SONGS OF ANCIENT AMERICA

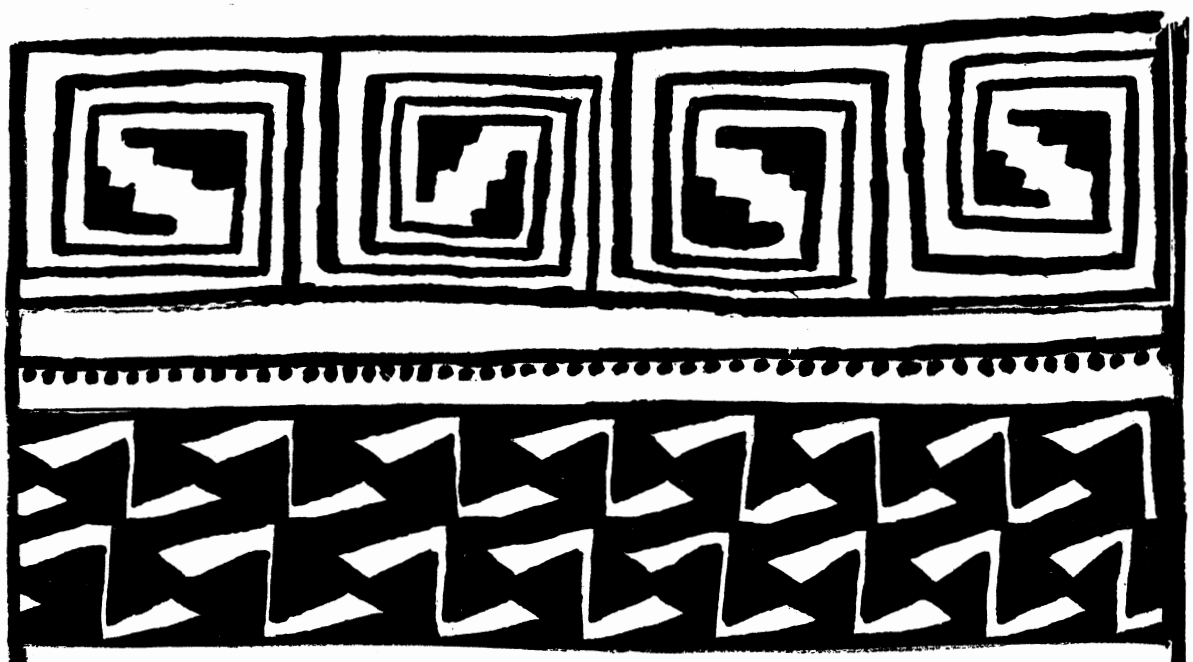
THREE PUEBLO INDIAN CORN-GRINDING SONGS FROM LAGUNA, NEW MEXICO

RECORDED,
WITH PIANOFORTE ACCOMPANIMENT
AND AN EXPLANATORY
INTRODUCTION,
BY

NATALIE CURTIS

1.25

NEW YORK : G. SCHIRMER



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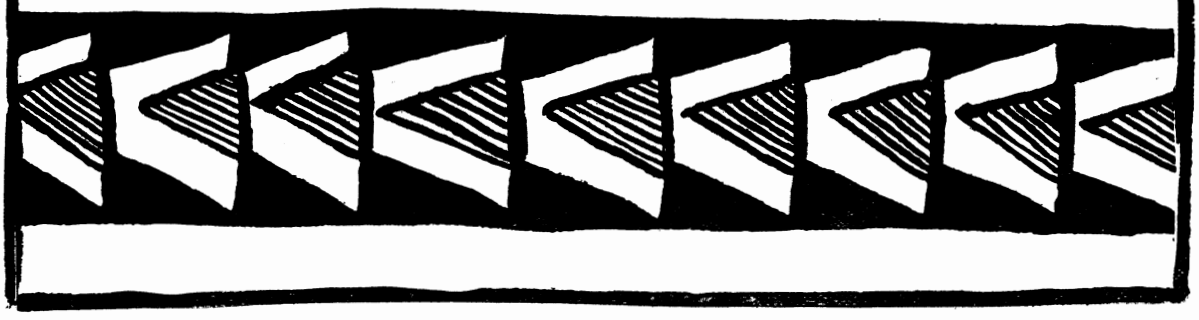

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THE uppermost design on the cover has for its central figure a cloud-form. The dots on the line below it are grains of corn. The design immediately beneath probably represents the young corn-shoots, and at the bottom of the page is the corn-stalk with its joints. The head-piece over the explanatory introduction shows the corn-stalk again with another symbol introduced near the end of the design probably representing lightning. The back of the cover is decorated with another cloud-form.

The decorations employed on the title and elsewhere were drawn by the Laguna Indians after prehistoric pottery designs.

SONGS OF ANCIENT AMERICA

THREE PUEBLO INDIAN CORN-GRINDING SONGS FROM LAGUNA, NEW MEXICO

THE song of the southwestern Indian is the voice of the American desert. It is outlined on the vast silence as the clear-cut mountain-line is traced upon the rainless sky. The three songs here offered are old traditional songs from the Indian town, or pueblo, of Laguna, New Mexico.

Laguna is one of the largest and most representative of the New Mexican pueblos. Its people are of the pueblo tribes who were conquered by Coronado in the sixteenth century, and held by the Spaniards until in 1680 all the pueblos rose in rebellion and cast off the Spanish yoke.

Pueblo culture is of a high order on the primitive plane. When first discovered by the Spaniards these Indians were living, as to-day, in towns or villages of stone and adobe, and were then, as now, a peaceful and industrious folk. Their main sustenance has always been the native corn prepared in various ways and ground by the women in stone mealing-bins, or metates. The corn is placed on a flat stone set into the floor of the house at an angle, and is ground by rubbing a cube-like stone up and down over the grains. The woman kneels to her work and sways back and forth with rhythmic swing, and as she grinds she sings, for the Indian accompanies nearly every act of life with song.

The natives of Laguna are small, gentle, and refined; natural potters and weavers; natural poets and song-makers, as well. Yet, under the influence of the white man, the art of the Indian—the making beautiful of common things—fast fades away, and the natural utterance of a healthy people, the unconscious burst of song, is almost stilled.

The corn-grinding songs here given were taught to me by the pueblo women, and written down at Laguna. Of course, the melodies are not always sung exactly alike by different singers, since there is no notation, and the songs, as an Indian so well expressed it, are held, not on paper, as with us, but "all in the head." I give the versions which, by careful comparison, seem most authentic. They are those sung for me by an aged woman, the wife of the "medicine-man." The quavering voice had the ring of old-time authority. How often had she sung thus at her grinding in all these many years!

The words are mostly archaic, not the common speech of to-day. The translations given by the Indians were accompanied by many explanations. For Indian poetry, like all branches of Indian art, is symbolic. Just as a few lines on jar or basket often stand for a thought instead of representing an object, so one word in a poem may be the symbol of a complete idea. Accordingly, a song often may be interpreted differently by different Indians. Thus in the first song the colors* mentioned were said by one Indian to allude to the different colored corn over which the butterflies should fly; for maize, in this region, is of many hues, and Laguna songs frequently refer to the corn by color alone. But an old and authoritative Indian asserted positively that this song had nothing to do with corn; that it was all about butterflies, and that the butterflies were to fly to flower-blossoms, not to corn-fields. "At the end of the song," said she, "we say to the butterflies, 'Go, butterfly, now go, for that is all!'"

The second song is a series of yodeling refrains without words. This, too, is very old, and fragments of just such refrains can be heard echoing through many a pueblo village. Sometimes two or three women grind corn together; and the arrangement of this song seeks to give the answering voice of a second grinder.

The last song is of singular beauty, and has found its way far beyond Laguna to distant Zuni, a pueblo whose inhabitants speak a different tongue. It tells of the sweet, pure rainwater, "wonder-water," caught in those reservoirs of nature, hollows worn in the rocks by the erosion of wind and sand. Such water is highly prized by the Indians, for rain is the great need of the agricultural pueblo people whose villages dot the cliffs and levels of the desert. Even though the pueblos of New Mexico are near the Rio Grande and are further aided by an ancient native system of irrigation, in song and dance is still expressed the cry for rain.

In order fully to translate the meaning of the last song, English words had to be added in the phrase, "Look where southwest clouds are bringing rain." The Indian words are simply, "Yonder southwest, yonder southeast." But the Indians thus explain the passage: "In the song we say, 'Look to the southwest, look to the southeast! The clouds are coming toward the springs; the clouds will bring the water.' It is from the southwest and the southeast that we usually get our rains."

In making accompaniments to these songs, I have in nowise changed the melodies, nor have I sought to harmonize them in the usual sense, nor to make of them musical compositions. I have merely tried to reproduce the actual sound of the grinding, and to add enough harmony to give, as it were, a background to the picture. The millstone forms, indeed, a crude native accompaniment to every grinding-song, and without a suggestion of it the true character of the song would be lost. In the choice of harmony, I have been governed alone by the character of Indian music, disregarding all thought of

* To fit the translation to the music, the word "wing" has been added. Otherwise, the translation is literal.

prescribed harmonic progressions. My one desire has been to let the Indian songs be heard as the Indians themselves sing them. Let the hearer imagine that he stands in some odd corner of the Indian village, beneath the dazzling sky, with the silence of the desert about him. Suddenly, from the upper story of some terraced house, comes the sound of a clear voice yodeling in graceful melody. It is accompanied by the high, scraping noise of the grinding-stone with its ceaseless monotony of rhythm. Out on the thin, clear atmosphere float the strange sounds—out into the desert stillness.

And the hearer loses all memory of the art of the European. These songs are unlike the music of other nations. They are born of the tinted wastes of sand, the turquoise heavens, the long horizon-lines of the southwest. In them we hear the voice of ancient America, of a race whose song rose on this continent for untold centuries before the coming of the white man. These are folk-songs of our own land, and, like all folk-music, they are the expression of the soul of a people.

NATALIE CURTIS

CORN-GRINDING SONG

No. 1.

POLAINA polaina
Hai-ke-o-tzi-o-no-ho
Kohochinishi
Koeshkasi
Hai-ke-o-tzi-o-no-ho
Kukanishi
Kasheshi
Hai-ke-o-tzi-o-no-ho
Ha-na-pu-ra-ni
Polaina polaina
Hai-ke-o-tzi-o-no-ho
Ha-na-pu-ra-ni.

BUTTERFLIES, butterflies,
Now fly away to the blossoms,
Fly, blue-wing,
Fly, yellow-wing,
Now fly away to the blossoms,
Fly, red-wing,
Fly, white-wing,
Now fly away to the blossoms.
Butterflies, away!
Butterflies, butterflies,
Now fly away to the blossoms,
Butterflies, away!

CORN-GRINDING SONG

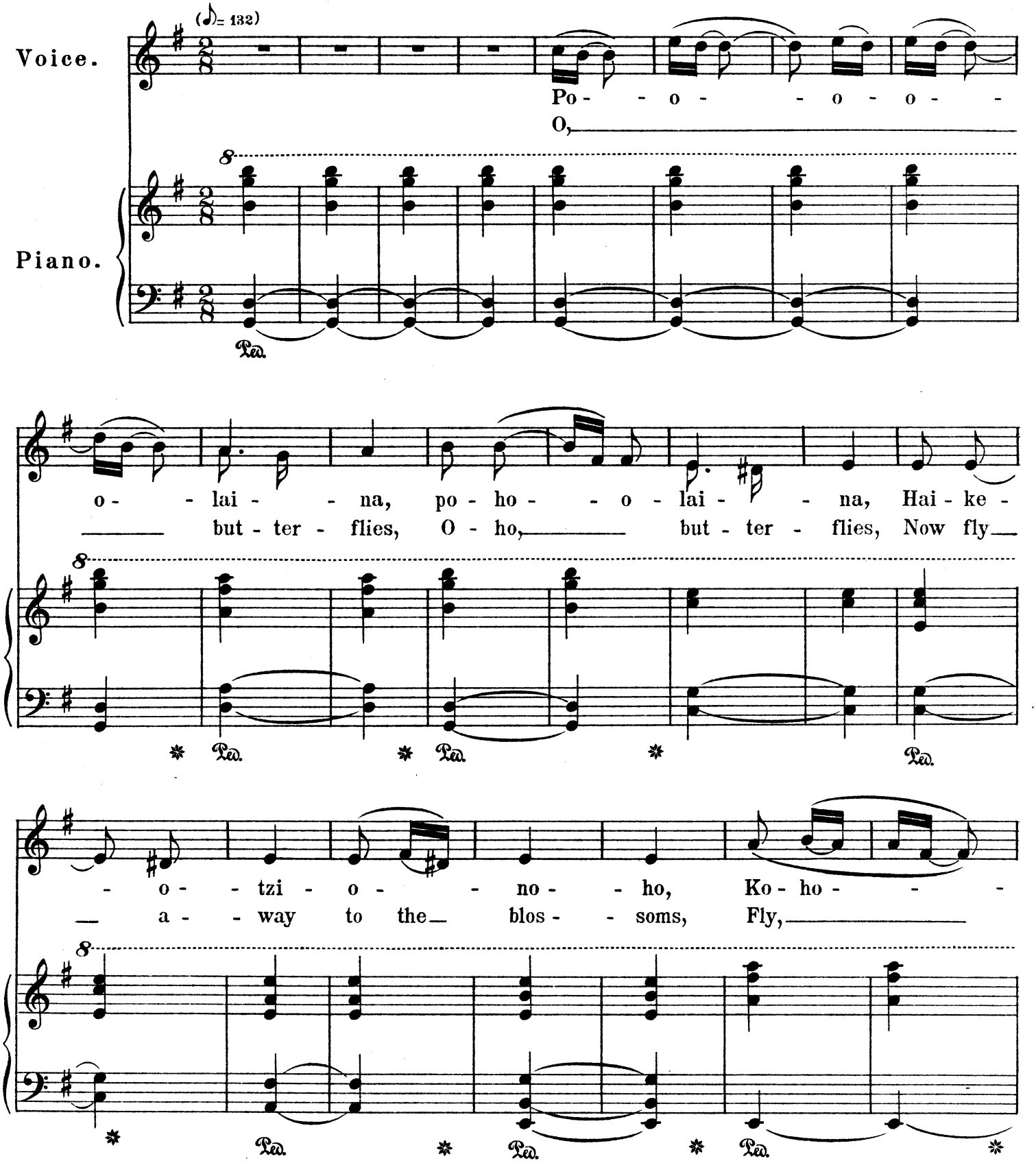
No. 3.

I-O-HO waitilanni
I-o-ho waitilanni
Tzi washo iyani-i
Yuweh puniakoekolika
Yuweh haniakoekolika
Tzi washo iyani-i
I-o-ho waitilanni
I-o-ho waitilanni
Tzi washo iyani-i.

I-O-HO, wonder-water,
I-o-ho, wonder-water,
Life anew to him who drinks!
Look where southwest clouds are bringing rain;
Look where southeast clouds are bringing rain!
Life anew to him who drinks!
I-o-ho, wonder-water,
I-o-ho, wonder-water,
Life anew to him who drinks!

Corn-Grinding Song

No 1.



chi - ni - shi, Ko - - - esh - ka - - si, Hai - ke - - o -
blue - - wing, Fly, yel - low - wing, Now fly a -

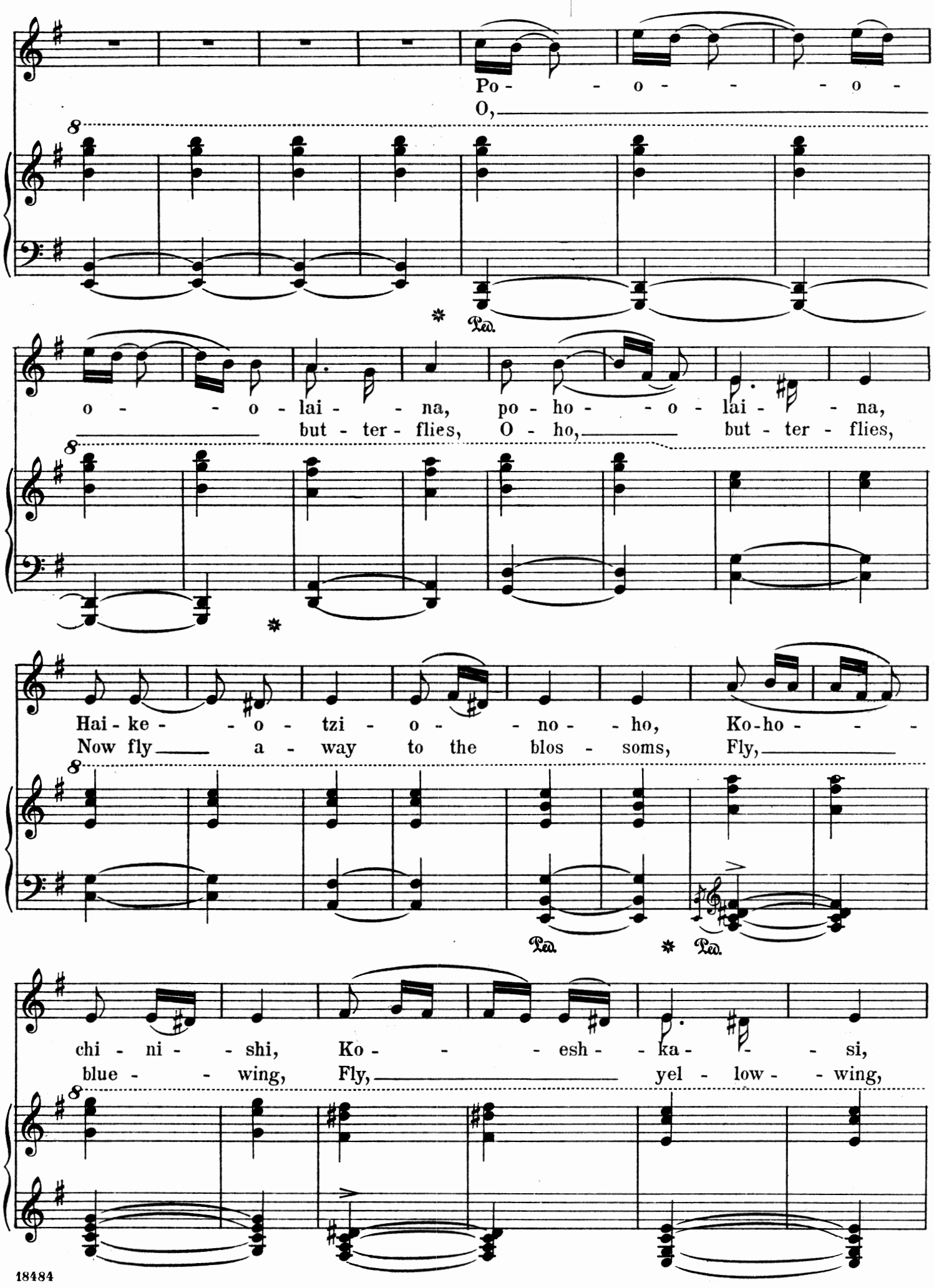
Ped. * Ped. *

tzi - o - - no - - ho, Ku - - - ka - ni - - shi,
way to the blos - soms, Fly, red - - wing,

Ka - - - she - - shi, Hai - ke - - o - tzi - o - -
Fly, white - wing, Now fly a - way to the

no - - ho, Ha - na - pu - ra - ni!
blos - - soms. But - ter - flies, a - way!

Ped. * Ped. * Ped.

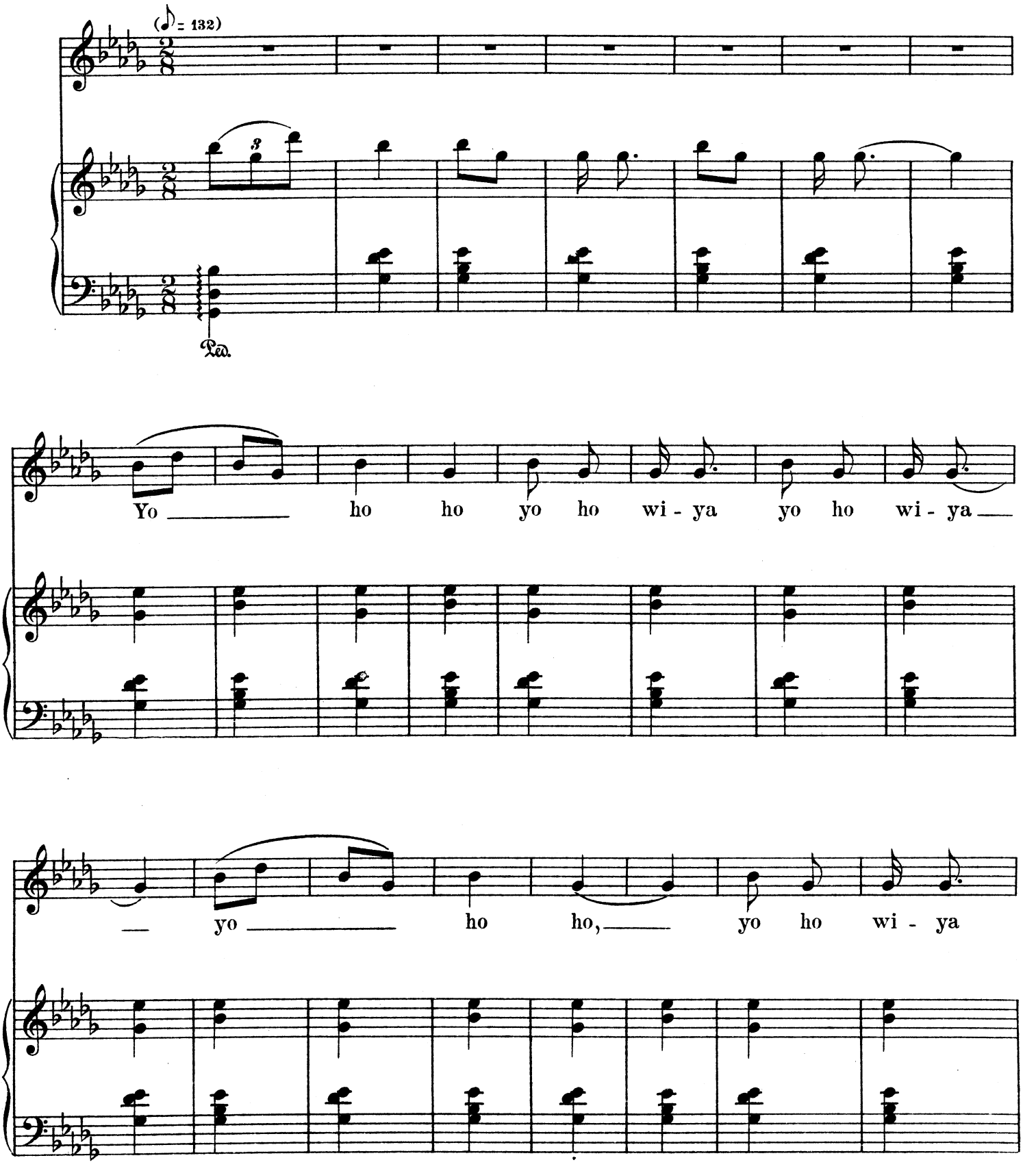

Po - - o - - - o -
O,
o - - o - lai - - na, po - ho - - o - lai - - na,
but - ter - flies, O - ho, but - ter - flies,
Hai - ke - - o - tzi - o - - no - - ho, Ko - ho - - -
Now fly a - way to the blos - soms, Fly,
chi - ni - - shi, Ko - - - esh - - ka - - - si,
blue - - wing, Fly, yel - low - - wing,

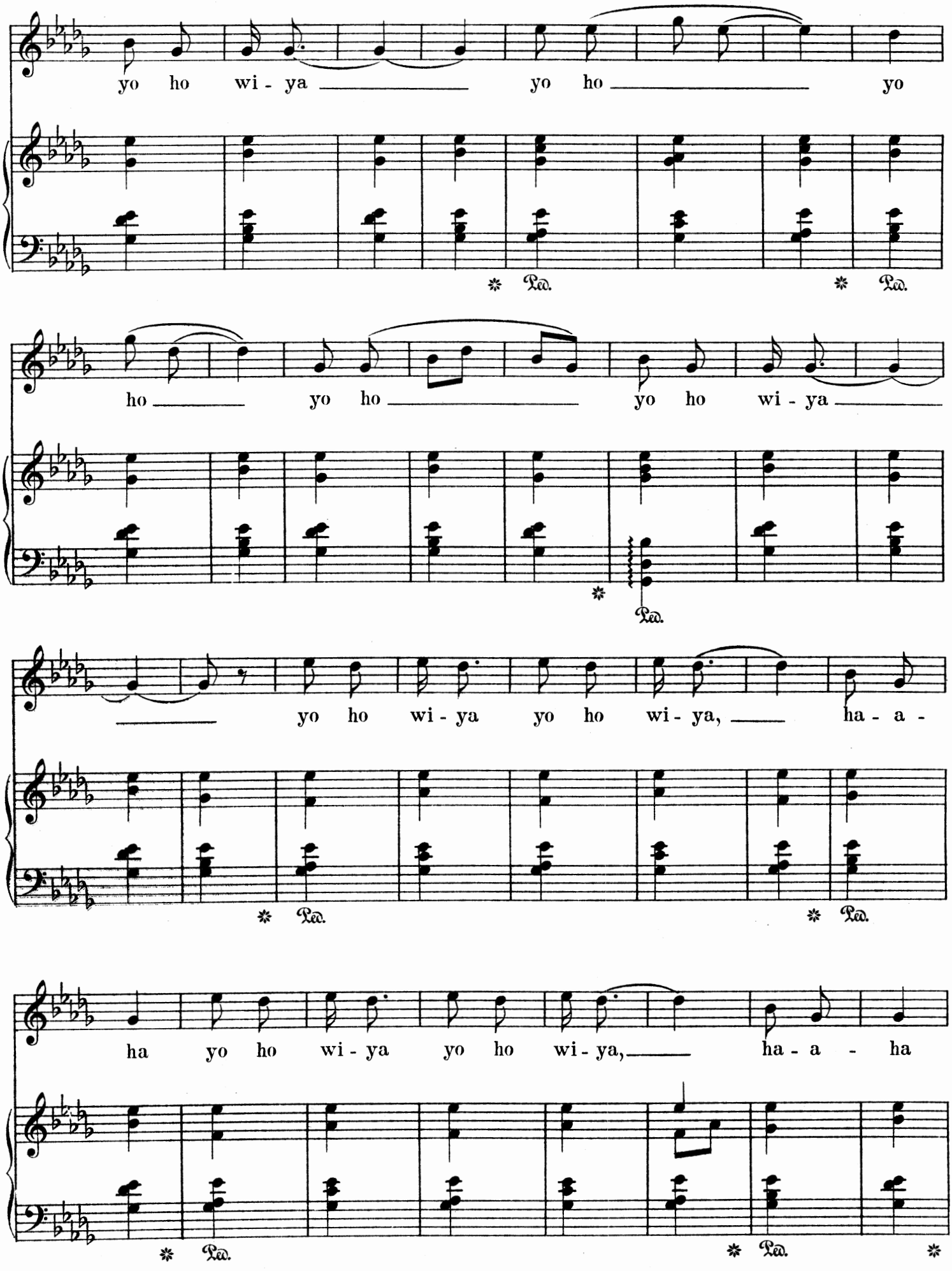
Hai - ke - - o - tzi - o - - no - - ho, Ku - - - - ka - ni - - shi, Ka - - - she - - shi,
Now fly a - way to the blos - - soms, Fly, red - - wing, Fly, white - - wing,

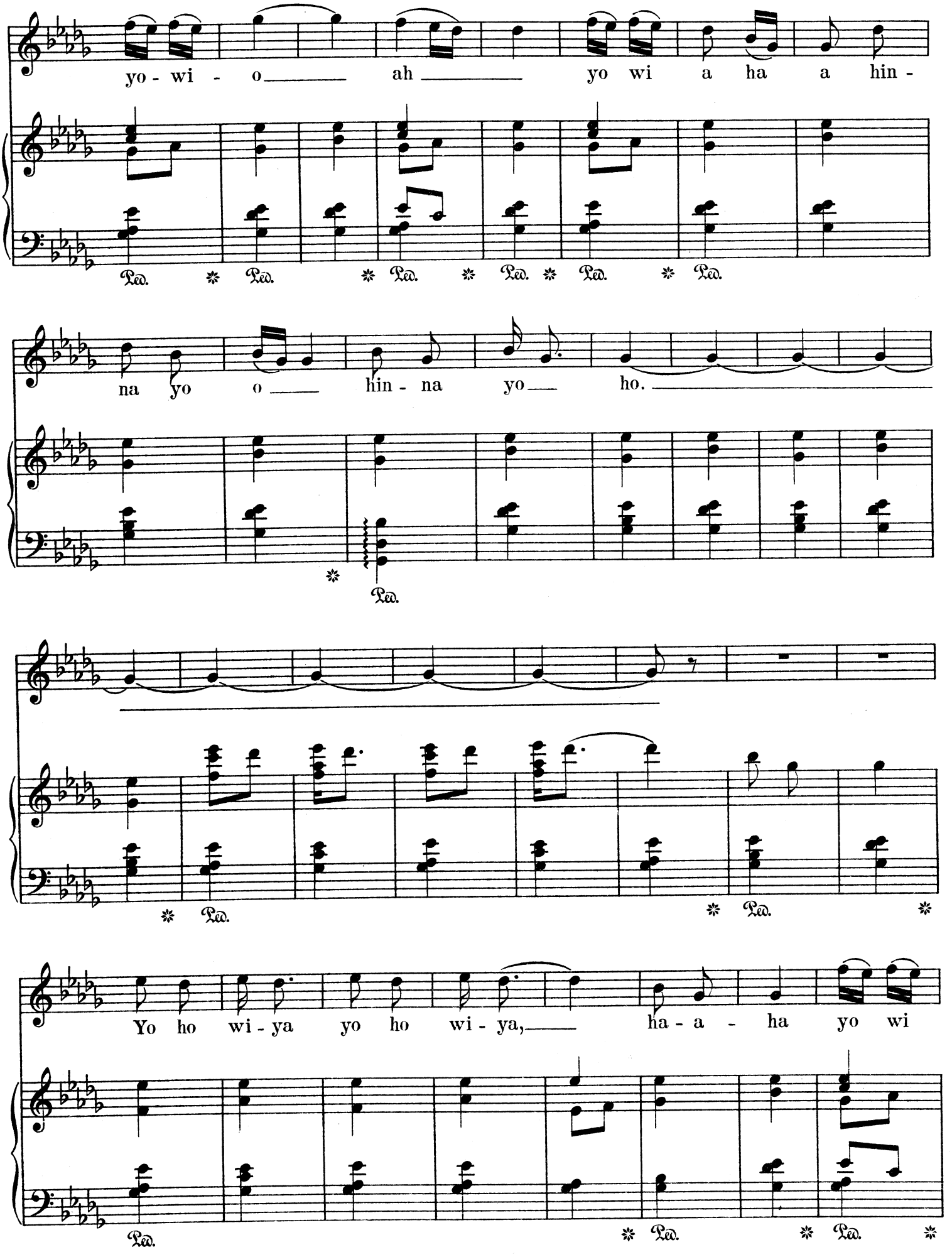
Hai - ke - - o - tzi - o - - no - - ho, Ha - na - pu - ra - ni!
Now fly a - way to the blos - - soms; But - ter - flies, a - way!

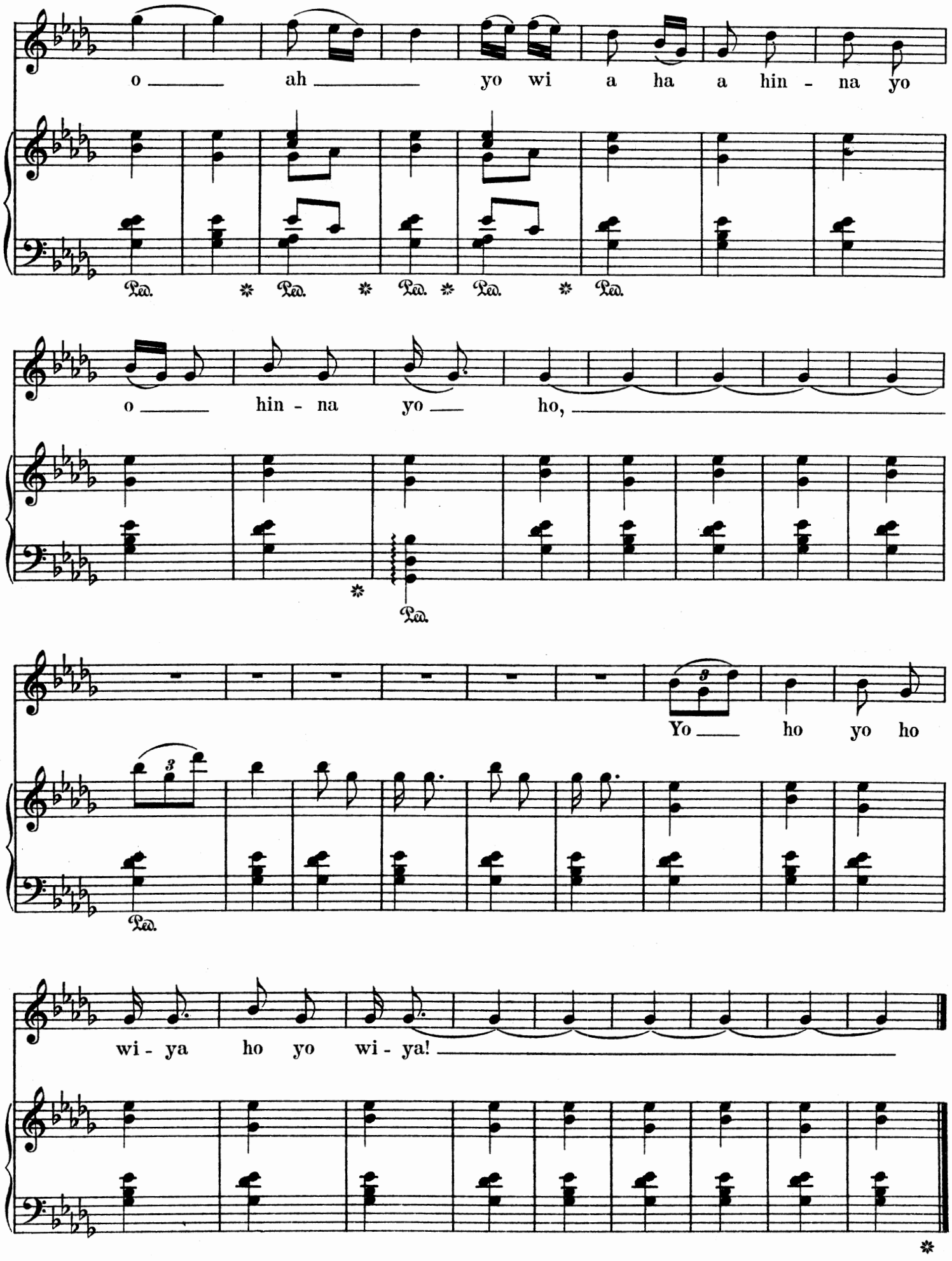
Corn-Grinding Song

No. 2.



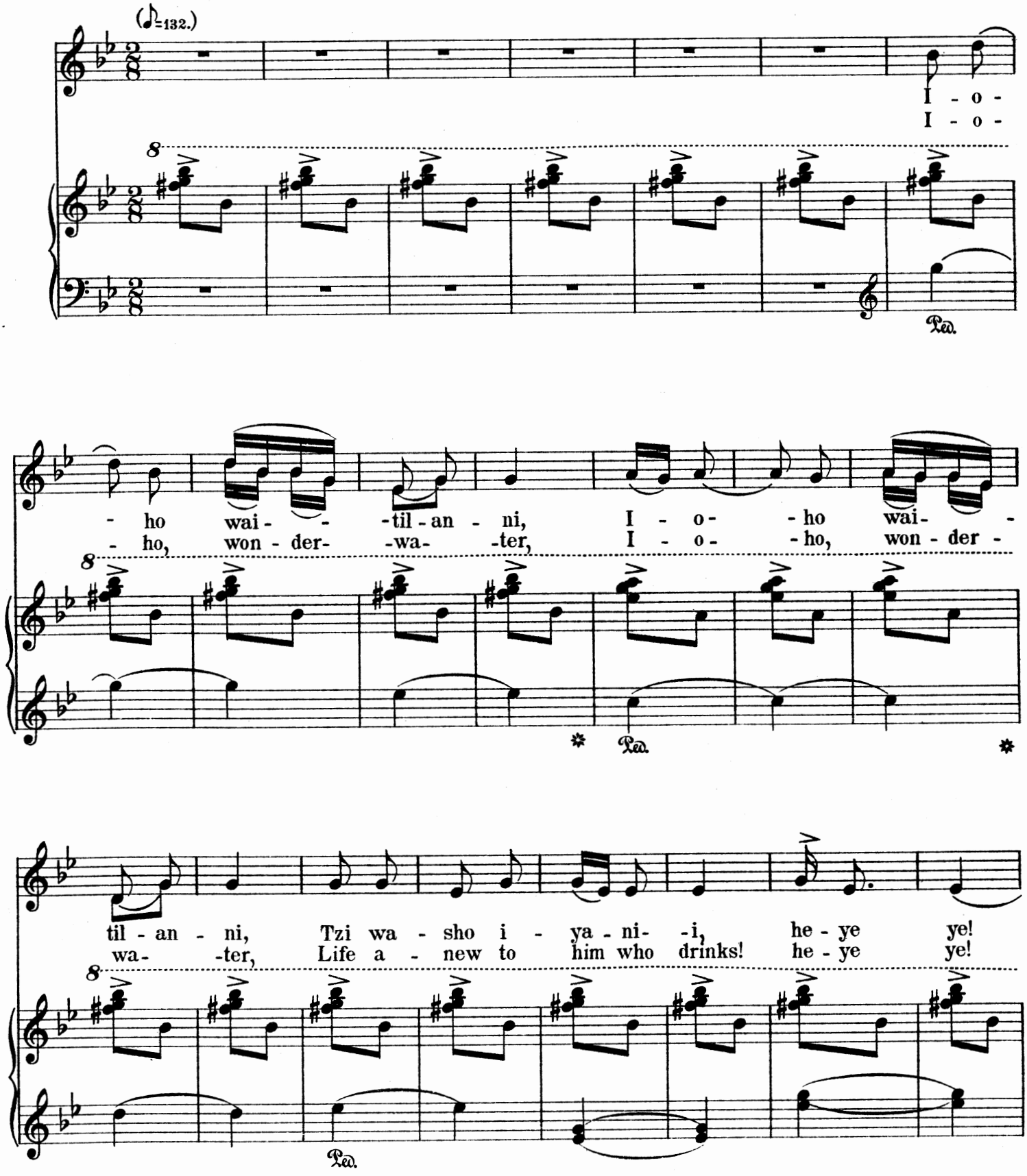

yo ho wi - ya yo ho yo
Ped.
Ped.
ho yo ho yo ho wi - ya
Ped.
yo ho wi - ya yo ho wi - ya, ha - a -
Ped.
Ped.
ha yo ho wi - ya yo ho wi - ya, ha - a - ha
Ped.
Ped.

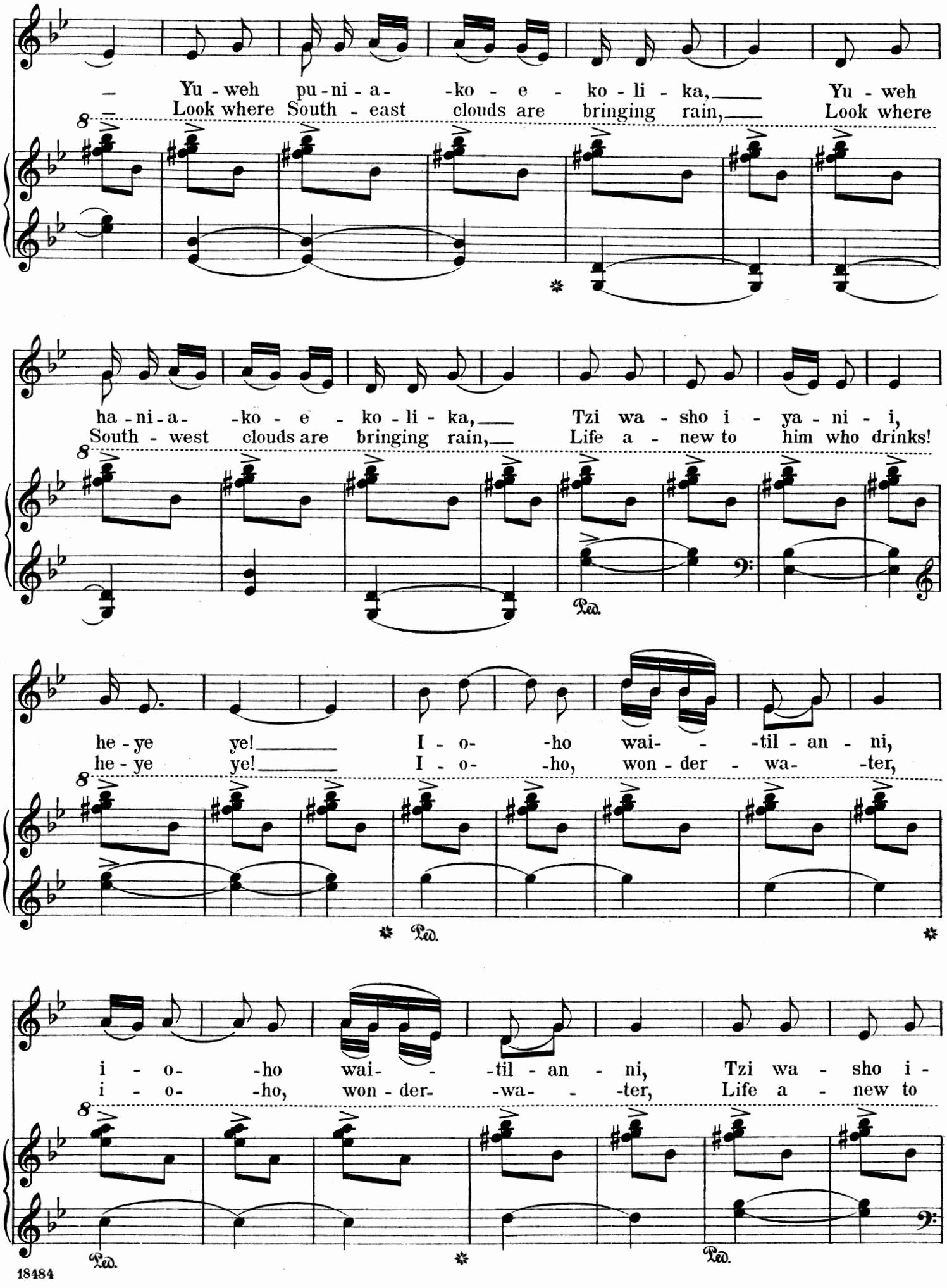

yo - wi - o ah yo wi a ha a hin -
Ped.
na yo o hin - na yo ho.
Ped.
Ped.
Yo ho wi - ya yo ho wi - ya, ha - a - ha yo wi
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.


o ah yo wi a ha a hin - na yo
Ped.
o hin - na yo ho,
Ped.
Yo ho yo ho
Ped.
wi - ya ho yo wi - ya!

Corn-Grinding Song

No. 3.




Yu - weh pu - ni - a- -ko - e - ko - li - ka, Yu - weh
Look where South - east clouds are bringing rain, Look where
ha - ni - a- -ko - e - ko - li - ka, Tzi wa - sho i - ya - ni - i,
South - west clouds are bringing rain, Life a - new to him who drinks!
he - ye ye! I - o- -ho wai- - -til - an - ni,
he - ye ye! I - o- -ho, won - der - wa- -ter,
i - o- -ho wai- - -til - an - ni, Tzi wa - sho i -
i - o- -ho, won - der- -wa- - -ter, Life a - new to

ya - ni - i, he - ye ye! Yu - weh pu - ni - a -
him who drinks! he - ye ye! Look where South - east

ko - e - ko - li - ka, Yu - weh ha - ni - a - ko - e - ko - li - ka,
clouds are bringing rain, Look where South - west clouds are bringing rain,

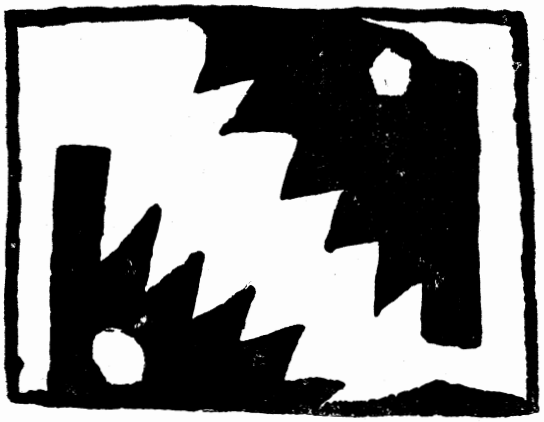
Tzi wa - sho i - ya - ni - i he - ye ye!
Life a - new to him who drinks! he - ye ye!

I - o - ho wai - til - an - ni, i - o -
I - o - ho, won - der - wa - ter, i - o -

-ho wai- - -til - an - ni, Tzi wa - sho i - ya - ni- -i,
-ho, won - der- -wa- -ter, Life a - new to him who drinks!

he-ye ye! Yu - weh pu - ni - a- -ko - e- -ko - li - ka,
he-ye ye! Look where South - east clouds are bring-ing rain,

Yu - weh ha-ni-a- -ko - e - ko - li - ka, Tzi wa - sho i -
Look where South - west clouds are bring-ing rain, Life a - new to

Ped.

ya - ni - i, he-ye ye! he-ye ye!
him who drinks! he-ye ye! he-ye ye!