John Schneider

Tombeau for Lou Harrison

John Schneider (b. 1950)

Tombeau for Lou Harrison (2006)

Plaint • Passacaglia • Valse Triste • Jahla

This musical 'tombstone' marks the passing of the divine Mr. Harrison in a manner reminiscent of the lute or harpsichord tombeaux of the French Baroque, and was written specifically for the refretted National Steel Guitar, an instrument that the composer invented for his last composition, the *Scenes from Nek Chand* (2002).

The initial keening of the *Plaint* is followed by the repetitions of a descending *Passacaglia* (with nods to both Purcell & Harrison's teacher Schoenberg), which itself begins to descend as the movement progresses. The grieving gradually subsides with the *Valse Triste*, whose bittersweet harmonies remind us that the dance of life continues in spite of loss, while the spritely *Jahla* varies a theme from Harrison's lovely *Music Primer* and is resplendent with the energetic inertia of Harrison's final decades, only to be cut short, mid-leap, as was the composer's life. The final measures are in keeping with the onomatopoetic images of several 17th century predecessors which represented a soul's upward journey towards heaven with a final ascending scale (or the infamous descending scale which, rather than condemn the deceased to eternal damnation, simply described one composer's ultimate corporeal demise, caused by the artist unintentionally descending a staircase, headfirst).

The *Tombeau* was written on the chilly Northern Coast of California with the title of Guy Madden's 2003 film *The Saddest Music in the World* constantly in my thoughts.

-J.S.

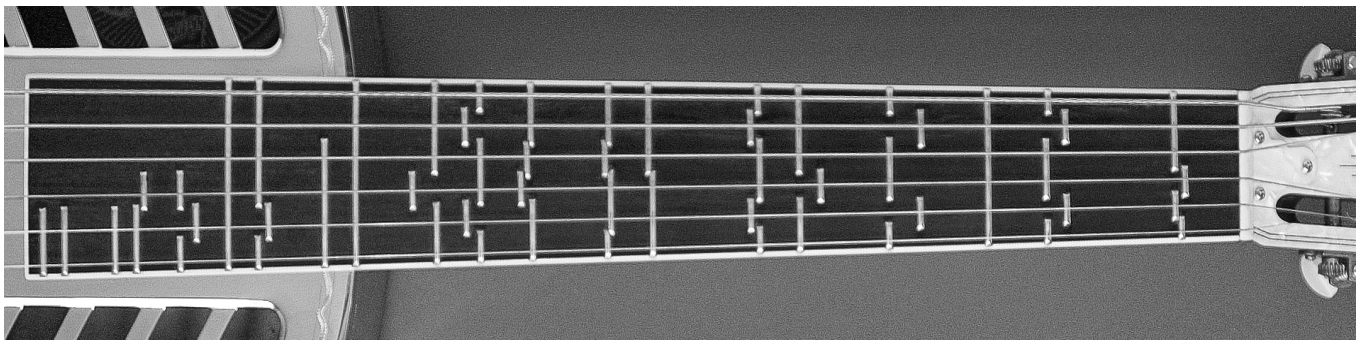
Tuning

The open strings of Lou Harrison's National Resophonic 'Harmonic' guitar are:

(Low) **D—A—D—G—A—D** *(High)*

The scale steps are tuned and fretted in the following manner:

0	-37	+4	-33	-14	-2	-49	+2	-35	-16	-31	-51	0	(¢ deviation)
D	Eb	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	Bb	B	C	C#	D	
1/1	28/27	9/8	7/6	5/4	4/3	11/8	3/2	14/9	5/3	7/4	11/6	2/1	

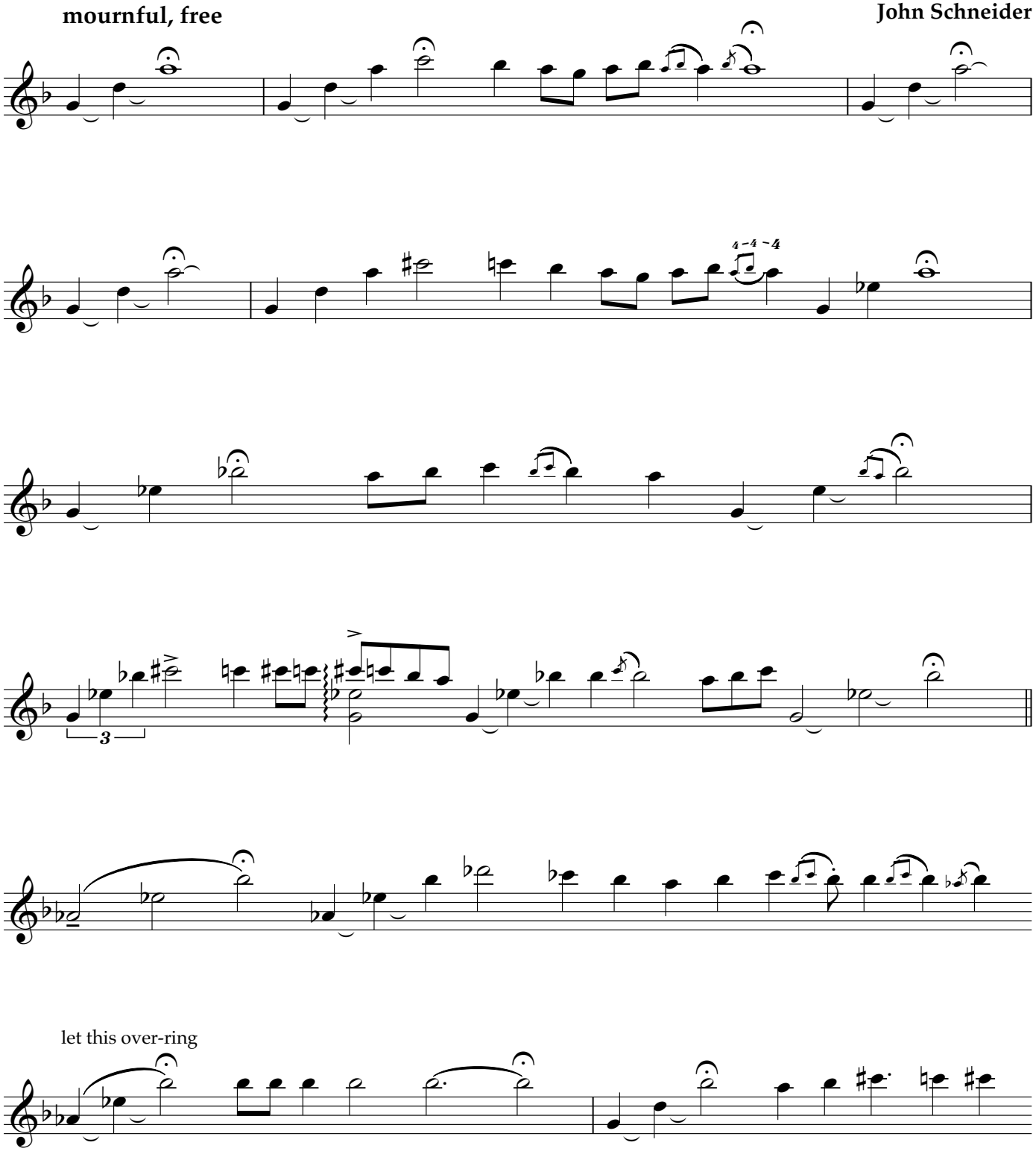


Though the work sounds best performed with steel strings on the intended instrument, a refretted nylon strung 'classic' guitar could also be very effective.

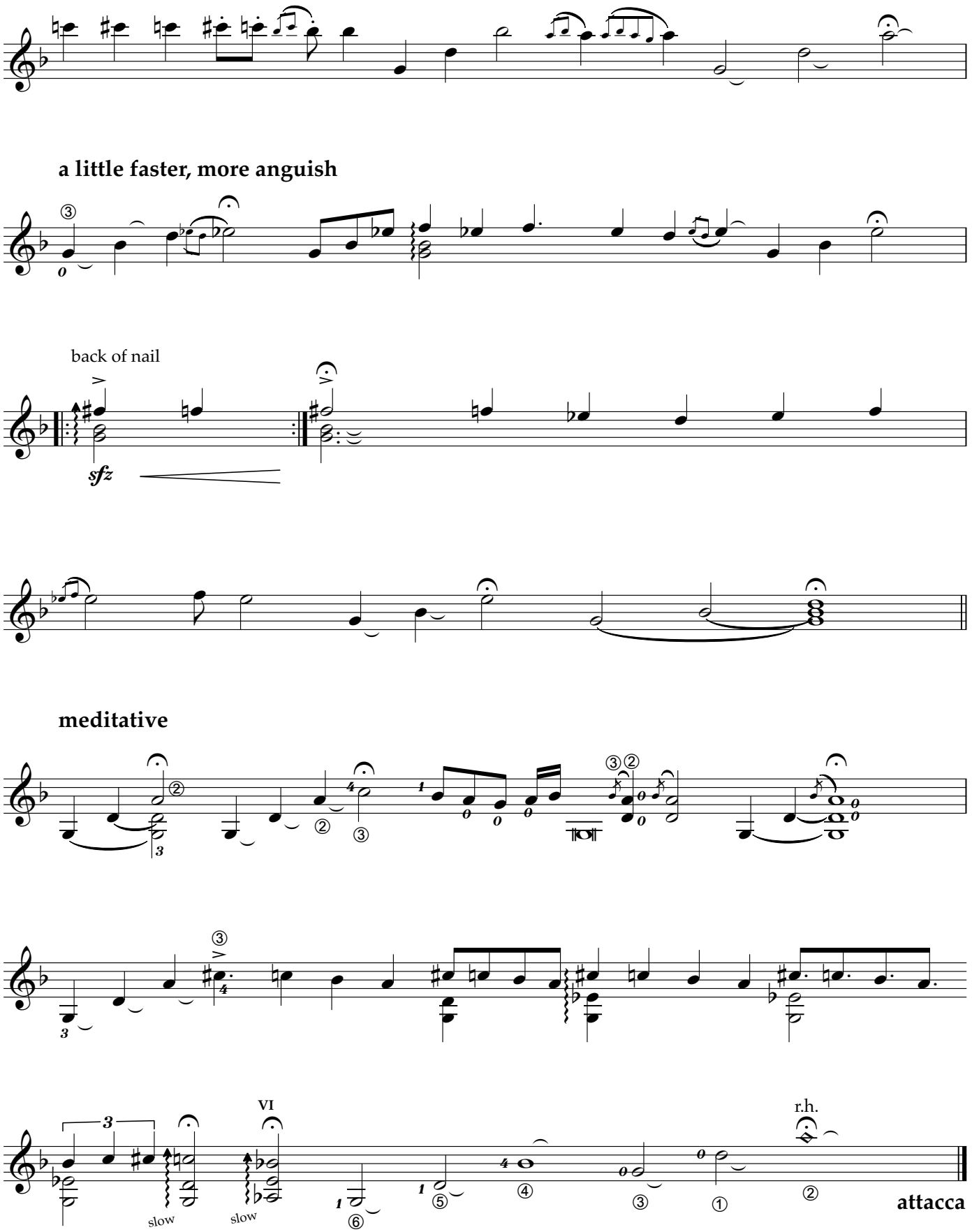
I. Plaint

mournful, free

John Schneider

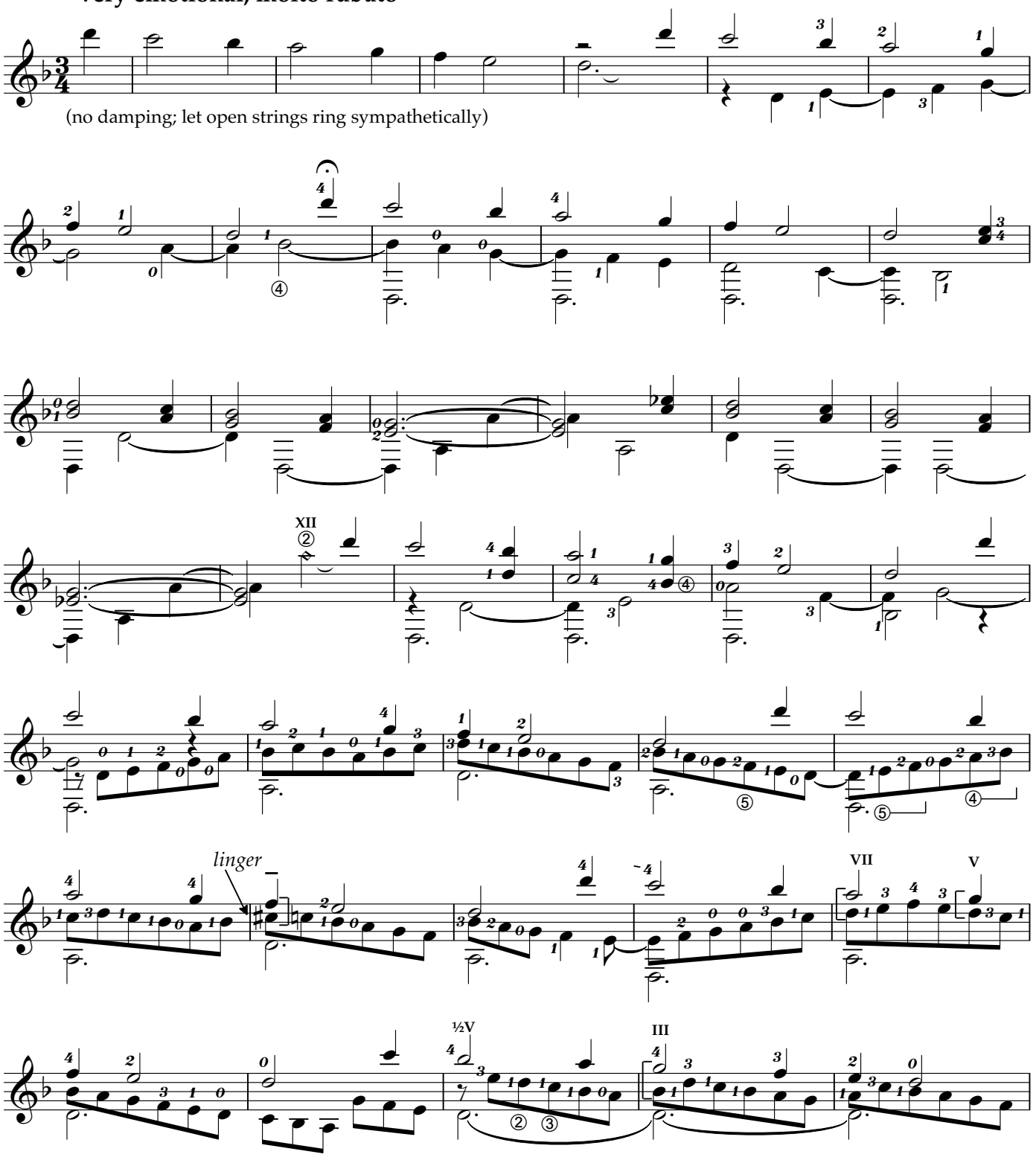


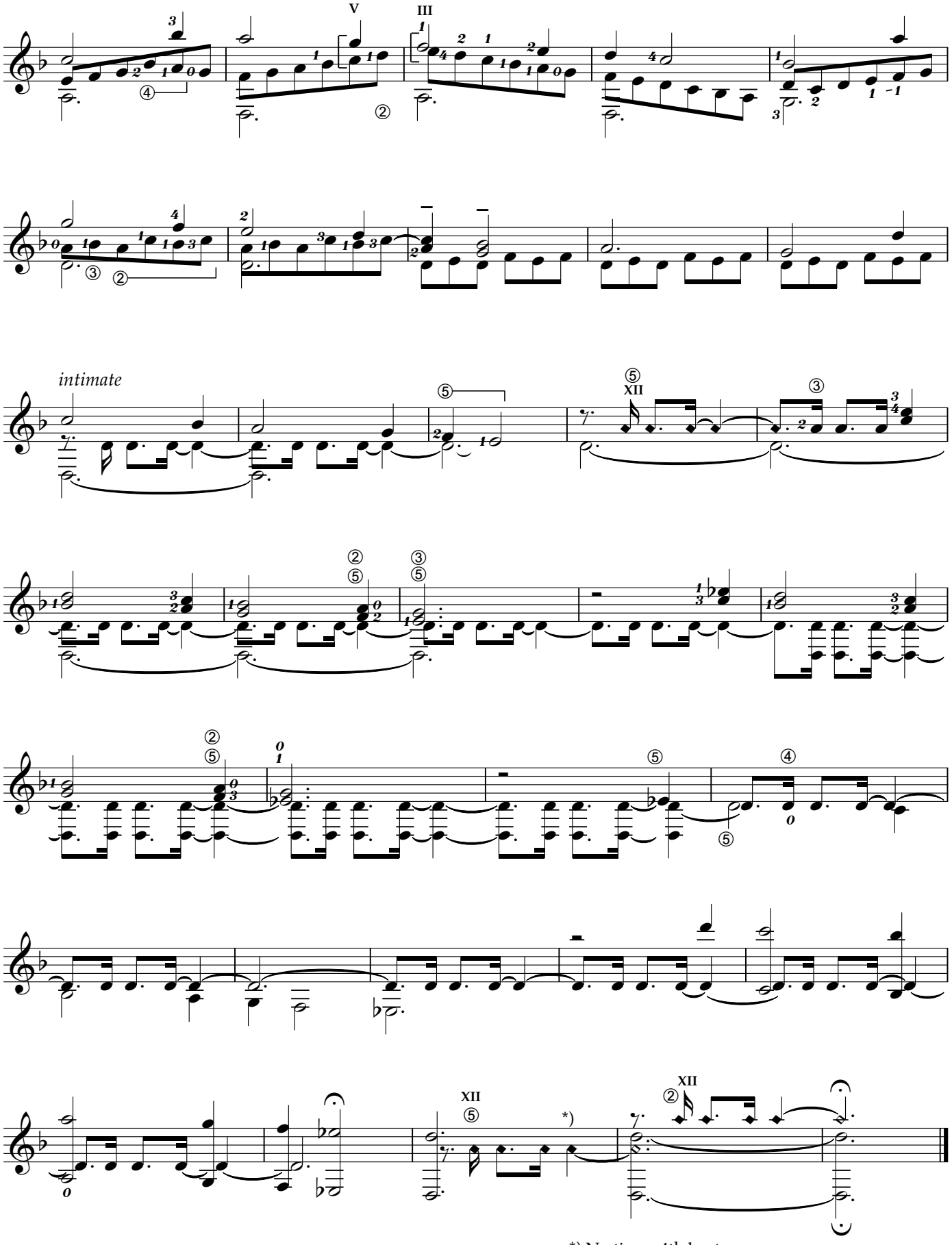
Copyright © 2006 by John Schneider (BMI)


a little faster, more anguish
back of nail
sfz
meditative
slow
slow
VI
r.h.
attacca

II. Passacaglia

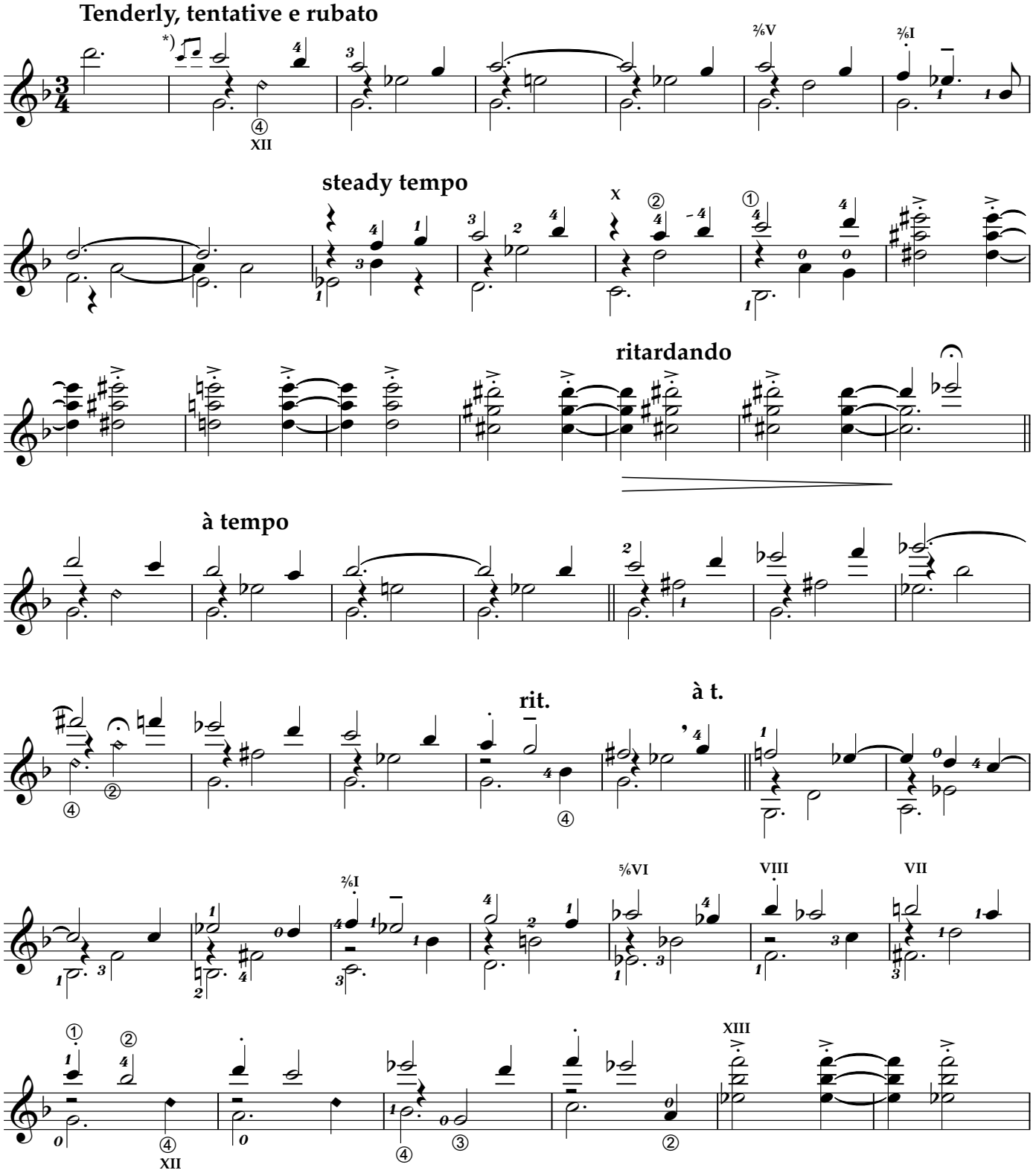
very emotional, molto rubato



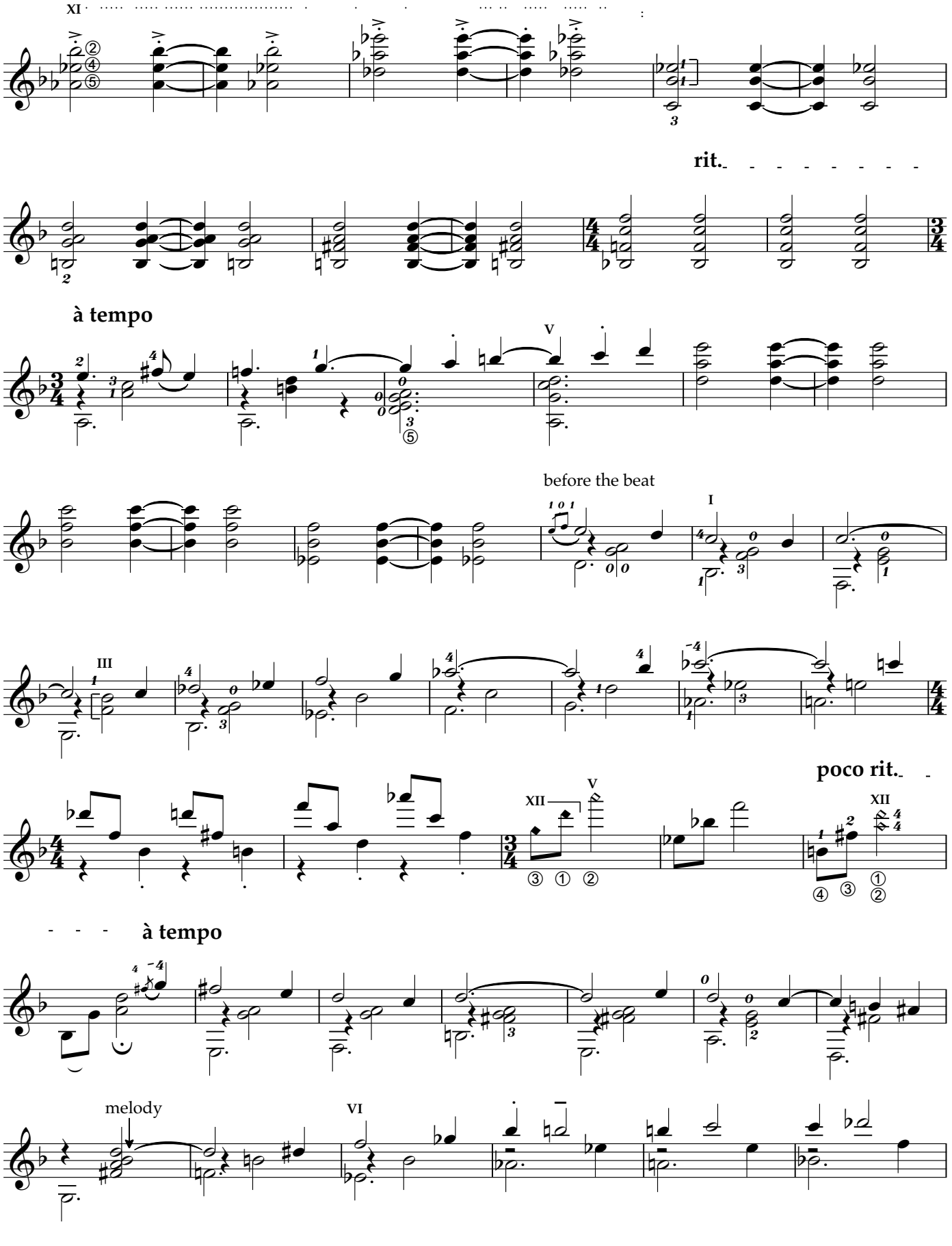


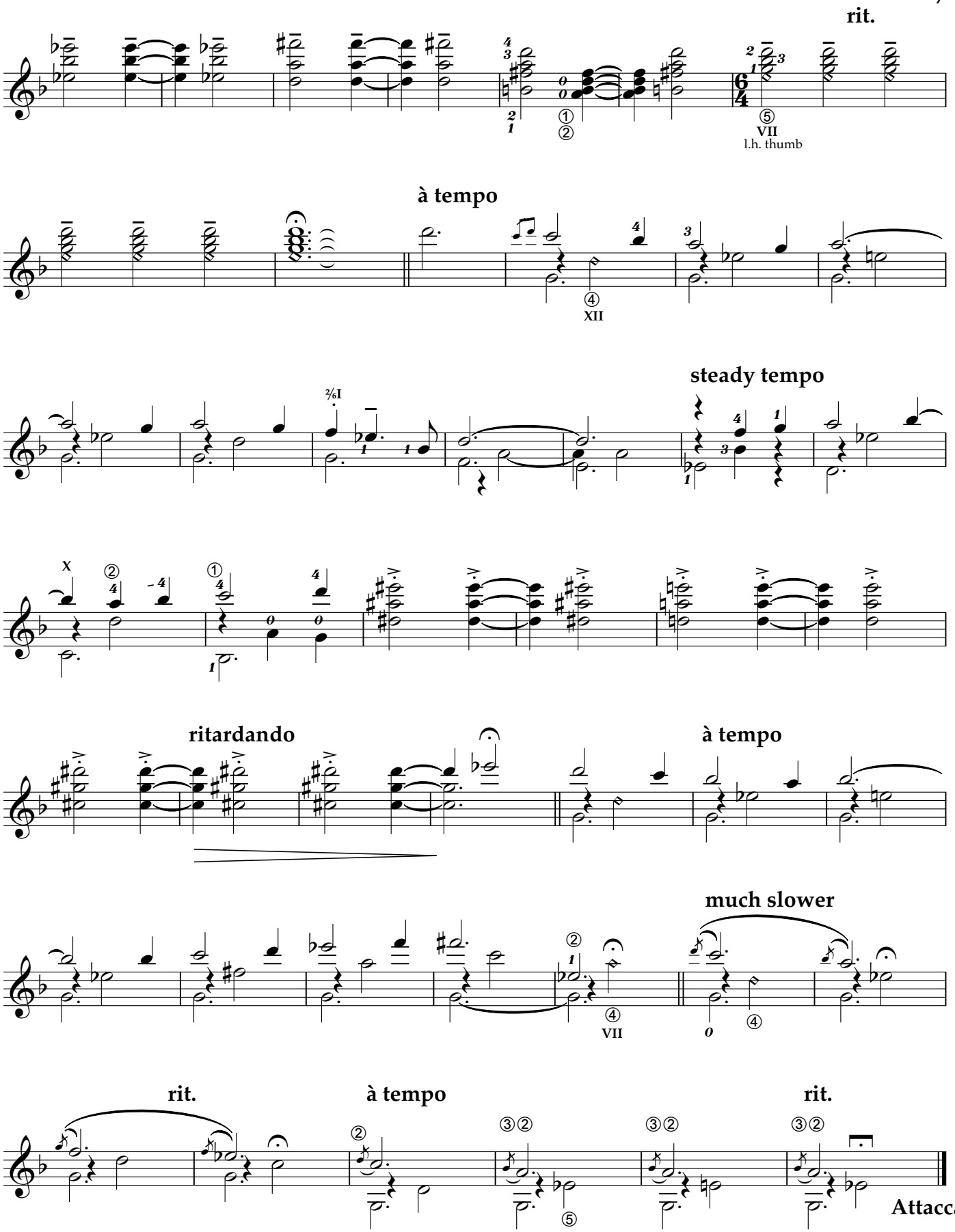
*) No tie on 4th beat

III. Valse triste



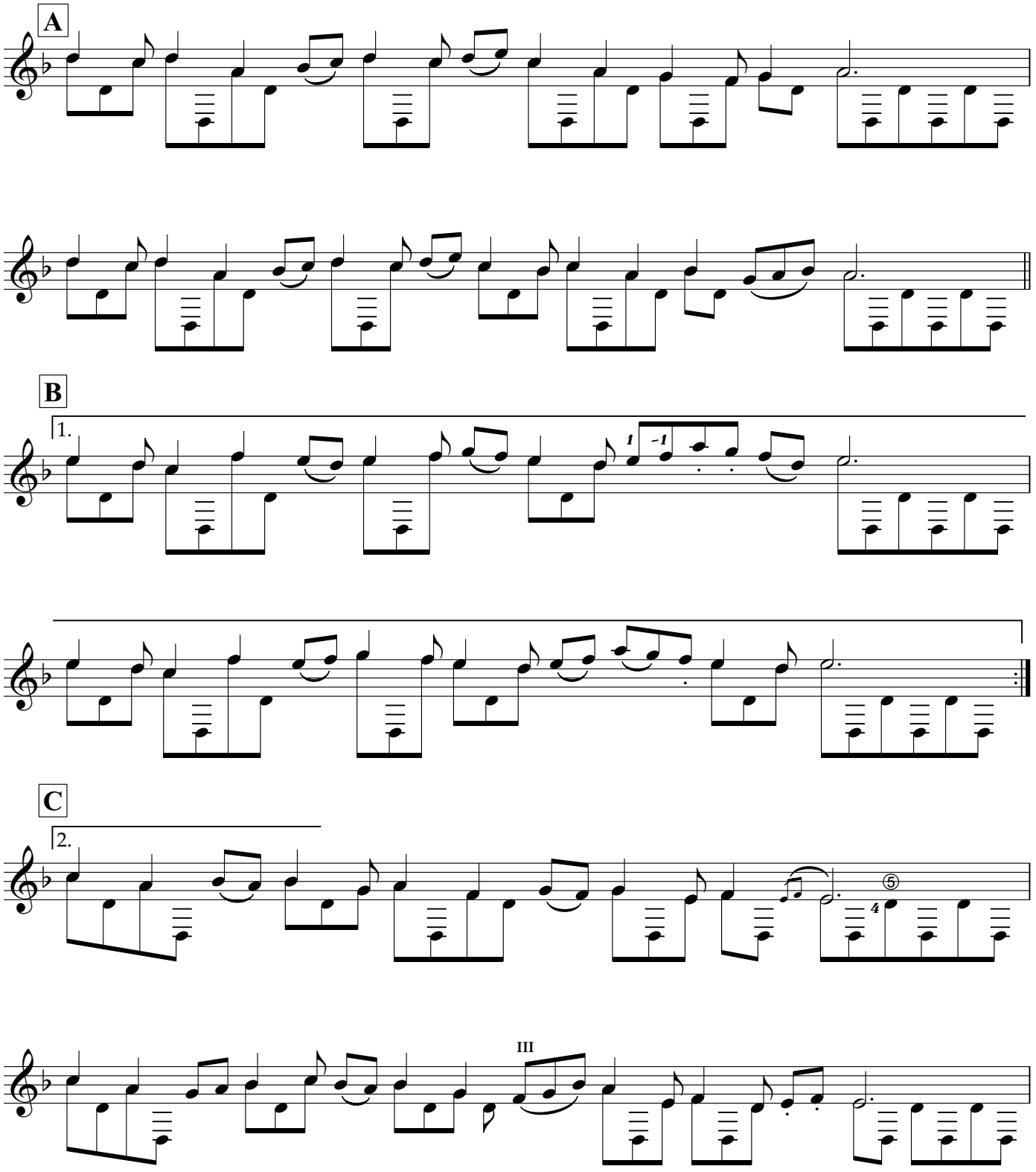
*) Before the beat


XI
rit.
à tempo
V
before the beat
I
III
poco rit.
XII
V
XII
à tempo
melody
VI

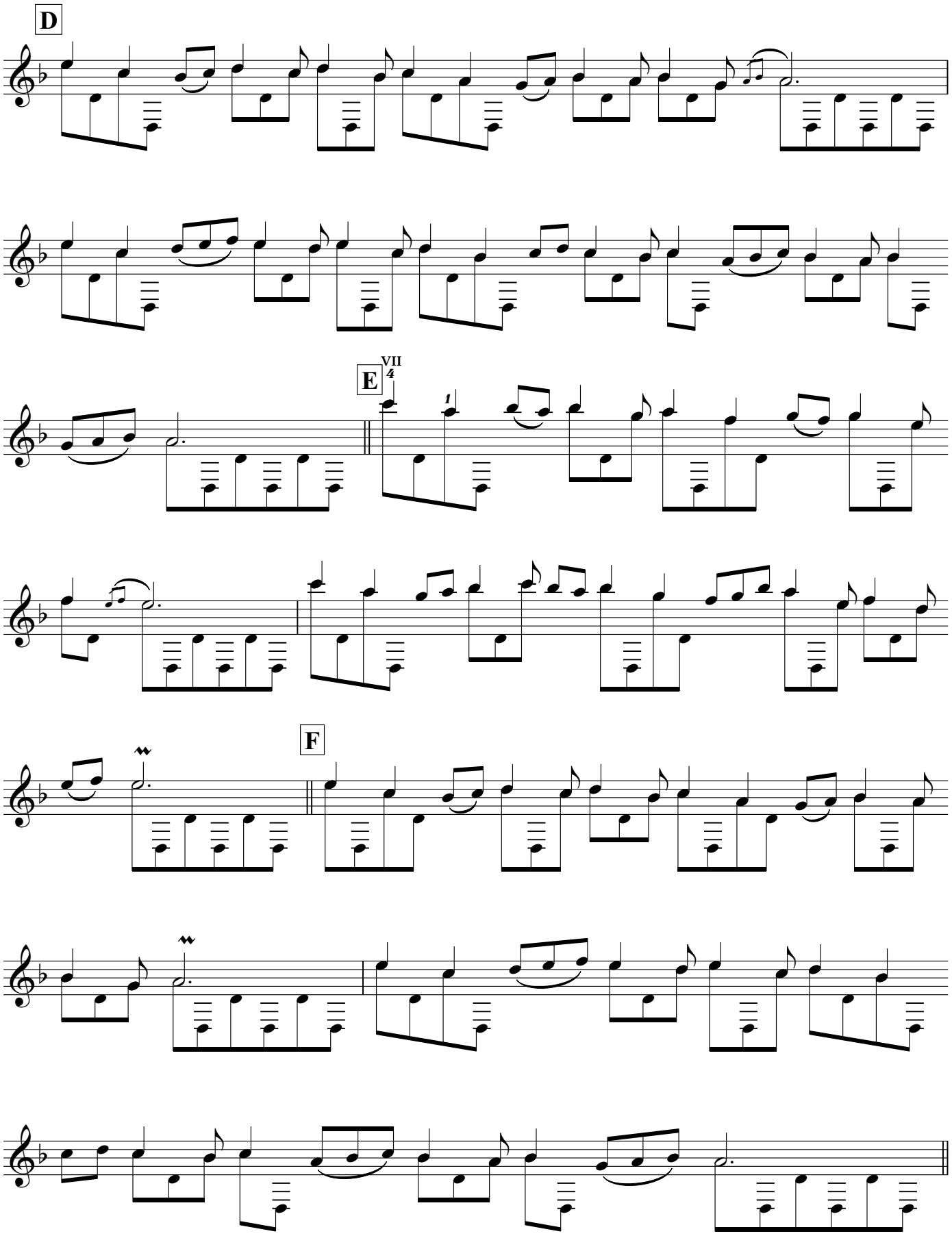

rit.
VII
l.h. thumb
à tempo
XII
steady tempo
X
ritardando
à tempo
much slower
VII
rit.
à tempo
rit.
Attacca

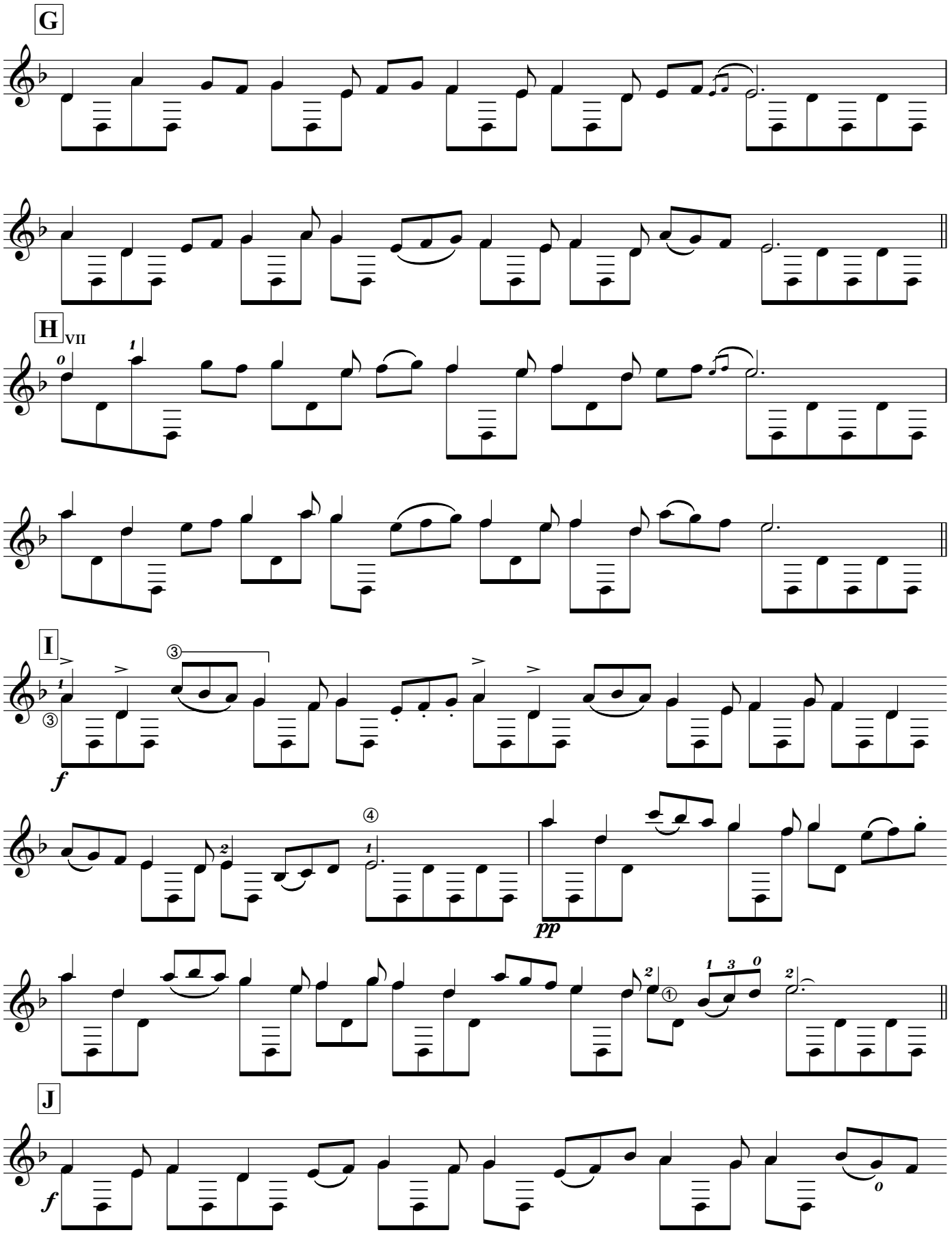
IV. Jahla

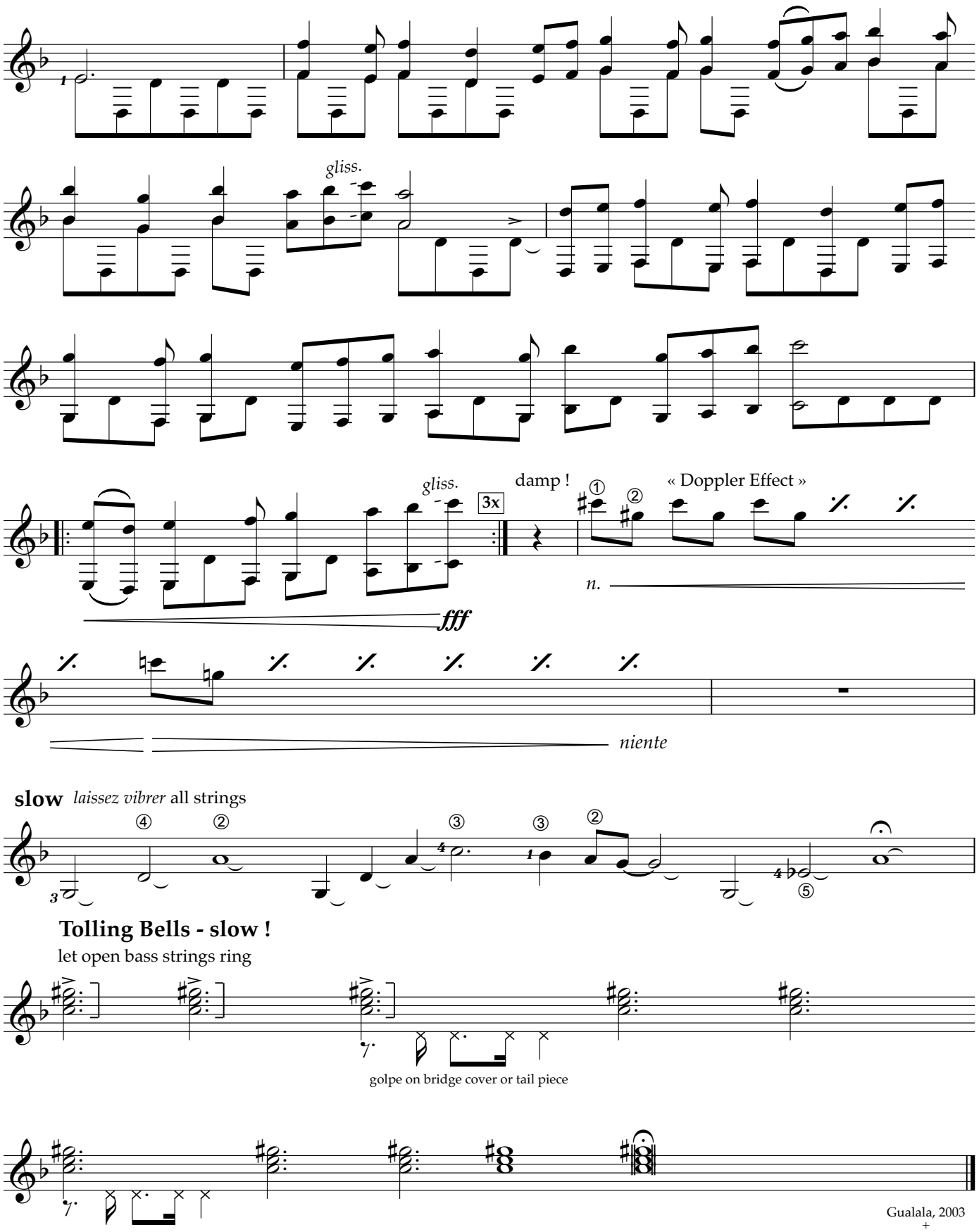
Bright and strong *)



*) Drone notes softer than up stem melody


D
E
VII
4
1
F


G
H
VII
I
J



Gualala, 2003
+
Mendocino, 2006