Clawhammer Techniques and Arrangements for 10 Jigs

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Louisville, KY

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By David Brooks

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Characteristics of Jigs

Playing jigs in clawhammer style can be a challenge since the normal clawhammer stroke doesn't work so well. In fact, one well-known teacher advised me to just strum the chords rather attempt to play the melody. Clawhammer can play a jig melody, however, by making the right adjustments to your stroke. It starts with understanding the jig rhythm.

Jigs use 6/8 time. There are 6 beats in each measure with the eighth notes getting one beat each. In practice, however, it is easier to think of there being two pulses in a measure made up of 3 eighth notes on each beat:

1-2-3 **2**-2-3

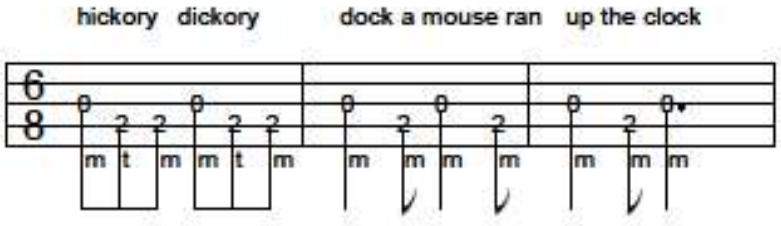
A different clawhammer stroke is called for with a jig. I use a downstroke on the first and third beats and on the fourth and sixth beats. The middle beat, if it is sounded, will be done with a left-hand lick (hammer-on or pull-off) or with a drop thumb. In the exercise that follows, the downstrokes are noted with the letter *m,* hammer-ons will be indicated by an *h*, pull-offs will be indicated by a *p*, and a drop thumb will be noted with a *t*.

A measure may also be populated with a quarter note paired with an eighth note. This combination adds a bit of syncopation to the rhythm. The quarter note counts for 2 eighth-note beats, and the eighth note adds the 3rd beat:

1 & **3** & **1** & **3**

Ken Perlman offers a handy way to think about 6/8 time using the nursery rhyme, "Hickory Dickory Dock."

> 6 eighth notes in a measure will sound like – "Hickory Dickory"
>
> 1 quarter note (beats 1 and 2) paired with an eighth note (beat 3) will sound like – ". . . Dock a Mouse Ran Up the Clock."



In the last measure of the above example, the dotted half note associated with "clock" has the value of 3 eighth-note beats – 2 beats for the half note and 1 beat added by the dot.

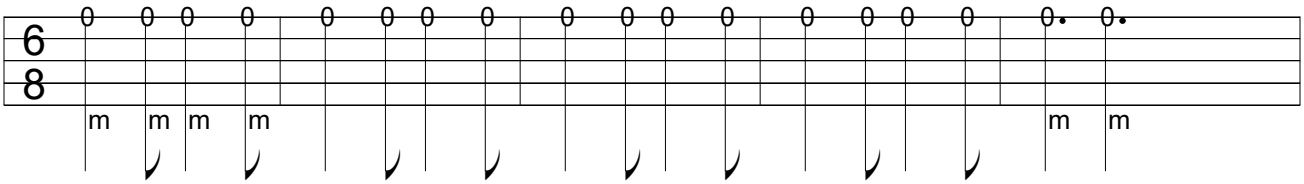
The following exercises may help you get a feel for the rhythm of a jig while exploring the left-hand and right-hand techniques for playing jigs successfully.

The following ten tabs for frequently played jigs (at least at Louisville contra dances) will help you apply this "jig stroke" to some actual tunes. Some of the tabs are fairly easy (e.g., "Kesh Jig" and "Out on the Ocean"). Others may require more time. But all are within your reach with practice.

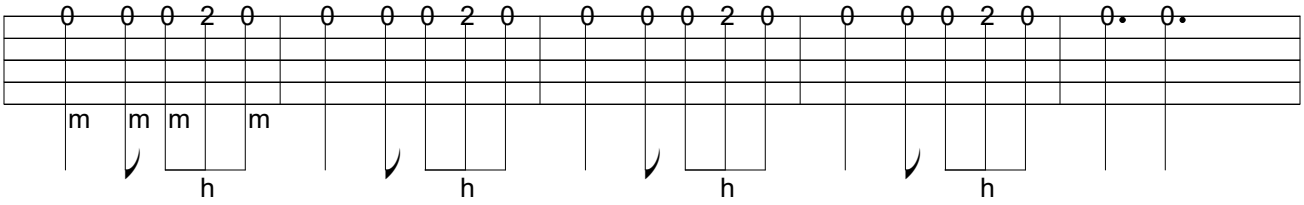
Jig Exercises

Key of G - gDGBD
Tab by David Brooks

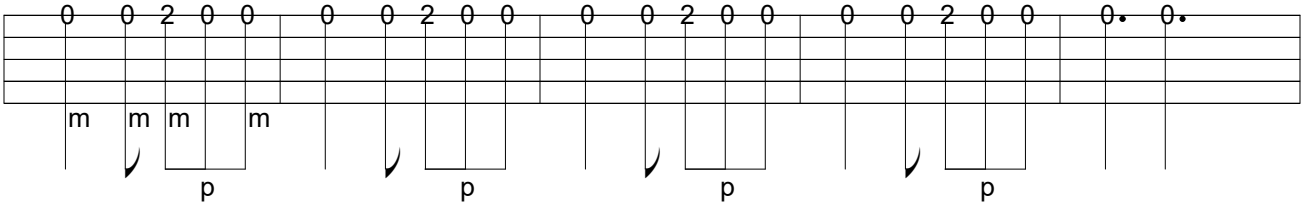
Quarter and eighth notes



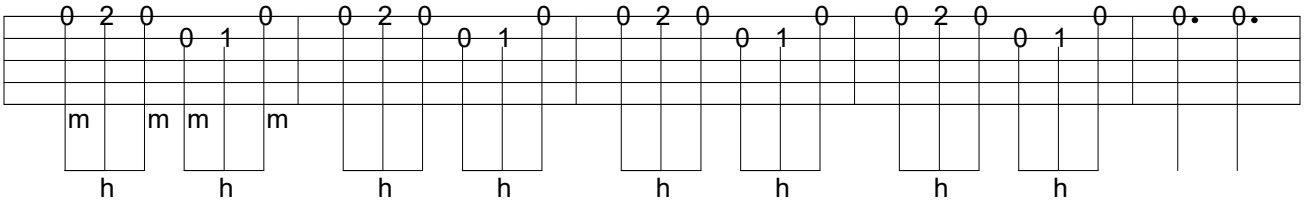
Using hammer-ons



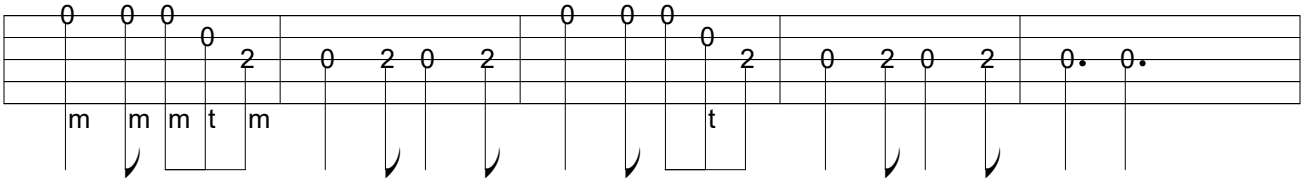
Using pull-offs



All eighth notes

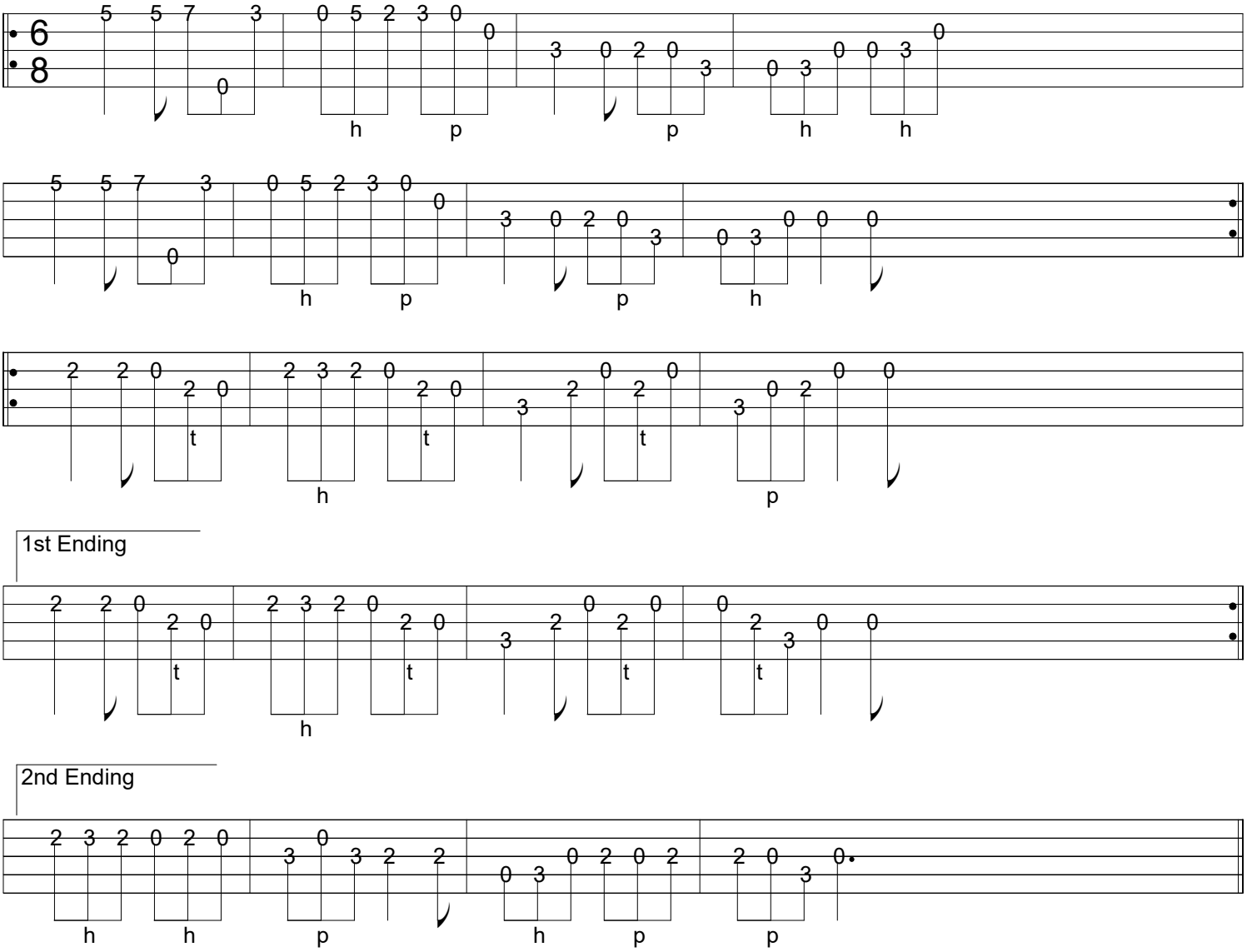


Drop thumb



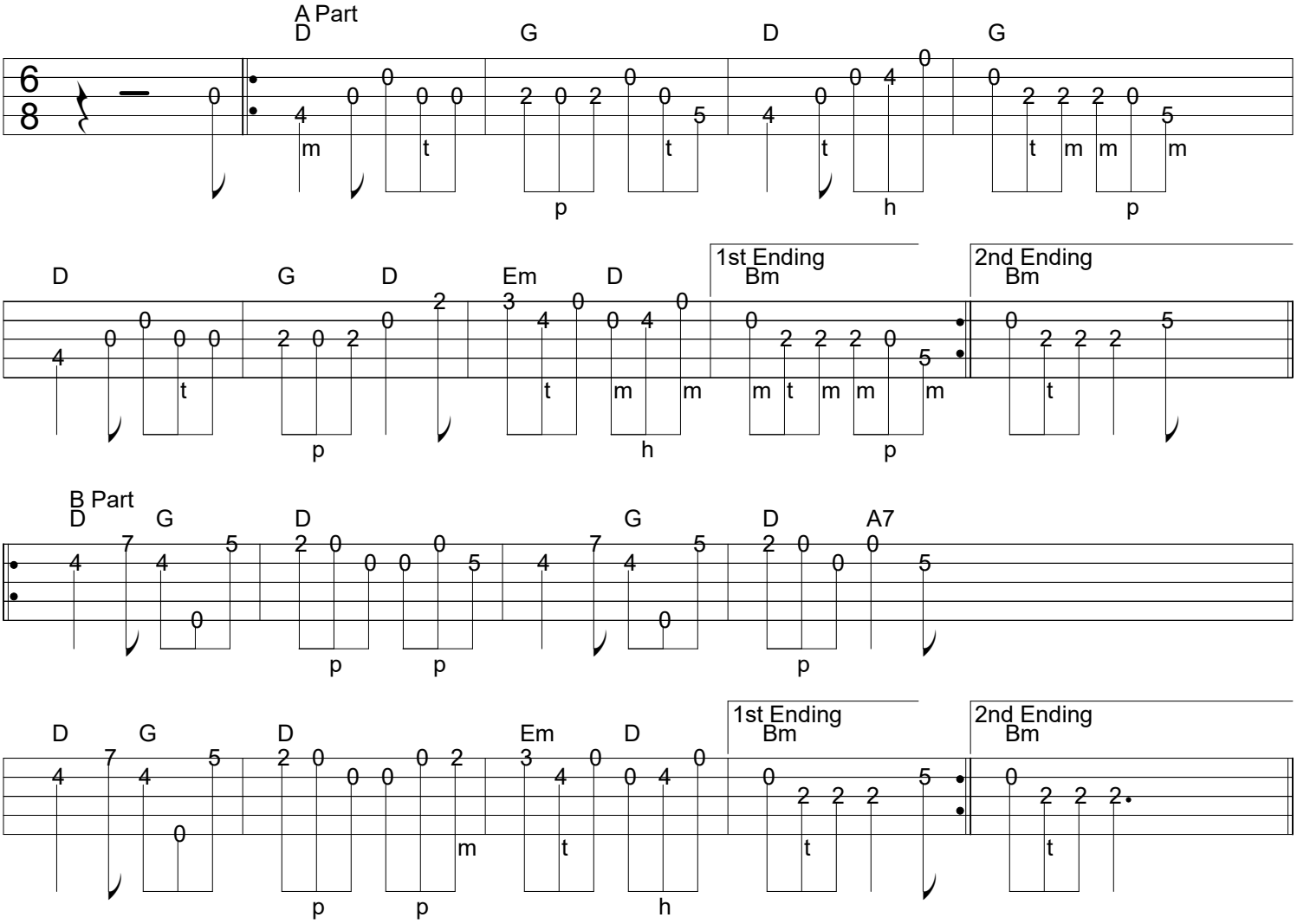
Cliffs of Moher

Key of Am - gDGCD (capo 2)
Tab by David Brooks



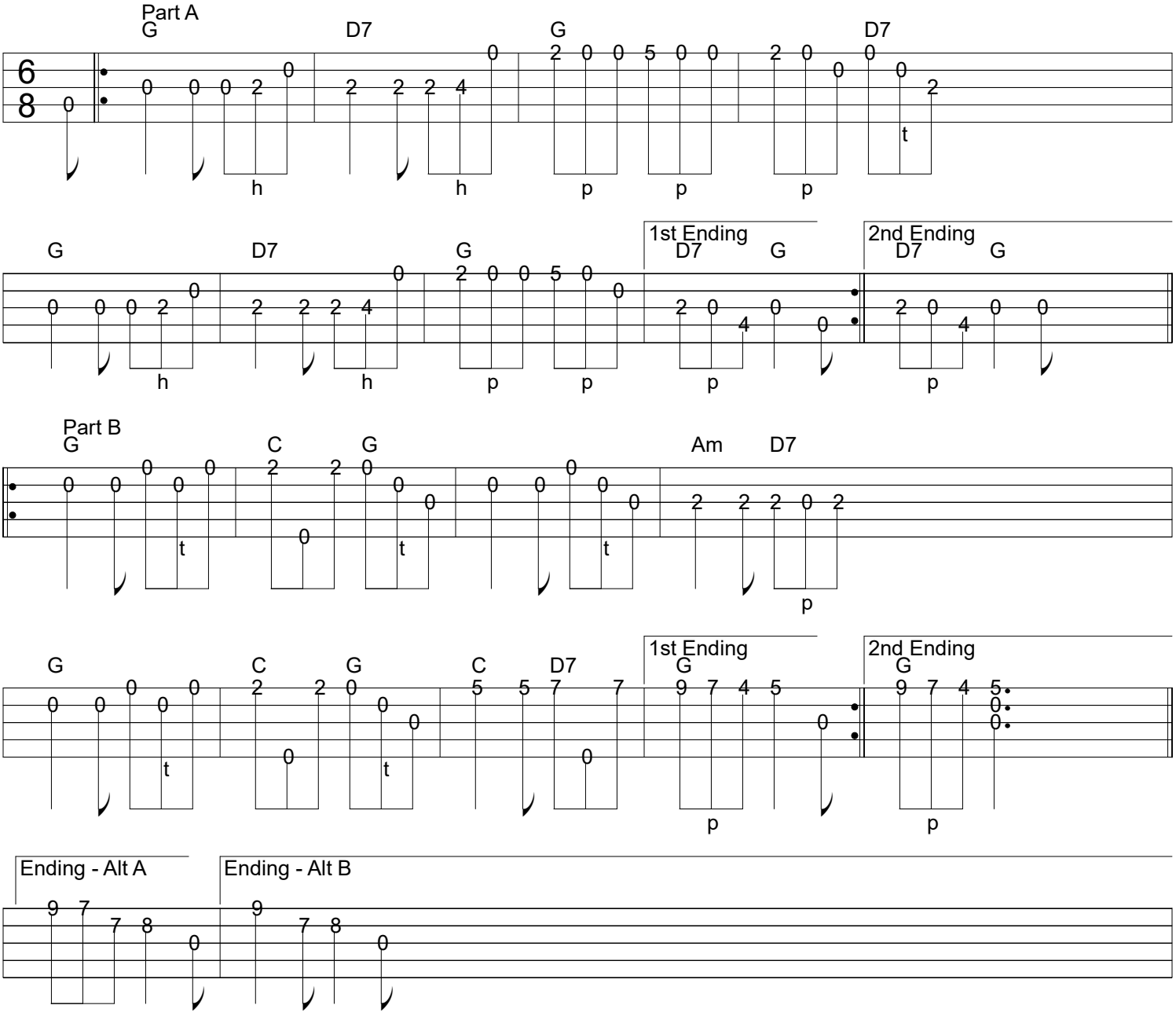
Connaughtman's Rambles

Key of D - gCGCD (capo 2)
Tab by David Brooks



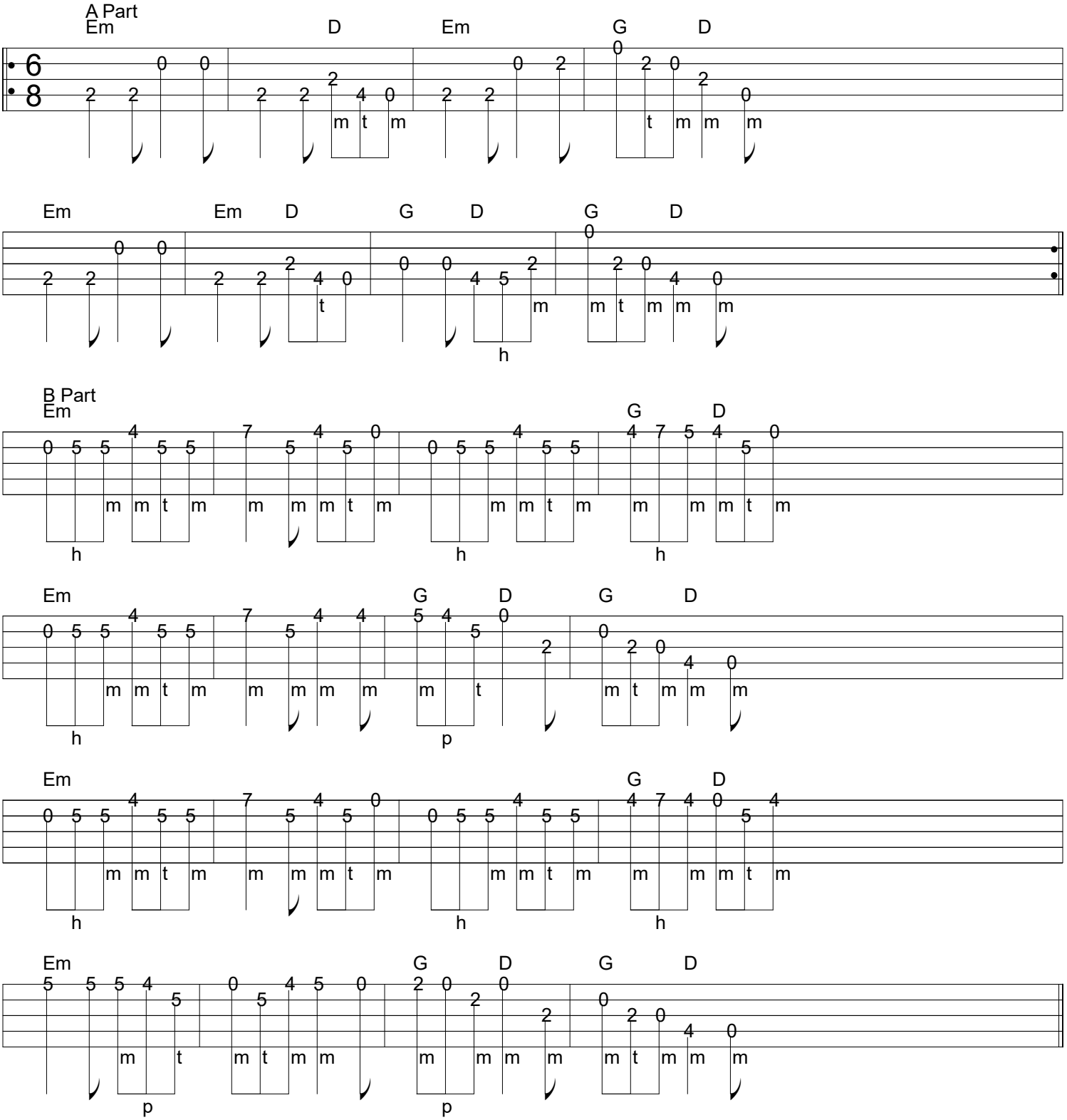
Kesh Jig

Key of G - gDGBD
Tab by David Brooks



Morrison's Jig

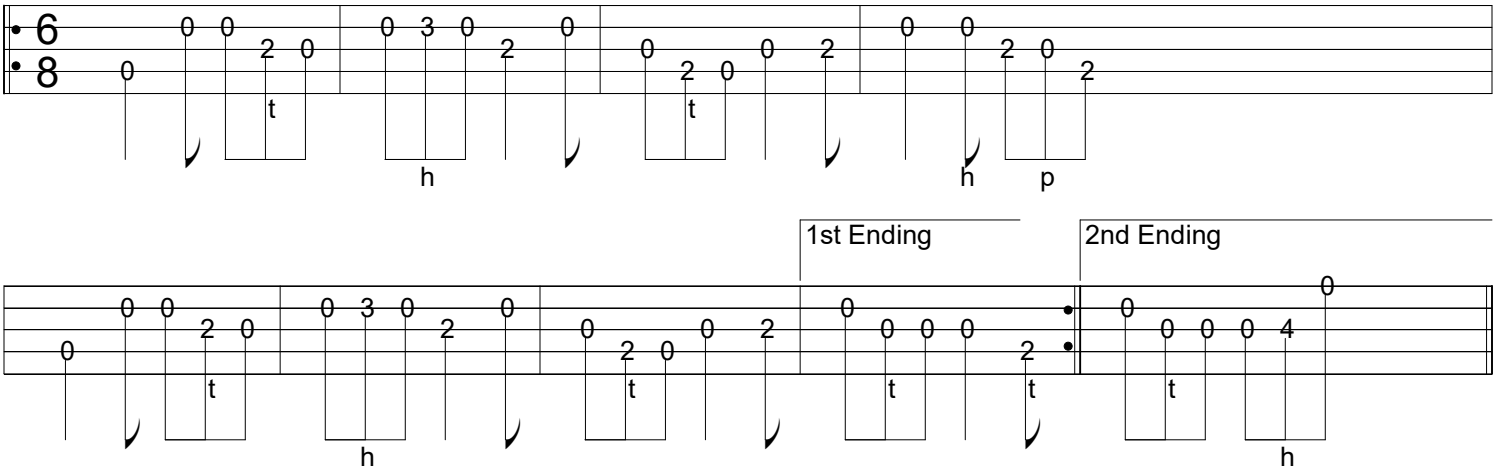
Tab by David Brooks
Key of Em - gDGBD



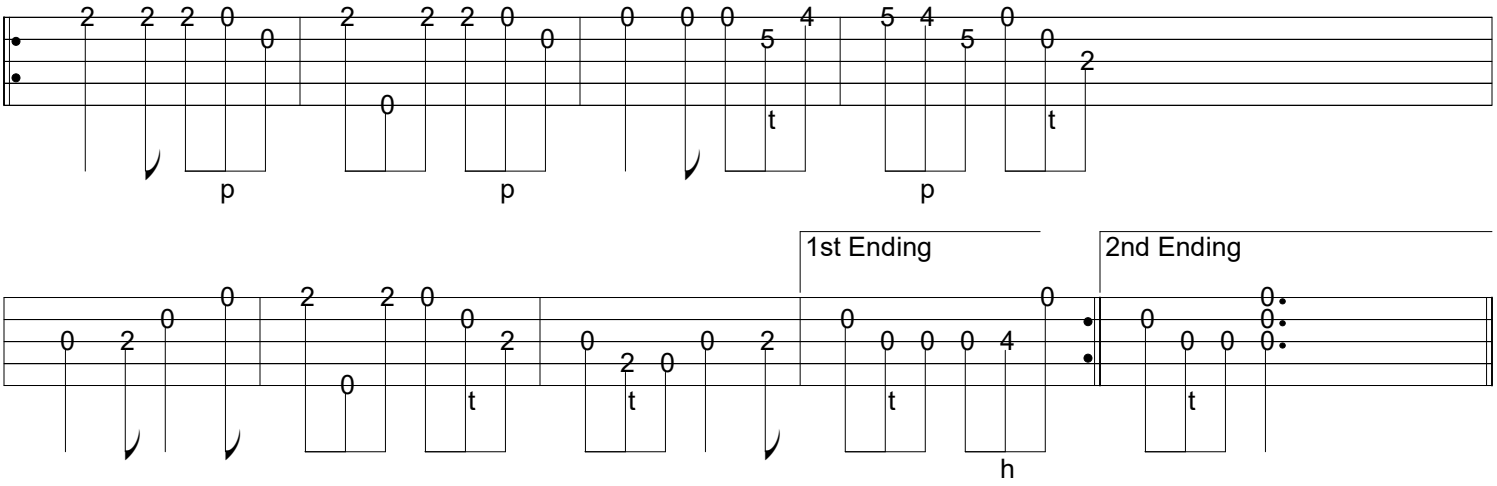
Out on the Ocean

Key of G - gDGBD
Tab by David Brooks

A Part

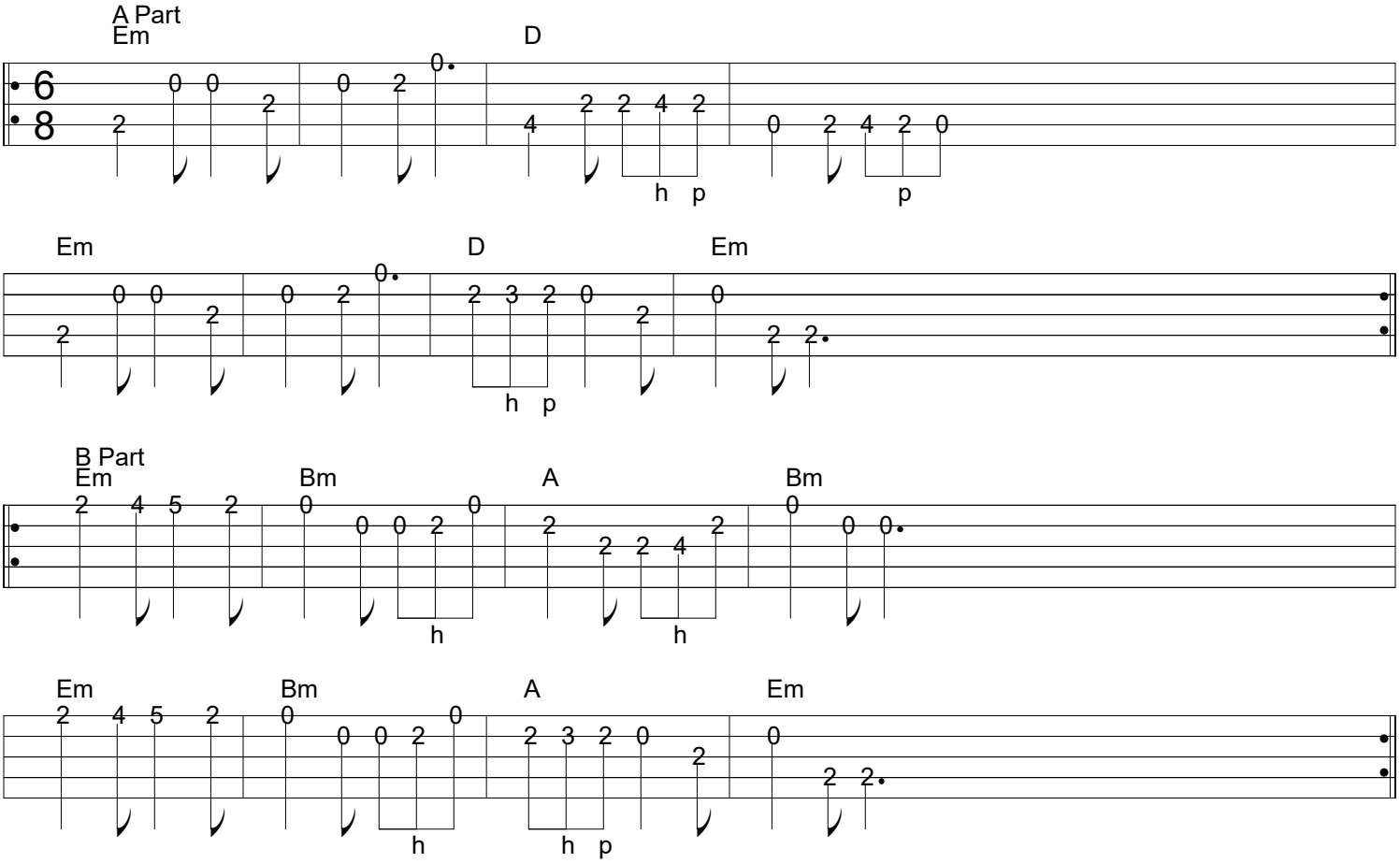


B Part



Road to Lisdoonvarna - Basic

Key of Em - gDGBD
Tab by David Brooks



Saddle the Pony

Key of G - gDGBD
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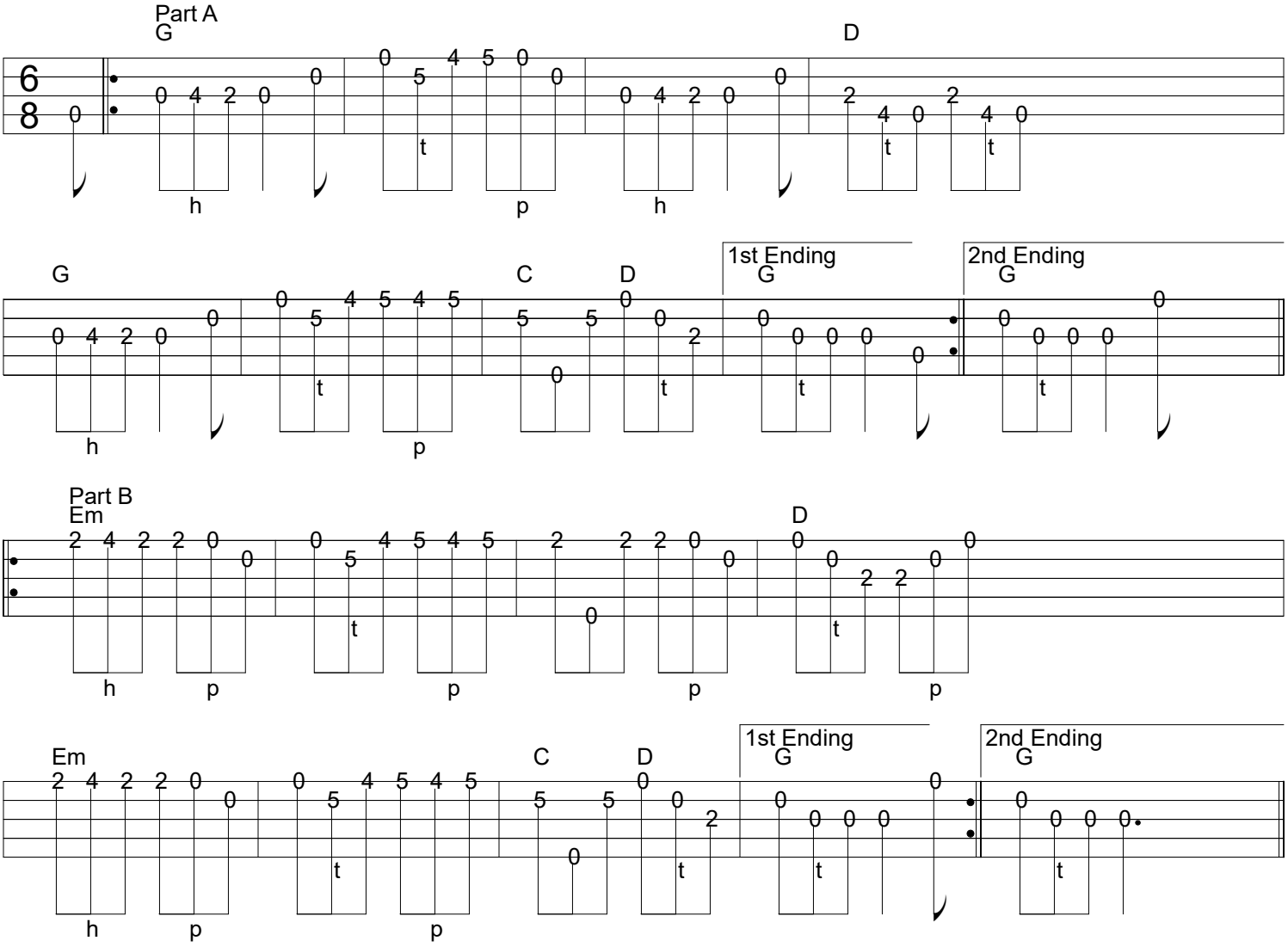
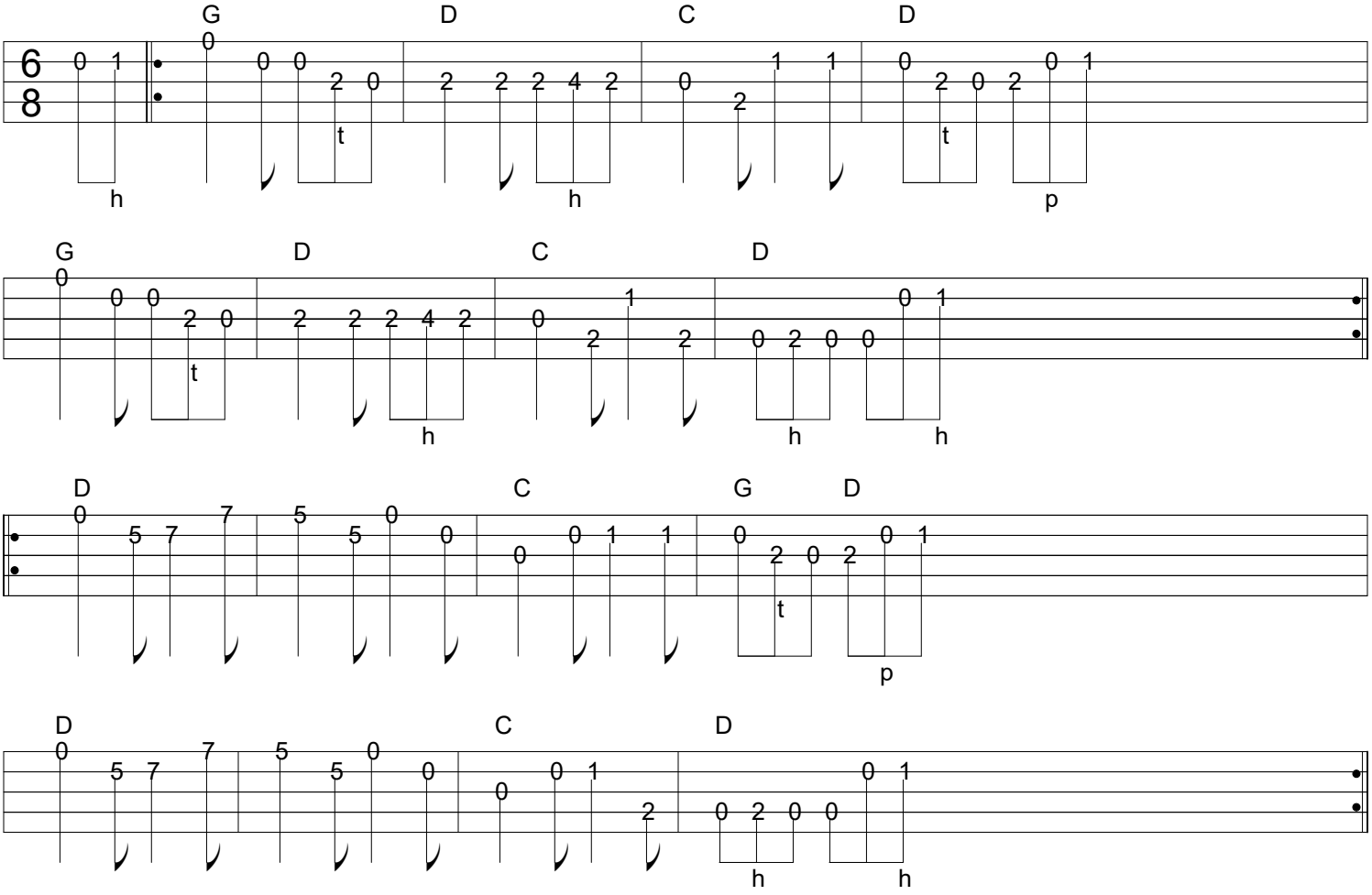


Star Above the Garter

Key of G - gDGBD
Tab by David Brooks



Swallowtail Jig

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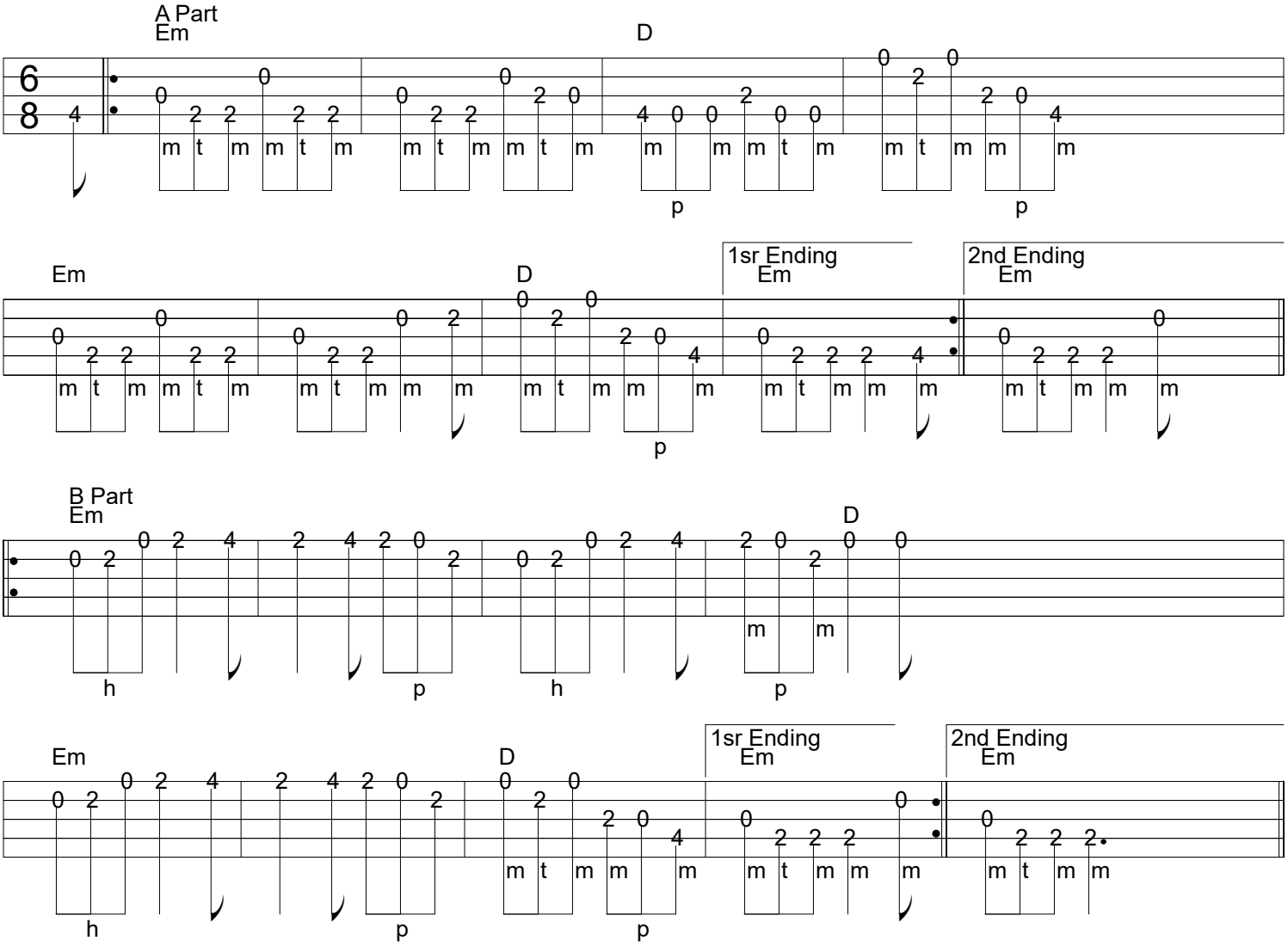
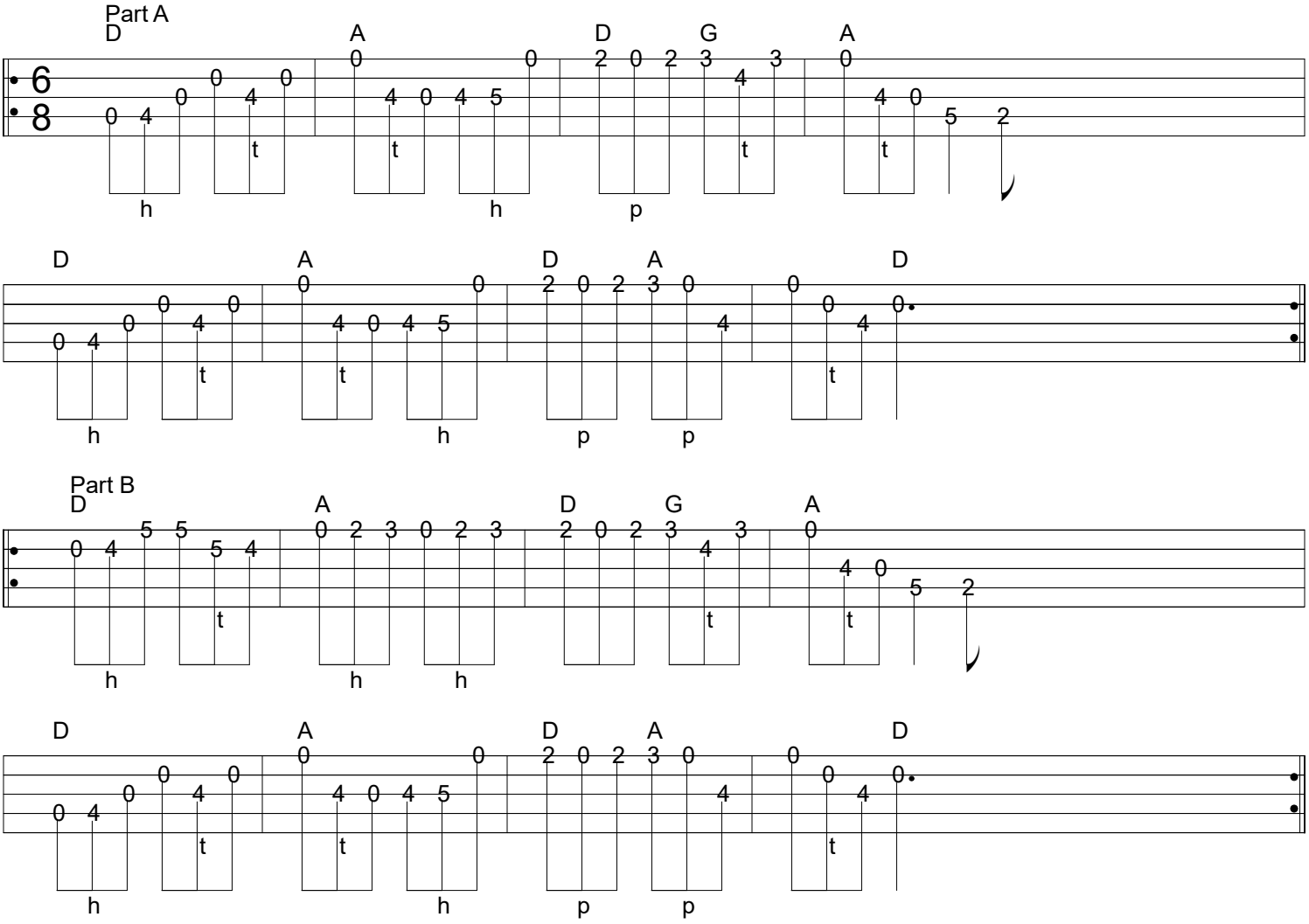


Tobin's Jig

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