National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

Songs of the Mississippi River

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Songs of the Mississippi River

About our National River

The Mississippi River contains 10,000 years of human history and countless millennia of natural evolution and change. Along its 2,350 mile journey from Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico can be found wooded islands, canyon-like walls and floodplain forest. Cutting through our country's midsection, the Mississippi River and its peoples are part of the American story.

So significant to the nation is the 72 miles of river between the cities of Dayton/Ramsey to Hastings, Minnesota, that Congress declared it a unit of the National Park System—the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. Visitors can find here a rich natural, historical and cultural heritage, a wide range of scenic and recreational resources, and a vital river economy.

About this Songbook

The Mississippi River may be the most musical river in the entire world. Drum songs, folk songs, blues, and jazz were all invented and reinvented along its banks. People paddled on the river, crossed over it, traveled and lived alongside it, and have felt the need to say something about the experience. Working people told stories and sang songs about what they saw on the river. Artists sketched, painted and photographed it. Musicians have been truly prolific not only in the sheer volume of works about the river, but by a need to create entirely new musical styles just so they could describe their feelings about themselves and the water.

There are many unique and interesting stories about the Mississippi River, some of which have inspired these songs. The guitar chords, the string and harmonica rhythms, and the lyrics floating along on top seem to imitate how the river runs. These songs reflect the eight educational themes presented by the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area and are proving to be a fine way to talk about the "Great Mississippi." The themes are listed on the contents page in bold followed by the titles of the songs that relate to them.

As you play these songs, ask yourself what the Mississippi River means to you. Even more importantly, come down to the river, rediscover its majesty, and consider taking an active role in caring for its future.

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1. The Mississippi is one of the world's great rivers.

"GREAT MISSISSIPPI"

"ROLL RIVER JOURNEY"

2. The stories of human life along the Mississippi River have unfolded over 12,000 years.

"FIRST NATIONS"

"PIERRE BOTTINEAU"

"REVEREND HICKMAN'S HANDS"

"LIGHT THE RIVER"

3. We must care for the Mississippi River.

"TAKE A LOOK"

4. Glacial and human forces shaped the river.

"OLD RIVER"

5. As a working river, the Mississippi River's influence extends far from its shoreline.

"PILOT DADDY"

"FALLING WATERS"

6. The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA) corridor includes a variety of organisms and ecosystems; improved biological diversity is a goal.

"FISHING RIVER"

7. All living things (including humans) in the MNRRA corridor are interdependent.

"PASS THE BOWL"

"RISING TIDE"

8. The resources of the MNRRA corridor are nationally significant. The area is a unit of the National Park System.

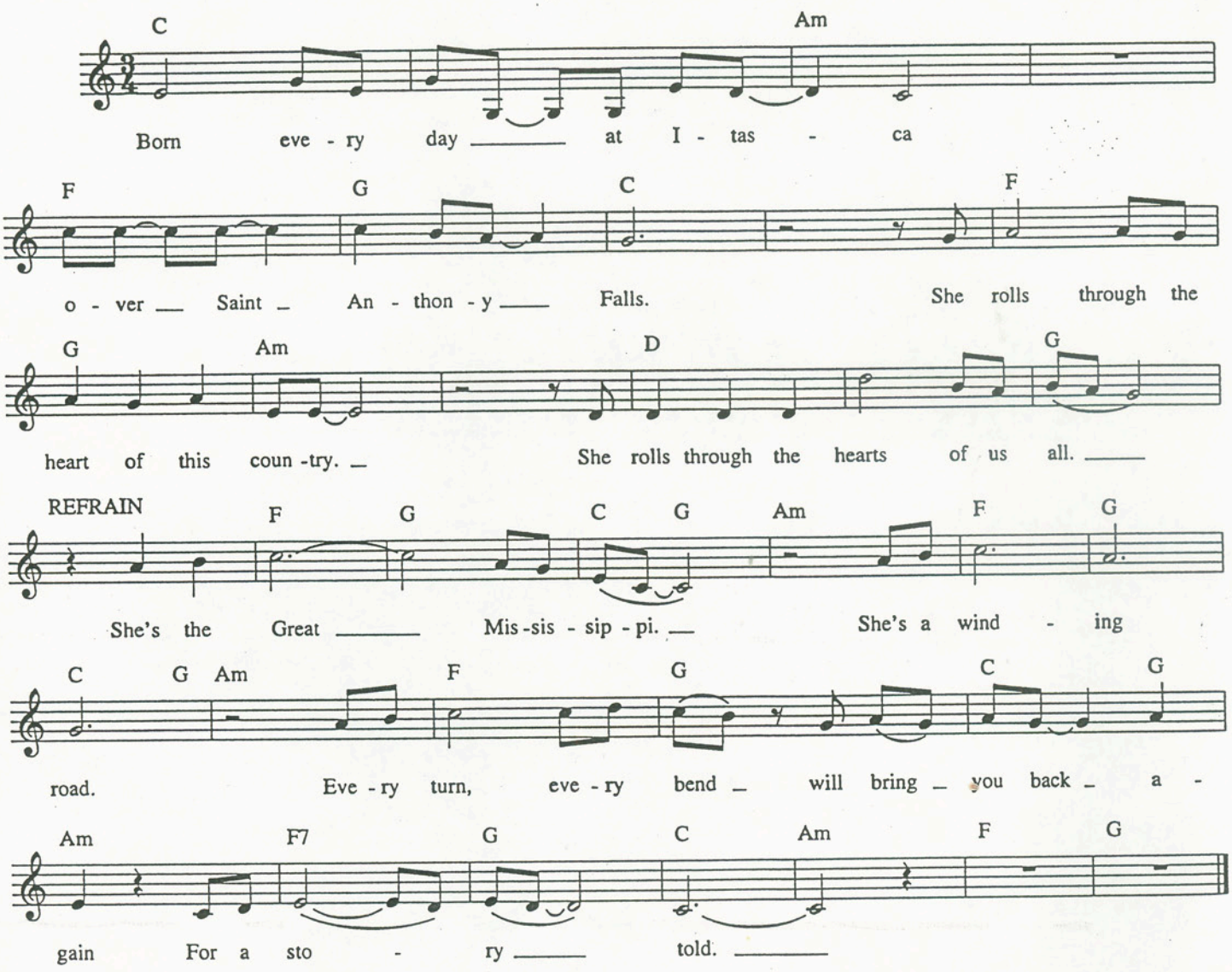
"RIVERTOWN"

"NATIONAL RIVER"

These songs were written by Charlie Maguire

GREAT MISSISSIPPI

Words and Music by
CHARLIE MAGUIRE



Additional Verses

She is a wide-shouldered river
Taking the Rockies' high mountain snow
And the soft spring rains of Virginia
Along with her as she goes.

Rolling over Saint Peter Sandstone
Twisting down Glenwood Shale
Bearing down on Platteville Limestone
For 12,000 years she's been there.

She's the "Rio Escondido,"
The "Sassagoula," the "Mee-zee-see-bee."
She has a river of names from her people,
Twenty-four hundred miles to the sea.

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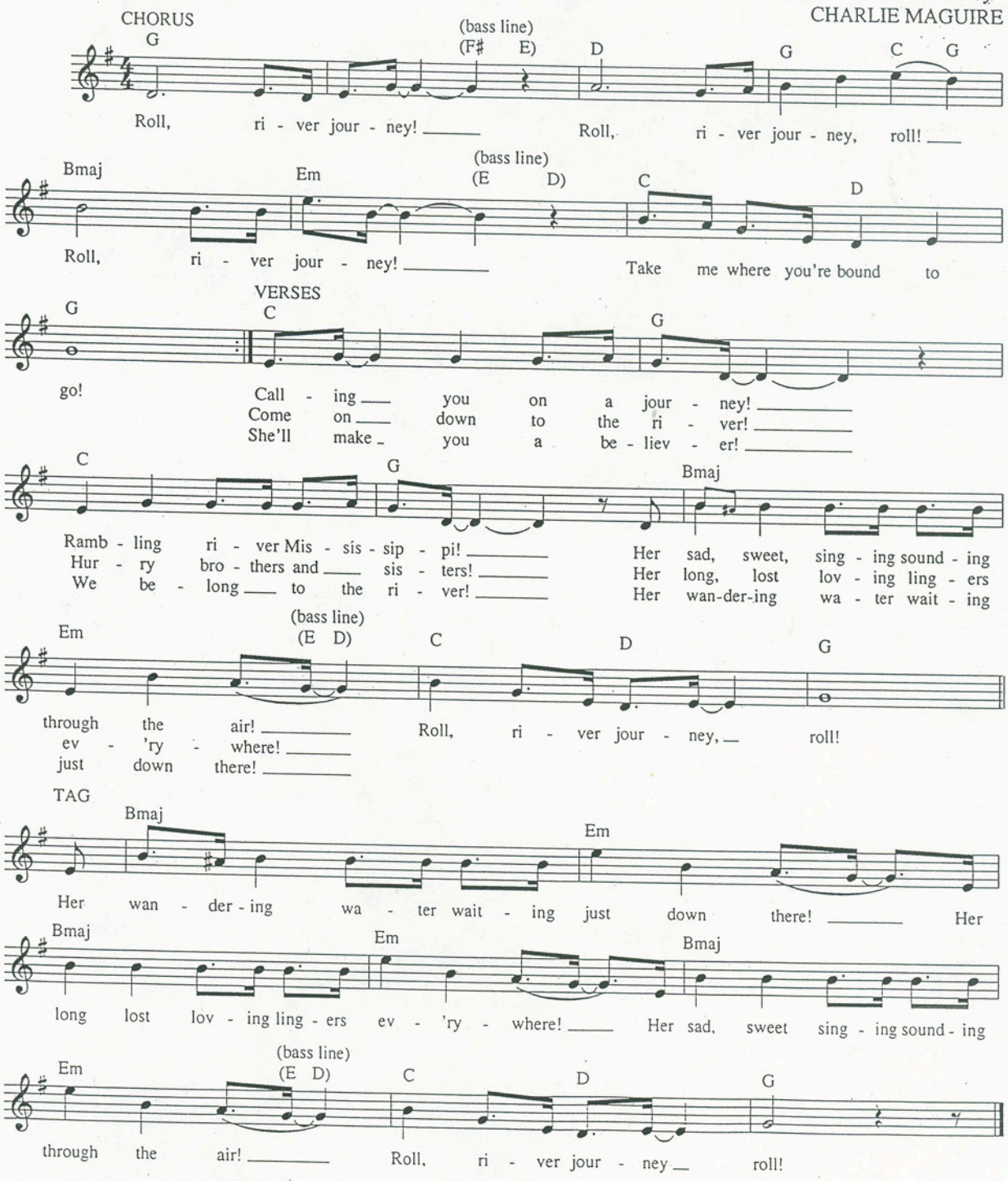
ROLL RIVER JOURNEY

Words and Music by
CHARLIE MAGUIRE



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FIRST NATIONS

Words and Music by
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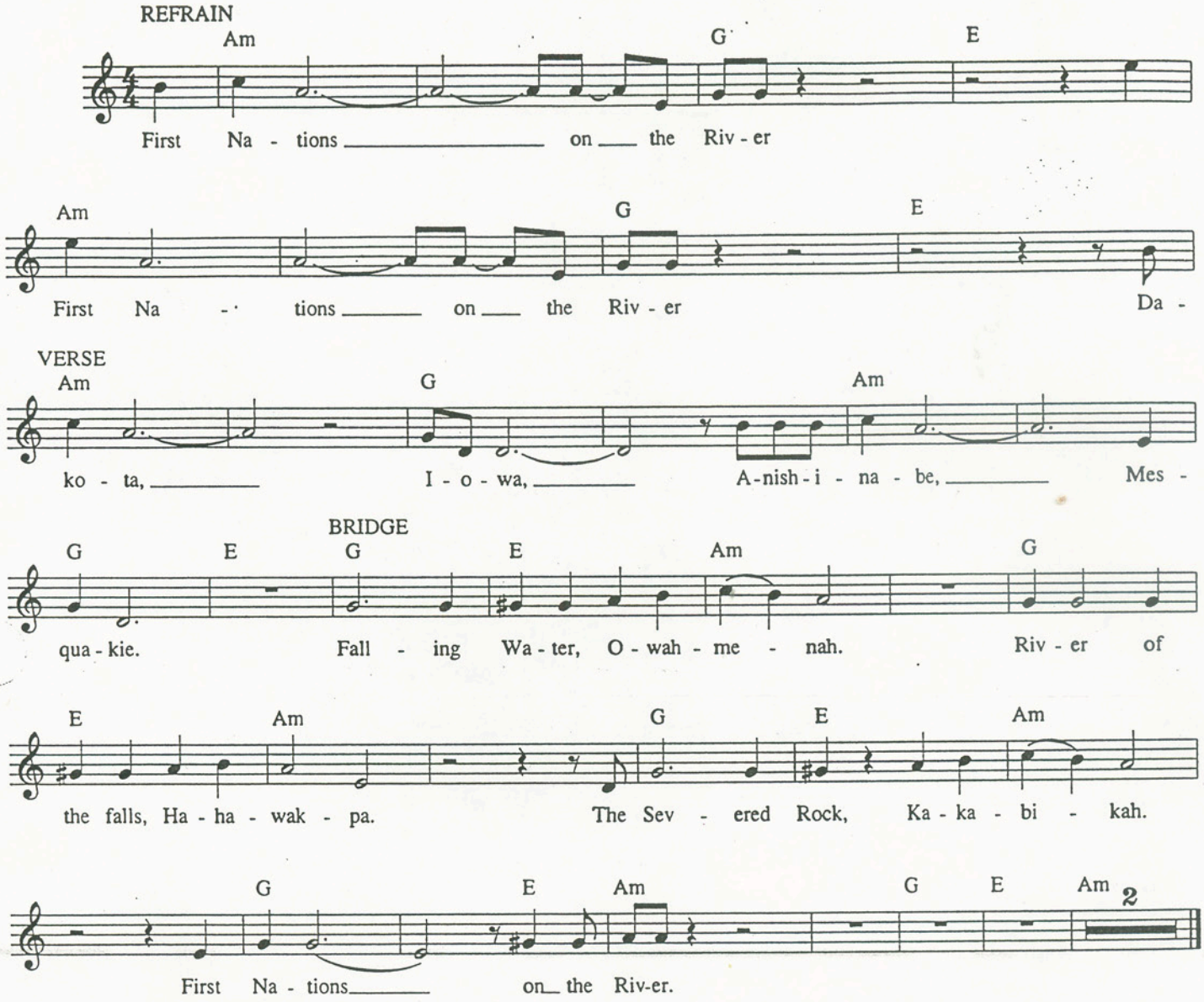

Additional Verses

2. And they called it
   Mee-zee-see-bee, Chauqua,
   Tapata, Sassagoula.

3. And they lived at
   Hole in the Day, Kaposia,
   Remnicha, Wabasha.

4. Dakota, Mesquakie, Illinois, Miami,
   Anishinabe, Tionontati.

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PIERRE BOTTINEAU

Words and Music by
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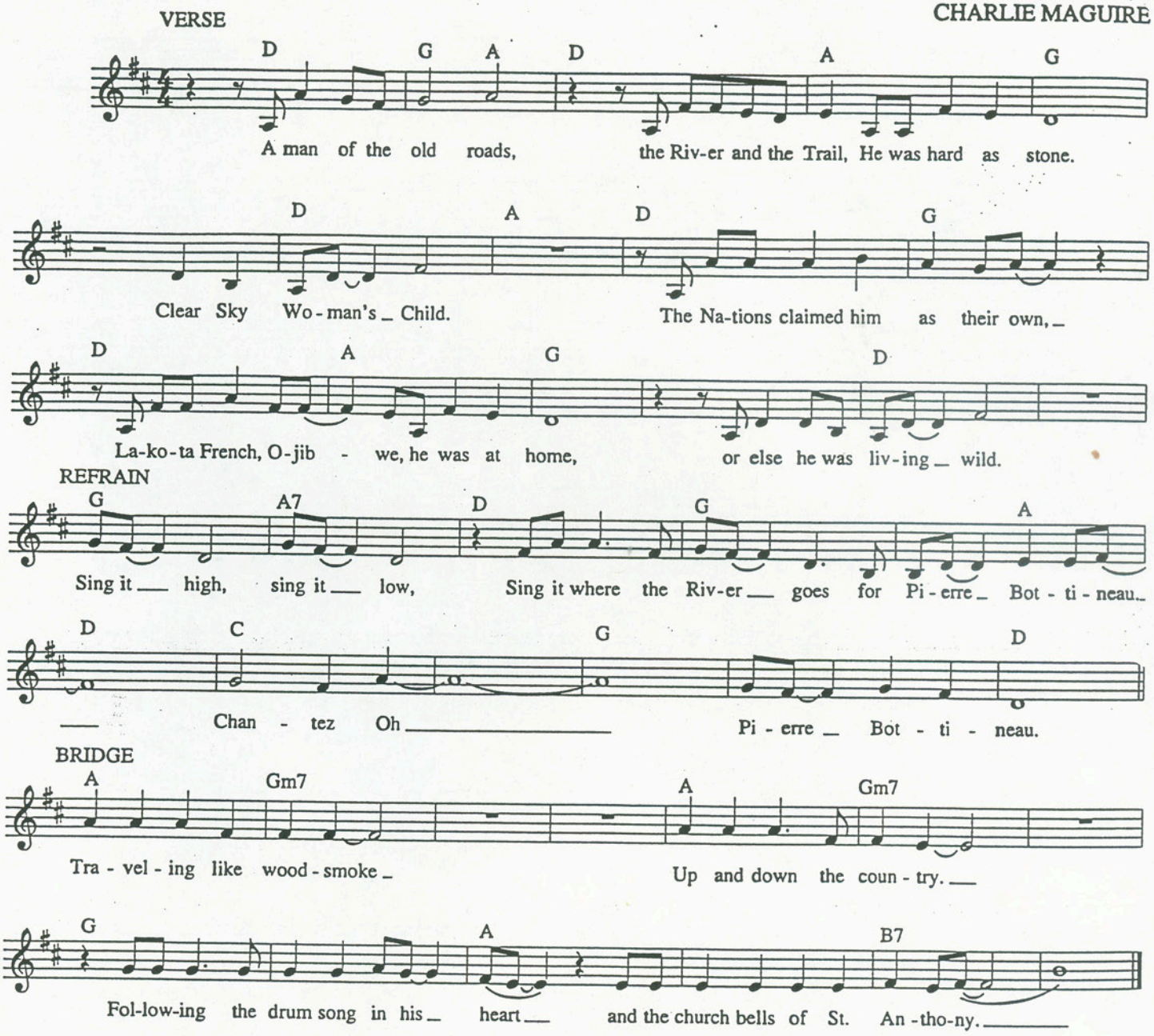

Additional Verses

2. A man of the old ways
Of the buffalo coat
And the Calumet
Outside of cabin walls
And in the fire-dancing night.
He whispered to her the stories of his days
In the language of the river falls.

3. A man of the old times
Who could read the future
And the buffalo sign
With equal fluency,
In this sainted land
Named by Galtier and the native bands
He held clearly to both memories.

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REVEREND HICKMAN'S HANDS

Words and Music by
CHARLIE MAGUIRE

VERSE 1

D D7 G

Rev - er-end Hick-man's hands were those _ of a work-ing __ man,

D F#m Bm E7 A D

Swing-ing a ham-mer and split-ting _ rail _____ by the light of day, __ Rev - er-end Hick-man's hands

D7 F# Bm G A D

were those _ of a preach - ing man. _ At night they built a boat to take the pil-grims a - way.

CHORUS

D D7 G

Oh Pil - grim, Run to the riv - er! Run to the riv - er!

D F#m Bm E7 A D

Run to the riv - er! The riv - er in prayer, Oh Pil - grim, Run to the

D7 F# Bm G D G D

riv - er! Run to the riv - er! For Free - dom! ____ Free - dom! ____

A D VERSE 2 D D7 G

Free-dom _ wait - ing there! Rev - er-end Hick-man's hands were those _ of a fear - less man, _

D F# Bm E7 A

____ When the cry went out they ___ were long, long gone. Rev - er-end

D D7 F# Bm G

Hick - man's hands were those _ of a preach - ing man. _____ No man, no wo-man, no

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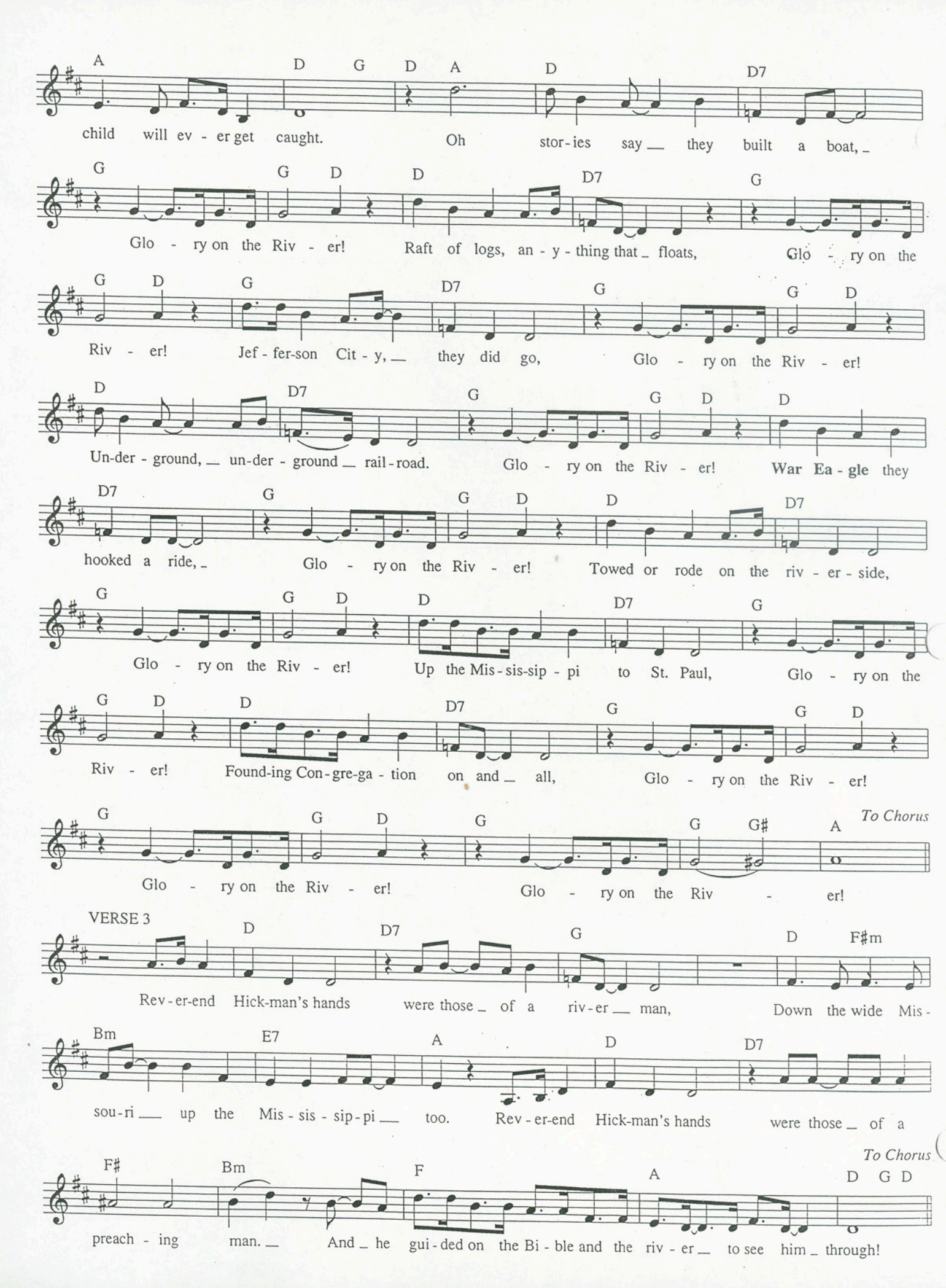
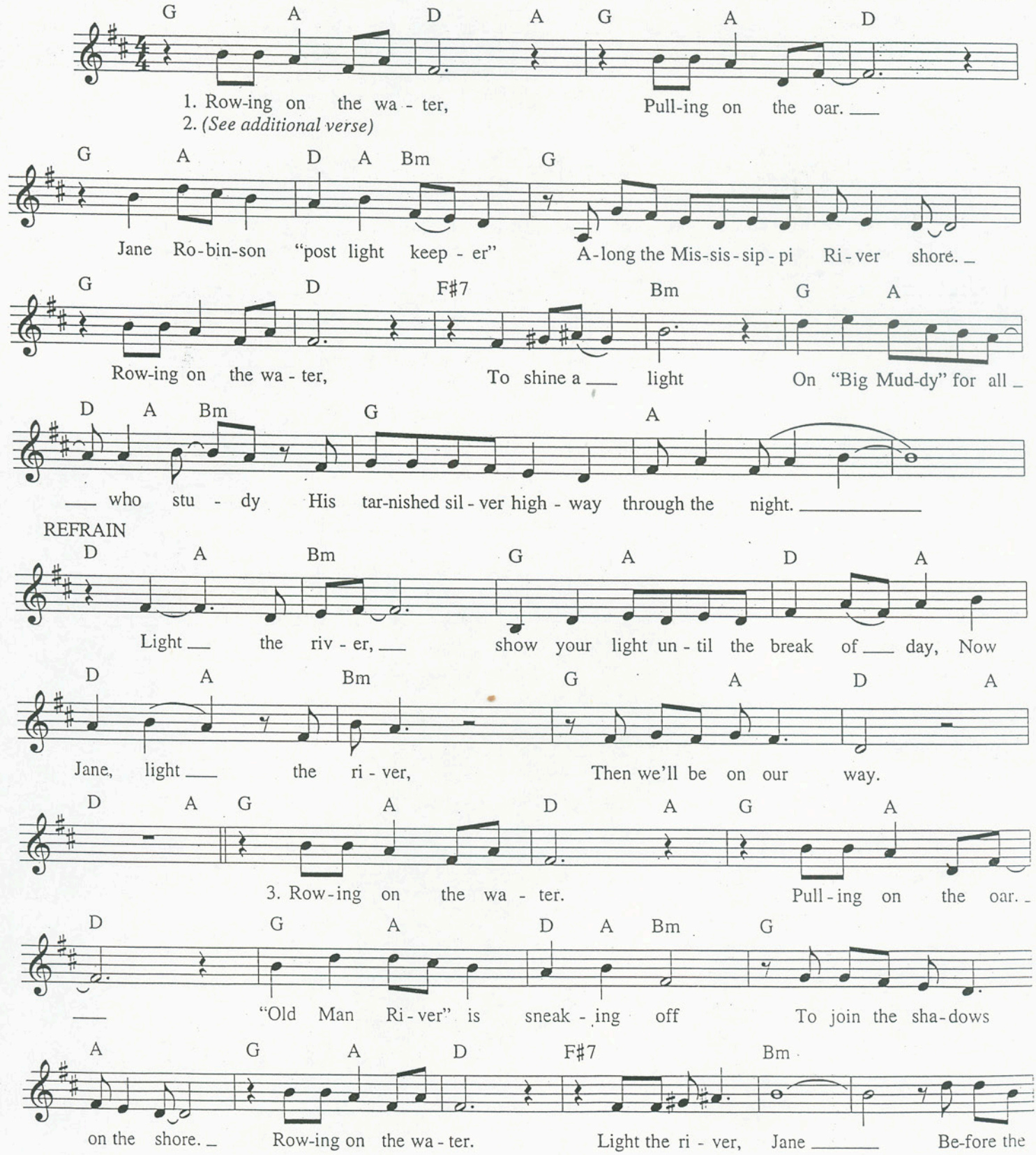

A D G D A D D7
child will ev - er get caught. Oh stor - ies say __ they built a boat, _
G G D D D7 G
Glo - ry on the Riv - er! Raft of logs, an - y - thing that _ floats, Glo - ry on the
G D G D7 G G D
Riv - er! Jef - fer-son Cit - y, __ they did go, Glo - ry on the Riv - er!
D D7 G G D D
Un-der - ground, __ un-der - ground __ rail-road. Glo - ry on the Riv - er! War Ea - gle they
D7 G G D D D7
hooked a ride, _ Glo - ry on the Riv - er! Towed or rode on the riv - er - side,
G G D D D7 G
Glo - ry on the Riv - er! Up the Mis - sis-sip - pi to St. Paul, Glo - ry on the
G D D D7 G G D
Riv - er! Found-ing Con - gre-ga - tion on and _ all, Glo - ry on the Riv - er!
G G D G G G# A
To Chorus
Glo - ry on the Riv - er! Glo - ry on the Riv - er!
VERSE 3
D D7 G D F#m
Rev - er-end Hick-man's hands were those _ of a riv - er __ man, Down the wide Mis -
Bm E7 A D D7
sou - ri __ up the Mis - sis - sip - pi __ too. Rev - er-end Hick-man's hands were those _ of a
To Chorus
F# Bm F A D G D
preach - ing man. __ And _ he gui - ded on the Bi - ble and the riv - er __ to see him _ through!

LIGHT THE RIVER

Words and Music by
CHARLIE MAGUIRE



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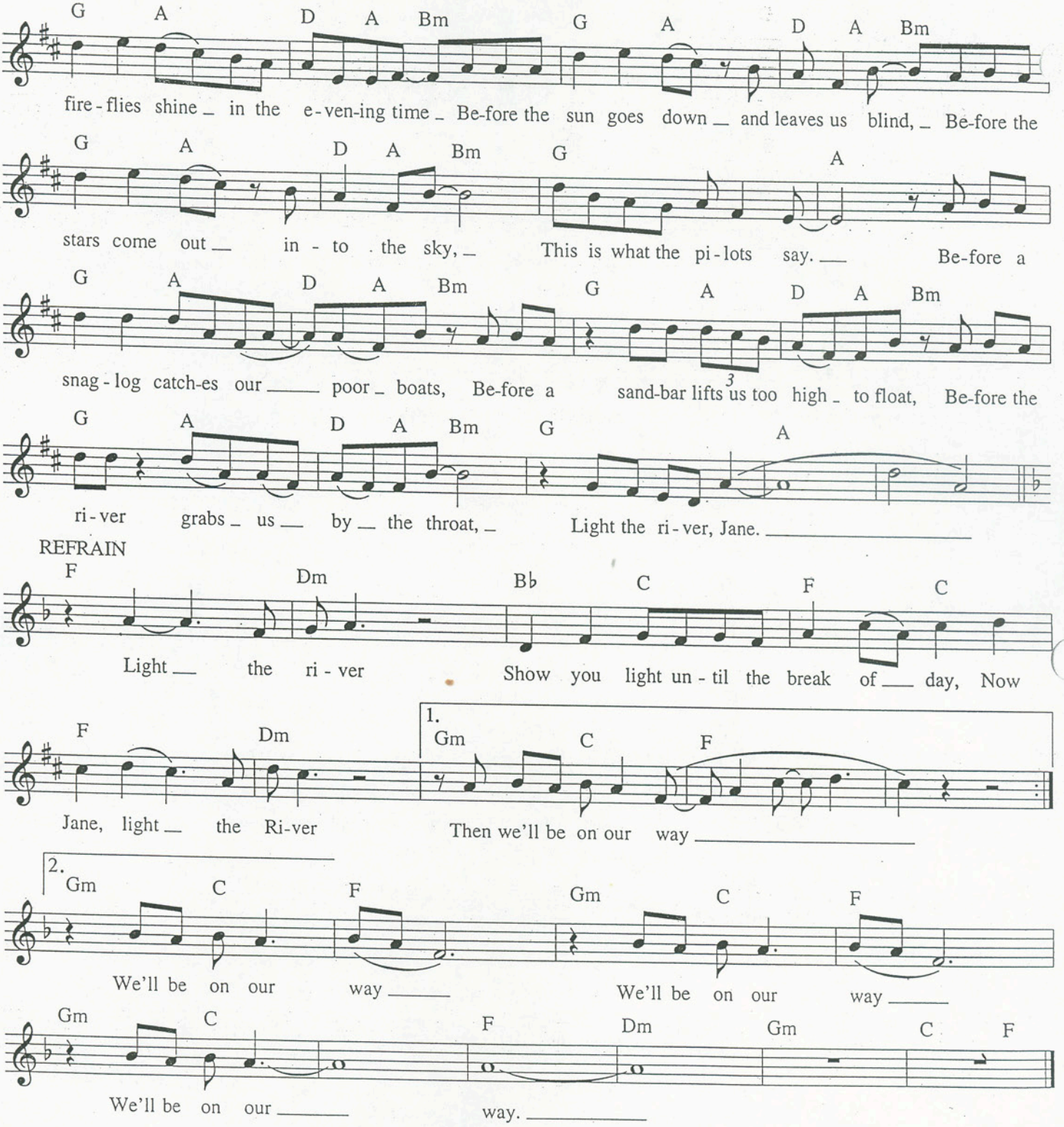
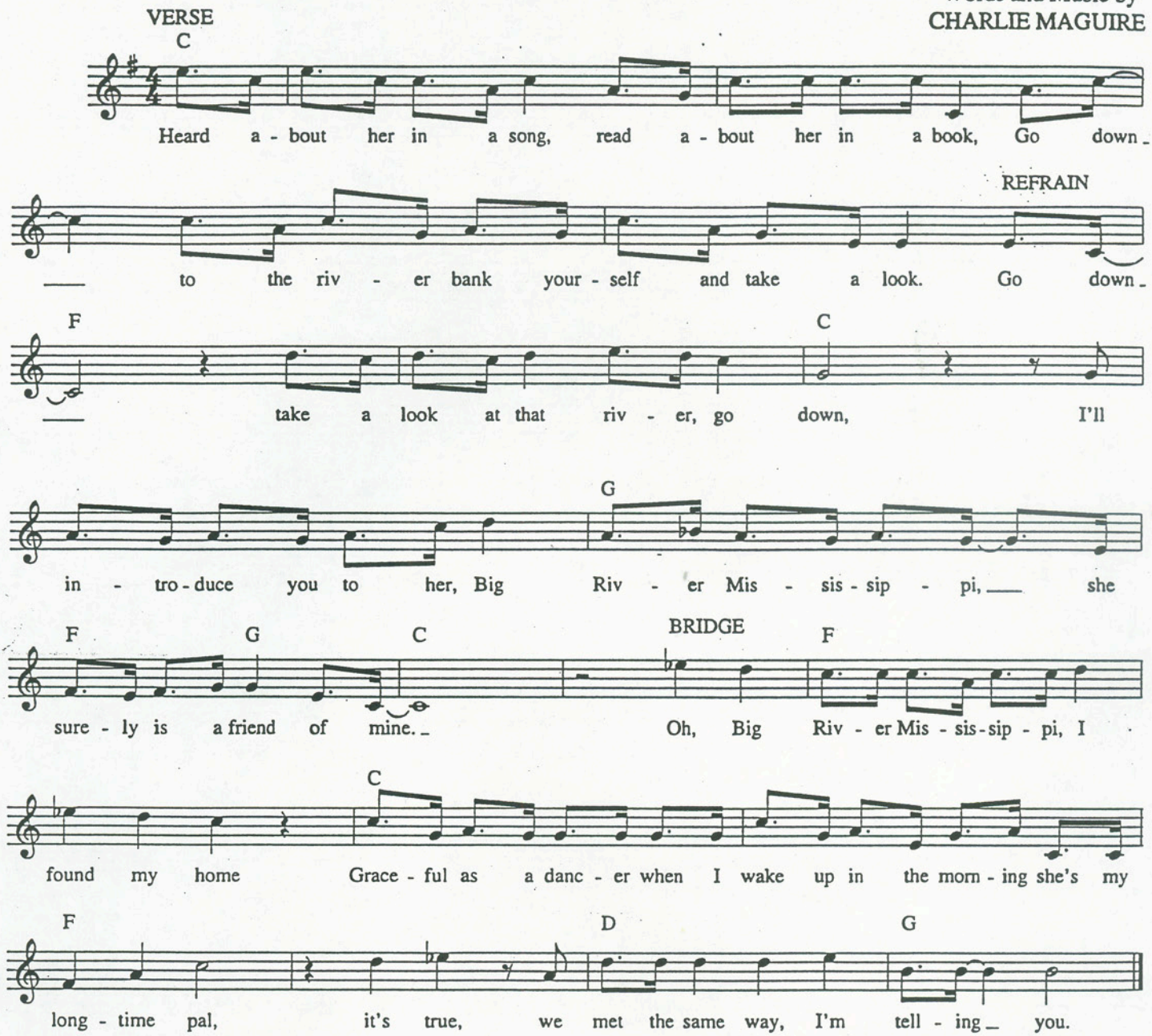


Additional Verse

2. Rowing on the water
Spring-flood to fall
Four lights showing whether clear or blowing
From Dayton Bluff to South Saint Paul
Rowing on the water
River woman, Jane
Bend your back in service to the brightest, purest
Government specified clear, white, flame
To Refrain

TAKE A LOOK

Words and Music by
CHARLIE MAGUIRE



Additional Verses

2. Big River Mississippi is wide and fair,
   But behind a city, she gets lost down there.

3. If you can't see her, even driving slow
   Pull over and park, go down and say hello.

4. In 1988 the Congress did say
   "She's a national river, she ought to stay that way."

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OLD RIVER

Words and Music by
CHARLIE MAGUIRE

F Bb A Dm Bb
You went wher - ev - er you want-ed to go in a time of your

C Bb F C
own. In a time of your own. Wind and wa - ter,

A Dm Bb C F REFRAIN
Earth and sky were all that you lived by. Old

Bb9 F C7
Riv - er, be - fore you had a name, You ran your own way, a

F Bb9 F
ram - bling. Old Riv - er, be - fore you had a

A G7 C
name, You were the name for trav - el - ing.

CODA (after last refrain)

Bbm7 C F
You were the name for leav - ing.

Additional Verses

2. You were whatever you wanted to be
In a time of your own.
In a time of your own.
Winter, Summer, Spring, and Fall
Never really changed you at all.

Old River, before you had a name,
You rambled through the seasons.
Old River, before you had a name,
You were the name for leaving.

3. You went wherever you wanted to go
In a time of your own.
In a time of your own.
Shallow and wide, narrow and deep
On your own way to the sea.

Old River, before you had a name,
You rambled through the seasons.
Old River, before you had a name,
You were the name for leaving.

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PILOT DADDY

Words and Music by
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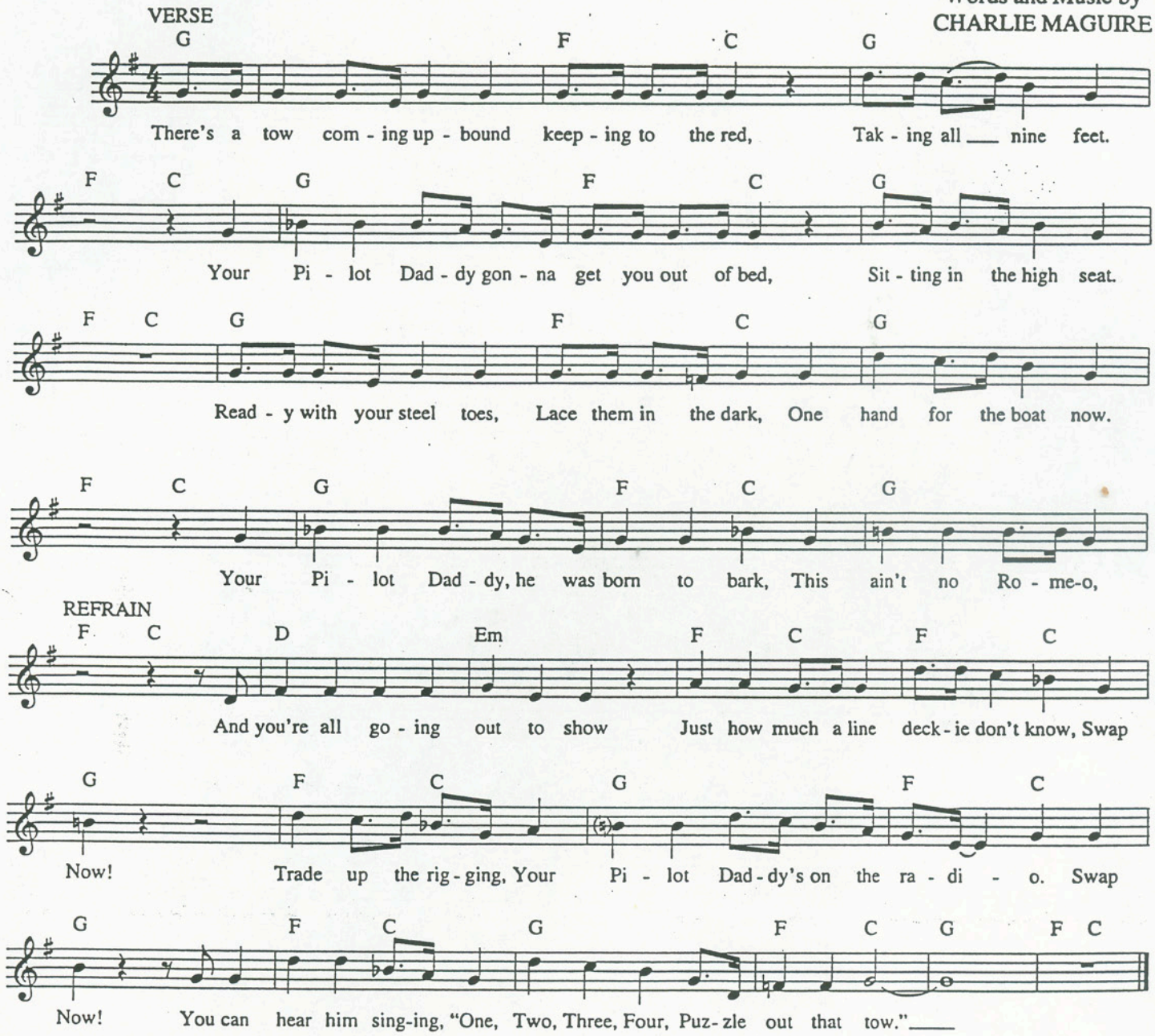

Additional Verses

2. A barge ain't nothing but a hole in the water
For moving the Midwest.
Your Pilot Daddy has no papers on one,
So he's talking to the office.
When he bumps,
You move as quick as you can.
One hand for the boat now,
Your Pilot Daddy he is going to keep you safe,
He's got the know-how.

3. Two boxes on the stern,
Three rakes on the head,
Notch on the portside.
Your Pilot Daddy is making his bread,
Watching how it all rides.
There's a tow coming upbound,
Keeping to the red,
Taking all nine feet.
Your Pilot Daddy is going to get you out of bed,
Sitting in the high seat.

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FALLING WATERS

Words and Music by
CHARLIE MAGUIRE

Very Slow and Free Flowing

VERSE

D A D G
Mis-sis-sip-pi she's a chang-ing riv-er. Don't let her

A D G A D
ea - sy go-ing fool you. Cit-ies have ris-en where she's gone,

E7 A
and she don't stay in one place for ver-y long.

REFRAIN

D G A A♭ G A
At her fall - ing wa-ters. You know, she's a might - y

D A D G A A♭
riv-er. At her fall - ing wa - ters.

BRIDGE

G A D G
Call her O-wah-me-nah, Call her St. An-tho-ny. Mis-sis-sip-pi

A D G A D
she's a liv-ing riv-er. Fall - ing wa-ters, O - wah-me-nah.

G A D
Once you've heard her fif - teen miles a - way.

E A
Sev-en-ty-five feet high, miles and miles from where she is to - day.

Additional Verses

2. Mississippi, she's a working river.
Don't let her graceful beauty fool you.
She's milled timber for a million houses, roof and walls,
Milled a million wheatfields, for bread on the table
for them all.

3. Mississippi, there are legends in the river.
Don't let her peaceful manner fool you.
She's been in every kind of story that's ever been tol
Light and dark, new and old.

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FISHING RIVER

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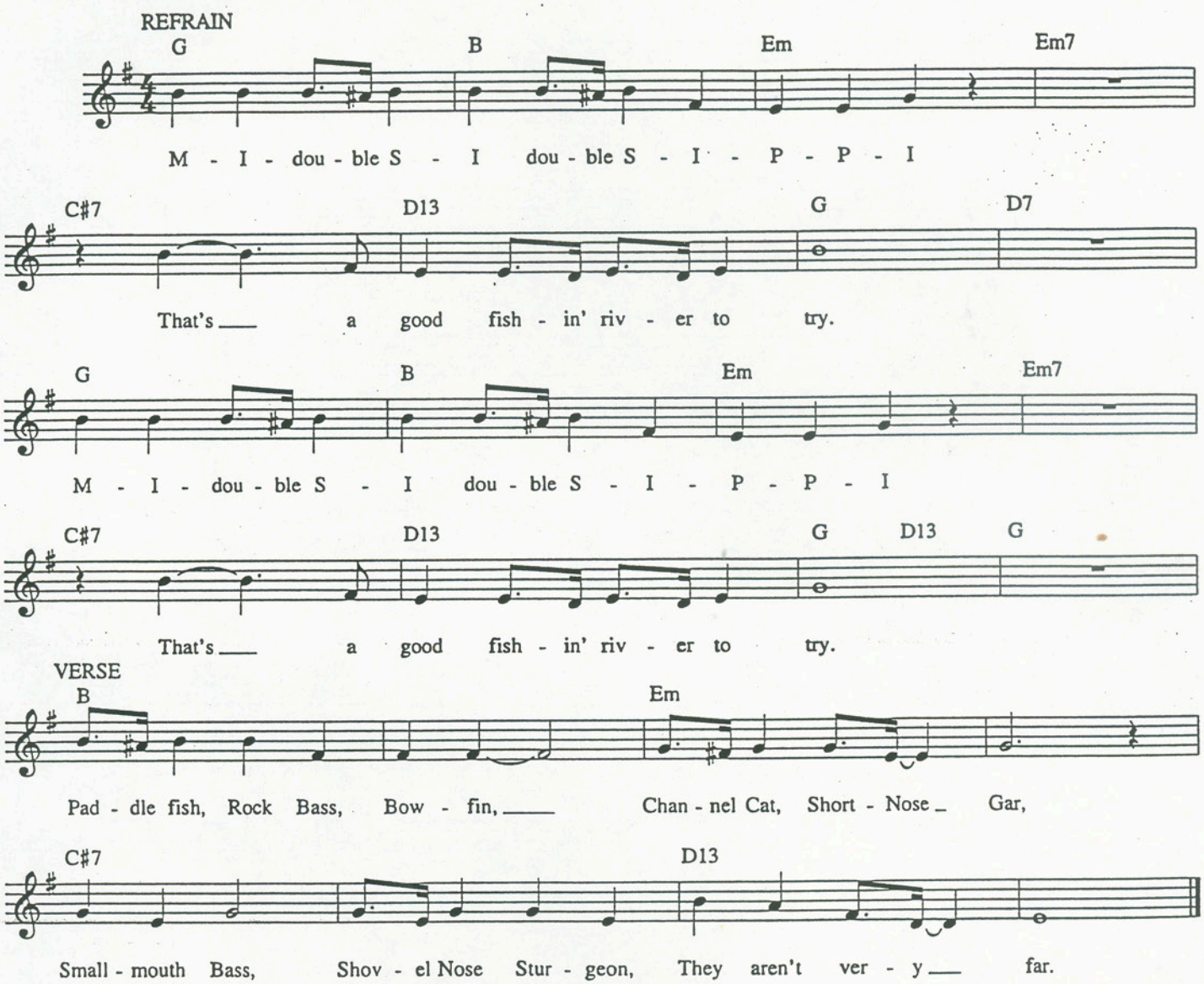

Additional Verses

I'm going to take my time
With my hook and line,
Trying to put on a show.
And if we get nothing,
We're sure to catch something,
Watching the River flow.

Quillback, Shorthead Redhorse,
Bigmouth Buffalo,
Mooneye, Walleye, Freshwater Drum,
Don't you want to go?

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PASS THE BOWL

Words and Music by
CHARLIE MAGUIRE

A CAPELLA
REFRAIN

Pass the bowl, oh Pass the bowl.

Oh Riv - er. Pass the bowl.

VERSE

The wild rice tall and slen - der Grow - ing in qui - et wa - ter.

The ca - noe will bring it clo - ser, Pass the bowl.

The rice is like a trea - sure, a gift from the riv - er,

Ripe and rea - dy for the Knock - er, Pass the bowl.

Additional Verses

Out in the fields
The wheat has risen,
Planted by machines in rhythm
To the weather and the season,
Pass the bowl.
This grain is like treasure.
Take it down upon the river,
Around the world to the cook and the baker.
Pass the bowl.

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RISING TIDE

Words and Music by
CHARLIE MAGUIRE

VERSE 1

F C G Am F C G Am

Hard win - ter, fro - zen ground. No place for Spring to go down.

F C G Am F C G C

No-where to go, no - where to hide. When the riv - er wants to ram-ble on the ris - ing tide.

CHORUS

F C G Am F C G Am

Ris - ing tide, on the high wa - ter, Ris - ing tide, on the riv - er - side.

F C G Am F C G

Ris - ing tide, on the high wa - ter. Get your-self down to the riv - er wide.

1. *End of 1st Chorus*

Am F C G

There's high wa - ter com - ing on the Ris - ing

2. *End of 2nd Chorus*

C C F C C C F C F C

Tide. high wa - ter com - ing on the

G Am F C G C C F C

Ris - ing Tide, There's high wa - ter com-ing on the Ris - ing Tide.

To Bridge

3. *End of 3rd Chorus*

C C F C F C G Am F C

high wa - ter com-ing on the Ris - ing Tide, There's high wa - ter com-ing on the

G Am F C G Am

ris - ing tide, There's high wa - ter com - ing on the ris - ing tide, There's

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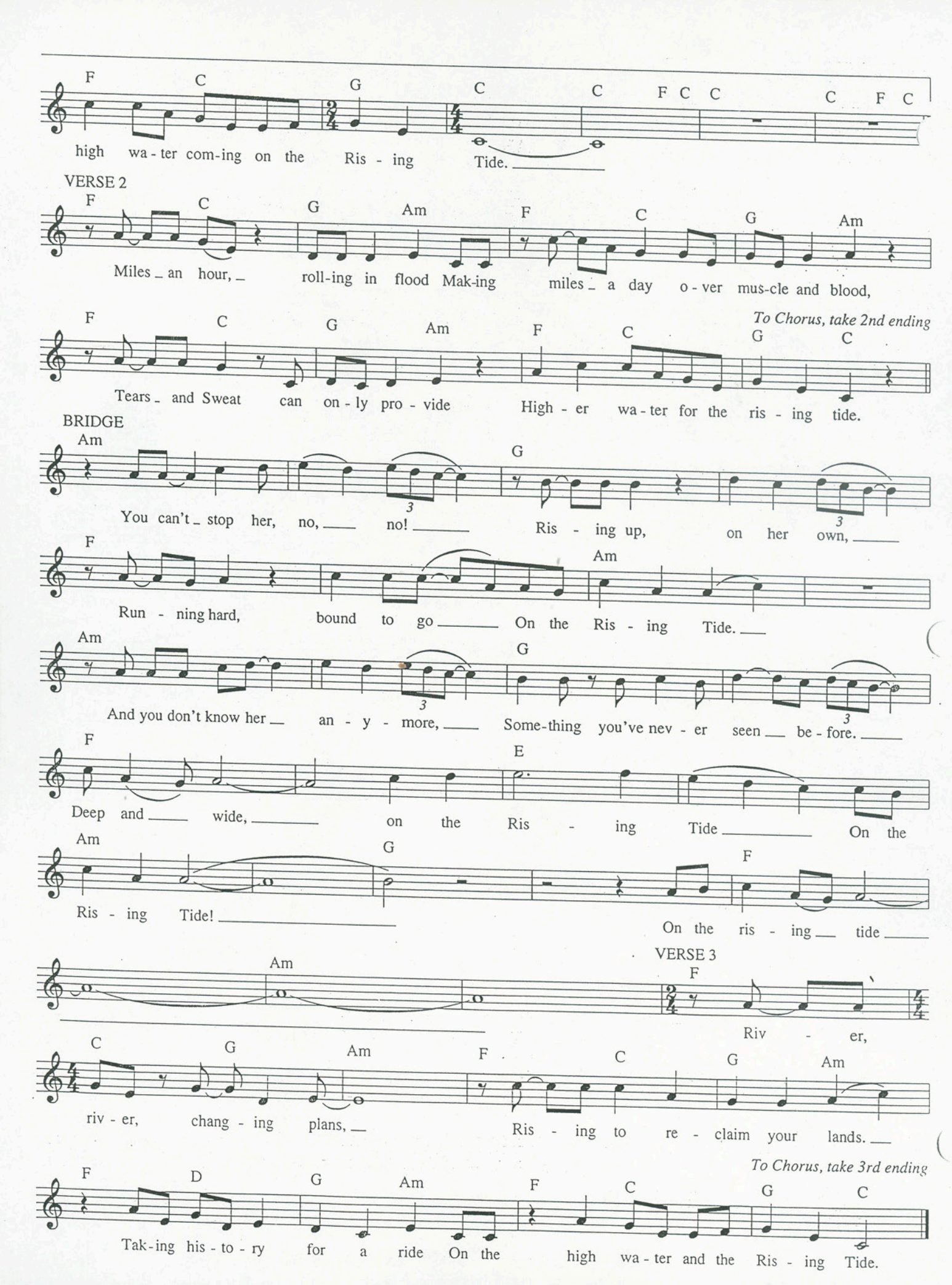
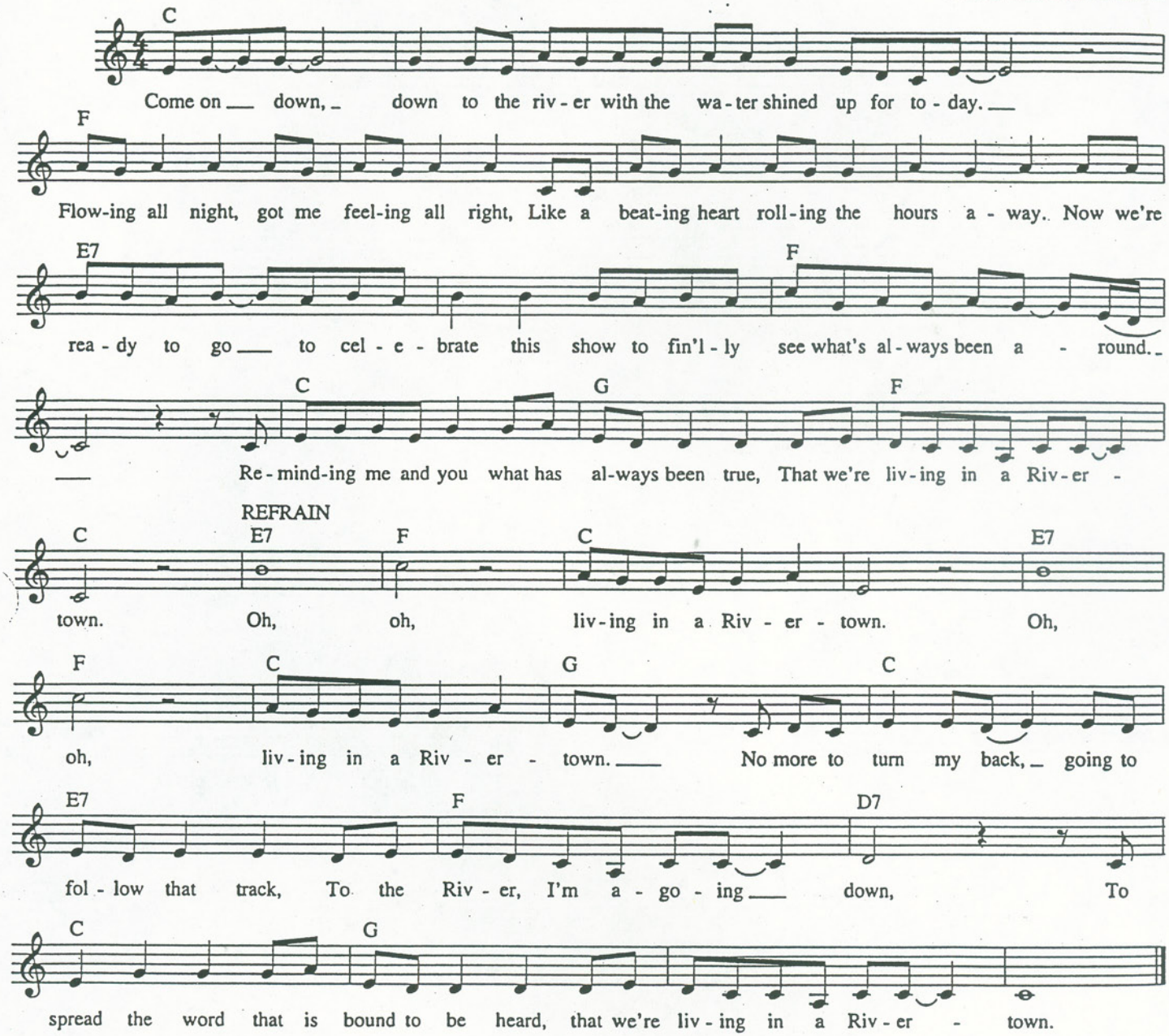

F C G C C F C C C F C
high wa - ter com-ing on the Ris - ing Tide.
VERSE 2
F C G Am F C G Am
Miles an hour, roll-ing in flood Mak-ing miles a day o - ver mus-cle and blood,
F C G Am F C G C
Tears and Sweat can on - ly pro - vide High - er wa - ter for the ris - ing tide.
To Chorus, take 2nd ending
BRIDGE
Am G
You can't stop her, no, no! Ris - ing up, on her own,
F Am
Run - ning hard, bound to go On the Ris - ing Tide.
Am G
And you don't know her an - y - more, Some-thing you've nev - er seen be - fore.
F E
Deep and wide, on the Ris - ing Tide On the
Am G F
Ris - ing Tide! On the ris - ing tide
Am
VERSE 3
F
Riv - er,
C G Am F C G Am
riv - er, chang - ing plans, Ris - ing to re - claim your lands.
To Chorus, take 3rd ending
F D G Am F C G C
Tak-ing his - to - ry for a ride On the high wa - ter and the Ris - ing Tide.

RIVERTOWN

Words and Music by
CHARLIE MAGUIRE



Additional Verses

Going to jump down, turn around
Listen to the river sound
Where it all began,
A highway, byway, up above a flyway
Long before anything was built by hand.
Now we're ready to go, to celebrate this show
To finally see what's always been around,
Reminding me and you what has always been true,
Living in a Rivertown.

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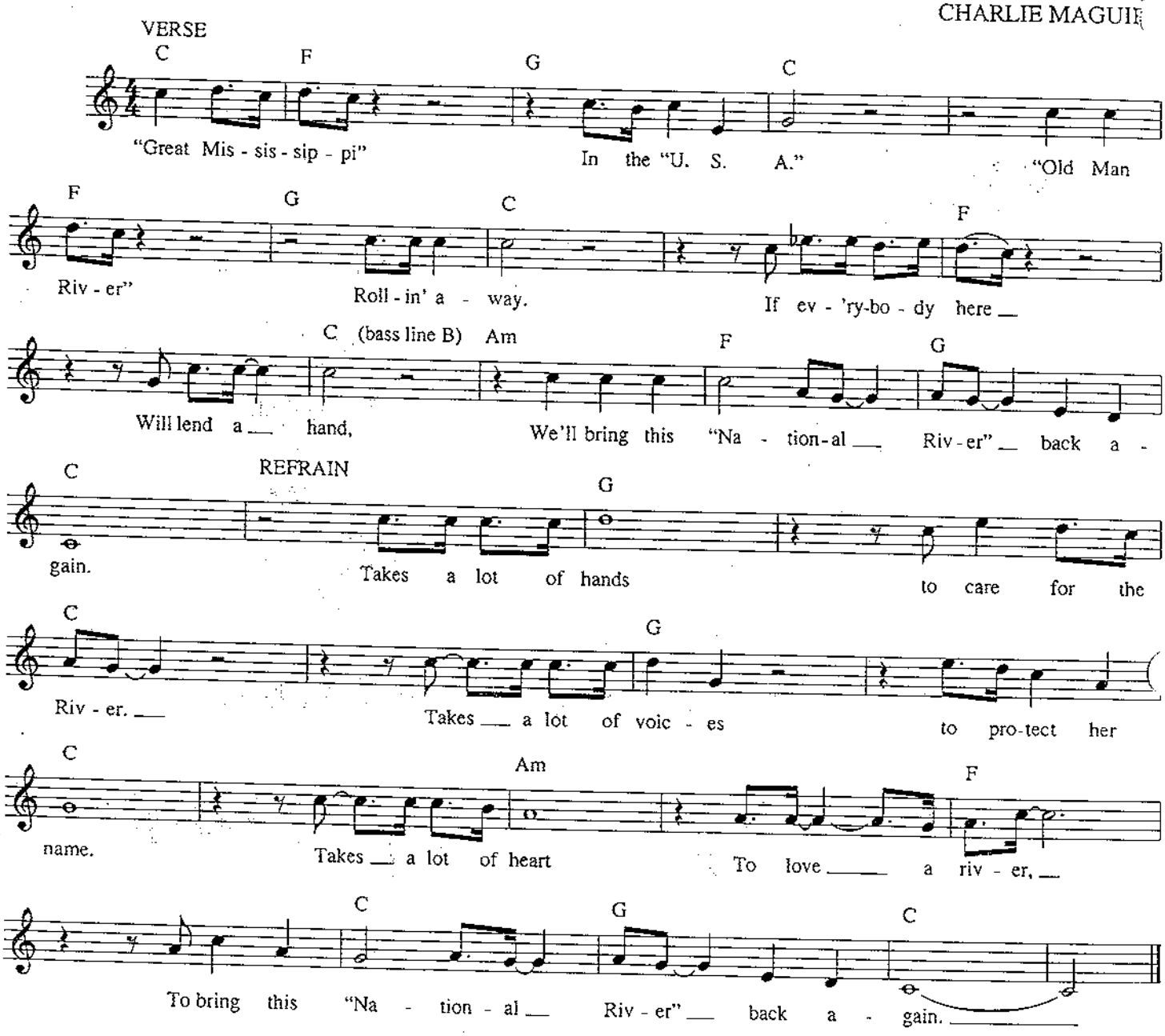
NATIONAL RIVER

Words and Music by
CHARLIE MAGUIR



Additional Verses

Mississippi River
"Red, White, and Blue"
Eagles are flying
Over the water too
If everybody here
Will take a stand
We'll bring this "National River " back again...

Mississippi River
Front end to end
"National River"
"All American"
If everybody here
Will make it their friend
We'll bring this "National River " back again...