EARLY BANJO ETUDES

Vol. 1

Timothy Twiss

Preface

This collection of ten etudes is firmly rooted in the 19th Century tradition. It ventures no further in technique than was common practice of that time. The harmonies, melodies, and rhythms are consistent with banjo publications found 1850-1880. For all practical purposes, it is an extension of that period.

These ten etudes cover a variety of styles found in banjo music. I included a straight eighth note Juba style, dotted rhythms, dactyl and anapaest rhythmic motifs, 6/8 timing, minor keys, syncopation and waltzes. Pieces are put together to reflect balanced and simplistic forms.

The technique draws directly from the 19th Century banjo tutors, especially the Converse Analytical of 1886. It is in that publication that he defines the Combination and the Hammer Movement as the essential building blocks of Stroke Style Technique. The Combination is simply a Strike, and is notated with a solid line above the notes. If one is careful to place the Strike as indicated, the character of the piece will become known to the player. If one observes the articulations of the Pull Offs and indicated positions, the physicality of the piece becomes apparent.

The resulting fingerings are sparse, making the score easier to read. It also serves the purpose of "getting the player into a certain frame of mind". Once you begin to play the notes with the Strikes etc., you will be more likely to anticipate the placement of them yourself. If a phrase is repeated, I usually would not re-write the fingering, as it should be obvious.

An addition, not usually found in earlier printed music, are tempo markings. The tempo indicated provides a clear conception of my intent. By writing them in, there is at least a point of departure. It should be noted that this style of music does work well with many interpretations of tempo.

Please refer to my book Early Banjo 3rd Edition or any of the original banjo tutors of the 19th Century to fully understand and appreciate the Stroke technique. The purpose of these etudes is not to teach the technique, but rather put it to use. These pieces are quite similar to what you will encounter as you explore the Early Banjo repertoire. They are predictable, and yet often throw in a twist, as most tunes will do.

Enjoy these songs as a way to develop your "chops" and also include them in performances.

Tim Twiss / June 2016

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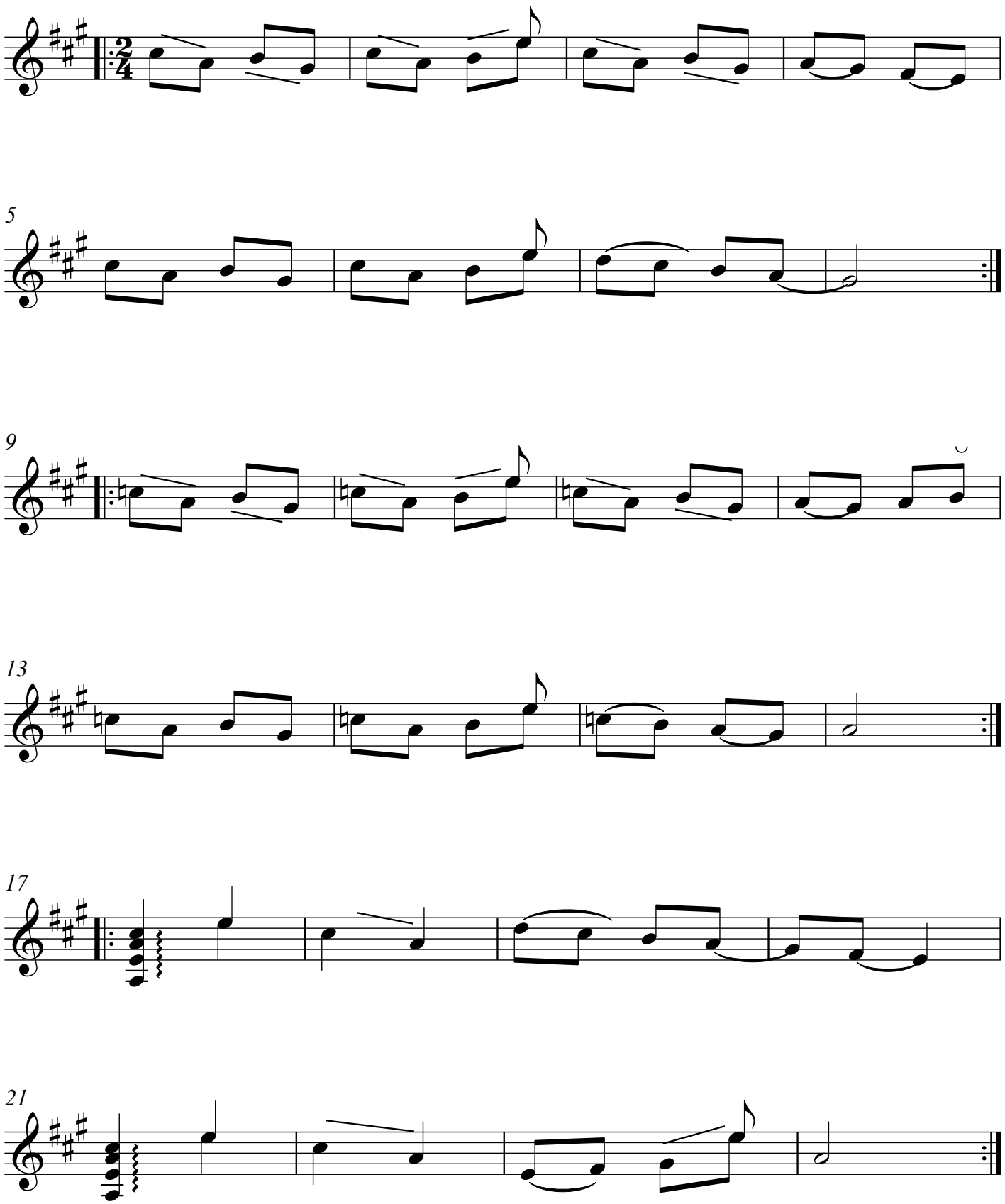

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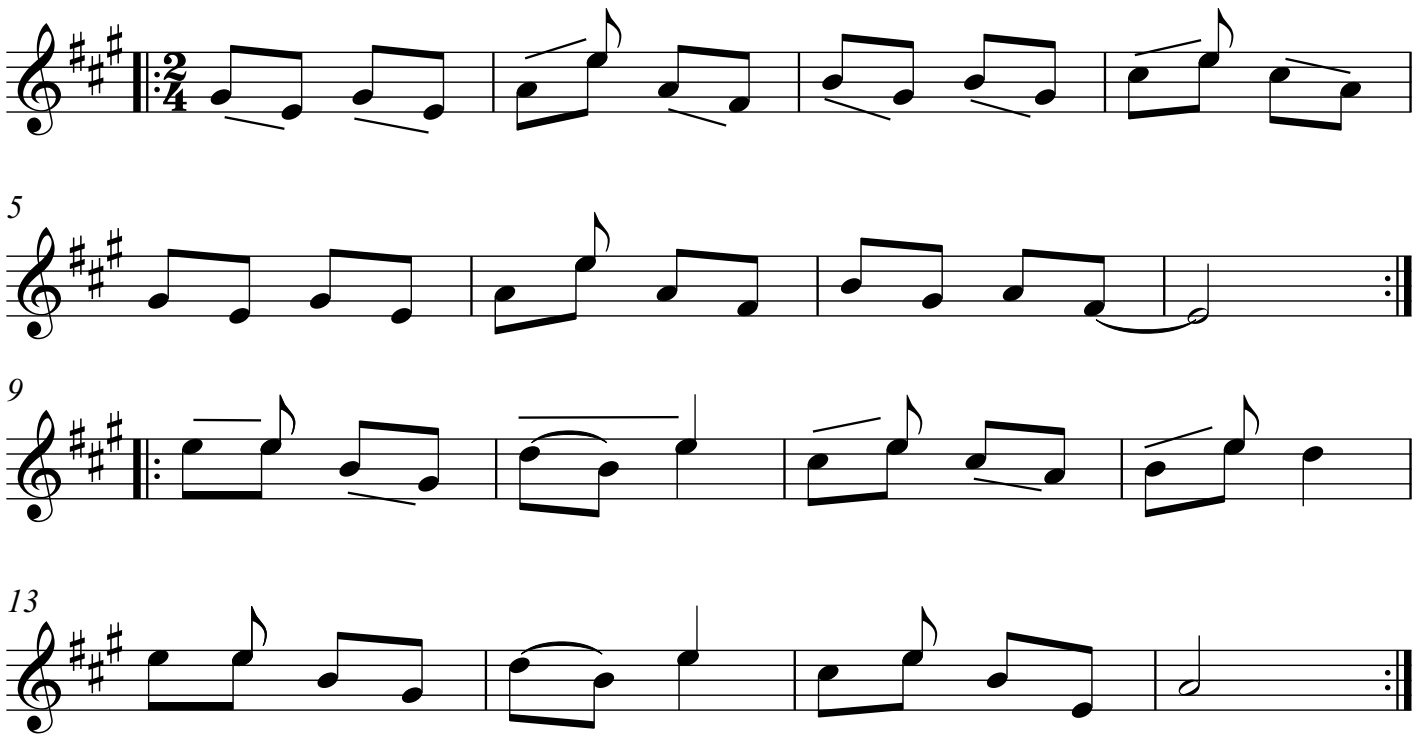

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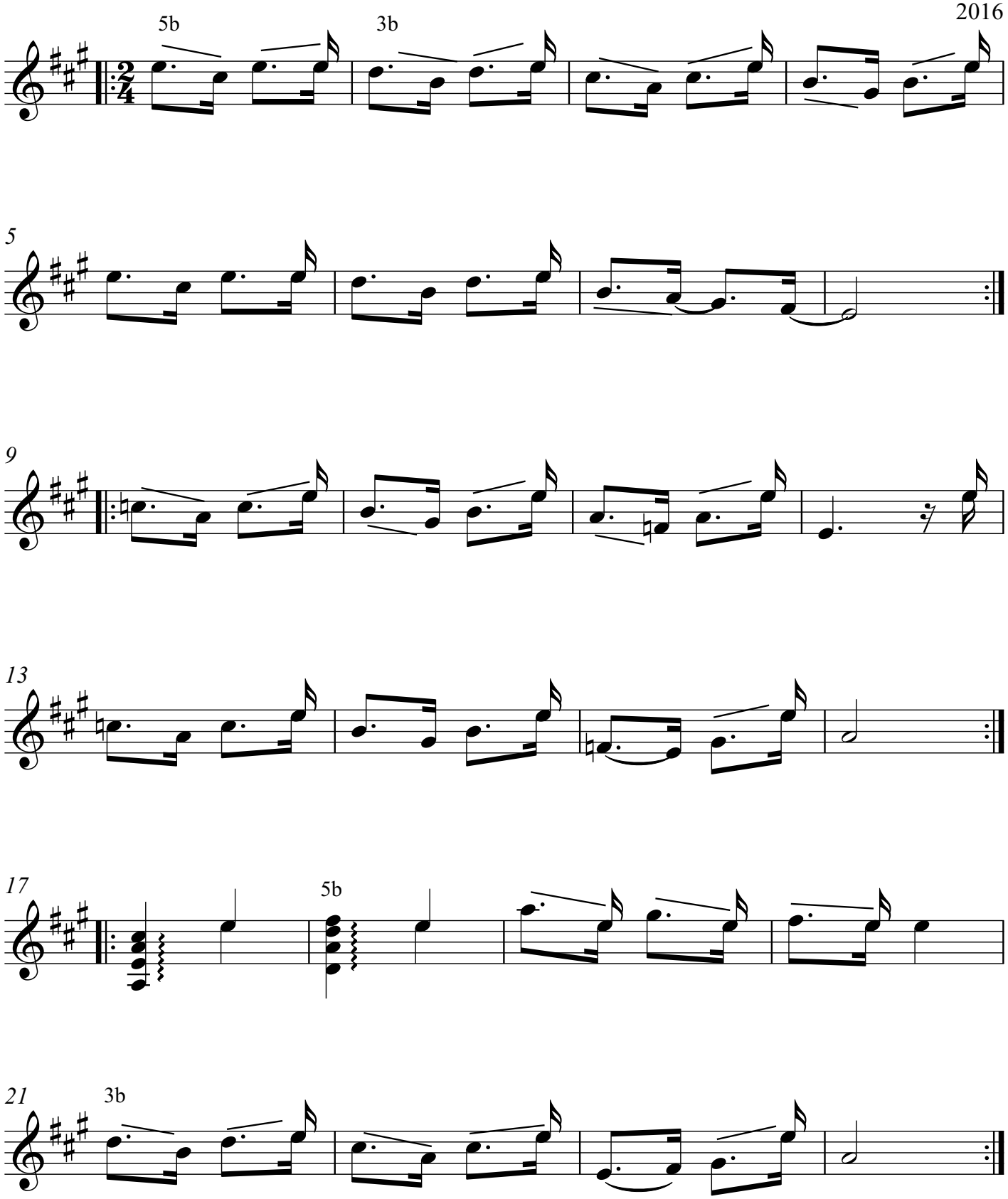

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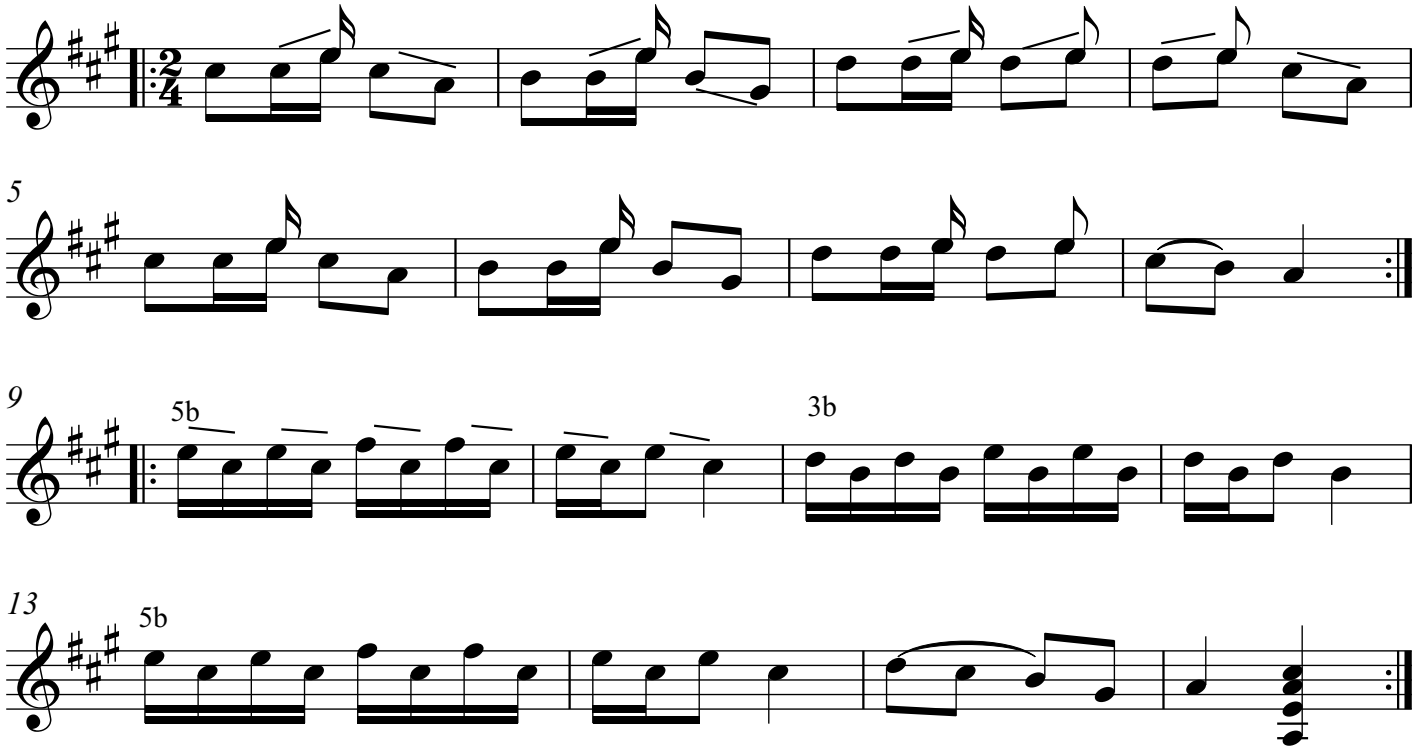

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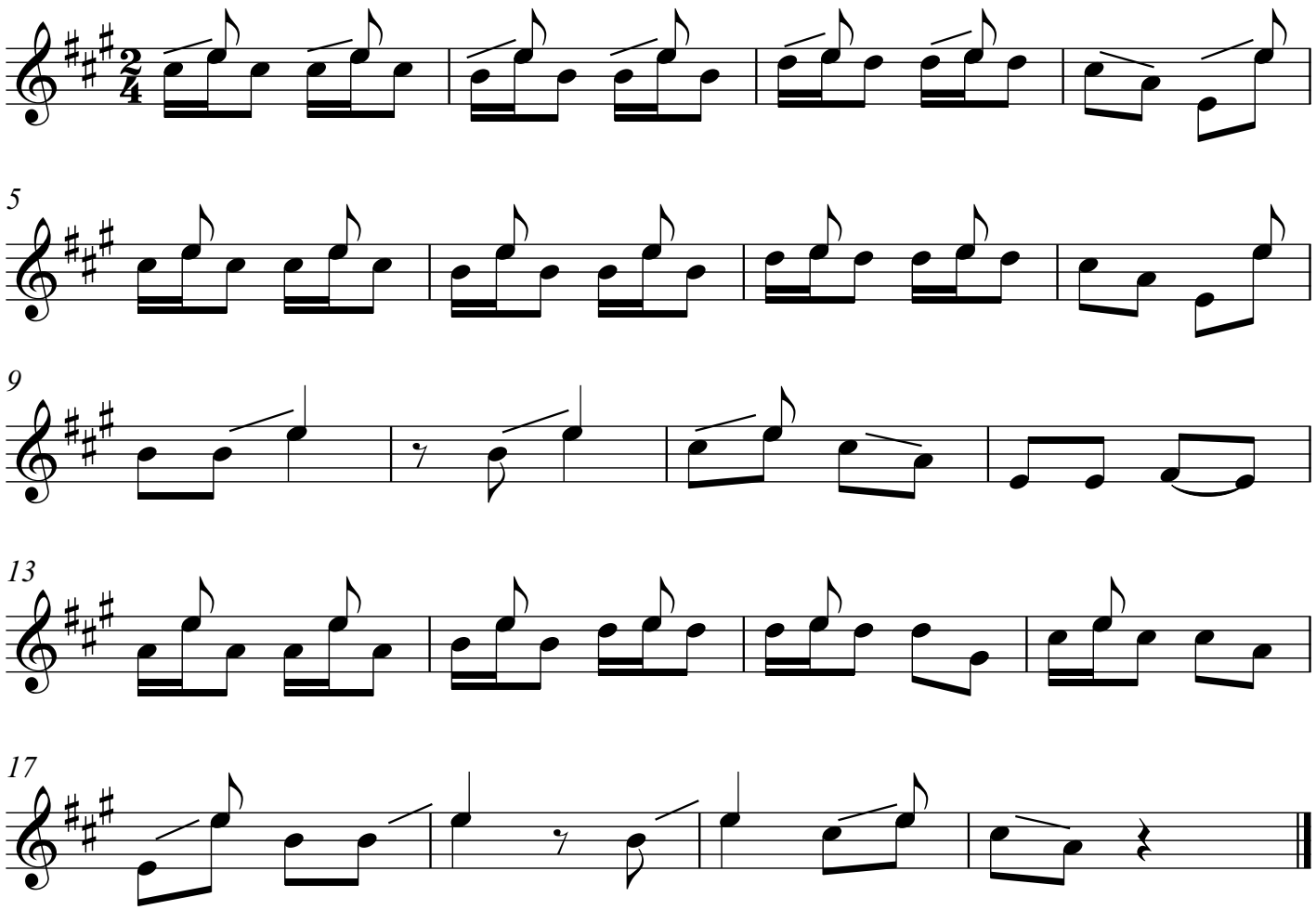

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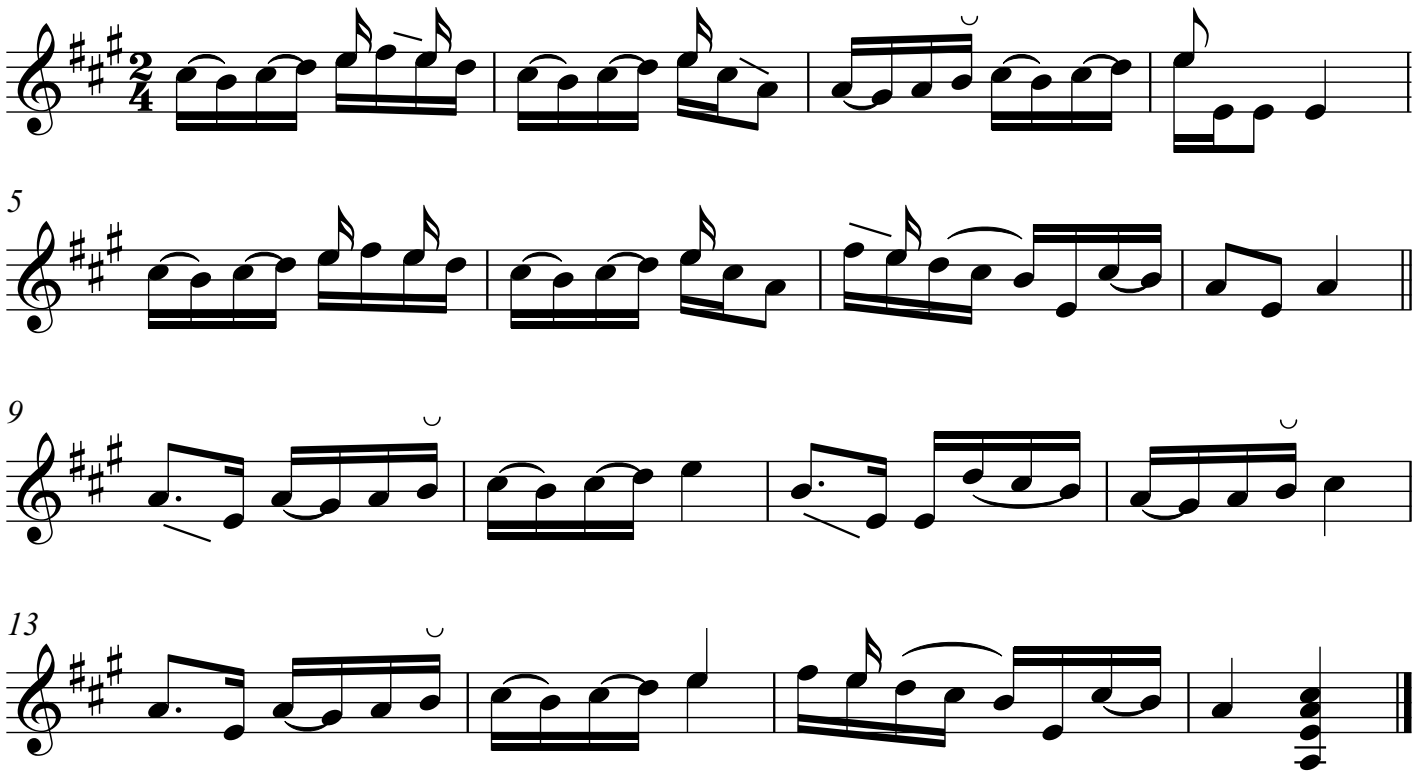

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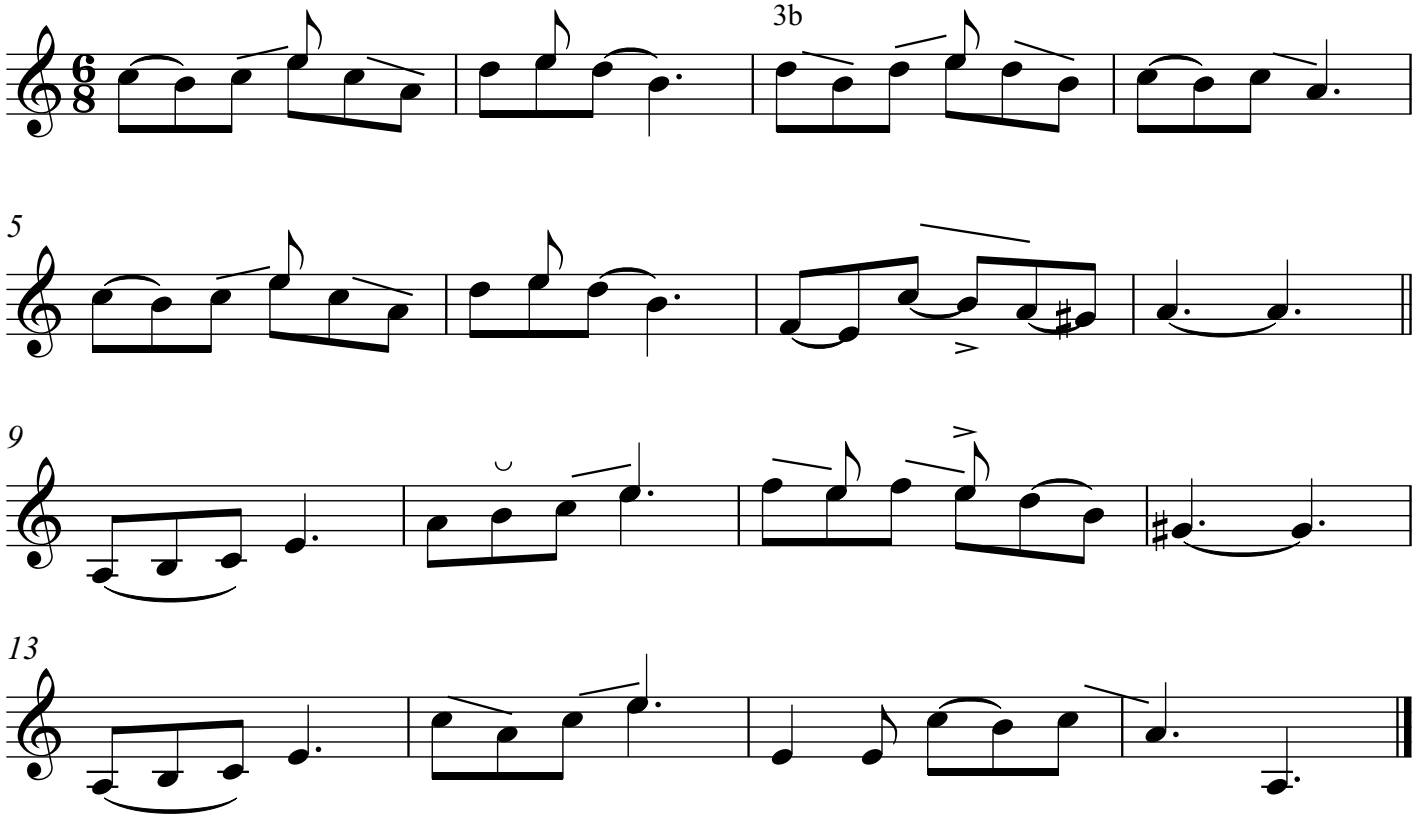

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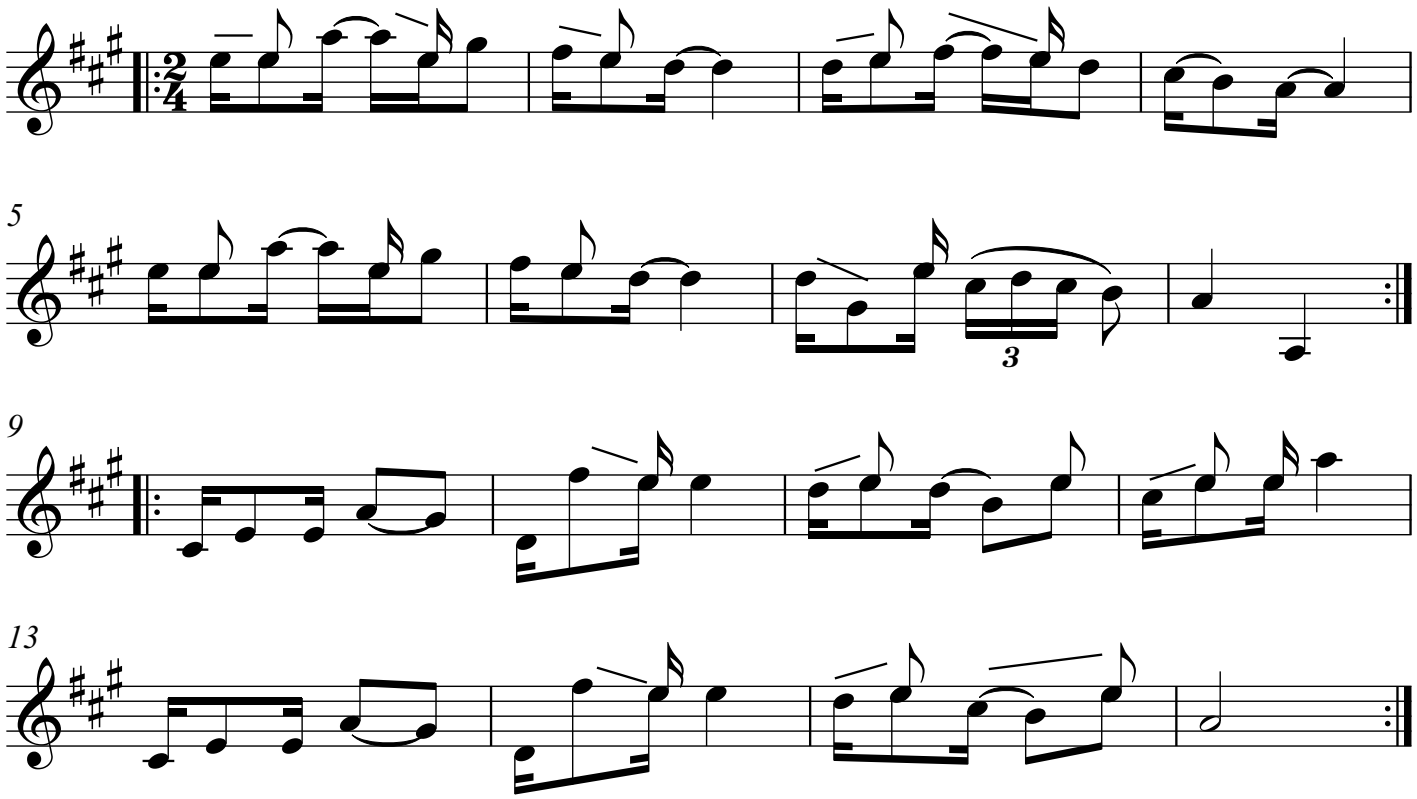

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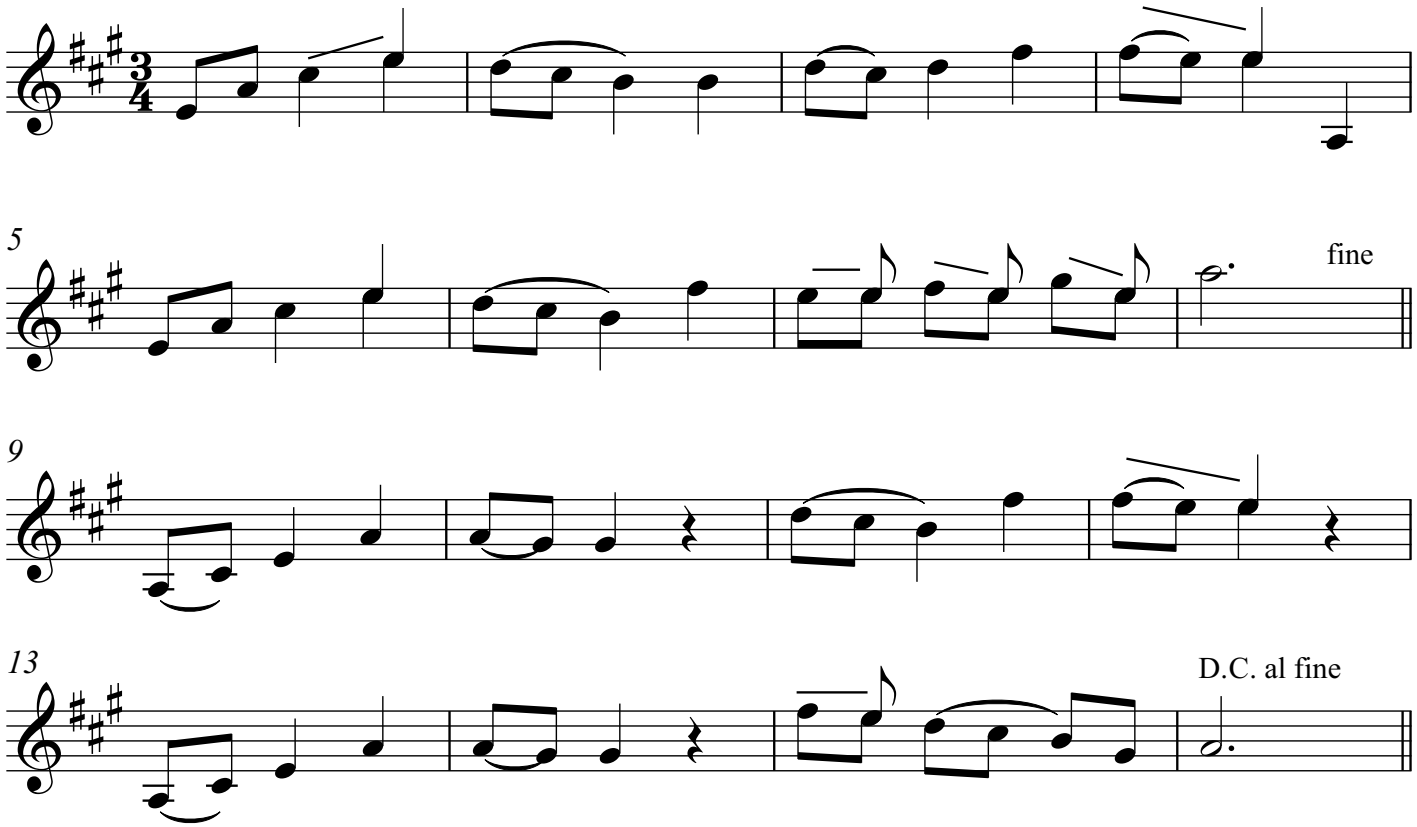

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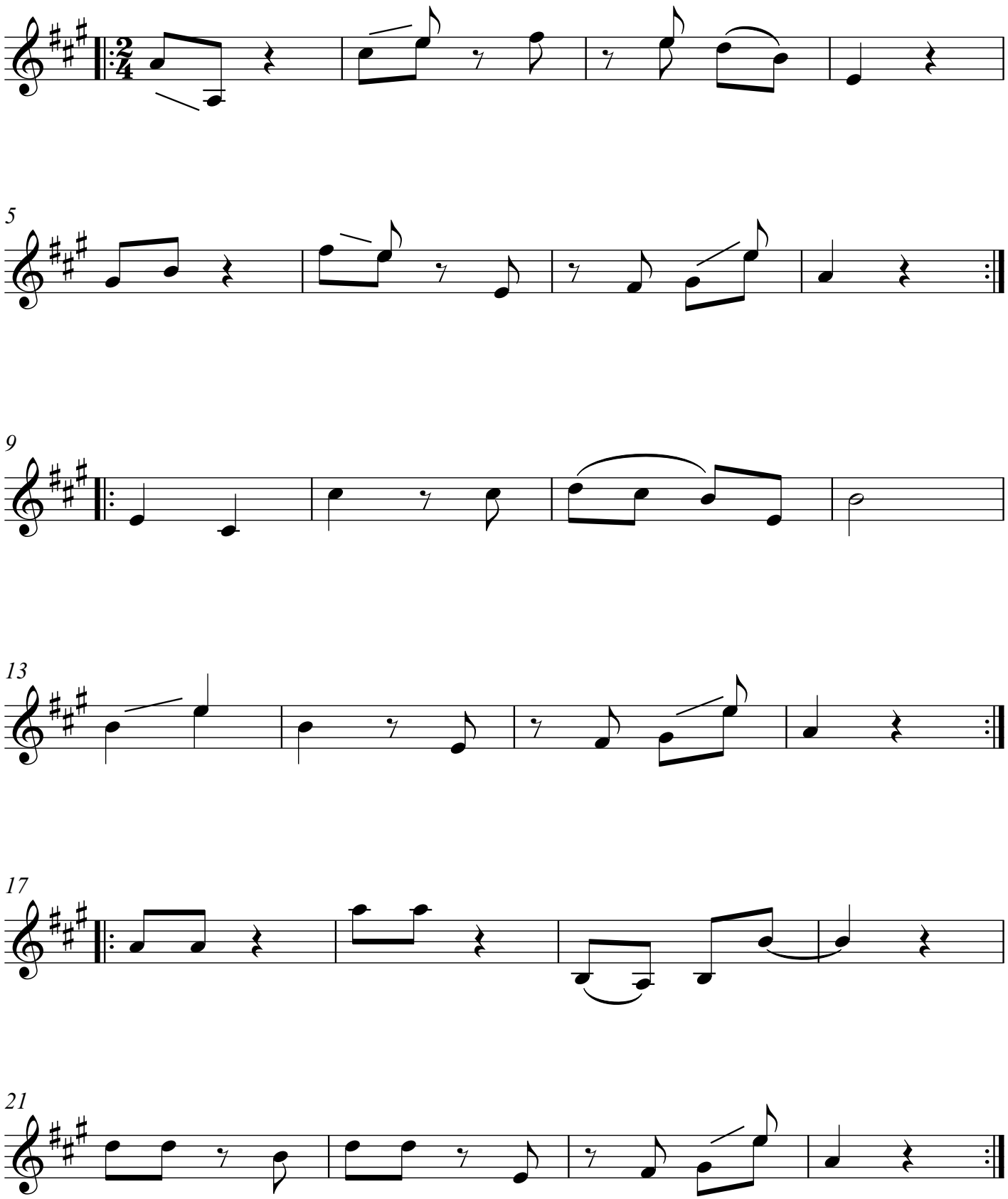

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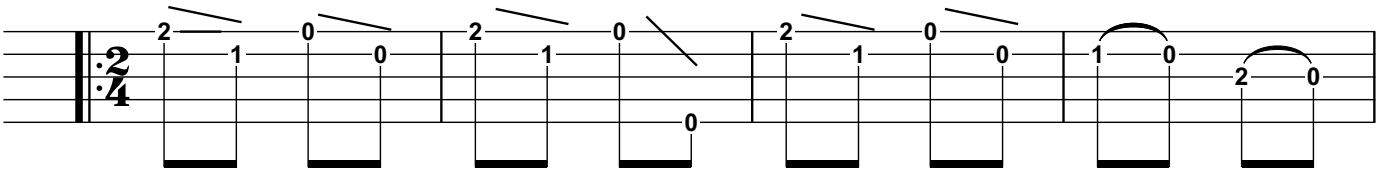

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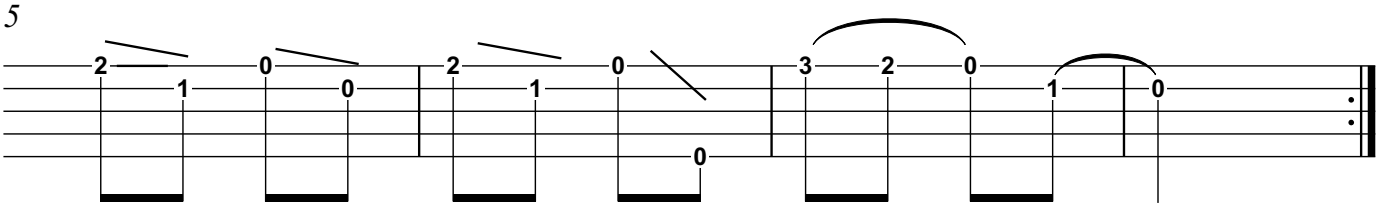

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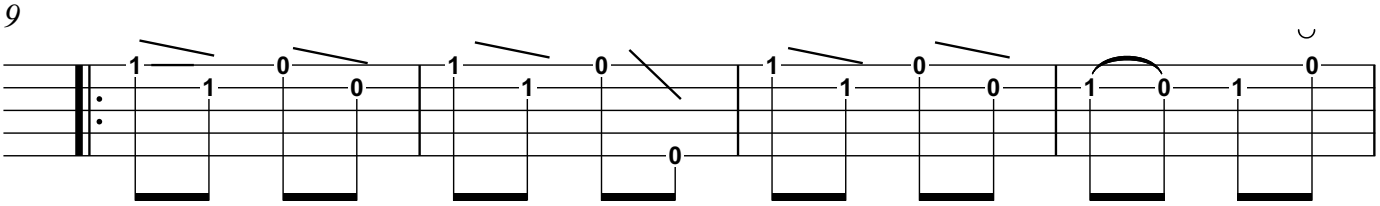

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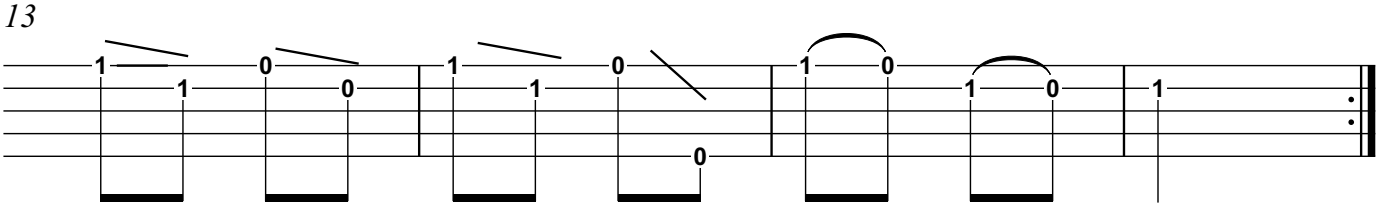

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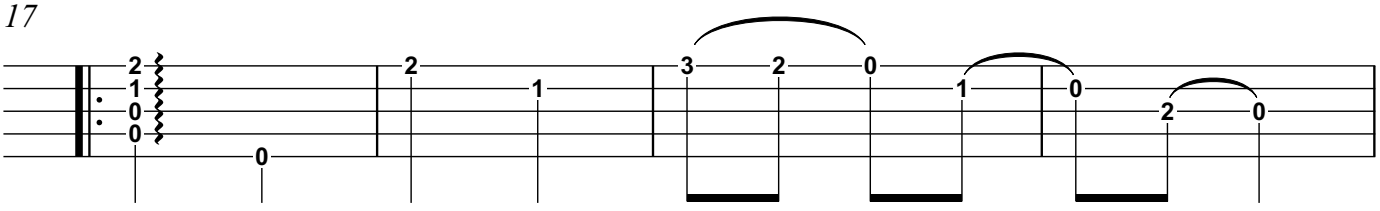

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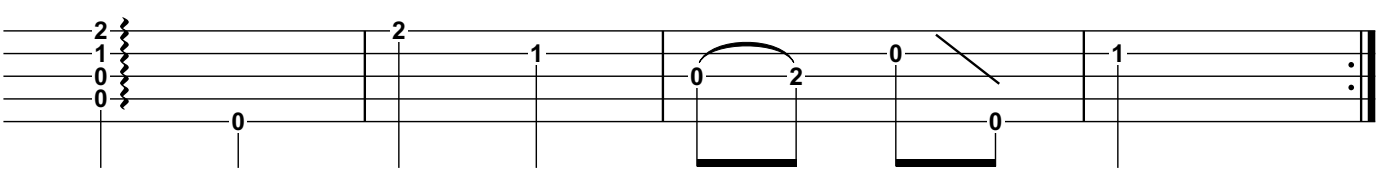

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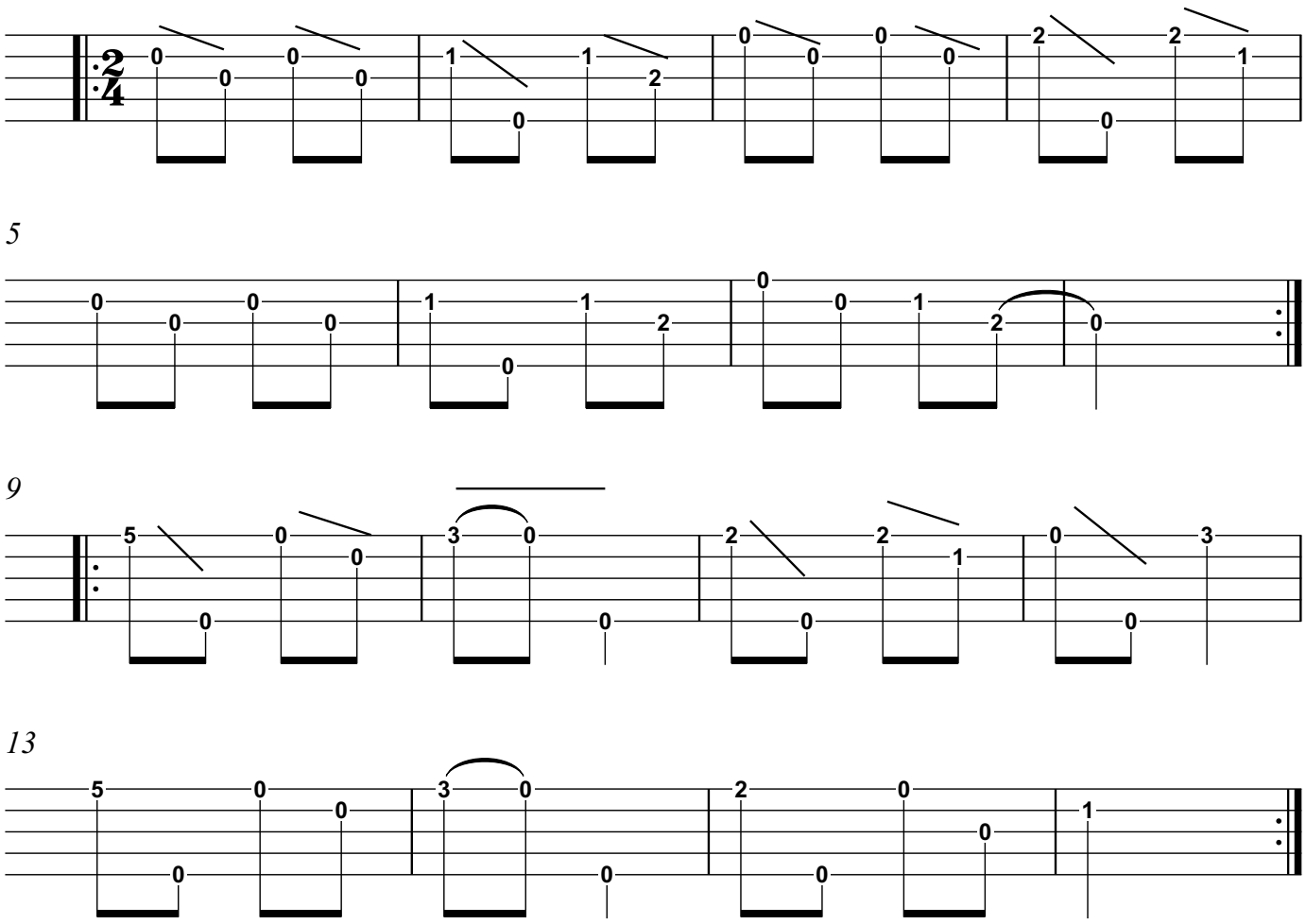

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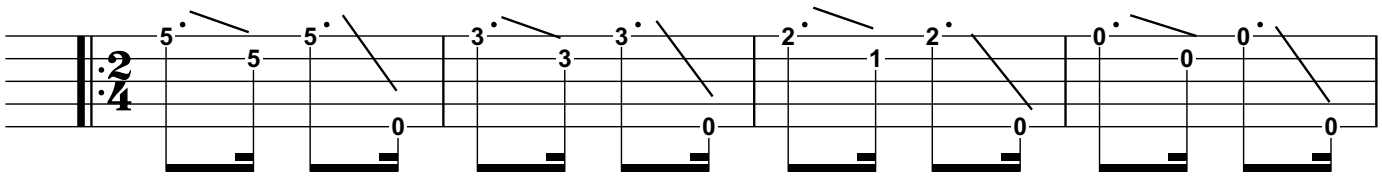

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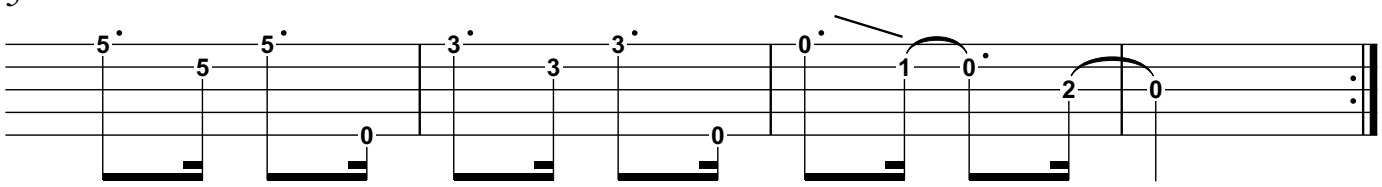

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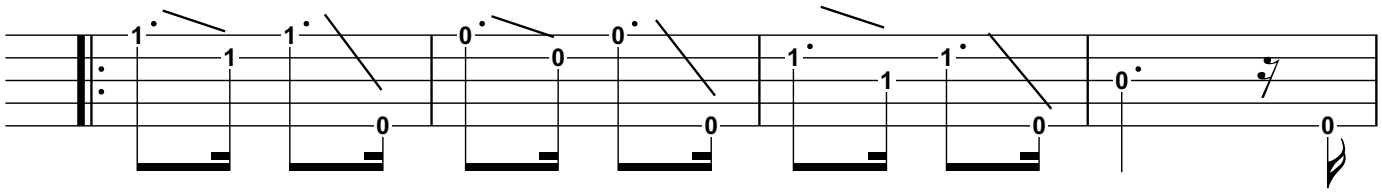

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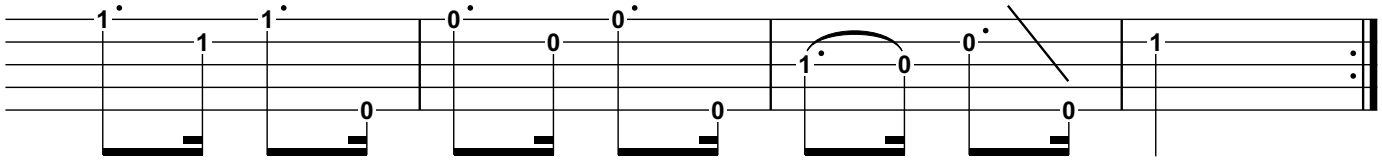

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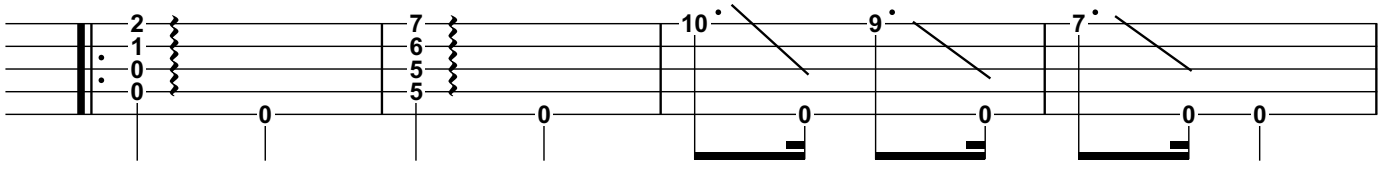

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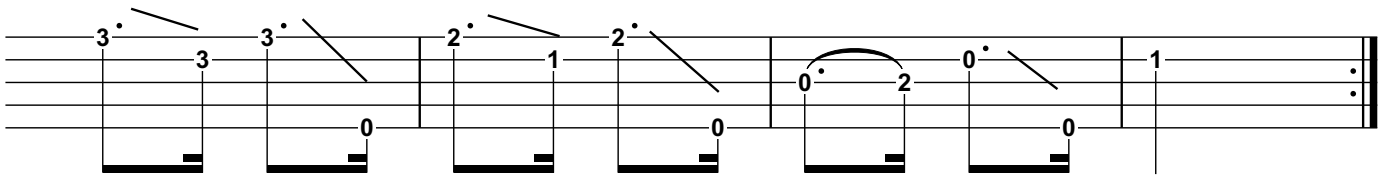

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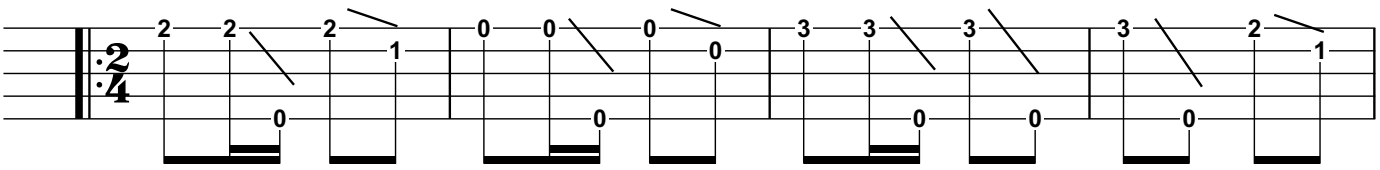

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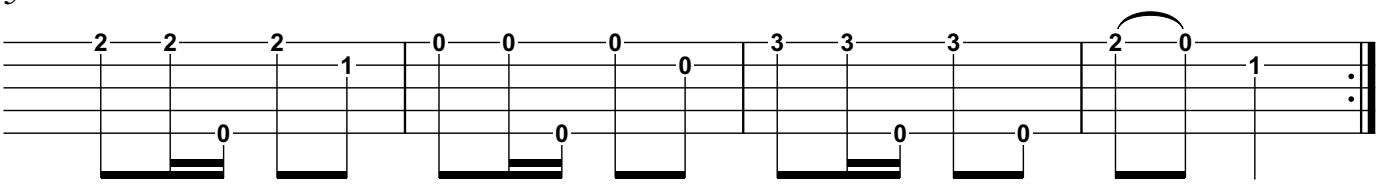

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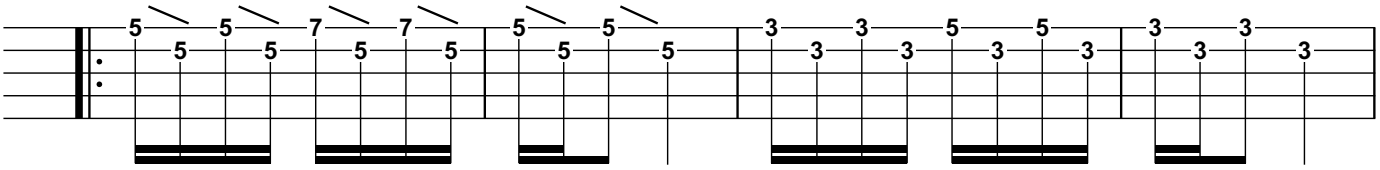

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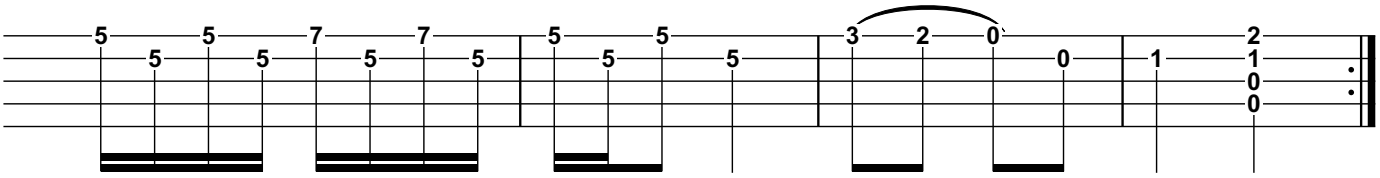

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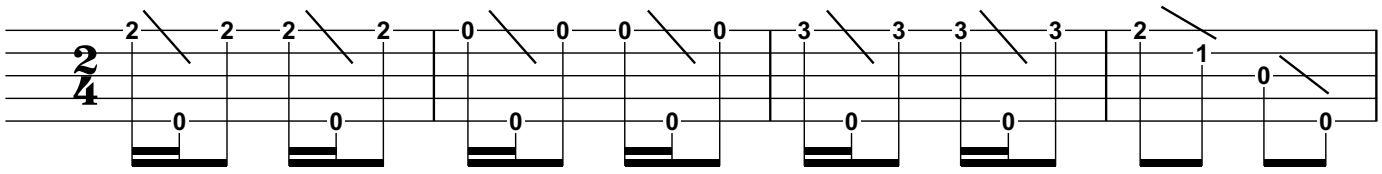

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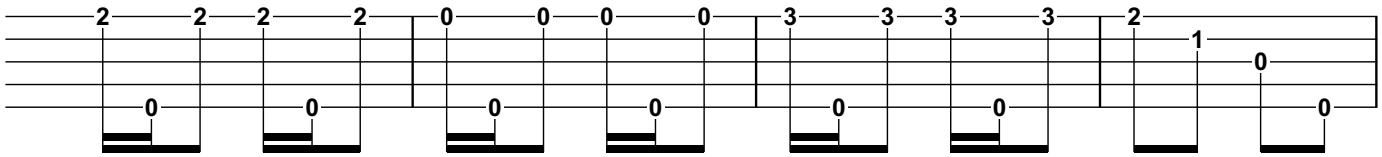

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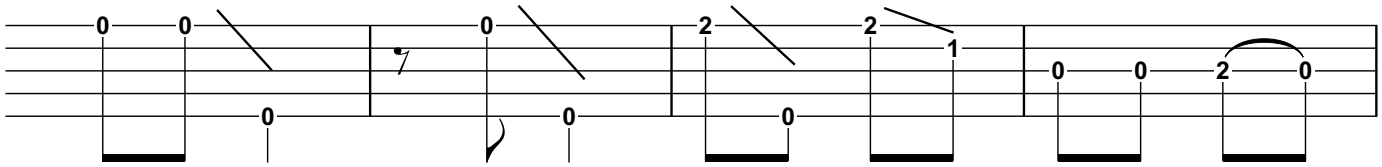

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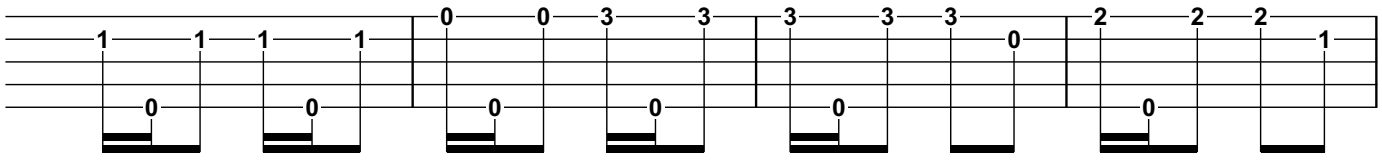

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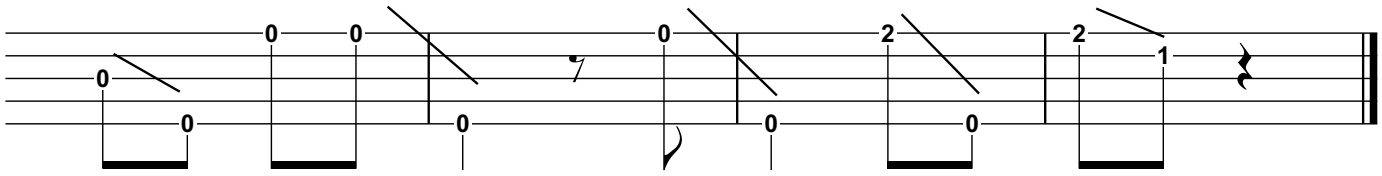

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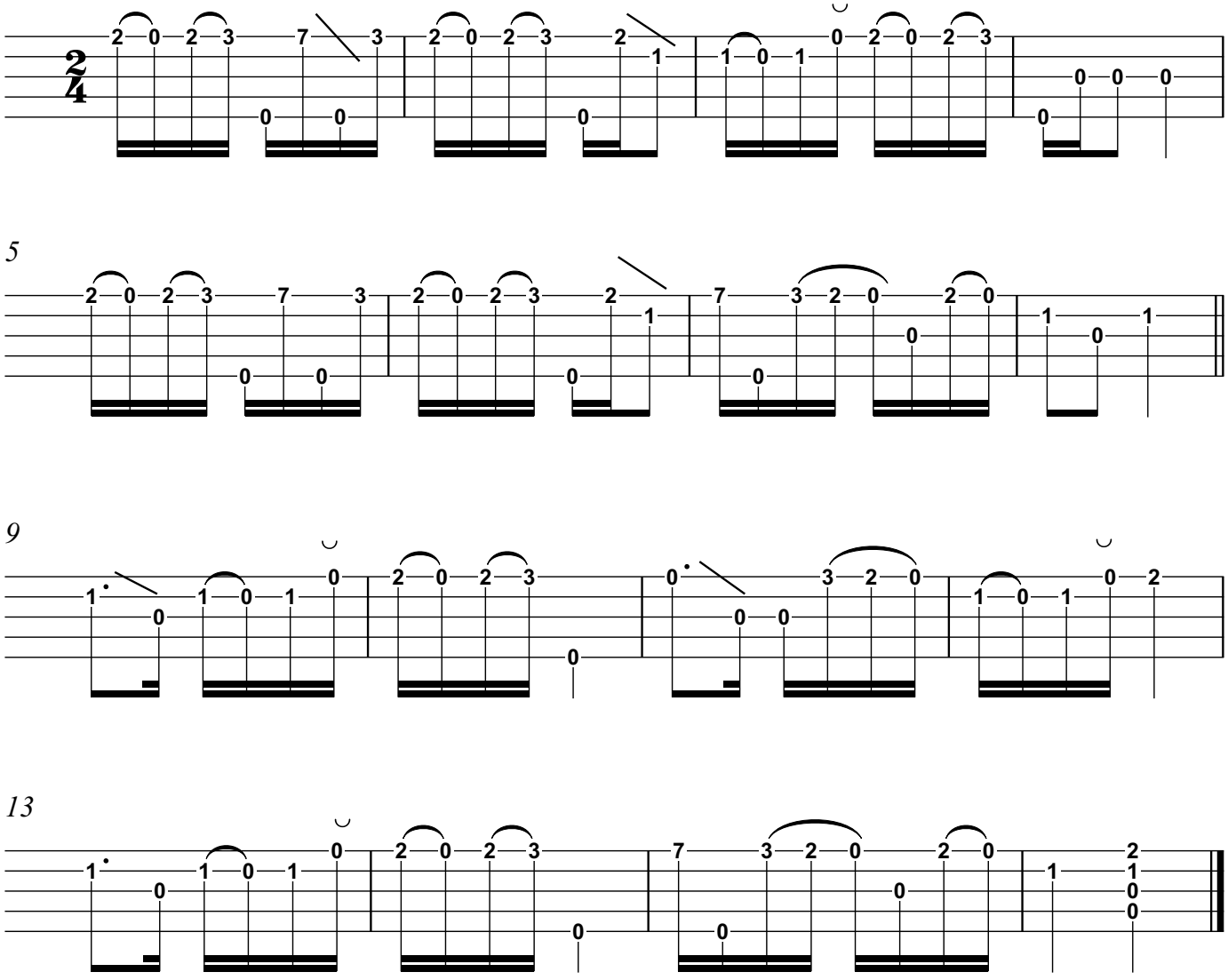

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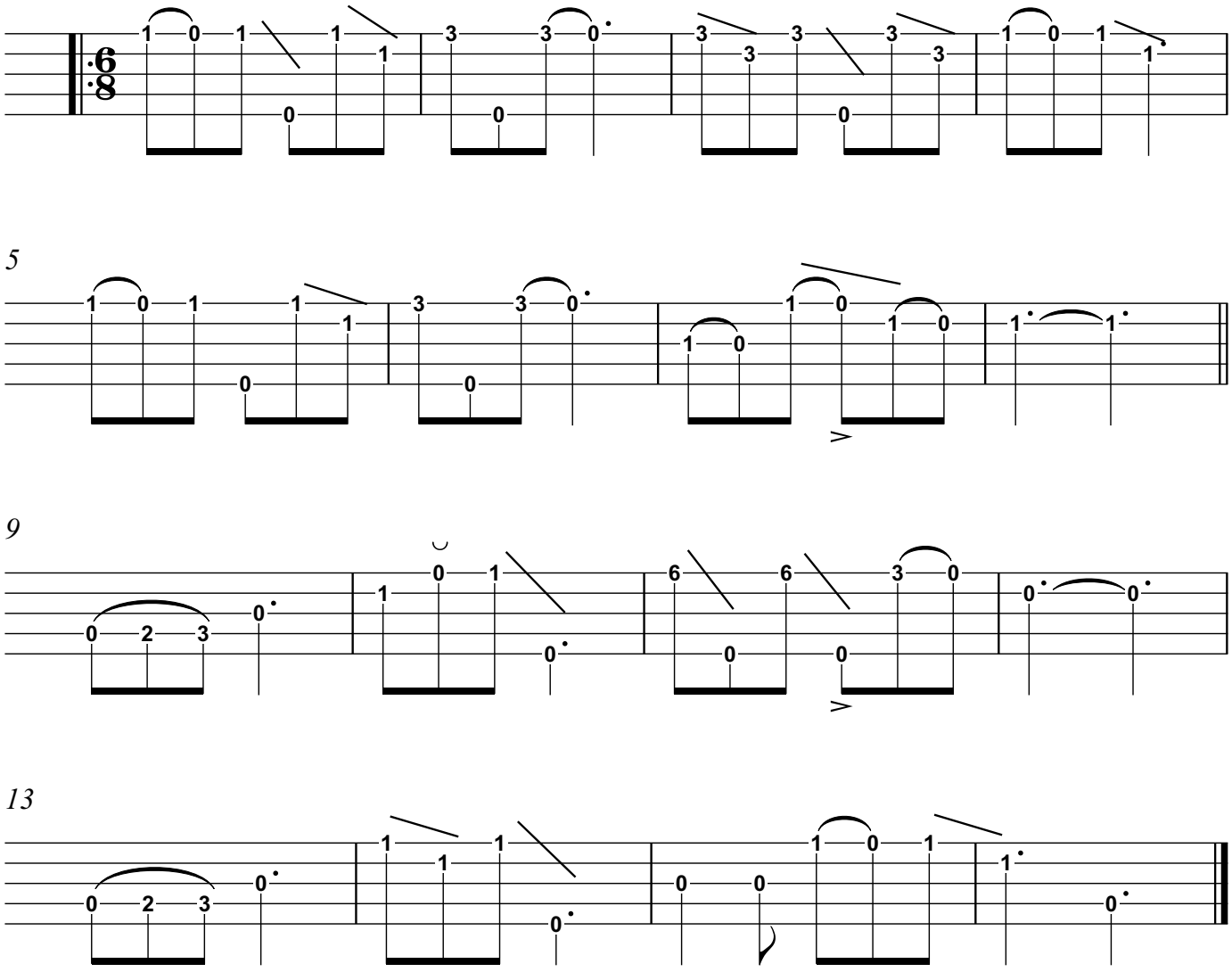

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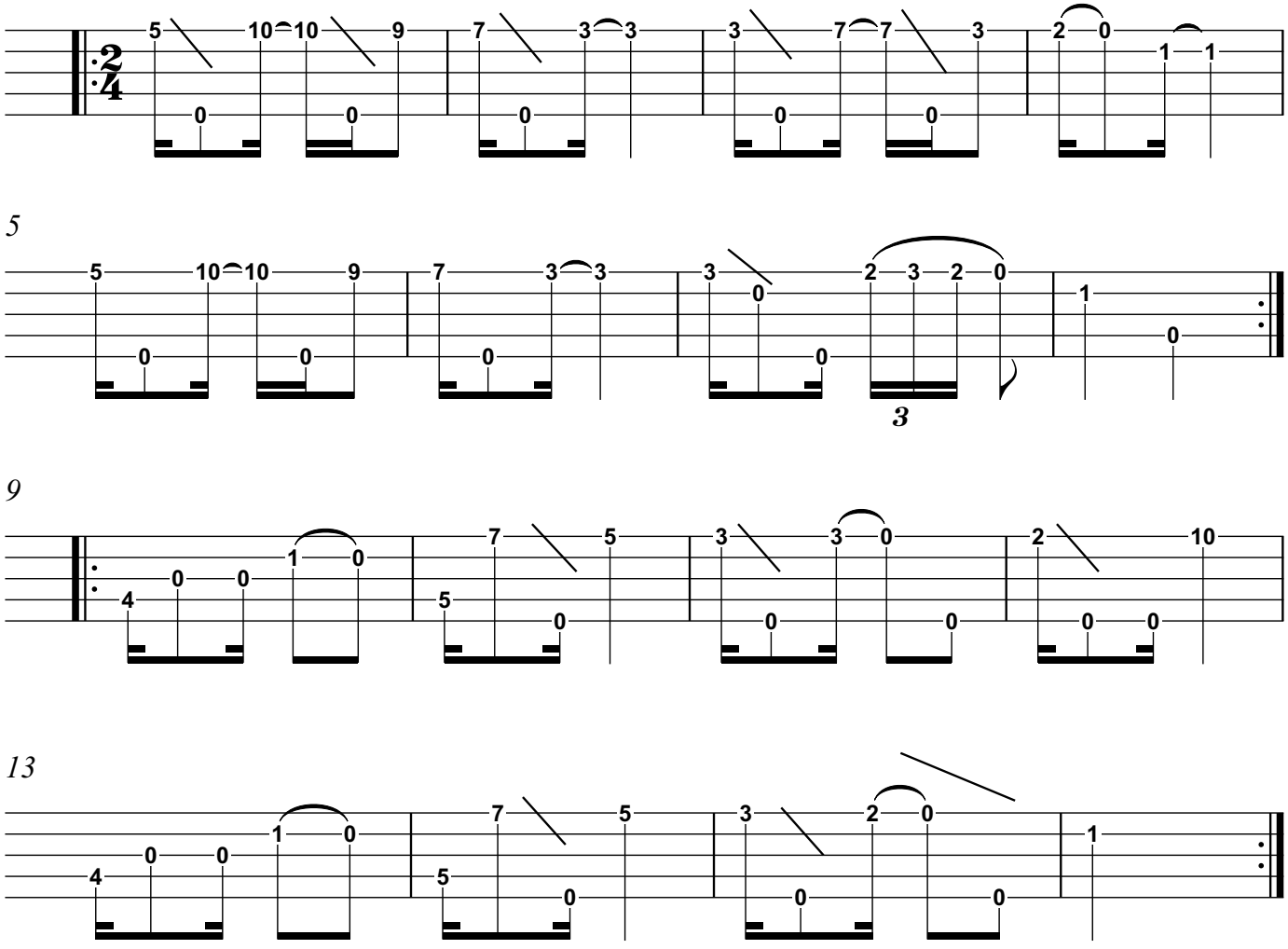

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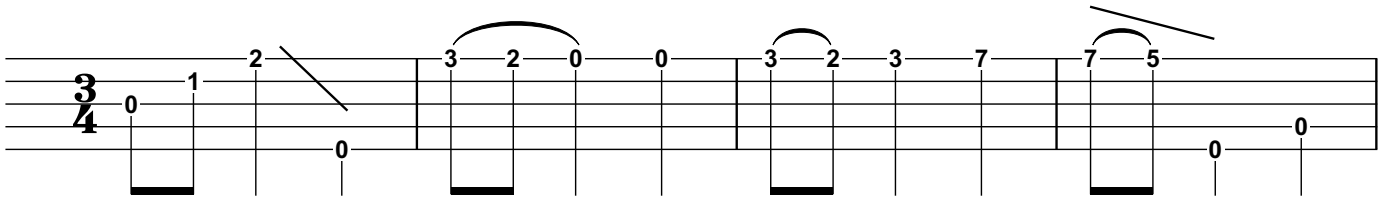

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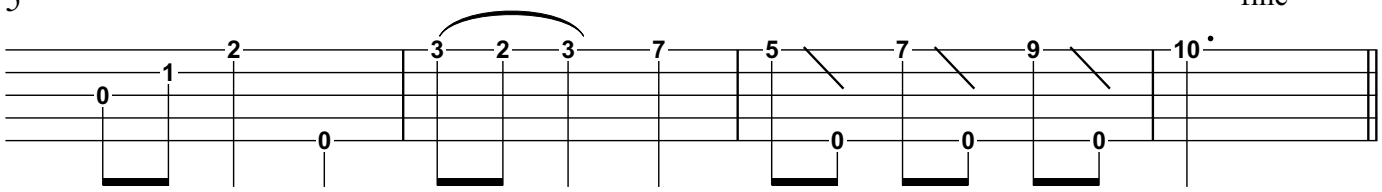

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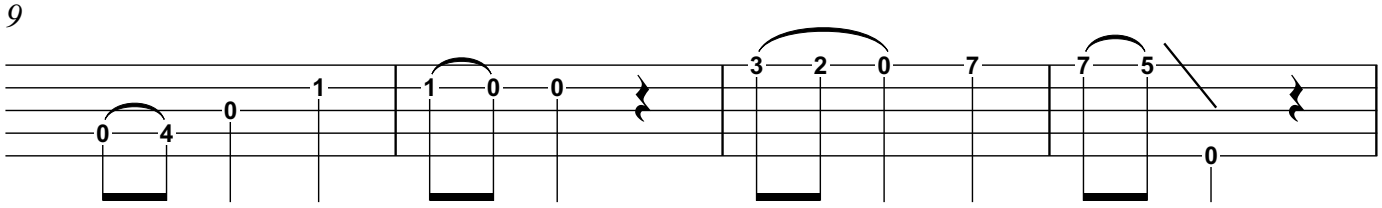

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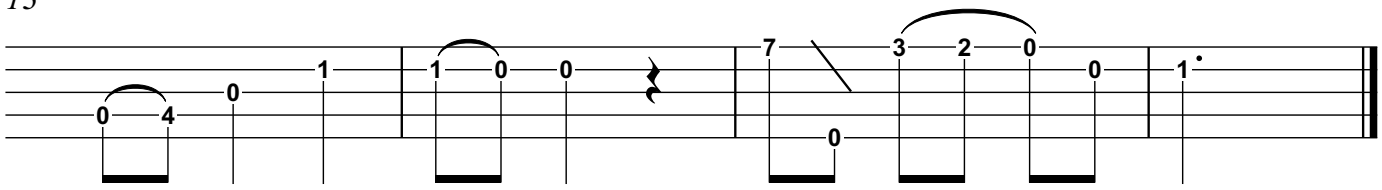

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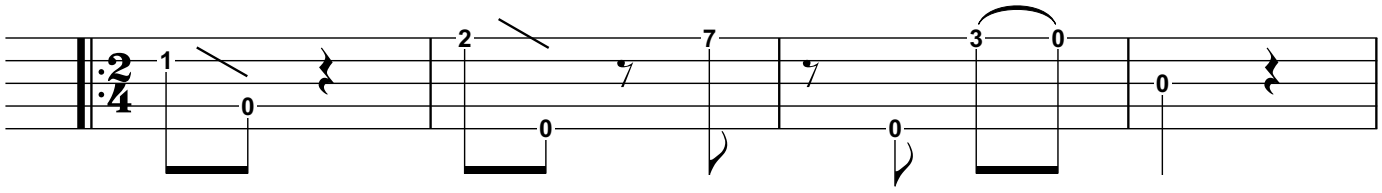

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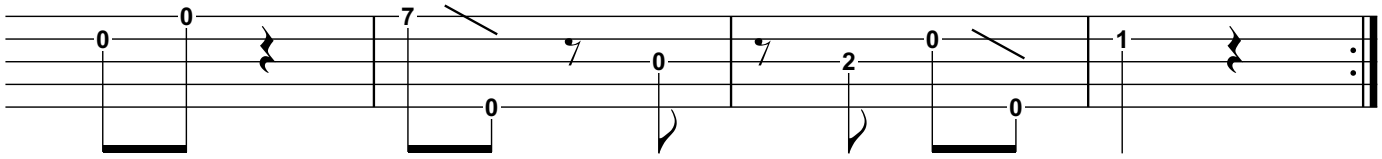

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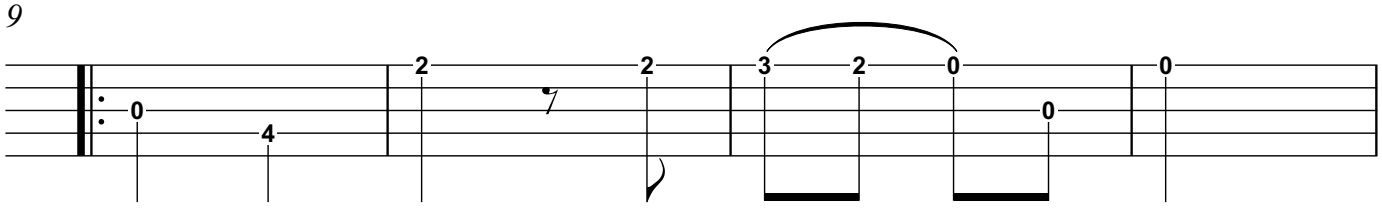

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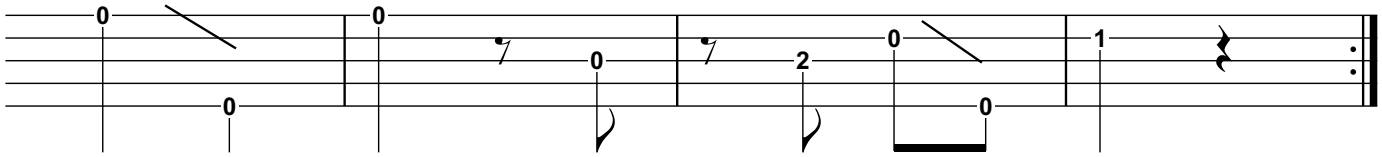

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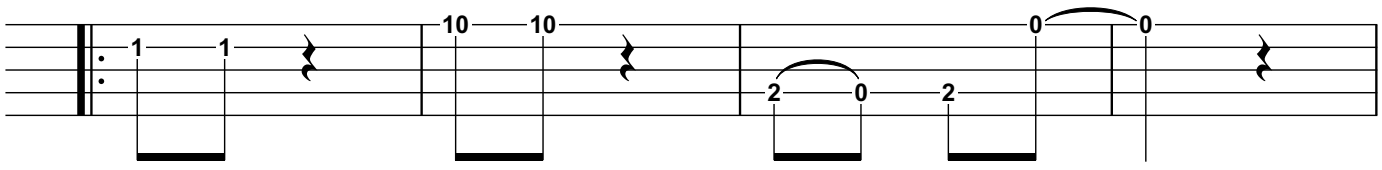
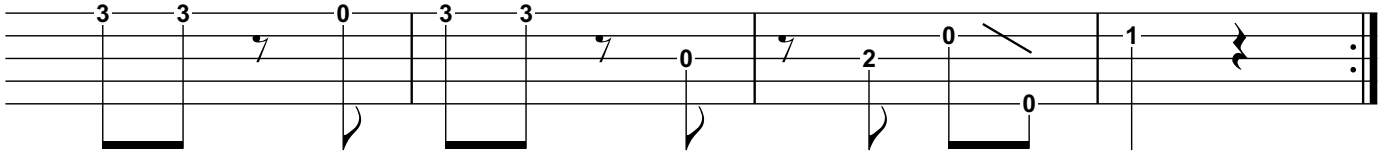
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