HOW TO CREATE MELODIES & IMPROVISE

Most song melodies are based on **WORDS and SENTENCES**. Songwriters rarely write a melody and then add words to it later, they usually start with a mixture of lyrics, chords and melody.

A melody or an improvisation is like a **CONVERSATION** - listen to people talking - you could almost hear it like a song.

"Hi Joan, how are you"	(fast and upbeat)
"HENRY - I never thought I'd see you again!!	(shocked, loud, snappy)
"I've been unwell"	(sombre, slower)
"I'm sorry to hear that"	(sympathetic)
"I'm ok now"	(more upbeat again)
"That's great, how's the kids'	(optimistic)
"DIDN'T YOU HEAR"	(tension)
"WHAT?"	(worried)
etc	

Can you see the **variety** contained in even a short conversation. The different lengths, different volumes, different speeds, different pitches - you might hear a woman with a high voice and a man with a low voice, the tension, release, excitement, anger, boredom, sadness, joy, some people talk too much, some just grunt words

Use these ideas when you are creating melodies or improvising. Don't just play random notes. Do you TALK randomly? Ask **questions** in one phrase and **reply** in the next phrase.

To begin with stick closely to the **CHORD TONES** to form your phrases. So if you are playing Em7 chord in the left hand play around with the same chord tones in your right hand adding the odd 'in-between' note to liven it up. As you progress you can be more daring but work up to that.

Play some ballad style left hand patterns and create a CONVERSATION with your RIGHT hand notes. Play it nice and slow. **THINK** about what you are doing, IMAGINE two people talking, it could be two lovers, or an argument, or just someone talking to themselves about a lost love or a past regret.

Learn from Beethoven

Newcomers to improvisation often play too many random notes because they imagine that if they just played one or two at a time it would sound like they had nothing to ‘say’.

But if you look at some of the world’s greatest composers they OFTEN used just ONE or TWO phrases as the basis of some of their finest compositions.

Think about Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony.
Everyone knows that famous opening phrase
‘Da da da Daah - da da da daah’

If you really listen closely you will discover that he repeats this basic pattern a seemingly ENDLESS number of times. It’s clearly what you DO with the pattern that counts.

The next time you listen to some improvisation notice how often patterns are repeated either in an ascending or descending way and they sound GREAT!

PREDICTABILITY and UNCERTAINTY

The best songs tend to have a balance between predictability and uncertainty. It’s nice - at times - to be able to guess where the song is going to go next . This can make us feel part of the creation of the song but If the song becomes TOO predictable it can become boring. It’s exciting to be led in another direction now and then. This keeps our interest.

Think about this when you are improvising or writing melodies. Don’t be afraid to be predictable or repetitive but try to maintain interest as well even if that means using ONE riff in an amazing variety of ways like Mr Beethoven!

APPLYING THE BALLAD STYLE TO MELODIES IN 3 EASY STEPS

BALLAD STYLE (PLAYING MELODIES)
IN 3 EASY STEPS

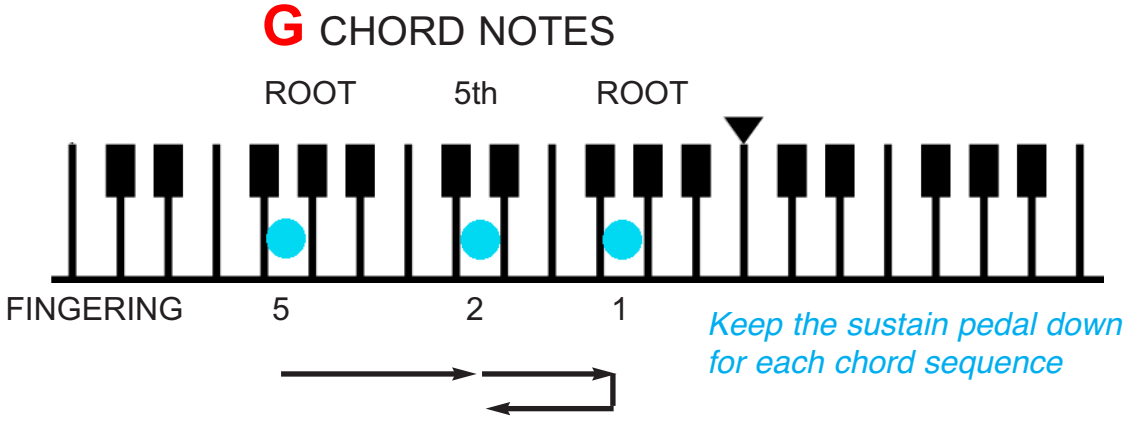
STEP 1 The LEFT HAND

A very easy LEFT HAND ballad style.

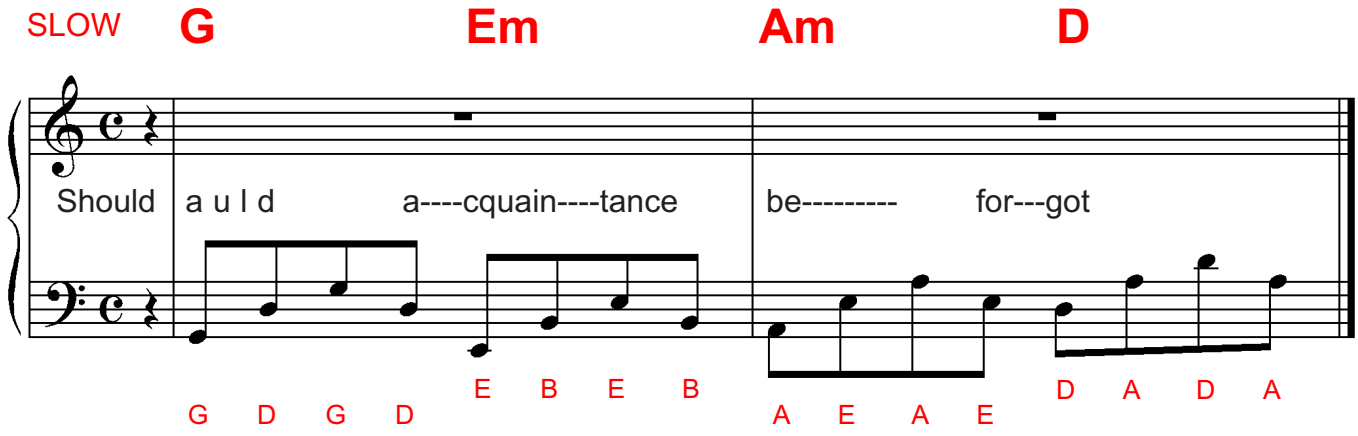
In ballad style there is generally more movement in the left hand so that an underlying ‘full’ sound can be created as an accompaniment to the right hand melody. This left hand sound is generally constructed of chord notes.

Try this pattern based on the chord of G

Play the low G first - then the D - then the higher G - then the D - Repeat



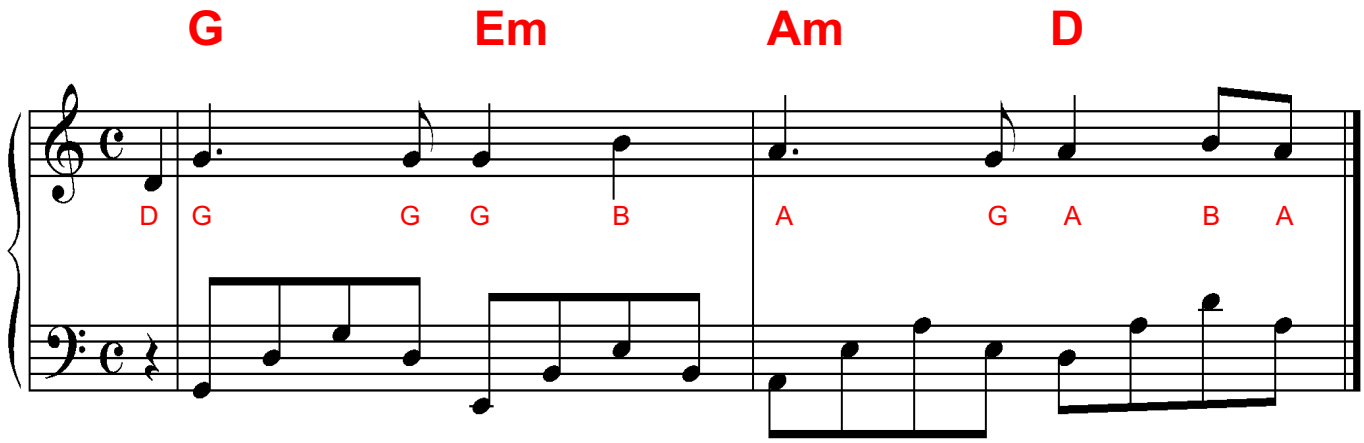
Now transpose this pattern into the first four chords of Auld Lang Sang



Remember that in ALL chords (except the ‘B’ group of chords) the ROOT and 5th have SAME coloured keys which makes this extremely easy to play

BALLAD STYLE (PLAYING MELODIES)

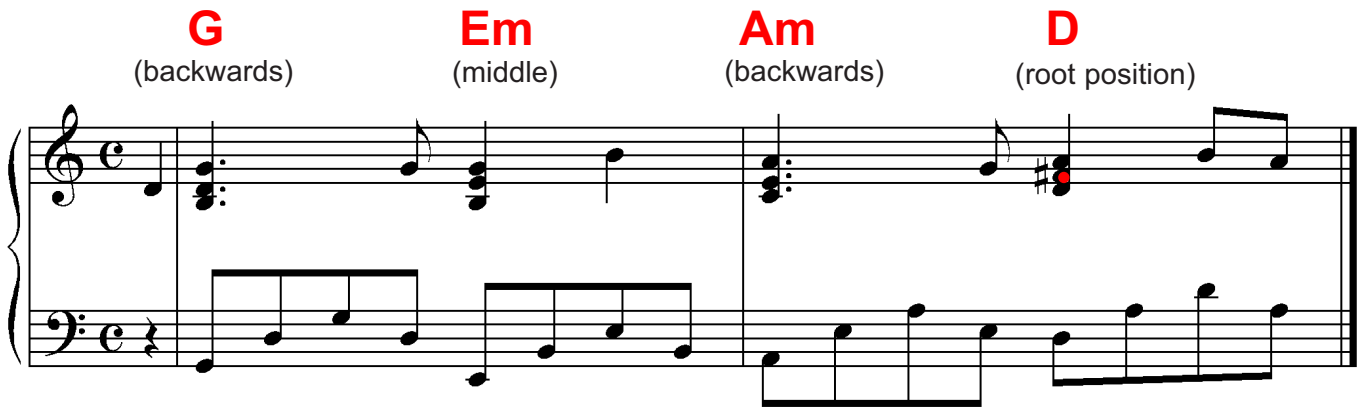
STEP 2 Add the RIGHT hand MELODY line



STEP 3 Add some RIGHT HAND CHORD NOTES beneath the MELODY line

What you just played sounds good but the overall sound is a bit ‘thin’.
This time see if you can add some RIGHT hand chord notes BENEATH the melody at the points where the chords change.

You add them UNDER the melody because our ears always pick out the TOP note of a chord more so than the other notes.

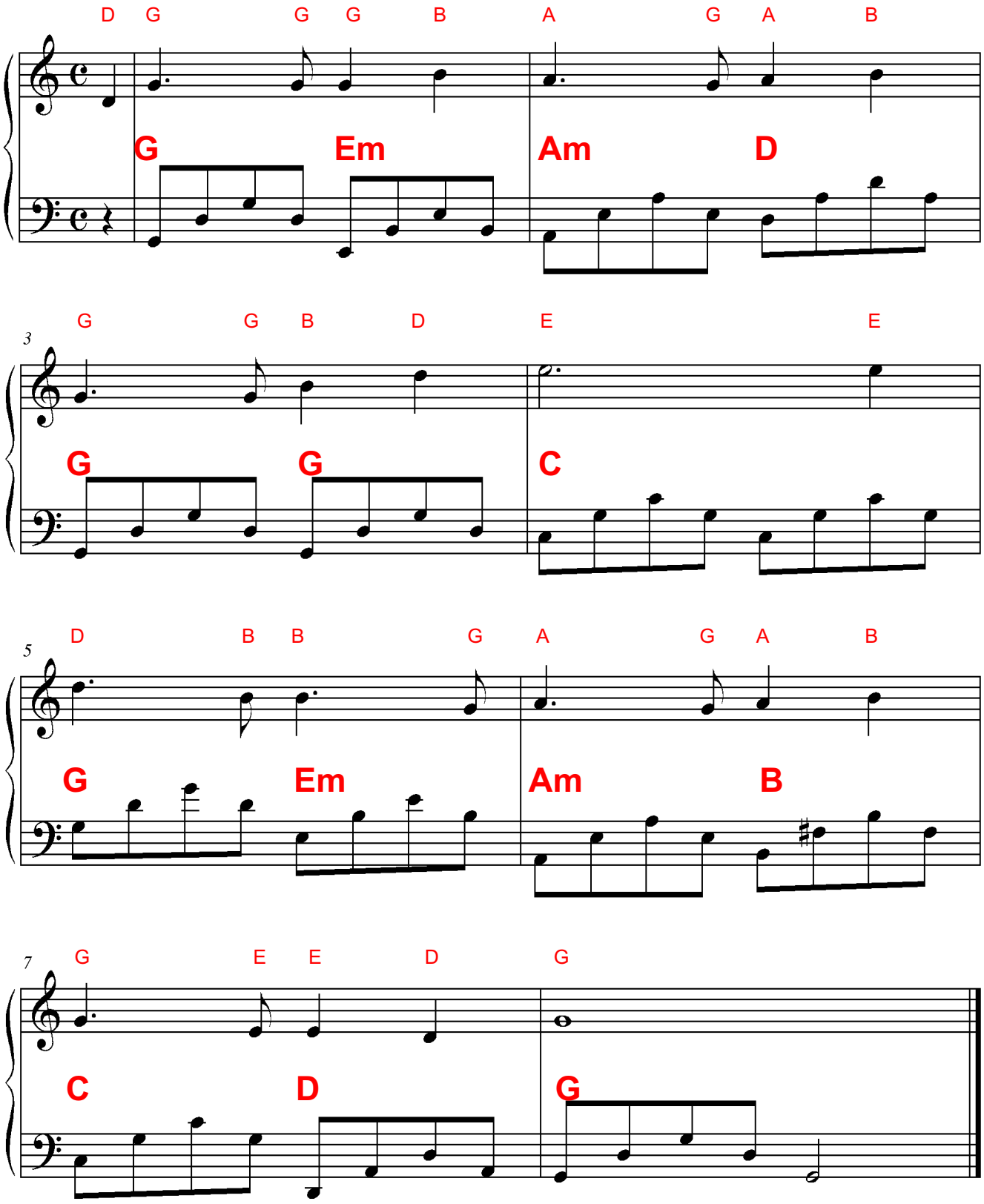


Got the idea? Now try it with the whole tune
First play the tune with single melody notes in the right hand

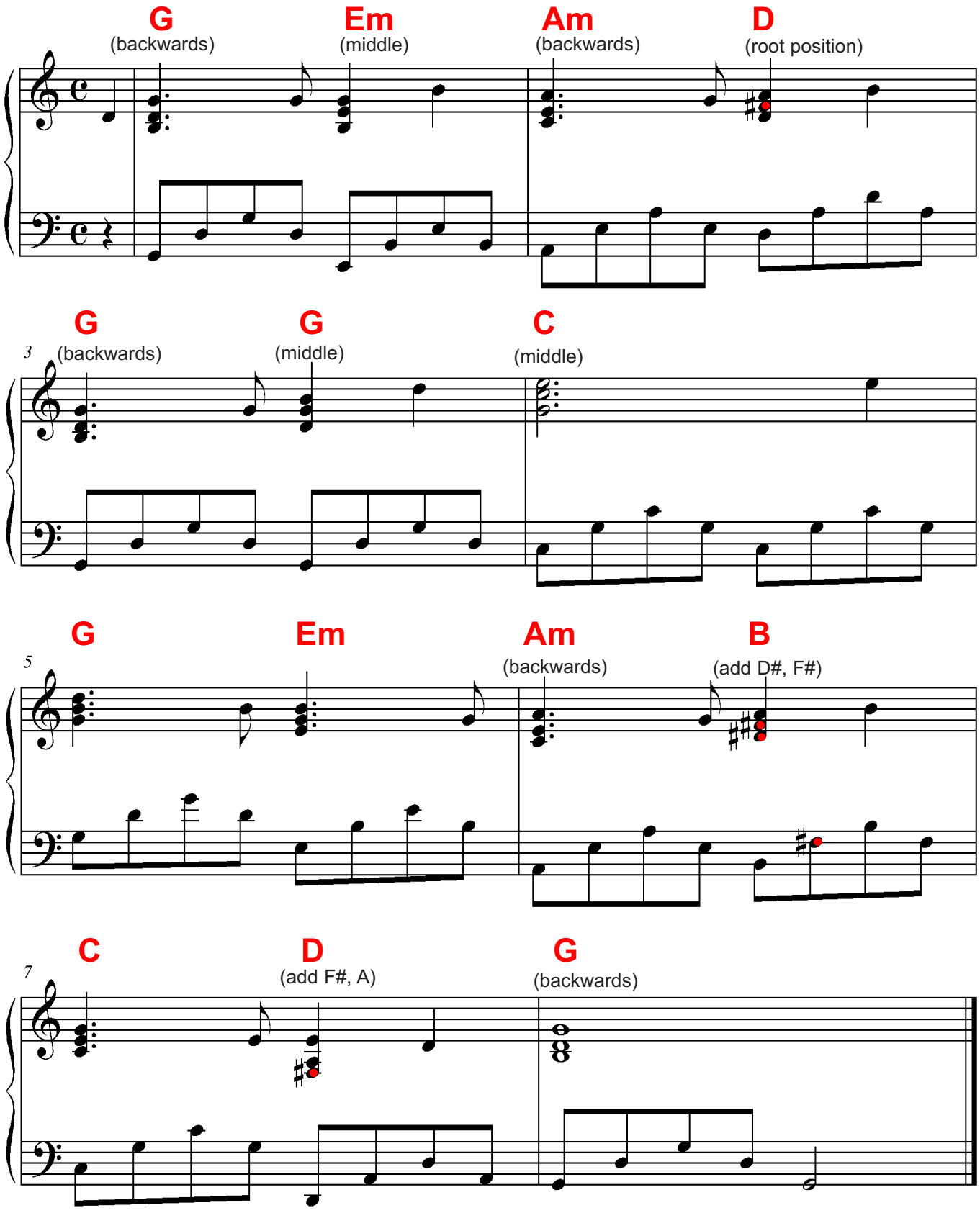
BALLAD STYLE (PLAYING MELODIES)
AULD LANG SANG

Putting it all together - part 1

(The whole tune without added chord notes)



BALLAD STYLE (PLAYING MELODIES)
AULD LANG SANG

Putting it all together - part 2

(The whole tune WITH added chord notes)