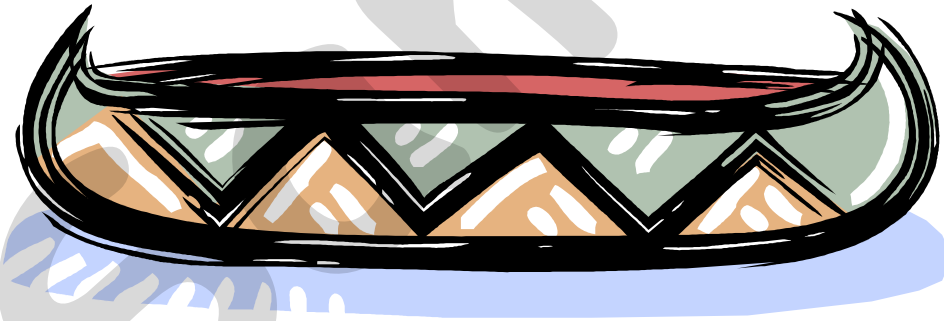
SIMON FRASER And the RAGING RIVER

A Musical
Play for
Elementary Students



Sample

Script and music
By
Gerda Blok-Wilson

Introduction

SIMON FRASER AND THE RAGING RIVER is dedicated to teacher extraordinaire, Ken Sharp, Principal, Anjula Corbin and the grade 4 students at École Spruceland, Prince George, British Columbia, 2007 who were studying Canadian history and early exploration of North America.

In elementary school, students respond eagerly to subject matter which includes creative drama, movement, music and visual art. The act of conveying curriculum this way enhances the student's ability to imagine, transform and authentically experience learning. Spruceland students added many of their ideas about what they learned in Social Studies class and improvised some of their own dialogue to carry the script between songs.

In experimenting with building arts resources which encourage language development and a "hands – on" approach to understanding curriculum, I have attempted to include pattern, repetition, rhythm, rhyme and song to develop verbal skills.

After two different performances of the play, I decided to write it out formally so other classes might be able to use it. My hope is that this play will encourage students and teachers to look at creatively transforming learning in the classroom with the skills and ideas available in their classroom. I think the show is appropriate for grades 3 – 6.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

The cast is made up of Simon Fraser, John Stuart, Jules Quesnel, Michael (a made up crew member) and narrator which can be divided up so all members of the cast have spoken parts. The costumes were caps/handkerchief; gingham/red shirts; dark pants, socks and shoes. I had the narrators wear school T-shirt or black but anything would work. Students will have many ideas. Let them research voyageur clothing.

THE SET

The set can be anything from a big sign that says SIMON FRASER AND THE RAGING to a picture display of things that the students determine (canoe, diary, trapped wildlife,).

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THE PLOT
Simon Fraser's journey on the river named for him is one of the greatest feats in the exploration of Canada. Although Fraser along with lesser known explorers, John Stuart and Jules Quesnel, failed to find a trading route to the Pacific Ocean, their exploration helped to open up North America and the province of British Columbia.

From the small trading post of Fort George, on the morning of May 22nd, 1808, Simon Fraser and his crew set out in four birch-bark canoes. Thirty minutes long, the "The Raging River" is a representation of his seventy – one day journey and raises issues including the affects of early exploration and the technologies used (transportation).

THE STAGING
Most of the action and speaking should occur downstage center. For visual effect, I recommend using different formations for each scene. Transitions can be used with the songs or tagged on by singing a cappella.

1. Imagine a Dream
After the whole cast finishes the song, they find their first formation on the stage. The narrator(s) introduce Fraser, Stuart and Quesnel.

2. Paddle Hard and Sing
The cast (including narrators) form into 4 canoes with the bows man in front so you can have as many as 6 – 8 in a canoe. Ask students to paddle to the beat. I had the students switch bows man each verse/chorus.

3. Riversong
Following the song create the sound of river rapids by having the students begin drumming against 1) stage stairs, 2) front stage, and 3) back stage wall to create the effect of river rapids. This can be done in staggered 3 – 4 groups so the sound builds. Finally everyone is front stage loudly stamping and patting knees. Ask students to decrescendo to very soft and then go right into scene 4.

4. Riversong chorus
While Fraser and Jules Quesnel rescue Michael, the cast sings the chorus and moves into the canoe formation again. Fraser, Quesnel and Michael join the canoes. The chorus can be repeated for the amount of transition time.

Soft steady drumming begins for Scene 5 and gets stronger when Fraser's crew is being chased. The drumming eventually fades.

5. Fur Traders Explorin' song
Ask students to develop movement.

6. Imagine a Dream (Reprise)

Sample

SCENE 1

Narrator: In 1808, as history tells us, there was an explorer, Simon Fraser, who had three jobs.

Narrator: As a partner in the Northwest Trading Company, the first was to build forts west of the Rocky Mountains.

Narrator: His second was to create a friendship with the local native people and establish trading relations with them.

Narrator: AND his third mission was to discover a way to get from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, to expand the Northwest Fur trading Company.

Narrator: Now, Simon Fraser seemed to be your regular adventurous explorer…

Narrator: …very curious…

Narrator: …somewhat brave, courageous and rugged…

Narrator: …moderately organized…

Narrator: …extremely literate…

Narrator: …**AND**, ***definitely,*** a leader.

Narrator: He really seemed to have all the qualities that any explorer before him had.

Narrator: Although, at the age of 25, he was the North West Company's **youngest** partner.

Narrator: He was smart, intelligent **and** responsible…

Narrator: And he was always in search of ways to establish trading posts and forts to reduce the cost of his exploration and improve the North West Company's wealth.

Narrator: So, his boss, William McGillivray, chose Simon Fraser to find a route to the Pacific Ocean.

Narrator: He was told to follow a river that explorer and fur trader Alexander Mackenzie had tried 12 years earlier.

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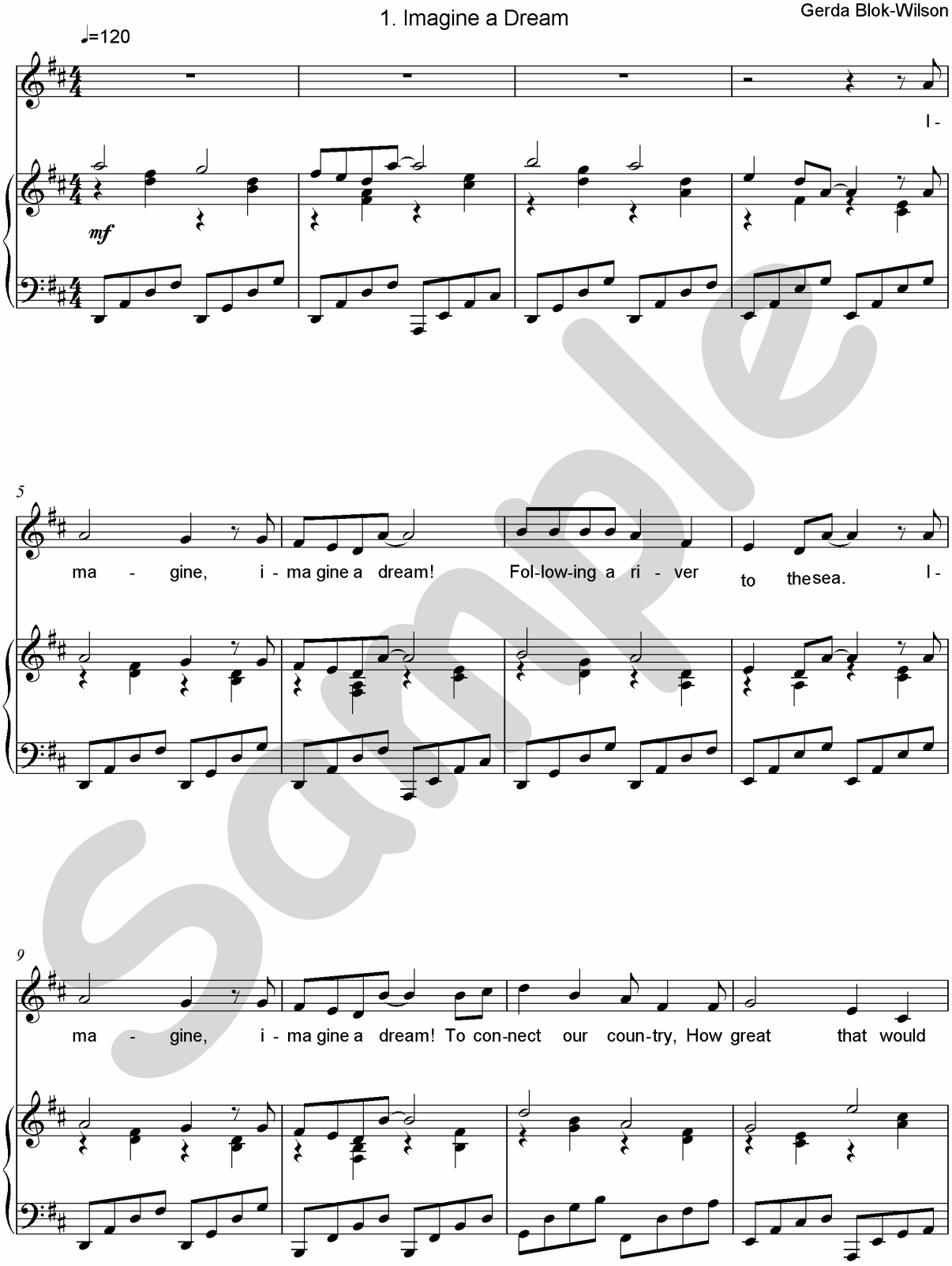
Song # 1 Imagine a Dream



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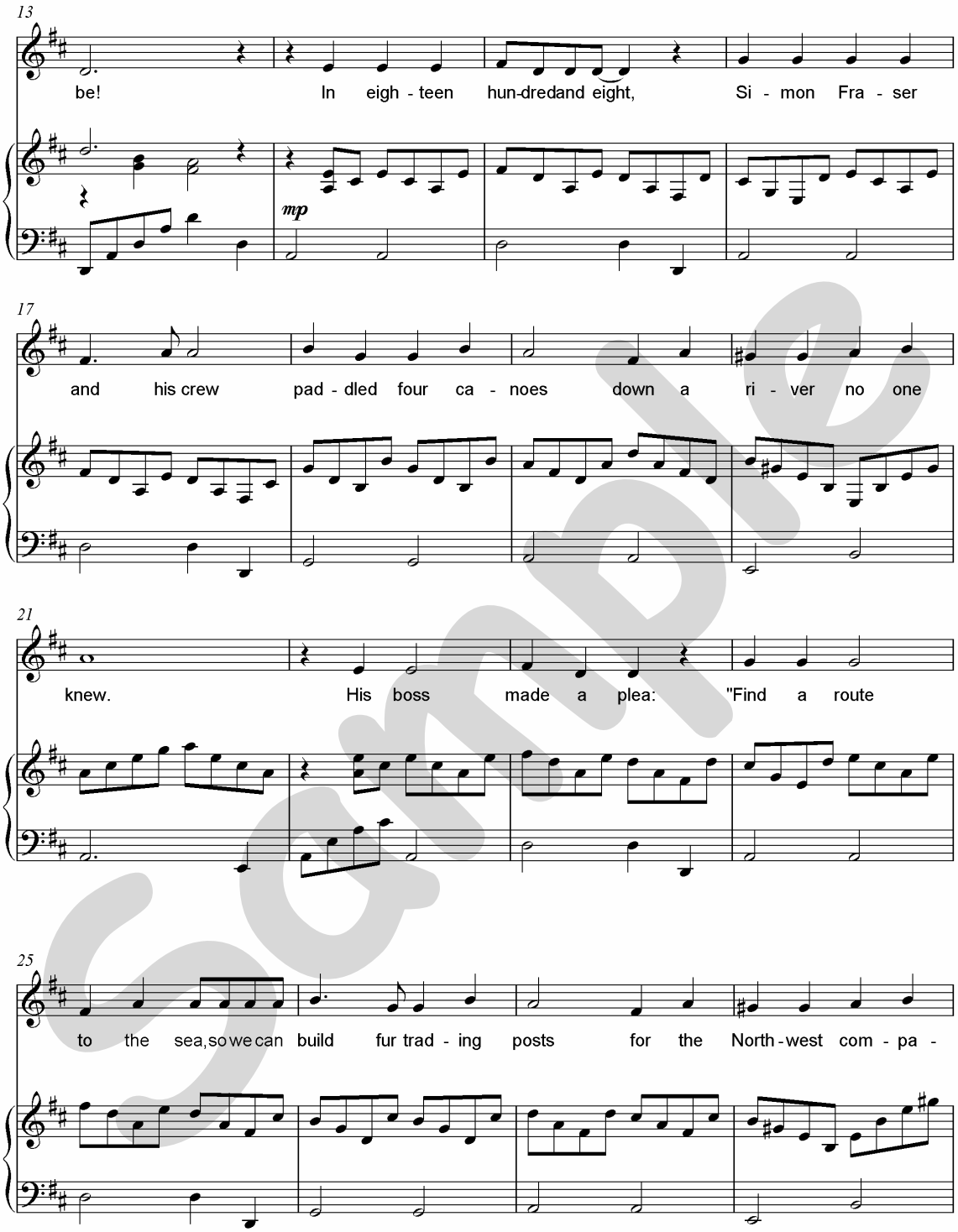
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knew. His boss made a plea: "Find a route
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to the sea,so we can build fur trad - ing posts for the North - west com - pa -

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2. Paddle hard and sing

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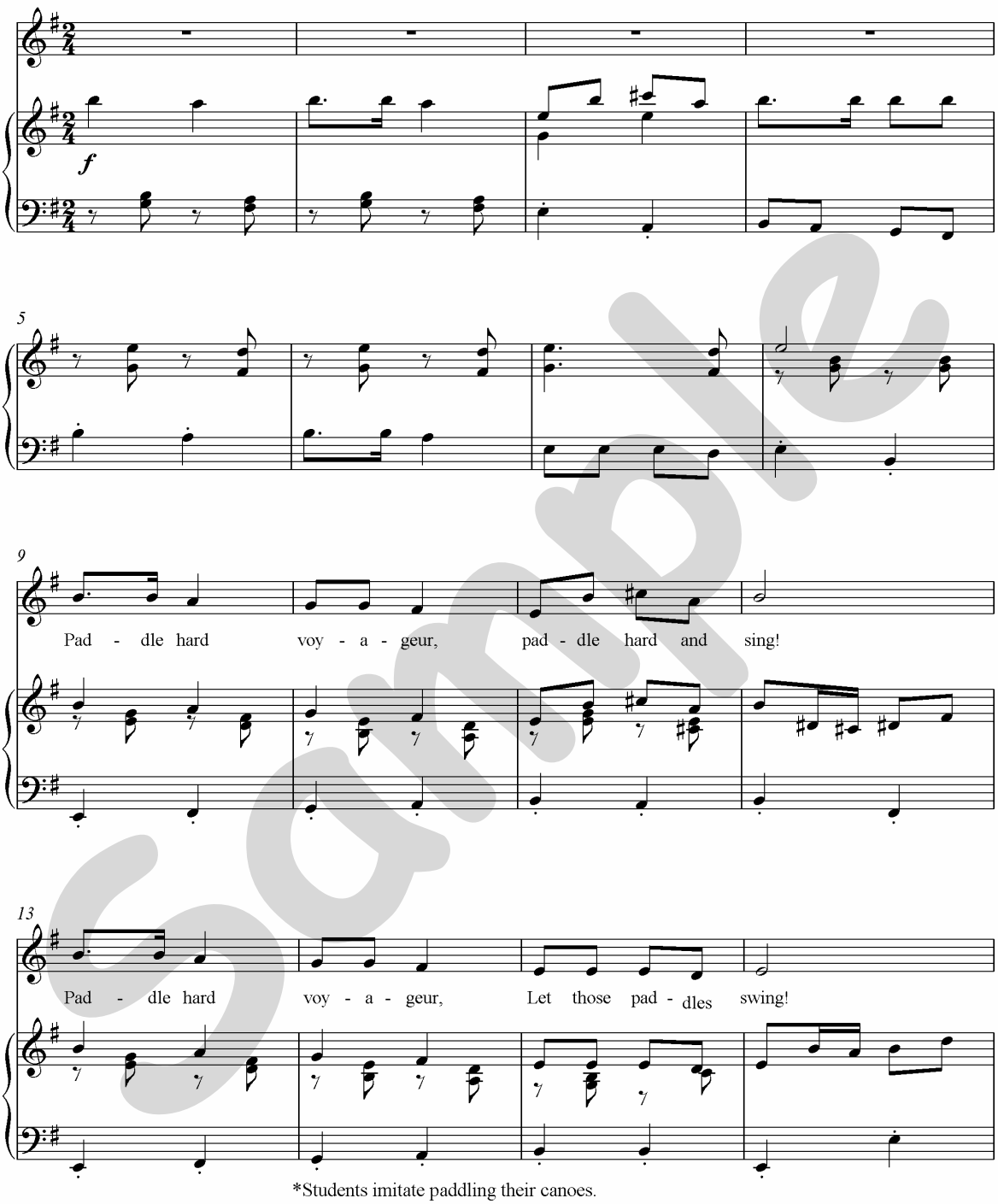

*Students imitate paddling their canoes.

Sample

3. Riversong

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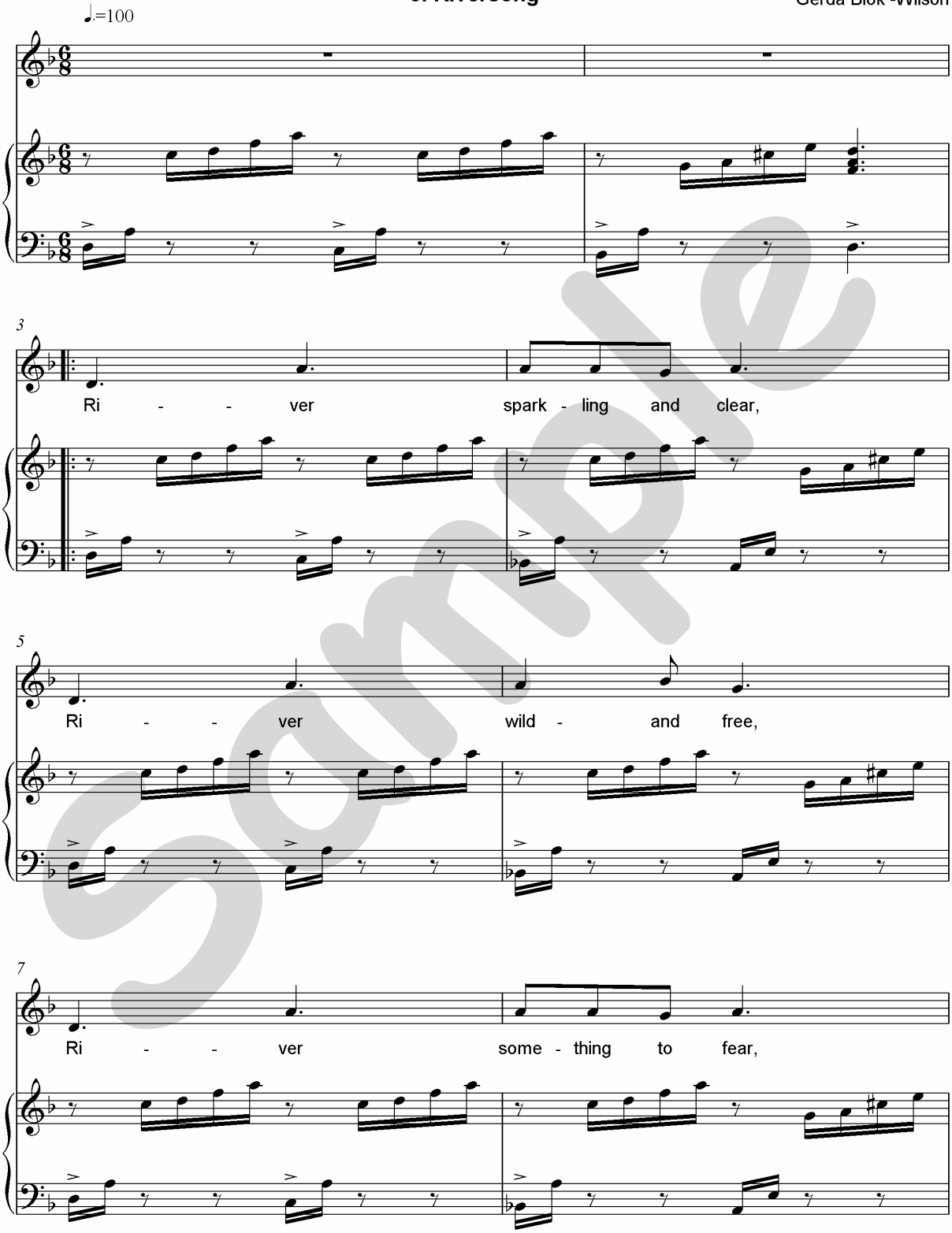

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