David Leisner

West Wind

6 Songs for Tenor (or Soprano) and Guitar

Mary Oliver has long been one of my favorite poets. I was grateful to have the occasion to set some of her work to music. WEST WIND is dedicated to two splendid tenors, William Ferguson and Rufus Müller, who gave its first performances. It was written in 2011.

In recent years, diatonic and chromatic harmonic approaches have merged in my work, mixing in a way that might have seemed confusing before, but feels perfectly natural to me now. These songs are written in this language.

Another departure from my personal method is the fact that most of the six songs in this cycle emerged not out of a melodic line or idea, but out of the structure created in the accompanying guitar part. The first song, for instance, starts with an interval of a minor third, followed by that minor third augmented by a half-step, and then another half-step augmentation and another. Then I laid out all the pitches in ascending order to make an exotic octatonic scale with whole steps and half steps in unusual places. The voice takes on the scalar passage, while the guitar plays with the intervallic augmentations, and then sometimes they switch. The second song uses a simple arpeggiated accompaniment for the guitar, alternating between repetitions of 4, 3, and 5 beats throughout. Each time the chord changes, it changes by only one note at a time. This creates a kind of harmony that I am often drawn to, one that is neither functional harmony nor atonal, but rather a harmony with gravitational attractions. Similar structural conceits guide the other songs, including the last one, which has a circular rhythmic development of a four-bar accompaniment figure in eighth-notes that leads to triplet-eighths, then to sixteenths, then to sextuplet-sixteenths, and returns in reverse order back to eighths. Each of these forms emerged in some way from the content of the poems.

– David Leisner

THEODORE PRESSER COMPANY

sample

dedicated to William Ferguson and Rufus Müller

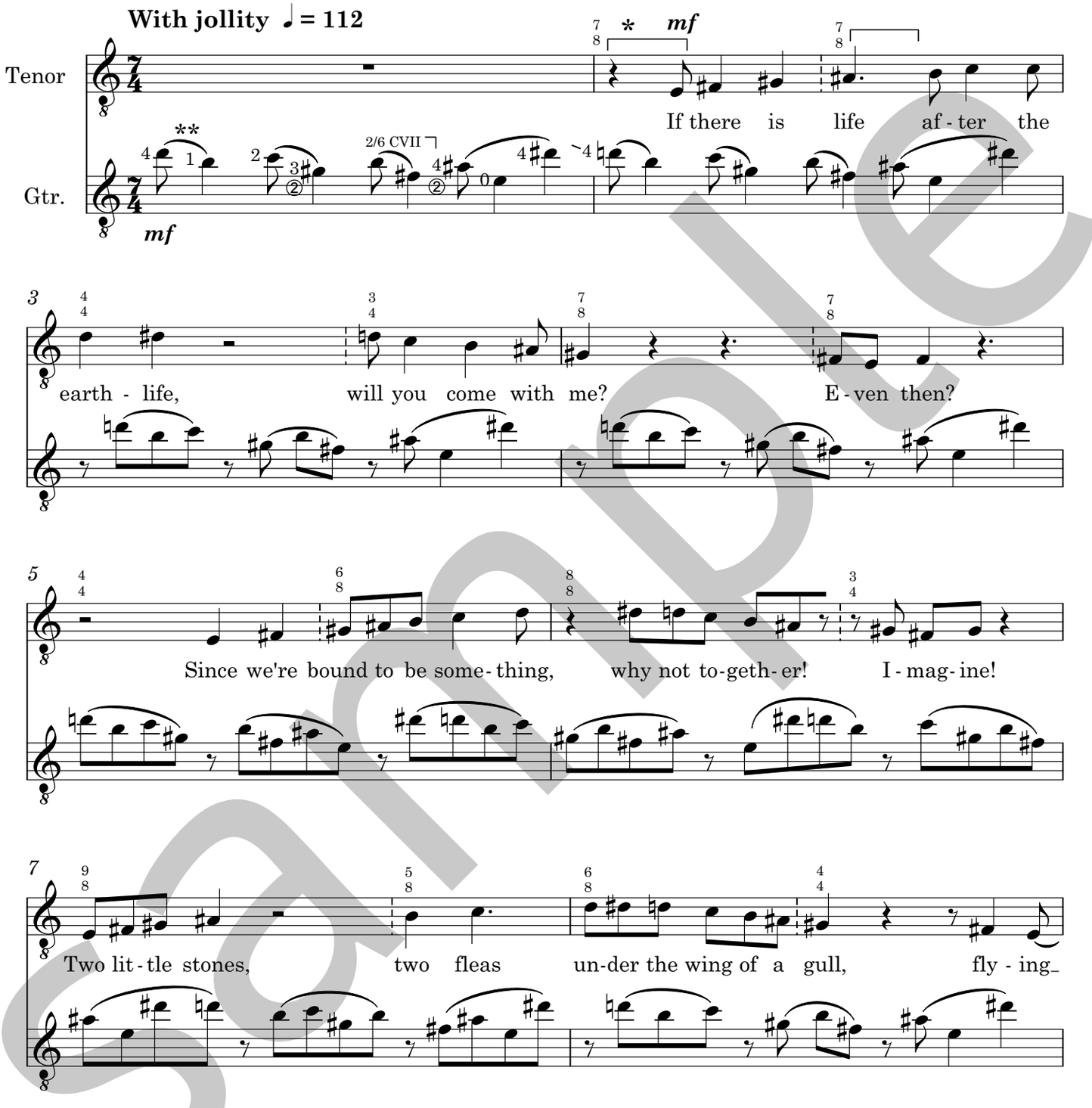
West Wind

6 songs for tenor (or soprano) and guitar

I. Come with me

MARY OLIVER

DAVID LEISNER



* Brackets show rhythmic groupings of 3 beats

** Solid lines in the guitar part are phrase markings, not left-hand slurs.

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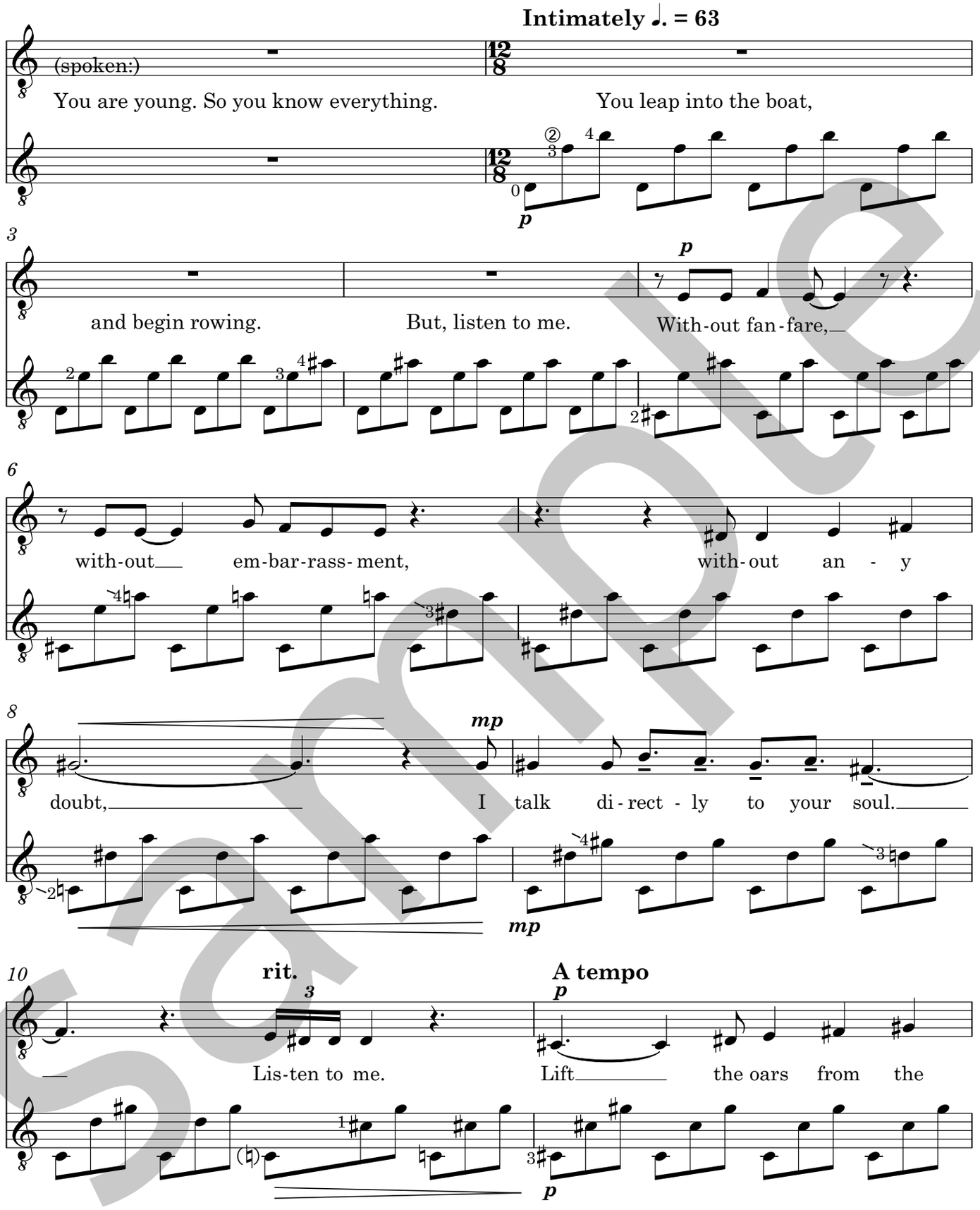
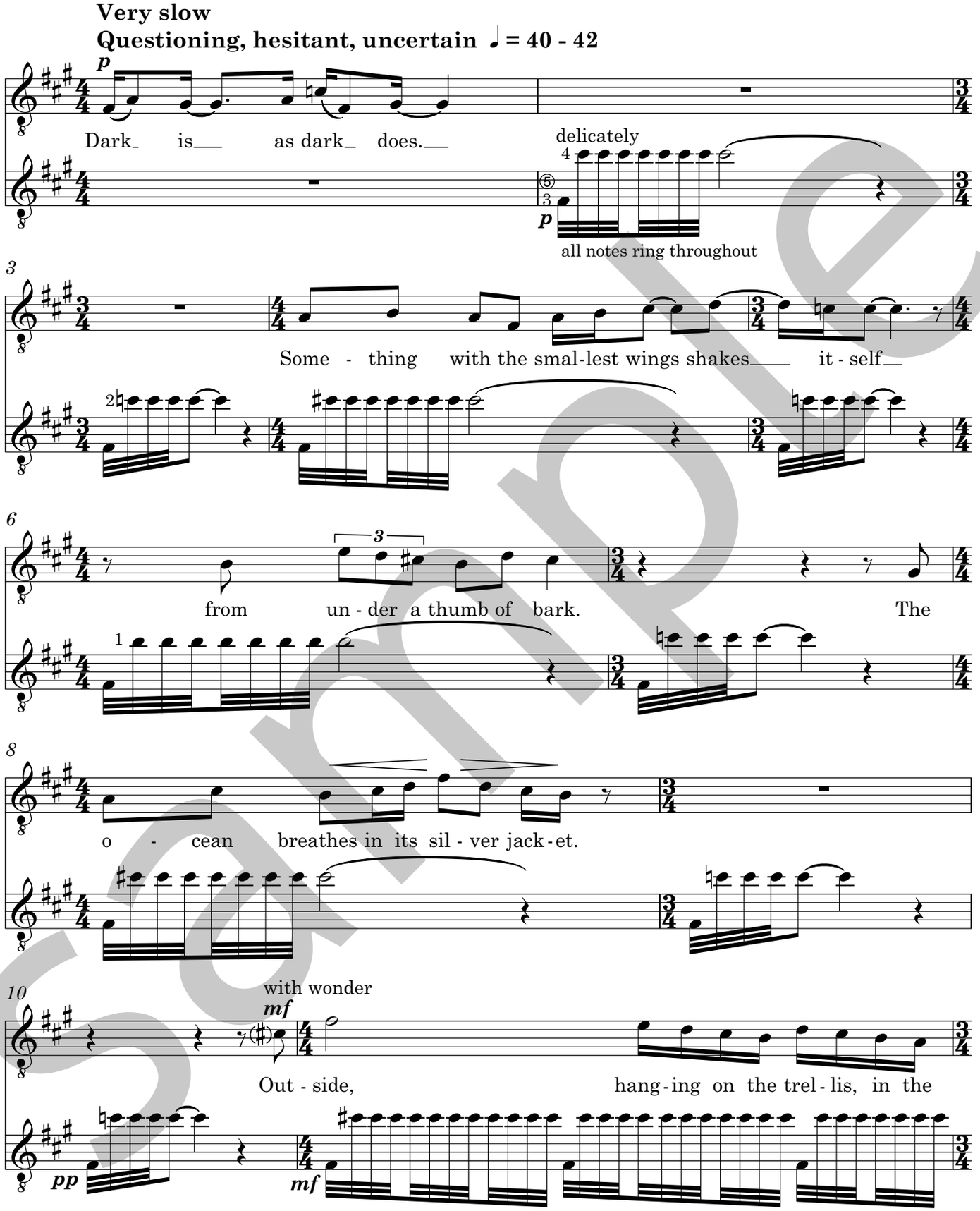

Intimately ♩. = 63
(spoken:)
You are young. So you know everything.
You leap into the boat,
and begin rowing.
But, listen to me.
With-out fan-fare,
with-out em-bar-rass-ment,
with-out an-y
doubt,
I talk di-rect-ly to your soul.
rit.
A tempo
Lis-ten to me.
Lift the oars from the

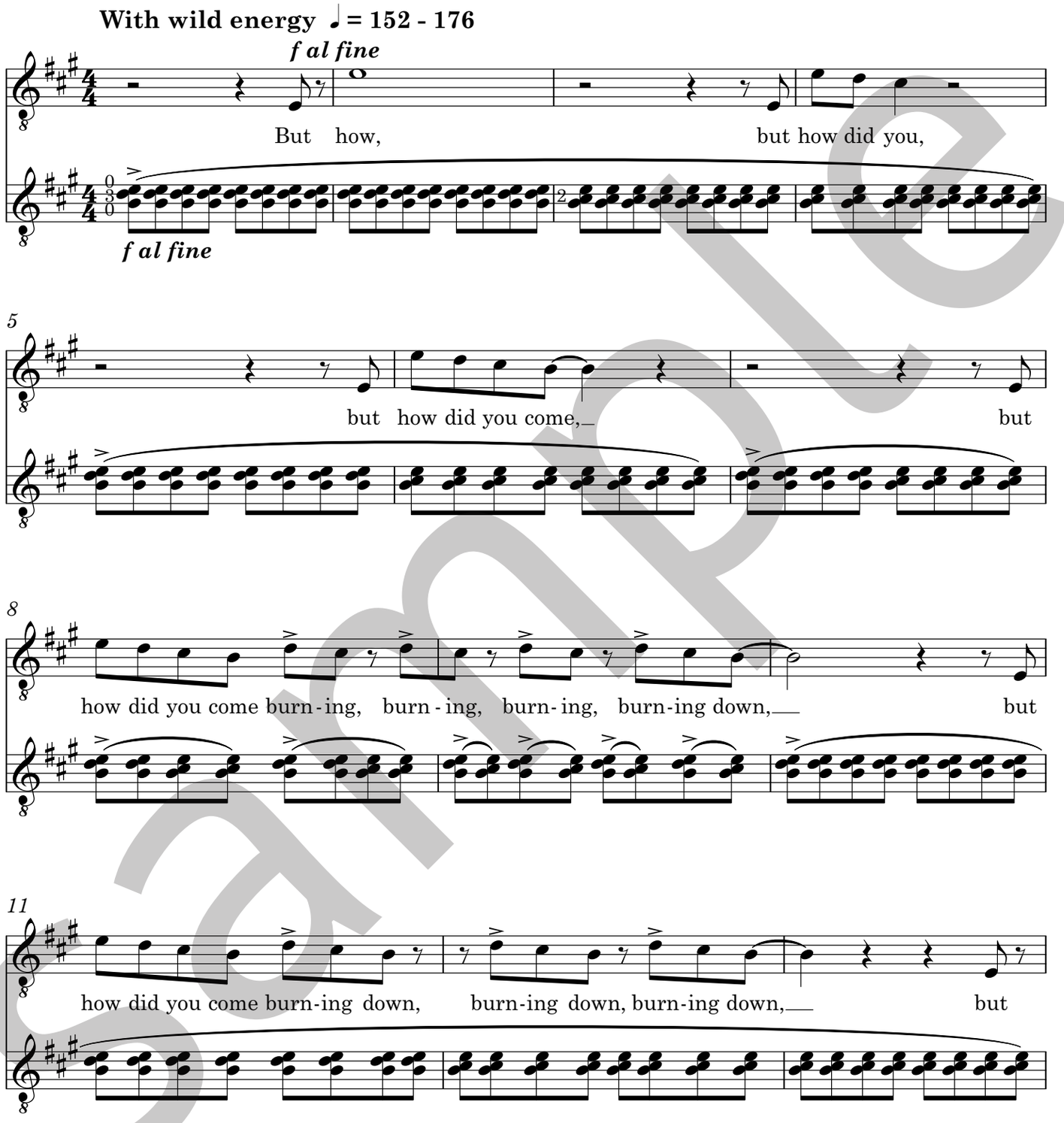
sample

III. Dark is as dark does



Sample

IV. Wild needle



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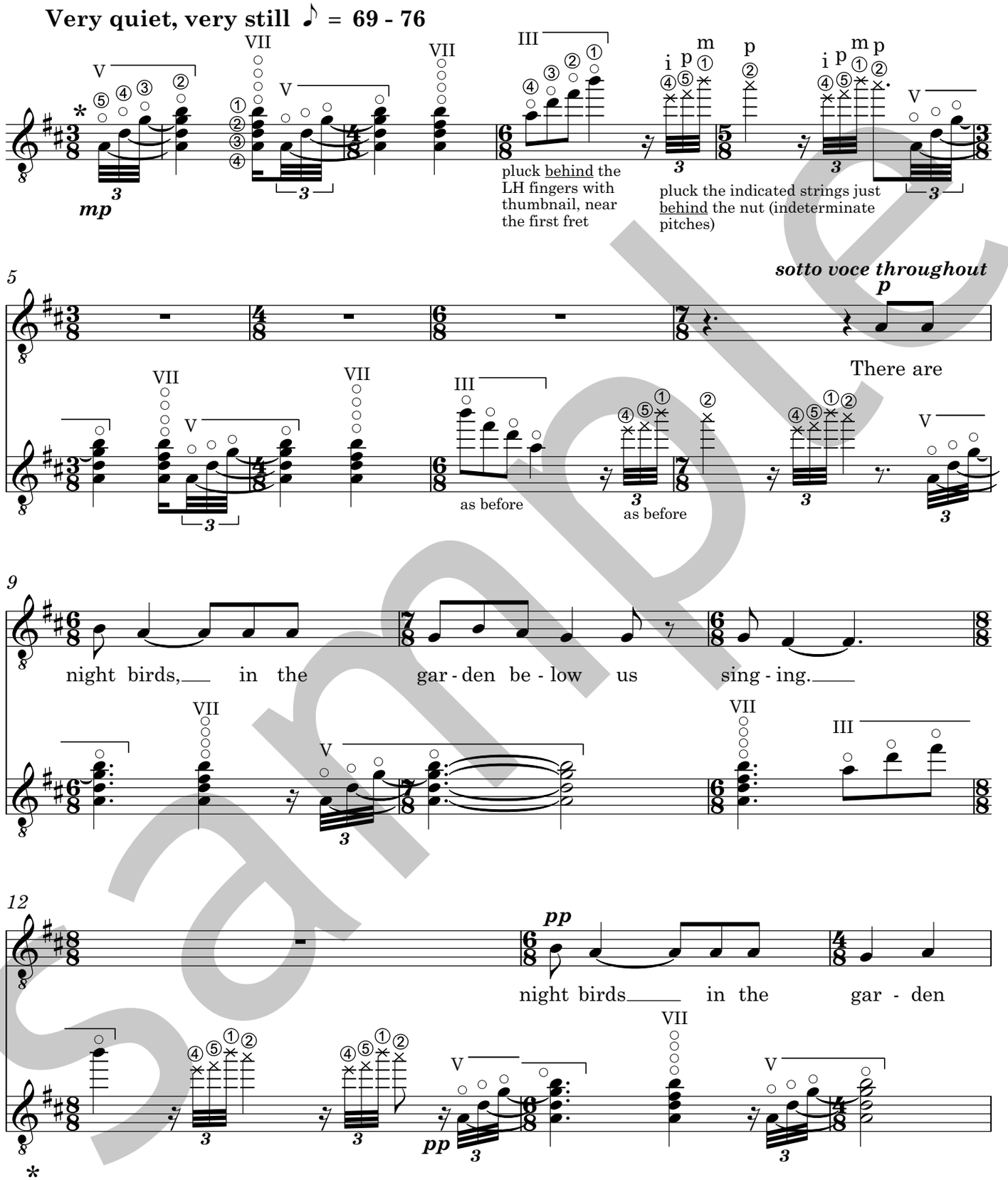
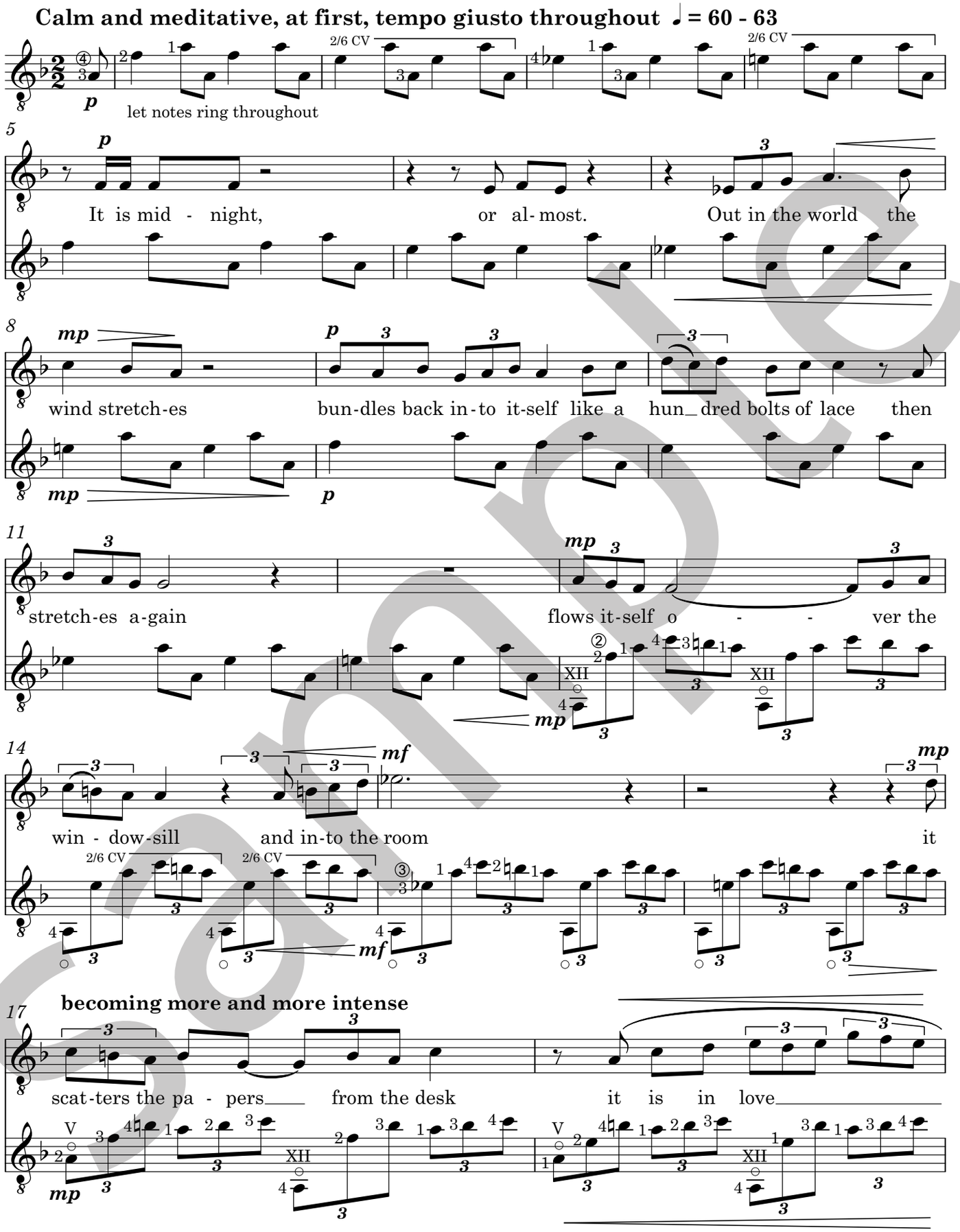
V. Night birds



sample

VI. West Wind



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