# Jams and jollies...fun social music-making with the autoharp.

Cathy Britell
http://www.larkpoint.com

The word “jamming” implies a kind of loose, unstructured, careless getting together, and if it’s musical...making music.

There are, however a few conventions that need to be observed in order to be welcome at a jam.

1. Make SURE your ‘harp is in tune. The major reason why fiddlers and banjo players and guitar players and singers look askance at you when you walk in with your autoharp is that they KNOW that AUTOHARPS ARE NEVER IN TUNE! Your mission, if you are to survive and be a welcome member of a “jamming” group, is to be IN TUNE AT ALL TIMES. If you’re not in tune, it’s better for everyone if you don’t take your ‘harp out of the case.

2. Kind of feel your way in. Start out sitting at the periphery of the circle and chording along quietly. If the person who’s “leading” the jam figures you can and want to take a melody break he/she will let you know...in that case, go for it! If it’s your turn to pick a tune, you’re then the “leader” and it’s your job to start the tune, pass the melody around, and finish it up. Never suggest a song that you can’t play well!

3. When it comes your turn, pick “mainstream” songs and tunes that others will know. If you’re unsure, ask. If you’re the only one who knows the tune, you’ll feel pretty lonely and people won’t like you much.

4. Spend some time practicing and thinking about how the autoharp can really contribute to the jam. Become proficient at the “mandolin chop” and other ways that the 'harp can be damped. Lots of ringing sounds are often deadly in an old-time or BG instrumental group.

5. And speaking of knowing some songs and tunes, it’s good if you do. Most of the time, you just can’t pull out your music and your music-stand (or if you do, you’ll have trouble seeing in the campfire light) Old-time fiddle tunes are very popular at jams, because they are usually short, simple, and repeat. There are some songs that also are sometimes played as tunes that pretty much everyone knows. Here are just a dozen popular instrumental tunes (or songs that are often played instrumentally) that it’s nice to know: Just about anybody who plays fiddle, guitar, mandolin, banjo, dulcimer, or autoharp that you meet at a festival, jam, airport, campground, or picnic will likely know these tunes. These (and a whole lot more like them) are called “CHESTNUTS”. (I don’t know why). There are probably about 150-200 of these tunes. They are the “language” of homemade instrumental music in America. If you like to be able to sit down with friends or strangers and just pick a tune, it’s a good idea to learn as many tunes like this as you can. (It gets easier as you learn more and more).

These are not everyone's “first dozen”, but of you know these, you'll have some common “jamming language”  and the list shows the keys they’re most often played in (you might have to transpose some of these arrangements to traditional keys):

Angeline the Baker (D)
Bonaparte Crossing the Rhine (D)
Home Sweet Home (D)
Liberty (D)
Old Joe Clark (A mixolydian)
Old Spinning Wheel (G or any key)
Shady Grove (Em or Am)
Southwind (D)
St. Anne’s Reel (D)
Westphalia Waltz (G or D)
Whiskey Before Breakfast (D)
Wildwood Flower- I’ll Twine mid the Ringlets (ANY KEY – singable in F or G)

Have Fun!
Cathy Britell

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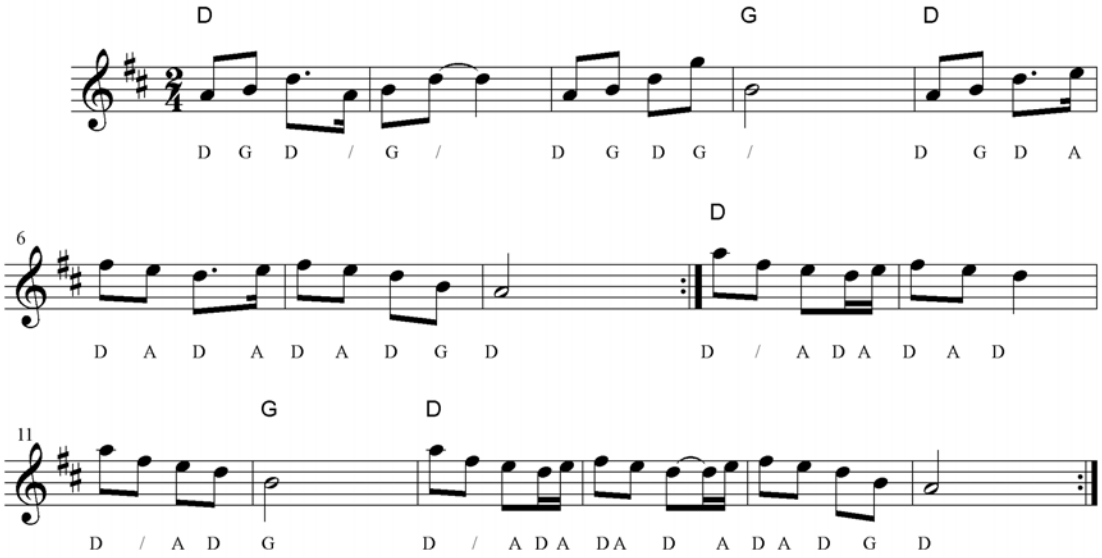
# Angeline the Baker

Traditional

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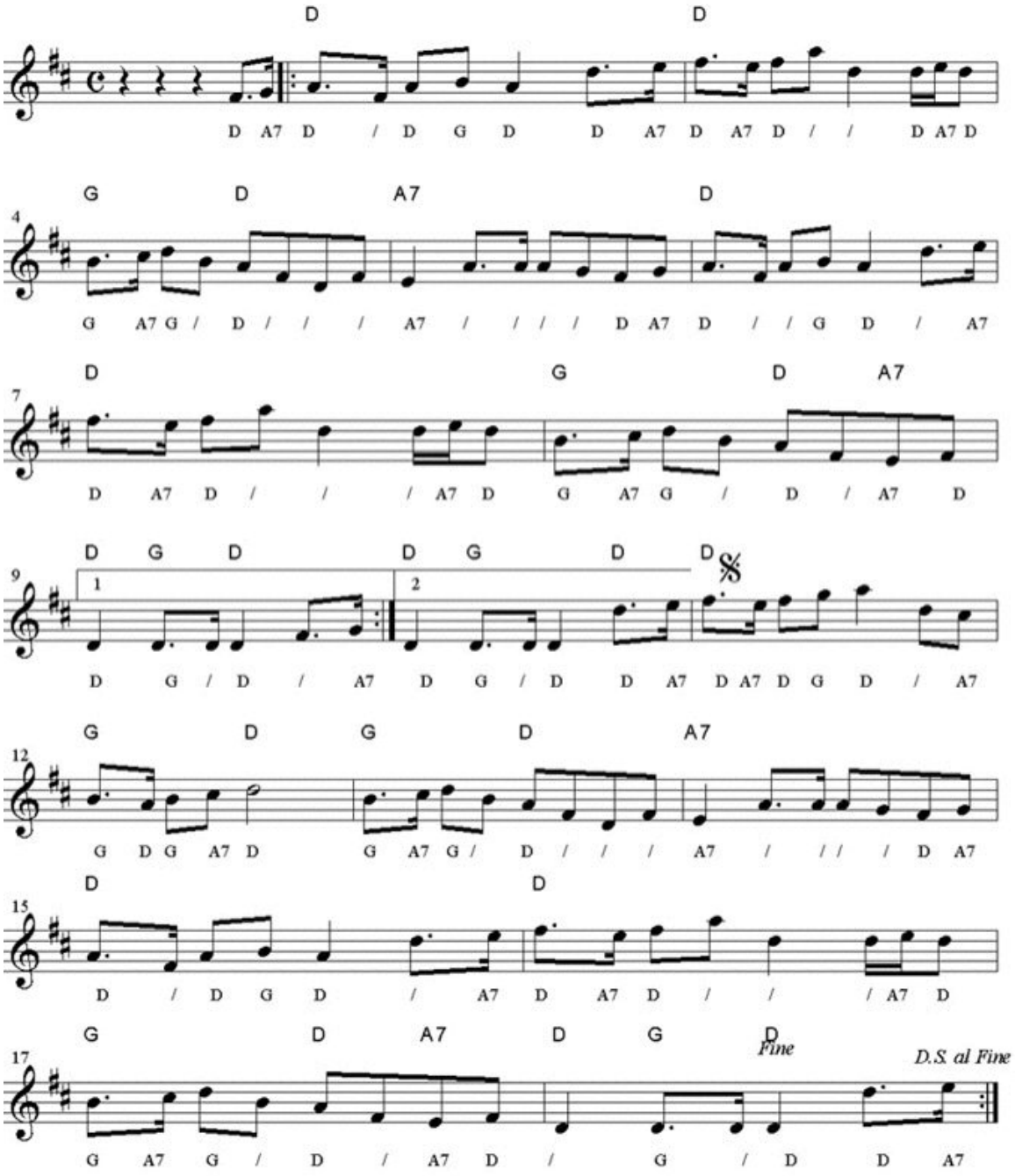
# Bonaparte Crossing the Rhine

Autoharp Arr: Cathy Britell

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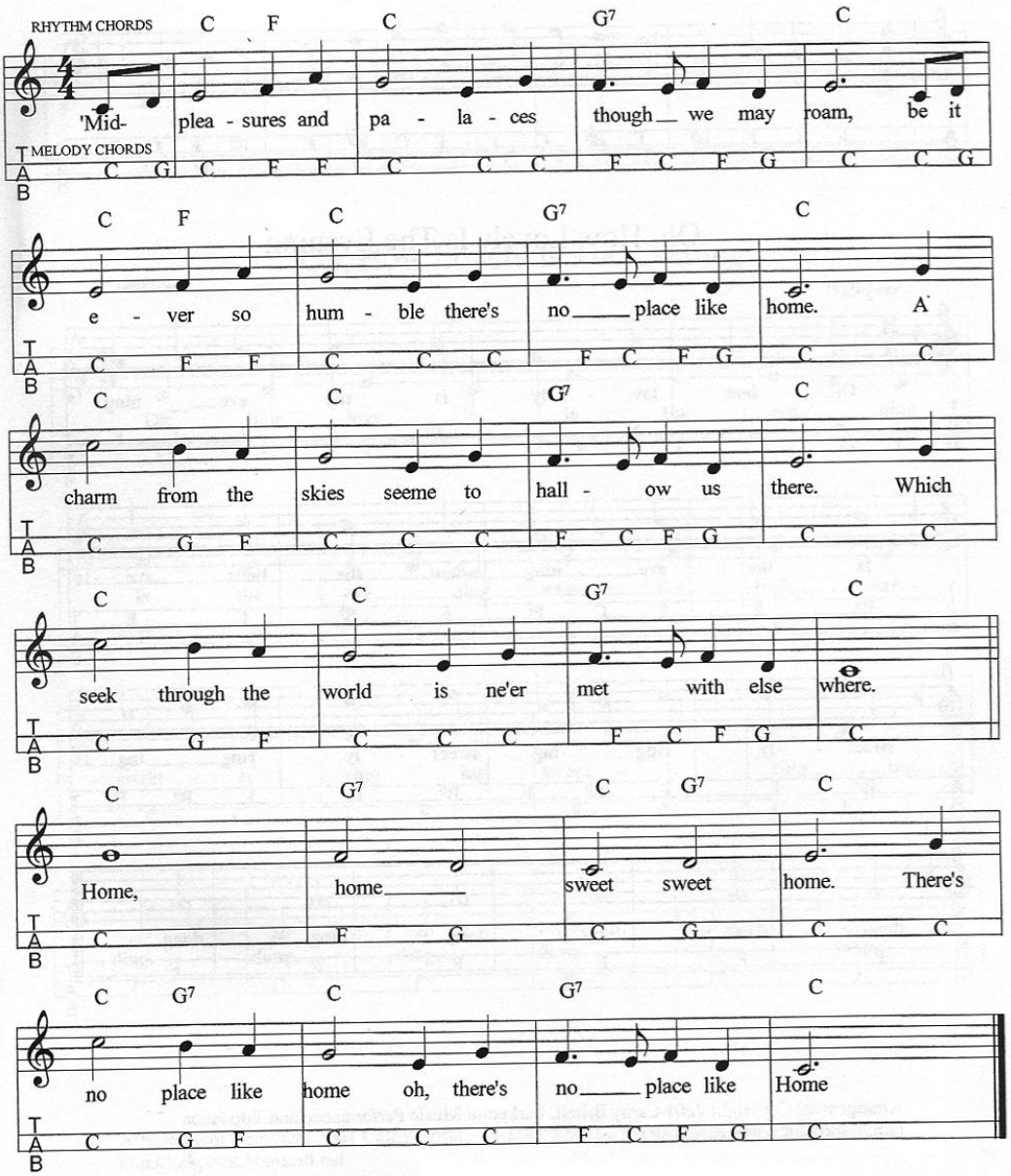
# Home Sweet Home

J.H. Payne and H.R. Bishop

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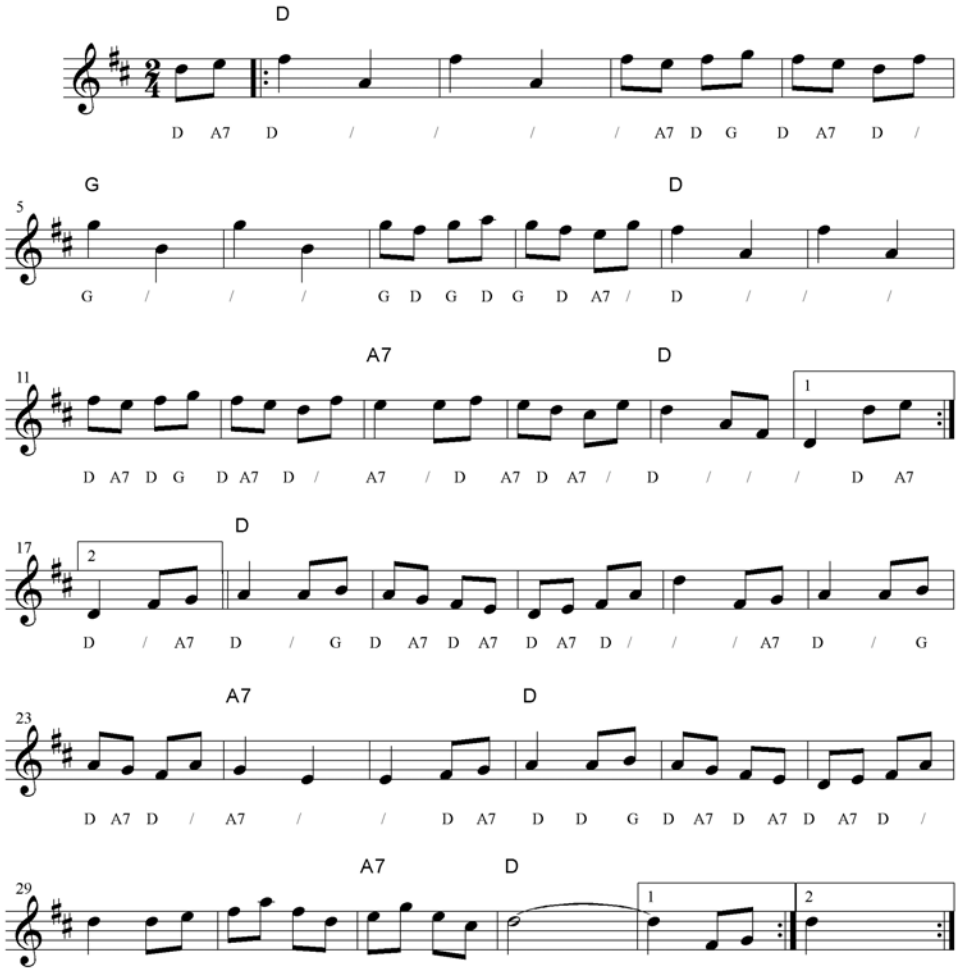
# Liberty

Traditional

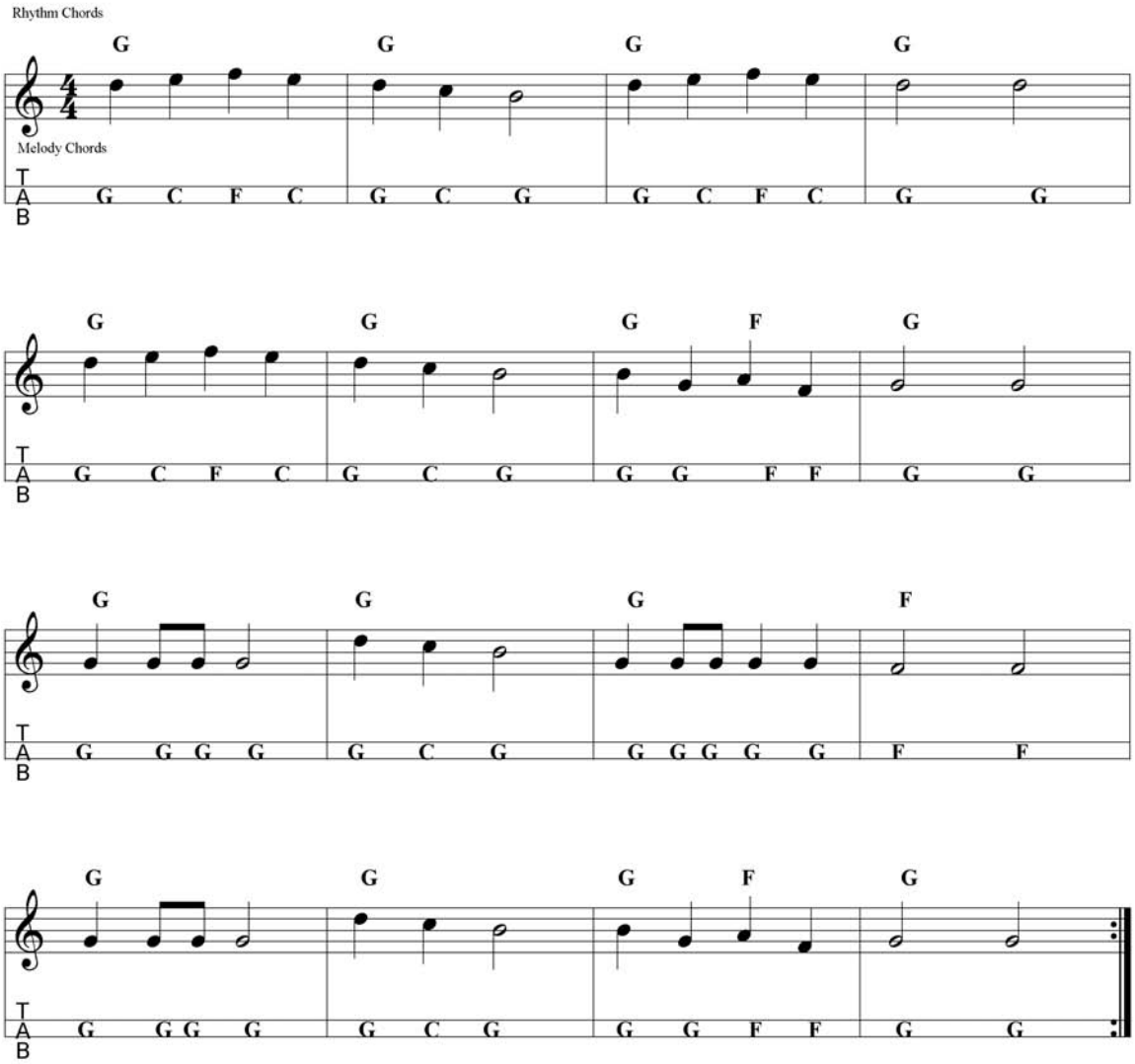



Autoharp arrangement c. 2004 Cathy Britell

# Old Joe Clark

Key=G mixolydian

Traditional

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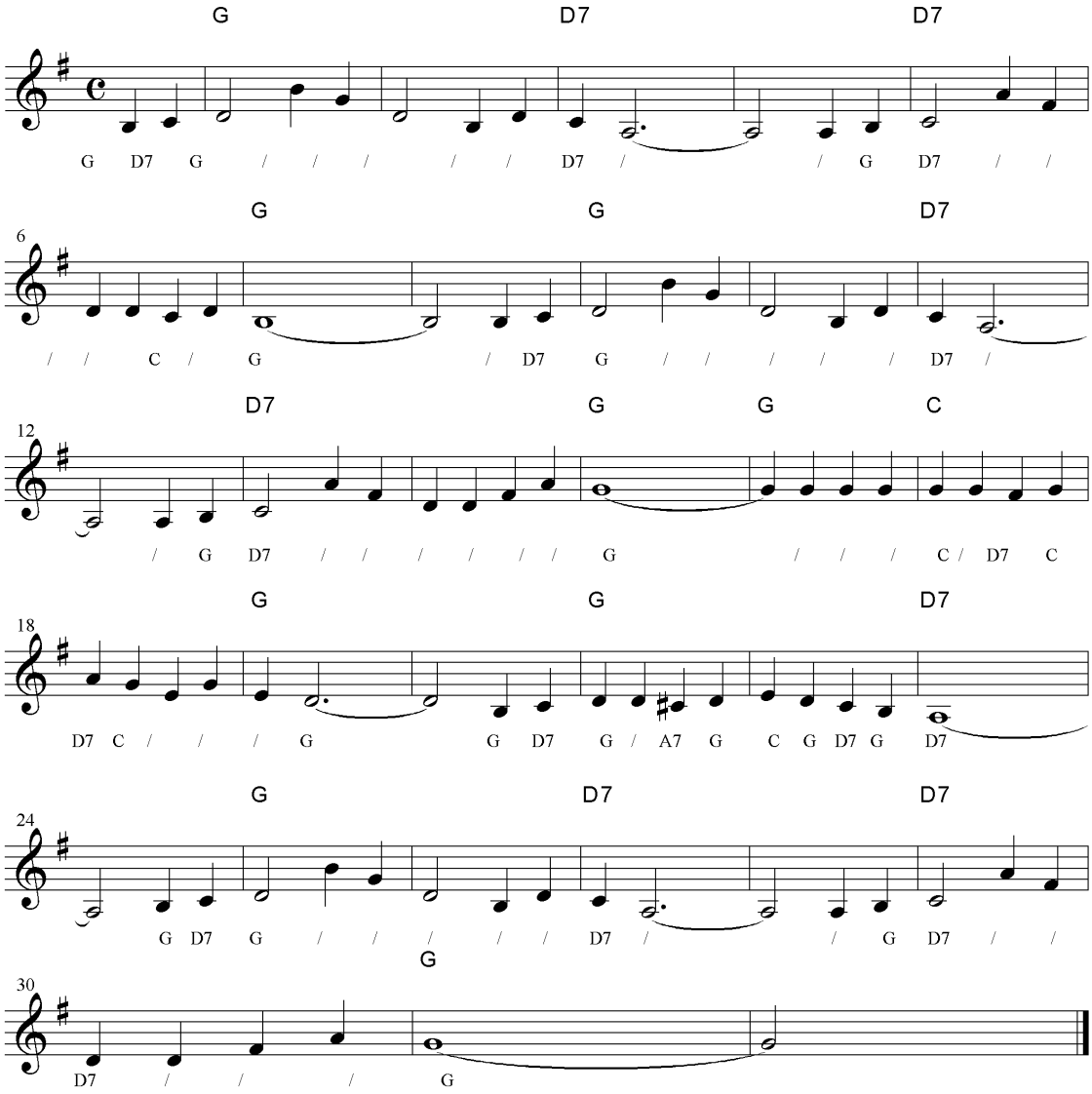
# There's An Old Spinning Wheel in the Parlor

William J. Hill 1930



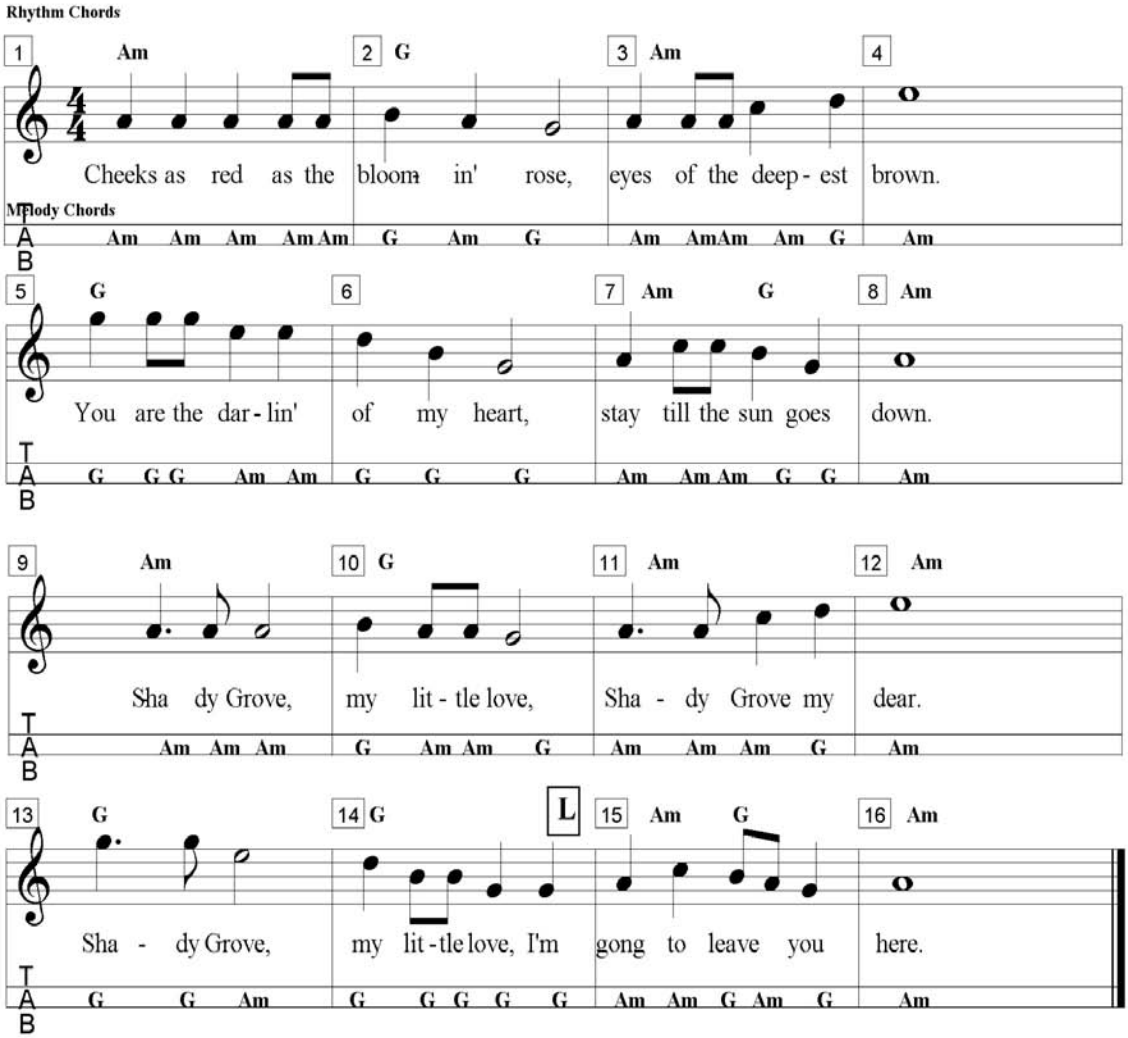

There's an old spinning wheel in the parlor
Spinning dreams of the long, long ago,
Spinning dreams of an old fashioned garden
And a maid with her old fashioned beau.

Sometimes it seems that I can hear her in the twilight
At the organ softly singing "Sweet and Low",
There's an old spinning wheel in the parlor,
Spinning dreams of the long, long ago,

Autoharp Arrangement 2003 Cathy Britell

# Shady Grove

Traditional

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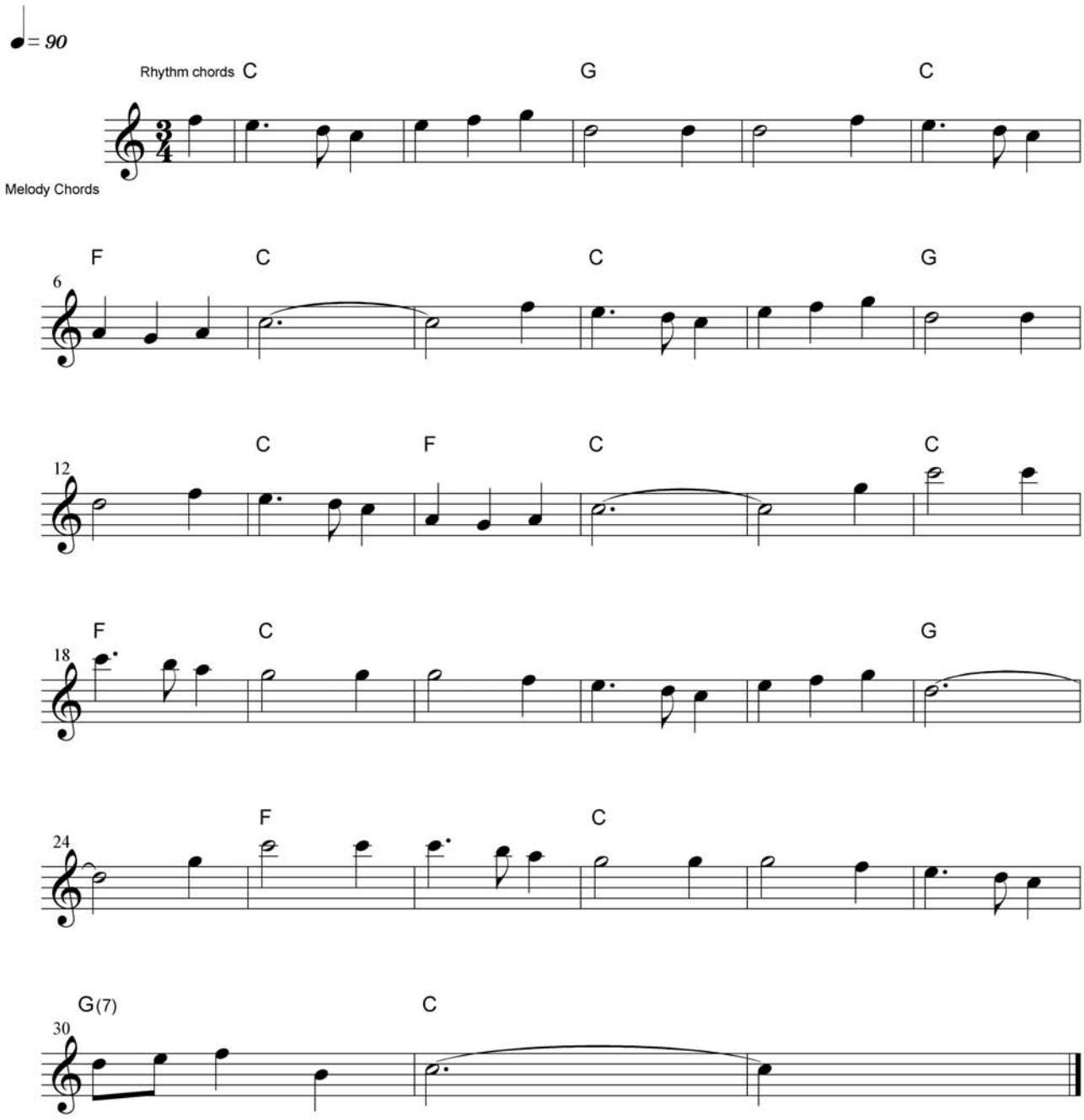
# Southwind

Traditional (arr. Cathy Britell)

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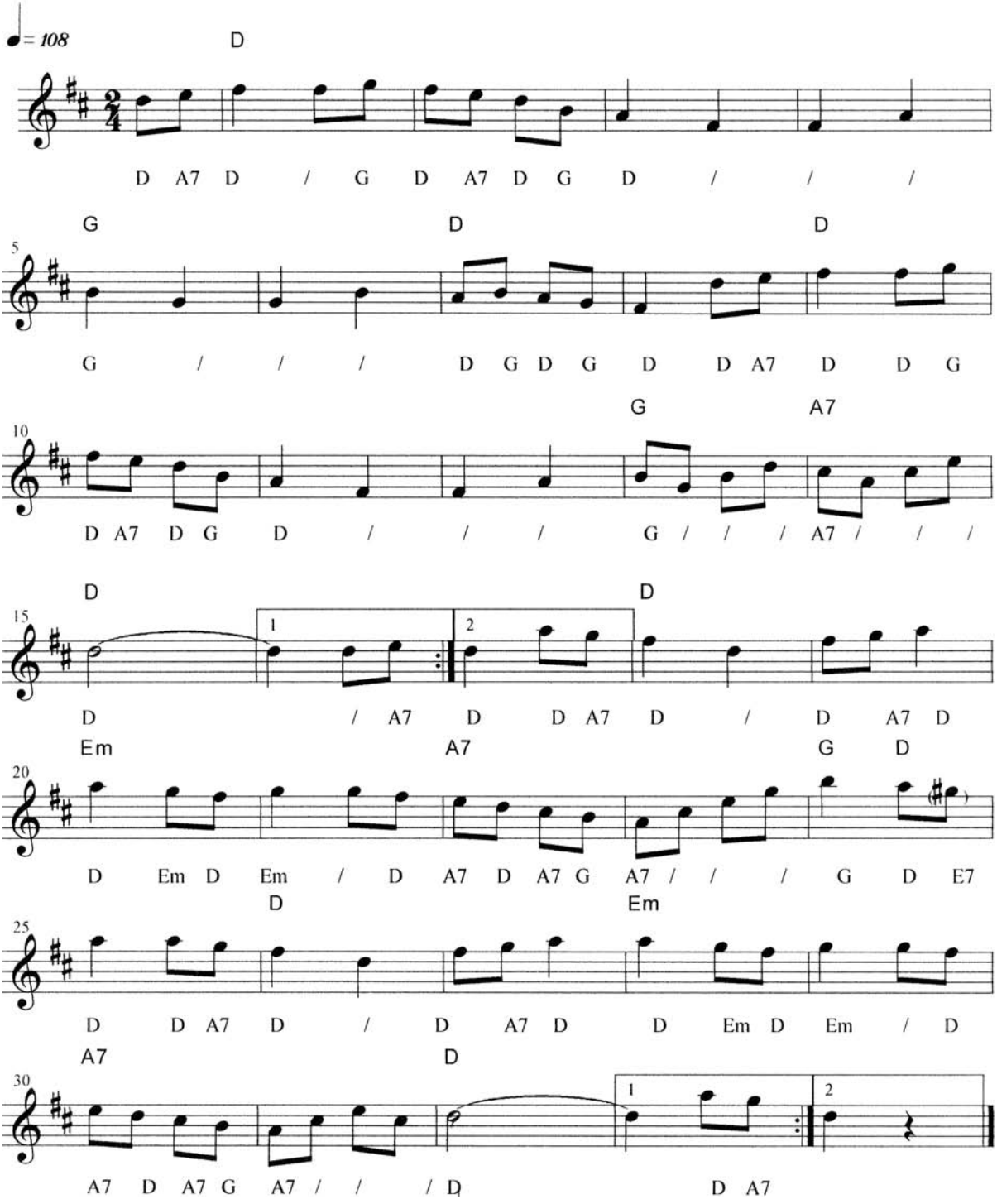
# Saint Anne's Reel

Traditional (Arr. Cathy Britell)

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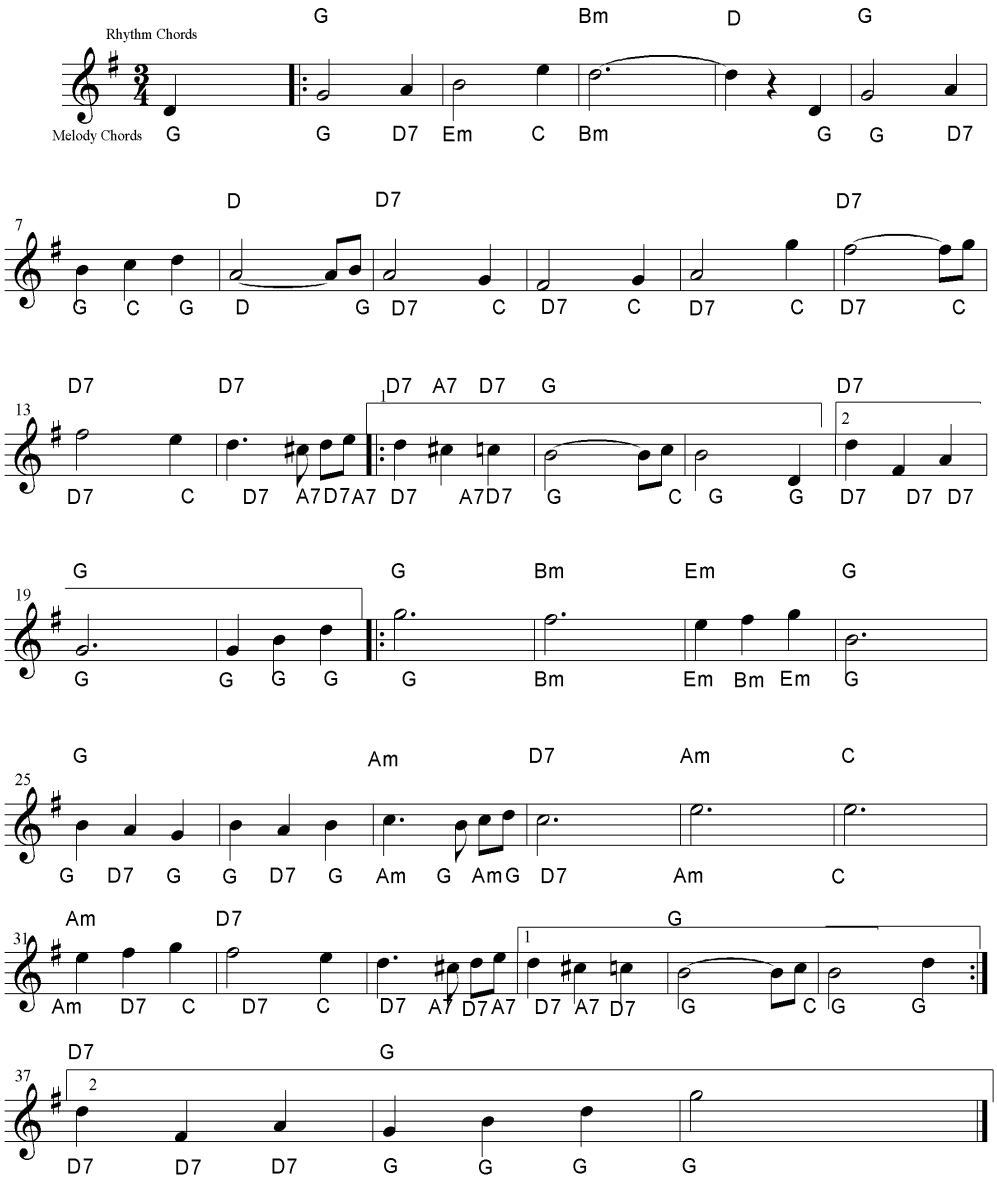
# Westphalia Waltz

Autoharp arr: Cathy Britell

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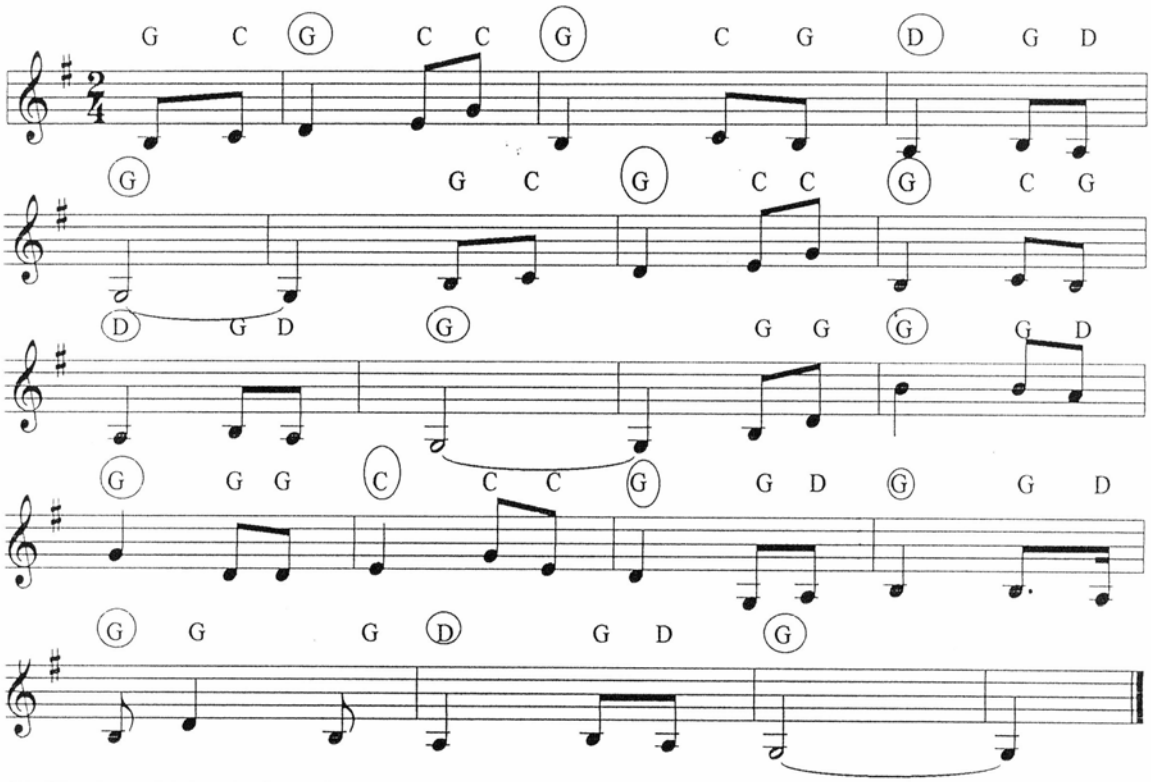
# Wildwood Flower

Maud Irving and
JD Webster
(arr: C Britell)




Oh I'll twine mid the ringlets of raven black hair,
The lilies so pale and the roses so fair,
The myrtle so bright with an emerald hue,
And the pale aronatus, with eyes of bright blue

I'll sing and I'll dance and my laugh shall be gay,
'll cease this wild weeping, drive sorrow away,
Though my heart is now breaking he never shall know
That his name made me tremble and my pale cheeks to glow.

He taught me to love him, he called me his flower
That blossomed for him all the brighter each hour
But I woke from my dreaming, my idol was clay
My visions of love have all faded away.

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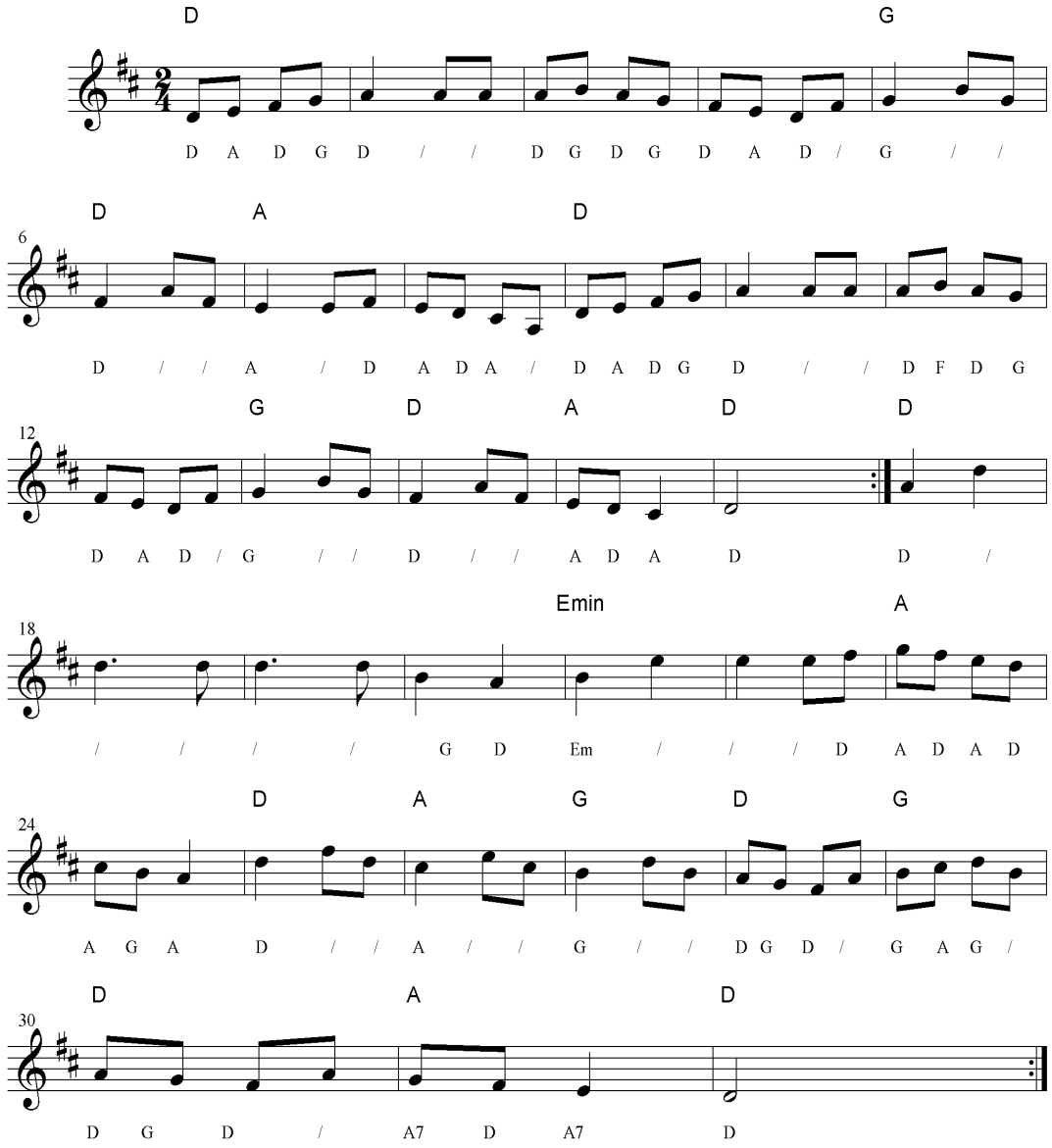
# Whiskey Before Breakfast

Traditional

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