(I have the last one he ever made). He was a lovely, sweet and humble man, loved by everyone. He repaired expertly many of my instruments and even put frets on my fiddle after I begged him 3 times, but added "you can't tell anyone I did it until after I'm dead". Homer died in 2006, so I can put the fretted fiddle story in print now and I'm sure he'd laugh at how I held up my end of the bargain.

**Hommage A Led Zeppelin**

My fabulous fiddling friend Tom Cunningham did me the great honor of recording this tune on his CD "Percolatin'" with his band The Coffee Zombies. They toured the northeast in 2016 and after the tour, he forwarded an email to me from a fiddle instructor in Maryland who had told him "this tune is the favorite of all my beginning fiddle students". Who wouldn't want that honor? Back in 2005, after a year's wait, I'd received a very finely crafted new banjo made by Will Fielding of Marlboro, Vermont. It was gorgeous and had a well-balanced woody tone. I was messing with it after playing some other tunes when a fairly simple but driving melody developed from the high A note on the E string. Then I found it an octave lower and had a fun, easy to play A part. The B part came not so easily, and finally emerged when I put a loop of "Stairway to Heaven" chords on my synthesizer bandmate, Roland, and attempted to channel Jimmy Page. Lo and behold, another simple and easy to play melody. Add drums and a bass and the only thing missing is Robert Plant.

**House of Mirrors**

I found the recording of this on my cell phone when I was going back through musical ideas that had potential as a tune. I don't remember much about composing it, but I remember finding it a few years ago and working out the bugs and thought it a decent melody with good chord structure. The name was on the recording and I don't remember why, but I thought keeping it would make it enigmatic and mysterious.

**J. Neufeld's Reel**

This tune was composed on an f style mandolin that I had purchased from a bandmate around the year 2000. A fine instrument with an excellent even tone, it has been pronounced a "fake Gibson" by a luthier friend who was a certified Gibson repairmen. It is well made, (except for some inner bracing which caused the top to collapse during a performance!) with well done "Gibson" inlay, nice joinery and a lovely finish. It's well proportioned but has to be held next to an authentic Gibson F5 to see some size differences. The only clue I have as to who made it was the the name "J. Neufeld" and "Canada" written inside. He should have put his own name on it. I've never been able to locate him to thank him for the many hours of pleasure I've had with his creation, so I honor him with this tune.

**Juan Fernando The Fourth**

I was noodling around on the mandolin, liking an Em to C chord change and came up with the first part of the tune, but thought it was boring and repetitive. I added more parts, but still didn't much like what I'd done. Just as as I was about to toss the tune into the creative trash can, my son Clay, walked by and said, "That sounds really cool!". Knowing that sometimes a composer is too close to a tune to judge it, I kept it and came up with the B part. As Clay had saved the tune, I let him name it. We had just rescued a baby squirrel and were feeding it and keeping it warm and Clay had named it "Juan Fernando The Fourth". I asked him where it came from and his answer was, 'I don't know, I just made it up". So the tune and the squirrel got the same names. The tune endured, the squirrel did not!

**Karina's Jig**

Composed for my newly born niece, Karina Benson.

**Kathy's Waltz**

Composed for my wife early in our courtship. She needed to take time to parent her children through some transitions and we did not see each other for several months. I greatly missed her and this waltz came out one evening and whispered her name to me.

**Lauren's Hambo**

Composed for my niece, Lauren Benson, celebrating her birth.

**Lullaby For Kevin John**

Created for the birth of Kevin John Benson, a newly born nephew.

**Mango Salsa**

Another St. Croix inspired composition. Named after the best mango salsa I've ever had, deliciously prepared by Beth Gibans and Analise Kelly (original recipe from Annie Johnson of Bend, Oregon), the hard working chefs who fed many a contradancer during The Tropical Dance Vacation. This tune feels zesty, tangy and tropical!

**Mecca**

Not sure how this tune came about, but it was during a period of time I was working with the Klezmer scale. I had been impressed by the feel of Larry Unger's "Beth Cohen's" and "Lowdown Hoedown". Composed on the 1976 Gibson Mastertone banjo.

**Nancy and Melvin's Waltz**

Co-written by me and my then 12 yo daughter for my sister, Nancy Atcher and Melvin Rowe who wed on Sept. 3, 1993

**Nancy's Jig**

Somewhere in her early teen years, my daughter wanted to learn guitar and I began showing her a few chords and she took off from there. I was in an Irish band in the late 90's and learned how to get around with my guitar tuned in DADGAD, as many of the top Irish guitarists of the time used that tuning. I showed Nancy the tuning and basic chords, and she was entranced by the sounds that came out As she entered her late teens and early twenties, she started an alternative rock band that chiefly played her original tunes. She kept her Gibson Les Paul tuned in DADGAD while in the band. I think her love of that tuning influenced me when I picked up my Irish tuned guitar and composed this jig. Given to my daughter as a two part Christmas present with the next tune.

**Nancy's Reel**

Composed in my daughter's favorite key, A minor. When she was a teen, we played a few contra dances. When she first heard the old time A minor tune "Cold Frosty Morn", it became her favorite and we even played it at one of her piano recitals with me playing fiddle. As I recall,with the bias of a proud father, we were brilliant!

**Samurai Reel**

This tune was composed on banjo and the first phrase of the melody was suggested by the ring tone of a cell phone.

**Suspension**

A waltz written when I was experimenting with jazz and swing chords. To me it had the feel of something floating in air.

**The Talking Walls**

I lived in Lexington, Ky in a house on Swigert avenue from 1993 to 2017 and in the course of being a contra dance organizer, I often housed the bands who came from far away to play our regular dances and our June dance weekend. I also held music workshops and house concerts there. Performers such as Bruce Greene, Bruce Molsky, Bryan McNeill, and Liz Knowles gave fiddle workshops, and I hosted bands including the Groovemongers, Airdance, Lift Ticket, The Volo Bogtrotters, Nightingale, Wild Asparagus, Domino, Notorious, and many others. I sold that house in 2017 and while sitting in the empty living room with my mandolin before the closing, this tune came out. Not a trained musician, I didn't know it was a jig until I played it for Lauren McDonald, fiddler in my current New York band, and she helped me write it out. She also contributed to refining the melody. While I was writing it I was thinking about all the great music that had infused this house, and felt the walls reminding me of that.

**Rotten To The Chord**

Somehow my rock music past gets twisted together with contradance tunes and things like this come out. Composed on banjo, the first phrase was a conscious effort to not use melodic patterns I'd used before. The B part was an attempt to have the same melody with chord changes underneath, seen in many contra tunes, like Bob McQuillen's famous "Dancing Bear". This melody came out after I had listened to some Tom Petty tunes and George Thoroughgood and the Destroyers' song "Bad To The Bone".

**Salt Point**

The first licks of this tune came after I had learned Dave Bartley's (of the group KGB) great tune, "Vladi On The Trans Siberian". I took the right hand feel of his opening phrase and used different notes and it led to the driving syncopated A part of the tune. It was named after we moved to an old farm in rural Salt Point, NY.

**Suzanna's Return From Brazil**

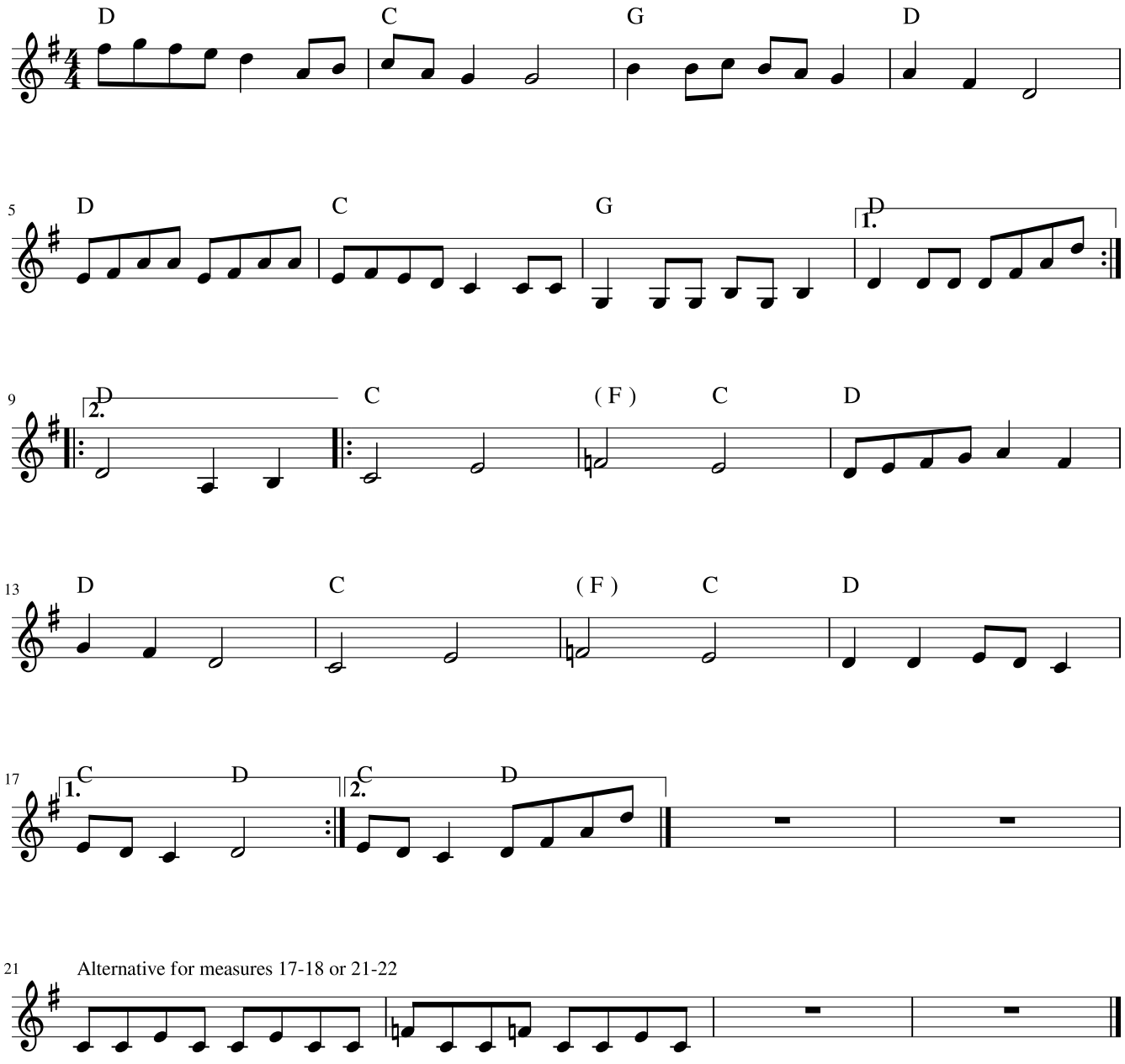
For about a year, Suzanna Barnes, of Cincinnati, Ohio played fiddle for our band and we were so lucky to have had her. She seemingly had the ability to play any melody and improvise in any style… bluegrass, jazz, rock. Sitting beside her at gigs was delightful and I was honored to be in her immediate acoustic presence. She seemed quiet and shy until she had a fiddle in her hand. One day she told us that she'd miss a gig to visit a friend in Brazil, a young man who played classical style guitar with her. While she was away, friends sent me a link to a Youtube video- there was our shy Suzanna, playing fiddle and singing a Beatles song at the Brazil National Auditorium! We were surprised and impressed. I wrote a tune that I thought would challenge her skills as well as sound good, and named it for her.

**Waiting For Kathy**

I met my wife while contra dancing on a restored paddle wheeler named The Belle Of Louisville as we chugged up and down the Ohio River on a beautiful September Sunday in 2003. I was totally and unexpectedly drawn to her and at the end of the dance, I got her email address, which started a long distance relationship between Lexington, Kentucky and Rhinebeck, New York. There were many flights and drives (812 miles, 12-14 hours) over the years. I was still thrilled with my Fielding banjo and one Thursday evening before my Friday flight to Albany, NY, this tune fell out of that banjo.

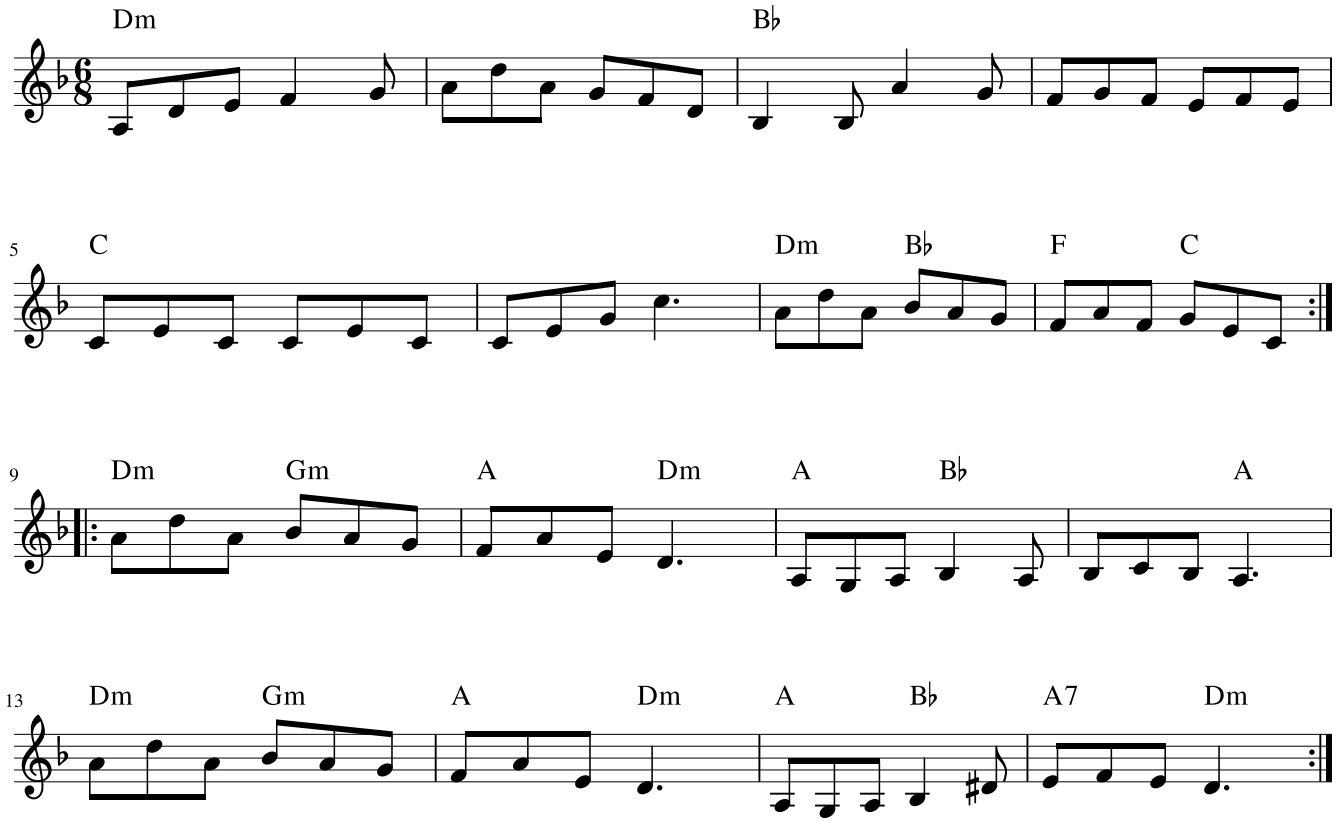
# Amnosia

David Atcher
March, 2006



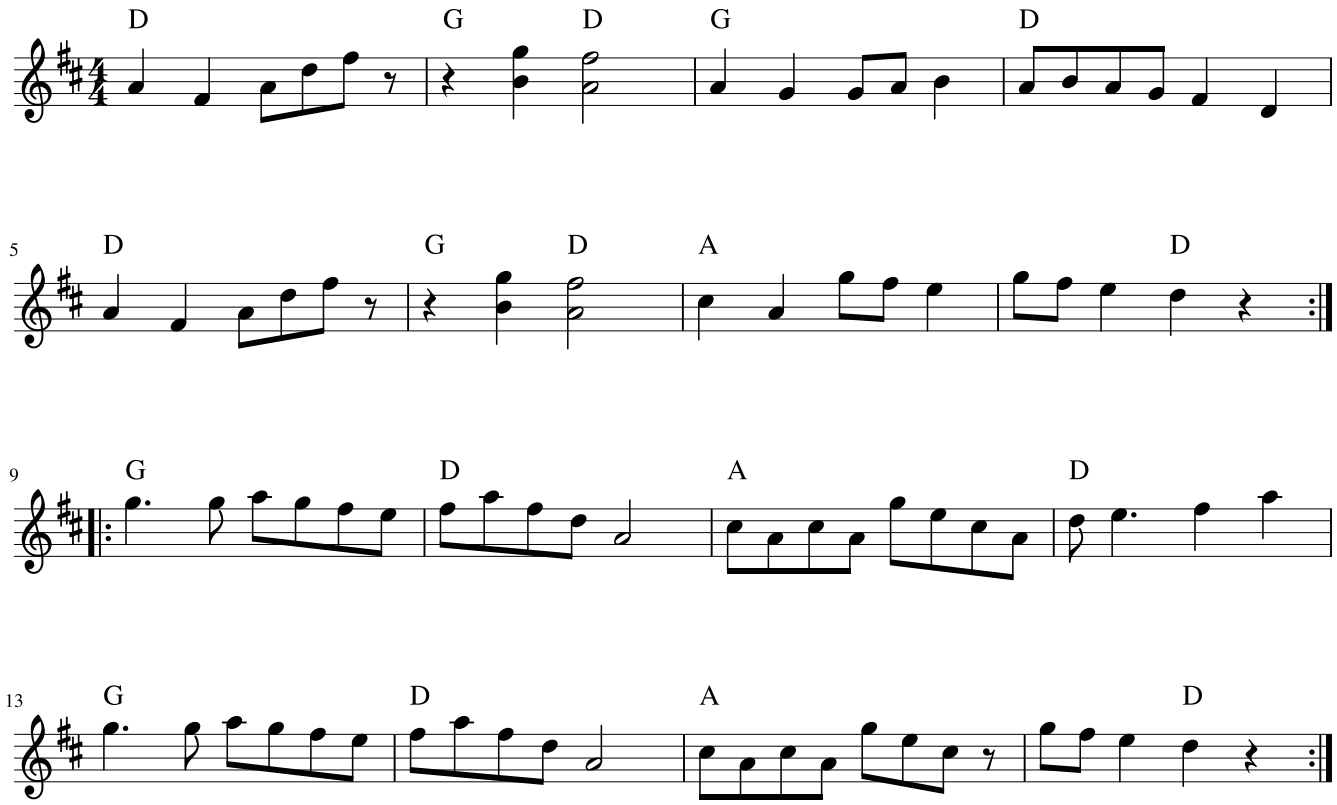
# Argumentative Jig

David Atcher
Dec. 24, 2003



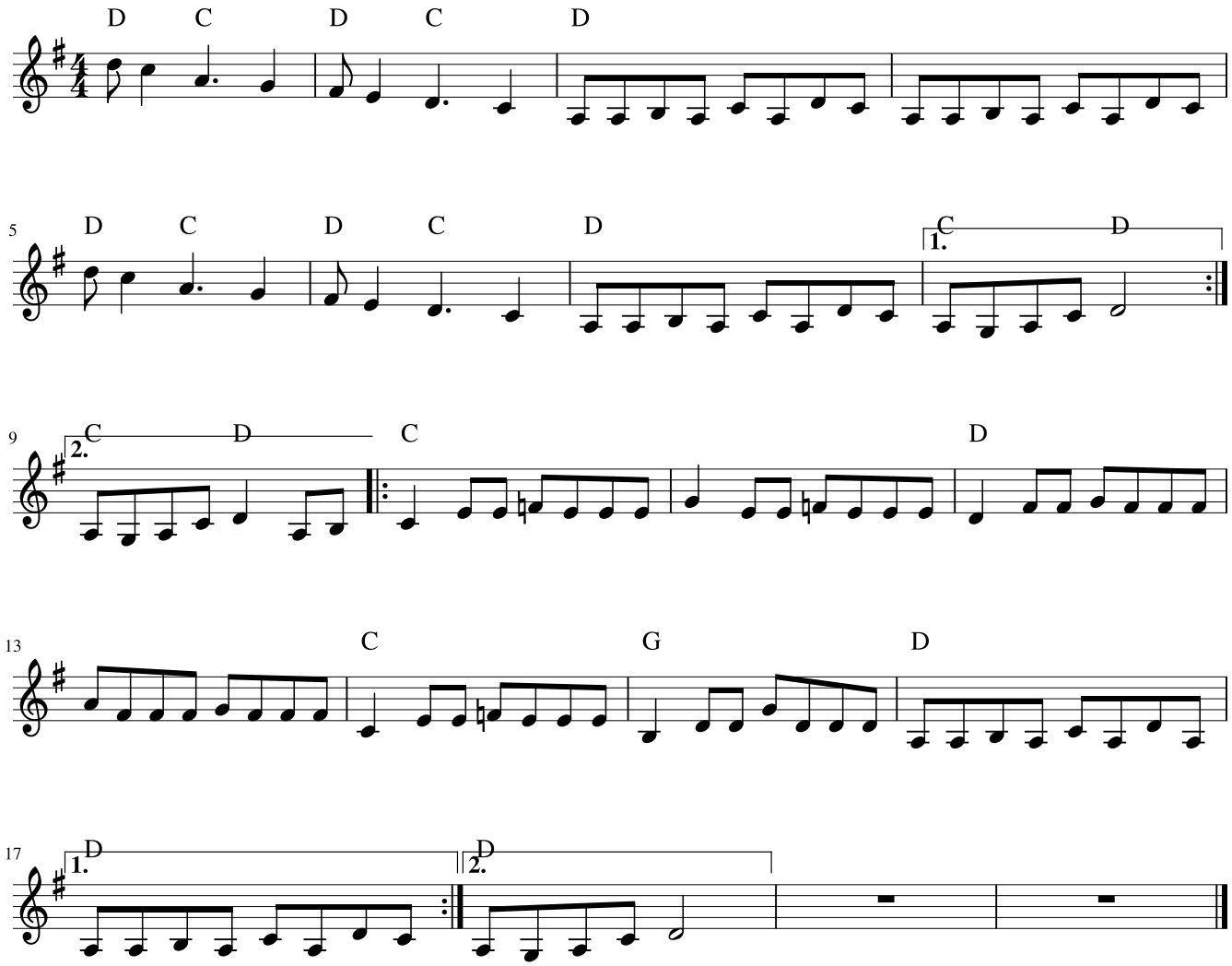
# Back To Old St. Croix

David Atcher
August, 2003



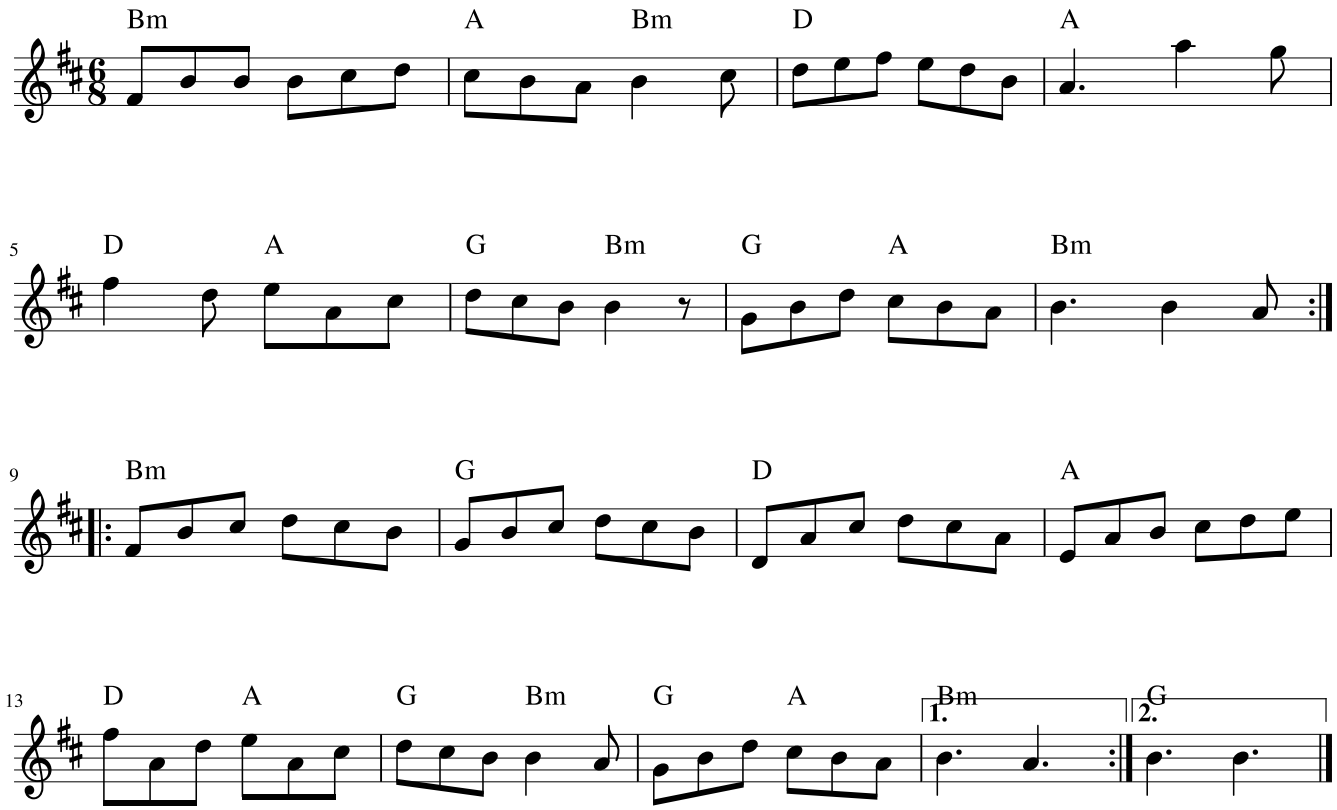
# Badinage

David Atcher
August 8, 2009



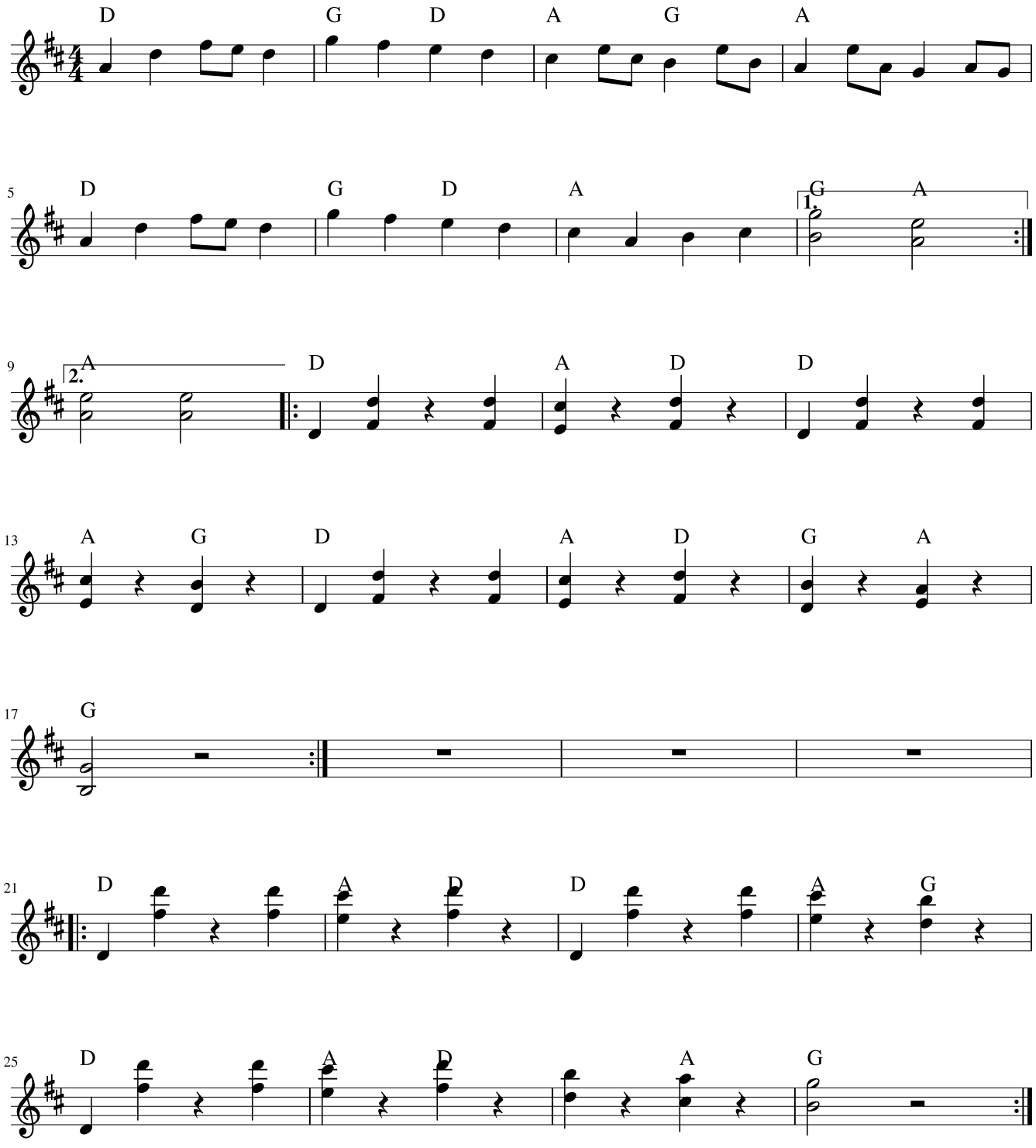
# Bob's Jig

David Atcher
December, 2000



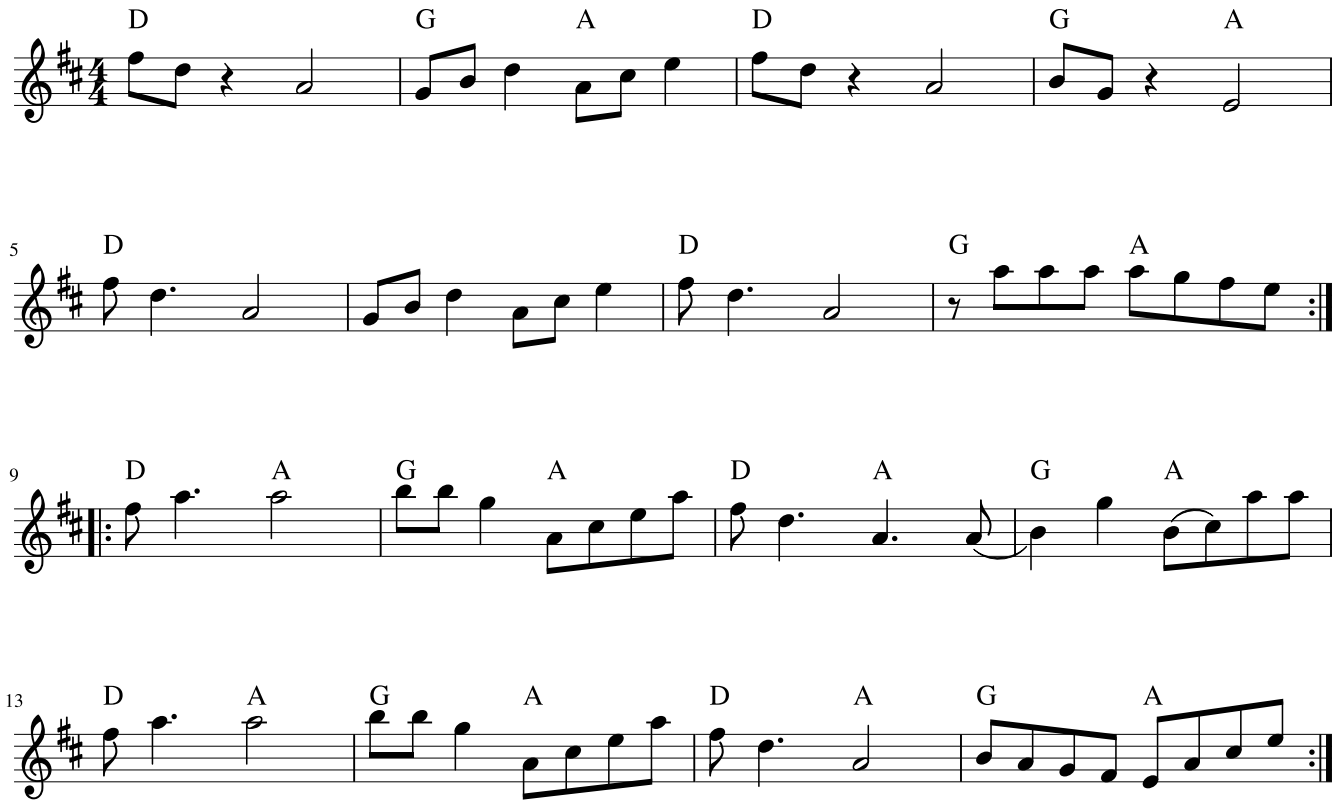
# Buckingham's Reel

David Atcher
Oct. 10. 2011



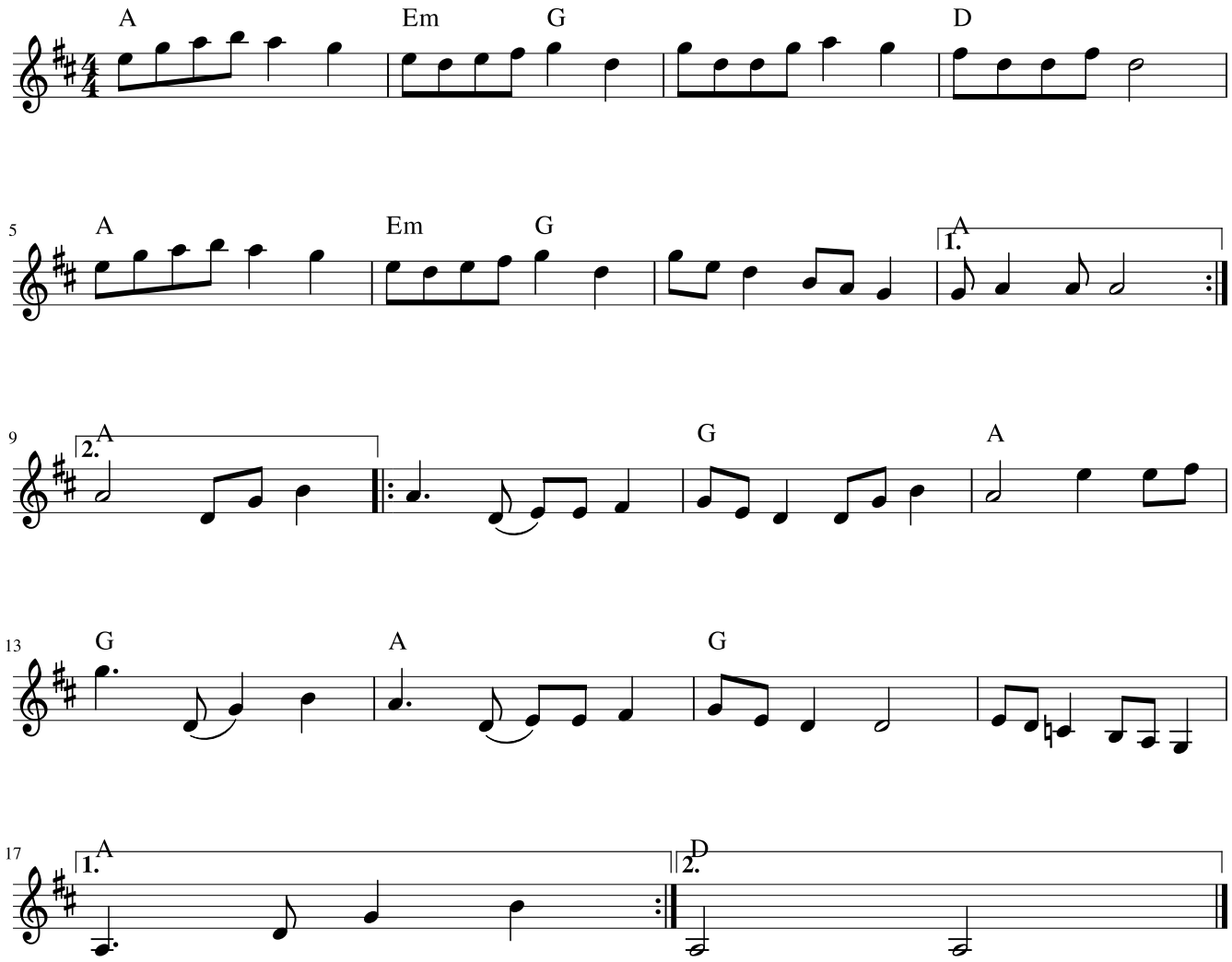
# Castles of Clay

David Atcher
December, 2002



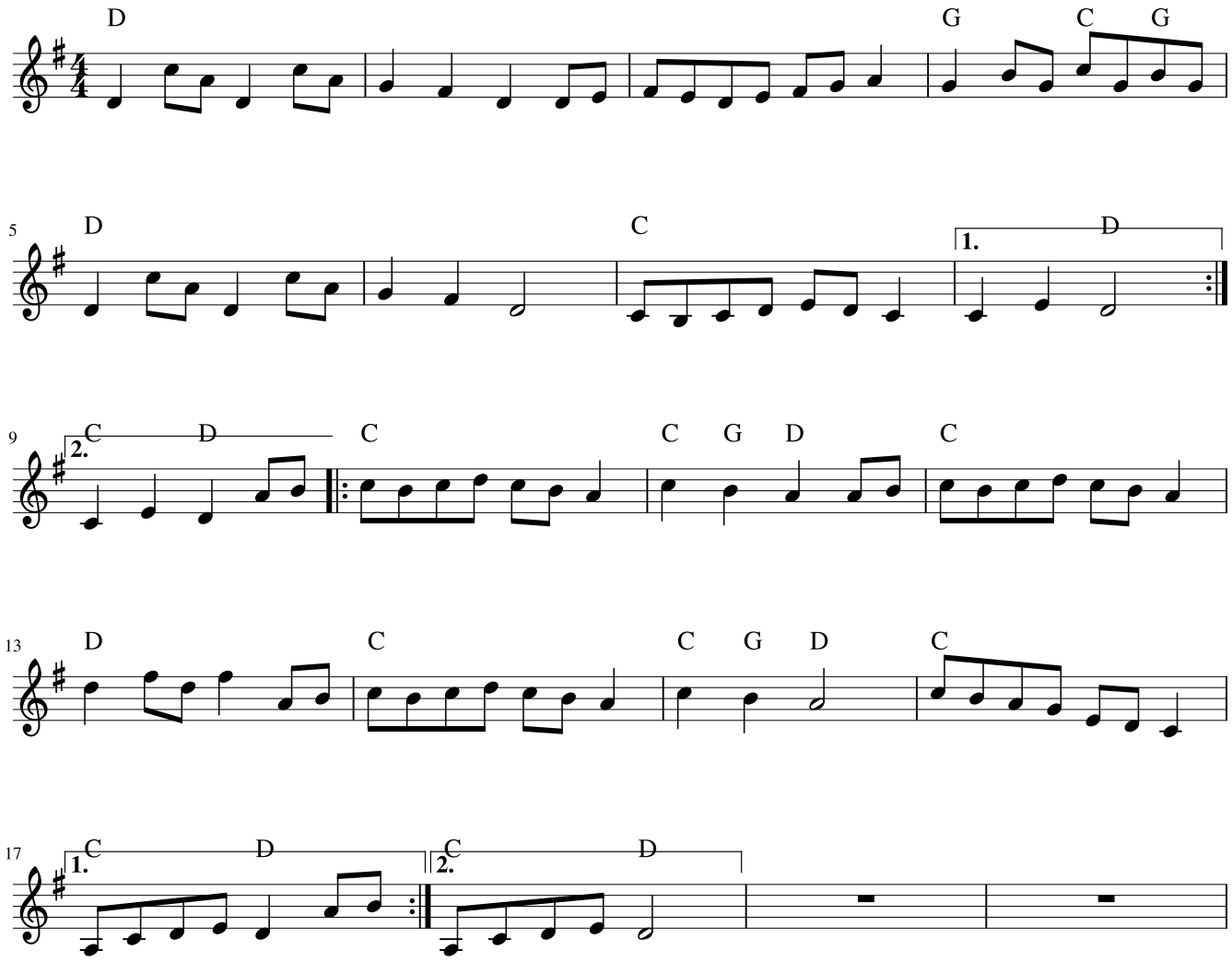
# Daisy Et The Corncob

David Atcher
March, 2005



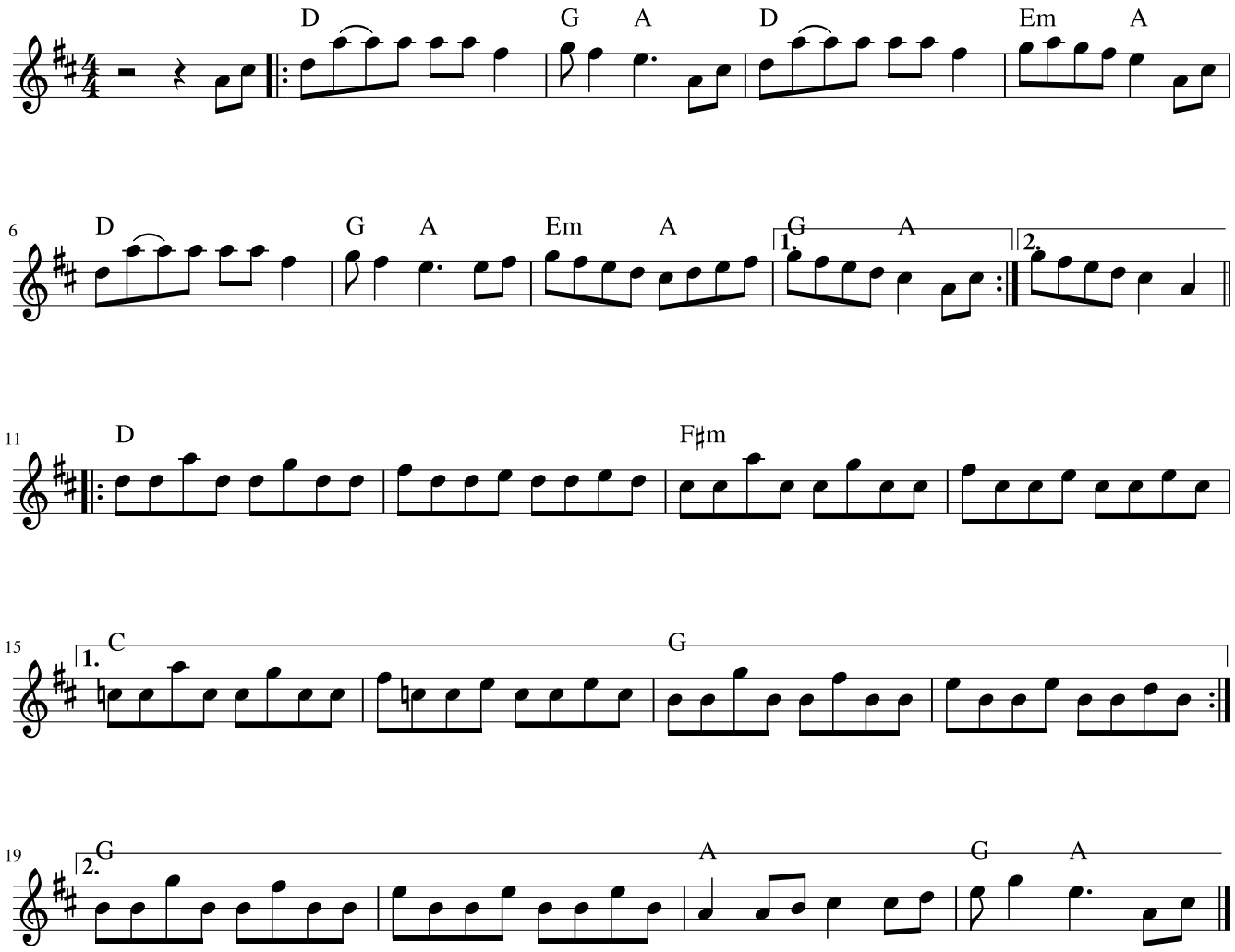
# The DanceTrance Reel

David Atcher
June, 1999



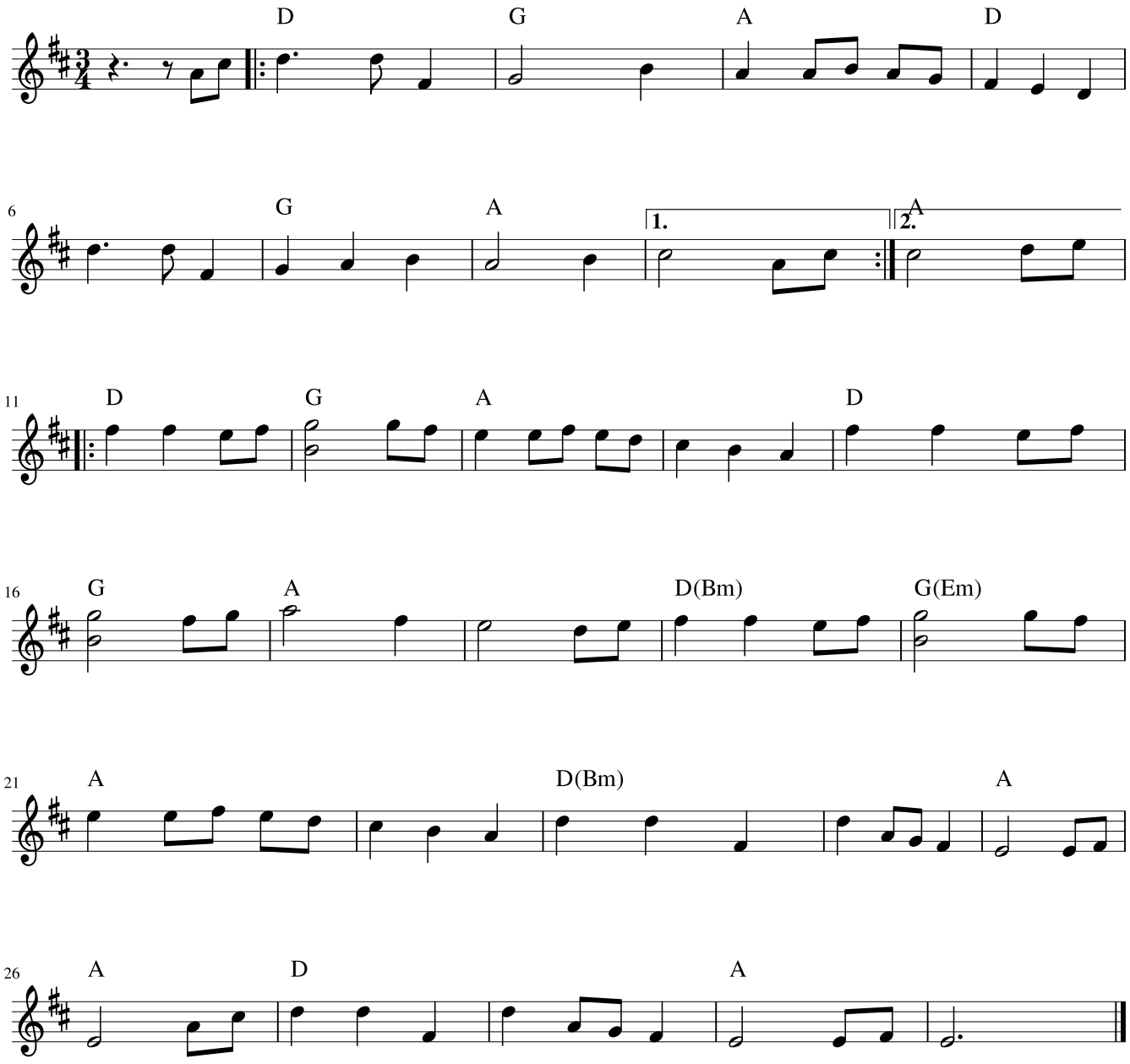
# Deb's Dream

David Atcher
Oct. 27, 2013



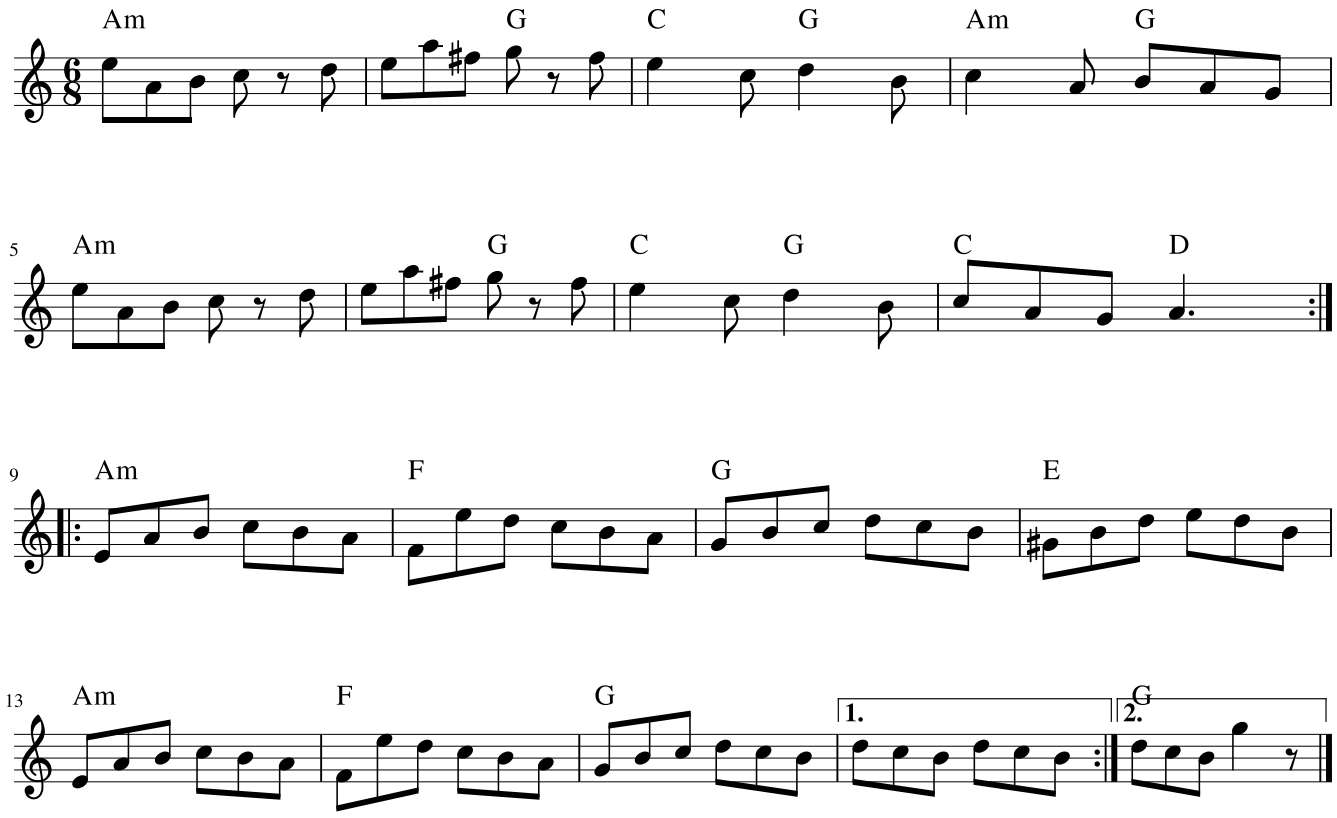
# Eileen and Abe's Wedding

David Atcher
July 8, 2006



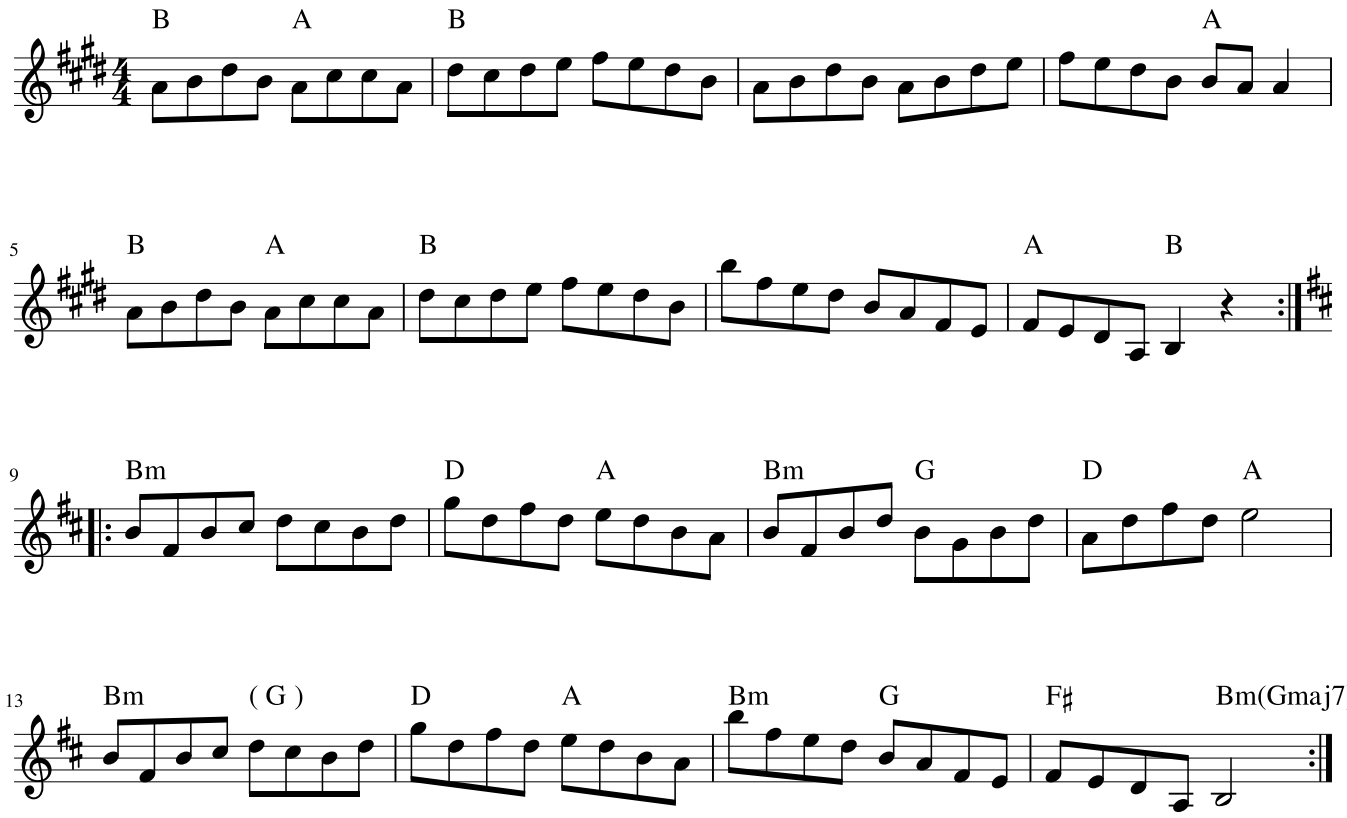
# The Emigma Jig

David Atcher
Summer, 2002



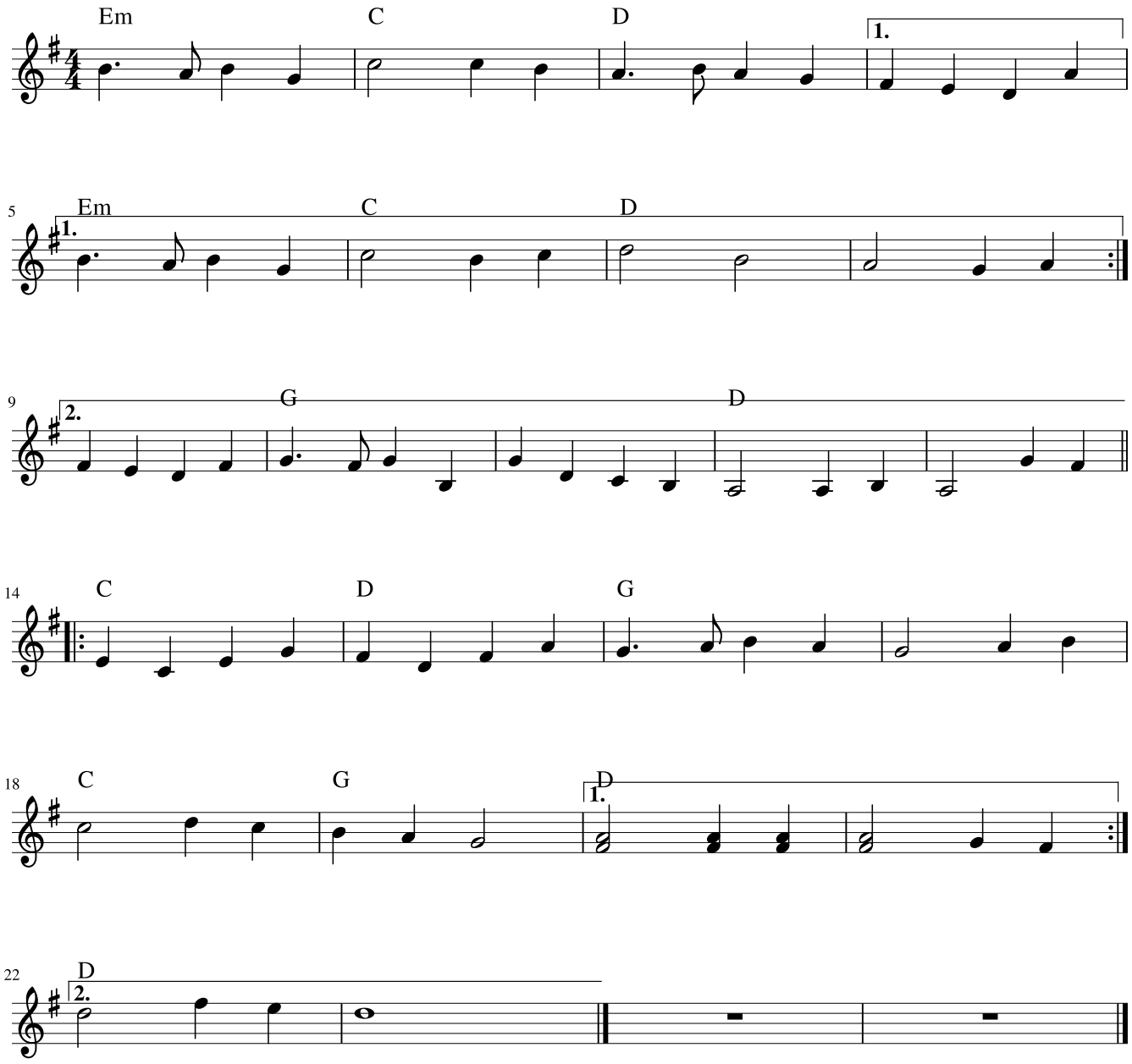
# Eve's Farewell

David Atcher
April 24, 2011



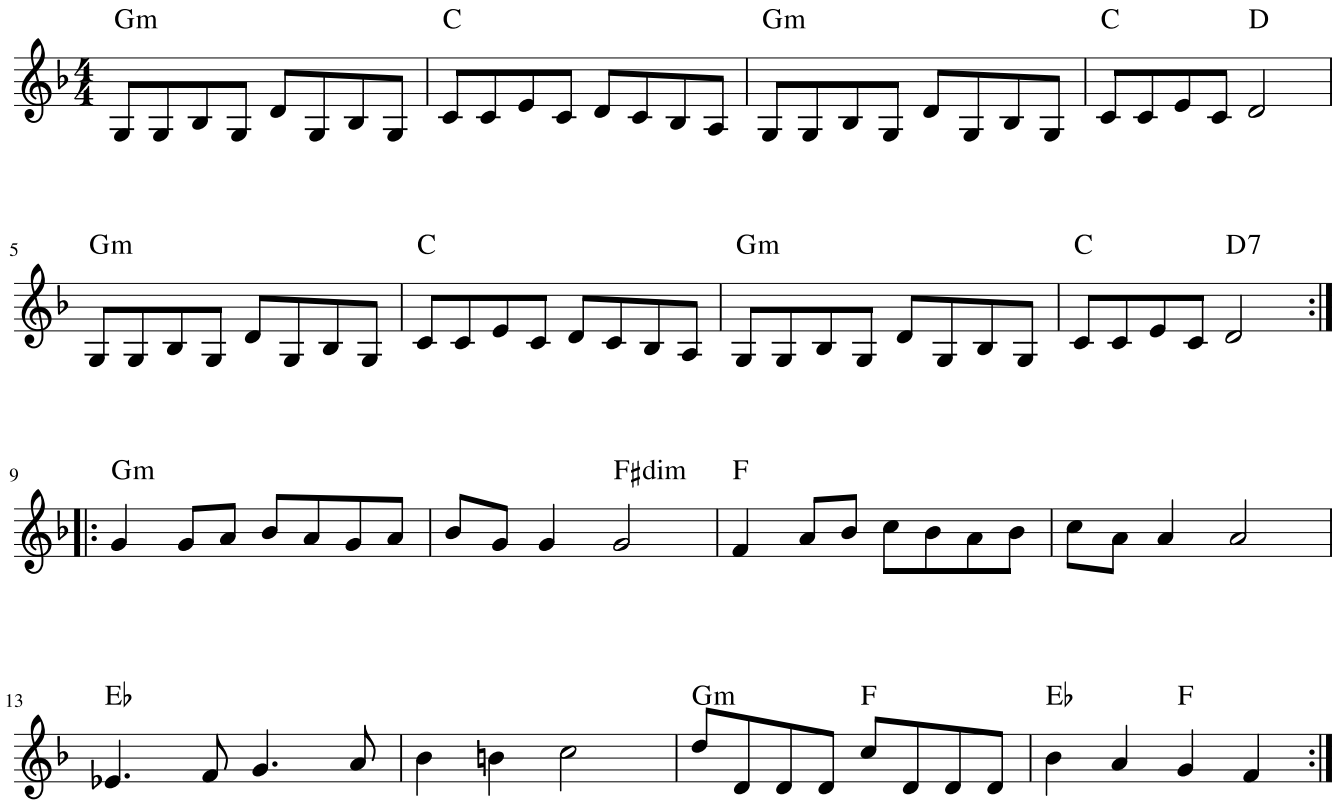
# Farewell To Rhinebeck

David Atcher
May 9. 2007



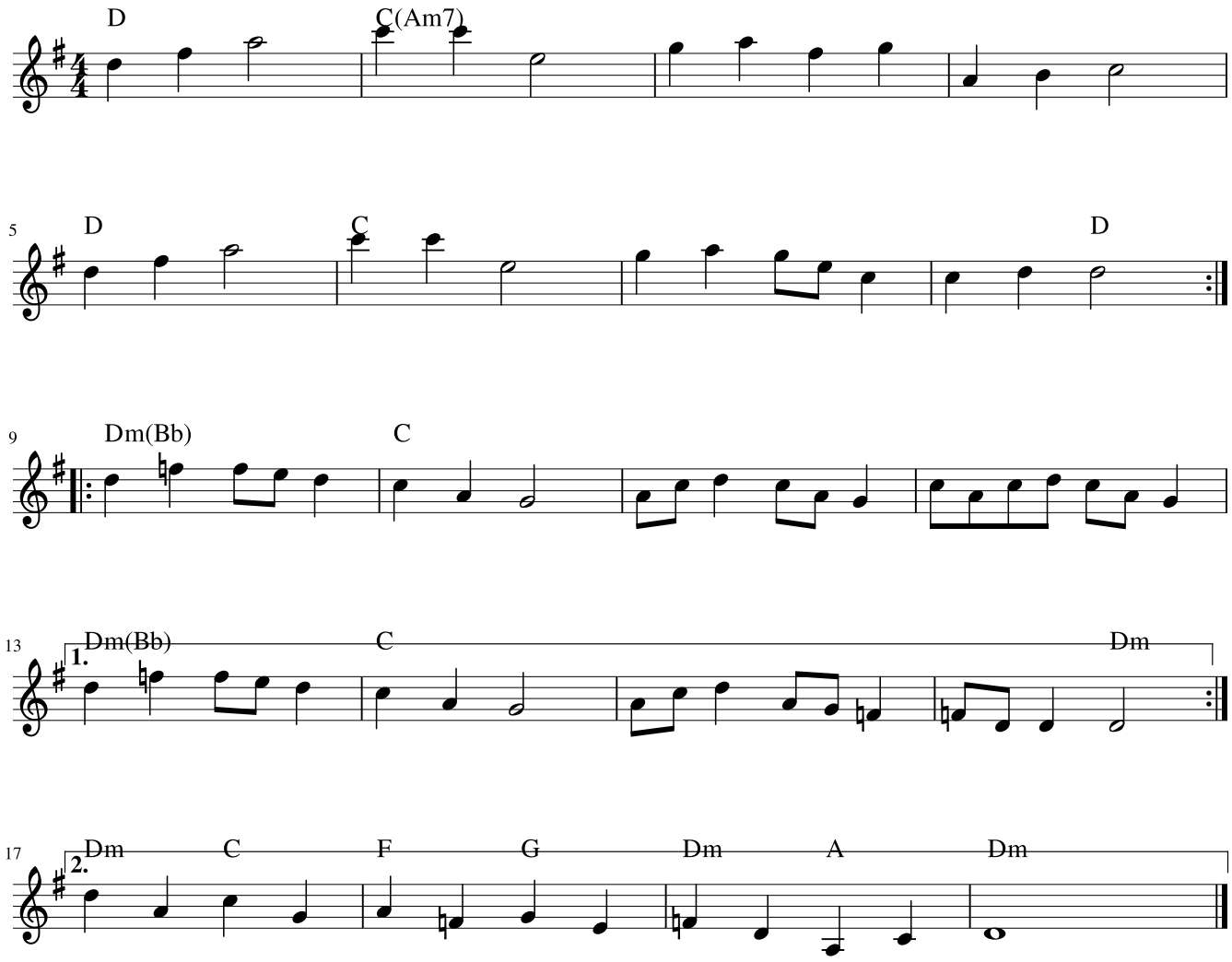
# The Firewoman Of Zachariah

David Atcher
Feb1, 2001



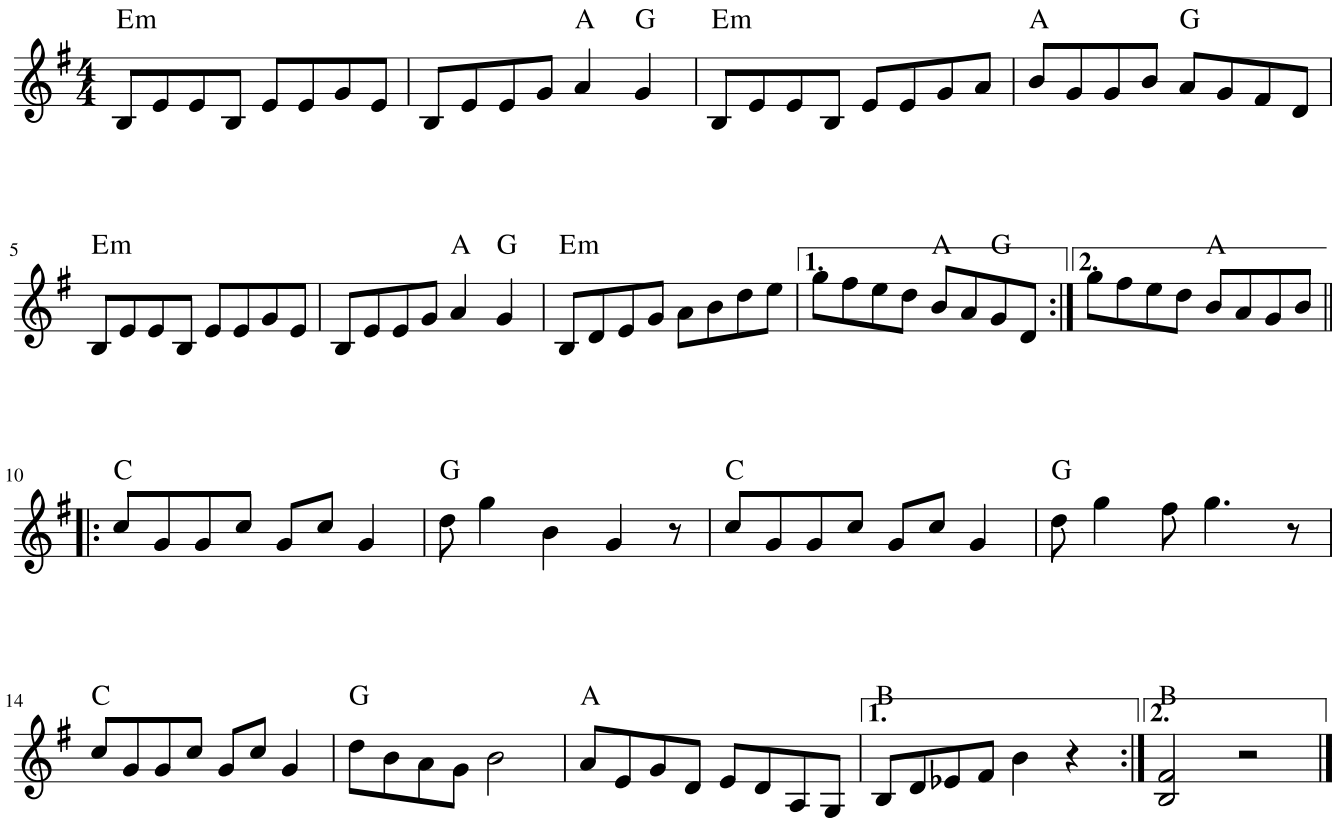
# Flight Of The Termites

David Atcher
May 21, 2010



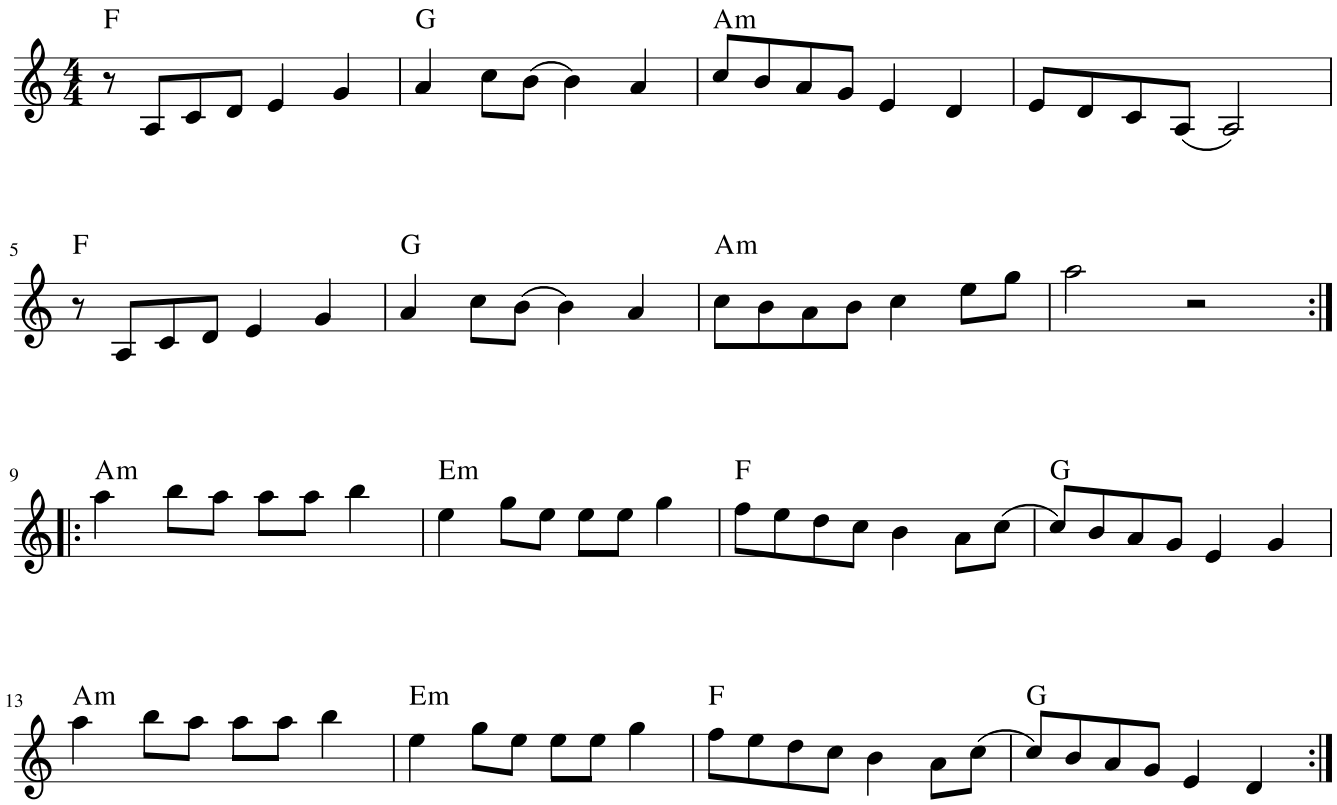
# Freddy's Reel

David Atcher
Oct 15, 2006



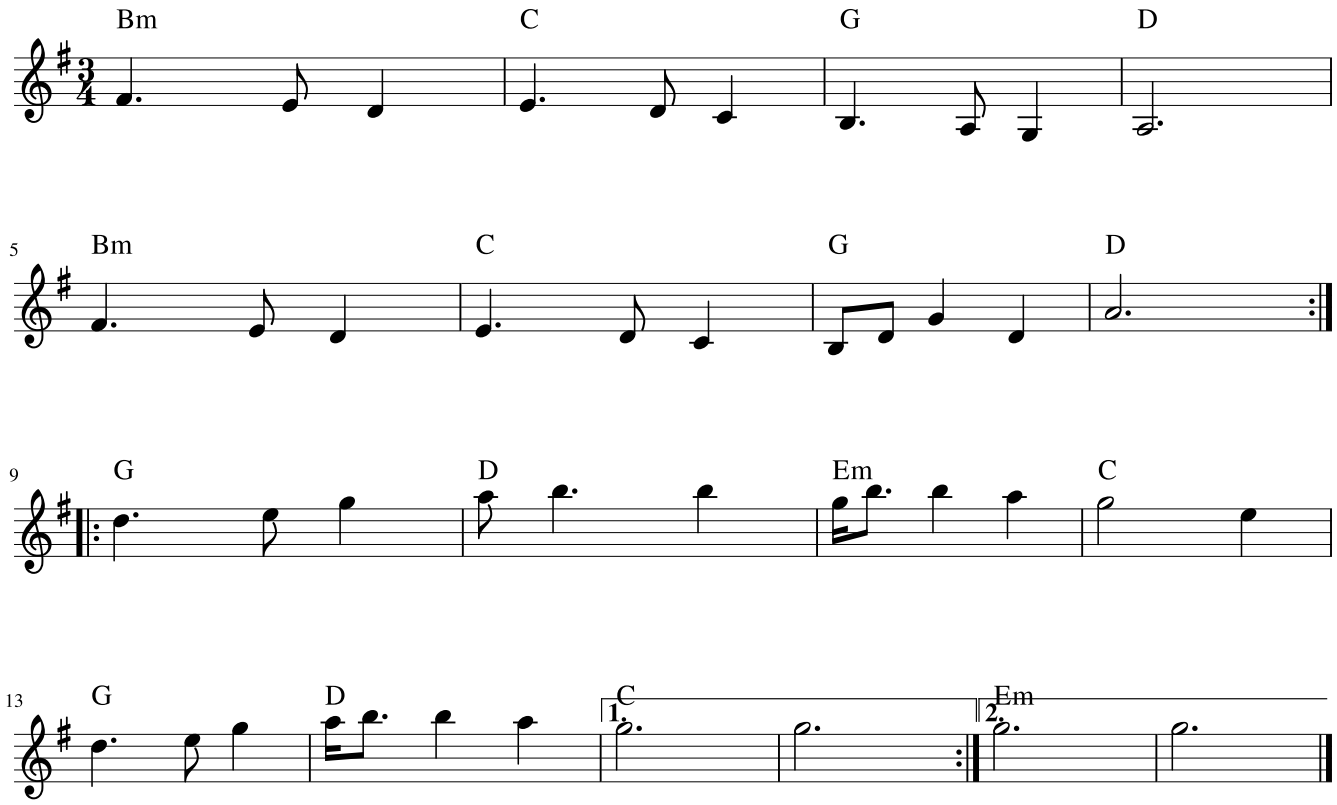
# The Gloaming

David Atcher
January, 2013



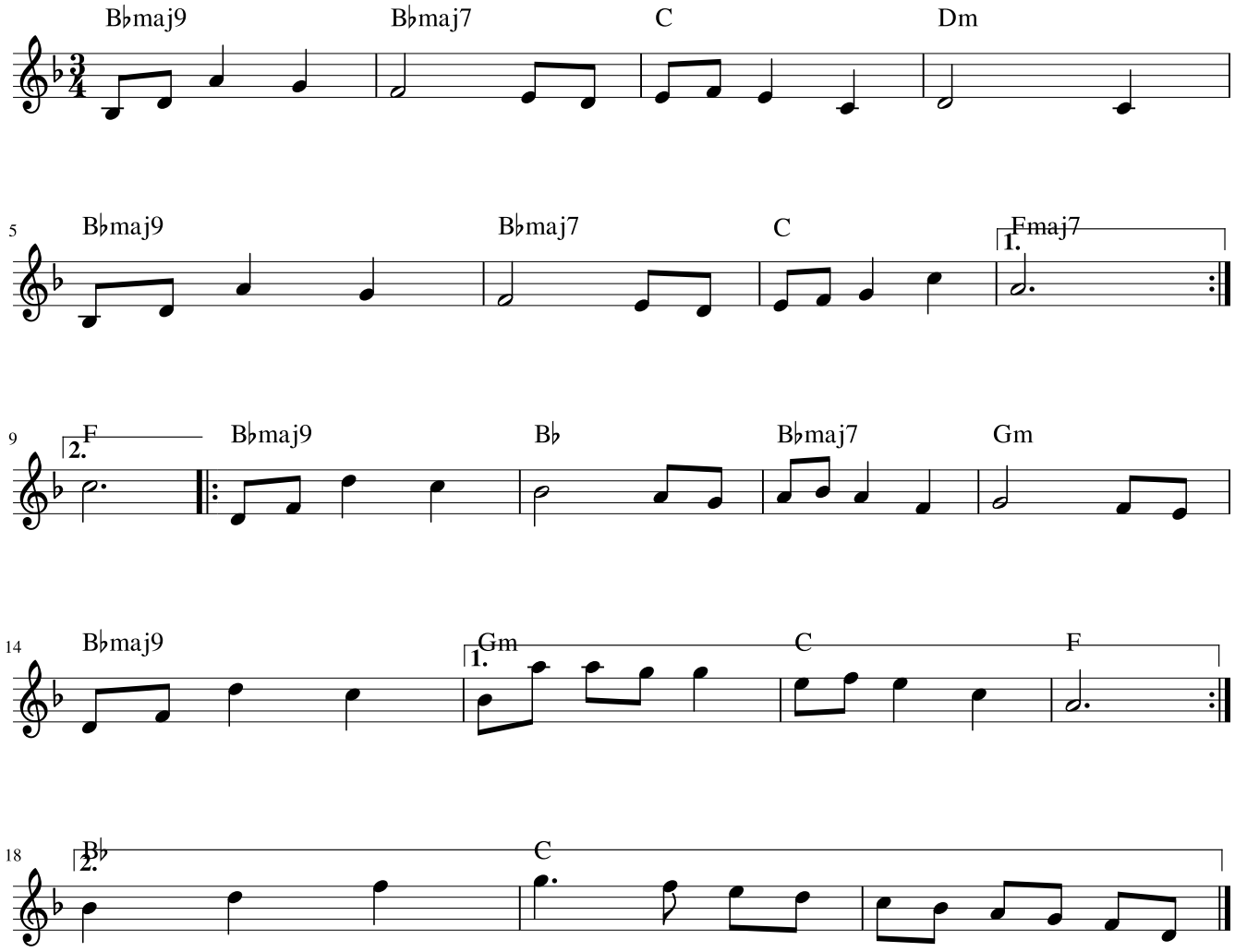
# Half Century Waltz

David and Nancy T. Atcher
March, 1994



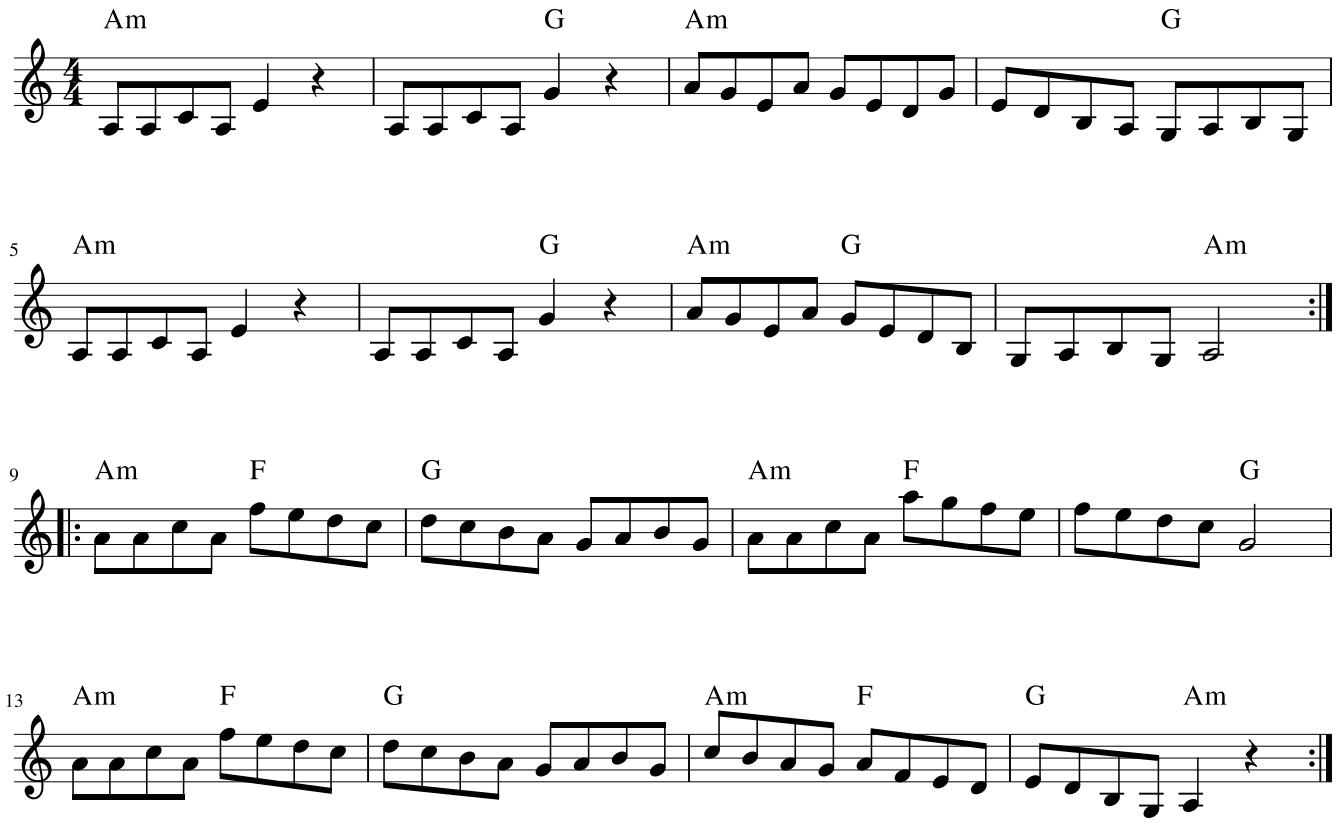
# Heart Of Ashes

David Atcher
September, 2012



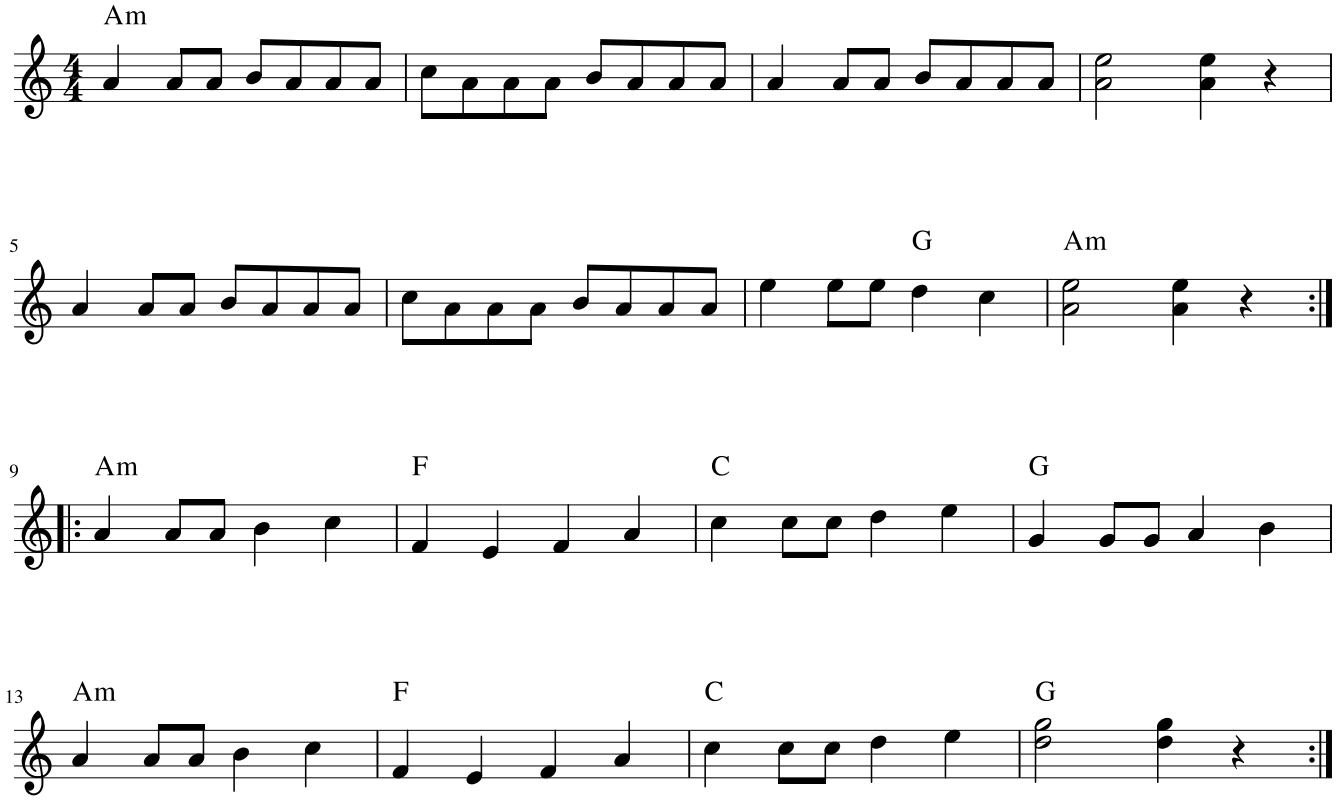
# Homer Ledford's Reel

David Atcher
May 19, 2013



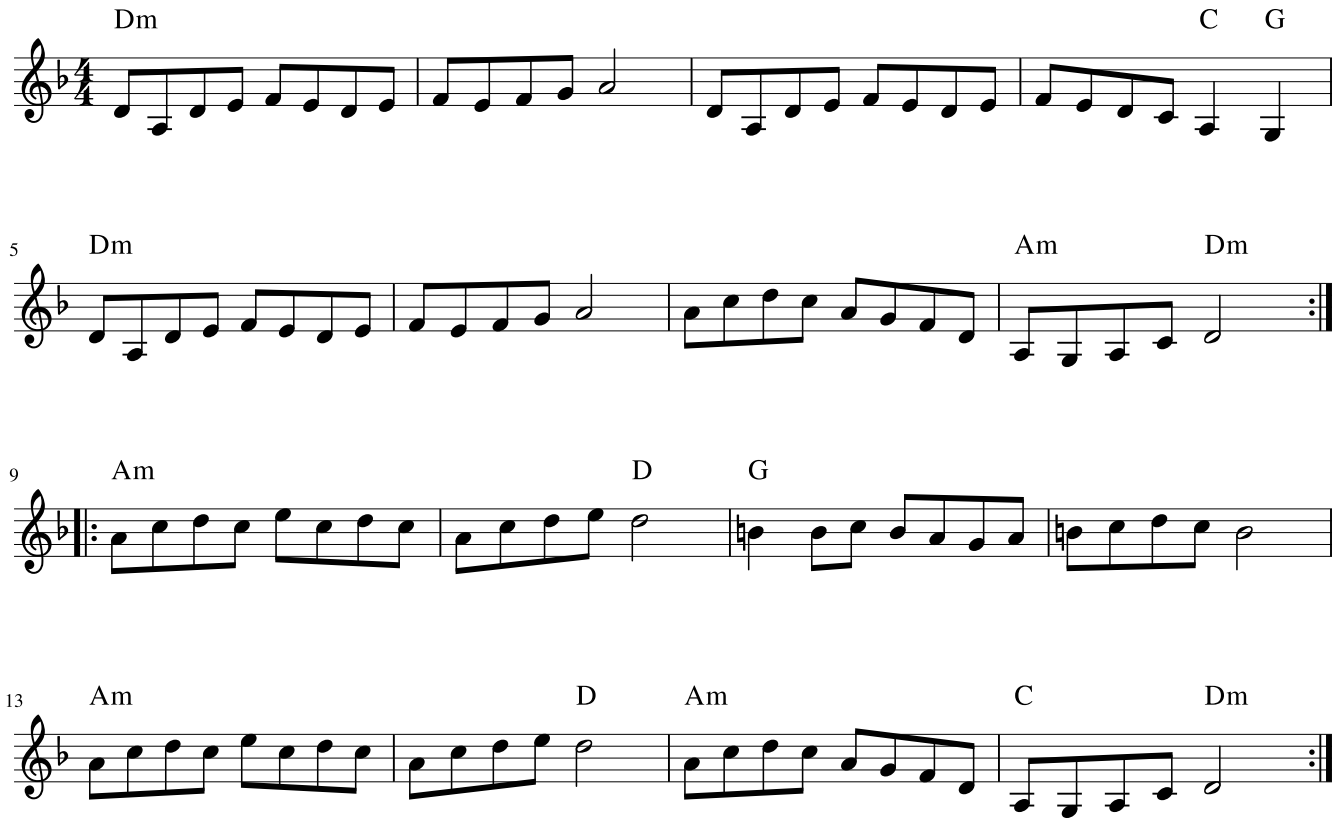
# Hommage A Led Zeppelin

David Atcher
August 29, 2005



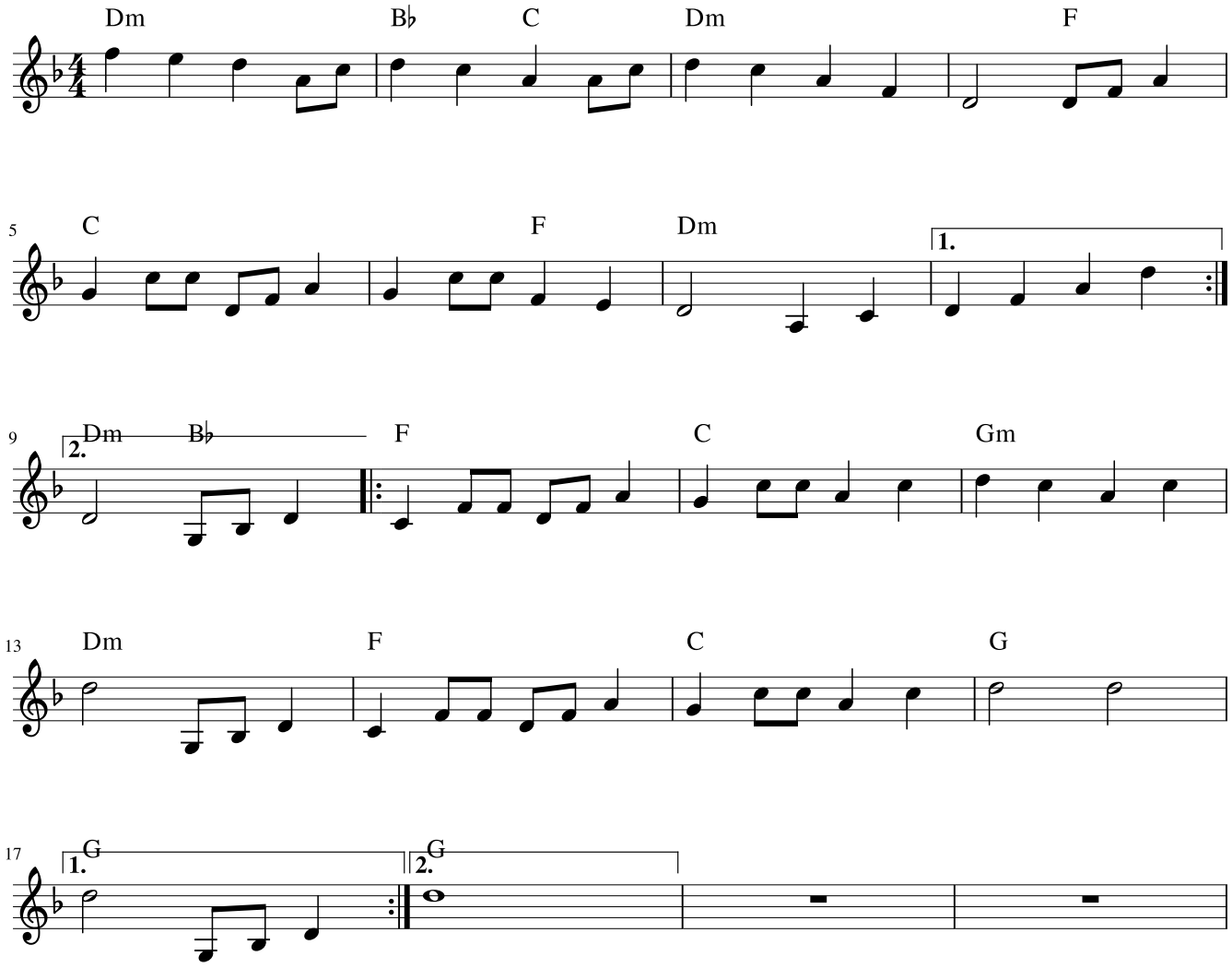
# House Of Mirrors

David Atcher
!st Decade, 21st Century



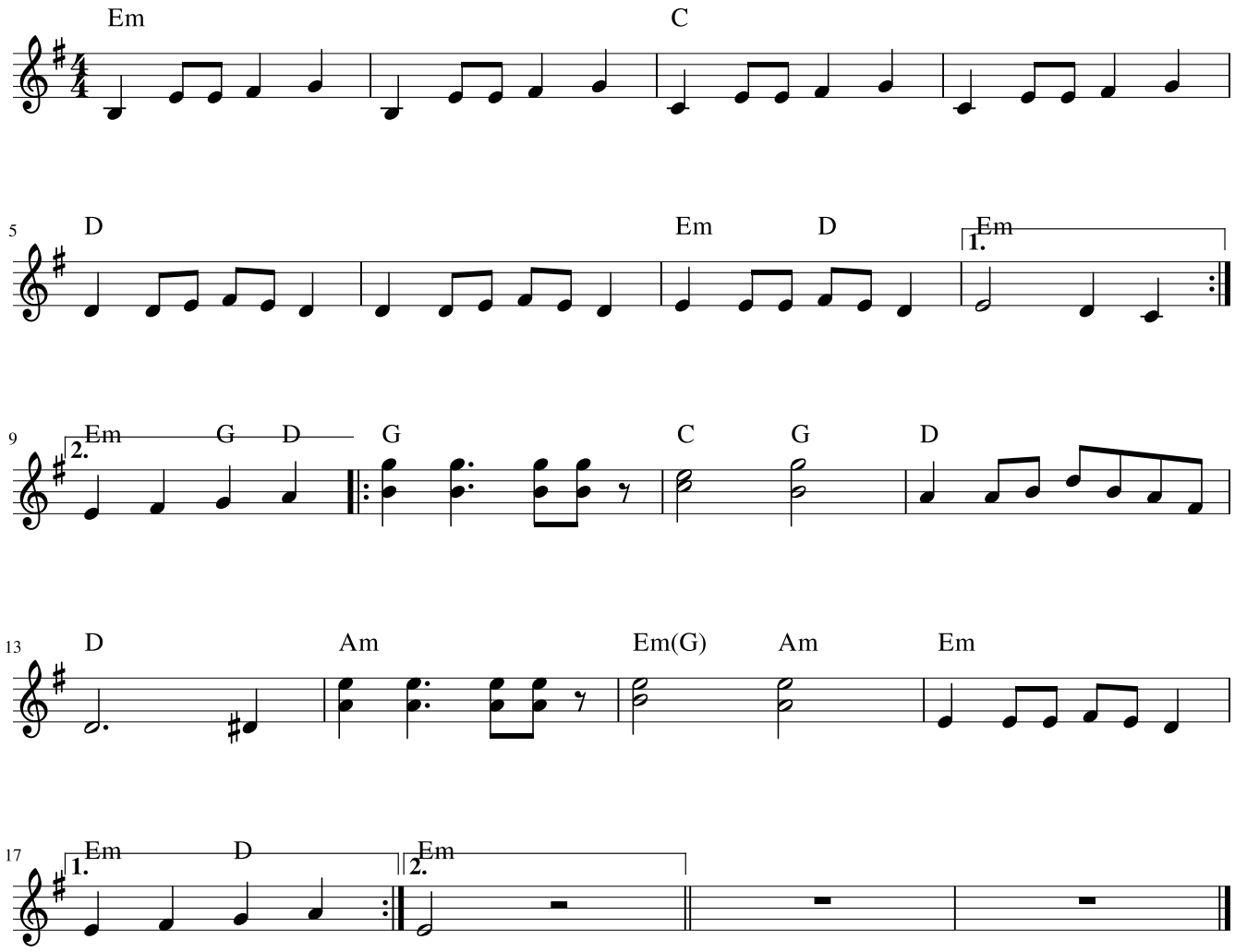
# J. Neufeld's Reel

David Atcher
April 7, 2006



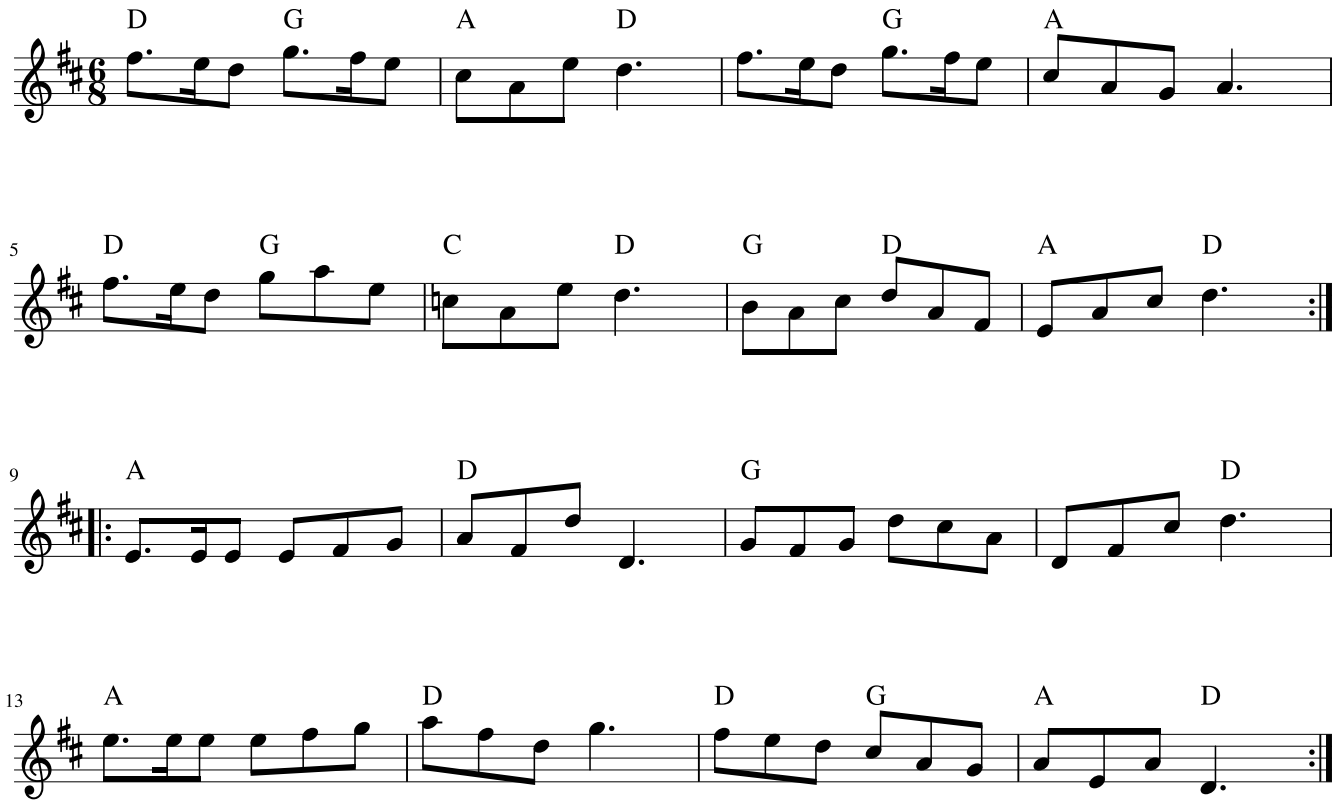
# Juan Fernando the Fourth

David Atcher
April 4, 2006



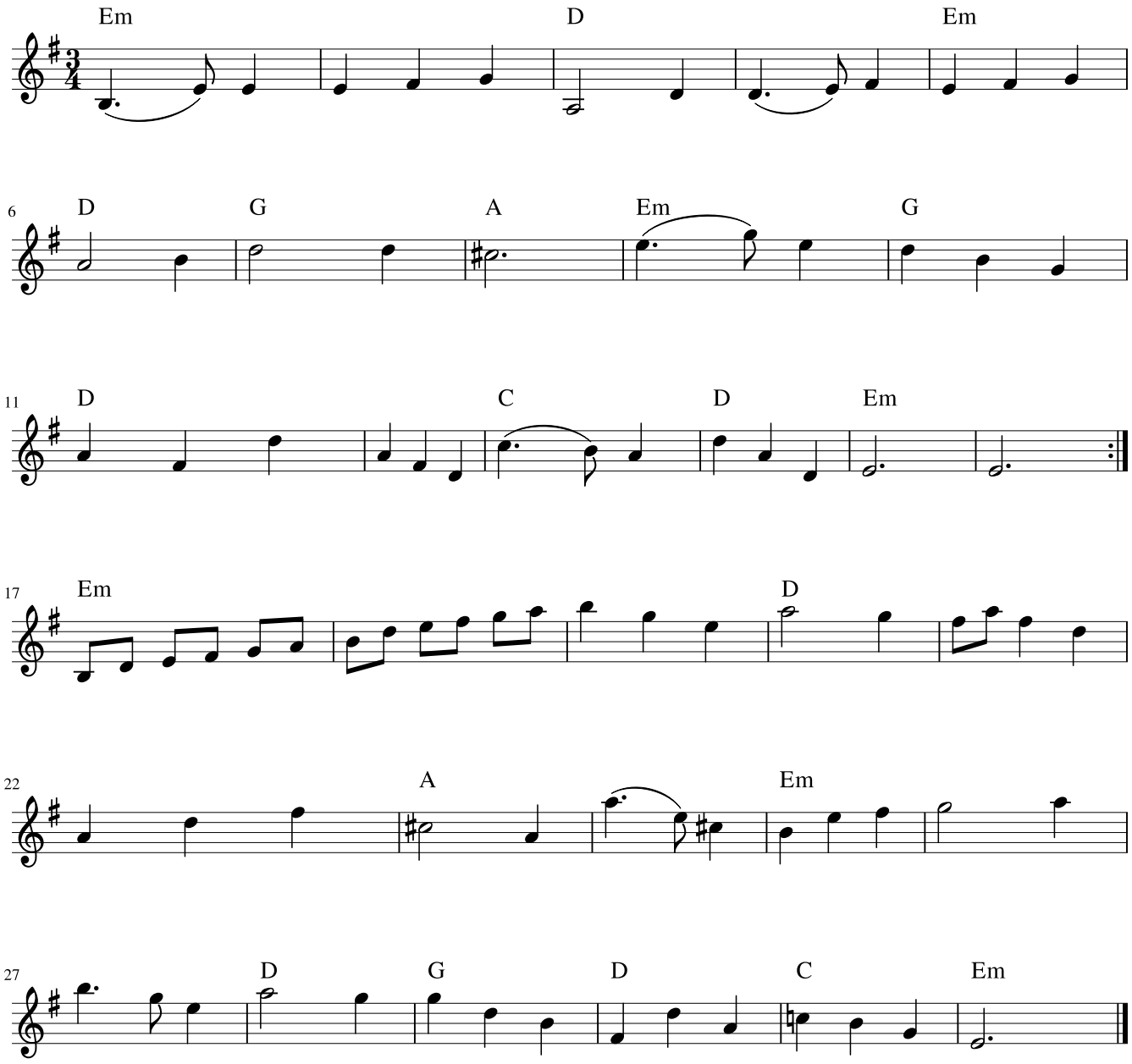
# Karina's Jig

David Atcher
December, 2001



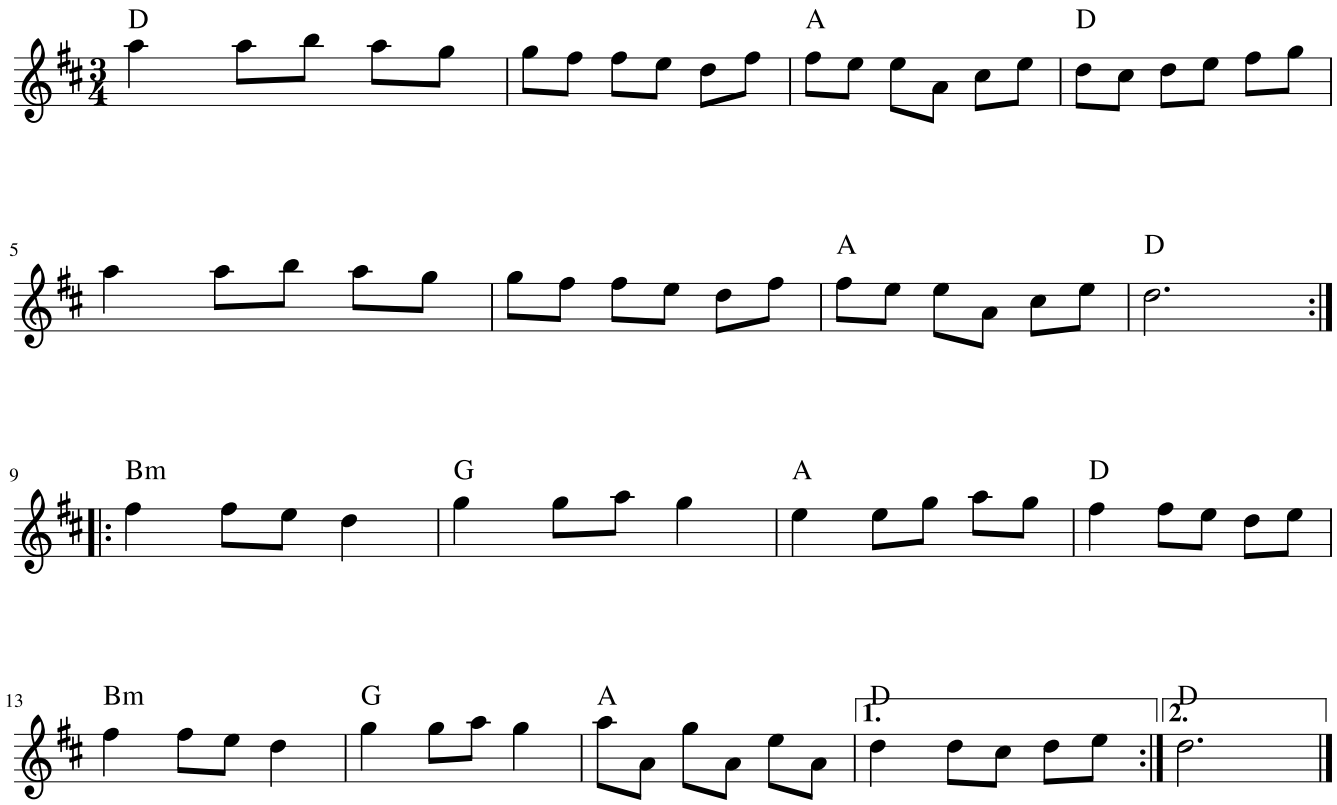
# Kathy's Waltz

David Atcher
Oct 31, 2005



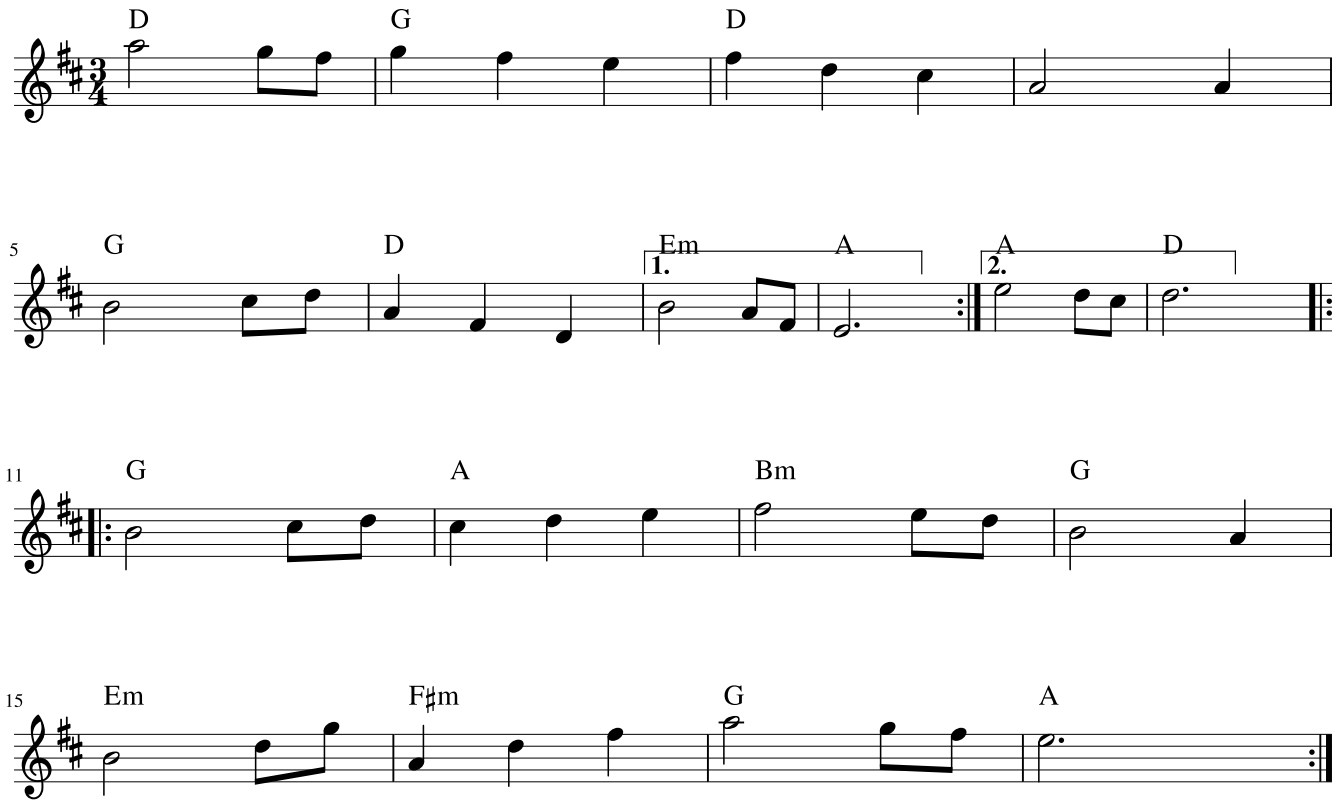
# Lauren's Hambo

David Atcher
December, 1999



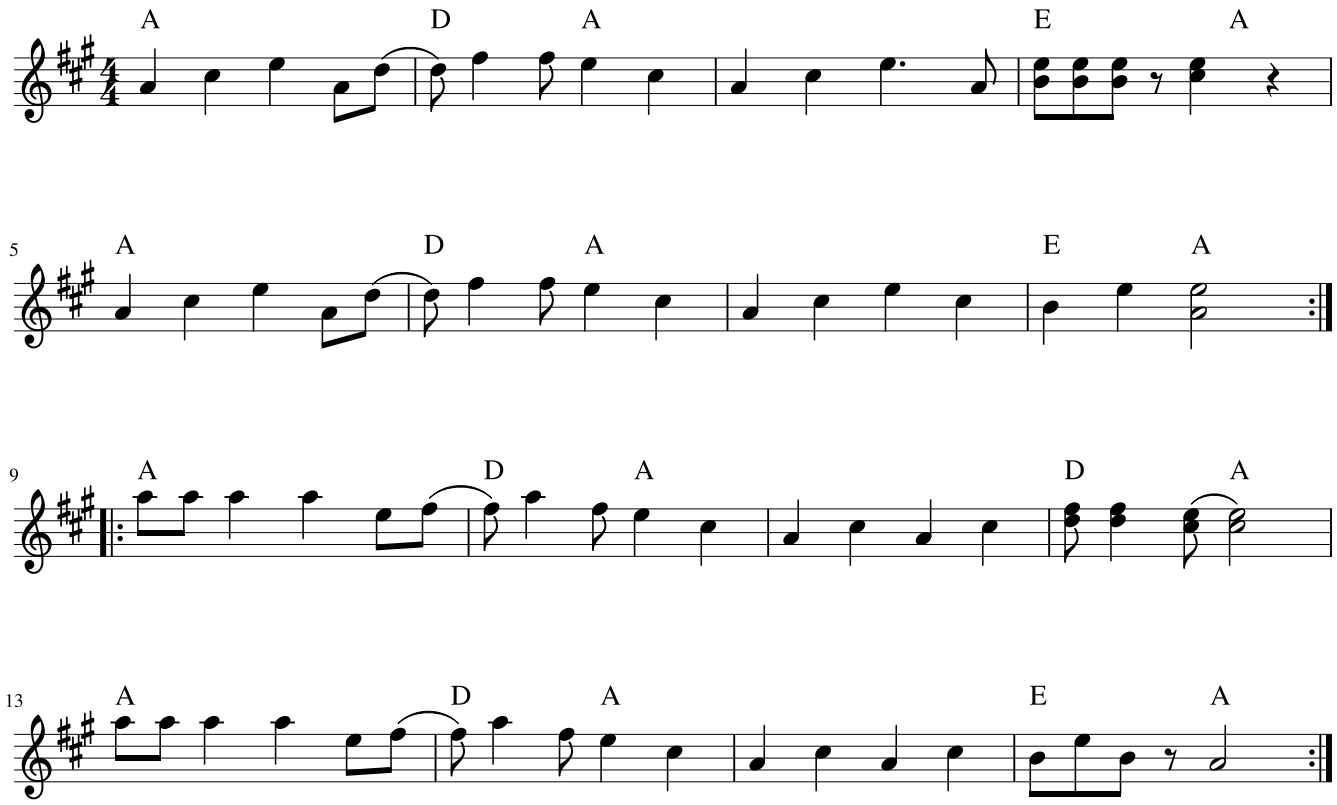
# Lullaby For Kevin John

David and Nancy T Atcher
March, 1996



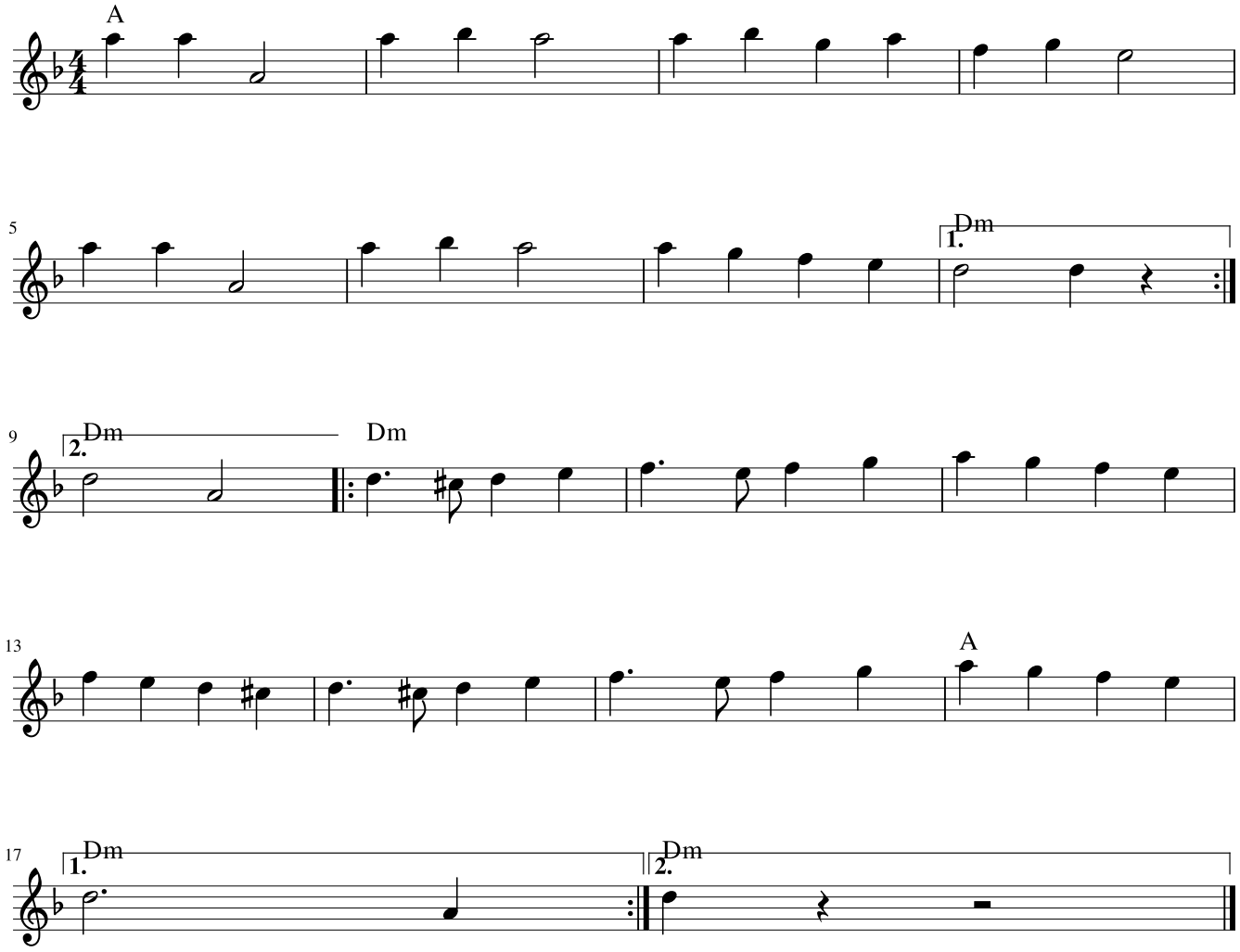
# Mango Salsa

David Atcher
March, 2006



# Mecca

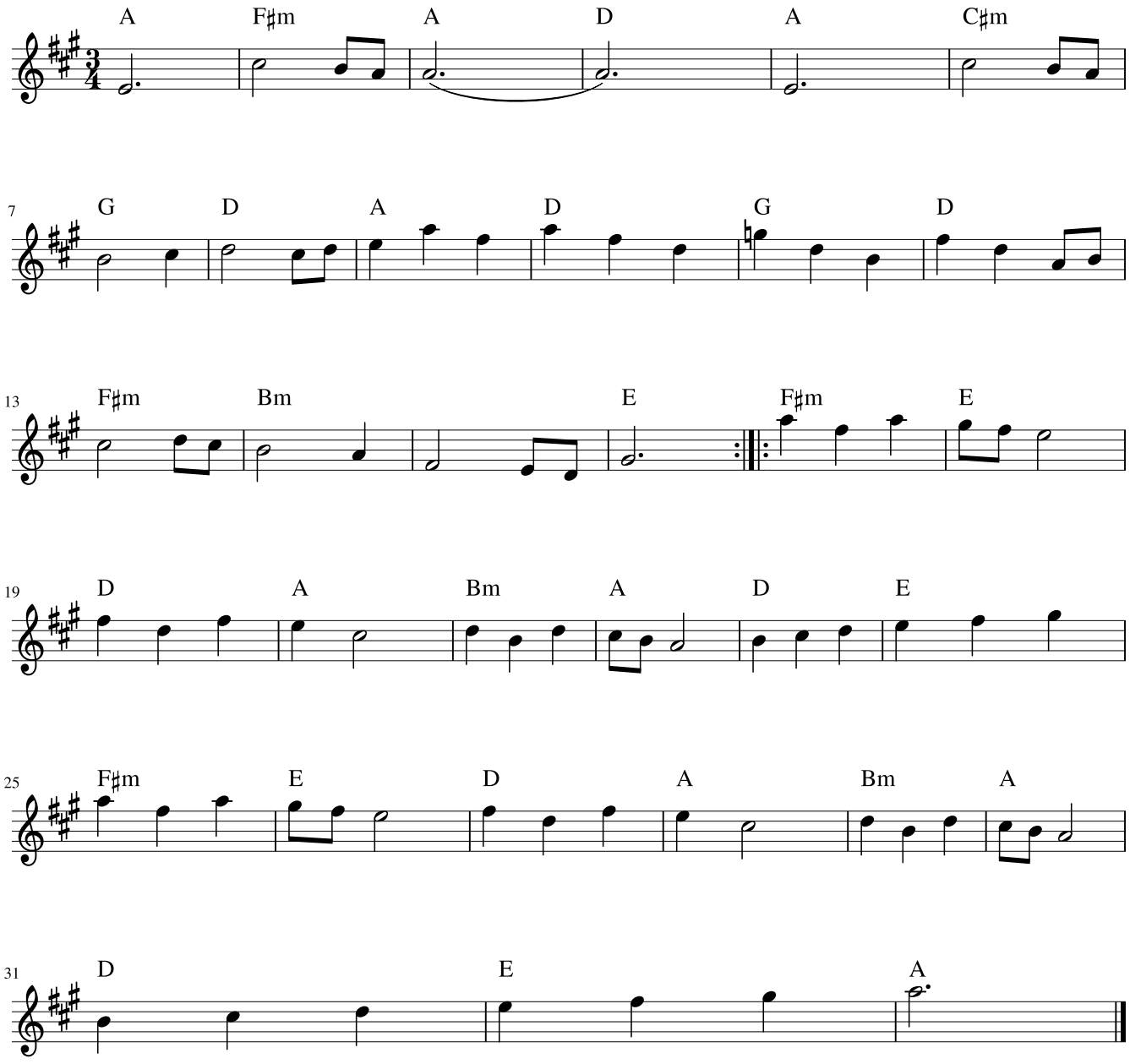
David Atcher
July, 2004



# Nancy and Melvin's Waltz

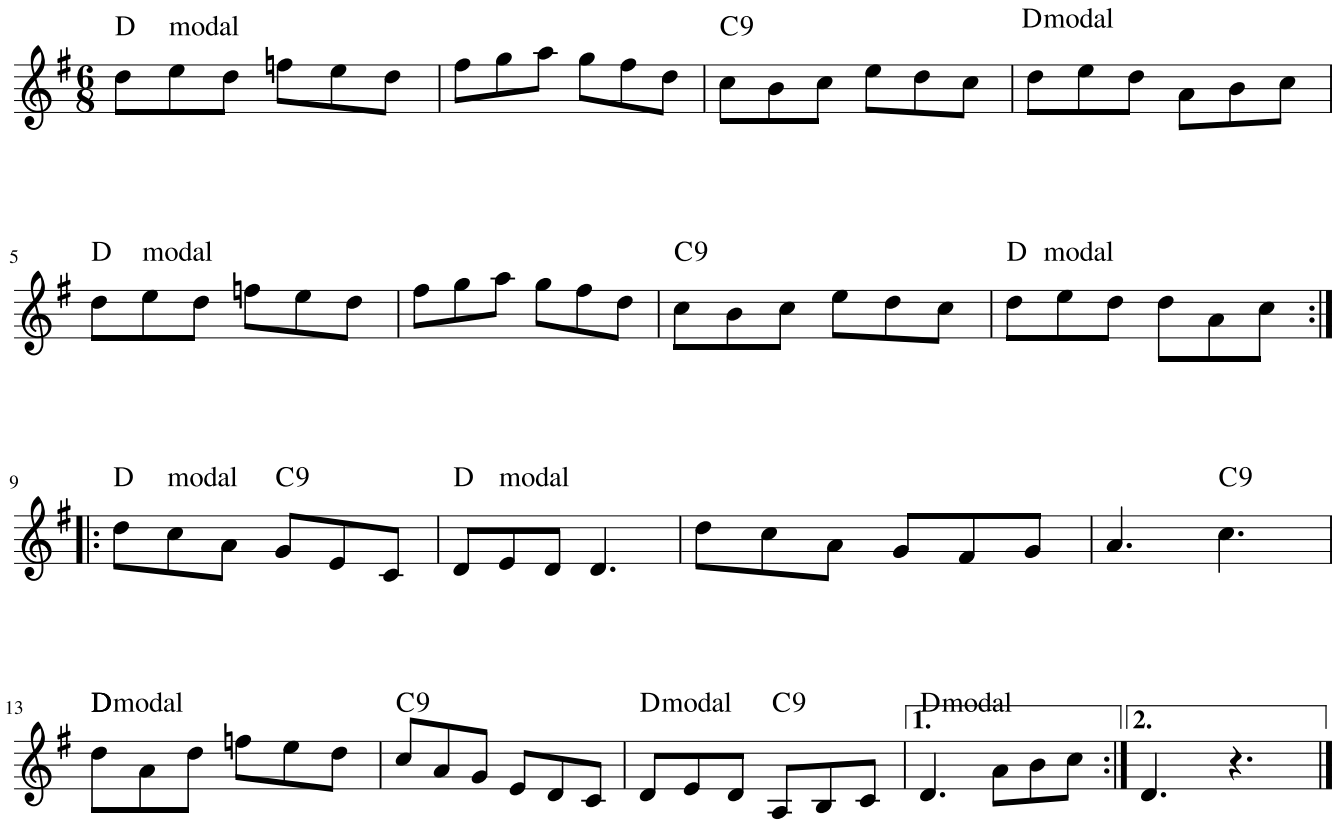
Nancy T Atcher and David Atcher

September 3, 1993



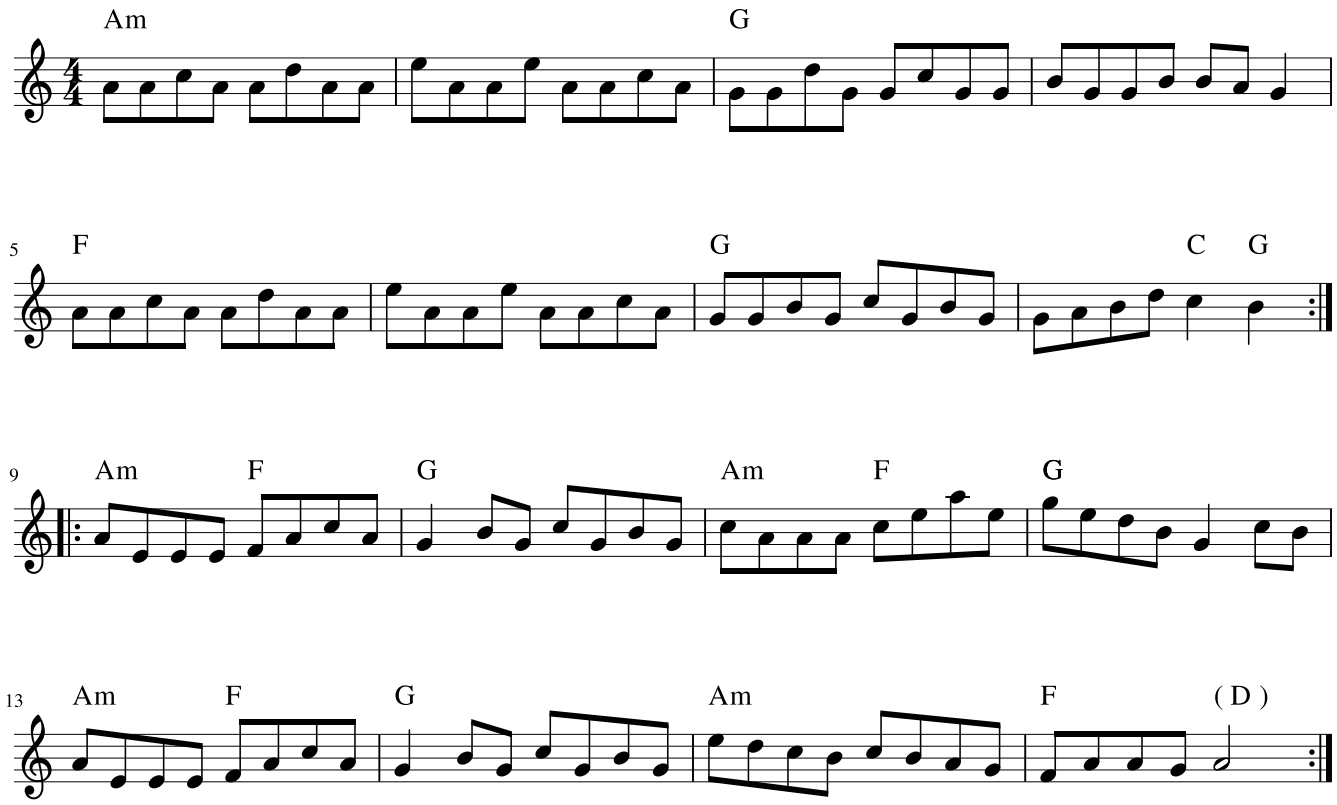
# Nancy's Jig

David Atcher
December 25, 2004



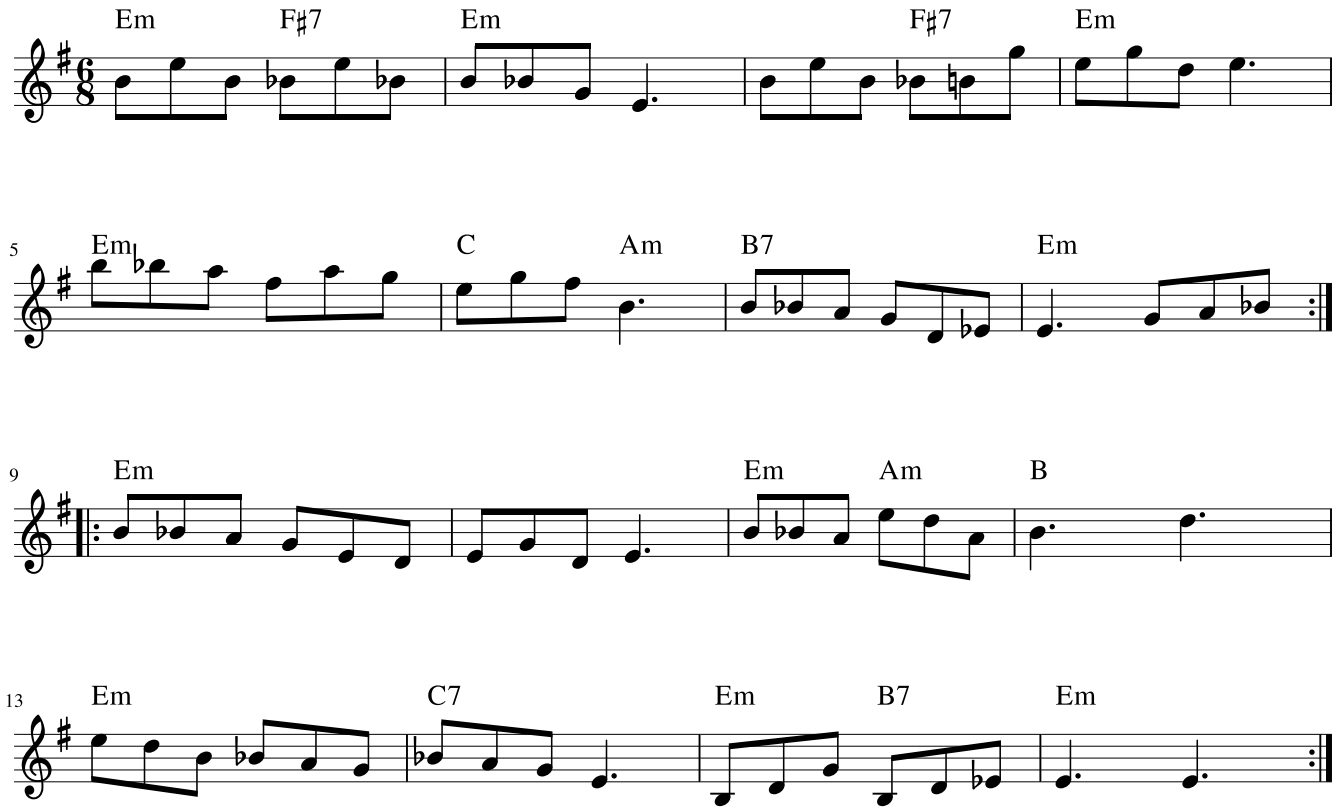
# Nancy's Reel

David Atcher
Dec. 25, 2004



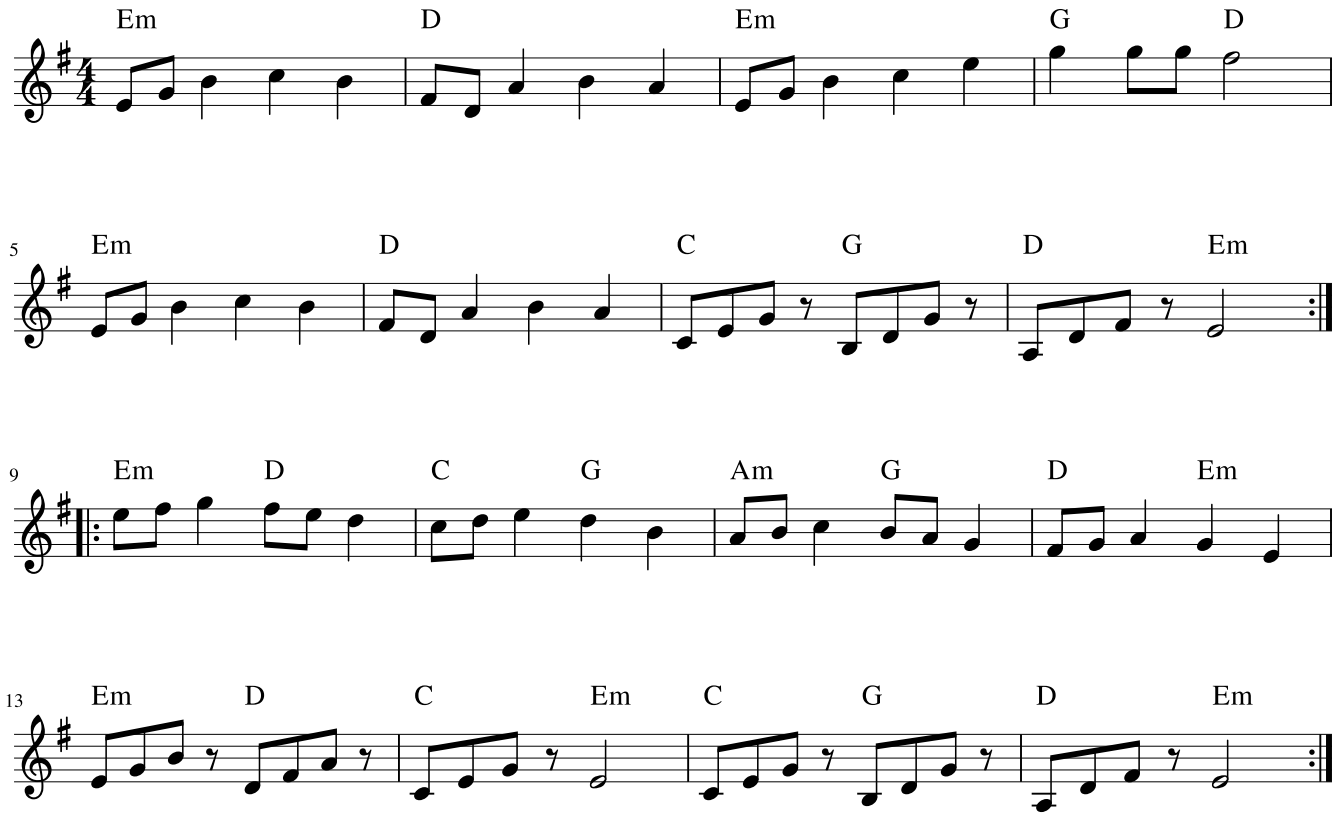
# Nathan's Jig

David Atcher
Dec. 2000



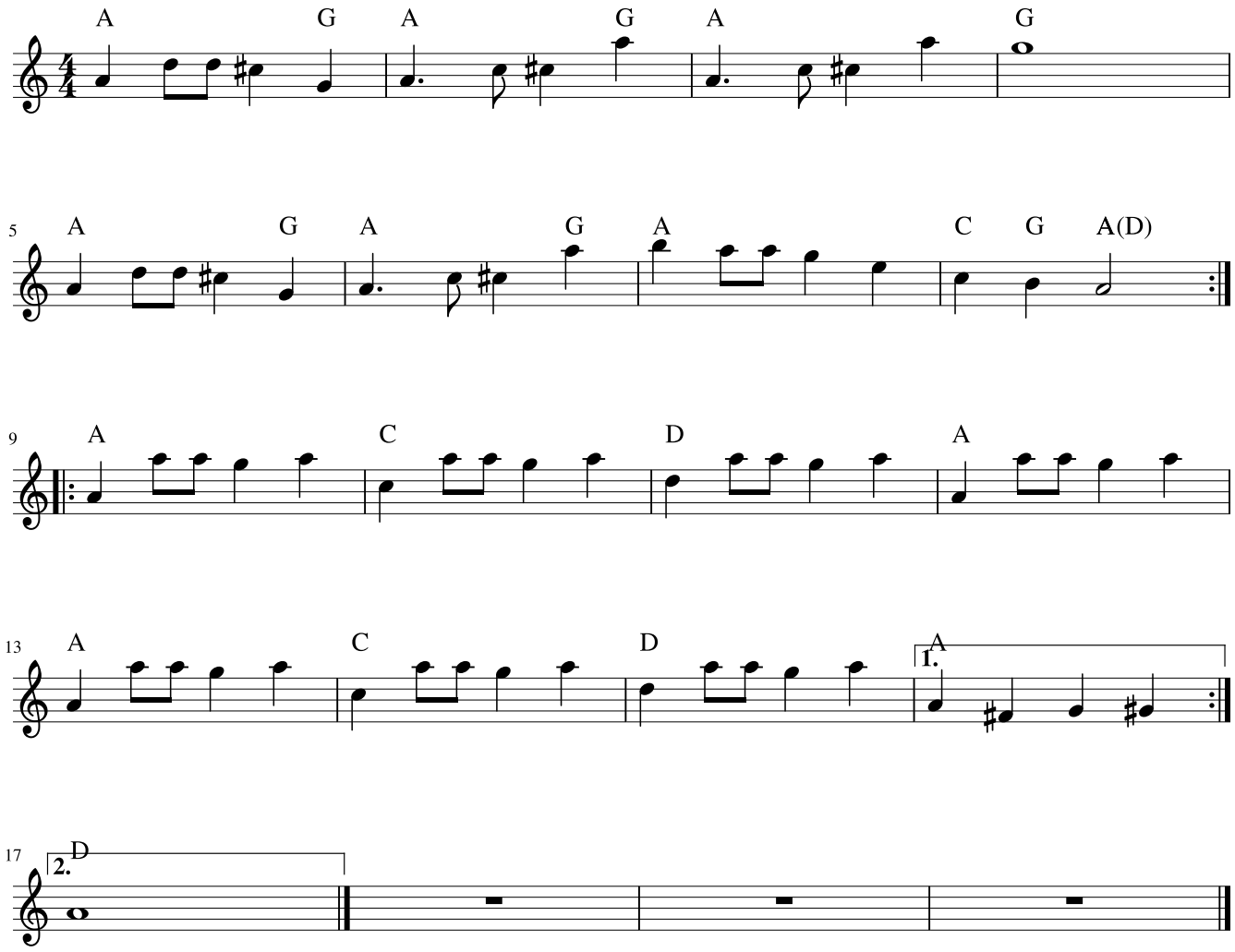
# November

David Atcher
November, 2007



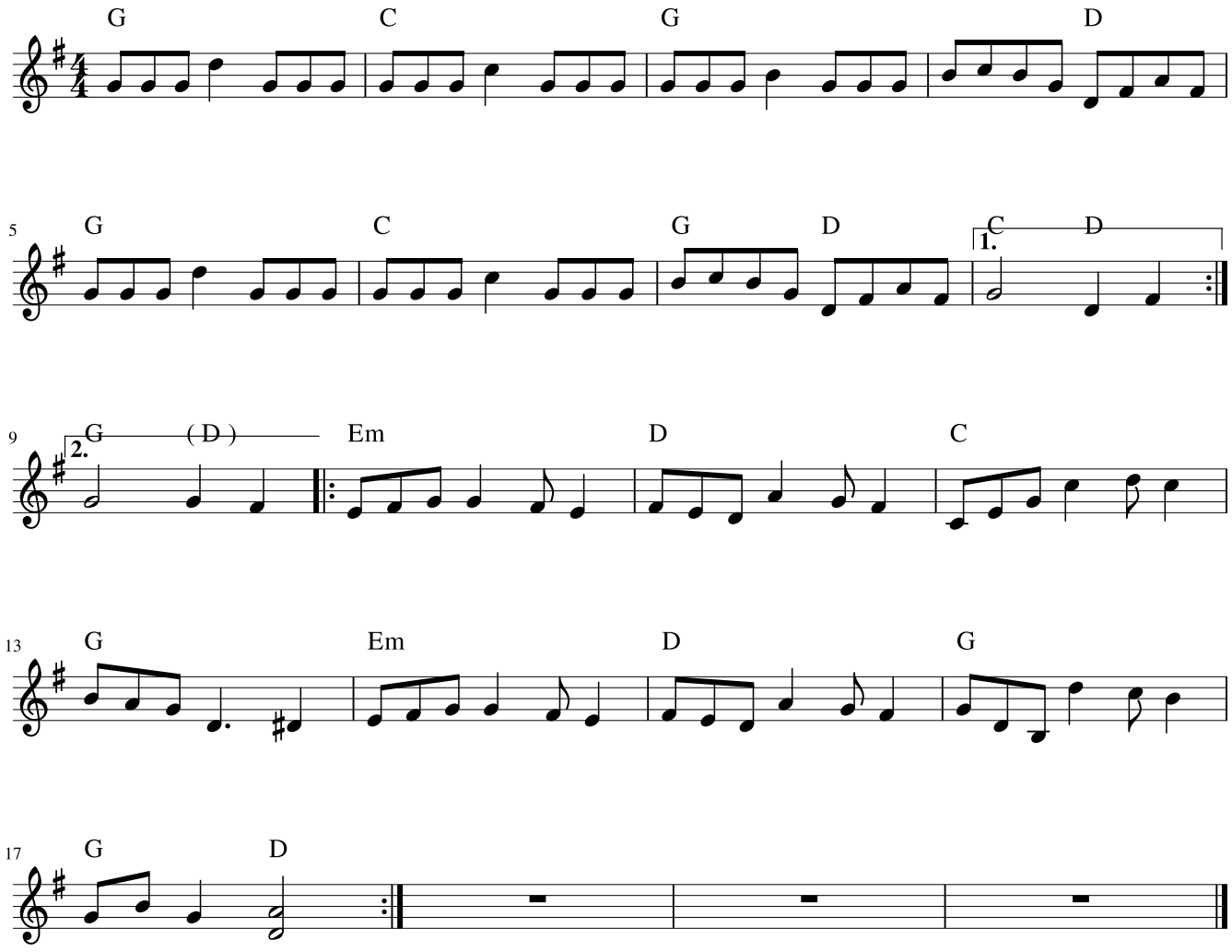
# Rotten To The Chord

David Atcher
March, 2006



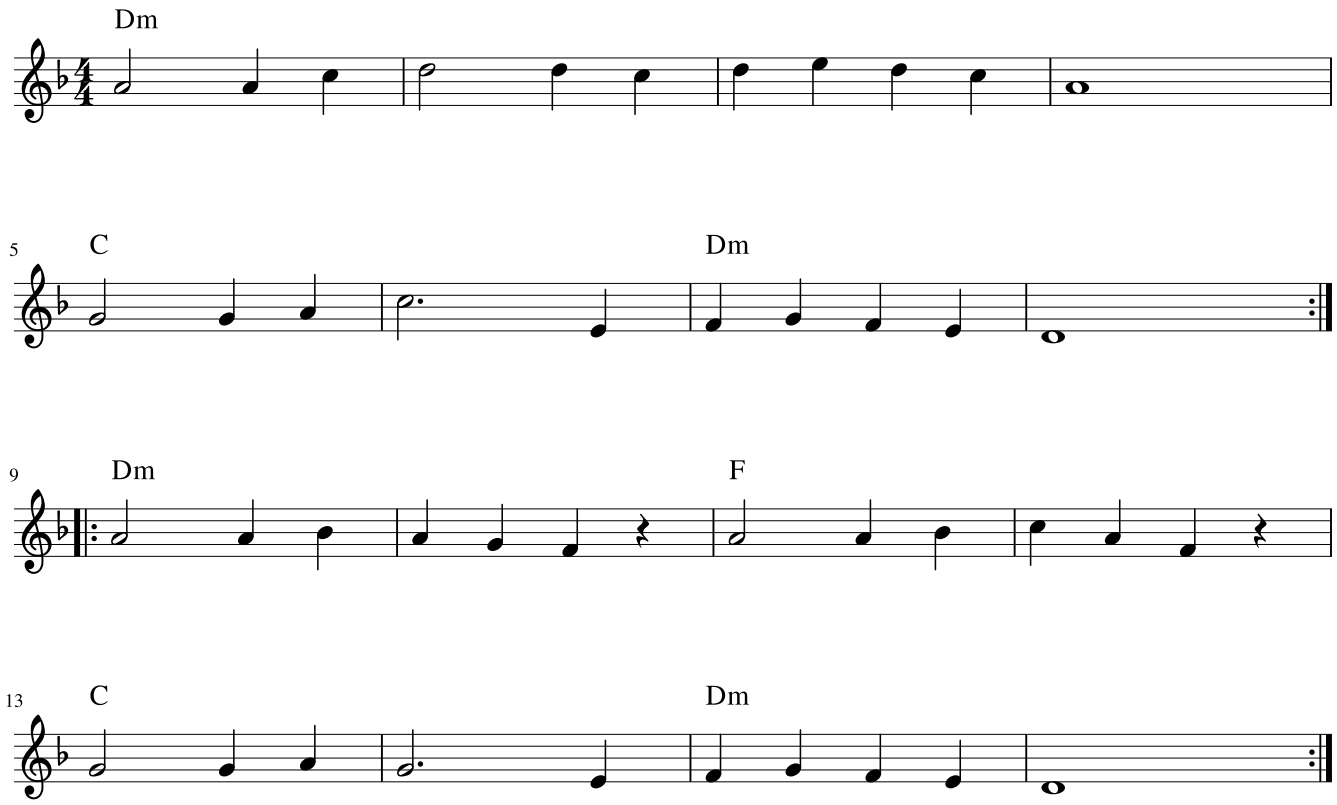
# Salt Point

David Atcher
April 23, 2011



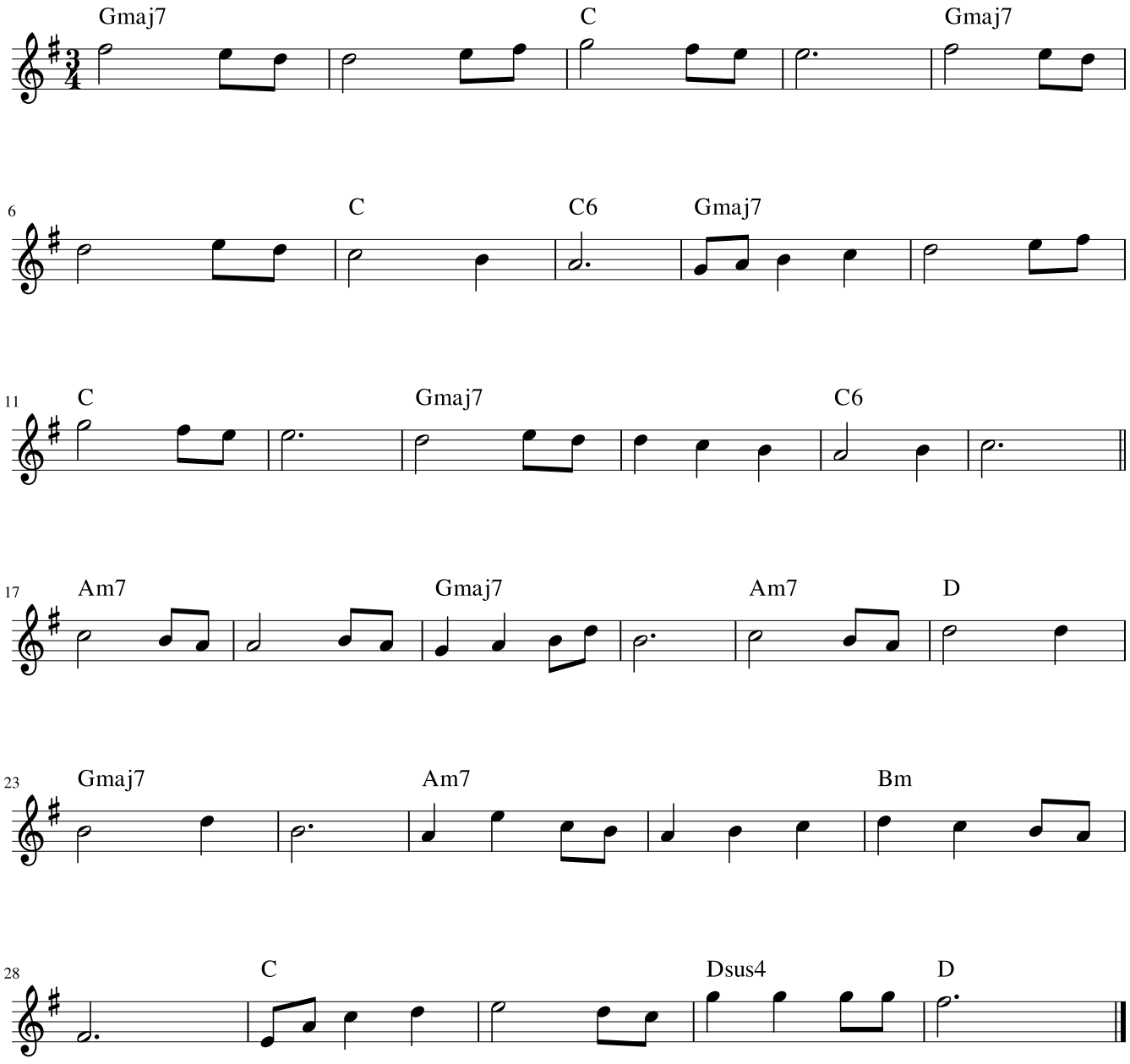
# Samurai Reel

David Atcher
Feb 18, 2007



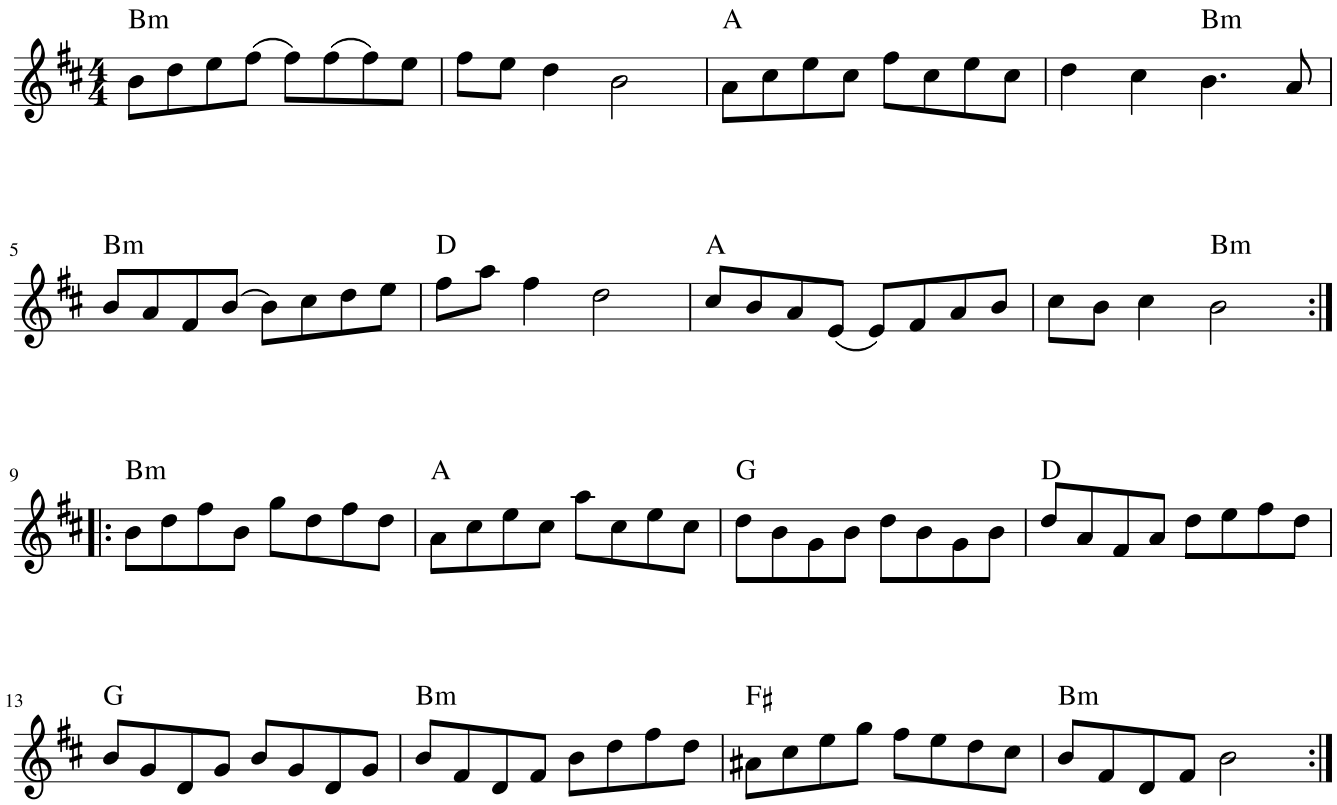
# Suspension

David Atcher
November 13, 2007



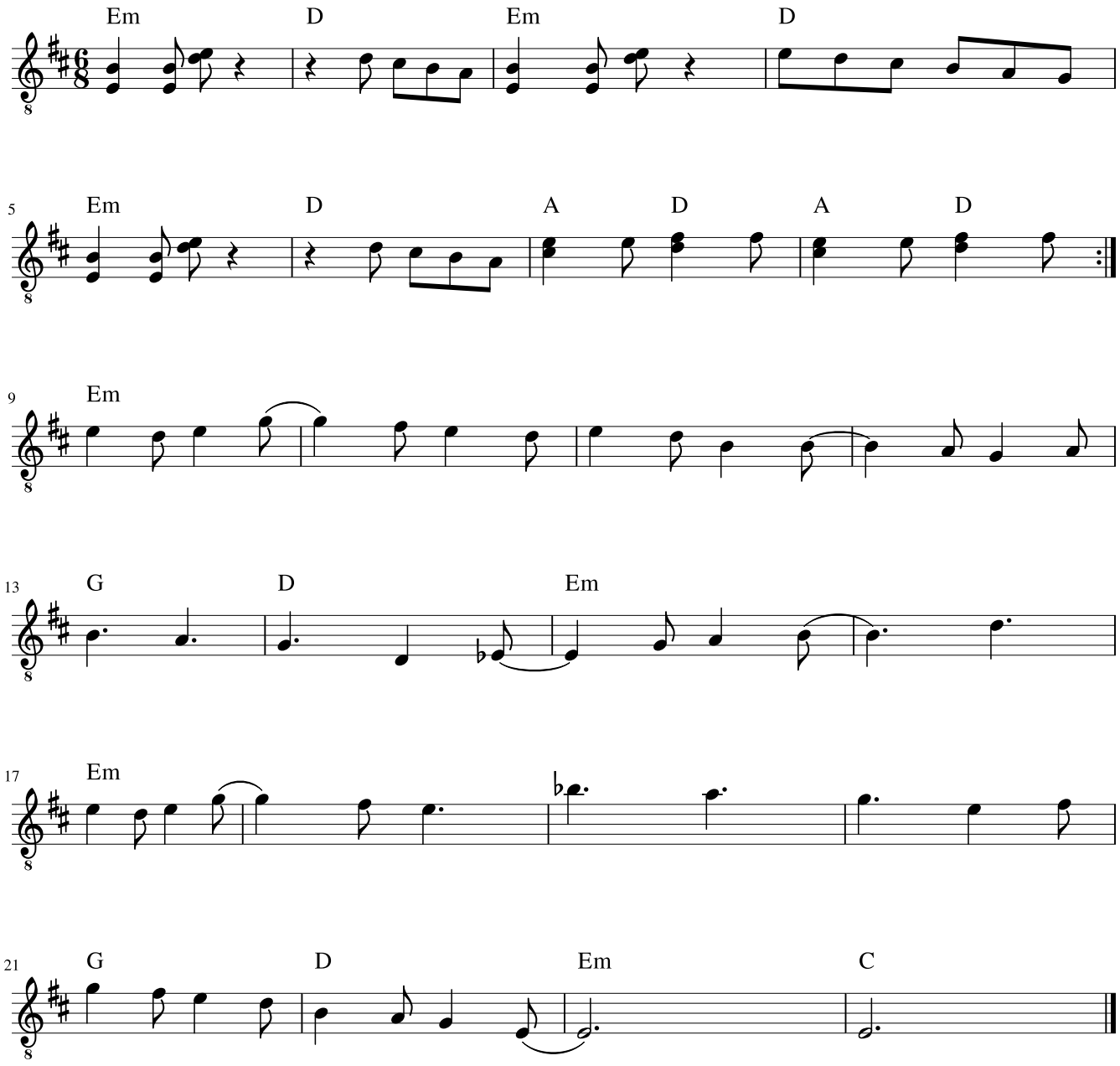
# Suzanna's Return From Brazil

David Atcher
Oct. 26, 2013



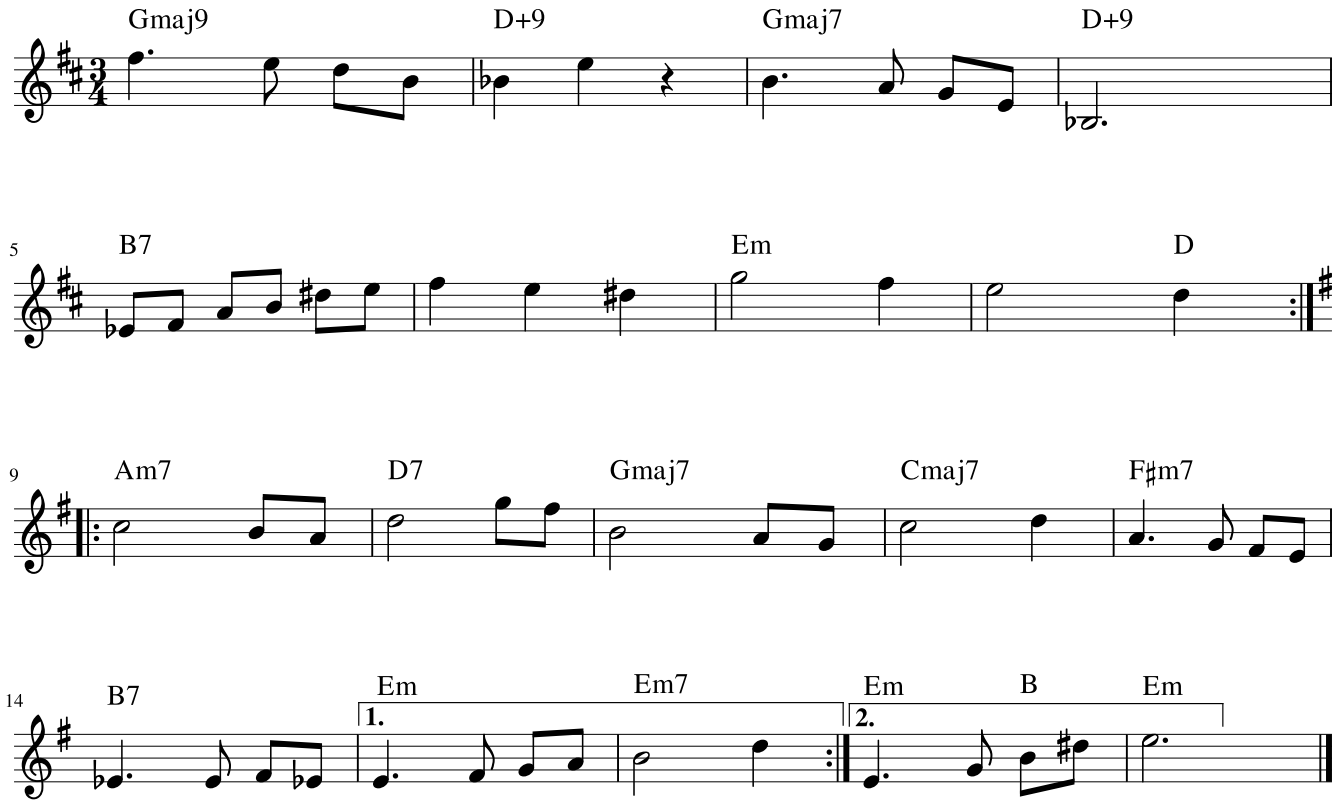
# Talking Walls

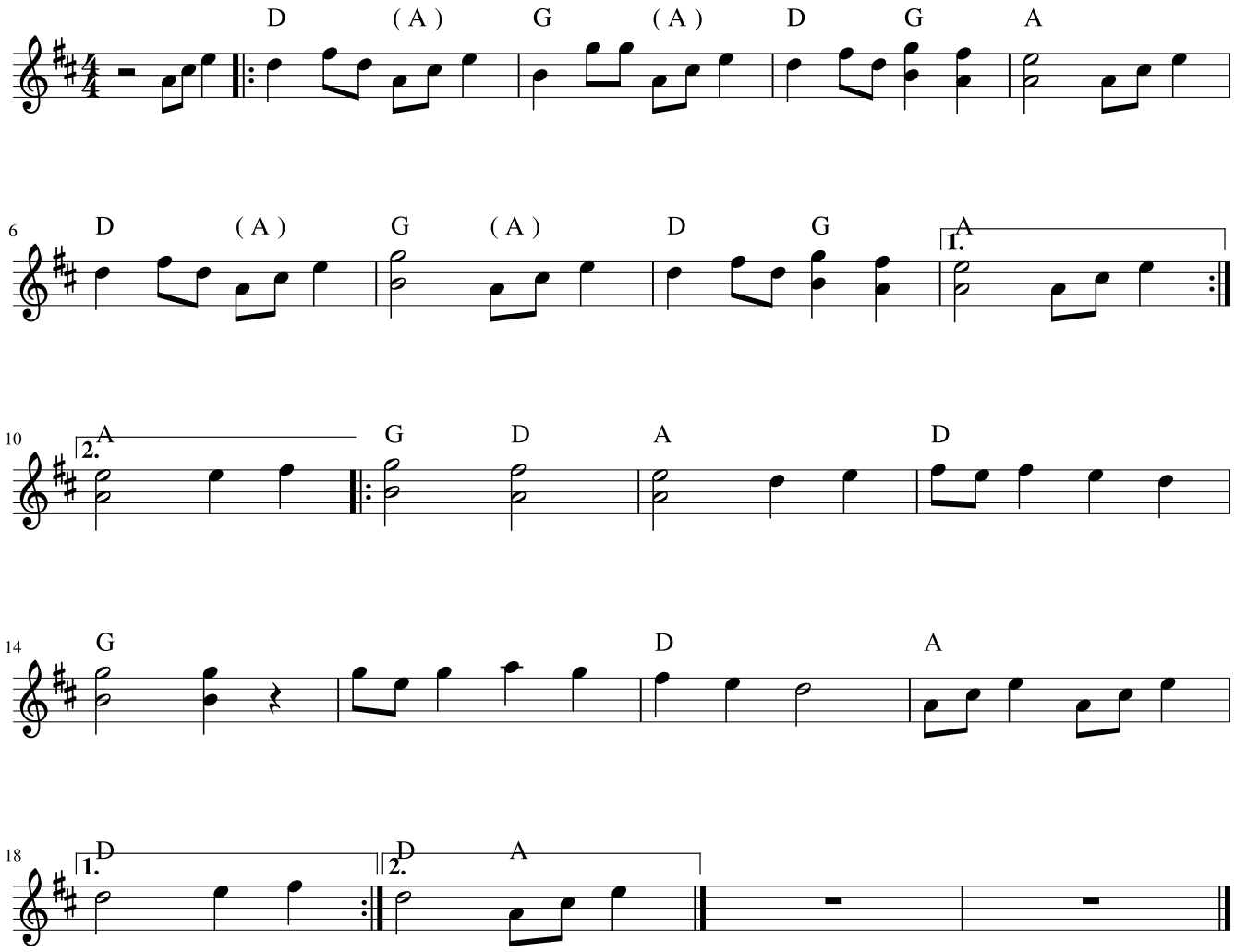
David Atcher and Lauren McDonald
Sept 12, 2016



# Tom Cunningham's Waltz

David Atcher
Nov. 10, 2015



# Waiting For Kathy

David Atcher
August, 2005