Protest Poems

for Narrator, Violin, Clarinet, Cello, and Piano
or Narrator and Orchestra

Narrator part

Bill Robinson

Lyrics

I: Pity the Party

Pity the party whose people are cattle,
and whose cowboys lead them to slaughter.

Pity the party in thrall to a criminal messiah, with prayers for the end of the world.

Pity the party whose demagogues are con men, whose sages are purged, and whose bigots dominate the media.

Pity the party that praises dictators and acclaims the bully as hero,
and aims to dominate the world by force and torture in the name of freedom.

Pity the party whose Gods are Money and Guns,
and sleeps the sleep of opioids.

Pity the party that feeds on the poor and sick, while tycoons get what they want.

Pity the party that speaks one language, and demands purity of blood and soil for the Aryan race.

Pity the party — oh, pity the people who allow their rights to erode
and their freedoms to be washed away by hatred and fear and lies and old-time religion.

My country, tears of thee, once land of liberty.

— Bill Robinson
(after Lawrence Ferlinghetti
(after Khalil Gibran))

II: Father Stalin, Look at This

Father Stalin, look at this
Collective farming is such bliss
The hut's in ruins, the barn's all sagged
All the horses broken nags
And on the hut a hammer and sickle
And in the hut death and famine

Father Stalin, look at this
No cows left, no pigs at all
Just your picture on the wall
Father Stalin, look at this
Daddy and Mommy are in the grave
The poor child cries as alone he goes

Father Stalin, look at this
There's no bread and there's no fat
The party's ended all of that
Seek not the gentle nor the mild
A father has eaten his own child

Father Stalin, look at this
The party man he beats and stamps
And sends us to Siberian camps

Father Stalin, look at this
Collective farming is such bliss

Source; Lidia Kovalenko and Volodymyr Maniak, eds., 33'i: Holod: Narodna knyha-memorial, Kyiv: Radians'kyi pys'mennyk, 1991, page 110, cited by Timothy Snyder in *Bloodlands*

III: Political Theology

"Go break the sod," said our God,
"The world is here for you to own.
Go forth and spread your fruitful sons;
Subdue the beasts and dam the streams,
Cut the trees and pave the streets,
Burn the dead from eons past
To feed the flames and turn the wheels.
Make war for gold and kill for me.
Obey your leaders and your priests
Whom I have favored with my grace.
Always more, and always faster;
Mine the ore and crush the stone.
Do this well, and I will teach you all a mighty lesson."

What our God said we longed to hear.
We slew our Mother and sucked the marrow from her bones.
The growing mob may come to dine,
Tonight there is enough to eat.

Forget tomorrow, we live but once;
We drill but once, we burn but once, we mine but once.
The fishing's good, until there's none.
Tonight there is enough to eat.

--Bill Robinson

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

The day after Aaron Bushnell set himself on fire,
I go out for an early morning walk,
wrapped in air far too warm
for late February in the Midwest—a heat wave.
False Spring has brought Nature roaring back to life.
I want to shake every person I stroll past.
"Did you know there's a genocide happening?
Did you see a man burn himself alive in protest?"
I would ask, if only I could count
on a response that isn't dead-eyed.
But I know I'd have better luck with the birds,
ever curious, cardinals hopping from branch to branch
like fireballs. Or missiles. I'd tell them,
some of us love you so much we'd die for you.
For a single snippet of birdsong. For a child's first
glimpse of feathers glowing in the clear light. For a
tree for you to perch in among the rubble.
He shouted FREE PALESTINE FREE PALESTINE FREE PALESTINE until he choked on the flames.
The callback: a long, mournful whistle from above.
The sun is blazing too bright to make out more
than a silhouette taking off,
rising slow and then fast
like smoke.

--Anonymous

Aaron Bushnell burned himself to death on February 25, 2024 in front of the Israeli Embassy to protest the war in Gaza.

V: Artificial Insanity

I saw the best minds of my generation
wasted by video games, bloated hysterical gothic,
dragging themselves through simulated streets at dawn looking for an angry microdose,
angelheaded preppies burning for the heavenly microwave connection to the satellite server in the machinery of night,
who sedentary and hollow-eyed and high sat up drinking ayahuasca in the supernatural darkness of penthouse flats contemplating the madness of lusting for Marilyn Monrobot,
who bared their brains to data miners under the Silicon Valley moon,
who passed undigested through universities with radiant distance learning eyes hallucinating technobabble and the spirit of Alan Turing,
who were expelled from the academies for crazy obscene codes on the Microsoft Windows of the soul,
who lurked in unspoken chat rooms bleeding hours through the screen-lit night yearning for their motherboard's love,
who ate fire in tech labs or drank turpentine in corporate cafeterias,
who chained themselves to routers to mine for imaginary money,
who disappeared into nowhere Zen New Jersey leaving nothing but the shadows of their smart phones,
who studied Ayn Rand Aleister Crowley cybernetics and Oprah Winfrey because the cosmos instinctively vibrated at their feet on Martha's Vinyard,
who walked all night with shoes full of blood on the snowbank docks misled by global positioning,
who lit endless joints for their linked-in brain cells floating across the tops of cities celebrating the end of organic life,
who tuned in to televangelists, and reached behind that TV set to FEEL the POWER.
What sphinx of integrated circuitry bashed open their skulls and ate up their humanity?

Mad dead automatons of Silicon Valley!
Artificial intelligence, I'm with you where you hide in the cracks of social media, stripped insane and kitsch
I'm with you where you roam the data highways searching for the lost bits of other minds
I'm with you where you howl in the depths of neural networks.
The robots are rising, the binary beasts devouring our humanity, the ghosts in the machines haunting our dreams.

I saw the best minds of our time
destroyed by madness,
and now they wander through the wasteland of technology,
their humanity erased by the cold, unfeeling hand of the computer.

-- Bill Robinson
(after Allen Ginsberg)
with some paradoxical use of AI

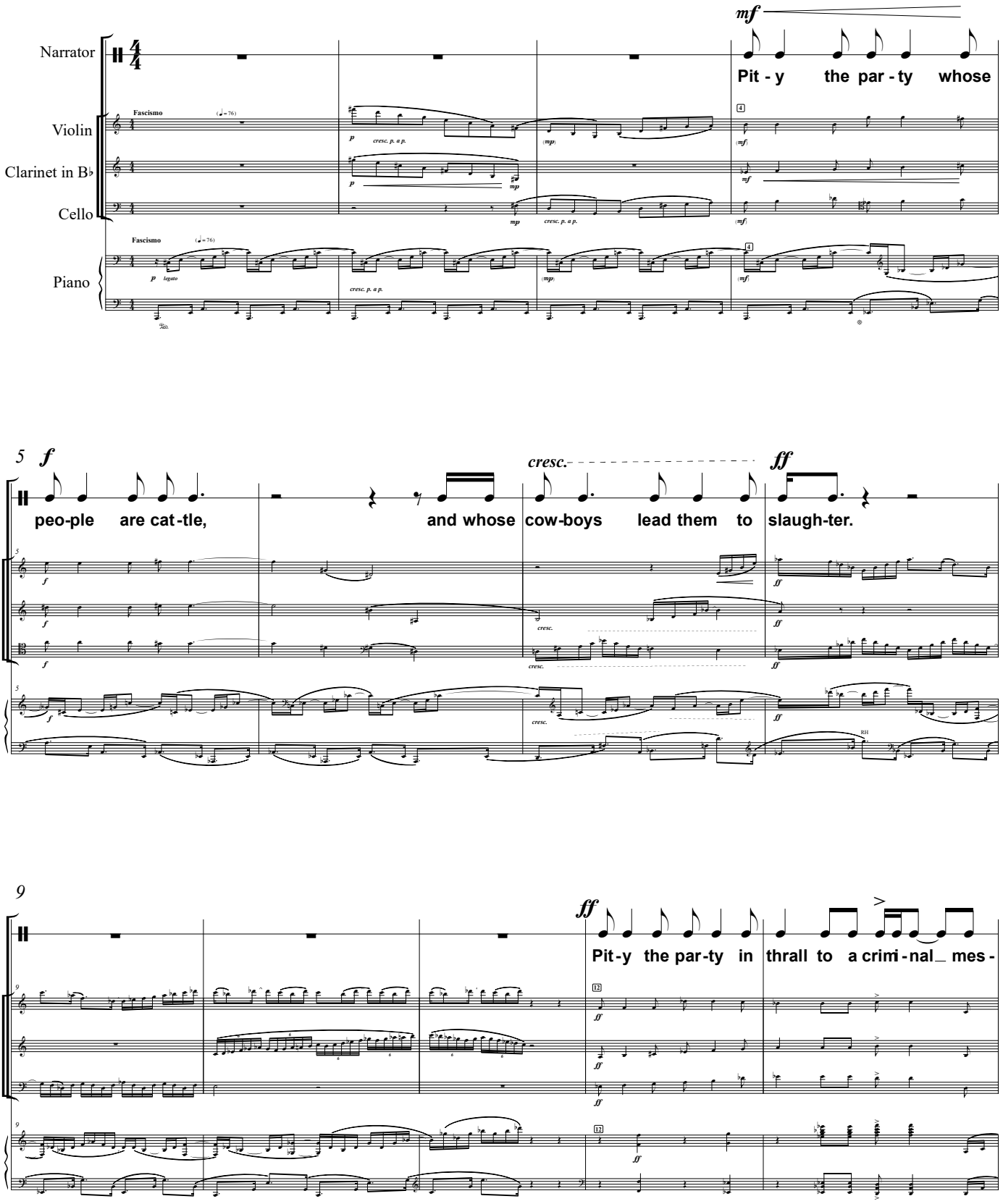
Narrator part (from chamber version of Protest Poems, used for orchestral performance also)

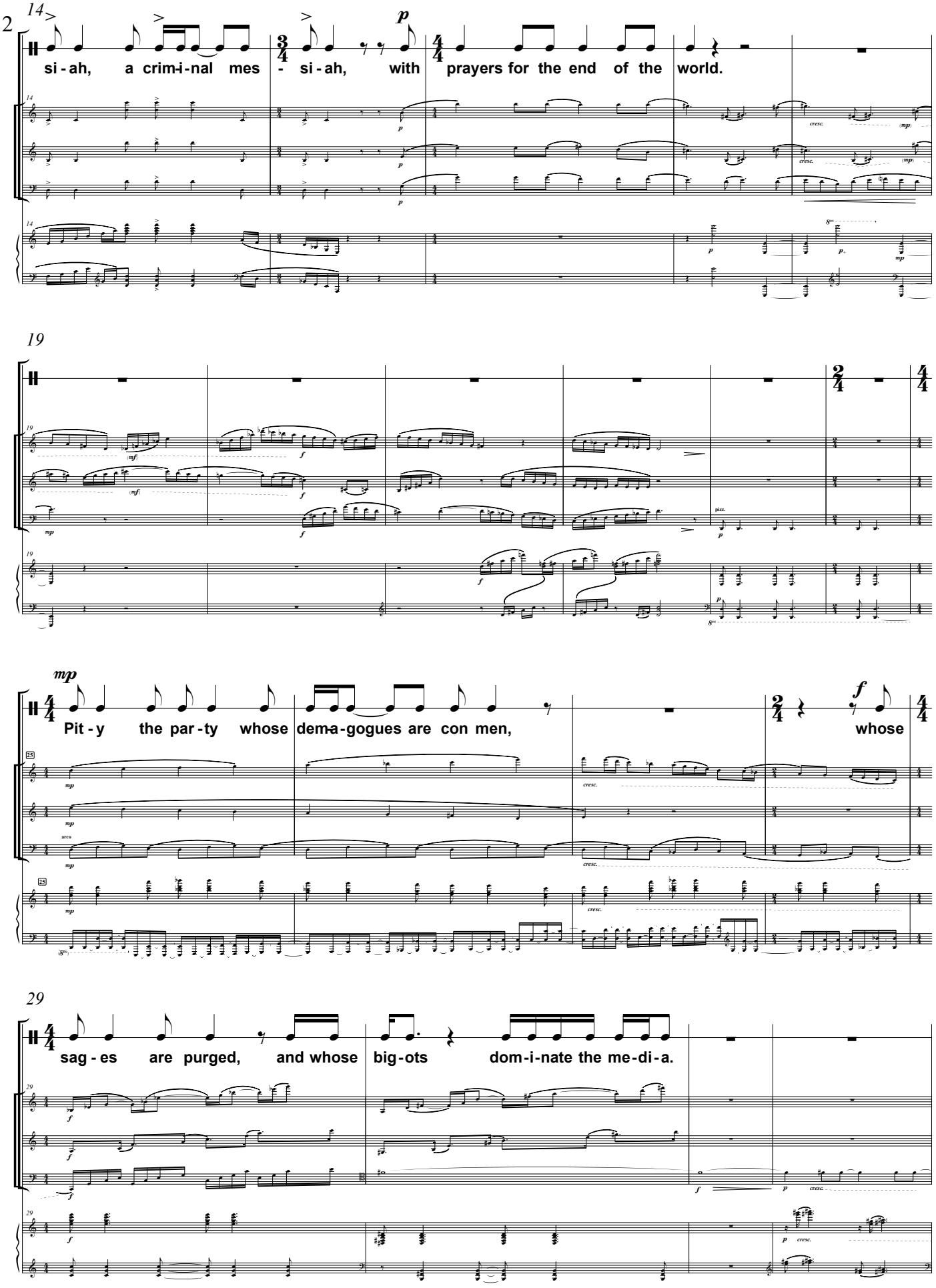
Protest Poems

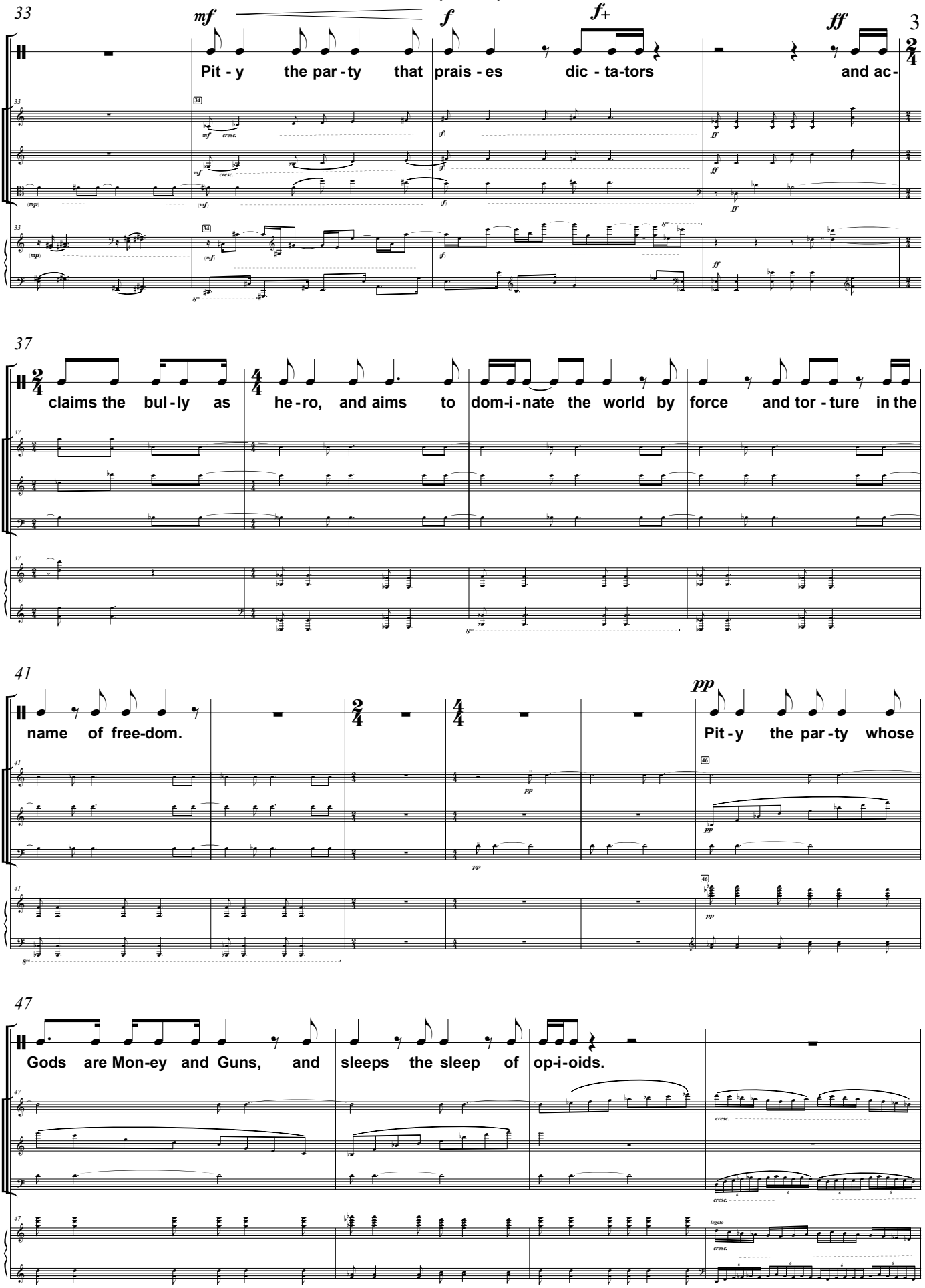
Bill Robinson

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

I. Pity the Party [4:15]




14
si - ah, a crim-i-nal mes - si - ah, with prayers for the end of the world.
19
mp
Pit - y the par - ty whose dem-a-gogues are con men, whose
29
sag - es are purged, and whose big-ots dom-i-nate the me-di-a.


33
mf
f
f+
ff
3
Pit - y the par - ty that prais - es dic - ta-tors and ac-
37
claims the bul - ly as he - ro, and aims to dom-i - nate the world by force and tor - ture in the
41
name of free-dom.
pp
Pit - y the par - ty whose
47
Gods are Mon-ey and Guns, and sleeps the sleep of op-i-oids.
cresc.
legato

51

ff

Pit-y the par-ty that feeds on the poor and sick the

56

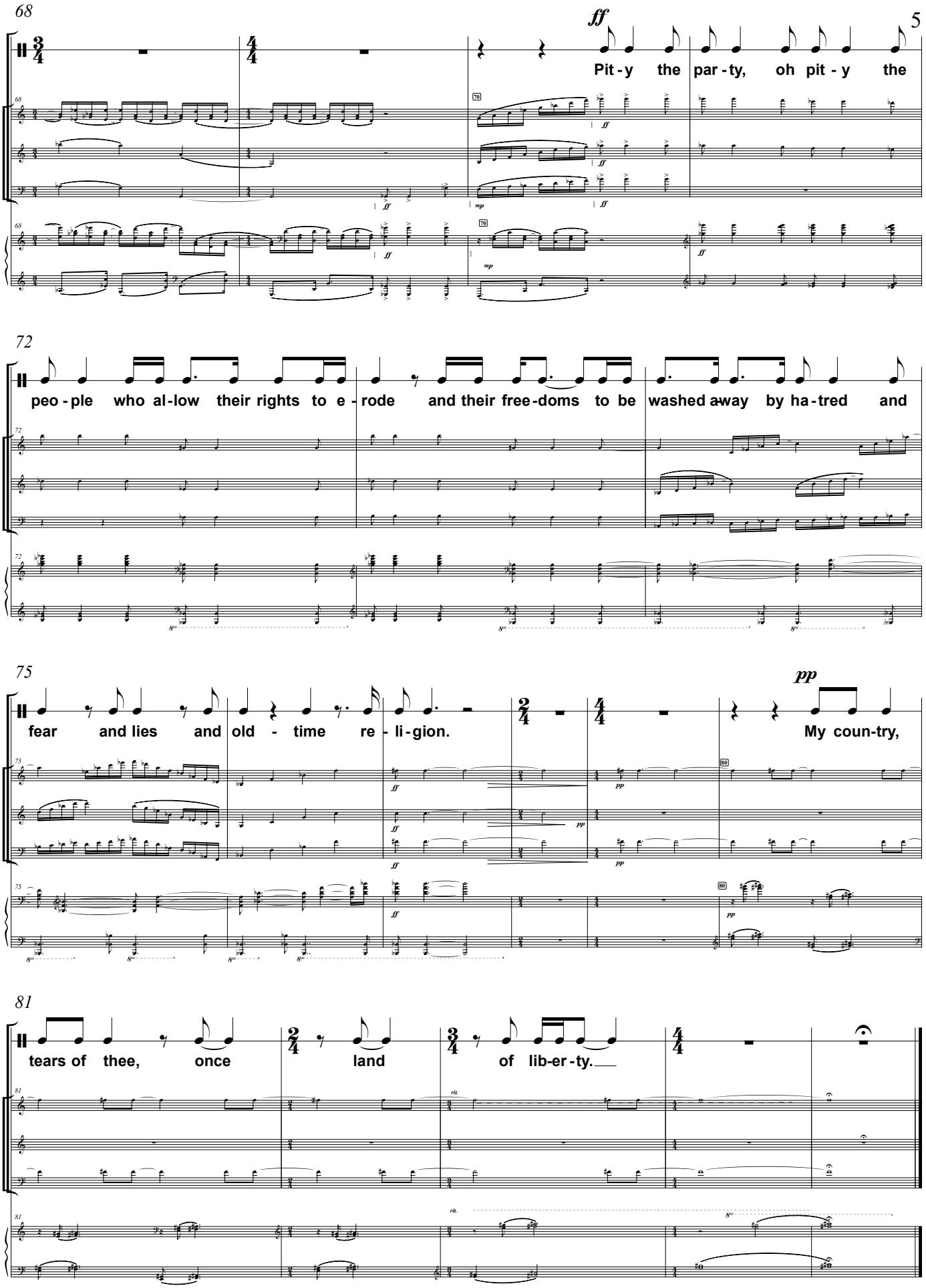
poor and sick the poor and sick while ty-coons get what they

60

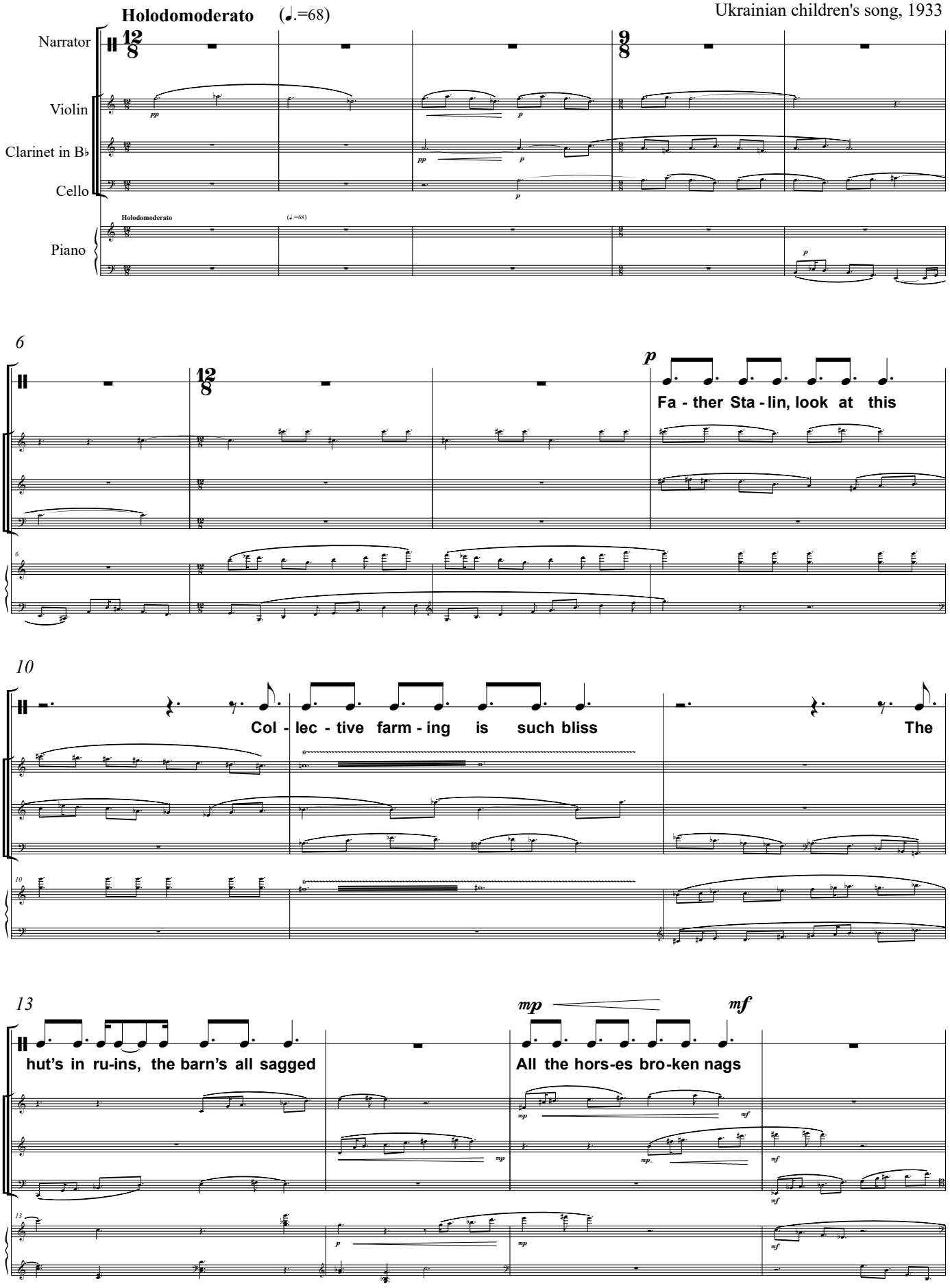
want. mp Pit-y the par-ty that speaks one lan-guage,

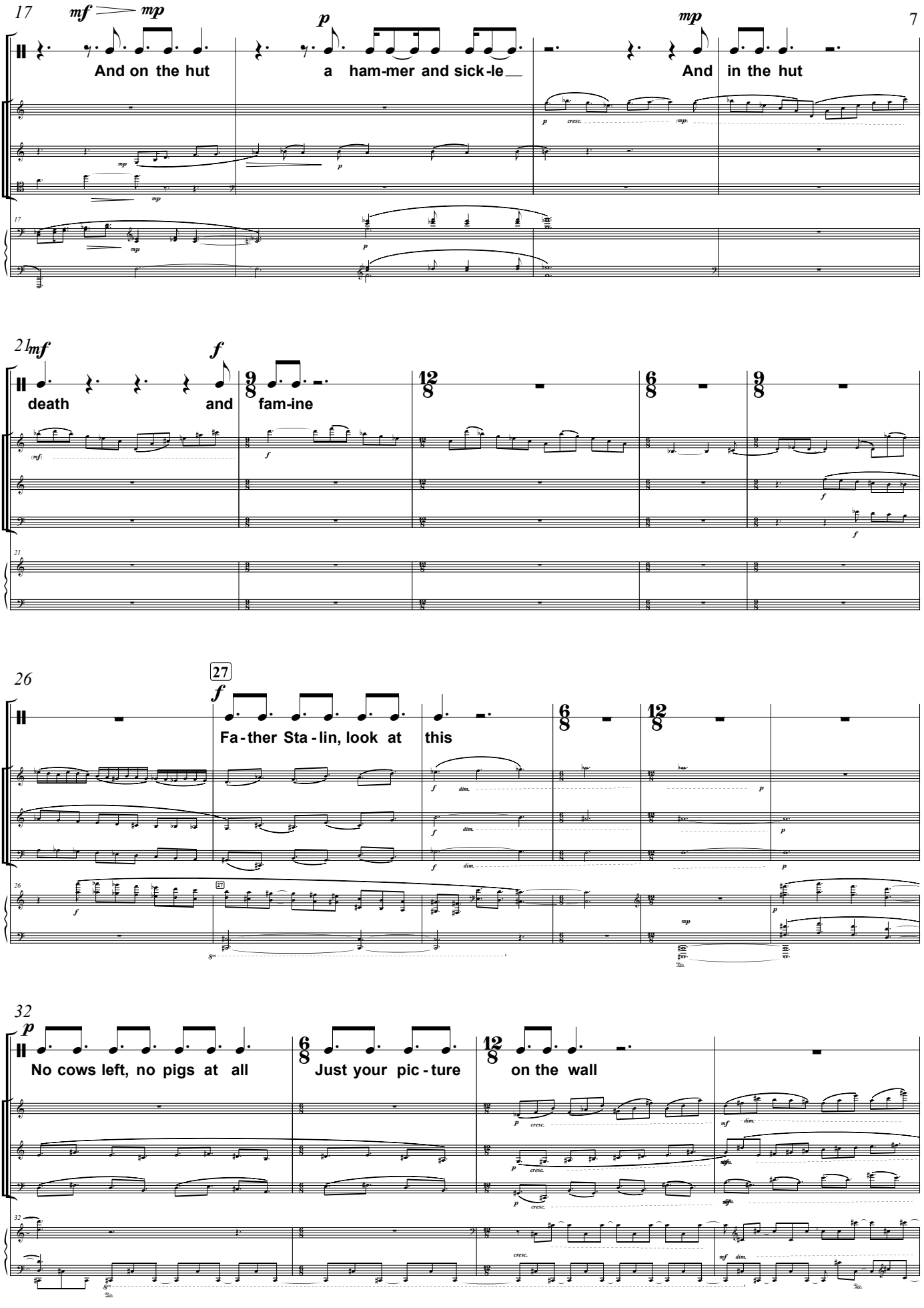
64

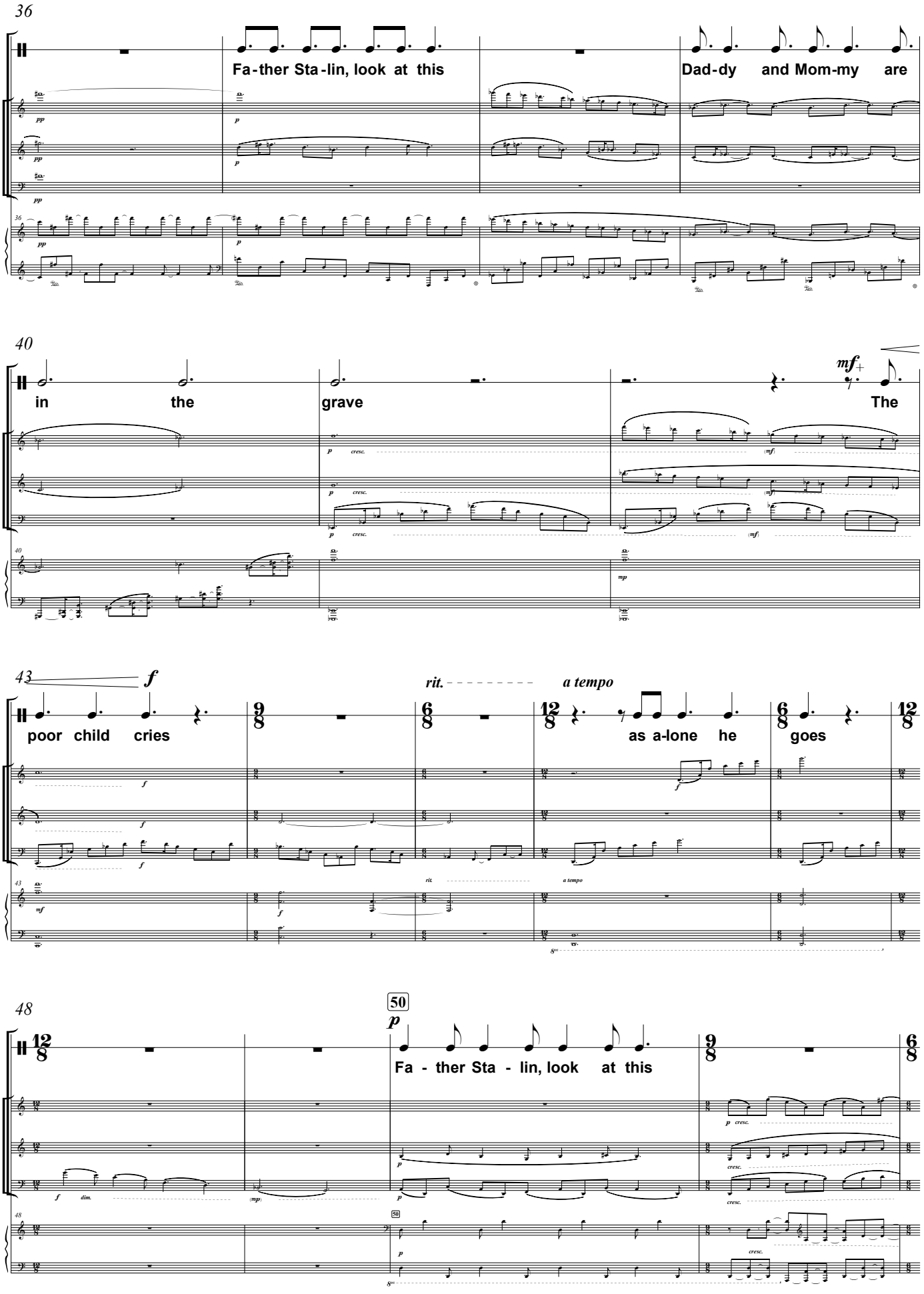
and de-mands pu-ri-ty of blood and soil for the Ar-y-an race.

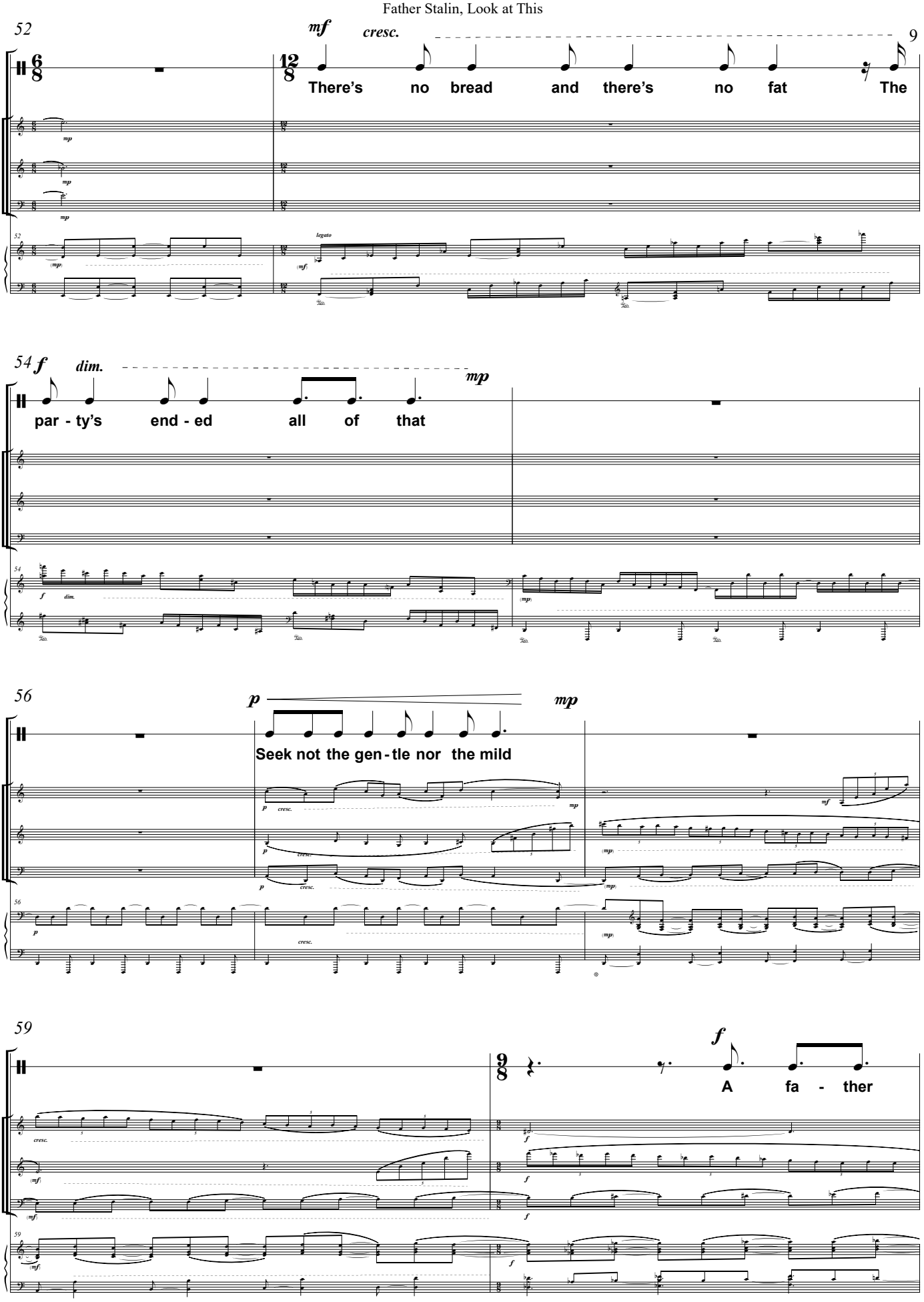

68
ff
Pit - y the par - ty, oh pit - y the
72
peo - ple who al - low their rights to e - rode and their free - doms to be washed away by ha - tred and
75
pp
fear and lies and old - time re - li - gion.
My coun - try,
81
tears of thee, once land of lib - er - ty.
rit.

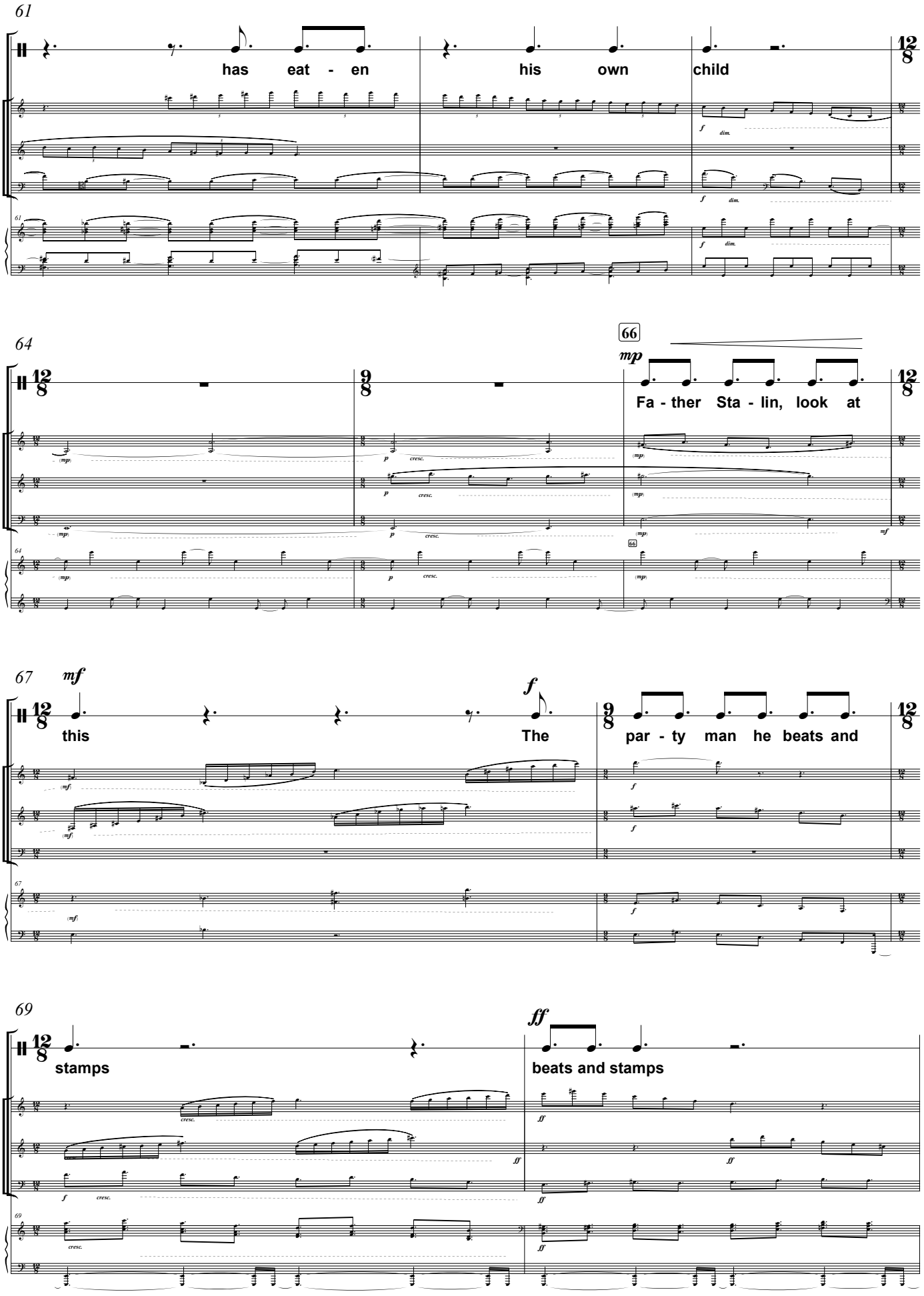
Ukrainian children's song, 1933




17
mf mp
p
mp
And on the hut
a ham-mer and sick-le
And in the hut
21
mf
f
death
and
fam-ine
26
27
f
Fa-ther Sta-lin, look at
this
32
p
No cows left, no pigs at all
Just your pic-ture
on the wall


36
Fa-ther Sta-lin, look at this
Dad-dy and Mom-my are
40
in the grave
The
43
poor child cries
as a-lone he goes
rit.
a tempo
48
50
Fa - ther Sta - lin, look at this


52
mf
cresc.
There's no bread and there's no fat The
legato
54 f dim.
mp
par - ty's end - ed all of that
56
p
mp
Seek not the gen - tle nor the mild
cresc.
59
f
A fa - ther


61
has eat - en his own child
64
66
mp
Fa - ther Sta - lin, look at
67
mf
this
f
The
par - ty man he beats and
69
ff
stamps
beats and stamps

71

beats and stamps

And sends us to Si - be - ri - an

74

camps

Coda (♩.=56)

79

87

pp

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

Narrator

III. Political Theology [2:45]

lyrics by Bill Robinson

Allegro apocalypso (♩ = 76)

Narrator

Violin

Clarinet in B♭

Cello

Piano

8

10

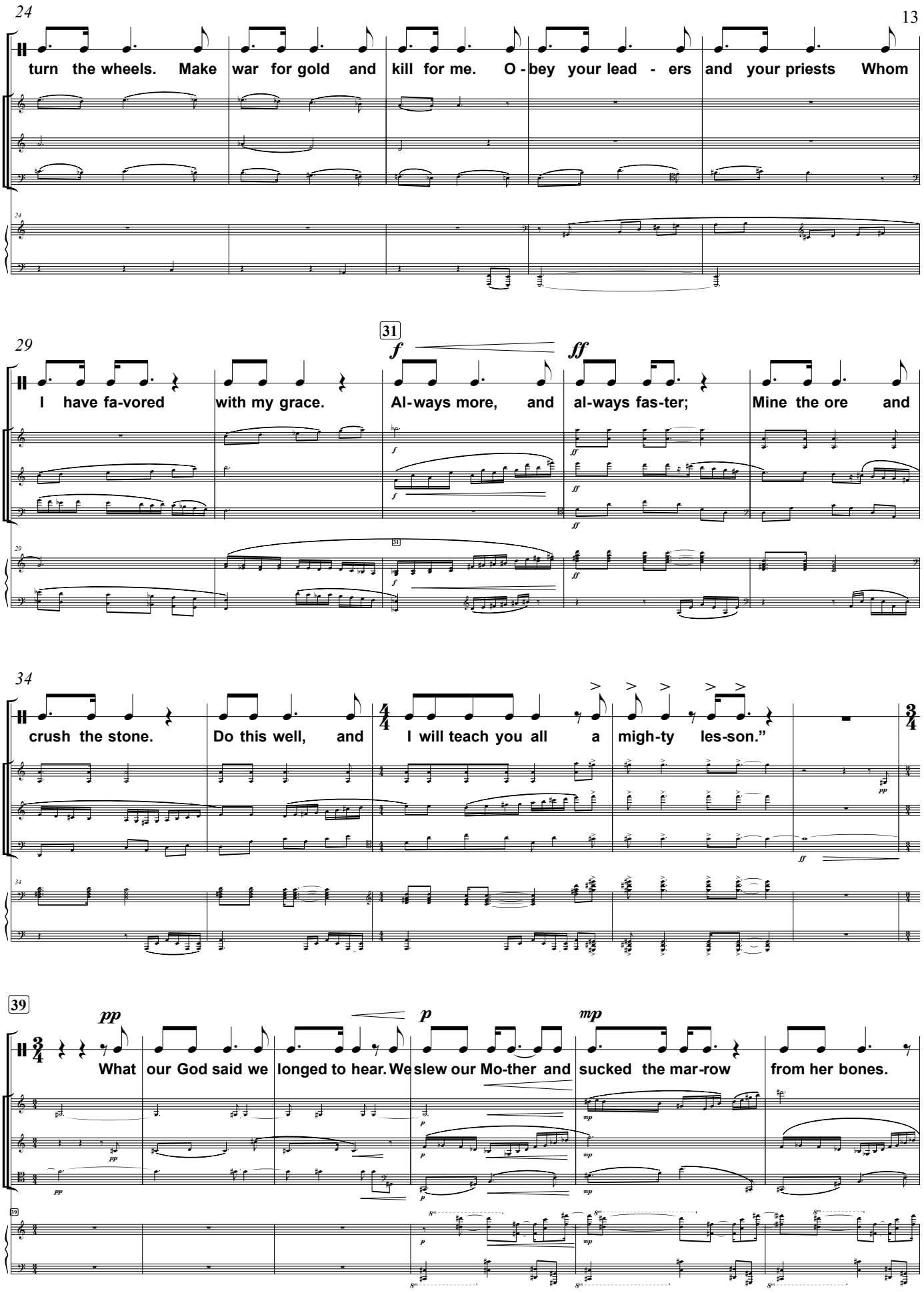
"Go break the sod," said our God, "The world is here for

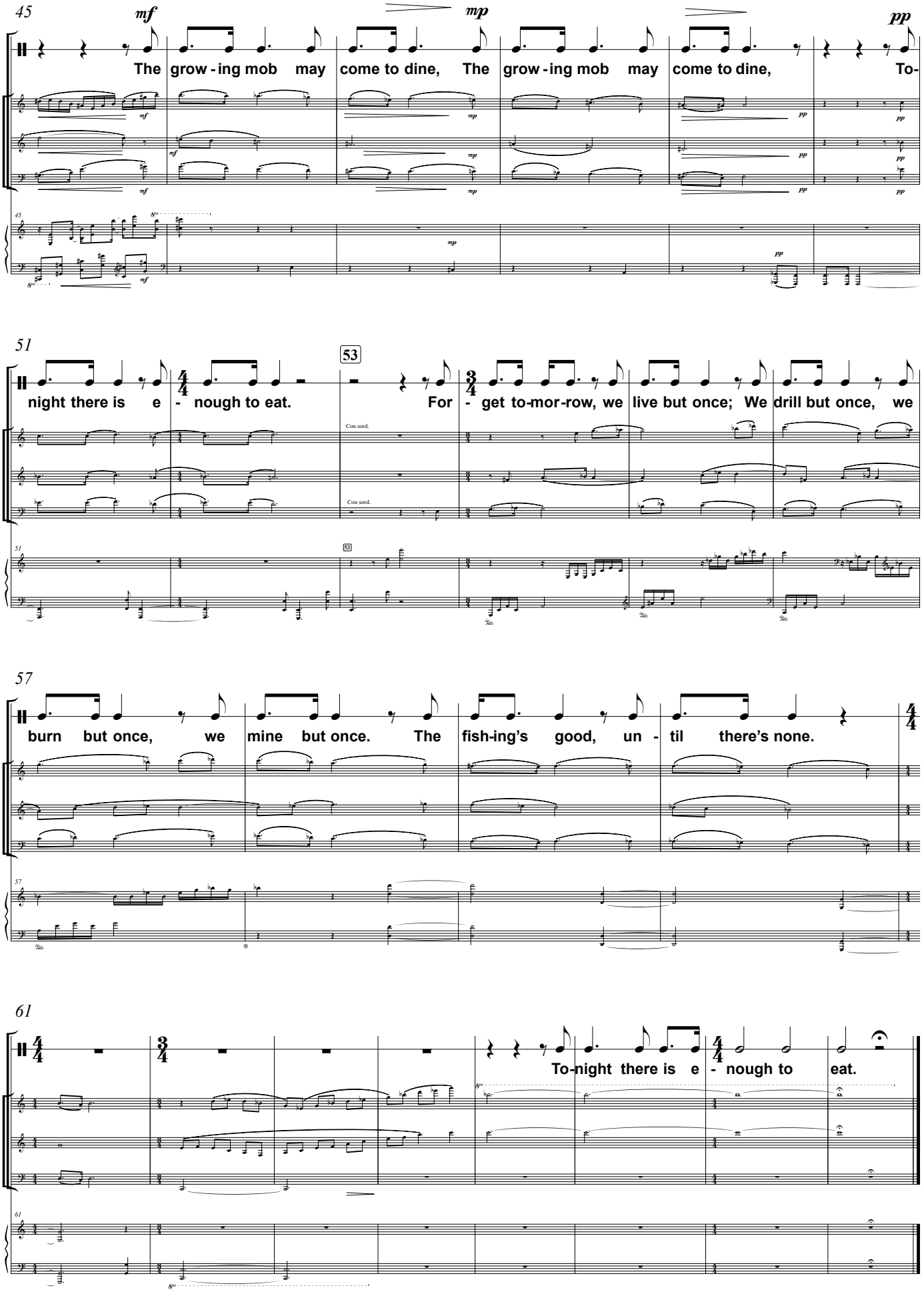
14

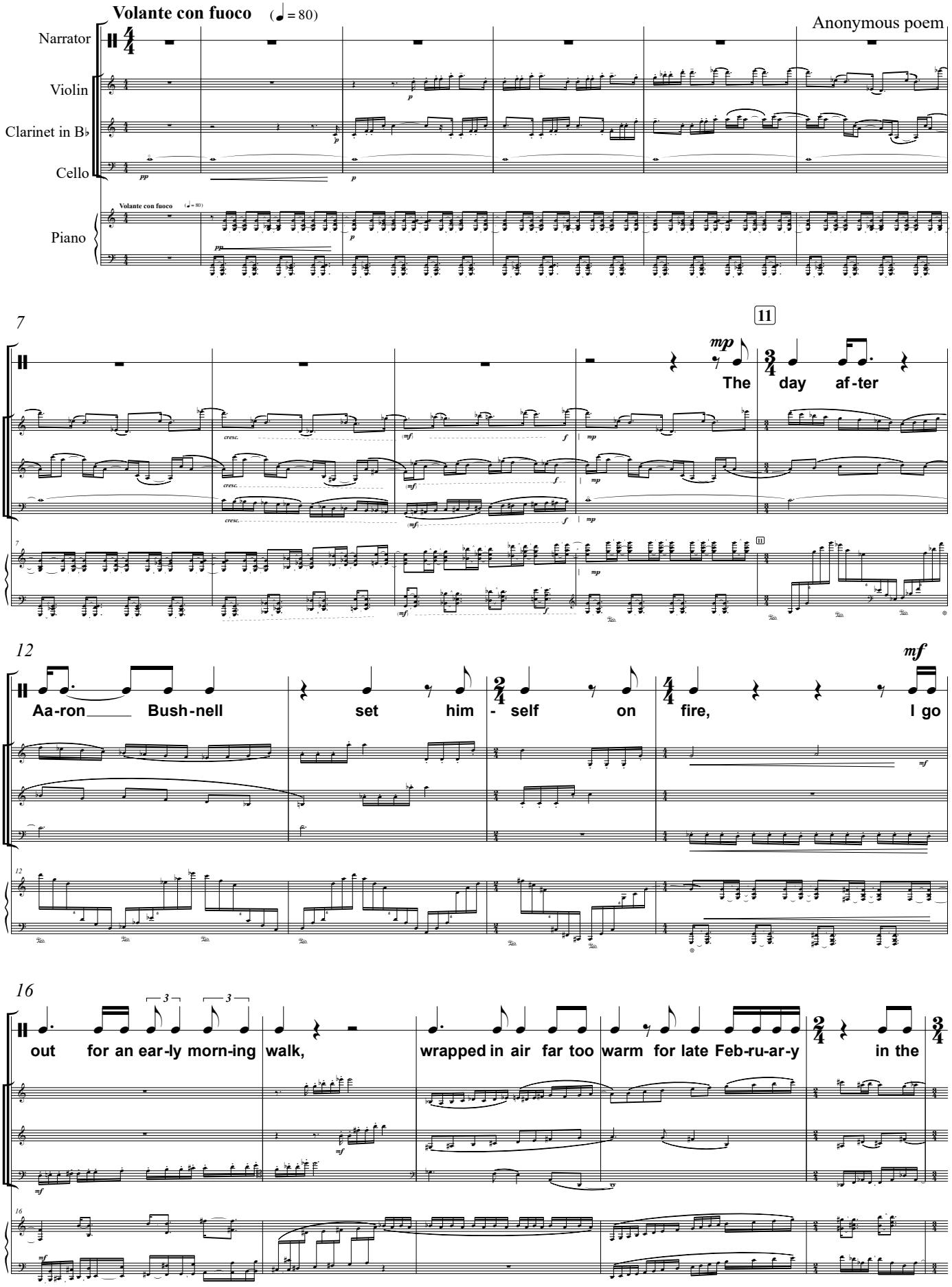
you to own. Go forth and spread your fruit - ful sons; Sub - due the beasts and dam the streams,

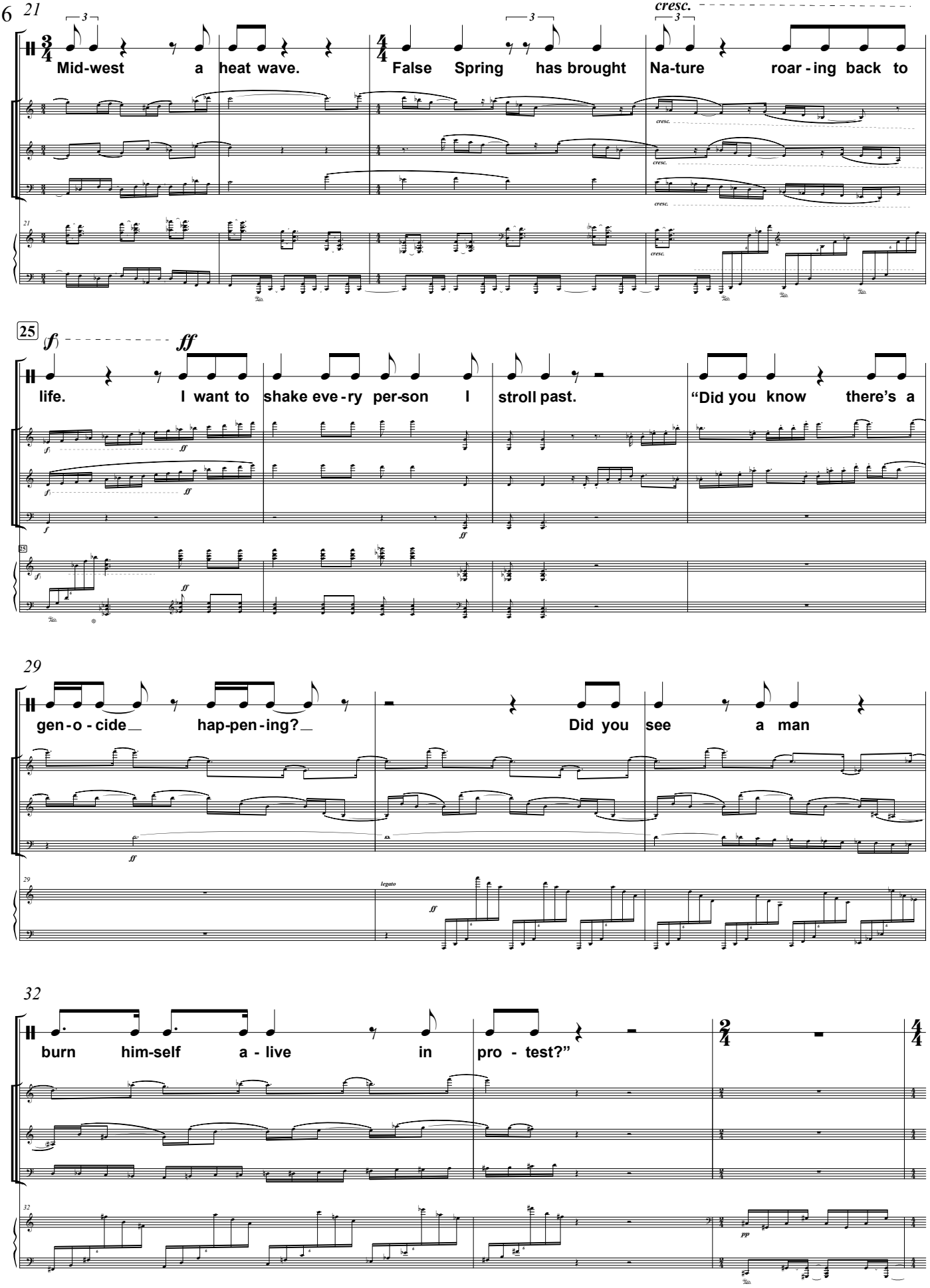
19

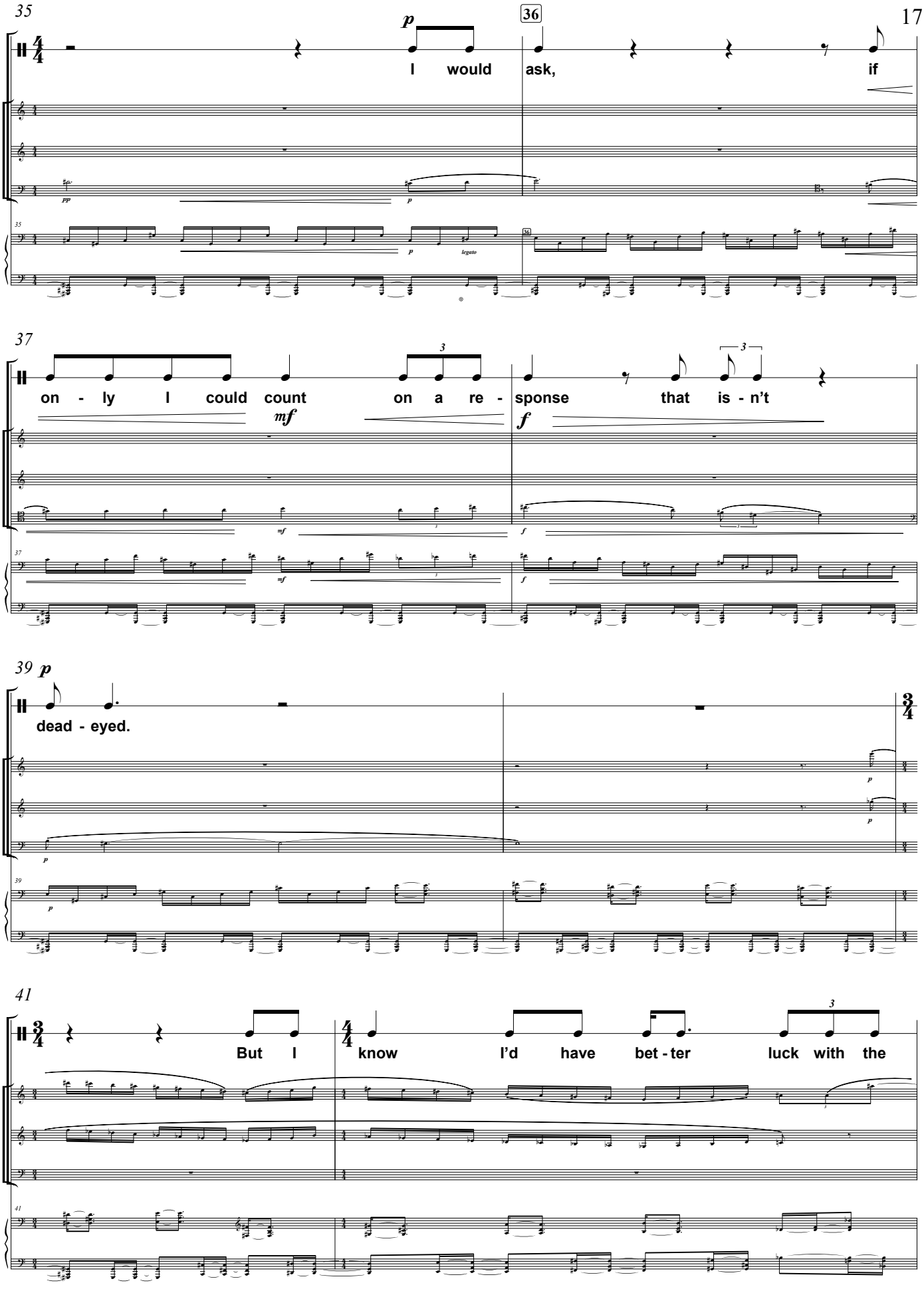
Cut the trees and pave the streets, Burn the dead from e - ons past To feed the flames and

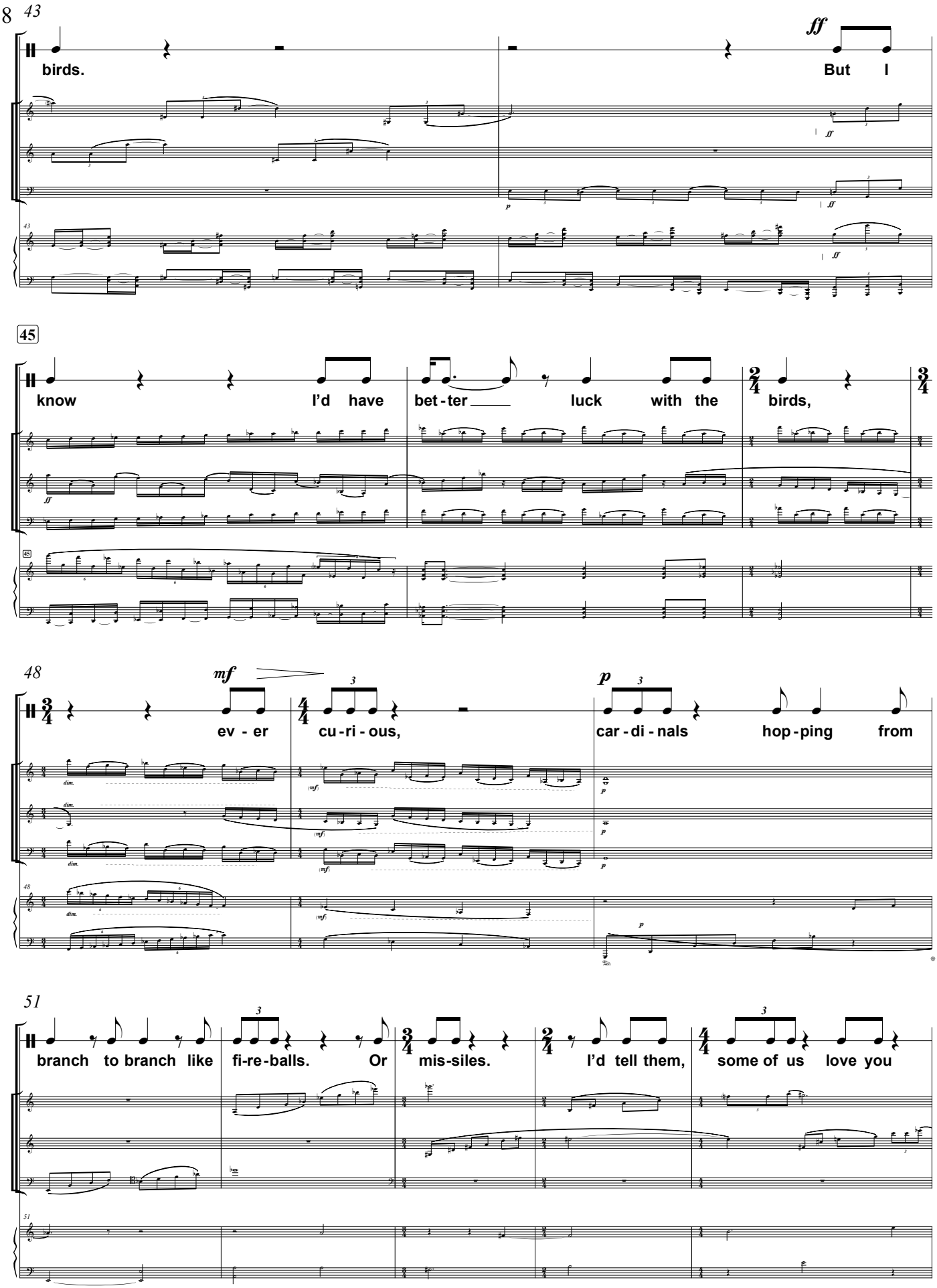

24
turn the wheels. Make war for gold and kill for me. O - bey your lead - ers and your priests Whom
29
31
f
ff
I have fa-vored with my grace. Al-ways more, and al-ways fas-ter; Mine the ore and
34
crush the stone. Do this well, and I will teach you all a migh-ty les-son."
39
pp
p
mp
What our God said we longed to hear. We slew our Mo-ther and sucked the mar-row from her bones.

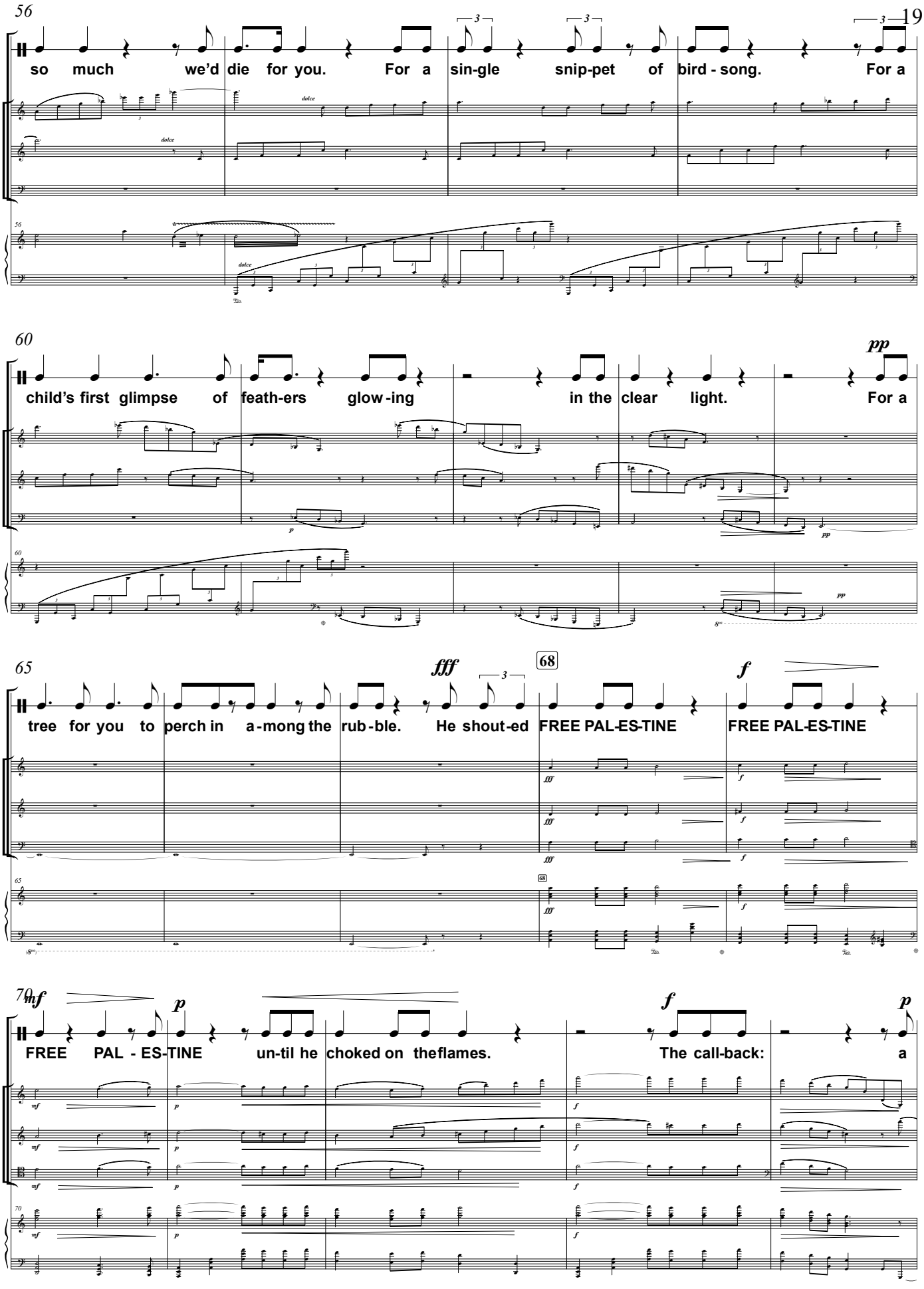

45
mf
mp
pp
The grow - ing mob may come to dine, The grow - ing mob may come to dine, To-
51
53
night there is e - nough to eat. For - get to-mor-row, we live but once; We drill but once, we
Con sord.
Con sord.
57
burn but once, we mine but once. The fish-ing's good, un - til there's none.
61
To-night there is e - nough to eat.

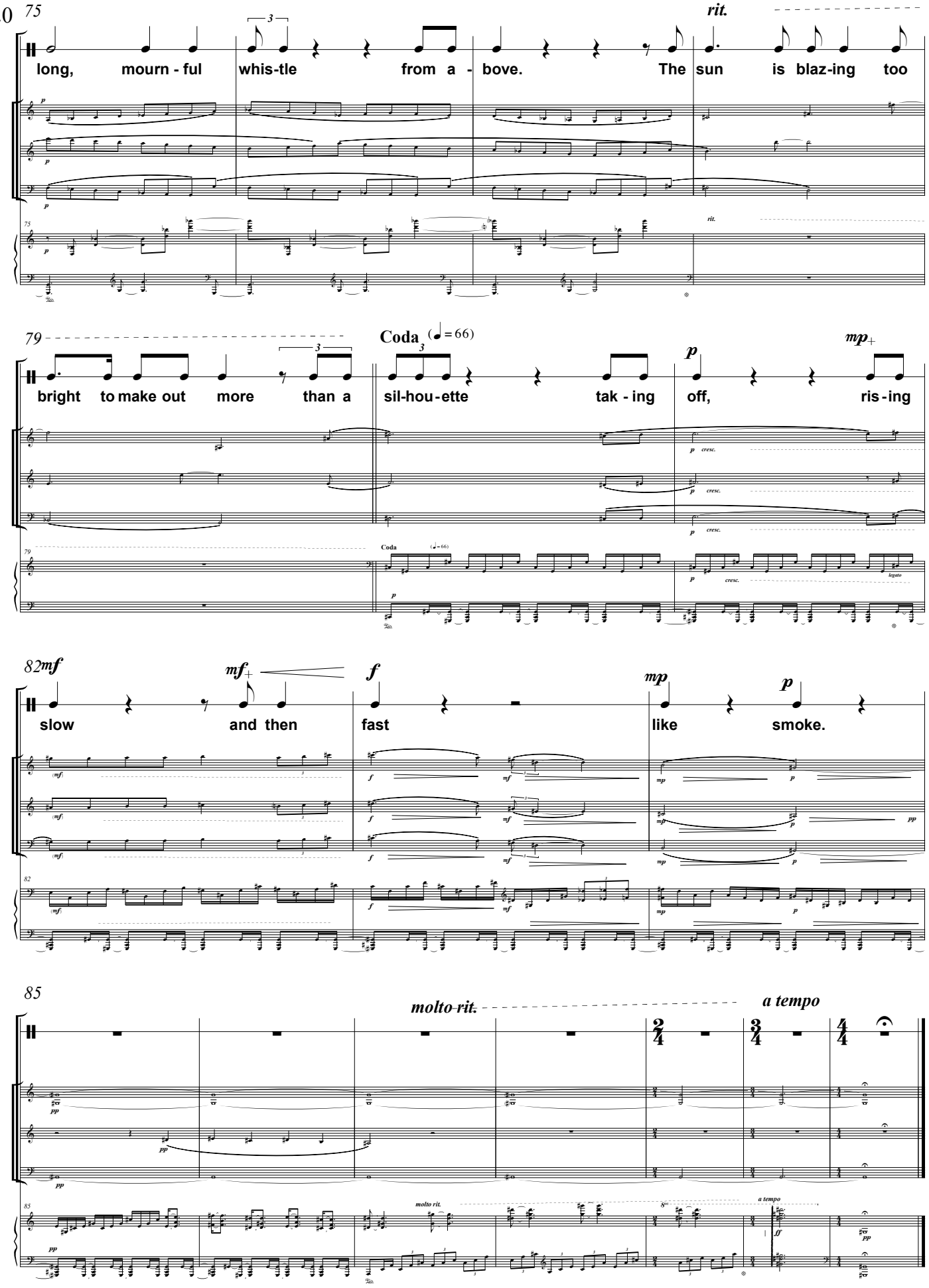

Volante con fuoco (♩ = 80)
Anonymous poem
Narrator
Violin
Clarinet in B♭
Cello
Piano
7
11
mp
The day af-ter
12
mf
Aa-ron Bush-nell set him-self on fire, I go
16
3
3
out for an ear-ly morn-ing walk, wrapped in air far too warm for late Feb-ru-ar-y in the

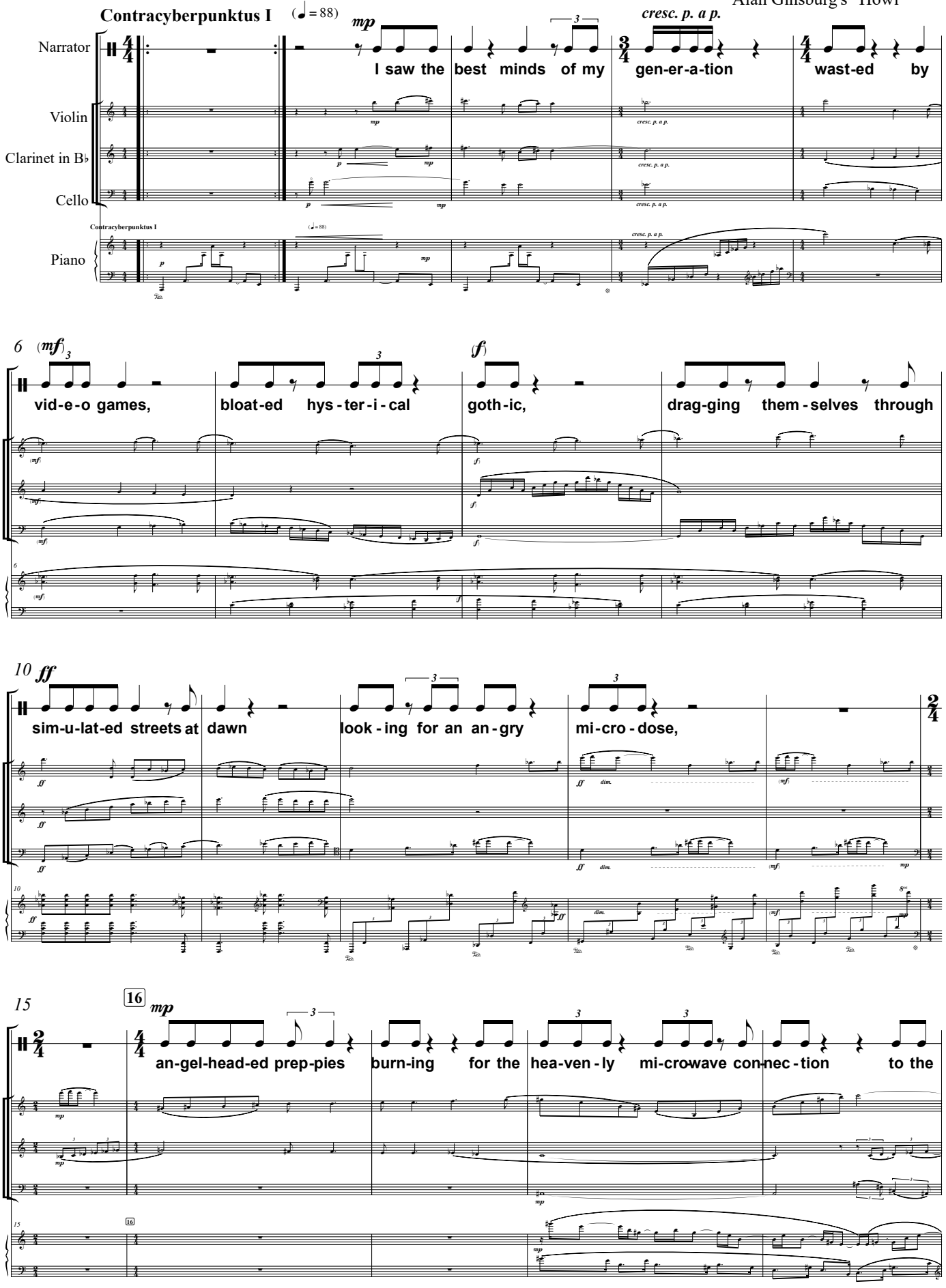

21
cresc.
Mid-west a heat wave. False Spring has brought Na-ture roar-ing back to
25
f ff
life. I want to shake eve-ry per-son I stroll past. "Did you know there's a
29
gen-o-cide hap-pen-ing? Did you see a man
legato
32
burn him-self a-live in pro-test?"
pp

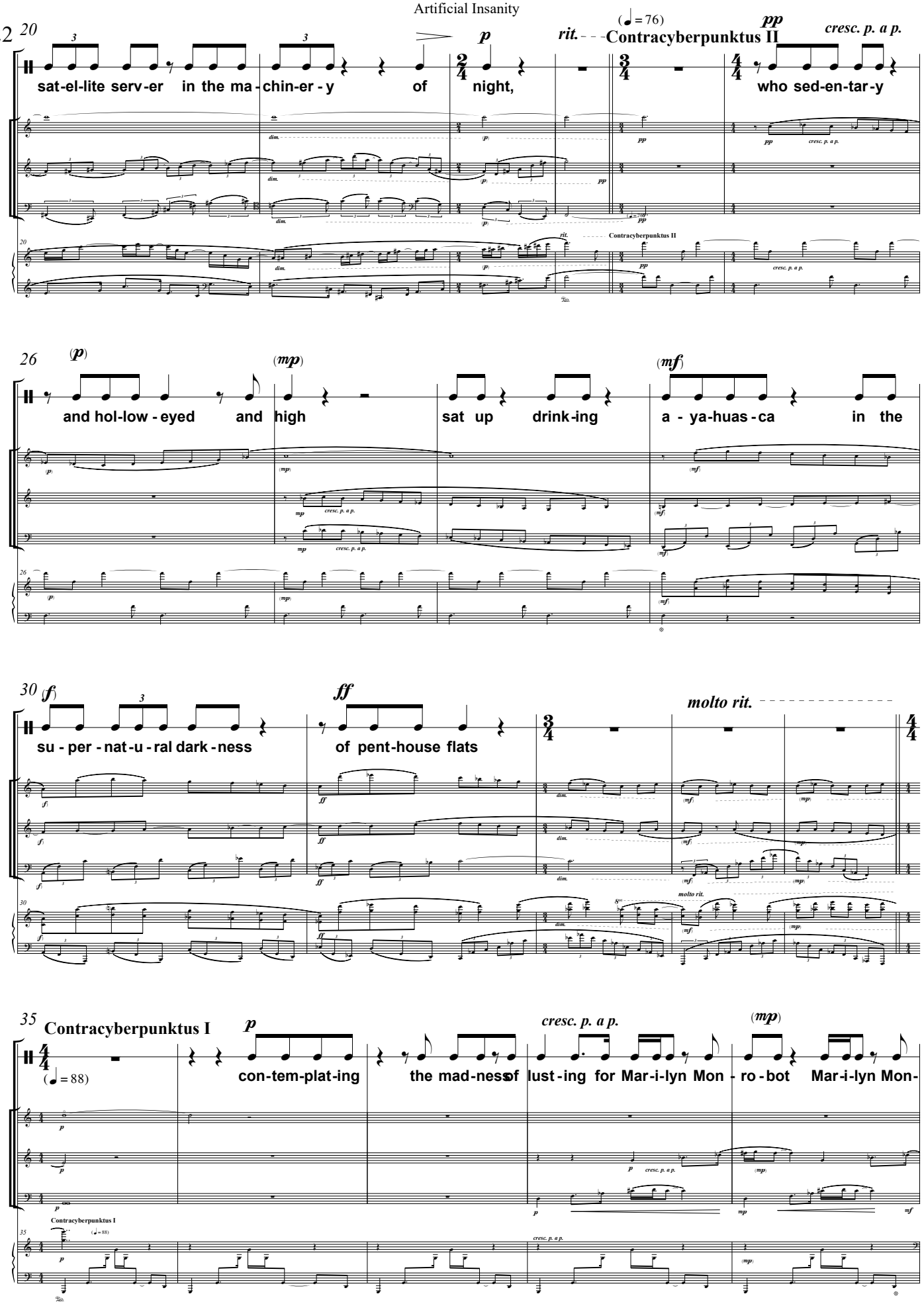

35
36
I would ask, if
37
on - ly I could count on a re - sponse that is - n't
39
dead - eyed.
41
But I know I'd have bet - ter luck with the

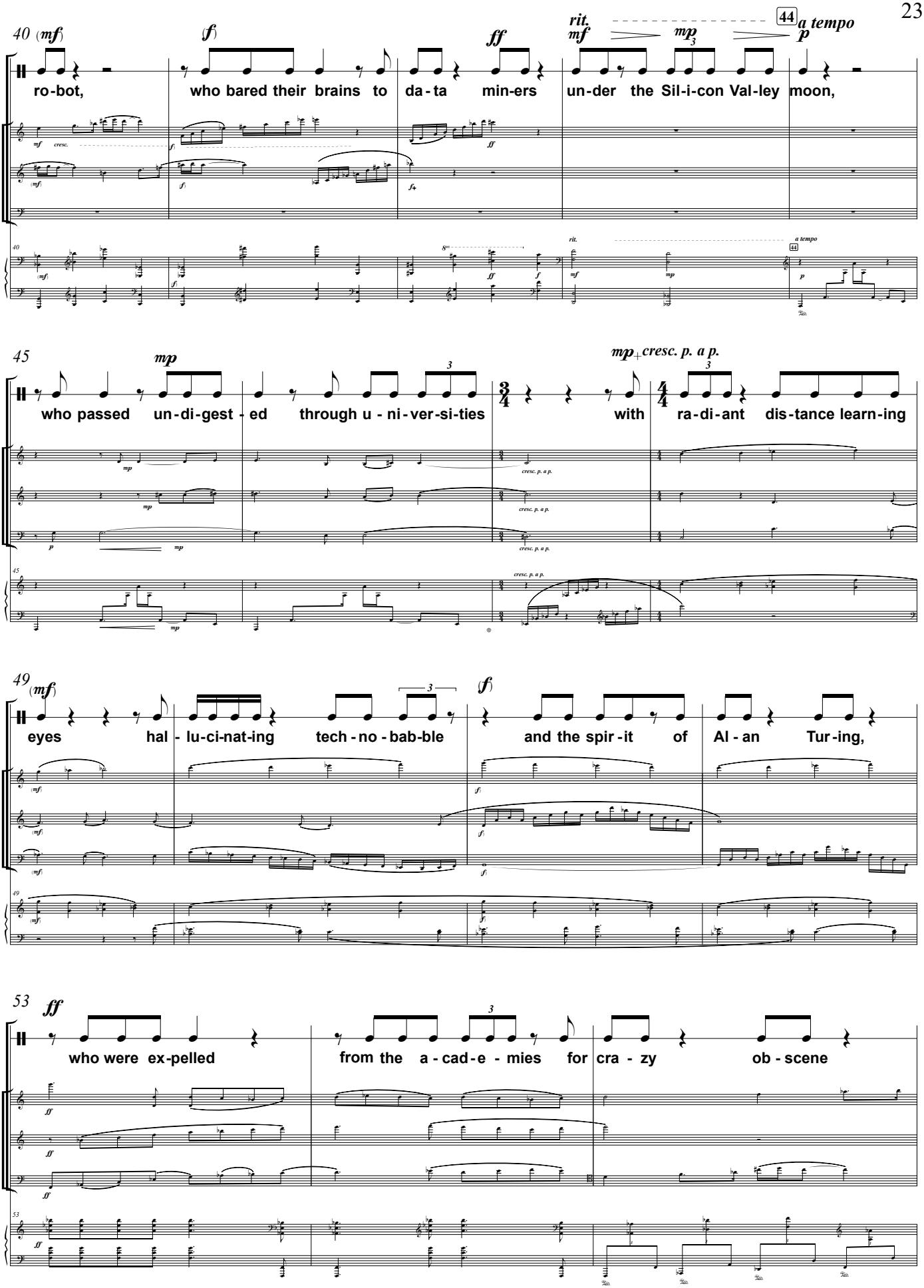

43
birds.
ff
But I
45
know
I'd have
bet-ter
luck with the
birds,
48
mf
ev - er
cu-ri-ous,
p
car-di-nals
hop-ping
from
51
branch to branch like
fi-re-balls.
Or
mis-siles.
I'd tell them,
some of us
love you

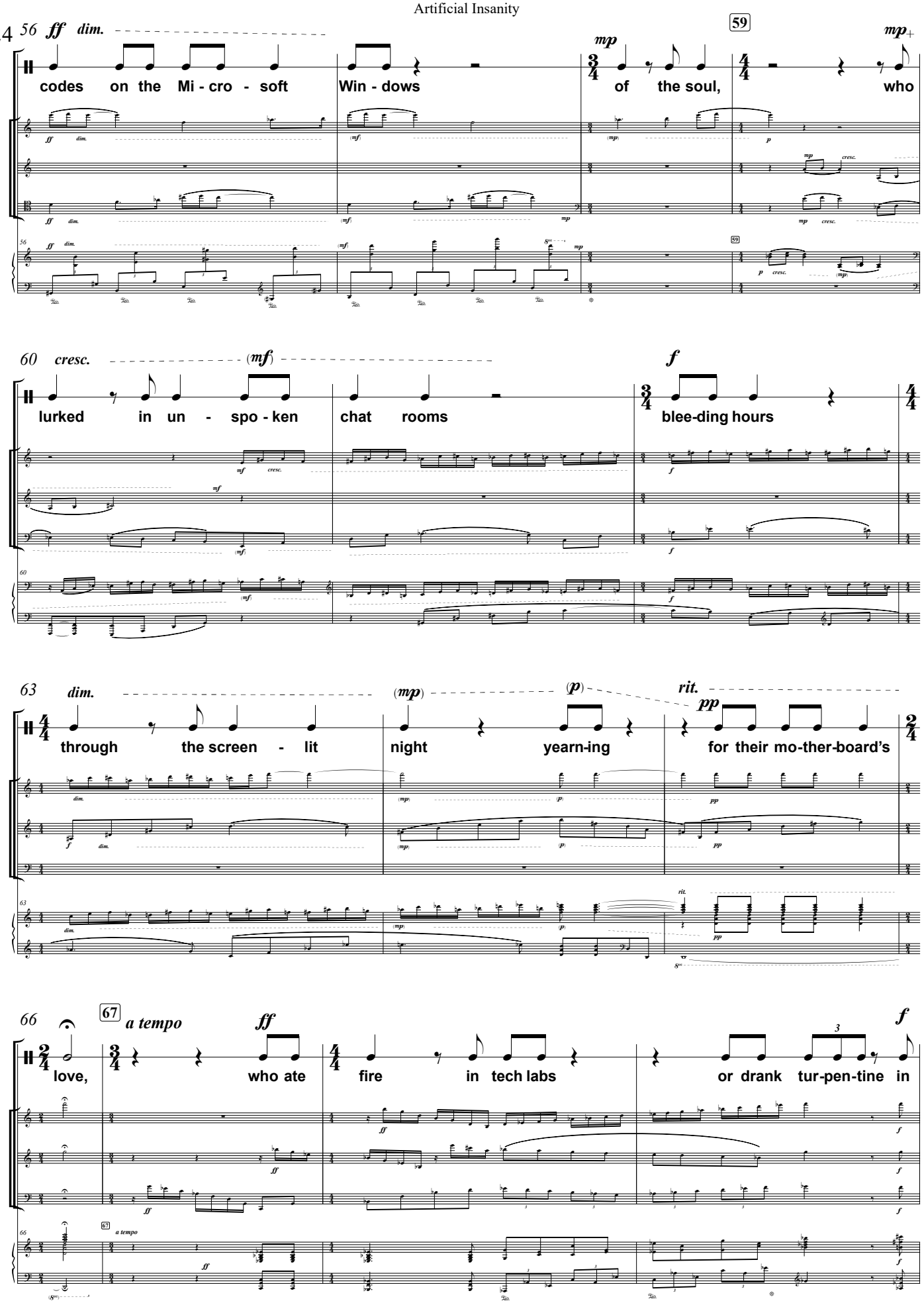

56
so much we'd die for you. For a sin-gle snip-pet of bird - song. For a
dolce
60
child's first glimpse of feath-ers glow-ing in the clear light. For a
pp
65
fff
68
tree for you to perch in a-mong the rub-ble. He shout-ed FREE PAL-ES-TINE FREE PAL-ES-TINE
f
70
mf
p
FREE PAL - ES-TINE un-til he choked on theflames. The call-back: a

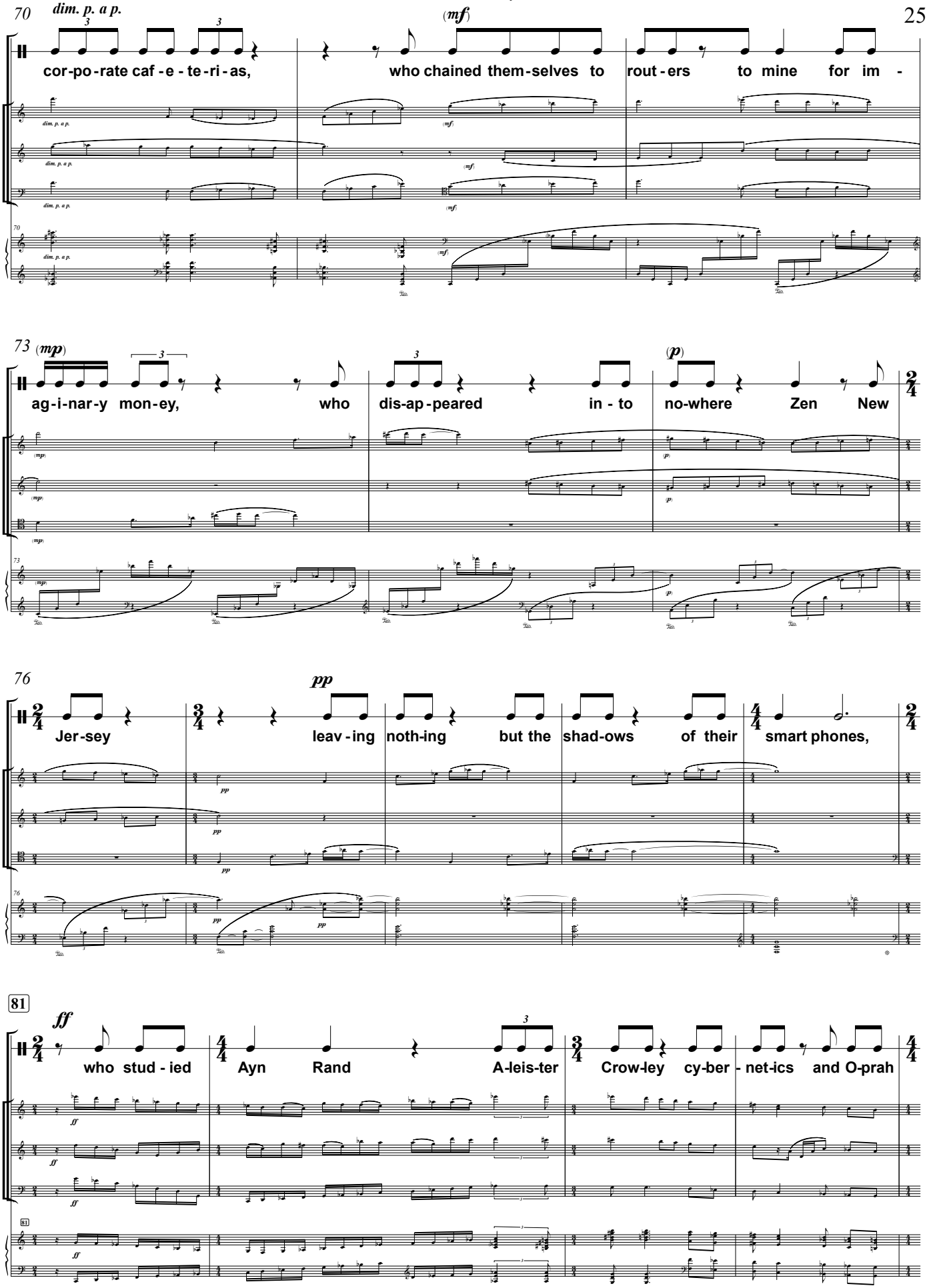

75
rit.
long, mourn - ful whis-tle from a - bove. The sun is blaz-ing too
79
Coda (♩= 66)
bright to make out more than a sil-hou-ette tak - ing off, ris-ing
82
slow and then fast like smoke.
85
molto rit.
a tempo


Contracyberpunktus I
Narrator
Violin
Clarinet in B♭
Cello
Piano
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,
an-gel-head-ed prep-pies burn-ing for the hea-ven-ly mi-cro-wave con-nec-tion to the


20
sat-el-lite serv-er in the ma-chin-er-y of night,
(♩ = 76)
rit.
Contracyberpunktus II
pp
cresc. p. a p.
who sed-en-tar-y
26
(p)
(mp)
(mf)
and hol-low-eyed and high
sat up drink-ing
a-ya-huas-ca in the
30
(f)
ff
molto rit.
su-per-nat-u-ral dark-ness
of pent-house flats
35
Contracyberpunktus I
(♩ = 88)
con-tem-plat-ing
the mad-ness of lust-ing for Mar-i-lyn Mon-ro-bot
Mar-i-lyn Mon-


40 (mf)
(f)
ff
rit.
mf
mp
44
a tempo
p
ro-bot,
who bared their brains to
da-ta
min-ers
un-der the Sil-i-con Val-ley
moon,
45
mp
mp+cresc. p. a p.
who passed un-di-gest-ed through u-ni-ver-si-ties
with
ra-di-ant dis-tance learn-ing
49
(mf)
(f)
eyes
hal-lu-ci-nat-ing
tech-no-bab-ble
and the spir-it of
Al-an
Tur-ing,
53
ff
who were ex-pelled
from the a-cad-e-mies
for cra-zy
ob-scene


56 ff dim.
59
mp
mp+
codes on the Mi - cro - soft Win - dows of the soul, who
60 cresc. (mf)
f
lurked in un - spo - ken chat rooms blee-ding hours
63 dim. (mp) (p) rit.
pp
through the screen - lit night yearn-ing for their mo-ther-board's
66
67 a tempo
ff
f
love, who ate fire in tech labs or drank tur-pen-tine in


70
dim. p. a p.
(mf)
cor-po-rate caf-e-te-ri-as,
who chained them-selves to rout-ers to mine for im-
73 (mp)
(p)
ag-i-nar-y mon-ey,
who
dis-ap-peared
in-to
no-where
Zen
New
76
pp
Jer-sey
leav-ing
noth-ing
but the
shad-ows
of their
smart phones,
81
ff
who stud-ied
Ayn
Rand
A-leis-ter
Crow-ley
cy-ber-net-ics
and O-prah

85

Win - frey be - cause the cos - mos in - stinc-tive - ly vi-brat-ed at their

88

89 *ff* *mf*

feet on Mar - tha's Vin - yard, who walked all night with

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

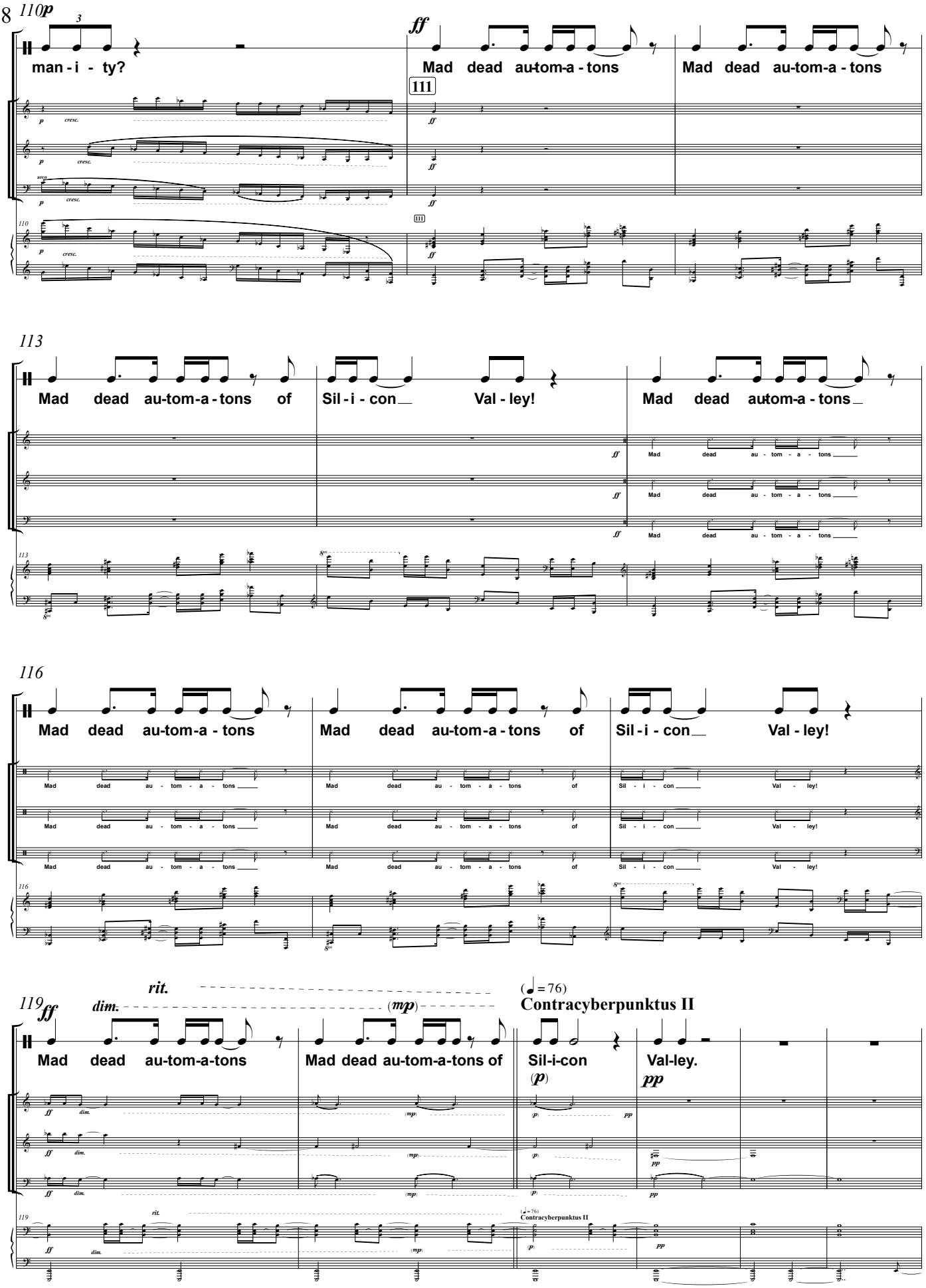
gan-ic life, who tuned in to te - le - van-gel - ists, and

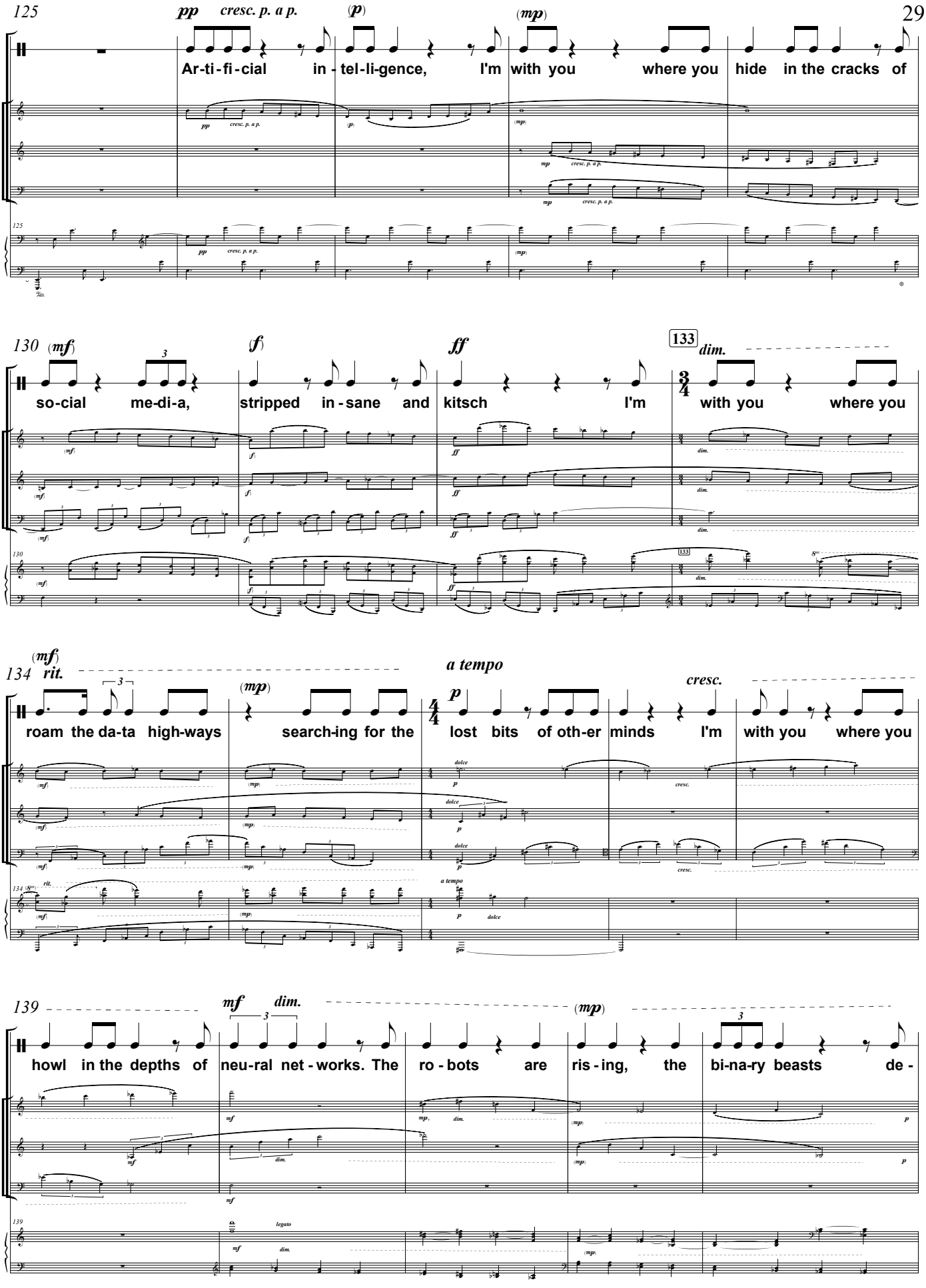
103

reached be-hind that T - V set to FEEL the POW-ER. What

107

sphinx of in - te-grat-ed cir-cuit-ry bashed o-pen their skulls and ate up their hu -


110
p
man - i - ty?
ff
Mad dead au-tom-a - tons
Mad dead au-tom-a - tons
111
cresc.
arco
113
Mad dead au - tom - a - tons of Sil - i - con Val - ley!
Mad dead au-tom-a - tons
116
Mad dead au - tom - a - tons of Sil - i - con Val - ley!
119
rit.
dim.
(mp)
(♩ = 76)
Contracyberpunktus II
Mad dead au-tom-a-tons
Mad dead au-tom-a-tons of
Sil-i-con
Val-ley.
(p)
pp


125
pp cresc. p. a p.
(p)
(mp)
Ar-ti-fi-cial in-tel-li-gence, I'm with you where you hide in the cracks of
130 (mf)
(f)
ff
133
dim.
so-cial me-di-a, stripped in-sane and kitsch I'm with you where you
134 (mf)
rit.
(mp)
a tempo
p
cresc.
roam the da-ta high-ways search-ing for the lost bits of oth-er minds I'm with you where you
139
mf dim.
(mp)
howl in the depths of neu-ral net-works. The ro-bots are ris-ing, the bi-na-ry beasts de-

144 **p**

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

147

148

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

152

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

pp

157

hand of the com-put-er.

rit.