§ii – Option b) Harmonising a Folk Song

This question will require you to complete a piano accompaniment to a given folk song melody. The extract will be approximately 8-12 bars long and the four bars you must complete may occur anywhere within the extract. Study the bars which are given so that you can maintain the given style.

Study and preparation

Sing and play some folk songs. They can be found in various collections, such as:

- The New National Song Book (Boosey & Hawkes)
- Pentatonic Song Book (Schott)
- Collections of English Folk Songs, arranged by Vaughan Williams (Penguin)
- One Hundred English Folk Songs, arranged by Cecil Sharpe (Dover)
- Songs of England, arranged by Margaret Hargest Jones (Boosey & Hawkes)
- Songs of Ireland, arranged by Margaret Hargest Jones (Boosey & Hawkes)
- Songs of Wales, arranged by Margaret Hargest Jones (Boosey & Hawkes)
- Folk Songs of England, Ireland, Scotland & Wales, edited by William Cole (Warner)
- Complete Folk Song Arrangements by Benjamin Britten (Boosey & Hawkes)

In your preparation to work this question, consider the following points:

- Determine the tonality – is the extract major, minor or modal?
- Phrase the melody (if this is not given), taking note of rests in the vocal line. This will give you the cadence points. The cadences within the song should be varied, and will usually end with a perfect cadence.
- Study the figures in the given piano part and try to incorporate them into your answer. These figures may be varied melodically, but the rhythm should be maintained. They can also be used in other registers of the piano.
- Remember to vary the dynamics, bearing in mind the words which are given. If it is appropriate, indicate where the pedal should be used.

Link to practice exercises

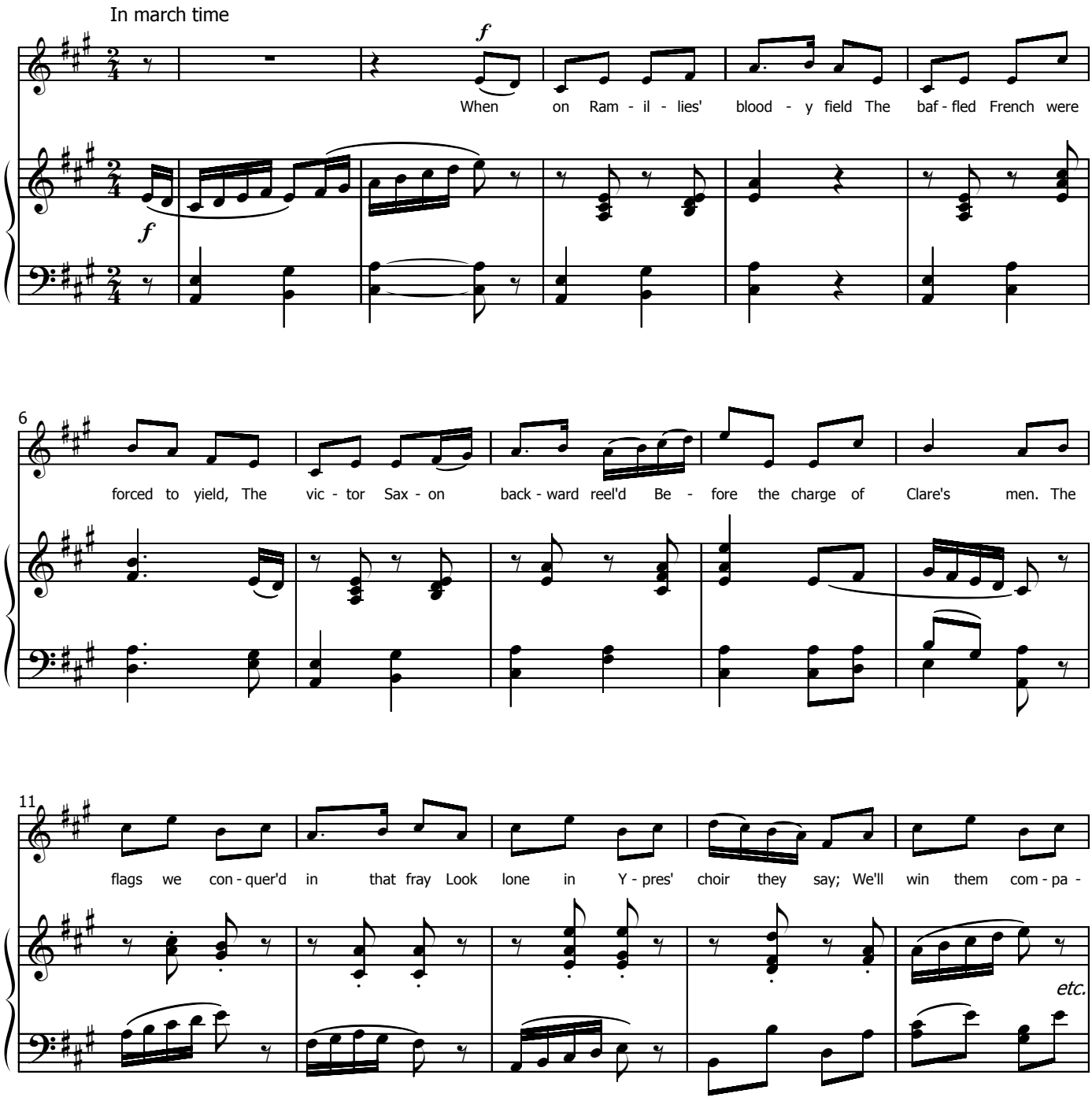
Link to accompaniment figurations

Link to cadences in folk songs

Link to modality

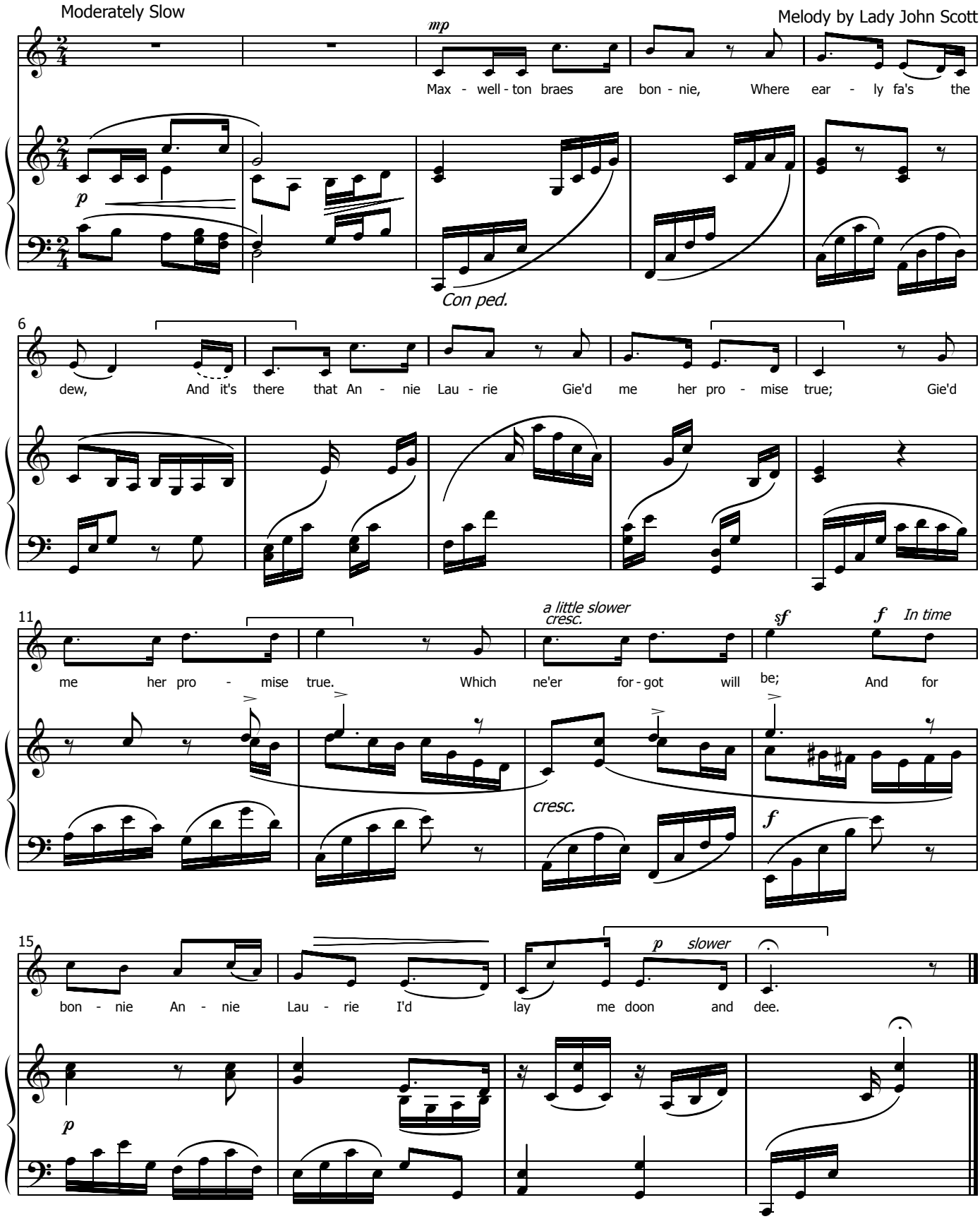
Below we give various examples with comments which we hope you will find helpful.

Example 1 Clare's Dragoons (Vive Là).
Condensed from a poem by Thomas Davis.



Note bar 3 – LH crotchet on the beat, RH quaver off the beat – as this pattern recurs. The piano introduction is derived from the semiquavers in the melody in bar 8. The rate of harmonic change is 2 chords per bar. In bar 11 the semiquaver pattern now appears in the LH. Rests are used effectively, and the music remains in the tonic key throughout. You should bear in mind that modulation in folk songs is usually quite simple.

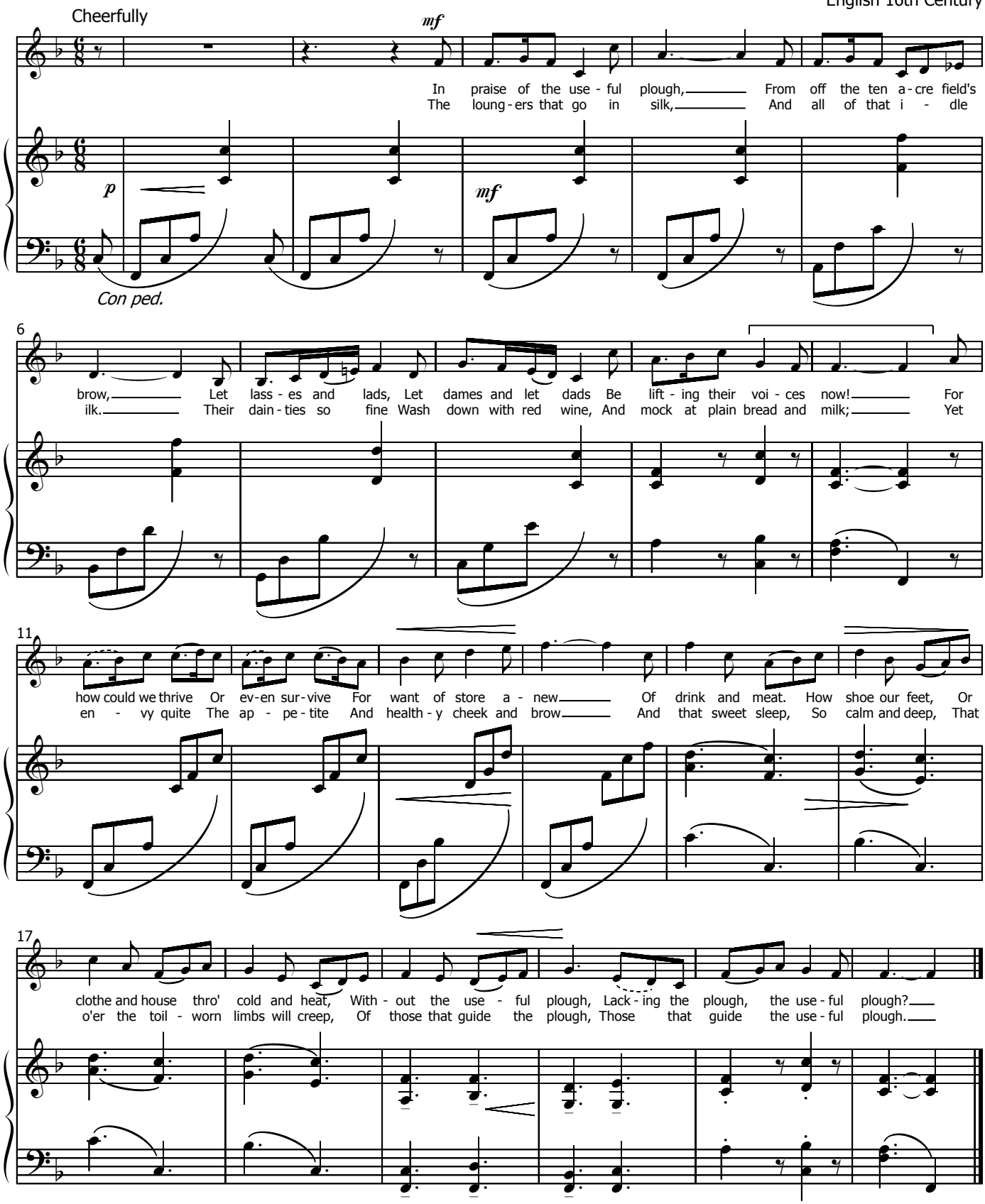
Example 2 Annie Laurie
Words founded on an old poem by Lady John Scott



This Scottish folk song begins with an introduction based on the first phrase of the melody. The music begins in the tonic key – C major – and modulates to A minor before returning to C major. The harmony is one, or occasionally two, chords per bar, and the chords are presented in arpeggio form throughout. The cadences (bracketed) are clearly defined. Note how the arpeggio figure is used to maintain forward movement at these points.

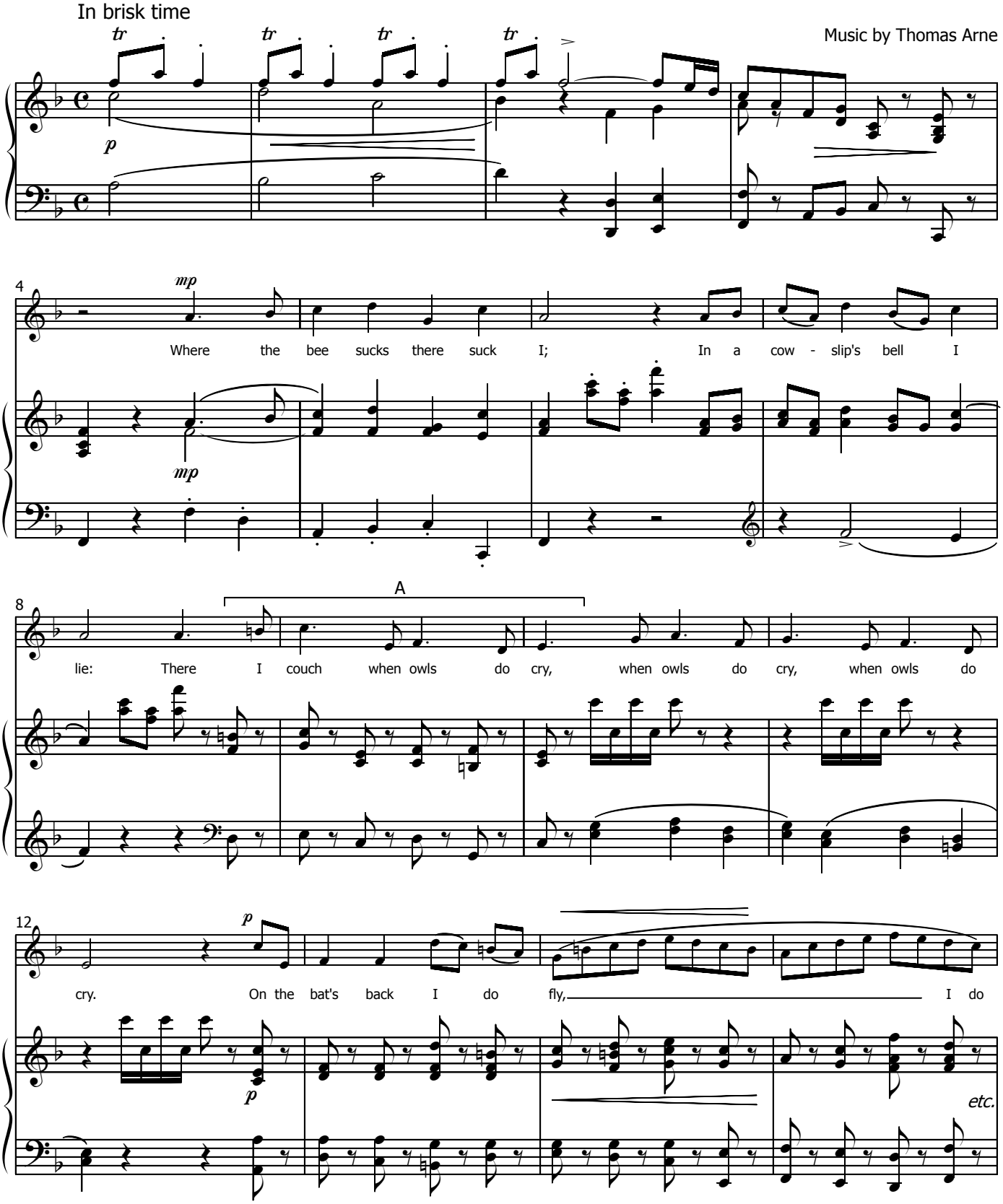
Example 3 The Useful Plough
Poem by A P Graves

English 16th Century



Another arpeggio-style accompaniment, in 6/8 time. Notice that bars 1-4 and bars 11-14 are based on the root position of the tonic chord. From bar 15, dotted crotchet chords are used on the beat to harmonise the melodic sequence above. Bars 19-20 are based on a tonic pedal (F in the bass). The bracketed cadence (bars 9-10) is a V9 – I cadence; this progression is used again for the final cadence. The accompaniment has a clear texture and does not intrude upon the lively and moving melodic line.

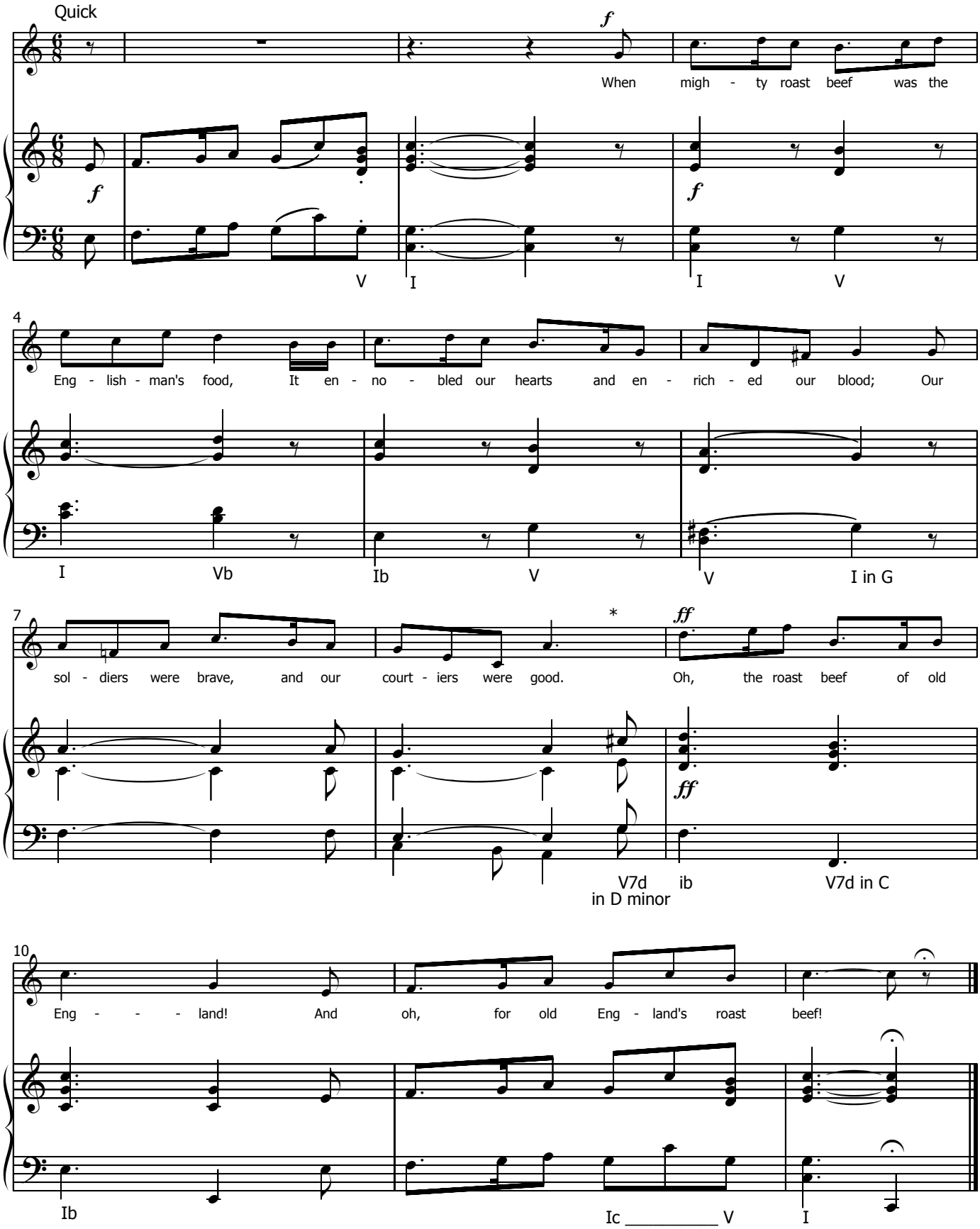
Example 4 Where the Bee Sucks
Poem by Shakespeare



This accompaniment is a mixture of chords and rhythmic patterns. Note the quaver movement at the cadence in bar 6. Note the quaver – quaver rest pattern (bracket A), and the decorative 'bird call' effect of the semiquavers in bars 10-12. The quaver – quaver rest pattern returns to accompany the melodic run on the word 'fly' (bars 14-15). At bar 6 the music moves to the dominant key, for the remainder of the extract.

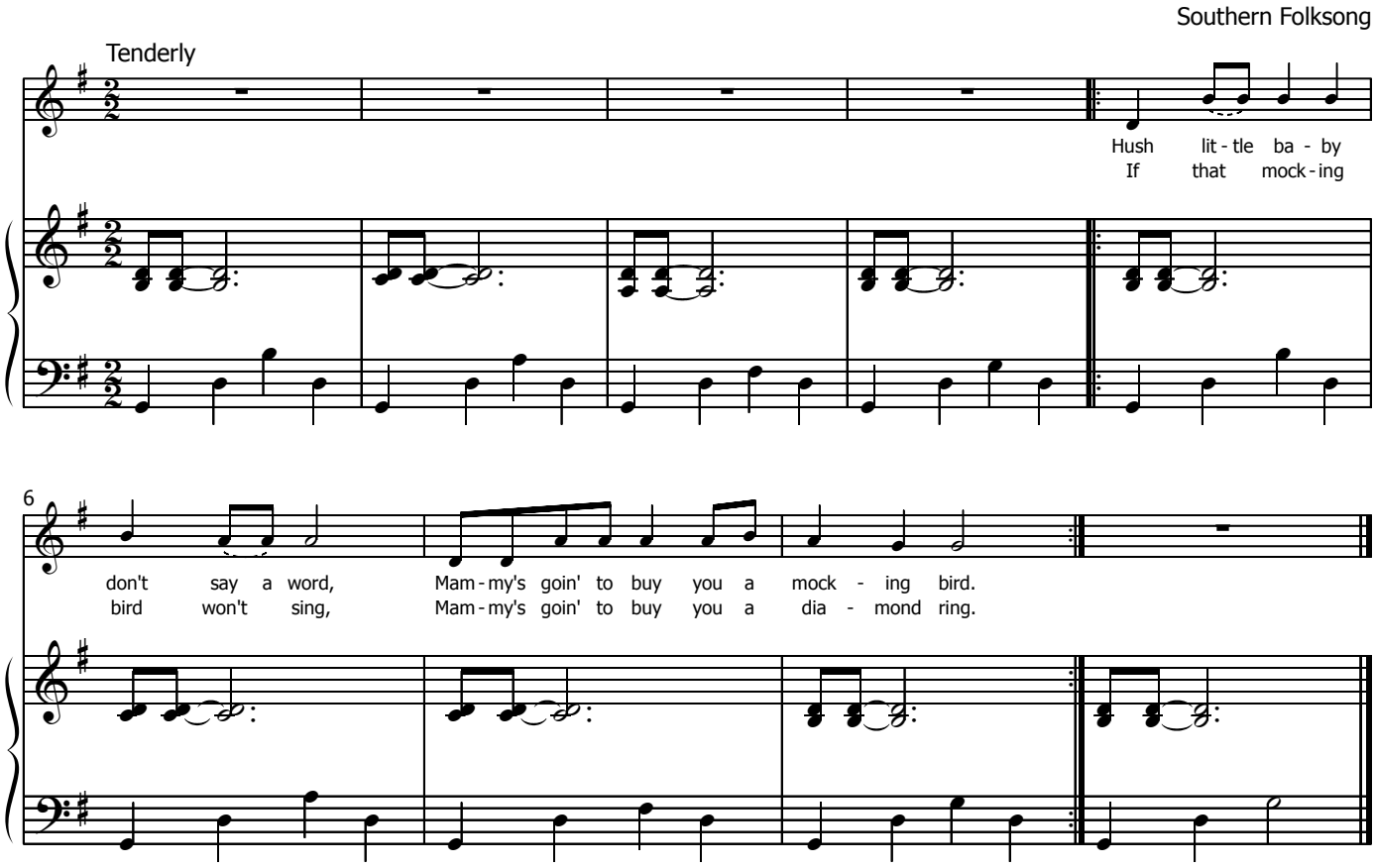
Example 5 The Roast Beef of Old England

Words and music by Richard Leveridge



This vigorous and almost patriotic-style song is mostly accompanied by chords on the strong beats. Notice that the introduction is derived from similar figures in the melodic line. Beginning in C major, the music moves to the dominant key (G major) in bar 6, and returns to C major at bar 10, after a brief reference to D minor at *. The chords are tonic/dominant orientated – see the chord symbols marked in the score.

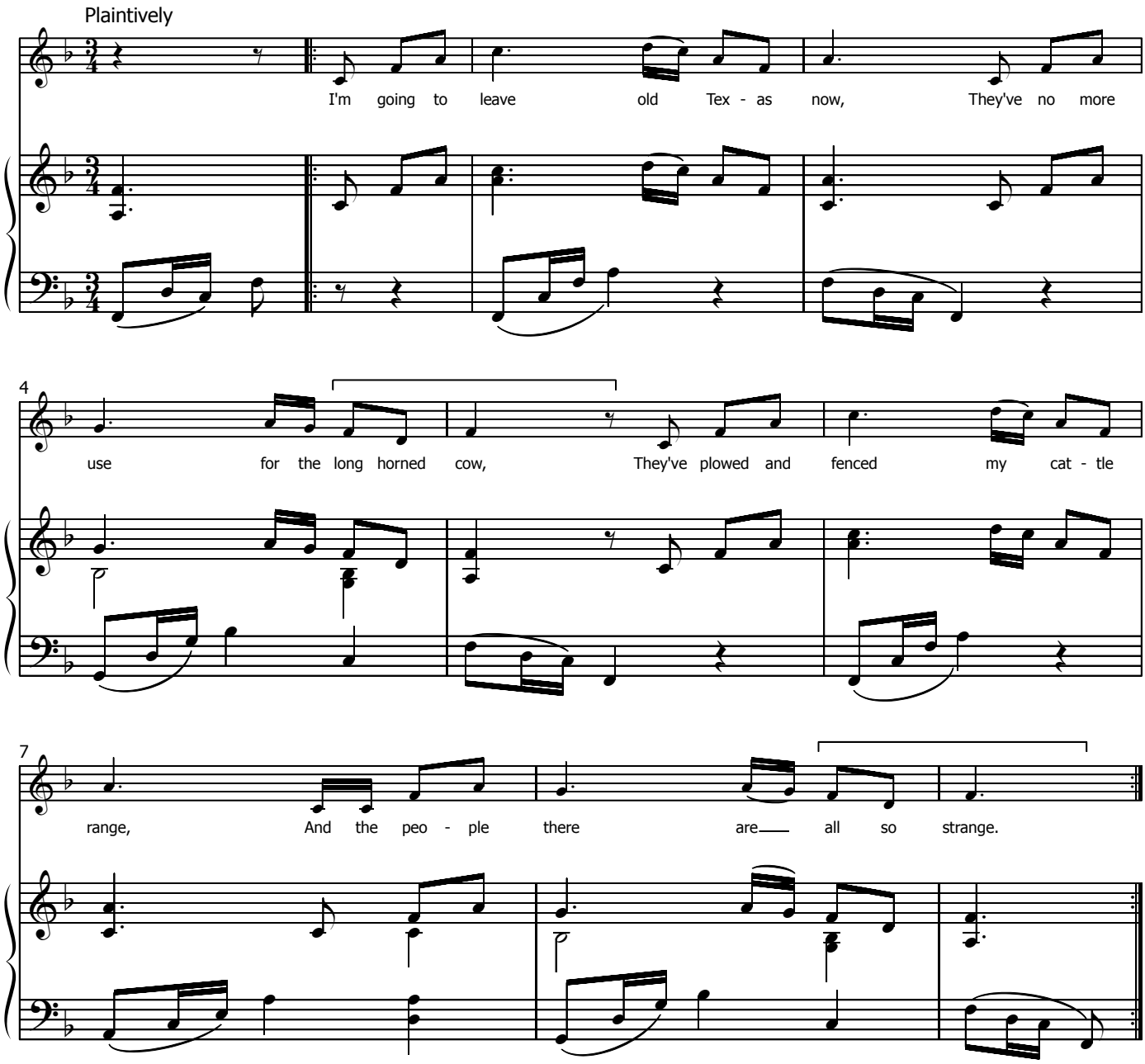
Example 6 The Mocking Bird Song



The interesting thing about this accompaniment is its sheer simplicity. The accompaniment is built over an arpeggio ostinato figure. The RH figure pre-empts the quavers in the melody. The gentle 'rocking' effect enhances this lullaby, which is based on the pentatonic scale.

Example 7 Old Texas

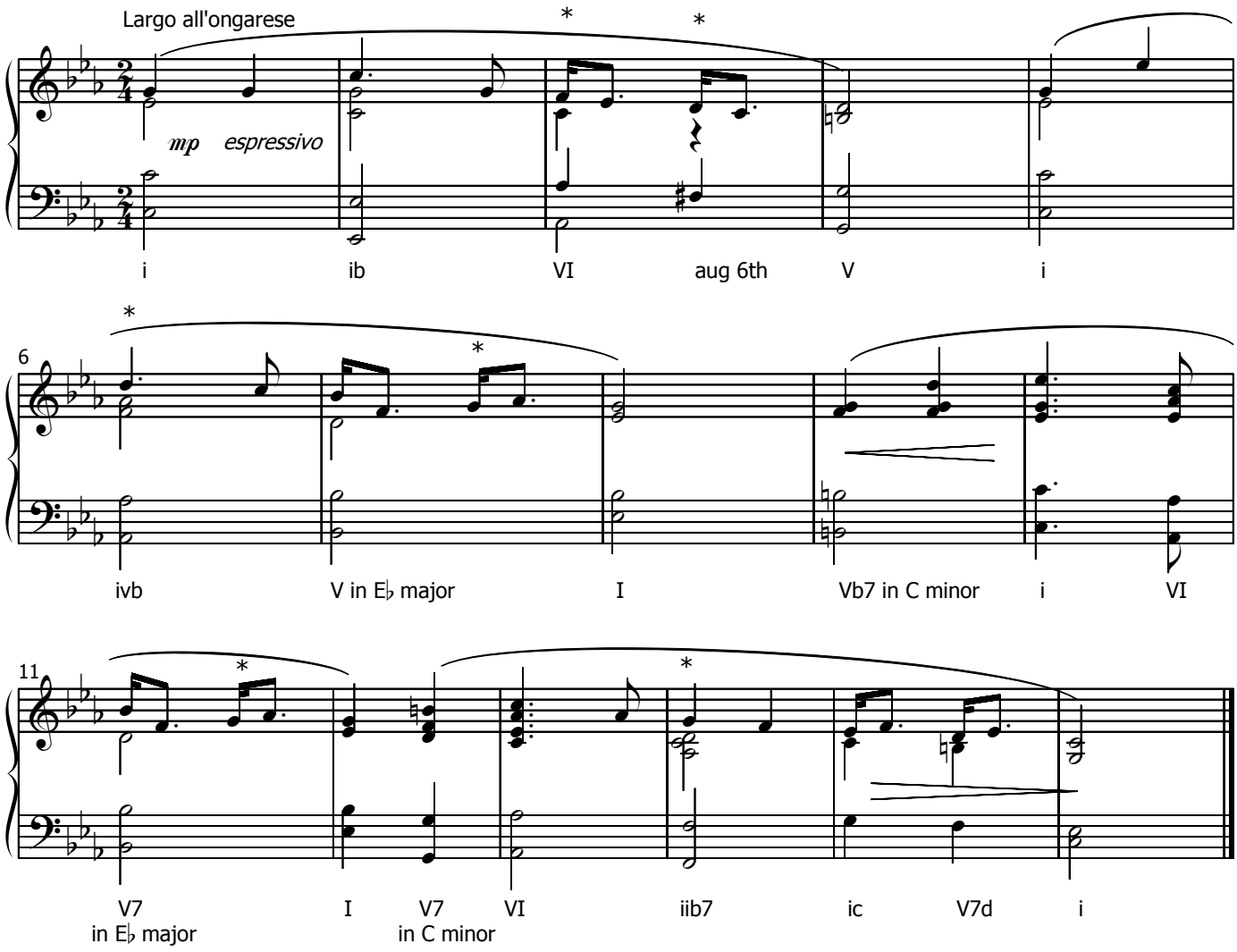
American



This is another pentatonic melody based on F. (Notice that the 4th note (B♭) and the 7th note (E) are missing in the melody line.) Notice also how the ♪♪ figure is used in the accompaniment in both RH and LH, and how it is used to maintain the movement when long notes appear in the melody. Note the dominant 7th and 11th effects at the bracketed cadences.

Example 8 Csak egy szep lany van a vilagon

Traditional

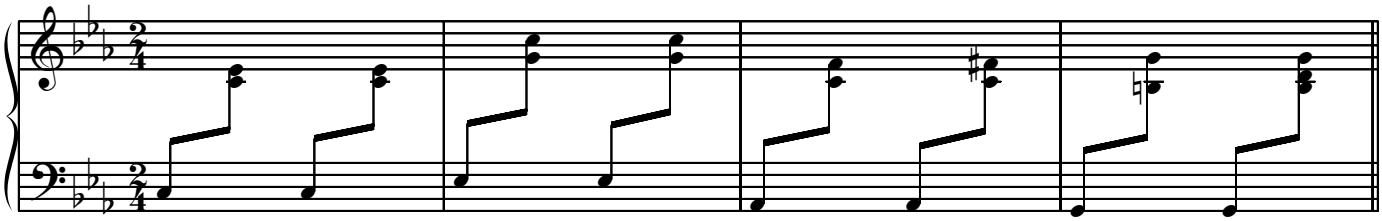


This mid-European folk song is harmonised here with simple chords in a version for piano solo. It includes an augmented 6th chord, and moves from C minor to E♭ major. Note the use of accented passing notes (appoggiaturas), marked *. The final cadence is interesting – the two melody notes falling by step (here E♭ and D semiquavers) may rise by step before moving to the next harmony note.

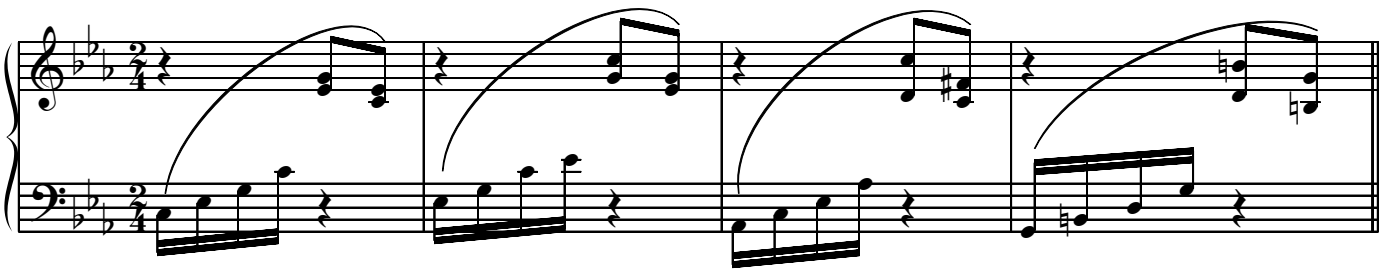
Accompaniment figurations

Below are some examples of accompaniment figurations which could be used, based on the chords of the first 4 bars of Example 8. They are self-explanatory and demonstrate the construction of patterns by the 'injection' of rhythm and gesture into the chords. Play them, listening carefully for the basic harmony outline as in the original.

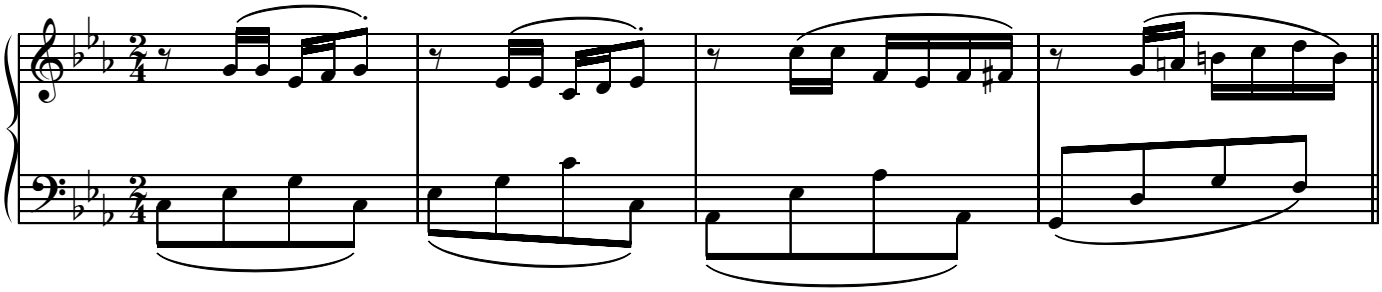
Example 9



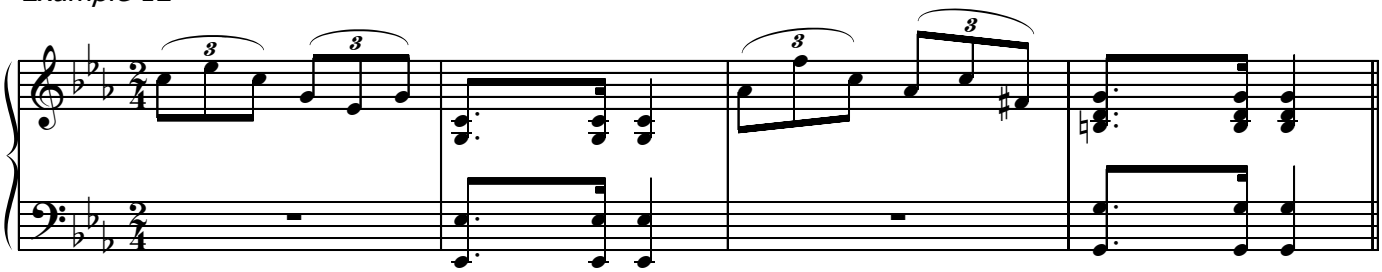
Example 10



Example 11



Example 12

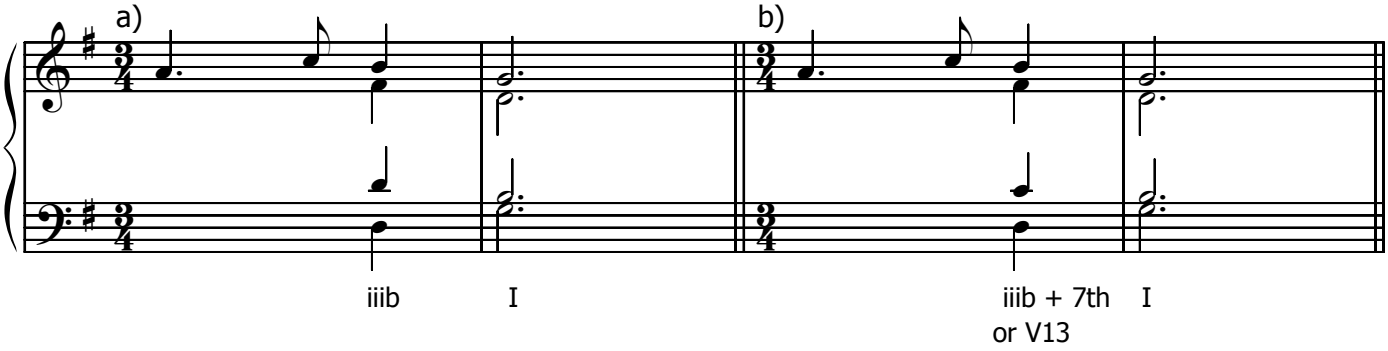


NB Dynamics will be dictated by the mood of the words, and should be included in your answer.

Cadences in folk songs

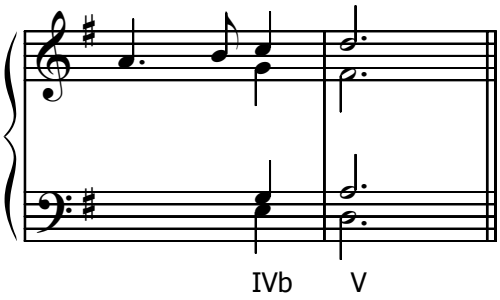
All regular cadences are of course featured in folk songs. Modal cadences are dealt with below. Other cadences arising from 19th century harmonic procedures may be used in arranging folk songs.

Example 13



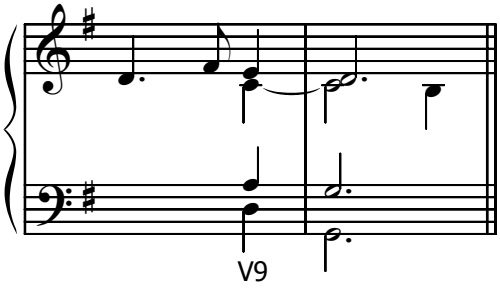
Where the melody ends Me – Doh (or mediant to tonic) the use of iiib to replace Va is common. Example 13b (above) shows the same chord incorporating the 7th of the dominant (V) in the tenor. It could also be described as a dominant 13th.

Example 14



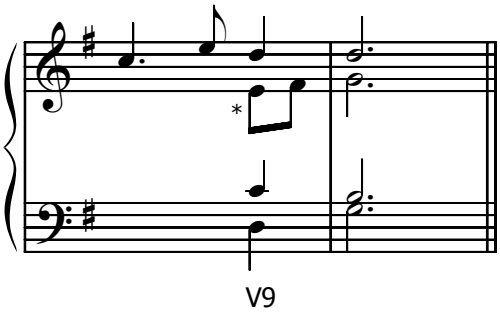
Example 14 demonstrates the use of the Phrygian cadence, which occurs in early music – it is particularly effective in minor keys.

Example 15



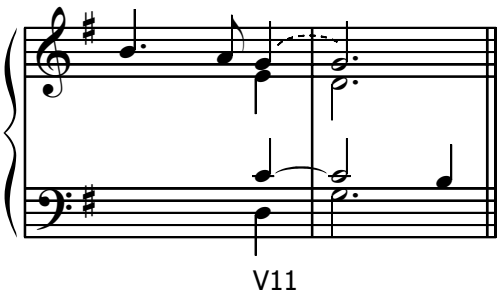
Example 15 demonstrates the use of a dominant 9th. Note the 4-3 suspension in the alto, which helps maintain the movement on the dotted minim D.

Example 16



The dominant 9th (*) is used as an accented passing note.

Example 17



This shows the use of the dominant 11th retained to become the tonic in I.

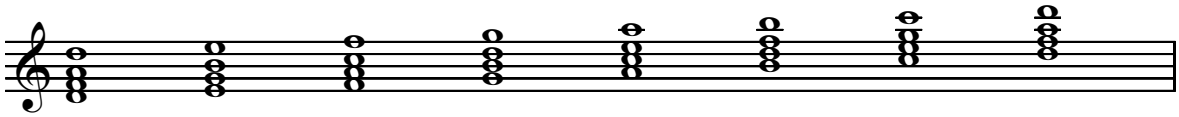
The use of the dominant 9th and 11th is fully explained in the LCM theory handbooks for grades 7 and 8.

Modality

Modes are used in harmonising folk tunes, as the melodies predate tonal harmony.

R. O. Morris, a distinguished scholar, wrote that reference to modal harmony is erroneous. Morris rightly draws our attention to the fact that modality is purely a melodic procedure; the chords are derived from the melody. Example 18 shows chords based on the notes of the Dorian mode. Refer to the LCM *Theory Handbook Grade 5* for illustrations of Lydian, Mixolydian, Ionian and Aeolian modes.

Example 18



Pre-18th century composers derived chords in this way, but they found they needed to alter the 6th and 7th degrees by using accidentals. This process is known as 'musica ficta' (literally 'fictional' or 'feigned' music). Modes in their 'pure' form are determined by the position of semitones; when musica ficta is used it destroys the original number and order of semitones, and the mode loses its original character.

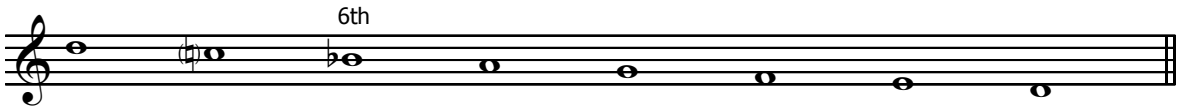
Often the 'Tierce de Picardie' was employed, where a minor chord has a sharpened 3rd, thus changing it into a major chord. It is said that 'the 3rd of Picardie' was first used by the early French composer of that name.

The examples below show the use of musica ficta – i.e. the use of accidentals to alter the pitch of the 6th and 7th notes in both ascending and descending forms of the Dorian mode.

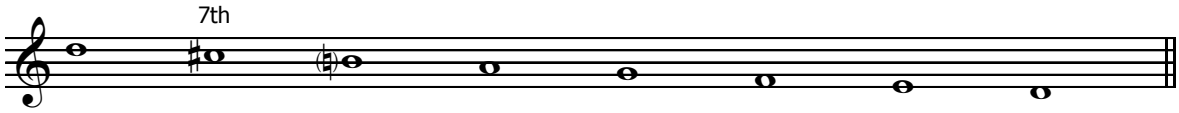
Example 19

Example 20

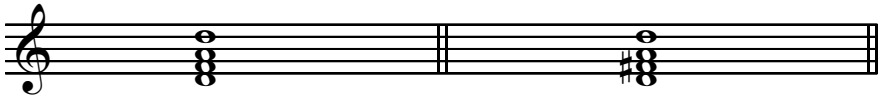
Example 21



Example 22



Example 23



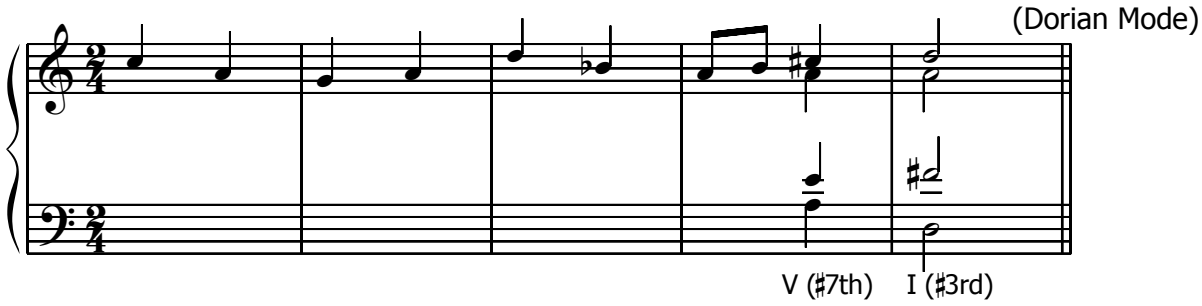
Final chord of Dorian Mode Here with ♯3rd (Tierce de Picardie)

All of these examples produce a mixture of both D melodic minor and D major, and if used without the accidentals, also the Dorian mode. Therefore, three distinct areas of tonality are employed. Note the avoidance of B♭ – C♯, an augmented interval found in the harmonic minor scale.

The chords formed in these examples are freely available in all positions as in normal harmony, as are all the elements of unessential harmony (e.g. passing notes, accented passing notes, auxiliary notes and suspensions).

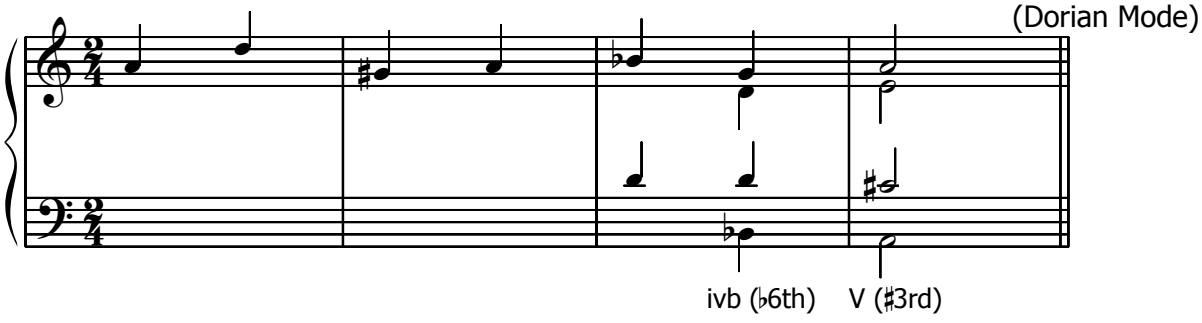
In a modal context, accidentals are needed in both chords of a perfect cadence, as shown in Example 24:

Example 24



Similarly with the Phrygian cadence:

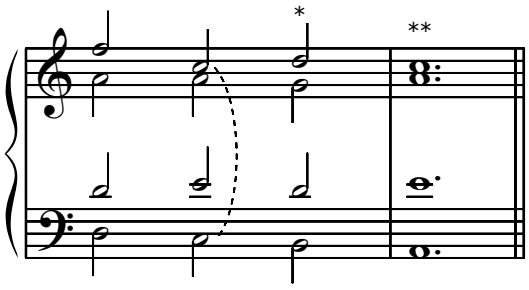
Example 25



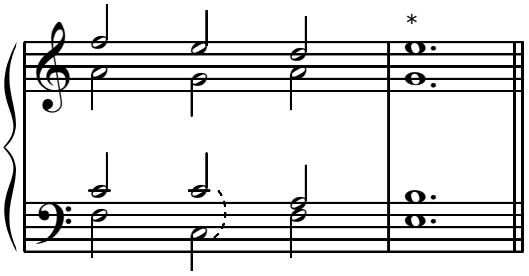
All cadences can be decorated by the use of suspensions. Cadences in inversion are available, and also iib – V and iib – I. Avoid iiib – I in a modal context. Always take care over accidentals, and avoid moving by diminished and augmented intervals.

Other progressions and cadences can be used employing chords from the original mode. In this case, the 7th note in the Dorian mode would be a C natural, and may be doubled as it is not the sharpened leading note, as in normal harmony. So the following would be acceptable:

Example 26



Example 27



Note in both examples the doubled 7th degree, indicated with a dotted line.

If using musica ficta, it would be possible to add G♯ in chords marked *, and C♯ in the chord marked **. In both cases this would form simple examples of modulation.

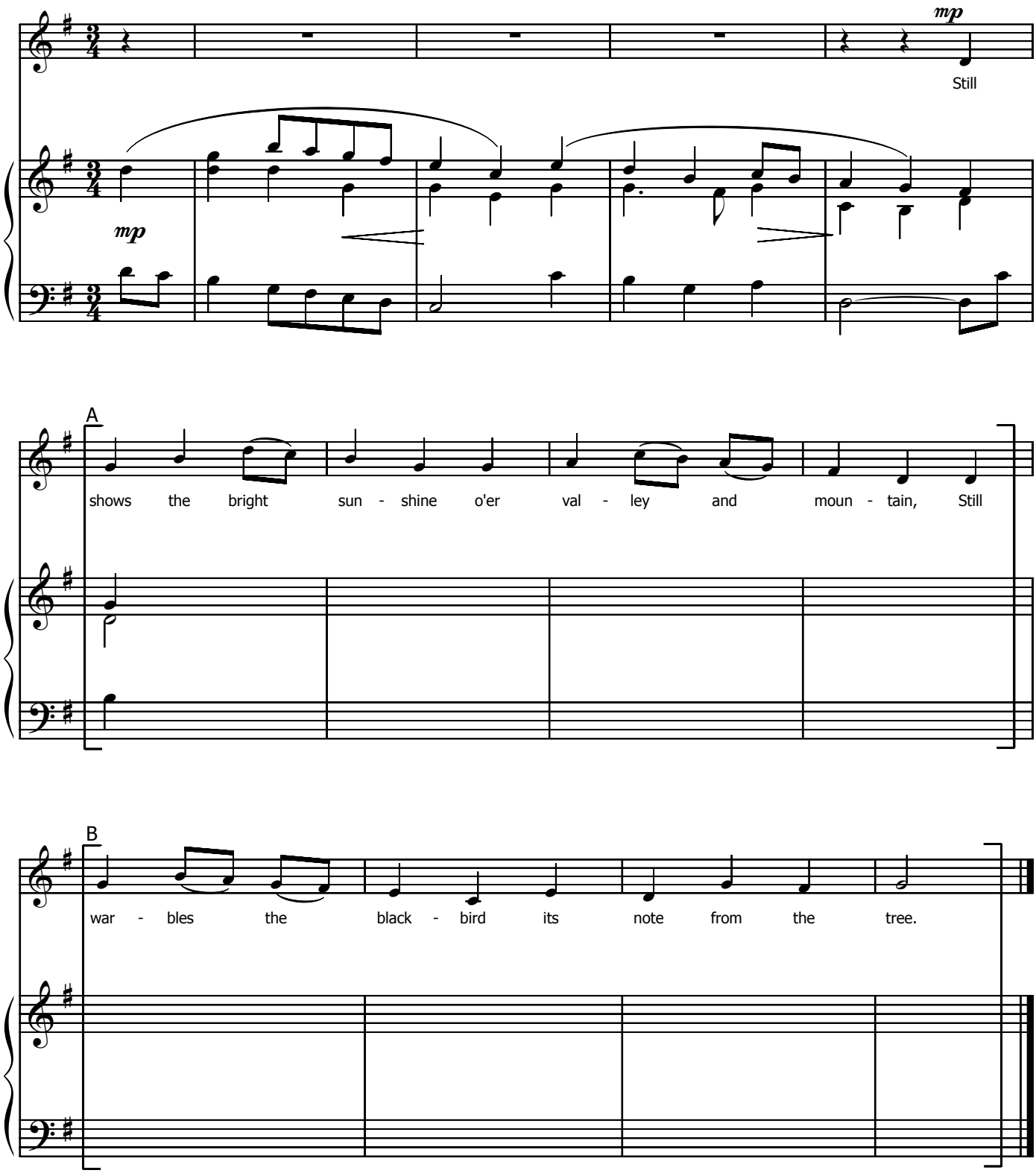
Practice exercises

Bracketed sections marked A and B indicate the kinds and lengths of portions of extracts which candidates will be asked to complete in the DipMusLCM examination.

Complete the following piano accompaniments. Remember that the style of the opening should be maintained and/or developed.

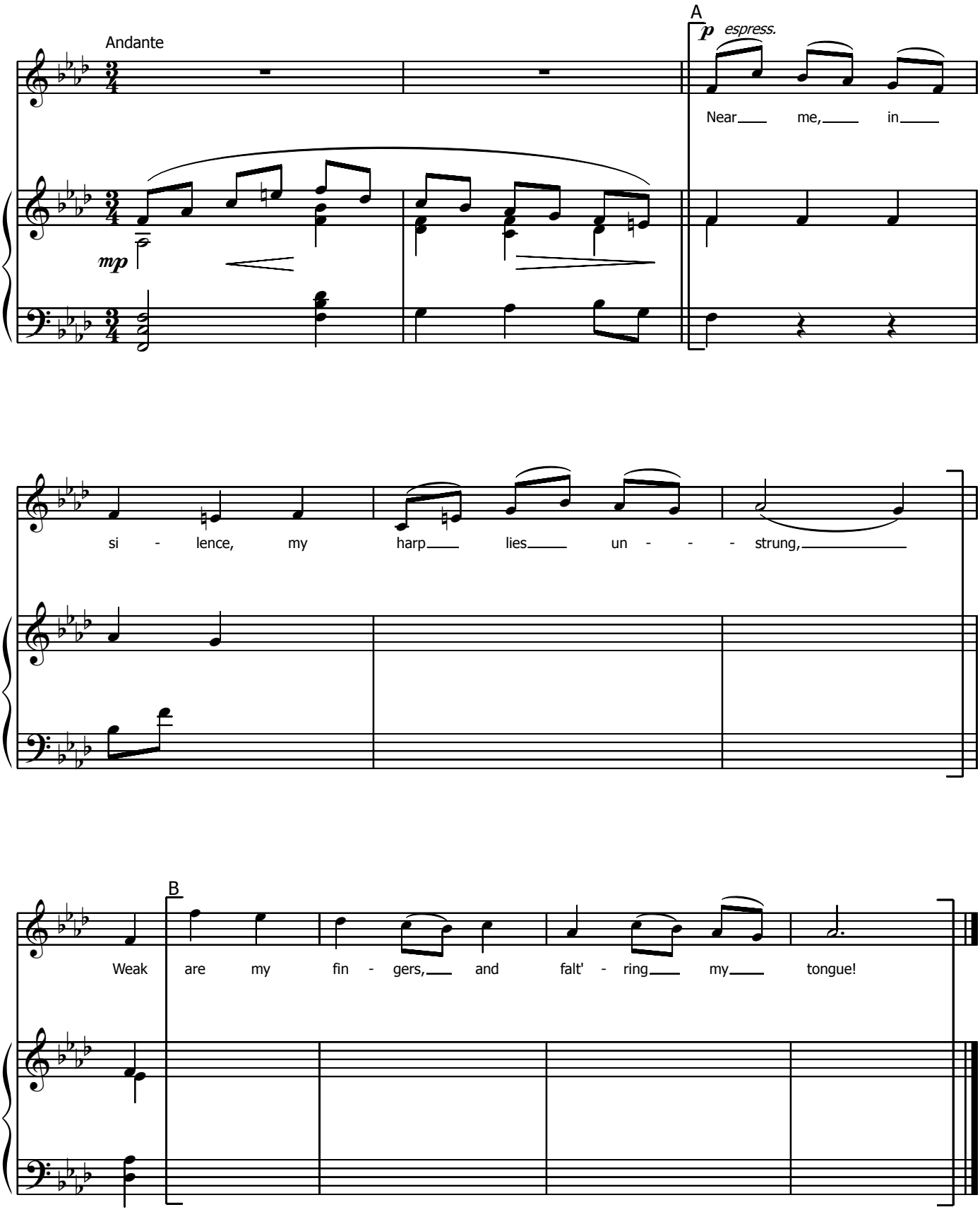
1.

Welsh folk melody



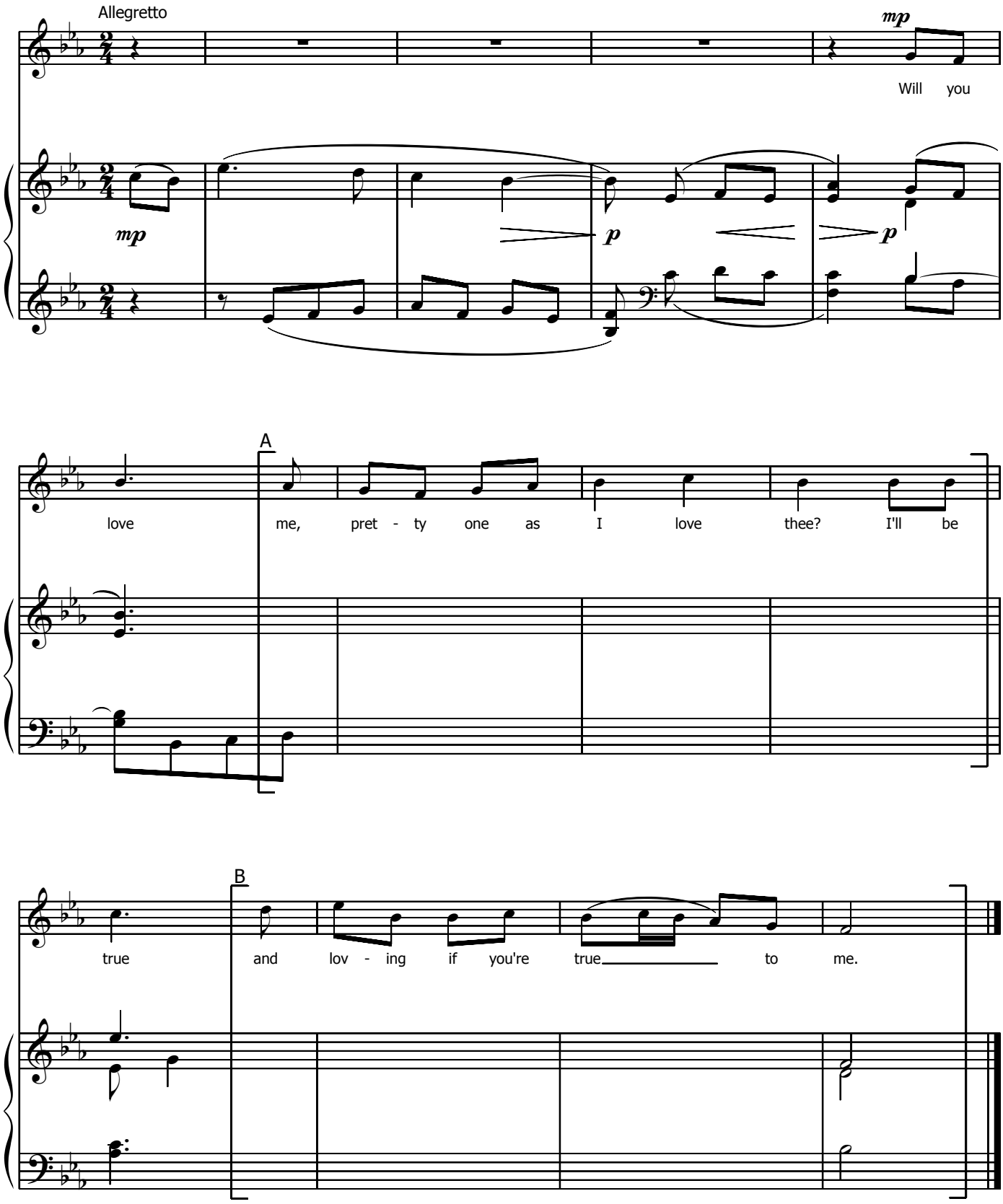
2.

Welsh folk melody



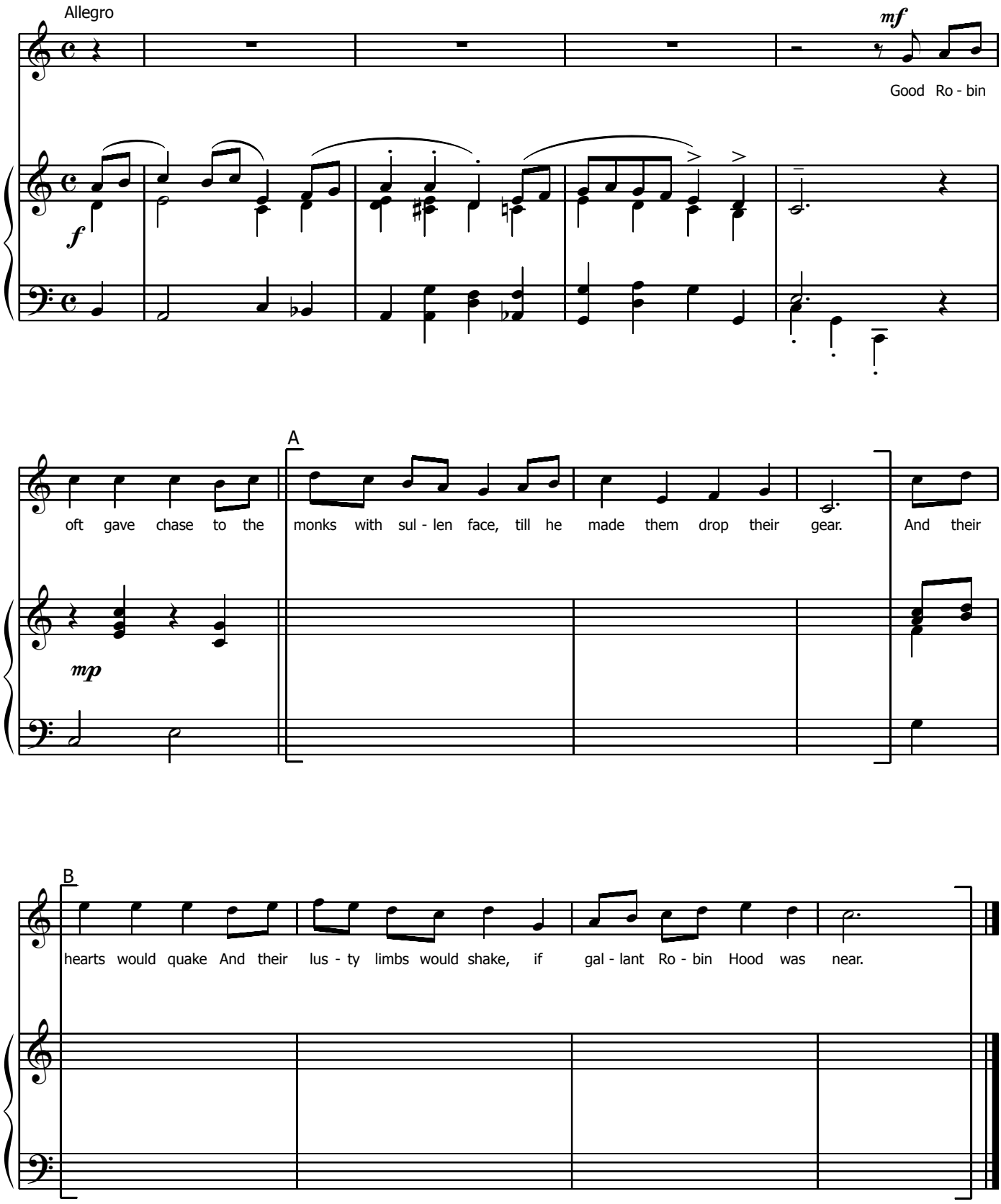
3.

French folk tune



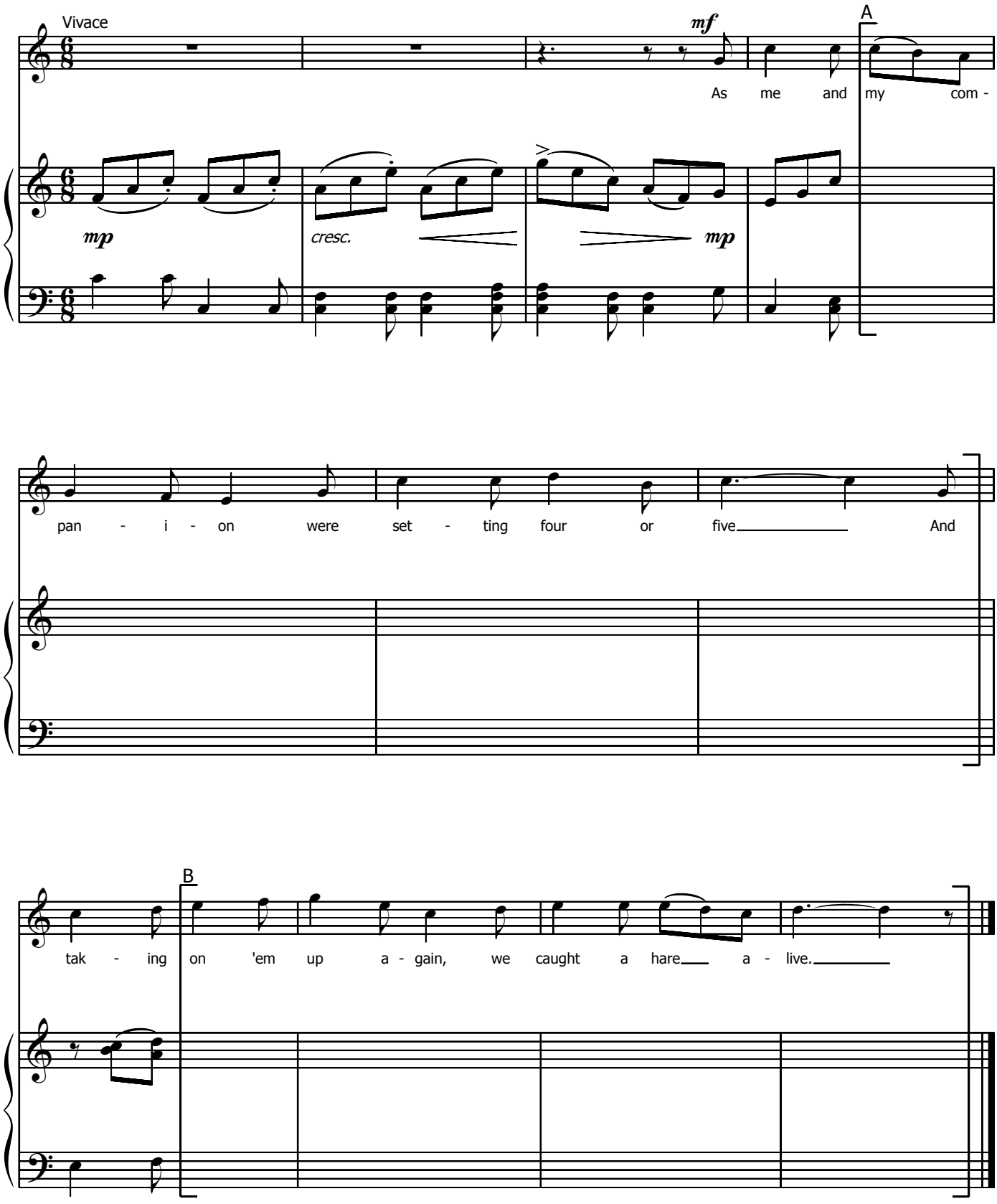
4.

English folk tune



5.

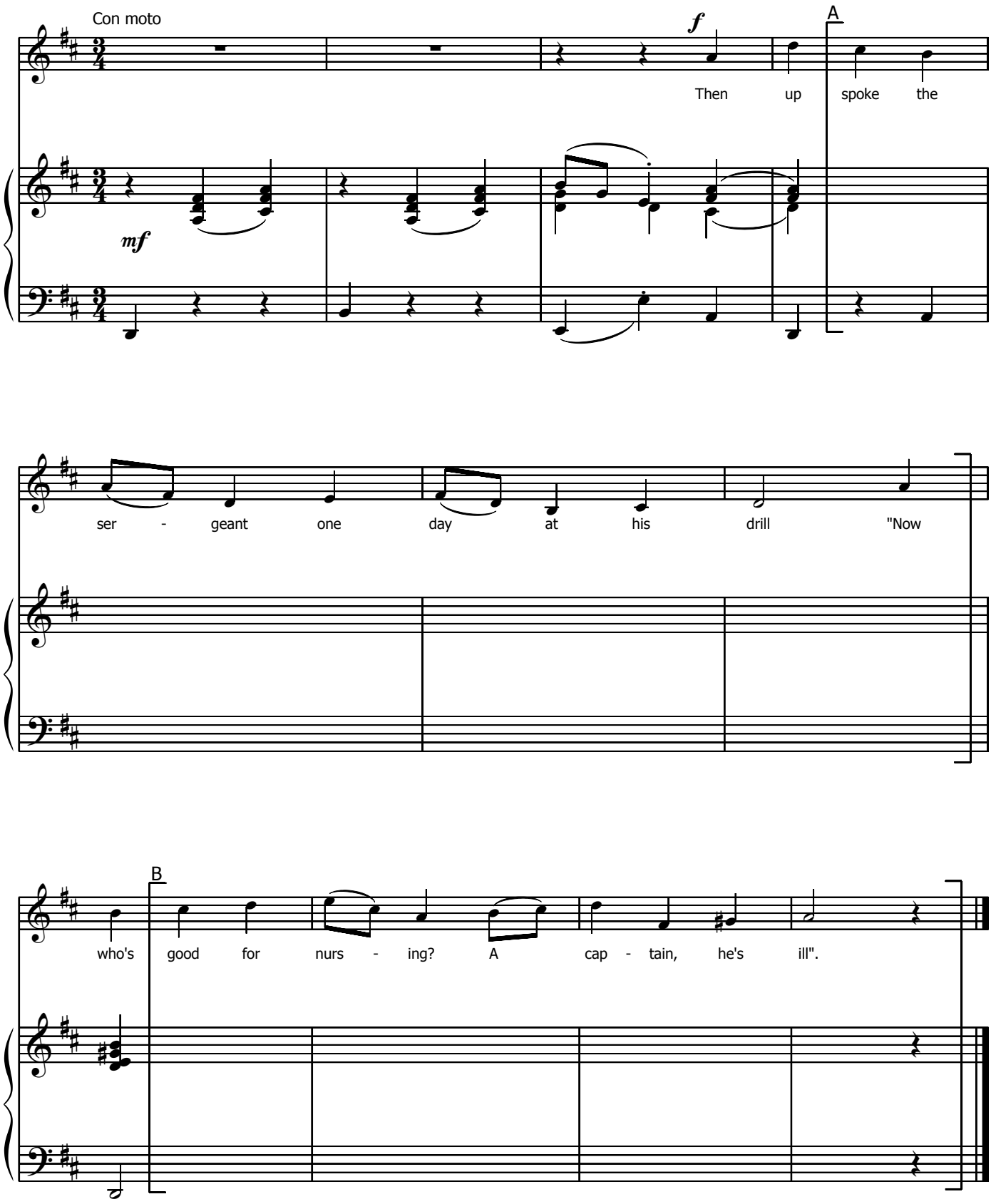
English folk tune



(Cadence in G)

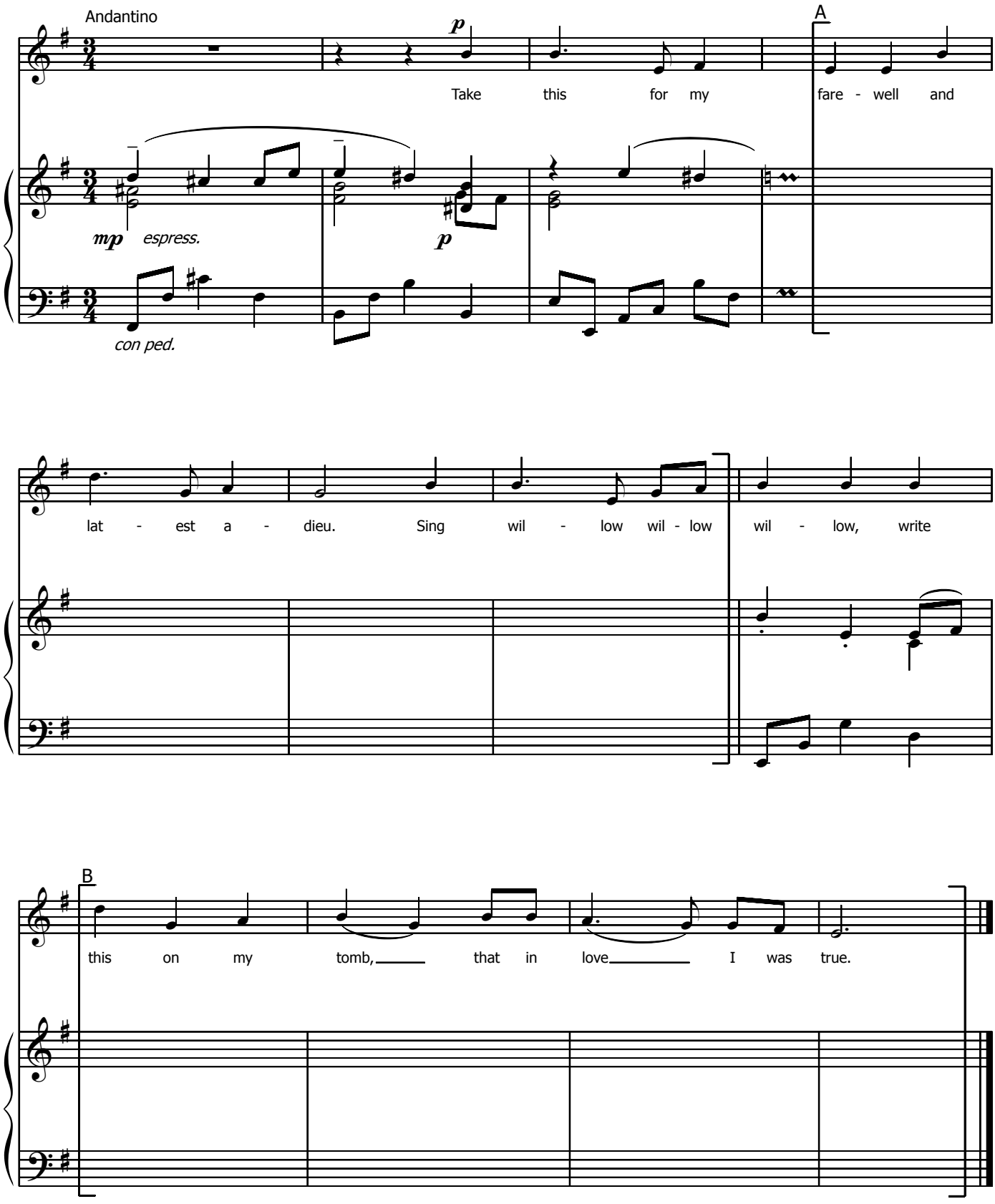
6.

English folk tune



7.

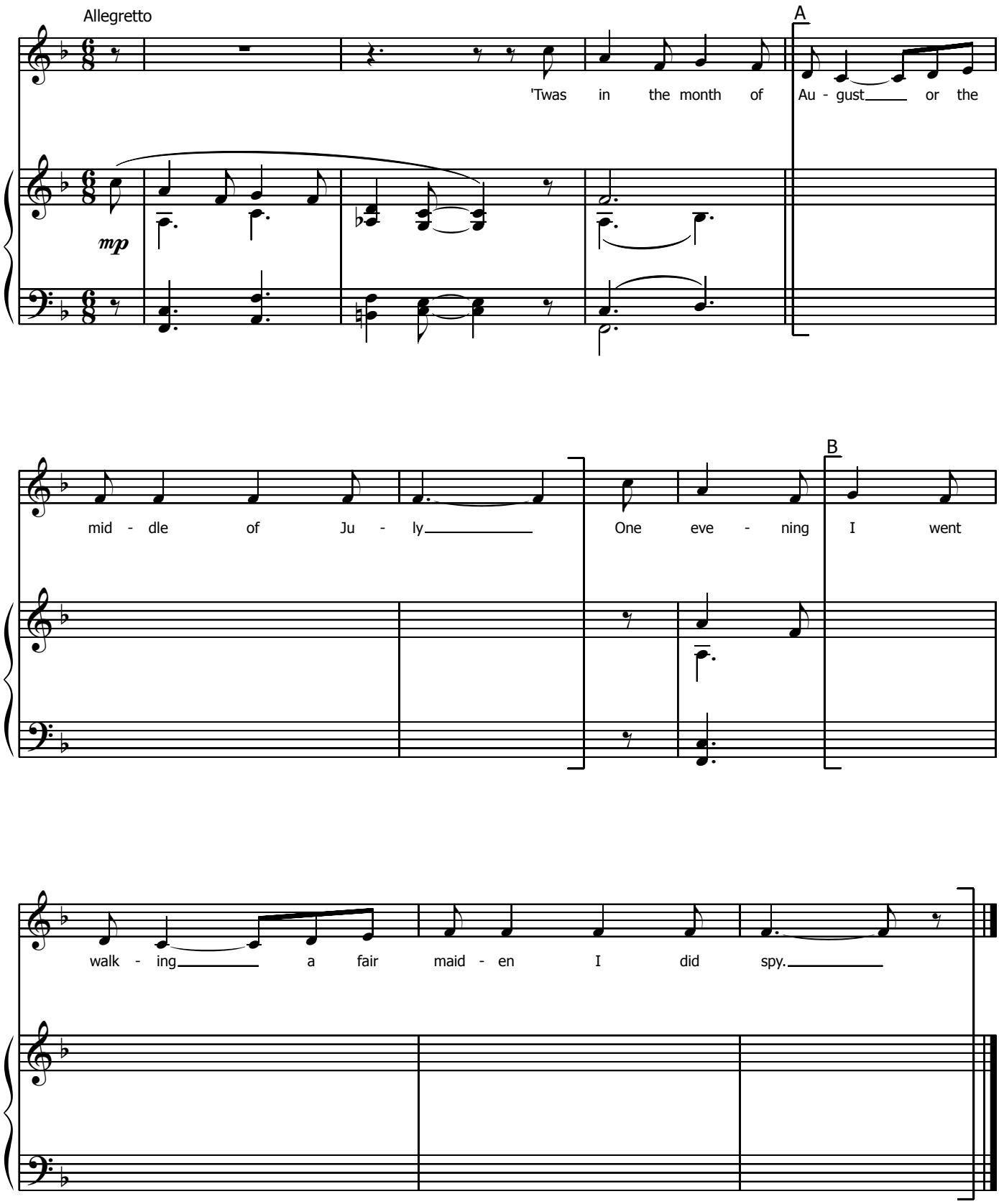
English folk tune



(Ending adapted)

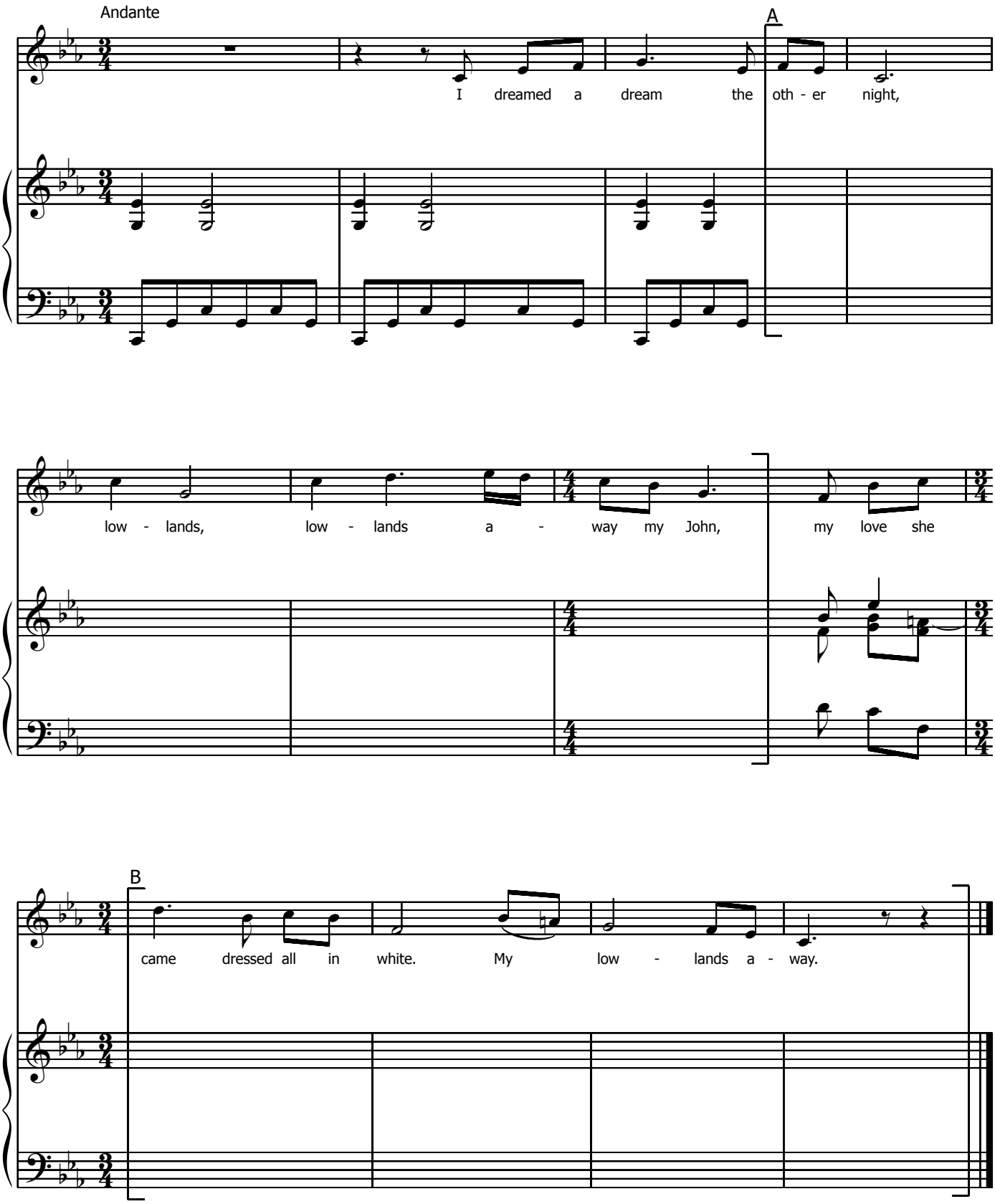
8.

American folk melody

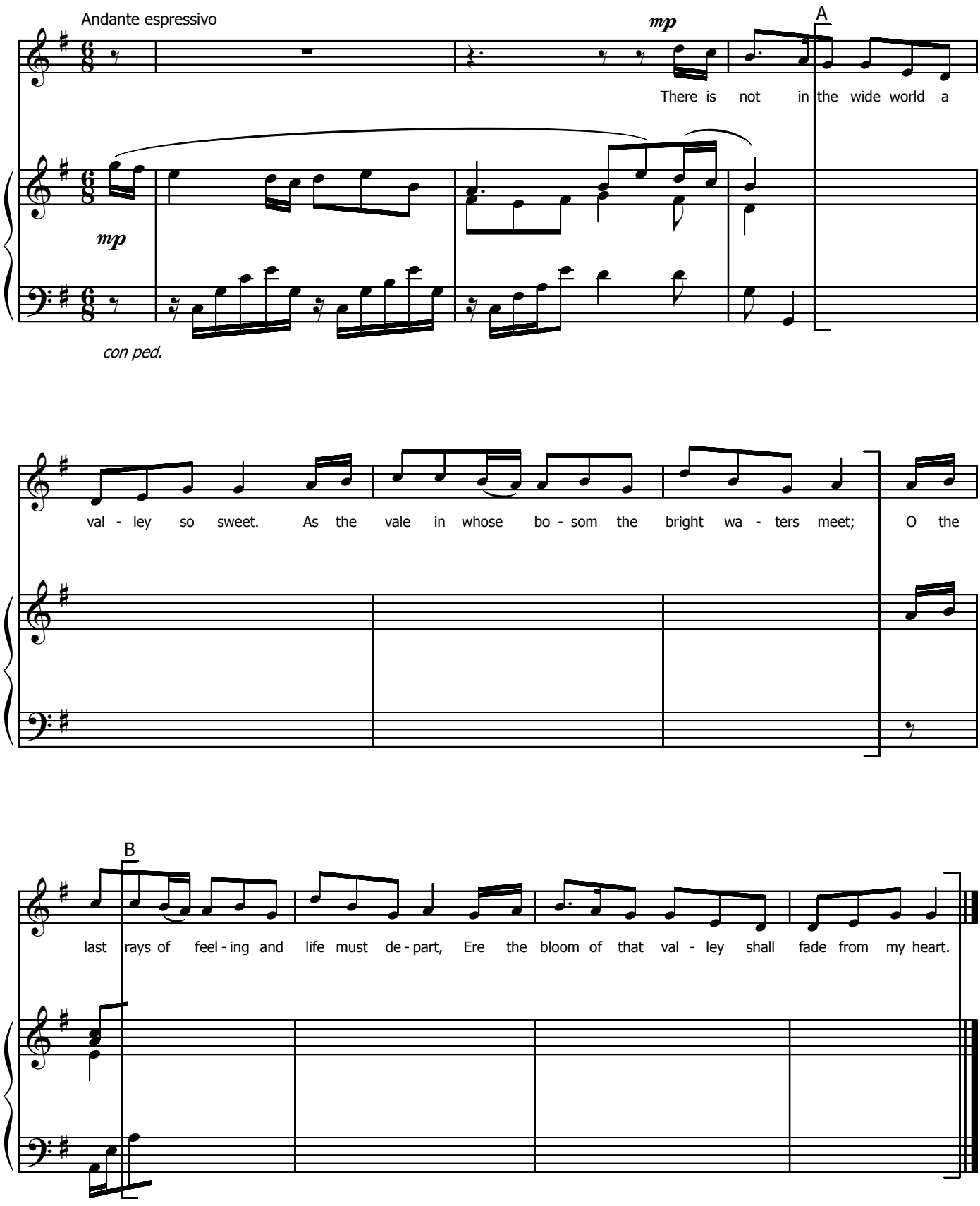


9.

Scottish folk tune

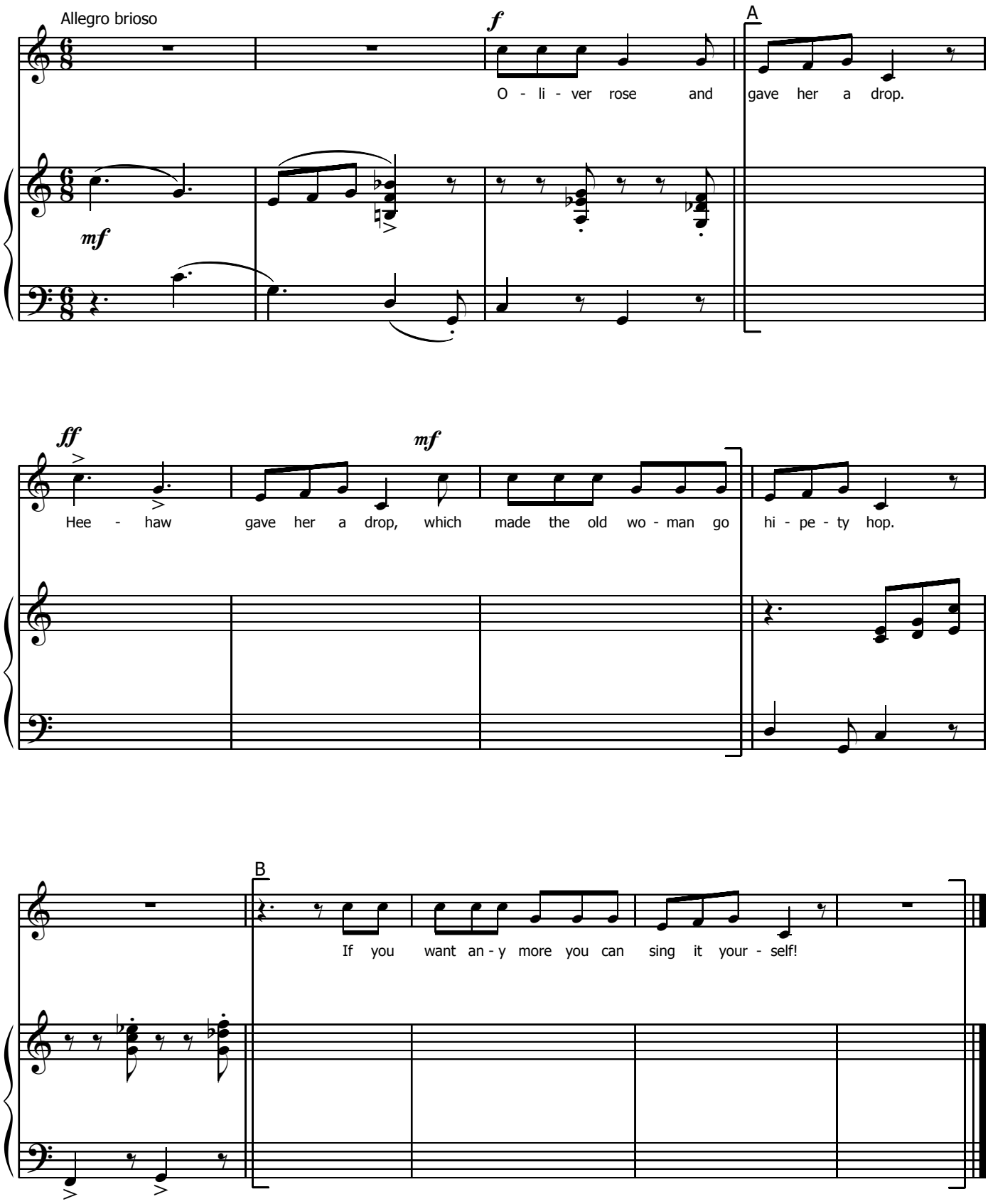


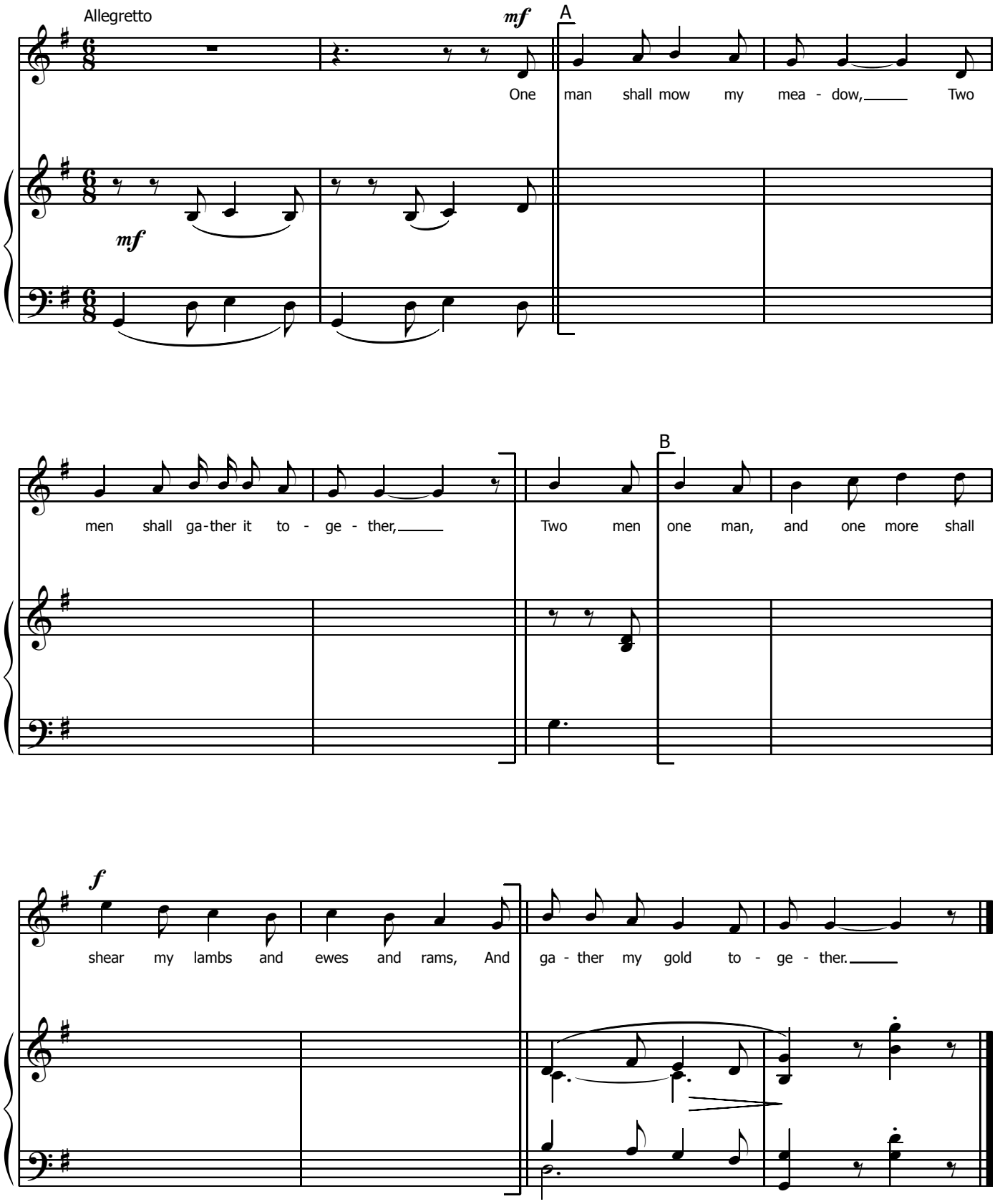
10. Scottish folk tune



(Ending adapted)

11. English folk tune



(adapted)

12. Somerset folk song