

# A-Soalin'

Traditional, adapted and arranged by Noel Paul Stookey,  
Elena Mezzetti, and Tracy Batteast



Peter, Paul and Mary released "A-Soalin'" three times: on their 1963 record, *Moving*; on their 1964 live release, *Peter, Paul and Mary in Concert*; and on their 1988 album, *A Holiday Celebration*. As a single, the 1963 track reached No. 15 on *Billboard*'s pop charts. Noel Paul Stookey penned "A-Soalin'" in Chicago at a friend's apartment. "It began as an exercise," says Stookey on the Peter, Paul and Mary website. "I was working on this two-voice ascending-descending part and then trying to sing the wassailing tune against it. Peter overheard from the kitchen, and then in rehearsal we realized that the tune of 'God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen' would fit nicely as a counter-melody."

The wassailing song Stookey refers to is "Heigh Ho, Nobody Home," which comprises the first verse. But "A-Soalin'" is more than just a wassailing song with a Christmas carol tagged onto the end. It mixes three traditions together: wassailing, the "soul-cake" tradition, and Christmas. In the wassailing tradition, singers went door-to-door in late December singing songs in return for "wassail" (a hot, spiced punch) or other refreshments. In the soul-cake tradition, children also went door-to-door, but this happened not during the Christmas holidays but on All Souls' Day (November 2) or the Celtic New Year (October 31). It's unclear how the door-to-door tradition unfolded, but these soul cakes apparently weren't originally intended for the living. Instead, families would set out one

final meal to nourish the souls of the dead from the previous year.

Stookey plays the pattern in measures 5–8 throughout the whole song, while Peter Yarrow fingerpicks around Em chords in root position and up at the seventh fret. The final notes in measure 6 can be tricky to grab. Try fretting the G notes on beat 3 with your middle and ring (or pinky) fingers on the sixth and first strings, respectively. Then, grab the low F# with your index finger while also fretting the high A note with your pinky finger. Then, you can slide up to the seventh fret with your pinky while you pluck open sixth string underneath. Notice that the second and fourth measures of Stookey's pattern differ slightly, making the full pattern last four bars. You may also note that some parts of the song don't divide evenly into four-measure chunks. Stookey got around this problem by occasionally truncating the riff to two measures, and playing either section (measures 5–6 or 7–8) several times in a row. Try mixing them up yourself as you play along. On the original recording, Stookey plays all the way through to the end with just this one riff. On the final two measures, Yarrow adds a two-octave descending run, which I've incorporated into the following arrangement.

—ANDREW DUBROCK

**Capo II Intro**  
N.C. (Em)  
♩ = 106

**Verse**  
with Rhythm Figure 1, throughout

1. Hey ho no-bo-dy home meat nor drink nor mon-ey have I none Yet shall we by mer-ry—  
2-4. See additional lyrics.

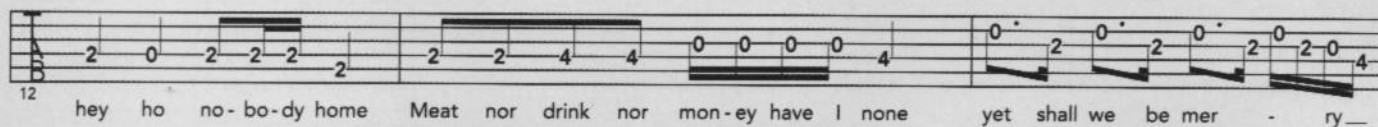
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Em/B D/A Em

D6

Cmaj7

Em/B D6/A Em

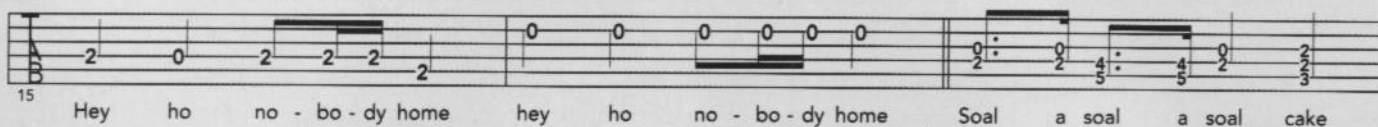


## \* Chorus

D6 Cmaj7

Em/B D/A Em

D6 Cmaj7

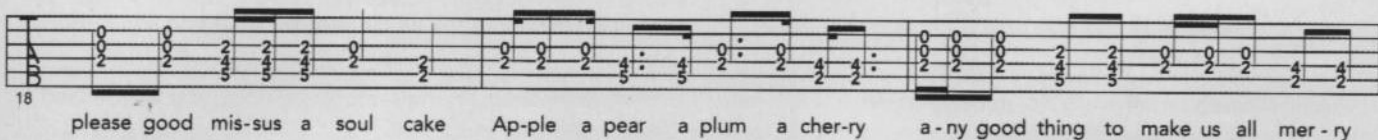


\*Insert four-measure riff before first chorus.

Em/B D6/A Em

D6 Cmaj7

Em/B D6/A Em

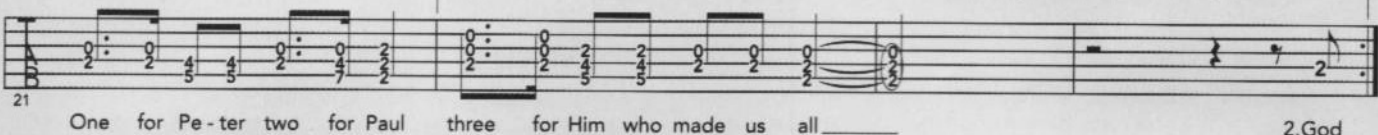


D6 Cmaj7

1-3.

Em/B D/A Em

D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D/A Em



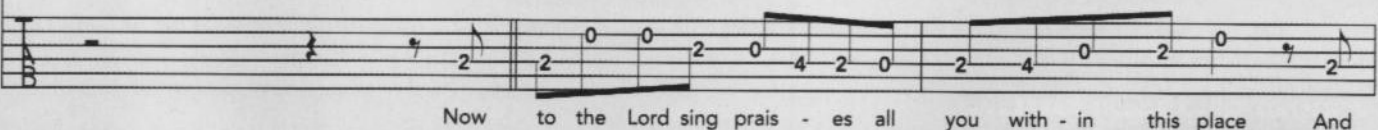
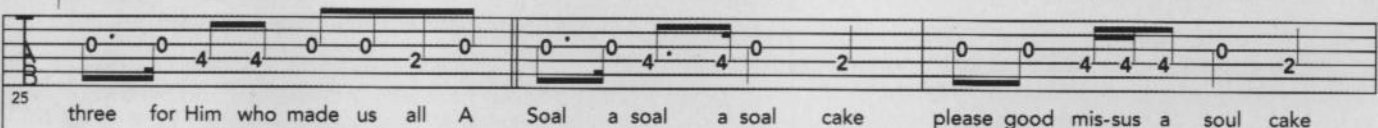
4.

## Chorus

Em/B D/A Em

D6 Cmaj7

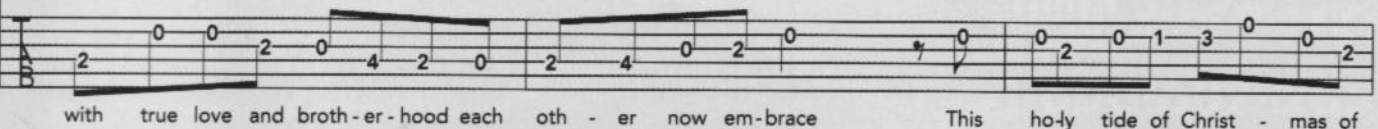
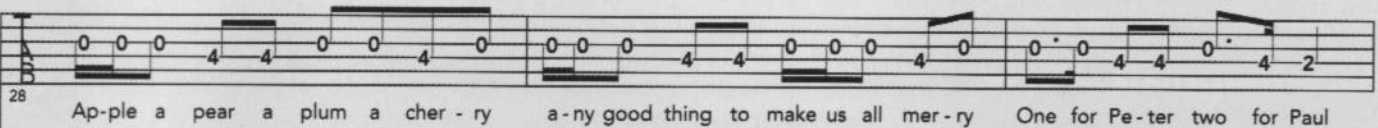
Em/B D6/A Em



D6 Cmaj7

Em/B D6/A Em

D6 Cmaj7



Em/B D/A Em D6 Cmaj7 Em

31 three for Him who made us all three for Him who made us all

beau-ty and of grace Oh tid-ings of com-fort and joy

- Em D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D6/A Em
1. Hey ho, nobody home, meat nor drink nor money have I none
- D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D/A Em
- Yet shall we be merry, hey ho, nobody home
- D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D6/A Em
- Meat nor drink nor money have I none, yet shall we be merry
- D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D/A Em
- Hey ho, nobody home, hey ho, nobody home

Chorus

- Em D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D6/A Em
- Soal, a soal, a soal cake, please good missus, a soul cake
- D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D6/A
- Apple, a pear, a plum, a cherry, any good thing
- Em
- to make us all merry
- D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D6/A Em
- One for Peter, two for Paul, three for Him who made us all
- D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D/A Em
- Em D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D6/A Em
2. God bless the master of this house and the mistress also
- D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D/A Em
- And all the little children that 'round your table grow
- D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D6/A Em
- The cattle in your stable, the dog by your front door
- D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D/A Em
- And all that dwells within your gates, we wish you ten times more

Repeat Chorus

- Em D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D6/A Em
3. Go down into the cellar and see what you can find
- D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D/A Em
- If the barrels are not empty, we hope you will be kind
- D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D6/A Em
- We hope you will be kind with your apple and strawber'
- D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D/A Em
- For we'll come no more a-soalin' till this time next year

Repeat Chorus

- Em D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D6/A Em
4. The streets are very dirty, my shoes are very thin
- D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D/A Em
- I have a little pocket to put a penny in
- D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D6/A Em
- If you haven't got a penny, a ha' penny will do
- D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D/A Em
- If you haven't got a ha' penny then God bless you

Repeat Chorus, two times (add verse below, second time)

- Em D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D6/A Em
- Now to the Lord sing praises all you within this place
- D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D/A Em
- And with true love and brotherhood each other now embrace
- D6 Cmaj7 Em/B D6/A Em
- This holy tide of Christmas of beauty and of grace
- D6 Cmaj7 Em
- Oh tidings of comfort and joy