Little Gremlins

by John Stropes
Some additional thoughts on “Ragamuffin”

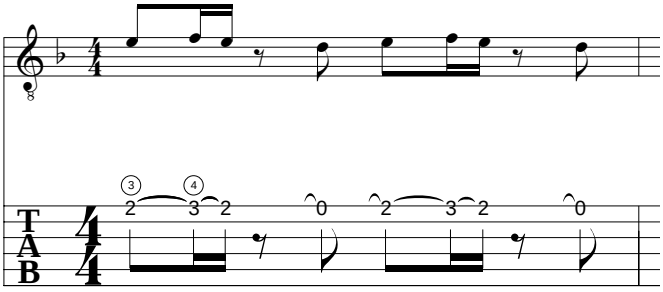
In composition and in performance, Michael Hedges invests his music with thought—thoughtful consideration of the musical import of his choices. That’s why we find his music fascinating. As we listen to it more closely and as we try to perform it ourselves, we can understand the intelligence that he has given to these notes.

“Ragamuffin” is a stunning composition that draws many different types of techniques together for its transcendent musical objective. The techniques are woven together seamlessly. But what does it really takes to be without seams?

In his teaching over the past 10 years Michael has mentioned various issues and exercises that he has focused on in order to bring greater depth to “Ragamuffin.”

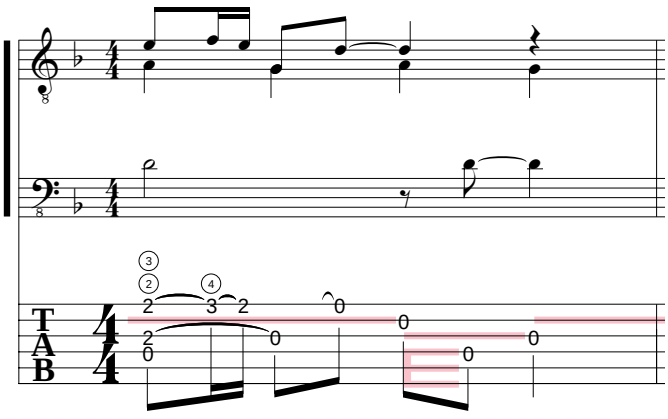
(The right-hand fingering is very straight-forward in this piece for both plucking individual notes and for string-stopping.: the thumb plays the sixth, fifth and fourth strings, the index finger plays the third string, the middle finger plays the second string and the ring finger plays the first string.)

In measure 1, the *E* which occurs on the last sixteenth of beat one terminates immediately on beat two. It is stopped by a left-hand release. Technically this can be challenging because this left-hand release immediately precedes a pull-off.

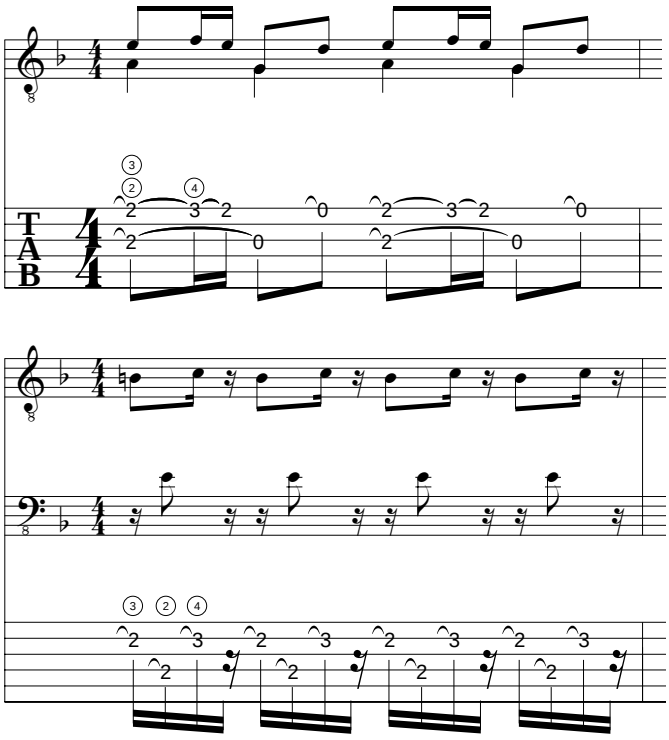


This allows the *G* which occurs on beat two to be perceived as part of the melody.

And this same *G* is also part of an important middle voice. According to Michael Hedges, “I don’t want the *G* [on beat two] to ring through the *A* [on beat three] or it won’t be as easily perceived as a little melody woven in there, which is why I like this tune: it sounds like there are all these little gremlins going around.” To stop this *G*, Michael uses right-hand string-stopping. Practice this exercise and listen for the middle voice:



At the beginning of measure 1 there is also an important issue regarding the precise placement of notes articulated by the left hand. Broadly speaking, this is the issue which Michael eloquently refers to as “rhythmic intonation.” “I practice:



Then I try to relax while I’m practicing.”

All of measure 1 is meticulously sculpted using extensive right-hand string-stopping. “I am listening and am very concerned about the duration of notes. For whatever reason it is, I’ve paid attention to that detail. And that’s what you’re hearing about some of the music that makes you think it’s more than one person. Not because I’m an extra-gifted, fast anything. It’s just that I put a little more thought into when to stop the notes so that you can perceive them as voices.”

Why not see if you can’t get some little gremlins working for *you*? Keep playing these exercises until what you hear makes a difference to you. Then see what you can do with measures 2, 3 and 4!

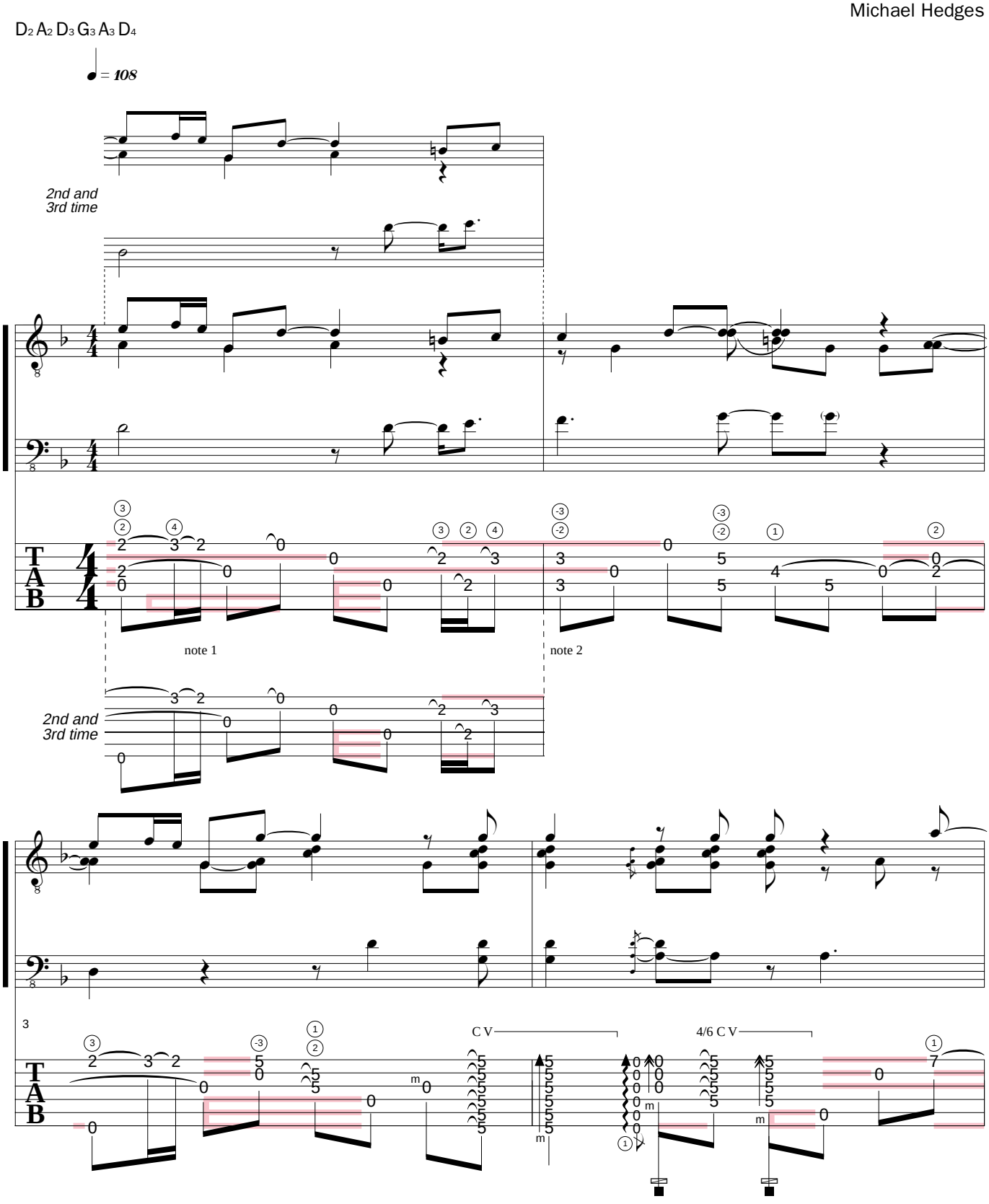
If you have any questions about this material, you can reach me by phone at 414-636-9910, by fax at 414-636-9911, by e-mail at stropes@execpc.com or online at http://www.execpc.com/~stropes.

The complete transcription of “Ragamuffin” is now available from Stropes Editions, Ltd. To order call toll-free 800-733-2520 (USA and Canada) or 414-636-9912.

John Stropes and Michael Hedges

Ragamuffin

Michael Hedges



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