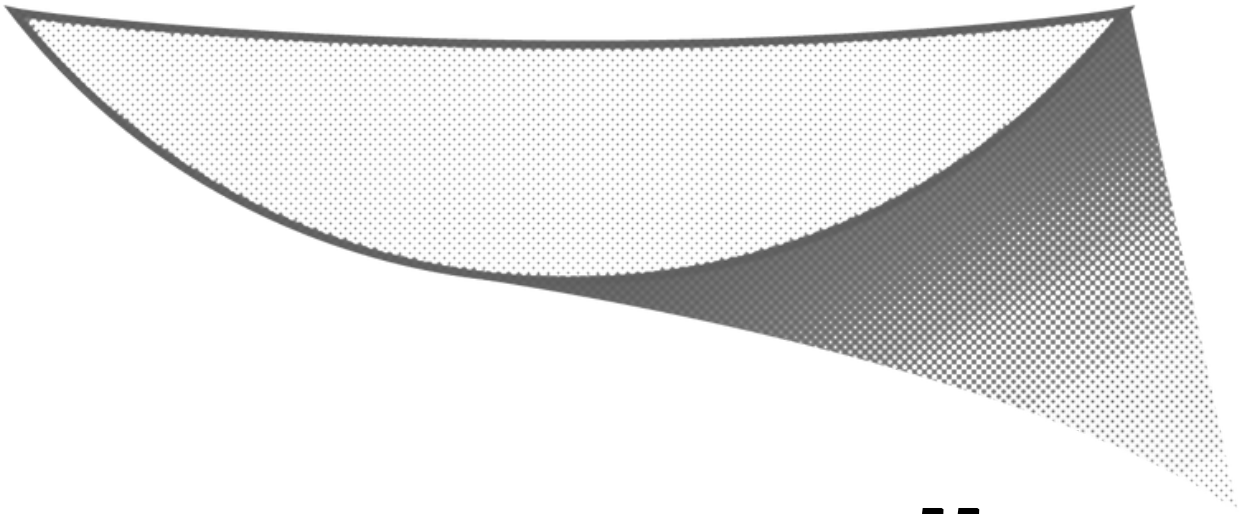


Sanctuary Walls

(2023)

for two voices and piano

orchestral arrangement is also available

Music by
Forrest Wentzel

Poetry by
Brian Griffin

Amira Parkey, 16, had just uttered her first lines as Miss Hannigan in “Annie, Jr.” when the performance at Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church was interrupted by a loud pop, witnesses said.

“We were just, ‘Oh, my God, that’s not part of the play,’ ” Amira said, adding that she saw a man standing near the door of the sanctuary and firing into the room.

It took a beat longer for fear to strike the audience.

“The music director realized what was going on and she yelled, ‘Get the hell out of here, everybody,’ ” said Sheila Bowen, 70, a church member.

Parents dove under the pews with their children, and the cast of young actors, some of them as young as 6, was quickly herded out of the sanctuary.

None of the victims were children.

Members of the church tackled the gunman and wrested his weapon, a 12-gauge shotgun, from him. The police received a call to the church at 10:18 a.m. and took the gunman into custody four minutes later.

...

There were about 200 people in the church when the gunman opened fire, church members said. Witnesses said that the gunman, carrying a guitar case, had first tried to enter the area where the children were preparing for the play, saying he was there to play music.

The New York Times
July 28, 2008

A Note from the Composer

I was not in the sanctuary when this act of violence was carried out, but the attack on the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church violated the sanctuary of a widespread community of people, including myself, who identified with and supported the values upheld by their congregation.

The loss of life depicted by *Sanctuary Walls* results in no glory and spreads no message of salvation. In that sense, this work is not a Passion nor is it a Requiem. These poems which I have selected from Brian Griffin's larger work, *Single Lens Reflex*, expose the grotesque and surreal nature of violence. While I could not encompass the full scale of the devastation as portrayed by *Single Lens Reflex*, I intended for *Sanctuary Walls* to be an experiential companion piece, an unflinchingly direct representation of Griffin's words.

Forrest Wentzel

A Note from the Poet

I wrote *Single Lens Reflex* because I felt a sense of guilt about the death of a friend and what happened under my watch -- an assault on a sanctuary full of children. In the immediate aftermath of the shooting, I realized that I might have the ability to communicate what trauma feels, looks, and sounds like. I vowed that day to capture my experience in words, and I hoped that perhaps those words would raise awareness of trauma and hate crime to a complacent nation, a nation that seems to be a bit too willing to allow mass shootings – and mass trauma – to continue as a part of what it means to be "a true American." I chose poetry because the analytical aspect of prose would veer me away from what is most important – the moment, and what it does to the body and mind. I've been working on it for years. I've struggled to write a statement for the very first page of the book that might serve as a kind of trigger warning. This is how it stands right now:

This is a book not of healing, but of witness
Not of solace, but of pain
It's a hard look at the hard reality
of hatred
and its consequences

We need to recognize the horror of violent hatred. For those who experience it, recognition can be a first step toward peace and healing. This book is my own recognition. It's not for everyone.

I write as a process of discovering what I think – of the place I live in, of the world around it, of the pain and the beauty, of family and friends, of the history that gnaws at the edges of everything we are. I write because words are more important than thought alone. Thought is fleeting and incomplete. Words nail it down for good or ill – but for good if we work at it. I write because writing is the only way I can begin to understand. I hope this work helps others understand, too.

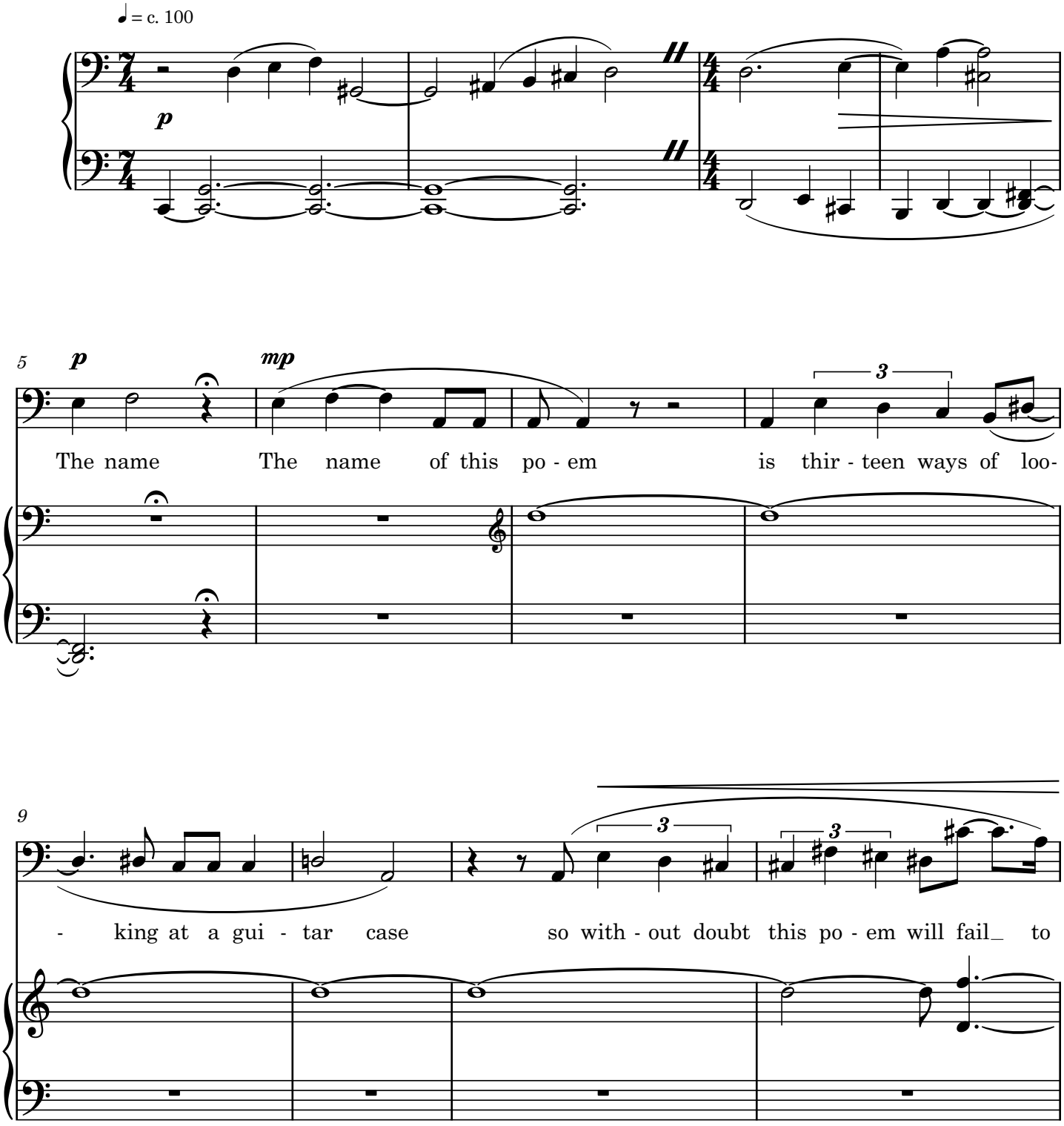
Brian Griffin

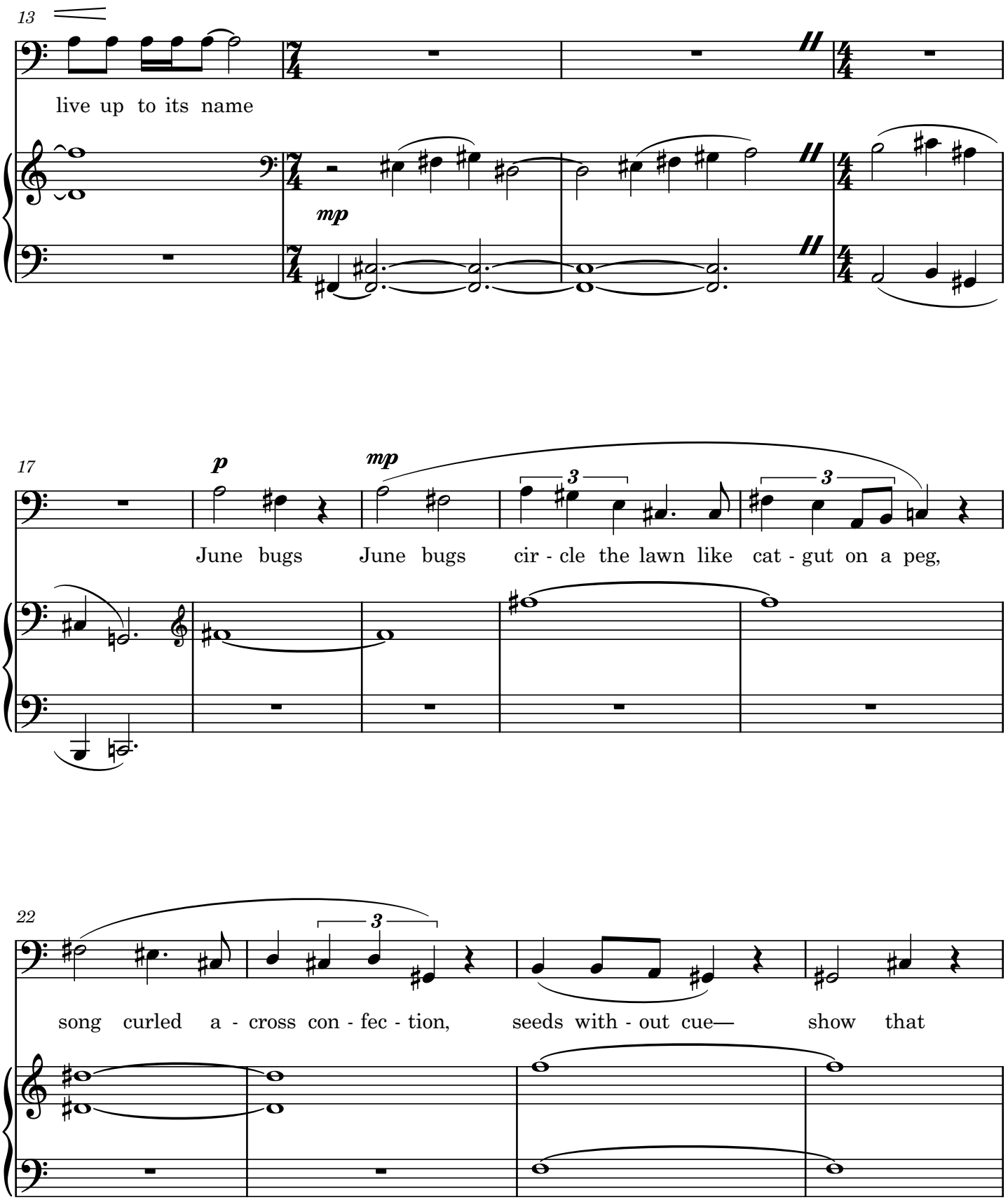
Sanctuary Walls

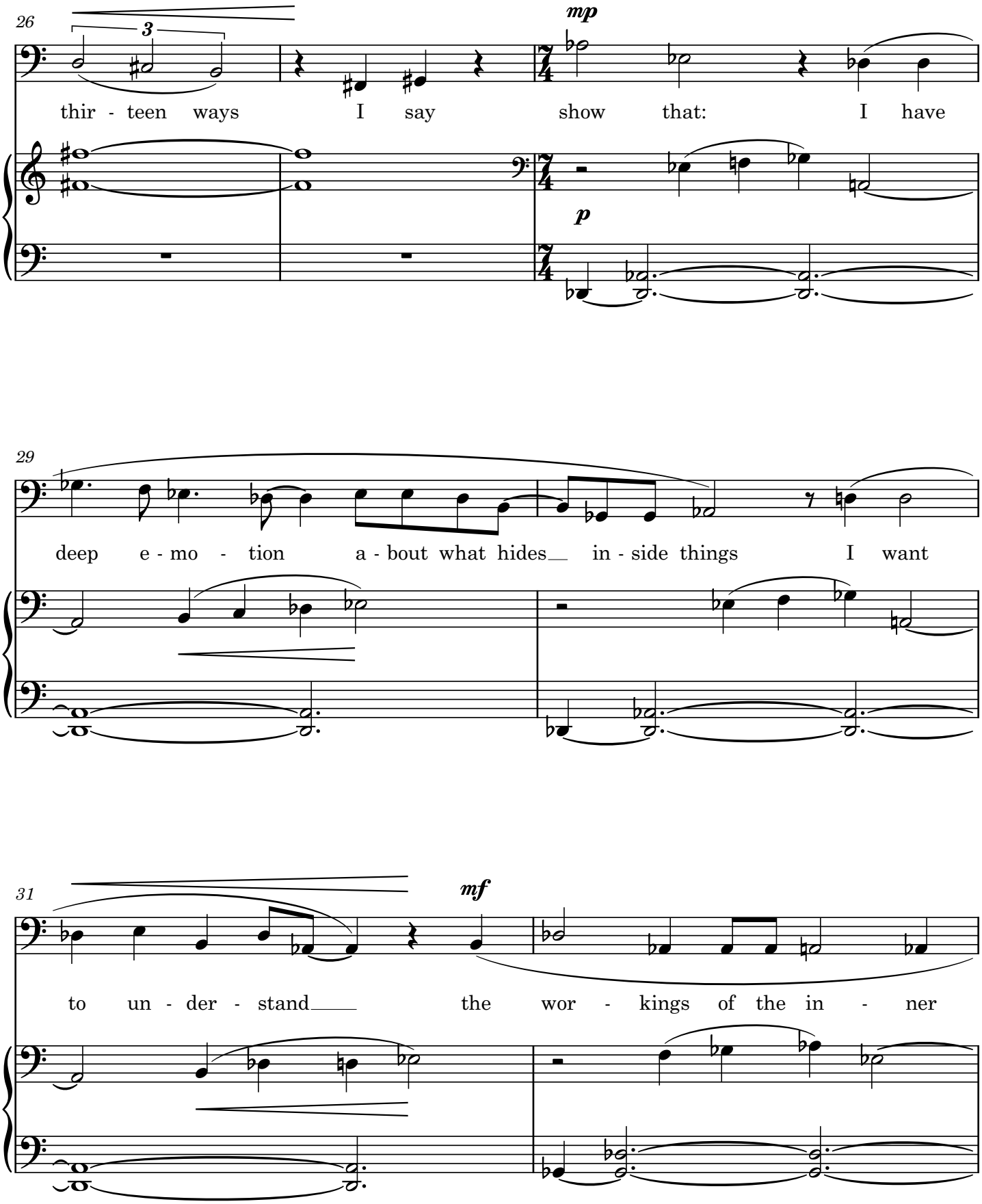
Brian Griffin

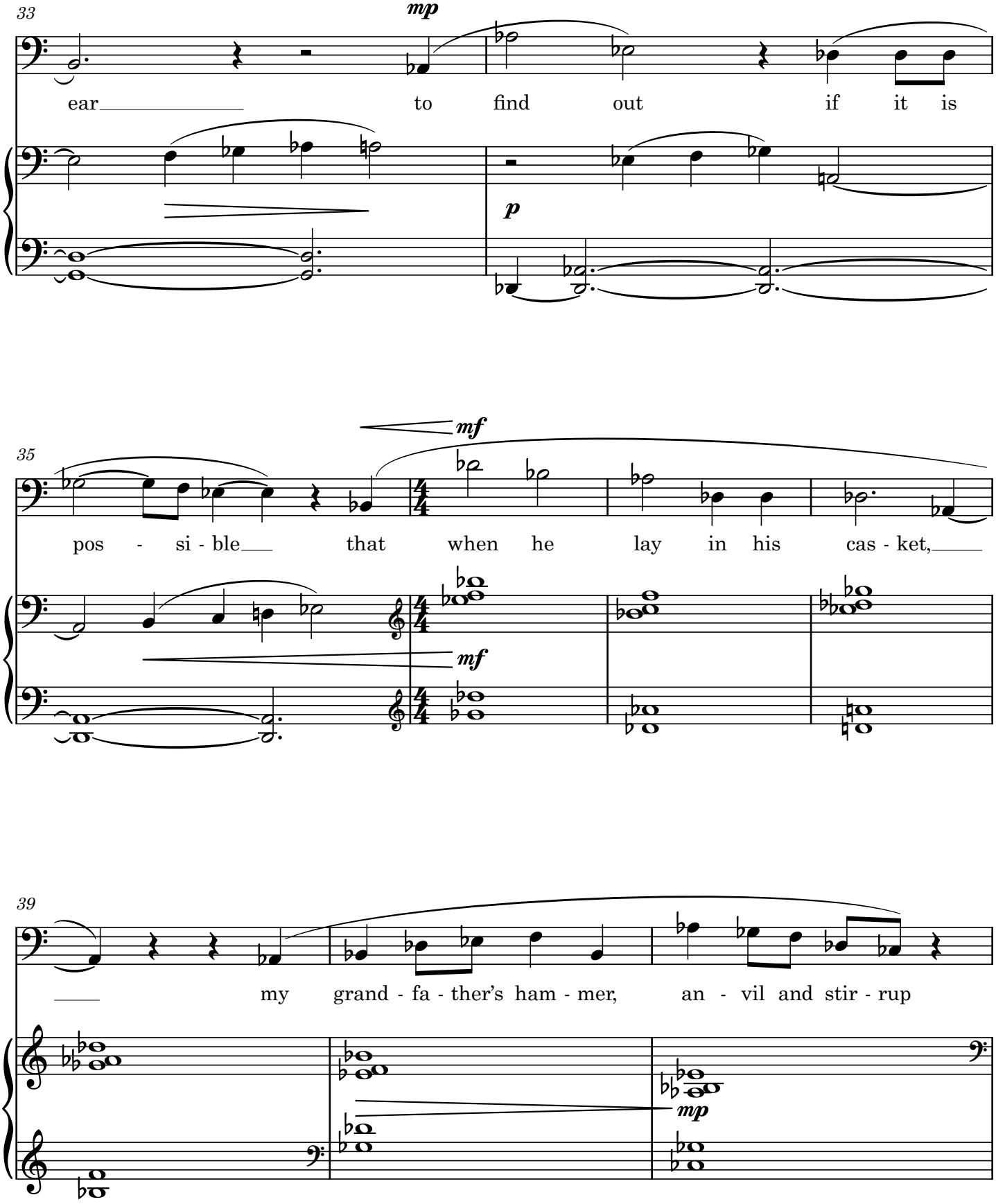
Forrest Wentzel

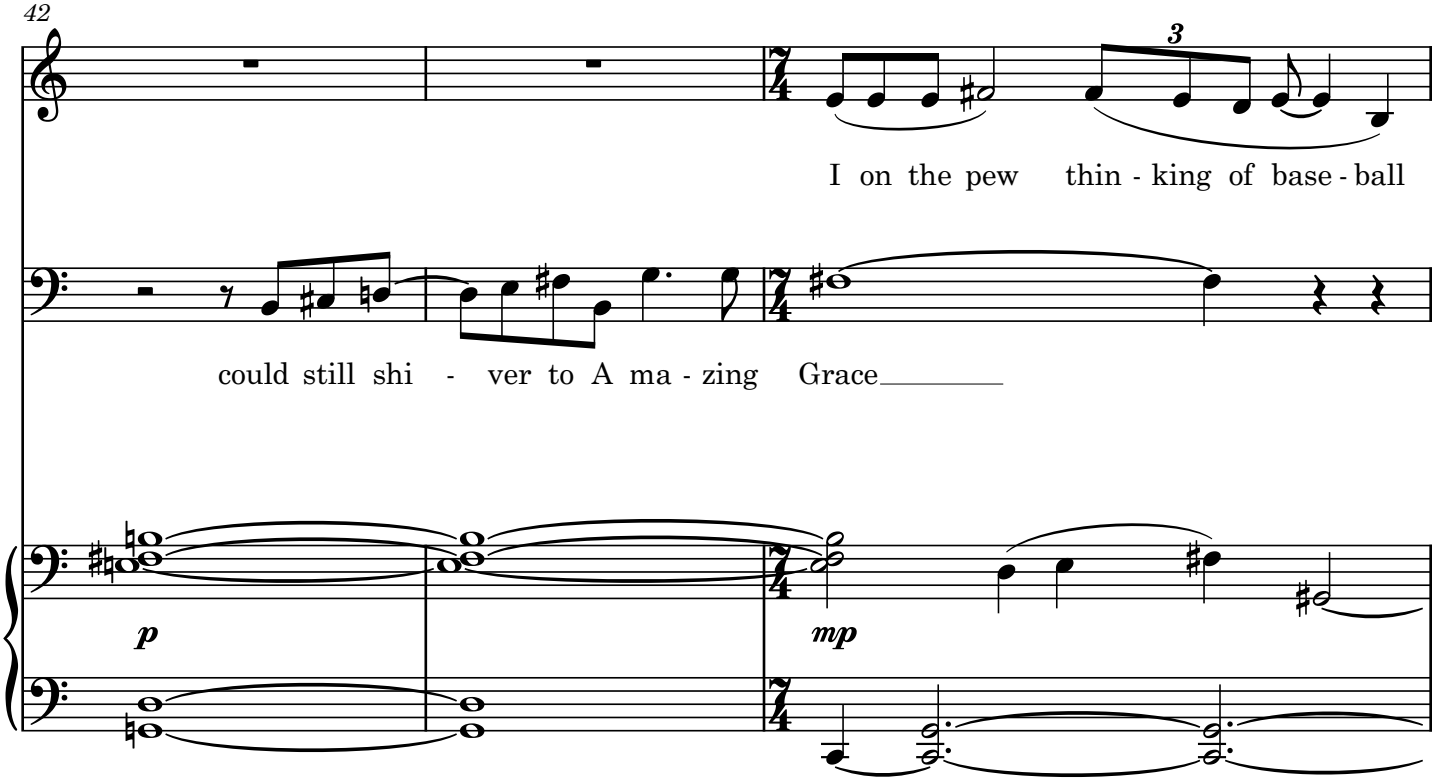
1. What a Hate Crime Sounds Like

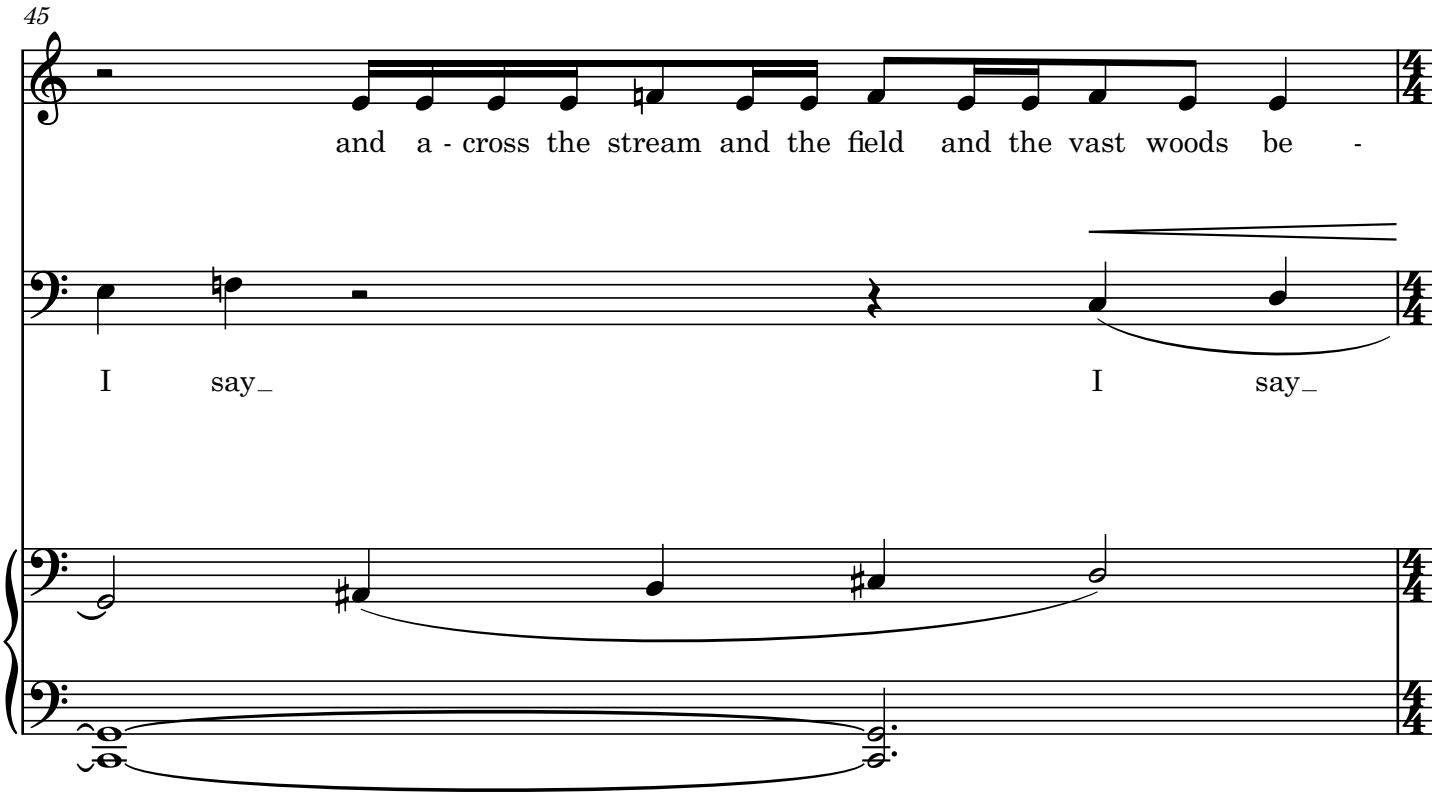


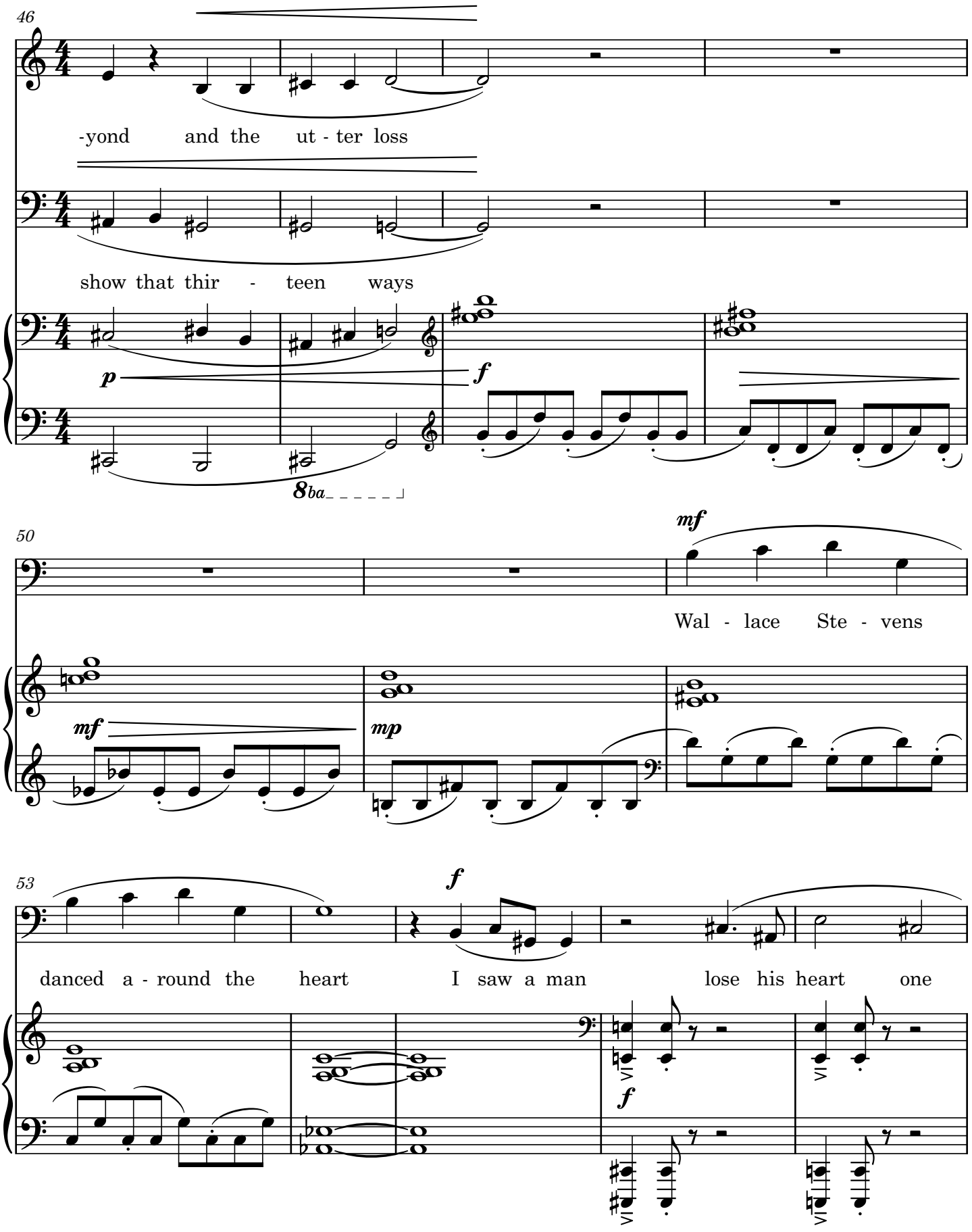

13
live up to its name
mp
17
p
mp
June bugs June bugs cir - cle the lawn like cat - gut on a peg,
22
song curled a - cross con - fec - tion, seeds with - out cue— show that

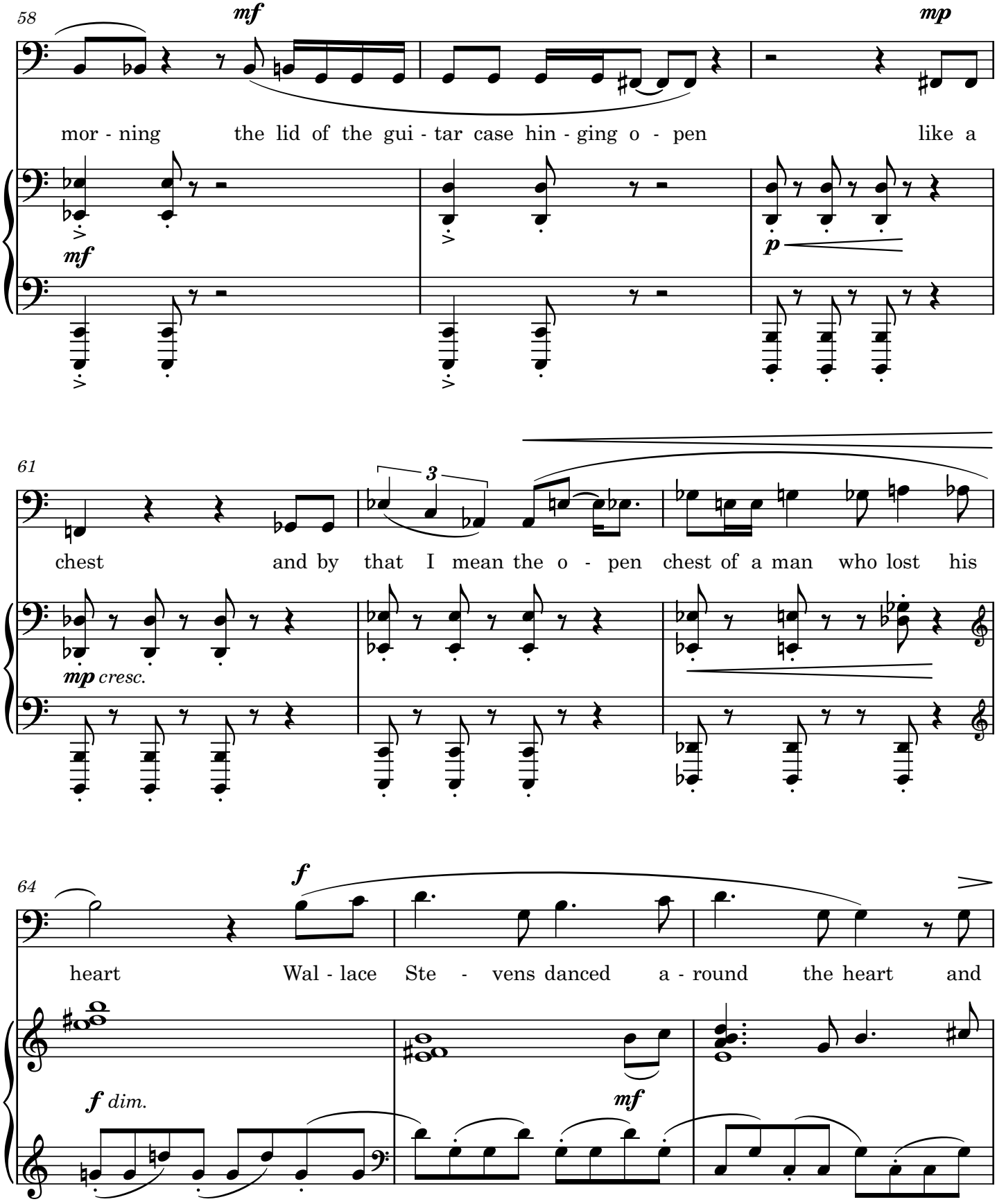

26
3
mp
thir - teen ways I say show that: I have
p
29
deep e - mo - tion a - bout what hides in - side things I want
31
mf
to un - der - stand the wor - kings of the in - ner

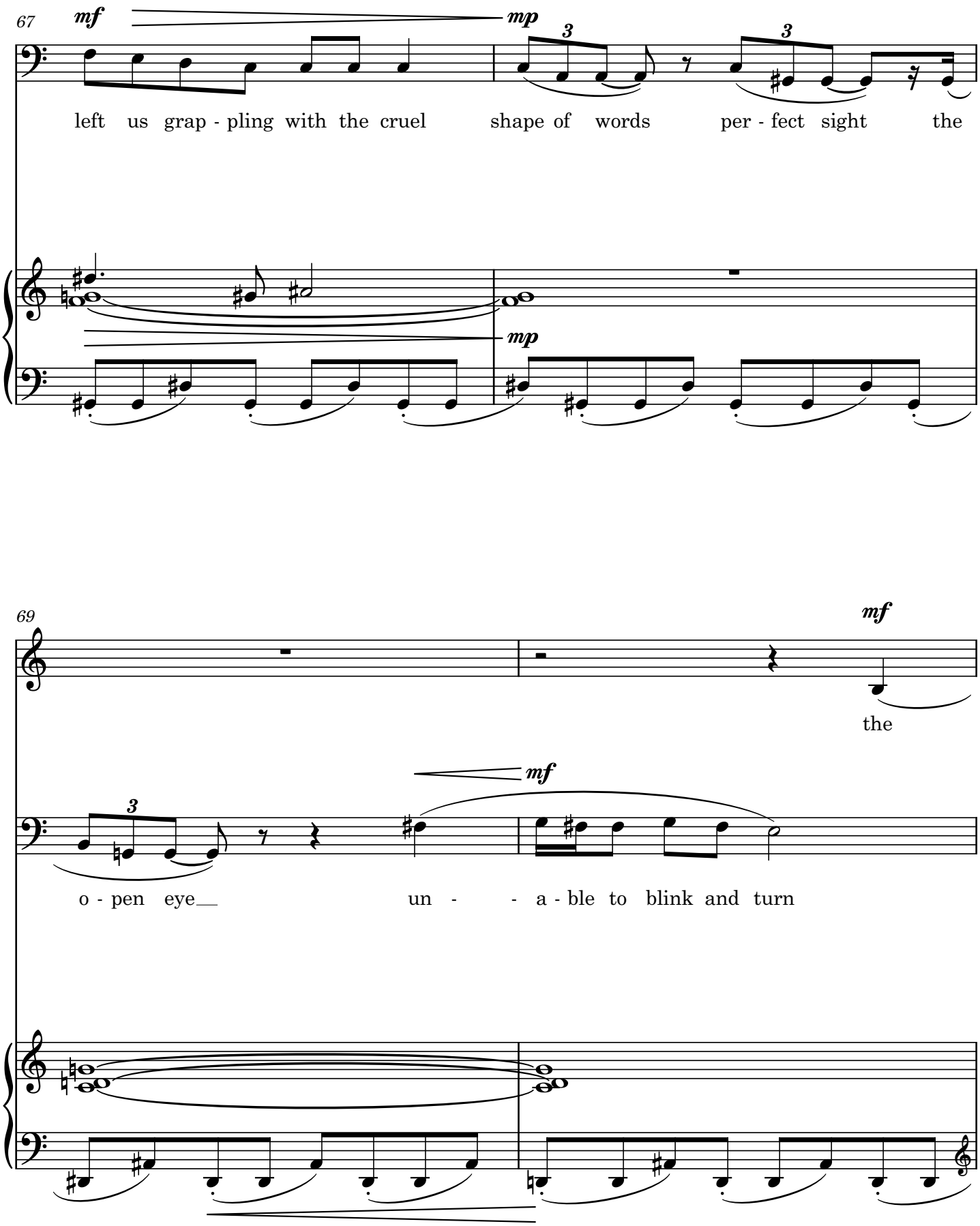

33
mp
ear to find out if it is
p
35
mf
pos - si - ble that when he lay in his cas - ket,
mf
39
my grand - fa - ther's ham - mer, an - vil and stir - rup
mp

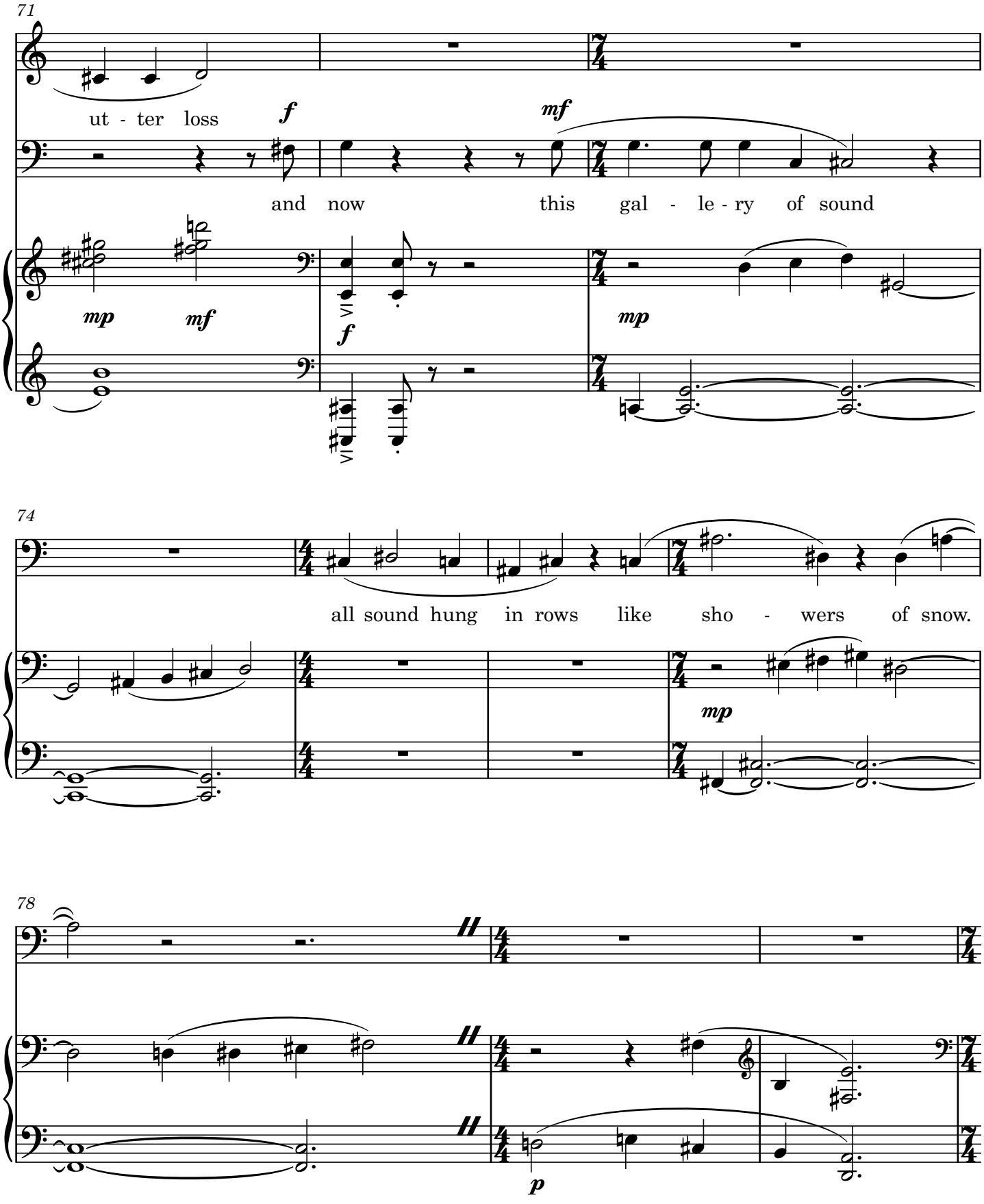

42
3
I on the pew thin - king of base - ball
could still shi - ver to A ma - zing Grace
p
mp

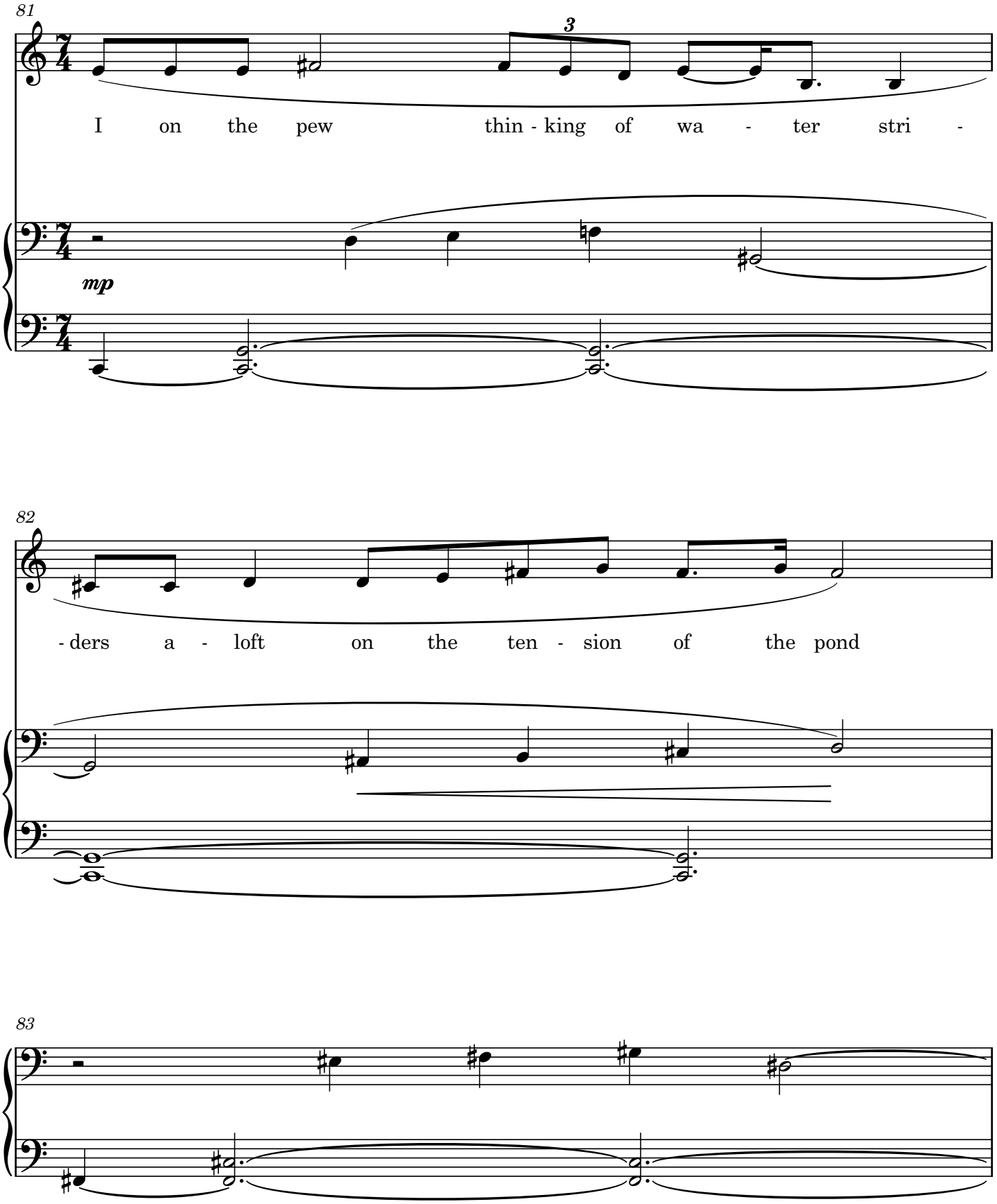

45
and a - cross the stream and the field and the vast woods be -
I say
I say

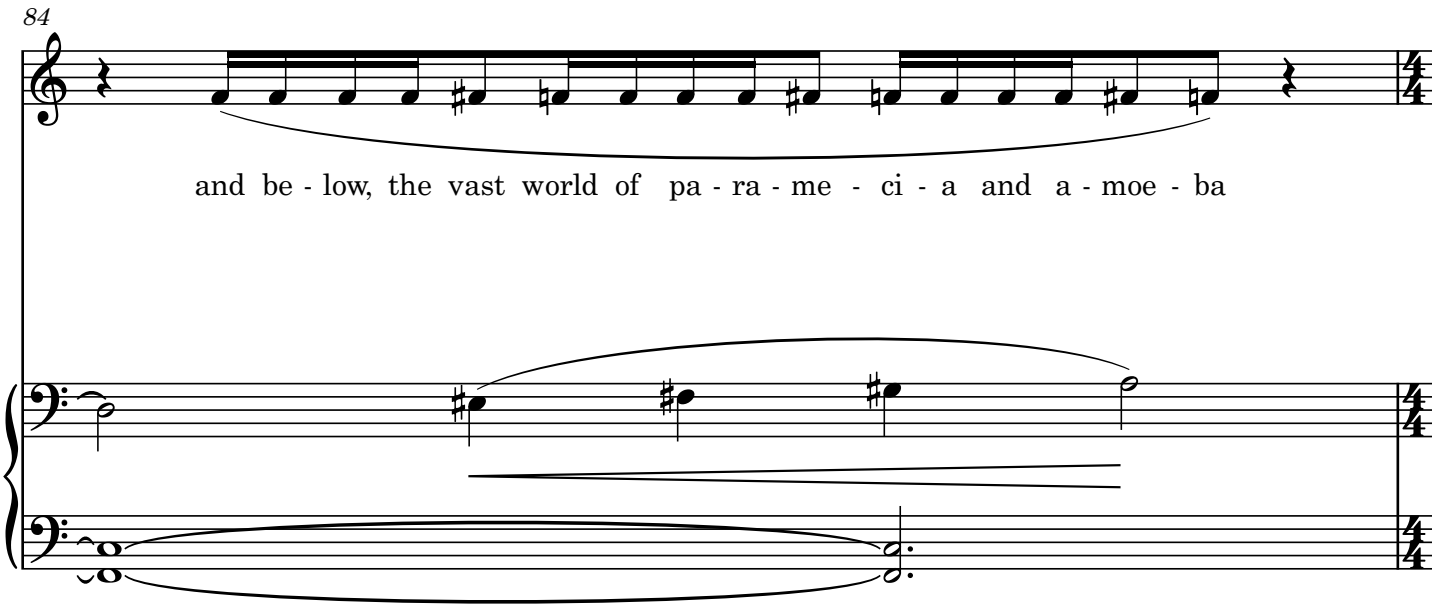

46
-yond and the ut - ter loss
show that thir - teen ways
p
f
8ba
50
mf
Wal - lace Ste - vens
mf
mp
53
f
danced a - round the heart I saw a man lose his heart one
f

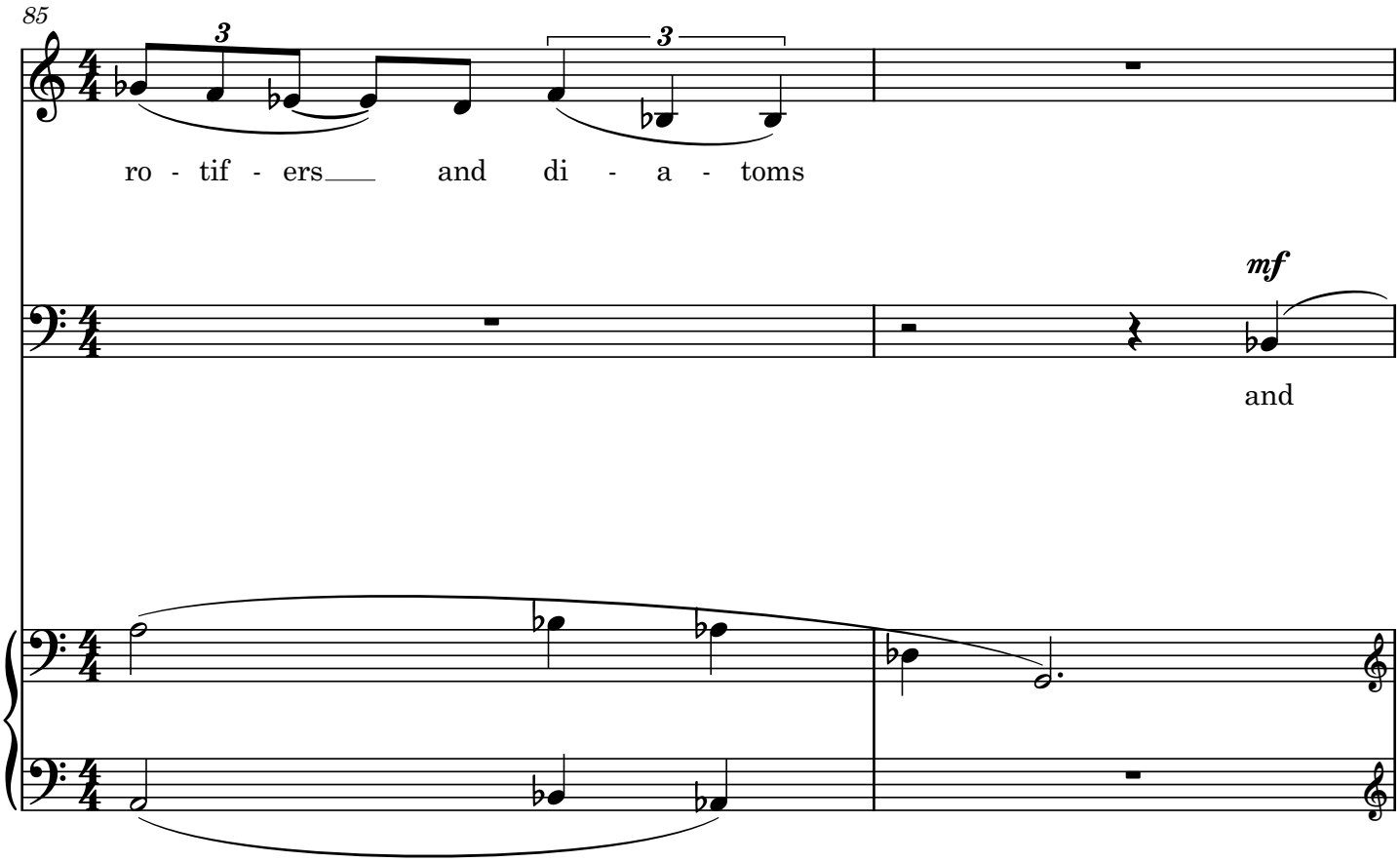

58
mf
mp
mor - ning the lid of the gui - tar case hin - ging o - pen like a
mf
p
61
3
chest and by that I mean the o - pen chest of a man who lost his
mp cresc.
64
f
heart Wal - lace Ste - vens danced a - round the heart and
f dim.
mf

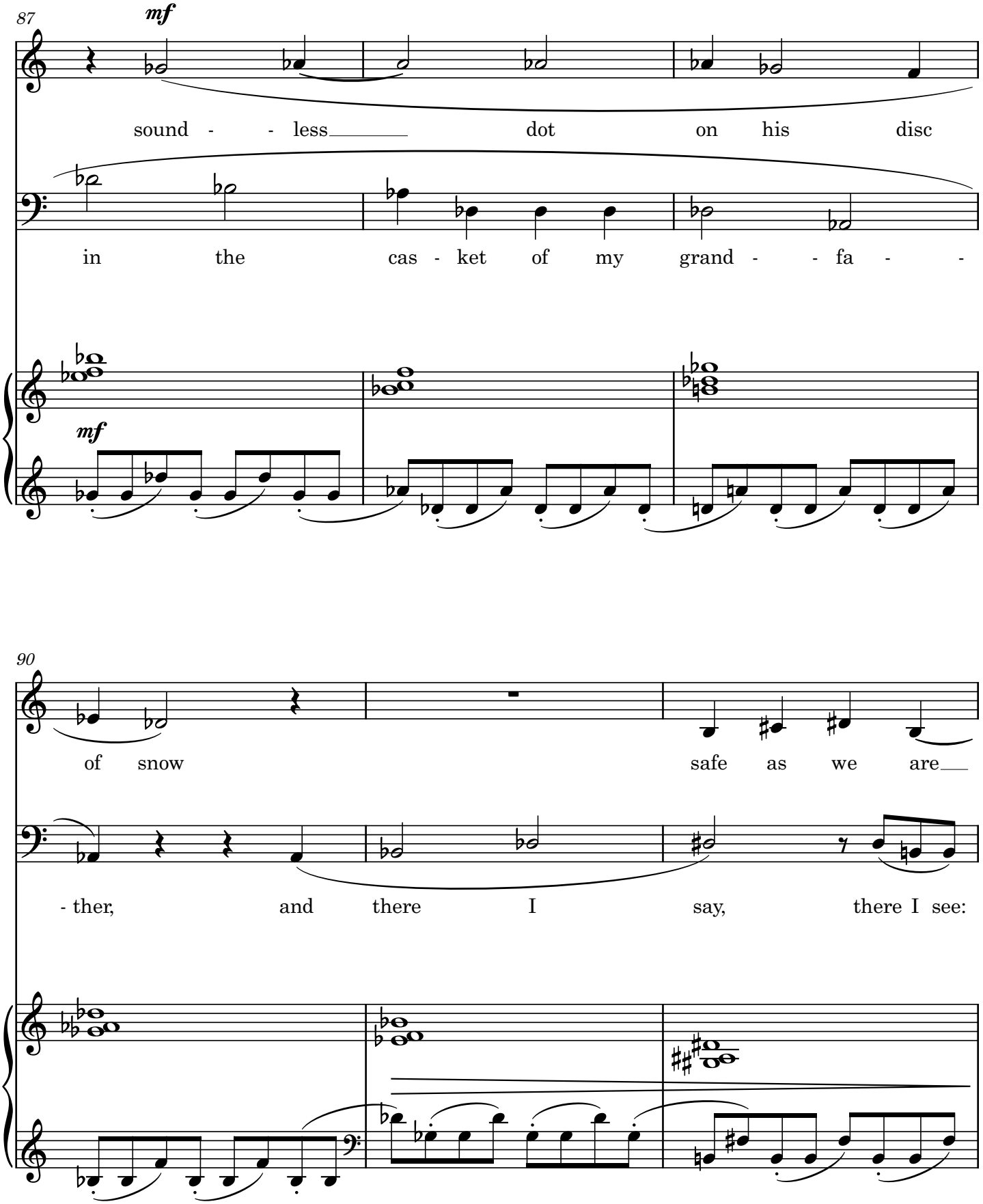

67
mf
mp
left us grap - pling with the cruel shape of words per - fect sight the
mp
69
mf
the
mf
o - pen eye un - - a - ble to blink and turn

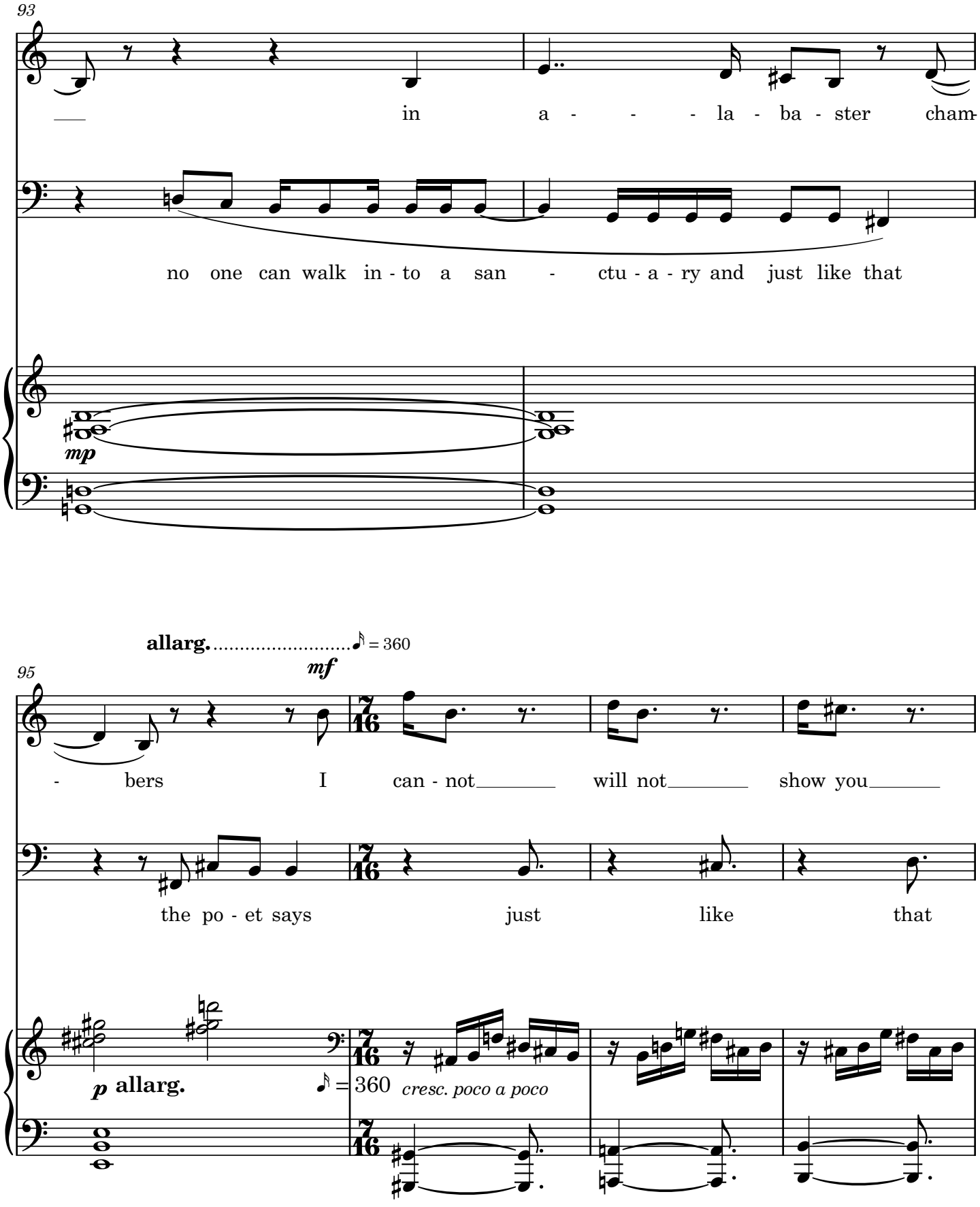

71
ut - ter loss
f
mf
and now this gal - le - ry of sound
mp
mf
f
mp
74
all sound hung in rows like sho - wers of snow.
mp
78
p

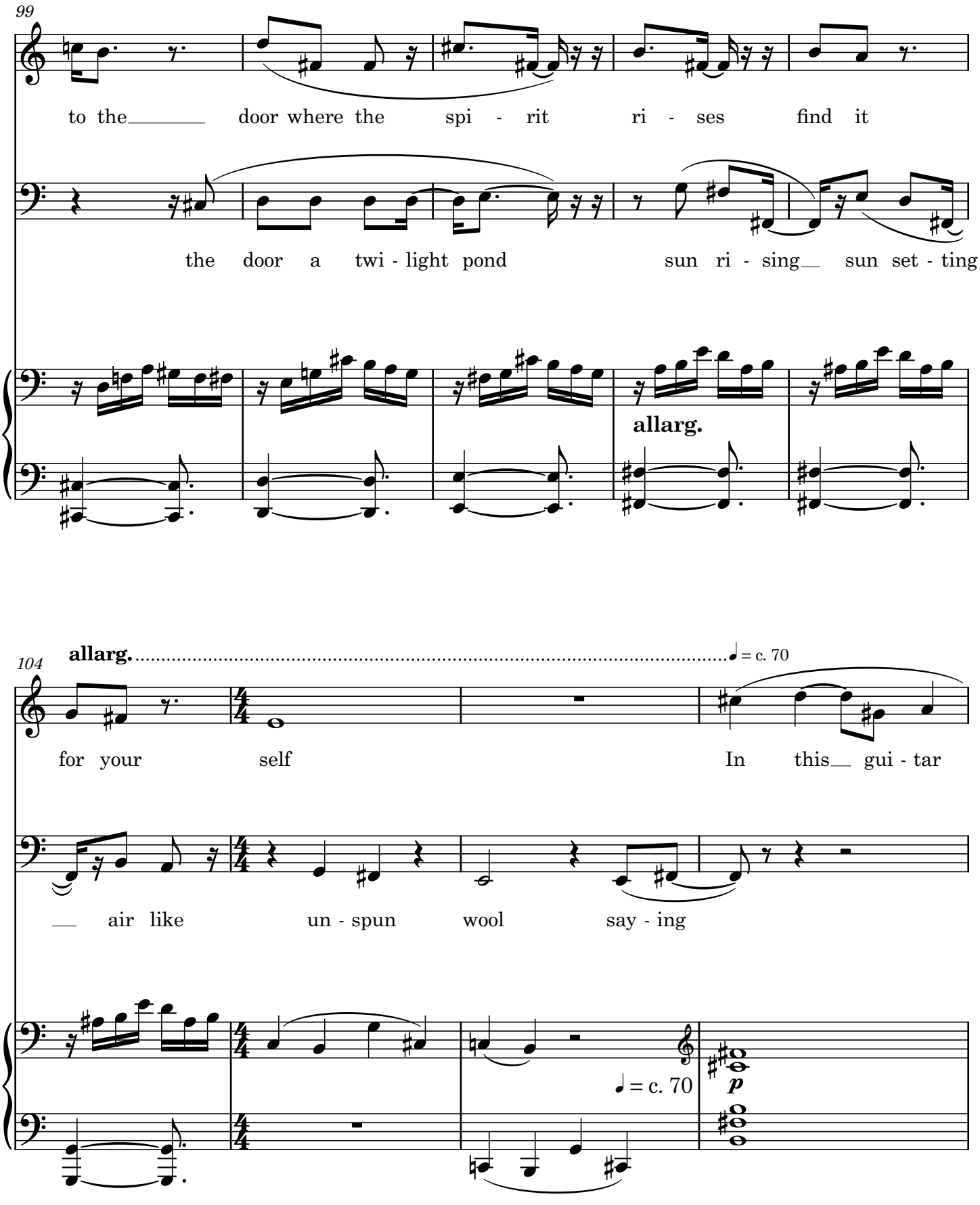

81
3
I on the pew thin - king of wa - ter stri -
mp
82
- ders a - loft on the ten - sion of the pond
83

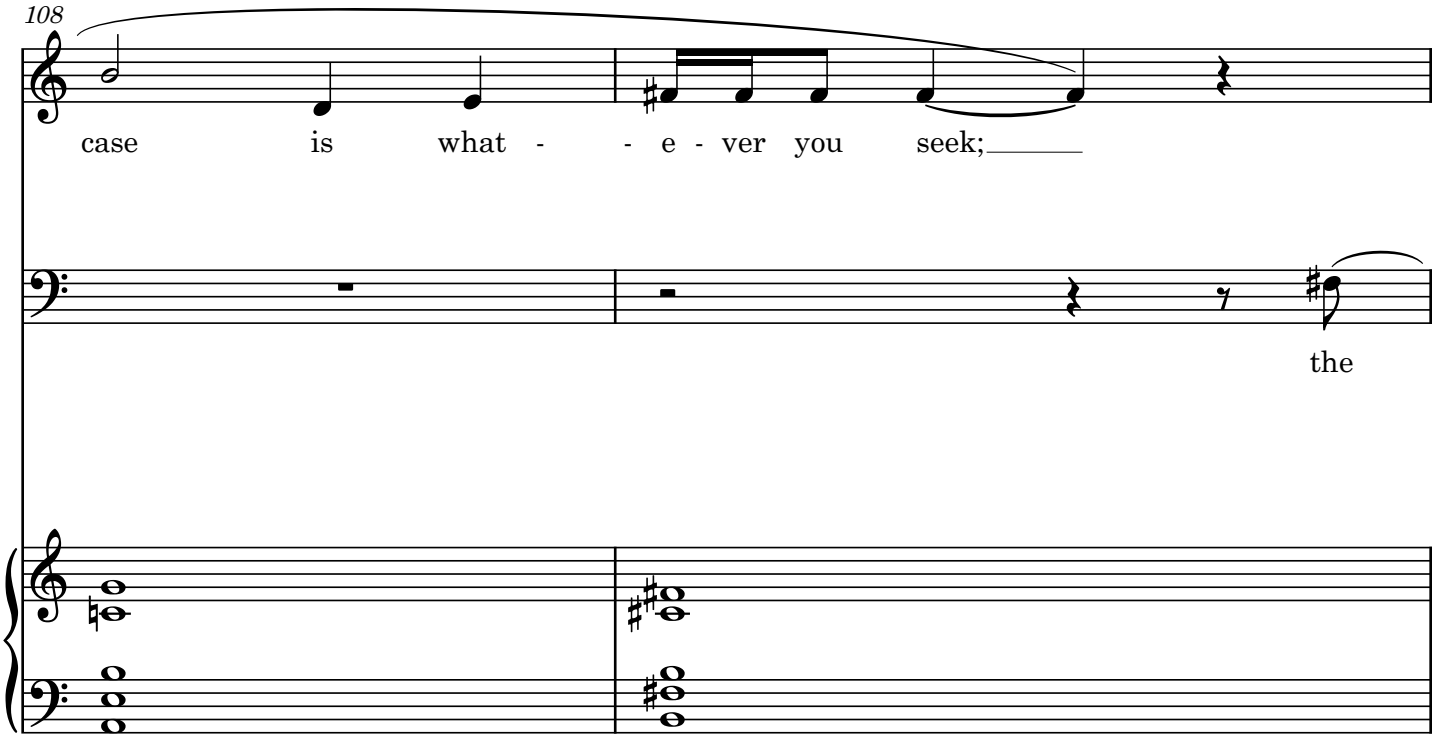

84
and be - low, the vast world of pa - ra - me - ci - a and a - moe - ba

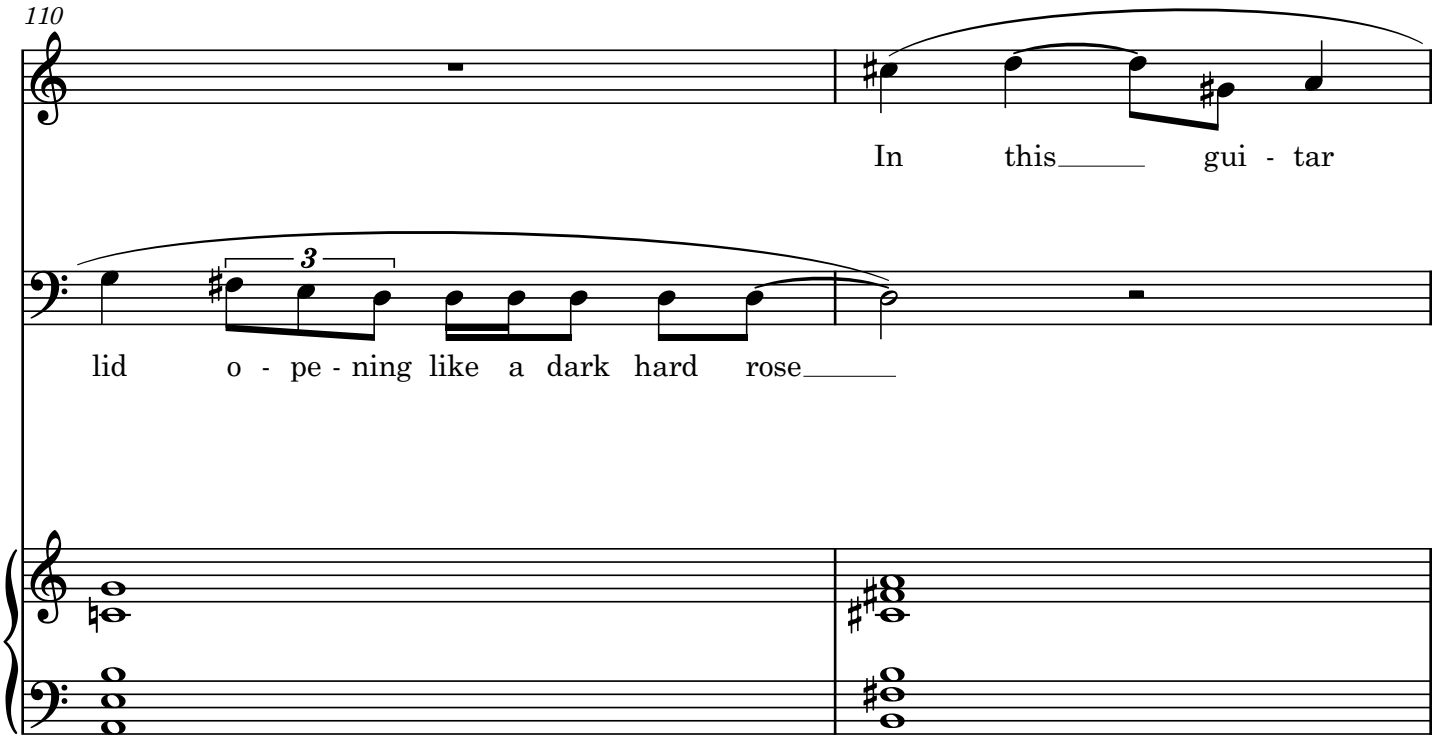

85
3
3
ro - tif - ers and di - a - toms
mf
and

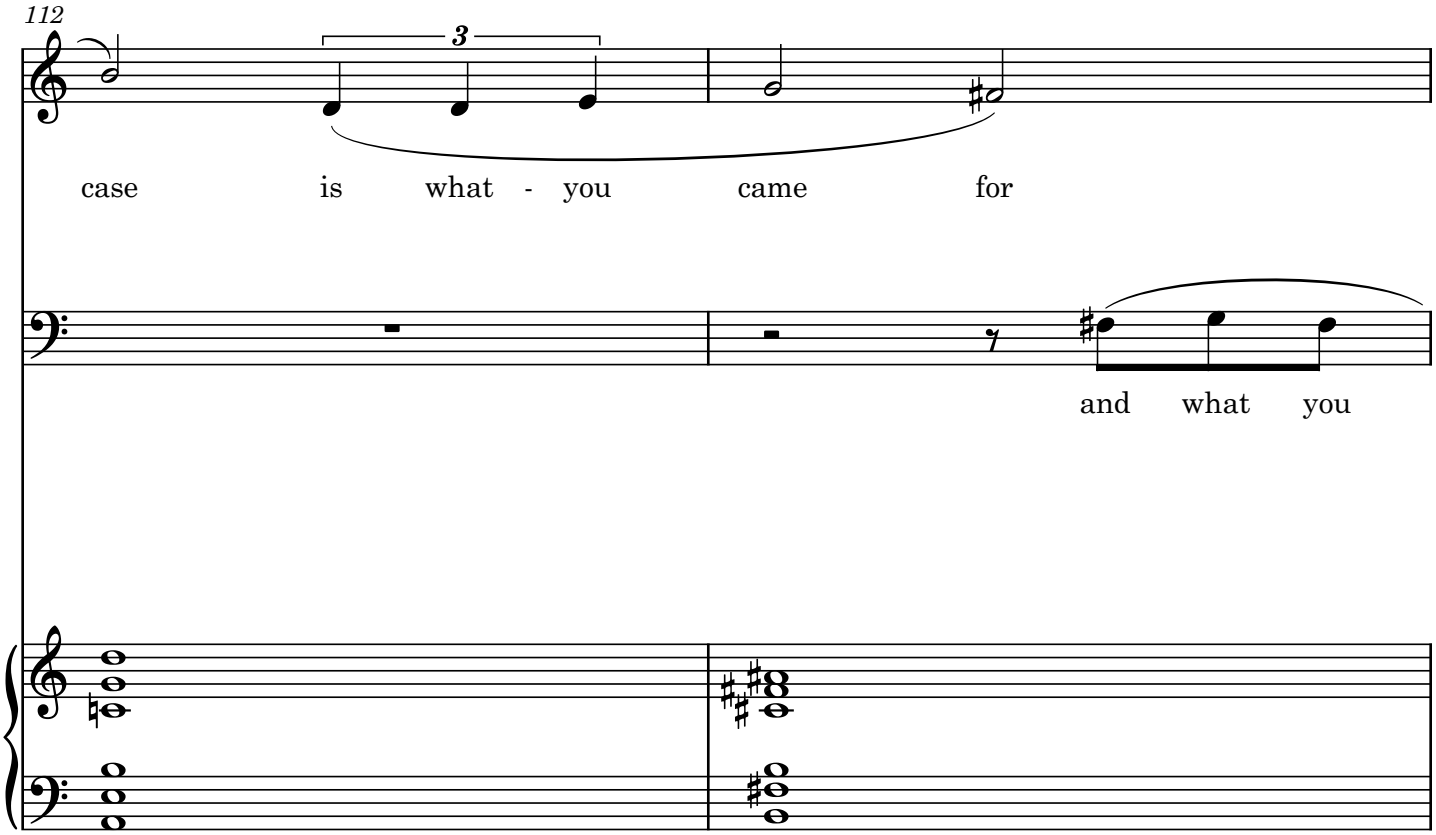

87
mf
sound - - less dot on his disc
in the cas - ket of my grand - - fa - -
mf
90
of snow safe as we are
- ther, and there I say, there I see:

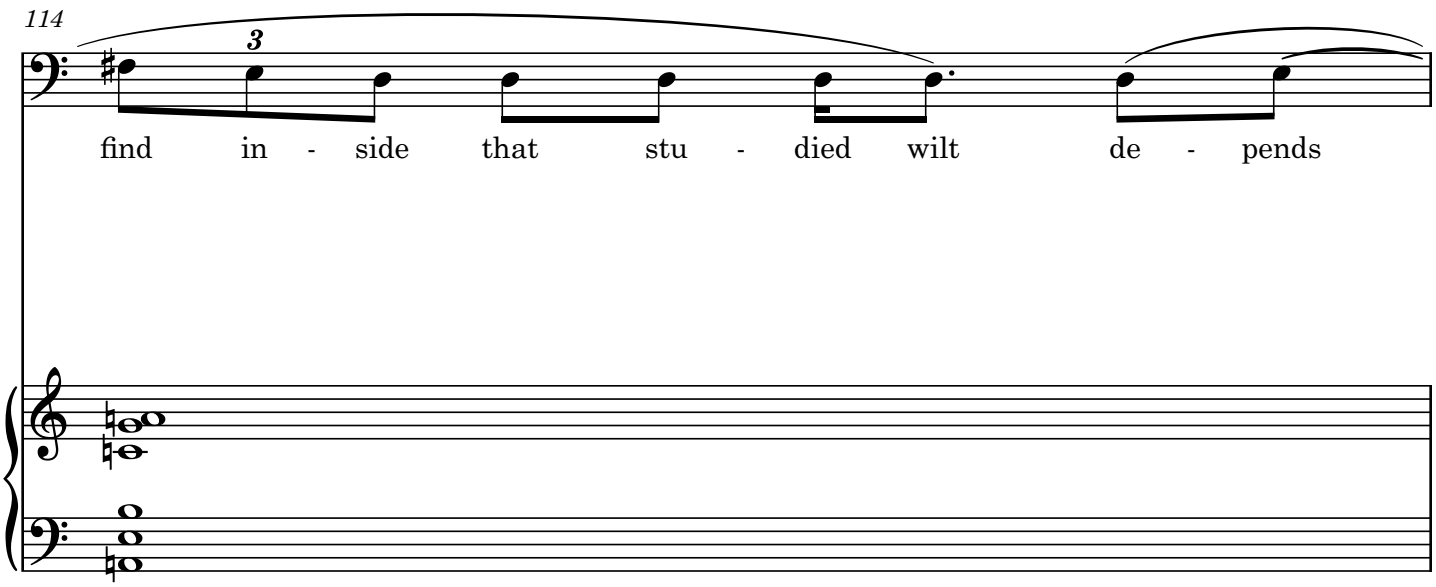

93
in a - - - la - ba - ster cham-
no one can walk in - to a san - ctu - a - ry and just like that
mp
allarg.
= 360
mf
95
- bers I can - not will not show you
the po - et says just like that
p allarg.
= 360
cresc. poco a poco

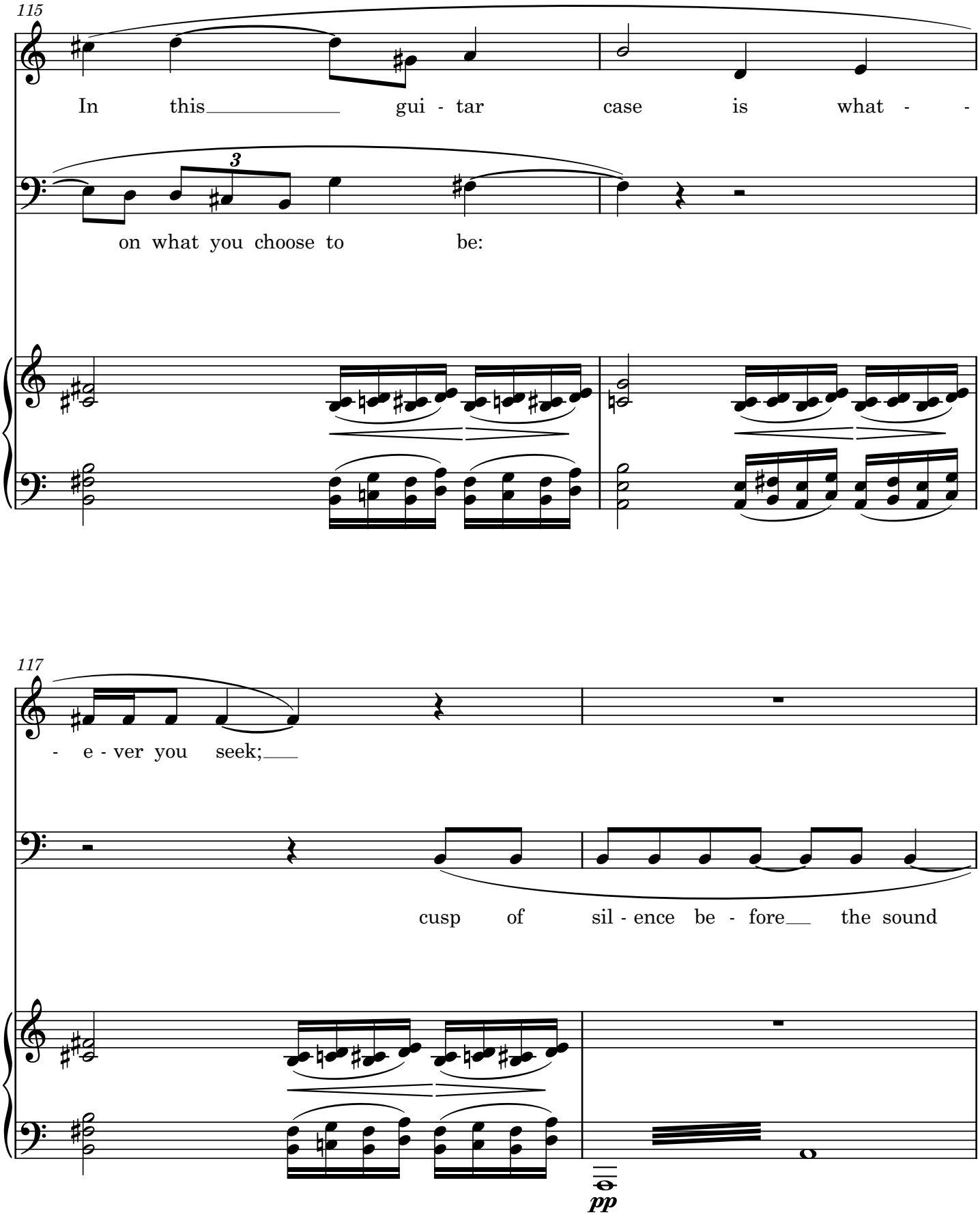

99
to the door where the spi - rit ri - ses find it
the door a twi - light pond sun ri - sing sun set - ting
allarg.
104
allarg.
♩ = c. 70
for your self In this gui - tar
air like un - spun wool say - ing
♩ = c. 70
p

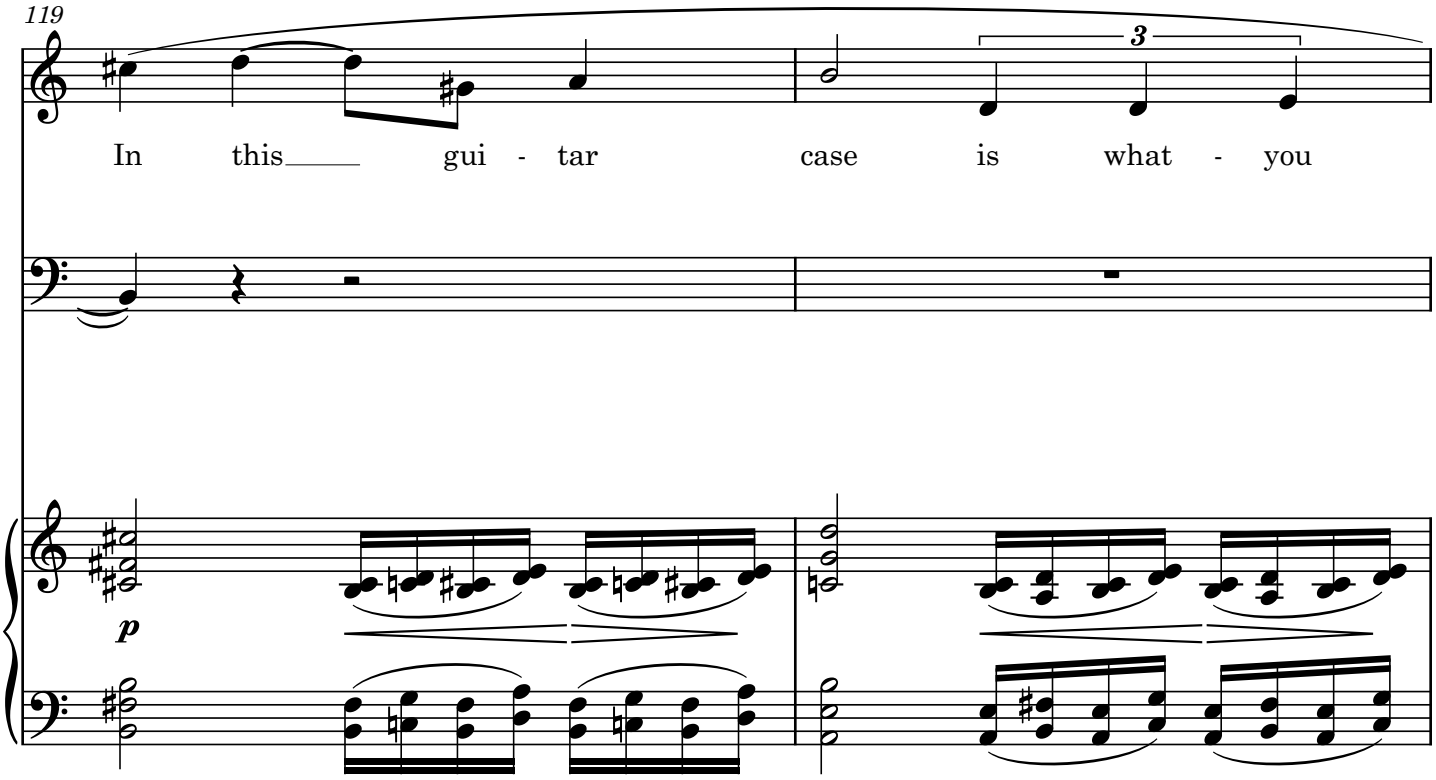

108
case is what - - e - ver you seek;
the

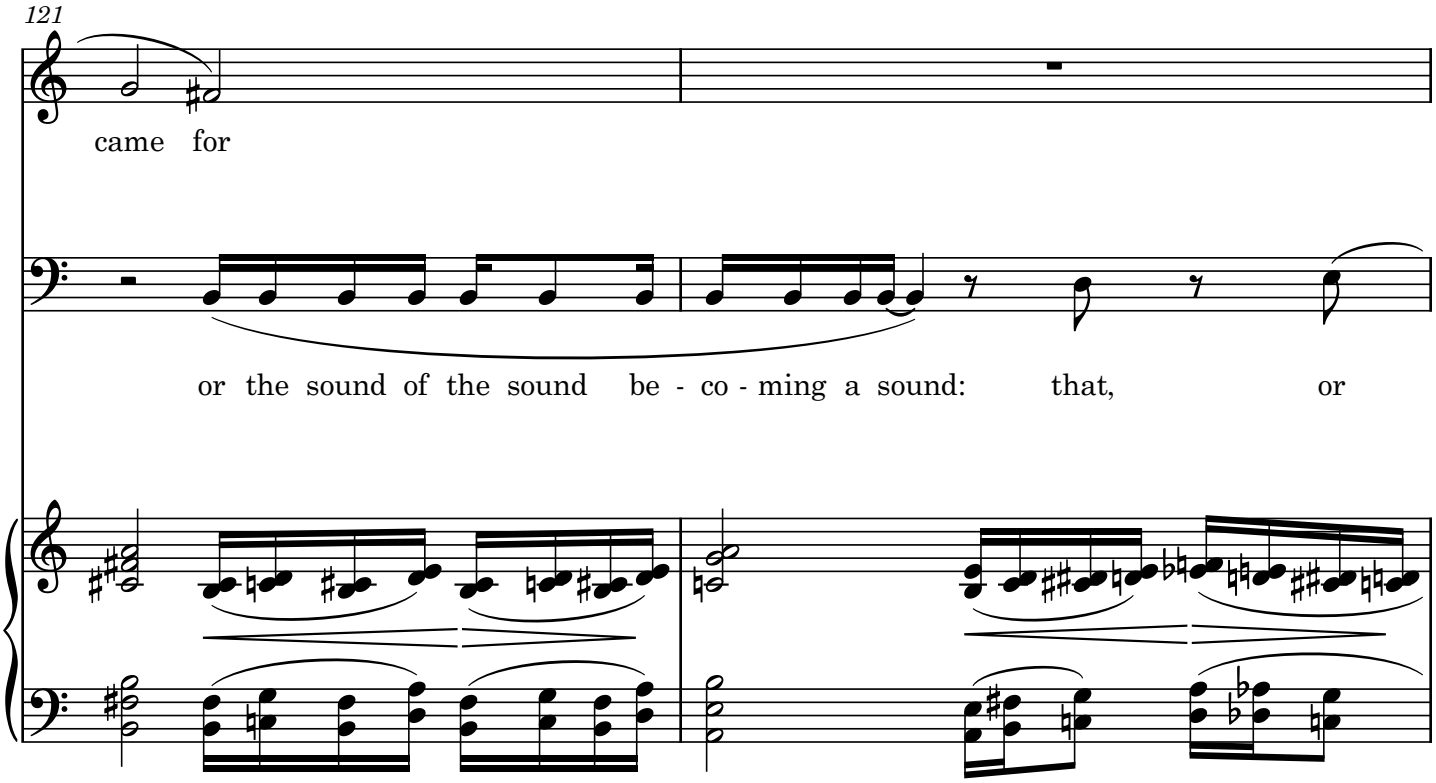

110
In this gui - tar
3
lid o - pe - ning like a dark hard rose

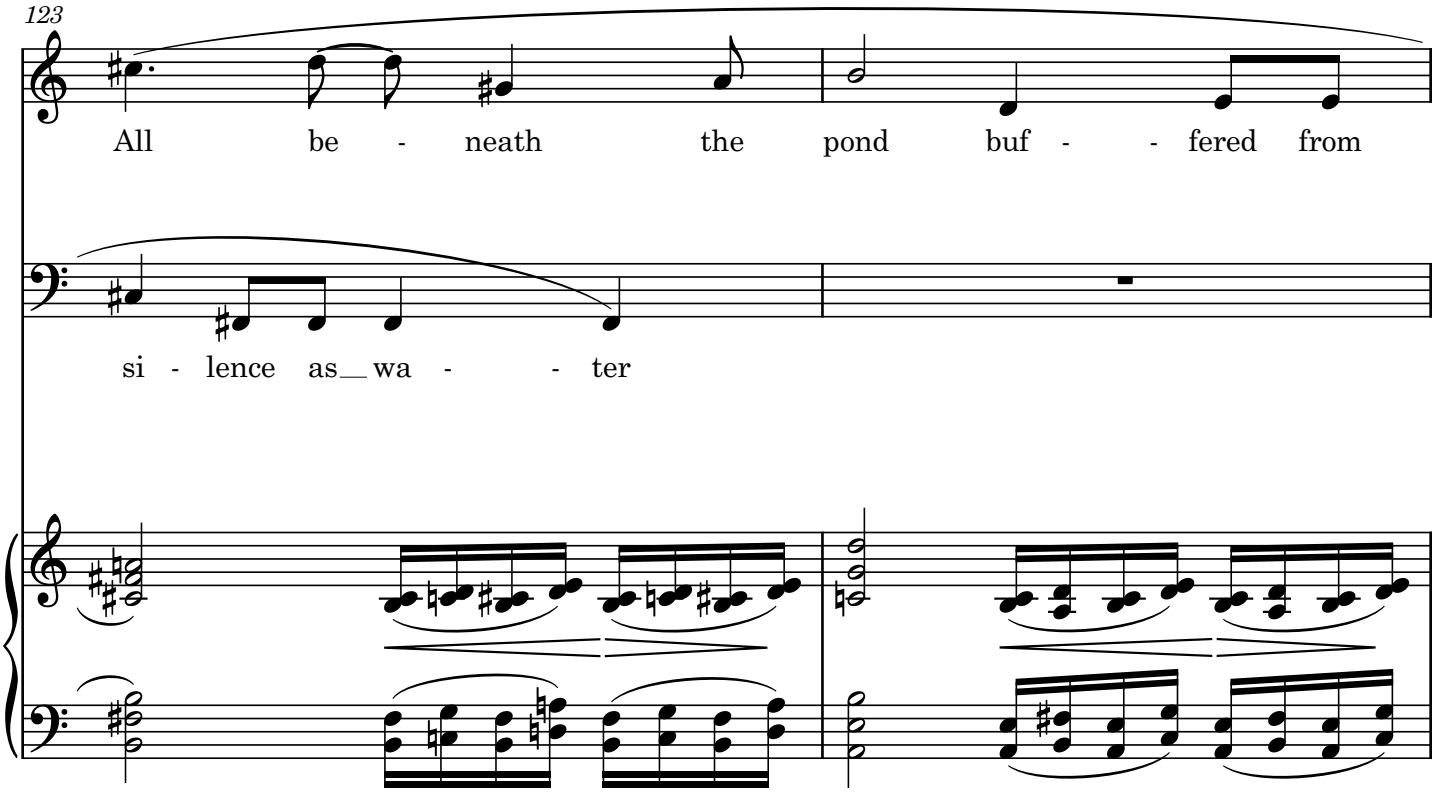

112
3
case is what - you came for
and what you

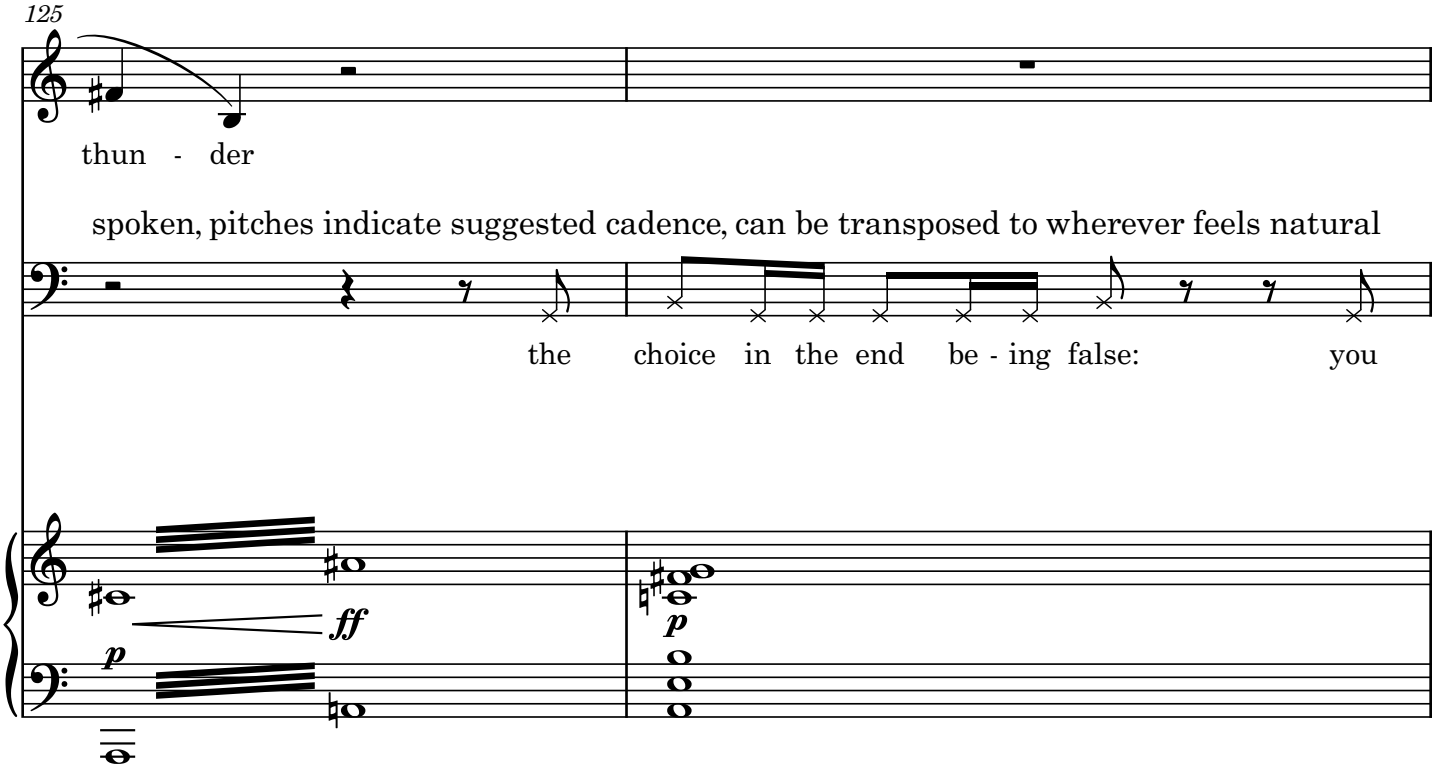

114
3
find in - side that stu - died wilt de - pends

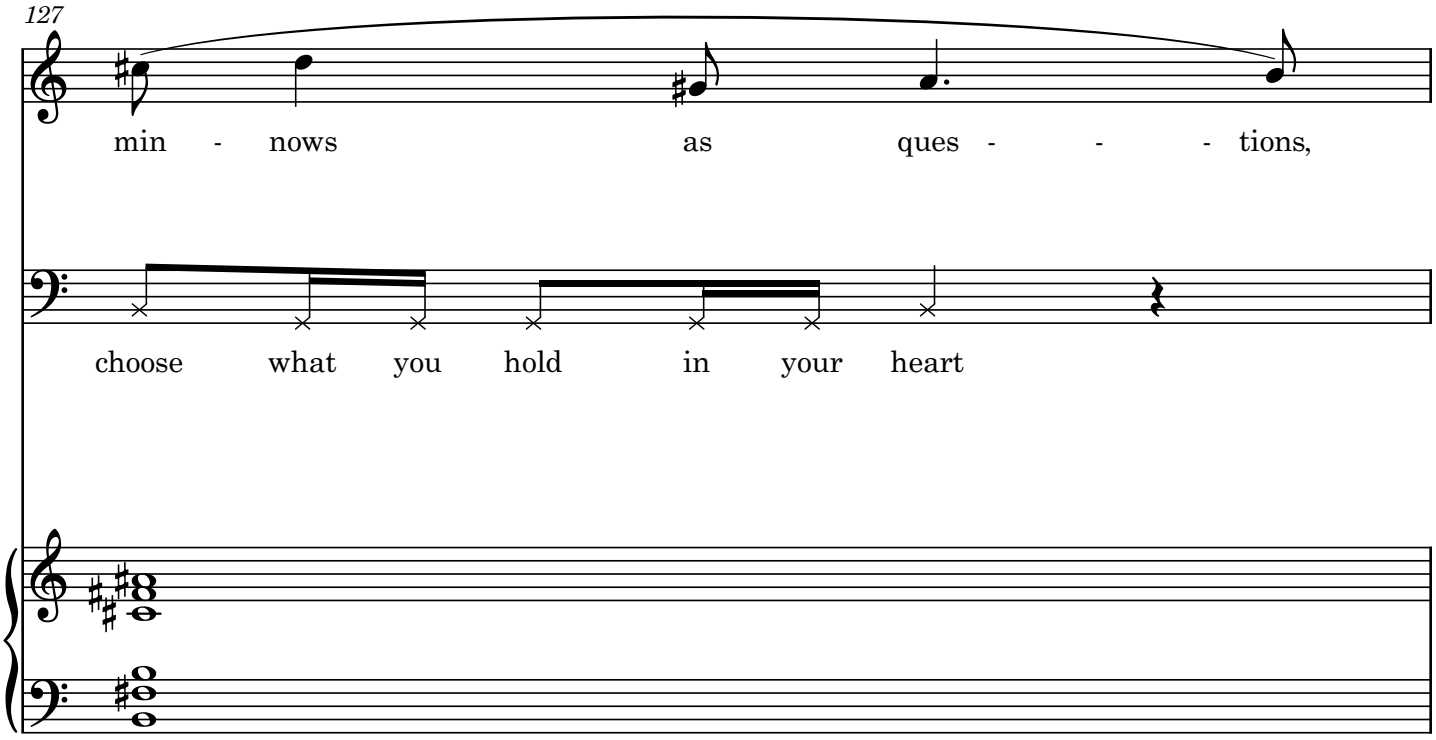

115
In this gui - tar case is what - -
3
on what you choose to be:
117
- e - ver you seek;
cusp of sil - ence be - fore the sound
pp

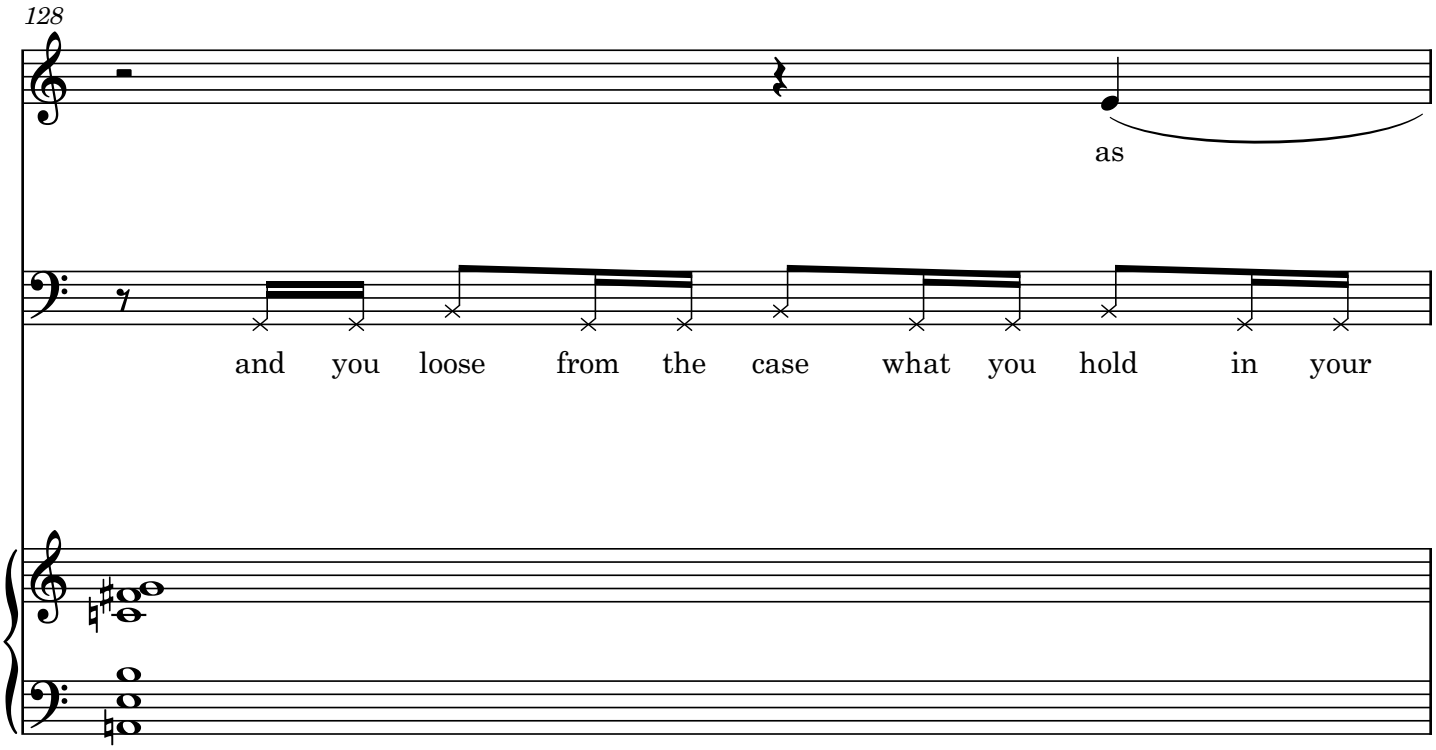

119
3
In this gui - tar case is what - you
p

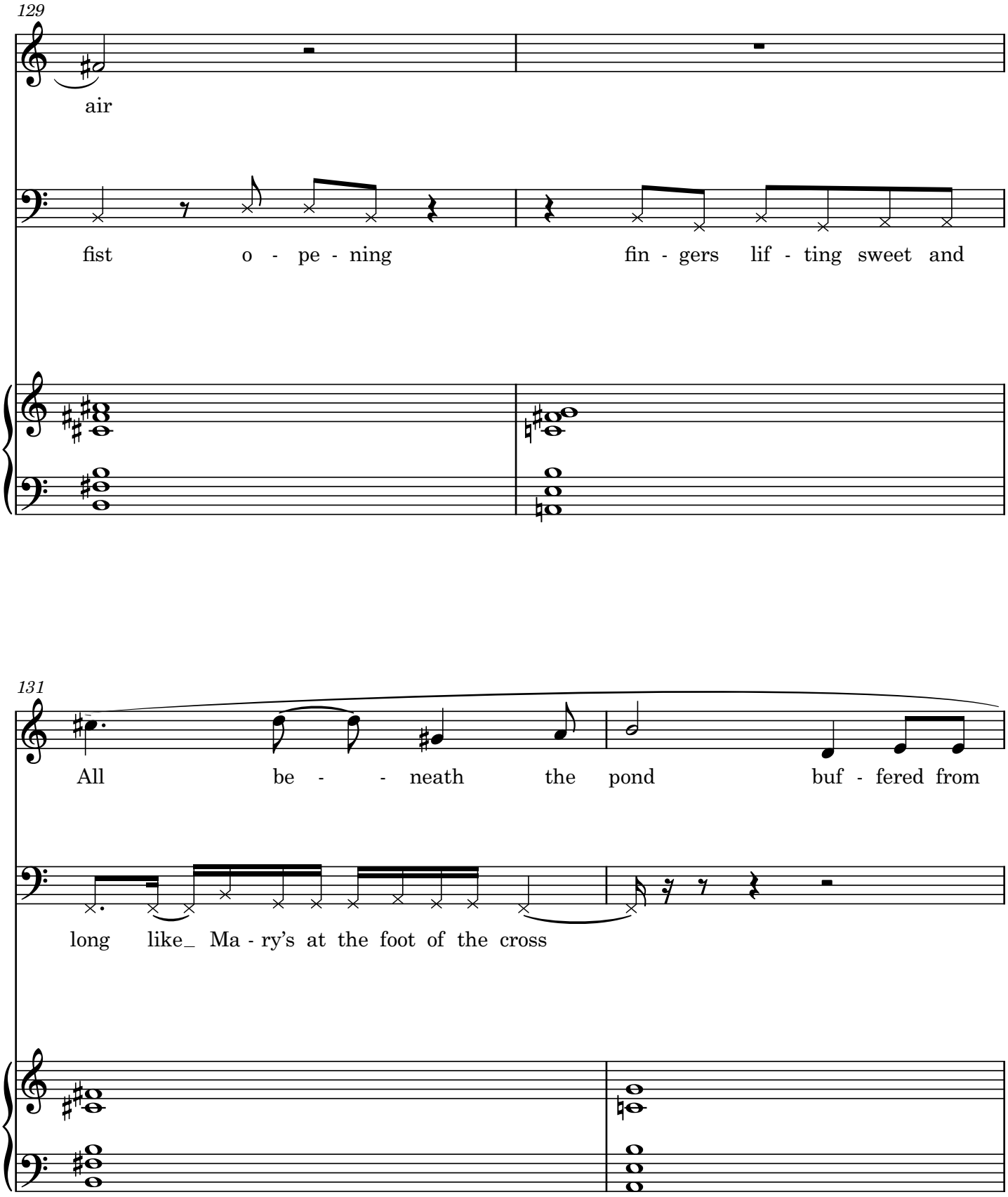

121
came for
or the sound of the sound be - co - ming a sound: that, or

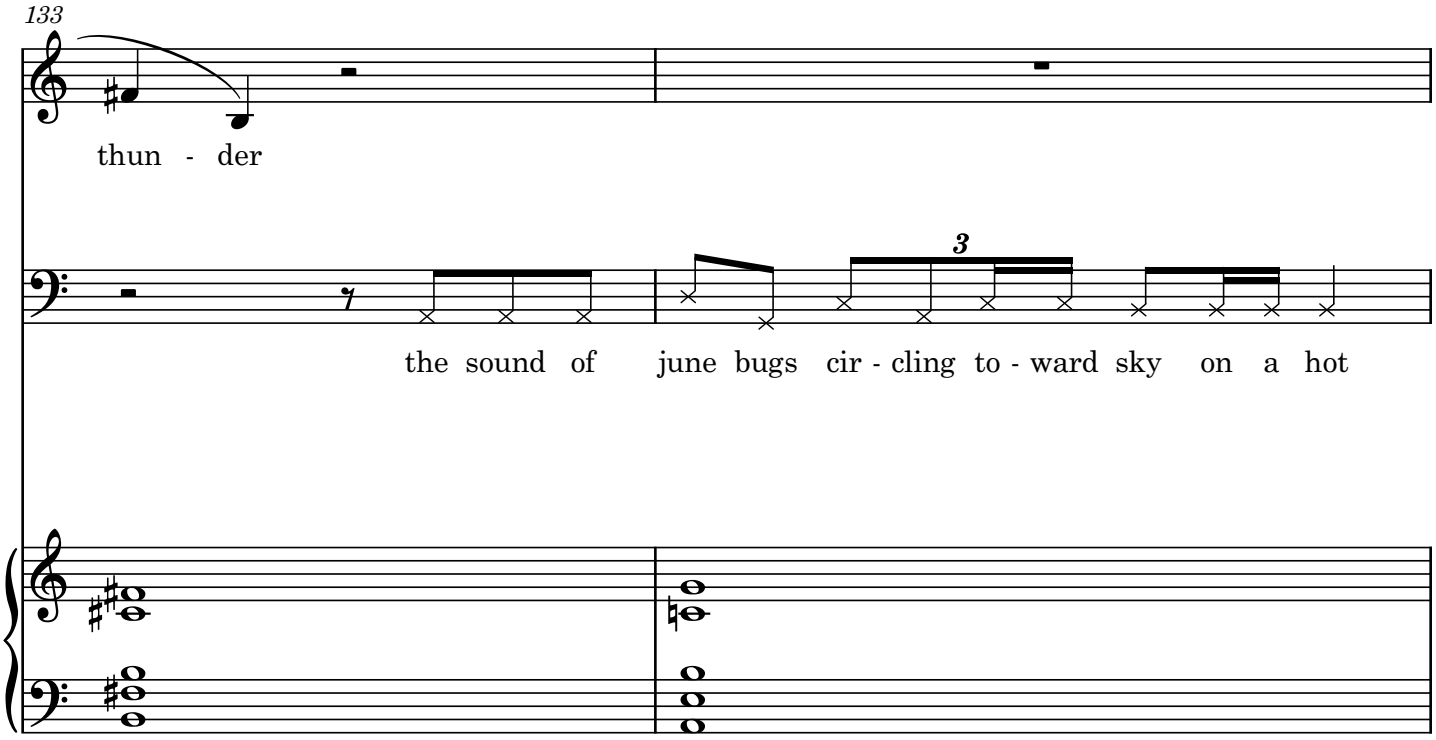

123
All be - neath the pond buf - - fered from
si - lence as wa - - ter

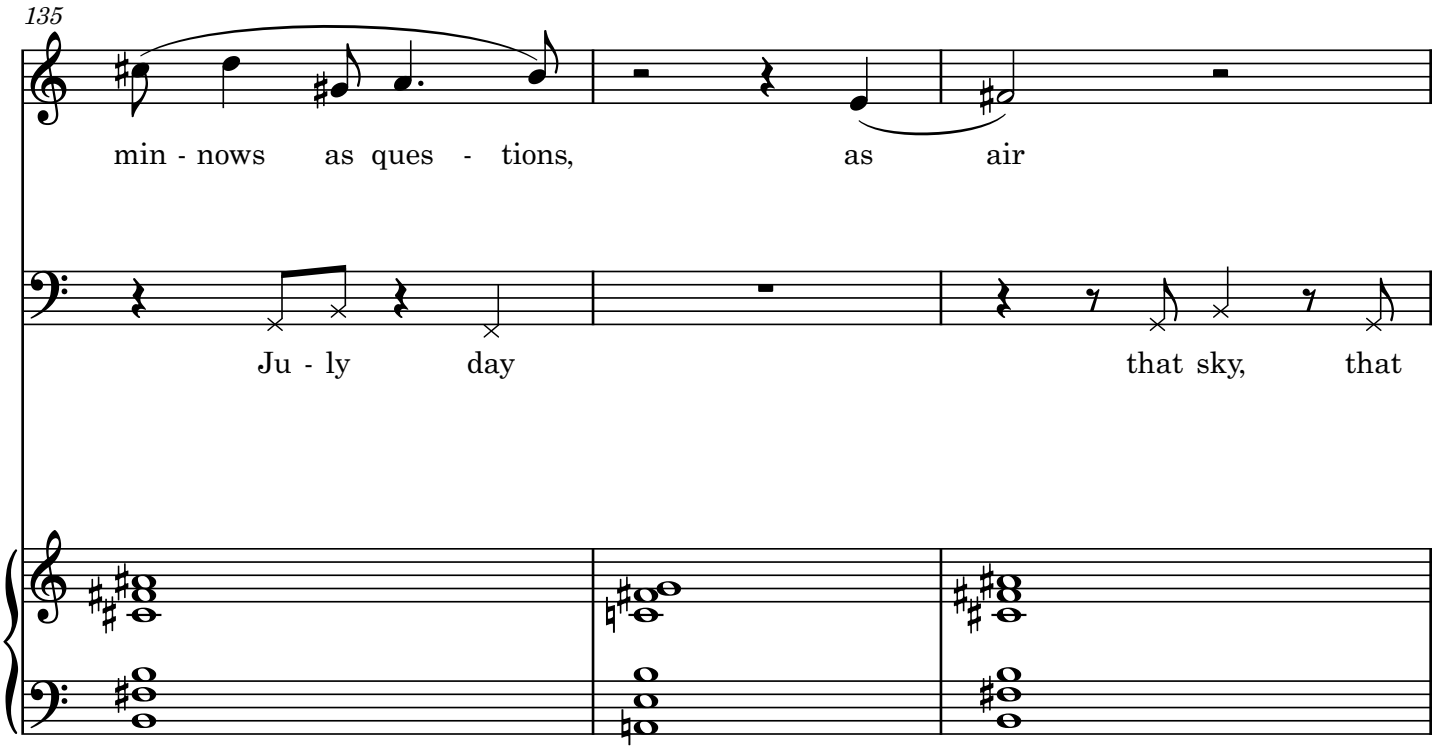

125
thun - der
spoken, pitches indicate suggested cadence, can be transposed to wherever feels natural
the choice in the end be - ing false: you
ff
p
p

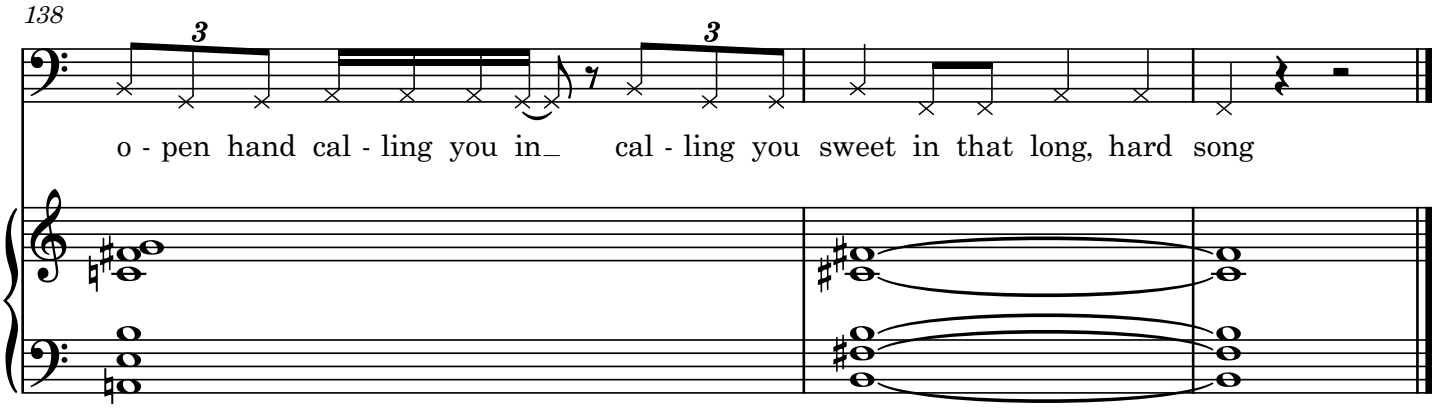

127
min - nows as ques - - - tions,
choose what you hold in your heart


128
as
and you loose from the case what you hold in your

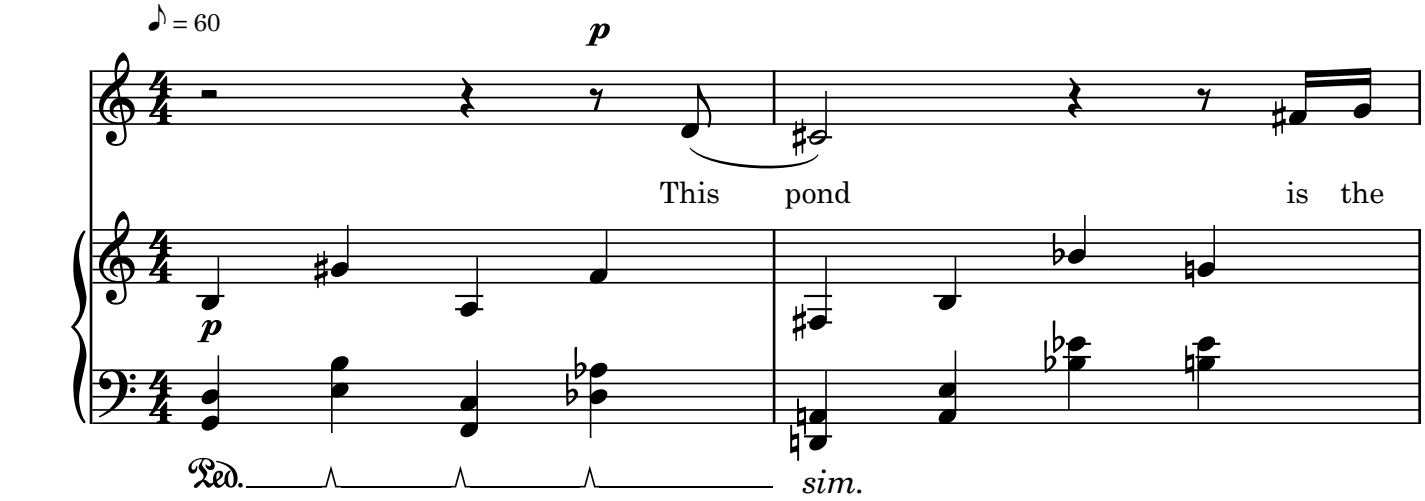

129
air
fist o - pe - ning fin - gers lif - ting sweet and
131
All be - - neath the pond buf - fered from
long like_ Ma - ry's at the foot of the cross

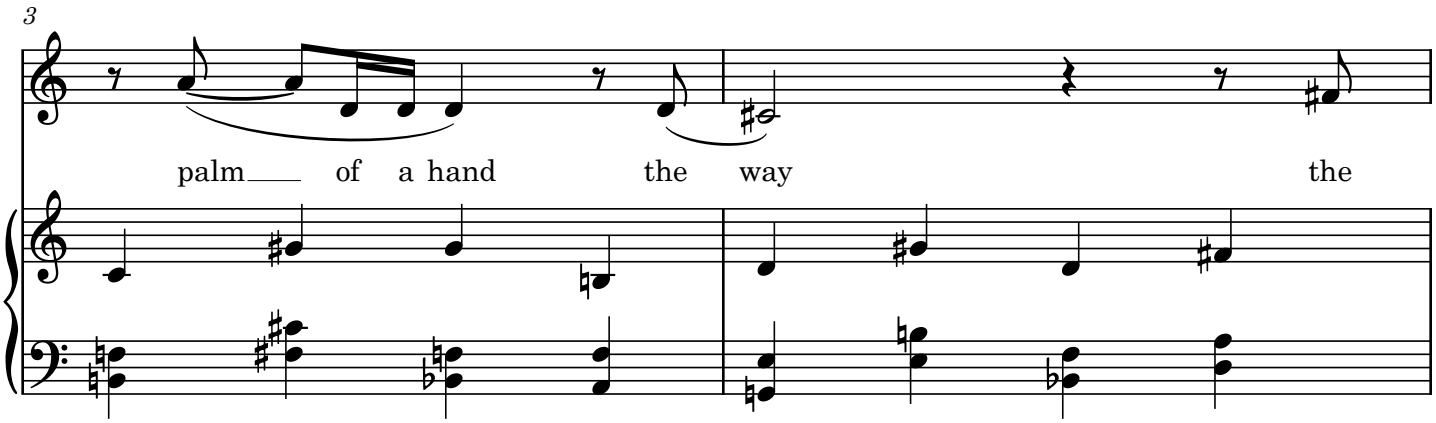

133
thun - der
3
the sound of june bugs cir - cling to - ward sky on a hot

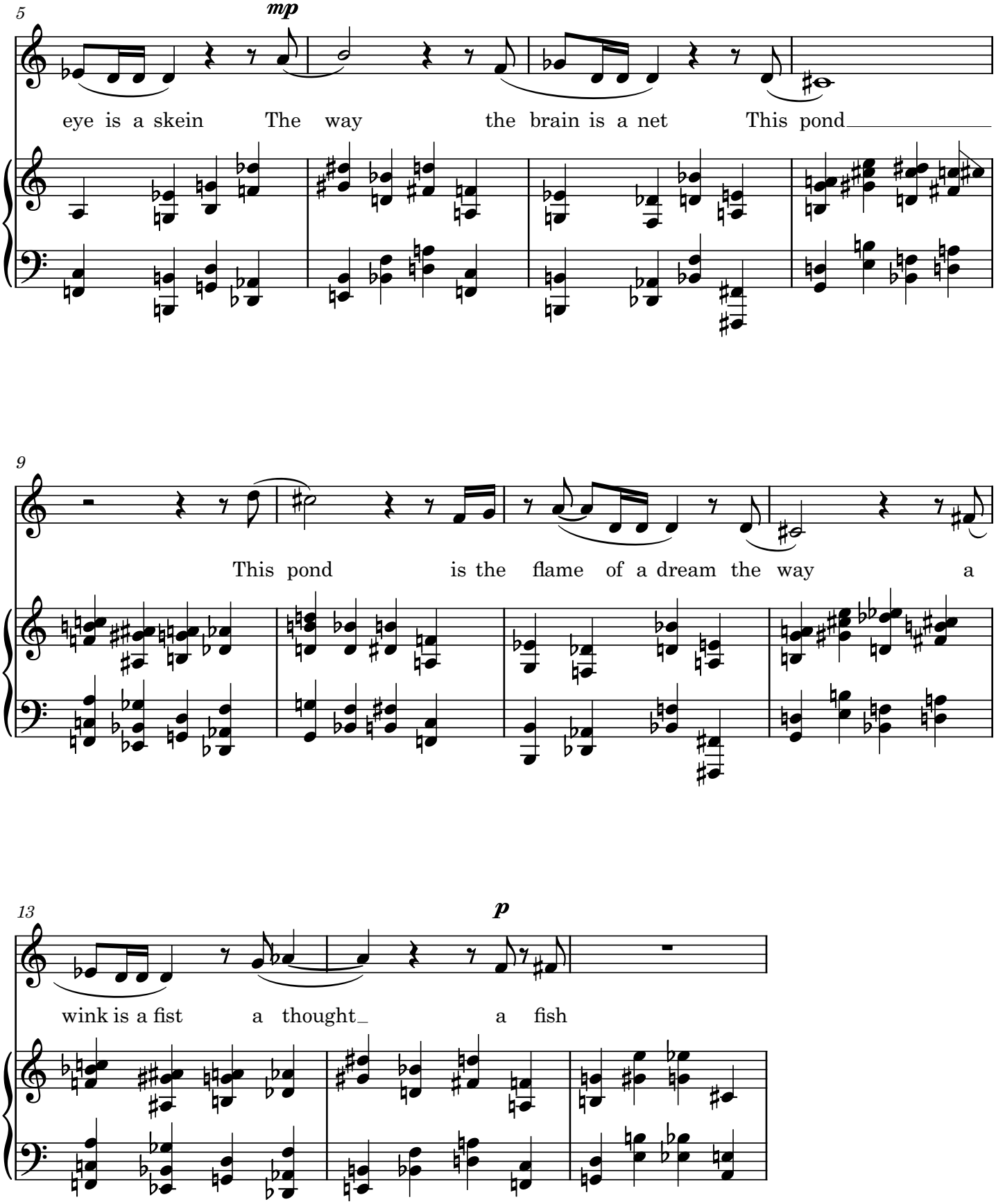

135
min - nows as ques - tions, as air
Ju - ly day that sky, that



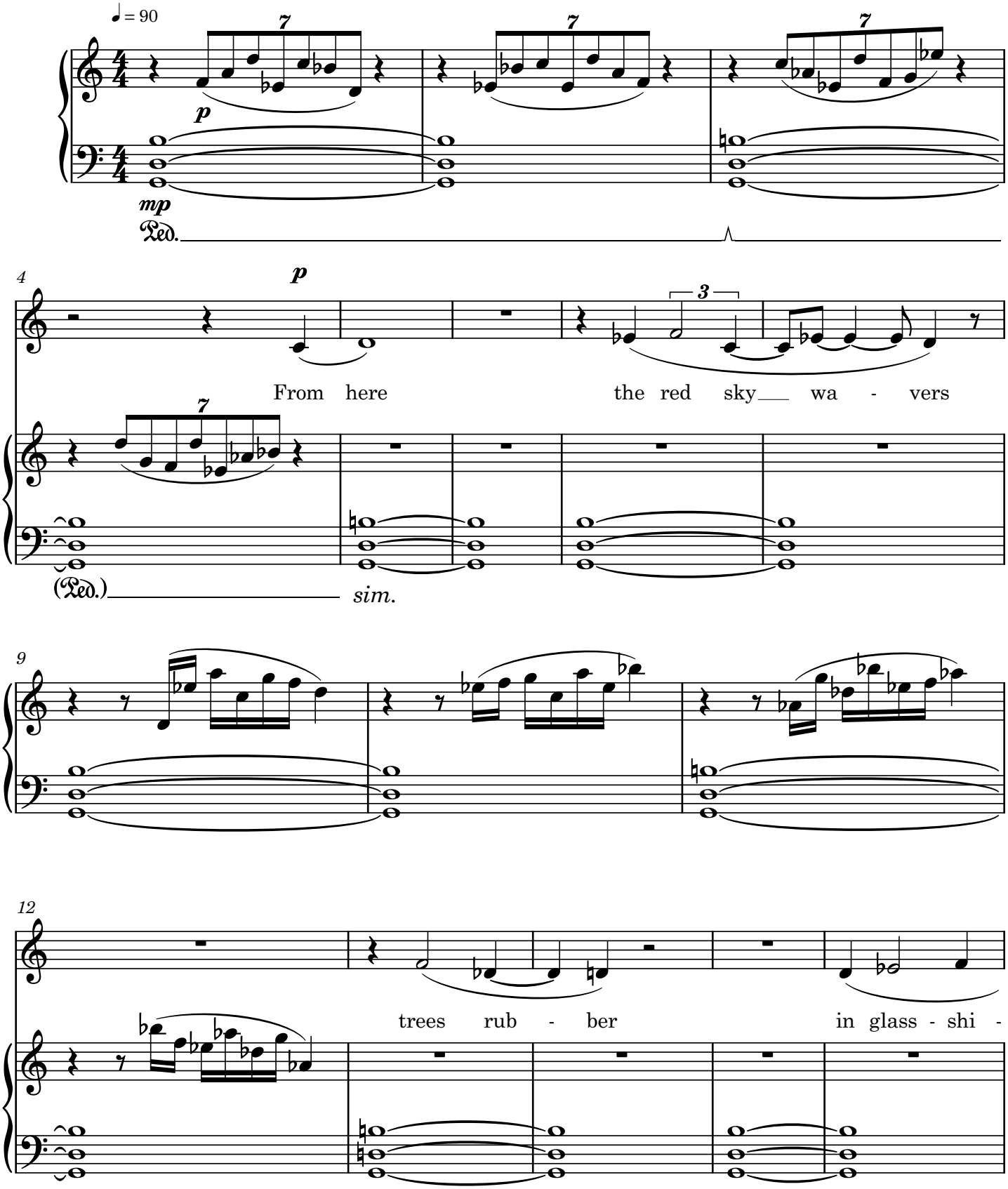
2. The Way a Minnow is a Dream

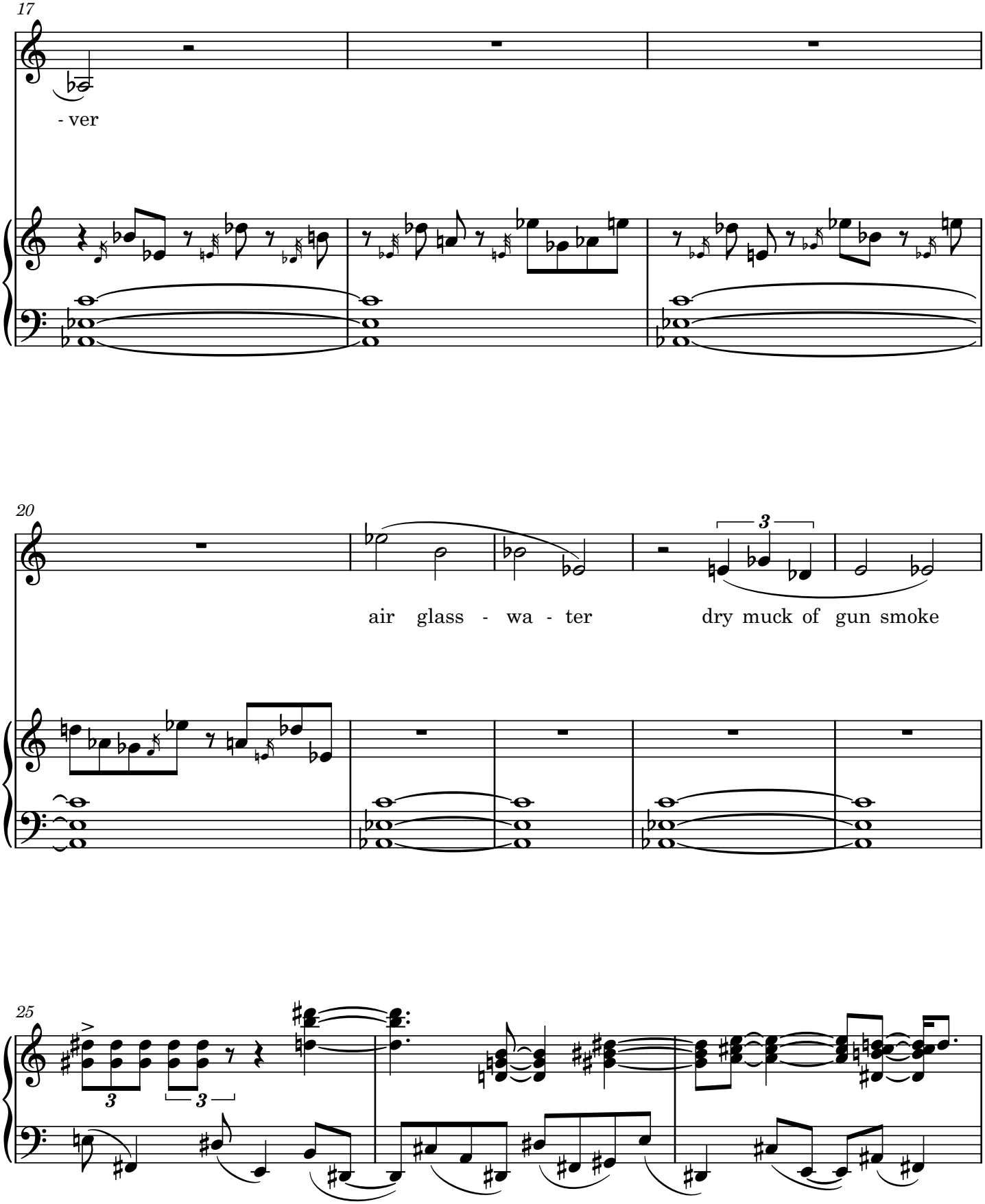


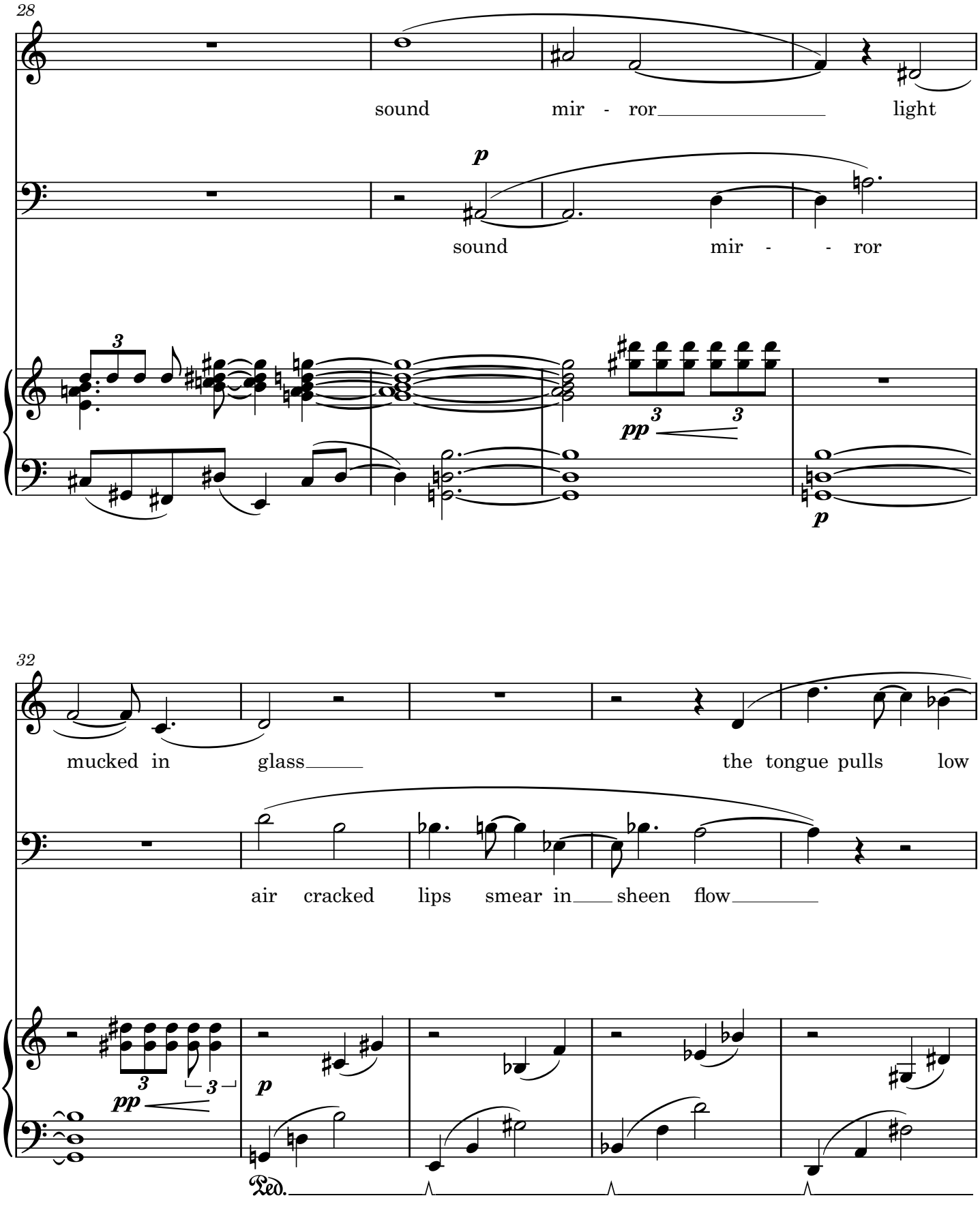


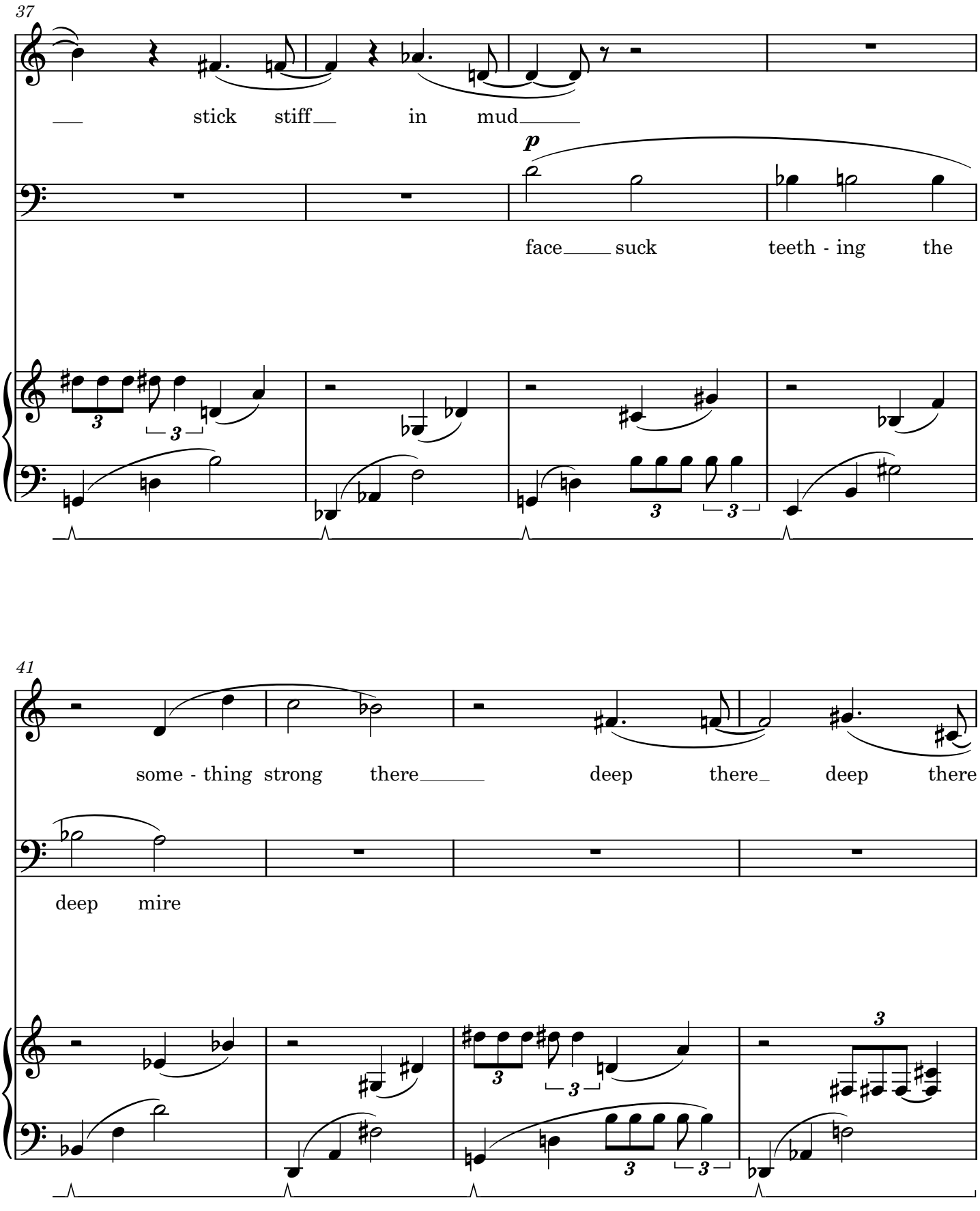

5
mp
eye is a skein The way the brain is a net This pond
9
This pond is the flame of a dream the way a
13
p
wink is a fist a thought a fish

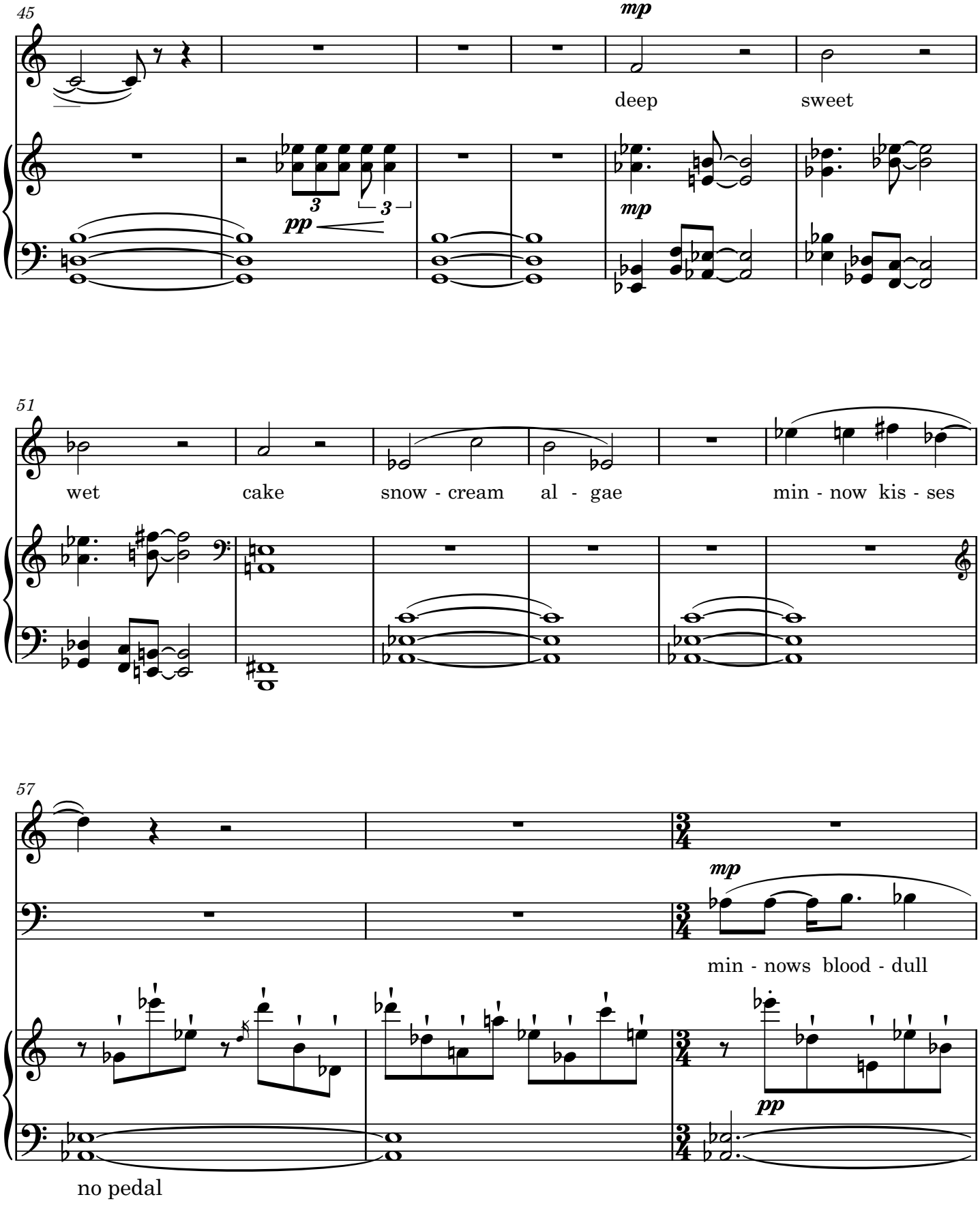
3. View From the Bloody Pond

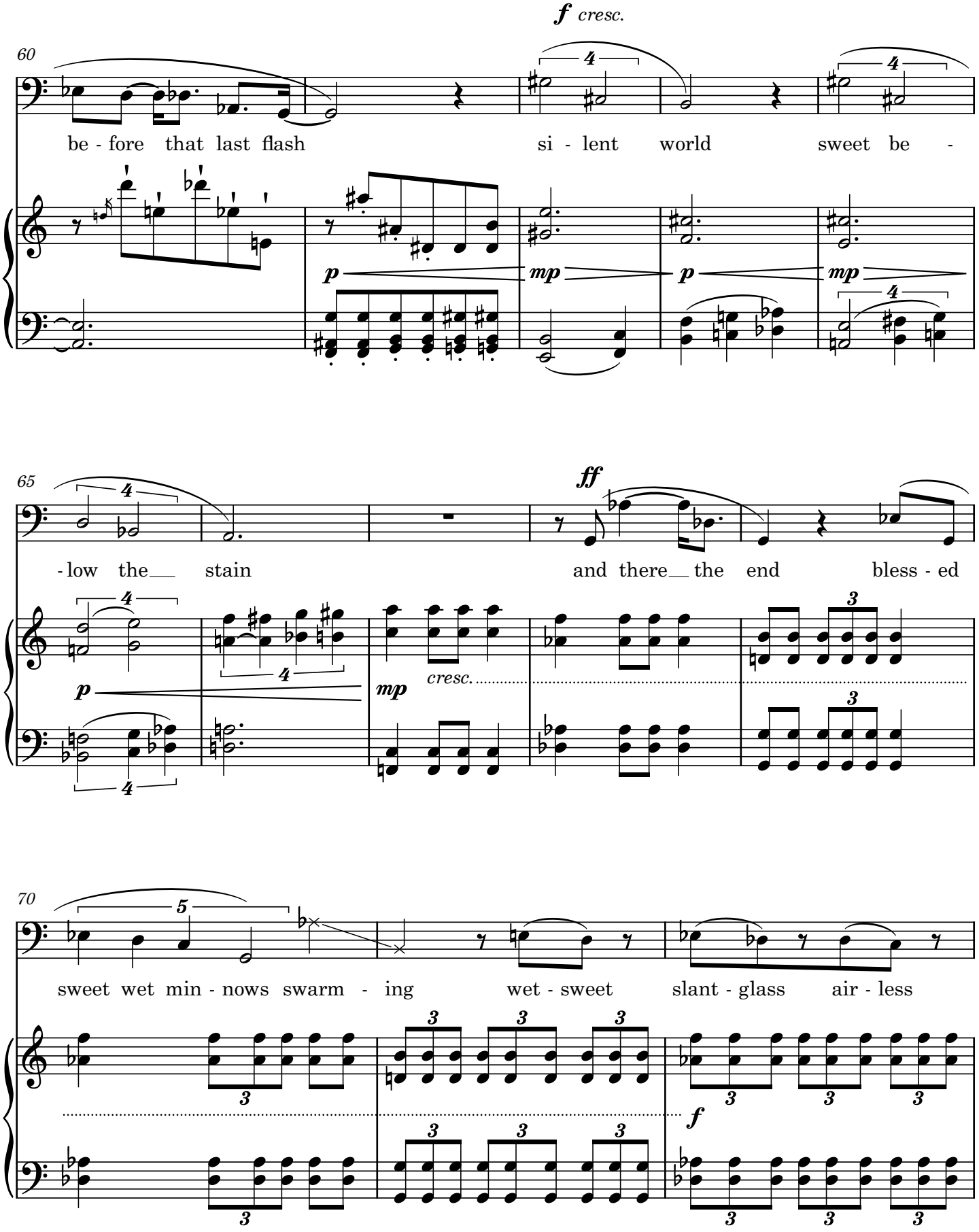


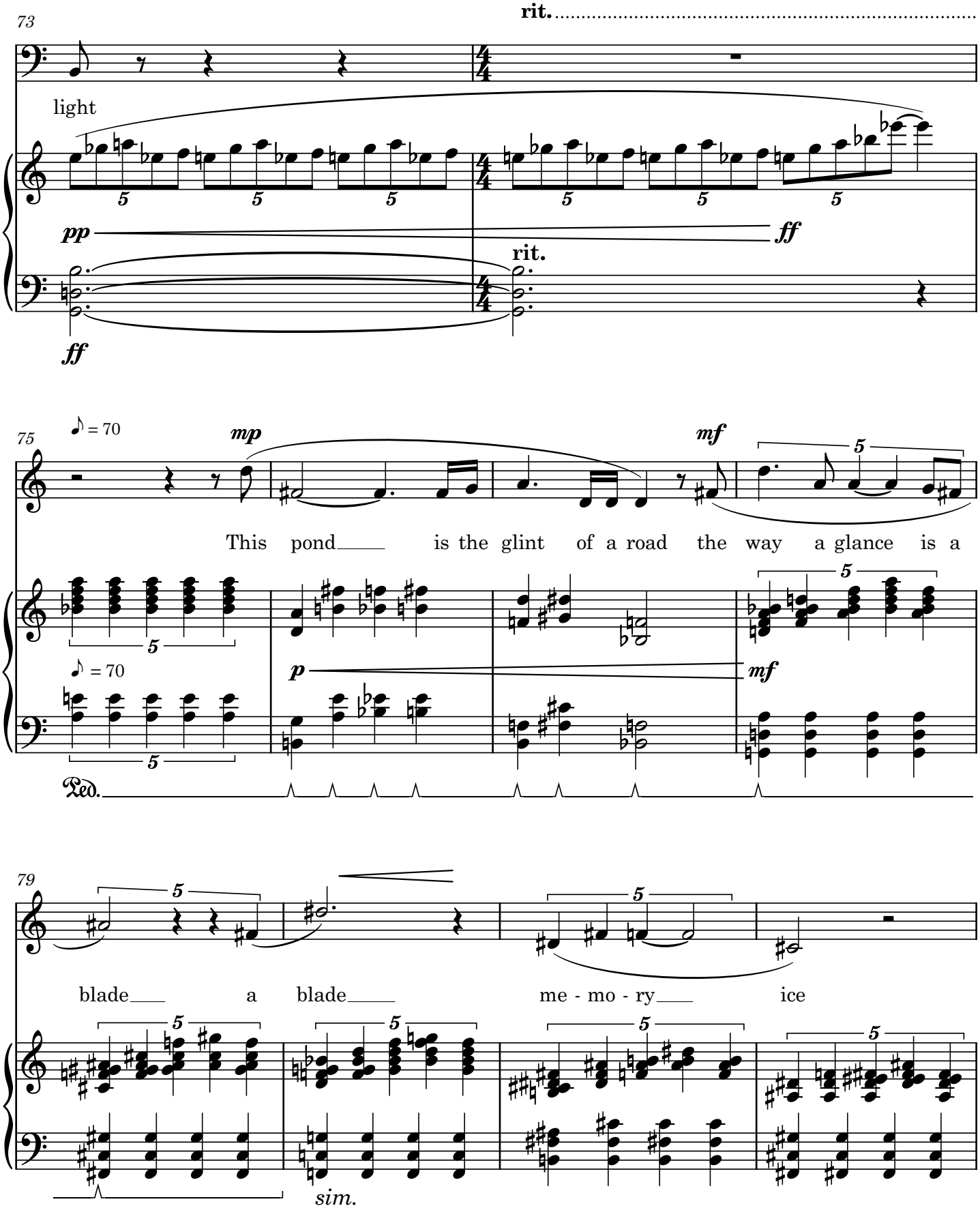

17
- ver
20
air glass - wa - ter
dry muck of gun smoke
25

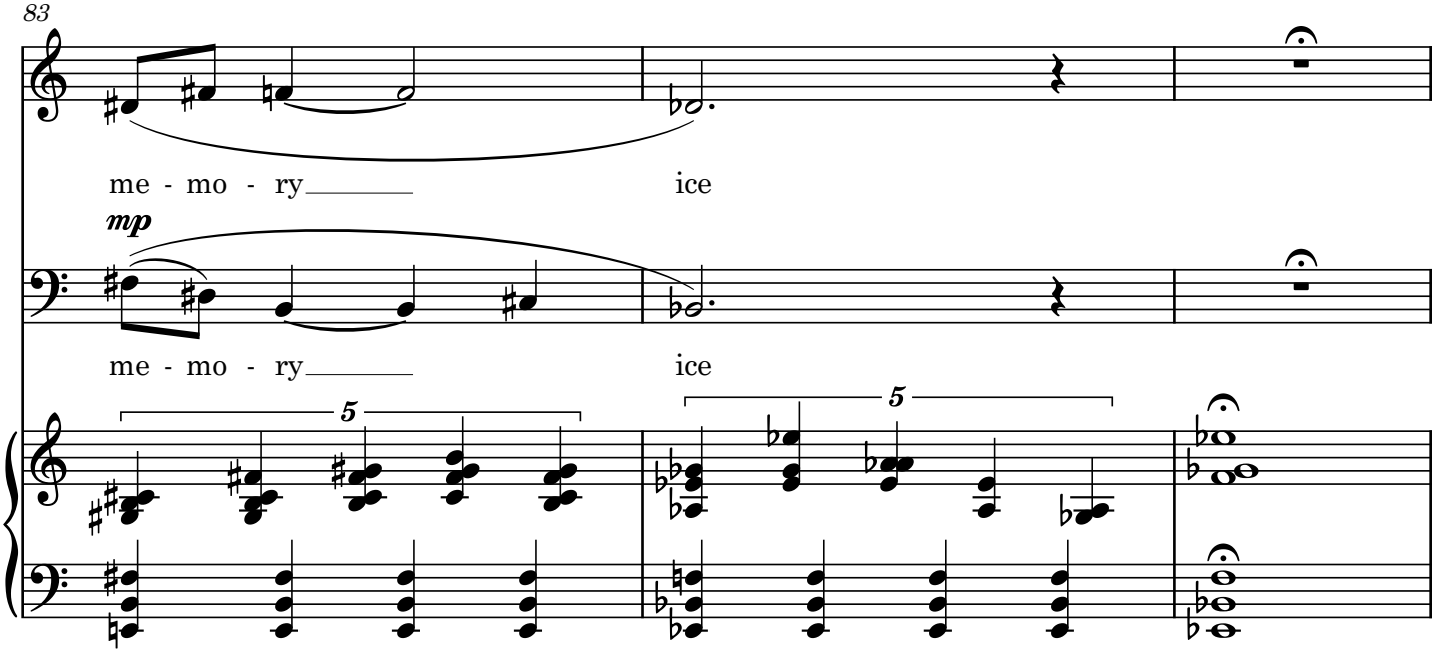

28
sound mir - ror light
p
sound mir - - ror
3
pp
3
3
p
32
mucked in glass the tongue pulls low
air cracked lips smear in sheen flow
3
3
pp
p
Ped.


37
stick stiff in mud
p
face suck teeth - ing the
41
some - thing strong there deep there deep there
deep mire

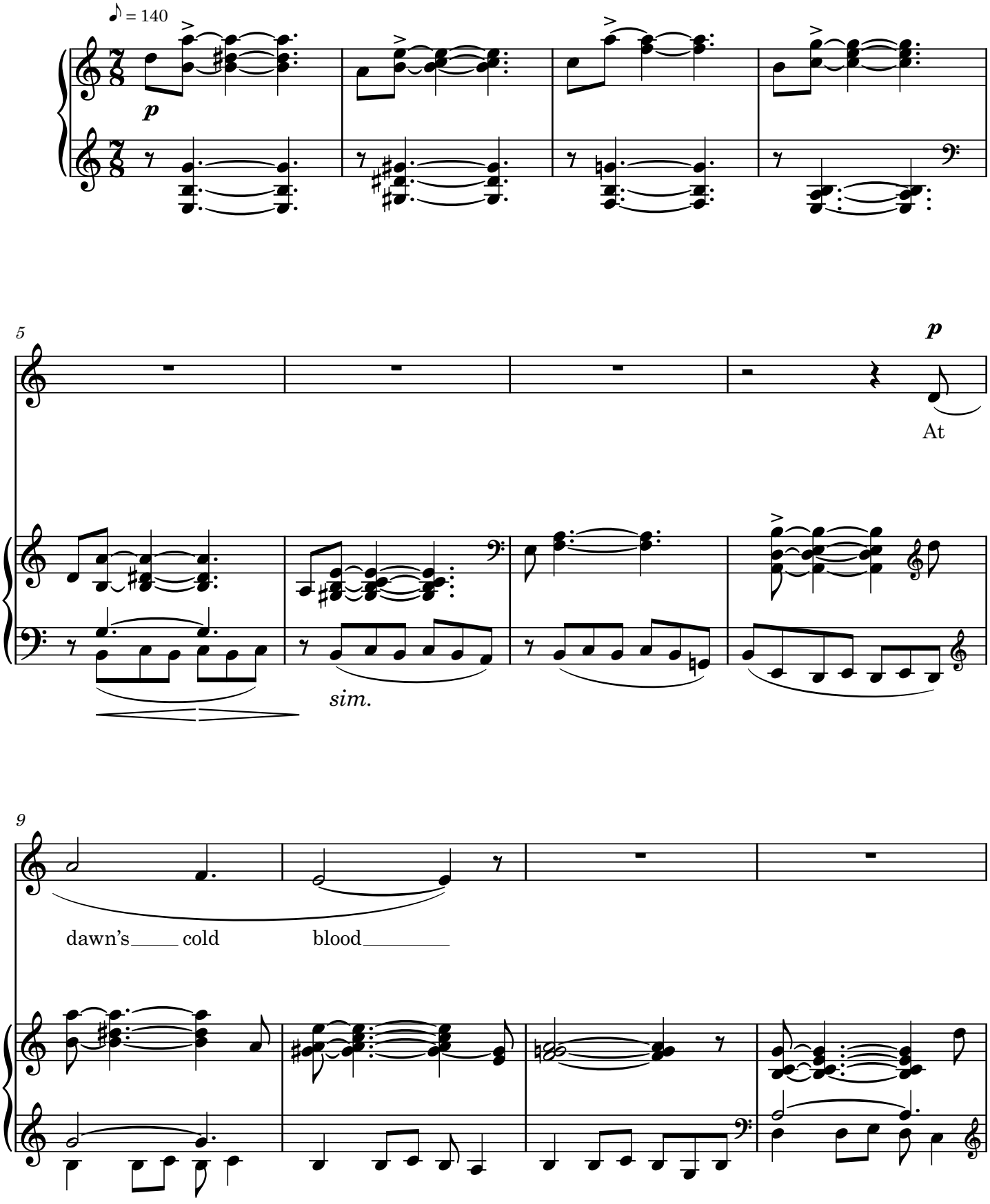

45
mp
deep
sweet
pp
mp
51
wet
cake
snow - cream
al - gae
min - now kis - ses
57
mp
min - nows blood - dull
pp
no pedal

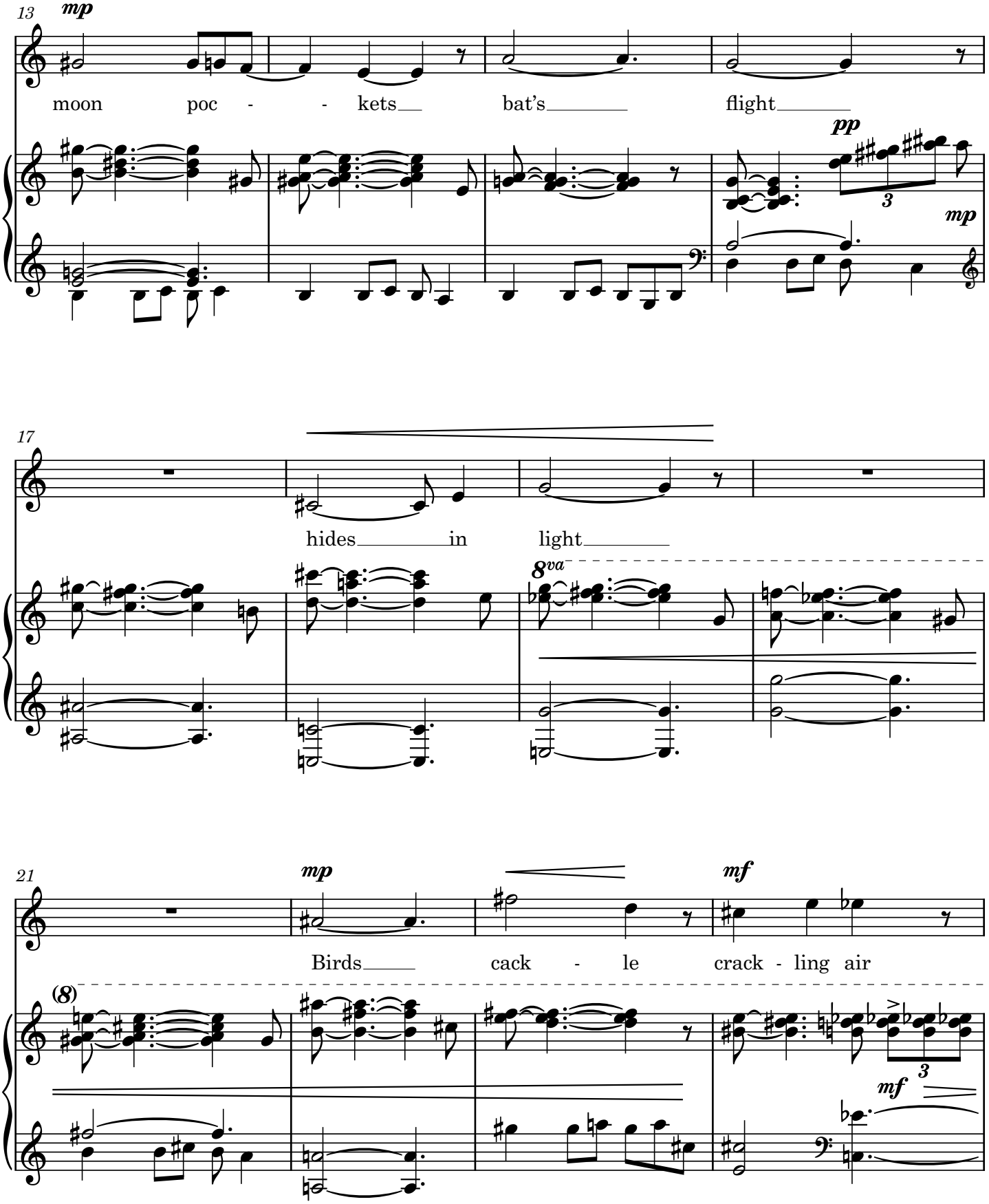

60
f cresc.
be - fore that last flash
si - lent world
sweet be -
p
mp
p
mp
65
ff
- low the stain
and there the end
bless - ed
p
mp
cresc.
70
sweet wet min - nows swarm - ing
wet - sweet
slant - glass air - less
f

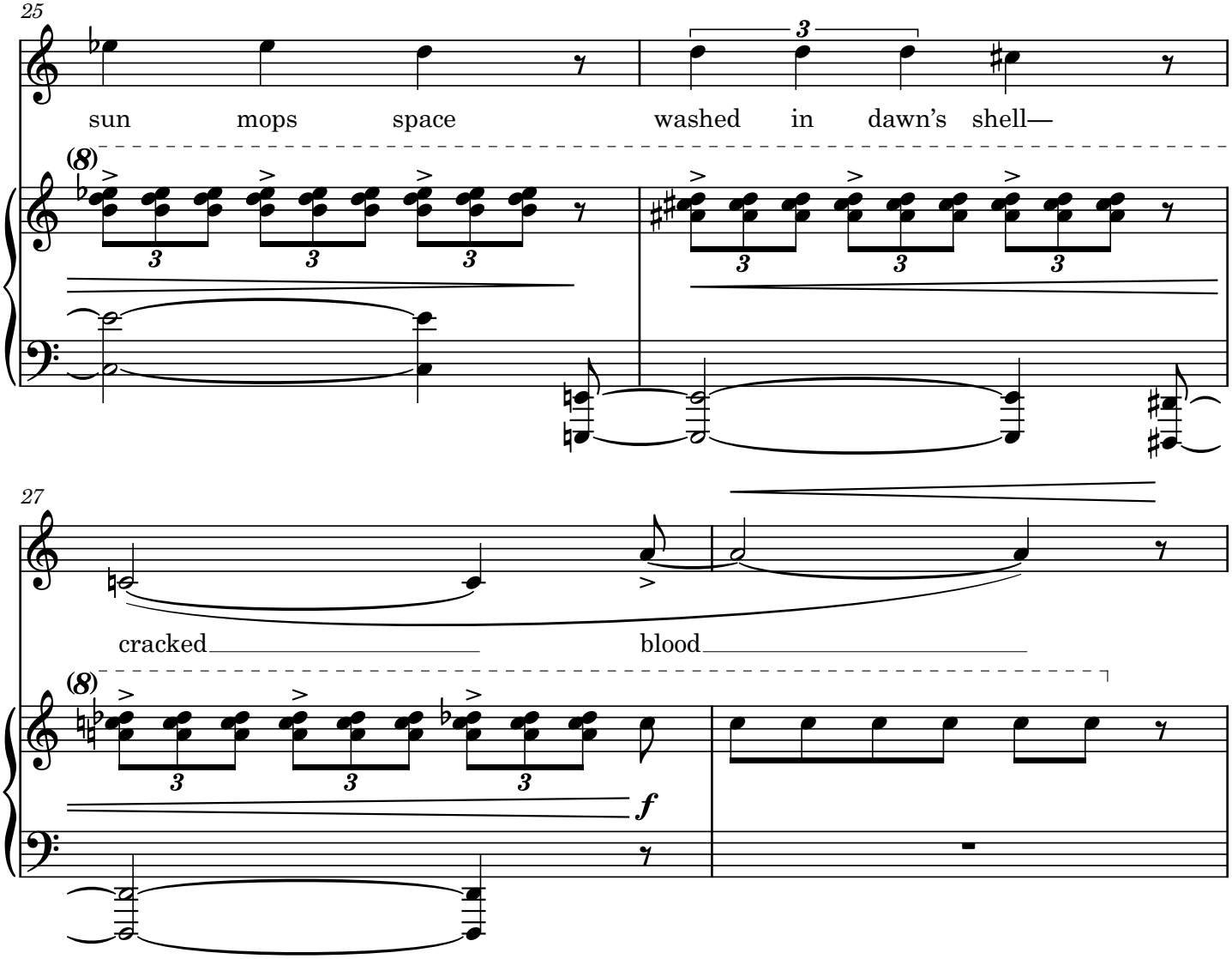

73
rit.
light
pp
ff
rit.
ff
75
♪ = 70
mp
mf
This pond is the glint of a road the way a glance is a
♪ = 70
p
mf
Ped.
79
blade a blade me - mo - ry ice
sim.


83
me - mo - ry
ice
mp
me - mo - ry
ice
5
5

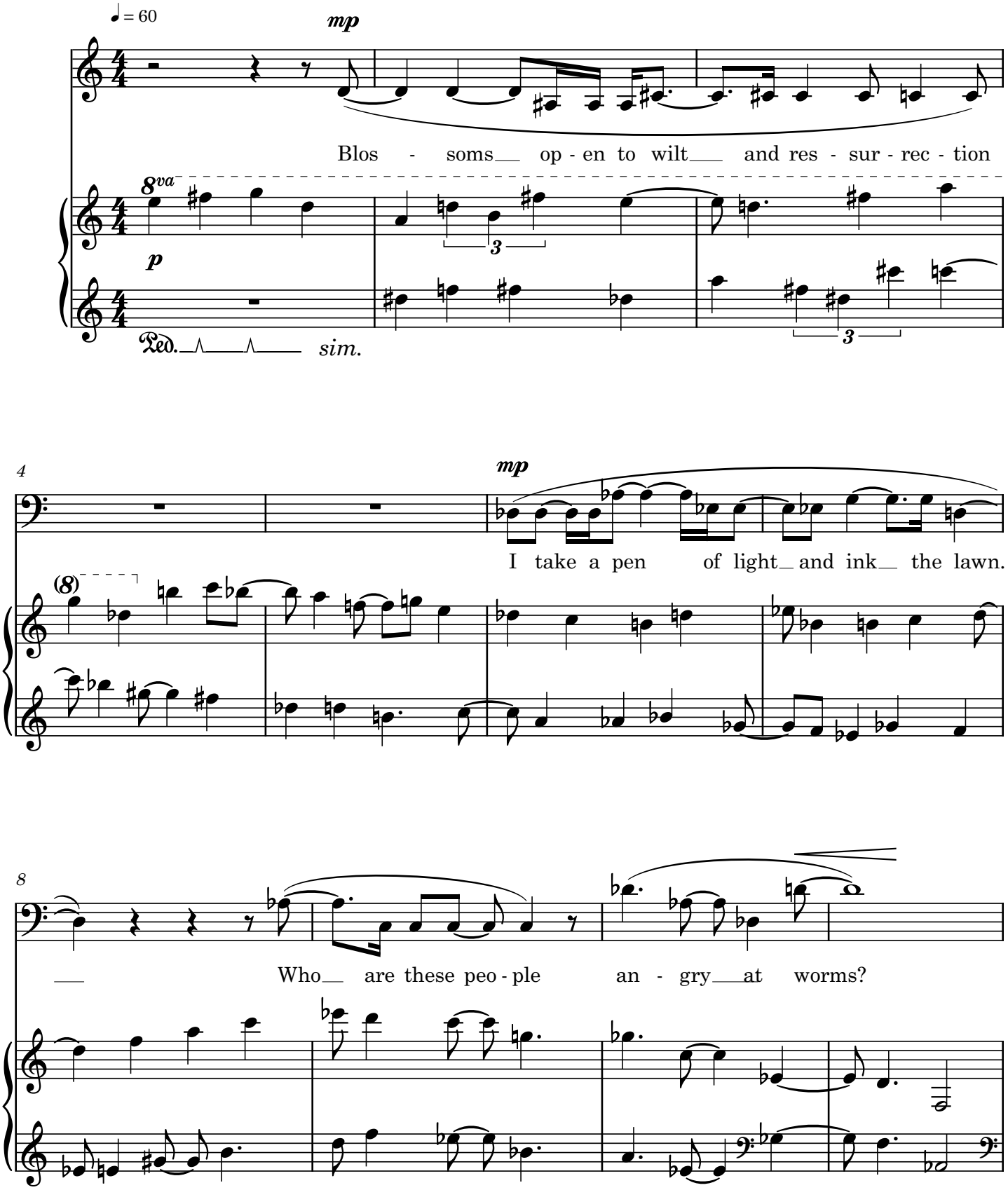
4. Morning

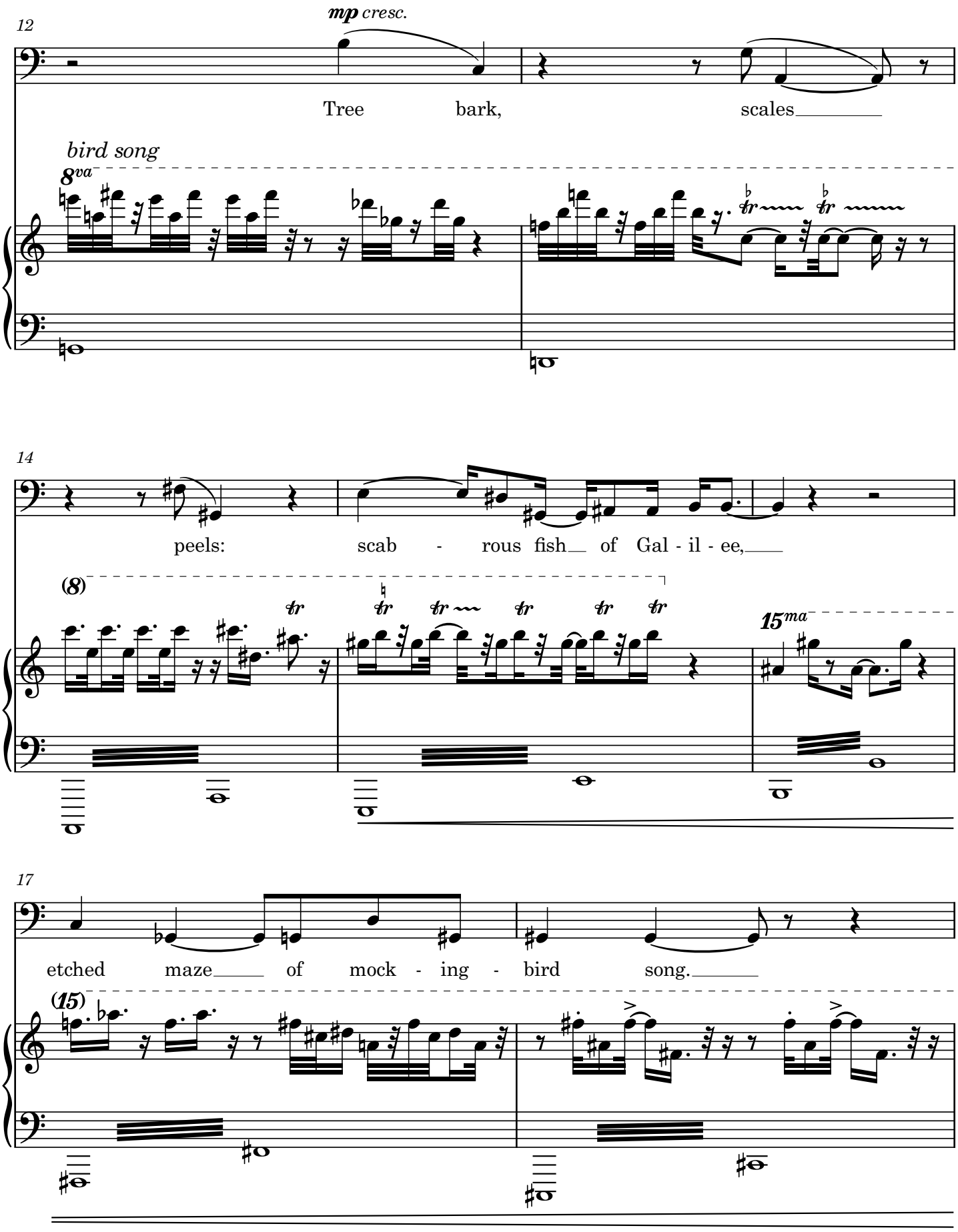


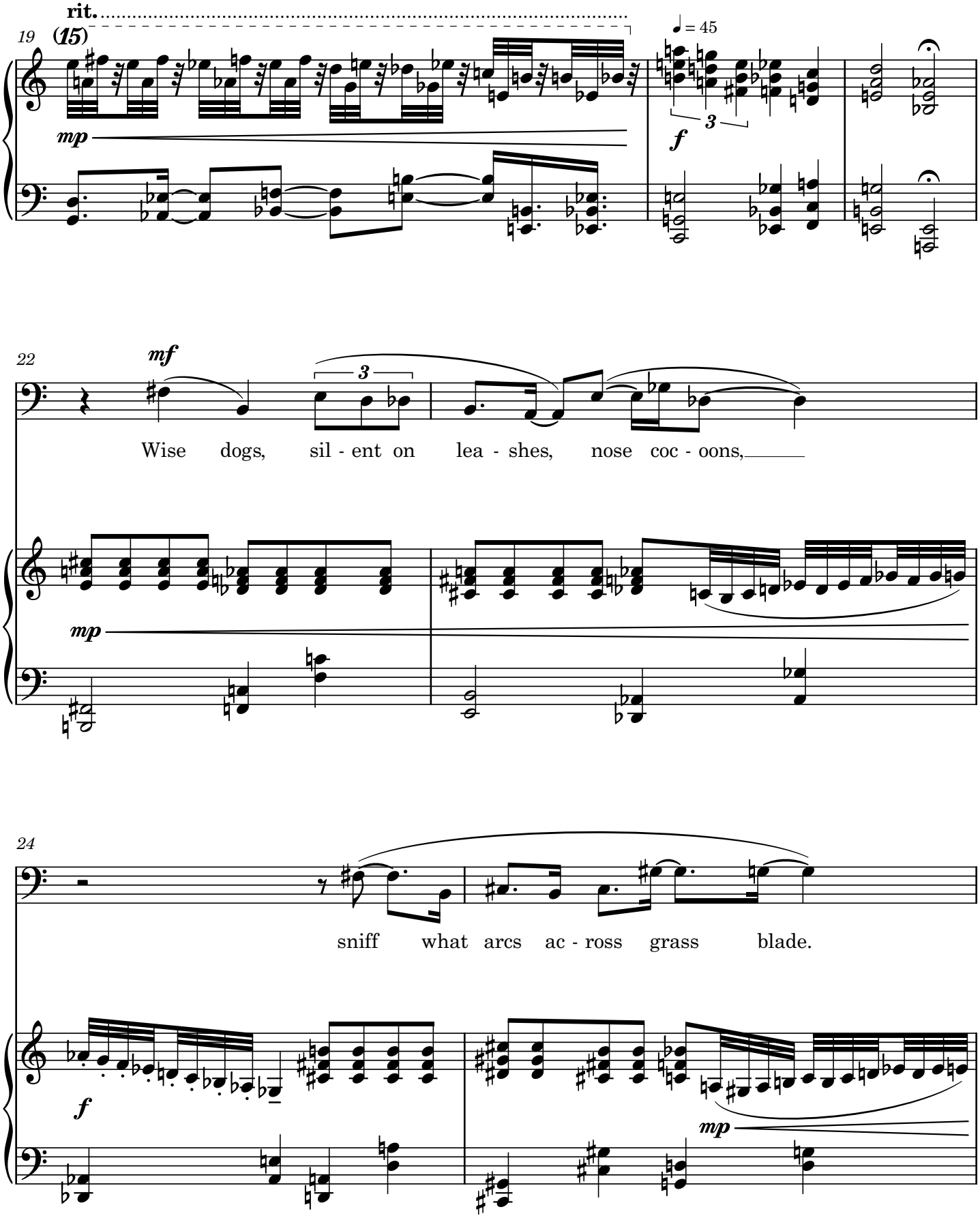

13
mp
moon poc - - kets bat's flight
pp
3
mp
17
hides in light
8va
21
mp
mf
Birds cack - le crack - ling air
(8)
3
mf

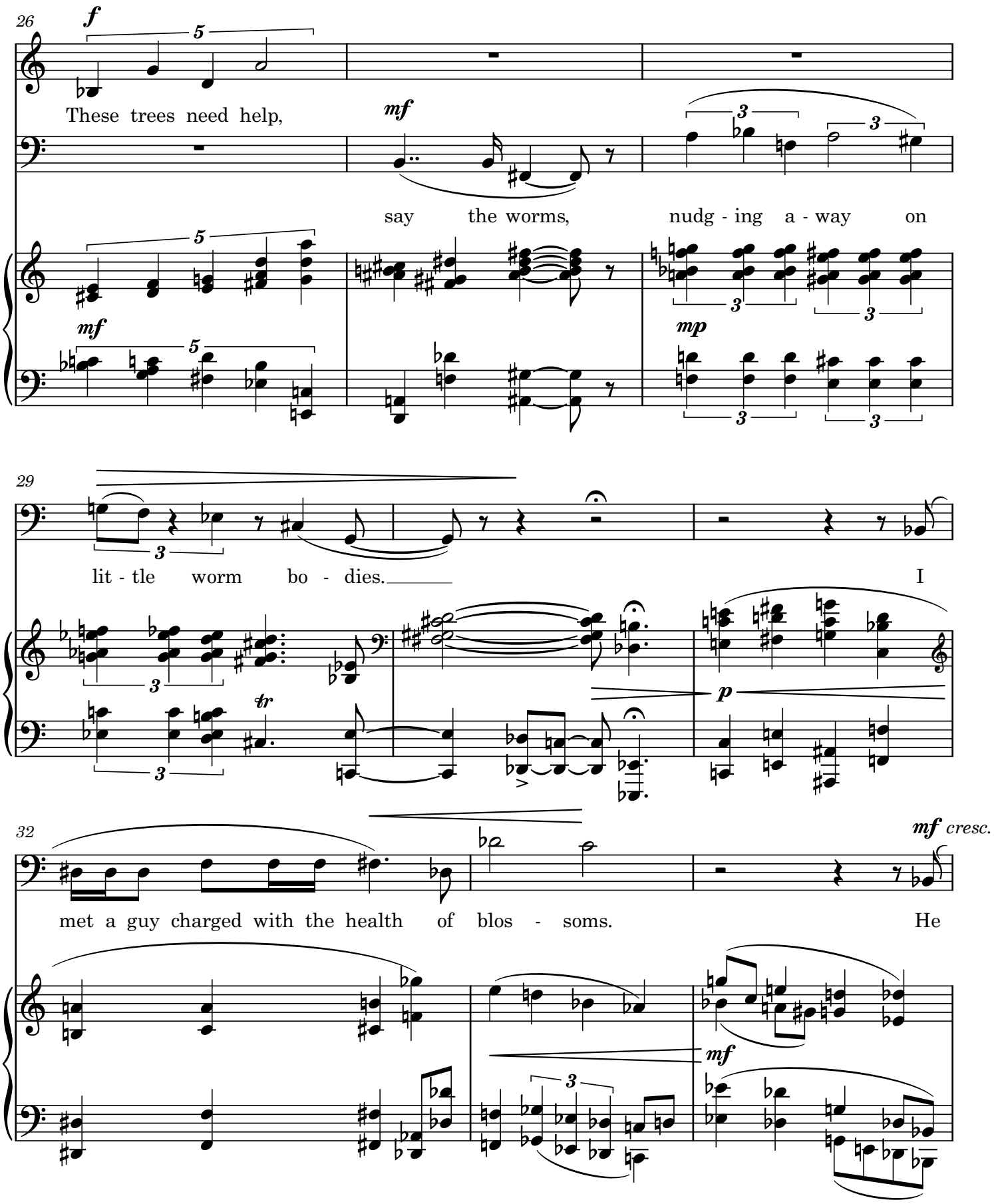

25
sun mops space washed in dawn's shell—
27
cracked blood
f

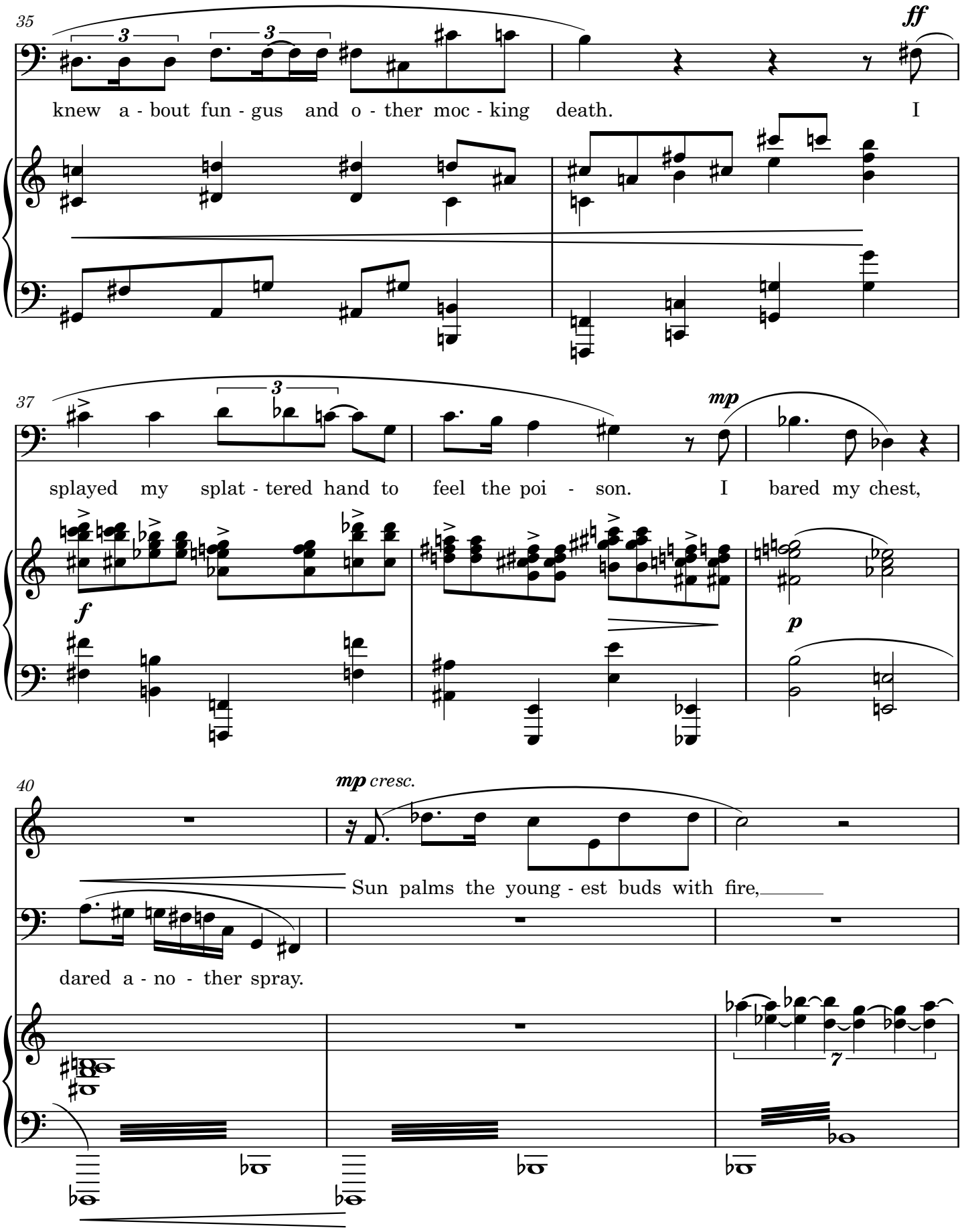
5. Dogwood

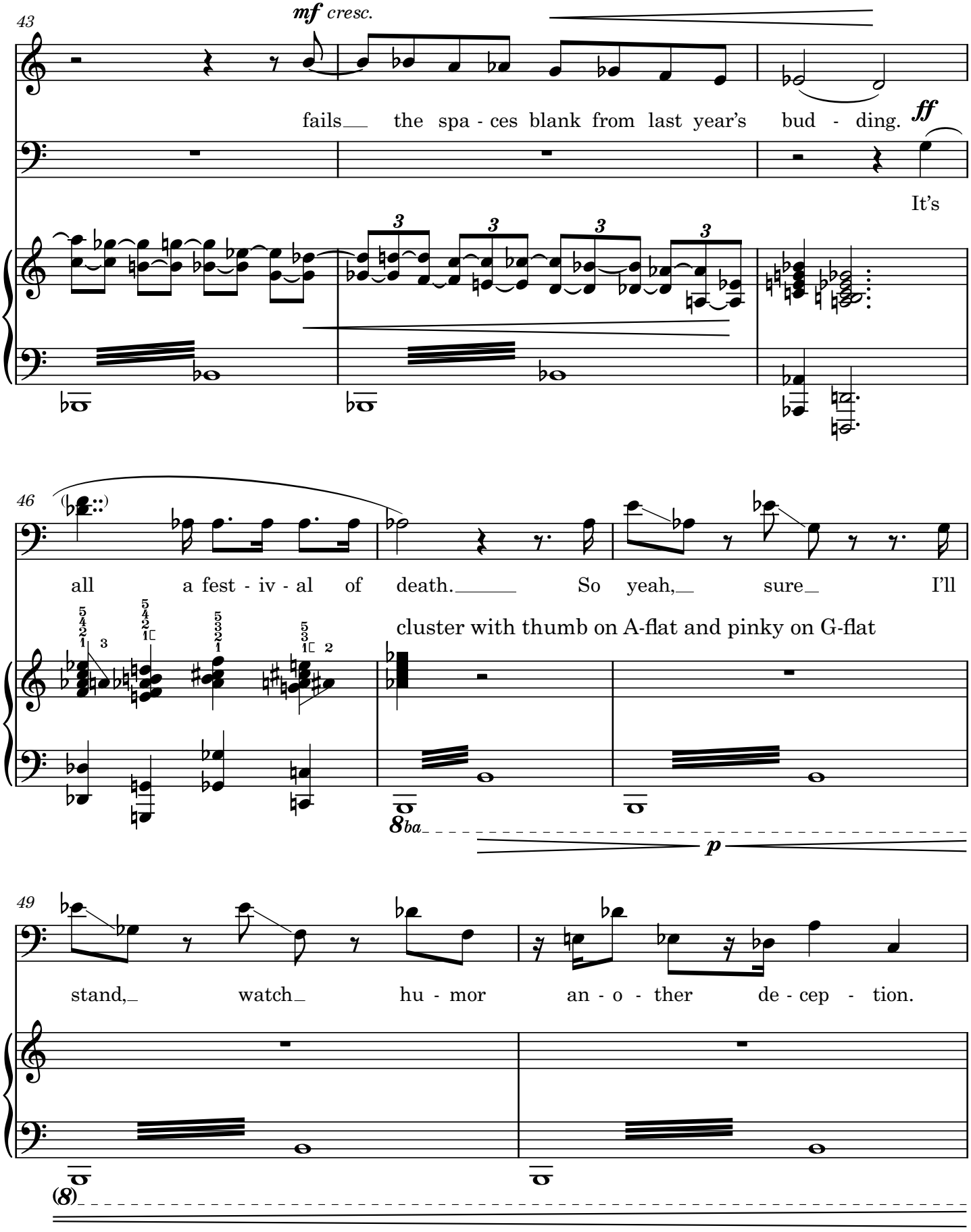

♩ = 60
mp
Blos - soms op - en to wilt and res - sur - rec - tion
8va
p
Ped.
sim.
4
mp
I take a pen of light and ink the lawn.
(8)
8
Who are these peo - ple an - gry at worms?

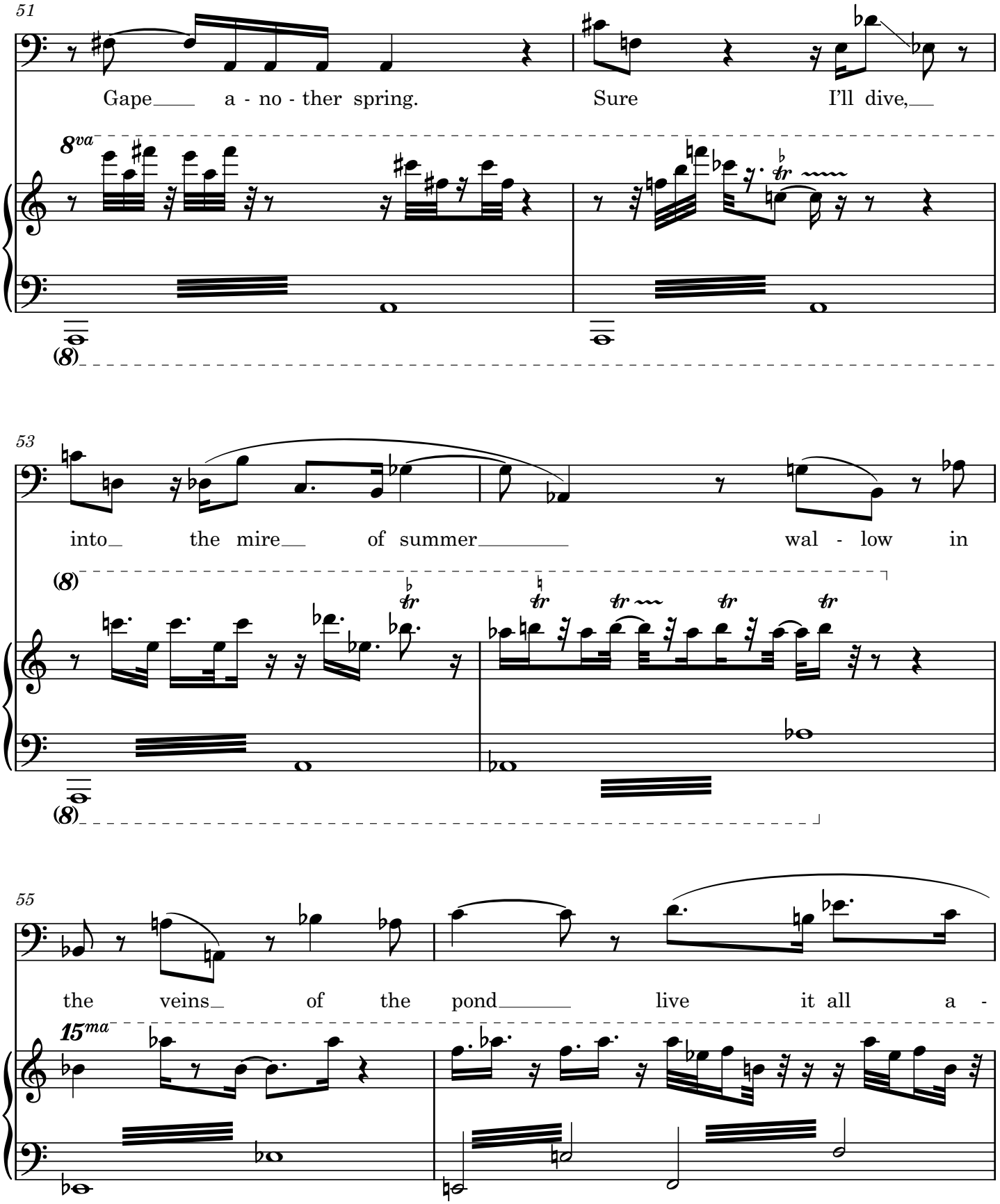

12
mp cresc.
Tree bark, scales
bird song
8va
14
peels: scab - rous fish of Gal - il - ee,
(8)
15ma
17
etched maze of mock - ing - bird song.
(15)

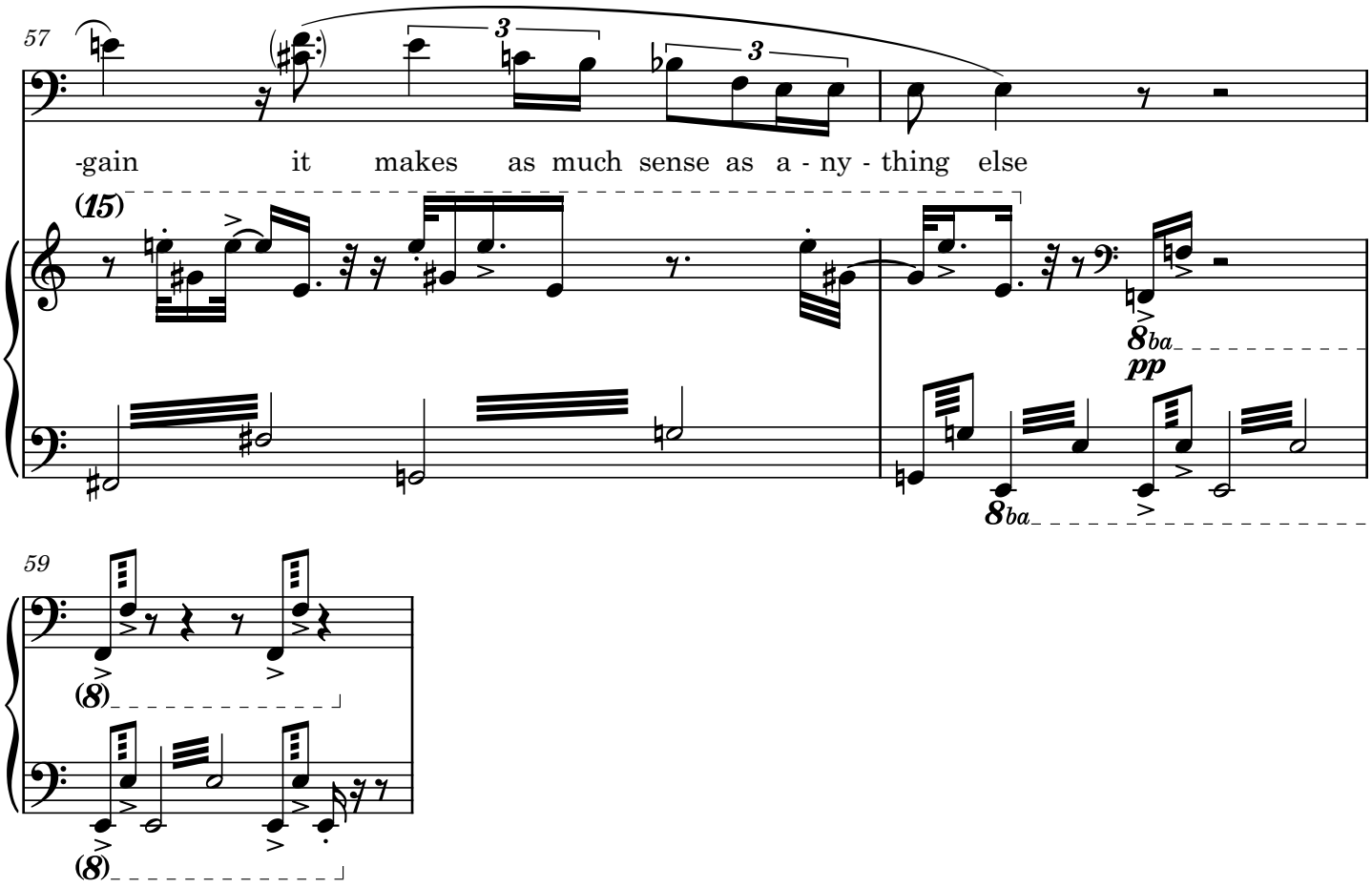

rit.
(15)
19
mp
♩ = 45
3
f
22
mf
3
Wise dogs, sil - ent on lea - shes, nose coc - oons,
mp
24
sniff what arcs ac - ross grass blade.
f
mp


26
These trees need help,
say the worms, nudg - ing a - way on
29
lit - tle worm bo - dies.
I
32
met a guy charged with the health of blos - soms.
He
cresc.

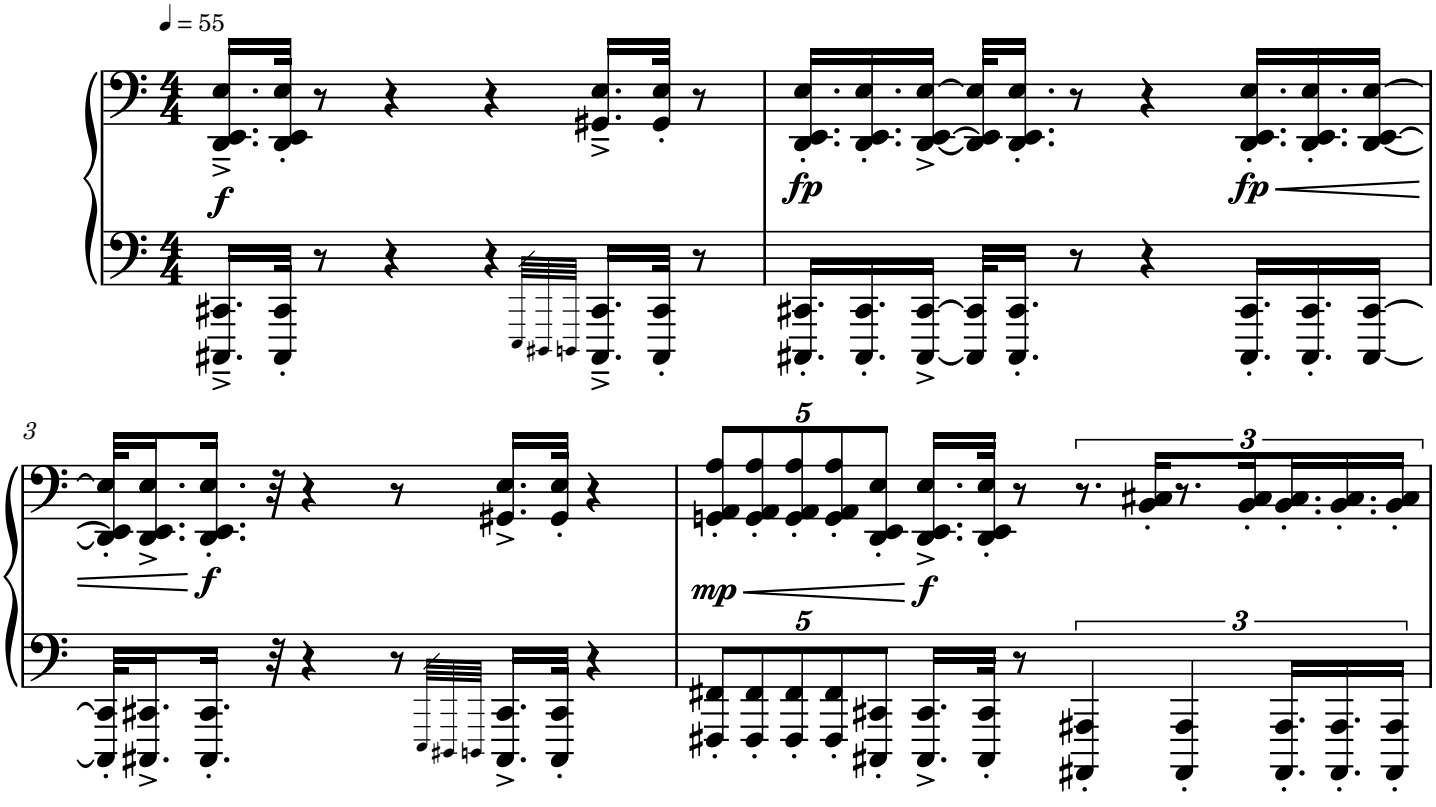

35
ff
knew a - bout fun - gus and o - ther moc - king death. I
37
mp
splayed my splat - tered hand to feel the poi - son. I bared my chest,
f
p
40
mp cresc.
Sun palms the young - est buds with fire,
dared a - no - ther spray.

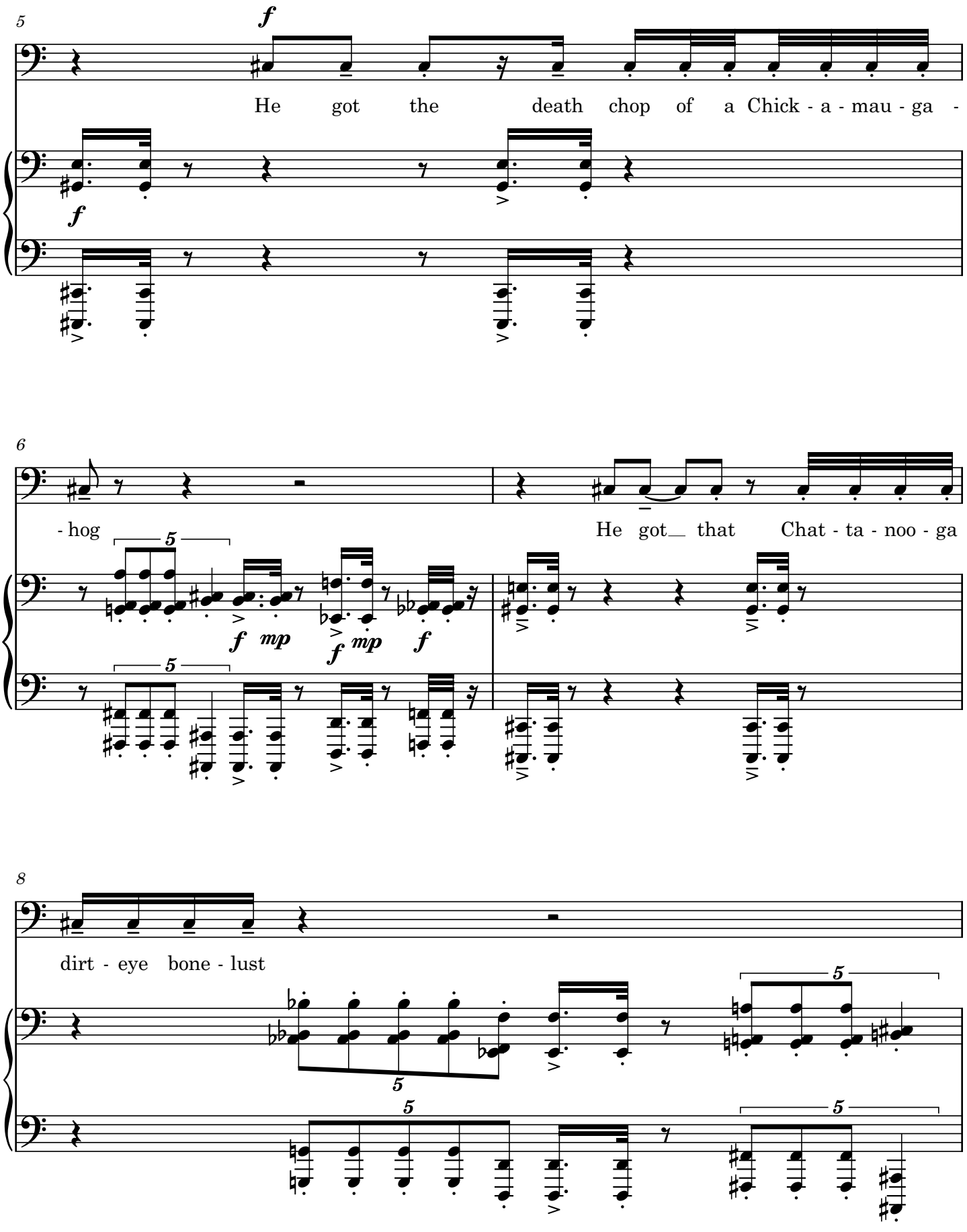

43
mf cresc.
fails the spa - ces blank from last year's bud - ding.
ff
It's
46
all a fest - iv - al of death. So yeah, sure I'll
cluster with thumb on A-flat and pinky on G-flat
8ba
p
49
stand, watch hu - mor an - o - ther de - cep - tion.
(8)

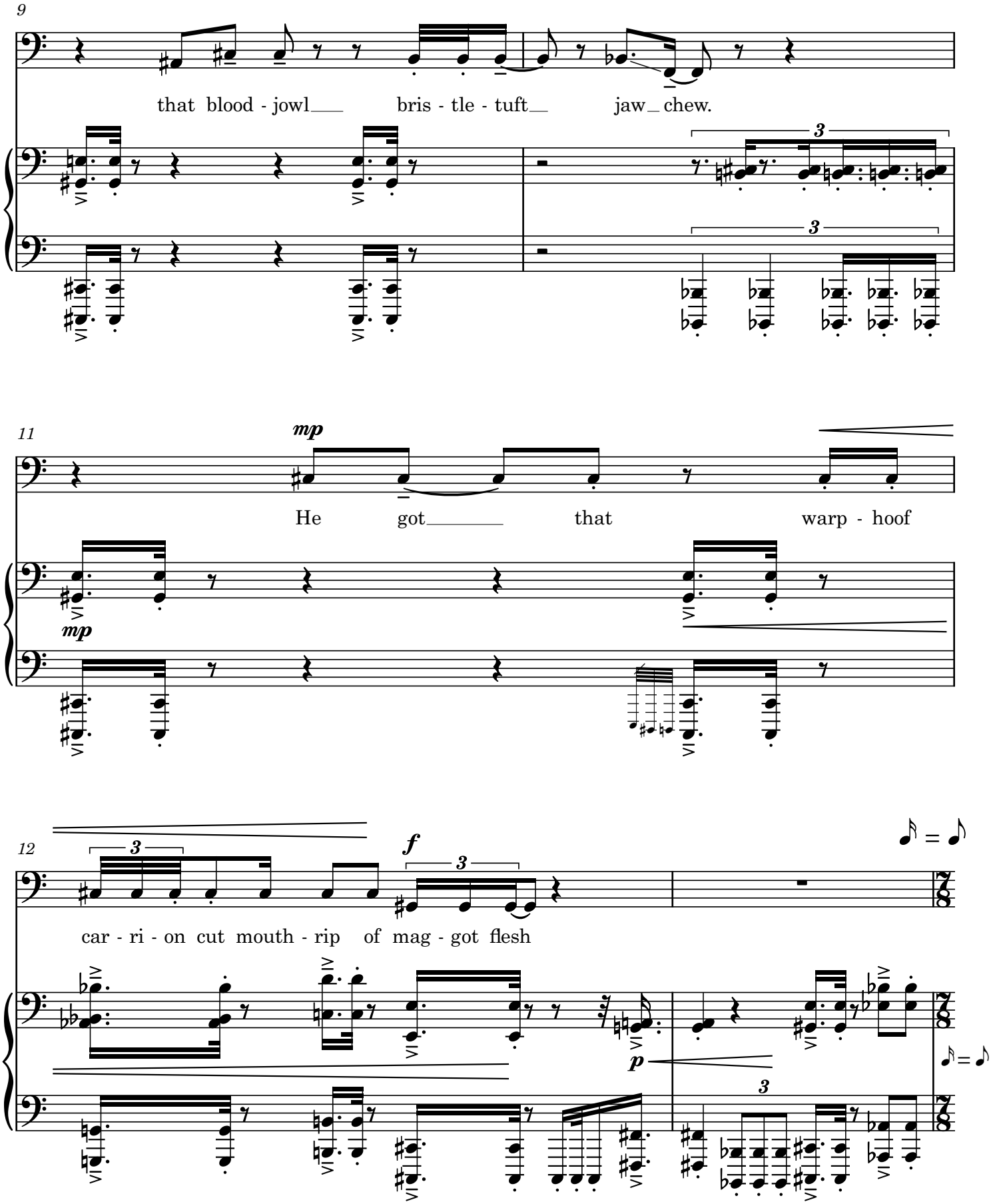

51
Gape a - no - ther spring.
Sure I'll dive,
8va
(8)
53
into the mire of summer
wal - low in
(8)
55
the veins of the pond
live it all a -
15ma

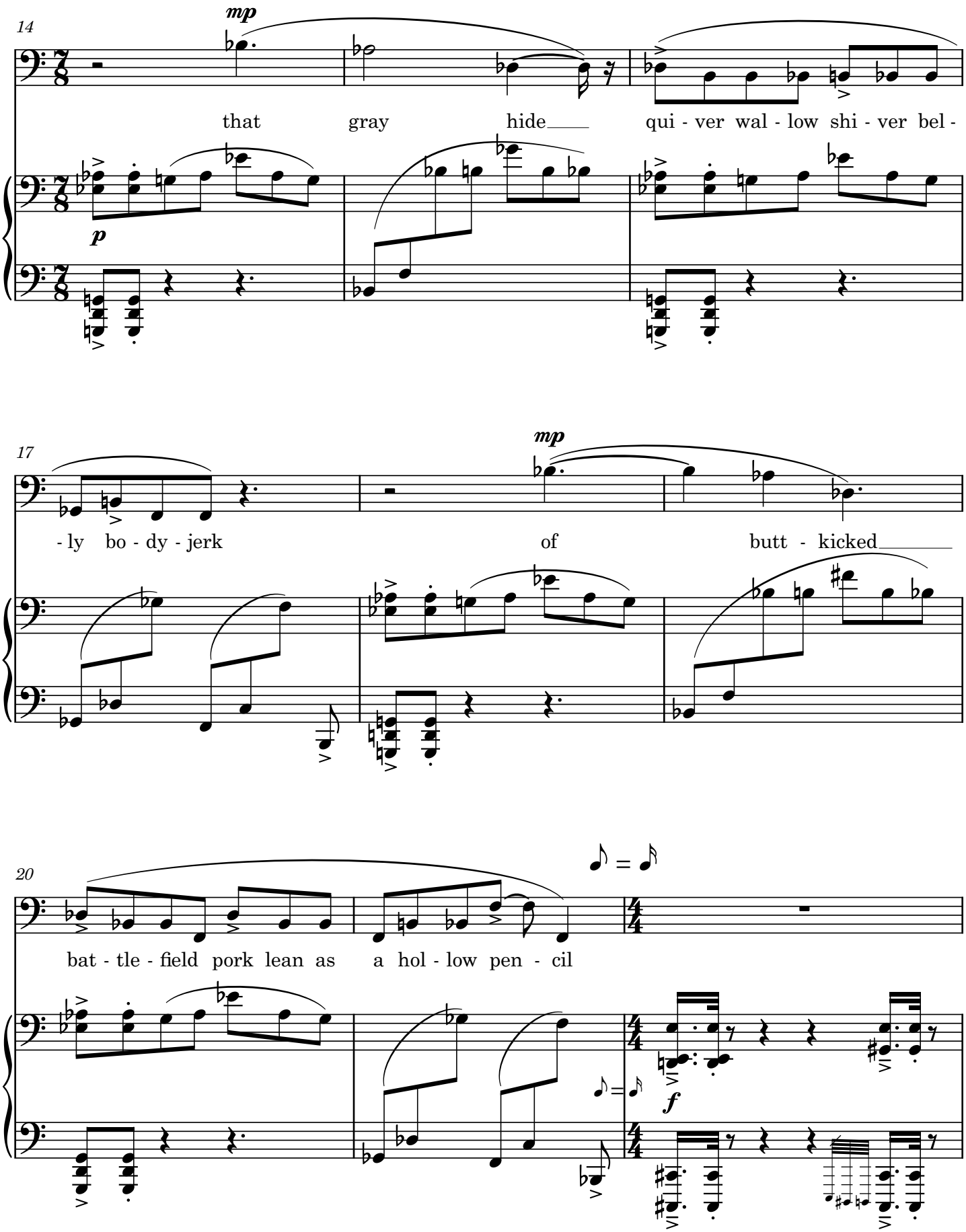

57
-gain it makes as much sense as a - ny - thing else
(15)
8ba
pp
8ba
59
(8)
(8)

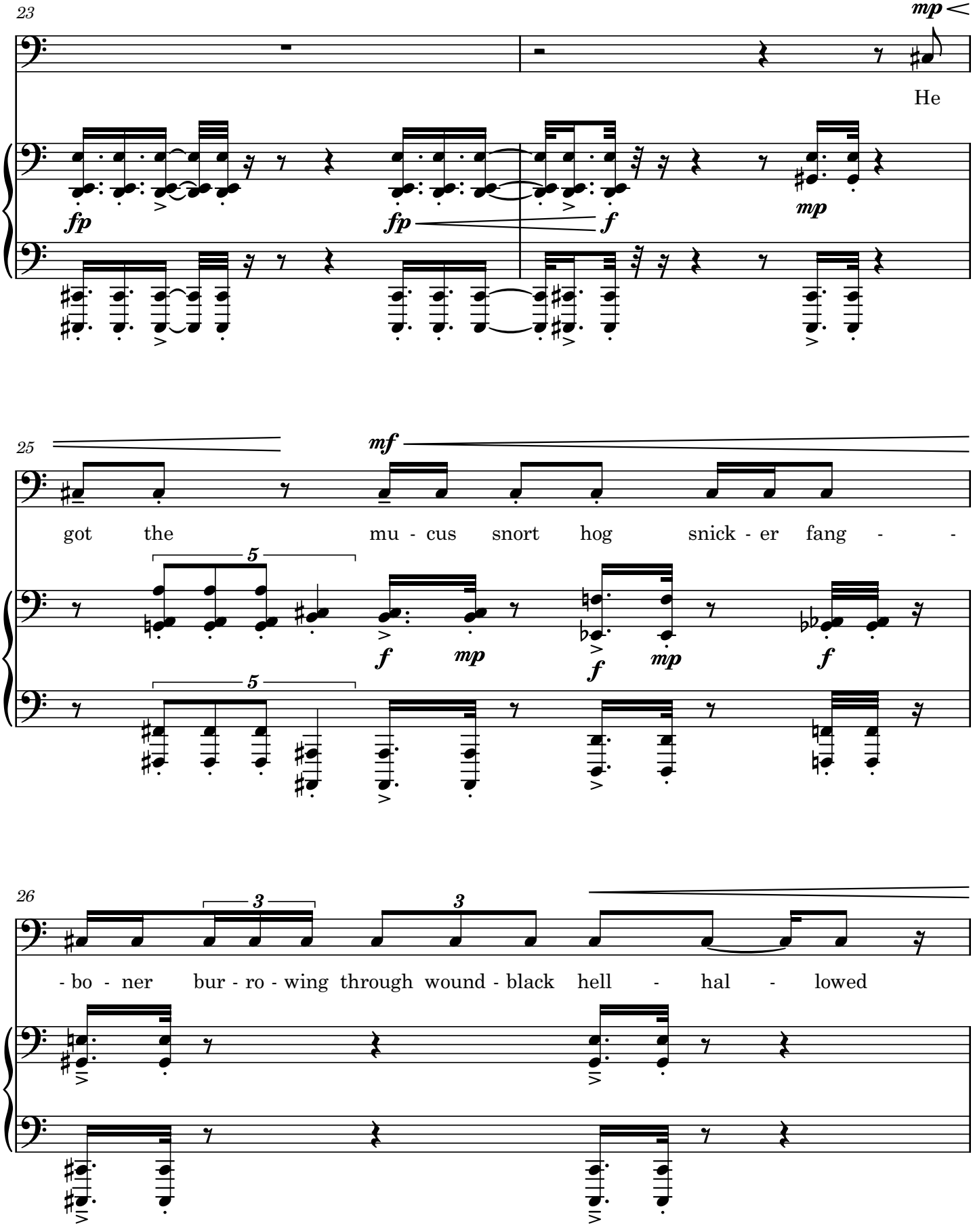
6. That Look

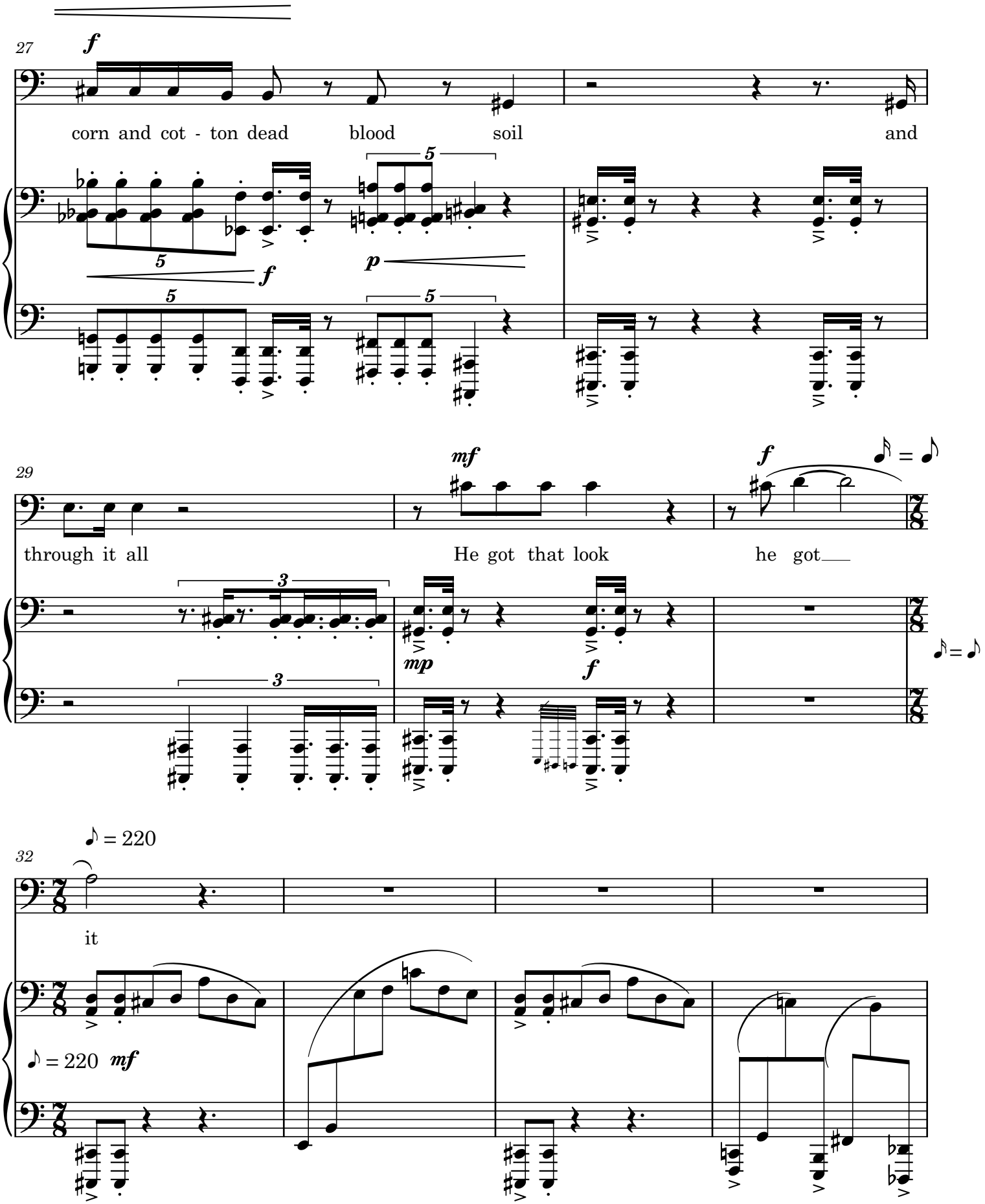

♩ = 55
f
fp
fp
3
f
mp
f
5
5
3
3

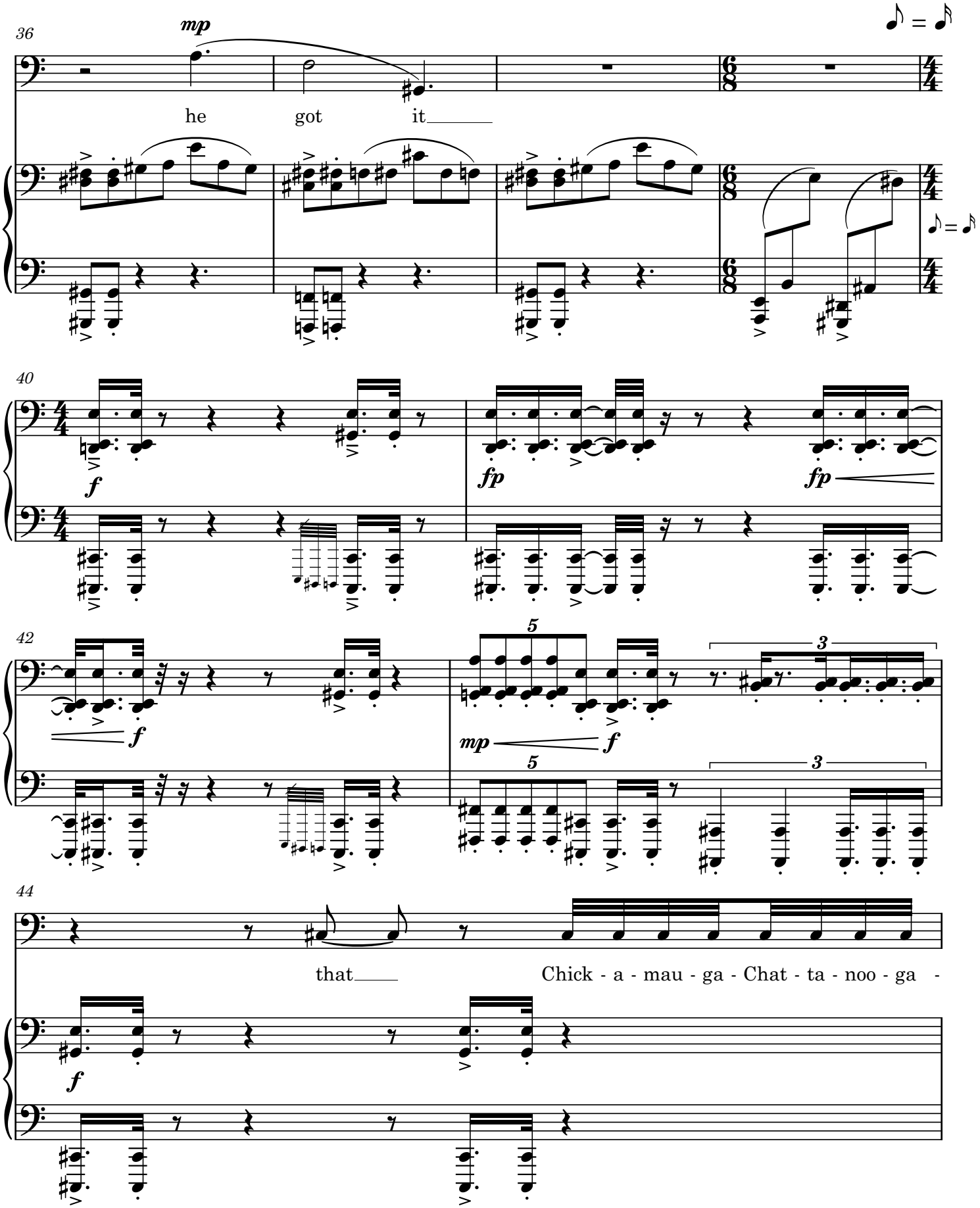

5
f
He got the death chop of a Chick - a - mau - ga -
f
6
- hog
He got that Chat - ta - noo - ga
f mp
f mp
f
8
dirt - eye bone - lust

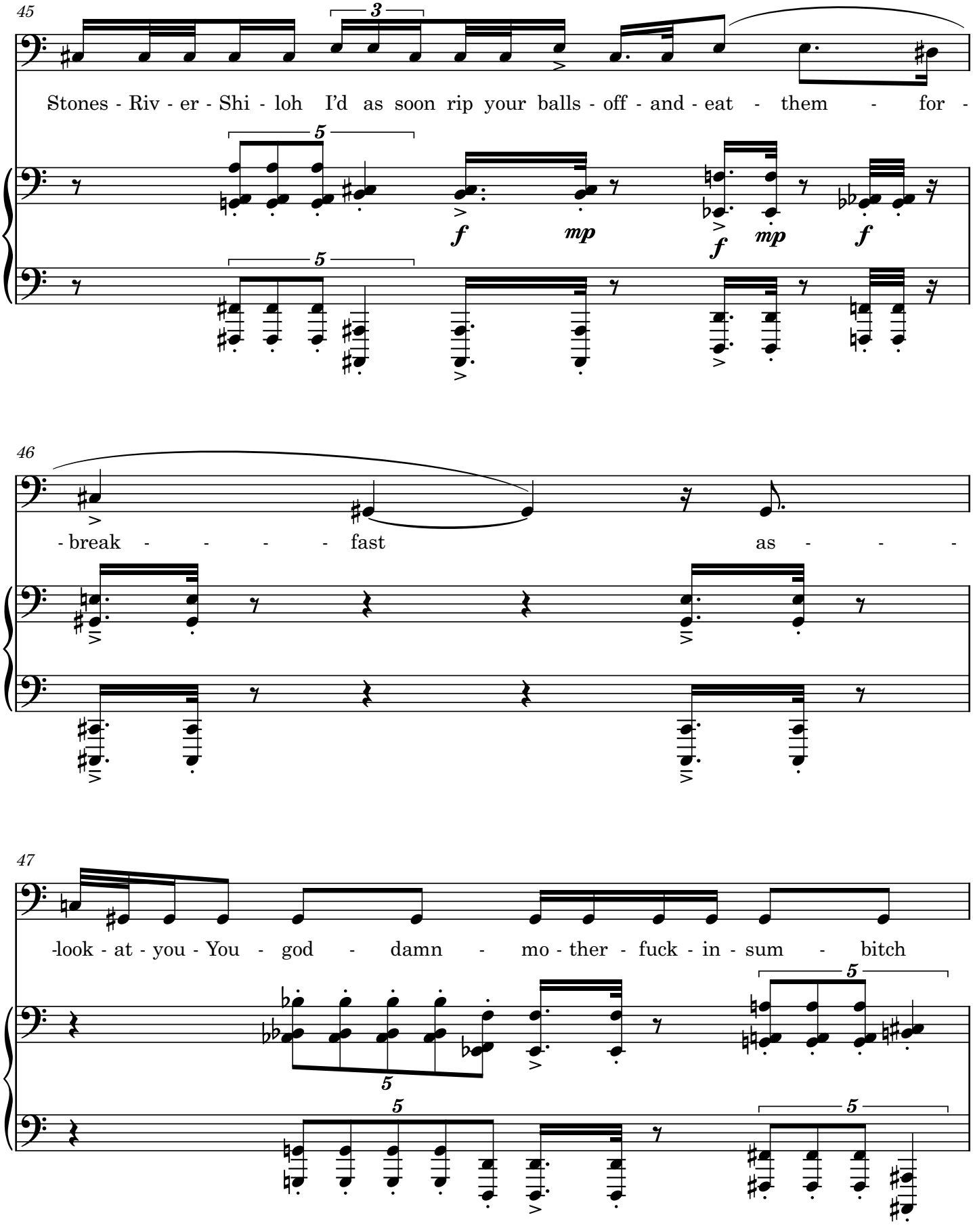

9
that blood - jowl bris - tle - tuft jaw chew.
11
mp
He got that warp - hoof
12
f
car - ri - on cut mouth - rip of mag - got flesh
p

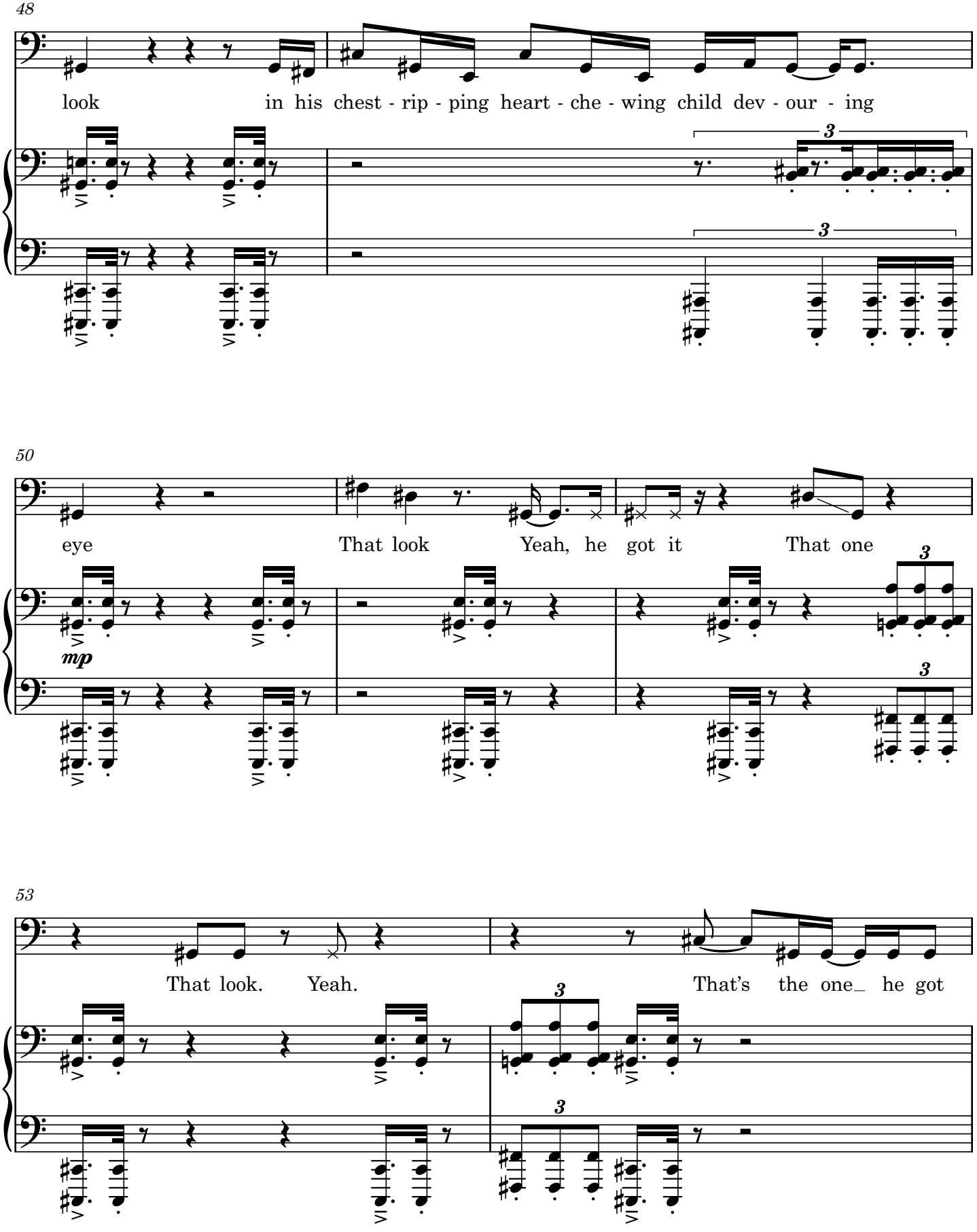

14
mp
that gray hide qui - ver wal - low shi - ver bel -
p
17
mp
- ly bo - dy - jerk of butt - kicked
20
bat - tle - field pork lean as a hol - low pen - cil
f

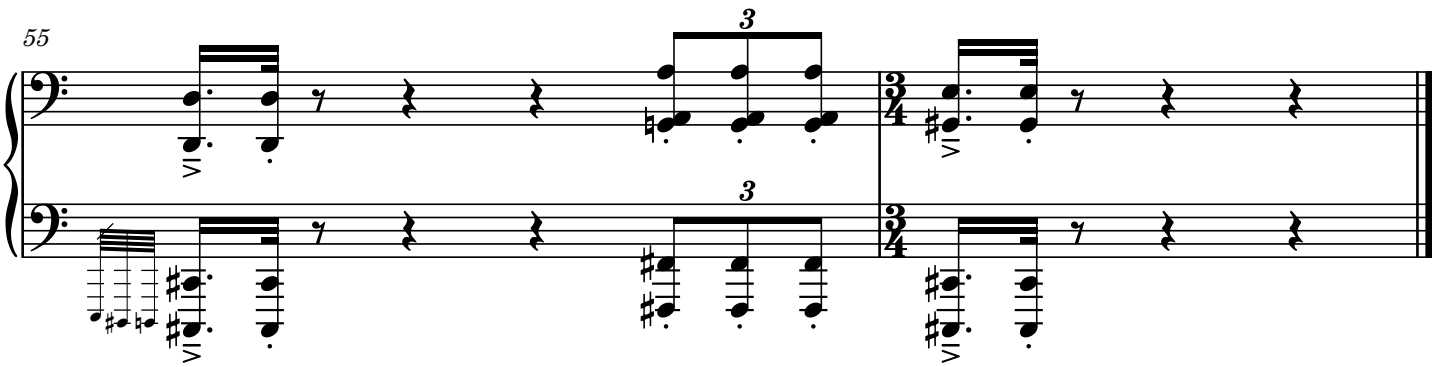

23
mp
He
fp
fp
f
mp
25
mf
got the mu - cus snort hog snick - er fang - -
5
5
f
mp
f
mp
f
26
3
3
- bo - ner bur - ro - wing through wound - black hell - hal - lowed


27
f
corn and cot - ton dead blood soil and
5
5
f
p
5
5
29
mf
f
through it all He got that look he got
3
3
mp
f
32
♪ = 220
it
♪ = 220 mf

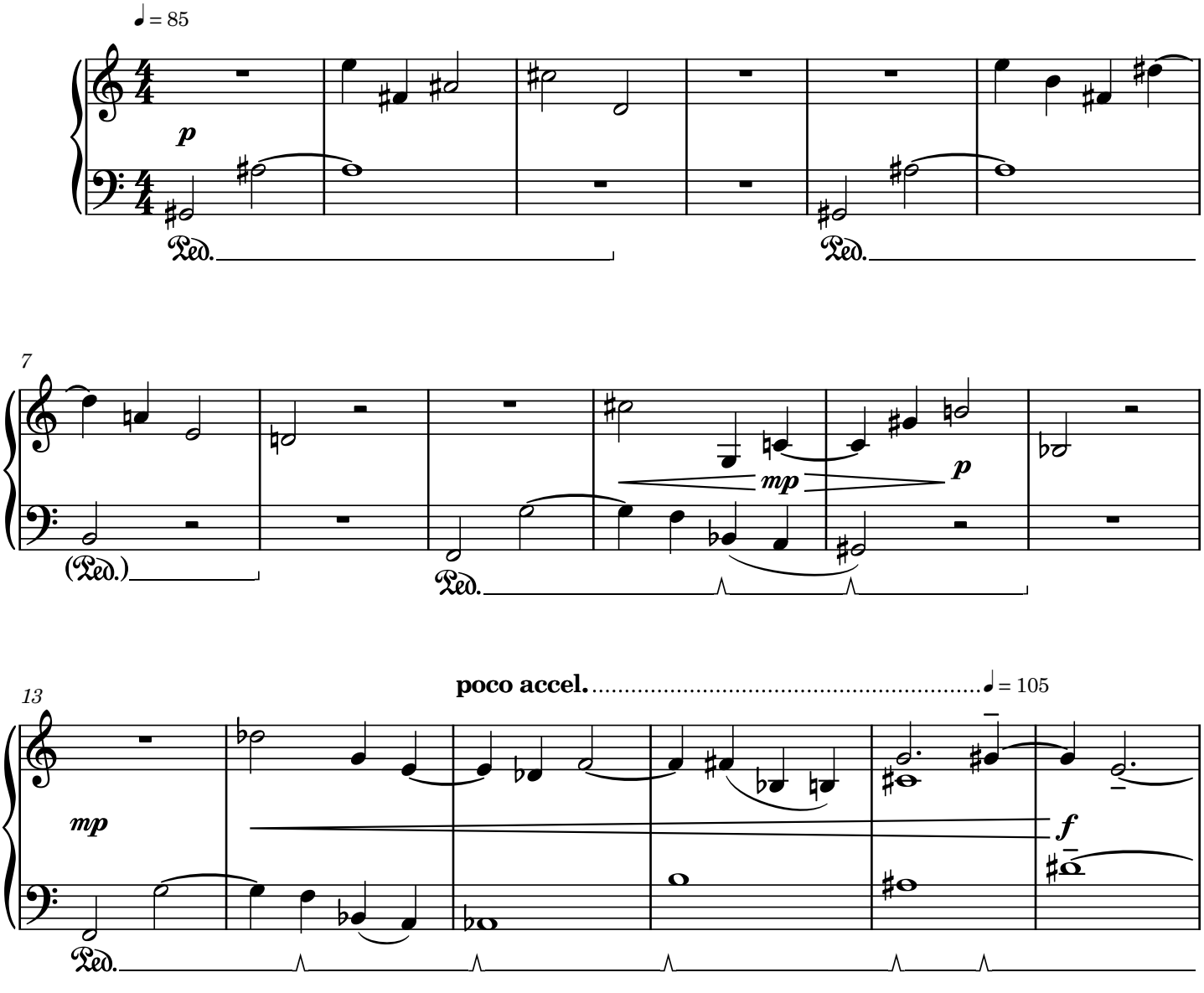

36
mp
he got it
40
f
fp
fp
42
f
5
3
mp
f
5
3
44
that
Chick - a - mau - ga - Chat - ta - noo - ga -
f

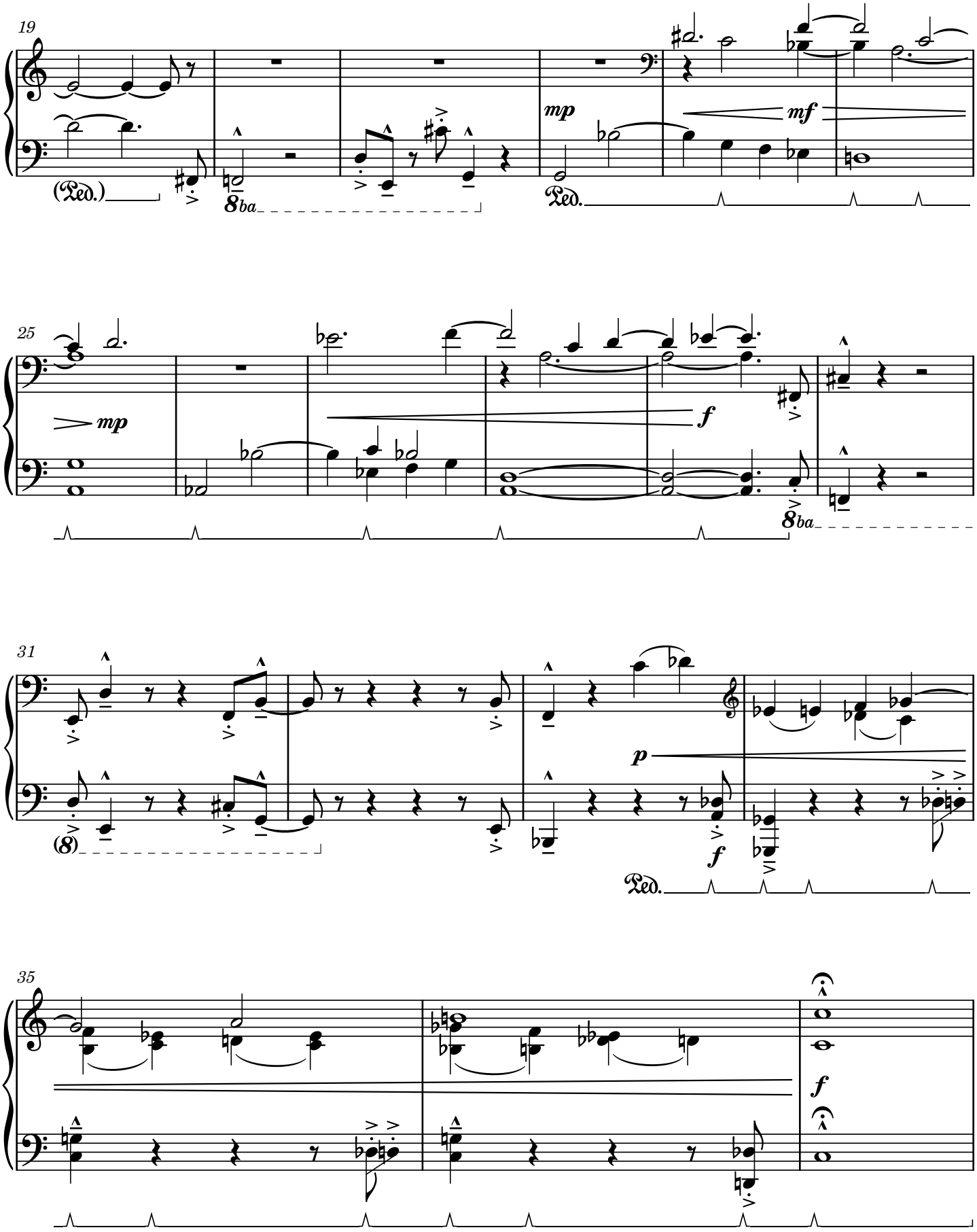

45
Stones - Riv - er - Shi - loh I'd as soon rip your balls - off - and - eat - them - for -
46
- break - - - - fast as - - -
47
-look - at - you - You - god - damn - mo - ther - fuck - in - sum - bitch


48
look in his chest - rip - ping heart - che - wing child dev - our - ing
3
3
50
eye That look Yeah, he got it That one
mp
3
3
53
That look. Yeah. That's the one_ he got
3
3



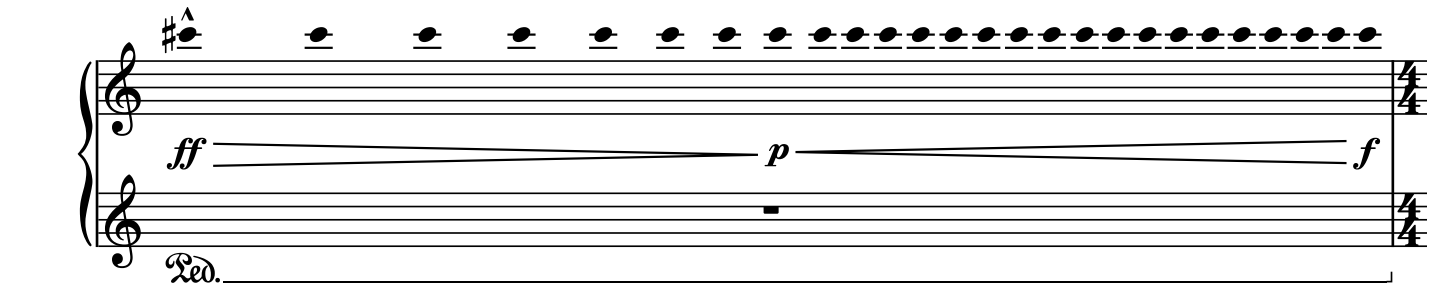
7. (Interlude)



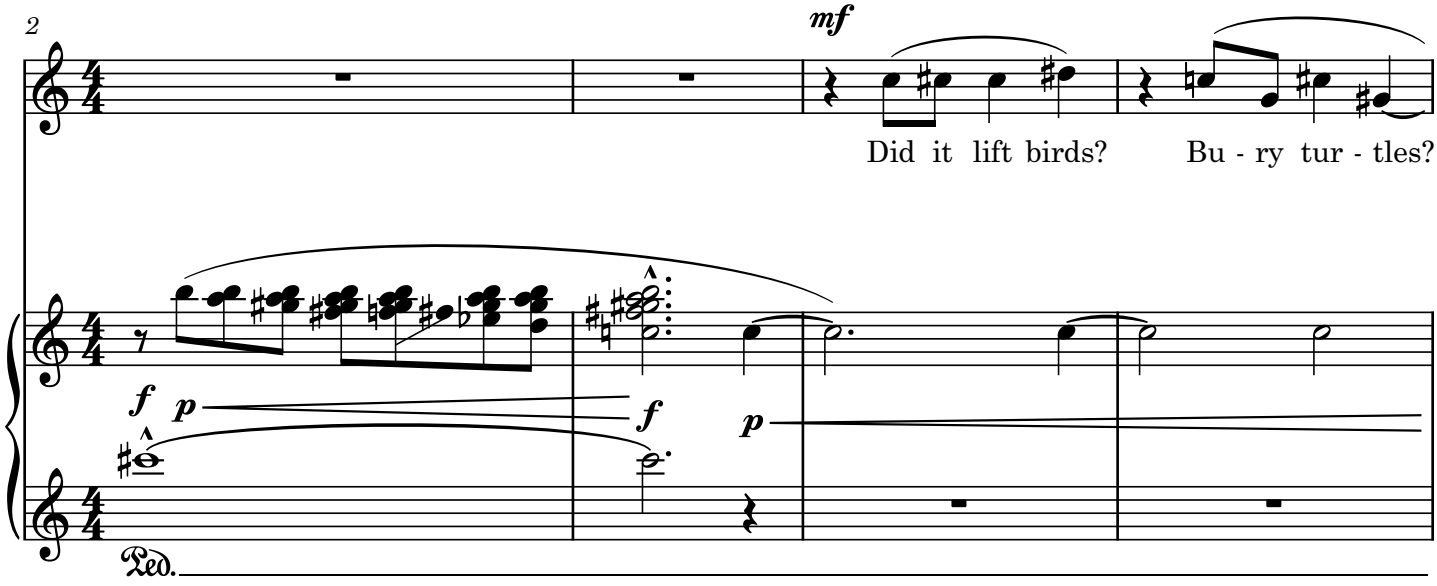

19
(Ped.)
8ba
mp
Ped.
mf
25
mp
f
8ba
31
(8)
p
f
Ped.
35
f

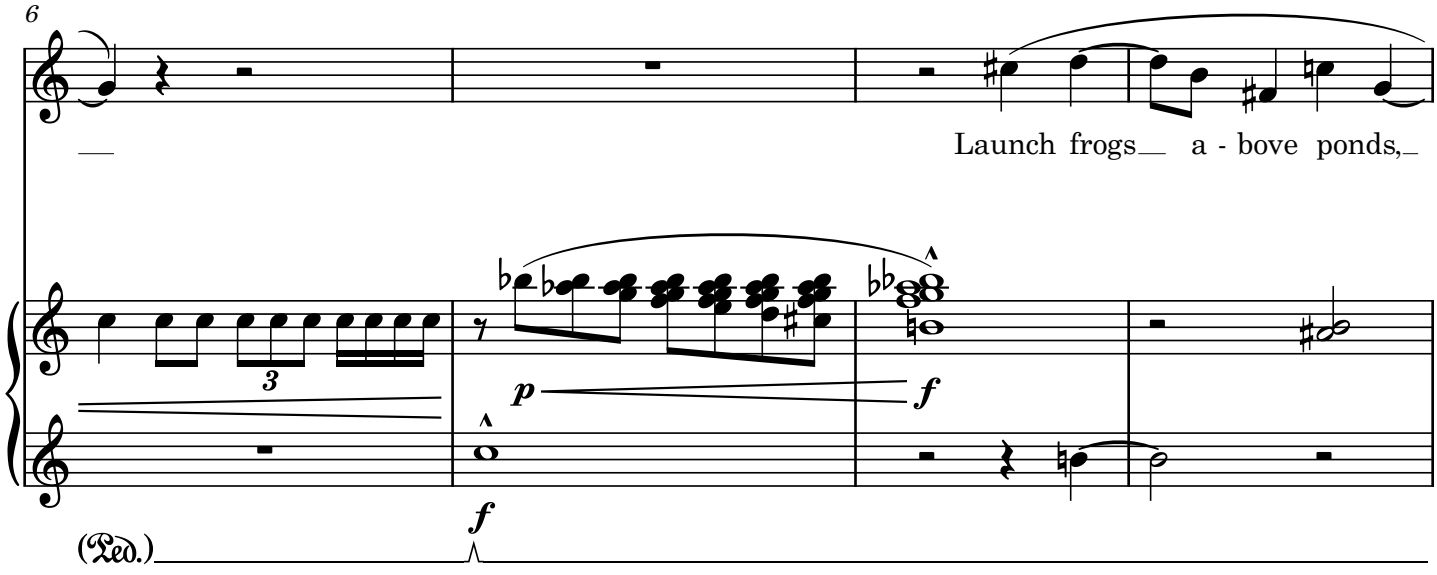
8. Three Shots: First

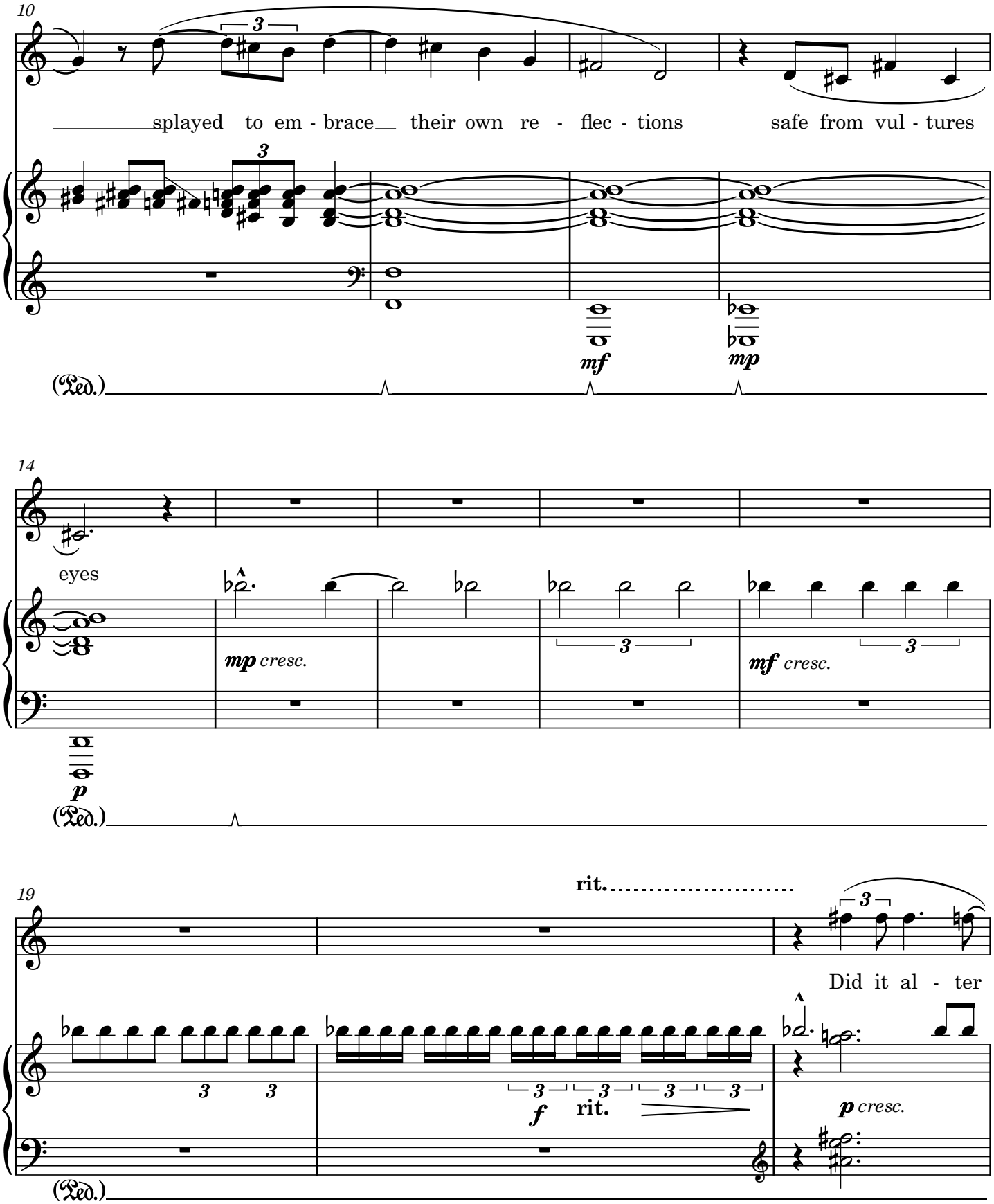
♩ = 100

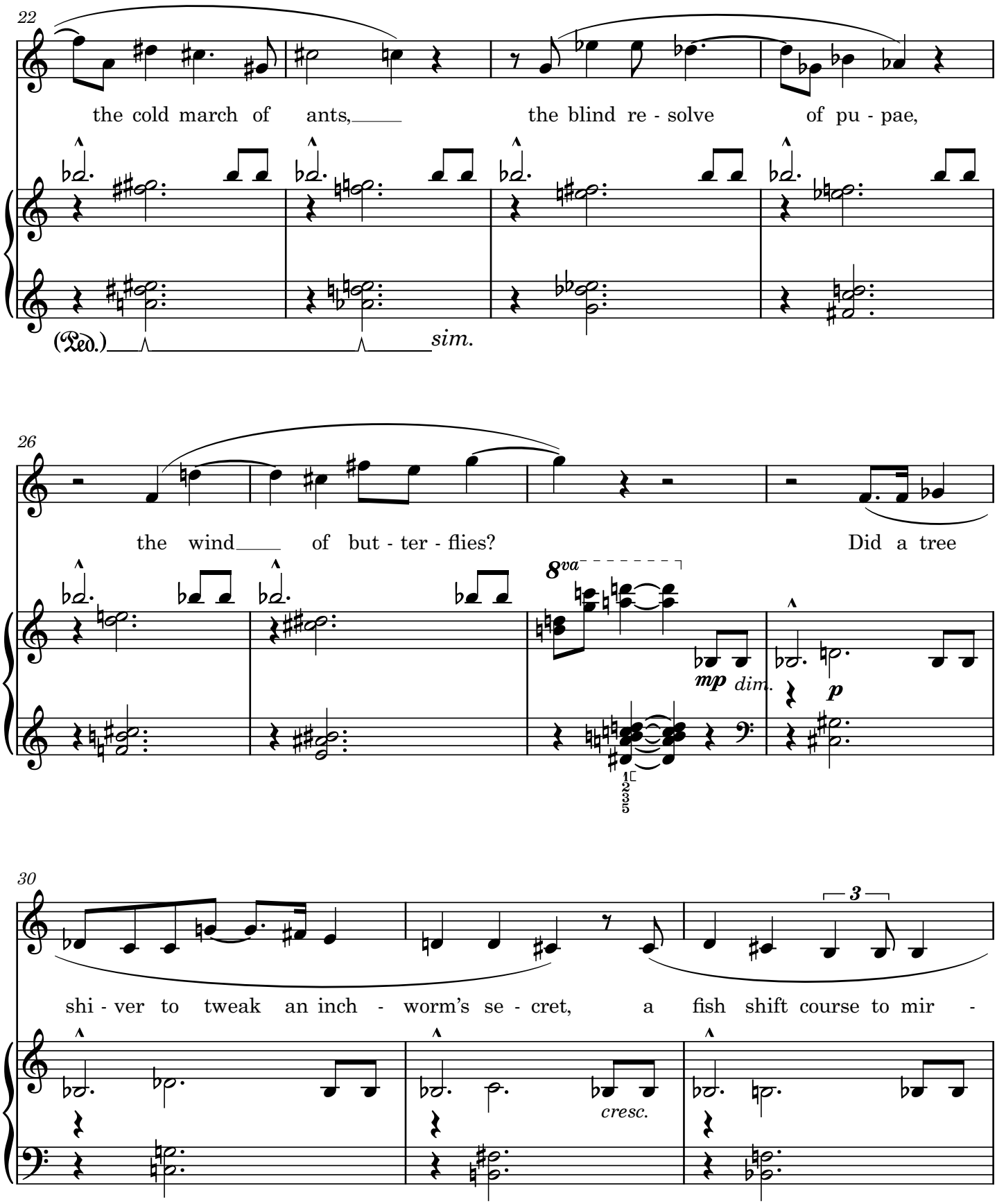


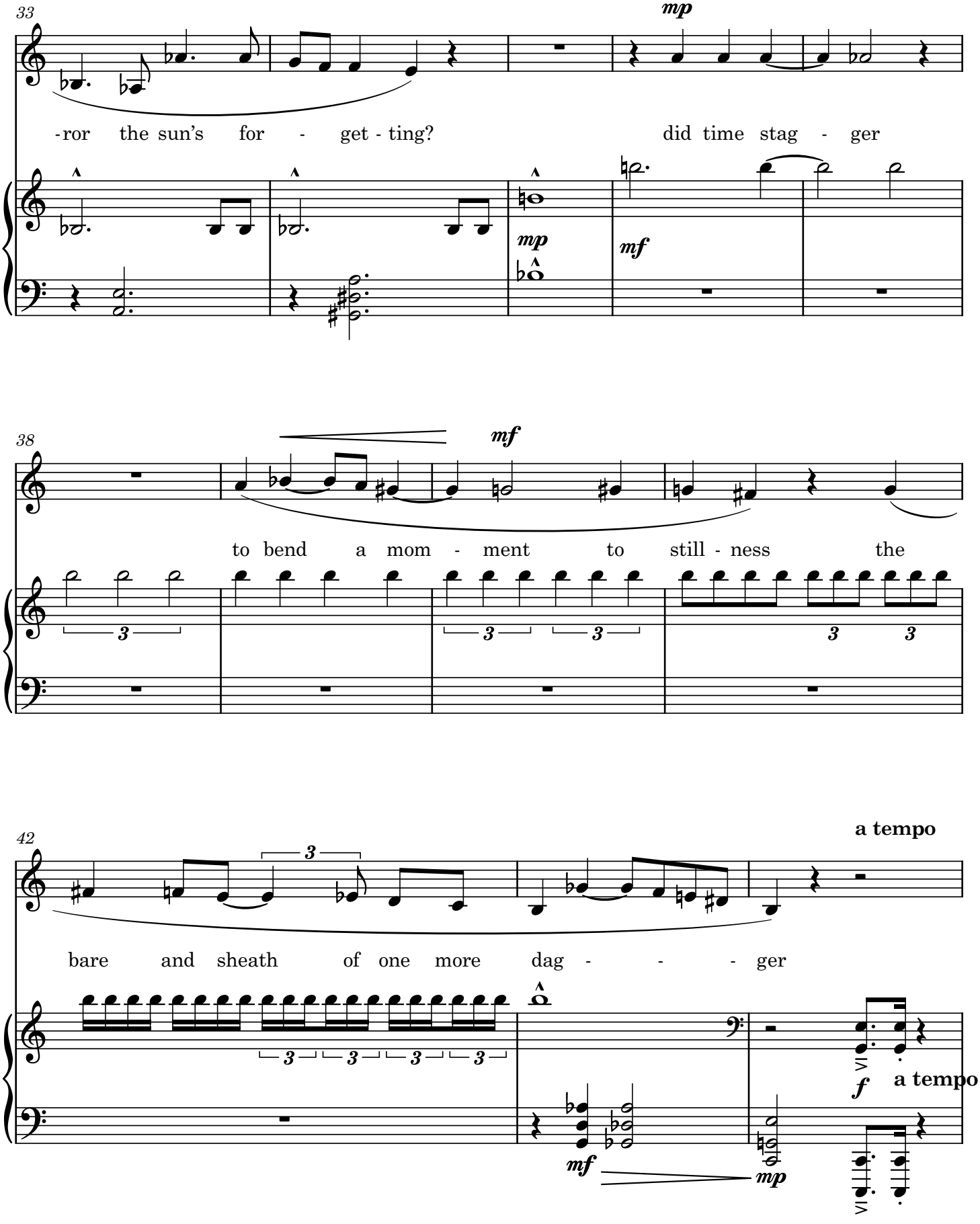
no counting — start glacially, then gradual accelerando to rapid pace (as quickly as possible)



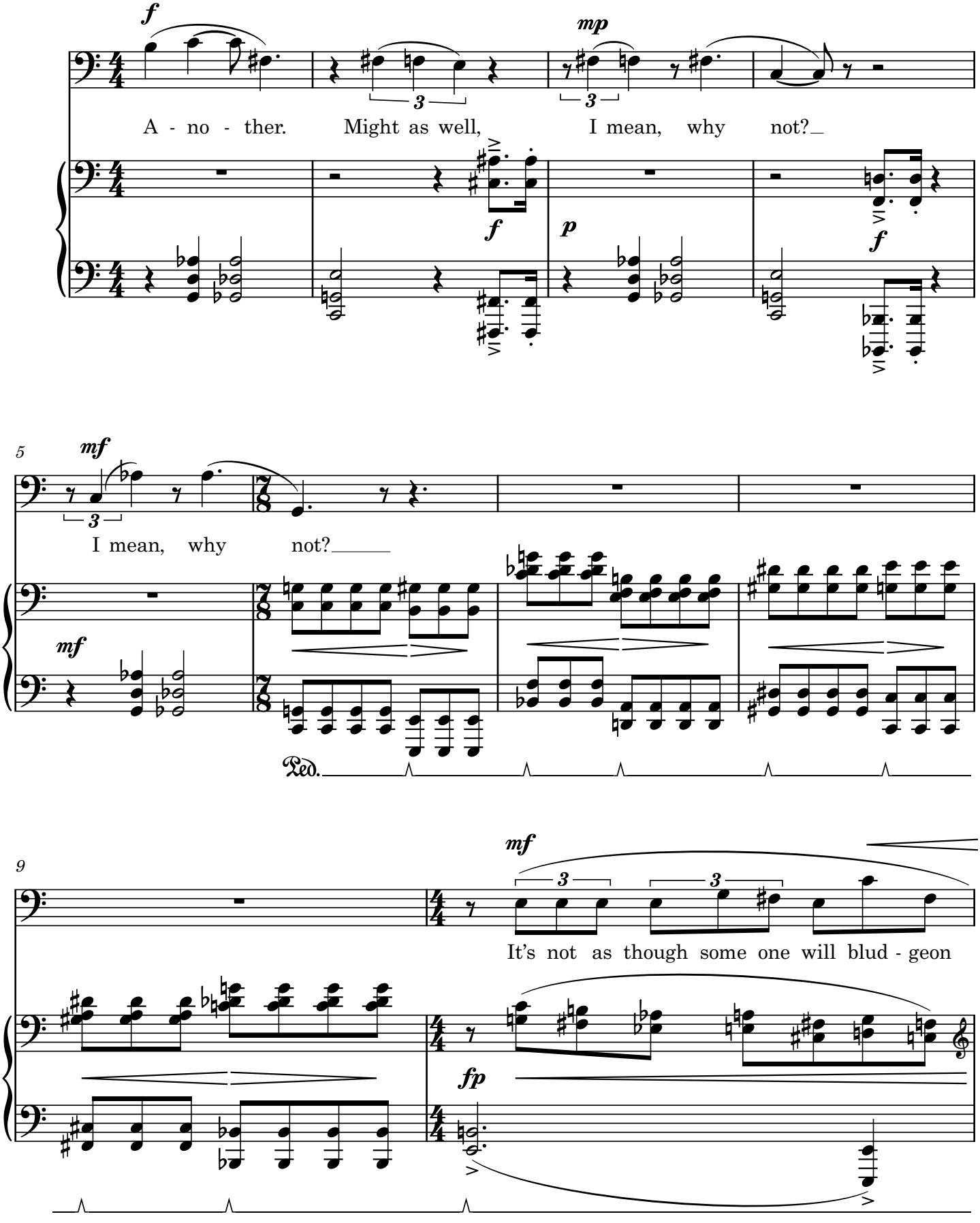


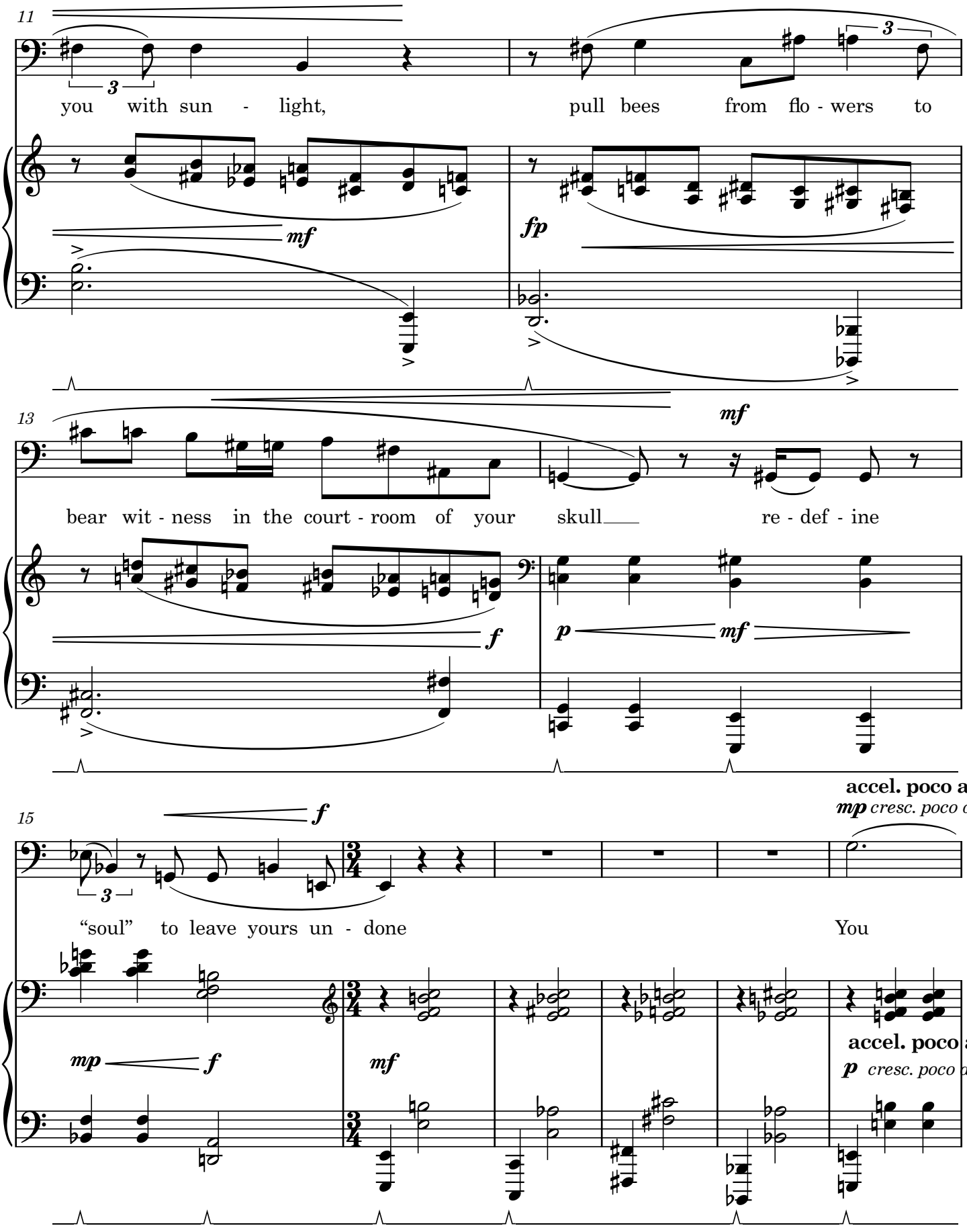

10
splayed to em - brace their own re - flec - tions safe from vul - tures
mf
mp
(Ped.)
14
eyes
mp cresc.
mf cresc.
p
(Ped.)
19
rit.
Did it al - ter
f
rit.
p cresc.
(Ped.)

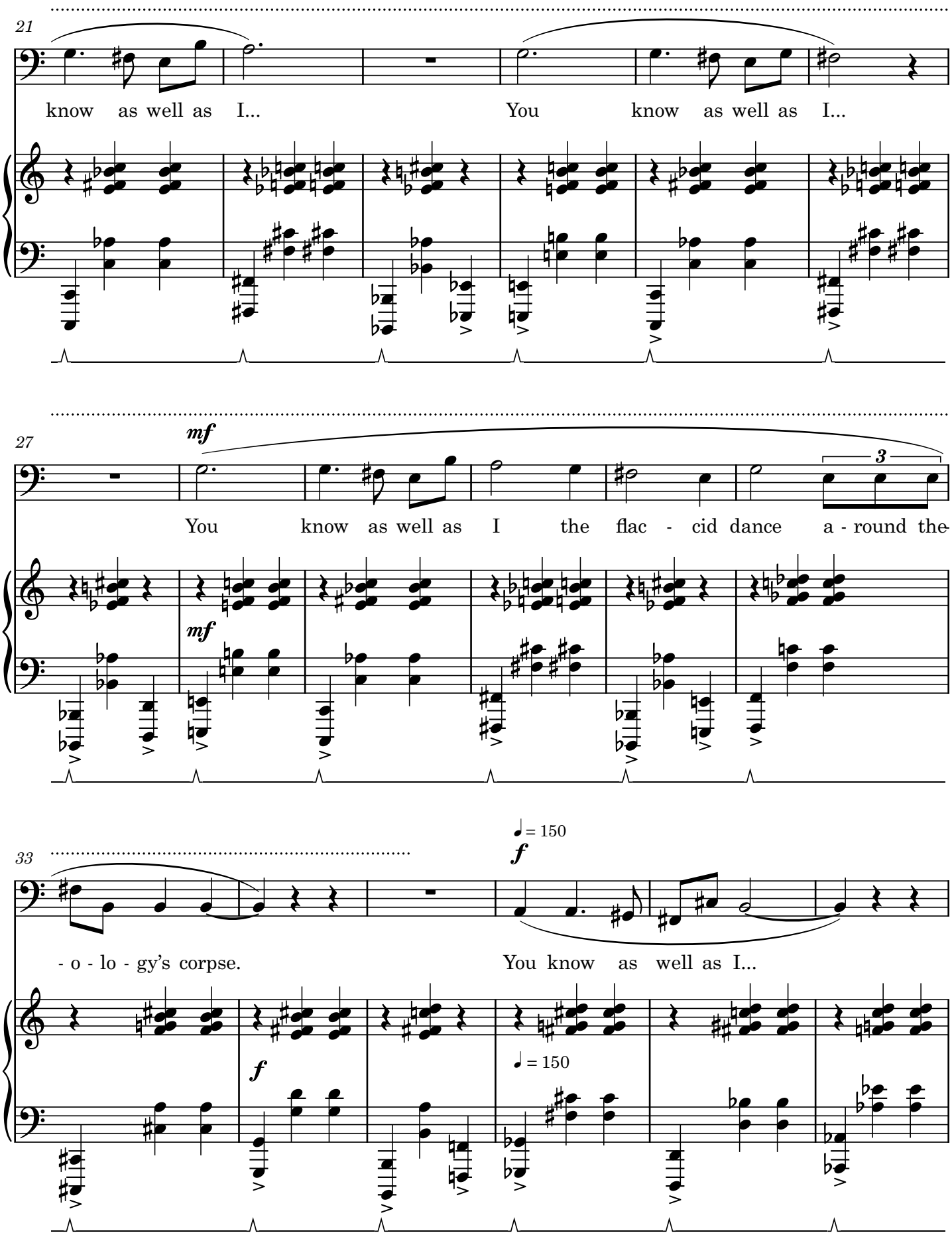

22
the cold march of ants, the blind re - solve of pu - pae,
(Ped.) sim.
26
the wind of but - ter - flies? Did a tree
8va
mp dim.
p
30
shi - ver to tweak an inch - worm's se - cret, a fish shift course to mir -
3
cresc.

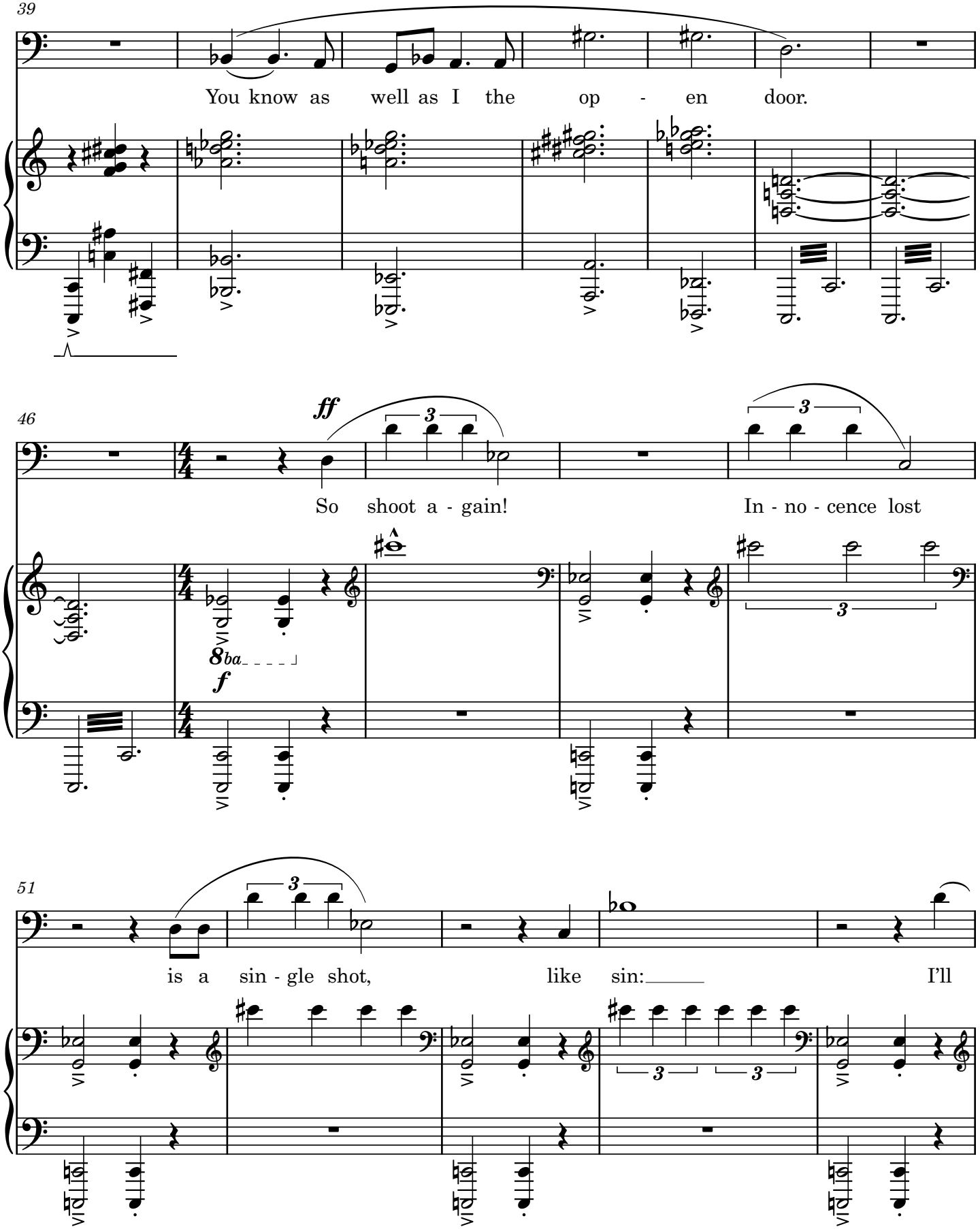

33
mp
-ror the sun's for - get - ting? did time stag - ger
mp
mf
38
mf
to bend a mom - ment to still - ness the
3
42
a tempo
3
bare and sheath of one more dag - - - ger
3 3 3 3
f
a tempo
mf
mp

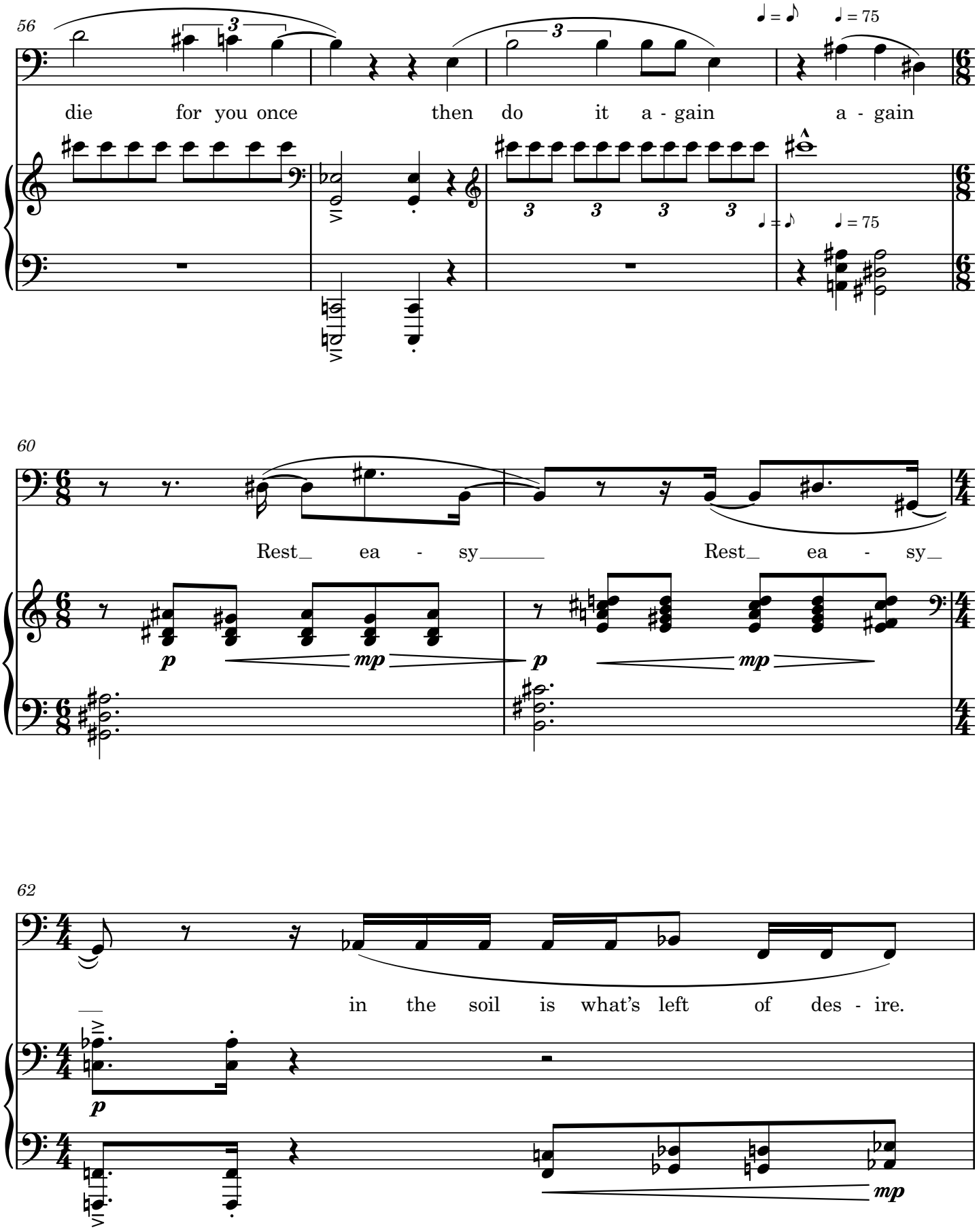
9. Three Shots: Second

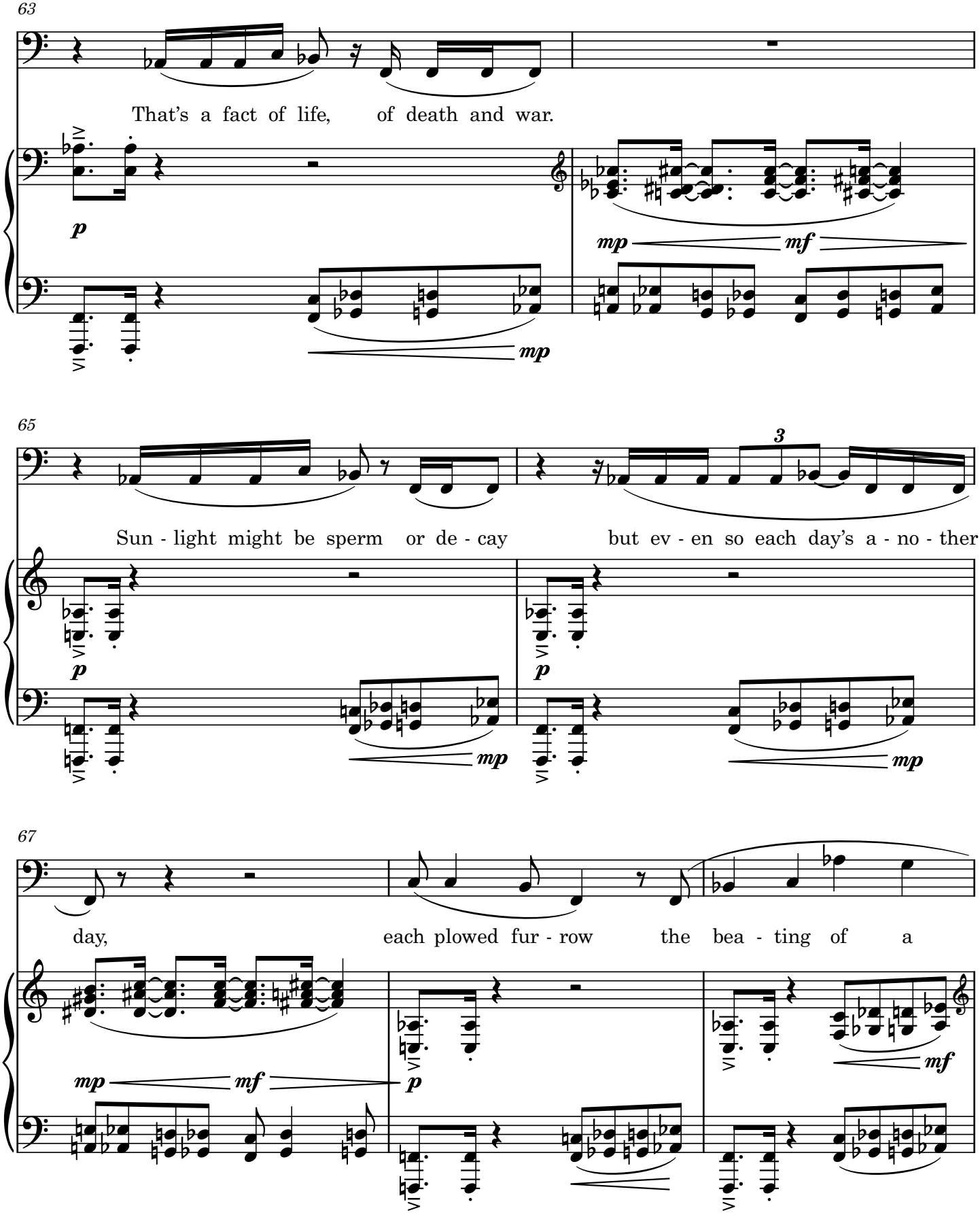


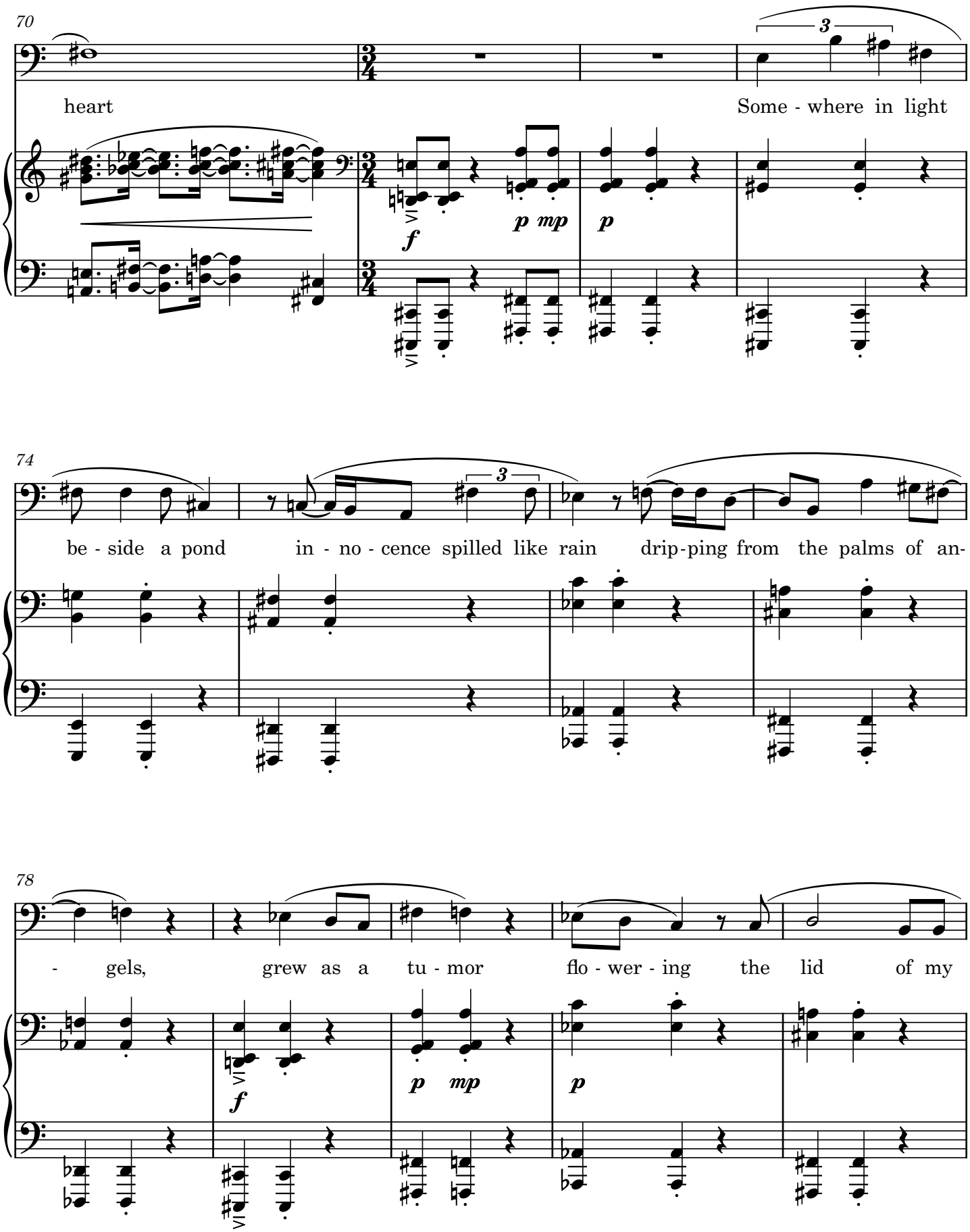

11
you with sun - light,
pull bees from flo - wers to
mf
fp
13
bear wit - ness in the court - room of your skull
re - def - ine
mf
f
p
mf
15
"soul" to leave yours un - done
You
accel. poco a poco
mp cresc. poco a poco
f
mp
f
mf
accel. poco a poco
p cresc. poco a poco

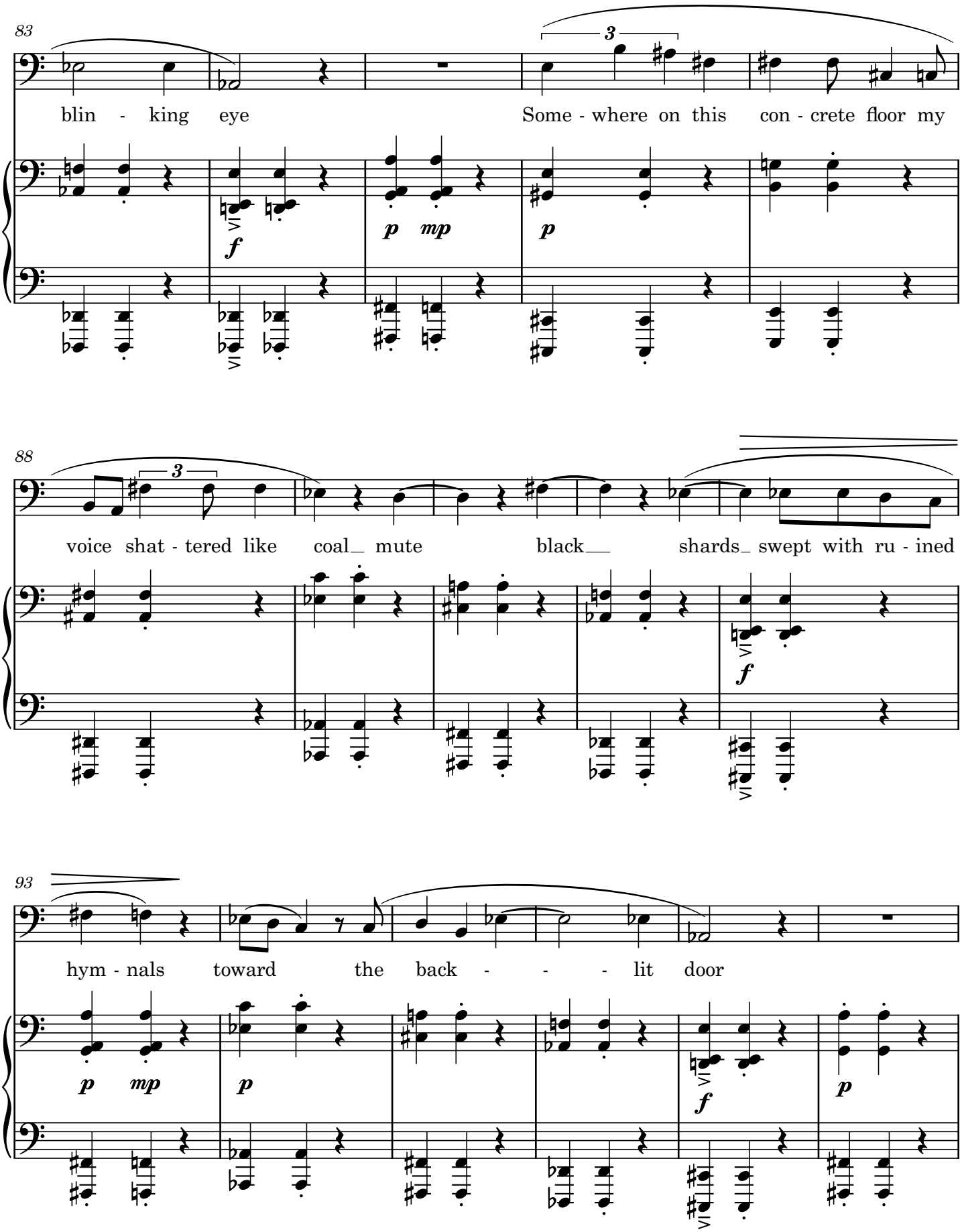

21
know as well as I...
You know as well as I...
27
mf
You know as well as I the flac - cid dance a - round the
mf
3
33
- o - lo - gy's corpse.
f
= 150
You know as well as I...
f
= 150

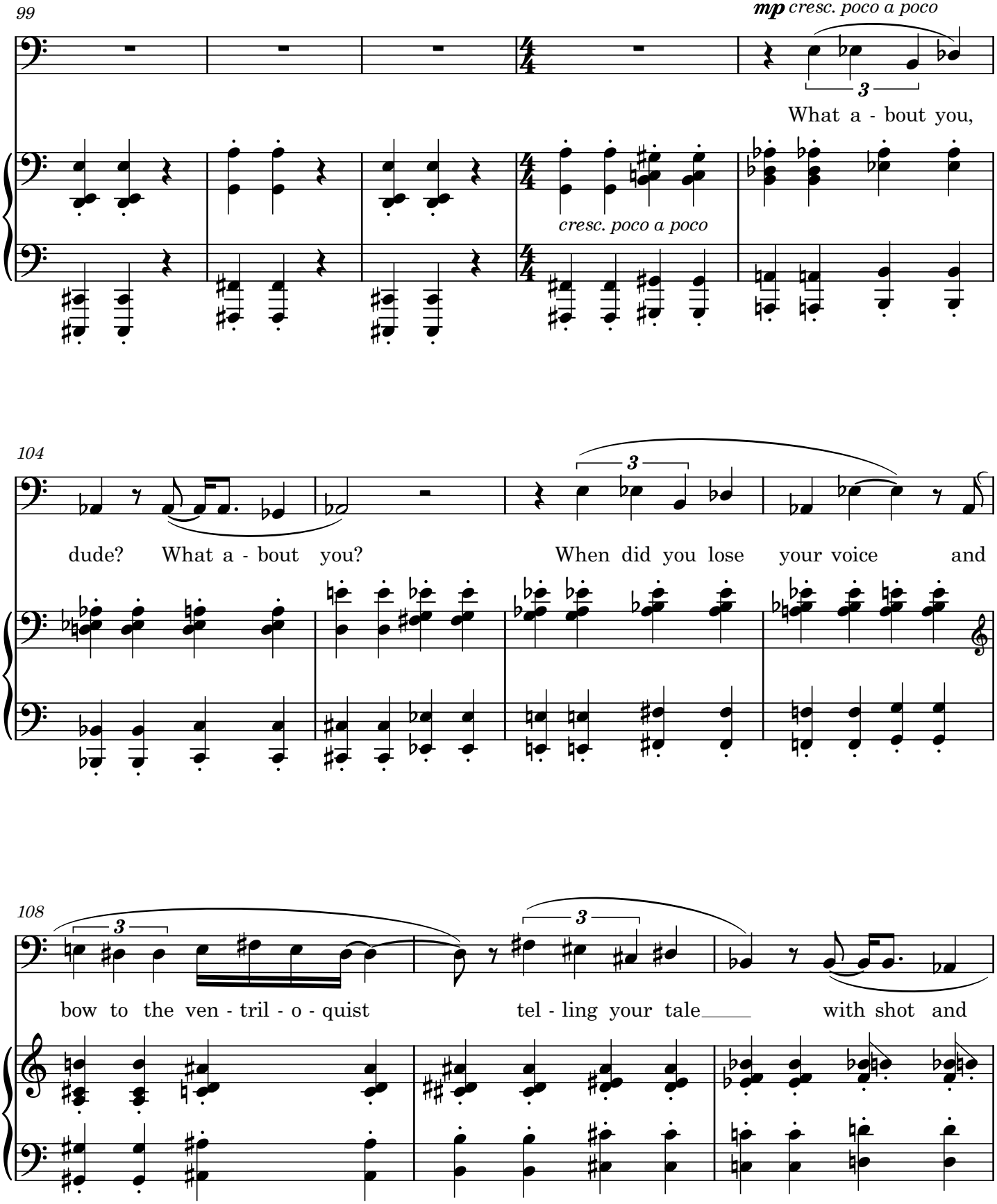

39
You know as well as I the op - en door.
46
ff
So shoot a - gain!
In - no - cence lost
8ba
f
51
is a sin - gle shot,
like sin:
I'll

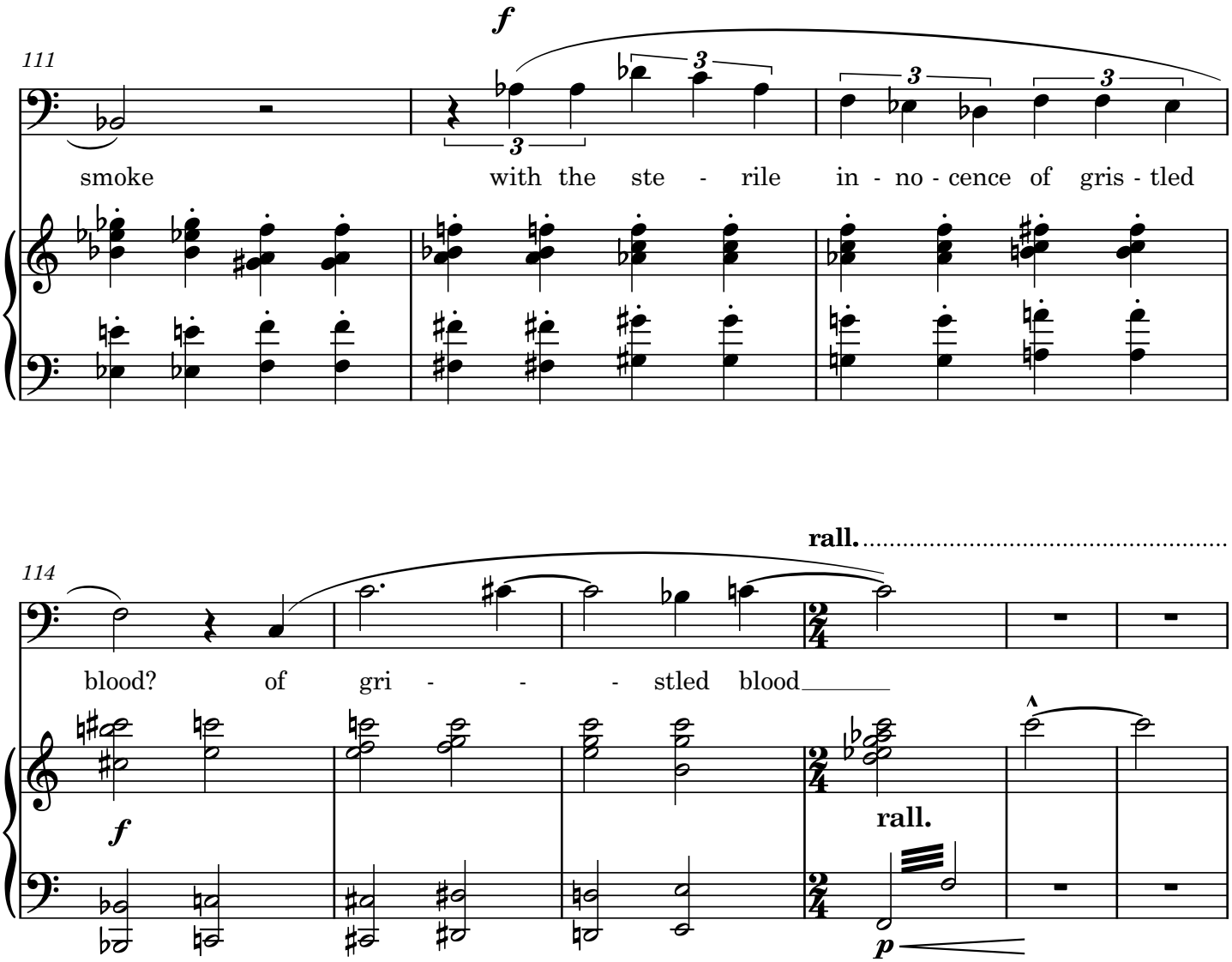

56
die for you once then do it a - gain a - gain
60
Rest_ ea - sy_____ Rest_ ea - sy_
62
in the soil is what's left of des - ire.


63
That's a fact of life, of death and war.
p
mp
mf
mp
65
Sun - light might be sperm or de - cay but ev - en so each day's a - no - ther
3
p
mp
p
mp
67
day, each plowed fur - row the bea - ting of a
mp
mf
p
mf

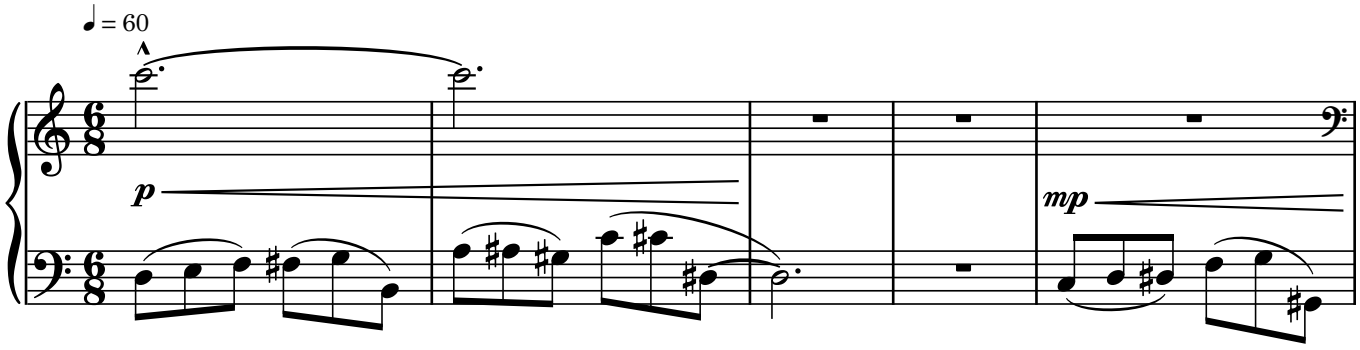

70
heart
Some - where in light
74
be - side a pond
in - no - cence spilled like rain
drip-ping from the palms of an-
78
- gels,
grew as a tu - mor
flo - wer - ing the lid of my

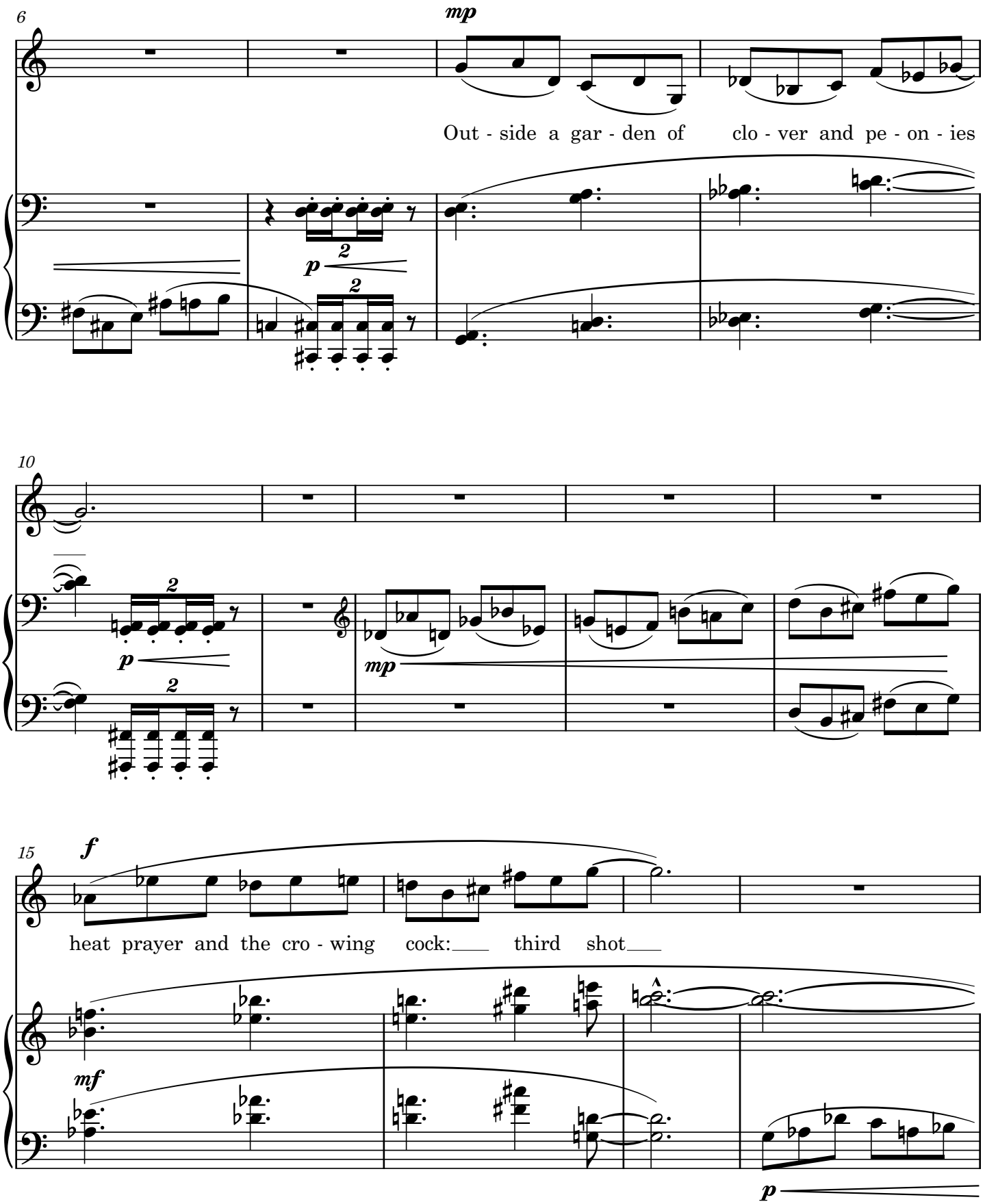

83
blin - king eye
Some - where on this con - crete floor my
88
voice shat - tered like coal mute black shards swept with ru - ined
93
hym - nals toward the back - - - lit door

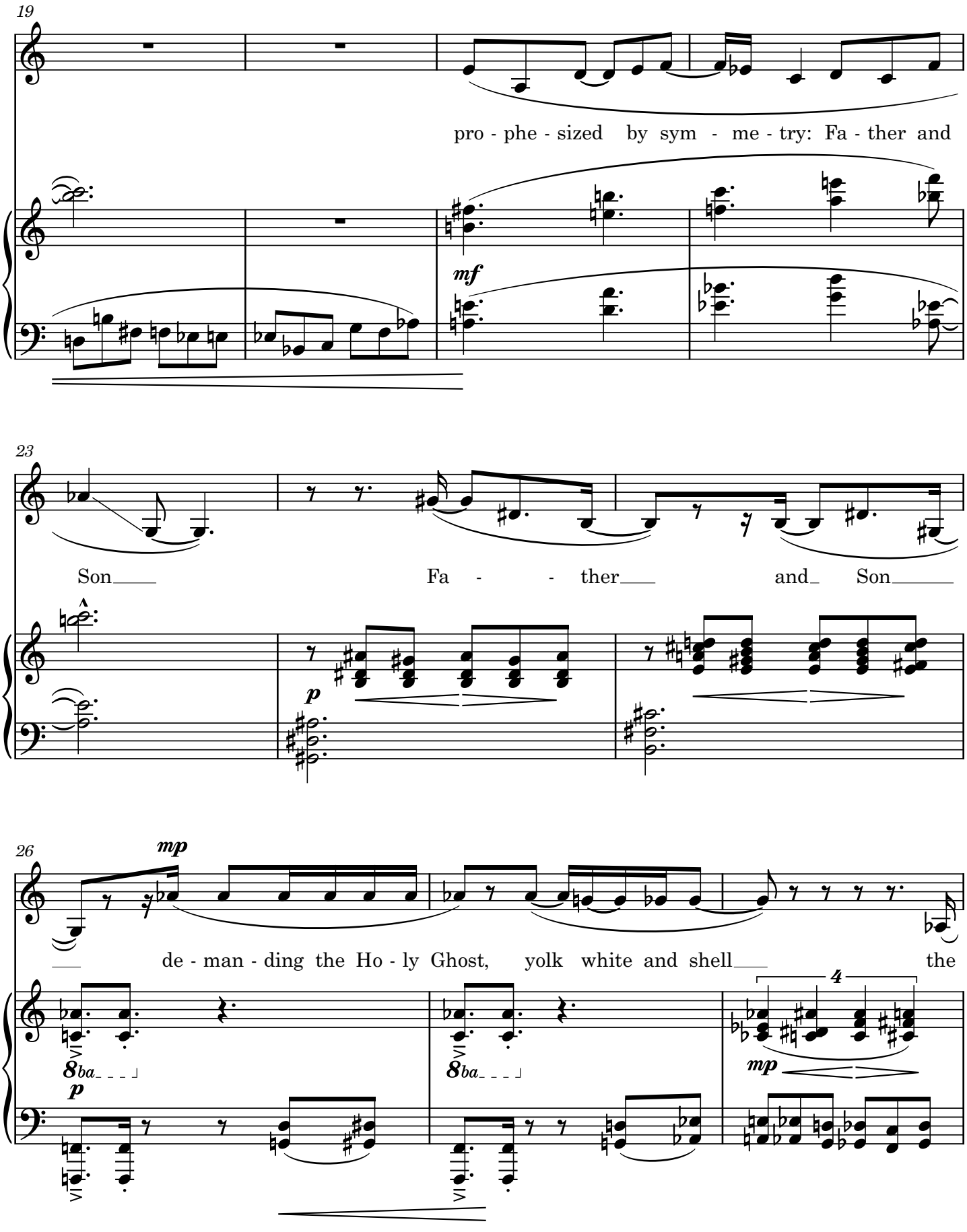

99
mp cresc. poco a poco
3
What a - bout you,
cresc. poco a poco
104
3
dude? What a - bout you? When did you lose your voice and
108
3
3
bow to the ven - tril - o - quist tel - ling your tale with shot and

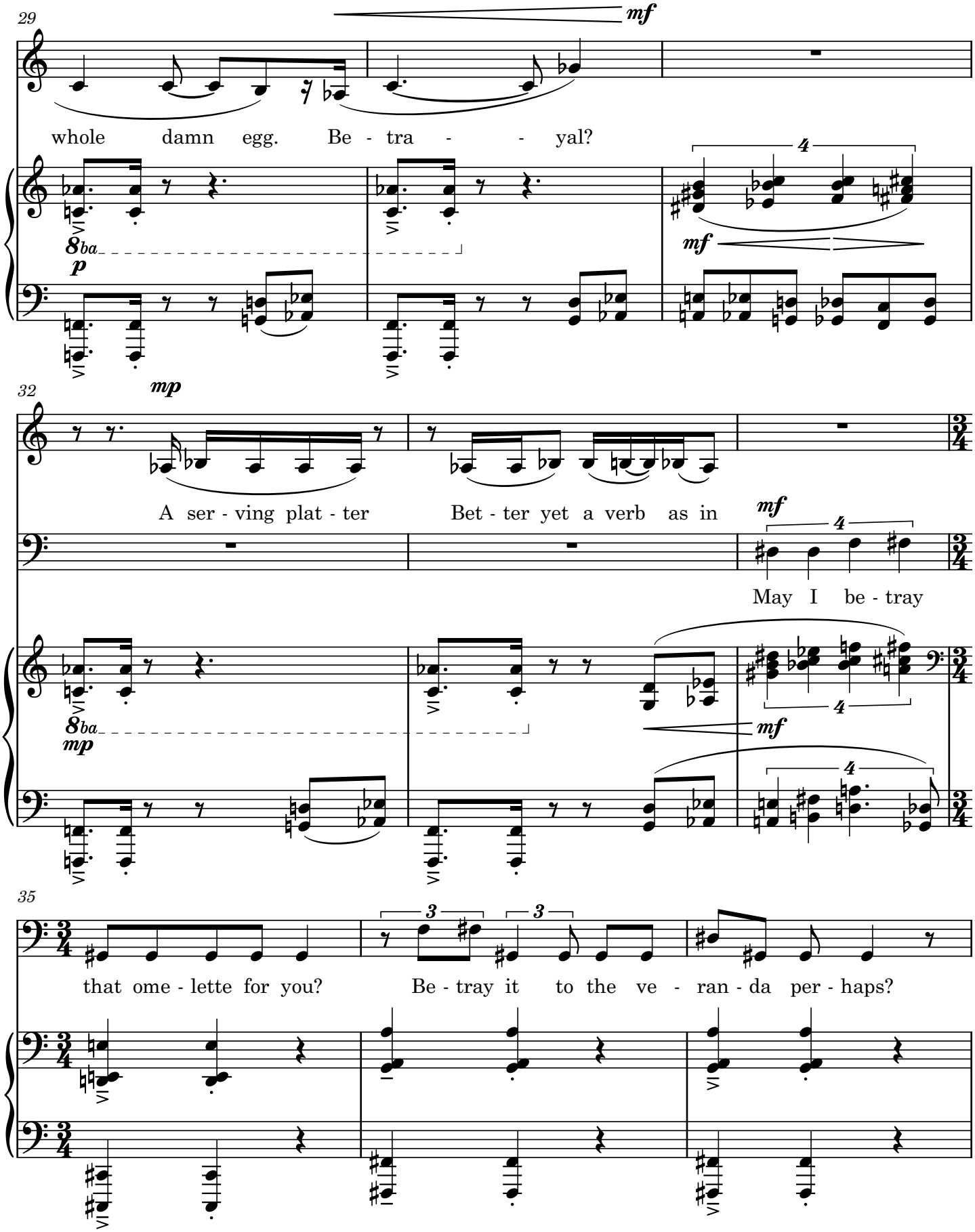


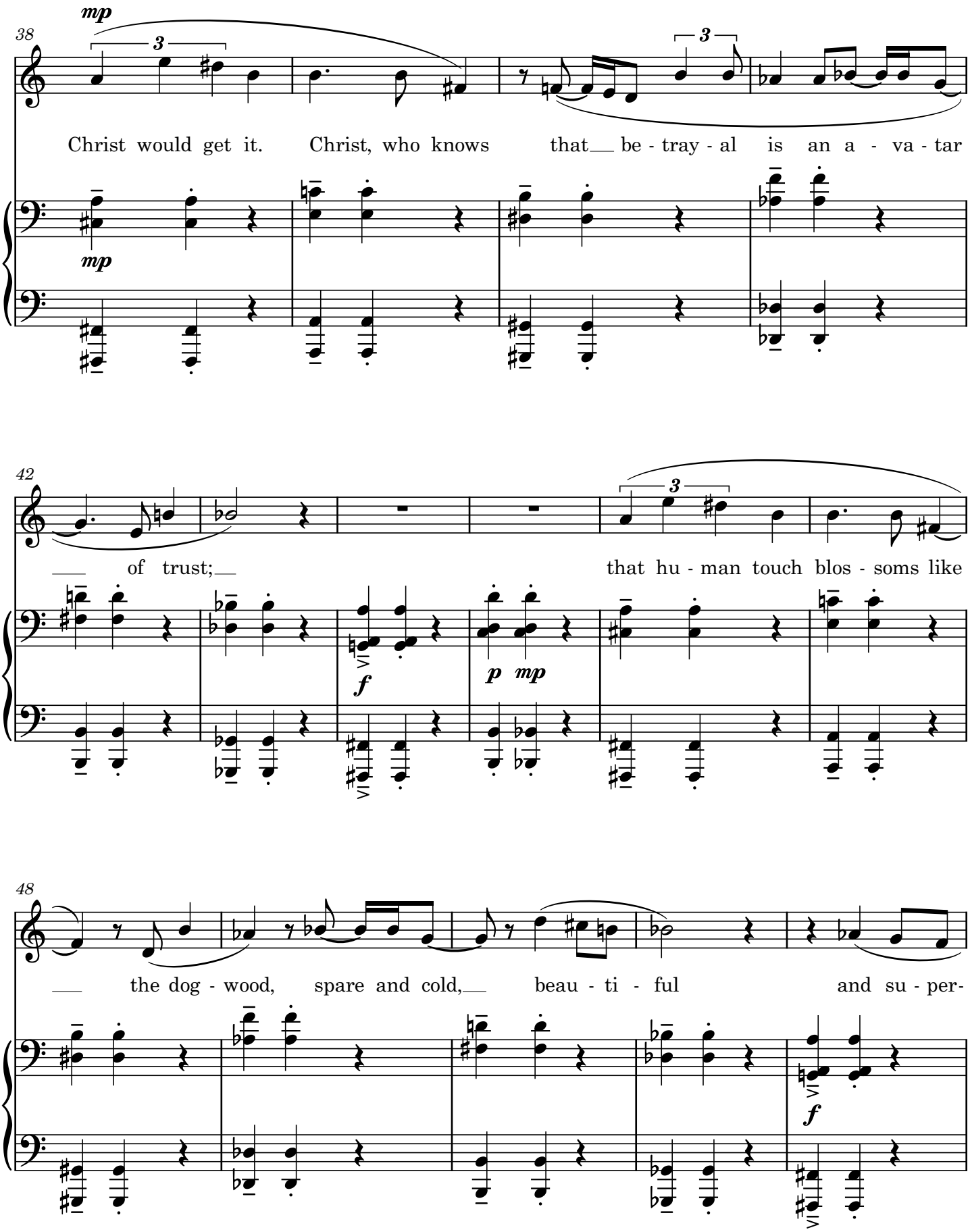
10. Three Shots: Third

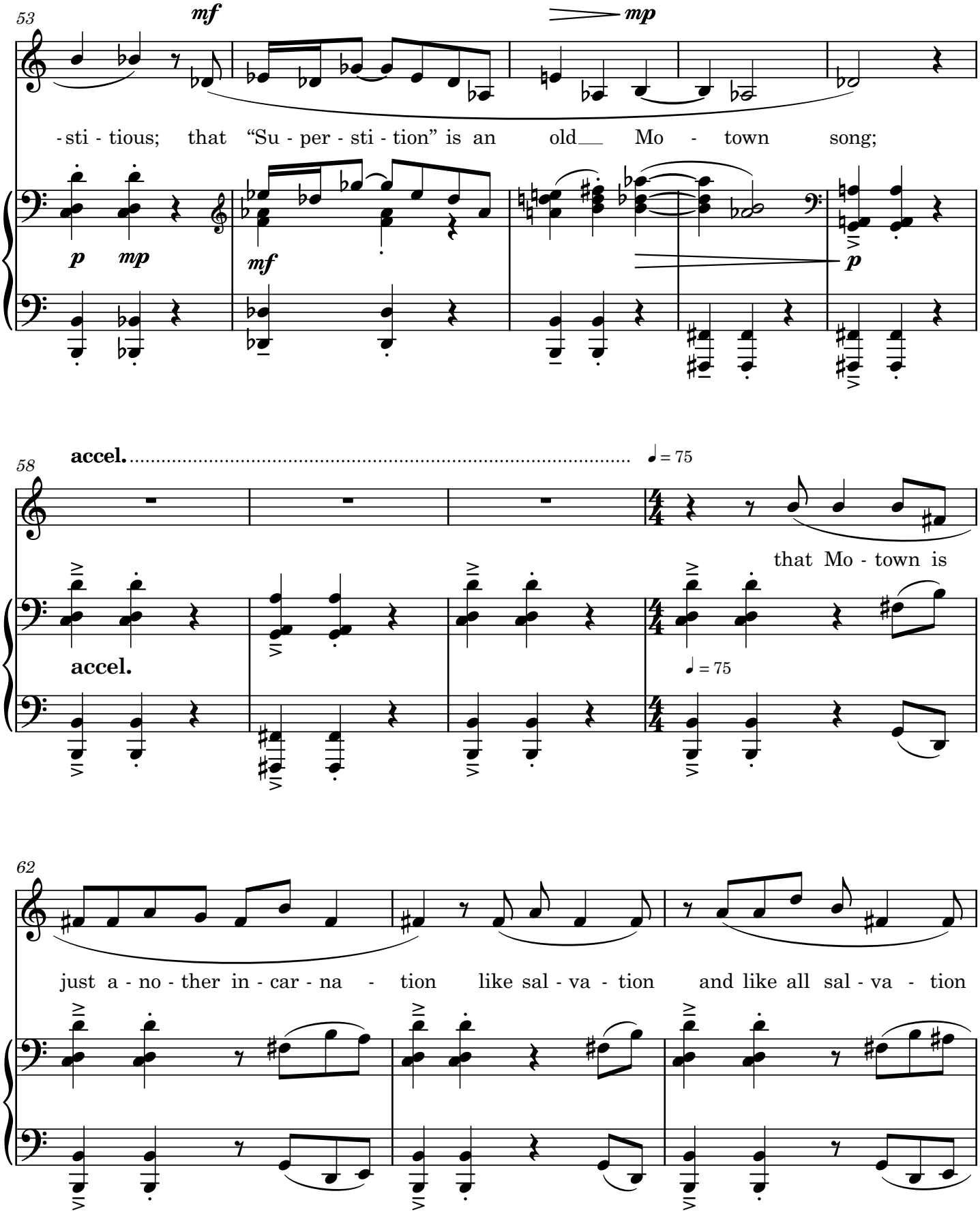


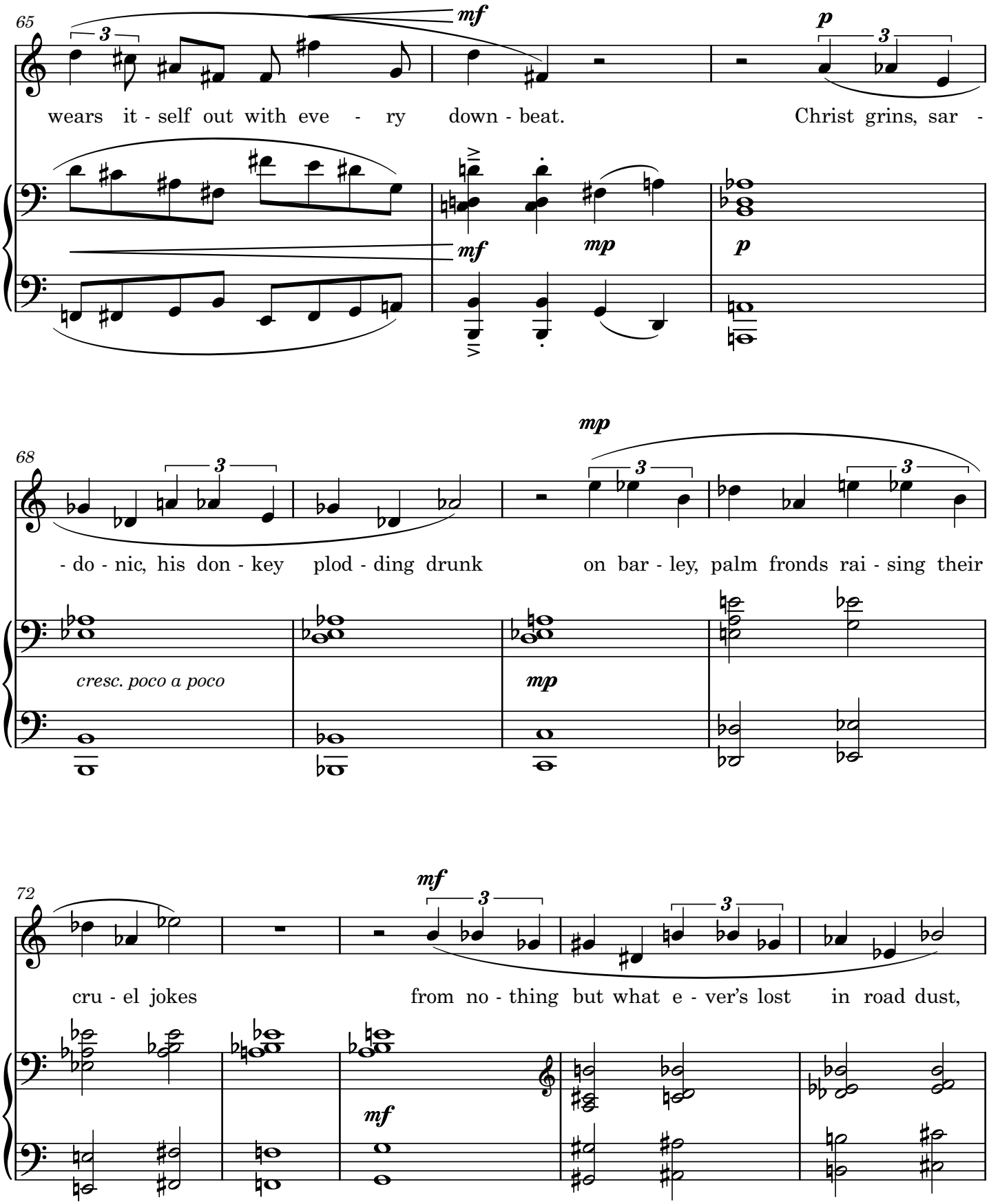

6
mp
Out - side a gar - den of clo - ver and pe - on - ies
p
10
p
mp
15
f
heat prayer and the cro - wing cock: third shot
mf
p

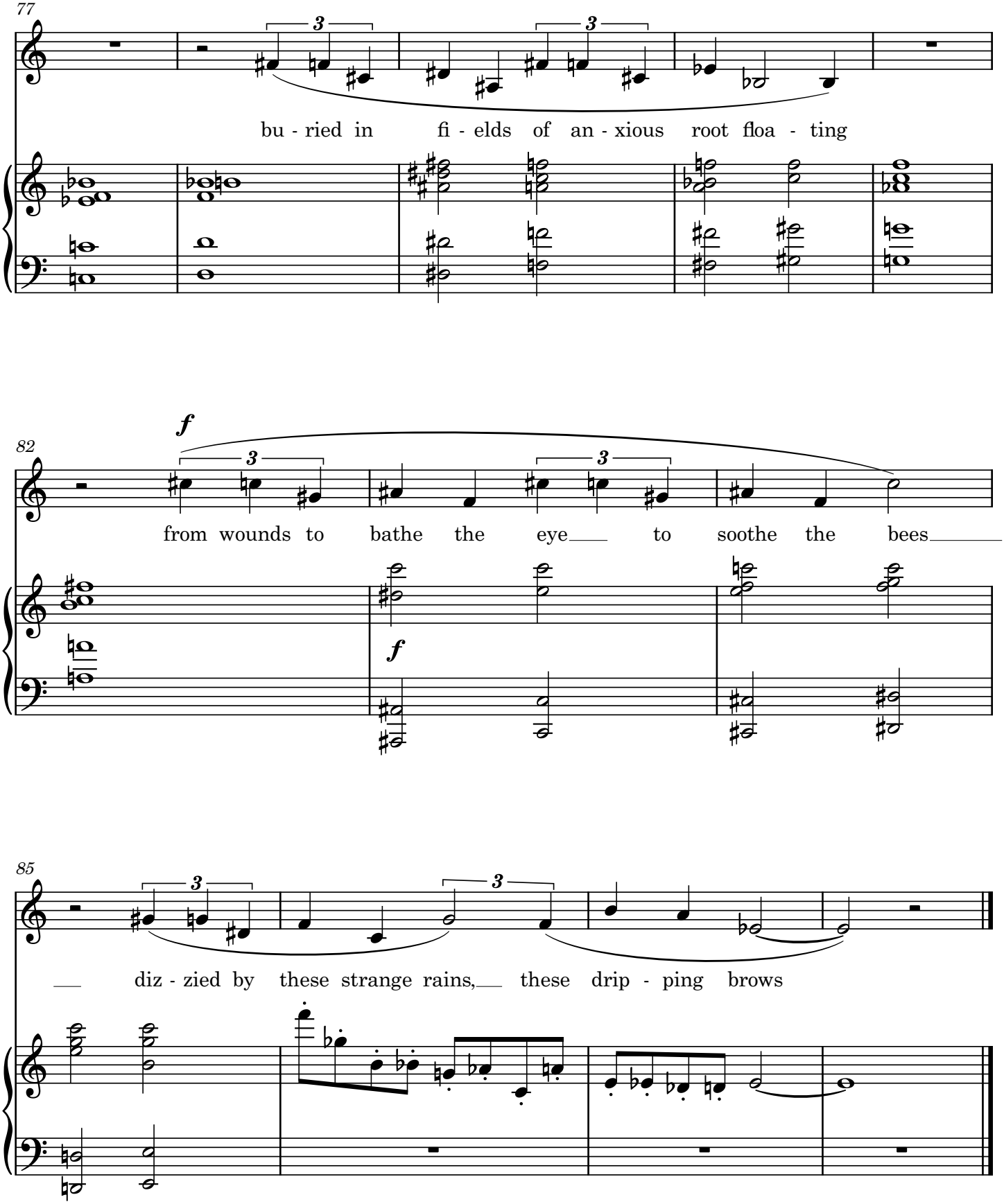

19
pro - phe - sized by sym - me - try: Fa - ther and
mf
23
Son Fa - - ther and Son
p
26
mp
de - man - ding the Ho - ly Ghost, yolk white and shell the
8ba
p
8ba
4
mp


29
mf
whole damn egg. Be - tra - - yal?
8ba
p
mf
32
mp
A ser - ving plat - ter
Bet - ter yet a verb as in
mf
May I be - tray
8ba
mp
mf
35
that ome - lette for you?
Be - tray it to the ve - ran - da per - haps?


38
mp
3
3
Christ would get it. Christ, who knows that be - tray - al is an a - va - tar
mp
42
3
of trust; that hu - man touch blos - soms like
f
p mp
48
the dog - wood, spare and cold, beau - ti - ful and su - per-
f


53
mf
mp
-sti - tious; that "Su - per - sti - tion" is an old Mo - town song;
p mp
mf
p
58
accel.
♩ = 75
that Mo - town is
accel.
♩ = 75
62
just a - no - ther in - car - na - tion like sal - va - tion and like all sal - va - tion

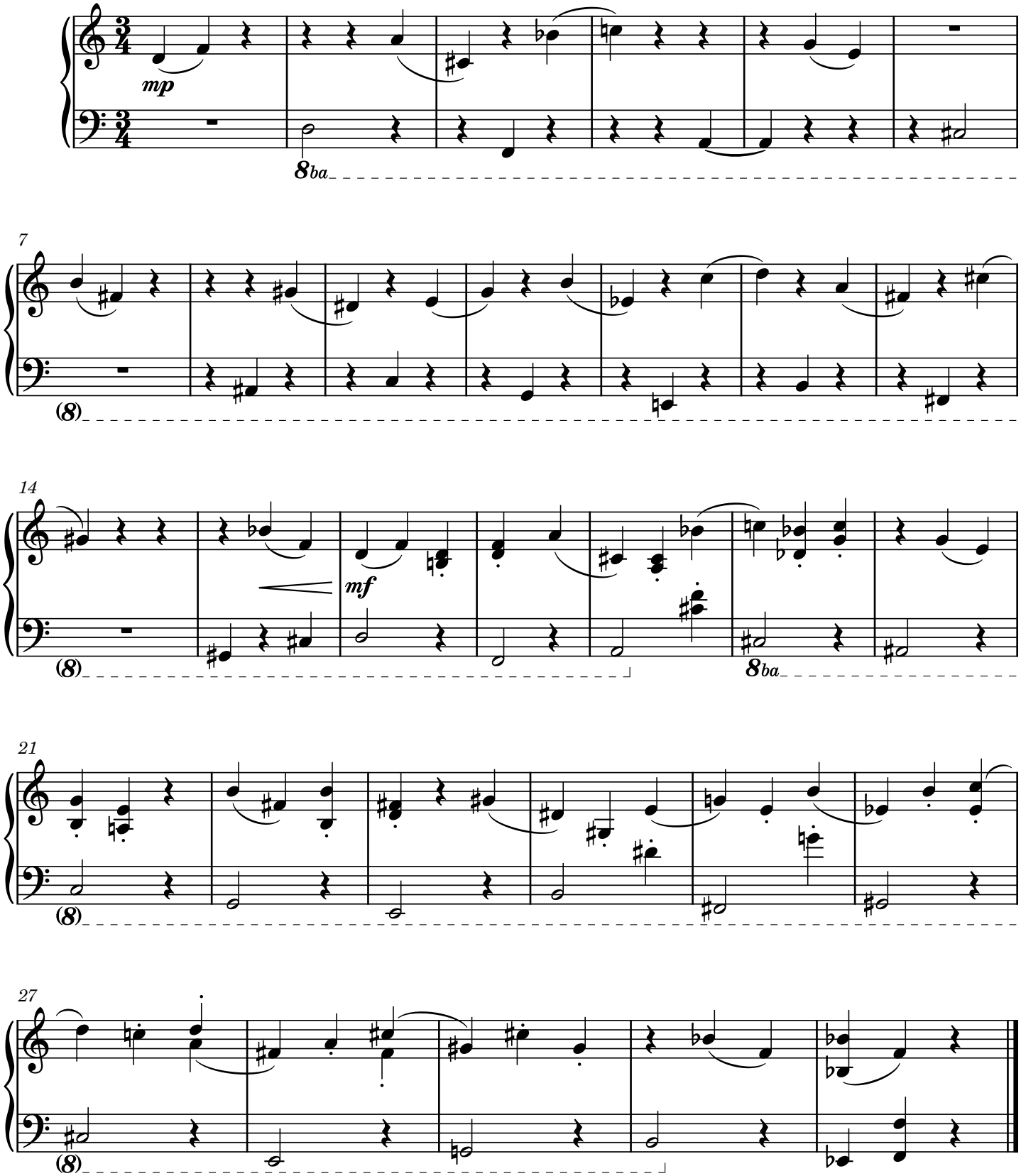

65
mf
p
wears it - self out with eve - ry down - beat. Christ grins, sar -
mf
mp
p
68
mp
- do - nic, his don - key plod - ding drunk on bar - ley, palm fronds rai - sing their
cresc. poco a poco
mp
72
mf
cru - el jokes from no - thing but what e - ver's lost in road dust,
mf


77
bu - ried in fi - elds of an - xious root floa - ting
82
f
from wounds to bathe the eye to soothe the bees
f
85
diz - zied by these strange rains, these drip - ping brows

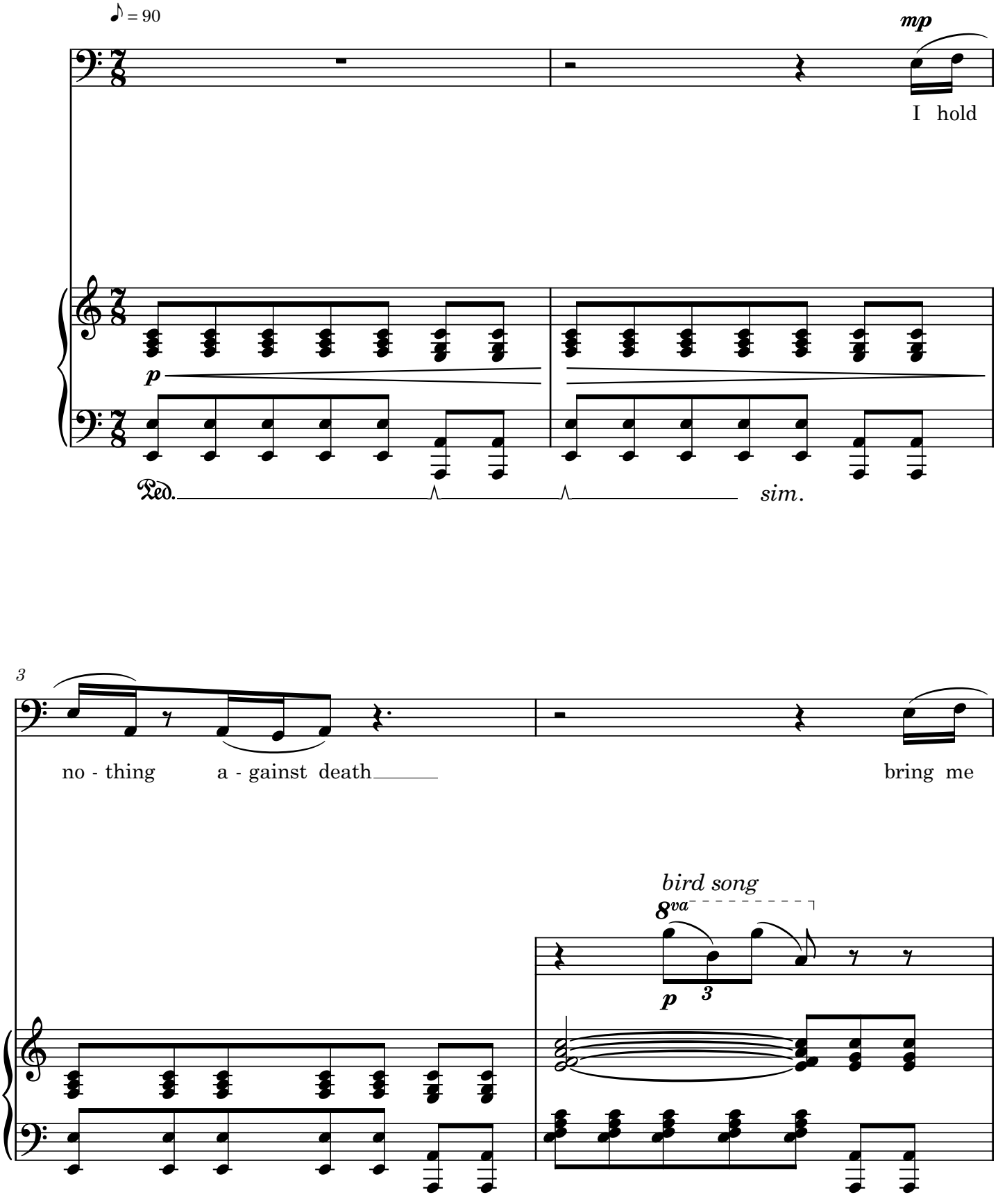
11. (Interlude)

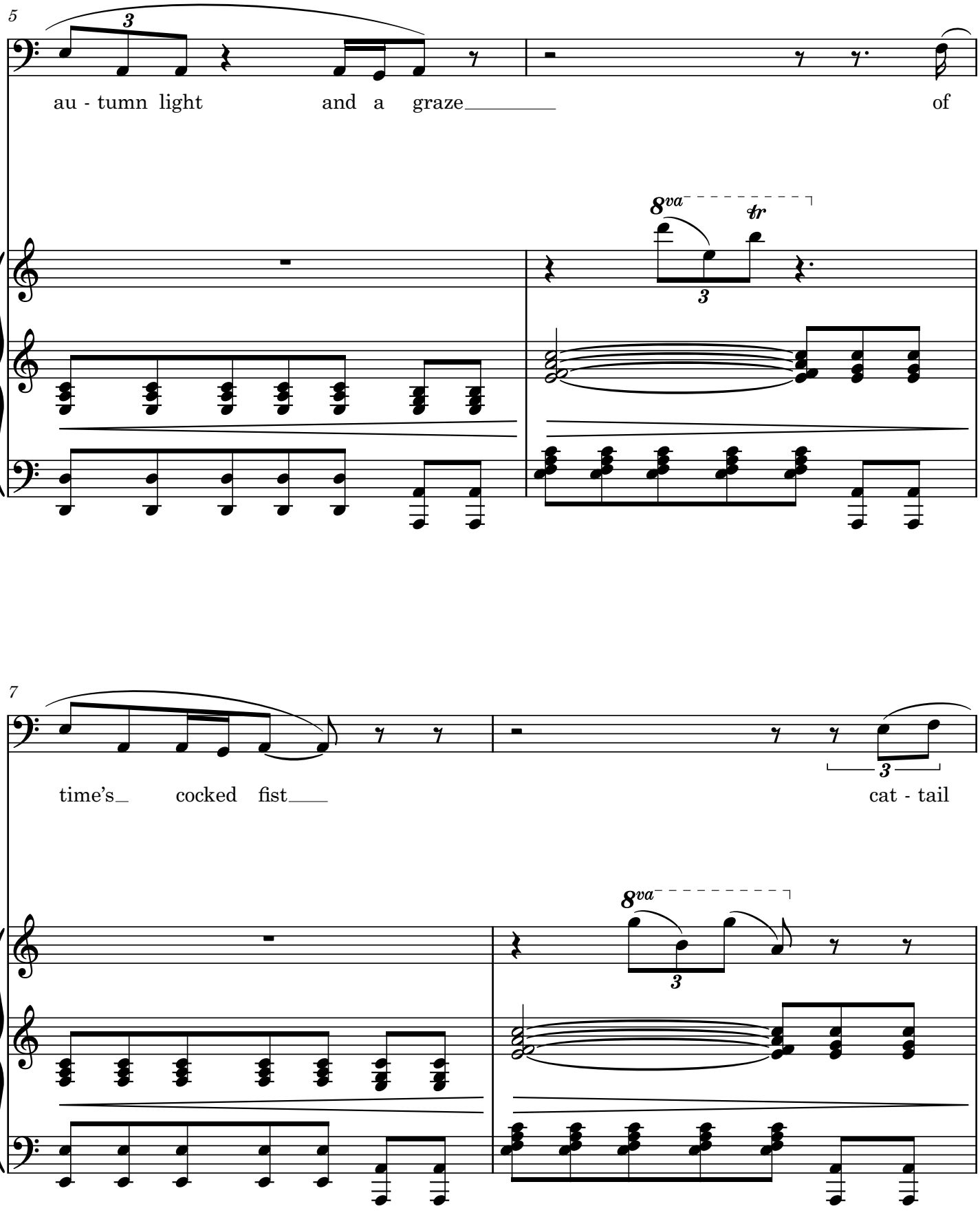
♩ = 120

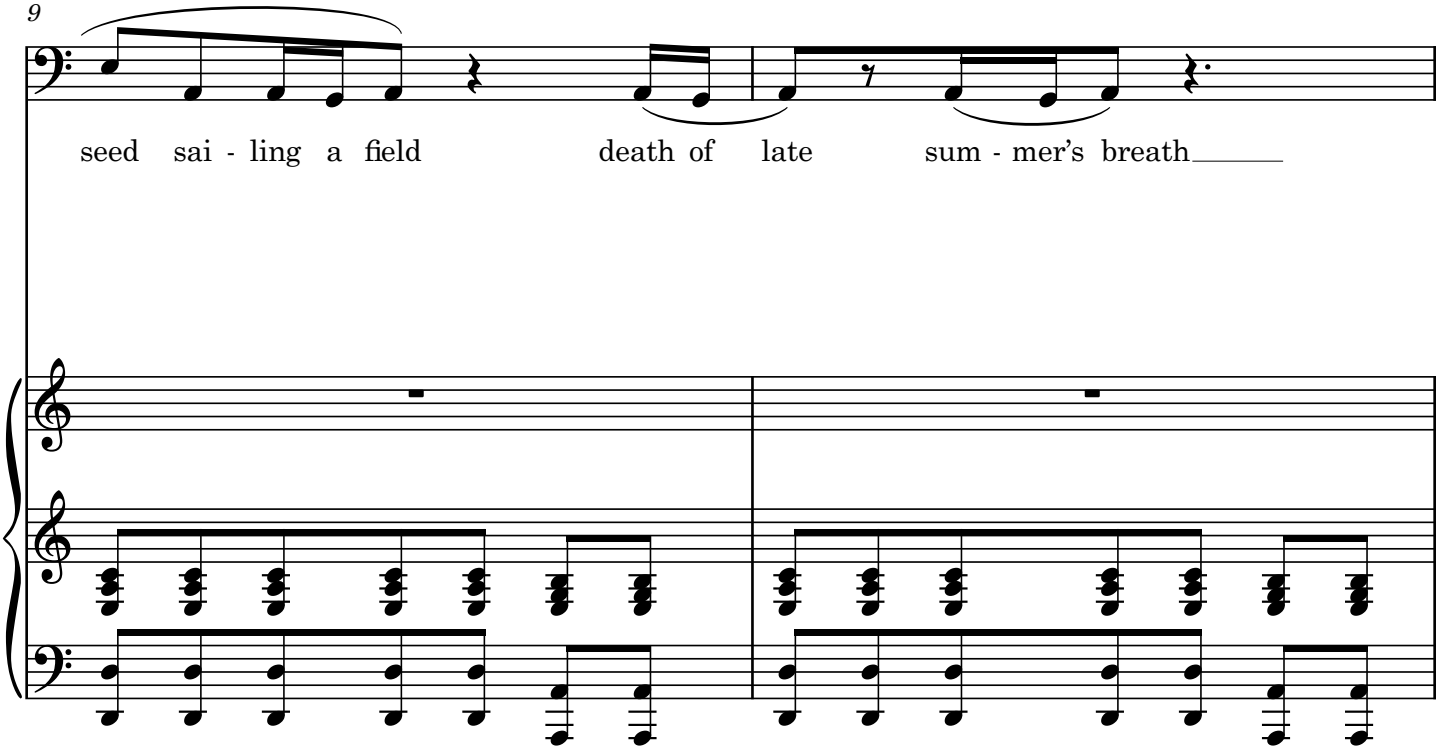
staccato notes slightly quieter than slurred notes (an echo)

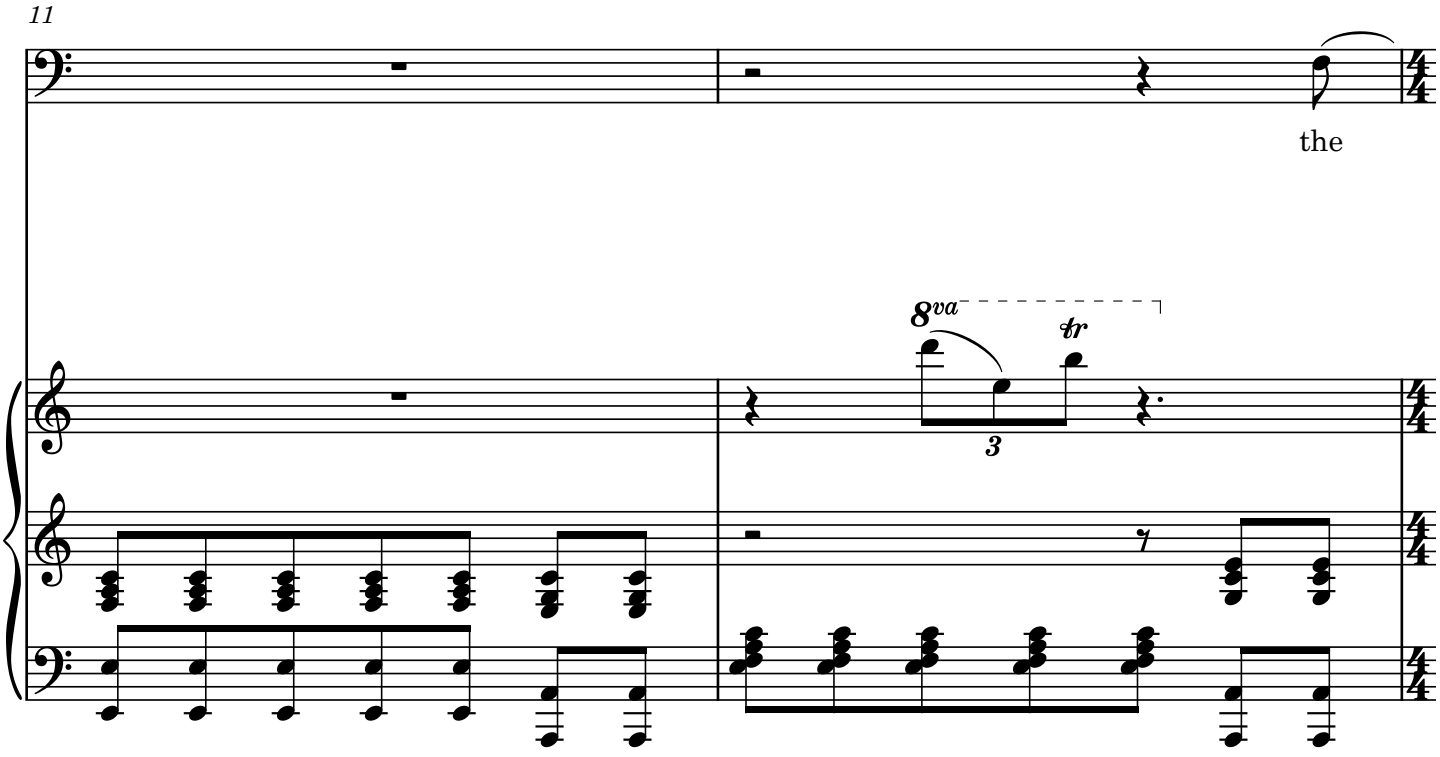


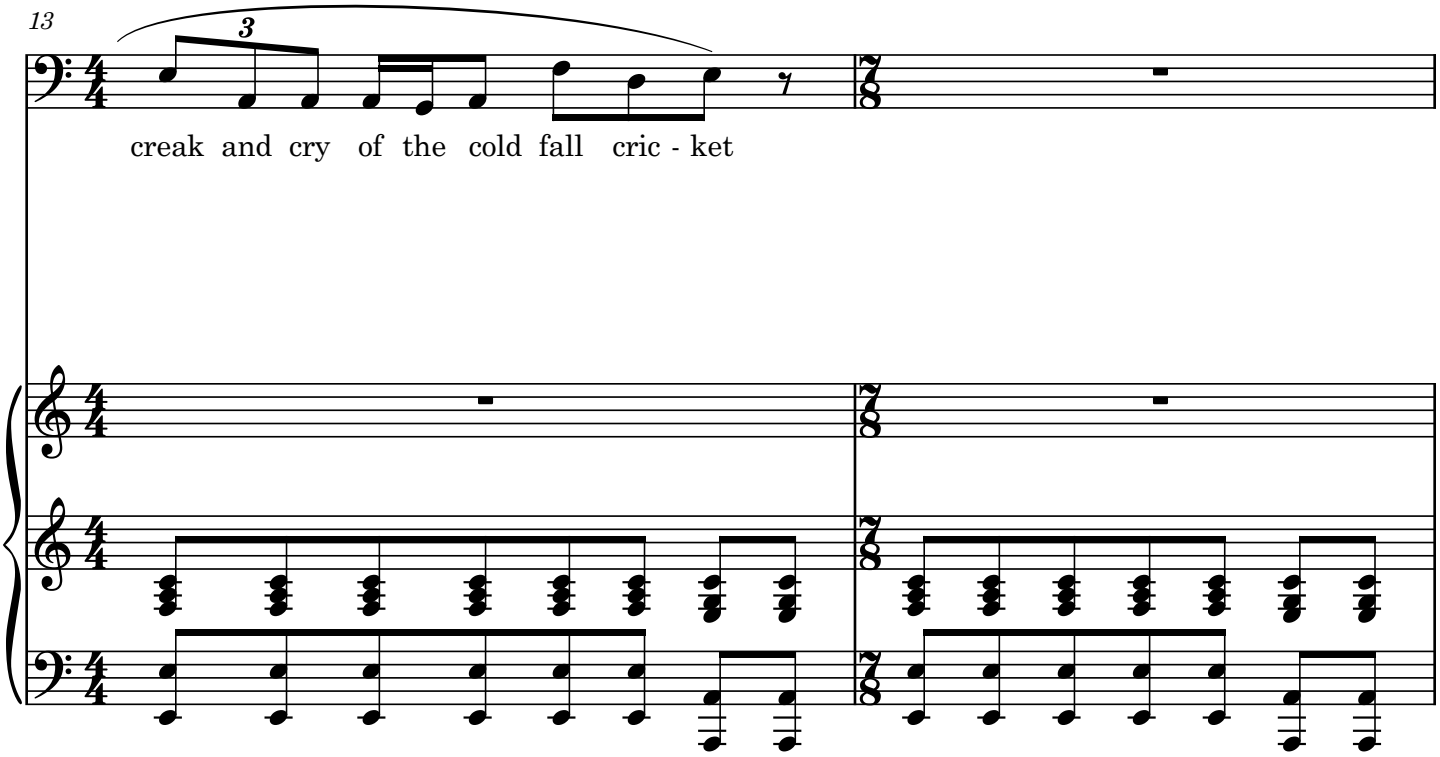
12. Things I Might Have Thought in Those Moments

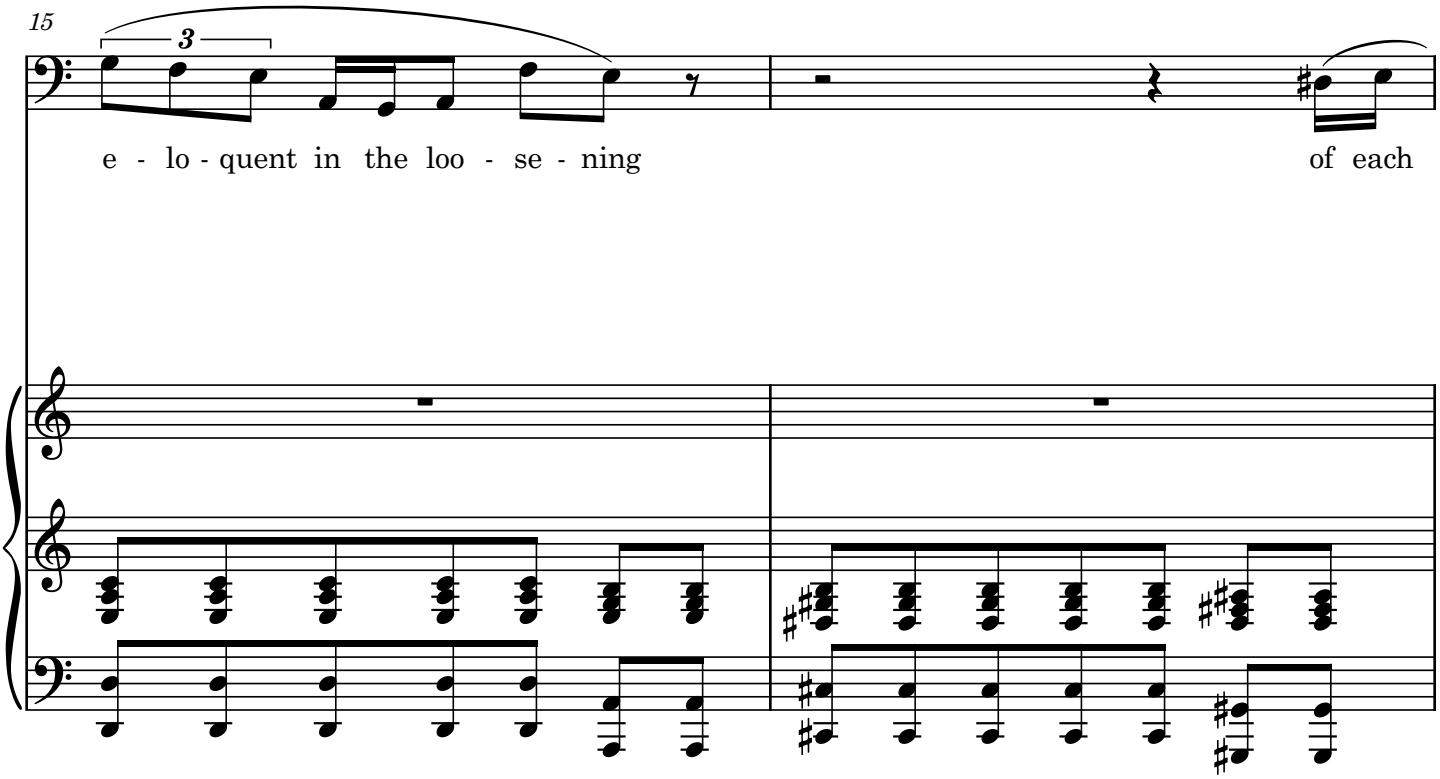


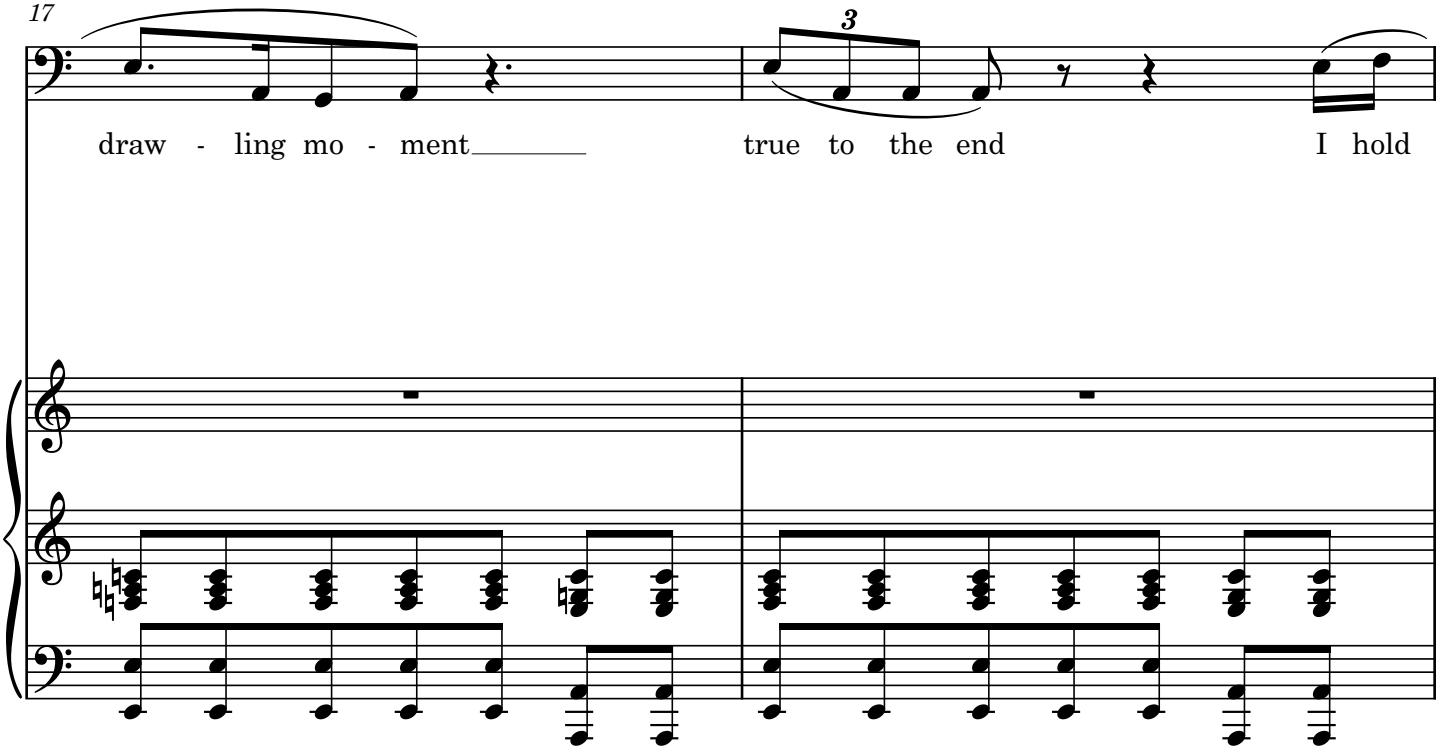

5
au - tumn light and a graze of
8va
tr
7
time's cocked fist cat - tail
8va

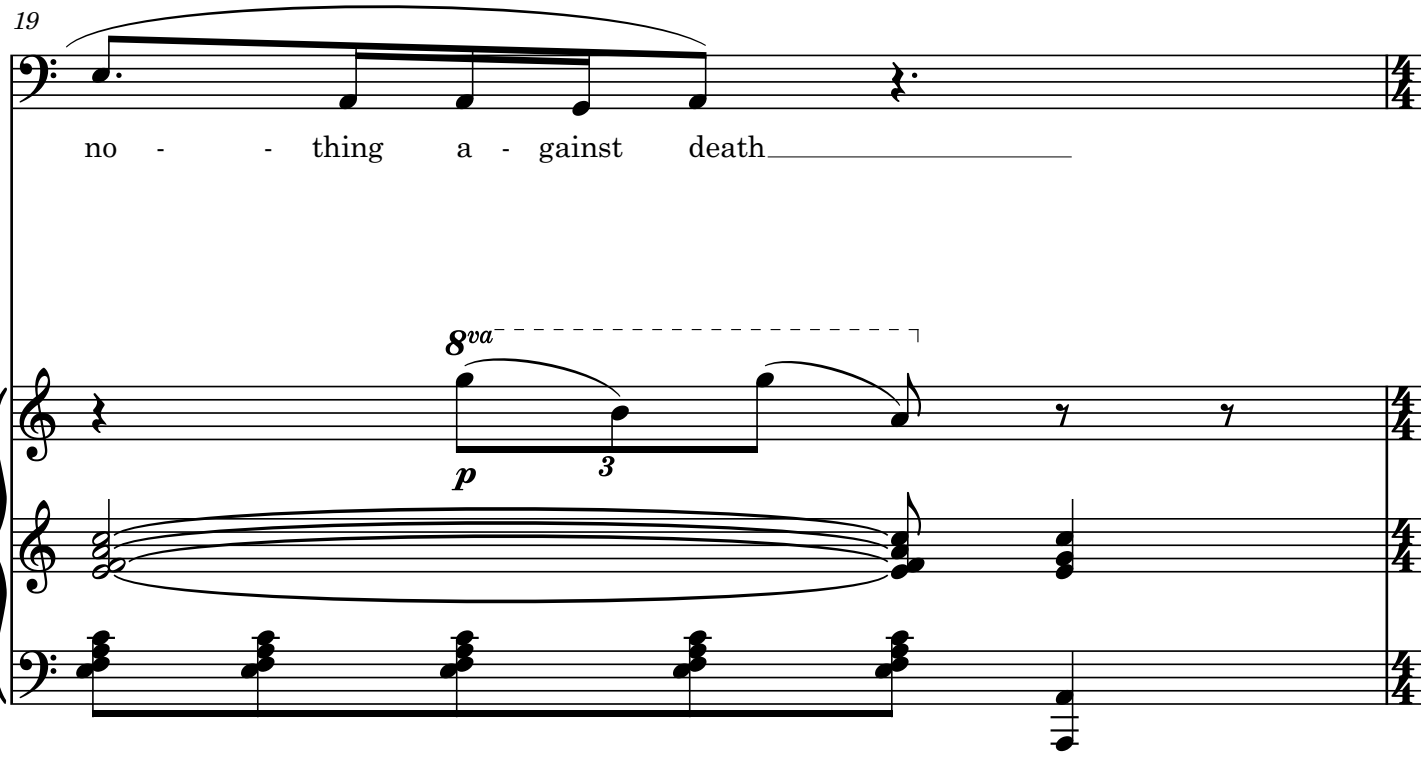

9
seed sai - ling a field death of late sum - mer's breath

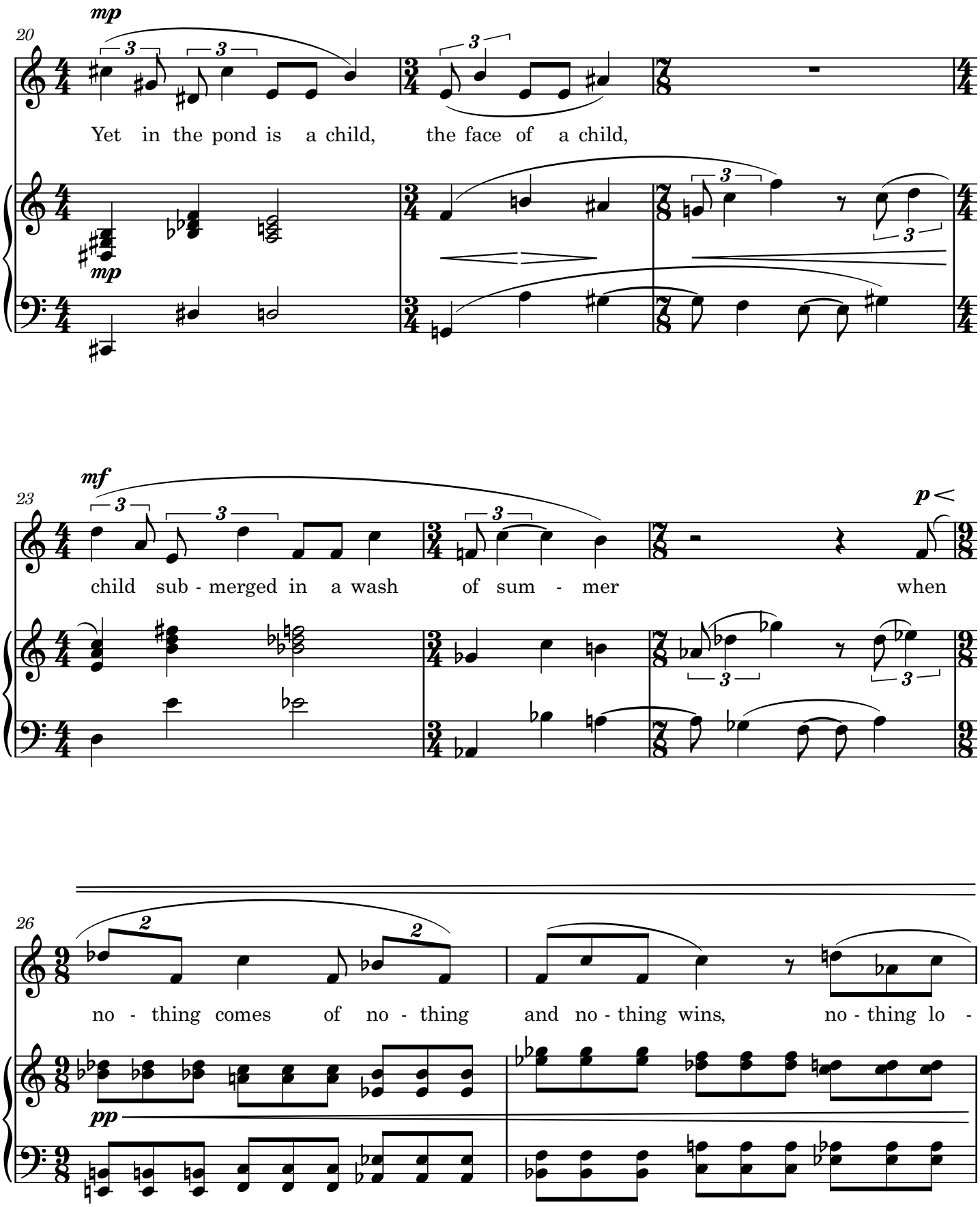

11
the
8va
tr
3

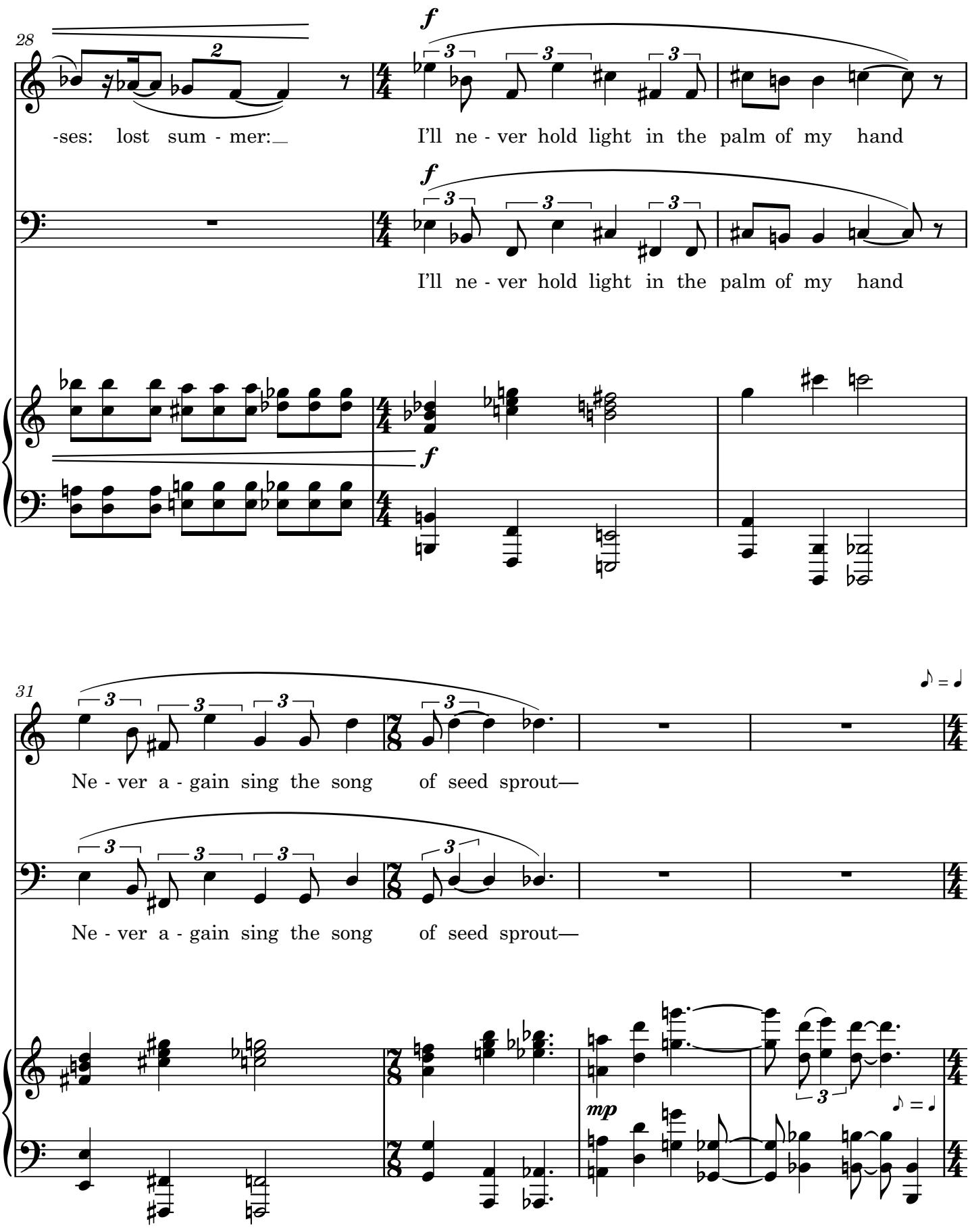

13
creak and cry of the cold fall cric - ket

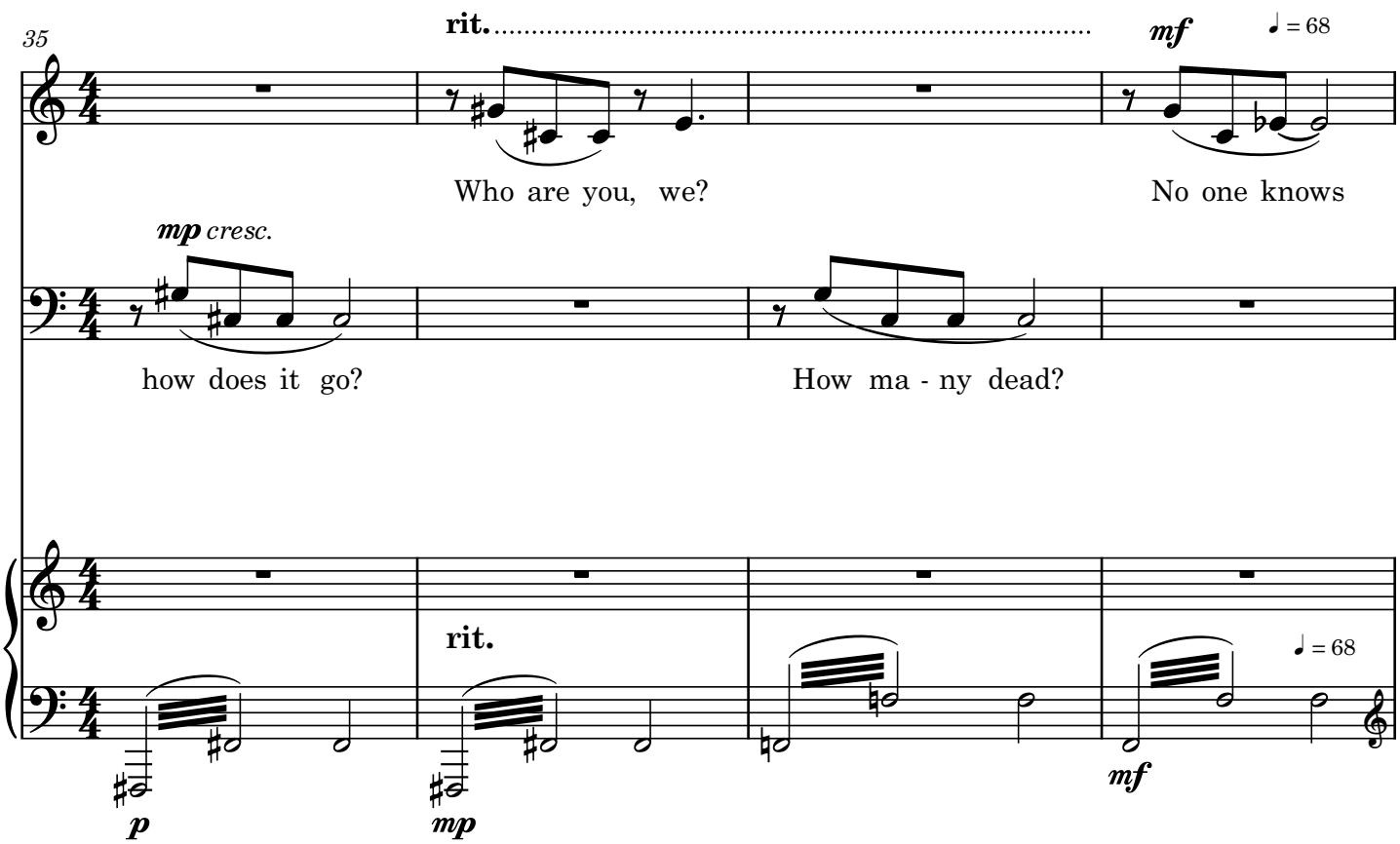

15
e - lo - quent in the loo - se - ning
of each

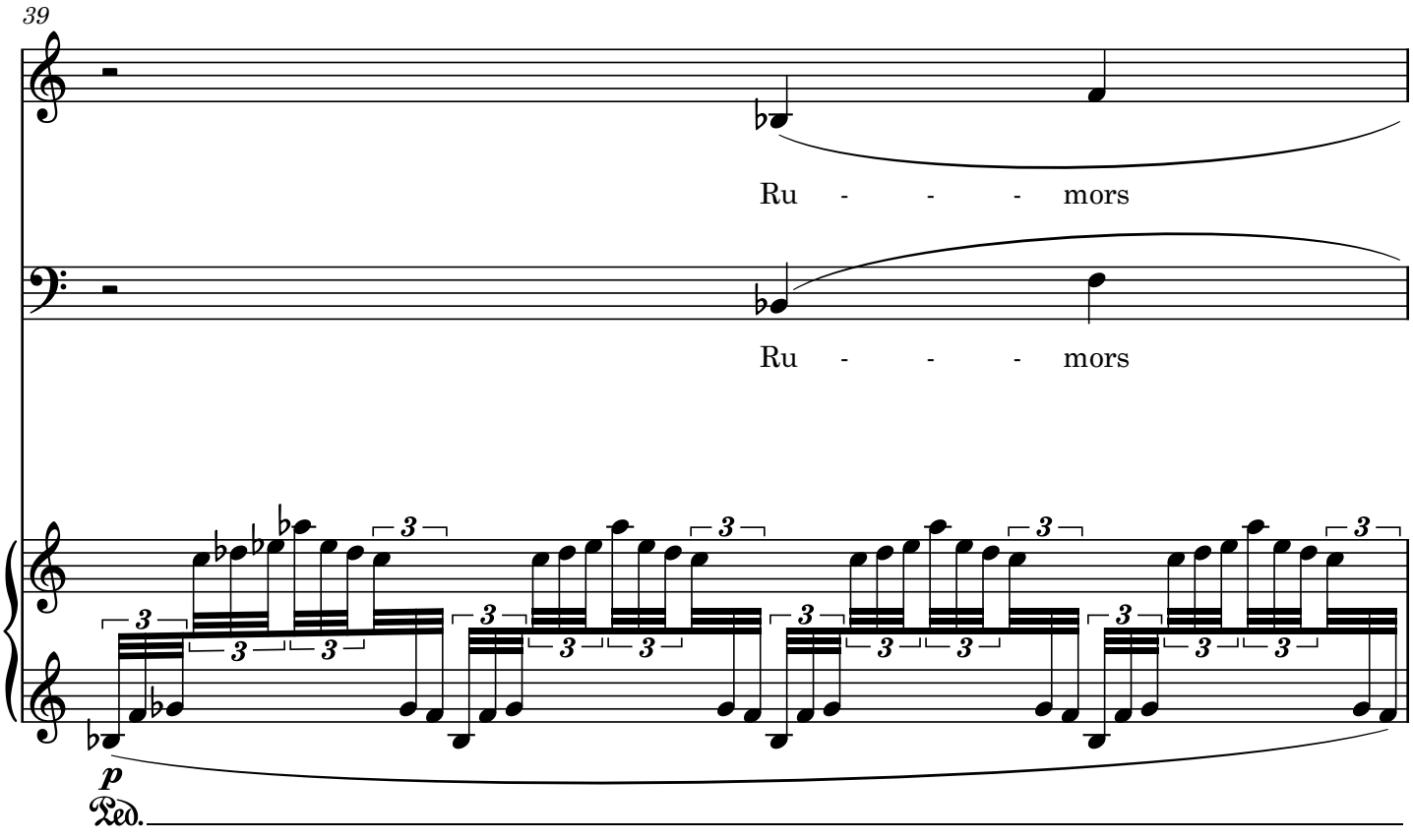

17
3
draw - ling mo - ment
true to the end
I hold

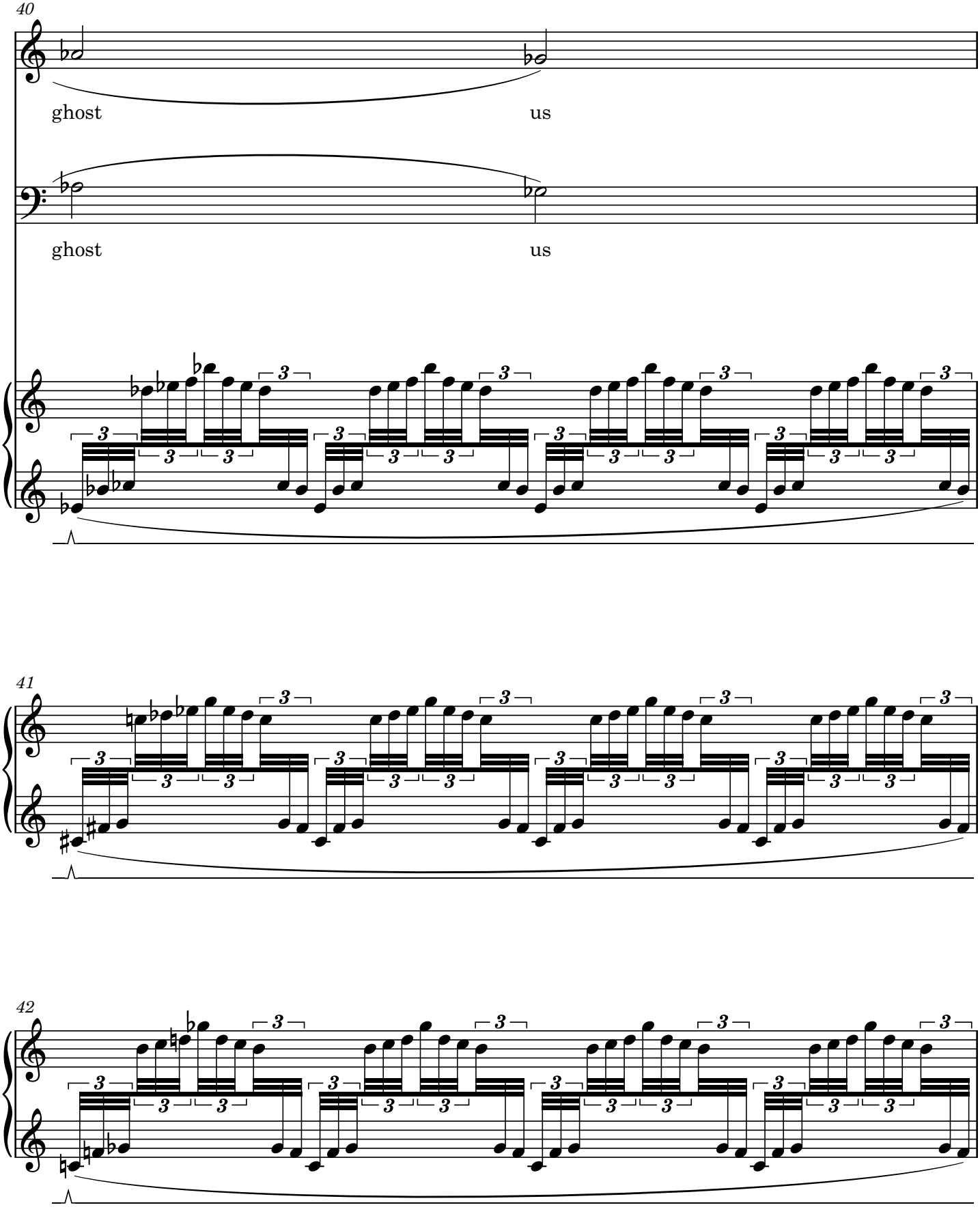

19
no - - thing a - gainst death
8va
p
3

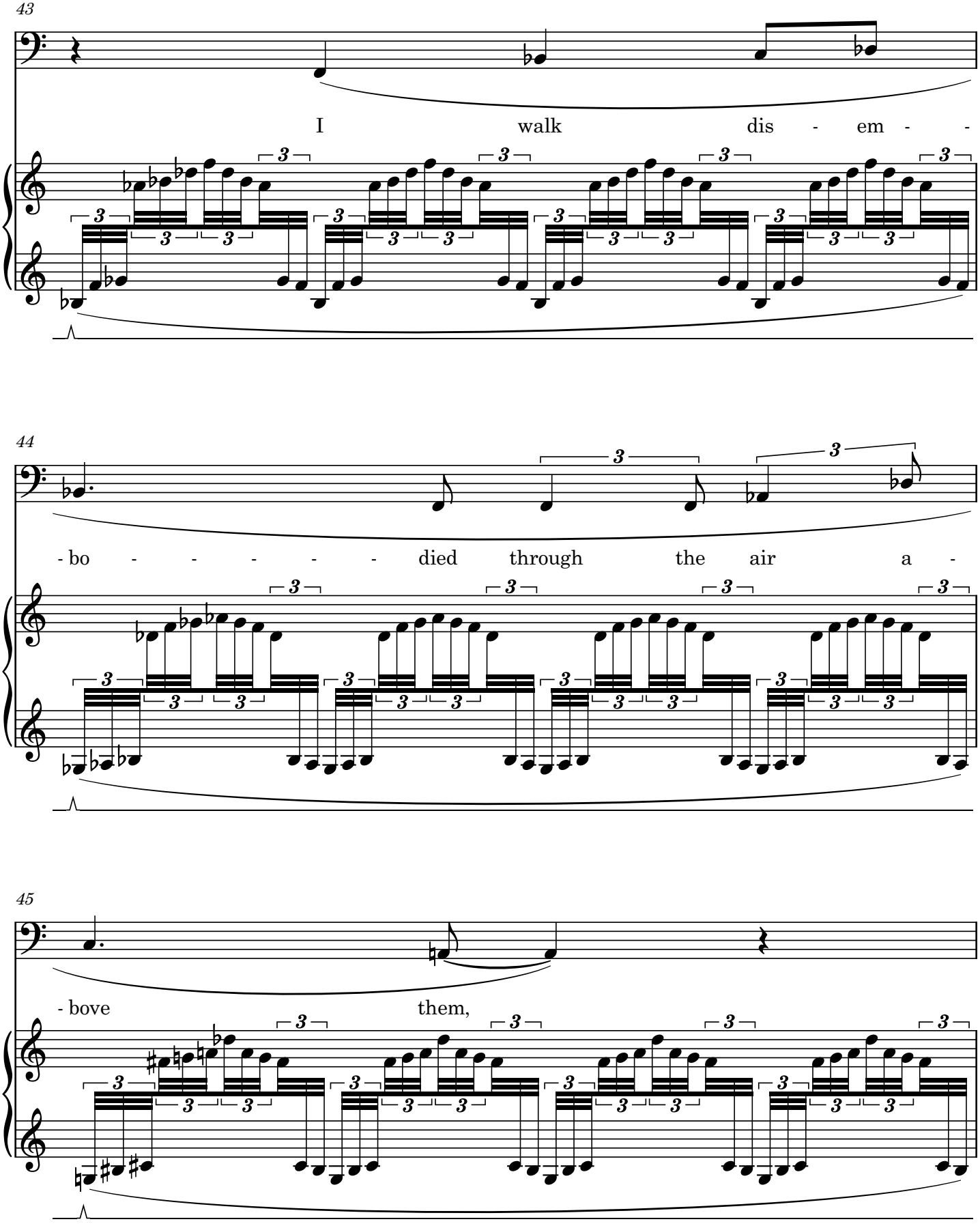

20
mp
Yet in the pond is a child, the face of a child,
mp
23
mf
child sub - merged in a wash of sum - mer when
p
26
no - thing comes of no - thing and no - thing wins, no - thing lo -
pp

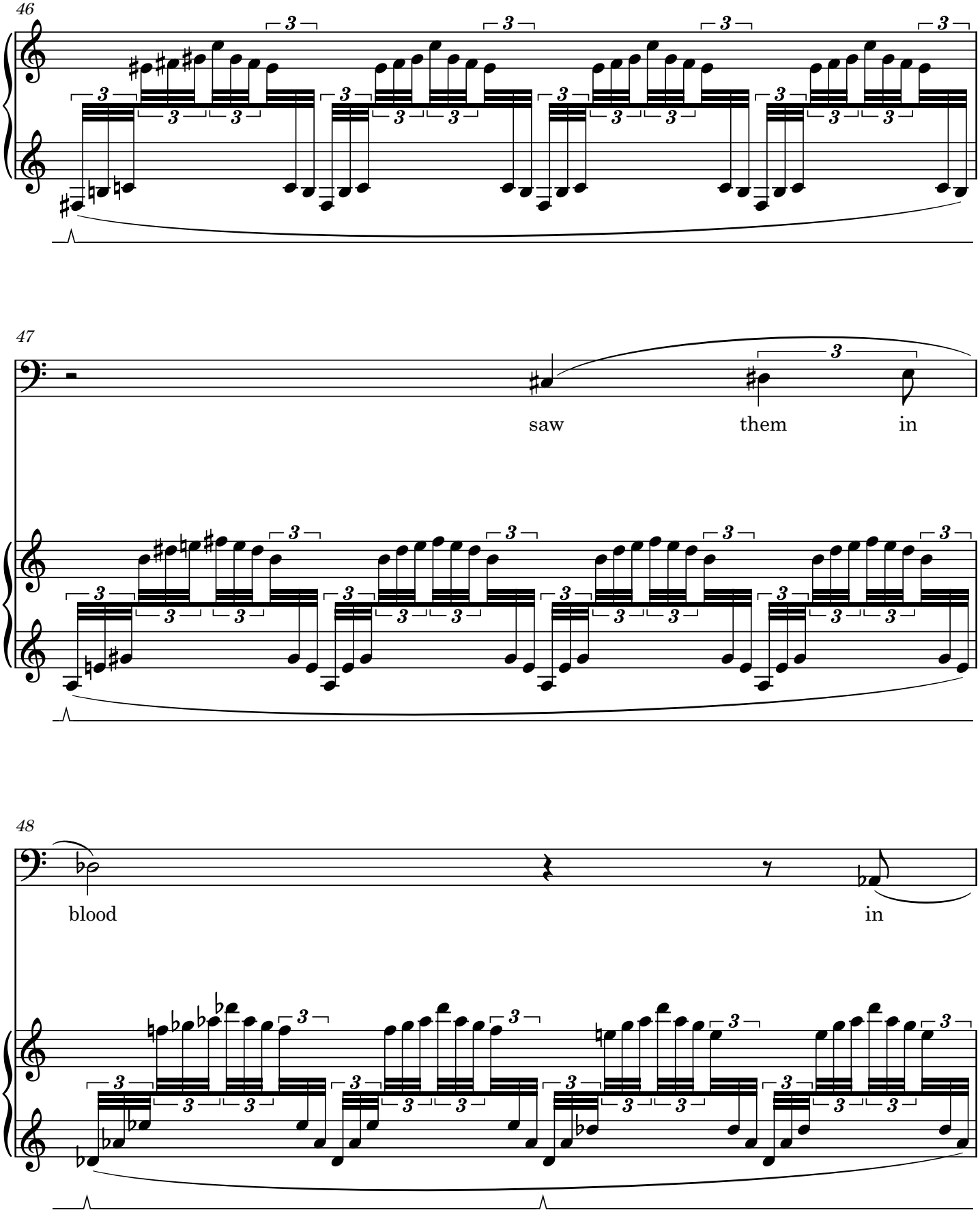

28
-ses: lost sum - mer:
I'll ne - ver hold light in the palm of my hand
I'll ne - ver hold light in the palm of my hand
31
Ne - ver a - gain sing the song of seed sprout—
Ne - ver a - gain sing the song of seed sprout—

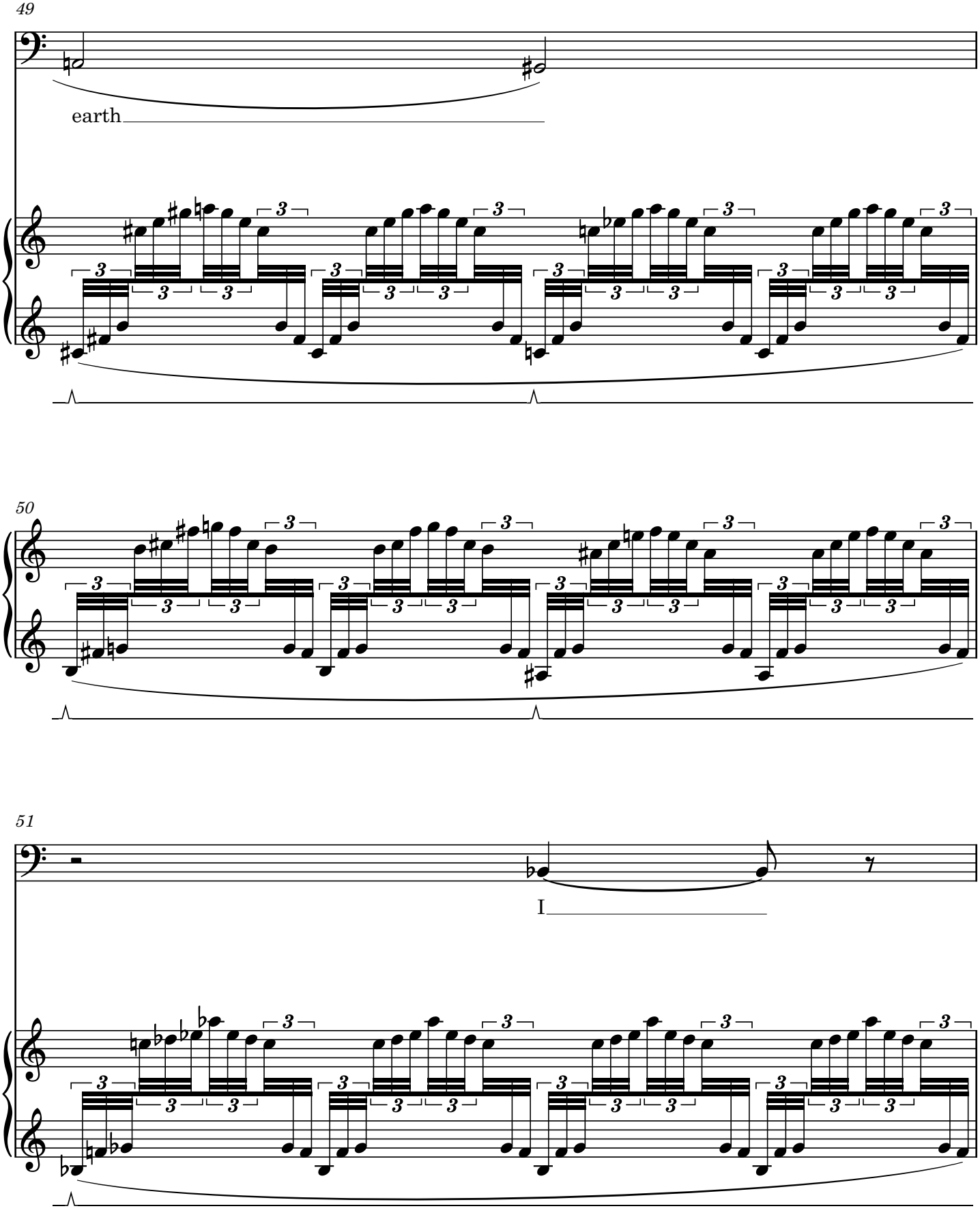

35
rit.
mf
♩ = 68
Who are you, we?
No one knows
mp cresc.
how does it go?
How ma - ny dead?
rit.
p
mp
mf
♩ = 68

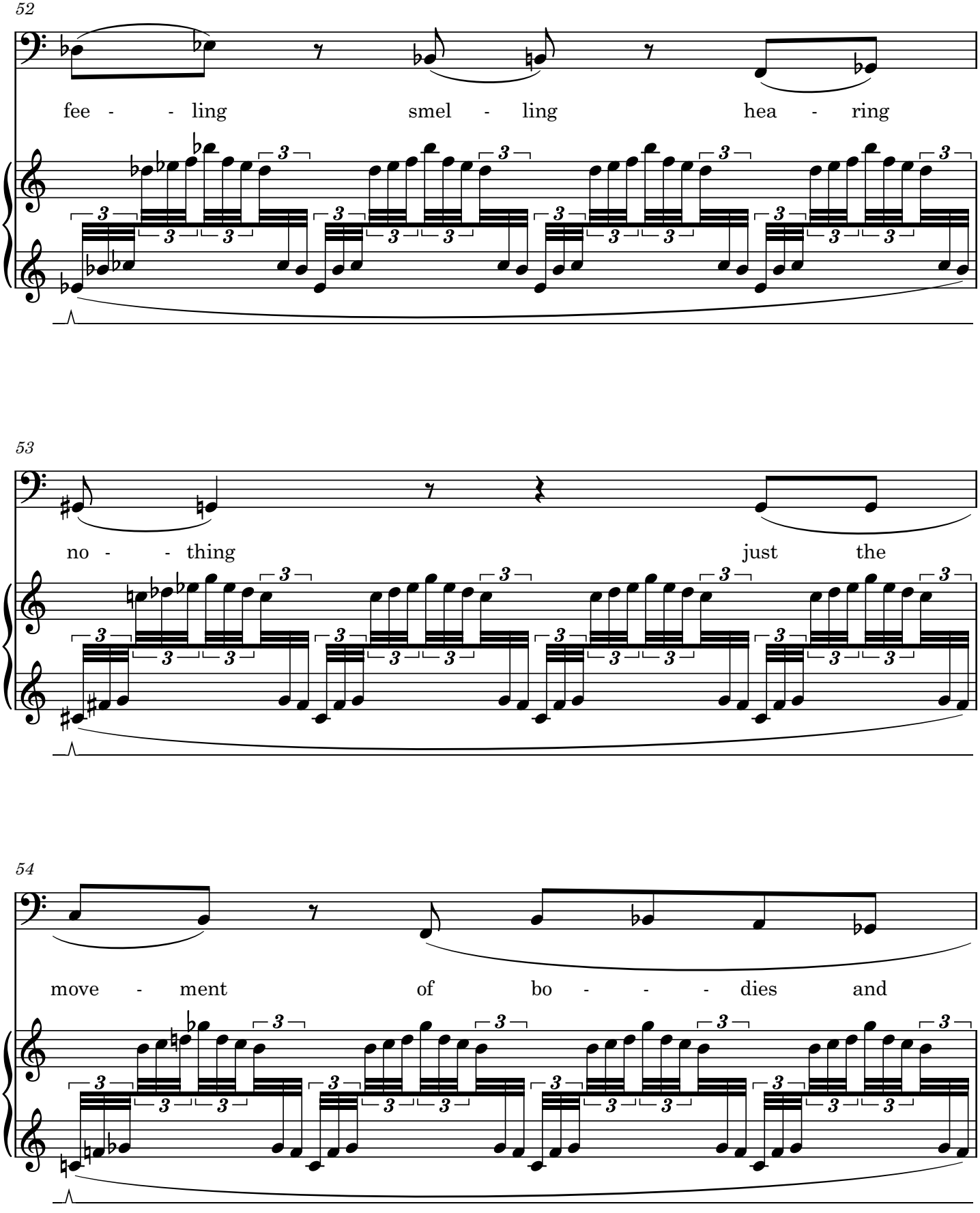

39
Ru - - - mors
Ru - - - mors
p
Ped.

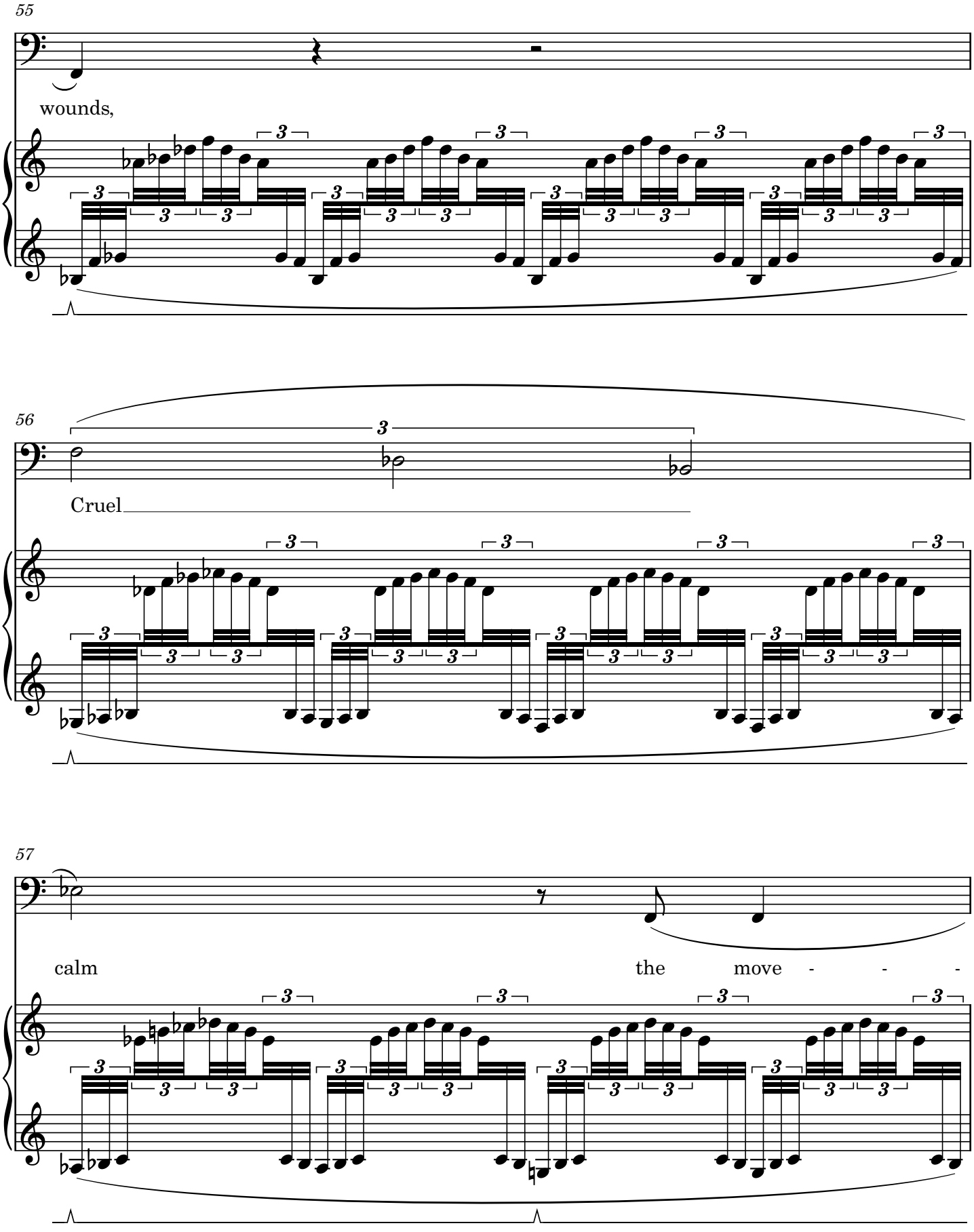

40
ghost
us
ghost
us
41
42

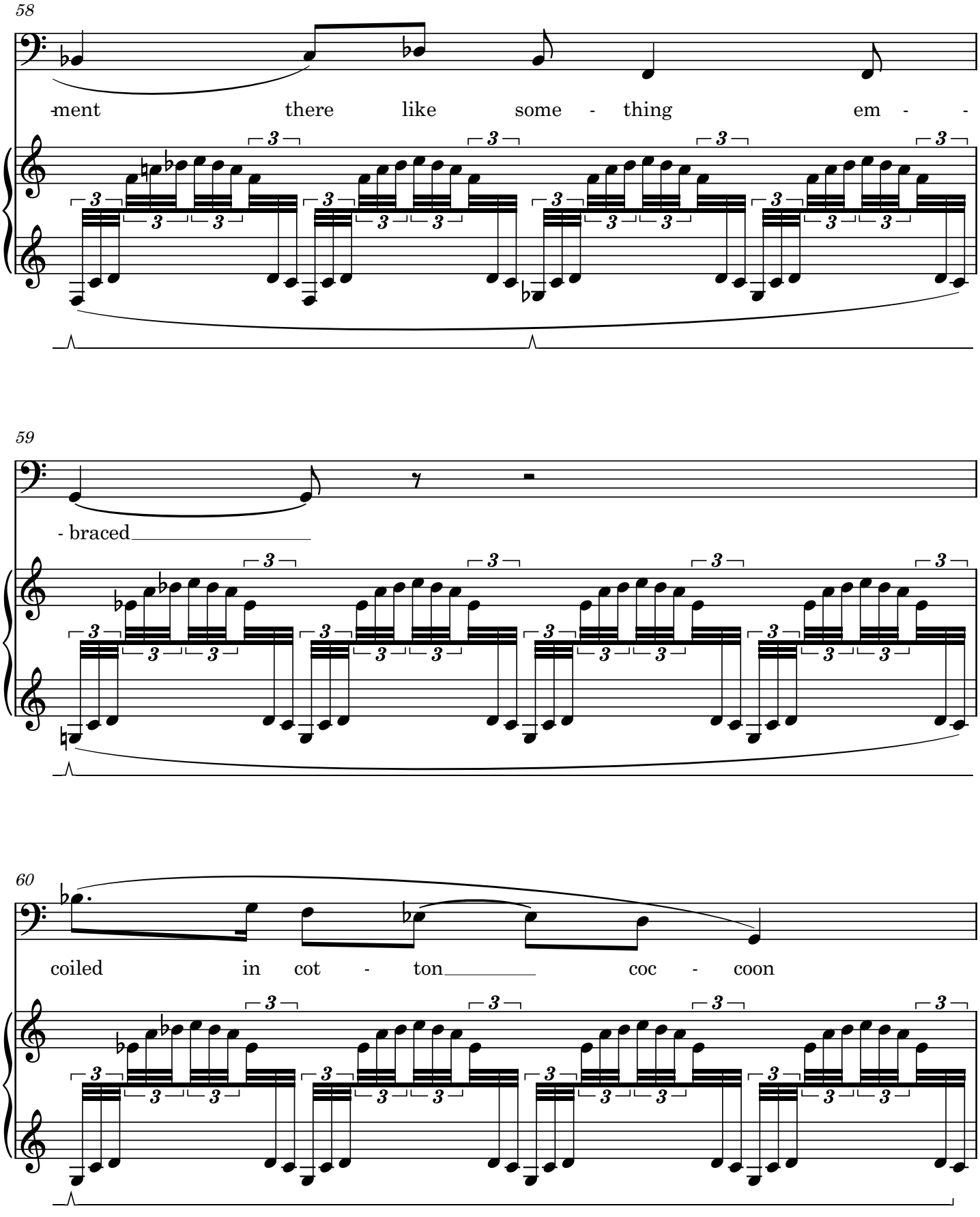

43
I walk dis - em -
44
- bo - - - - - died through the air a -
45
- bove them,

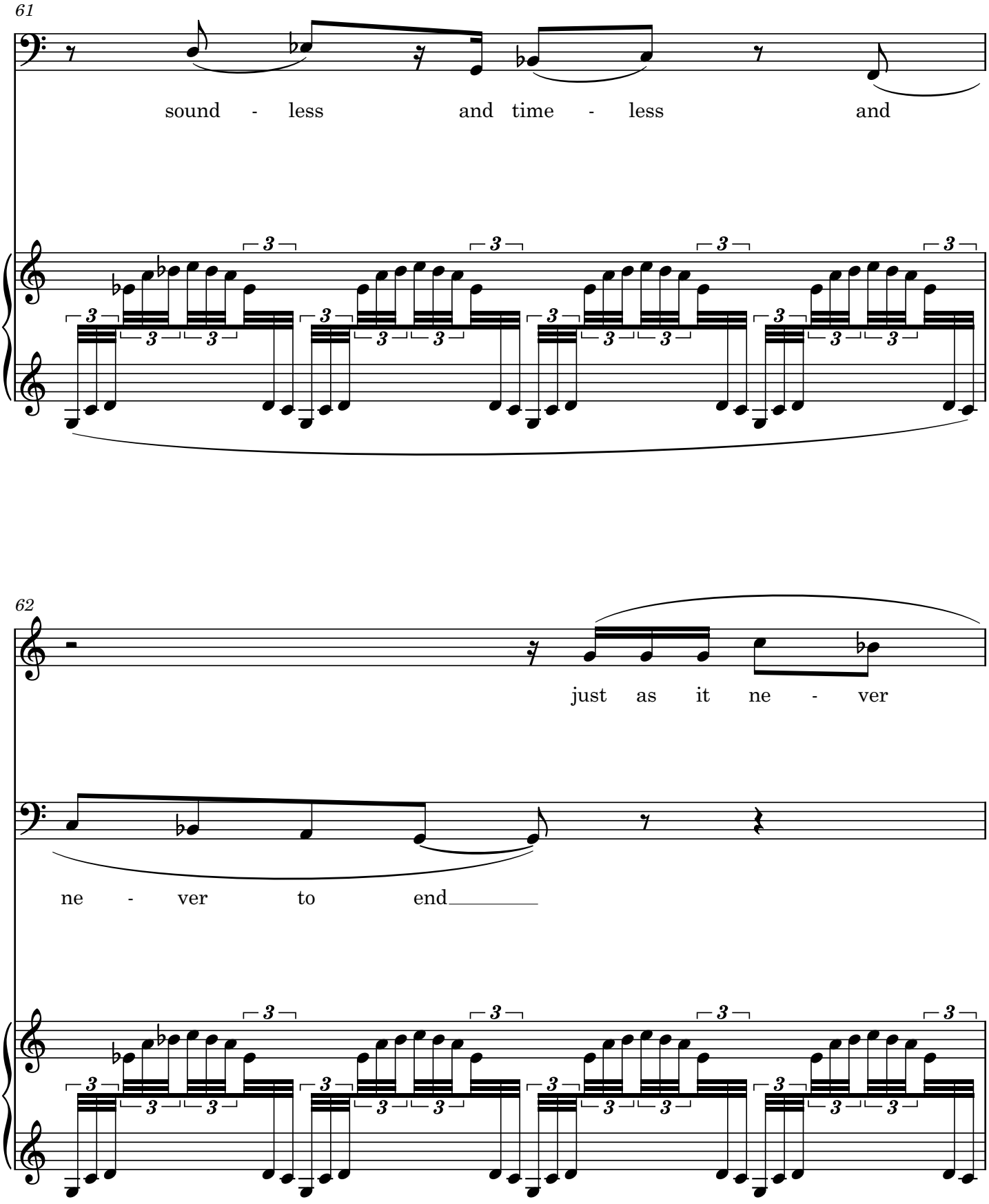

46
47
saw
them
in
48
blood
in

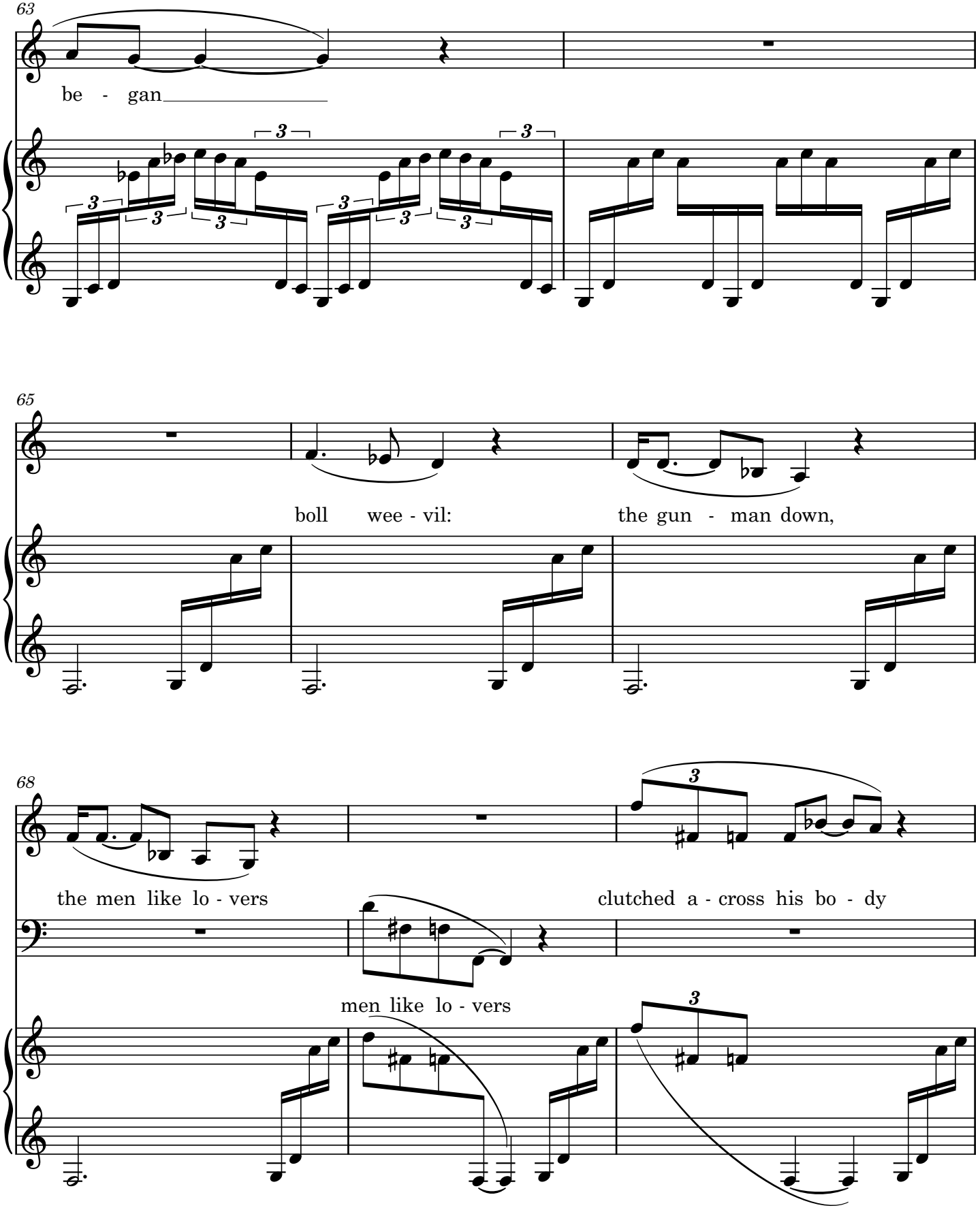

49
earth
50
51
I

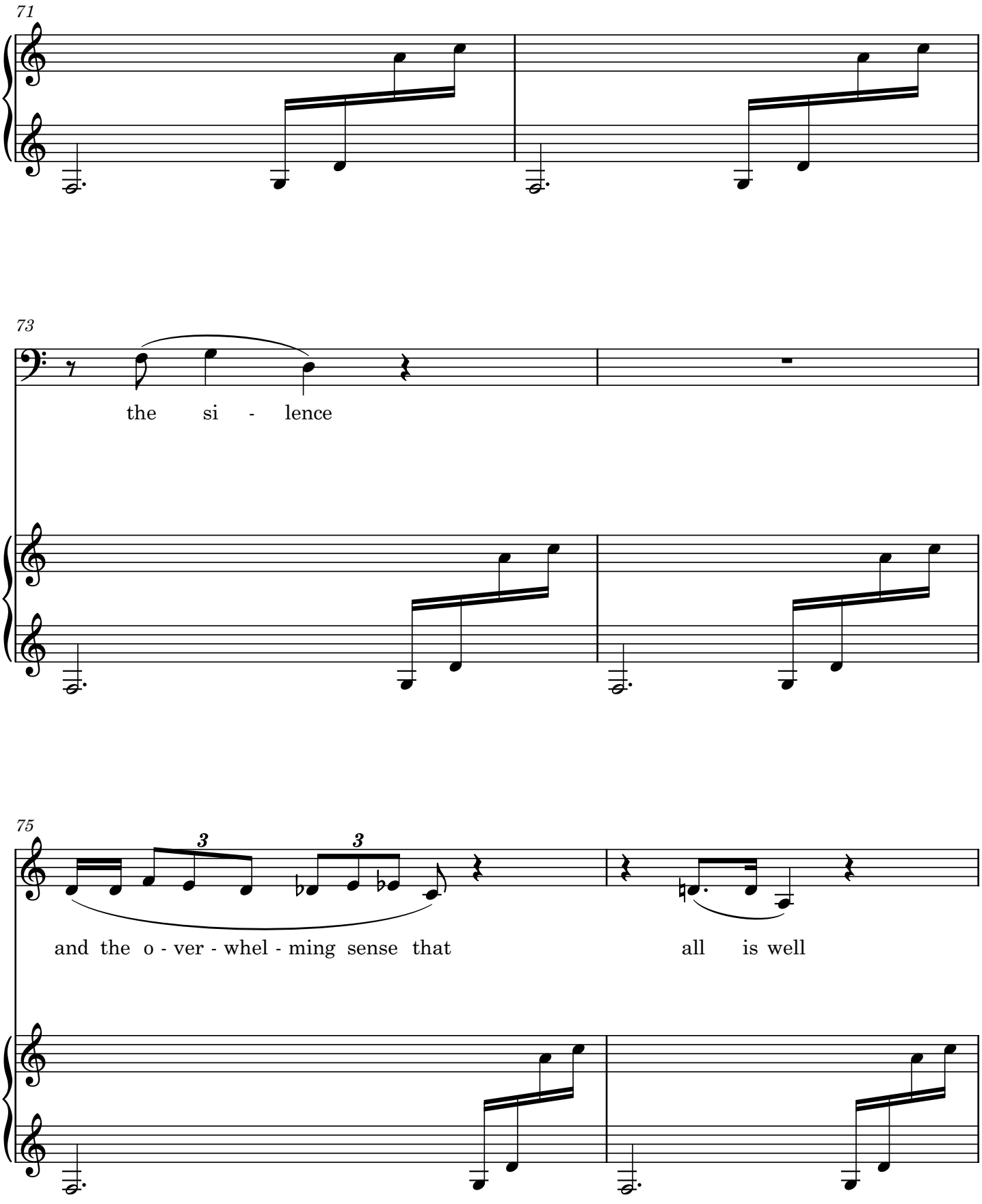

52
fee - - ling smel - ling hea - ring
53
no - - thing just the
54
move - ment of bo - - - dies and

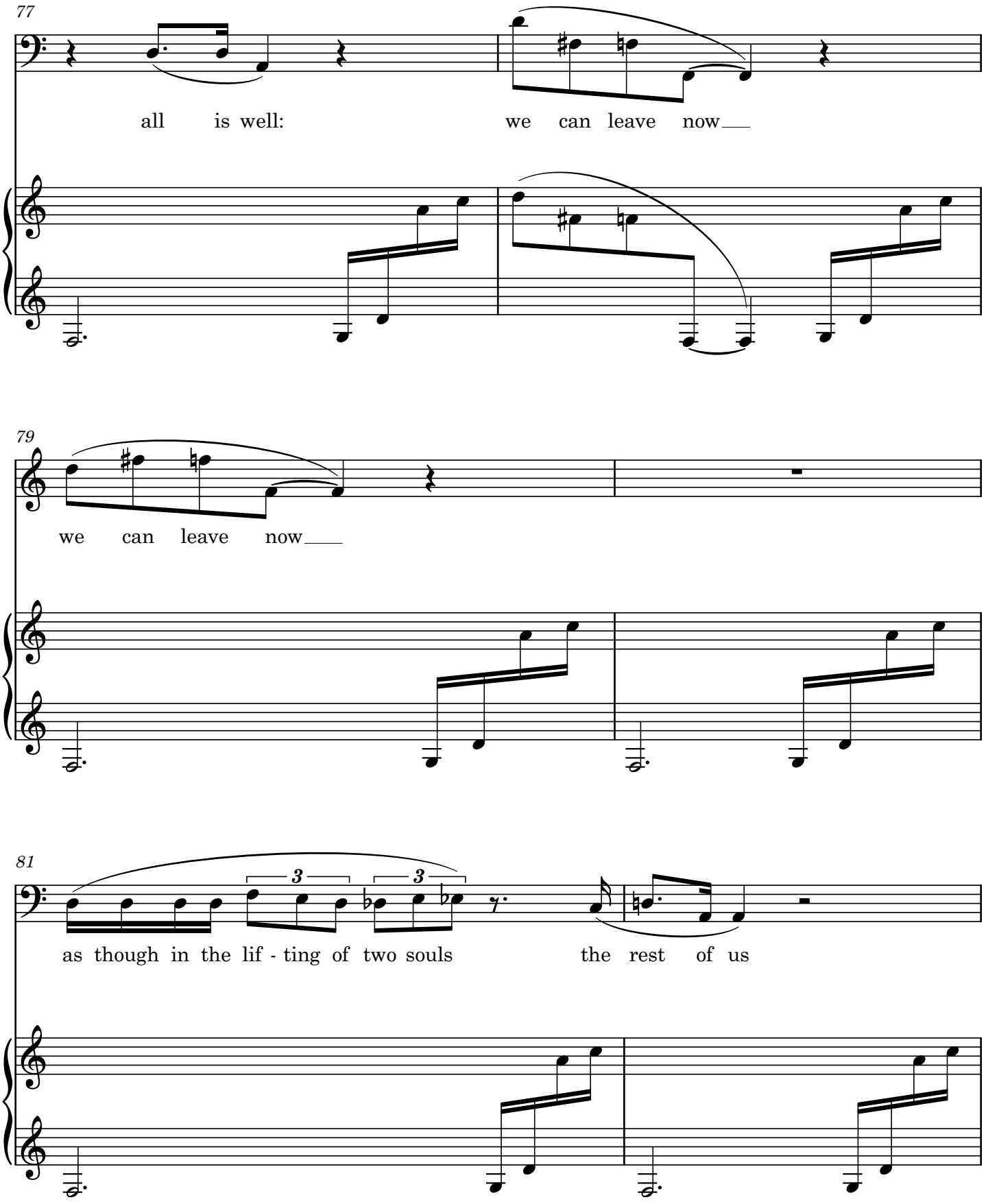

55
wounds,
56
Cruel
57
calm
the
move - - -

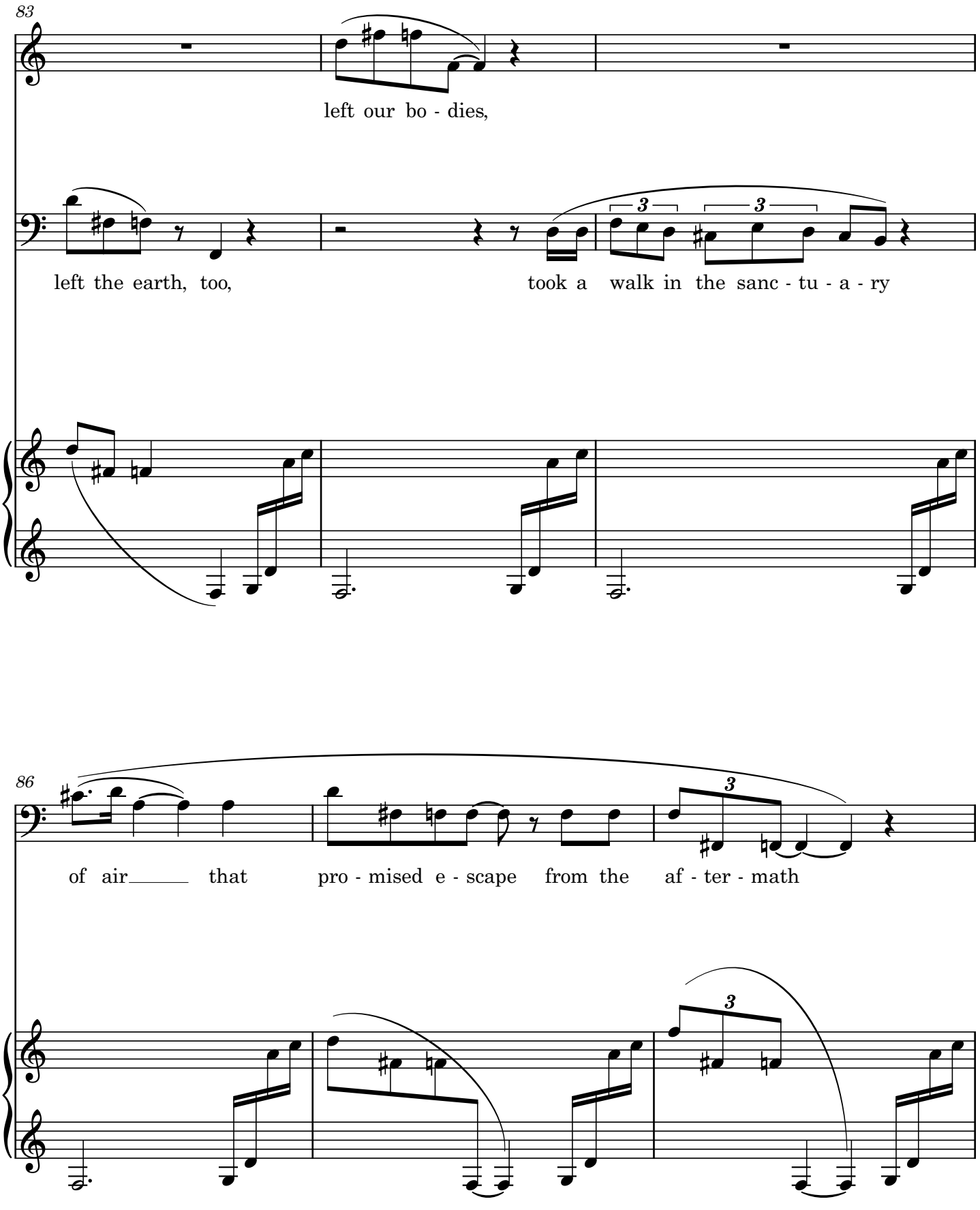

58
ment there like some - thing em - -
59
- braced
60
coiled in cot - ton coc - coon

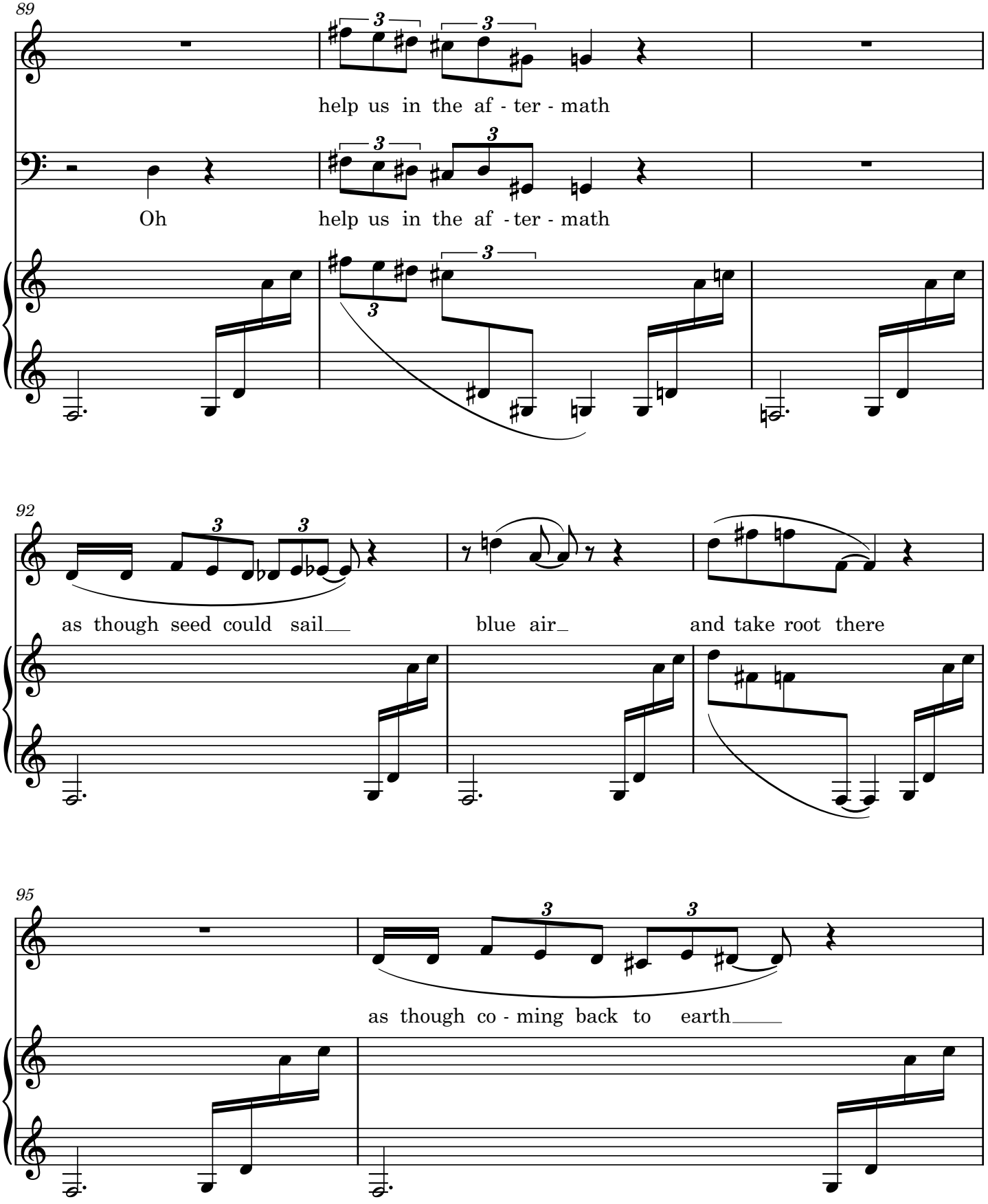

61
sound - less and time - less and
62
just as it ne - ver
ne - ver to end

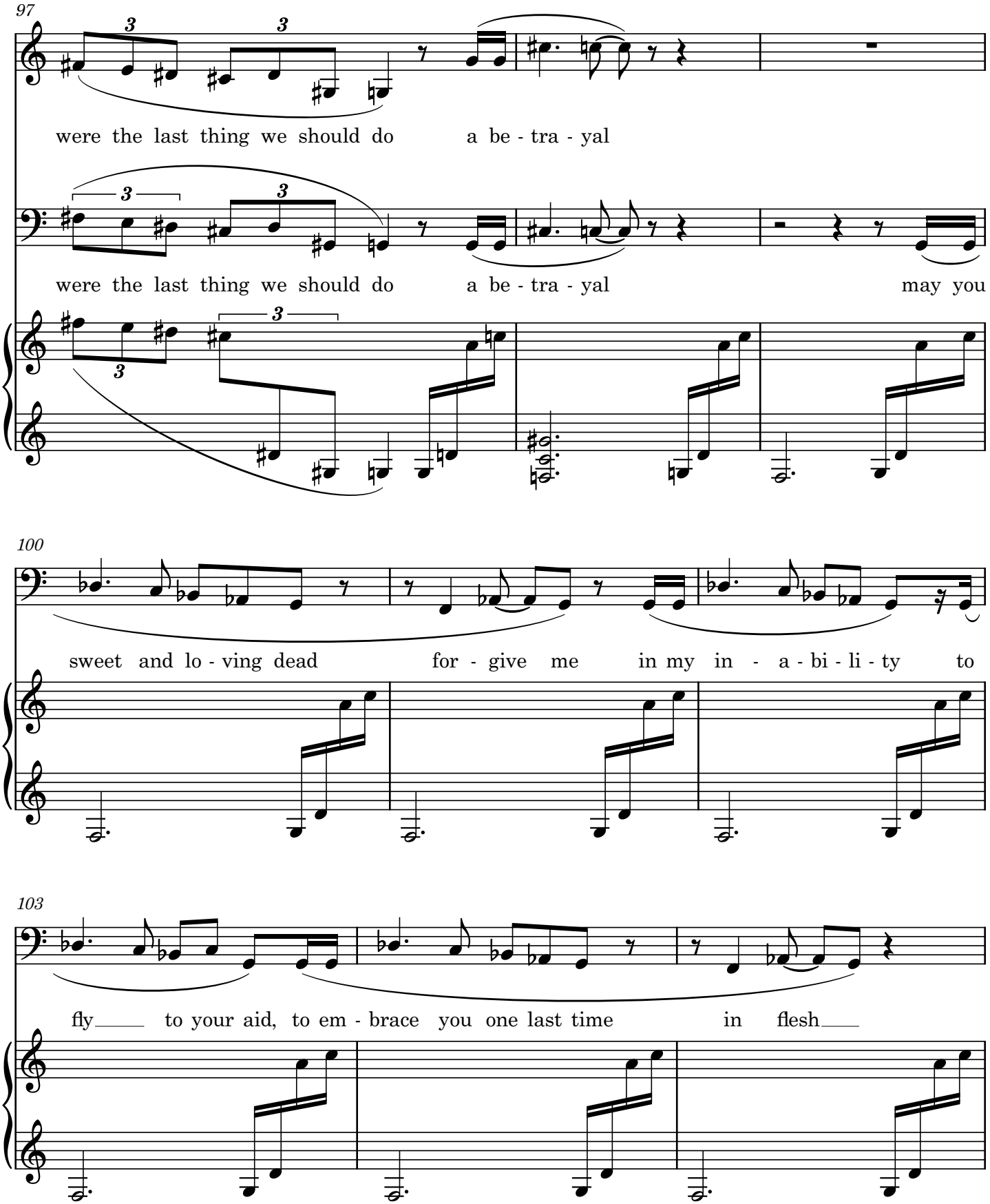

63
be - gan
65
boll wee - vil:
the gun - man down,
68
the men like lo - vers
clutched a - cross his bo - dy
men like lo - vers

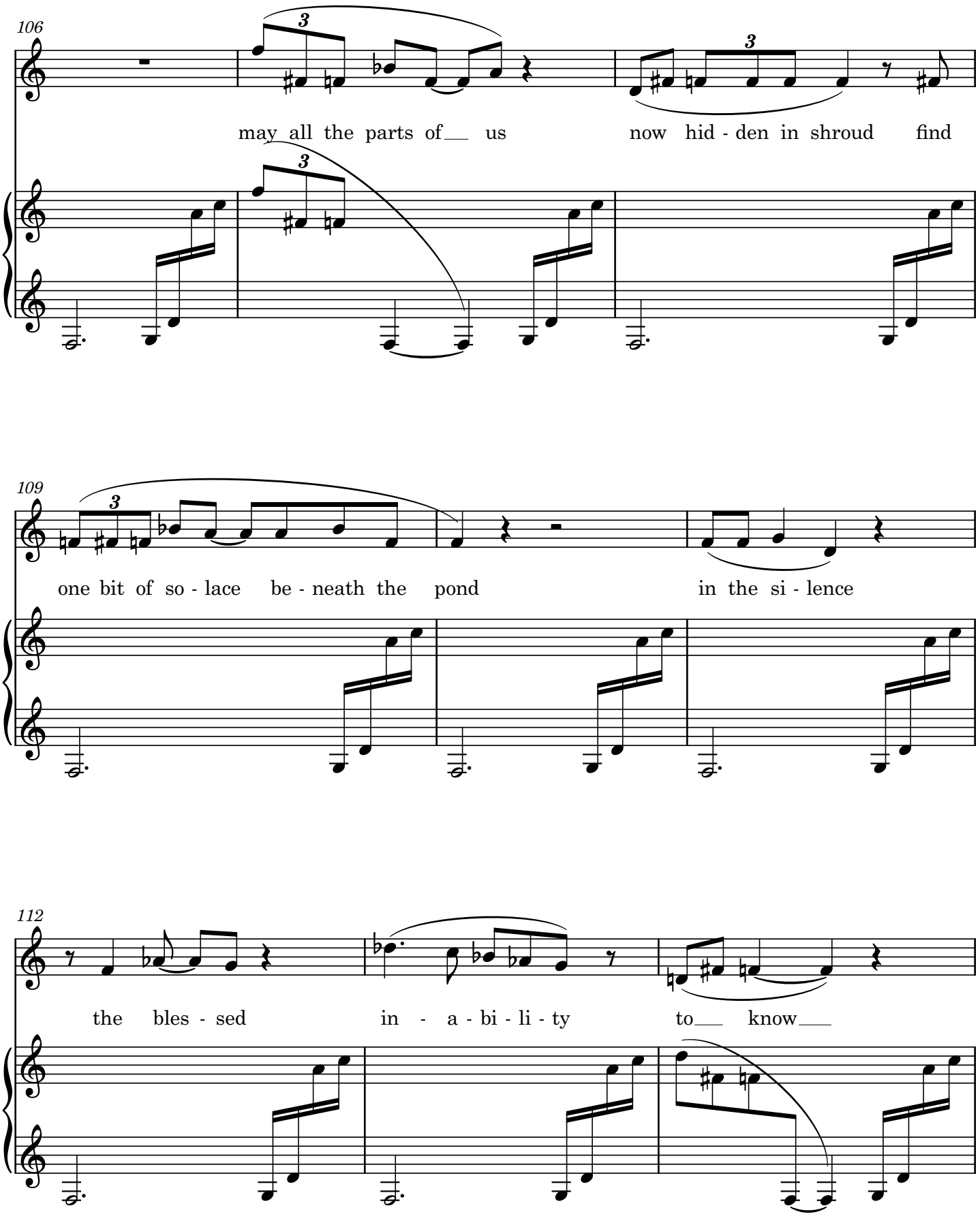

71
73
the si - lence
75
3
3
and the o - ver - whel - ming sense that
all is well

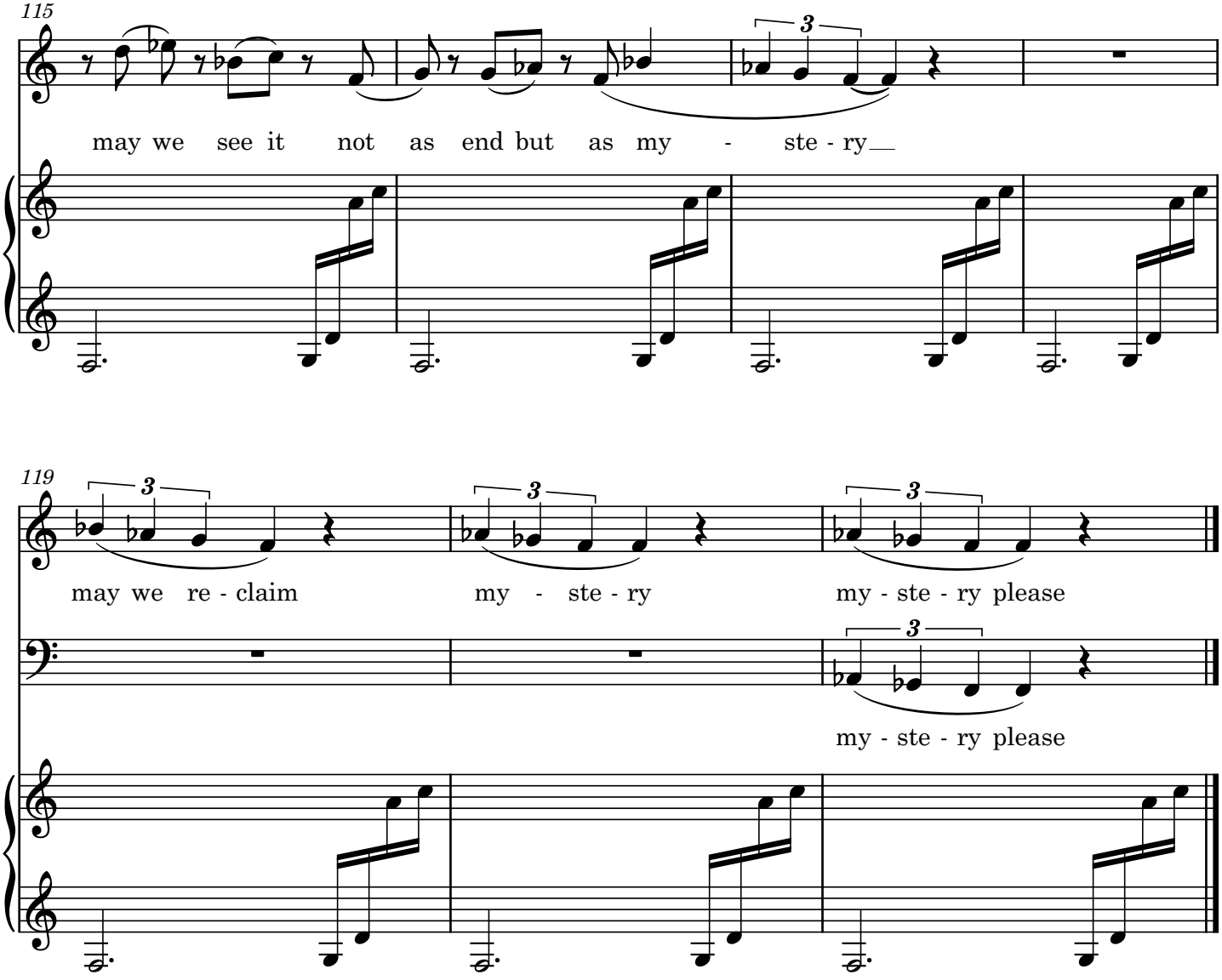

77
all is well: we can leave now
79
we can leave now
81
3
3
as though in the lif - ting of two souls the rest of us


83
left our bo - dies,
left the earth, too,
took a walk in the sanc - tu - a - ry
86
of air that
pro - mised e - scape from the af - ter - math

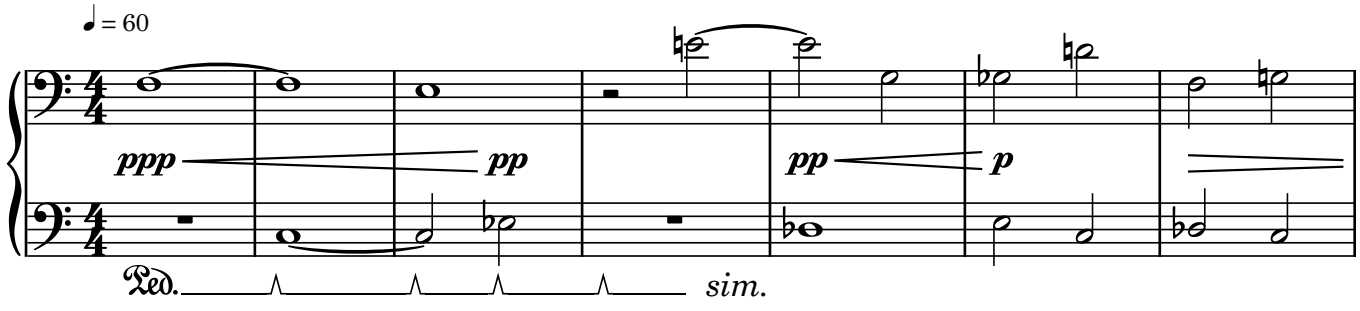

89
help us in the af - ter - math
Oh
help us in the af - ter - math
92
as though seed could sail
blue air
and take root there
95
as though co - ming back to earth

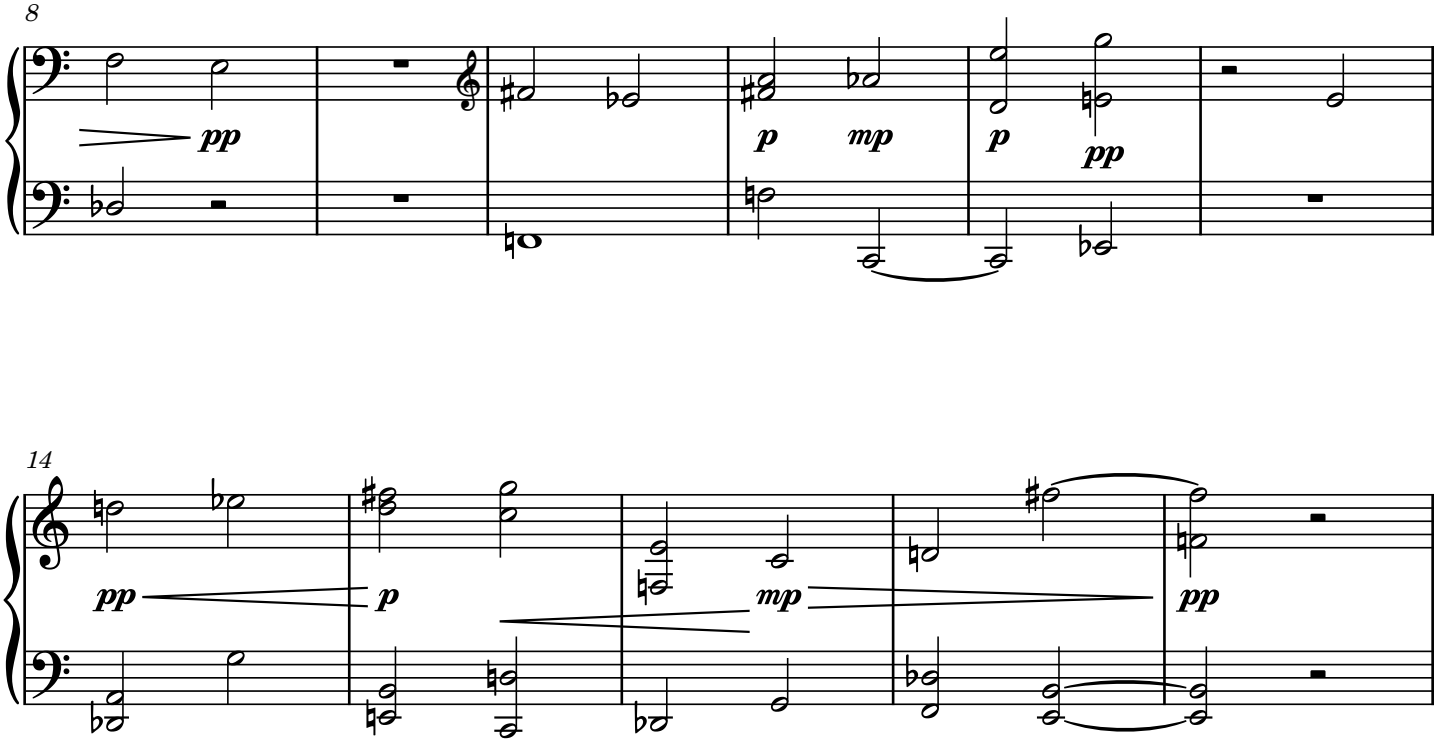

97
were the last thing we should do a be - tra - yal
were the last thing we should do a be - tra - yal may you
100
sweet and lo - ving dead for - give me in my in - a - bi - li - ty to
103
fly to your aid, to em - brace you one last time in flesh


106
may all the parts of us now hid - den in shroud find
109
one bit of so - lace be - neath the pond in the si - lence
112
the bles - sed in - a - bi - li - ty to know

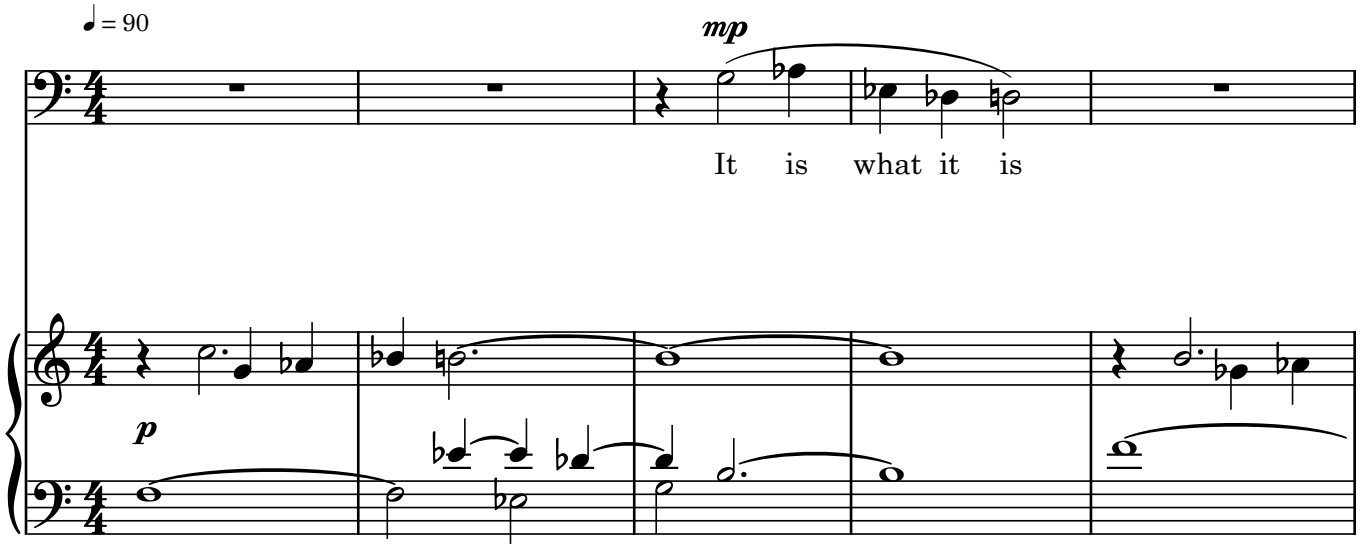


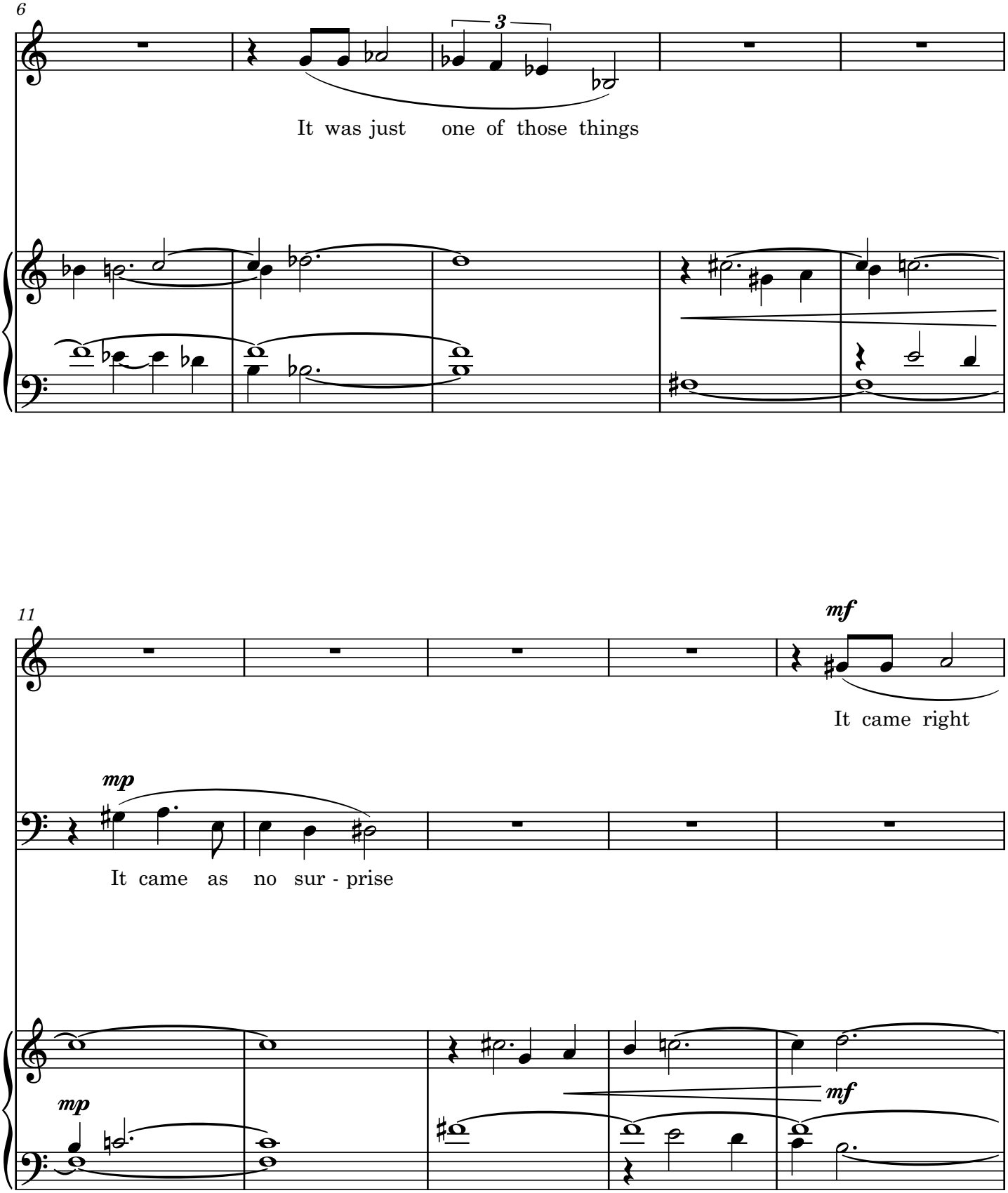
13. (Interlude)

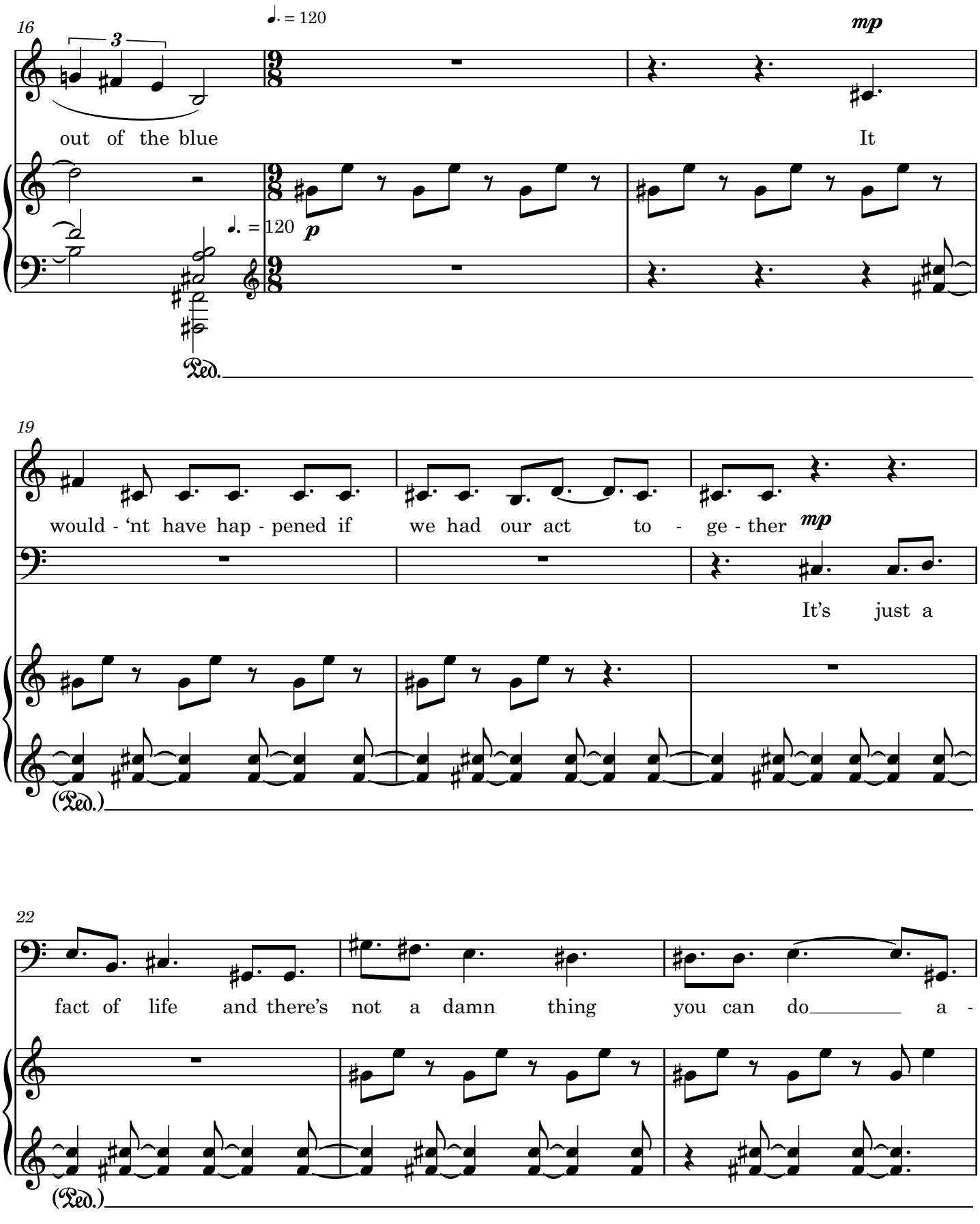


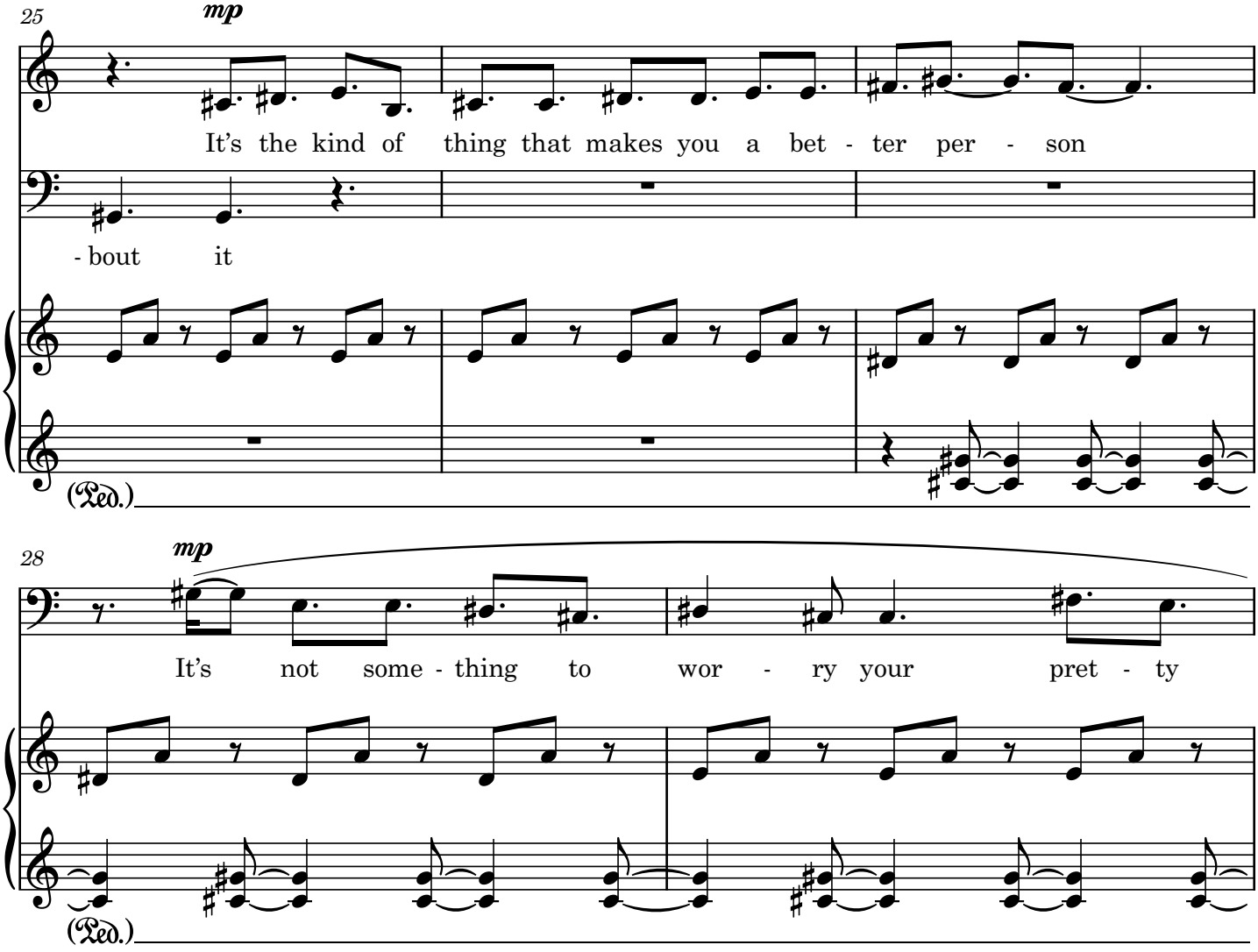


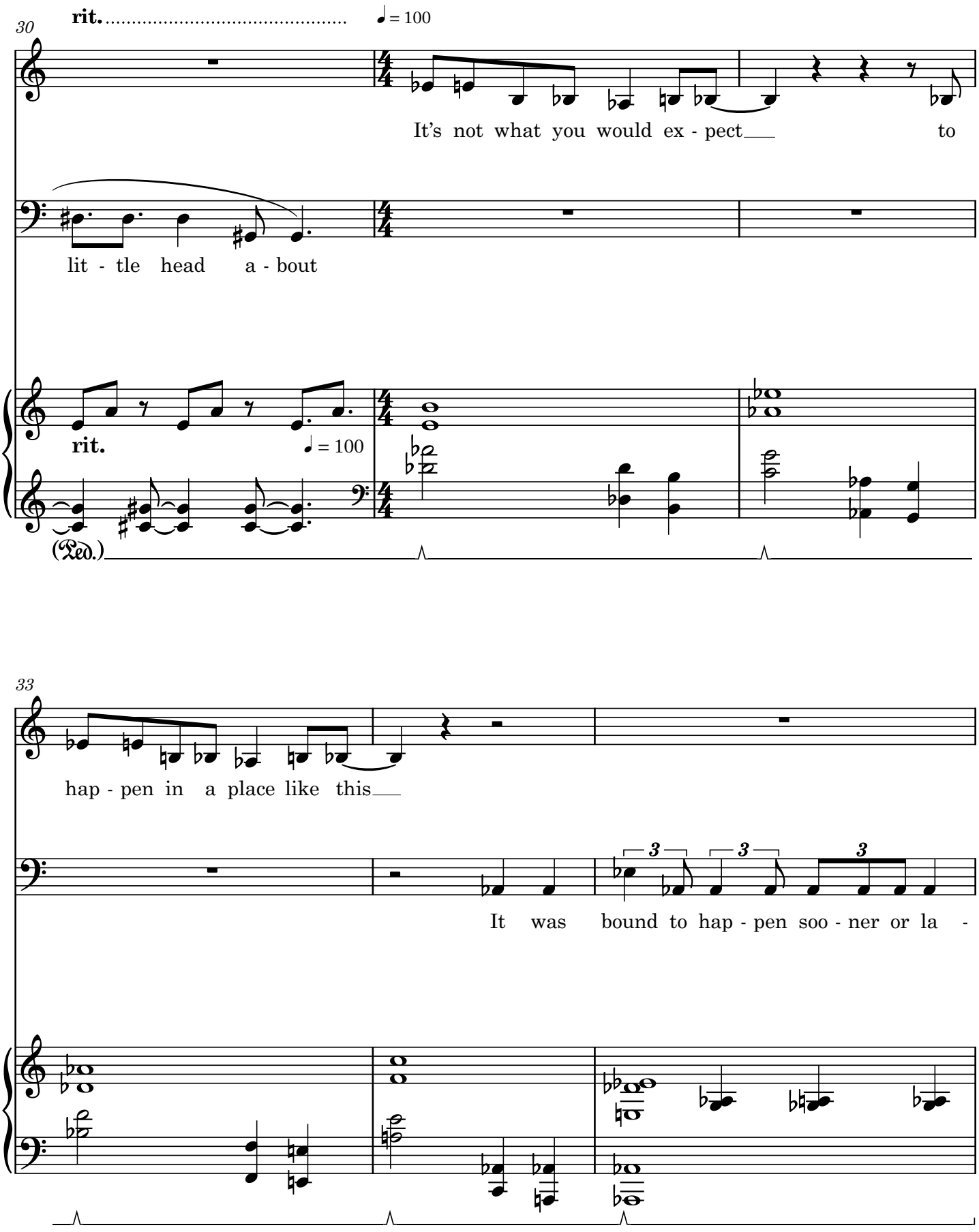
14. It

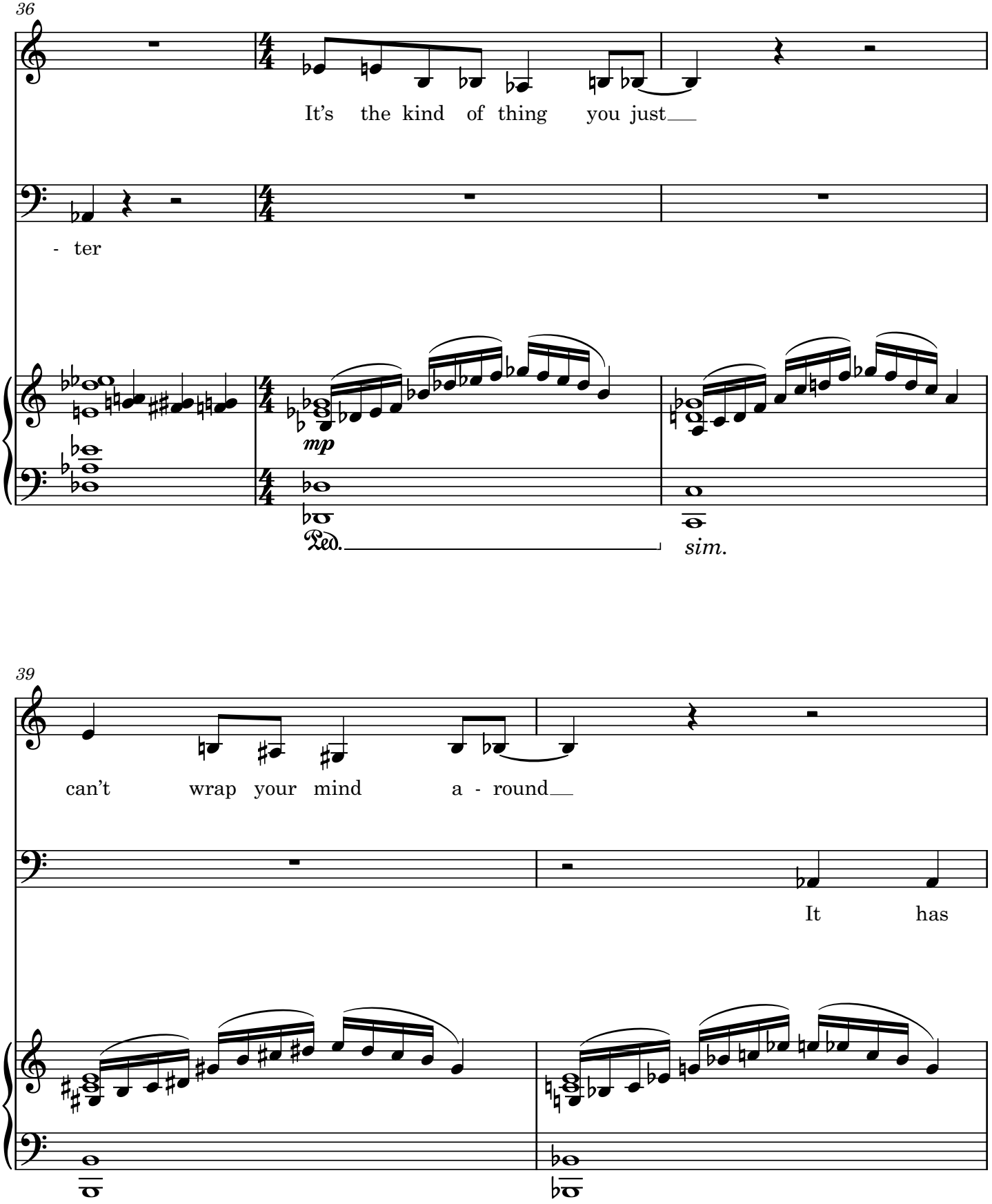


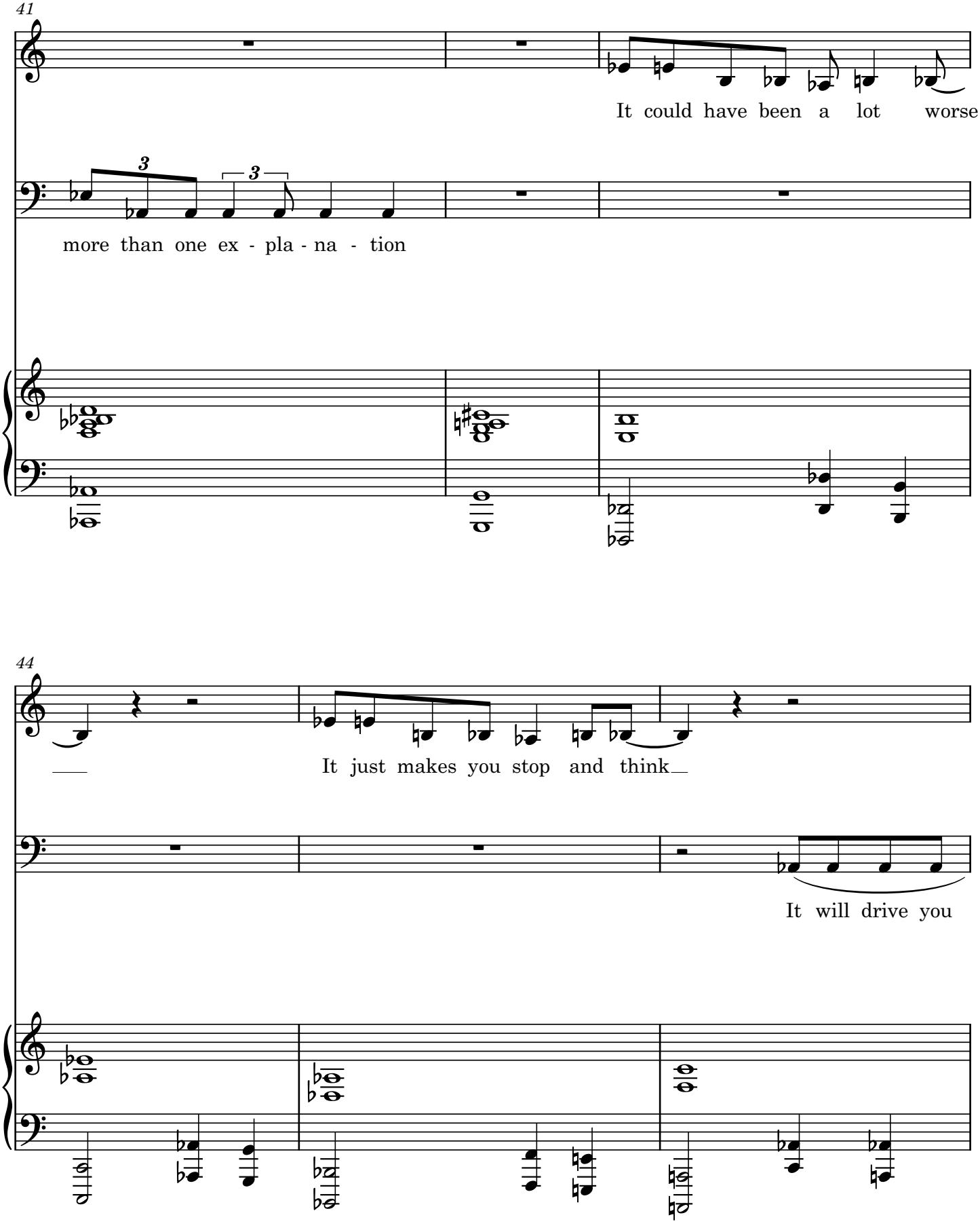

6
3
It was just one of those things
11
mf
It came right
mp
It came as no sur - prise
mp
mf

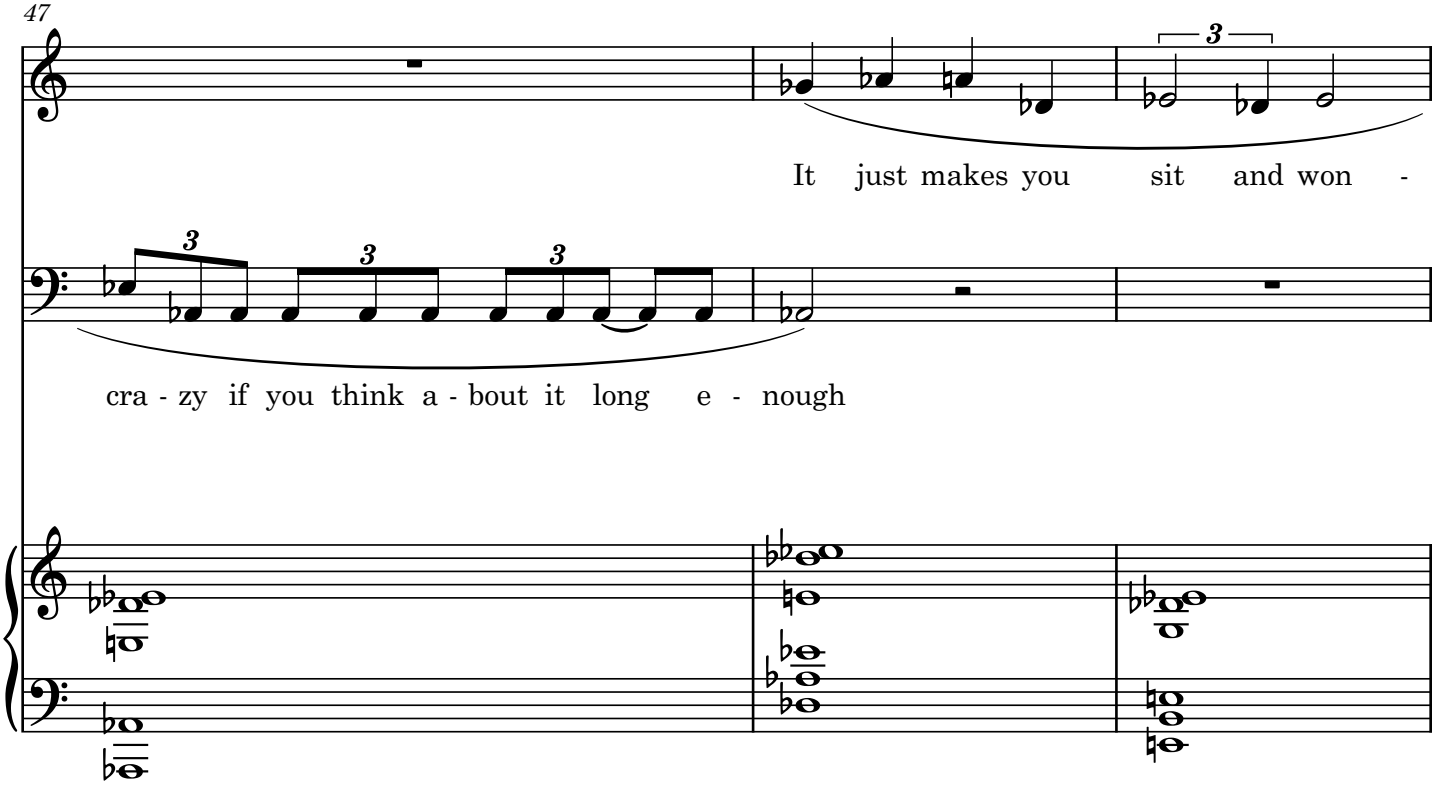

16
3
♩. = 120
mp
out of the blue
It
♩. = 120
p
Ped.
19
would - 'nt have hap - pened if we had our act to - ge - ther
mp
It's just a
(Ped.)
22
fact of life and there's not a damn thing you can do a -
(Ped.)

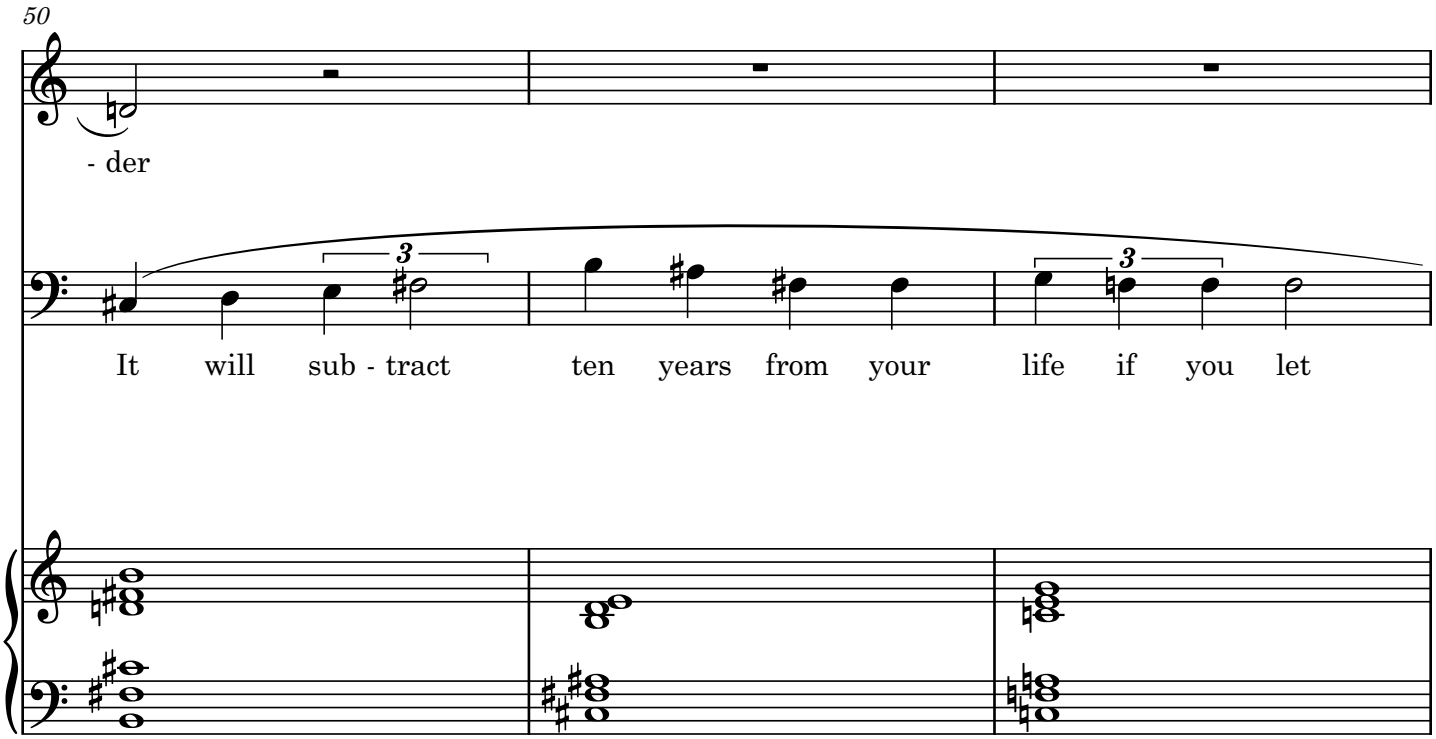

25
mp
It's the kind of thing that makes you a bet - ter per - son
- bout it
(Ped.)
28
mp
It's not some - thing to wor - ry your pret - ty
(Ped.)

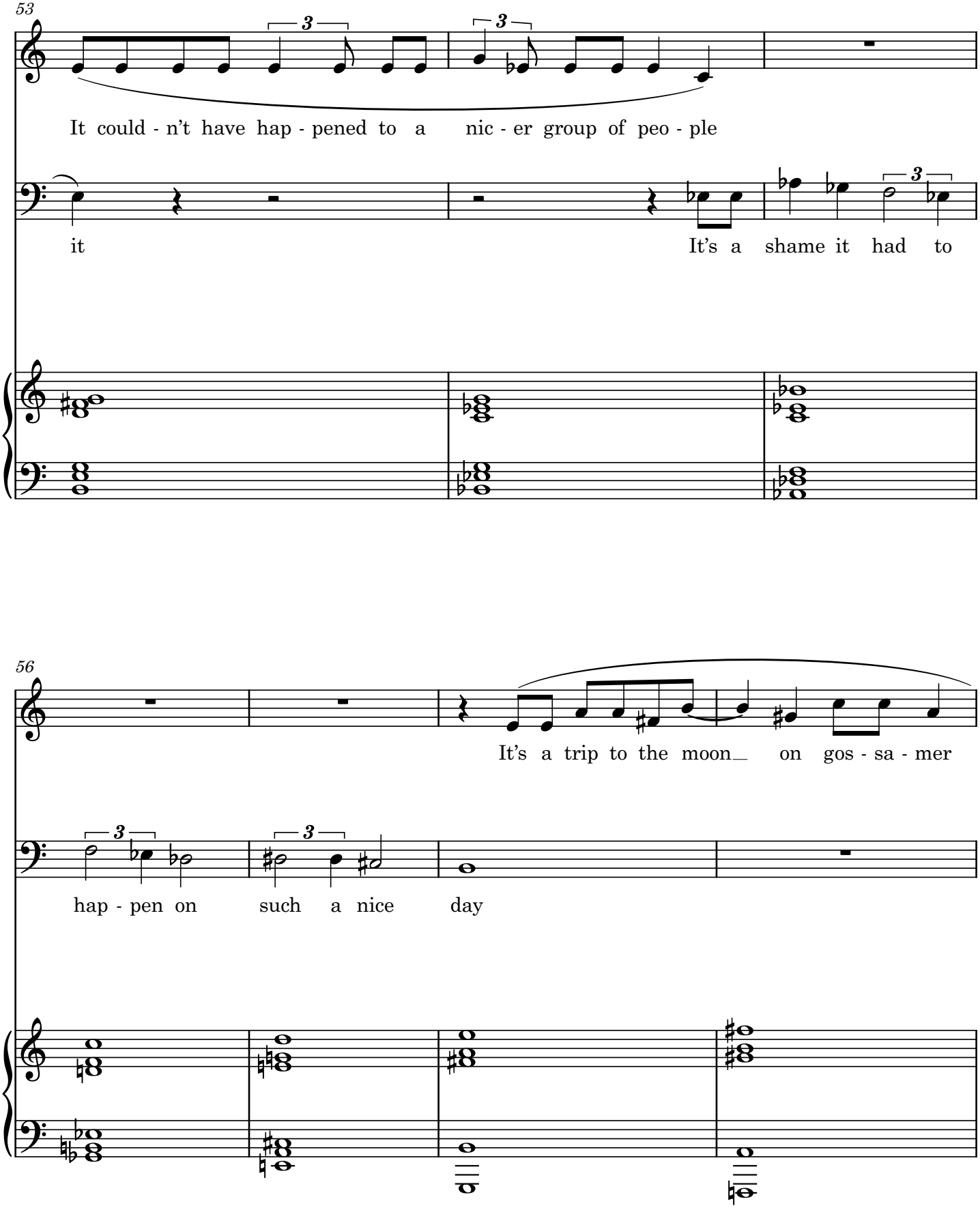

30
rit.
♩ = 100
It's not what you would ex - pect to
lit - tle head a - bout
rit.
♩ = 100
(Ped.)
33
hap - pen in a place like this
It was bound to hap - pen soo - ner or la -

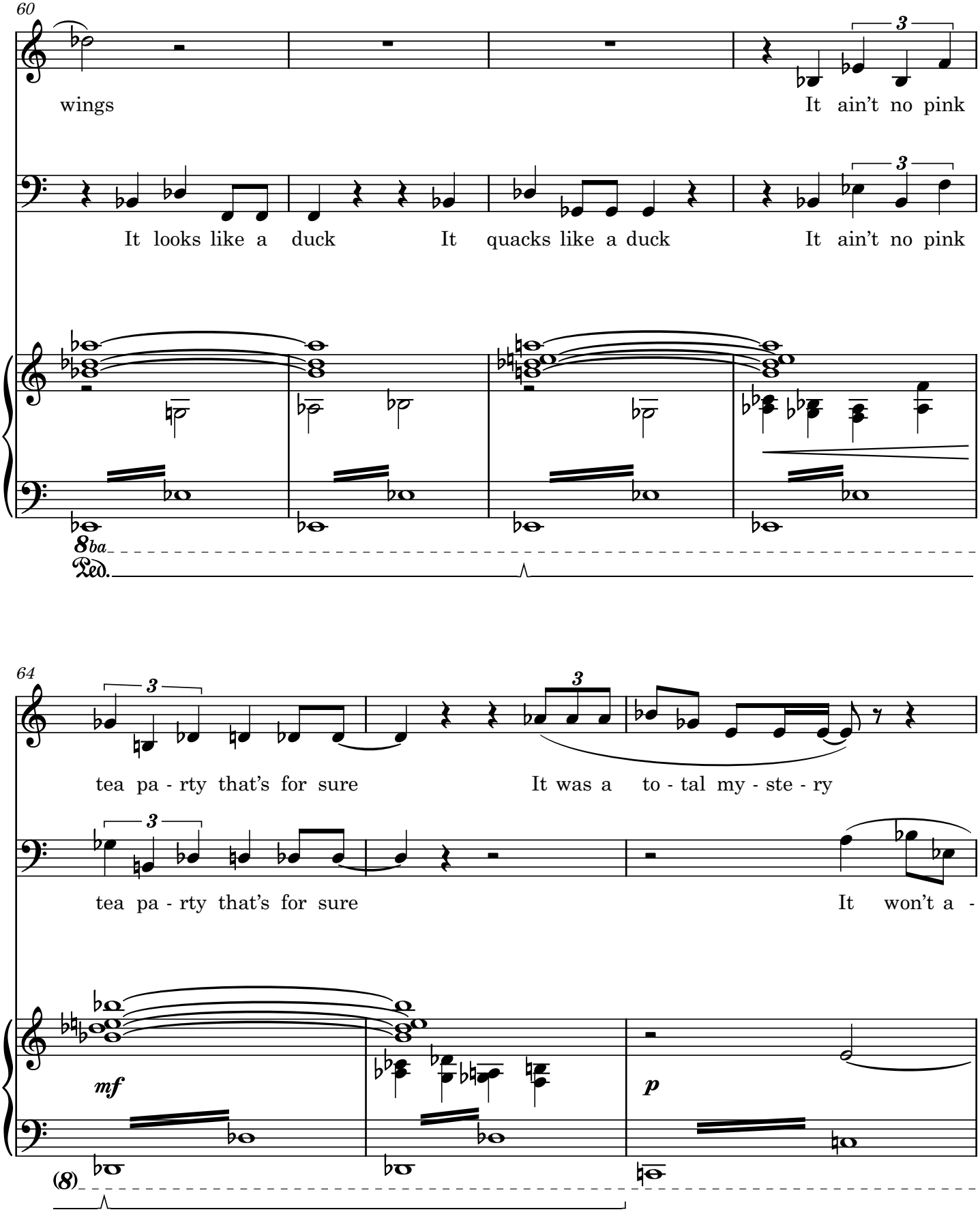

36
It's the kind of thing you just
- ter
mp
Ped.
sim.
39
can't wrap your mind a - round
It has

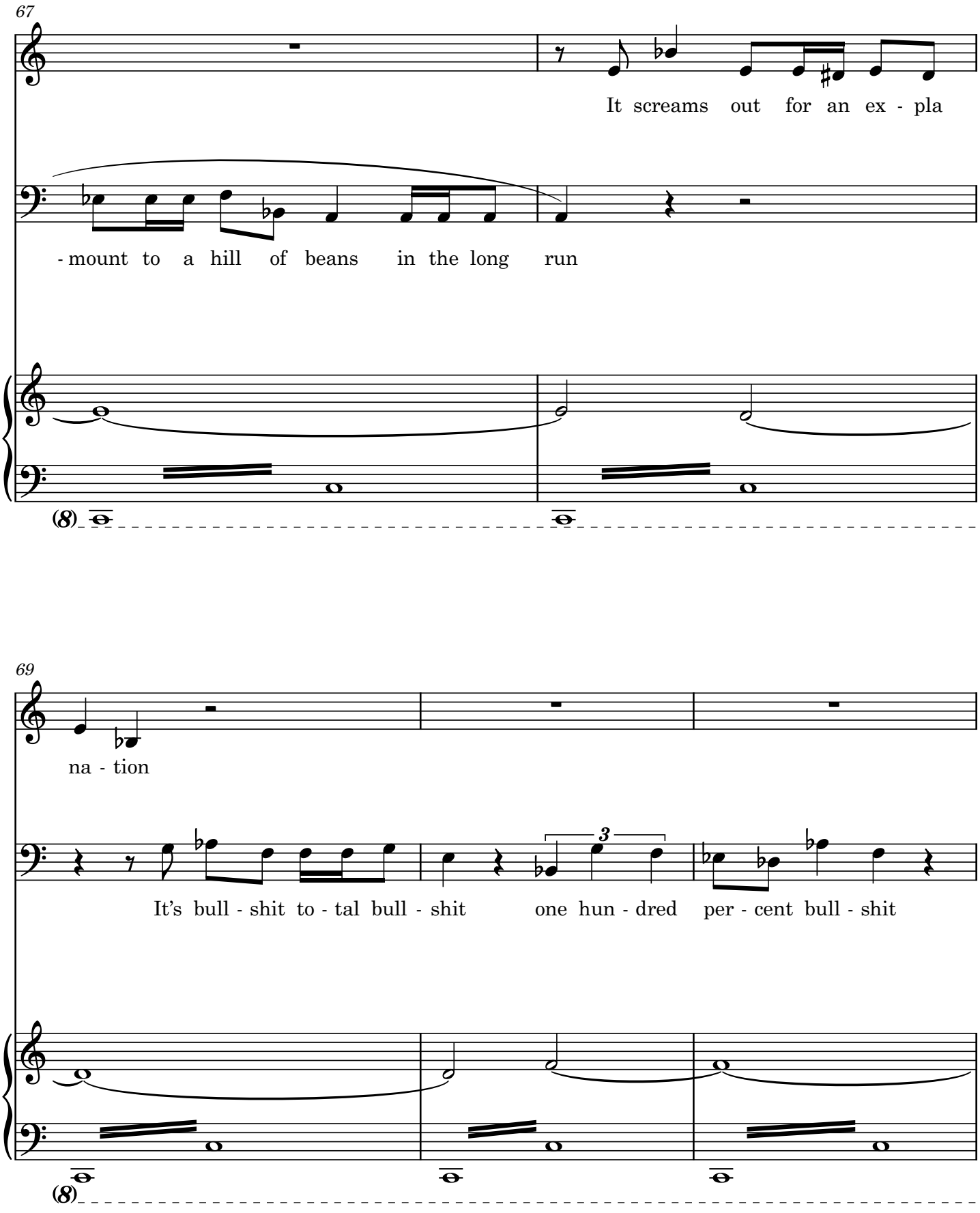

41
It could have been a lot worse
more than one ex - pla - na - tion
44
It just makes you stop and think
It will drive you

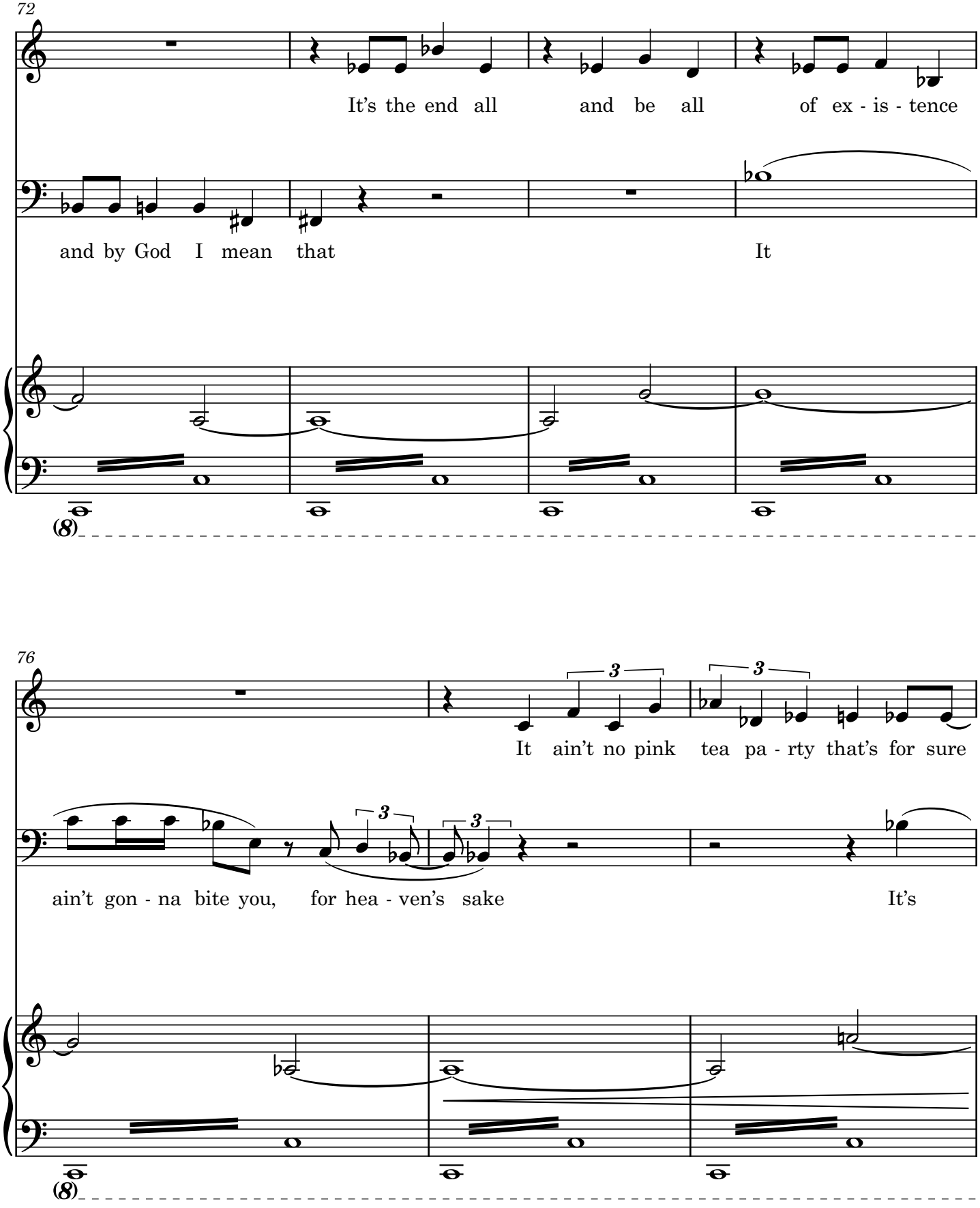

47
It just makes you sit and won -
cra - zy if you think a - bout it long e - nough

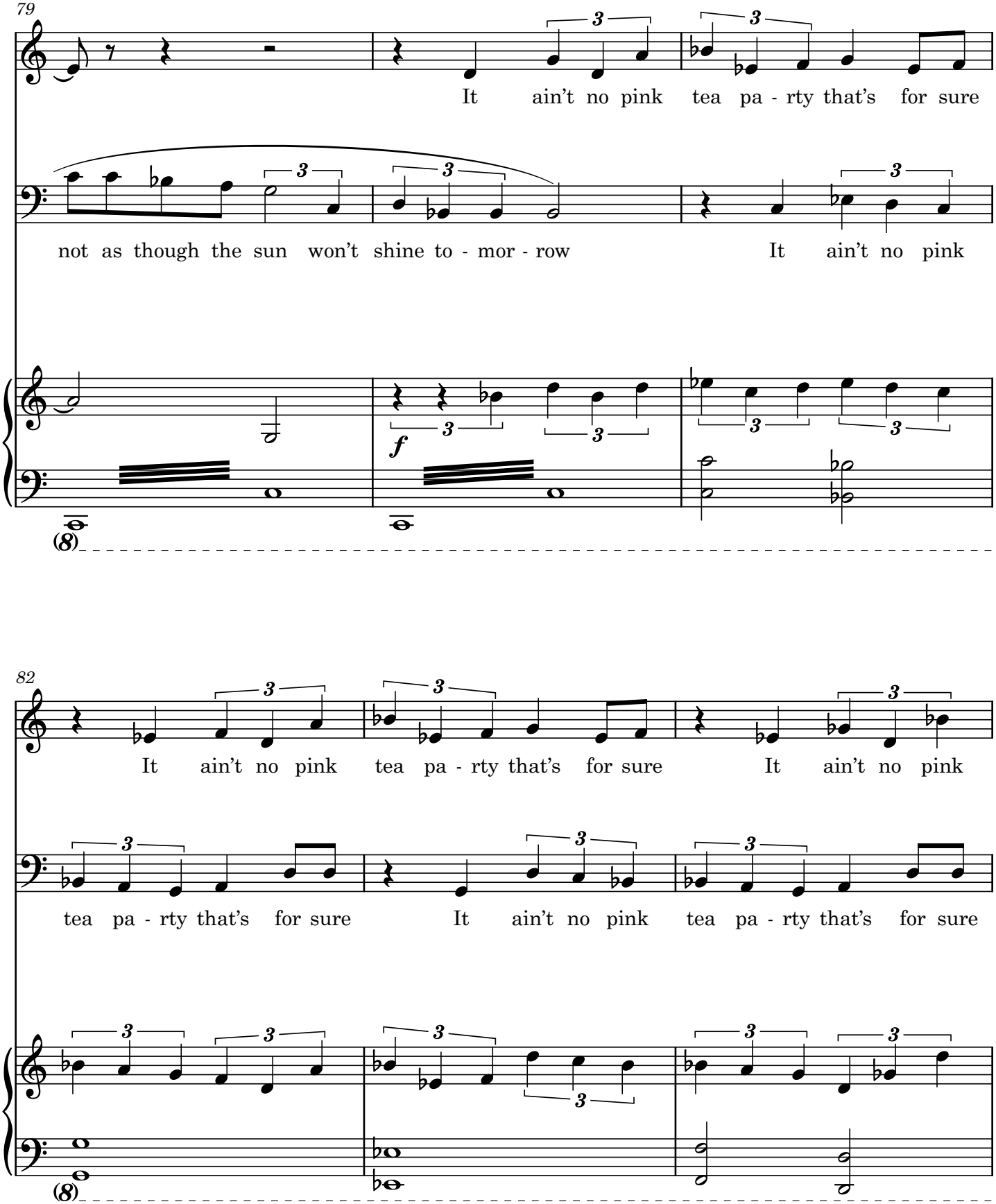

50
- der
It will sub - tract ten years from your life if you let

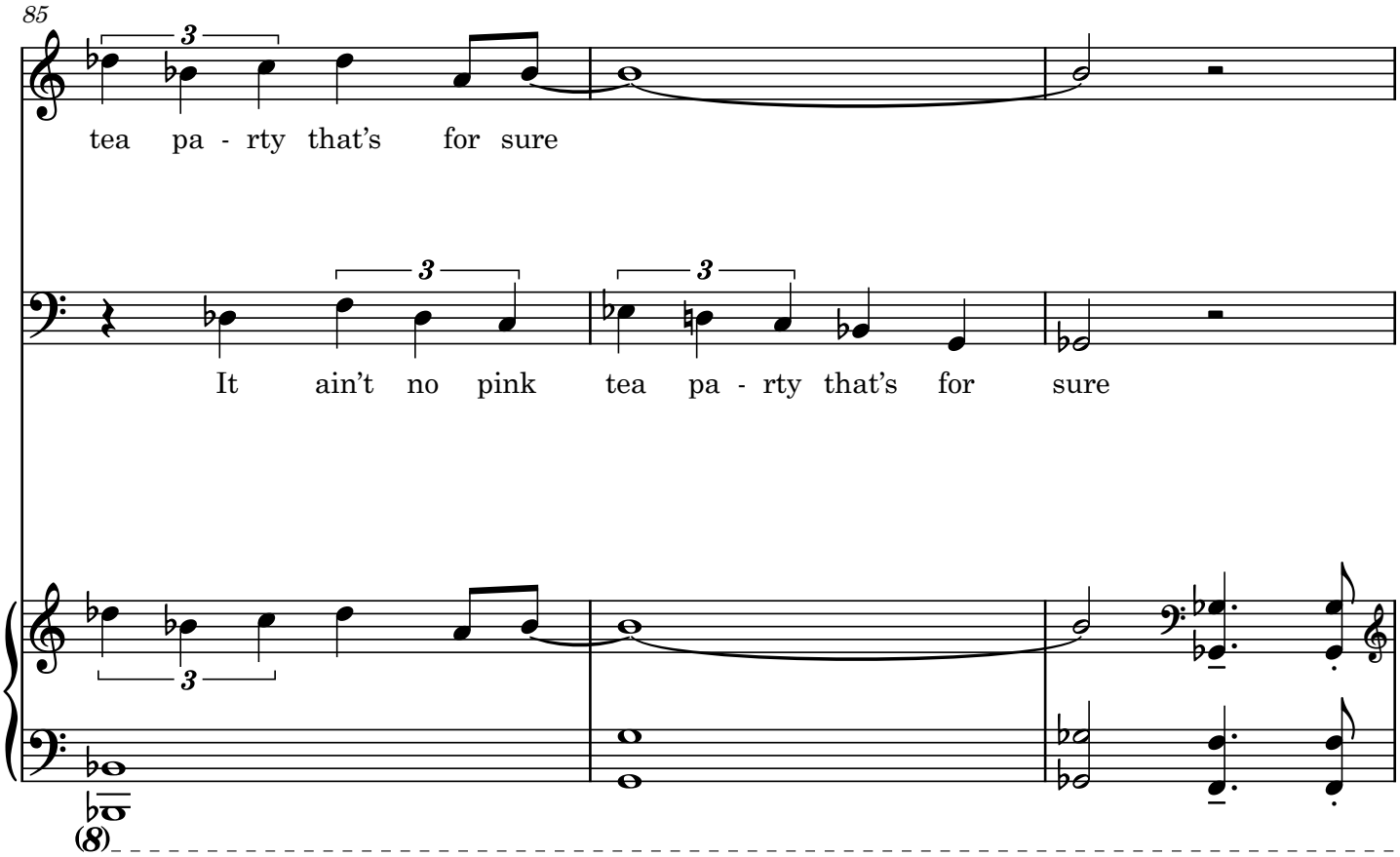

53
It could - n't have hap - pened to a nic - er group of peo - ple
it
It's a shame it had to
56
It's a trip to the moon on gos - sa - mer
hap - pen on such a nice day

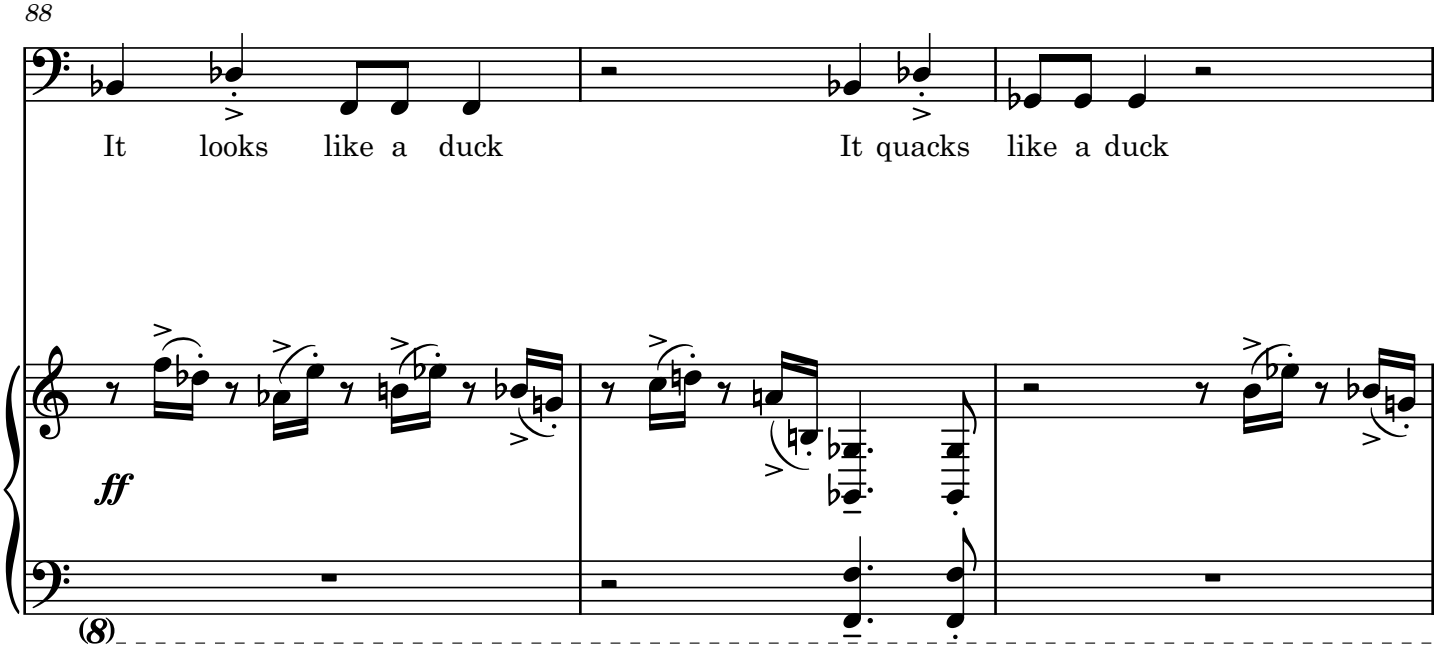

60
wings
It ain't no pink
It looks like a duck
It quacks like a duck
It ain't no pink
8ba
Ped.
64
tea pa - rty that's for sure
It was a to - tal my - ste - ry
tea pa - rty that's for sure
It won't a -
mf
p
(8)

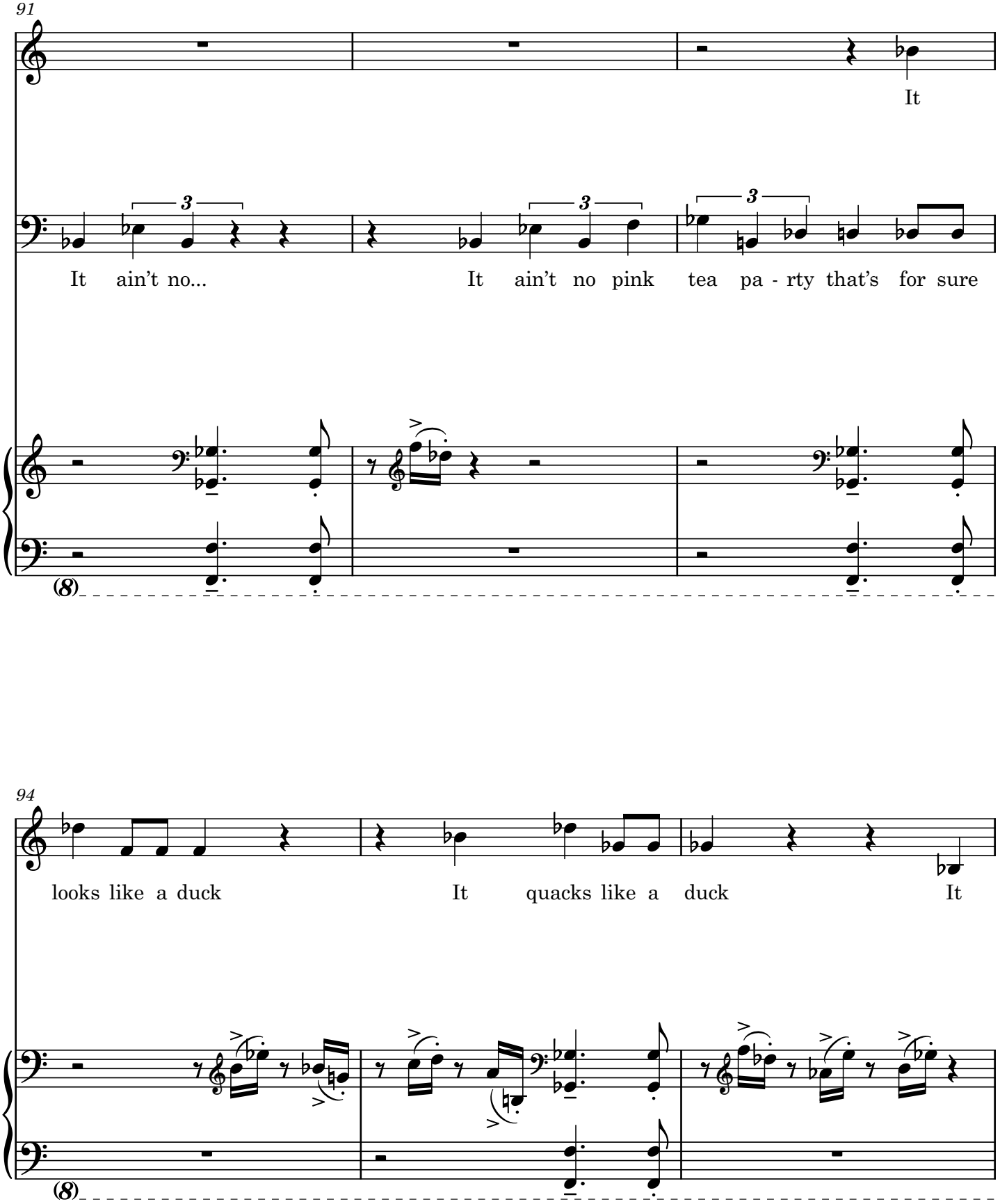

67
It screams out for an ex - pla
- mount to a hill of beans in the long run
(8)
69
na - tion
It's bull - shit to - tal bull - shit
3
one hun - dred per - cent bull - shit
(8)

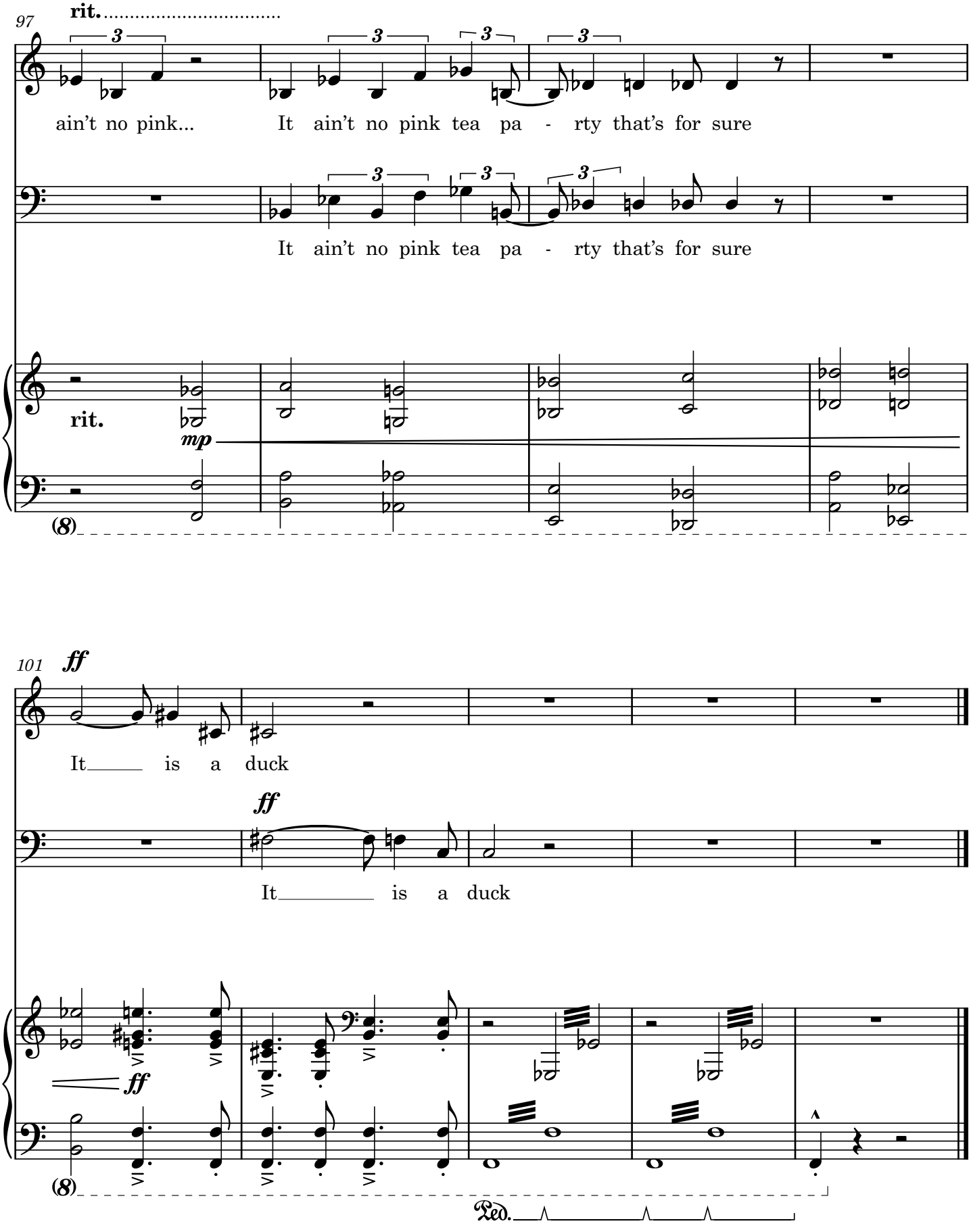

72
It's the end all and be all of ex - is - tence
and by God I mean that It
76
It ain't no pink tea pa - rty that's for sure
ain't gon - na bite you, for hea - ven's sake It's


79
It ain't no pink tea pa - rty that's for sure
not as though the sun won't shine to - mor - row It ain't no pink
f
(8)
82
It ain't no pink tea pa - rty that's for sure It ain't no pink
tea pa - rty that's for sure It ain't no pink tea pa - rty that's for sure
(8)


85
tea pa - rty that's for sure
It ain't no pink tea pa - rty that's for sure
(8)


88
It looks like a duck
It quacks like a duck
ff
(8)


91
It
It ain't no...
It ain't no pink tea pa - rty that's for sure
94
looks like a duck
It quacks like a duck
It


97
rit.
ain't no pink...
It ain't no pink tea pa - rty that's for sure
It ain't no pink tea pa - rty that's for sure
rit.
mp
(8)
101
ff
It is a duck
ff
It is a duck
ff
(8)
Ped.