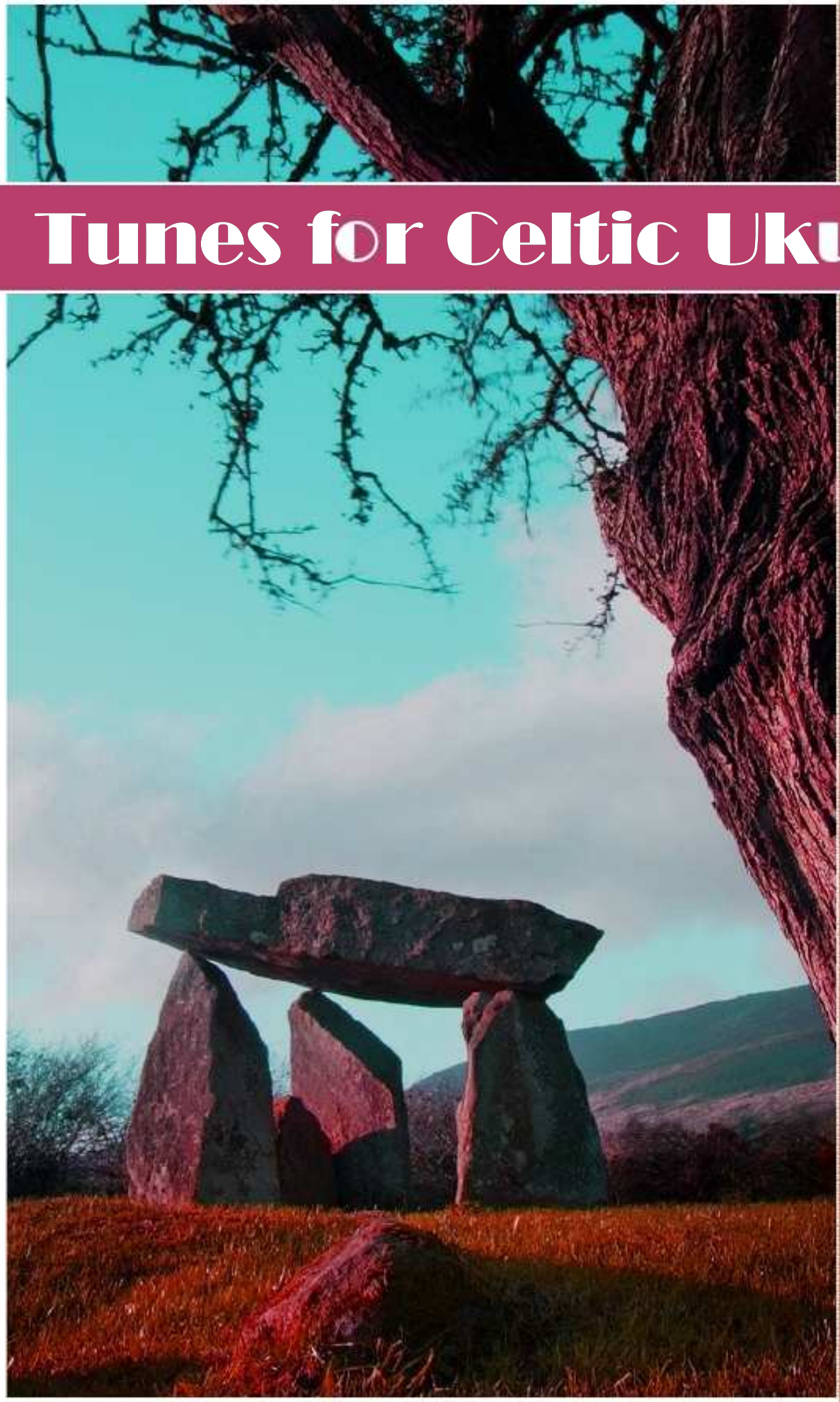
Ken Middleton



12 Tunes for Celtic Ukulele

Standard

High G Tuning

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12 Tunes for Celtic Ukulele

by

Ken Middleton

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you so much for buying my second eBook. I have a real love for Celtic music, so here are 12 new arrangements for ukulele. All use standard high G tuning.

So what do I mean by Celtic music? For this book I have taken it to mean the traditional music of Ireland and Scotland. Most of the tunes in this book fit into this category. However, there are some tunes, like *Lord of the Dance* and *The Harp That Once Through Tara's Halls*, that are not really traditional, but are arranged in an obvious Celtic style. With these two tunes I have made a conscious effort to make the ukulele sound like a small hand-held harp. Of course, many of the other tunes I have used can be found in O'Neill's *Music of Ireland*. Naturally I have used this wherever possible as my primary source.

Although some of my arrangements are more difficult to play than others, again I have just put them in alphabetical order. You can decide which are easy and which are harder. I have included some basic performance notes for each piece which should help you to master those tricky passages and techniques. I also give a little bit of historical information about each song.

Each arrangement is written in ukulele TAB with conventional music above it. I have also added chords for each tune.

These tunes are arranged especially for ukulele and so are not always in the usual, standard key. Instead, I have put them into a key that makes them more easily playable. As the ukulele cannot really compete in volume with guitars, flutes, bagpipes, mandolins and fiddles, why not try out these pieces with a friend on another ukulele? Most of all, have fun.

WHAT YOU GET

So what do you get for your money?

First of all, you get this eBook which contains 12 newly-arranged ukulele pieces in a Celtic style. The book and all the music were produced during 2009 and 2010. It is loaded onto your computer in the form of a PDF file.

I have also included each tune as a single PDF file. You can therefore print out and work on the tunes individually. These PDFs will give you a much better printout as well.

Each song is accompanied by 3 MIDI files. Each of the 3 files goes at a different speed. This will enable you to work on a song at the tempo of your choice.

In the future you will be able to freely listen to my recordings of these tunes in MP3 format from my website. I have already produced a video for several of them which can be viewed on YouTube.

My website can be found at www.kenmiddleton.co.uk

My YouTube channel is www.youtube.com/kenmiddletonukulele

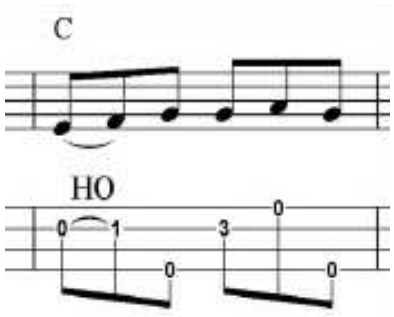
What don't you get for your money?

You don't get the right to distribute these arrangements to others, either by photocopying, printing out or by giving them an electronic copy.

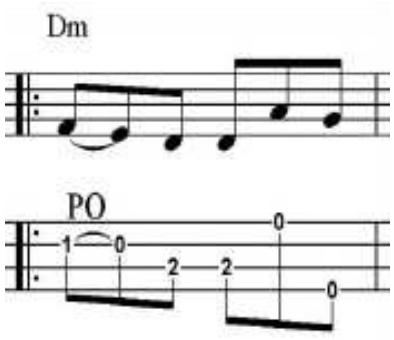
READING THE TAB

If you have bought this book, you probably already know how to read either TAB or conventional music. However, in Celtic music there are a number of important techniques used. These tend to be notated in lots of different ways. Here, I shall explain which techniques I have used, how I have written them and how you might play them.

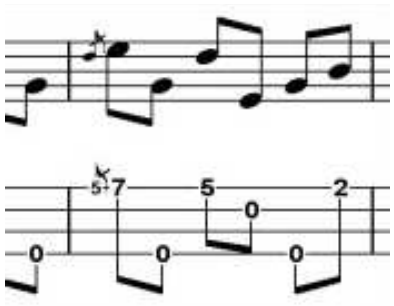
As in my last book, I have tried to keep the conventional music as clutter-free as possible, with just written chord symbols over this part. It is mainly in the TAB part that I have used the following signs and abbreviations.



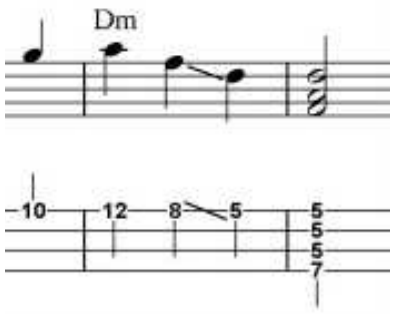
This is **hammer on** (HO). This one is in bar 12 of *Brian Borouhme*. To play this, you pluck the open 2nd string and then hammer a finger of your left hand on to the 1st fret of the same string. You do not pluck the string for the second note. This technique is very common in Celtic music.



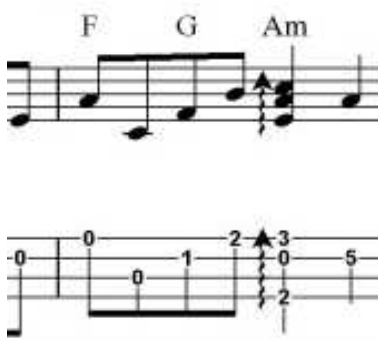
This next technique is also very common. It is called a **pull off** (PO). This one is found right at the start of *Brian Borouhme*. Here, you would pluck the 2nd string with you left hand on the 1st fret. For the next note you just pull the finger of your left hand off the string but do not pluck it.



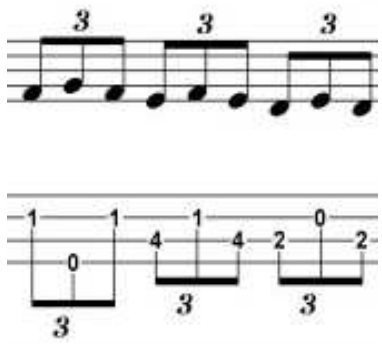
Here is an **acciaccatura**. These sound terrific in Celtic music. To play this one, you must pick note at the 5th fret of the top string and then quickly hammer on to the 7th fret of the same string. These can also be played in a downwards direction too. This example is from *She Moved Through The Fair*.



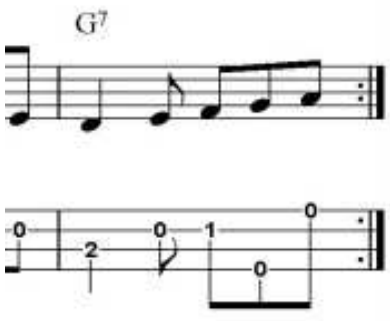
With this kind of **slide**, from *Loch Na Garr*, you play the first note (8th fret) and slide down to the second note (5th fret) which you also play. This effect can also be used in an upward direction. Over-use of this effect can sound rather amateurish.



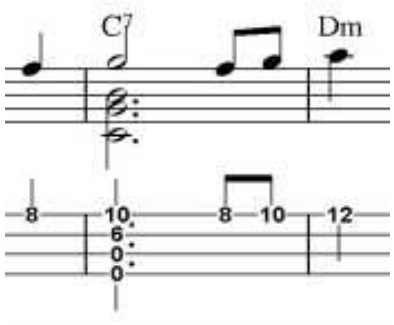
In the tune *The Harp That Once Through Tara's Halls* you will find a **broken chord**. To play this you pluck the notes rapidly, one after the other in the direction of the arrow. Here, I play the 4th string with my thumb (P), the 2nd string with my first finger (I) and 1st string with my second finger (M).



This symbol is called a **triplet**. It is indicated with a number 3. You have to play 3 notes in the time that would normally take you to play 2. This passage can be found in the tune *Humphrey's Hornpipe*. Triplets are very common in Celtic music and they can be found in many of these arrangements.



Here is a **repeat sign**. You go back to a similar sign where the dots are on the other side of the double bar. You then play the section again. It saves space, but it can make the piece of music more confusing. This example is taken from *Light and Airy*.



In *Loch Na Garr*, as well as playing single notes, it is necessary to play 2, 3 or even 4 notes at once. To play these **chords** you use a combination of your thumb and 1, 2 or 3 fingers of the right hand, depending on how many notes there are. The 4th (pinky) finger is not usually used to play the strings.

USING THE MIDI FILES

You will find the MIDI files for these tunes in a separate folder. MIDI files do not play very stylishly, but they are perfect for playing along with, however. Playing with style is something you will have to do.

You can open the files by double clicking on them and they will open in your default player, like Windows Media Player, for instance. Don't expect them to sound much like a ukulele though. The purpose of these files is to help you to understand the music, not to be a perfect performance. For a more subtle and human performance, please refer to my website, www.kenmiddleton.co.uk, where you will find videos and MP3s of me playing some of these songs.

There are three MIDI files for each tune. Each of these three will play at a different tempo: slow, medium, fast.

The slow file plays at 40-60 BPM (beats per minute). The medium file plays at 50-100 BPM. The fast file will play at the fastest speed that I think is appropriate for the arrangement. You can, of course, play these pieces at whatever speed you choose – it's up to you.

Here is an example

The Fisher's Hornpipe – slow 60 BPM

The Fisher's Hornpipe – medium 100 BPM

The Fisher's Hornpipe – fast 136 BPM

If you have a music application that is capable of manipulating MIDI files, you can get them to play at whatever tempo you like.

PERFORMANCE NOTES and MUSIC

Brian Borouhme

Brian Borouhme is a typical Irish jig. It is written in compound duple time: two beats in each bar, with each beat subdivided into three.

I have put considerable effort into making it straightforward to play. You should find that it lies under the fingers very well. Once you have learned the notes, you should be able to play it at quite a speed.

I have written it out in the key of Dm, and the chord shapes should be very familiar to most ukulele players.

There are no complex rhythms in the entire piece. The only tricky bar is 21 which comes on you unexpectedly. The structure of the tune is very simple too. Each 8 bar section is more or less repeated giving the structure AABB.

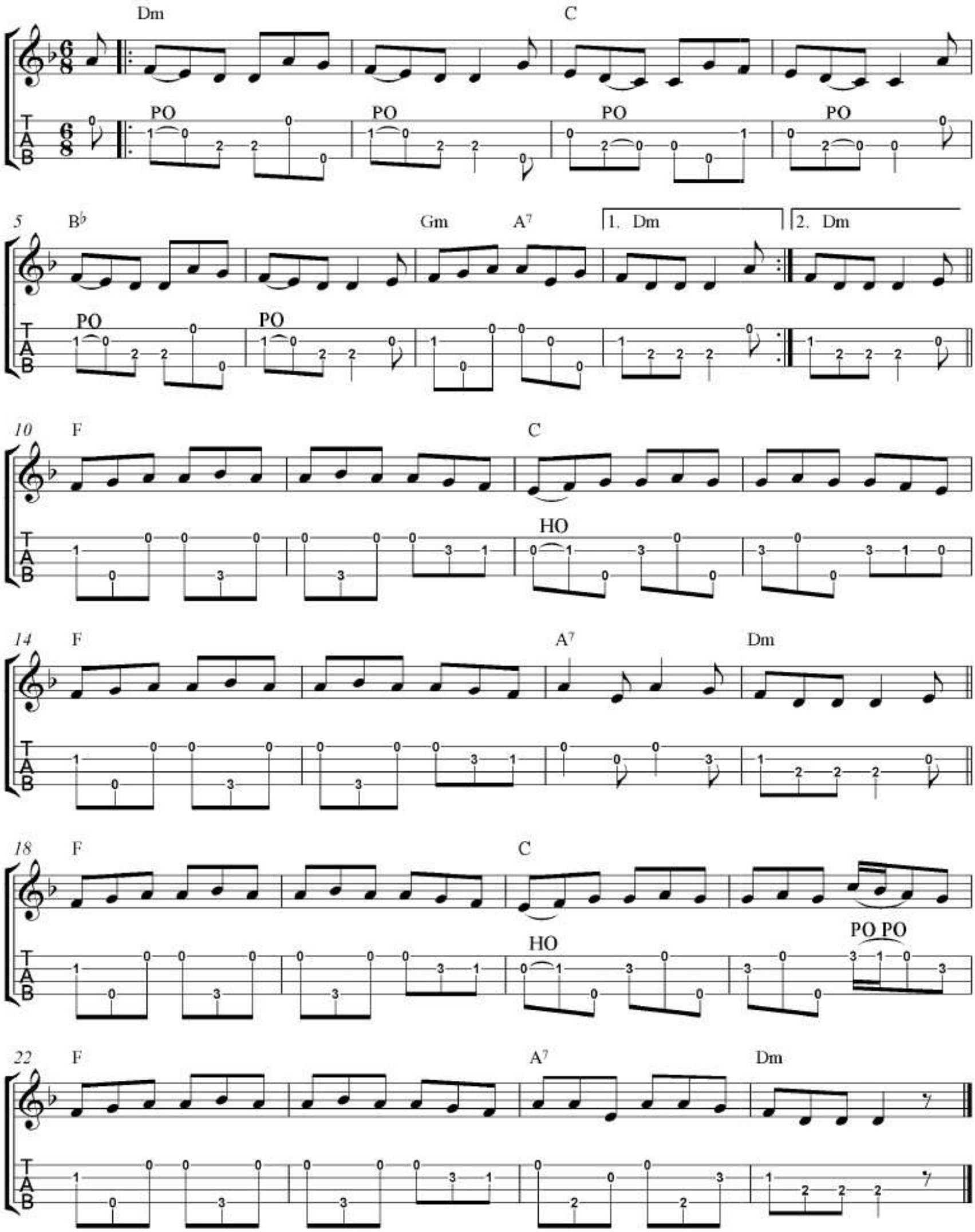
Although it is obviously a bit tricky to play at speed, most of it is simple enough to master. The hardest bits are probably the hammer-ons and pull-offs in the first section. The second half is generally quite reasonable to play because of the way the tune is "shared out" by using the re-entrant string.

End loudly and don't slow down.

Brian Borouhme

Ukulele tuning gCEA (high G)

Arranged by Ken Middleton



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Castles In The Air

Here we have a typical Irish hornpipe. As with most hornpipes, it is certainly best played with a swing.

I have arranged this tune in the key of F. This means that most of it can be played in 1st position (the 1st finger playing the notes of the 1st fret).

It lies under the fingers very well and is not too difficult to play. But watch out for a where the 4th finger (pinky) has to stretch to reach the 5th fret e.g. in bar 3.

There are just a couple of tricky places which will probably need a little more practise.

One such passage is the triplet in the 3rd bar of each phrase. Here, the first two notes are pull-offs. You will probably need to work carefully on this, particularly if you are not used to doing pull-offs.

The other place which might present a problem is at bar 9. At this point, you need to move up to 5th position in order to play the notes easily. This means that the first note of bar 9 is played with the 1st finger. You move straight back to 1st position for bar 10.

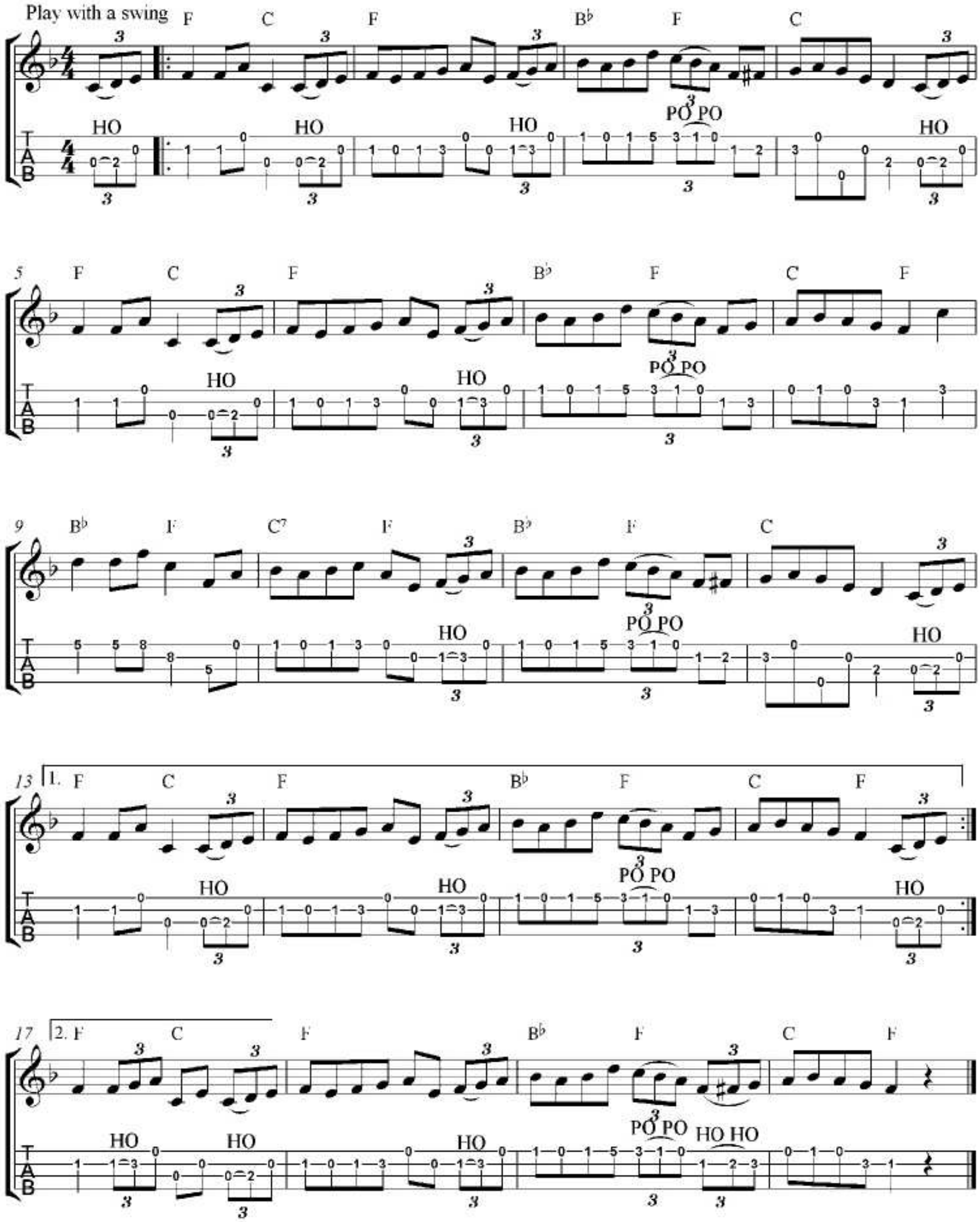
The accompanying chords are very simple: F, Bb and C(7). This makes it an ideal piece to play along with a friend or family member who has not been learning the ukulele for long.

Castles In The Air

Ukulele tuning gCEA (high G)

Arranged by Ken Middleton

Play with a swing



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Fisher's Hornpipe

This is a very bouncy hornpipe in the easy key of C. Again, it should be played with a swing.

The arrangement is much easier than it looks and the second half is almost identical to the first half.

Again, the chords are easy enough to play. There are only four of them (C, Dm, F and G7), but make sure that you change chords on the correct beat. This will require a little practice for the accompanying player.

Much of the piece is played in 1st position where the 1st finger plays the notes on the 1st fret. At bars 7-8 you have to move to 3rd position to enable you to stretch up to the 7th fret with the 4th (pinky) finger.

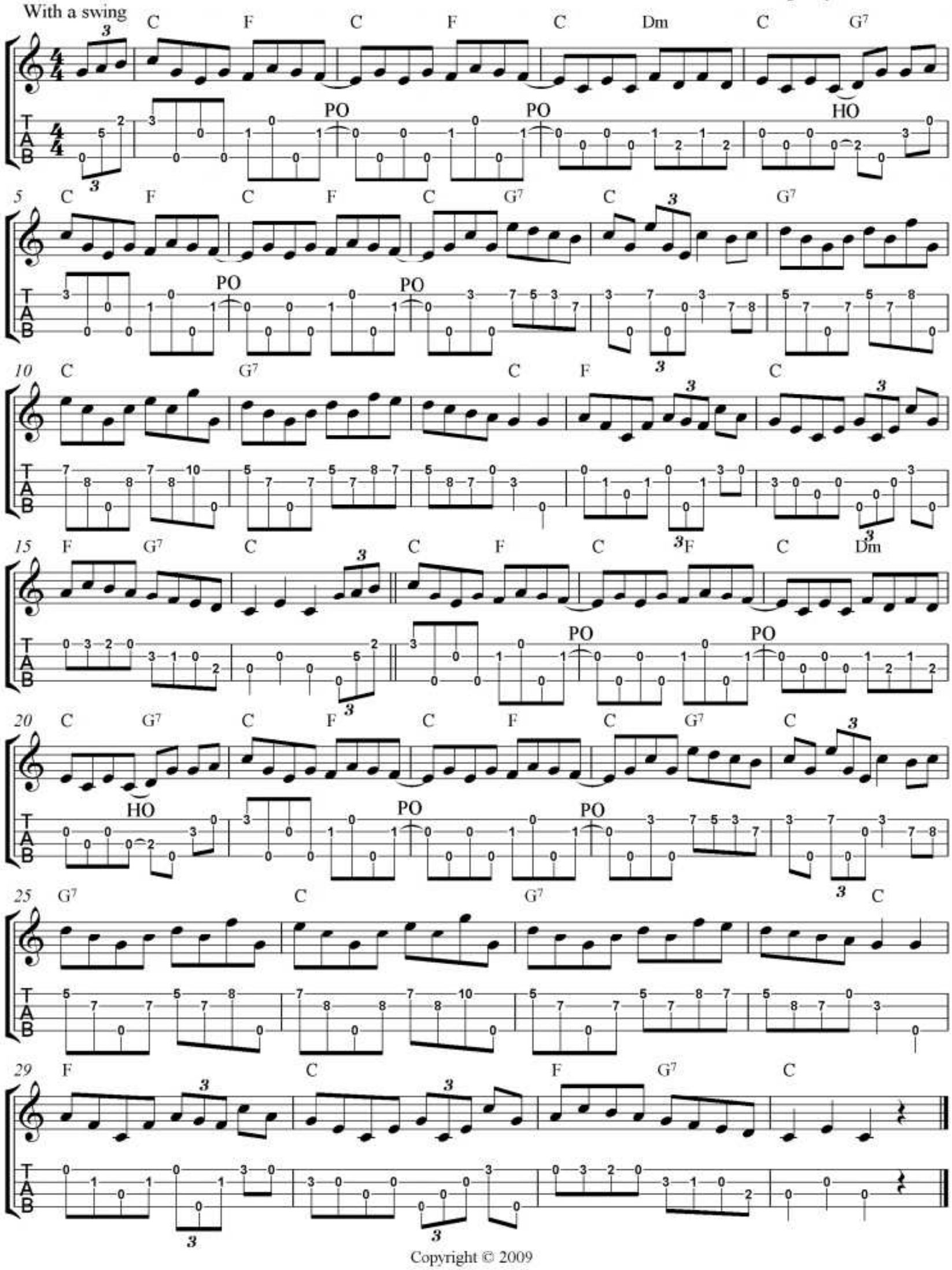
Bars 9-12 are a little harder. You have to move up to 5th position in bar 9, then up to 7th position for bar 10, and back to 5th position for bar 11. With practice this section sounds tremendous and is not really that difficult to play convincingly.

Interestingly, this is one of those pieces of music that sounds much more difficult than it actually is.

Fisher's Hornpipe

Ukulele tuning gCEA (high G)

Arranged by Ken Middleton



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Humphrey's Hornpipe

Another Irish hornpipe. Play it with a swing.

The structure is very clear on this one. There are two 8 bar sections, each one being repeated.

It is written in the key of C and the chords are very simple to play. The chords also change in logical places. It is another piece that is ideal to play along with a beginner. A complicated strum is not necessary – in fact, it rather gets in the way of the tune.

Notice the triplet figures where three G notes are played together. This would be very difficult to play were it not for the fact that I have used the re-entrant string for the middle note.

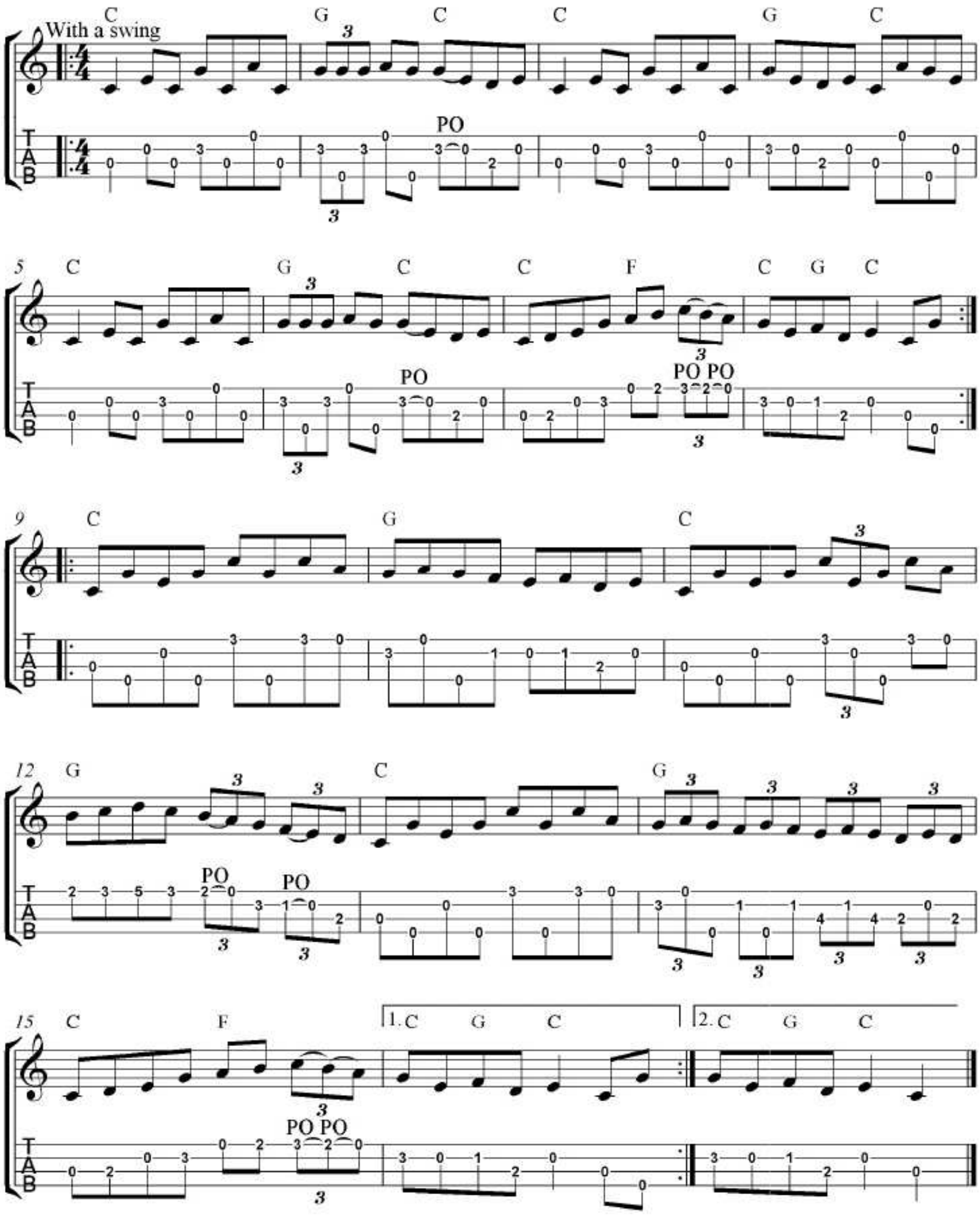
There are some pull-offs, but these should not present too much of a problem. The one exception is in bar 12 where the two triplets need to be played both quickly and accurately. Practise this passage slowly.

Perhaps the most exciting passage in this piece occurs at bar 14 where we get an example of the *campanella* technique. Notice here that the tune is played by (wherever possible) using a different string for the subsequent note. Let each note ring on for as long as possible.

Humphrey's Hornpipe

Ukulele tuning gCEA (high G)

Arranged by Ken Middleton



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Lady's Fancy

This arrangement is a little bit unusual. It has 3 sections, each 16 bars long. The piece has a definite ancient feel to it and the tonality is clearly modal. The first two sections basically move around the chord D minor. The third section moves to the chord of D major.

In the first section I have used several strings in almost every bar, even though the notes are quite close together. This enables you to let the notes ring on, giving a harp-like feel to the music.

The second section has a more minor key feel. The use of quarter notes, eighth notes and sixteenth notes (crotchets, quavers and semi-quavers) makes it rhythmically more interesting too.

The third section has a clear dance-like feel to it. Using mainly major chords, this section is much brighter as well.

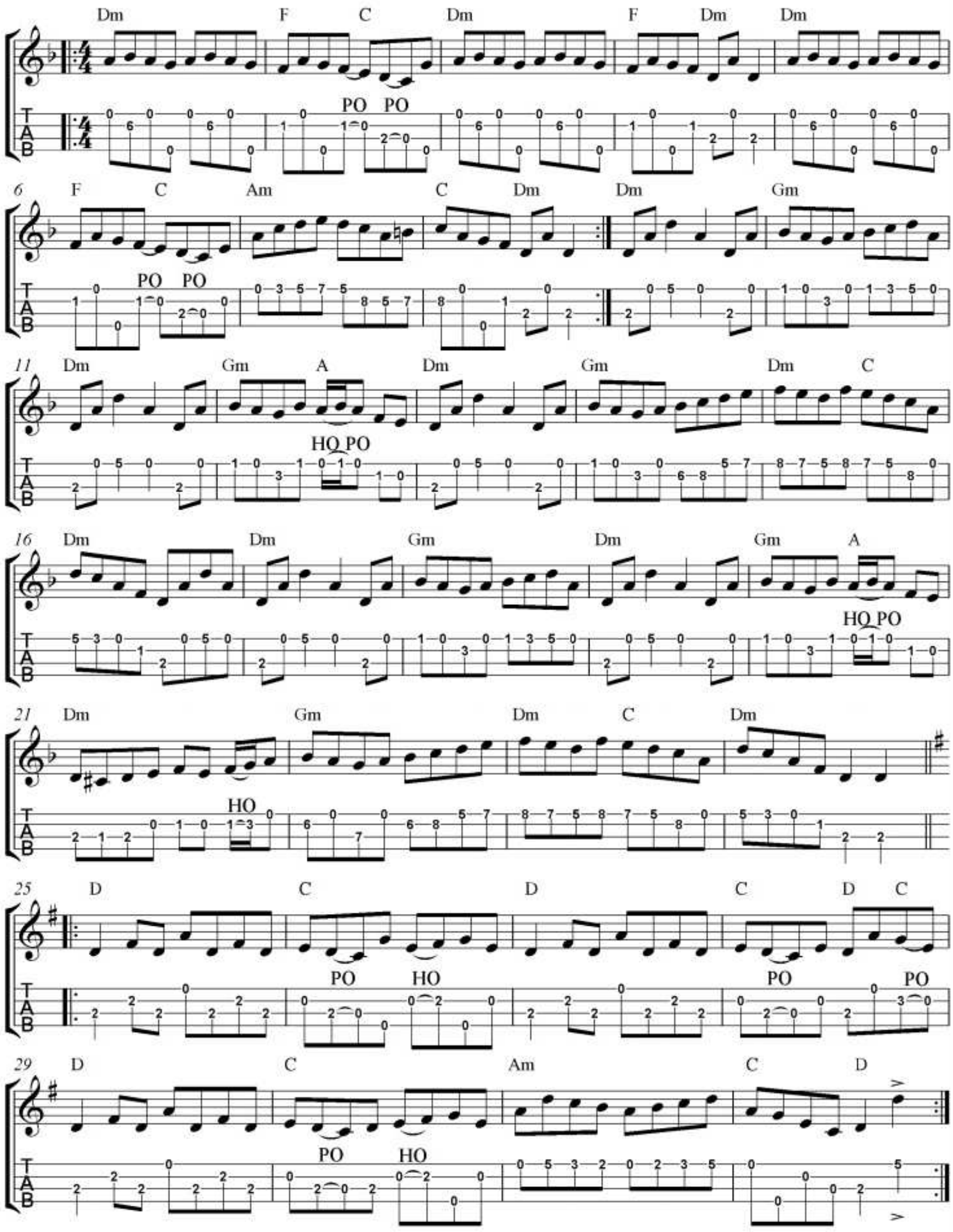
Throughout this arrangement, the use of hammer-ons and pull-offs will add interest to your performance. Try and emphasise the first note in each bar to give a strong beat. This will both help you to keep time and also help the listener to make sense of the tune.

Play this piece with a straight feel (play the notes as they are written).

Lady's Fancy

Ukulele tuning gCEA (high G)

Arranged by Ken Middleton



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Larry O'Gaff

This lovely jig has become deservedly famous because of John King's superb arrangement of it. A staggering accompanying part is put in by James Hill. You will find their wonderful performance on YouTube.

In my arrangement, I have started from scratch and consciously tried not copy John King. I went back and researched the tune. However, because John stuck very close to the accepted folk tune, there are bound to be similarities. They are in the same key, for instance and the basic chord sequence is the same.

The main difference is in the fact that John King's arrangement uses the *campanella* technique throughout - mine doesn't.

I have used this *campanella* style quite sparingly, but you can see its use in places like bars 1, 2 and 3. You will also see it in the upbeat (anacrusis) to the first bar.

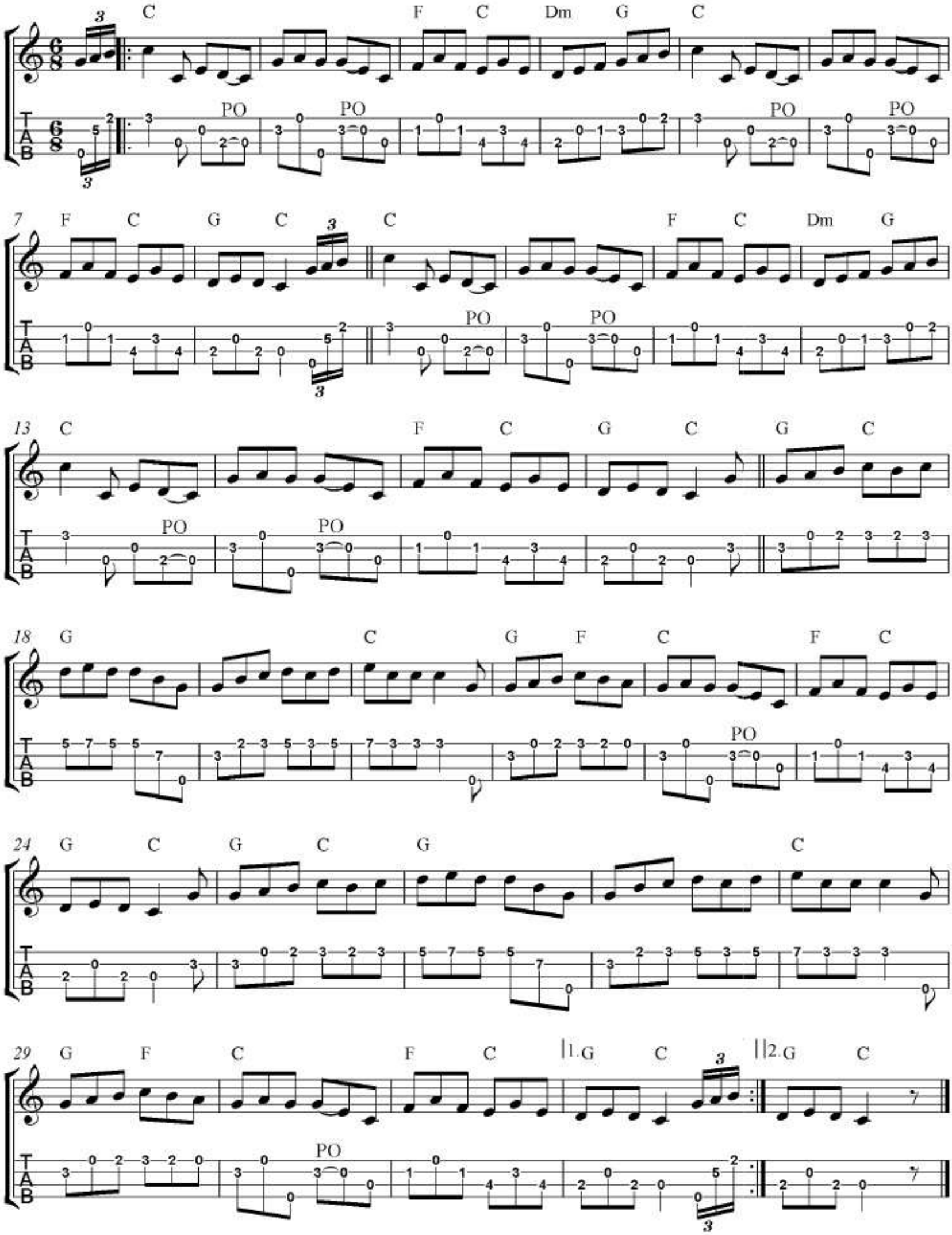
The second section of my arrangement moves in a much more linear way. In some ways this makes it easier to play. Truthfully though, it is always going to be tricky to play very fast.

To play the upbeat at the speed required you need to use the following right-hand fingering: P (thumb), I (first), M (second) and then A (third) on the first note of the first full bar.

Larry O'Gaff

Ukulele tuning gCEA (high G)

Arranged by Ken Middleton



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Light and Airy

Another bright and cheerful jig. This one sounds great when played fast.

The 3 simple chords I have used make it very easy to play the accompanying part.

There are 3 sections, each of which is 8 bars long with repeats. It is written in compound duple time (2 beats in each bar with each beat subdivided into 3 notes).

Because it is written in the key of C, it means that lots of open strings can be used. If you let these notes ring on, a harp-like feel comes through.

The first section is simple enough, but it gets to be a little more difficult in section 2. In bar 10, for example, we have to stretch with our left hand to reach the notes. The latter half of this section moves up to 5th position to enable you to reach the top F.

The third section is again straightforward, with no difficult stretches or changes of position to contend with.

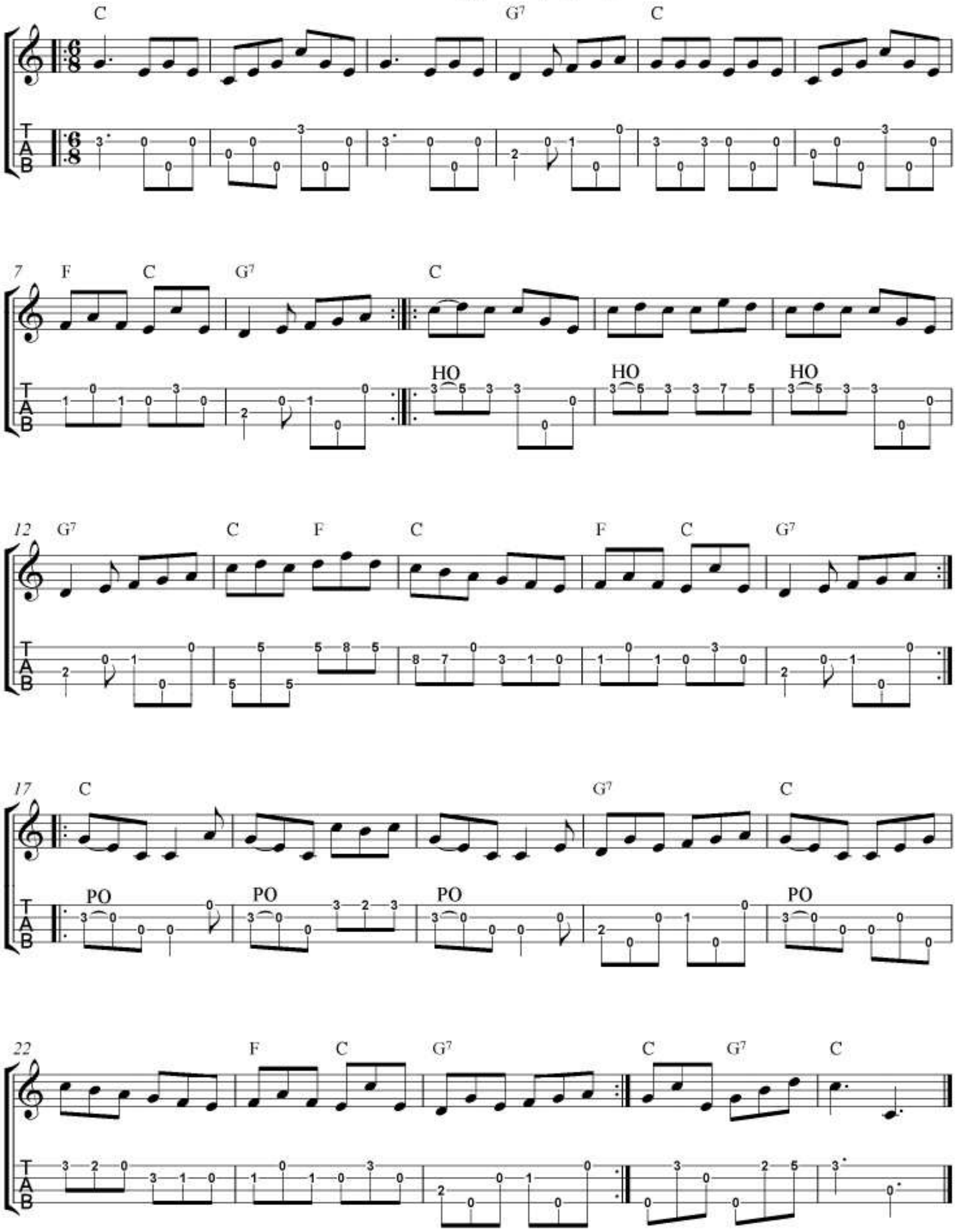
You can, of course, play it through as many times as you like, but when you do decide to finish there is a 2 bar tag to complete the piece.

Play this tag loudly, without slowing down.

Light And Airy

Ukulele tuning gCEA (high G)

Arranged by Ken Middleton



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Loch Na Garr

I don't know much about this one. It appears to be a Scottish folk tune, but no doubt the Irish too will claim it as theirs.

There is an early 19th century poem by Lord Byron which has beautifully evocative words, but I somehow feel that the tune is much older.

I have used the *campanella* technique extensively in this arrangement (though not in the central section). In other words, I have split up the tune using a different string for the next note whenever possible. In places where I have used the same string, it is intentional. Let the strings ring on if you can. This will require very precise and careful fretting of the notes.

The *campanella* style of playing can be seen and heard clearly in places like bars 1-2 or bars 11-12.

In the middle section, beginning at bar 17, the voicing is much more chordal. You must hold down the chord whilst picking out the melody. Again, very controlled playing is required.

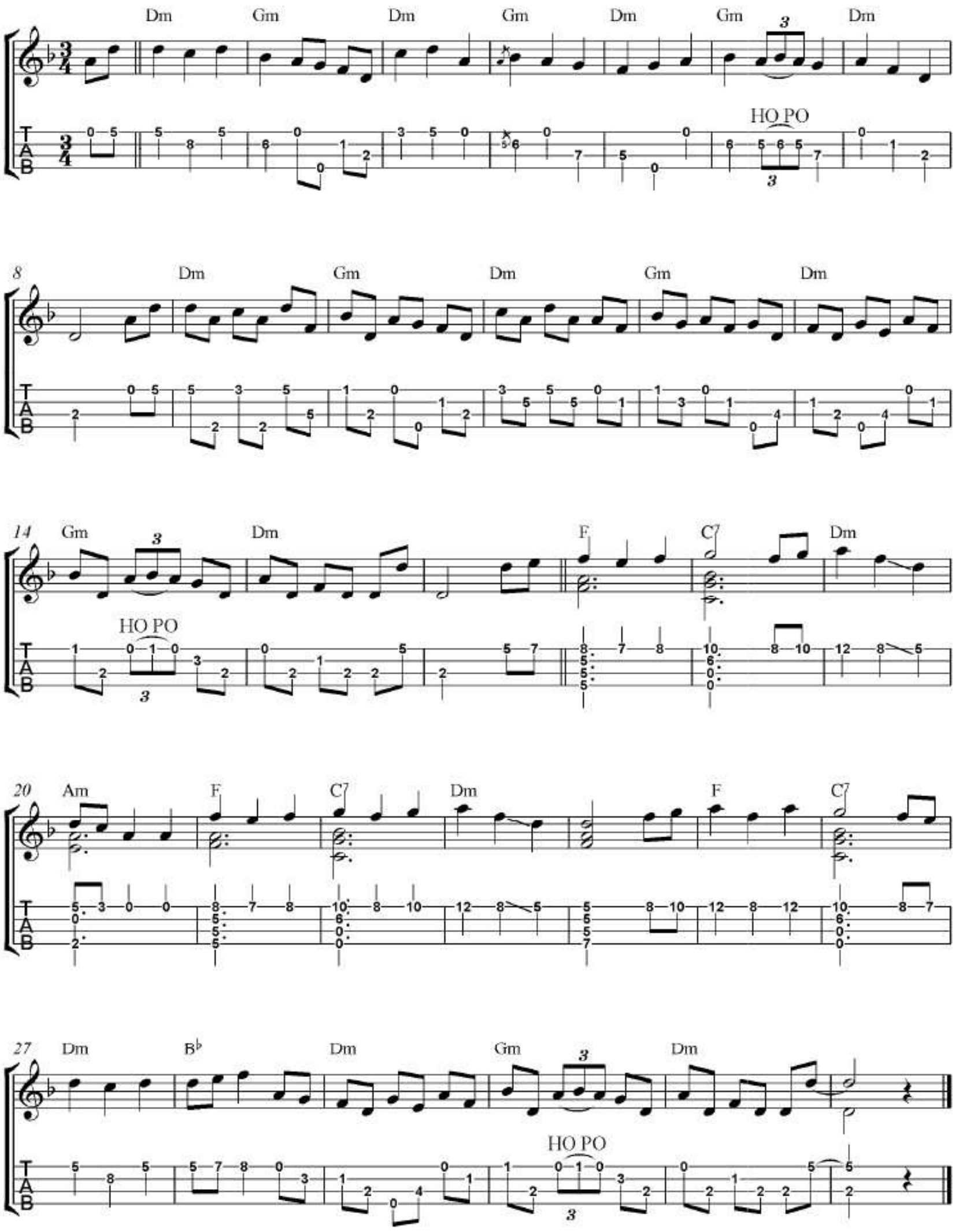
In this middle section there are two slides (bars 19 and 23). Make sure that you play both notes, but slide down from one to the other.

At the very end, take care to allow the tied note on the first string to continue to ring.

Loch Na Garr

Ukulele tuning gCEA (high G)

Arranged by Ken Middleton



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She Moved Through The Fair

This beautiful Irish folk tune is often sung to the words added by the poet Padraic Colum.

The melody employs the mixolydian mode, which is why you hear that curious F to G figure at the end. It gives a really ancient feel to the tune.

Because the melody has a number of very long notes which would die away too quickly on a ukulele, I have kept the movement going by using eighth notes (quavers) throughout. It is, however, quite important to pick out the melody notes with a bit more emphasis when playing this piece. In order to see where the melody lies, I have written out that part on a third clef. You could, in fact, have someone play this part along with you on another instrument e.g. flute.

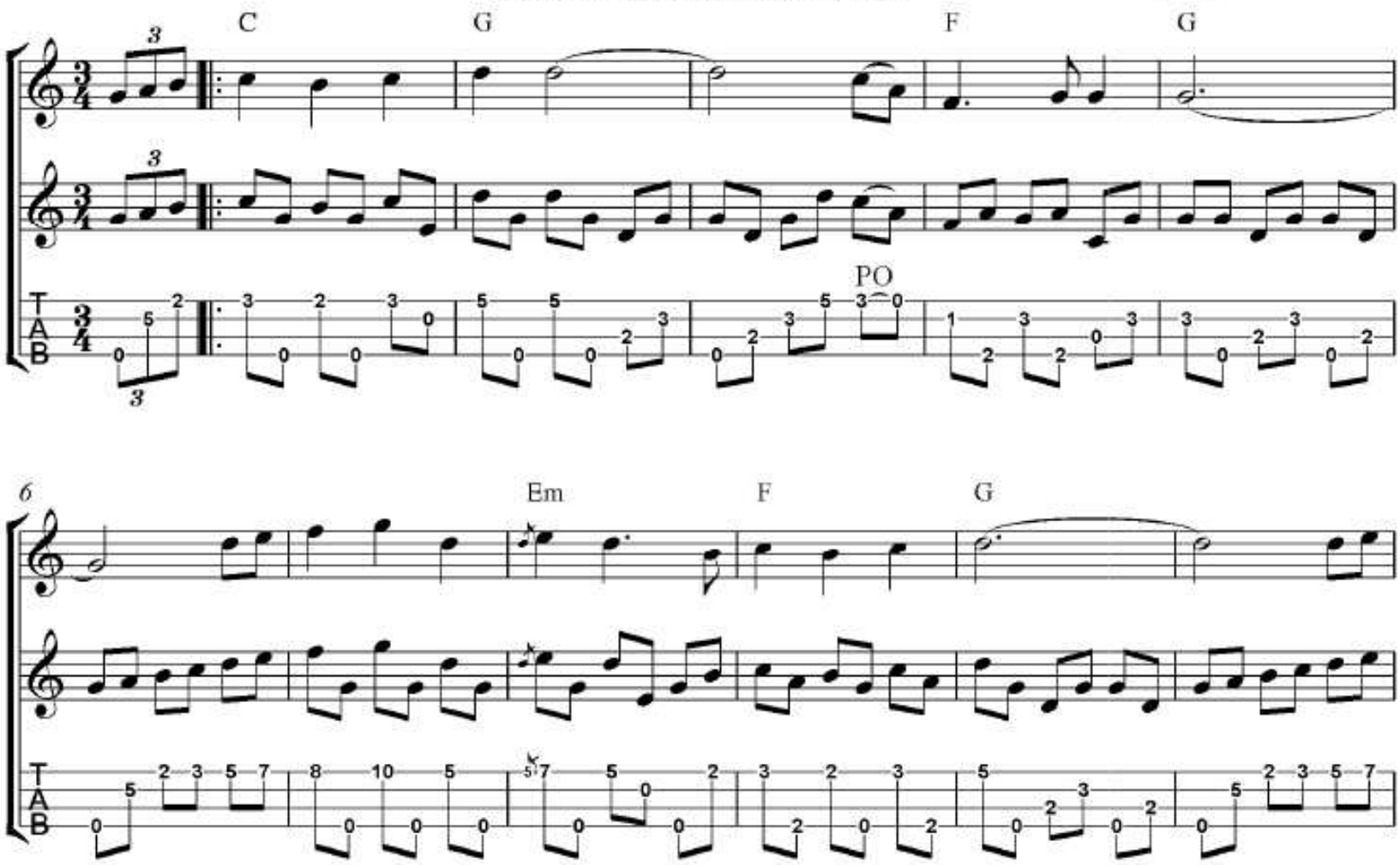
The only other thing I want to point out is the use of two grace notes (acciaccaturas) in bars 8 and 13. These small notes should be played quickly before the main note that follows them.

Don’t play this piece too quickly. Play it as slowly as you dare.

She Moved Through The Fair

Ukulele tuning gCEA (high G)

Arranged by Ken Middleton



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The Gypsy Rover

I like to play this tune with a swing, but it sounds just as good played straight.

There are, of course, many different variants of this song. I have taken the most common one as a basis for this arrangement.

Listen to the versions by The Clancy Brothers to get a clear idea of the mood of the song.

The arrangement has 2 sections. Be aware that the second one is slightly different from the first with some added triplets. Naturally, this makes the second half a little more difficult to play.

The upward slides are straightforward and easy to play. Play only the first of each pair of notes.

The chord sequence that I have used has a rather modern flavour, particularly with the modulation (change of key) to E minor in bar 15.

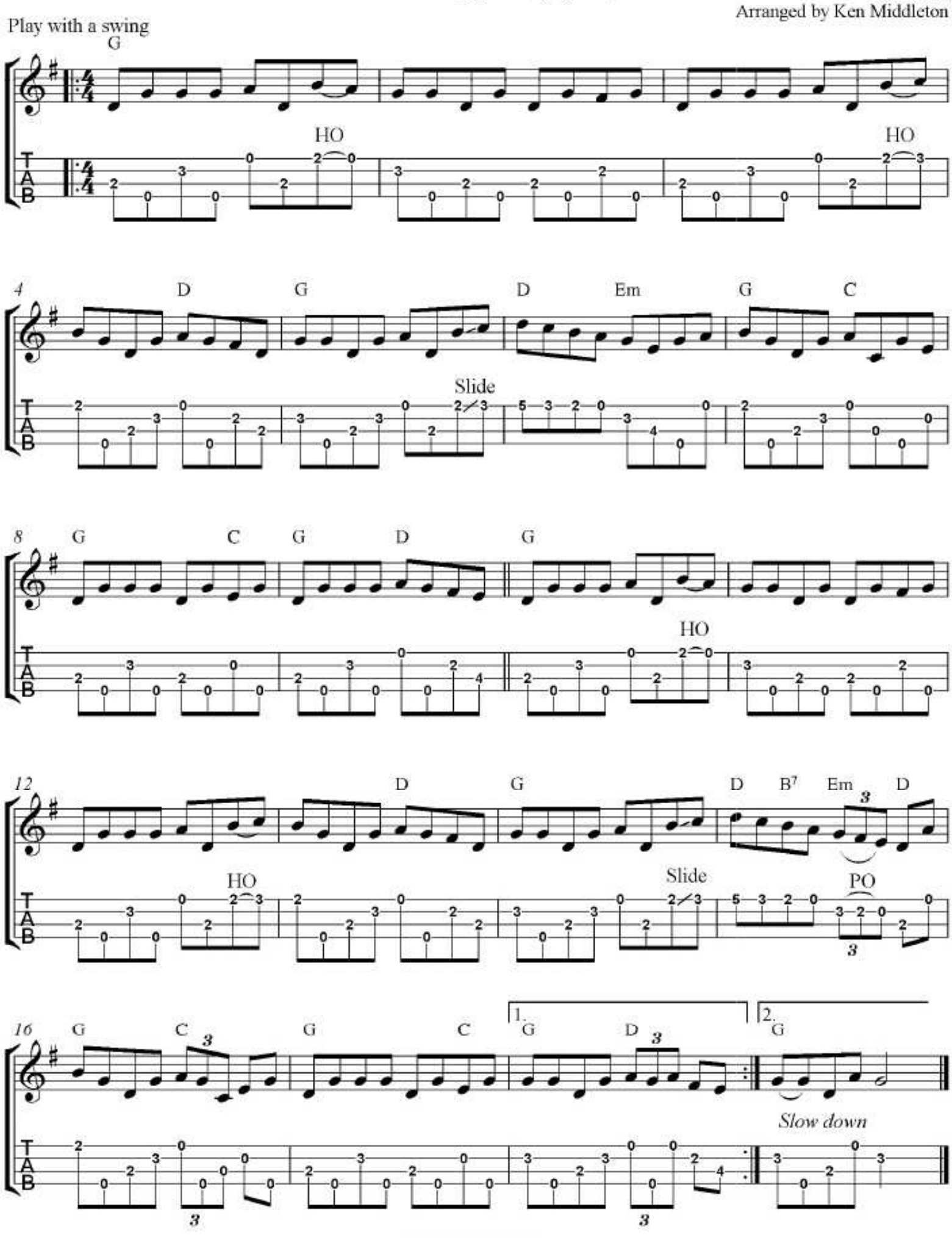
As with many of my Celtic arrangements, it sounds very effective to slow down over the last few notes.

The Gypsy Rover

Ukulele tuning gCEA (high G)

Traditional
Arranged by Ken Middleton

Play with a swing



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The Harp That Once Through Tara's Halls

This tune could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be called Celtic, but the song does conjure up a picture of the days of the ancient Irish high kings.

The words to this ballad were written by the Irish poet Thomas Moore (1779-1852). It was written at a time when Ireland was under English rule. It has a wonderfully evocative tune.

This is really a very straightforward arrangement of just 16 bars. Don't play it too quickly though – it sounds much more effective at a steady pace. I like to slow down a little on the last couple of notes of each 4 bar phrase.

I have arranged it in the key of C. Again, this means that I could put lots of open string notes into the gaps between the melody notes.

Rhythmically it is very simple to play with only quarter notes and eighth notes (crotchets and quavers) used.

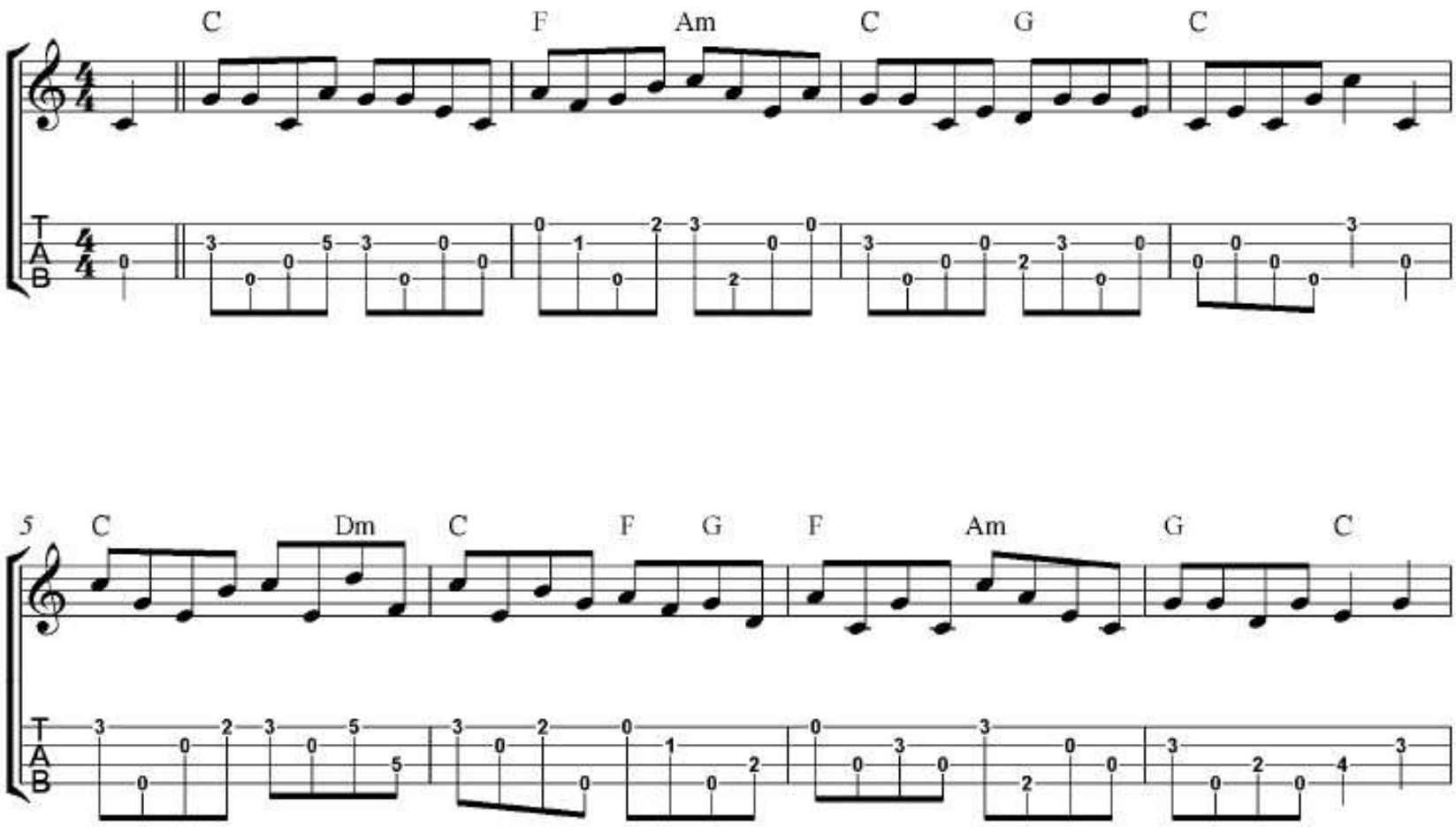
One place to build up to is the broken chord in bar 14. You should play this chord by playing the 3 notes quickly one after the other using 3 different fingers of the right hand.

If someone else is strumming the accompanying chords, they need to keep their part quite simple.

The Harp That Once Through Tara's Halls

Ukulele tuning gCEA (high G)

Arranged by Ken Middleton



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The Lord Of The Dance

Here is a very famous tune that many people believe to be quite ancient - perhaps going back into the dark mists of Celtic times.

It was, in fact written by Joseph Brackett Jn., in 1848.

The lyrics to “Lord of the Dance” were only written in 1967 and the tune was lifted from the Shaker hymn “Simple Gifts”.

The tune just sounds old, which is why I have used it. I have nonetheless tried to infuse something of an “oldy-worldy” flavour to it. I tried to give my arrangement that harp-like quality that I like so much.

The harp-like effect is largely achieved by using as many strings as I can. The *campanella* effect can be seen and heard in several places throughout the piece. Very effective passages are found at bar 3 and in bars 12-13.

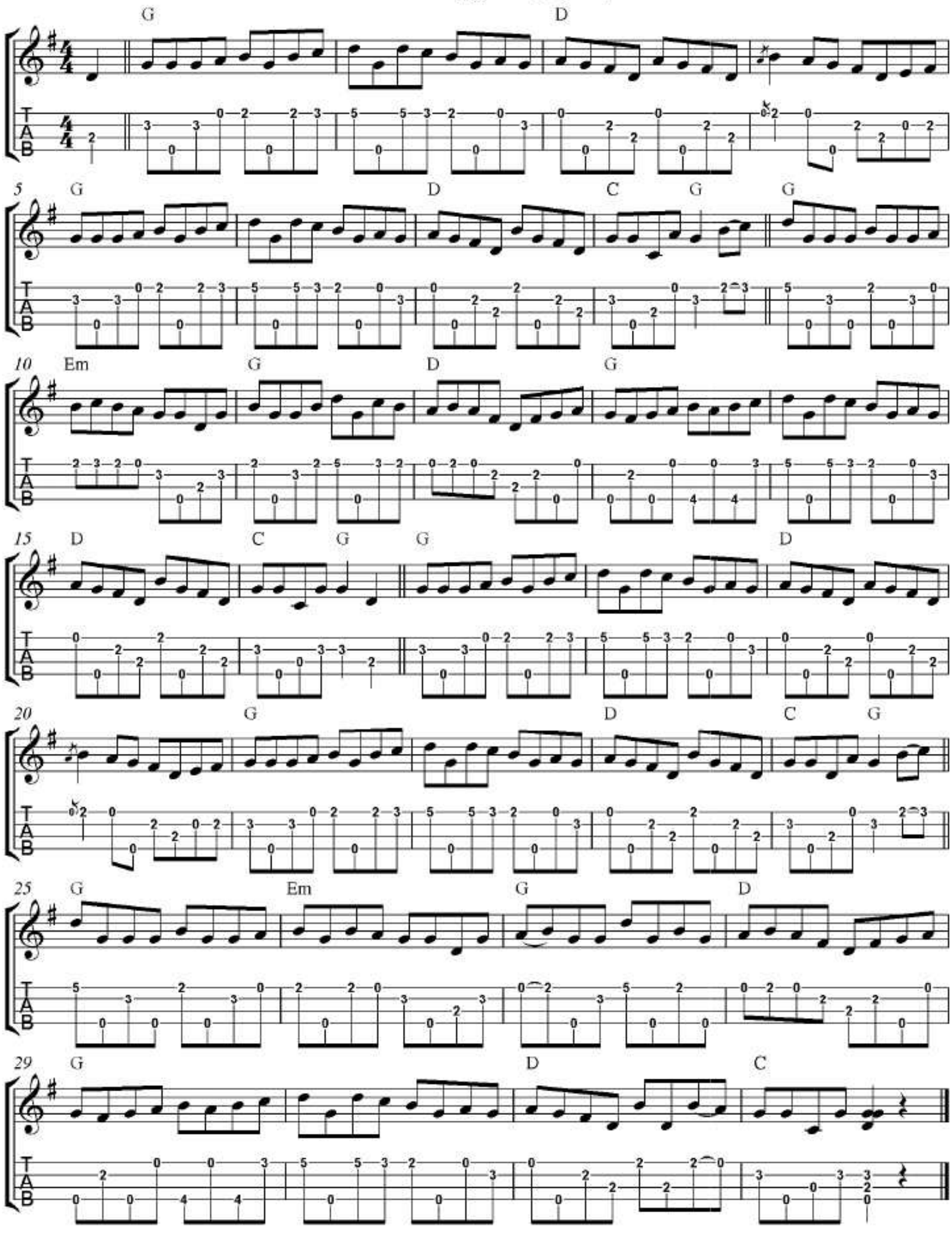
I have tried to keep the movement going in this arrangement by using almost exclusively eighth notes (quavers). Make sure when you play it that you emphasise particularly the main beats of each bar (1st and 3rd).

Only 4 chords are used in the accompaniment.

The Lord Of The Dance

Ukulele tuning gCEA (high G)

Arranged by Ken Middleton



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