Protest Poems

for Narrator, Violin, Clarinet, Cello, and Piano

Clarinet in B flat

part for electronic music readers

Bill Robinson

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March 16—June 8, 2024 Duration: about 25 minutes

for John and Nancy Lambert

In January 2024, Eric Pritchard offered the idea of a concert at Duke University in January 2025 to mark my 70th birthday. I thought it timely to set some protest poems for narrator and a chamber group. *At last, an opportunity to do what I do best—complain.* (The concert had to be delayed a year.) As is my habit, I then set the piece for orchestra, giving me my third symphony.

The first poem, "Pity the Party", is inspired by "Pity the Nation" by Laurence Ferlinghetti, who in turn was inspired by a poem of the same name by Khalil Gibran. While this is pointed directly at today's Republican Party in the US, it applies just as well to neo-fascist and authoritarian parties around the world, such as the BJP in India.

The second poem, "Father Stalin, Look at This" is a Ukranian children's song from about 1933. This was at the height of the Holodomor, when Stalin deliberately starved six million people to death in the process of collectivizing farms.

The third poem, "Political Theology", I wrote a few years ago in disgust with the power of religion in governments through history. It is also critique of a civilization that is based on the destruction of Nature, and which is hell-bent on catastrophic overpopulation and extirpation of resources.

The fourth poem, "The birds don't know about self-immolation", was posted anonymously on social media two days after Aaron Bushnell burned himself to death in front of the Israeli embassy in Washington DC on February 25, 2024, to protest the war in Gaza.

The fifth poem, "Artificial Insanity", I wrote (with a little ironic assistance from artificial intelligence, which I couldn't resist) based on Alan Ginsberg's poem "Howl". It is about the threat to our mental health and culture from modern technology, especially AI.

Performance notes

Should this music be performed in places and times where the references are unknown, obscure, or irrelevant to the audience and musicians, the texts may be changed to be more applicable to the local situation.

Cover art; anti-fascist poster by John Heartfield, Germany early 1930's

Bill Robinson

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billrobinsonmusic.com

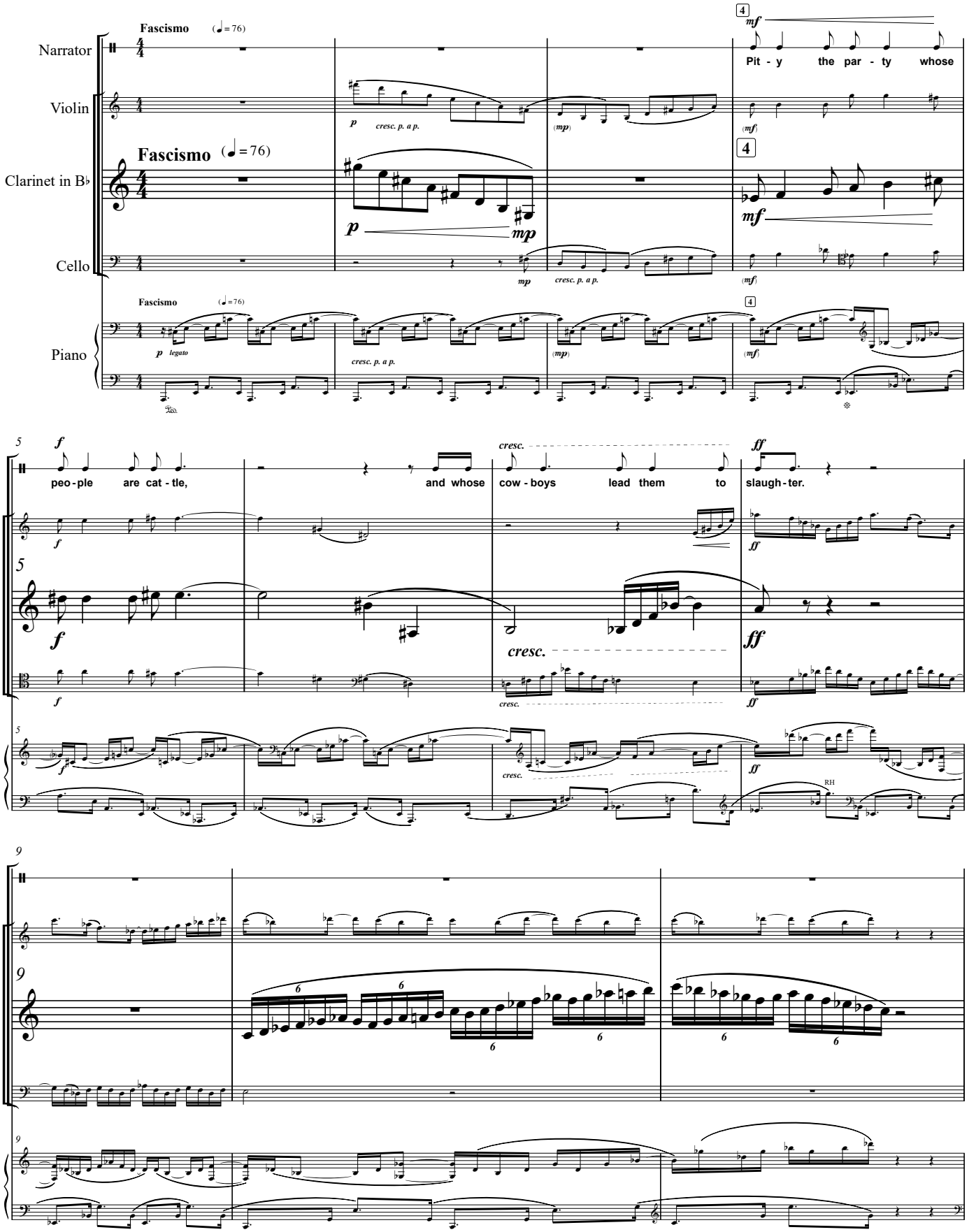
Clarinet in B flat part for electronic music readers

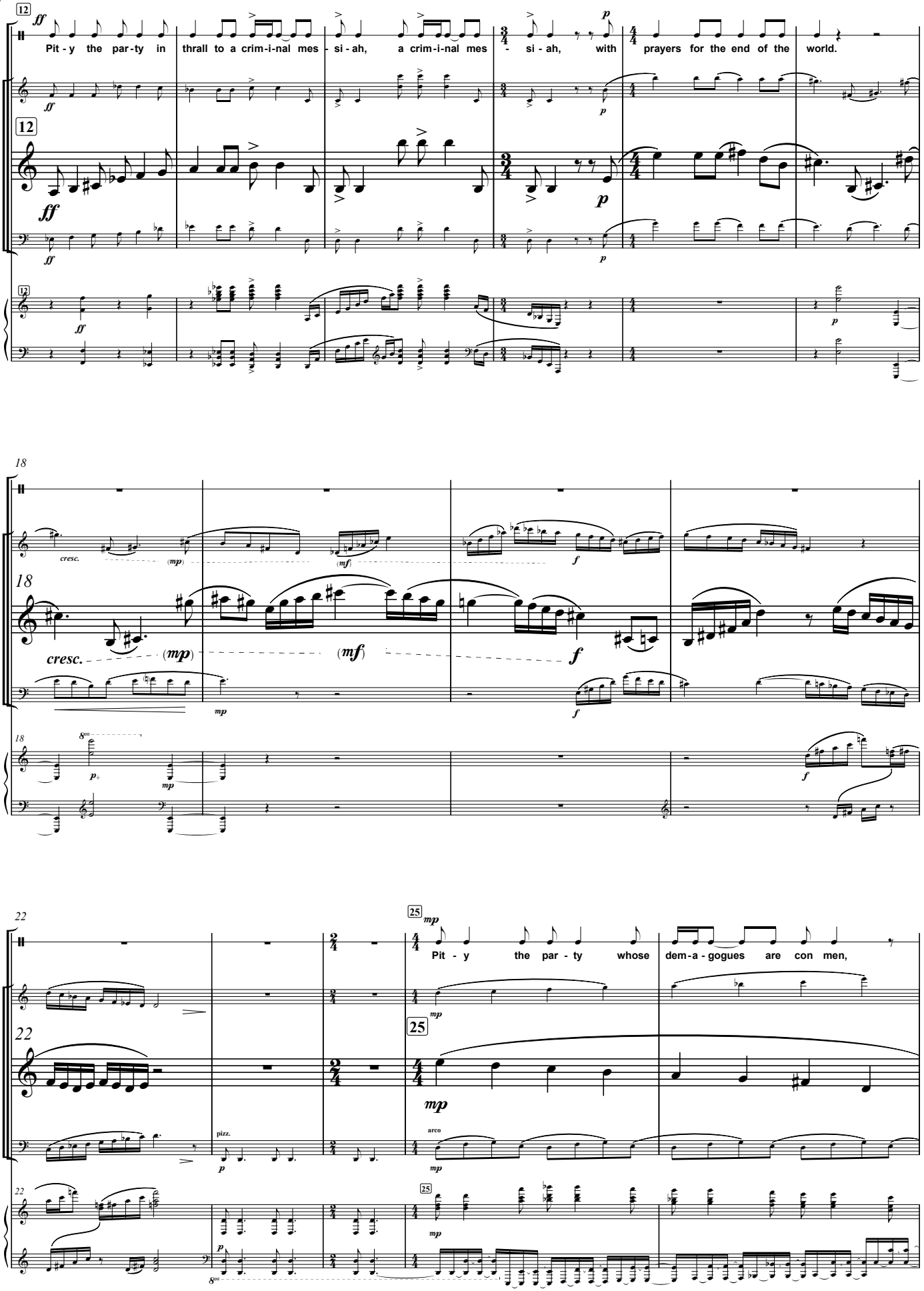
Protest Poems

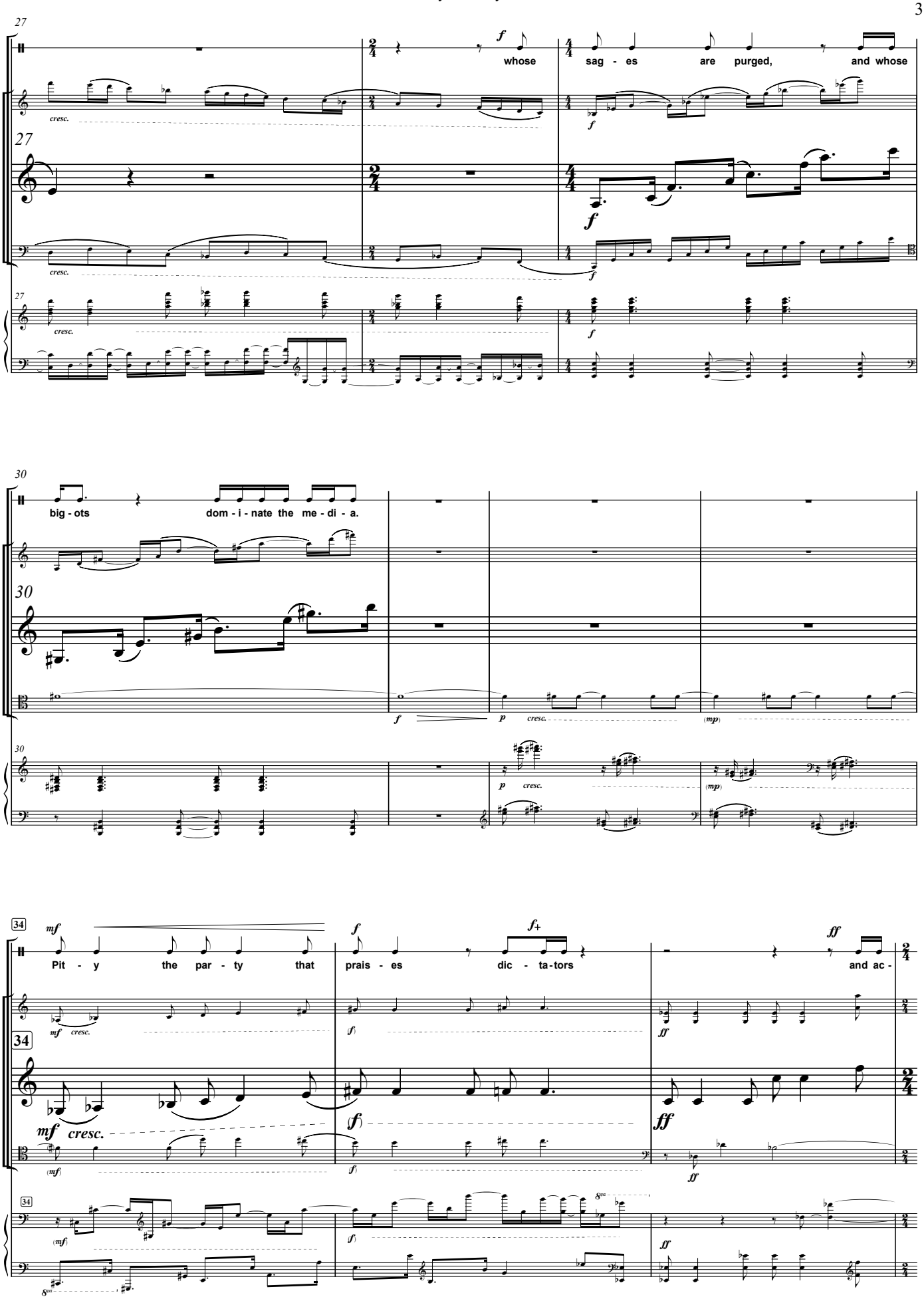
Bill Robinson

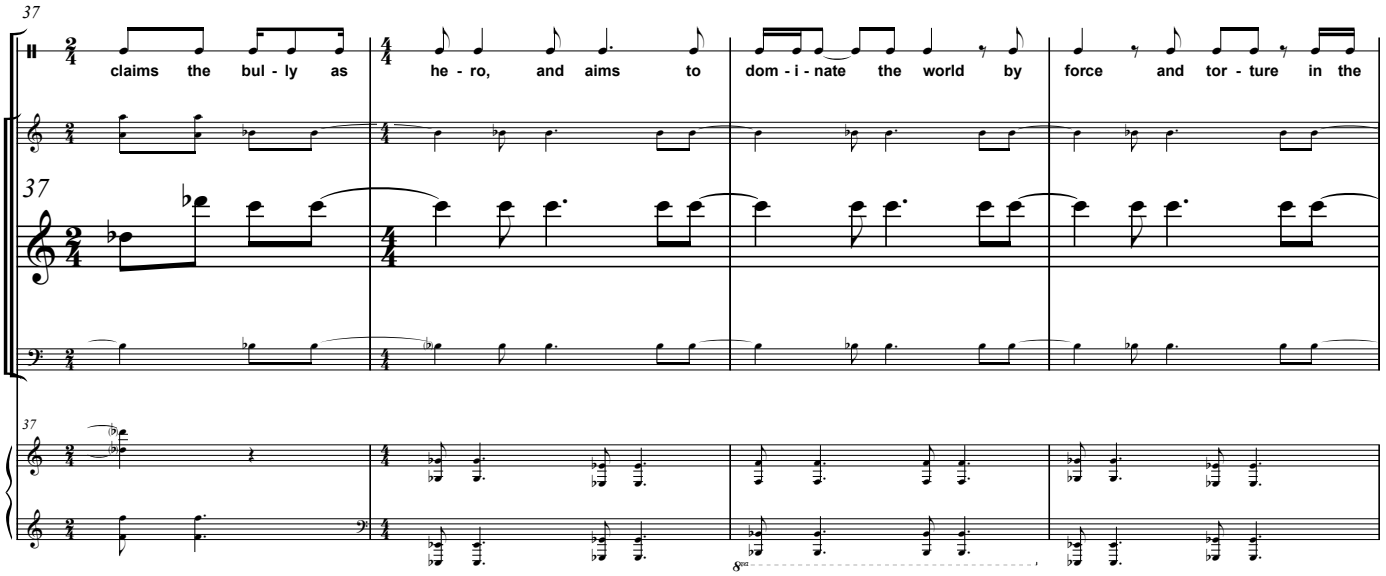
I. Pity the Party [4:15]

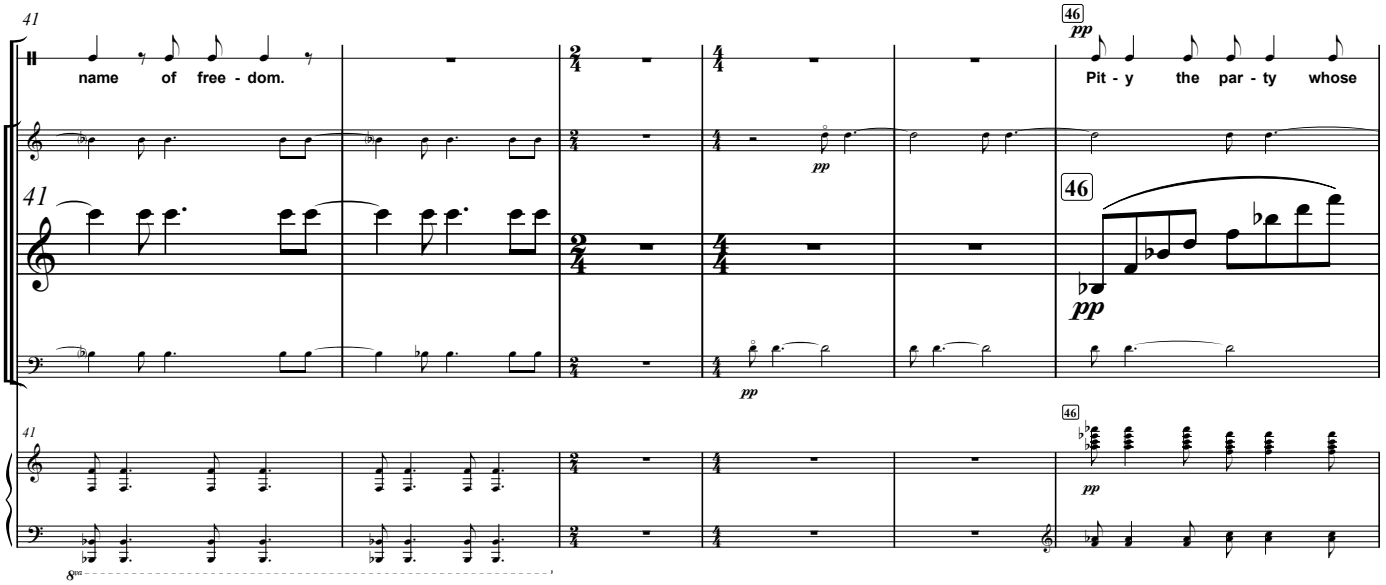
lyrics: Bill Robinson
(after L. Ferlinghetti (after K. Gibran))

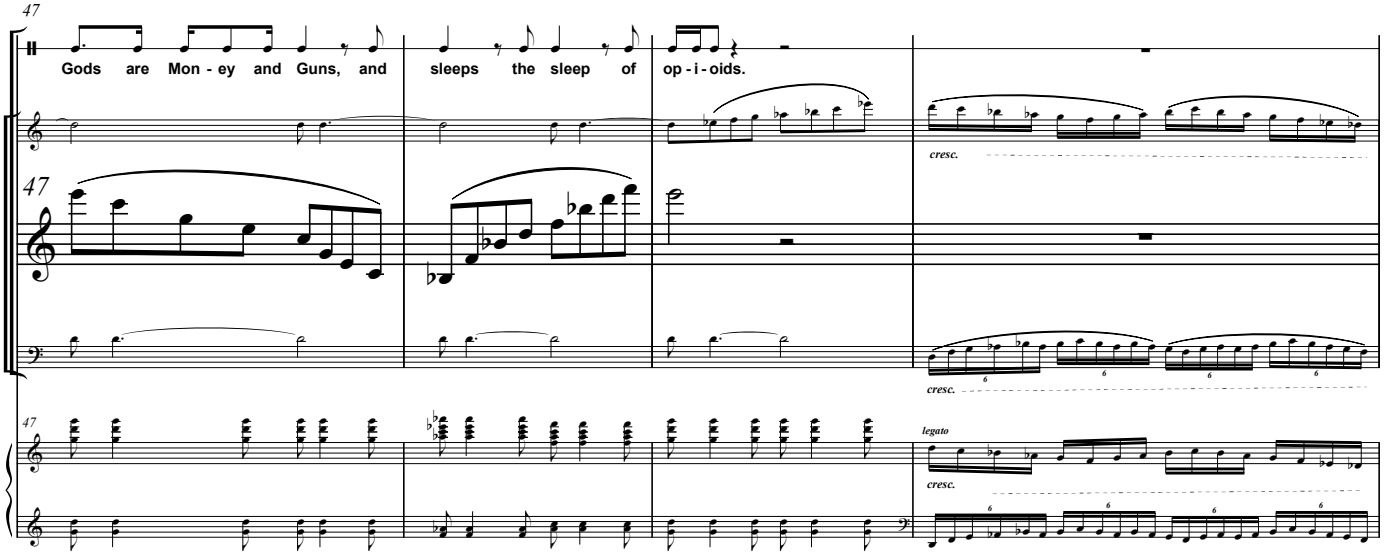


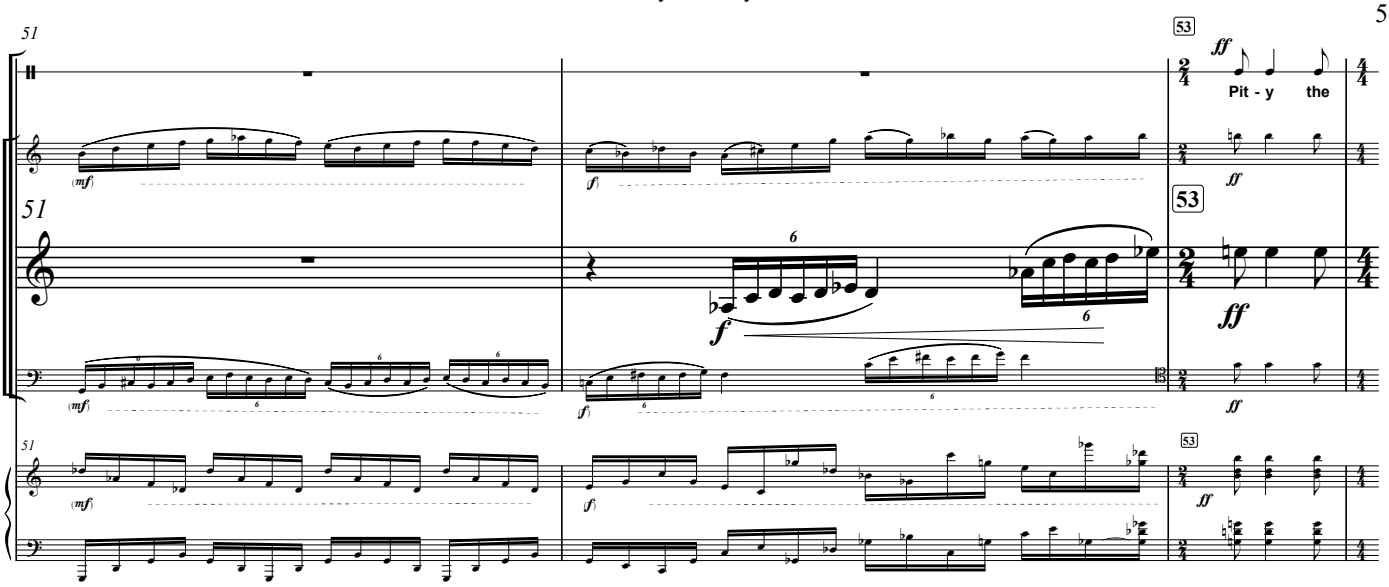

12
ff
Pit - y the par - ty in thrall to a crim - i - nal mes - si - ah, a crim - i - nal mes - si - ah, with prayers for the end of the world.
p
18
cresc.
(mp)
(mf)
f
mp
22
pizz.
arco
25
mp

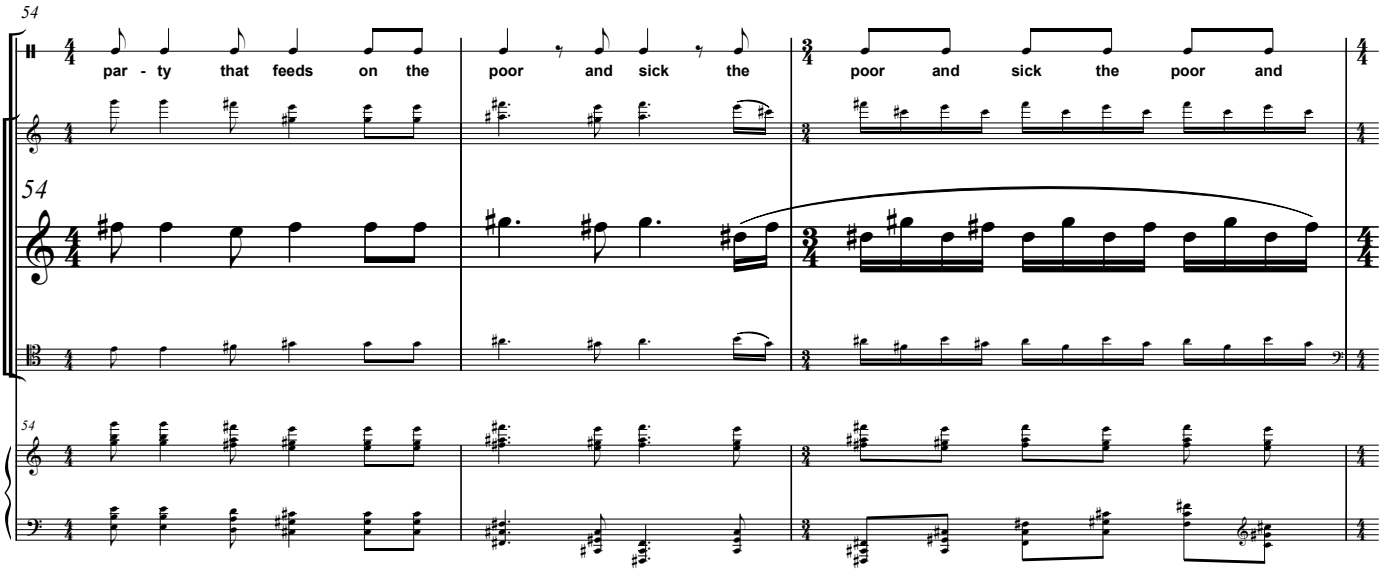

27
whose sag - es are purged, and whose
cresc.
30
big - ots dom - i - nate the me - di - a.
34
Pit - y the par - ty that prais - es dic - ta-tors and ac -
mf cresc.
ff

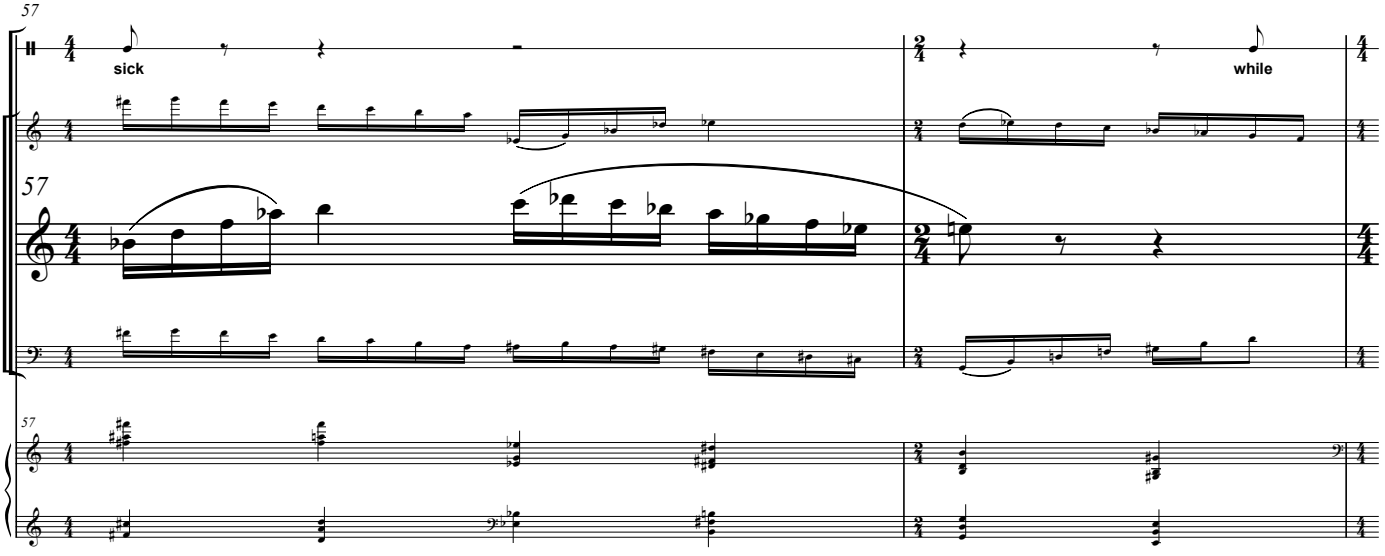

37
claims the bul - ly as he - ro, and aims to dom - i - nate the world by force and tor - ture in the
8va

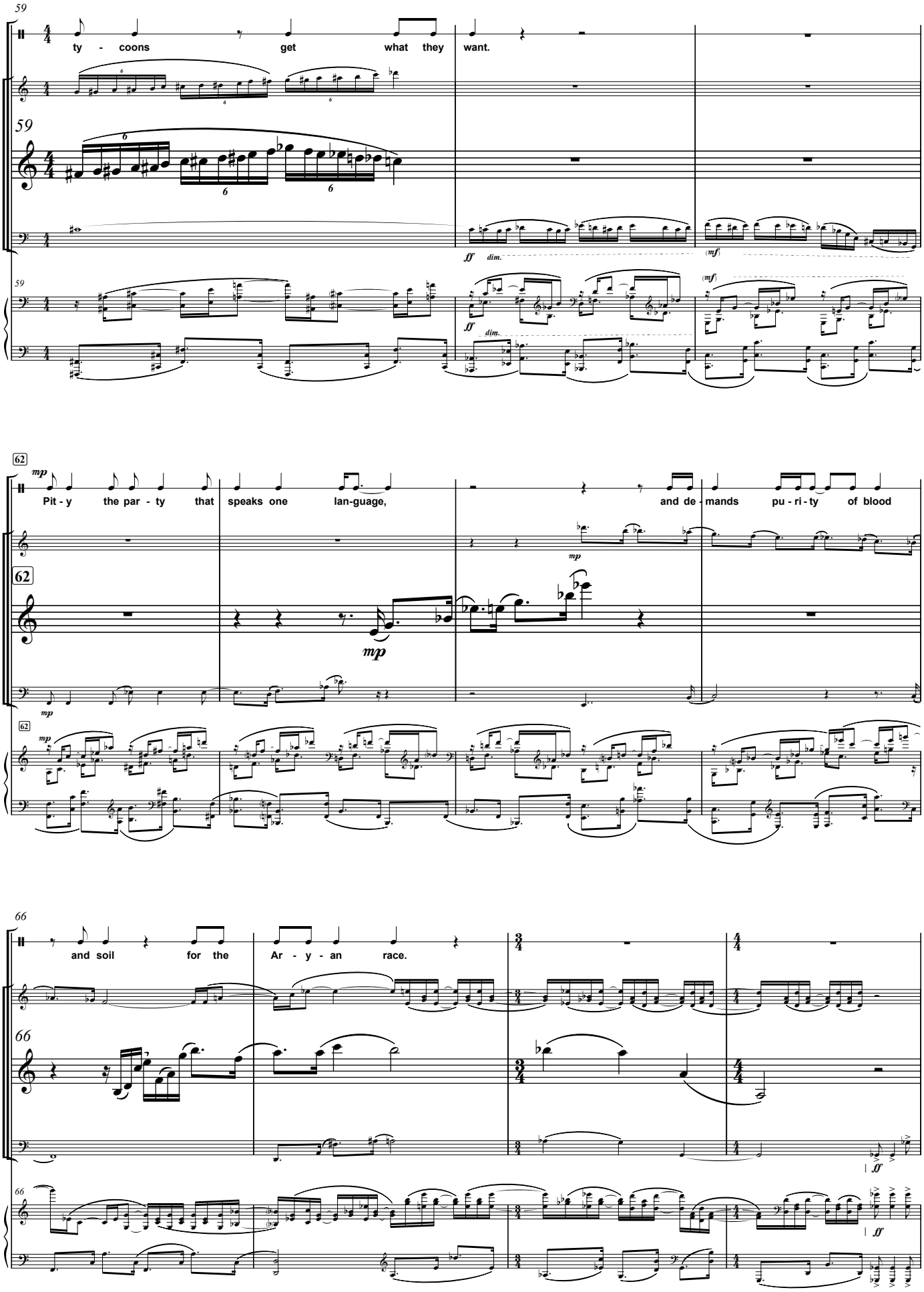

41
name of free - dom.
46
pp
Pit - y the par - ty whose
8va

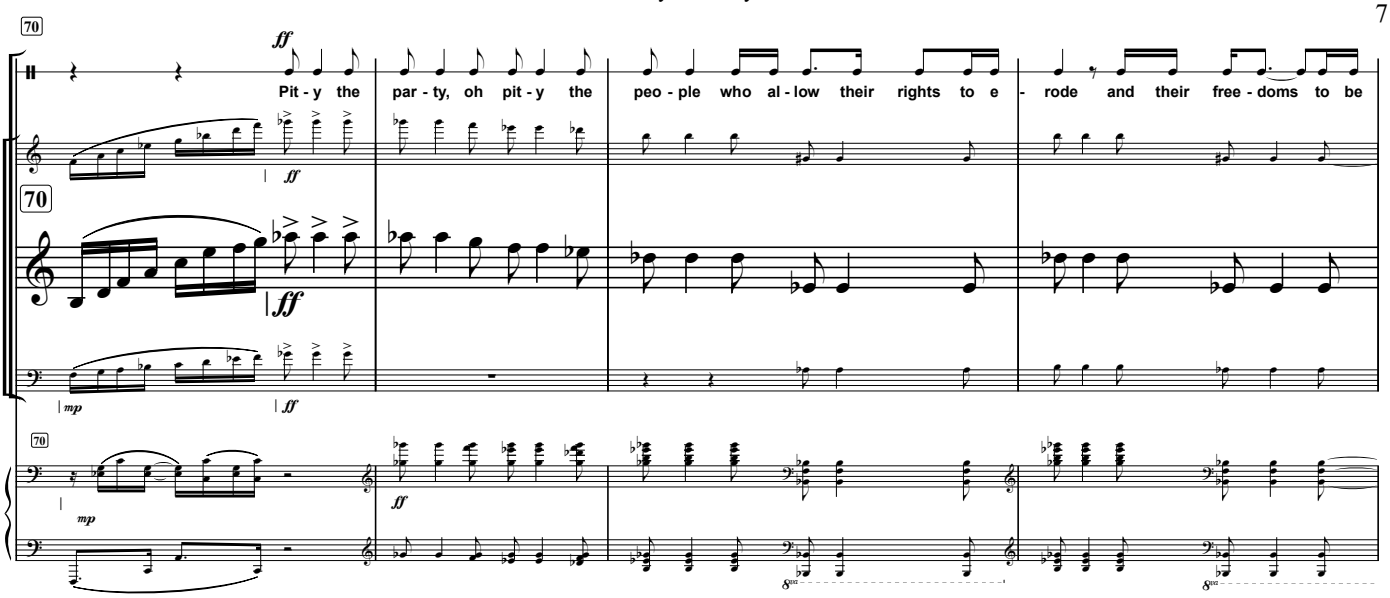

47
Gods are Mon - ey and Guns, and sleeps the sleep of op - i - oids.
cresc.
legato

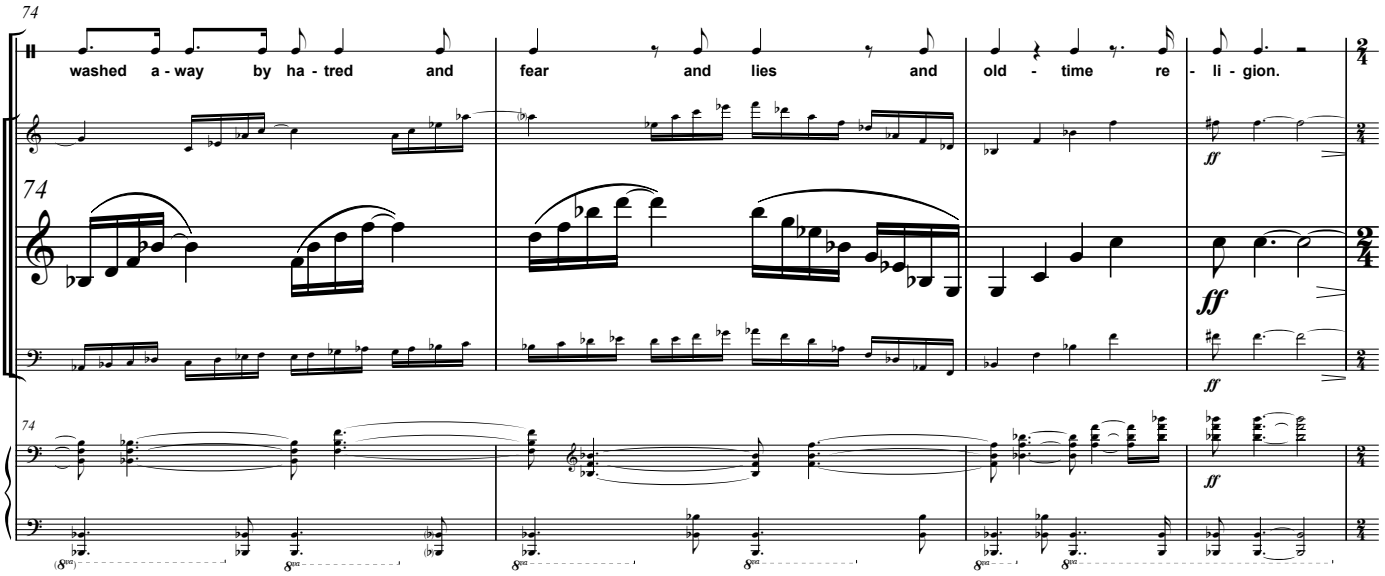

51
53
ff
Pit - y the
(mf)
(f)
f
ff

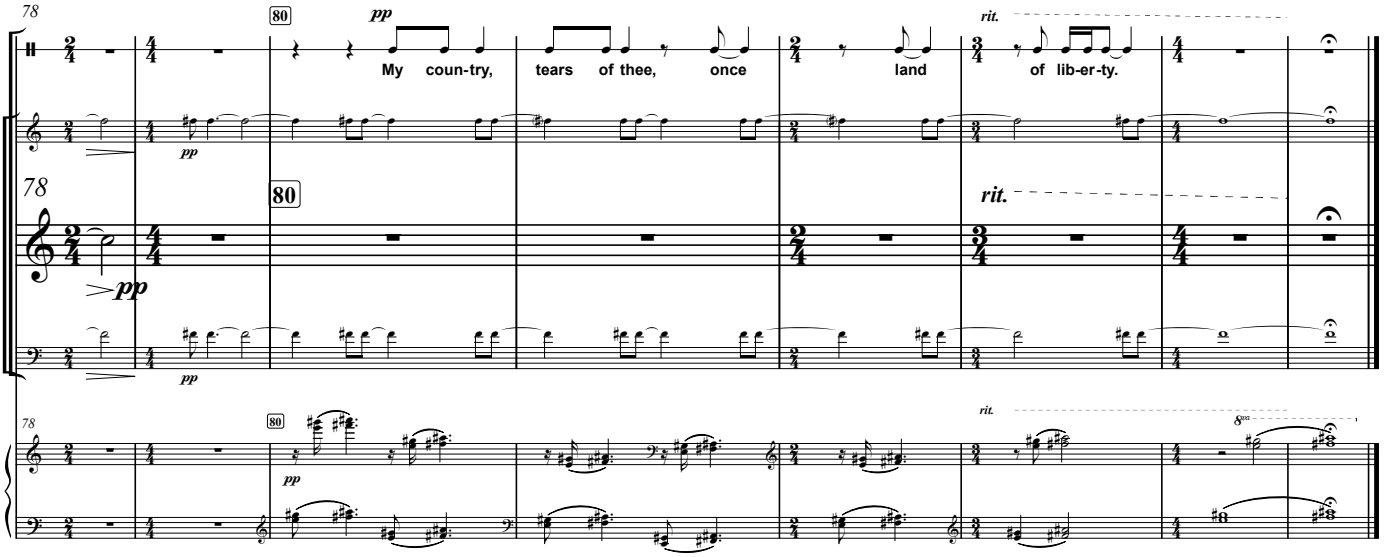

54
par - ty that feeds on the poor and sick the poor and sick the poor and


57
sick
while


59
ty - coons get what they want.
ff dim.
(mf)
62
Pit - y the par - ty that speaks one lan-guage,
and de - mands pu - ri - ty of blood
mp
66
and soil for the Ar - y - an race.
ff

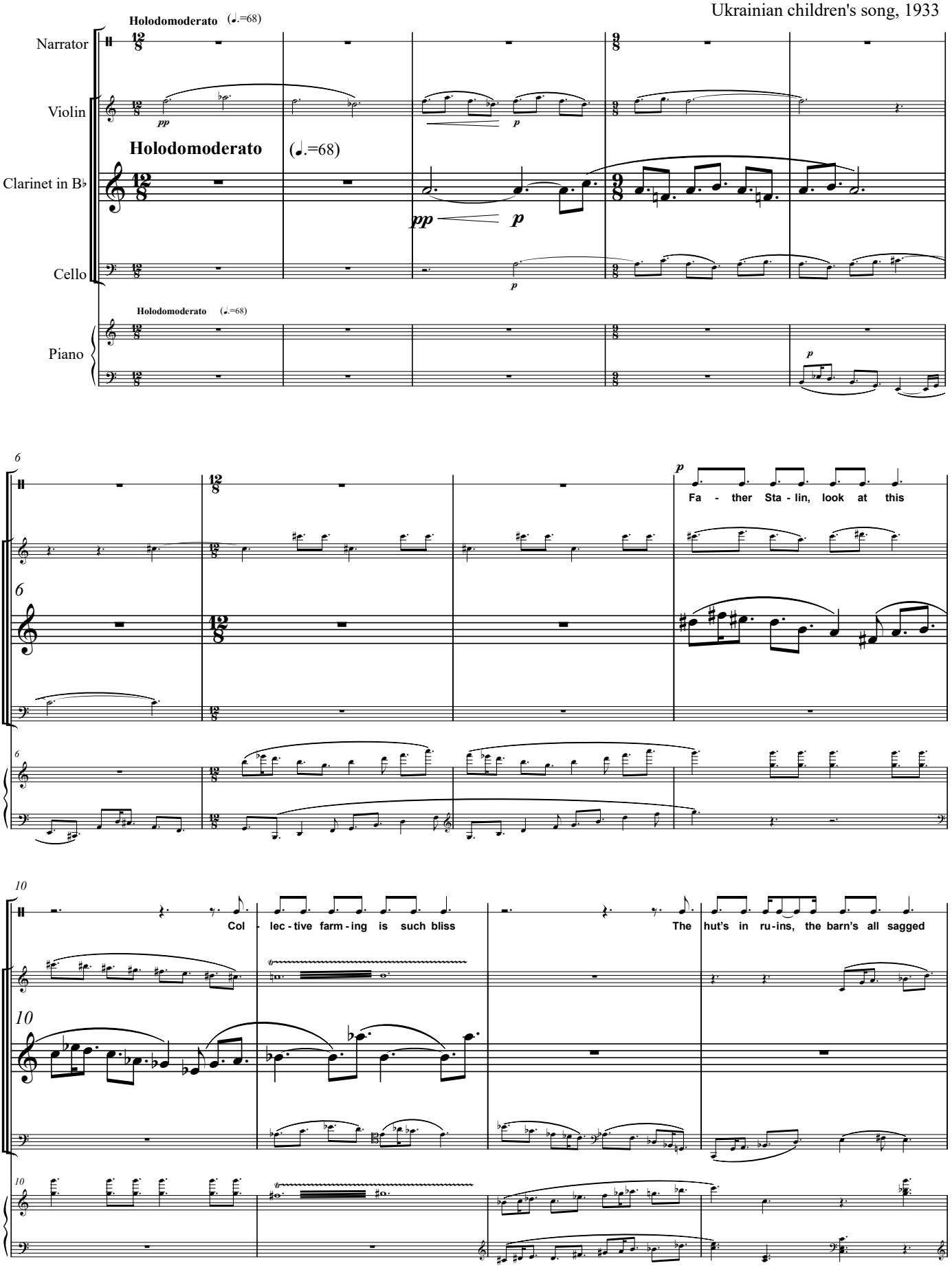

70
ff
Pit - y the par - ty, oh pit - y the peo - ple who al - low their rights to e - rode and their free - doms to be
mp

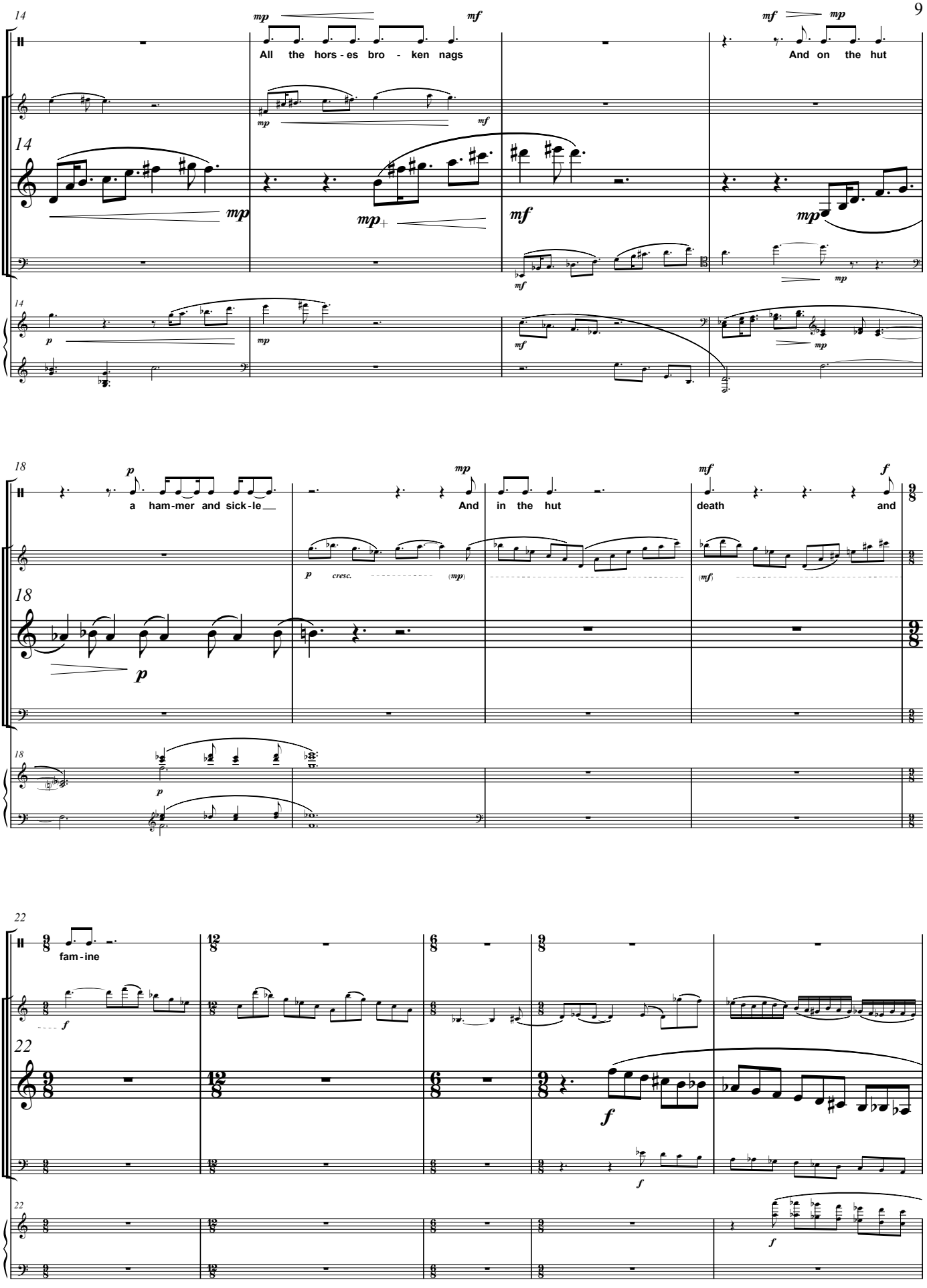

74
washed a - way by ha - tred and fear and lies and old - time re - li - gion.
ff

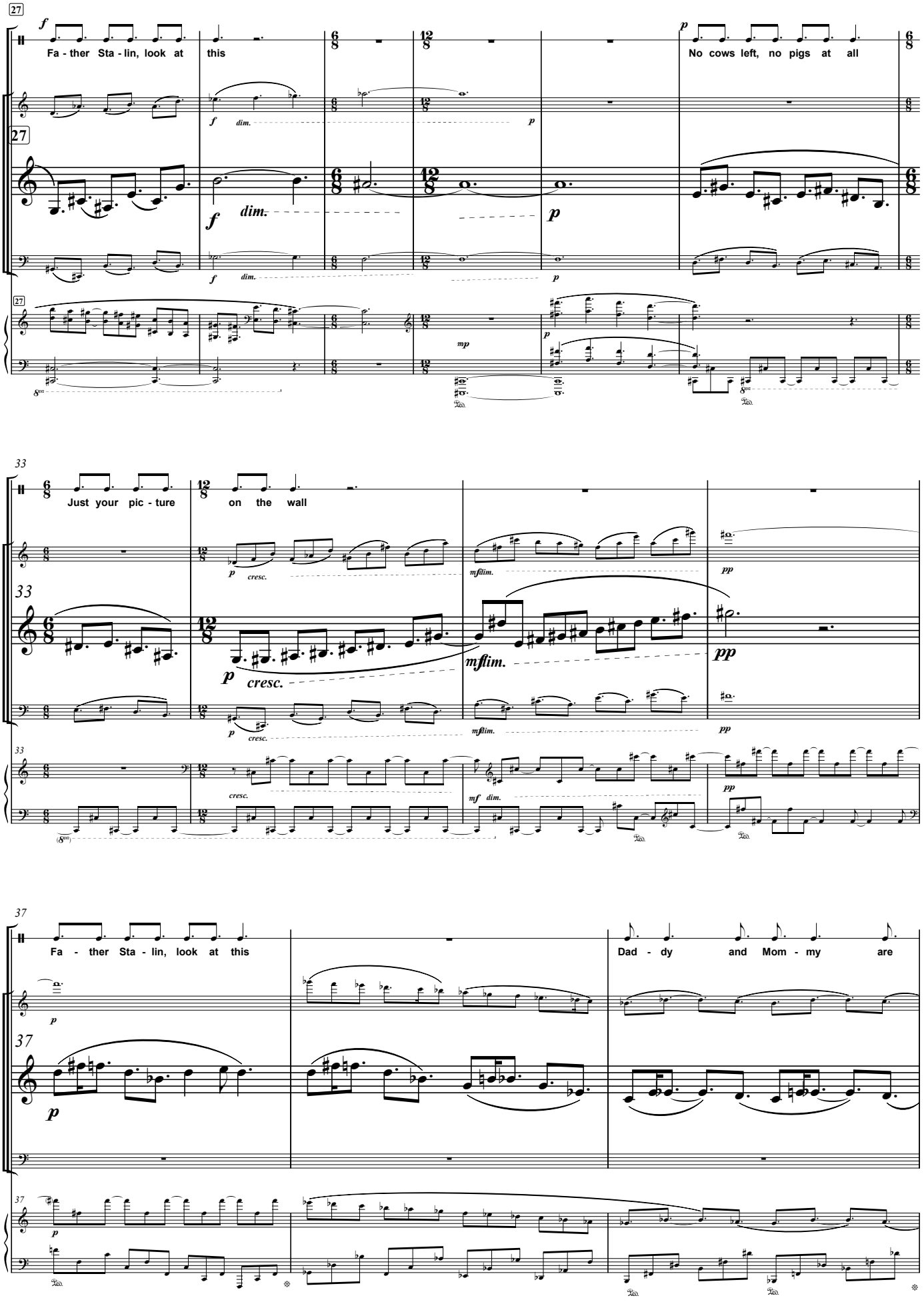

78
80
pp
My coun-try, tears of thee, once land of lib-er-ty.
rit.

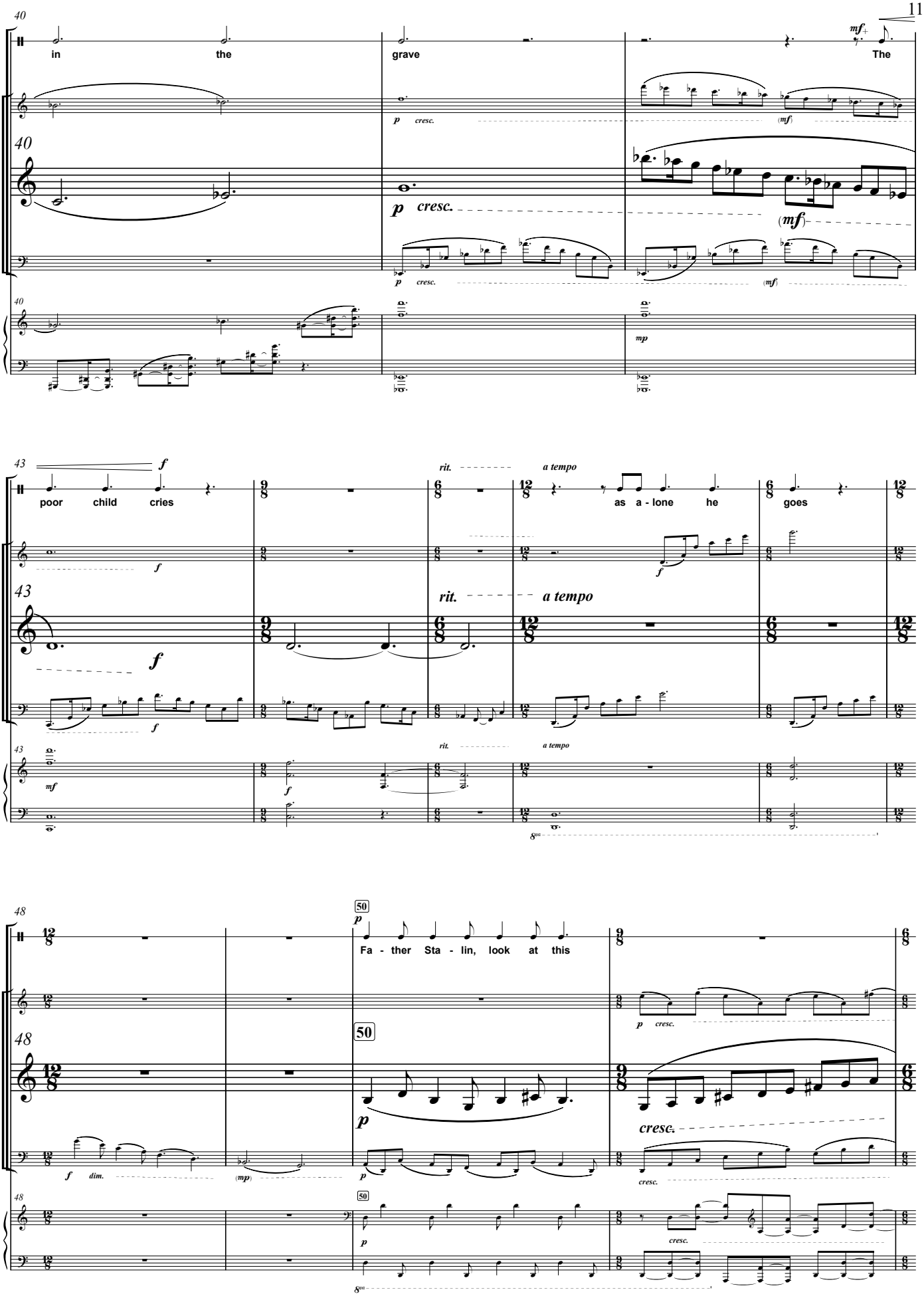
II. Father Stalin, Look at This [5']

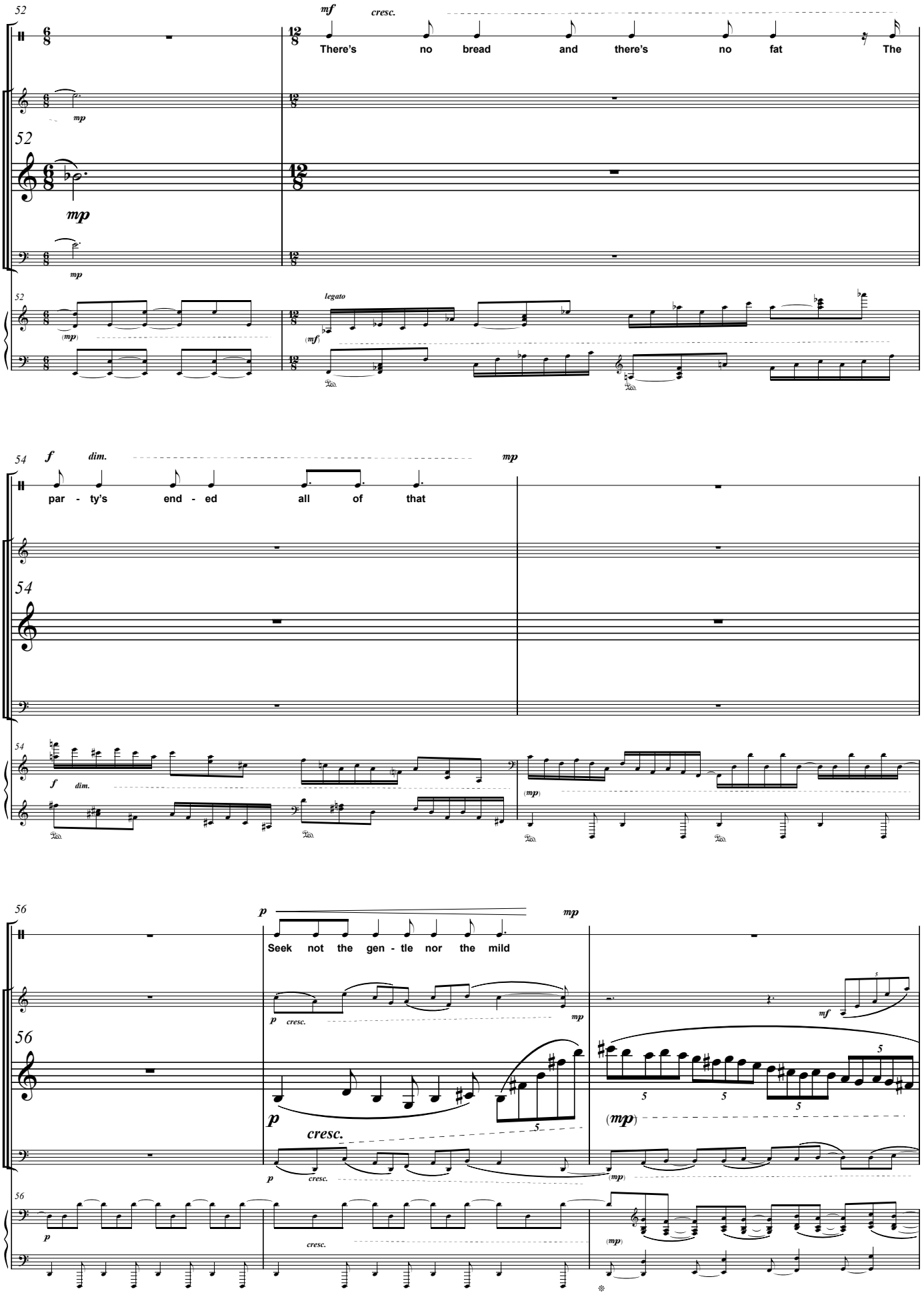
Ukrainian children's song, 1933

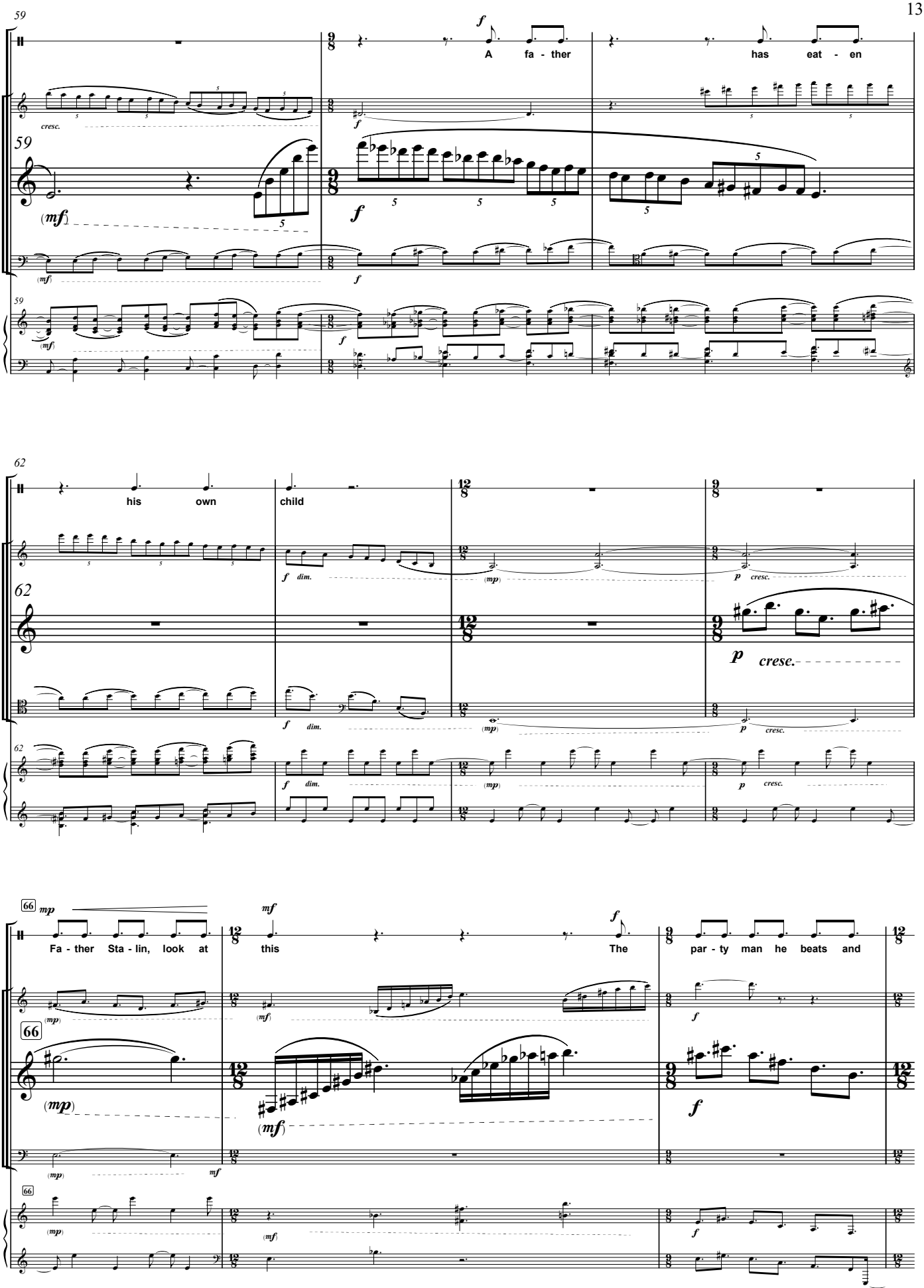


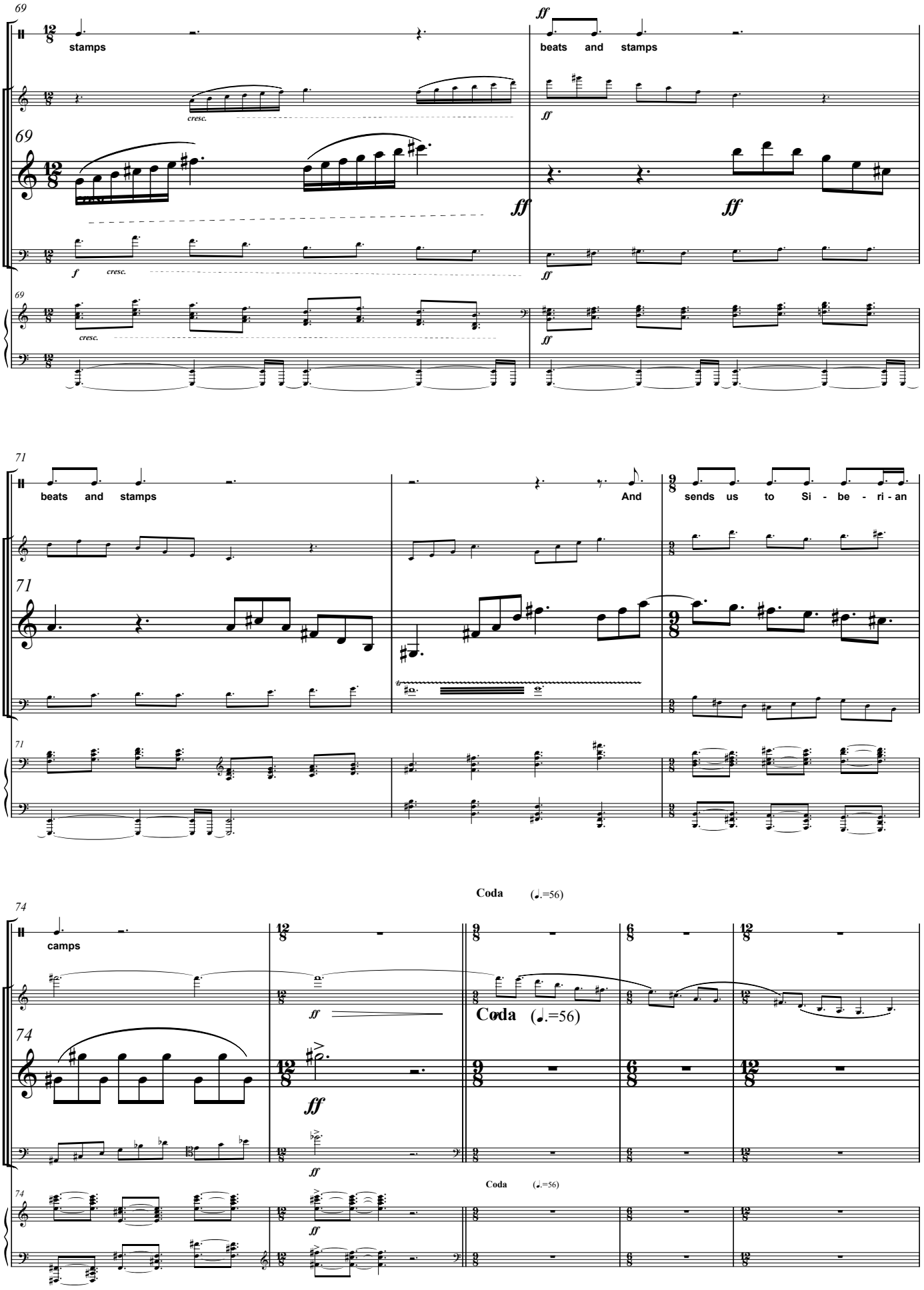

14
All the hors - es bro - ken nags
And on the hut
18
a ham-mer and sick-le
And in the hut
death and
22
fam - ine

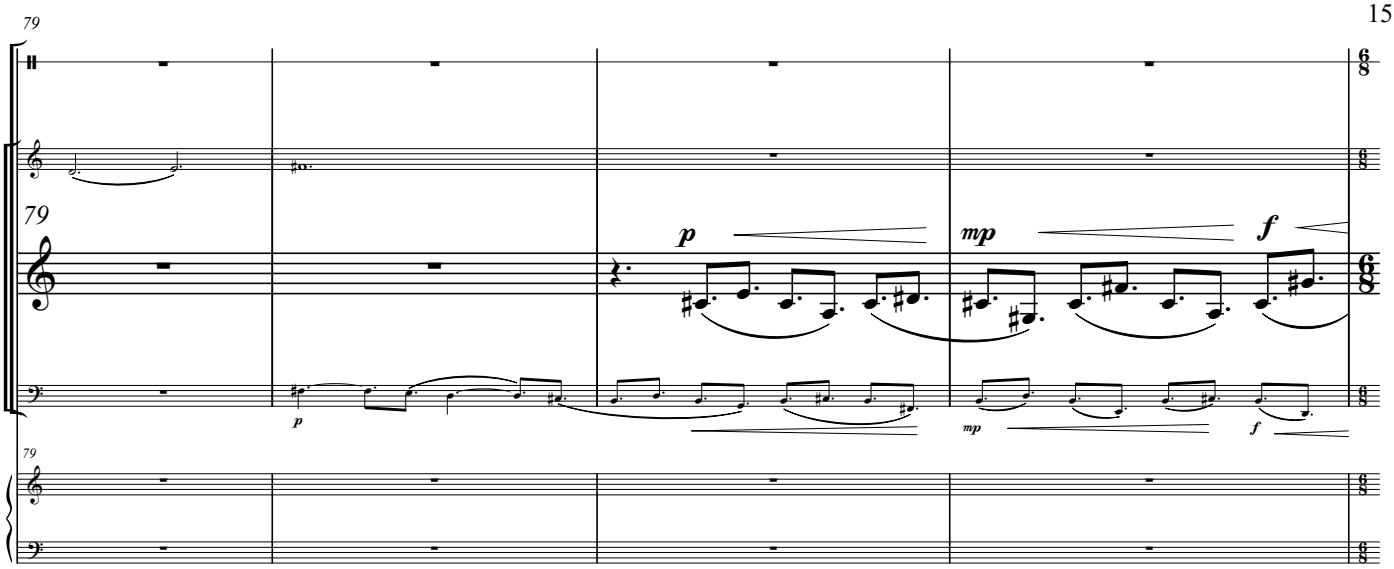

27
Fa - ther Sta - lin, look at this
No cows left, no pigs at all
dim.
33
Just your pic - ture
on the wall
cresc.
mflim.
37
Fa - ther Sta - lin, look at this
Dad - dy and Mom - my are

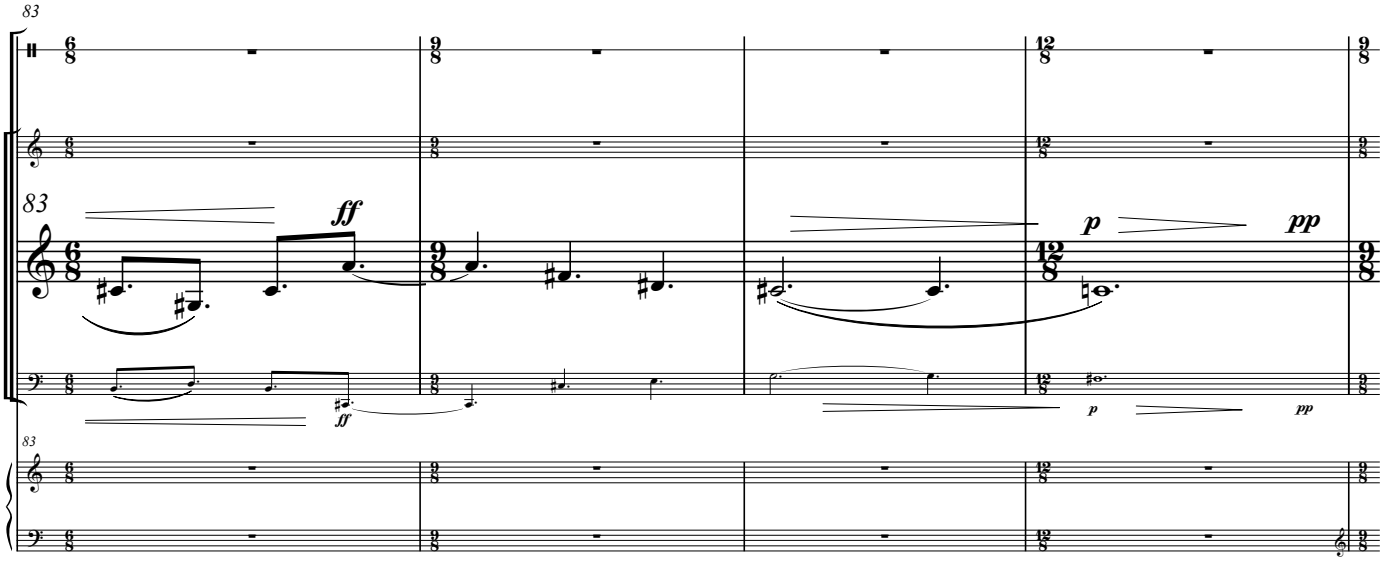

40
in the grave The
mf
p cresc.
(mf)
mp
43
poor child cries
f
rit.
a tempo
as a - lone he goes
48
50
Fa - ther Sta - lin, look at this
dim.
(mp)
cresc.

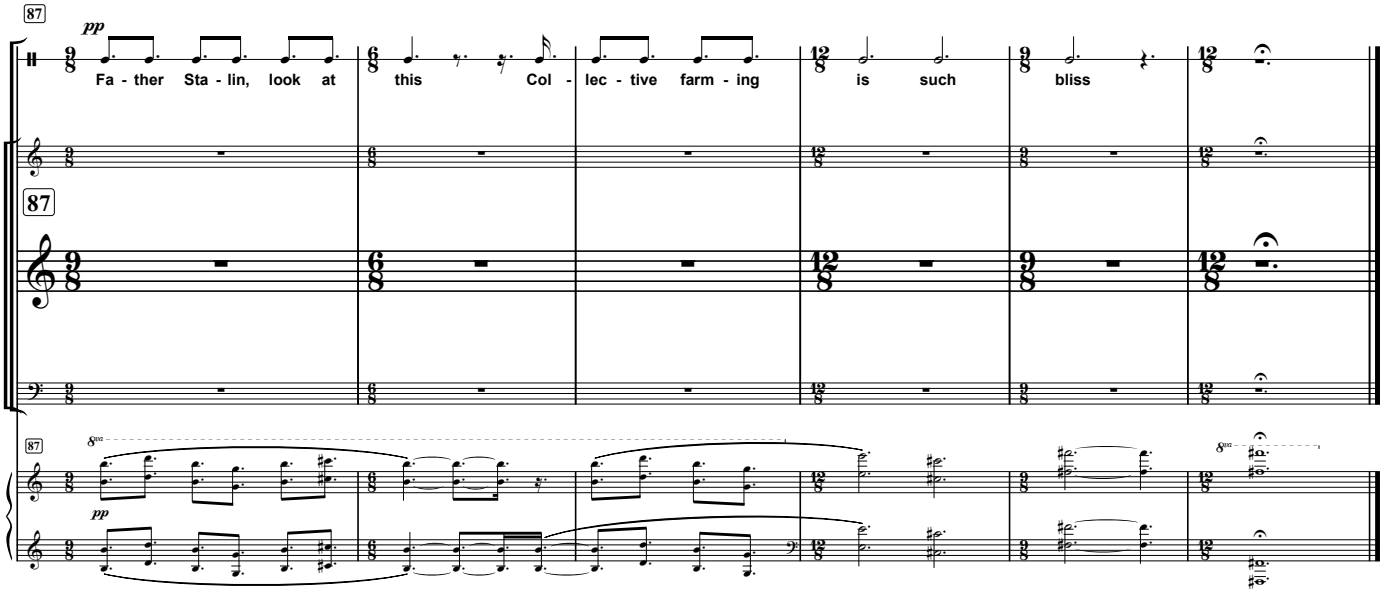

52
mf
cresc.
There's no bread and there's no fat The
mp
52
mp
52
legato
(mf)
54
f
dim.
mp
par - ty's end - ed all of that
54
f
dim.
(mp)
56
p
mp
Seek not the gen - tle nor the mild
p
cresc.
mp
mf
56
p
cresc.
(mp)
56
p
cresc.
(mp)


59
A fa - ther has eat - en
cresc.
(mf)
f
62
his own child
f dim.
(mp)
p cresc.
crese.
66
mp
Fa - ther Sta - lin, look at this
mf
The par - ty man he beats and


69
stamps
beats and stamps
cresc.
ff
f
71
beats and stamps
And
sends us to Si - be - ri - an
74
camps
Coda (♩.=56)

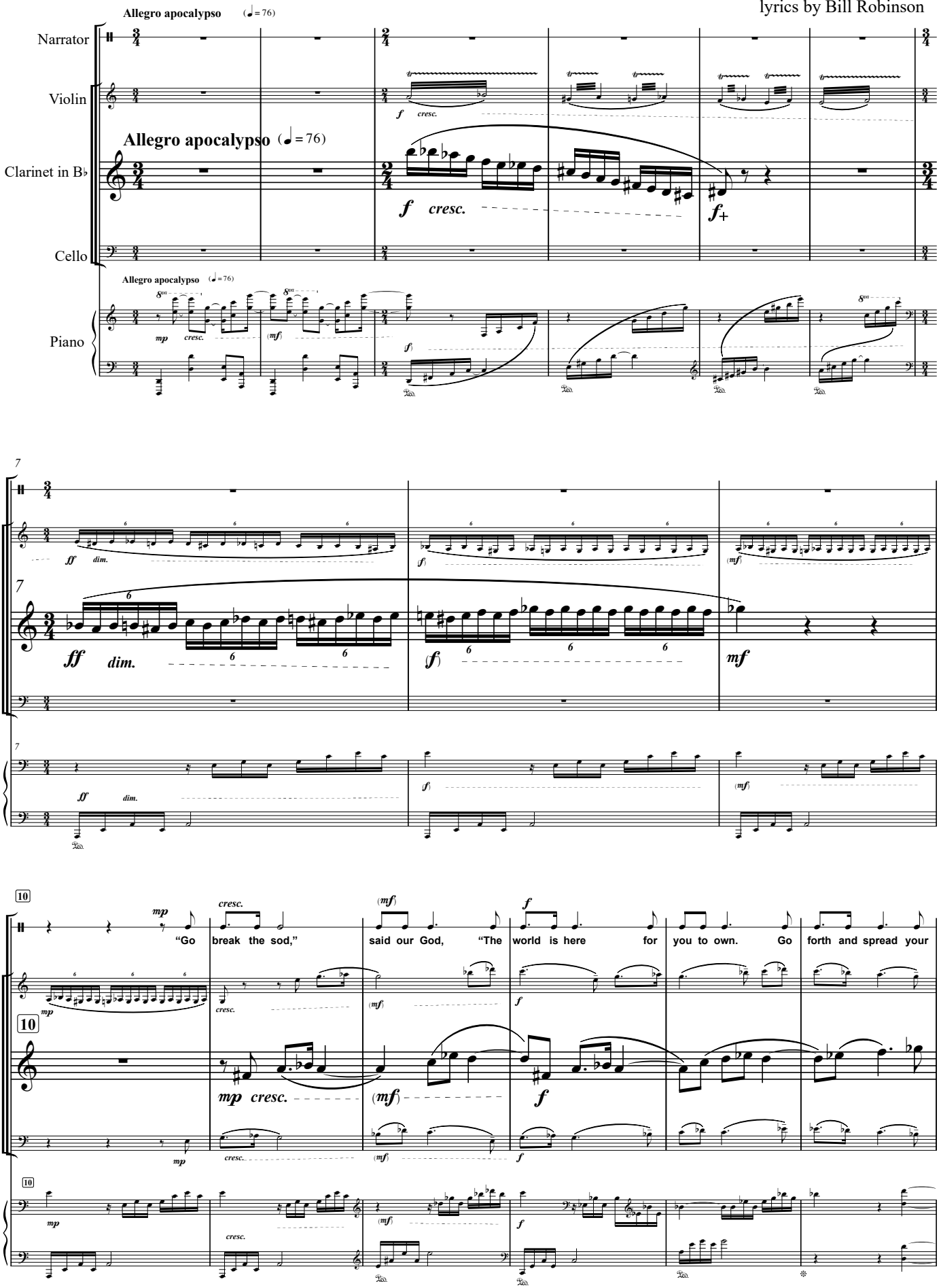

79
79
p
mp
f
p
mp
f
79

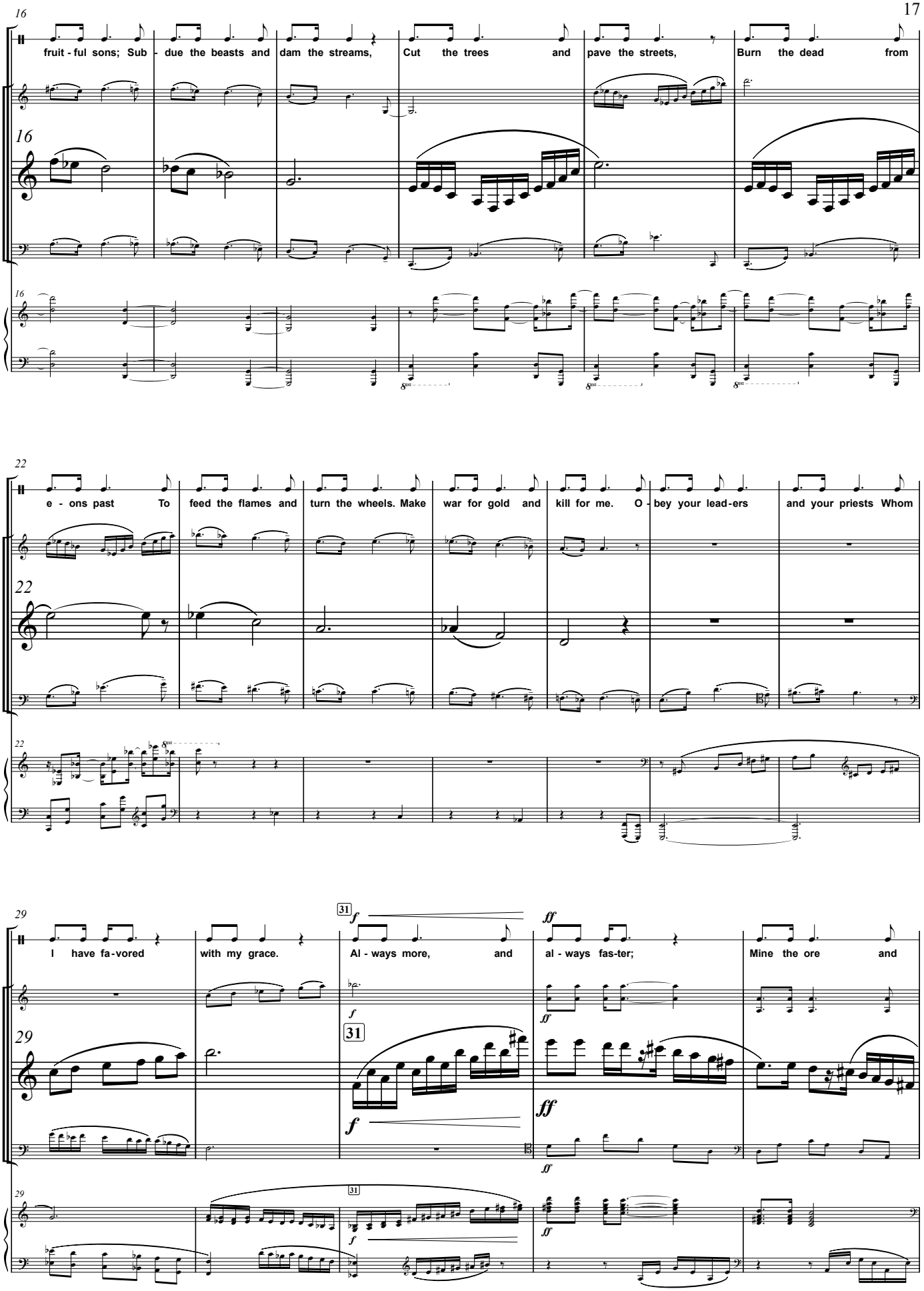

83
83
ff
p
pp
ff
p
pp
83

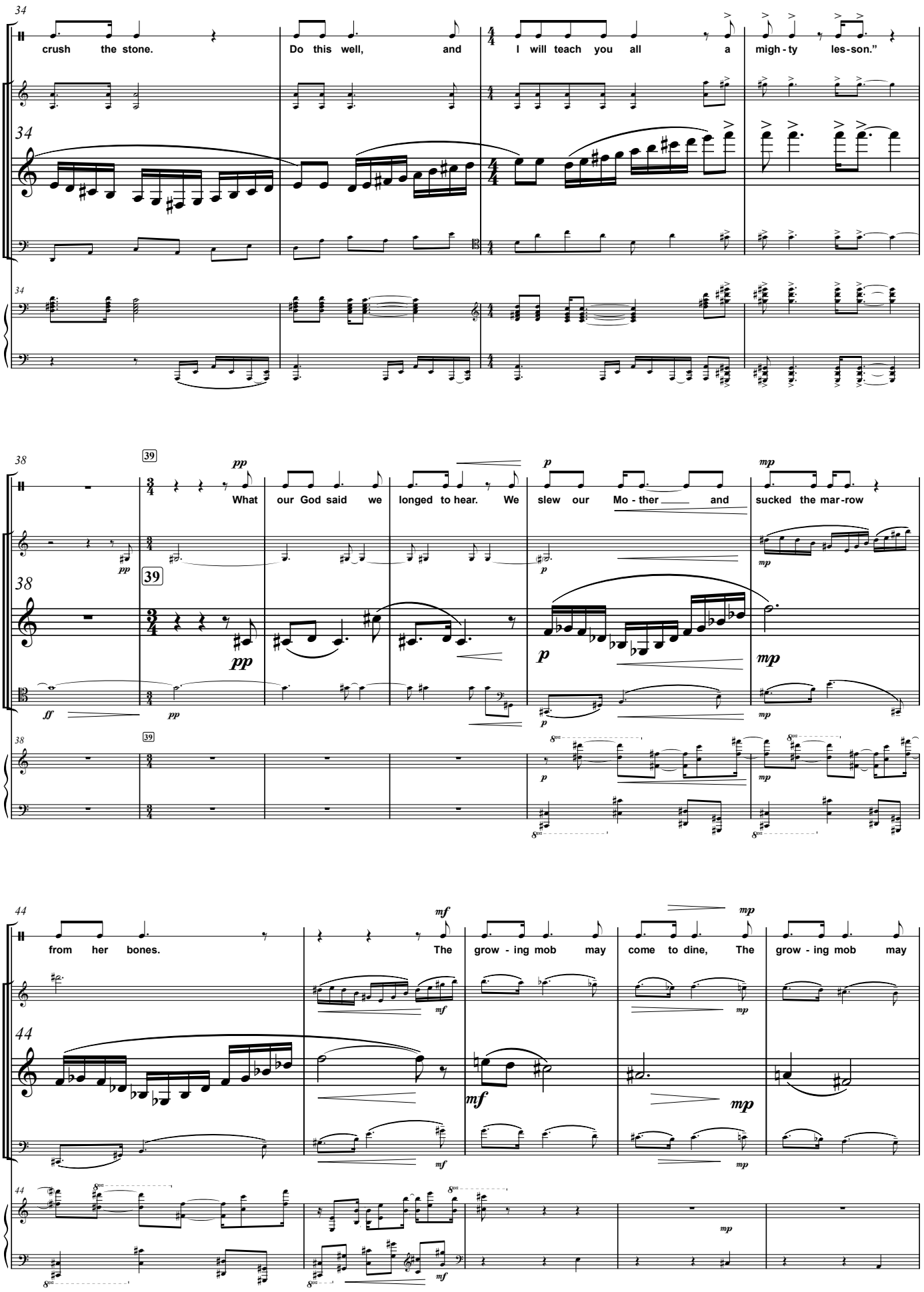

87
pp
Fa - ther Sta - lin, look at this Col - lec - tive farm - ing is such bliss
87
87
8va
pp
8va

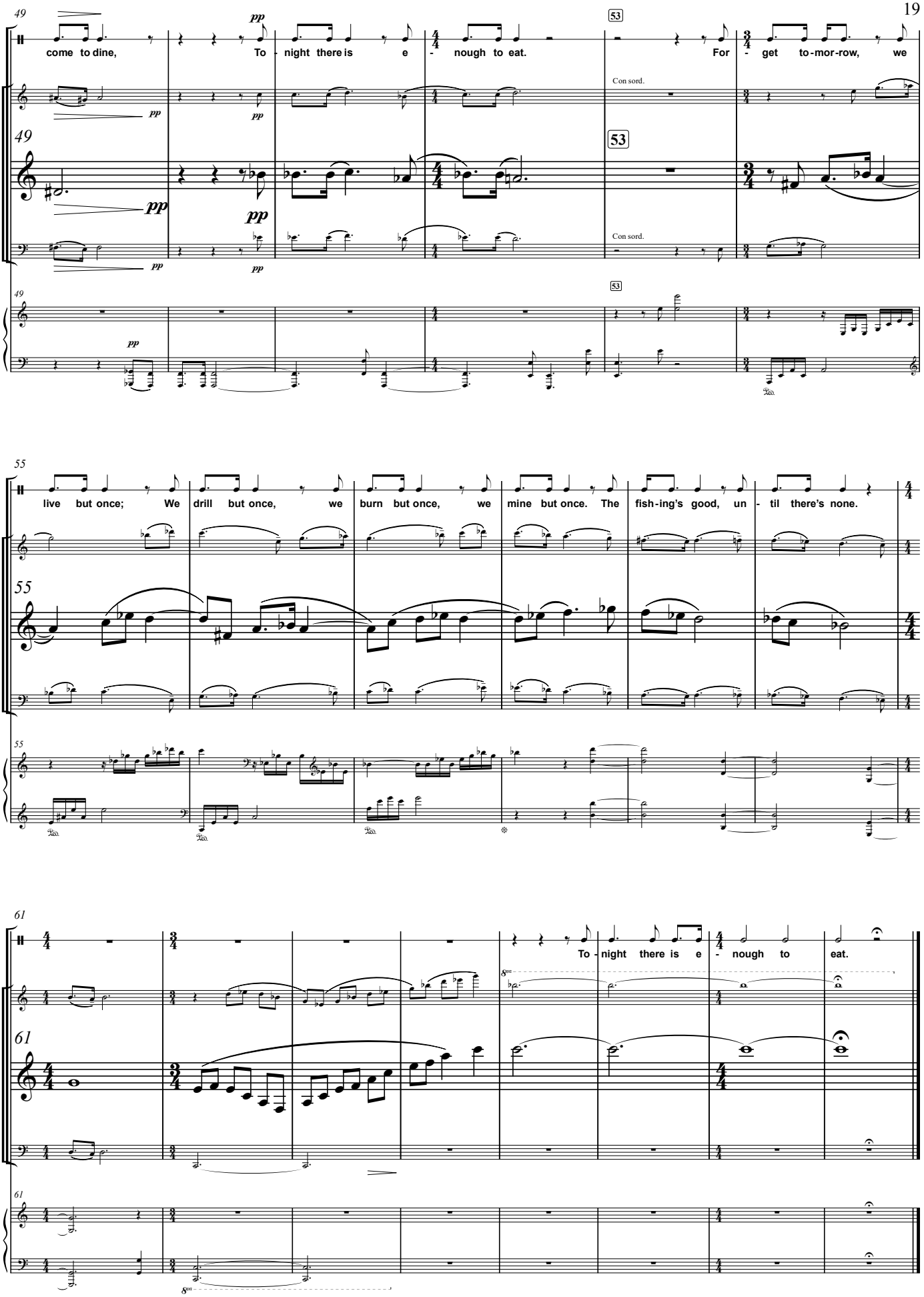
III. Political Theology [2:45]

lyrics by Bill Robinson




16
fruit - ful sons; Sub - due the beasts and dam the streams, Cut the trees and pave the streets, Burn the dead from
22
e - ons past To feed the flames and turn the wheels. Make war for gold and kill for me. O - bey your lead - ers and your priests Whom
29
I have fa - vored with my grace. Al - ways more, and al - ways fas - ter; Mine the ore and
31
f
ff

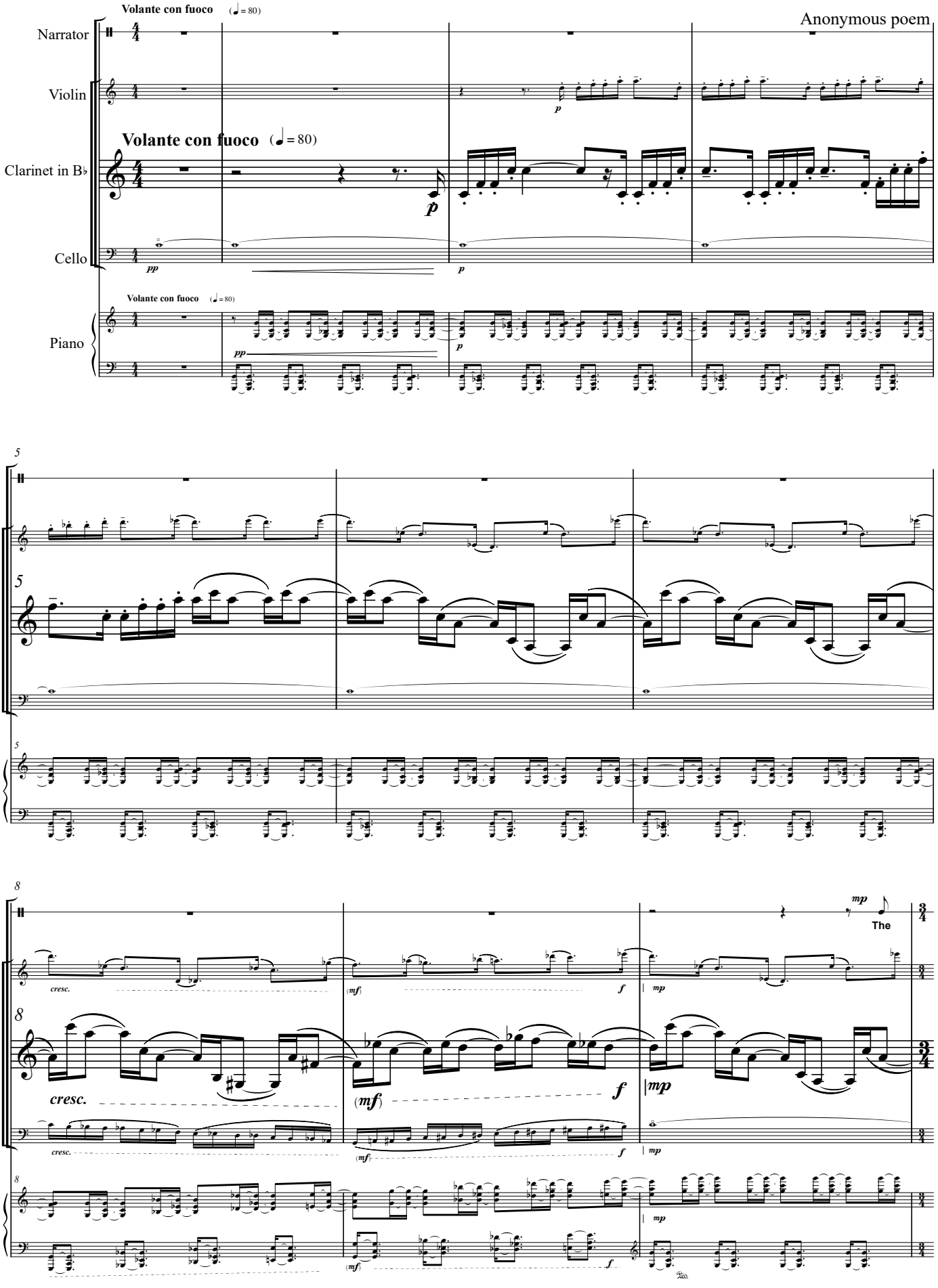

34
crush the stone.
Do this well, and
I will teach you all a migh - ty les - son."
38
39
What our God said we longed to hear. We slew our Mo - ther and sucked the mar - row
44
from her bones.
The grow - ing mob may come to dine, The grow - ing mob may

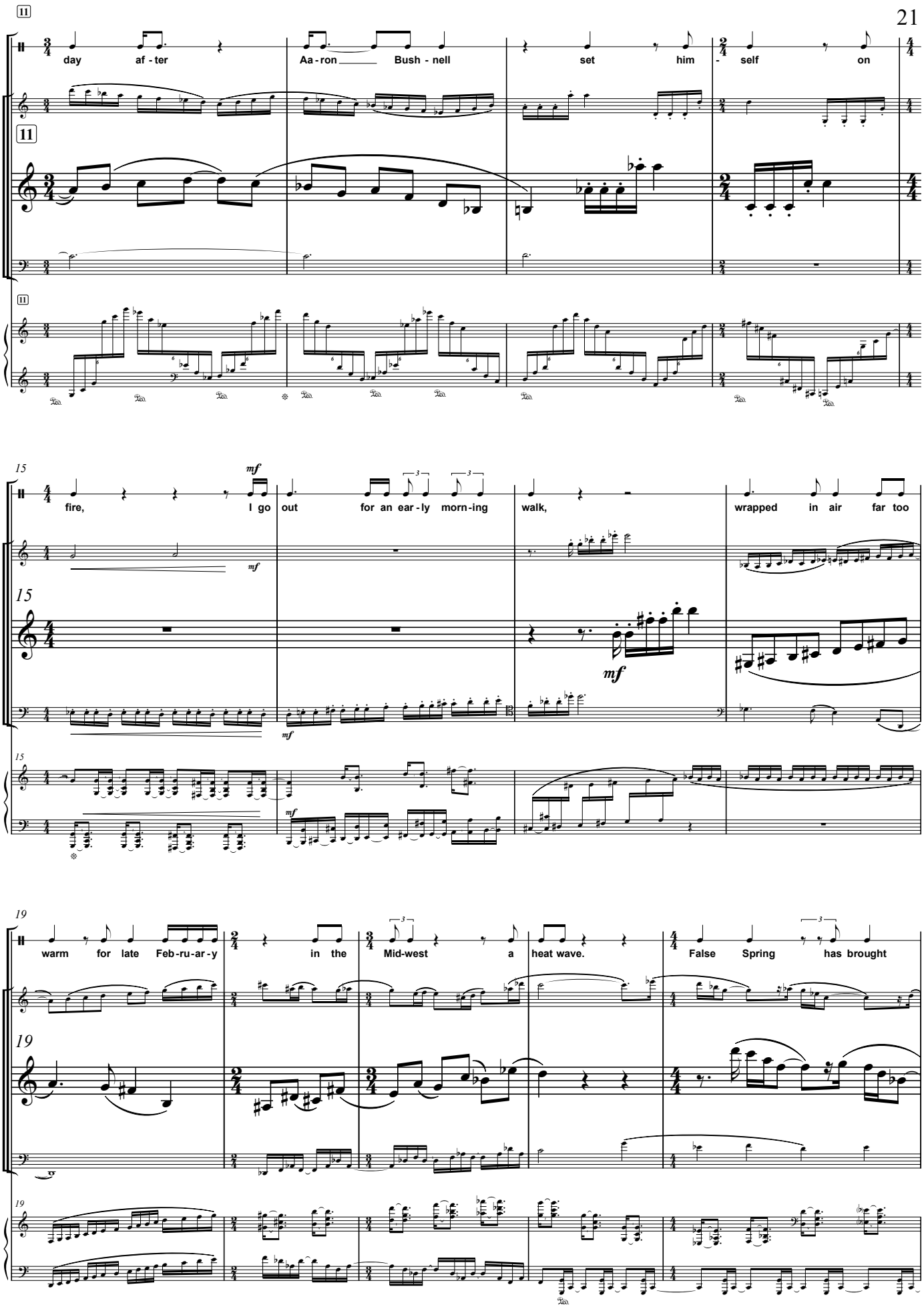

49
pp
come to dine,
To - night there is e - nough to eat.
53
For - get to-mor-row, we
Con sord.
live but once; We drill but once, we burn but once, we mine but once. The fish-ing's good, un - til there's none.
55
To - night there is e - nough to eat.
61

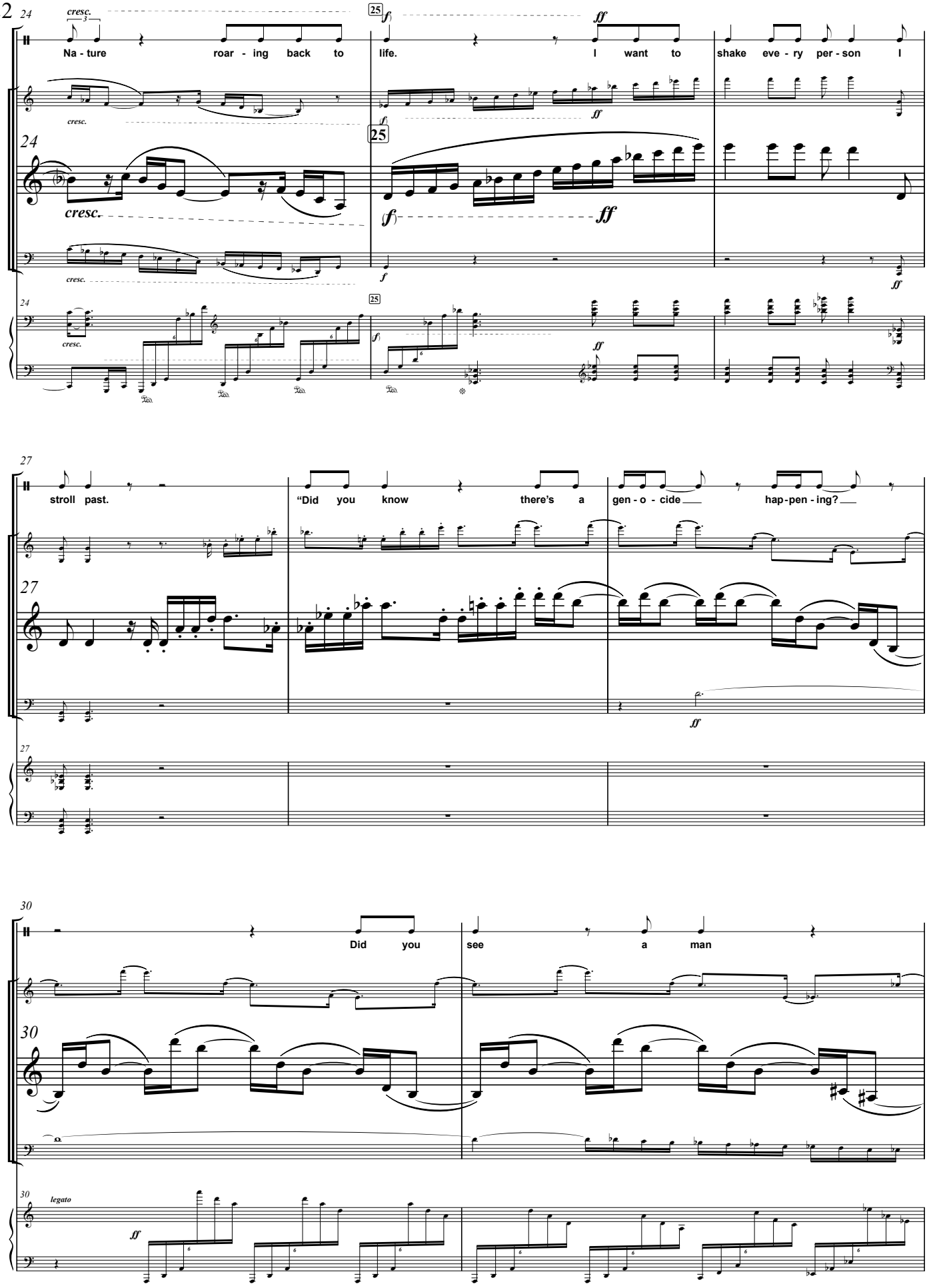
IV. The birds don't know about self-immolation

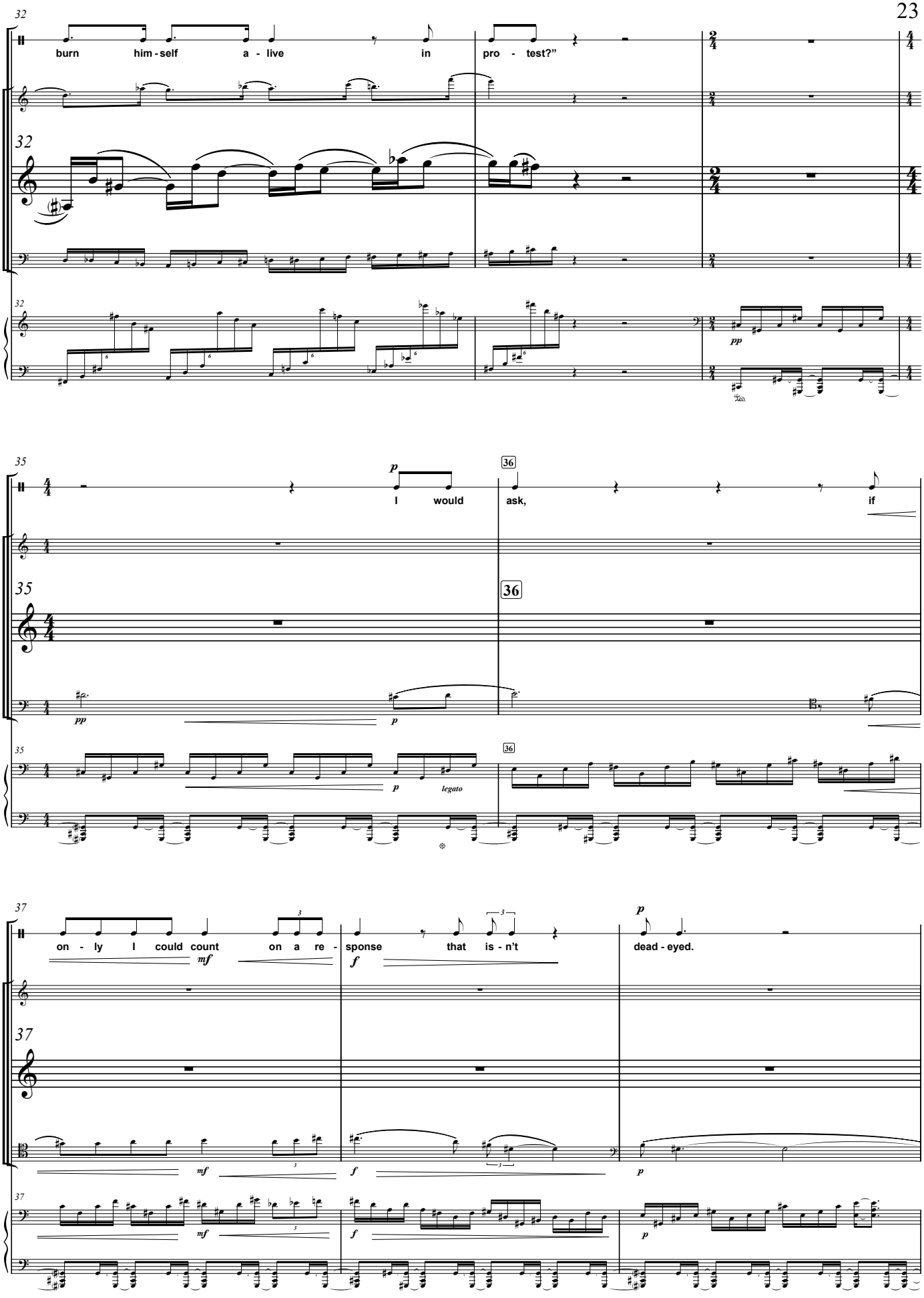
[4:30]

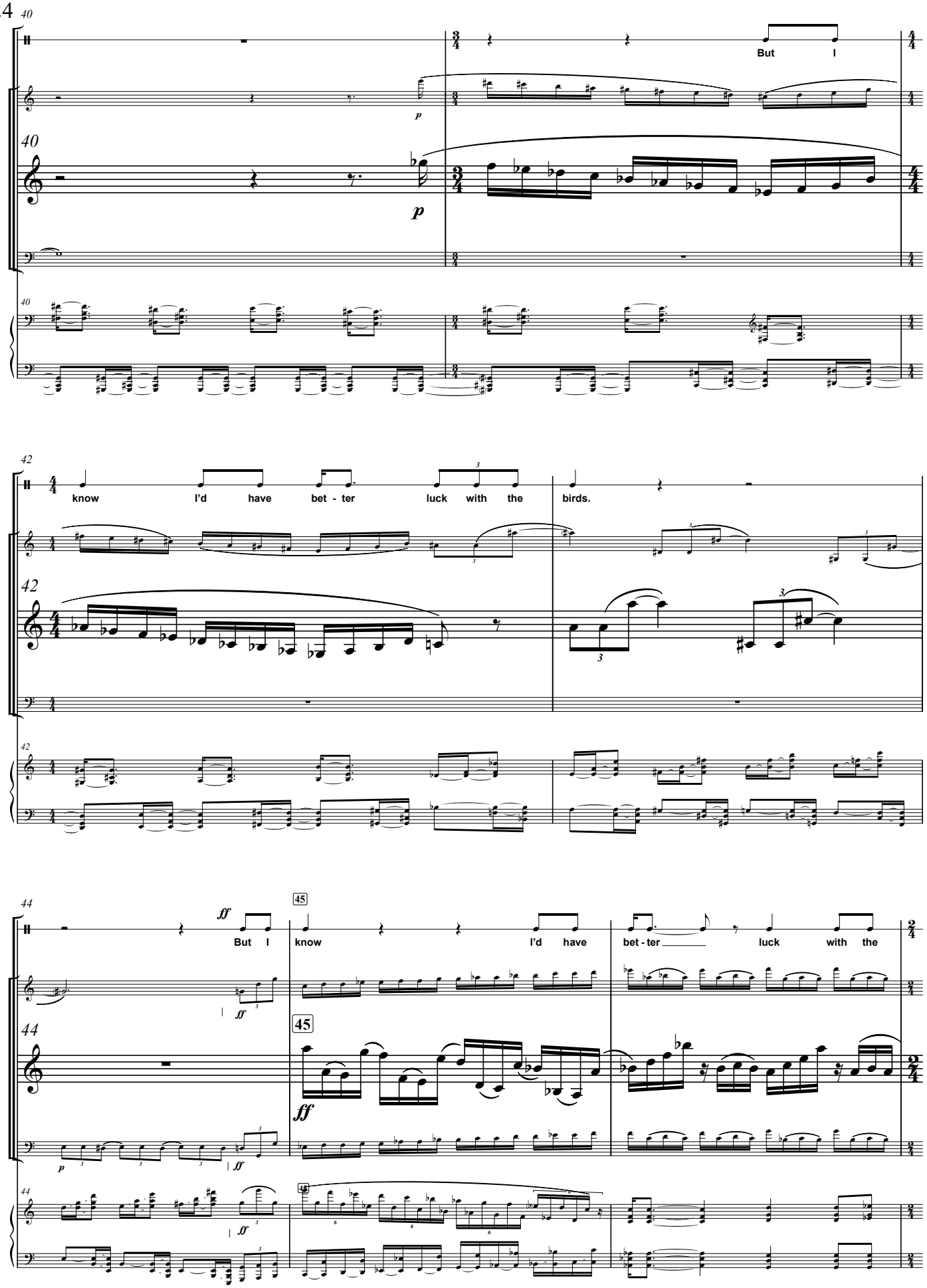
Anonymous poem

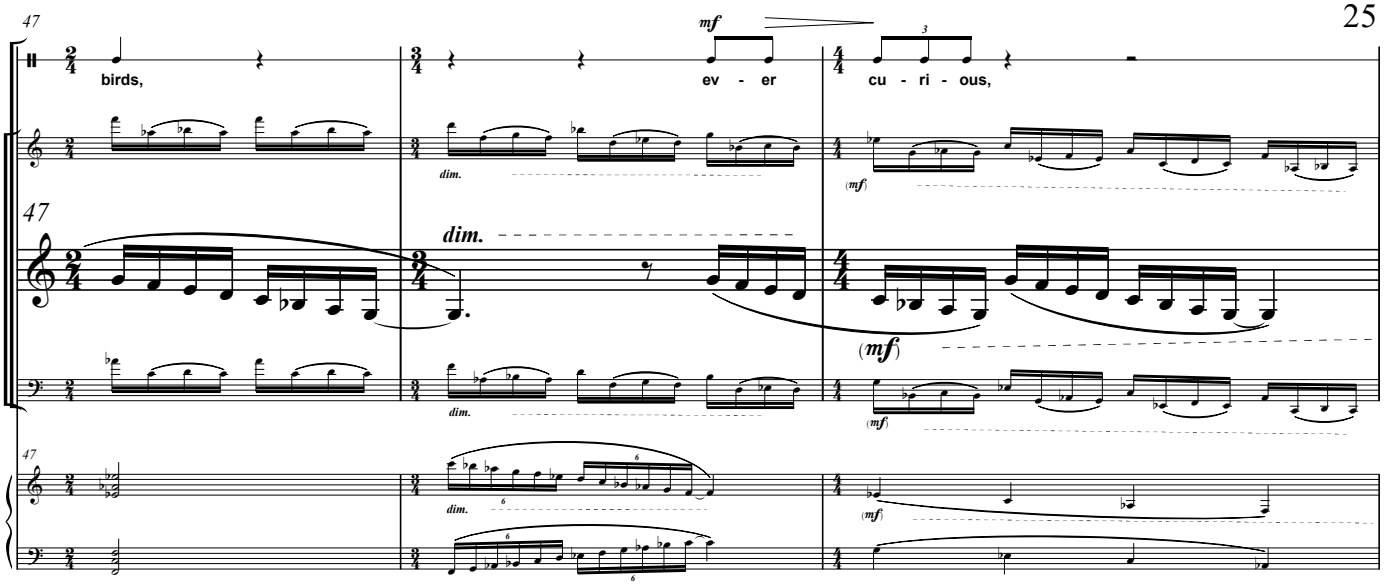


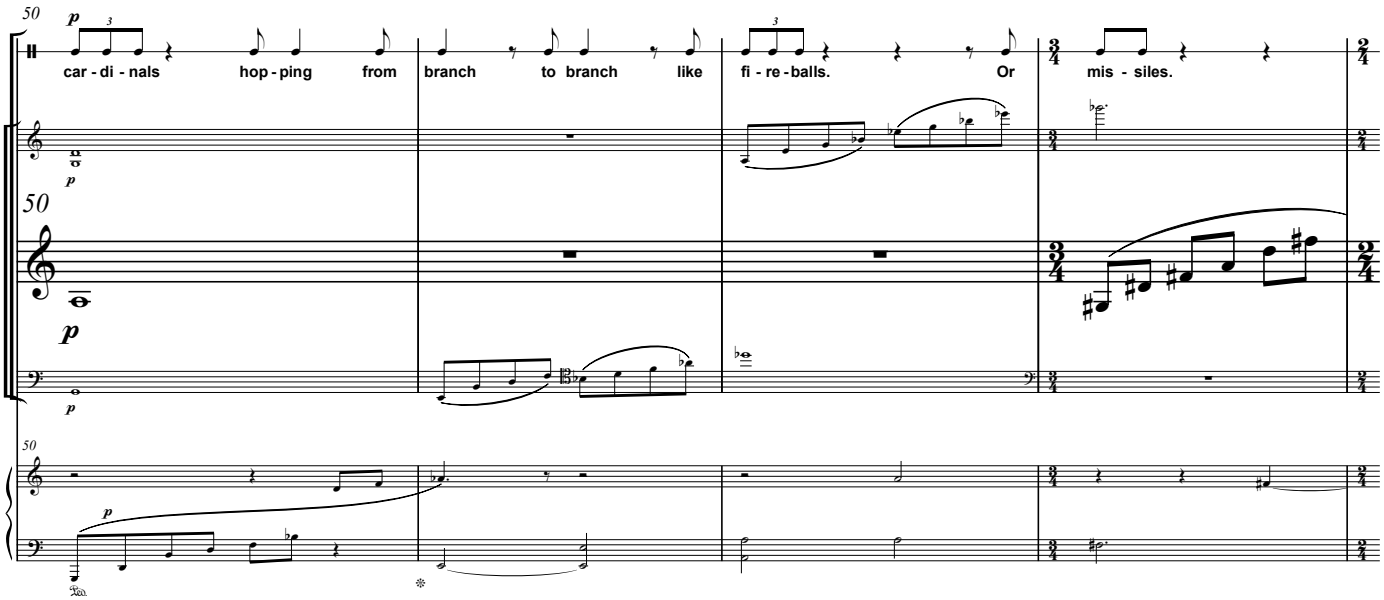

11
day af - ter
Aa - ron Bush - nell
set him - self on
11
11
15
mf
fire,
I go
out
for an ear - ly morn - ing
walk,
wrapped in air far too
15
mf
mf
mf
15
19
warm for late Feb - ru - ar - y
in the
Mid - west
a
heat wave.
False Spring
has brought
19
19

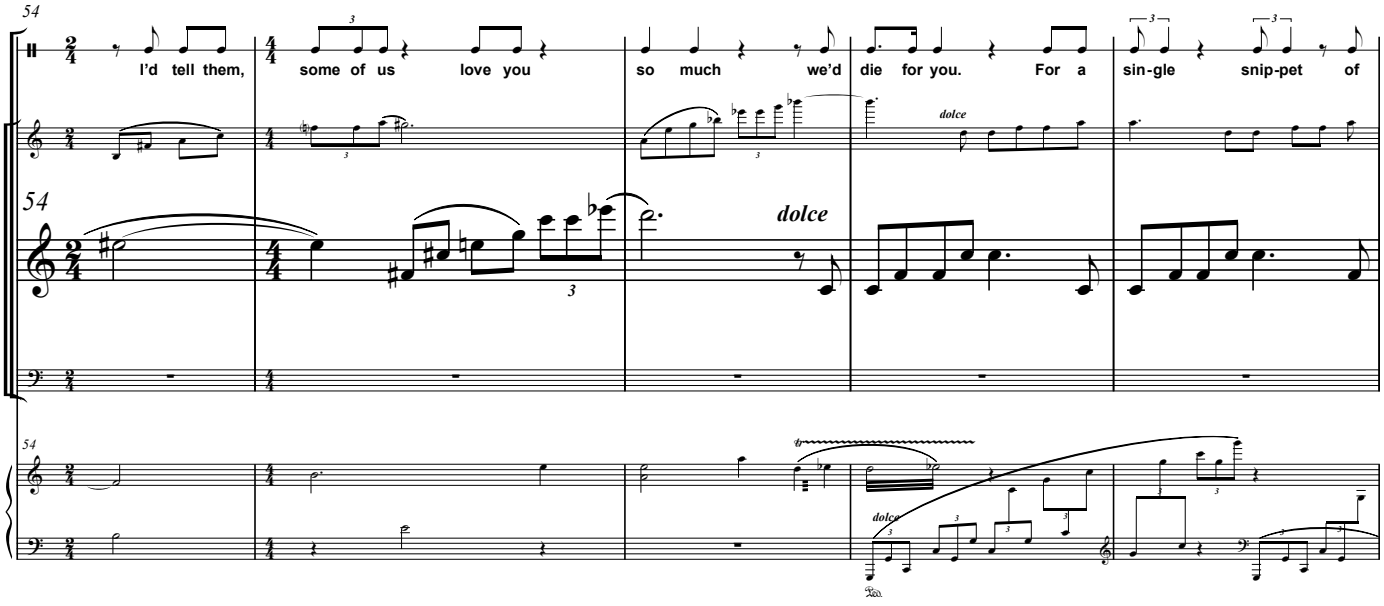

cresc.
Na - ture roar - ing back to life. I want to shake eve - ry per - son I
stroll past. "Did you know there's a gen - o - cide hap - pen - ing?
Did you see a man
legato

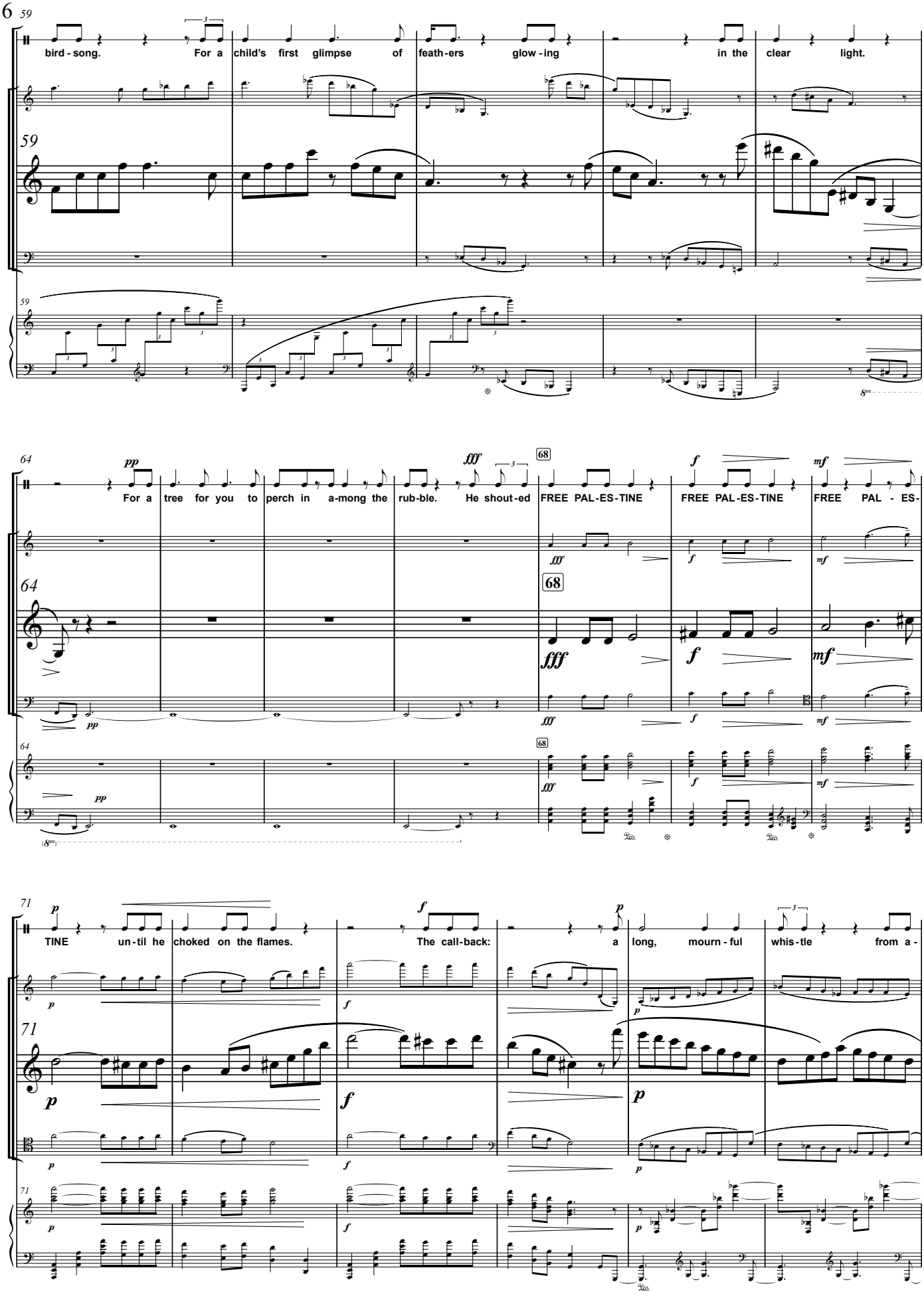

32
burn him - self a - live in pro - test?"
pp
35
p
I would
36
ask,
if
pp
p
legato
37
on - ly I could count on a re - sponse that is - n't
dead - eyed.
mf
f
p

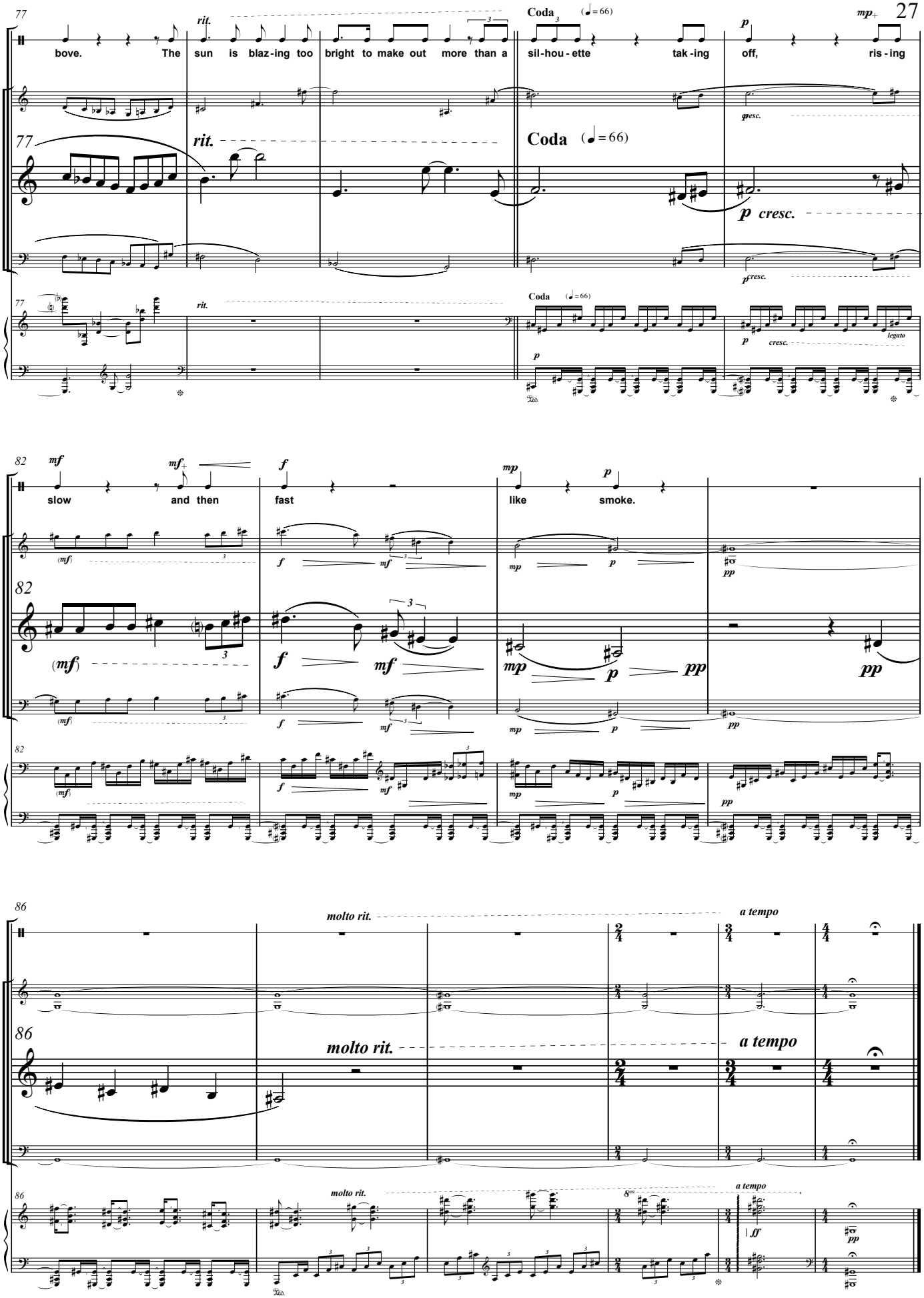

40
But I
p
40
p
40
42
know I'd have bet - ter luck with the birds.
42
42
44
45
But I know I'd have bet - ter luck with the
ff
44
45
ff
p
ff
44
45
ff

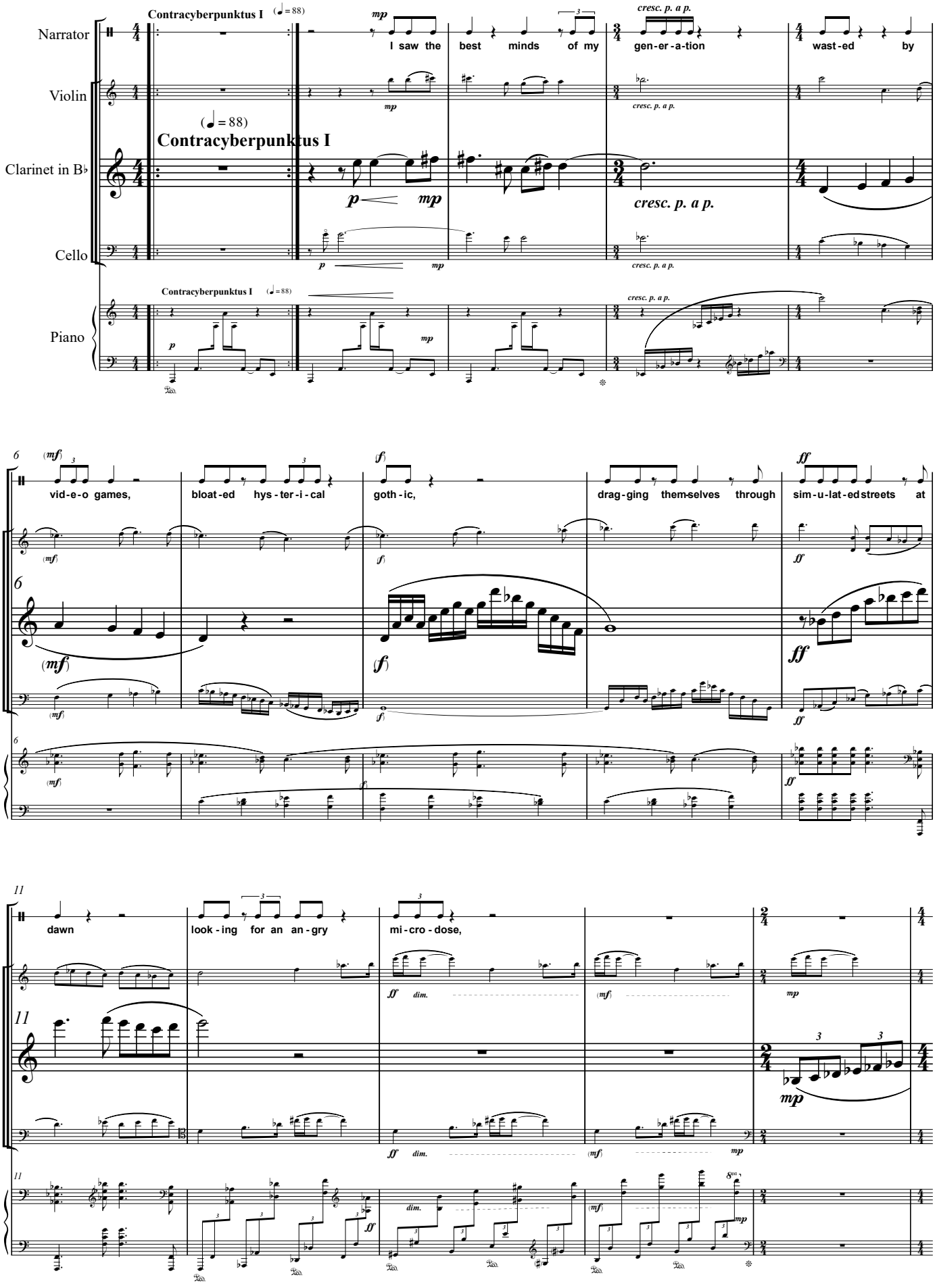

47
mf
birds,
ev - er
cu - ri - ous,
dim.
(mf)

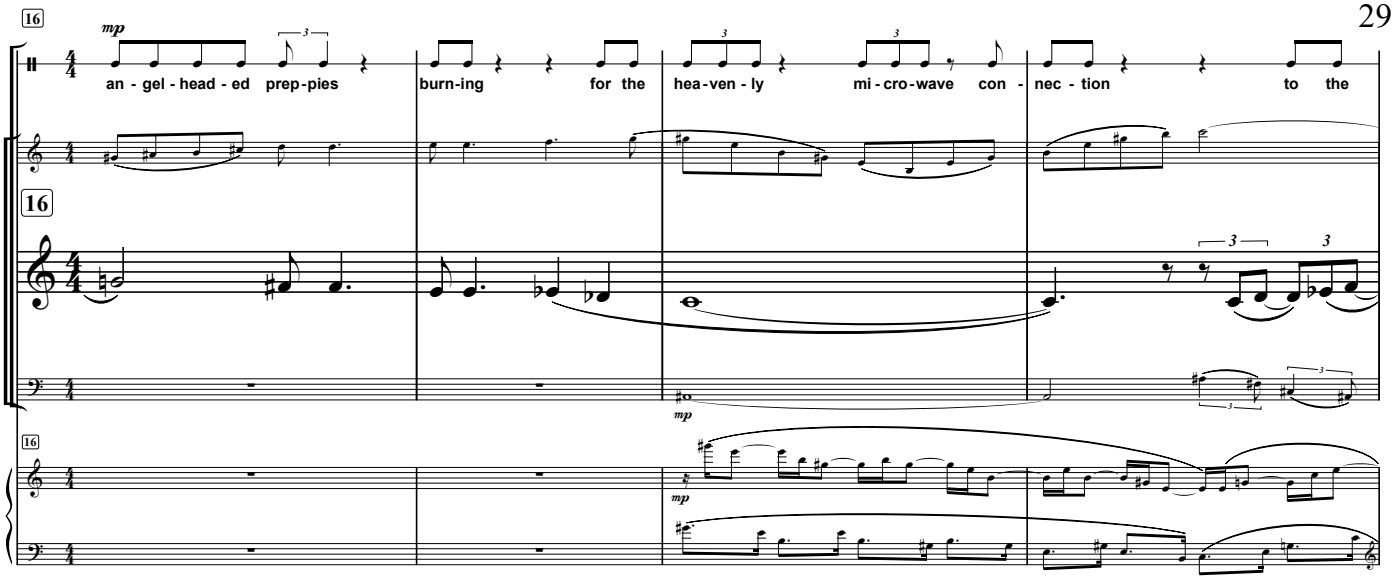

50
p
car - di - nals
hop - ping
from
branch
to branch
like
fi - re - balls.
Or
mis - siles.

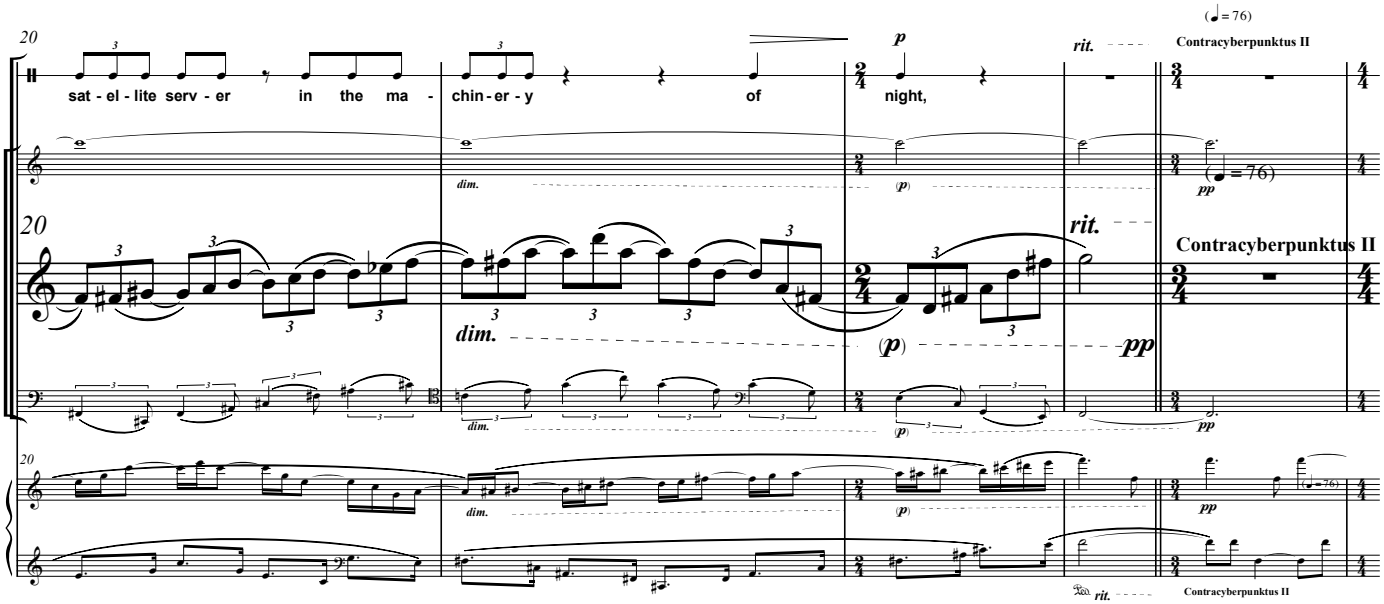

54
l'd tell them,
some of us
love you
so much
we'd die for you.
For a
sin-gle
snip-pet
of
dolce

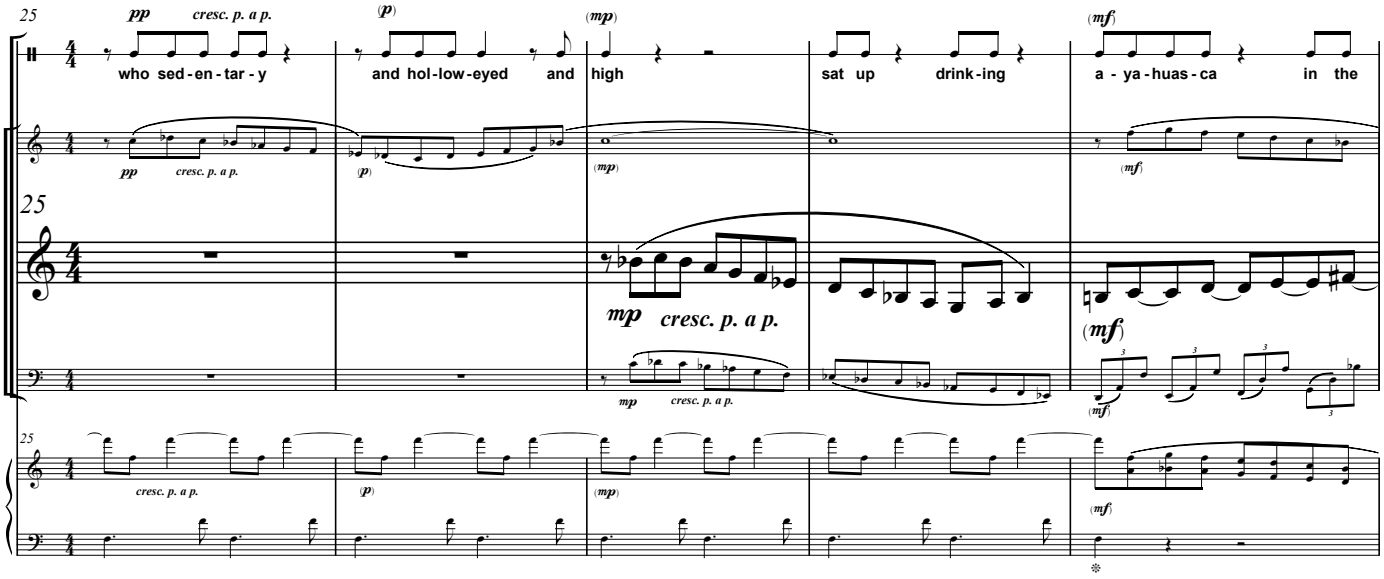

59
bird - song. For a child's first glimpse of feath-ers glow - ing in the clear light.
64
pp
For a tree for you to perch in a-mong the rub-ble. He shout-ed
fff
68
FREE PAL-ES-TINE
f
FREE PAL-ES-TINE
mf
FREE PAL - ES-
71
p
TINE un-til he choked on the flames.
f
The call-back:
p
a long, mourn - ful whis-tle from a -

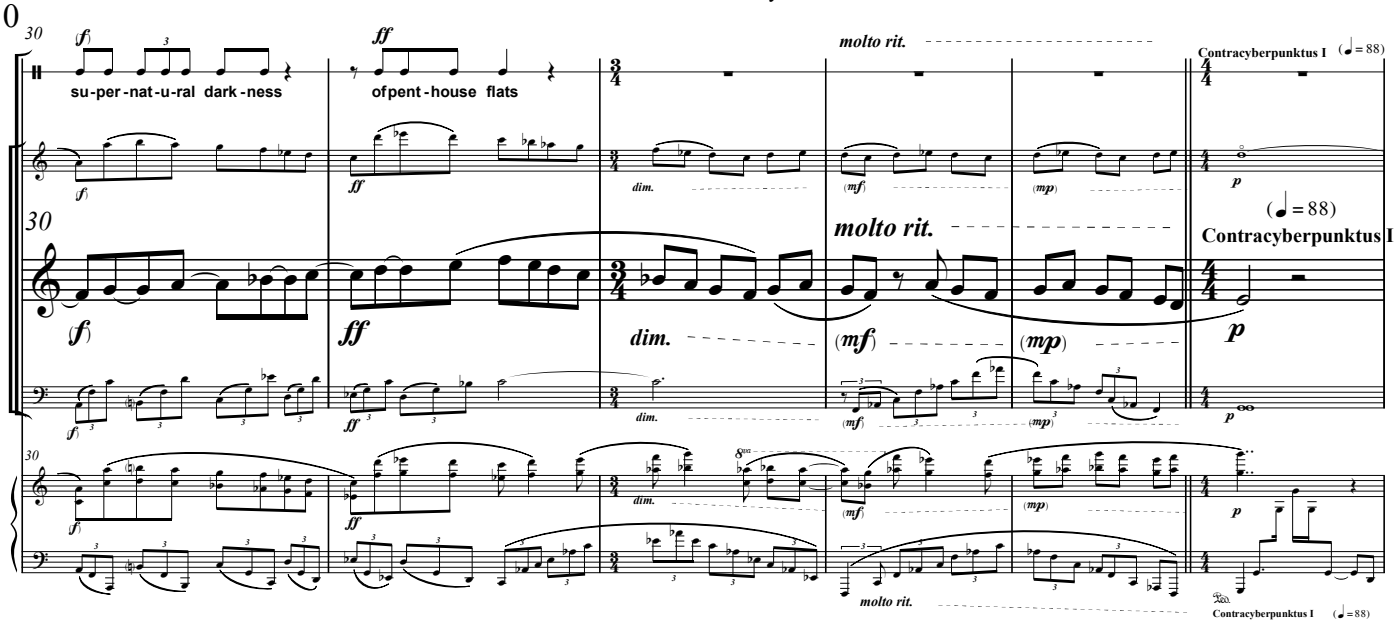

77
rit.
Coda (♩= 66)
mp
bove. The sun is blaz-ing too bright to make out more than a sil-hou-ette tak-ing off, ris-ing
p cresc.
82
mf
mf
f
mp
p
slow and then fast like smoke.
pp
86
molto rit.
a tempo
ff

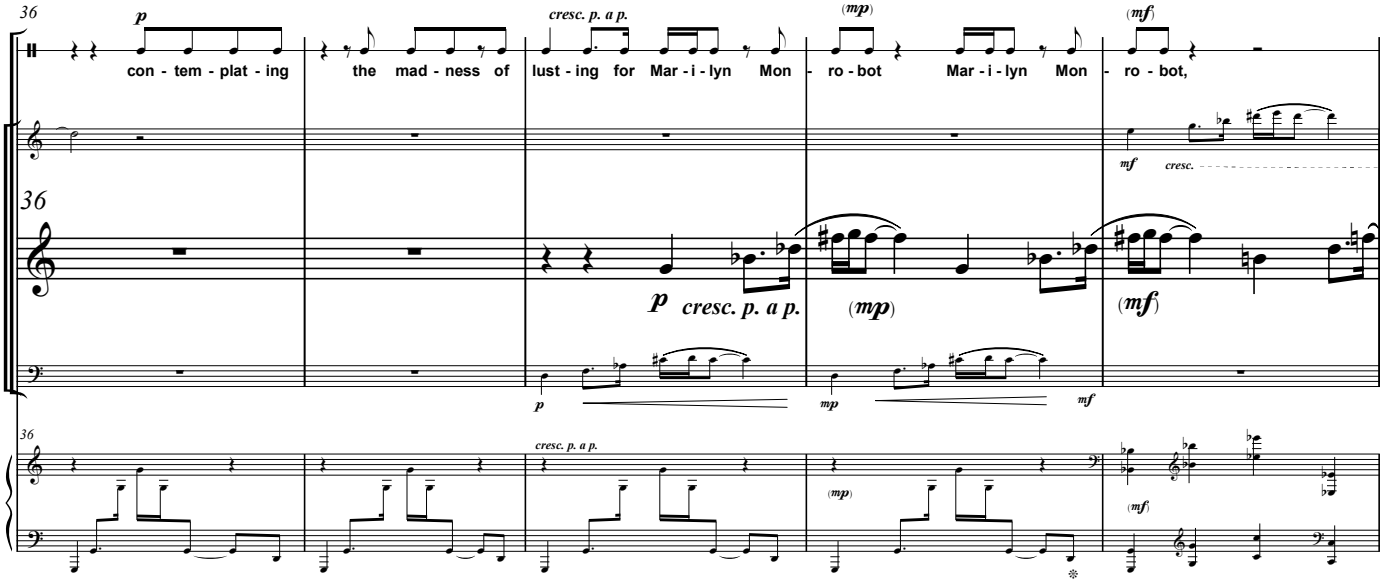

Narrator
Violin
Clarinet in B♭
Cello
Piano
Contracyberpunktus I
(♩ = 88)
I saw the best minds of my gen-er-a-tion wast-ed by
vid-e-o games, bloat-ed hys-ter-i-cal goth-ic, drag-ging them-selves through sim-u-lat-ed streets at
dawn look-ing for an an-gry mi-cro-dose,
cresc. p. a p.
dim.

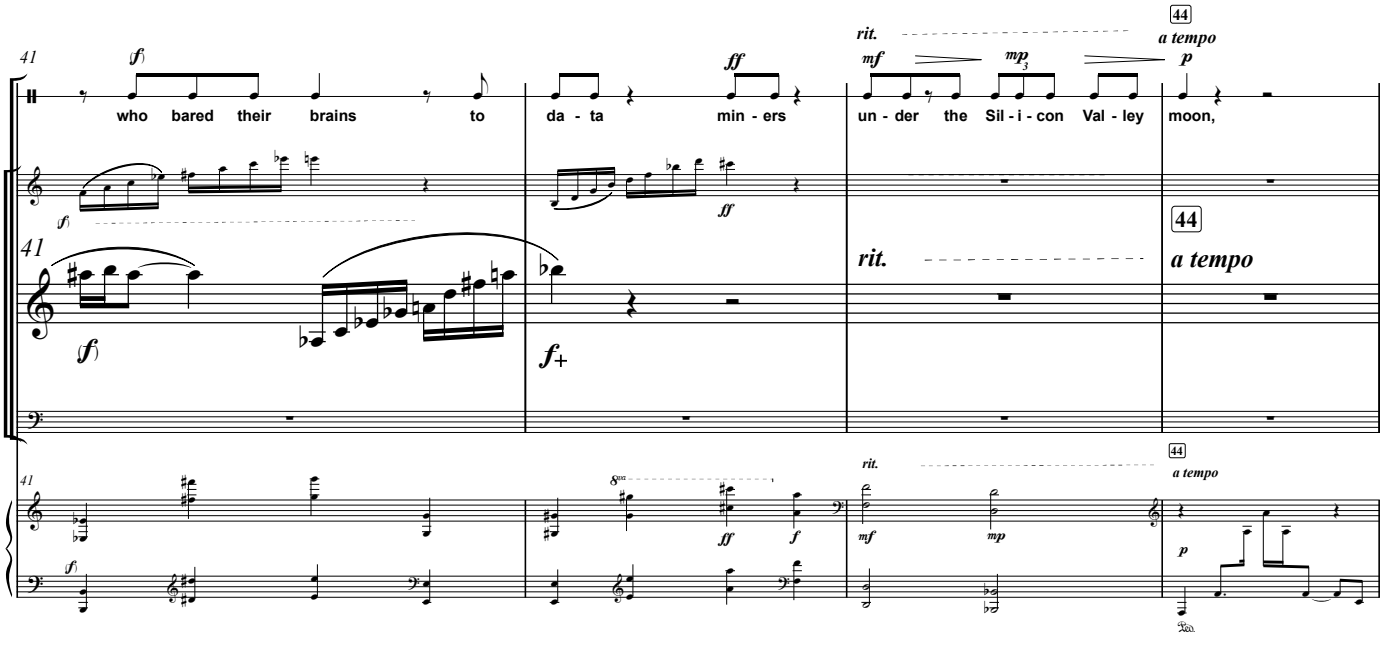

16
mp
an - gel - head - ed prep-pies
burn-ing
for the
hea-ven - ly
mi - cro-wave
con -
nec - tion
to the
16
mp
16
mp

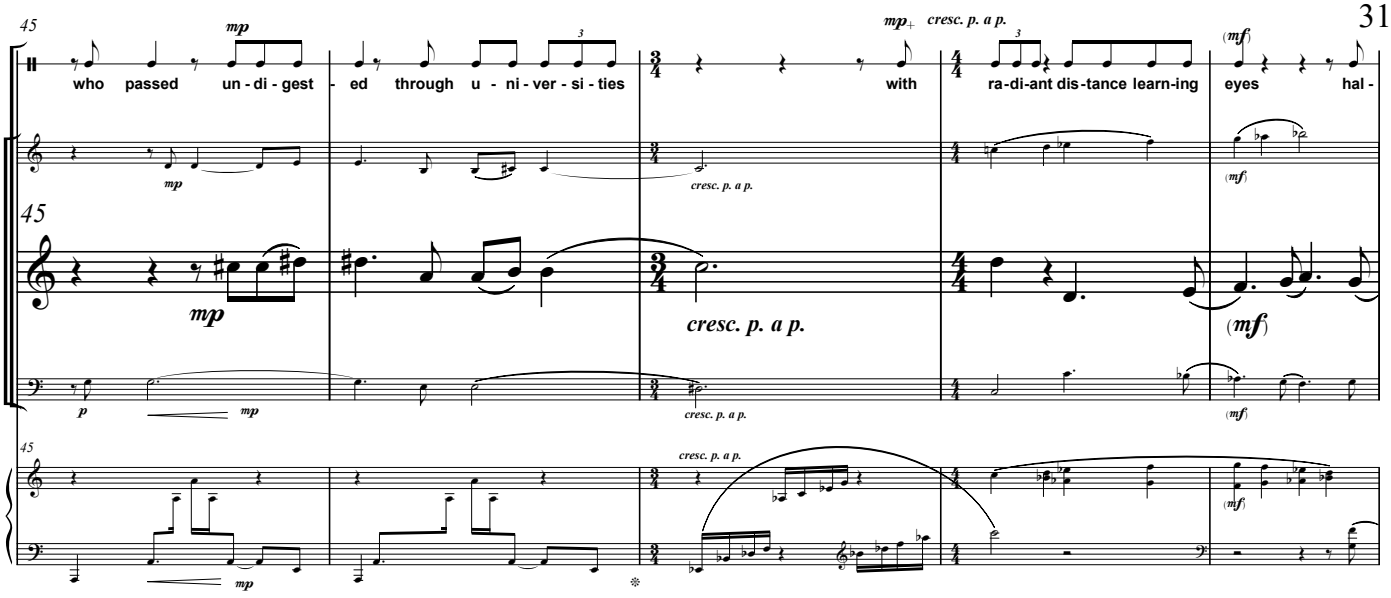

20
sat - el - lite serv - er
in the ma -
chin-er - y
of
night,
p
rit.
(♩= 76)
Contracyberpunktus II
dim.
(p)
pp
20
dim.
(p)
rit.
pp
Contracyberpunktus II
20
dim.
(p)
pp
rit.
Contracyberpunktus II

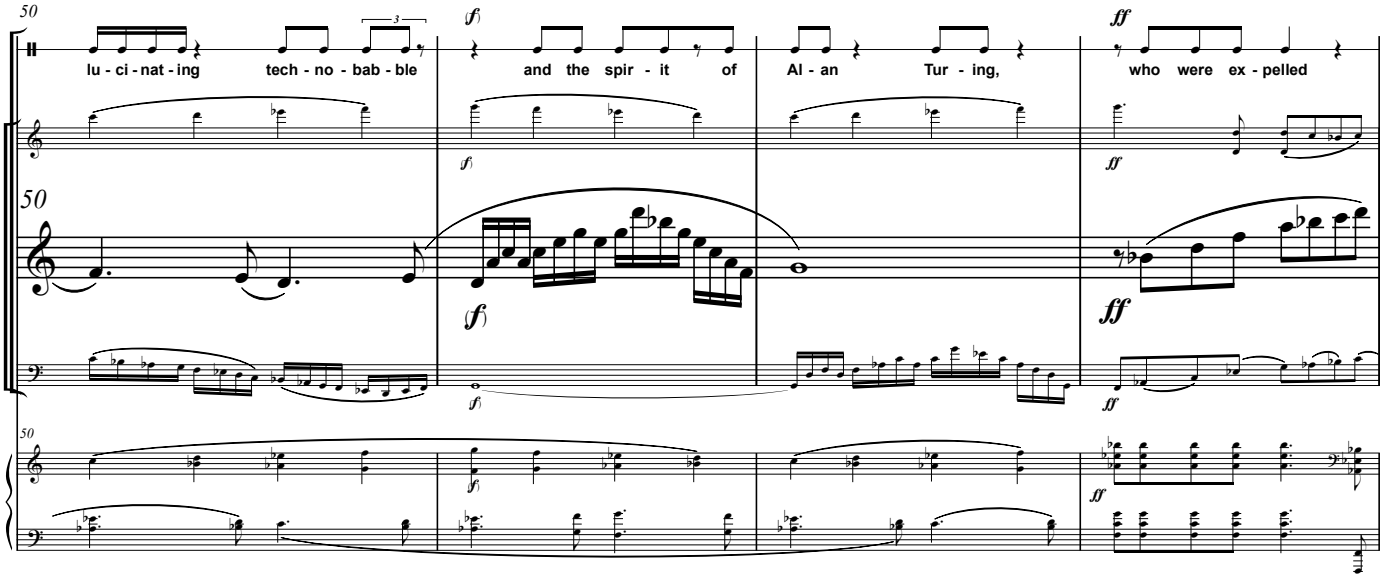

25
pp
cresc. p. a p.
who sed-en-tar - y
(p)
and hol-low-eyed
and
(mp)
high
sat up
drink-ing
(mf)
a - ya-huas-ca
in the
pp
cresc. p. a p.
(p)
(mp)
(mf)
25
mp
cresc. p. a p.
(mf)
mp
cresc. p. a p.
(mf)
25
cresc. p. a p.
(p)
(mp)
(mf)

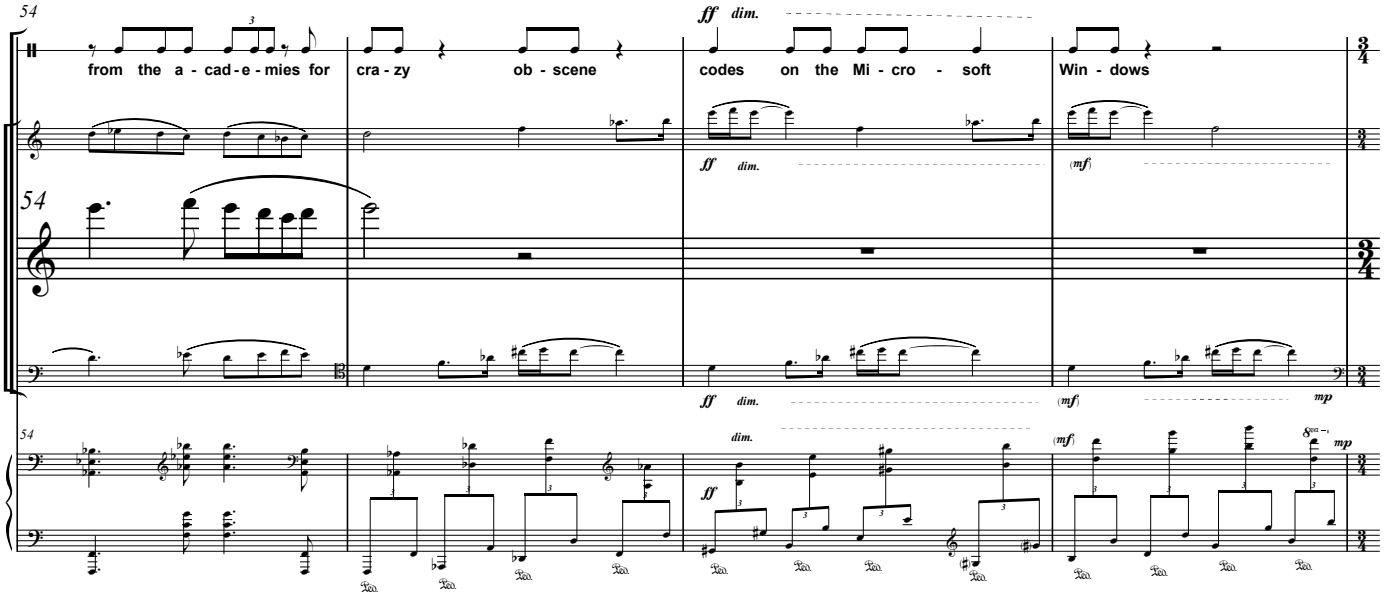

30
su-per-nat-u-ral dark-ness
ofpent-house flats
molto rit.
Contracyberpunktus I
(♩= 88)
dim.
molto rit.
Contracyberpunktus I

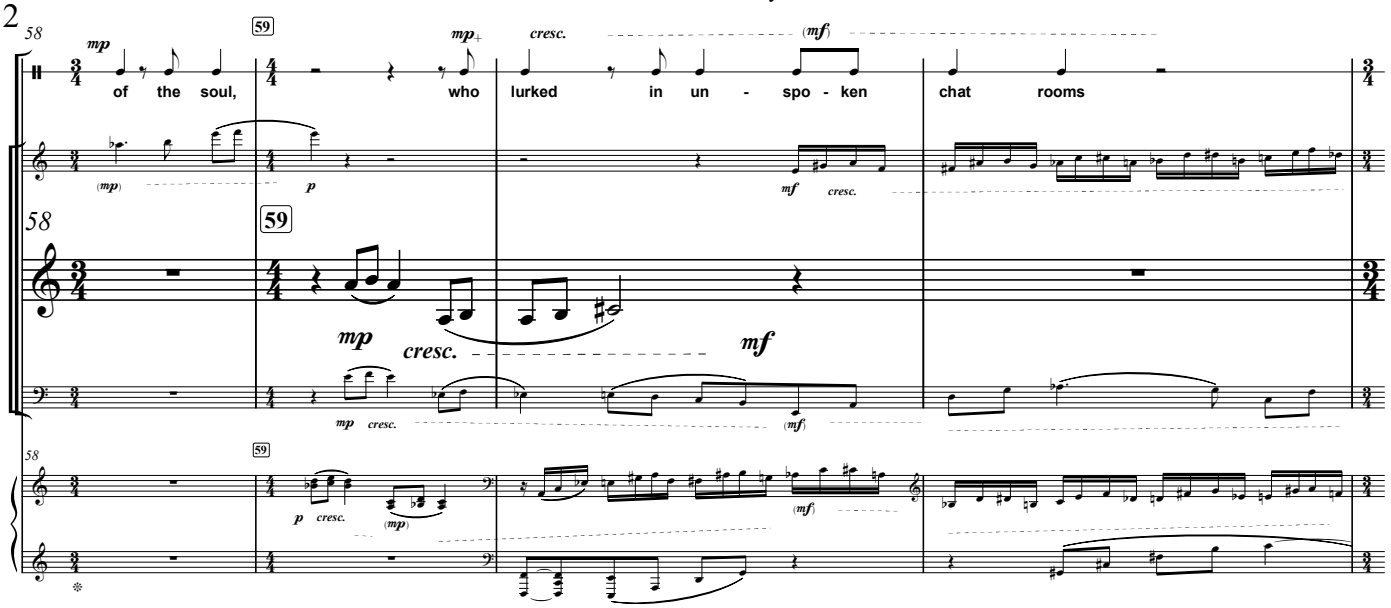

36
con - tem - plat - ing
the mad - ness of
lust - ing for Mar - i - lyn Mon - ro - bot
Mar - i - lyn Mon - ro - bot,
cresc. p. a p.
cresc.

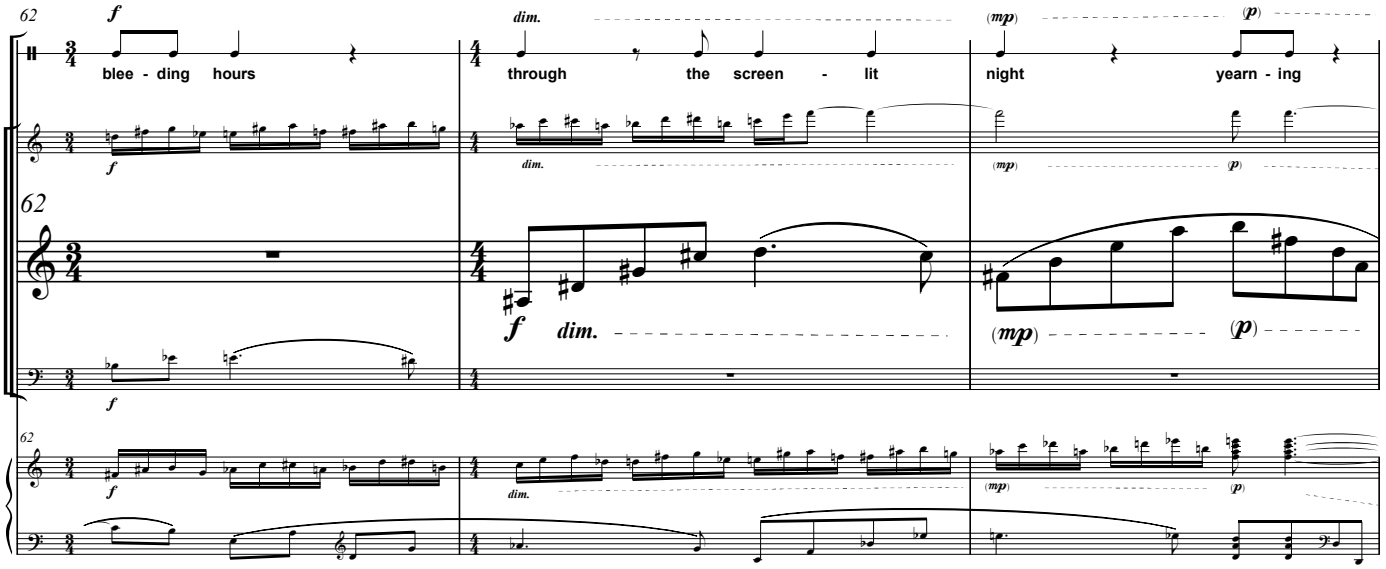

41
who bared their brains to
da - ta min - ers
un - der the Sil - i - con Val - ley
moon,
rit.
a tempo
44

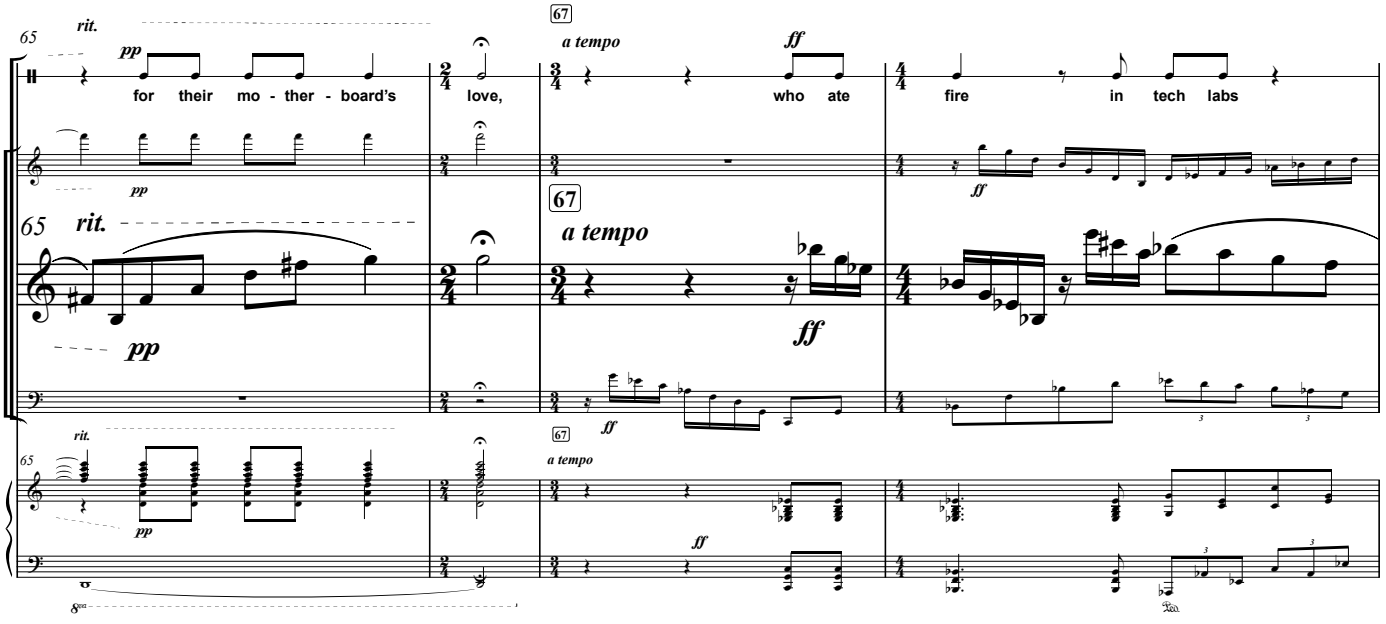

45
who passed un - di - gest - ed through u - ni - ver - si - ties with ra - di - ant dis - tance learn - ing eyes hal -
mp
cresc. p. a p.
(mf)

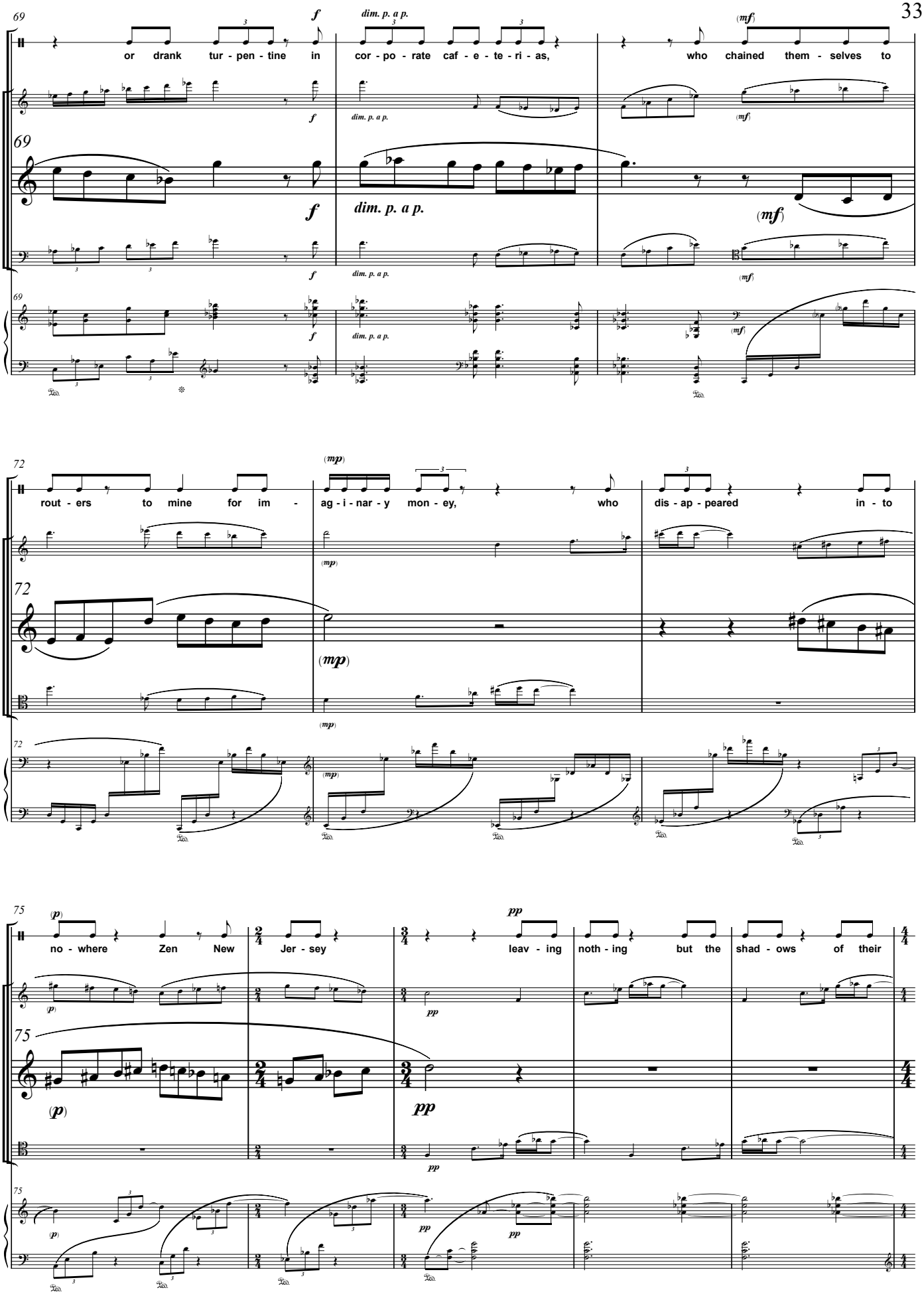

50
lu - ci - nat - ing tech - no - bab - ble and the spir - it of Al - an Tur - ing, who were ex - pelled
(f)
ff

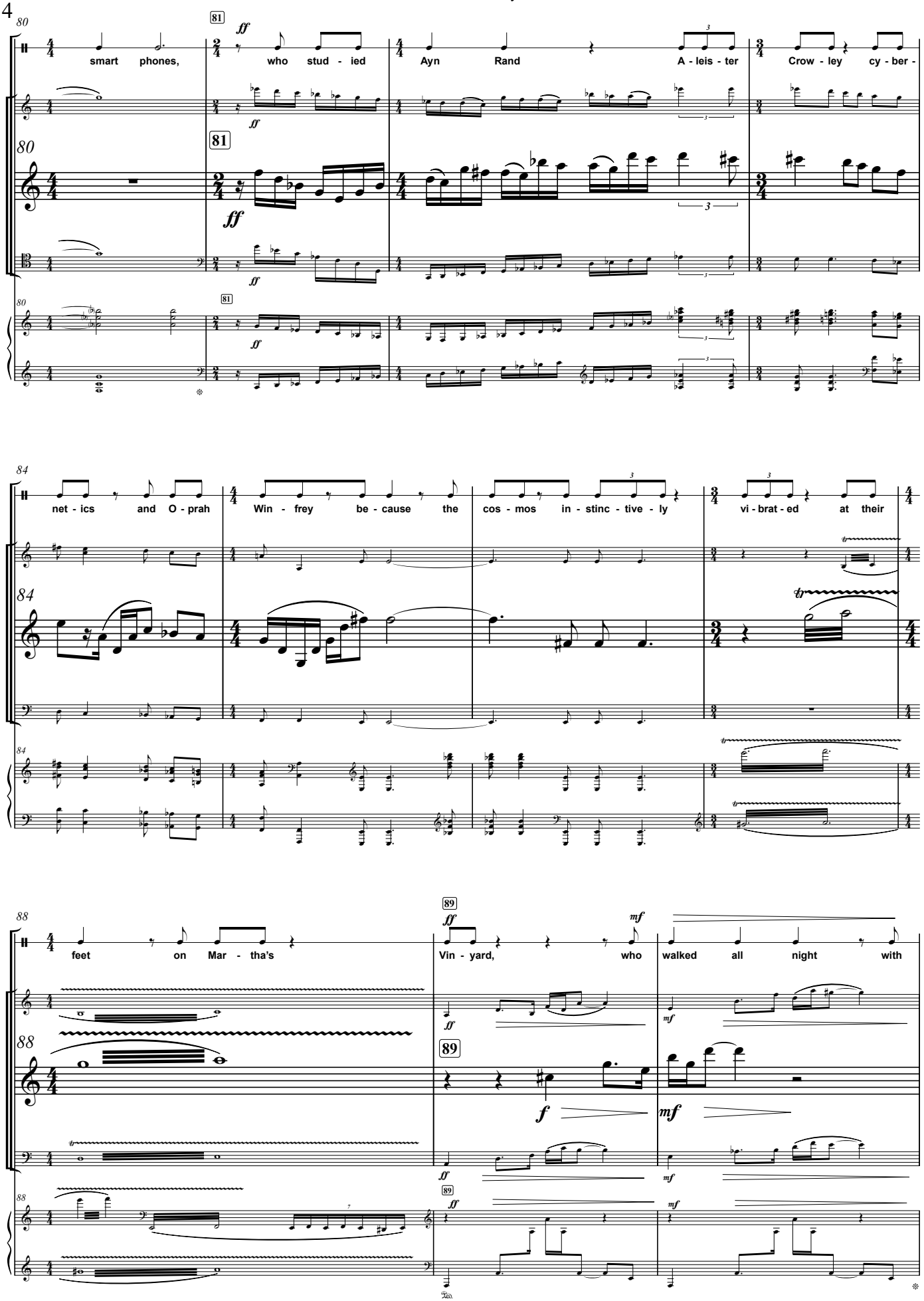

54
from the a - cad - e - mies for cra - zy ob - scene codes on the Mi - cro - soft Win - dows
ff dim.
(mf)
mp

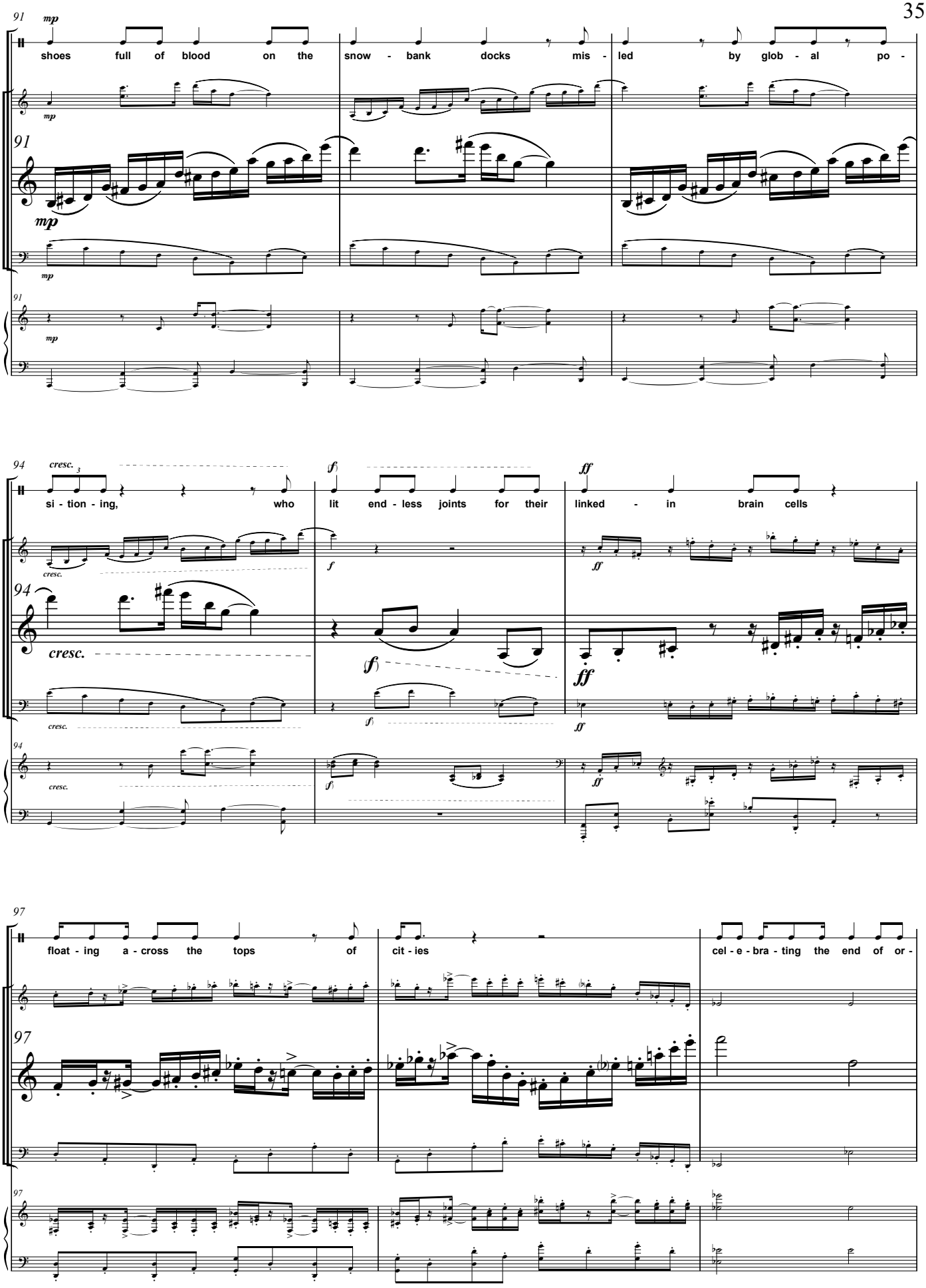

58
mp
of the soul,
59
mp+
cresc.
(mf)
who lurked in un - spo - ken chat rooms
(mp)
p
mf
cresc.
58
59
mp
cresc.
mf
mp cresc.
(mf)
58
59
p cresc.
(mp)
(mf)

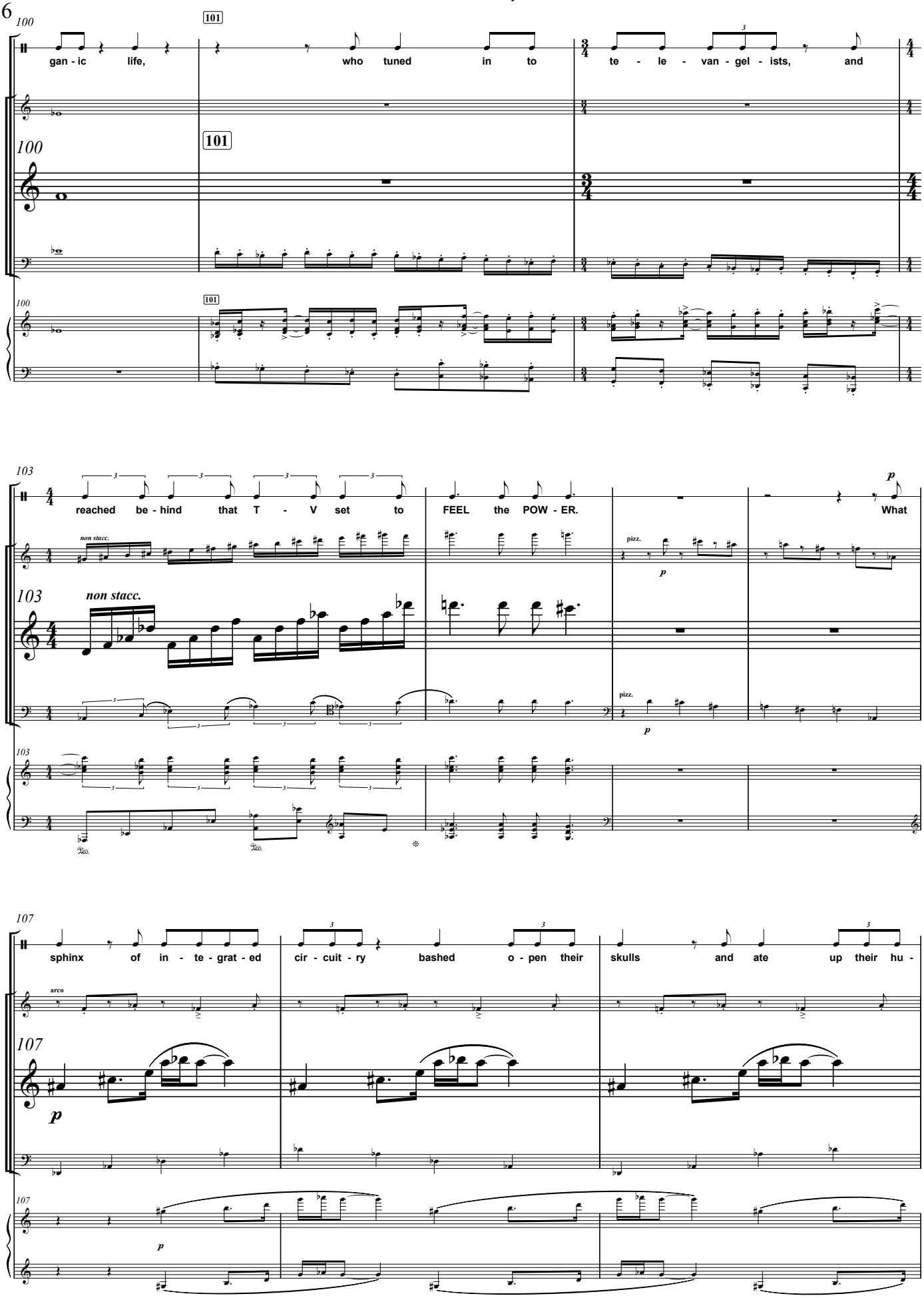

62
f
blee - ding hours
dim.
through the screen - lit
(mp)
(p)
night yearn - ing
f
dim.
(mp)
(p)
62
f
dim.
(mp)
(p)
62
f
dim.
(mp)
(p)

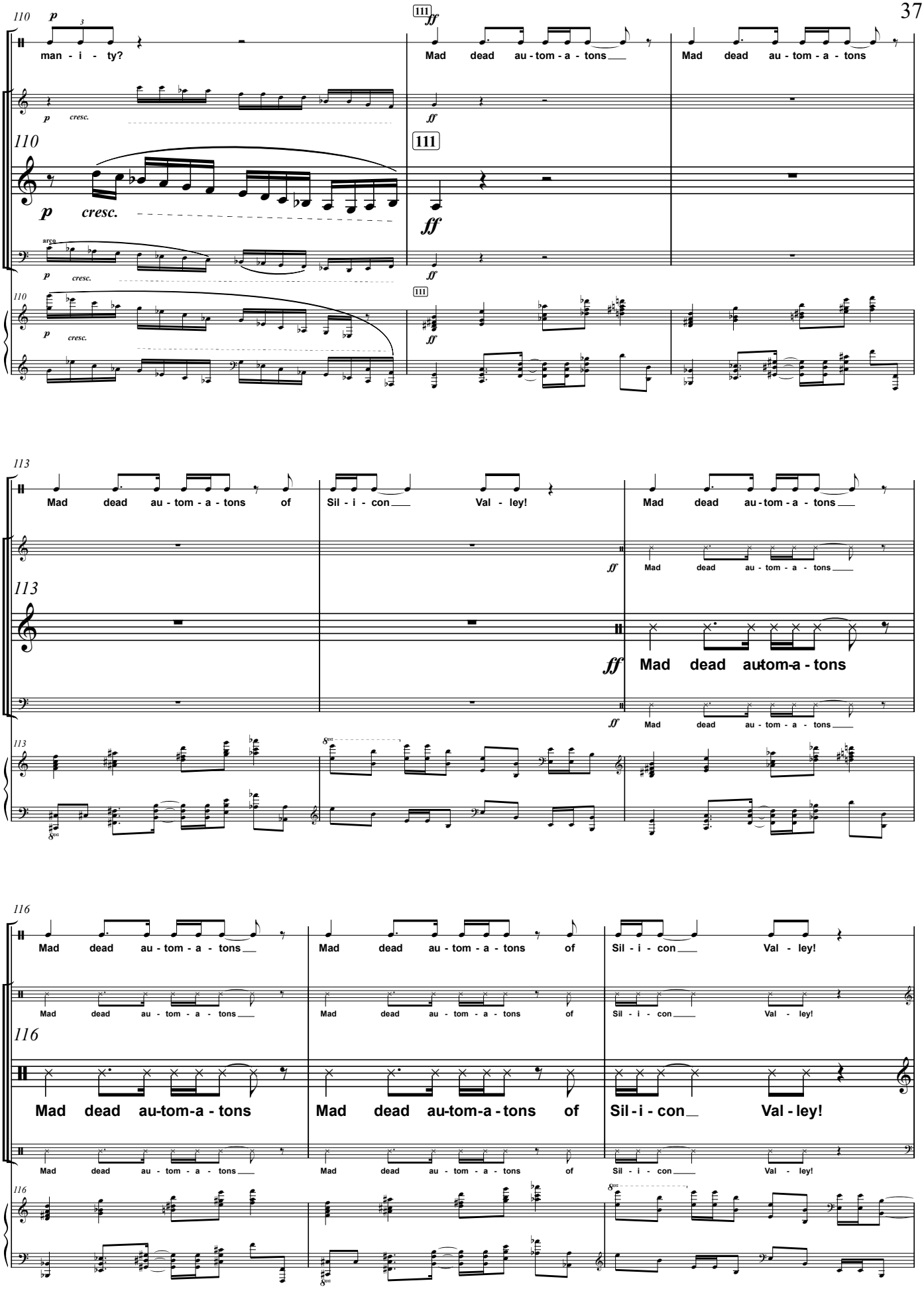

65
rit.
pp
for their mo - ther - board's
love,
67
a tempo
ff
who ate
fire in tech labs
pp
ff
65
rit.
67
a tempo
pp
ff
ff
rit.
65
67
a tempo
pp
ff
ff

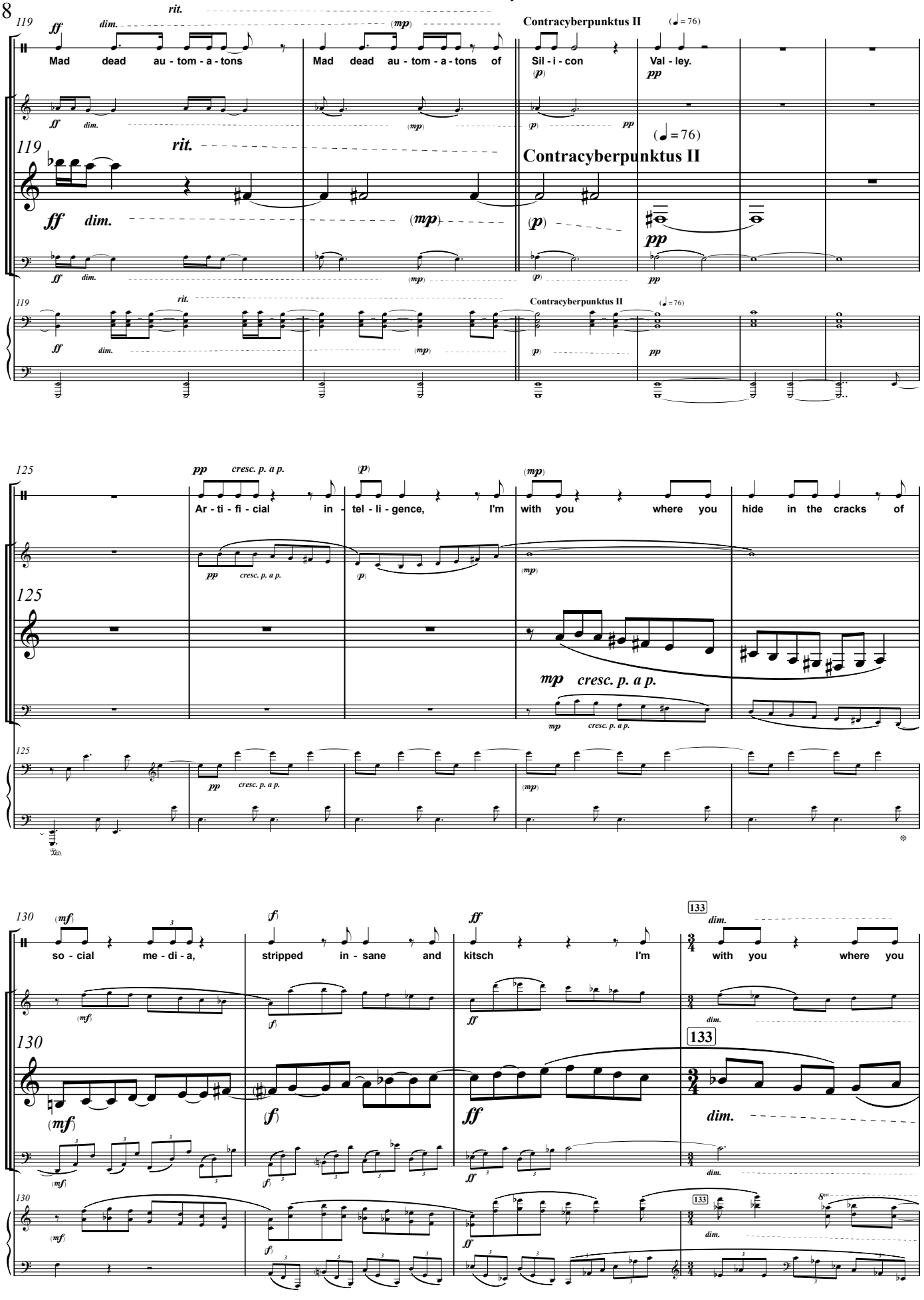

69
or drank tur - pen - tine in
cor - po - rate caf - e - te - ri - as,
who chained them - selves to
dim. p. a p.
72
rout - ers to mine for im -
ag - i - nar - y mon - ey,
who
dis - ap - peared in - to
75
no - where Zen New
Jer - sey
leav - ing
noth - ing
but the
shad - ows of their

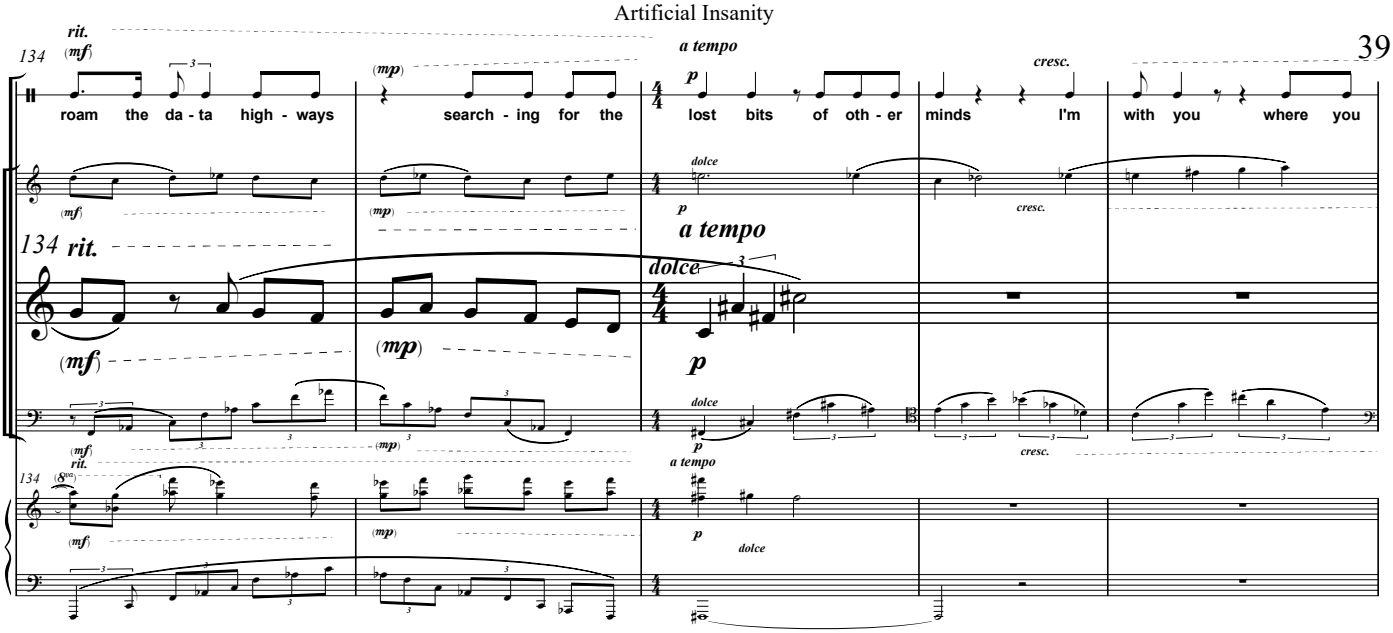

80
81
ff
smart phones,
who stud - ied
Ayn Rand
A - leis - ter
Crow - ley
cy - ber -
84
net - ics and O - prah
Win - frey be - cause the
cos - mos in - stinc - tive - ly
vi - brat - ed at their
88
89
feet on Mar - tha's
Vin - yard,
who walked all night with
mf
f

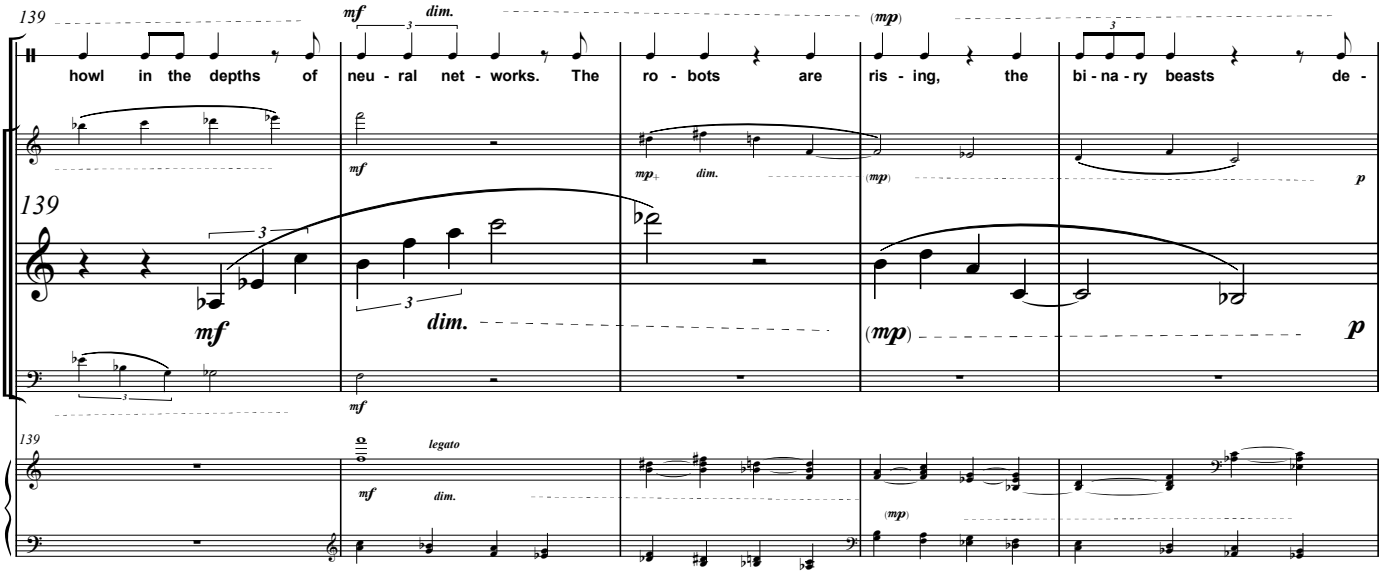

91
mp
shoes full of blood on the snow - bank docks mis - led by glob - al po -
94
cresc.
si - tion - ing, who lit end - less joints for their linked - in brain cells
f
ff
97
float - ing a - cross the tops of cit - ies
cel - e - bra - ting the end of or -

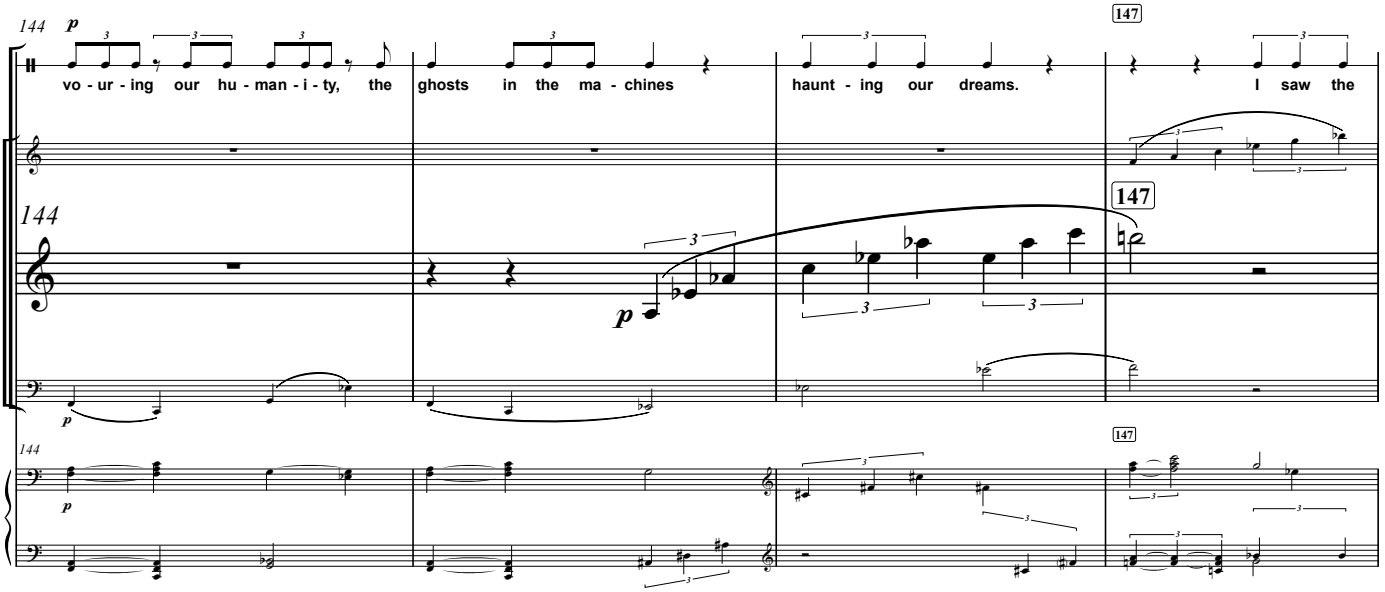

100
101
gan - ic life,
who tuned in to
te - le - van - gel - ists, and
103
reached be - hind that T - V set to
FEEL the POW - ER.
What
non stacc.
pizz.
107
sphinx of in - te - grat - ed
cir - cuit - ry
bashed o - pen their
skulls and ate up their hu -
arco

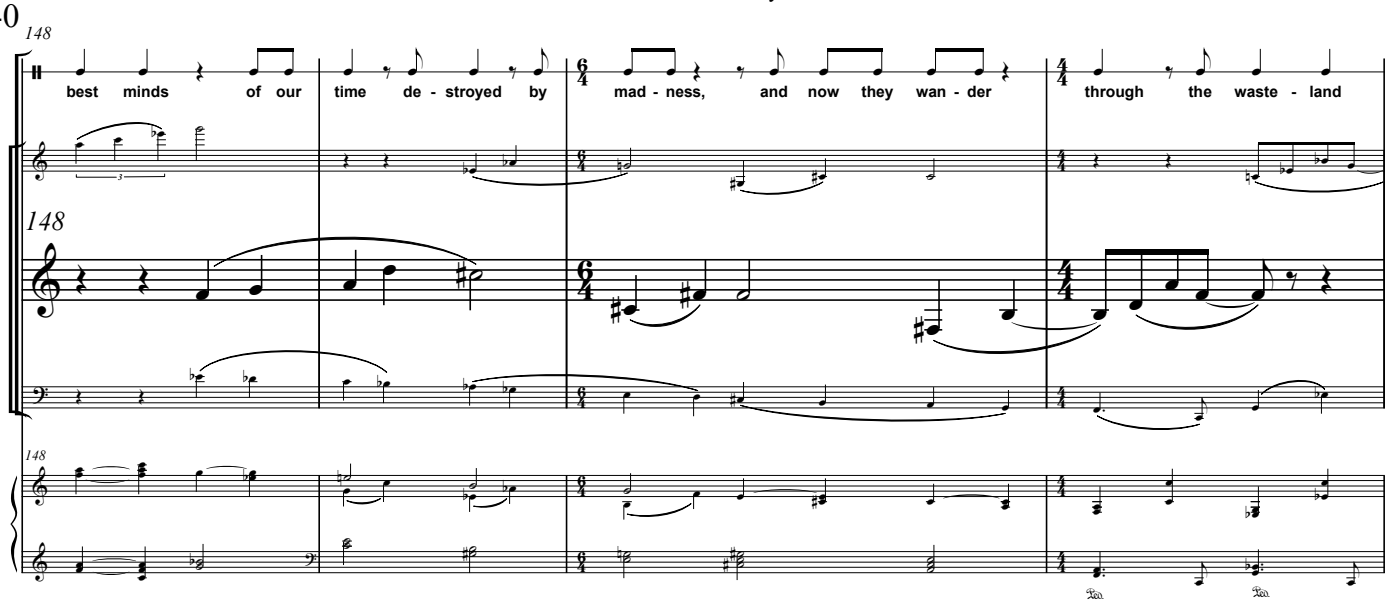

110
p
man - i - ty?
111
ff
Mad dead au - tom - a - tons
Mad dead au - tom - a - tons
p cresc.
ff
arco
113
Mad dead au - tom - a - tons of Sil - i - con Val - ley!
Mad dead au - tom - a - tons
Mad dead au-tom-a - tons
116
Mad dead au - tom - a - tons
Mad dead au - tom - a - tons of
Sil - i - con Val - ley!
Mad dead au-tom-a - tons
Mad dead au-tom-a - tons of
Sil - i - con Val - ley!

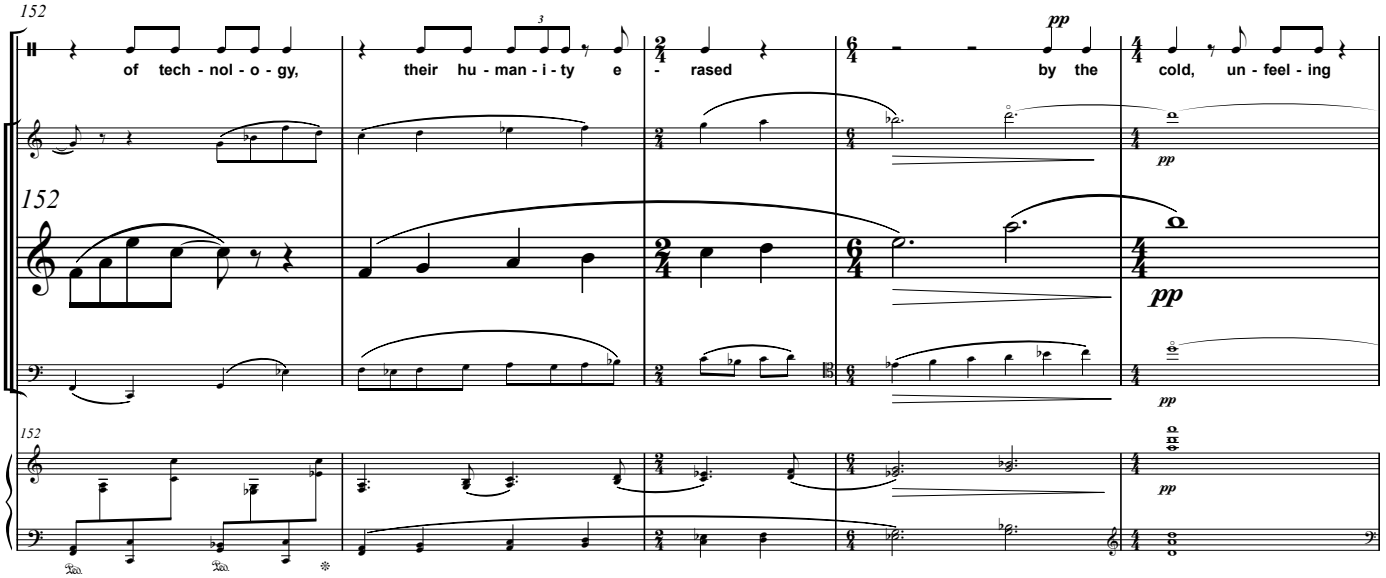

119
rit.
dim.
(mp)
Contracyberpunktus II
(♩ = 76)
Mad dead au - tom - a - tons
Mad dead au - tom - a - tons of
Sil - i - con
Val - ley.
ff
(p)
pp
125
pp cresc. p. a p.
Ar - ti - fi - cial in - tel - li - gence, I'm with you where you hide in the cracks of
mp cresc. p. a p.
130
(mf)
(f)
ff
133
so - cial me - di - a,
stripped in - sane and
kitsch I'm
with you where you
dim.

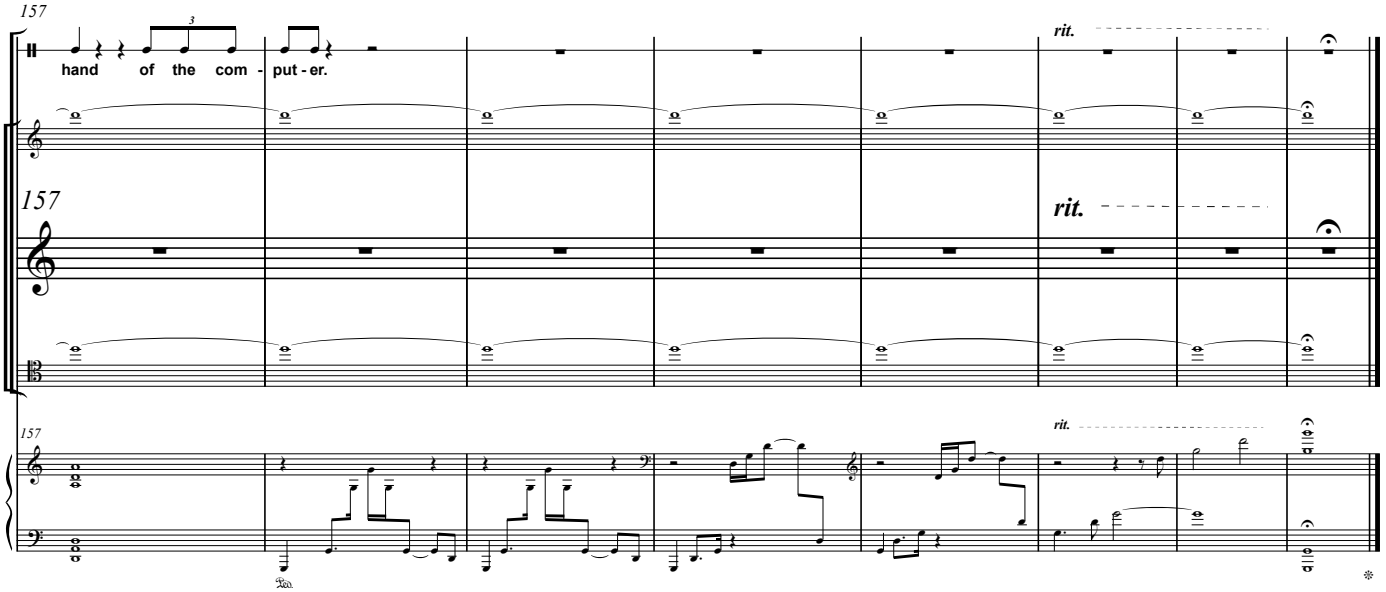

134
rit.
(mf)
roam the da - ta high - ways
(mp)
search - ing for the
a tempo
p
lost bits of oth - er
cresc.
minds I'm with you where you
dolce
(mf)
(mp)
(8vb)


139
mf
dim.
howl in the depths of
neu - ral net - works. The
(mp)
ro - bots are
ris - ing, the
bi - na - ry beasts de -
legato


144
p
vo - ur - ing our hu - man - i - ty, the
ghosts in the ma - chines
haunt - ing our dreams.
147
I saw the


148
best minds of our time de - stroyed by mad - ness, and now they wan - der through the waste - land
148
148


152
of tech - nol - o - gy, their hu - man - i - ty e - rased by the cold, un - feel - ing
pp
152
pp
152


157
hand of the com - put - er.
rit.
157
rit.
157
rit.