The Minstrel Boy

by Nate Lee

"The Minstrel Boy" was written by Thomas Moore (1779-1852) who set it to the melody of an old Irish aire called "The Moreen." It is believed that he wrote it in honor of three friends who participated in the 1798 rebellion of the United Irishmen. One died in prison, one was wounded, and the other was captured and hung. This song was popular during the Civil War with the Irish-American soldiers, primarily on the Union side.

This song holds some special significance for me because it is the first song I remember learning by ear without the aid of a tape or a teacher. The version I learned came from a Civil War reenactment string band that was one of my first influences on the mandolin. The mandolin player's axe was somewhat cheap and didn't produce the best tone. As a ten year old with precious little mandolin music to draw from, I started going around asking how I could get that "plinky" sound on my mandolin. When I finally asked an experienced mandolin player about it he said, "If you want to sound like that then you're braver than I am." I was later to learn that the "plinky" sound is also known as "bad tone".

- Standard pick direction rules apply—down stroke on the down beat, up stroke on the up beat.
- The tempo is marked as 125 beats to the Half Note. This is only my preference, however, and you should decide for yourself at what tempo you will perform it.
- This arrangement is pinky free but once you've learned it, go back and learn it in closed position (no open strings) so you can play it in all keys. This song is also often played in Mixolydian mode—major scale with a lowered 7^{th}. In the key of D the scale would be D E F# G A B C D.
- Wash, rinse, repeat and good luck finding that elusive "plinky" sound.

For lyrics and more information about The Minstrel Boy and Thomas Moore visit http://ogallchobhair.org/minstrelboy.htm or http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minstrel_Boy

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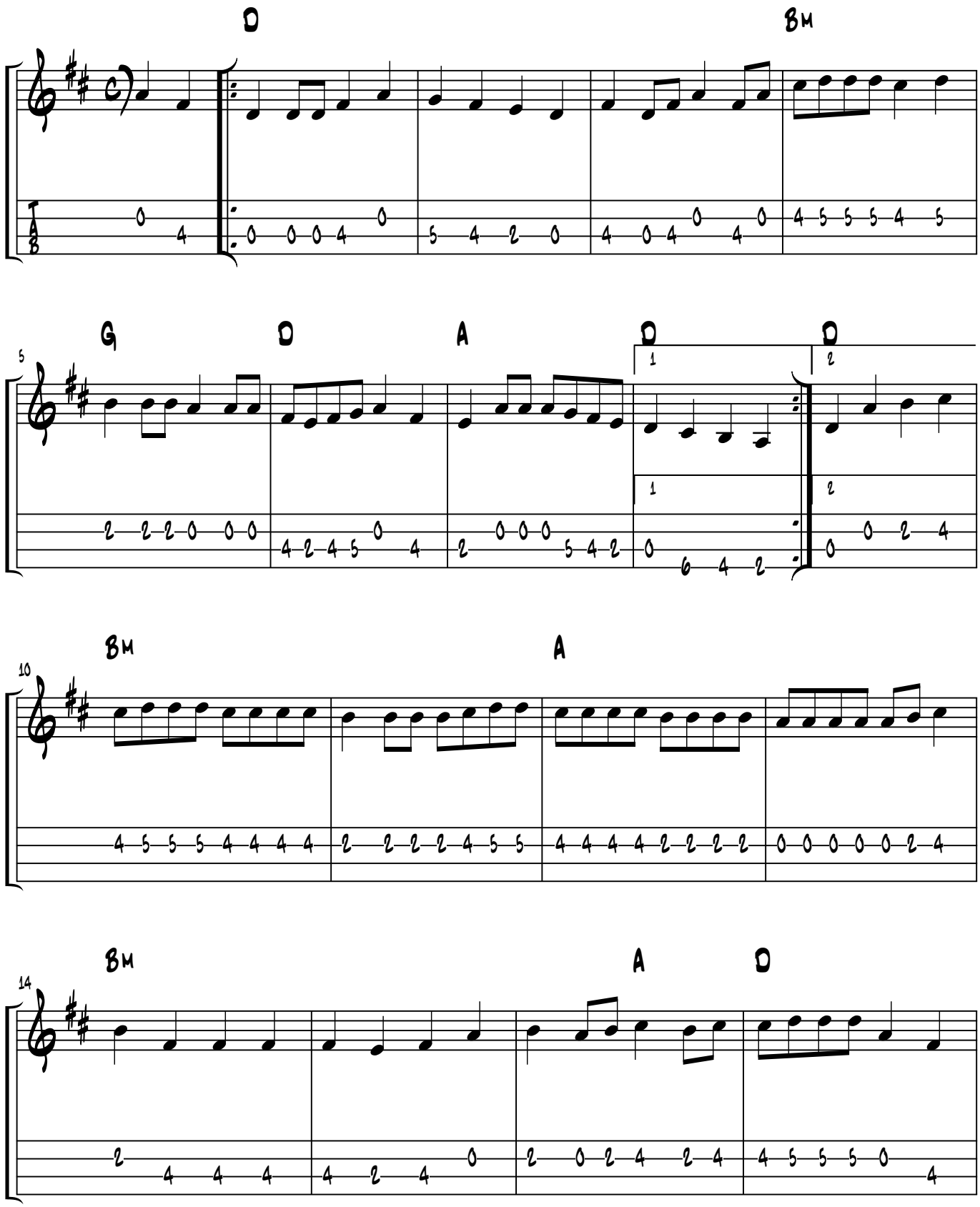
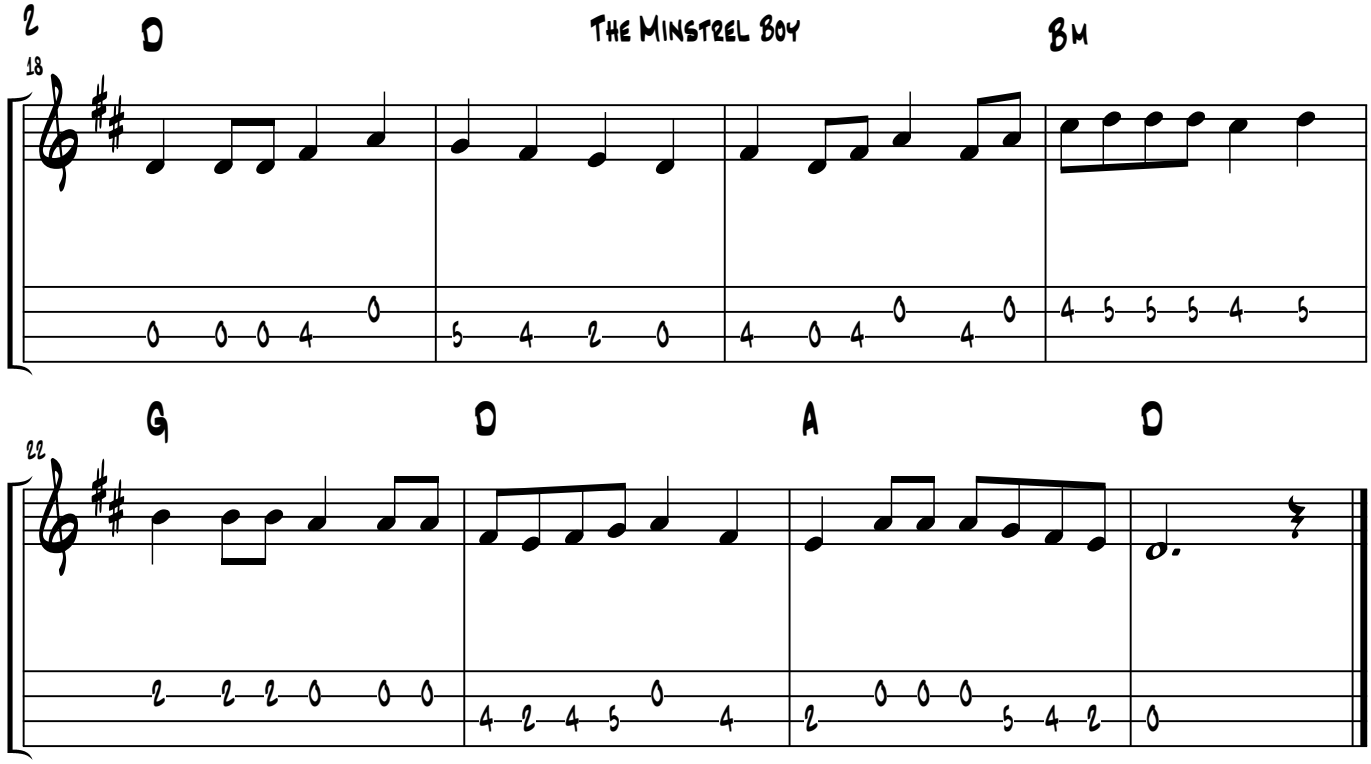
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