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She, Herself, Said It – Investigating Communication with Words, Music, and Theatricality in Kate Soper's *IPSA DIXIT*
and
You're Still Here for soprano, mezzo-soprano, alto, violin, cello, and piano

By

ADDIE CAMSUZOU
DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Music Composition and Theory

in the

OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

DAVIS

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2023

Abstract

Kate Soper is one of the foremost composers of the 21st century, especially lauded for her vocal music which pushes the boundaries of voice writing conventions. Her six-movement masterwork *IPSA DIXIT,* scored for soprano, flute, violin, and percussion, is one of her most celebrated works, but is often mislabeled. While *IPSA DIXIT* is most frequently compared to opera, it is more accurate to describe it as a work of metatheatre. It does not function as a straightforward text-setting, and instead uses music and theatricality in ways that highlight, challenge, or even obscure aspects of its texts to communicate Soper's own meaning over that of the texts themselves. *IPSA DIXIT* is entirely concerned with communication, and Soper carefully chose texts which are either themselves themed on communication or could be recontextualized as being about communication. The texts set in *IPSA DIXIT* are drawn from a variety of authors; three of the movements set sections from Aristotle's treatises *Poetics, Rhetoric,* and *Metaphysics*, while the other three movements set texts from authors as varied as Sarah Teasdale and Sigmund Freud. My analysis investigates how *IPSA DIXIT* communicates, as well as what conclusions it itself draws about whether true communication is or isn't possible. Conducting this analysis required a careful look at the score, guided by Soper's own writings and interviews about the piece, as well as an awareness of how words, music, and theatricality communicate individually and in combination with each other.

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Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of my family, friends, teachers, and colleagues who I have had the honor of knowing throughout my life and my studies at UC Davis.

To my mother – thank you for driving me to every lesson, for attending every concert, and for always being my biggest supporter

To my father – thank you for everything, I know you would be so proud

To my sisters – thank you for always inspiring me with your hard work and stunning talent

To my husband, Josiah – thank you for always believing in me, encouraging me, and most importantly, getting me out of the house

To my wonderful friend Ryan Suleiman – thank you for being such an inspiration, and a constant support for these past 10 years

To my colleagues at UC Davis – thank you for all your kindness and support

To the UC Davis Staff – thank you for all your expertise, support, and patience

To the UC Davis Composition Faculty – thank you for your wisdom, for your inspiring lessons, and for helping me find my compositional voice

To my dissertation committee members, Pablo Ortiz and Kurt Rohde – thank you for all your guidance, patience, and encouragement

To my dissertation advisor, Laurie San Martin – thank you for the countless hours, immeasurable support, and inspiring teaching you have provided not only throughout this process, but throughout my entire time at UC Davis

Copyright Information

Score excerpts of *IPSA DIXIT:*

Kate Soper IPSA DIXIT
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Introduction

Prologue

Kate Soper is one of the most dynamic composers of the 21st century, particularly known and celebrated for her vocal music that consistently pushes the boundaries of voice writing conventions. As a composer with a notable interest in words, particularly in philosophy and poetry, Soper's vocal music is often structured more with an eye to elevating or shading the meaning of the words rather than following traditional musical structures. One of her larger works, *IPSA DIXIT*, is especially fascinating in its treatment of words. *IPSA DIXIT* is an evening-length six-movement work scored for soprano, flute, violin, and percussion. Not only do each of its six movements set rich and complex texts with hyper-sensitivity, but the entire work itself is concerned with communication as a concept. *IPSA DIXIT* is often compared to opera, with the term "Philosophy Opera" being almost exclusively used as its label after Alex Ross first coined the term in his review of the piece.[1] Yet, I believe that this label does somewhat of a disservice to the piece, as it is neither an opera nor a lesson in philosophy. While it does involve philosophy, the texts are often manipulated by Soper's settings in a way that reframes or even redefines their meaning. Instead, it would be more accurate to describe *IPSA DIXIT* as a work of metatheatre.[2] It not only uses words, but is also about words. Similarly, the piece is theatrical and musical, but in a self-conscious way; it is sometimes as if the musicians are imitating the act of making music or being theatrical. Throughout *IPSA DIXIT*, Soper blends her own musical instincts with musical, lingual, and theatrical devices that are entirely self-referential. Thus, I believe a study of *IPSA DIXIT* focusing on the intricacies of communication is necessary to better understand the piece within Soper's own identified parameters.

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[1] Alex Ross, "Kate Soper's Philosophy-Opera," *The New Yorker,* February 19, 2017, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/02/27/kate-sopers-philosophy-opera.

[2] Metatheatre, or metadrama, can be defined as "drama about drama; it occurs whenever the subject of a play turns out to be, in some sense, drama itself." Richard Hornby, *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1986), 31.

While the lore of communication in *IPSA DIXIT* has been disseminated throughout Soper's own writings and interviews about the piece, my initial point of interest was the unique virtuosity that was tailor-made for the original performing musicians, and Soper's vocal writing in particular. As a singer herself, Soper used her own voice to develop entirely unique vocal techniques. Soper originally wrote *IPSA DIXIT* for herself to perform, which allowed her to write music so technically and expressively demanding that it might have otherwise been considered unreasonable or even impossible. When investigating Soper's virtuosic composition style, I came across an interview in which she described thinking about the voice in "a bunch of different z-axis ways" while writing another voice-centric work, *Here Be Sirens*.[3] I found the concept of a vocal "z-axis" not only incredibly evocative and thought-provoking, but also an apt description of the vocal writing in *IPSA DIXIT*. But the deeper I went into investigating *IPSA DIXIT's* "z-axis," the clearer it became that this was just one small part of the piece's puzzle. Once I became familiar with how Soper describes *IPSA DIXIT*, my focus broadened to how the "z-axis" and other stylistic choices serve the piece's larger theme of communication. While my initial point of entry into the piece's analysis changed, I find it interesting that both points of entry were inspired by what Soper has chosen to say about her music. Given her notable interest in words, it can be assumed that Soper chooses her words very carefully. Her quotes about *IPSA DIXIT* function more as clues to how the piece can be interpreted rather than as complete answers about her intentions. Thus, the entirety of *IPSA DIXIT* is shrouded in the mystery of what it means to communicate, what constitutes effective communication, and the extent to which "real communication" may or may not be possible. An analysis of *IPSA DIXIT* must therefore involve a careful look at the piece's development, the original ensemble's performances, and Soper's own descriptions of the piece, in addition to a careful look at the score itself. To begin, I will provide an overview of *IPSA DIXIT's* background.

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[3] Alexis Scangas, "Forget the Familiar: the Feminist Voice in Contemporary Dramatic Song" (Master's thesis, Graduate College of Bowling Green State University, 2018), 76, https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/ws/send_file/send?accession=bgsu1522672693855537&disposition=inline.

Background of *IPSA DIXIT*

IPSA DIXIT was written over a period of six years, from 2010–2016, and is scored for soprano, flute, violin, and percussion in varying configurations. The first, third, and fifth of its six movements feature the full quartet, while the second, fourth, and sixth movements feature duos (soprano and flute, soprano and percussion, and soprano and violin, respectively). *IPSA DIXIT* has garnered a legacy; it was selected as a Pulitzer Prize finalist in 2017 and has inspired many diversely interpretive performances. The duo movements are widely performed, with "Cipher" even inspiring the formation of the Cipher Duo, a violin and soprano duo named for the final movement of *IPSA DIXIT*.[4] The entirety of *IPSA DIXIT* has also been performed though less often, with notable performances done by soprano Stephanie Lamprea in 2019 and by the Seattle Modern Orchestra in 2023, and with a performance by Long Beach Opera planned for 2024.

IPSA DIXIT was not originally imagined as the six-movement work it is now, and instead the three duo movements were originally written as entirely independent pieces. *Only the Words Themselves Mean What They Say* for soprano and flute was written first in 2010–2011, followed by *Cipher* for soprano and violin in 2011, and finally *The Crito* in 2012. Each of these duos is a dazzling display of virtuosity for each instrumentalist, featuring both traditional and nontraditional playing techniques developed through intense collaboration between Soper and flutist Erin Lesser, percussionist Ian Antonio, and violinist Josh Modney, all members of the music collective Wet Ink Ensemble. After performing these duos several times, Soper realized that they "had things to say to each other."[5] This phrase is particularly apt for describing Soper's music. She has expressed a tendency to conceptualize even her non-vocal music in literary terms, stating that some of her chamber pieces that may seem "odd" musically make sense in a "novelistic" way.[6] After making this literary connection between the three duos, Soper wanted to weave them together, which lead to the creation of the three quartet movements. The quartet movements were conceptualized to provide a literary glue with which to bind the duo movements together into the cohesive whole that is now *IPSA DIXIT*.[7]

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[4] Justine Aronson and Sarah Goldfeather, "Cipher: Voice + Violin," http://www.cipherduo.com/bio-1.

[5] Lauren Isheda, "5 Questions to Kate Soper (composer) about IPSA DIXIT," *I Care If You Listen*, October 16, 2018, https://icareifyoulisten.com/2018/10/5-questions-to-kate-soper-composer-ipsa-dixit/.

Each quartet uses a text from Aristotle that functionally introduces and expounds upon a literary concept that the proceeding duo exemplifies. The first movement of *IPSA DIXIT*, "Poetics" (2015), examines what makes good tragedy, and is immediately followed by "Only the Words Themselves Mean What They Say" which Soper describes as full of melodrama and pathos. The third movement, "Rhetoric" (2015), outlines the persuasive art of rhetoric and is followed by "The Crito" which centers on "rhetorically charged dialogue." The fifth movement, "Metaphysics" (2016), uses more abstract language to philosophically examine the limits of perception, which leads to the surreal final movement, "Cipher."[8] The new structure of *IPSA DIXIT* recontextualized "Cipher" as a finale, so it is heard not only as a strange and dreamlike exploration of the ideas presented in "Metaphysics" but also as a final statement on the literary concepts presented throughout the earlier movements.

My own listening experience has been completely different between hearing the ending of "Cipher" performed as a standalone piece versus as the final movement of the entire six-movement work. One's listening experience will inevitably be different, as the standalone version of "Cipher" is scored just for soprano and violin while "Cipher" as *IPSA DIXIT's* finale directs the full ensemble to return to stage for the final measures. “Cipher’s” ending does function well in the standalone version, but it has more conclusive meaning when it ends *IPSA DIXIT* because it ties together many of the ideas explored throughout the entire piece. Each movement of *IPSA DIXIT* has a literary theme related to communication which is intentionally blurred by the limitations of communication. While some of the movements do at times propose solutions, all of them highlight problems, inconsistencies, or impossibilities. Thus, while each movement can be heard and analyzed individually, studying the ways in which they “speak” to one another may reveal both how and what *IPSA DIXIT* communicates to the listener.

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[6] Andrew Leland, "An Interview with Kate Soper," *The Believer* 120, August 1, 2018, https://www.thebeliever.net/an-interview-with-kate-soper/.

[7] Isheda, "5 Questions to Kate Soper."

[8] Isheda, "5 Questions to Kate Soper."

To study how *IPSA DIXIT* communicates, it is important to consider how every aspect of the piece conveys information to its audience, including the title. Because Soper is so mindful of words, and because the title is the first piece of information that the audience will encounter, the significance of *IPSA DIXIT’s* title should not be underestimated. In the following section, I will delineate the meaning of the title and its implications for the thematic material of the piece.

What *IPSA DIXIT's* Title Communicates

"*Ipsa dixit*" is derived from the fallacious term "*ipse dixit*," which translates to "he, himself, said it." In Soper's program note for the piece, she playfully summarizes this fallacy as meaning "I don't need to prove what I say is true, it's true because I say so!"[9] While the phrase is in Latin, it is a translation from its original ancient Greek. "*Ipsa dixit*" is the feminized form of the phrase, which changes its meaning to "she, herself, said it." Already, there are several clues that can be gleaned from the title. First, the piece draws some connection to ancient Greece. Second, the literal translation of the title is about *saying* something, which points to the theme of communication. Third, the fallacious title implies unsound arguments, or an exploration of truth. This point may also fuel our distrust of the narrator, planting the idea that the narrator's message may not be reliable; some aspect of the performance may seem true only to ultimately be proven false. Finally, the change from *"ipse"* to *"ipsa"* suggests that Soper is tapping into the historical and current stereotypes and assumptions about how women behave, and the typical roles relegated to women in music and stories. Examining these clues further reveals that each has a strong connection to the structural and philosophical foundations of *IPSA DIXIT*.

To begin, the piece's connection to ancient Greece runs much deeper than just the title. As previously noted, each quartet movement sets a text by Aristotle which serves to introduce the thematic content of each duo movement. Additionally, "Poetics" includes text by Sophocles, and "The Crito" includes text by Plato. The theatricality in *IPSA DIXIT* is also rooted in ancient Greek culture, as the piece makes frequent use of miming. Mime originates from ancient Greece and was adopted by ancient Roman culture, and there is evidence that the music ensembles involved in mime performances were remarkably similar to *IPSA DIXIT's* ensemble; mimes performed or were accompanied by song, flutes, stringed instruments, and percussion instruments.[10] Finally, the title itself perfectly encapsulates the thematic content of *IPSA DIXIT*. This is further evidence that aspects of Ancient Greek philosophy inform some of the creative ideas in the piece.

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[9] Kate Soper, program note for *IPSA DIXIT,* https://www.eamdc.com/psny/composers/kate-soper/works/ipsa-dixit/.

The title being *about* saying something may at first seem simple, but it actually points to *IPSA DIXIT's* proximity to metatheatre. A piece's title functions to say something about the piece, and this title is *about* saying something, which in turn implies that the piece will be *about* saying something. Not only does the title imply the piece's overall theme of communication, but it also encapsulates the feeling of meta-communication that is present throughout the piece. Still, even the "something" that is said by the title is immediately shaded by doubt. The fallaciousness of *"ipsa dixit"* conveys an ever-present theme in the piece of things being presented as absolutely true, only to be questioned or outright debunked. The soprano is often positioned as an unreliable narrator and makes statements or performs actions that are later shown to be untrue or impossible. Truth itself is often called into question, with references made throughout the piece to "natural truths," "apparent truth," "the whole of truth," and what it means to come across as honest or dishonest when communicating the same "truthful" information. In connection with the piece's theatricality, Soper often depicts "apparent truths" through the use of miming so seamless as to actually trick the audience into believing what they are seeing, juxtaposed against miming that is so obvious that the audience will immediately understand the performance as mimed.

Finally, the title specifically using the feminized "*ipsa dixit*" does indicate that a look at the role of gender in *IPSA DIXIT* is warranted. I initially hesitated to discuss gender in connection with this piece, as it is so often used as a crutch when discussing women composers' music. As a woman composer myself, I am all too familiar with how the compositional elements of a piece are sometimes brushed aside in conversations about music composed by women. Often, the conversation about gender takes over discussions of these pieces. In wanting to avoid perpetuating this bias, I initially tried to remove the topic of gender from my analysis of *IPSA DIXIT*. However, the more I studied the piece the more I realized that my analysis had to consider the role of the woman and how it informs the structure and dramatic effect of this piece. First, the title communicates that the fallacious individual making dogmatic statements is a woman, being either Soper as the composer, the soprano as a character, or both. While certainly not all individuals with soprano voices are women, I will follow the title's indication that the soprano's character in *IPSA DIXIT* is a woman and will therefore use the pronouns "she/her" when referring to the soprano throughout this dissertation. If the character of the soprano is a woman, this adds another layer to the theme of apparent truth. Women navigating the same spaces as men often have to be spectacular to the point of being superhuman in order to garner the same recognition and opportunities as their male peers. Throughout *IPSA DIXIT*, the soprano's performance is dazzlingly virtuosic and expressively varied. The soprano must depict impossibilities, either covertly or overtly, with the overt drawing attention to the soprano's inability to actually perform the impossible. The soprano is always bending herself in all kinds of impossible shapes to communicate texts written by men that were taken at their word for thousands of years. This tension forms an ever-present commentary in *IPSA DIXIT* on the perception of women and authenticity, and of women and authority.

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[10] Glenys E. M. Wootton, "Representations of Musicians in the Roman Mime," *Mediterranean Archaeology* 17, 2014.

Now that I have delineated the preliminary information that can be derived from *IPSA DIXIT's* background and title, I will introduce my approach to analyzing the musical score and aspects of its performance. This includes my research questions, my goals in analyzing the piece, and the limitations of my study.

Questions, Goals, and Limitations

My analysis of *IPSA DIXIT* was inspired by the following questions: what forms of communication are present in *IPSA DIXIT*? How do each of these forms communicate, and what are their inherent successes and failings? What is true communication, and how is or isn't it possible? Investigating these questions required not only a careful look at Soper's score and performances, but also at communication at large. To do so, I identified three primary forms of communication to focus on in my analysis: communication using words, communication in music, and communication through theatricality and movement. Therefore, while the focus of my analysis is on communication in *IPSA DIXIT*, a broader goal of my analysis is to provide insight about how music, words, and theatricality communicate.

My analysis will be limited to my own perspective, informed by published articles and interviews with Kate Soper. I have not spoken to the composer myself. Throughout my analysis, I will necessarily make frequent reference to preexisting research to support my findings. However, it is not my intention to thoroughly summarize every study conducted on these subjects, or to consider every study when performing my analysis. Rather, I utilize a few key sources to explain the inner workings of the piece. I am primarily concerned with studying how and why Soper made the compositional decisions she made in *IPSA DIXIT*, and what effect these decisions have on the listener's experience.

Part 1: Investigating Communication

The three forms of communication focused on in my analysis – words, music, and movement – may at first seem simple to define. Words have inherent meaning that is conveyed directly through writing or speech, music has ambiguous meaning that communicates more emotionally than literally, and movement communicates broad emotions or actions. However, each are much more complicated and nuanced. These three communication forms are not so disparate, and the ways in which they transmit information may be similar or overlap with one another depending on the communicatee's perception. In this section, I will investigate how each form communicates by examining what kinds of information each form conveys, and the strengths and shortcomings innate to each form.

Words as Communication

Words have assigned meaning, so a 1:1 ratio should be possible between what is said or written and what is understood by the listener or reader. However, the relationship between words and meaning is more complex. Words themselves can only ever serve as generalizations of the physical or conceptual things they describe. To translate an idea into words requires stripping it of its most specific meaning to describe it in the more general terms allowed by words. This problem has been described by Charles Seeger as being because "most of the words of a language are abstract, universal concepts, empirical concepts and general terms."[11] Even if it were possible to choose words that exactly communicated the meaning intended by the listener, great discrepancies in their interpretation would still be possible. This is because words do not only communicate their literal meaning, but also contextual factors depending on the intensions with which they were used.

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[11] Charles Seeger, "Speech, Music, and Speech About Music" in *Studies in Musicology, 1935–1975* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1977), 24.

Context can ascribe much more meaning to words than they carry on their own. On this discrepancy, philosopher J. L. Austin observed that in spite of an "age-old assumption in philosophy" that "to say something…is always and simply to *state* something," a more realistic description would be that "to *say* something is to *do* something."[12] To this point, philosopher P. F. Strawson similarly differentiated between "theorists of formal semantics" and "theorists of communication-intention," with theorists of communication-intention viewing communication as an activity wherein the purpose is to convey the meaning of the words in addition to the intention with which they are used.[13] Therefore, words can communicate not only their literal meaning but also emotional states, calls to action, or an entirely different meaning through subtext.

A thorough exploration of this concept can be found in the second movement of *IPSA DIXIT*, aptly named "Only the Words Themselves Mean What They Say." This movement is comprised of three sub-movements, each of which sets a text by Lydia Davis. The text set in the first sub-movement, "Go Away," explores all the complicated nuance needed to understand what exactly someone might mean by telling you to go away and never come back; do they never want you to come back, or do they just want you to understand how angry they are? The context and manner in which words are delivered can completely change their meaning. For words to accurately communicate the meaning intended by the speaker or writer, their recipient must have a contextual understanding of why these have been chosen, and the intentions with which the speaker or writer has used them. Therefore, while words have the unique ability to convey massive amounts of information with great variety, there is still potential for lost clarity in their transmission.

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[12] J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 12.

[13] P. F. Strawson, *Logico-Linguistic Papers*, rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 131,

Music as Communication

Music's ability to communicate is usually described in metaphor, and it is more difficult to concretely identify what is communicated in music and why. One possible explanation can be offered by examining the physical gestures performed by the musicians when embodying the music. Roger Sessions proposed that music communicates by embodying movement with the use of rhythm, harmony, dynamics, and other musical features that imply an "attitude," such as tension or relaxation. This embodiment serves to communicate not specific emotions, but rather emotional energy, or "abstract qualities of emotion."[14] Elisabeth Le Guin has also posited a relationship between the physical act of music performance and communication, observing that the physical sensations felt by the musician when performing are also felt by the listener-observer. According to Le Guin, "such matters communicate themselves entirely without the benefit of a verbal exegesis, and are a proper, if always only contingent, part of the performed work of art."[15] Thus, the physical performance of music directly communicates its physicality to the listener, who may in turn ascribe abstract qualities of emotion to the embodied sensations. Still, the actual sound of music communicates something to the listener. What it communicates, and how, may be explained by examining the relationship between music and memory.

The relationship between music as communication through memory can be observed in programmatic music or music involving text-painting, wherein the musical sounds imitate some other familiar sound with such accuracy that the listener will immediately recognize it. However, memory is also responsible for the perceived emotional responses that are often attributed to musical communication. Over the course of one's life, the perception that music sounds "sad" or

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[14] Roger Sessions, *The Musical Experience of Composer, Performer, Listener*, rev. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 23.

[15] Elisabeth Le Guin, *Boccherini's Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 24.

"joyful" depends entirely on repeated contextual patterns present within the culture in which we listen to music. The musical patterns observed throughout one's listening history are also responsible for musical preference. The music one has already heard will form expectations for how future music will sound, and the ways in which music meets or subverts these expectations will determine whether one finds it enjoyable. Leonard B. Meyer credited expectation as responsible for musical enjoyment and any emotions felt when listening to music, stating that "because expectation is largely a product of stylistic experience, music in a style with which we are totally unfamiliar is meaningless."[16] David Huron sought to codify this phenomenon by developing his ITPRA theory (Imagination, Tension, Prediction, Reaction, and Appraisal) to explain the listener's "pre-outcome responses" (imagination and tension) and "post-outcome responses" (prediction, reaction, and appraisal).[17] Each of these responses generates a feeling response in the listener, be it frustration, pleasure, anger, or melancholy, depending on how the music does or does not meet the expectations formed by one's listening history. Thus, while it is true that music cannot communicate the same breadth and specificity of information as words, it cannot be said that music only communicates the abstract. Music communicates physicality and plays on the listener's expectations with immediacy and directness. From there, patterns formed over the course of one's listening history will determine how these physical and expectational manipulations are interpreted, in a process that is often immediate and is certainly direct.

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[16] Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956): 35.

[17] David Huron, *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation* (Cambridge: Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 2006): 7.

Movement as Communication

The way in which movement communicates in theater or art has often been compared to communication with words. Henrietta Bannerman observed a structural commonality shared between dance and language, as both dance and language communicate "according to cultural codes."[18] This idea is similar to the theory of communication-intention with words, in which communication involves not only the words' meaning, but also the intent with which they were used. In discussing mime, Bari Rolfe made a similar observation that "neither word nor gesture are 'interesting' in themselves if one does not see the idea behind them."[19] Additional comparison between language and mime gesture has been made by Russel Graves, who stated that "language has grown from a gestural origin." Graves goes even farther to state that while language is helpful for "condensing, generalizing, and analyzing active experience," it functions as "an extension of the sense of gesture inherent in all of us."[20] Mime communication must be especially considered in this paper, as not only does Soper make frequent use of mime throughout *IPSA DIXIT,* but also because mime performance is so related to meta-theatricality. Both mime and meta-theatricality are self-referential, and involve *performing* performance.

Mime is often described as most effective not through performing actions exactly as they are done in real life, but through *performing* the performance of these actions. For example, when describing the mime of Marcel Marceau, Marianne L. Simmel observed that "he does not sit down 'naturally' as we do in everyday life," but rather "*represents* 'sitting down,'" and quotes Marceau's own statement that "the task of the mime is not to show reality, but to recreate reality." Beyond caricature of natural actions, Simmel found that "the representation of an action can be created of components that are entirely alien to the 'natural action'—yet they constitute most forceful and convincing representations of such actions."[21] On this, Marceau described his own mime of walking upstairs as being unlike how one would actually climb stairs, and as instead communicating "the feeling of climbing stairs."[22] This is similar to words, as it is not the specific words or actions chosen that communicate meaning, but the intentions and context of their use. Similar to music, communication through movement is direct and immediate.

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[18] Henrietta Bannerman, "Is Dance a Language? Movement, Meaning and Communication," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 3, No. 1 (Summer 2014).

[19] Bari Rolfe, "The Mime of Jacques Lecoq," *The Drama Review: TDR* 16, No. 1 (March 1972).

[20] Russel Graves, "The Nature of Mime," *Educational Theatre Journal* 10, No. 2 (May 1958).

Words, music, and theatrical movement have the ability to affect communication not only individually, but also in varying combinations and juxtapositions. The ways in which they interact and overlap in a musical performance can completely change their meanings. For example, the music accompanying a section of text could together communicate a specific emotion, only to be immediately undermined by a theatrical action. Analyzing communication in *IPSA DIXIT* will therefore necessitate an examination of how each of these communication forms function individually, as well as how they interact with and affect each other. In addition to these three forms of communication, however, there is still another layer of communication that must be investigated in *IPSA DIXIT.* Because Soper originally wrote the piece for herself to perform, there is necessarily a layer of meaning that is communicated in her own performances that cannot be specific to the score, and therefore cannot be replicated by any other musician. Therefore, Soper's unique position as performer and composer must be considered.

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[21] Marianne L. Simmel, "Mime and Reason: Notes on the Creation of the Perceptual Object," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* 31 No. 2 (Winter 1972).

[22] William Fifield, "The Mime Speaks: Marcel Marceau," *The Kenyon Review* 30, No. 2 (1968).

The Composer as Performer and Primary Communicator

Not only did Soper use her own voice when composing and developing singing techniques for *IPSA DIXIT,* but she also wrote the piece initially for herself as the performer. She has stated that one of the reasons she often performs her own vocal music is because she, as the performer, will do anything asked by herself as the composer.[23] This fact allows her to not only write vocal music that may be especially challenging or unconventional, but also to write music that is nearly impossible to perform, or at least to perform with consistent vocal technique and quality. Some of the vocal music she writes extends well beyond the standard range for soprano. In Soper's own performances, the extreme low pitches she sings have an almost ghostly quality because they are so far below her own vocal range, while some of the very high notes have a somewhat strained quality to them. Sometimes the soprano must move between notes in these ranges very quickly. Soper as the performer knows that it is less important for these notes to sound "good" than it is that the effect of these extremes is present. By writing for herself as the performer, Soper was able to write "impossible" music in order to better communicate the meaning of the music.

Another near-impossibility present in Soper's performances is the fact that she performs the entirety of *IPSA DIXIT* from memory, a feat that I have never seen any other vocalist attempt. I do believe that an off-book performance is more effective as it more strongly centers the soprano as a narrator, which overall makes the push and pull between truth and apparent truth clearer. What I find interesting about Soper's performances, however, is that they are not always word-for-word accurate to the score. Because Soper is the composer, she has the authority to prioritize conveying the piece's meaning effectively over getting every single word right. *IPSA*

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[23] Soper, "Kate Soper: Real Communication," *NewMusicBox* video, January 18 2016, https://vimeo.com/152226966.

DIXIT is extremely dense and wordy, so for anyone to perform it exactly right from memory is essentially impossible. However, another vocalist performing *IPSA DIXIT* will not have the ease or the authority to say any of the words differently than they are written. To prioritize saying the right words the performer must look at the score, which removes a layer of theatricality and immersion. Because in Soper's performances she is simultaneously the creator and the performer, it is difficult to know which aspects of her performance give special insight into the piece, and which are incidental to the performance.

Soper's performances are imbued with expressive choices not present in the score that add extra layers of meaning. Some of these choices seem connected to personal preference and associations with certain singing styles; for example, she generally does not sing in a traditionally operatic style, and occasionally imitates that style to convey something that is silly or pretentious. Other choices may be more subtle, such as changing her tone slightly to shade the meaning of the words on an intimate level. I personally find the way Soper performs the final measures of *IPSA DIXIT* to be extremely important to the overall communication of the piece's meaning, but her expressive choices are only present in her performances, and are not found in the score or in performances by other musicians. Soper as the performer is uniquely omniscient, and she holds total understanding of the piece's meaning and her intentions as the composer. In turn, the recordings of her performances can serve as an extension of the written score.

Part 2: Musical Analysis of *IPSA DIXIT*

I. "Poetics": Depicting Impossibilities

"Poetics" constantly manipulates the audience's perception of truth. The movement's text is adapted from Aristotle's treatise *Poetics*, which delineates the structural elements of good poetry and demonstrates poetry's legitimacy as an art form.[24] Aristotle's text is necessarily certain in tone, yet Soper's setting pokes holes in both the text's arguments and in musical or theatrical "truths" presented within the movement. Throughout "Poetics," several aspects of its performance are presented as objectively true, only for them to later be questioned or dismantled. "Poetics" is almost entirely comprised of contradictions, which strengthens its function within *IPSA DIXIT.* As the opening movement, "Poetics" is burdened with introducing the entirety of *IPSA DIXIT* and setting the audience's expectations for the rest of the piece. I believe "Poetics" demonstrates the fallaciousness of *IPSA DIXIT's* title and communicates the piece's themes by making the audience direct participants in the performance's deception.

The opening of "Poetics" simultaneously confirms and subverts two preliminary expectations that the audience is likely to have. First, because the ensemble features a singer, the audience will likely expect the singer to act as the center of the ensemble. In vocal music with texts the singer is often assumed outright to hold the role of direct communicator in the ensemble. While the soprano does not initially sing, she does speak, which confirms that she will act as the direct communicator in the ensemble. The second preliminary expectation, however, is subverted. The audience will expect the instrumentalists to play their instruments. Instead, the instrumentalists only mime the performance of their instruments without producing any sound. The instrumentalists' mimed playing is immediately followed by the soprano stating that "art is imitation," and then ringing (or rather, appearing to ring) a bell. As is revealed later in the movement, the soprano's bell is only a prop; its clapper has been removed, rendering it silent. The bell's sound is instead provided by the percussionist.

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[24] Andrew Ford, "The Purpose of Aristotle's *Poetics*," *Classical Philology* 110, No. 1 (January 2015).

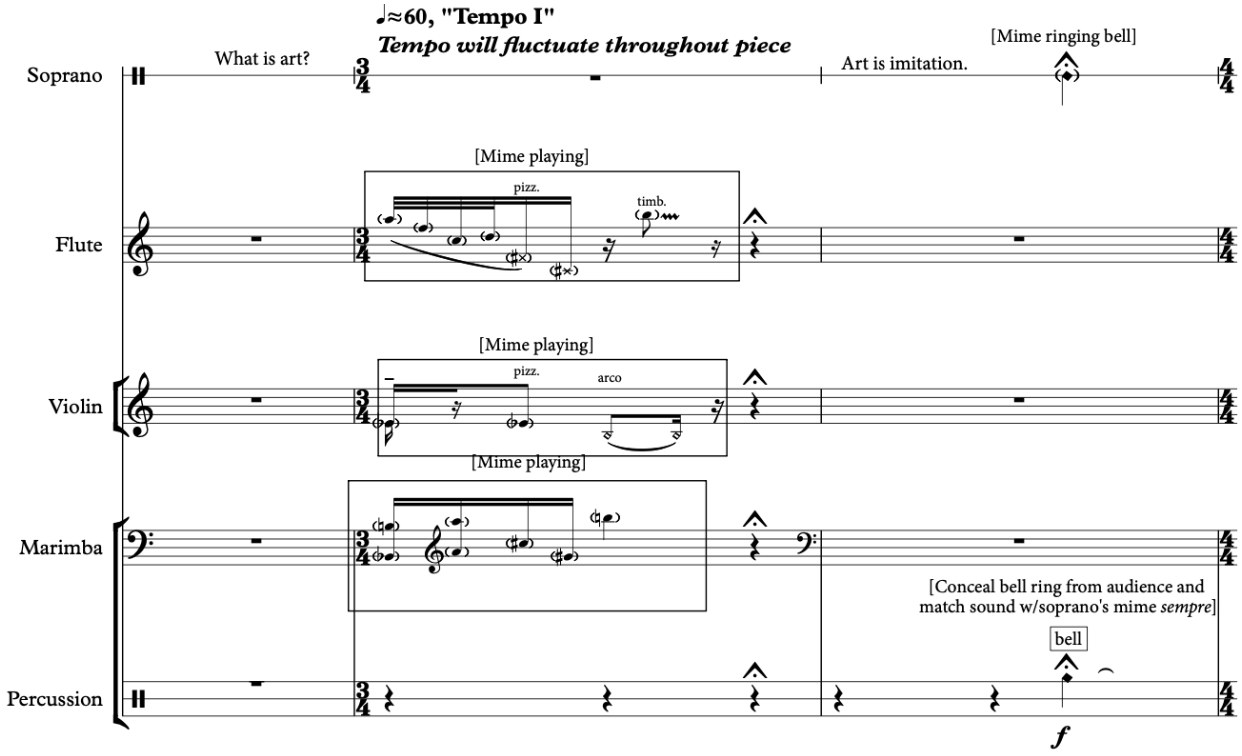
♩≈60, "Tempo I"
Tempo will fluctuate throughout piece
Soprano
What is art?
Art is imitation.
[Mime ringing bell]
Flute
[Mime playing]
pizz.
timb.
Violin
[Mime playing]
pizz.
arco
Marimba
[Mime playing]
[Conceal bell ring from audience and match sound w/soprano's mime *sempre*]
bell
Percussion
f

Fig. 1. *"Poetics" mm. 1–3*

Upon first watch of the piece, the soprano's statement that "art is imitation" may seem only to reference the instrumentalists' mime, but secondary viewings imbue this opening with dramatic irony. The instrumentalists' mime is not an illusion; the audience will immediately understand that the musicians are meta-theatrically performing performance. True illusion does occur, however, when the soprano "rings" her bell. This introduces a dichotomy present throughout the movement of affected illusion and true illusion. The instrumentalists' mime is affected illusion; it is not intended to trick anyone, and it instead is a kind of meta-illusion. This makes the true illusion of the soprano's bell-ringing all the more successful. The piece appears to be revealing its tricks, communicating that it will involve some kind of trickery and explicitly showing you what it may look like. This makes the audience all the less likely to suspect the soprano's bell-ringing to be deceptive, despite the fact that any amount of suspicion would immediately expose it. While the score does not specify the physical gesture with which the soprano should imitate ringing the bell, her gesture in the Wet Ink Ensemble's 2016 performance seems to have set the standard followed by other performances.[25] Aliana De La Guardia in 2017 and Stephanie Lamprea in 2019 and 2023 both imitate Soper's gesture in their performances.[26] Therefore, when describing the physicality of this gesture I will be referencing the gesture Soper performs in this 2016 concert.

To begin, total synchronization between the soprano's bell-ringing gesture and the actual bell sound is statistically unlikely. Any performance will likely have one or more moment in which the motion and the sound do not perfectly line up. A more egregious discrepancy occurs between the physical gesture of the soprano "ringing" the bell and the actual sound that this gesture would produce. First, ringing a bell upside down would prevent it from ringing with clear sustain, as the clapper would rest against the bell's side and dampen the sound. Second, the physical acts of raising the bell above one's head to ring it, lowering it again to be held right-side-up, and holding it throughout the performance could never be silent; if one were holding a real bell, all of this motion would cause it to be very noisy. Multiple viewings made the illusion obvious to me, yet when I first watched Soper's performance I was completely tricked. The success of the trick may be explainable by considering movement communication and mime.

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[25] Soper, "Poetics," performance by The Wet Ink Ensemble, recorded December 9, 2016, video, 1:14–1:18, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFLqzJkKSJM.

[26] Aliana De La Guardia, "Poetics," performance by Equilibrium Ensemble, recorded December 2, 2017, video, 0:10–0:17, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ElR96fjy8tY; Stephanie Lamprea, "Poetics," performance by Equilibrium Ensemble, recorded April 12, 2019, video, 0:07–0:10, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FG-Noa8nN4A; Lamprea, "Poetics," performance by Lamprea et al., recorded April 17, 2023, video, 0:48–0:52, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5lDy9r6_m18.

To reiterate the words of Marceau, "the task of the mime is not to show reality, but to recreate reality." If the soprano were using a regular bell, the bell would have to sit on a cloth-covered surface to dampen its sound until used. To use the bell, the soprano would have to very slowly pick the bell up from its surface, taking care to keep the bell very still as any movement would cause it to ring. To ring the bell, the soprano would have to keep the bell right-side-up, and then very carefully set the bell back down. To mime the bell-ringing exactly as one would ring a real bell would only draw attention to and expose the trick. So much focus would be drawn to the inevitably stilted performance of the bell-ringing that the audience would be much more likely to notice any discrepancy between the soprano's gesture and the bell's sound. Therefore, while the bell-ringing gesture in "Poetics" is entirely unrealistic, the simplicity of the gesture and the blasé confidence it affects will actually make the audience less likely to notice the trick. This blasé confidence gets at the very heart of *IPSA DIXIT.* The performance is presenting the illusion as factual and needing no further proof, yet even the slightest scrutiny would expose it; however, the audience is unlikely to exact this scrutiny and will be take what they see at face value. The soprano's bell, therefore, functions as a mechanism through which the themes of *IPSA DIXIT* will be communicated by actually making the audience experience believing something to be true, only to be shown that it was false all along.

The soprano's role throughout "Poetics" is also in service of communicating the central themes of *IPSA DIXIT.* From the very opening, the soprano performs Aristotle's text as a lecture, speaking it continuously while the instrumentalists provide musical or theatrical demonstrations of the concepts described in the text.

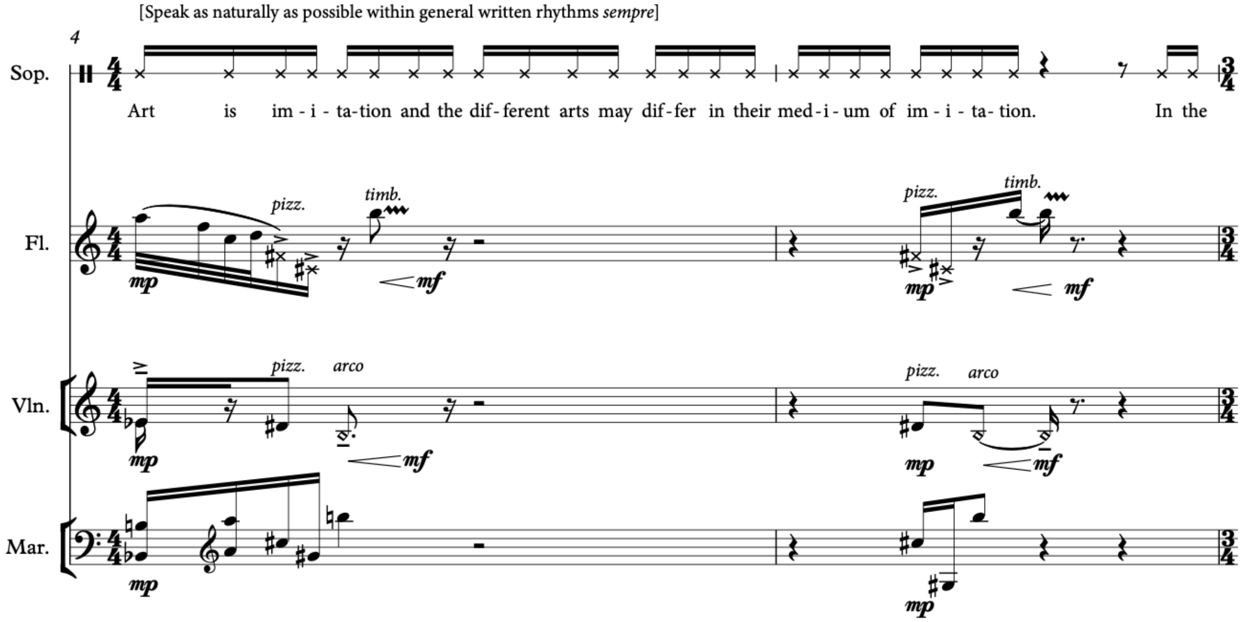
[Speak as naturally as possible within general written rhythms *sempre*]
4
Sop.
Art is im - i - ta-tion and the dif- ferent arts may dif-fer in their med-i-um of im - i - ta- tion. In the
Fl.
pizz.
timb.
mp
mf
Vln.
pizz.
arco
mp
mf
Mar.
mp

Fig. 2. *"Poetics" mm. 4–5*

The Aristotelian lecture in "Poetics" appears fluid and continuous, but Soper's adaptation has been abstracted from sections throughout the original *Poetics'* 26 chapters. Therefore, while the text *seems* clear because it is written with such an authoritative tone, it has been removed from its original context which will inevitably remove some of its meaning and clarity. The soprano as lecturer also appears to be communicating clearly and directly, but her Aristotelian lecture is dense, difficult to understand, and contextually isolated. This lack of clarity may leave the audience feeling as though "it's true because she says so! But… what is she saying?" This tension points again to *IPSA DIXIT's* title and central themes. Instead of exacting effective communication by highlighting the meaning of the text, Soper's setting exaggerates its denseness, intentionally causing the audience to experience the feelings associated with ineffective communication. What I find especially successful about this treatment is its subtlety. Like the silent bell, the audience will have no reason to suspect that this obfuscation of the text is intentional; it is another illusion. The audience will still look to the soprano as the direct communicator, despite her communication being not entirely direct. This tension structurally creates an opportunity within the movement for the soprano's authority to be explicitly challenged, and for the soprano as narrator to be revealed as unreliable.

For approximately the first 3 and a half minutes of the piece, the musical texture is consistent; the soprano-narrator performs her lecture while the instrumentalists provide musical examples. Suddenly, in measure 46, the music changes in several ways. The soprano suddenly begins singing, the musical temporality is suddenly much more sustained, and the text is suddenly in Greek instead of English.

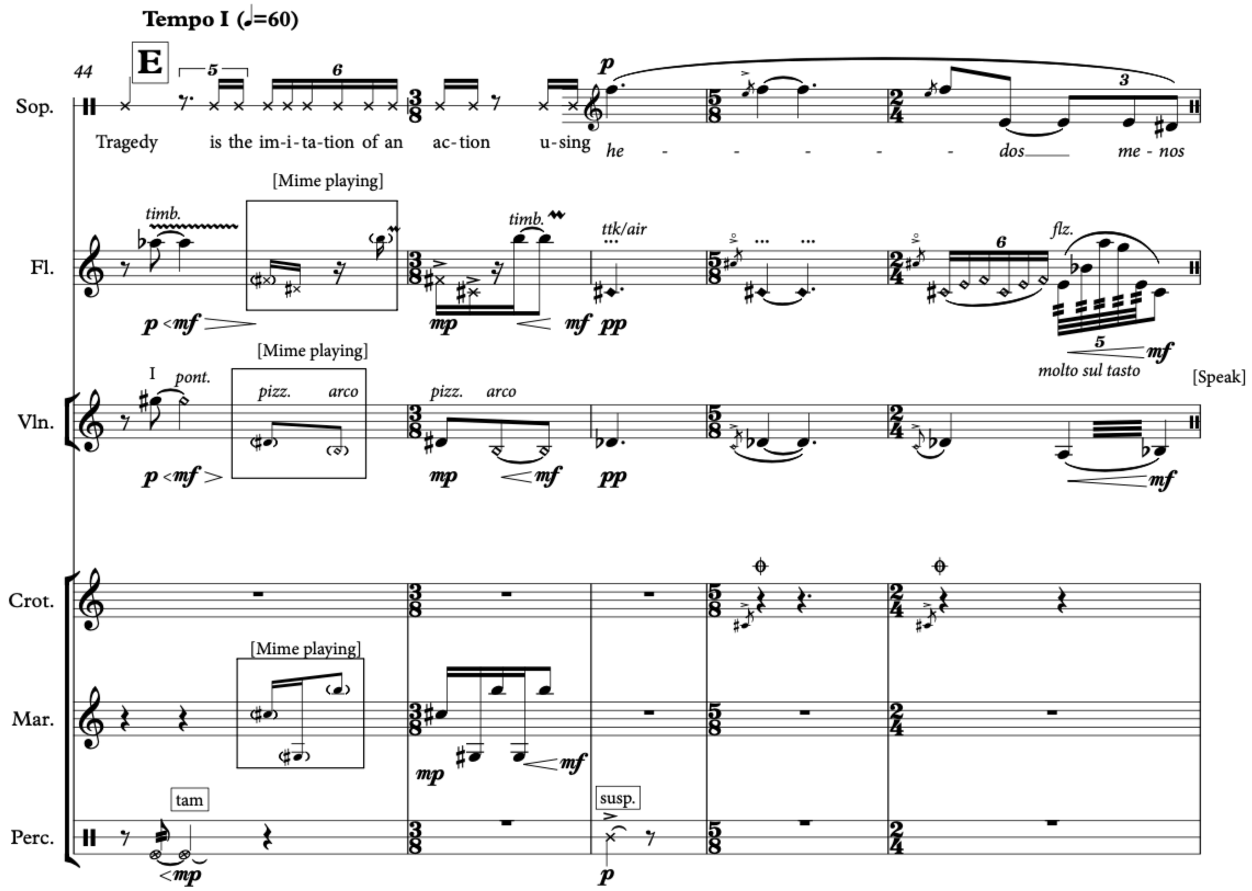
Tempo I (♩=60)
E
44
Sop.
Tragedy is the im-i-ta-tion of an ac-tion u-sing
he - - - - - - dos me - nos
Fl.
timb.
[Mime playing]
ttk/air
flz.
molto sul tasto
[Speak]
Vln.
I pont.
pizz. arco
Crot.
Mar.
Perc.
tam
susp.
p
mf
mp
pp

Fig. 3. "Poetics" mm. 44–48

A soprano singing melisma over sustained harmony is not itself unusual. However, because it is so unlike the music preceding it, this more traditional passage sounds novel and even mysterious to the listener. The language choice also contributes to this feeling of mystery, as Greek is less likely to be understood by the audience. This language barrier further increases tension between the soprano's role as "direct communicator" and the audience's ability to understand what is being communicated. The effect is heightened by a disruption of the words' rhythm with the first syllable of *"hedus"* lasting for several seconds, and by the large registral leap that occurs within *"hedus."* Both the leap and the disruptive rhythm force the listener to focus on individual syllables rather than hearing them as connected to whole words or phrases. What I find especially interesting about this moment is that while "Poetics" has thus far been instructional, in this moment its answers are intentionally concealed. The text, "tragedy is the imitation of an action using *hedus menos,"* is still instructional in tone, but is ultimately incomprehensible. Connecting again to *IPSA DIXIT's* title, the text in this moment appears to be telling you something but does not actually do so.

Another example of the piece only seeming to tell you something occurs in measures 68–75. The soprano first teases clarity by instructively beginning the phrase with "for example," before continuing "as the sower scatters seeds, so the sun's rays scatter light, and so we may describe the sun as *speiron theotikstan phloga."* The statement at first sounds like it makes sense, and the audience may even feel as though it should make sense to them, but of course it cannot make sense. Part of the example's solution is masked in Greek, so this information is hidden from the listener. This moment pokes additional holes into the soprano's role as "direct communicator."

Throughout much of "Poetics," the instrumentalists' role is to back up the soprano's lecture. To do so, they communicate in a very broad sense. For example, in measures 144–146 expressive, tonal consonance accompanies the word "good" and aggressive dissonance accompanies the word "bad."

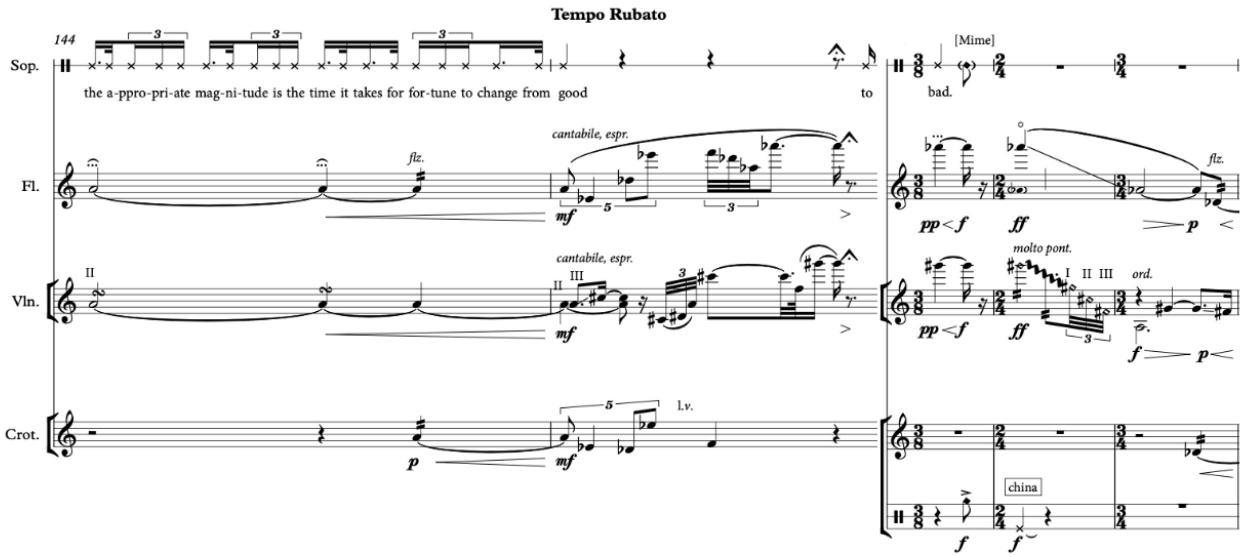
Tempo Rubato
144
Sop.
the a-ppro-pri-ate mag-ni-tude is the time it takes for for-tune to change from good
to
[Mime]
bad.
Fl.
cantabile, espr.
flz.
mf
pp<f
ff
p
Vln.
II
III
cantabile, espr.
molto pont.
I II III
ord.
mf
pp<f
ff
f
p
Crot.
l.v.
p
mf
china
f
f

Fig. 4. "Poetics" mm. 144–148

In Western tonal music, this is one of the oldest tricks in the book; "pretty" tonal music sounds good, and "ugly" dissonant music sounds bad. I find this broad representation of music communication to relate to the affected illusion of the instrumentalists' mime which opened "Poetics." The piece appears again to reveal its tricks, giving the audience an easy answer as to how music communicates. Like a sleight of hand trick, "Poetics" appears to present the audience with all the answers, only to later reveal that the answers are much more complicated. This concept is explored throughout *IPSA DIXIT,* but I do consider the music that concludes "Poetics" to introduce a more complicated representation of musical communication. Before discussing the final section, however, I must return to the soprano's bell-ringing and its structural function.

Throughout the movement, the soprano's implicit authority within the ensemble has been theatrically represented by her appearing to ring a bell. This bell-ringing at first seemed to exert control over the form of the piece, signaling phrase endings or expressive changes within gestures. Gradually, the bell-ringing is used to theatrically exert control over the instrumentalists themselves. For example, in measures 158–160 the flutist and violinist are instructed to “trail off as if losing interest” which results in “erratic” playing, and the soprano is consequently directed to “ring” the bell to “regain their attention.”

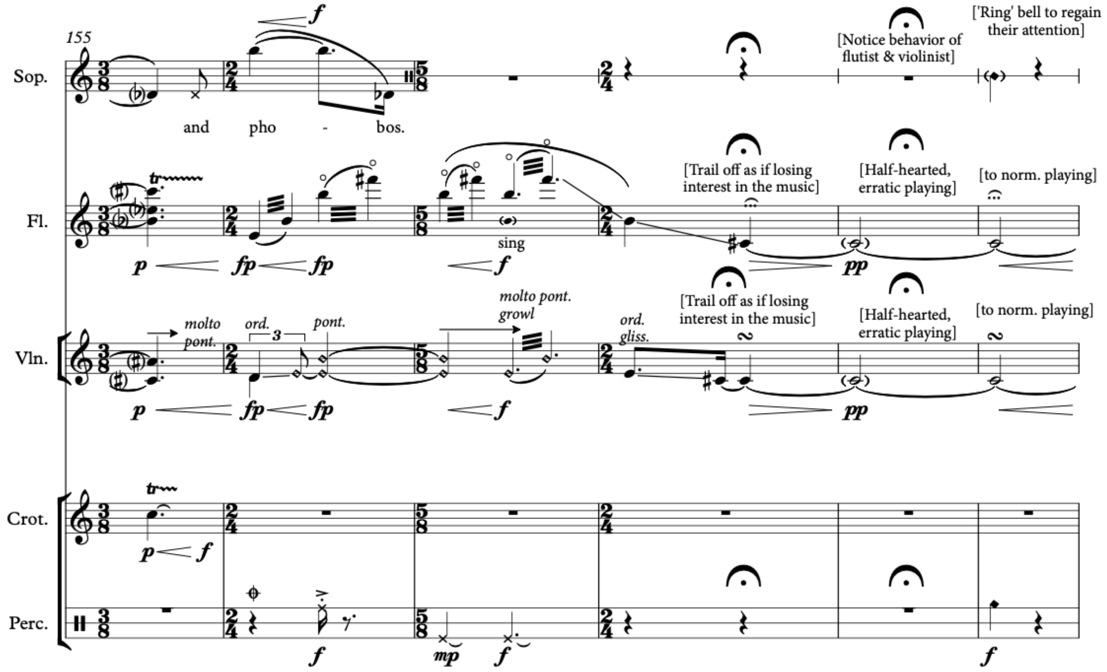
155
Sop.
Fl.
Vln.
Crot.
Perc.
and pho - bos.
[Notice behavior of flutist & violinist]
['Ring' bell to regain their attention]
[Trail off as if losing interest in the music]
[Half-hearted, erratic playing]
[to norm. playing]
sing
molto pont.
ord.
pont.
molto pont. growl
ord. gliss.
[Trail off as if losing interest in the music]
[Half-hearted, erratic playing]
[to norm. playing]
p fp fp f pp
p fp fp f pp
p f
f mp f f

Fig. 5. *“Poetics” mm. 155–160*

In measure 186, it is finally revealed that the soprano’s bell is only a prop. The soprano performs the same bell-ringing gesture, but it makes no sound. The soprano’s frantic attempts to ring the bell to get the musicians’ attention are futile, and the flutist and violinist exit the stage while the remaining percussionist visibly ignores the soprano. After the percussionist performs the bell's sound without the soprano's bell-ringing gesture, the percussionist leaves the stage as well.

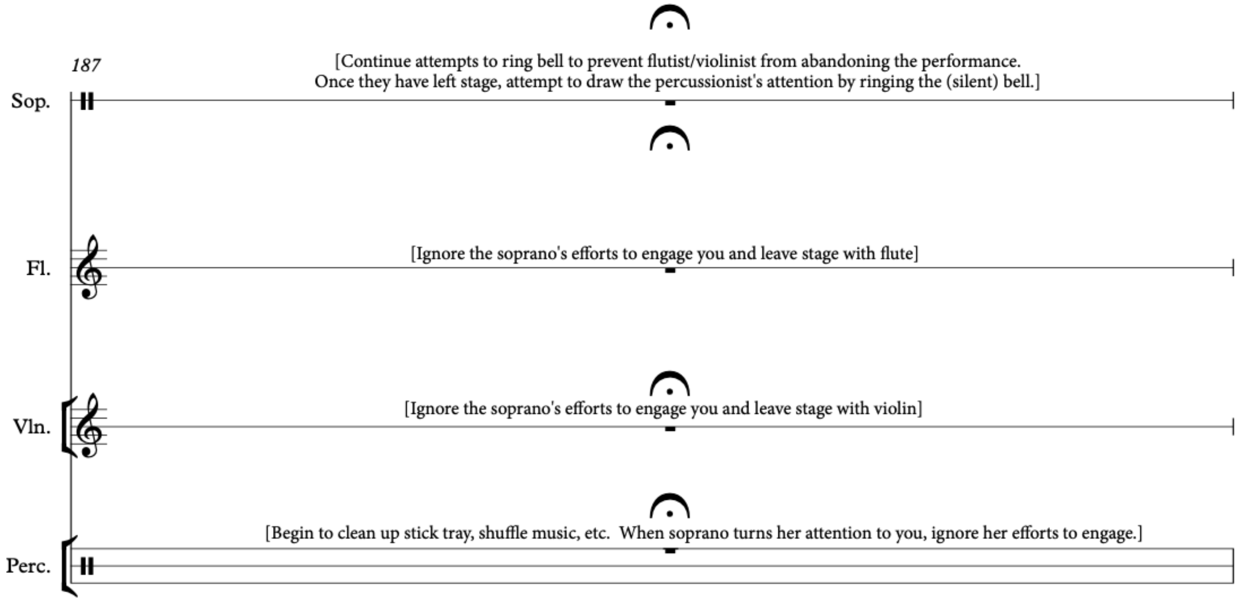
187
Sop.
[Continue attempts to ring bell to prevent flutist/violinist from abandoning the performance.
Once they have left stage, attempt to draw the percussionist's attention by ringing the (silent) bell.]
Fl.
[Ignore the soprano's efforts to engage you and leave stage with flute]
Vln.
[Ignore the soprano's efforts to engage you and leave stage with violin]
Perc.
[Begin to clean up stick tray, shuffle music, etc. When soprano turns her attention to you, ignore her efforts to engage.]

Fig. 6. *"Poetics" mm. 187*

The soprano's bell is no longer an effective tool for controlling the ensemble, but of course, it never really was. The audience would never have actually believed that the soprano's bell controlled the instrumentalists' behavior, and its power is clearly just theatrical. The lost power of the soprano's bell-ringing serves more as an exaggeration of the truly surprising reveal, that the soprano's bell is silent. This reveal theatrically deflates the soprano's image as "direct communicator." Within "Poetics," the silent bell exposes the soprano's character as an unreliable narrator, and that despite the authoritative tone of her lecture she was not actually the authority within the ensemble. The bell's reveal has broader implications for the piece in general, however. Revealing that the soprano, who has every air of confidence, is not even reliable in the world of the piece implies that the audience cannot take *IPSA DIXIT* at its word. "She, herself, said it," and she was proven wrong. Therefore, while the text of the piece and the soprano's delivery of it may sound totally sure of itself, it is not necessarily infallible. It places the audience in the middle of the communication issue that Soper made central to the piece. This is something I find most intriguing about how *IPSA DIXIT* communicates; instead of simply presenting ideas to the audience, *IPSA DIXIT* works more like immersive theater by making the audience experience these ideas themselves. In the first section of "Poetics," the audience will experience ineffective communication through the disconnect between the soprano's authoritative lecture and their actual ability to understand what she is saying. When the bell's silence is revealed, they will experience disillusionment at realizing the symbol of her authority is phony.

The bell's reveal also points to a connection to *IPSA DIXIT's* theme of female authority. The bell was at first used to add emphasis to key points, or to signal new sections within the movement's form. Once she begins using it to control the instrumentalists' behavior, however, the bell becomes gradually less effective. The instrumentalists start to ignore her, and she has to ring the bell several times to get their attention. Finally, the instrumentalists ignore her entirely, and her authority is completely nullified. Theatrically, the instrumentalists were willing to allow the soprano to hold her position of authority until she started using it to tell them what to do. It is only after she seems vulnerable that they return again, and she never again rings the bell. This mirrors a broad cultural phenomenon in which women who hold positions of authority are never afforded the same implicit respect that men receive in the same positions. Often, once women begin to act too authoritative without also performing humility, their colleagues become resistant to their directions. It is a paradox; if a woman acts too humble she may not be placed in positions of authority, but if she acts too confident she may be perceived as distastefully forceful.

“Poetics” ends with the soprano speaking the final words “the key to depicting emotion in art is to truly feel the emotions described. Thus the artist is either a talented specialist of imitation…or a lunatic who becomes carried away.” This sentence is yet another example of “Poetics” seeming to tell you something concrete or even profound, but with its answers being difficult to deduce. To say that there is a “key to depicting emotion in art” is illogical, as depicting emotion in art, especially nonverbal art, is not entirely possible. Art can describe, make reference to, or imitate abstract qualities of emotion, but it can’t exactly depict emotions themselves. Also, placing the responsibility of depicting emotion entirely on the artist is unrealistic, as its success depends on the emotions its audience will ascribe to the art. The statement could be seen as a transition to the next movement, and Soper herself has described the connection between these first two movements as being that “Aristotle’s ‘Poetics,’ an examination of what makes good tragedy, leads into the flute duo with all its melodrama and pathos.”[27] Given Soper’s statement, it is fitting that the final words of “Poetics” lead into “Only the Words Themselves Mean What They Say.” In this second movement, the soprano must be emotionally expressive almost to the point of lunacy. However, even then the soprano’s performance does not result from her truly feeling the emotions themselves, and it is more of a wild exaggeration of emotion than a realistic depiction.

While I may be looking at this statement more literally than is necessary for the text of a musical piece, *IPSA DIXIT* invites you to look at words literally and then to challenge that literal interpretation. This idea is certainly thematic in the following movement. I believe the final statement exemplifies “she, herself” authoritatively saying something that is actually impossible in practice. As the final words in the first of six movements, this final statement is a point of departure. It presents a fallacious impression from which future movements can challenge and develop into something that may be closer to the truth. Dogmatically taking statements at their word is immediately scrutinized in the following movement, “Only the Words Themselves Mean What They Say,” one of the most stunningly virtuosic movements in *IPSA DIXIT.*

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[27] Isheda, “5 Questions to Kate Soper.”

II. “Only the Words Themselves Mean What They Say”: A Spectacle of Emotional Extremes and Illusions

“Only the Words Themselves Mean What They Say” is a duo for soprano and flute that utilizes the technical and expressive extremes of each musician’s instrument. The entire movement is comprised of three sub-movements, “Go Away,” “Head, Heart,” and “Getting to Know Your Body,” which each set a text by Lydia Davis. Each sub-movement takes a unique approach to depicting different emotional states. “Go Away” examines emotional extremes in a meta-theatrical way, with the soprano acting as a person rationalizing someone else’s extreme outburst while experiencing extreme feelings herself in response. “Head, Heart” uses a more pared back expressive style to examine the pervasiveness of death and loss, and the associated waves of pain. “Getting to Know Your Body” eschews words almost completely in favor of more abstract and nonliteral communication, and uses different musical sounds and theatrical expressions to provoke basic emotional responses such as confusion or amusement. In many ways, “Only the Words Themselves Mean What They Say” is a spectacle; it requires both musicians to be technically and expressively virtuosic almost to the point of impossibility. I also propose that it relates to the concept of the female spectacle, as the movement resulted from the creative efforts of a woman writer, a woman composer, and women musicians; viewing the movement through this lens also places its focus on feeling states in an interesting context, as the stereotype of being “too emotional” has been frequently weaponized against women, both currently and historically. Overall, “Only the Words Themselves Mean What They Say” structurally functions to build on themes presented in “Poetics” such as depicting impossibilities and not taking the text at its word; it also begins to blur the lines between the way words communicate and the way music communicates.

i. “Go Away”

The first sub-movement, “Go Away,” is wildly mercurial and dramatic. Its text by Davis examines the many layers of meaning that words can have depending on their intention and context, specifically by analyzing a man angrily saying “go away and don’t come back.” Soper’s setting is hyper-specific in its expressive directions in order to generate a performance that highlights different interpretations of this statement. Soper’s setting places the soprano as a character that experienced this outburst and is herself trying to rationalize it. However, the soprano and flute are often scored in a way that blends their sounds together, sometimes so seamlessly that it is difficult to differentiate their sounds. In turn, their roles are also blended, and instead of behaving as singer and accompanying instrumentalist, they largely act as one. This unification of the duo decenters the soprano as the protagonist and instead gives the movement’s message a sense of universality; two separate voices express the same ideas and overlap to the point of becoming indistinguishable. This universality is naturally connected by their shared use of breath to perform their instruments. The constant sound of breath here organically connects to such human experiences as breathing deeply to calm oneself or feeling breathless after speaking rapidly. “Go Away” is an overly dramatic, larger than life depiction of how one might experience the thoughts expressed in Davis’ text. Similar to the unrealistic bell-ringing in “Poetics,” “Go Away” uses heightened expression to get across very intimate ideas in a way that will communicate their meaning more effectively.

“Go Away” immediately blends the soprano’s and flutist’s roles by instructing the flutist to mutter “loudly and unintelligibly” into their instrument, thus having the flutist act as speaker before the soprano. The flutist’s muttering also sets the tone for the movement as anxious and intimate, as it evokes rapidly muttering to oneself. When the soprano enters, she speaks along with the flutist, which keeps their roles united.

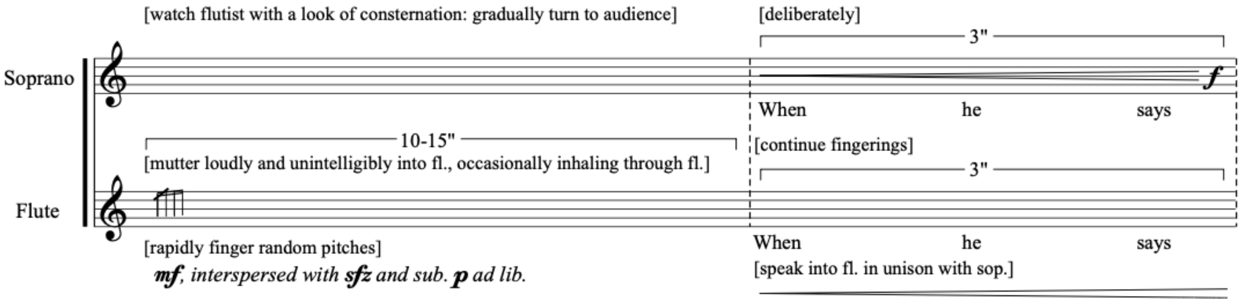

[watch flutist with a look of consternation: gradually turn to audience]
[deliberately]
3"
Soprano
f
When he says
10-15"
[mutter loudly and unintelligibly into fl., occasionally inhaling through fl.]
[continue fingerings]
3"
Flute
When he says
[rapidly finger random pitches]
mf, interspersed with sfz and sub. p ad lib.
[speak into fl. in unison with sop.]

Fig. 7. "Go Away" system 1

In addition to having the musicians speak together, Soper uses several other techniques to blend their sounds. For example, in systems 13 and 15 the soprano articulates only the initial consonants of words while the flutist loudly whispers the entire words, creating what will sound like whole composite words. The audience will be unable to tell which musician is producing which part of the word, and when.

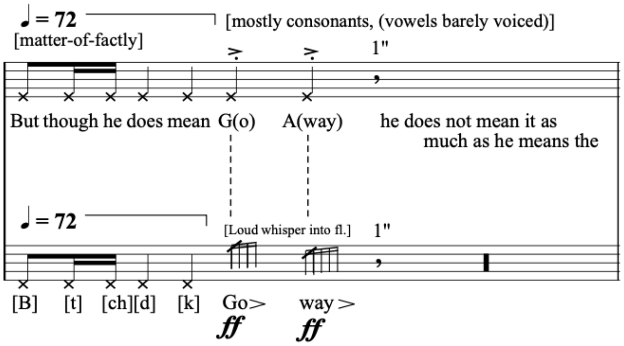

♩= 72
[matter-of-factly]
[mostly consonants, (vowels barely voiced)]
1"
But though he does mean G(o) A(way) he does not mean it as much as he means the
♩= 72
[Loud whisper into fl.]
1"
[B] [t] [ch][d] [k] Go> way>
ff
ff

Fig. 8. "Go Away" system 13

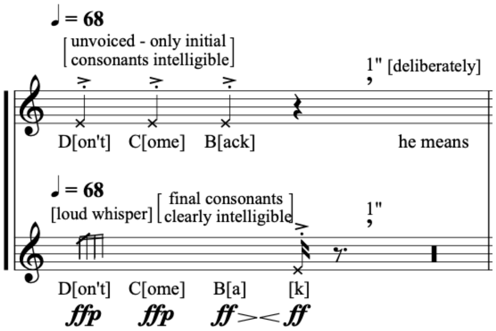
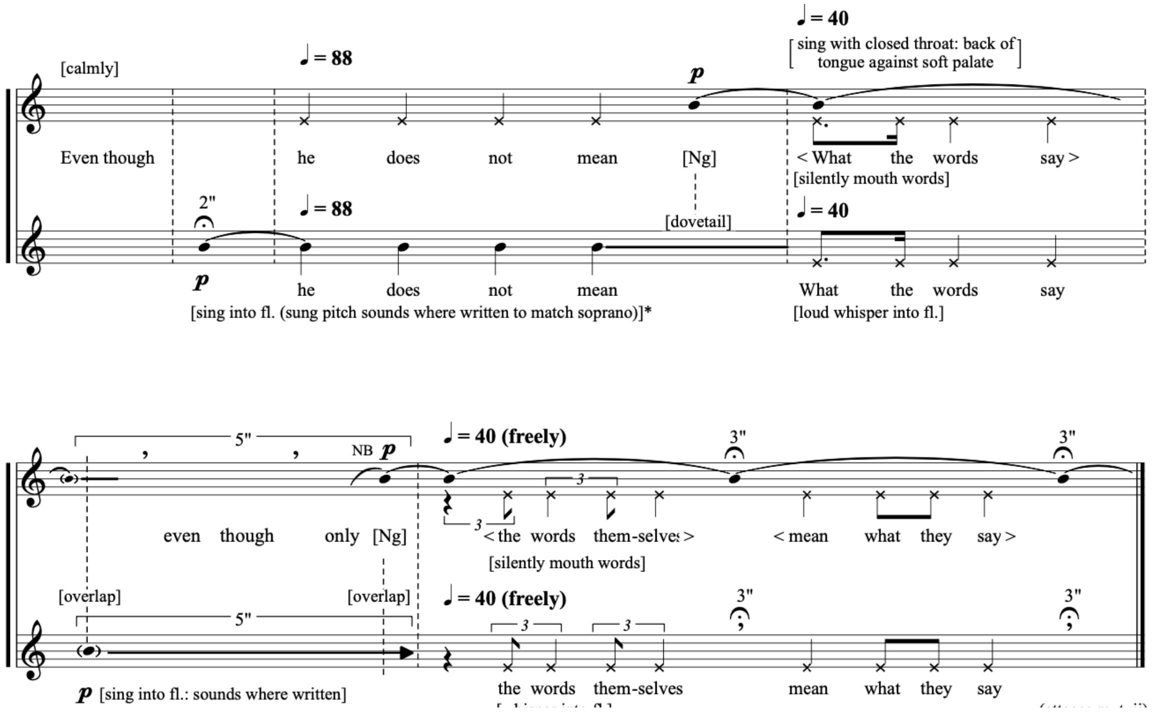

♩= 68
[unvoiced - only initial consonants intelligible]
1" [deliberately]
D[on't] C[ome] B[ack] he means
♩= 68
[loud whisper]
[final consonants clearly intelligible]
1"
D[on't] C[ome] B[a] [k]
ffp ffp ff>< ff

Fig. 9. "Go Away" system 15

Soper also uses lip-sync at times to disguise which musician is speaking. For example, in systems 29 and 30 the soprano and flutist alternate speaking portions of the text with the soprano silently mouthing the words spoken by the flutist, creating an illusion that the soprano is speaking the entirety of the phrase. The effect is similar to the soprano's mimed bell-ringing in "Poetics." When I first heard the piece, I was completely fooled by this lip-syncing until I looked at the score.



[calmly]
♩= 88
p
♩= 40
[sing with closed throat: back of tongue against soft palate]
Even though
he does not mean [Ng]
< What the words say >
[silently mouth words]
2"
[dovetail]
he does not mean
What the words say
[sing into fl. (sung pitch sounds where written to match soprano)]*
[loud whisper into fl.]
5"
NB
♩= 40 (freely)
3"
even though only [Ng]
< the words them-selves >
< mean what they say >
[silently mouth words]
[overlap]
[overlap]
the words them-selves
mean what they say
[sing into fl.: sounds where written]

Fig. 10. *"Go Away" systems 29–30*

Unlike the bell-ringing in "Poetics," however, the lip-syncing is never revealed to the audience. Unless the musicians themselves expose this deception, or one has access to the score, the audience is unlikely to realize that the soprano is lip-syncing the final words in "Go Away." The silent bell's reveal had a significant structural impact, so what could be the purpose of this lip-syncing if it is not revealed to be deceptive, especially at such a pivotal moment as the sub-movement's final measures?

I believe one possible explanation relates to the concept of female spectacle, and to the recurring theme of depicting impossibilities. Lip-syncing has been used throughout the history of musical entertainment, often to maintain an illusion of perfection which is actually impossible. This impossible ideal of perfection has historically been heavily burdened upon women. For example, voice dubbing in films allows directors to cast famous and attractive actresses while maintaining the illusion that they also perfectly sing the part, despite hiring separate women to sing for them. Lip-syncing has been used by musical artists in live performances to seemingly perform without flaws, even while dancing or performing extreme physical acts, to avoid the public derision that accompanies the inevitable imperfections of live performances. Revealing that the actor or performer may have lip-synced could threaten the artist's professional reputation and career, but imperfectly performing live could have similar consequences. It is an impossible situation created by impossible standards, sometimes risking the professional reputation of the female performer. I see the lip-syncing in "Go Away" as a haunting depiction of the impossible female spectacle. Whether or not the audience recognizes the deception, the strange and otherworldly act is taking place, depicting an impossible version of reality.

The wild and dramatic expressiveness of "Go Away" is quite unlike the subdued style of the next sub-movement, "Head, Heart." However, they share a similarly heavy sense of universality. "Head, Heart" confronts the universal experience of dreading death and loss, and in doing so, takes a closer look at how music itself can communicate.

ii. "Head, Heart"

While "Head, Heart" lacks the volatile twists and turns of "Go Away," it is no less powerful. It is much simpler, seemingly using the very basics of language and music to express the pervasiveness and inevitability of loss. The instrumentation of the sub-movement is also simpler; "Go Away" utilized both flute and bass flute to allow for expressive extremes, but "Head, Heart" uses only the bass flute. Soper's musical choices are entirely shaped by the bass flute, which marks an interesting turn in *IPSA DIXIT* towards using the physical properties and limitations of the musical instruments as the foundation for communication. The bass flute's range, tone quality, and construction are all used to generate the melodies in “Head, Heart,” as well as the expressive style of the soprano.

Soper wrote the melodies in “Head, Heart” to follow the overtone series because she wanted the music to have a tangible connection to the text’s themes. In its entirety, the text reads:

> Heart weeps.
> Head tries to help heart.
> Head tells heart how it is, again.
> You will lose the ones you love. They will all go. But even the earth will go, someday.
> Heart feels better, then.
> But the words of Head do not remain long in the ears of Heart.
> Heart is so new to this.
> I want them back, says Heart.
> Head is all Heart has.
> Help, Head. Help Heart.

When describing the organization of this sub-movement, Soper said “because the story of the text is so elemental, I wanted to ground the material in something really inexorable, just some kind of physical feature of music. So, this piece is all based on harmonics of the bass flute, just something that has inevitability and circularity.”[28] When examining communication through words and through movement, I stated that the context and intention with which words or movement are used must be understood by the audience for the communication to be most effective. The elemental quality of these melodies is not likely to be known by the audience, but Soper still chose to ground the melodies in this physical feature of music rather than using a style that is more broadly referential to emotional or physical experiences. Because the words in the text are themselves so simple, “Head, Heart” is an experiment of what musical sound itself can communicate on its own merit. This experiment is trialed throughout *IPSA DIXIT* and most explicitly in “Rhetoric” and “Metaphysics,” but never with any concrete results. Like much of

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[28] Soper, “Kate Soper: Only the Words 10 Year Anniversary!,” YouTube, February 11, 2021, video, https://youtu.be/m2u58RPmgyY.

IPSA DIXIT, I believe this experiment inspires more questions than it provides answers. However, examining the musicians' embodiment of the music may provide one way to understand how the music communicates.

The singing style in "Head, Heart" is modeled on the sound of the bass flute. The soprano imitates the airy tone quality of the bass flute by singing "extremely breathy" and "match[ing] flute timbre as much as possible." Soper also codified a "breath tremolo" technique to further blend the two musicians' sounds together.

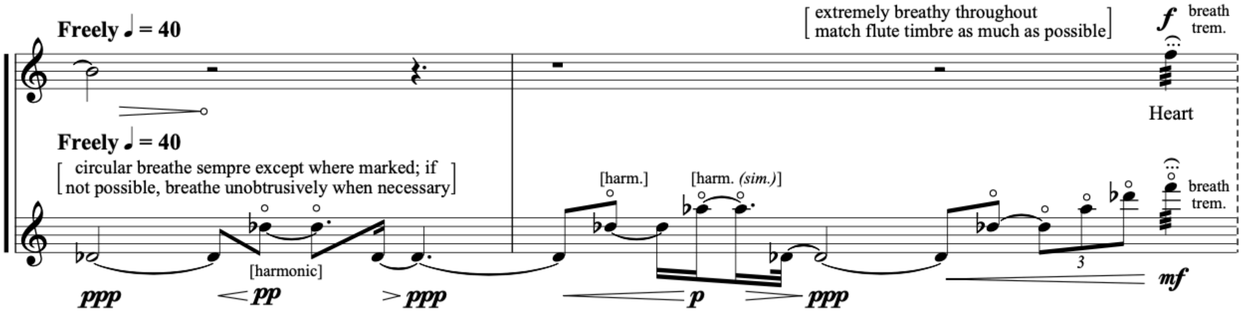

Freely ♩ = 40
[extremely breathy throughout match flute timbre as much as possible]
f
breath trem.
Heart
Freely ♩ = 40
[circular breathe sempre except where marked; if not possible, breathe unobtrusively when necessary]
[harm.]
[harm. (sim.)]
breath trem.
[harmonic]
ppp
pp
ppp
p
ppp
3
mf

Fig. 11. *"Head, Heart" system 1*

I have previously noted the flutist's and soprano's shared use of breath to produce sound, but in "Head, Heart" Soper also capitalizes on the similar tone qualities shared across the two musicians' ranges. The bass flute naturally has a clearer and more full tone quality in its high register, and an increasingly airy tone quality in its lower register. The voice's tone quality is similar to that of the flute's; it is easier to sing very high notes with a loud clear tone, and to sing very low notes with a more quiet and breathy tone. The soprano can generally be expected to sing B3-C4, but the melodies in “Head, Heart” stretch as low as D-flat3. These registral extremes exhibit tone qualities similar to those of the bass flute, but Soper exaggerates these tone qualities even further by specifying that the soprano should sing pitches rising to the highest range as gradually less breathy and pitches falling to the lowest range as gradually more breathy.

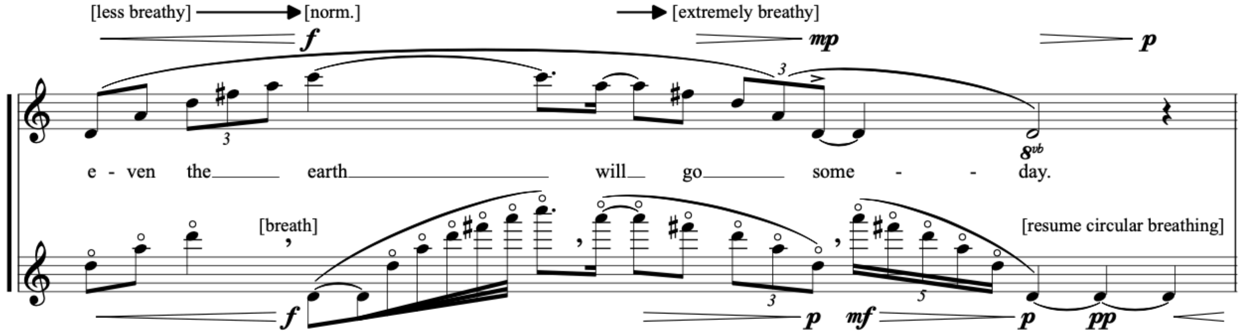
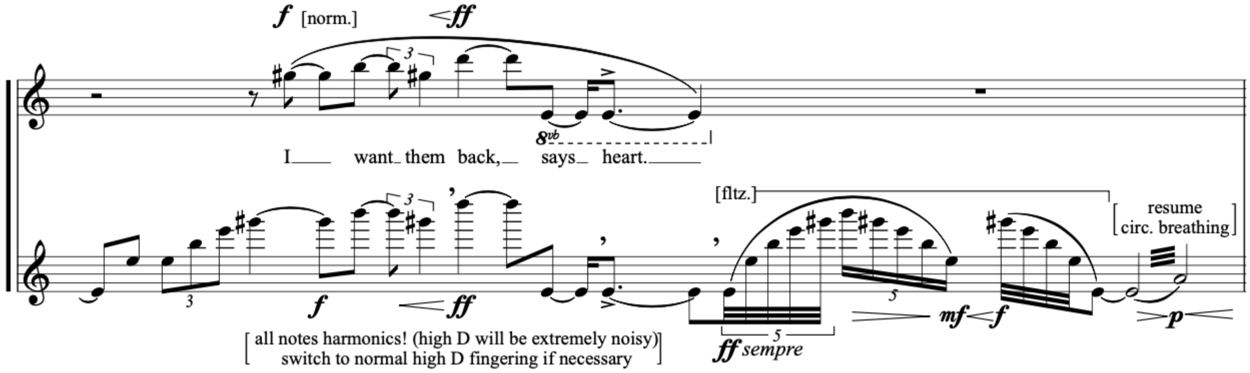

[less breathy]
[norm.]
[extremely breathy]
f
mp
p
e - ven the earth will go some - - day.
8vb
[breath]
[resume circular breathing]
f
p
mf
p
pp

Fig. 12. “Head, Heart” system 5

The dynamics rise and fall along with the melodic contour, which aligns with the natural tendencies of the flute and voice. This contour also aligns with our own breath– the tension of holding the breath in, and the release of letting the breath out. The rise in pitch and dynamic coincides with the emotional intensity implied in the text. This alignment is reminiscent of Sessions’ and Le Guin’s philosophies on musical communication. Sessions observed that “when we raise our voices we increase the intensity of our vocal effort, a rise in pitch implies an increase in tension, and therefore an intensity of energy, or, in other terms, of expressiveness in one direction.” Sessions specified that this expressiveness communicates not “emotion in the specific sense," but rather "emotional energy."[29] Le Guin studied the kinesthetic experience of instrumental performance, examining such phenomena as the tension or relief felt by the musician depending on the level of difficulty or quality of tension required to perform the passage. Le Guin described that producing pitches on the cello descending from the highest register allows a gradual decrease in bow resistance, creating for the musicians' hands "an experience of increasing ease and relaxation, and probably relief."[30] In "Head, Heart," the strongest outcries "I want them back" and "help" are scored in the greatest extremes of both musicians' ranges and with increased volume and tone clarity.



f [norm.]
<ff
3
8vb
I want them back, says heart.
[fltz.]
resume circ. breathing
3
3
f
<ff
[all notes harmonics! (high D will be extremely noisy) switch to normal high D fingering if necessary]
ff sempre
5
5
>mf<f
>p<

Fig. 13. *"Head, Heart" system 9*

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[29] Sessions, *The Musical Experience,* 17–18, 24.

[30] Le Guin, *Boccherini's Body,* 18.

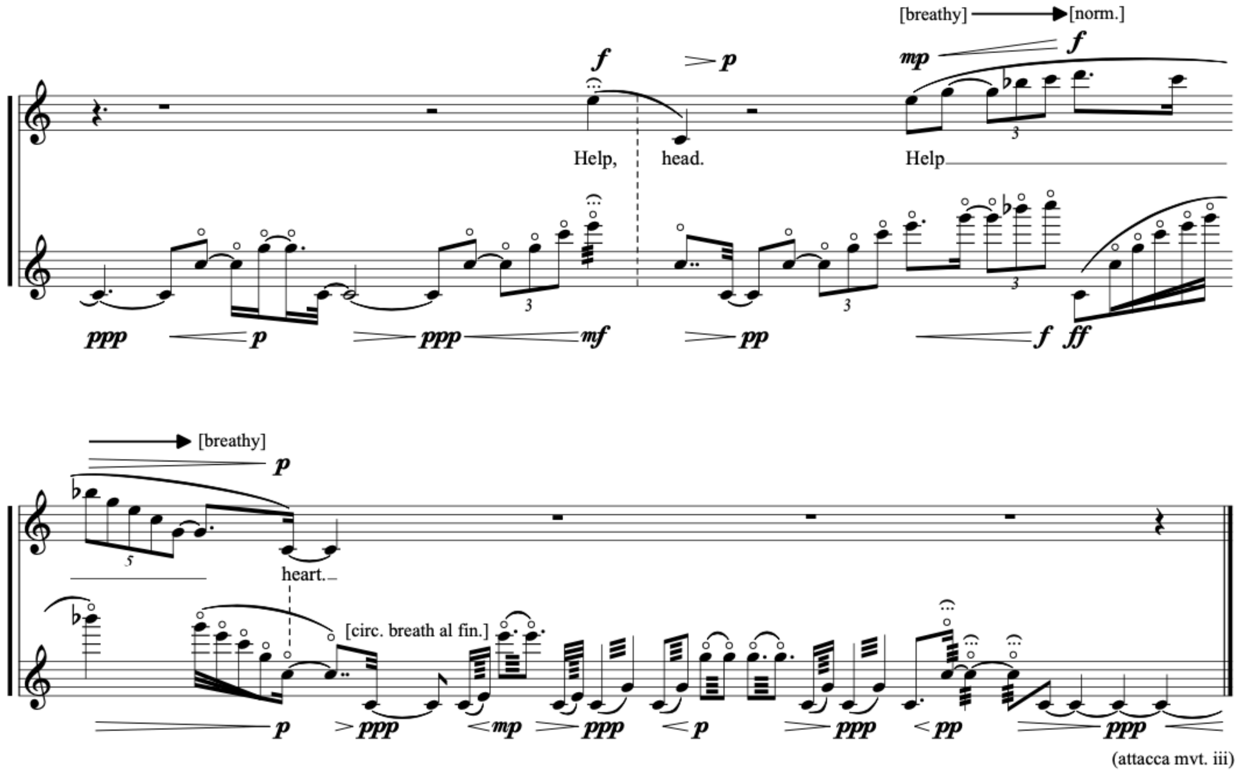

[breathy]
[norm.]
Help,
head.
Help
[breathy]
heart.
[circ. breath al fin.]
ppp
p
mf
pp
f
ff
mp
(attacca mvt. iii)

Fig. 14. *"Head, Heart" systems 11–12*

The climactic pitch of both "I want them back" and "help" is D6, one of the highest pitches of a soprano's range, which naturally communicates intensity. However, the undulating nature of the melodies prevents the D6 as being heard as a climax. Instead, these high points are merely the largest swells of the movement's gently rolling melodic waves, which evokes the circularity of the text's subject matter.

The ideas communicated in the music of "Head, Heart" are much more abstract than those of "Go Away." "Head, Heart" communicates the simple text illustrated by sound. The third sub-movement, however, takes abstractness to the extreme. "Getting to Know Your Body" disavows allegiance to text almost entirely, and instead is a tightly choreographed performance of apparent nonsense.

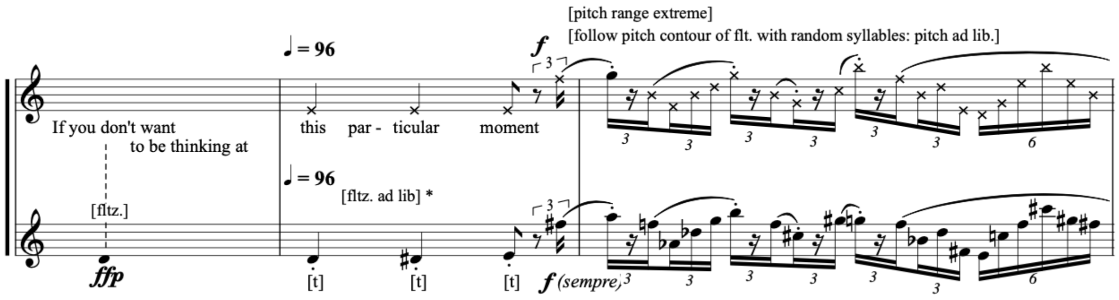
iii. “Getting to Know Your Body”

“Getting to Know Your Body” has the shortest text of any movement, or even sub-movement, of *IPSA DIXIT.* The text is comprised of two sentences:

> If your eyeballs move, this means that you’re thinking, or about to start thinking.
> If you don’t want to be thinking at this particular moment, try to keep your eyeballs still.

The text itself makes up the minority of “Getting to Know Your Body,” as most of the sub-movement’s vocalisms are gibberish. Soper’s setting focuses on the text’s implication of movement, and on starting and stopping. This kind of nonverbal communication, while abstract, is also immediate. Similar to mime, “Getting to Know Your Body” uses exaggerated expression to communicate very simple physicality and emotional states with directness. Scored for soprano and piccolo, this sub-movement showcases the two musicians performing increasingly bizarre passages with total coordination.

Most of “Getting to Know Your Body” features machinelike motoric rhythms formed compositely by both musicians, with one passage in the middle of the sub-movement featuring atonal singsong-like babblings. This passage begins in measure 22, and is comprised of the soprano singing unpitched nonsense mapped over the piccolo’s triplet melodies that rise and fall in a skip-like pattern. Combined, the two musicians’ lines create a bizarre, frenzied sound that evokes playful singsong and hysteria, simultaneously. This passage interrupts the soprano speaking the words “if you don’t want to be thinking at this particular moment,” and exaggeratedly represents the innocence and nonsensical chaos of a mind that is not thinking.


[pitch range extreme]
[follow pitch contour of flt. with random syllables: pitch ad lib.]
♩ = 96
f
If you don't want
to be thinking at
this par- ticular moment
3
6
♩ = 96
[fltz. ad lib] *
[fltz.]
ffp
[t]
[t]
[t]
f (sempre)

* Pitches quasi ad lib: follow contours and rhythms.

Fig. 15. *“Getting to Know Your Body” mm, 20–22*

The machinelike motoric rhythms, particularly in the final section, are virtuosic and extremely difficult to perform. Both musicians must start and stop at exactly the same time without any perceivable coordination or looking at the score. Whether the performers memorize the score or not, the precision and coordination of these irregular entrances is challenging. The performers’ bodies are nearly motionless, not showing any hint of the usual cues that performers rely on to coordinate entrances and tempo changes. The audience will have no way to understand how these two musicians could possibly start and stop at the same time. The effect is reminiscent of the illusions in “Poetics,” but here, there is no sleight of hand: nothing in the musicians’ performance redirects the audience’s attention away from their method of coordination. Still, no method of coordination is perceivable. Similar to the lip-syncing in “Go Away,” the audience is looking directly at the trick in front of them. It is not quite mime, but is somehow mime-adjacent in that it constructs an impossible reality through physical gesture.

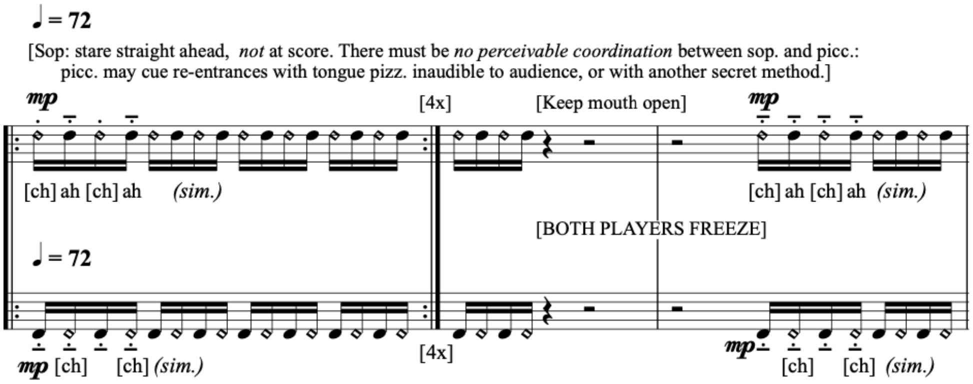

♩= 72
[Sop: stare straight ahead, *not* at score. There must be *no perceivable coordination* between sop. and picc.: picc. may cue re-entrances with tongue pizz. inaudible to audience, or with another secret method.]
mp
[4x]
[Keep mouth open]
mp
[ch] ah [ch] ah (sim.)
[ch] ah [ch] ah (sim.)
[BOTH PLAYERS FREEZE]
♩= 72
mp [ch] [ch] (sim.)
[4x]
mp
[ch] [ch] (sim.)

Fig. 16.*"Getting to Know Your Body" mm. 40–42*

"Getting to Know Your Body" prioritizes communicating the text the least of any movement in *IPSA DIXIT,* and functions more as a dazzling finale to "Only the Words Themselves Mean What They Say" than as a contribution to *IPSA DIXIT's* larger themes. It does not do any direct disservice to *IPSA DIXIT* as a whole, but because it is such a strong ending it does not generate any momentum leading into the next movement. Instead, it makes the entire second movement feel whole and complete. When the third movement, "Rhetoric," follows in performances of *IPSA DIXIT,* I sometimes feel disappointed that another lengthy musical lecture follows what could be a showstopping movement. However, I believe this contrast may point back to the overall themes of *IPSA DIXIT.* The piece takes an authoritative tone, but is not meant to be wholly convincing. The musical lectures in particular are perhaps too lengthy and even arrogant to by entirely persuasive. This tension is especially important for "Rhetoric," as its text centers on persuasive language. The contrast between "Getting to Know Your Body" and "Rhetoric" destabilizes "Rhetoric's" persuasive strength from its outset, which helps prevents "Rhetoric" from sounding as persuasive as Aristotle's text alone might be.

III. “Rhetoric”: Lingual and Musical Persuasion

The third movement of *IPSA DIXIT,* “Rhetoric,” returns to the style of musical lecture. “Rhetoric” sets text Soper adapted from Aristotle’s treatise on the art of persuasion, *Rhetoric.* Soper’s setting not only highlights Aristotle’s conclusions on persuasive language, but also introduces the idea of musical rhetoric. To represent rhetoric in music, Soper wanted to use “unassailable things that happen in music” including triads and twelve-tone structures, because both evoke a quality of there being a “right answer.”[31] Soper first aligns individual “unassailable things” with specific words that are cornerstones of persuasive language, but as the movement continues, these “unassailable things” become folded into larger musical structures like words folded into a persuasive sentence. Similar to “Poetics,” much of “Rhetoric” functions as a metatheatrical commentary on the ideas presented in the text. However, “Rhetoric” also serves as a more concrete exploration of how music communicates by aligning rhetorical language devices with what may be rhetorical devices in music.

Most of “Rhetoric” is comprised of a motoric eighth-note pulse over which the soprano speaks and sings her lecture. This motoric pulse, beginning in measure 9, is initially unpitched. The pulse’s sound is generated by different combinations of the ensemble: the percussionist on the “rattle drum” (the tom with a small chain taped on it), the violinist performing a “crackle” sound by twisting the bow on the string while applying firm bow pressure, the flutist alternating between unpitched “s,” “sh,” and inhale sounds through the flute, and the soprano rubbing sandpaper blocks together. This pulse is irregularly punctuated by pitched gestures performed by varying members of the ensemble. These gestures form simple triadic harmonies but have no apparent harmonic relationship to one another, and do not generate any harmonic momentum from one to the next.

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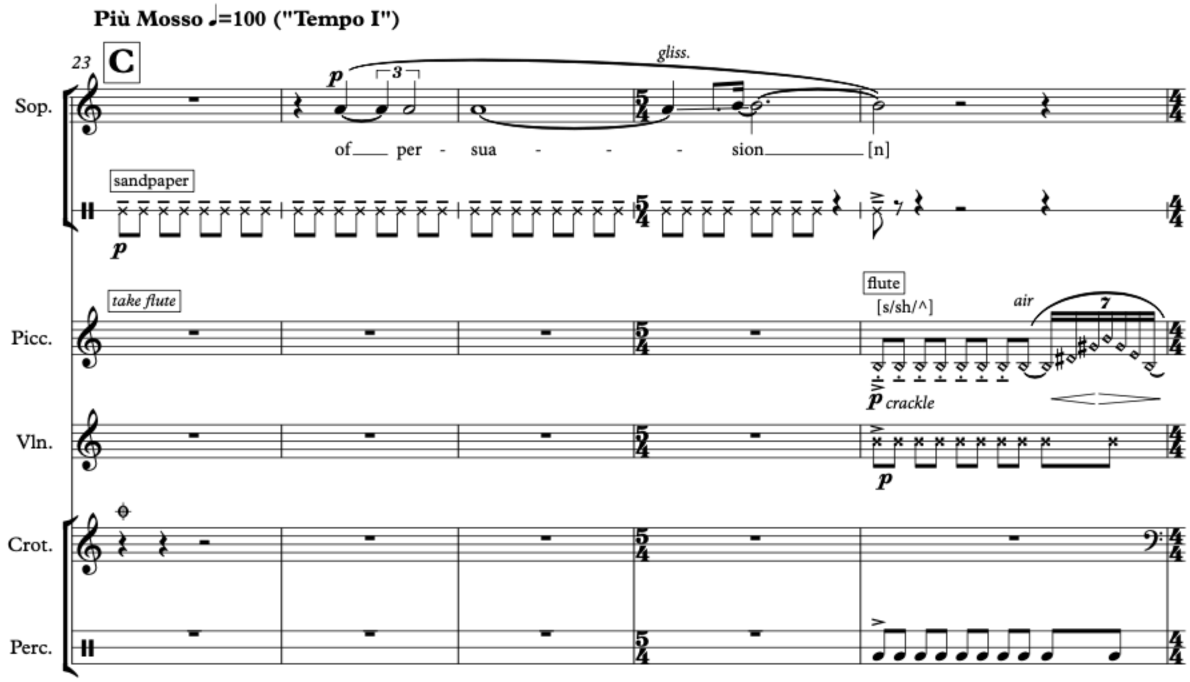
[31] Leland, “An Interview with Kate Soper.”



Più Mosso ♩=100 ("Tempo I")
23
C
Sop.
p
3
gliss.
of per - sua - - - - sion [n]
sandpaper
p
take flute
Picc.
flute
[s/sh/^]
air
7
p crackle
Vln.
p
Crot.
Perc.

Fig. 17. "Rhetoric" mm. 23–27

As the movement continues, however, these gestures begin forming harmonic relationships with one another, and a larger harmonic structure starts to take shape. The motoric pulse itself also becomes more pitched, and gradually forms harmonic support for the soprano's melody. Throughout the first section of the movement there are occasionally moments in which the pulse becomes pitched momentarily, but the pulse gradually becomes consistently pitched leading into measure 128.

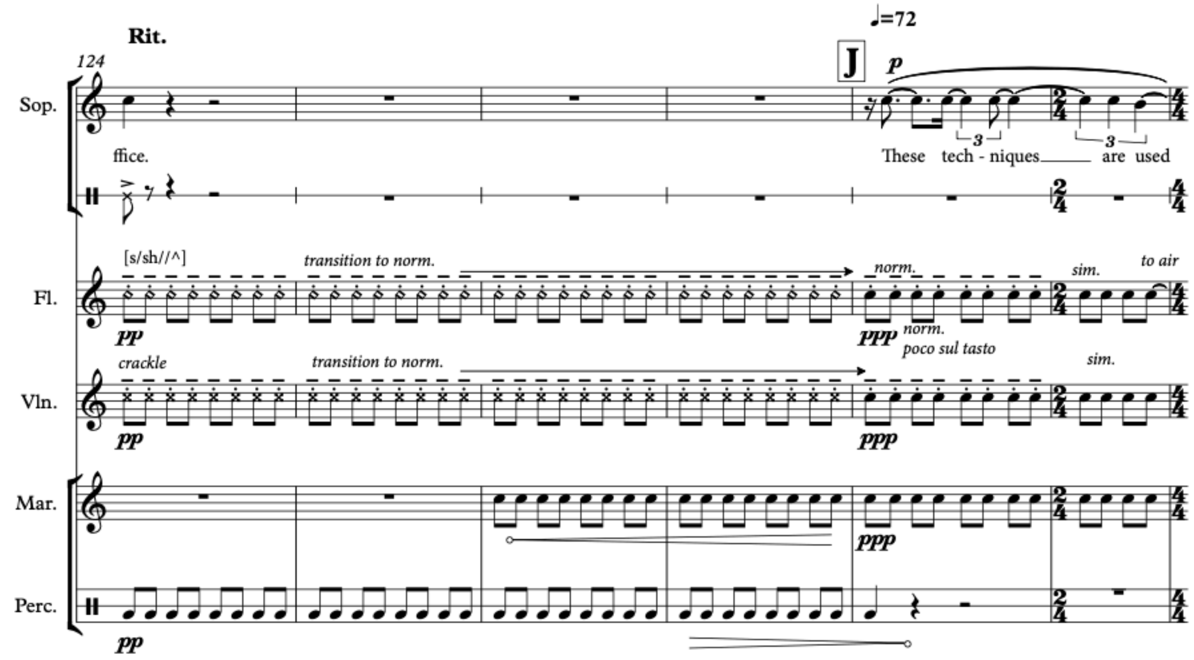

Rit.
124
♩=72
J
p
Sop.
ffice.
These tech - niques are used
3
3
Fl.
[s/sh//^]
transition to norm.
norm.
sim.
to air
pp
ppp
Vln.
crackle
transition to norm.
norm.
poco sul tasto
sim.
pp
ppp
Mar.
ppp
Perc.
pp

Fig. 18. *"Rhetoric" mm. 124–129*

The fact that the instrumentalists' motoric pulse becomes united on the pitch C strongly implies a connection to the concept of musical rhetoric, and of "unassailable things" in music. In Western tonal harmony, C is a paradigm of tonal structures. C is the only pitch whose scale involves no sharps or flats, it is the pitch that begins octave sets, and Middle C on the keyboard is imperative to orientating new pianists to the instrument. In many ways, C is the most central and fundamental pitch in Western tonal harmony. Historically, the key of C major has been described as "pure," "noble," "simple," and "the basis of all further development."[32] From stabilizing on this fundamental pitch, the pitch content of the pulse gradually becomes more complex. In the final section, the pulse develops into interweaving melodic lines throughout the ensemble that create a composite eighth-note pulse over which the soprano's melody soars.

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[32] Rita Steblin, *A History of Key Characteristics in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1983), 223–226.

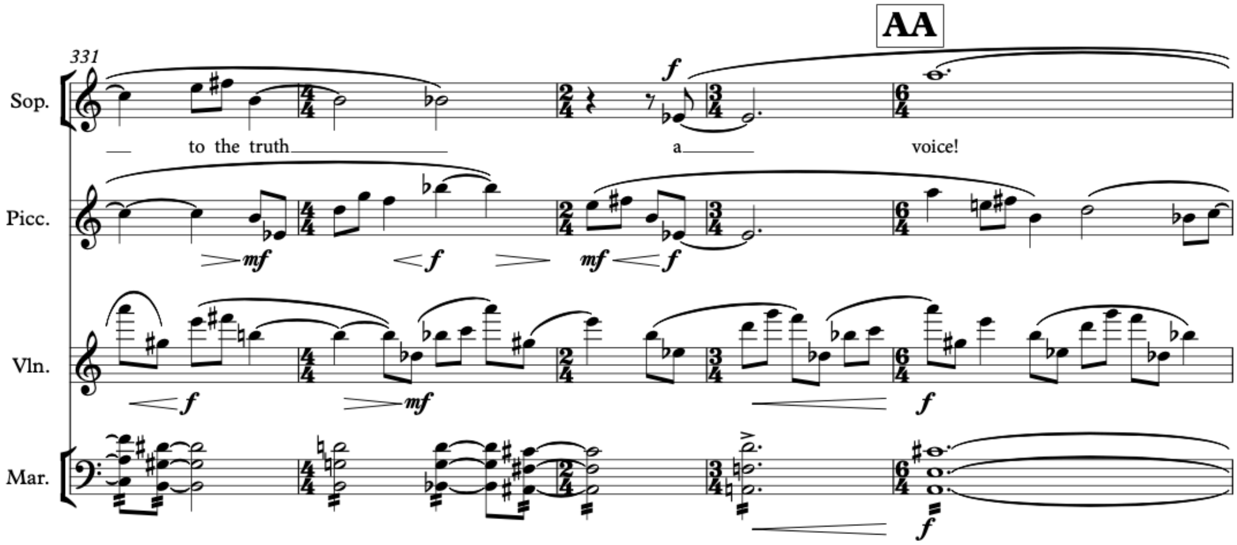


Fig. 19. "Rhetoric" mm. 331–335

The pulse developing into interlocking melodies mirrors the meaning of the text. As the text explicates rhetoric, the accompanying music also more closely resembles functional harmony. Metaphorically, beginning the pitched pulse with C and building to a more dense and harmonically complex pulse represents a sense of starting from the basics to form a persuasive argument. C alone does not have strong rhetorical influence, and it must be placed in a larger musical context for it to have persuasive strength. This is similar to how the text of "Rhetoric" describes "truth." According to the text, truth itself can only be as persuasive as the speaker or writer makes it, and rhetoric's goal is to build a persuasive argument that will convince the listener or reader of the truth's legitimacy. In addition to the pulse, Soper also embeds this concept of musical rhetoric in many of the harmonies that align with significant words in the text.

In the first measures of the piece, the soprano's first spoken word, "rhetoric," is immediately followed by a *forte* B minor triad outlined by the instrumentalists. Throughout the movement, the word "rhetoric" is always given special emphasis with strong harmonic arrivals. To list a few examples, in measure 46 "rhetoric" is underscored by a B-flat minor triadic harmony moving to a G major harmony.

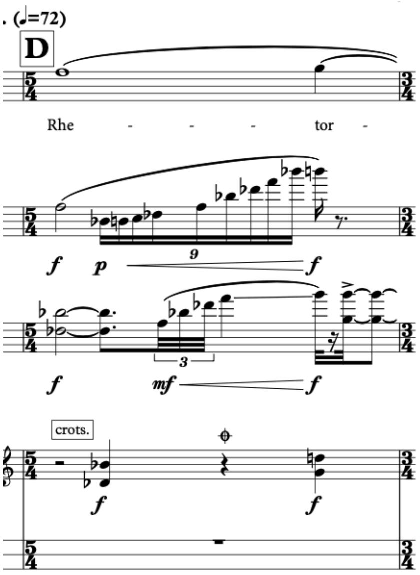
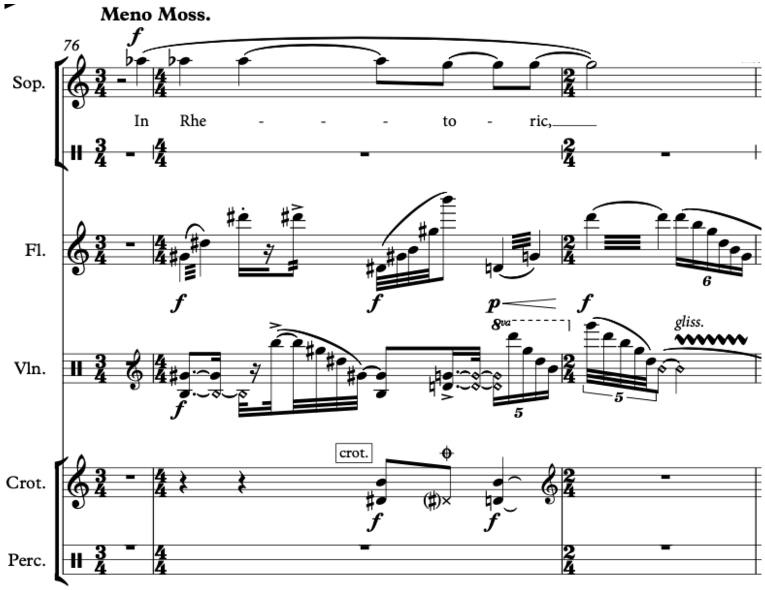


Fig. 20. "Rhetoric" m. 46

In measures 76–78, “rhetoric” is underscored by a G-sharp minor triadic harmony moving to a G major harmony.



Meno Moss.
76
Sop.
In Rhe - - - to - ric,
Fl.
Vln.
Crot.
Perc.
crot.
8va
gliss.
6
5
5
f
p

Fig. 21. “Rhetoric” mm. 76–78

In measures 116–117, “rhetoric” is underscored by an E major triadic harmony moving to a G minor harmony.

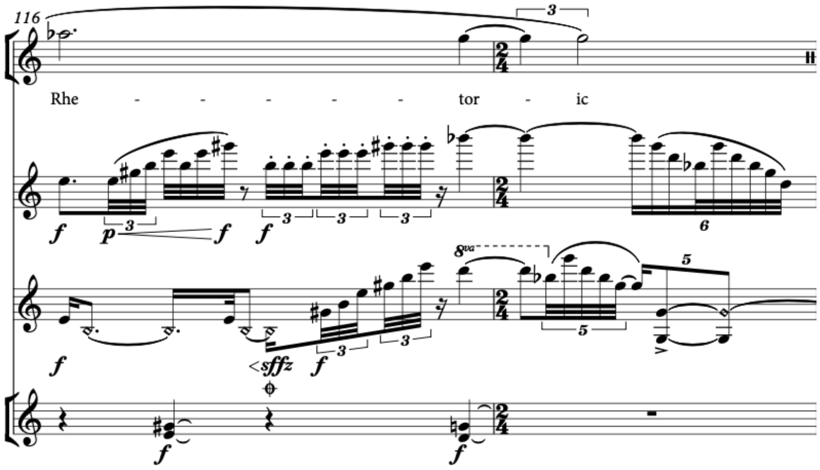


Fig. 22. "Rhetoric" mm. 116–117

These moments always stand out from the surrounding music, as the motoric eighth-note pulse will suddenly be interrupted by these grandiose cadences that stop the music's momentum. Much of "Rhetoric" is dense with lengthy sections of text spoken or sung over the instrumentalists' repetitive eighth-note pulse. The continued density could easily overwhelm the listener, who could become lost. These cadential moments pull the listener's attention back to the piece, and always draw focus to the word "rhetoric" aligned with strong triadic harmonies.

Additional strong harmonic arrivals accompany the words *"ethos," "pathos,"* and *"logos,"* which Aristotle identifies as the three forms of persuasion. In measure 30, *"ethos"* is characterized by harmonies implying an authentic cadence in C major. This moment evokes a particular sense of stability not only because of the strength of the cadence, but also because it tonicizes the paradigmatic pitch C.

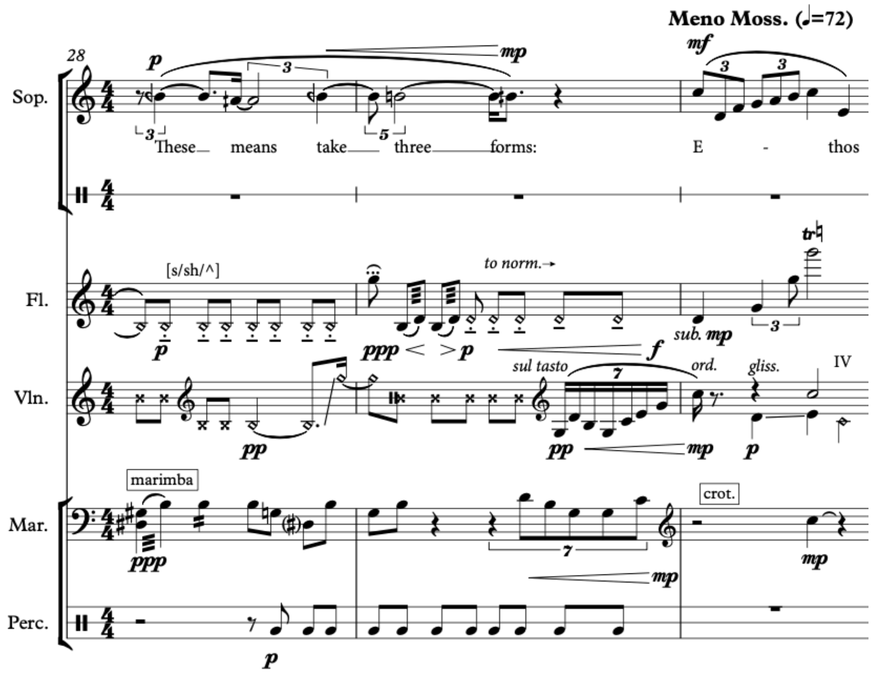

Meno Moss. (♩=72)
28
Sop.
Fl.
Vln.
Mar.
Perc.
These means take three forms:
E - thos
[s/sh/^]
to norm.
sul tasto
ord.
gliss.
IV
marimba
crot.
sub. mp

Fig. 23. *"Rhetoric" mm. 28–30*

In measures 33–34, *"pathos"* is sung by the soprano in a flourishing gesture across her range that evokes a more traditionally operatic gesture. In Soper's performances, she colors this gesture by also singing it in a more traditionally operatic vocal style than she uses throughout the majority of *IPSA DIXIT.* This detail is not written in the score, and instead seems to be a musical rhetorical device she herself adds. The soprano's gesture is underscored by the instrumentalists playing a diminished harmony combined with an emotive *glissando* played by the violinist to evoke a dramatic, melancholy feeling.

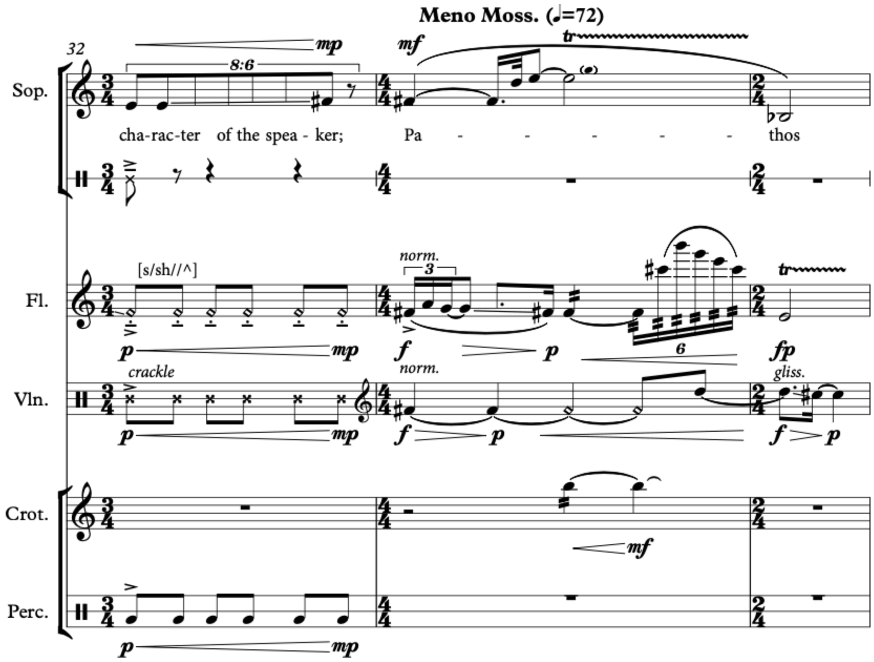

Meno Moss. (♩=72)
32
mp
8:6
mf
tr
Sop.
cha-rac-ter of the spea - ker;
Pa - - - - - - thos
[s/sh//^]
norm.
3
Fl.
p
mp
f
p
6
tr
fp
crackle
norm.
gliss.
Vln.
p
mp
f
p
f
p
Crot.
mf
Perc.
p
mp

Fig. 24. "Rhetoric" mm. 32–34

In measures 37–38, *"logos"* is characterized by the interval of a Perfect 5th outlined by the entire ensemble. The Perfect 5th here is prominent; its impact is informed by the tonal leanings in this movement, and the connection overall with the pitches and intervals of the harmonic series. The instrumentalists outline a C-sharp triad, which further underlines the relationship between C harmonies and "truth" in "Rhetoric."

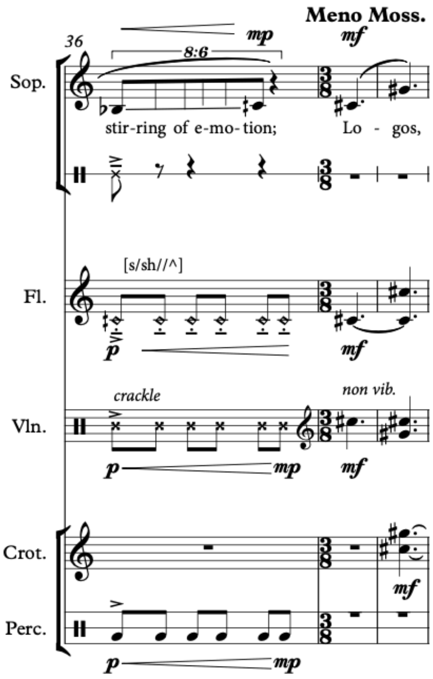

Meno Moss.
36
Sop.
stir-ring of e-mo-tion; Lo - gos,
8:6
mp
mf
Fl.
[s/sh//^]
p
mf
Vln.
crackle
non vib.
p
mp
mf
Crot.
mf
Perc.
p
mp

Fig. 25. *"Rhetoric" mm. 36–38*

Soper also controls the soprano's style of speaking to exaggerate the concept of an argument's persuasiveness depending on how it is expressed. From the movement's opening, the rhythms of the soprano's spoken words are tightly controlled, evoking an unnatural and militant quality that contributes to the machinelike quality of the instrumentalists' accompanying pulse. In measure 337 the soprano's speech becomes rhythmically free but is still not intended to sound natural, with the soprano directed to "speak in a grandiose 'stage voice.'"

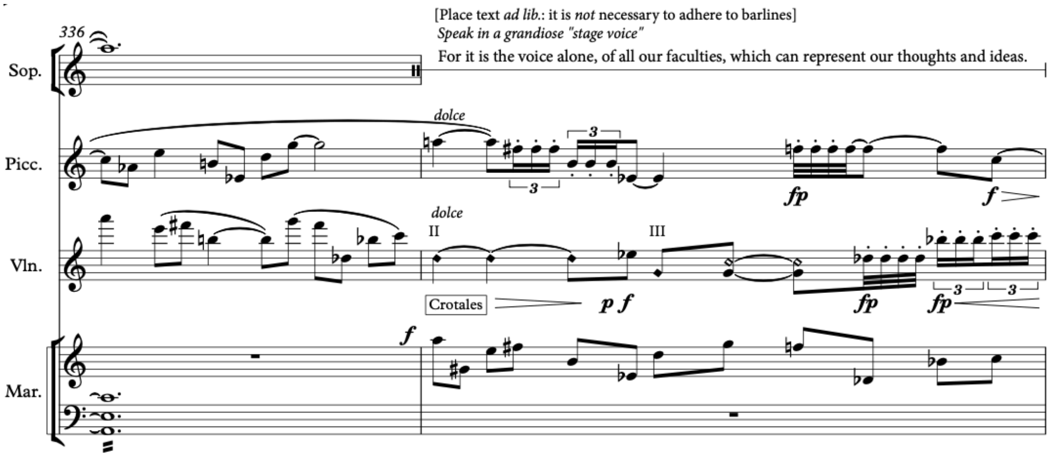

[Place text *ad lib.*: it is *not* necessary to adhere to barlines]
Speak in a grandiose "stage voice"
For it is the voice alone, of all our faculties, which can represent our thoughts and ideas.
336
Sop.
Picc.
Vln.
Mar.
dolce
dolce
II
III
Crotales
p f
fp
f
3

Fig. 26. *"Rhetoric" mm. 336–337*

This "stage voice" contrasts with the "natural voice" used in measure 335, which coincides with the text describing how natural speaking voices come across as more honest to the listener.

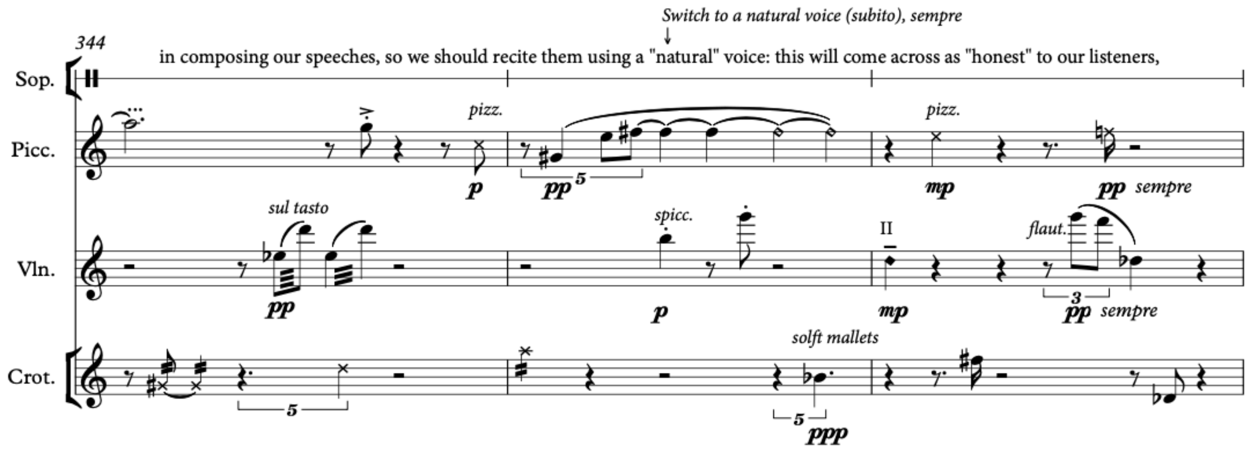

Switch to a natural voice (subito), sempre
344
in composing our speeches, so we should recite them using a "natural" voice: this will come across as "honest" to our listeners,
Sop.
Picc.
Vln.
Crot.
pizz.
p
pp
5
pizz.
mp
pp sempre
sul tasto
pp
spicc.
p
II
flaut.
mp
3
pp sempre
solft mallets
5
5
ppp

Fig. 27. "Rhetoric" mm. 344–346

When describing the ways in which words and music communicate, Soper herself has expressed a bias towards using natural speech for moments in a piece that she wants to come across as more sincere. On this preference, she has stated "when I have a really emotional moment, I usually turn to speech, and I let the music cut out a little bit."[33] Soper's words perfectly describe this moment in "Rhetoric," as gradually the instrumentalists fade to nothing and the soprano alone speaks in this "natural voice." However, as the text further goes on to state that the style of speech can greatly affect the outcome, and that successful persuasion requires careful use of rhetoric, the soprano's style of speech gradually becomes more tightly controlled rhythmically once again. "Rhetoric" seems to contradict Soper's statement, or to expand on it. Whether a natural speaking style is most persuasive depends on the context and the medium in which it is used. To use a "natural" speaking voice in the context of a musical performance requires performing natural speech or imitating it, but the audience can never actually be convinced that the soprano is speaking naturally within this context. This disparity is further magnified by the fact that it is not Soper's sentiments that the soprano articulates, but Aristotle's. Nothing about this moment is sincere or honest, and it can only be an illusion of authenticity. This point relates to the delicate balance women must keep between showing that they are capable without coming across as threatening.

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[33] Leland, "An Interview with Kate Soper."

The return to rhythmic control builds momentum to the final iteration of the word "rhetoric," which is scored with a plagal cadence outlined by the instrumentalists. This strong cadence evokes a sense of finality, but the movement is not over. The percussionist performs a low-register *tremolo* chord on the marimba while each musician takes turns speaking the final sentences of the text: "I have spoken. You have heard me. The facts are before you. I await your judgement." Here, each of the musicians here act as the narrator, and seem to directly ask the audience to consider the arguments made in "Rhetoric" and form their own conclusions. These words would likely have a stronger sense of finality if spoken by the soprano, because she has been acting as the narrator throughout "Rhetoric." However, having each of the musicians speak one of the four sentences destabilizes the conclusion's sense of finality. It adds something new, another element of surprise at the end of the movement. However, it also creates momentum into the next movement and foreshadows the strange theatricality in "The Crito."

IV. “The Crito”: Extreme Contrasts in Uncanny Theater

The fourth movement, “The Crito,” is scored for soprano and percussion. This movement has been described by Soper as “a little stage play.”[34] It is comprised of two sub-movements, “The Dream of Socrates” and “The Crito.” The entire movement is made up of bizarre contrasts. I find it to have some of the most beautiful music in all of *IPSA DIXIT,* contrasted by a necessarily strange and stilted performance of theatrical dialogue, which is contrasted again by extremely broad characterizations made within the dialogue. No one section is quite like the next, and instead of actually feeling like a little stage play, I experience it more as metatheatre; it is like a strange representation of a stage play. As the successor to “Rhetoric,” “The Crito” takes extremely contrasting approaches to examining and demonstrating both lingual and musical rhetoric.

i. “The Dream of Socrates”

The opening of “The Dream of Socrates” is immediately jarring. The violinist appears to read stage directions as if introducing a play, stating “early one morning, the week of his execution, Socrates, asleep in his prison cell, dreams of Achilles.” These words are followed by a beautiful melody sung by the soprano, and the spoken stage directions never return for the rest of “The Crito” or even *IPSA DIXIT.* This is one of the strangest moments in the whole piece. It gives the movement’s opening a surreal quality, and immediately makes the little play of “The Crito” feel like an uncanny representation of itself.

Following the violinist’s strange introduction, the music of “The Dream of Socrates” is one of the simplest settings of *IPSA DIXIT.* The soprano personifies Socrates and sings lilting melodies over the marimba’s softly rolling chords. This passage is similar to how Soper describes the music of singer-songwriters: “they have this vulnerability, and you can understand the words, and they’re singing about themselves.”[35] Soper’s setting accesses this affect by using songwriting techniques that may humanize the soprano’s characterization of Socrates. The soprano’s melody is in the middle of her range, where the words will be especially clear to the listener, and where the soprano’s voice will also sound the most comfortable and even relatable. The melody is simple and almost folk-like, and its ambiguous harmonic impulses keep it from having any sense of conclusion. The melody’s rhythmic values are also simple, and are close to how they would be heard in natural speaking. This humanizing effect is even stronger in the final measures of this sub-movement, when the soprano sings “soon you too will be alone” followed by repeated, contemplative humming.

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[34] Isheda, “5 Questions to Kate Soper.”

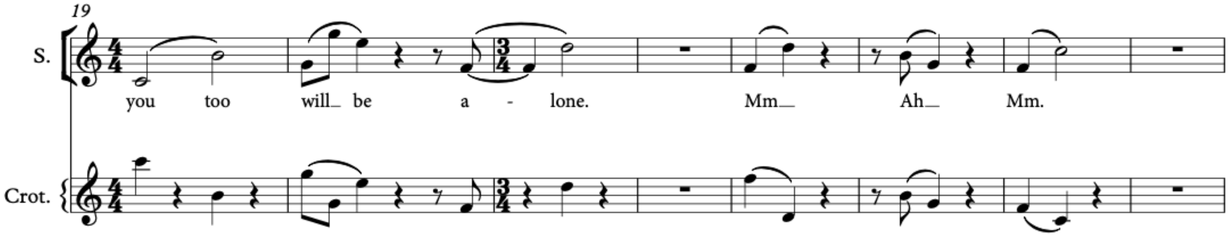

Fig. 28, *“The Crito” mm. 19–26*

The melody of this humming gently rocks across simple intervallic changes across the middle of the soprano’s range, and evokes someone singing to comfort themselves or even a lullaby. There is no sense of conclusion, and the humming continues until it eventually fades into silence. The soprano's characterization of Socrates is more personable and relatable than her characterization of Aristotle's texts in "Poetics" and "Rhetoric," and the simplicity of the music gives her character a kind of vulnerability. This is almost immediately contrasted, however, by her characterization of Socrates in the second sub-movement, "The Crito." Socrates' characterization in "The Crito" is much more bombastic and less personable, and is at times even overwhelming.

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[35] Leland, “An Interview with Kate Soper.”

ii. "The Crito"

The opening of the second sub-movement, "The Crito," immediately introduces a new musical style. Both musicians speak as if they are actors in a play, with the soprano characterizing Socrates and the percussionist characterizing Crito. As they act, the musicians must simultaneously play notes on the marimba across from one another. Their dialogue imitates a conversation between friends, but the choreography of speaking while playing the marimba prevents the dialogue from sounding relaxed. It is like they are conversing while working on something together that requires their focus. This choreography gives the dialogue a heightened, almost stilted quality. As the movement progresses, the choreography gets even more complex. As an audience member myself, I initially felt that this virtuosic choreography got in the way of the play's performance. However, after learning more about the thematic intentions of *IPSA DIXIT,* I now interpret this play as being intentionally uncanny. There is a palpable tension between the musicians trying to act in this play while also playing the marimba. The audience is immersed in this tension in a way that is reminiscent of "Poetics." In "Poetics," the meaning of the text was obfuscated in a way that would cause the audience to experience feelings associated with ineffective communication in order to demonstrate the fallaciousness of *IPSA DIXIT.* "The Crito" similarly suggests a sincere effort at play performance, but the choreography distracts from the play’s performance. The play inside “The Crito” is another illusion. As the movement following “Rhetoric,” “The Crito” seemingly prevents the musicians from performing persuasively. This effect is dramatically foiled by the music of the next section, which exaggerates rhetorical persuasion to an extreme degree.

In measure 81, the musical texture changes dramatically. The soprano suddenly begins loudly singing in her highest register, and the percussionist accompanies with a jarring tam-tam crash and glittering crotale melodies. Within the play, this change occurs when Socrates begins personifying “The Laws” to argue on their behalf. The character of Socrates is arguing to Crito that laws must be obeyed, regardless of how one personally feels about their consequences. To do so, the music characterizes “The Laws” as an almost inhuman, or even Godlike.

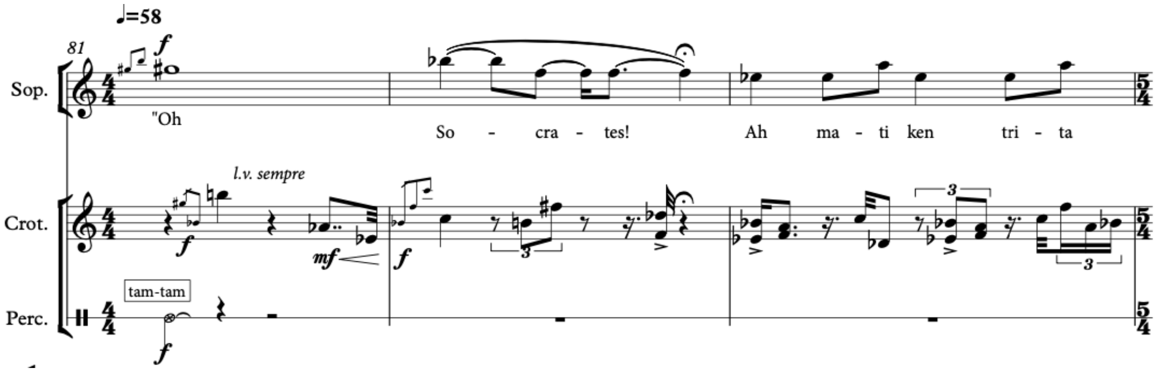
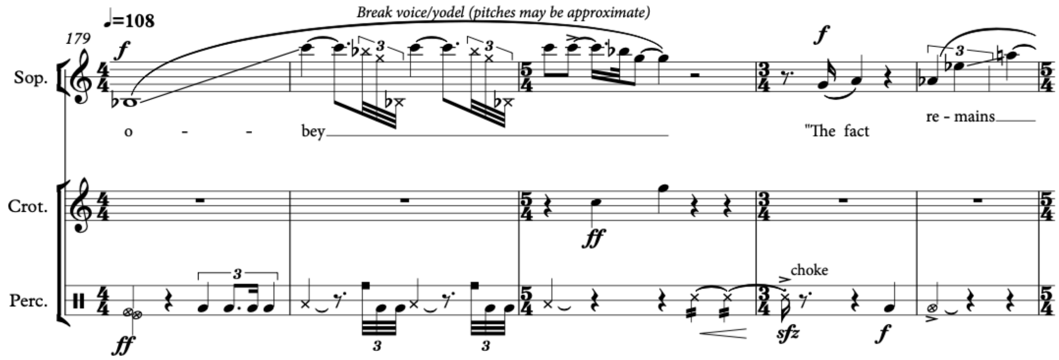


Fig. 29. “The Crito” mm. 81–83

This music is a stark contrast not only to the dialogue in the previous section, but also to the vocal music in the first sub-movement. In “The Dream of Socrates,” the simple melodies placed in the middle of the soprano’s range seemed to humanize the soprano’s characterization of

Socrates. In contrast, The Laws' characterization pushes the soprano's vocalisms to the absolute extreme. The Laws' melodies span the entirety of the soprano's vocal range very quickly, with huge glissandi and yelp-like yodeling connecting the soprano's lowest and highest pitches.



♩=108
179
Break voice/yodel (pitches may be approximate)
Sop.
Crot.
Perc.
o - - bey
"The fact
re - mains
choke
f
ff
sfz

Fig. 30. "The Crito" mm. 179–183

The Godlike power of The Laws' characterization is starkly contrasted by Socrates' characterization of an opposing argument. The music is suddenly much simpler, with the soprano and percussionist playing high-pitched eighth-note melodies that often squirm around by half-step motion or other close intervals.

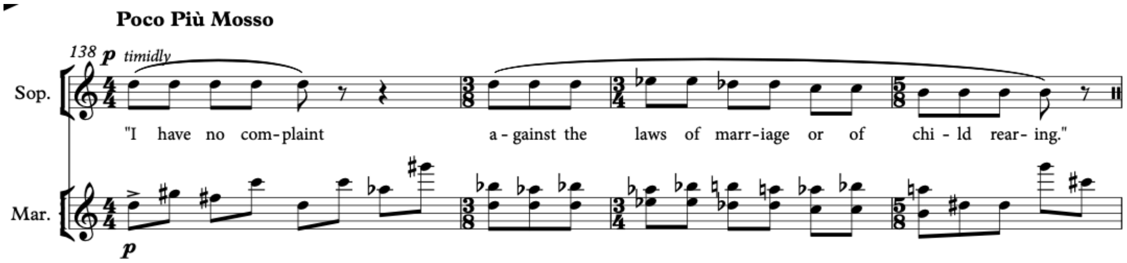

Poco Più Mosso
138
p
timidly
Sop.
"I have no com-plaint a-gainst the laws of marr-iage or of chi-ld rear-ing."
Mar.
p

Fig. 31. *“The Crito” mm. 138–141*

“The Crito” does not characterize The Laws or the opposing argument fairly; The Laws are characterized as Godlike while the opposing argument is characterized as meek, timid, and ridiculous. The effect is similar to when a person recounts an argument but characterizes their opponent with a silly voice to disparage their point of view. Soper embeds these encoded meanings into the music of The Laws’ hypothetical opponent so that the audience will understand Socrates’ tone as mocking. Soper’s Socrates presents not just a factual argument, but also uses musical rhetoric to make his argument more convincing and to make the opposing argument appear silly and inadequate.

The final section of “The Crito” is scored with ghostly melodies sung by the soprano and mirrored by the percussionist’s crotales, all underscored by a soft tam-tam *tremolo.*

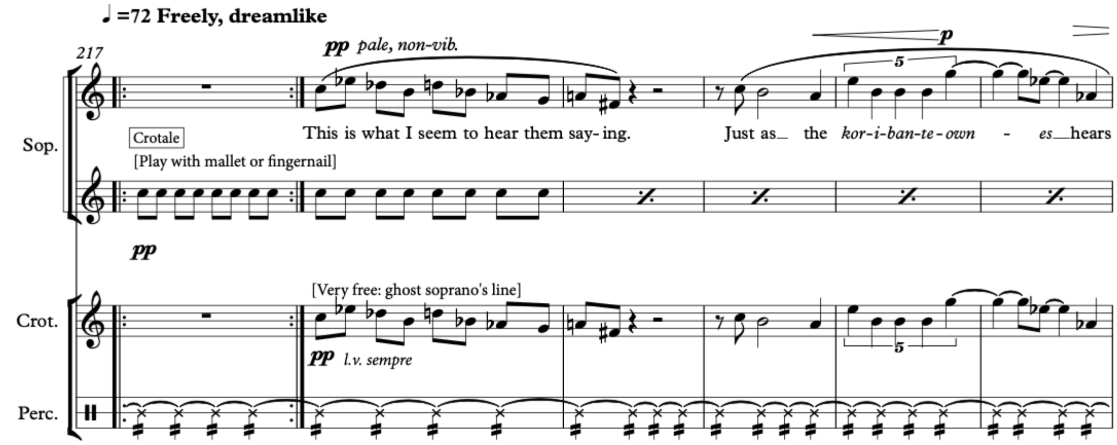

♩=72 Freely, dreamlike
217
pp pale, non-vib.
p
5
Sop.
This is what I seem to hear them say-ing.
Just as the kor-i-ban-te-own - es hears
Crotale
[Play with mallet or fingernail]
pp
Crot.
[Very free: ghost soprano's line]
pp l.v. sempre
5
Perc.

Fig. 32. *"The Crito" mm. 217–222*

This musical style is more reminiscent of "The Dream of Socrates," and the soprano returns to singing more simple and lyrical melodies in the middle of her range. These melodies are directed to be sung "pale" and with no vibrato, which serves as an expressive foil to the drama of The Laws' argument. Socrates invites Crito to present a counterargument by stating "but speak if you have anything to say." Crito does not speak, and his silence is accentuated by the tam-tam *tremolo.* Socrates' invitation feels insincere, as he has already characterized any opposing arguments as being silly. His invitation, then, is another illusion.

V. “Metaphysics”: Representing the Unknowable in Music

The fifth movement, “Metaphysics,” sets text from Aristotle’s doctrinal work *Metaphysics*. *Metaphysics* is a fourteen-book treatise which classifies knowledge of all perceivable things, such as substance, matter, form, and cause, while also proposing the existence of an imperceivable realm. Aristotle teleologically argues that there must be a final state that all things strive to reach, and that this final state is entirely comprised of thought. The arguments for the perceivable and unperceivable are treated as equals within the text, but the imperceivable is entirely unprovable. In Soper’s “Metaphysics,” there is a tension between the perceivable features of music-making– such as the physical characteristics of instruments or musical sound– and the imperceivable– such as musical impulse and intentions. This tension is reminiscent of the tension between truth and apparent truth which recurs throughout *IPSA DIXIT.* In Soper’s setting, music functions as a metaphor for the concepts examined in the text. Conversely, the text is commenting on the tension between what can be perceived and not perceived in music-making. Over the course of the movement, Soper aligns concepts in the text with specific musical sounds or theatrical actions to align the apparent truths of physical existence with those of music-making.

The musical material in “Metaphysics” develops similarly to that of “Rhetoric,” in that it begins with very simple and ephemeral musical gestures that gradually become more complex and fully formed over the course of the movement. This musical development coincides with the development of the ideas in the text. “Metaphysics” opens with a question spoken by the soprano, “we all by our nature desire to know, but how is knowledge acquired?,” followed by an intermittently sung statement, “we are none of us able to know the whole of truth, yet neither can each of us fail completely in knowing some part of the nature of things.” This establishes a central dichotomy of “Metaphysics,” and a juxtaposition: awareness of certain knowledge being unattainable, and the continued search for these unknowable answers. Each spoken statement is underscored by ghostly short atonal gestures that have an almost slippery quality, faintly entering and leaving before the listener can truly grasp them. As the text continues to explicate the details of what is perceivable, the music also becomes more present.

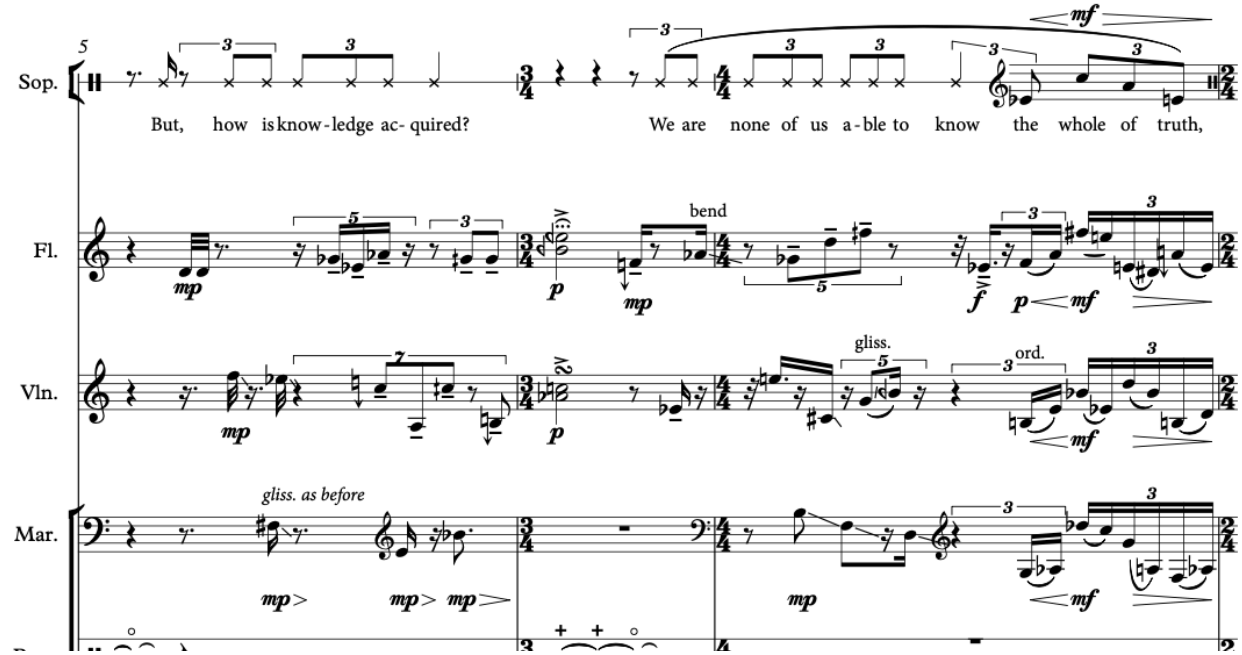

5
Sop.
Fl.
Vln.
Mar.
But, how is know-ledge ac- quired?
We are none of us a-ble to know the whole of truth,
gliss. as before
bend
gliss.
ord.
mp
p
f
mf

Fig. 33. “Metaphysics” mm. 5–7

The broad philosophical points in “Metaphysics” are always set apart from the rest of the musical texture, but Soper’s setting usually demarcates questions regarding perceivable things with speech, and questions whose answers are purely conceptual with music. In measure 37, the entire ensemble loudly asks “what is the nature of being?” in unison, and in measure 56 the entire ensemble quietly asks “what causes things to be?” in unison. For both of these questions, the momentum of the music stops, leaving only words. Both questions are then followed by the soprano providing an almost entirely spoken explanation while the instrumentalists provide musical examples, which is reminiscent of the texture of “Poetics.” By contrast, the next statement to stand out from the rest of the texture does so through musical harmony and temporal changes. The harmony accompanying the soprano’s sung words, “our taste for enjoyment is the cause of music,” gradually settles into an A-flat major triad, which is quite unlike the culminating music. Additionally, a *rallentando* extends the phrase, and a *fermata* follows it to further demarcate this moment from the surrounding texture. This moment marks the text’s turn toward examining abstract concepts with a shift from speech to music. Shortly after, another broad philosophical question is posed, “what does it mean to be?” Unlike the previous philosophical questions, this question is also sung by the soprano and accompanied by the instrumentalists. The explanation that follows this question relates entirely to music; the soprano states “I do not come to be myself only when I am musical, nor do I cease to be me when I lose this characteristic,” with the word “musical” sung as if it were a dramatic opera melisma. Not only does this moment directly align the concept of “being” specifically with “being musical,” but it is also meta-theatrical. In this moment, the soprano is almost self-reflective, as she is examining this topic *as* a soprano who does not exist only within the context of this piece. This moment leads to one of the recurring motifs of “Metaphysics,” in which the soprano posits the existence of some “fundamental substance” from which all things originate.

The phrase “fundamental substance” is set with one of the most distinct musical sounds in the entire movement. The soprano sings in the lower half of her range on a repeated E-flat4 while the violinist and flutist play extremely high pitches colored by microtonal oscillations. The entire gesture is underscored by a tam-tam crash. This phrase first appears in measure 93 and recurs several times throughout the movement, always scored in almost exactly the same way. The distinctness of the phrase's setting will always draw the listener's attention, and its repetition implies it has special significance within "Metaphysics."

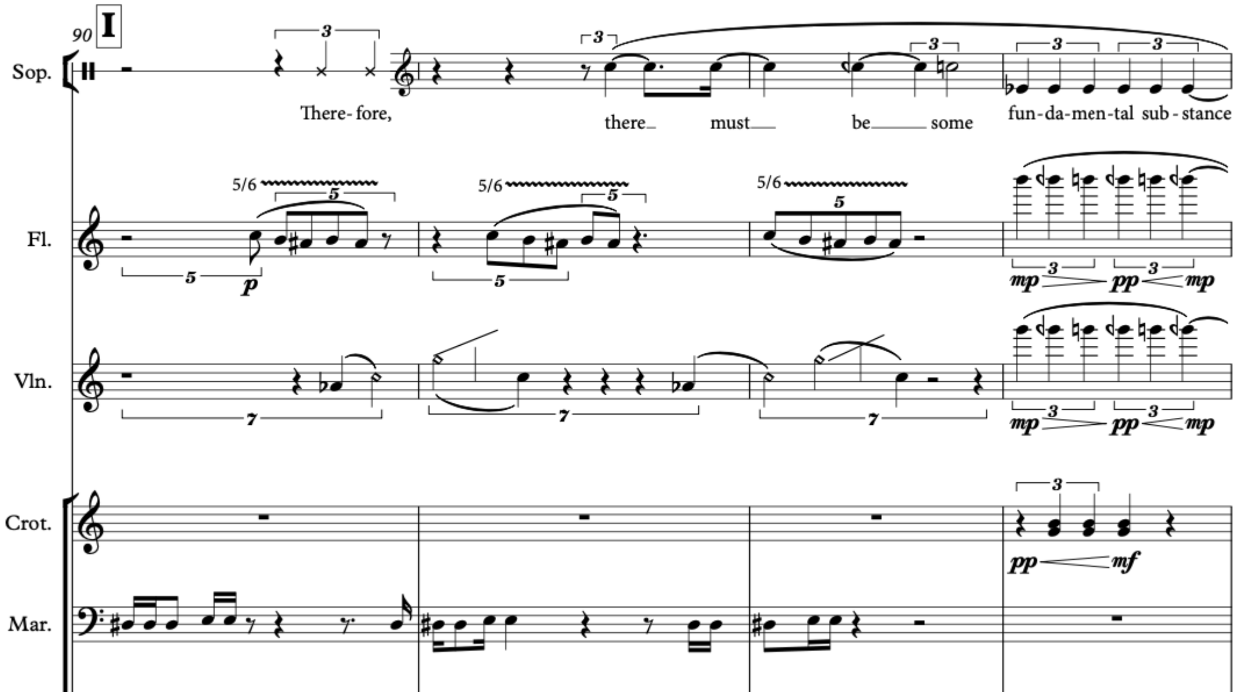

90
I
Sop.
Fl.
Vln.
Crot.
Mar.
There- fore,
there
must
be
some
fun- da- men- tal sub- stance
5/6
p
mp
pp
mp
mp
pp
mp
pp
mf

Fig. 34. *"Metaphysics" mm. 90–93*

The arrival of "fundamental substance" implies structural significance; after its first appearance, the music and the text work together in a way that not only demonstrates the meaning of the text, but also the text in direct relationship to the concept of music-making. In measures 95–99, the text “as all complex sounds consist of the same constituent parts” is scored with music that implies the overtone series. In measures 100–109, the soprano states “when the physical characteristic of things, the length and breadth and depth are stripped away, that which remains we call matter.” She speaks these words to the percussionist, who is performing a drumroll gesture on the tom, and she removes the drumhead as she finishes her statement. She displays the detached drumhead to the audience as she says the words “we call matter,” which theatrically communicates that the drumhead is “matter.” Each of these physical characteristics of music are part of what is perceivable about music-making, but none of them explain the nonphysical impulse to make music. The text goes on to state that matter cannot be the “fundamental substance,” as that must be something eternal that does not change. Because the drumhead was used to exemplify “matter,” this statement implies that the fundamental substance of music-making cannot be the physical instruments themselves, as music-making can continue in spite of these instruments changing or being removed entirely. The connection between the text and the concept of music-making is intensified when the text examines form.

In measures 133–138, the text states that “when the object is taken apart, the form no longer exists but the elements exist.” As the soprano intermittently sings and speaks these words, she gradually removes the flute body from its head joint, all while the flutist continues to play. She then separates the flute body from its foot joint and displays these pieces to the audience while singing “these elements are made of elements.” She next sings that “the fundamental substance must be indestructible, unable to be broken apart.” This moment’s theatricality leading into the soprano’s description of the “fundamental substance” as “unable to be broken apart” further implies a tactile connection between the text and music-making, as the flutist’s musical impulse was shown to continue in spite of the flute being broken apart. The development of this tactile connection facilitates the communication of one of the most highly conceptual ideas in the text, that the "fundamental substance" exists beyond the realm of perceivable things.

In measures 154–159, the soprano sings "when individual things are removed from our senses, how can we be completely certain that they still exist?" After the first half of this phrase, she takes the violin out of the violinist's hands. As she continues, the violinist holds their position and continues miming the gesture they had been playing. This is immediately followed by the statement "the fundamental substance must exist apart from the realm of perceivable things." Because previous iterations of the "fundamental substance" were theatrically aligned with the concept of music-making, the theatricality of this moment implies that the fundamental substance of music-making must exist in this unperceivable realm. The violinist's mime theatrically communicates that their musical impulse remains even without having their instrument. The exaggerated theatricality of this moment helps ground the concept of an unperceivable realm in something that can be immediately understood and related to by the audience. Similar to the ideas presented in the text, we can make increasingly acute observations about how music interacts with our brains, but we cannot entirely explain why or how our penchant for music-making came to be. It stands to reason that there must be some explanation for this phenomenon, but such an explanation can never be proven, just as Aristotle's suppositions on an unperceivable realm can neither be proven nor disproven.

The final section of "Metaphysics" introduces Aristotle's concept of a nonphysical "state of supreme contemplation" in which we all long to be. This idea is highly conceptual, but Soper aligns it with music in a way that grounds it and makes it relatable to the audience. The soprano's final sung text, “we long to be in that state of supreme contemplation, and we sometimes are,” is followed by an extended musical passage performed by the instrumentalists.

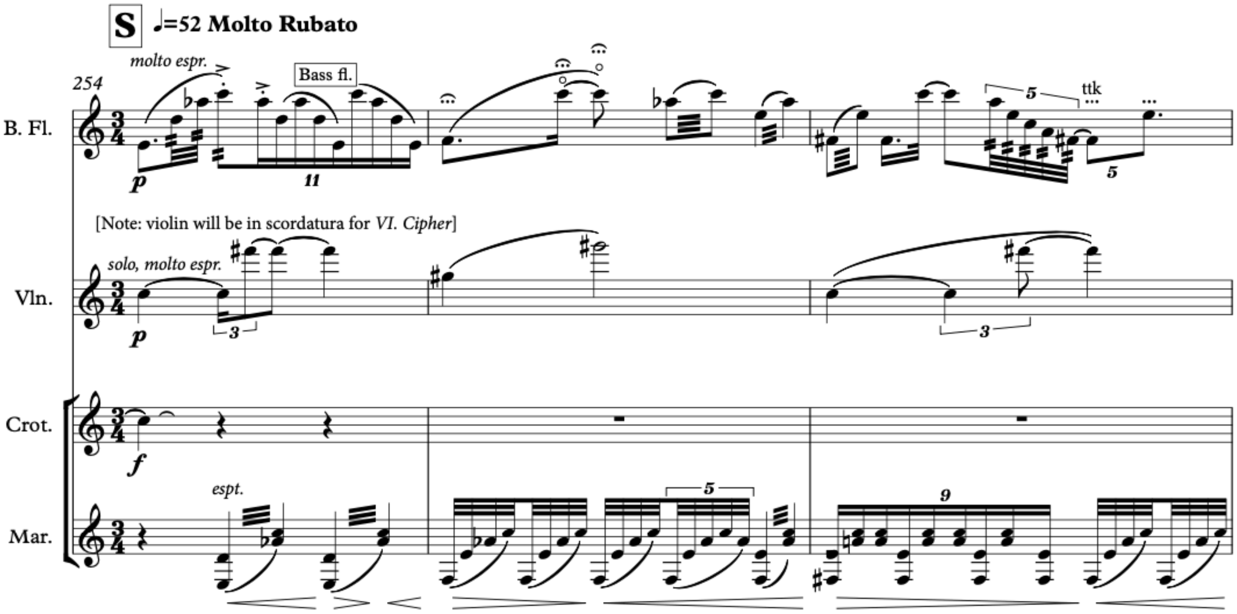

S
♩=52 Molto Rubato
254
molto espr.
Bass fl.
ttk
B. Fl.
[Note: violin will be in scordatura for VI. Cipher]
solo, molto espr.
Vln.
Crot.
espt.
Mar.

Fig. 35. “Metaphysics” mm. 254–256

The juxtaposition of these two events aligns the imperceivable state of supreme contemplation with music-making. This juxtaposition further functions to resolve the tension culminating throughout *IPSA DIXIT* between what can be perceived and what is still unknowable. The “supreme contemplation” seems to exist within the context of not knowing or understanding. Explaining any of these concepts with certainty will inevitably require some amount of fallaciousness, as our own perception of them is so limited. By concluding with a musical demonstration, “Metaphysics” moves away from attempting explanation, and instead leans into the unknowable. In my own experience, I have often listened to this final section and sat in complete wonder of its beauty, unable to reason why it has such a strong effect on me. I believe that this is the intended effect of "Metaphysics'" ending. Instead of analyzing and explaining, the final music of "Metaphysics" invites us to just listen and feel. It may be that accepting these things as unknowable, and simply experiencing them as they are, is the state of supreme contemplation.

While "Metaphysics" seems to comfortably surrender to the unknowable, it does not conclude the entire piece. It is immediately followed by the final movement, "Cipher." I hear "Cipher" as leaning further into the unknowable by expanding to an examination of lingual communication and communication in general. "Cipher" exaggerates the inadequacies of communication presented throughout *IPSA DIXIT,* and offers a possible conclusion to the question of whether or not real communication is possible.

VI. “Cipher”: Communicating Incommunicability

The sixth and final movement, “Cipher,” is a thrilling duo for violin and soprano. “Cipher” contains four sub-movements, each named for the authors of its texts: “Jenny Holzer (feat. Ludwig Wittgenstein),” “Pietro Bembo (feat. Michael Drayton),” “Introducing Sigmund Freud," and “Guido d’Arezzo presents Sarah Teasdale (feat. Jenny Holzer).” While I do find “Cipher” to be strong on its own, it is even more effective as the finale of *IPSA DIXIT.* Within itself, “Cipher” poses questions about the successes and failings possible when communicating with words or music. When placed at the end of *IPSA DIXIT,* however, these questions serve a structural function. “Cipher” returns to concepts previously explored throughout earlier movements to create a sense of recapitulation. The conclusion of “Cipher” is strengthened when positioned as *IPSA DIXIT’s* conclusion, because it returns and resolves much of the unresolved and accumulated tension from throughout the entire work. One aspect that I find especially strong about “Cipher” as a finale is that it does not provide definitive answers to *IPSA DIXIT’s* questions, but instead leans into their uncertainty. Nearly all of the texts featured in “Cipher” focus on communication and provide clear answers for how communication can be fully achieved. However, Soper’s settings often contradict or even audibly obscure the meaning of the texts. The resulting effect implies the most central theme of *IPSA DIXIT:* true communication may not be possible at all. This feeling that communication may be ultimately impossible concludes “Cipher,” and *IPSA DIXIT* altogether.

i. “Jenny Holzer (feat. Ludwig Wittgenstein)”

“Cipher” opens with a text by Jenny Holzer which states that language gives you the ability to communicate explicitly. The full text reads:

> I came to language because I wanted to be explicit about things…and it became clear that the only way to do it was to use language. People can understand you when you say…something.

However, the soprano does not sing the words clearly; the tongue is intermittently pressed against the hard palate, which dramatically diminishes the words' intelligibility. This creates tension by constantly teasing an explanation of how to communicate clearly, while also obscuring the explanation. In the first few measures, the only words that can be heard clearly are the words "explicit" and "clear," with the surrounding words shaded by varying degrees of obscurity. In measures 5–7 the words "the only way for me to do it" become increasingly clear, but just as the soprano hints at an answer by saying "was to," the words fall back into obscurity. This clear manipulation of language creates suspense. In measure 9 an answer is hinted at again as the soprano sings clearly "people can understand you when you…," but by the time the answer of "say something" is reached, the words have fallen into obscurity once more. This shifting between clarity and obscurity is further highlighted by dynamic changes, as the dynamics rise with the words' increased intelligibility and fall with the words' increased obscurity.

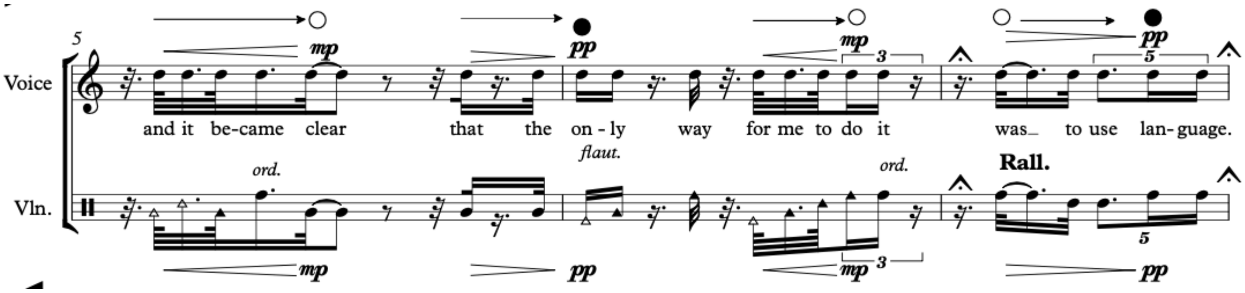


Fig. 36. "Cipher" mm. 5–7

Throughout this opening, the violinist mirrors the soprano by playing the exact same pitch and rhythms and by imitating the soprano's shifting tone quality by alternating between harmonics, fingered pitches, and open strings. In imitating each other's sounds, the soprano and violin form one blended sound reminiscent of the blended sound created by the flutist and soprano in "Only the Words Themselves Mean What They Say." In that movement, the musicians' unity facilitated the expression of extreme emotions by combining individual dramatic gestures together into singular gestures. Here in "Cipher," the musicians' hyper unity is more compact and concentrated. The expressive spectrum is highly contained, with any expressive change happening on a micro level. Soper has described the difference between these two movements' expressive styles as a "straightforward text-setting" in "Only the Words Themselves Mean What They Say," and a "more surreal and circuitous take on the problems of language" in "Cipher."[36] Unlike the grandiose gestures of "Only the Words Themselves Mean What They Say," the tension created by the hyper unity in "Cipher" is driven by an expectation that something texturally or harmonically must change, a tension that increasingly grows more and more with every repetition.

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[36] Isheda, "5 Questions to Kate Soper."

This inevitable change is marked by an abrupt replacement of Holzer’s word “say” with the word “so,” which transitions into the next text featured in “Cipher”: a section of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* by Ludwig Wittgenstein. Similar to Holzer’s text, this excerpt treats words as the foundation for true communication. Soper sets his text, “one and the same sign can be common to two different symbols,” somewhat literally by subtly shifting the musicians’ pitches to tuned to different fundamental, and tuning using just intonation.

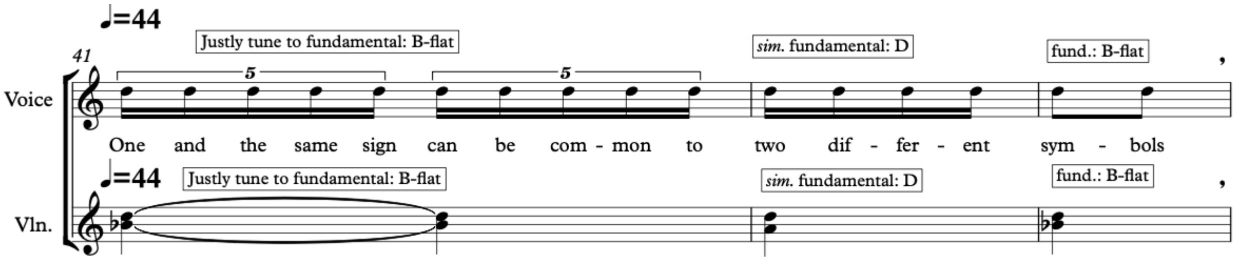
♩=44
41
Justly tune to fundamental: B-flat
5
5
sim. fundamental: D
fund.: B-flat
Voice
One and the same sign can be com - mon to two dif - fer - ent sym - bols
♩=44
Justly tune to fundamental: B-flat
sim. fundamental: D
fund.: B-flat
Vln.

Fig. 37. *“Cipher” mm. 41–42*

The individual pitches can be heard differently when recontextualized against different fundamentals, which corresponds directly to the ideas presented in Wittgenstein’s text. While the casual listener may not recognize how literally this musical passage relates to the text, some part of the passage’s intended effect will still be communicated. The sudden contrast of sustained pitches gradually fading in and out of the texture will force the audience to focus on the sounds of the instruments, and on their pitches. The final words of the text, “we must observe how it is used with a sense,” are followed by another section of repeated vowels. This passage is reminiscent of the repeated vowels heard in the opening of this movement. Here, however, the vowels are much slower; each is given its own dynamic and expressive direction. This transitions to the second sub-movement which features a text by Pietro Bembo that explores the expressive potential of words on a micro-level, focusing on the vowels themselves.

ii. “Pietro Bembo (feat. Michael Drayton)”

Similar to the texts of Holzer and Wittgenstein, Bembo’s text treats words as the basis for true communication but goes even further to posit that the very sounds of words have expressive meaning.

‘A:’ …con ciò sia cos ache ella più di spirito…e più al Cielo ne va esso spirito.	[‘A’…it is this that sends out the most spirit, and so sends the most spirit up to the heavens.]
Viene ultimamente la ‘U’…molto più ristretto…il che toglie alla boca e allo spirito dignità…	[We come at last to ‘U,’ much more restricted, a pulling-out takes away from the mouth the dignified spirit…]
Debole e leggiero e chinato e tuttavia dolce spirito…è richiesto alla ‘I’…soave nondimeno alquanto.	[Weak and slightly bent, and yet with a sweet spirit, next we come to ‘I,’ which is very gentle.]
Buiono è suono della ‘O;’ allo spirito della quale mandar fuori, il che ritondo e sonoro nel fa uscire.	[How good is the sounds of ‘O,’ which sends the spirit out with lips quite extended, it is round and sonorous as it exits.]

Soper’s setting initially supports this idea by scoring the vowel sounds in a way that evokes the corresponding expressive qualities suggested by Bembo. For example, when the text describes the vowel “U” as being restricted, the soprano is directed to sing in an “extremely nasal, pinched, scrunched, and ugly” style and the violinist uses extended techniques including *sul ponticello* and *col legno* to distort the sound with a similarly pinched quality.

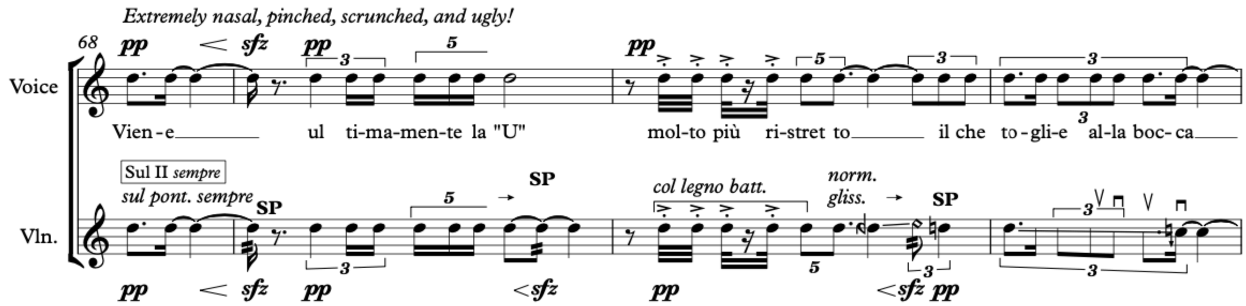
Extremely nasal, pinched, scrunched, and ugly!
Voice
Vln.
Vien-e ul ti-ma-men-te la "U" mol-to più ri-stret to il che to-gli-e al-la boc-ca
Sul II sempre
sul pont. sempre
col legno batt.
norm.
gliss.
SP
pp sfz

Fig. 38. "Cipher" mm. 68–71

When the text describes the vowel "O" as being round and sonorous, the soprano is directed to sing in a "warm and richly expressive" style while the violinist supports this sound by playing only on the richly sonorous G string. Soper keeps the text in its original Italian rather than translating it into English, allowing the music to communicate the expressive qualities ascribed to the vowels.

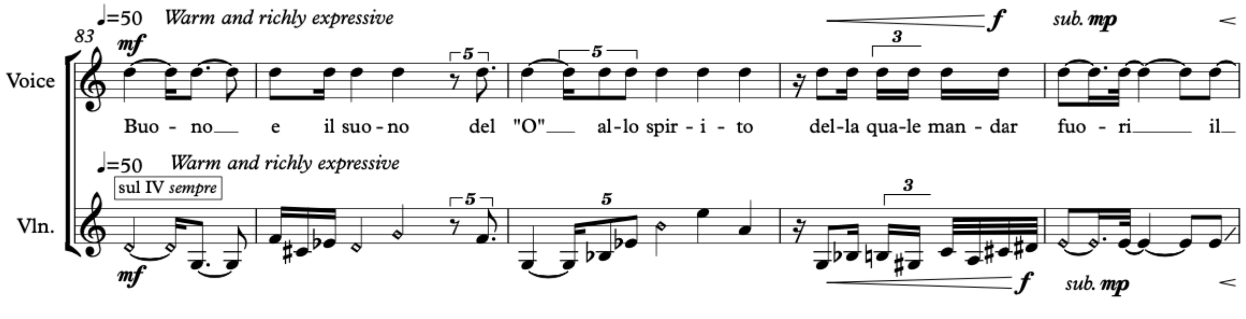
♩=50 Warm and richly expressive
Voice
Vln.
Buo - no e il suo - no del "O" al - lo spir - i - to del-la qua-le man - dar fuo - ri il
sul IV sempre
mf f sub. mp

Fig. 39. "Cipher" mm. 83–87

The repeated vowels, each with individualized expressions, start occurring more frequently to the point that they sound connected. Eventually, these sounds connect to become the vowel motive that recurs throughout "Cipher." This motive is comprised of rapidly alternating vowel sounds, usually paired with the violinist imitating the sound by playing the same note fluidly and rapidly across strings and with varying finger pressure. This motive functions as a connective tissue between the otherwise disparate sections of "Cipher." Its driving momentum moves the music forward into each new section. This vowel motive transitions seamlessly out of Bembo's text and into a text by Michael Drayton by having the oscillating vowels gradually morph into the first two words of Drayton's text, "while we." Drayton's text was chosen specifically because it began with the words "while we" in order to create this effect.[37]

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[37] Isheda, "5 Questions to Kate Soper."

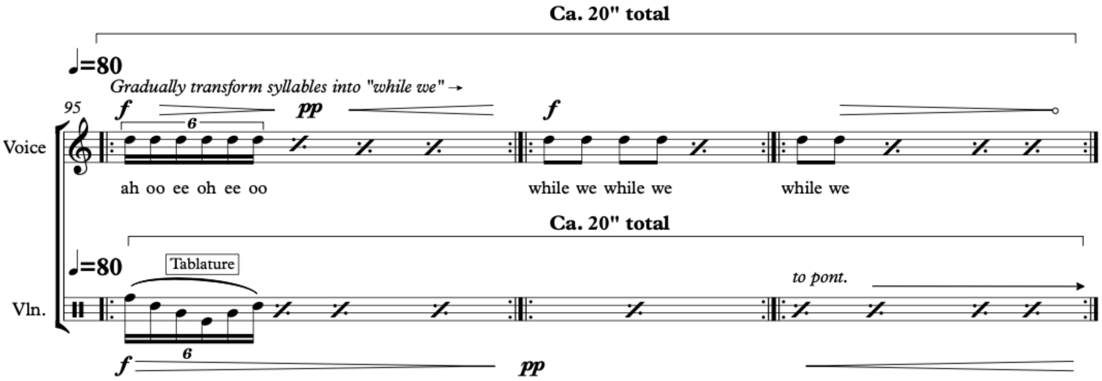
Ca. 20" total
♩=80
Gradually transform syllables into "while we" →
95
f
pp
f
6
Voice
ah oo ee oh ee oo
while we while we
while we
Ca. 20" total
♩=80
Tablature
to pont.
Vln.
6
f
pp

Fig. 40. "Cipher" mm. 95–97

Rather than the music being written to accommodate the text, Drayton's text was chosen purely for its sounds to accommodate the music. The words are being treated more like instrumental sounds, chosen for the way they sound rather than for their literal meaning. This concept connects to Bembo's text setting, which treated vowels as expressive musical sounds. This effect is repeated at the end of this passage when Drayton's text transitions from the words "while we" into the connective oscillating vowels, which in turn drives the music forward into the third sub-movement, "Introducing Sigmund Freud."

iii. "Introducing Sigmund Freud"

The text setting in this third sub-movement focuses primarily on the concept of speech counterpoint. The soprano never sings and instead speaks in counterpoint with the violinist. Additionally, both the violinist and soprano help to play the violin in tandem: the soprano adjusts the violin's sound by affixing a mute onto the instrument, retuning the E string, and fingering pitches while the violinist continues controlling the bow. This is one of the most collaboratively virtuosic passages, as both musicians must keep track of the timings of their words and how their texts overlap with each other while also focusing on this unusual tandem performance on the violin.

The musicians begin by speaking text in relay. It could be interpreted as two people not listening to each other and interrupting. However, Soper's score has provided specific points of entry in the texts; the two texts align several times on the same word. In measure 153 the texts align on the word "dream."

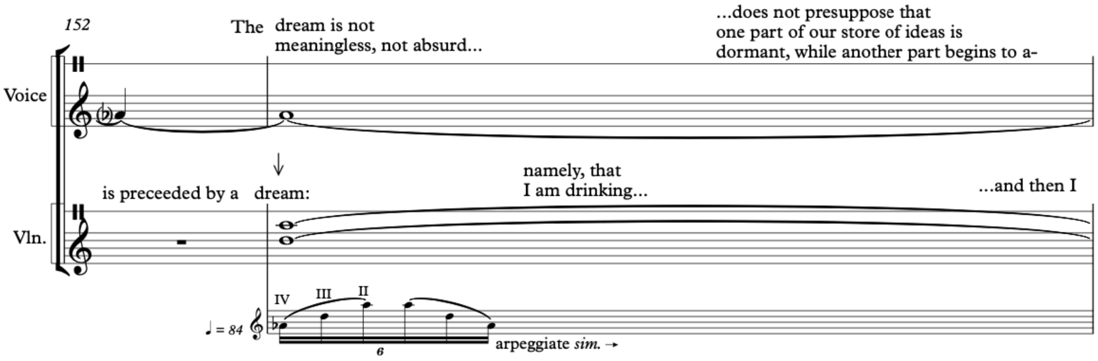
152
The
dream is not meaningless, not absurd...
...does not presuppose that one part of our store of ideas is dormant, while another part begins to a-
Voice
is preceeded by a
dream:
namely, that I am drinking...
...and then I
Vln.
IV
III
II
♩ = 84
6
arpeggiate sim. →

Fig. 41. *"Cipher" mm. 152–153*

In measure 154 the texts align on the word "wake," and in measure 157 on the word "actual(ly)."

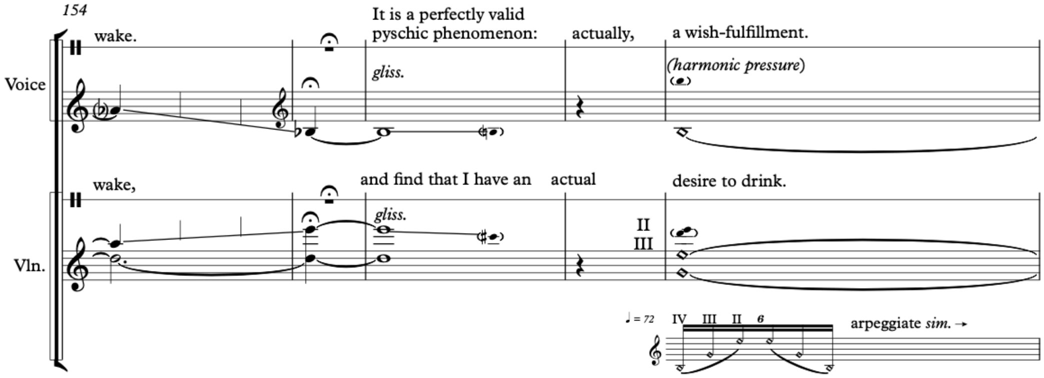
154
Voice
wake.
It is a perfectly valid
pyschic phenomenon:
actually,
a wish-fulfillment.
gliss.
(harmonic pressure)
Vln.
wake,
and find that I have an
actual
desire to drink.
gliss.
II
III
♩= 72
IV III II 6
arpeggiate sim. →

Fig. 42. *"Cipher" mm. 154–158*

In measure 160 the texts align on the word "psychic."

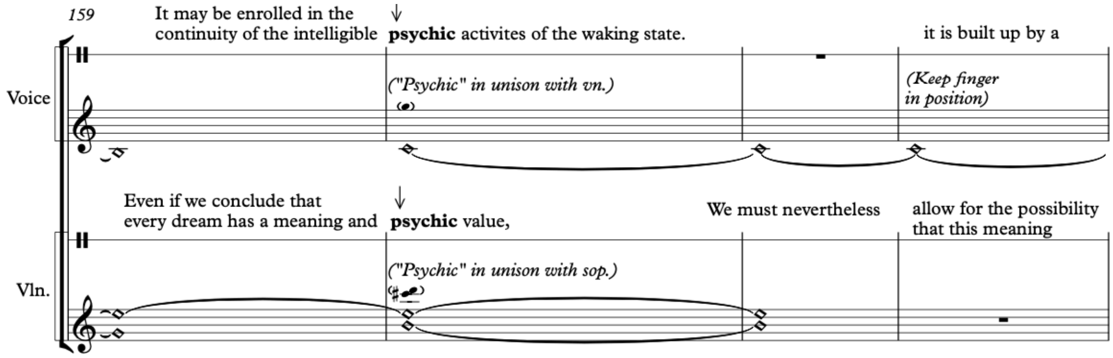
159
Voice
It may be enrolled in the
continuity of the intelligible
psychic activites of the waking state.
it is built up by a
("Psychic" in unison with vn.)
(Keep finger
in position)
Vln.
Even if we conclude that
every dream has a meaning and
psychic value,
We must nevertheless
allow for the possibility
that this meaning
("Psychic" in unison with sop.)

Fig. 43. *"Cipher" mm. 159–162*

The speech counterpoint gradually becomes denser with larger segments of texts overlapping, and the unisons of shared words provide brief moments of rest from the tension. These unisons function similarly to harmonic consonance. The speech counterpoint is further controlled in measure 163, when the soprano is instructed to stretch the word “highly” to last over the duration of the violinist’s words “may not be the,” so that both musicians enter measure 164 at the same time on their respective words.

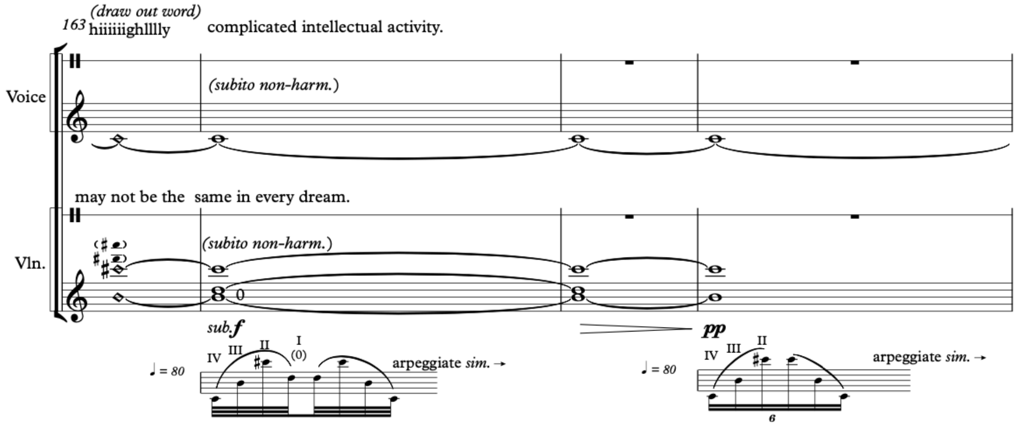
(draw out word)
163
hiiiiiighllllly
complicated intellectual activity.
Voice
(subito non-harm.)
may not be the same in every dream.
Vln.
(subito non-harm.)
0
sub. f
pp
♩ = 80
IV III II I (0)
arpeggiate sim. →
♩ = 80
IV III II
arpeggiate sim. →
6

Fig. 44. *“Cipher” mm. 163–166*

This sound shares qualities with traditional counterpoint when one instrument’s note is sustained while another instrument completes its musical phrase, so that they can enter the next section together. In each of these examples, words are being organized in a manner that is more similar to music than it is to dialogue. In turn, the audience will hear the words less for their meaning and more as a collection of organized sounds working together to create a complex aural fabric. This functions not only as an exploration of words being treated more like musical notes, but also creates a dreamlike quality wherein nothing is behaving quite like you would expect. Instead of literally describing a dream, this section pulls the listener into a strange dreamlike performance, which may better communicate the feeling of a dream.

iv. “Guido d’Arezzo presents Sarah Teasdale (feat. Jenny Holzer)”

The fourth and final sub-movement of “Cipher” begins with a sung text by d’Arezzo that translates to “Just as everything that can be spoken can be written, so everything [that] can be made into a song can be written. Therefore everything can be sung that can be spoken.” This was identified as the “evident motto of the piece” by Alex Ross, but an alternative perspective can be formed by considering how *IPSA DIXIT* has contradicted this statement up to this point.[38] D’Arezzo’s text assumes a connection between singing and words, and does not account for the ways in which singing can transform the meaning of the text. But as we have experienced previously in *IPSA DIXIT,* the way something is sung can add nuance to the words’ meanings such that the words cannot entirely express themselves. For example, in system 21 of “Go Away” the phrase “I’m very angry at you” is indicated to be sung “pale” and “expressionless” with no *vibrato,* hollowing the phrase’s meaning and removing any colors of aggression or anger.

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[38] Ross, “Kate Soper’s Philosophy-Opera.”

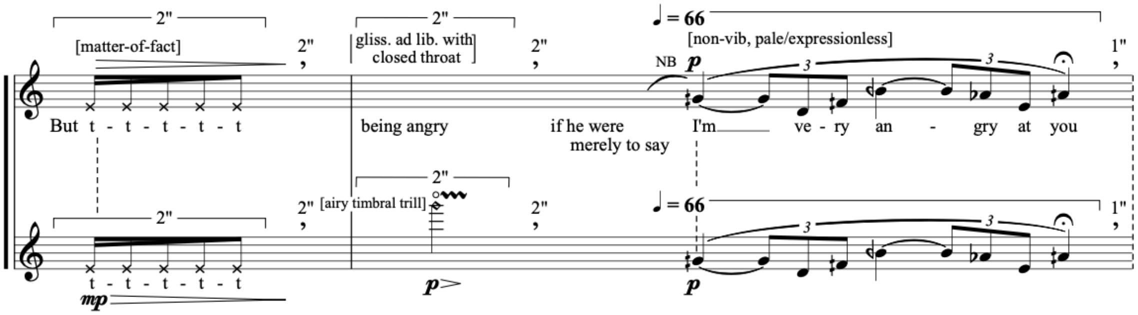

2"
[matter-of-fact]
2"
2"
gliss. ad lib. with closed throat
2"
♩ = 66
[non-vib, pale/expressionless]
NB
p
3
3
1"
But t - t - t - t - t
being angry
if he were merely to say
I'm ve - ry an - gry at you
2"
[airy timbral trill]
2"
2"
♩ = 66
1"
3
3
t - t - t - t - t
mp
p
p

Fig. 45. "Go Away" system 21

D'Arezzo's text also does not account for wordless singing, which can convey an emotion or expression of some kind in a non-literal manner. An example of this occurs in systems 13 and 14 of "Go Away." The original text states "he does not mean it as much as he means the anger that the words have in them as he also means the anger in the words don't come back," but both appearances of the word "anger" are replaced by dramatically expressive singing.

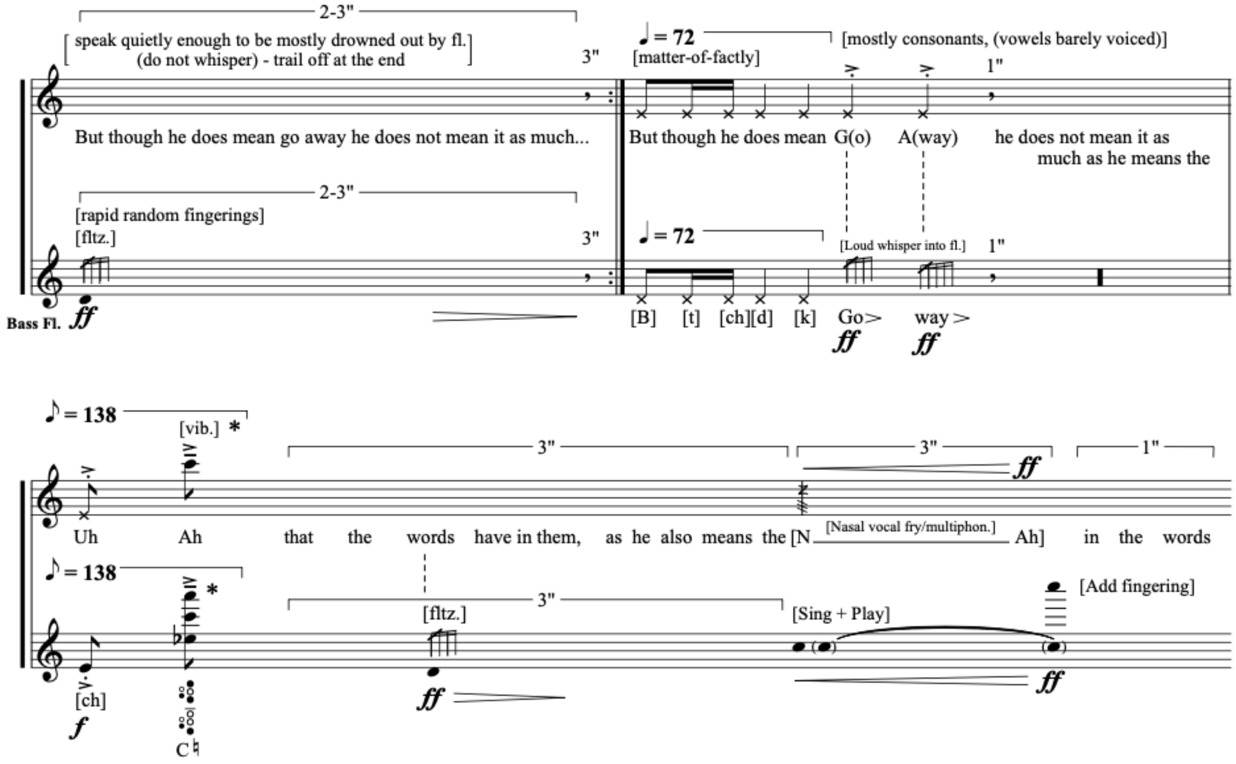
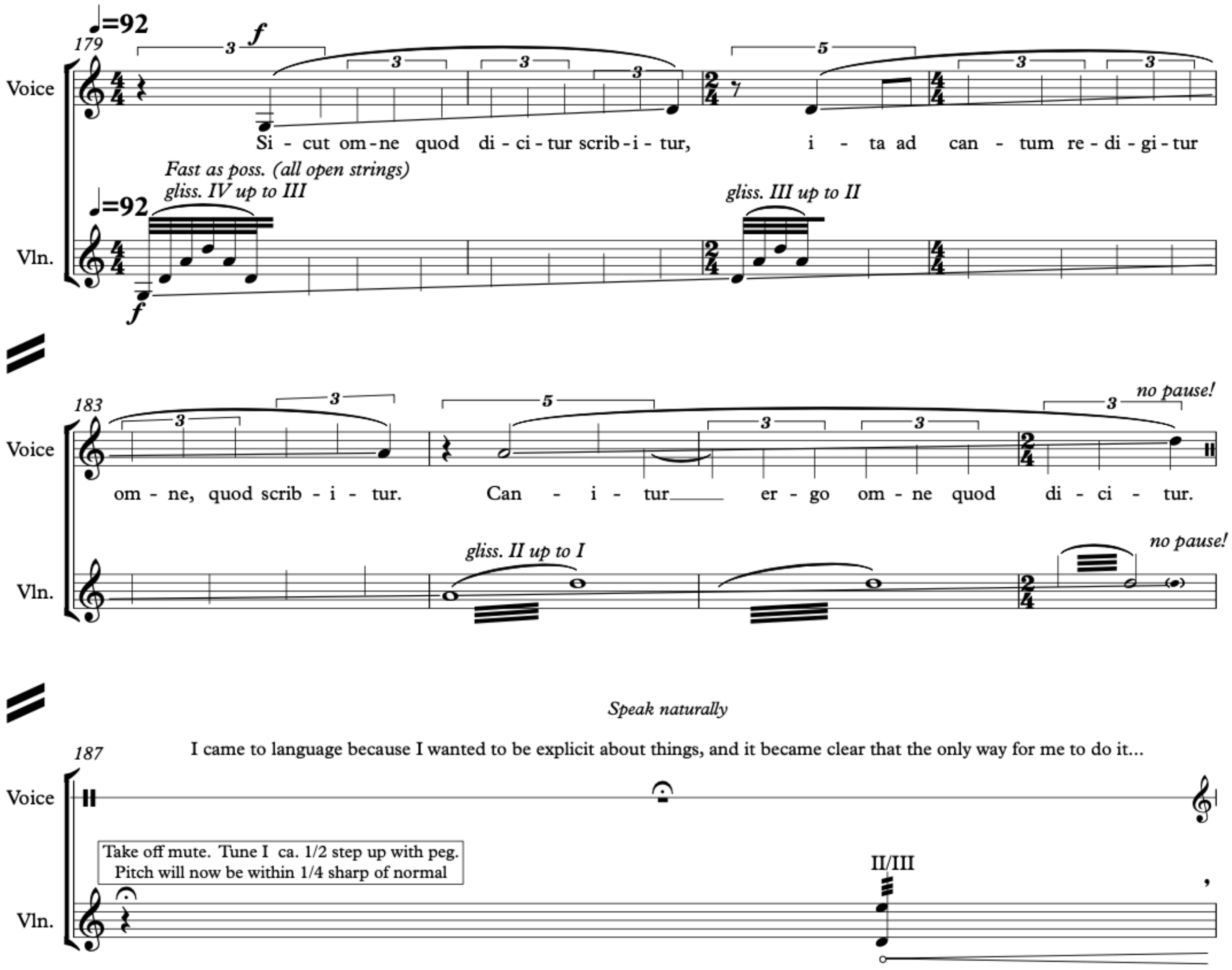

2-3"
[speak quietly enough to be mostly drowned out by fl. (do not whisper) - trail off at the end]
3"
♩= 72
[matter-of-factly]
[mostly consonants, (vowels barely voiced)]
1"
But though he does mean go away he does not mean it as much...
But though he does mean G(o) A(way) he does not mean it as much as he means the
2-3"
[rapid random fingerings]
[fltz.]
3"
♩= 72
[Loud whisper into fl.]
1"
Bass Fl.
ff
[B] [t] [ch][d] [k] Go> way>
ff
ff
♪= 138
[vib.] *
3"
3"
ff
1"
Uh Ah that the words have in them, as he also means the [N [Nasal vocal fry/multiphon.] Ah] in the words
♪= 138
*
[fltz.]
3"
[Sing + Play]
[Add fingering]
[ch]
f
C♮
ff
ff

Fig. 46. "Go Away" systems 13–14

While it can be understood that these sung expressions are there in place of the word "anger," their sound is able to convey much stronger emotion than the word itself. Both of these sounds more accurately express the physical way in which anger is felt in the body, and both express different shades of anger; the first is more sudden and mimics an immediate reaction to an offense, while the second builds into a loud growl of anger, evoking a slowly heightening tension or frustration.

D'Arezzo's statement is also contradicted by the passage that immediately precedes it. Freud's text presents information on dreams in a way that is logical and clear, but Soper's setting uses the text to imitate a dreamlike strangeness rather than simply presenting Freud's words.

Finally, Soper's setting of d'Arezzo's text also prevents it from having the dramatic impact necessary to be perceived as the piece's motto. The text is not translated into English and is instead sung in its original Latin, so the audience will only know its meaning if they consult the program. It is sung entirely as a *glissando* rising from G3 to D5, accompanied by a violin *glissando* of G3 to D5 while oscillating across the remaining open strings. This oscillation combined with the *glissando* creates a sense of constant forward momentum towards the reappearance of Holzer's text, "I came to language because I wanted to be explicit about things."

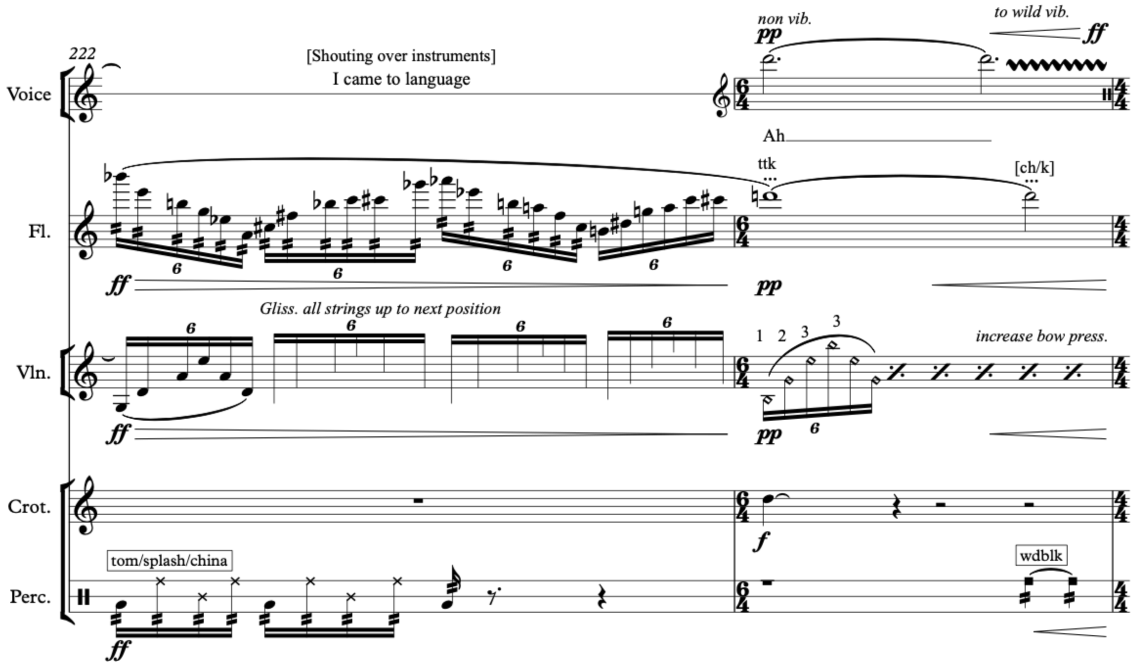


♩=92
179
Voice
Si - cut om - ne quod di - ci - tur scrib - i - tur, i - ta ad can - tum re - di - gi - tur
Fast as poss. (all open strings)
gliss. IV up to III
gliss. III up to II
Vln.
183
om - ne, quod scrib - i - tur. Can - i - tur er - go om - ne quod di - ci - tur.
no pause!
gliss. II up to I
187
Speak naturally
I came to language because I wanted to be explicit about things, and it became clear that the only way for me to do it...
Take off mute. Tune I ca. 1/2 step up with peg.
Pitch will now be within 1/4 sharp of normal
II/III

Fig. 47. *"Cipher" mm. 179–187*

Just as in "Cipher's" opening, the statement's conclusion is interrupted. Here it is interrupted by the violinist playing a loud minor 2nd while the soprano sings an eighth-flat above the violinist's higher pitch. This creates an especially dissonant and jarring sound, which halts the conclusion of Holzer's statement. While the entrance lacks a specificity of information that could be possible with words, it communicates a kind of raw emotion more viscerally than words may be able to.

Holzer’s words return in the final section of the movement where the tension between words and music has reached a frenzied peak. When “Cipher” is performed as a part of *IPSA DIXIT,* the entire ensemble returns at this point which creates even greater dramatic effect and intensity. Measures of the soprano shouting fragments of Holzer’s text over the ensemble’s chaotic counterpoint are juxtaposed against measures in which the soprano sings the single vowel “ah” on a pitch unison with the flute and crotale. Meanwhile, the violin provides harmonic support and rhythmic momentum.



222
[Shouting over instruments]
I came to language
non vib.
pp
to wild vib.
ff
Voice
Ah
ttk
[ch/k]
Fl.
6
ff
pp
Gliss. all strings up to next position
Vln.
1 2 3
3
increase bow press.
Crot.
f
tom/splash/china
wdblk
Perc.

Fig. 48. *“Cipher” mm. 222–223*

Soper has described some of her works as “trying really hard to tell you something, and you know that I’m trying, and you’re getting something out of it, but basically we’re both aware of the fact that that’s not possible.”[39] “Cipher” as a finale perfectly encapsulates this feeling. A labored effort to communicate through words is expressed through shouting over a tumultuous ensemble texture. The wordless musical passages are granted more simplicity and calmness in their expression, but they are not able to communicate a message as specific as Holzer’s text. The intractability of communication is inevitable, as a message communicated through words or music will be generalized according to the restraints of the communicative medium. Soper’s setting highlights this intractability and the tension of the section mounts with each measure, driving forward to a dramatic conclusion. However, the piece takes yet another unexpected turn; the music’s intensity gradually dies down, and the soprano’s statement “the only way for me to do it was to use language” is underscored by the violinist’s dynamic falling to *pianissimo.* At the same time, the flutist’s and percussionist’s dynamics diminish to *niente.*

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[39] Leland, “An Interview with Kate Soper.”

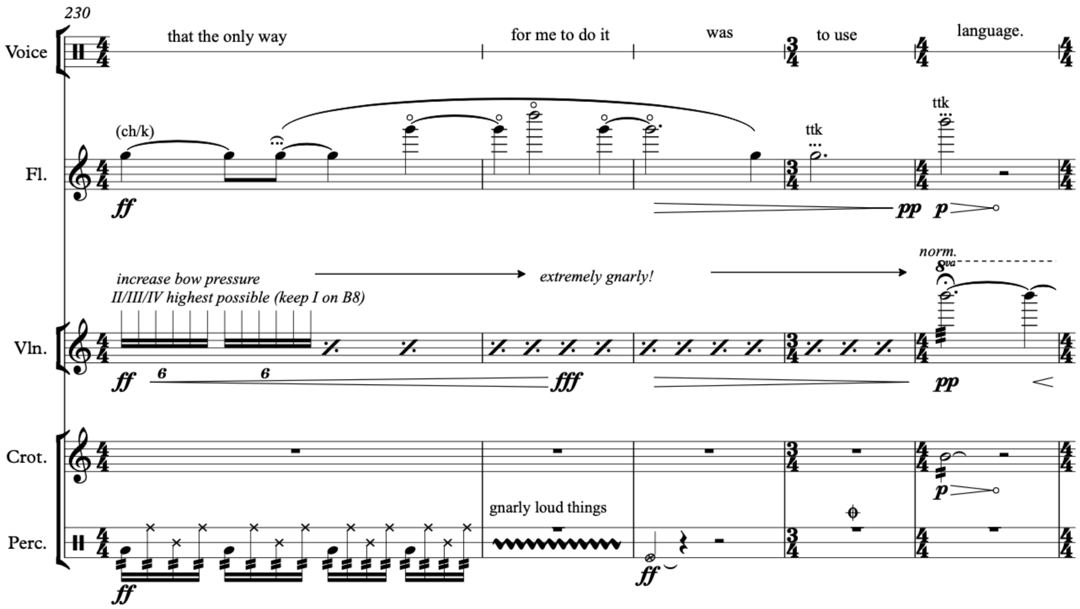
230
Voice
that the only way
for me to do it
was
to use
language.
Fl.
(ch/k)
ttk
ttk
ff
pp
p
increase bow pressure
II/III/IV highest possible (keep I on B8)
extremely gnarly!
norm.
8va
Vln.
ff
6
6
fff
pp
Crot.
p
gnarly loud things
Perc.
ff
ff

Fig. 49. *“Cipher” mm. 230–234*

The tone of Holzer’s text alone is one of conviction, but this setting removes any feeling of definitiveness and instead creates a feeling of uncertainty. The final two measures feature the most definitive statement from Holzer’s quote: “people can understand you when you say something.” The words alone have no hint of doubt, but Soper’s setting again prevents these words from being heard as conclusive.

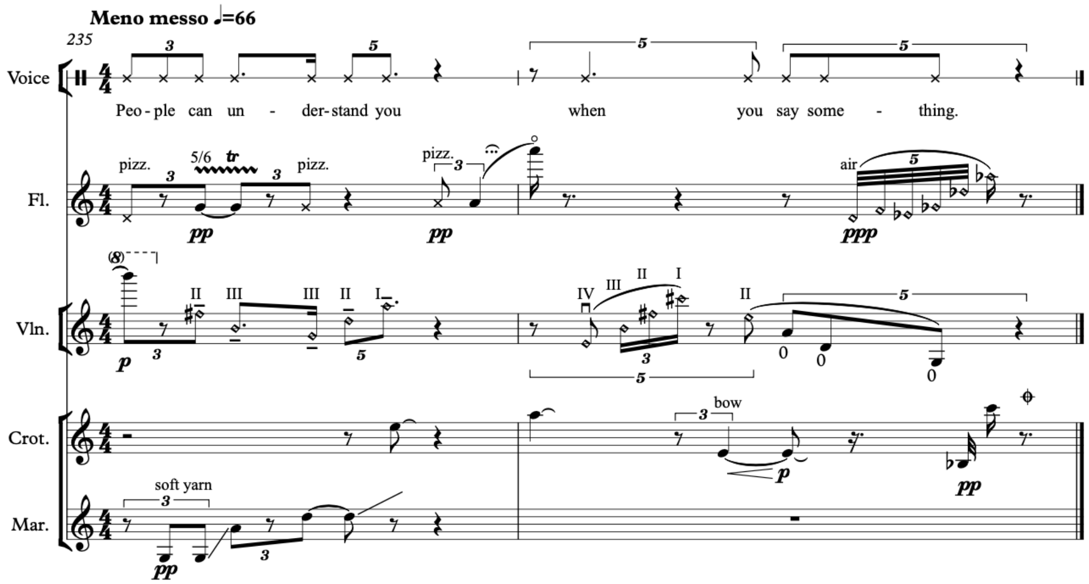
Meno messo ♩=66
235
Voice
Fl.
Vln.
Crot.
Mar.
Peo - ple can un - der - stand you when you say some - thing.
pizz.
5/6
tr
pizz.
pizz.
air
pp
pp
ppp
(8)
II III III II I
IV III II I
II
p
bow
p
pp
soft yarn
pp

Fig. 50. *“Cipher” mm. 235–236*

The statement “people can understand you when you say something” does not sound like a statement of fact, and instead colors the ending with a feeling of uncertainty. It defies the sense of conclusion, and suggests that another movement is coming. It is this uncertainty which gets at the heart of the work. In the words of Soper, “the pursuit of honesty, under everyday circumstances as well as in matters of life and death, relentlessly haunts *IPSA DIXIT.”*[40] The ending of “Cipher” does not give the listeners a feeling of conclusion, and like “Metaphysics,” instead invites the audience to remain in a state of contemplation. Perhaps there are no answers to the nature of communication, and surrendering to this intractability may be our only way to resolve this tension.

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[40] Soper, program note for *IPSA DIXIT*.

Conclusion

I was initially drawn to *IPSA DIXIT* because of the bespoke virtuosity that Soper wrote into the piece for herself and her fellow Wet Ink Ensemble musicians to perform. However, studying the ways in which Soper embedded the concept of communication throughout the piece gave me a greater appreciation for the level of detail that went into its creation. I originally favored certain movements over others, and rarely listened to the entire six movements altogether. Because of this, I was initially not able to see the nuanced ways in which the movements are connected, the ways in which the movements are "saying things" to each other, and the many ways that earlier movements create tension that is resolved in later movements. Without listening to the piece as a whole, and considering the ways separate movements affect each other over the course of the piece, one will not be able to fully appreciate all that is happening in each movement.

"Poetics" holds an important position as the introductory movement. It uses words, music, and theatricality carefully to create an overall tone that seems entirely certain, while its arguments are progressively shown to be unsound. When I would listen to "Poetics" on its own, I felt all the tension of its obscured communication. However, by removing it from the full context of *IPSA DIXIT,* I was not hearing the resolution of this tension, nor was I understanding that "Poetics" intentionally uses obscured communication. I expected "Poetics" to communicate the meaning of its text, and because the text's meaning was unclear, I felt it was less successful than some of the more direct movements such as "Only the Words Themselves Mean What They Say." After conducting this analysis, however, I now understand "Poetics" to be entirely successful at communicating its intended message. It also functions particularly well as an introductory movement. "Poetics" introduces communication with words, music, and theatricality*,* and clearly shows each of them to be imperfect. The text is certain in tone, and the soprano's delivery of the text is entirely confident, but the text's meaning is not easily understood by the audience; this effect is achieved by Soper abstracting disparate portions of Aristotle's text and combining them in ways that don't provide clear answers. Communication is also obscured here by intentionally masking the text's answers by keeping key words in Greek. Music is first shown to communicate in direct ways through text painting, but the music in the movement's final section uses less obvious musical devices while still being emotionally effective. Theatrical movement also at first seems to communicate directly through obvious illusions such as the instrumentalists' mimed playing, but is later shown to communicate with much more nuance when the soprano's bell is revealed to be silent. "Poetics" thus introduces the idea that words, music, and theatrical movement communicate in more nuanced ways than may be expected. "Poetics" on its own does not provide conclusions about how words, music, or theatrical movement do communicate. These tensions are only resolved by hearing *IPSA DIXIT* in its entirety.

I have always admired "Only the Words Themselves Mean What They Say" as a standalone piece, but understanding it as part of *IPSA DIXIT* gave me an even greater appreciation for the ways that it communicates different emotional states. "Go Away" takes an explicitly critical look at the ambiguity of words by examining every possible meaning of a single phrase; these different interpretations are made even more distinct with Soper's use of music and theatricality. "Go Away" also advances *IPSA DIXIT's* connection to female spectacle by theatrically representing the soprano going to extreme lengths to rationalize a man's careless words spoken in anger; the universality of this experience is communicated by using breath and lip-sync to seamlessly unite the two musicians' performances. "Head, Heart" moves away from the text painting heard in “Poetics,” and instead explores what physical features of music, such as the overtone series, might communicate on their own. The answer is still unclear, however; while the melodies following the overtone series do evoke a sense of tension and relaxation as they move across the musicians’ ranges, it is still unclear what is communicated through this music, and how. “Getting to Know Your Body” abandons words almost entirely, and explores what theatricality itself can communicate. The tightly coordinated starting-and-stopping that concludes this sub-movement does not communicate a concrete message, but does still communicate the strangeness of this seemingly impossible act, and the suspense of not knowing if and when the musicians will start the pattern again. Theatrical communication can be quite literal as seen in “Poetics,” but “Getting to Know Your Body” avoids connecting theatricality to anything literal, and shows that something is still communicated in spite of this. Thus, each sub-movement in “Only the Words Themselves Mean What They Say” examines communication with words, music, and theatricality in greater depth than “Poetics,” but still does not provide any clear answers about how they each communicate. This was never an impression I was left with after hearing the movement as a standalone piece; the virtuosity and choreography involved in performing the movement was so impressive that my attention was drawn away from asking such questions. I initially had difficulty seeing “Only the Words Themselves Mean What They Say” as a second movement of a six-movement work, as it functions so well on its own. After studying *IPSA DIXIT* as a whole, I now recognize that “Only the Words Themselves Mean What They Say” relates directly to the following movement, “Rhetoric,” in that it is so convincing that I never wondered what was actually being communicated.

Similar to “Poetics,” my early experiences listening to “Rhetoric” were isolated from the rest of *IPSA DIXIT,* which negatively impacted how I felt about the movement. I experienced the denseness and length of the text to be overwhelming, and was not entirely convinced by the musical rhetoric developed throughout the movement. Like in “Head, Heart,” “Rhetoric” examines how music can communicate similarly to language. Paradigms of Western tonal music including triadic harmonies, Perfect 5th intervals, and the pitch C are used in connection with the text to evoke rhetorical strength, and convey truth. However, without the accompanying text, these musical sounds would not communicate such concrete concepts. “Rhetoric” seems to provide clear and replicable answers about how music communicates, but these answers do not hold up to any scrutiny. There is an irony to this movement that I did not initially recognize; its title and text propose that persuasiveness can be codified, but persuasiveness is objective to the listener. This divergence can also be observed in how the soprano’s speech is controlled throughout the movement. The movement seems to conclude that speaking in a “natural” voice will come across as more honest to the listener, but the movement continues past this point, and the soprano’s speech becomes rhythmically controlled again when the movement’s true ending warns that only careful use of rhetoric will make an argument successful with its audience. Performing a “natural” voice is not natural at all, and instead imitates genuineness as part of a carefully choreographed performance in order to manipulate listeners. It is a trick similar to the soprano’s bell-ringing in “Poetics.” While “Poetics” used the absurd and unrelatable scenario of a bell controlling the musicians’ behavior, the illusion of naturalness proposed in “Rhetoric” calls to mind real experiences in which a seemingly natural façade is used to appear relatable to one’s audience, and to make something impossible actually seem true.

The rhetoric of music and language is more exaggeratedly explored in the surreal little stage play of “The Crito.” This movement again places the audience inside its tension; the audience will see that the musicians are acting out a play, but the performance will be affected by them playing the marimba while acting, so the effort of putting on this play will be communicated more than the play itself. I was initially puzzled by the contrasting ways that Socrates is characterized throughout the movement. In “The Dream of Socrates,” Soper’s setting humanizes Socrates and makes him relatable with simple melodies representing his internal reflections. In the second sub-movement, however, Socrates is characterized as confident to the point of arrogance. His arguments are heightened with almost super-human dramatic expression, while any opposing arguments are represented with a mockingly meek tone. I now believe these contrasting characterizations are intentionally heightened to highlight musical and lingual rhetoric. Socrates can seem sympathetic in one moment and arrogant in the next depending not only on the style of language used, but also the music that accompanies the words.

As I went deeper into my analysis of *IPSA DIXIT,* I found myself increasingly drawn to, and appreciative of, “Metaphysics.” I was unable to pinpoint exactly why, but I heard its music as especially beautiful, and its final section to be emotionally effective to the point of inspiring awe. After studying the movement within the full context of *IPSA DIXIT,* I now hear “Metaphysics” as resolving the tension accumulated through the previous movements between what is and isn’t possible to communicate. The first four movements all poke holes in the abilities of words and music to communicate fully, often using theatrical illusion to demonstrate this tension between truth and apparent truth. “Metaphysics” acknowledges this tension, but instead of highlighting it as an issue, invites the listener to consider this uncertainty as an inevitable part of human experience. “Metaphysics” only provides answers to *IPSA DIXIT’s* questions by positing that there are no answers, and that that is okay. “Metaphysics” most specifically resolves the question of music’s ability to communicate. Soper theatrically demonstrates that no matter how much we fragment the music and break away from the perceivable aspects of music-making, we still cannot understand the nonphysical nature of musical impulse. “Metaphysics” posits that we should surrender to not knowing, and allow ourselves to just experience music without trying to assign meaning within the limited scope of our human senses.

My appreciation for “Cipher” also grew throughout this analysis, and I now consider this movement to be even more dynamic as *IPSA DIXIT’s* finale than as a standalone piece. Like “Metaphysics,” “Cipher” resolves the tension of *IPSA DIXIT,* but while “Metaphysics” primarily answered the question of musical communication, “Cipher” answers the question of communication in general. It does so by theatrically placing the audience inside of its ineffective communication, but instead of disguising this effect as in “Poetics,” “Cipher” makes it clear that it is intentionally obscuring the text. The phrase “I came to language because I wanted to be explicit about things, and it became clear that the only way for me to do it was to use language; people can understand you when you say something” is constantly pulled in and out of obscurity, with its entire meaning always teased but never heard in full. When this phrase finally is heard in full at the end of the movement, it is robbed of its conclusive weight. The soprano begins by shouting the first part of this phrase over loud and chaotic music, theatrically fighting to make this point. However, by the time she is able to say “people can understand you when you say something,” the musical chaos has cleared, and the instrumentalists accompany this final sentence with simple, ghostly gestures. The soprano no longer has to shout, and her quieter tone combined with the ghostly accompaniment make this sentence sound less certain, and less conclusive. Similar to the ending of “Metaphysics,” this ending implies that there is no answer to the question of true communication. Instead, becoming aware of the complicated nuance involved in trying to communicate can get us closer to better understanding how we individually and collectively communicate.

When performing this analysis, I was initially worried that the idiosyncrasies of different ensembles' performances would influence how the piece came across. However, I was surprised to find that the overall message of the piece still came through. For example, in Stephanie Lamprea's April 2023 performance of "The Crito," she does not perform on the marimba at all and the percussionist does not act as Crito. Instead, an additional performer acts as Crito along with Lamprea as Socrates.[41] Despite these changes, the surreal quality of "The Crito" remains. Much of this consistency is attributable to the score, but it may also be attributable to the accessibility of Soper's own performances as referential resources. Because *IPSA DIXIT* is primarily concerned with communication, it stands to reason that Soper's performances hold nuanced details that can't be captured by a score, but most accurately reflect Soper's intentions. Her position as the piece's creator adds a contextual layer to her performances; she is not only acting as the soprano's character, but in doing so is acting out her own ideas that formed the piece. This point is further supported by the creation process of the piece: Soper workshopped her piece for years before settling on the final version of the score. It is likely that the videos of her performances act as an extension of the score, and are used by prospective performers as reference for creating their own interpretations. This supposition is supported by the consistency of bell-ringing motions across performances, all of which are similar to Soper's bell-ringing motion in her 2016 performance. While there are necessarily small deviations in the way other musicians perform *IPSA DIXIT,* I find the overall effect of these different performances to consistently communicate the tension required to sustain the piece from beginning to end.

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[41] Lamprea, "The Crito," performance by Lamprea, Darren Gallacher, and Anne Kjær, recorded April 26, 2023, video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NMXvvlY3KlU.

My analysis is by no means exhaustive, and there are several analytical points which warrant study within other specialized disciplines such as performance studies and linguistics. Overall, I view my analysis as a jumping off point from which deeper and more specialized research can develop. What I found most rewarding about analyzing *IPSA DIXIT* was the ways in which it challenged my original assumptions and analytical impulses. I originally expected the piece to prioritize communicating the meaning of the text, and I assumed that moments where the text was unclear were unsuccessful in their intention. However, diving into the intentions of the piece helped me understand that the piece *does* communicate very effectively; it just doesn't communicate in the ways I initially expected. *IPSA DIXIT* invites you to question and to think critically about assumptions formed throughout a lifetime of hearing music. Applying this critical lens to the music we engage with can only deepen our understanding and appreciation; for composers, this lens can only help make our own musical decisions more intentional and more effective.

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Addie Camsuzou

You're Still Here

2023
For soprano, mezzo-soprano, alto,
violin, cello, and piano

Texts by Bret Harte, Ada Hastings Hedges, and Elizabeth Lambert Wood

Program Note

You're Still Here is an ongoing project that explores the concepts of loss and grief from various perspectives, using various texts. "Never to Door or Gate" imagines a heavenly landscape that can never be returned to, and is almost mythologized in memory; "God's Country" laments the desecration of natural land in the name of higher callings; "O Mission Bells" is inspired by the many layers of grief housed in Mission San Miguel; "Where Columbia Meets the Sea" imagines a made-up coastal dwelling with made-up songs heard over the tide, as a means of escape; and "I'm Not Here" reflects on the anxious, painful, and even humorous ways grief is experienced in everyday life.

Performance Notes - Throughout

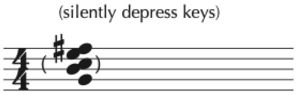
Piano

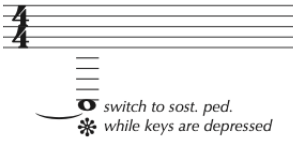
tap string - tap the string with your middle finger in a sharp enough motion to cause the string to ring, but without using your fingernail

nail gliss.: pitches non-specific; use your fingernail to glissando across the piano strings

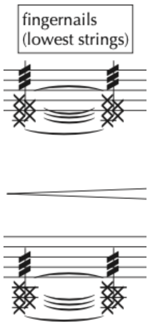
mute at tuning peg: use the fingers of one hand to mute the string at the tuning peg where the pitch will still sound, but will have a softer, more muffled quality

trem. gliss. freely: roll the chord continuously and rapidly; repetitions of individual notes can be inexact

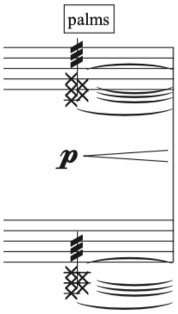




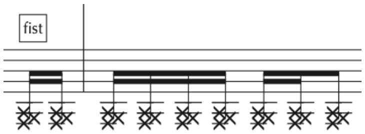
- for best results, silently depress the keys while the resonance from the previous measures is still ringing; then switch to the sostenuto pedal right before playing the next gesture



- pitches non-specific; tremolo fingernails on the wire strings in a drum-like style, alternating between hands



- pitches non-specific; tremolo palms on the wire strings in a drum-like style, alternating between hands



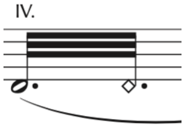
- pitches non-specific; use the bottom of your fist on the wire strings to create a soft rumbling sound

I. Never to Door or Gate

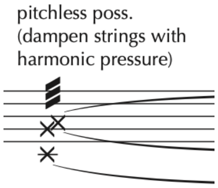
Instrumentation
Soprano
Mezzo-soprano
Alto
Violin
Cello
Piano

Violin

MSP - molto sul ponticello

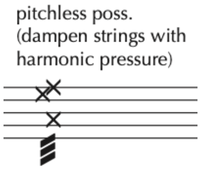


- trill-like between regular finger pressure and harmonic finger pressure


pitchless poss.
(dampen strings with
harmonic pressure)

- use harmonic finger pressure at a non-harmonic point on the string that will produce as little pitch as possible; an airy, wind-like sound

Cello


pitchless poss.
(dampen strings with
harmonic pressure)

- for both arco and pizz., use harmonic finger pressure at a non-harmonic point on the string to produce as little pitch as possible; arco should sound airy, and pizz. should sound percussive

II. God's Country

Instrumentation
Alto
Violin

Violin

pizz. quasi guitara - for best results, hold and strum the violin in the style of a guitar; however, standard playing position can be used if preferred

III. O Mission Bells

Instrumentation

Soprano
Mezzo-soprano
Alto
Finger cymbals

All voices

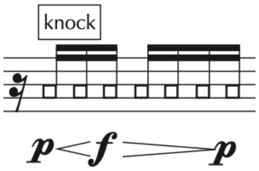
inhale and exhale - these should be unpitched breath sounds only

IV. Where Columbia Meets the Sea

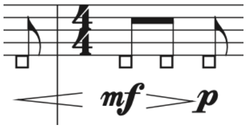
Instrumentation

Soprano
Mezzo-soprano
Alto
Piano

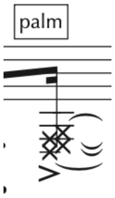
Piano



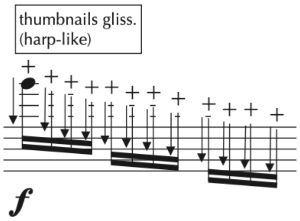
- knock with knuckles on the 2nd from lowest beam within the piano



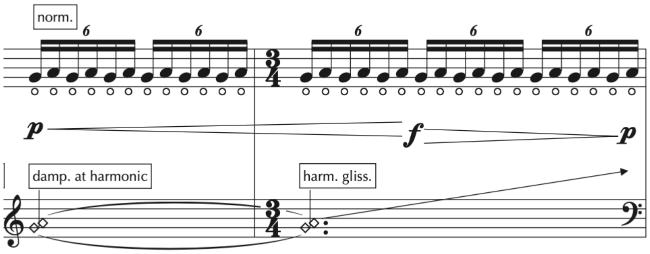
- knock with knuckles on the lowest beam within the piano



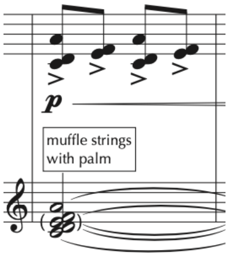
- strike the wire strings with palm in a slap-like gesture


thumbnails gliss.
(harp-like)
f

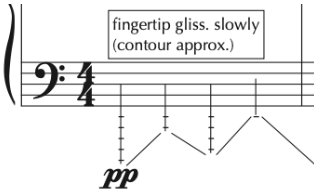
- alternate between right and left thumbnails rapidly strumming across the strings; rhythms and pitches can be inexact in favor of keeping some part of the chord ringing at all times, and maintaining a gradual downward contour


norm.
6
6
6
6
6
p
f
p
damp. at harmonic
harm. gliss.

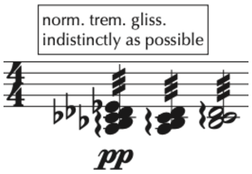
-place fingers of the left hand at the harmonic closest to the player, then gradually glissando up the strings


p
muffle strings
with palm

- use your left palm to completely muffle the strings, making the notes sound entirely percussive


fingertip gliss. slowly
(contour approx.)
pp

- glissando across lowest strings; pitches, rhythms, and contour are non-specific, but the sound should slowly and continuously move up and down across the strings


norm. trem. gliss.
indistinctly as possible
pp

- roll the chord continuously and rapidly, but as softly as possible to keep the individual pitches as indistinct as possible, creating a general rumbling sound

V. I'm Not Here

Instrumentation

Soprano
Piano

Texts

I. Never to Door or Gate

The sun is melting
The sage, wind-swept
The road between the sage, winding
Luminous dust along the golden span

Sands are forgetful
Distant havens still, or disappear
Travel, but do not tarry here

In the sunset mystery
Of luminous dust along the golden span
You may see in cloudy shapes some distant havens

The winding channel of the road
Between the sage, wind-swept and desolate
Has made its course as water might have flowed

But turning never to a door or a gate

Ada Hastings Hedges

II. God's Country

Potentilla uliginosa
Calochortus monanthus
Arctostaphylos franciscana
Erigeron mariposanus

Calystegia sepium
Plagiobothrys mollis

This is God's country

Lycium verrucosum
Monardella pringlei
Ribes divaricatum
Helianthus nuttallii

Cirsium praeteriens
Atriplex tularensis

Plagiobothrys lithocaryus
Diplacus traskiae
Cryptantha hooveri
Potentilla multijuga
Castilleja uliginosa
Castilleja leschkeana

Thismia americana

III. O Mission Bells

O bells that rang, O bells that sang
What are your garnered sheaves today?
O Mission bells, eleison bells,
O Mission bells of Monterey

O bells that crash, O bells that clash
Above the chimney-crowded plain
On wall and tower your voices dash,
But never with the old refrain
O Mission bells, eleison bells,
O Mission bells of Monterey

Oh bells that die, so far, so nigh,
Come back once more across the sea
O Mission bells, eleison bells,
O Mission bells of Monterey

Come with his love alone
O Mission bells of Monterey

Bret Harte

IV. Where Columbia Meets the Sea

Rolling, tolling

There a cormorant is diving,
And a salmon net is drying,
Near where ships to sea are flying

Where the gulls wheel

Under spruce trees left and right

Where Columbia meets the sea

Then the heavens black and glowering,
Overpowering

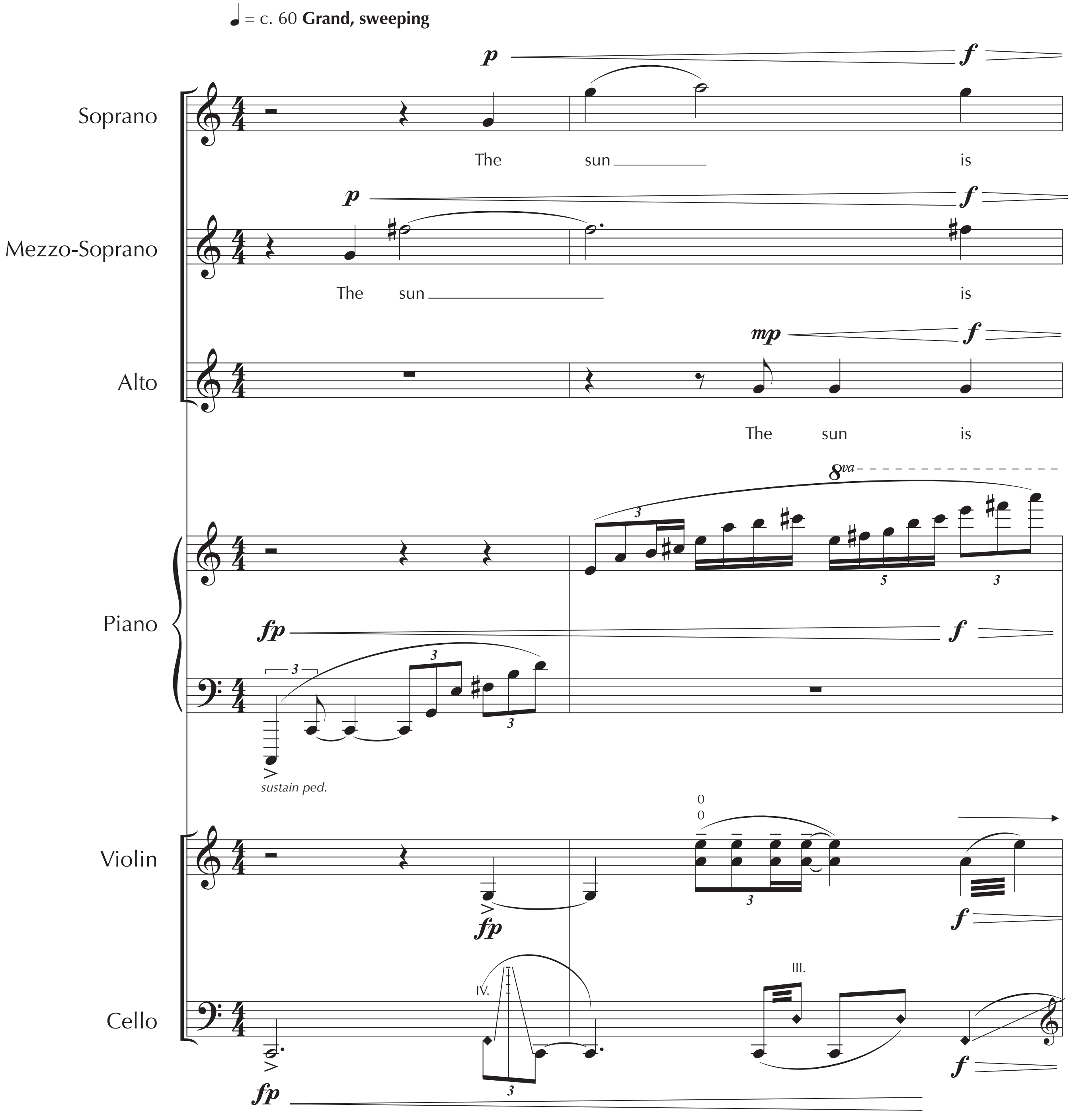
Elizabeth Lambert Wood

V. I’m Not Here

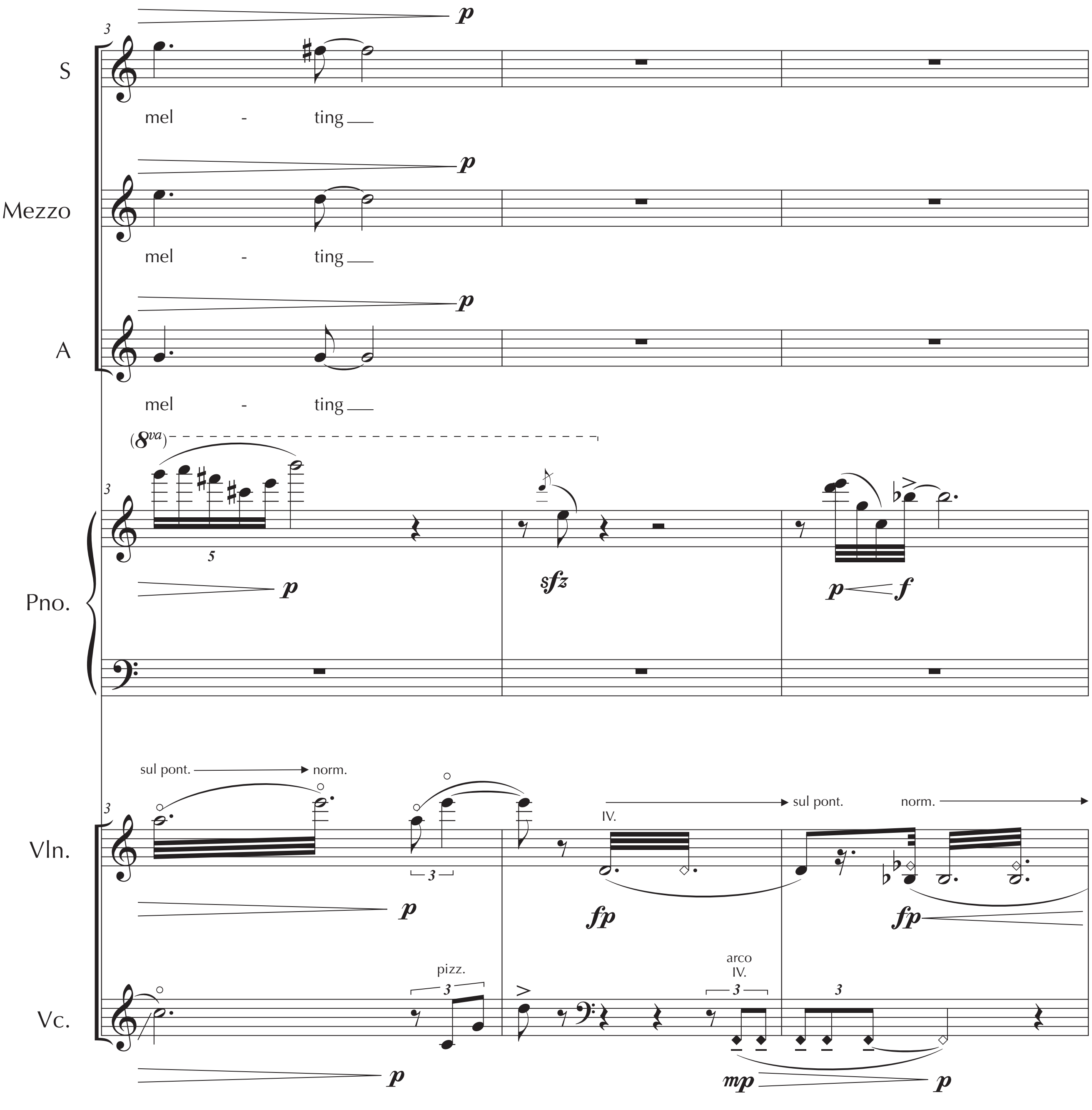
I’m not here,
Don’t mind me

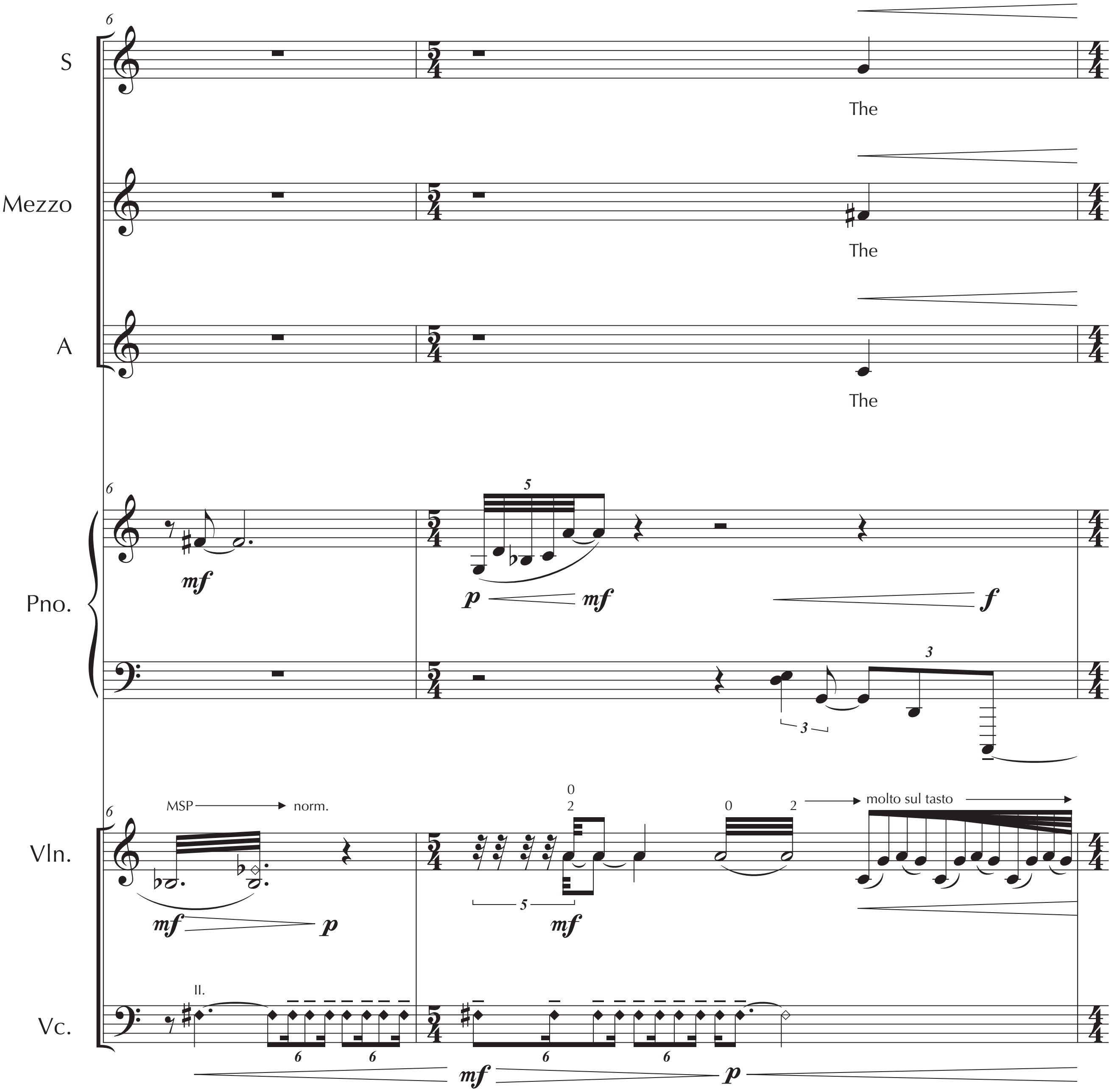
Never to Door or Gate

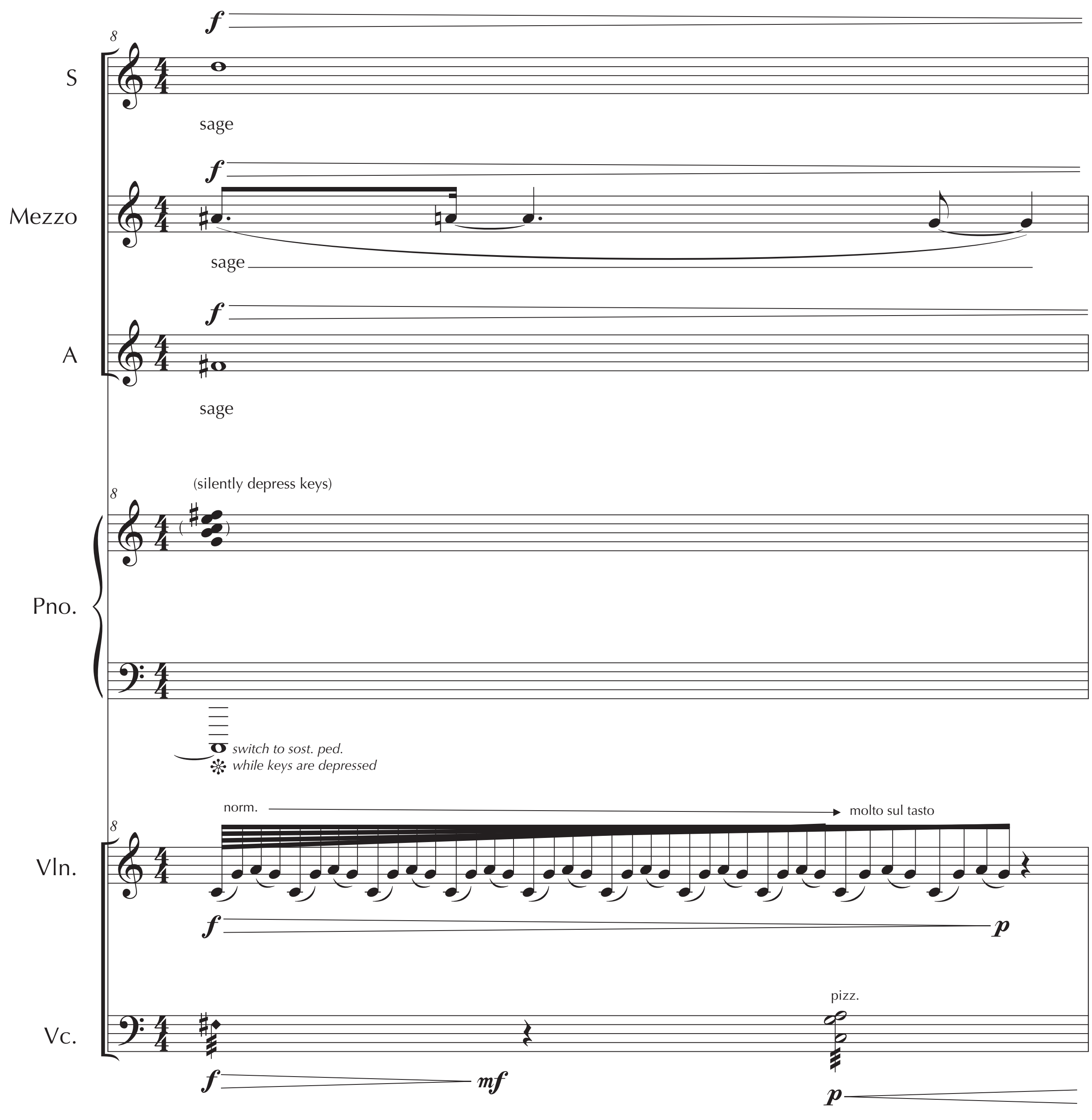
Music by Addie Camsuzou
Words by Ada Hastings Hedges

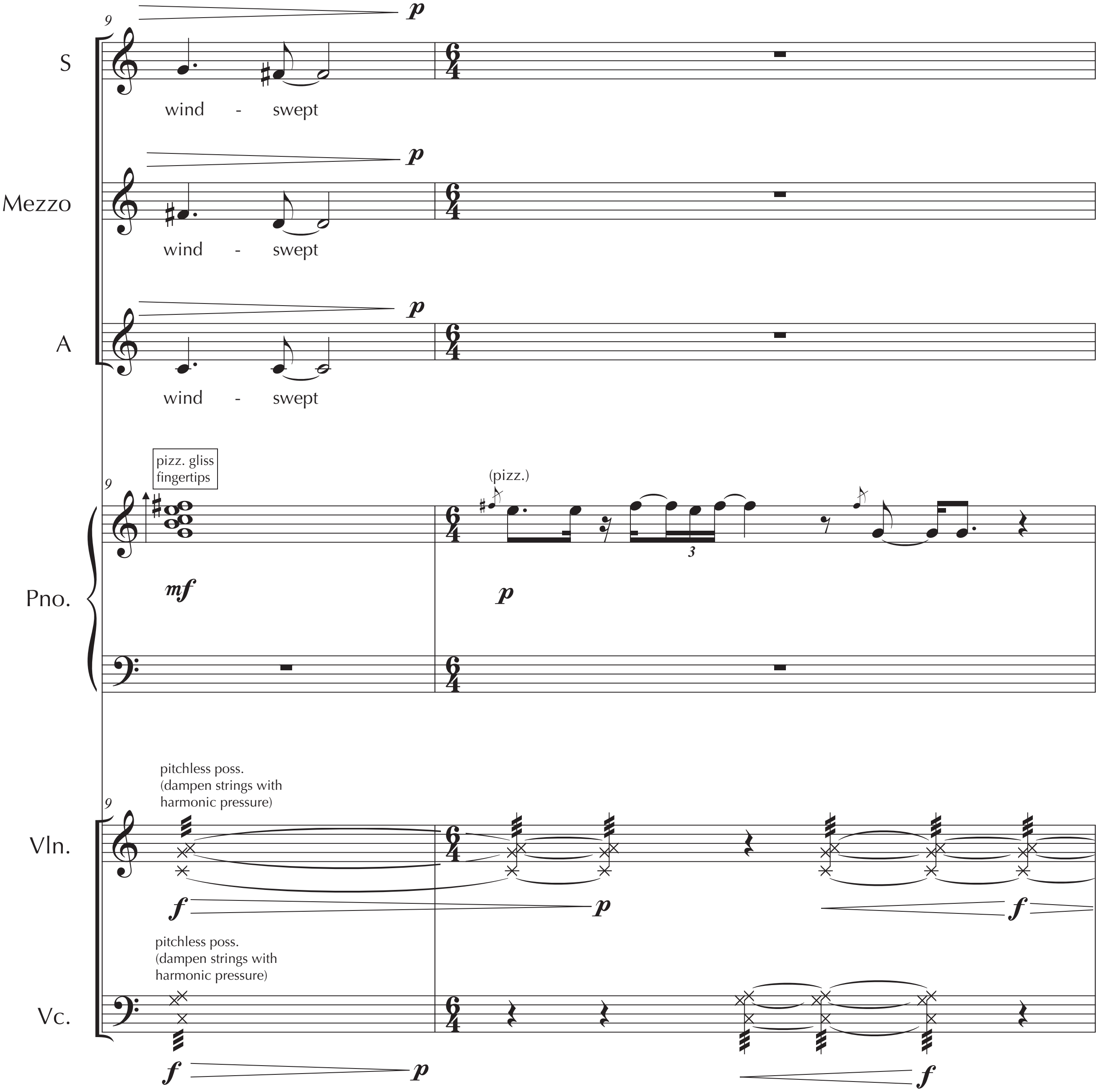


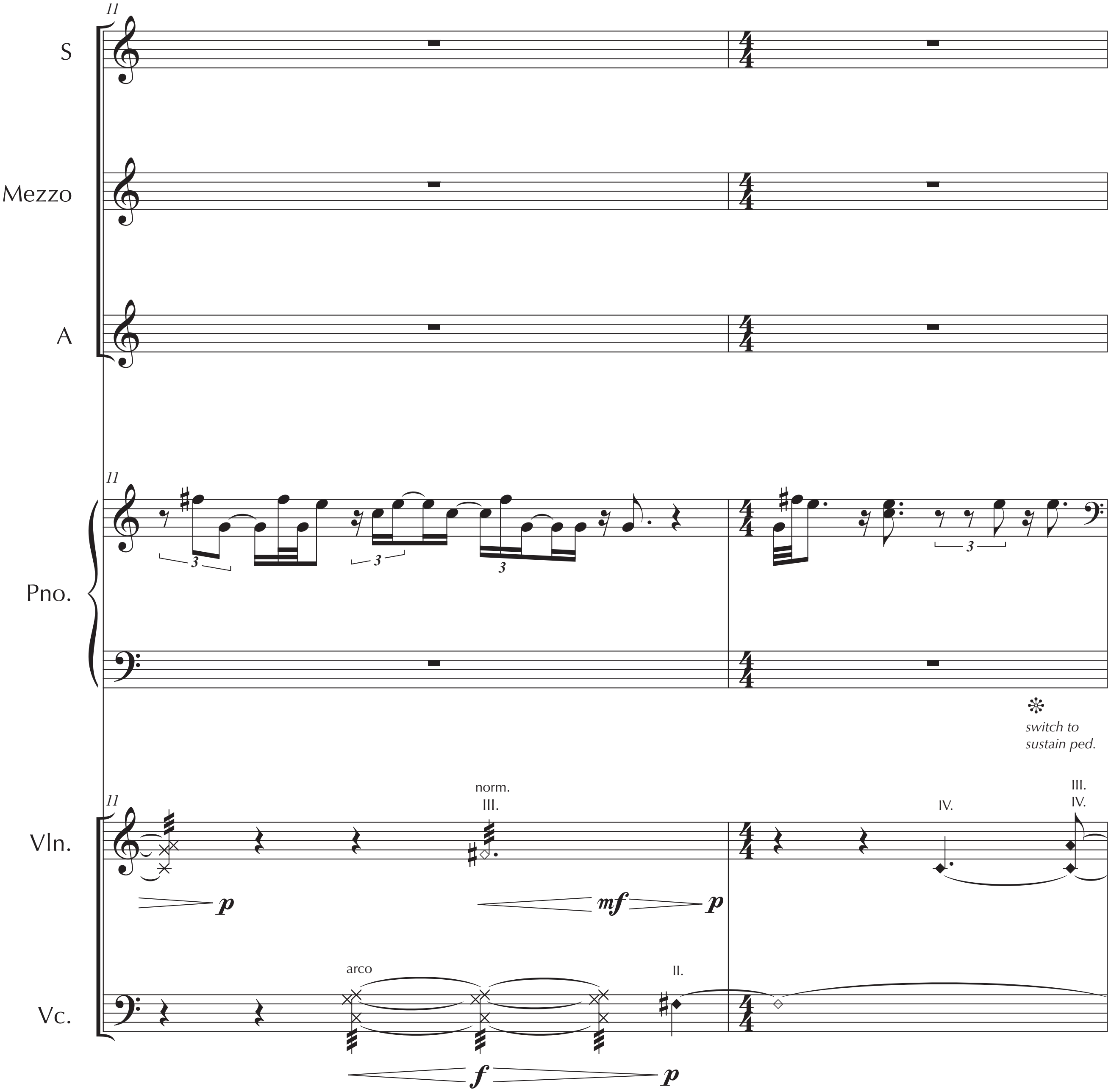
♩ = c. 60 Grand, sweeping
Soprano
Mezzo-Soprano
Alto
Piano
Violin
Cello
p
f
mp
fp
The sun is
The sun is
The sun is
8va
3
5
sustain ped.
0
0
IV.
III.

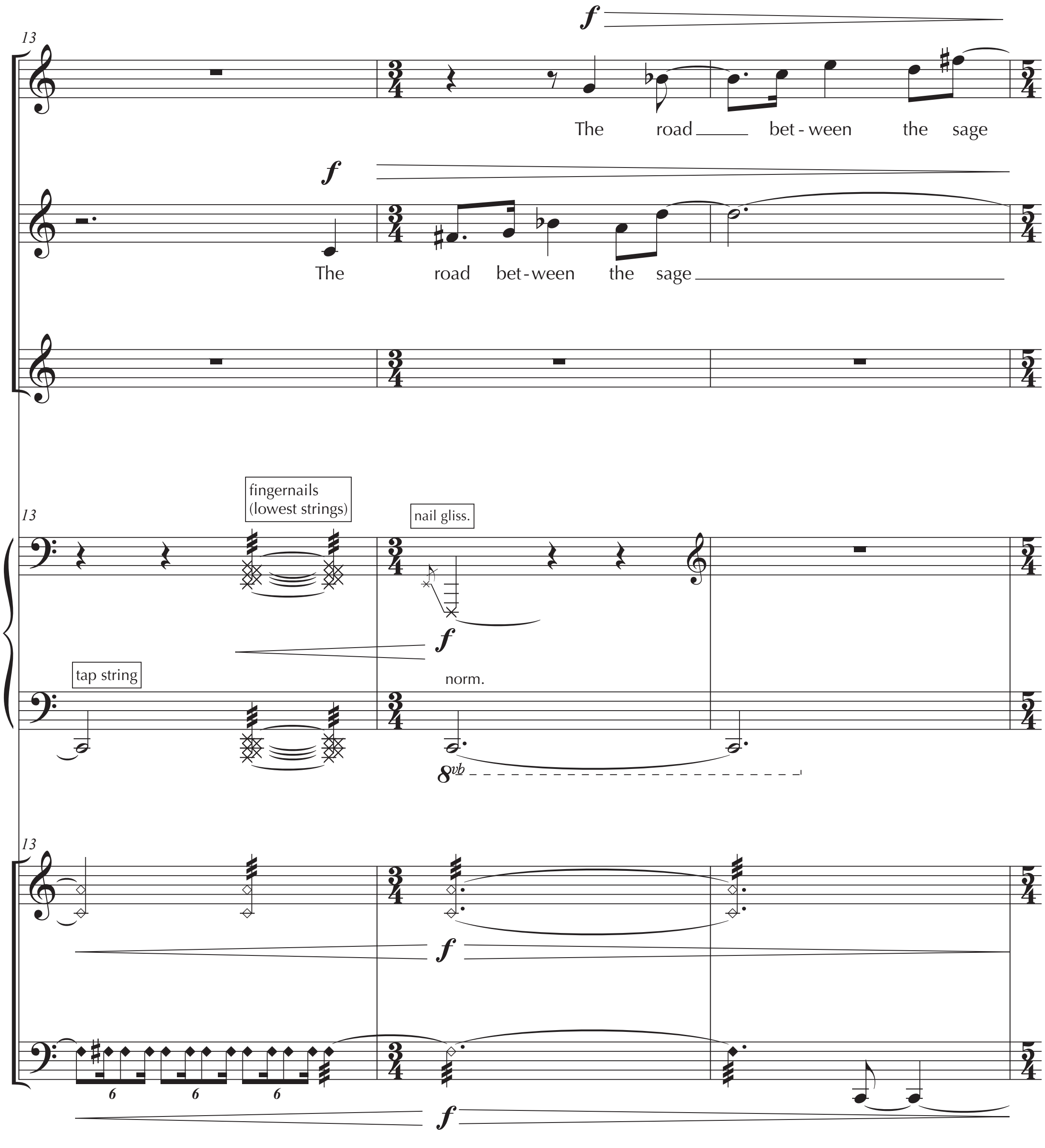

3
S
mel - ting
Mezzo
mel - ting
A
mel - ting
p
(8va)
5
Pno.
p
sfz
p
f
sul pont.
norm.
IV.
sul pont.
norm.
Vln.
3
p
fp
fp
pizz.
arco
IV.
Vc.
3
p
mp
p

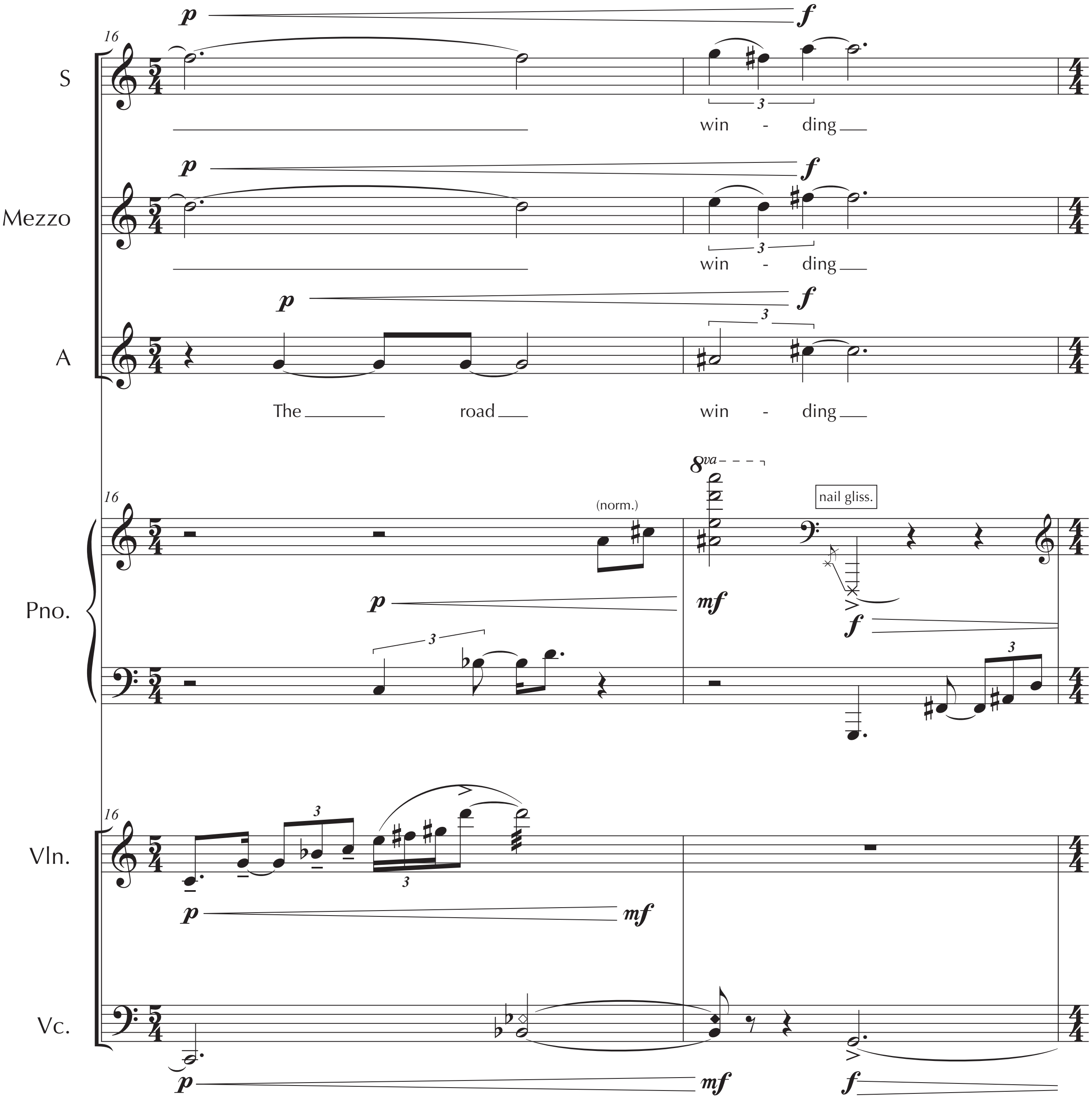

6
S
Mezzo
A
The
The
The
Pno.
mf
5
p
mf
f
3
3
Vln.
MSP
norm.
0
2
0
2
molto sul tasto
5
mf
p
Vc.
II.
6
6
6
6
mf
p

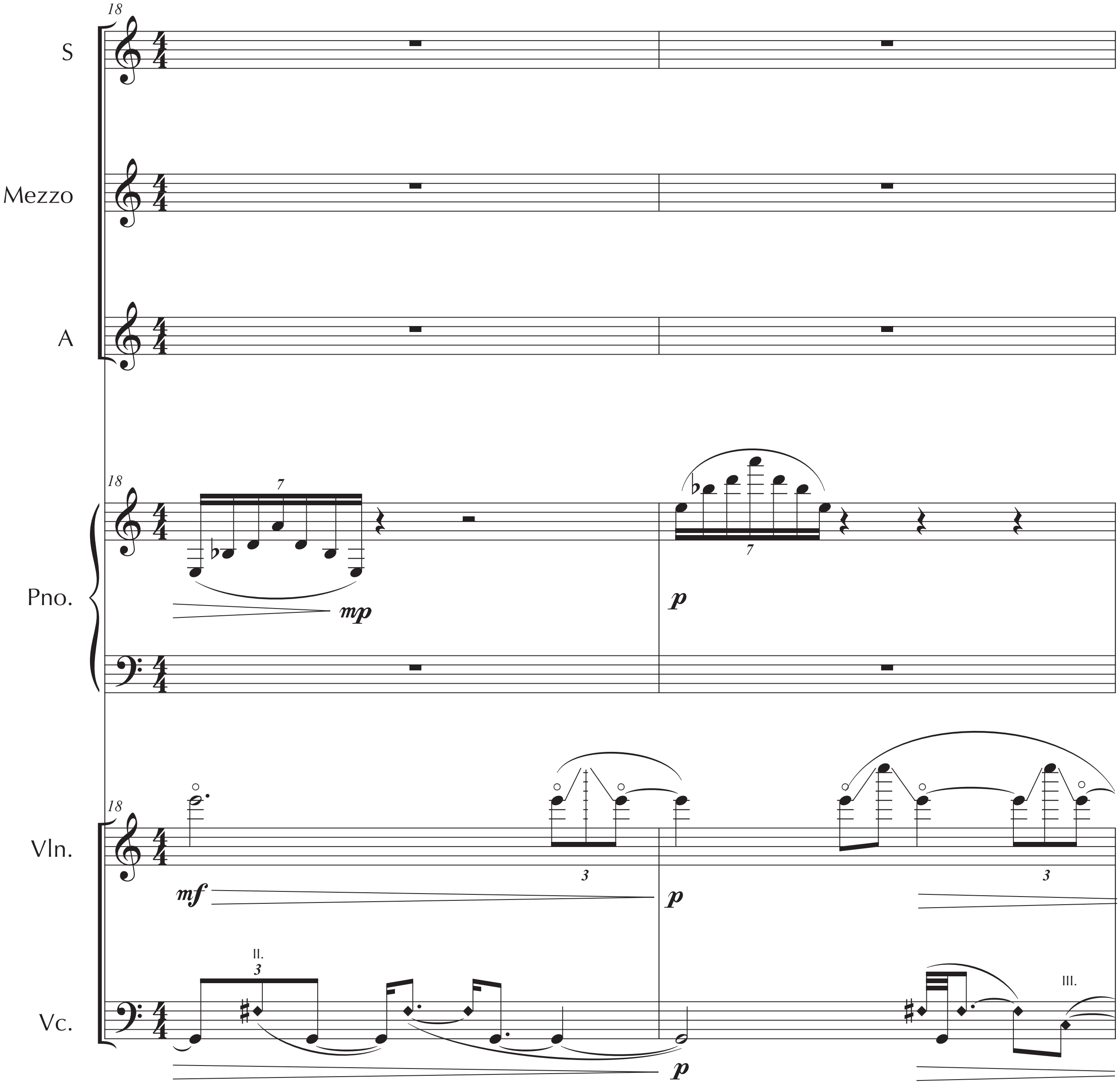

8
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
sage
sage
sage
(silently depress keys)
switch to sost. ped.
while keys are depressed
norm.
molto sul tasto
pizz.
f
mf
p

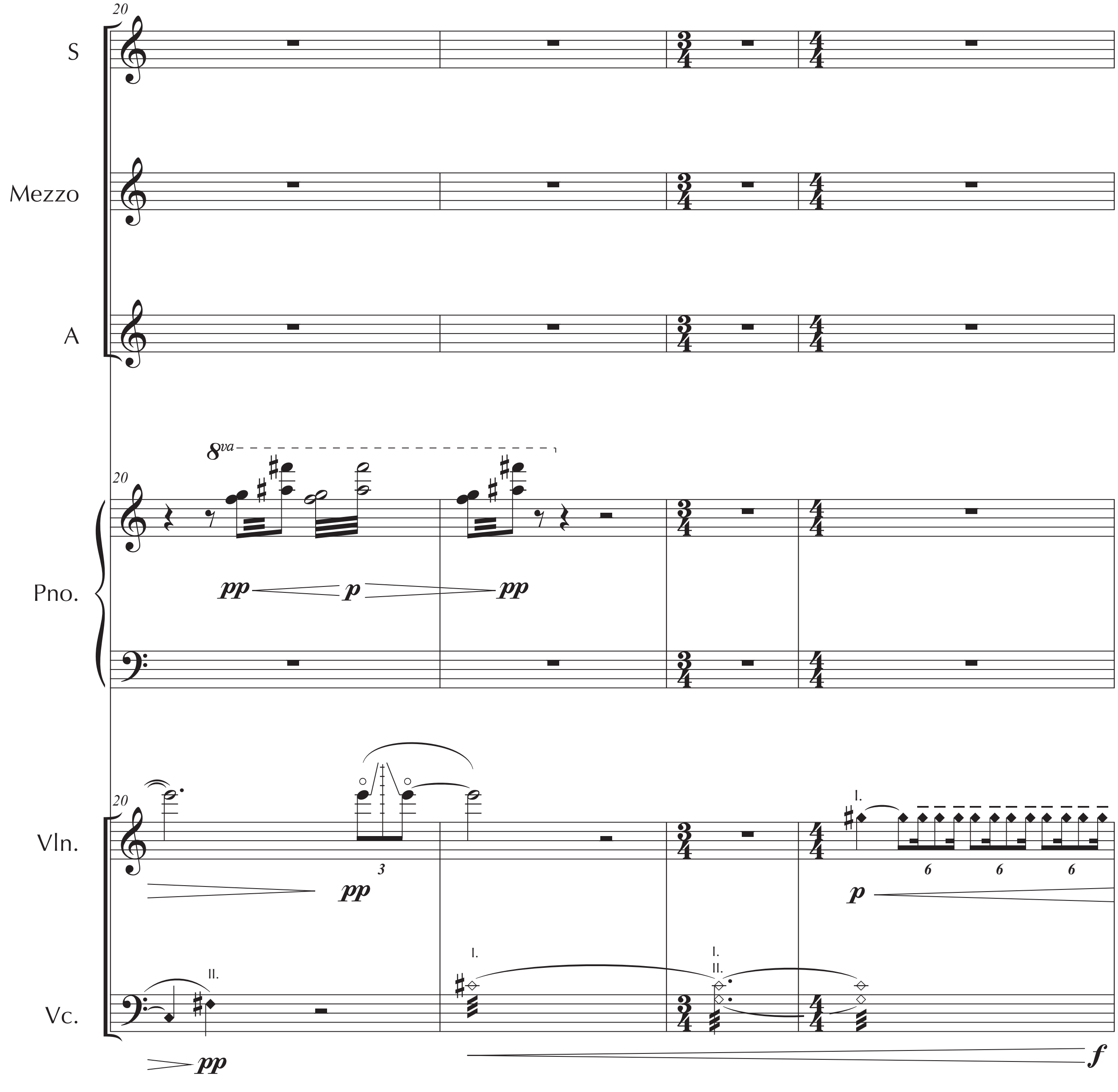

9
S
wind - swept
Mezzo
wind - swept
A
wind - swept
p
pizz. gliss
fingertips
(pizz.)
Pno.
mf
p
3
pitchless poss.
(dampen strings with
harmonic pressure)
Vln.
f
p
f
pitchless poss.
(dampen strings with
harmonic pressure)
Vc.
f
p
f

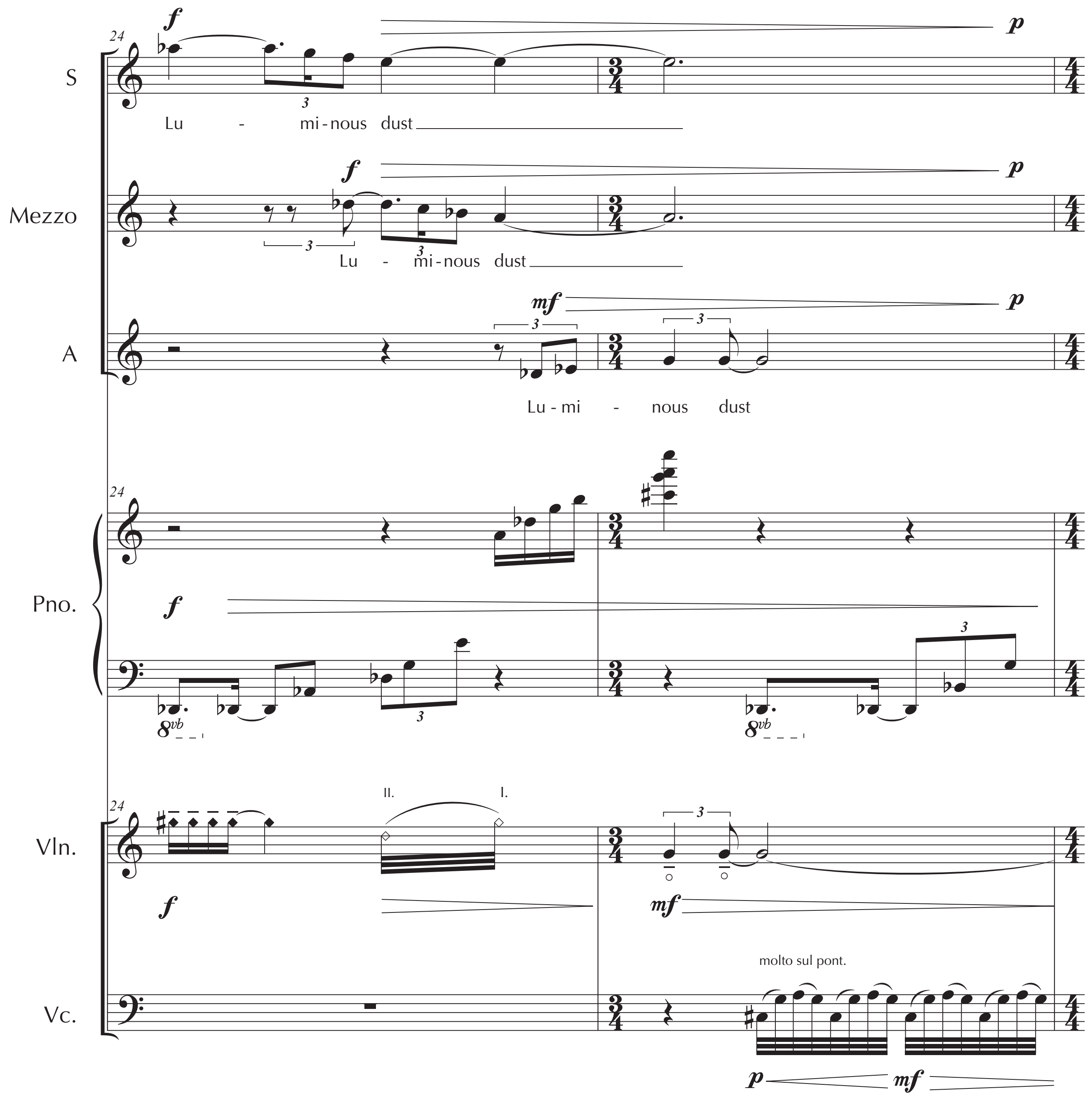

11
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
3
❊
switch to
sustain ped.
norm.
III.
IV.
arco
II.
p
mf
f

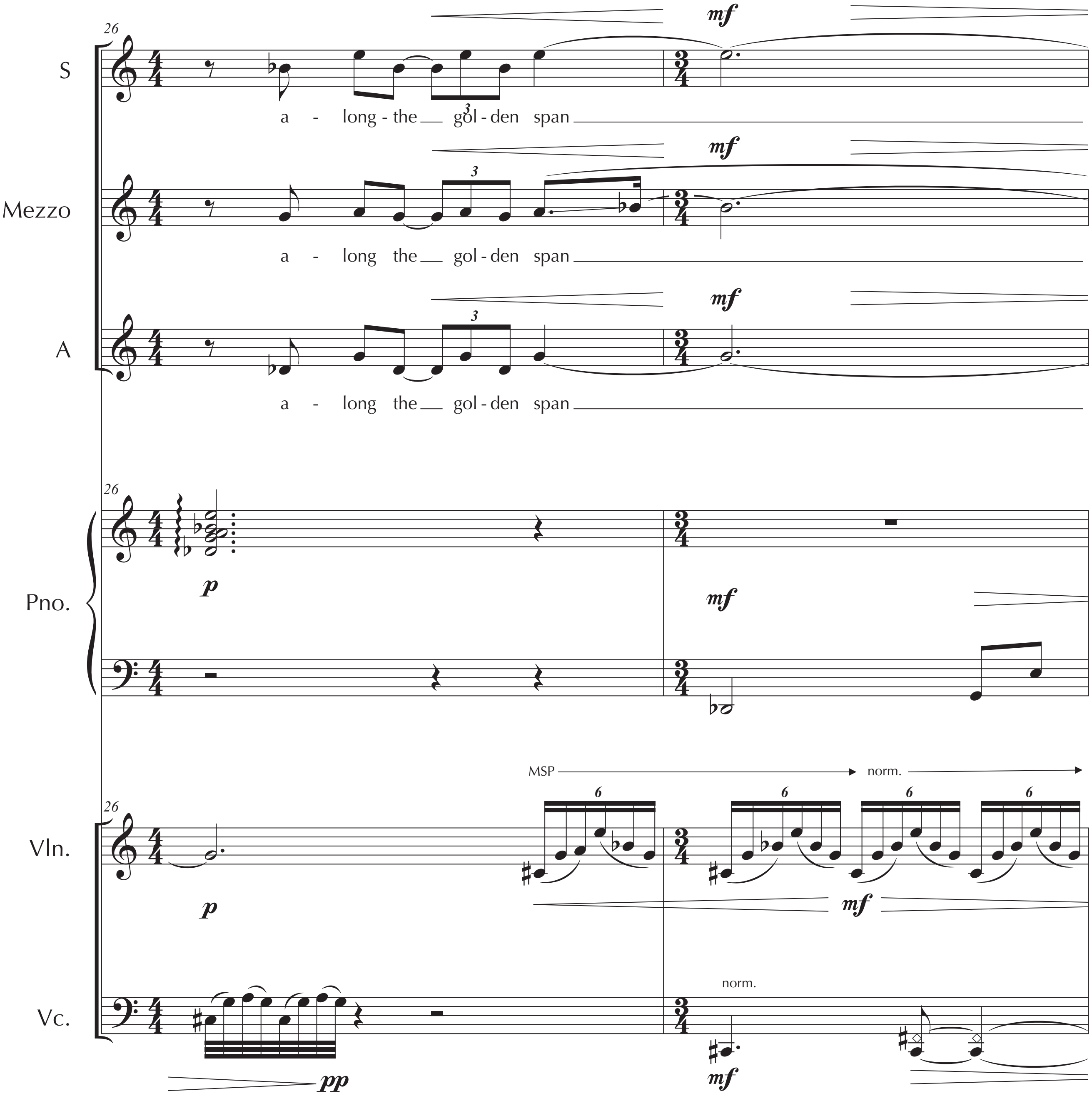

13
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
f
The road bet-ween the sage
The road bet-ween the sage
fingernails (lowest strings)
nail gliss.
tap string
norm.
8vb
6
6
6

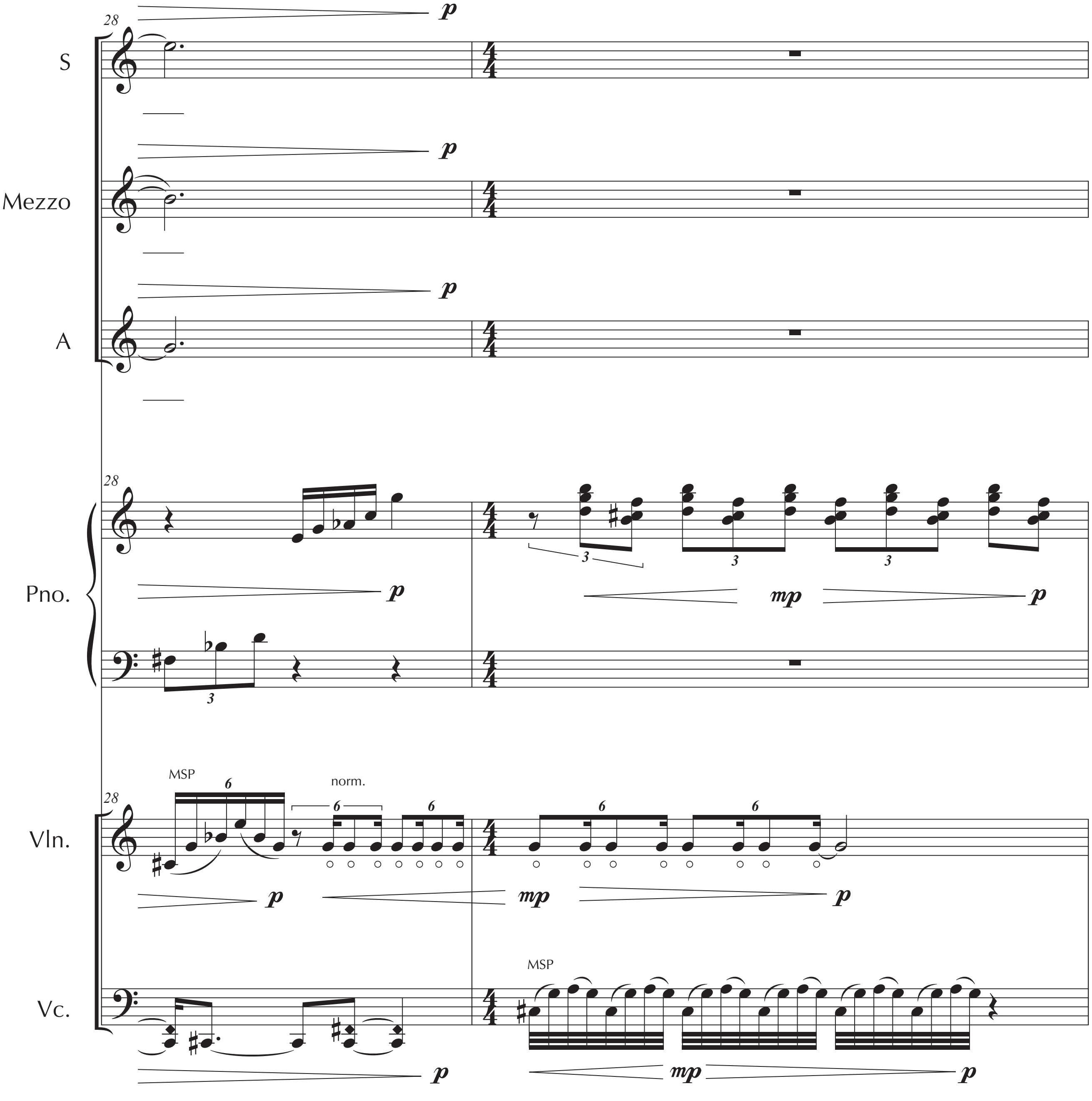

16
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
p
f
mf
win - ding
The road
(norm.)
8va
nail gliss.
3

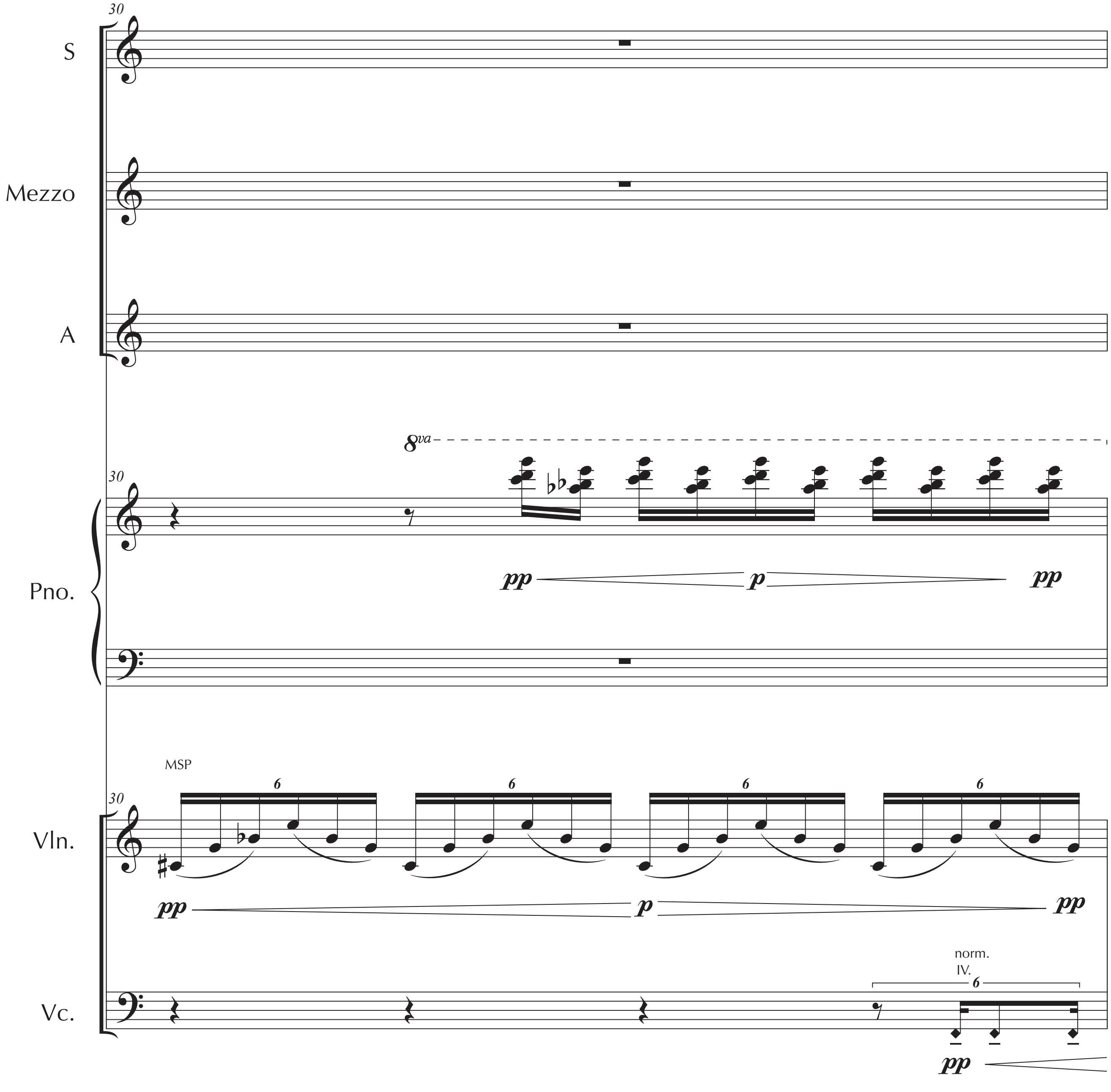

18
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
7
mp
p
3
mf
II.
III.

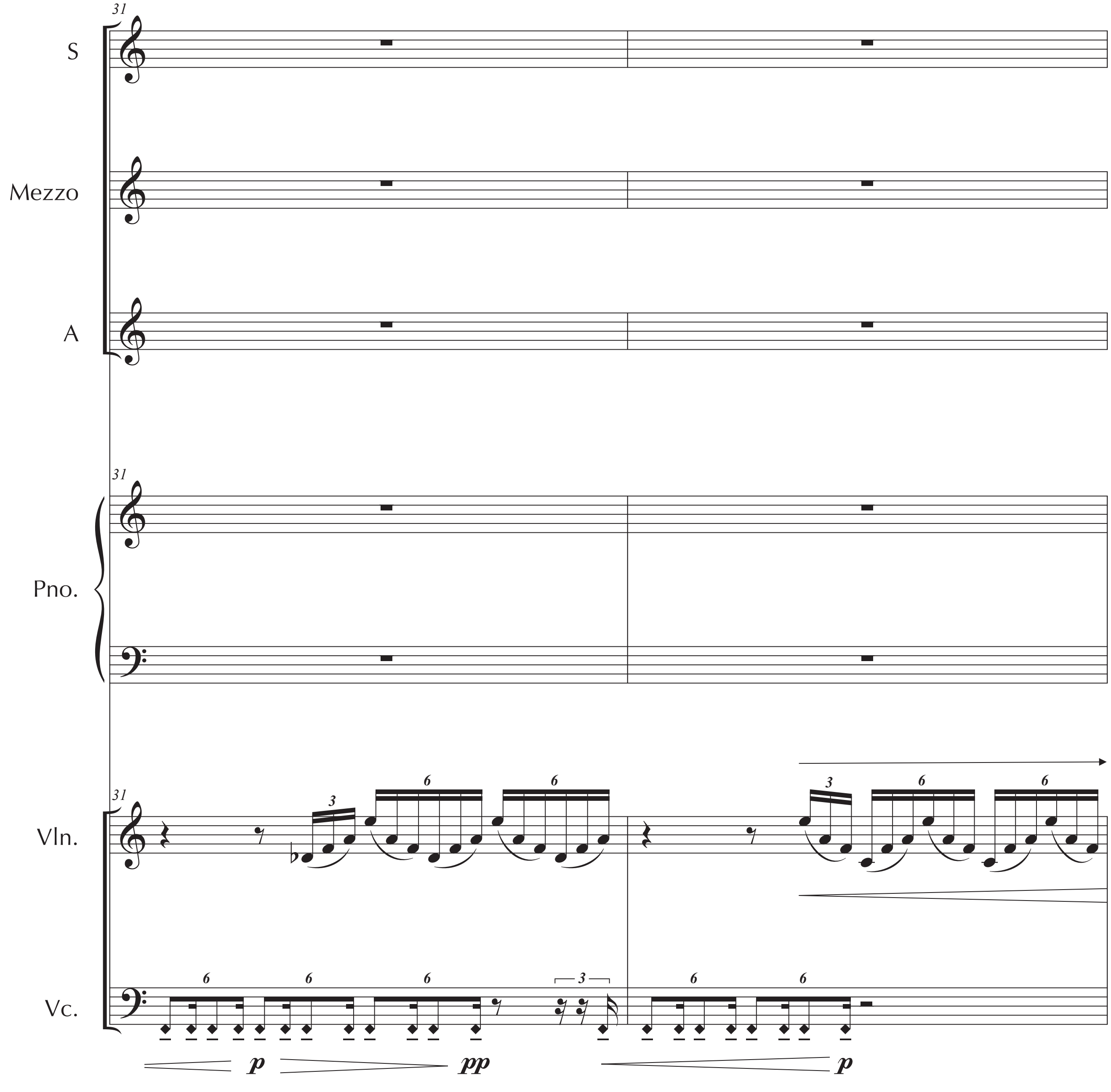

20
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
8va
pp
p
pp
Vln.
pp
3
I.
p
6
6
6
Vc.
II.
I.
I.
II.
pp
f

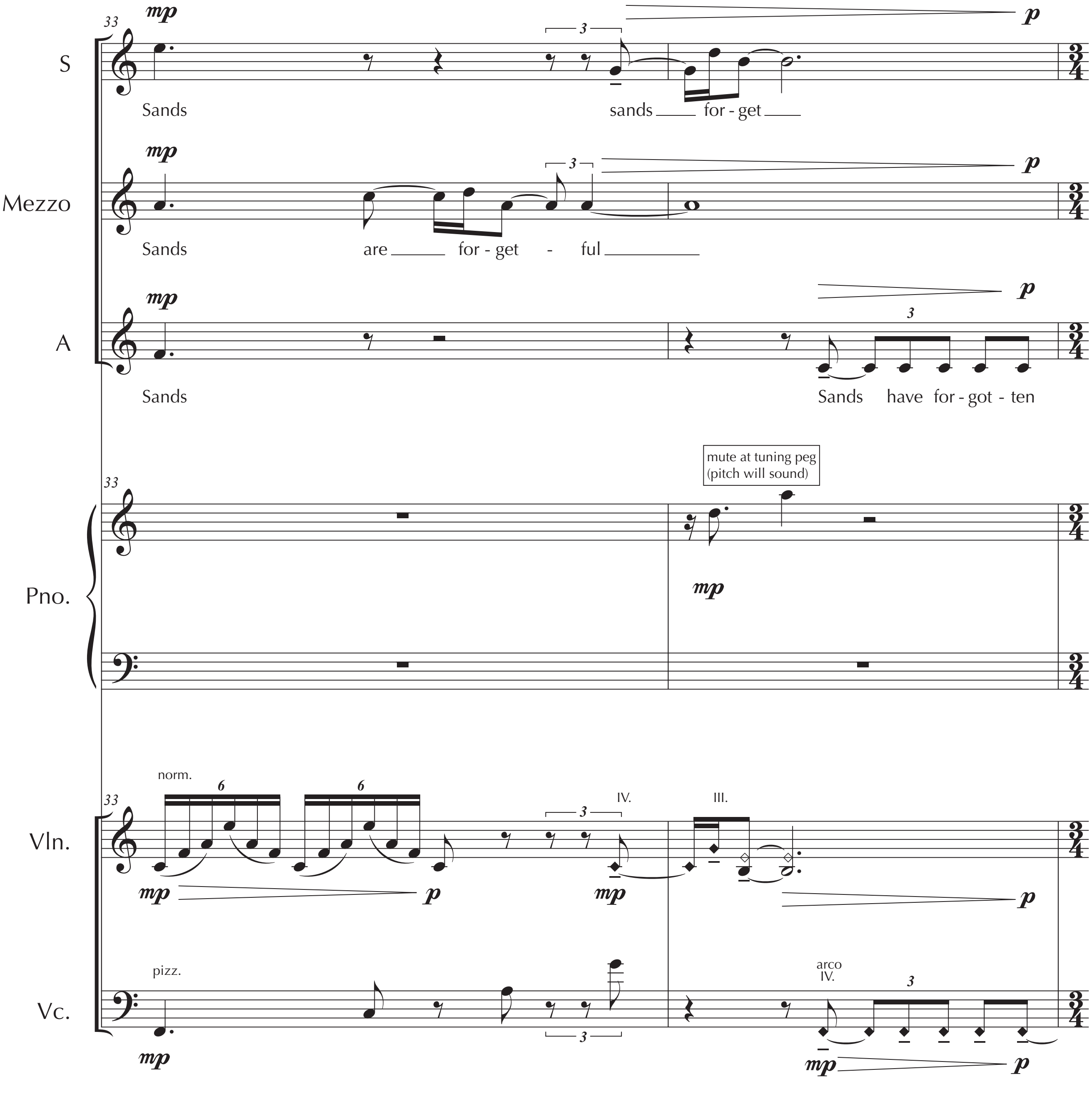

24
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
f
p
mf
Lu - mi-nous dust
Lu - mi-nous dust
Lu-mi - nous dust
3
8vb
II.
I.
molto sul pont.

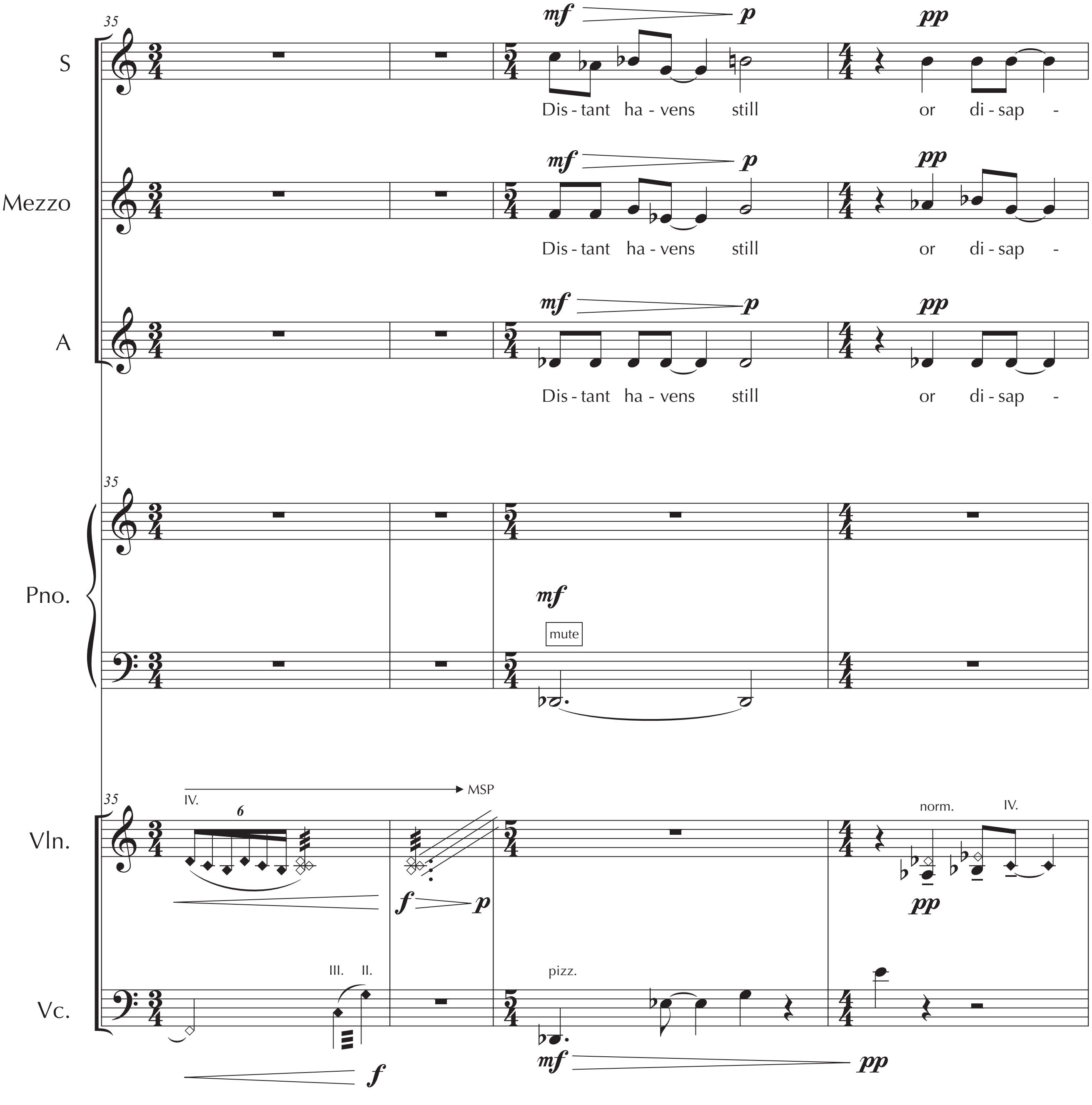

26
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
mf
a - long - the gol - den span
a - long the gol - den span
a - long the gol - den span
3
p
mf
pp
MSP
norm.
6

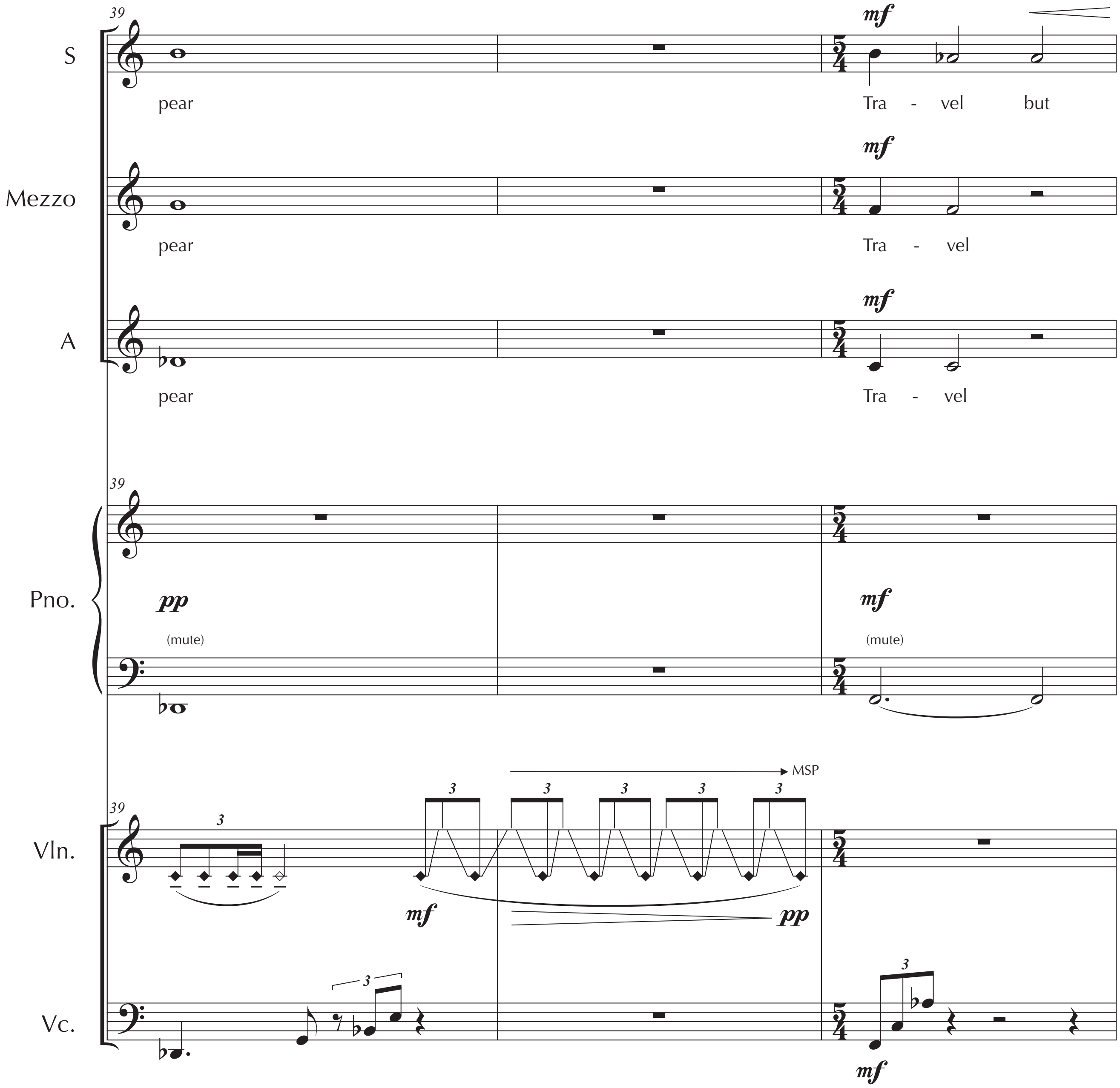

28
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
p
mp
MSP
norm.
6
3

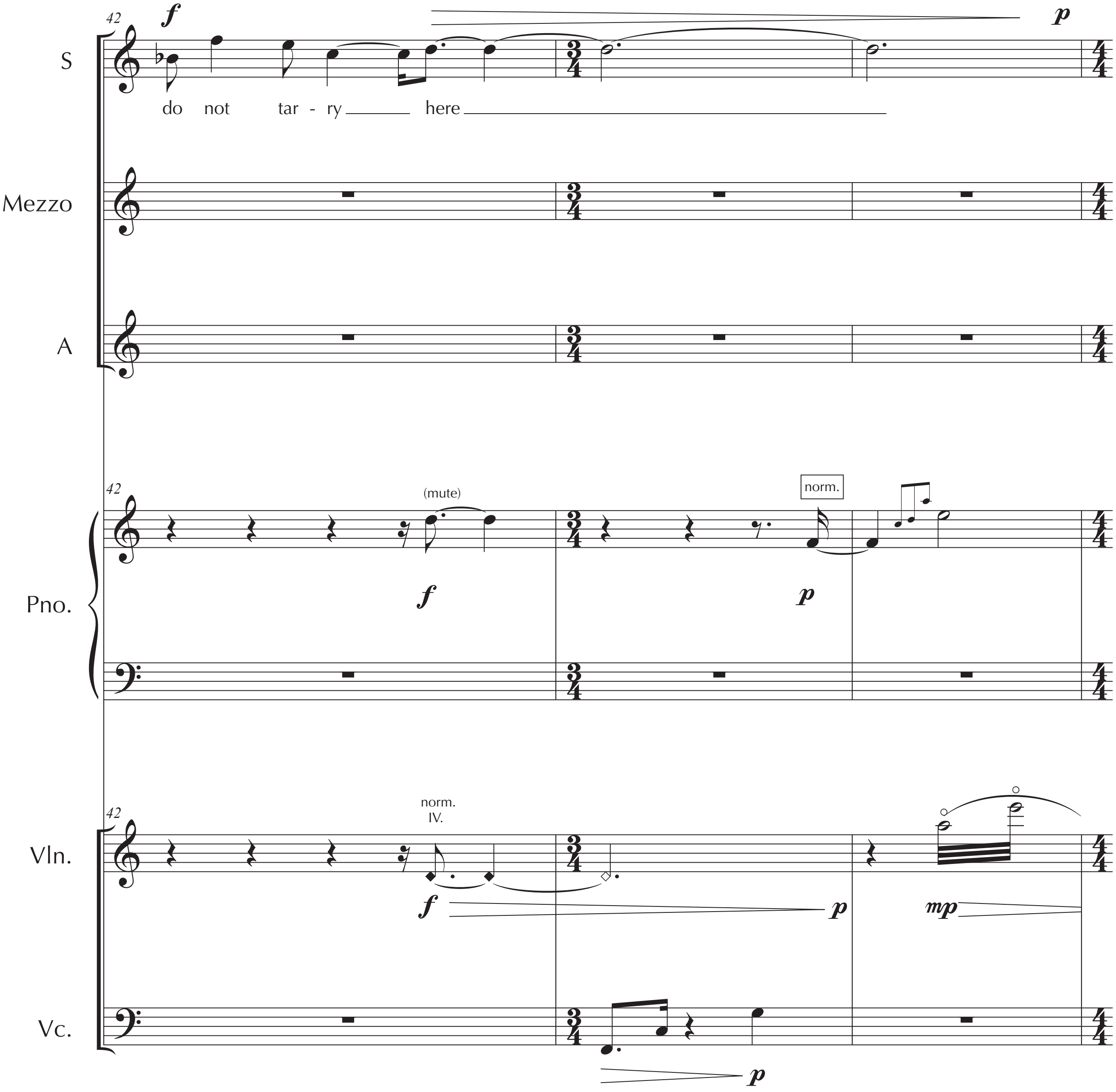

30
S
Mezzo
A
8va
Pno.
pp
p
pp
MSP
Vln.
6
pp
p
pp
Vc.
norm.
IV.
6
pp

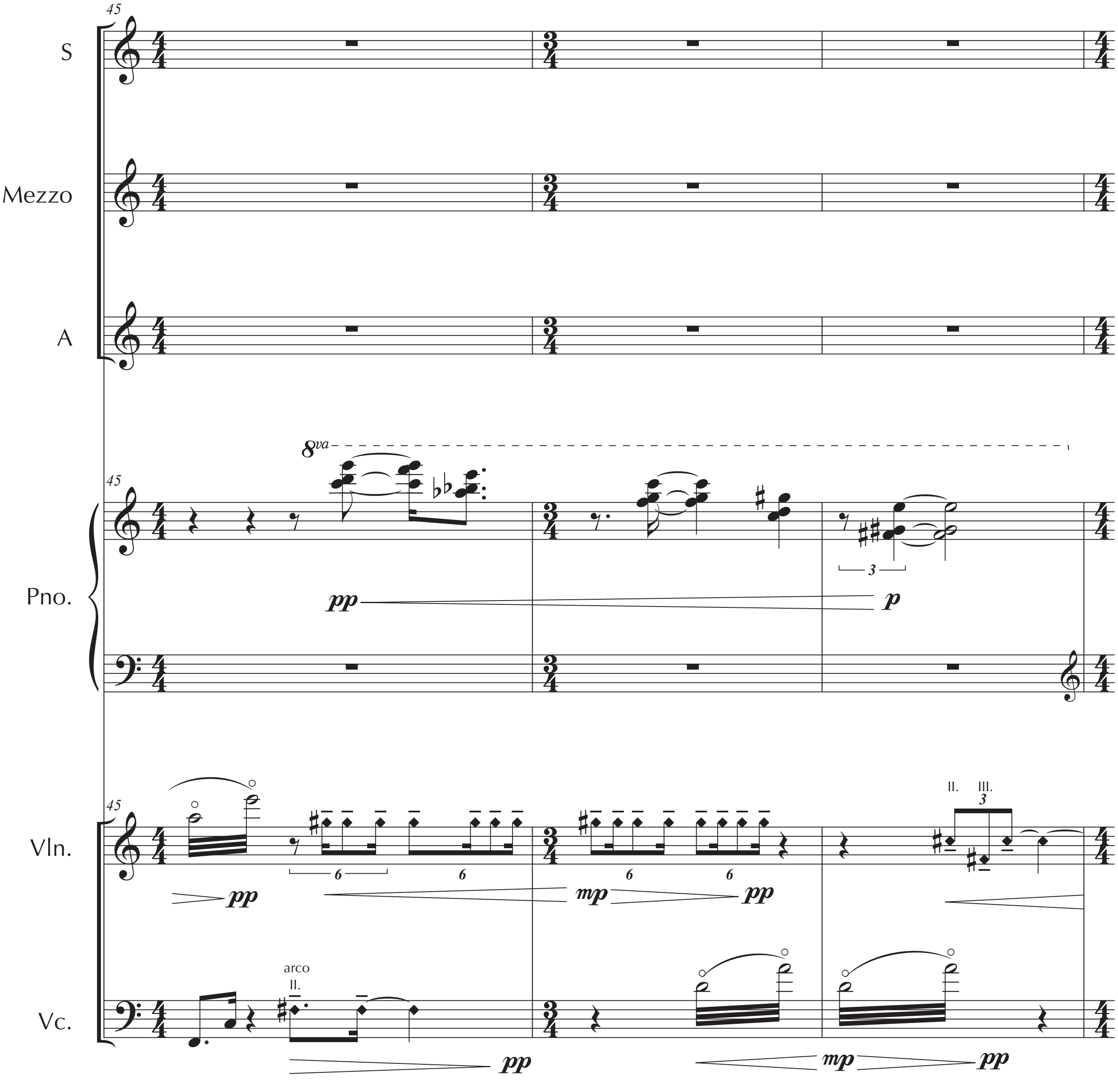

31
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
3
6
p
pp

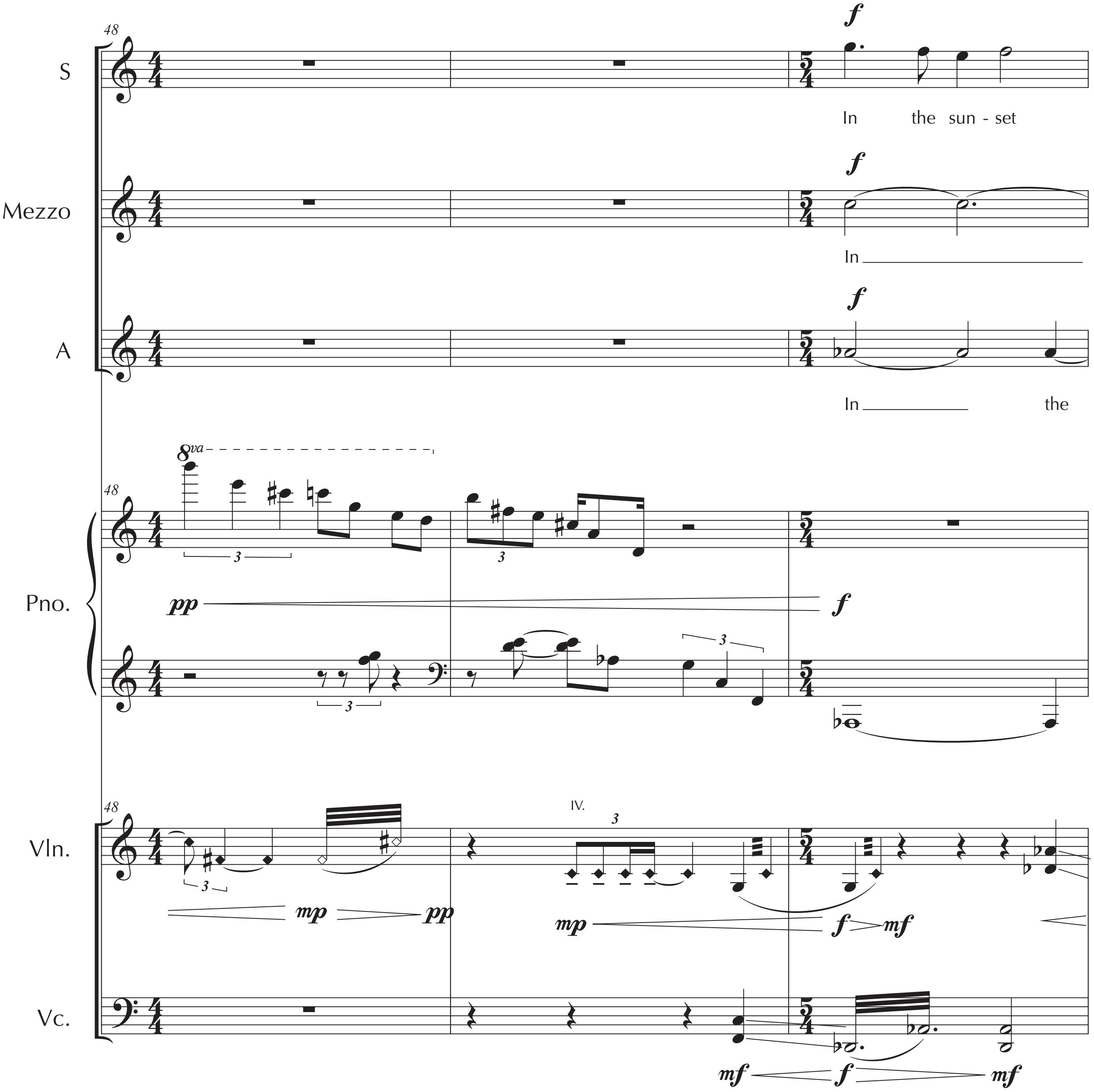

33
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
mp
p
Sands sands for - get
Sands are for - get - ful
Sands Sands have for - got - ten
mute at tuning peg (pitch will sound)
norm.
IV.
III.
pizz.
arco IV.
6
3

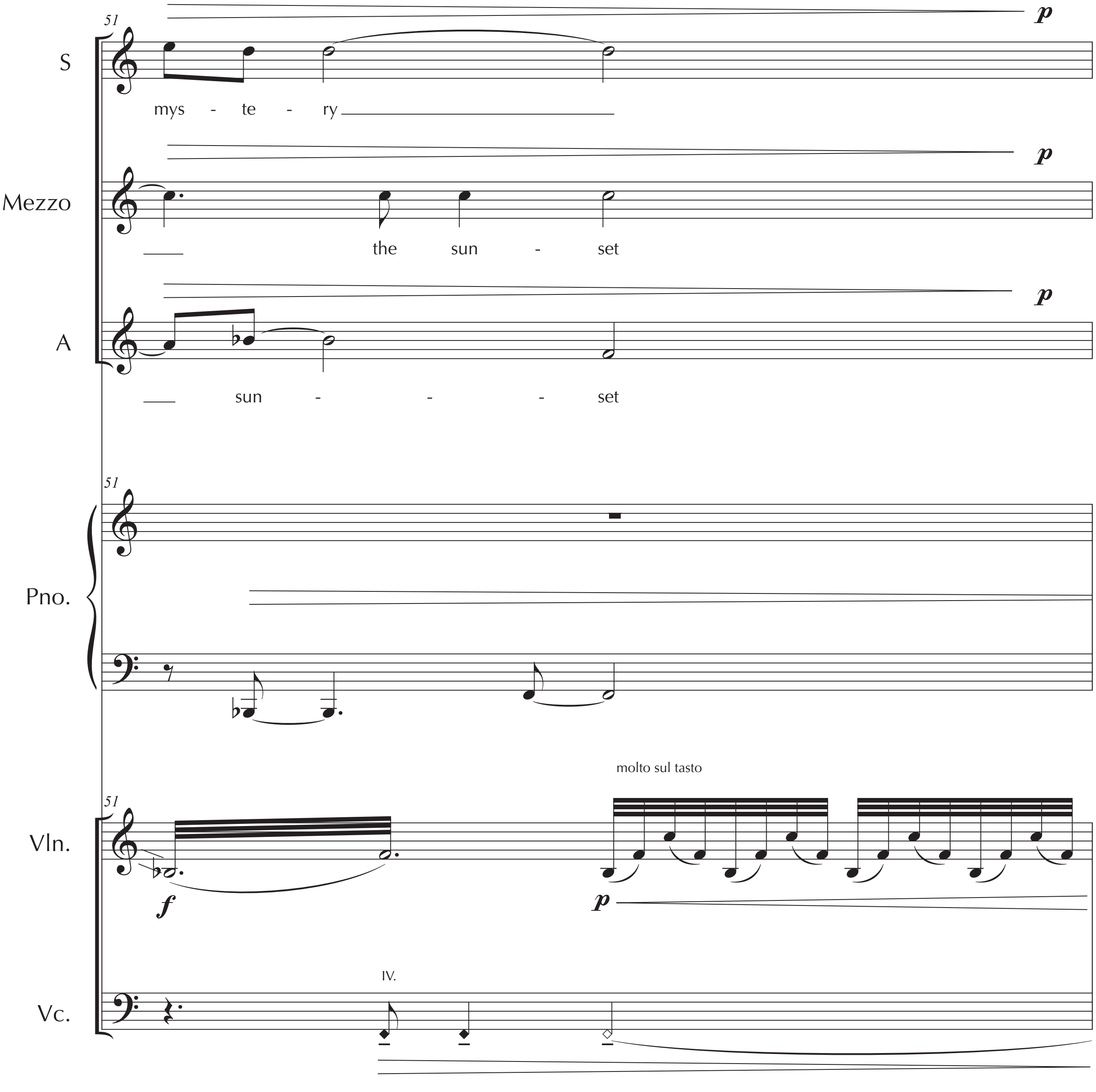

35
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
mf
p
pp
Dis - tant ha - vens still or di - sap -
mute
IV.
6
MSP
f
norm.
III.
II.
pizz.

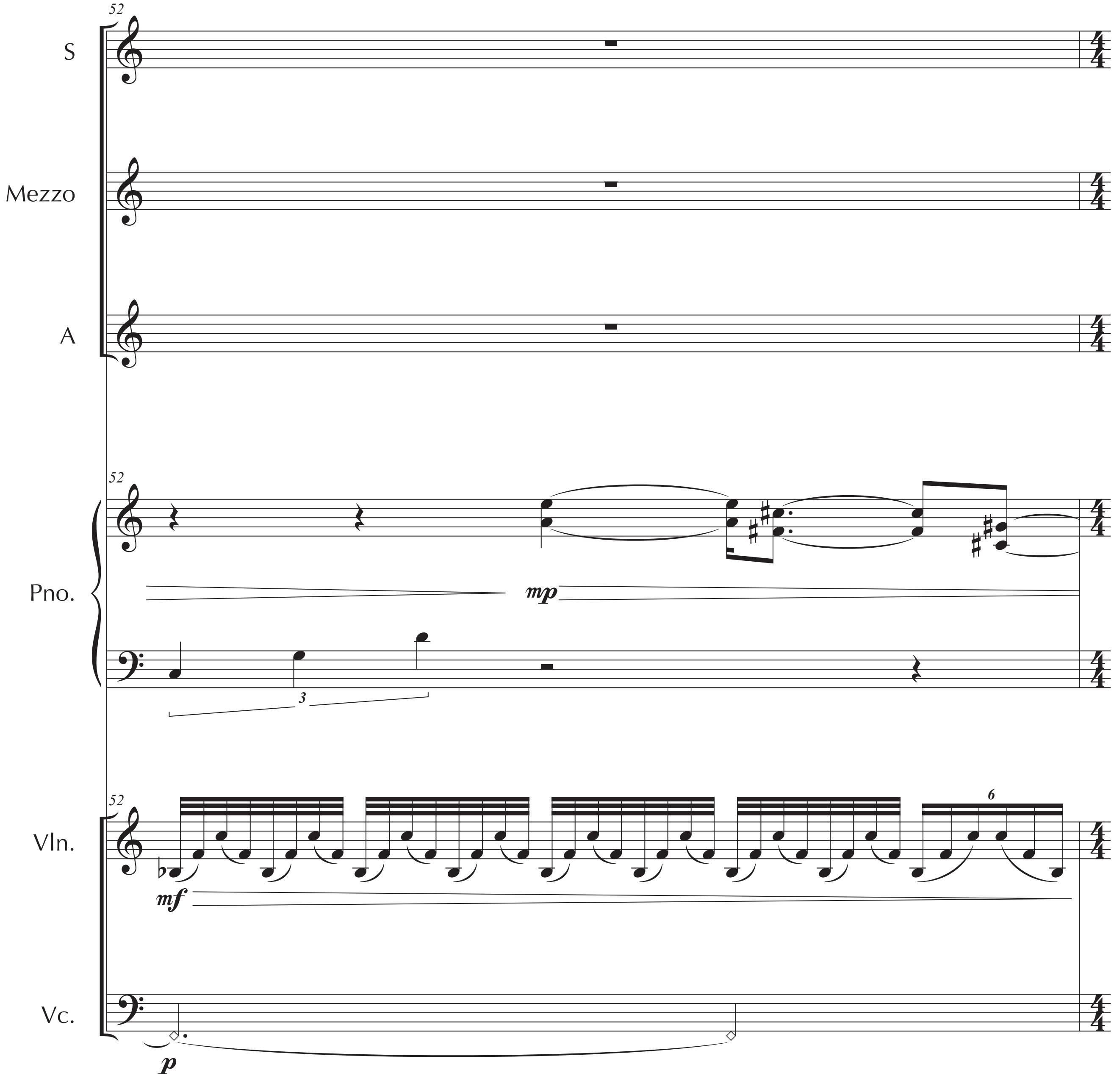

39
S
Mezzo
A
pear
Tra - vel but
Tra - vel
Tra - vel
mf
Pno.
pp
(mute)
mf
(mute)
Vln.
Vc.
3
MSP
pp
mf

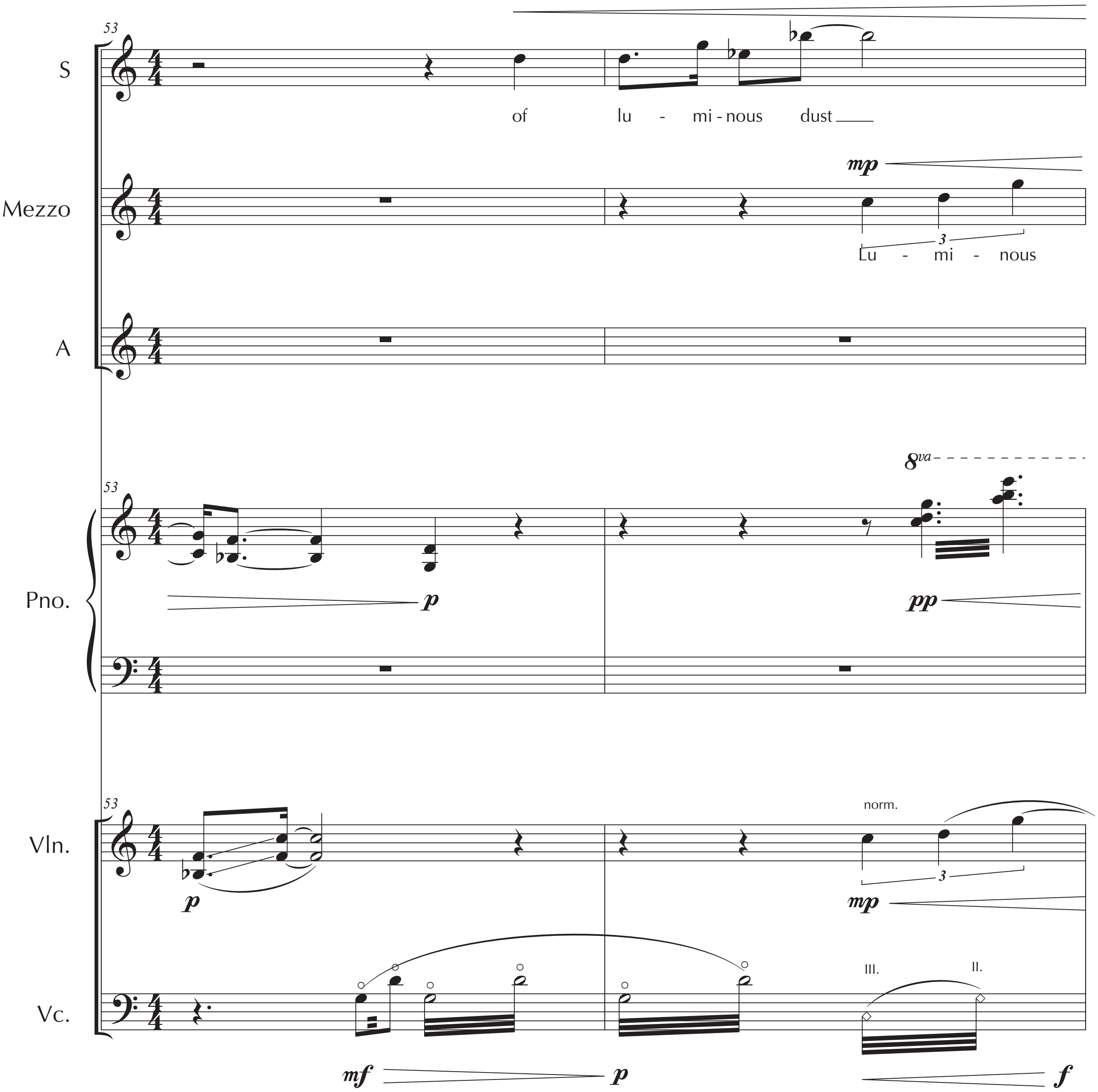

42
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
f
p
do not tar - ry here
(mute)
norm.
norm.
IV.
mp

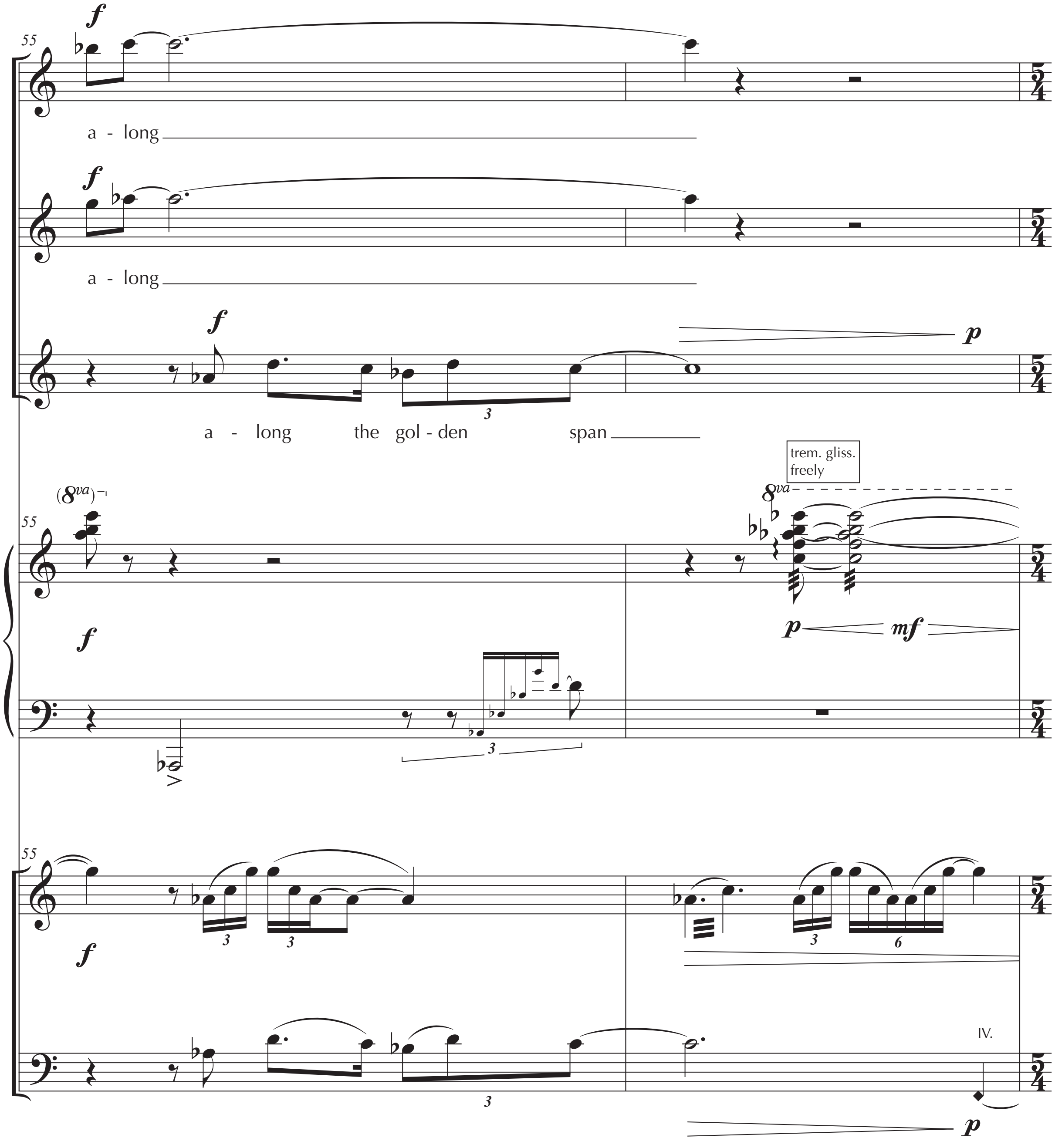

45
S
Mezzo
A
8va
Pno.
pp
p
3
Vln.
II.
III.
6
mp
arco
Vc.

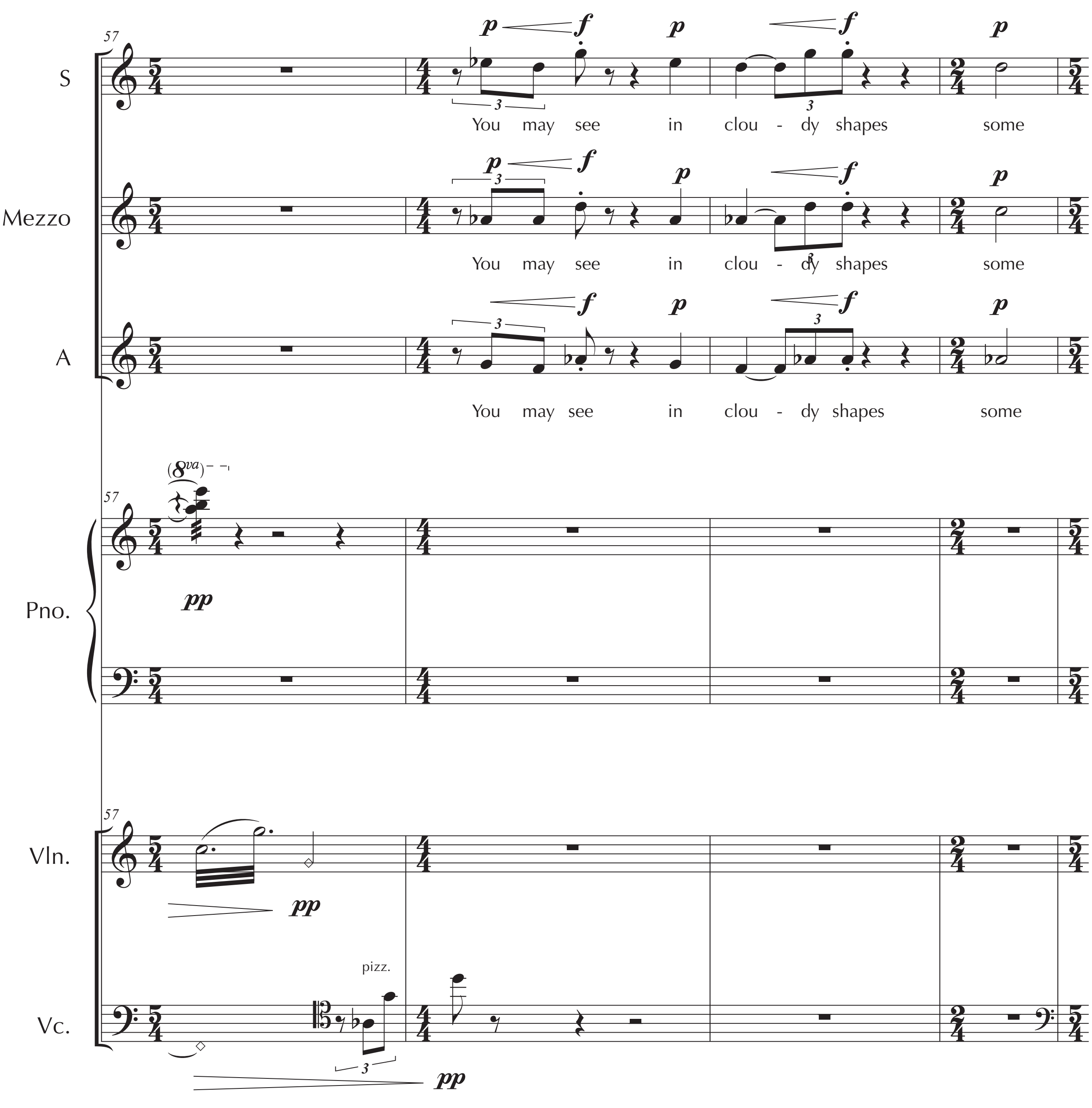

48
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
f
In the sun - set
In
In the
8va
pp
f
IV.
mp
pp
mf

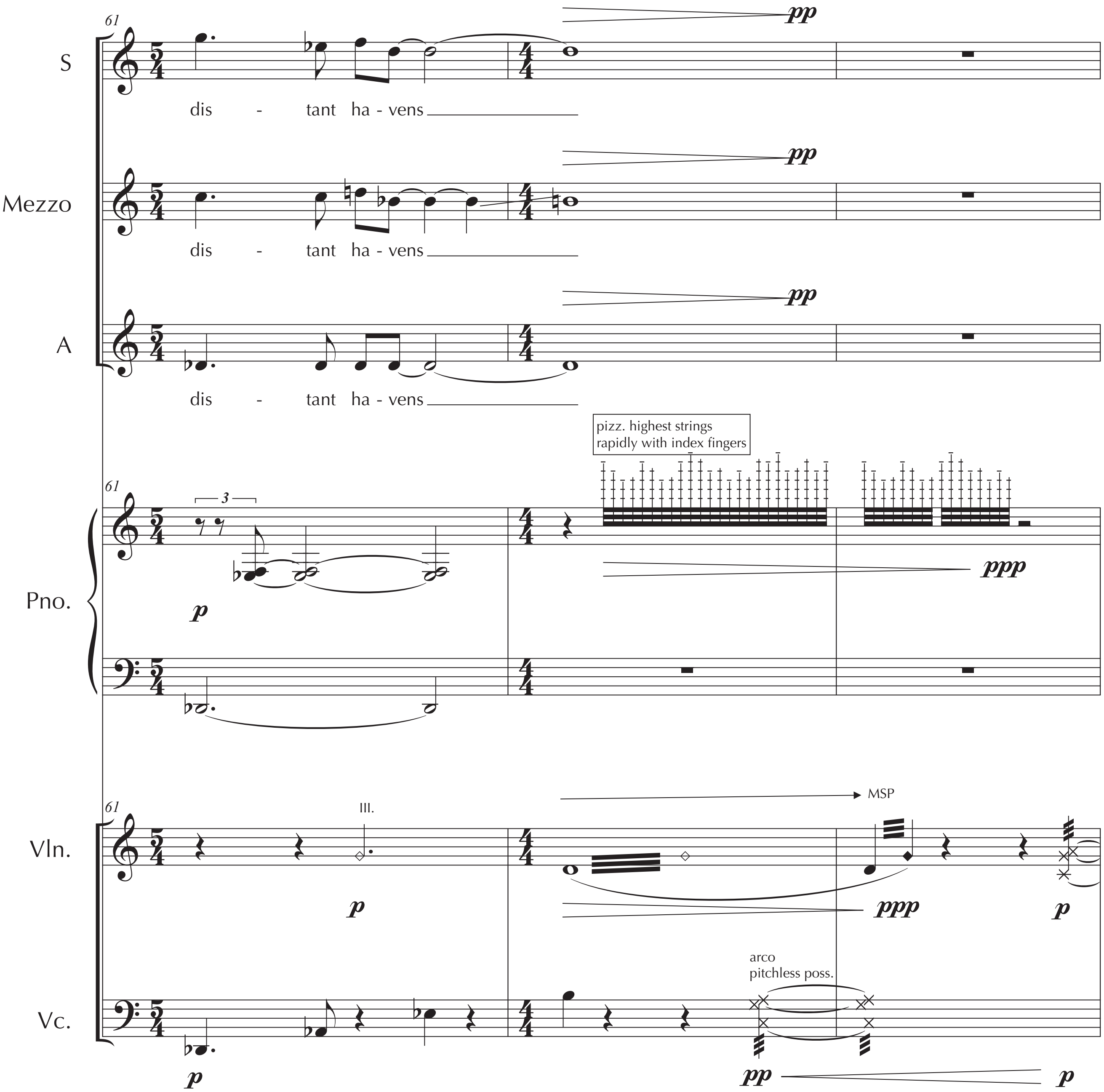

51
S
mys - te - ry
Mezzo
the sun - set
A
sun - - - set
p
Pno.
Vln.
f
molto sul tasto
p
Vc.
IV.

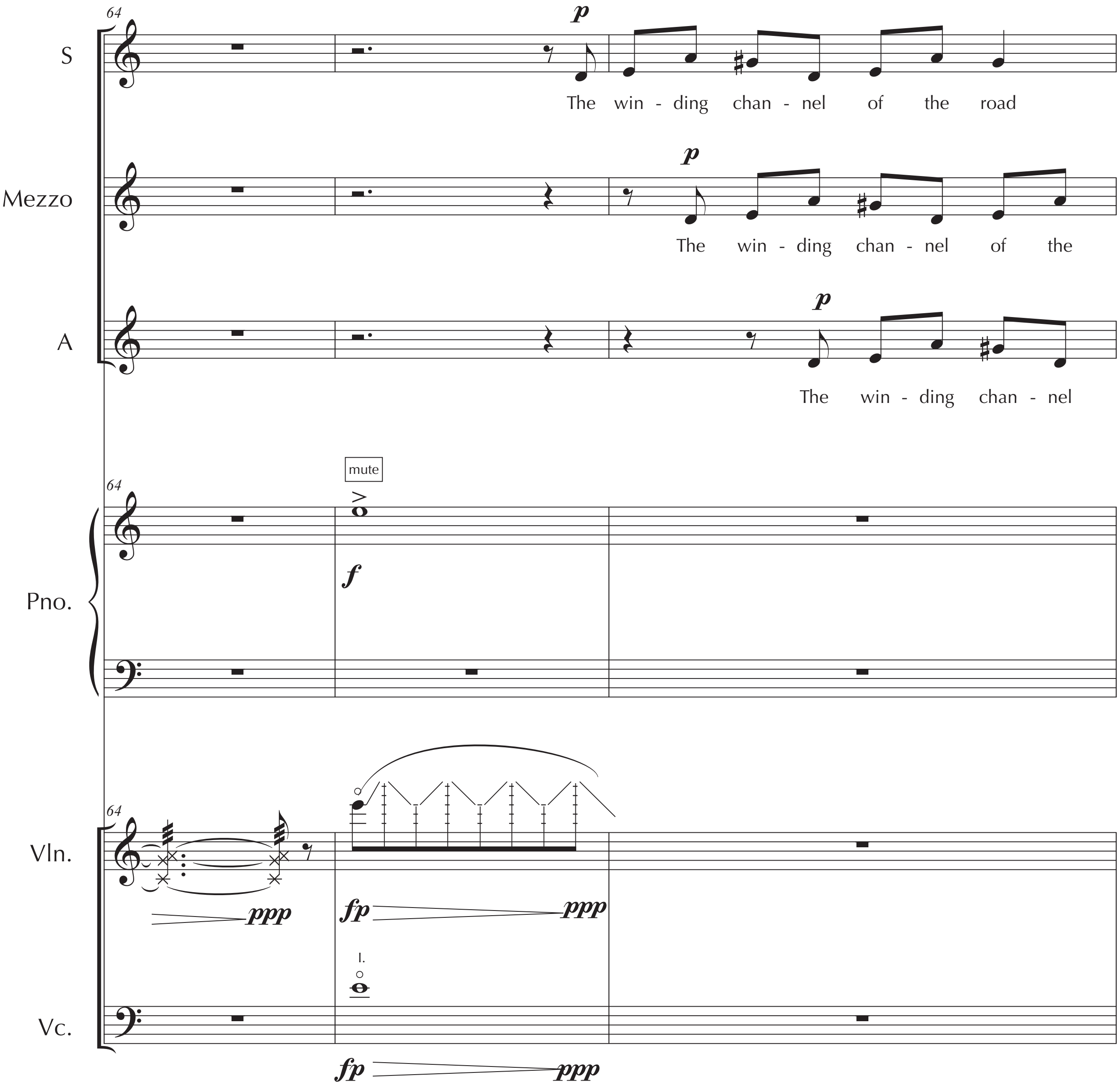

52
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
mp
3
Vln.
mf
6
Vc.
p

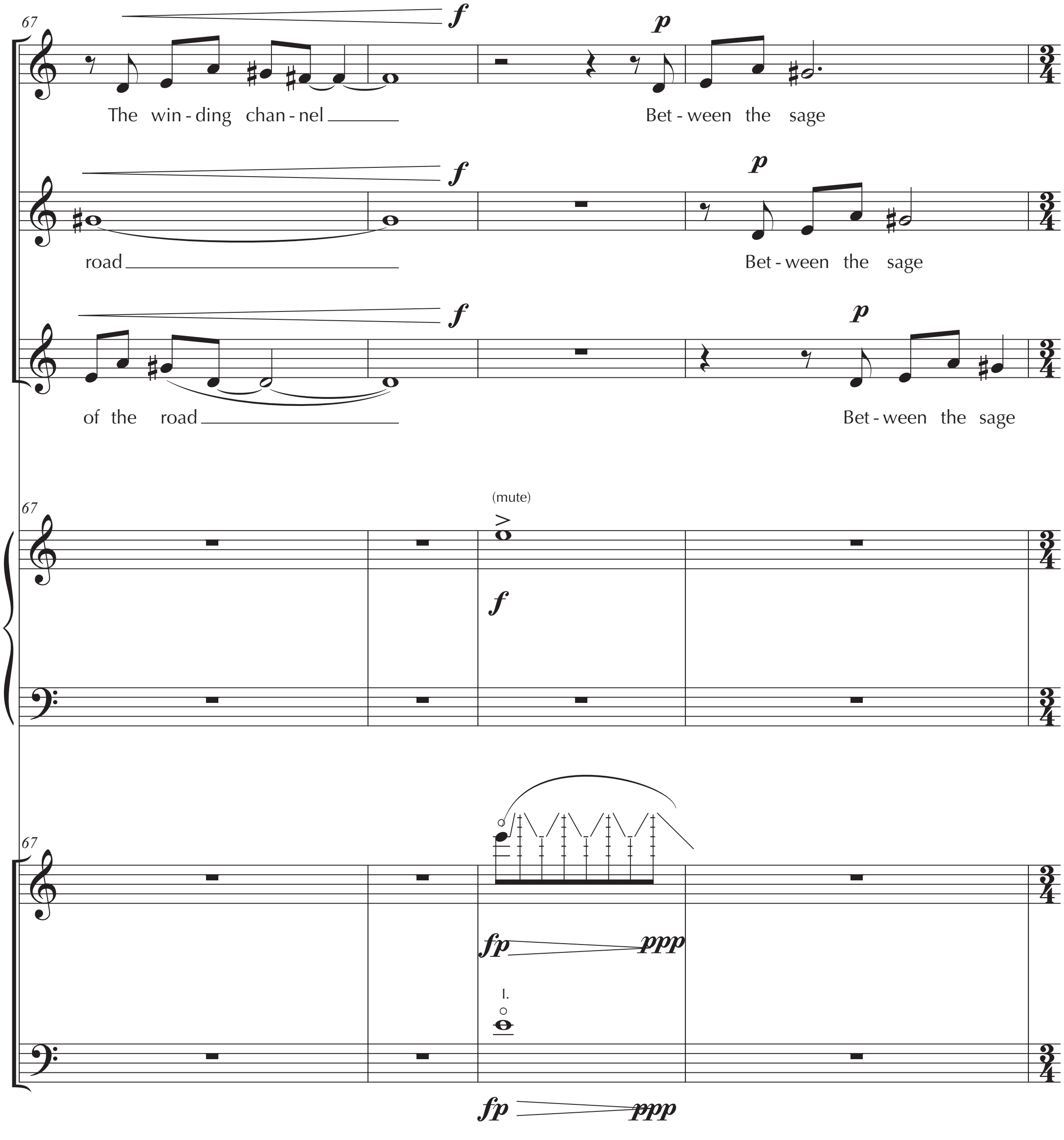

53
S
of lu - mi - nous dust
Mezzo
mp
3
Lu - mi - nous
A
Pno.
8va
p
pp
Vln.
Vc.
norm.
III.
II.
mf
f

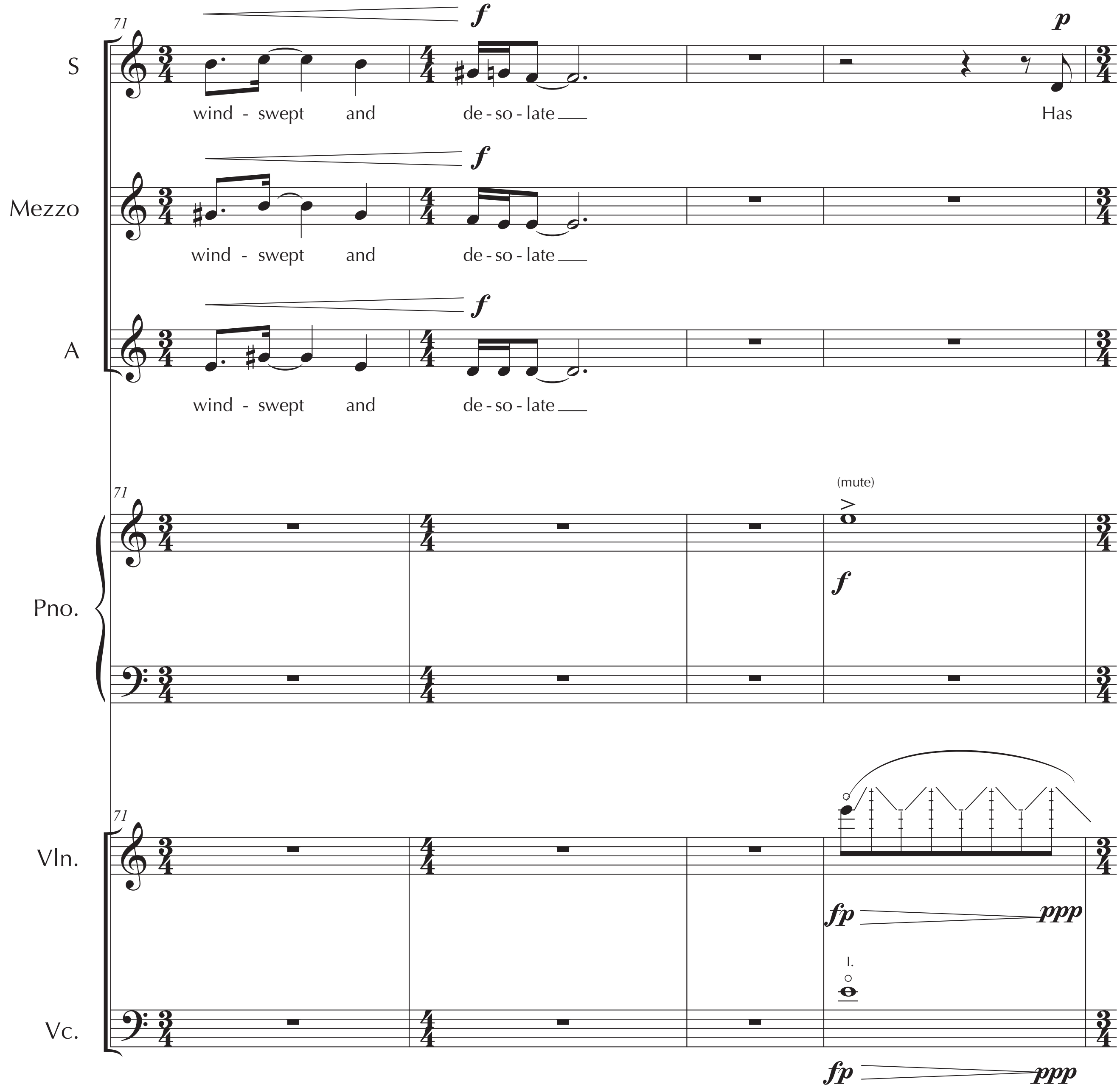

55
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
f
a - long
a - long
a - long the gol - den span
p
trem. gliss. freely
(8va)
8va
p
mf
3
6
IV.

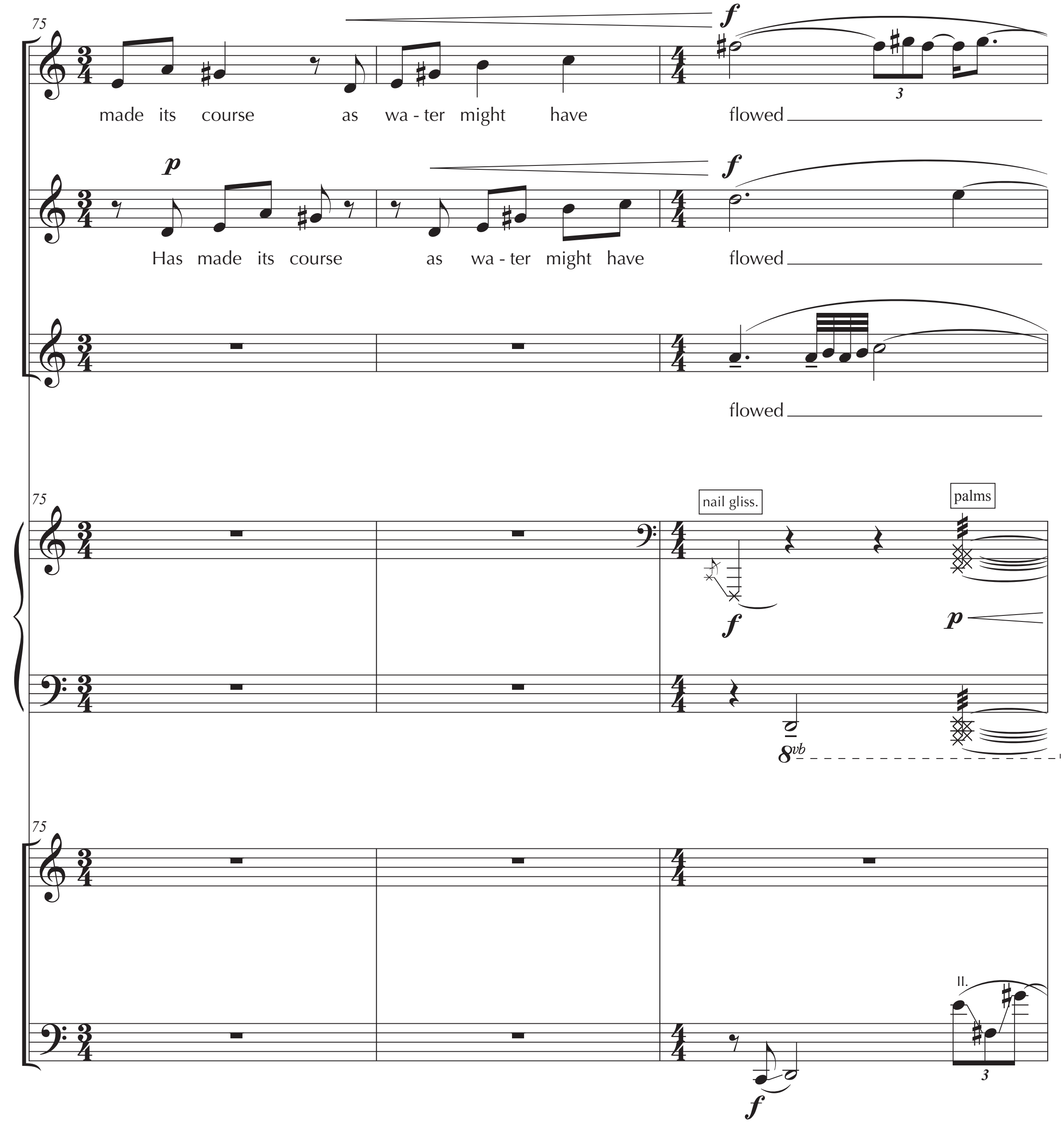

57
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
p
f
pp
(8va)
pizz.
3
You may see in clou - dy shapes some

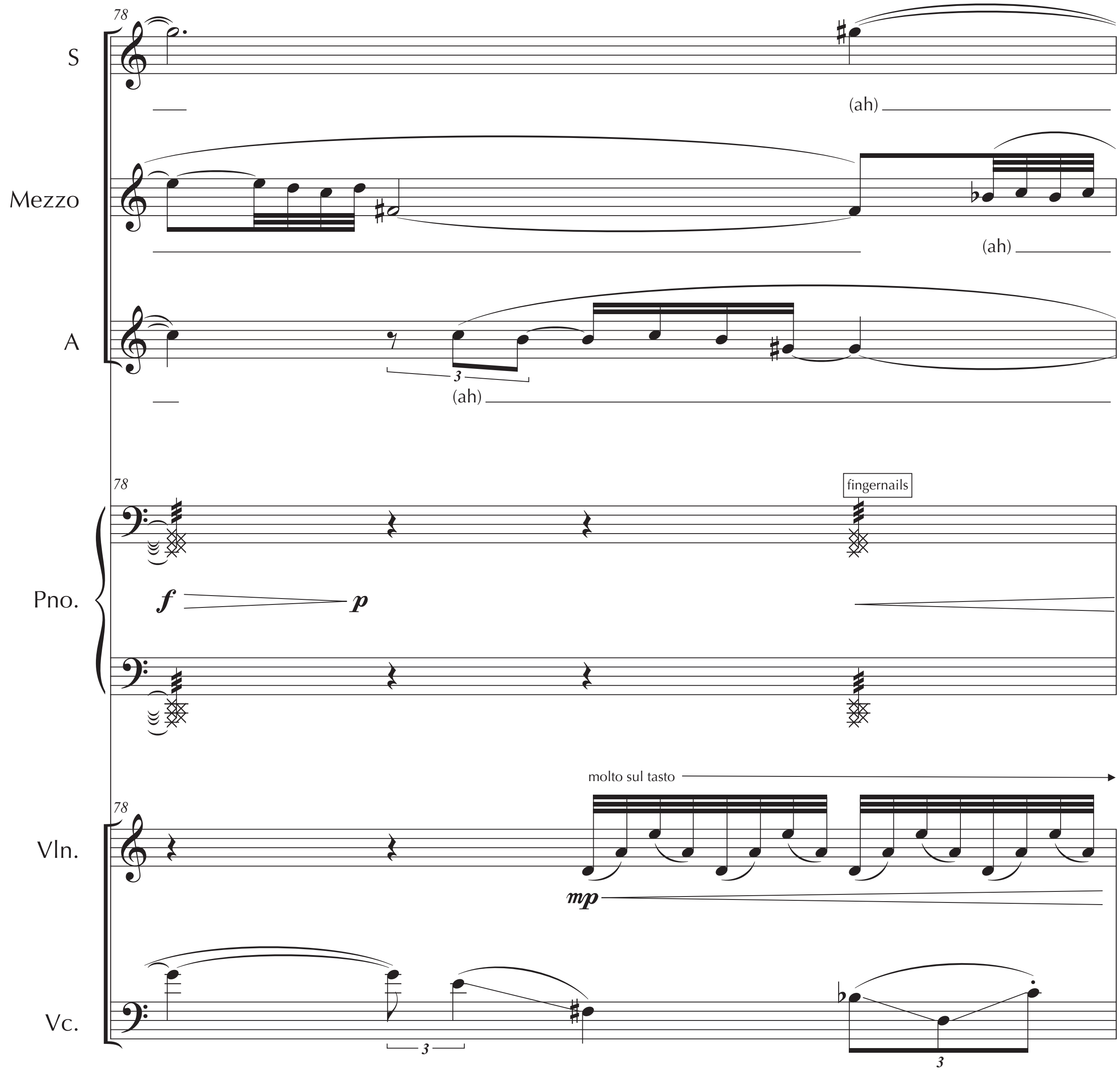

61
S
Mezzo
A
dis - tant ha - vens
pp
Pno.
pizz. highest strings
rapidly with index fingers
3
p
ppp
Vln.
Vc.
III.
MSP
arco
pitchless poss.
p
pp
ppp

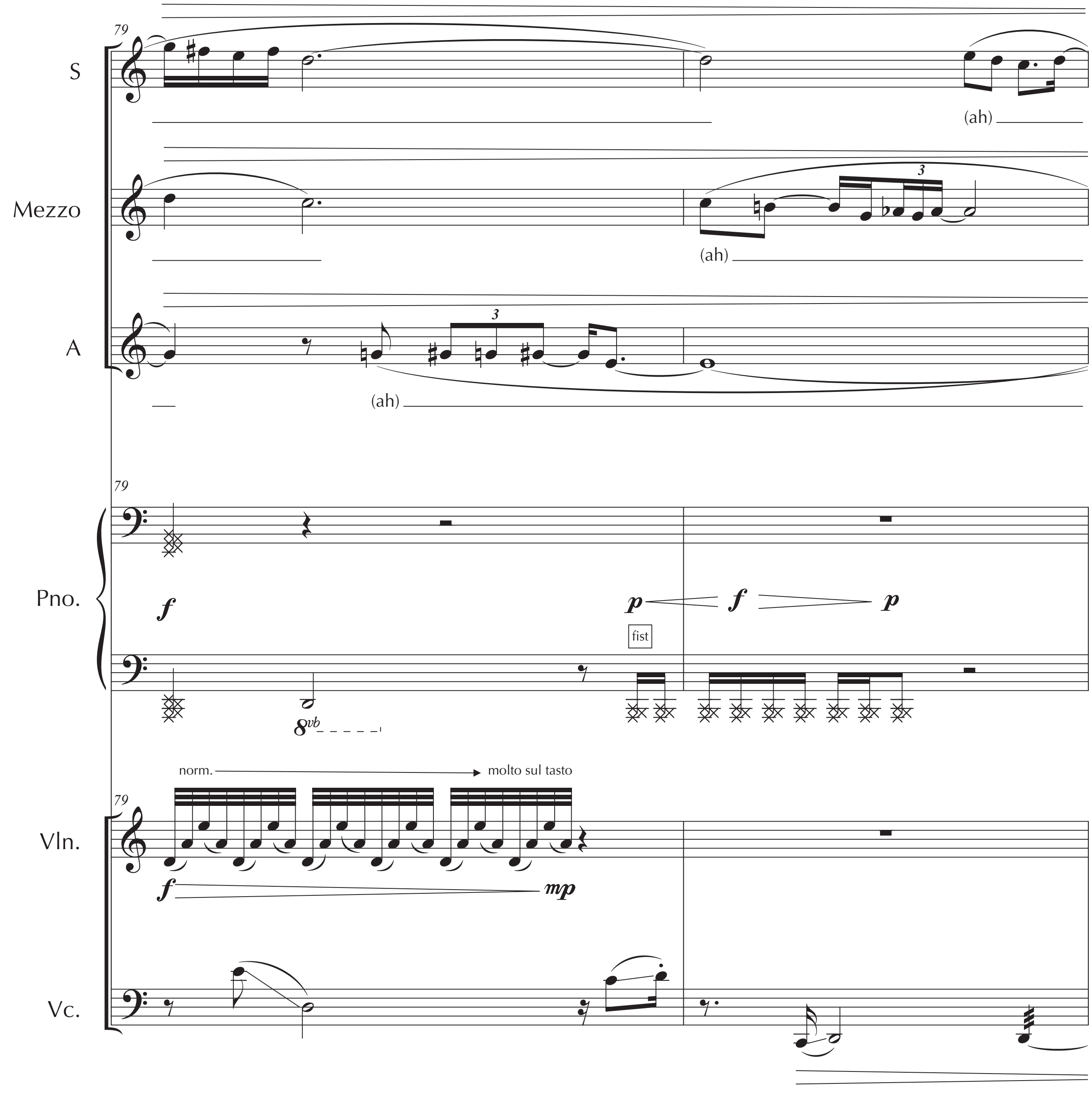

64
S
Mezzo
A
p
The win - ding chan - nel of the road
The win - ding chan - nel of the
The win - ding chan - nel
mute
Pno.
f
Vln.
Vc.
ppp
fp
ppp
I.

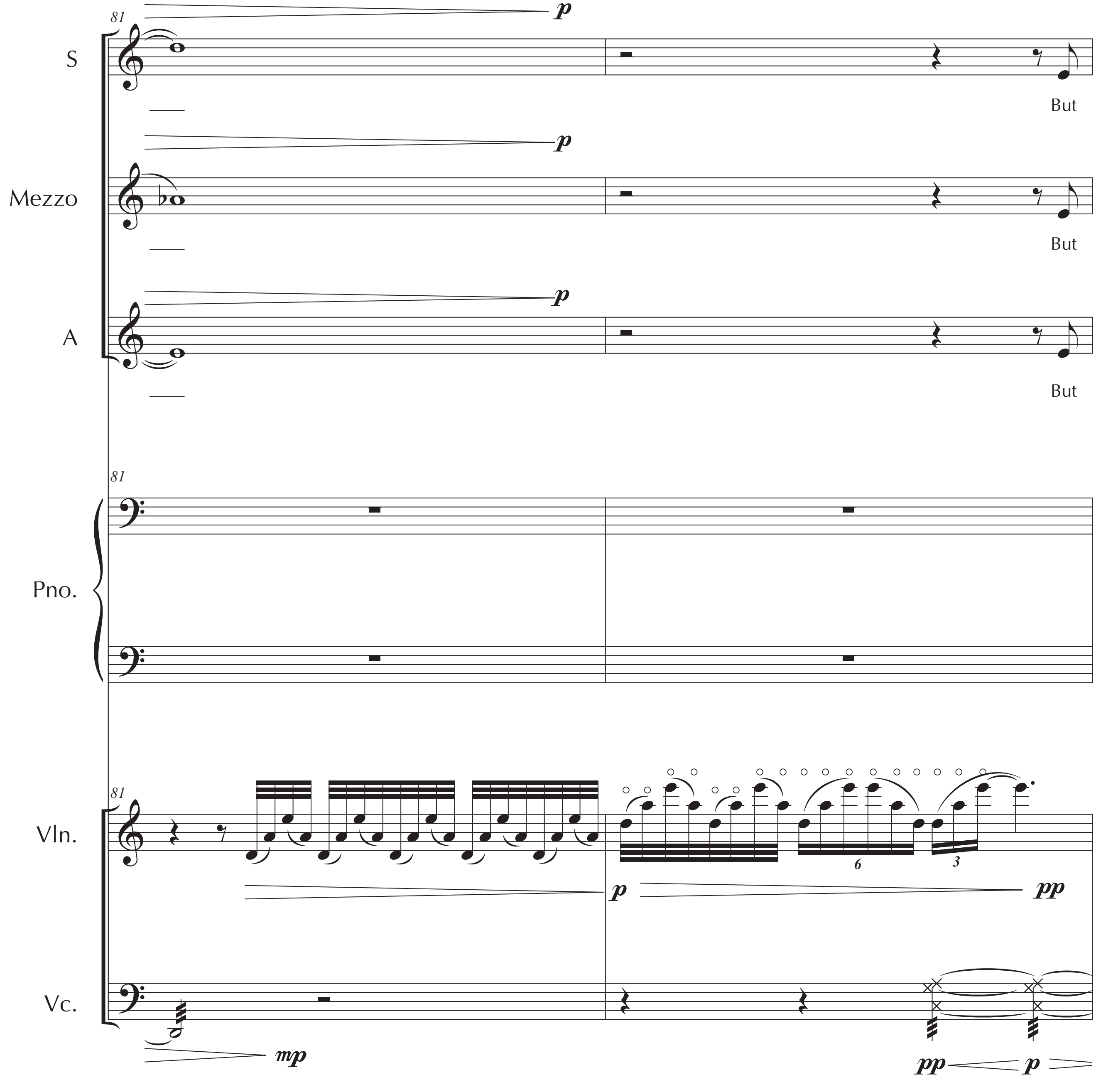

67
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
f
p
The win - ding chan - nel
Bet - ween the sage
road
Bet - ween the sage
of the road
Bet - ween the sage
(mute)
f
fp
ppp
I.
3/4

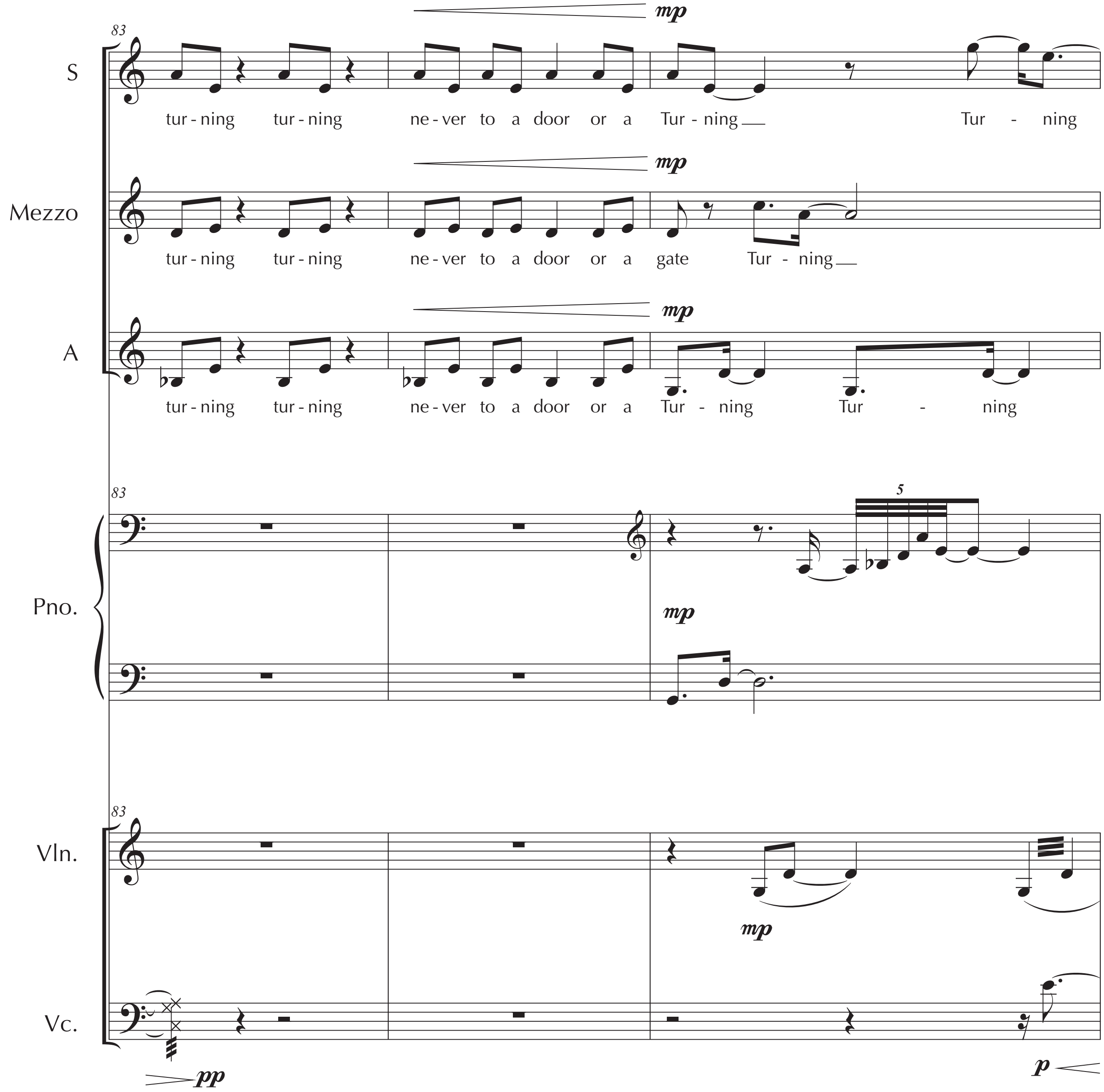

71
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
f
p
wind - swept and de - so - late
Has
(mute)
I.
fp
ppp

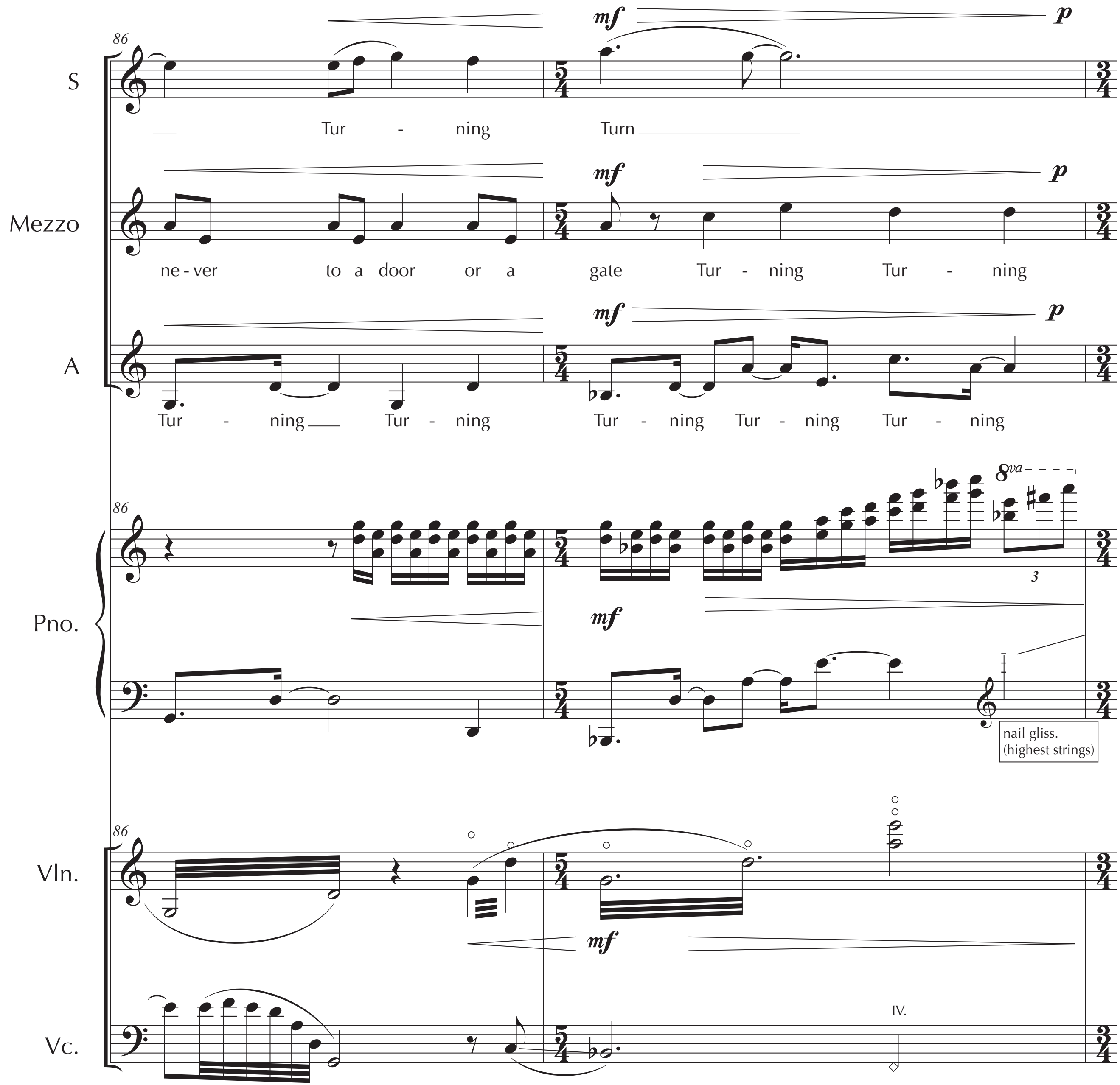

75
S
made its course as wa - ter might have flowed
Mezzo
Has made its course as wa - ter might have flowed
A
flowed
Pno.
nail gliss.
palms
8vb
Vln.
Vc.
II.

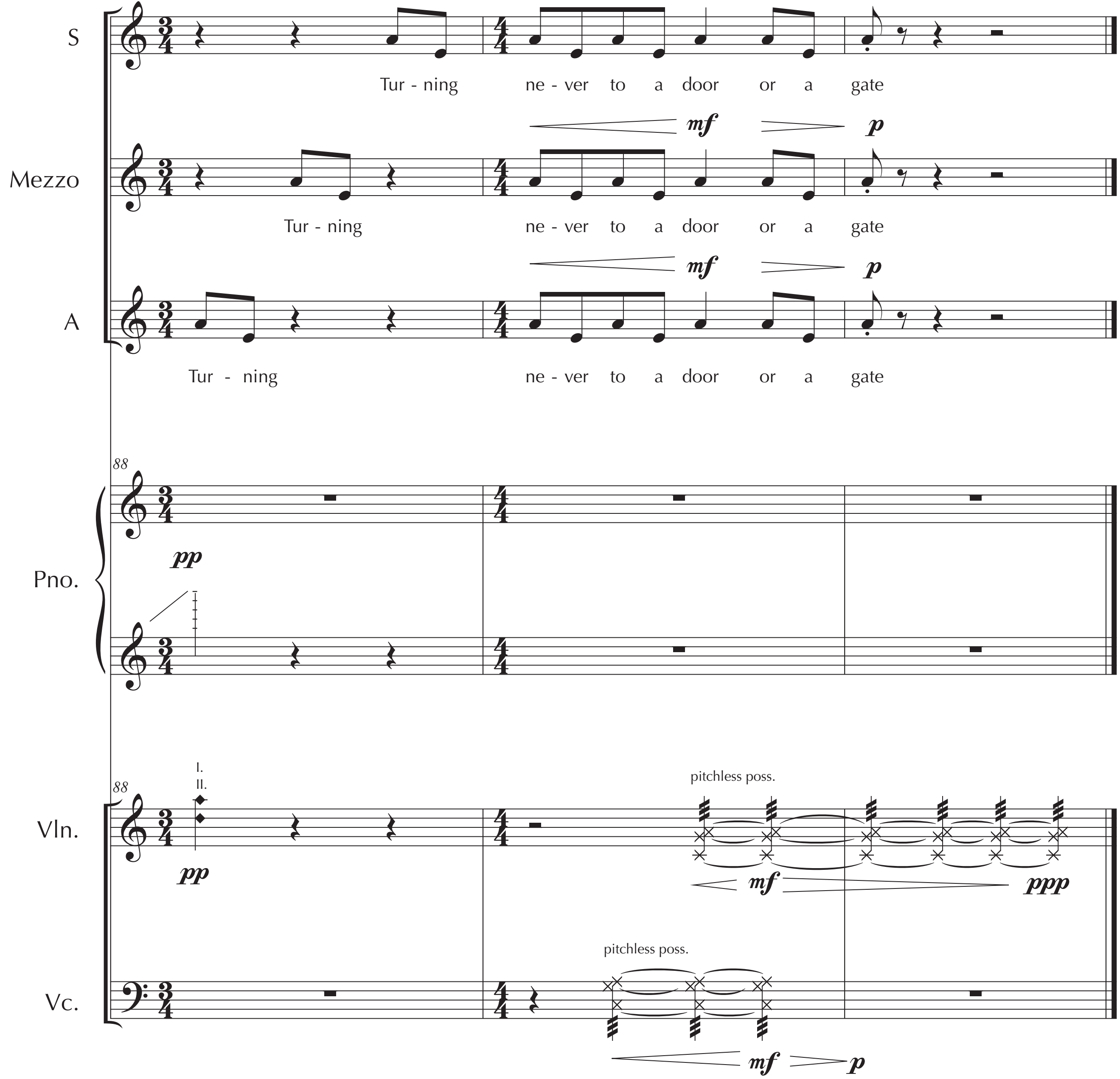

78
S
(ah)
Mezzo
(ah)
A
3
(ah)
78
fingernails
Pno.
f
p
78
molto sul tasto
Vln.
mp
Vc.
3
3


79
S
(ah)
Mezzo
(ah)
3
A
(ah)
3
79
Pno.
f
p
f
p
fist
8vb
norm.
molto sul tasto
79
Vln.
f
mp
Vc.


81
S
Mezzo
A
But
But
But
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
p
mp
pp
6
3

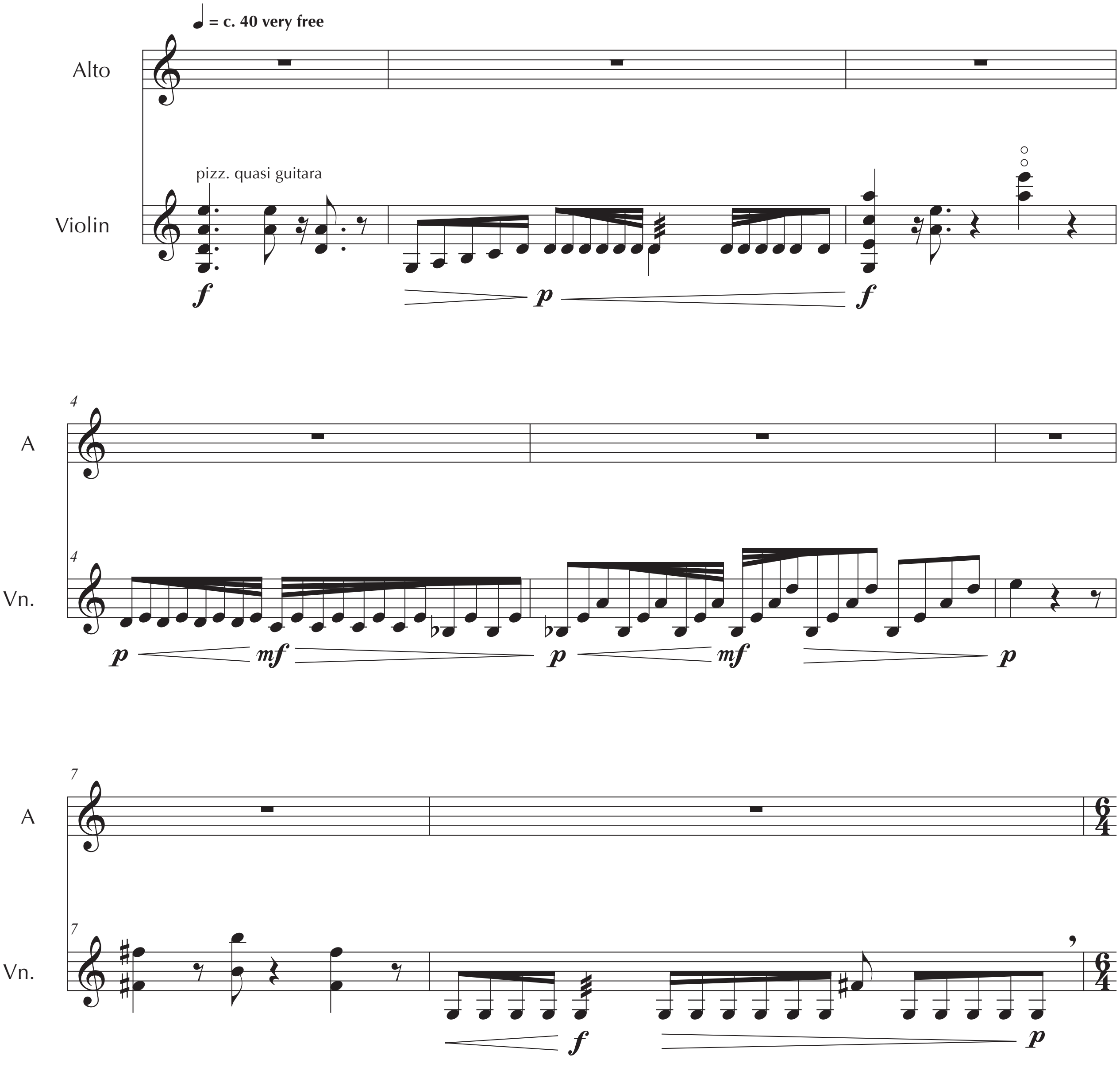

83
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
mp
mp
mp
mp
mp
pp
p
5
turning turning never to a door or a Turning Turning
turning turning never to a door or a gate Turning
turning turning never to a door or a Turning Turning


86
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
mf
p
Turning Turn
ne-ver to a door or a gate Turning Turning
Turning Turning Turning Turning Turning
8va
3
nail gliss. (highest strings)
IV.
6

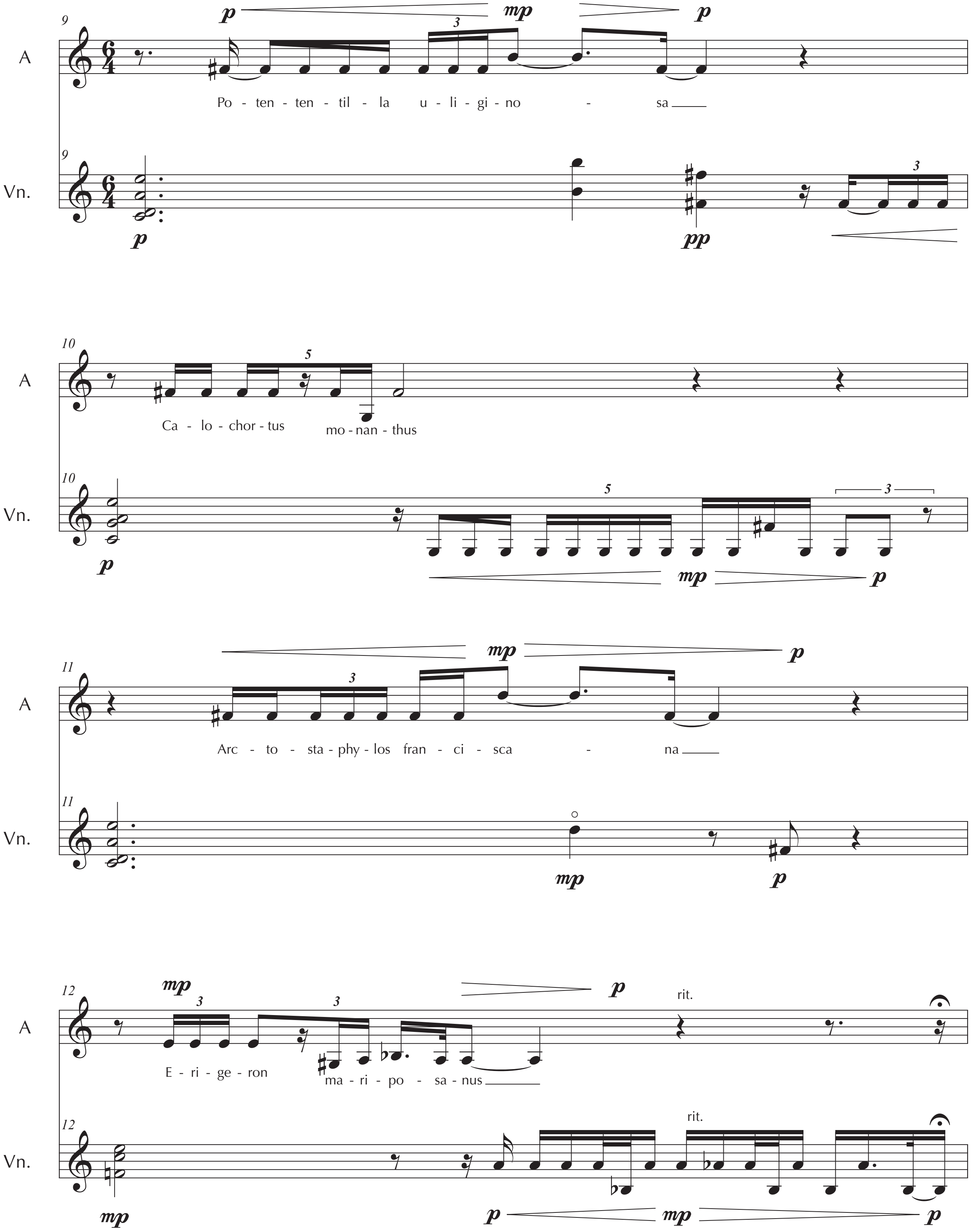

88
S
Mezzo
A
Turning never to a door or a gate
mf
p
Pno.
pp
I.
II.
pitchless poss.
Vln.
Vc.
ppp

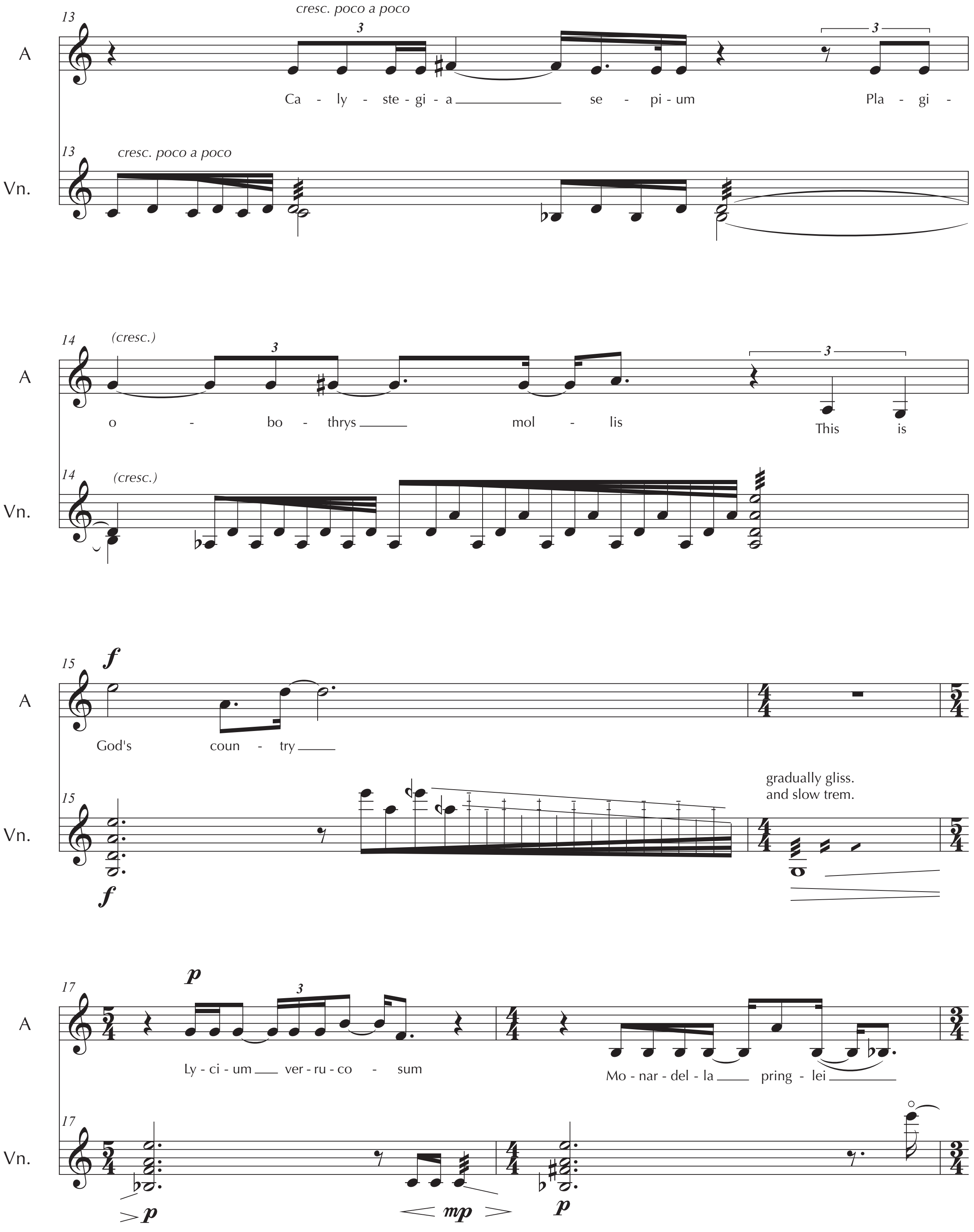
God's Country

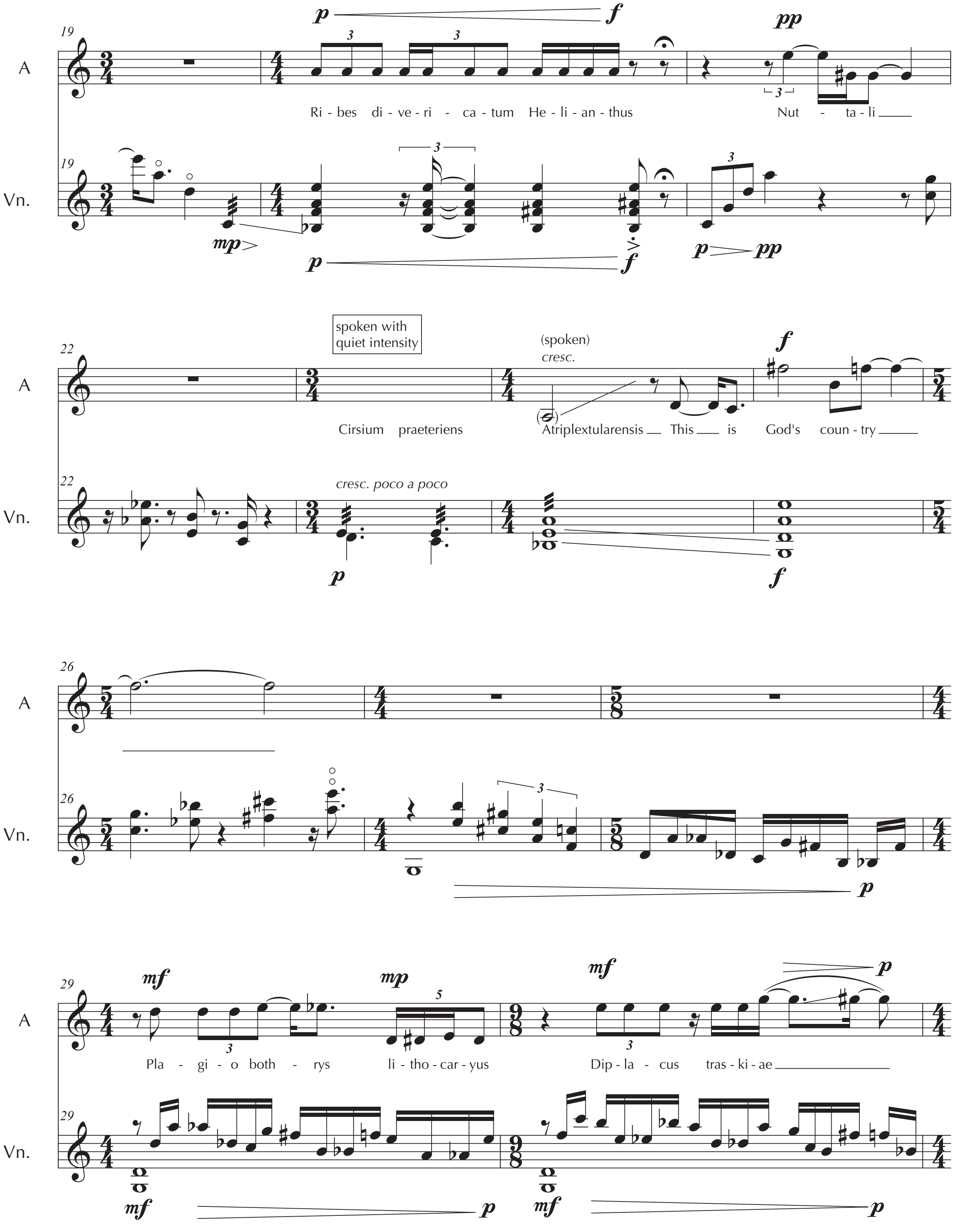
Addie Camsuzou

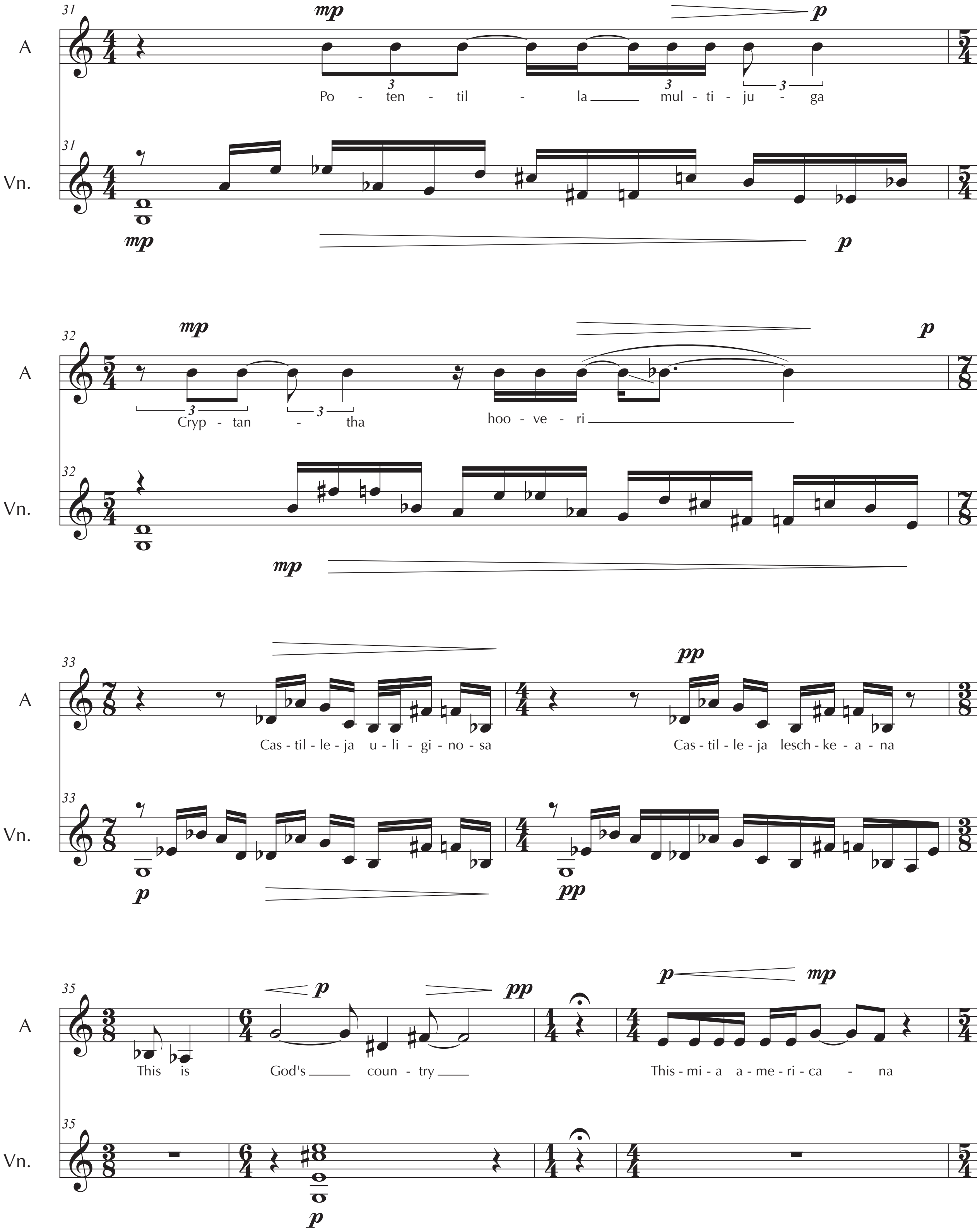


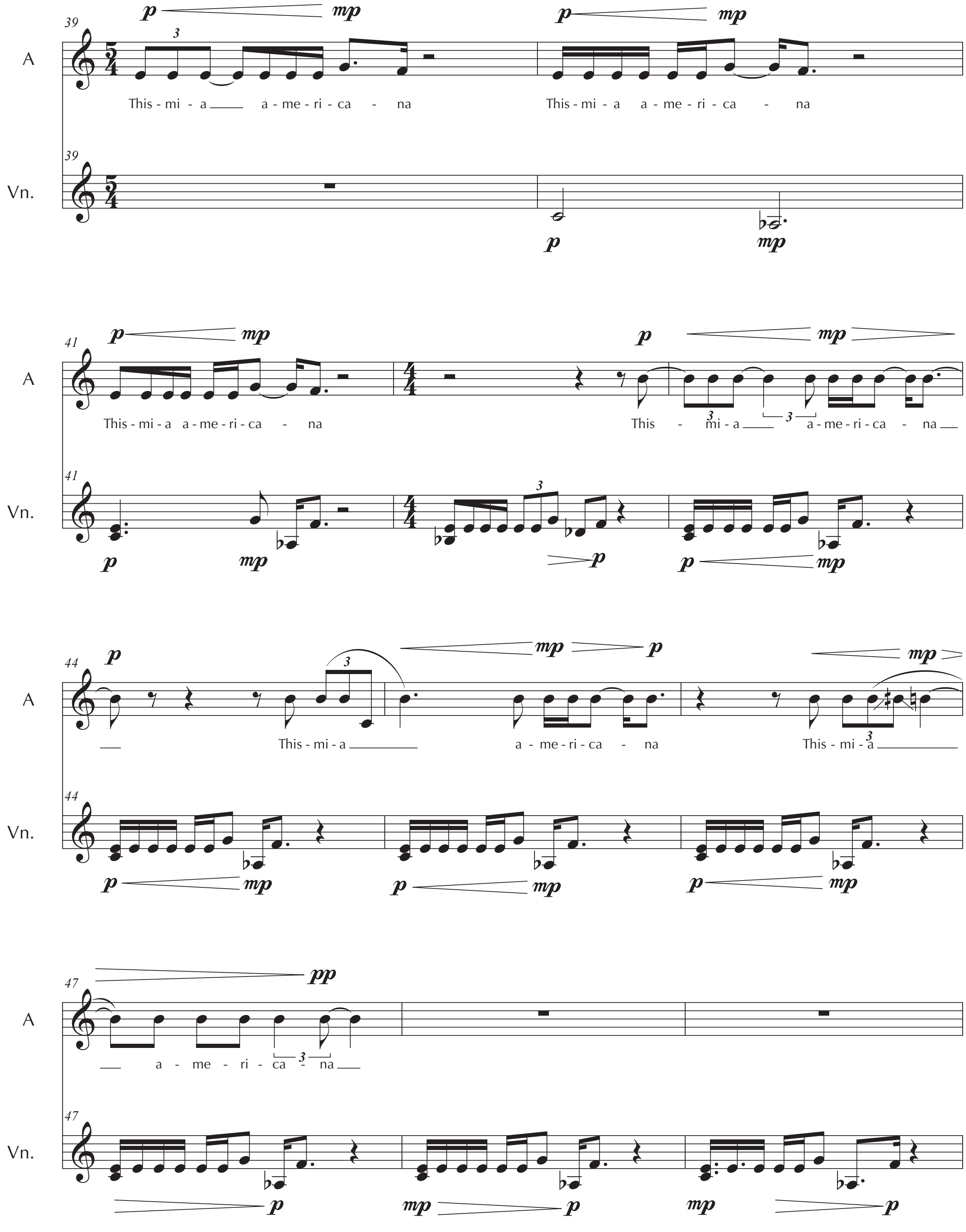
♩ = c. 40 very free
Alto
Violin
pizz. quasi guitara
f
p
f
4
A
Vn.
p
mf
p
mf
p
7
A
Vn.
f
p

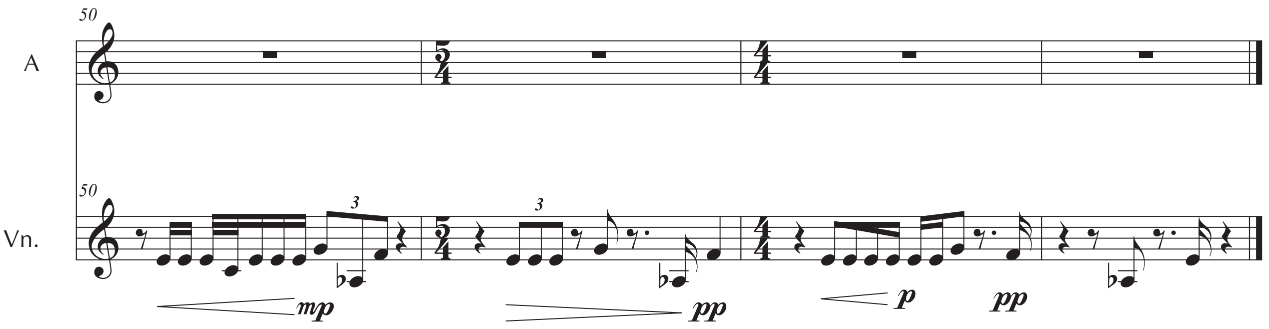

9
A
p
mp
p
3
Po - ten - ten - til - la u - li - gi - no - sa
Vn.
p
pp
3
10
5
Ca - lo - chor - tus mo - nan - thus
p
5
3
mp
p
11
mp
p
3
Arc - to - sta - phy - los fran - ci - sca - na
mp
p
12
mp
3
3
p
rit.
E - ri - ge - ron ma - ri - po - sa - nus
mp
rit.
p
mp
p


13
A
cresc. poco a poco
3
Ca - ly - ste - gi - a se - pi - um Pla - gi -
13
Vn.
cresc. poco a poco
14
(cresc.)
o - bo - thrys mol - lis This is
14
(cresc.)
15
f
God's coun - try
15
f
gradually gliss. and slow trem.
17
p
Ly - ci - um ver - ru - co - sum
Mo - nar - del - la pring - lei
17
>p
< mp >
p


19
A
Vn.
p
f
pp
mp
Ri - bes di - ve - ri - ca - tum He - li - an - thus
Nut - ta - li
p
f
p
pp
22
spoken with quiet intensity
(spoken)
cresc.
Cirsium praeteriens
Atriplextularensis This is God's coun - try
cresc. poco a poco
p
f
f
26
p
29
mf
mp
mf
p
Pla - gi - o both - rys li - tho - car - yus
Dip - la - cus tras - ki - ae
mf
p
mf
p

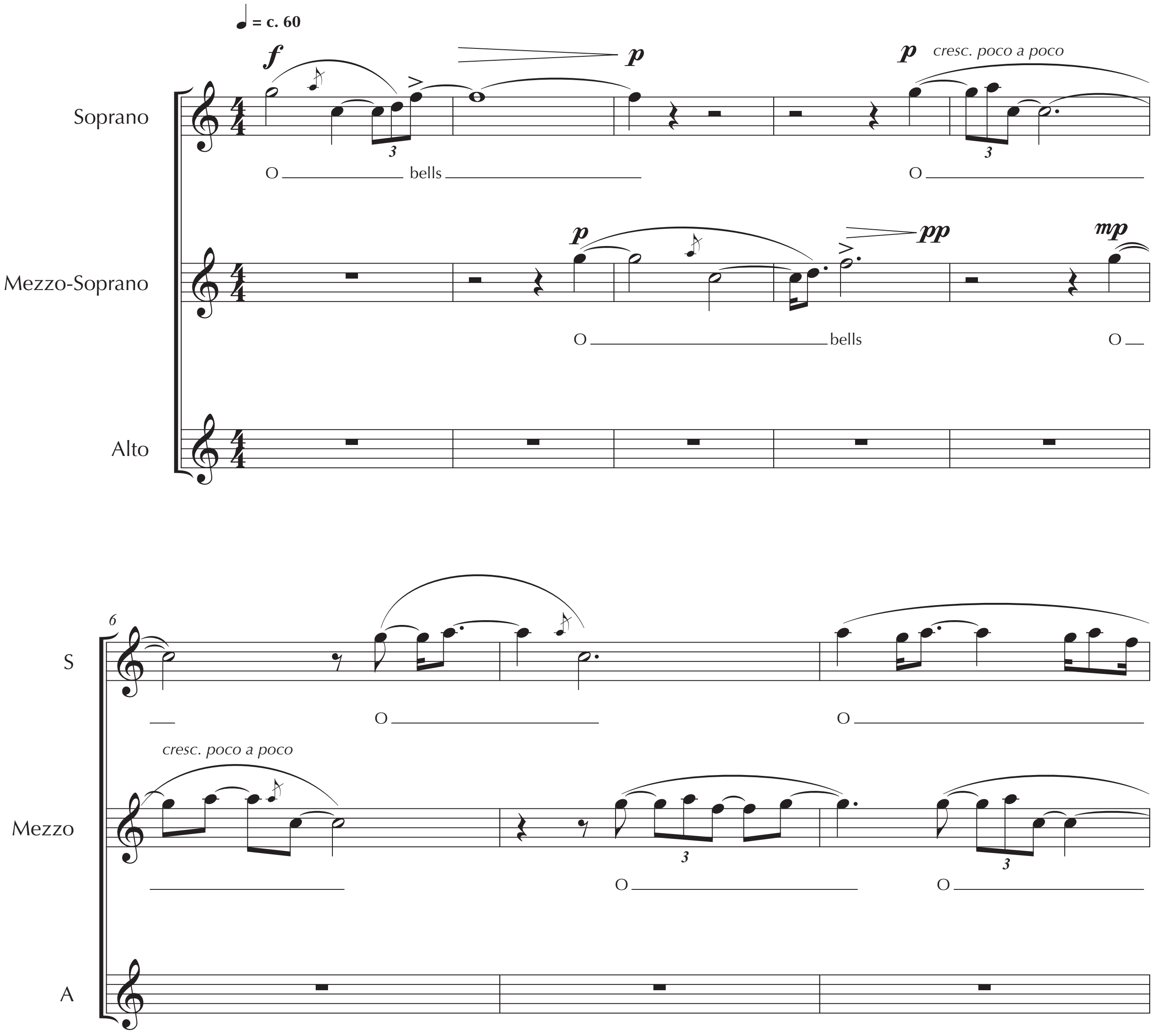

31
A
Vn.
mp
p
Po - ten - til - la mul - ti - ju - ga
32
mp
p
Cryp - tan - tha hoo - ve - ri
33
p
pp
Cas - til - le - ja u - li - gi - no - sa
Cas - til - le - ja lesch - ke - a - na
35
p
pp
mp
This is God's coun - try
This - mi - a a - me - ri - ca - na

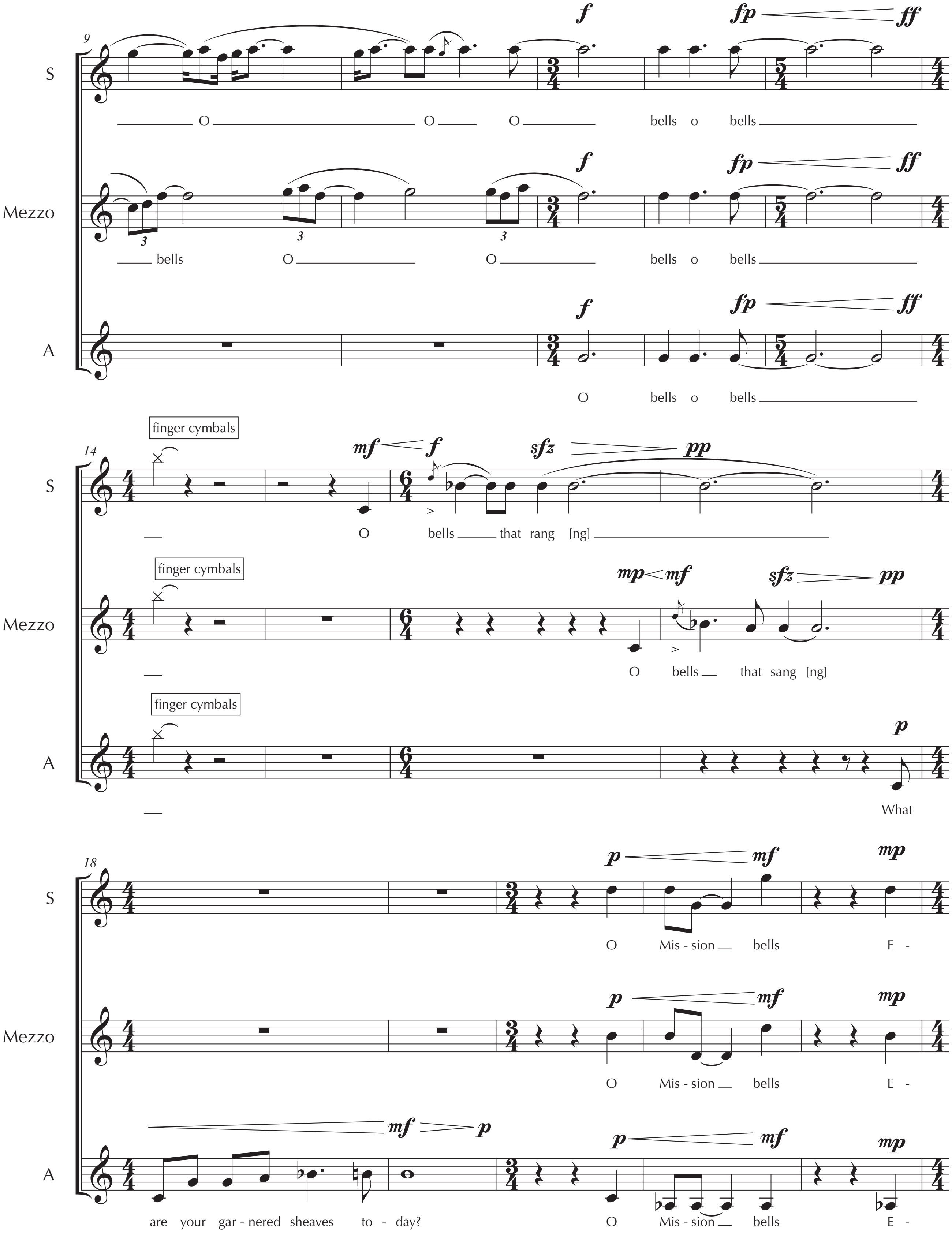

A
Vn.
39
41
44
47
p
mp
pp
This - mi - a a - me - ri - ca - na
This - mi - a a - me - ri - ca - na
This - mi - a a - me - ri - ca - na
This - mi - a a - me - ri - ca - na
This - mi - a a - me - ri - ca - na
This - mi - a a - me - ri - ca - na
a - me - ri - ca - na
3

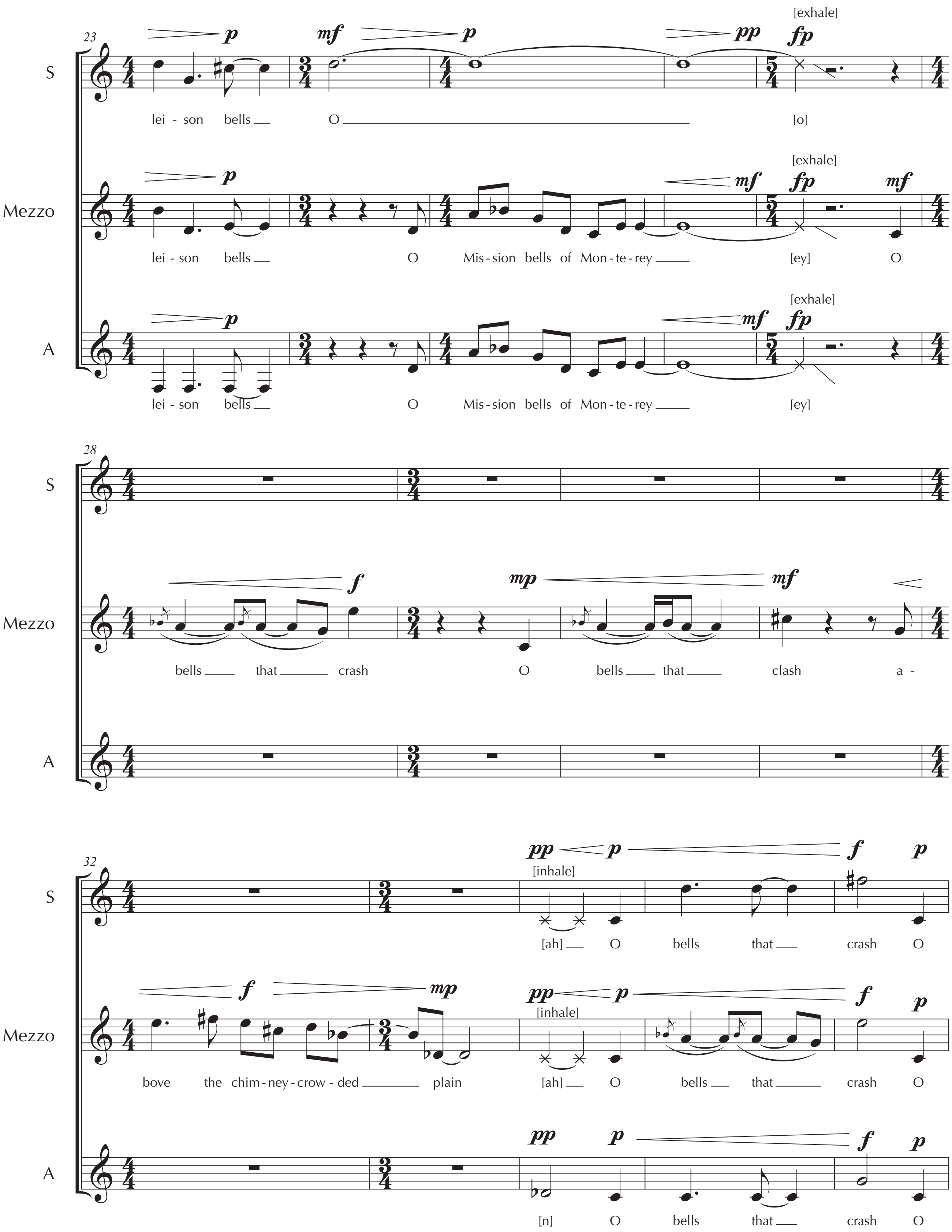

50
A
Vn.
3
mp
pp
p
pp

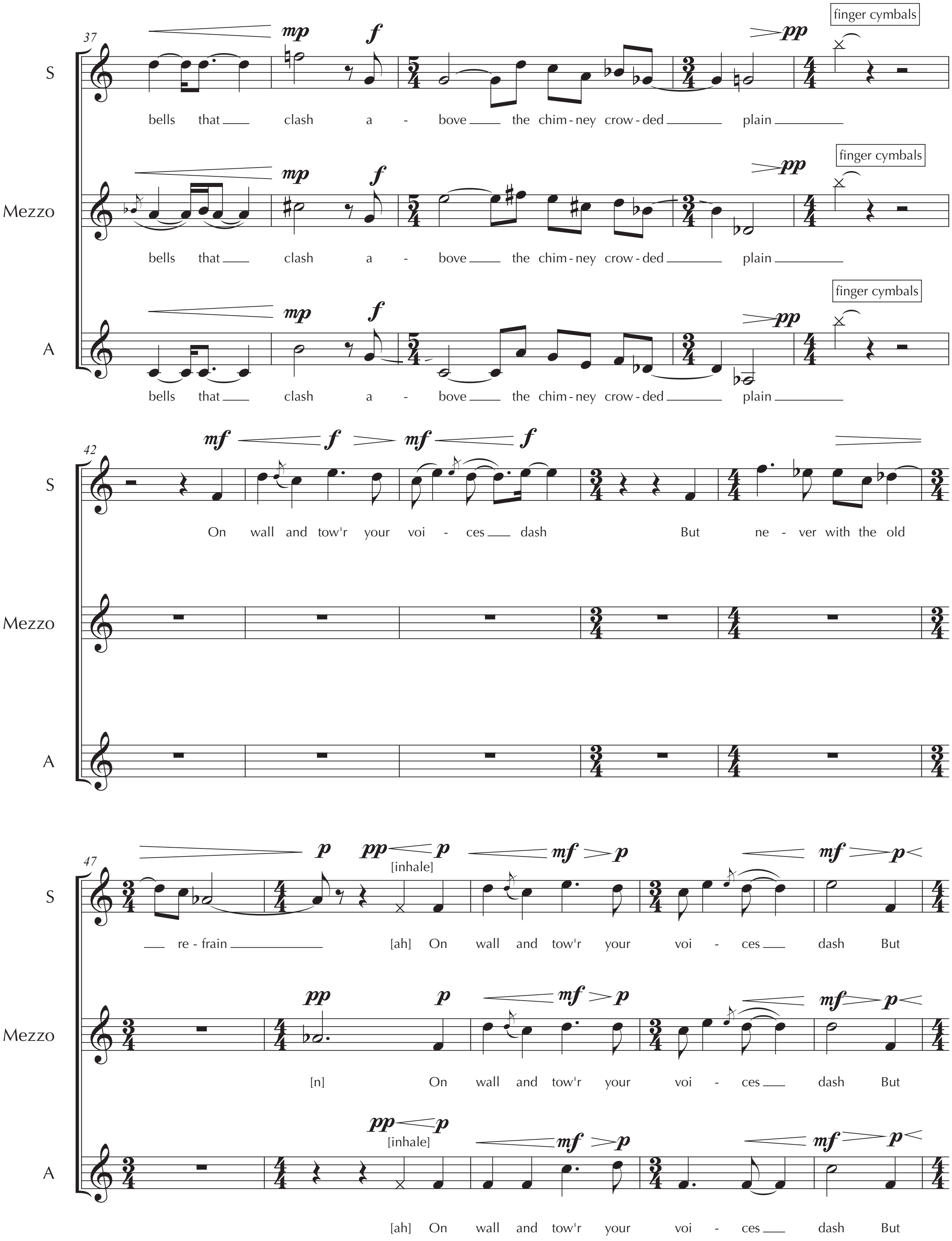
O Mission Bells

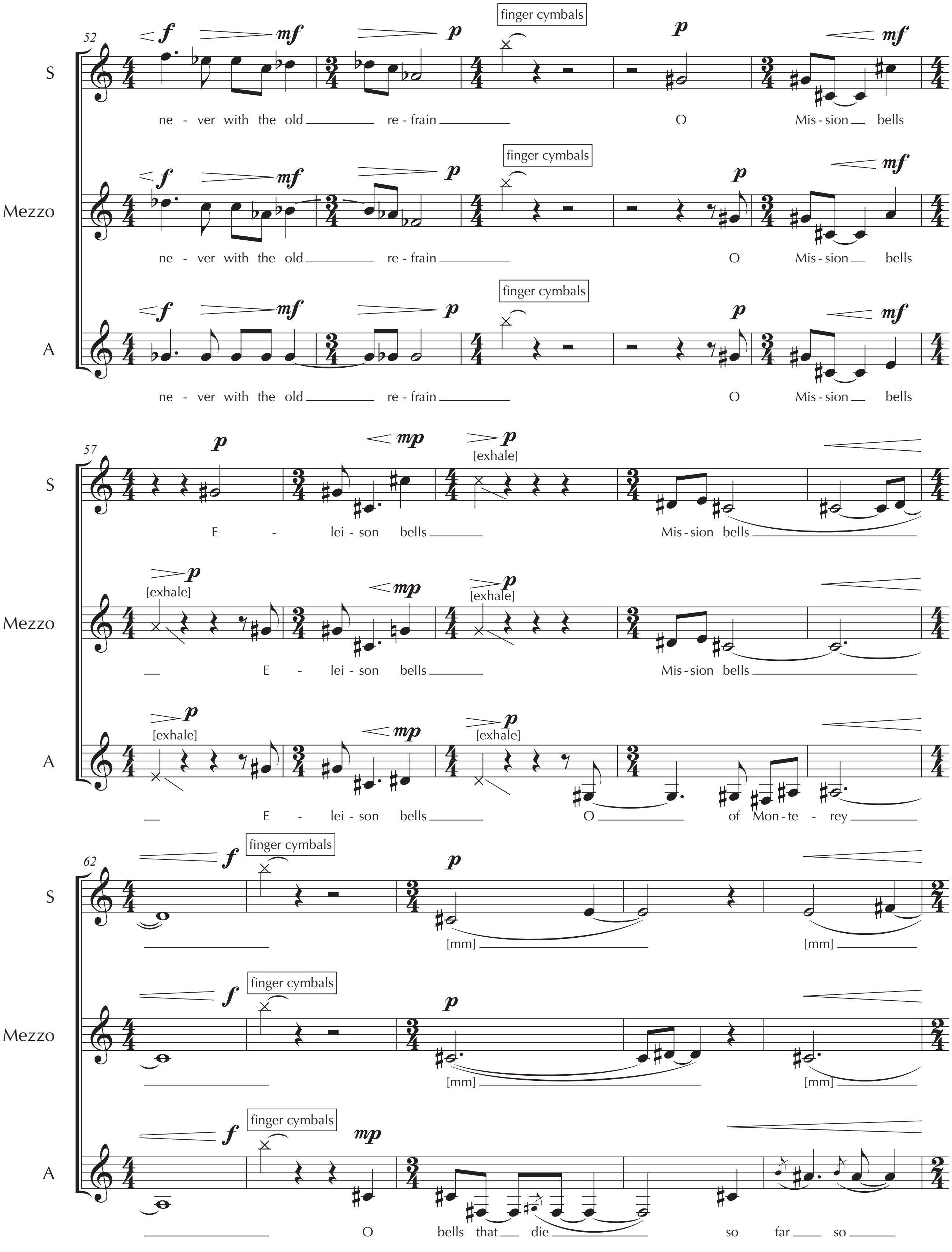
Music by Addie Camsuzou
Words by Bret Harte

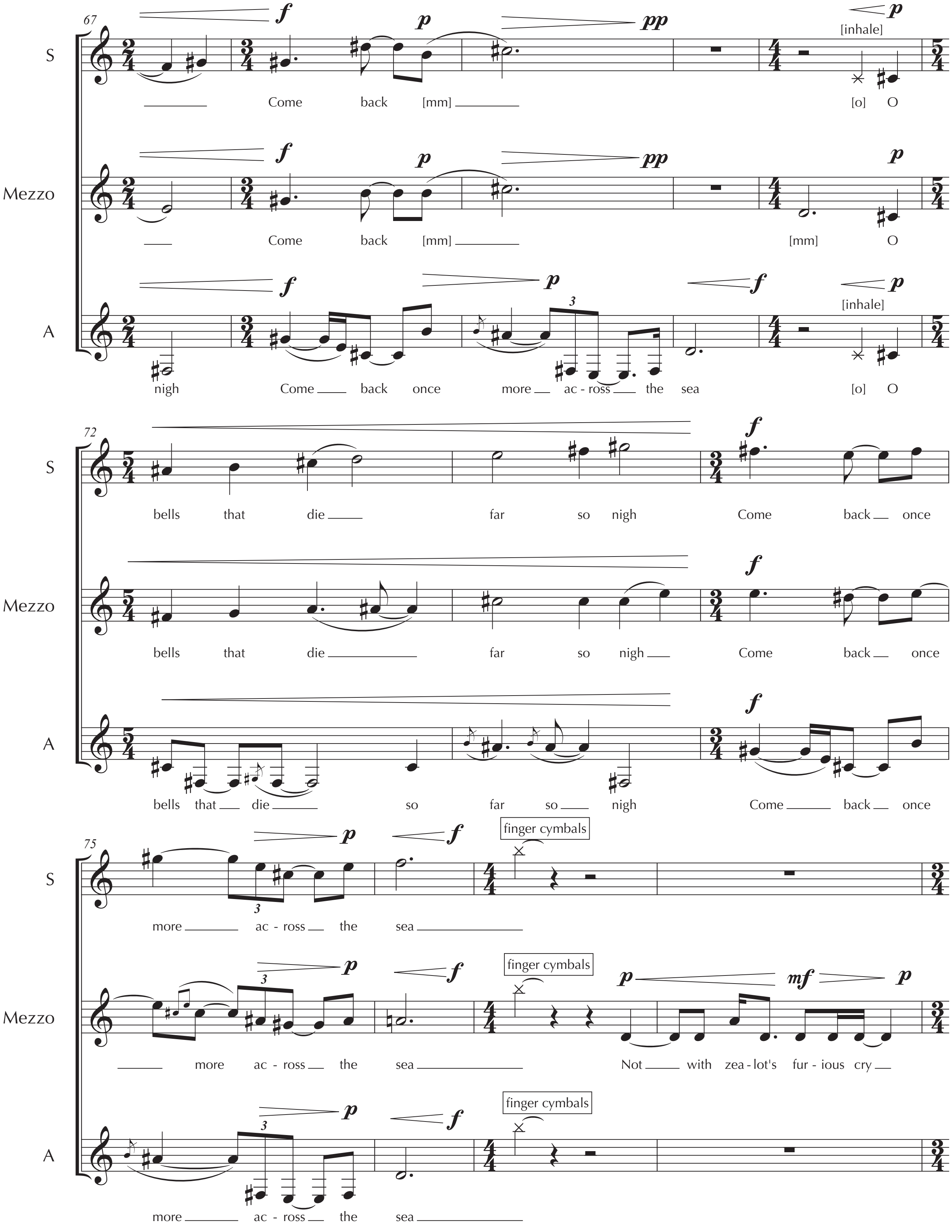

♩ = c. 60
Soprano
Mezzo-Soprano
Alto
f
p
p
cresc. poco a poco
p
pp
mp
O bells
O
O bells
O
6
S
Mezzo
A
cresc. poco a poco
O
O
O
O
3

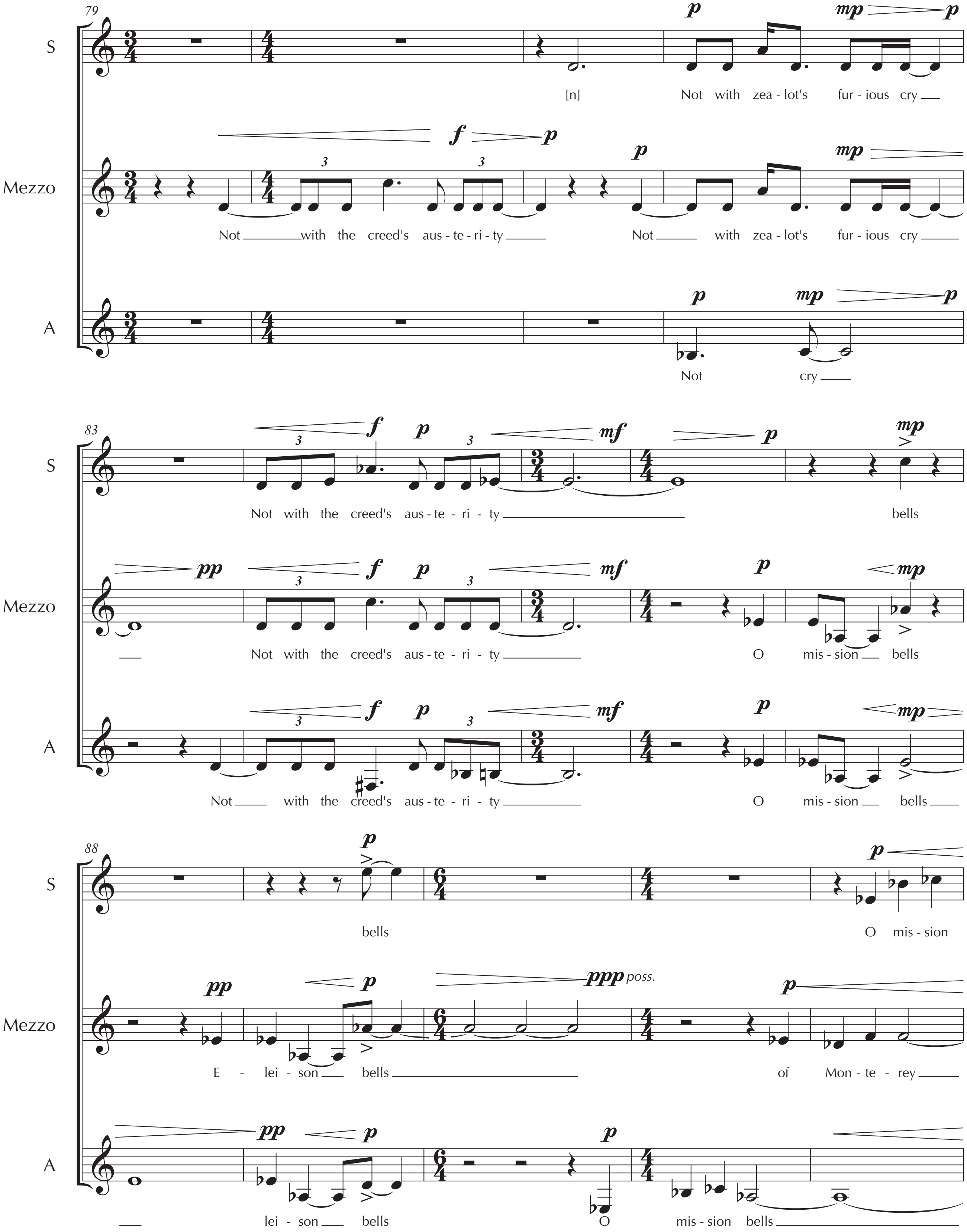

9
S
Mezzo
A
f
fp
ff
O O O bells o bells
bells O O bells o bells
O bells o bells
14
finger cymbals
mf
f
sfz
pp
mp
O bells that rang [ng]
O bells that sang [ng]
p
What
18
mf
p
mp
O Mis - sion bells E -
O Mis - sion bells E -
are your gar - nered sheaves to - day?
O Mis - sion bells E -

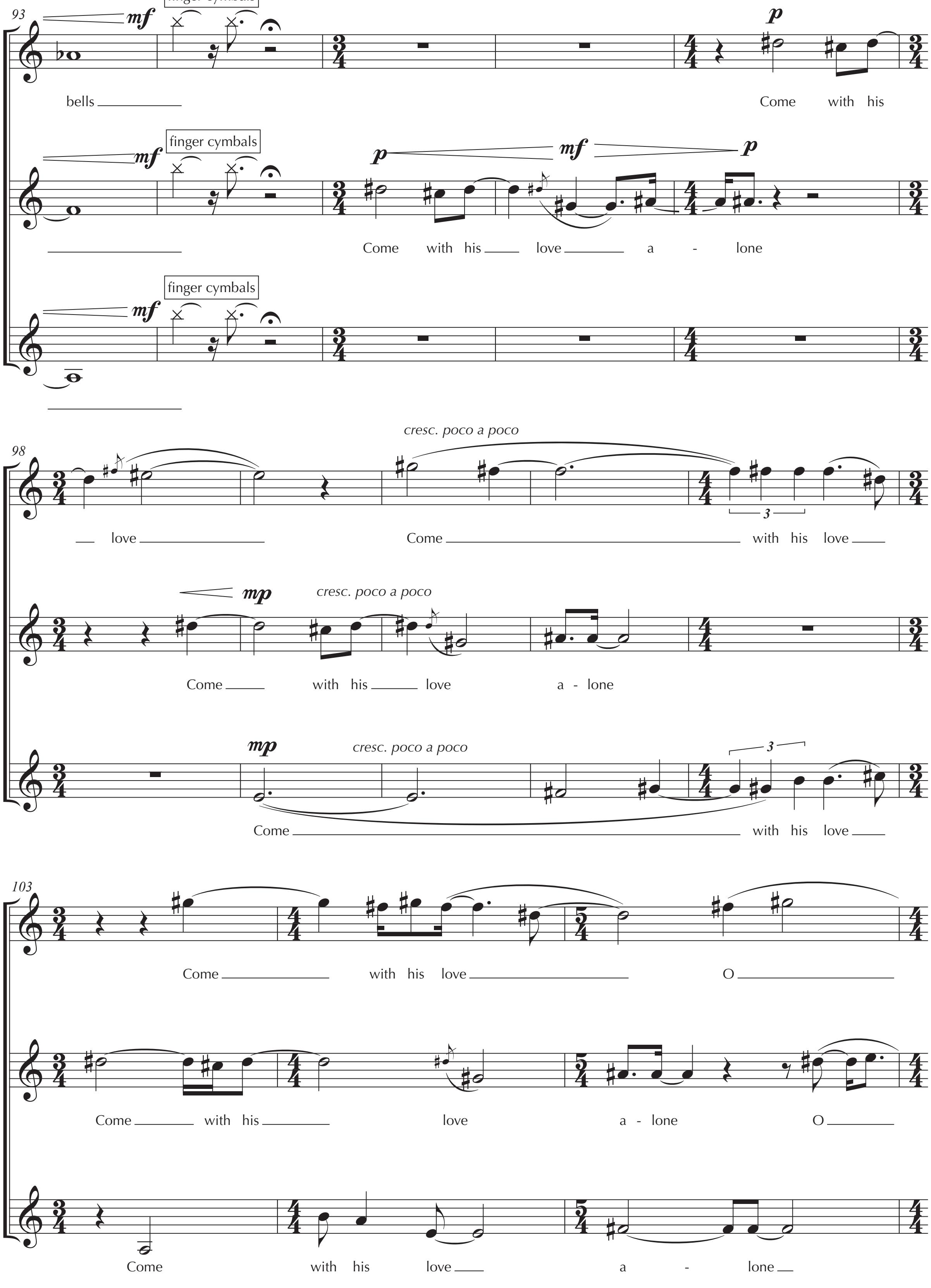

23
S
Mezzo
A
[exhale]
p
mf
pp
fp
lei - son bells O [o]
Mezzo: lei - son bells O Mis - sion bells of Mon - te - rey [ey] O
A: lei - son bells O Mis - sion bells of Mon - te - rey [ey]
28
f
mp
mf
bells that crash O bells that clash a -
32
[inhale]
[ah] O bells that crash O
bove the chim - ney - crow - ded plain [ah] O bells that crash O
[n] O bells that crash O

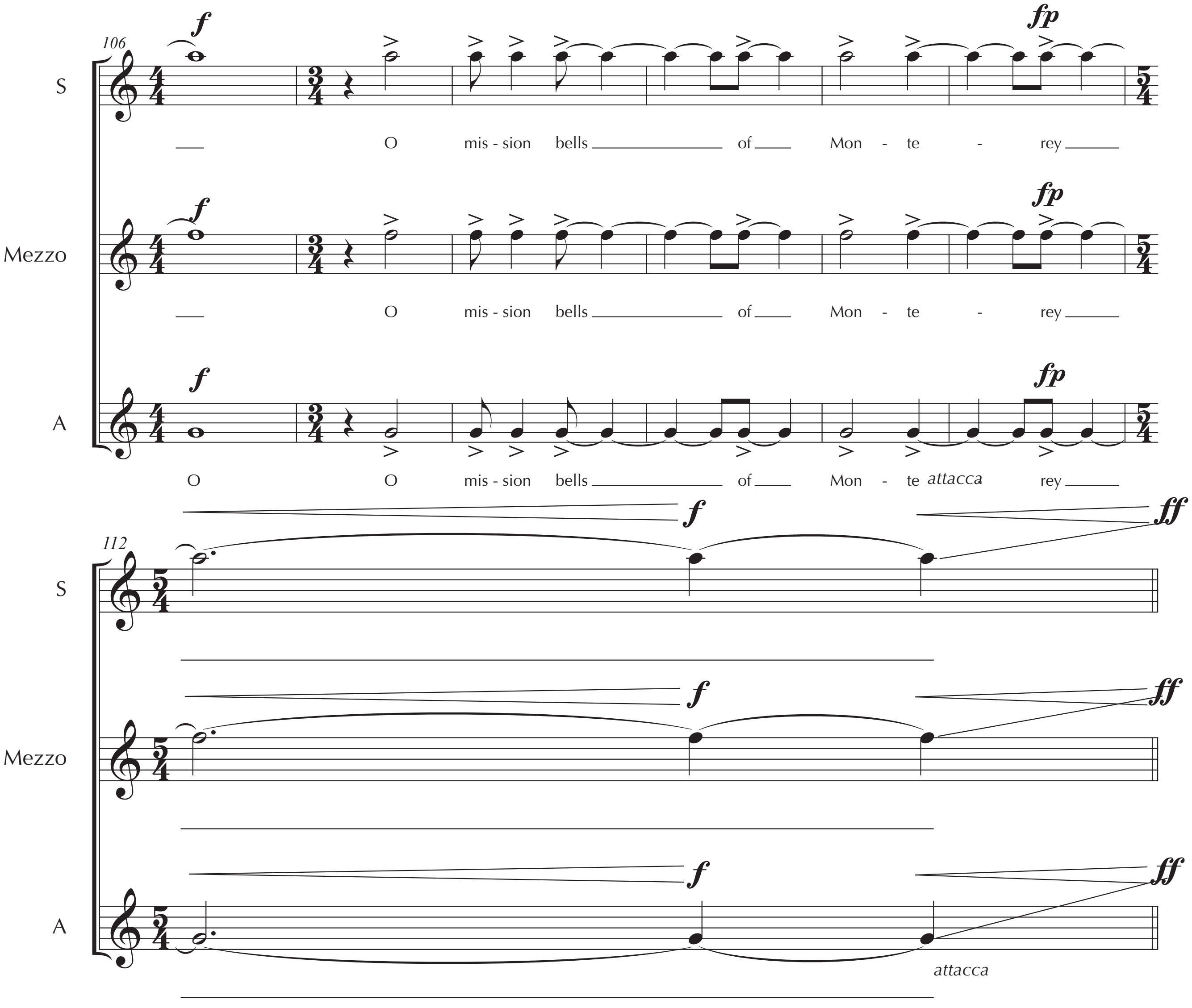

37
finger cymbals
S
Mezzo
A
mp
f
pp
bells that clash a - bove the chim - ney crow - ded plain
42
mf
f
On wall and tow'r your voi - ces dash But ne - ver with the old
47
p
pp
mf
[inhale]
re - frain [ah] On wall and tow'r your voi - ces dash But
[n] On wall and tow'r your voi - ces dash But
[ah] On wall and tow'r your voi - ces dash But


52
S
Mezzo
A
f mf p
finger cymbals
mf
ne - ver with the old ___ re - frain ___ O Mis - sion ___ bells
57
[exhale]
p mp
E - lei - son bells ___ Mis - sion bells ___
O ___ of Mon - te - rey ___
62
f p mp
[mm] ___
O bells that ___ die ___ so far ___ so ___


67
S
Mezzo
A
Come back [mm]
[inhale]
[o] O
[mm] O
nigh Come back once more ac - ross the sea
[o] O
72
bells that die far so nigh Come back once
bells that die far so nigh Come back once
bells that die so far so nigh Come back once
75
more ac - ross the sea
finger cymbals
more ac - ross the sea
Not with zea - lot's fur - ious cry
more ac - ross the sea
f p pp mf


79
S
Mezzo
A
p
mp
p
f
p
[n]
Not with zea - lot's fur - ious cry
Not with the creed's aus - te - ri - ty
Not with zea - lot's fur - ious cry
Not cry
83
Not with the creed's aus - te - ri - ty
bells
pp
mf
Not with the creed's aus - te - ri - ty
O mis - sion bells
Not with the creed's aus - te - ri - ty
O mis - sion bells
88
bells
O mis - sion
pp
ppp poss.
E - lei - son bells
of Mon - te - rey
lei - son bells
O mis - sion bells

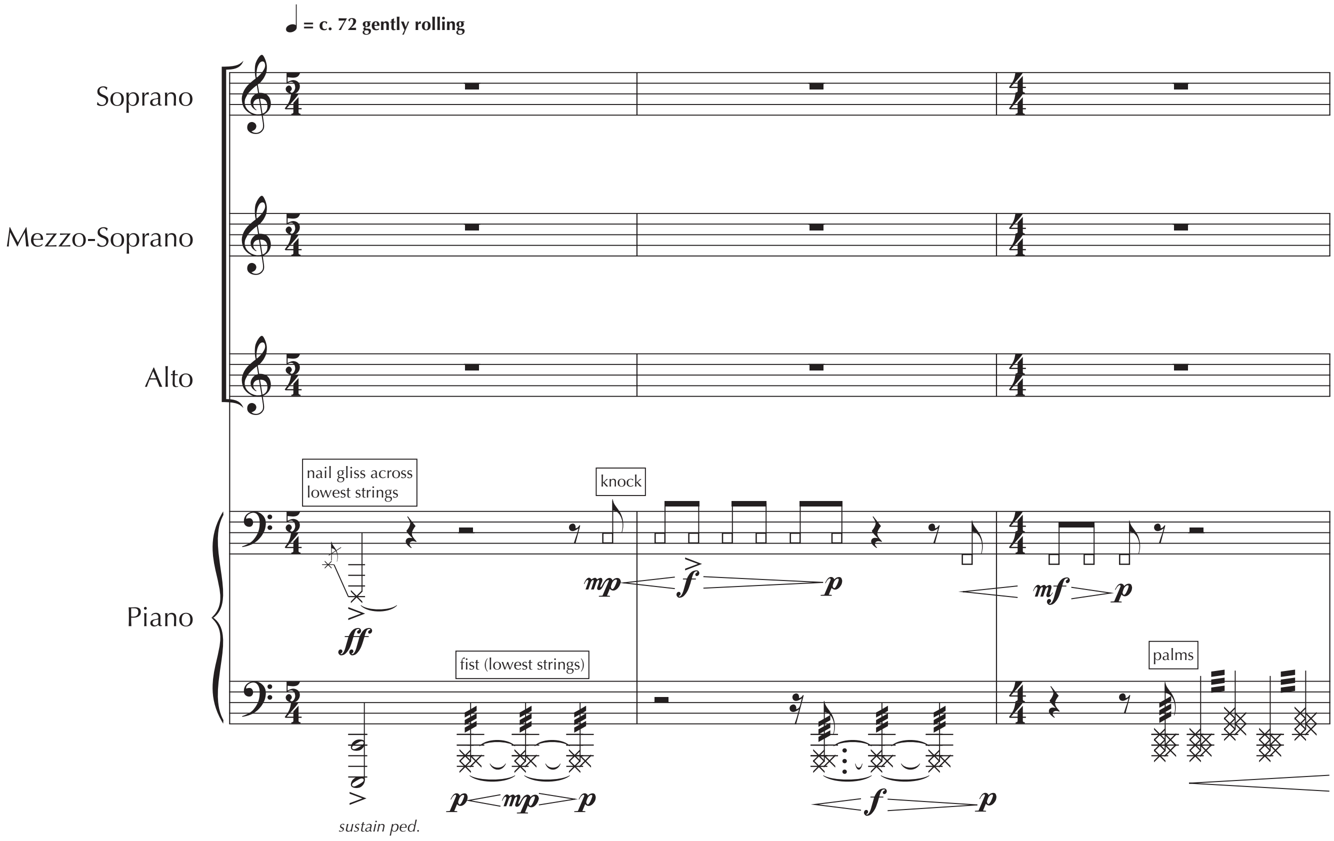

93
98
103
S
Mezzo
A
finger cymbals
finger cymbals
finger cymbals
mf
p
mf
p
mp
mp
cresc. poco a poco
cresc. poco a poco
cresc. poco a poco
3
bells
Come with his love
Come with his love a - lone
Come with his love
Come with his love
Come with his love a - lone
Come with his love
Come with his love
O
Come with his love a - lone
O
Come with his love a - lone

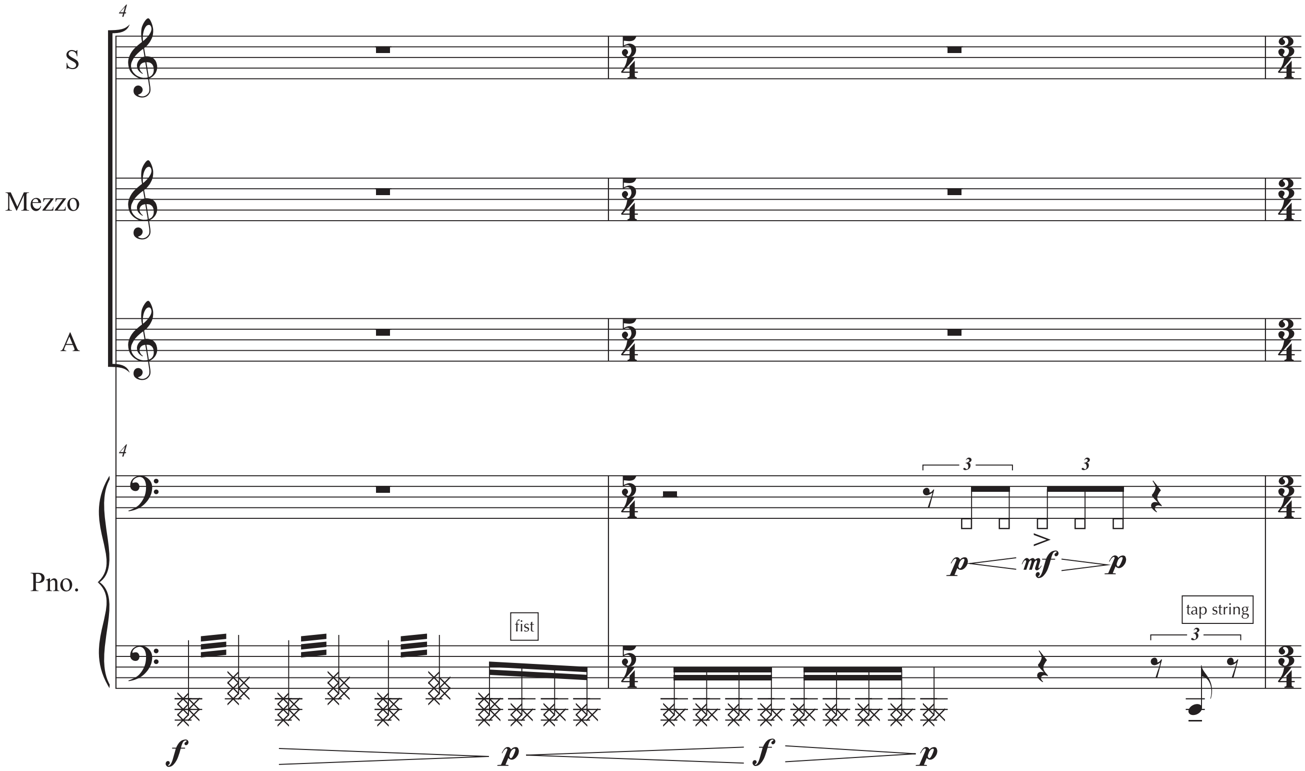

106
S
Mezzo
A
f
fp
O mis - sion bells of Mon - te - rey
O O mis - sion bells of Mon - te attacca rey
112
f
ff
attacca

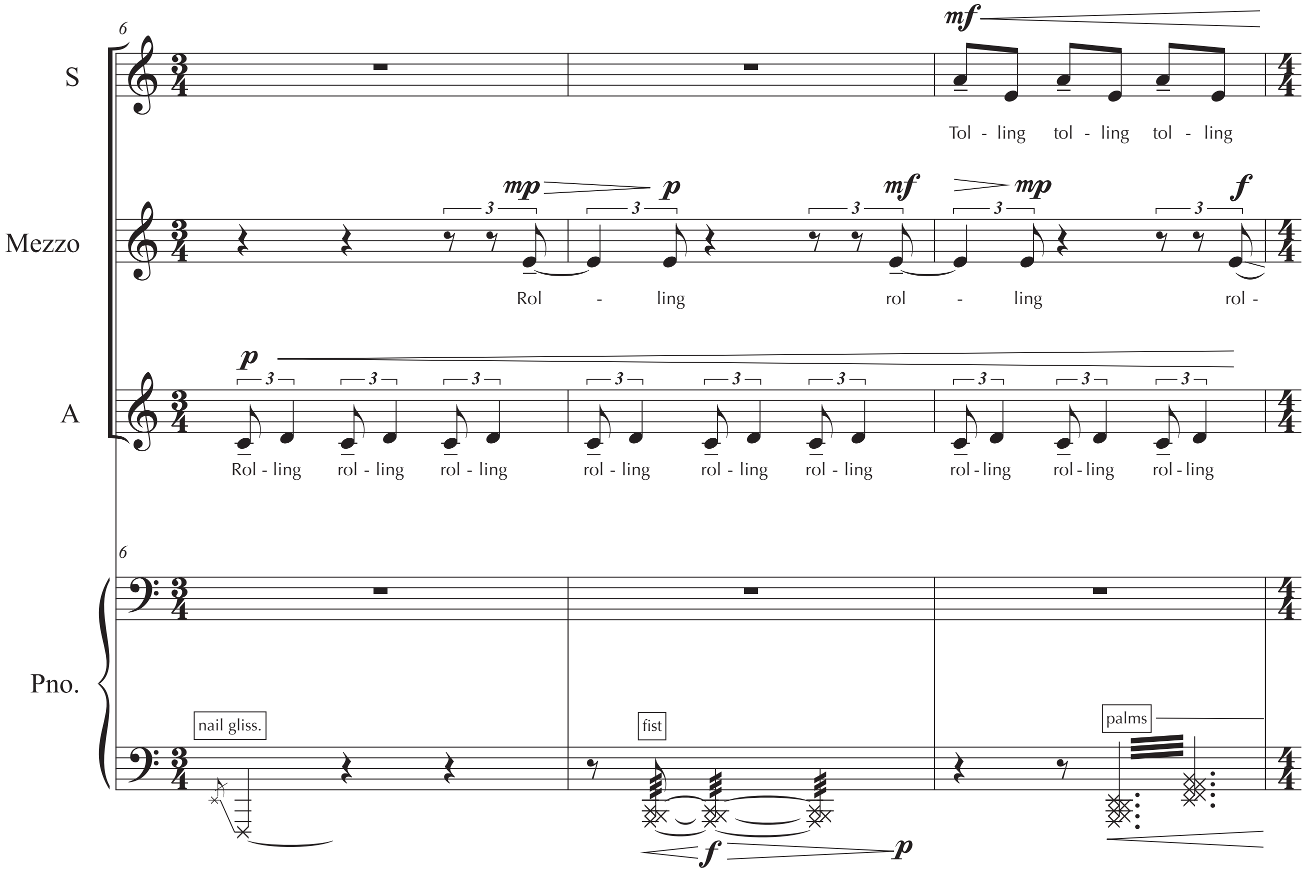
Where Columbia Meets the Sea

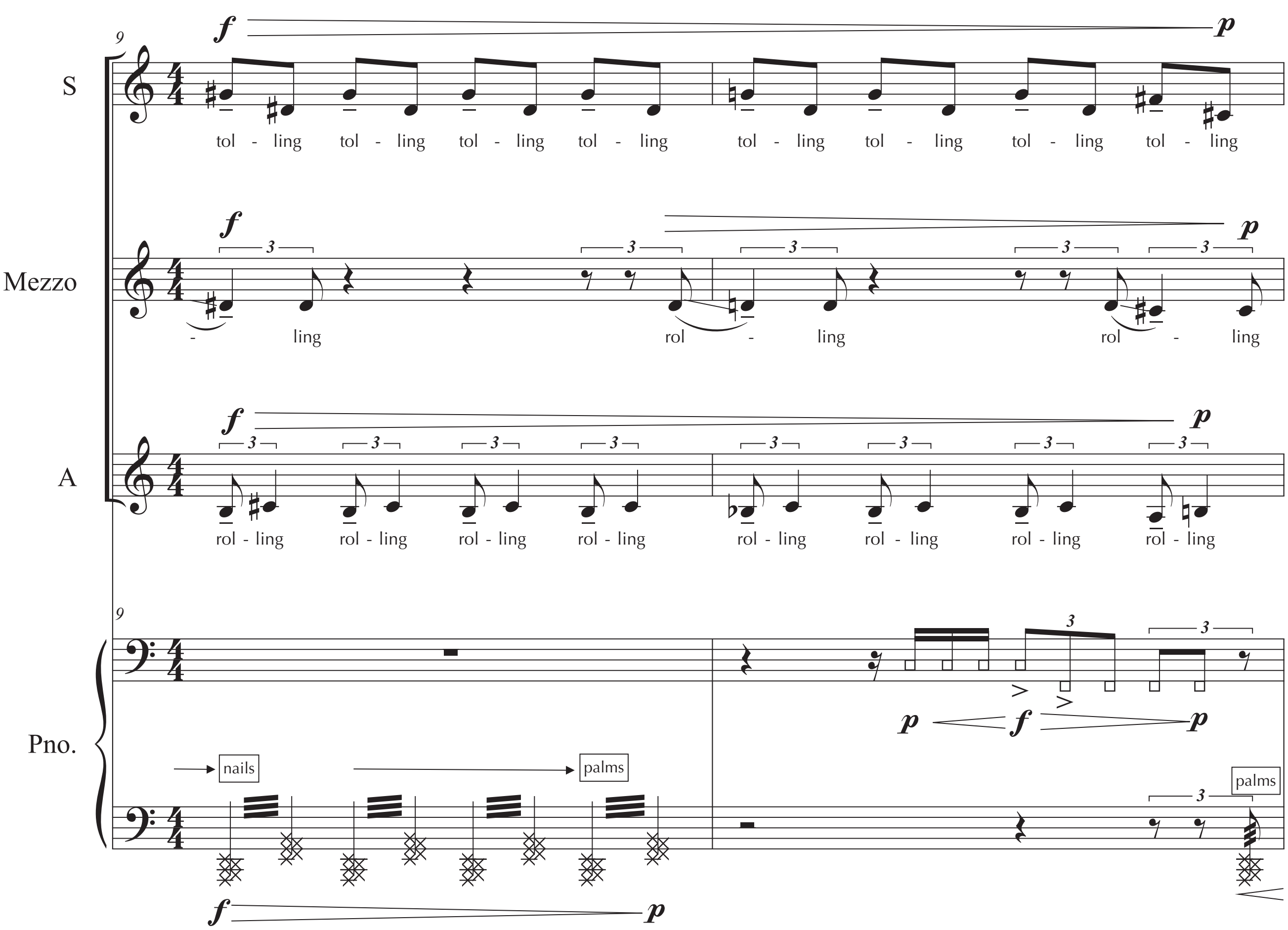
Music by Addie Camsuzou

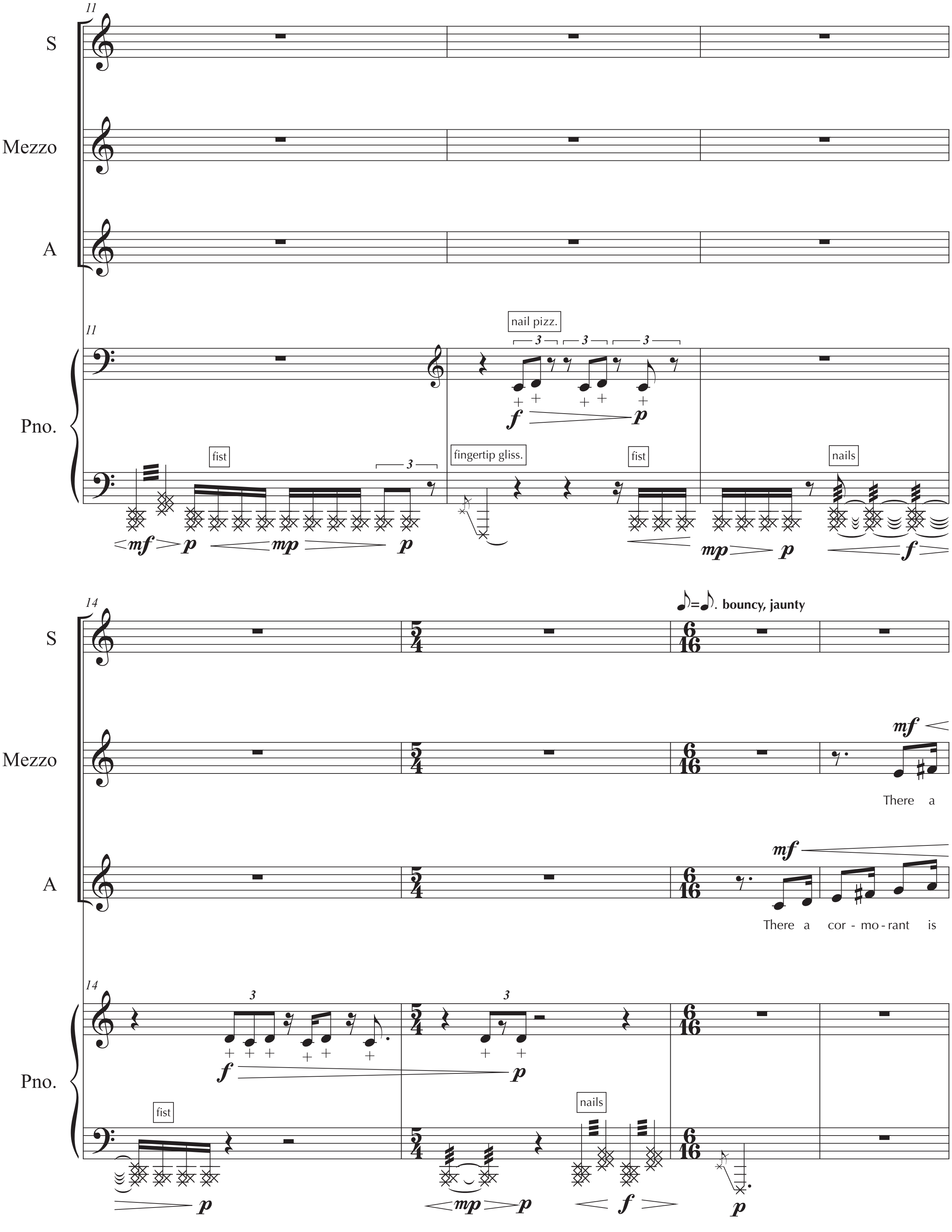
Words by Elizabeth Lambert Wood

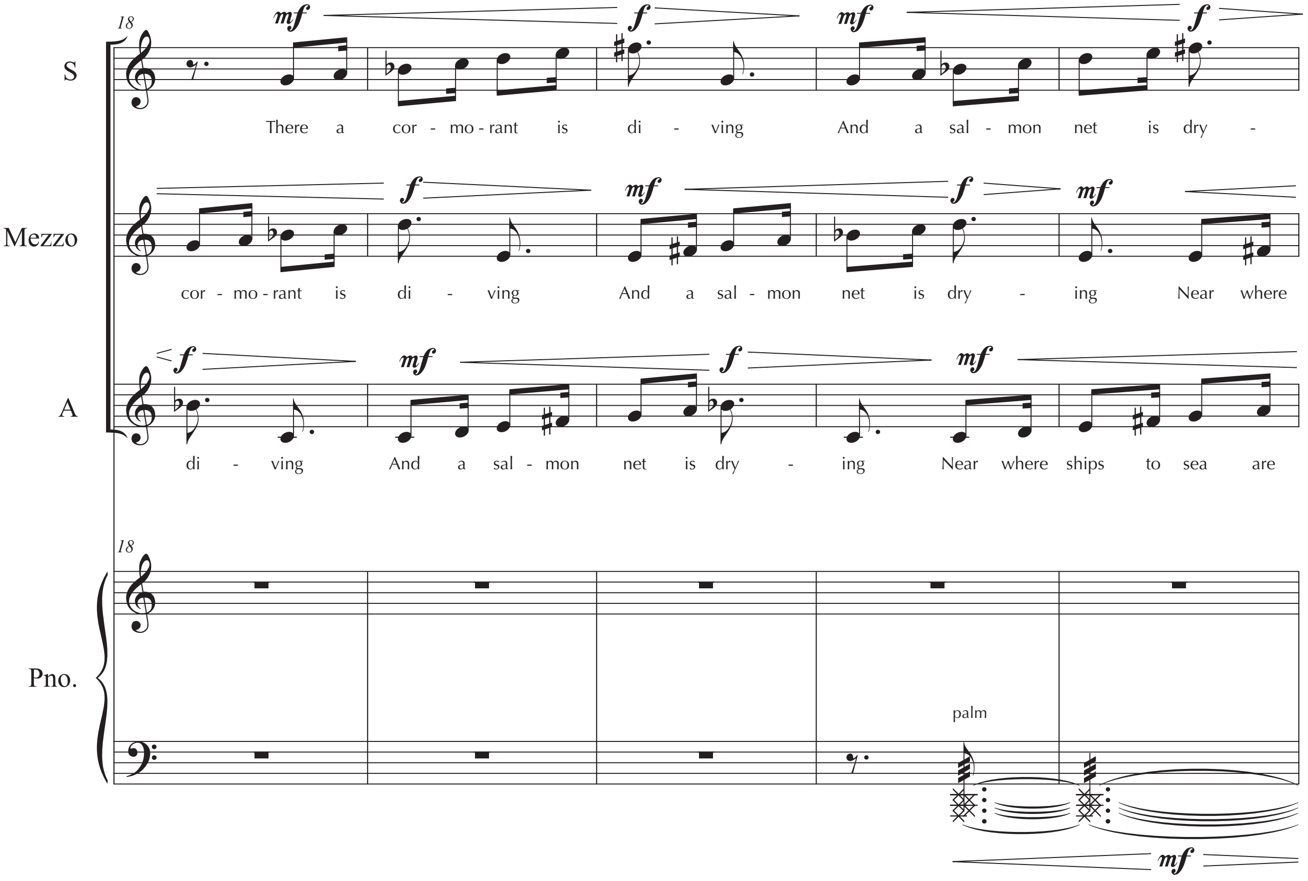

♩ = c. 72 gently rolling
Soprano
Mezzo-Soprano
Alto
Piano
nail gliss across lowest strings
knock
fist (lowest strings)
palms
ff
mp
f
p
mf
sustain ped.

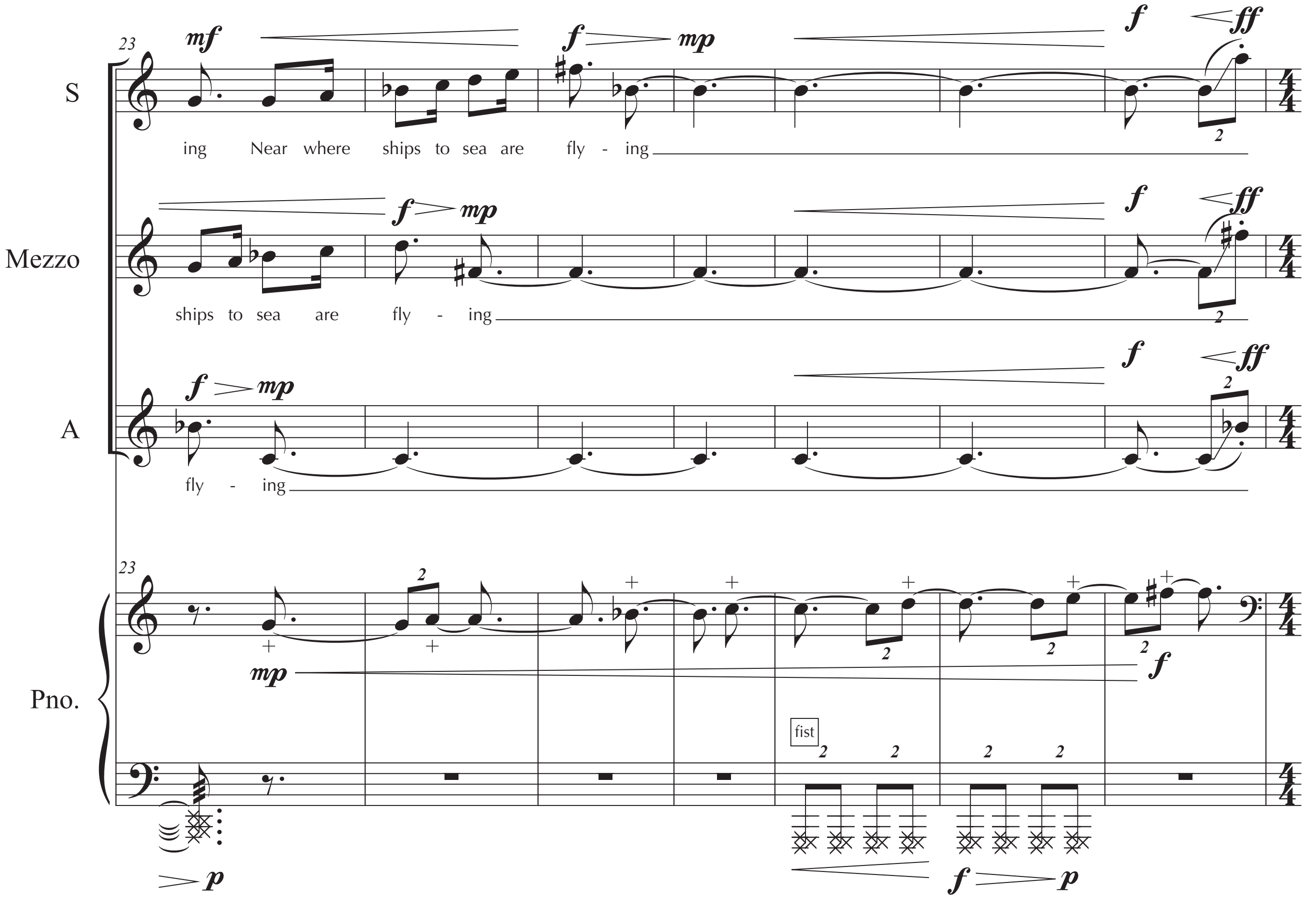

4
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
3
p mf p
fist
tap string
f p f p

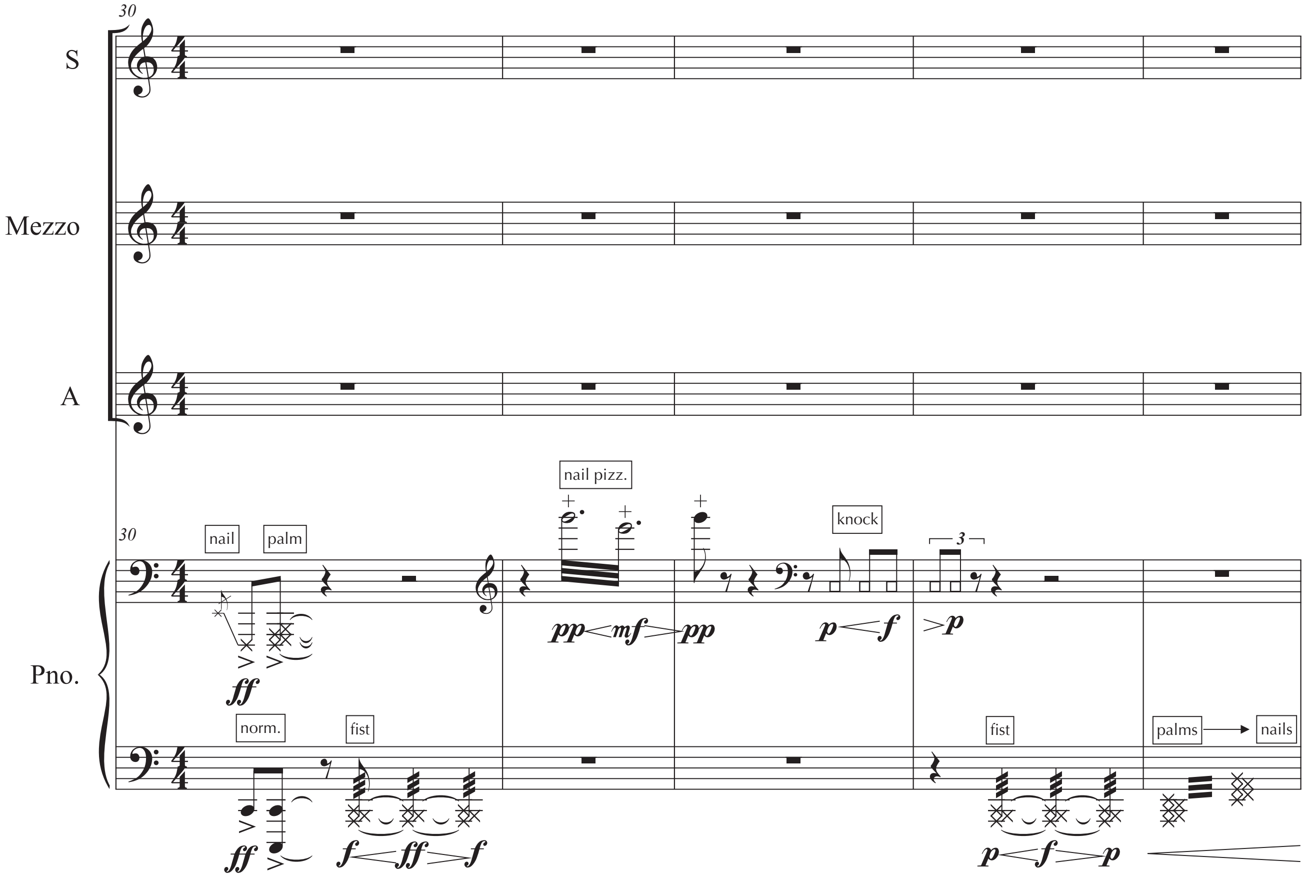

6
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
mf
Tol - ling tol - ling tol - ling
mp p mf mp f
Rol - ling rol - ling rol -
p
Rol - ling rol - ling rol - ling rol - ling rol - ling rol - ling rol - ling rol - ling rol - ling
nail gliss.
fist
palms
f p

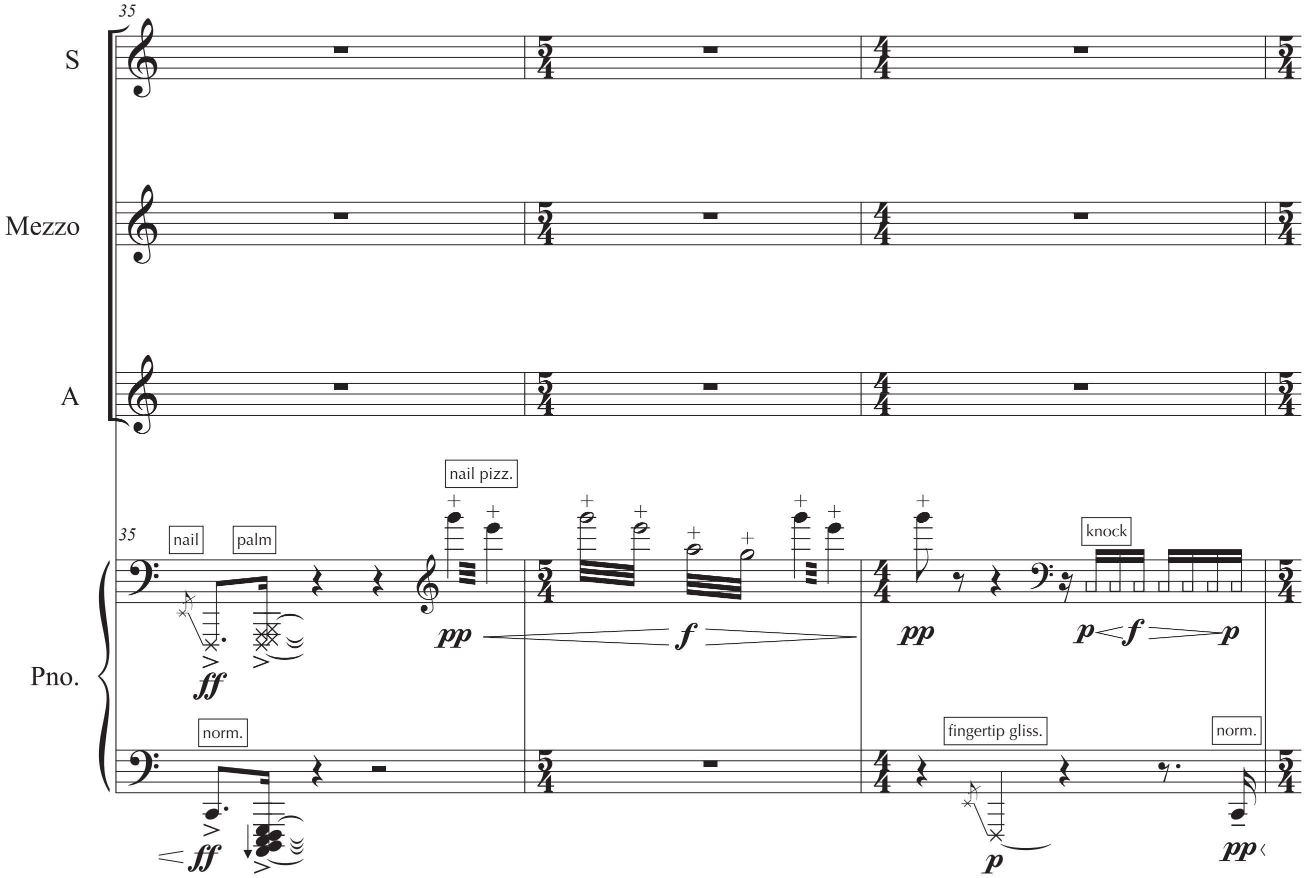

9
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
f
p
tol - ling tol - ling tol - ling tol - ling tol - ling tol - ling tol - ling tol - ling
- ling rol - ling rol - ling
rol - ling rol - ling rol - ling rol - ling rol - ling rol - ling rol - ling rol - ling
nails
palms

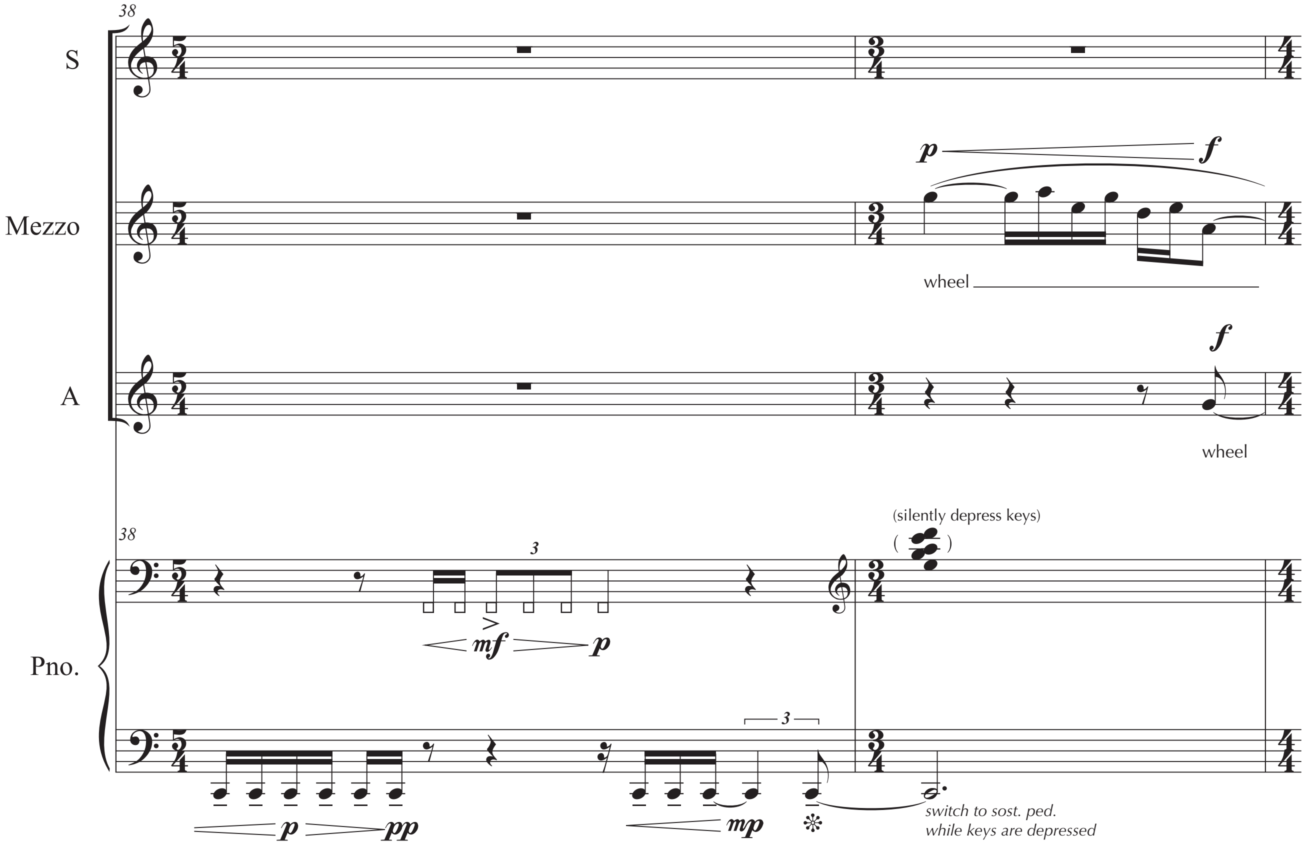

11
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
nail pizz.
fist
fingertip gliss.
fist
nails
14
♪=♪. bouncy, jaunty
There a
There a cor - mo - rant is
fist
nails

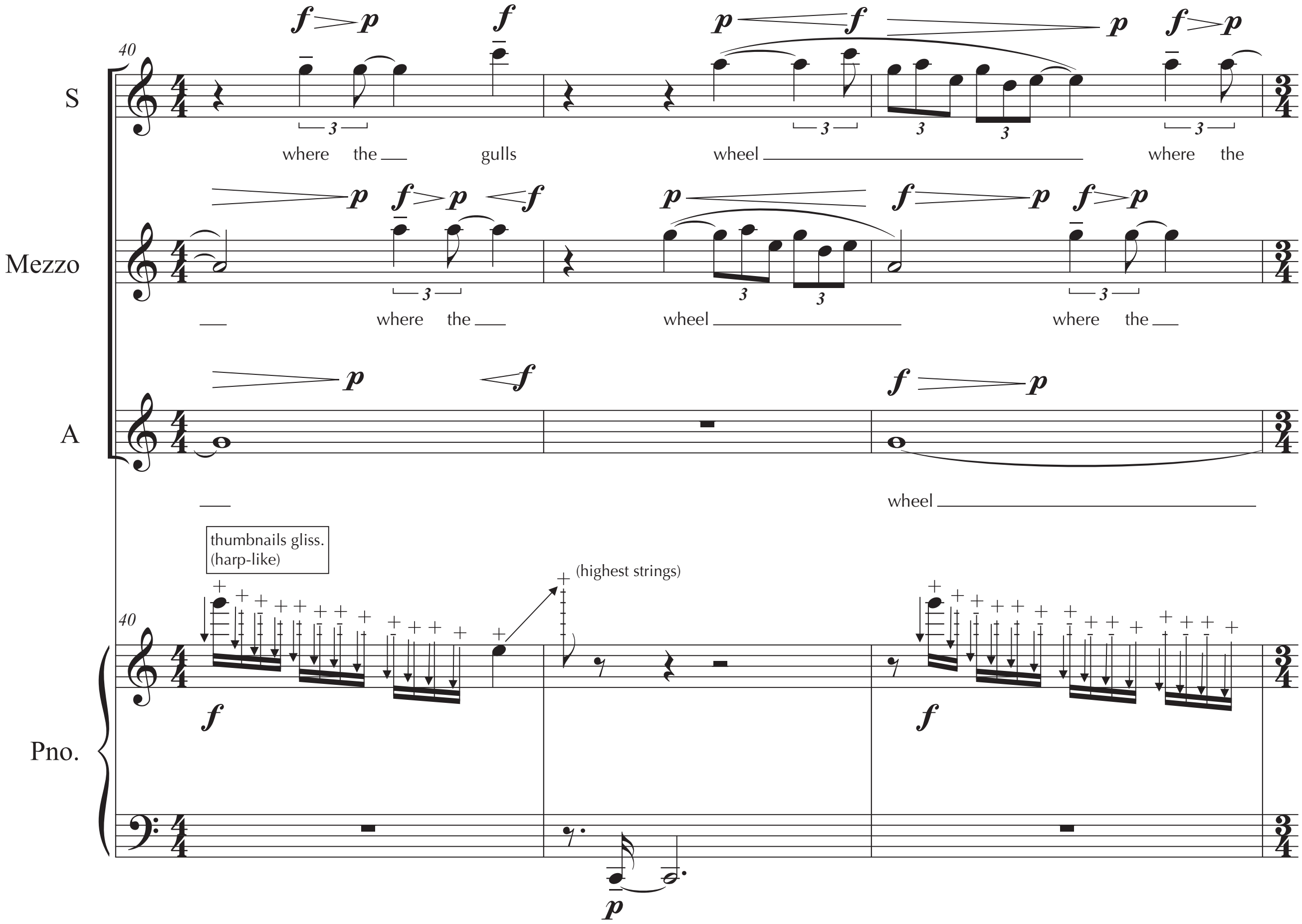

18
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
mf
f
There a cor - mo - rant is di - ving And a sal - mon net is dry -
cor - mo - rant is di - ving And a sal - mon net is dry - ing Near where
di - ving And a sal - mon net is dry - ing Near where ships to sea are
palm

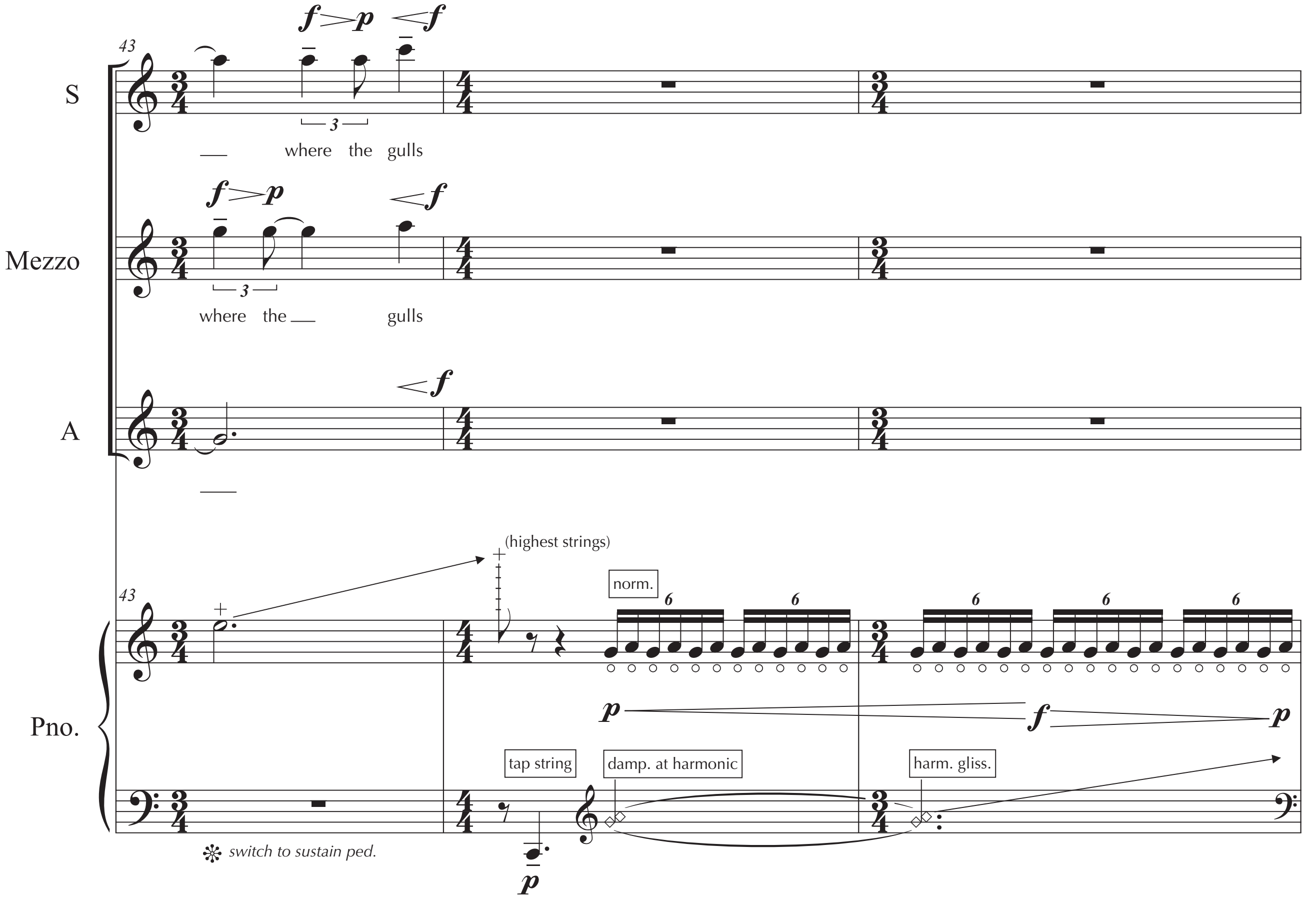

23
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
mf
f
mp
ff
ing Near where ships to sea are fly - ing
ships to sea are fly - ing
fly - ing
fist
p

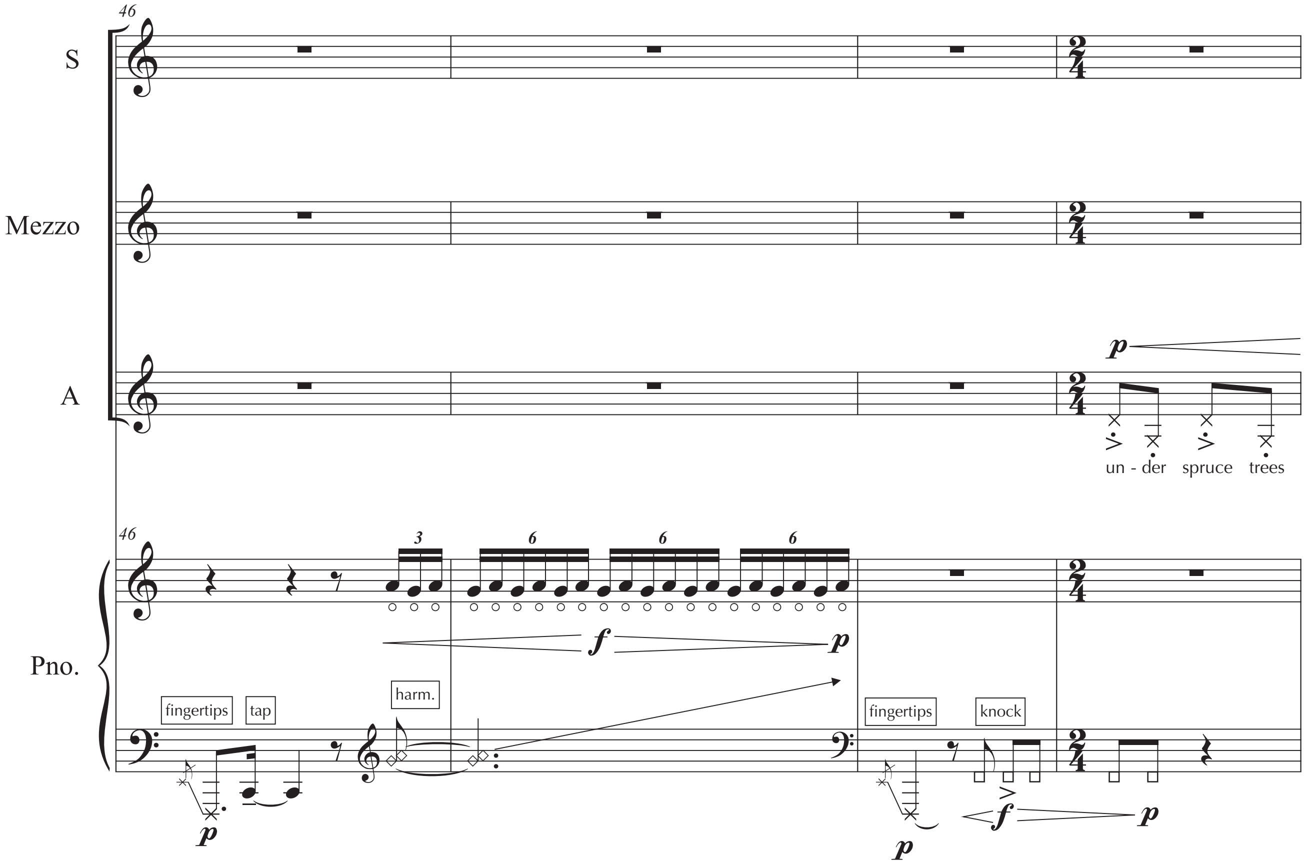

30
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
nail
palm
norm.
fist
nail pizz.
knock
fist
palms
nails
3
ff
f
pp
mf
p

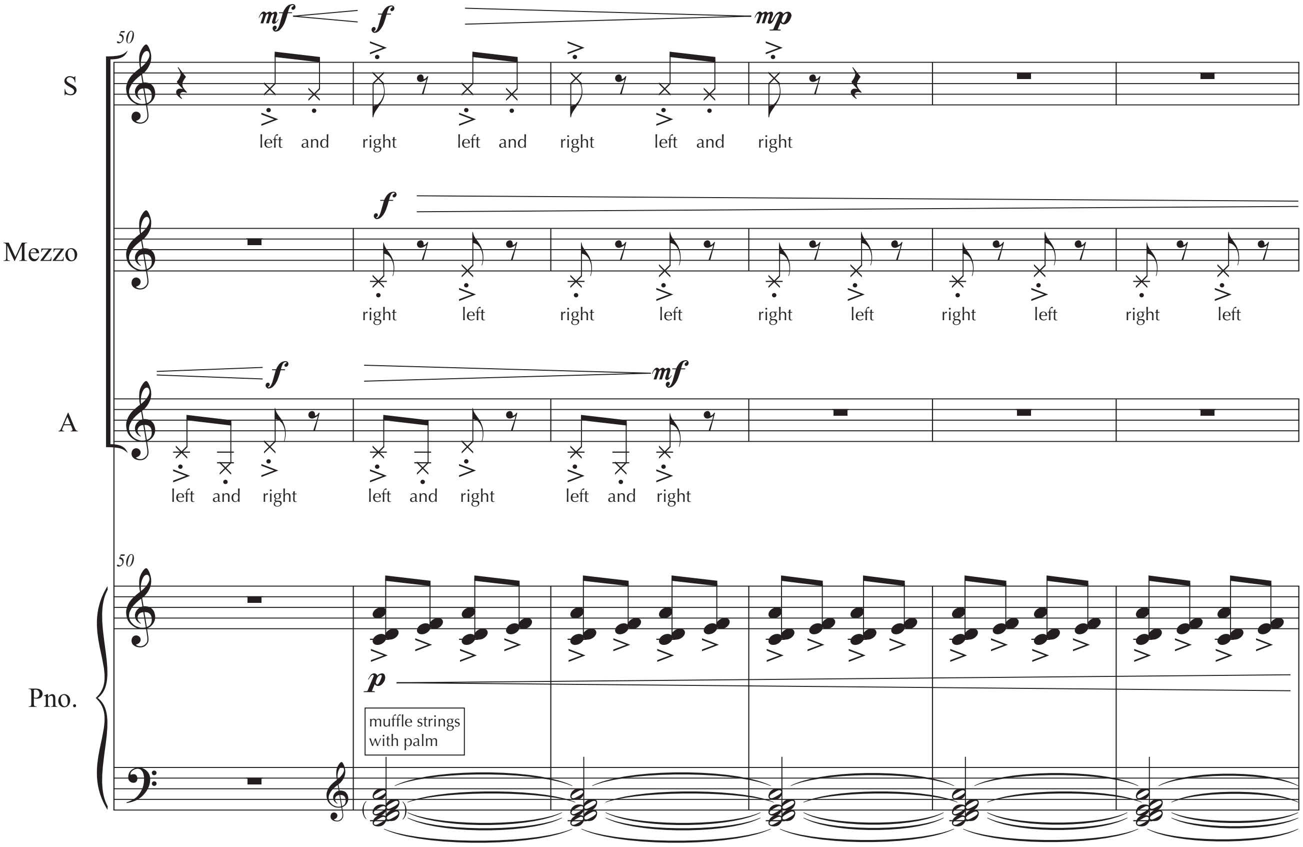

35
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
nail pizz.
nail
palm
knock
pp
f
pp
p
f
p
ff
norm.
fingertip gliss.
norm.
ff
p
pp

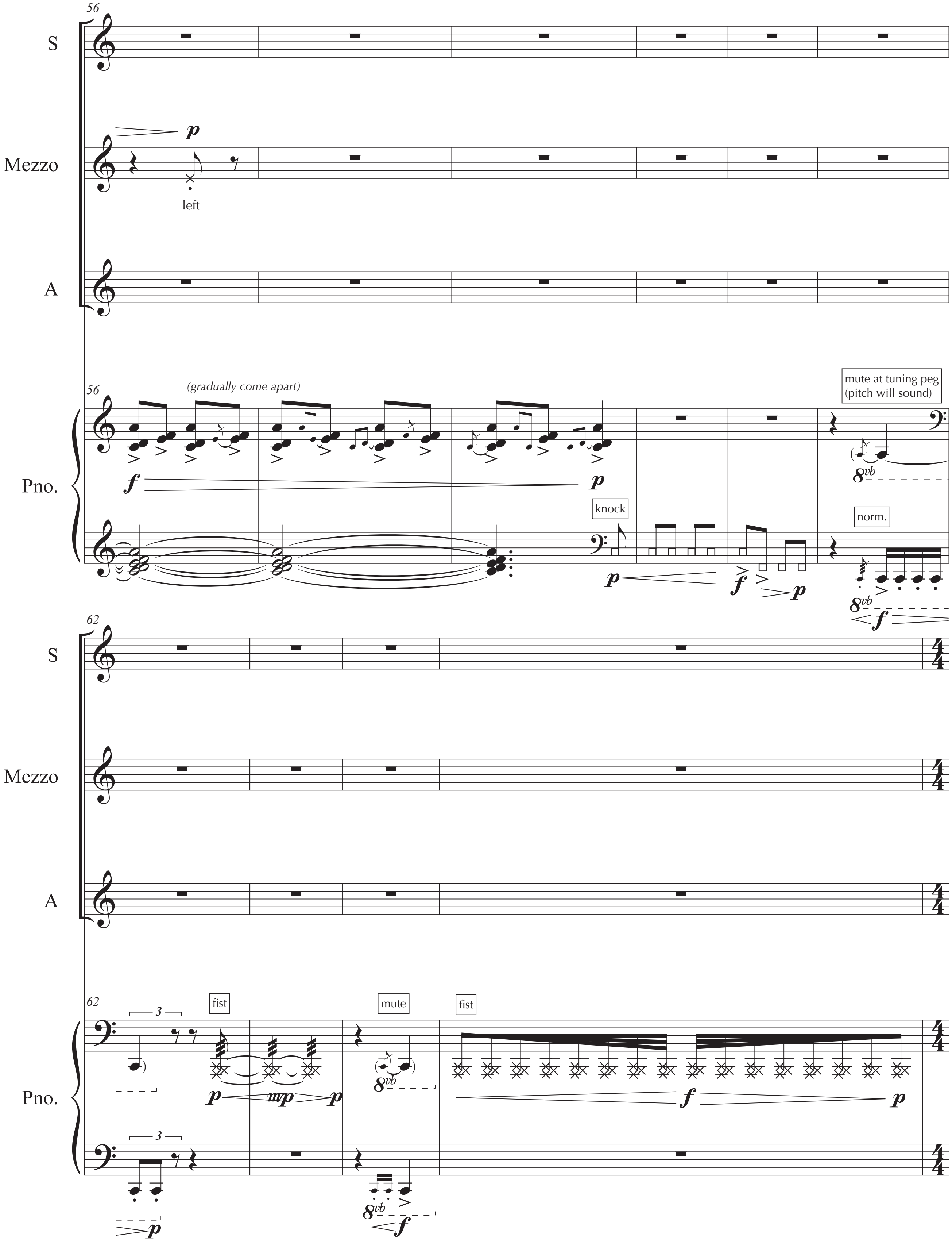

38
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
p
f
wheel
f
wheel
(silently depress keys)
3
mf
p
p
pp
mp
3
switch to sost. ped.
while keys are depressed

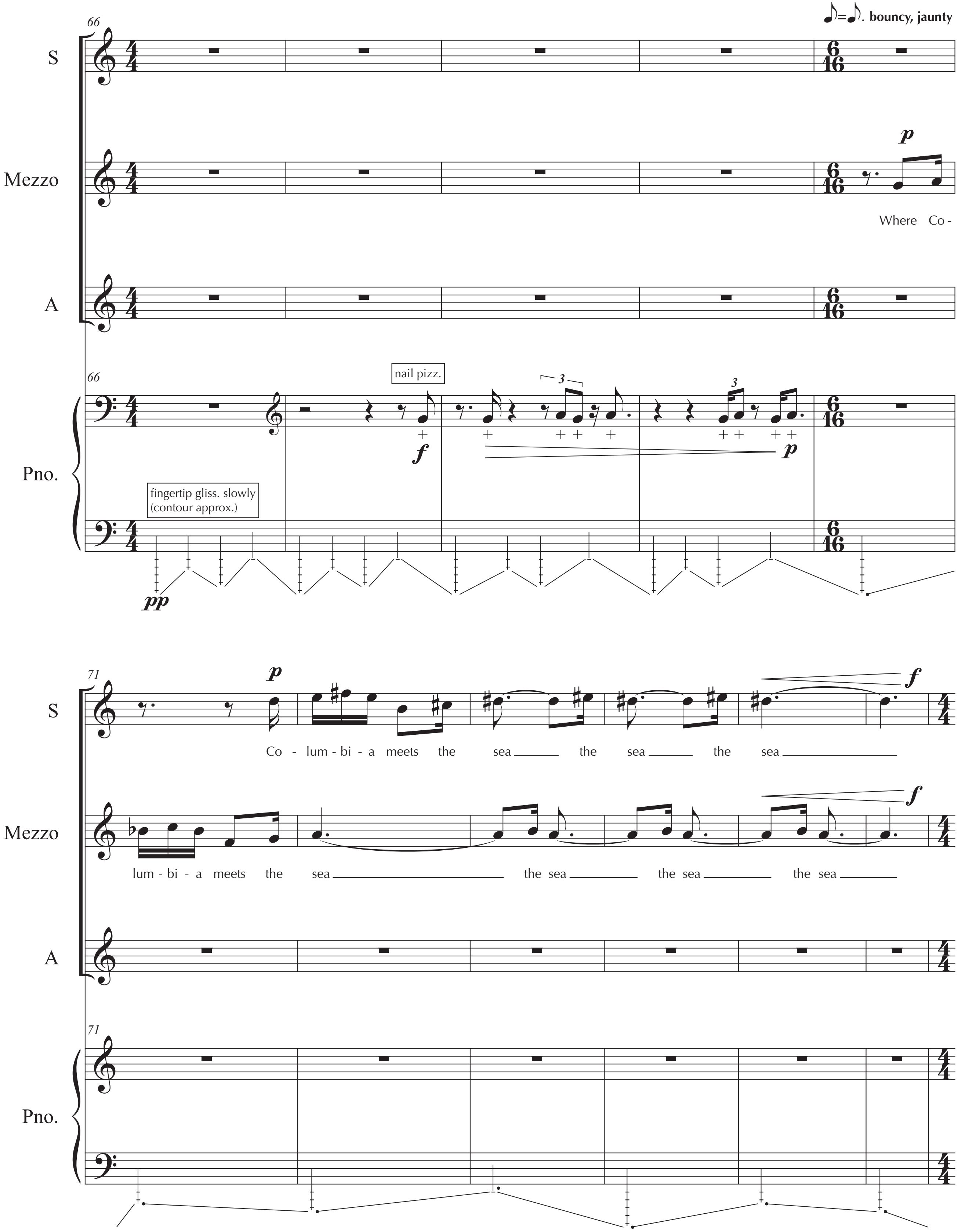

40
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
where the gulls
wheel
where the
where the
wheel
where the
wheel
thumbnails gliss. (harp-like)
(highest strings)
f
p


43
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
where the gulls
where the gulls
(highest strings)
norm.
tap string
damp. at harmonic
harm. gliss.
switch to sustain ped.

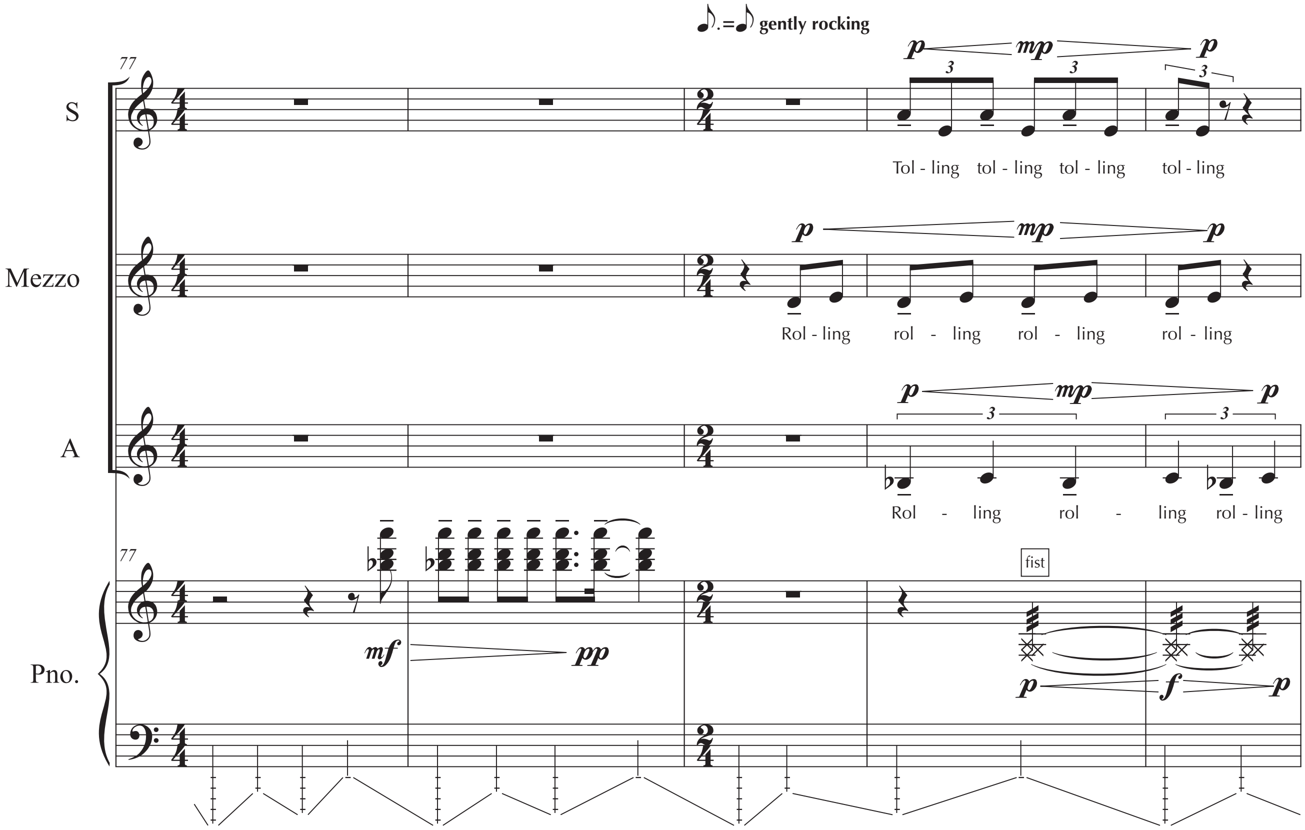

46
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
p
un - der spruce trees
3
6
6
6
f
p
fingertips
tap
harm.
fingertips
knock
p
f
p
p

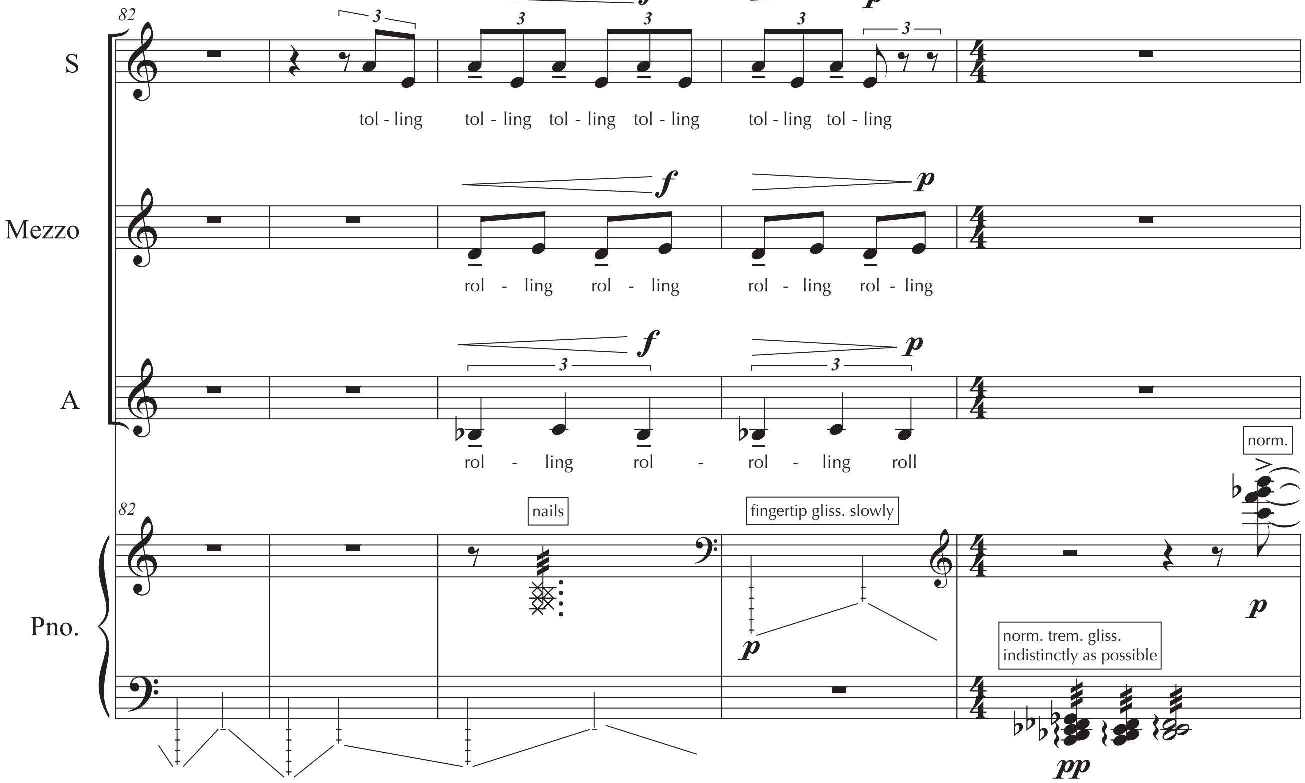

50
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
mf
f
mp
mf
left and right left and right left and right
right left right left right left right left right left
left and right left and right left and right
p
muffle strings with palm

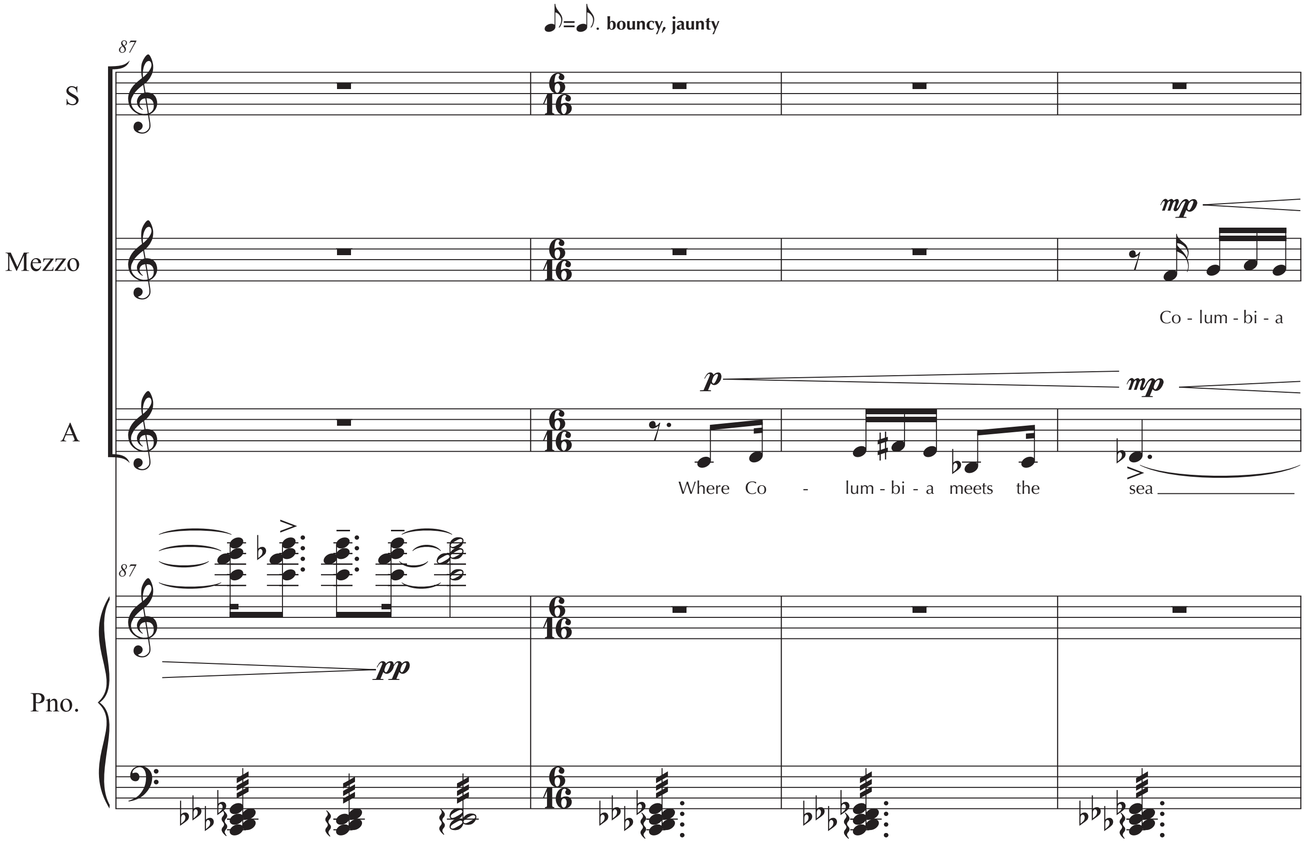

56
S
Mezzo
A
p
left
56
(gradually come apart)
Pno.
f
p
knock
p
f
p
mute at tuning peg (pitch will sound)
norm.
8vb
f
62
S
Mezzo
A
62
3
fist
mute
fist
Pno.
p
mp
p
8vb
f
p
3
p
8vb
f
4/4

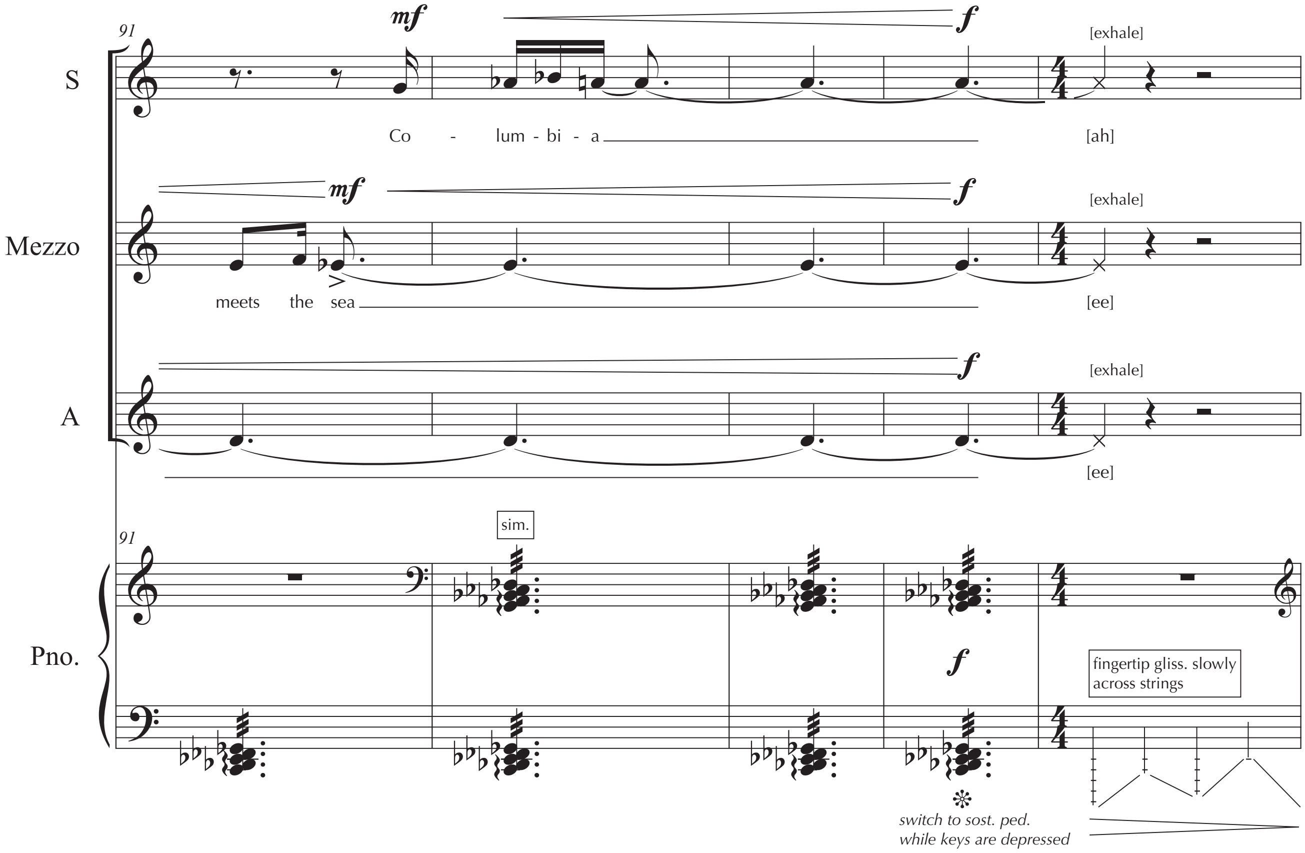


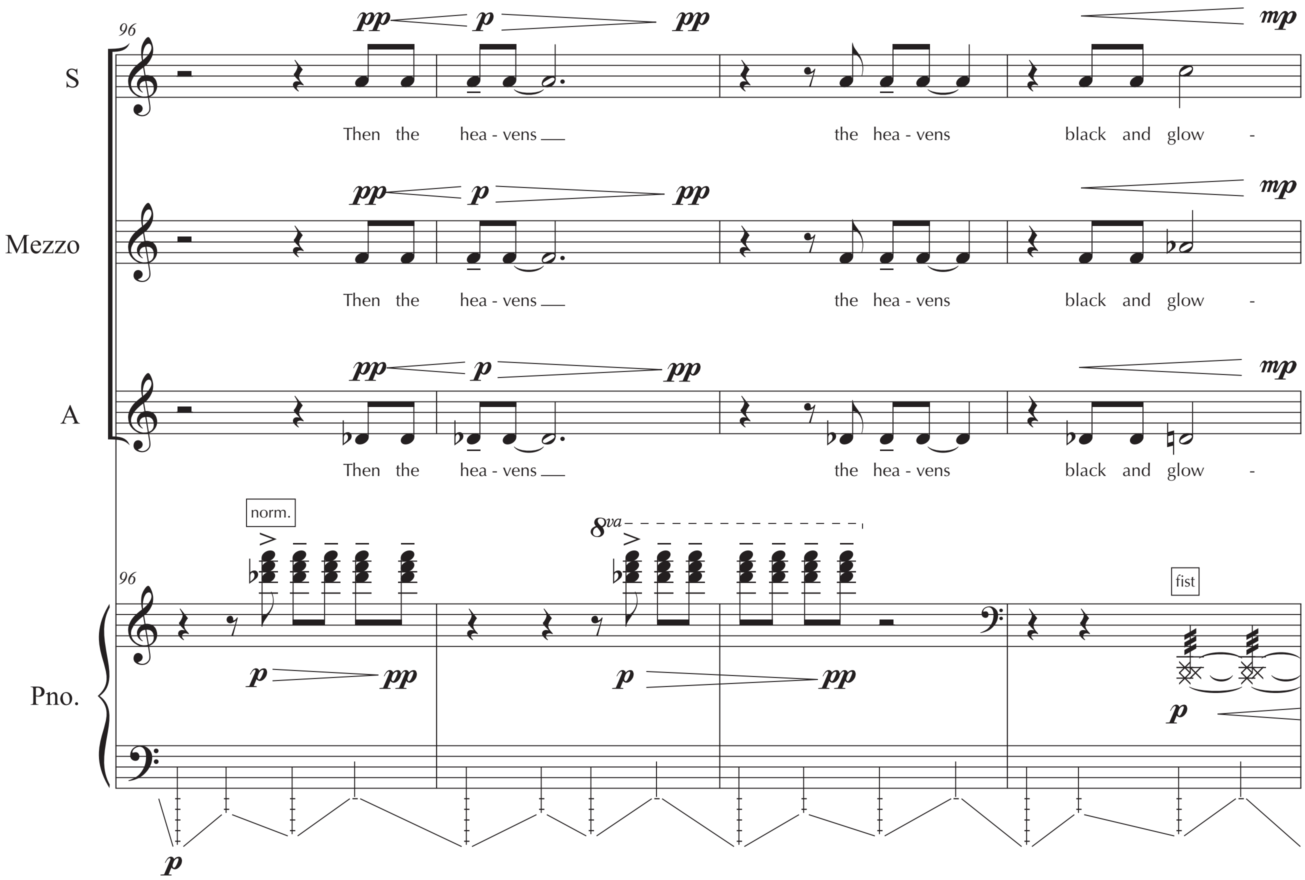
♪=♪. bouncy, jaunty
66
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
p
Where Co -
nail pizz.
3
f
p
fingertip gliss. slowly
(contour approx.)
pp
71
p
Co - lum - bi - a meets the sea the sea the sea
lum - bi - a meets the sea the sea the sea the sea
f

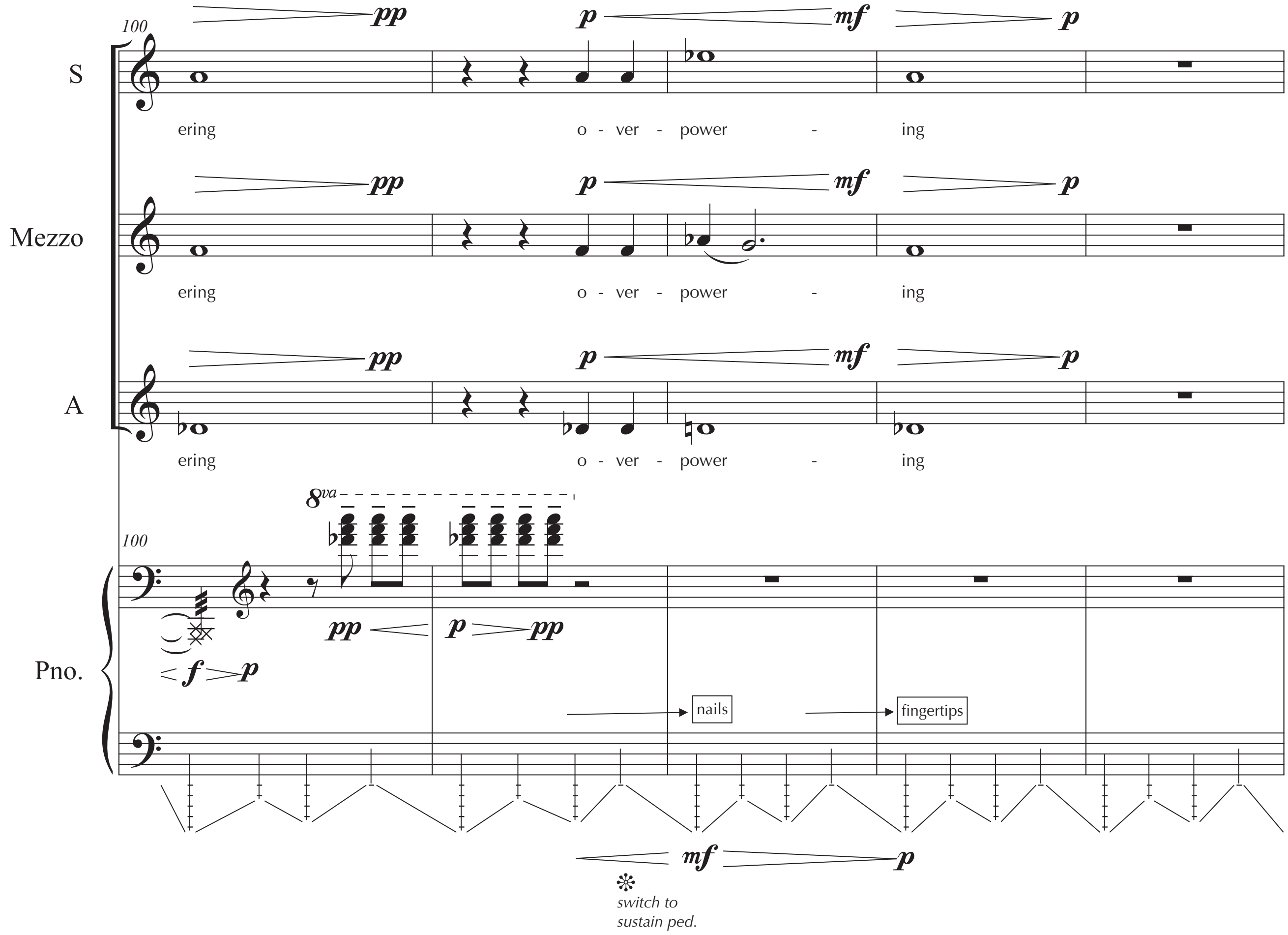

♪. = ♪ gently rocking
77
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
p
mp
p
Tol - ling tol - ling tol - ling tol - ling
Rol - ling rol - ling rol - ling rol - ling
Rol - ling rol - ling rol - ling
mf
pp
fist
f

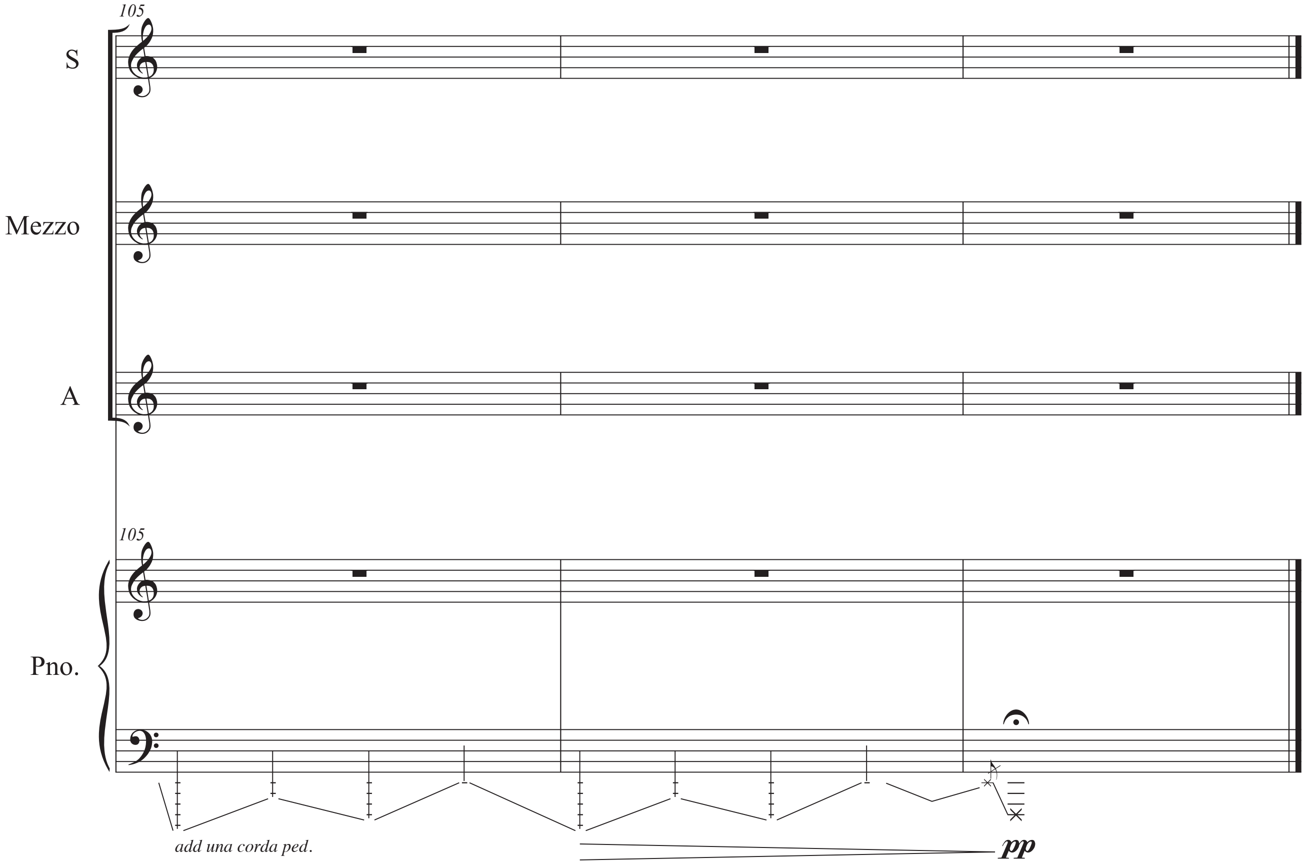

82
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
tol - ling tol - ling tol - ling tol - ling tol - ling tol - ling
rol - ling rol - ling rol - ling rol - ling
rol - ling rol - rol - ling roll
f
p
3
nails
fingertip gliss. slowly
norm.
norm. trem. gliss. indistinctly as possible
pp


bouncy, jaunty
87
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
mp
p
mp
pp
Co - lum - bi - a
Where Co - lum - bi - a meets the sea


91
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
mf
f
[exhale]
Co - lum - bi - a
[ah]
meets the sea
[ee]
sim.
fingertip gliss. slowly across strings
switch to sost. ped. while keys are depressed

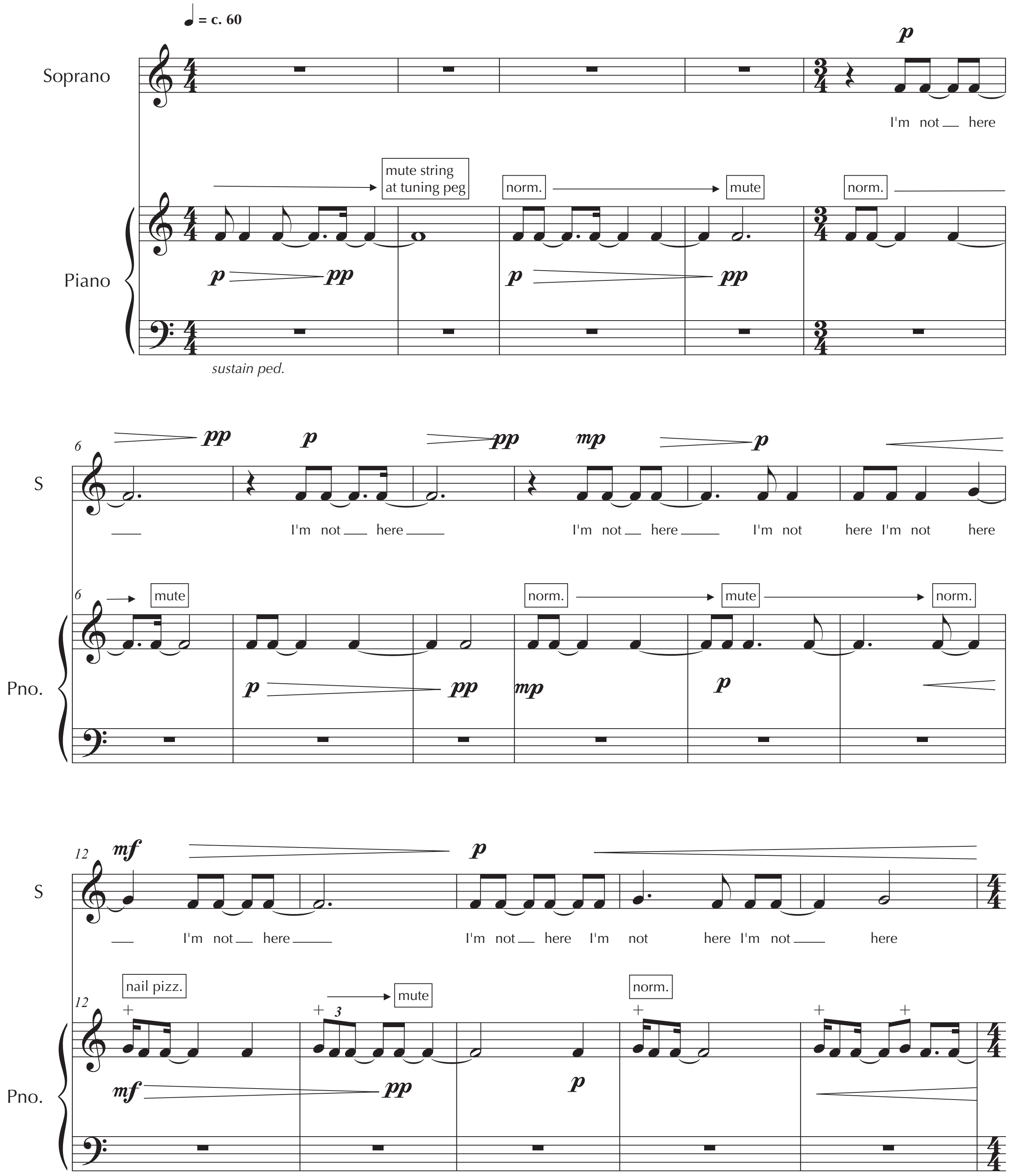

96
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
pp
p
mp
Then the hea - vens the hea - vens black and glow -
norm.
8va
fist

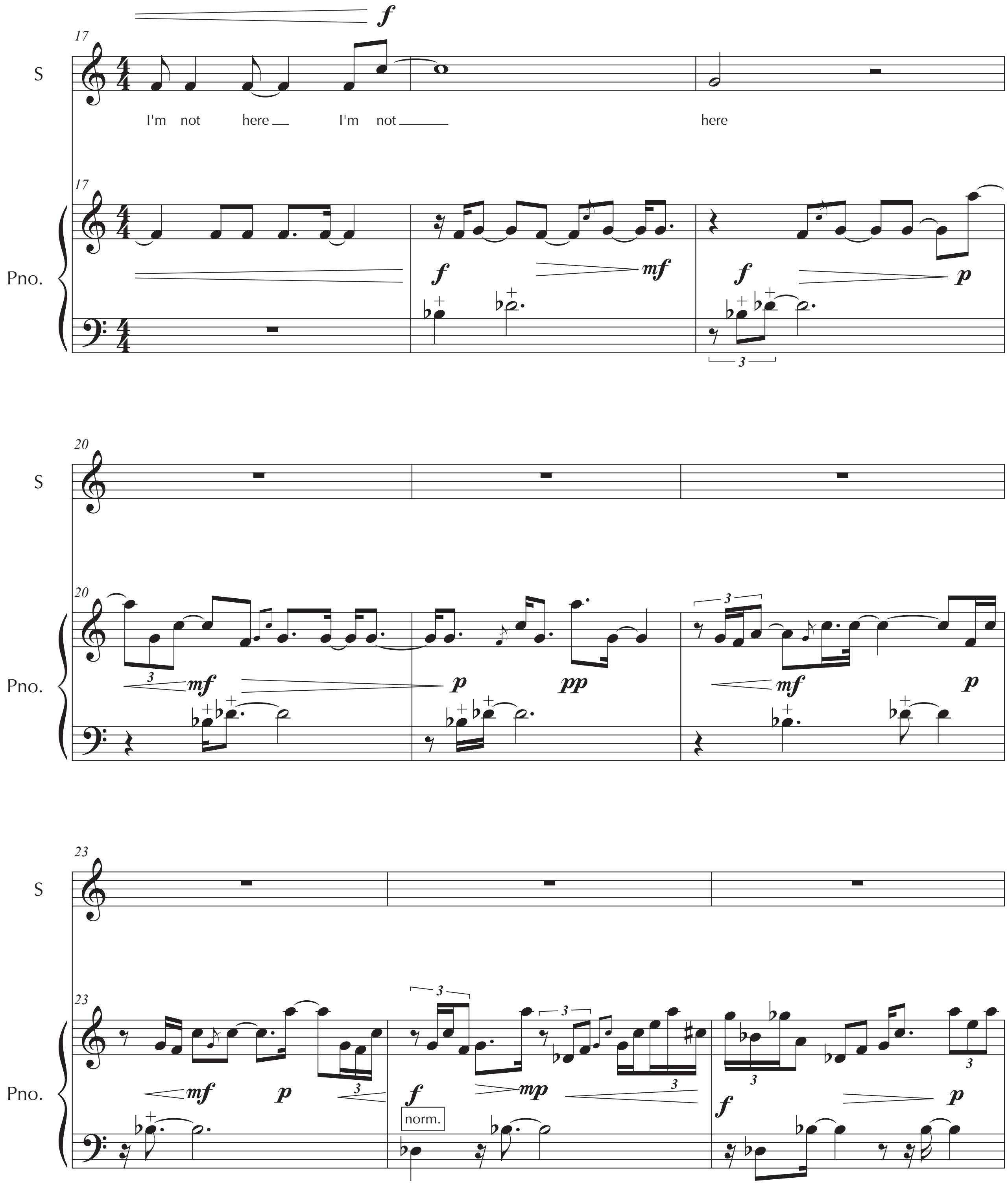

100
S
Mezzo
A
Pno.
pp
p
mf
p
ering
o - ver - power - ing
8va
pp
p
pp
f
nails
fingertips
switch to sustain ped.

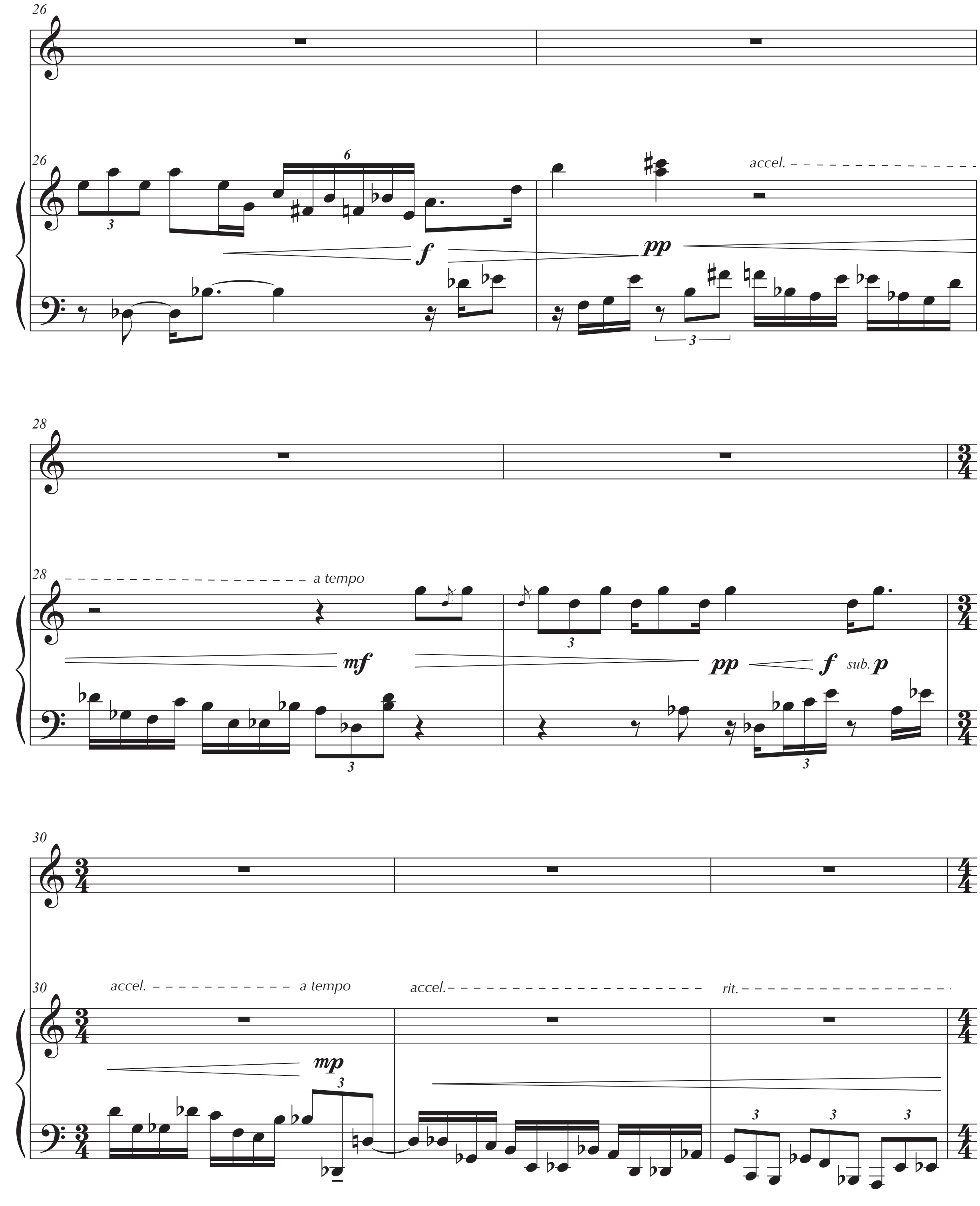

105
S
Mezzo
A
105
Pno.
add una corda ped.
pp

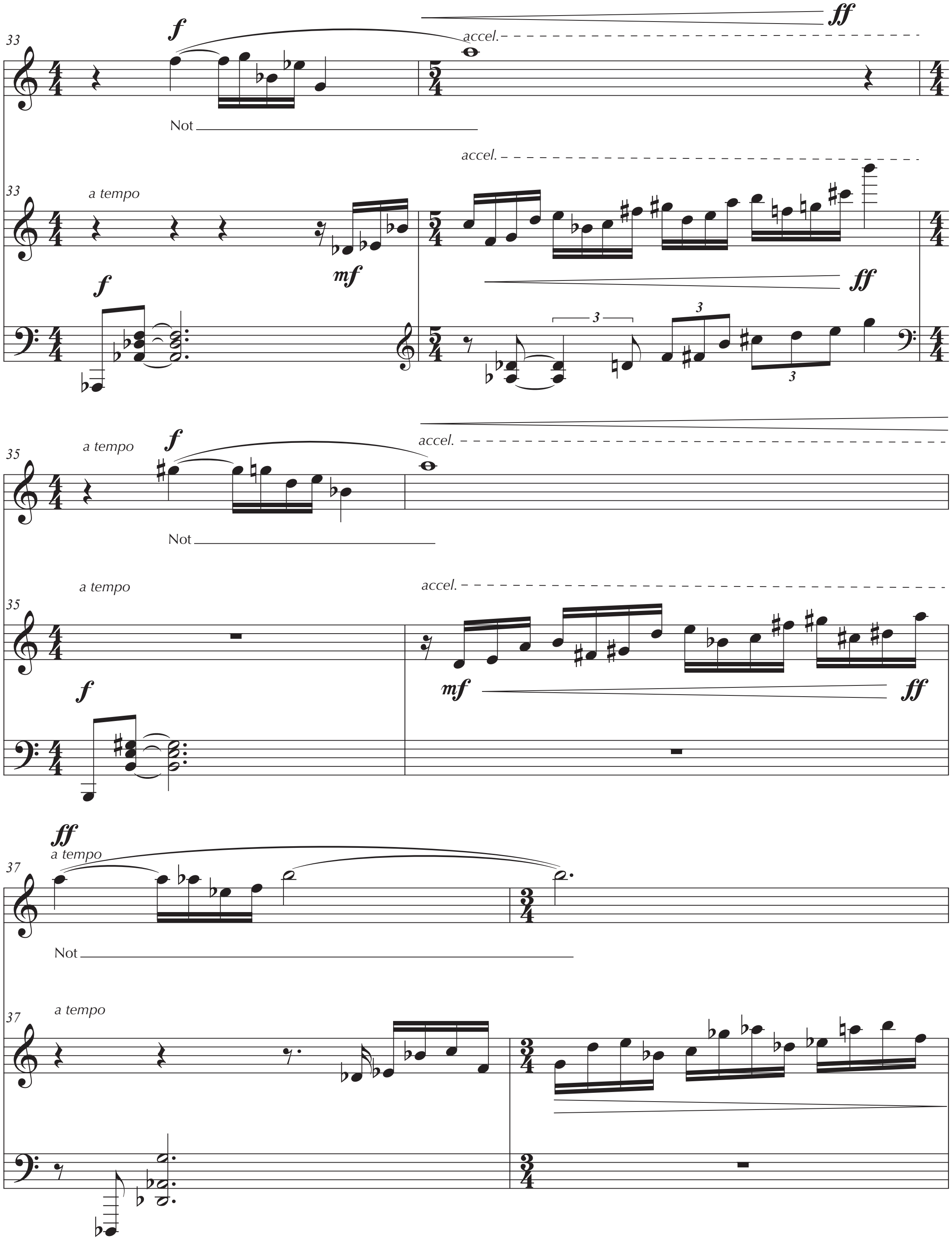
I'm Not Here

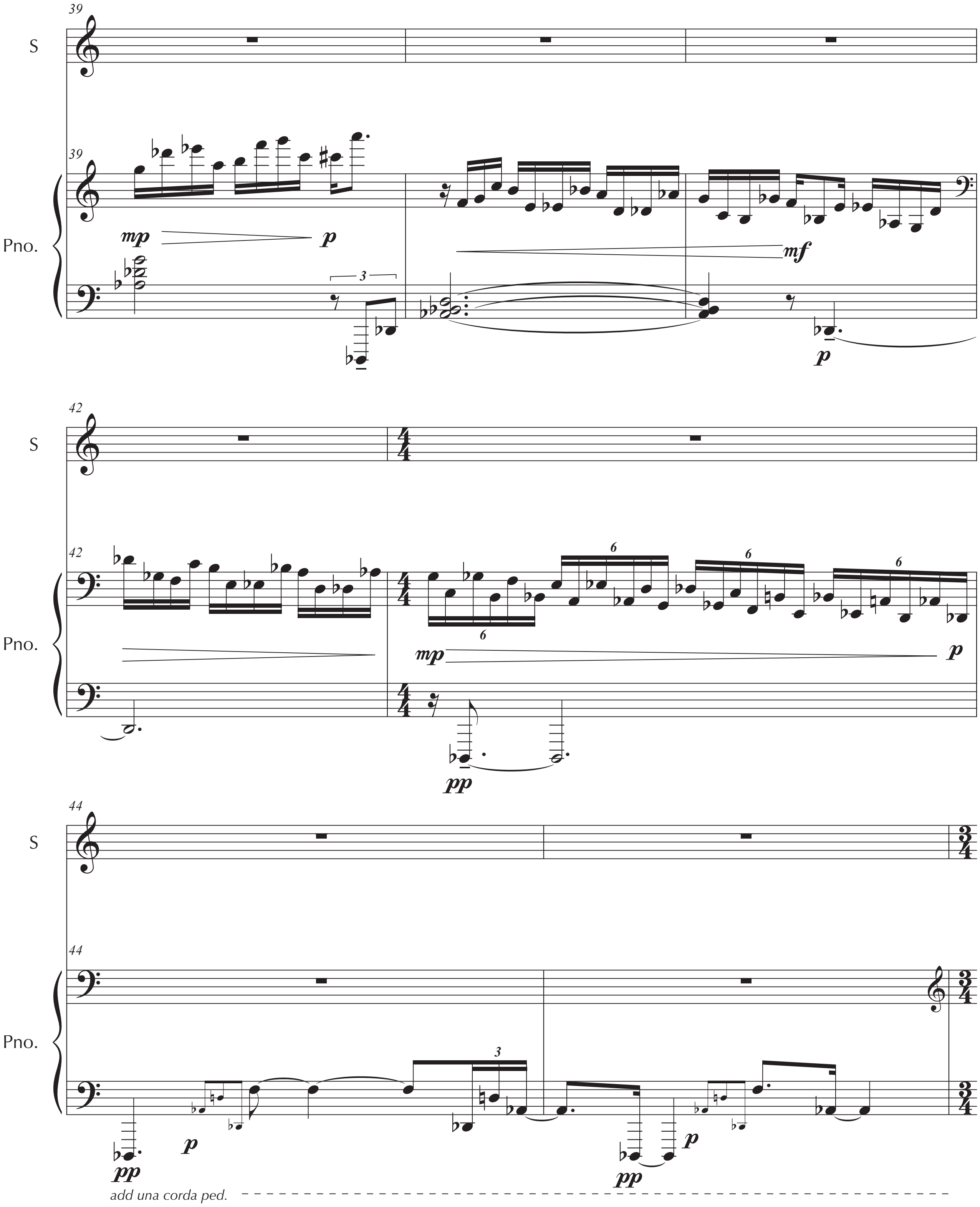
Addie Camsuzou

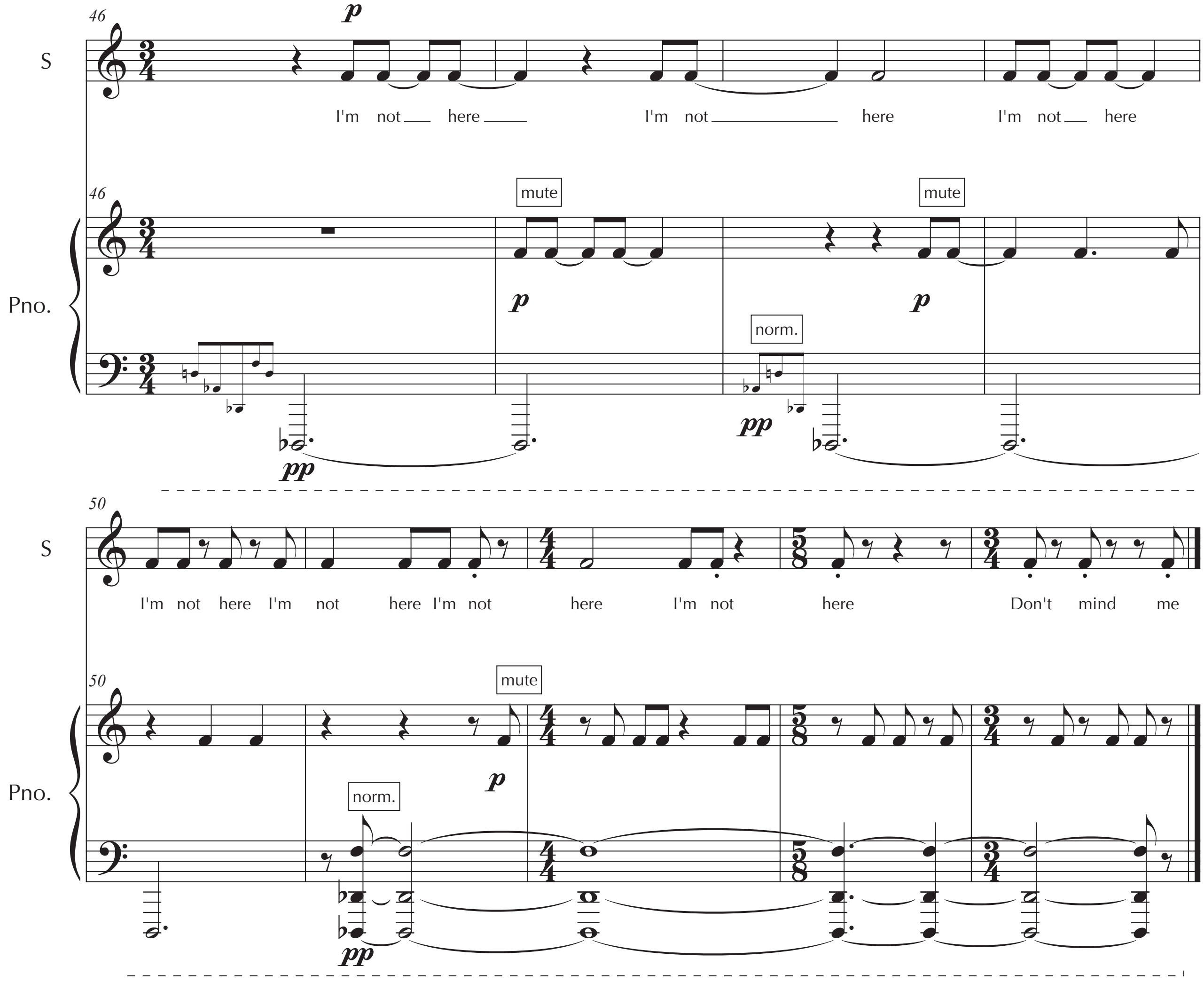

♩ = c. 60
Soprano
Piano
mute string at tuning peg
norm.
mute
norm.
sustain ped.
I'm not here
I'm not here
I'm not here
I'm not here I'm not here
S
Pno.
nail pizz.
I'm not here
I'm not here I'm not here I'm not here
p
pp
mp
mf


f
17
S
I'm not here I'm not here
Pno.
f
mf
f
p
3
20
mf
p
pp
mf
p
23
mf
p
f
norm.
mp
3
f
p


26
S
Pno.
6
3
f
pp
accel.
28
a tempo
mf
pp
f
sub. p
30
accel.
a tempo
rit.
mp


33
f
ff
accel.
S
Not
a tempo
mf
Pno.
3
35
a tempo
f
accel.
37
ff
a tempo


39
S
39
Pno.
mp
p
3
mf
p
42
S
42
Pno.
6
mp
p
pp
44
S
44
Pno.
3
pp
p
pp
p
add una corda ped.


46
p
S
I'm not here I'm not here I'm not here
Pno.
mute
p
norm.
pp
mute
p
pp
50
S
I'm not here I'm not here I'm not here I'm not here Don't mind me
Pno.
mute
p
norm.
pp