Bluegrass Soloing with G Runs

by Mickey Abraham

I am very excited to be the flatpicking instructor for FGM's online newsletter. It is my goal as your online flatpicking teacher to, over time, give you all the information you'll need to become a more advanced and accomplished flatpicker. Everyone learns differently and not everyone is at the same level; hence, I need to vary my lessons to appeal to everyone. Please email any flatpicking topics you would like to see featured in the "lesson" portion of these newsletters. Some may prefer awesome new tunes (building repertoire), while others may need improvising ideas, picking techniques (alternate picking and triplet runs), or anything else that eager flatpicking students may have questions on.

This month's lesson is about expanding the way we look at the classic G run. By adding a couple slight variations (changing the order and timing of the notes) and by adding a couple new notes (flatted 7th's and flatted 5th's) we can have endless ways to interpret a G run. You can use these ideas to fill the spaces between vocals or expand them into an entire flatpicking solo for an instrumental tune.

All of the variations in this lesson are in G open position in the lower octave. Once you have learned all these G run variations it is your job to move these ideas up an octave and to transpose the ideas to fit over other chords! To show you how to use these ideas in a music situation I have transposed the ideas to work over C and D (the other two main chords in the key of G) and strung them together to form what I call "G Jam 1" over a G instrumental tune like Monroe's "Road to Columbus."

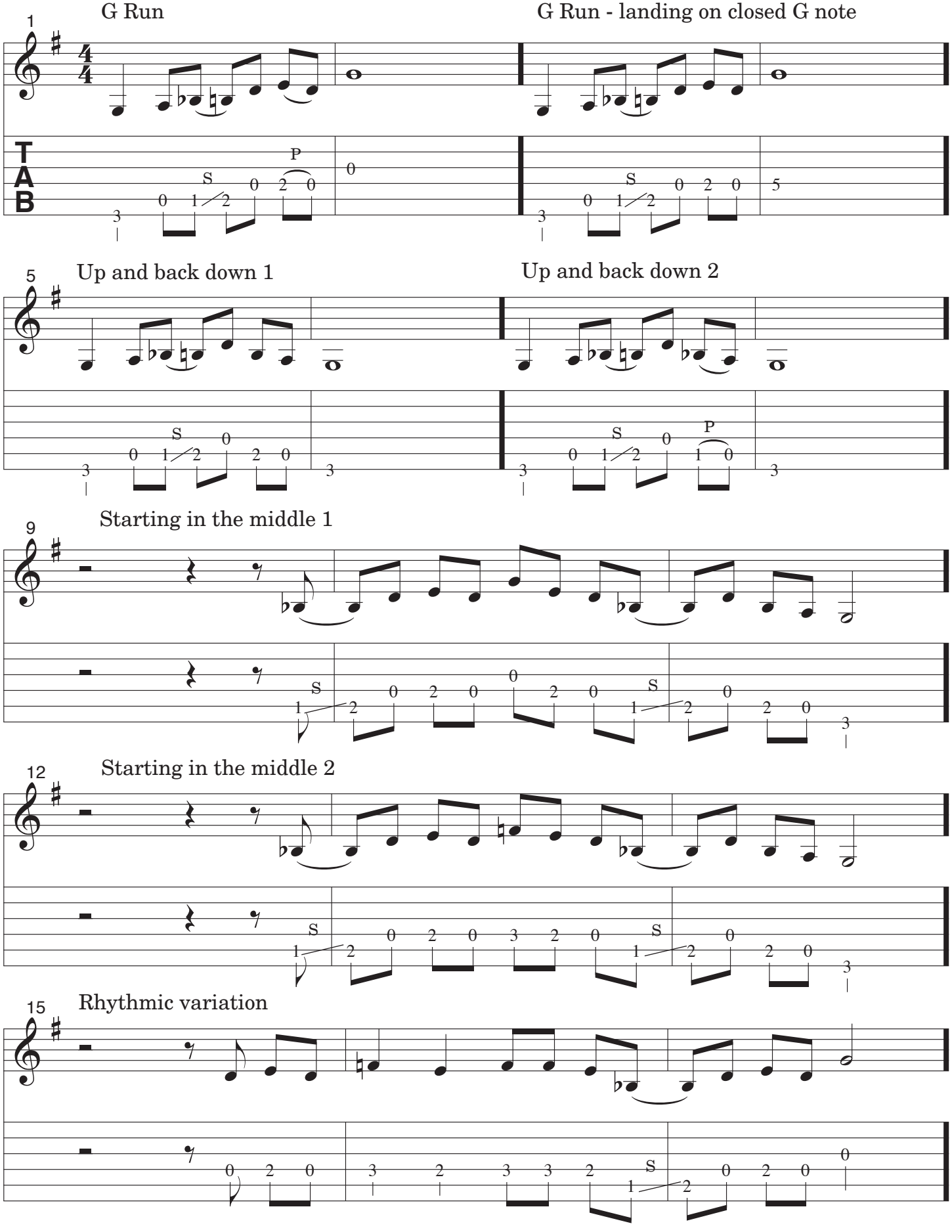
Each letter is one 4 beat measure:

G Jam 1

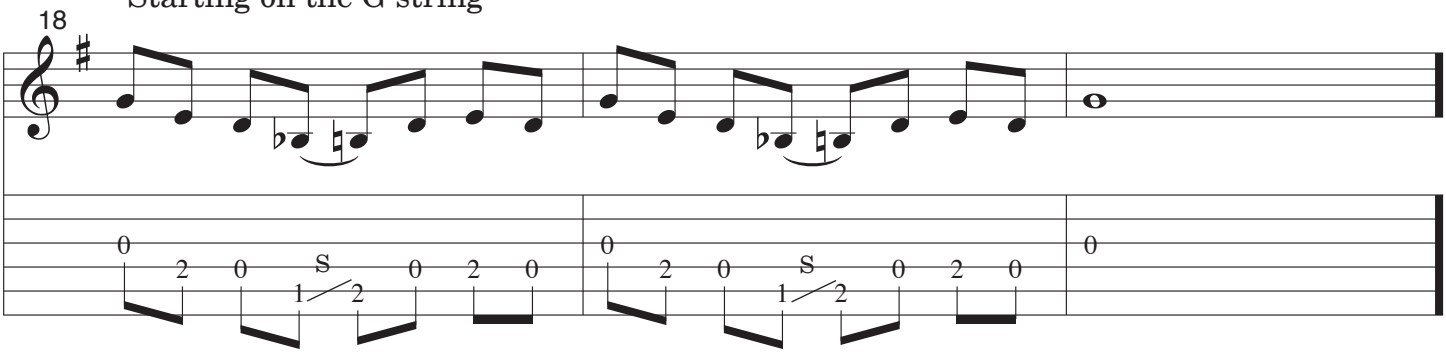
GGCC
GGDD
GGCC
GDGG

I use this typical chord progression to teach my students how to play over changes (outline chords). When I learn new licks and runs I try to apply them to this chord progression in all my favorite keys. I would first need to learn each example in not only G, C, and D but eventually in A, B, Bb, and C# -- well, you get the idea...I could play these ideas in any key! Finally, I cut and paste the ideas together to fit the desired chord progression of a bluegrass song. Sometimes it takes some time and patience to fit these ideas together in a way that makes sense. You'll no doubt need a tape recorder or a patient friend to back you up as you take the time needed to transpose these G run variations all over the guitar.

I encourage you to email me at michabraham@comcast.net if you'd like help beginning to transpose these ideas. Feel free to contact me with any other questions about this lesson, general comments and questions, or with any concepts you'd like to see me cover in the future in these free online lessons.

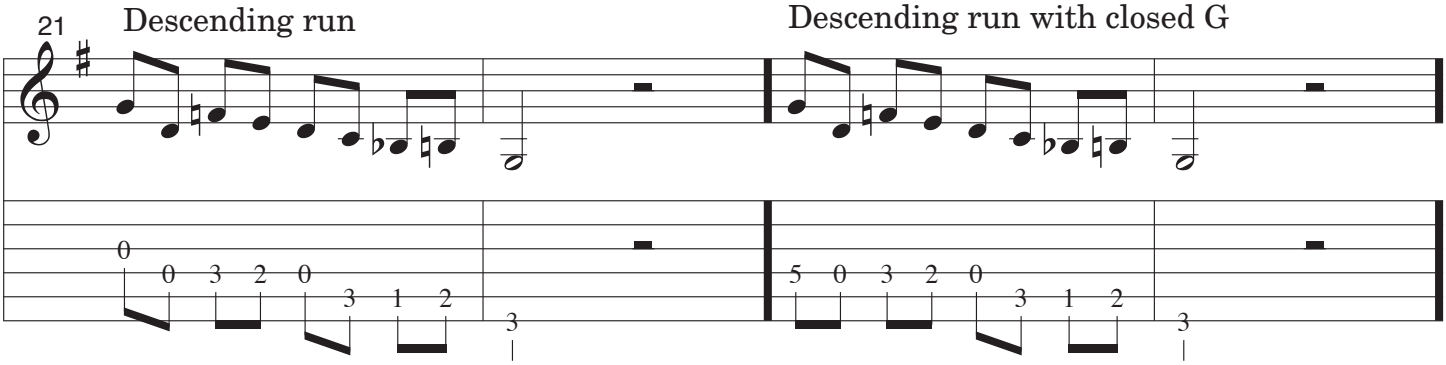

1
G Run
G Run - landing on closed G note
5
Up and back down 1
Up and back down 2
9
Starting in the middle 1
12
Starting in the middle 2
15
Rhythmic variation

Starting on the G string



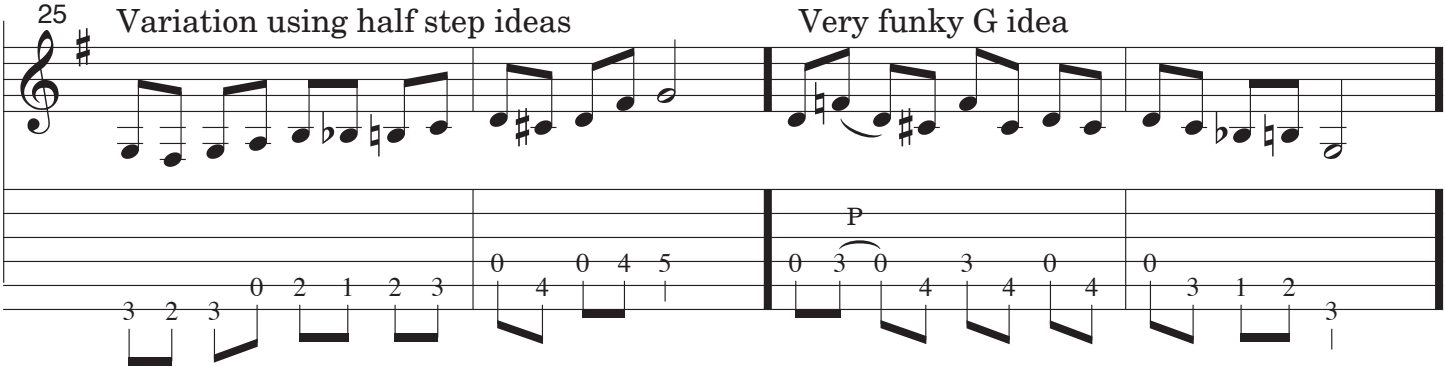
Descending run

Descending run with closed G

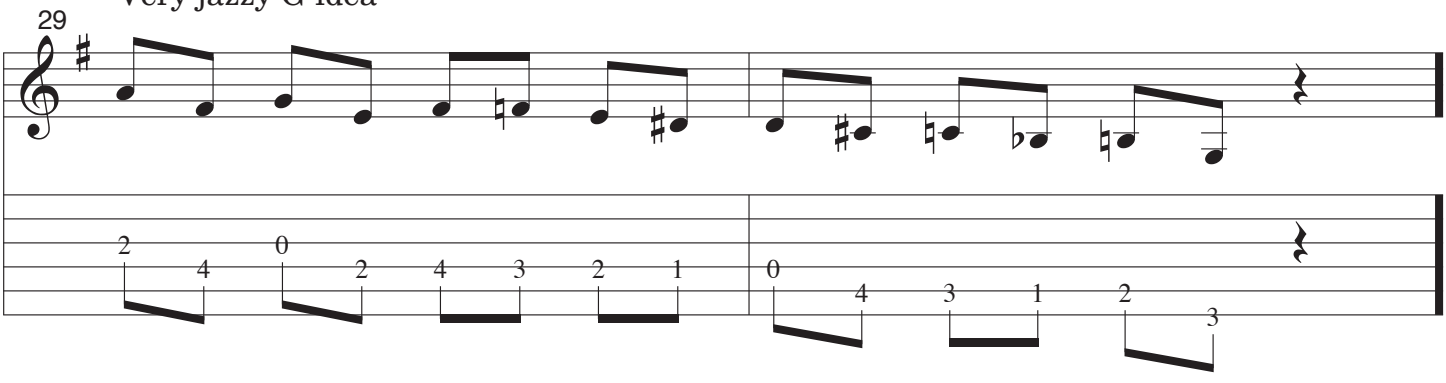
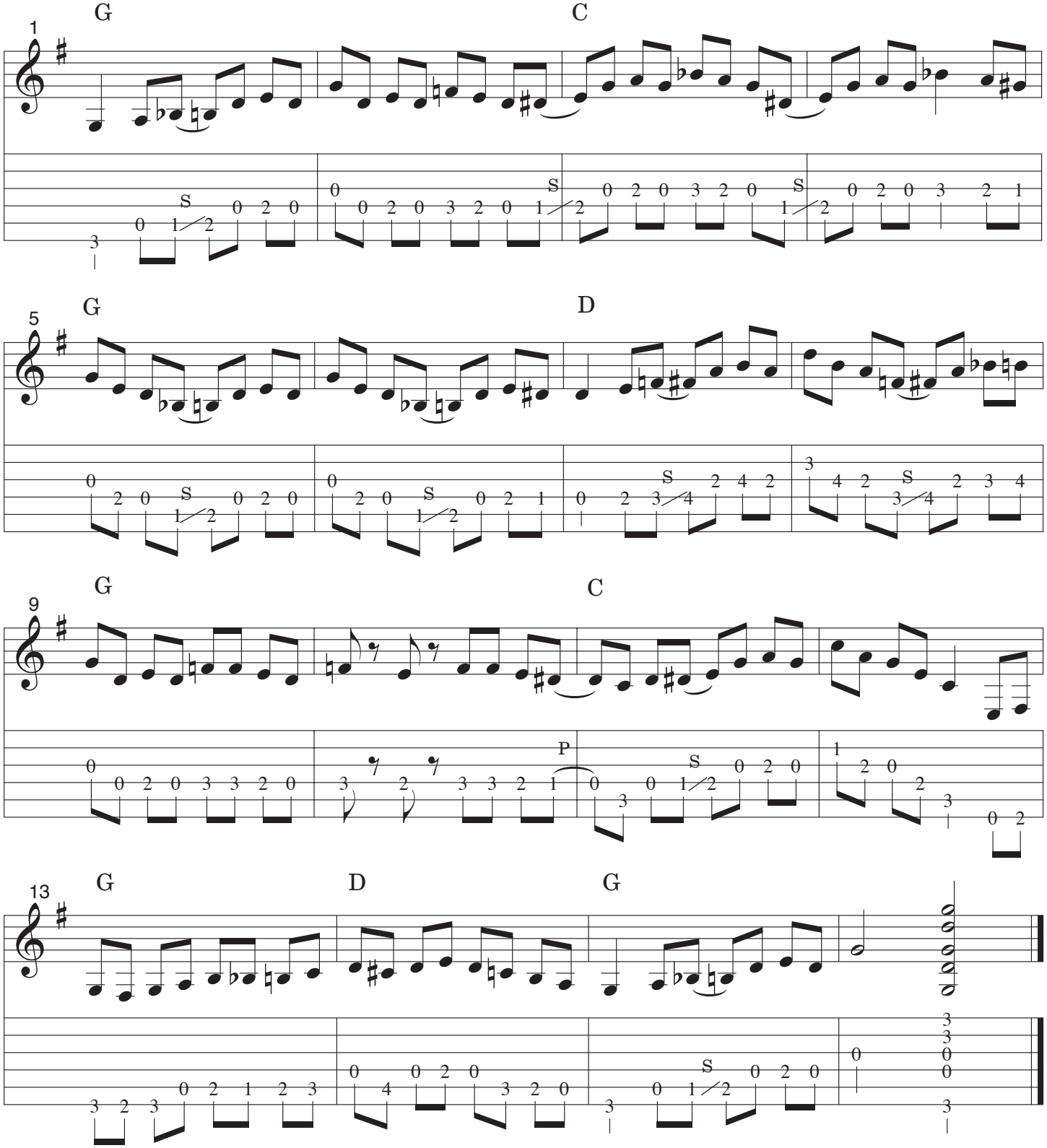


Variation using half step ideas

Very funky G idea



Very jazzy G idea



G Jam 1