Dear Matafele Peinam

for mezzo-soprano and piano

Clifton Callender

Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, text

2021

Dear Matafele Peinam

1. You are
2. I want to tell you
3. Don't cry
4. You'll see

for William and Ethan
we will all fight

Written for Phyllis Pancella

Duration: ca. 18 minutes

PROGRAM NOTES

[N]ow that I feel personally and intimately anchored in the future in a different way, I feel a different kind of fear. — Jedediah Britton-Purdy

[M]y work has [...] always been about processing the emotional weight of climate change through art.[1] — Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner

Several years ago, I fell into despair after hearing a report about millennials questioning the wisdom, even morality, of having children given the climate crisis and projections of the type of world their children would inherit. Setting aside the merits of such arguments[2], the discussion struck at the heart of my own anxieties raising two children who are aware that their entire lives will be affected unpredictably by climate change. Succumbing to these fears, I was plagued with insomnia, joyless, and felt physically ill at my own daily contributions to greenhouse gas emissions.

Looking beyond scientific articles and the news, I turned to artistic responses to the crisis and discovered the work of the Marshall Islander poet, spoken-word artist, and climate activist Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner. "Dear Matafele Peinam" was written for and first performed at the Opening Ceremony of the 2014 UN Secretary-General's Climate Summit. Written to her then seven-month-old daughter, the poem addresses climate change in general and the specific and urgent threat to the Marshall Islands and similar island countries through the lens of the most intimate of relationships—a parent seeking to protect their child.

we are artists painting, dancing, writing

In setting the poem, I've done my best to capture its meaning and provide a musical context for the text without losing the overall directness, succinct articulation of the threat and subsequent focus on the collective fight, and especially the touching depiction of the poet's daughter. The poem is presented in four sections, realized as four separate movements. "You are" captures the simple delights of a young child (bananas, hugs, walks by the lagoon) and concludes with a slightly exhausted mother and a still bouncing baby. "I want to tell you" hints at the threats facing the Marshall Islands, with peaceful lagoons devouring shorelines, sea walls, and roots of breadfruit trees, rendering the islands uninhabitable, their inhabitants left to wander without a home. The third and by far largest section of the poem ("Don't cry") channels anger at "blindfolded bureaucracies" and companies "with broken morals" into personal and collective action. "You'll see" is (mostly) a lullaby, reassuring a drowsy child and recalling the melody from the first movement most associated with her.

i apologize to you

The most challenging portion of the text to set was a passage in the third movement in which Jetñil-Kijiner changes voice, directly apologizing to other Pacific Islanders who have already become climate-change refugees. At this point, the music is suddenly torn off and the text is framed by a strident chord. This same chord recurs in three separate passages: the first recurrence accompanies lines about those who pretend that the Marshall Islands and similar island nations, as well as the many disasters attributed to climate change, don't exist. The chord next accompanies text about people marching in the streets "chanting for change NOW." Finally, this chord associated with apology slightly colors the closing repeated chords recalling the bouncing baby from the opening movement.

Since the poem was completed in 2014, there have been many other climate-change disasters and refugees—devastating cyclones striking southern Africa and Puerto Rico, wildfires in Australia and California, massive floods in south Asia, severe droughts in east Africa and central America, European heatwaves. Indeed, Marshall Islanders are having to contemplate raising their islands or the construction of artificial islands in case it becomes impossible to remain on their homeland in its natural state. Will we have to apologize to this daughter? To our own children?

we won't let you down, you'll see

We can't promise our children that everything will be okay, but we can assure them that we are going to fight, which begins with those most vulnerable to climate change. The best chance we have to protect our own homeland is to do everything we can to preserve theirs.

[1] Jetñil-Kijiner, K. (2019, February 19). Bulldozed reefs and blasted sands: rituals for artificial islands [Blog post]. Retrieved from http://kathyjetnilkijiner.com/blog/.
[2] Gibson, C. (2020, February 14). How climate experts think about raising children who will inherit a planet in crisis. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://washingtonpost.com.

TEXT

“Dear Matafele Peinam” by Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner
from Iep Jāltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter

dear matafele peinam,

you are a seven month old sunrise of gummy smiles
you are bald as an egg and bald as the buddha
you are thighs that are thunder and shrieks that are lightning
so excited for bananas, hugs and
our morning walks past the lagoon

dear matafele peinam,

i want to tell you about that lagoon
that lucid, sleepy lagoon lounging against the sunrise

men say that one day
that lagoon will devour you

they say it will gnaw at the shoreline
chew at the roots of your breadfruit trees
gulp down rows of your seawalls
and crunch your island’s shattered bones

they say you, your daughter
and your granddaughter, too
will wander rootless
with only a passport to call home

dear matafele peinam,

don’t cry

mommy promises you

no one
will come and devour you

no greedy whale of a company sharking through political seas
no backwater bullying of businesses with broken morals
no blindfolded bureaucracies gonna push
this mother ocean over
the edge

no one’s drowning, baby
no one’s moving

no one's losing
their homeland
no one's gonna become
a climate change refugee

or should i say
no one else

to the carteret islanders of papua new guinea
and to the taro islanders of the solomon islands
i take this moment
to apologize to you
we are drawing the line here

because baby we are going to fight
your mommy daddy
bubu jimma your country and president too
we will all fight

and even though there are those
hidden behind platinum titles
who like to pretend
that we don't exist
that the marshall islands
tuvalu
kiribati
maldives
and typhoon haiyan in the philippines
and floods of pakistan, algeria, colombia
and all the hurricanes, earthquakes, and tidalwaves
didn't exist

still
there are those
who see us

hands reaching out
fists raising up
banners unfurling
megaphones booming
and we are
canoes blocking coal ships
we are
the radiance of solar villages
we are
the rich clean soil of the farmer's past
we are
petitions blooming from teenage fingertips
we are

families biking, recycling, reusing,
engineers dreaming, designing, building,
artists painting, dancing, writing
and we are spreading the word

and there are thousands out on the street
marching with signs
hand in hand
chanting for change NOW

and they're marching for you, baby
they're marching for us

because we deserve to do more than just
survive
we deserve
to thrive

dear matafele peinam,

you are eyes heavy
with drowsy weight
so just close those eyes, baby
and sleep in peace

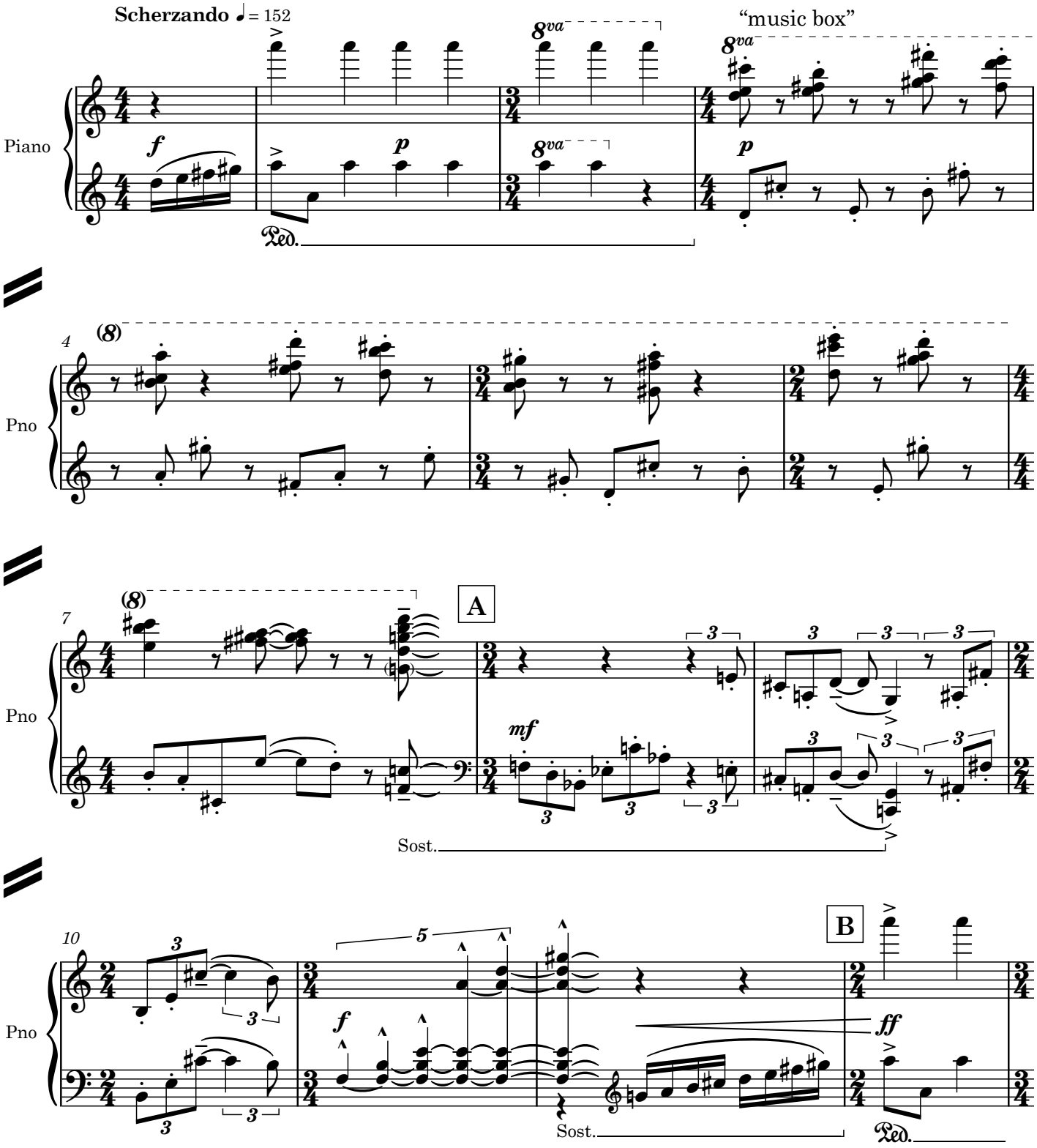
because we won't let you down
you'll see

Dear Matafele Peinam

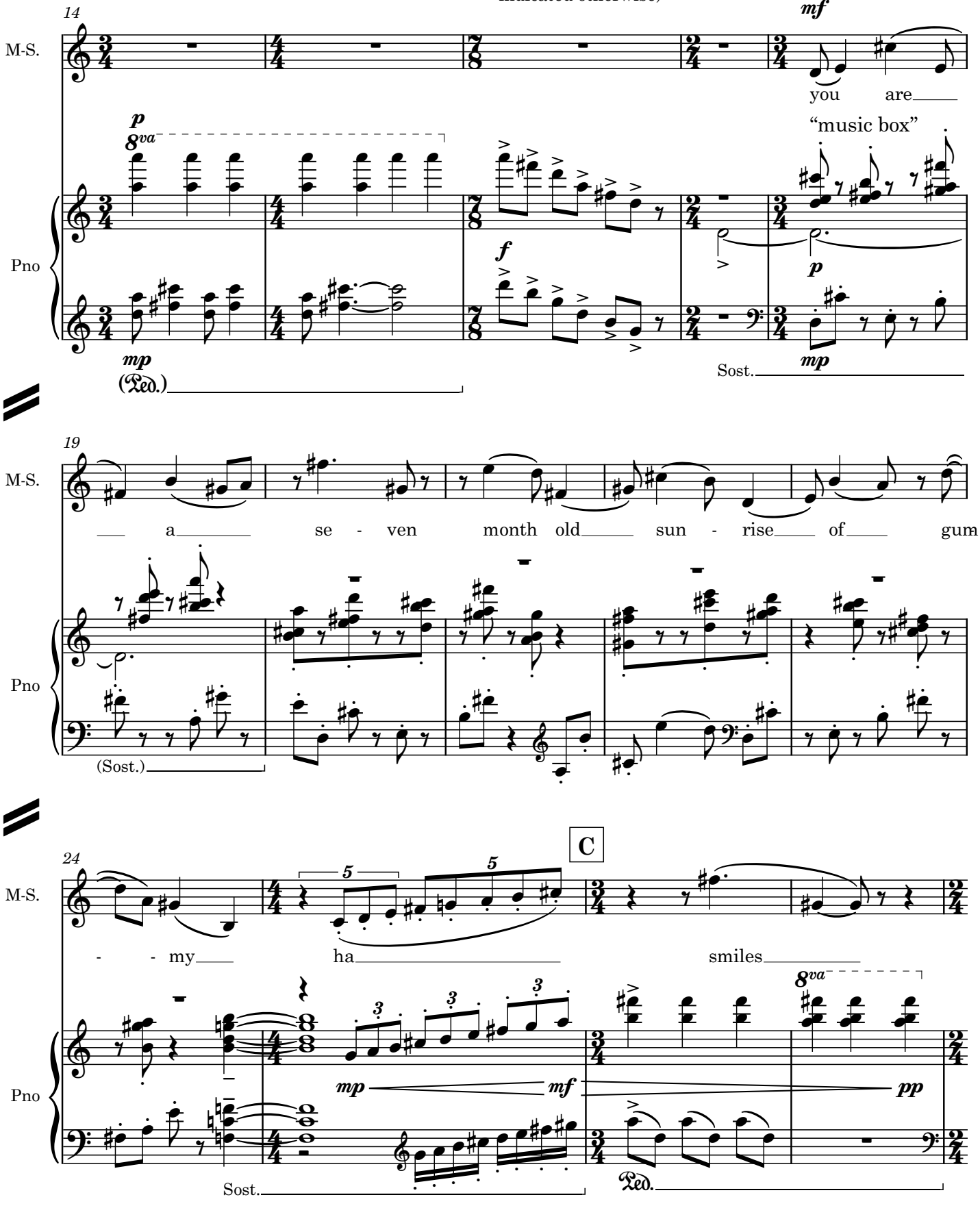
Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner

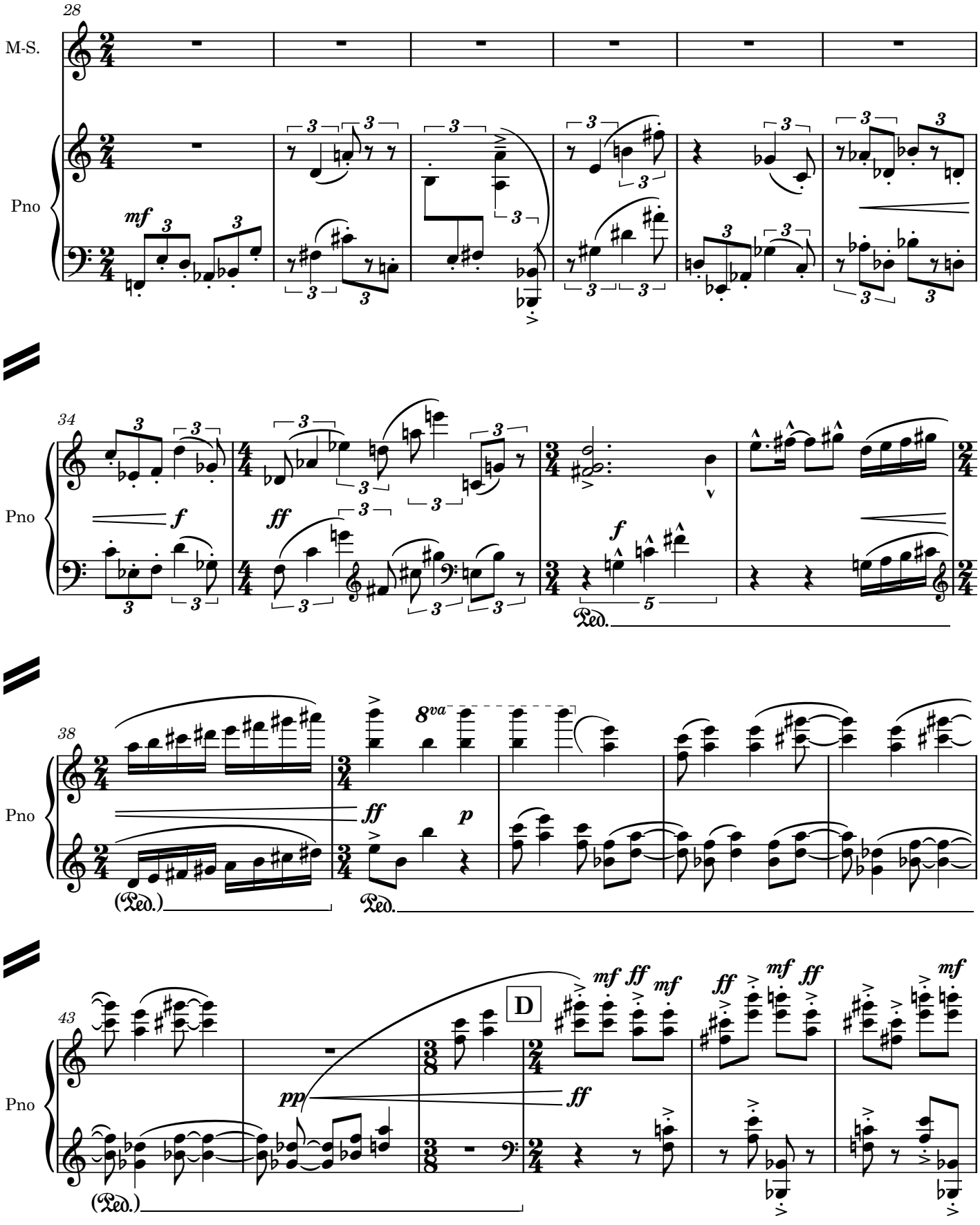
Clifton Callender

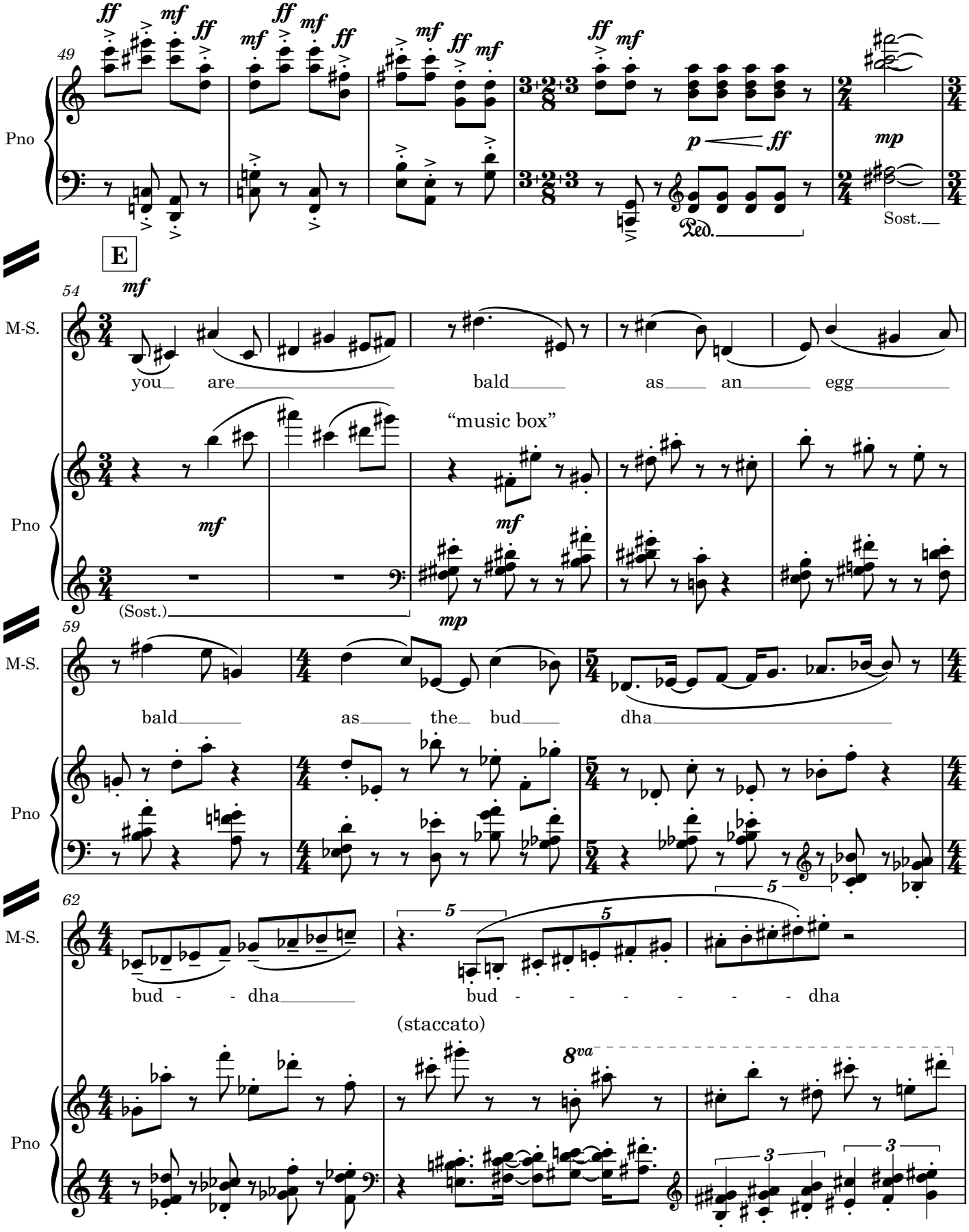
1. You are

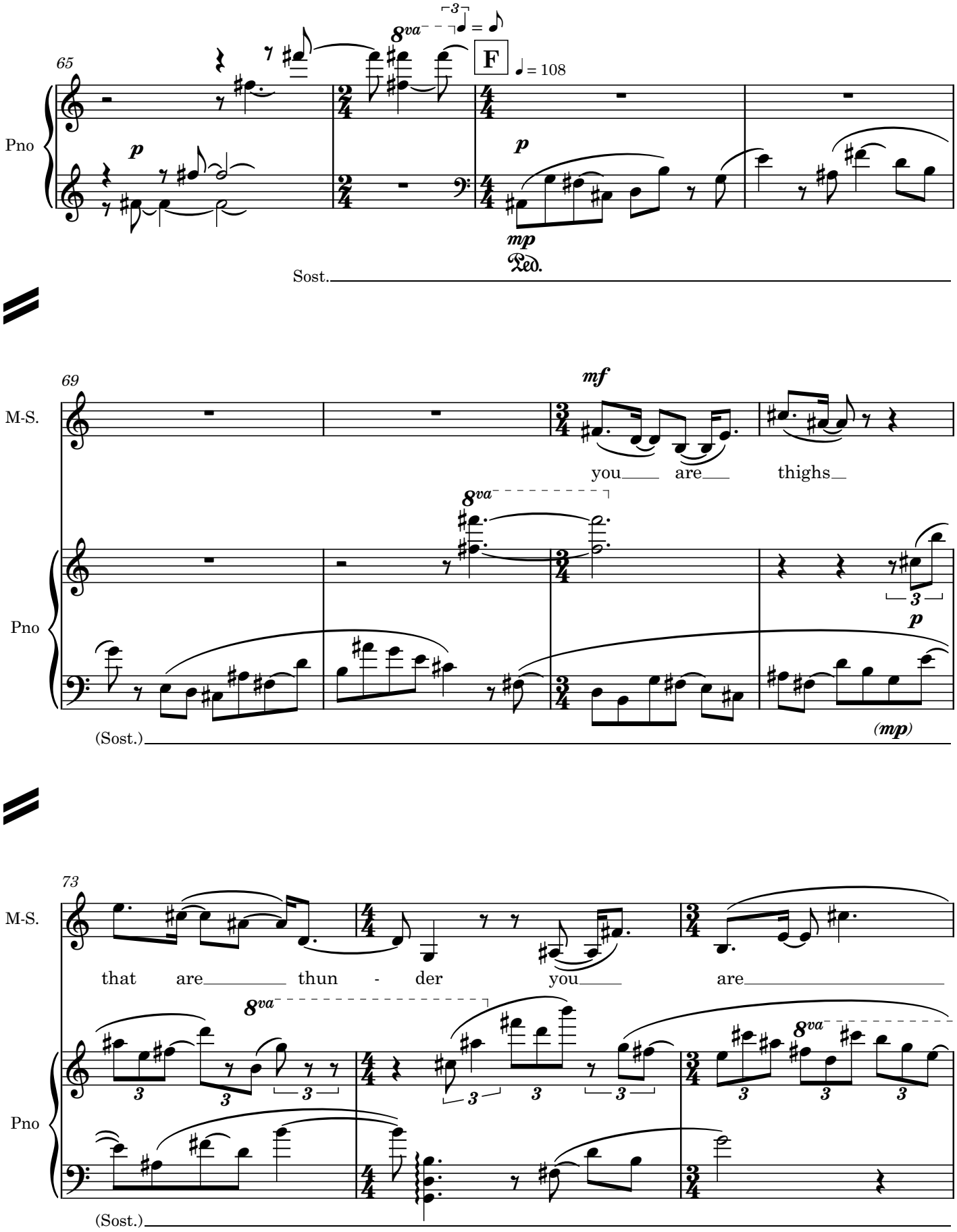


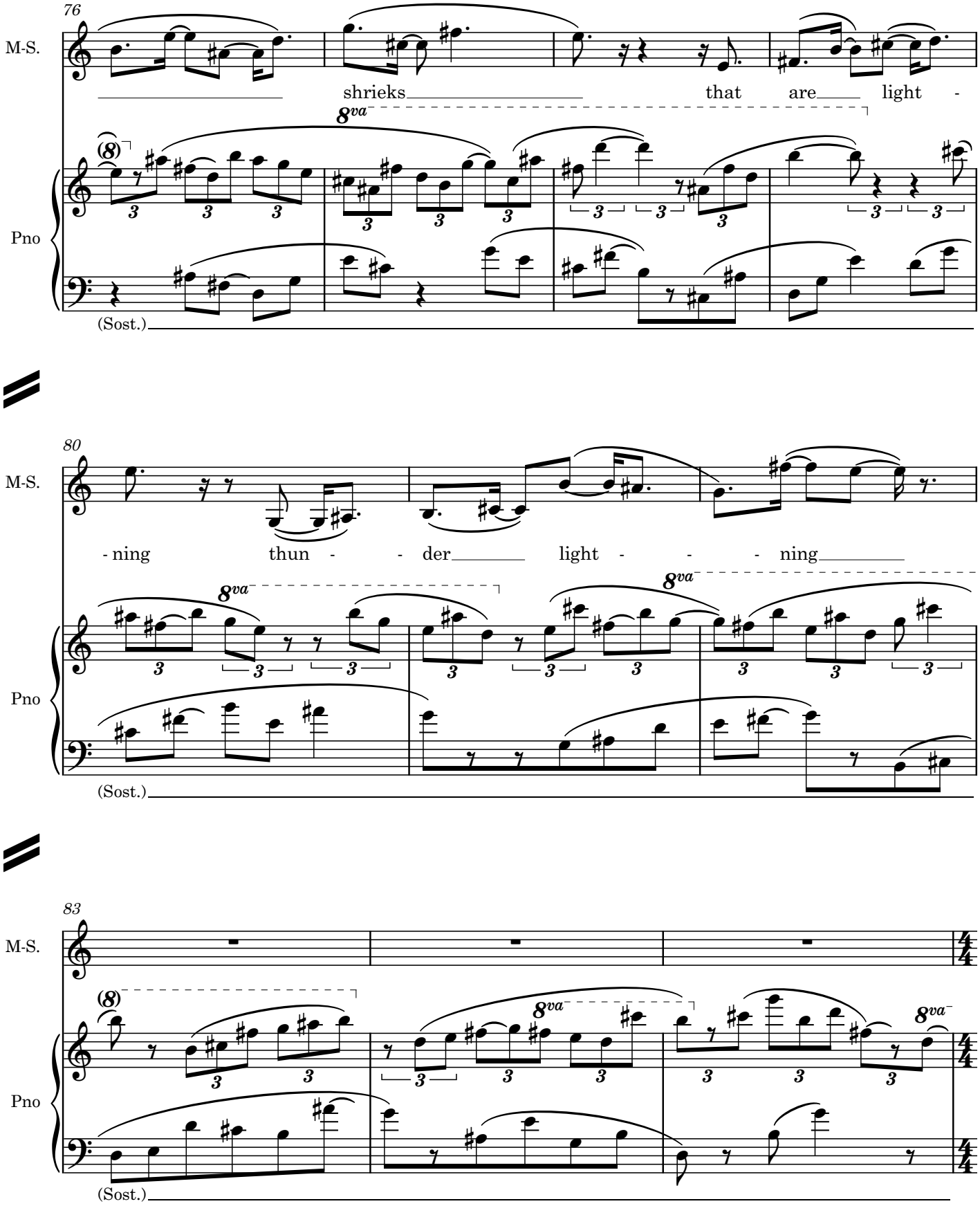
♪ = ♪ sempre (unless indicated otherwise)

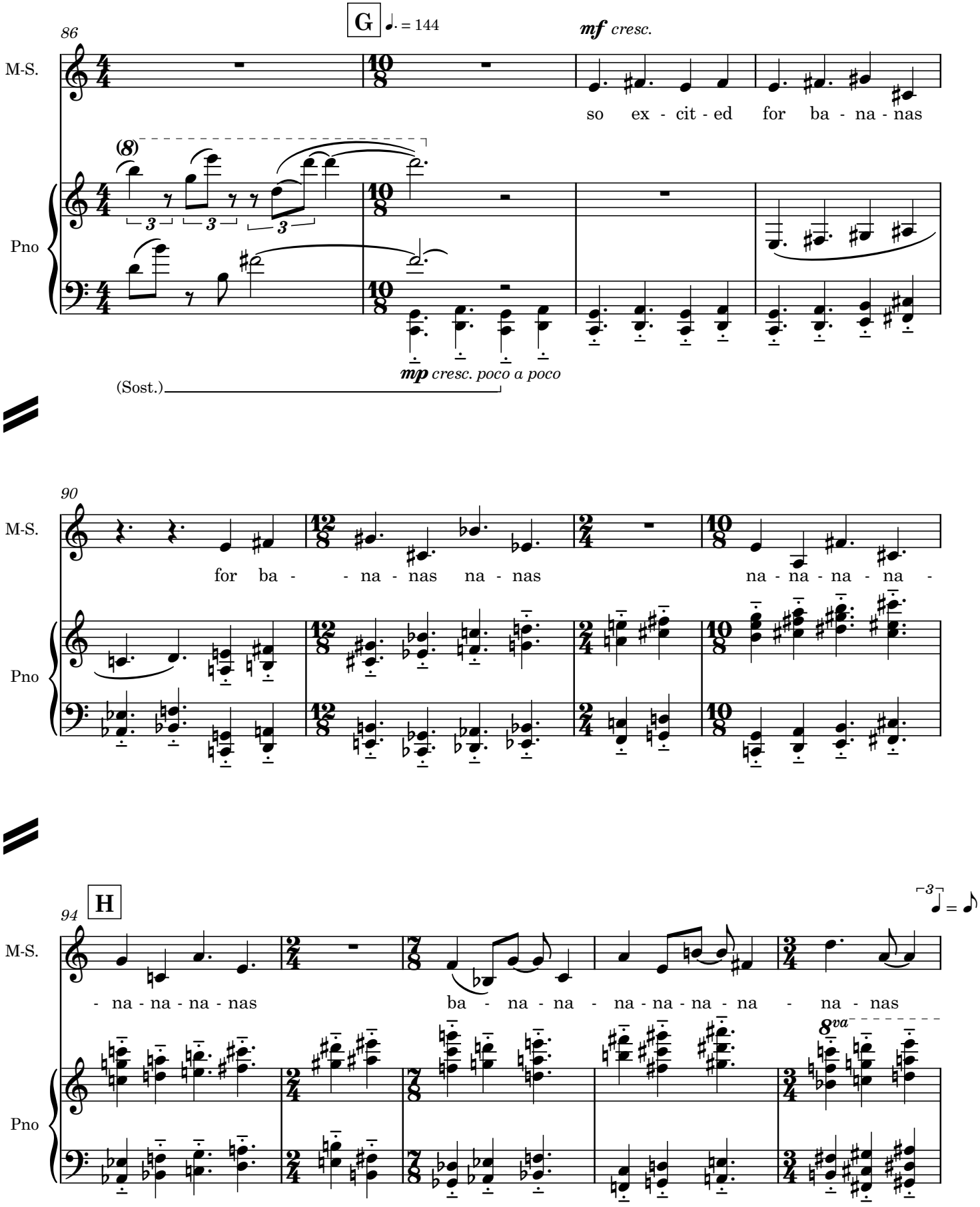


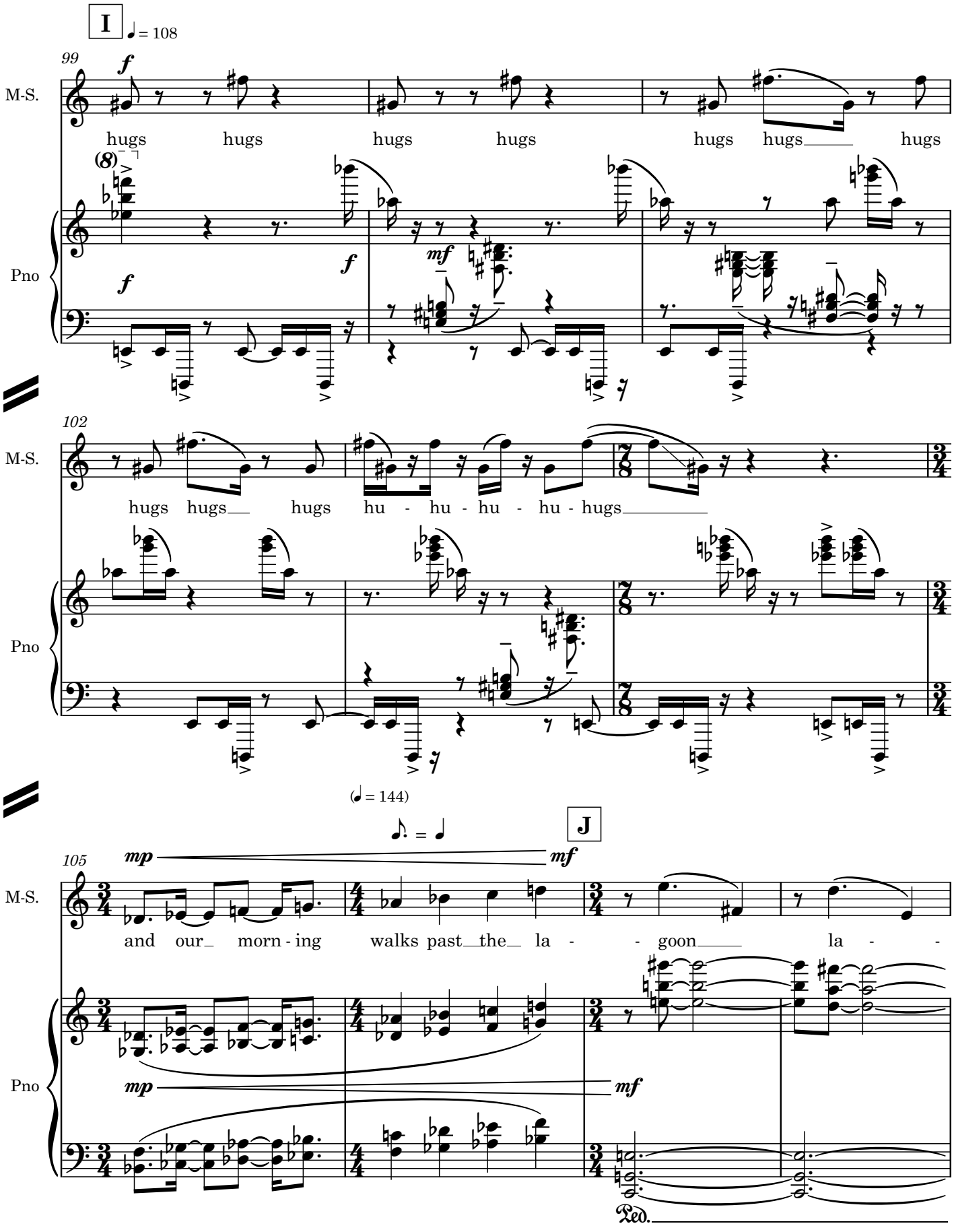

28
M-S.
Pno
mf
34
Pno
f
ff
f
Ped.
38
Pno
8va
ff
p
(Ped.)
Ped.
43
Pno
D
pp
ff
mf
(Ped.)

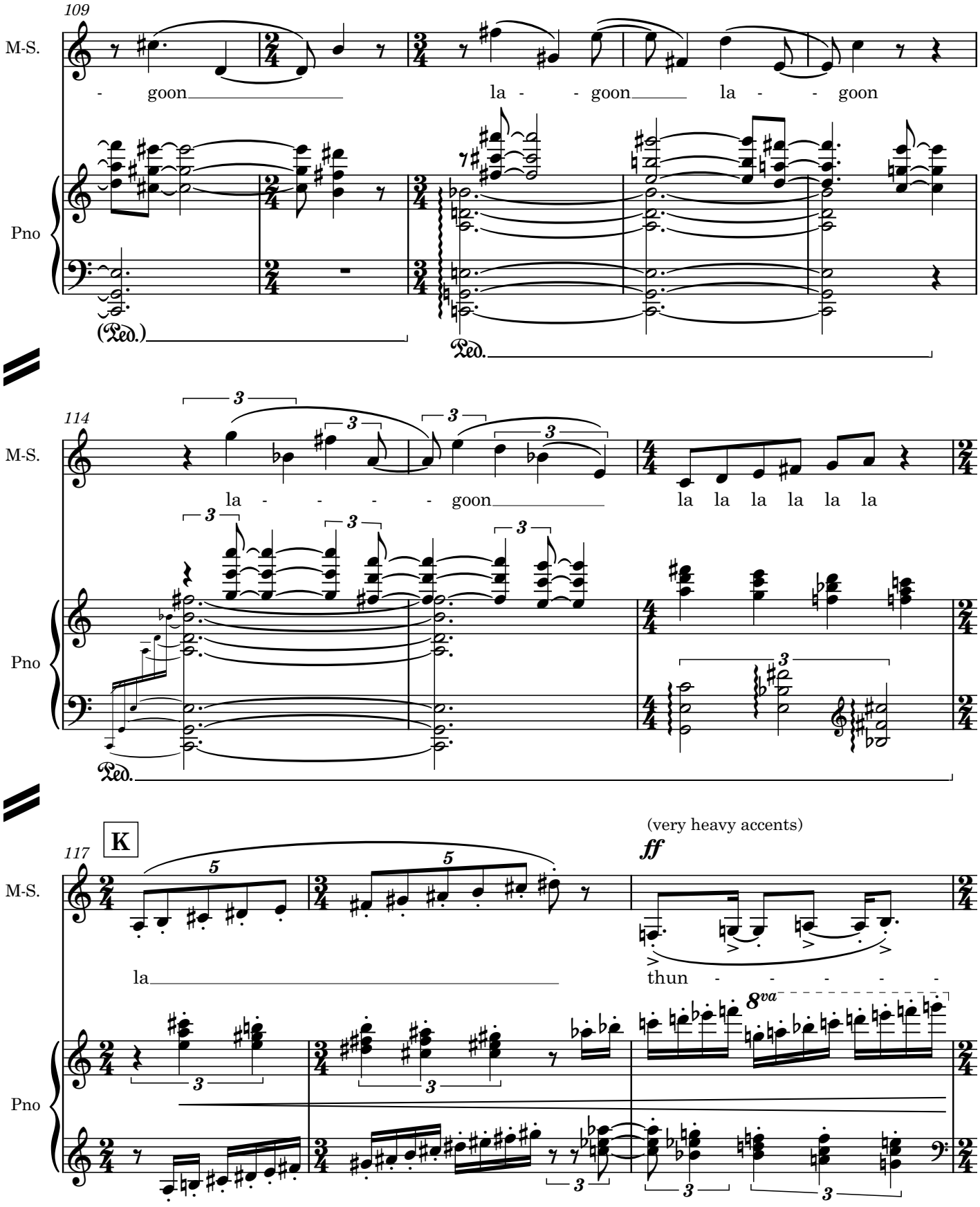

49
Pno
Sost.
E
54
M-S.
you are bald as an egg
"music box"
Pno
(Sost.)
59
M-S.
bald as the bud dha
Pno
62
M-S.
bud - dha bud - - - - - - dha
(staccato)
8va
Pno

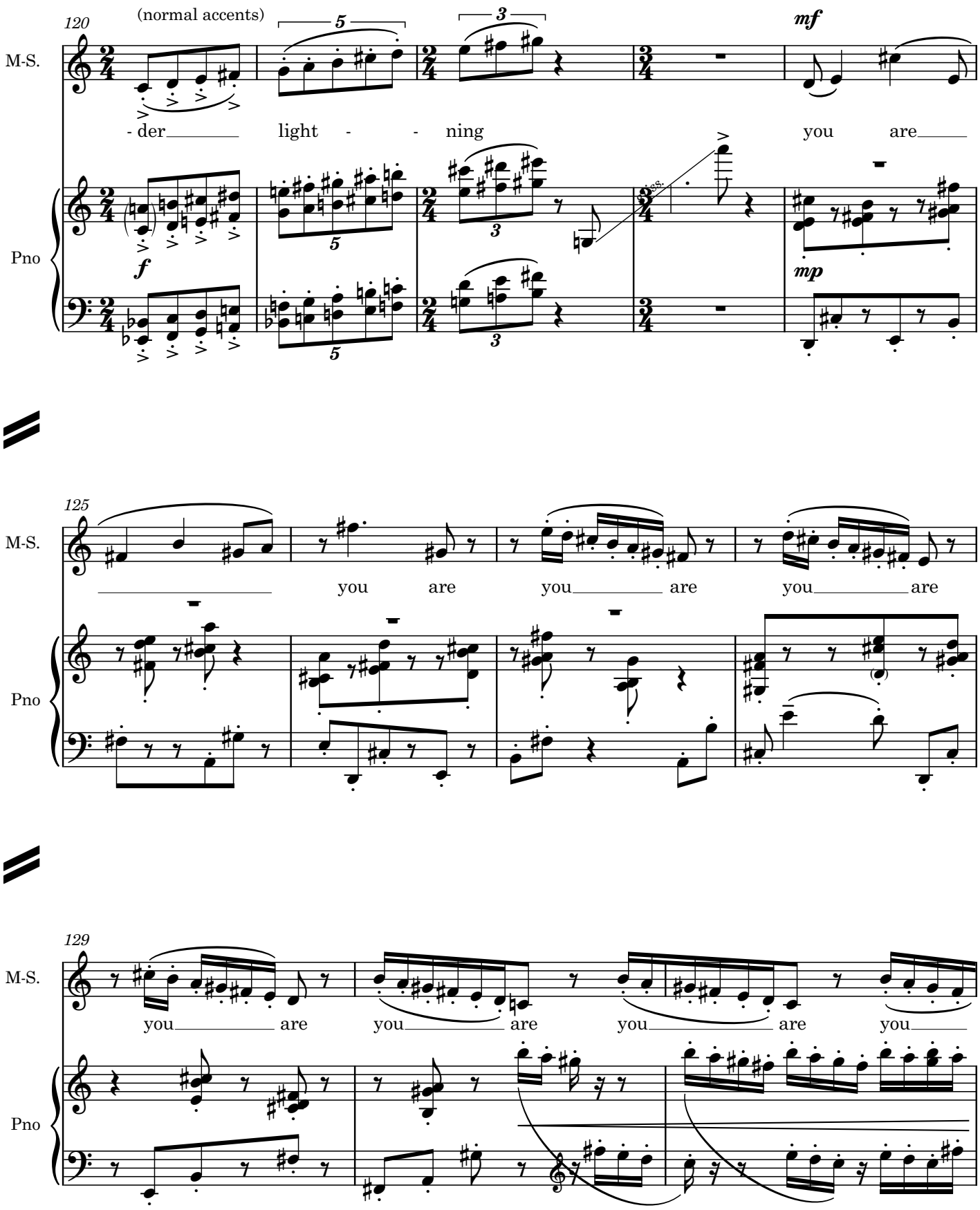

65
Pno
8va
F
♩ = 108
p
mp
Ped.
Sost.
69
M-S.
mf
you are thighs
8va
p
(mp)
(Sost.)
73
M-S.
that are thun - der you are
8va
8va
Pno
(Sost.)

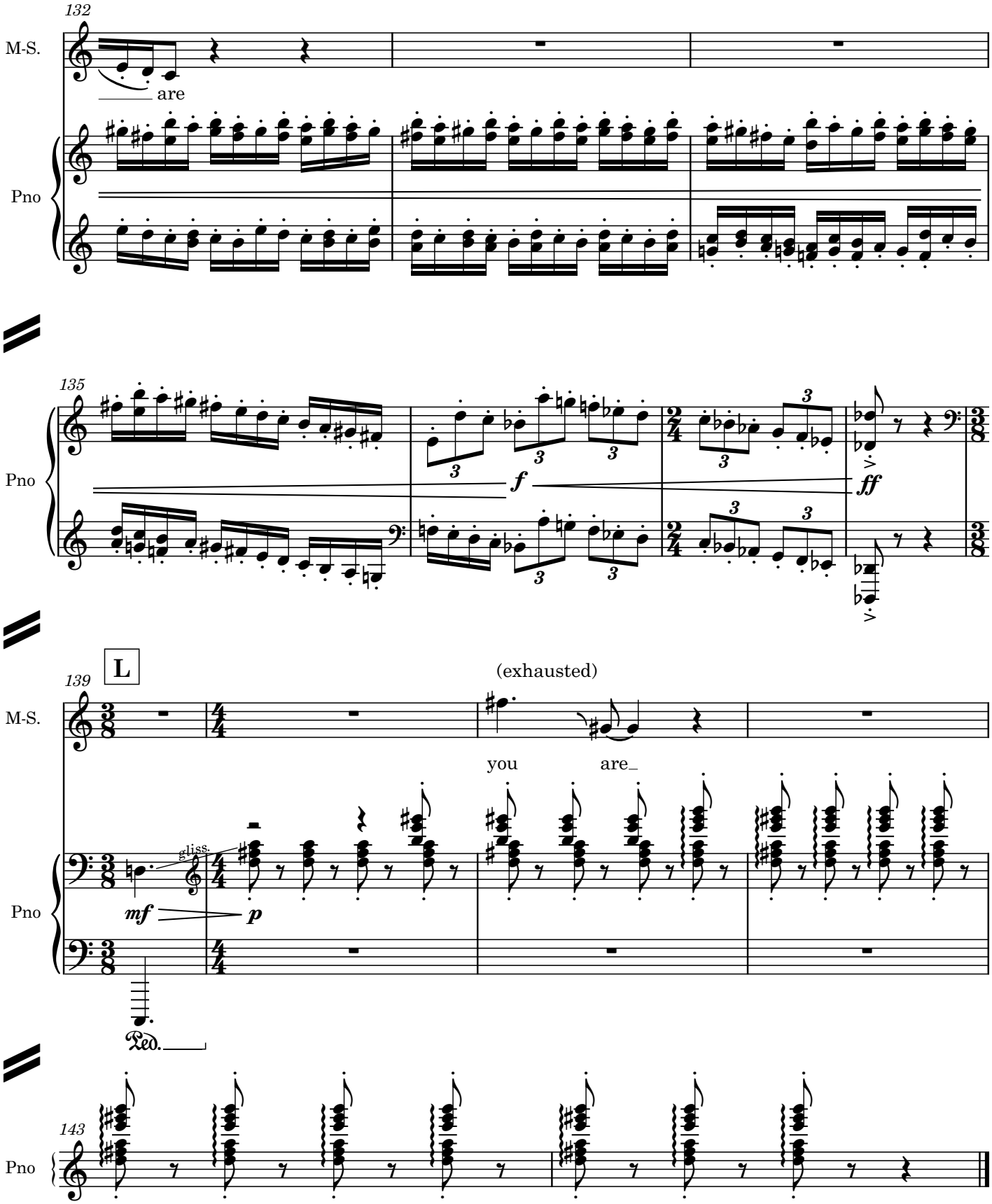

76
M-S.
shrieks that are light -
8va
Pno
(Sost.)
80
M-S.
- ning thun - - der light - - - ning
8va
8va
Pno
(Sost.)
83
M-S.
8va
8va
Pno
(Sost.)


G
♩. = 144
86
mf cresc.
M-S.
so ex - cit - ed for ba - na - nas
(8)
3
Pno
mp cresc. poco a poco
(Sost.)
90
M-S.
for ba - - na - nas na - nas
na - na - na - na -
Pno
94
H
3
♩ = ♪
M-S.
- na - na - na - nas
ba - na - na - na - na - na - na - nas
8va
Pno

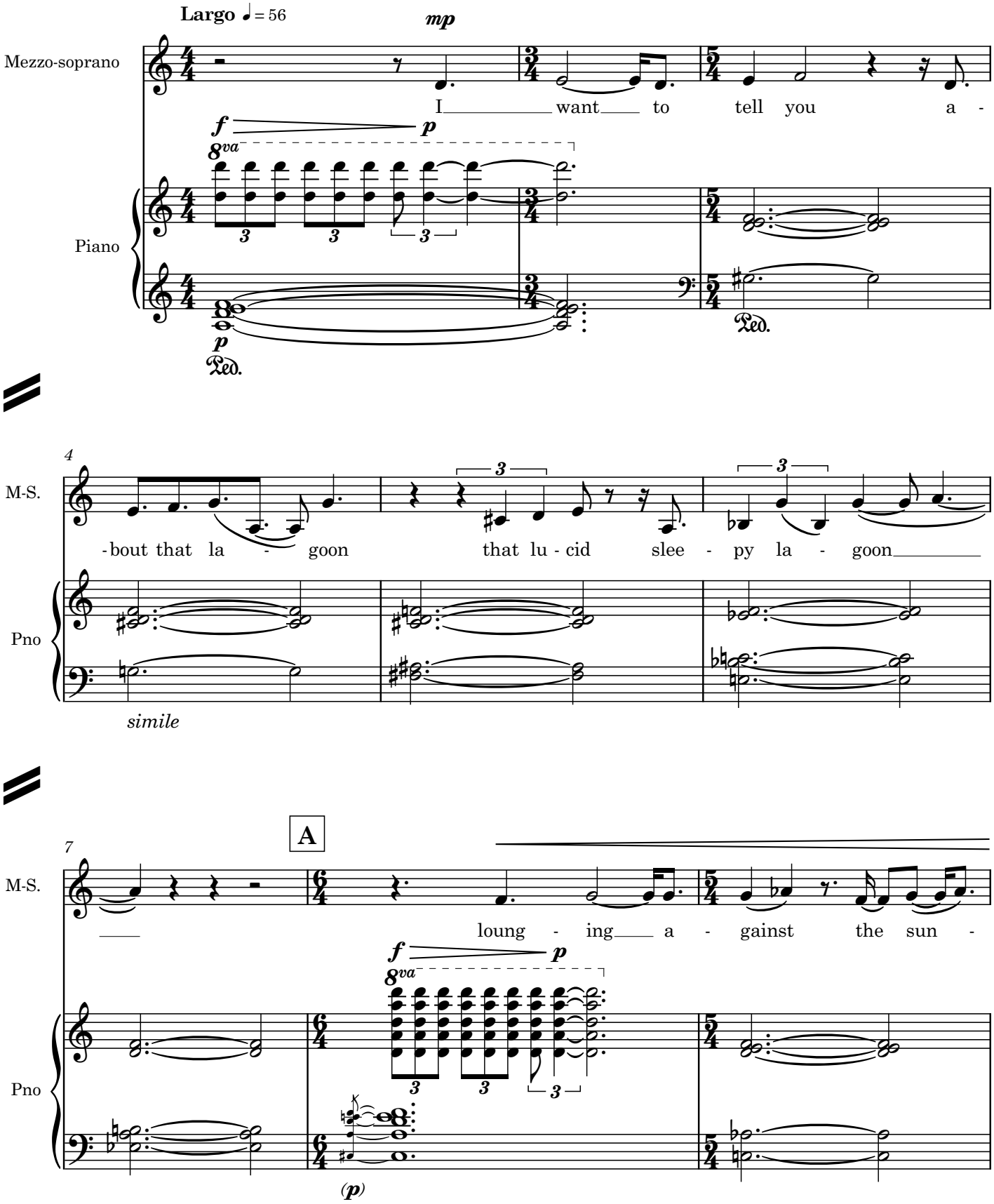

I
♩ = 108
99
M-S.
Pno
hugs hugs hugs hugs hugs hugs hugs
102
hugs hugs hugs hu - hu - hu - hu - hugs
(♩ = 144)
♪. = ♩
J
105
and our morn - ing walks past the la - goon la -
Ped.

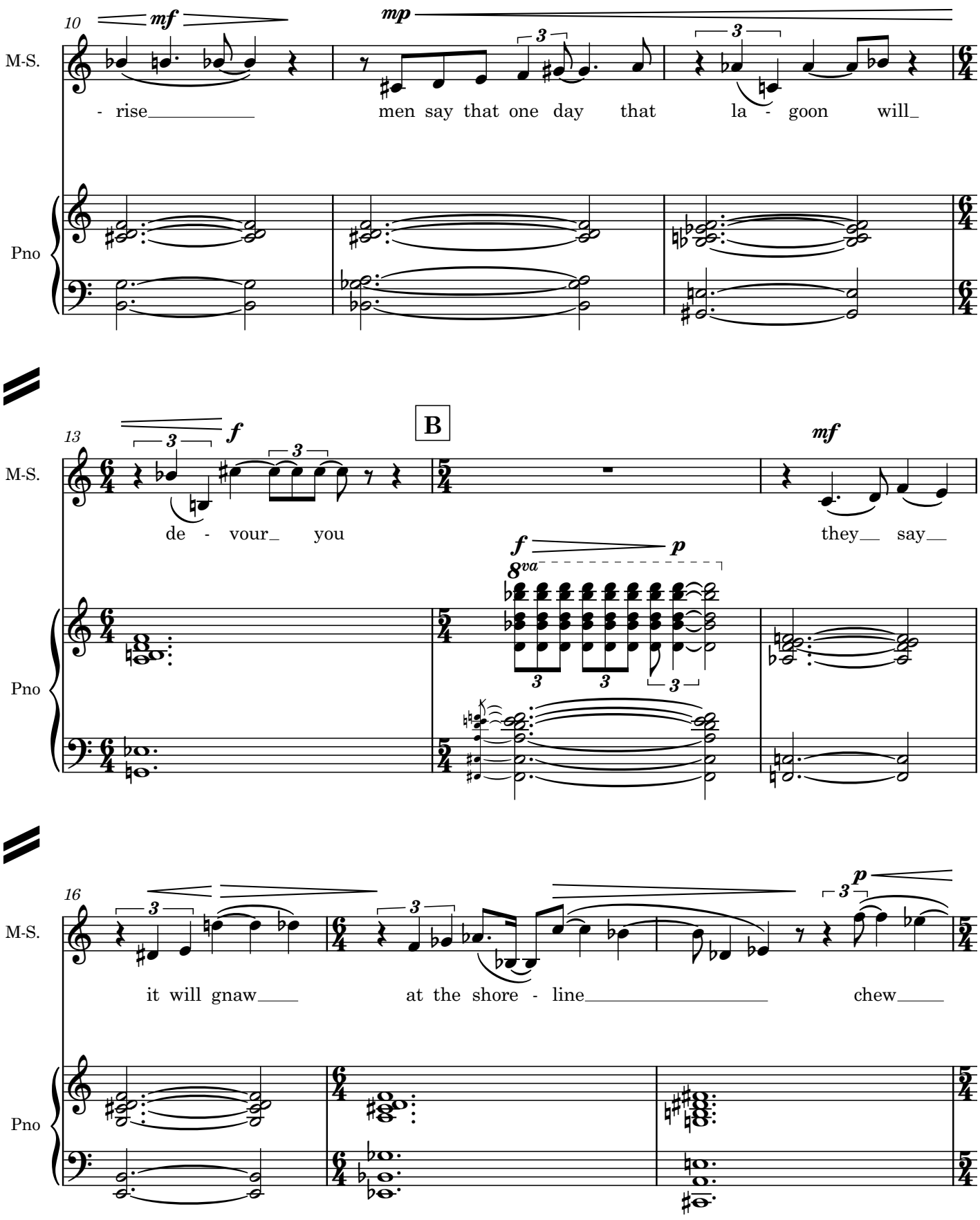

109
M-S.
- goon
la - - goon
la - - goon
Pno
(Ped.)
Ped.
114
M-S.
la - - - - goon
la la la la la la
Pno
Ped.
117
K
M-S.
la
(very heavy accents)
ff
thun - - - - -
8va
Pno

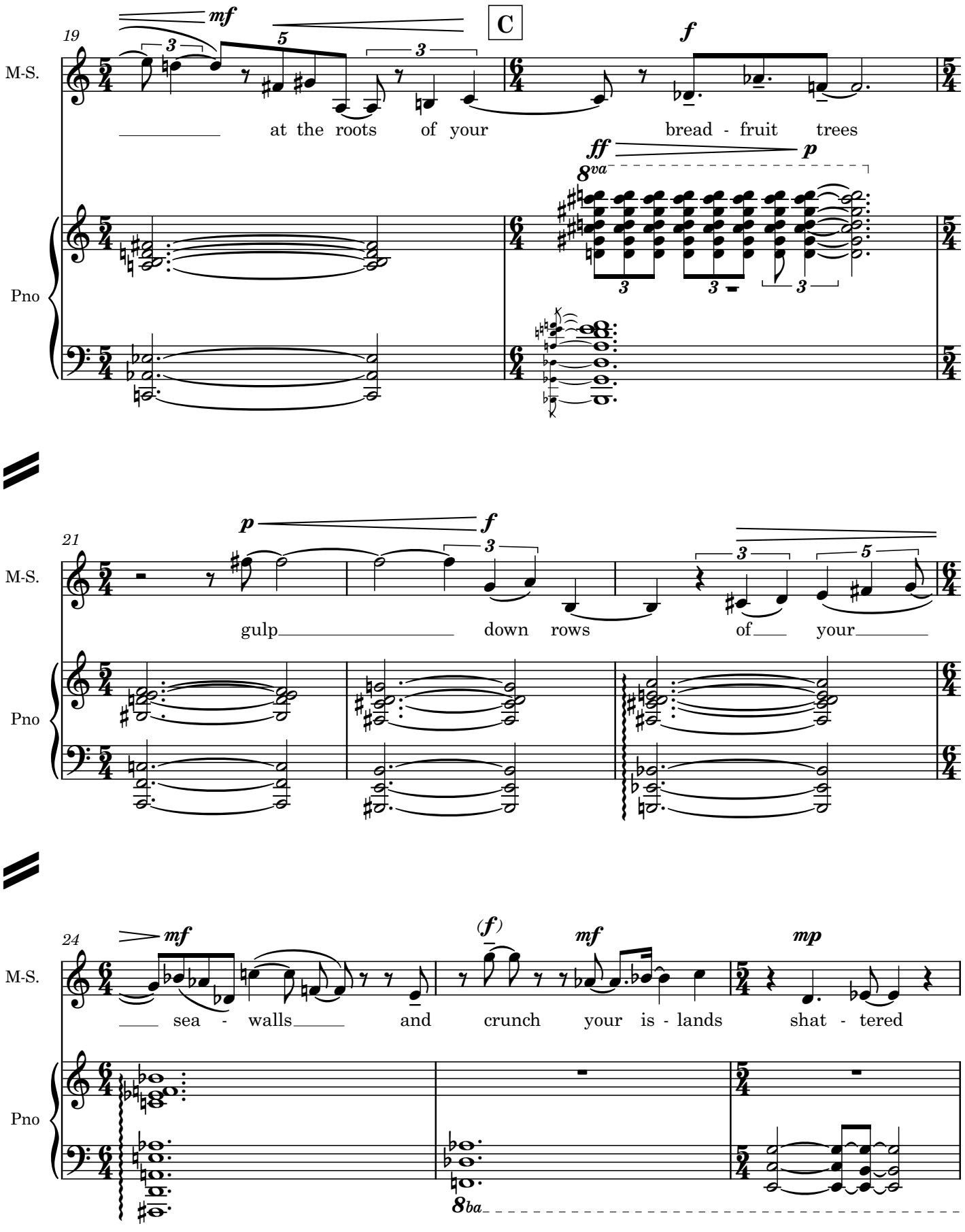

120
(normal accents)
M-S.
Pno
- der light - - ning you are
mf
f
mp
125
you are you are you are
129
you are you are you are you

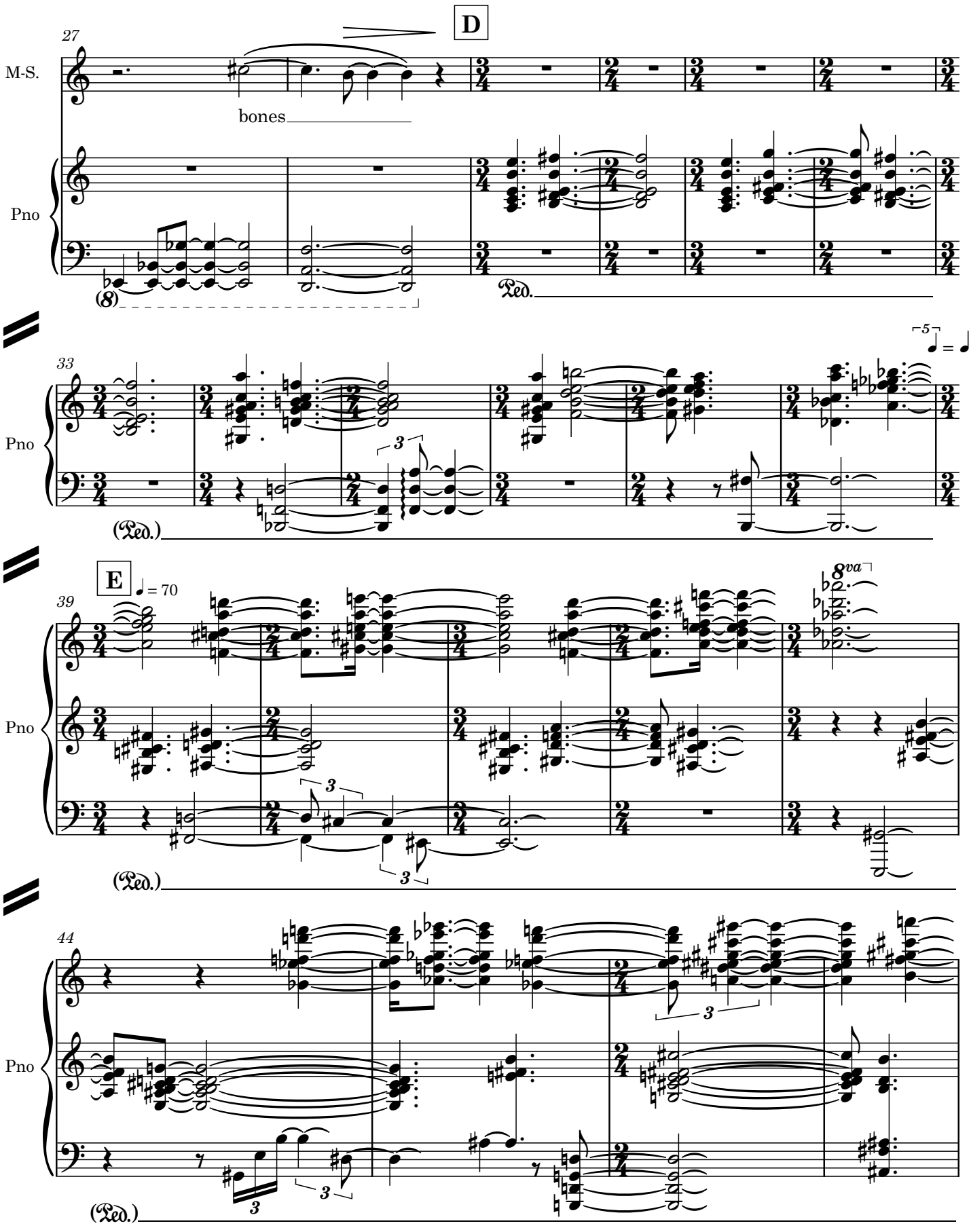

132
M-S.
are
Pno
135
Pno
f
ff
L
139
M-S.
(exhausted)
you
are
gliss.
mf
p
Ped.
143
Pno

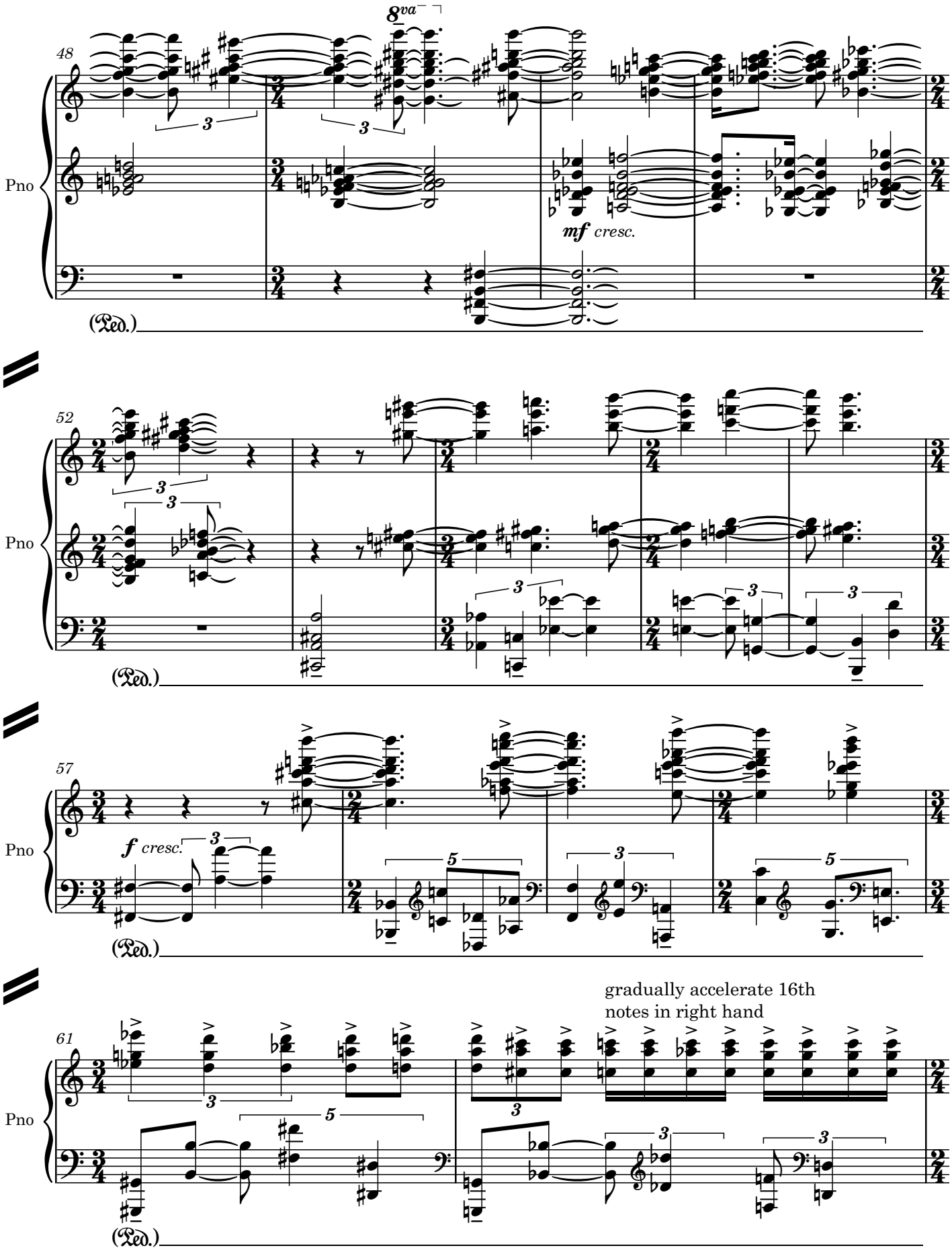
2. I want to tell you

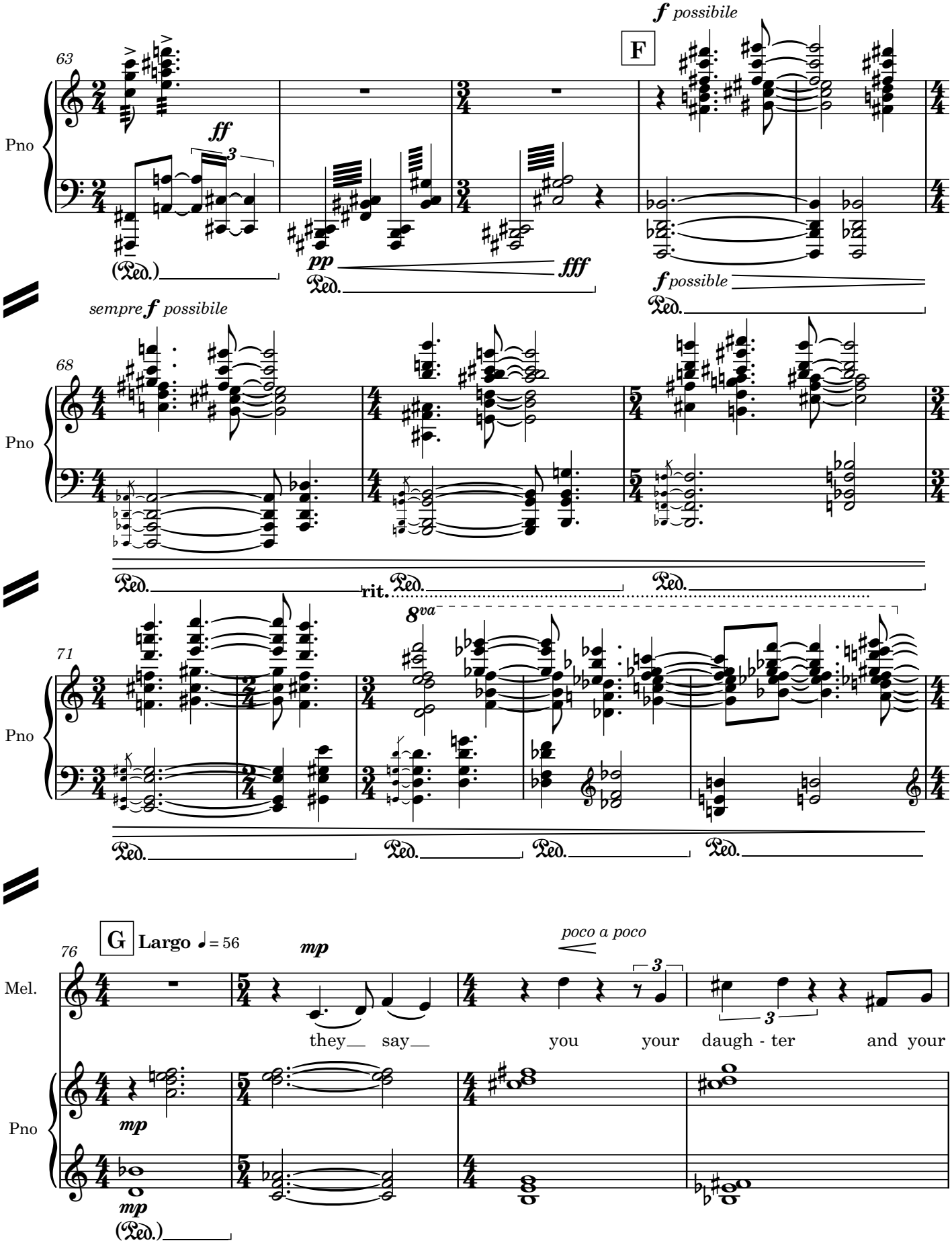


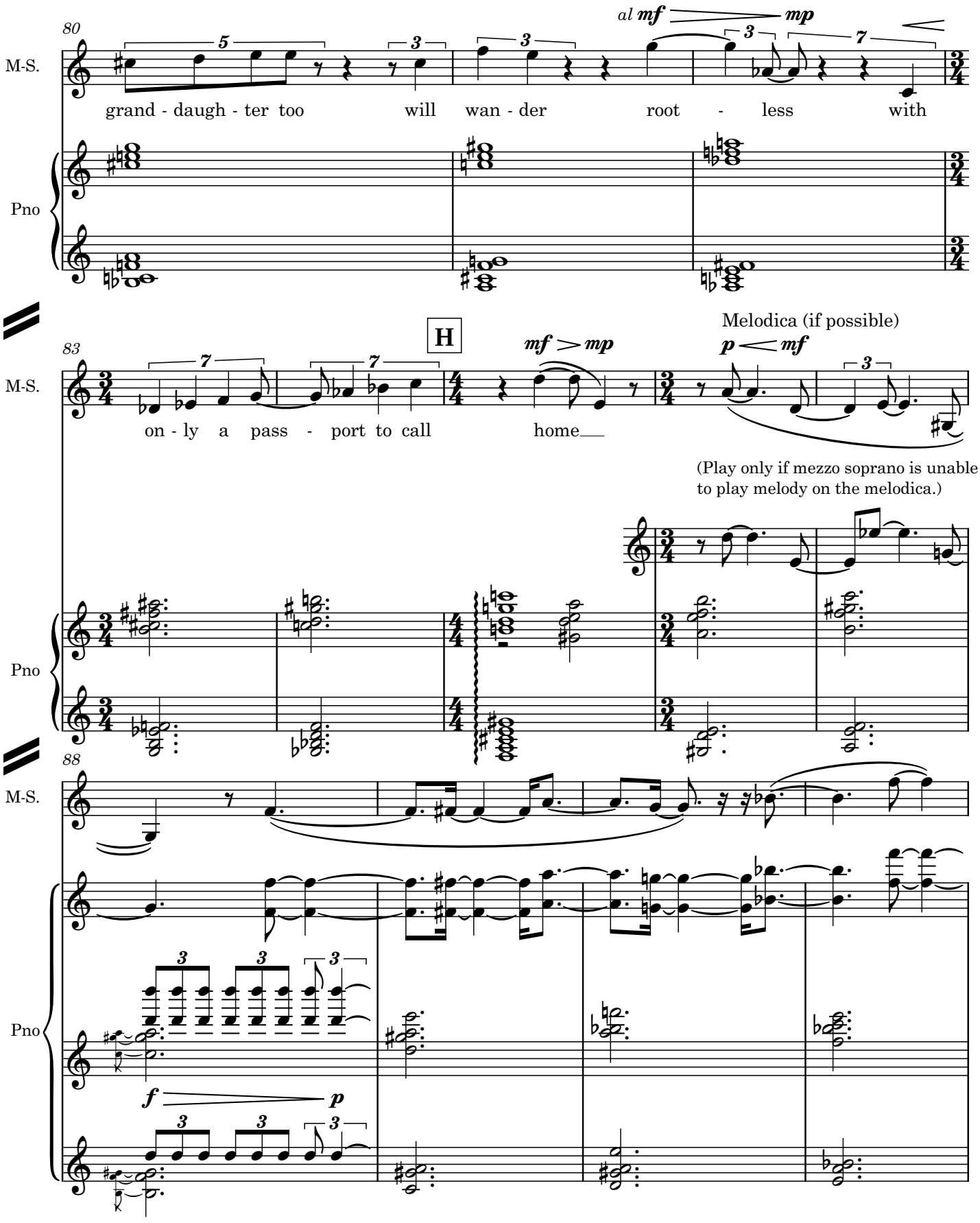

10
mf
mp
M-S.
- rise
men say that one day that la - goon will
Pno
13
f
B
de - vour you
mf
they say
f
p
8va
16
it will gnaw
at the shore - line
chew
p

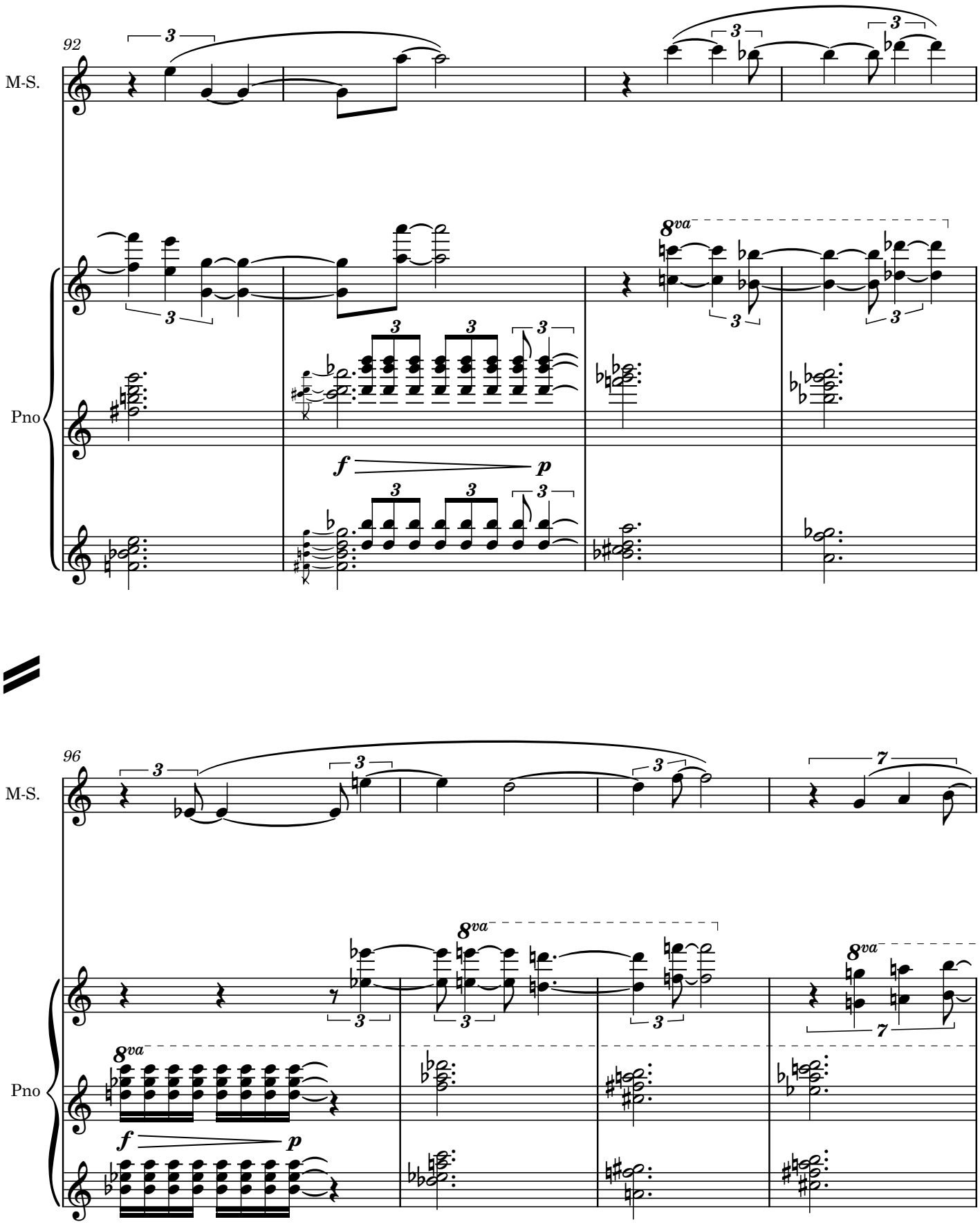

19
M-S.
Pno
mf
C
f
at the roots of your bread - fruit trees
ff
p
8va
21
p
f
gulp down rows of your
24
mf
(f)
mf
mp
sea - walls and crunch your is - lands shat - tered
8ba

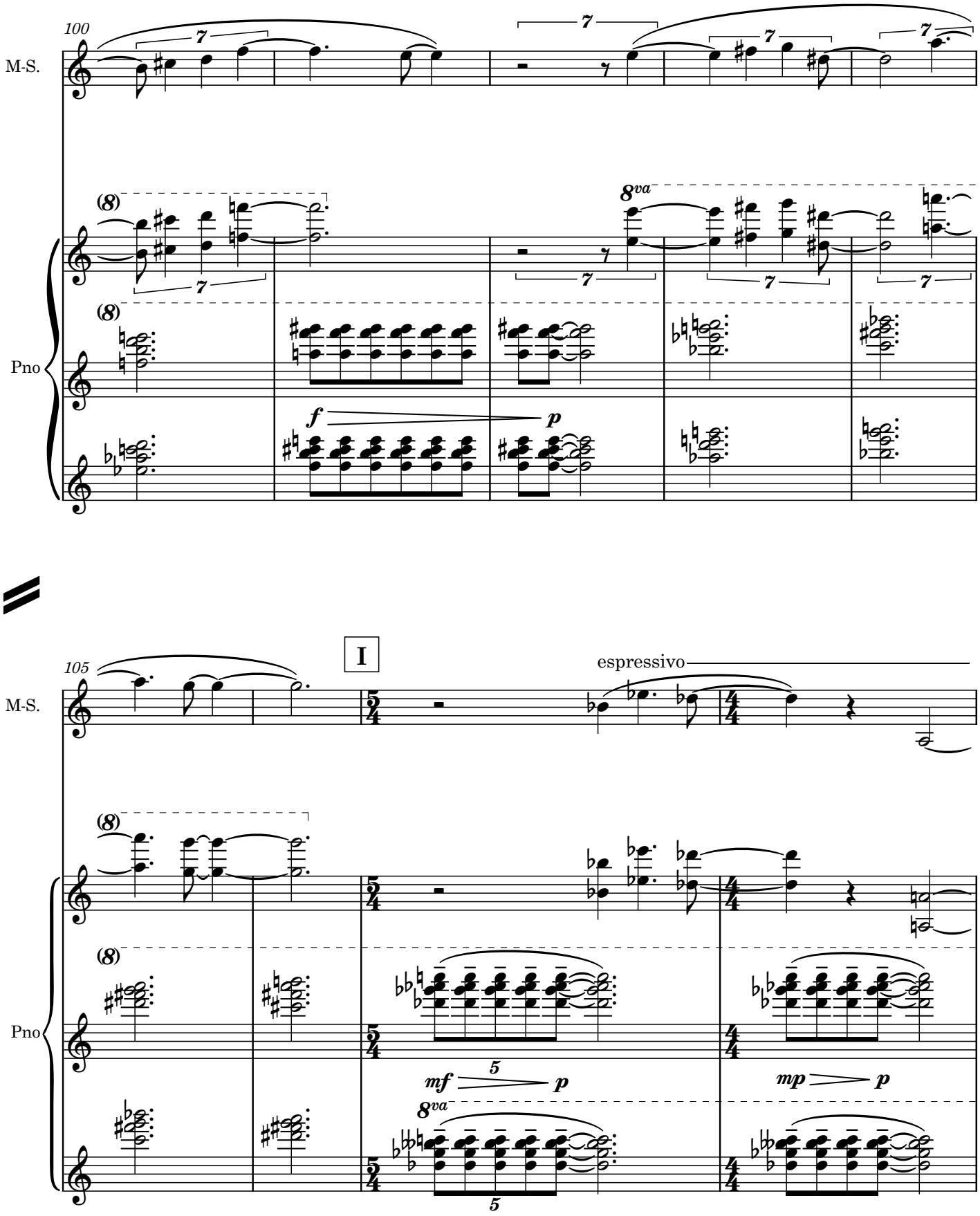

27
D
M-S.
bones
Pno
(8)
Ped.
33
5
Pno
3
(Ped.)
E
39
♩ = 70
8va
Pno
3
(Ped.)
44
Pno
3
(Ped.)

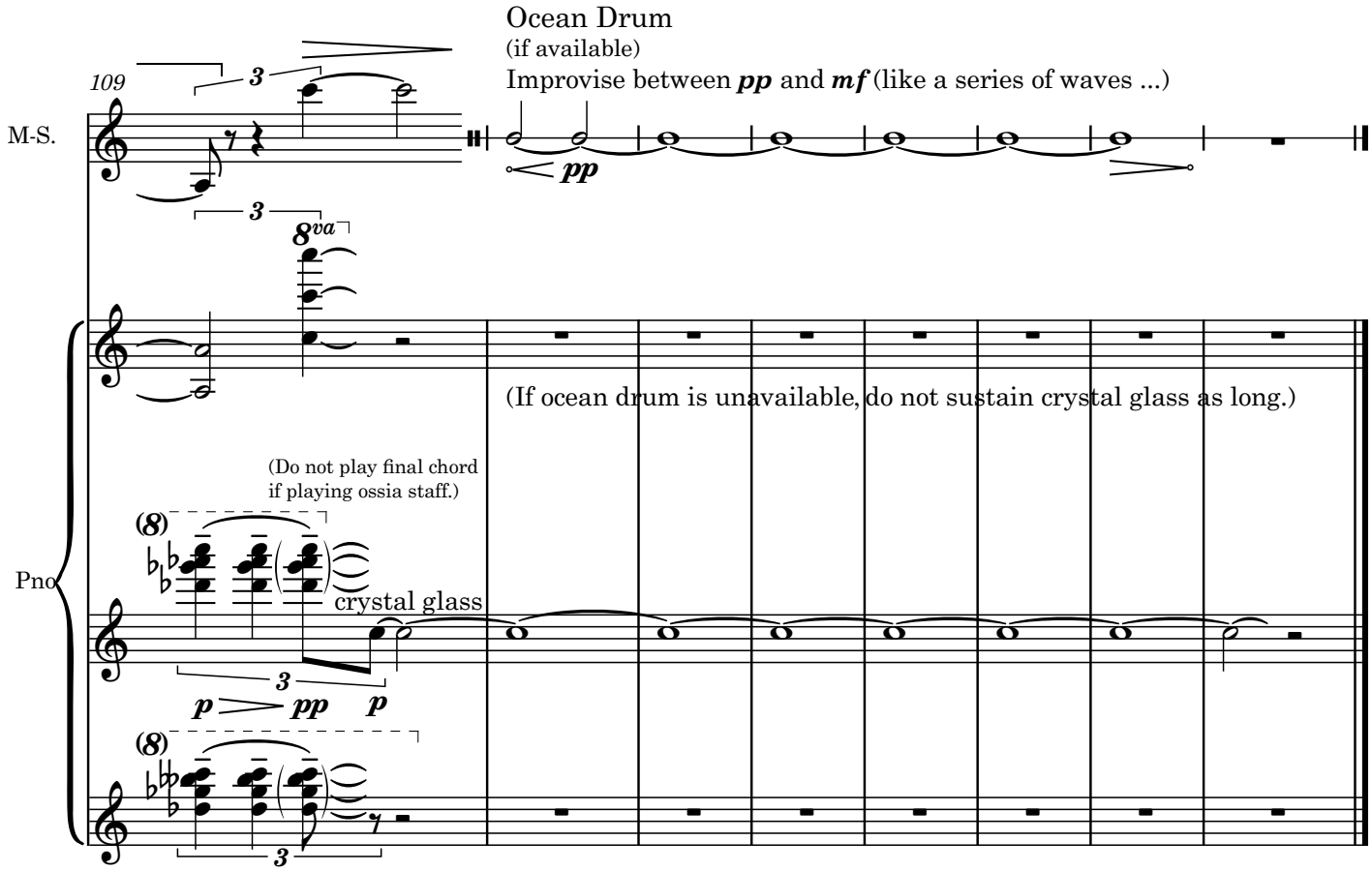

48
8va
Pno
mf cresc.
(Ped.)
52
Pno
(Ped.)
57
Pno
f cresc.
(Ped.)
61
Pno
gradually accelerate 16th notes in right hand
(Ped.)


63
Pno
ff
3
(Ped.)
pp
fff
Ped.
F
f possibile
f possibile
Ped.
sempre f possibile
68
Pno
Ped.
rit.
Ped.
Ped.
8va
71
Pno
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
G
Largo ♩= 56
76
mp
poco a poco
3
3
Mel.
they say you your daugh - ter and your
Pno
mp
mp
(Ped.)


80
M-S.
grand - daugh - ter too will wan - der root - less with
al mf mp
Pno
83
M-S.
on - ly a pass - port to call home
H
mf > mp
p < mf
Melodica (if possible)
(Play only if mezzo soprano is unable to play melody on the melodica.)
Pno
88
M-S.
Pno
f p


92
M-S.
Pno
8va
f
p
96
M-S.
Pno
8va
f
p


100
M-S.
Pno
8va
f
p
105
I
espressivo
mf
mp


Ocean Drum
(if available)
Improvise between pp and mf (like a series of waves ...)
109
M-S.
Pno
pp
8va
(If ocean drum is unavailable, do not sustain crystal glass as long.)
(Do not play final chord
if playing ossia staff.)
crystal glass
p pp p

3. Don’t cry

Tenderly ♩ = 92

poco rubato

legato

Piano

mp

6

A *mp*

M-S.

Don’t cry mom - my prom - i - ses you

Pno

10

M-S.

no one will come and de - vour

Pno

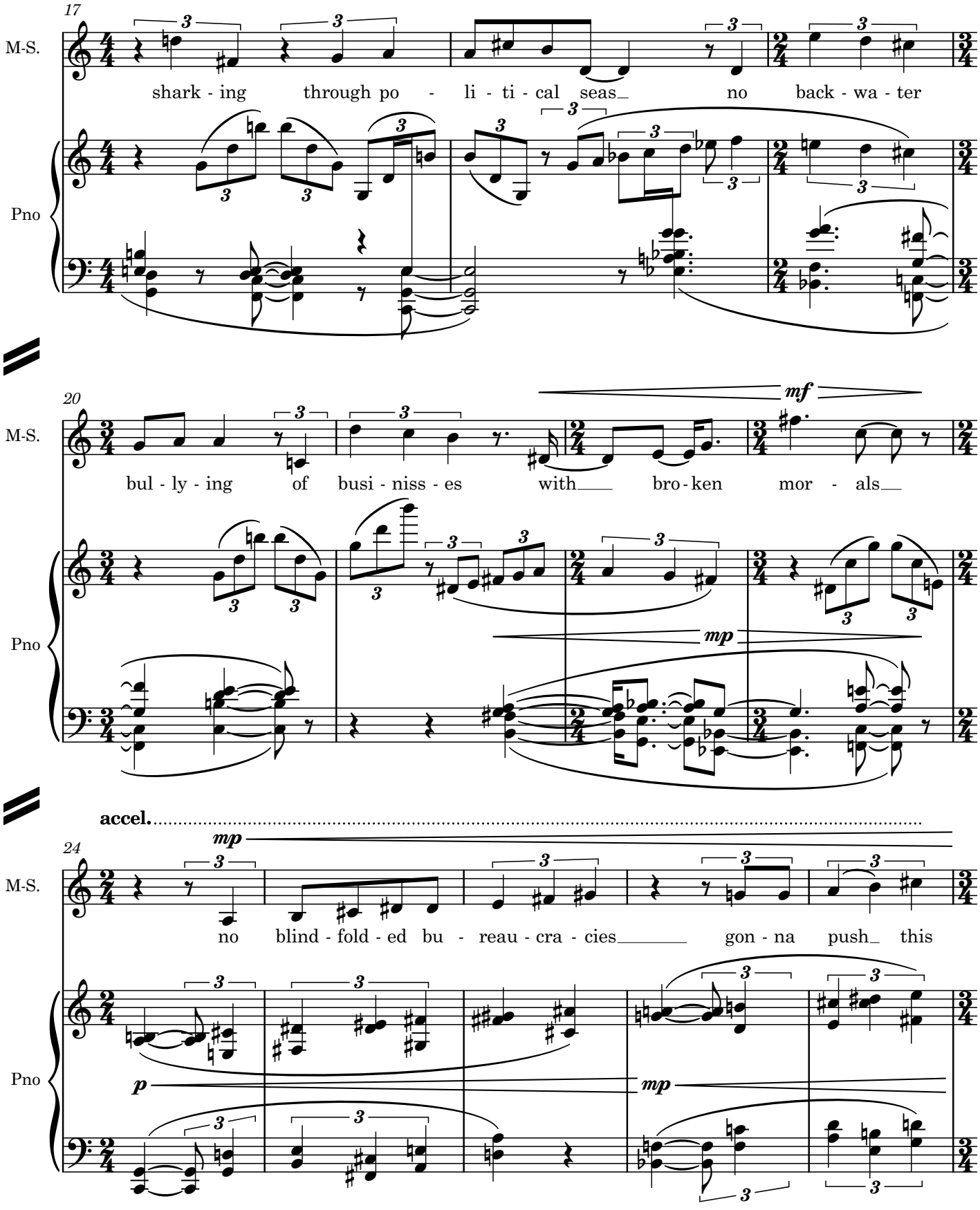
14

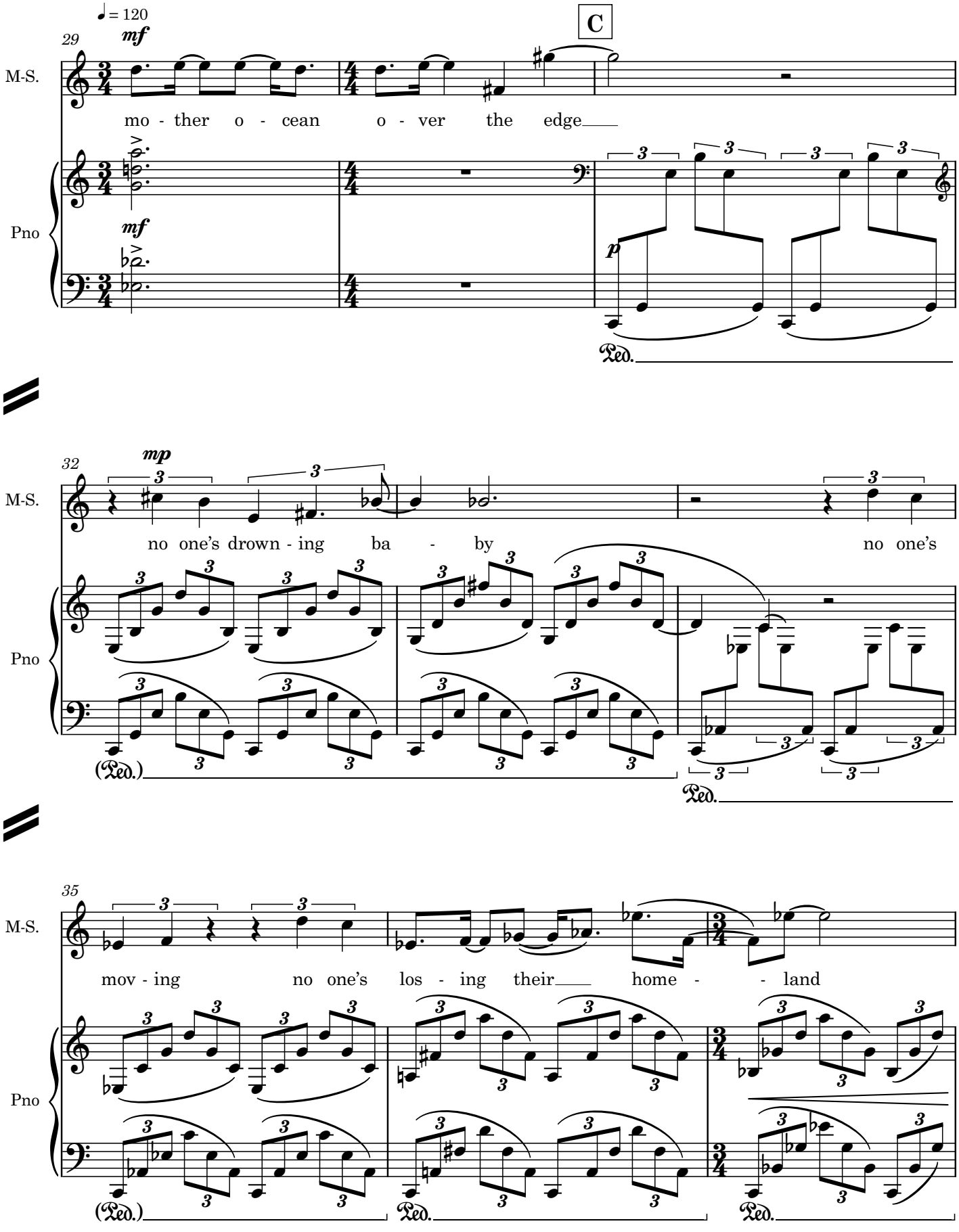
B **Grazioso** ♩ = 108

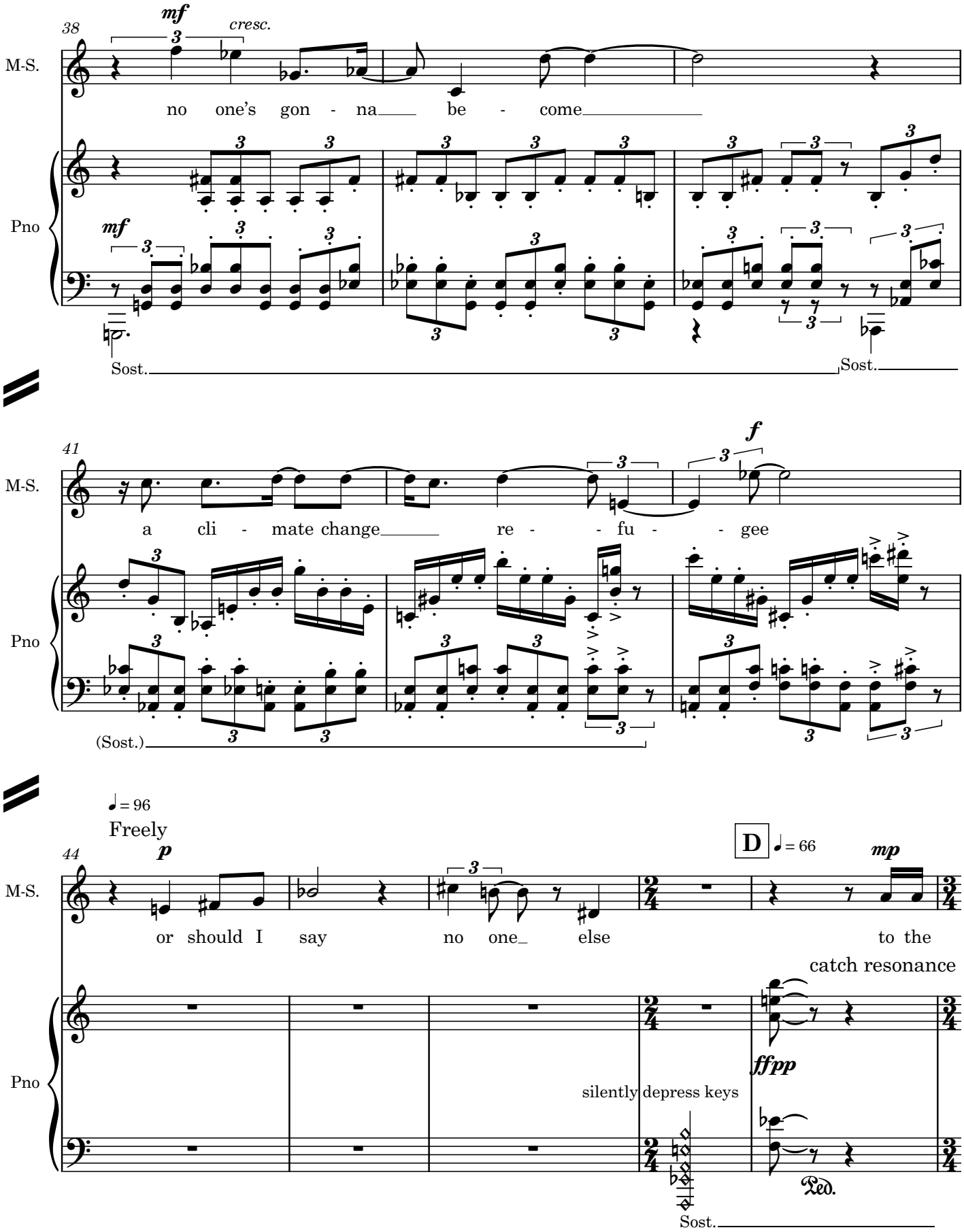
M-S.

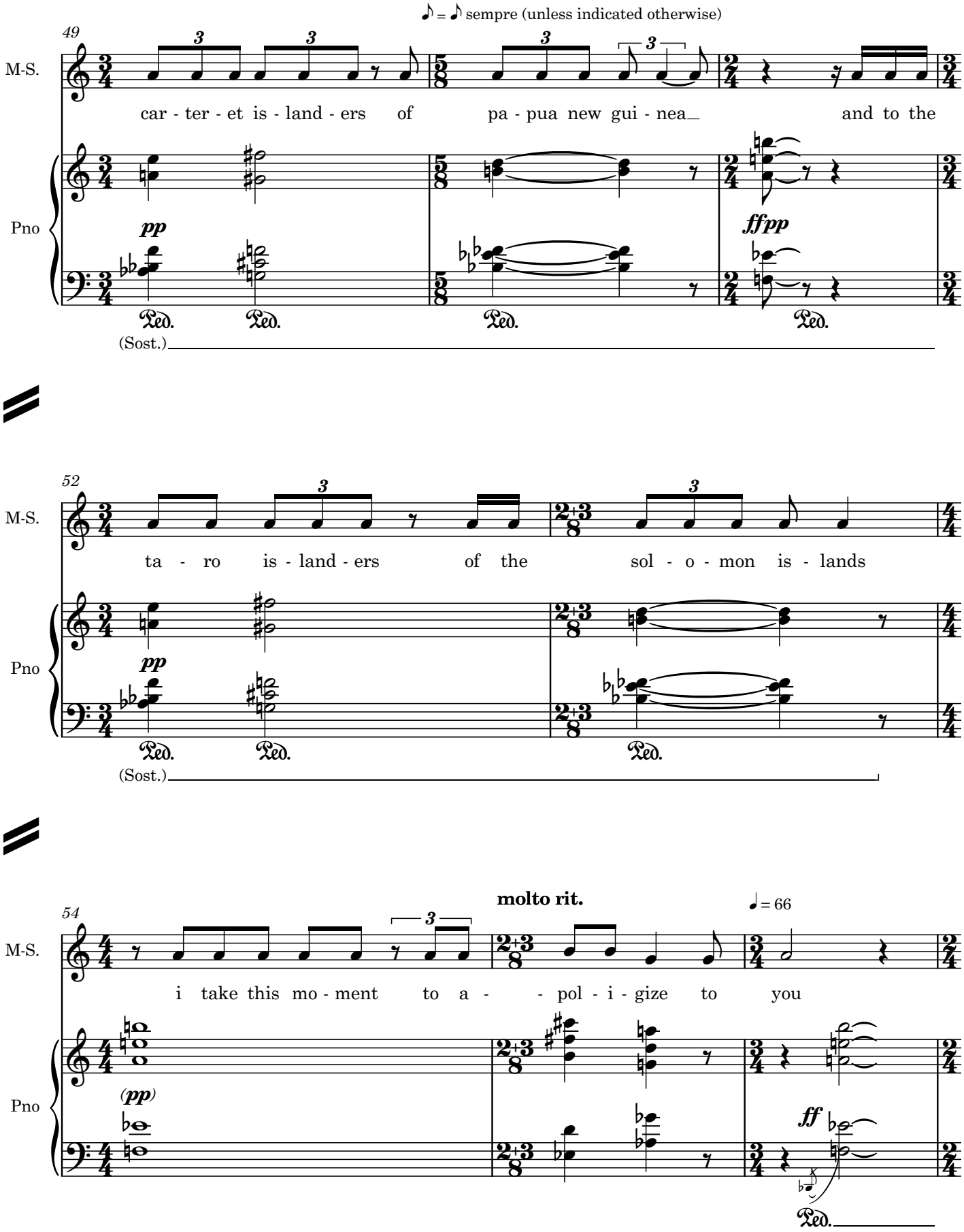
you no greed - y whale of a com - pan - y

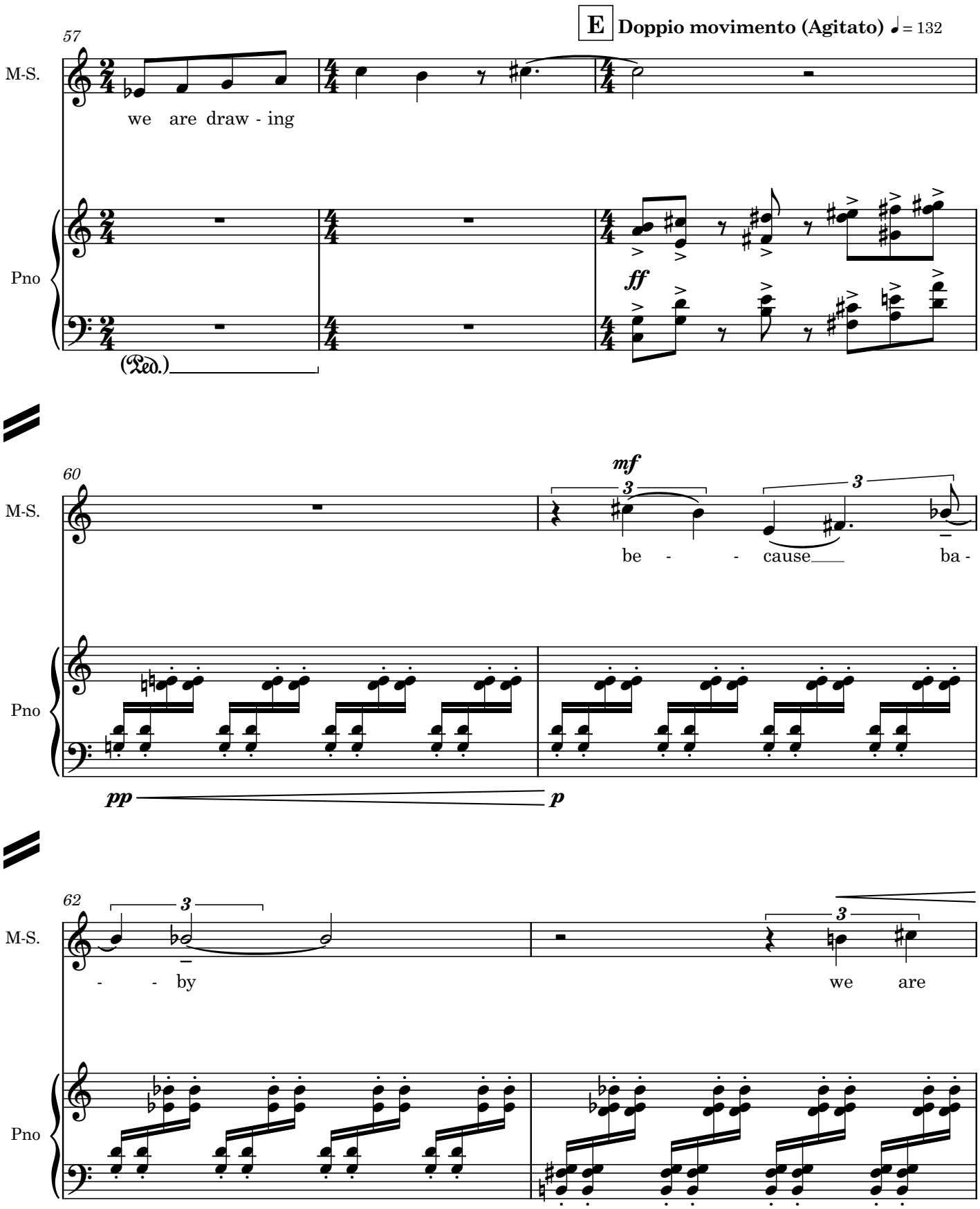
Pno

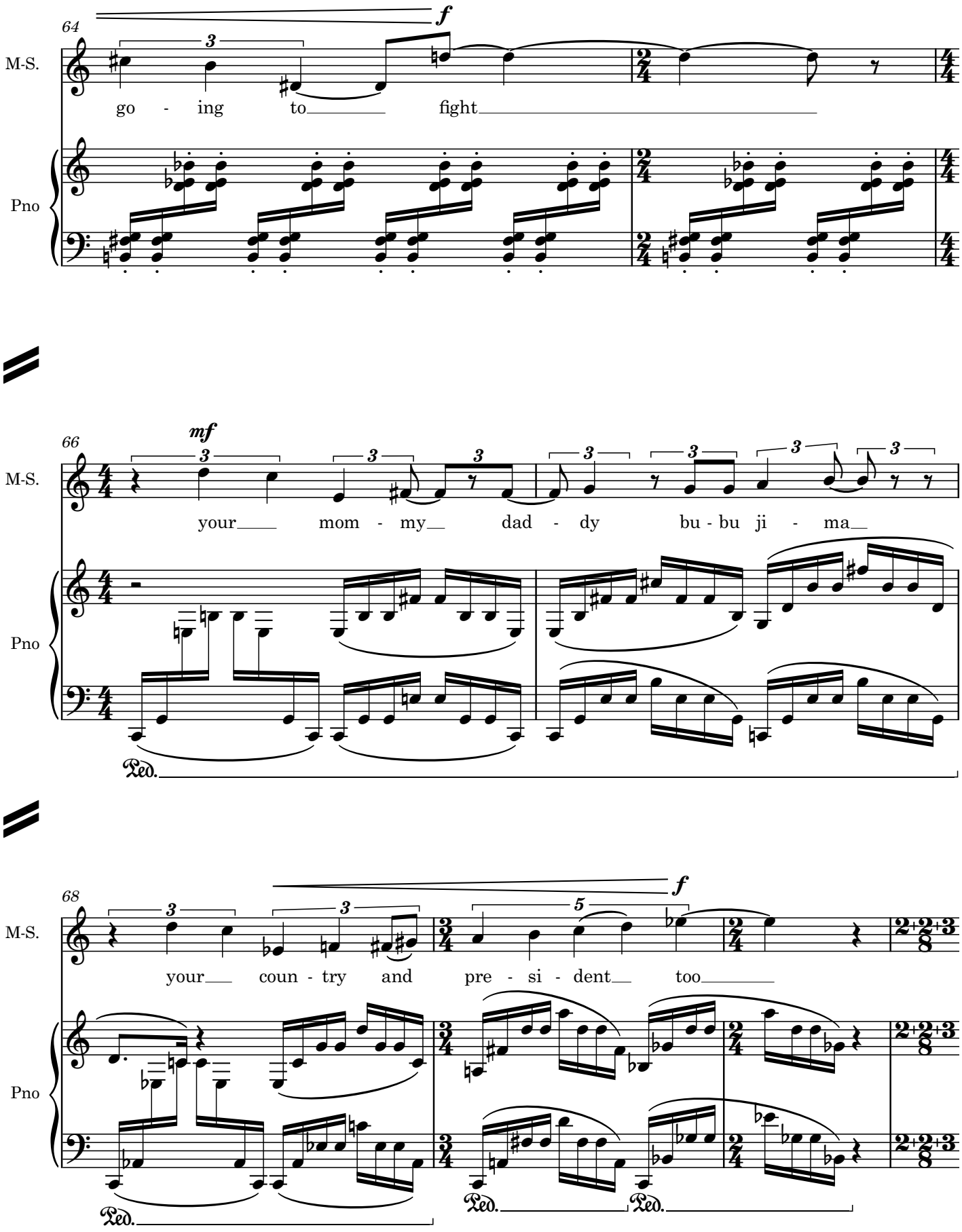

17
M-S.
shark - ing through po - li - ti - cal seas no back - wa - ter
Pno
20
M-S.
mf
bul - ly - ing of busi - niss - es with bro - ken mor - als
mp
Pno
accel.
24
M-S.
mp
no blind - fold - ed bu - reau - cra - cies gon - na push this
Pno
p
mp

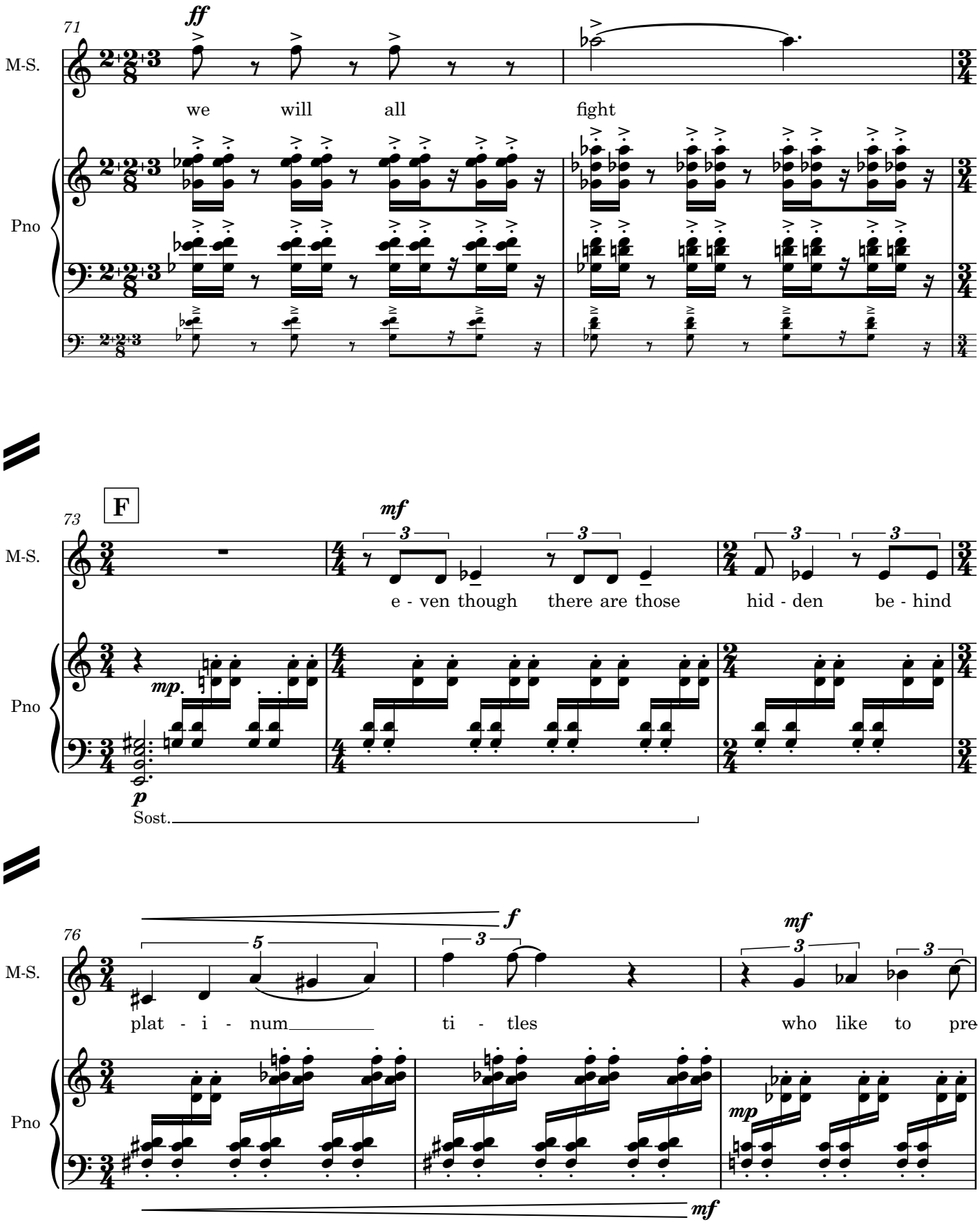

♩ = 120
29
mf
C
M-S.
mo - ther o - cean o - ver the edge
Pno
mf
p
Ped.
32
mp
M-S.
no one's drown - ing ba - by no one's
Pno
(Ped.)
Ped.
35
M-S.
mov - ing no one's los - ing their home - - land
Pno
(Ped.)
Ped.
Ped.

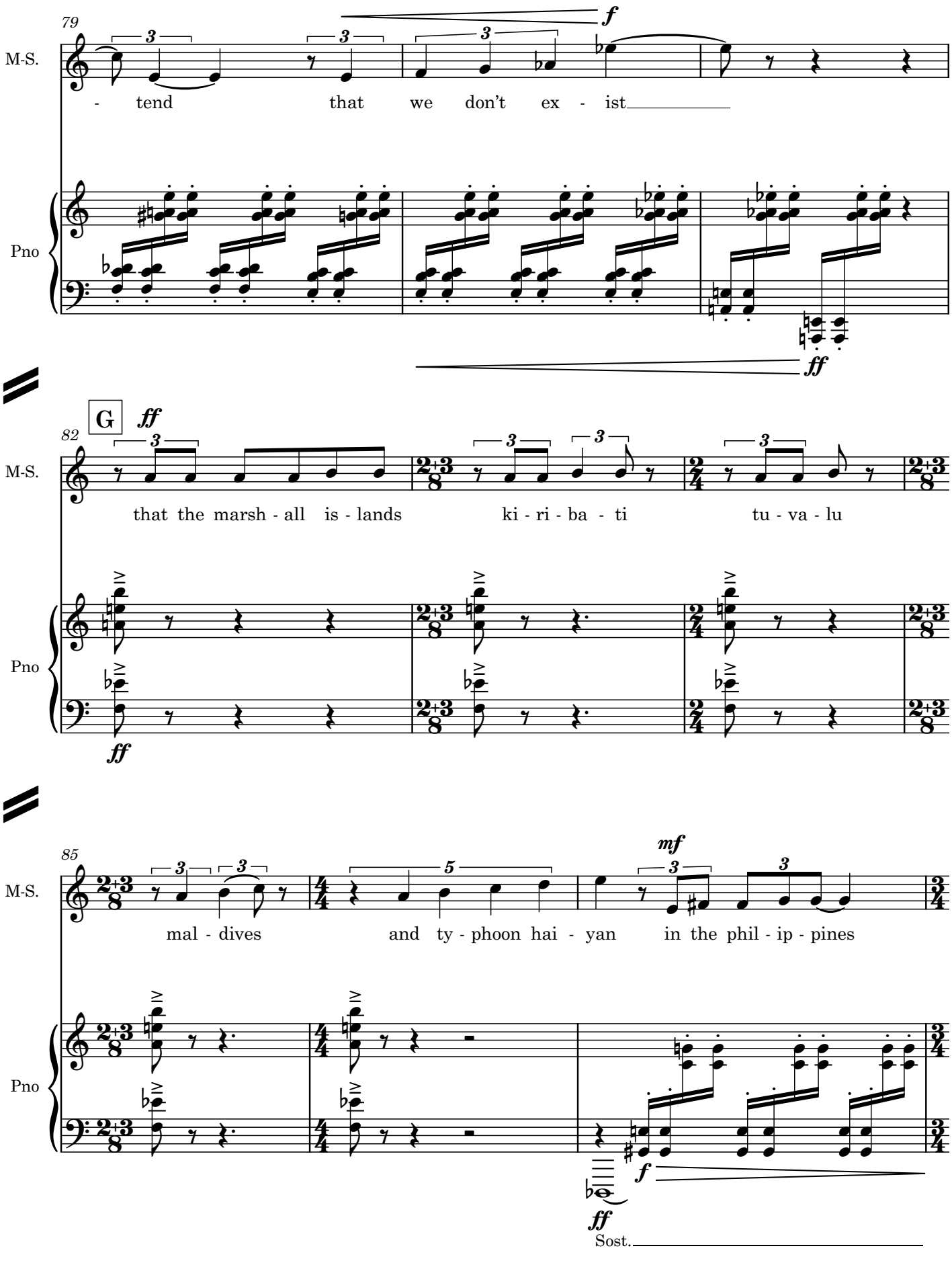

38
mf
cresc.
M-S.
no one's gon - na be - come
Pno
mf
Sost.
Sost.
41
f
M-S.
a cli - mate change re - fu - gee
Pno
(Sost.)
♩= 96
Freely
44
p
M-S.
or should I say no one else to the
D
♩= 66
mp
catch resonance
Pno
ffpp
silently depress keys
Ped.
Sost.

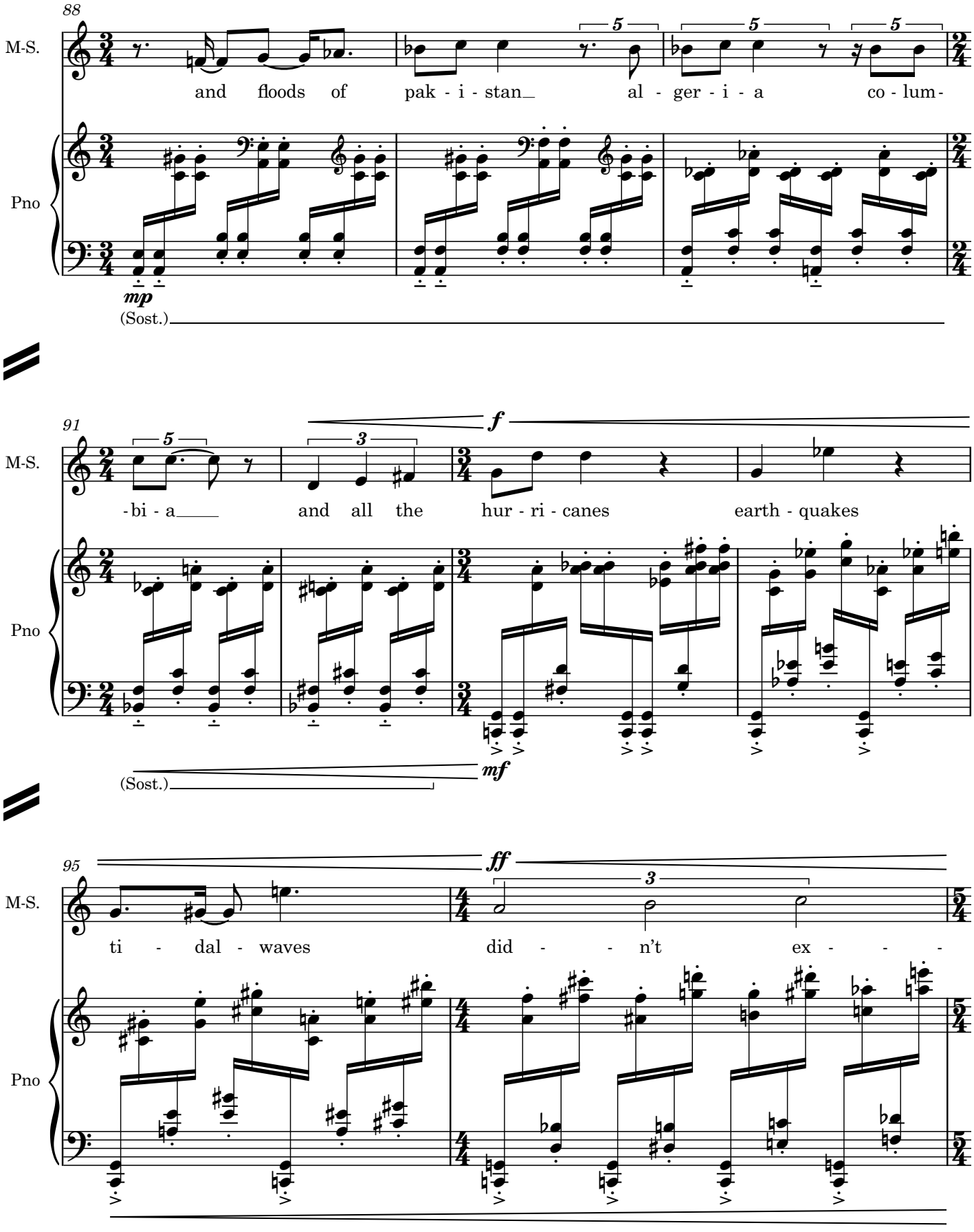

♪ = ♪ sempre (unless indicated otherwise)
49
M-S.
car - ter - et is - land - ers of pa - pua new gui - nea and to the
Pno
pp
ffpp
Ped.
(Sost.)
52
M-S.
ta - ro is - land - ers of the sol - o - mon is - lands
Pno
pp
Ped.
(Sost.)
molto rit.
♩ = 66
54
M-S.
i take this mo - ment to a - pol - i - gize to you
Pno
(pp)
ff
Ped.

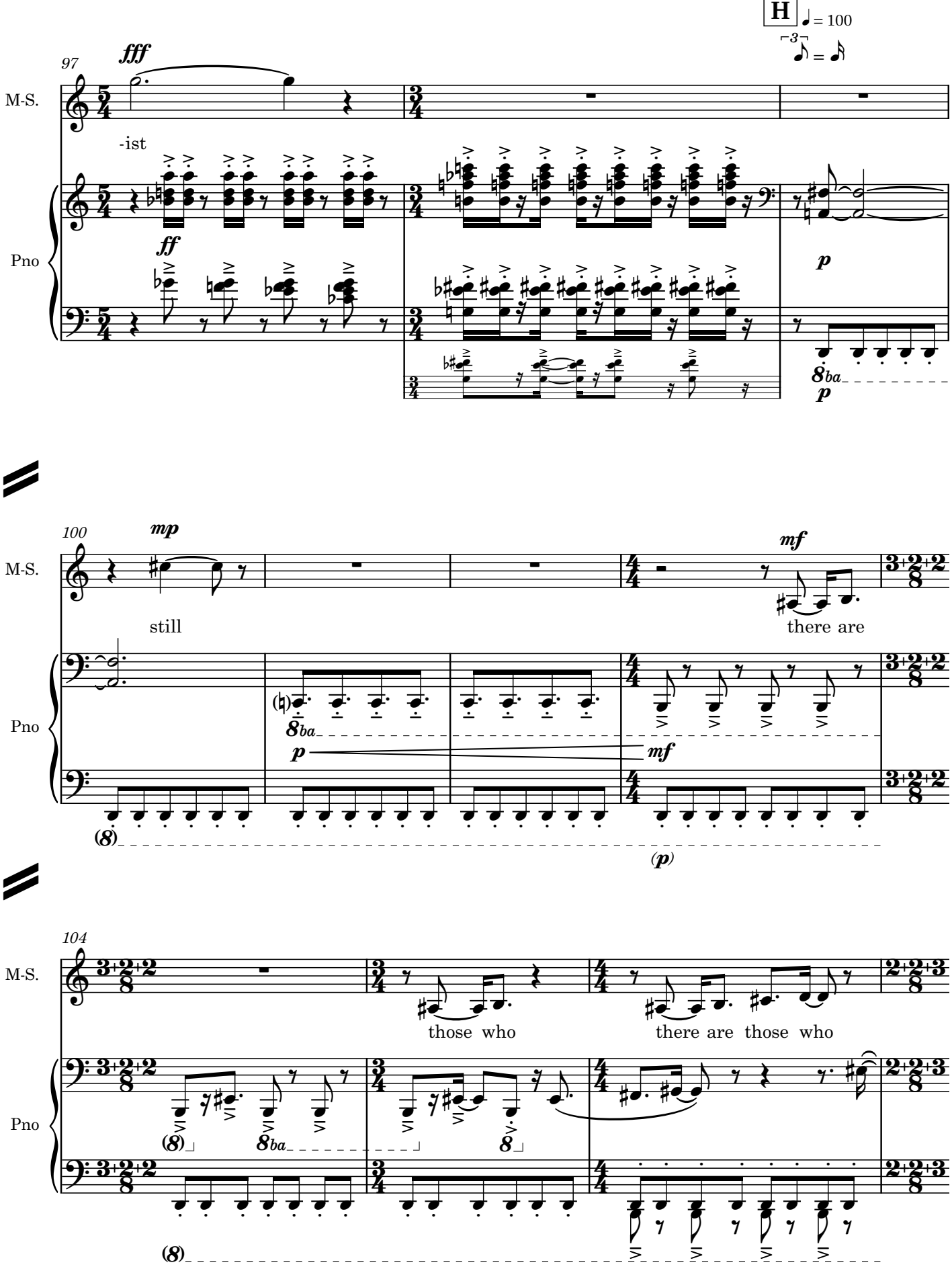

E
Doppio movimento (Agitato) ♩= 132
57
M-S.
we are draw - ing
Pno
ff
(Ped.)
60
M-S.
mf
be - - cause ba -
Pno
pp
p
62
M-S.
- - by
we are
Pno

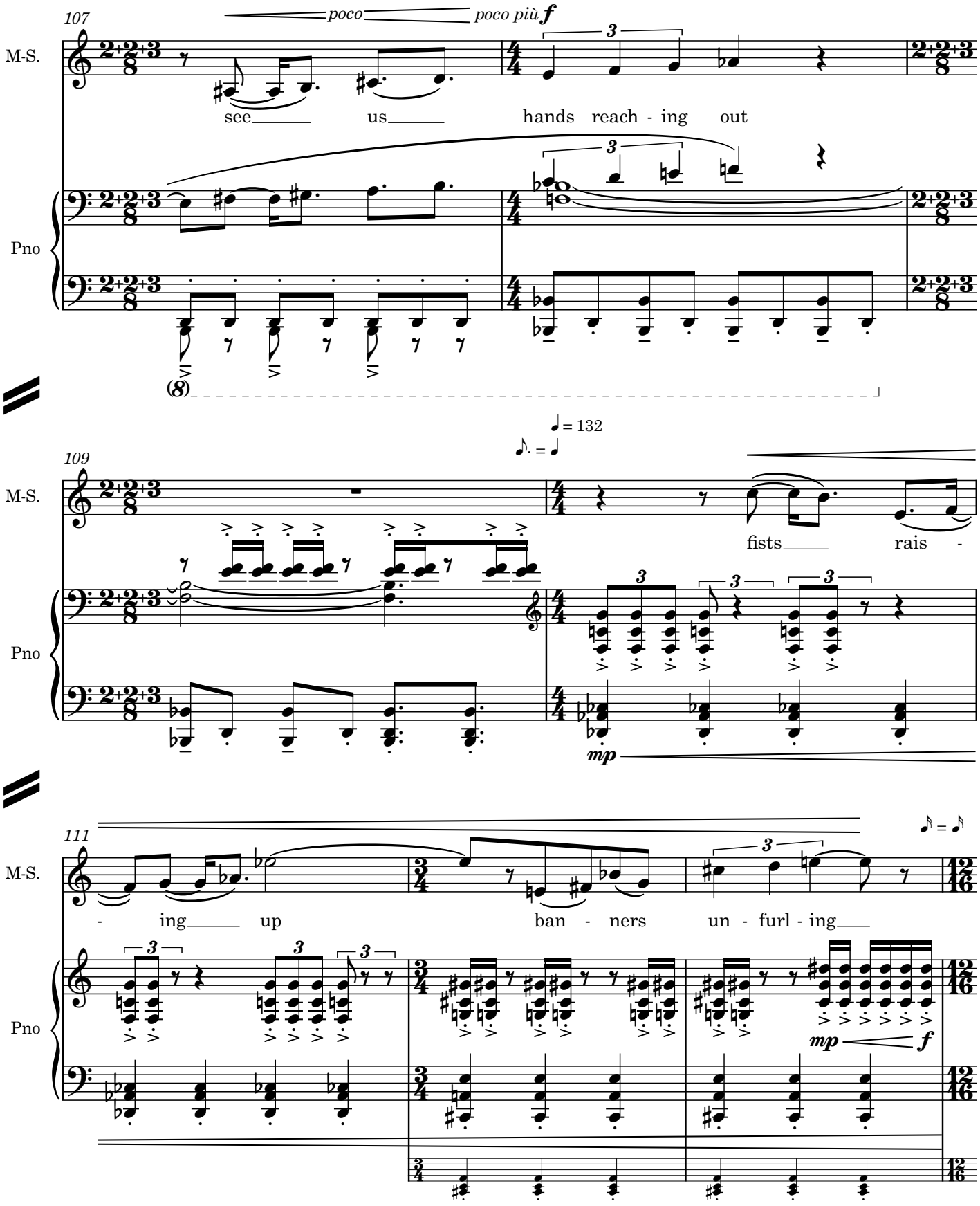

64
f
M-S.
go - ing to fight
Pno
66
mf
M-S.
your mom - my dad - dy bu - bu ji - ma
Pno
Ped.
68
f
M-S.
your coun - try and pre - si - dent too
Pno
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.

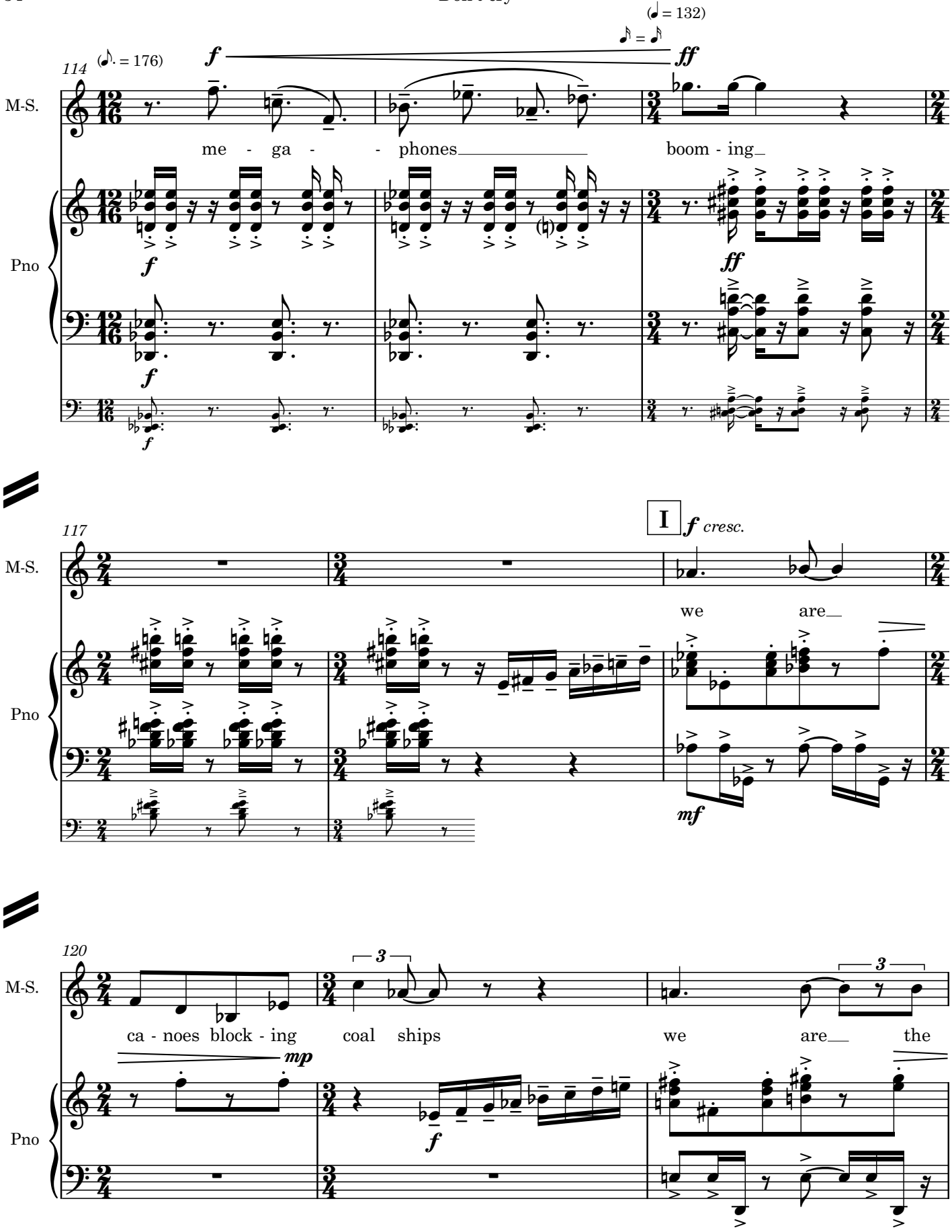

71
ff
M-S.
we will all fight
Pno
F
73
mf
e - ven though there are those hid - den be - hind
mp.
p
Sost.
76
f
mf
plat - i - num ti - tles who like to pre
mp
mf

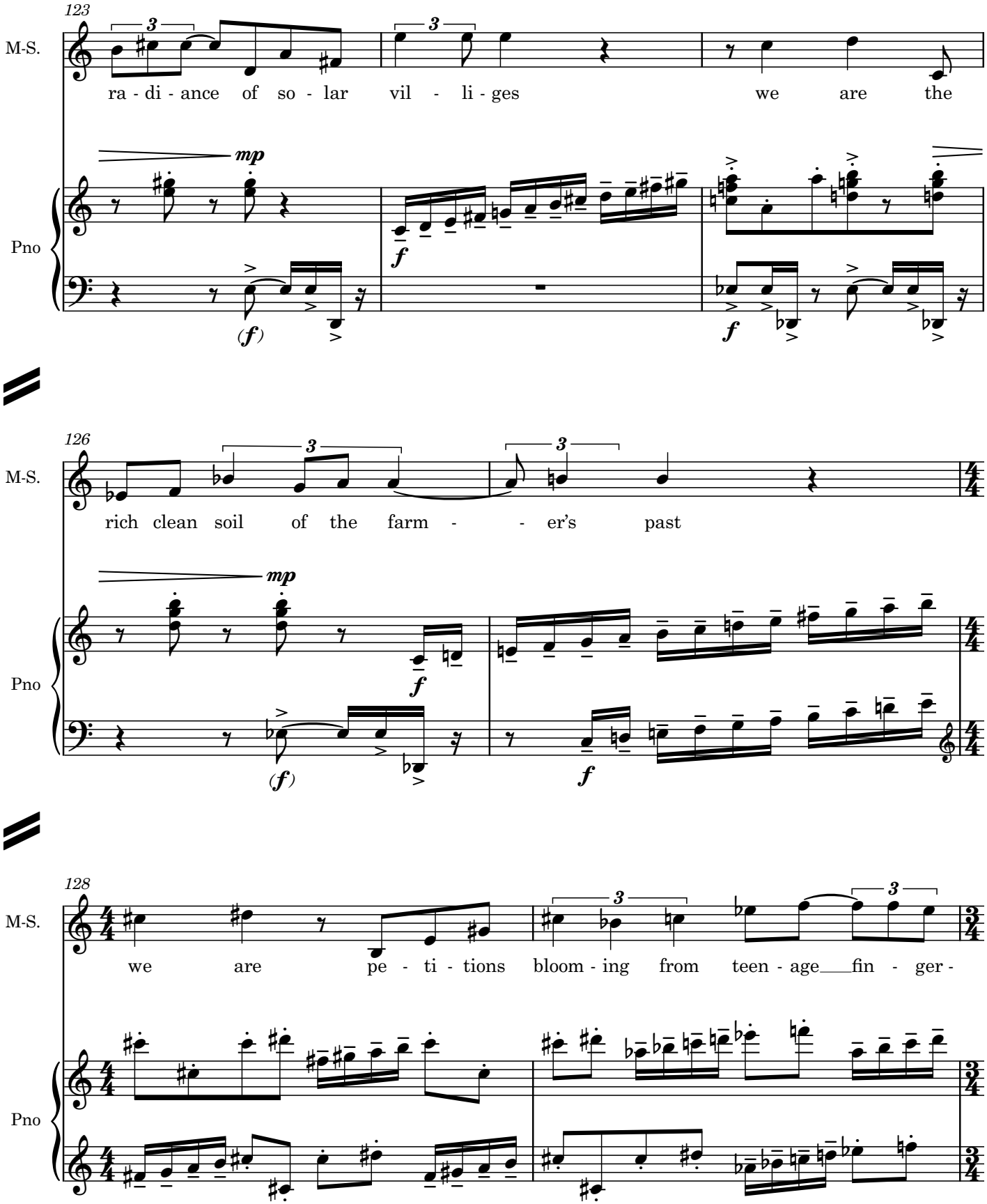

79
M-S.
- tend that we don't ex - ist
Pno
f
ff
G
82
ff
M-S.
that the marsh - all is - lands ki - ri - ba - ti tu - va - lu
Pno
ff
85
M-S.
mal - dives and ty - phoon hai - yan in the phil - ip - pines
mf
Pno
f
ff
Sost.

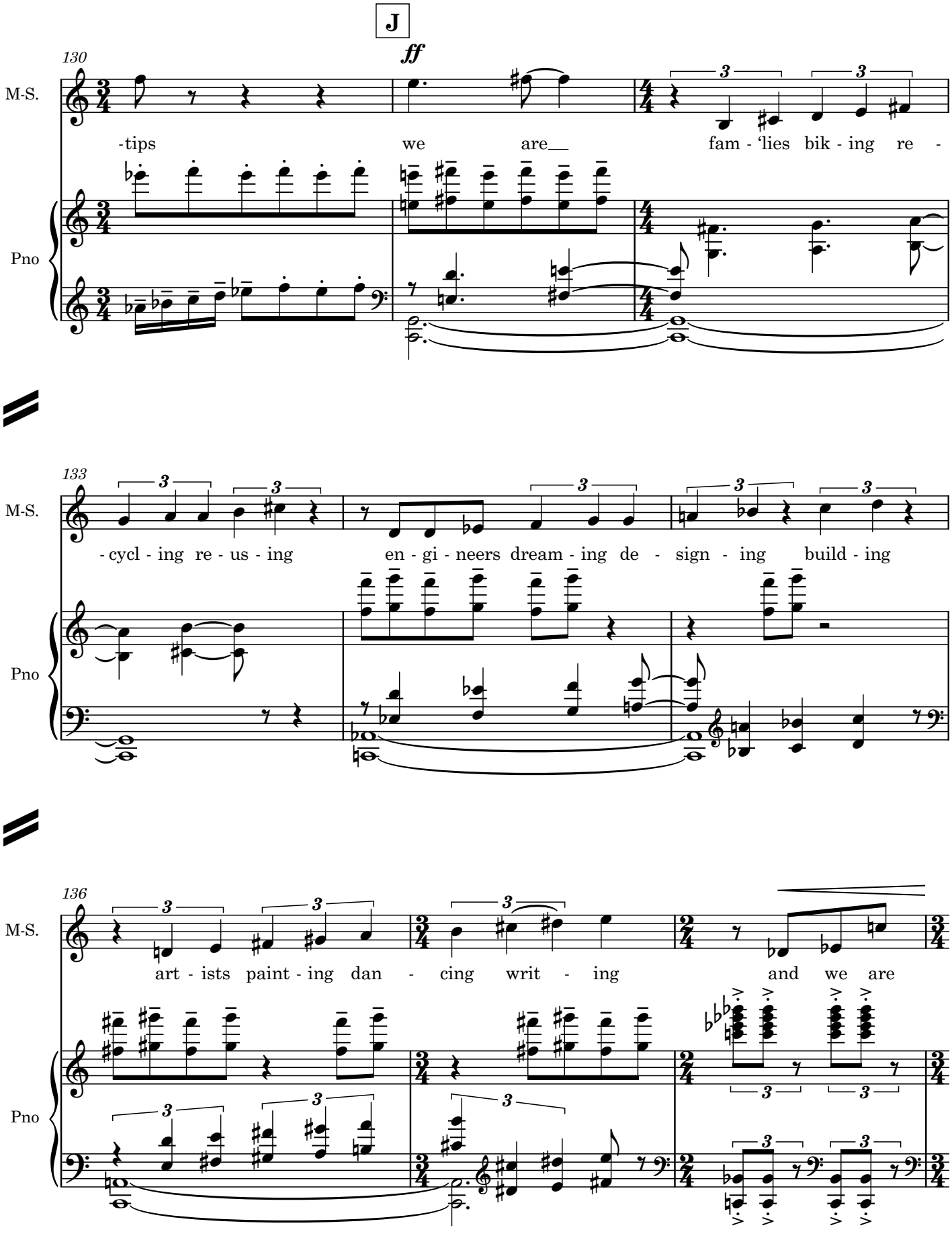

88
M-S.
and floods of pak - i - stan al - ger - i - a co - lum -
Pno
mp
(Sost.)
91
M-S.
-bi - a and all the hur - ri - canes earth - quakes
f
mf
Pno
(Sost.)
95
M-S.
ti - dal - waves did - - n't ex - - -
ff
Pno

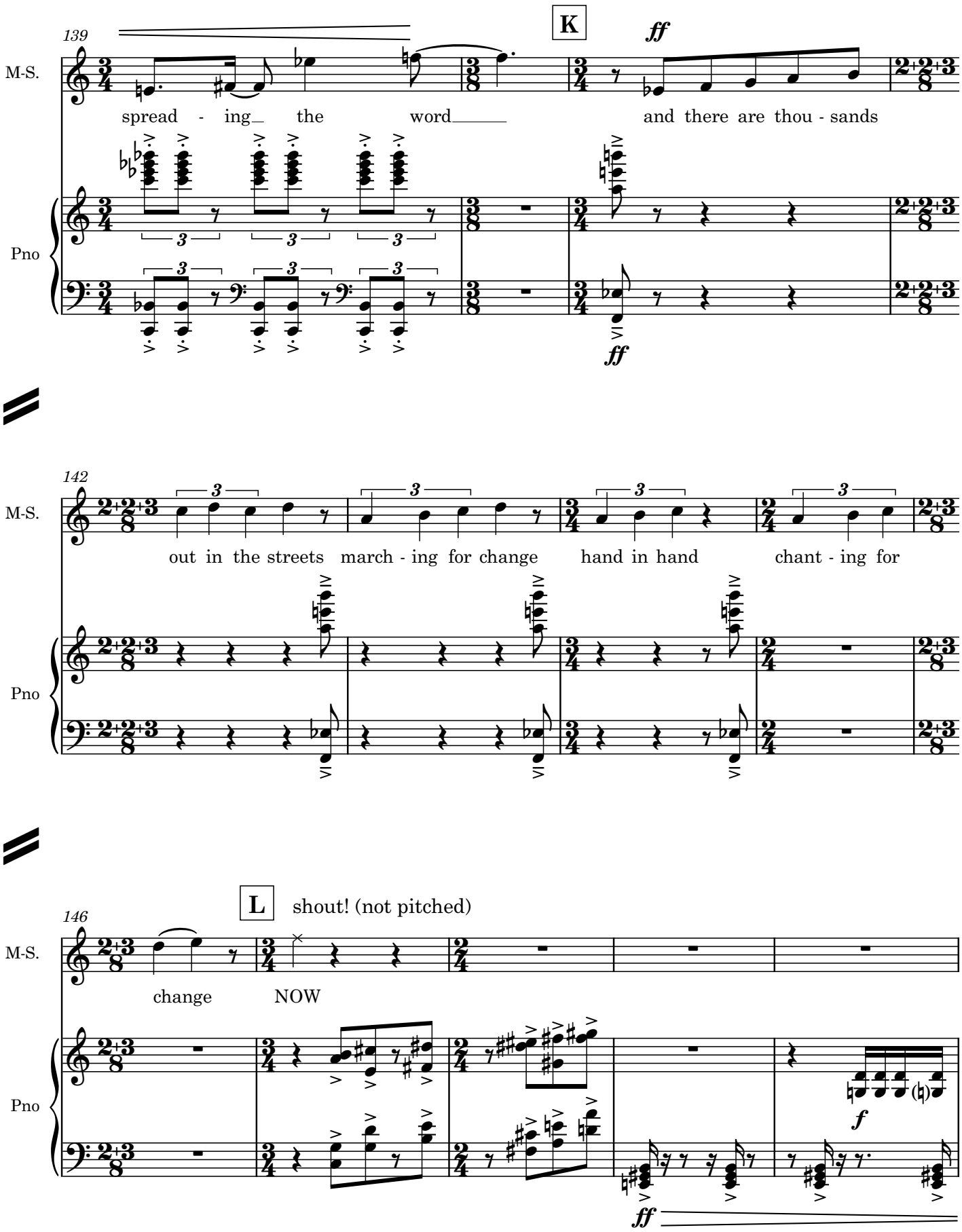

H
♩ = 100
97
fff
M-S.
-ist
Pno
ff
p
8ba
p
100
mp
mf
still
there are
8ba
p
mf
(8)
(p)
104
those who
there are those who
(8)
8ba
8
(8)

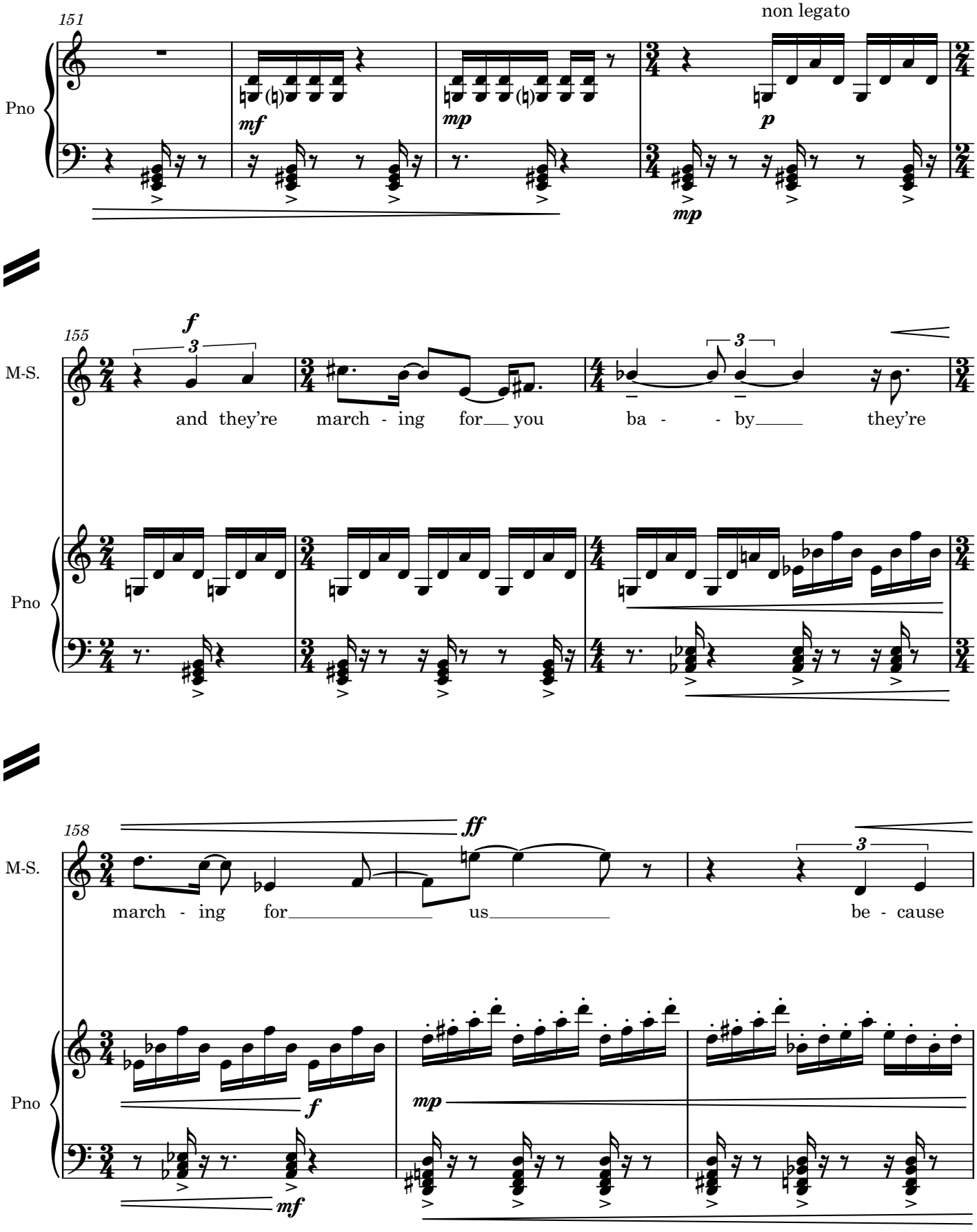

107
poco
poco più f
M-S.
see us hands reach - ing out
Pno
(8)
109
♩ = 132
M-S.
fists rais -
Pno
mp
111
M-S.
- ing up ban - ners un - furl - ing
Pno
mp f

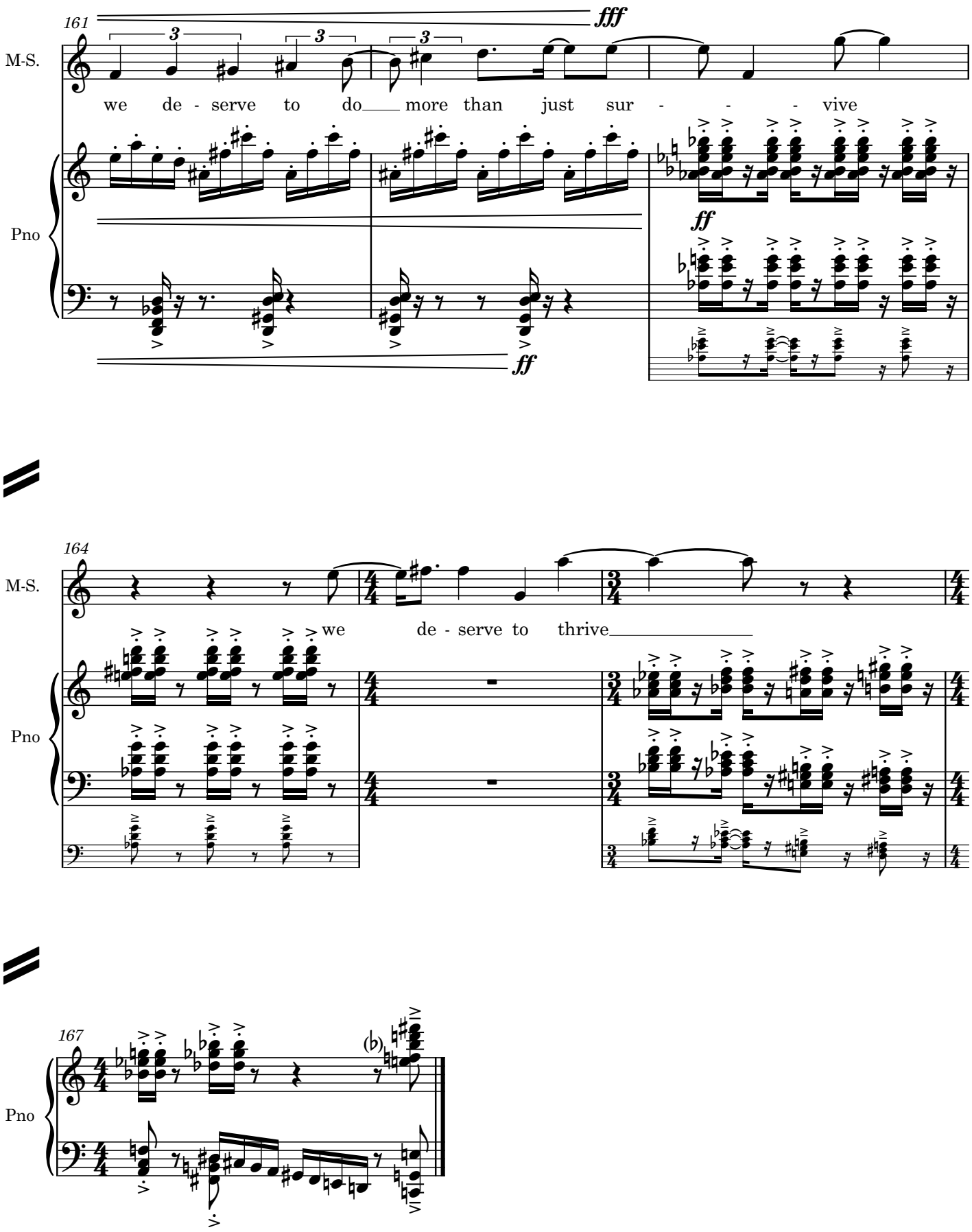

114
(♪. = 176)
(♩ = 132)
♪ = ♪
f
ff
M-S.
me - ga - - phones boom - ing
Pno
117
I
f cresc.
we are
mf
120
3
ca - noes block - ing coal ships we are the
mp
f


123
M-S.
ra - di - ance of so - lar vil - li - ges we are the
Pno
126
rich clean soil of the farm - - er's past
128
we are pe - ti - tions bloom - ing from teen - age fin - ger -

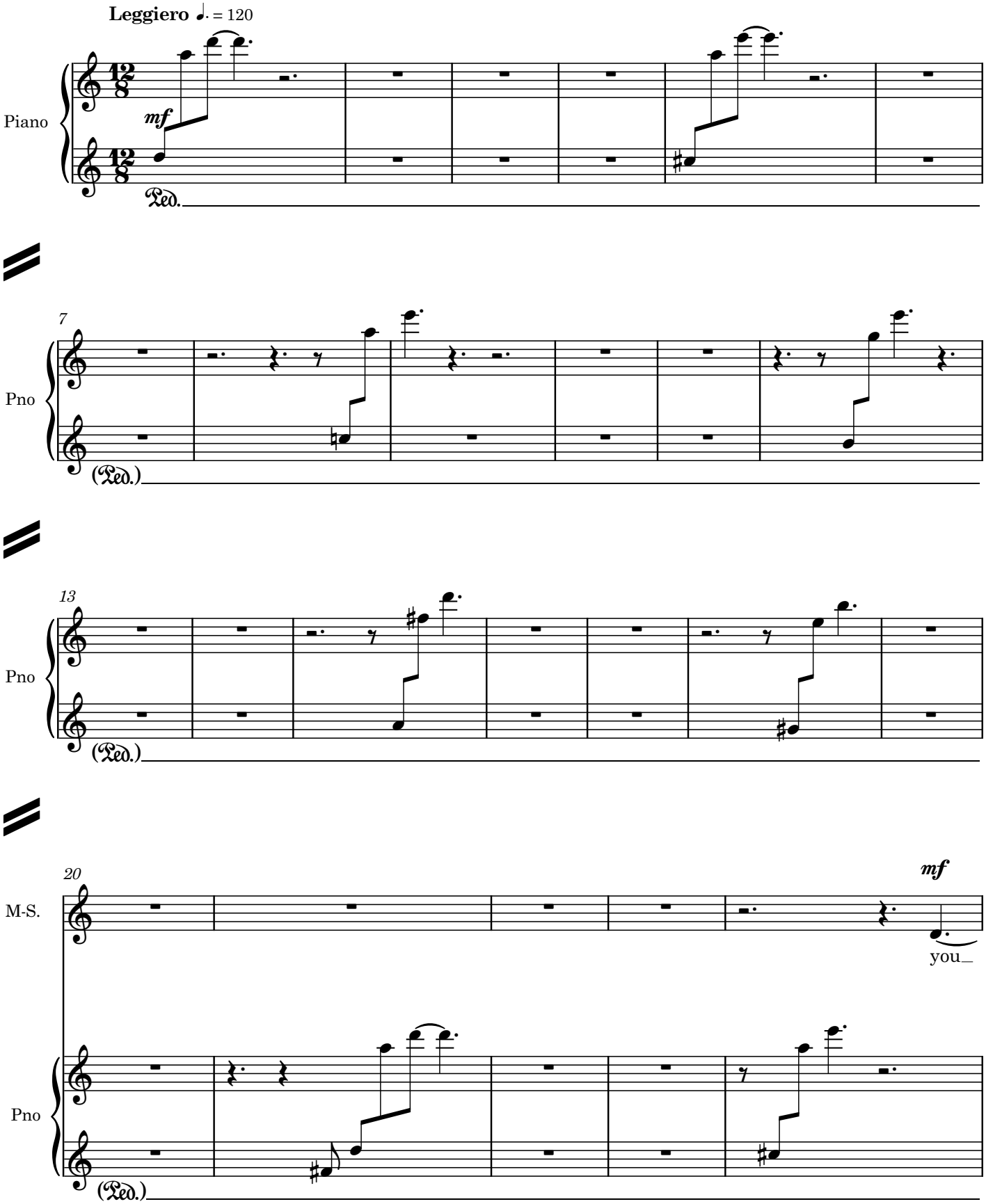

J
130
ff
M-S.
Pno
-tips we are fam - 'lies bik - ing re -
133
M-S.
Pno
- cycl - ing re - us - ing en - gi - neers dream - ing de - sign - ing build - ing
136
M-S.
Pno
art - ists paint - ing dan - cing writ - ing and we are

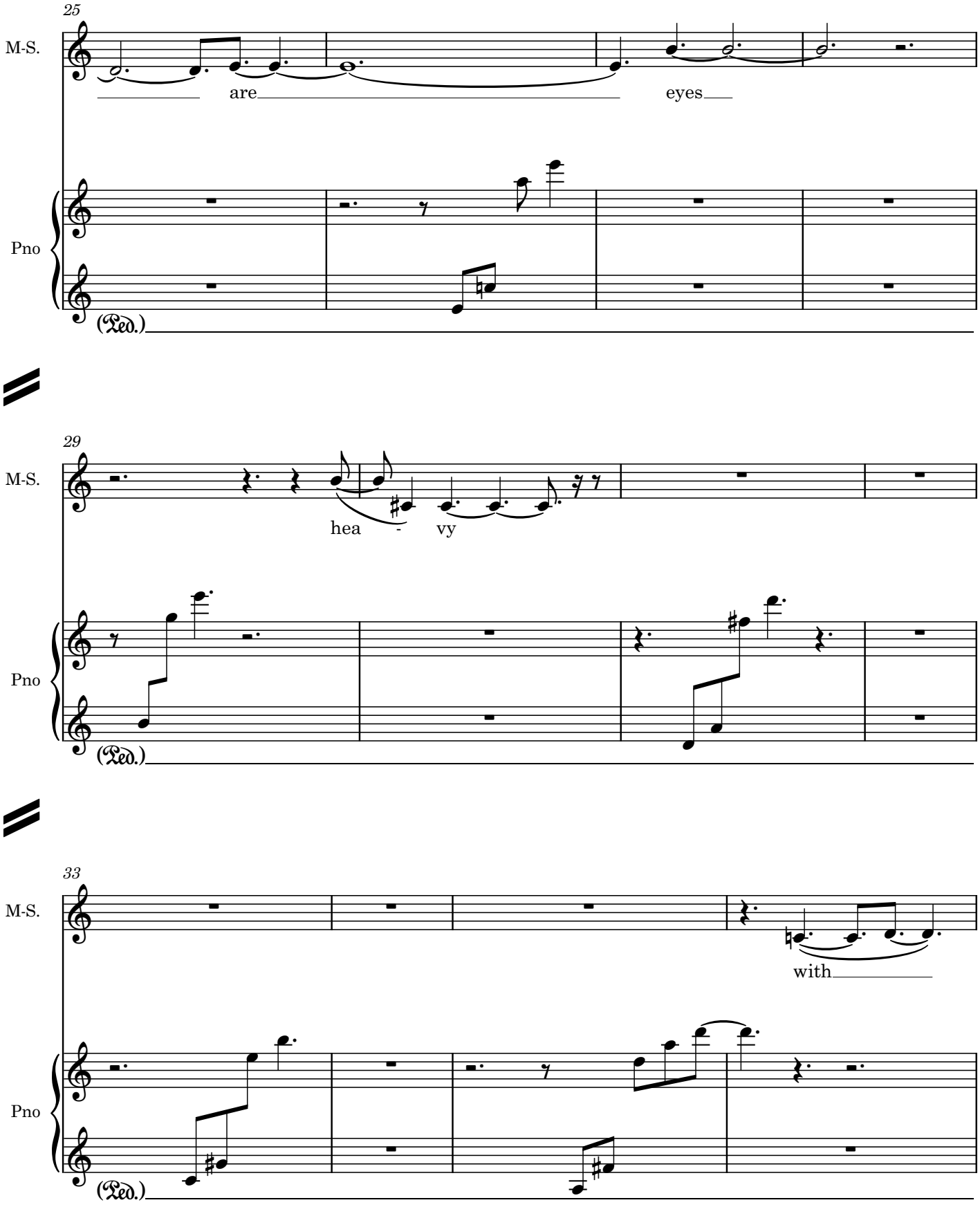

139
K
ff
M-S.
spread - ing the word and there are thou - sands
Pno
ff
142
M-S.
out in the streets march - ing for change hand in hand chant - ing for
Pno
L
shout! (not pitched)
146
M-S.
change NOW
Pno
f
ff

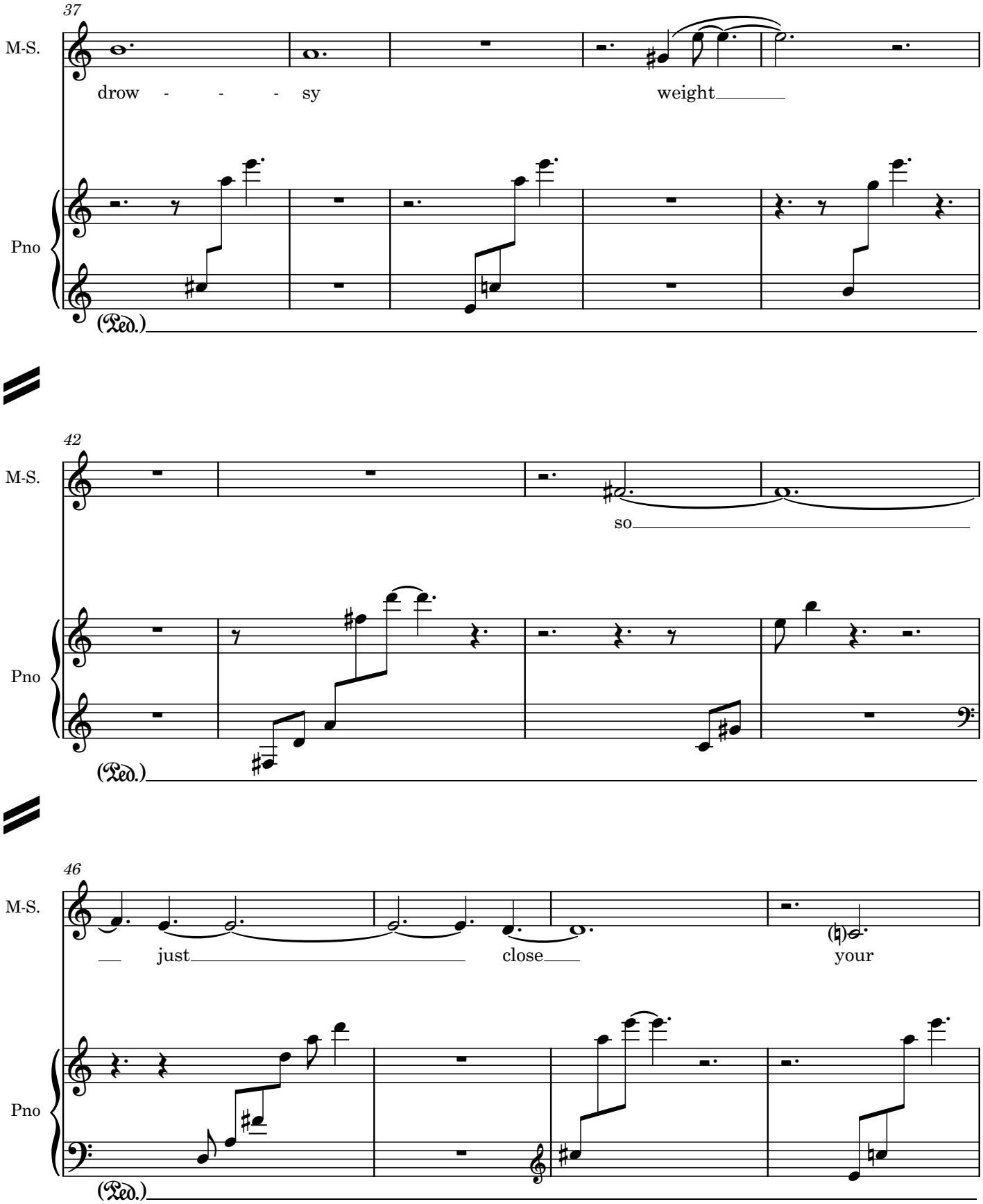

151
non legato
Pno
mf
mp
p
mp
155
M-S.
f
3
and they're march - ing for you
3
ba - - by they're
Pno
158
M-S.
ff
march - ing for us
3
be - cause
Pno
f
mf
mp

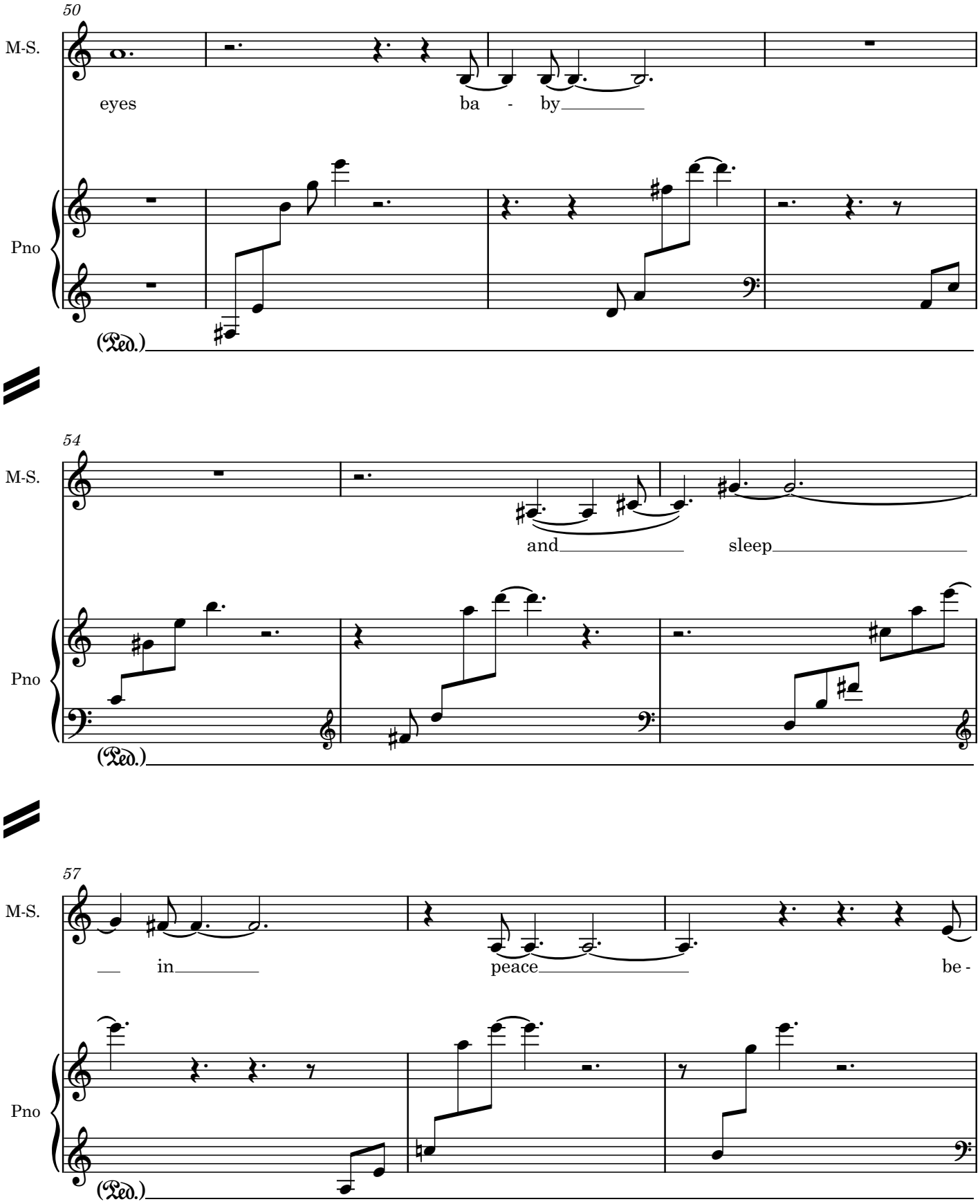

161
fff
M-S.
we de - serve to do more than just sur - - - vive
Pno
ff
ff
164
M-S.
we de - serve to thrive
Pno
167
Pno

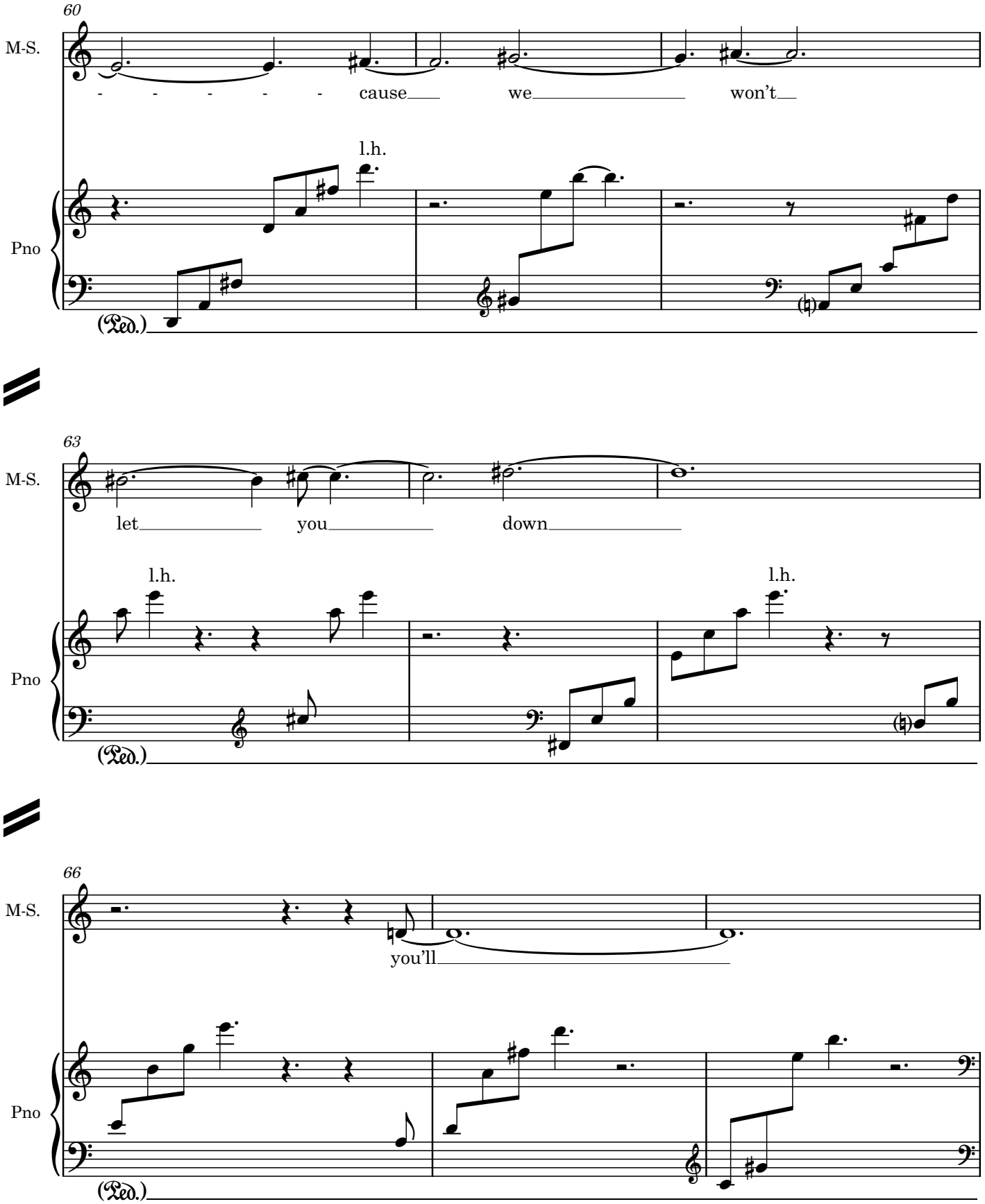
4. You'll see

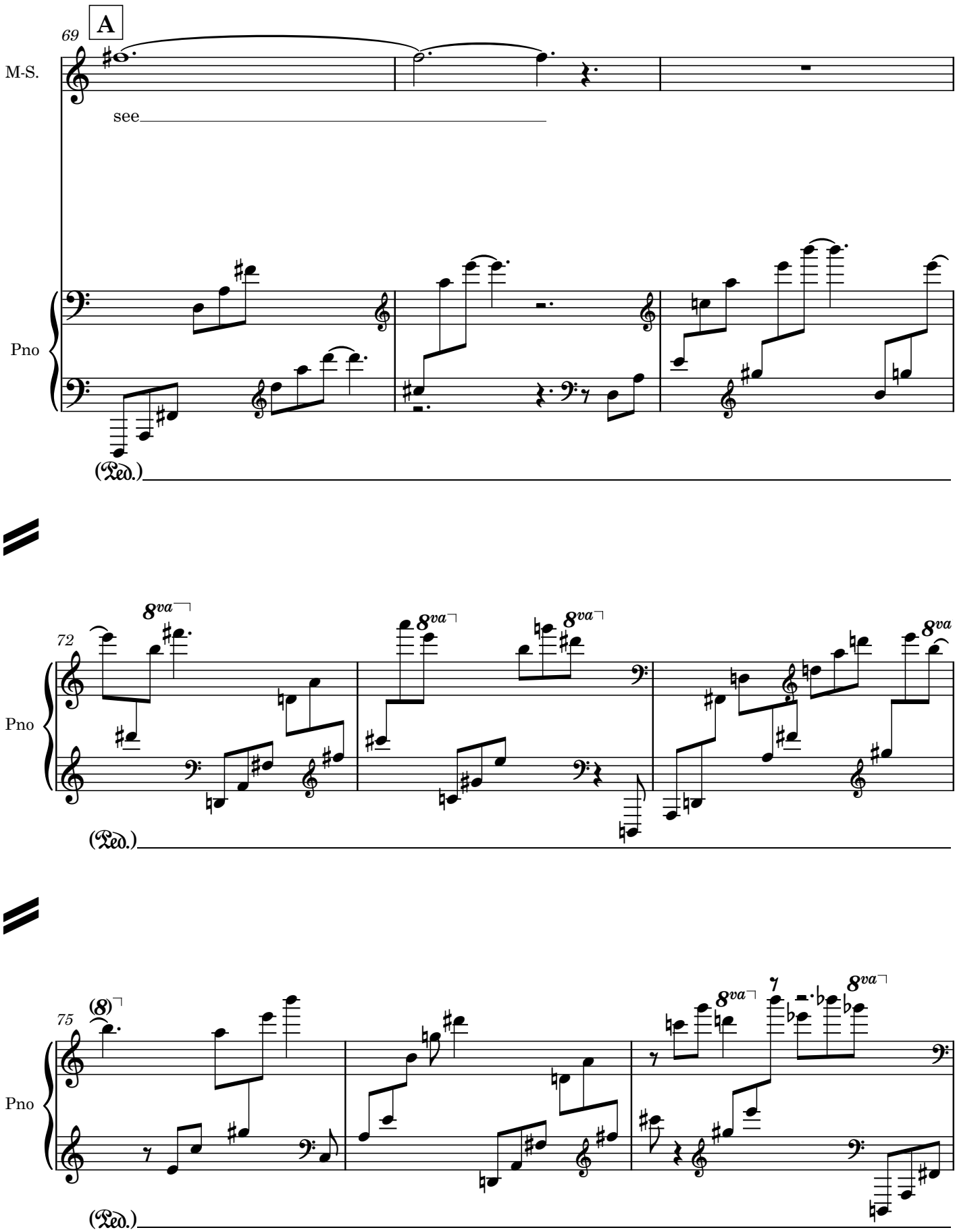

Leggiero ♩. = 120
Piano
mf
Ped.
7
Pno
(Ped.)
13
Pno
(Ped.)
20
M-S.
mf
you_
Pno
(Ped.)

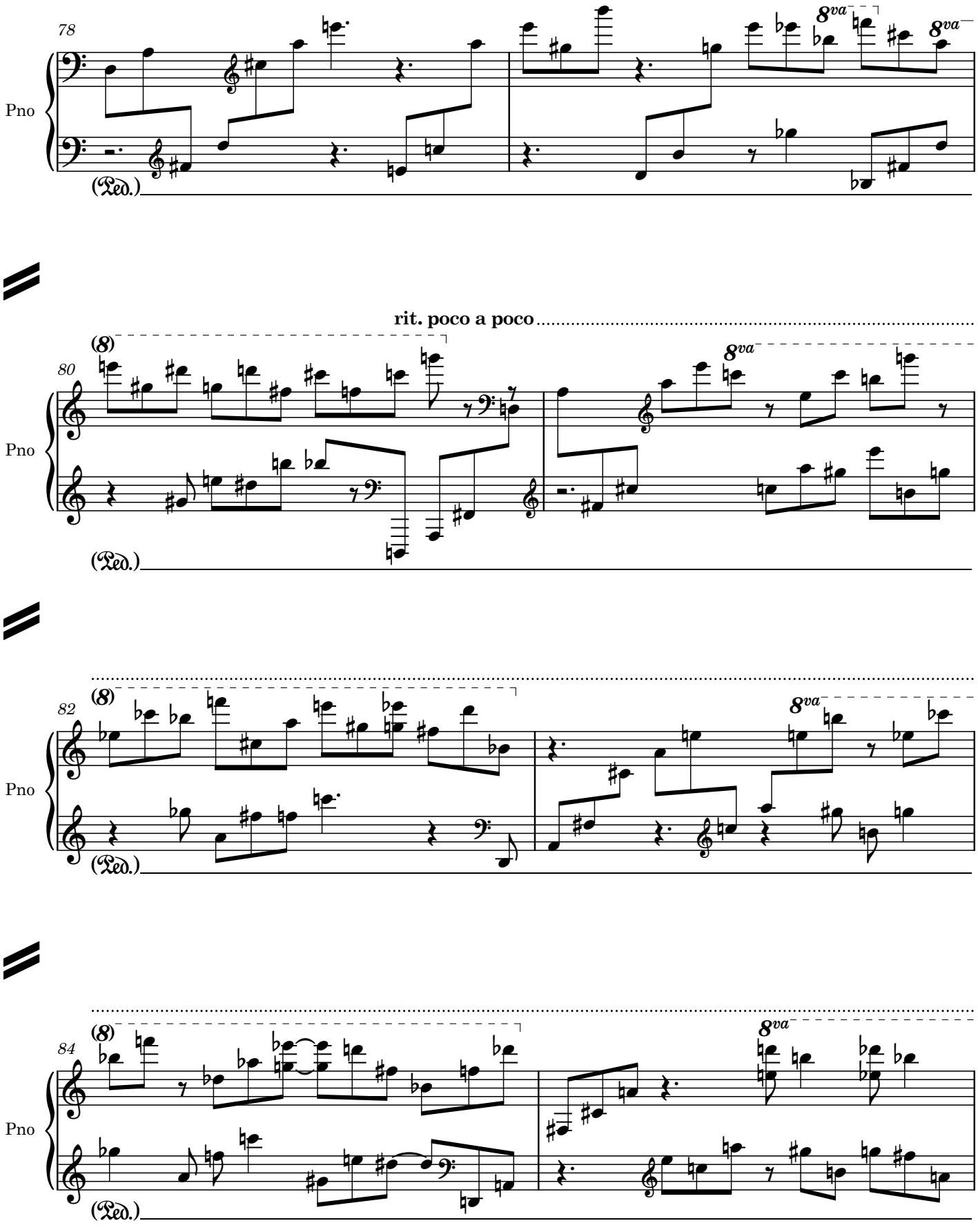

25
M-S.
are
eyes
Pno
(Ped.)
29
M-S.
hea
-
vy
Pno
(Ped.)
33
M-S.
with
Pno
(Ped.)

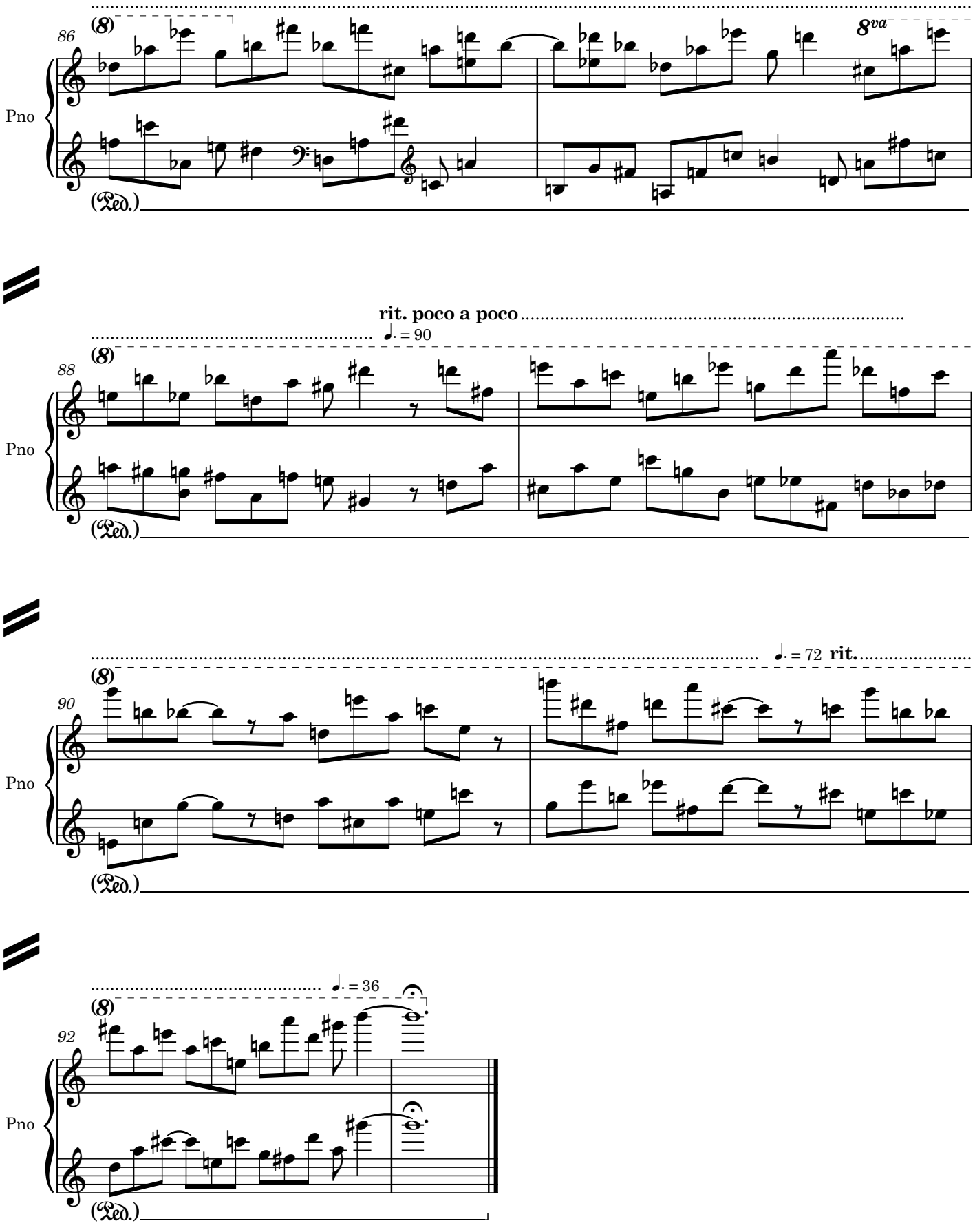

37
M-S.
drow - - - sy
weight
Pno
(Ped.)
42
M-S.
so
Pno
(Ped.)
46
M-S.
just
close
your
Pno
(Ped.)


50
M-S.
eyes
ba - by
Pno
(Ped.)
54
M-S.
and
sleep
Pno
(Ped.)
57
M-S.
in
peace
be -
Pno
(Ped.)


60
M-S.
- - - - - cause we won't
l.h.
Pno
(Ped.)
63
M-S.
let you down
l.h.
l.h.
Pno
(Ped.)
66
M-S.
you'll
Pno
(Ped.)


A
69
M-S.
see
Pno
(Ped.)
72
8va
Pno
(Ped.)
75
(8)
8va
Pno
(Ped.)


78
Pno
8va
8va
(Ped.)
rit. poco a poco
(8)
80
Pno
8va
(Ped.)
(8)
82
Pno
8va
(Ped.)
(8)
84
Pno
8va
(Ped.)


86
(8)
8va
Pno
(Ped.)
rit. poco a poco
♩. = 90
88
(8)
Pno
(Ped.)
♩. = 72 rit.
90
(8)
Pno
(Ped.)
♩. = 36
92
(8)
Pno
(Ped.)