The Convergence: Notes on the Plague Year 2020.

For Voice and Piano

Lawrence Kramer

Text by Thomas Hardy

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The Convergence of the Twain

Lines on the Loss of the *Titanic*

I

In a solitude of the sea
Deep from human vanity,
And the Pride of Life that planned her, stilly couches she.

II

Steel chambers, late the pyres
Of her salamandrine fires,
Cold currents thrid, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres.

III

Over the mirrors meant
To glass the opulent
The sea-worm crawls—grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent.

IV

Jewels in joy designed
To ravish the sensuous mind
Lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and blind.

V

Dim moon-eyed fishes near
Gaze at the gilded gear
And query: "What does this vaingloriousness down here?"

VI

Well: while was fashioning
This creature of cleaving wing,
The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything

VII

Prepared a sinister mate
For her—so gaily great—
A Shape of Ice, for the time far and dissociate.

VIII

And as the smart ship grew
In stature, grace, and hue,
In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.

IX

Alien they seemed to be:
No mortal eye could see
The intimate welding of their later history

X

Or sign that they were bent
By paths coincident
On being anon twin halves of one august event,

XI

Till the Spinner of the Years
Said "Now!" And each one hears,
And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres

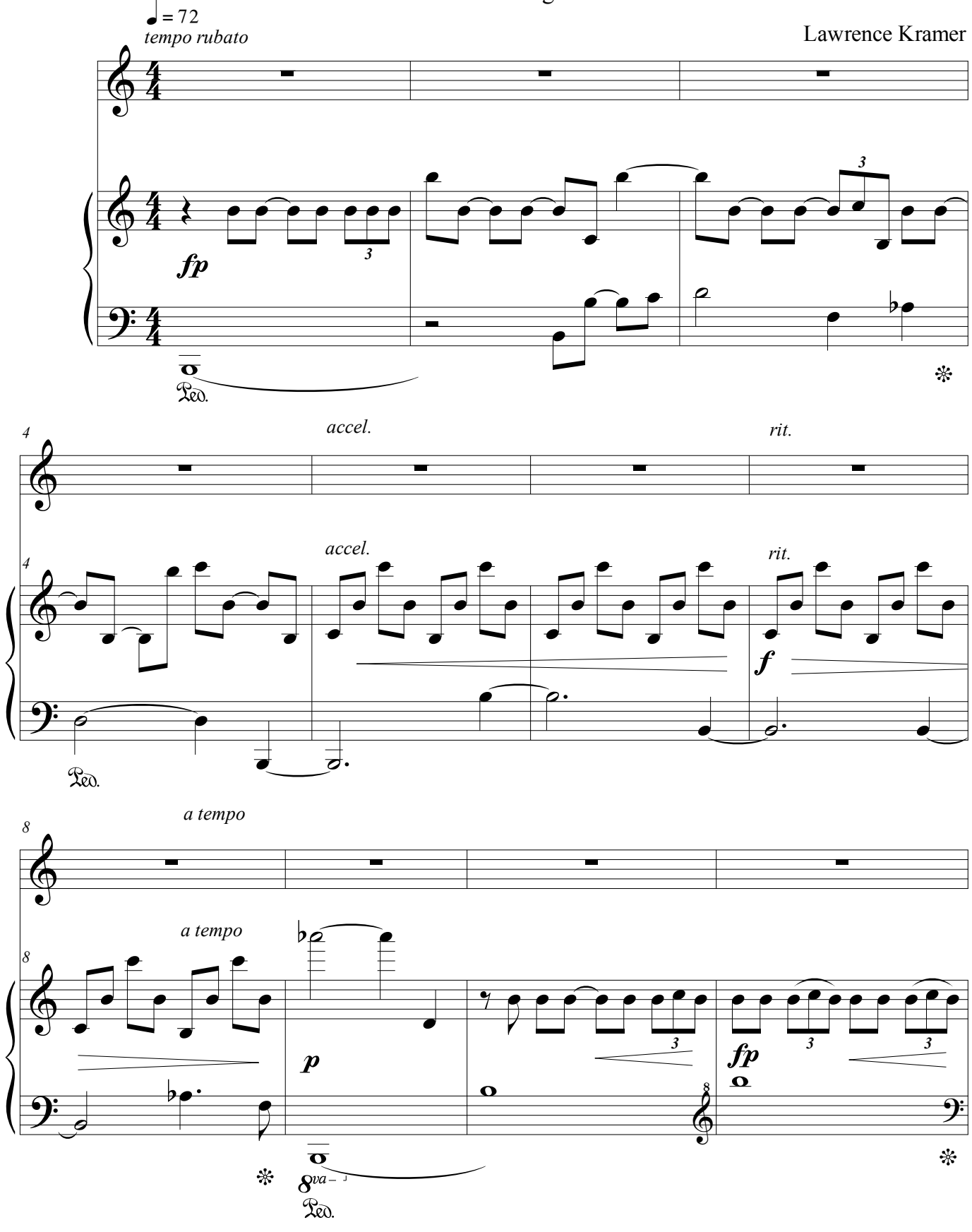
The Convergence: Notes on the Plague Year 2020.

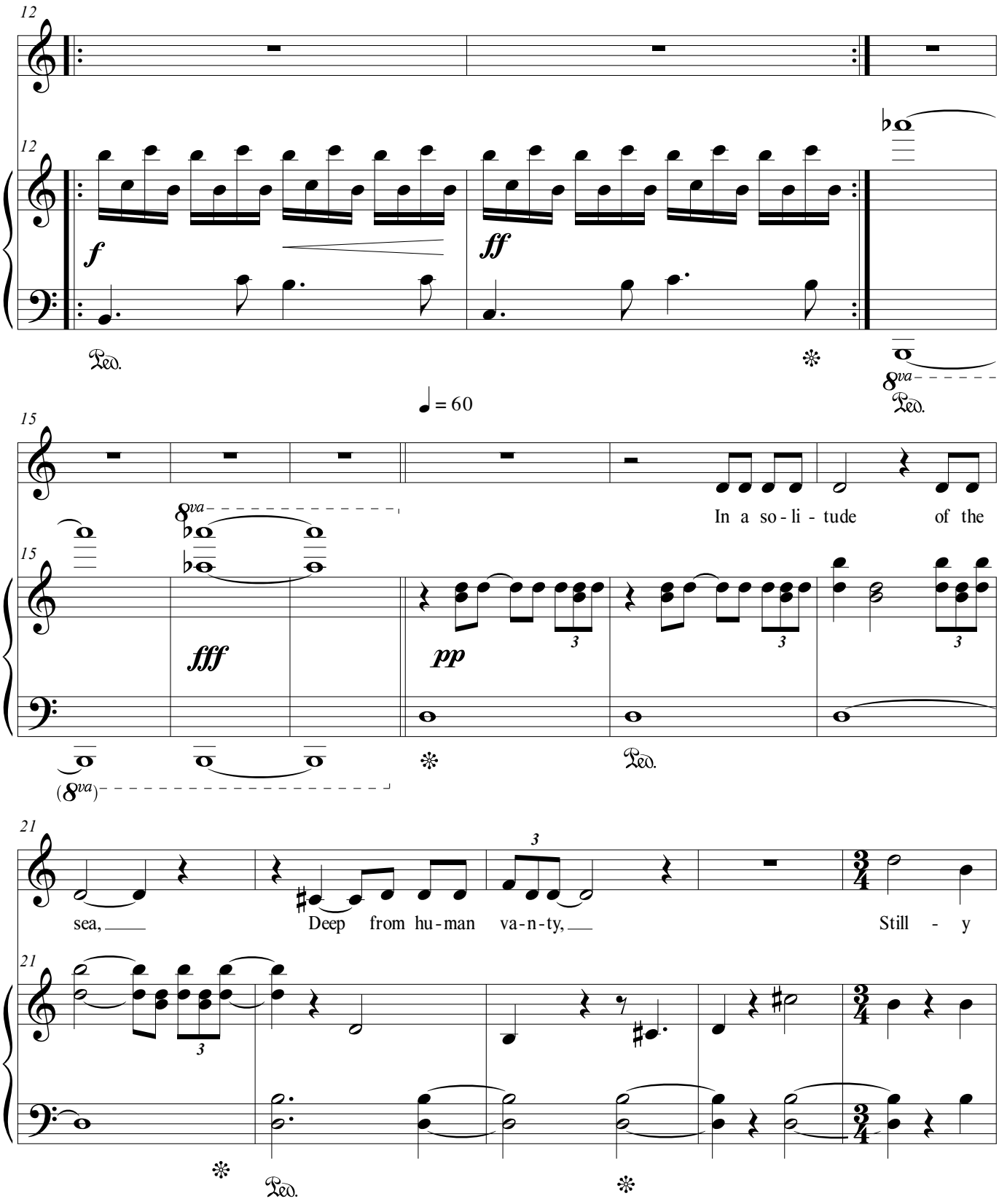
The word "notes" in the title of this piece refers, pardonably, I hope, both to the notes of the music and to notes in the sense of observations. Much of the response of the classical music world to the coronavirus pandemic has involved live streaming of classical repertoire. But composers will surely respond, too, as I seek to do here. (It is early May as I write this.) Thomas Hardy's poem "The Convergence of the Twain" is about the loss of the *Titanic* in 1912, but its narative forms all too apt a metaphor for the shipwreck of 2020: a collision between human and natural forces that upsets the order we foolishly thought was secure, a shock wave that rips across the entire globe. The poem, with its reflection on "vaingloriousness," seems especially pertinent to condition in the United States, where arrogance and ignorance at the top levels of government, led by one vainglorious man, gave the virus a free hand to spread more misery and death than it could do anywhere else on the planet. So this musical setting is a work of political art as well as a kind of elegy. Composed to be sung by any voice type (whether as written or an octave lower), it may also be recited instead of sung.

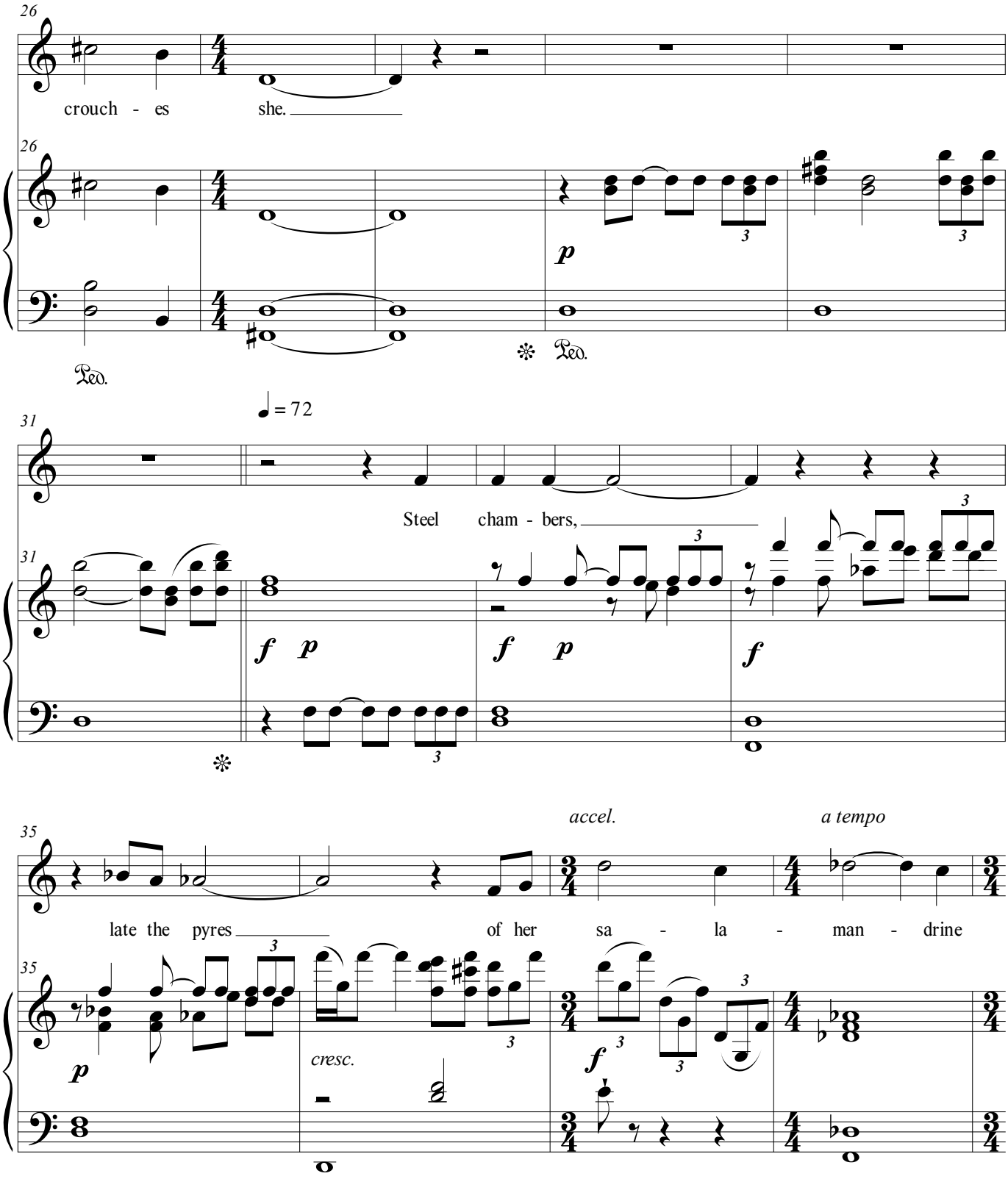
The Convergence

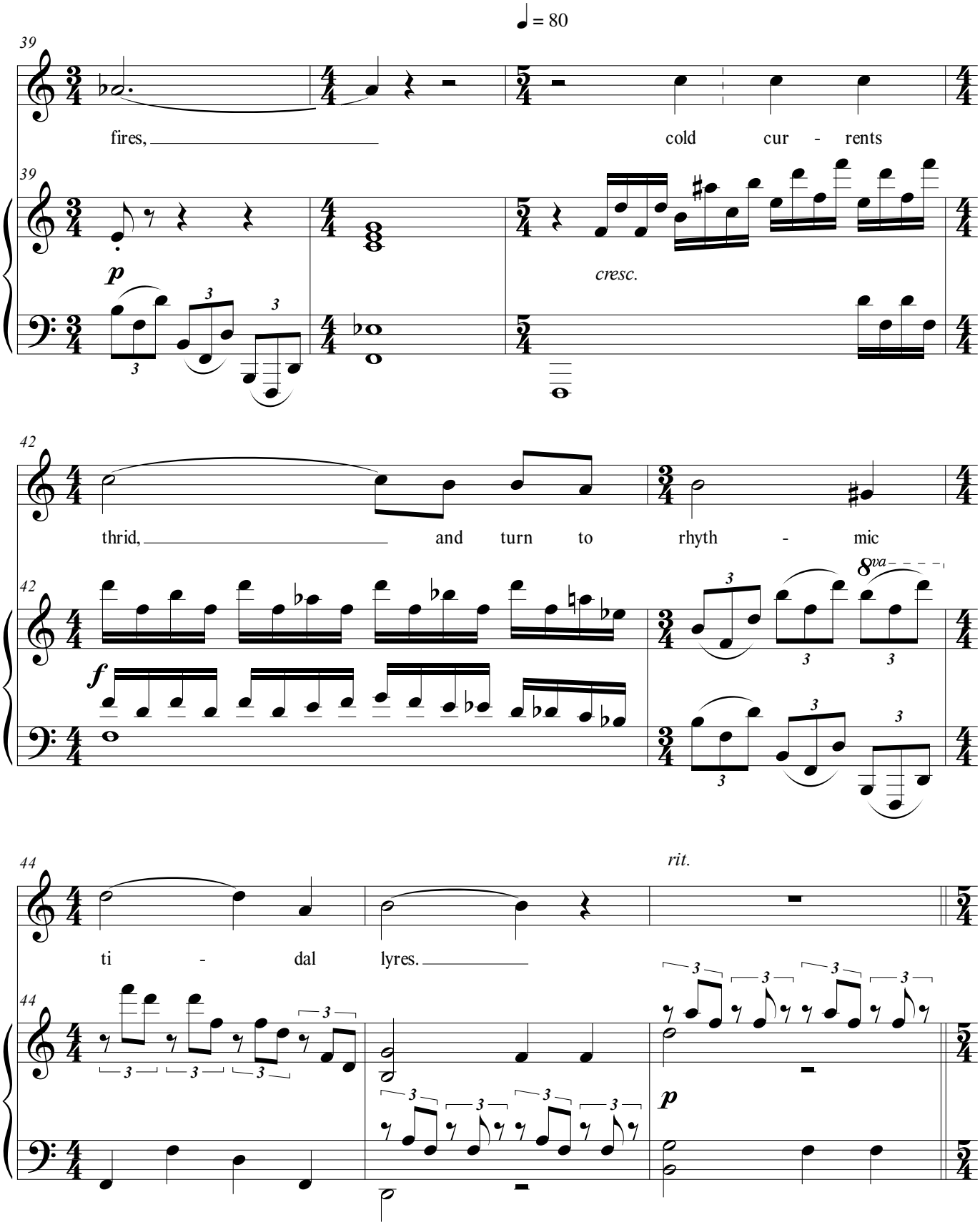
Notes on the Plague Year 2020

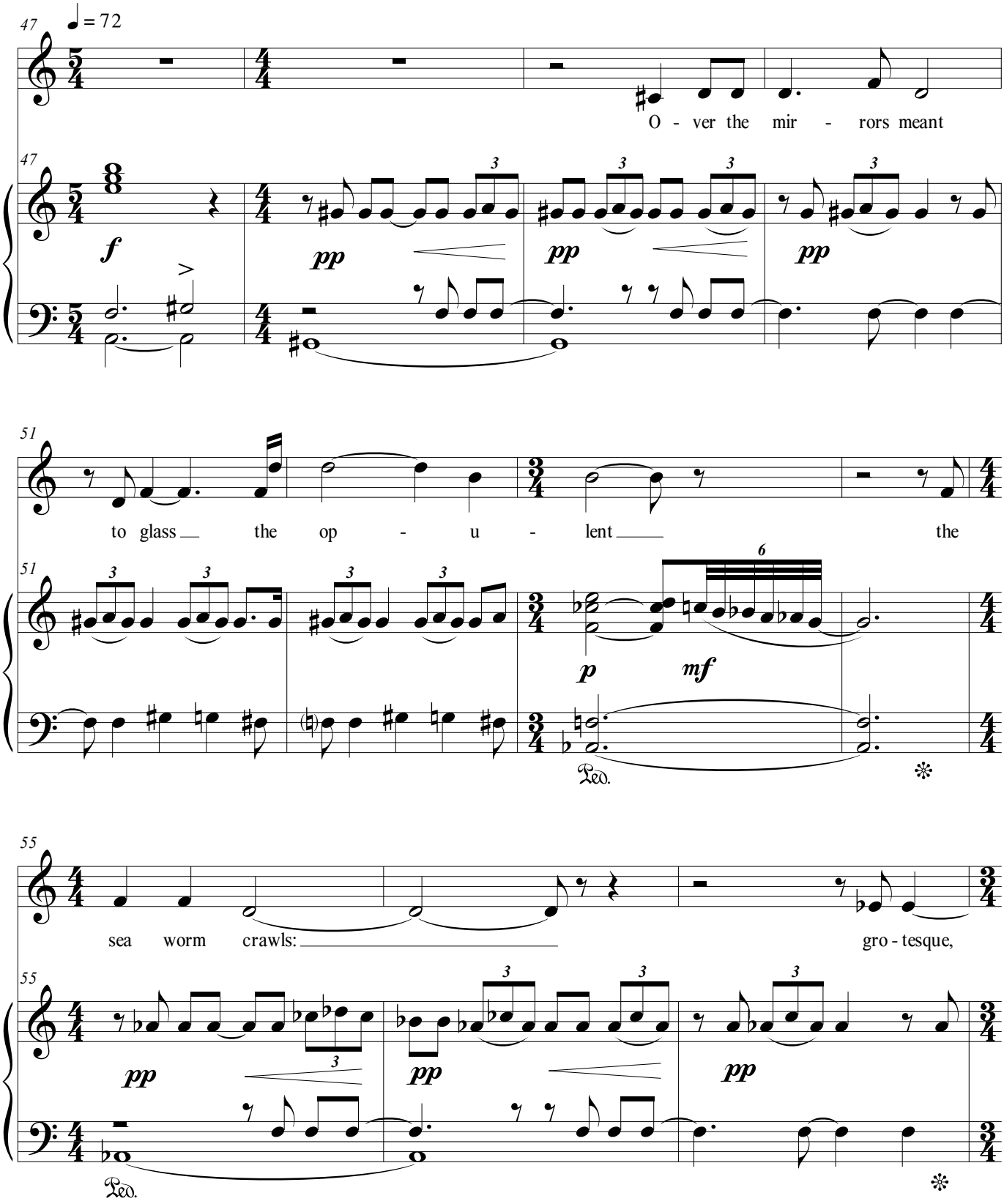
Lawrence Kramer

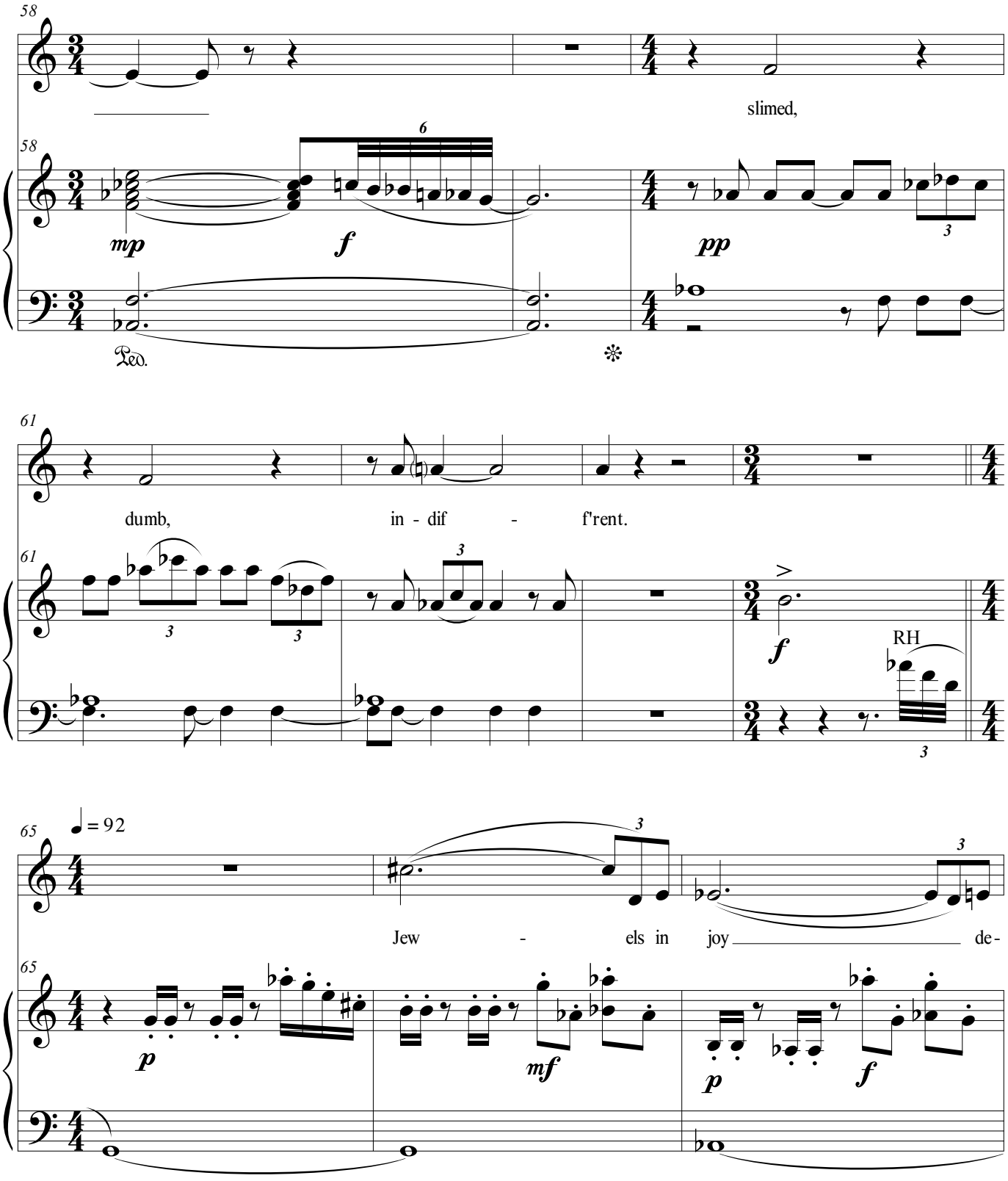


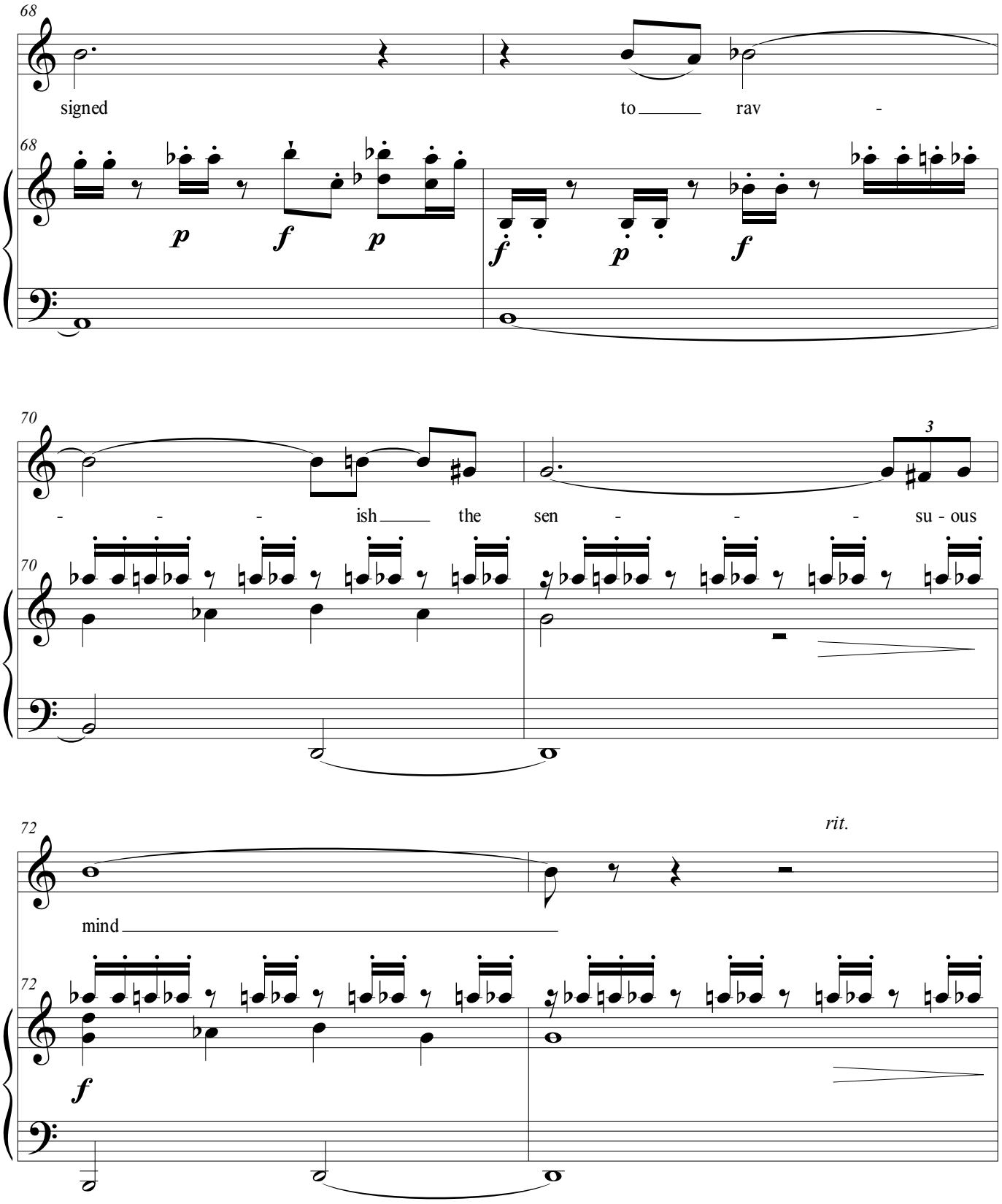

12
12
f
ff
Ped.
8va
Ped.
♩ = 60
15
15
8va
fff
pp
In a so - li - tude of the
(8va)
Ped.
21
21
sea,
Deep from hu-man va-n-ty,
Still - y
Ped.
Ped.

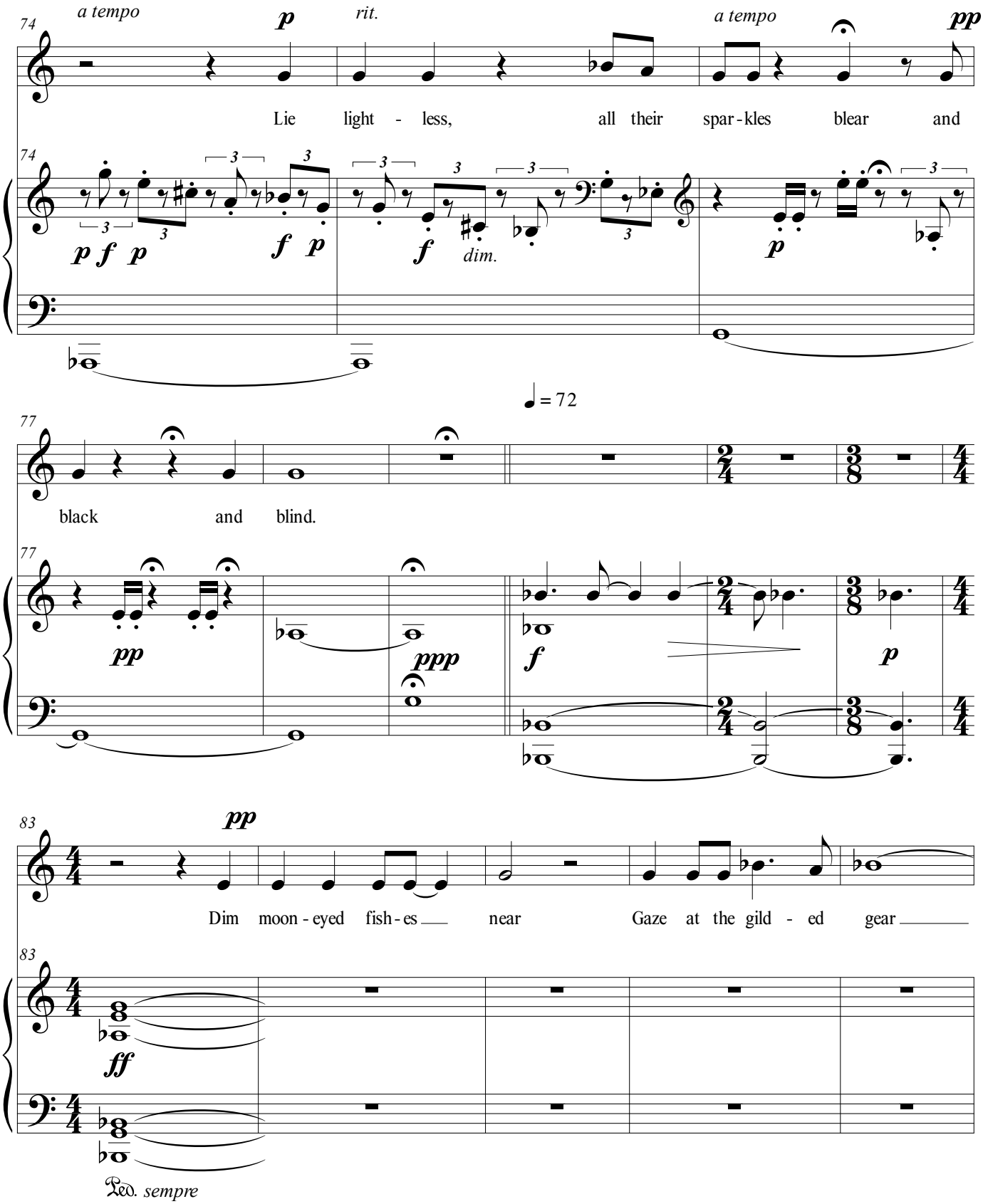

26
crouch - es she.
Ped.
Ped.
31
♩ = 72
Steel cham - bers,
35
accel.
a tempo
late the pyres of her sa - la - man - drine
cresc.

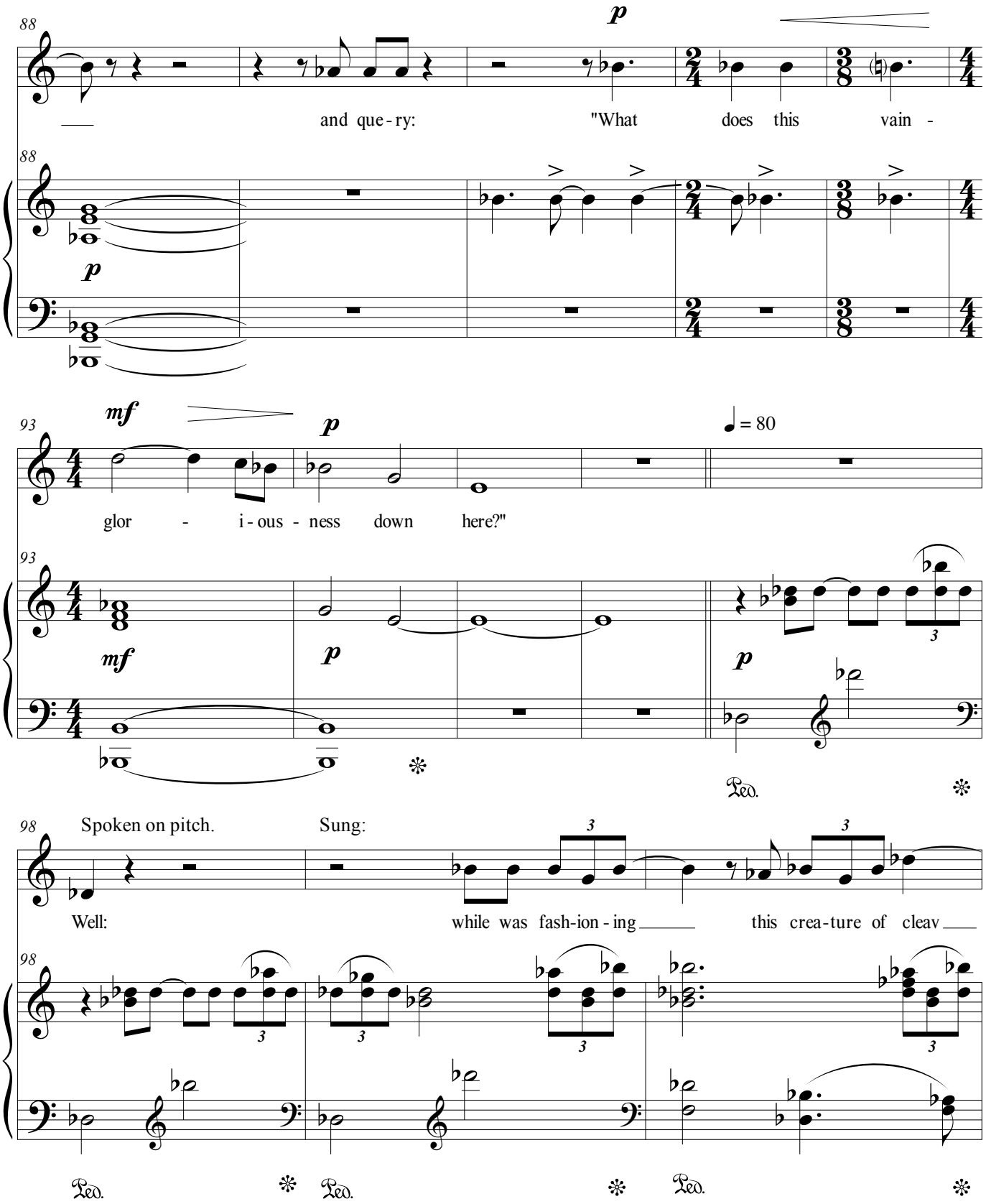

♩ = 80
39
fires,
cold cur - rents
cresc.
p
42
thrid,
and turn to rhyth - mic
8va
f
44
rit.
ti - dal lyres.
p

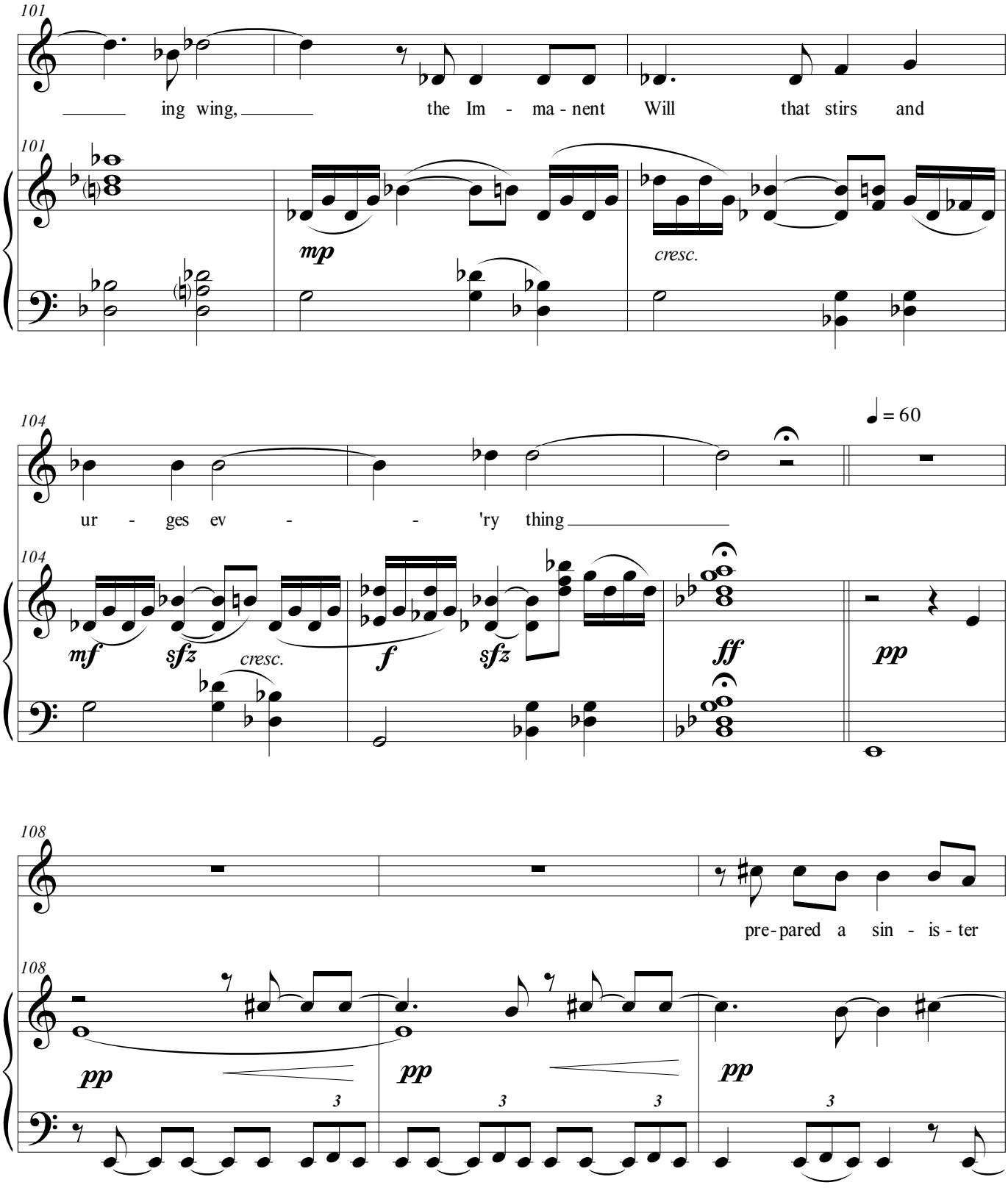

47
♩ = 72
O - ver the mir - rors meant
f
pp
pp
pp
51
to glass the op - u - lent the
p
mf
6
Ped.
55
sea worm crawls:
gro - tesque,
pp
pp
pp
Ped.

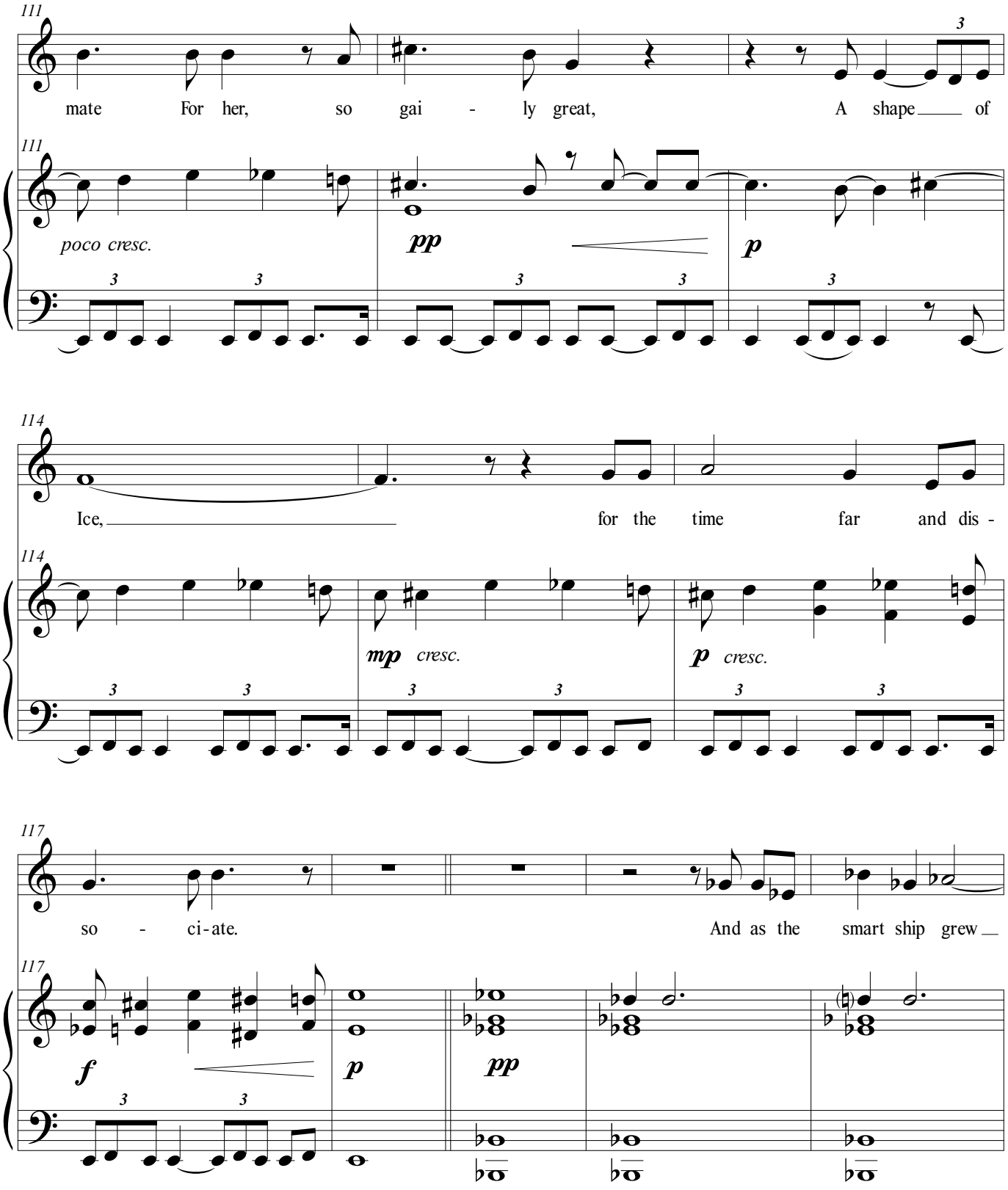

58
slimed,
58
6
mp
f
pp
3
Ped.
61
dumb,
in - dif - f'rent.
61
3
3
3
f
RH
3
65
♩ = 92
3
3
Jew - els in joy de-
65
p
mf
p
f

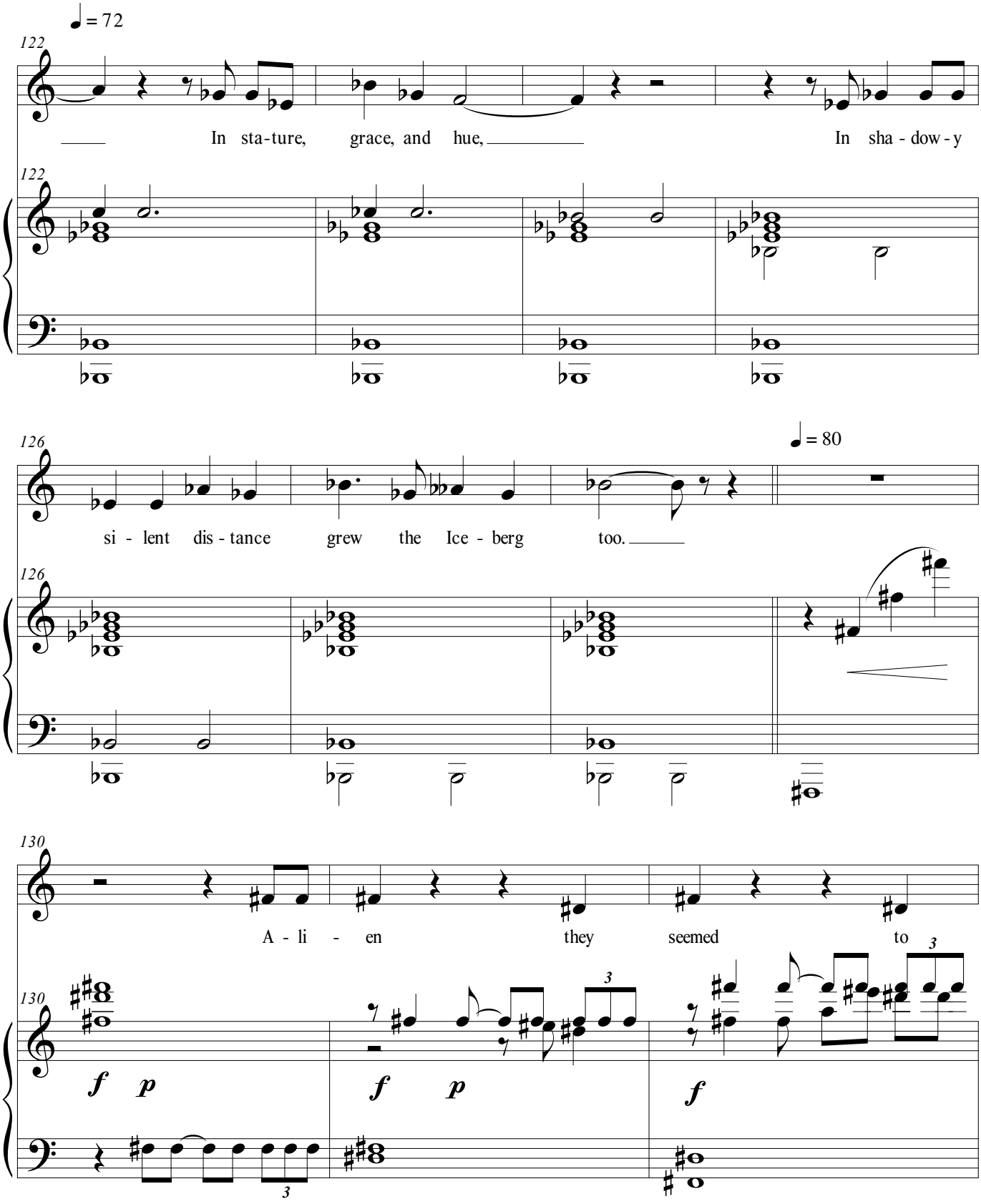

68
signed
to
rav
-
68
p
f
p
f
p
f
70
-
-
-
ish
the
sen
-
-
-
su - ous
3
70
72
rit.
mind
72
f

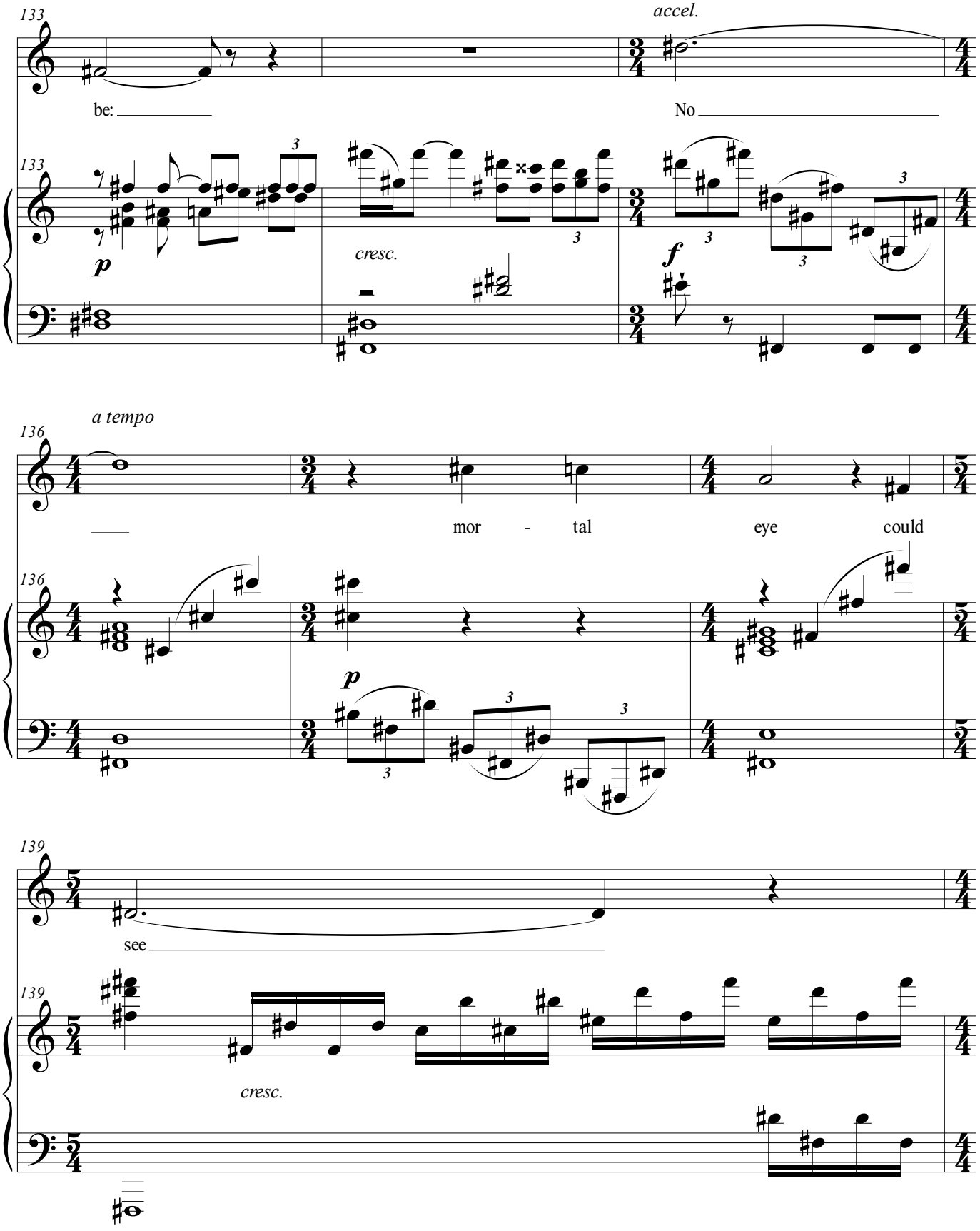

74
a tempo
p
rit.
a tempo
pp
Lie light - less, all their spar - kles blear and
p f p
f p
f
dim.
p
77
black and blind.
pp
ppp
f
p
83
pp
Dim moon - eyed fish - es near Gaze at the gild - ed gear
ff
Ped. sempre

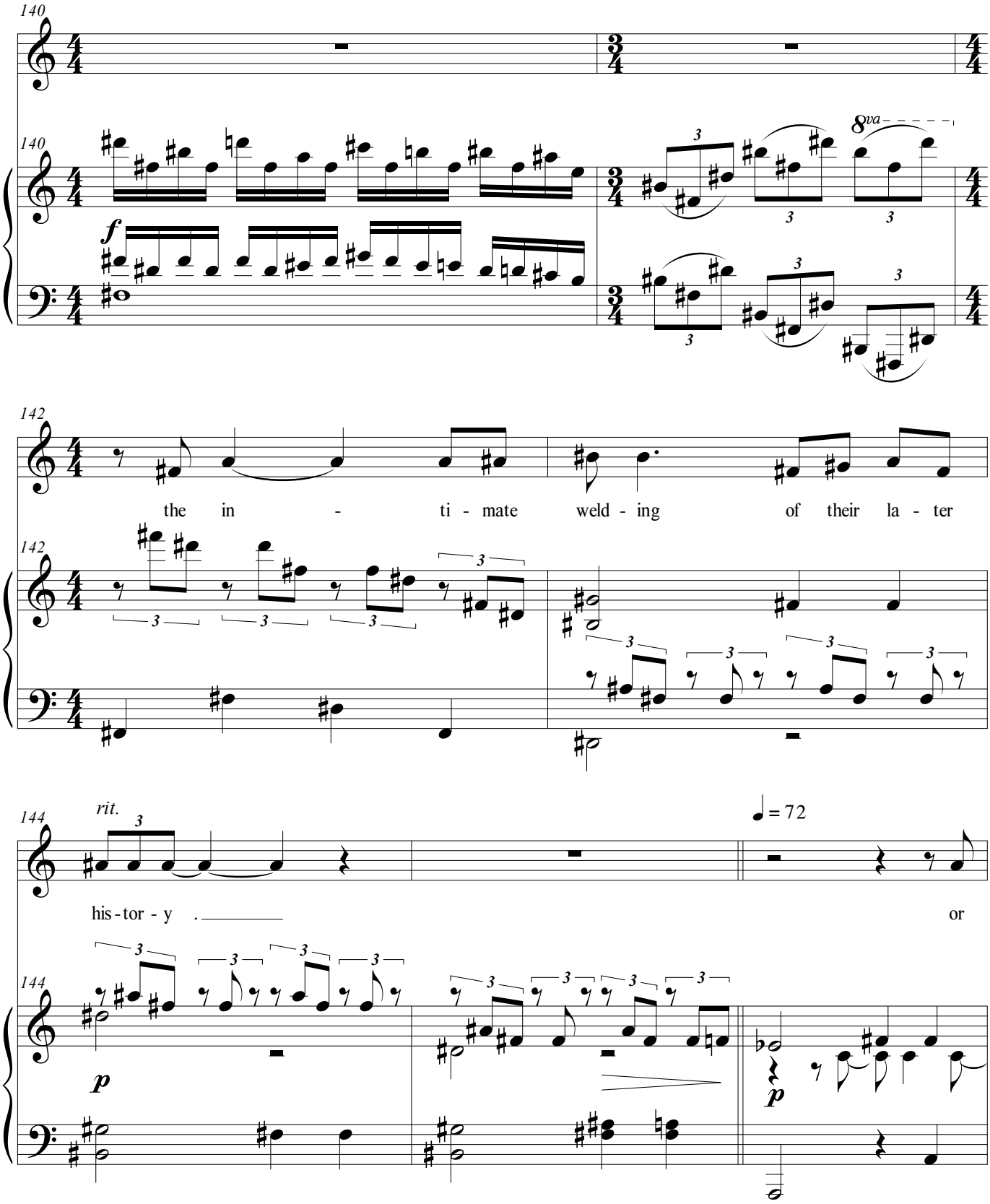

88
p
and que - ry:
"What
does this
vain -
88
p
93
mf
p
= 80
glor - i - ous - ness down here?"
93
mf
p
p
3
Ped.
98
Spoken on pitch.
Sung:
Well:
while was fash-ion - ing
this crea-ture of cleav
98
3
3
3
3
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.

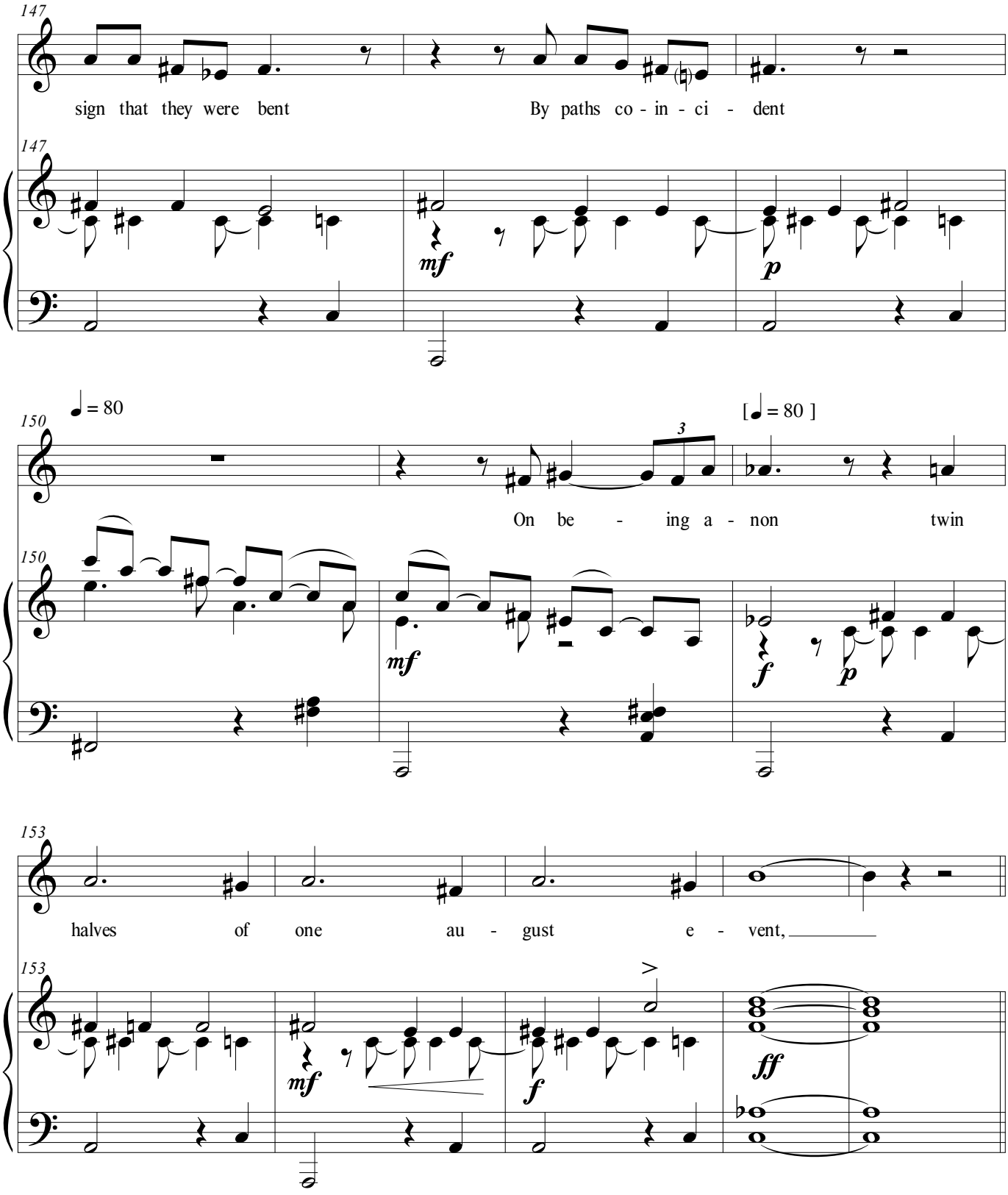

101
ing wing, the Im - ma - nent Will that stirs and
101
mp
cresc.
104
♩ = 60
ur - ges ev - - 'ry thing
104
mf
sfz
cresc.
f
sfz
ff
pp
108
pre-pared a sin - is - ter
108
pp
pp
pp
3
3
3
3

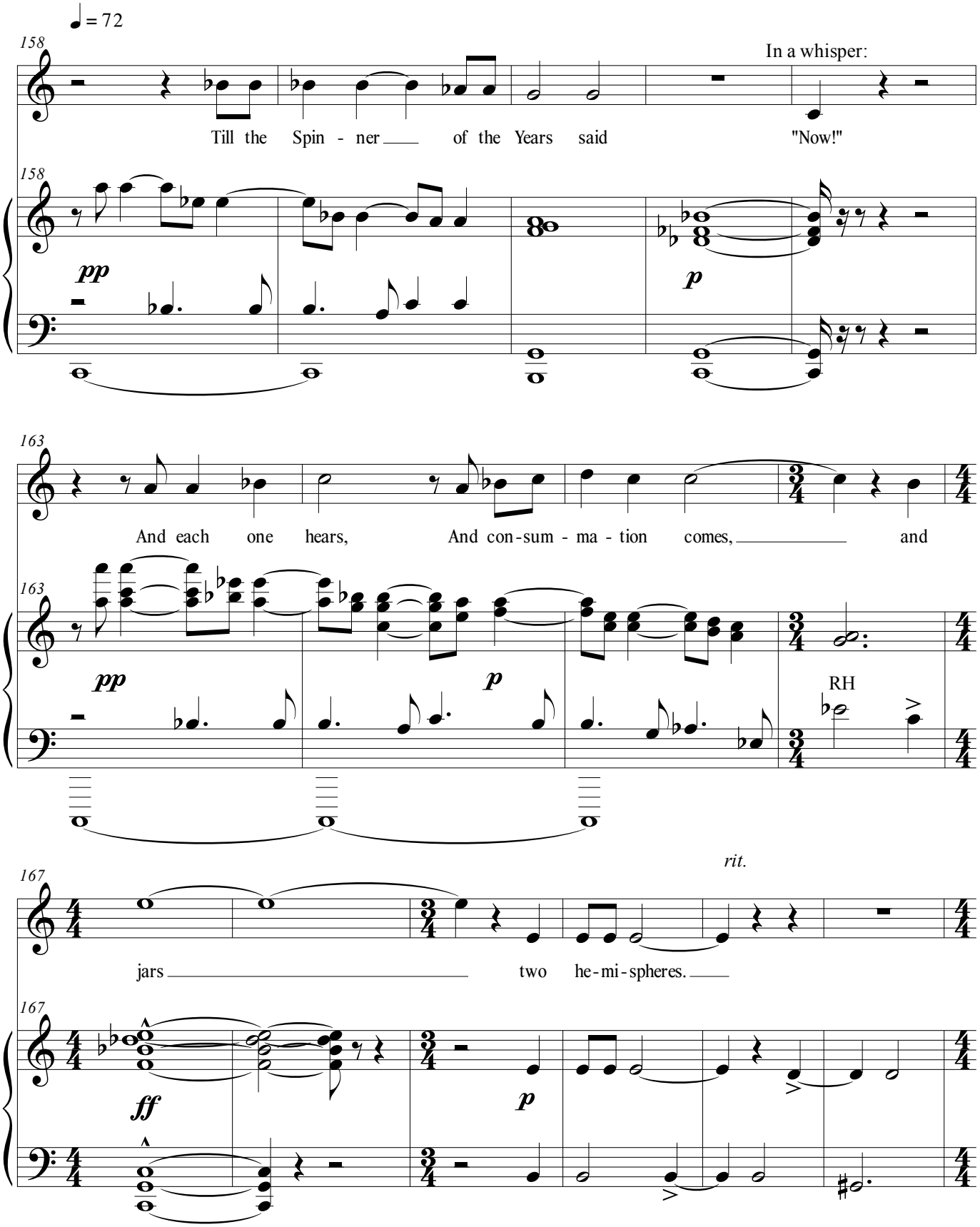

111
mate For her, so gai - ly great, A shape of
poco cresc.
pp
p
114
Ice, for the time far and dis -
mp cresc.
p cresc.
117
so - ci-ate. And as the smart ship grew
f
p
pp

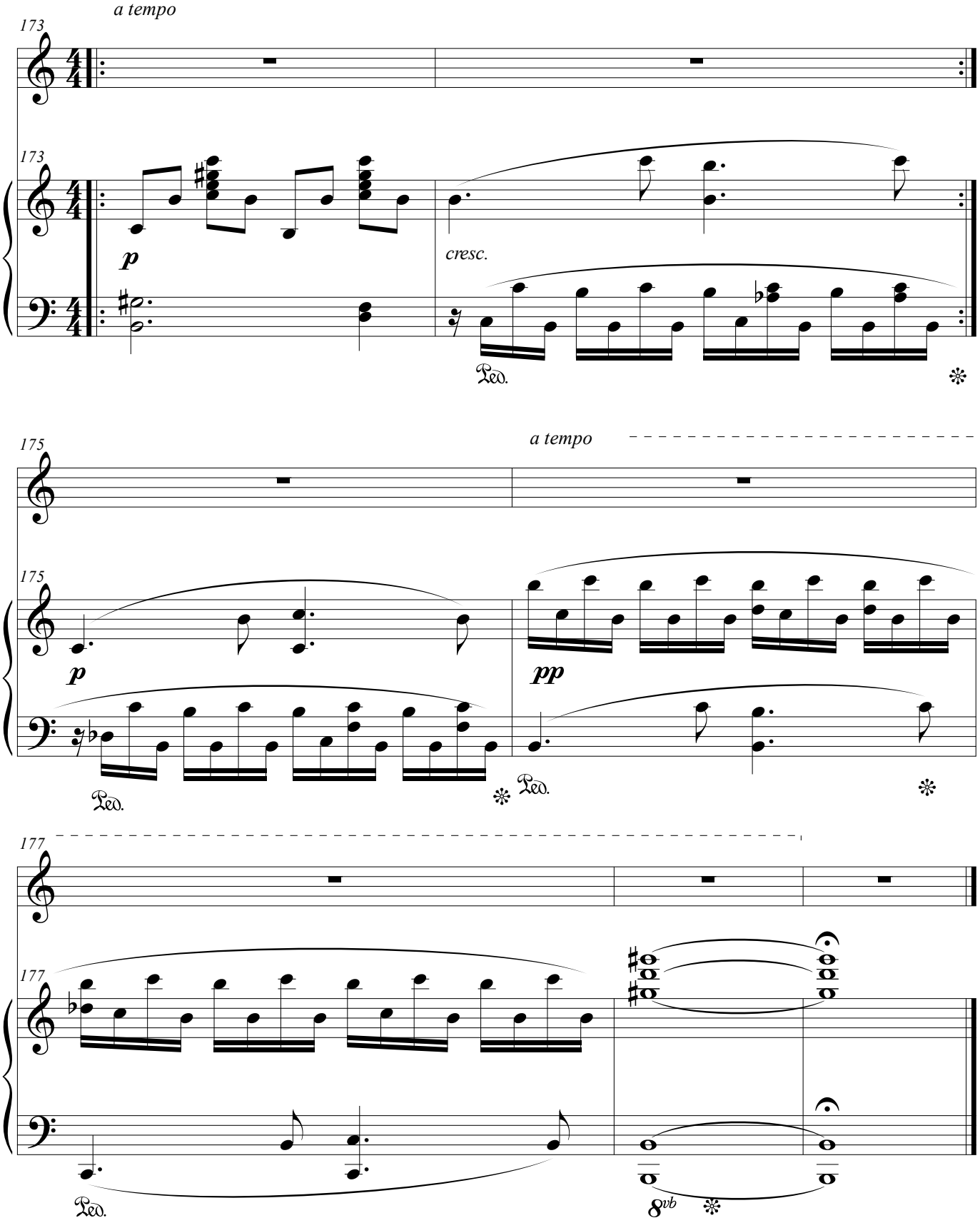

♩ = 72
122
In sta-ture, grace, and hue, In sha - dow - y
122
126
si - lent dis - tance grew the Ice - berg too.
♩ = 80
126
130
A - li - en they seemed to
3
130
f p
f p
f
3


133
accel.
be:
No
133
p
cresc.
f
a tempo
136
mor - tal eye could
136
p
139
see
139
cresc.


140
f
8va
142
the in - ti - mate weld - ing of their la - ter
144
rit.
his - tor - y .
or
♩ = 72
p
p


147
sign that they were bent
By paths co - in - ci - dent
147
mf
p
150
♩ = 80
[♩ = 80]
3
On be - ing a - non twin
150
mf
f
p
153
halves of one au - gust e - vent,
153
mf
f
ff


♩ = 72
158
In a whisper:
Till the Spin - ner of the Years said "Now!"
158
pp
p
163
And each one hears, And con-sum - ma - tion comes, and
163
pp
p
RH
167
rit.
jars two he-mi-spheres.
167
ff
p


a tempo
173
173
p
cresc.
Ped.
175
175
a tempo
p
pp
Ped.
Ped.
177
177
Ped.
8vb