Family Portraits

by

Doug Davis

I. My Letter to the World (Emily Dickinson)
II. Untamed Portrait (Shona Doyle)
III. To be away (Adele Davis)
(Interlude)
IV. There Is Only Love (Doug Davis)
V. Alleluia (Doug Davis)

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Doug Davis: Family Portraits

Composition title and movements: Family Portraits (2000)

I. My Letter to the World (Emily Dickinson)
II. Untamed Portrait (Shona Doyle)
III. To be away in May (Adele Davis)
Interlude
IV. There Is Only Love (Doug Davis)
V. Alleluia (Doug Davis)

The initial impetus for this song cycle was a poem from my daughter. It began:

Chaotic canvas gushing imprecise

I immediately recognized she was talking my language and began the most precise matter of notating music. Hearing my efforts, my wife Adele handed me a poem that she created after the untimely death of a friend from cancer. We were her principal care-givers during her final seven months when she required 24/7 assistance. This cathartic song seemed almost to be already written. The first song, Emily Dickinson's "My Letter to the World" seemed to encapsulate a perspective of which I'm familiar. The fourth song was written with the hope that its sentiments might help my student who was facing the most difficult time for any family, the death of a young child. The cycle concludes with an "Alleluia" which includes an entreaty to return from paradise only to extend its glory, certainly a point of view I don't plan to "top".

Complete Texts for vocal works:

I This is my letter to the World
That never wrote to Me
The simple News that Nature told
With tender Majesty
Her Message is committed
To Hands I cannot see
For love of her
Sweet countrymen
Judge tenderly of Me
(Emily Dickinson)

II "Untamed portrait"
Chaotic canvas
Gushing
Imprecise
Screaming hues need no explanation
Brush stroke blue
Precise, brilliant, still
Yearning
(Shona Doyle Milazo)

III To be away, in May
To be gone away, in May
Means to lose so much

To miss the spring
To miss the news
To trade away—
Forsaking friendship's binding force
To escape the pain of pending loss
While spring's eternal life flows forth
Perplexing though it may be to me-

Why my senses reel
Why my balance tilts
So strong I've always said I feel
That I wish to cry
In May.
(Adele Davis)

IV There is only love.
There is only peace.
All things abide in love.
Let our love surround you.
Let our care enfold you.
Let us hold and comfort,
we who so dearly love you....
for within you is the light of the world.
(Doug Davis)

V Alleluia, alleluia
Alleluia, alleluia
Take flight from Time's frozen light
And float again on breezes blown
By wings of the earth's revolving
By life's ever enfolding
Into yet another alleluia
Alleluia
(Doug Davis)

Review: "Doug Davis exhibited a nuanced lyricism, carefully fitted to poems of mourning and transcendence, disciplined in their craft but free enough to express deep feeling." Mike Greenberg, San Antonio Express-News

Family Portraits, selected as part of the Society of Composers Incorporated (SCI) Performers Series, was recorded by Lynn Eustis, soprano and Elvia Puccinelli, piano, on the CD entitled "Portraits" and was released by Capstone Records. (CPS-8792) (2008)

My Letter to the World

Flexible and expressive

♩ = 44

Music by Doug Davis
Text by Emily Dickinson

1

pp

rit.

Ped.

*Note: Sustaining pedal remains depressed until a new pedal (ped.) or release (*) is indicated

4

mp

This is my let - ter to the world That

Ped. Ped. Ped.

7

mf

nev - er wrote to Me

r.h. l.h. r.h. l.h.

Ped. Ped. Ped.

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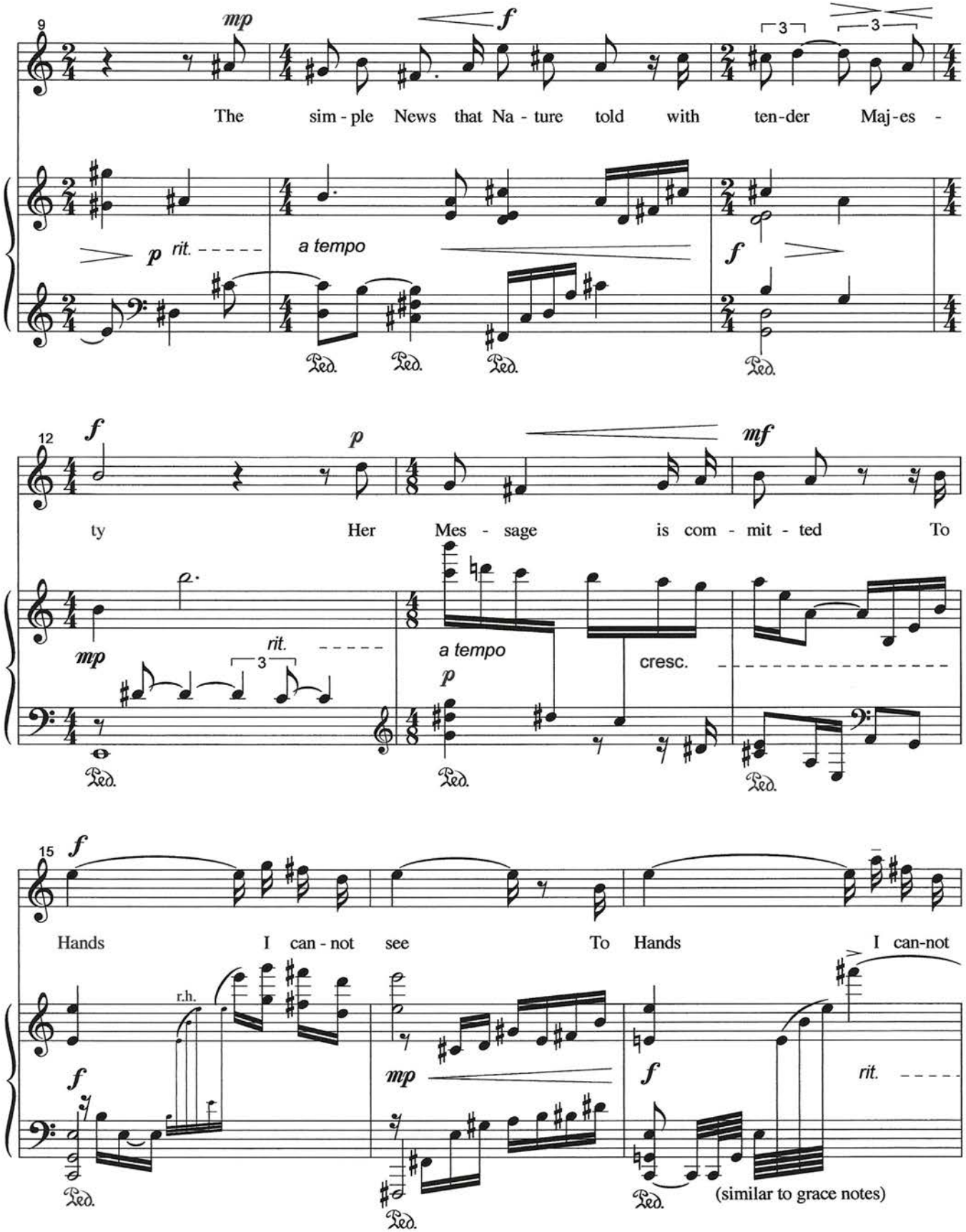
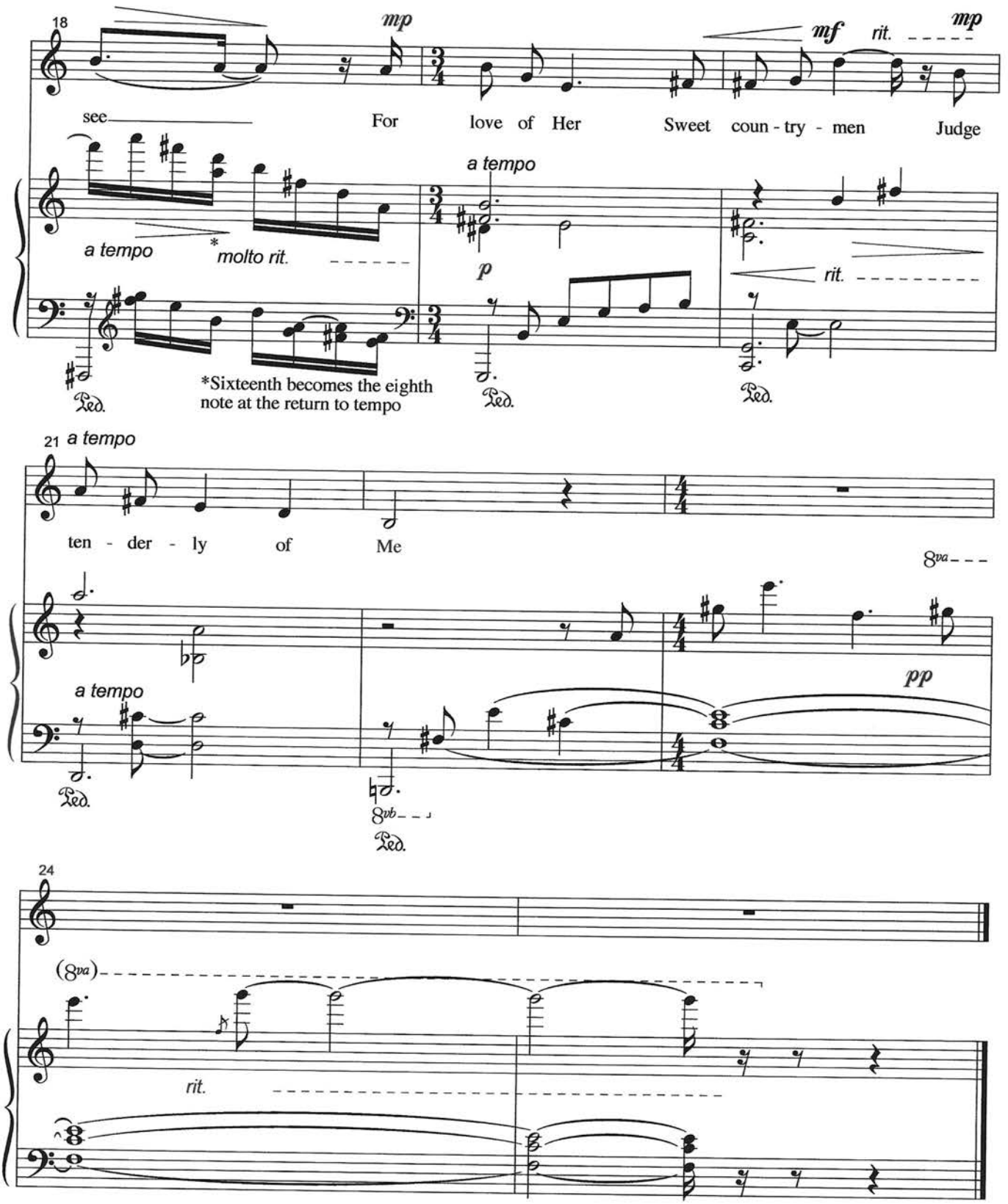
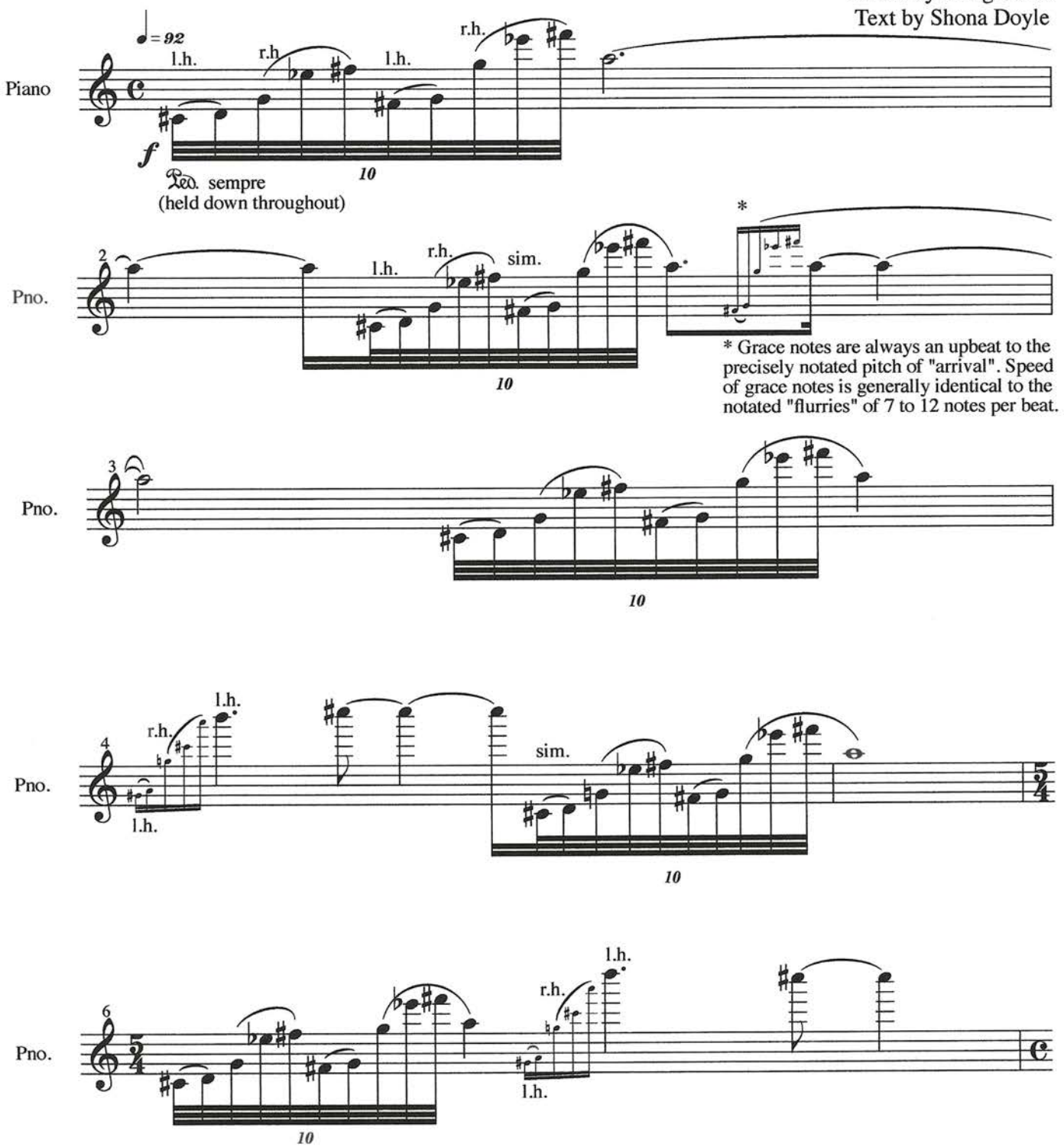
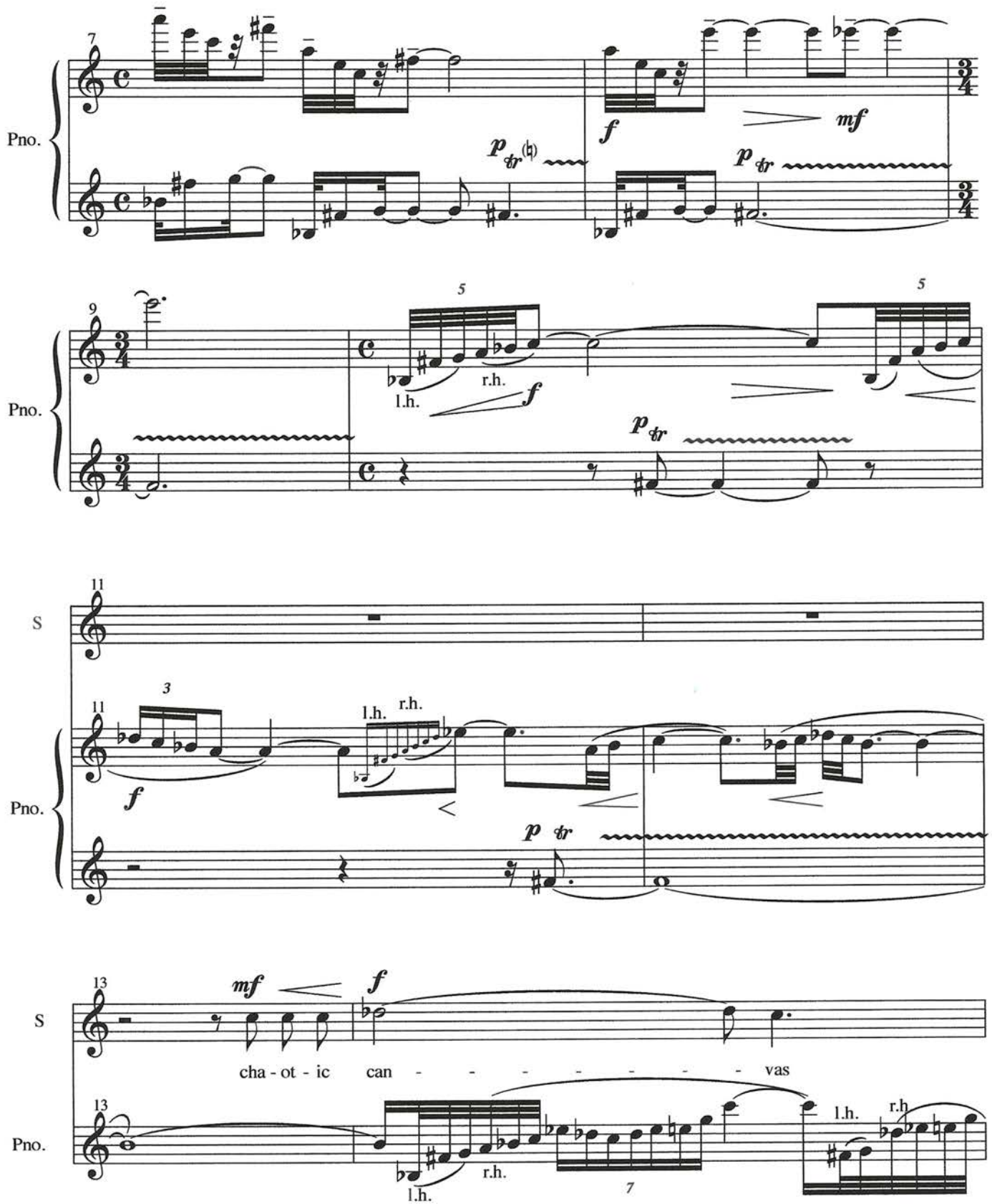

9
mp
f
The sim - ple News that Na - ture told with ten-der Maj-es -
p rit.
a tempo
f
12
f
p
mf
ty Her Mes - sage is com - mit - ted To
mp
rit.
a tempo
p
cresc.
15
f
Hands I can - not see To Hands I can-not
r.h.
f
mp
f
rit.
(similar to grace notes)

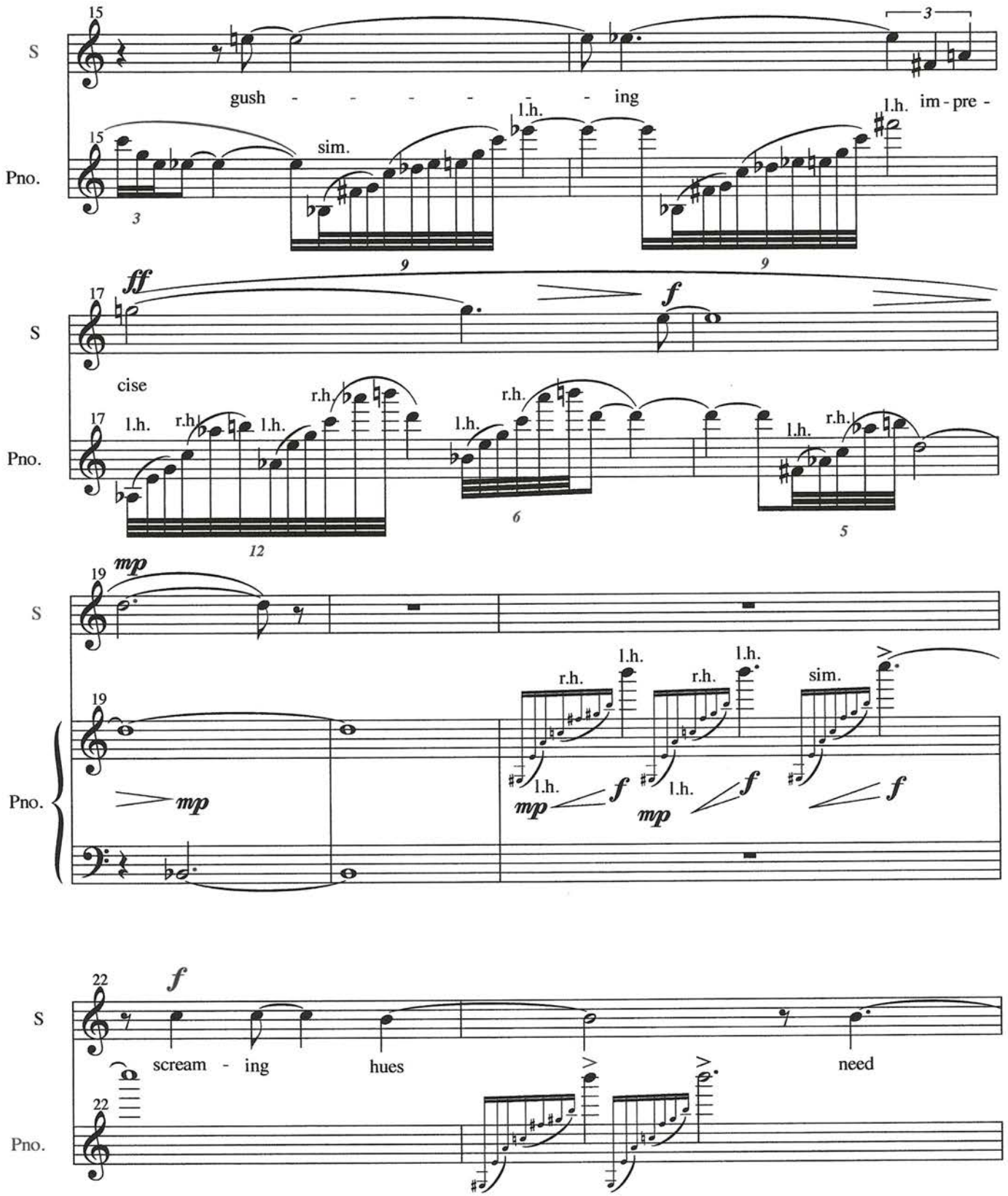

18
mp
mf
rit.
mp
see
For love of Her Sweet coun - try - men Judge
a tempo
a tempo
molto rit.
*
p
rit.
Ped.
*Sixteenth becomes the eighth note at the return to tempo
Ped.
Ped.
21 a tempo
ten - der - ly of Me
8va
a tempo
pp
Ped.
8vb
Ped.
24
(8va)
rit.

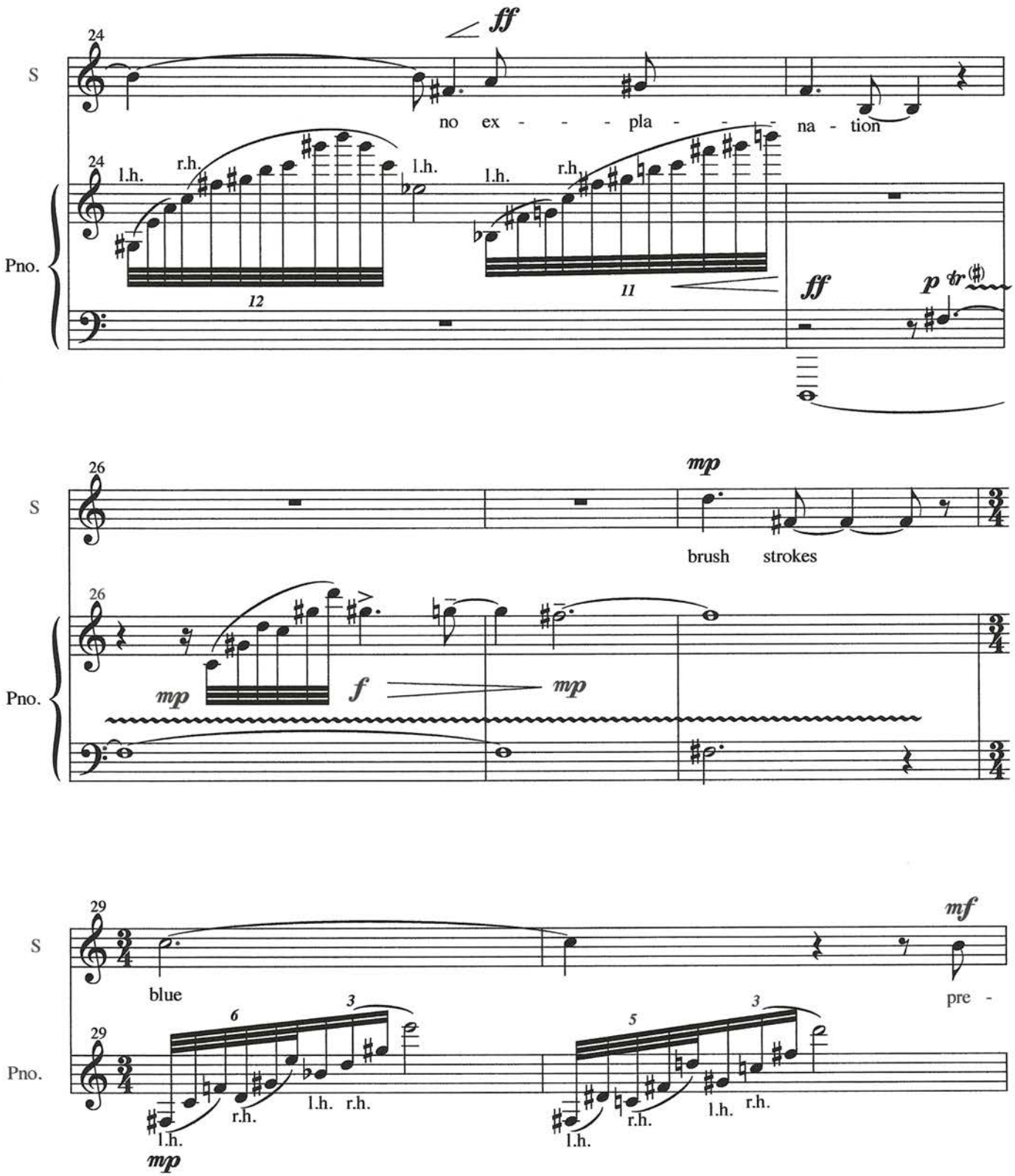
Untamed Portrait

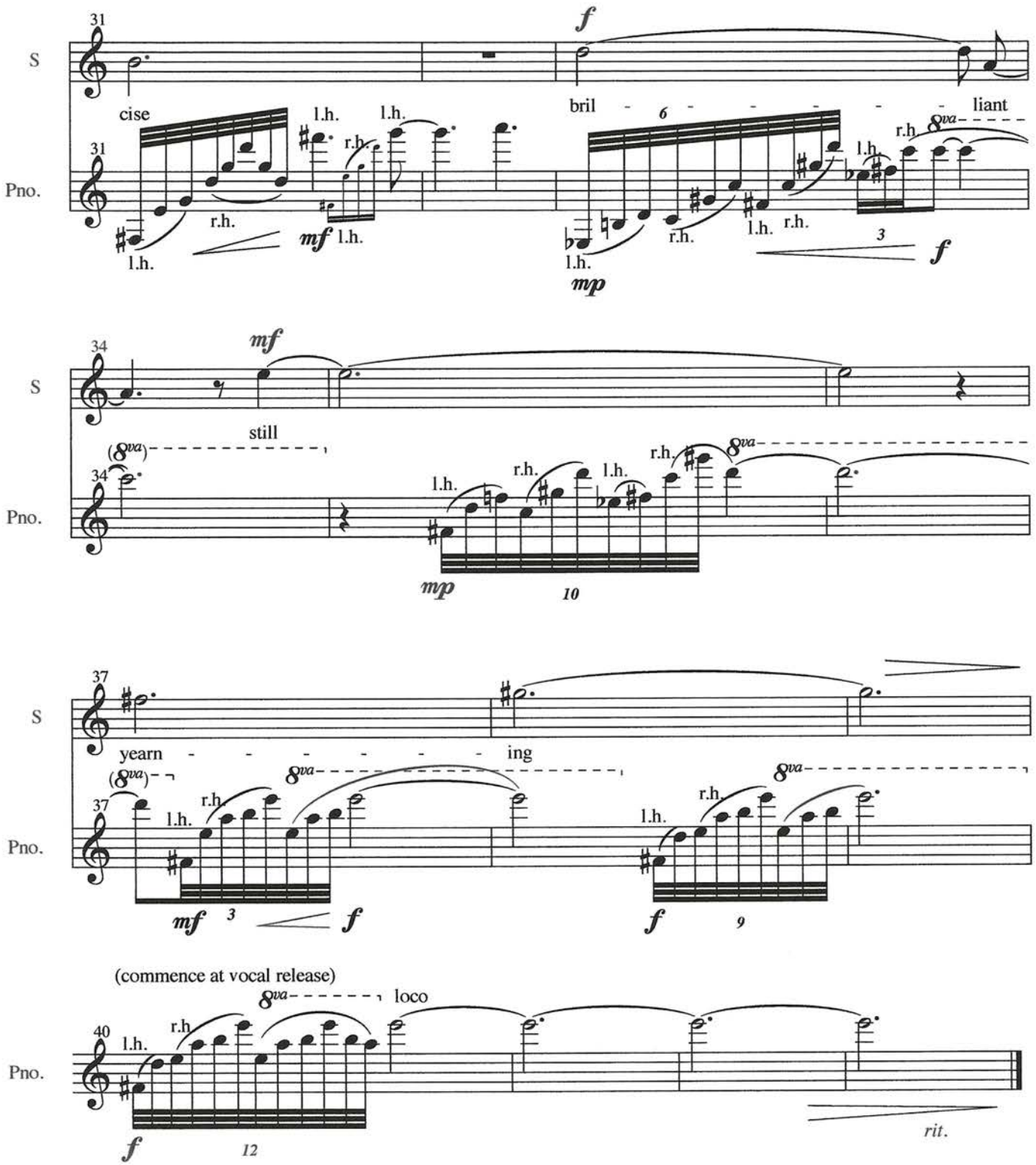
Music by Doug Davis
Text by Shona Doyle




7
Pno.
p tr (♮)
f
mf
p tr
9
5
5
Pno.
l.h.
r.h.
f
p tr
11
S
11
3
Pno.
l.h.
r.h.
f
p tr
13
S
mf
f
cha - ot - ic can - - - - - - - - vas
13
Pno.
l.h.
r.h.
7
l.h.
r.h

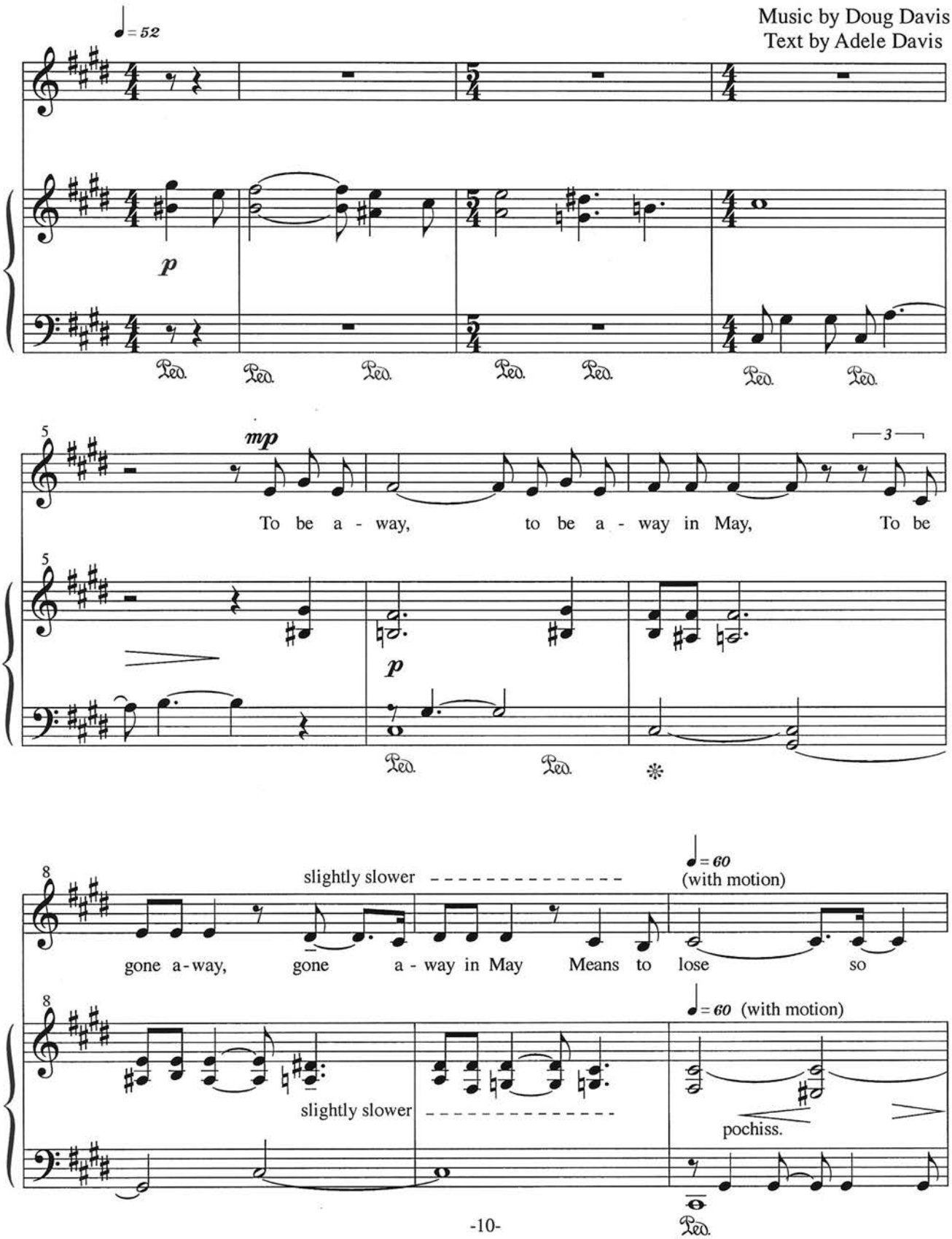

15
S
gush - - - - - - - ing
3
l.h. im - pre -
Pno.
sim.
l.h.
9
9
17
ff
f
cise
r.h.
l.h.
12
6
5
19
mp
sim.
mp
f
22
scream - ing
hues
need

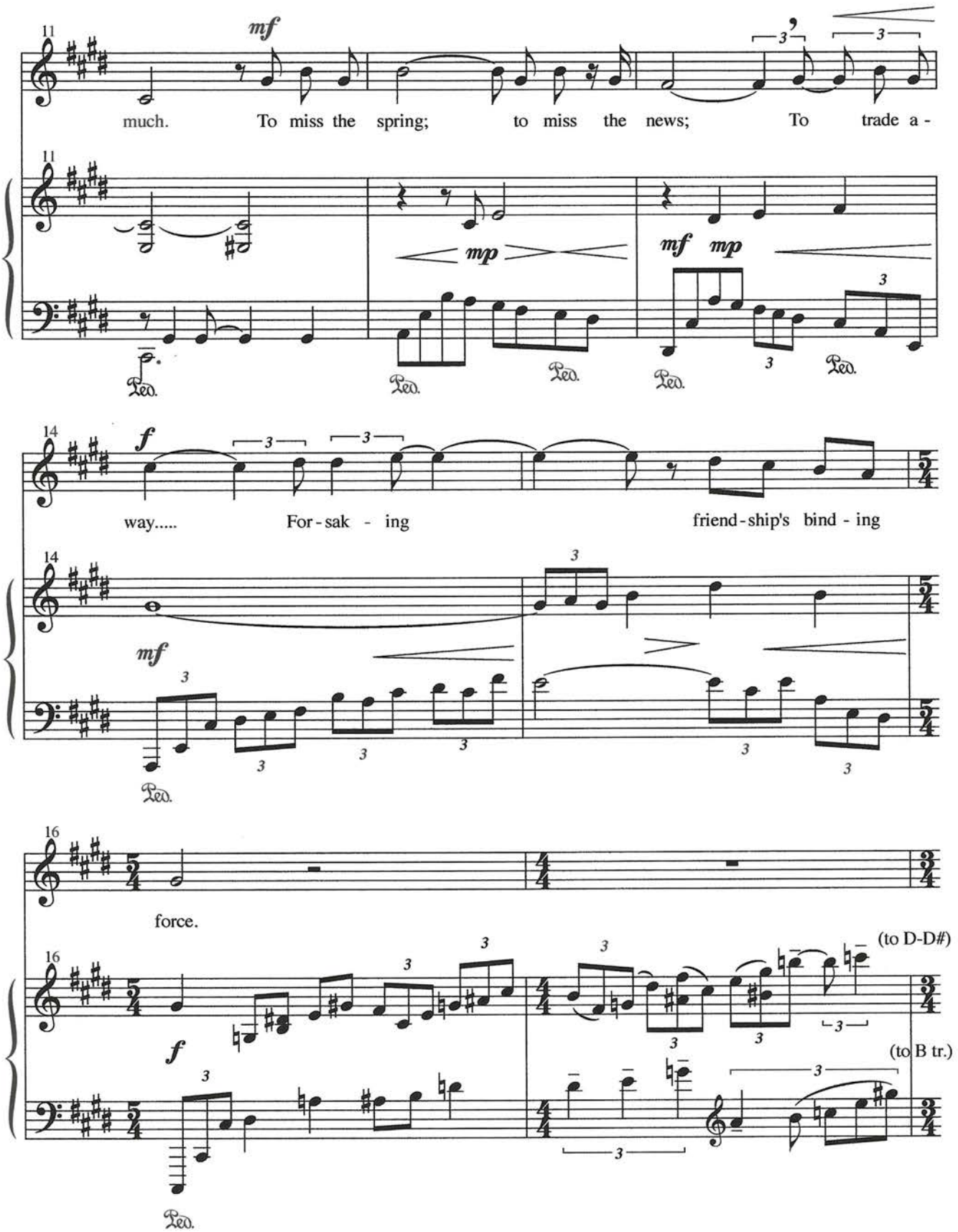

24
S
Pno.
ff
no ex - - - pla - - - na - tion
l.h.
r.h.
12
11
ff
p
26
mp
brush strokes
f
29
mf
blue
pre -
6
3
5
mp

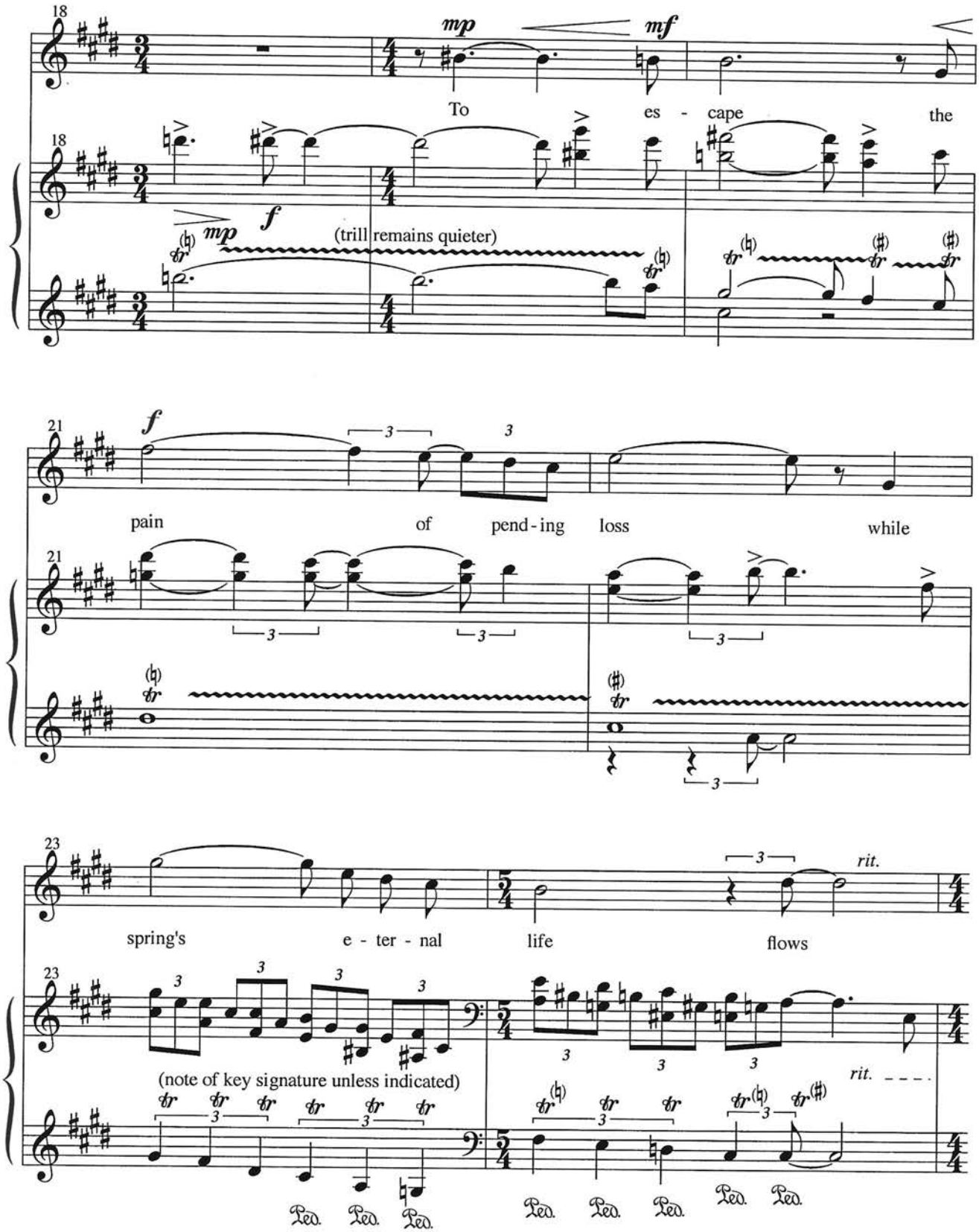

S
Pno.
cise
bril - - - - - - liant
still
yearn - - - - - - ing
(commence at vocal release)
loco
rit.

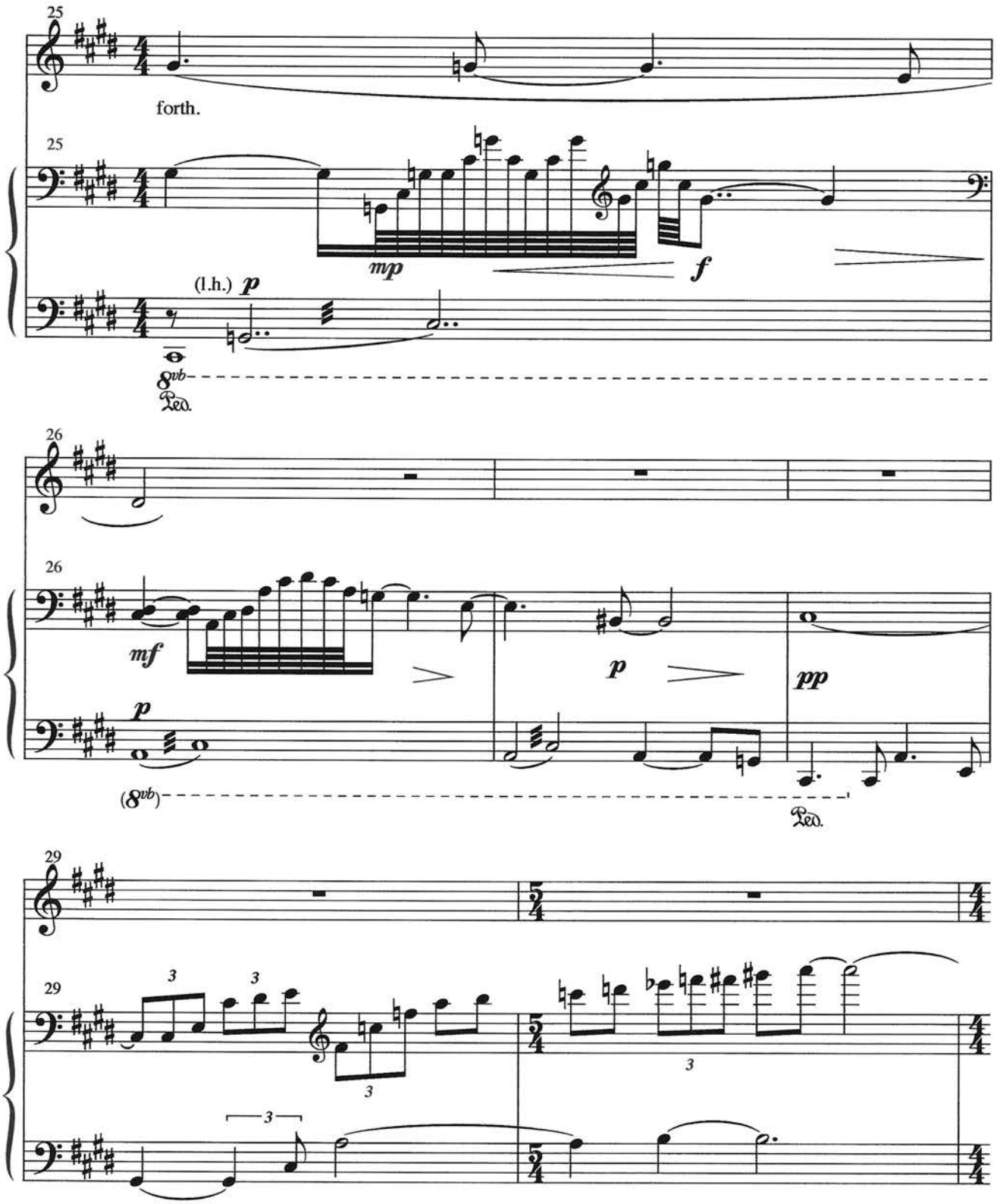
To be away

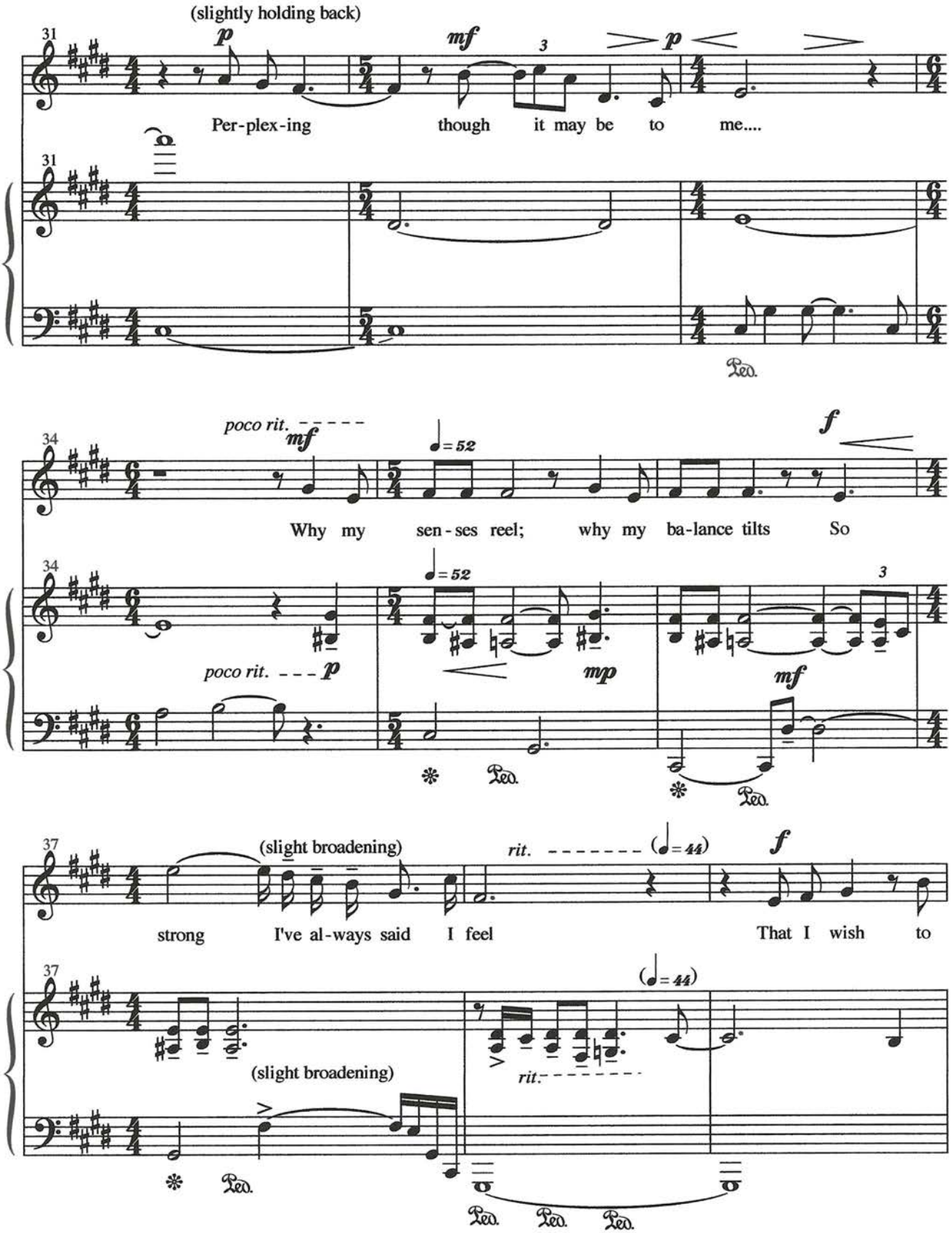
Music by Doug Davis
Text by Adele Davis

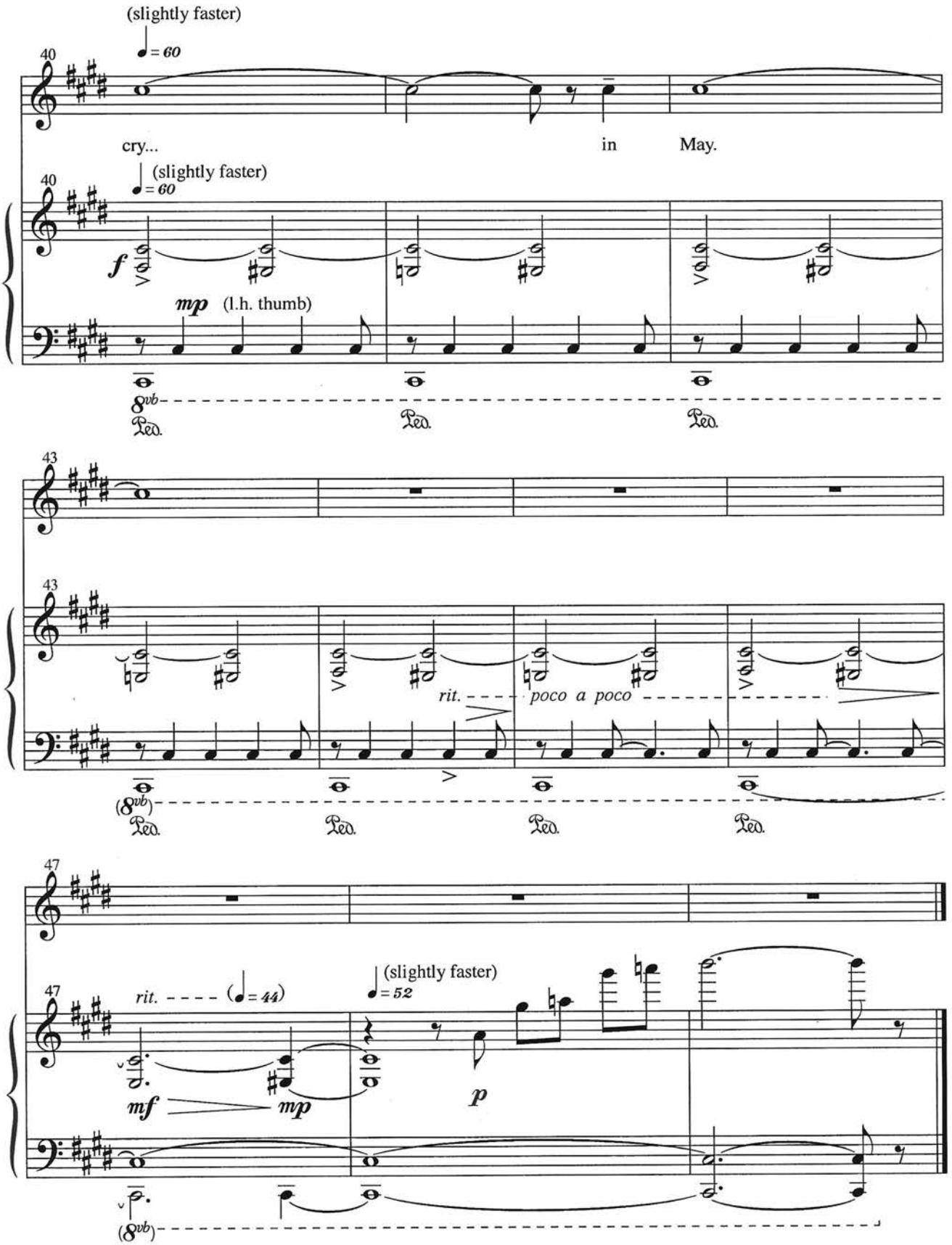



11
mf
much. To miss the spring; to miss the news; To trade a -
mp
mf mp
Ped.
14
f
way..... For - sak - ing friend - ship's bind - ing
mf
16
force.
(to D-D#)
(to B tr.)
f


18
mp
mf
To es - cape the
f
mp
(trill remains quieter)
21
f
pain of pend - ing loss while
23
spring's e - ter - nal life flows
rit.
(note of key signature unless indicated)
rit.
Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.


25
forth.
25
mp
f
(l.h.) p
8vb
Ped.
26
26
mf
p
p
pp
(8vb)
Ped.
29
29
3
3
3
3

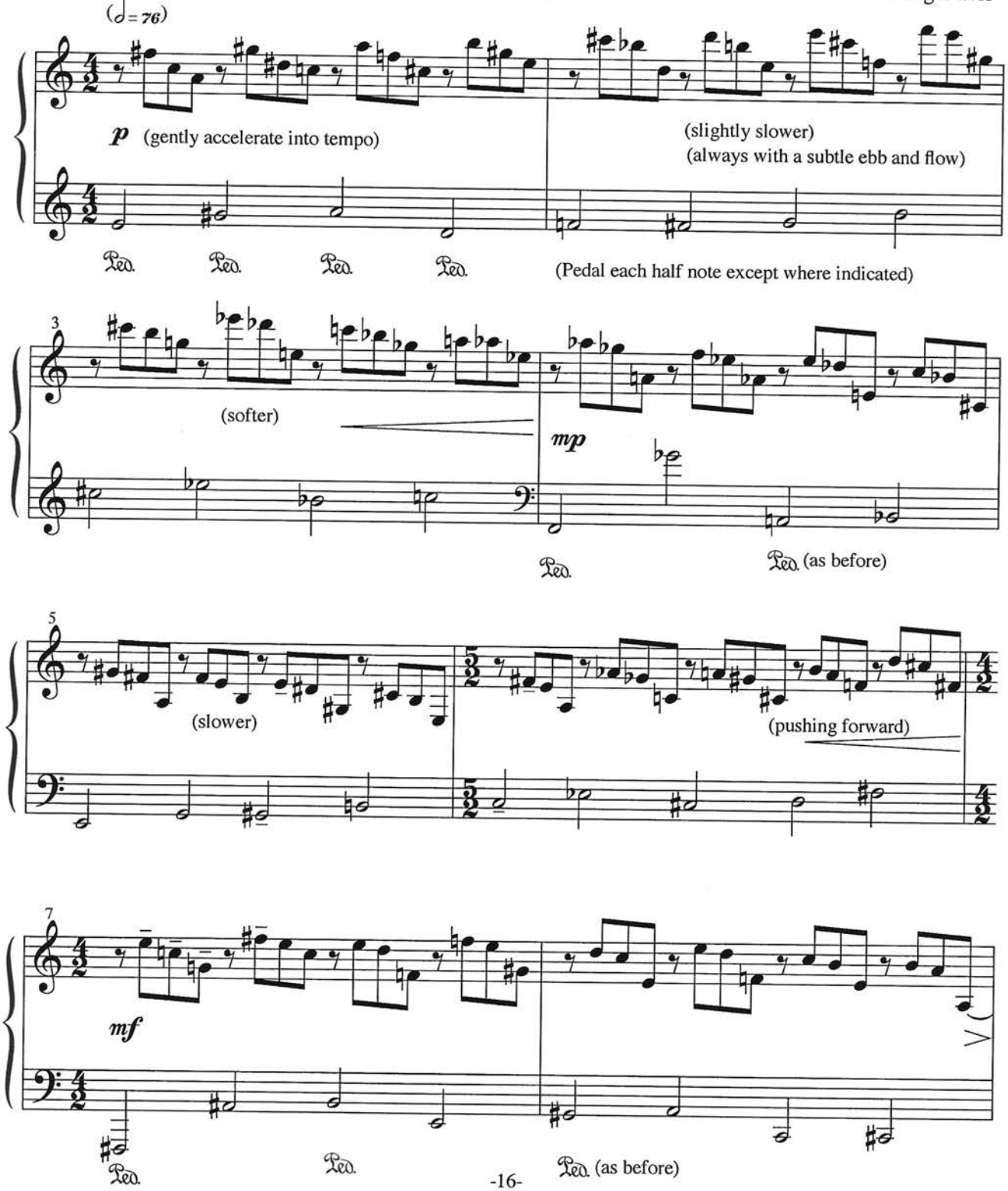

(slightly holding back)
31
p
mf
3
p
Per-plex-ing
though
it may be
to
me....
Ped.
poco rit.
mf
34
= 52
f
Why my
sen-ses reel;
why my
ba-lance tilts
So
poco rit.
p
mp
mf
3
Ped.
37
(slight broadening)
rit.
(= 44)
f
strong
I've al-ways said
I feel
That I
wish
to
(slight broadening)
rit.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.

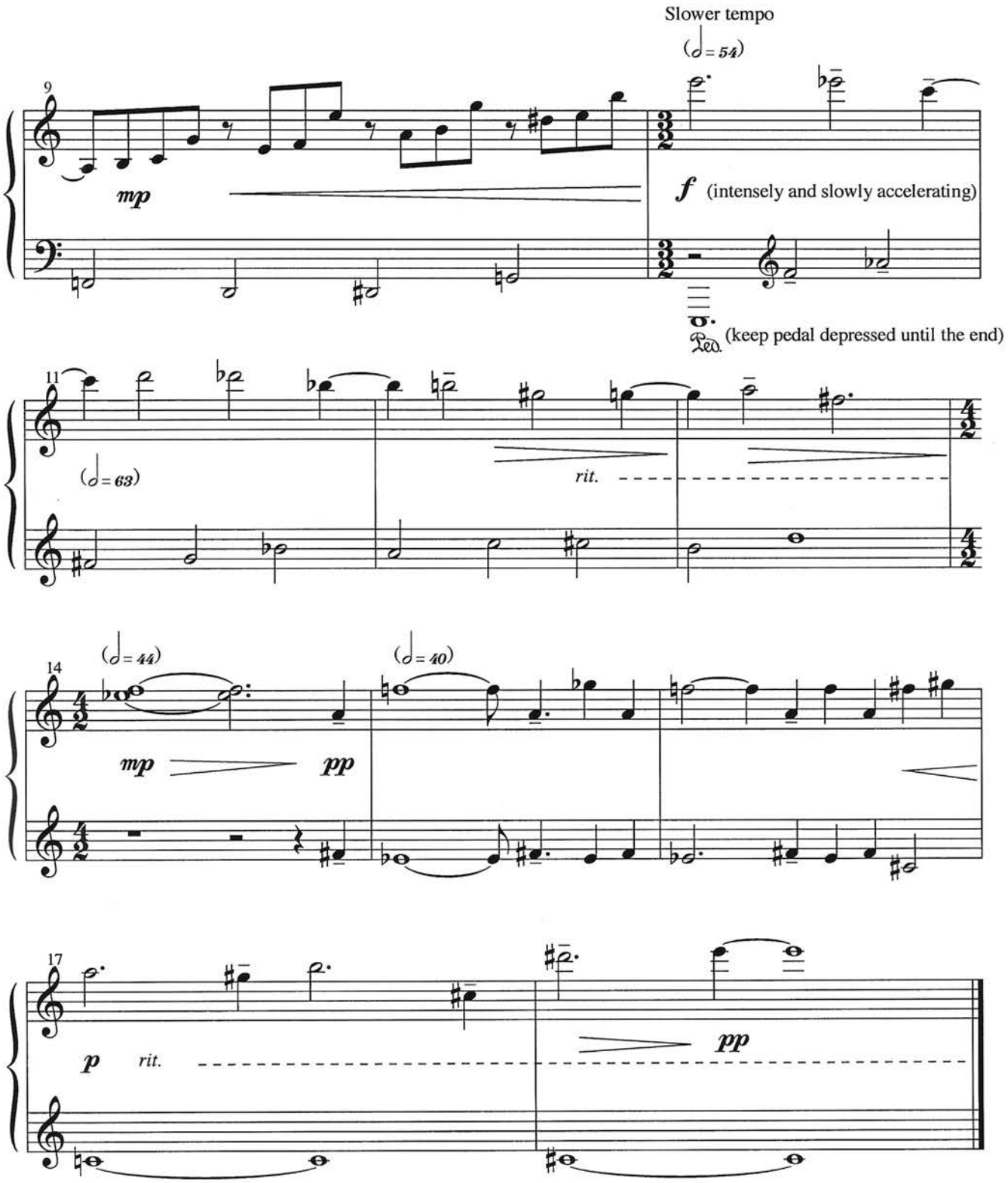

(slightly faster)
♩ = 60
40
cry...
in
May.
(slightly faster)
♩ = 60
40
f
mp
(l.h. thumb)
8vb
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
43
43
rit.
poco a poco
(8vb)
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
47
47
rit.
(♩ = 44)
(slightly faster)
♩ = 52
mf
mp
p
(8vb)

Interlude

(A flexible musical flow should be maintained throughout)

Doug Davis



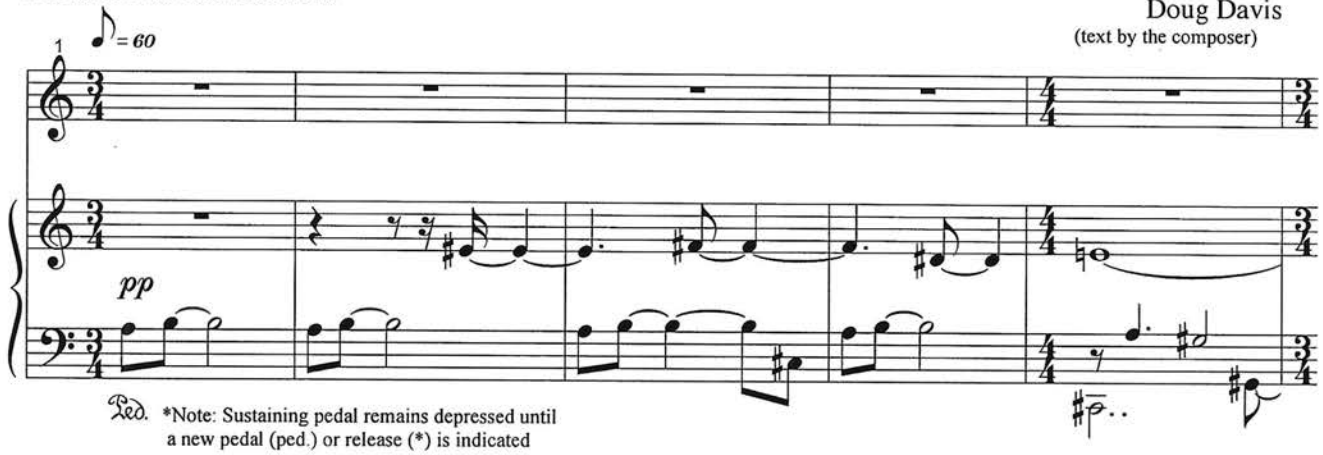

Slower tempo
(♩= 54)
9
mp
f (intensely and slowly accelerating)
Ped.
(keep pedal depressed until the end)
11
(♩= 63)
rit.
14
(♩= 44)
(♩= 40)
mp
pp
17
p
rit.
pp

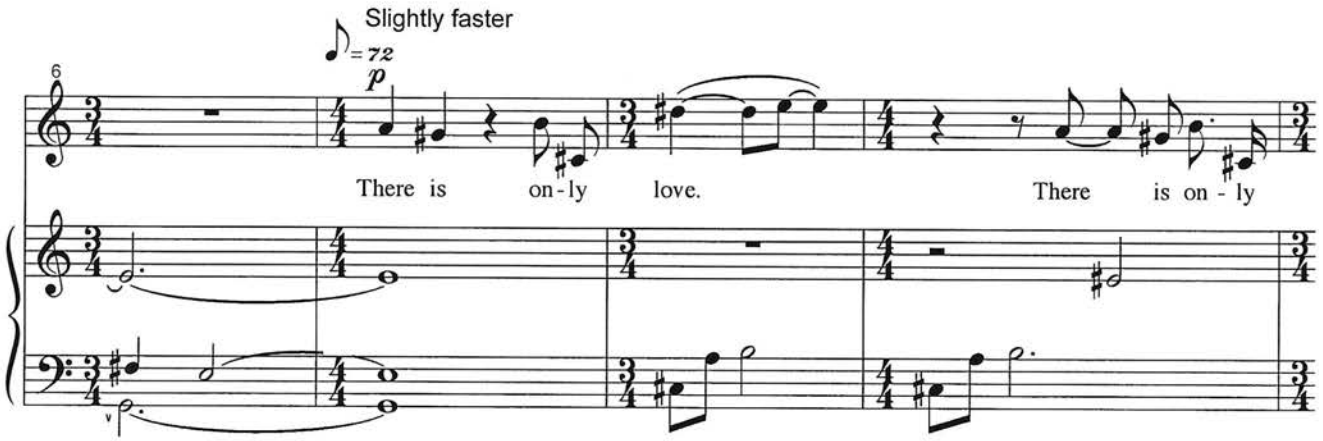
To Susie

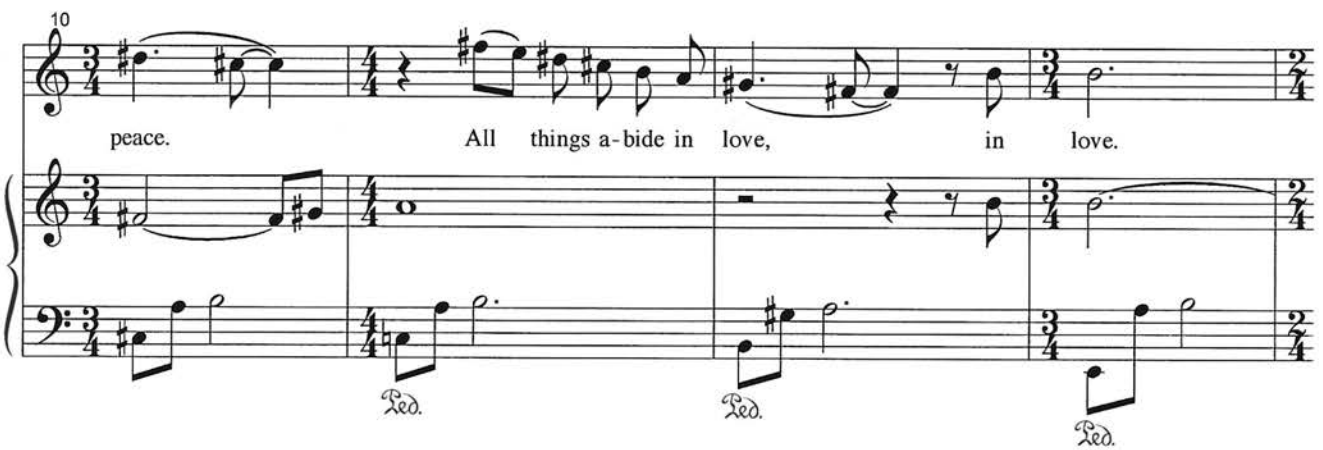
There Is Only Love

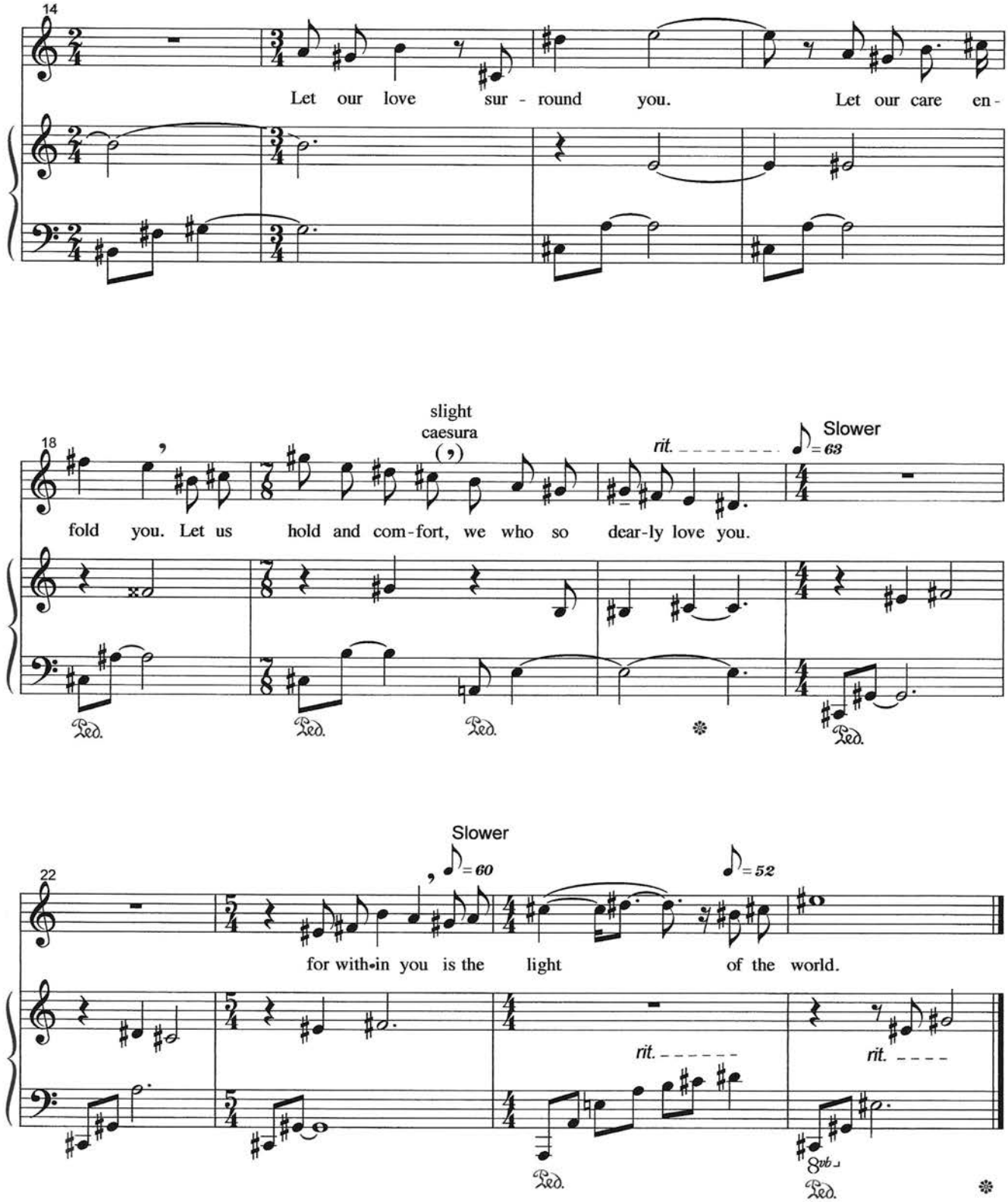
with infinite care and tenderness

Doug Davis
(text by the composer)



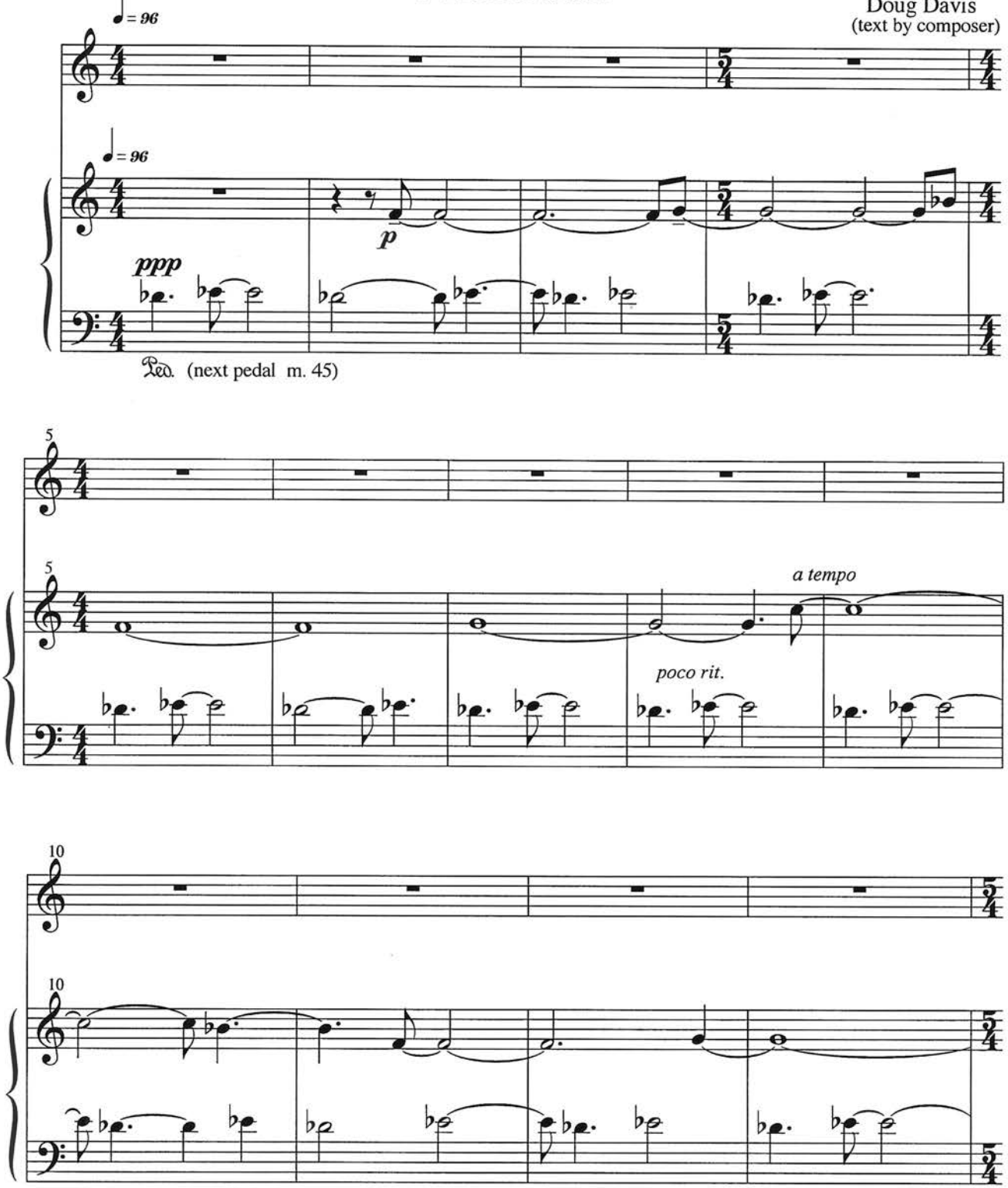


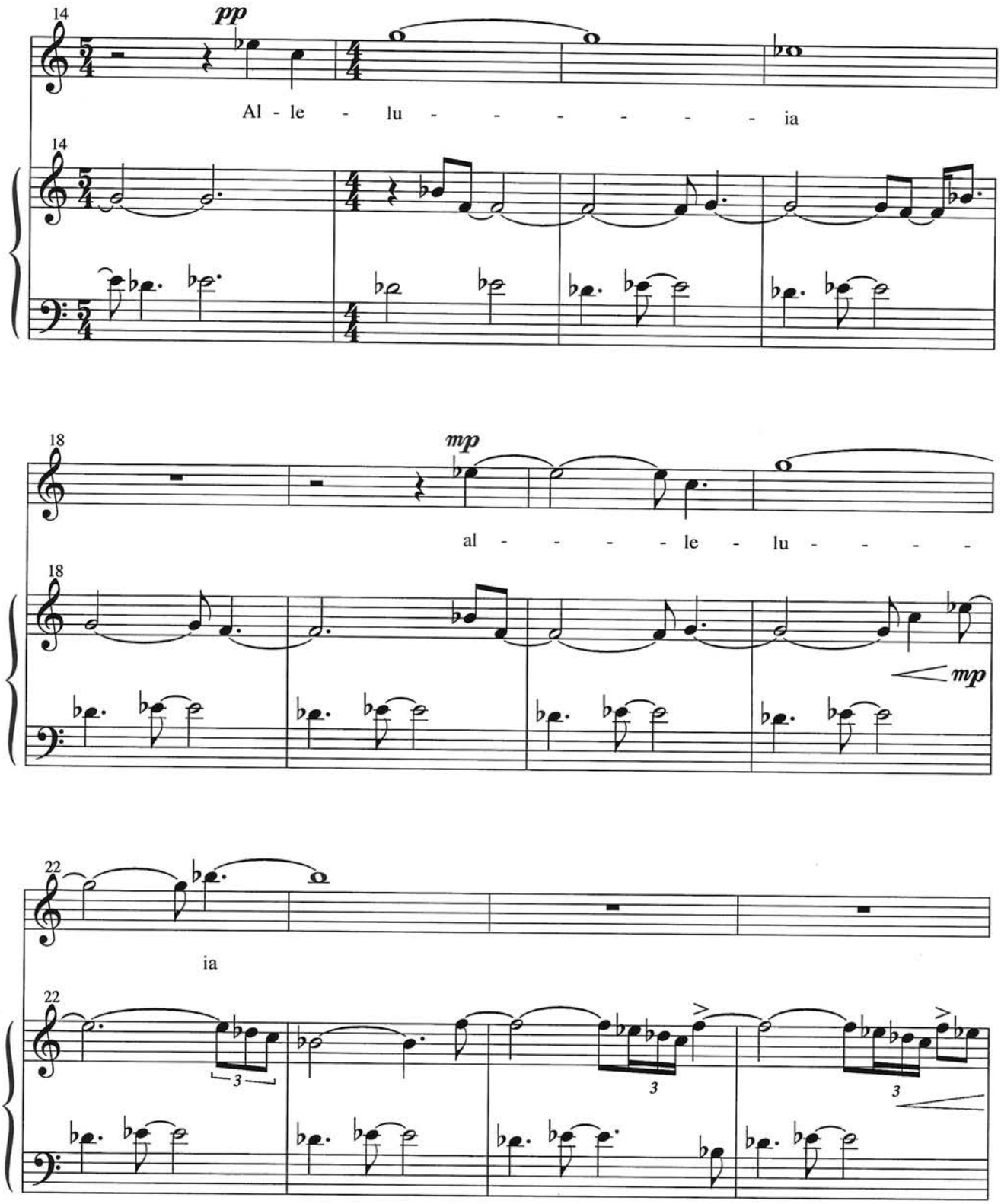


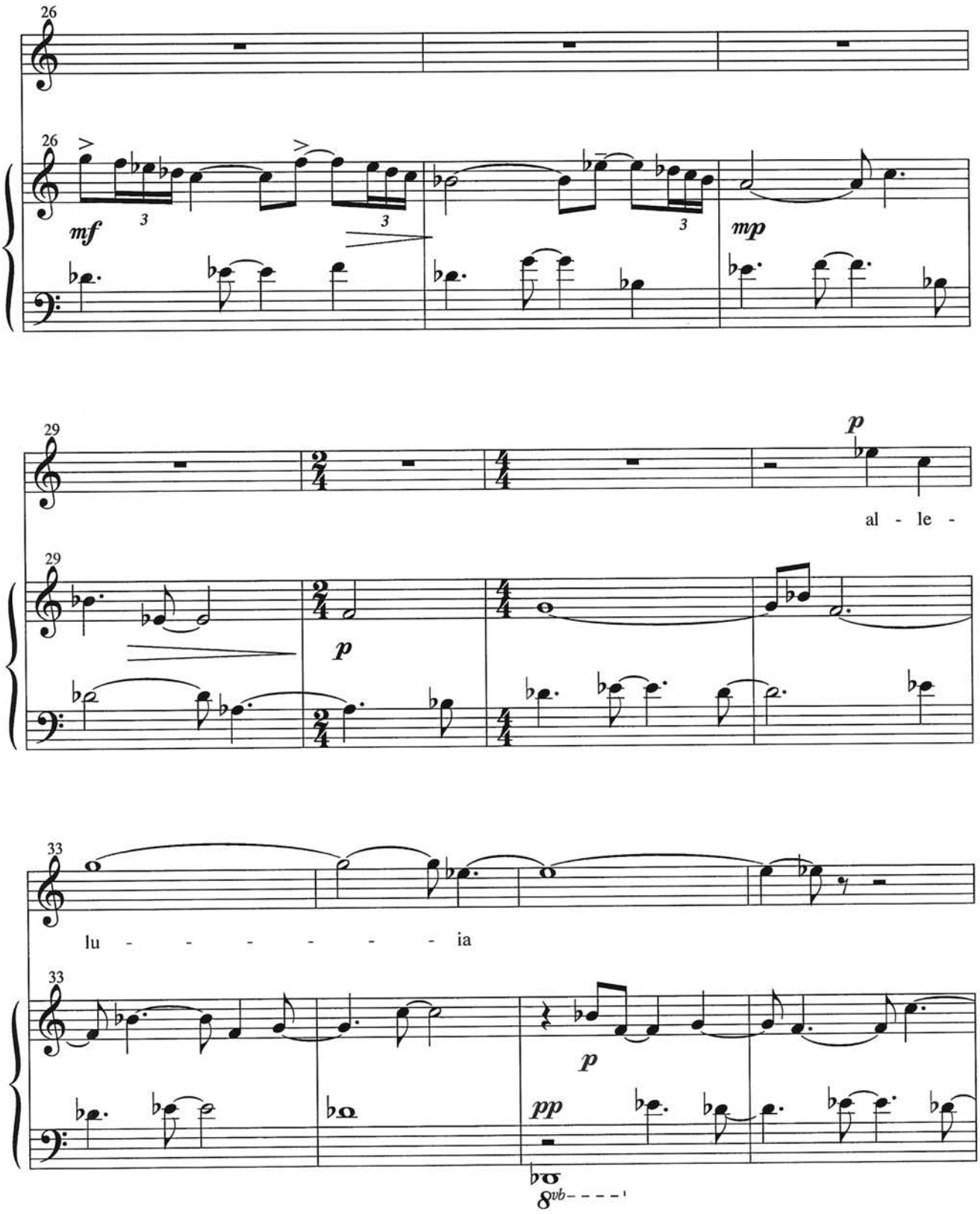

14
Let our love sur - round you. Let our care en -
18
slight
caesura
rit.
Slower
= 63
fold you. Let us hold and com-fort, we who so dear-ly love you.
Ped.
22
Slower
= 60
= 52
for with-in you is the light of the world.
rit.
rit.
8vb

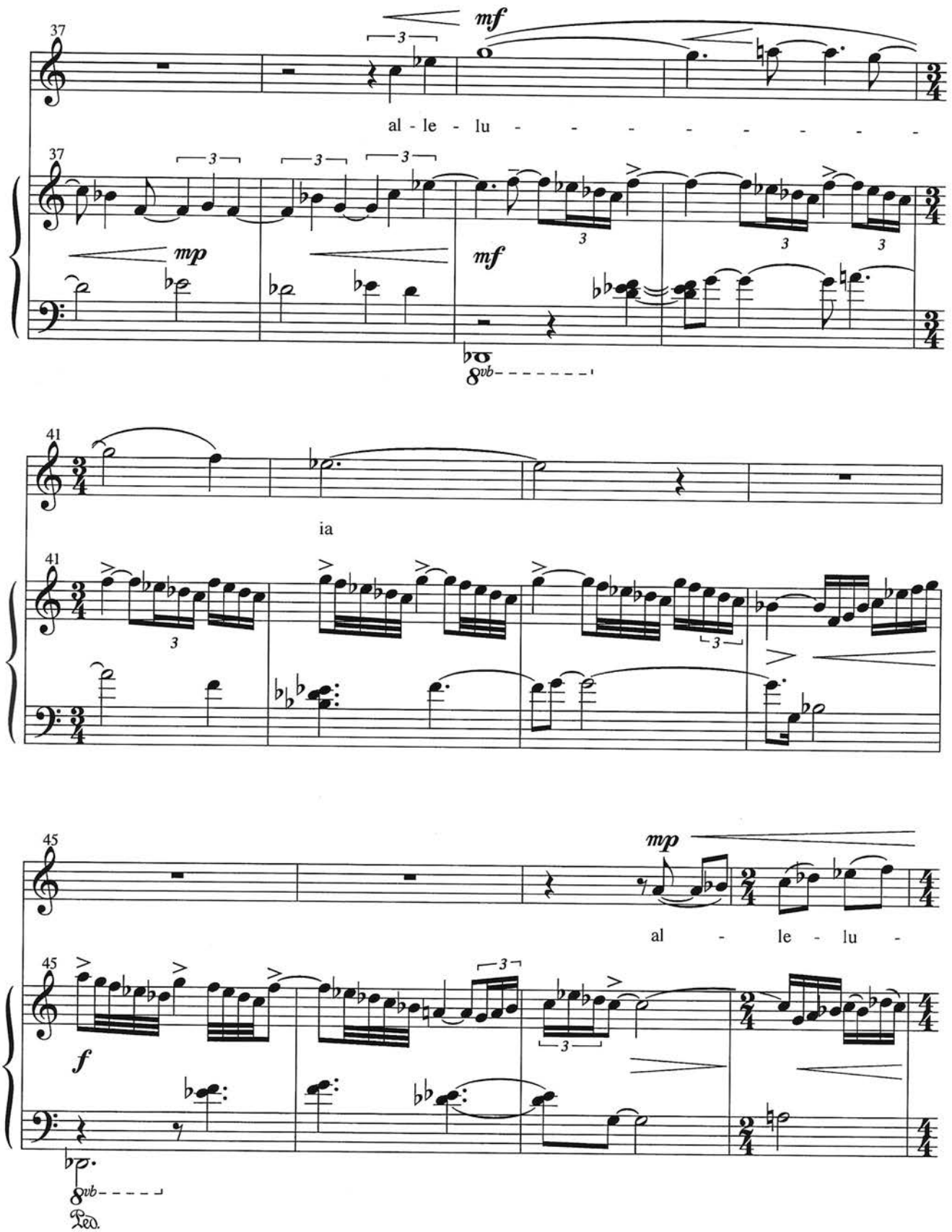
Alleluia

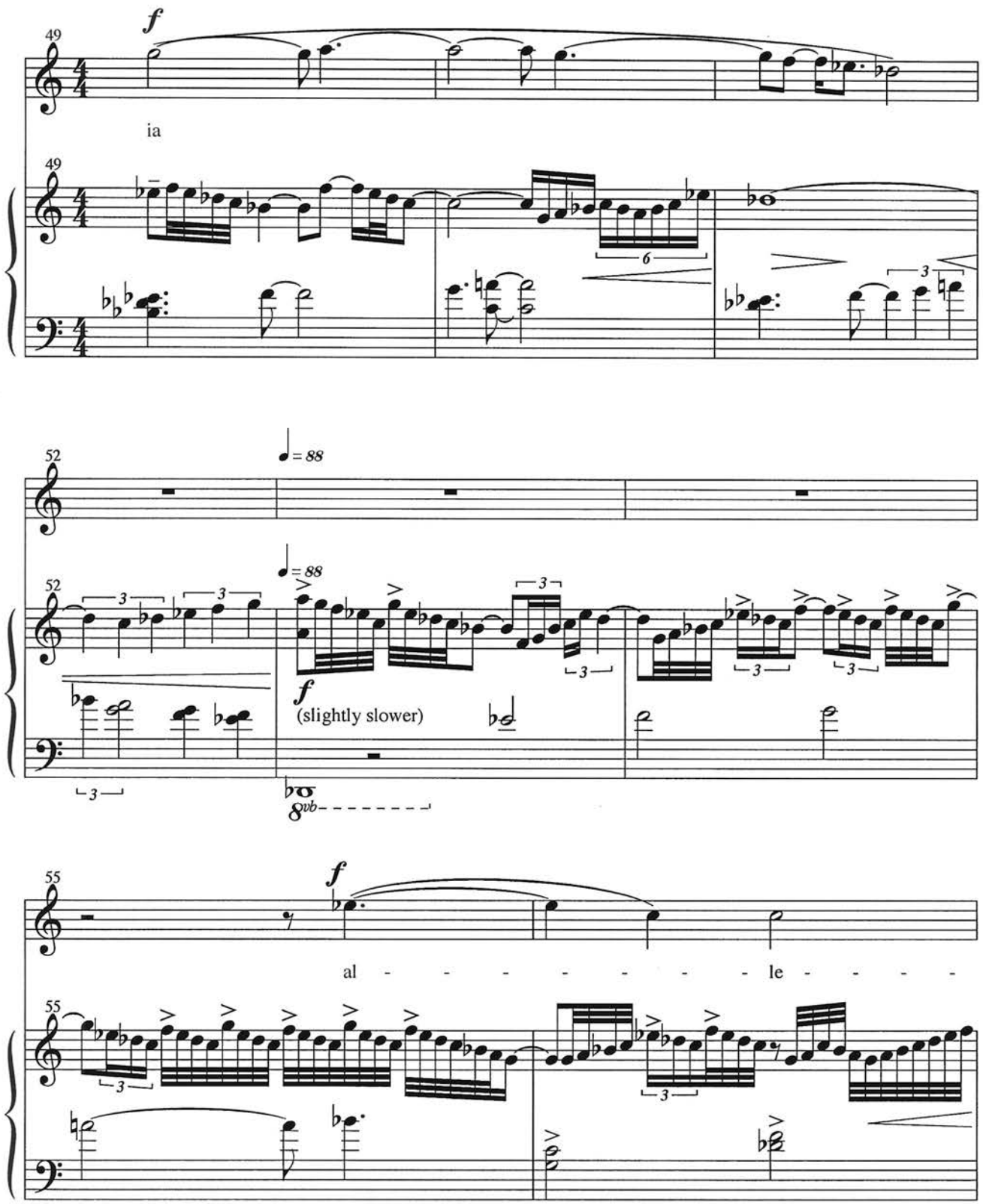
Doug Davis
(text by composer)

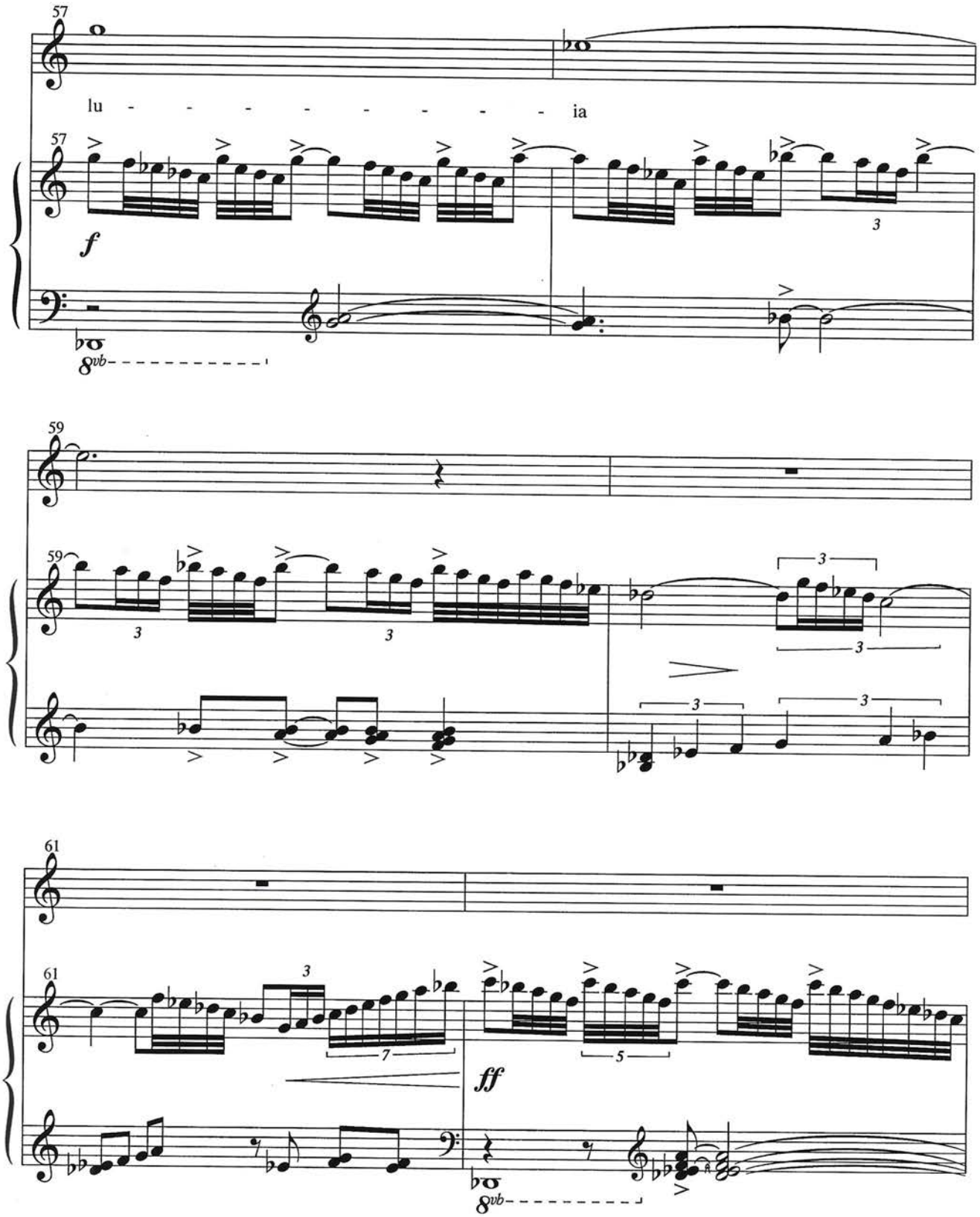


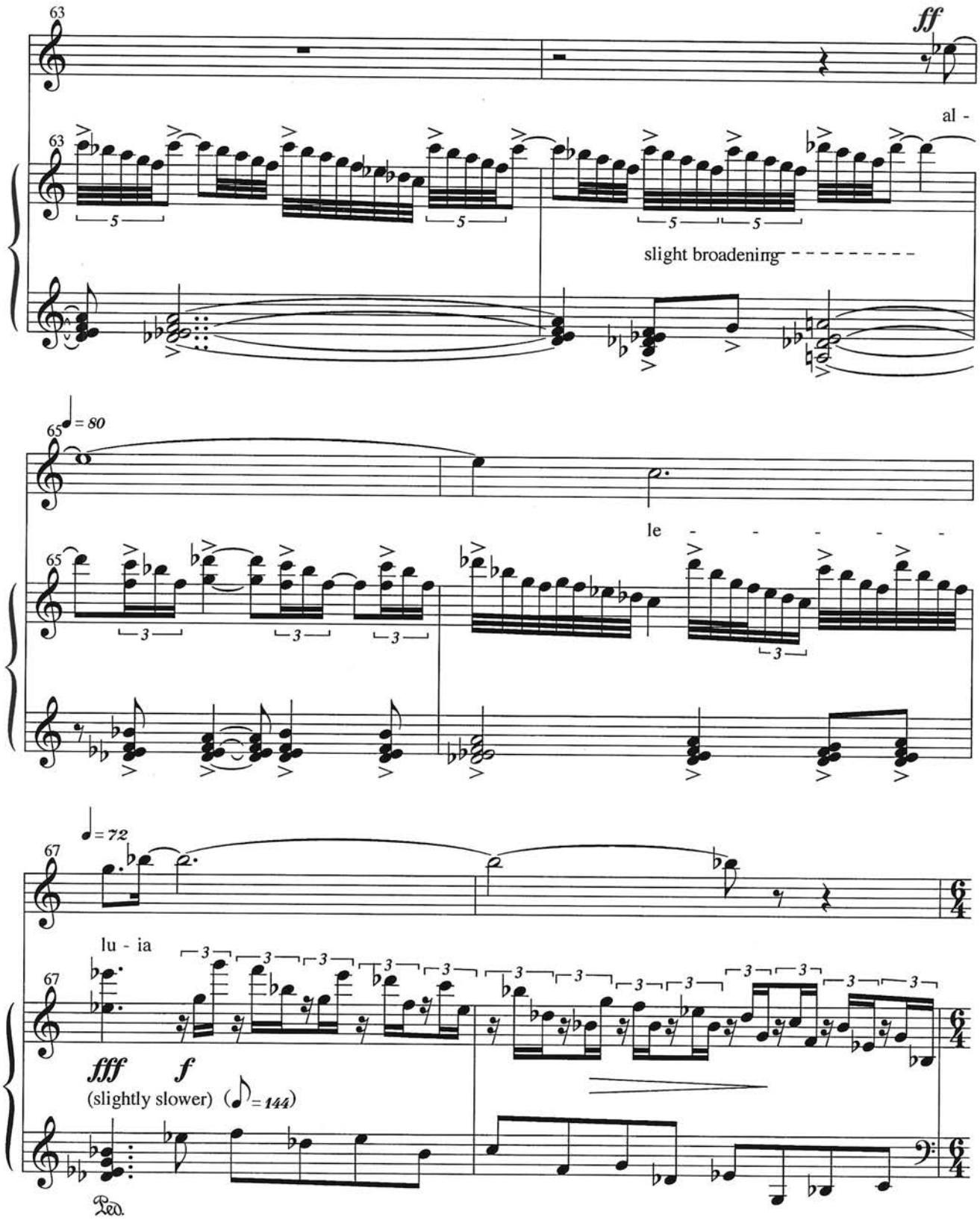

14
pp
Al - le - lu - - - - - - - ia
14
18
mp
al - - - - - le - lu - - - -
18
mp
22
ia
22
3
3
3

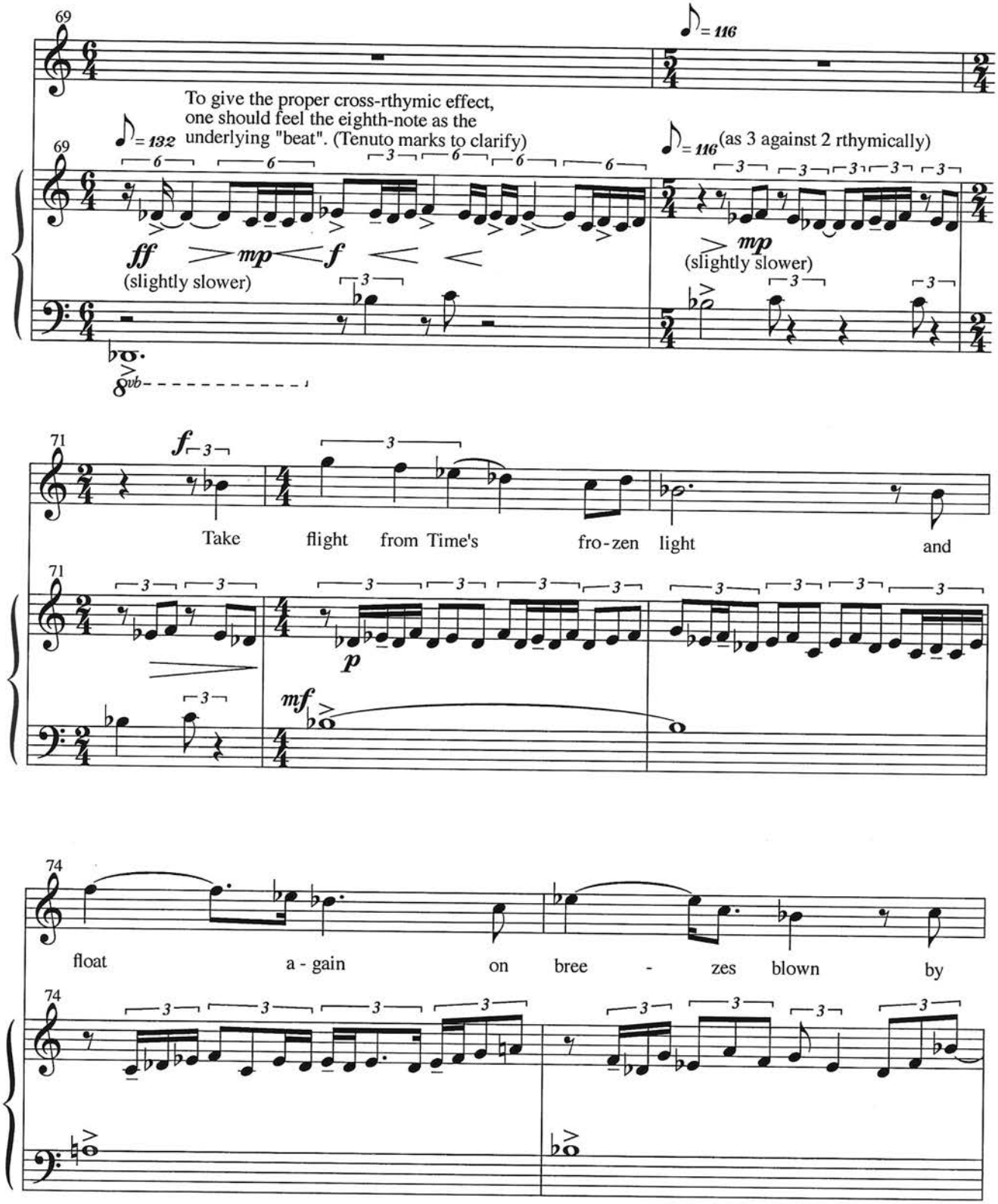

26
26
mf
3
3
3
mp
29
29
p
al - le -
p
33
33
lu - - - - - - - ia
p
pp
8vb

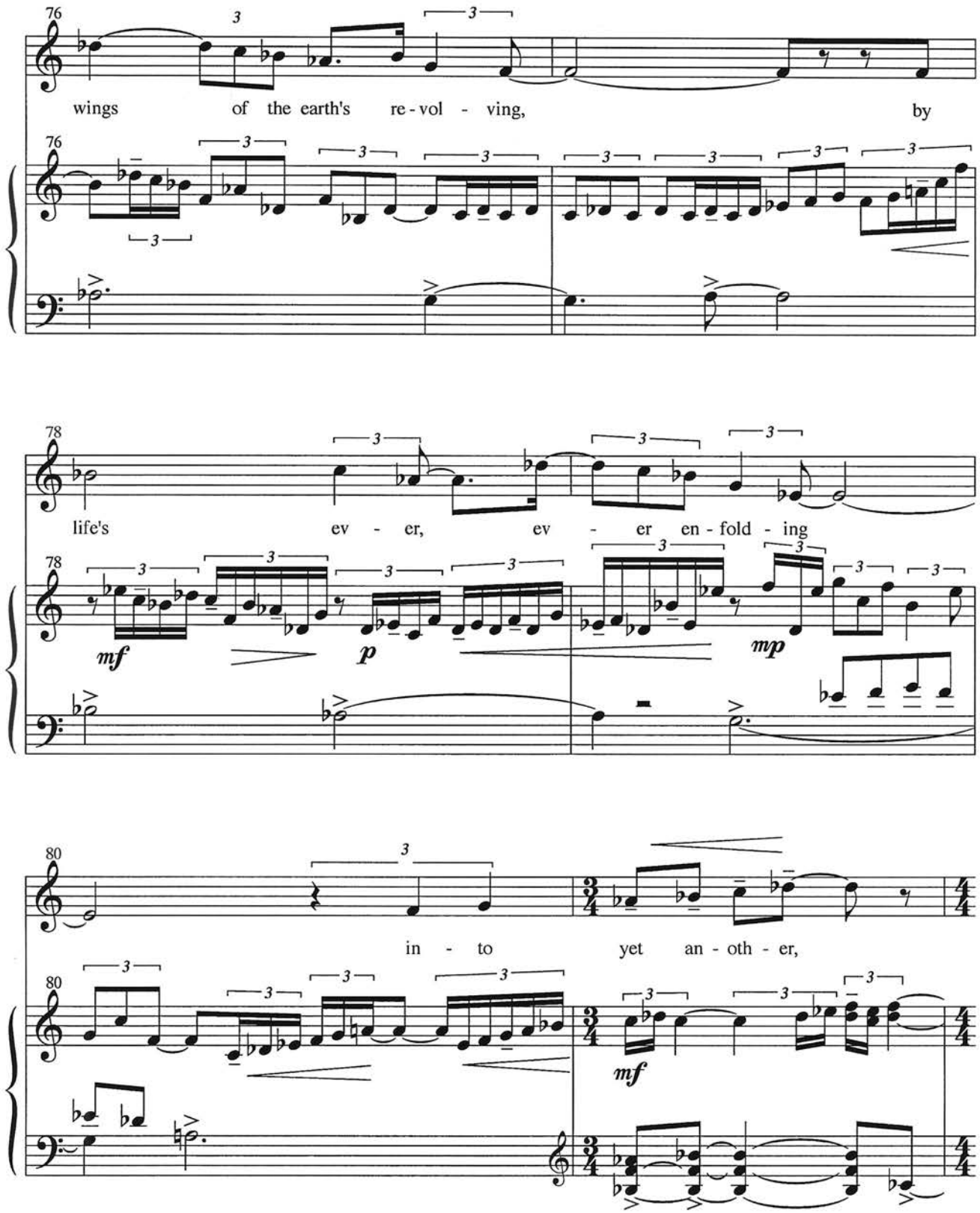

37
mf
al - le - lu - - - - - - - - -
mp
mf
8vb
41
ia
45
mp
al - le - lu -
f
8vb
Ped.

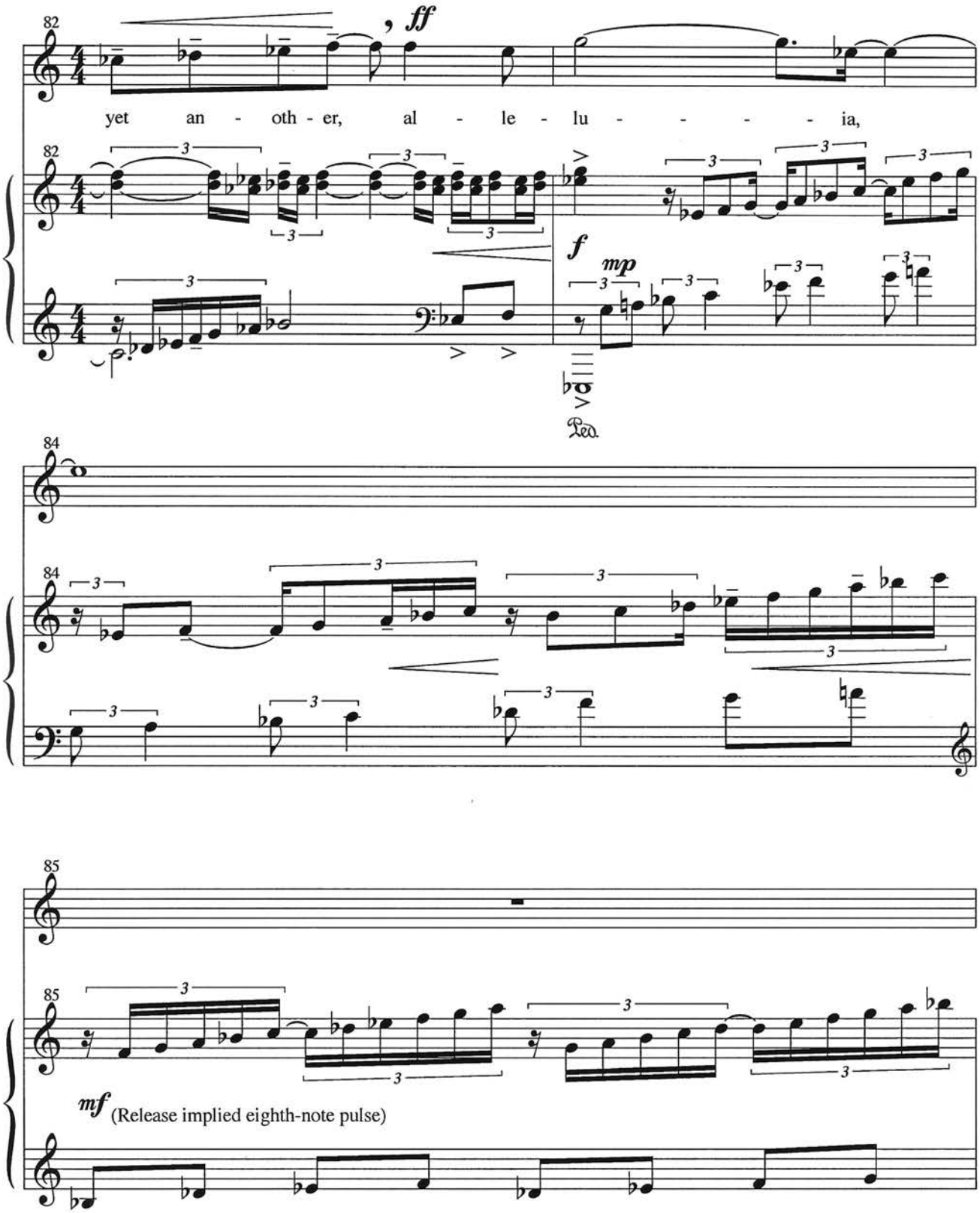

49
f
ia
49
52
♩= 88
52
♩= 88
f
(slightly slower)
8vb
55
f
al - - - - - - - - le - - - -
55

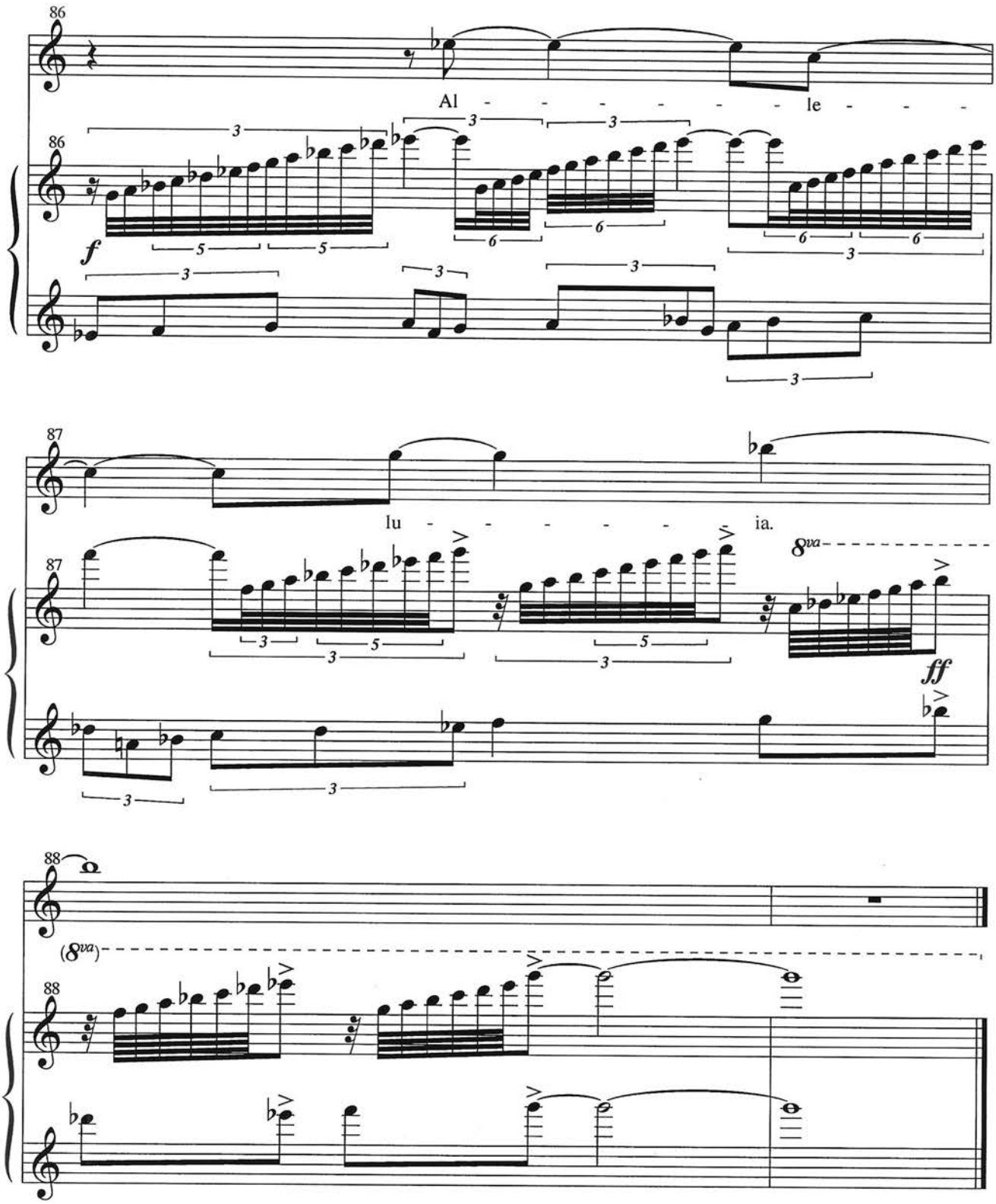

57
lu - - - - - - - - - - ia
57
f
8vb
59
59
3
3
3
3
3
3
61
61
3
7
5
ff
8vb


63
ff
al -
63
slight broadening
65
♩= 80
le - - - - - -
65
67
♩= 72
lu - ia
67
fff
f
(slightly slower) (♪= 144)
Ped.


69
To give the proper cross-rthymic effect,
one should feel the eighth-note as the
underlying "beat". (Tenuto marks to clarify)
(as 3 against 2 rthymically)
ff
mp
f
mp
(slightly slower)
(slightly slower)
8vb
71
Take flight from Time's fro-zen light and
p
mf
74
float a - gain on bree - zes blown by


76
wings of the earth's re - vol - ving, by
78
life's ev - er, ev - er en - fold - ing
mf
p
mp
80
in - to yet an - oth - er,
mf


82
ff
yet an - oth - er, al - le - lu - - - - - ia,
82
f
mp
Ped.
84
84
85
85
mf
(Release implied eighth-note pulse)


86
Al - - - - - - - le - - -
86
f
87
lu - - - - - - ia.
87
8va
ff
88
(8va)
88

Composition title and movements: Family Portraits

I. My Letter to the World (Emily Dickinson) 2:06
II. Untamed Portrait (Shona Doyle) 2:00
III. To be away in May (Adele Davis) 4:13
IV. Interlude (piano only) 2:02
V. There Is Only Love (Doug Davis) 2:59
VI. Alleluia (Doug Davis) 4:25

Date of Composition: 2000

Duration: 15:43 without piano interlude; 17:45, full song cycle

Biography: A summa cum laude graduate of the University of Tennessee studying with David Van Vactor, Doug Davis went on to complete his Ph.D. degree from Harvard University where he studied with Earl Kim and Leon Kirchner. At Harvard, he was selected by Leonard Bernstein as the student member of the Norton Lectures Discussion Group. Recent performances include "Psalm for an Orange Angel" by the Hungarian Symphony and "Token" for voice and orchestra featured at the Ukrainian "Contrasts" festival. Several of his compositions have been recorded by jazz greats including Chick Corea, Larry Coryell, and Bennie Wallace. Davis is a Professor of Music at California State University, Bakersfield. Davis was selected the outstanding professor at California State University, Bakersfield where he is the director of theory, composition, and jazz studies. In 2003, he received the WANG Family Excellence Award that is given to four faculty members chosen from the entire 23 campuses in the California State University system.

Program notes: The initial impetus for this song cycle was a Christmas present from my daughter. It was a framed poem that began:

Chaotic canvas gushing imprecise

I immediately recognized she was talking my language and began the most precise matter of notating music. Hearing my efforts, my wife handed me a poem that she created after the untimely death of a friend from cancer. We were her principal care-givers during her final seven months when she required 24/7 assistance. This cathartic song seemed almost to be already written. These two settings became the second and third songs in this emerging cycle. The first song, Emily Dickinson's "My Letter to the World" seemed to encapsulate a perspective of which I'm familiar. The fourth song was written with the hope that its sentiments might help my student who was facing the most difficult time for any family, the death of her young child. The cycle concludes with an "Alleluia" which includes an entreaty to return from paradise only to extend its glory, certainly a point of view I don't plan to "top".

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