"La Grange" ZZ Top

By Douglas Baldwin

ZZ Top's third album, *Tres Hombres*, is a study in the contradictions that define the band and, in particular, guitarist Billy Gibbons. The trio's simple, boozy boogie-rock is infused with subtle, surreal sarcasm, and Gibbons' mastery of intimate blues informs songs that have become arena-anthem huge. "La Grange," an outstanding cut on an outstanding album, celebrates the establishment immortalized in *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* by appropriating John Lee Hooker's "Boogie Chillun," keeping the vocals to a sly minimum, and setting the amps to "afterburner."

THE HYBRID PICKING

"La Grange" is chock full of the twists and turns that distinguish Gibbons as a guitar genius. The rhythm-guitar figures, for one, are hybrid-picked: your thumb and index finger manipulate the pick while your bare middle and ring fingers pluck the strings. Your fingers play everything except the isolated A strings—even the pairs of notes that *include* the A string. Using the notation *pi* = pick, *m* = middle finger, and *a* = ring finger, **Fig. 1** sorts out the picking for the first two measures. The fret hand ain't slouchin' either—its 1st and 4th fingers spread out to play frets 2 and 5, respectively, with the thumb providing leverage from directly behind the neck.

Gibbons, bassist Dusty Hill, and drummer Frank Beard move up from the original key center of A to C for the first guitar solo. For Rhy. Fig. 2, Gibbons transforms the usually open-string-dependent boogie shuffle into an all-fretted affair. You'll find this figure easier to grasp if you envision the three chord shapes as they appear in **Fig. 2**. At the first interlude, Gibbons tweaks a traditional blues turnaround by displacing the chromatic descending line of G–F♯–F (usually played in the same octave as the droning A) down an octave. The three outlaws then return to the key of A to restate the intro, after which Gibbons blazes into the outro guitar solo.

ALBUM
Tres Hombres
(Warner Bros.)

A-HOW, HOW, HOW, HOW?

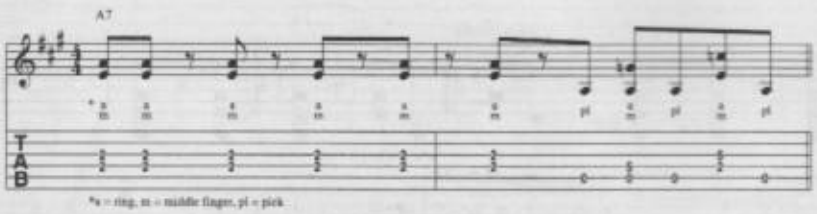
On the surface, Gibbons' soloing covers standard blues-rock territory: his notes are found almost exclusively within the minor-pentatonic position any first-year guitar player memorizes [**Fig. 3**]. Yet no one would mistake his phrasing for a schoolboy's meandering. How does he do it? First, check his tone—just enough grind and compression to let his notes sing, but not so much as to obscure his dynamics. Next, note the accuracy and emotion of his bends and vibrato. He starts by confidently bending a B♭ up to a C—he knows where home is—and proceeds to work the whole yard, descending melodically across the entire fretboard by the end of the solo's sixth measure. Hybrid-picked *double stops* (two notes played simultaneously on adjacent strings) are tossed in for contrast.

And, of course, Gibbons offers some textbook examples of pinch harmonics here, slathering them on like gravy on biscuits during his second solo. The simplest way to achieve these squeals is to choke up on your pick so that the tip of your thumb digs into the strings along with the pick, causing the string to be excited at a *nodal harmonic point*. Using a Mexican peso for a pick, as Gibbons reputedly does, may also add to your Rio Grande tone.

TONE ZONE

GUITAR 1: Solidbody
PICKUP/POSITION: Single-coil/Bridge and Middle
GAIN: 4
EQ: Bass/Mid/Treble: 5/3/5
GUITAR 2: Solidbody
PICKUP/POSITION: Single-coil/Bridge and Middle
GAIN: 6
EQ: Bass/Mid/Treble: 5/5/5
GUITAR 3: Solidbody
PICKUP/POSITION: Single-coil/Bridge
GAIN: 8
EQ: 5/7/8

Fig. 1



*a = ring, m = middle finger, pi = pick

Fig. 2

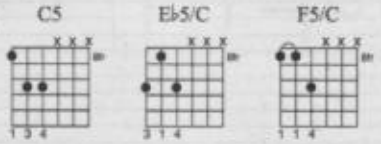
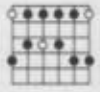


Fig. 3



TIM COSTELLO/RETNA

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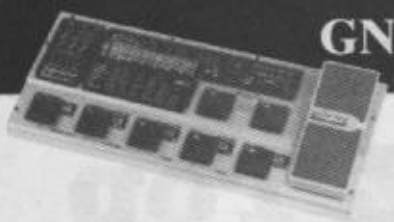


LA GRANGE

As Recorded by ZZ Top

(From the Warner Bros. Recording TRES HOMBRES)

TRACK 45 ON THE CD

Words and Music by Billy F. Gibbons, Dusty Hill and Frank Beard

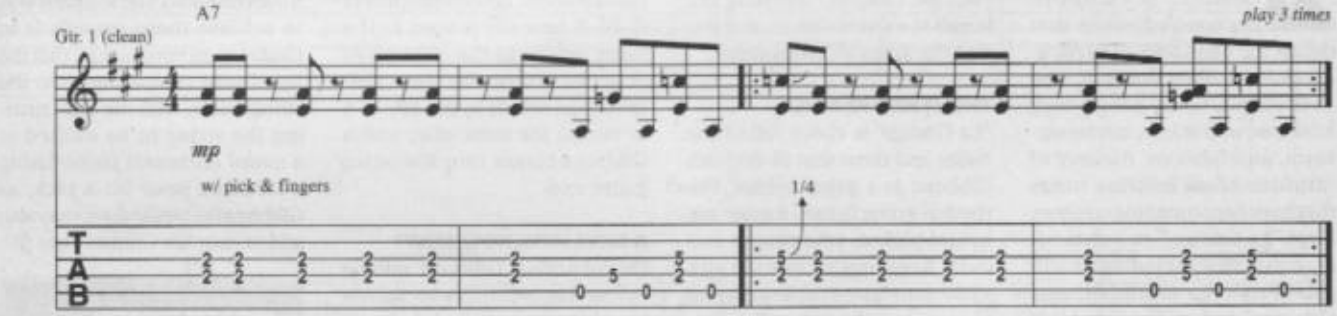
Lyrics

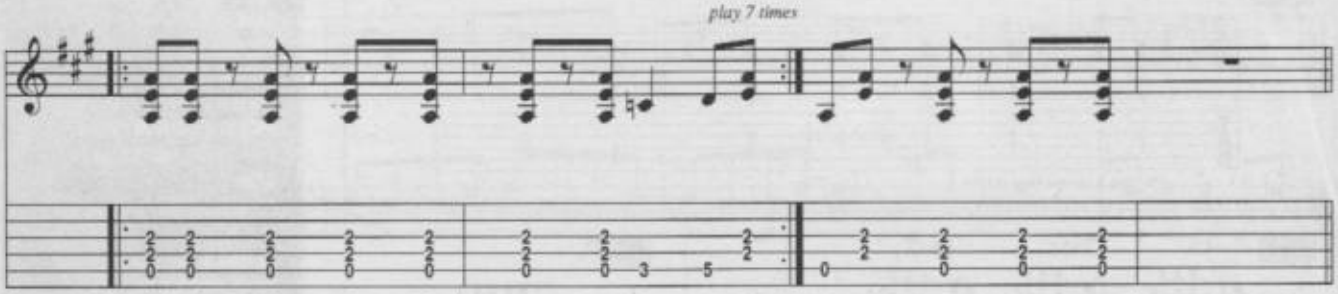
Intro
Rumor spreadin' 'round in that Texas town
'Bout that shack outside La Grange.
And you know what I'm talkin' about.
Just let me know if you wanna go
To that home out on the range.
They gotta lotta nice girls, ah.

Verse
Well, I hear it's fine, if you got the time
And the ten to get yourself in.
And I hear it's tight most every night,
But now I might be mistaken.

Intro

Moderately Fast Shuffle ♩ = 160 (♫ = ♩ ♪)





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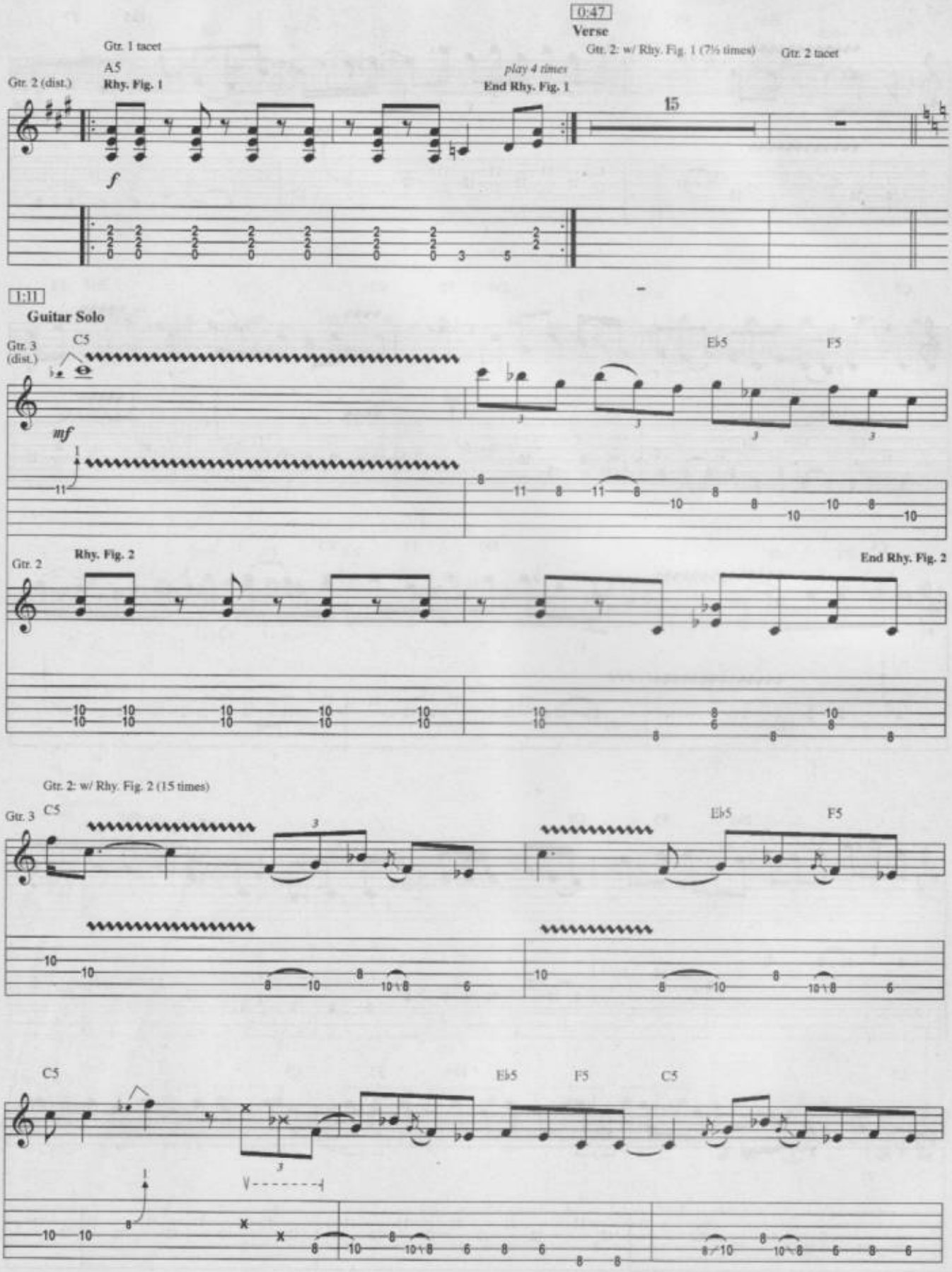
La Grange



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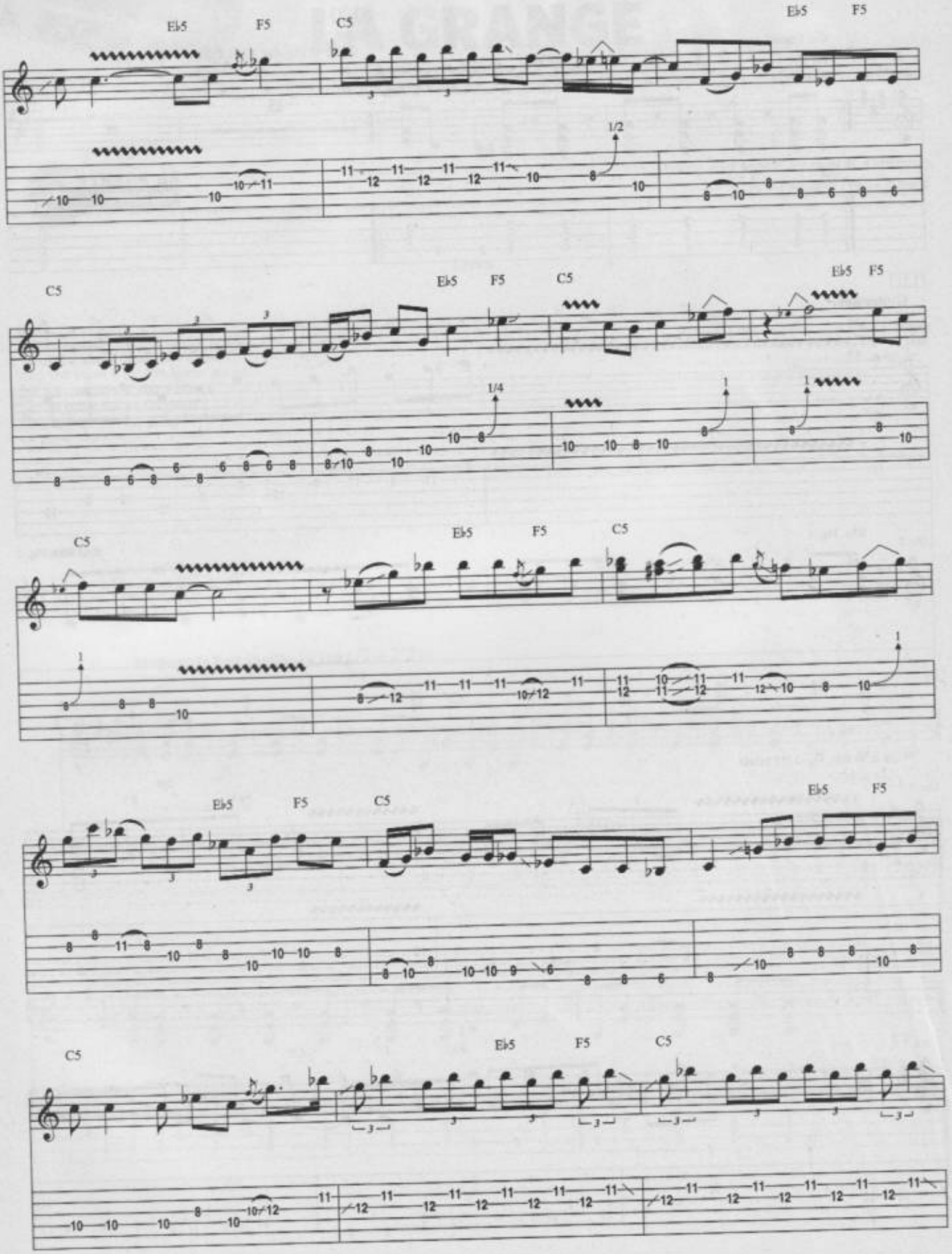
La Grange



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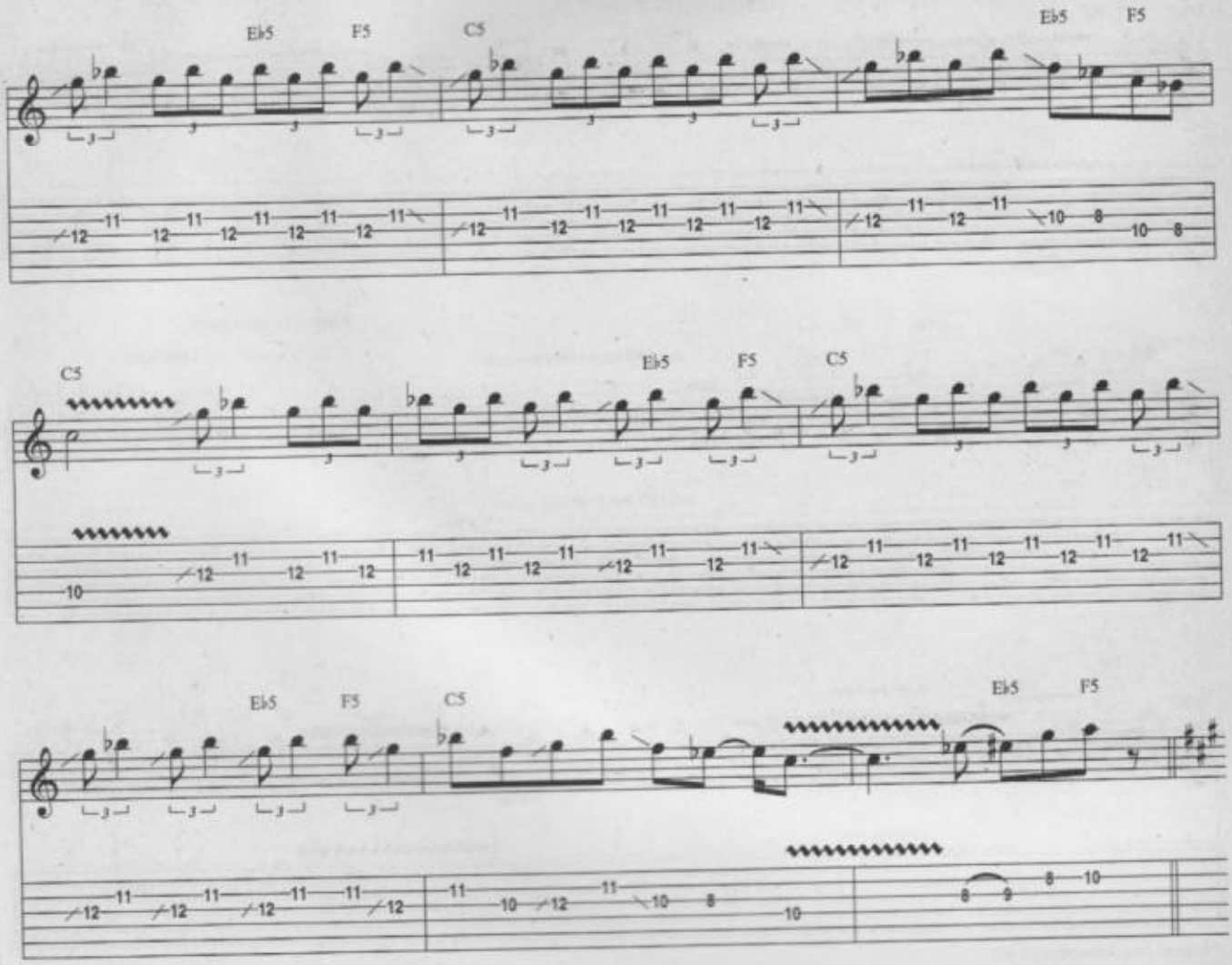

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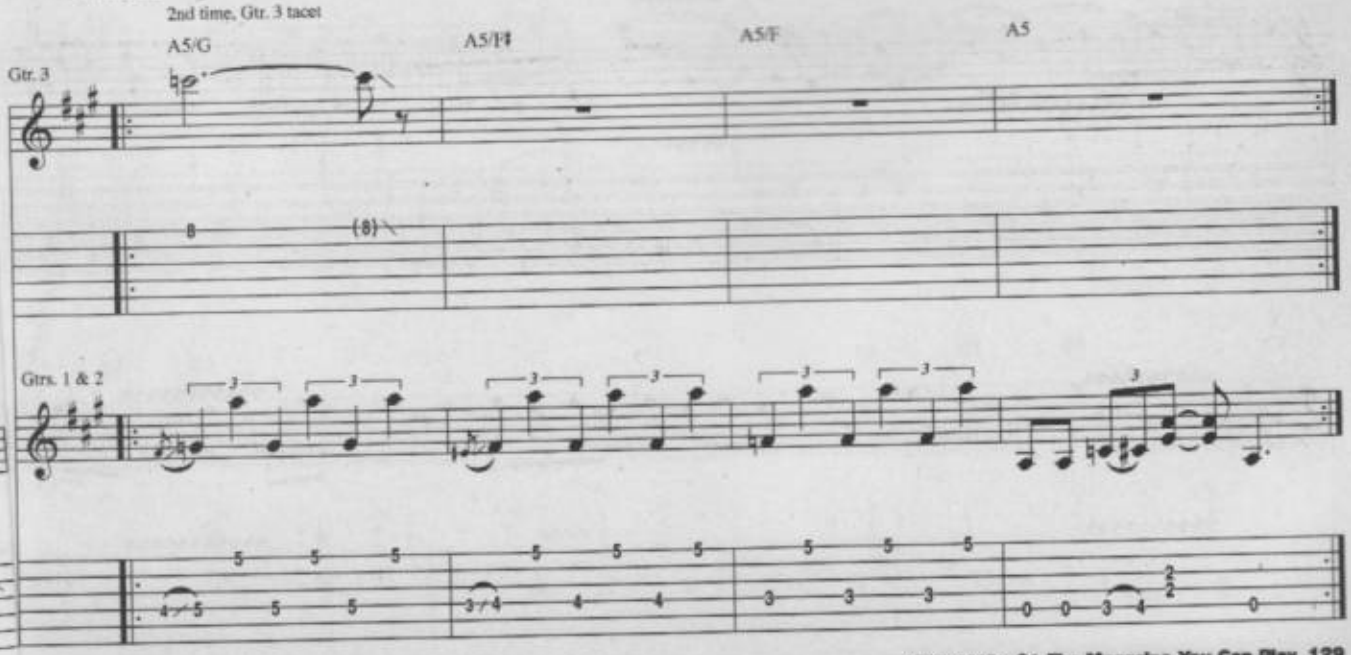
Interlude

2nd time, Gtr. 3 tacet



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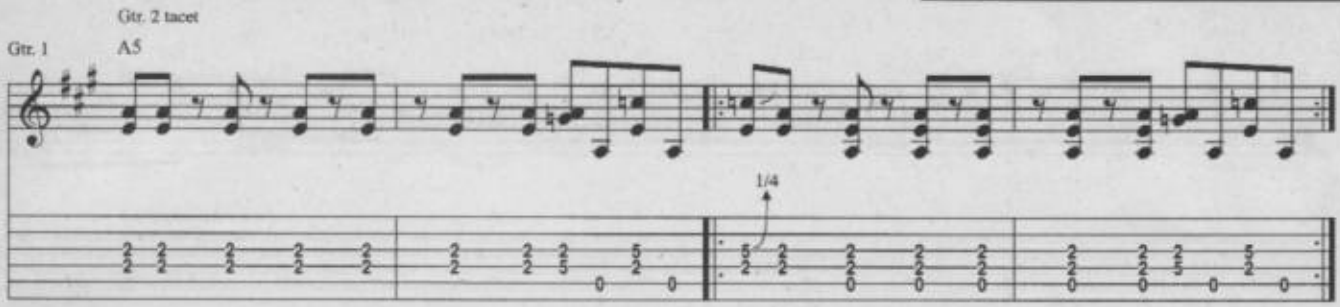
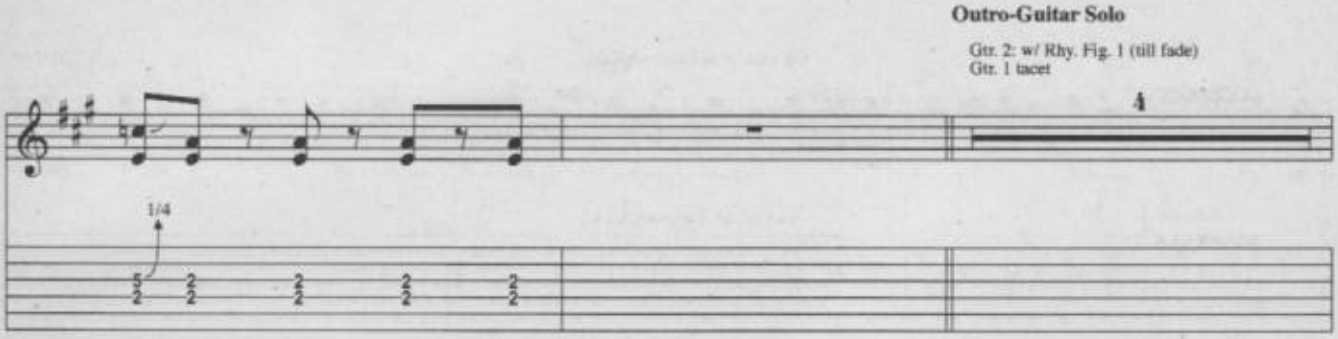
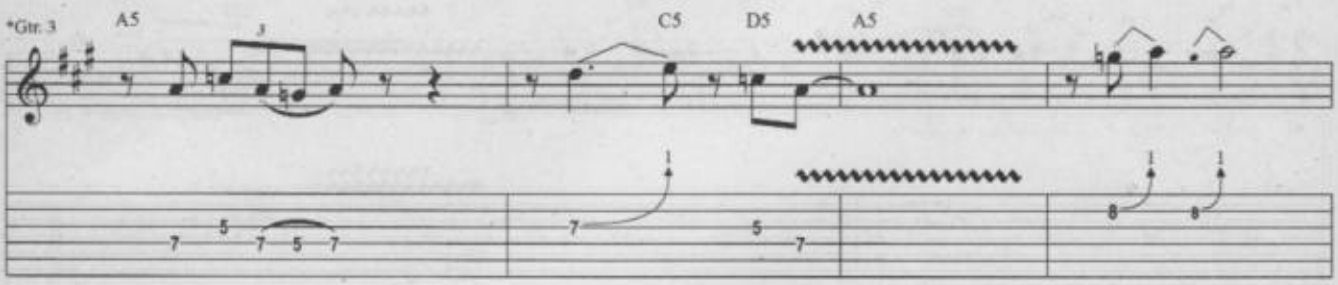
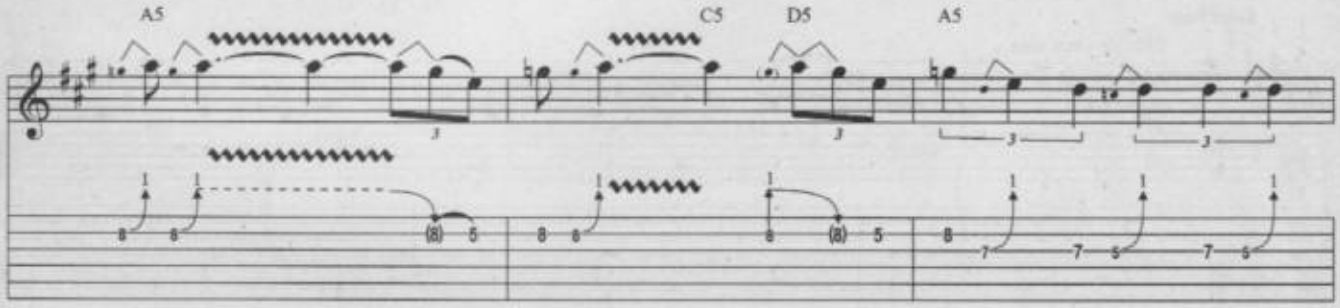


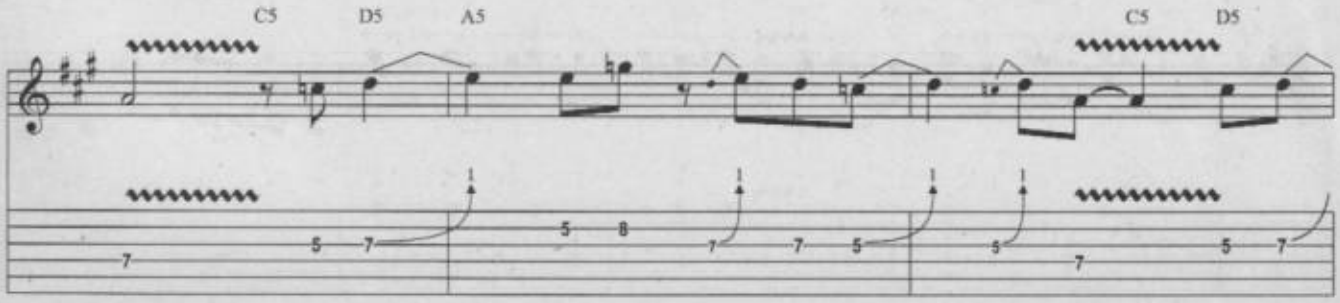
Outro-Guitar Solo





*w/ misc. pinch harmonics till end





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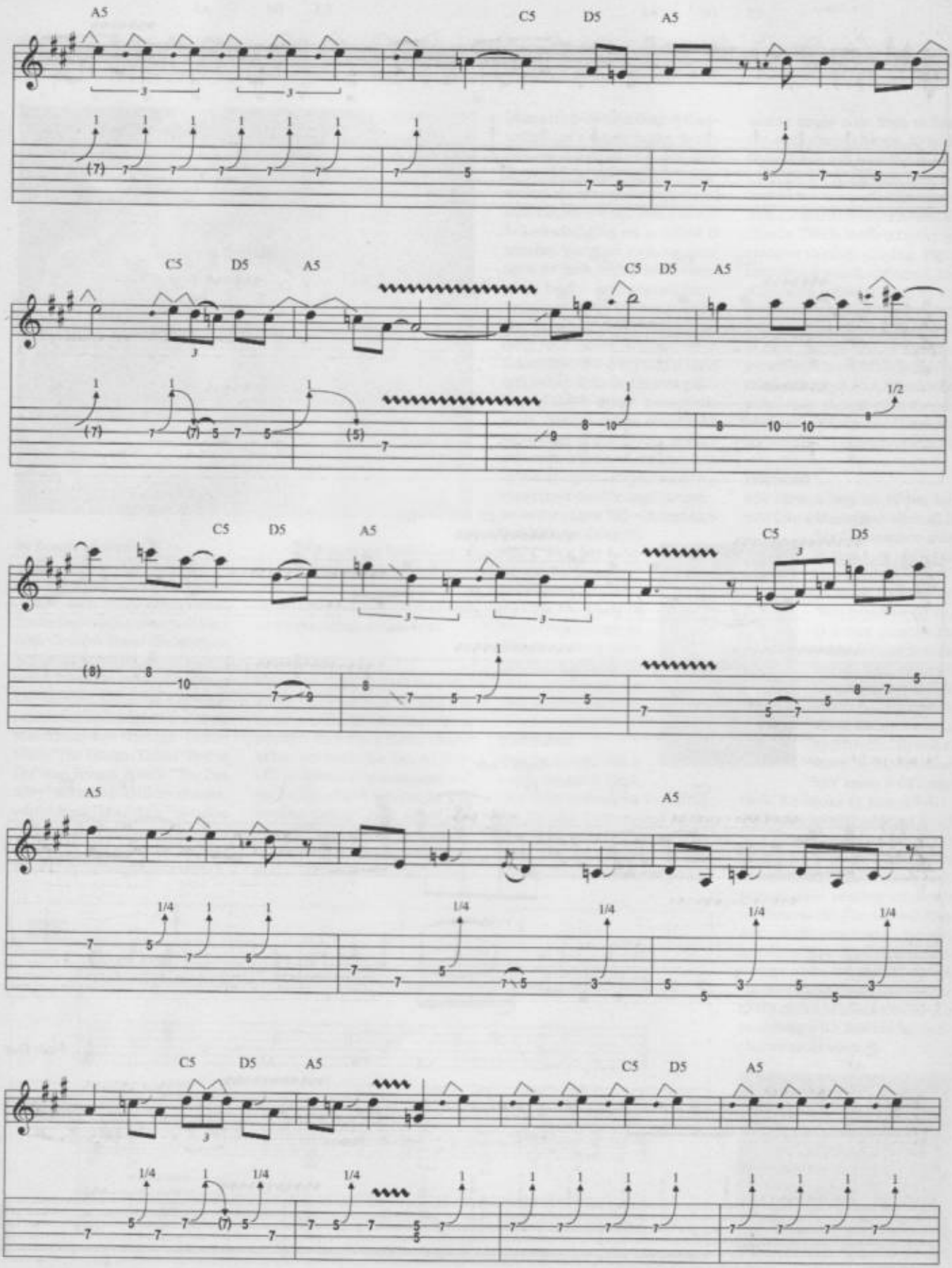

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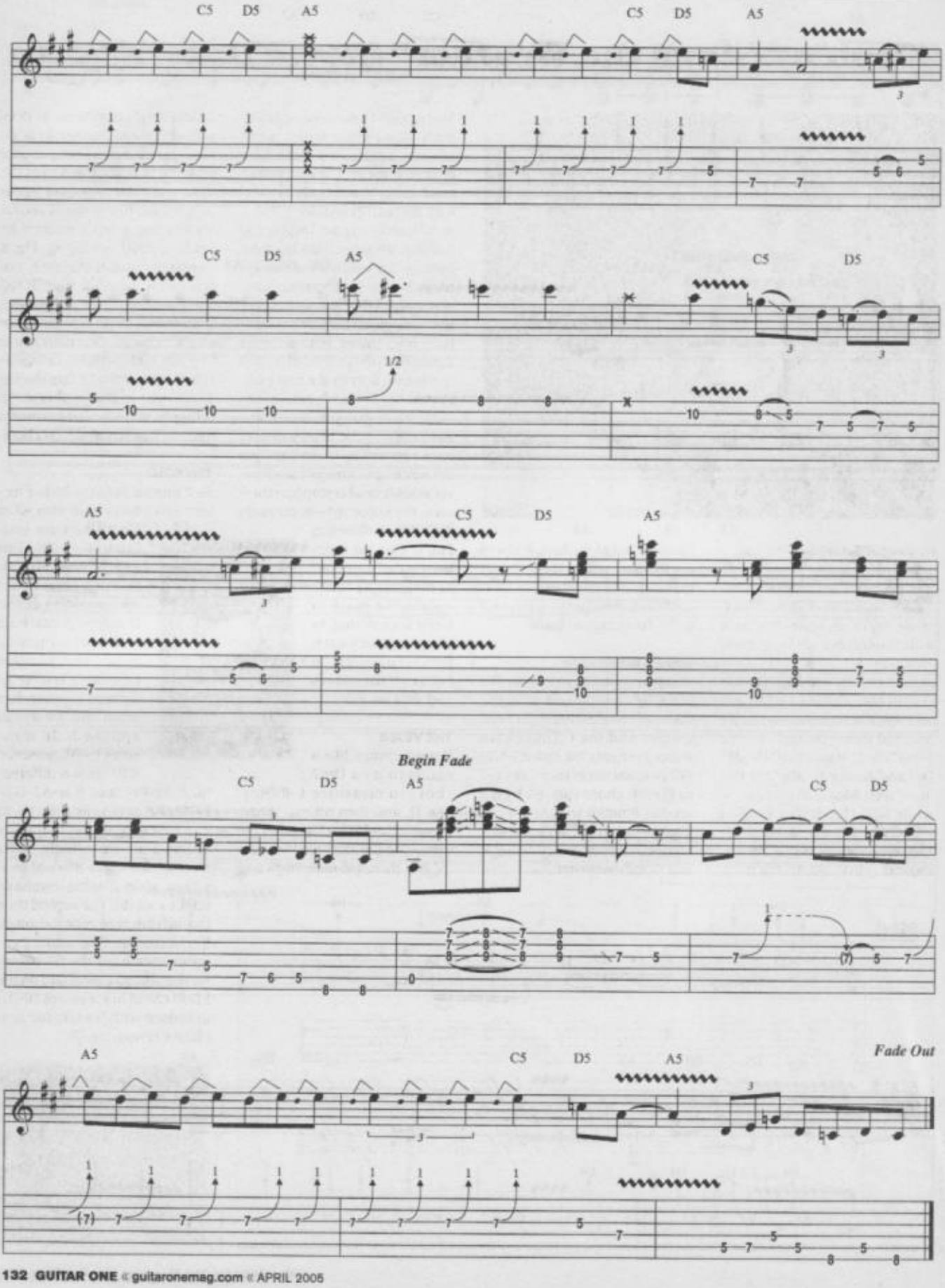


"Couldn't Stand the Weather" Stevie Ray Vaughan

By Douglas Baldwin

One year after blowing away blues and rock guitarists with 1983's *Texas Flood*, Stevie Ray Vaughan stormed back with *Couldn't Stand the Weather*. Although the relentless shower of notes from the previous release carried over, this time a musical rainbow of both original and cover material shone through. Guitar Slim's "The Things (That) I Used to Do" and Jimmy Reed's "Tin Pan Alley" were nods to blues classics, while Jimi Hendrix's "Voodoo Chile (Slight Return)" pointed to a far edgier rock influence that also showed up in Vaughan's title track. Reminiscent of the funk-blues of the Band of Gypsys, it confirmed that the new blues guitar hero could compose hip tunes as well as fry the strings on his Strat.

THE INTRO

Vaughan (Gtr. 1) previews the verse by cleverly reversing the order of the descending chord section and the i (Dm) chord vamp. He treats the Bm–A7–G7–F♯7 progression in measures 1–7 as if each chord (played by big brother Jimmie) were a new key, improvising in free time with the respective root-position B, A, and G minor pentatonic scales. Measures 8–19 then drop dynamically into a super-funky, James Brown–approved bass line derived from the D minor pentatonic scale, chromatically flavored with the 3rd (F♯) and ♭5th (G♯/A♭). Acknowledging an implied D tonality, Vaughan caps his mini opus de funk with a back-snapping, hyper-syncopated four-measure riff (Riff B) over the bass line. He repeats the pattern similarly four times, with octaves drawn from the gritty ♭3rd (F) and quicksilver licks in the root position of the D minor pentatonic scale. Note that you could take advantage of the bluesy major/minor ambiguity of the bass line by switching to a major tonality—via a classic double stop hammer-on to the major 3rd—in measure 2 of Riff B, as shown in **Fig. 1**. This bar functions as the "response" to measure 1's "call"; it's also the place to begin improvising, as Vaughan does each time Riff B appears (in between the verses and after the solo).

ALBUM
Couldn't Stand the Weather
(Epic)

THE VERSE

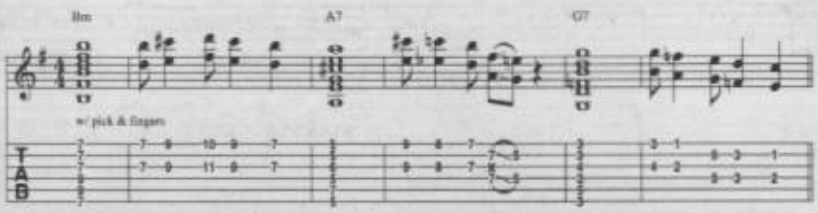
Jimmie comps like a madman on a Dm7 chord in measures 1–8 (Rhy. Fig. 1), and then returns to the Bm–A7–G7–F♯7♯9 changes of the intro. Dig the slick way he uses broken chords, double stops and sparse single-note lines to flesh out each chord change. In addition, check out how the crucial ♭3rd (D) is highlighted over the Bm, as are the respective major 3rds (C♯ and B) over the A7 and G7 chords. This is fertile territory for creative rhythm playing. **Fig. 2** contains a much different, but ultimately cohesive, way to sail through a Bm–A7–G7 progression: with double stops in 6ths relative to each change. One of the most versatile tools available to the discriminating guitarist, 6ths double stops exist in that netherworld between melody and harmony, and can function as either or both.

THE SOLO

SRV turns a very un-12-bar format into a blues bash after all in his 31-measure solo. In bars 1–15 of the Dm vamp (Rhy. Fig. 3), he busts loose in the root position of the D minor pentatonic scale. Idiosyncratic bends and phrases invariably resolve to the root—appropriate when taking a modal approach. In measures 16–31, however, SRV takes a different tack: he looks at Bm–A7–G7–F♯7♯9 changes in measures 16–23 as a new progression in the key of Bm, and, accordingly, shifts his attention to the B minor pentatonic scale, placing emphasis on the root (B). The second time through the progression, though, he relocates to the G minor pentatonic scale for the G7 chord. He then bangs down hard on the F♯7♯9 chord in measures 30–31, in unison with Jimmie for conclusive resolution.

Fig. 1

Fig. 2



ANDREA LAUBACH/RETNA

TONE ZONE
GUITAR 1: Solidbody
PICKUP/POSITION: Single-coil/notch between middle and bridge
GAIN: 7
EQ: Bass/Middle/Treble: 4/4/7