"The Sky Is Crying" Stevie Ray Vaughan

By Dave Rubin

It would be even more heartbreaking to comprehend the title of the posthumously released "The Sky Is Crying" if not for the explosive abandon of Stevie Ray Vaughan's playing on the track. Recorded during 1981's *Soul to Soul* sessions but not released until 1991 (the same year former Texas governor Ann Richards declared his birthday, October 3, "Stevie Ray Vaughan Day"), the tune was yet another tribute to Albert King, SRV's main slow-blues mentor. Elmore James wrote the original, and in 1959 he played bottleneck on song with his Broom-dusters. King, however, served up a bent and heavily vibratoed version in 1968 that Vaughan emulated with uncanny accuracy.

ALBUM
The Sky Is Crying
(Epic)

THE "ALBERT KING BOX"

Like most blues guitar cats, Albert King made merry in the root position of the minor pentatonic scale. Yet, by the time he moved to Memphis and Stax Records in the mid-'60s, he had also found a new home in the extended position of the scale. Now known affectionately as the "Albert King box" [**Fig. 1**], the extension's compact arrangement contains (low to high) the 5th, ♭7th, root, ♭3rd and 4th notes from the scale (in the key of C: G, B♭, C, E♭ and F). Vaughan traverses the box in both the verses and solo, torturing his strings with wide bends and continuous fret-grinding vibrato.

THE VERSES

The mojo of the Albert King box derives from the close proximity of its tension-inducing "blues notes"—the ♭3rd (E♭) and ♭7th (B♭)—to the root (C). And since the basic idea of blues soloing is to create wave after wave of tension and release (with resolution to the root), this box is an efficient tool for hip improvisers. **Fig. 2** shows classic Albert King moves that illustrate this concept beautifully. Eric Clapton, another noted King acolyte, nicked the lick on beat 1 for "Strange Brew" (1967), his tribute to A.K. Use your middle finger on string 3 and your index and ring fingers, respectively, on strings 2 and 1. Back up the bends on the 1st string with the middle and index fingers; this way, you'll have maximum leverage for the multi-step bends that Vaughan plays in measure 7 of verses 1 and 2. A quick hand-position shift allows you to nail the root note on either string 2 (ring finger) or string 1 (index finger).

Though he only recorded slide on "Boot Hill," Vaughan idolized Elmore James. Measures 1 and 2 of the first verse feature his take [**Fig. 3**] on the licks at the beginning of Elmo's "The Sky Is Crying."

THE SOLO

Vaughan squeezes every ounce of emotion out of his Strat over two choruses. Note that he begins each one by digging into the "box" for several measures before arcing down to the root position. Measure 9 (G) of the first chorus is particularly packed; this is the perfect spot to build tension in a 12-bar blues, as it usually marks the first appearance of the V chord and heralds the descent down to the IV chord and the turnaround.

ON THE CD-ROM

This issue's disc contains the key licks of "The Sky Is Crying"—delineated in the transcription as Figs. 1–5—at both full and half speeds. Fig. 1 (track 83), an Albert King staple and the tune's signature lick, is restated varyingly throughout. Fig. 2 features a nifty turnaround, Figs. 3 and 4 represent the solo's most noteworthy moments, and Fig. 5 is the ending phrase.

TONE ZONE
GUITAR 1: Solidbody
PICKUP/POSITION: Single-coil/Neck
GAIN: 8
EQ: Bass/Mid/Treble: 5/5/7

Fig. 1

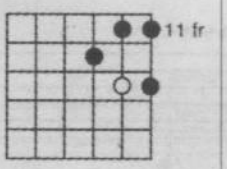


Fig. 2

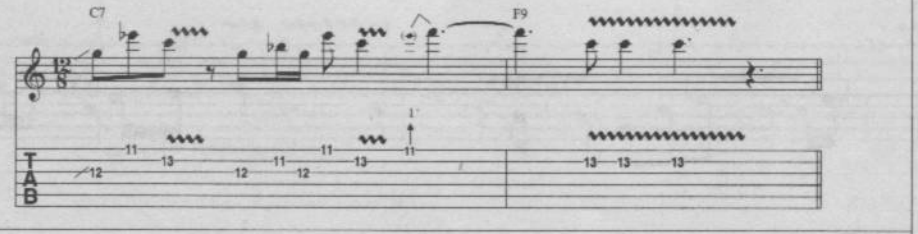
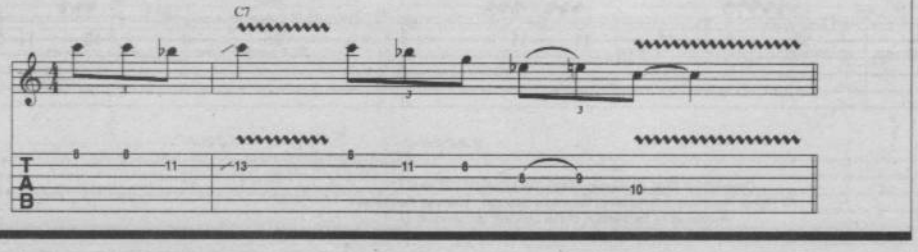


Fig. 3



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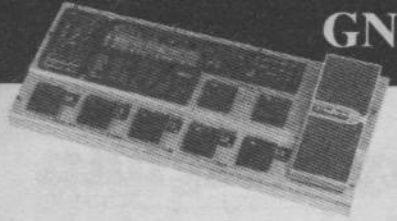


THE SKY IS CRYING

As Recorded by Stevie Ray Vaughan

(From the Epic Recording THE SKY IS CRYING)

Words and Music by Elmore James

FIGS. 1-5 » TRACKS 83-87*
ON THE CD

Lyrics

Verse 1
The sky is cryin',
Can't you see the tears roll down the street?
The sky is cryin',
Can't you see the tears roll down the street?
I've been looking for my baby, yeah!
And I wonder where can she be?

Verse 2
I saw my baby early one mornin',
She was walkin' on down the street.
I saw my baby early this mornin',
She was walkin' on down the street.
You know it hurt me, hurt me so bad,
Made my poor heart skip a beat.

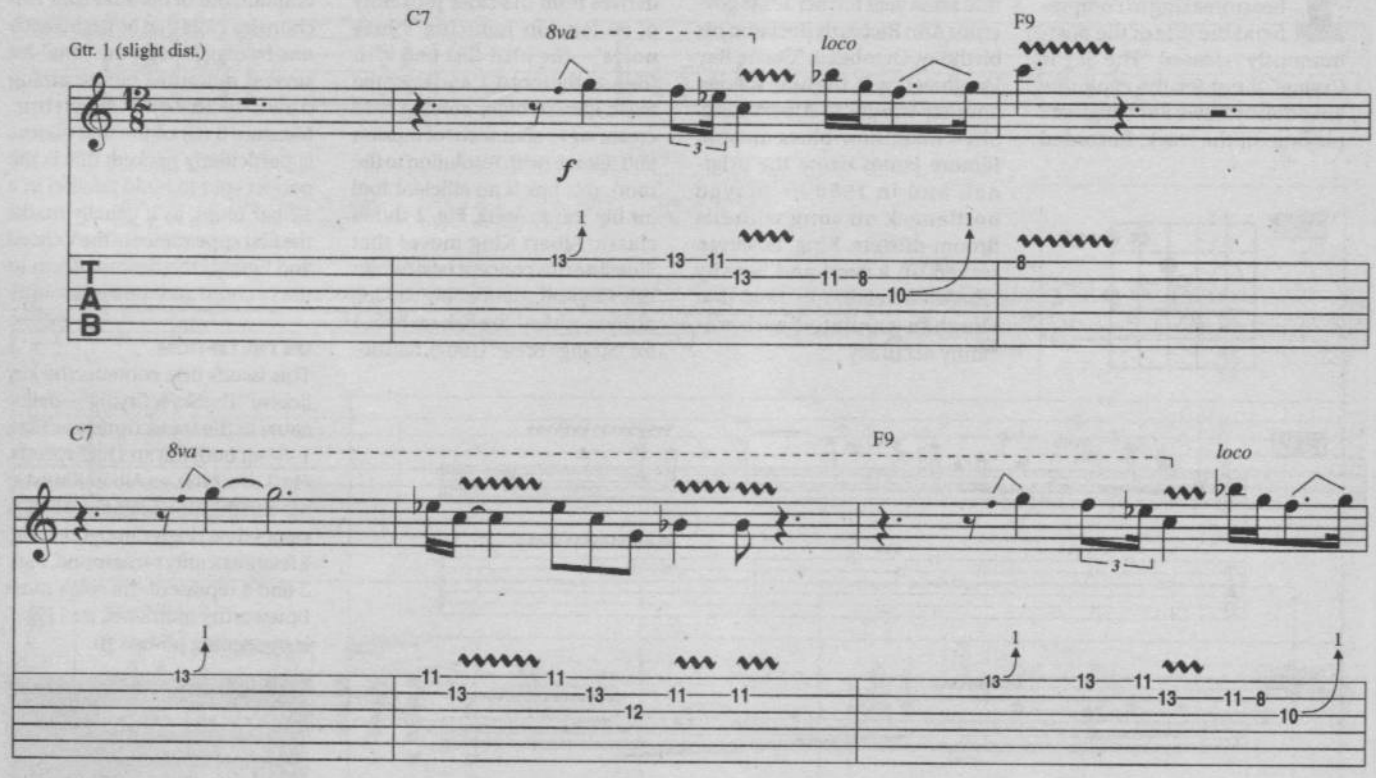
Verse 3
I've got a real, real, real, real bad feelin'
That my baby, she don't love me no more.
I've got a real, real bad feelin'
That my baby don't love me no more.
You know the sky, the sky's been cryin', yeah!
Can you see the tears rollin' down my nose?

Tune down 1/2 step:
(low to high) E♭–A♭–D♭–G♭–B♭–E♭

Verse 1

Slow Blues ♩. = 55

FIG.1 » TRACK 83



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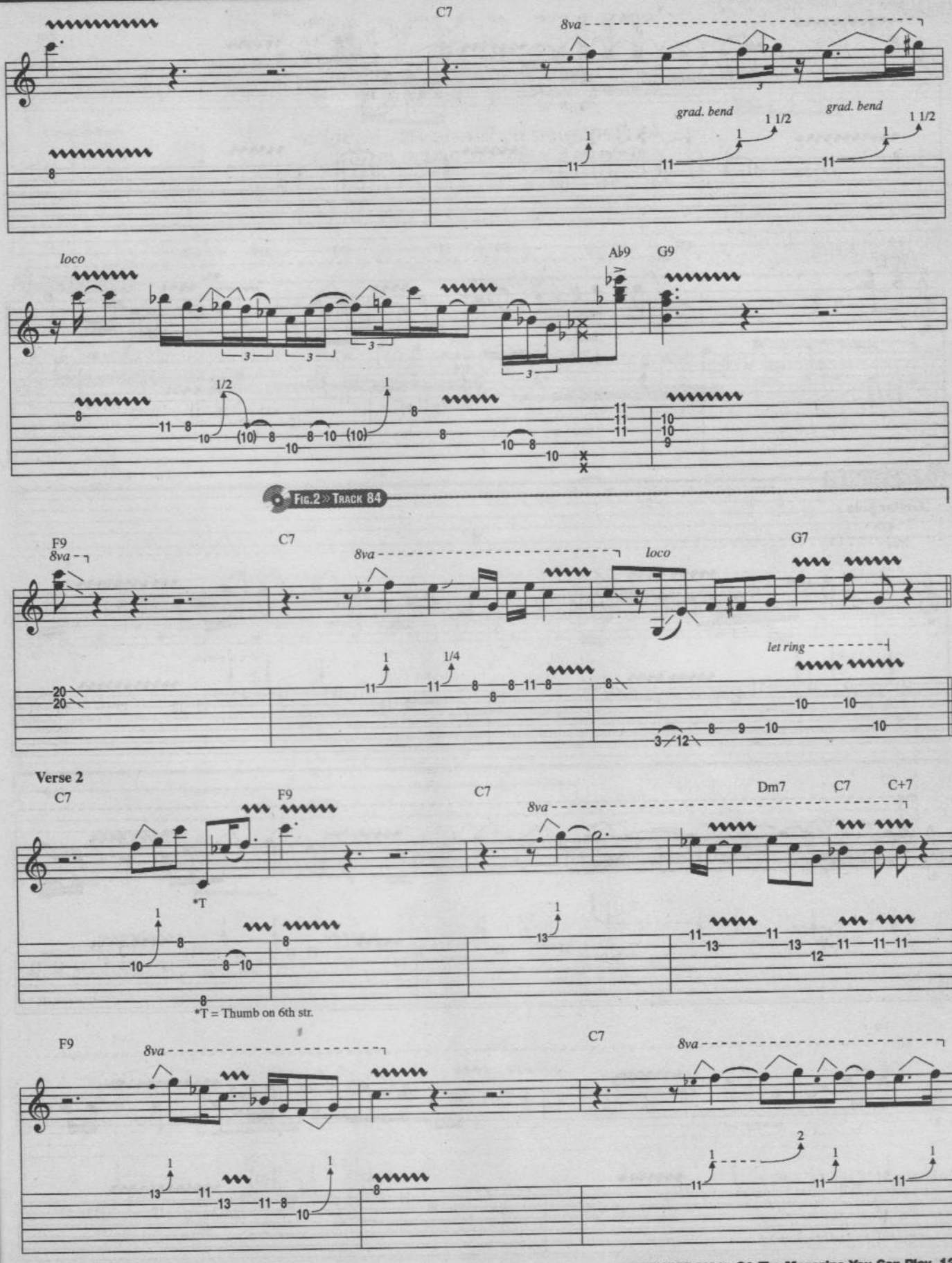

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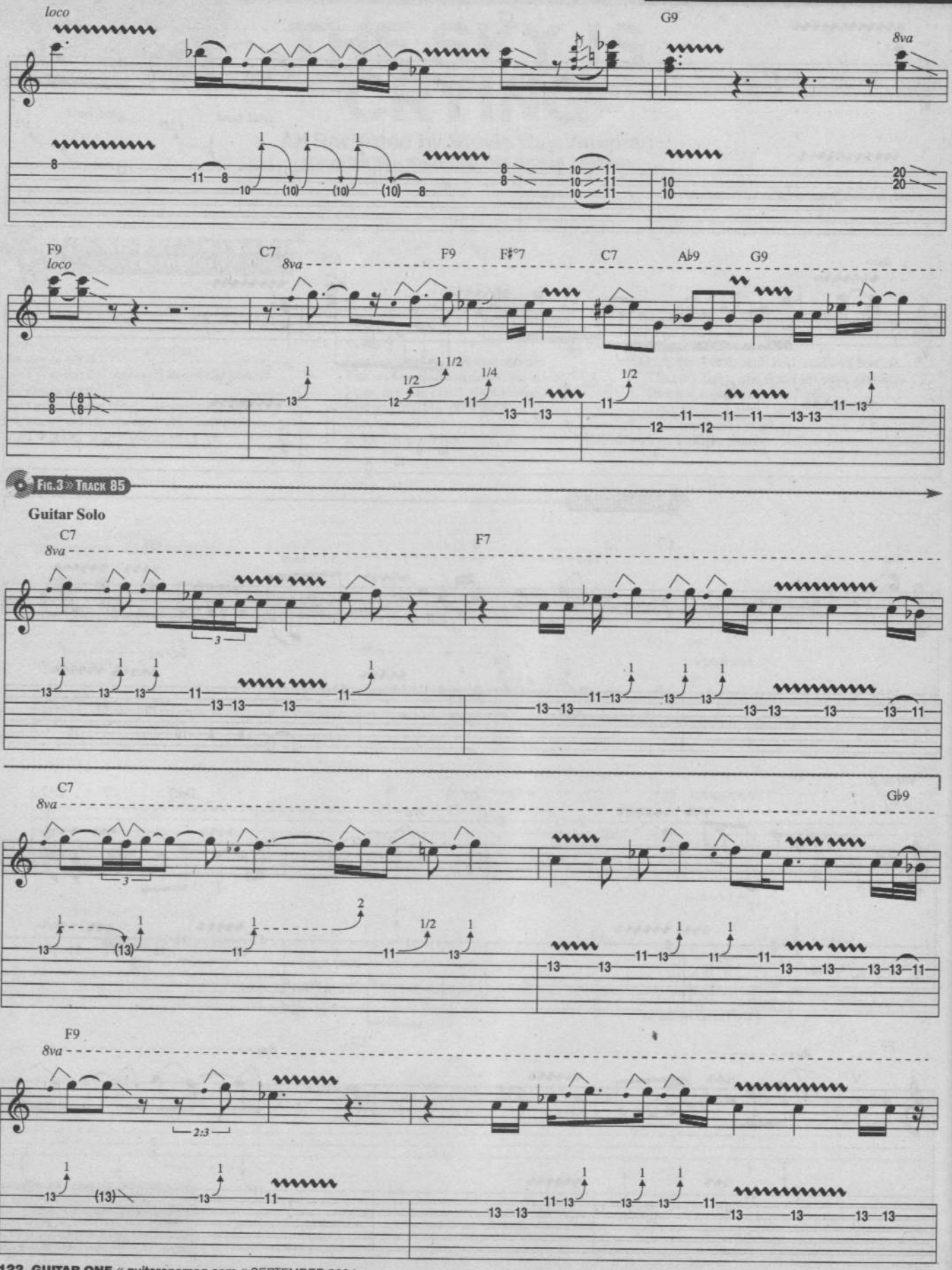

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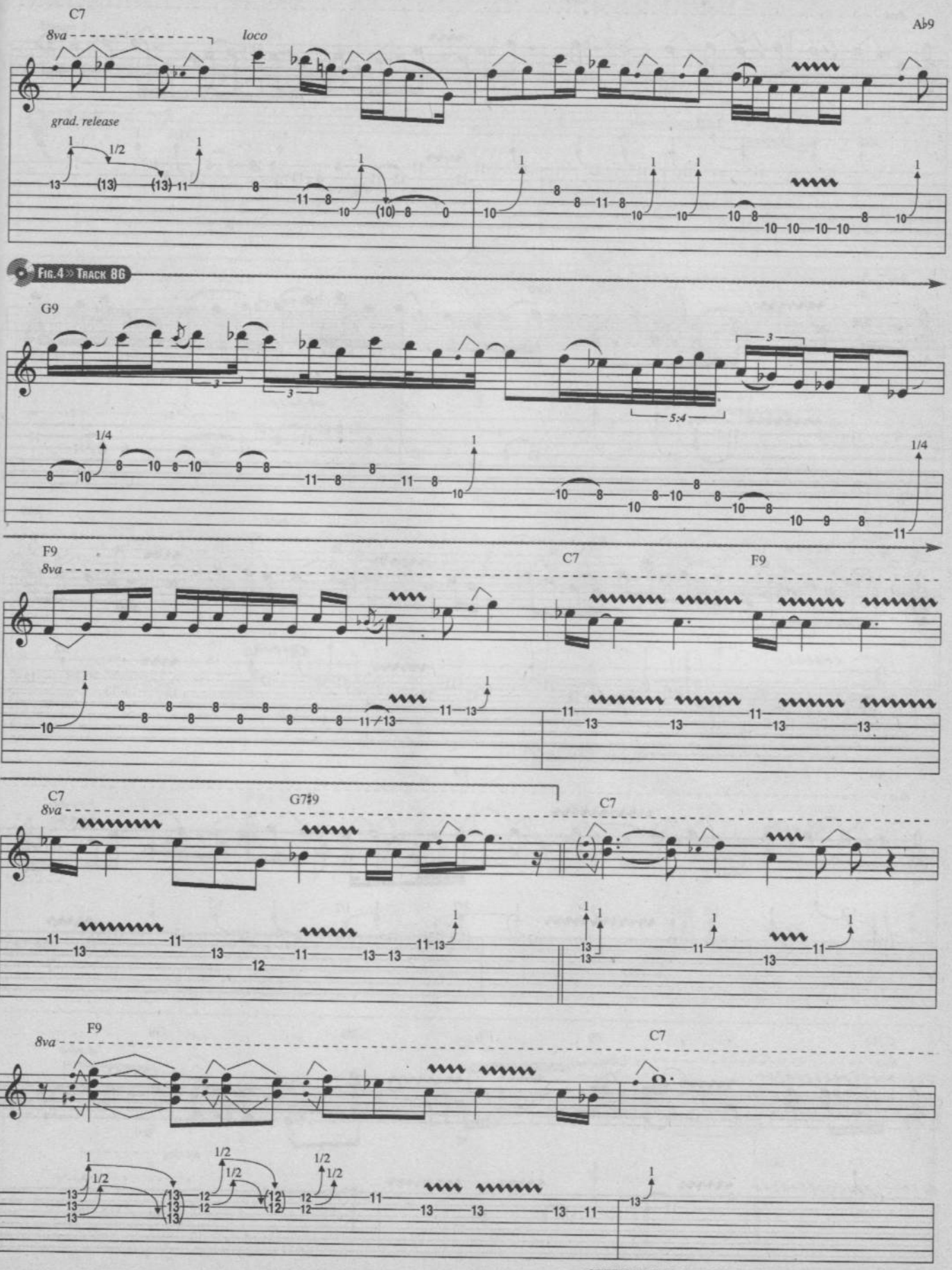

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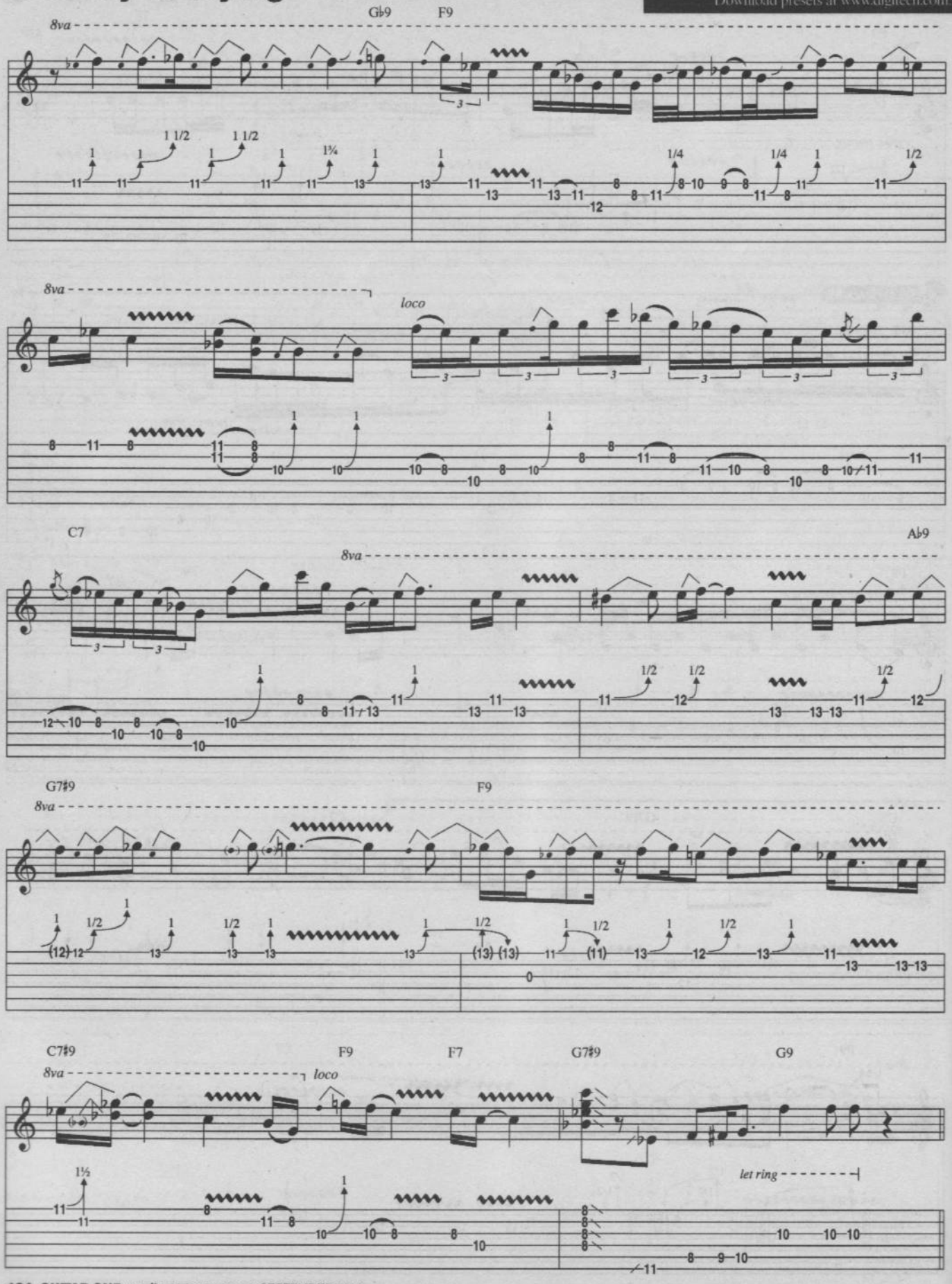
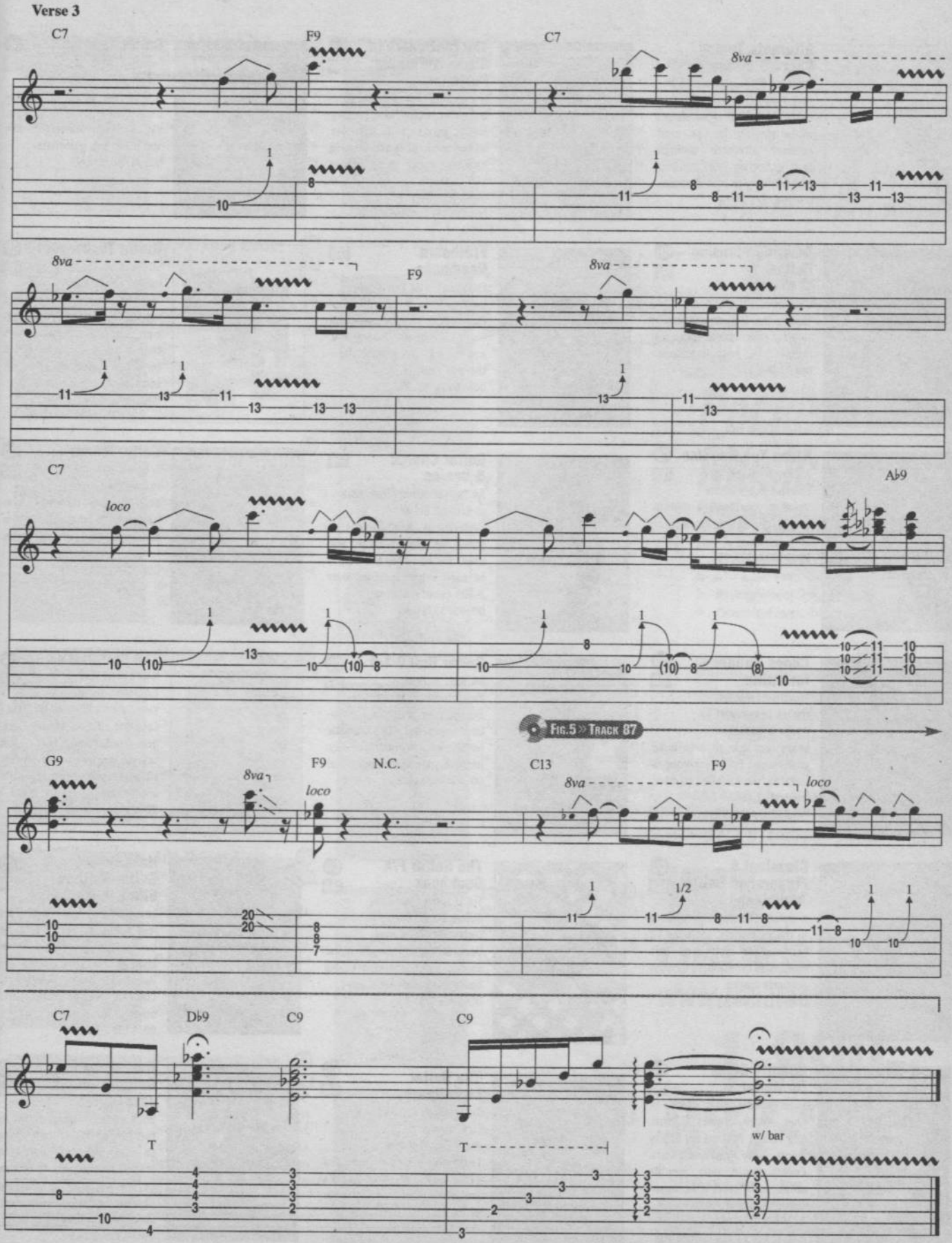
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