"HOT, NEW ENGLISH GROUP LED ZEPPELIN"

It was a modest announcement, a two-page press release issued in November 1968: "Atlantic Records has signed the hot, new English group Led Zeppelin to a long-term exclusive recording contract. Although the exact terms of the deal are secret, it can be disclosed that it is one of most substantial deals Atlantic has ever made."

Most of what followed was quick biography—Jimmy Page's history with The Yardbirds, where he had succeeded Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck as lead guitarist, and as one of the best and busiest session musicians in Britain; bassist John Paul Jones' success as an arranger of hit records for Donovan and The Rolling Stones, among many others. There were references to drummer John Bonham's already notorious solos as a member of American singer Tim Rose's touring band and to Robert Plant's blooming reputation as "one of England's outstanding young blues singers."

There was a promise too. "Top English and American rock musicians who have heard the tracks," the release said, referring to Zeppelin's imminent debut album, "have compared the LP to the best of Cream and Jimi Hendrix and have called Led Zeppelin the next group to reach the heights achieved by Cream and Hendrix."

That was audacious talk, a fat power chord in the face, at a time when Hendrix still walked the Earth and Cream were a fresh memory—the latter played their farewell shows that very month at London's Royal Albert Hall. In comparison, when Led Zeppelin opened their first North American tour in Denver, Colorado, on December 26, 1968, they were third on a bill to Vanilla Fudge and Spirit and treated like a doormat. The promoter, Plant told me years later, deducted the cost of the backstage grub—"this four-loaves-and-five-fishes thing"—from the band's pay. At other dates, Plant operated Zeppelin's P.A. system himself, onstage, and Bonham often played without miking his kit (a minor annoyance as he was loud enough without electricity). In Detroit a local newspaper ad for Zeppelin's three-night stand at the Grande Ballroom announced the appearance of "Led Zeptlin."

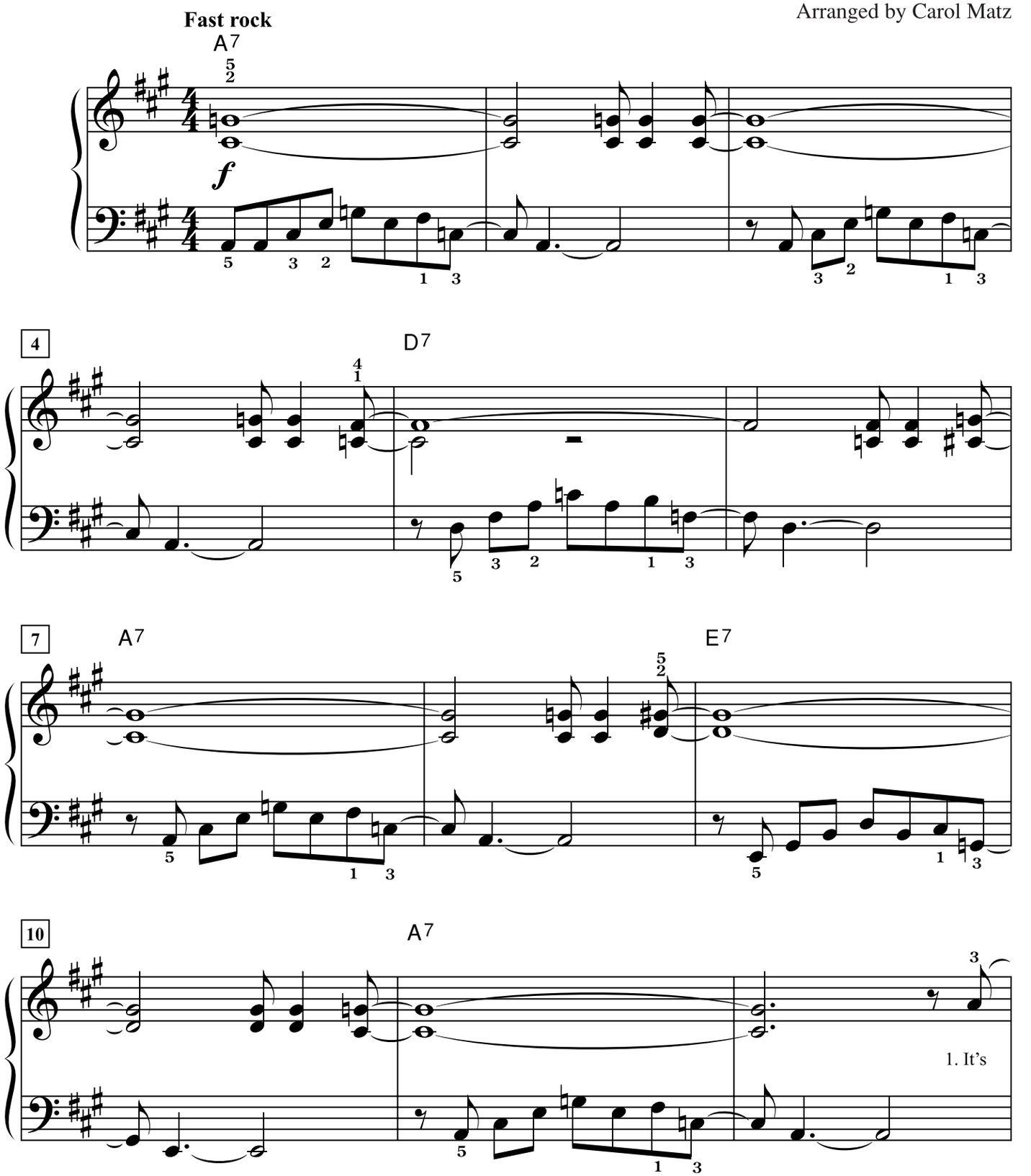
But as Page said later, recalling that tour, "You could feel something happening—first this row, then that row. It was like a tornado, and it went rolling across the country." By the end of 1969, Page, Plant, Jones, and Bonham had torn through North America four times, each time to bigger, sold-out audiences. In Britain, where they had been in clubs as The New Yardbirds as late as October 1968, Zeppelin quickly followed Cream into the Royal Albert Hall, filling it in June 1969 (and again in January 1970). In that first whiplash year, Led Zeppelin also released two of the most exciting and important rock albums ever made, *Led Zeppelin* and *Led Zeppelin II*—together, the fundamental bones of hard rock and heavy metal for the next four decades.

From the start, Led Zeppelin were working warriors. They toured like dogs—albeit in wild-boy luxury, fiercely protected by their manager, Peter Grant—and made eight studio albums (one a double LP) at a pace that now seems superhuman. Page claimed the total recording time for *Led Zeppelin* was 30 hours. The band made *II* on rare off days between shows in the summer of '69, in nearly a dozen different studios. "I remember we did vocal overdubs in an eight-track studio in Vancouver where they didn't even have proper headphones," Page recalled in a 1977 interview with Dave Schulps for the American magazine *Trans-Oceanic Trouser Press.* "Can you imagine that?"

Actually, yes. Even the band's harshest critics—and there were armies of them at the time—could not deny that Led Zeppelin had a rare drive to excel and conquer. "So many people are frightened to take a chance in life," Page told *Rolling Stone's* Cameron Crowe in 1975, "and there's so many chances you have to take." Jones did not hesitate to give up the regular,

ROCK AND ROLL

Words and Music by Jimmy Page, Robert Plant,
John Paul Jones and John Bonham
Arranged by Carol Matz



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BLACK DOG

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Robert Plant and John Paul Jones
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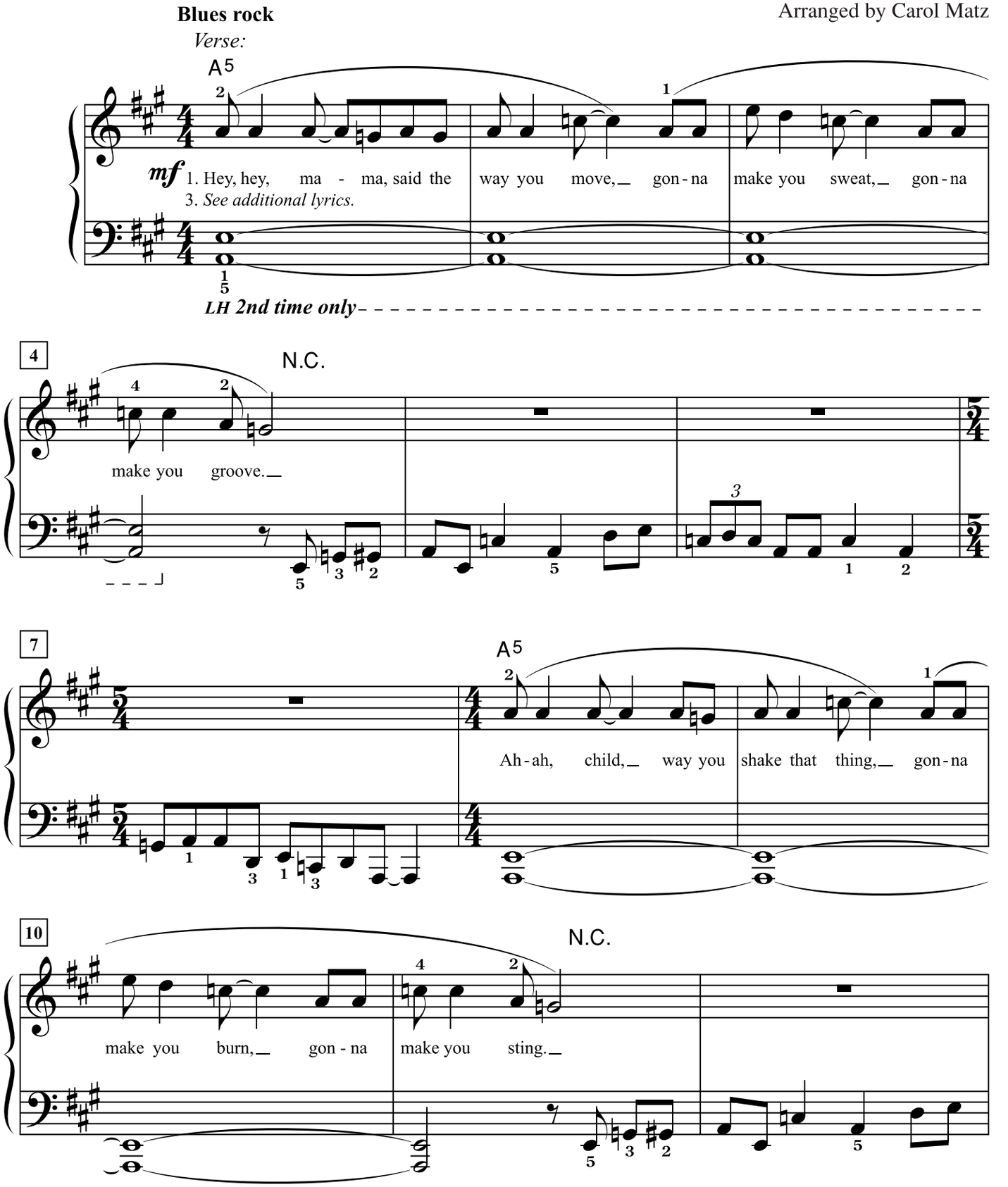

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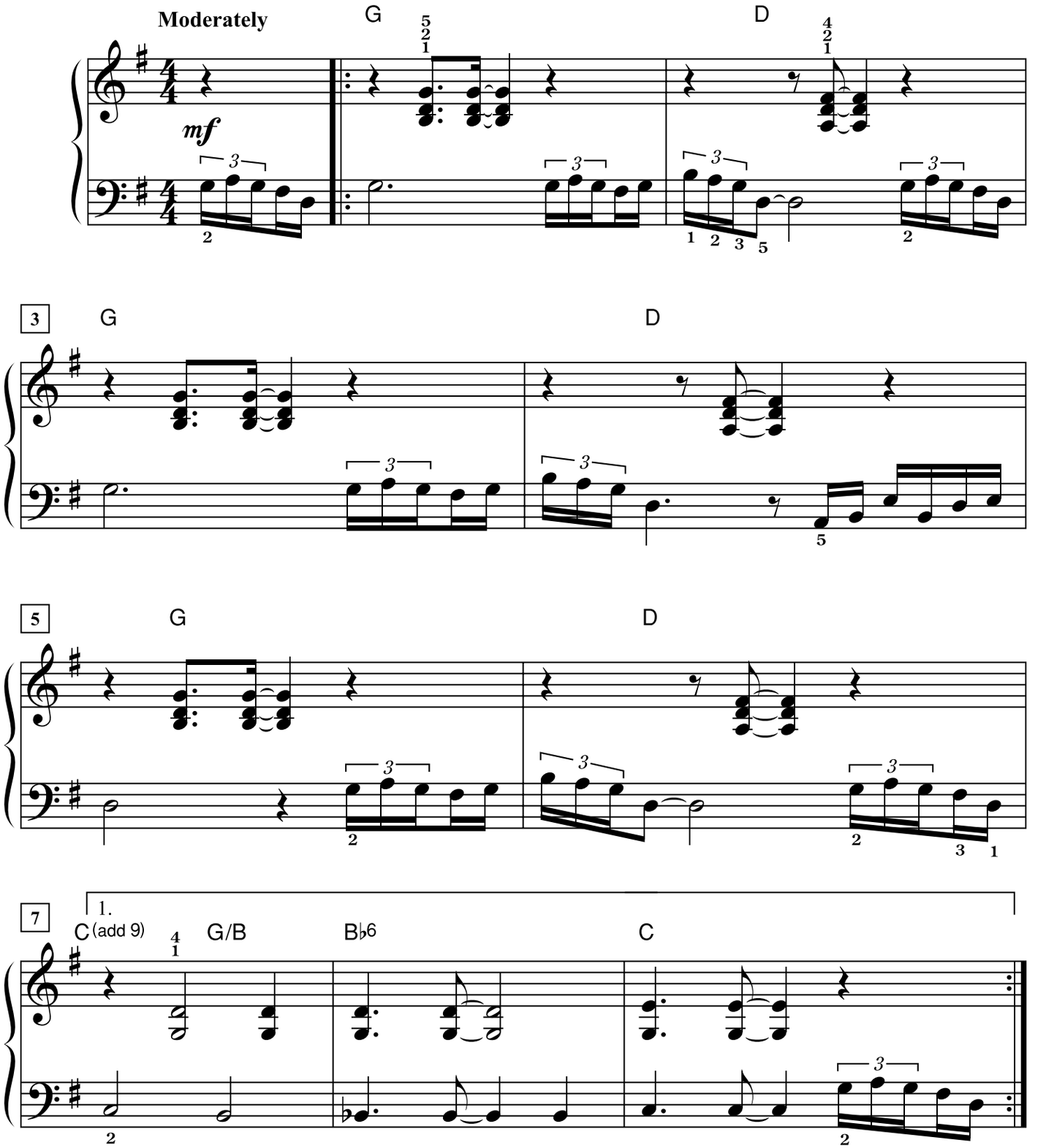
OVER THE HILLS AND FAR AWAY

Words and Music by
Jimmy Page and Robert Plant
Arranged by Carol Matz



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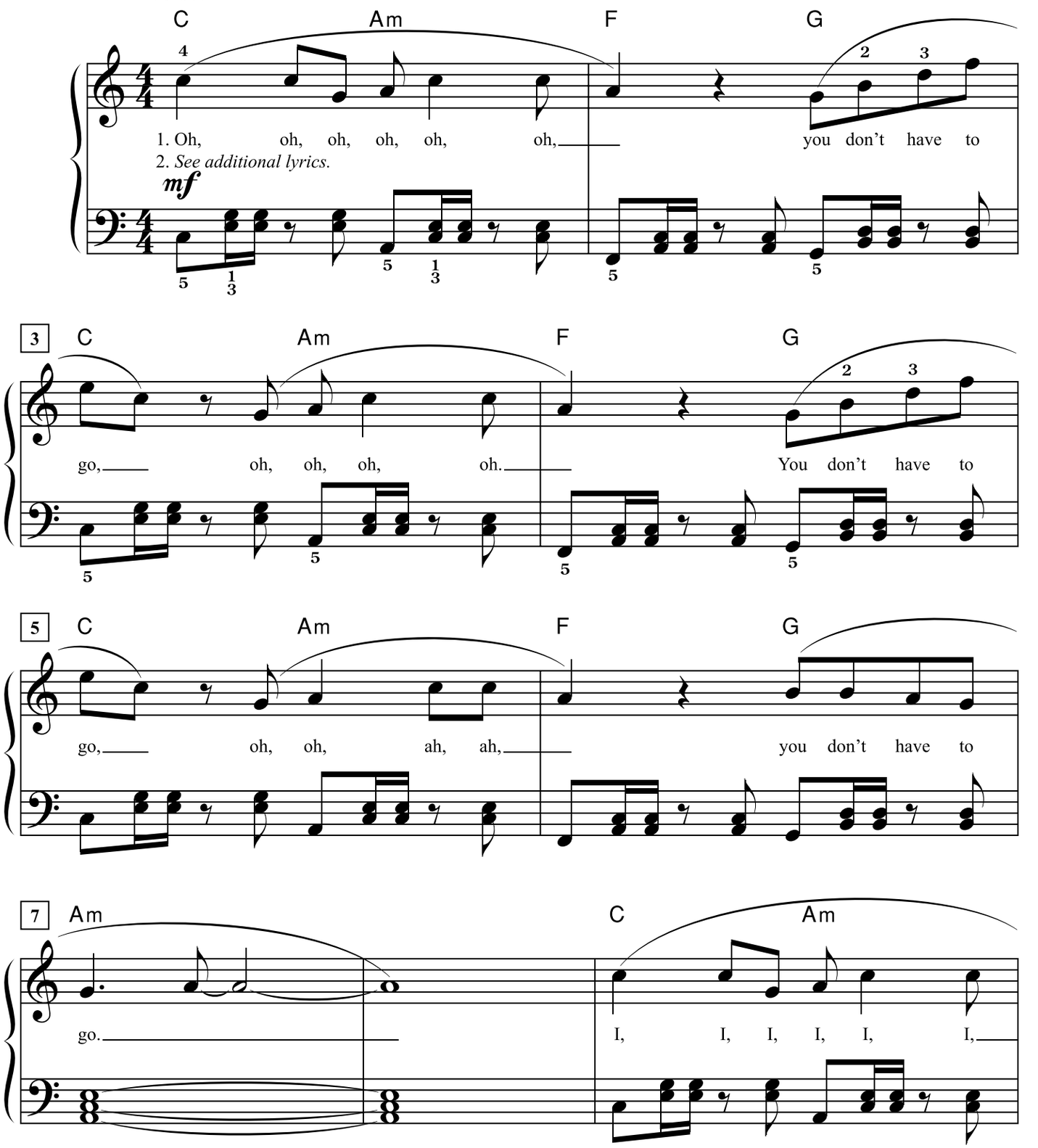
D'YER MAK'ER

Words and Music by Jimmy Page, John Bonham, John Paul Jones and Robert Plant
Arranged by Carol Matz

Reggae rock

Verse:



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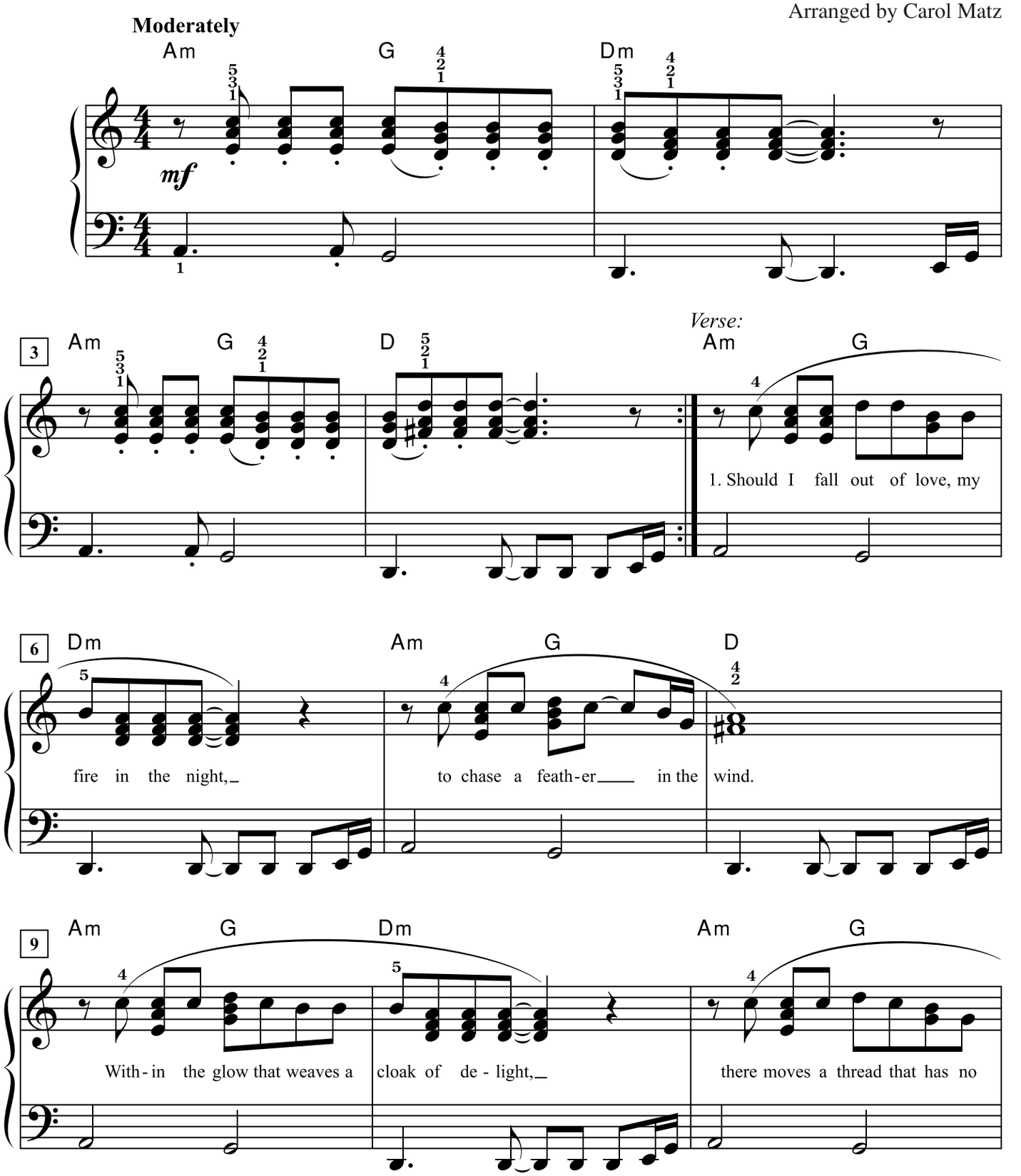
ALL MY LOVE

Words and Music by
John Paul Jones And Robert Plant
Arranged by Carol Matz



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