music by **shawn e okpebholo**

text by **marcus amaker**

unknown

song cycle for mezzo-soprano,
two baritones, and chamber ensemble

commemorating the 100th anniversary of the founding of
the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington Cemetery

Commissioned by **UrbanArias** with
the **Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts**,
Opera Colorado, **Minnesota Opera**,
Opera Birmingham, and
Stephen E. and Dorothy P. Bird

note from the composer

unknown is a five-movement song cycle for mezzo-soprano, two baritones, and chamber ensemble commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, a memorial at Arlington Cemetery for unidentified soldiers who have succumbed to war. Poet Marcus Amaker penned the evocative text.

The first movement begins with an extended and solemn introduction. From the perspective of a soldier, it is an anthem expressing the realities of war, but also the pride for her country and the service and sacrifice she's willing to give for the place she calls home.

The second movement is a melancholic waltz from the perspective of the loved one of a soldier off to war. With only letters and anxiety, there is still space for hope that his beloved will return home.

The third movement—ever so soulful, requiring the baritone voice to engage his falsetto—is an introspective lament from the viewpoint of an injured soldier who is mindful that he is about to die and transition to his eternal home.

From the perspectives of the guards who protect the tomb 24 hours a day, the fourth movement is a dignified march, sustained by an irregular-metered drum cadence: 21/8. The number 21 is significant because a soldier who guards the tomb marches 21 steps, rests for 21 seconds, and repeats this routine in all directions until the soldier's shift is over. I subtly quote *Taps*, the bugle call that happens during military funerals at, coincidentally, 21:00 hours. And, I also briefly quote *America the Beautiful* as an homage to the third verse, which says,

Oh beautiful for heroes proved
In liberating strife
Who more than self, their country loved
And mercy more than life.

The final movement is a poetic *In Memoriam* for the unknowns, and in a way, serves as a reprise for the cycle. This contemplative setting brings back motives, harmonies, themes, and texts from the previous four movements, musically embodying the various aspects of what it means to go off to war.

poems

1.
As the morning rises
with the clean air of summer,
my mind is clouded
in smoke.

Anxiety is ammunition
for a duty
that haunts
my dreams:

A war that will
take me away from home,
a departure
that digs deep
within the battlefields
of my soul.

I am one
of many warriors
willing to
fight for a country
that promises freedom,

a country
that I am proud
to call

2.
Home is a hollow space
when world-wide hostility
takes ahold of its habitat.

Beneath this roof
are memories
of life without combat,
a breath before bloodshed,
a love untouched by fear.

I am haunted
more than I am happy.

Reading letters
loaded with the tragedies
of war,
stories about future legends,
soon-to-be ghosts
who fought with honor,
and lost their lives
without losing their faith.

home.

3.
If death has a sound,
then I am now its echo.

Silence will soon
pass through me

and I will remember
that I was made
to have an ending.

And war,
with its infinite reverence,
also has boundary.

I am far
from my family,
but I will soon
be home.

4.
With honor,
I march.

21 steps
in time
for the timeless spirts
of soldiers.

With service,
I march.

21 seconds
in rhythm
for the breathless voices
of the decorated
and departed.

With commitment,
I march.

24 hours
in tempo
to guard the ghosts
who gave their lives
for our country

so that we
can safely call
this land
our home.

5.
Layers of remembrance
hover over us like clouds.

When it rains,
we are wrapped
in sorrow
because we can't escape
the memory of
fallen heroes.

How many storms
have gone unnoticed?

How many more
downpours deserve
our attention?

Our homes
and hearts
are enlivened
by the recognition
of generations
who are gone,
but never forgotten.

piano/vocal score

Duration: 18 minutes

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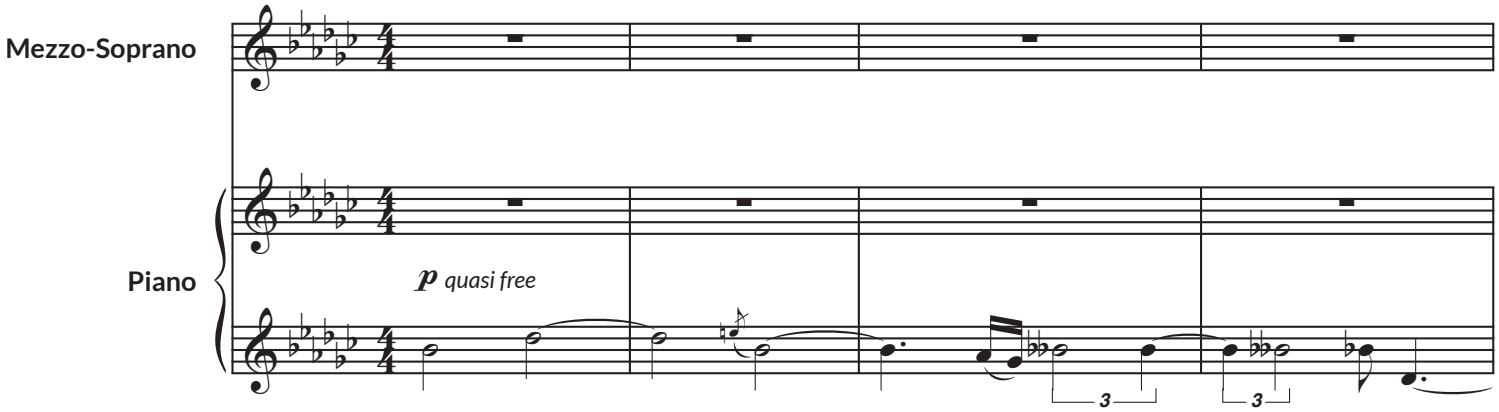
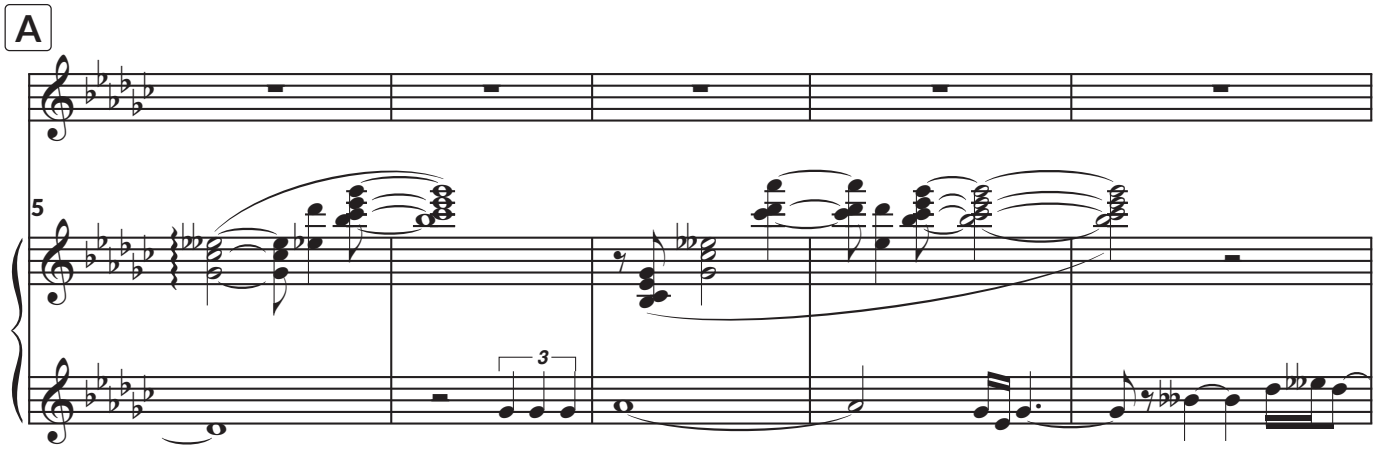
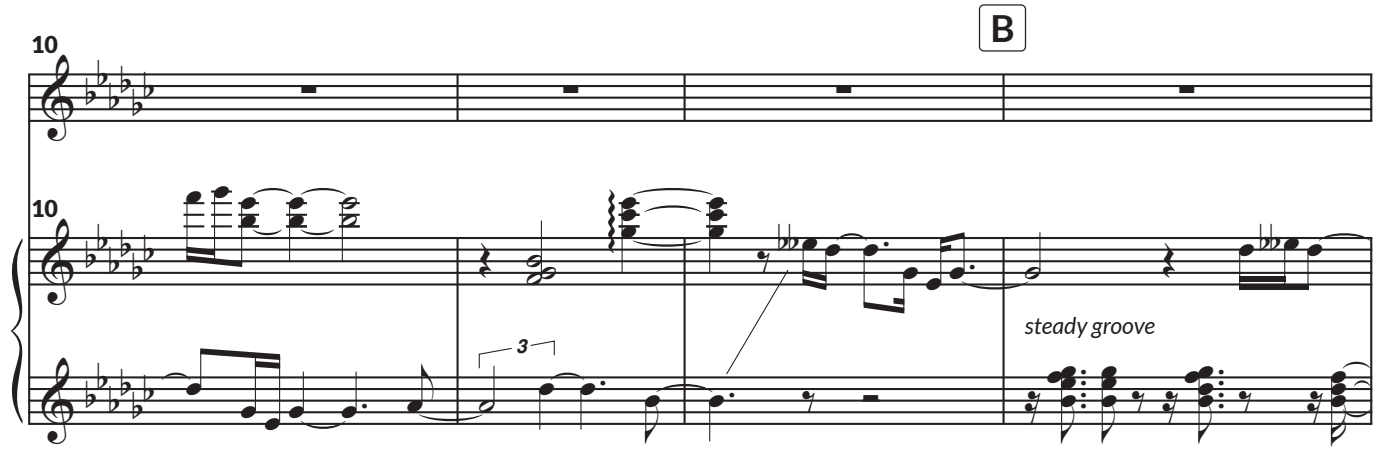
I.

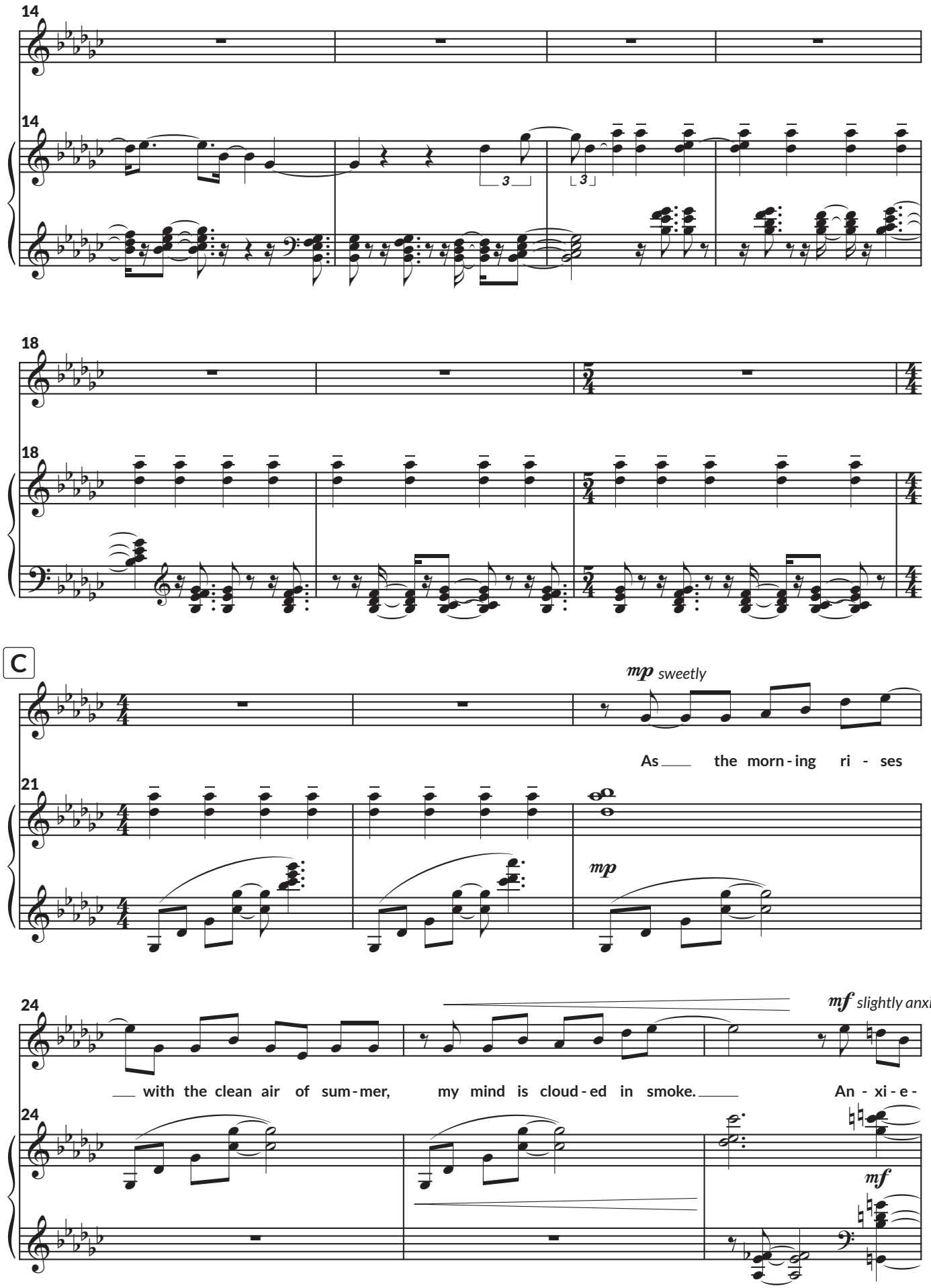
Music by Shawn E. Okpebholo
Text by Marcus Amaker

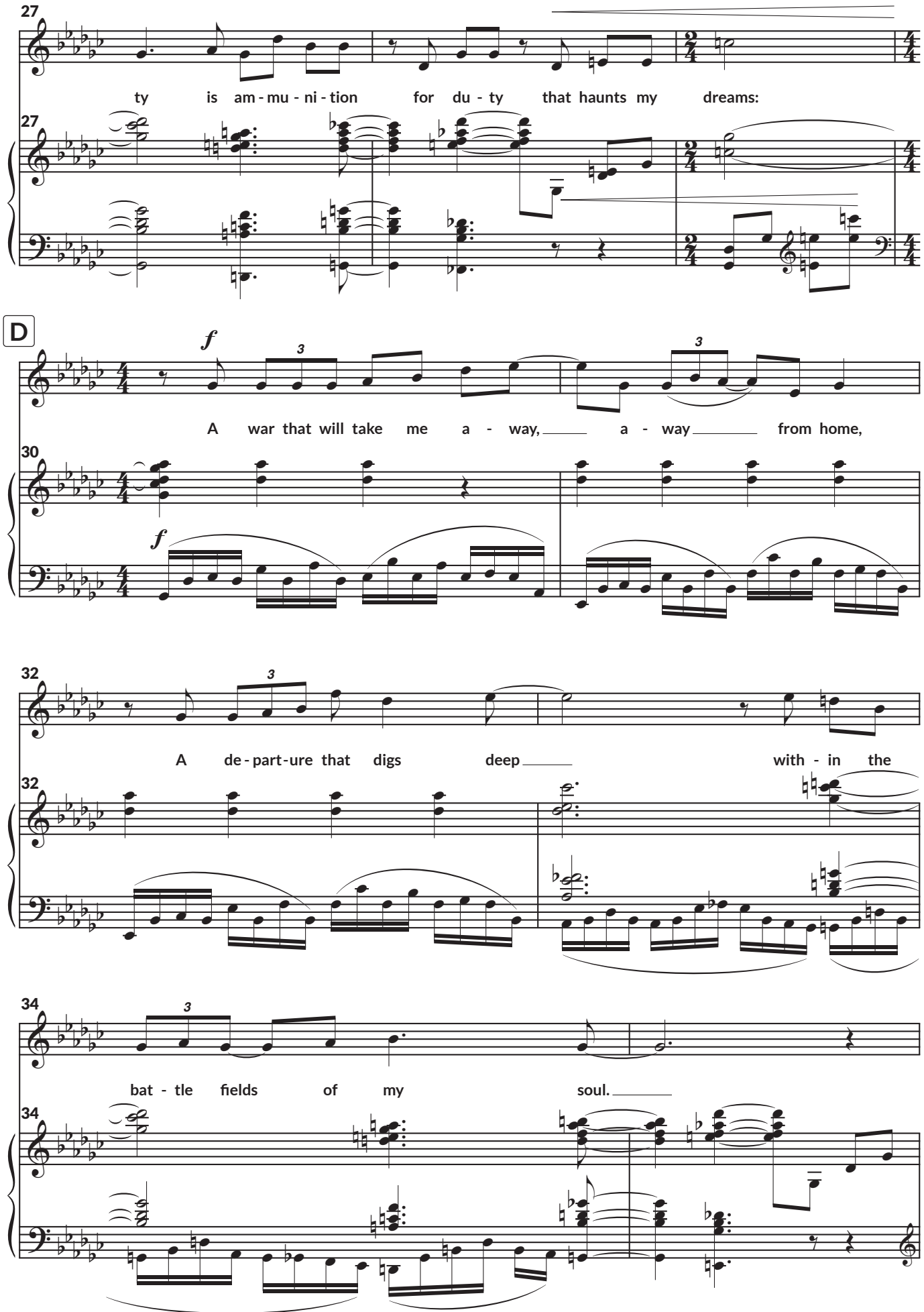
Reflective, patient, warm ♩ = 64

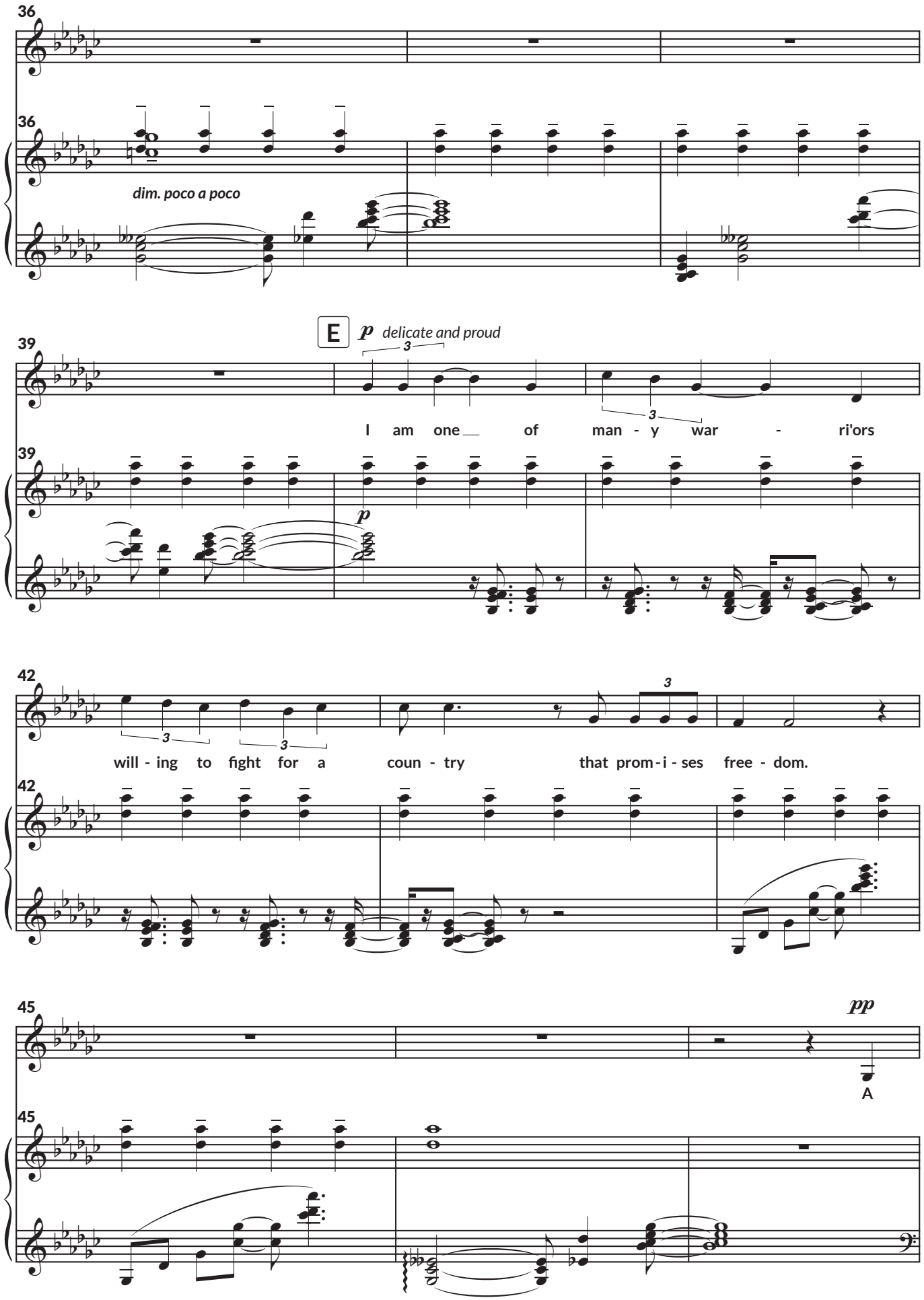


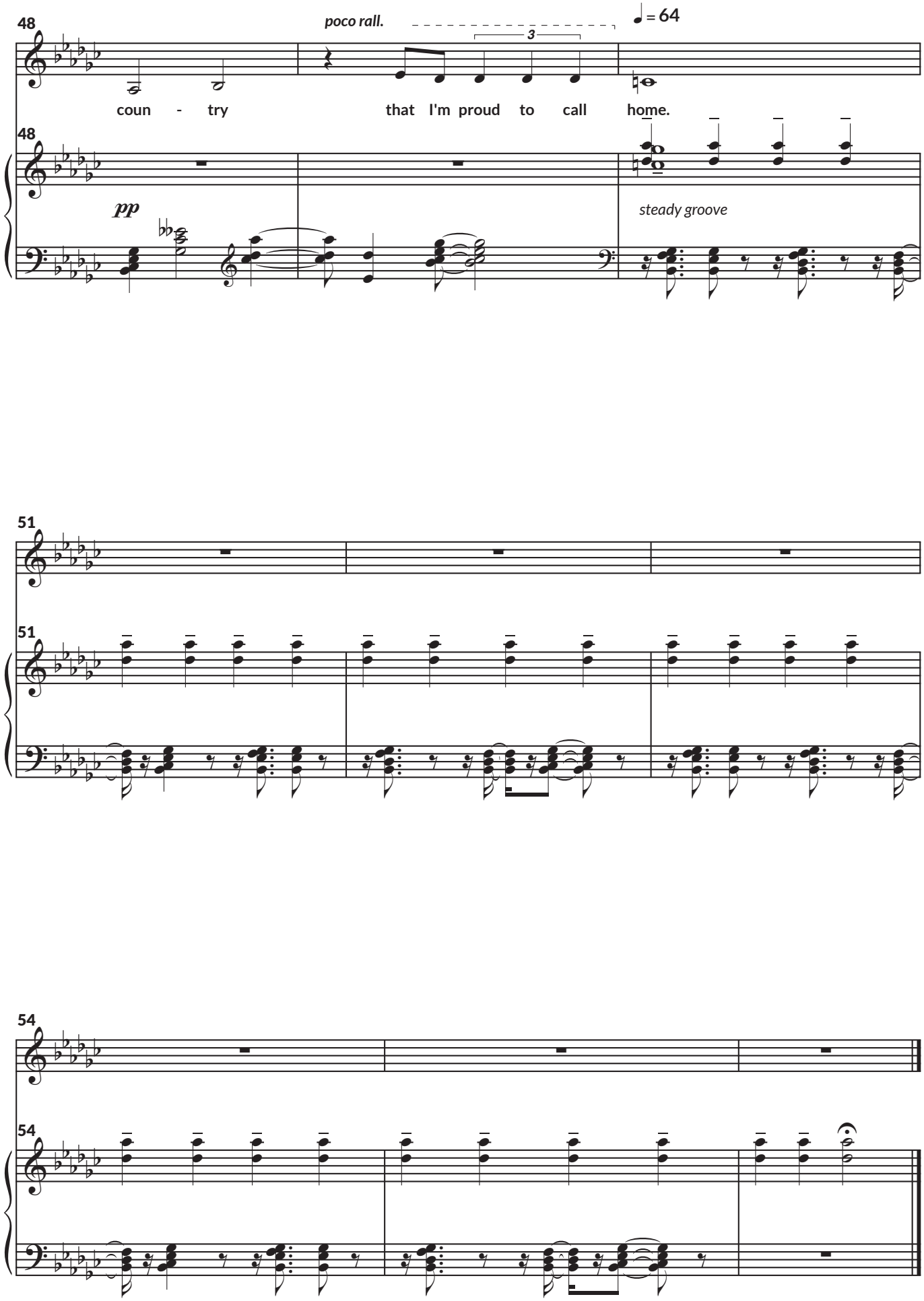




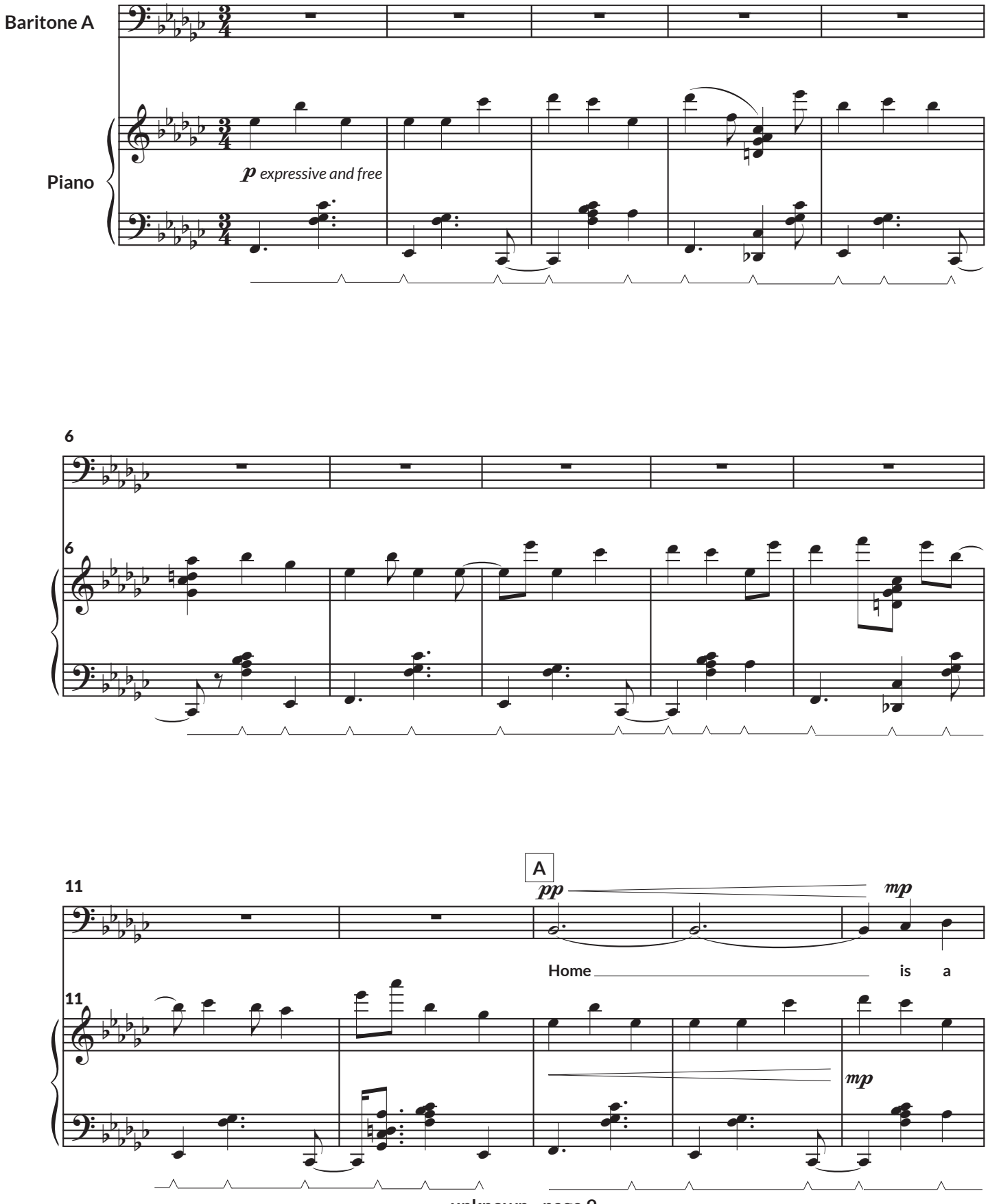

14
14
3
3
18
18
C
mp sweetly
As the morn - ing ri - ses
21
mp
24
mf slightly anxious
with the clean air of sum - mer, my mind is cloud - ed in smoke. An - xi - e -
24
mf


27
ty is am - mu - ni - tion for du - ty that haunts my dreams:
27
D
f
3
A war that will take me a - way, a - way from home,
30
f
32
3
A de - part - ure that digs deep with - in the
32
34
3
bat - tle fields of my soul.
34


36
dim. poco a poco
E
p delicate and proud
39
I am one of man - y war - ri'ors
42
will - ing to fight for a coun - try that prom - i - ses free - dom.
45
pp
A


48
poco rall.
3
♩ = 64
coun - try that I'm proud to call home.
48
pp
steady groove
51
51
54
54

Melancholic, nostalgic, satisfying groove ♩ = 92



16

hol - low space when world - wide hos - stil - i - ty takes

16

20

light –

a - hold... takes a - hold of its ha -

20

23

- bi - tat. Home is a hol -

23

p float...

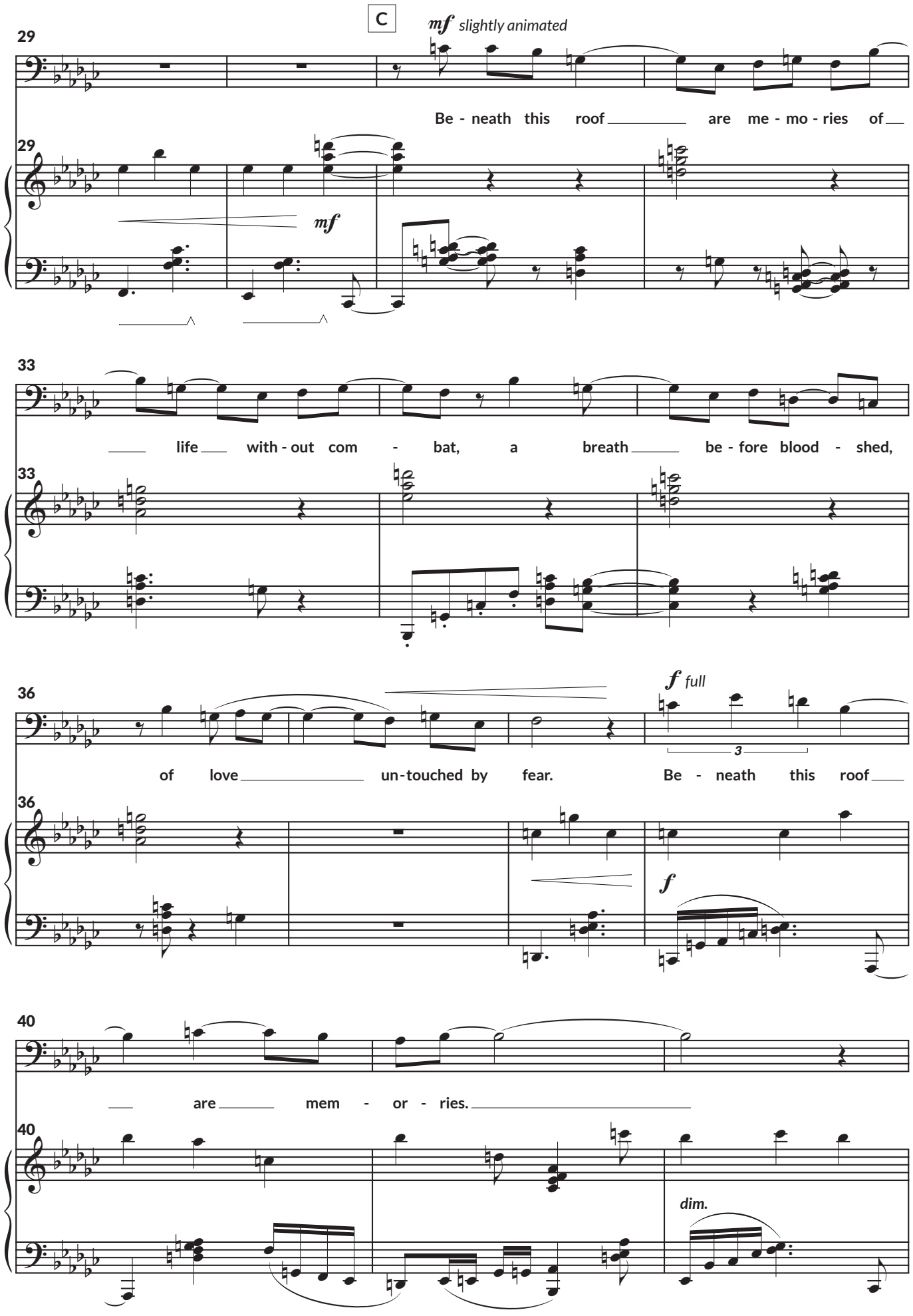
B

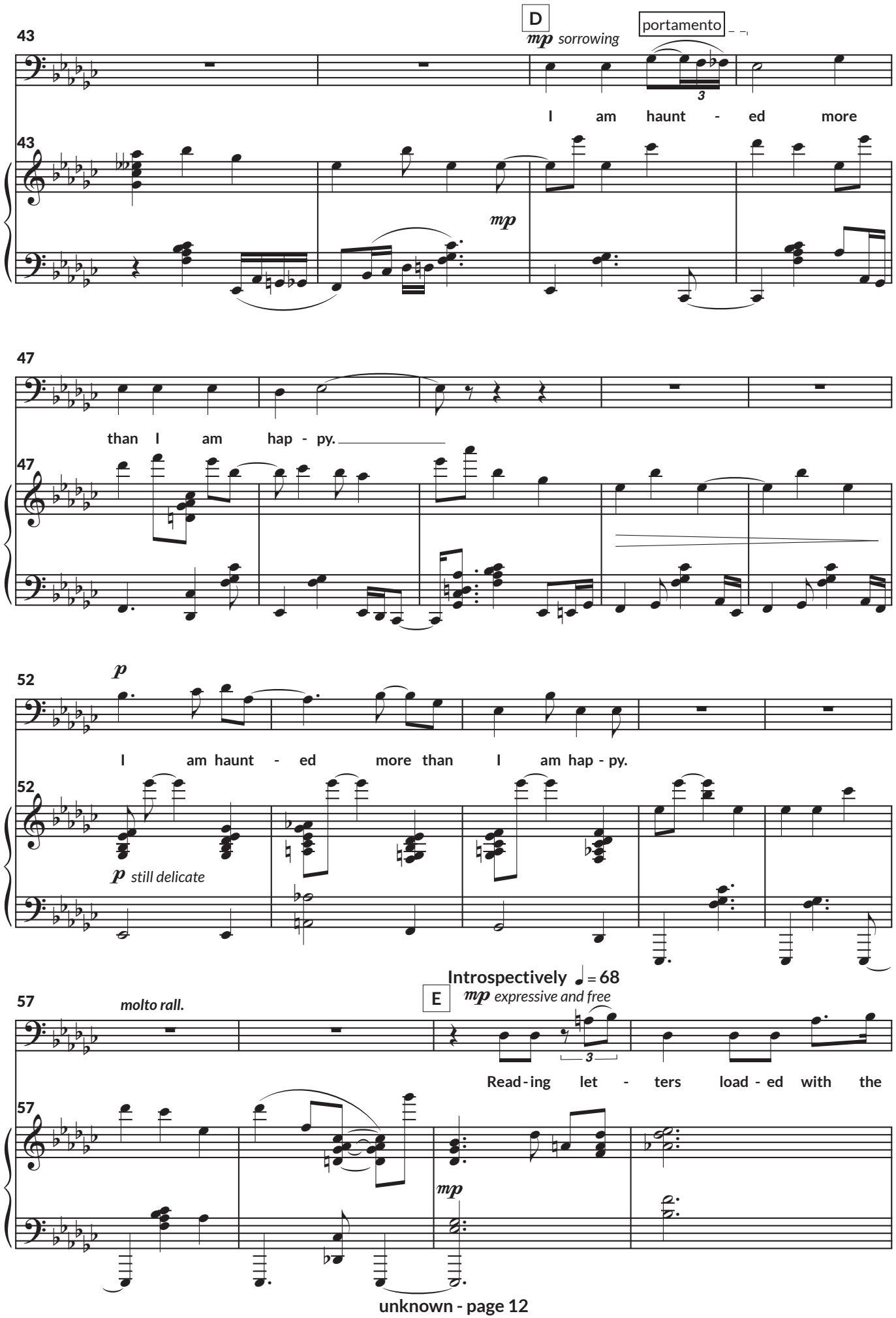
26

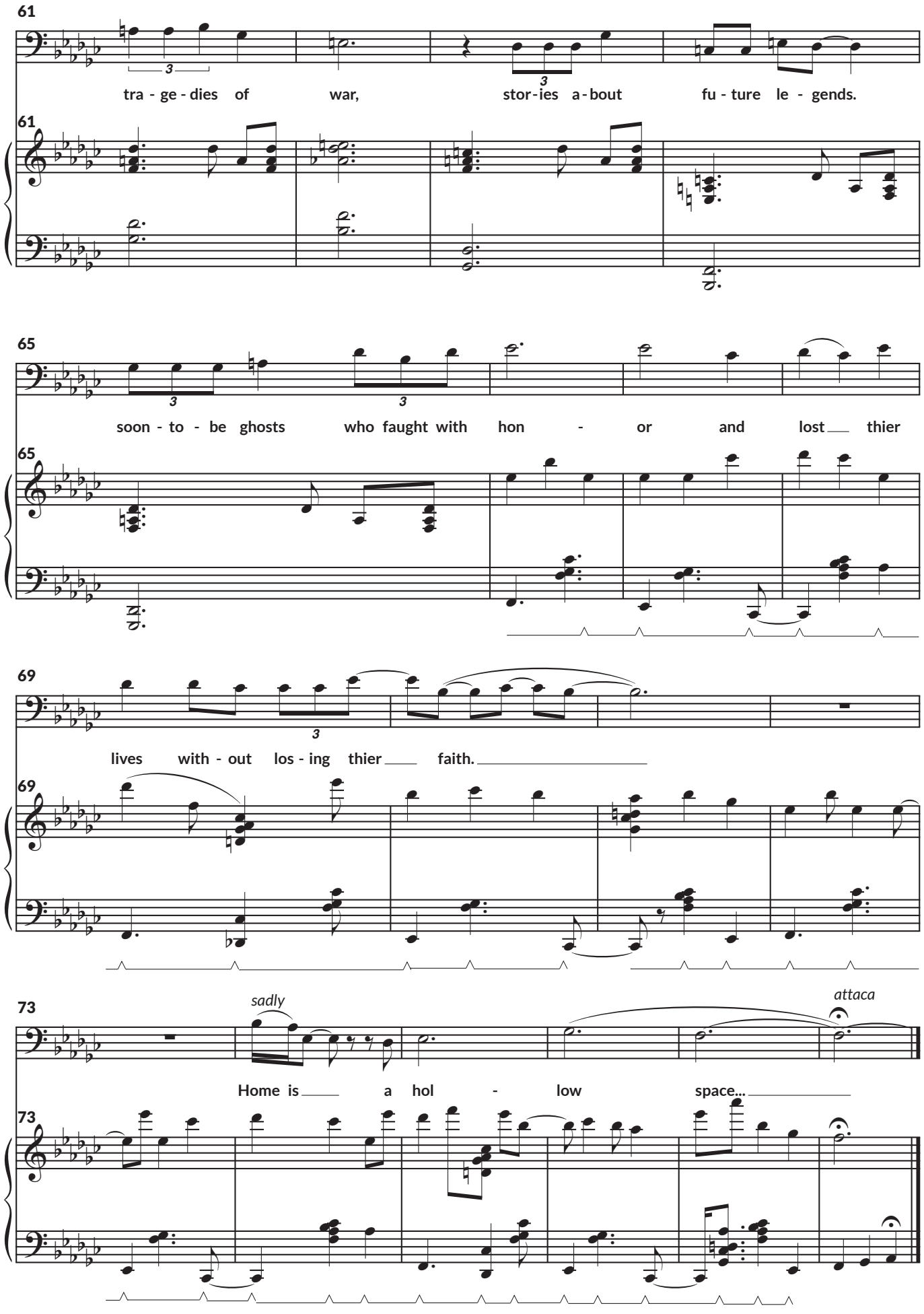
low space...

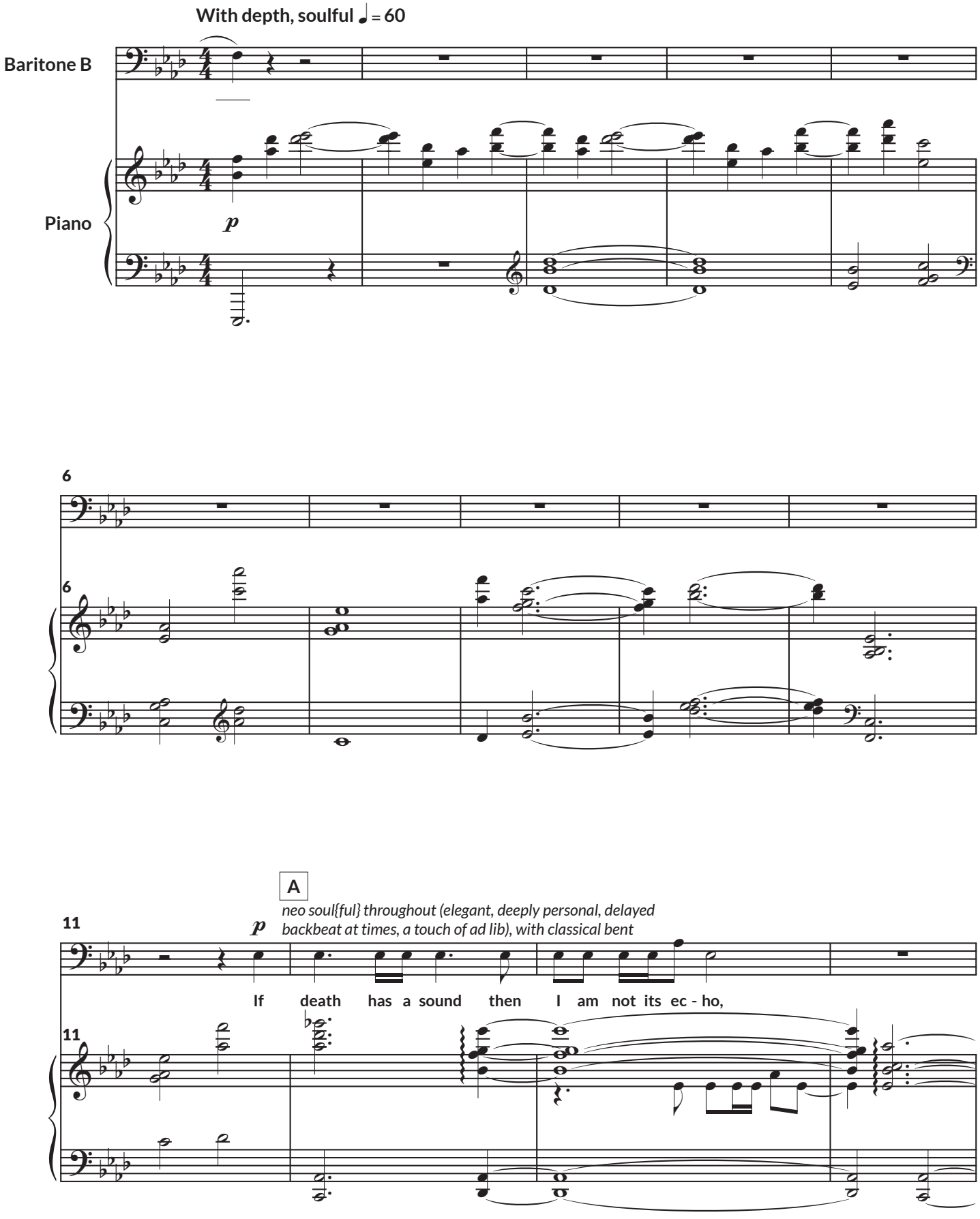
26

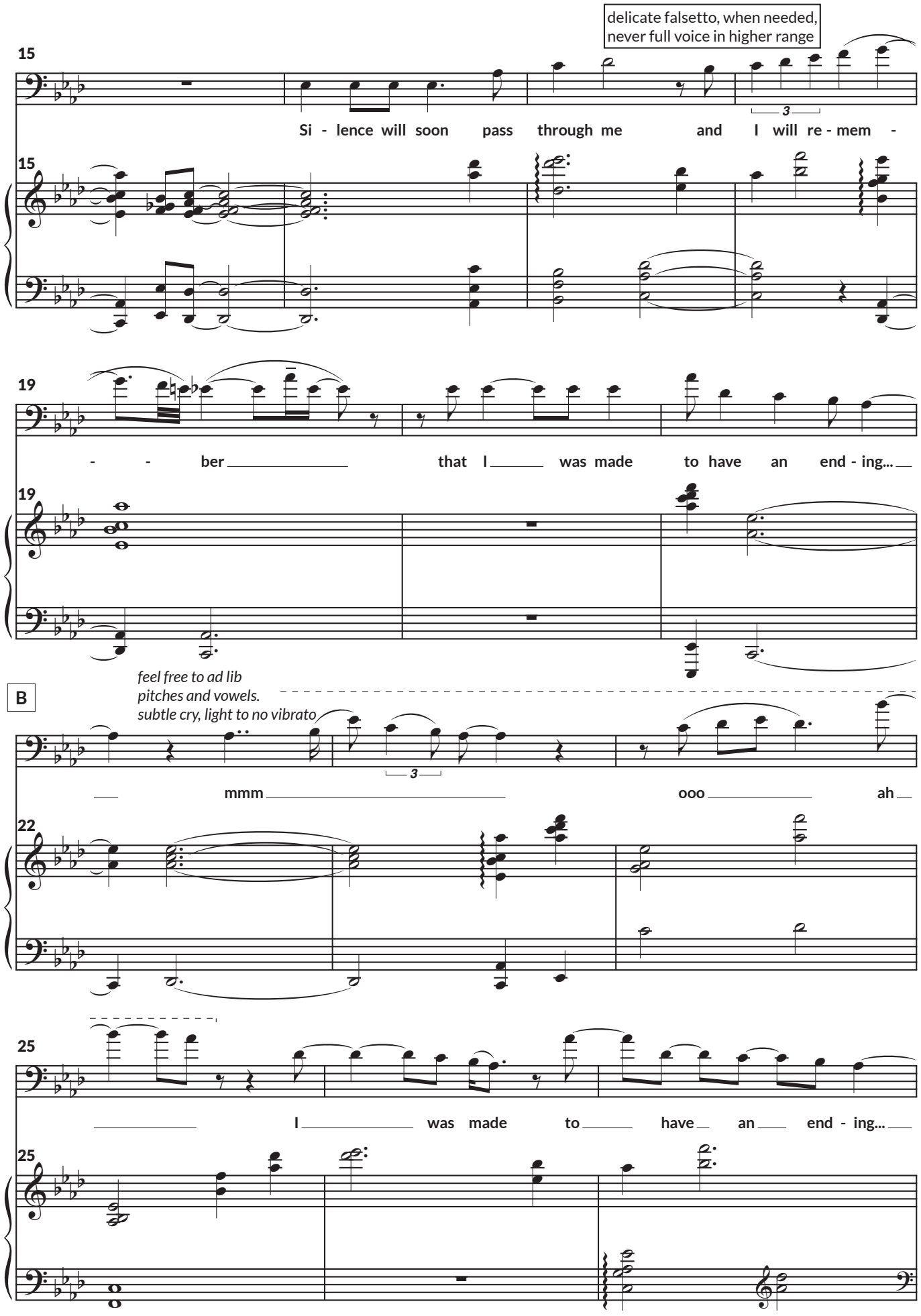
p

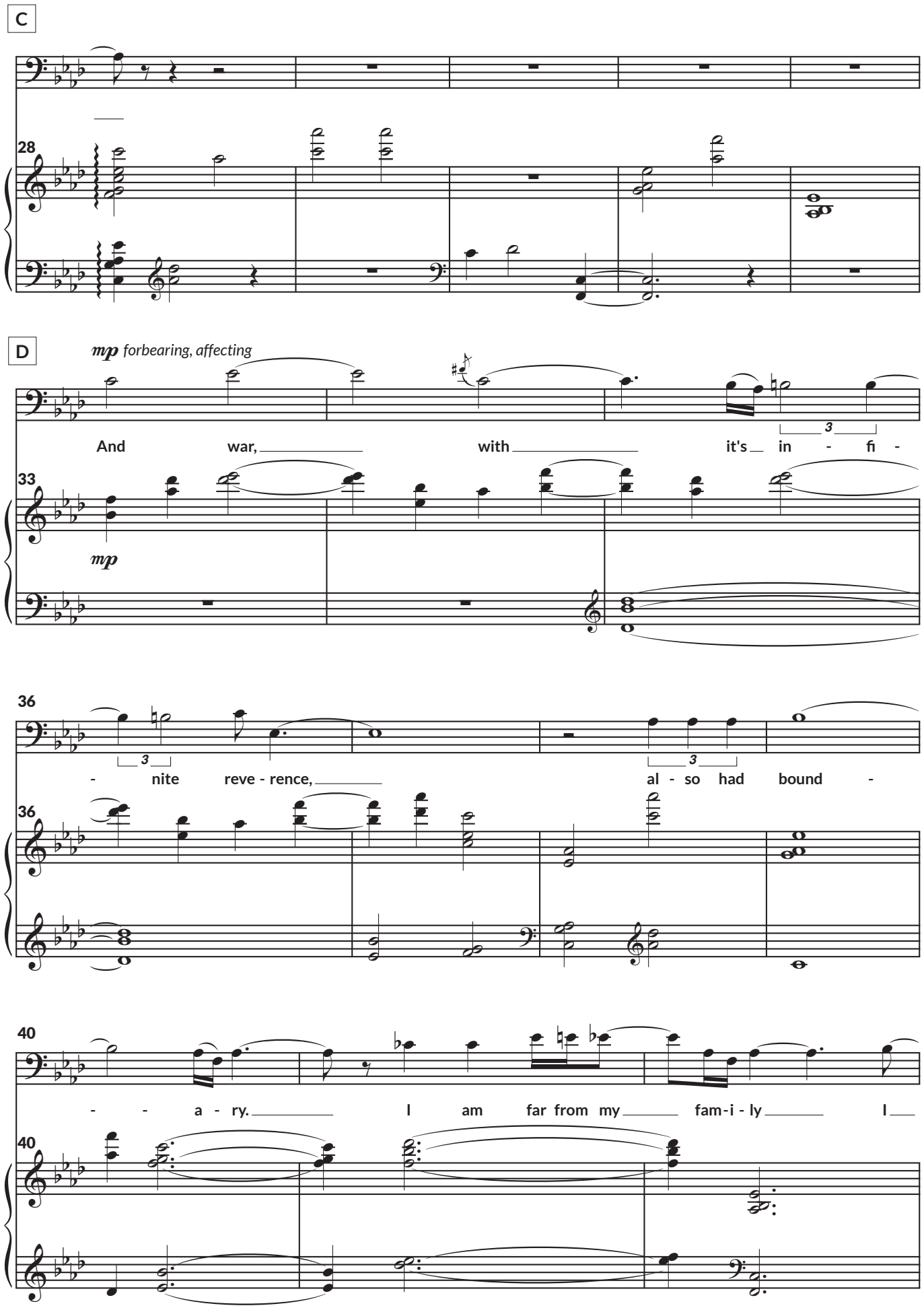

C
mf slightly animated
29
Be - neath this roof are me - mo - ries of
mf
33
life with - out com - bat, a breath be - fore blood - shed,
36
f full
3
of love un-touched by fear. Be - neath this roof
f
40
are mem - or - ries.
dim.

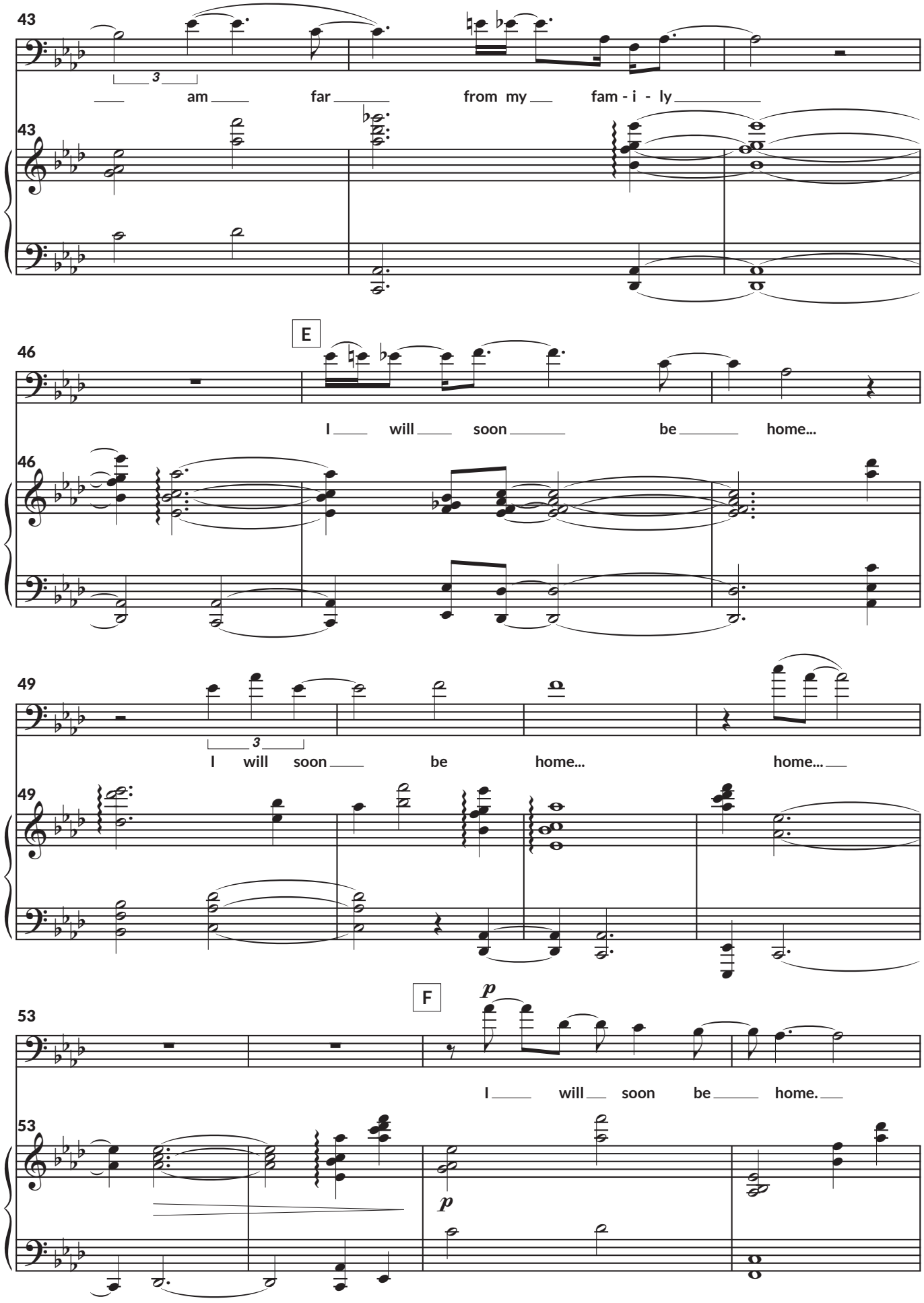

D
mp sorrowing
portamento
43
I am haunt - ed more
mp
47
than I am hap - py.
52
p
I am haunt - ed more than I am hap - py.
p still delicate
Introspectively ♩ = 68
57
molto rall.
E
mp expressive and free
Read - ing let - ters load - ed with the
mp

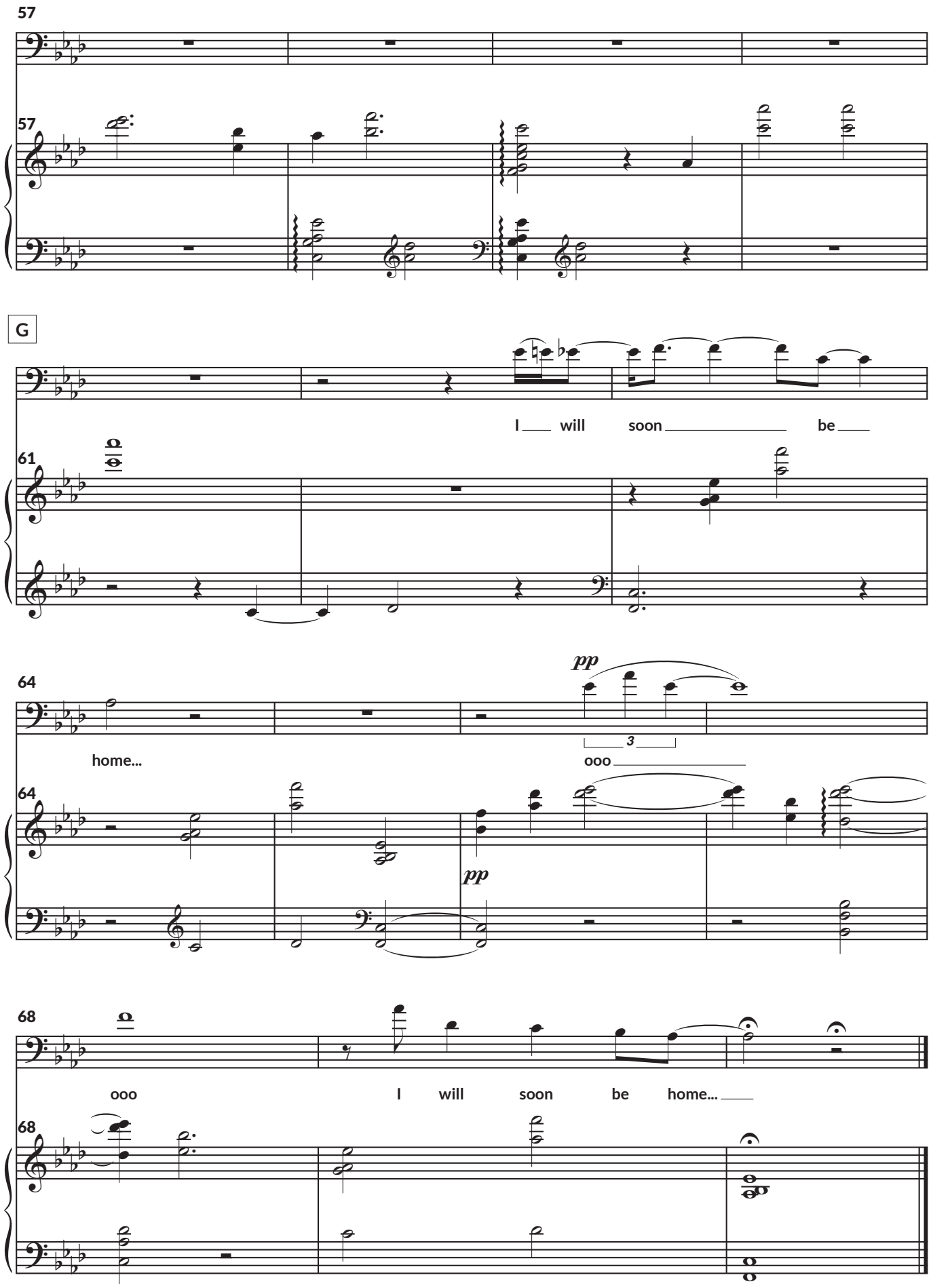

61
tra - ge - dies of war, stor - ies a - bout fu - ture le - gends.
61
65
soon - to - be ghosts who faught with hon - or and lost thier
65
69
lives with - out los - ing thier faith.
69
73
sadly
attaca
Home is a hol - low space...
73

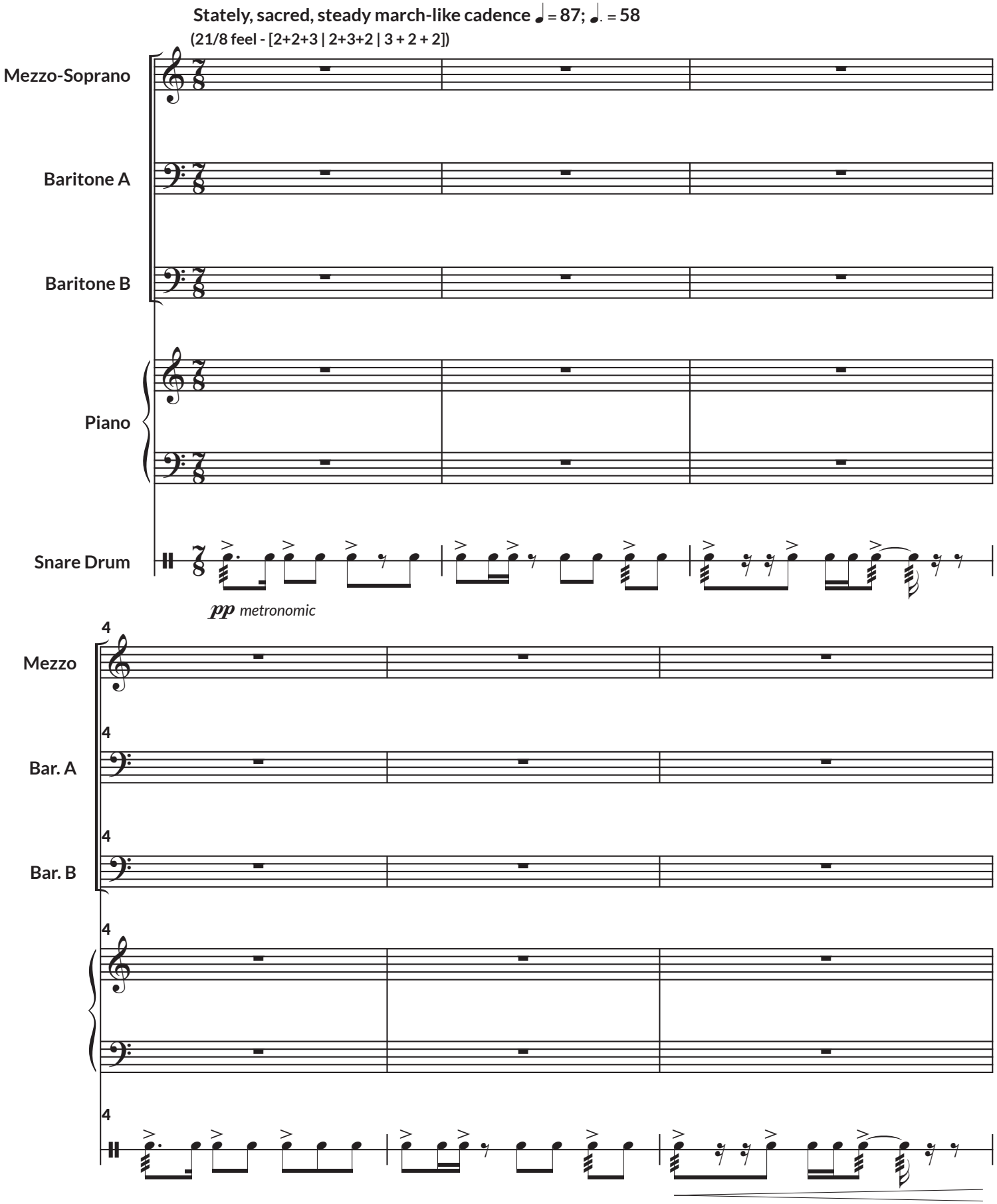

With depth, soulful ♩ = 60
Baritone B
Piano
p
6
6
A
neo soul{ful} throughout (elegant, deeply personal, delayed backbeat at times, a touch of ad lib), with classical bent
11
p
If death has a sound then I am not its ec - ho,
11

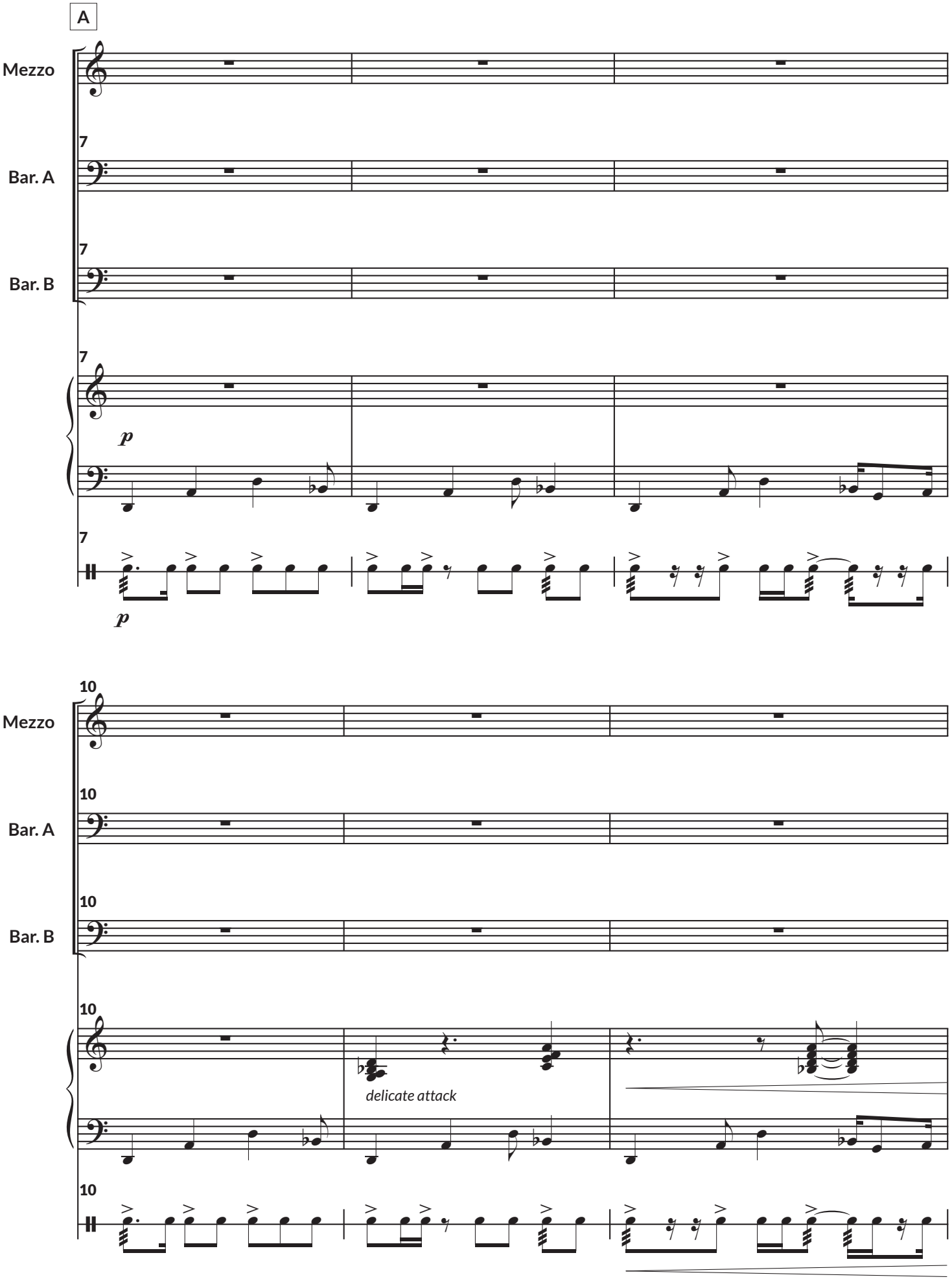

delicate falsetto, when needed,
never full voice in higher range
15
Si - lence will soon pass through me and I will re - mem -
19
- - ber that I was made to have an end - ing...
B
feel free to ad lib
pitches and vowels.
subtle cry, light to no vibrato
mmm ooo ah
22
I was made to have an end - ing...
25

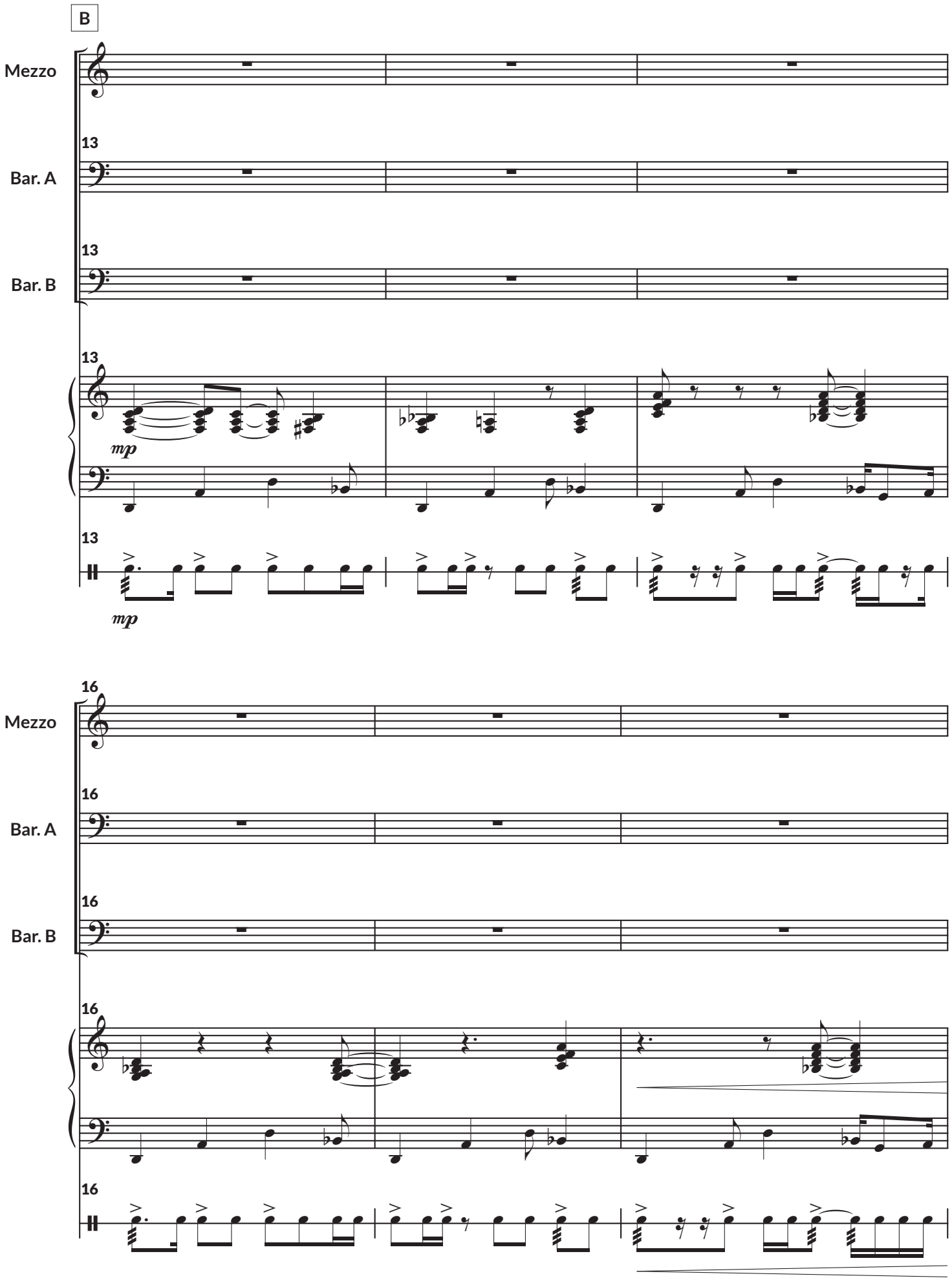

C
28
D
mp forbearing, affecting
And war, with it's in - fi -
33
mp
36
- nite reve - rence, al - so had bound -
36
40
- - a - ry. I am far from my fam-i - ly I
40

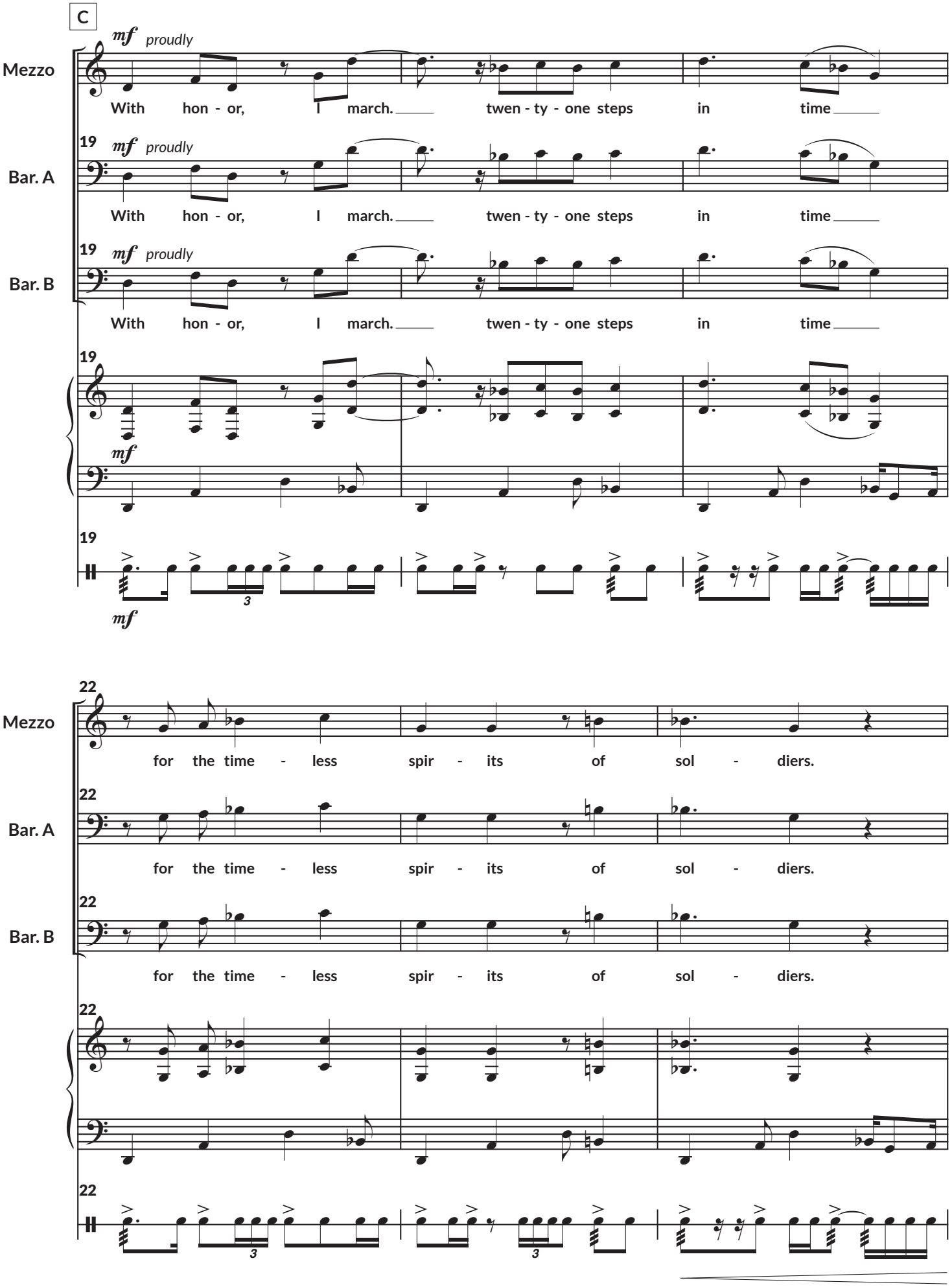

43
3
am far from my fam - i - ly
43
E
46
I will soon be home...
46
49
3
I will soon be home... home...
49
F
p
53
I will soon be home.
53
p

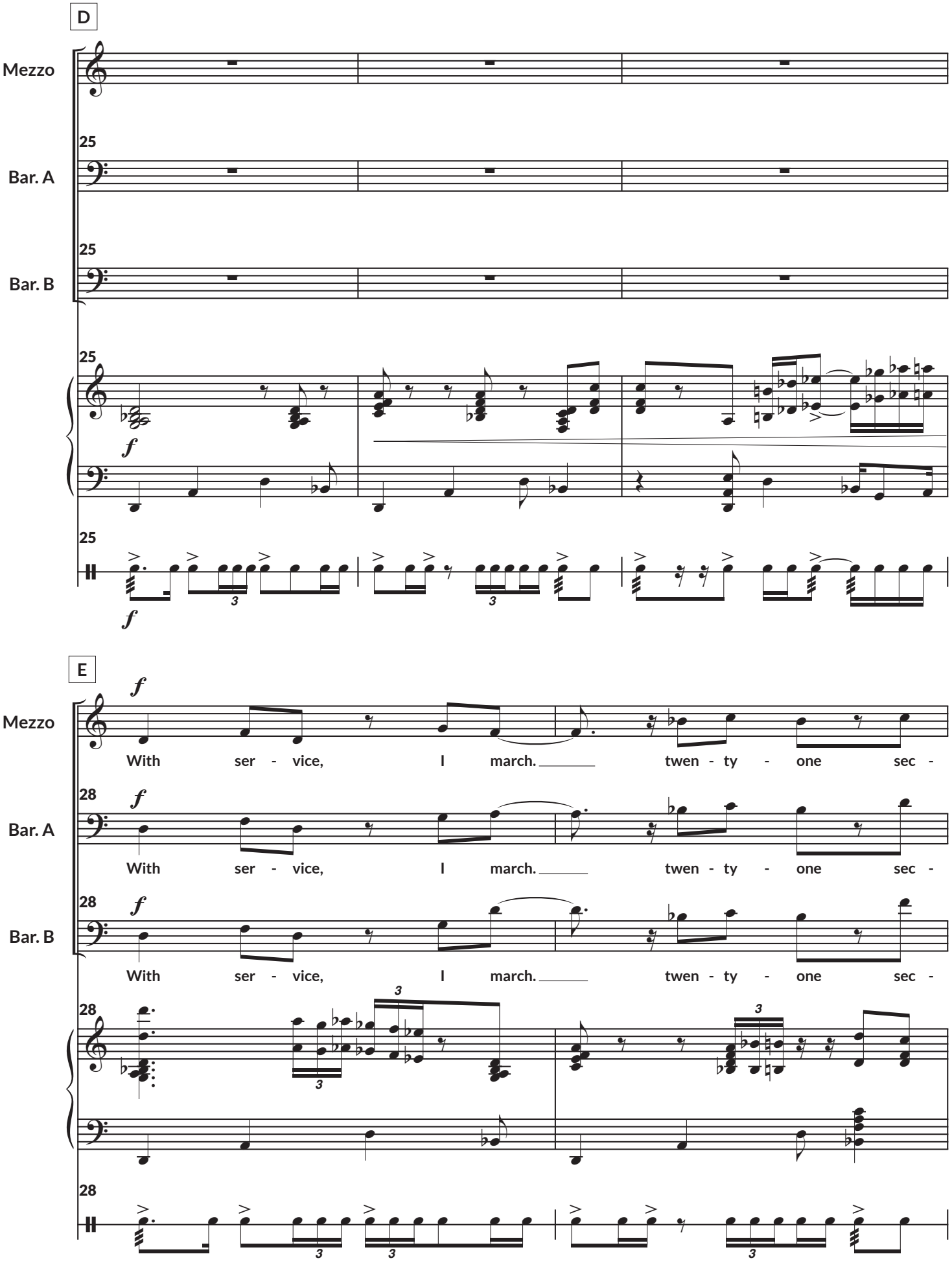

57
57
G
I will soon be
61
64
pp
3
home...
ooo
64
pp
68
ooo
I will soon be home...
68

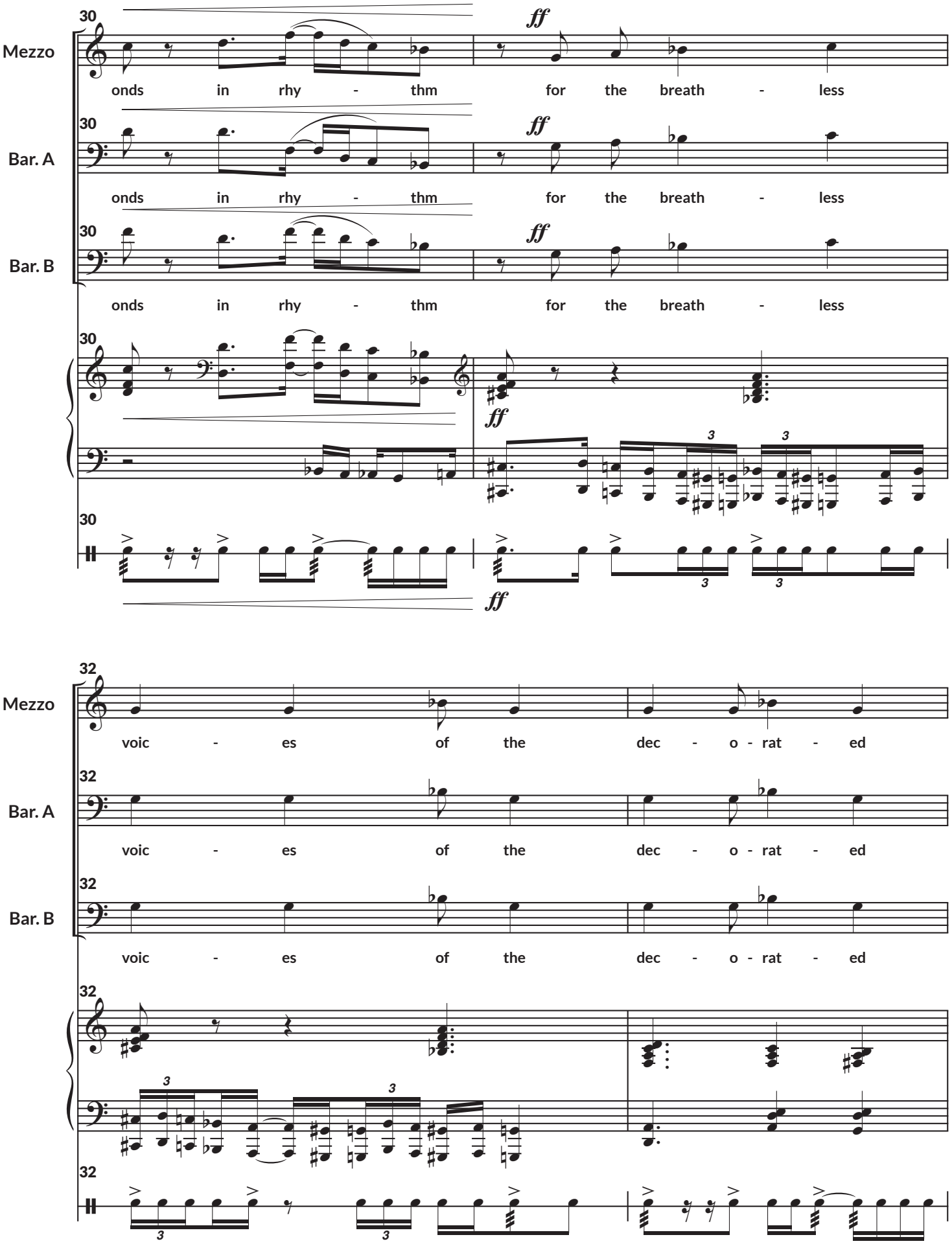

Stately, sacred, steady march-like cadence ♩ = 87; ♩. = 58
(21/8 feel - [2+2+3 | 2+3+2 | 3 + 2 + 2])
Mezzo-Soprano
Baritone A
Baritone B
Piano
Snare Drum
pp metronomic
4
Mezzo
Bar. A
Bar. B

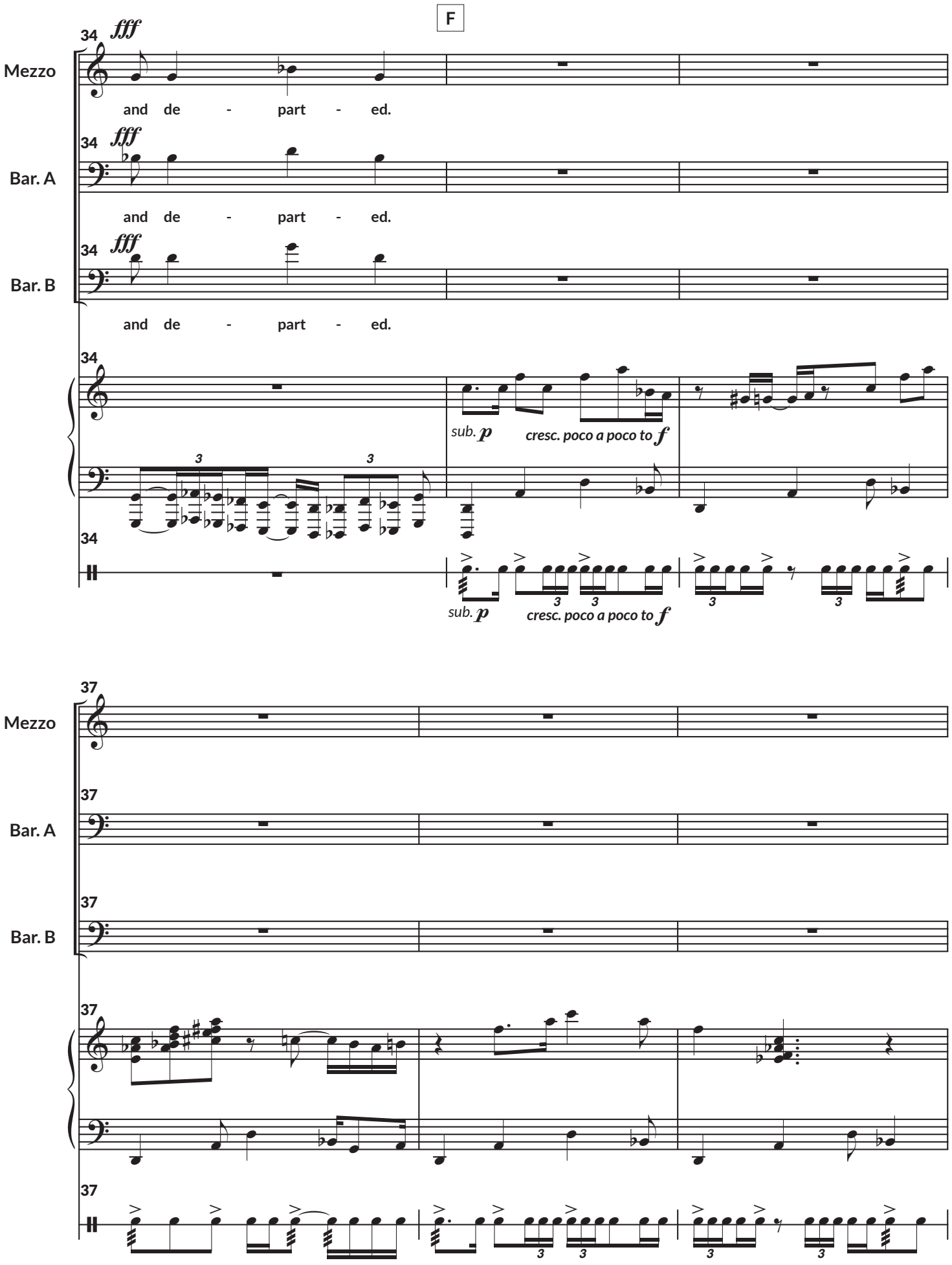

A
Mezzo
Bar. A
Bar. B
7
p
p
10
delicate attack

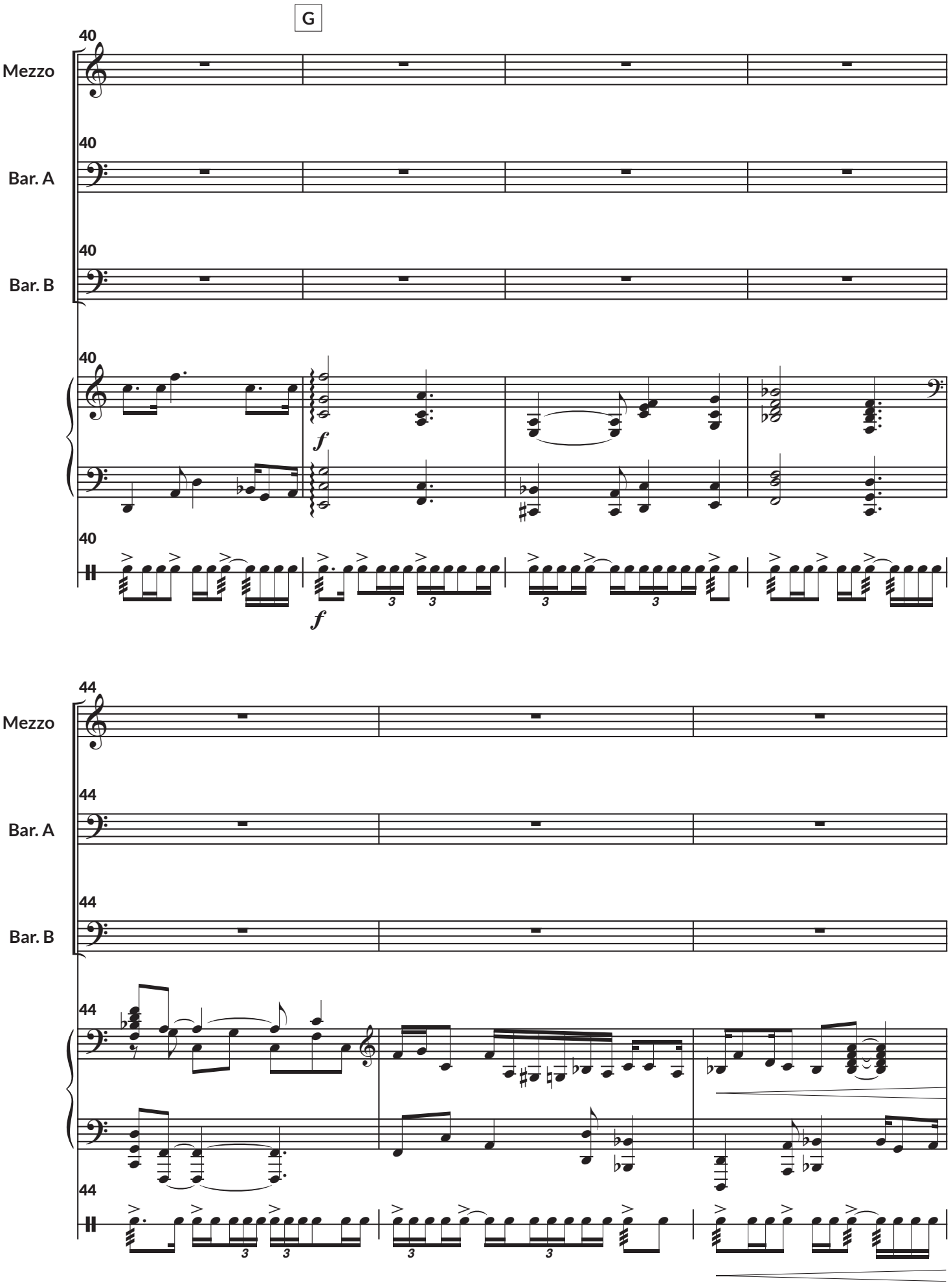

B
Mezzo
13
Bar. A
13
Bar. B
13
mp
13
mp
16
Mezzo
16
Bar. A
16
Bar. B
16
16

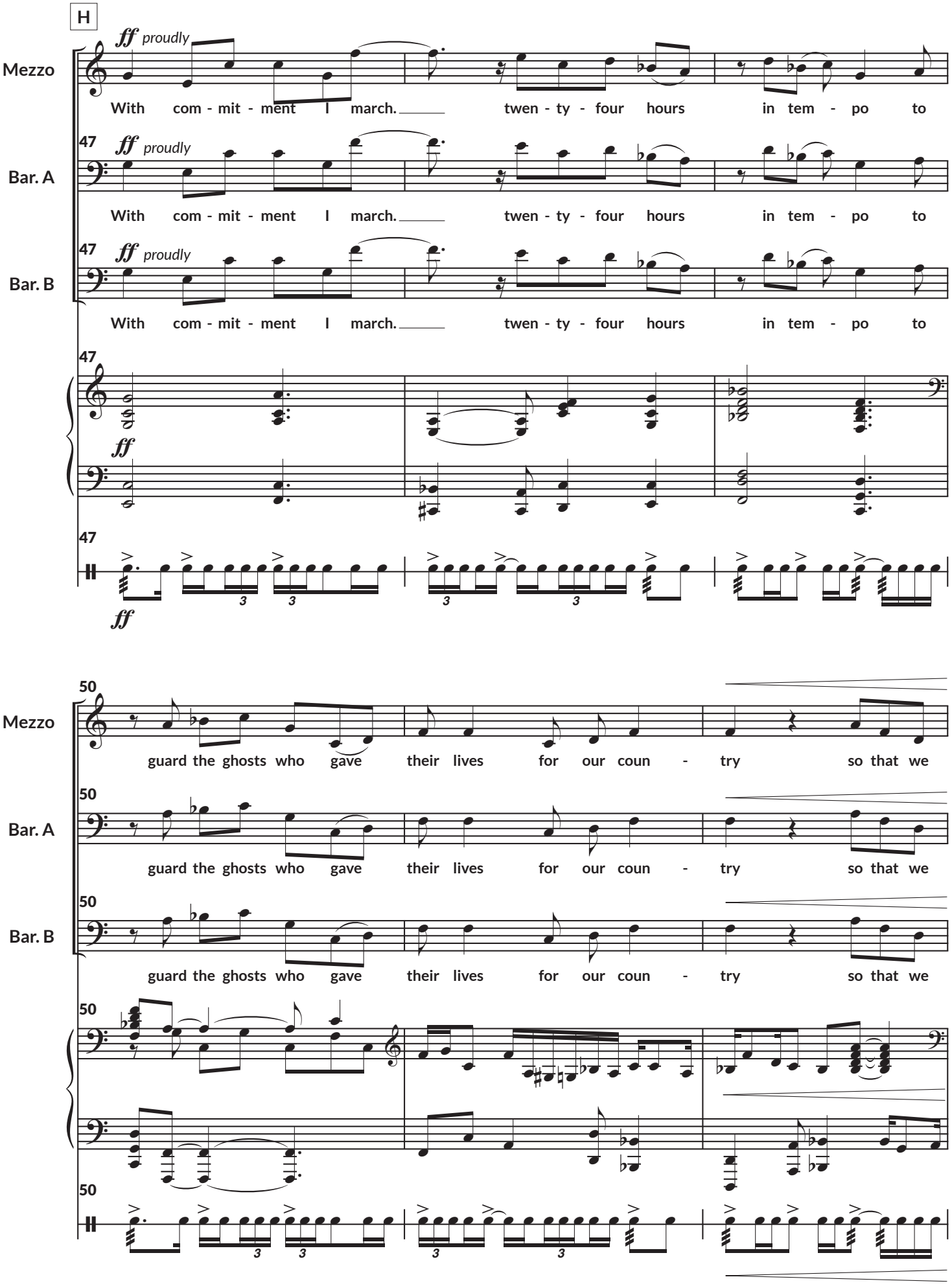

C
Mezzo
mf proudly
With hon - or, I march. twen - ty - one steps in time
Bar. A
19
mf proudly
With hon - or, I march. twen - ty - one steps in time
Bar. B
19
mf proudly
With hon - or, I march. twen - ty - one steps in time
19
mf
19
3
mf
Mezzo
22
for the time - less spir - its of sol - diers.
Bar. A
22
for the time - less spir - its of sol - diers.
Bar. B
22
for the time - less spir - its of sol - diers.
22
22
3
3

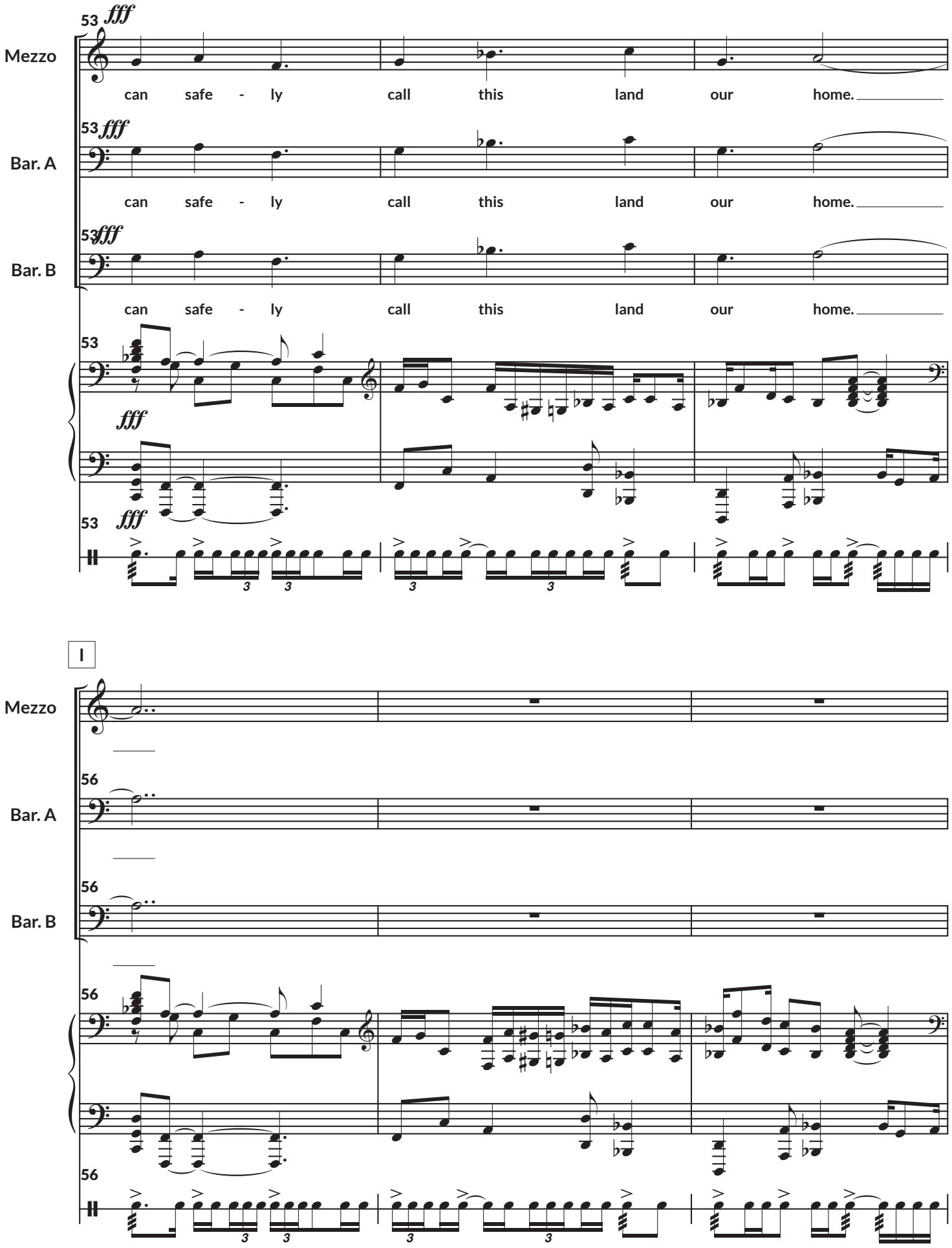

D
Mezzo
25
Bar. A
25
Bar. B
25
25
f
f
E
f
Mezzo
With ser - vice, I march. twen - ty - one sec -
28
f
Bar. A
With ser - vice, I march. twen - ty - one sec -
28
f
Bar. B
With ser - vice, I march. twen - ty - one sec -
28
3
3
3
28
3
3
3

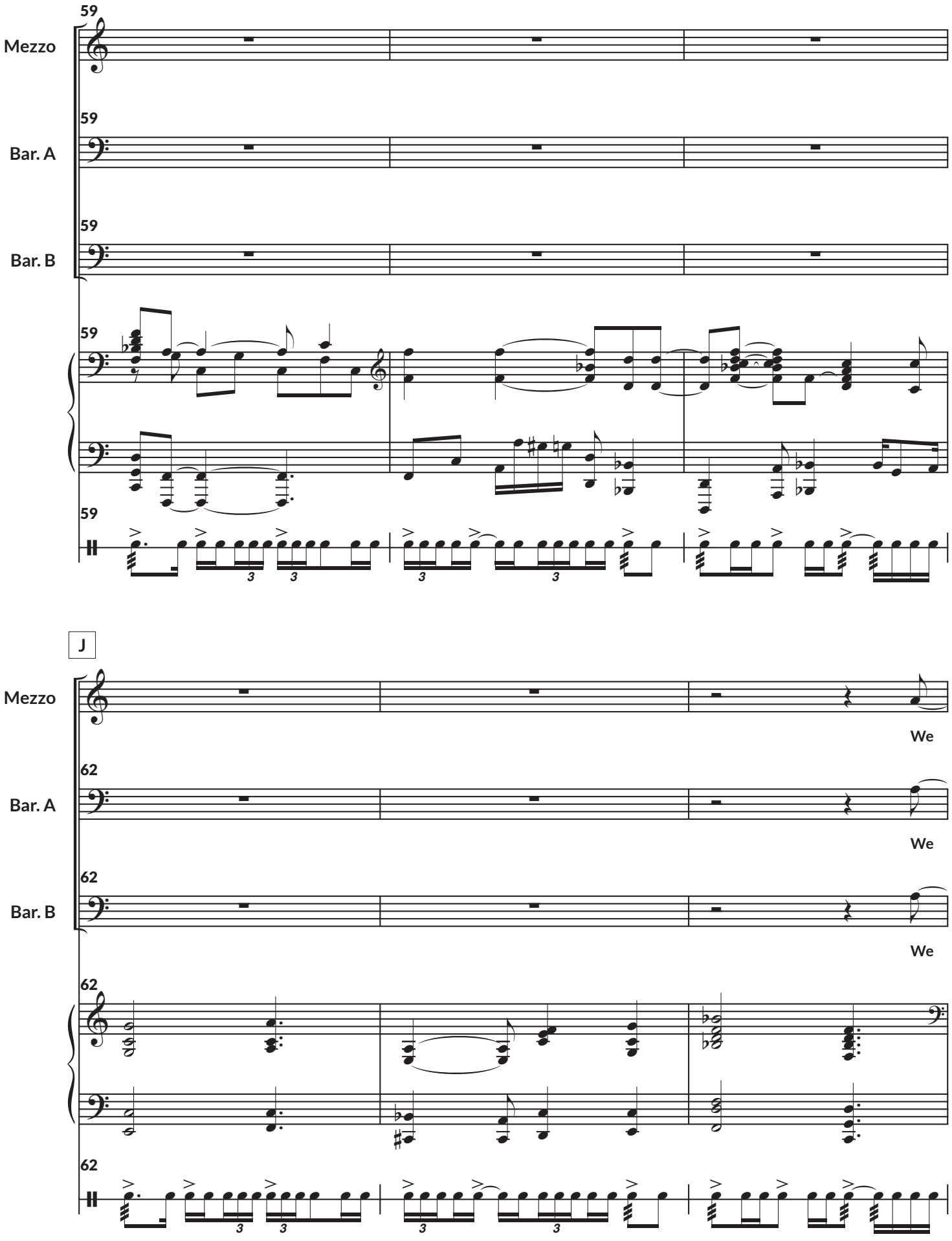

30
Mezzo
ff
onds in rhy - thm for the breath - less
30
Bar. A
ff
onds in rhy - thm for the breath - less
30
Bar. B
ff
onds in rhy - thm for the breath - less
30
ff
3
3
30
3
3
ff
32
Mezzo
voic - es of the dec - o - rat - ed
32
Bar. A
voic - es of the dec - o - rat - ed
32
Bar. B
voic - es of the dec - o - rat - ed
32
3
3
32
3
3

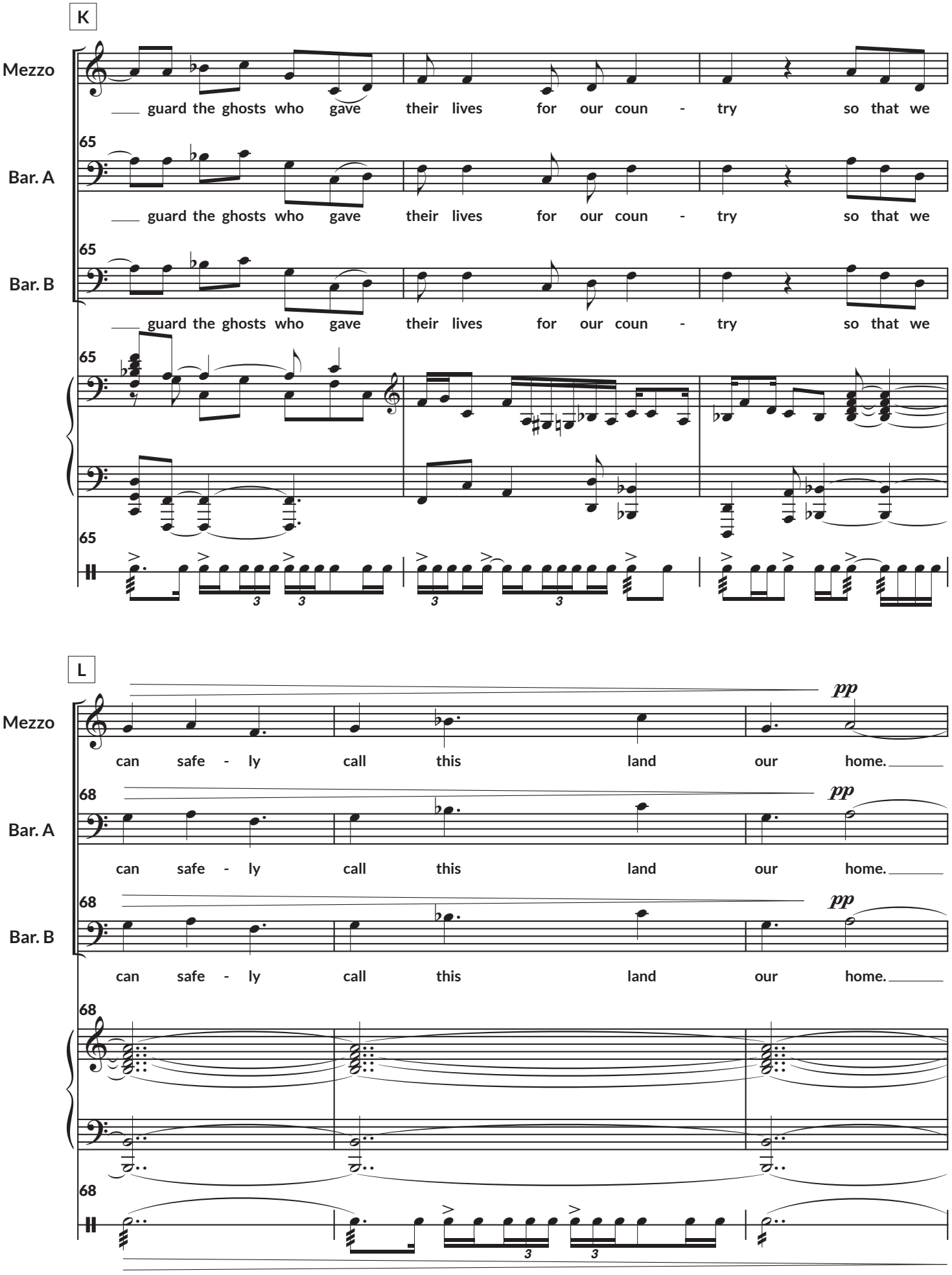

F
34
fff
Mezzo
and de - part - ed.
34
fff
Bar. A
and de - part - ed.
34
fff
Bar. B
and de - part - ed.
34
sub. p
cresc. poco a poco to f
3
3
34
sub. p
cresc. poco a poco to f
37
Mezzo
37
Bar. A
37
Bar. B
37
37

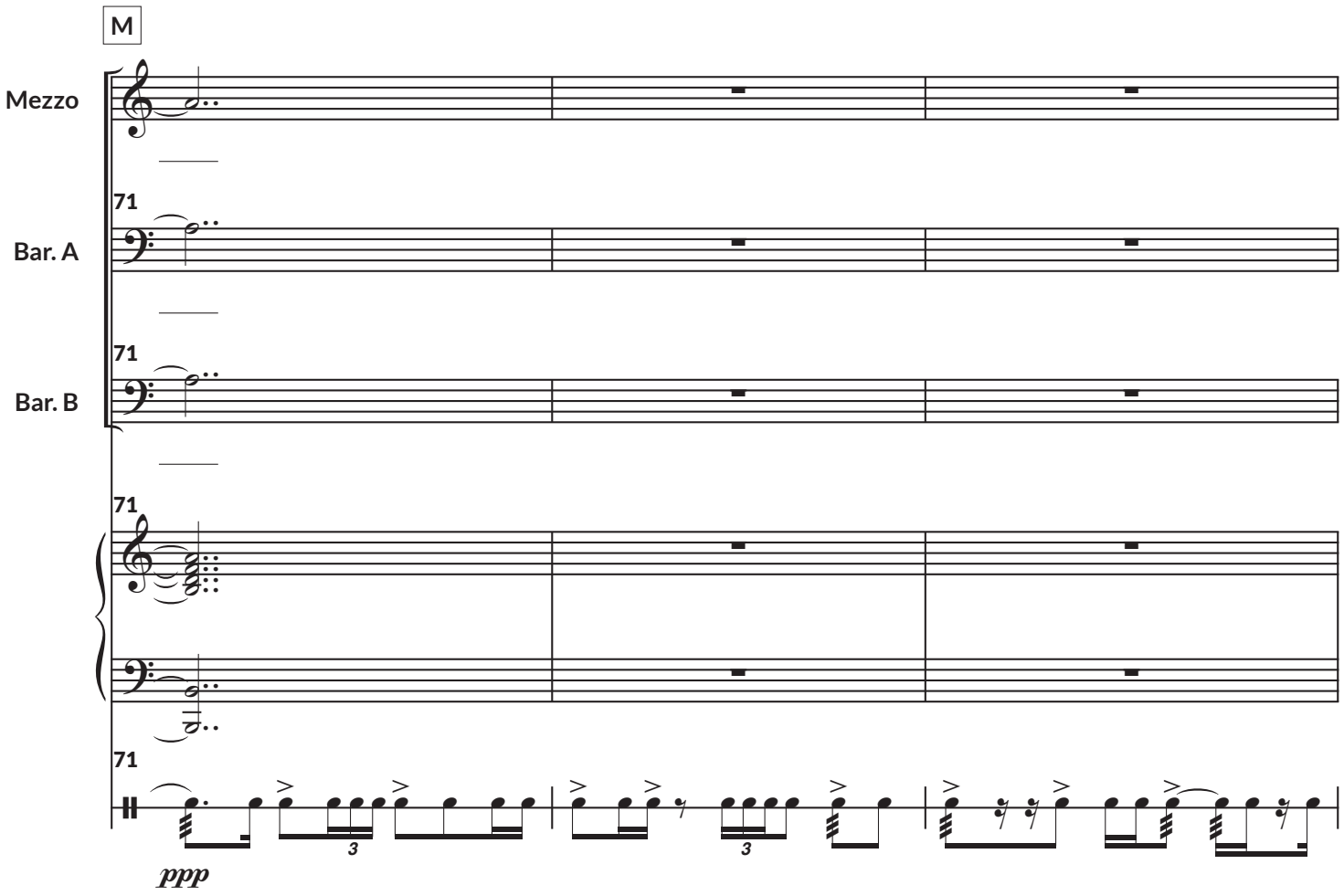

G
40
Mezzo
40
Bar. A
40
Bar. B
40
f
40
f
3
3
3
3
44
Mezzo
44
Bar. A
44
Bar. B
44
44
3
3
3
3

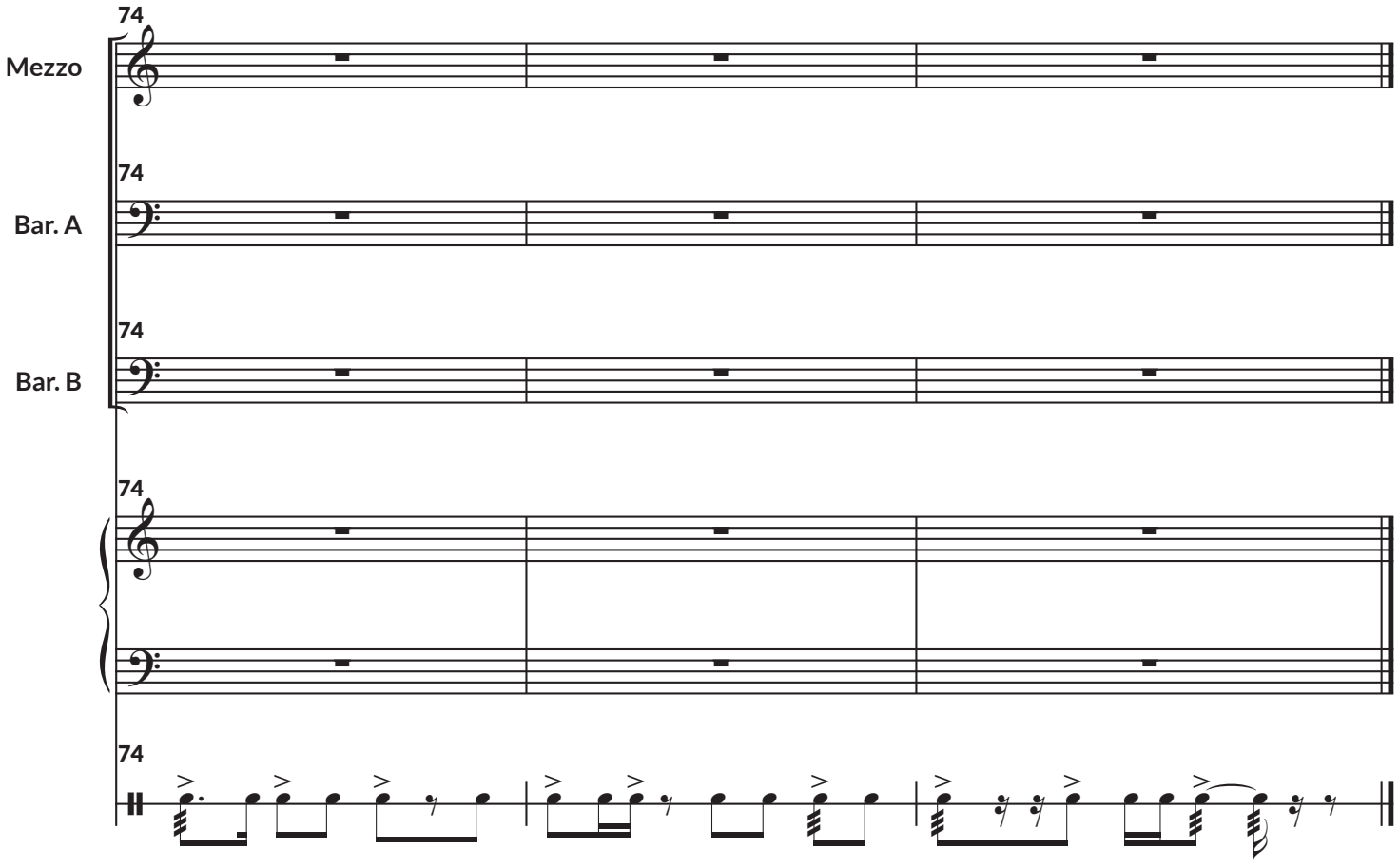

H
Mezzo
Bar. A
Bar. B
47
50
ff proudly
With com - mit - ment I march. twen - ty - four hours in tem - po to
guard the ghosts who gave their lives for our coun - try so that we
ff

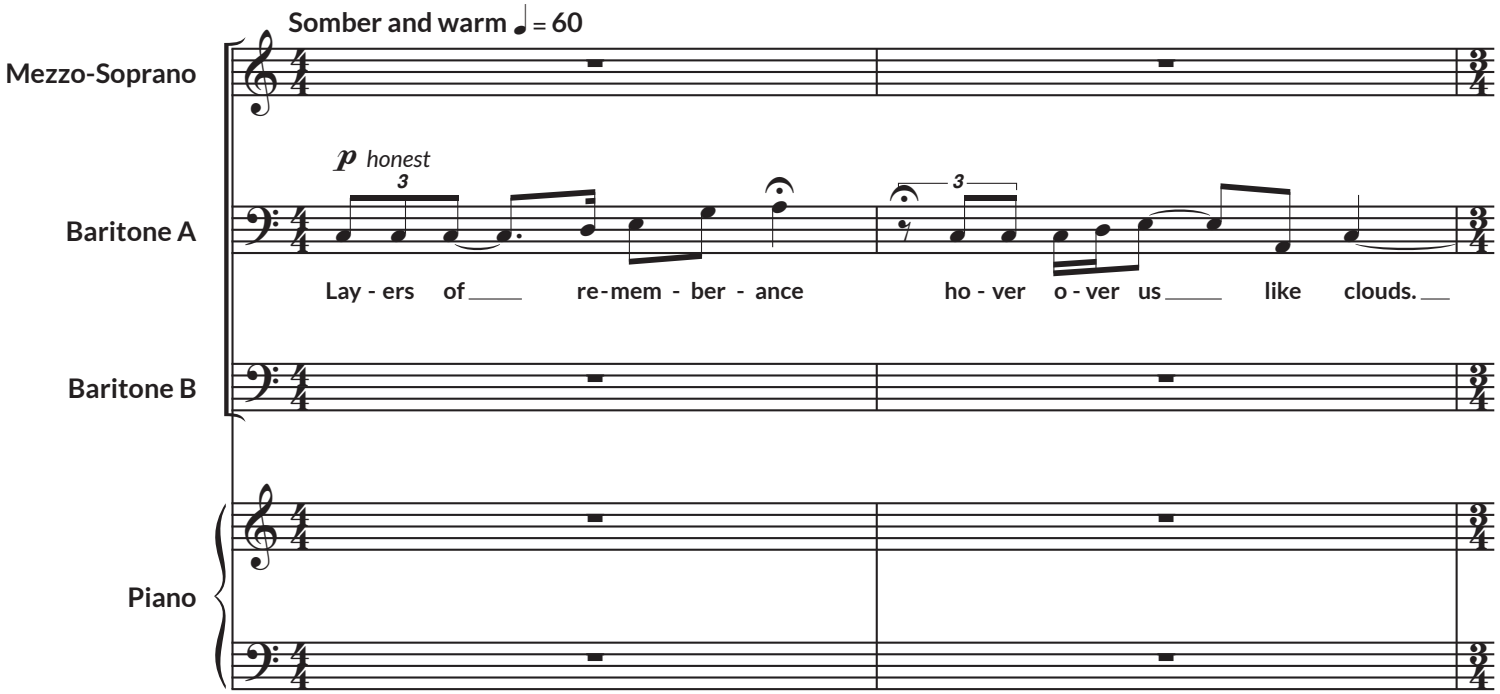

53 fff
Mezzo
can safe - ly call this land our home.
53 fff
Bar. A
can safe - ly call this land our home.
53 fff
Bar. B
can safe - ly call this land our home.
53
fff
53 fff
I
Mezzo
56
Bar. A
56
Bar. B
56
56

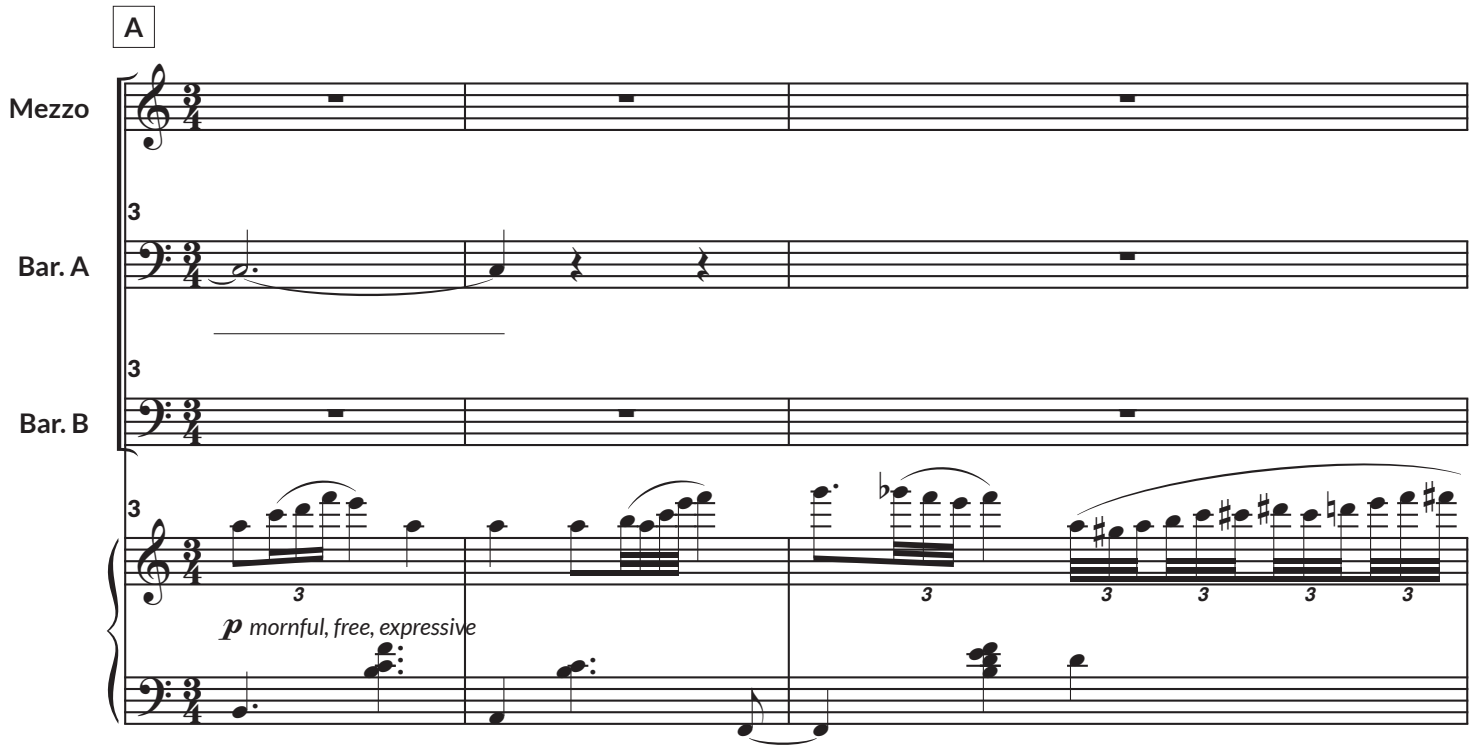

59
Mezzo
59
Bar. A
59
Bar. B
59
59
J
Mezzo
We
62
Bar. A
We
62
Bar. B
We
62
62

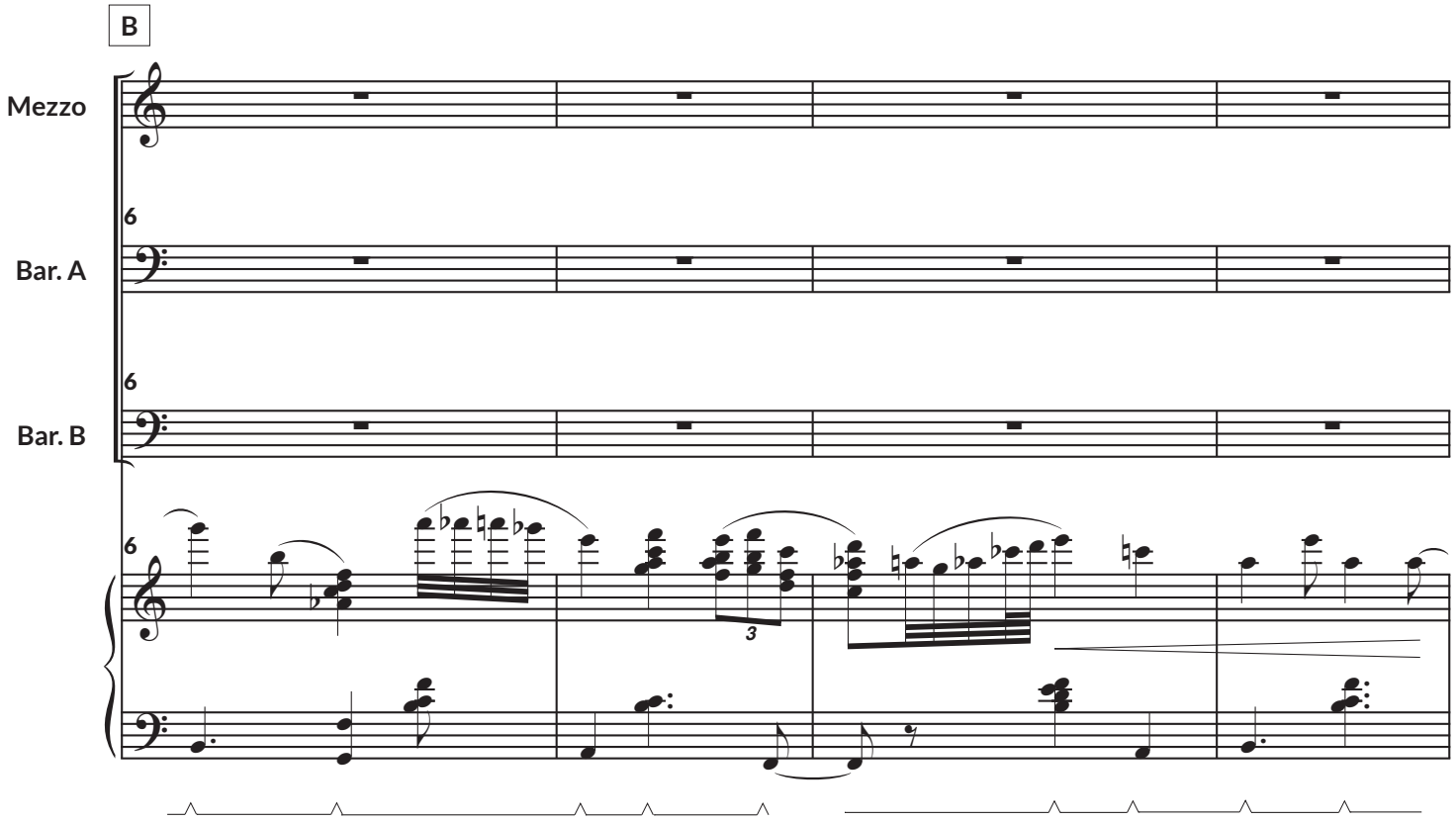

K
Mezzo
guard the ghosts who gave their lives for our coun - try so that we
65
Bar. A
guard the ghosts who gave their lives for our coun - try so that we
65
Bar. B
guard the ghosts who gave their lives for our coun - try so that we
65
65
L
Mezzo
pp
can safe - ly call this land our home.
68
Bar. A
pp
can safe - ly call this land our home.
68
Bar. B
pp
can safe - ly call this land our home.
68
68

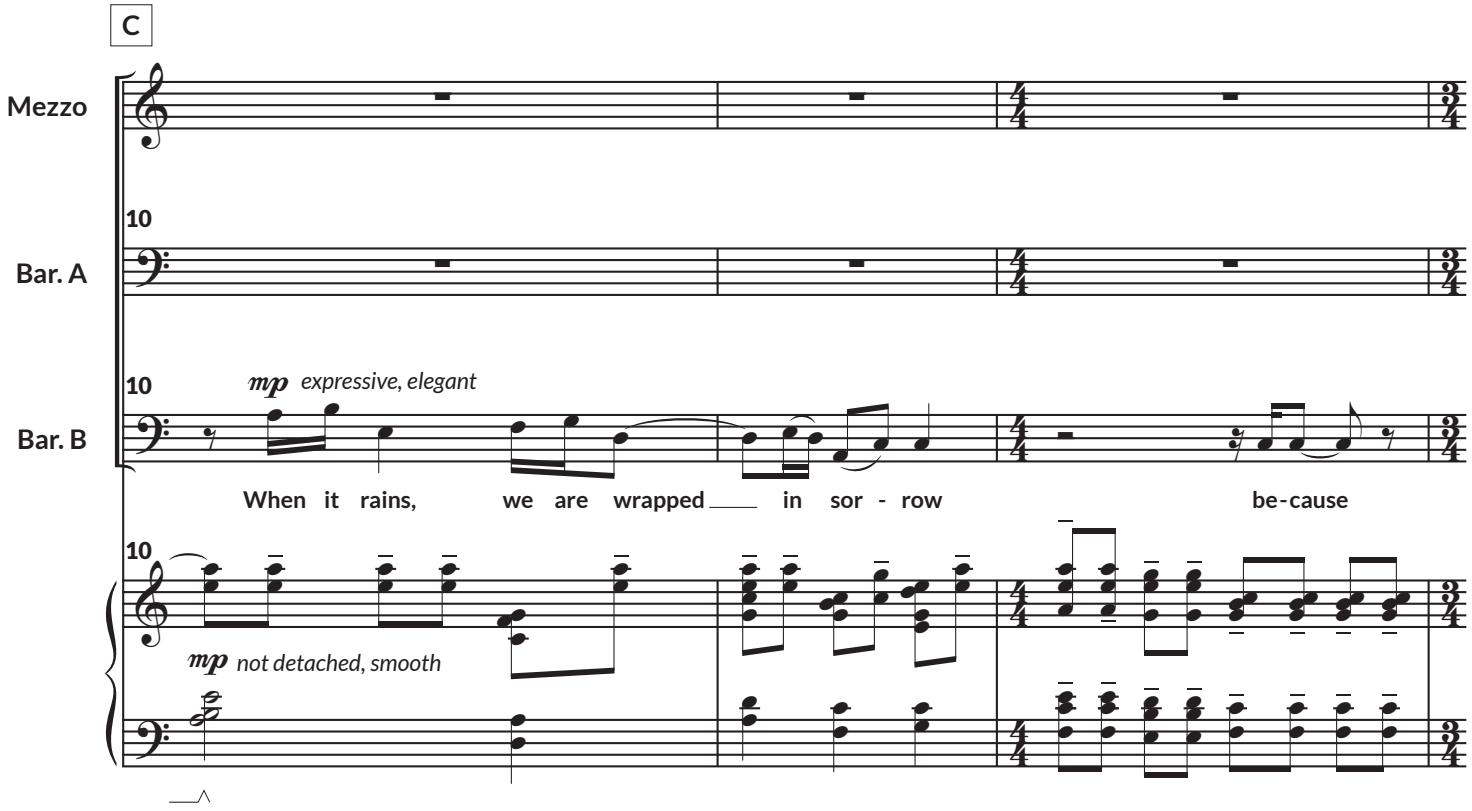

M
Mezzo
71
Bar. A
71
Bar. B
71
71
3
3
ppp

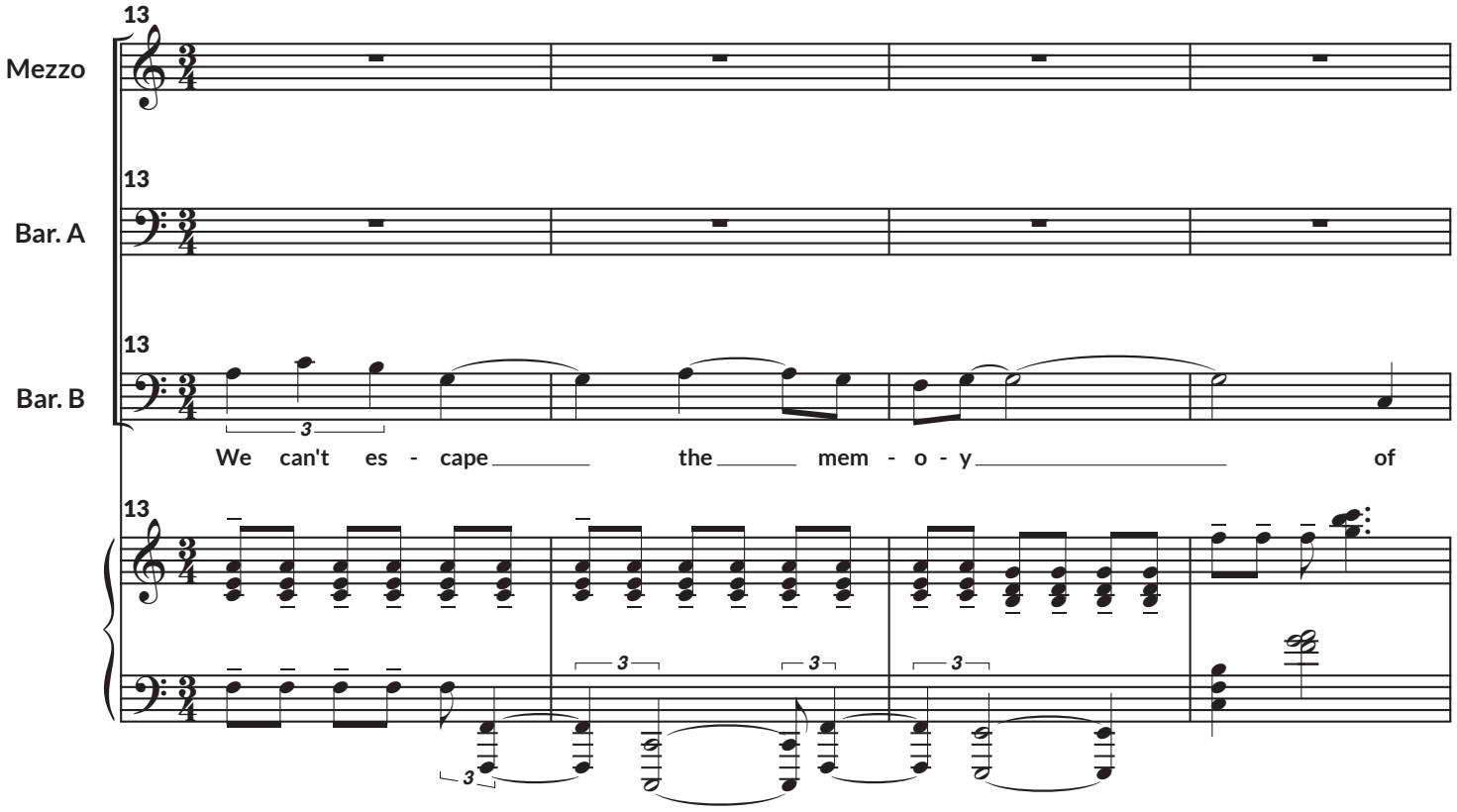

74
Mezzo
74
Bar. A
74
Bar. B
74
74

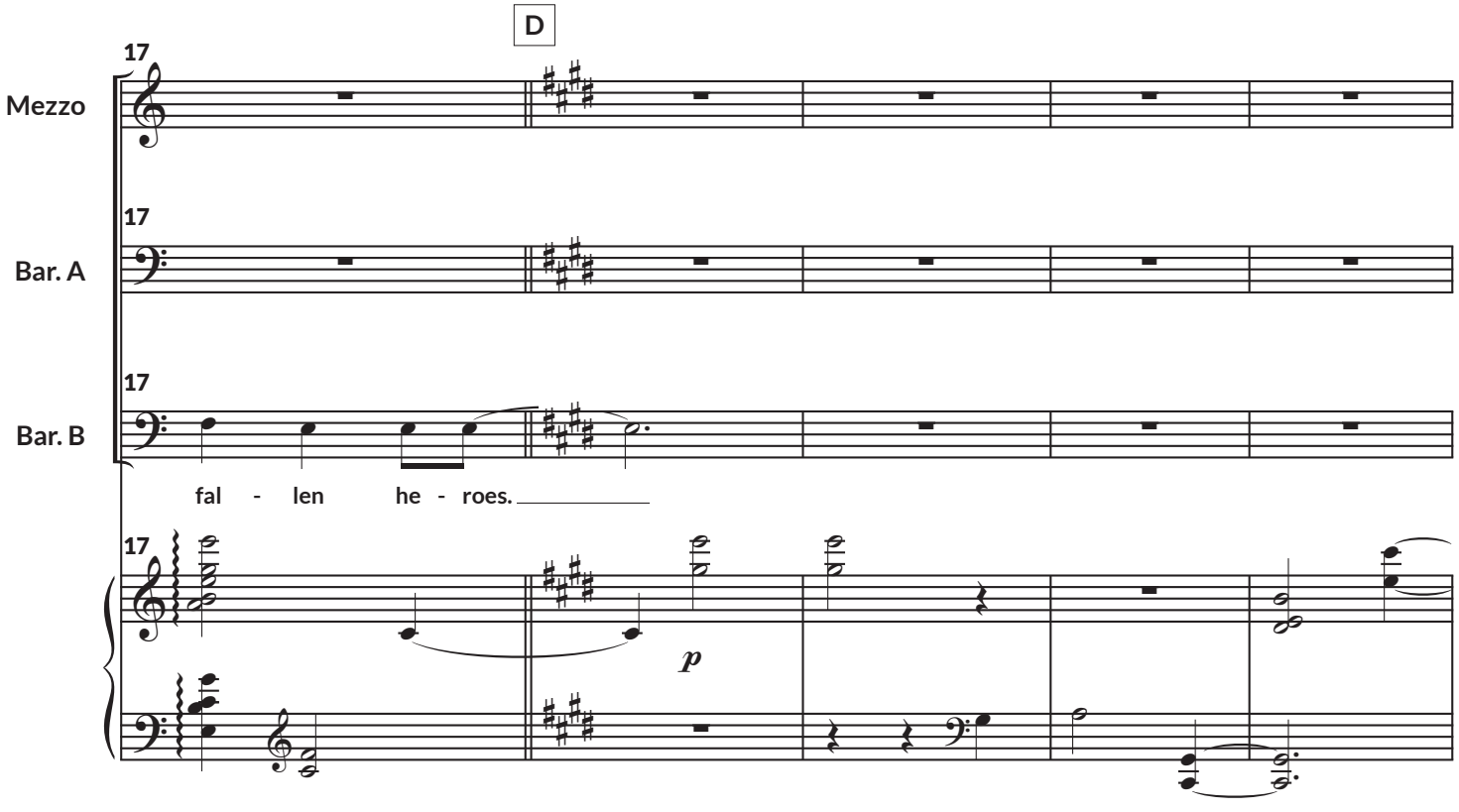

Somber and warm ♩ = 60
Mezzo-Soprano
Baritone A
Baritone B
Piano
p honest
Lay - ers of re-mem - ber - ance ho - ver o - ver us like clouds.

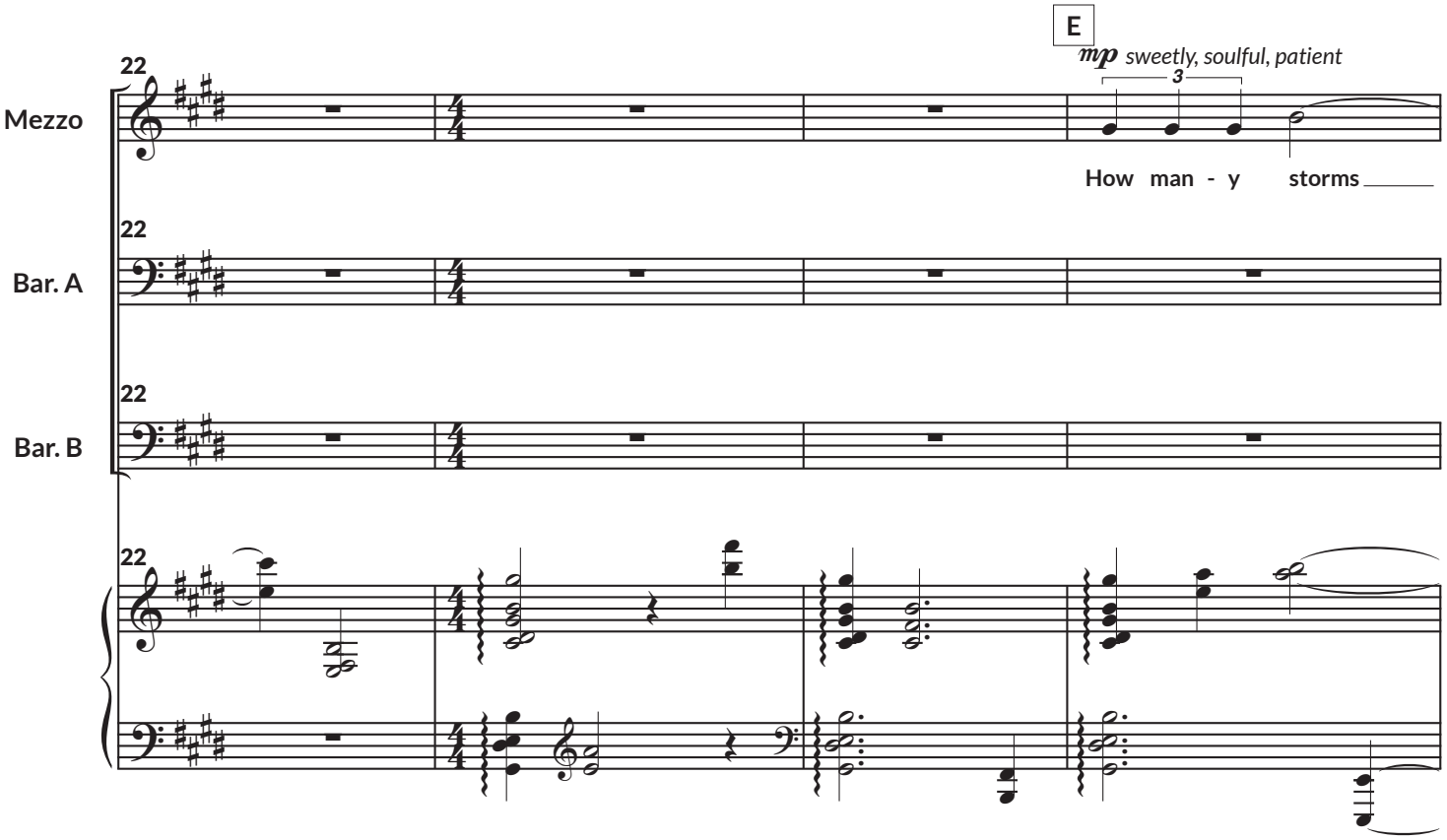

A
Mezzo
Bar. A
Bar. B
p mornful, free, expressive

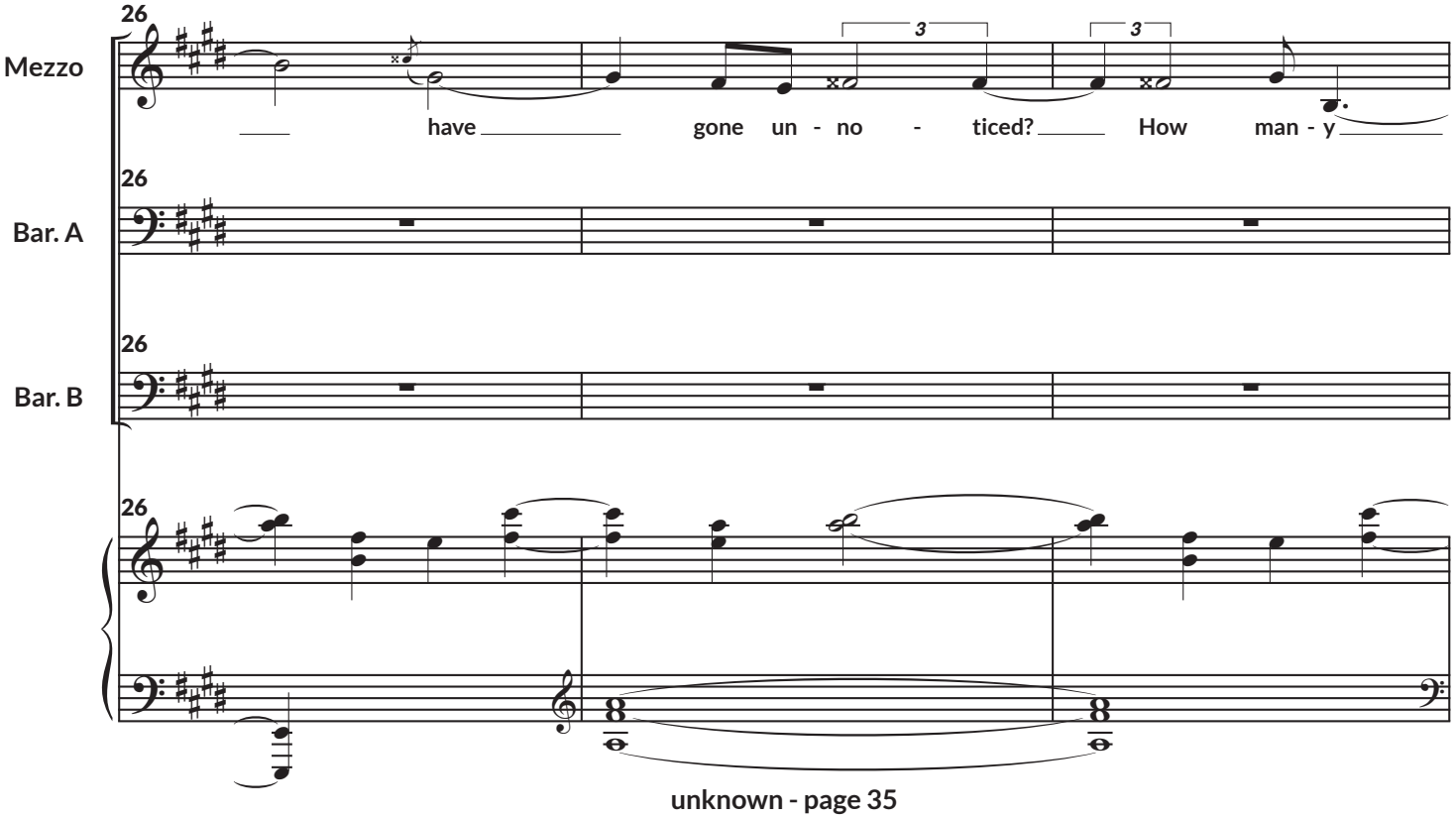

B
Mezzo
6
Bar. A
6
Bar. B
6
3

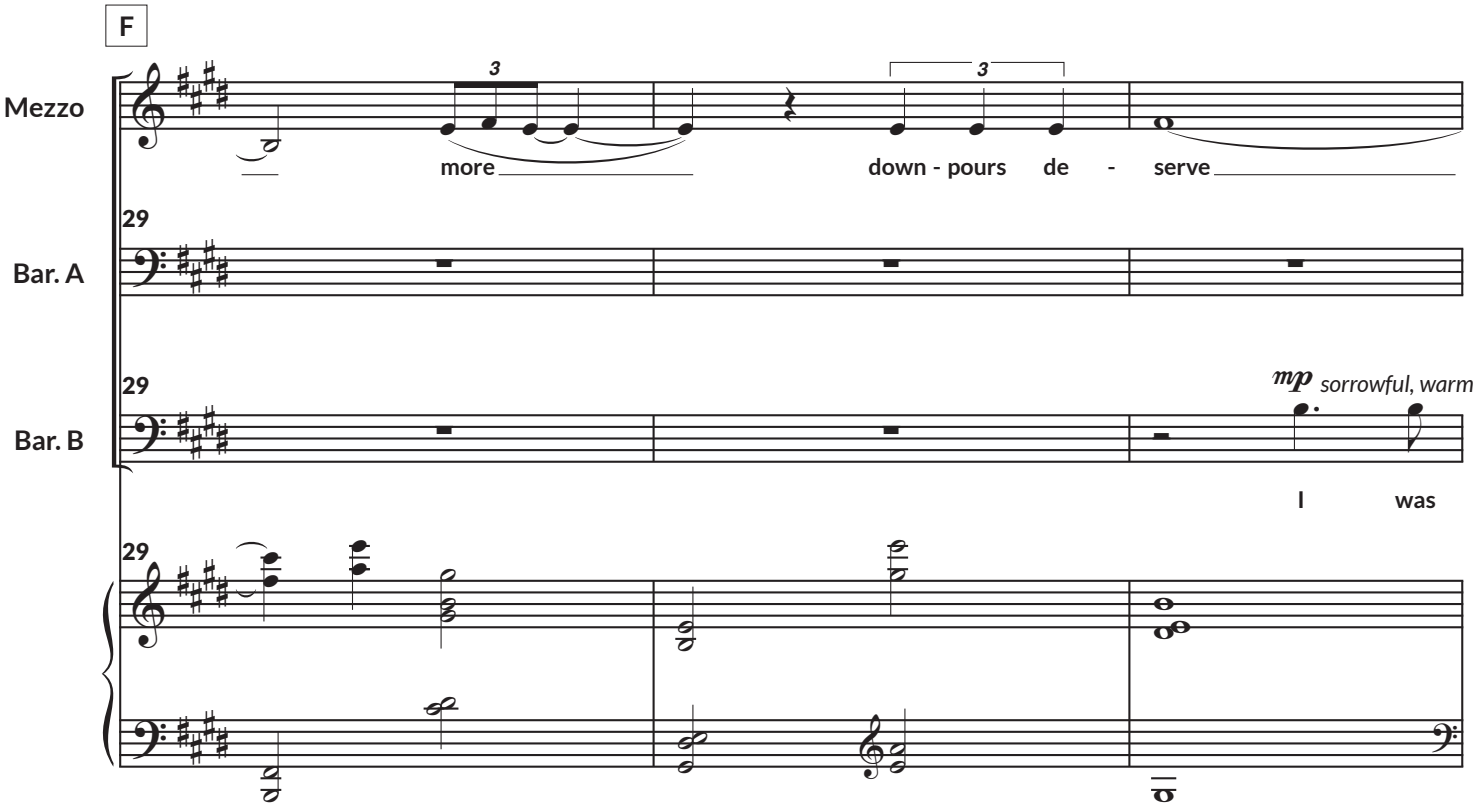

C
Mezzo
10
Bar. A
10
Bar. B
mp expressive, elegant
When it rains, we are wrapped in sor - row be-cause
10
mp not detached, smooth

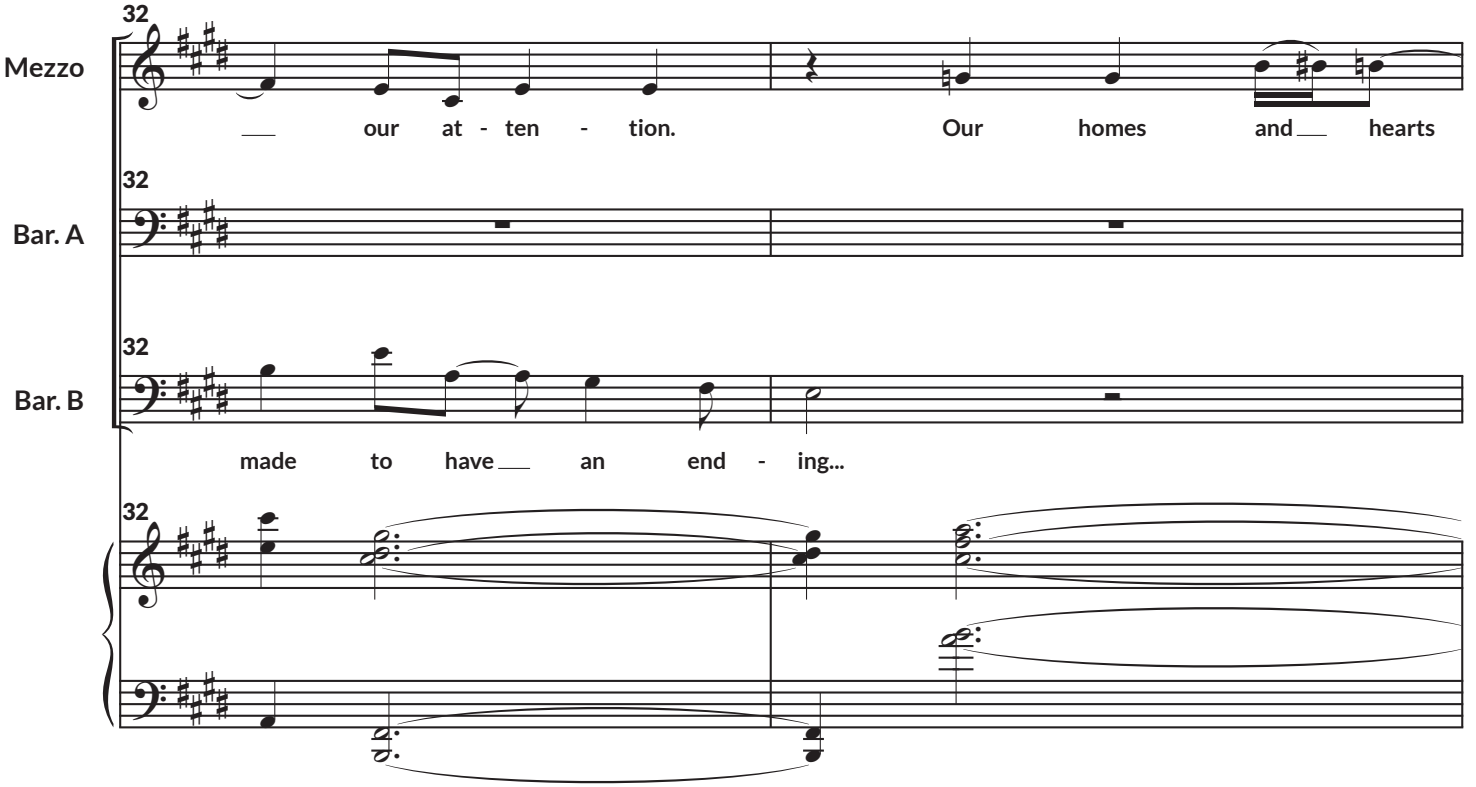

13
Mezzo
13
Bar. A
13
Bar. B
We can't es - cape the mem - o - y of
13

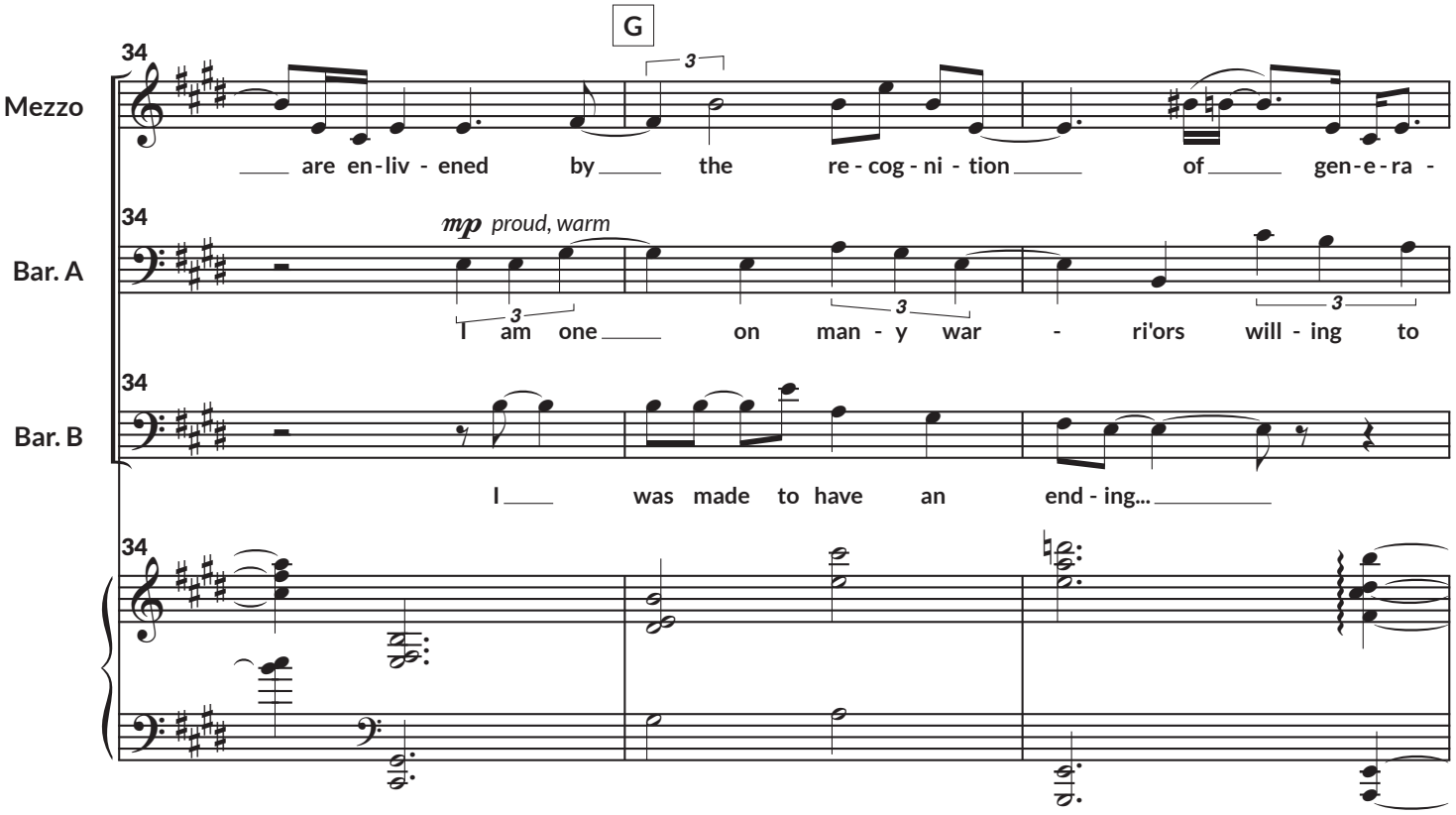

D
17
Mezzo
17
Bar. A
17
Bar. B
fal - len he - roes.
17
p

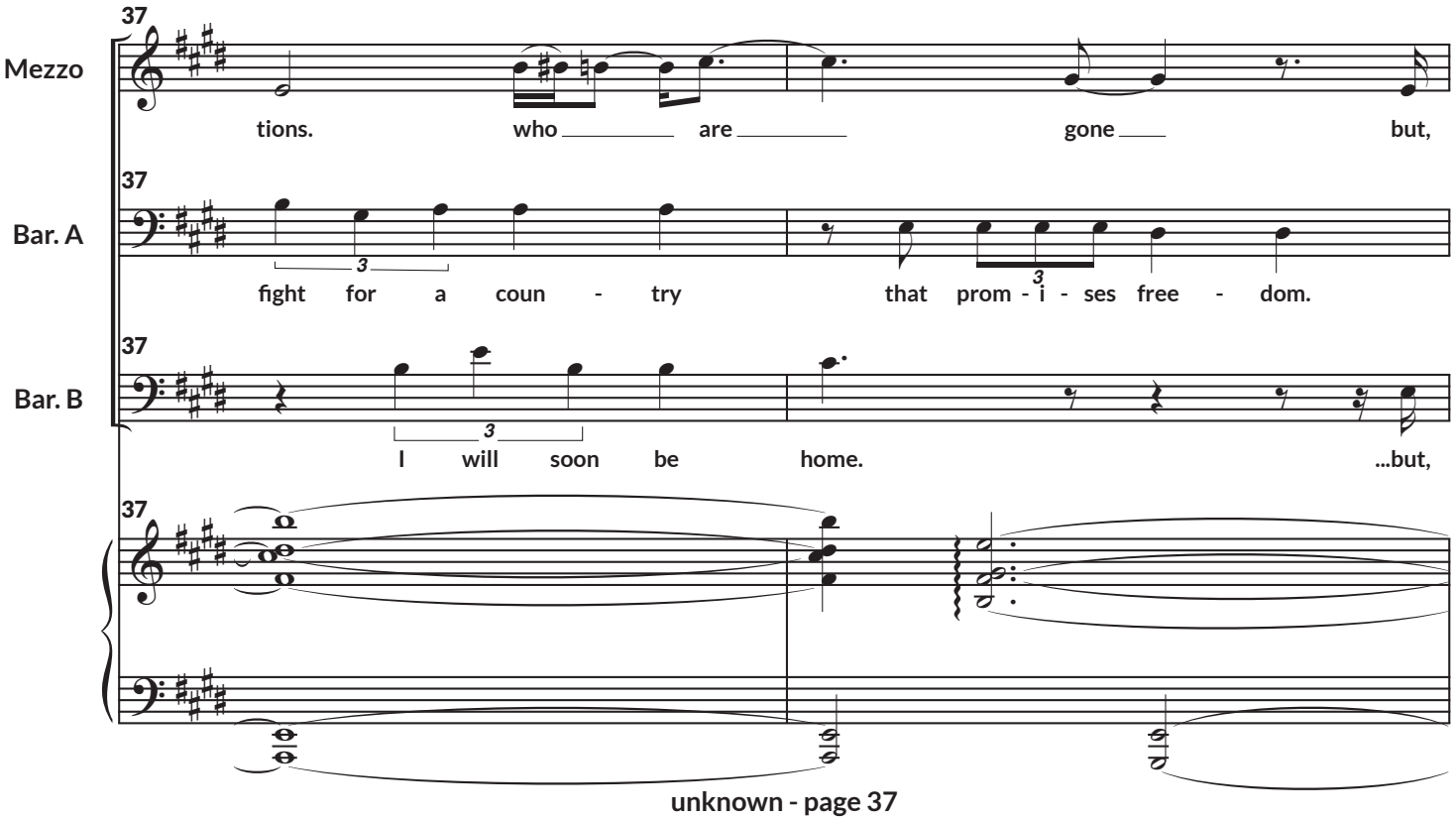

E
mp sweetly, soulful, patient
3
22
Mezzo
How man - y storms
22
Bar. A
22
Bar. B
22

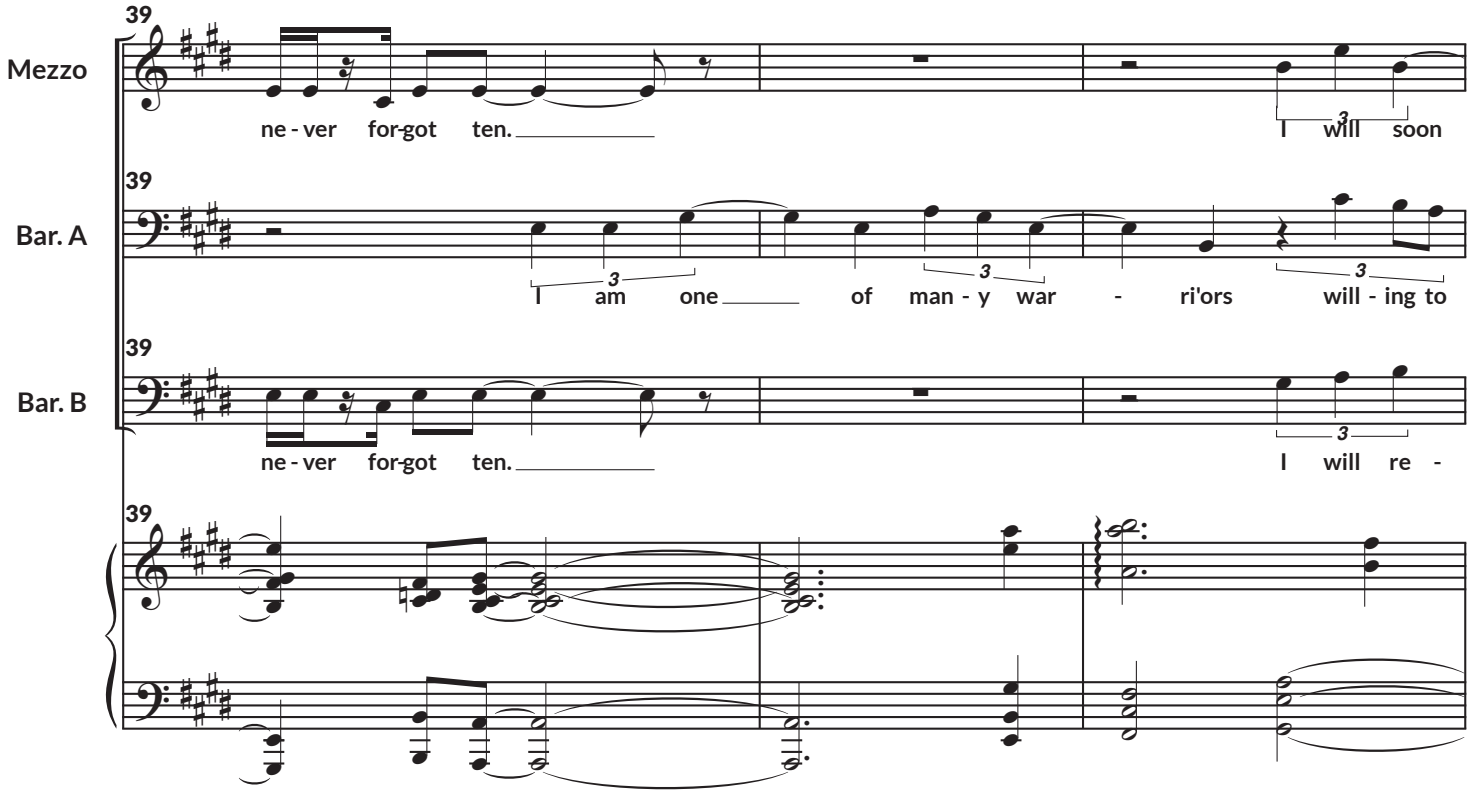

26
Mezzo
have gone un - no - ticed? How man - y
3
3
26
Bar. A
26
Bar. B
26

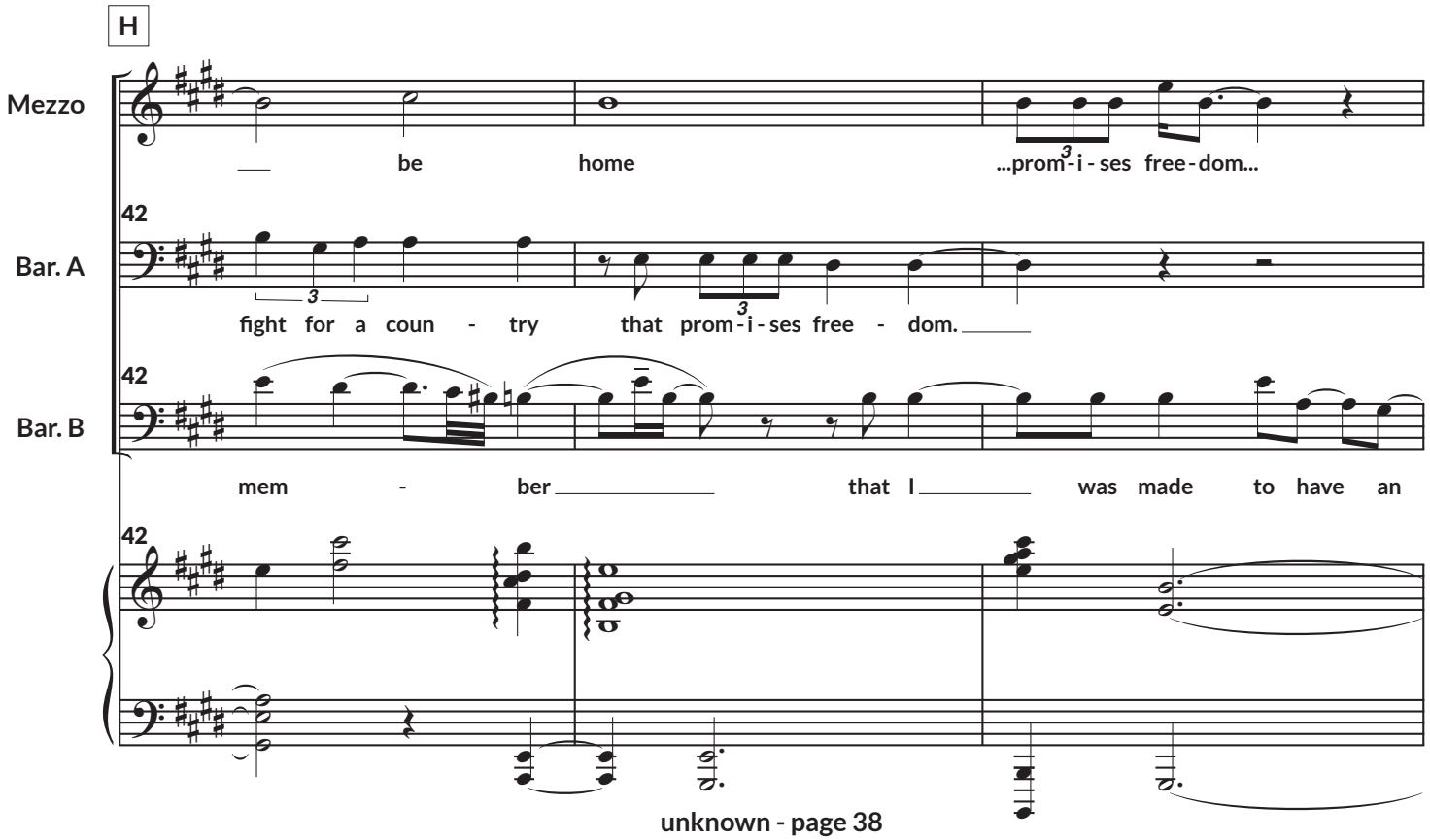

F
Mezzo
more
down - pours de - serve
29
Bar. A
29
Bar. B
mp sorrowful, warm
I was
29

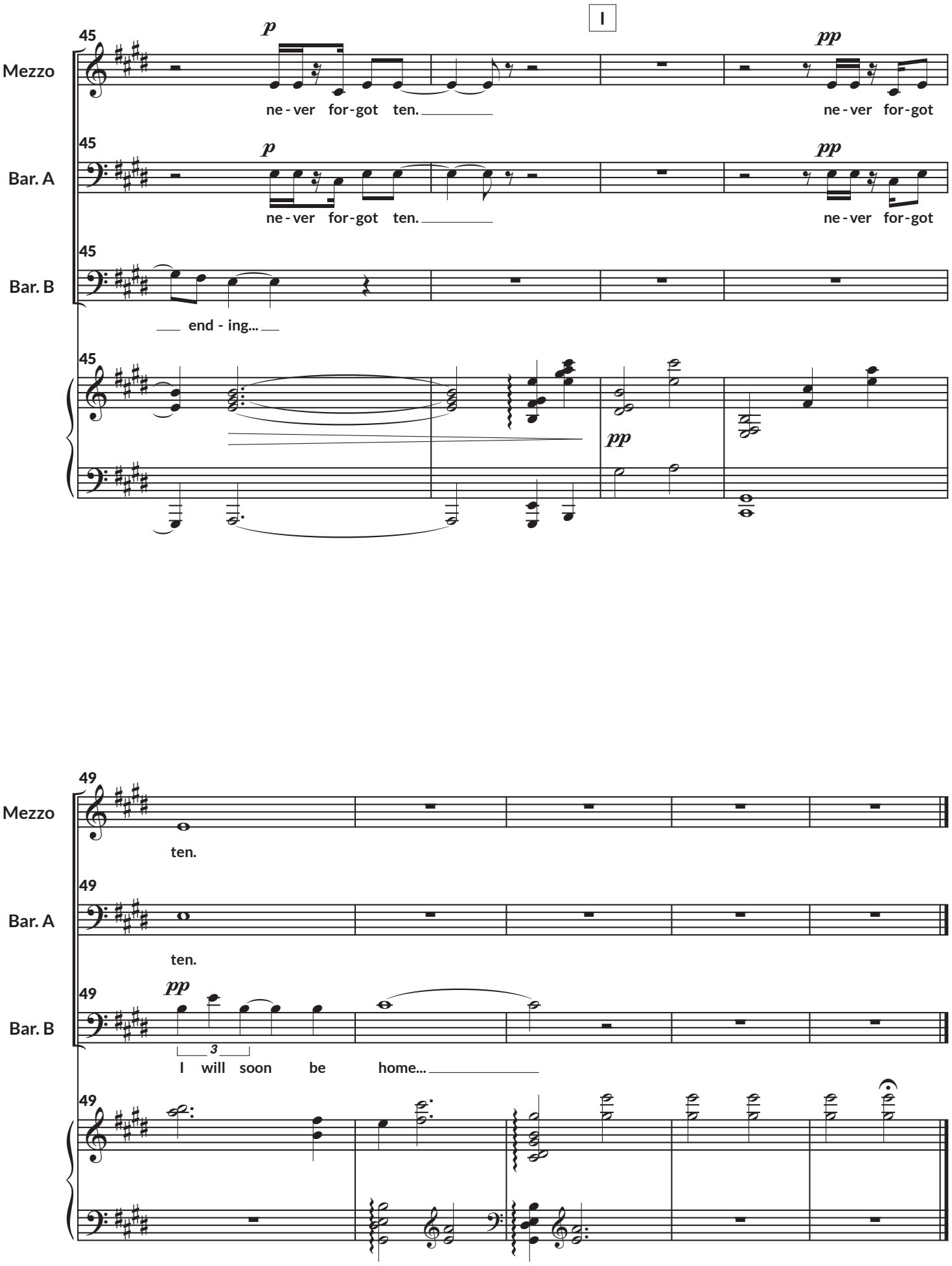

32
Mezzo
our at - ten - tion.
Our homes and hearts
32
Bar. A
32
Bar. B
made to have an end - ing...
32


G
34
Mezzo
are en-liv - ened by the re - cog - ni - tion of gen-e-ra -
34
Bar. A
mp proud, warm
I am one on man - y war - ri'ors will - ing to
34
Bar. B
I was made to have an end - ing...
34


37
Mezzo
tions. who are gone but,
37
Bar. A
fight for a coun - try that prom - i - ses free - dom.
37
Bar. B
I will soon be home. ...but,
37


39
Mezzo
ne - ver for-got ten.
I will soon
39
Bar. A
I am one of man - y war - ri'ors will - ing to
39
Bar. B
ne - ver for-got ten.
I will re -
39


H
Mezzo
be home
...prom - i - ses free - dom...
42
Bar. A
fight for a coun - try that prom - i - ses free - dom.
42
Bar. B
mem - ber that I was made to have an
42


I
45
Mezzo
p
ne - ver for - got ten.
pp
ne - ver for - got
45
Bar. A
p
ne - ver for - got ten.
pp
ne - ver for - got
45
Bar. B
end - ing...
45
pp
49
Mezzo
ten.
49
Bar. A
ten.
49
Bar. B
pp
3
I will soon be home...
49