Beginning Irish Mandolin

by Michael B. Gregory

The final slide of our set is introduced in this issue. It is relatively straightforward except for two spots in the first part. In the second full measure, you need to pick up your index (first) finger quickly to bounce from the E (on the D string) to the B (on the A string). You could also roll your index finger to accomplish this. The other tricky spot occurs at the end of the third measure but this time it involves your second (middle) finger. It isn't difficult at all once you get it in your head that the finger needs to fret the F# immediately after the triplet d-c#-d is played. If the third measure as written below is too tough for you initially, you can substitute the entire first measure for it and retain the spirit of the tune. On the other hand, when you have mastered that third measure, you might consider substituting it for the first measure occasionally. The second part stays completely on the A and E strings and has an especially interesting rhythm and melody.

I have found this tune on two recordings. The first is the cd "O Chicago go Carrachan" by Maidhe Daimin O Se, a County Kerry accordion player. The second is an older album by melodeon player Johnny Connolly titled "Drioball Na Fáinleoige". O Se used the title Droichead Atha Luain (pronounced roughly as "Druh-hid Aw-ha Loo-in", according to my reliable consultant Paul deGrae) for this tune while Connolly used its English translation, The Bridge of Athlone. Paul also recommended using the Irish language title but I decided against that. The tune is what is most important here and I didn't want to distract attention from that by attaching a heading that might be difficult to pronounce for most readers. I've mentioned before what a difficult thing it is to put agreed-upon names to most slides and polkas. The mp3's provided here are designed to get you up-to-speed with not only The Bridge of Athlone but also with the entire three-slide set. The other two slides can be found here:

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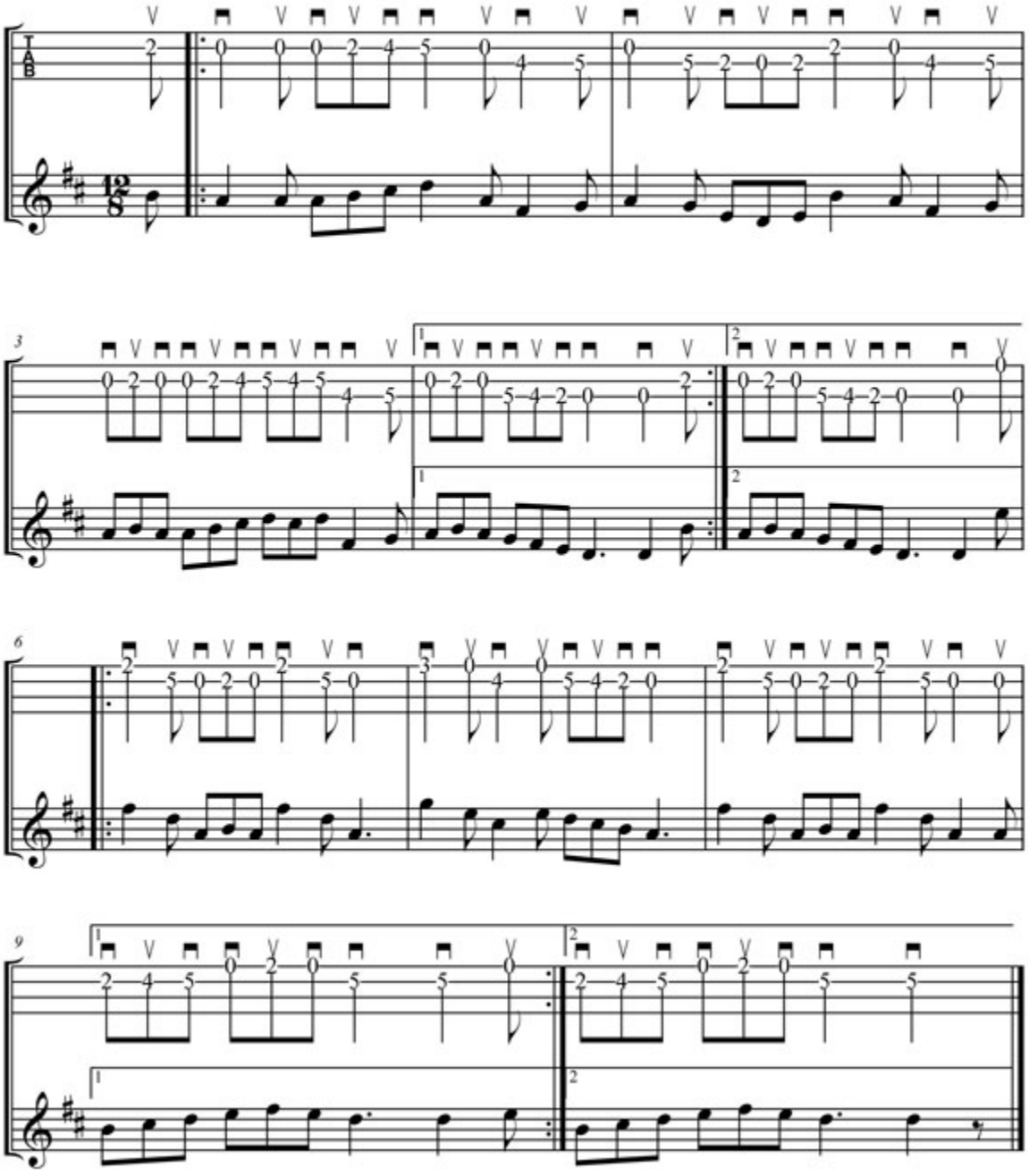
You may find the transition from one tune to the next to be difficult at first. I certainly did. To learn it, what I did was to slow down considerably and practice over-and-over the transition until it felt natural and only then, did I try to bring it up-to-speed. Listen carefully to the transitions in the mp3 recording of the entire set. You'll soon master it. Speed is not an issue unless you're playing for dancers so keep it slow at first. When you play slowly, you have a better chance to listen to the tone of your instrument and to pay attention to finger placement, which can only improve your sound. Experiment by striking the strings closer to and then farther away from the bridge. Try different picks of varying thicknesses and materials. You'll probably want to use a heavier pick to bring out the tone.

A kind reader has informed me that the (free) mp3 player, Winamp, has a plug-in called Pacemaker that allows you to slow down and change the pitch of any mp3 file. While The Amazing Slow Downer that I've recommended in my previous issues is not free (the current price is US$49.95), it does have many features that these free programs lack.

Please let me know how you're doing with these tunes. I can be reached at michael.gregory@und.edu.

athlone_slow.mp3
slide_set_tempo.mp3

The Bridge of Athlone