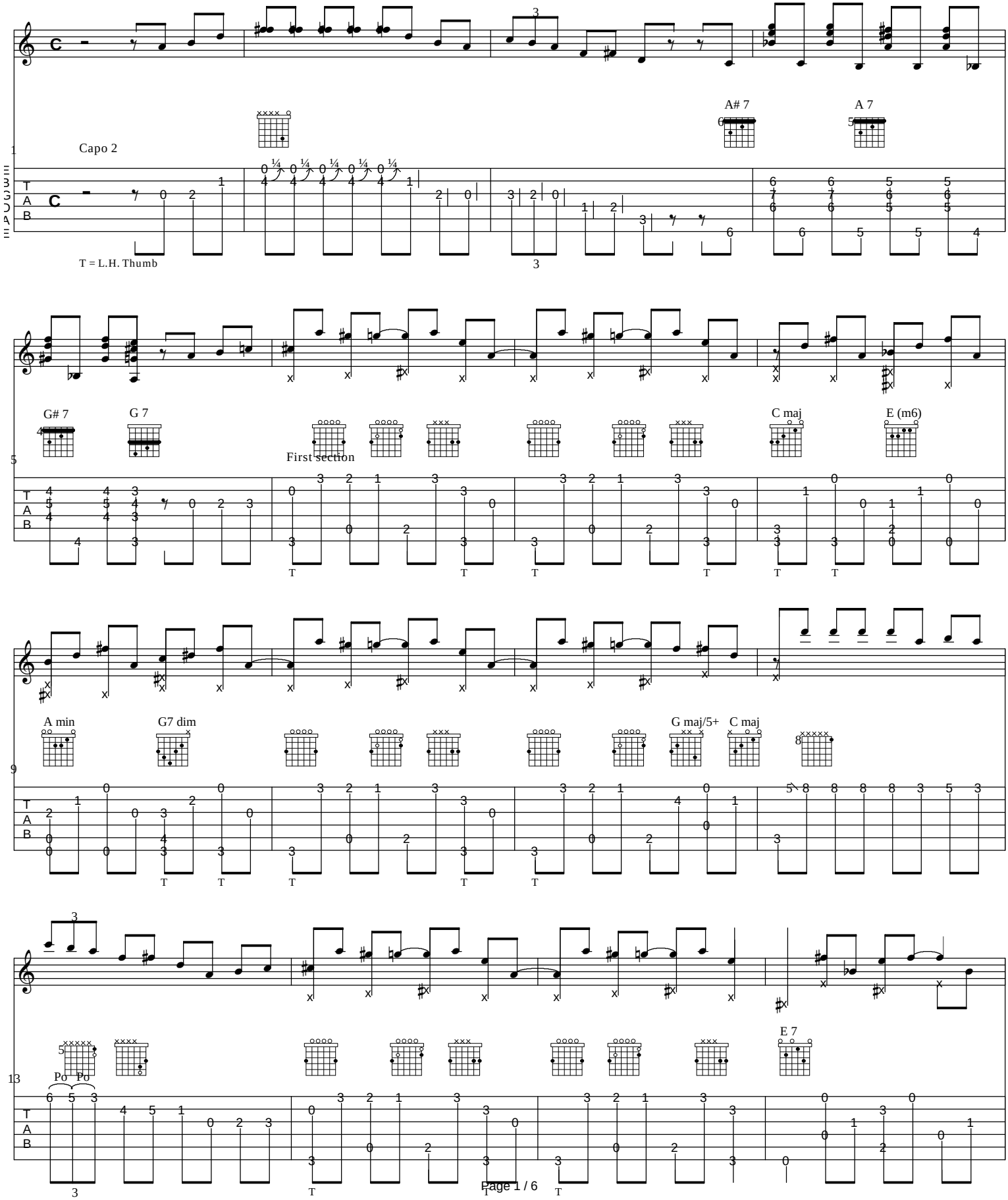
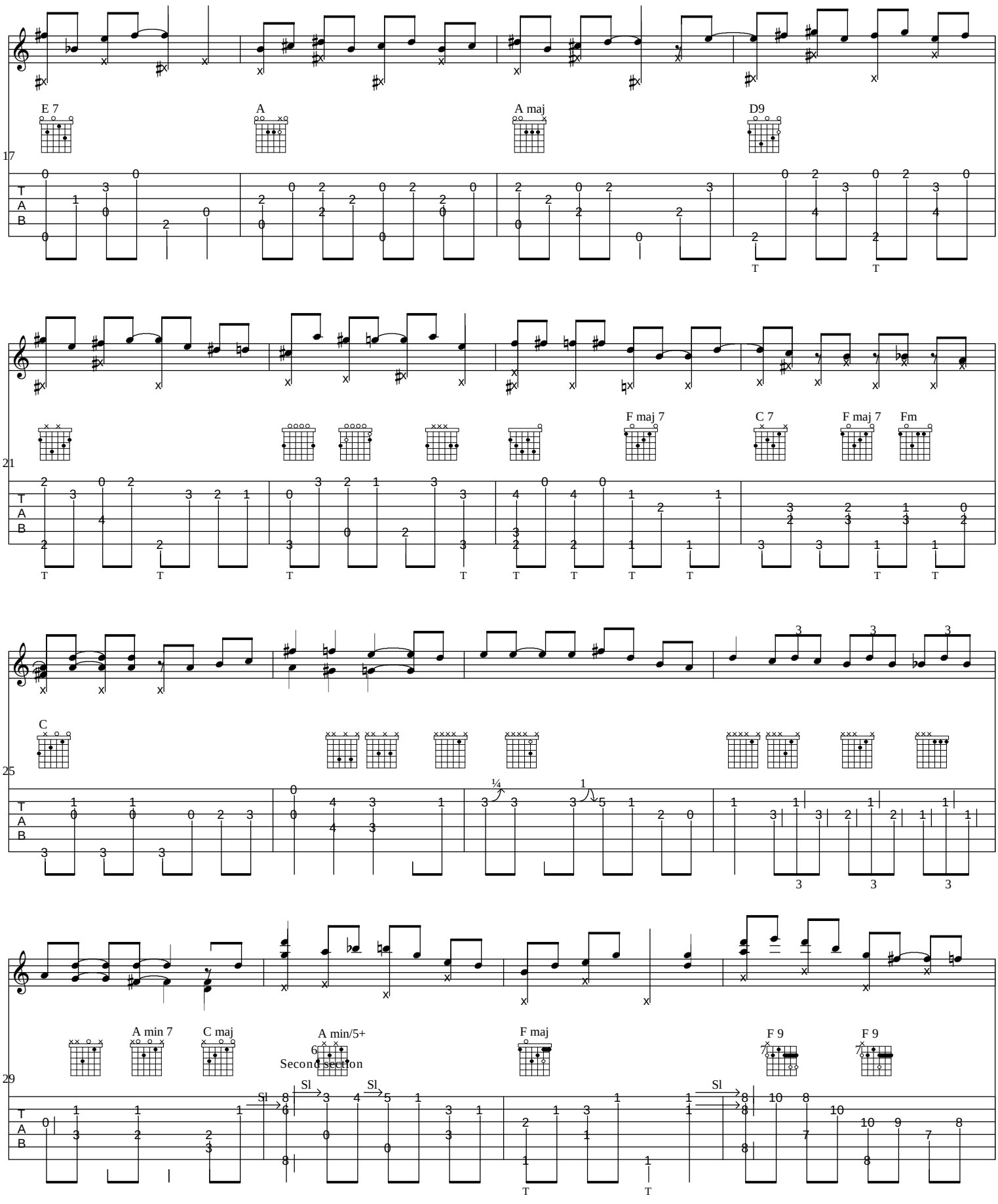
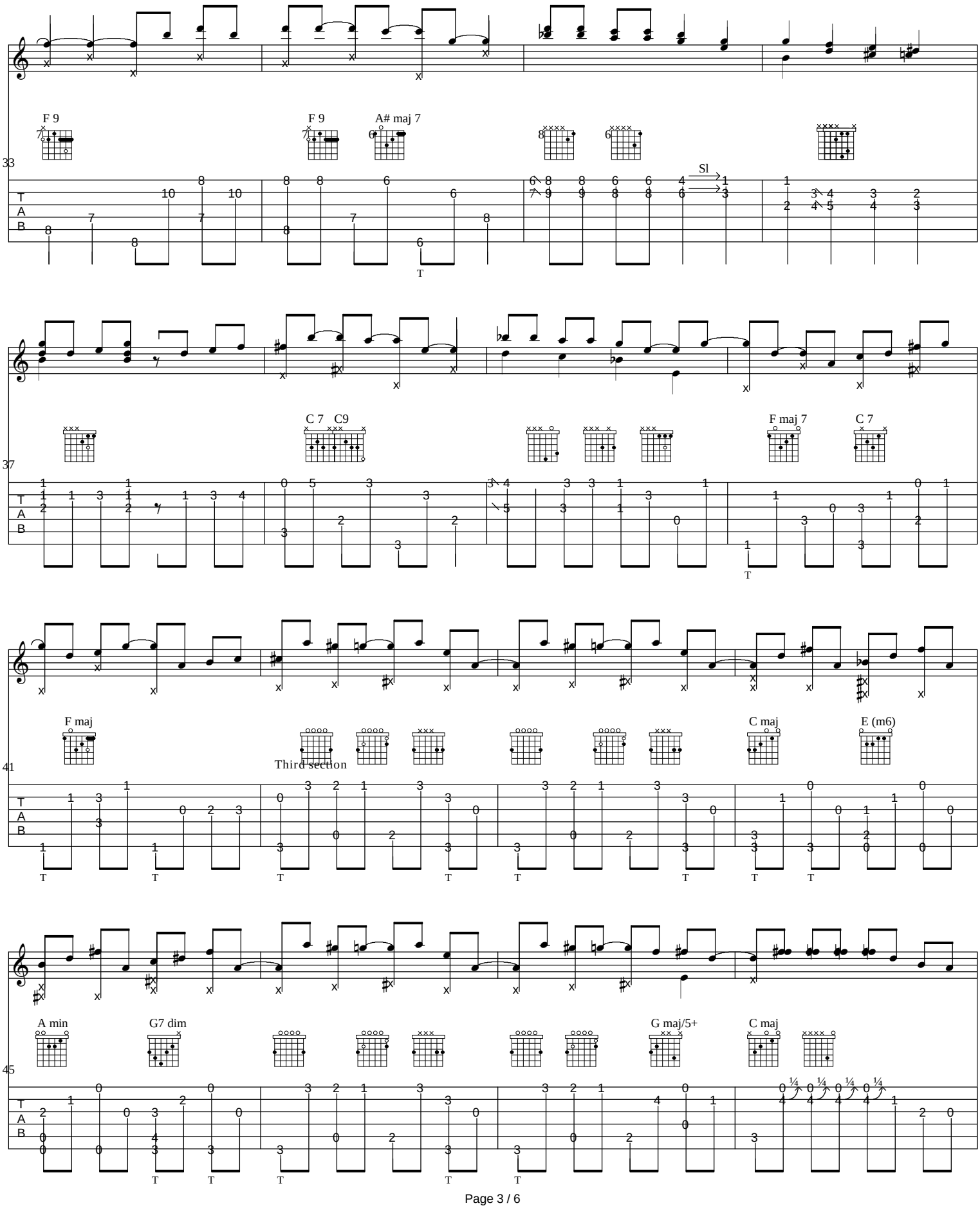
Memphis Blues

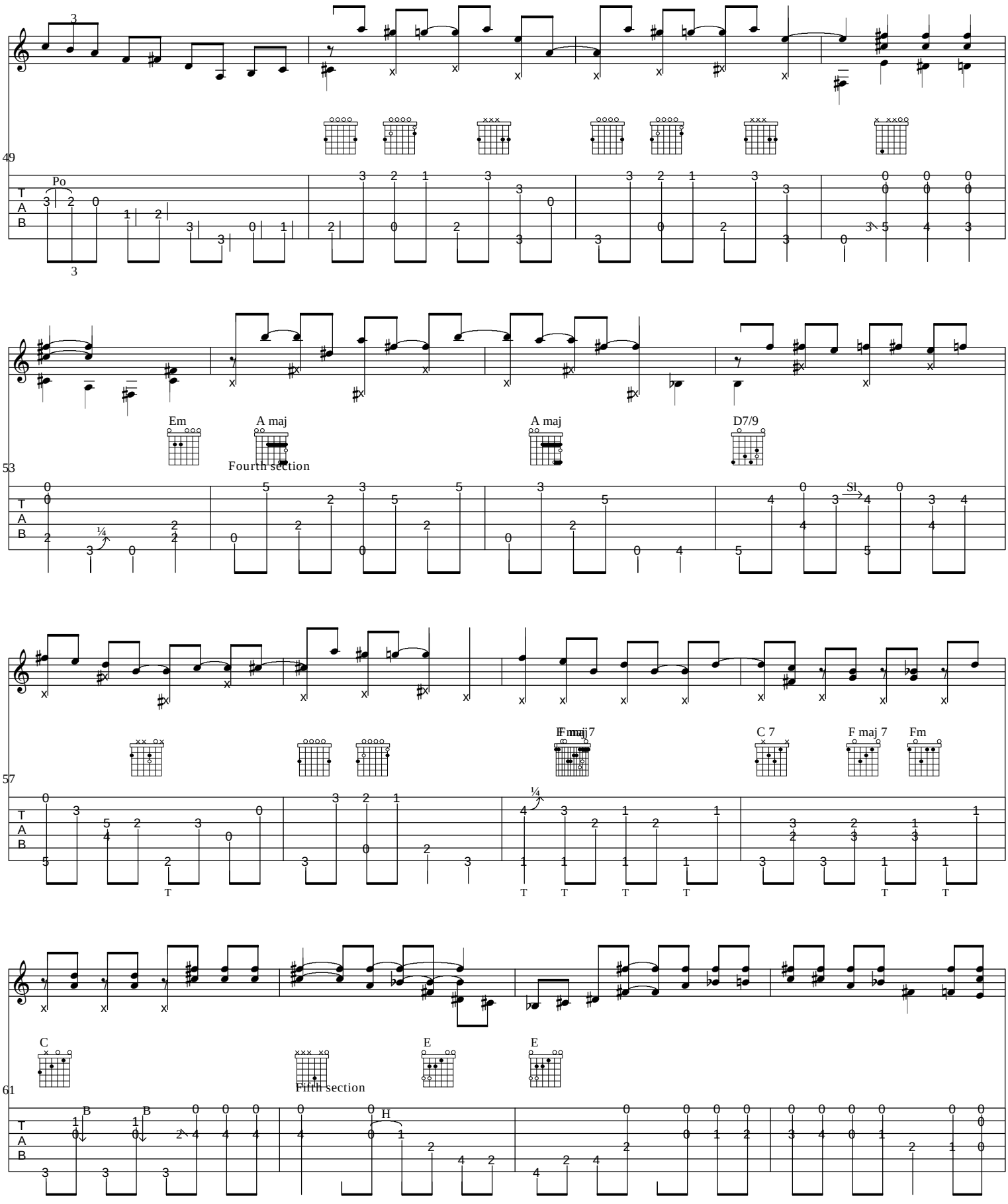
(Mr. Crump) W. C. Handy (1912)

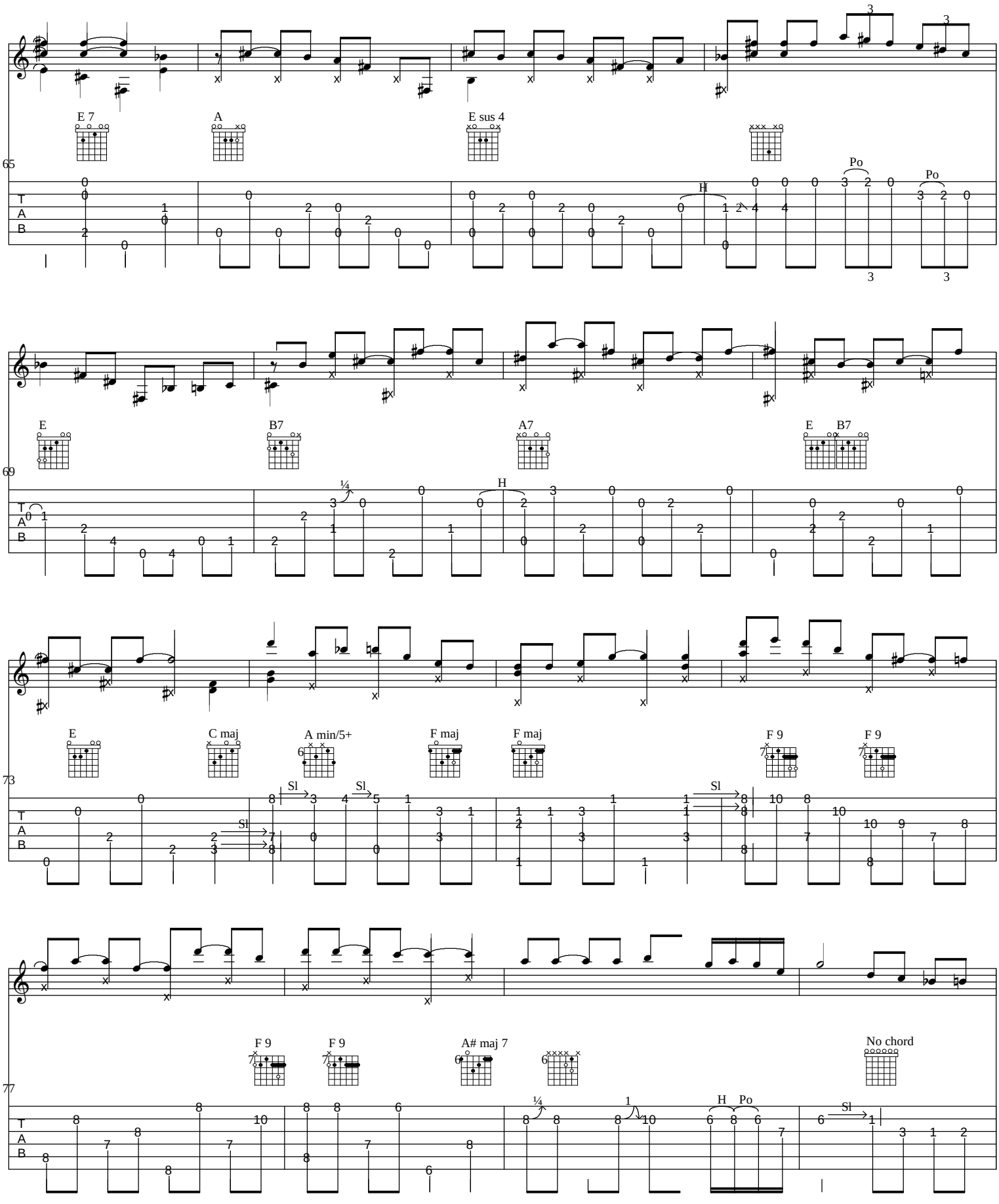
Arr: Merle Travis
TablEdited by Tom Thomason

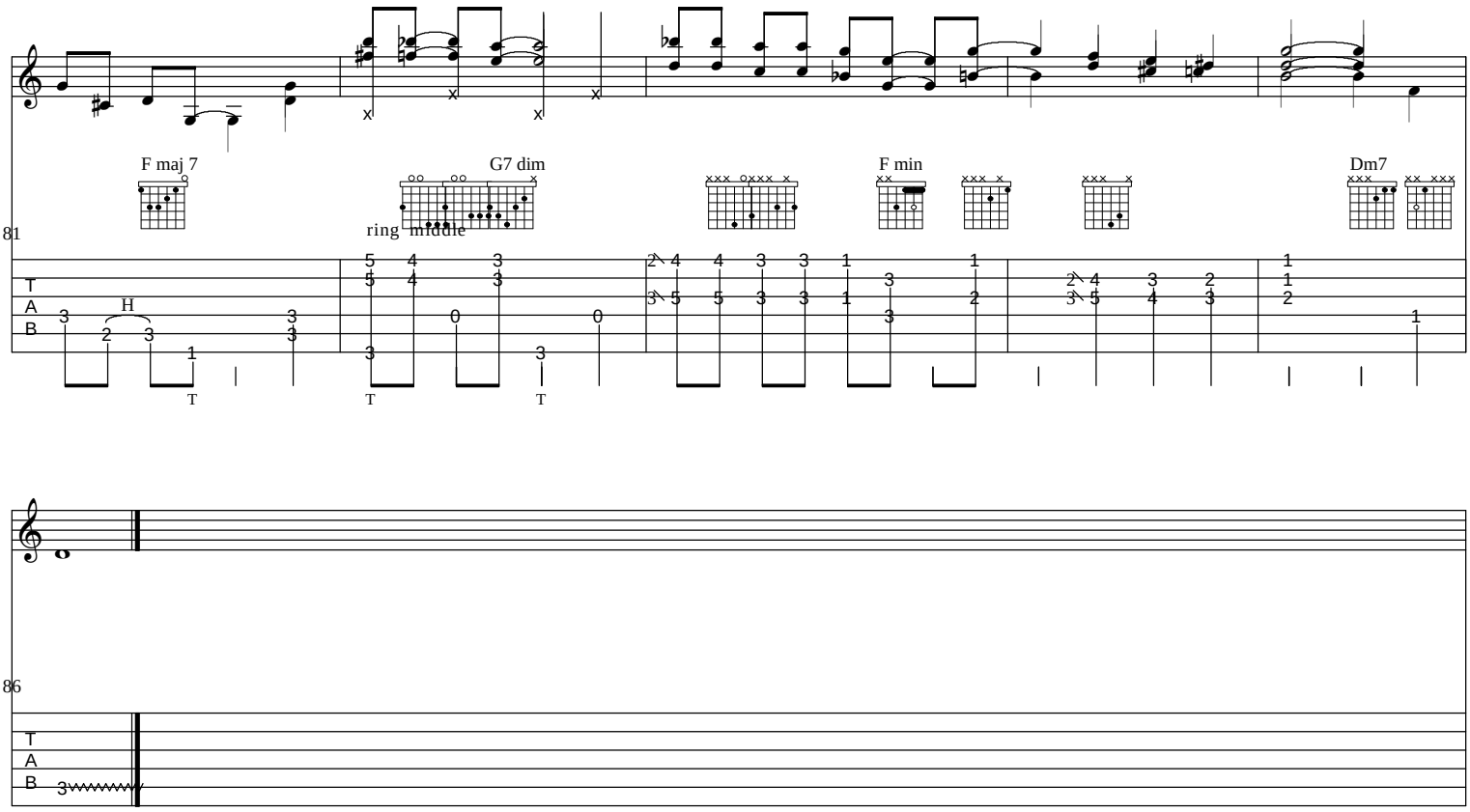



E 7
A
A maj
D9
17
F maj 7
C 7
F maj 7
Fm
21
C
25
A min 7
C maj
A min/5+
Second section
F maj
F 9
F 9
29
Sl
Sl
Sl
Sl


F 9
F 9
A# maj 7
Sl
33
C 7
C9
F maj 7
C 7
37
F maj
C maj
E (m6)
Third section
41
A min
G7 dim
G maj/5+
C maj
45
T A B


49
Po
53
Em
A maj
Fourth section
A maj
D7/9
Sl
57
F maj 7
C 7
F maj 7
Fm
61
C
Fifth section
E
E
B
H


E 7
A
E sus 4
65
Po
H
E
B7
A7
E
B7
69
¼
H
E
C maj
A min/5+
F maj
F maj
F 9
F 9
73
Sl
Sl
Sl
Sl
F 9
F 9
A# maj 7
No chord
77
¼
H
Po
Sl
T
A
B



Written in 1910 by William Christopher Handy, blues mythology has for many years credited this as being the first printed composition with the word "blues" in the title. The myth is, unfortunately, just that, a myth. There are several such numbers which printed earlier.

This is one of my favorite Merle Travis arrangements and one of the tunes I've played the longest. Despite the fact that Merle is supposed never to have used barré chords, I haven't stuck myself with this restriction.
One of the more distinctive trademarks of the true Travis style is the use of right-hand damping in the bass. Most modern finger picking arrangements strive to have three voices (as opposed to the two usually used in classical guitar treatments) going at the same time: bass line, chord accompaniment and a melody line on top. Travis goes one step further by adding a fourth, more rhythmic, voice by lightly damping one or more of the bass strings at the bridge with the outer edge of the palm of his right hand. When damped, the strings carry a "thunkier", stand-up bass sound which emphasizes the melody in the treble srings and opens the path for contrasting bass melodies played with the damping removed.

I've added a walking bass to the recurring G figure first appearing in measure 6. The left-hand thumb remains securely in place on the third fret of the sixth string, anchoring and supporting the rest of the hand as it cycles through the chords. Note also that the right-hand thumb often hits bass strings just a little harder in certain places, providing a slight brush effect that picks up the next higher string in passing.

In the end of measure 29, you slide a C shape up to the eighth fret. The ring finger of the left hand gets transferred to the sixth string during the trip. Make sure to pick the eighth fret note as soon as the slide arrives in position. The subsequent slide from the eighth fret down to the third fret isn't quite as explicit as the tablature might suggest. It's one of those "note disappearing downwards in the distance" effects whose main purpose (other than lingering, hauntingly, on the ear) is to set your left hand up for the 4-5 slide which comes next. The only real requirement for the 8-3 slide is that it end at, or preferably below, the fourth fret.

When sliding the first position F to the eighth fret F9 in measure 32, the left hand changes position somewhere in the middle of the slide. Don't wait until you get up there and have to make a sudden change.

The open first string notes in measures 63-64 should be played fairly softly compared to the third string run, They're used as a sort of drone sound behind the actual melody.