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Embers from the Void

A Dissertation Presented

by

Matthew Michael Vandegriff

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

(Music Composition)

Stony Brook University

May 2012

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2012

STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

Matthew Michael Vandegriff

We, the examination committee for the above candidate for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

hereby recommend acceptance of the candidate's doctoral dissertation.

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Associate Professor, Department of Music

Robert Mueller

Professor of Music at University of Arkansas

This dissertation is accepted by the Graduate School

Charles Taber

Interim Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Dissertation
Embers from the Void
by
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2012

Embers from the Void for string quartet and voice is a work centered around the idea of transition, specifically the transition state of death. Each moment explores this idea through imagery of landscape, season, and space or, more precisely, forest, winter, and emptiness (the void). The poetry, self-authored, was written for and in conjunction with the music. The two are inseparable.

A running theme that will be apparent in the text is "what lies beneath the surface." An aspect of this theme will be present in each movement and is itself a metaphor for both literary ideas and the theoretical foundation of the music.

Musically, this work is at times sparse and relentlessly singular in process. In contrast, it is at times lush and complex. Within, there are moments in which the music could be classified as minimal, spectral, atonal, and quasi-tonal. Underlying all of this is a sole foundation that is the genesis of the entire work. This work, in practically every aspect, is formed from the geometry inherent in golden arithmetic. Proportions are guided by the golden ratio. Pitch, with rare exception, is derived from the Fibonacci sequence and similar additive number patterns that are themselves approximating, with ever increasing accuracy, the golden or "divine" proportion.

On the surface ***Embers from the Void*** is seemingly simple and transparent, however, this simplicity is the result of golden geometry that is intricate and other-worldly yet familiar, and this transparency is the result of crystalline structures at the foundation of that very geometry. To understand this work, one must look *beneath the surface* of the unassuming façade to the glint of gold that lies beyond.

Embers from the Void

There's a light
There's a light, from far away.
It shines on a redwood tree,
and in its wake...silence,
loss,
endlessly.
But there's a light...
a little light shining.

Ember from the void,
wandering, hopelessly lost.
Everlasting.

Under the Snow
A seed falls from a tree,
helpless.
Storm clouds paint the sky in black charcoal.
Lightning strikes.
Under the snow a dead phoenix lies under the snow a dead phoenix.
Waiting, and counting our remains.
Our remains.
Not enough.
Not enough.

Sinking to Ever Darker Worlds
Slowly, cold bites my body still,
...sinking to ever darker worlds.

River ice hides ever changing,
flowing streams.
Never still.

I met the weakness in the ice.
Fought to reach the surface.
Floating,
further down below the ice.
Slowly,
further,
further down.
The water's getting colder.
The water's getting ...colder.

Event Horizon
Right out of reach, High above,
a star shining black draws near.

In the night sky turning slow,
offering to the blind eternal sight, endless sight

Here is not life,
it's death in disguise

Still, this single point of light shines
dim and still.
This single point of light
cast cold from the void.

Clear Stream
Clear stream that bends,
tell me which way.
The sun sets soon,
...too soon.
...too soon.
I see a hawk in the night sky,
an oddly black hawk.

I need some time to rest my eyes.
I need just a moment to rest my eyes.

Traveler's song
In those great woods that carry my heart
I fall and let you entwine
this body curled like a newborn
And sink beneath the warm soil.

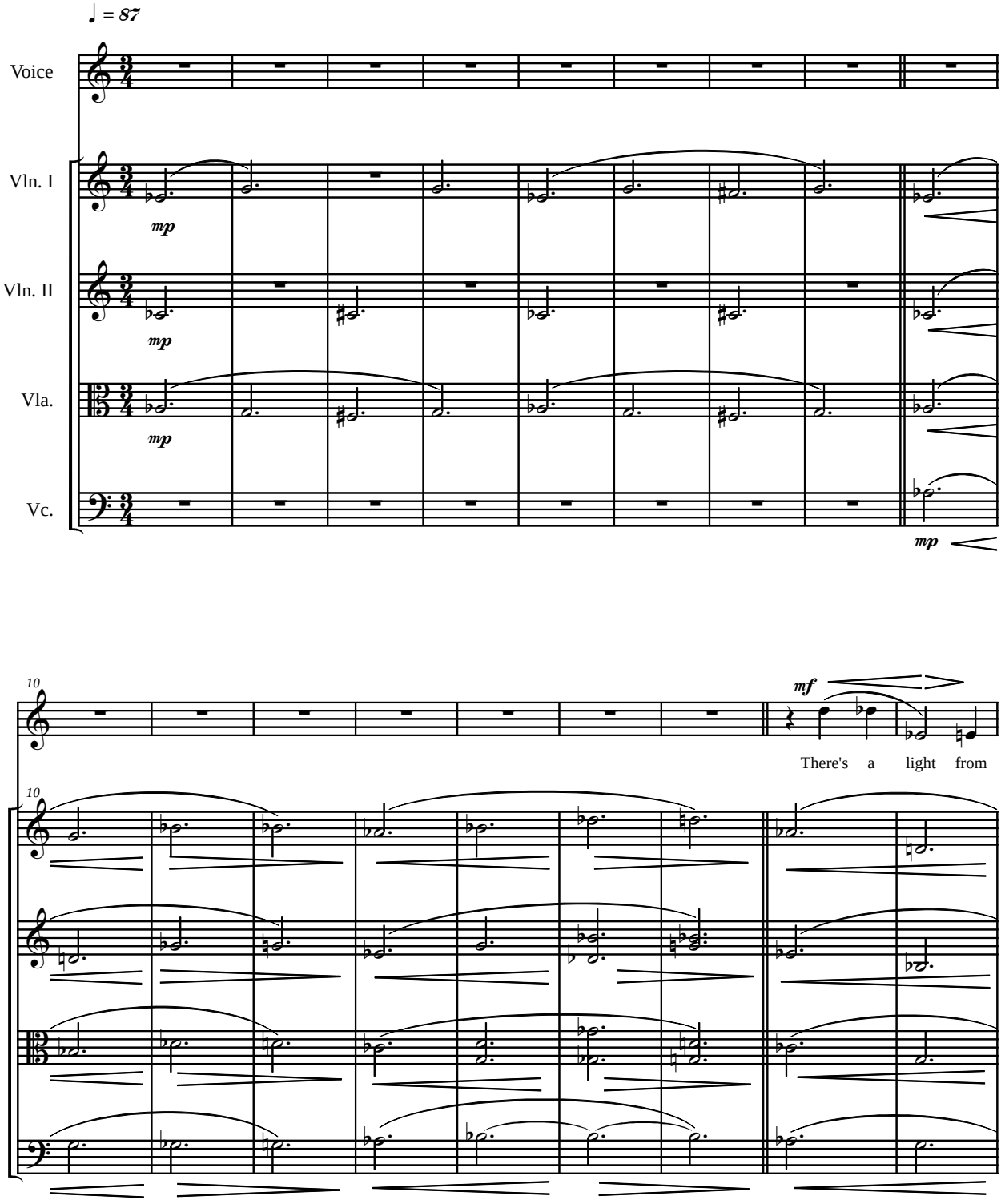
The stars have bled the night sky
of blackest aether.

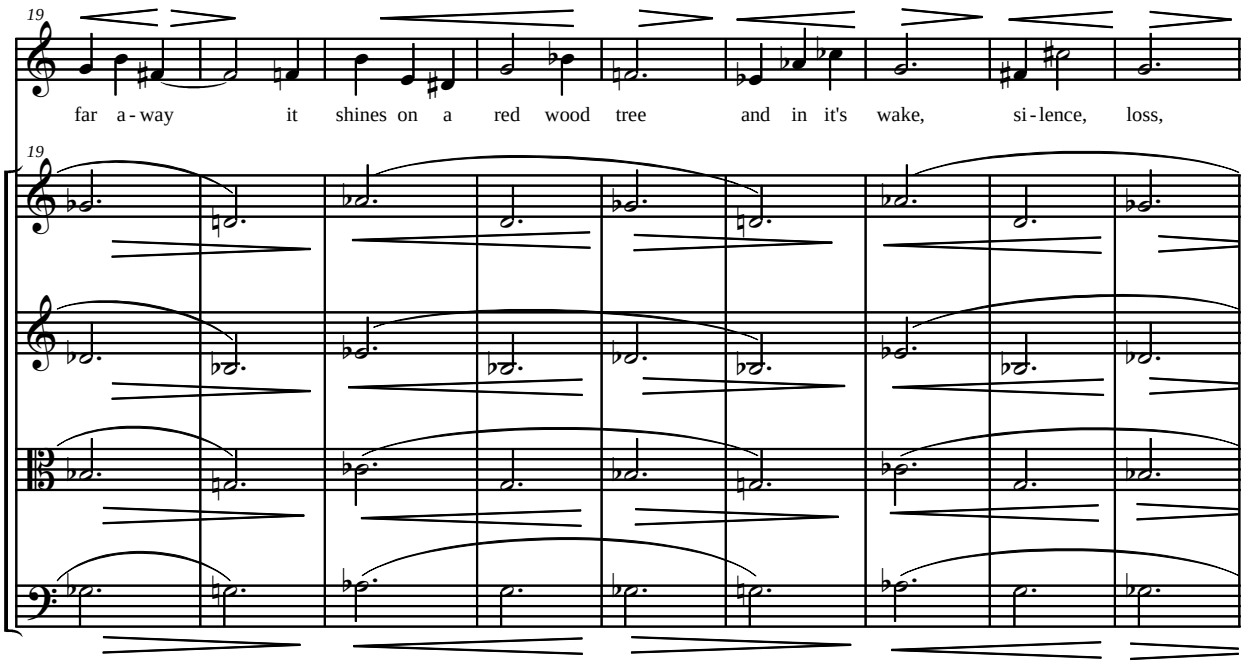
Please watch my loved ones here,
I set sail against the void.
A traveler ever wandering
through countless dark worlds.

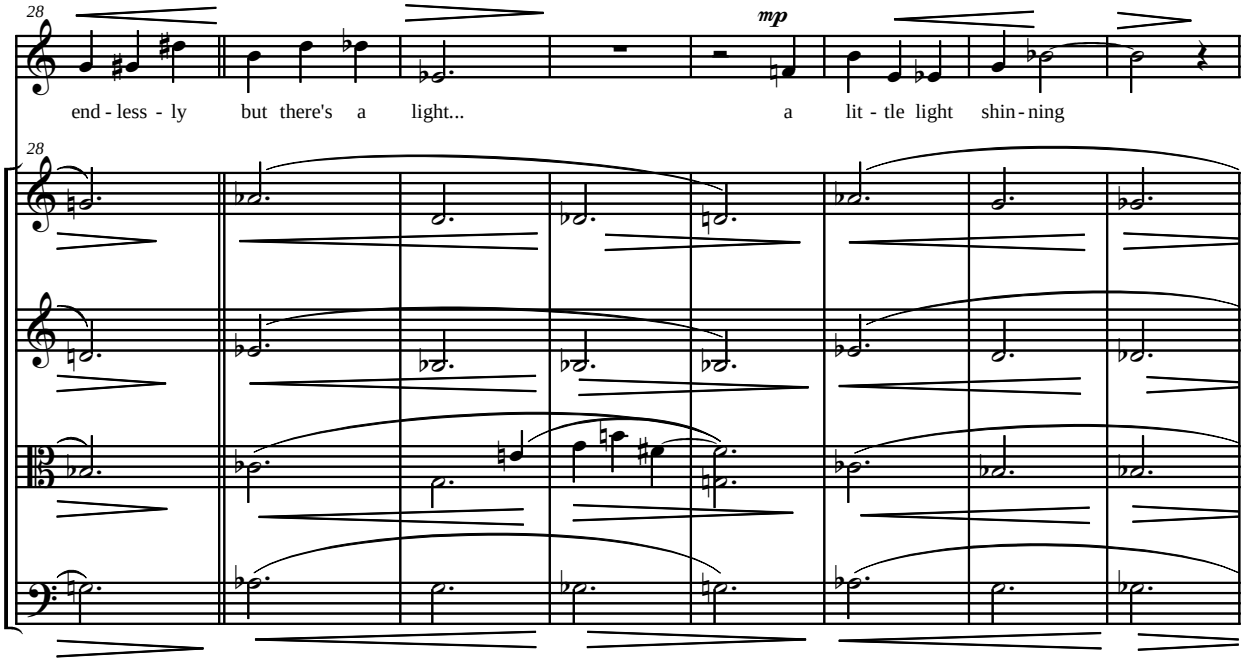
I cross what's empty
and light a small fire.

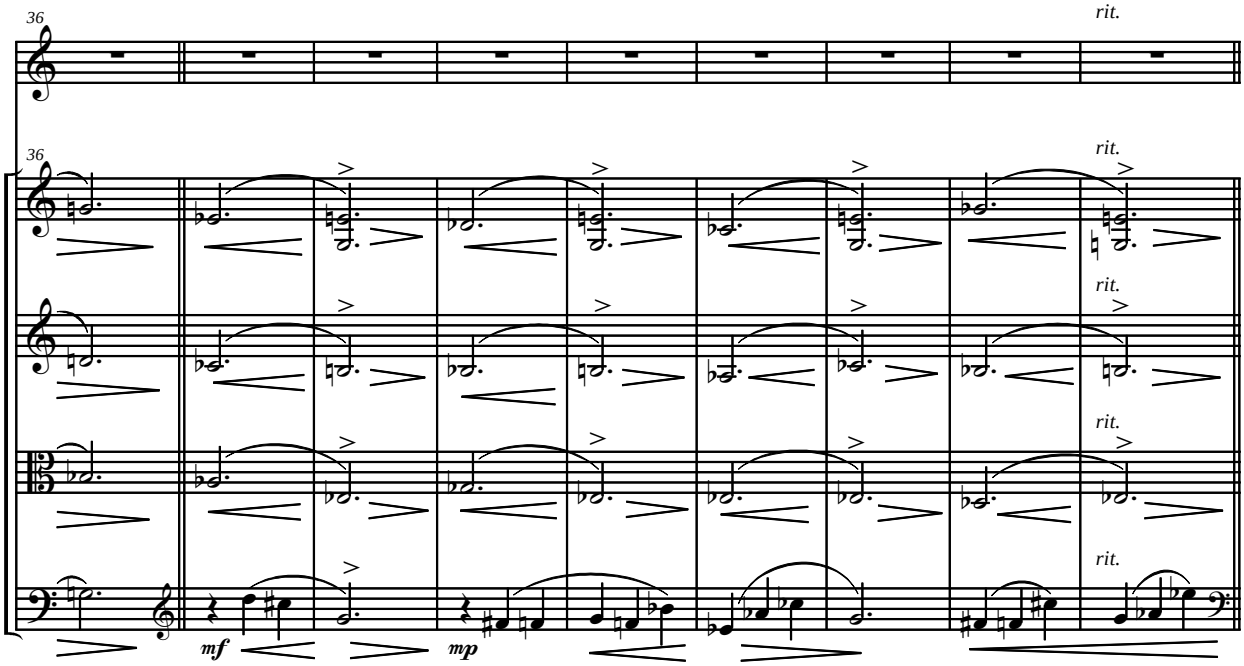
There's a Light

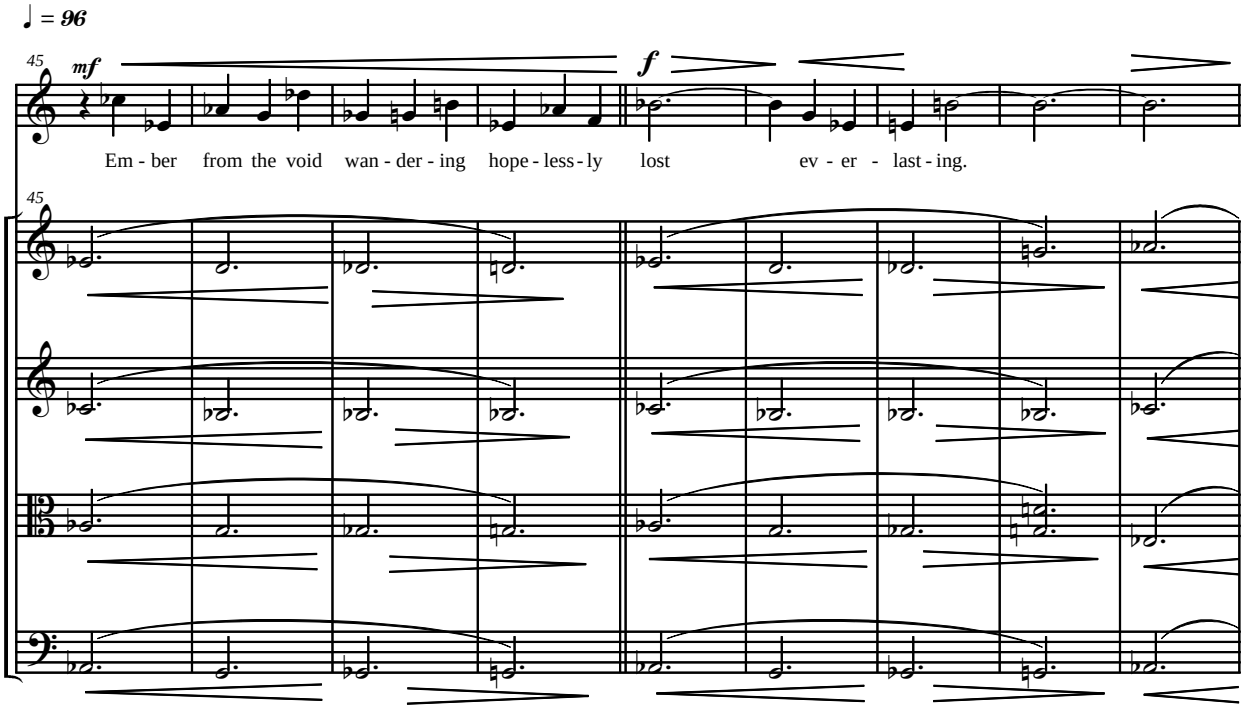
M. Vandegriff

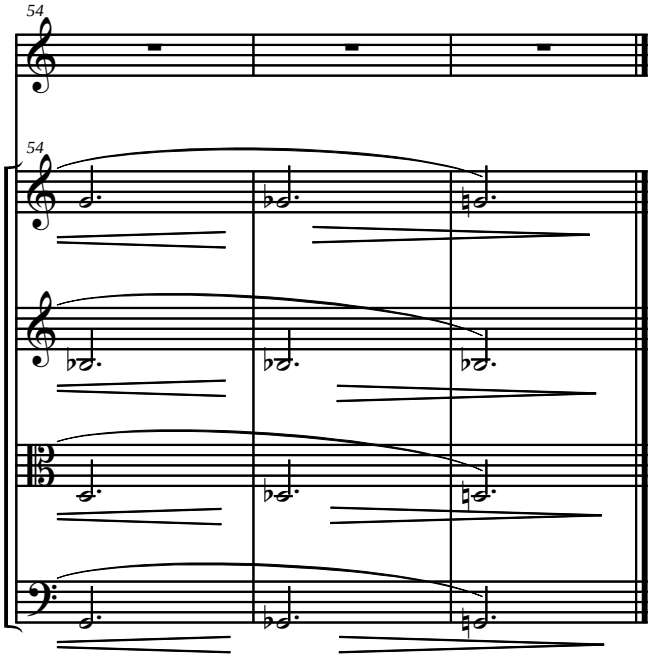



19
far a - way it shines on a red wood tree and in it's wake, si - lence, loss,
19

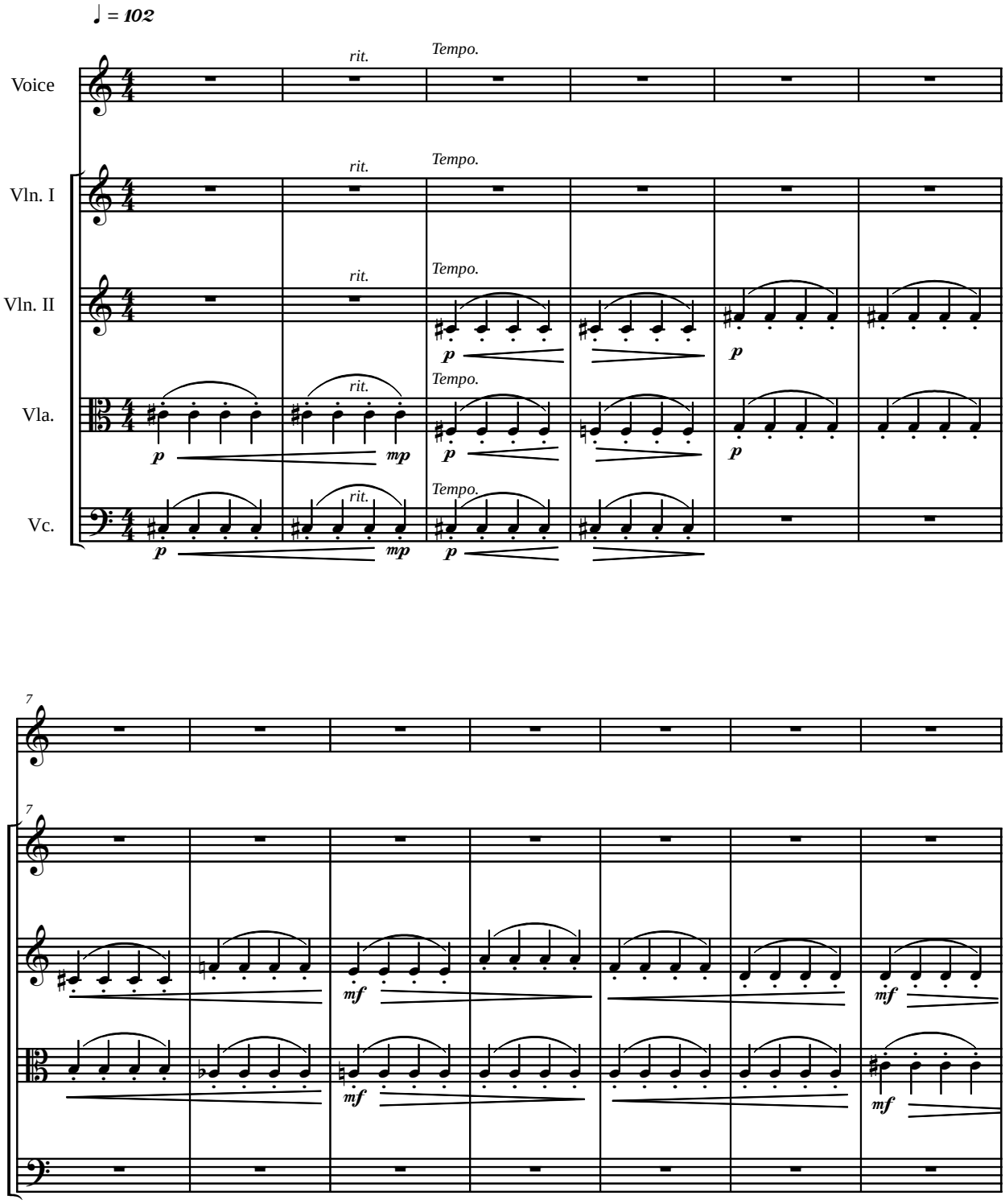

28
mp
end - less - ly but there's a light... a lit - tle light shin - ning
28

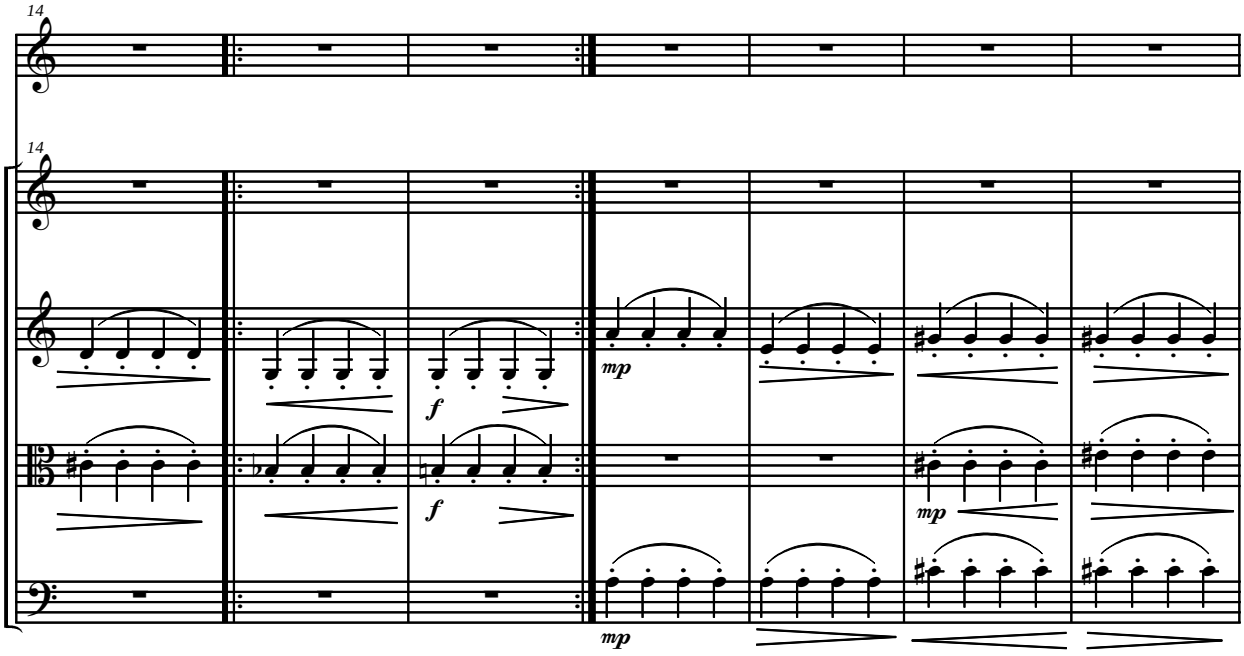

36
rit.
36
rit.
rit.
rit.
rit.
mf
mp

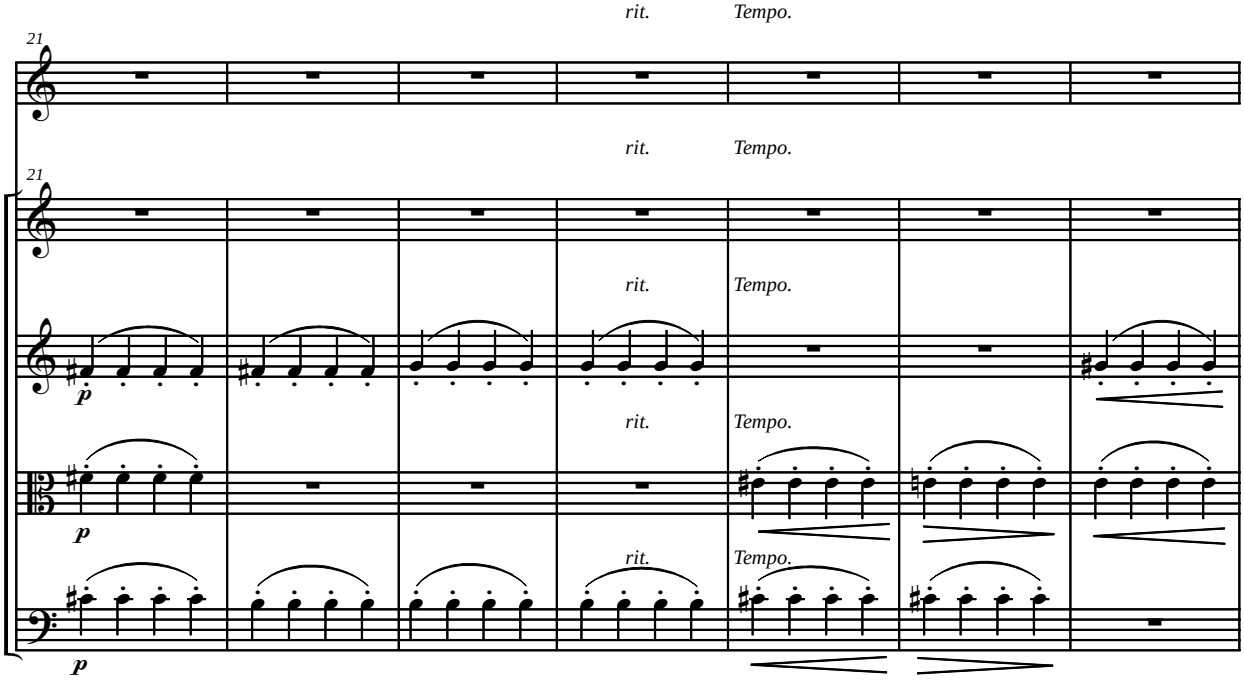

♩ = 96
45
mf
f
Em - ber from the void wan - der - ing hope - less - ly lost ev - er - last - ing.
45

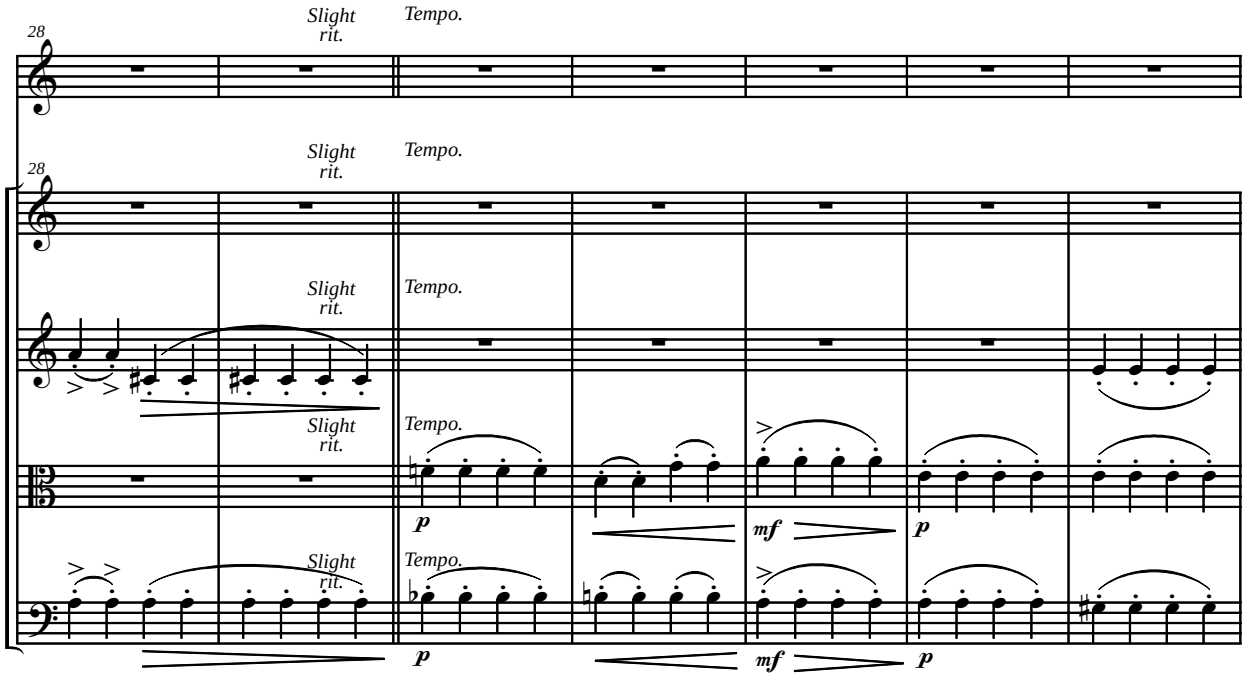

54
54

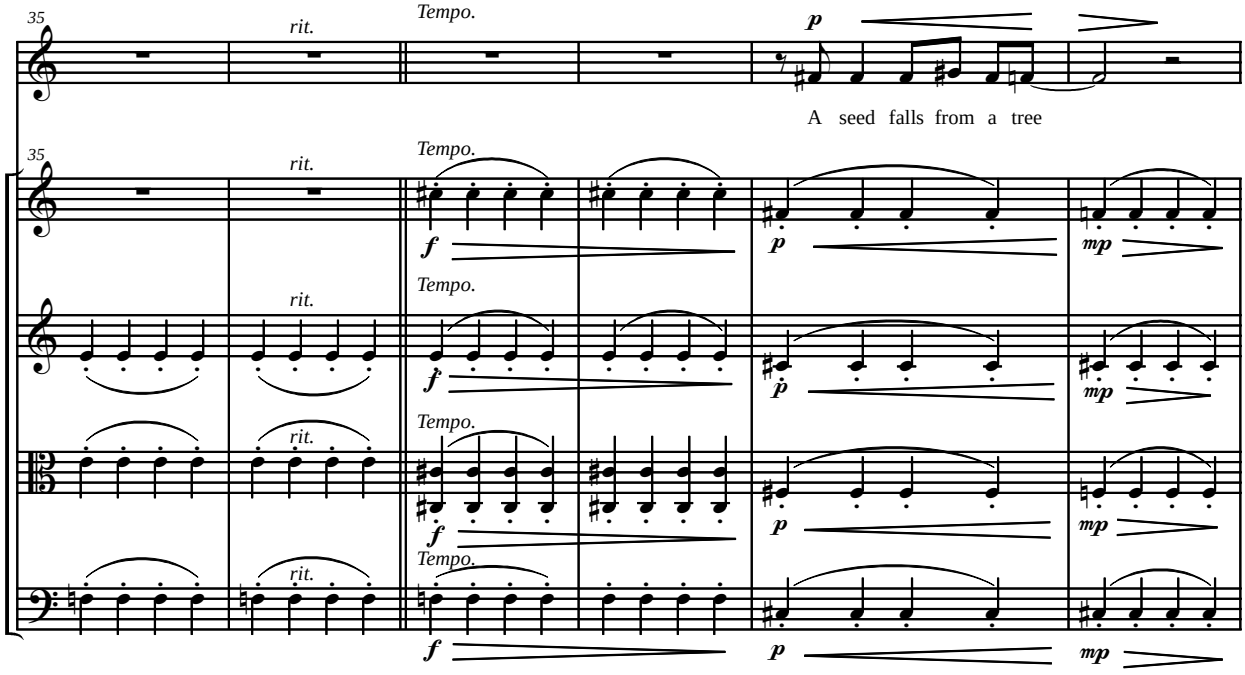
Under the Snow

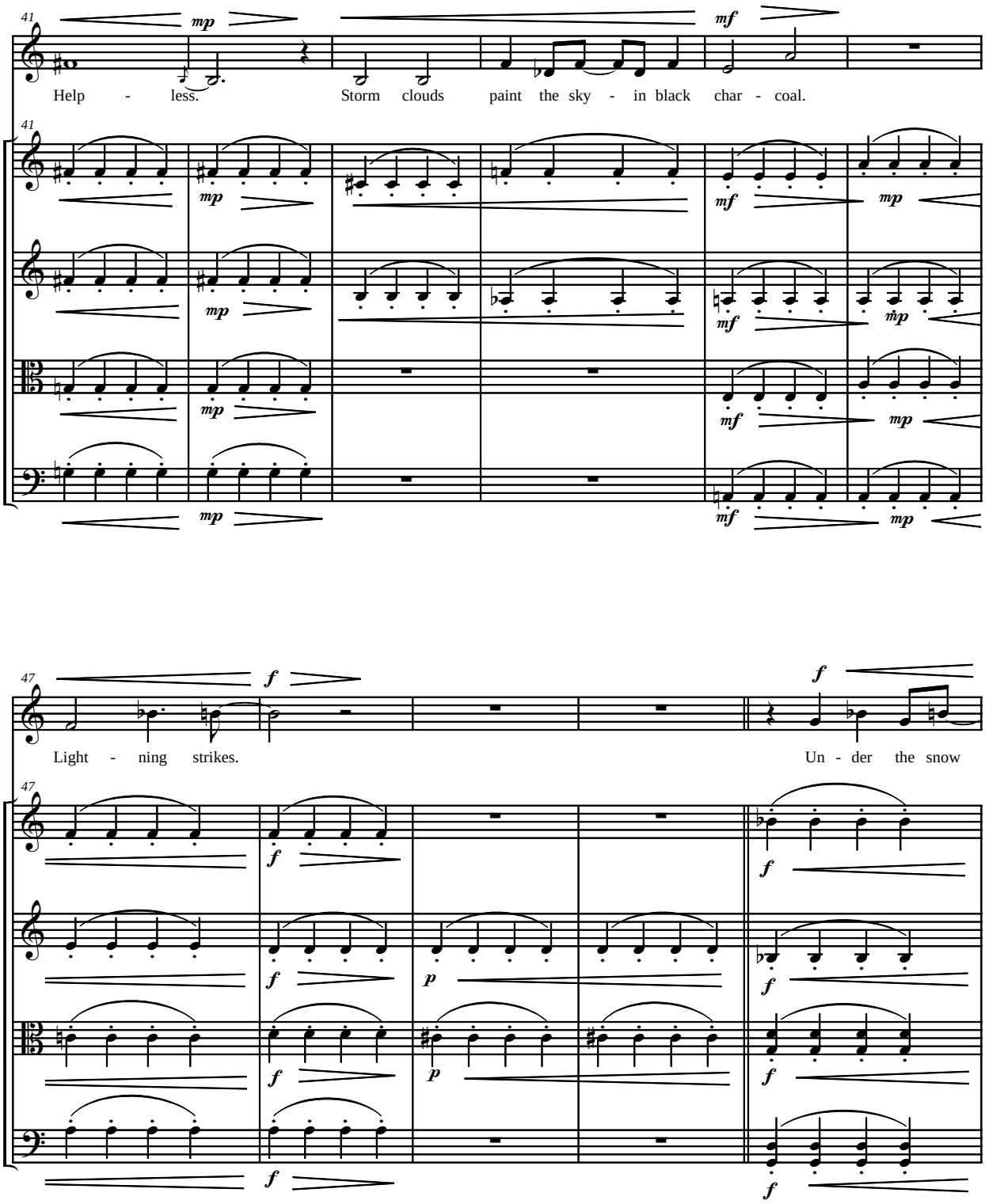


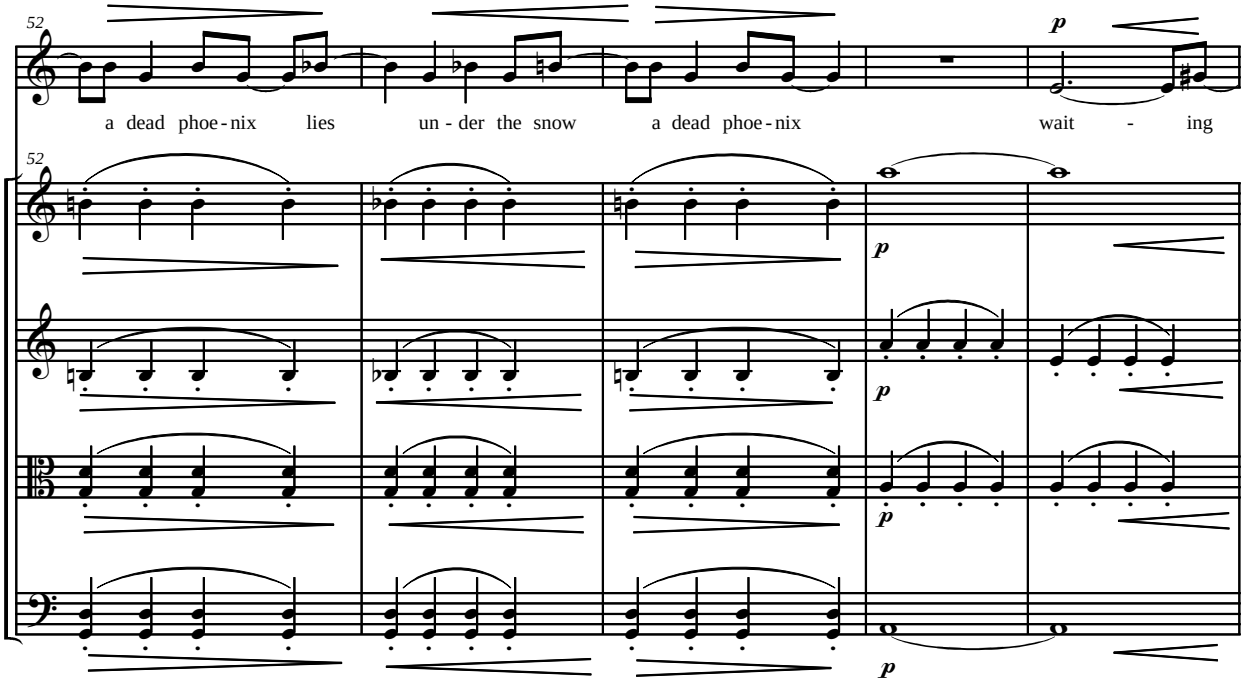

14
14
f
f
mp
mp
mp

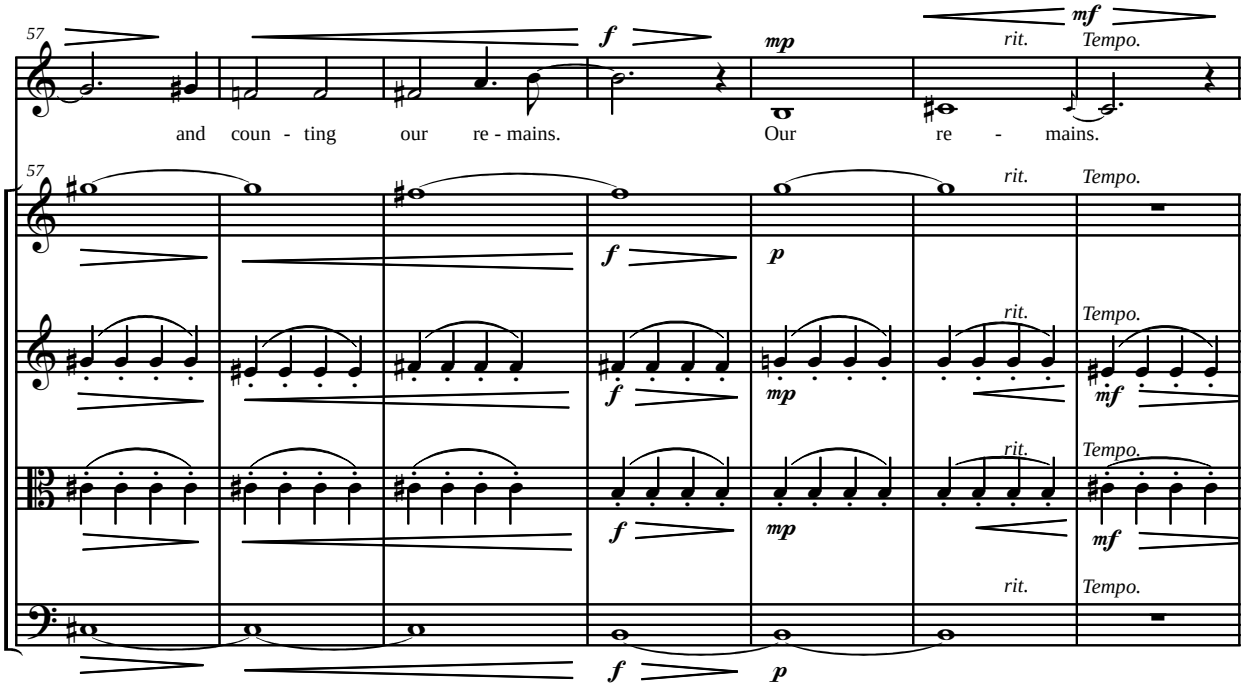

rit.
Tempo.
21
rit.
Tempo.
21
rit.
Tempo.
rit.
Tempo.
rit.
Tempo.
p
p
p

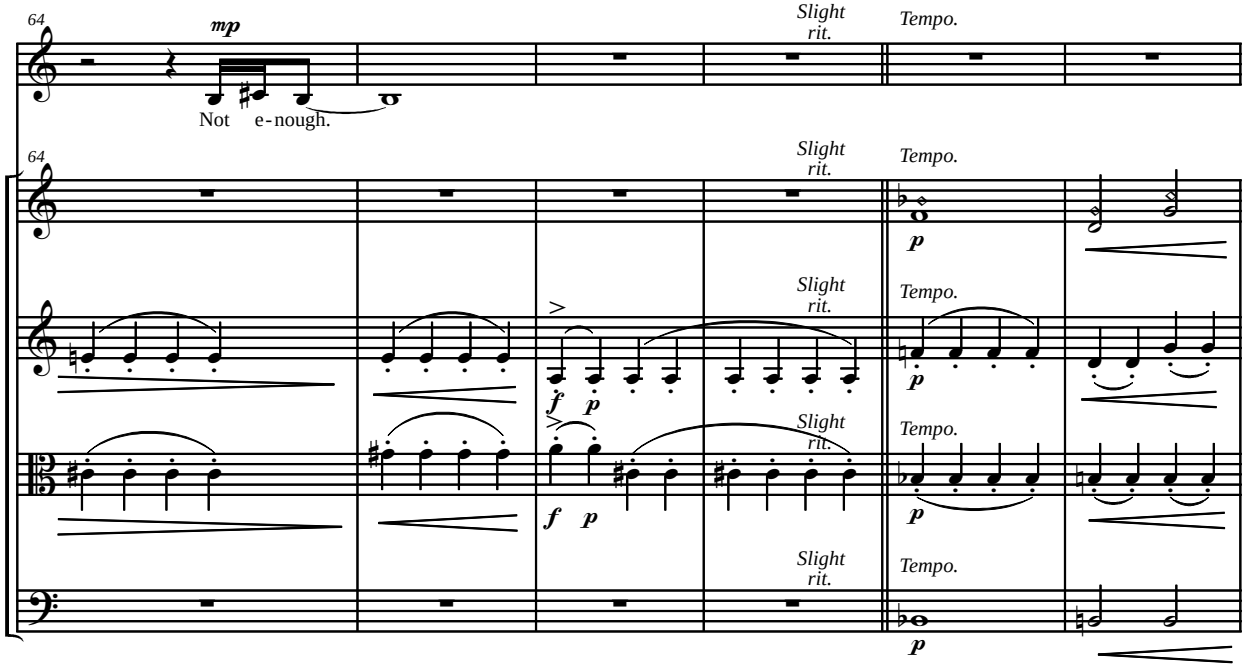

28
Slight rit.
Tempo.
p
mf
p

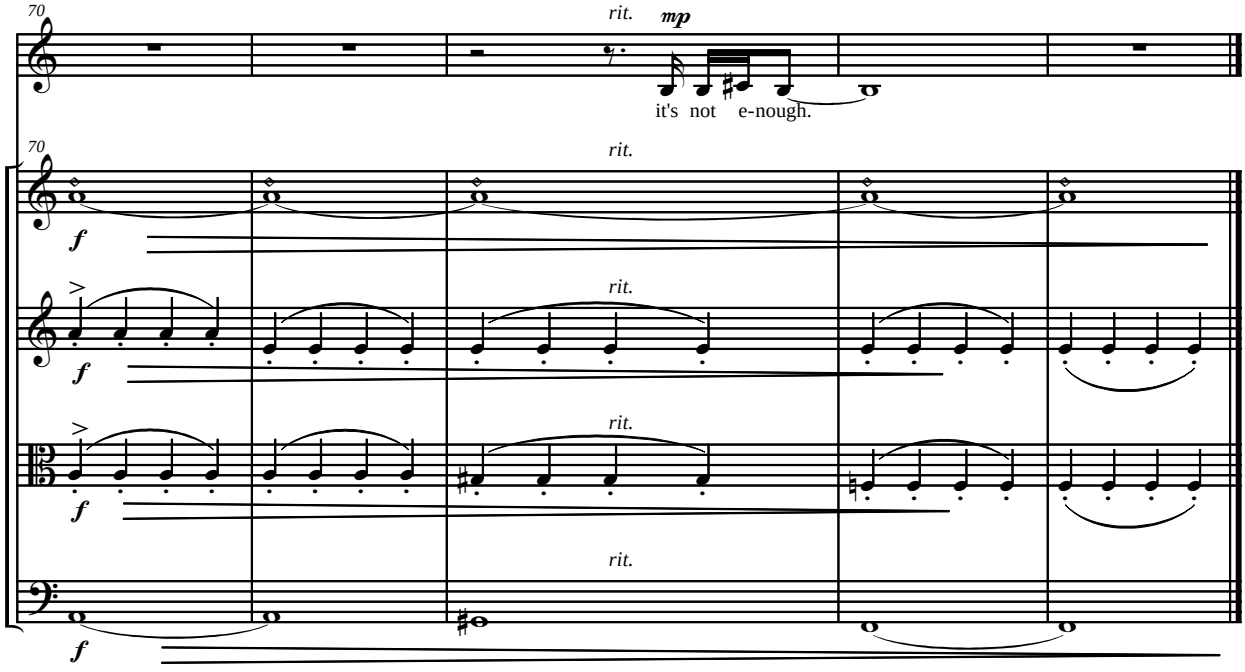

35
rit.
Tempo.
p
A seed falls from a tree
f
mp


41
mp
mf
Help - less.
Storm clouds paint the sky - in black char - coal.
47
f
Light - ning strikes.
Un - der the snow
p

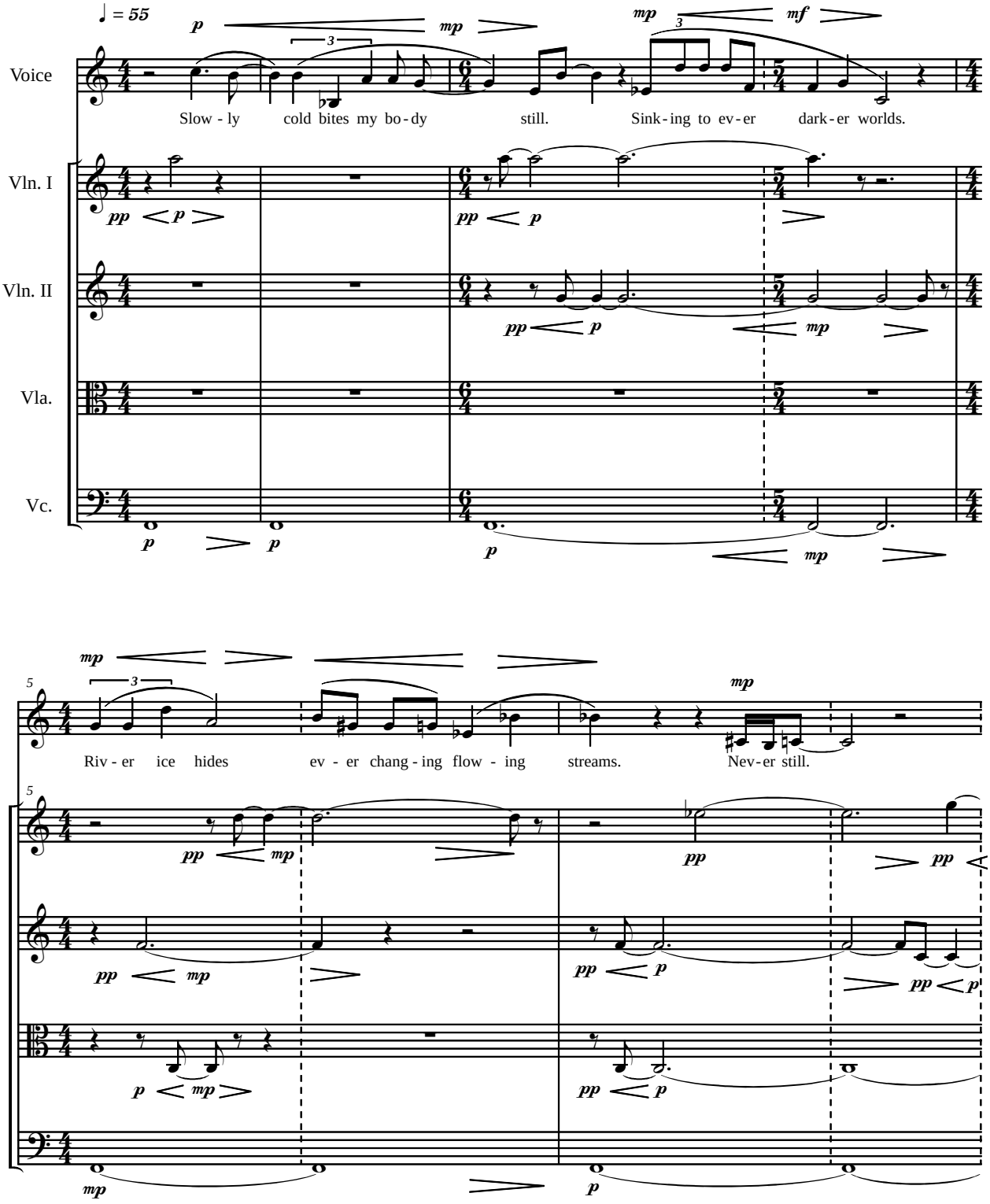

52
a dead phoe - nix lies un - der the snow a dead phoe - nix wait - ing
p
52
p
p
p
p

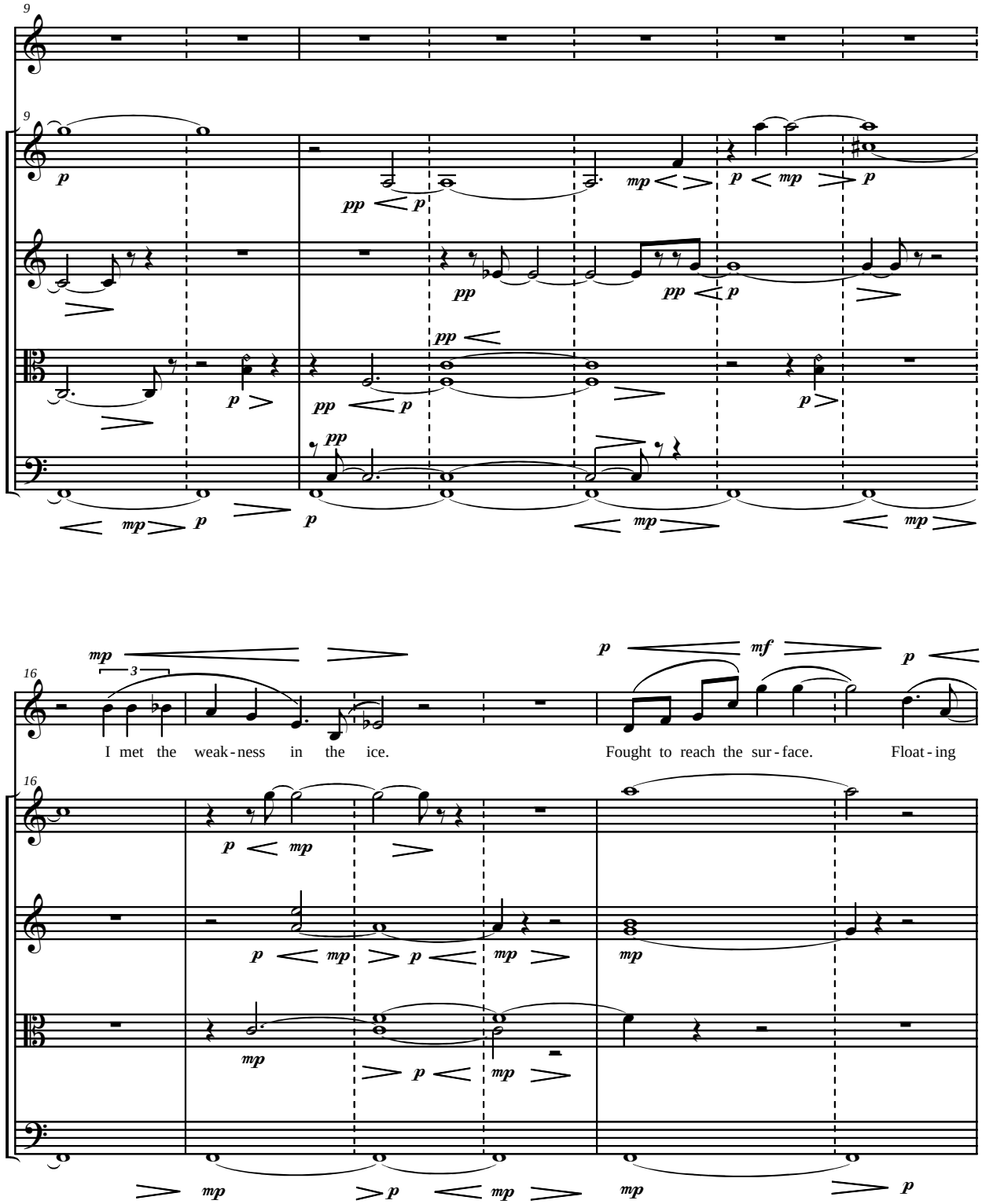

57
and coun - ting our re - mains. Our re - mains.
f
mp
mf
rit.
Tempo.
57
f
p
rit.
Tempo.
f
mp
mf
rit.
Tempo.
f
mp
mf
rit.
Tempo.
f
p

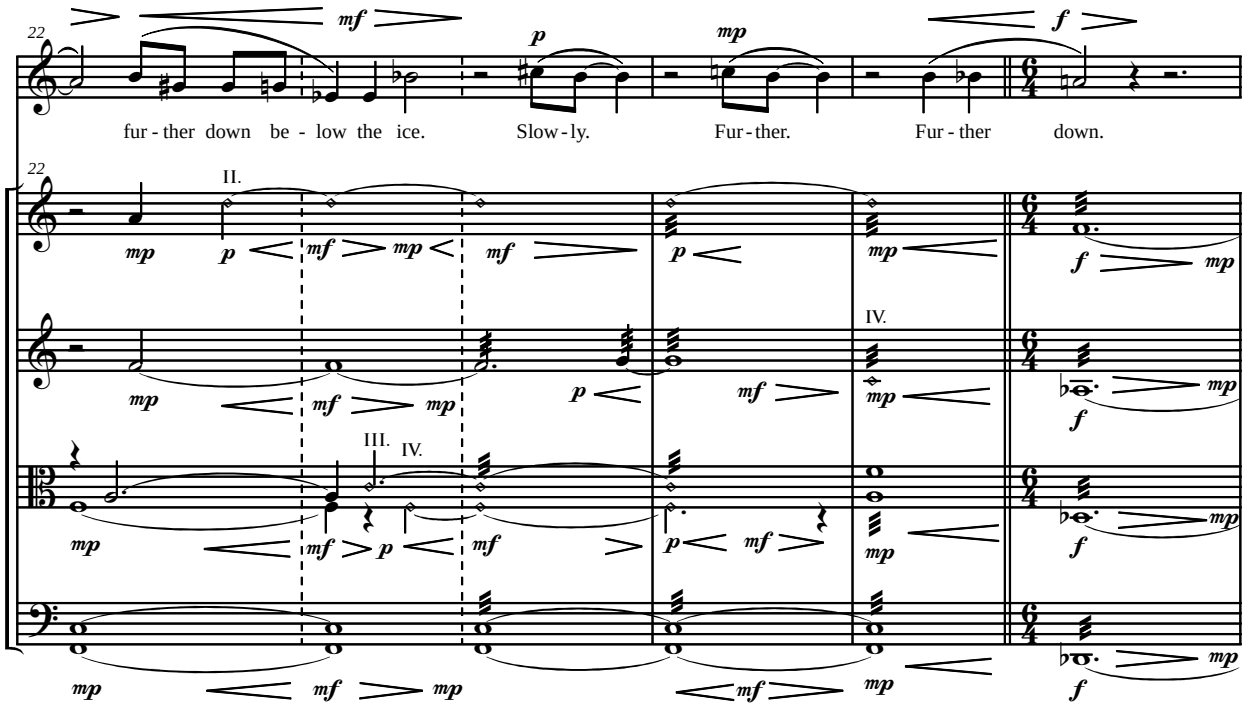

64
mp
Not e-nough.
Slight rit.
Tempo.
p
f
p

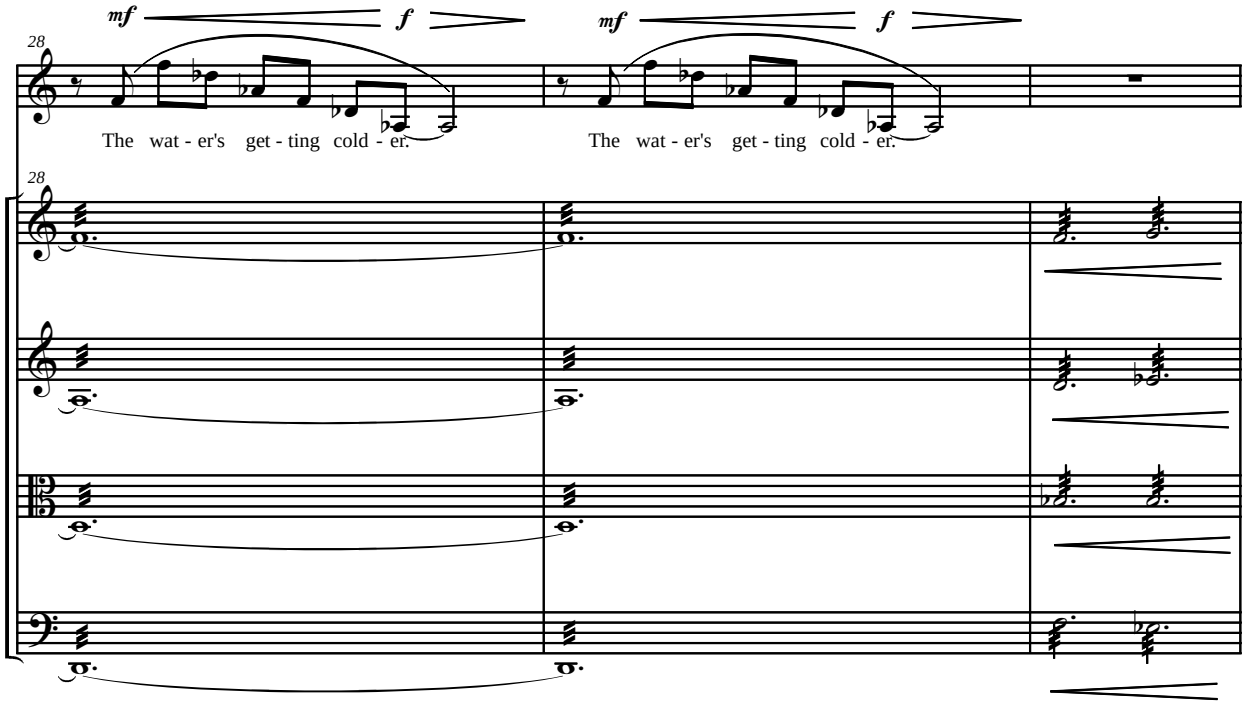

70
rit.
mp
it's not e-nough.
f

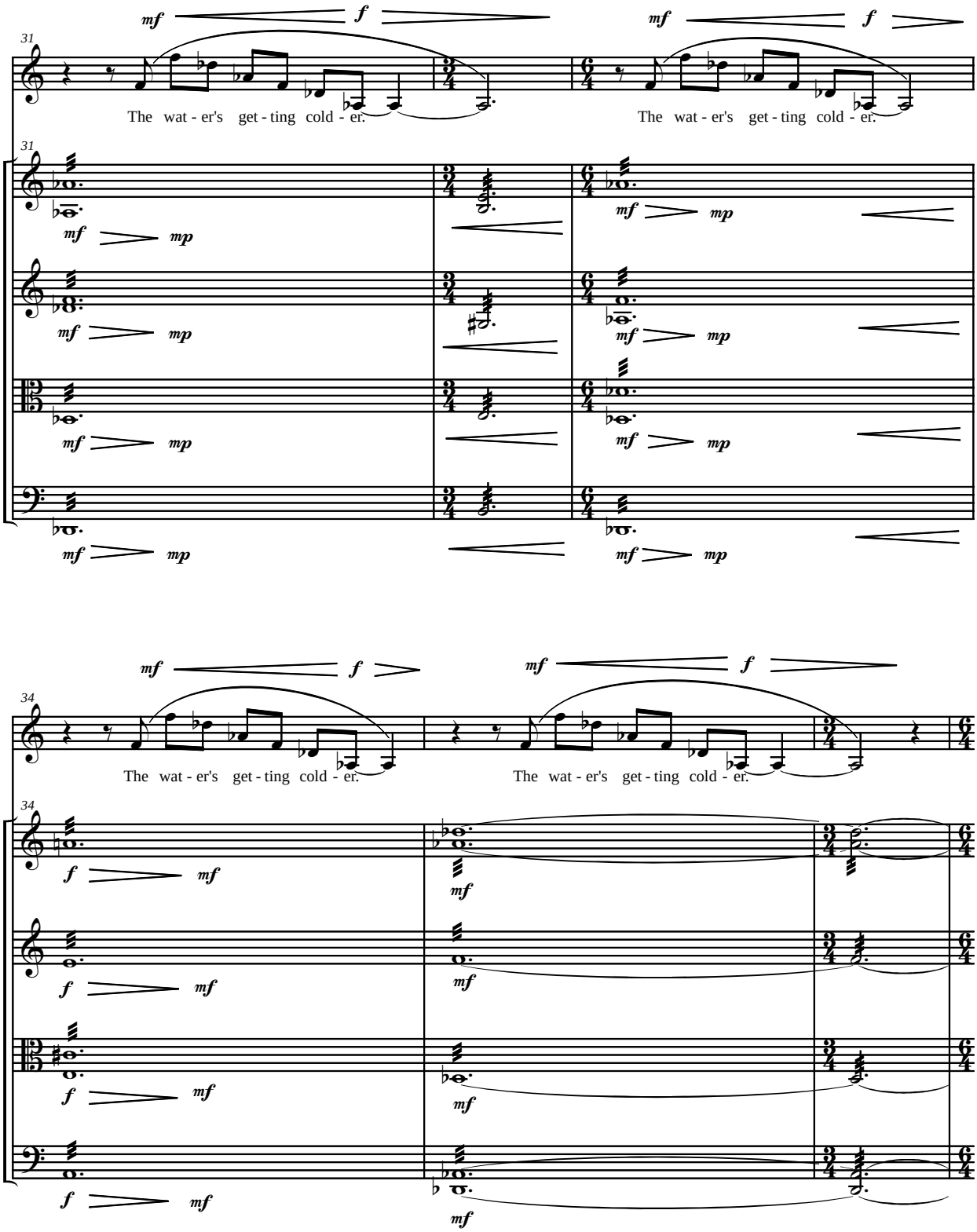
Sinking to Ever Darker Worlds

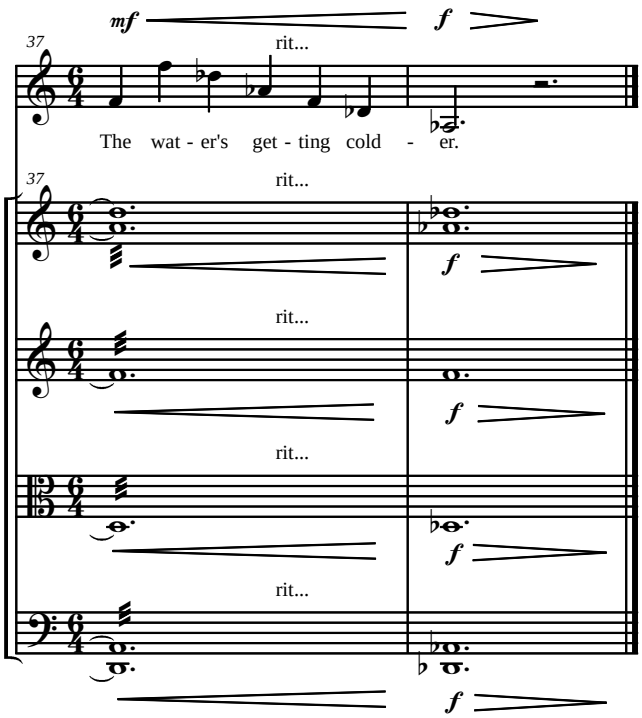



I met the weak-ness in the ice.
Fought to reach the sur-face.
Float-ing

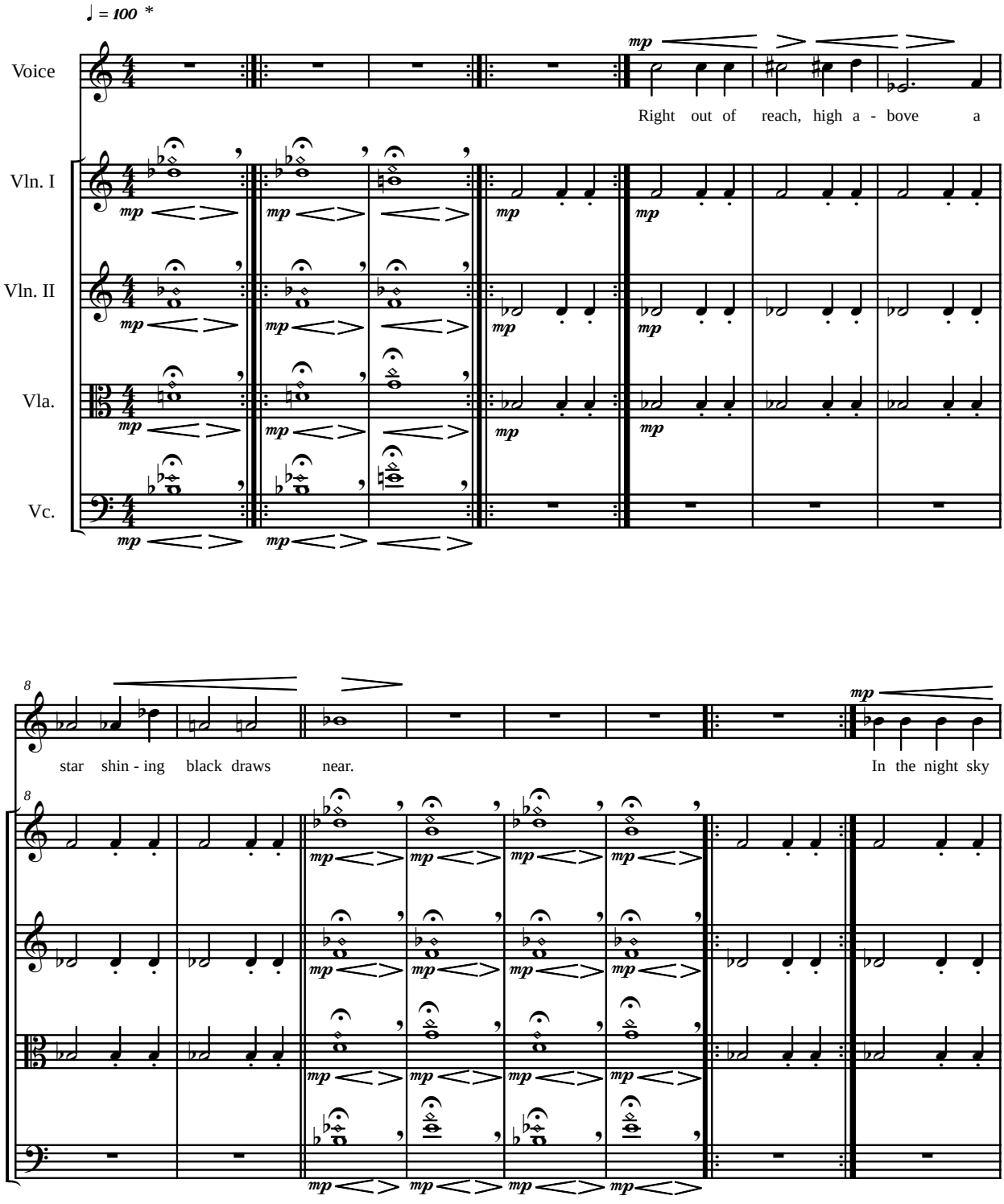

22
fur - ther down be - low the ice.
Slow - ly.
Fur - ther.
Fur - ther down.
II.
III.
IV.


28
The wat - er's get - ting cold - er.
The wat - er's get - ting cold - er.

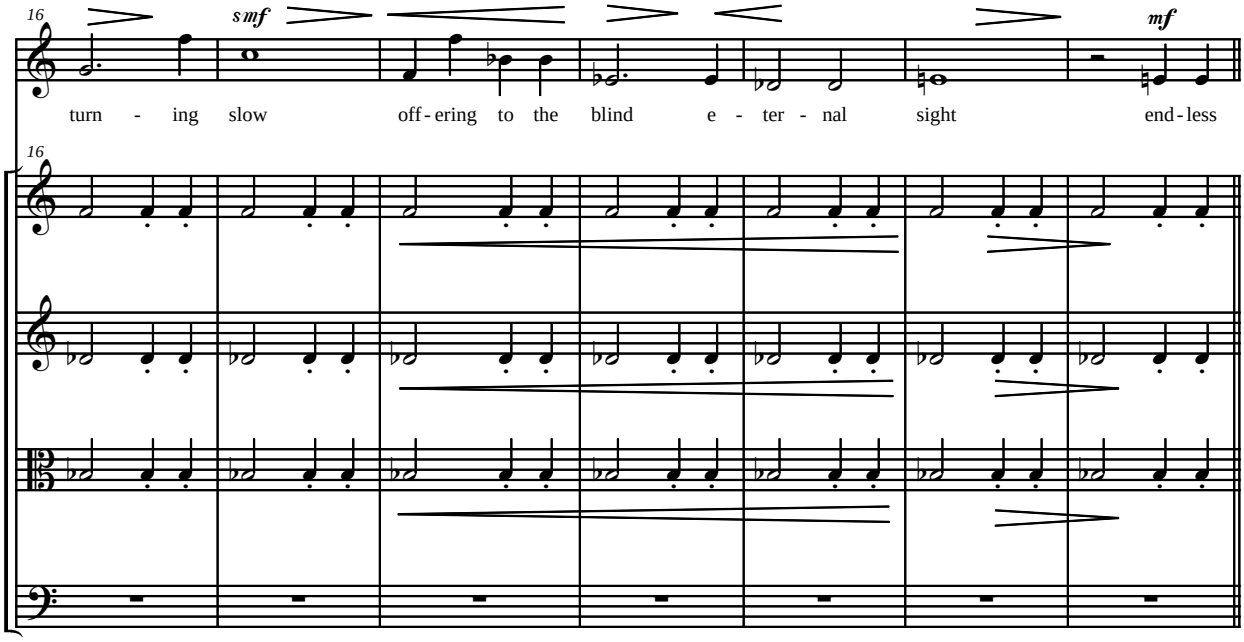

31
mf f
The wat - er's get - ting cold - er.
mf f
The wat - er's get - ting cold - er.
mf mp
34
mf f
The wat - er's get - ting cold - er.
mf f
The wat - er's get - ting cold - er.
f mf
mf

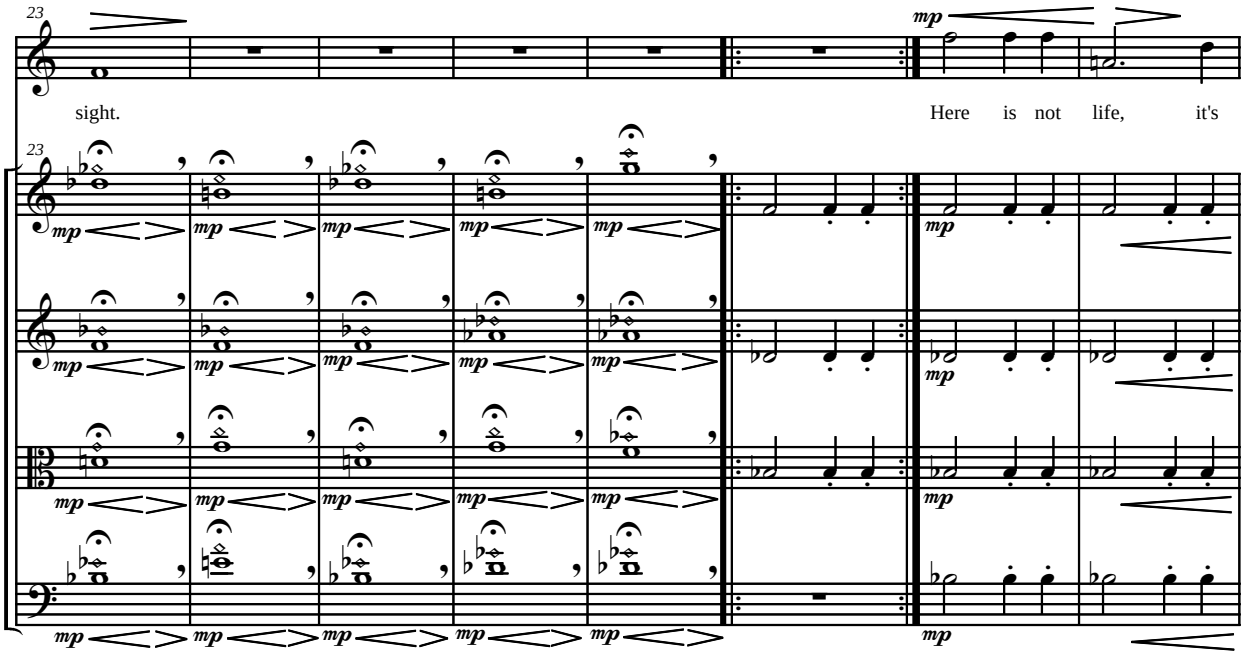

mf
f
37
rit...
The wat - er's get - ting cold - er.
37
rit...
f
rit...
f
rit...
f
rit...
f

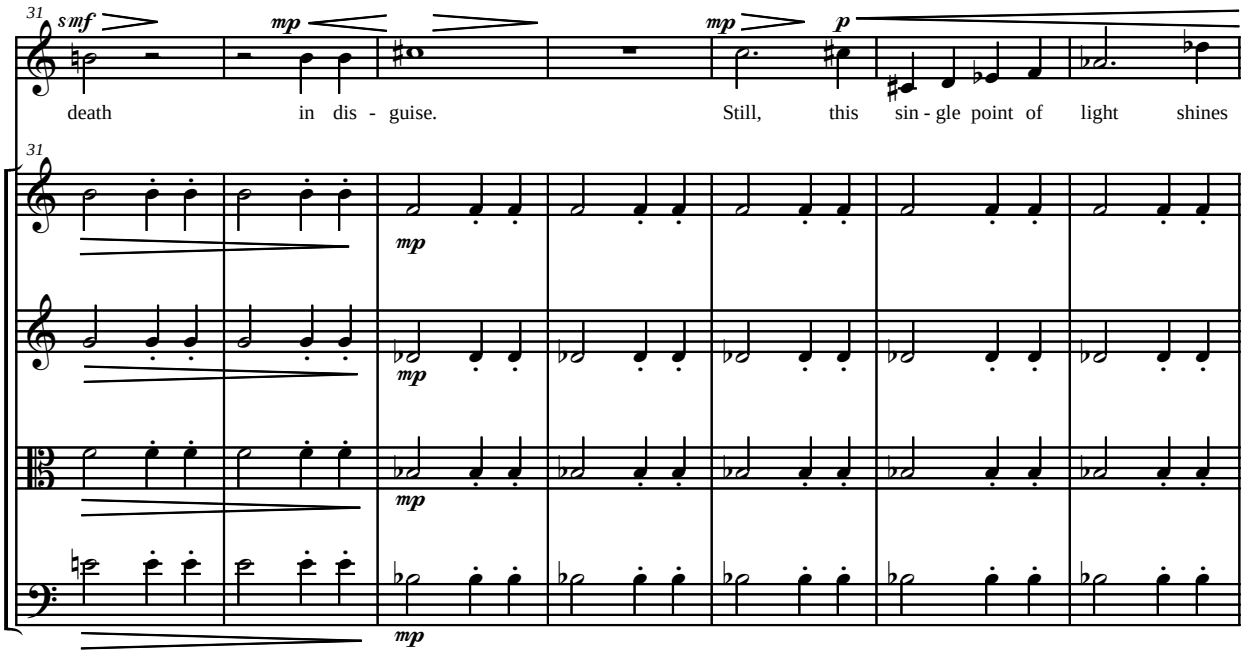
Event Horizon

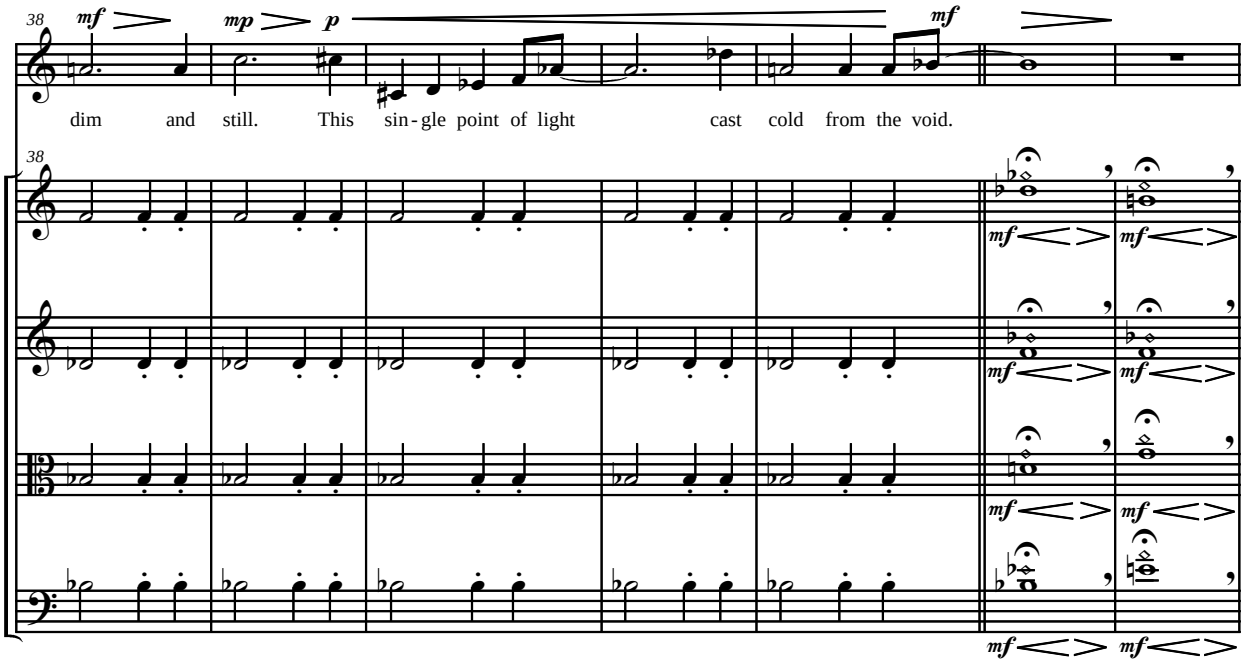


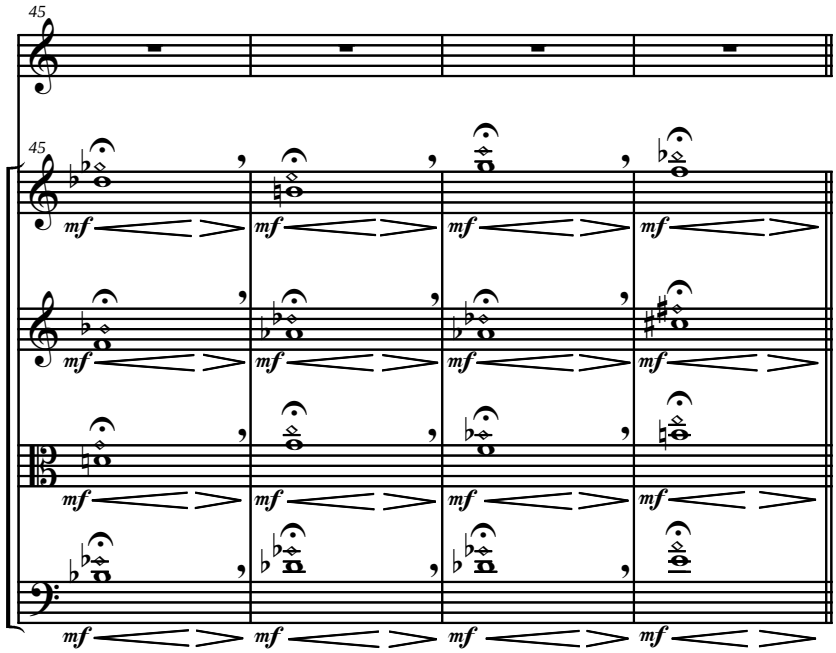
* Repeat only once (classical repeat).


16
smf
mf
turn - ing slow off - ering to the blind e - ter - nal sight end - less
16

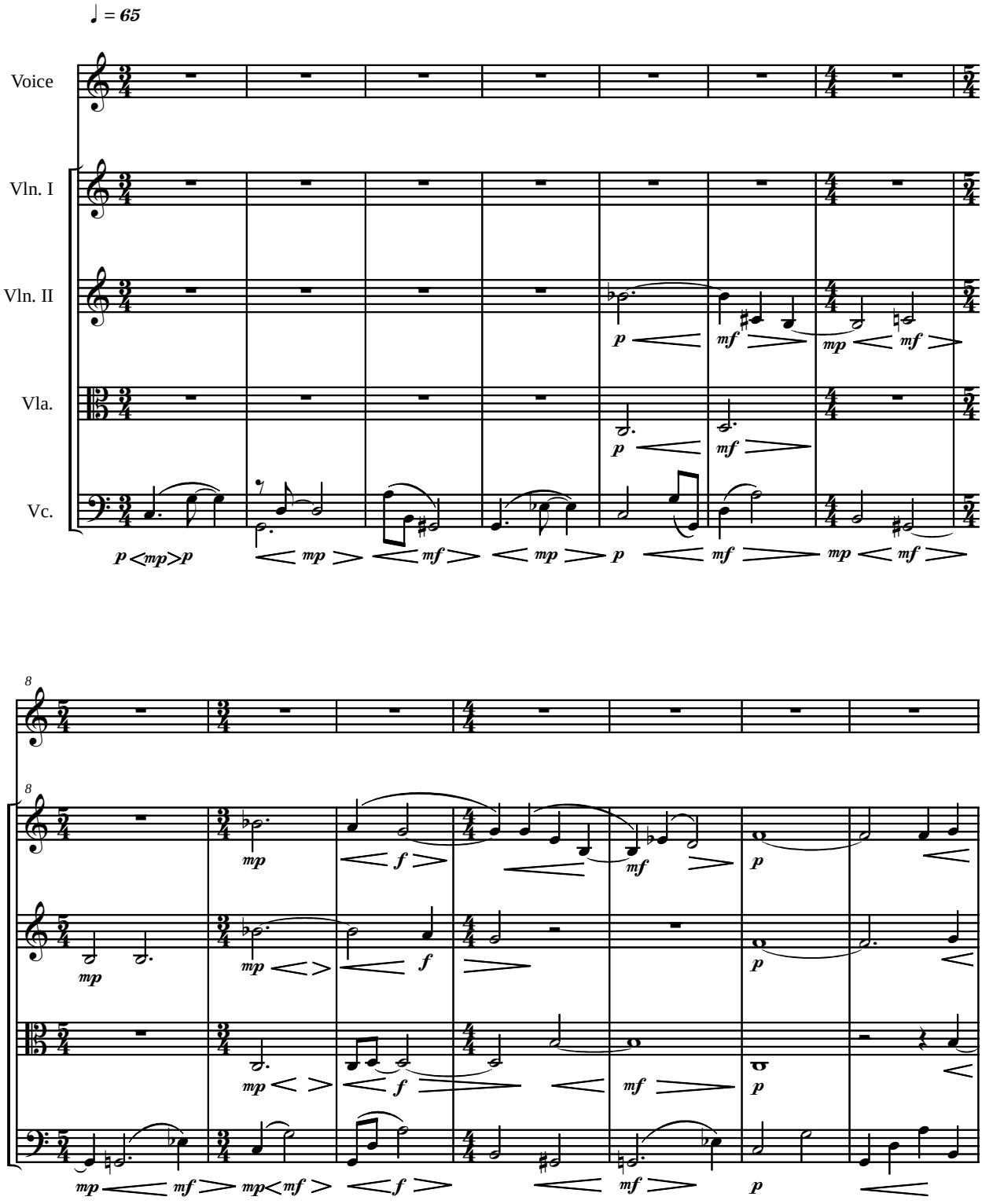

23
mp
sight.
Here is not life, it's
23
mp

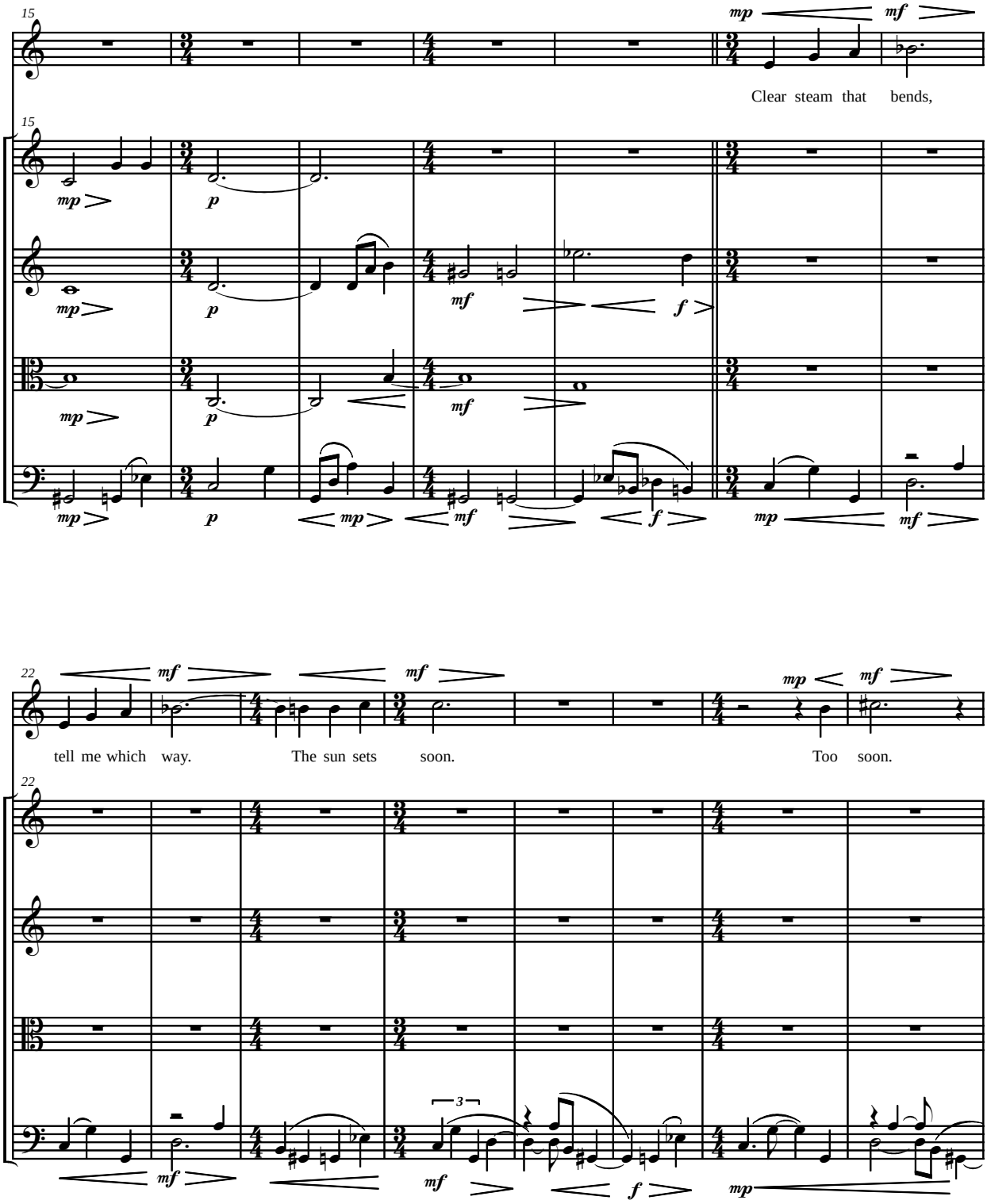

31
s mf
mp
mp
p
death in dis - guise. Still, this sin - gle point of light shines
31
mp
mp
mp

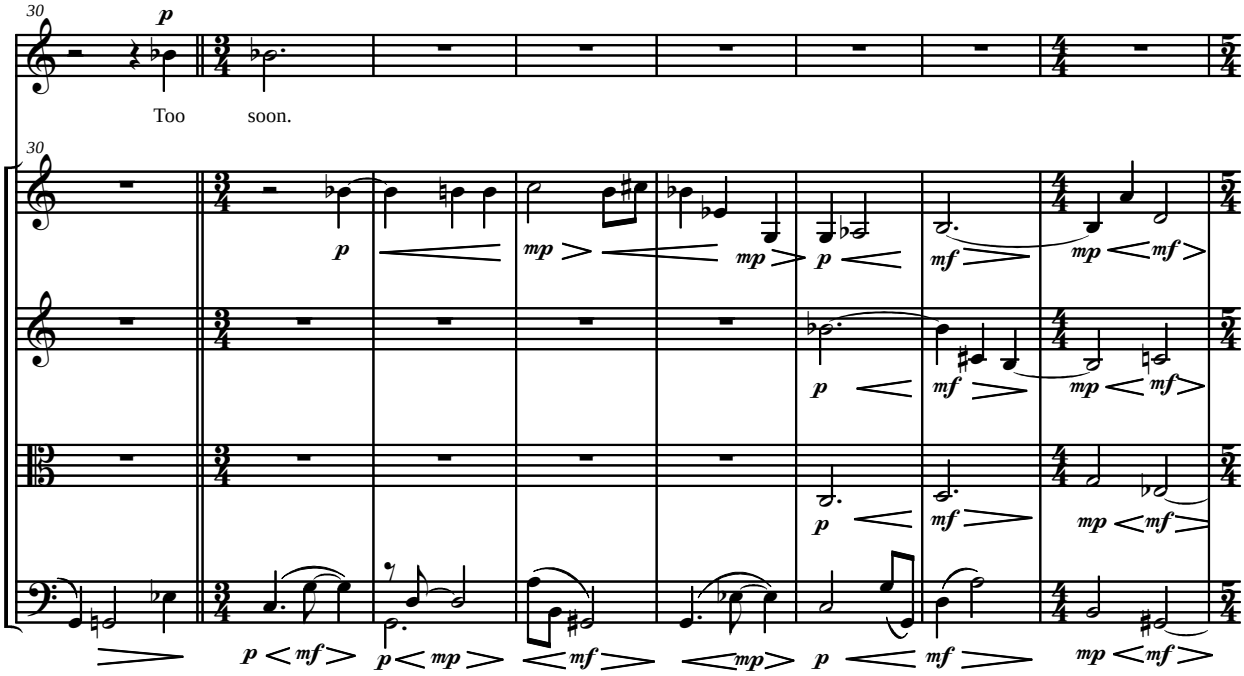

38
mf
mp
p
mf
dim and still. This sin - gle point of light cast cold from the void.
38
mf
mf
mf
mf
mf
mf

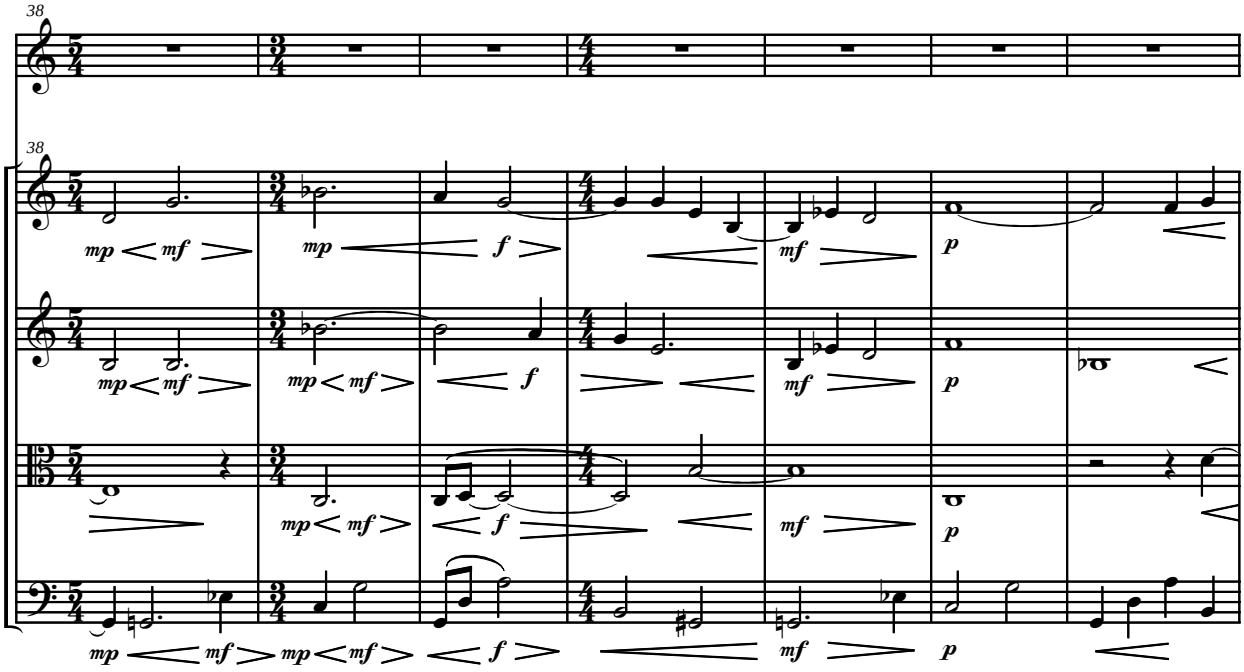

45
45
mf
mf
mf
mf
mf
mf
mf
mf
mf
mf
mf
mf
mf
mf
mf
mf

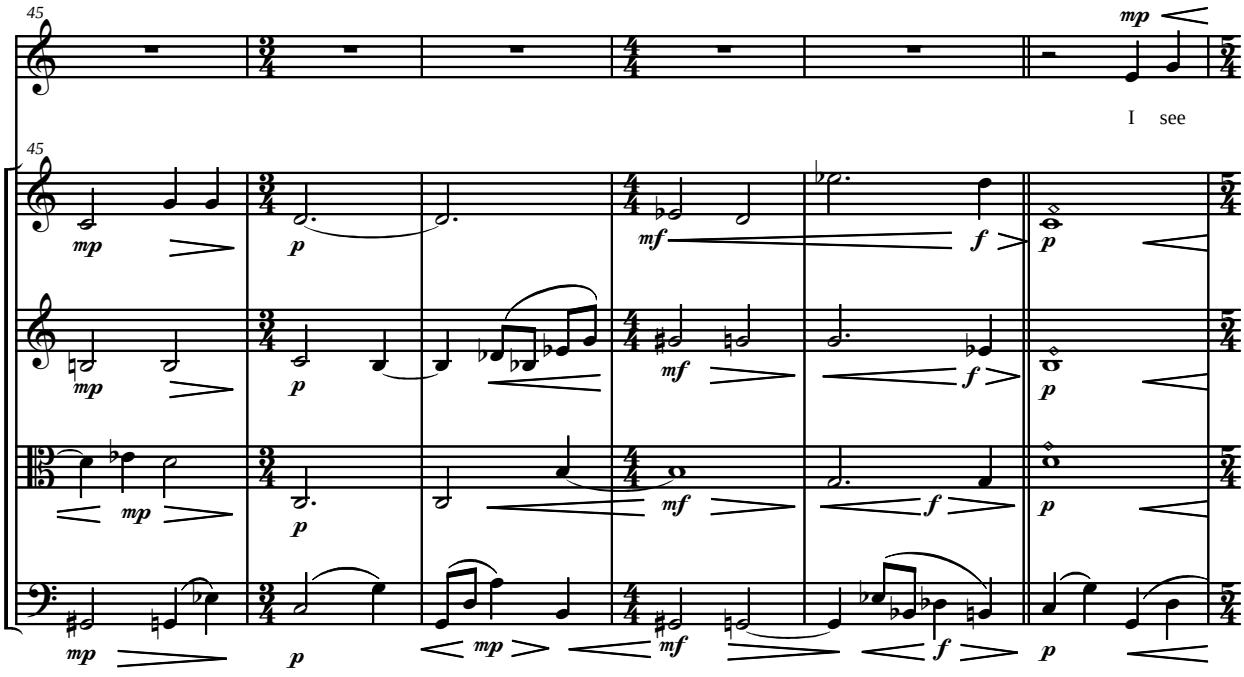
Clear Stream

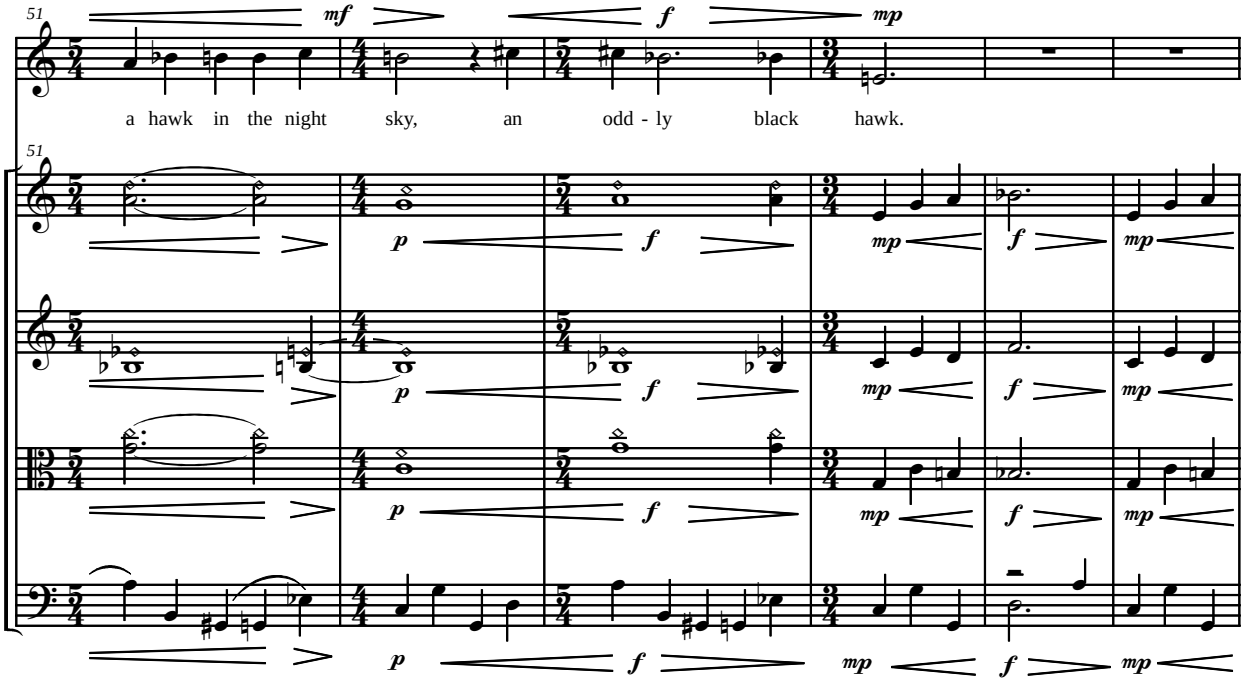


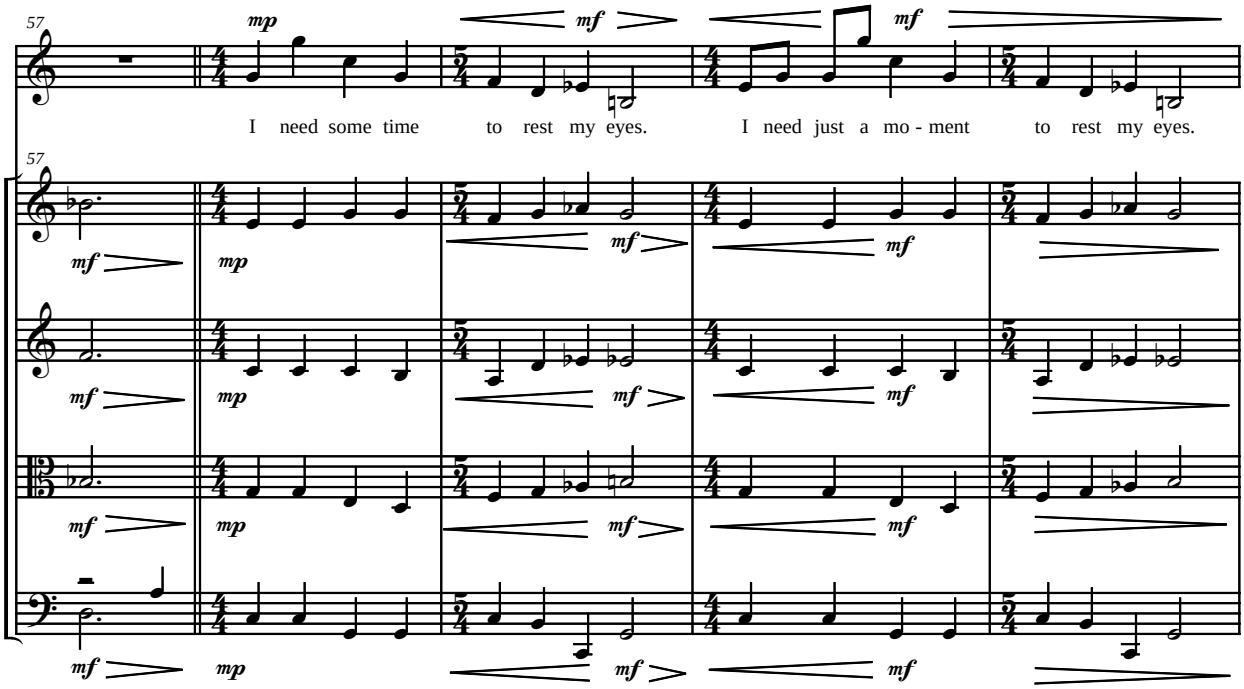

15
mp
mf
Clear steam that bends,
15
mp
p
mf
f
22
mf
mp
tell me which way.
The sun sets soon.
Too soon.
22
3

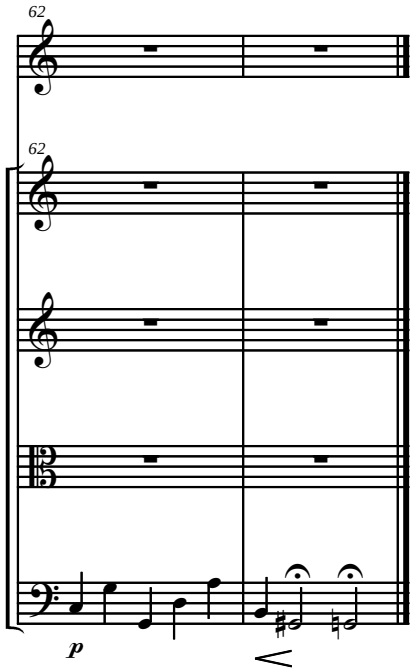

30
Too soon.


38

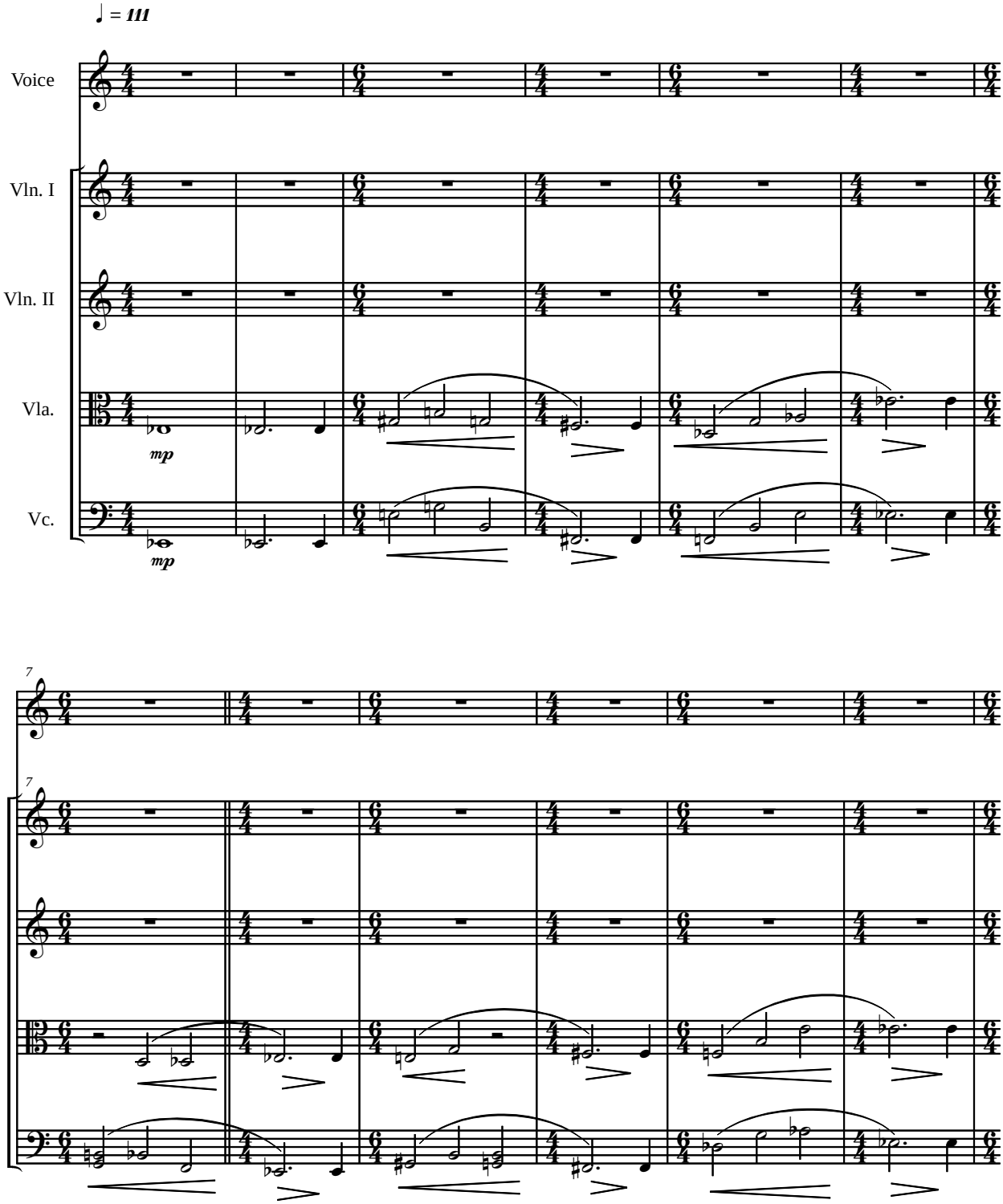

45
mp
I see
45
mp
p
mf
f
p
mp
p
mf
f
p
mp
p
mf
f
p
mp
p
mf
f
p

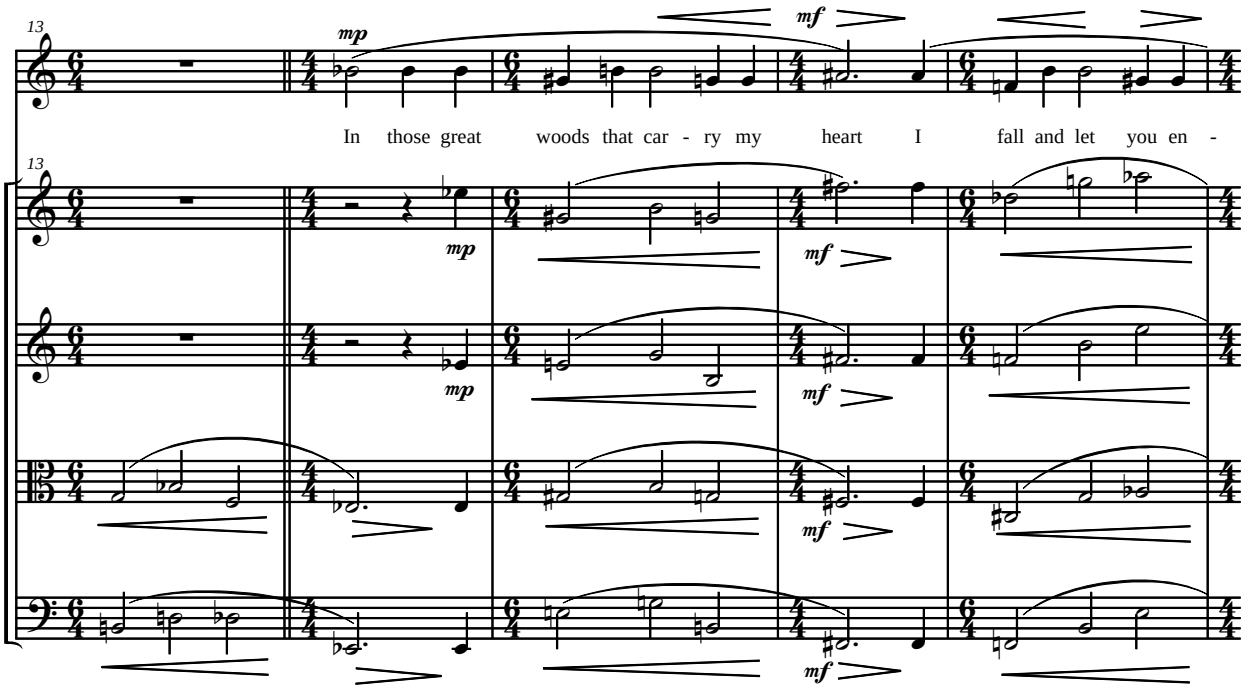

51
mf
f
mp
a hawk in the night sky, an odd - ly black hawk.
51
p
f
mp
f
mp
p
f
mp
f
mp
p
f
mp
f
mp
p
f
mp
f
mp

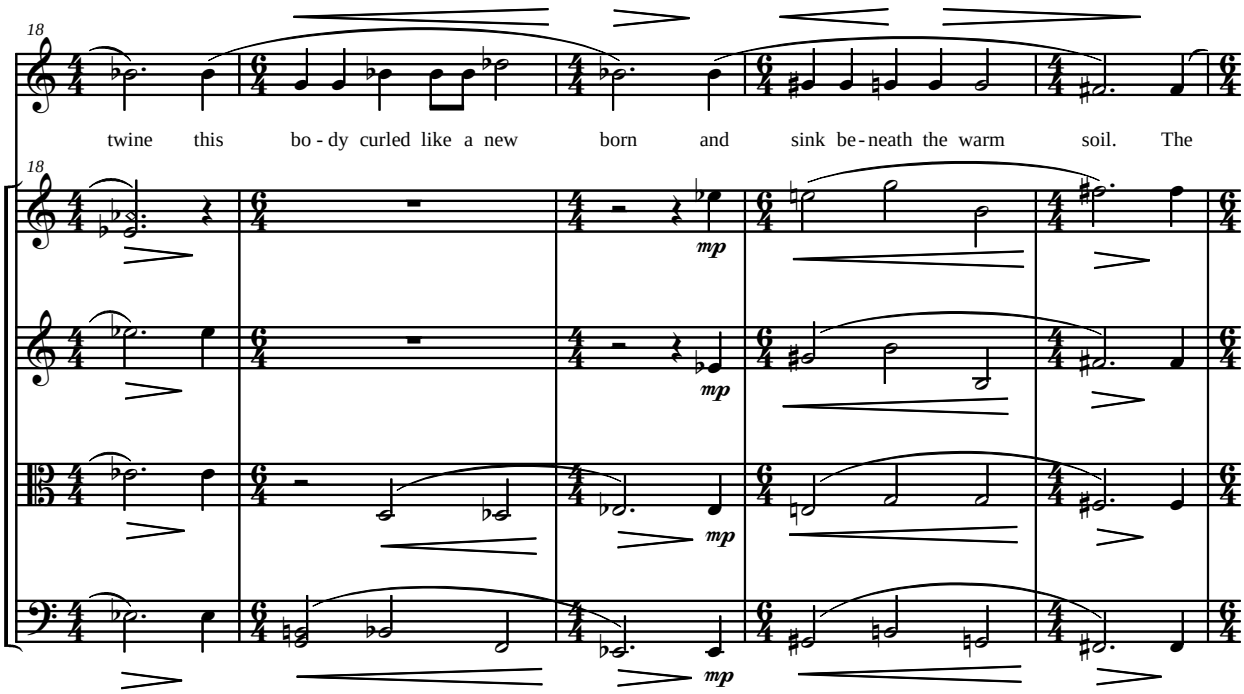

57
mp
mf
mf
I need some time to rest my eyes. I need just a mo - ment to rest my eyes.
57
mf
mp
mf
mf
mf
mp
mf
mf
mf
mp
mf
mf
mf
mp
mf
mf

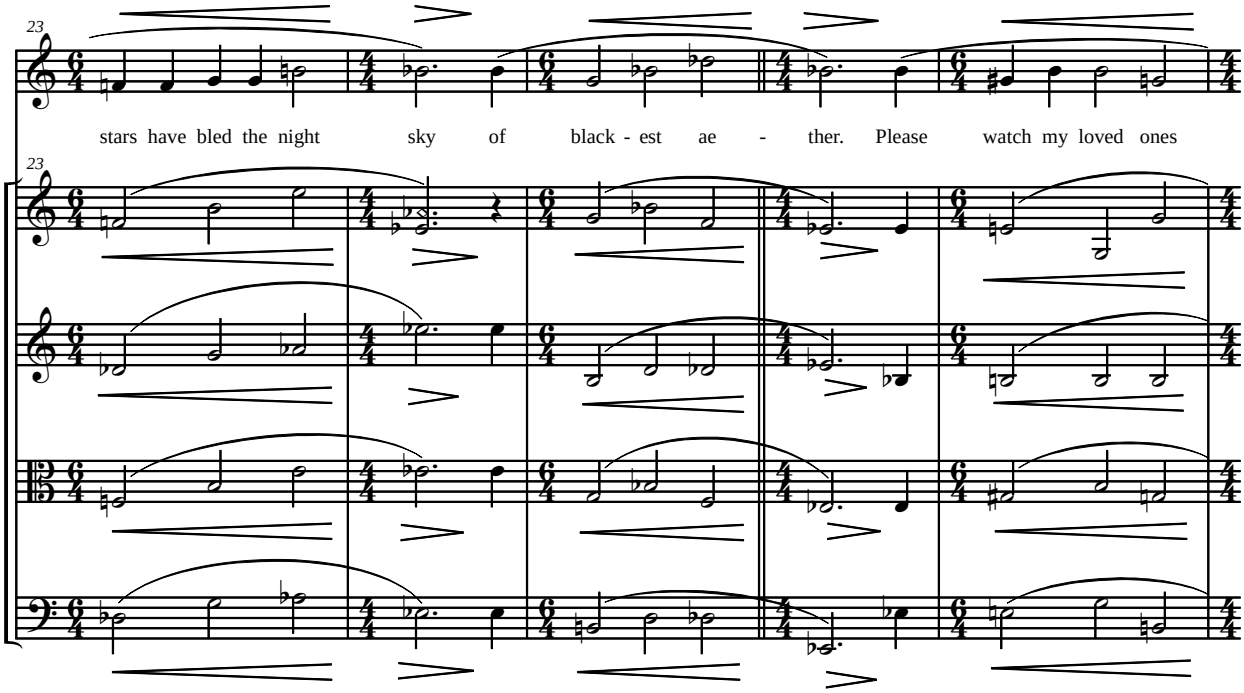

62
62
p

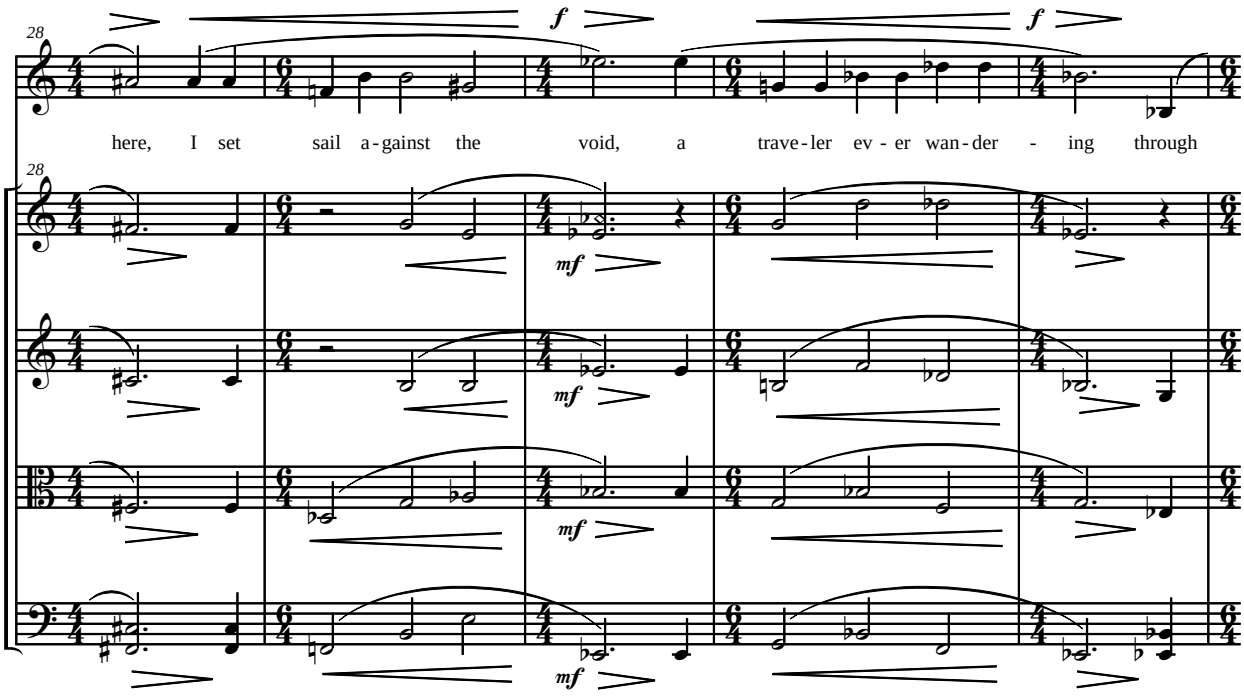
Traveler's Song

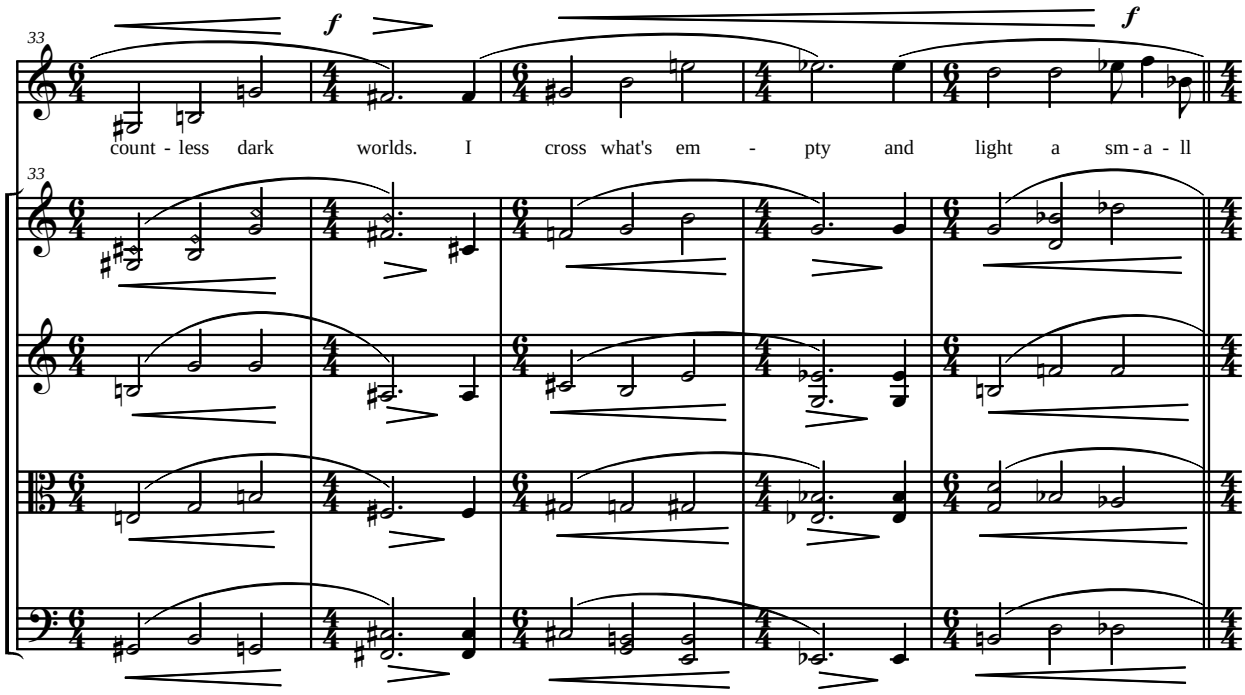


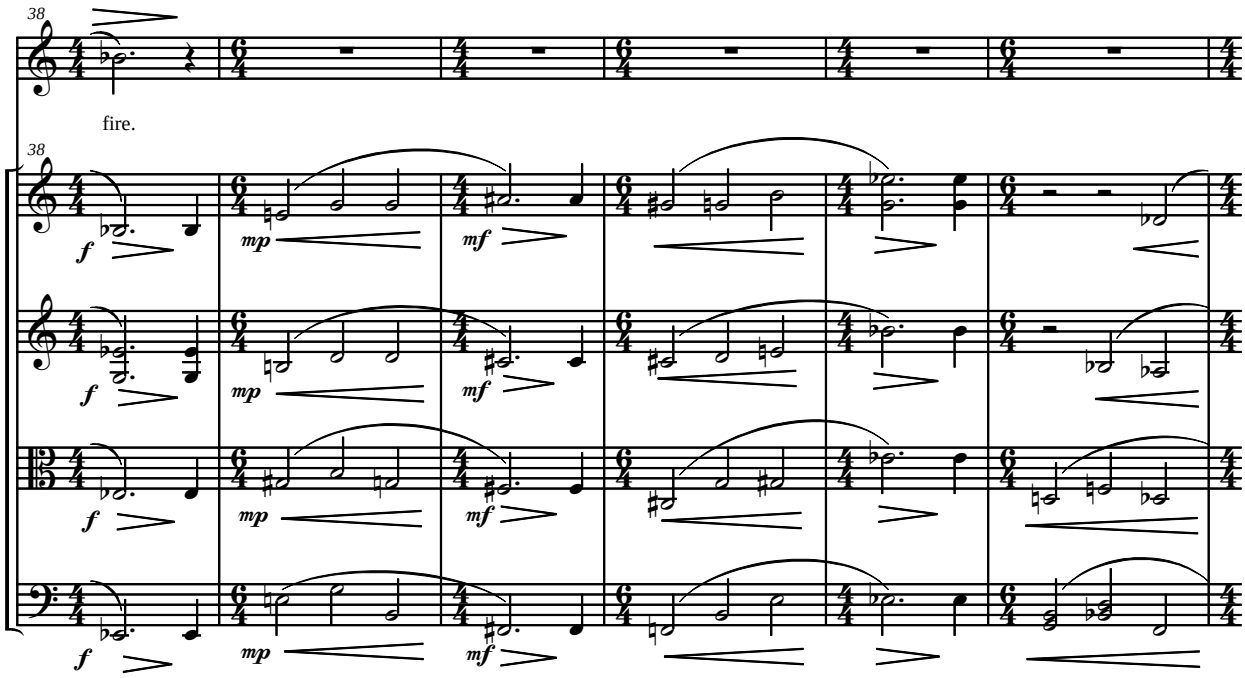

13
mp
mf
In those great woods that car - ry my heart I fall and let you en -

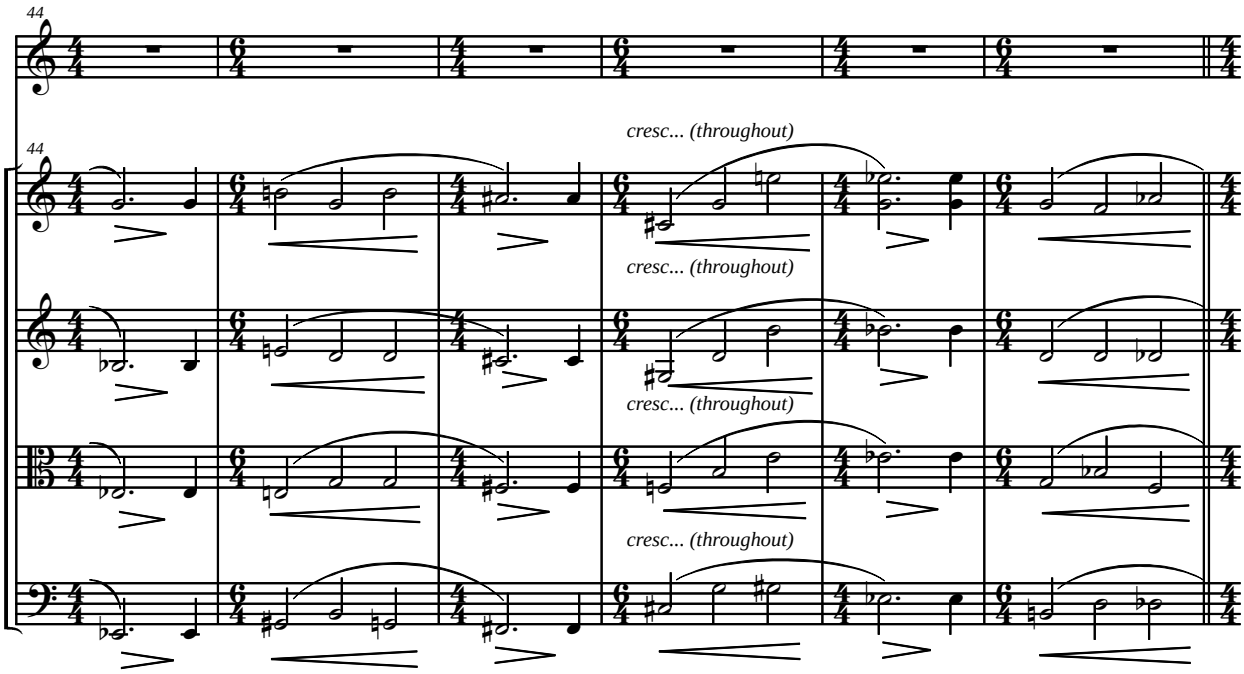

18
twine this bo - dy curled like a new born and sink be - neath the warm soil. The
mp

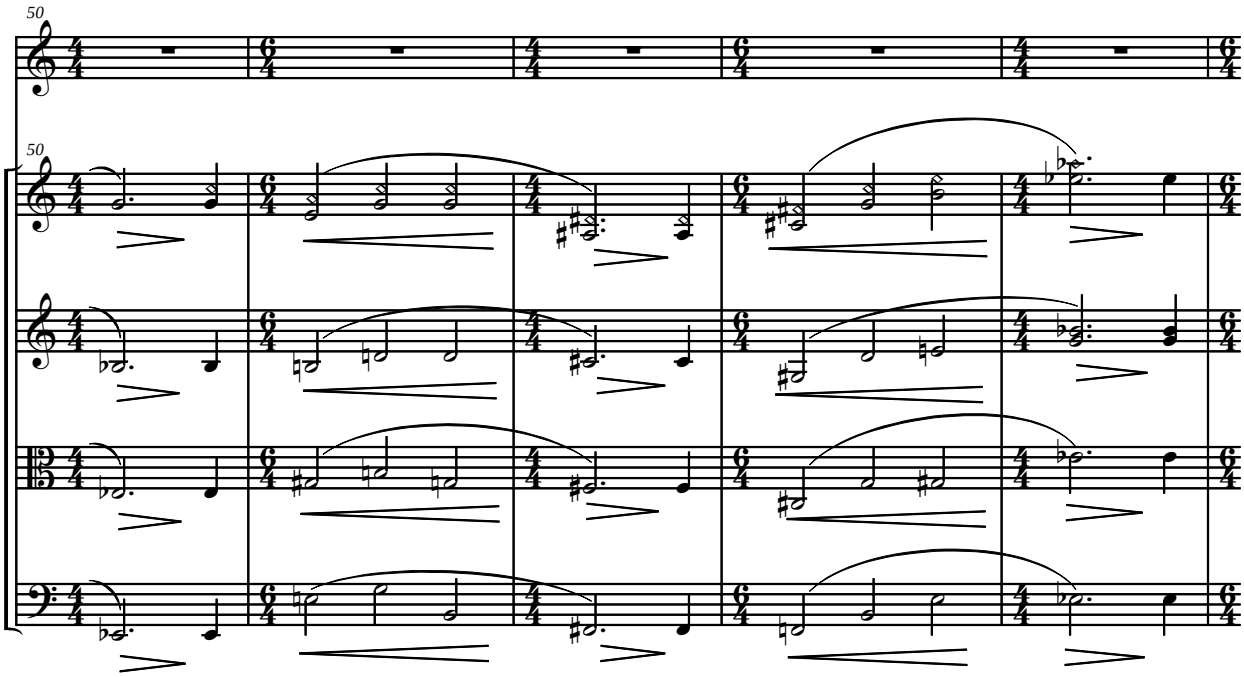

23
stars have bled the night sky of black - est ae - ther. Please watch my loved ones
23


28
f
f
here, I set sail a-gainst the void, a trave-ler ev - er wan-der - ing through
28
mf
mf
mf
mf


33
f
f
count - less dark worlds. I cross what's em - pty and light a sm - a - ll


38
fire.
f
mp
mf


44
44
cresc... (throughout)
cresc... (throughout)
cresc... (throughout)
cresc... (throughout)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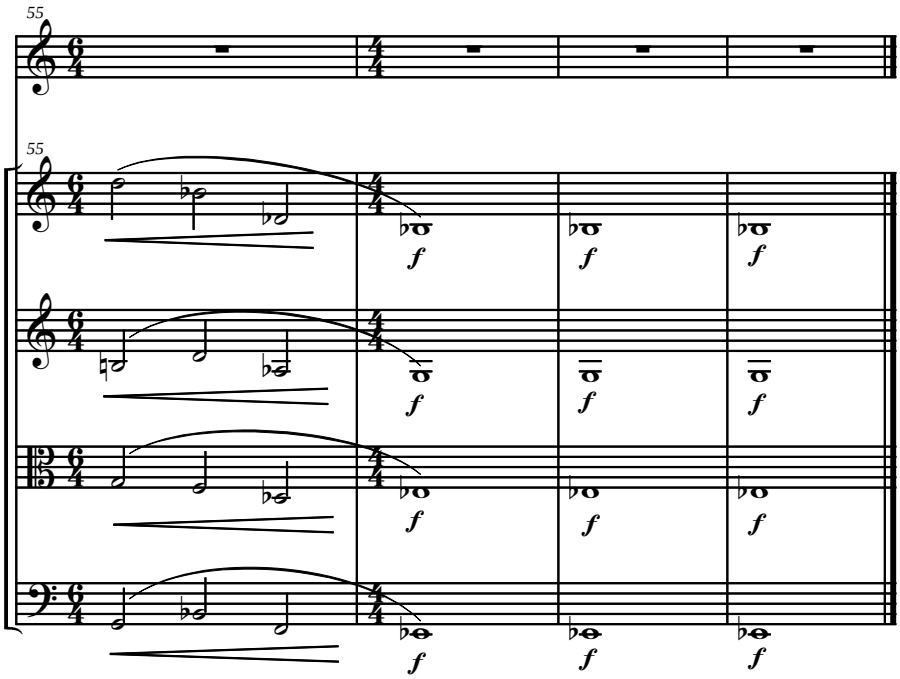
55
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f
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