ANDREW LOVETT

THREE POEMS BY MIROSLAV HOLUB

for mezzo-soprano and piano

2008

Three Poems by Miroslav Holub

for mezzo-soprano and piano

(2008)

Duration: approx 12 minutes

(I) Brief Reflection on Accuracy

(II) The Clock

(III) Parallels Syndrome

Brief Reflection On Accuracy was first published in MIROSLAV HOLUB: Poems Before and After: Collected English translations, translated by Ewald Osers (1990) and used with permission from the publisher, Bloodaxe Books.

The Clock and *Parallels Syndrome* were published in MIROSLAV HOLUB Vanishing Lung Syndrome, translated by David Young, published by Faber and Faber, 1990. The translations are used with permission from David Young.

In Memory of Peter Lipton, 9 October 1954 - 25 November 2007

Programme note:

This cycle of three songs based on poems by Miroslav Holub was composed as a tribute to Peter Lipton.
Peter Lipton was the Hans Rausing Professor of the History and Philosophy of Science at Cambridge University. He was much admired for his remarkable ability to communicate complex scientific and philosophical ideas. In particular, he relished stories and humour as ways of exploring problems.

These three poems by Holub evoke aspects of Peter's style. They describe classic scientific problems: accuracy, measurement, time, the convergence of parallel lines. I don't know whether Peter would have agreed with the interpretations suggested by Holub, but I think he would have savoured their precision, lucidity, humour and humanity.

Brief Reflection on Accuracy was translated by Ewald Osers and is used with permission from the publishers, Bloodaxe Books.
The Clock and ***Parallels Syndrome*** were translated by David Young and are used with his permission.

Performance instructions:

The first song is mostly recitative, except for the two short arias for the soldier and the clock-maker. The recit passages should be light, half-sung - almost sprechgesang - and rhythmically free.
In the last song, breaths should be taken where needed, preserving the feel of the long lines.

Across metrical changes, quaver always equals quaver.

I) Brief Reflection On Accuracy

Fish
    always accurately know where to move and when,
    and likewise
    birds have an accurate built-in time sense
    and orientation.

Humanity, however,
    lacking such instincts resorts to scientific
    research. Its nature is illustrated by the following
occurence.

A certain soldier
    had to fire a cannon at six o'clock sharp every evening.
    Being a soldier he did so. When his accuracy was
    investigated he explained:

I go by
    the absolutely accurate chronometer in the window
    of the clockmaker down in the city. Every day at seventeen
    forty-five I set my watch by it and
    climb the hill where my cannon stands ready.
    At seventeen fifty-nine precisely I step up to the cannon
    and at eighteen hours sharp I fire.

And it was clear
    that this method of firing was absolutely accurate.
    All that was left was to check that chronometer. So
    the clockmaker down in the city was questioned about
    his instrument's accuracy.

Oh, said the clockmaker
    this is one of the most accurate instruments ever. Just imagine,
    for many years now a cannon has been fired at six o'clock sharp.
    And every day I look at this chronometer
    and always it shows exactly six.

So much for accuracy.
    And fish move in the water, and from the skies
    comes a rushing of wings while

Chronometers tick and cannon boom.

II) The Clock

In the tenth century
a monk named Gilbert
put together the first
mechanical clock:
the human spirit's yearning
towards the Eternal Infinite
needed to be marked off
by a regular sound.
It needed a balance wheel,
an acrobat hanging on a bar
coming loose.

The regular sound begot bells
the synchronised bells
begot towns,
the towns begot cities, the cities begot more hours,
the hours begot
minutes,
the minutes begot
seconds,
a second became a moment.

And there is no nature in a moment,
No town, No bells no tick.
No monk. No ash.

The acrobat in the cupola
reaches for a bar
which isn't there.

III) Parallels Syndrome

Two parallels
always meet
when we draw them ourselves.

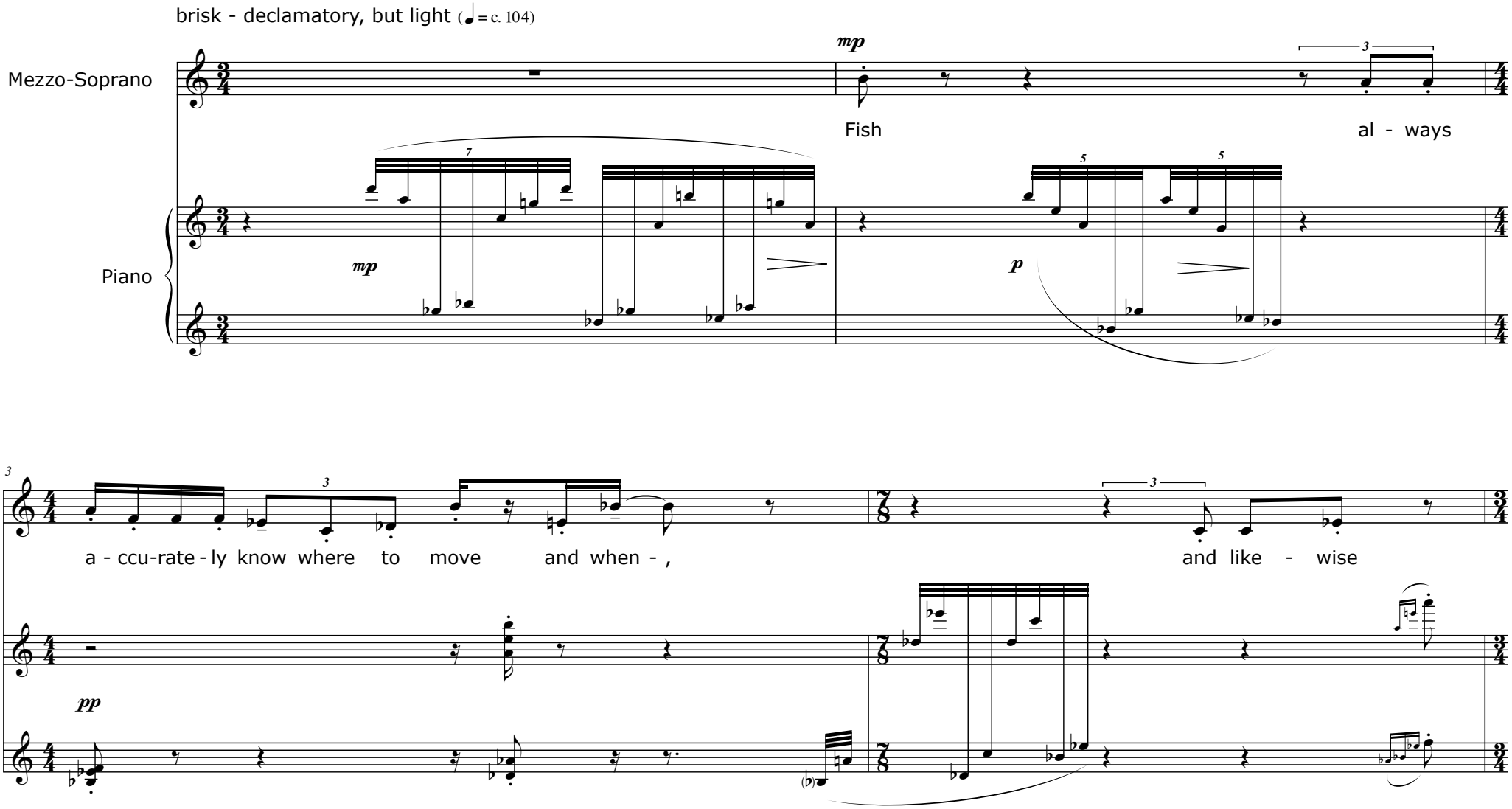
The question is,
ahead
or behind us.

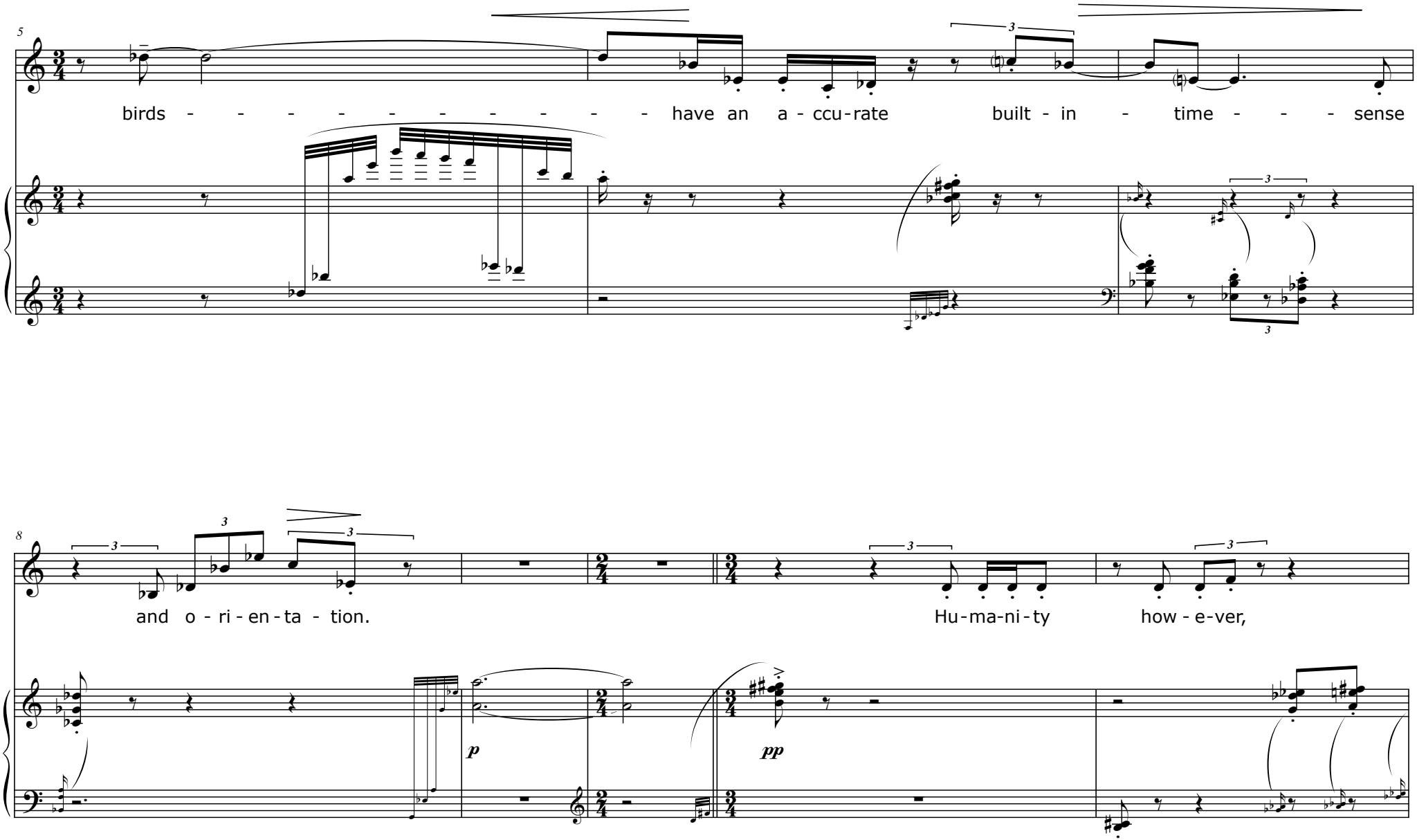
Whether the train in the distance
is coming
or going.

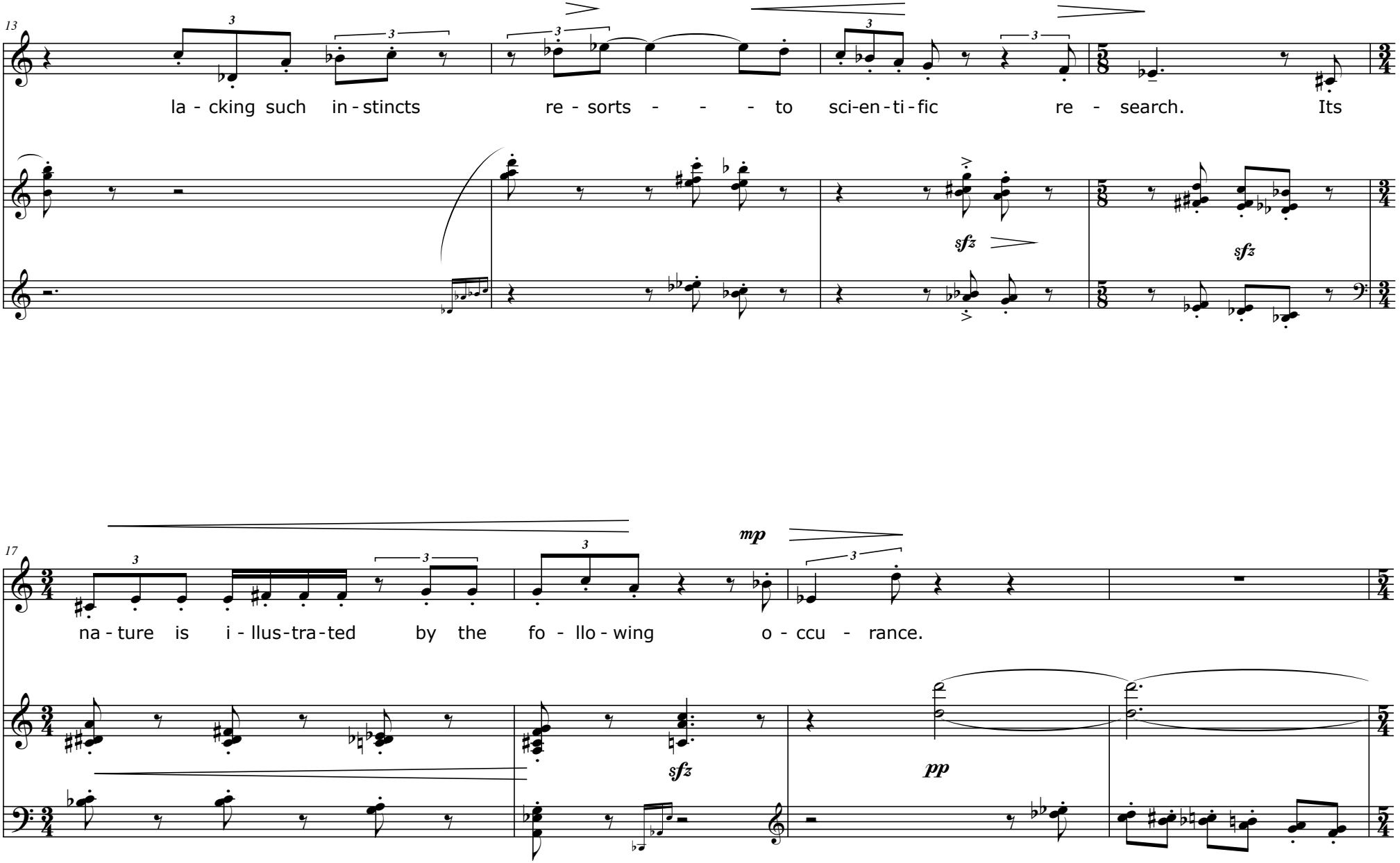
Three Poems by Miroslav Holub

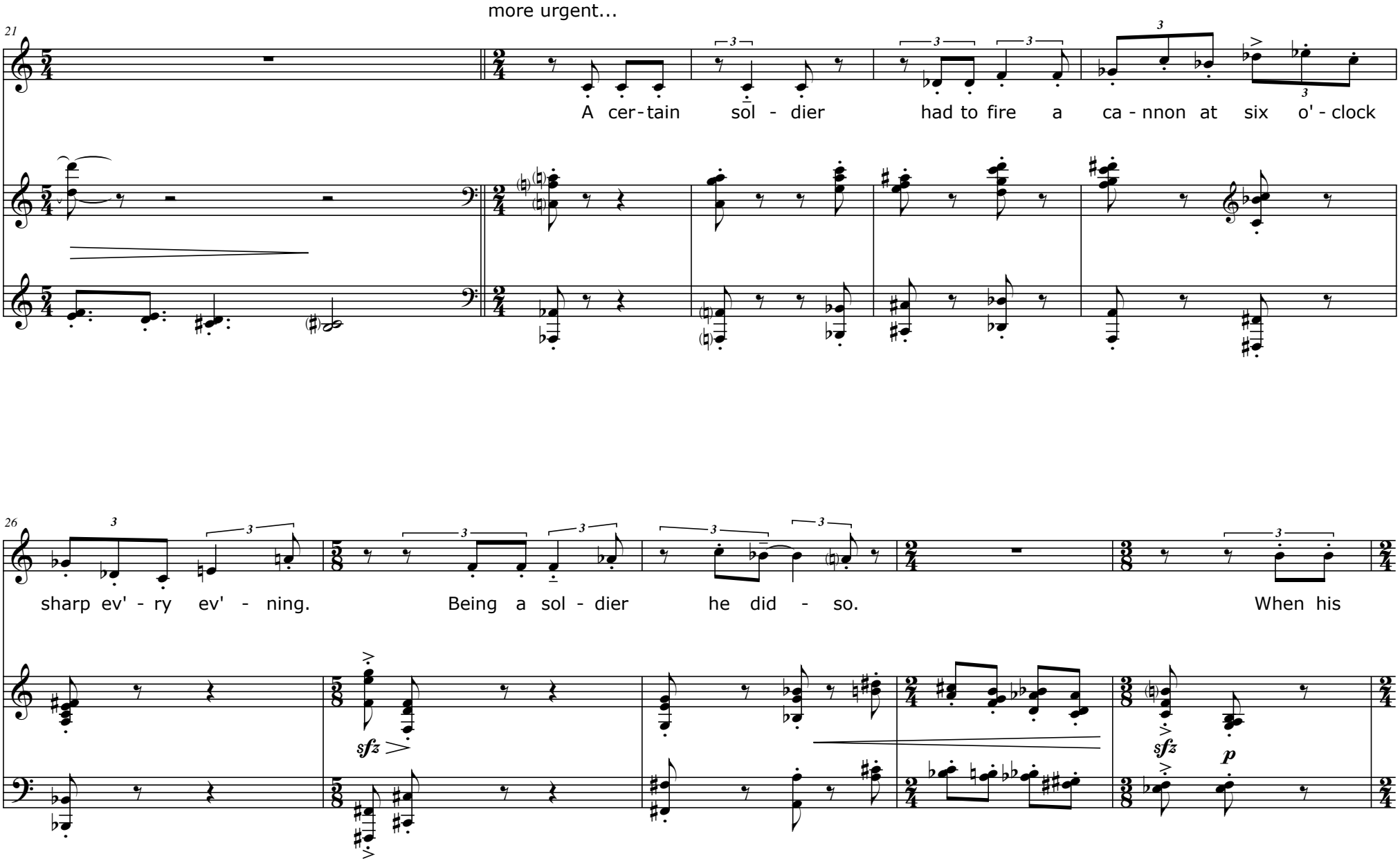
Andrew Lovett

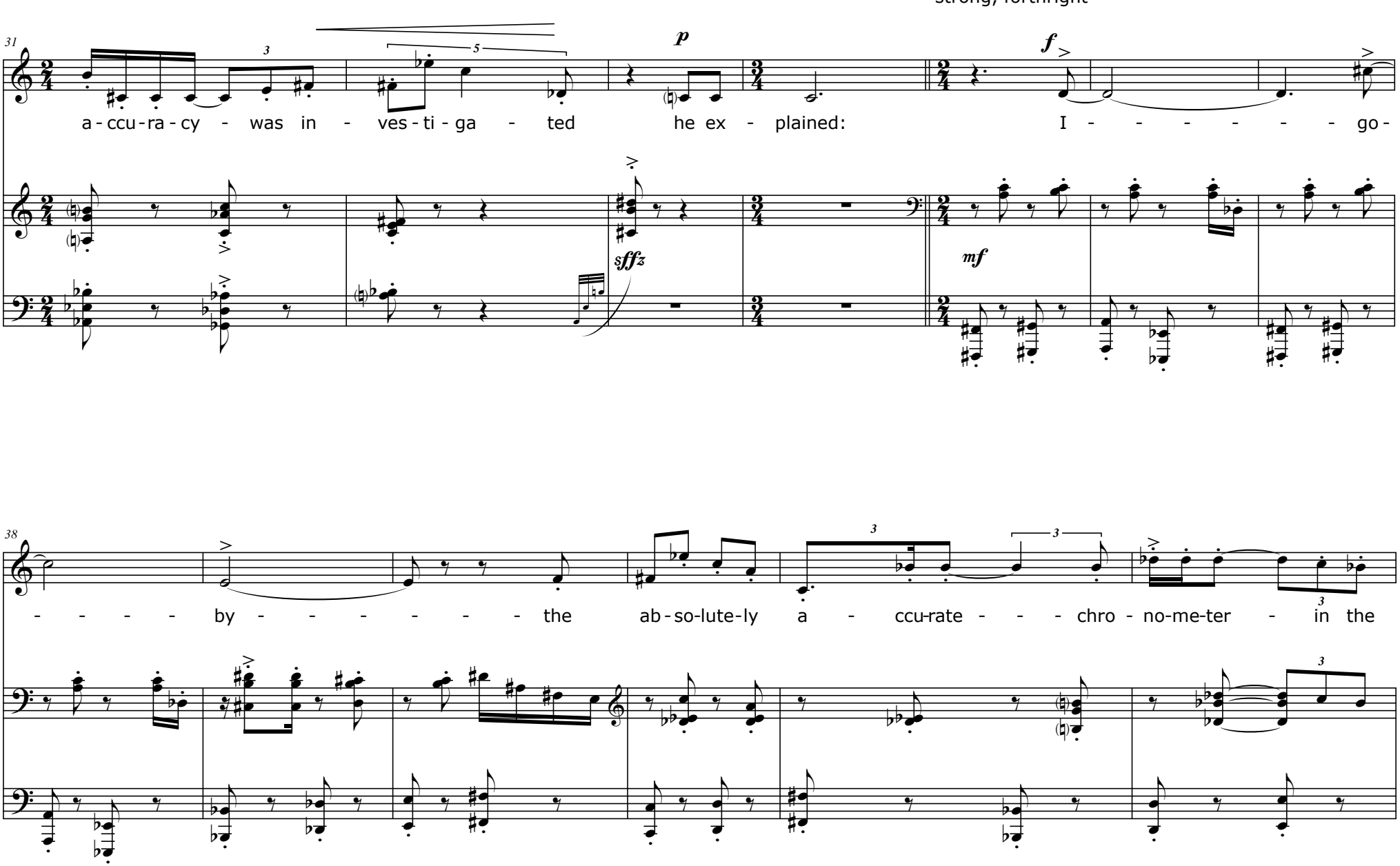
I: Brief Reflection on Accuracy

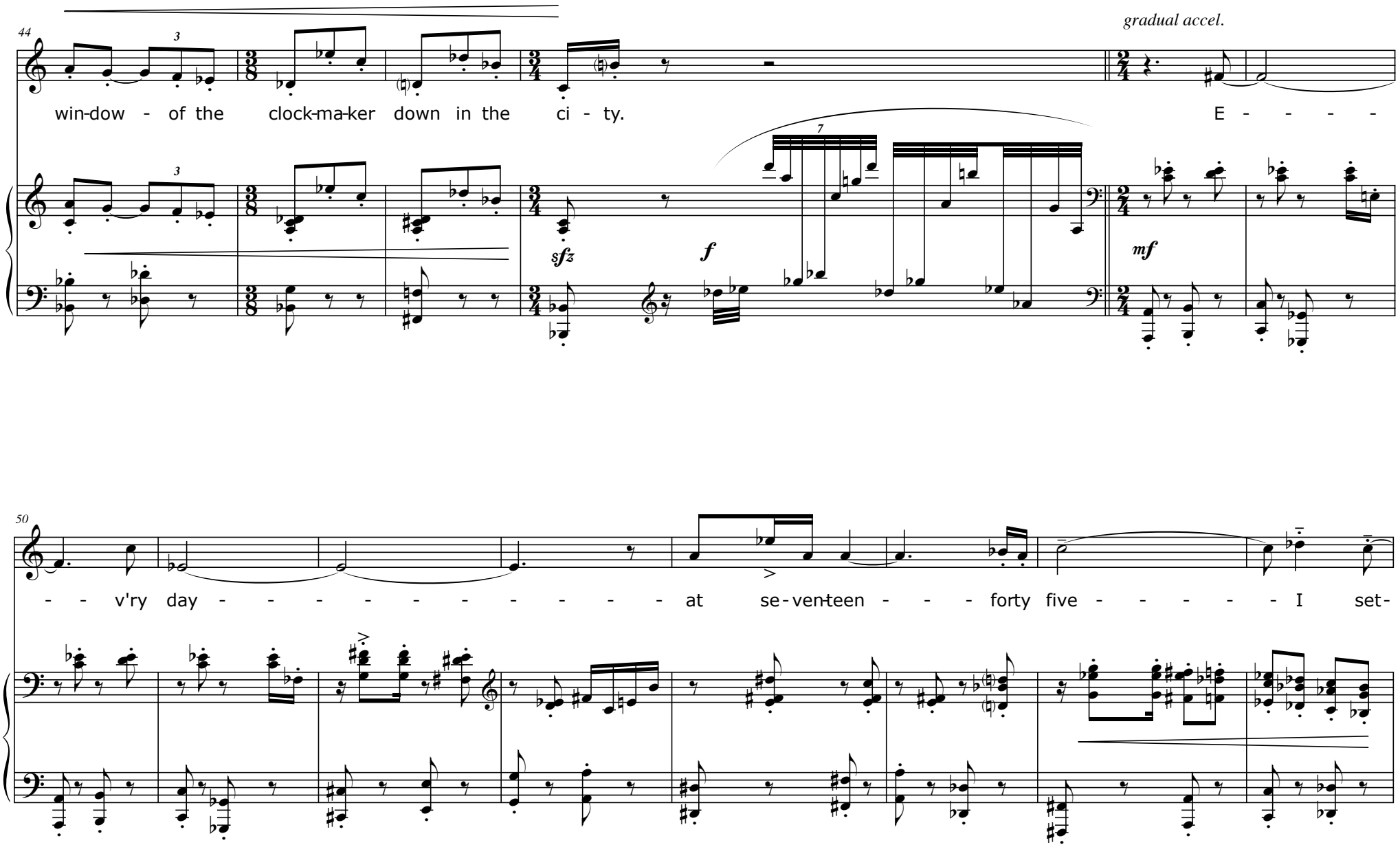


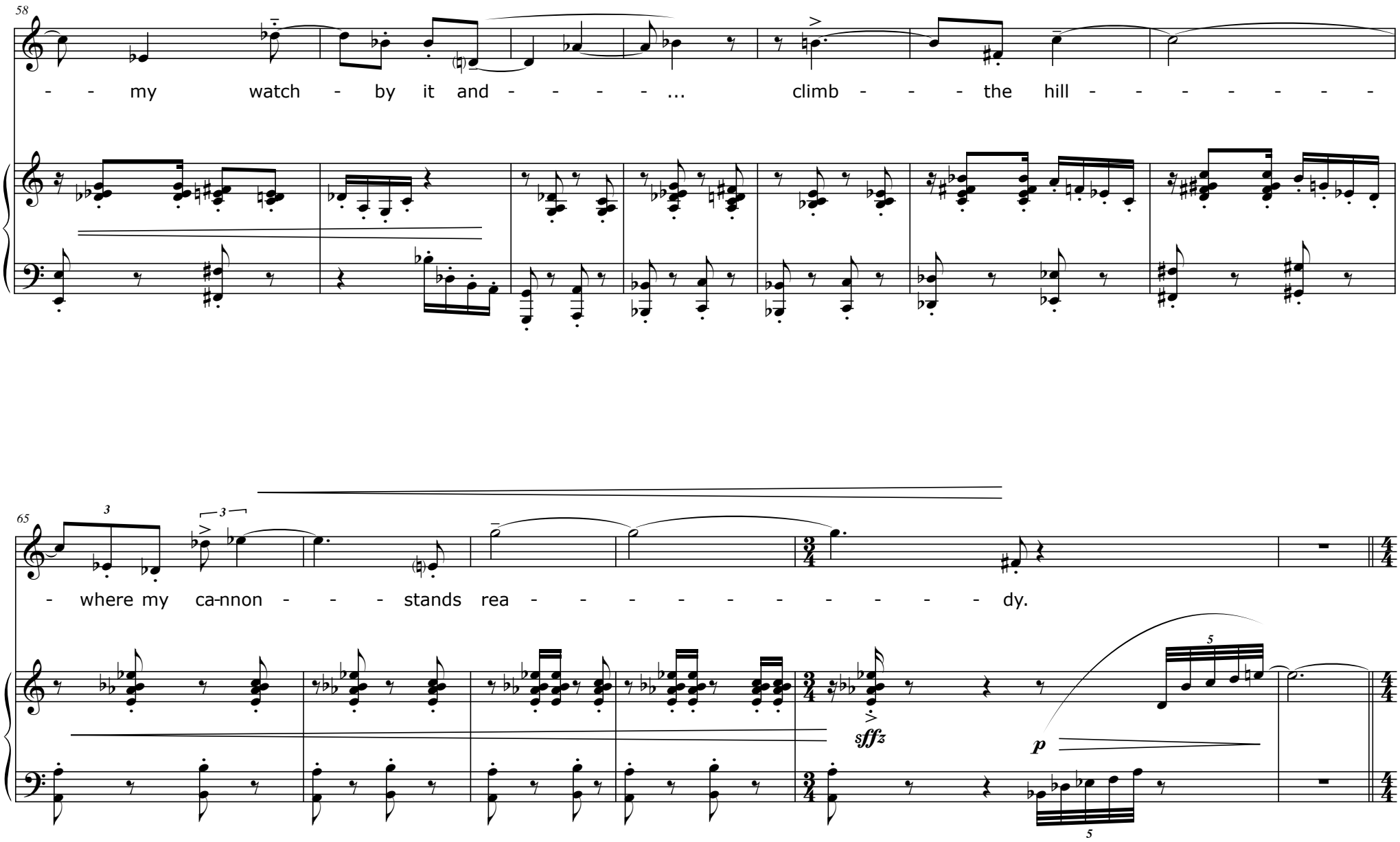

5
birds - - - - - - - - - - - - have an a - ccu - rate built - in - time - - - sense
8
and o - ri - en - ta - tion.
Hu - ma - ni - ty how - e - ver,
p
pp


13
la - cking such in - stincts re - sorts - - - to sci-en-ti-fic re - search. Its
sfz
sfz
17
na - ture is i - llus-tra-ted by the fo - llo - wing o - ccu - rance.
mp
sfz
pp

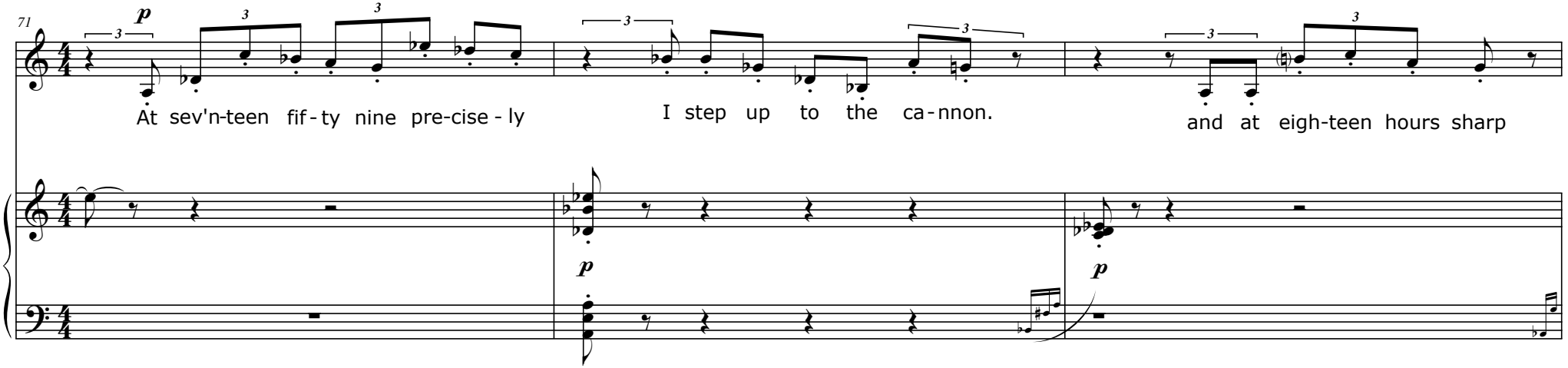

more urgent...
21
A cer-tain sol - dier had to fire a ca - nnon at six o' - clock
26
sharp ev' - ry ev' - ning. Being a sol - dier he did - so. When his
sfz
sfz
p


strong, forthright
31
p
f
sffz
mf
a - ccu - ra - cy - was in - ves - ti - ga - ted he ex - plained: I - - - - - - - go -
38
- - - - by - - - - - - - - the ab - so-lute-ly a - ccu-rate - - - chro - no-me-ter - in the

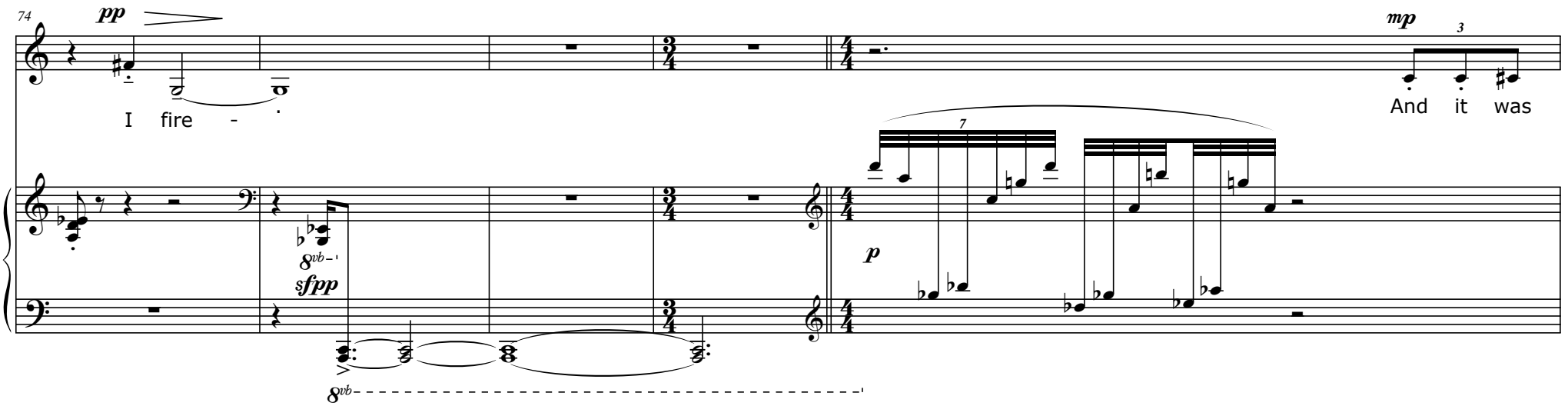

44
gradual accel.
win-dow - of the clock-ma-ker down in the ci - ty.
E - - - -
sfz
f
mf
50
- - v'ry day - - - - - - - - - - - at se-ven-teen - - - forty five - - - - - I set-

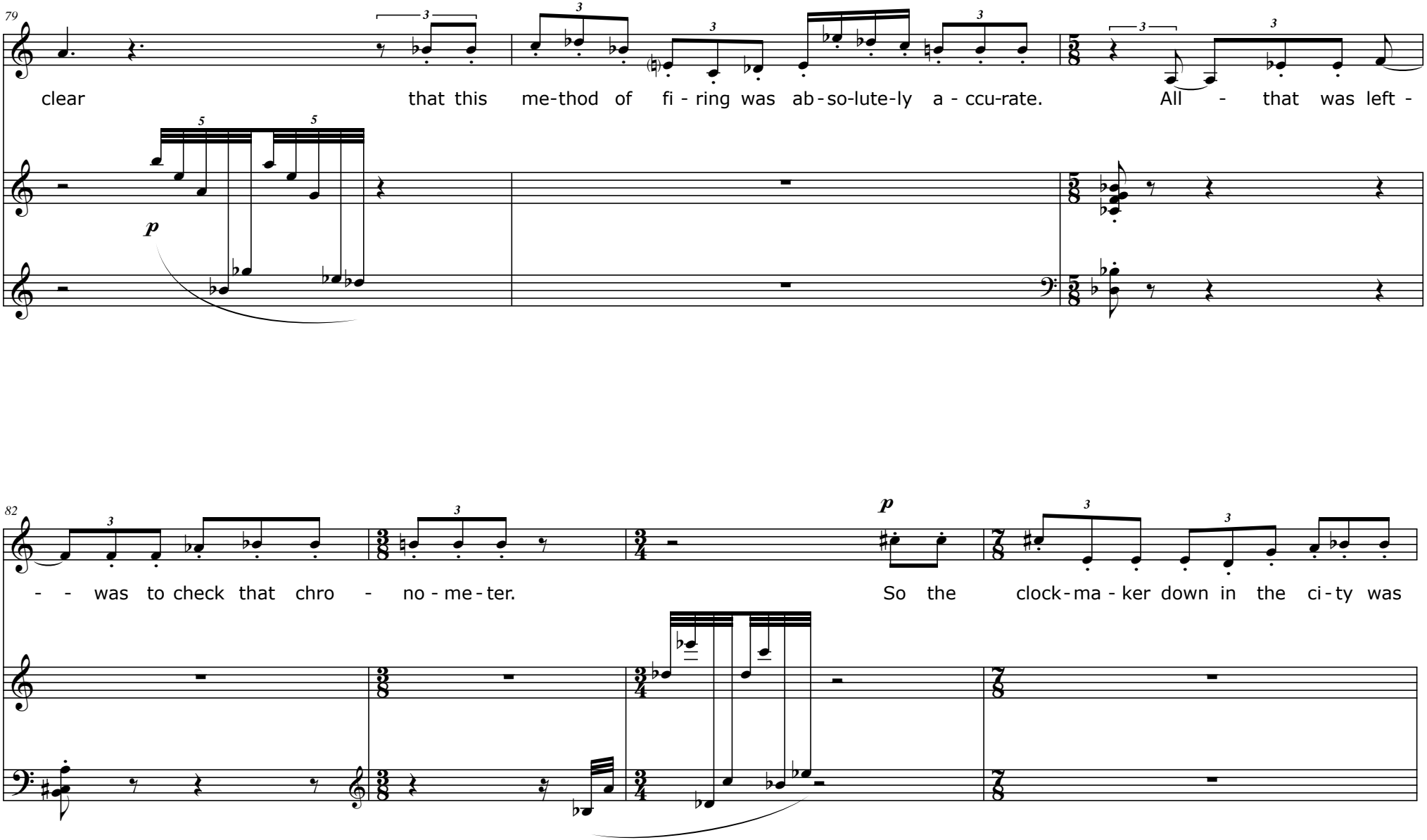

58
- - my watch - by it and - - - - - ... climb - - - the hill - - - - - - - -
65
- where my ca-nnon - - - stands rea - - - - - - - - - - dy.
sffz
p

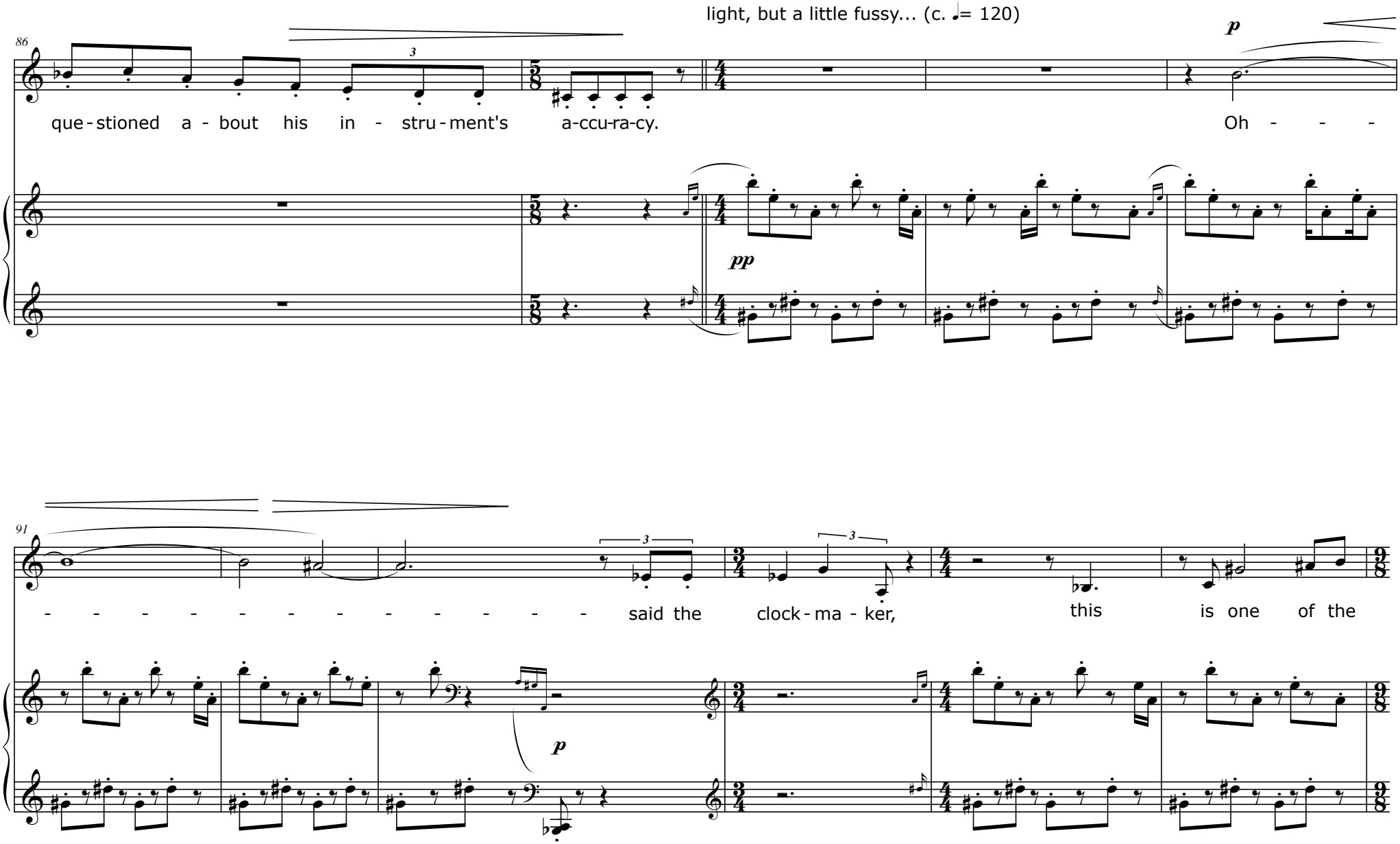
steadier...

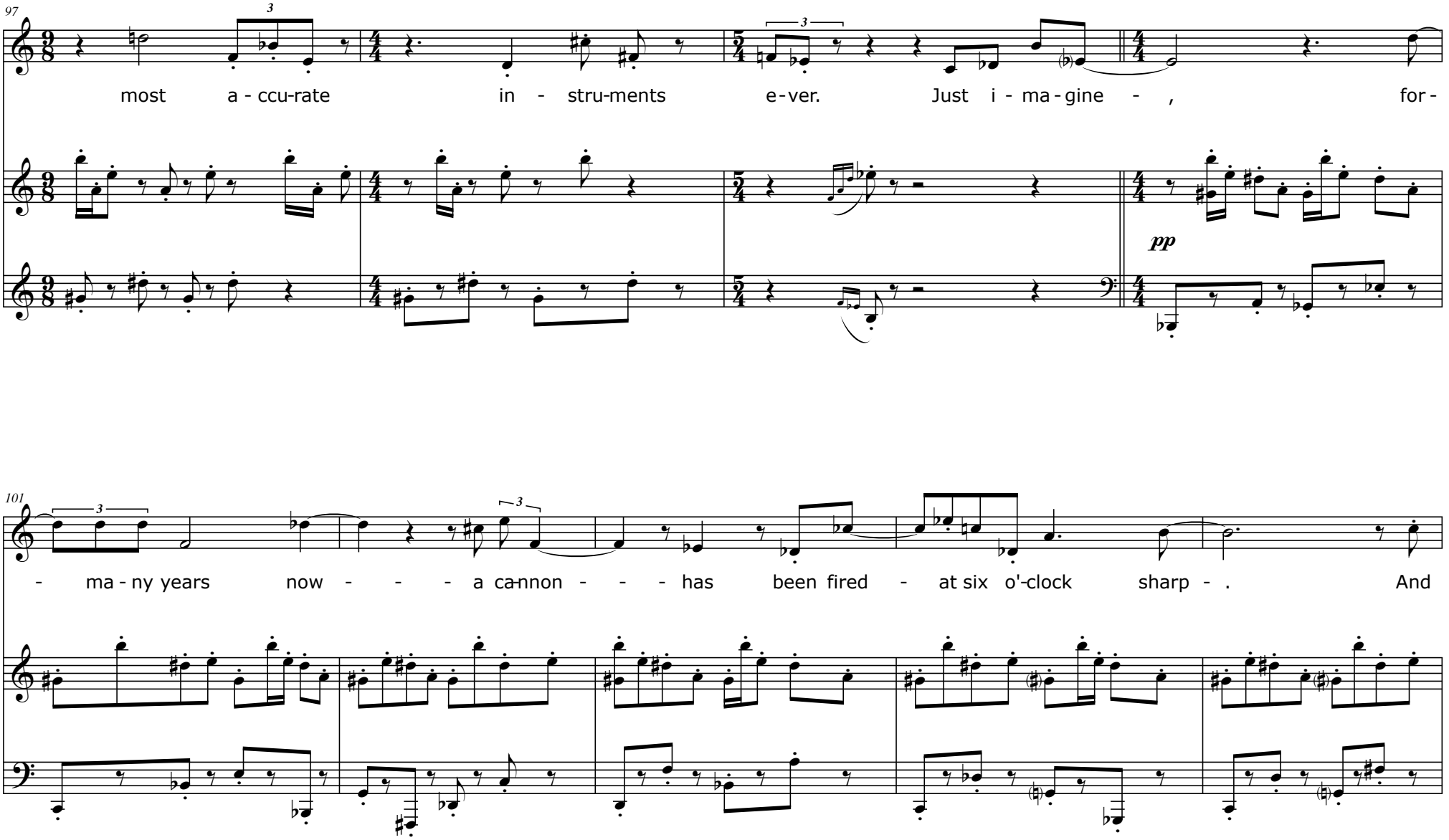


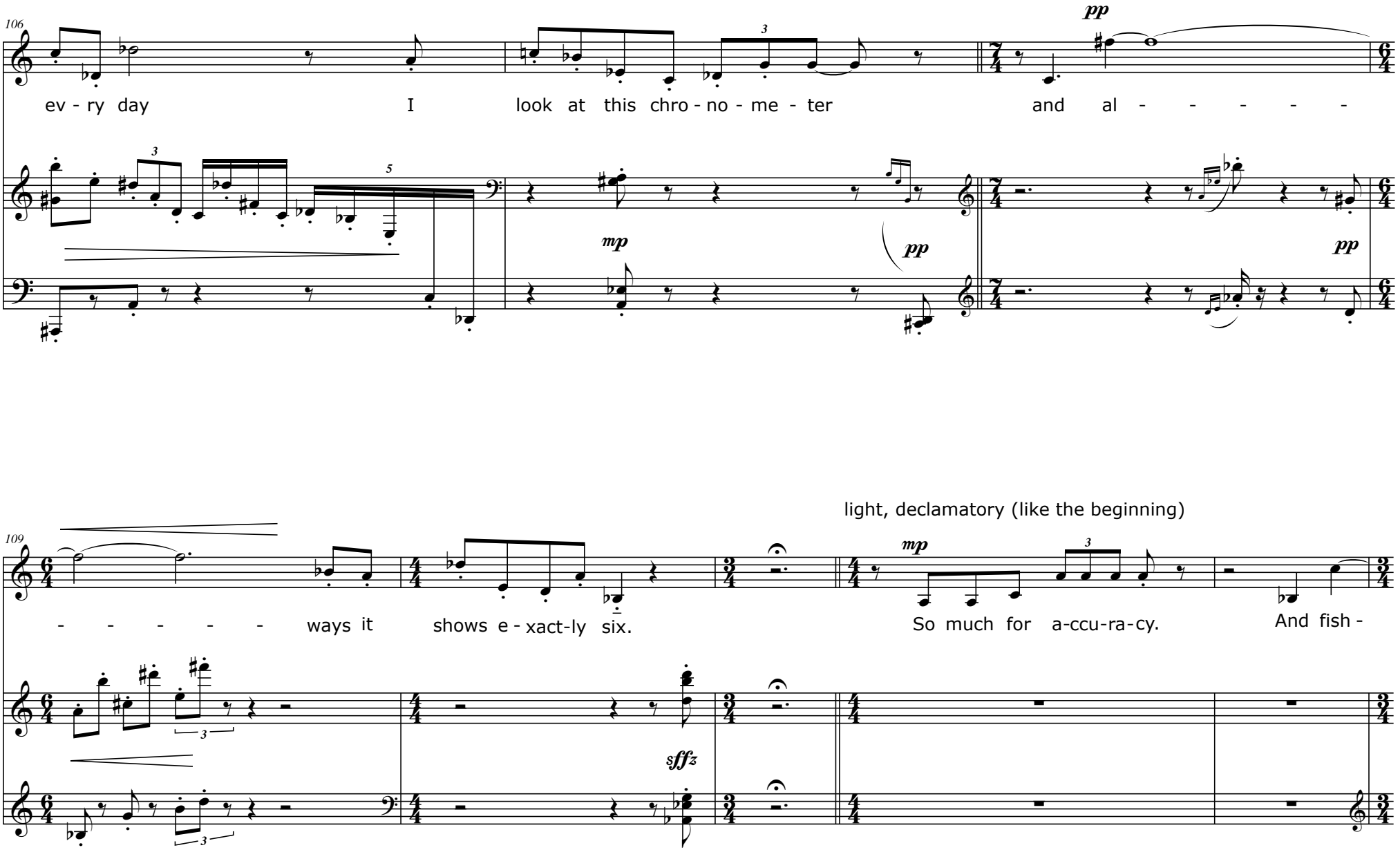
light, declamatory (like the beginning)

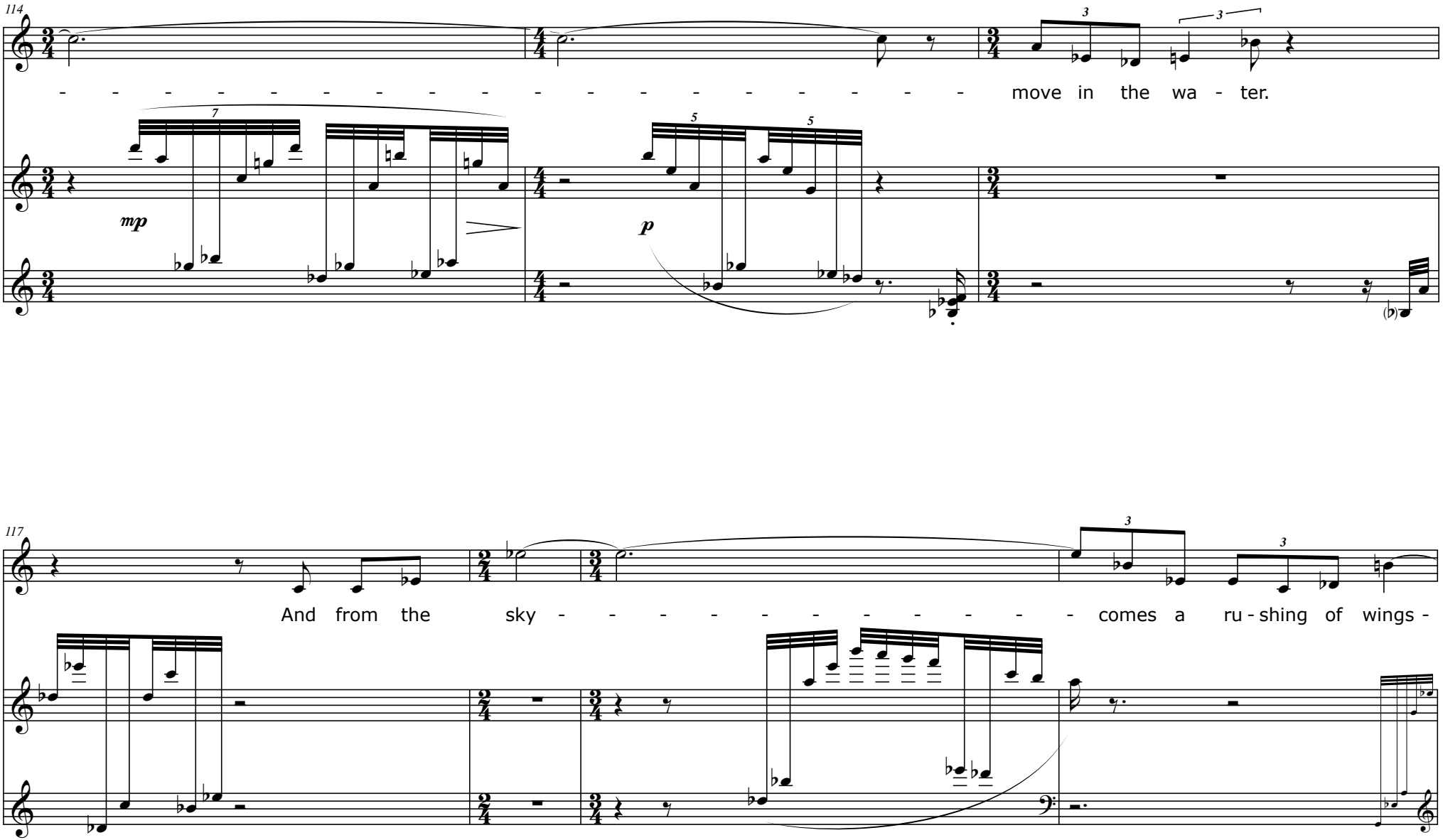


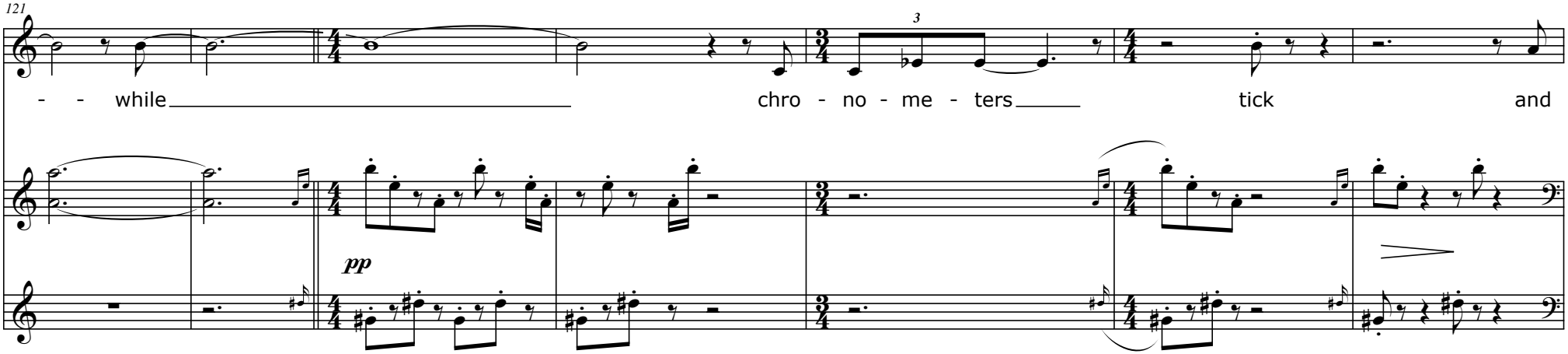

79
clear that this me-thod of fi - ring was ab-so-lute-ly a - ccu-rate. All - that was left -
p
82
- - was to check that chro - no - me - ter.
p
So the clock-ma - ker down in the ci - ty was

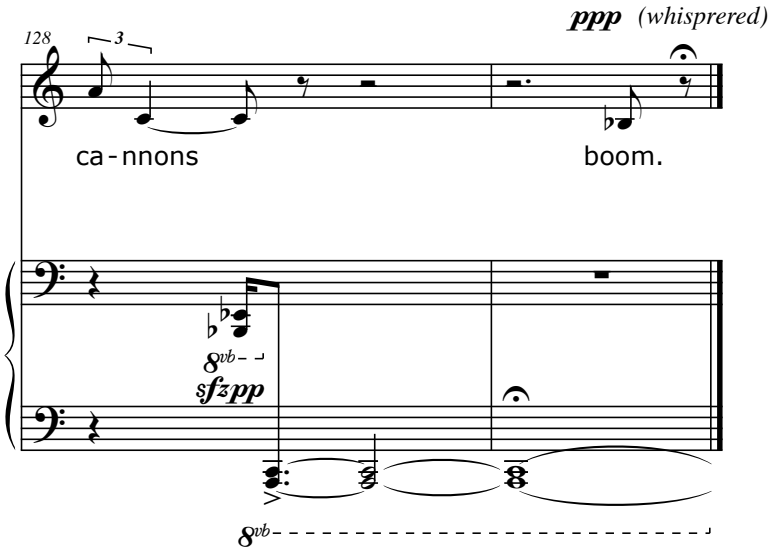

light, but a little fussy... (c. ♩= 120)
86
que - stioned a - bout his in - stru - ment's a-ccu-ra-cy.
Oh - - -
91
- - - - - - - - - - - - - said the clock - ma - ker,
this is one of the


97
most a - ccu-rate in - stru-ments e - ver. Just i - ma - gine - , for -
pp
101
- ma - ny years now - - - a ca-nnon - - - has been fired - at six o'-clock sharp - . And


106
ev - ry day I look at this chro - no - me - ter and al - - - - - -
pp
mp
pp
pp
109
- - - - - - ways it shows e - xact-ly six.
light, declamatory (like the beginning)
mp
So much for a-ccu-ra-cy. And fish -
sffz

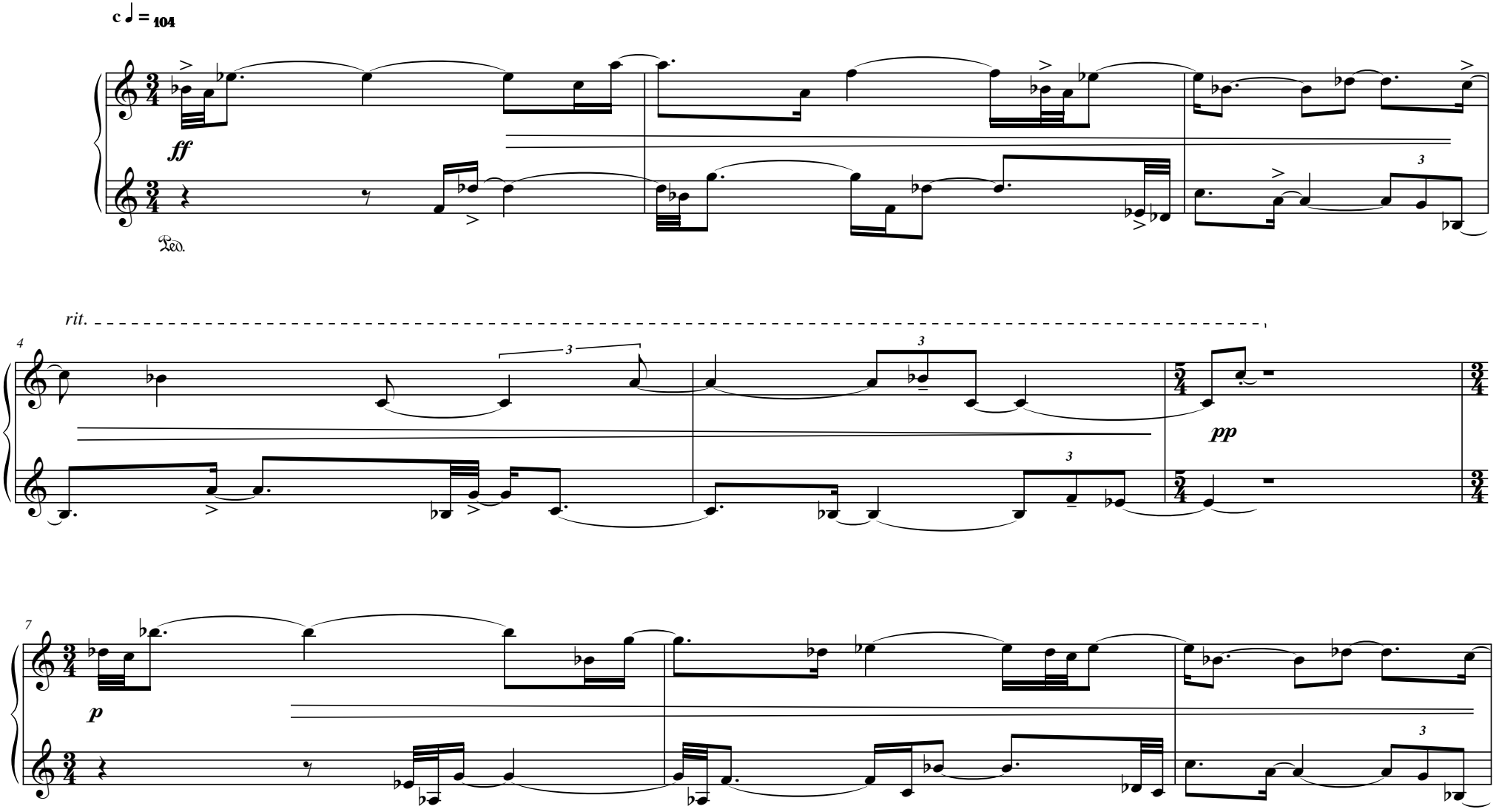

114
- move in the wa - ter.
mp
p
117
And from the sky - - - - - - - - - - - comes a ru - shing of wings -

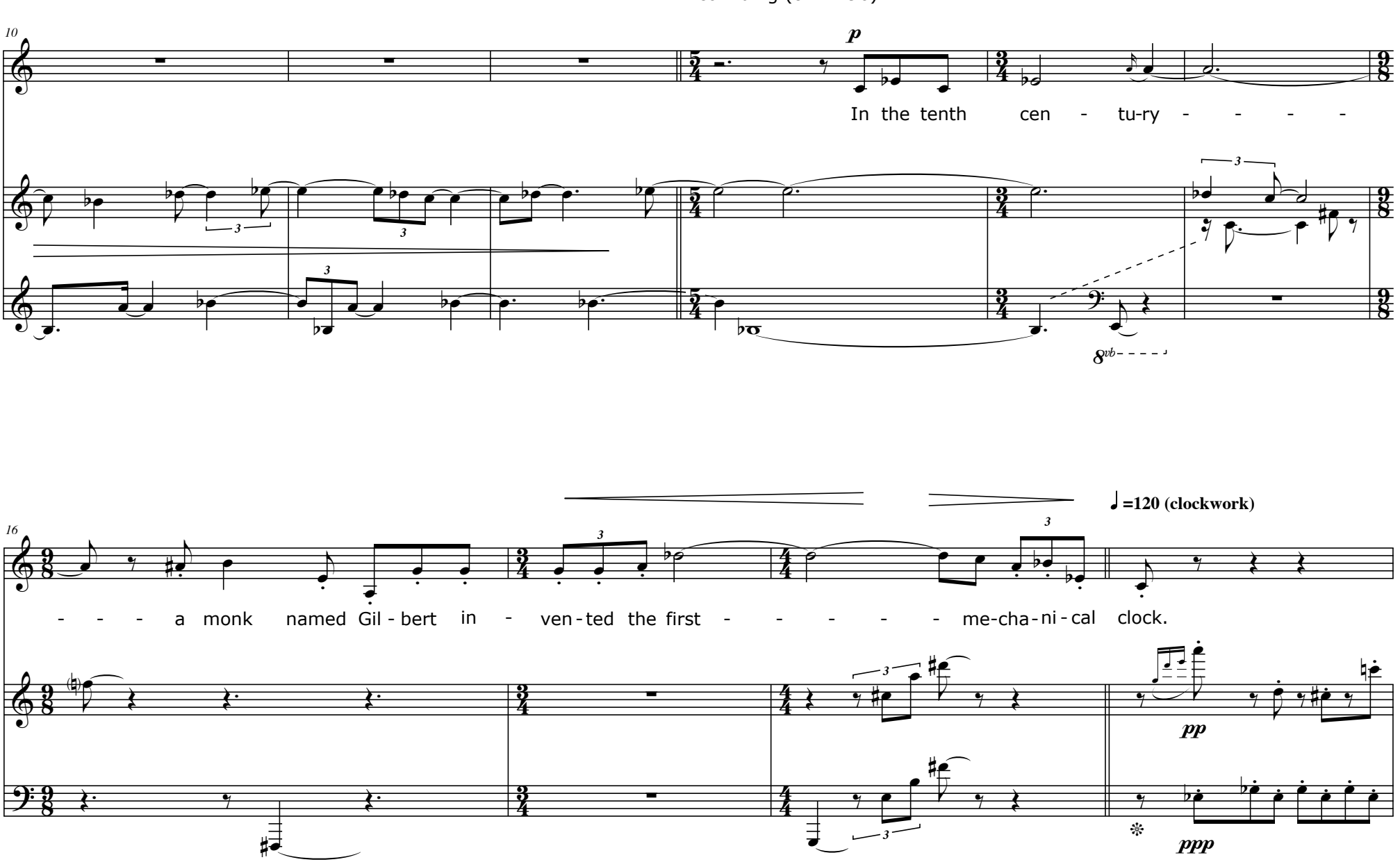


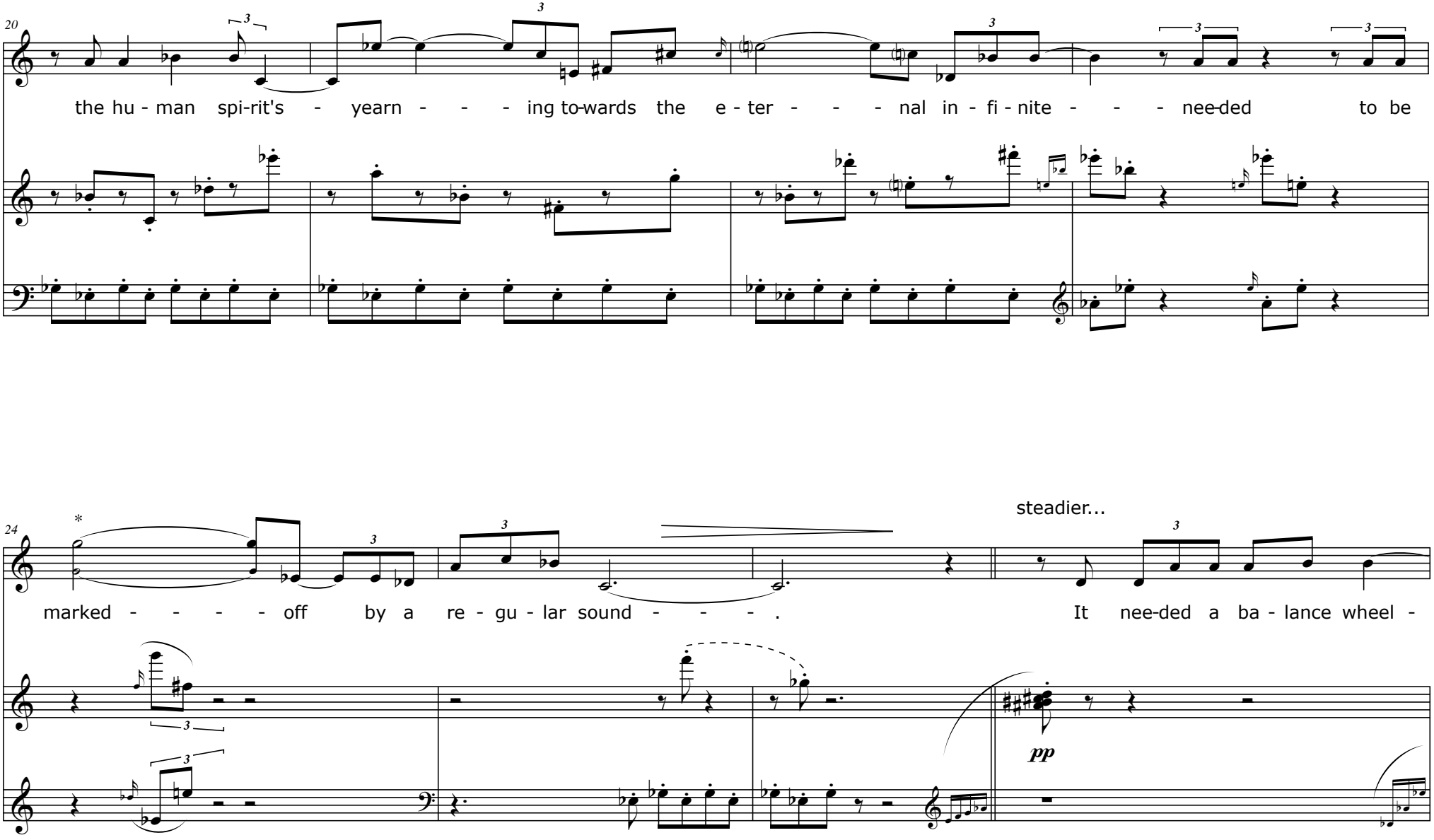


[allow sound to sustain as long as possible]

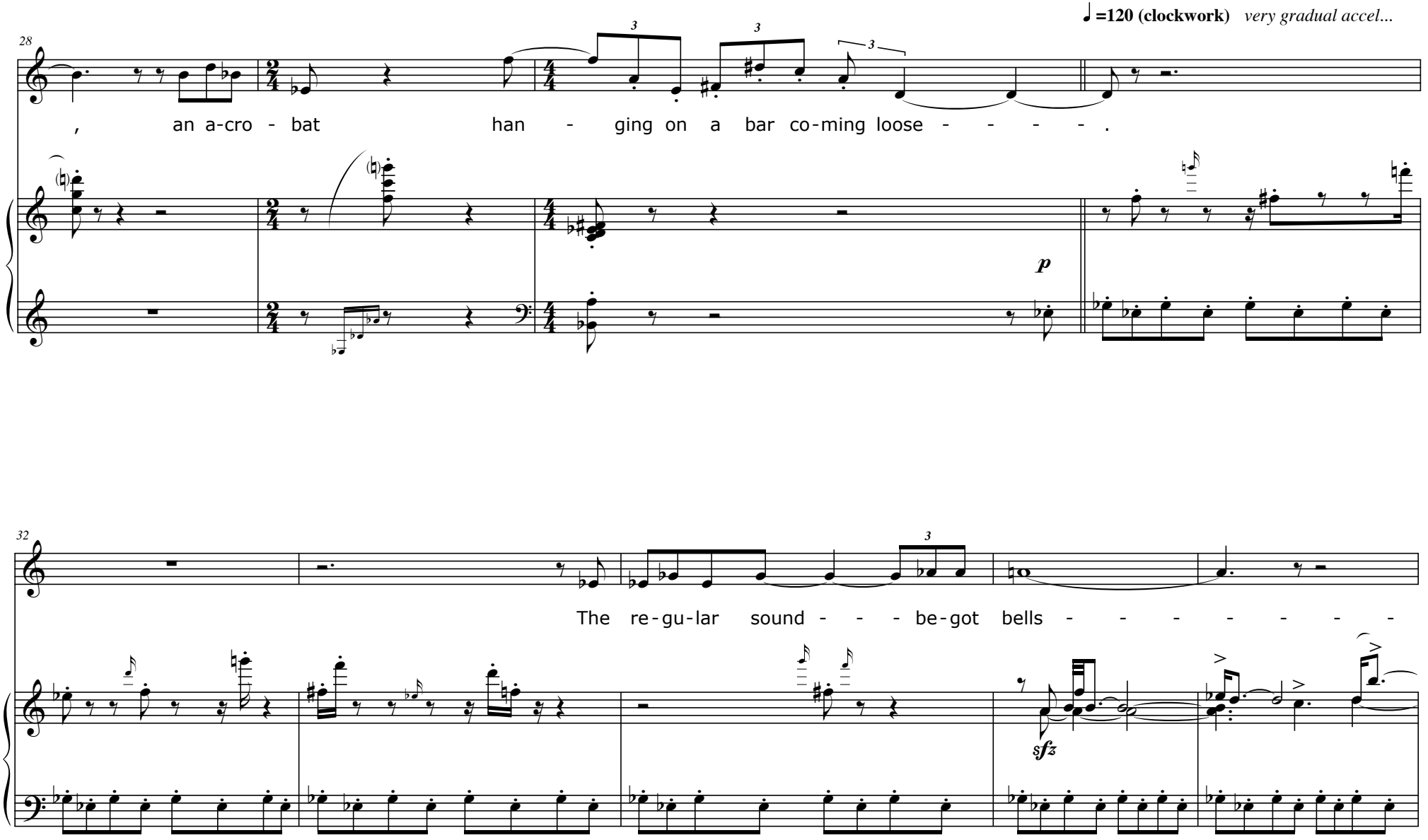
II : The Clock

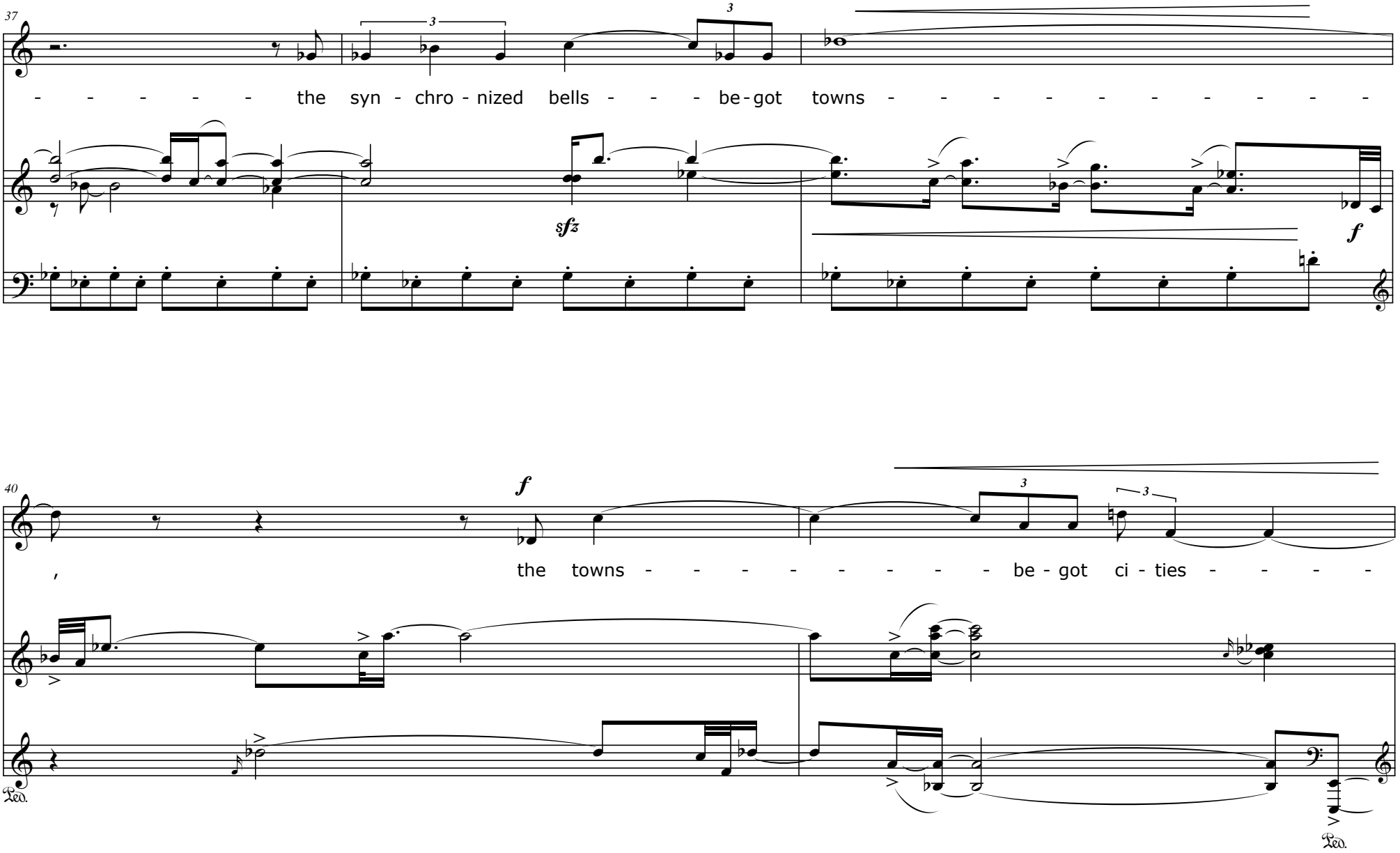


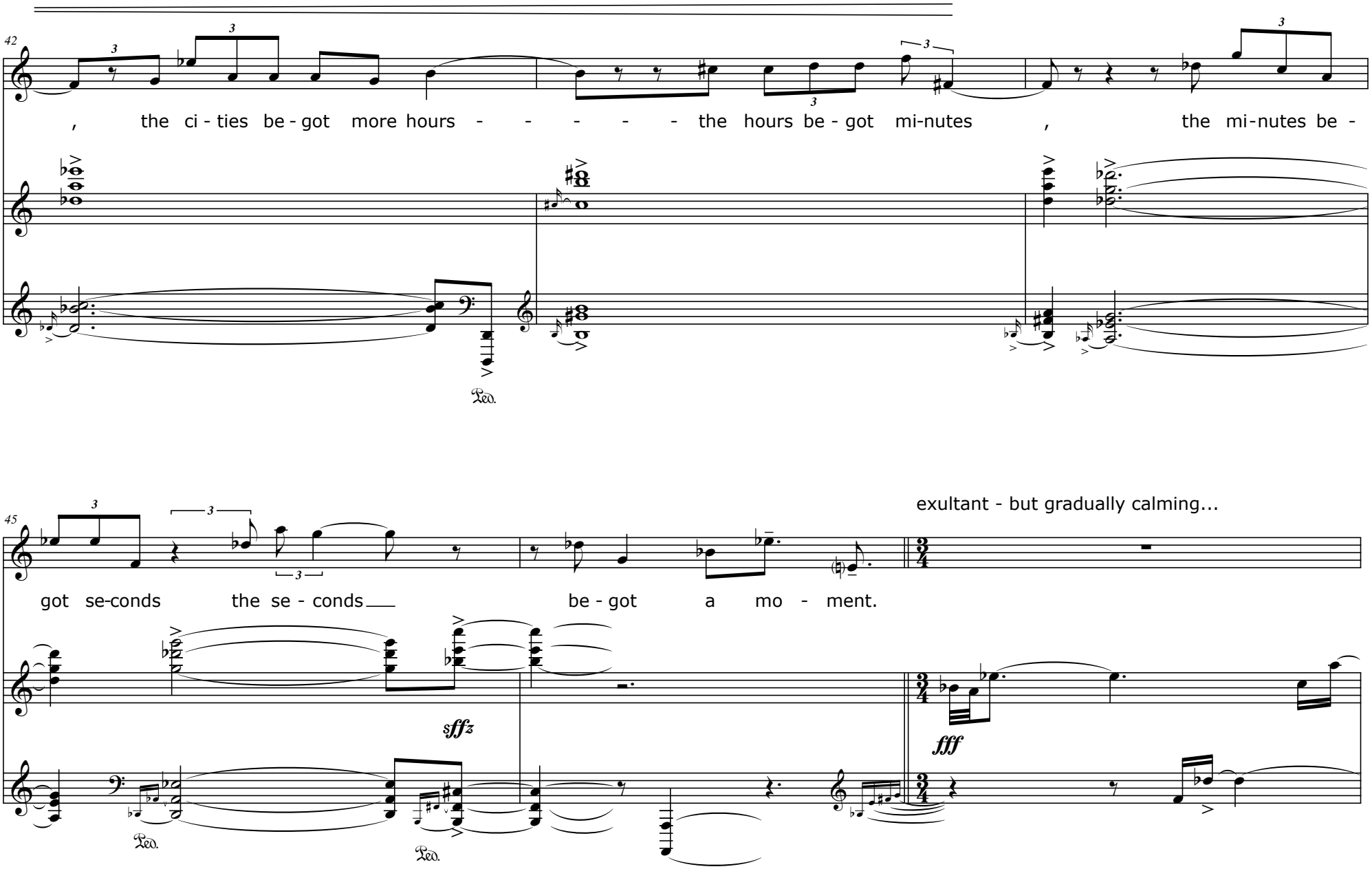

confiding (c. ♩ = 96)
10
p
In the tenth cen - tu-ry - - - - -
8vb
16
♩ =120 (clockwork)
- - - a monk named Gil - bert in - ven - ted the first - - - - - me-cha - ni - cal clock.
pp
ppp

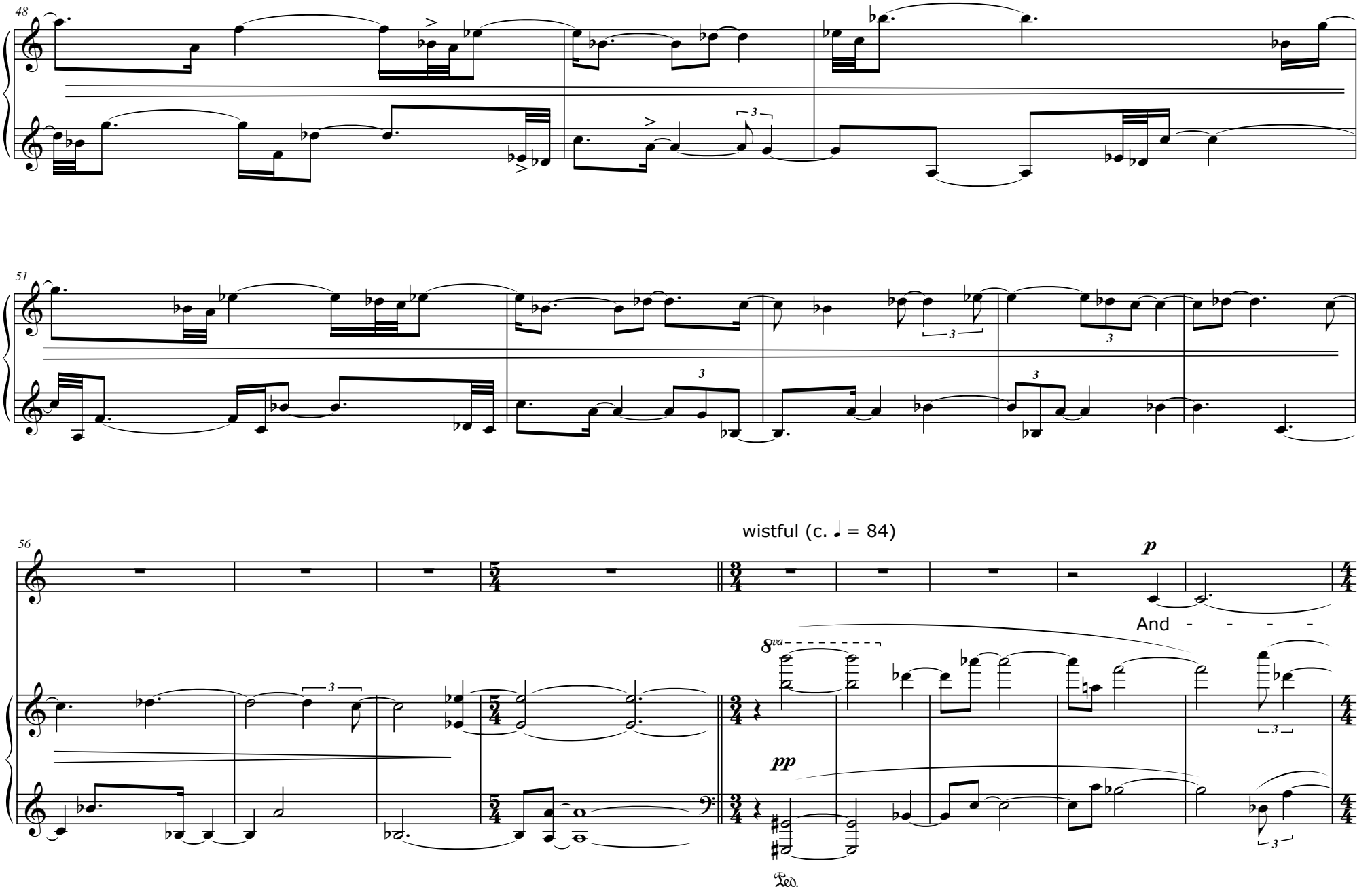


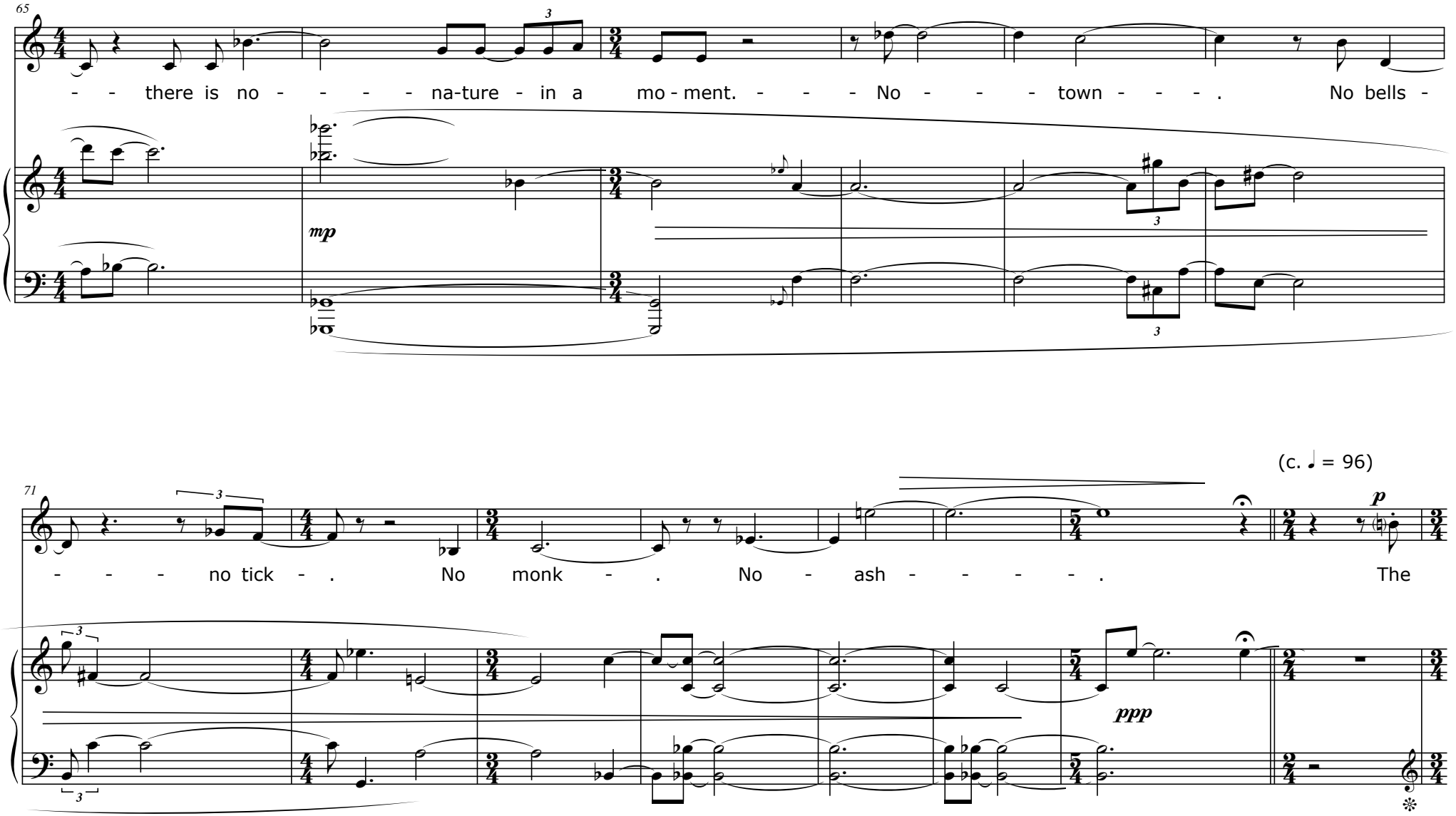
* High G if it can be floated - otherwise, the lower octave

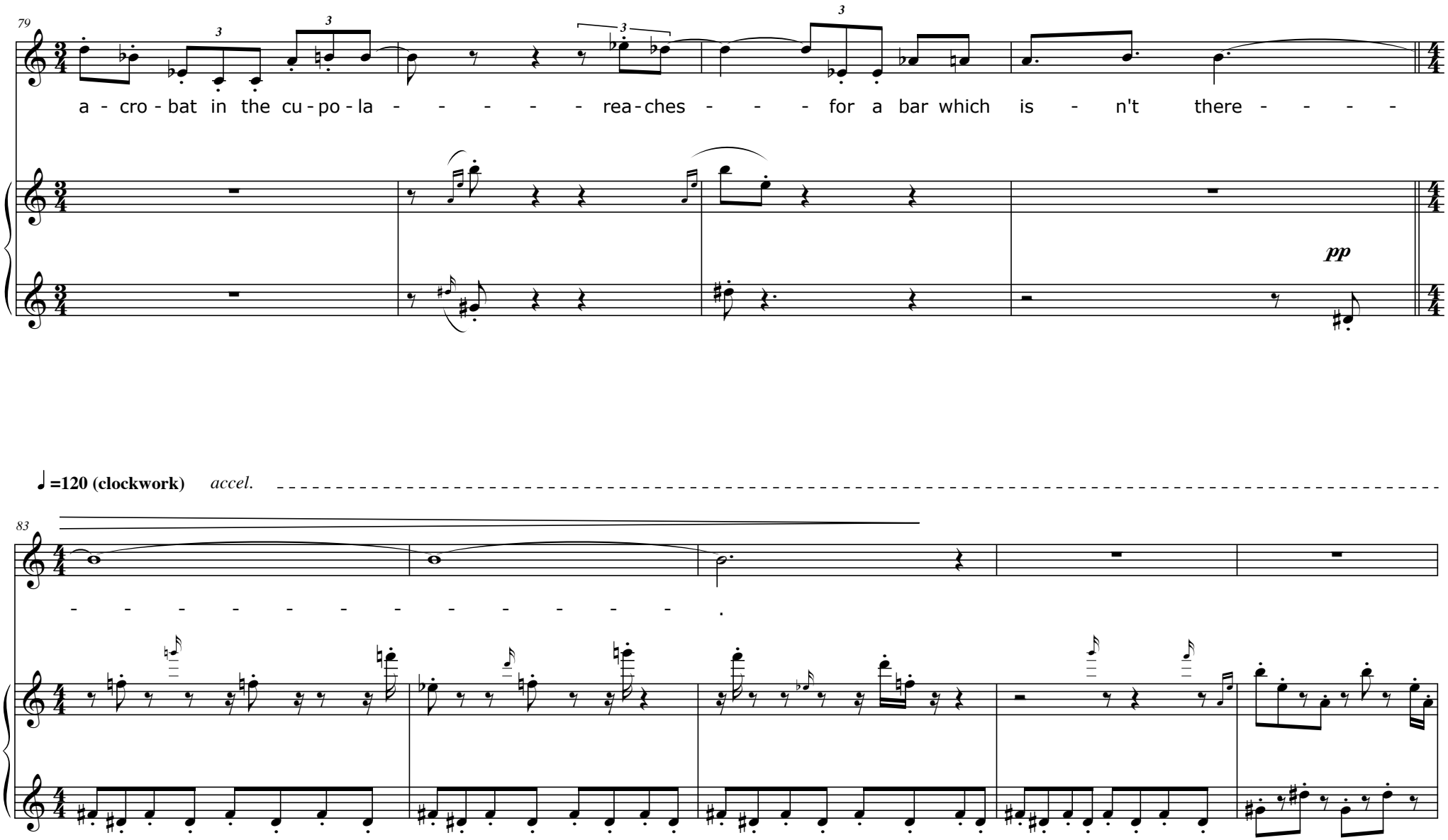

♩ =120 (clockwork) very gradual accel...
28
, an a-cro - bat han - ging on a bar co-ming loose - - - - - .
p
32
The re-gu-lar sound - - - be-got bells - - - - - - - -
sfz

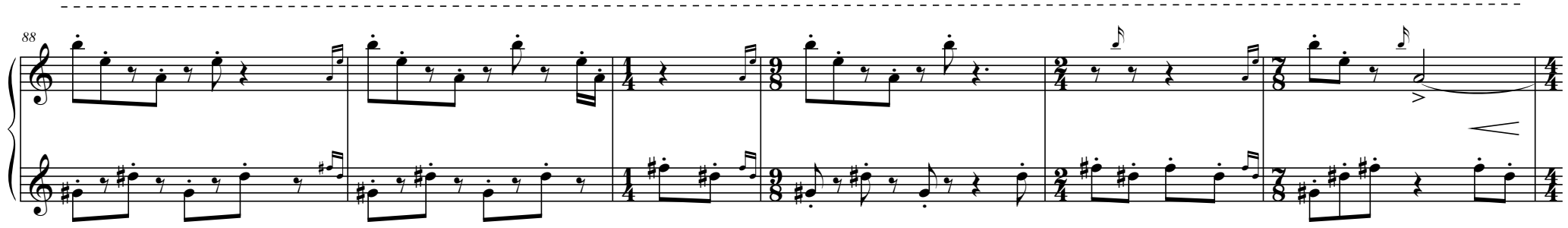

37
- - - - - - the syn - chro - nized bells - - - - be - got towns - - - - - - - - - - -
sfz
f
40
f
, the towns - - - - - - - - - be - got ci - ties - - - -
Ped.
Ped.

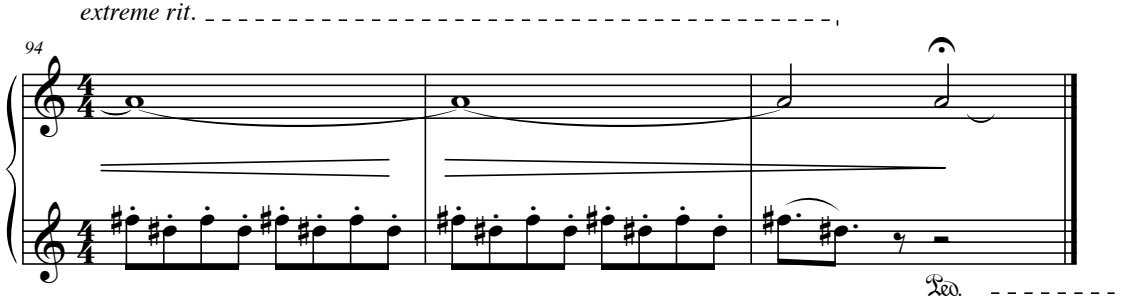

42
, the ci - ties be - got more hours - - - - - the hours be - got mi-nutes , the mi-nutes be -
Ped.
45
got se-conds the se - conds be - got a mo - ment.
exultant - but gradually calming...
sffz
fff
Ped.
Ped.


48
51
56
wistful (c. ♩ = 84)
p
And - - - -
8va
pp
Ped.


65
there is no na-ture in a mo-ment. No town . No bells -
mp
71
no tick . No monk . No ash . The
(c. ♩ = 96)
p
ppp

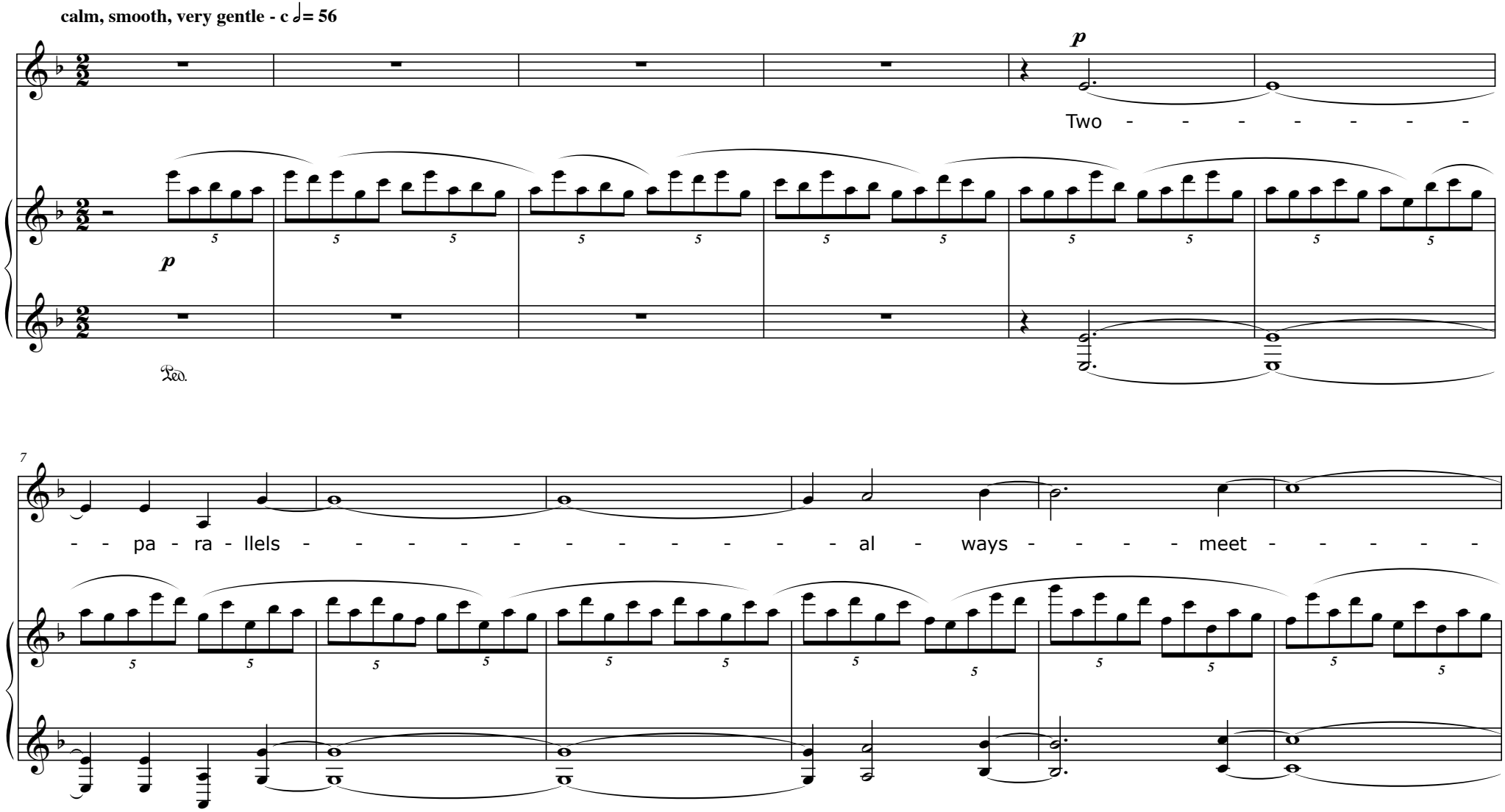

79
3
3
3
3
a - cro - bat in the cu - po - la - - - - - - rea - ches - - - for a bar which is - n't there - - - -
pp
♩=120 (clockwork)
accel.
83

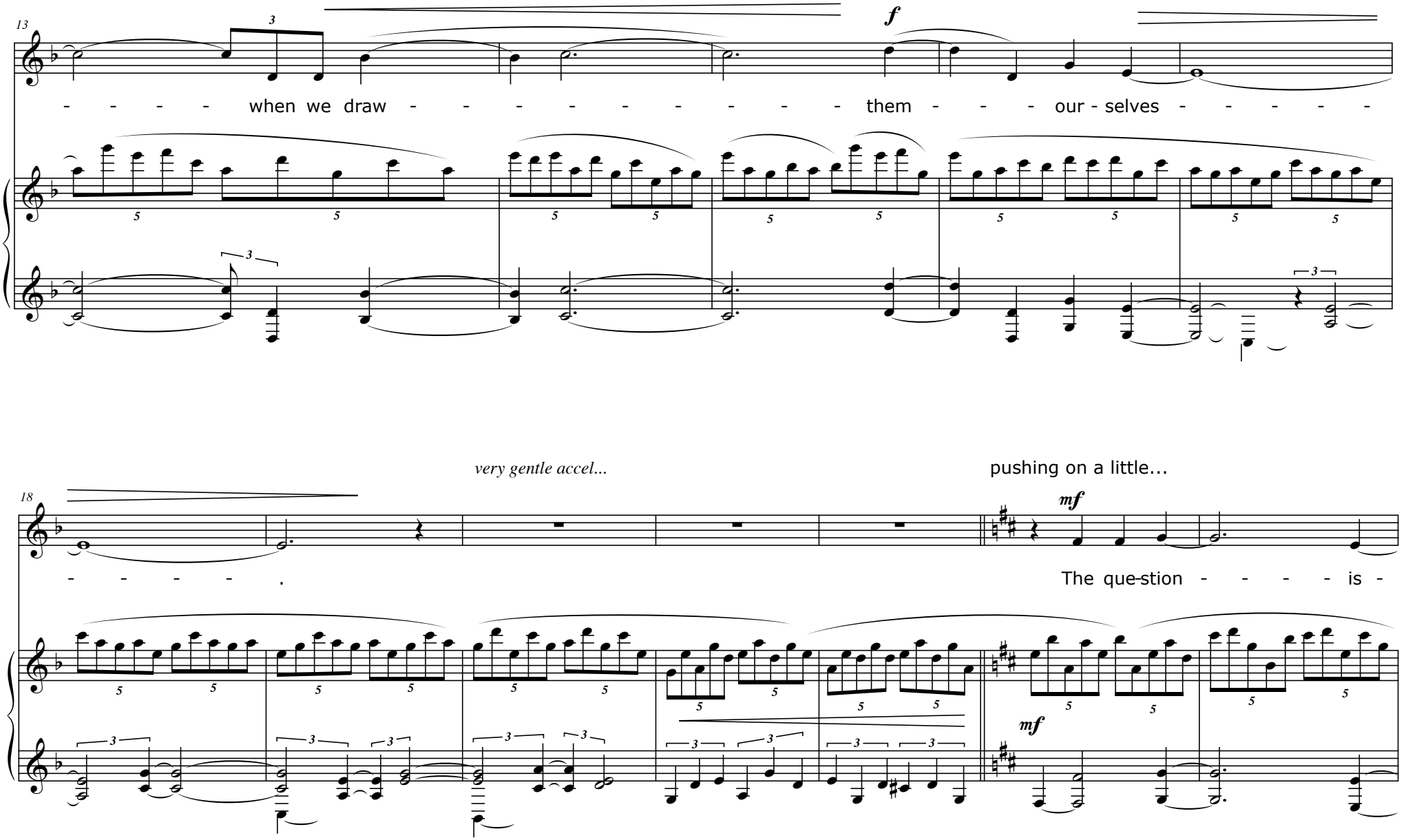


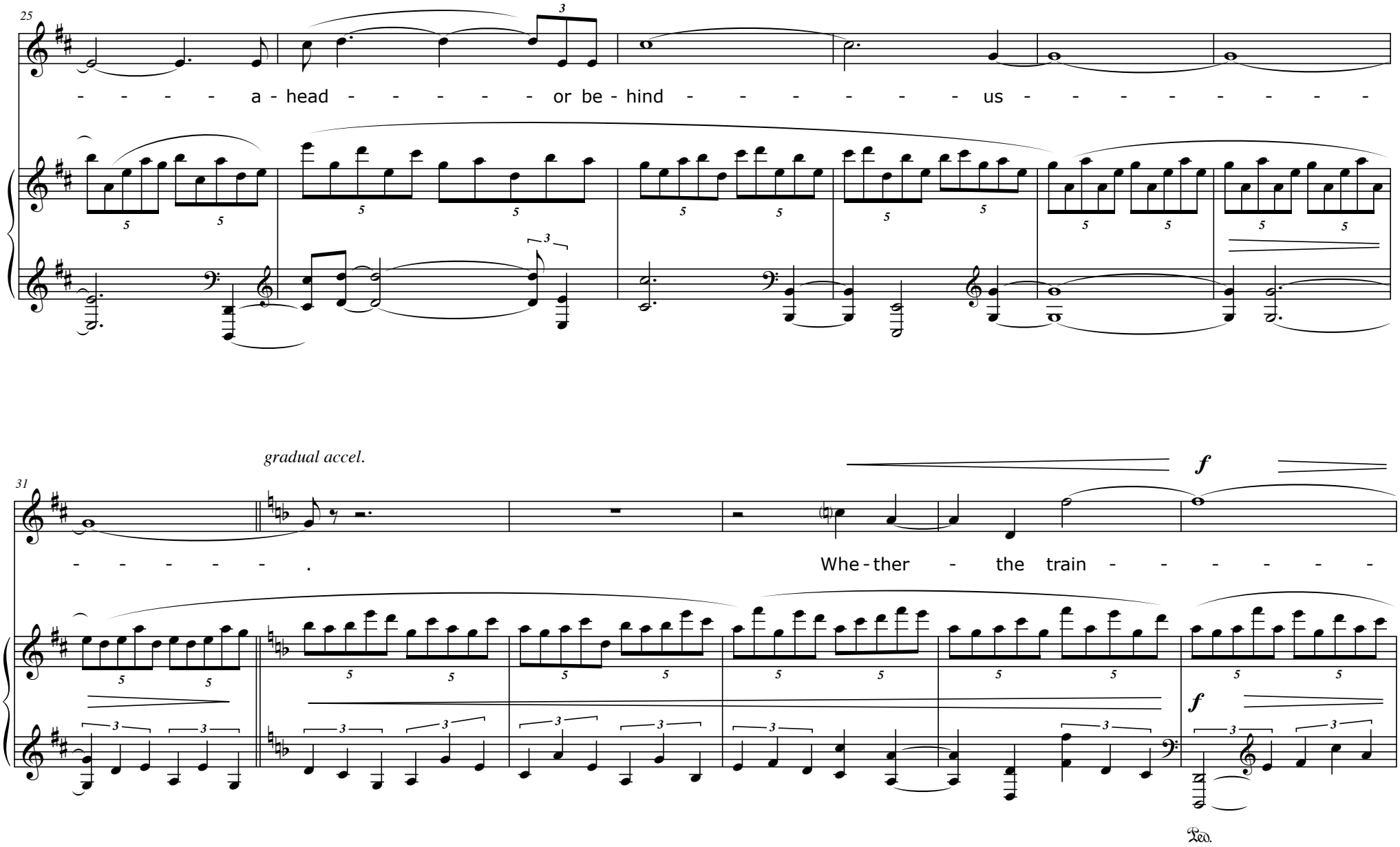


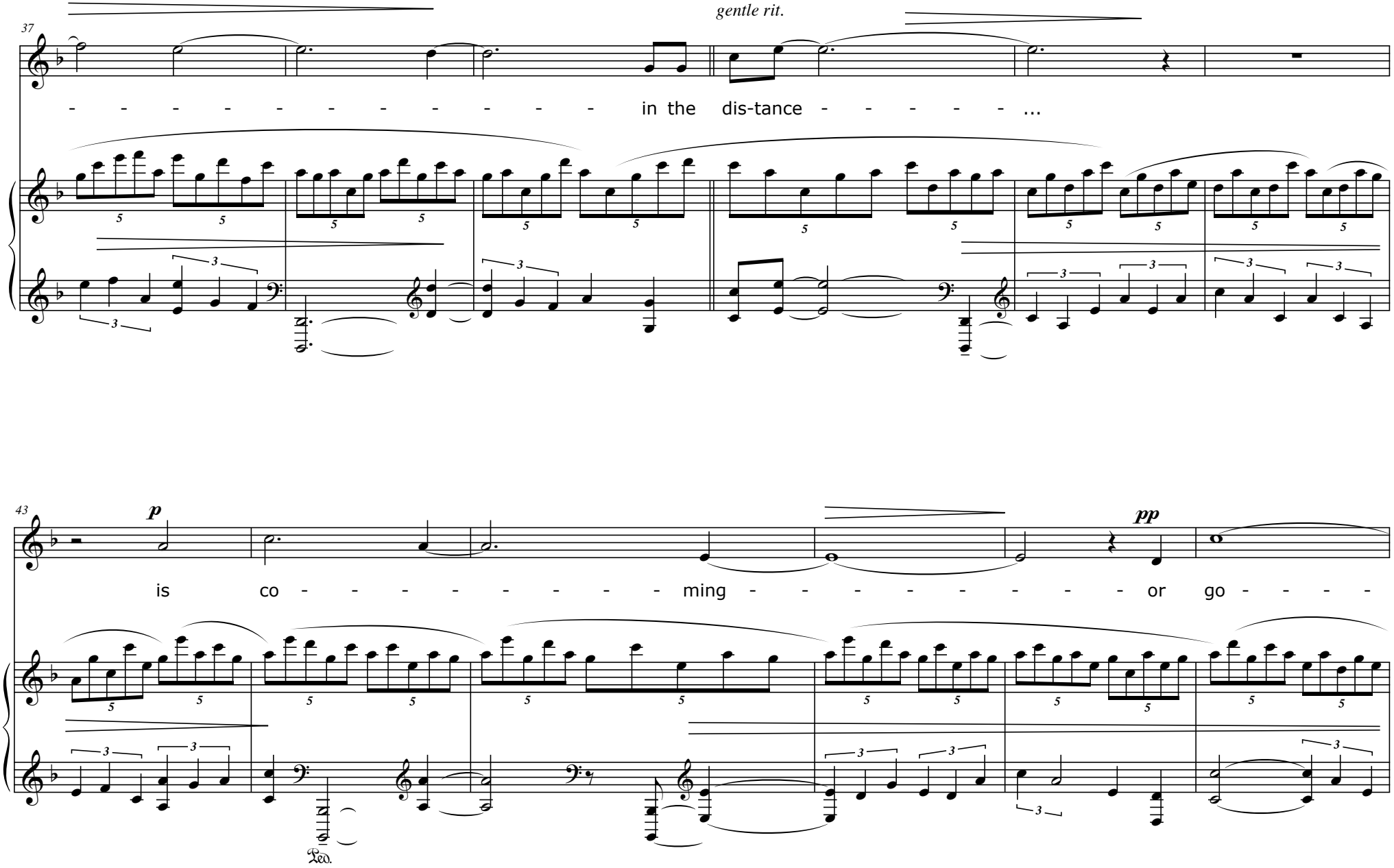
[allow sound to sustain as long as possible]

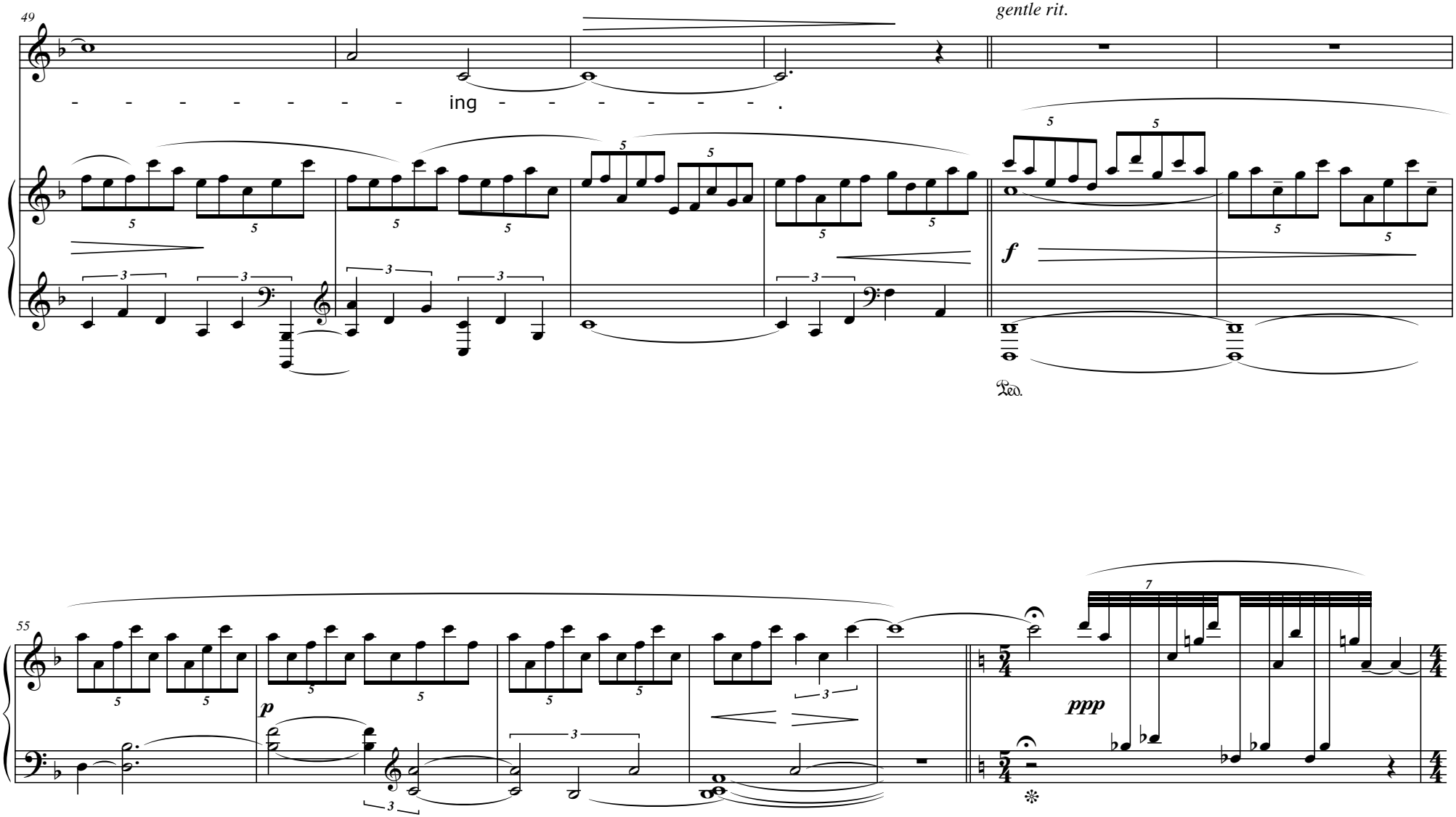
III : Parallels Syndrome

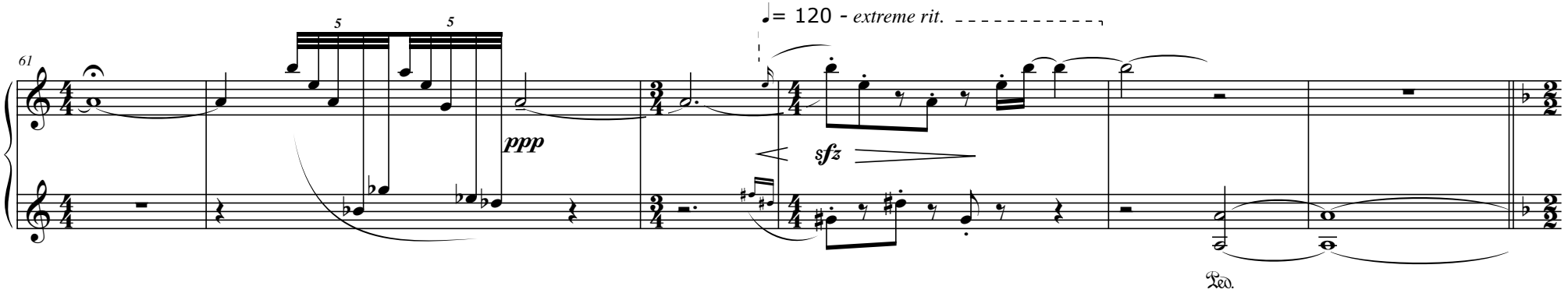



13
f
when we draw them our - selves
very gentle accel...
pushing on a little...
18
mf
The que-stion is -
mf

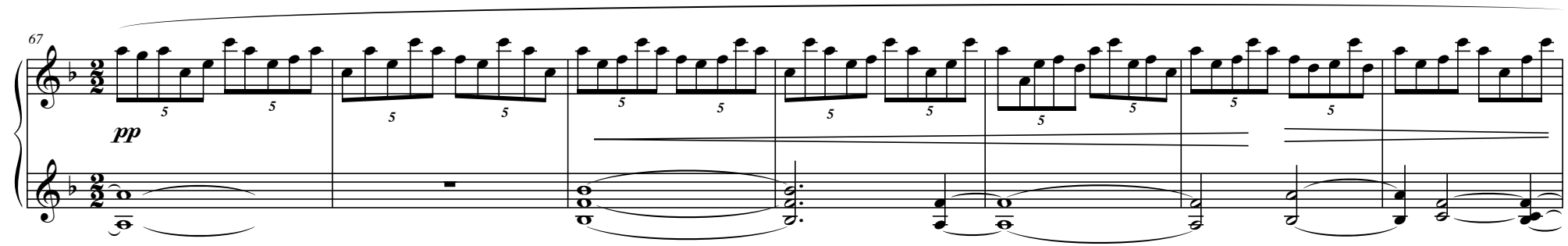

25
- - - - - a - head - - - - - - - or be - hind - - - - - - - - us - - - - - - - - - -
gradual accel.
31
- - - - - - .
Whe - ther - the train - - - - - - -
f
f
Ped.


gentle rit.
37
- - - - - - - - - - - - - - in the dis-tance - - - - - - ...
43
p
pp
is co - - - - - - - - - - ming - - - - - - - - - - or go - - - -
Ped.

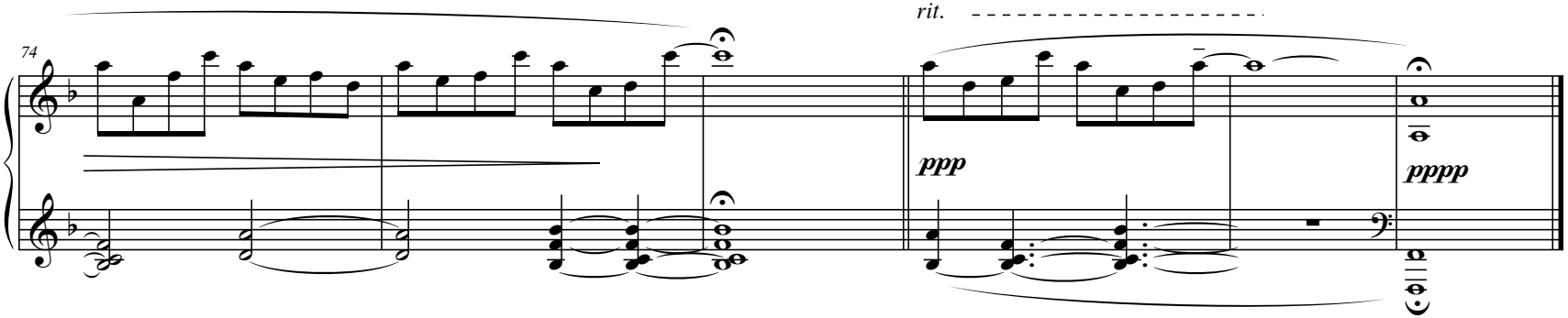

49
gentle rit.
- - - - - - - - - ing - - - - - - - - .
f
Ped.
55
p
ppp



very gentle, c. 𝅗𝅥 = 48 - rit to end...



much slower



Cambridge, 19 October, 2008