New Rosin for an Old Bow

Compositions by

Mike Bell

with a few tunes composed
with, or by, good friends

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Version 1.1

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Foreword

For many years I've had this problem: I can't play traditional tunes without finding new ones hopping out of my mandolin. I think that's how it's supposed to be with tradition. It's supposed to be alive and hopping, not dead and slumbering. Traditional music is supposed to connect past and present, and is supposed to have a future as well. It is supposed to be *unfinalizable*, as the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin was fond of saying.

Thus the title of this tune collection: *New Rosin for an Old Bow.* I do not desire to offer here new rosin for a new bow. I like the old bow very much. But if you keep using a favorite old bow, you will soon feel the need to rosin it up once again. Some day you may even feel the need to acquire a whole new chunk of the stuff. Here in this book, you may find that new chunk of rosin for your old bow.

Alright, so I play mandolin and banjo, not fiddle. Maybe I should have called the collection "new picks for an old mandolin," or "new strings for an old banjo." But the tradition these tunes emerge out of is that of "fiddle tunes"—the generic name players toss around to encompass a range of styles, from Southern to New England, Celtic to French-Canadian, that flow from the common pulse of (generally) 32 bar tunes with an AABB melodic pattern, so suited to dancing and to sitting around in a living room or a kitchen, swapping tunes.

I hope these tunes will find their way into many a dance and many a jam session. You'll find that I've marked each tune with a copyright notice, and the phrase "some rights reserved." Here's what that means: I and my co-composers in this book hereby give free license to anyone for the live performance, in private or public, of any of these tunes. And if you're lucky enough that someone pays you for your performance, well bless you. We hope you spend the money well. We don't ask for any of it. We have not registered these tunes with ASCAP or BMI. To do so would be, I think, to violate the spirit of folk tradition.

But if you want to record or otherwise mechanically reproduce any of these tunes, then we would like to hear from you first. In my case, I have yet to ask for any royalty greater than a free copy of the CD the tune is recorded on or book it is printed in. Yet in the remote circumstance that somebody is going to make big money with one of these tunes, we don't want to end up like Stephen Foster either, dead in the gutter with only the crumbs. As long as these tunes are still in a "folk" context, we seek no gain from them. But if they enter the commercial realm, we think we should have the opportunity to negotiate a share of any return.

And long life to that folk tradition! That's what really wrote these tunes. The basic ideas behind "fiddle tunes" have been worked out over the years by countless players. My co-composers and I have just given these ideas a twist here and there.

I've found the materials for the twists that I add from Klezmer, jazz, classical, and other tapestries I cannot give name to, because I don't know what the names are. These twists just show up in my head and in my fingers, often in the midst of playing for a contradance, or right afterwards when I get home, head still swirling with notes. In this sense, my band-mates always have at least an indirect role in writing the tunes (and in several instances, indicated by co-composership, a direct role). So many thanks to my fellow members of the Barn Owl Band, eleike, Fiddlasaurus Rex, Fiddle Faddle, the Fiddleheads, Froggie on the Carport, Heywired, the Outhouse Shouters, the Pretty Good Band, Taychopera, and the Wiretappers, bands past and present in varying degrees.

And thanks to you for rosining up your bow with these tunes, giving them the continuing life that is the true essence of tradition.

MMB
January 1, 2009
Madison, Wisconsin

A Note on "Slip Waltzes"

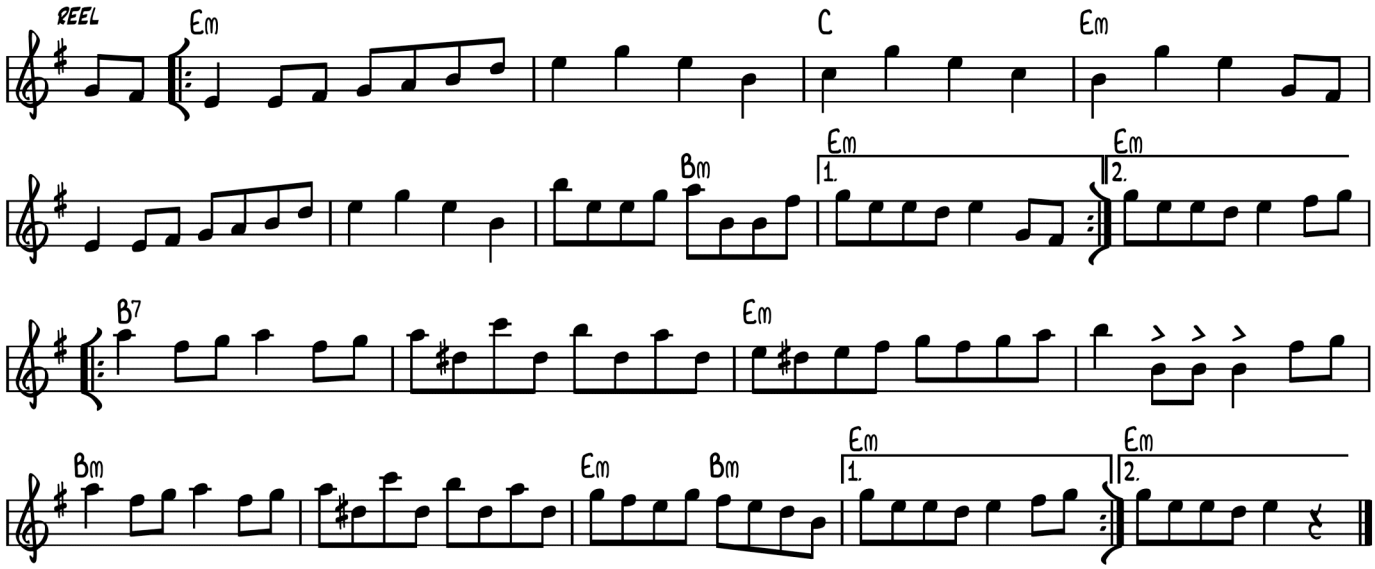
In the waltz section of the collection are a couple of tunes I call "slip waltzes," sort of (but not really) the waltz equivalent of "slip jigs." Like a slip jig, a slip waltz has an extra beat. But unlike a slip jig the extra beat comes only every fifth measure: 4 measures in 3/4 followed by one measure in 4/4. The result gives a total of 16 beats in the sequence (3 times 4 = 12, plus 4 more), and dancers happily wind up on their starting foot at the start of the next sequence. I intend them as a couple dance, in ballroom position, and quite fast—at Viennese waltz speed, in the range of 160 beats per minute. The result feels like a cross between a waltz and a polka. You dance the first four measures as a regular waltz (but at Viennese speed), followed by two quick "slip steps" for the 4/4 measure, pivoting around as in a polka. In many ways, a slip waltz is a reinvention of "zweifachers," an Austrian couple dance with an irregularly variable meter. The meter in slip waltzes also varies, but in a constant five-measure pattern.

Musicians beware: For a slip waltz to work for the dancers, you really have to pound out the *one*-two, *three*-four in the 4/4 measure.

Reels

Bishop Street

Mike Bell



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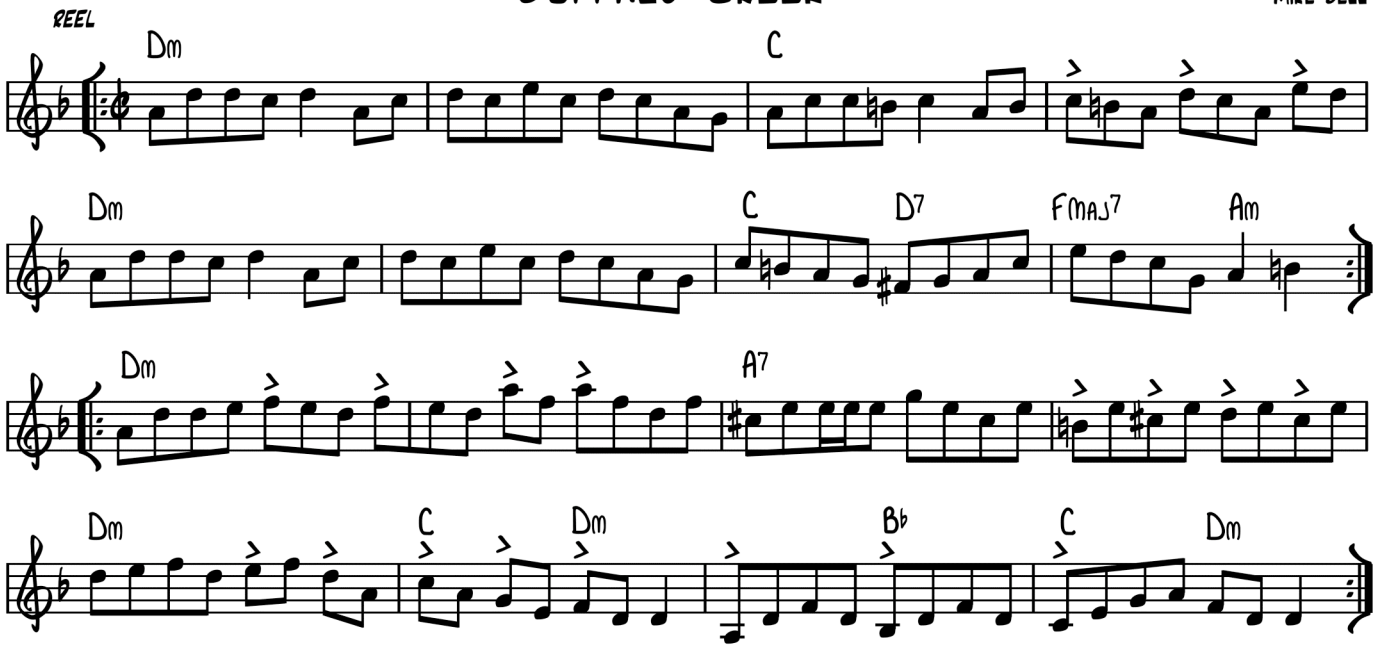
— A street in New Haven, Connecticut, where lots of graduate students at Yale live. Back in the 1980s, two great bands — *Wild Asparagus* and *Fool's Gold* — both recorded this one.

Buffalo Creek

Mike Bell



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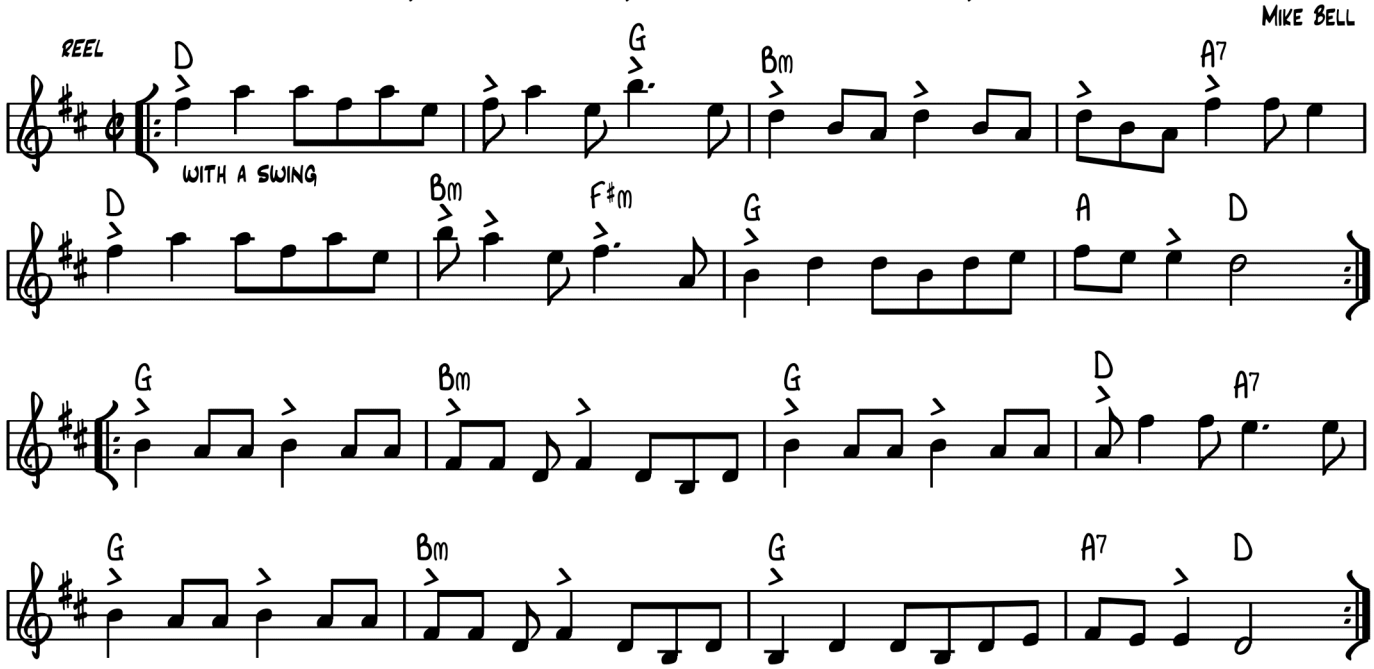
— For the people of Buffalo Creek, West Virginia, victims of a terrible flood in 1975. And for Kai Erikson, who told their story with such humanity.

Bullfrog Knocking at the Cottage Door

Mike Bell



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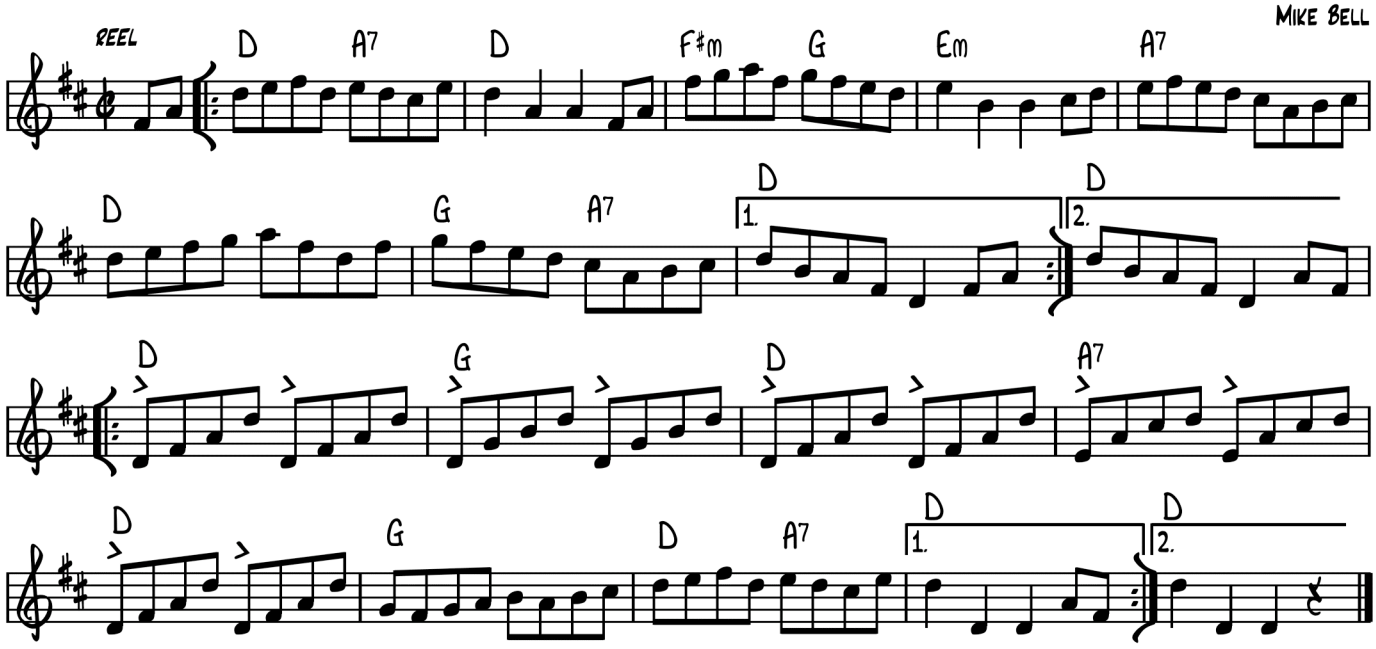
— For Jamie, who couldn't sleep for the knocking.

East Rock Reel

Mike Bell



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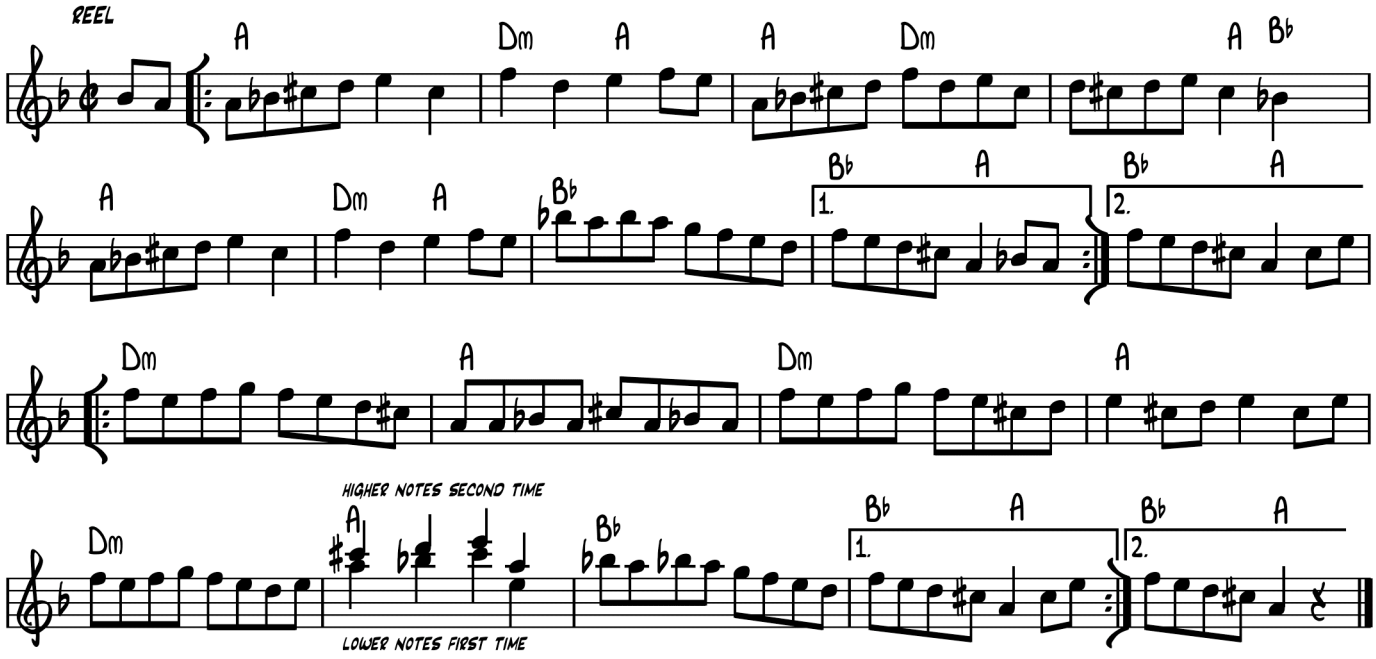
— One of the two huge traprock ridges that stand behind New Haven, Connecticut, once the pipework of a massive volcanic eruption and now one of America's great urban parks.

Ellis Island

Mike Bell



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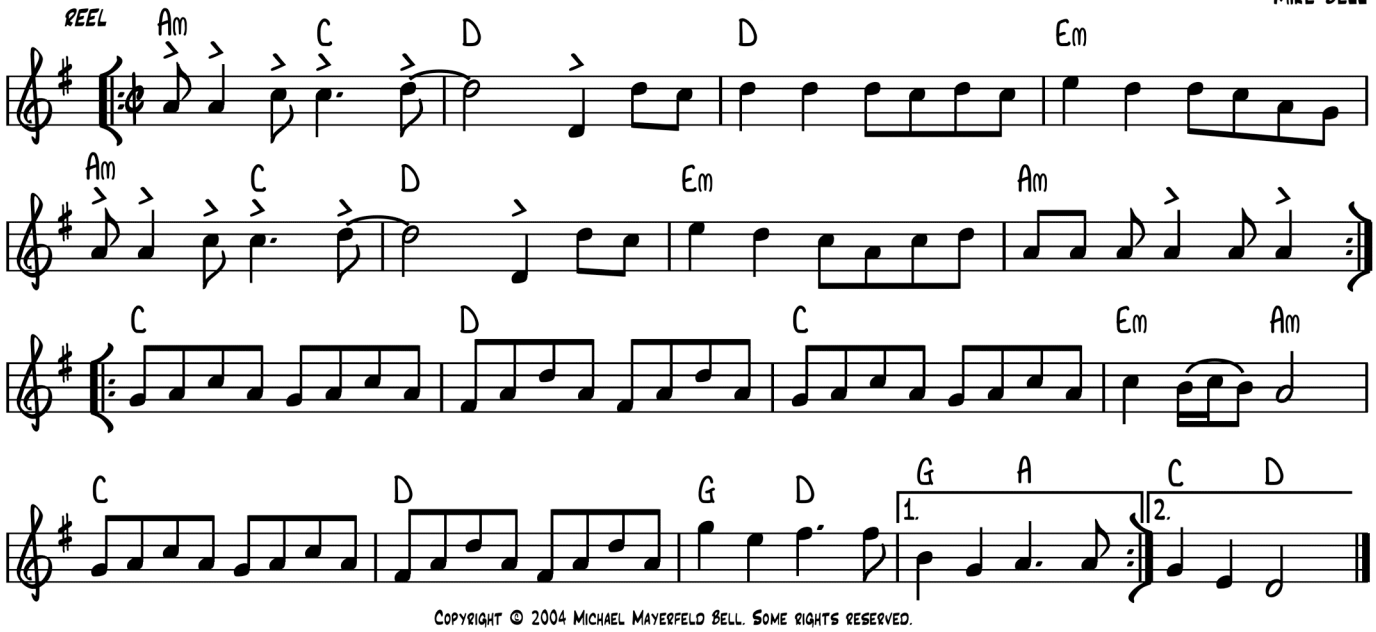
— A Klez-contra tune, named for the port of entry that brought so much of Klezmer music to America.

Fly by Night

Mike Bell



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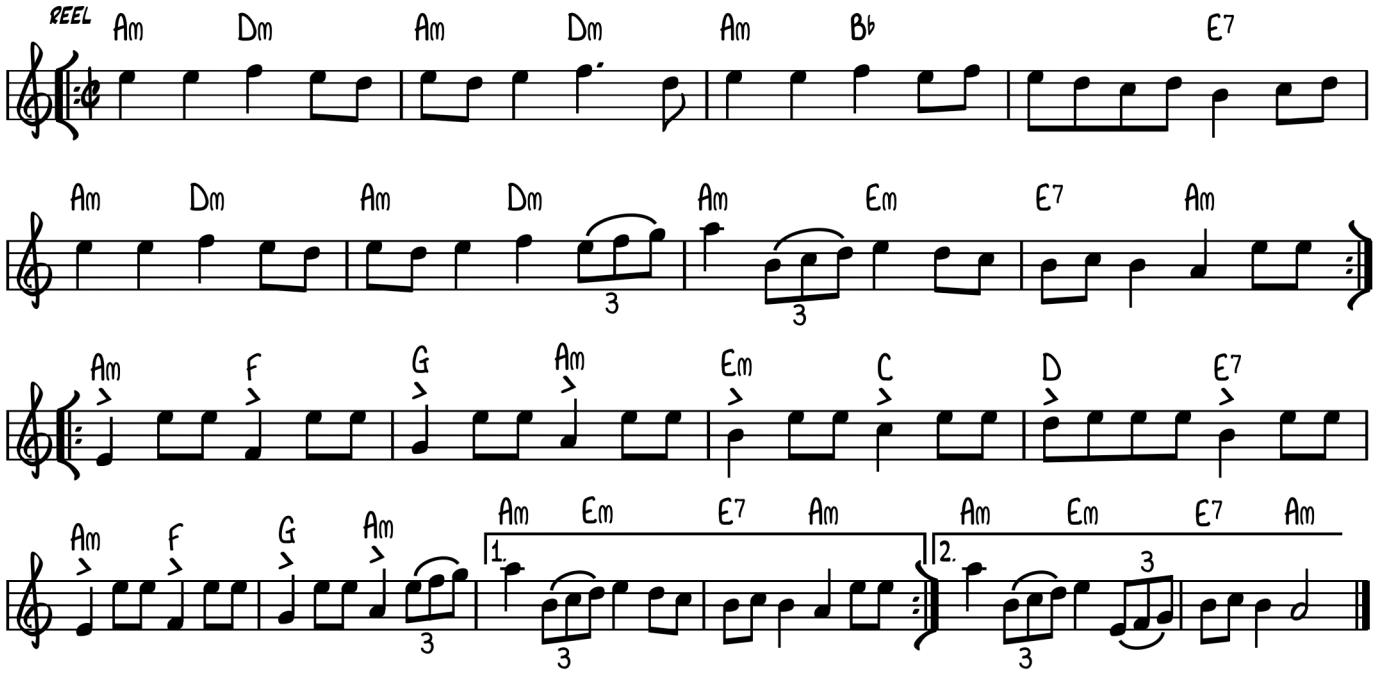
— Some advice for Jason Huntley, who was leaving town.

Forgive You? Forget It!

Mike Bell



– Well, maybe....

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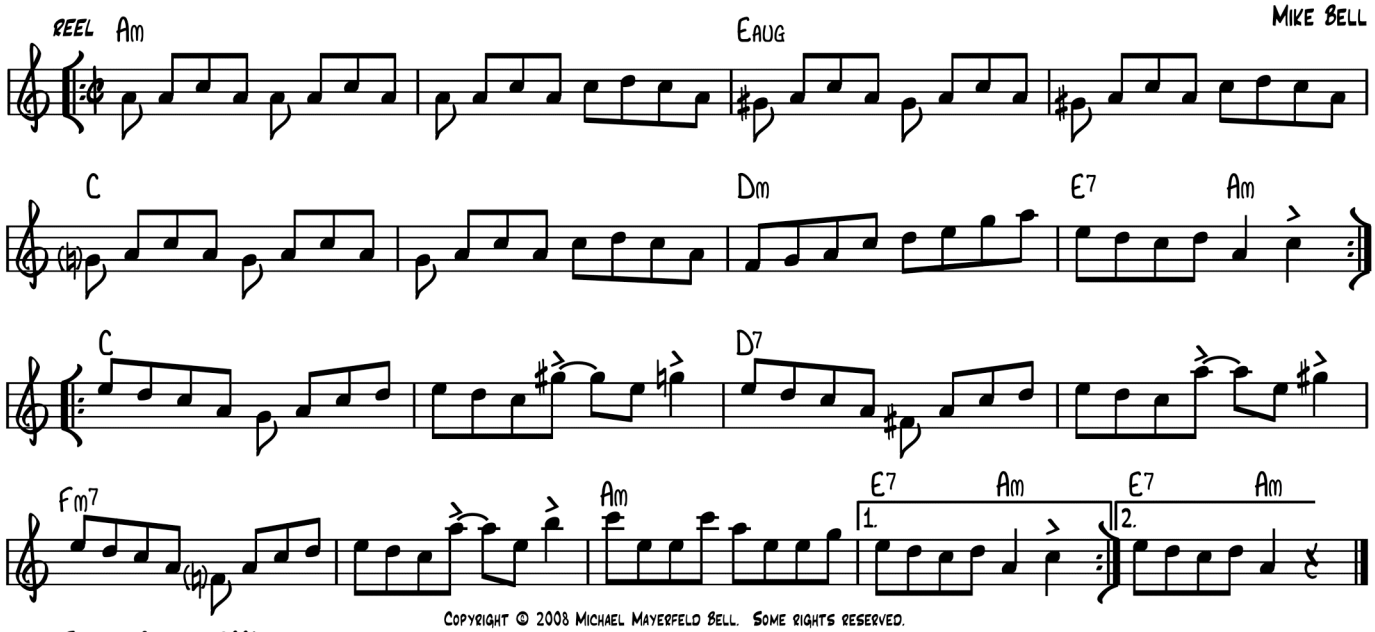
Free Fall

Mike Bell



– For the Crash of 2008.

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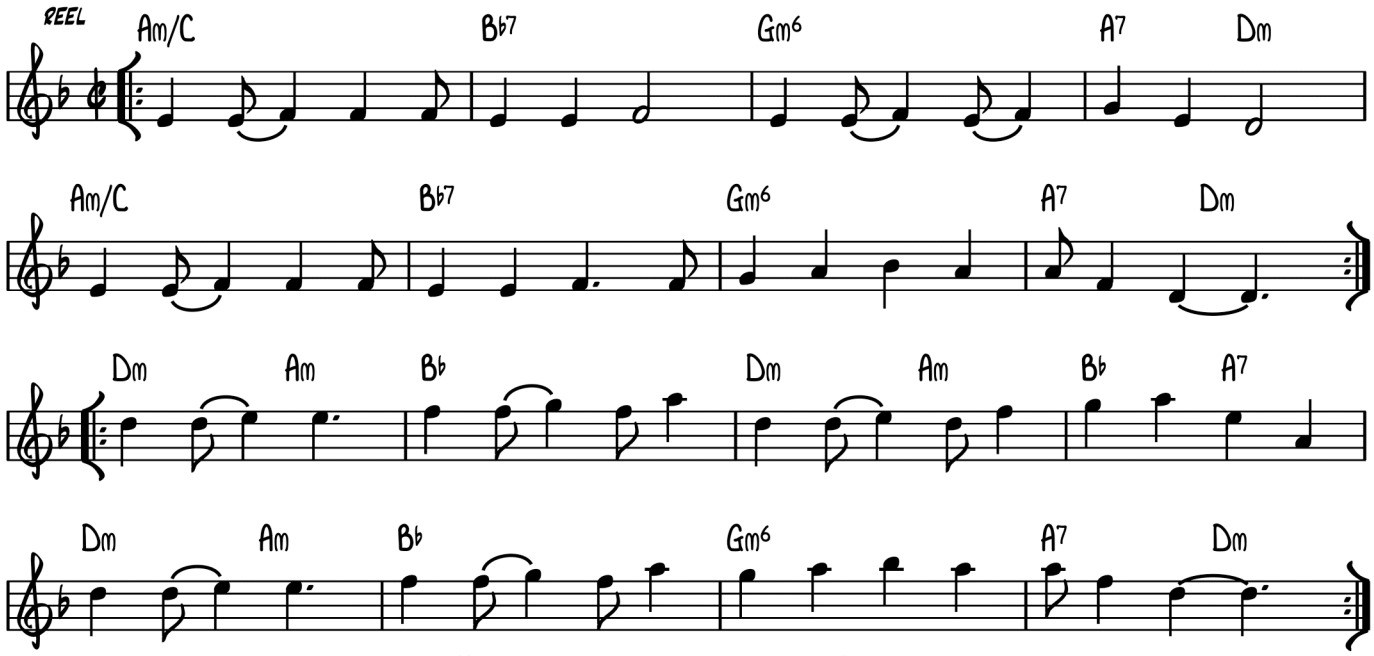
Gibbous Moon

Michael Bell and Bill Obermeyer



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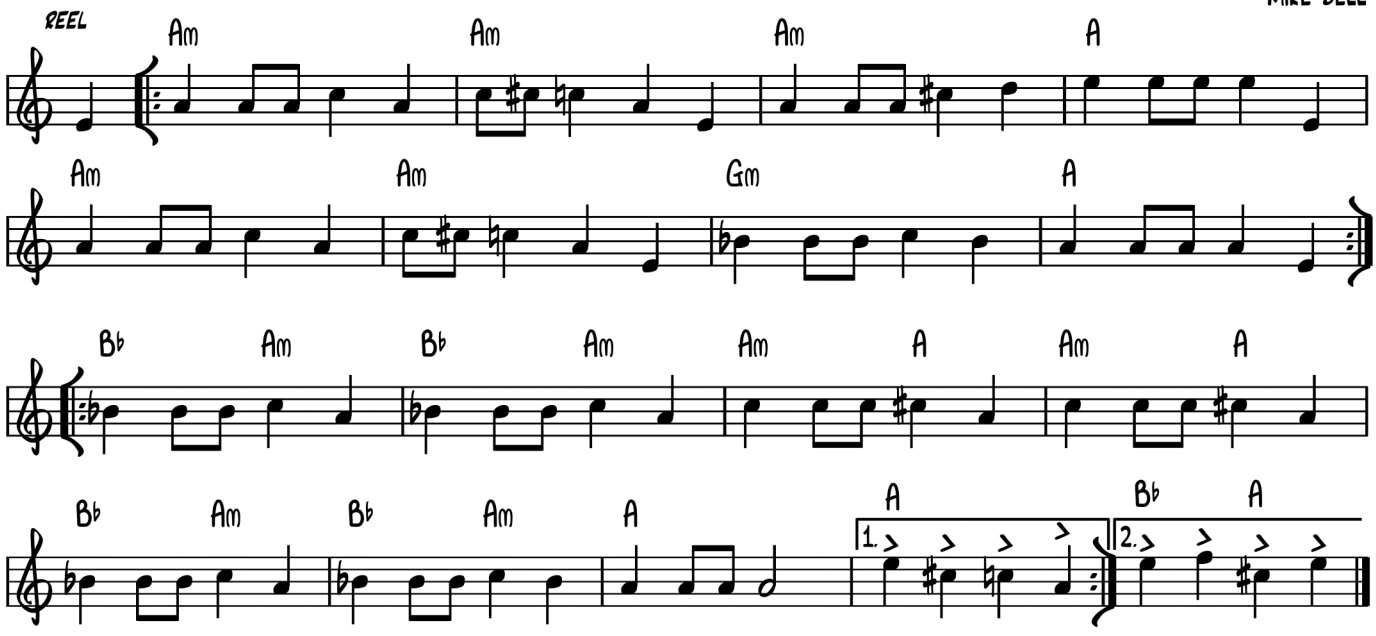
— A spooky and jazzy little tune, written pretty much while we first performed it.

Horseradish

Mike Bell



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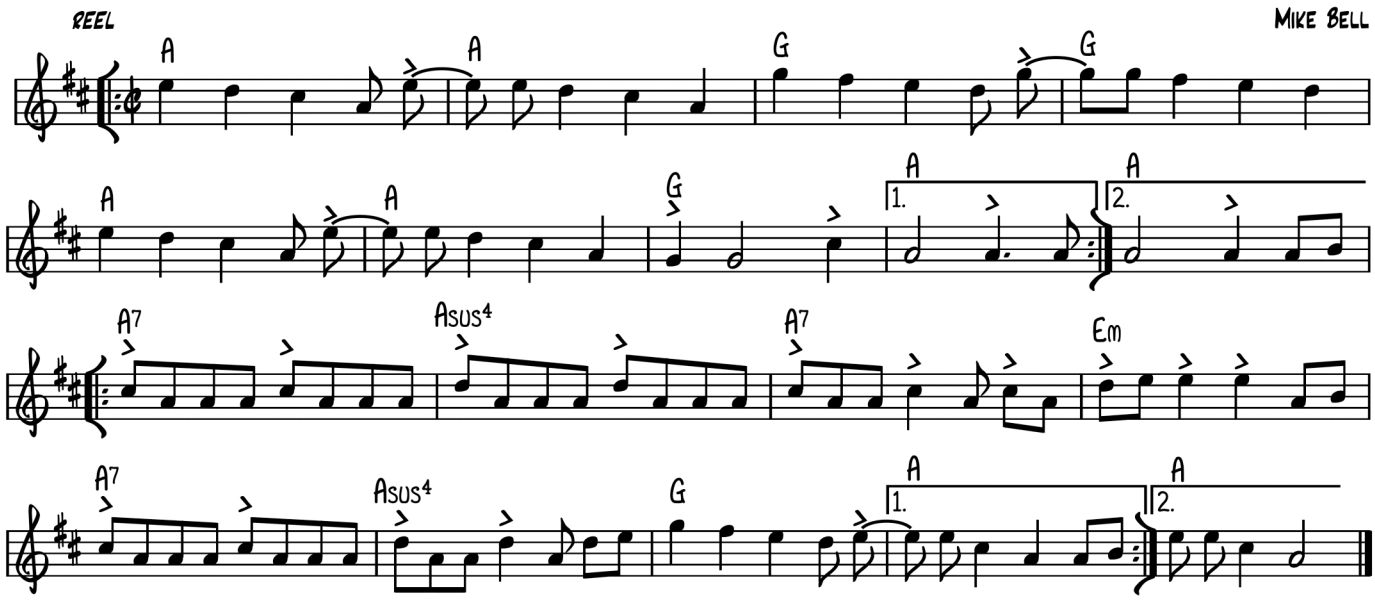
— A klez-contra tune, with some bite.

Howlin' Bill



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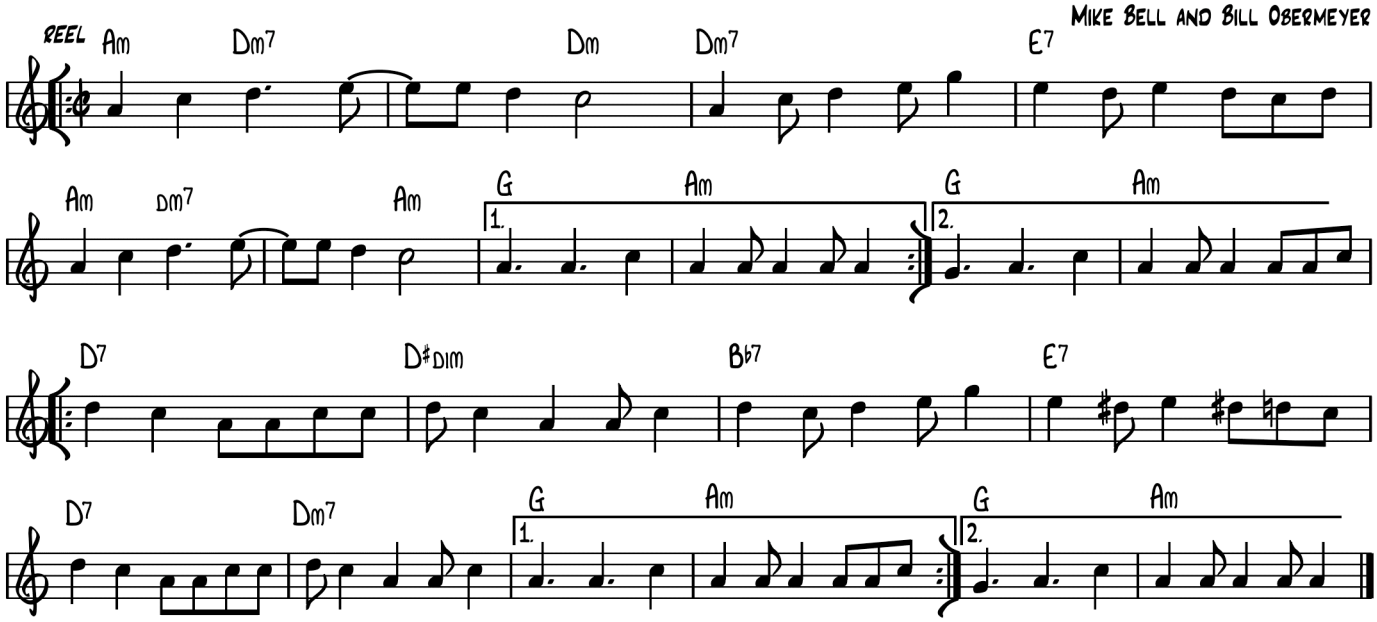
– For Bill Obermeyer. Long may he howl. The *Barn Owl Band* and *Shift* have both recorded this one.

Jammin' the Breaks



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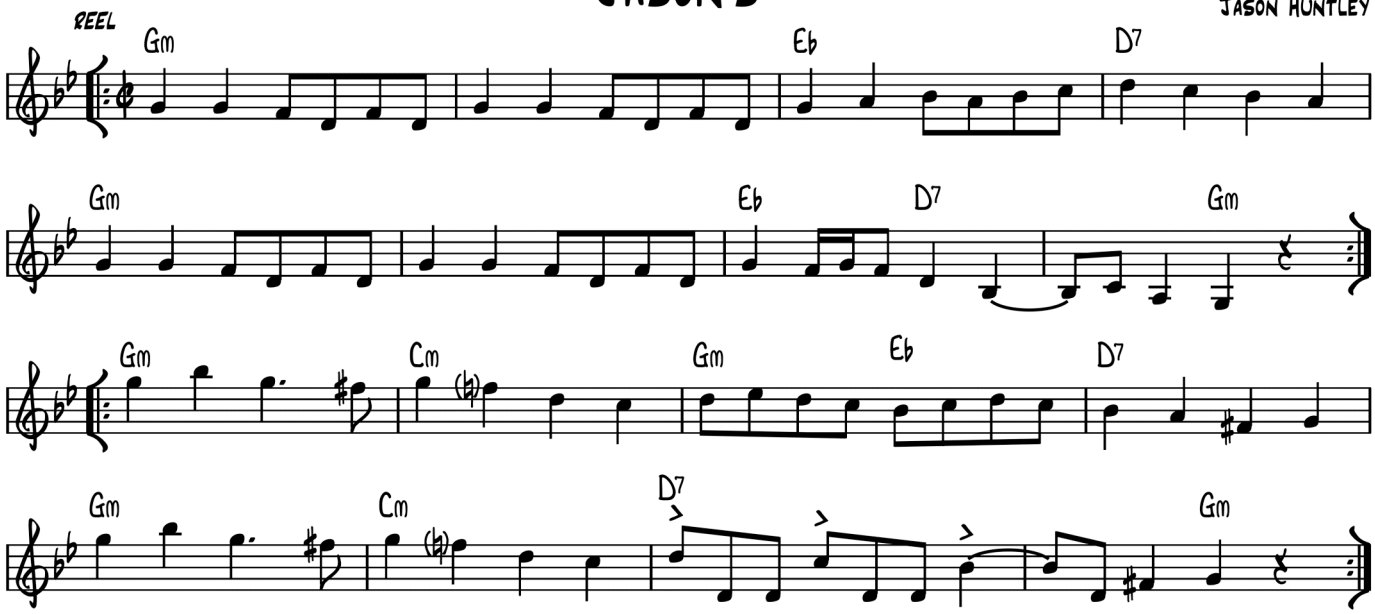
– AKA Jam on the Brakes.

Jason's

Jason Huntley



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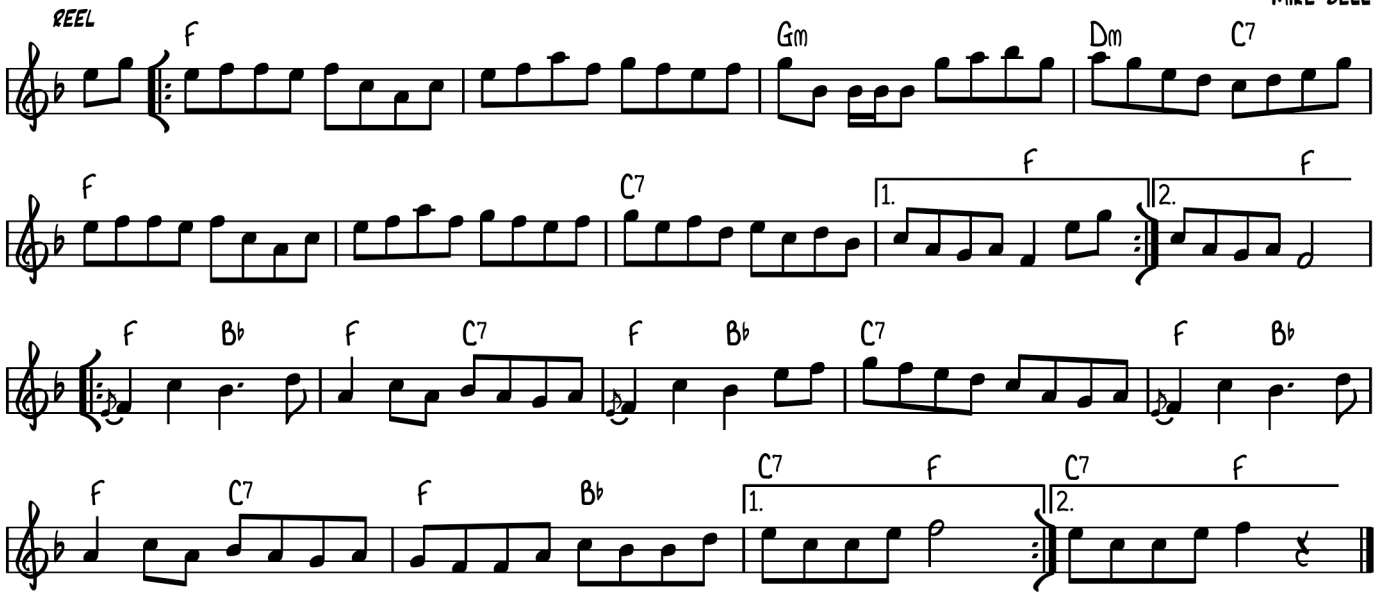
— An irrepressable tune by an irrepressible fiddler.

Kids' Island

Mike Bell



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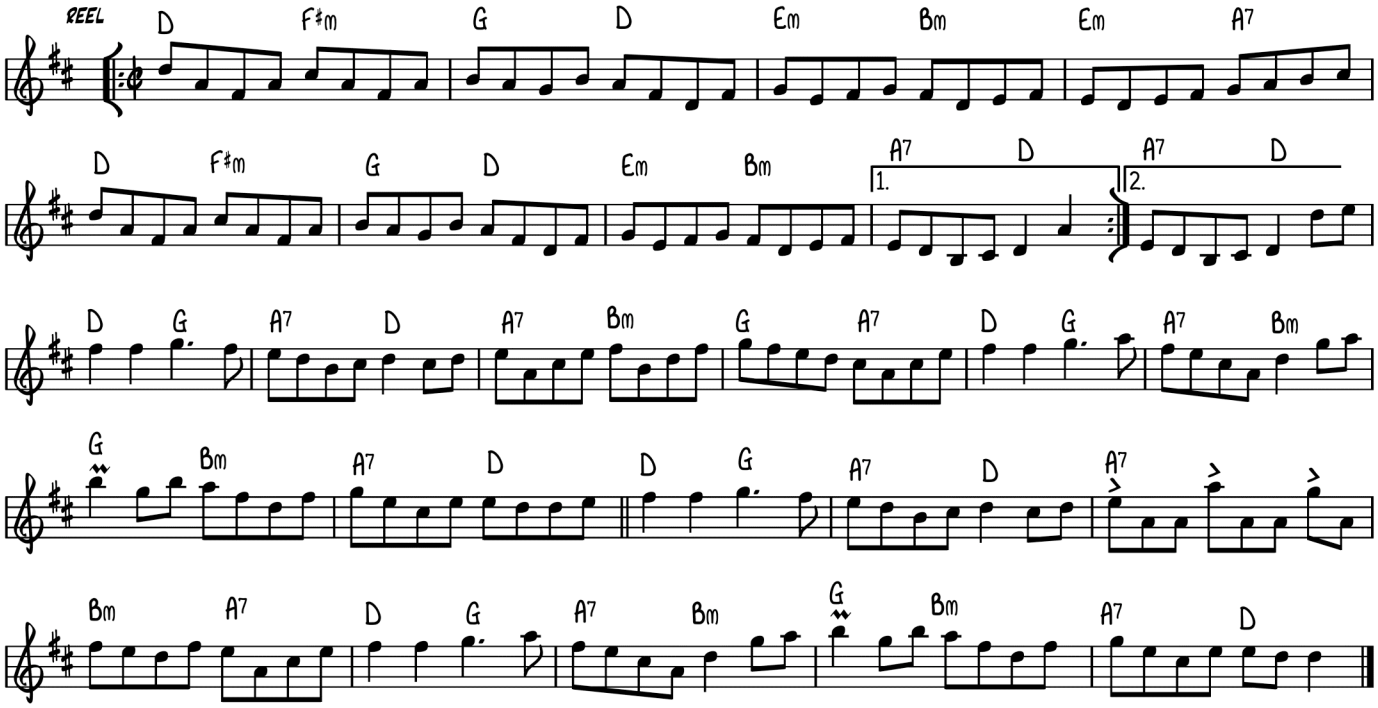
— A great place to swim.

Michael's Welcome to Samuel (Sam's Reel)

Mike Bell



– Written upon the birth of my son.

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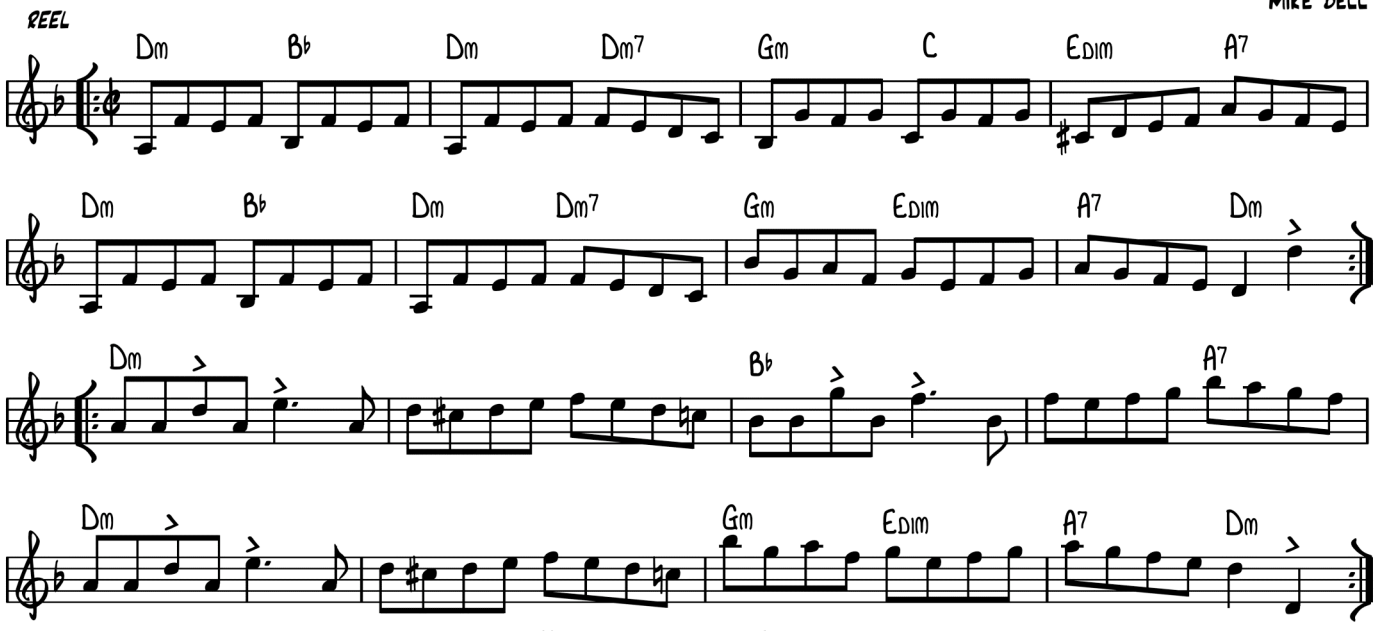
New Rosin for an Old Bow

Mike Bell



– Or for an old beau.

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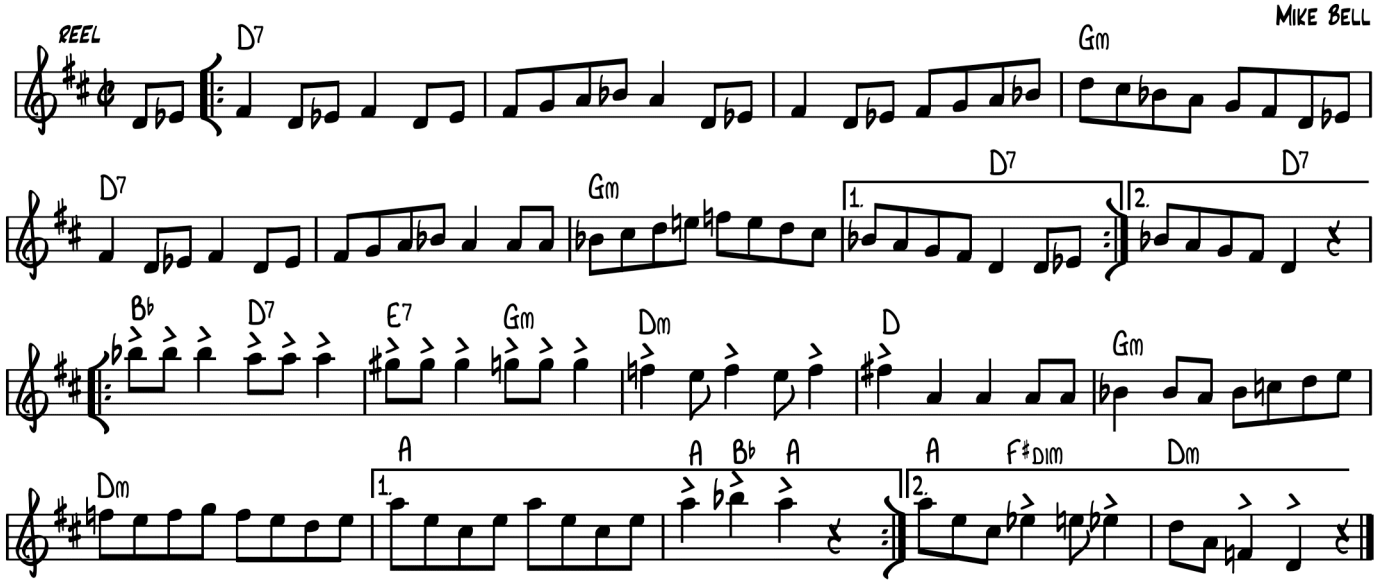
Oy Vey, Such a Day

Mike Bell



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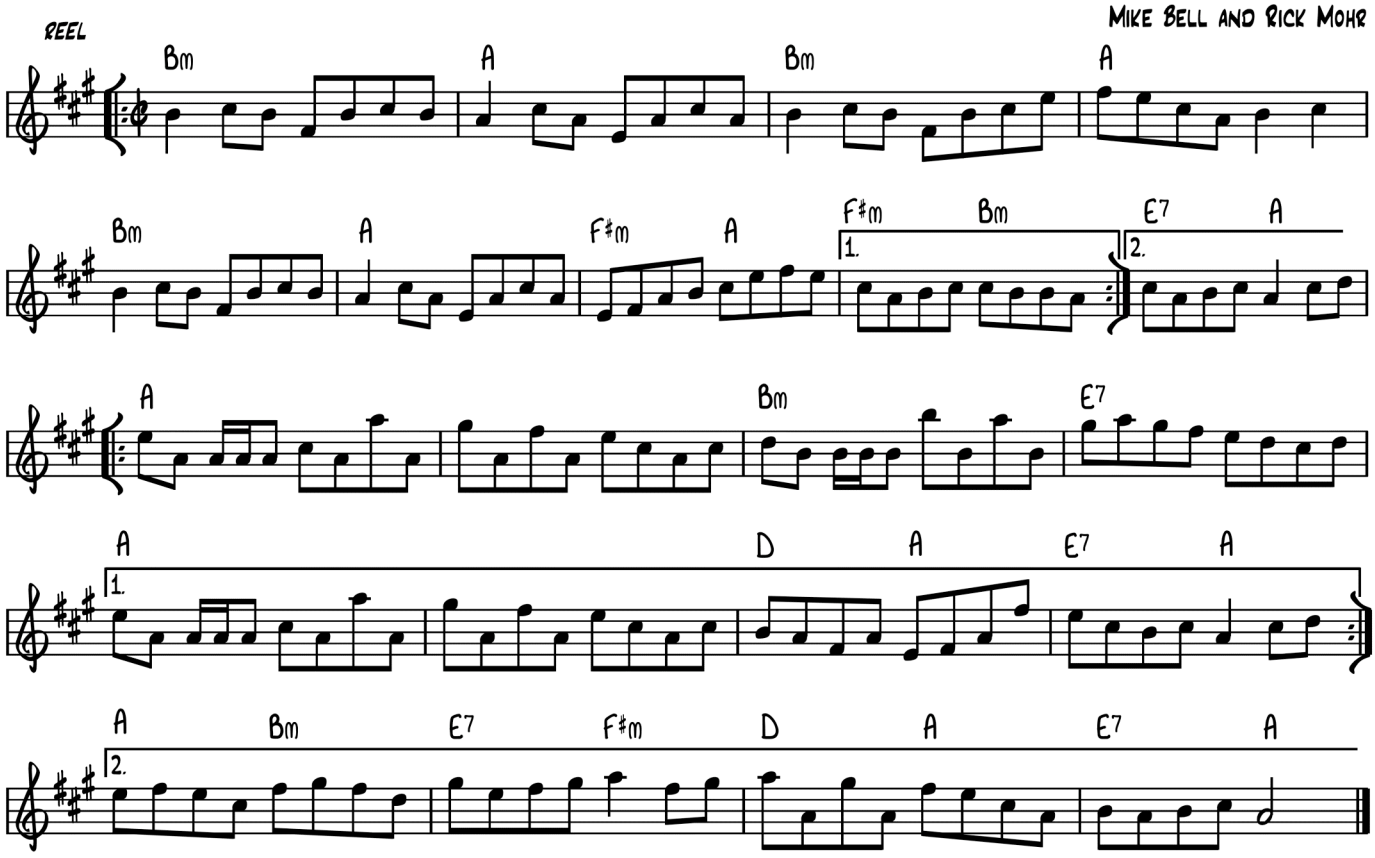
— One of the tunes written for the weddink of my friends Sue West and Eric Pallant. In the key affectionately known by some former fellow band members as "Bell-bizarre-o."

Pleasant Street

Mike Bell and Rick Mohr



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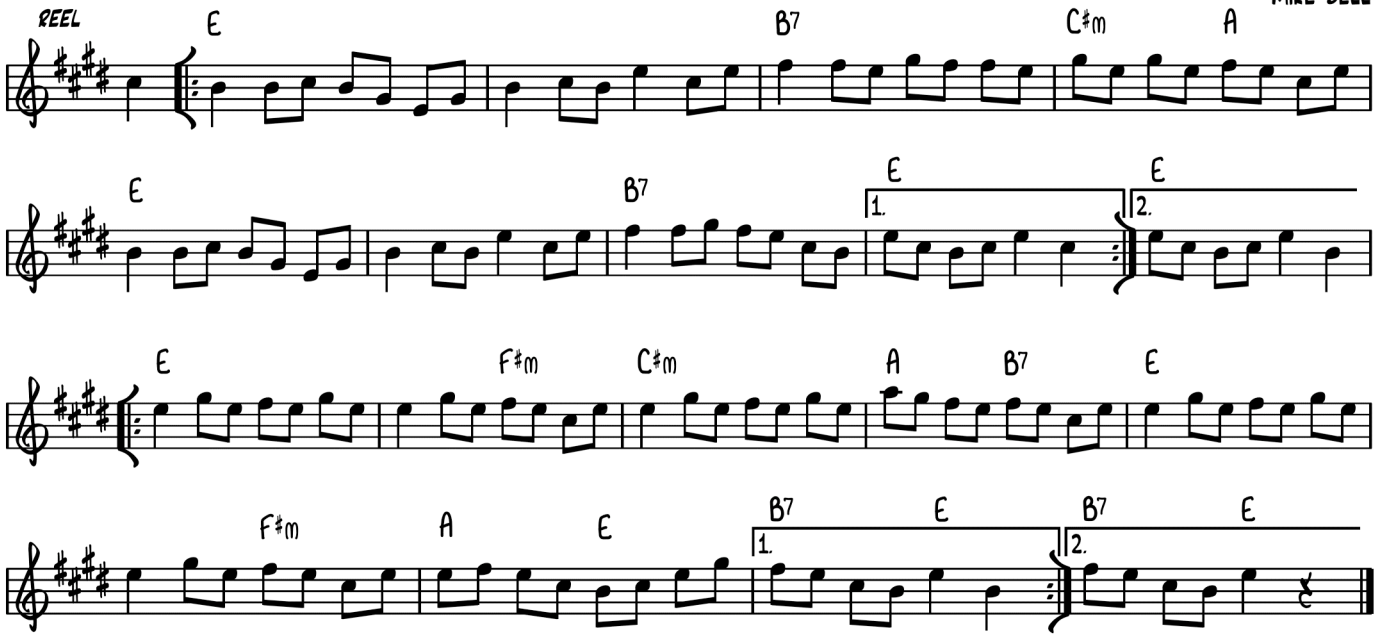
— Named for the streeet in New Haven, Connecticut, where a great old band of the past, Froggie on the Carport, used to practice, and for where we all should live.

The Pleasure of Leisure

Mike Bell



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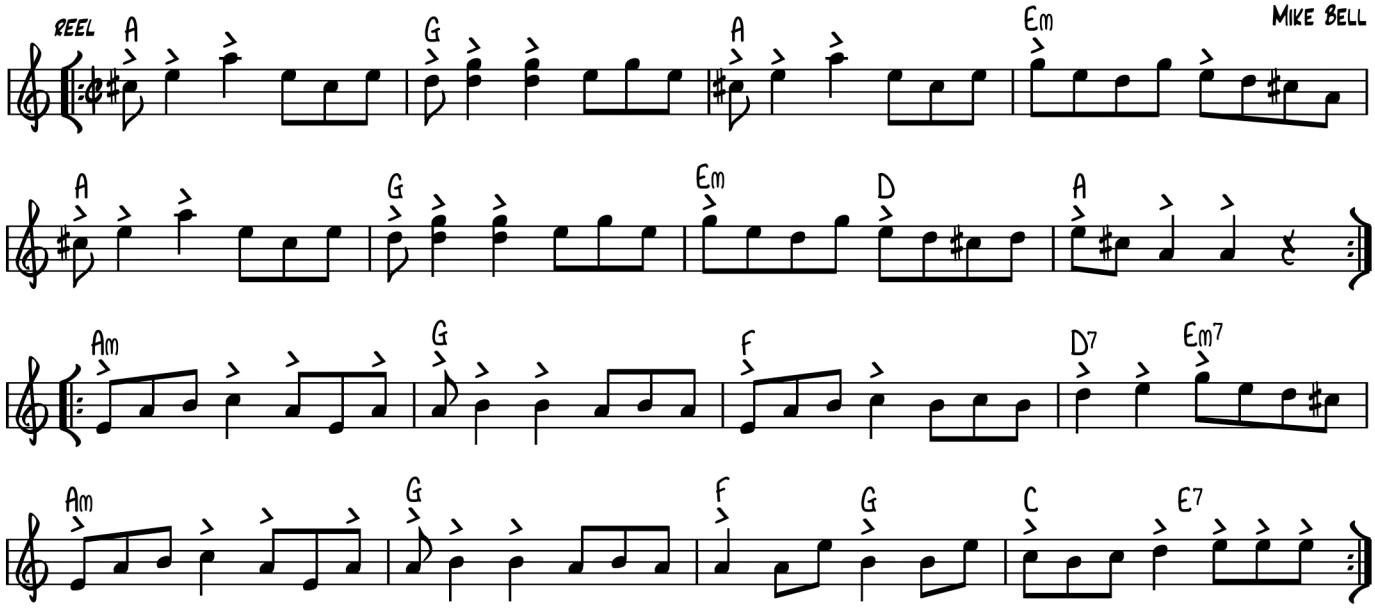
– The great debate: Is it the pleh-sure of leh-sure or the plee-sure of lee-sure? Either way, we all need more of it.

River Dragon Reel

Mike Bell



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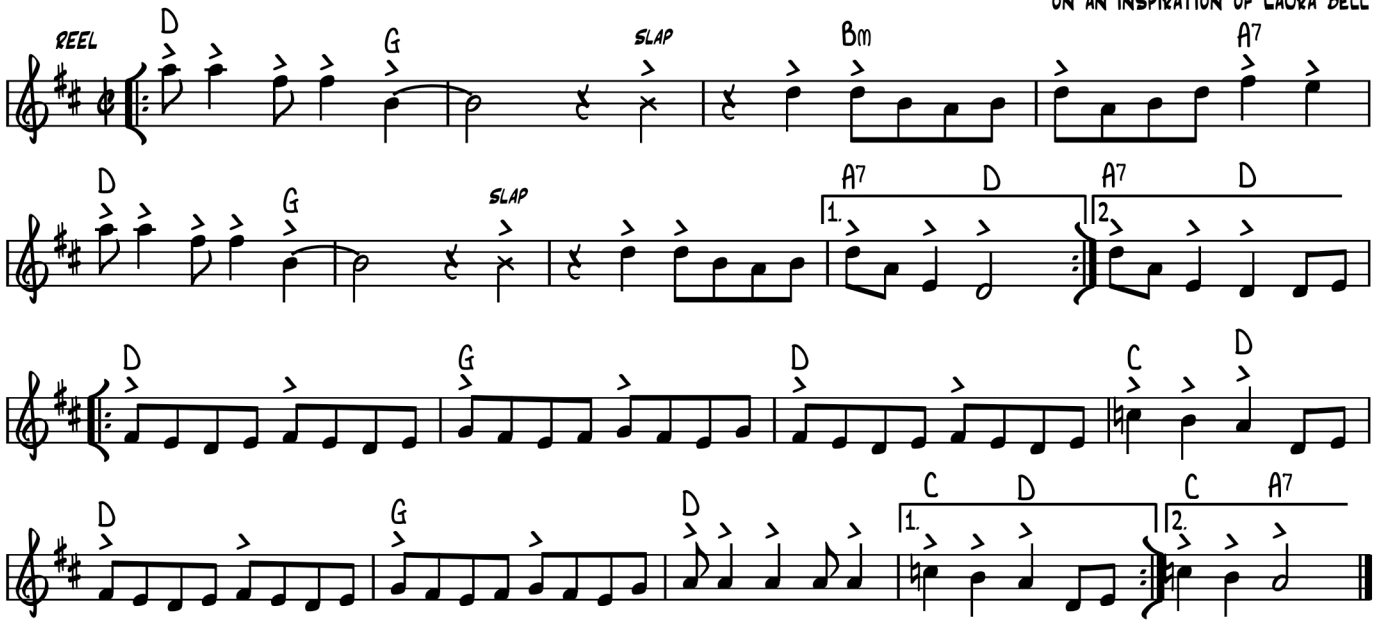
– For the great protective spirits of the St. Lawrence River.

Slapping Mosquitoes

Mike Bell and Evan Premo
on an inspiration of Laura Bell



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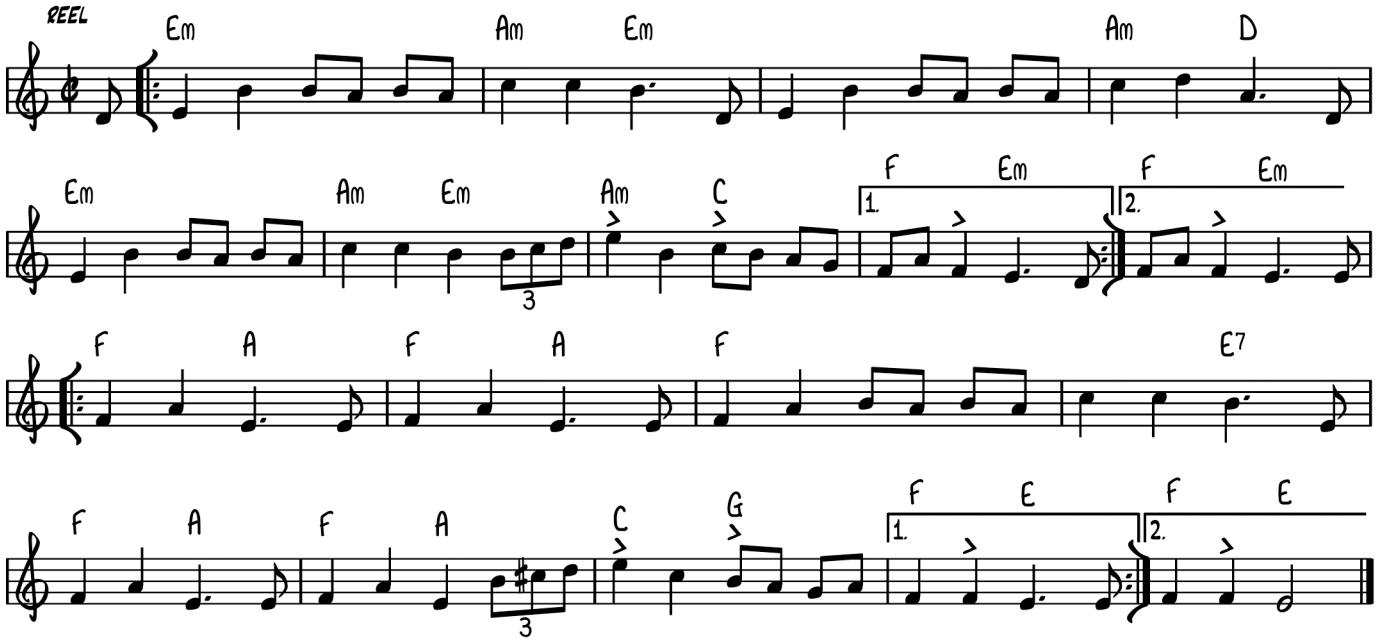
– Otherwise, it was a lovely evening.

Toe Dusting

Mike Bell



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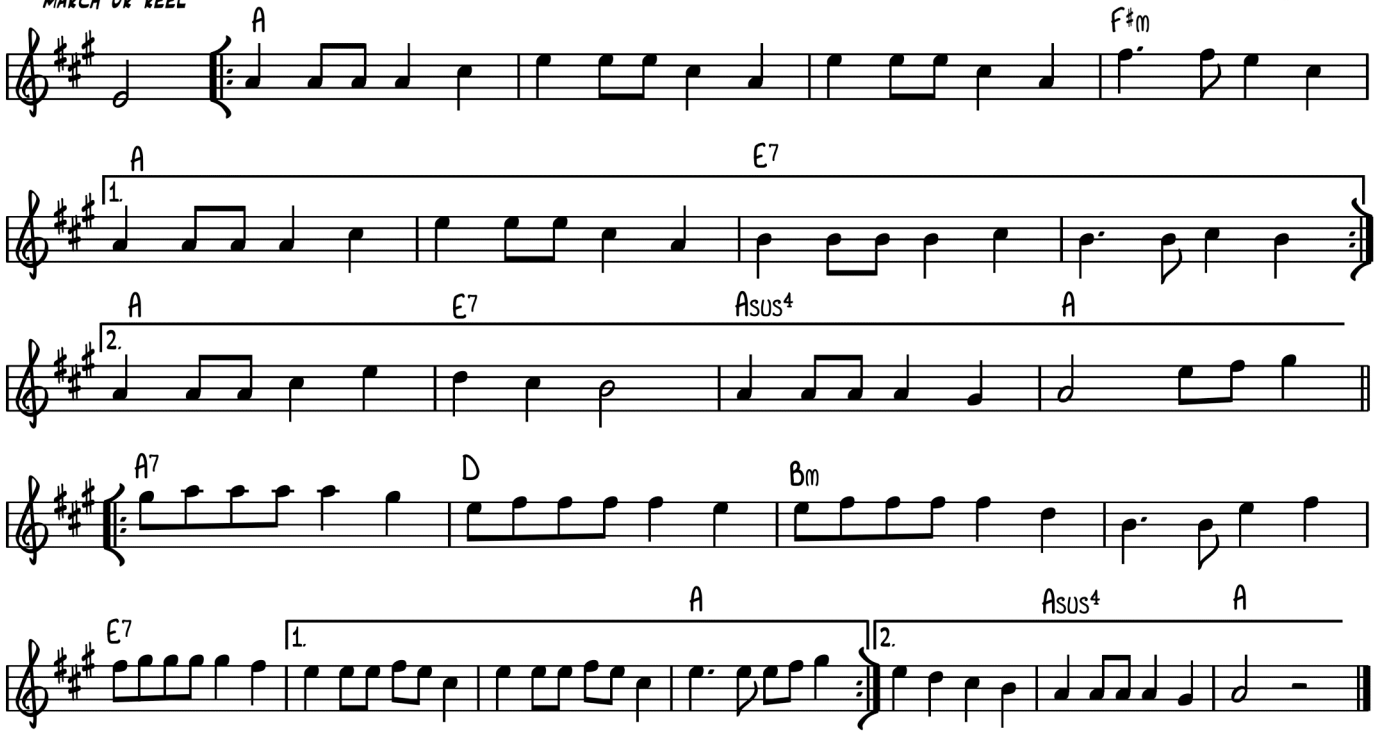
– For the Barn Owl Band. Toe dusting is one of the characteristic habits of barn owls.

Trip to the River

March or reel

Mike Bell



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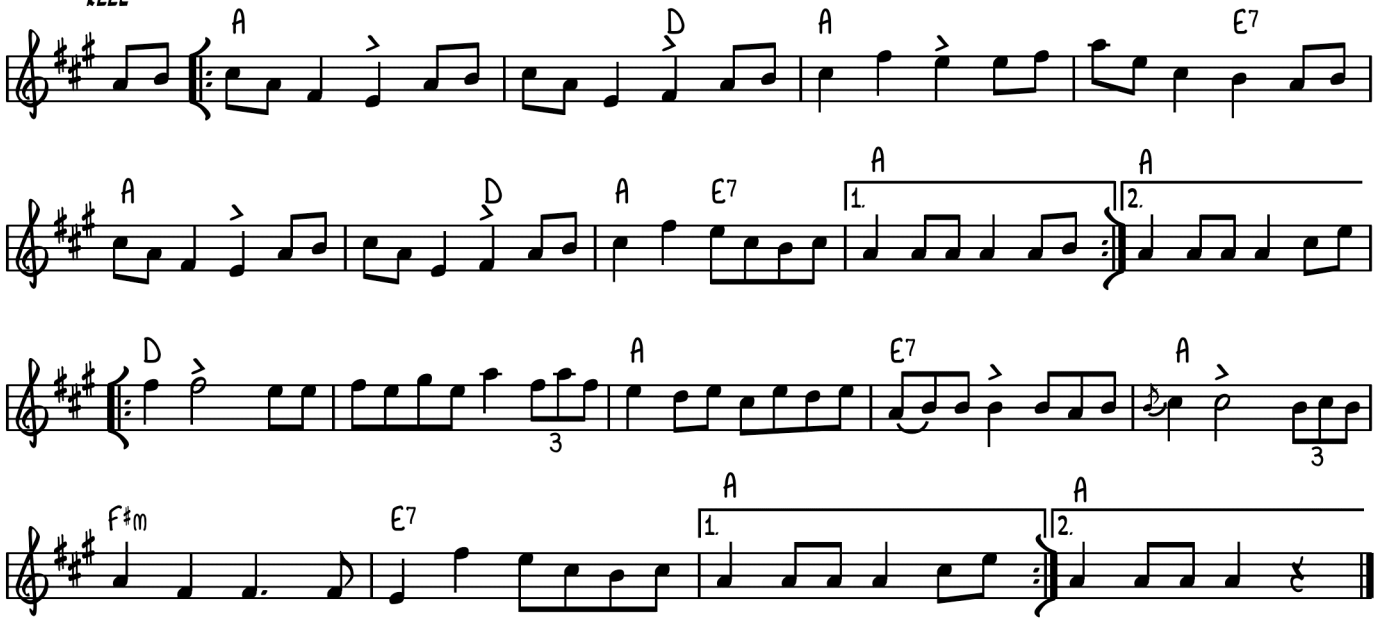
– For Willow Soltow and Jim Sirch, who took a great trip to the River one summer, and are still taking it.

Unquoa Road

Reel

Mike Bell



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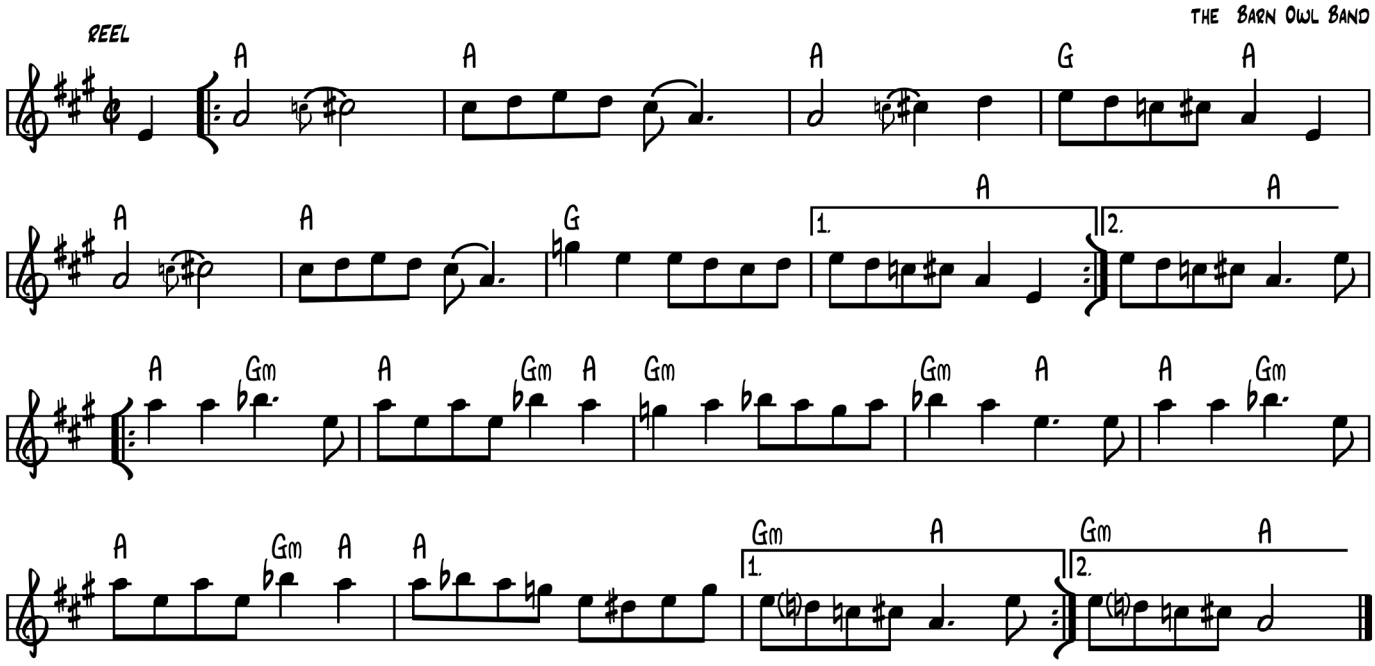
– For the road in Connecticut, named after an ancient Sachem, where a banjo-playing friend used to live.

Unreel

Mike Bell and Merle Hall
with editorial help from
the Barn Owl Band



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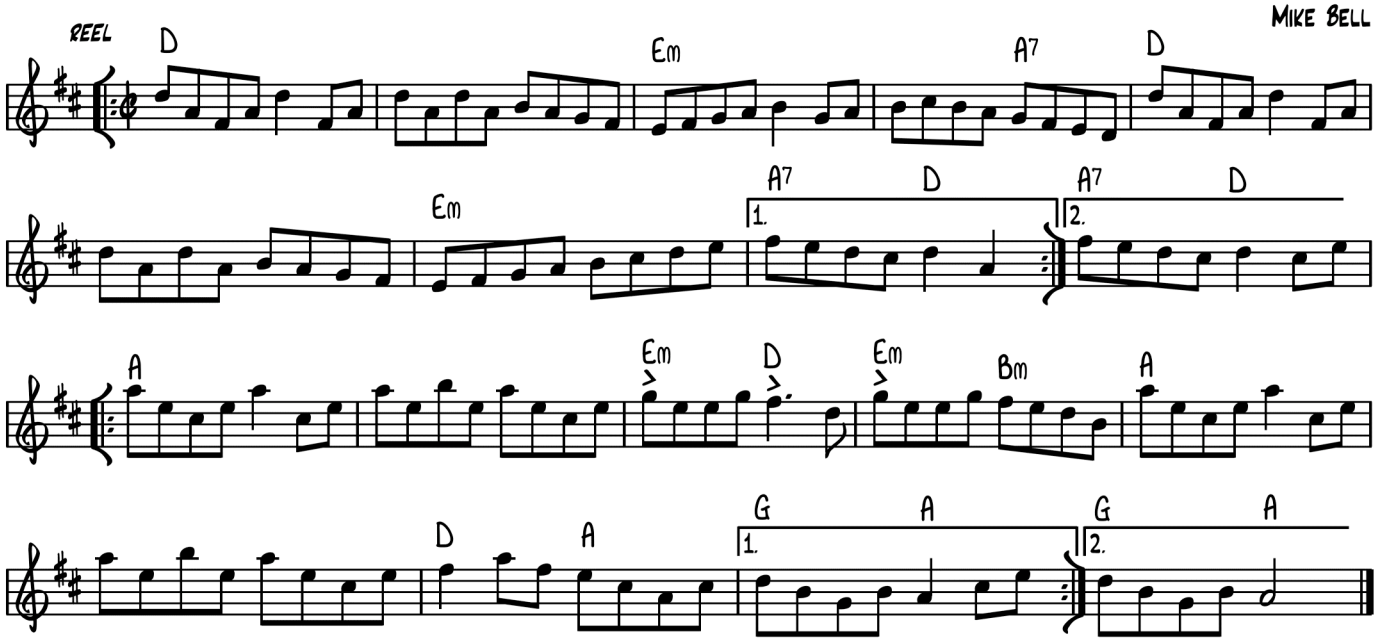
– Sort of Appalachia meets the Stedl. Written at an Owls practice session in about five minutes.

West Rock Reel

Mike Bell



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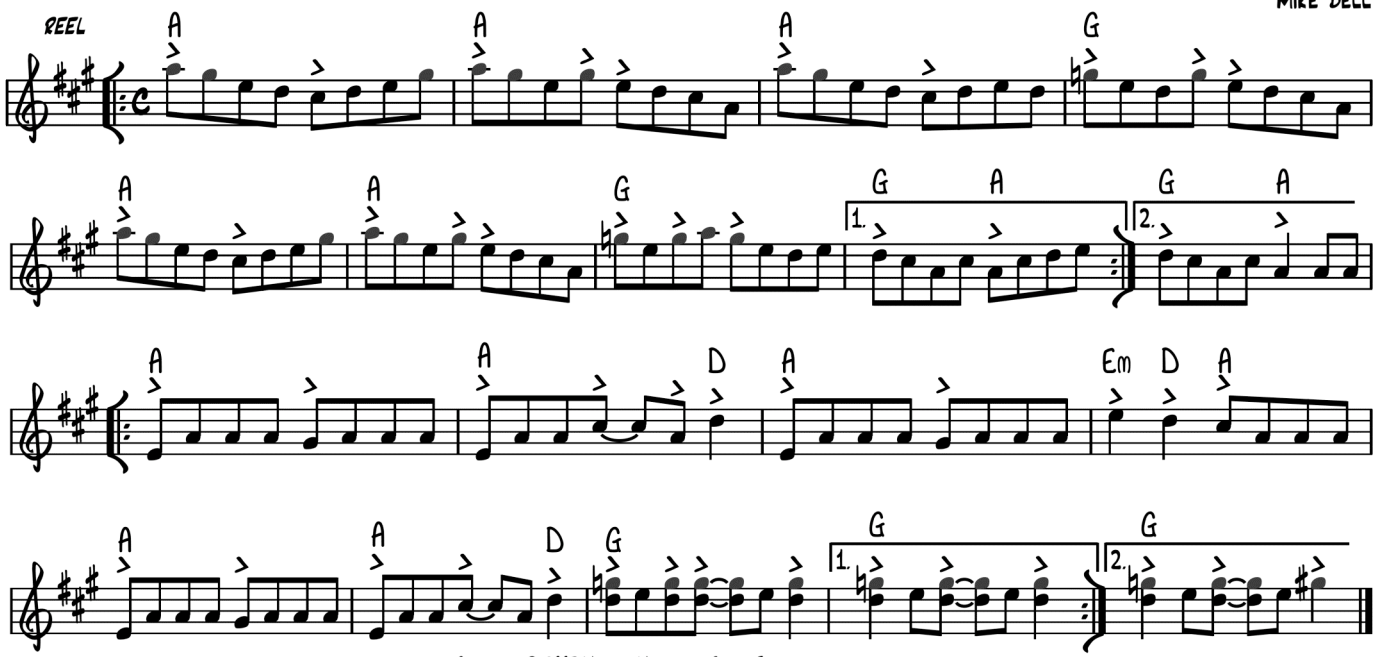
– One of the two great traprock ridges that overlook New Haven, Connecticut, where I was living at the time. Ted Senella, the great New England caller who was instrumental in reviving the New England style, often used to ask for this one. I always remember him when I play it.

Wiretappers

Mike Bell



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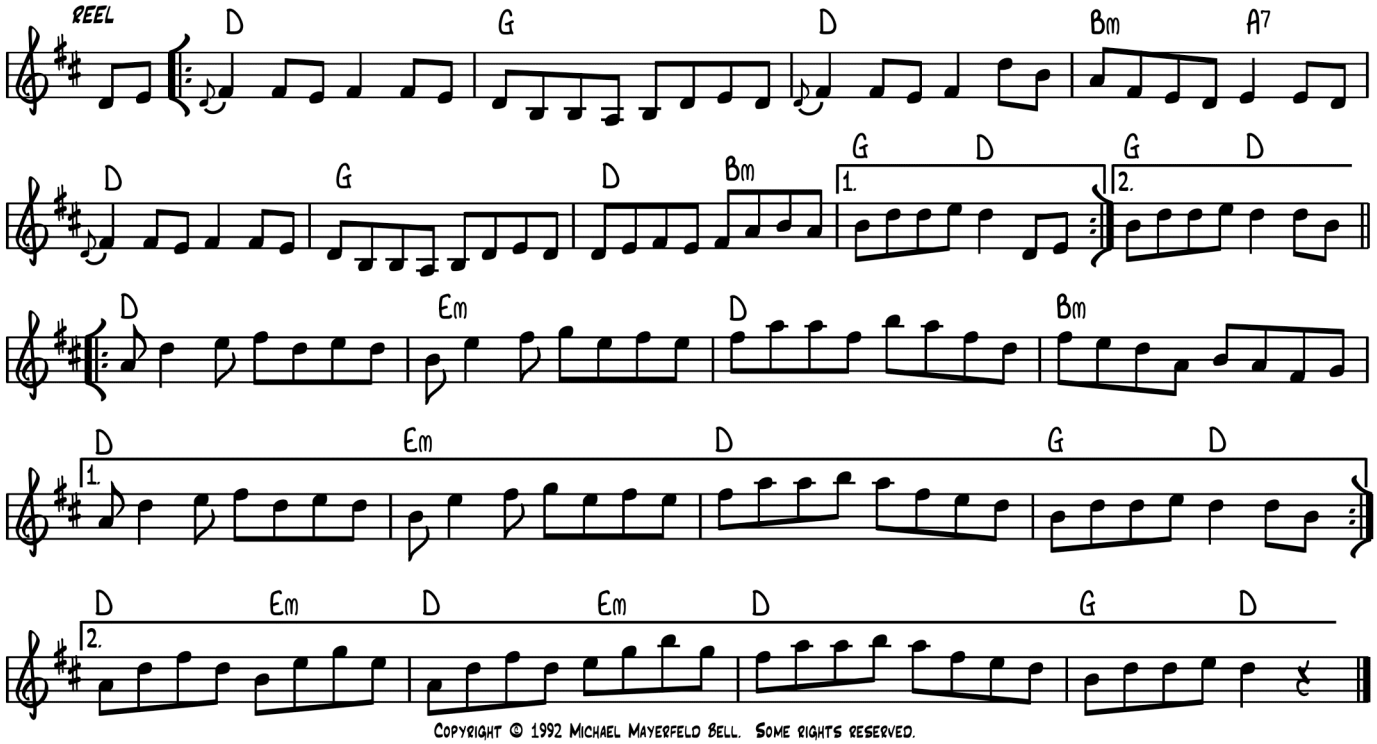
– Because you never know who's listening.

The Wise Peasant

Mike Bell



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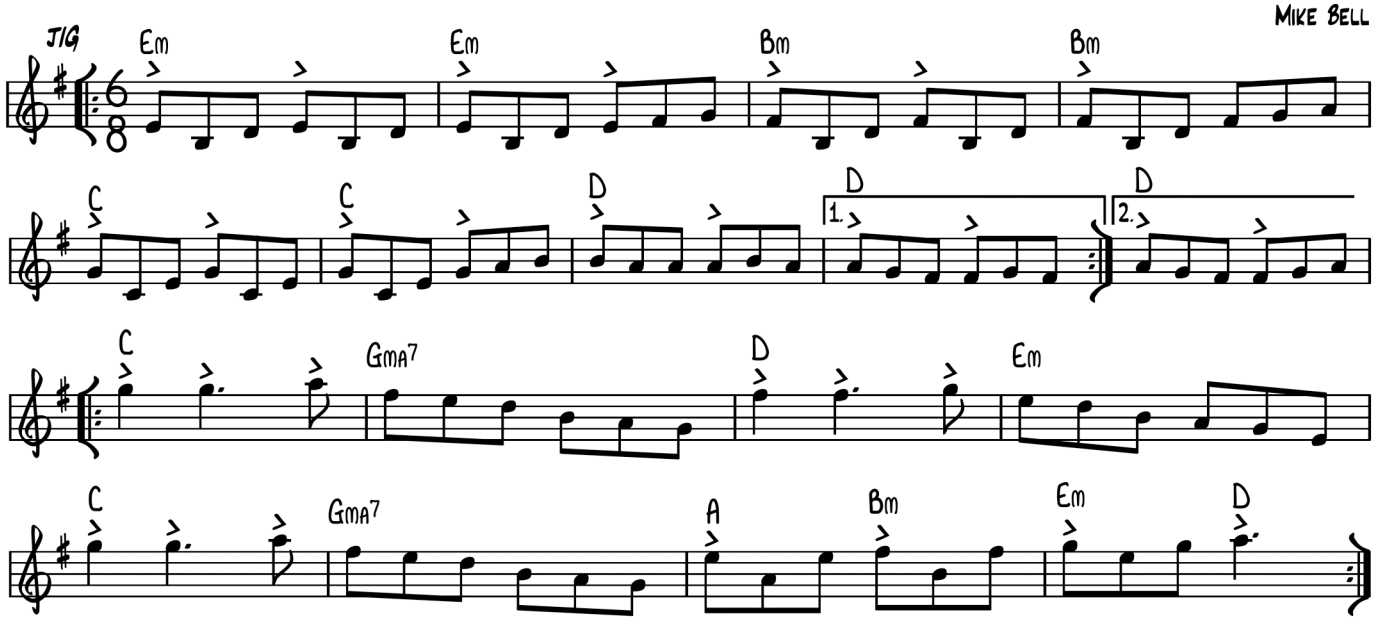
– For one of my teachers, Jim Scott, and his favorite Egyptian proverb.

JIGS

Barnacle Love

Mike Bell



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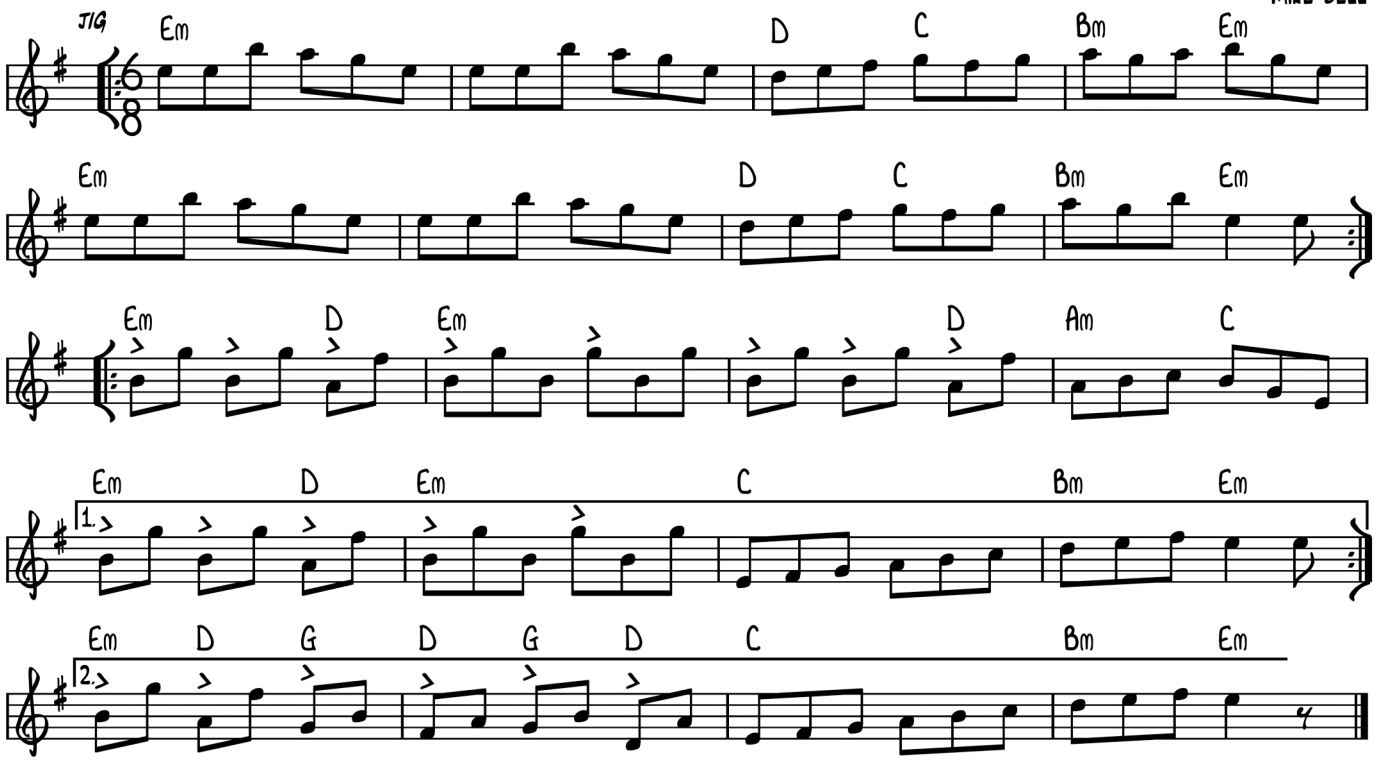
– This one I won't explain. Ask a marine biologist.

Broken Glass

Mike Bell



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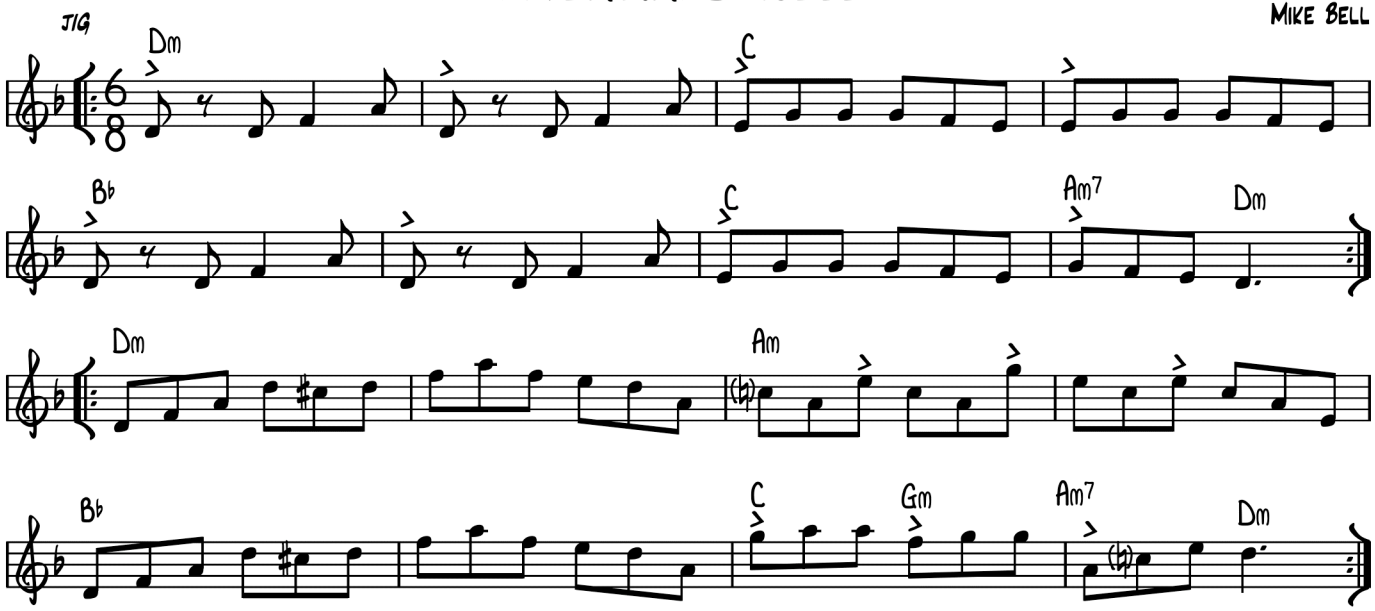
– Minimalism after three pints of Guinness.

Coventina's Well

Mike Bell



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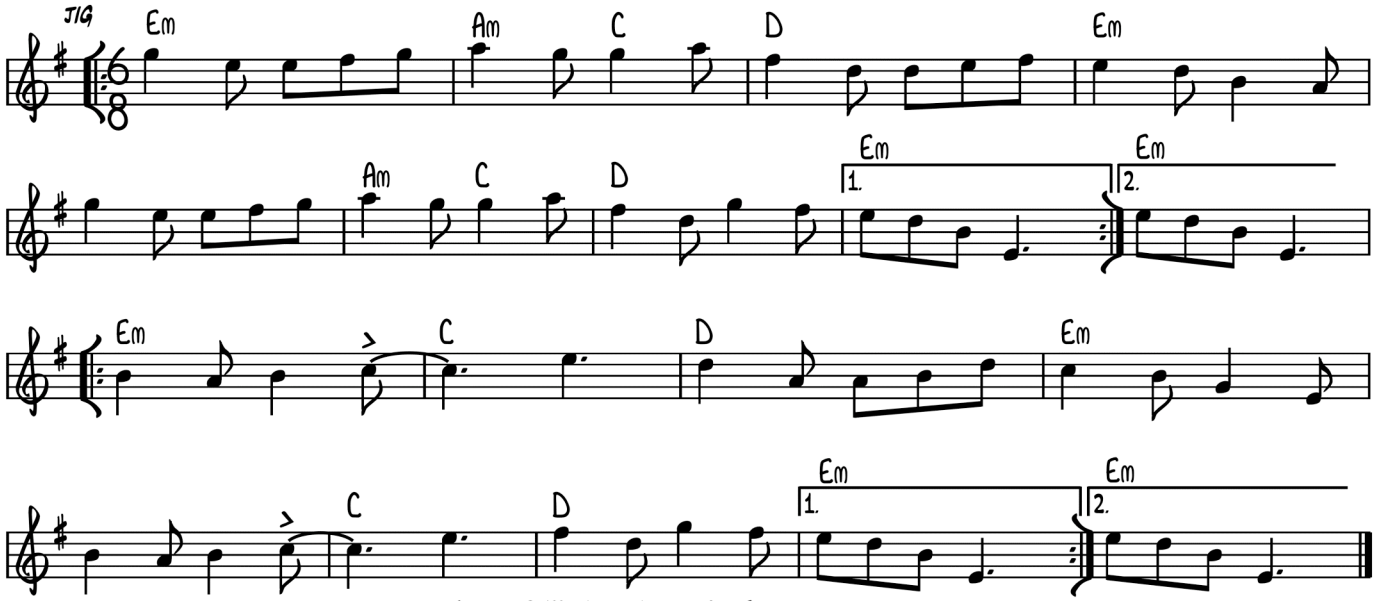
– Named for a place goddess who lives in a well along Hadrian's Wall in Northumbria, England. Both the Celts and the Romans used to worship her and her healing powers.

Crossing the Equinox

Mike Bell



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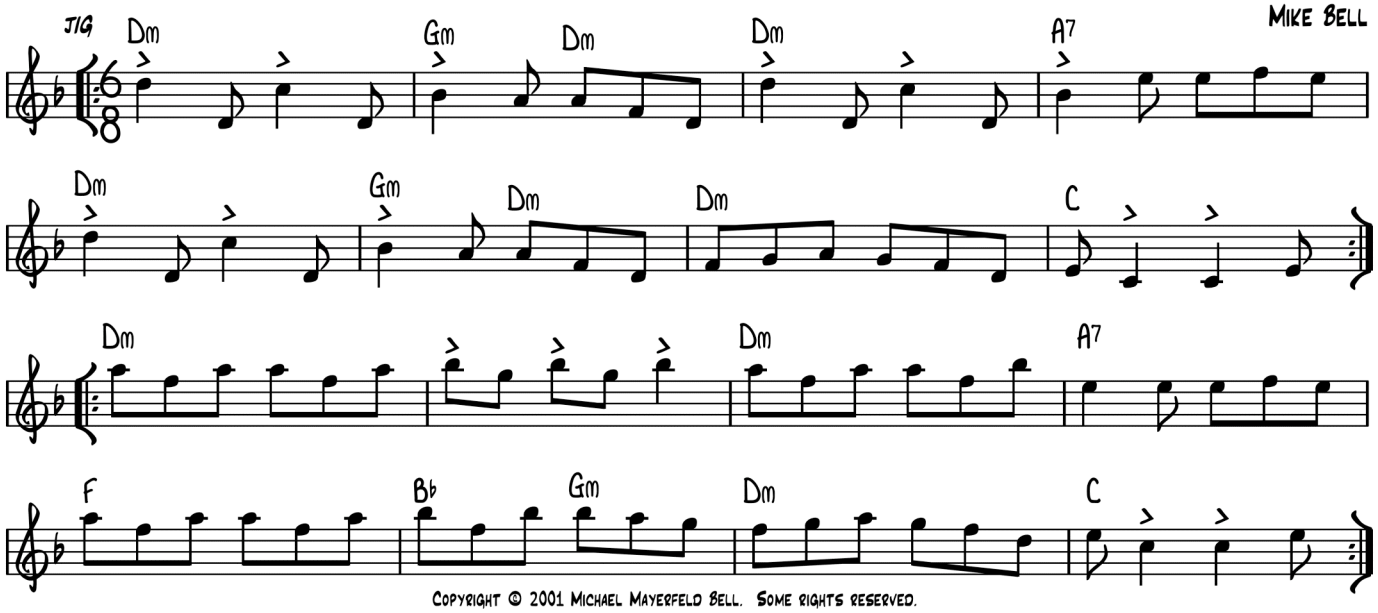
– In testament to the dynamic circularity of the seasons which brings it all around again, but always at least a little bit different. This circularity is also musical; the A-part and B-part can be played as a two-part round.

Dancing on a Skateboard



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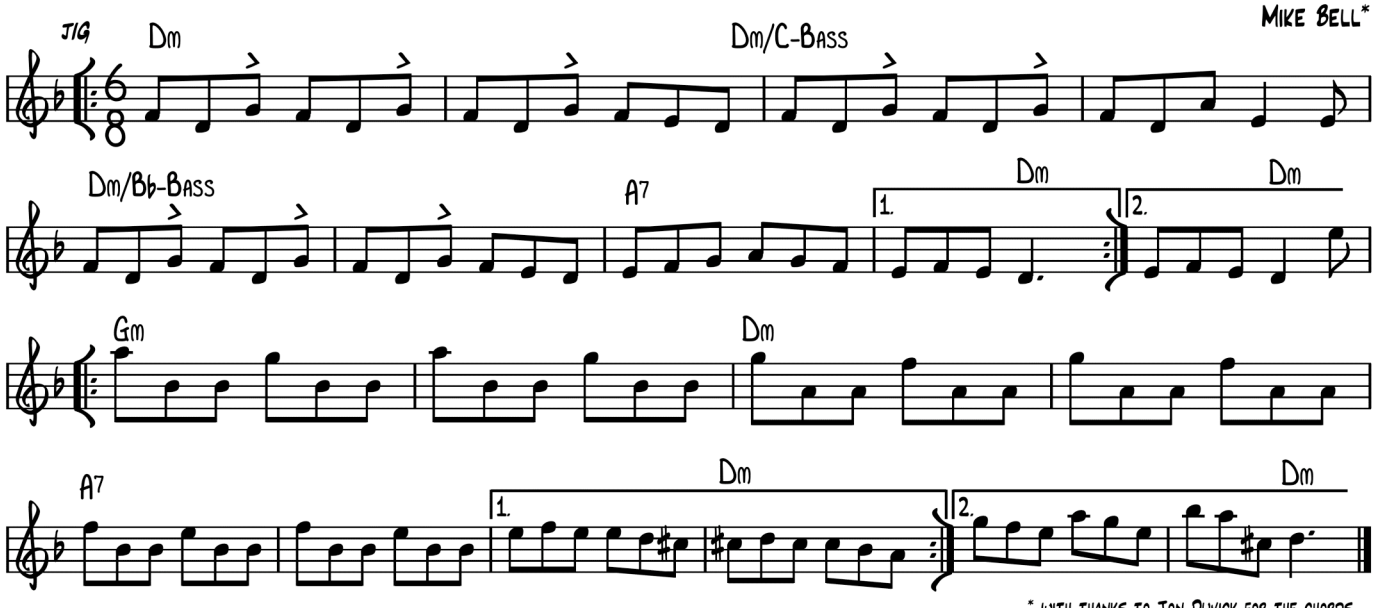
– Sometimes you just get a little short of tune names. Written with the editorial help of my fellow Barn Owls.

The Empty Bottle



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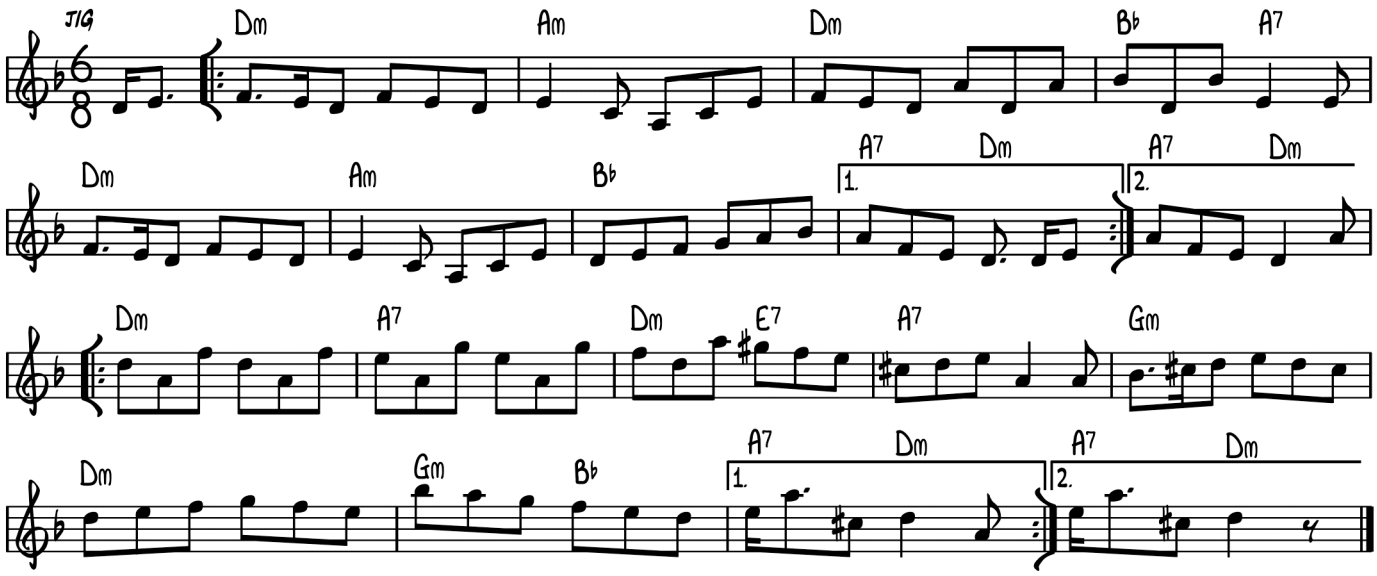
* with thanks to Jon Duvick for the chords.

– And the stores were all closed at that hour.

The Fiddler at the Bar

Mike Bell



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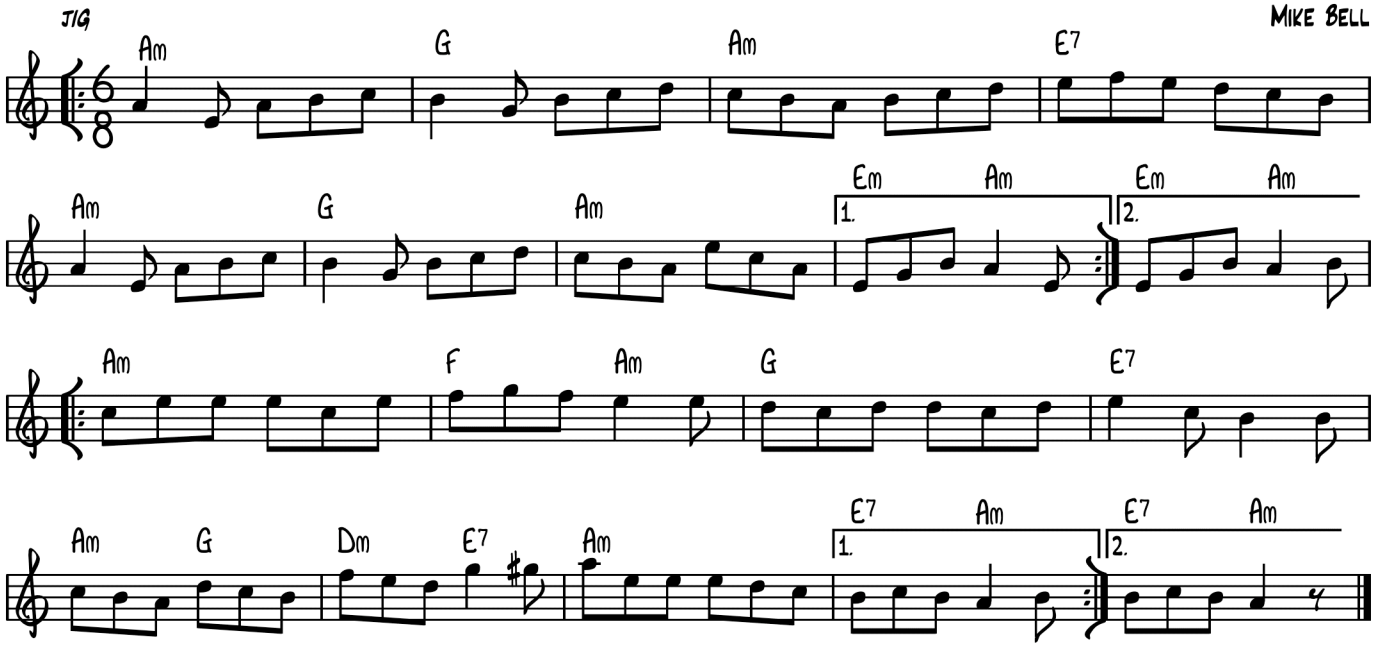
— A common habitat of fiddlers. For Michael Koenigsberg, a legal fiddler.

Mattabassett

Mike Bell



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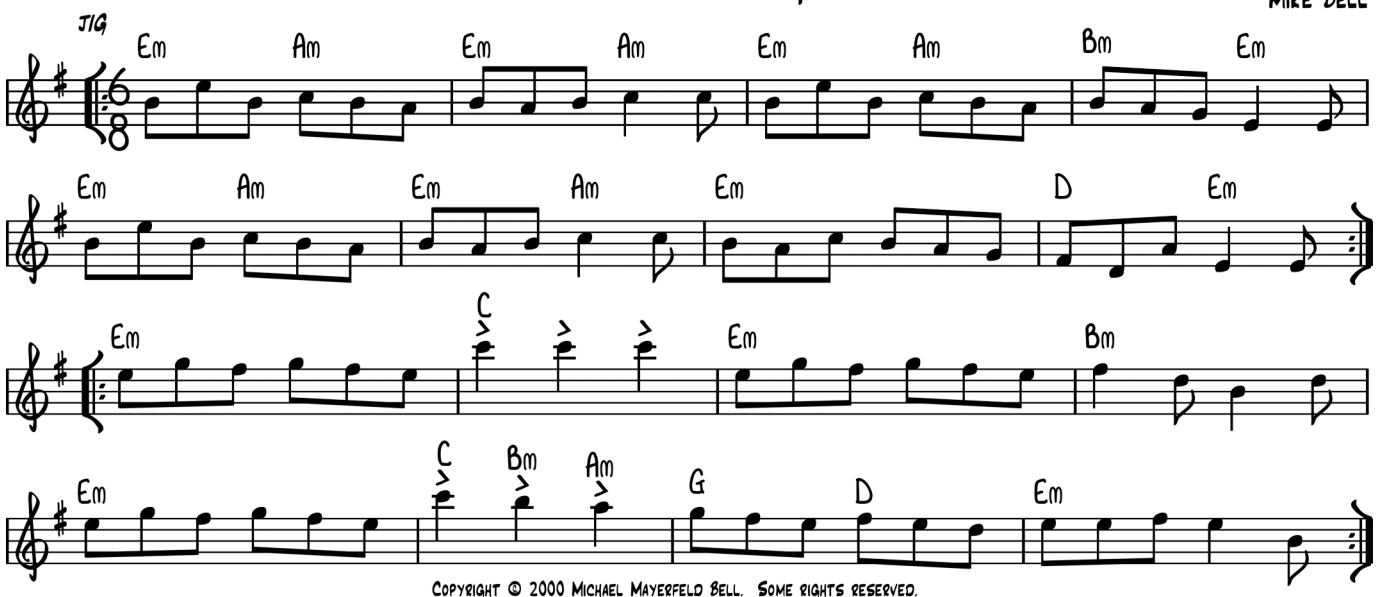
— For the Mohegan sachem, Mattabassett, who resisted the European colonization of Connecticut.

October Jig

Mike Bell



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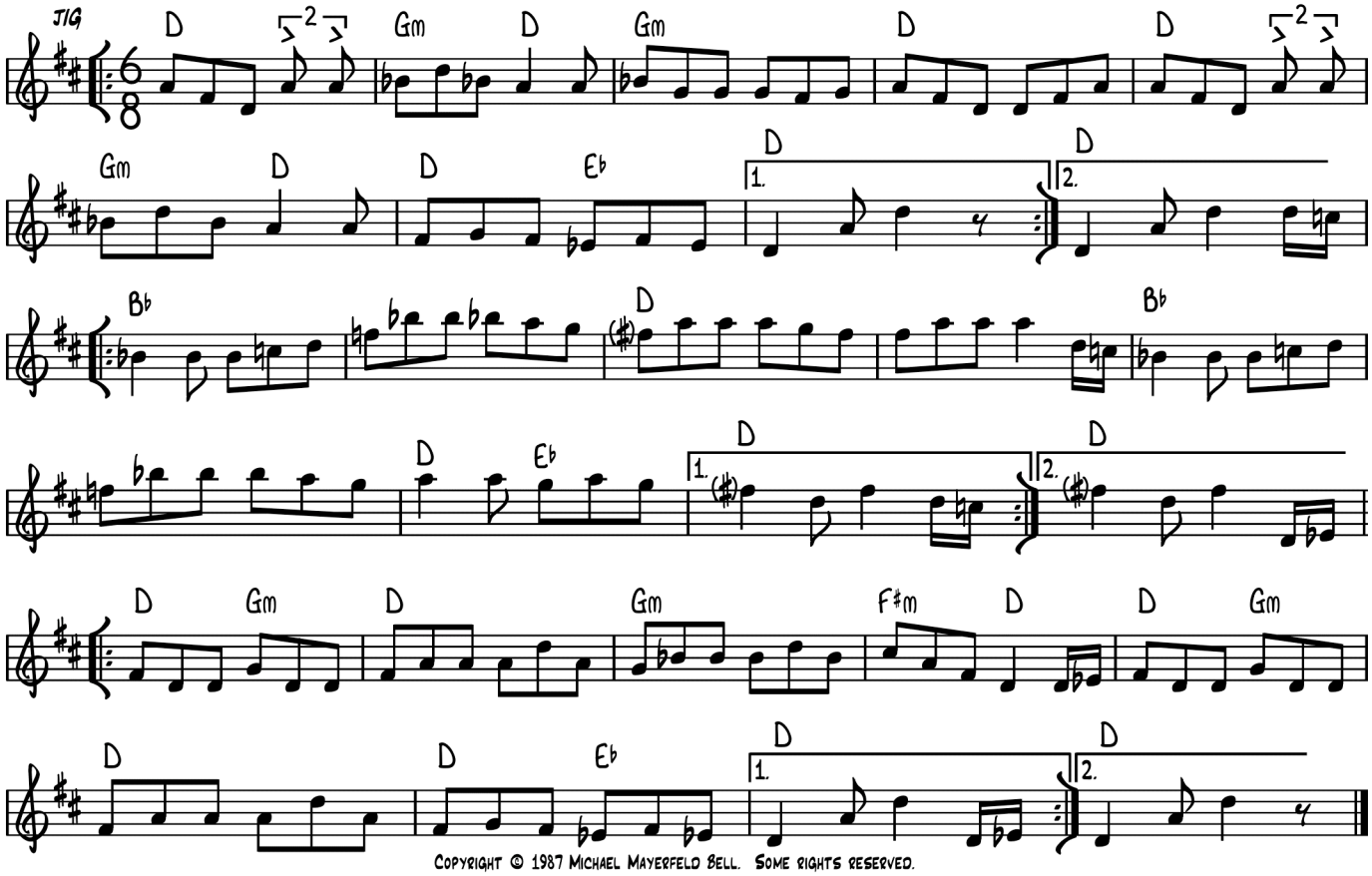
– Because it was October.

Quantum Chaos

Mike Bell



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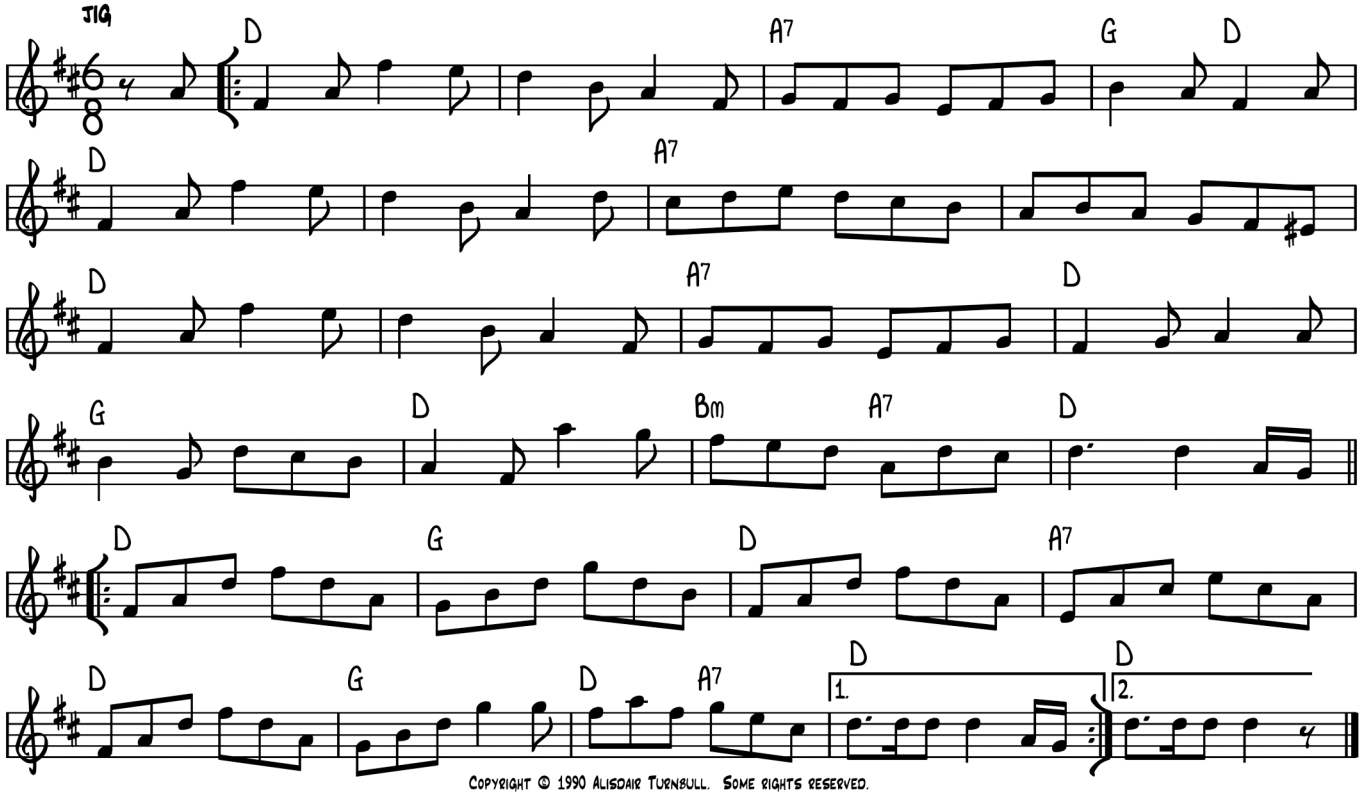
– A three-part tune for Malcolm Sanders, a fiddler-physicist and old friend.

Wilf the Beermat Tosser

Alisdair Turnbull



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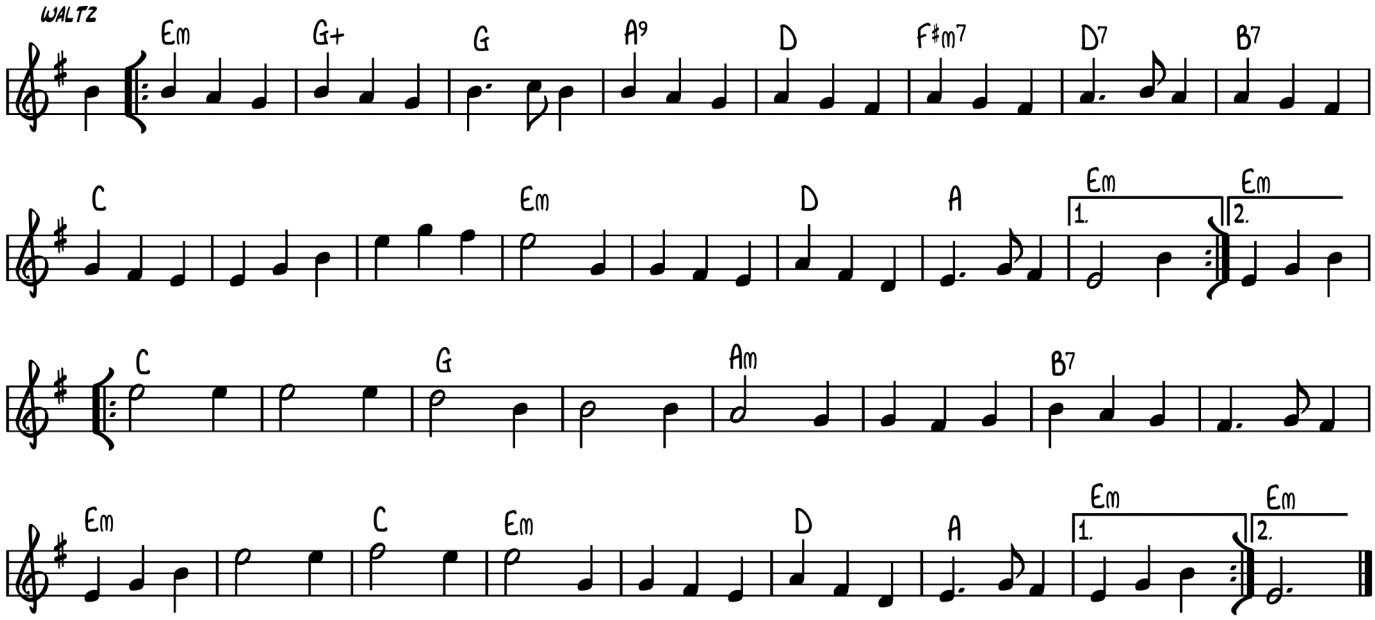
– One of two tunes Ali wrote for a friend's late, lamented bar hound. See also Ali's *Lament for Wilf*.

Waltzes

Bud's Waltz

Mike Bell



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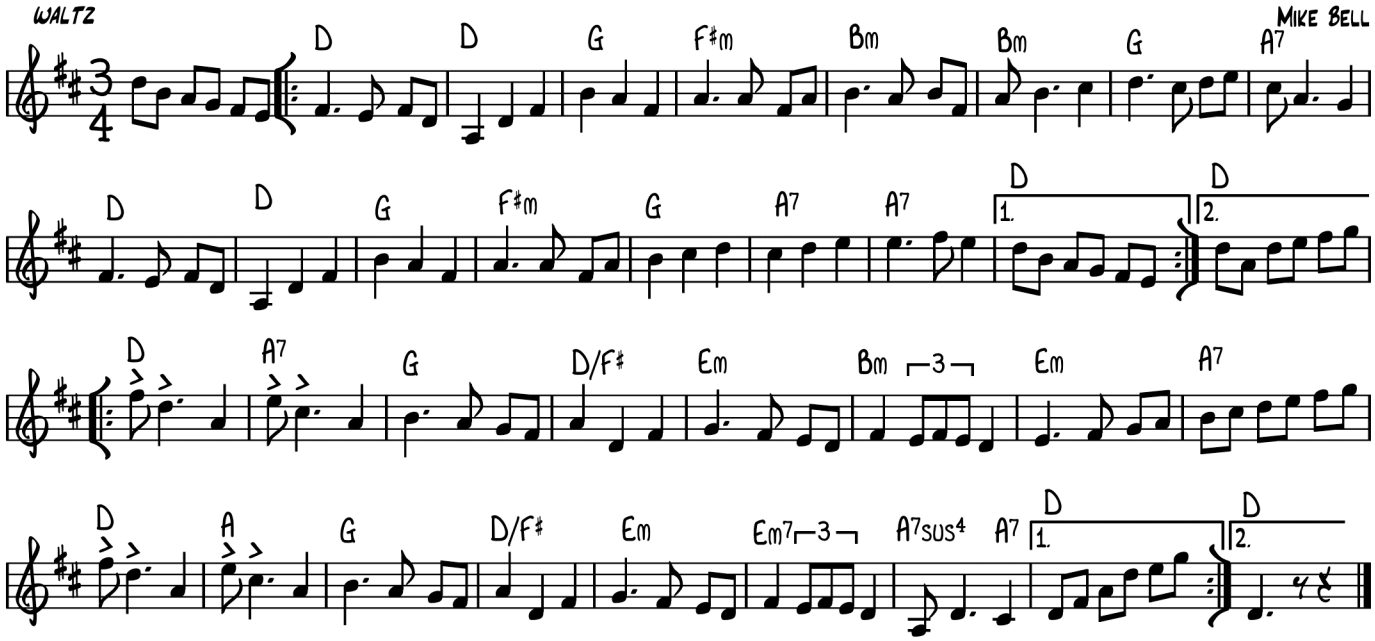
— For Bud Lichtenstein, who needed this at the time. The Massachusetts band *Swallowtail* made a lovely recording of this one.

The Cloud Forest

Mike Bell



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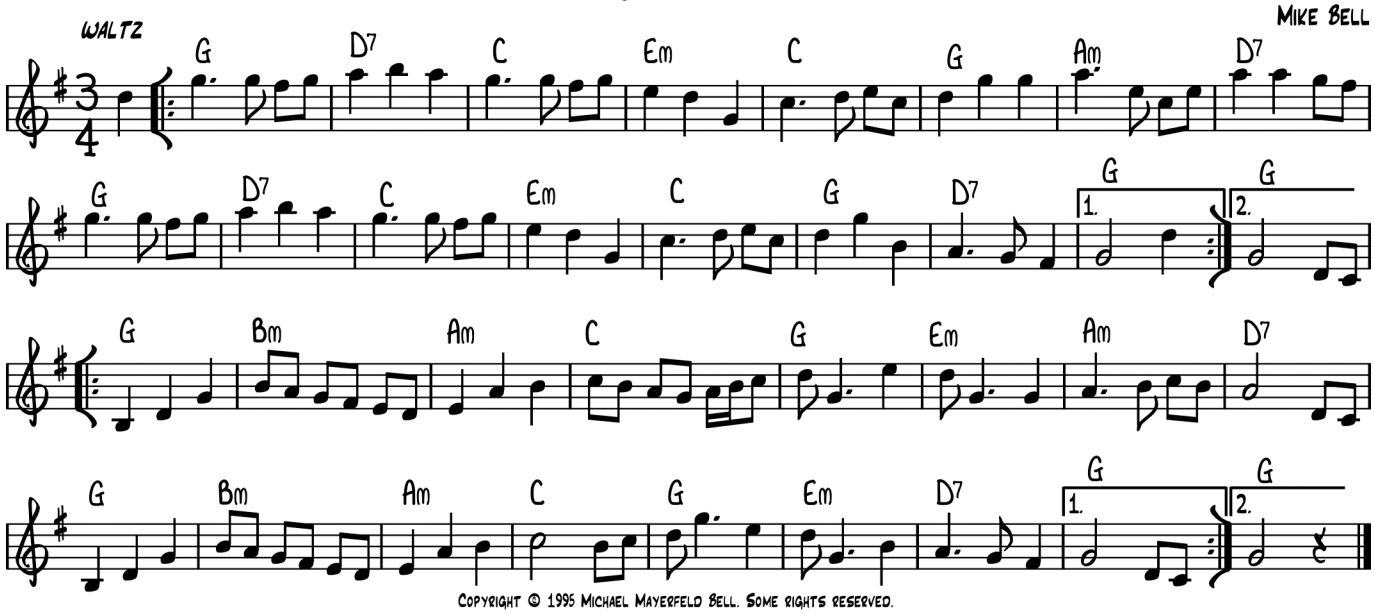
— In honor of the wedding of Eric and Sue, who discovered the cloud forest of love in Costa Rica. In 2002, the Barn Owls played this one on National Public Radio's longrunning show *A Prairie Home Companion*.

Dulcinea's Waltz

Mike Bell



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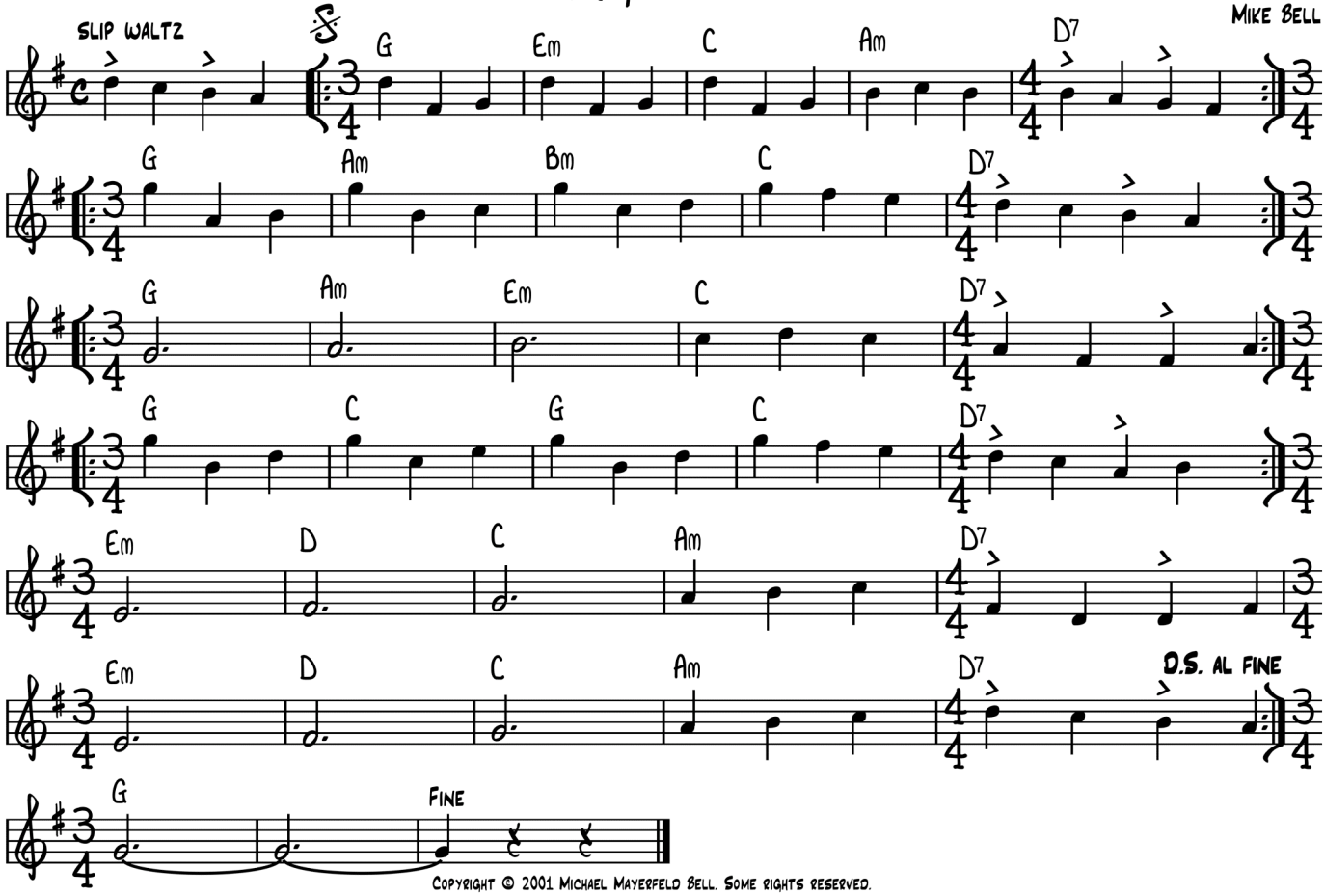
— For a gracious feline, long-lived and long-loved, of two good friends.

Falling for You

Mike Bell



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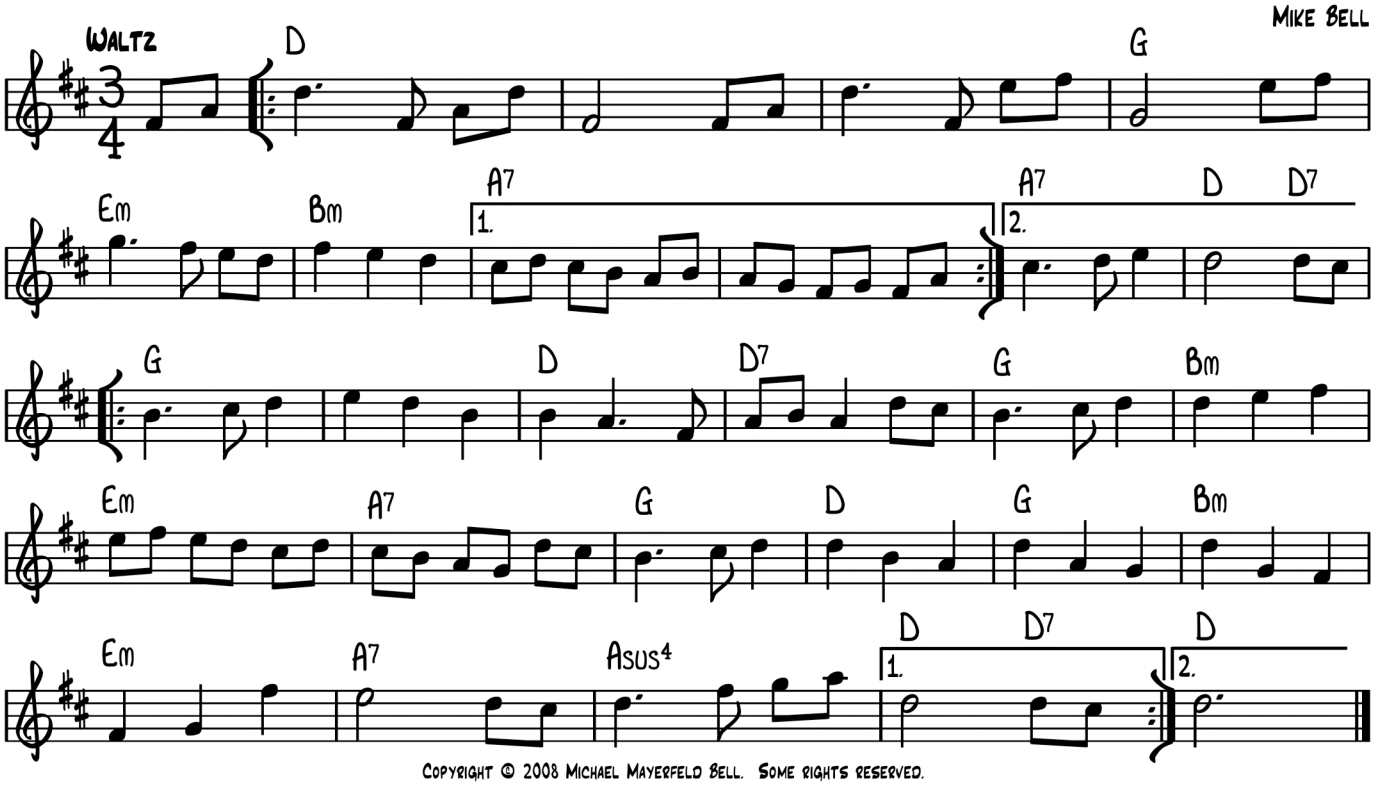
— In honor of the Wedding of Sharon and Jeff, July 7, 2001. See the note on slip waltzes at the end of the forward.

The Fiddle Loves the Pipes

Mike Bell



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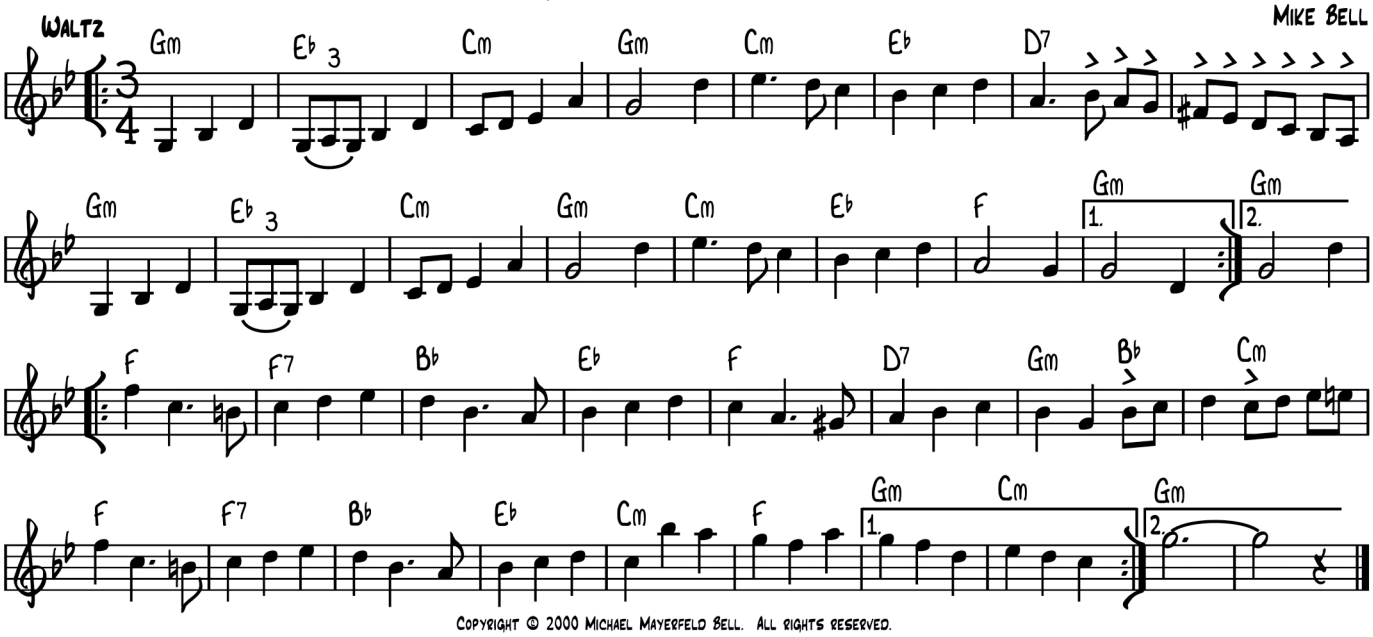
– For Keith and Maureen, on the occasion (more or less) of Maureen's 50th birthday.

The Great Hall Waltz

Mike Bell



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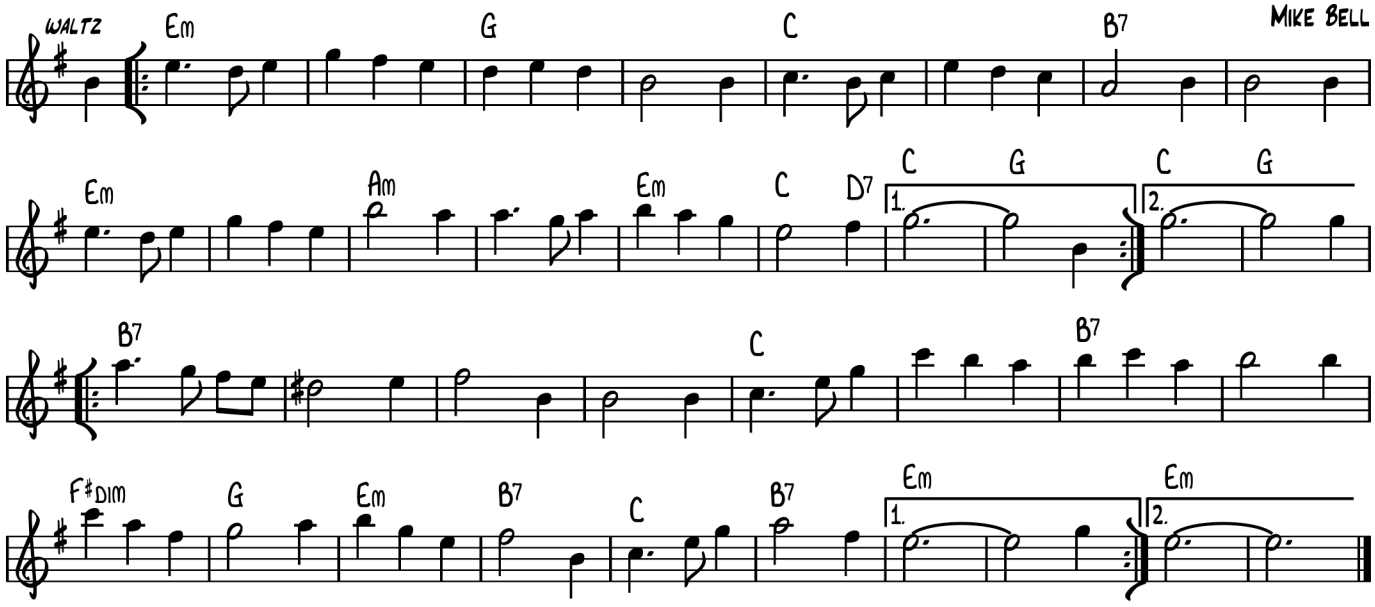
– In Honor of the Wedding of Jason and Heather, In the Great Hall, October 14, 2000.

Laura's Waltz



— For Laura, wherever she is now.

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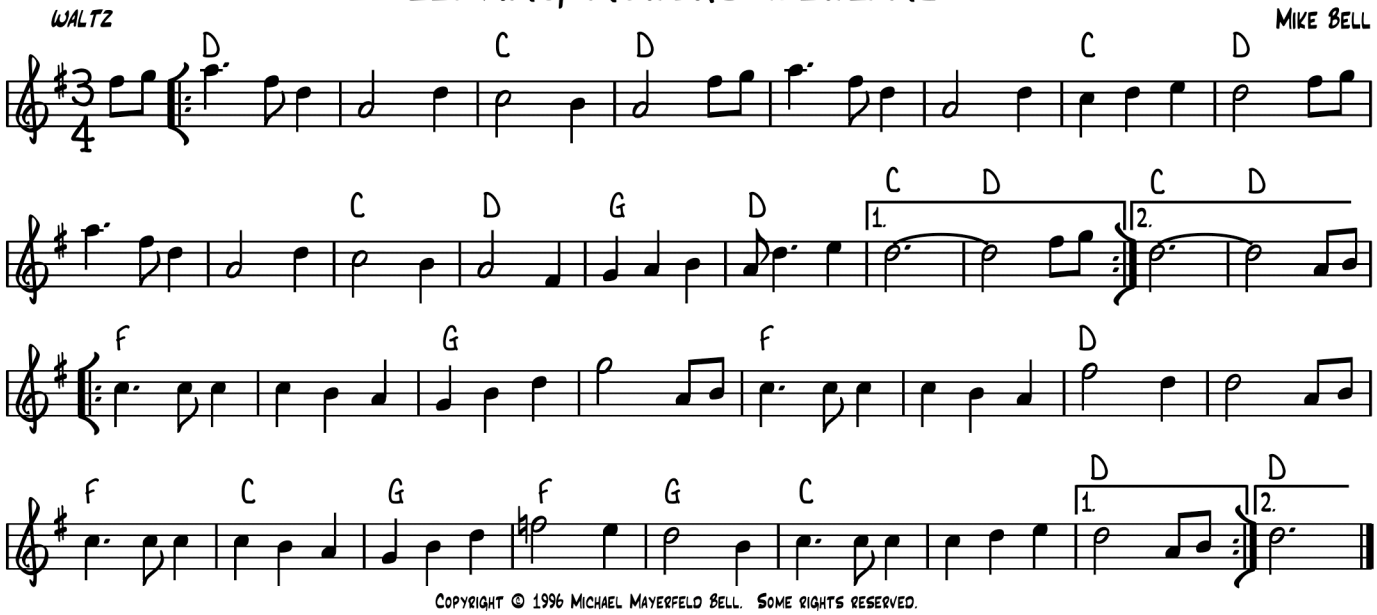
Leaving Northumberland



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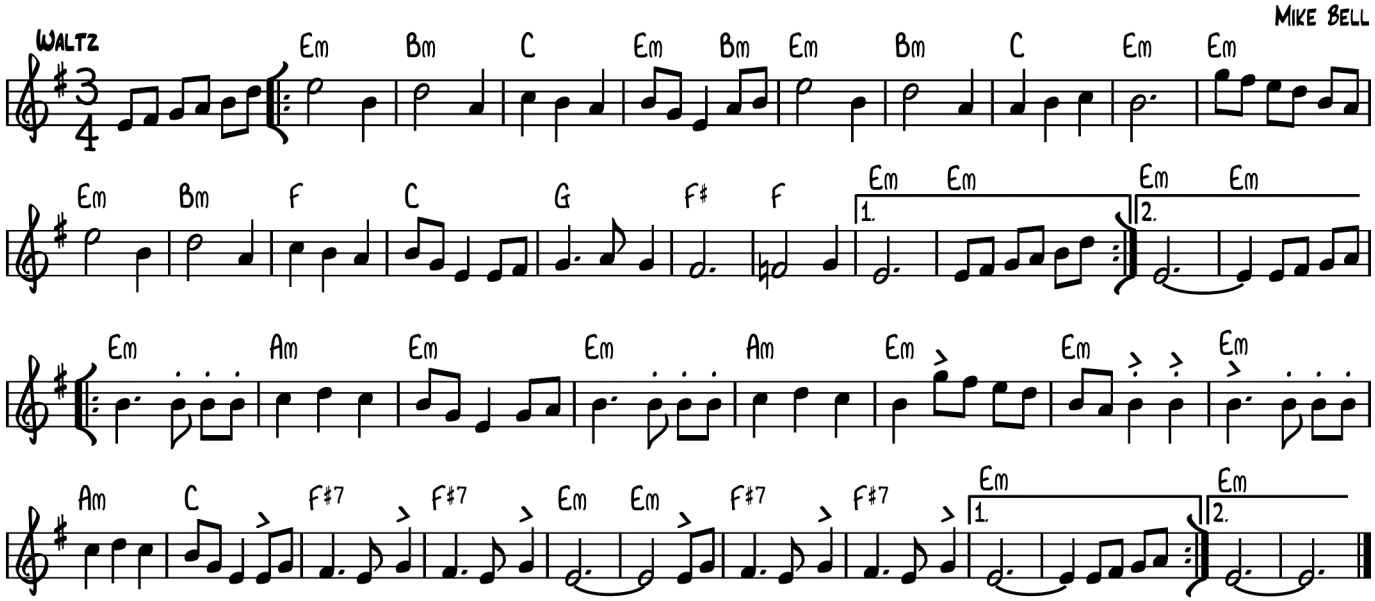
— For the gang at the Tap and Spile, Morpeth, Northumberland.

Planxty Mom

Mike Bell



– For Joe Lynch and his mom.

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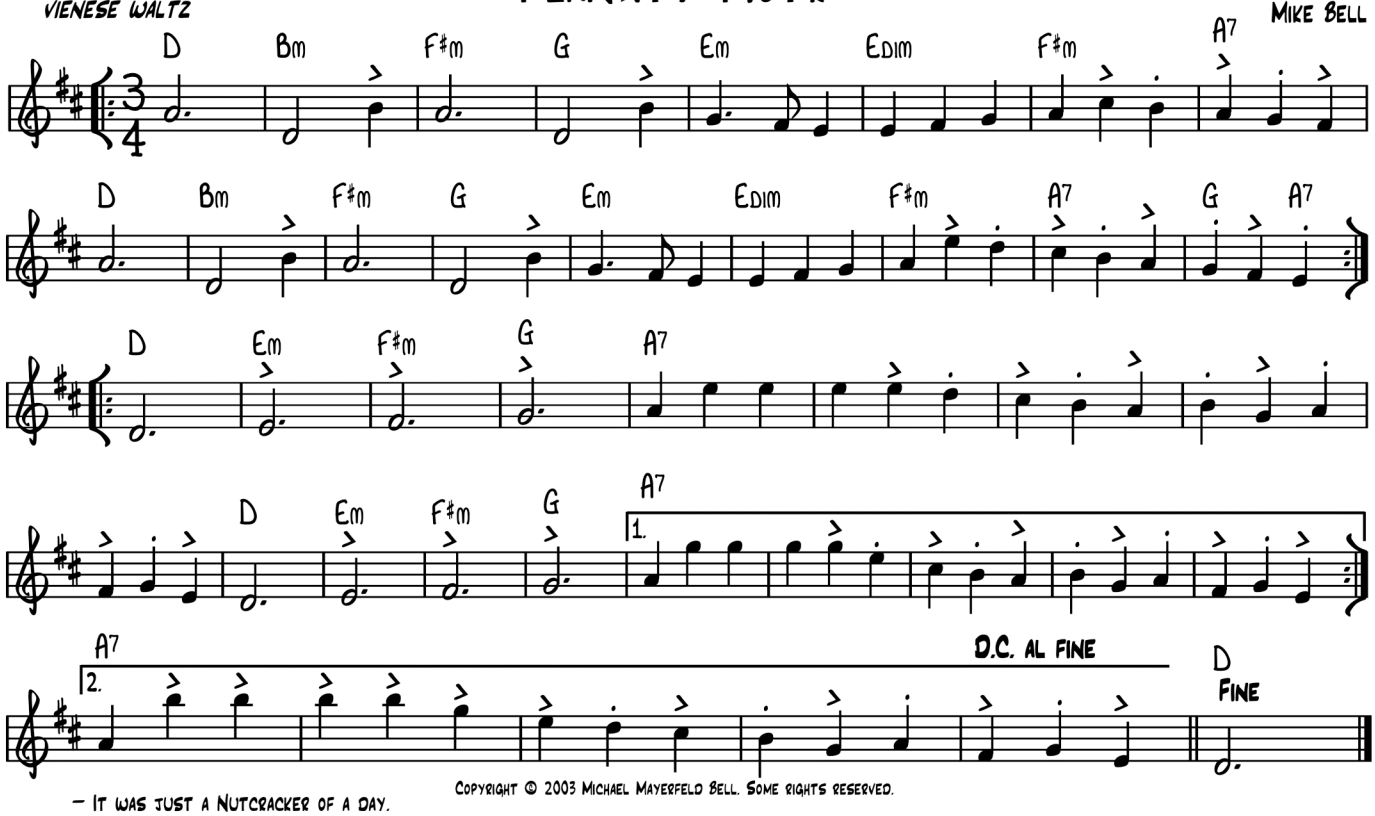
Planxty Piotr

Mike Bell



– It was just a Nutcracker of a day.

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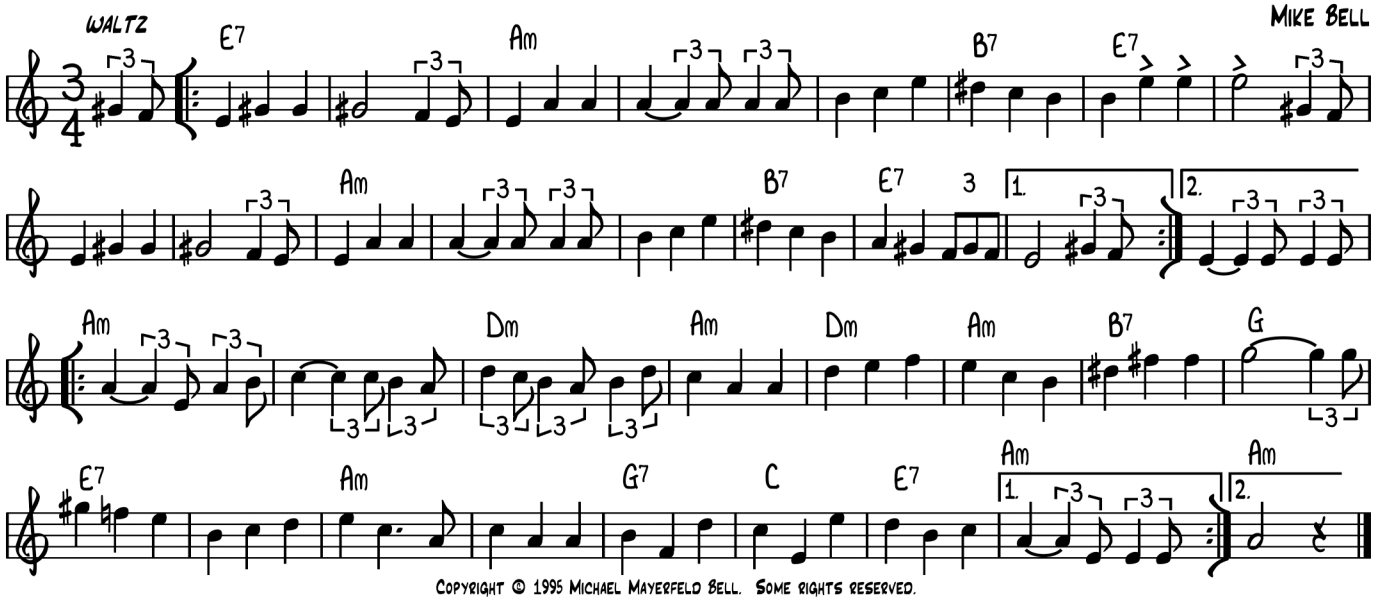
The Rooster and the Nightingale



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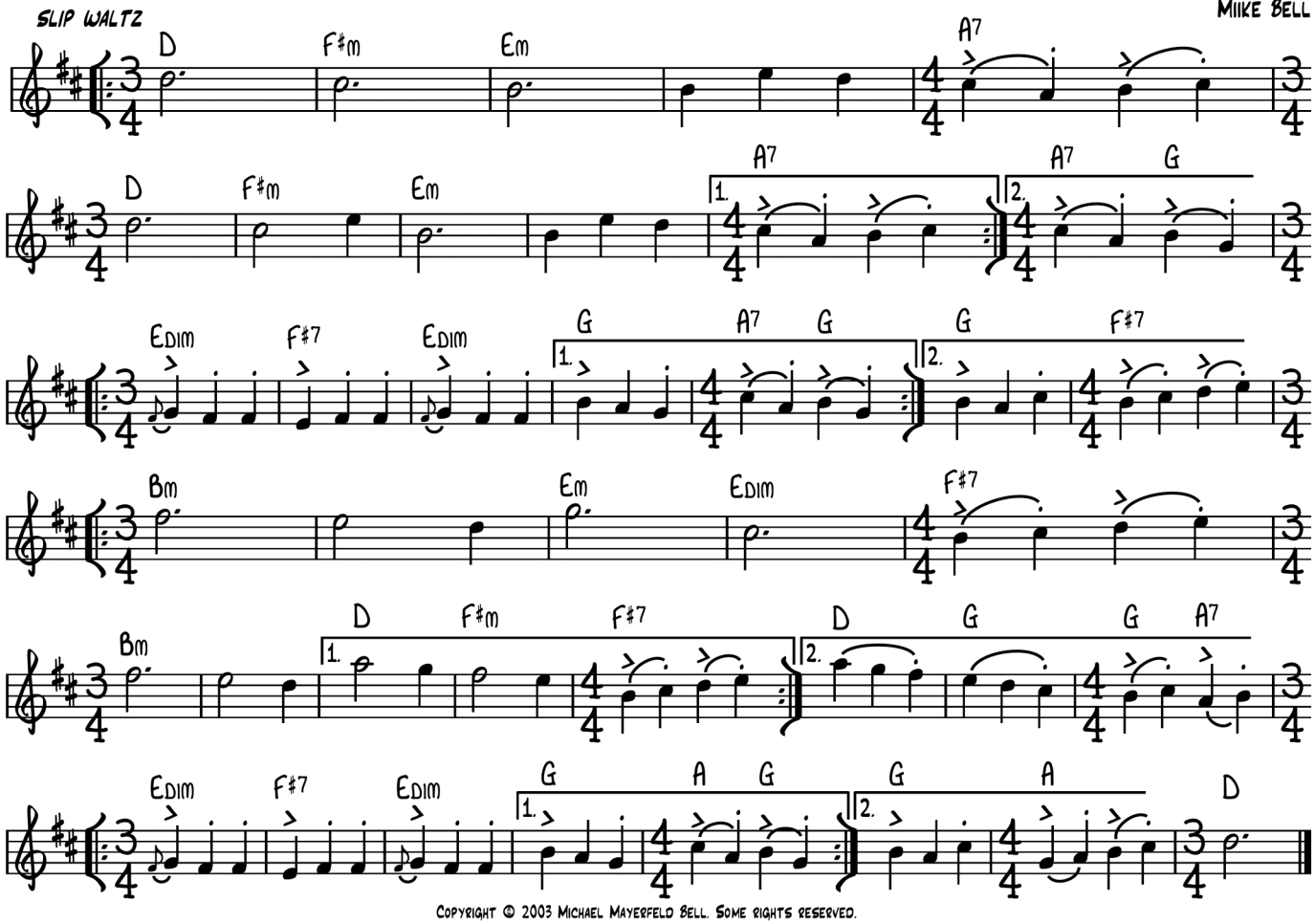
— In honor of the wedding of Joe Lynch and Lonna Nachtigal.

Stitchin' Time



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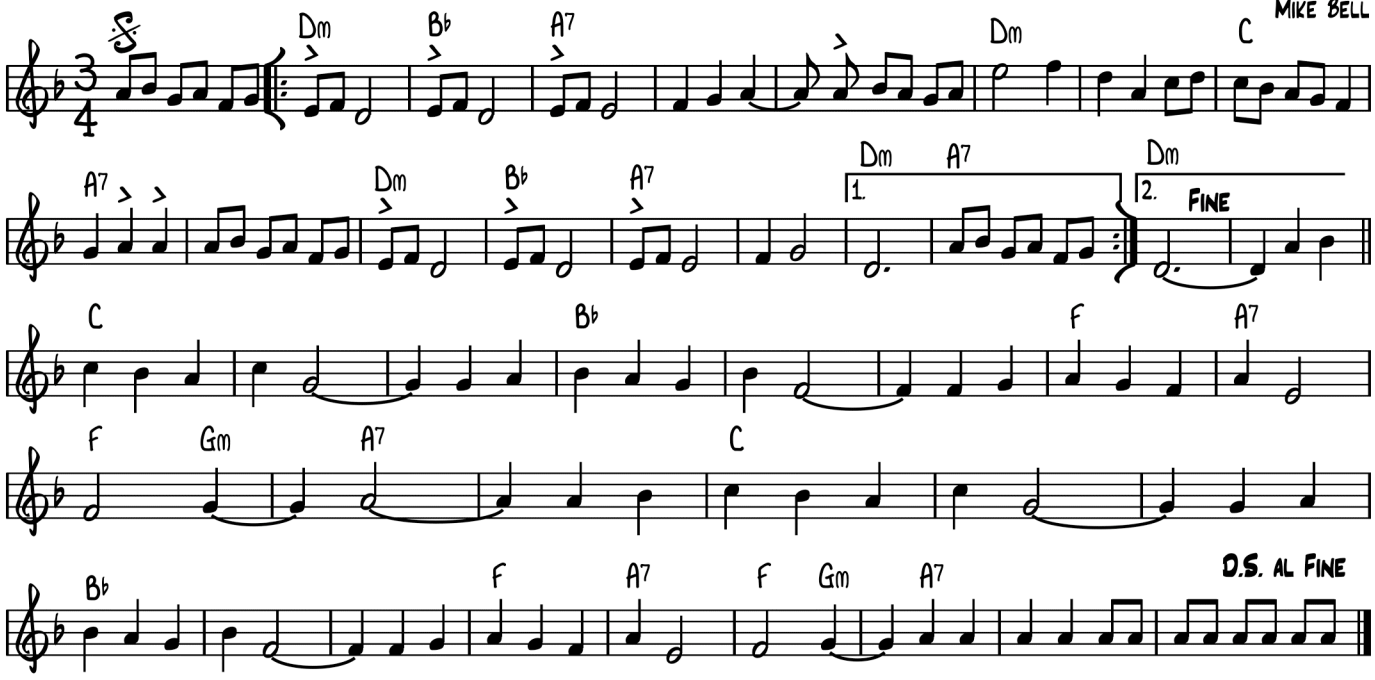
— Another slip waltz, named for how this rhythm stiches two time signatures together, as it does a couple as they dance to it. Have a look at the end of the forward for advice on dancing a slip waltz.

Waltzing with a Blackberry

Waltz

Mike Bell



– For a dear blackberry blonde.

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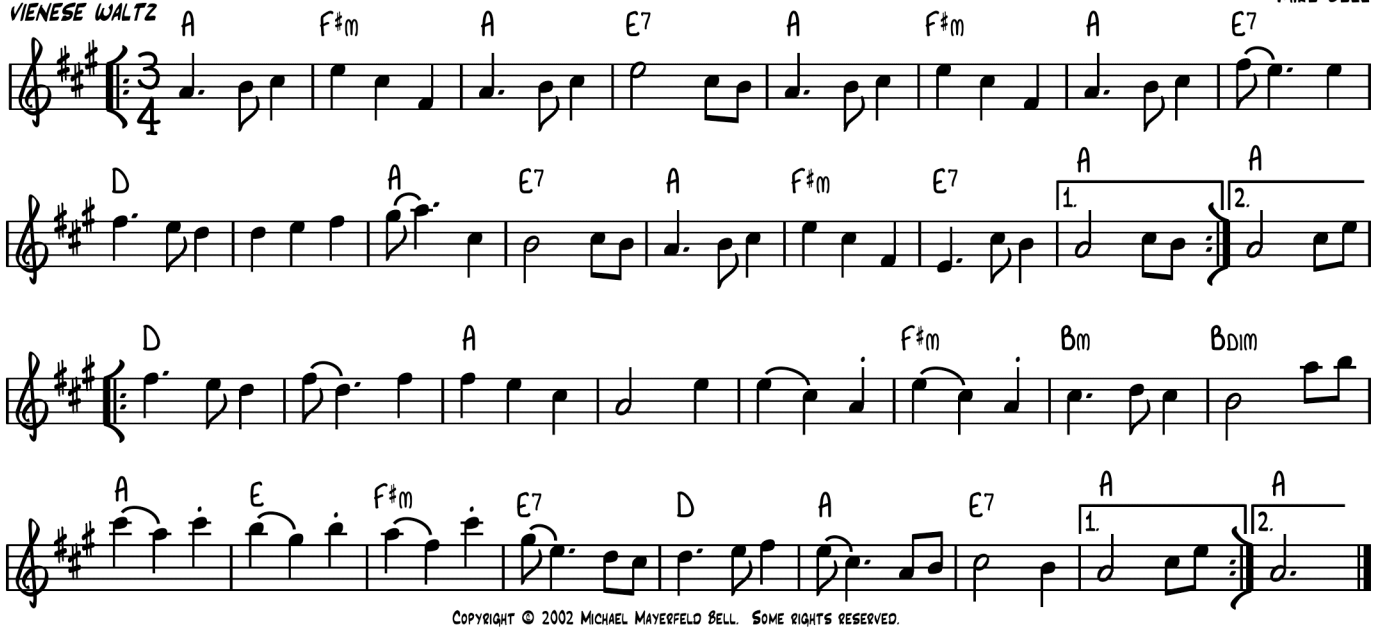
Waltzing with Wolfgang

Mike Bell

Viennese Waltz



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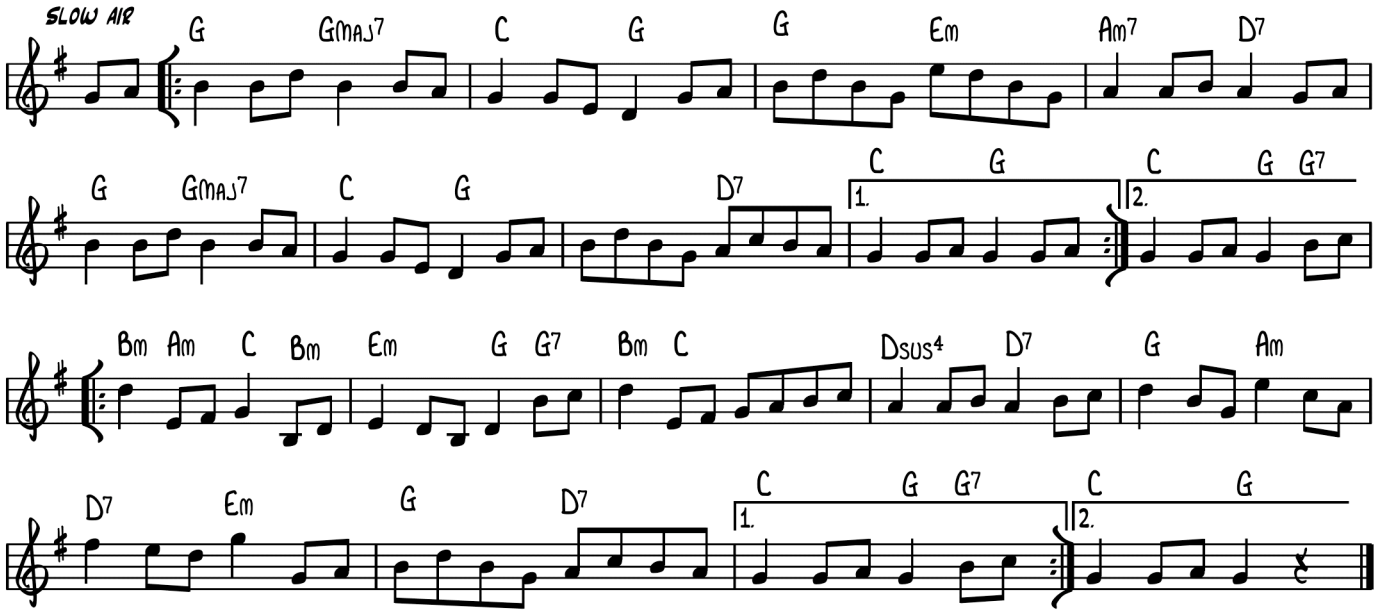
– Written on a day when I was channeling Mozart, for some reason.

Airs, Hornpipes, and Other Tunes

Closing the Cottage

Mike Bell



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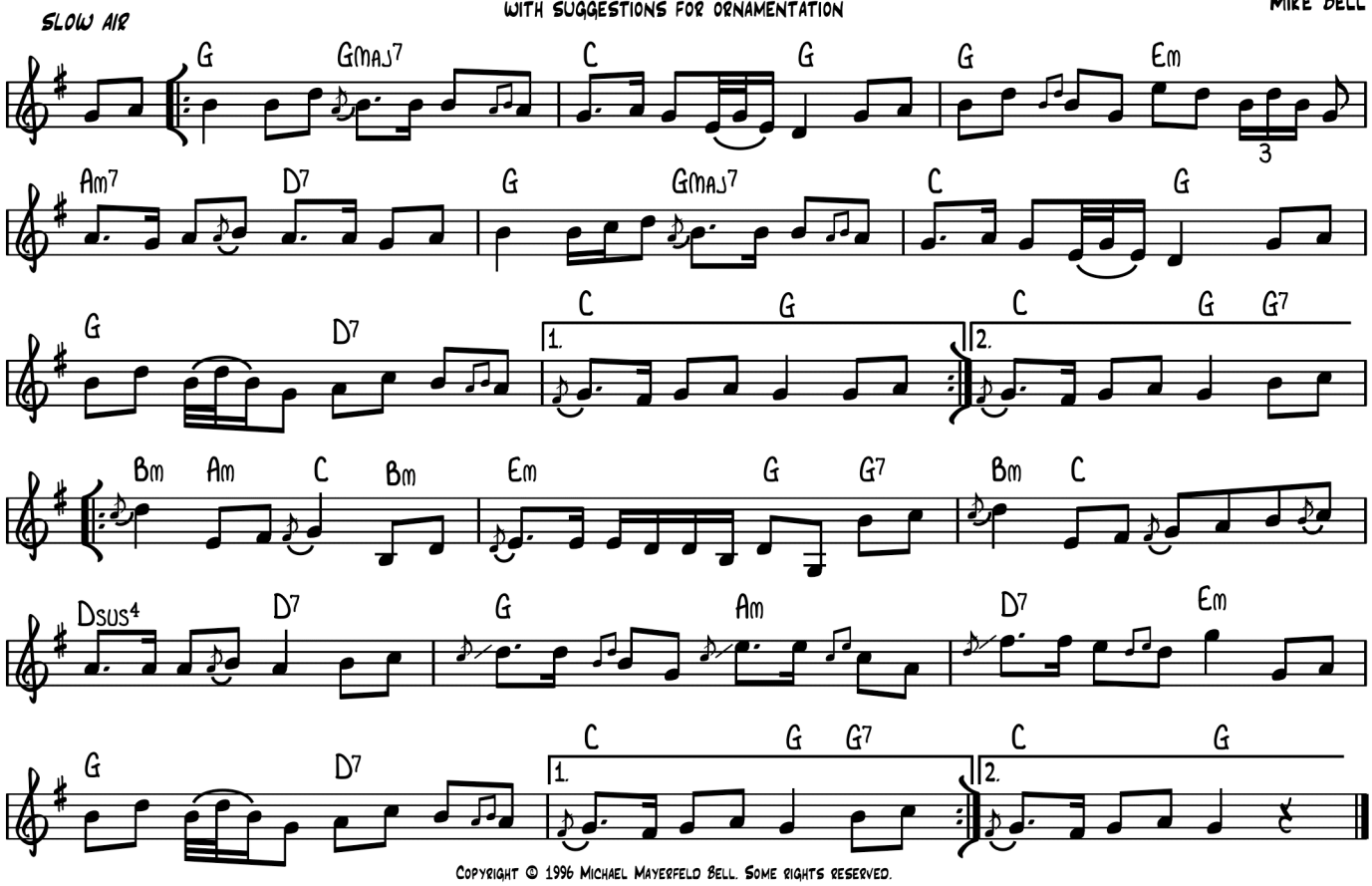
— The hardest tune for me to play. I wrote it as we were closing up our summer place for the season, sitting among the bags due to go down to the dock. My brother and I later played it at our father's memorial service.

Closing the Cottage

with suggestions for ornamentation

Mike Bell



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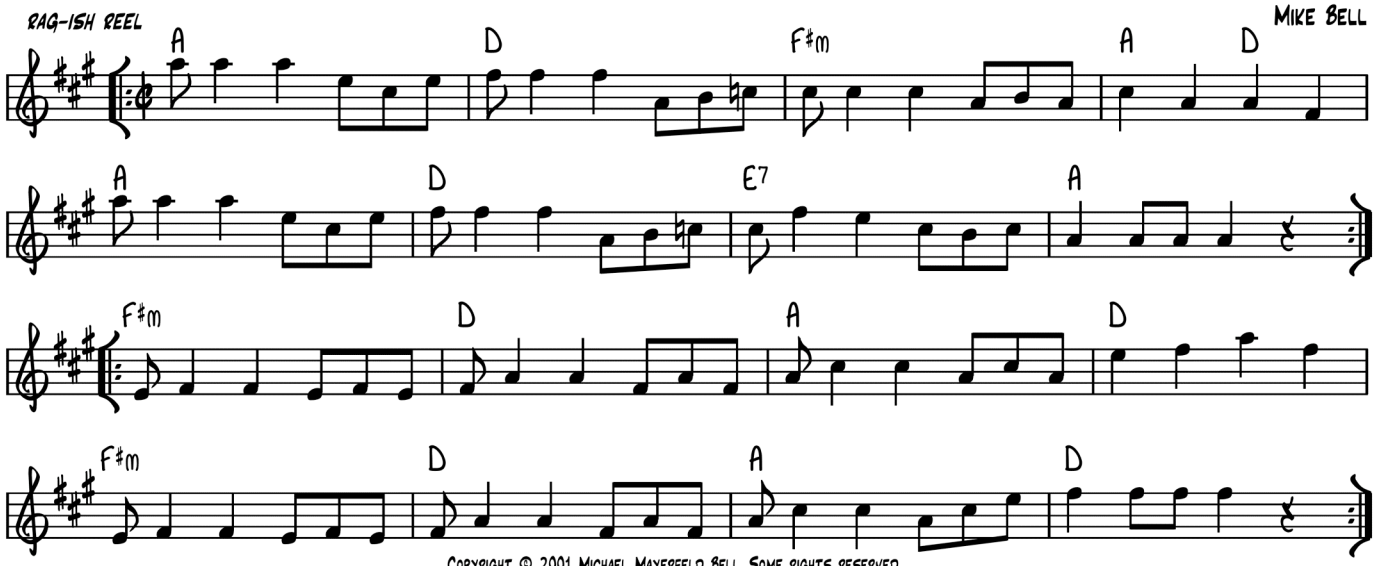
— I usually play this air highly ornamented, along these lines — particularly the second time through the tune.

Dragonfly

rag-ish reel

Mike Bell



– Just because it sounds like one.

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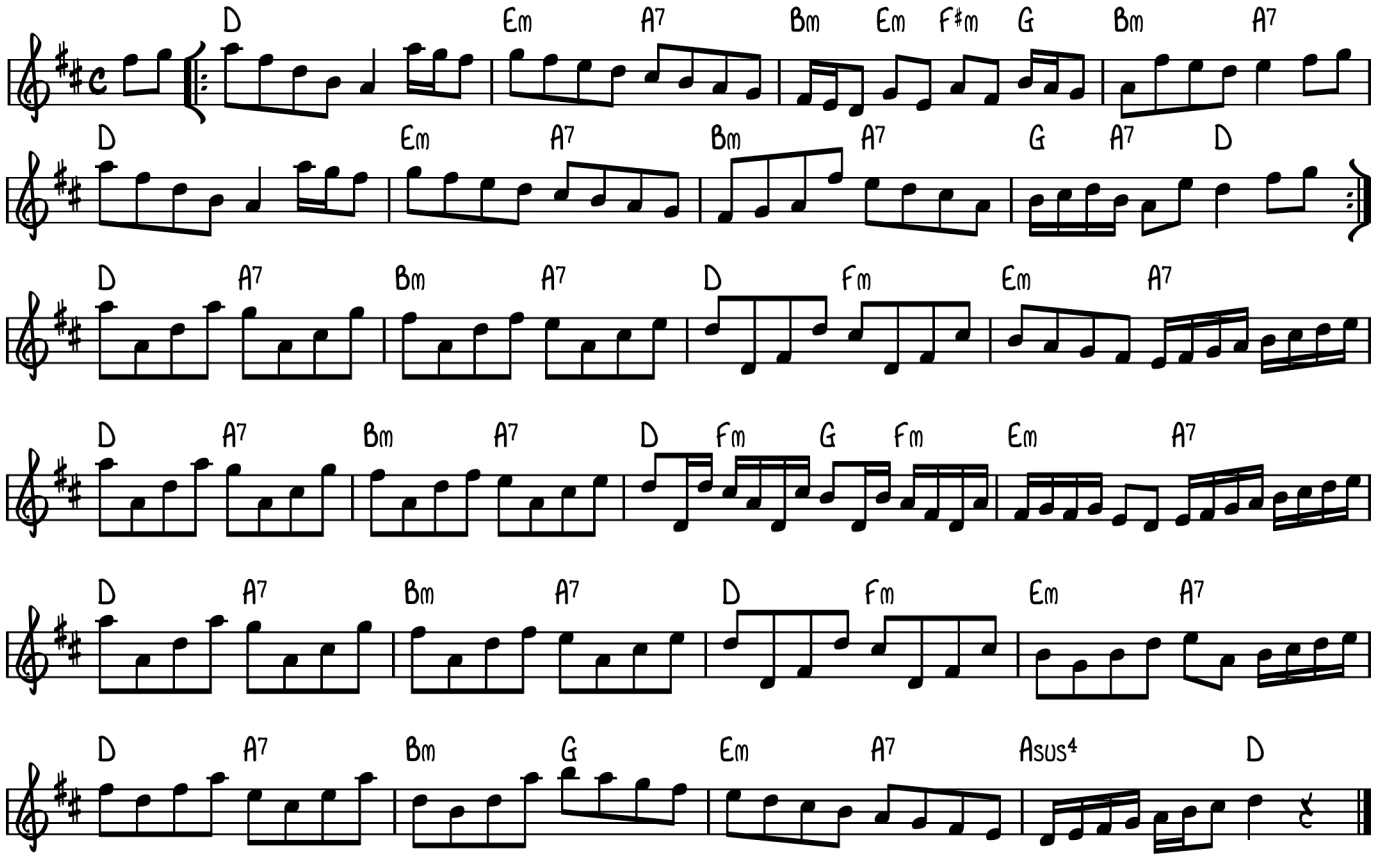
The First Notes of Spring

Lively but Gently

Mike Bell



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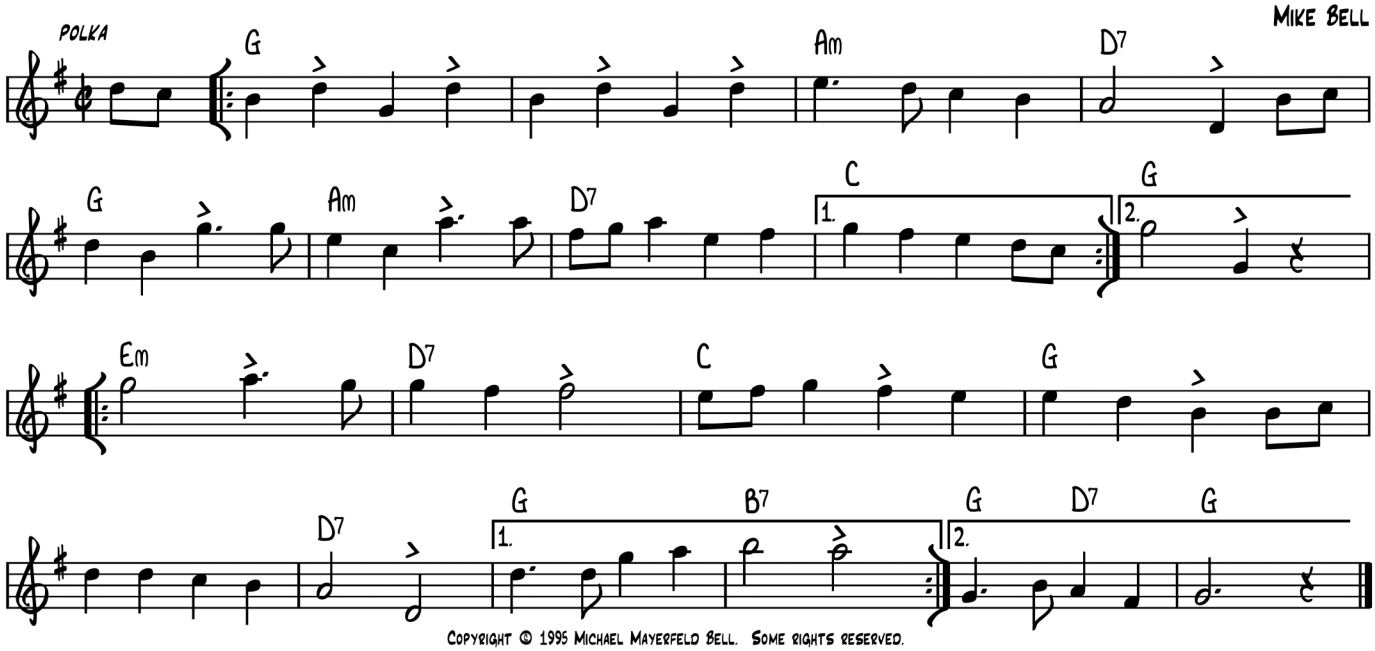
– A tune to welcome the sounds of life back to the land. Written for a friend who needed some good cheer.

The First Tomato

Mike Bell



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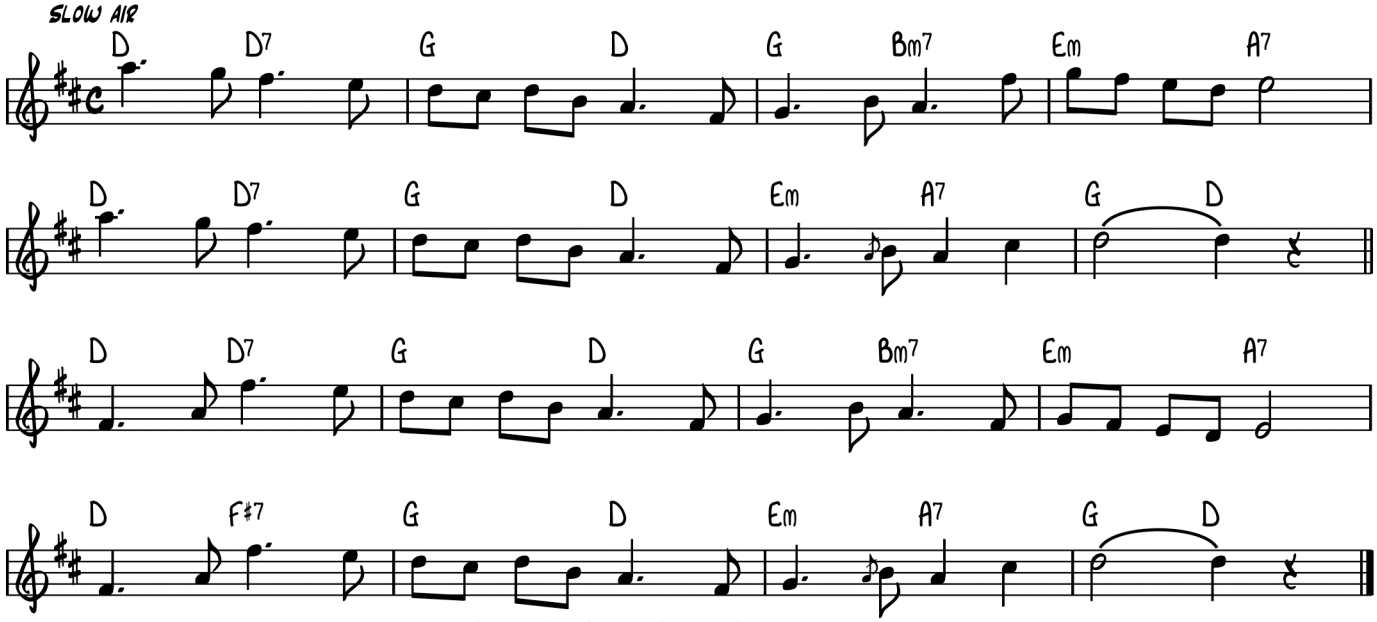
– There is no better tomato then the first one out of the year's garden. You watch it as a flower, which grows into a promising green ball, and ripens into sun-hot goodness. Such sweet anticipation.

Lament for Wilf

Alisdair Turnbull



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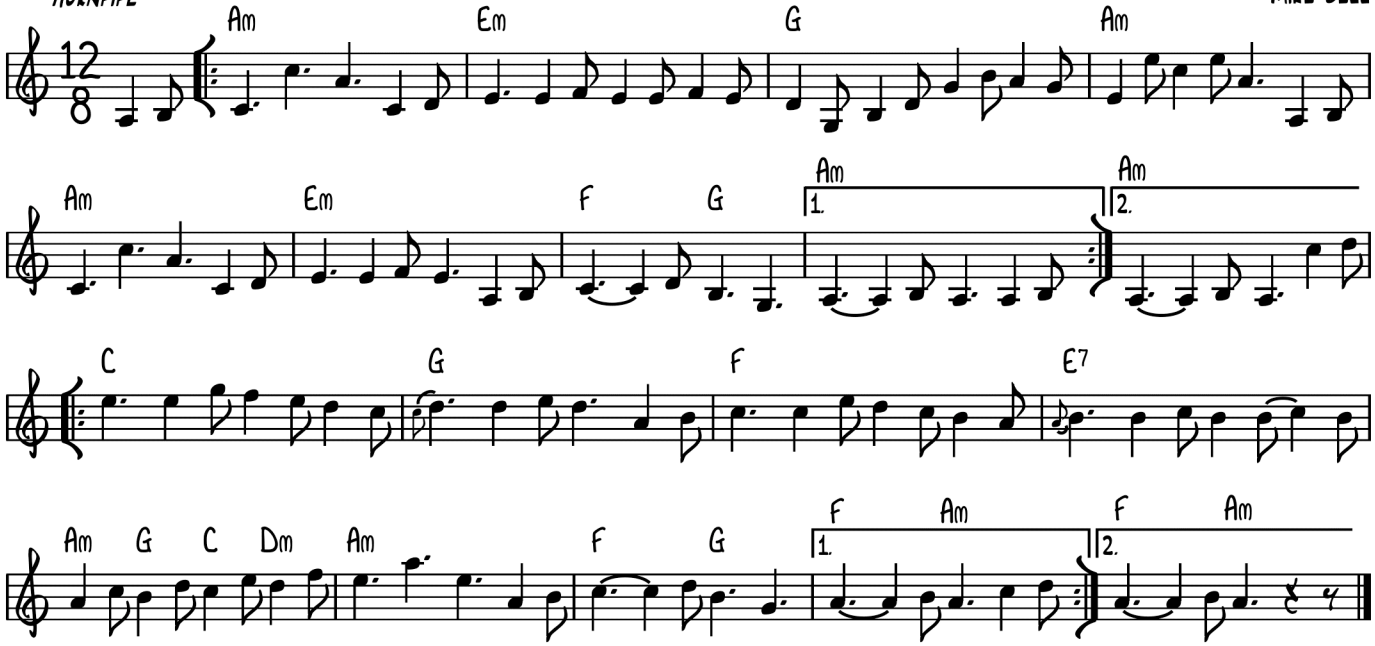
– Ali's other tune for Wilf. See also *Wilf the Beermat Tosser*..

Mabon

Hornpipe

Mike Bell



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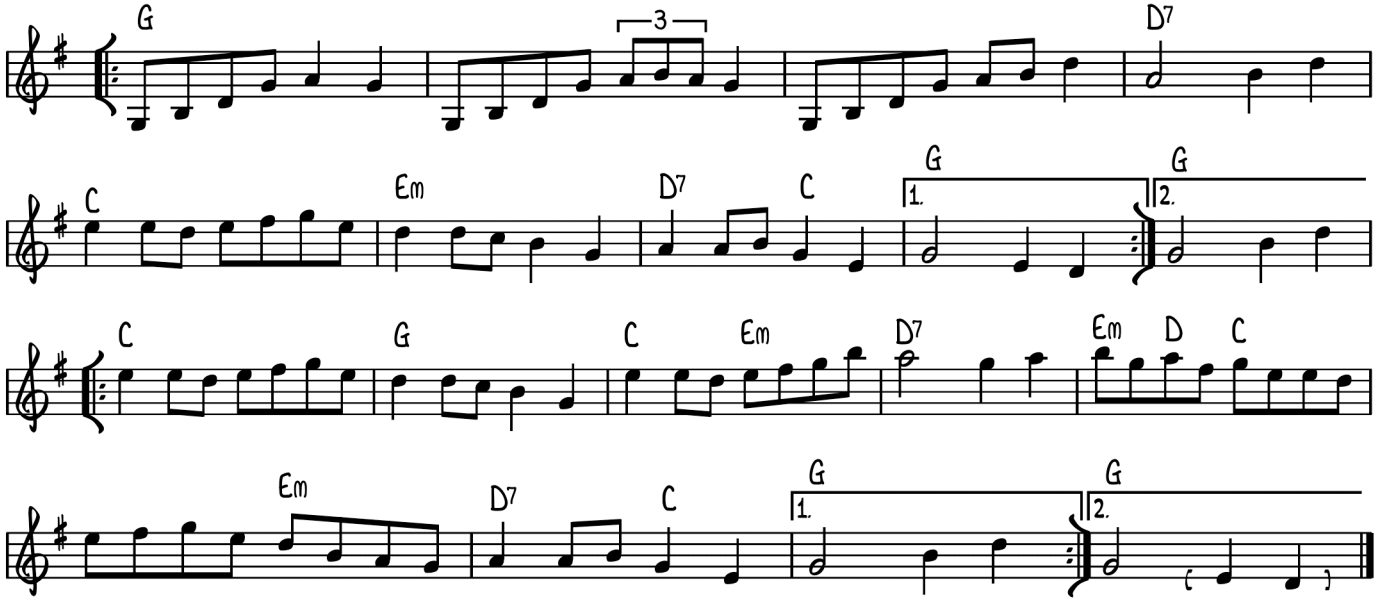
– Mabon is the name of a Welsh and British god, also venerated by the Roman solidiers along Hadrian's Wall. Mabon is favored with ever-lasting youth. I named the tune after this ancient aspiration.

Michael's Welcome to Eleanor

Slow March

Mike Bell



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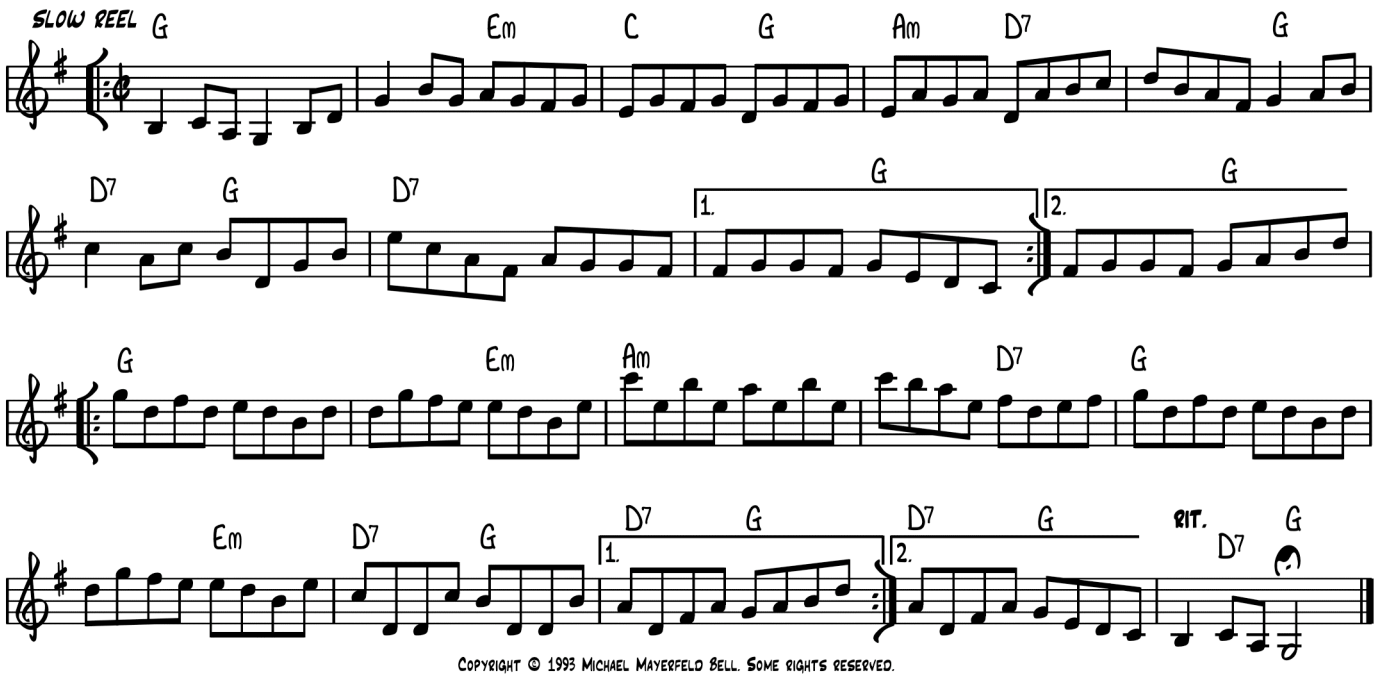
– Written upon the birth of our daughter, Eleanor.

Quinnetuckqut

Mike Bell



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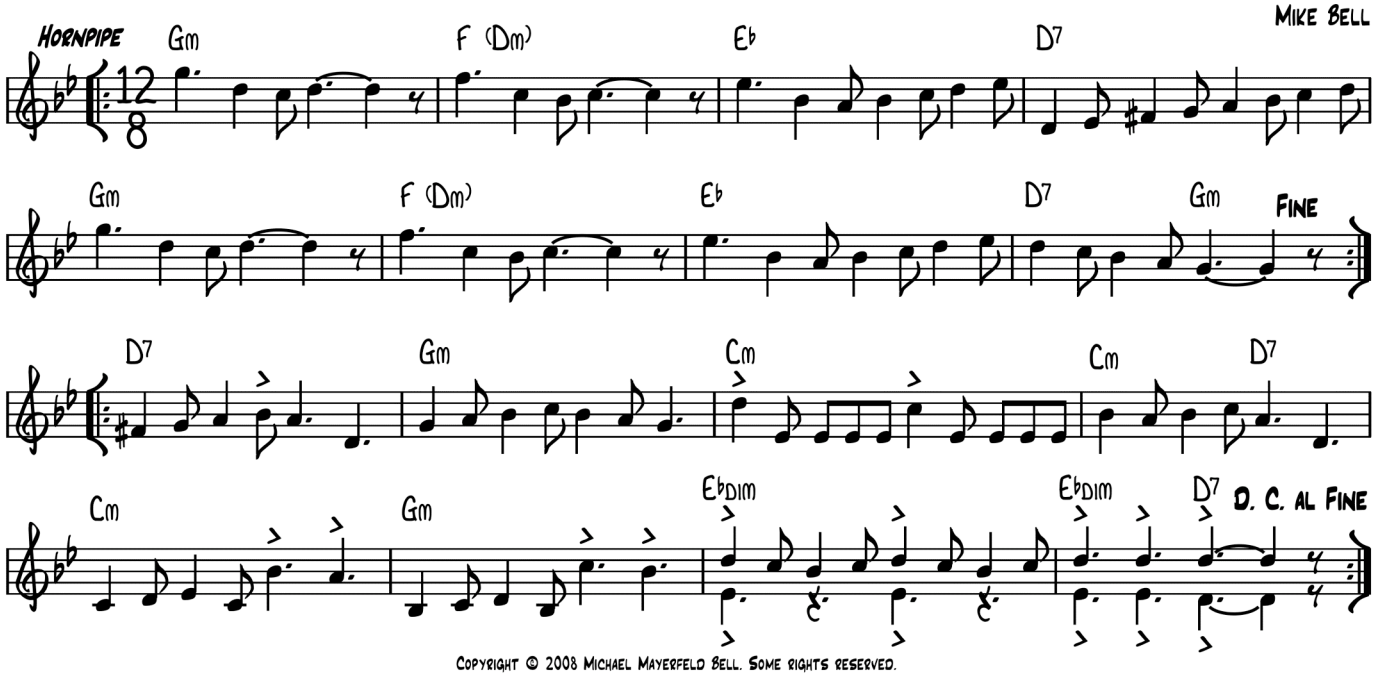
— The original native American name for Connecticut, the state where I was living at the time. It is reputed to mean "land beside the long river."

Silverberry's Chalice

Mike Bell



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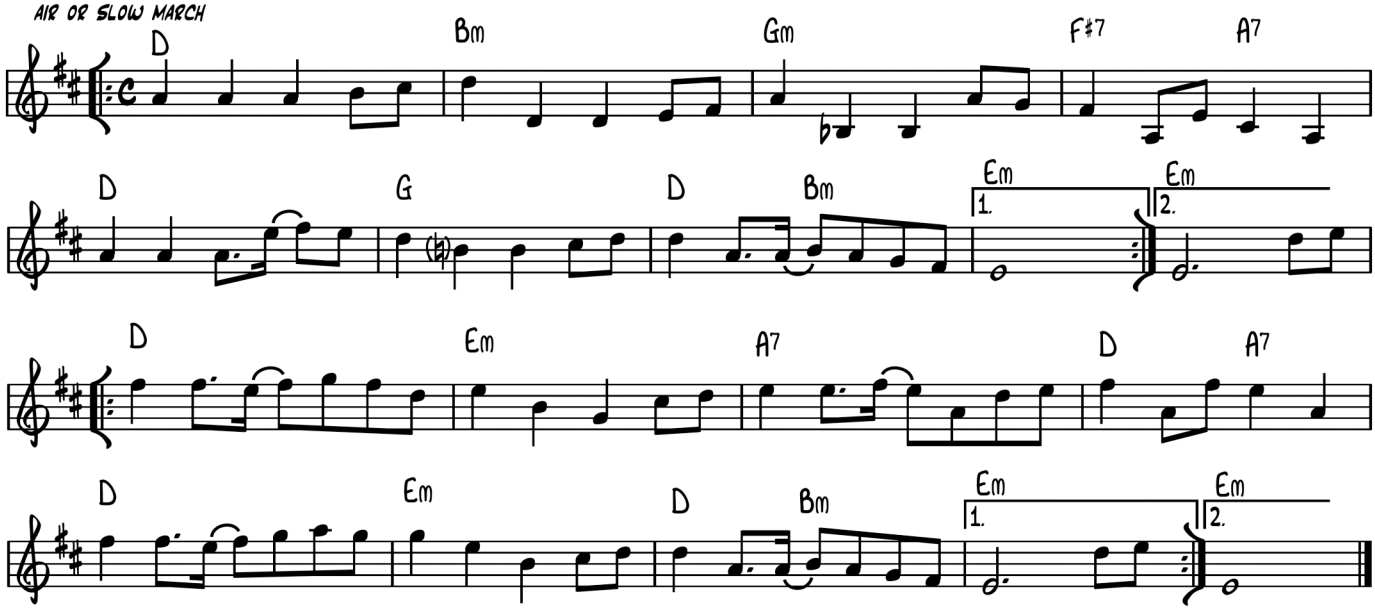
— For Diane and twenty-five years of the best potion ever.

Two Braids

Mike Bell



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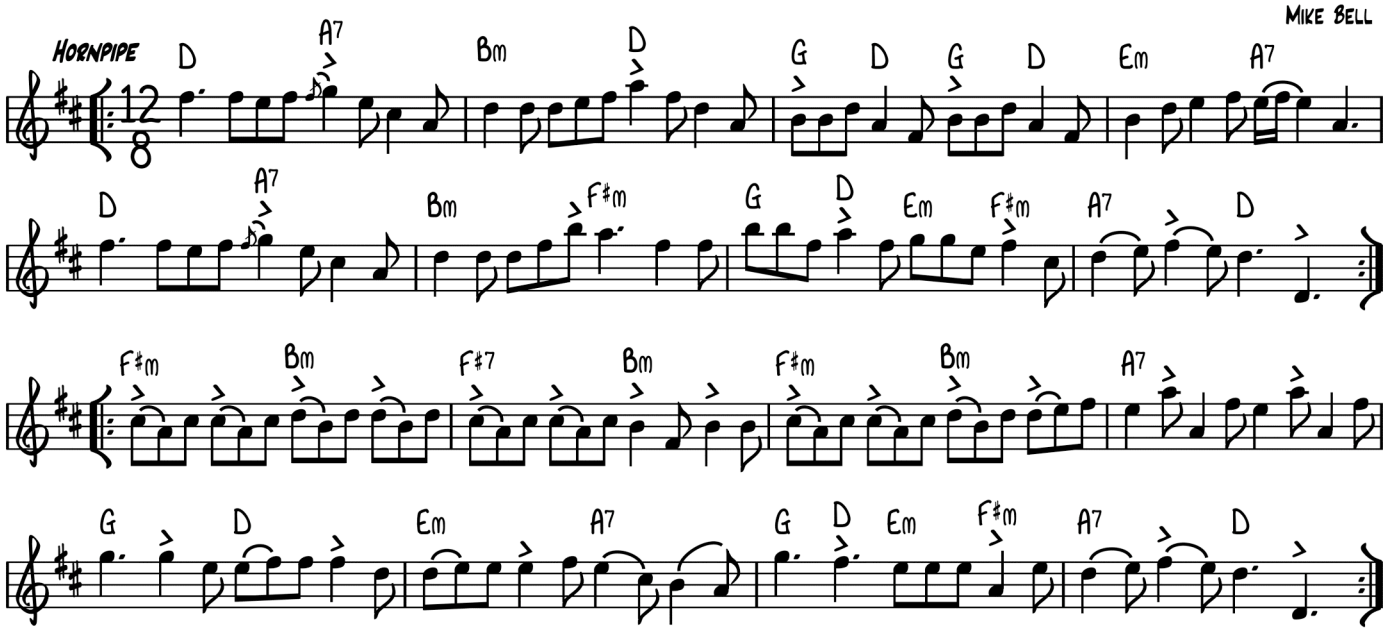
– The sight from behind of my wife and daughter, sitting together. It also works well in A, which is where I usually play it, up high.

Ursina's Ramble

Mike Bell



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– For a little bear from Switzerland who rambled to America. The B-part of this one quotes a pipers' tune from Scotland, *Athole Highlanders*, but sets the same pitches in a different key.