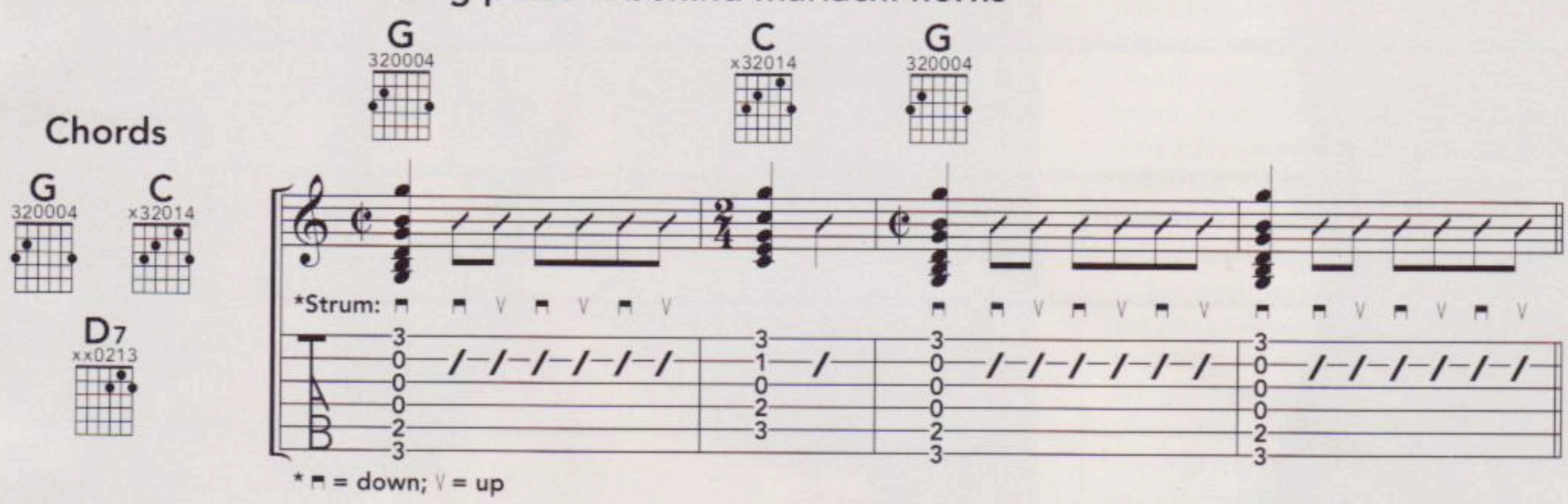
Ring of Fire

Words and music by Merle Kilgore and June Carter

June Carter wrote "Ring of Fire" (with the assistance of Merle Kilgore) as she fell in love with Johnny Cash. June's sister, Anita Carter, initially recorded the song in 1962, but Johnny Cash covered it one year later, making it into a huge hit.

The song has an upbeat, cut-time feel, and it occasionally breaks into 2/4 time for an odd measure or two: as an accent at the end of each mariachi horn break, and at the end of most verse lines. See the strumming pattern below for how this looks (the phrase shown is the accompaniment during the first of two mariachi phrases; in the second phrase, the guitar plays a D7 instead of a C). The G and C chord shapes below allow for an easy switch between the two during the 2/4 phrase, but Cash often played the G chord with all four fingers by moving his ring finger up to the third fret of the B string and grabbing the lowest two strings with his index and middle fingers (try this out to see how much more difficult it is to switch quickly between these G and C chords). On the recording, two electric guitars—one hard-panned to the left and one mixed right on top of Cash's acoustic—add walking bass lines and chord embellishments like quick C/G stabs over Cash's static G chords. On his part, Cash occasionally omits the first D7 chord on the chorus' third line, holding out the G chord to accentuate the final "ring" when he finally hits D7. —ANDREW DUBROCK

Strumming pattern behind mariachi horns



G C G C G
1. Love is a burning thing

D7 G D7 G
And it makes a fiery ring

C G C G
Bound by wild desire

D7 G
I fell into a ring of fire

Chorus

D7 C G
I fell into a burning ring of fire

D7 C G
I went down, down, down and the flames went higher

D7 G D7 G
And it burns, burns, burns, the ring of fire, the ring of fire

G C G D7 G
G C G D7 G

Repeat Chorus

G C G C G
2. The taste of love is sweet

D7 G D7 G
When hearts like ours meet

C G C G
I fell for you like a child

D7 G
Oh, but the fire went wild

Repeat Chorus, two times

G D7 G D7 G
And it burns, burns, burns, the ring of fire, the ring of fire

D7 G
The ring of fire *(repeat and fade)*

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