The Marionette
Music by Phil Keaggy

Most recently released as a moving instrumental on the 1996 Phil Keaggy Club Recording, *Acoustic Sketches*, "The Marionette" began its life, not as an instrumental, but as the accompaniment to a story by Calvin Miller of the same title, read by its author for a radio program on the imagination produced by Michael Card. Both the instrumental version and a version with Miller's reading were released on Phil's 1993 limited-edition cassette, *Backroom Trax Volume Five*. As beautiful as "The Marionette" is as an instrumental, the brilliance of this composition can only be fully appreciated on hearing it accompanying the story that inspired it. Phil's playing follows Miller's reading phrase by phrase, cadence by cadence, changing tempo and mood moment by moment to support the story.

Astonishingly, despite what appears to be meticulous craftsmanship, "The Marionette" was *improvised* within an hour of Phil's first hearing of Miller's reading! Andy Asmus, Phil's road manager at the time of the recording, described the event as follows:

> It was, I believe, summer of '93. That day (I think after a walk in Edwin Warner Park), we loaded the gear up and headed for Mole End Studio on Michael Card's property outside of Franklin, Tennessee. Mike, producer Phil Naish, and engineer Ronnie Brookshire were there, and Mike explained the idea to Phil. We then listened to the story once, after which Phil went into the tiny studio and played along with it, completely blowing everyone away. They were falling on the floor. I knew, though, that what went down was mostly trademark motifs, and that he could easily improve. I kept my mouth shut, until he mentioned the same thing after coming in and listening to the playback. I encouraged him to listen carefully to the story, and he went in for one more pass. Mike and gang, however, were so thrilled with the first one that they didn't think it necessary. The next time through, Phil absolutely nailed it. Listen for the marionette strings to be cut (*ping!*), and for the slump to the floor. It was chilling to watch.

Phil recorded "The Marionette" with his Olson guitar tuned down a half step; for simplicity the transcription is relative to standard tuning. As is appropriate for an accompaniment to spoken word, the composition does not have a regular tempo or meter. The many changes of meter in the transcription are intended merely as an aid to displaying Phil's phrasing. The tempo varies according to the storyline, quickening as the tension builds in the story, and then becoming more stately for the joyful resolution. The tonal center similarly changes from E major to E minor and back several times; for simplicity the tune is notated in E major throughout.

From the very first chord—an unusual and evocative voicing of an E dominant 9th—it is clear the listener will be taken on an interesting musical journey. Indeed, much of the musical and emotional content of the story can be summarized in two chords: the opening E dominant 9 chord, and the E Major 9 chord beginning the final movement in bar 79.

Though the opening E9 chord is based on an E major triad, the subtle dissonances of the dominant 7th and 9th intervals evoke the poignant longing of the marionette (the opening line is, "Marionetta wanted to be a real, live girl"), and also convey tension and anxiety, a foreboding of the serious decision Marionetta will soon confront. Phil's voicing combines notes at high positions with the open low E string to create an almost orchestral fullness. These two aspects of the very first chord foreshadow techniques Phil uses throughout the piece: Many of the chords and harmonies later in the piece extend basic major and minor triads with 9ths, 6ths, and 4ths to create emotional ambiguity or tension. And, as in many of his compositions in the key of E, Phil very creatively uses open strings with fretted notes at high positions to create spacious voicings, interesting harmonies, or drones.

The intervals comprising the E Major 9 chord in bar 79 differ from those in the opening dominant ninth chord only in having the dominant 7th raised a half step—but what a difference this is! The

emotion is totally changed. There is still a poignant quality to it, but it expresses joy now, not tension. Phil's use of this chord is a delightful example of musical economy. By playing it with a reverse arpeggio (the notes moving from highest to lowest), he expresses the falling of Marionetta when her last string is cut, but by his choice of harmony, he simultaneously makes it clear that this is a joyful event, not a disaster (as some of Marionetta's puppet friends believe). All this is expressed with one chord, in one beat. The whole story can be summarized in the move from E9 to EM9, from tension to release and fulfillment. If you learn nothing else from this tune, learn these two chords and study how Phil has used them.

The remainder of the composition provides the player with many challenges and rewards. Even simple major and minor triads often appear in unusual voicings and positions. Several of the extended harmonies are built with difficult fingerings that stretch across many frets. Small numbers in the standard staff provide suggested left hand fingerings to guide you in executing some of these chords, and Roman numerals above the tab staff indicate left hand barres and partial barres. A few notational novelties are worth pointing out. In the tab staff for the E chord in bar 13, the breath mark on the 5th string indicates that you should dampen the open A note (the left hand first finger should be free for this purpose). The slide markings at the end of bar 44 and at the last note on the 4th string in bar 97 have no destination in the tab staff; they are quick slides upward in the course of changing left hand position. The arpeggio symbol above *single* notes in the tab staff in bars 69 to 73 indicates a "sweep:" you can play these quick arpeggios by sweeping the right hand thumb across the strings. A similar sweep occurs in the midst of the fast run in bar 63. Finally, the *reverse* arpeggios (e.g., in bar 32) can be executed in the standard manner, simply strumming upwards. But Phil himself usually executes these with a right hand "pinch:" with the right hand thumb resting on the lowest string to be played, execute most of the arpeggio by strumming up with the right hand index finger. Just as the arpeggio ends, play the lowest note with the thumb. If you don't usually play downward arpeggios this way, it may take some getting used to, but it provides more precise control of the articulation of the bass note.

"The Marionette" is a difficult piece to learn in its entirety. However, it's a treasure trove of progressions, arpeggios, runs, and techniques that stand well on their own, so don't let the complexity of the piece as a whole prevent you from adding bits and pieces of it to your repertoire of musical ideas. To help you learn isolated phrases or chords, the times when key passages and transitions occur are noted below the tab staff (in minutes and seconds) so you can easily refer between the recording and the transcription. Among the many trademark Keaggy techniques you'll find here are:

- Descending hammer-on/pull-off triplets (bars 16 and 75), a technique found in Phil's electric playing since his days with the trio Glass Harp (e.g., "David & Goliath," "Gentle Eyes").
- Open string drones, used between chords with voice leading (bars 10–13) or accompanying a single-note run (bars 65–68; 76–77).
- Creating large, evocative intervals with pull-offs and hammer-ons between high fretted notes and open strings (bar 89) (e.g., "Addison's Walk").
- Lightning-fast arpeggios (bars 54–60; 69–73), executed with a rapid *p-i-p-i* motion in a standard Travis picking pattern across four strings (e.g., introduction to "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen," coda to solo video version of "The Reunion").
- Pizzicato runs, executed with right hand muting (bars 48–51) (e.g., "Wedding in the Country Manor," "Fare Thee Well").
- Fast runs executed by expert use of hammer-ons, pull-offs and sweeps, with slides to facilitate changes in the left hand position (bars 63–64, 75, 97).
- Double-stops with pull-offs (bar 88) (e.g., introduction to "The Wind and the Wheat").

If you learn some of these passages in isolation, consider studying the bars immediately preceding

and following them, to put them in a musical context. This will help you identify situations in your own playing when the techniques will be musically appropriate.

Although some chords and small phrases in this tune are reminiscent of other Keaggy compositions, "The Marionette" is striking in its originality, the more so because it was improvised. Phil has a gift for taking old riffs and progressions and giving them new life in improvised settings. But there is almost none of that here, despite a recording situation that would lead most musicians to draw on familiar material.

I had the opportunity to share my amazement at the improvisational origins of "The Marionette" in an interview with Phil in December 1995, and learned an important lesson about musicianship in the process:

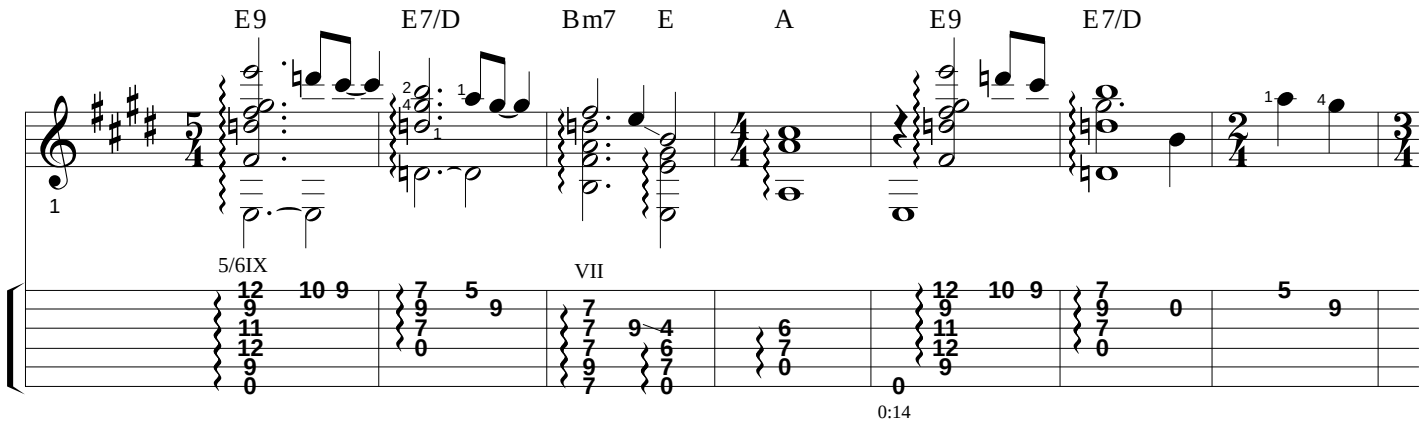
> TL: So that was just *improvised*?!
>
> PK: Improvised.
>
> TL: That was *not worked out*?!
>
> PK: No; nothing was worked out. In fact, the first time I went through it, it was different from the second time. I *really* enjoyed that! What you hear—some of the phrases on the guitar—were just lines as I was responding to what I was listening to. So it's good to be a musician who listens to what's going on around you, even while you're playing.

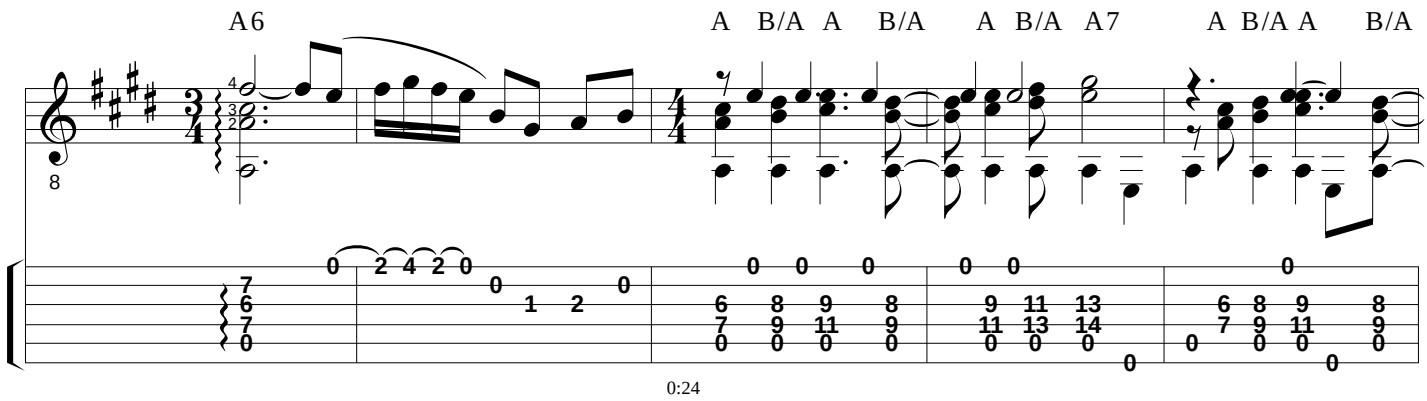
Though "The Marionette" may first impress listeners as a *performance*, it is perhaps most impressive as an example of an artist creatively *listening*. Phil's many years of practice and performance have provided him with a technical facility that frees him from having to focus on the execution of each musical phrase, allowing him to *listen*, and to respond spontaneously. And there is little doubt that he was listening, not only to Calvin Miller's reading, but also to the Spirit who is his source of inspiration and motivation. If you're like me, as you learn parts of this song, you'll be listening intently to many missed notes and perhaps occasional creaks of uncomfortably stretched fingers! But as you work through the transcription, it is my hope that it will help you also to learn what could not be transcribed: the art of creative listening.

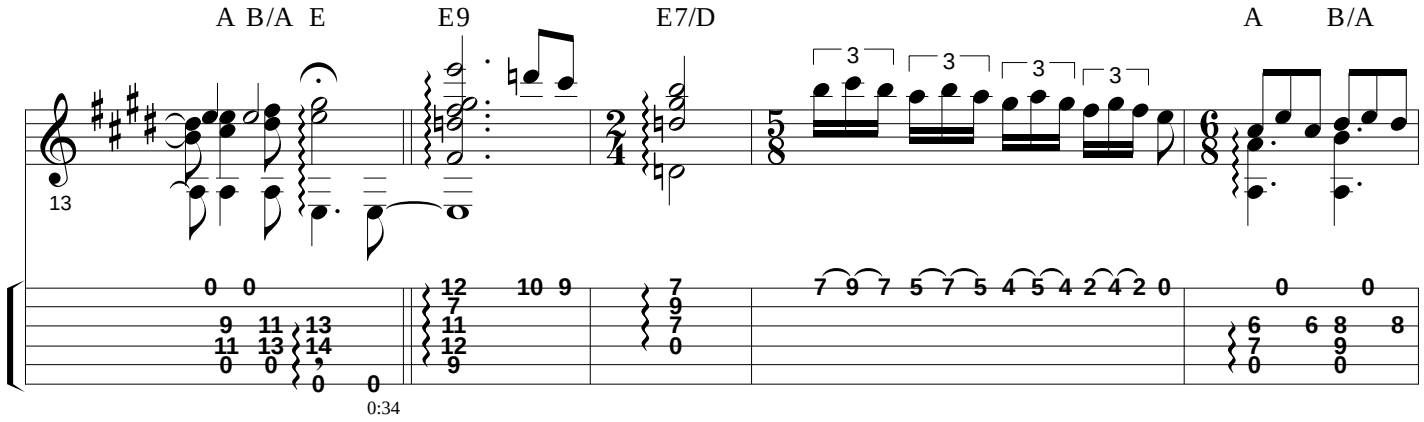
—Tom Loredo, February 1997

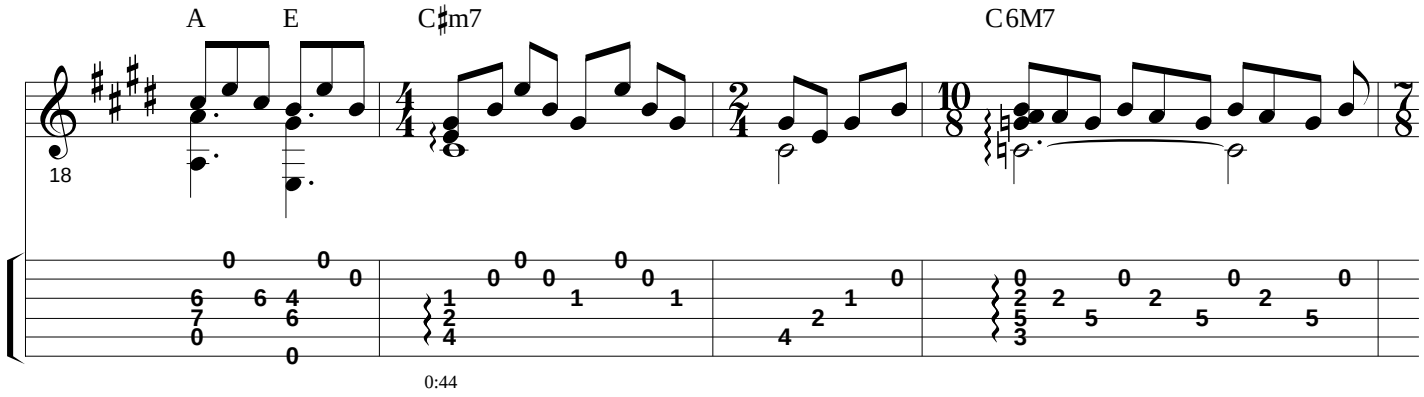
The Marionette

Phil Keaggy









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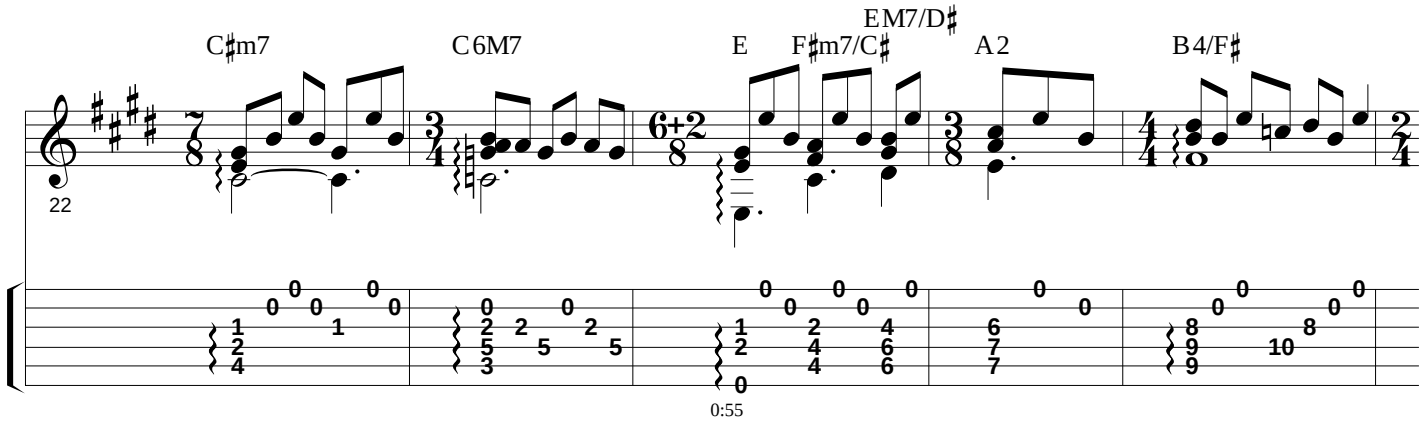
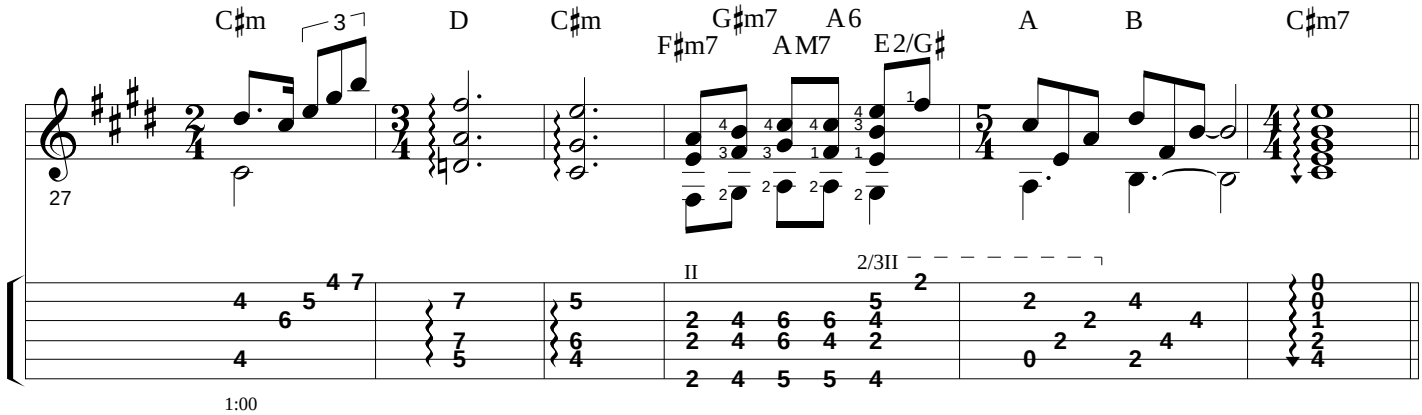
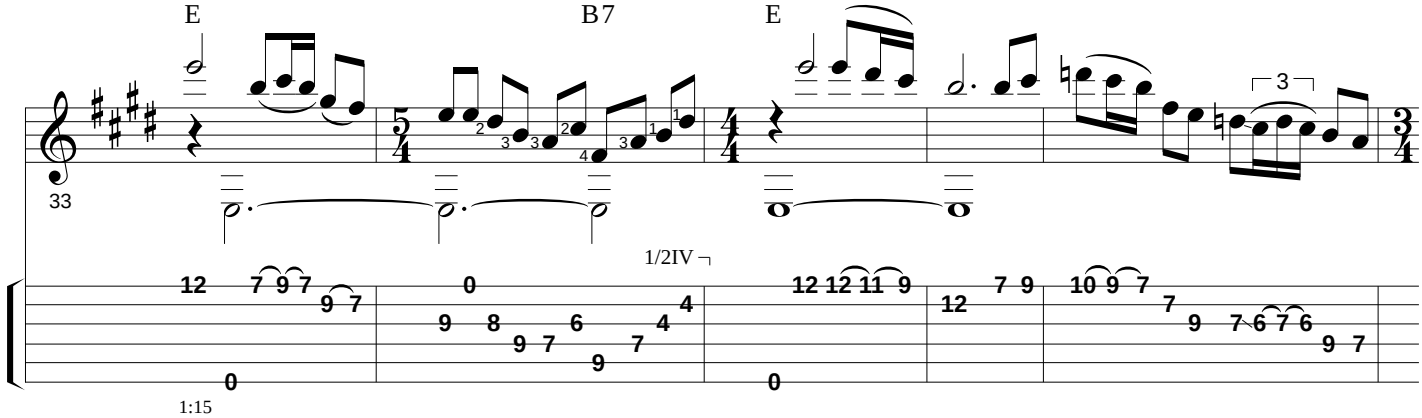
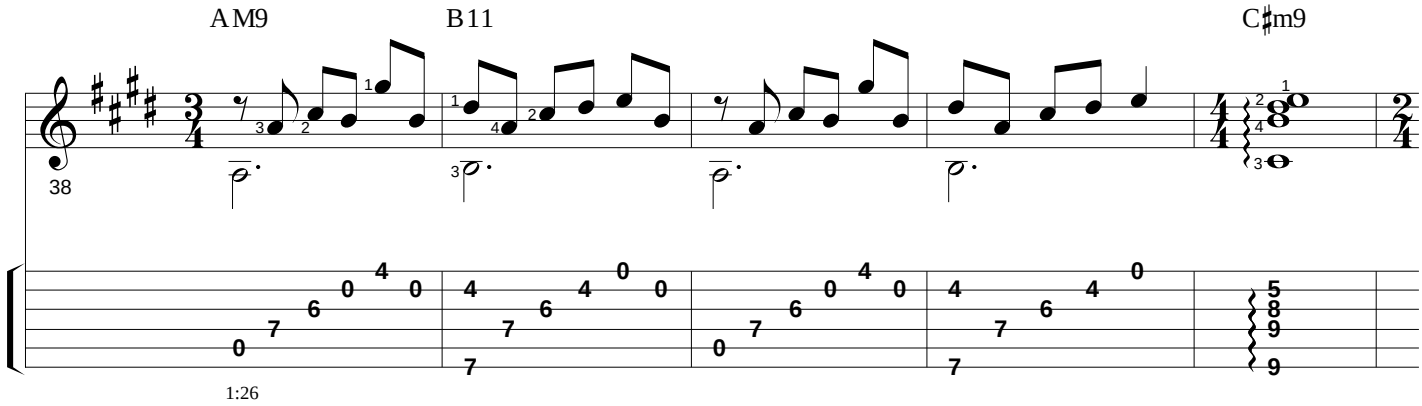
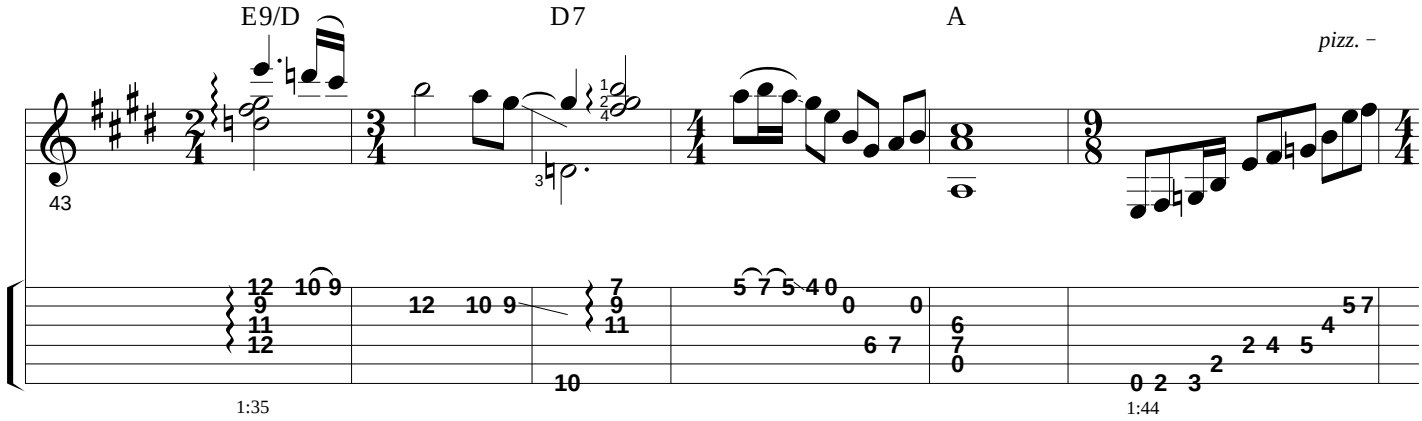
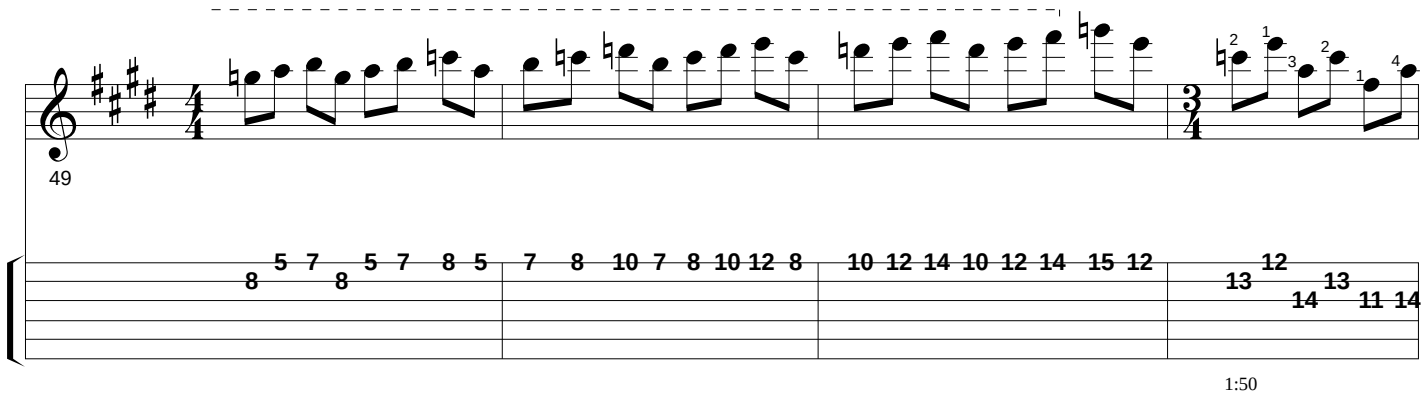

C♯m7
C6M7
E
F♯m7/C♯
EM7/D♯
A2
B4/F♯
22
0:55


C♯m
3
D
C♯m
G♯m7
A6
F♯m7
AM7
E2/G♯
A
B
C♯m7
27
II
2/3II
1:00


E
B7
E
3
33
1/2IV
1:15


AM9
B11
C♯m9
38
1:26


E9/D
D7
A
pizz. –
43
1:35
1:44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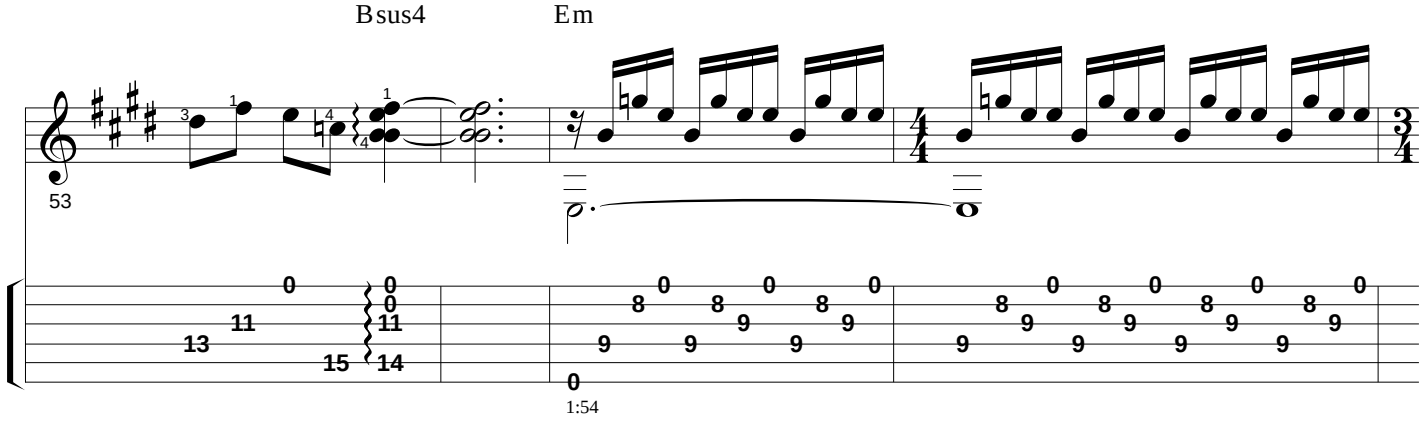
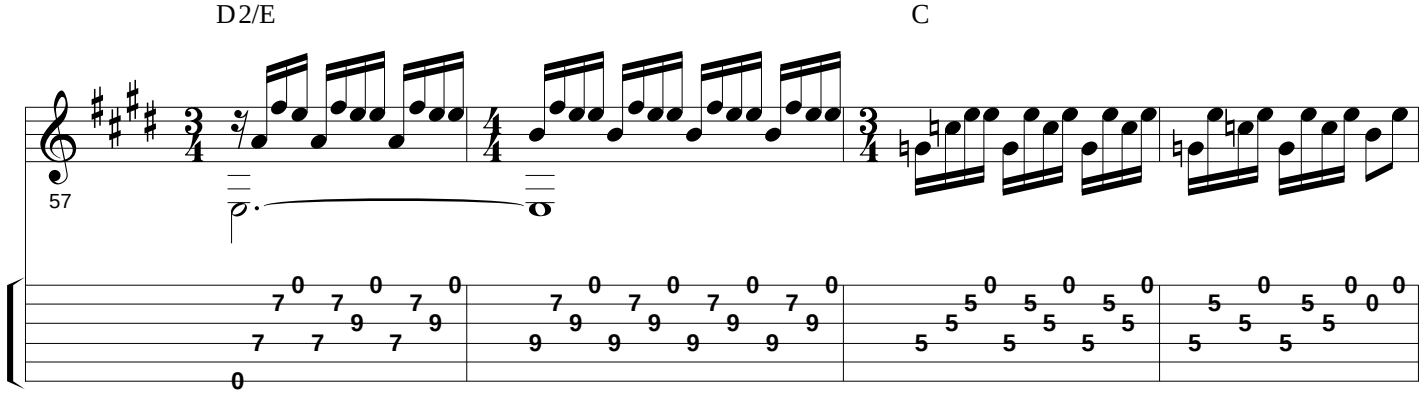
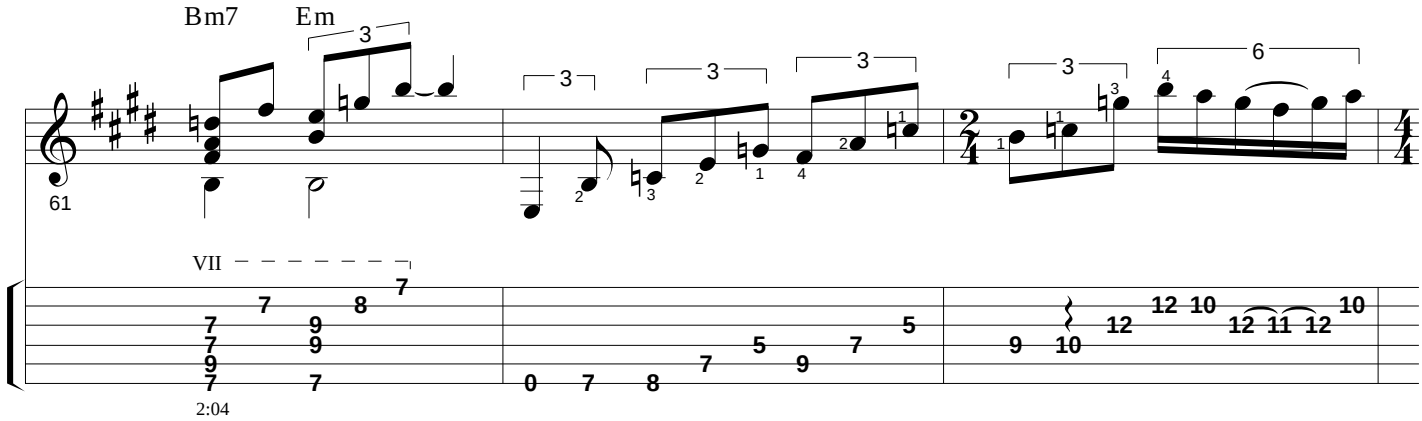
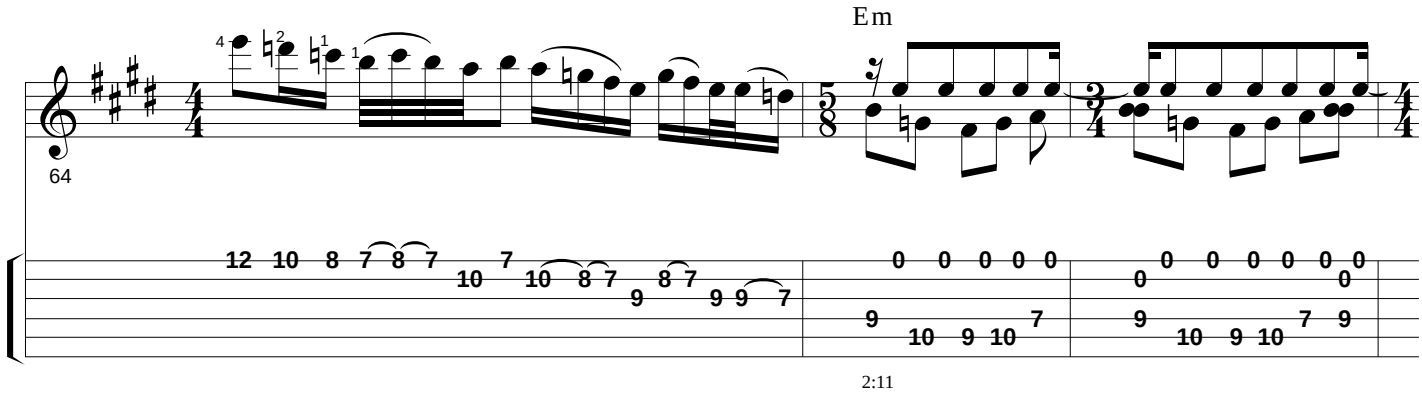
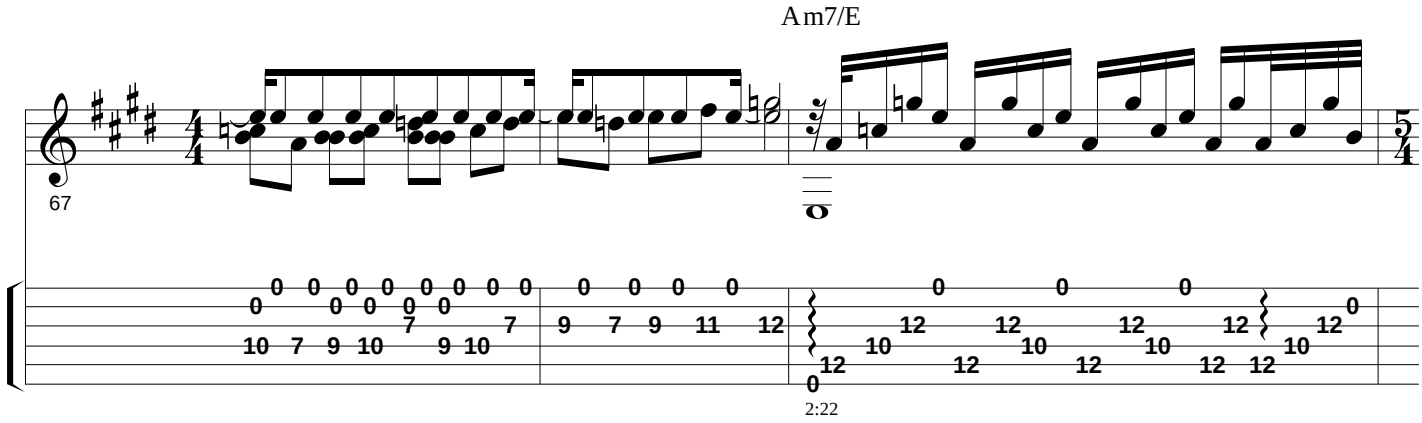
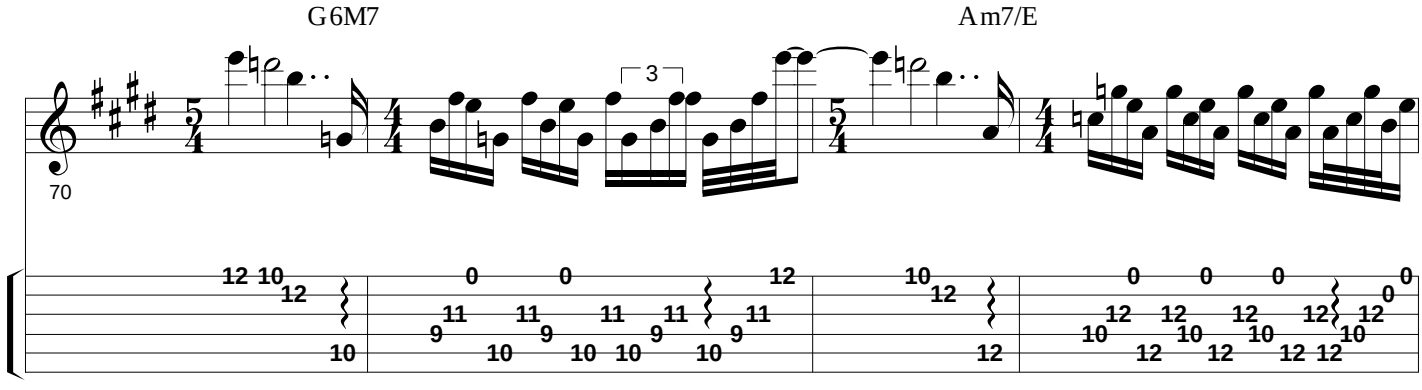

Bsus4
Em
53
1:54

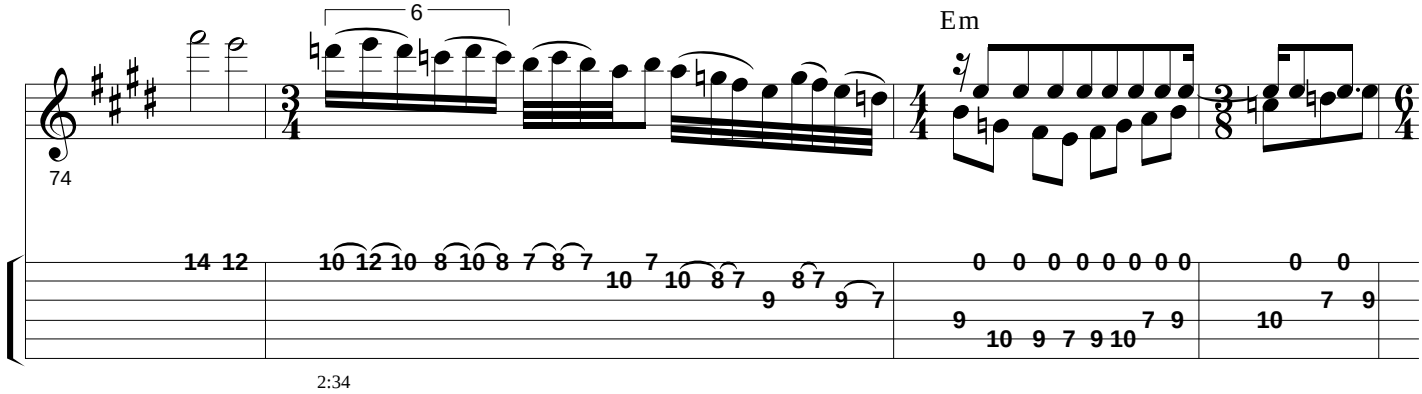

D2/E
C
57

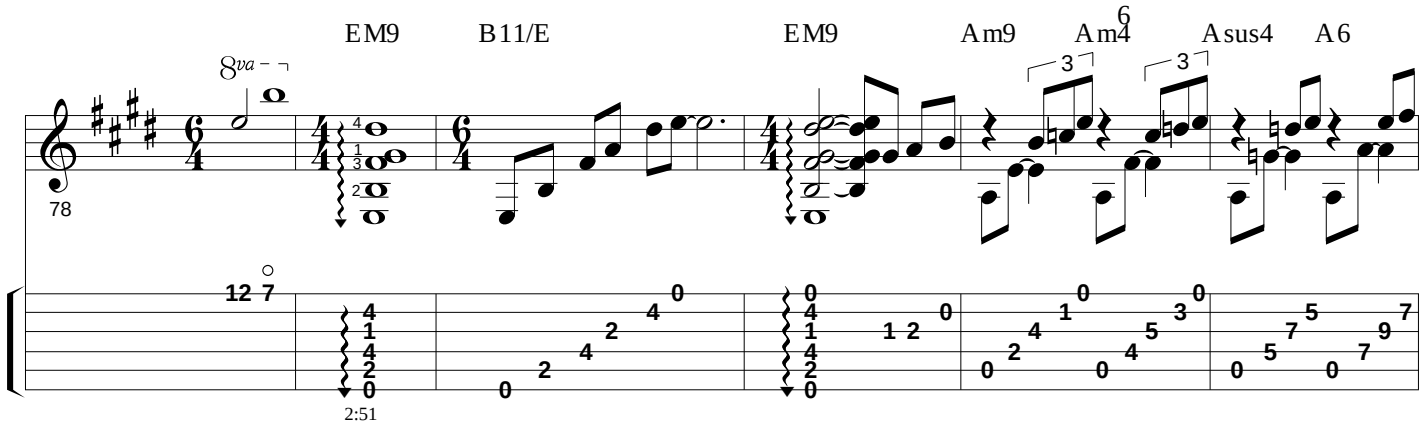

Bm7
Em
61
VII
2:04

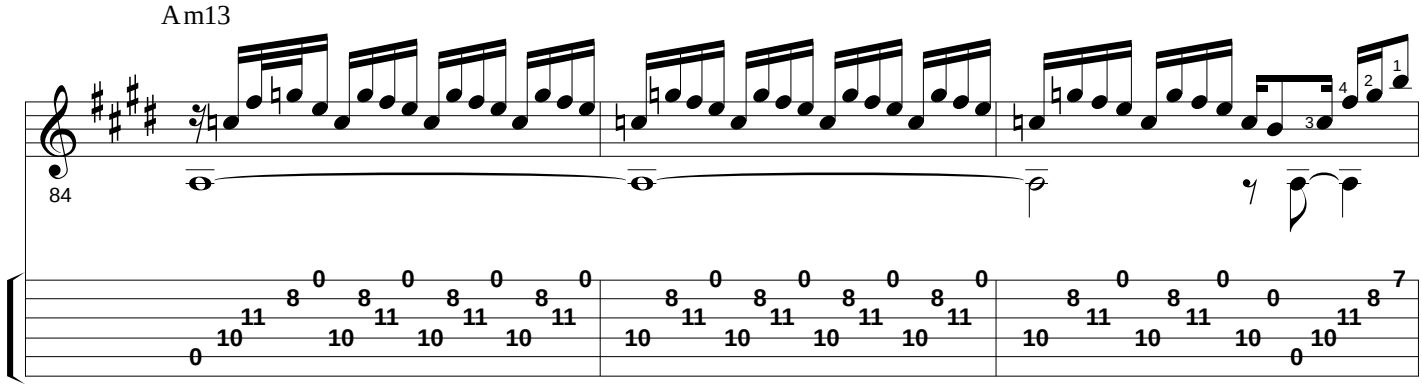

Em
64
2:11

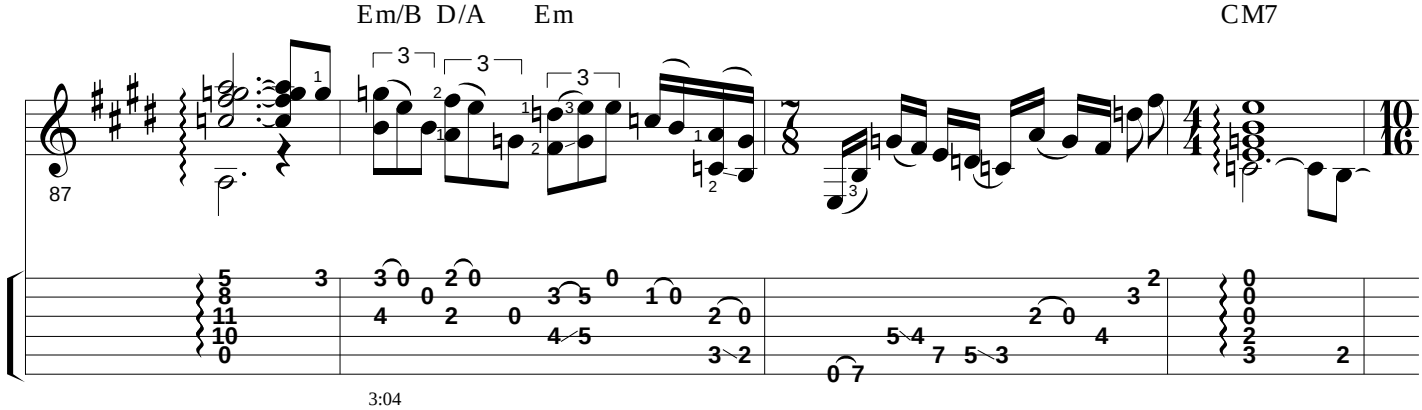

Am7/E
67
2:22

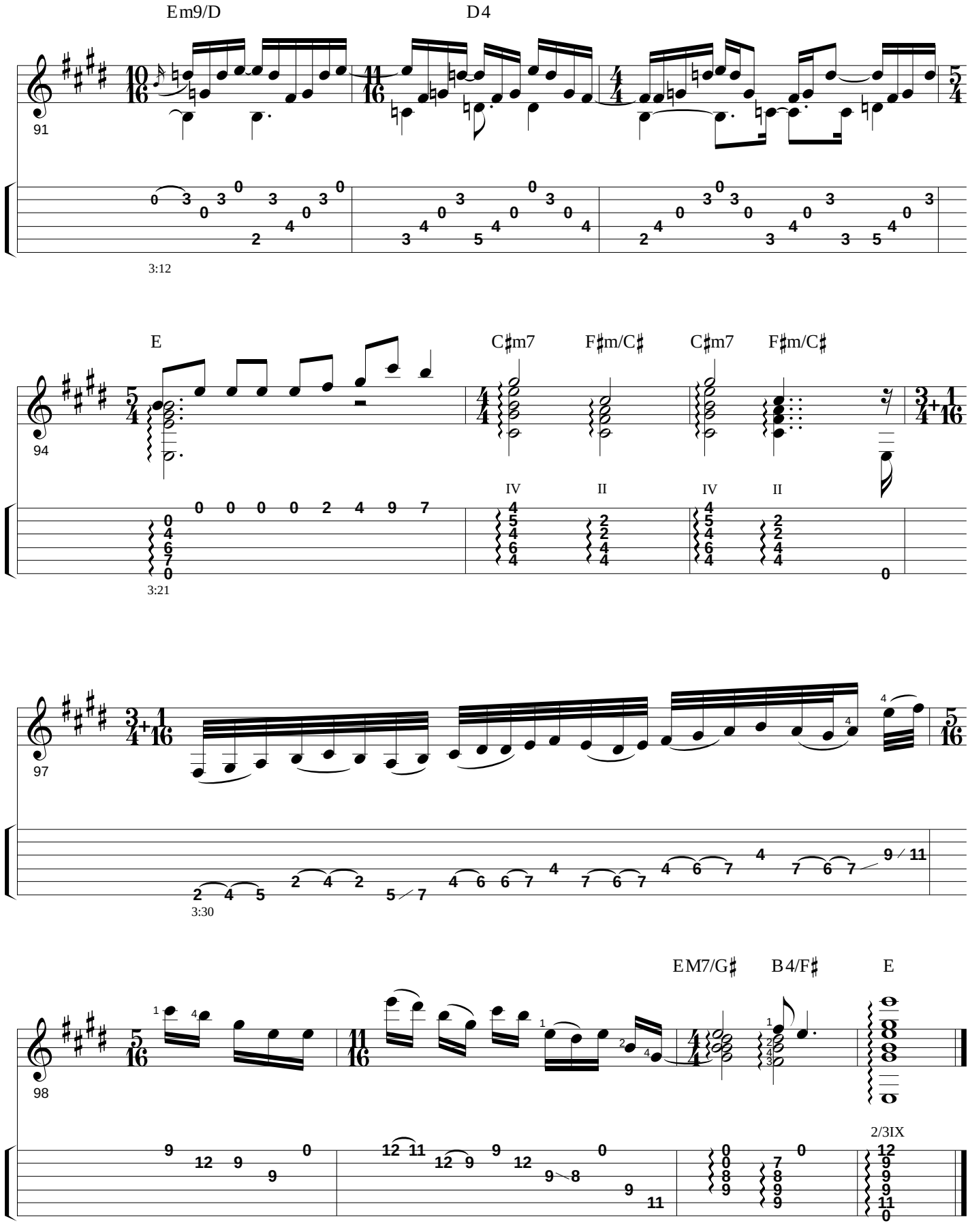

G6M7
Am7/E
70


Em
74
2:34


EM9
B11/E
EM9
Am9
Am4
Asus4
A6
78
2:51


Am13
84
2:57


Em/B
D/A
Em
CM7
87
3:04



Transcribed by Tom Loredo