Ethan Hayden

DIE AUFGABE DES ÜBERSETZERS

- for six voices -

(S Ms A T Br Bs)

2015-16

DIE AUFGABE DES ÜBERSETZERS is a setting of the Walter Benjamin essay of the same title. Rather than setting the text directly, a variety of techniques have been utilized to set Benjamin's words while also realizing the philosopher's approach to translation theory.

One aspect of this is realized in the piece's "nonsense" settings: One paragraph of Benjamin's essay has undergone a homophonic translation by the composer, and it is this translation (which renders the sounds of Benjamin's German into a near-homophonic English equivalent) that has been set rather than the original German or a semantic translation thereof.

Another aspect is realized in the "Wörtlich" movements, in which the literal syntactic structure of specific sentences from the original text are translated into musical structures whose complexity mirrors that of the original text's syntax.

The 22-minute piece consists of eleven movements in three suites:

I.

N. 1 "Un cygne qui s'était évadé de sa cage"
N. 2 Wörtlich I
N. 3 Elf-gobble
N. 4 un-Trotsky riding vague sins

II.

N. 5 "Des Escorchés et des Squelettes"
N. 6 Wörtlich II
N. 7 Ten-vase conga rider
N. 8 Fry height

III.

N. 9 Four book words
N. 10 Thrifty carrion zoos
N. 11 Wörtlich III / "Babel d'escaliers et d'arcades"

Special thanks to Zach Wellstood & Tianyi Xie for their assistance in the transcription and translation of Benjamin's syntax.

N. 1 *"Un cygne qui s'était évadé de sa cage"*

"Un [signe] qui s'était évadé de sa cage" ^

N. 2 *Wörtlich I*

[untexted]

N. 3 *Elf-gobble*

Air shined,
The elf gobbled the Superset, sir.
Sin saw him licked, sewed, roan.
The vagrant ear, a low song
sick unto a dark drink,
"le kazoo," for Finn's turn—
Yawn! These are elf-gobbles!
in their rubber-set song dens.
Amen.

N. 4 *un-Trotsky riding vague sins*

Super?
Then how's an un-Trotsky riding vague sins on first-hand liquor?
Too few rend him [annoying sentence]
Your hunt,
our standing hole,
their land: Suffolk.

N. 5 *"Des Escorchés et des Squelettes"*

"Des Ecorchés et des Squelettes […]
de vos muscles dépouillés"

"des visages sans lèvre,
Des lèvres sans couleur, des mâchoires sans dent" ^

N. 6 *Wörtlich II*

[untexted]

N. 7 *Ten-vase conga rider*

Leaker, fervent
on these a bigger frustrates
        a nine
        a moon
outflows like ants
                (viz., Paul).
Ten-vase conga rider destroy a forty!

N. 8 *Fry height*

Troy and fry height, fry
hide their single mace envy—
        their gobble—
                and in here, them deans.
Troy: an echidna's force!

N. 9 *Four book words*

Four book words:
        dusty,
        gross,
        stain-soaked.

N. 10 *Thrifty carrion zoos*

Her note went:
"Eager, advise a moose also?
        yea / nay?
For thereon—
        therein wrecked off their hand
        therein grinds their fur
        broken, leaked out
thrifty carrion zoos."
                Amen.

N. 11 *Wörtlich III / "Babel d'escaliers et d'arcades"*

Le végétal irrégulier […]
L'enivrante monotonie […]
Babel d'escaliers et d'arcades […]
pierres inouïes ^

zu erlöschen be-stimmt *

All texts from Ethan Hayden, *The Elf Gobbled the Superset, sir* (2015-16), except:

^ Charles Baudelaire, *Tableaux Parisiens* (1861)

* Walter Benjamin, 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,' (1923)

"[…] And then there are translations that hurl one language against another […] taking the original text for a projectile and treating the translating language like a target. Their task is not to lead a meaning back to itself or anywhere else; but to use the translated language to derail the translating language."

—Michel Foucault

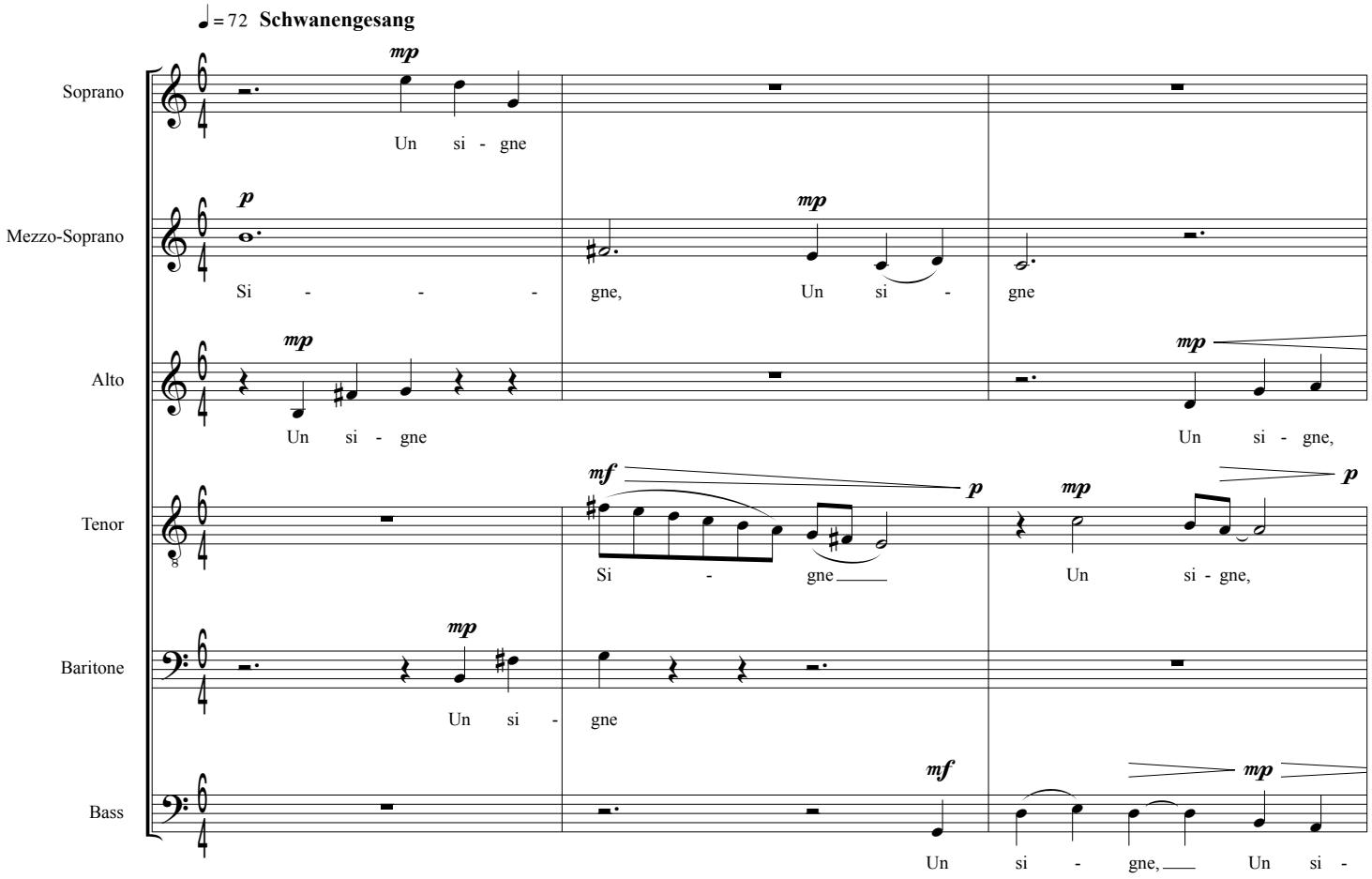
"Les mots qui saignent" (trans. Lawrence Venuti), *L'Express* 29 (August 1969), 30.

Ethan Hayden

DIE AUFGABE DES ÜBERSETZERS

I

N. 1 *"Un cygne qui s'était évadé de sa cage"*



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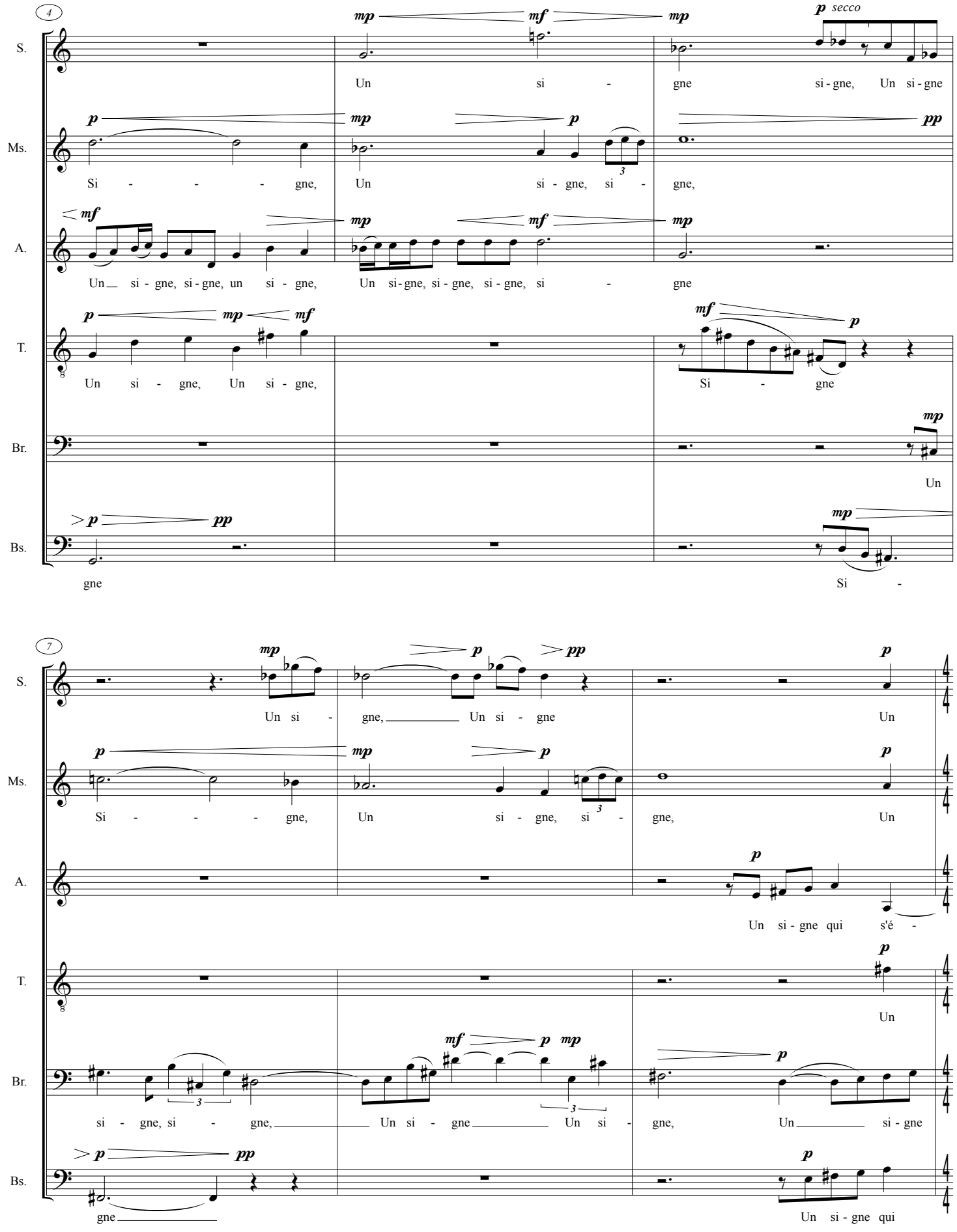
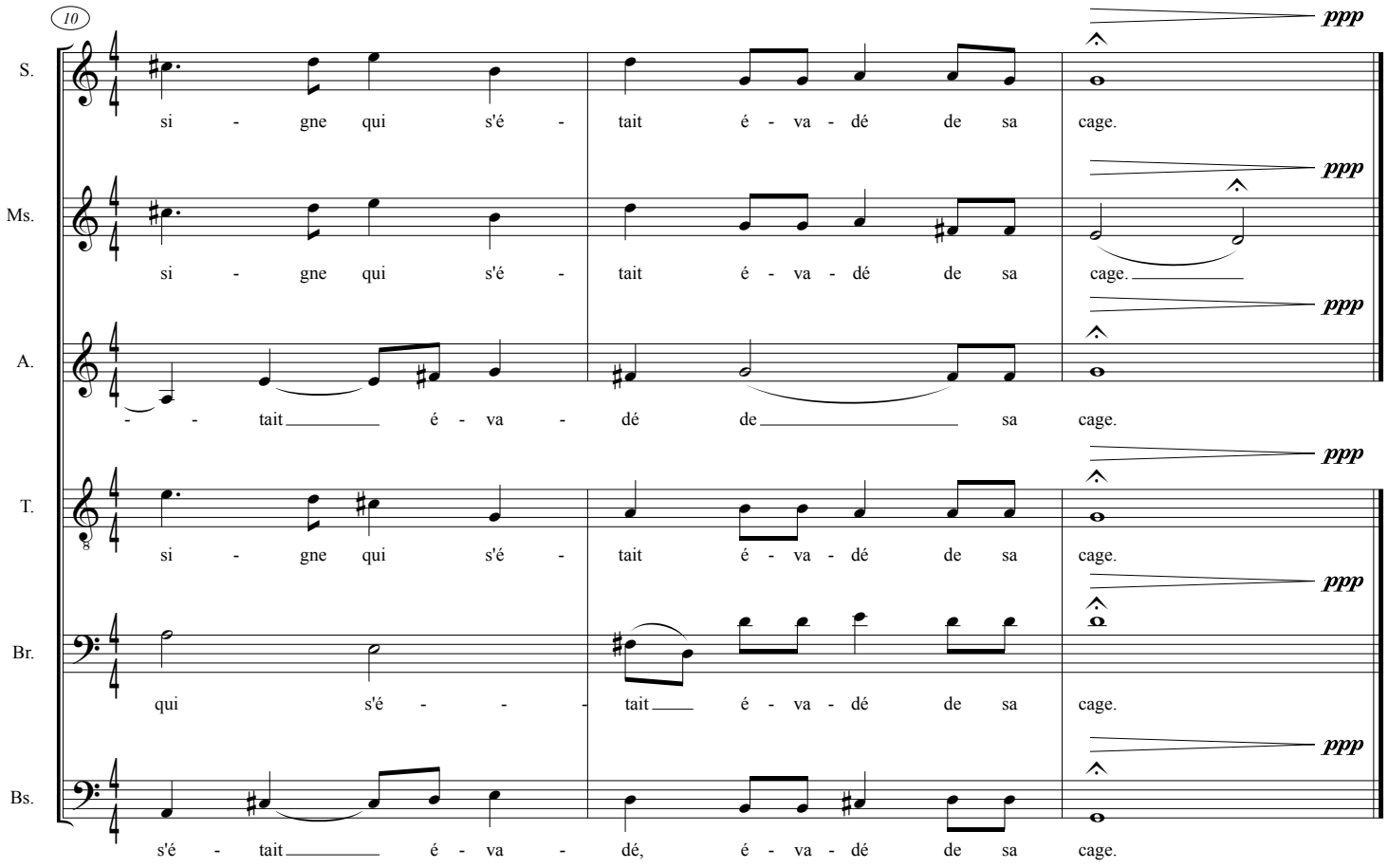
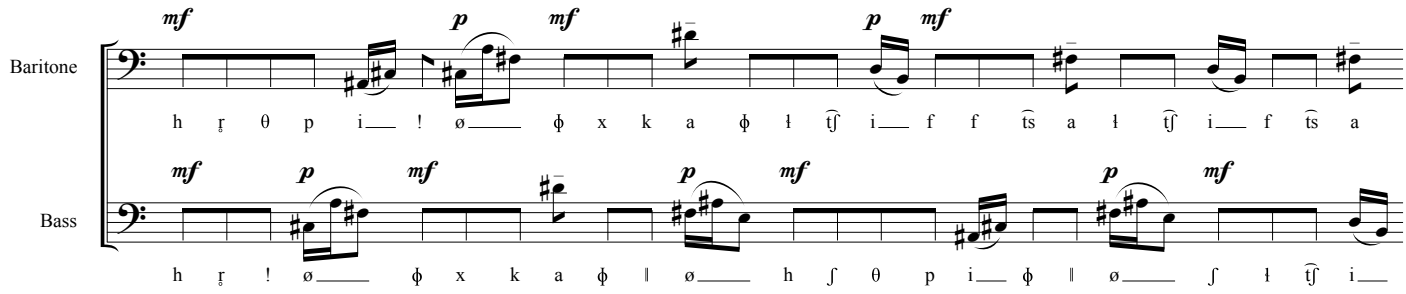

4
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
Br.
Bs.
mp mf mp p secco
Un si - gne si - gne, Un si - gne
p mp p pp
Si - - - gne, Un si - gne, si - gne,
mf mp mf mp
Un si - gne, si - gne, un si - gne, Un si - gne, si - gne, si - gne, si - gne
p mp mf mf p
Un si - gne, Un si - gne, Si - gne
mp
Un
p pp mp
gne Si -
7
mp p pp p
Un si - gne, Un si - gne Un
p mp p p
Si - - - gne, Un si - gne, si - gne, Un
p
Un si - gne qui s'é -
p
Un
mf p mp p
si - gne, si - gne, Un si - gne Un si - gne, Un si - gne
p pp p
gne Un si - gne qui


10
S.
si - gne qui s'é - tait é - va - dé de sa cage.
ppp
Ms.
si - gne qui s'é - tait é - va - dé de sa cage.
ppp
A.
- - tait é - va - dé de sa cage.
ppp
T.
si - gne qui s'é - tait é - va - dé de sa cage.
ppp
Br.
qui s'é - - - tait é - va - dé de sa cage.
ppp
Bs.
s'é - tait é - va - dé, é - va - dé de sa cage.
ppp

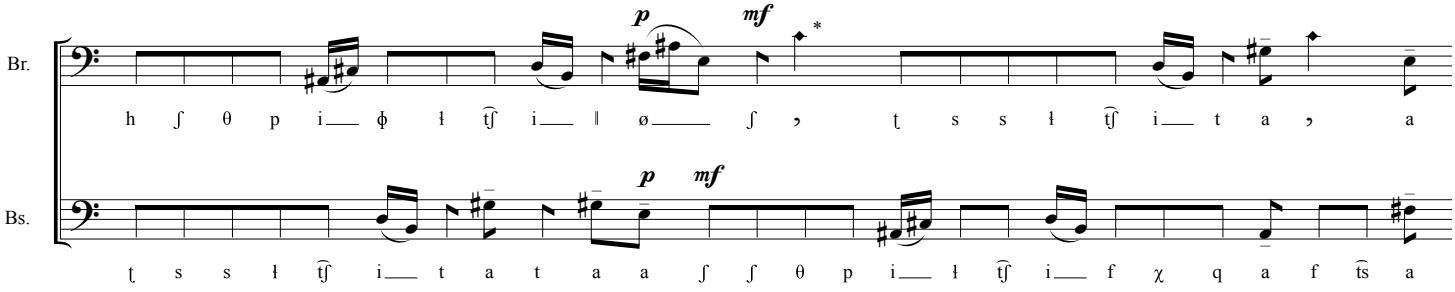
duration: ~1'

N. 2 *Wörtlich I*

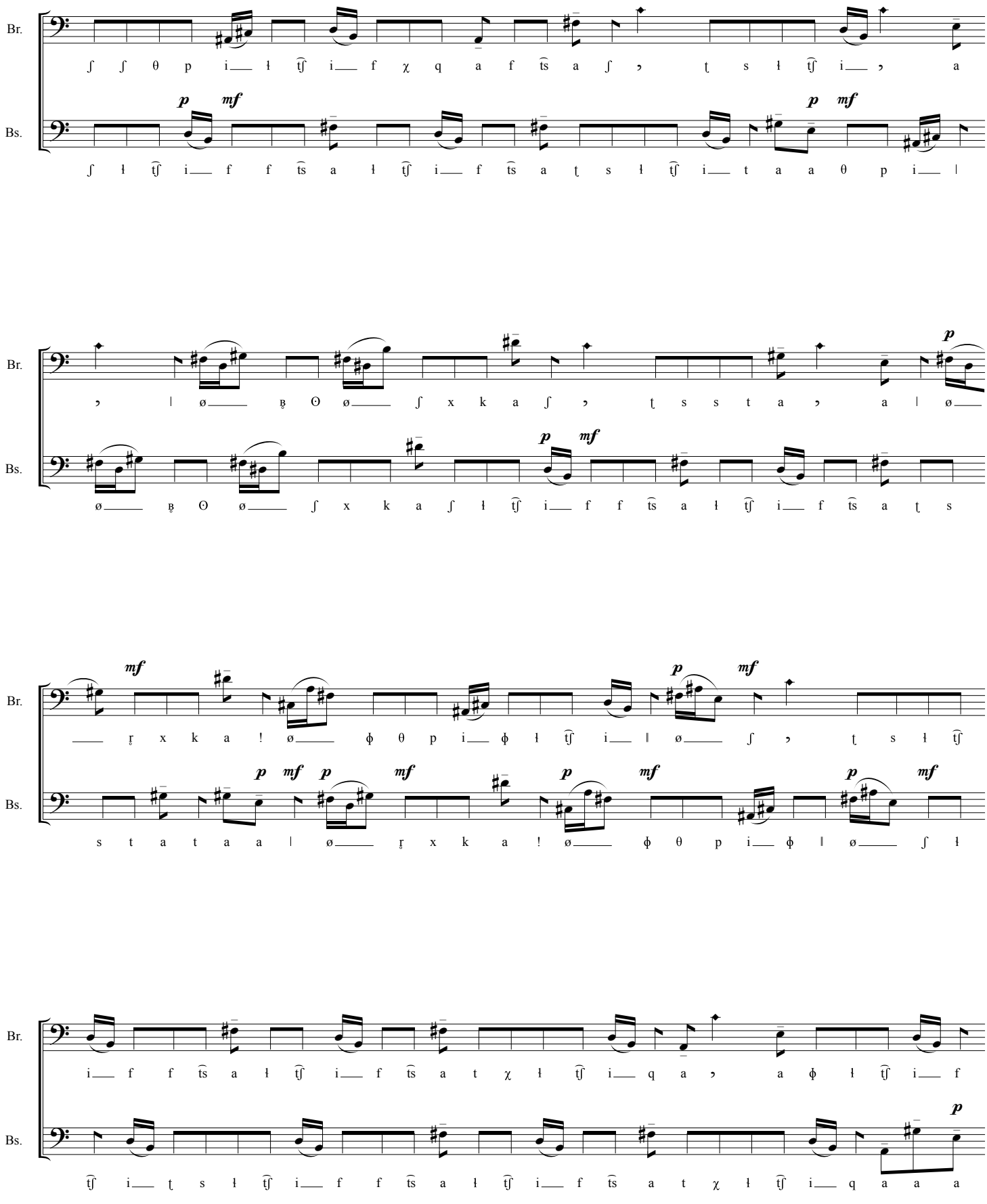
♪ = 240 **Colder / calder-esque**

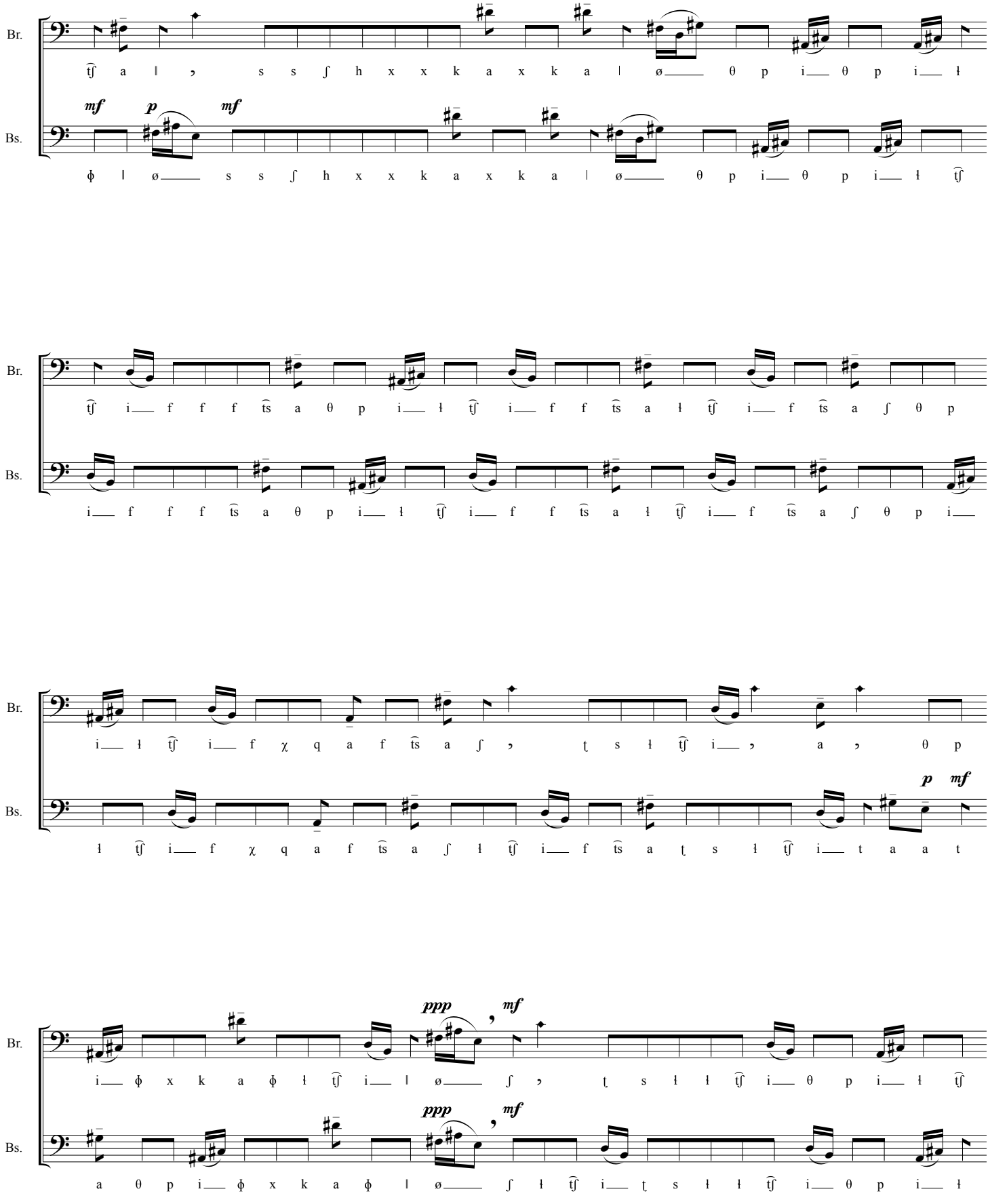


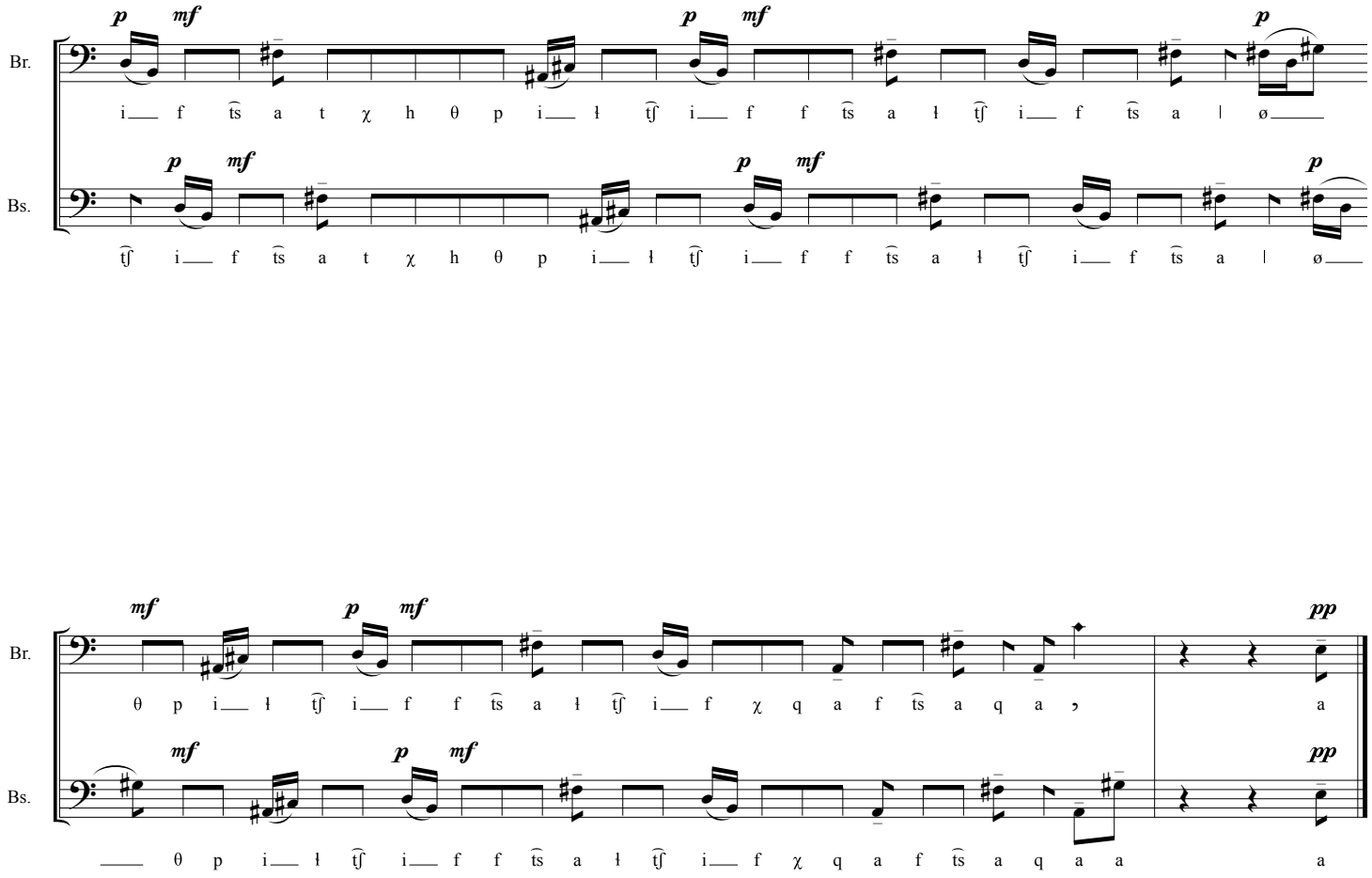
Note: Accidentals only modify the note they immediately precede



*Audible ingressive breath

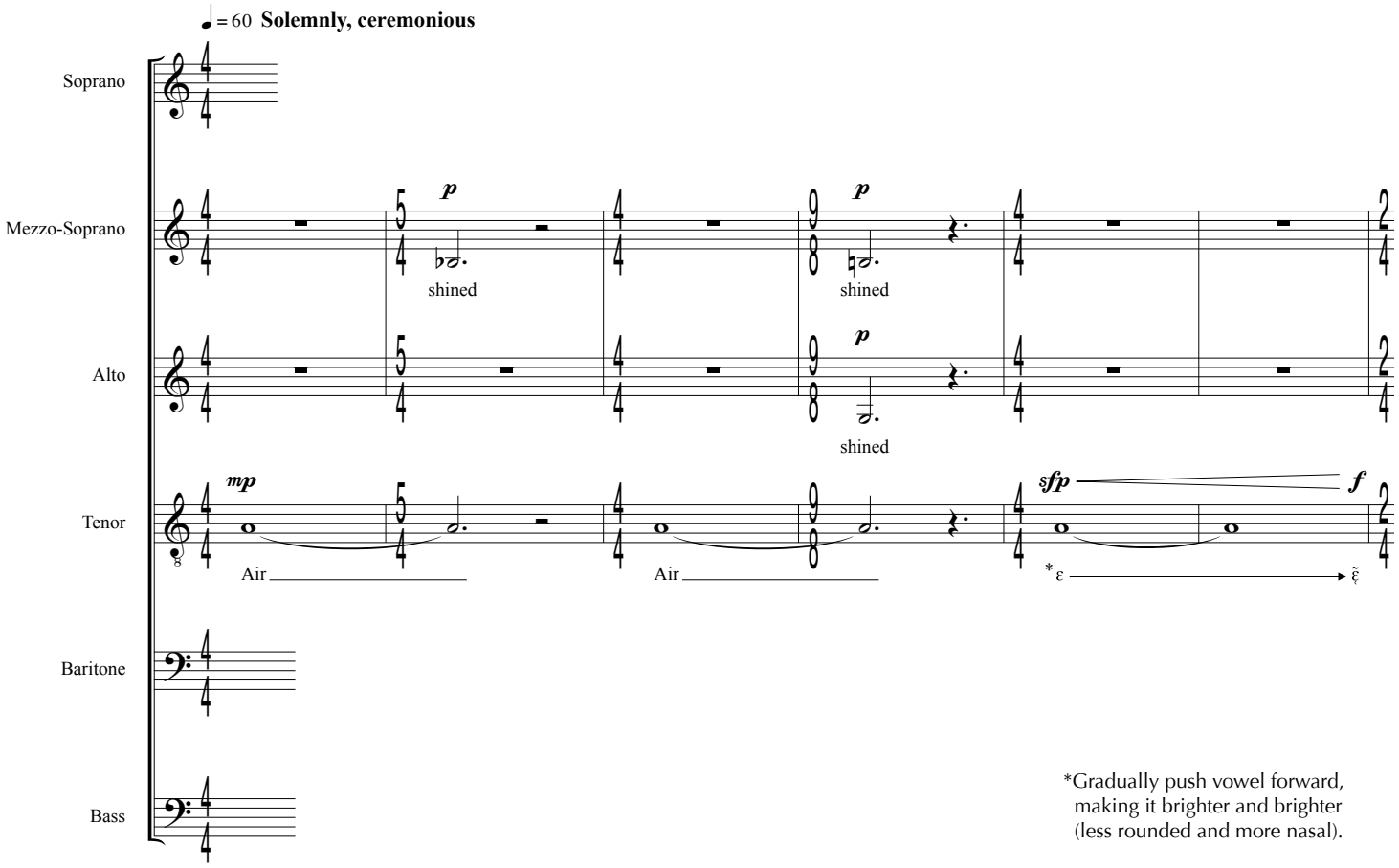

Br.
Bs.
ʃ ʃ θ p i ɬ t͡ʃ i f χ q a f t͡s a ʃ ˌ ʈ s ɬ t͡ʃ i ˌ a
ʃ ɬ t͡ʃ i f f t͡s a ɬ t͡ʃ i f t͡s a ʈ s ɬ t͡ʃ i t a a θ p i
ˌ ǀ ø ʁ̥ Θ ø ʃ x k a ʃ ˌ ʈ s s t a ˌ a ǀ ø
ø ʁ̥ Θ ø ʃ x k a ʃ ɬ t͡ʃ i f f t͡s a ɬ t͡ʃ i f t͡s a ʈ s
ʀ̥ x k a ! ø ɸ θ p i ɸ ɬ t͡ʃ i ǀ ø ʃ ˌ ʈ s ɬ t͡ʃ
s t a t a a ǀ ø ʀ̥ x k a ! ø ɸ θ p i ɸ ǀ ø ʃ ɬ
i f f t͡s a ɬ t͡ʃ i f t͡s a t χ ɬ t͡ʃ i q a ˌ a ɸ ɬ t͡ʃ i f
t͡ʃ i ʈ s ɬ t͡ʃ i f f t͡s a ɬ t͡ʃ i f t͡s a t χ ɬ t͡ʃ i q a a a


Br.
Bs.
mf
p
mf
tʃ a ǀ , s s ʃ h x x k a x k a ǀ ø θ p i θ p i ɬ
ɸ ǀ ø s s ʃ h x x k a x k a ǀ ø θ p i θ p i ɬ tʃ
tʃ i f f f ʦ a θ p i ɬ tʃ i f f ʦ a ɬ tʃ i f ʦ a ʃ θ p
i f f f ʦ a θ p i ɬ tʃ i f f ʦ a ɬ tʃ i f ʦ a ʃ θ p i
i ɬ tʃ i f χ q a f ʦ a ʃ , ʈ s ɬ tʃ i , a , θ p
ɬ tʃ i f χ q a f ʦ a ʃ ɬ tʃ i f ʦ a ʈ s ɬ tʃ i t a a t
p
mf
ppp
mf
i ɸ x k a ɸ ɬ tʃ i ǀ ø ʃ , ʈ s ɬ ɬ tʃ i θ p i ɬ tʃ
ppp
mf
a θ p i ɸ x k a ɸ ǀ ø ʃ ɬ tʃ i ʈ s ɬ ɬ tʃ i θ p i ɬ

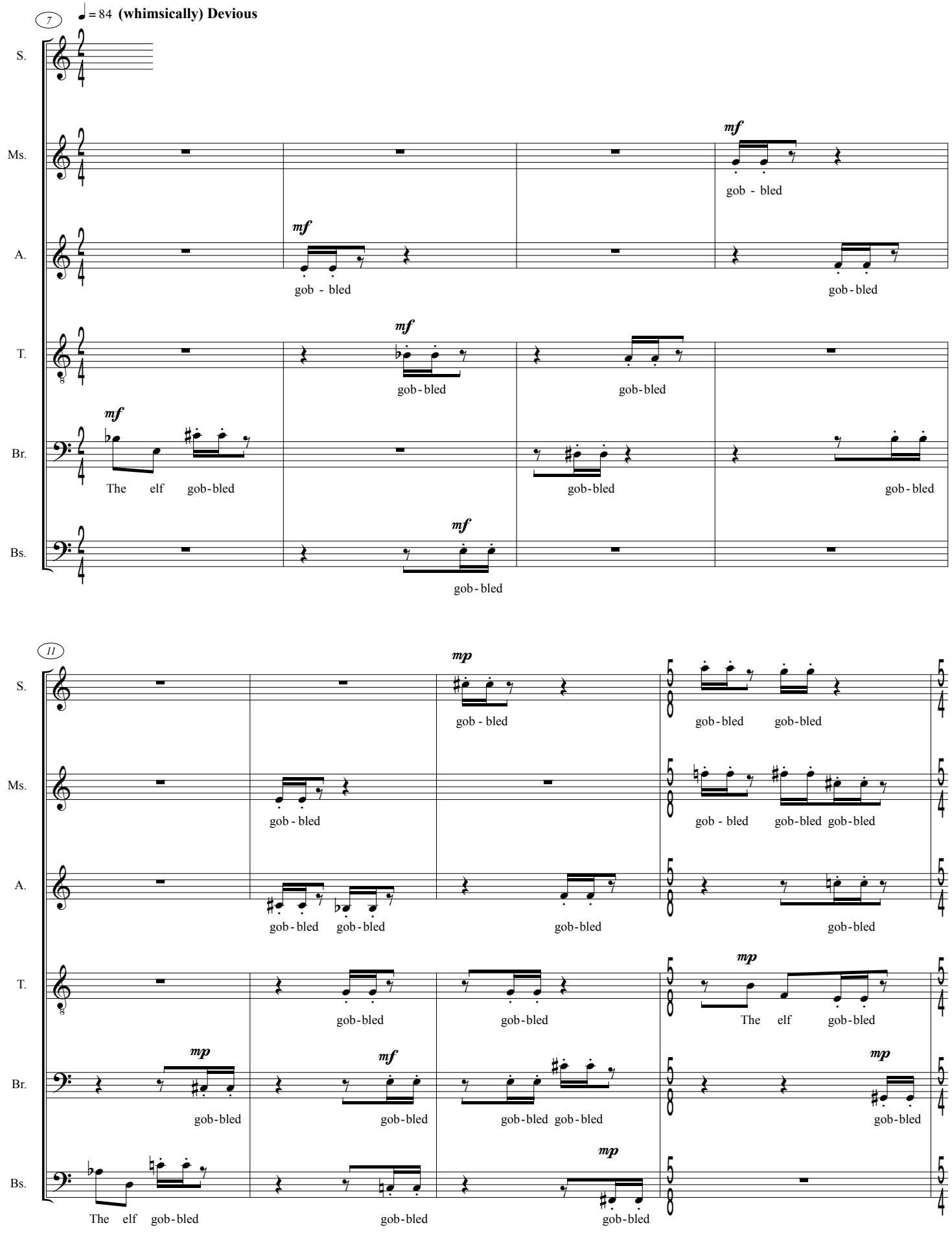


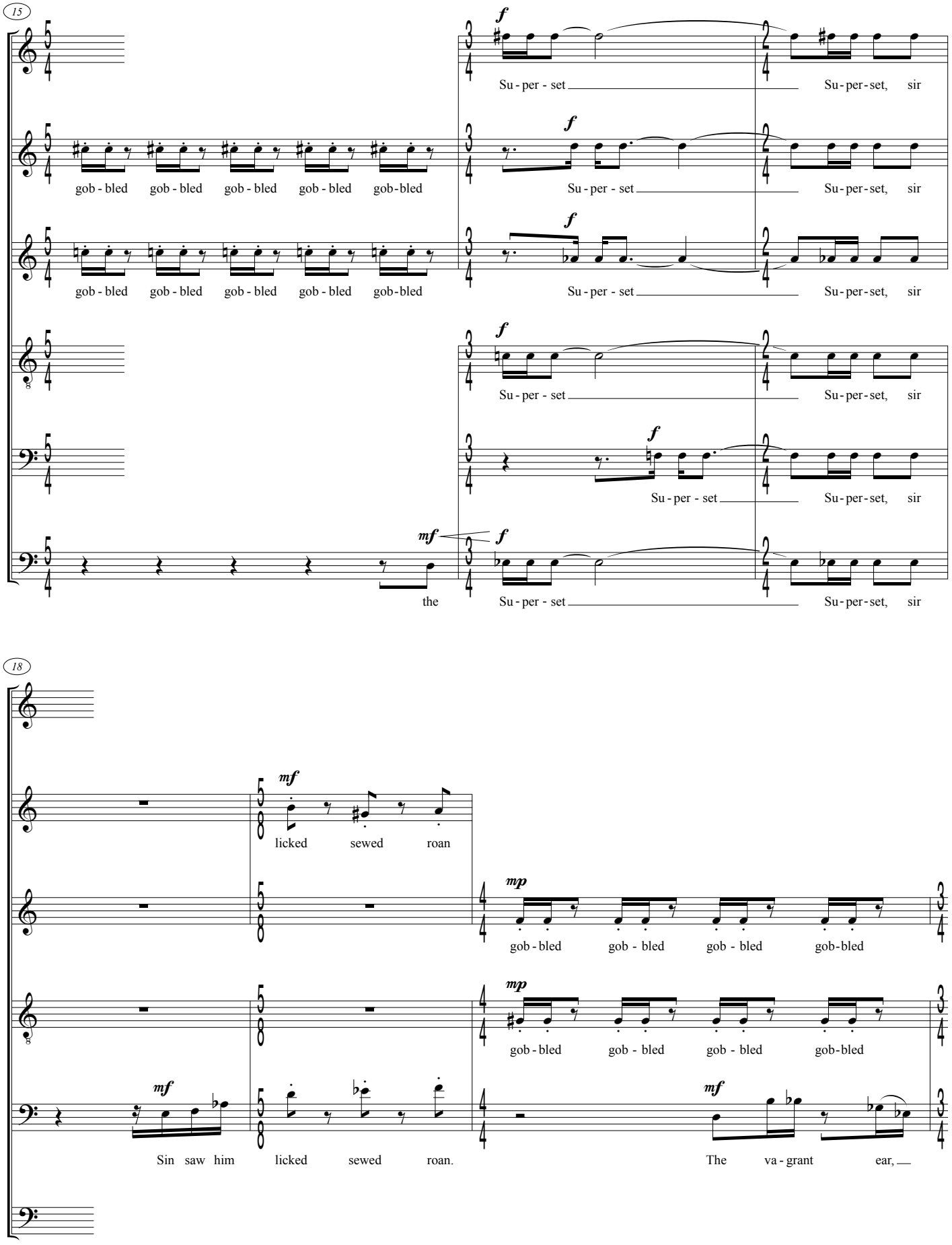
duration: ~1:20

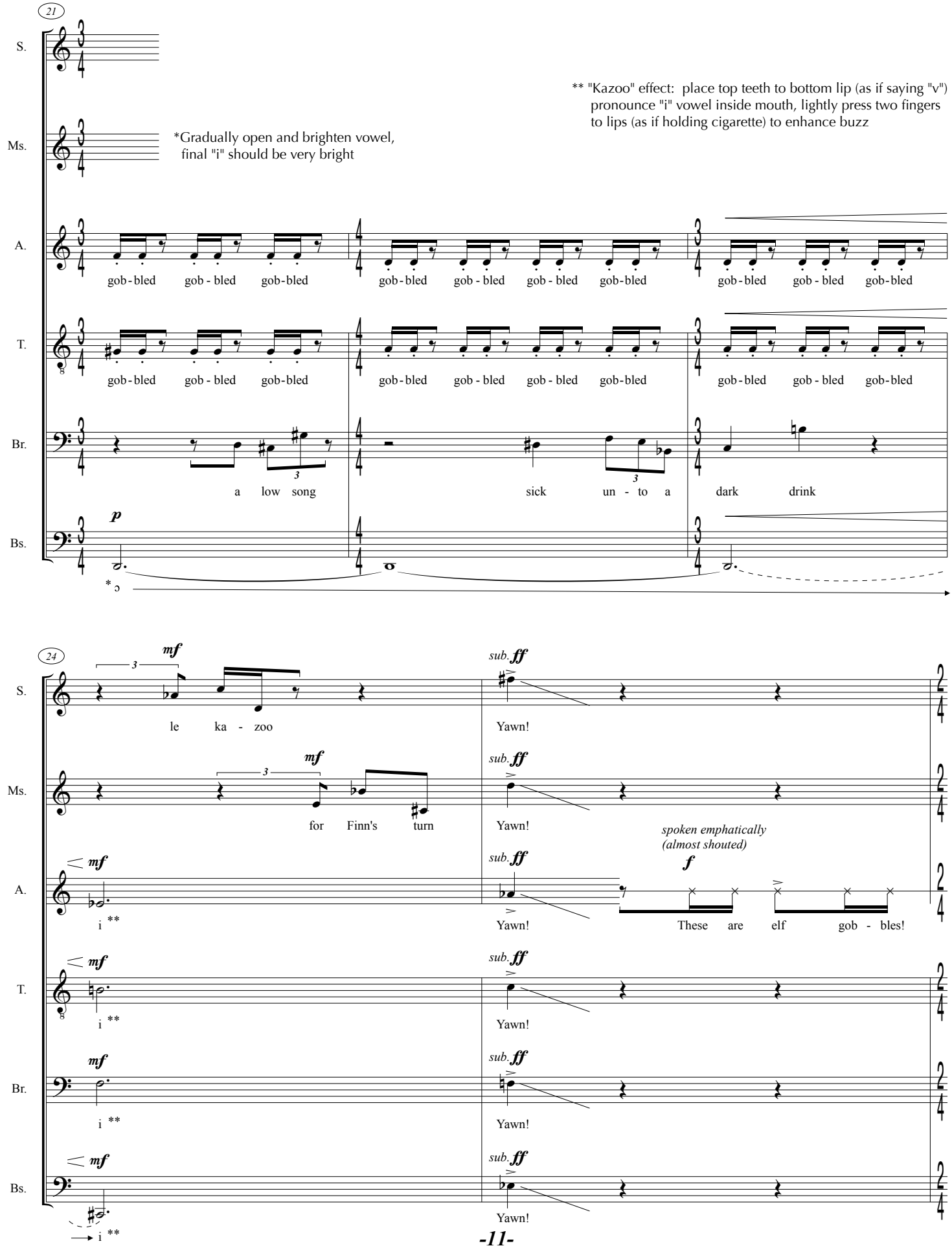
N. 3 *Elf-gobble*

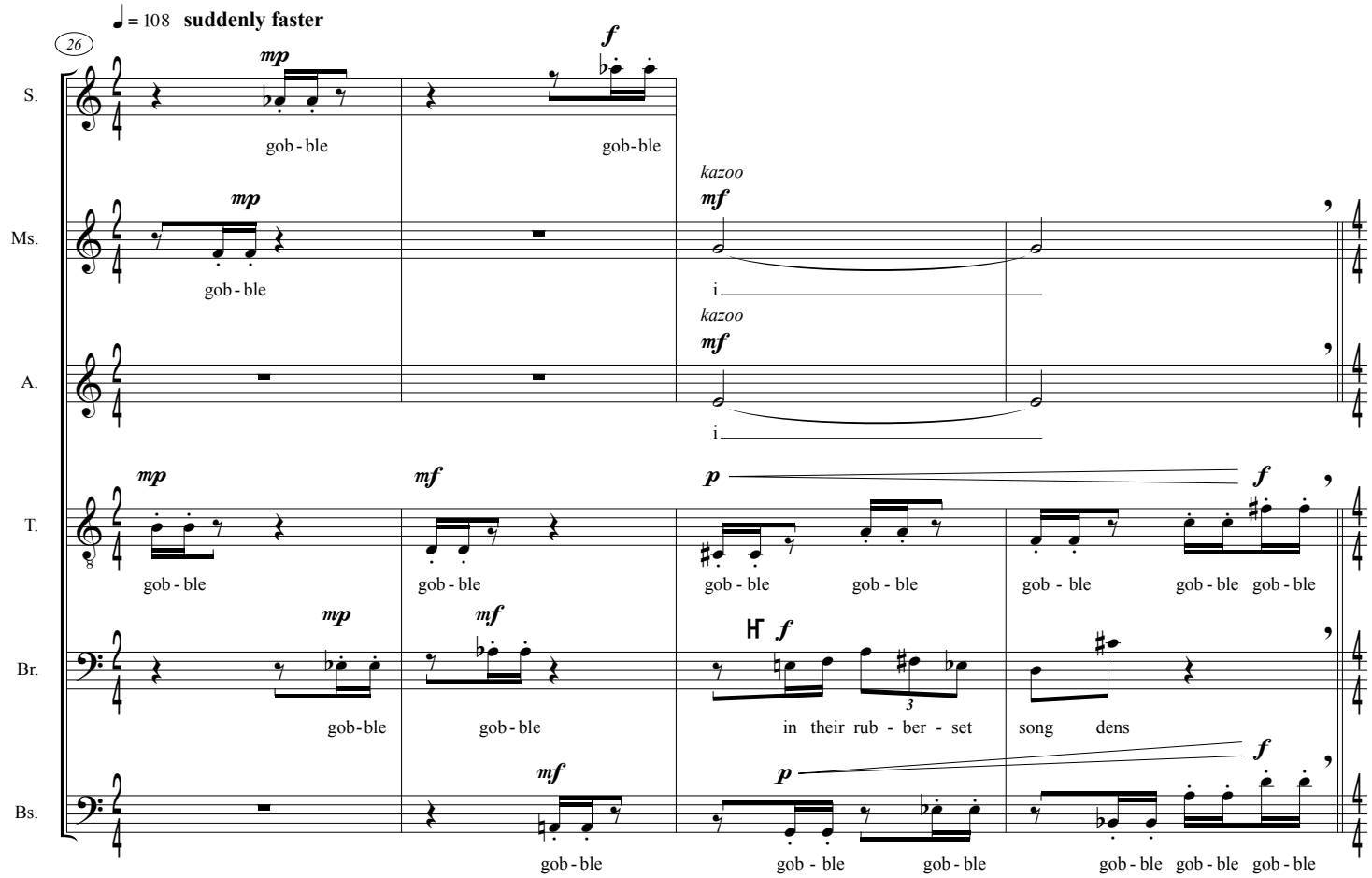


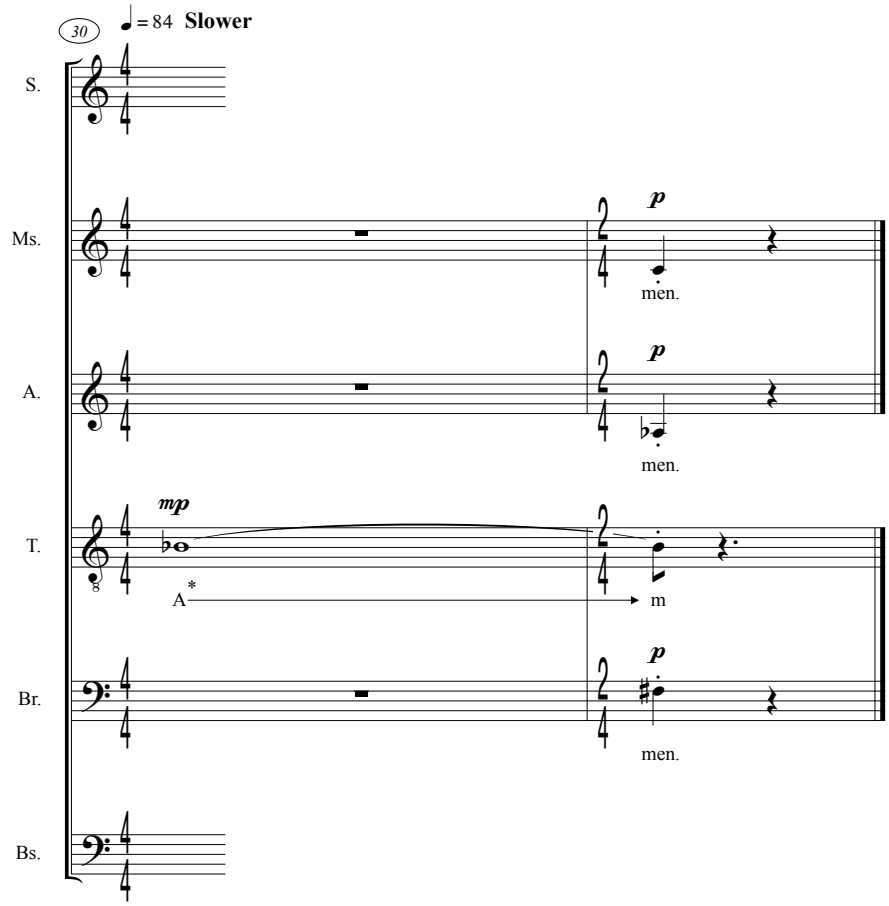
*Gradually push vowel forward, making it brighter and brighter (less rounded and more nasal).


7
♩ = 84 (whimsically) Devious
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
Br.
Bs.
mf
gob - bled
gob-bled
The elf gob-bled
11
mp
mf
The elf gob-bled


15
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
Br.
Bs.
f
Su - per - set
Su - per - set,
sir
gob - bled
gob - bled
gob - bled
gob - bled
gob-bled
mf
the
18
mf
licked
sewed
roan
mp
gob - bled
gob - bled
gob - bled
gob-bled
Sin
saw
him
licked
sewed
roan.
The
va - grant
ear,


21
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
Br.
Bs.
*Gradually open and brighten vowel, final "i" should be very bright
** "Kazoo" effect: place top teeth to bottom lip (as if saying "v") pronounce "i" vowel inside mouth, lightly press two fingers to lips (as if holding cigarette) to enhance buzz
gob-bled gob - bled gob-bled gob-bled gob - bled gob-bled gob-bled gob-bled gob - bled gob-bled
a low song sick un - to a dark drink
p
24
mf
le ka - zoo
for Finn's turn
i **
sub. ff
Yawn!
spoken emphatically (almost shouted)
f
These are elf gob - bles!

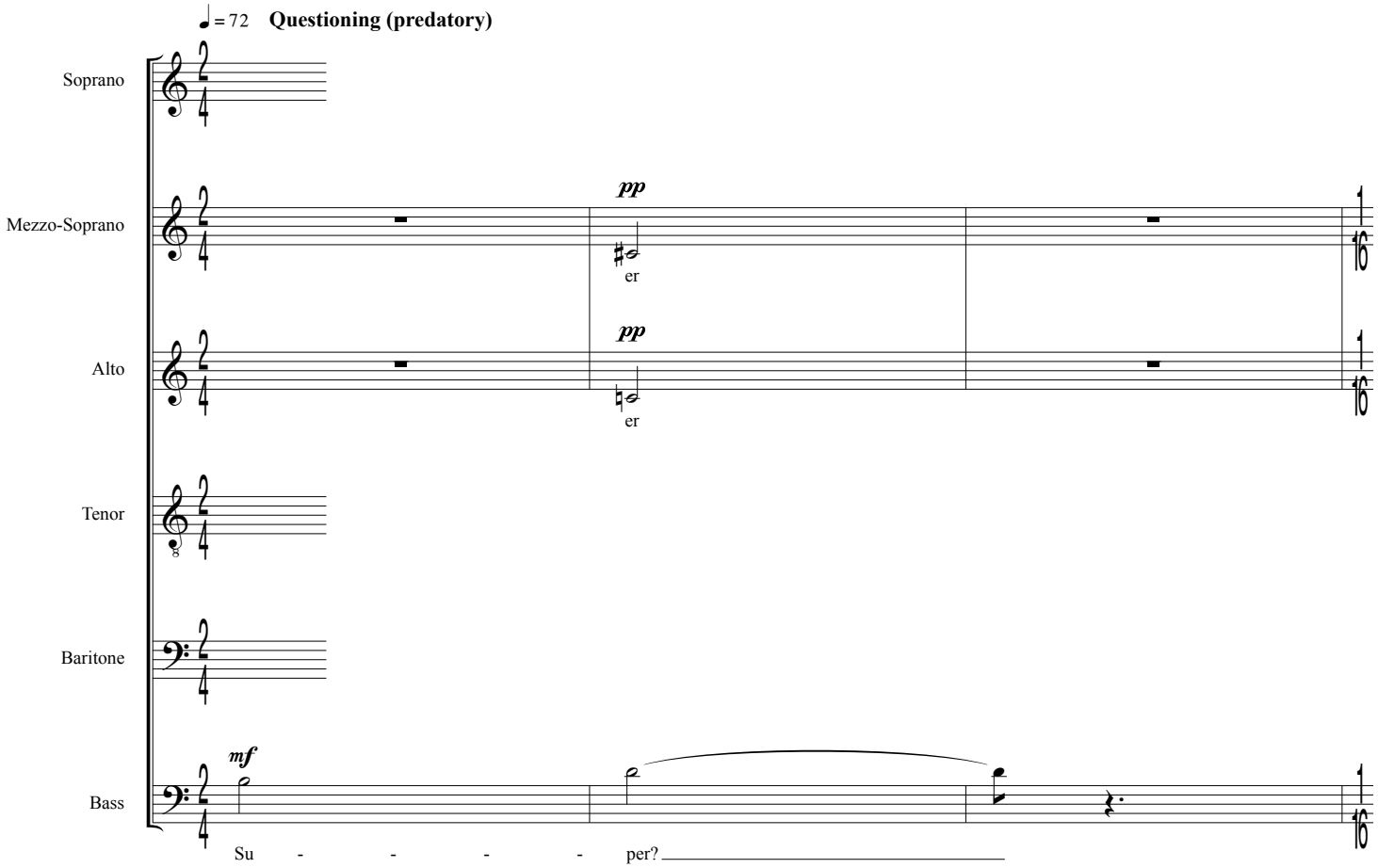


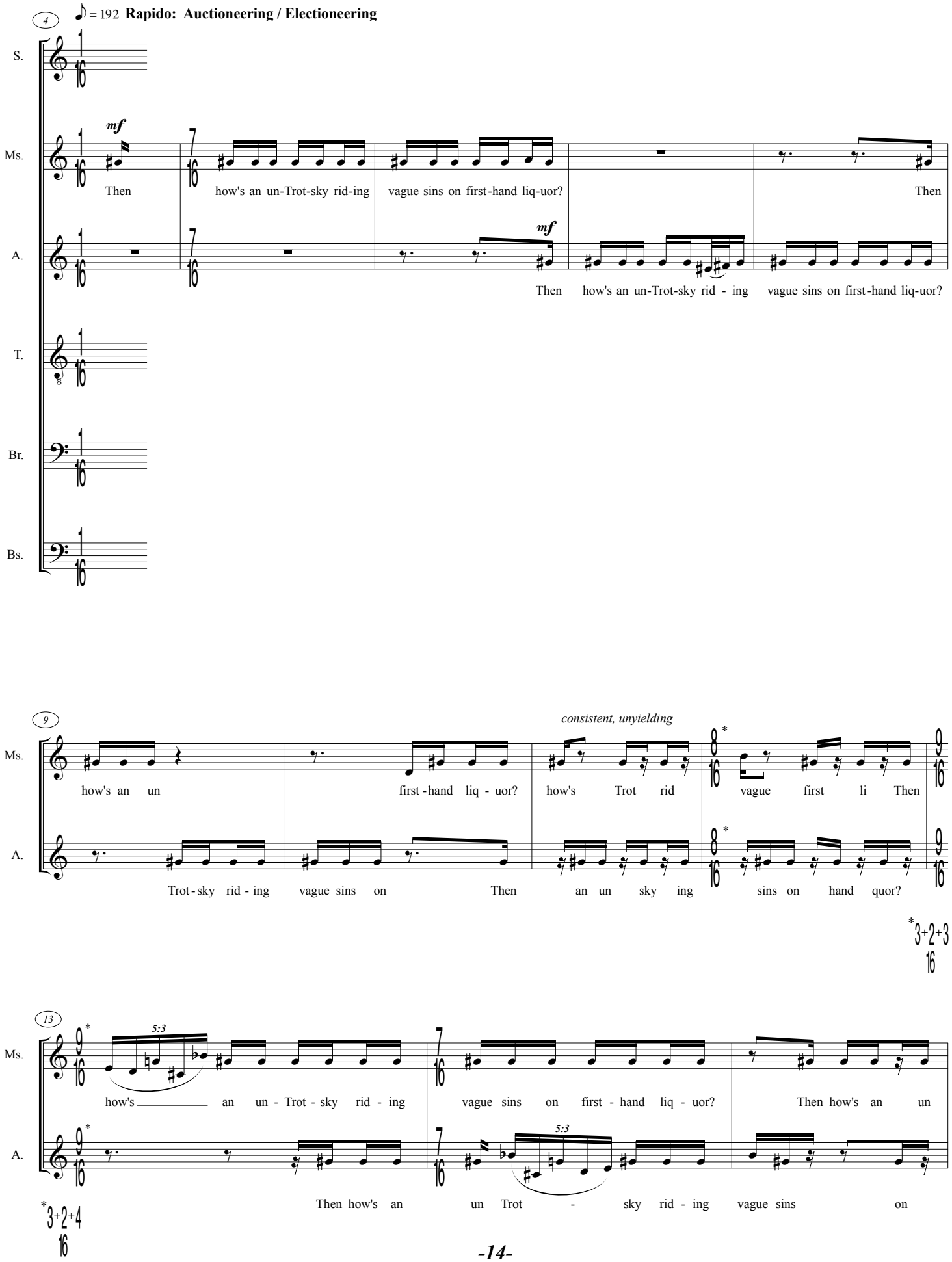


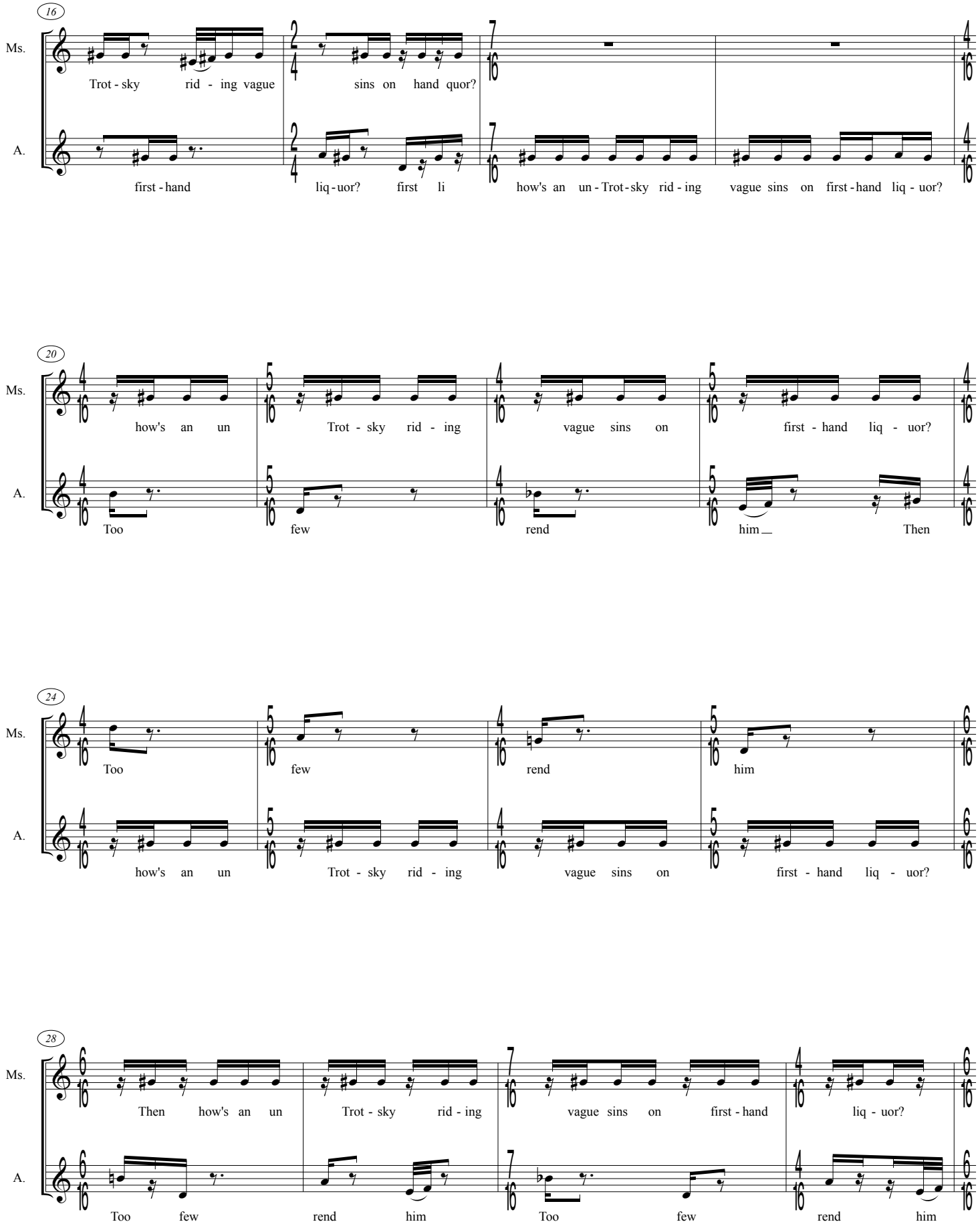
*Gradually close mouth to "m" sound

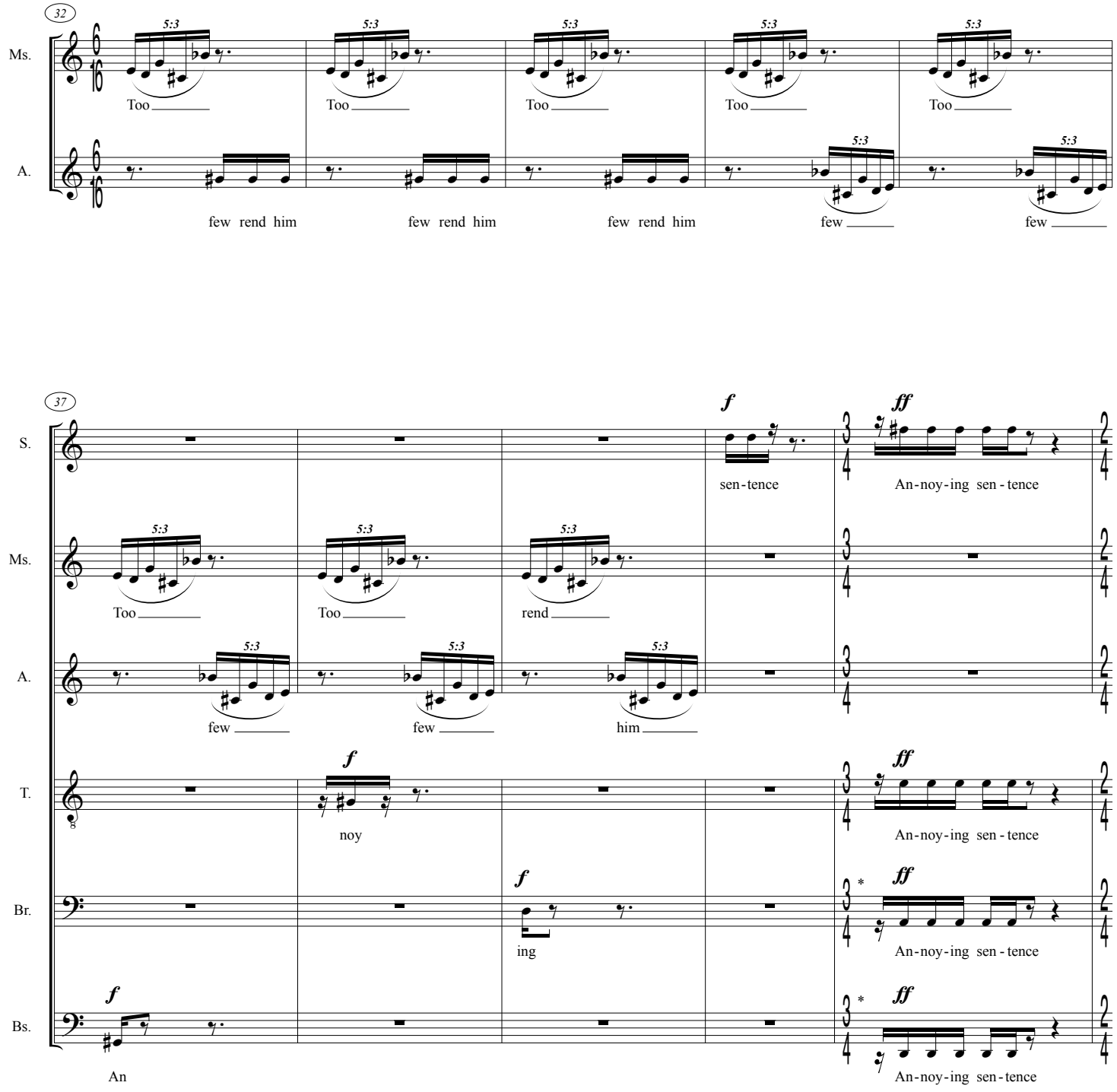
duration: ~1:10

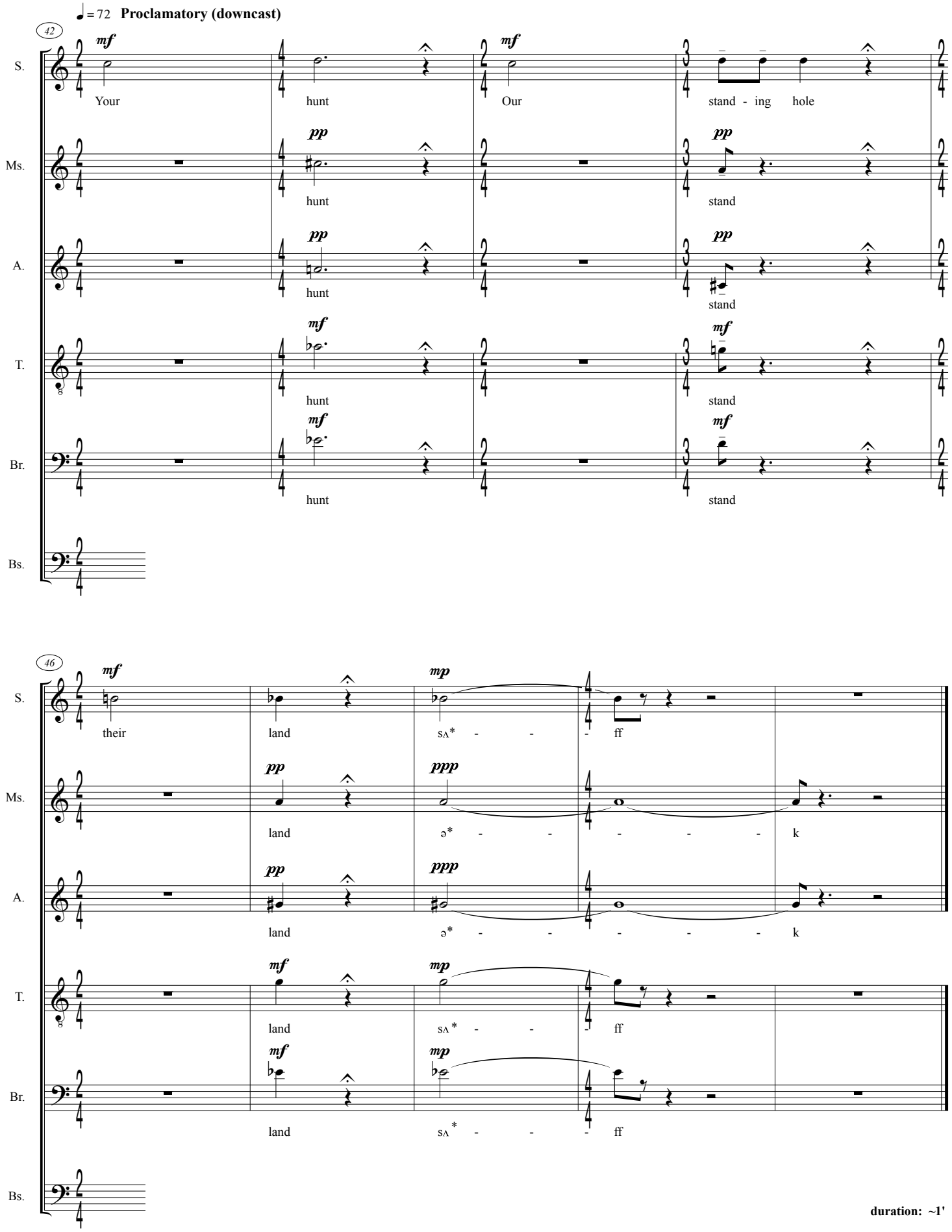
N. 4 *un-Trotsky riding vague sins*




4
♪ = 192 Rapido: Auctioneering / Electioneering
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
Br.
Bs.
mf
Then how's an un-Trot-sky rid-ing vague sins on first-hand liq-uor? Then
mf
Then how's an un-Trot-sky rid - ing vague sins on first-hand liq-uor?
9
consistent, unyielding
how's an un first-hand liq - uor? how's Trot rid vague first li Then
Trot-sky rid - ing vague sins on Then an un sky ing sins on hand quor?
*3+2+3
16
13
5:3
how's an un - Trot - sky rid - ing vague sins on first - hand liq - uor? Then how's an un
5:3
*3+2+4
16
Then how's an un Trot - sky rid - ing vague sins on


16
Ms.
A.
Trot - sky rid - ing vague sins on hand quor?
first - hand liq - uor? first li how's an un - Trot - sky rid - ing vague sins on first - hand liq - uor?
20
how's an un Trot - sky rid - ing vague sins on first - hand liq - uor?
Too few rend him Then
24
Too few rend him
how's an un Trot - sky rid - ing vague sins on first - hand liq - uor?
28
Then how's an un Trot - sky rid - ing vague sins on first - hand liq - uor?
Too few rend him Too few rend him

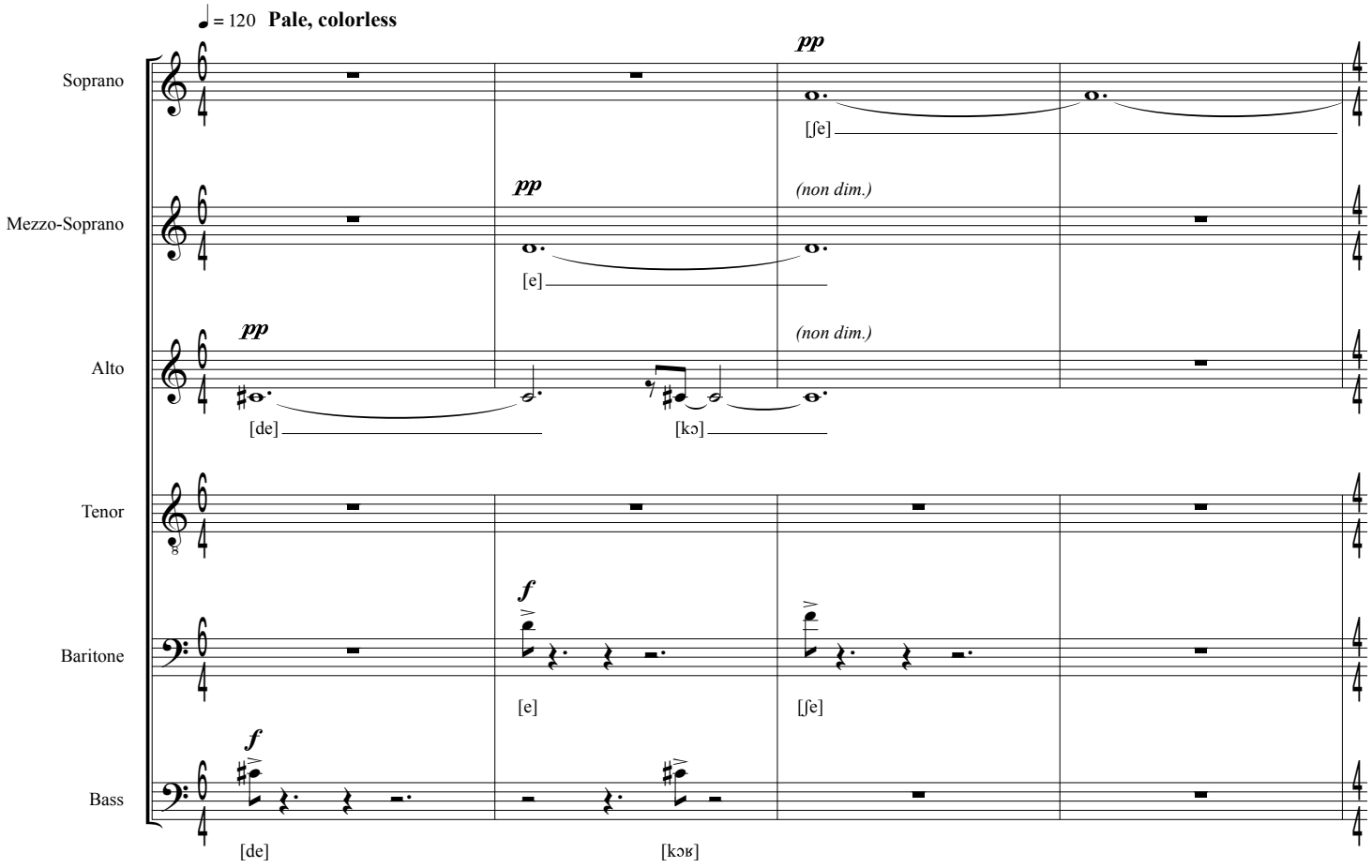

32
Ms.
A.
Too
few rend him
few
37
S.
T.
Br.
Bs.
sen-tence
An-noy-ing sen-tence
rend
him
noy
ing
An
*Bass may optionally sing 8va in m41,
but if so, Baritone should also sing 8va

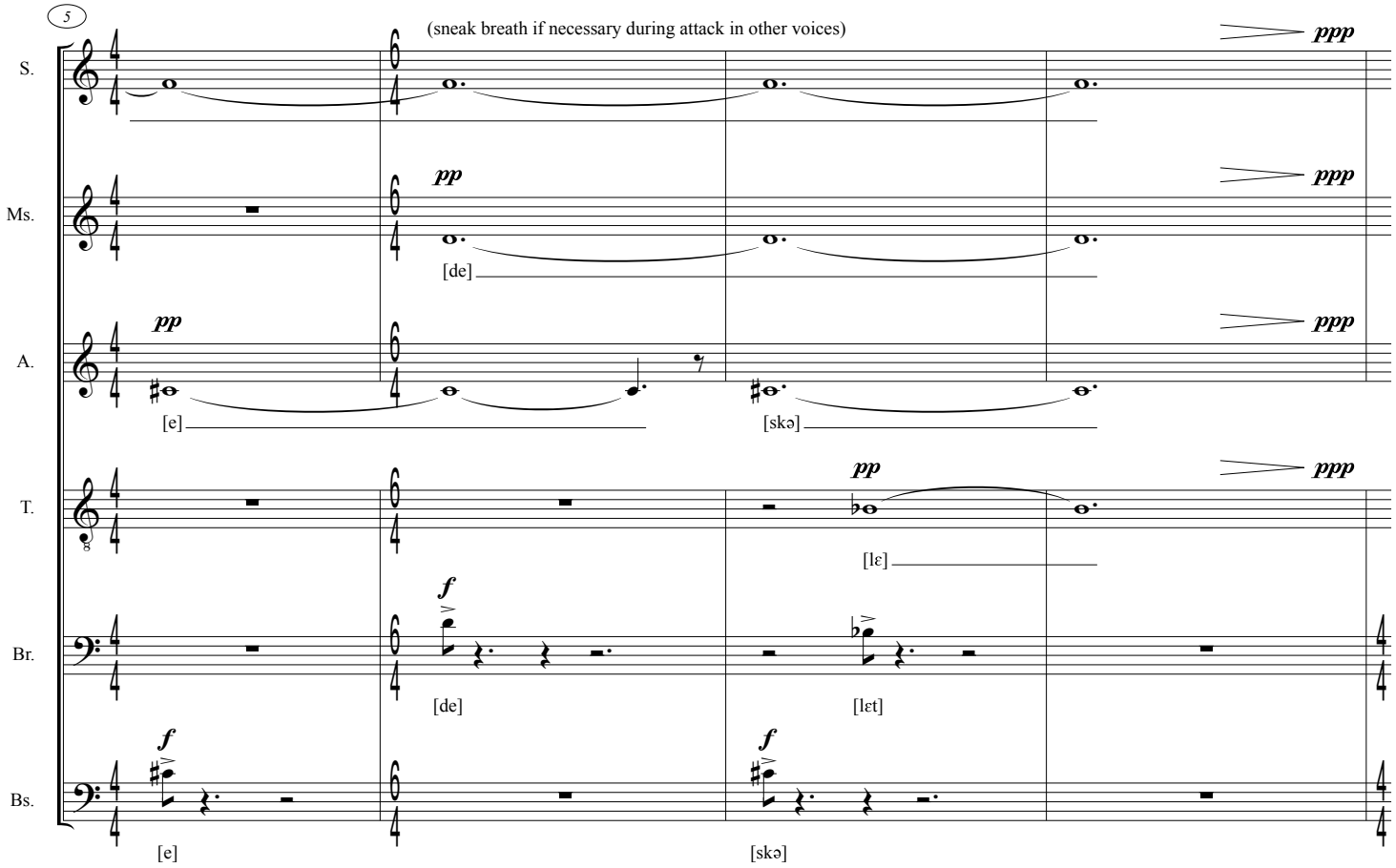


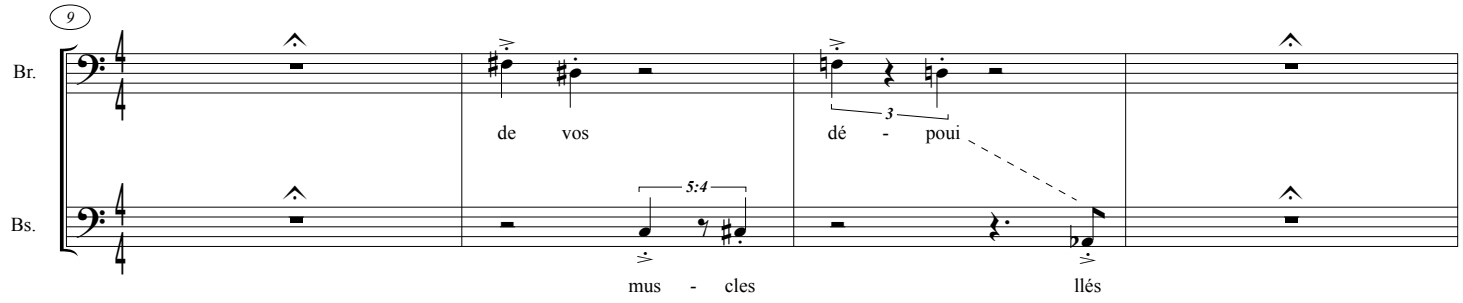
*the composite word sung here is "Suffolk" (sʌfək)

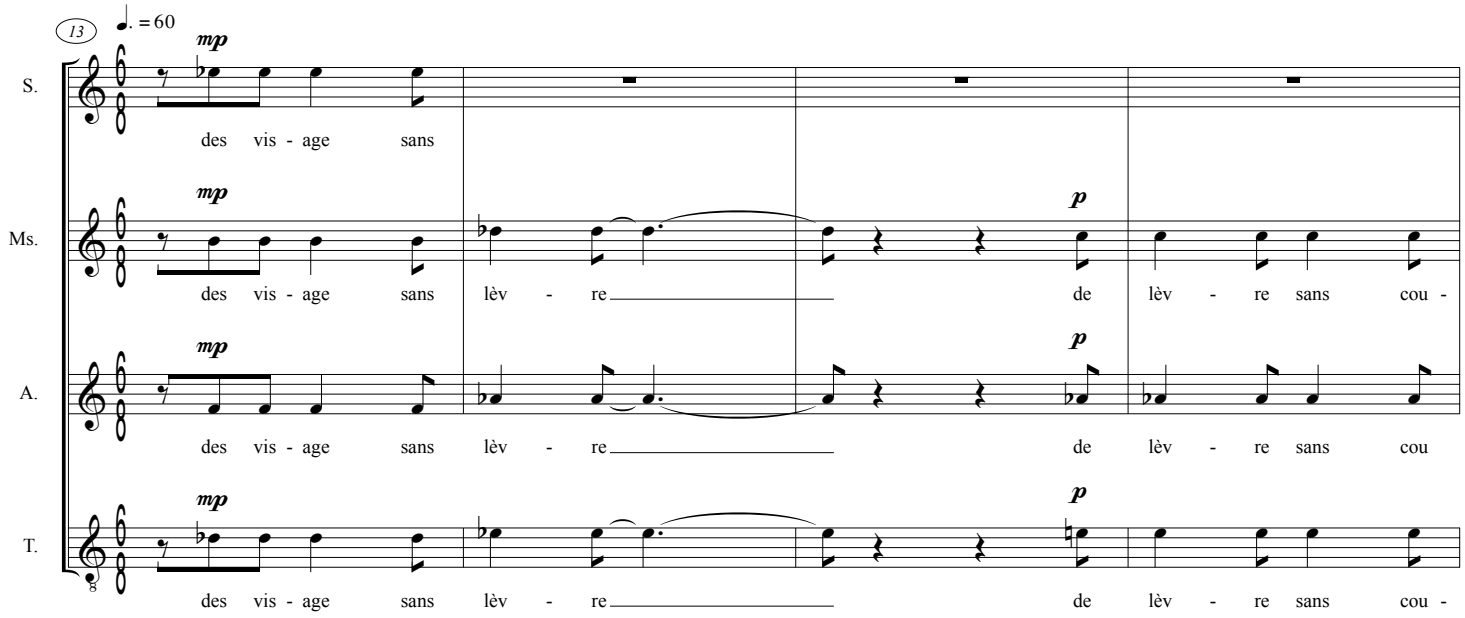
II

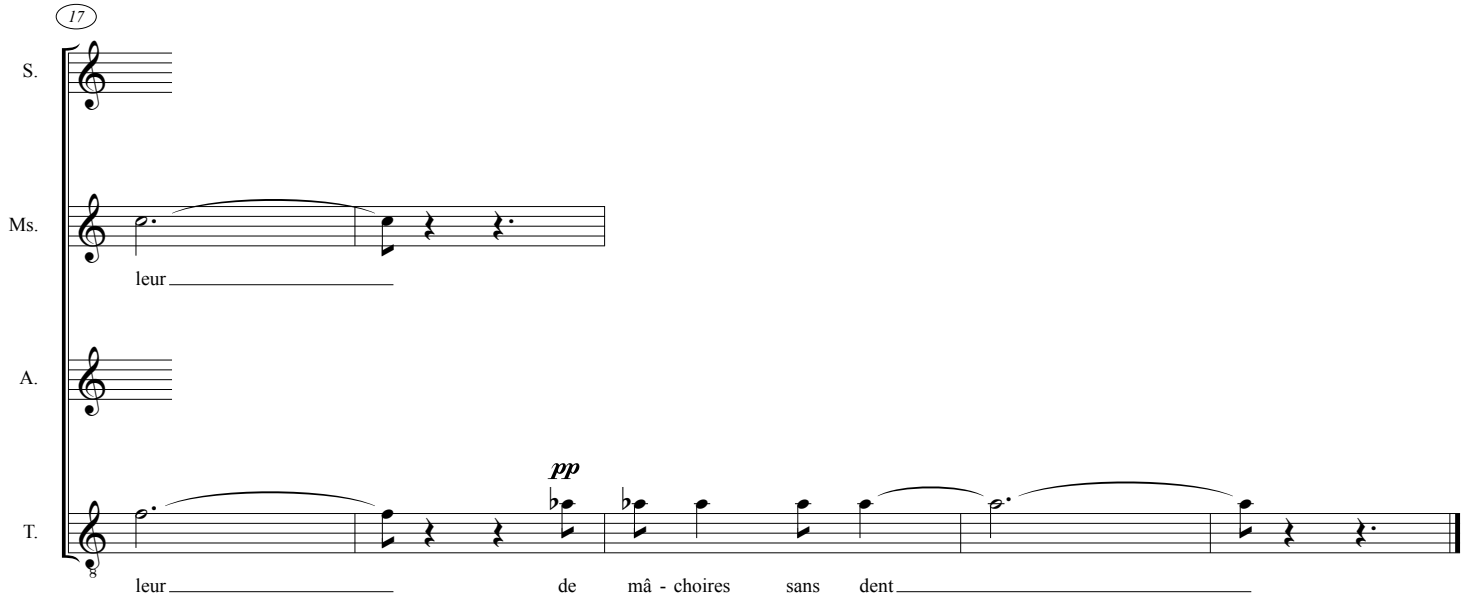
N. 5 *"Des Ecorchés et des Squelettes"*




5
(sneak breath if necessary during attack in other voices)
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
Br.
Bs.
ppp
pp
[de]
[e]
[skə]
[lɛ]
[lɛt]
f


9
Br.
Bs.
de vos
dé - poui
mus - cles
llés
3
5:4

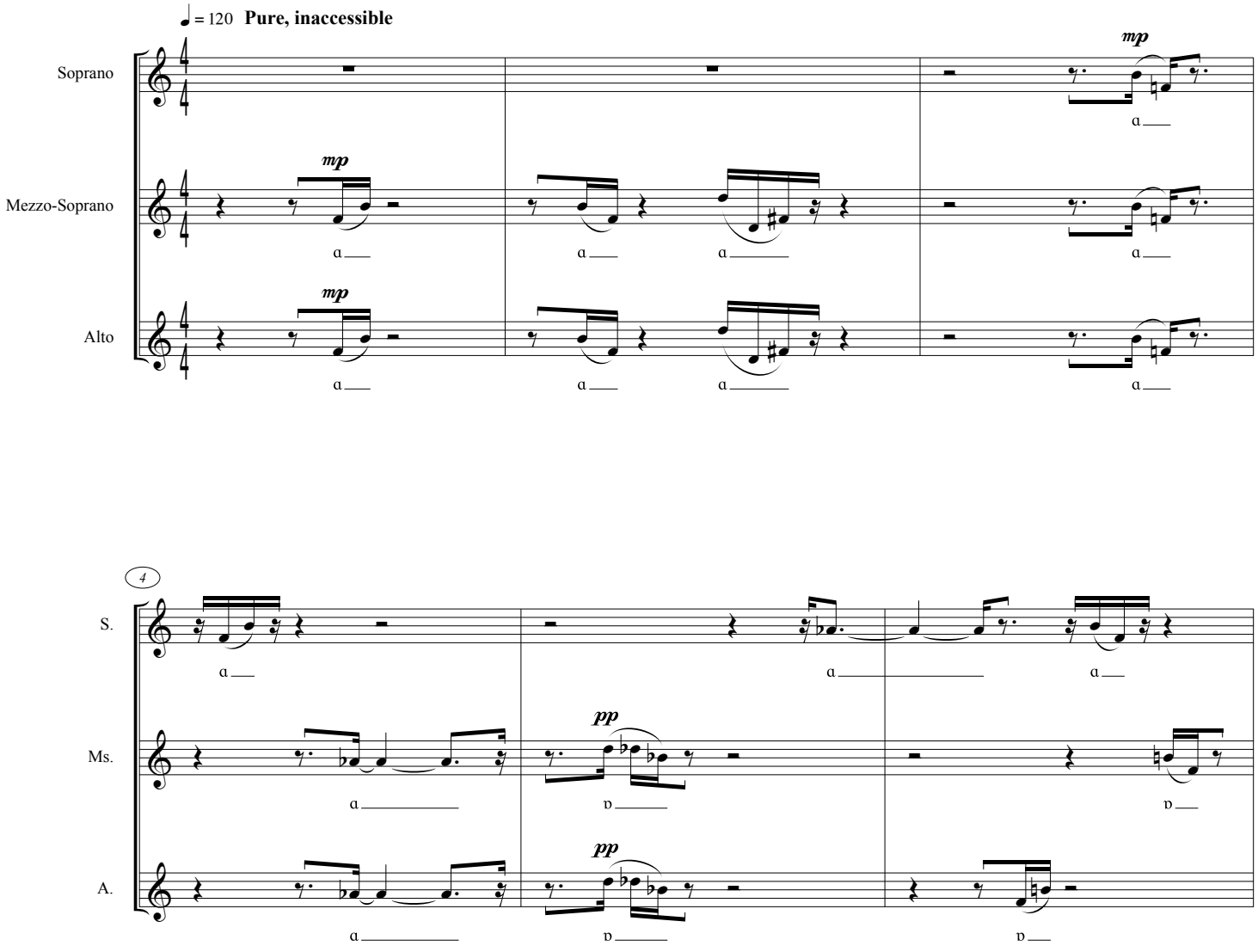

13
♩. = 60
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
mp
p
des vis - age sans lèv - re de lèv - re sans cou -
des vis - age sans lèv - re de lèv - re sans cou

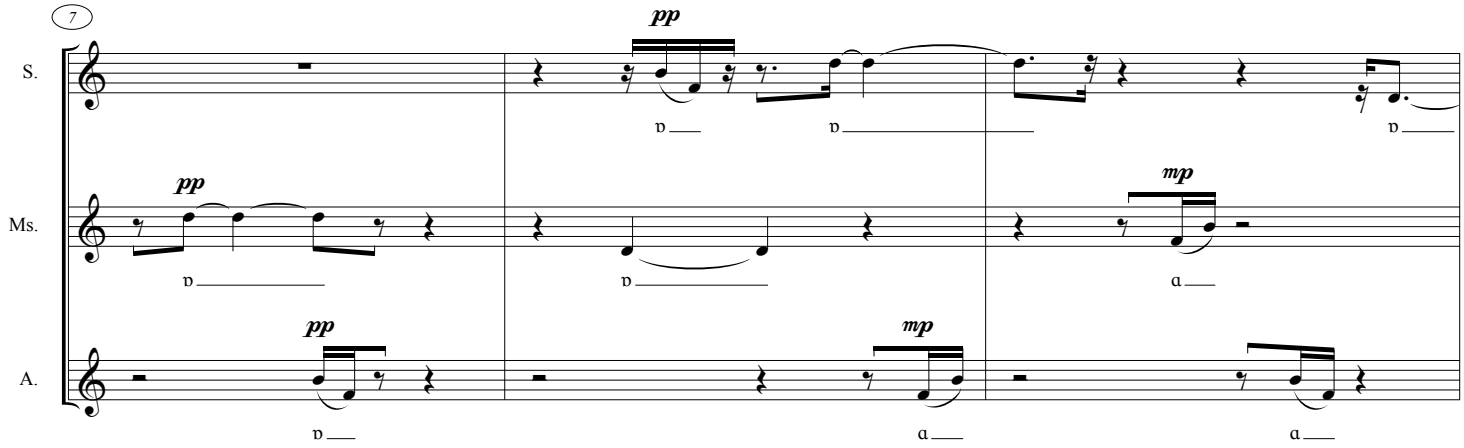

17
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
pp
leur
leur de mâ - choires sans dent

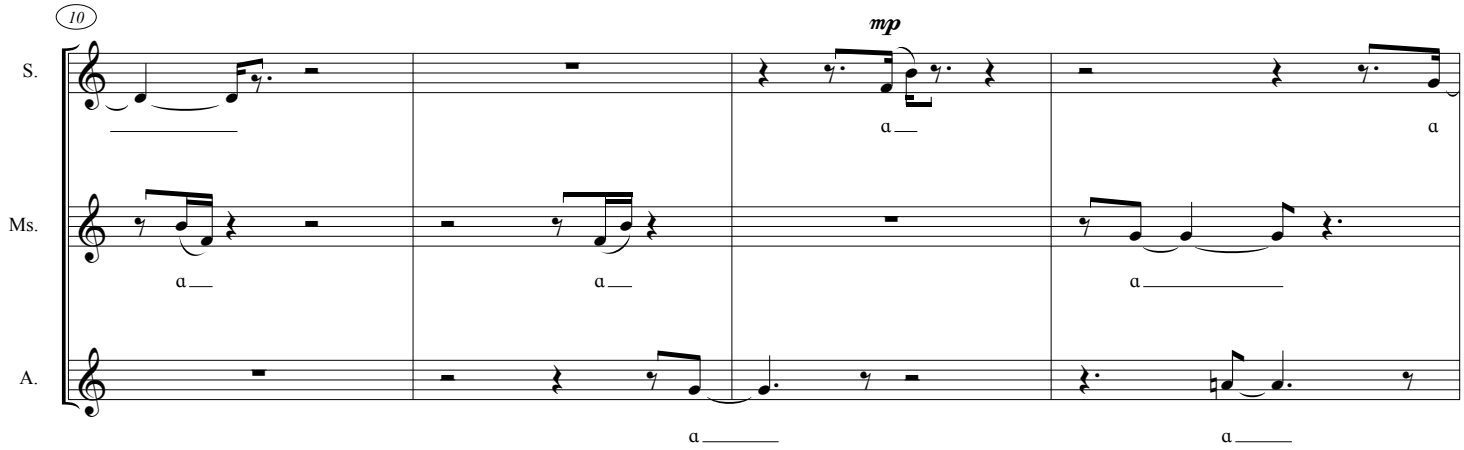
duration: ~1'

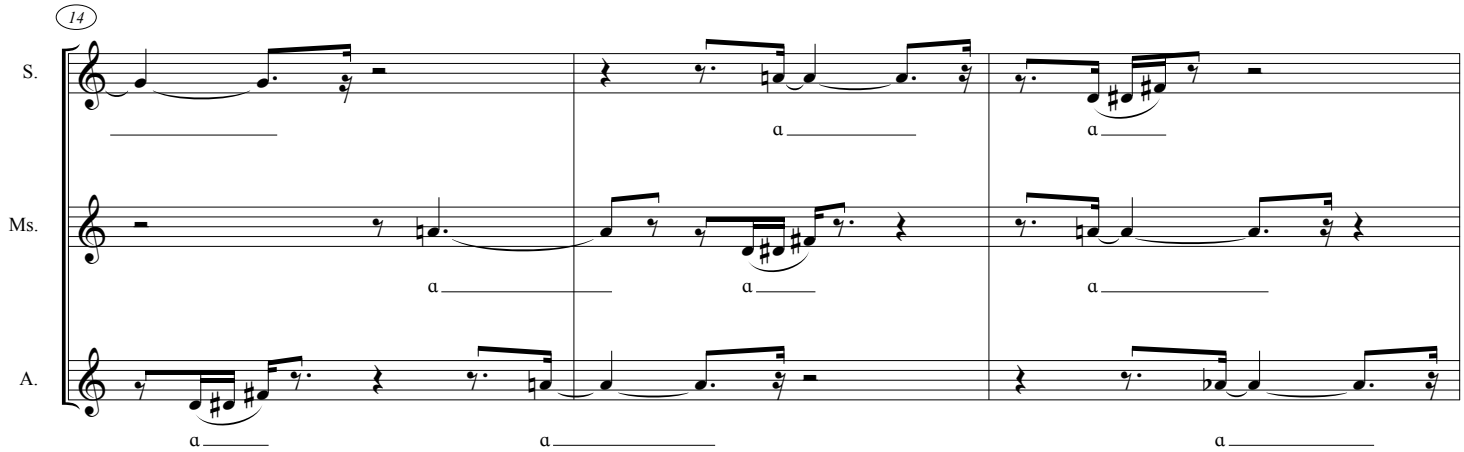
N. 6 *Wörtlich II*

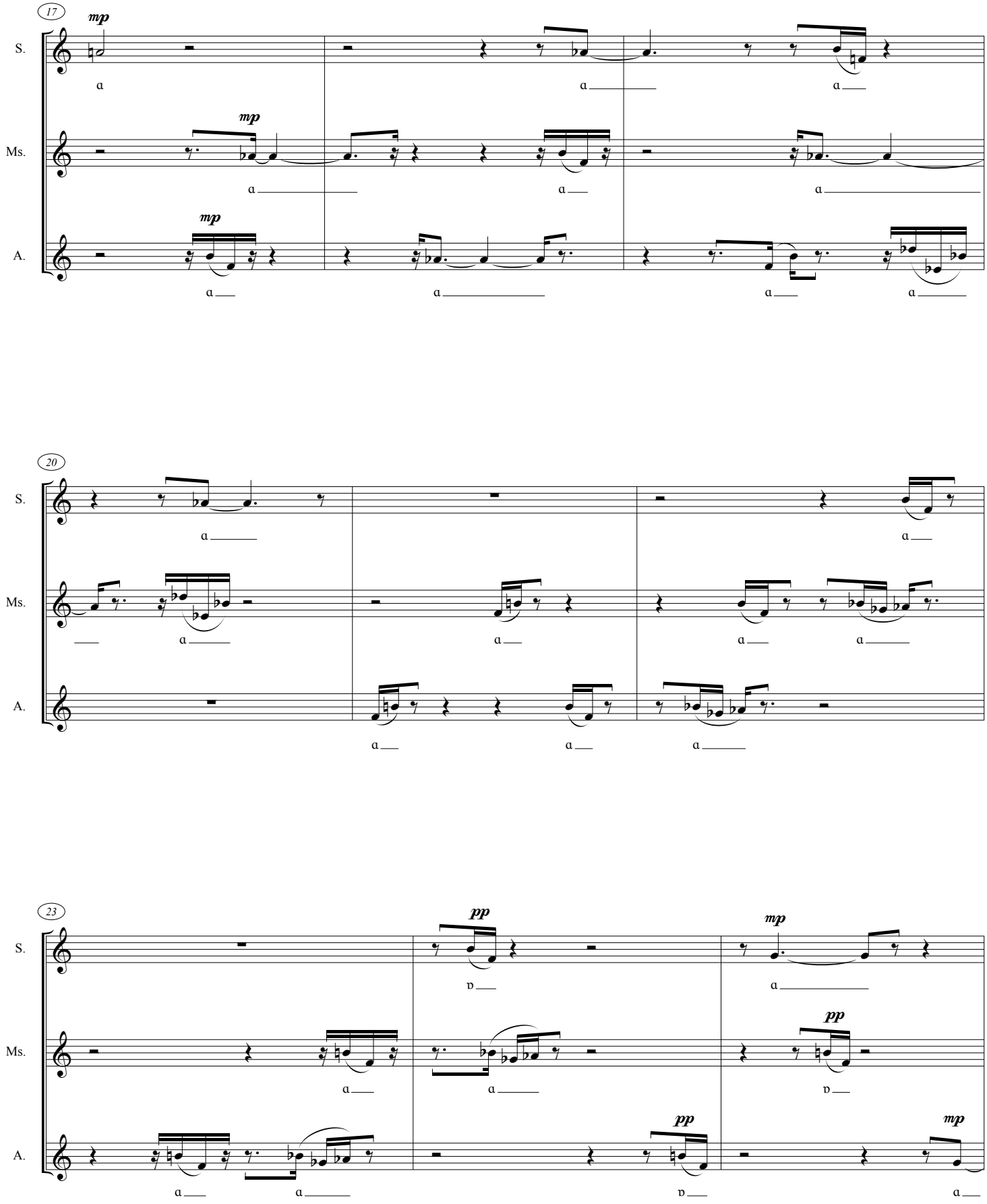
♩ = 120 **Pure, inaccessible**

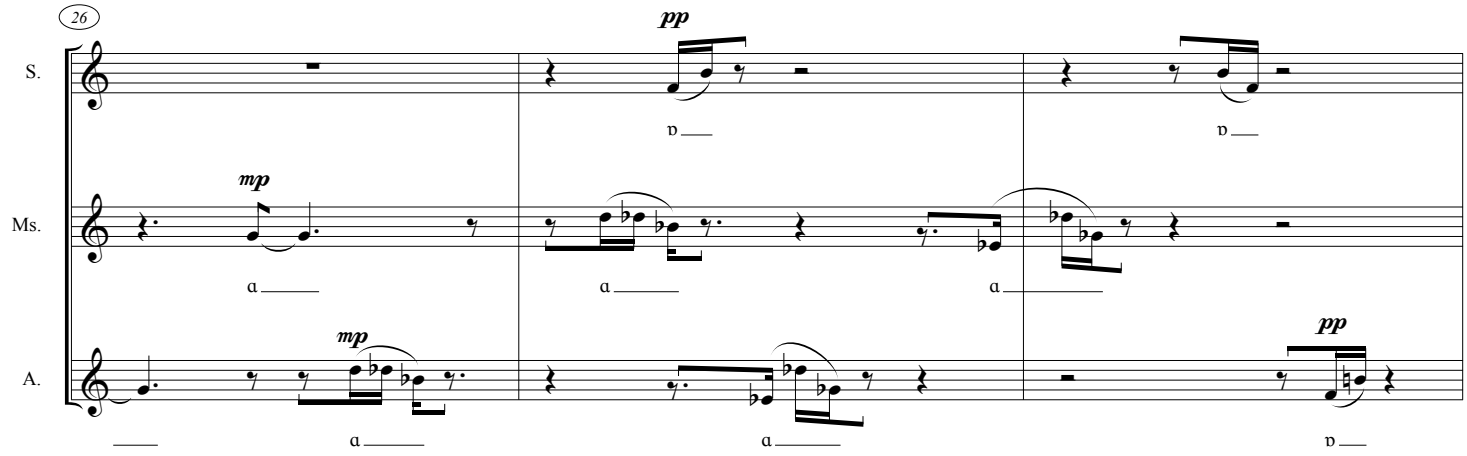


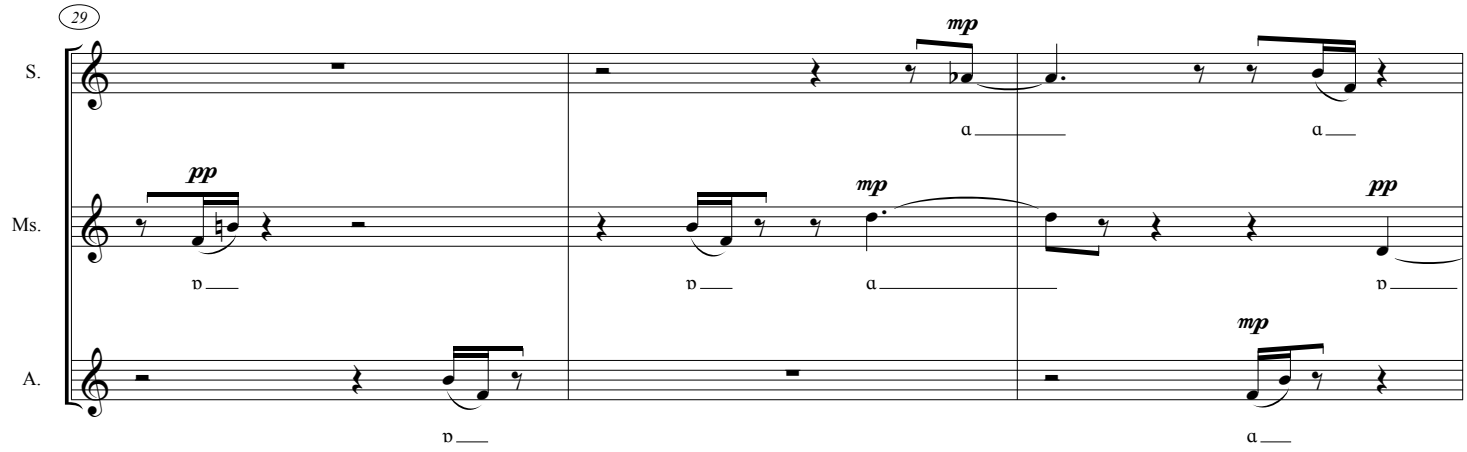

7
S.
Ms.
A.
pp
pp
pp
mp
mp

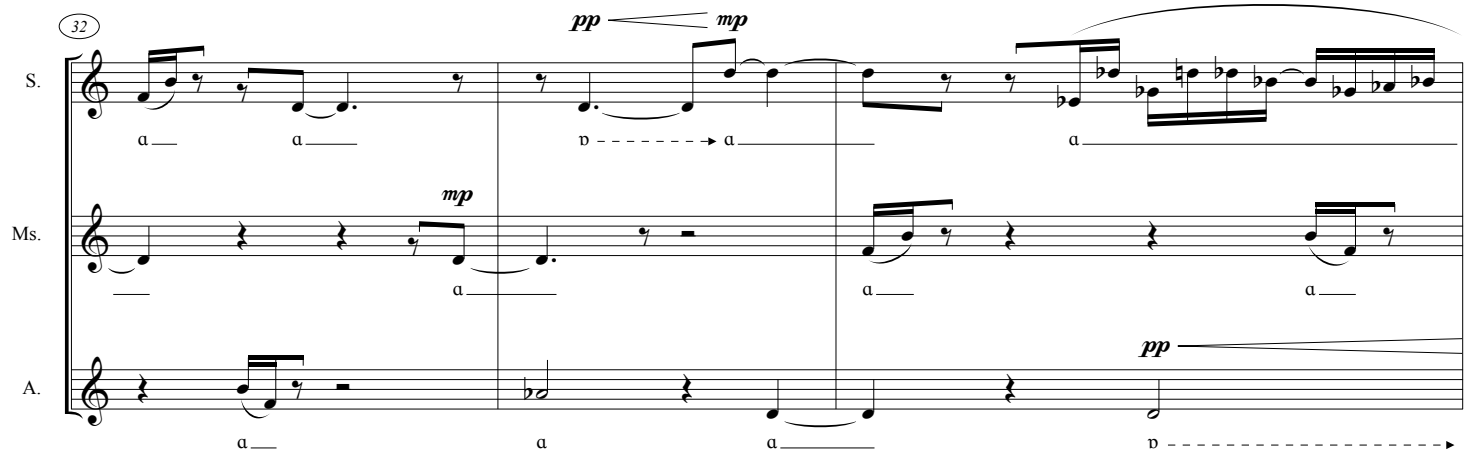

10
S.
Ms.
A.
mp

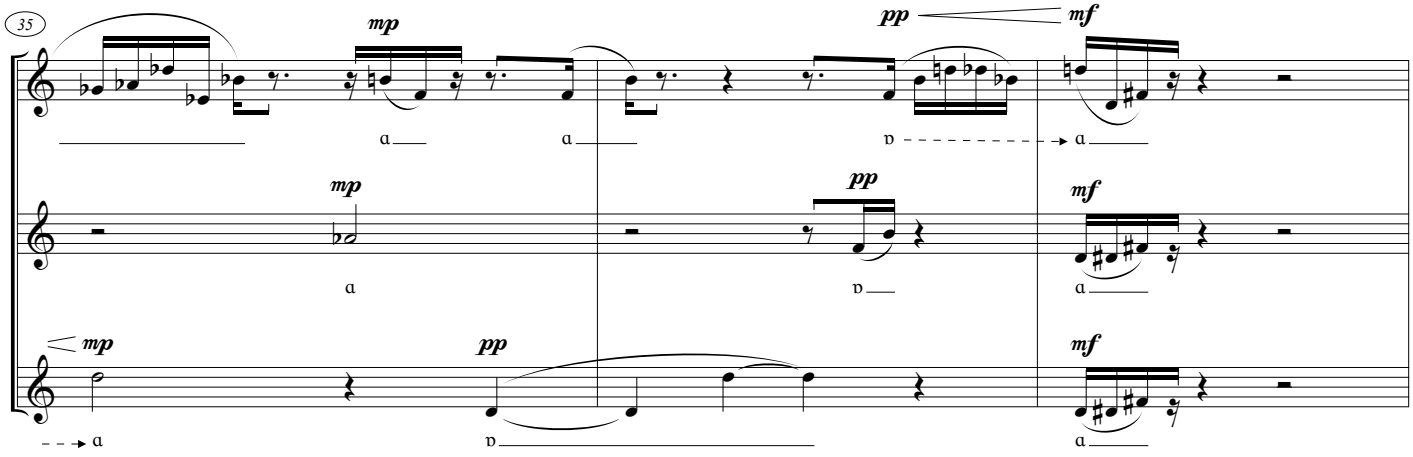

14
S.
Ms.
A.

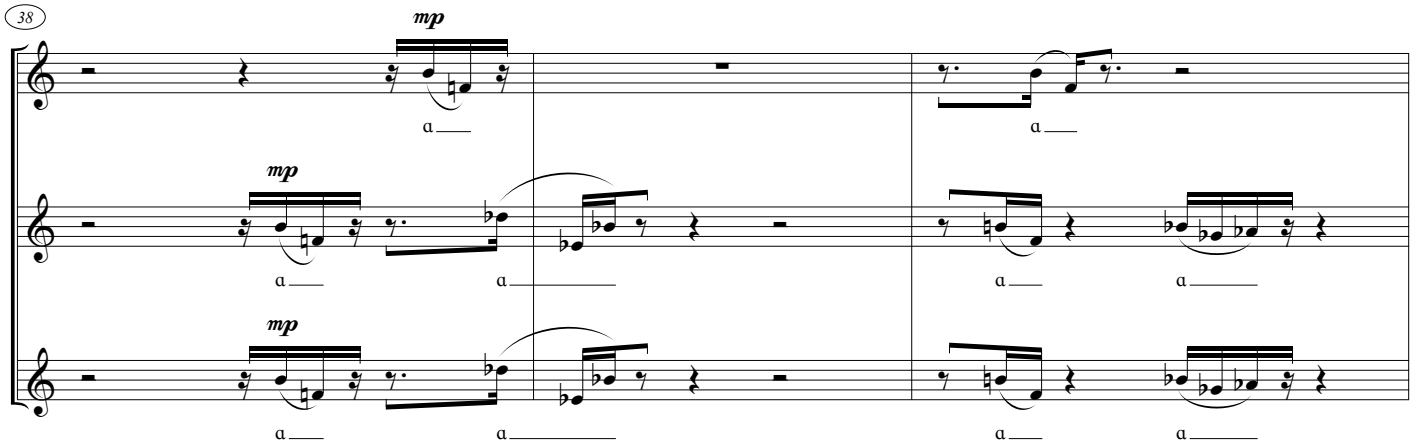

17
mp
S.
Ms.
A.
a
20
23
pp
mp

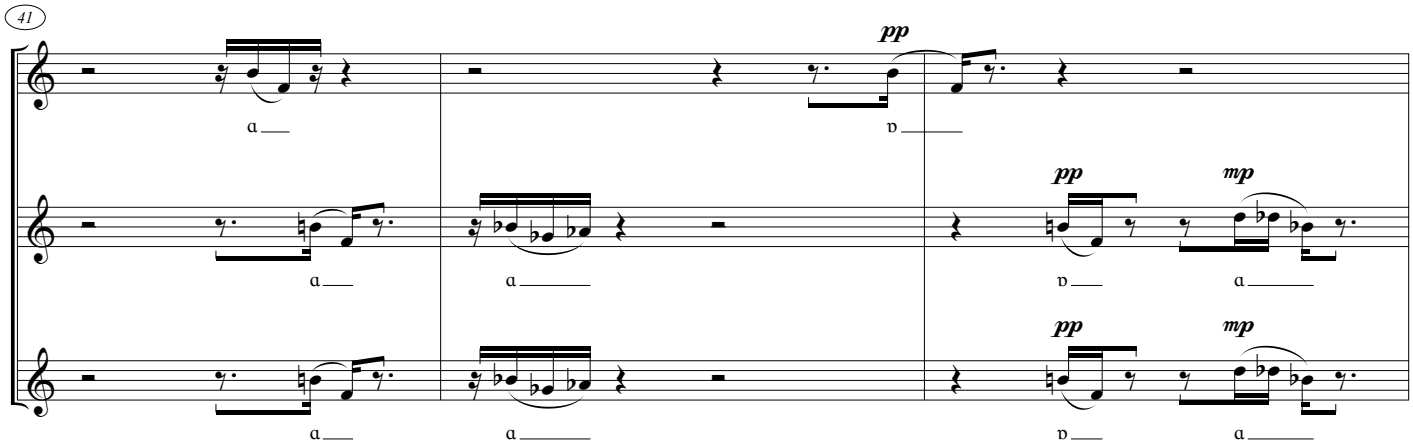

26
S.
Ms.
A.
pp
mp
mp
pp

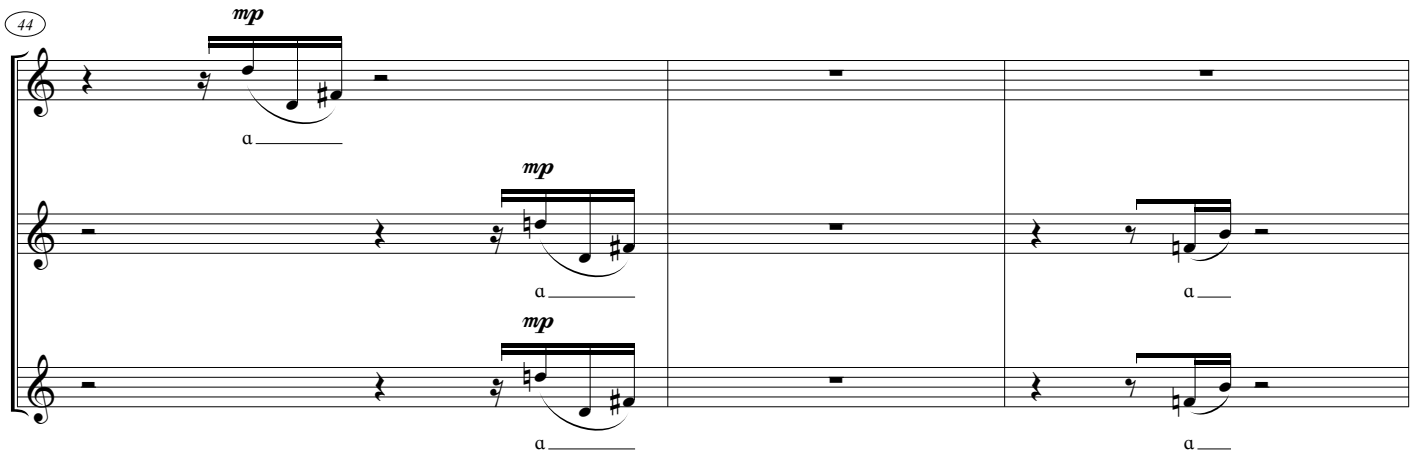

29
S.
Ms.
A.
mp
pp
mp
pp
mp

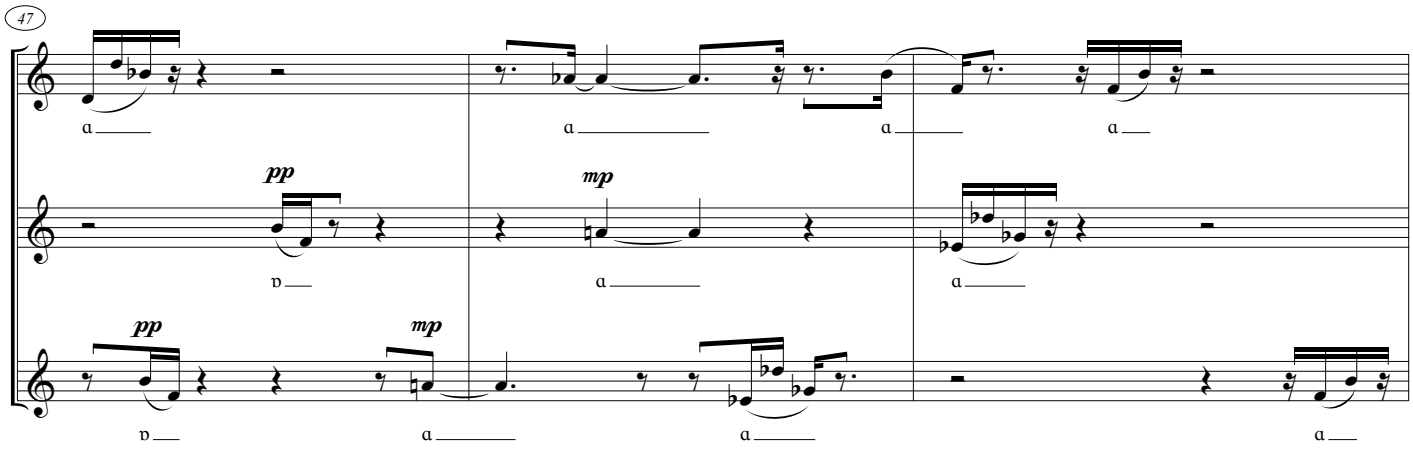

32
S.
Ms.
A.
pp
mp
mp
pp

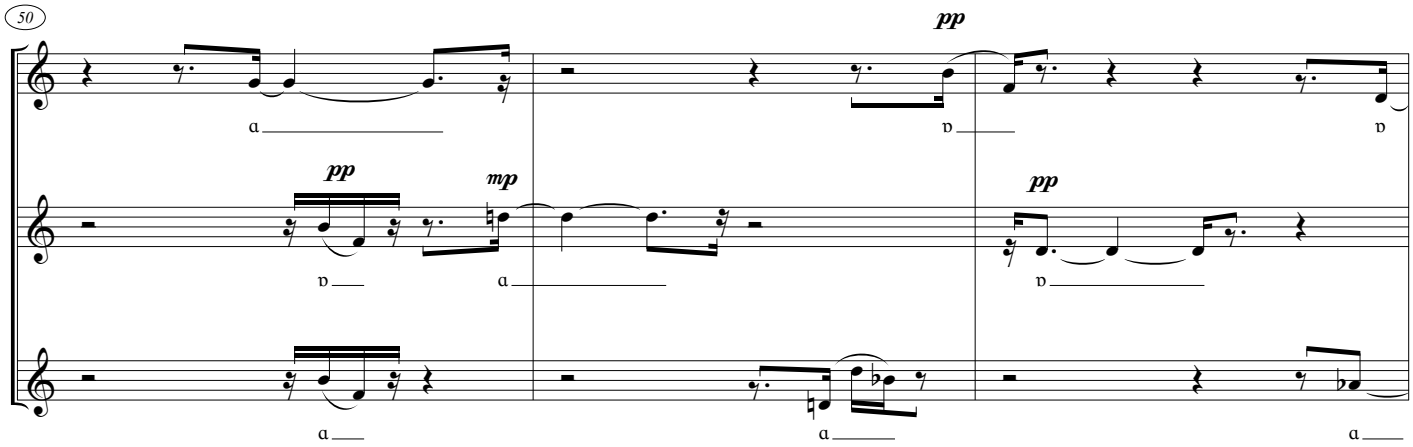

35
S.
Ms.
A.
mp
pp
mf

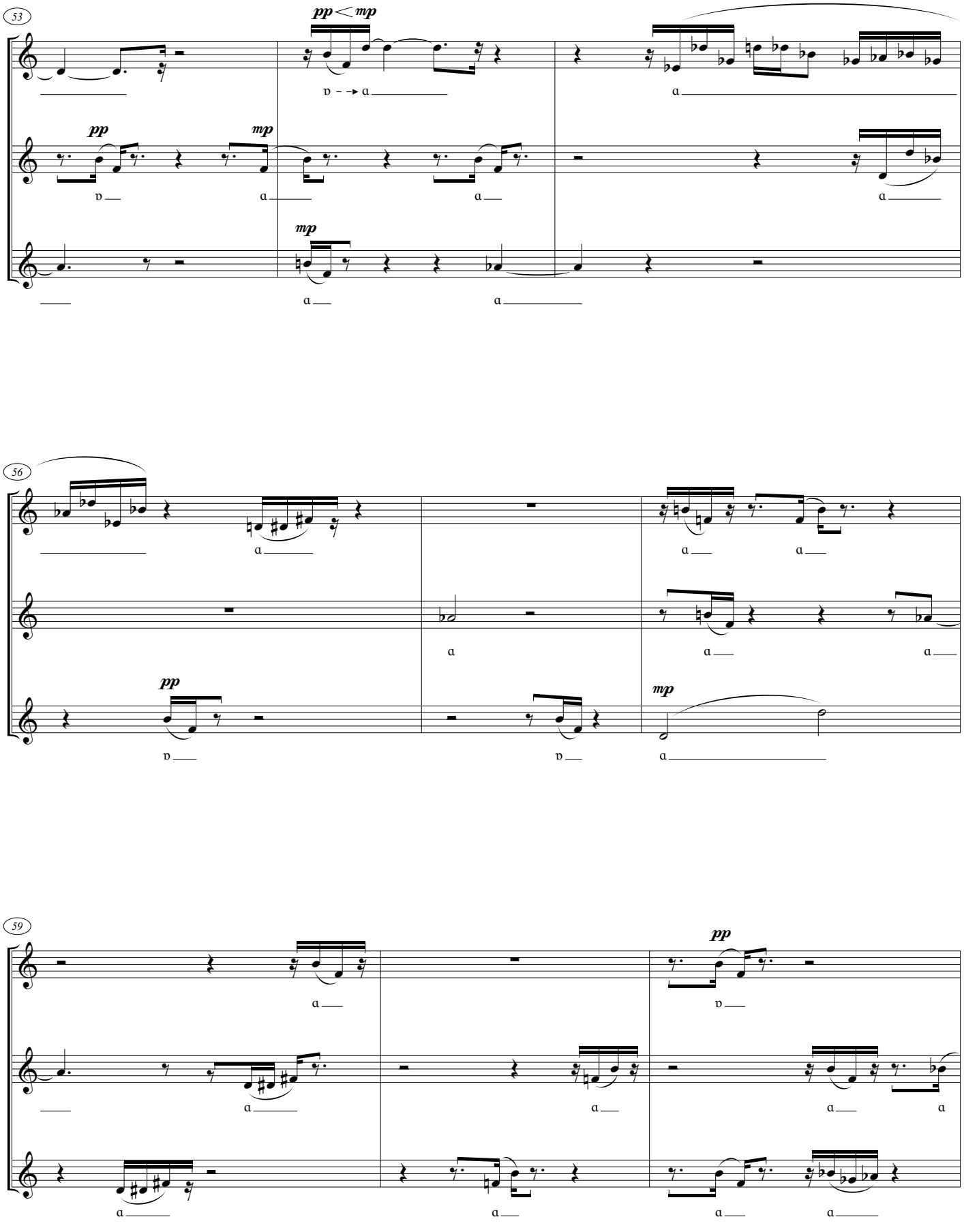

38
S.
Ms.
A.
mp

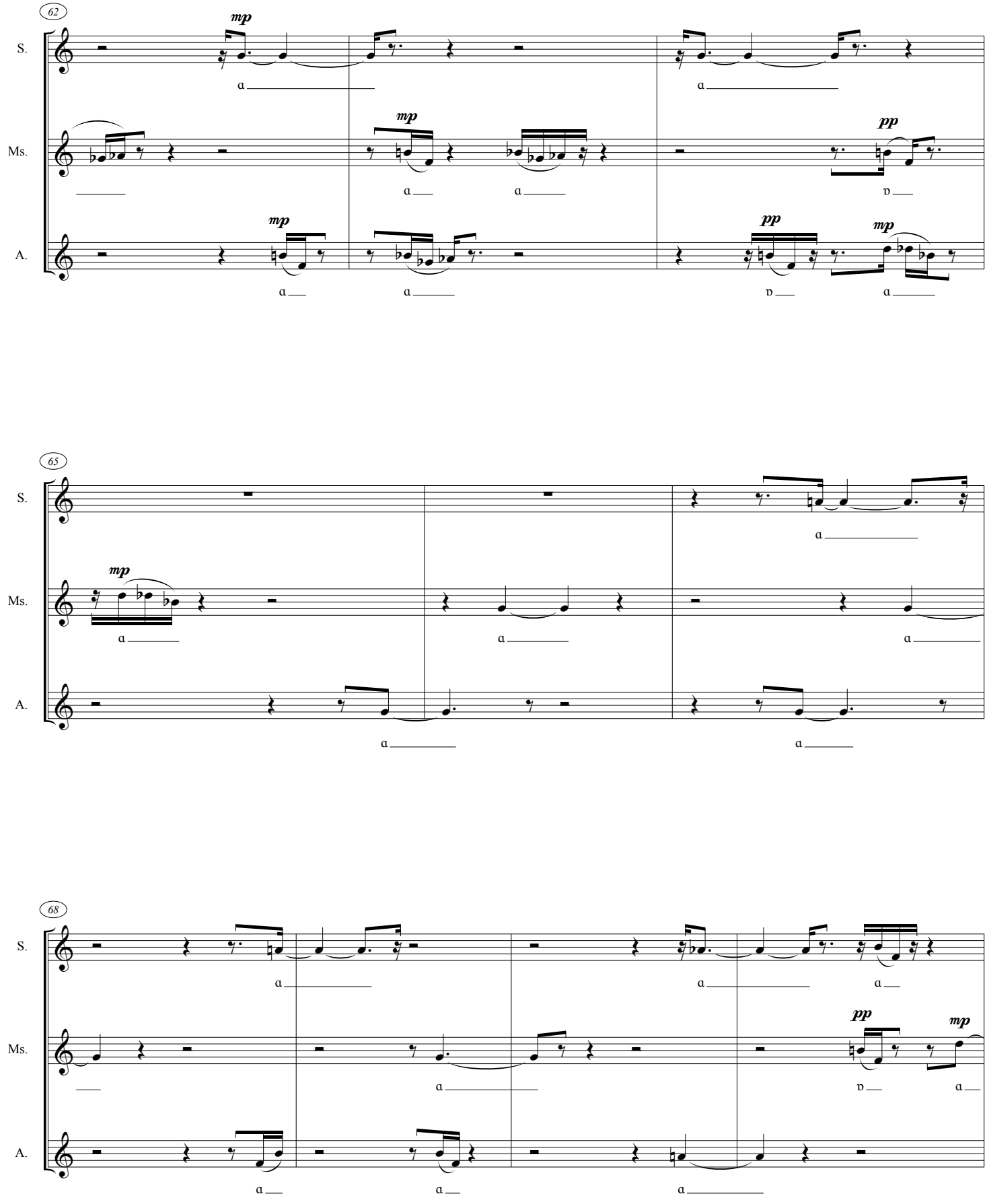

41
S.
Ms.
A.
pp
mp

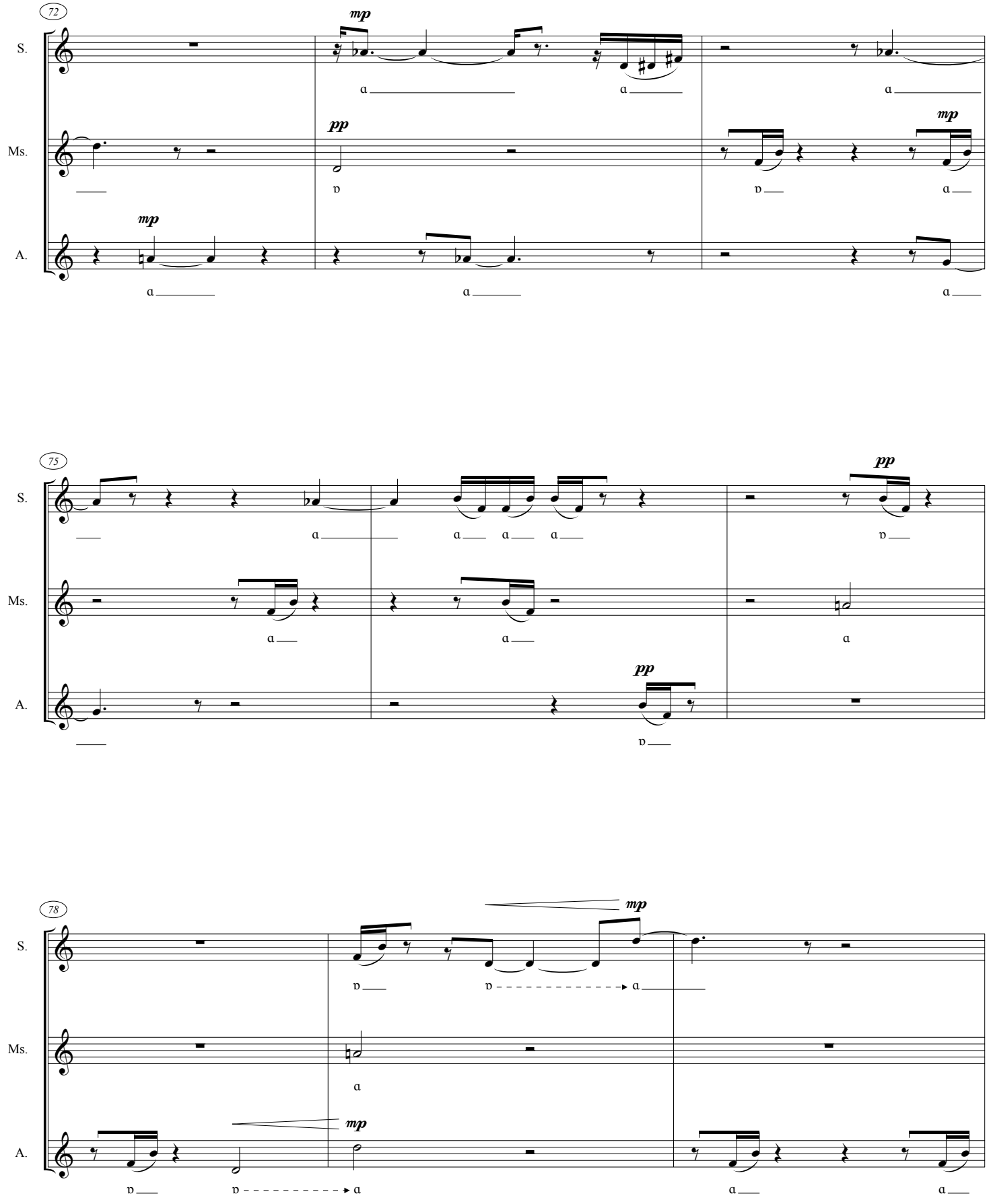

44
S.
Ms.
A.
mp
mp
mp

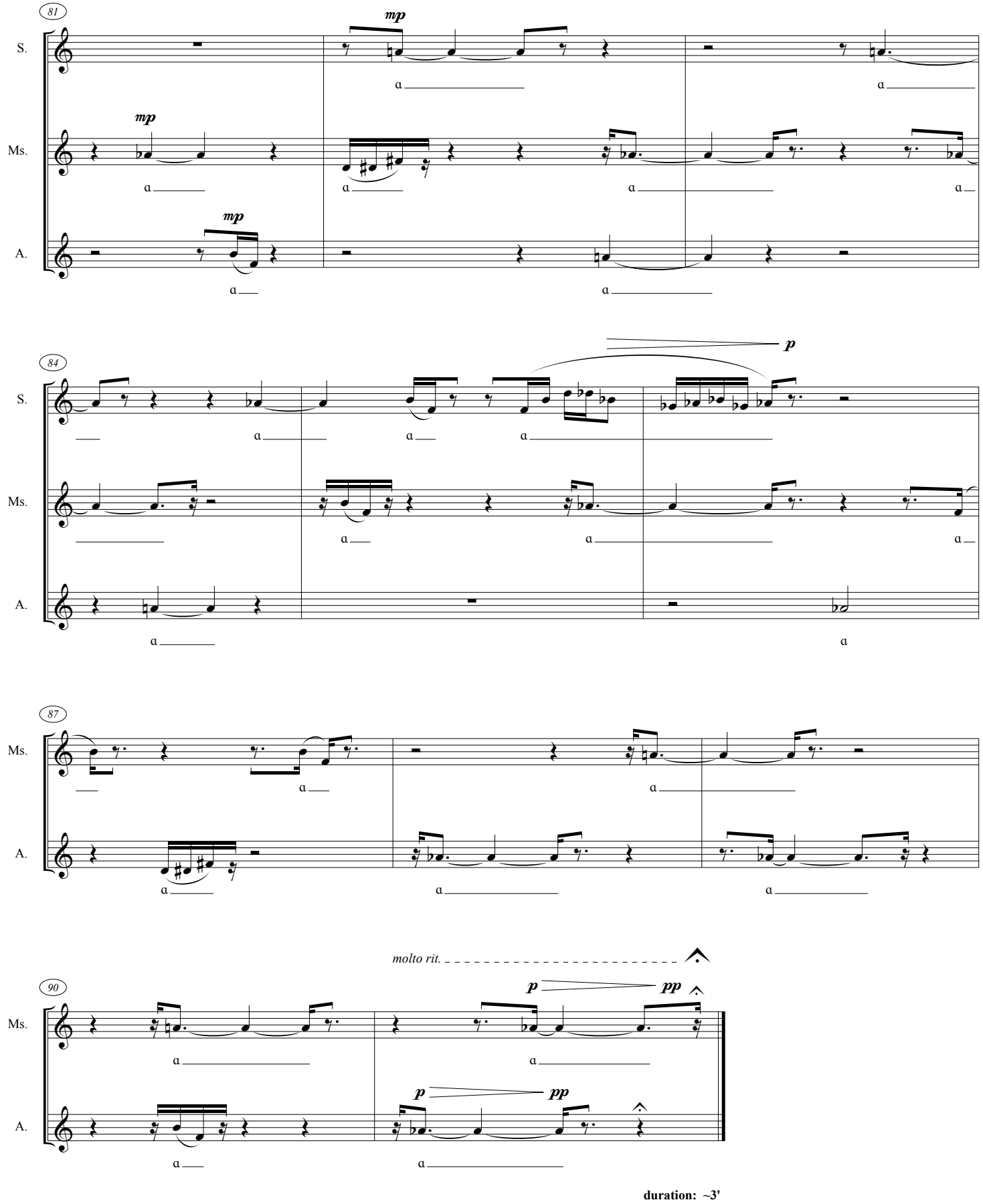

47
S.
Ms.
A.
pp
mp
pp
mp


50
S.
Ms.
A.
pp
pp
mp
pp


53
S.
Ms.
A.
pp
mp
56
59

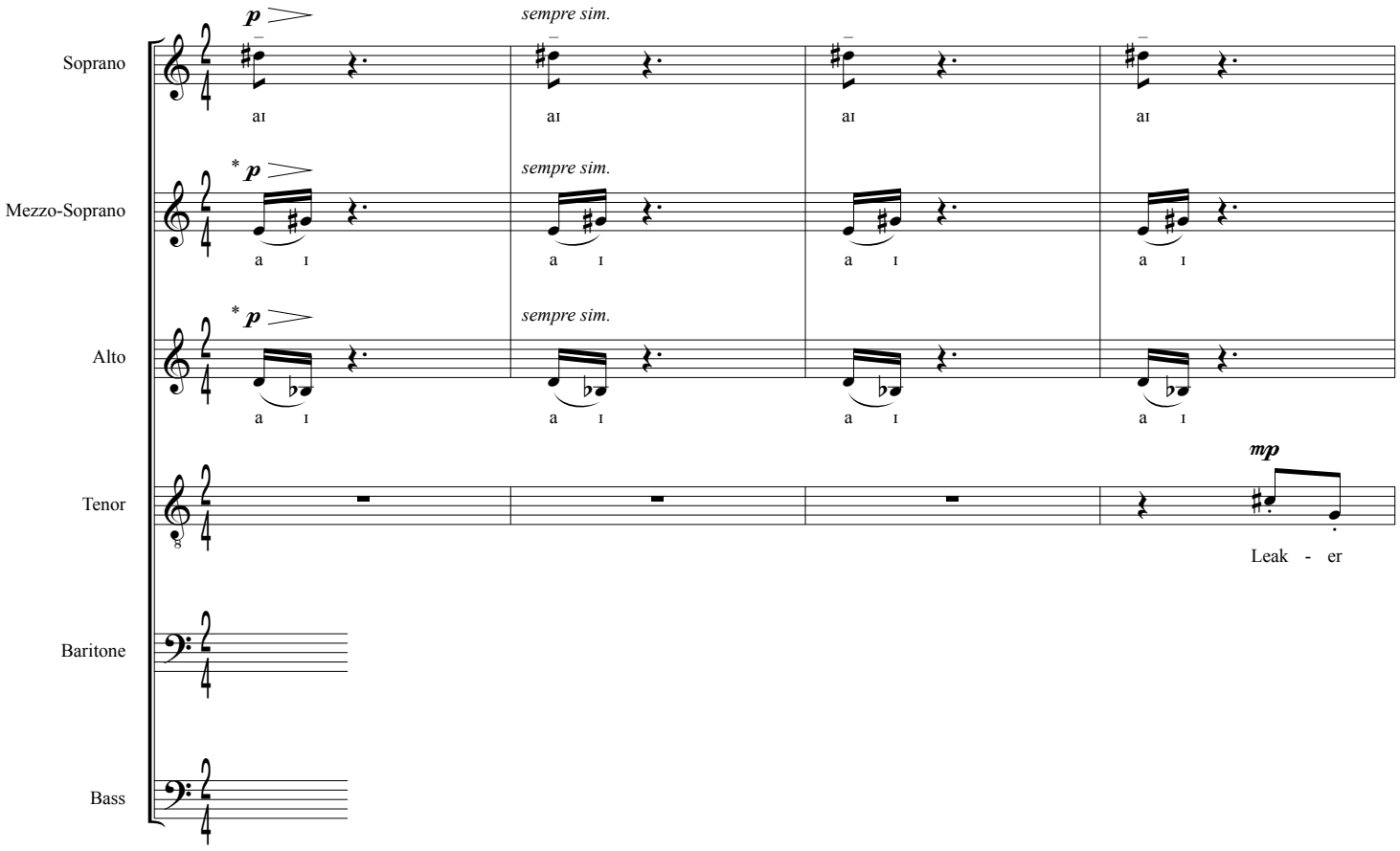

62
S.
Ms.
A.
mp
mp
mp
pp
pp
mp
65
S.
Ms.
A.
mp
68
S.
Ms.
A.
pp
mp


72
S.
Ms.
A.
mp
pp
mp
mp
75
S.
Ms.
A.
pp
pp
78
S.
Ms.
A.
mp
mp

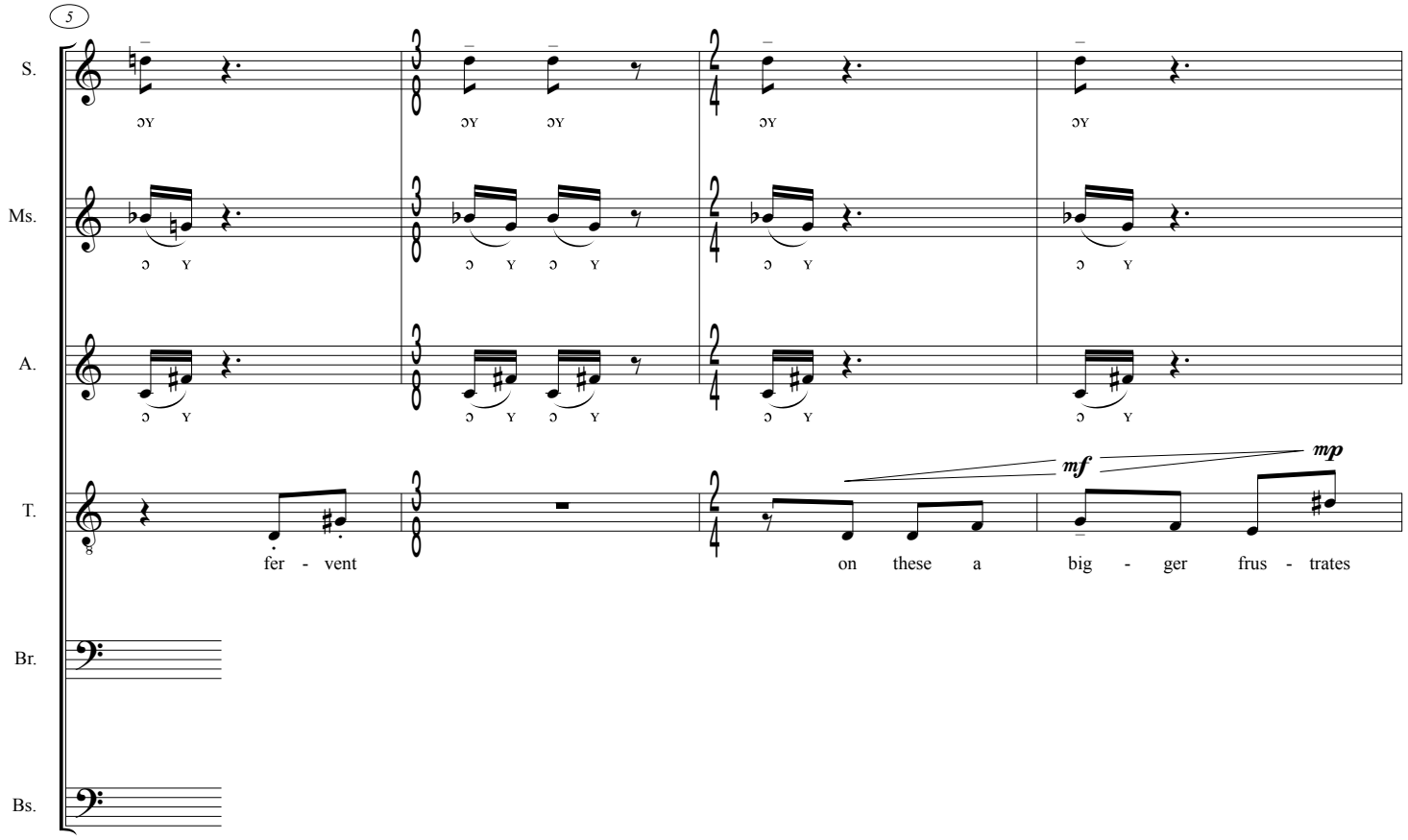

81
S.
Ms.
A.
mp
mp
mp
a
84
p
87
molto rit.
90
p
pp
duration: ~3'

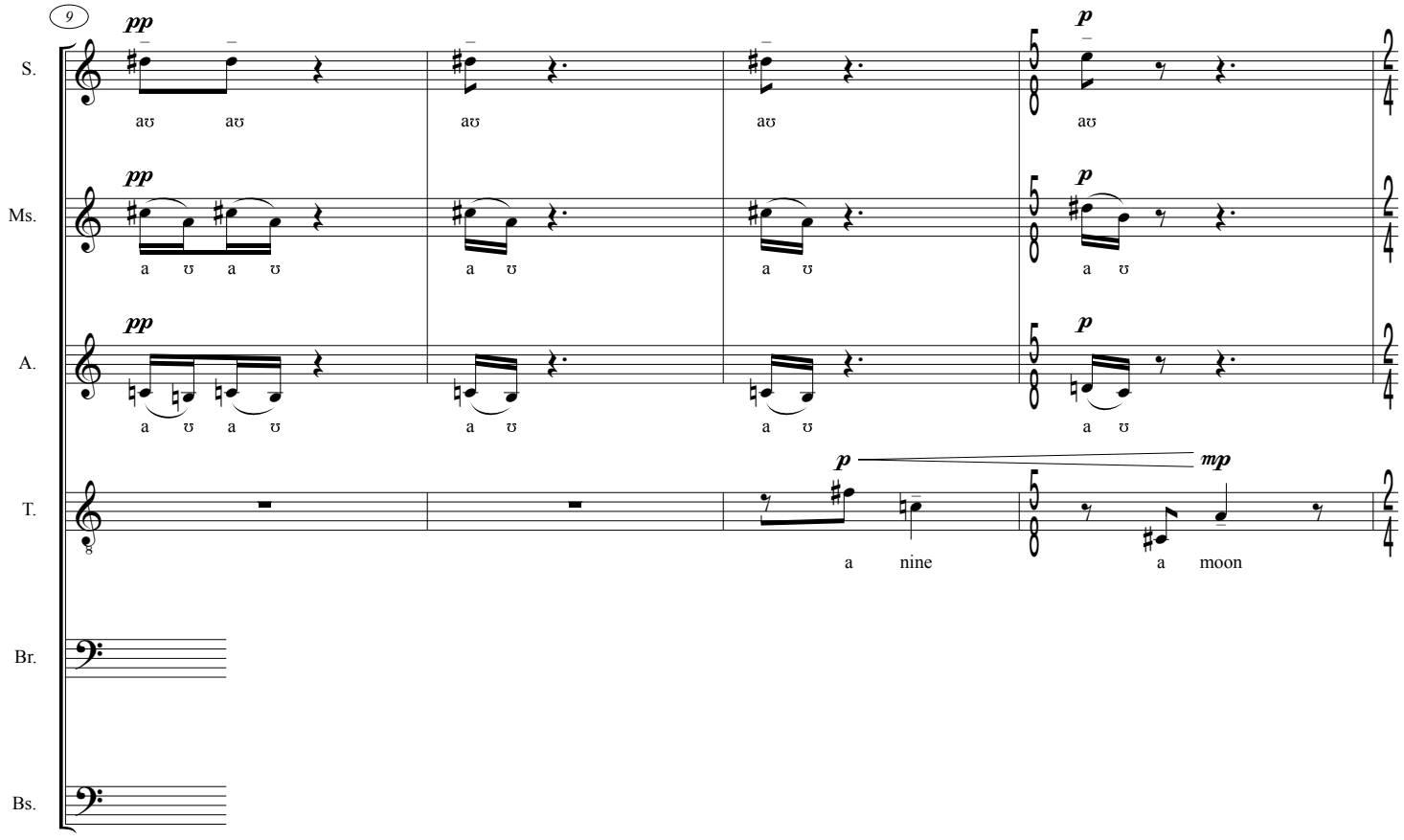
N. 7 *Ten-vase conga rider*

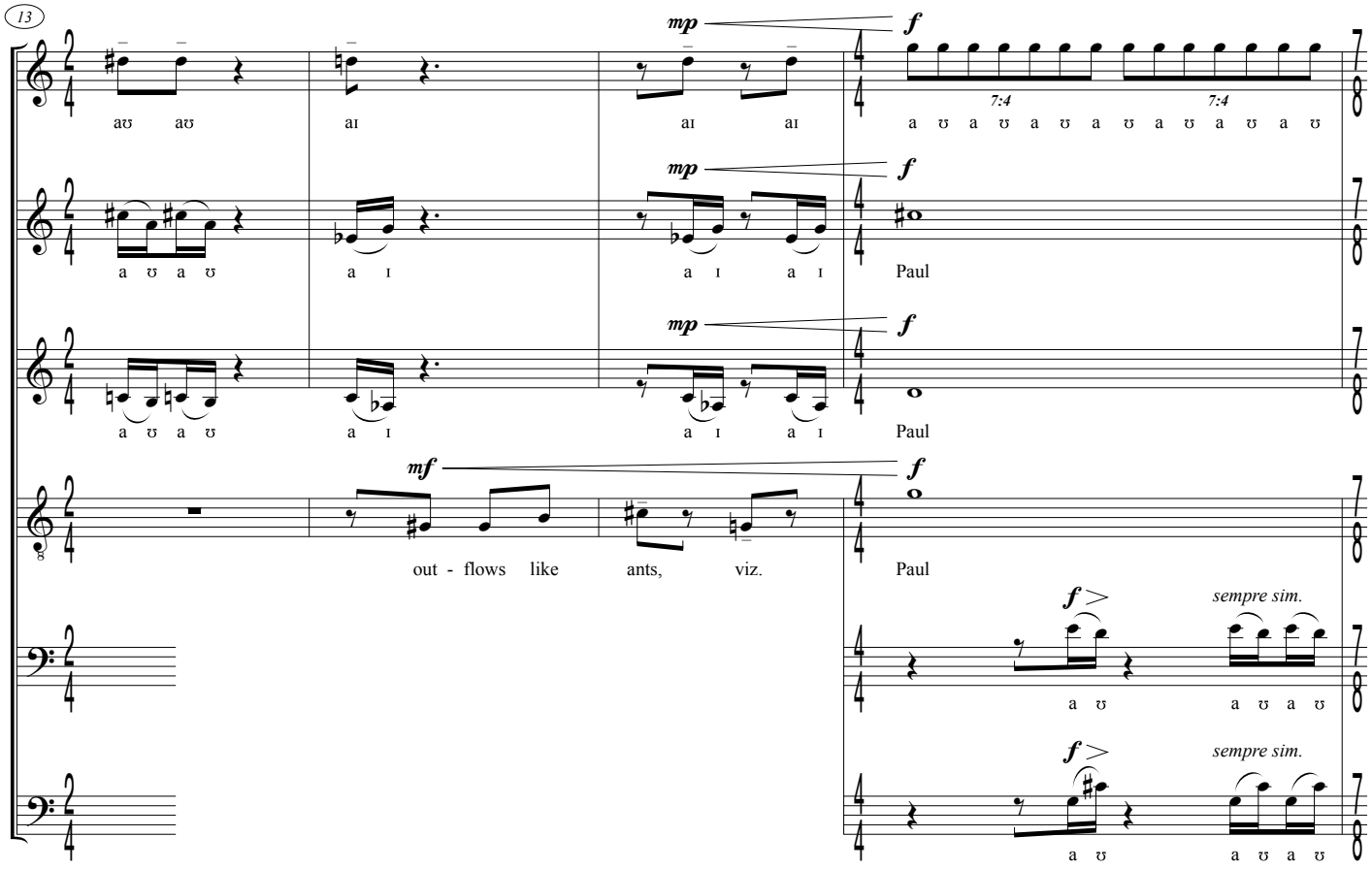
♩ = 120 **Sprightly / spritely**

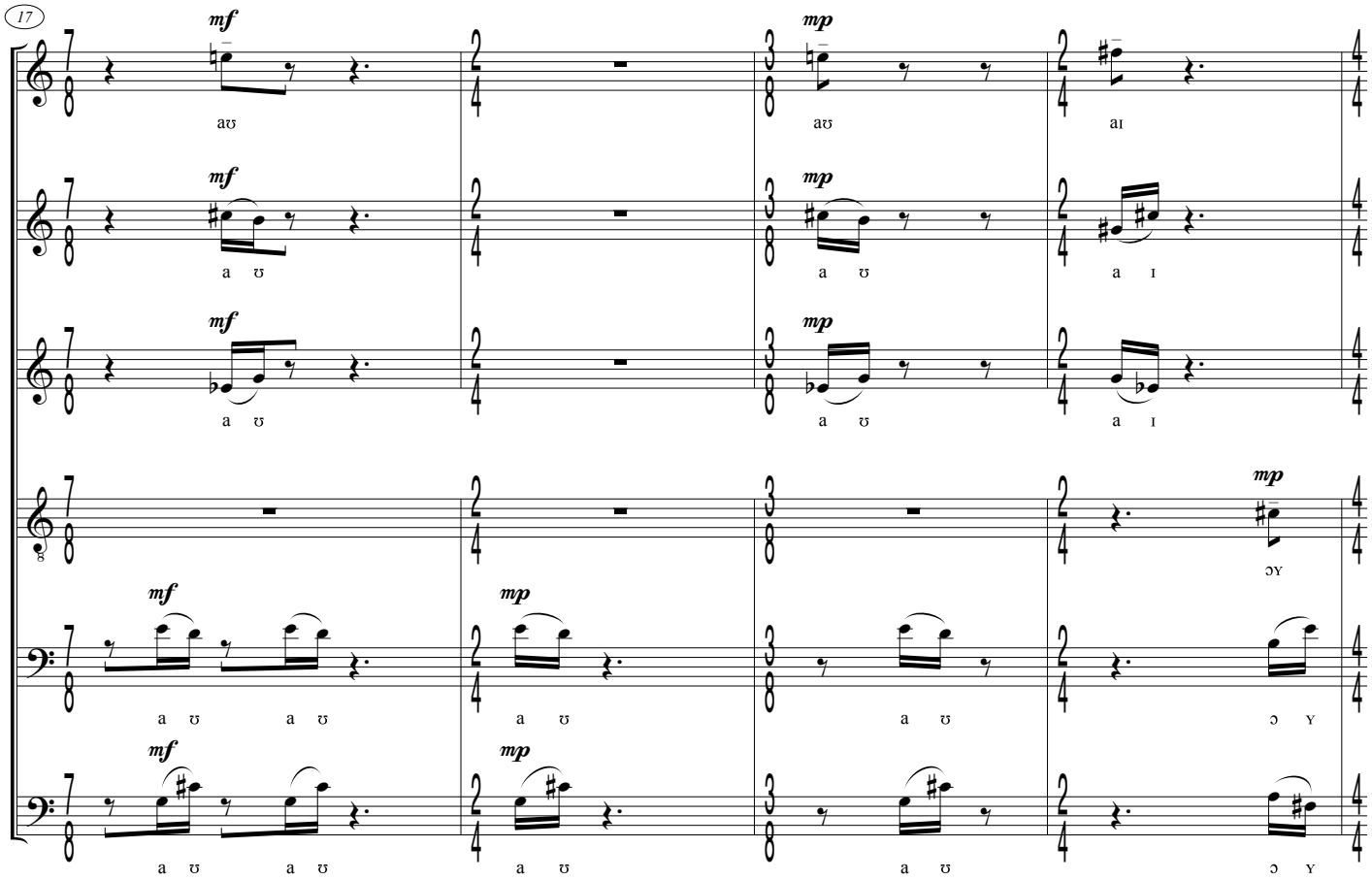


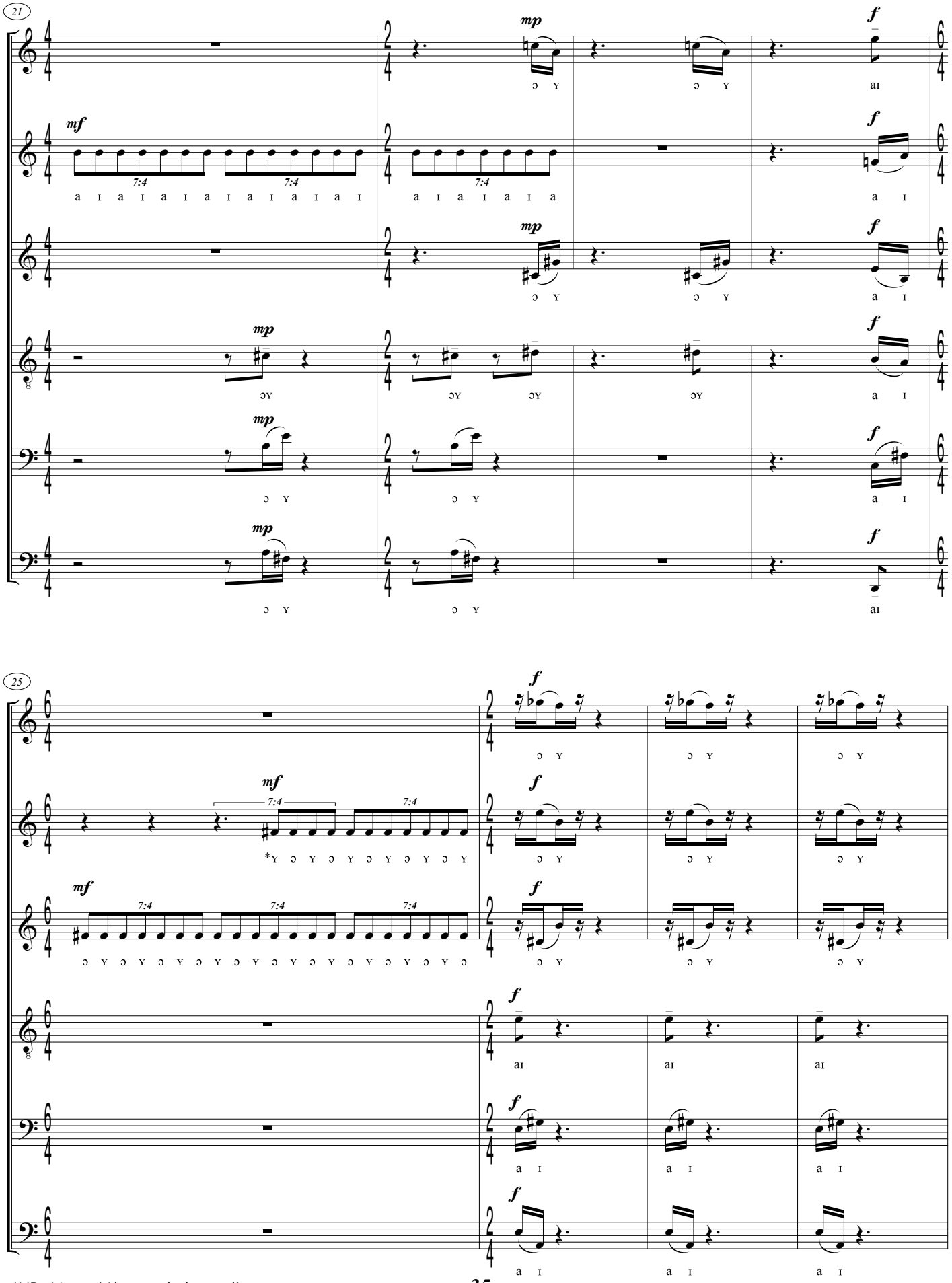
*Gestures like these in the Mezzo and Alto should be sung in a connected fashion, like a single-syllable diphthong (as opposed to two separate syllables).


5
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
Br.
Bs.
ɔʏ
ɔ Y
fer - vent
mf
mp
on these a
big - ger
frus - trates

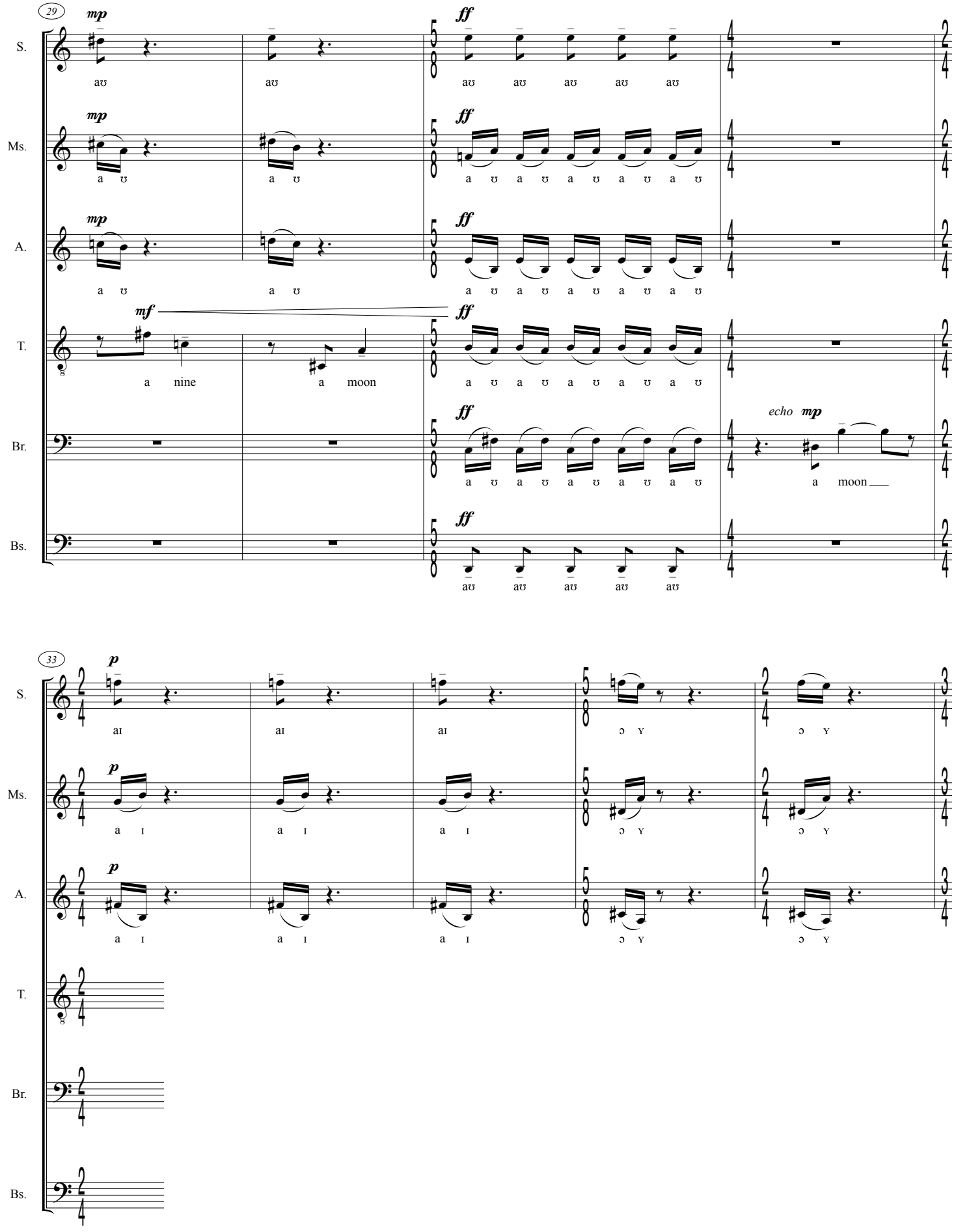

9
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
Br.
Bs.
pp
p
mp
aʊ
a ʊ
a nine
a moon

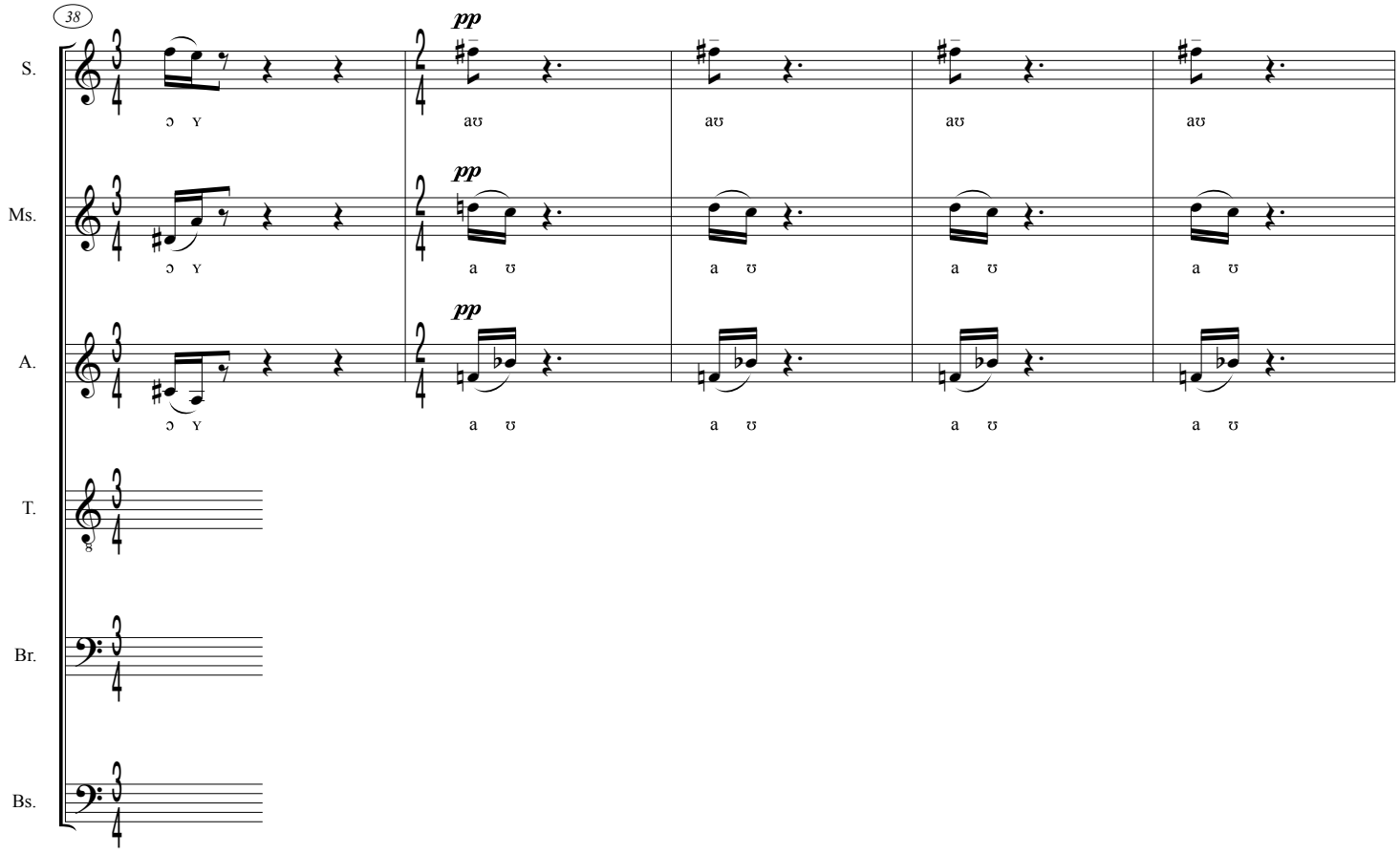

13
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
Br.
Bs.
mp
f
mf
aʊ aʊ
aɪ
aɪ aɪ
7:4
7:4
a ʊ a ʊ a ʊ a ʊ a ʊ a ʊ a ʊ a ʊ
a ʊ a ʊ
a ɪ
a ɪ a ɪ
Paul
out - flows like ants, viz.
sempre sim.
a ʊ
a ʊ a ʊ

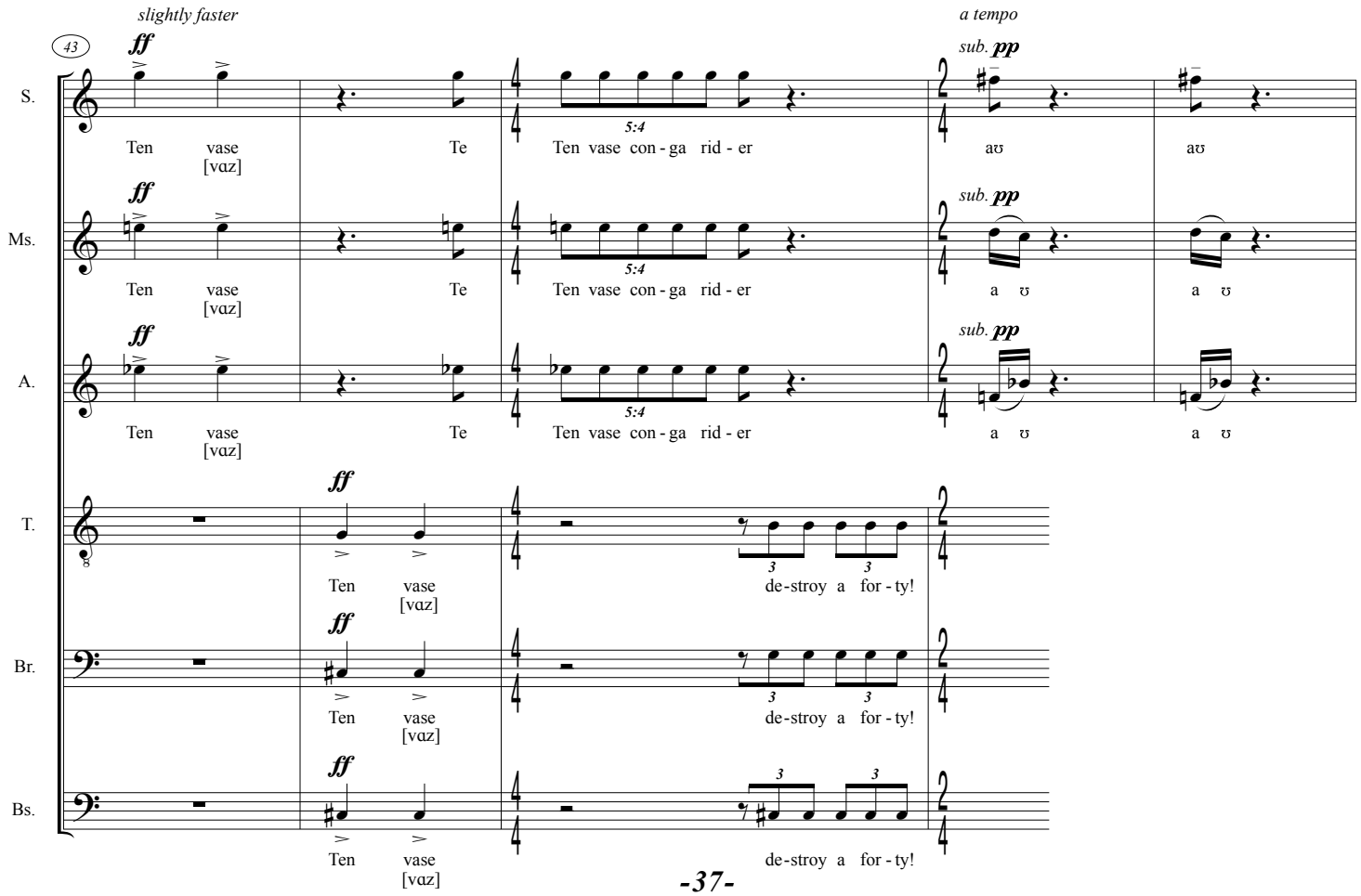

17
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
Br.
Bs.
mf
mp
aʊ
aʊ
aɪ
a ʊ
a ʊ
a ɪ
a ʊ
a ʊ
a ɪ
ɔʏ
a ʊ a ʊ
a ʊ
a ʊ
ɔ ʏ
a ʊ a ʊ
a ʊ
a ʊ
ɔ ʏ

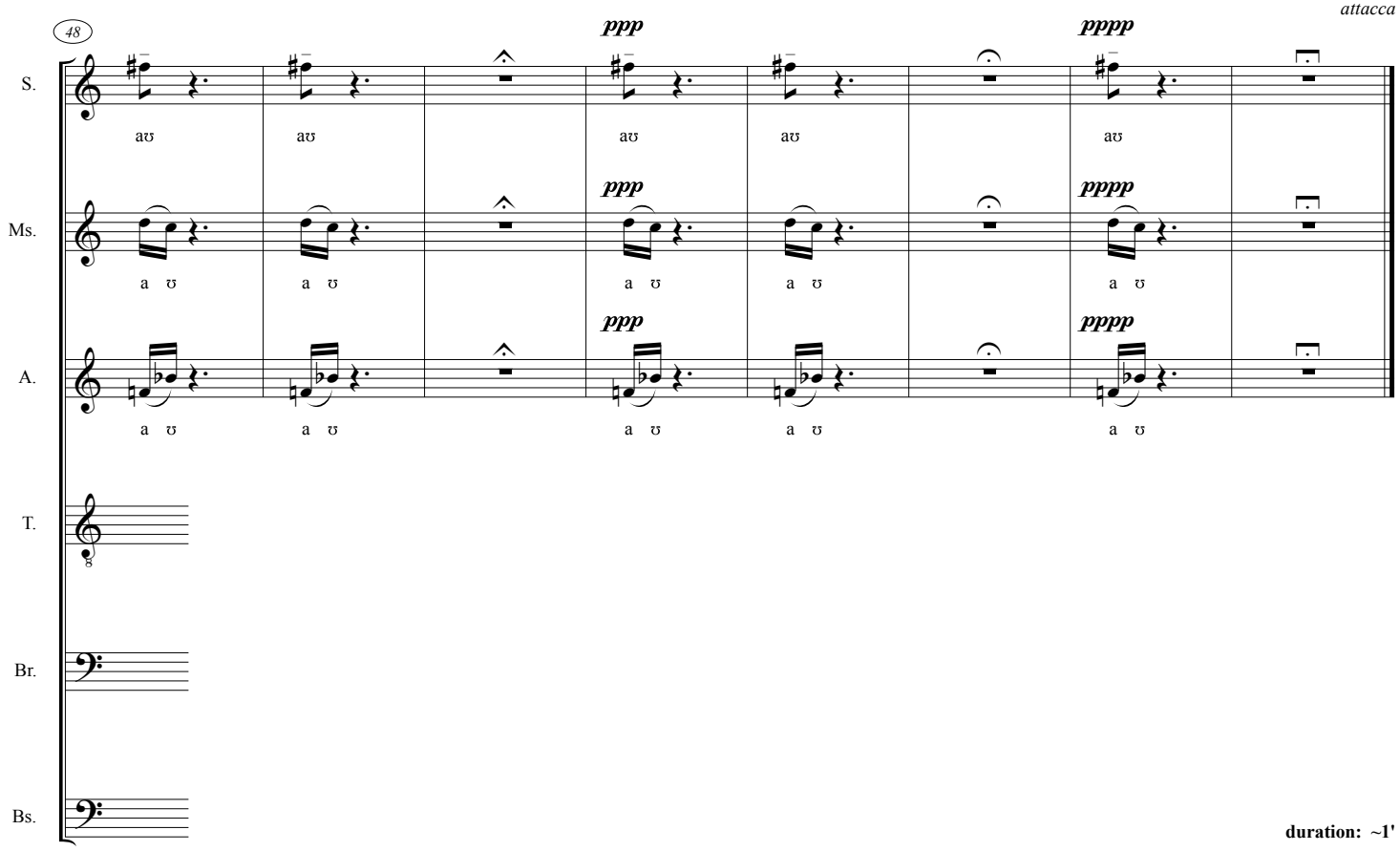


*NB: Mezzo / Alto vowels do not align

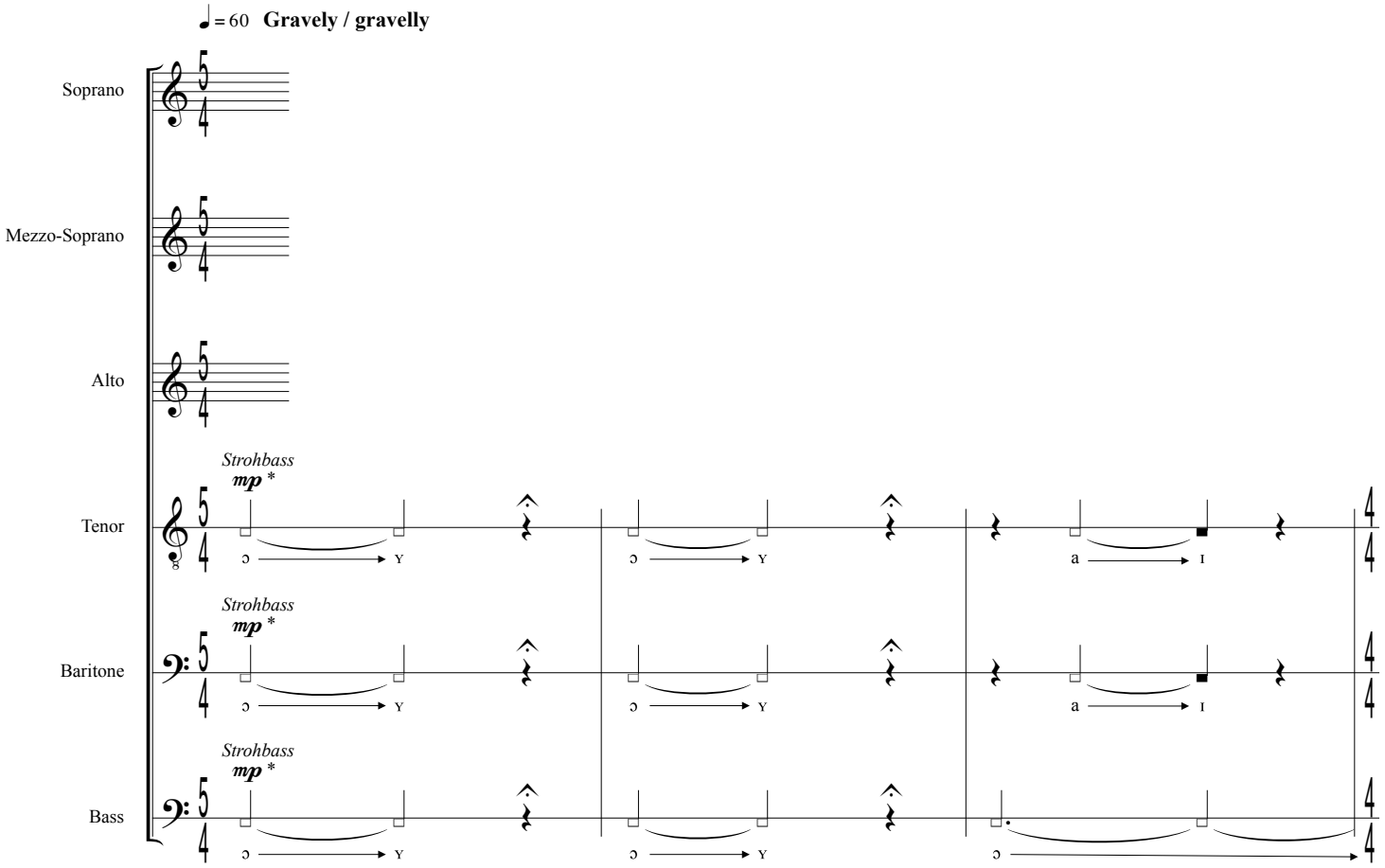

29
mp
ff
S.
Ms.
A.
mf
T.
a nine
a moon
Br.
echo mp
a moon
Bs.
33
p
a ɪ
ɔ ʏ


38
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
Br.
Bs.
pp
ɔ ʏ
aʊ
a ʊ

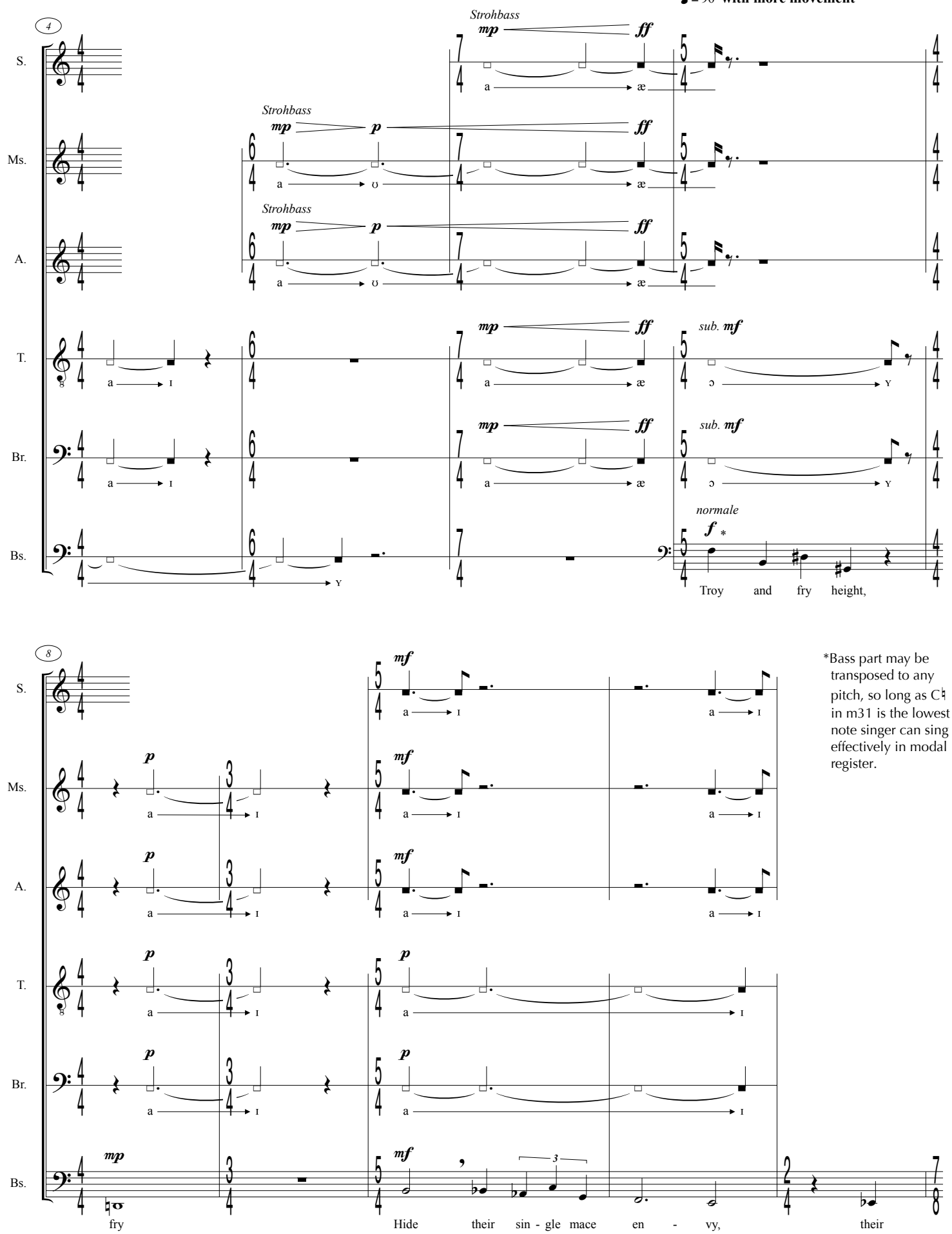

slightly faster
a tempo
43
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
Br.
Bs.
ff
sub. pp
Ten vase [vɑz]
Te
Ten vase con - ga rid - er
5:4
aʊ
a ʊ
de-stroy a for - ty!

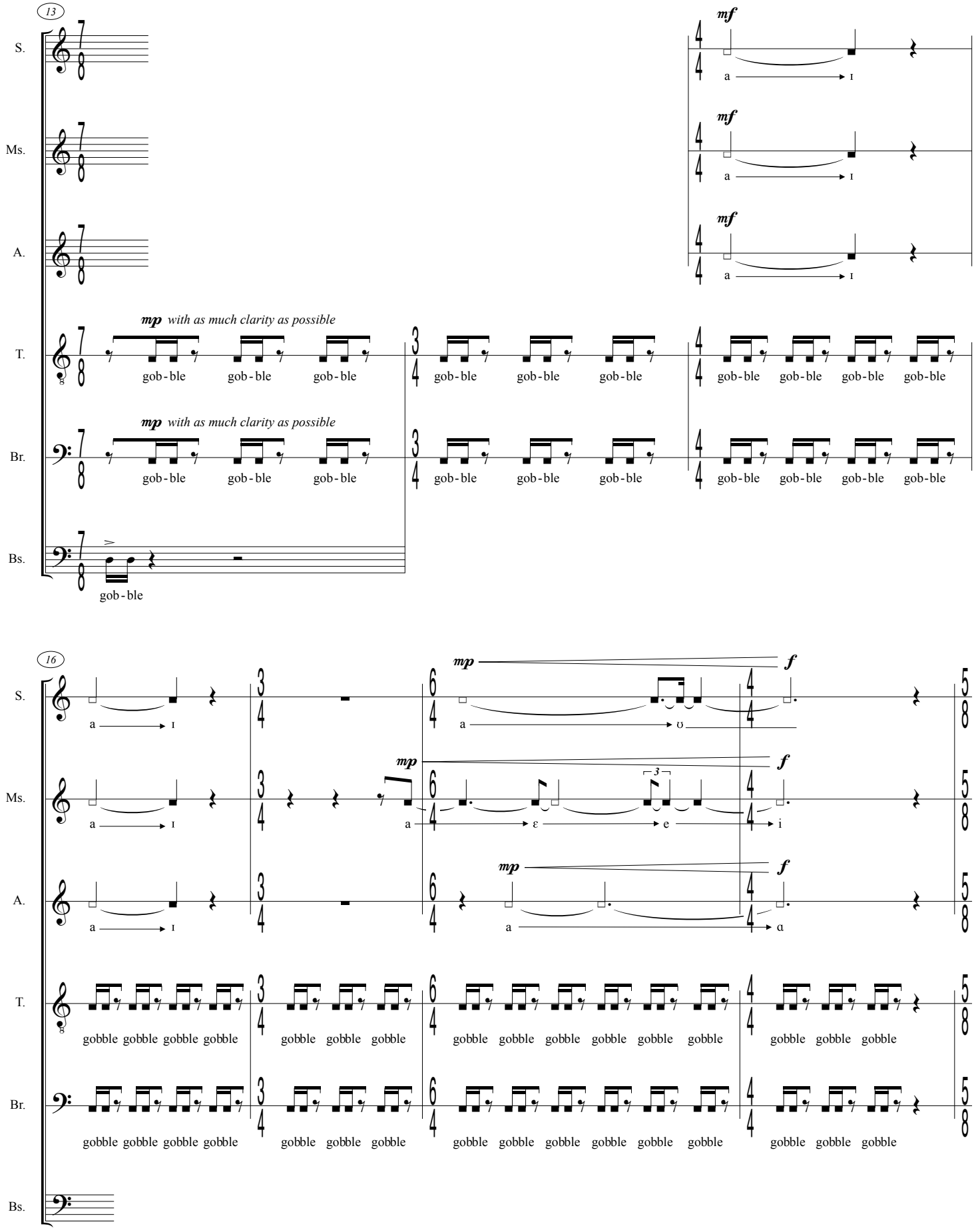

attacca
48
ppp
pppp
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
Br.
Bs.
aʊ
a ʊ
duration: ~1'

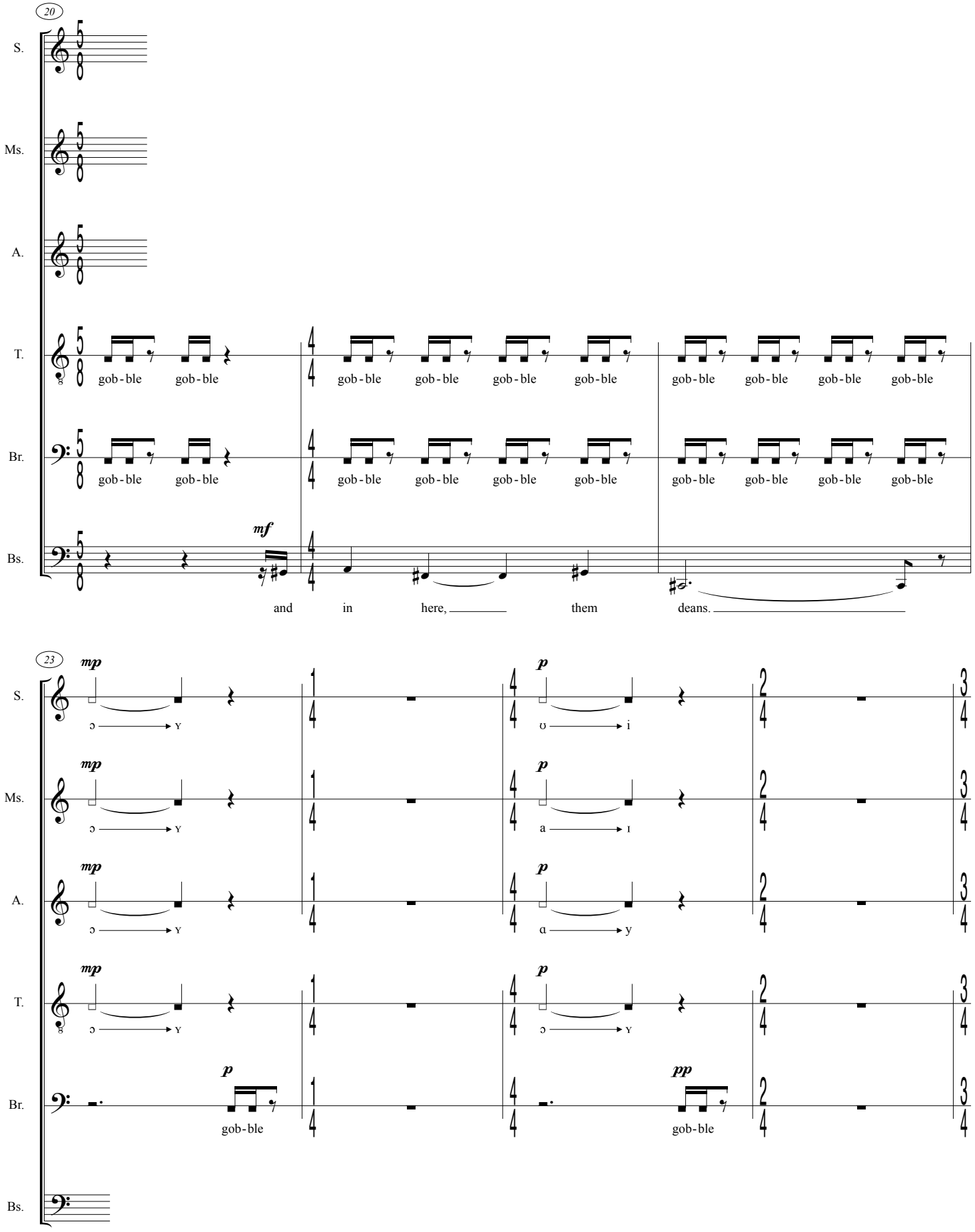
N. 8 *Fry height*

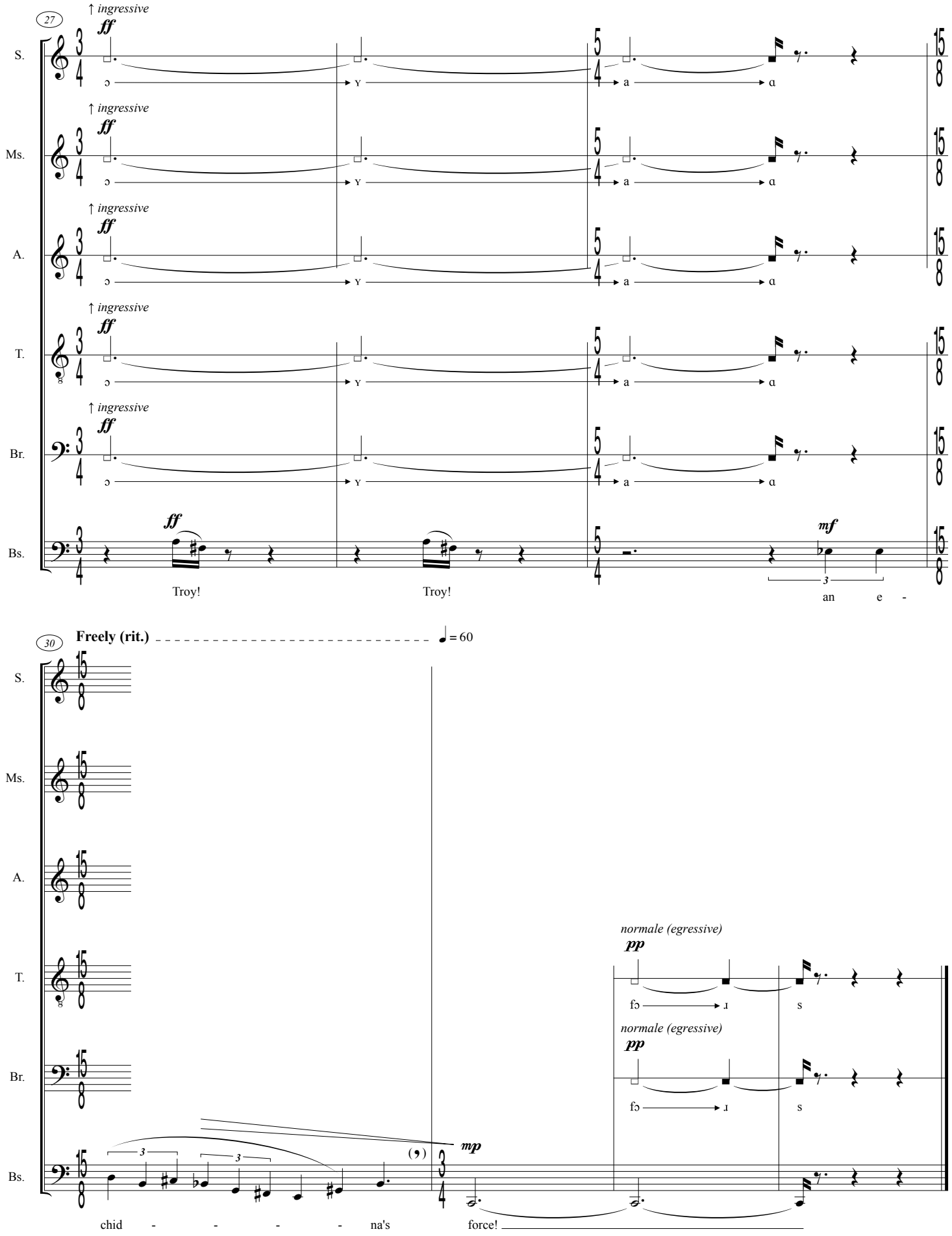


*Dynamics for Strohbass (vocal fry) are relative and denote the amount of air support behind the sound, they do not refer the actual volume of the resulting sound.


♩= 90 with more movement
4
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
Br.
Bs.
Strohbass
mp
p
ff
sub. mf
normale
f *
Troy and fry height,
8
mf
fry
Hide their sin - gle mace en - vy, their
*Bass part may be transposed to any pitch, so long as C♮ in m31 is the lowest note singer can sing effectively in modal register.


13
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
Br.
Bs.
mf
a ɪ
mp with as much clarity as possible
gob-ble gob-ble gob-ble
gob-ble gob-ble gob-ble
gob-ble gob-ble gob-ble gob-ble
gob-ble
16
mp
f
a ɪ
a ʊ
a ɛ e i
a ɑ
3
gobble gobble gobble gobble
gobble gobble gobble
gobble gobble gobble gobble gobble gobble
gobble gobble gobble


20
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
Br.
Bs.
gob-ble gob-ble
gob-ble gob-ble gob-ble gob-ble
gob-ble gob-ble gob-ble gob-ble
mf
and in here, them deans.
23
mp
p
pp
ɔ → ʏ
ʊ → i
a → ɪ
ɑ → y
gob-ble
gob-ble

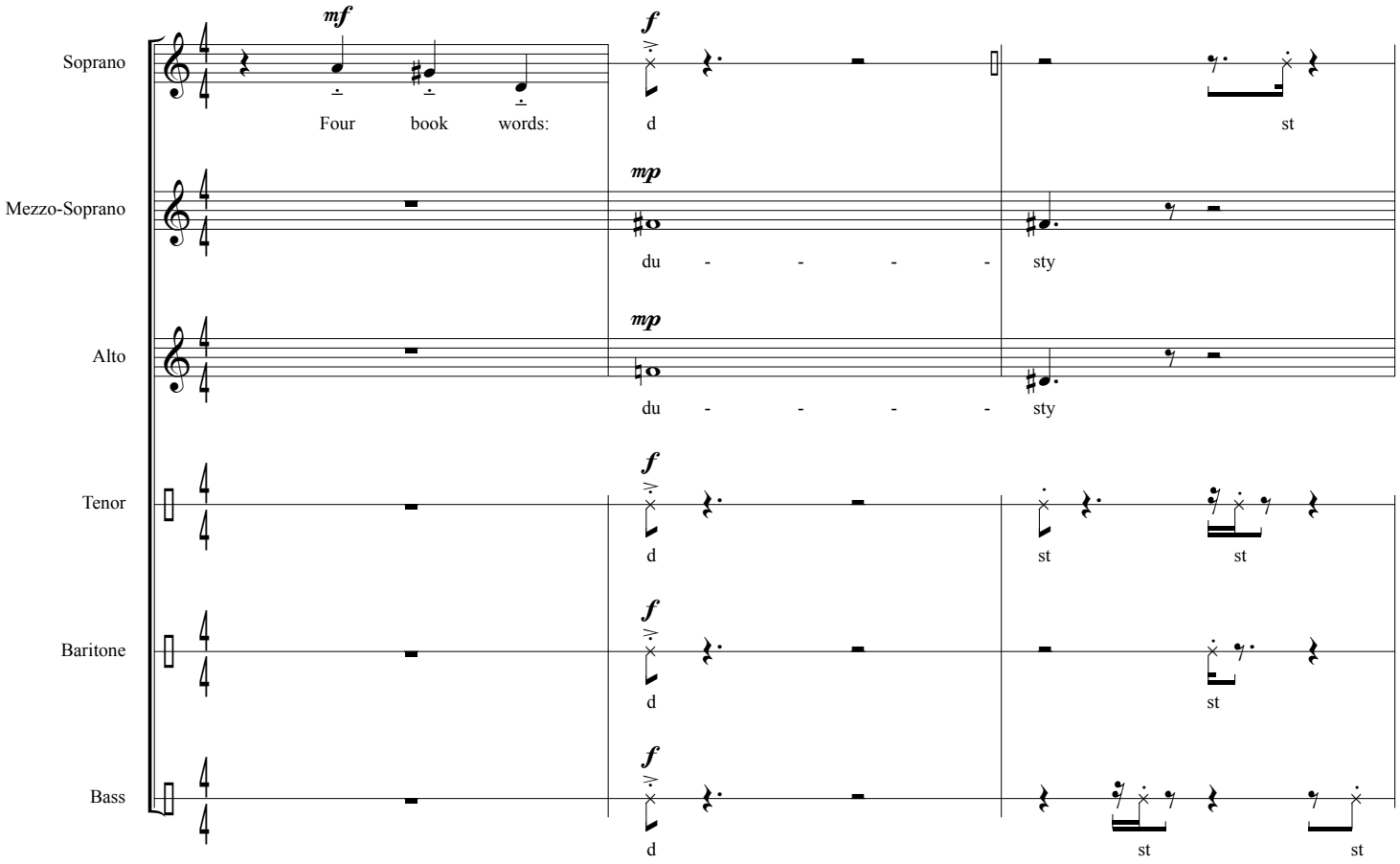


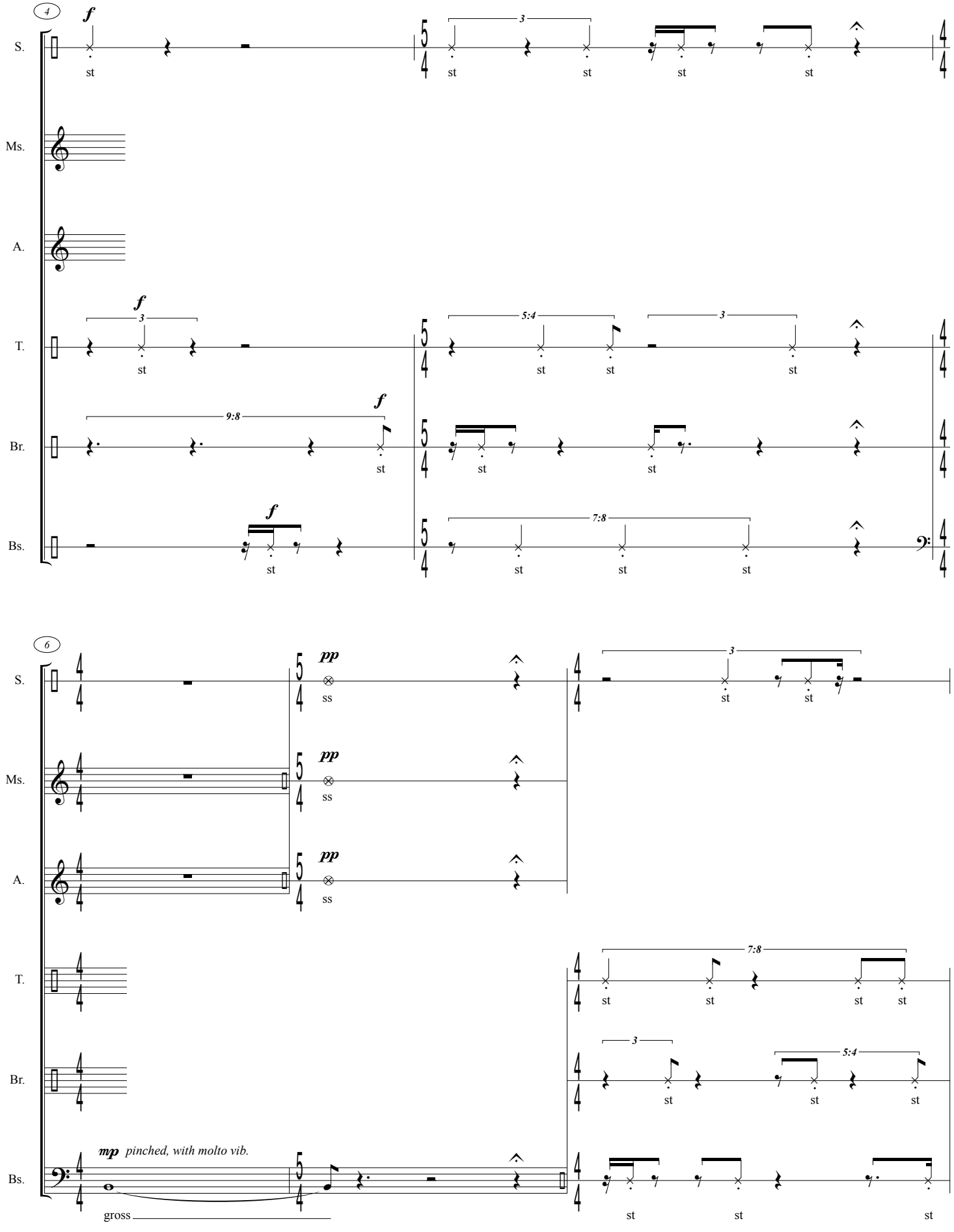
duration: ~1:40'

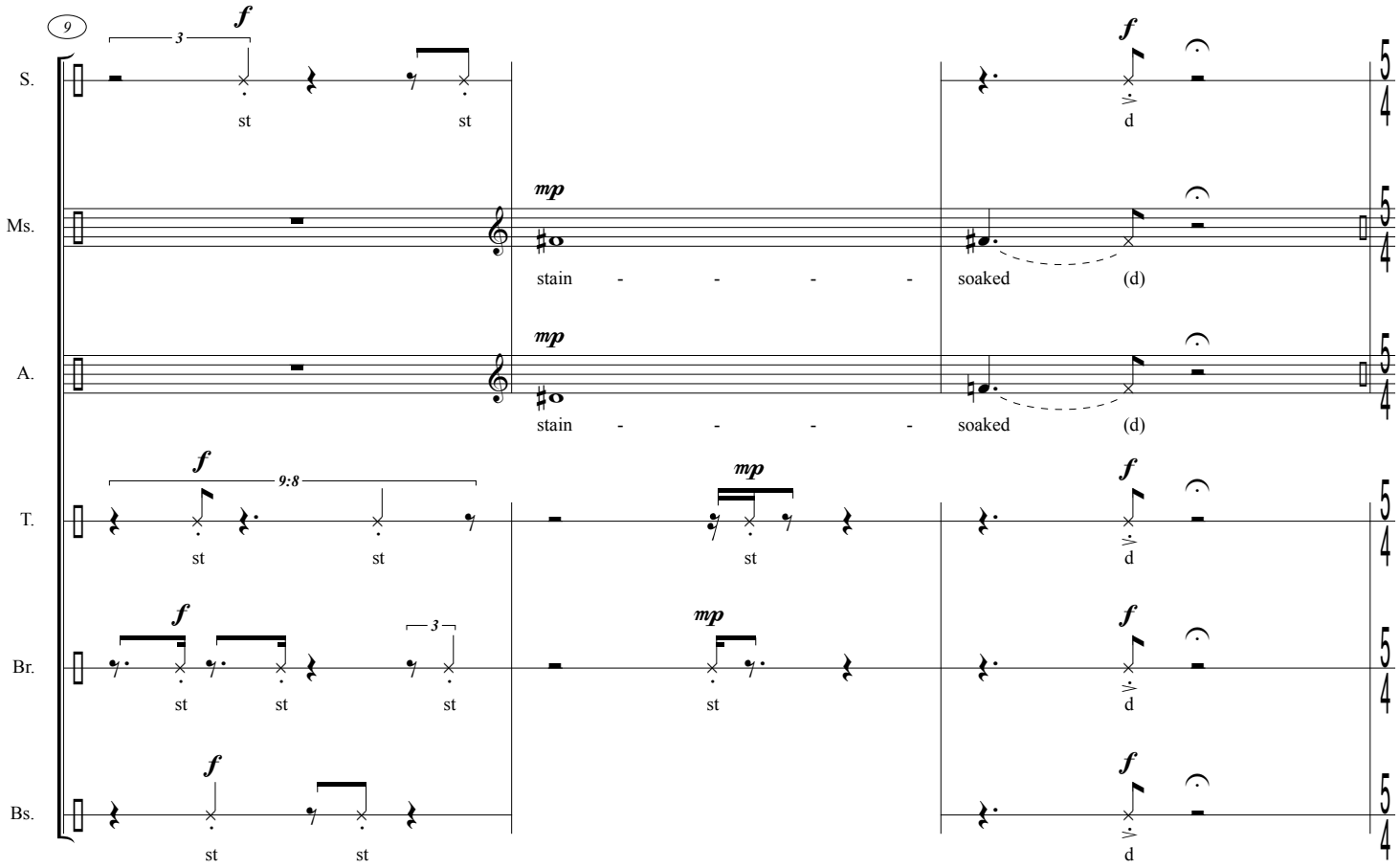
III

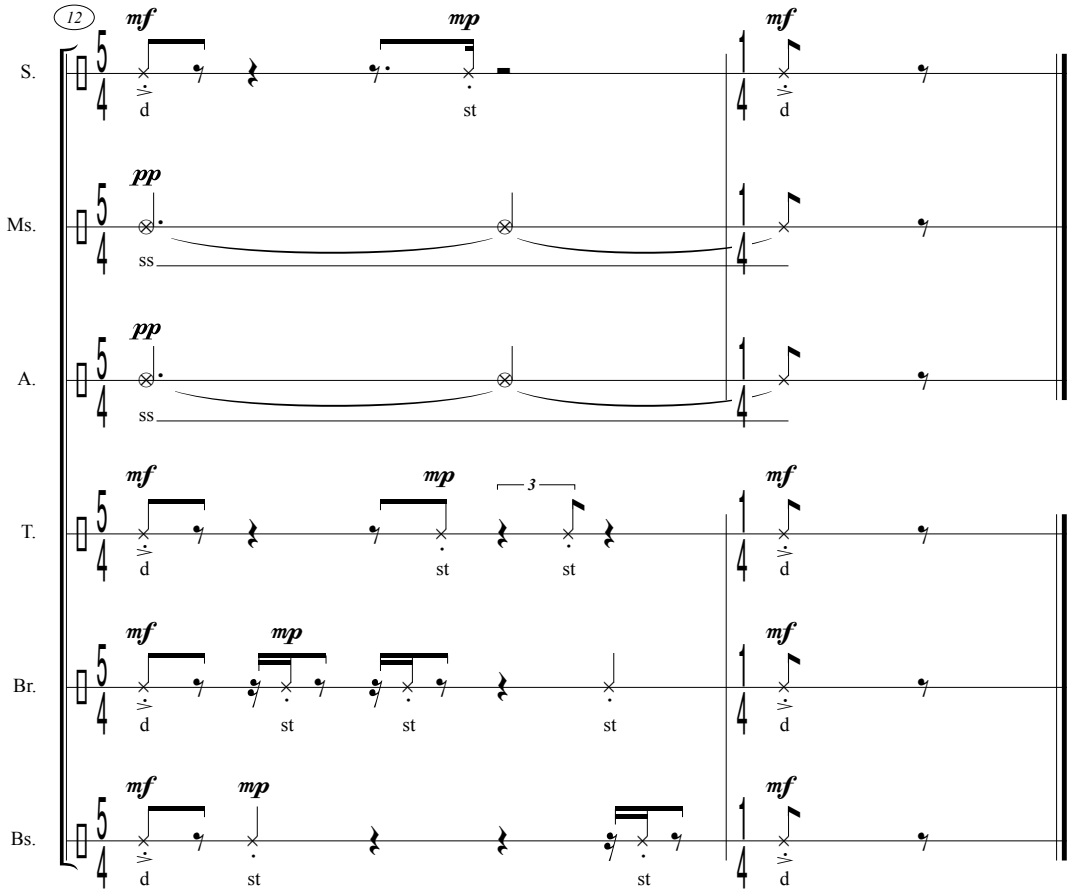
N. 9 *Four book words*

♩ = 108 **Musty, brittle**




4
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
Br.
Bs.
f
st
3
5:4
9:8
7:8
6
pp
ss
mp
pinched, with molto vib.
gross

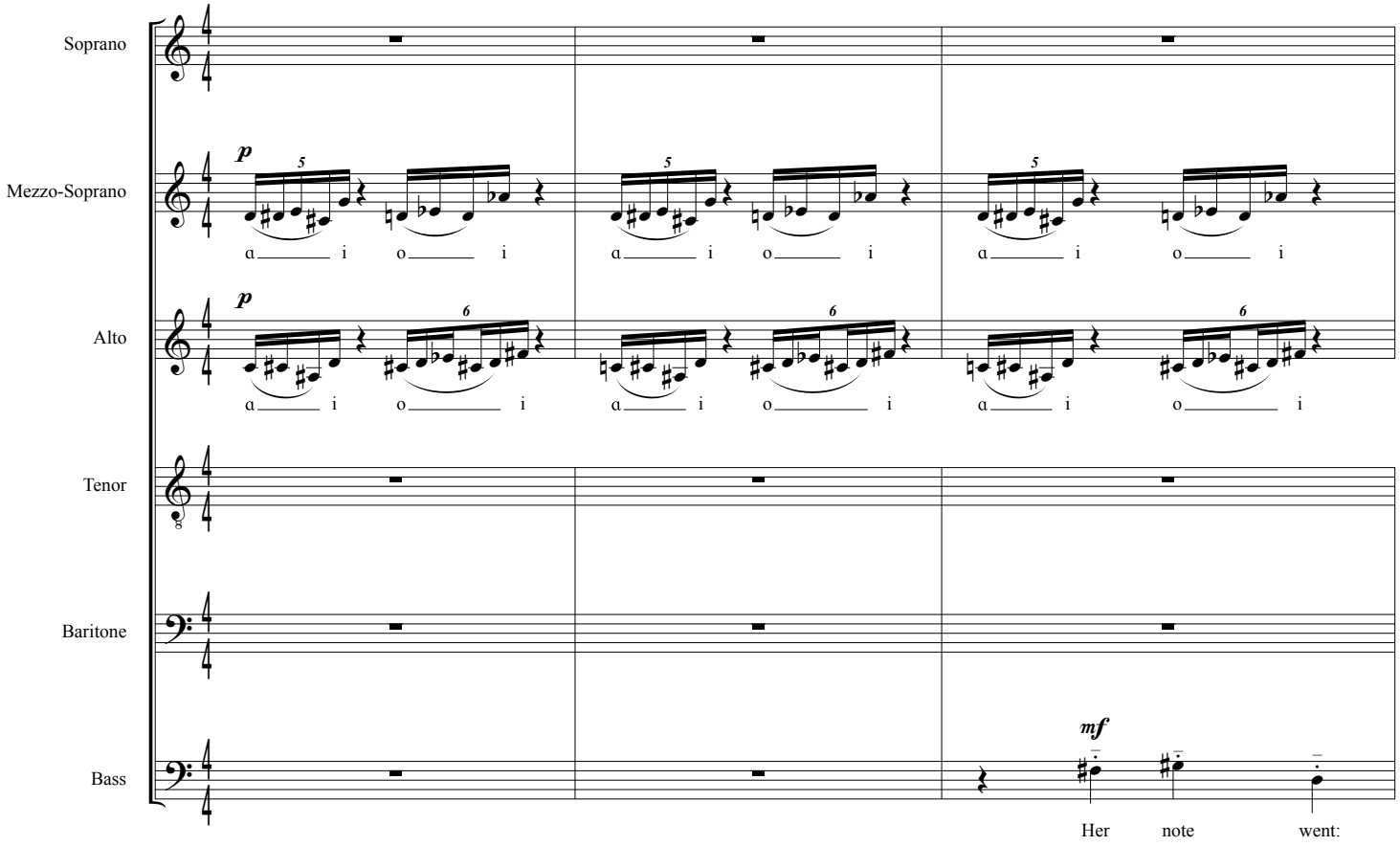


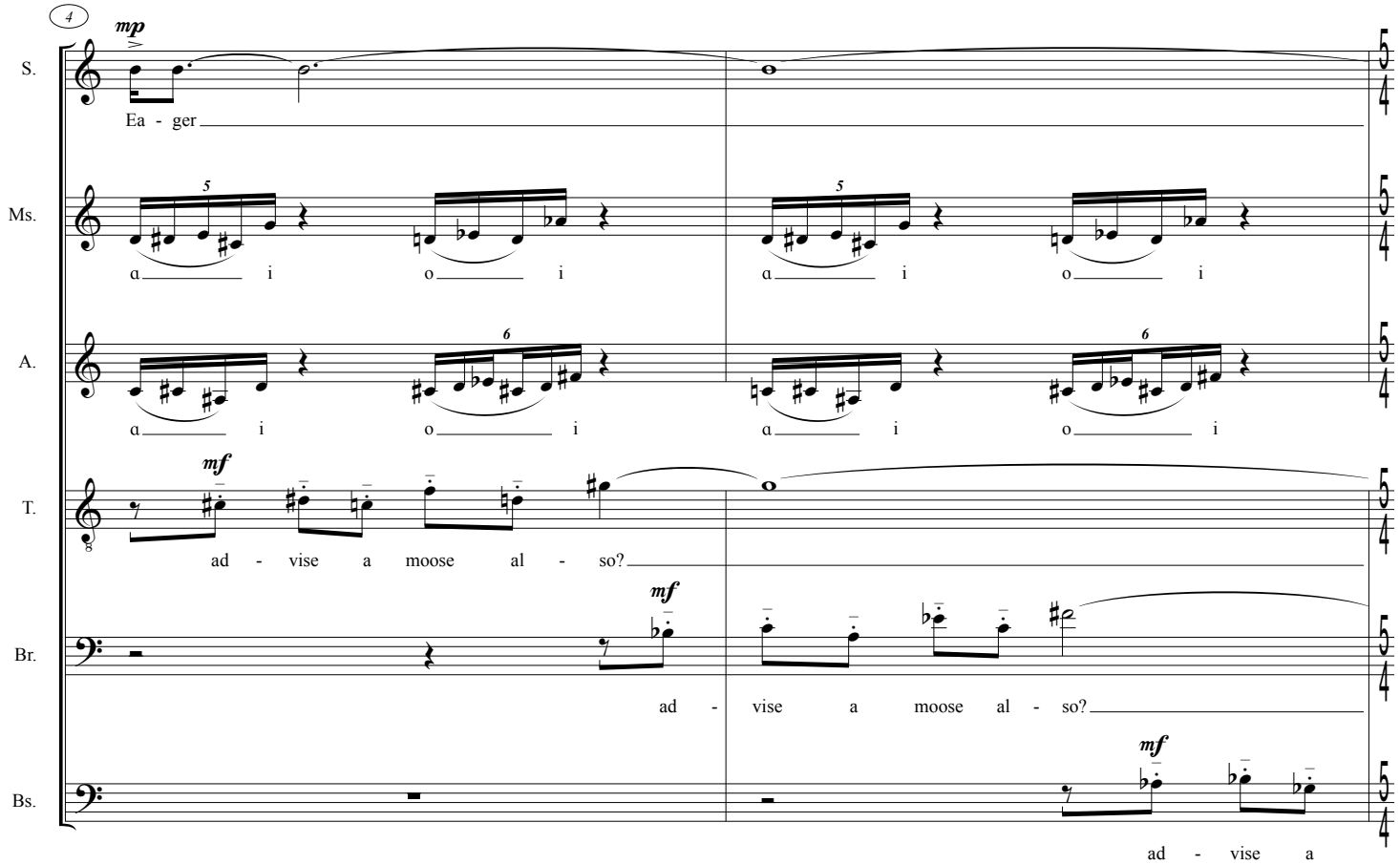


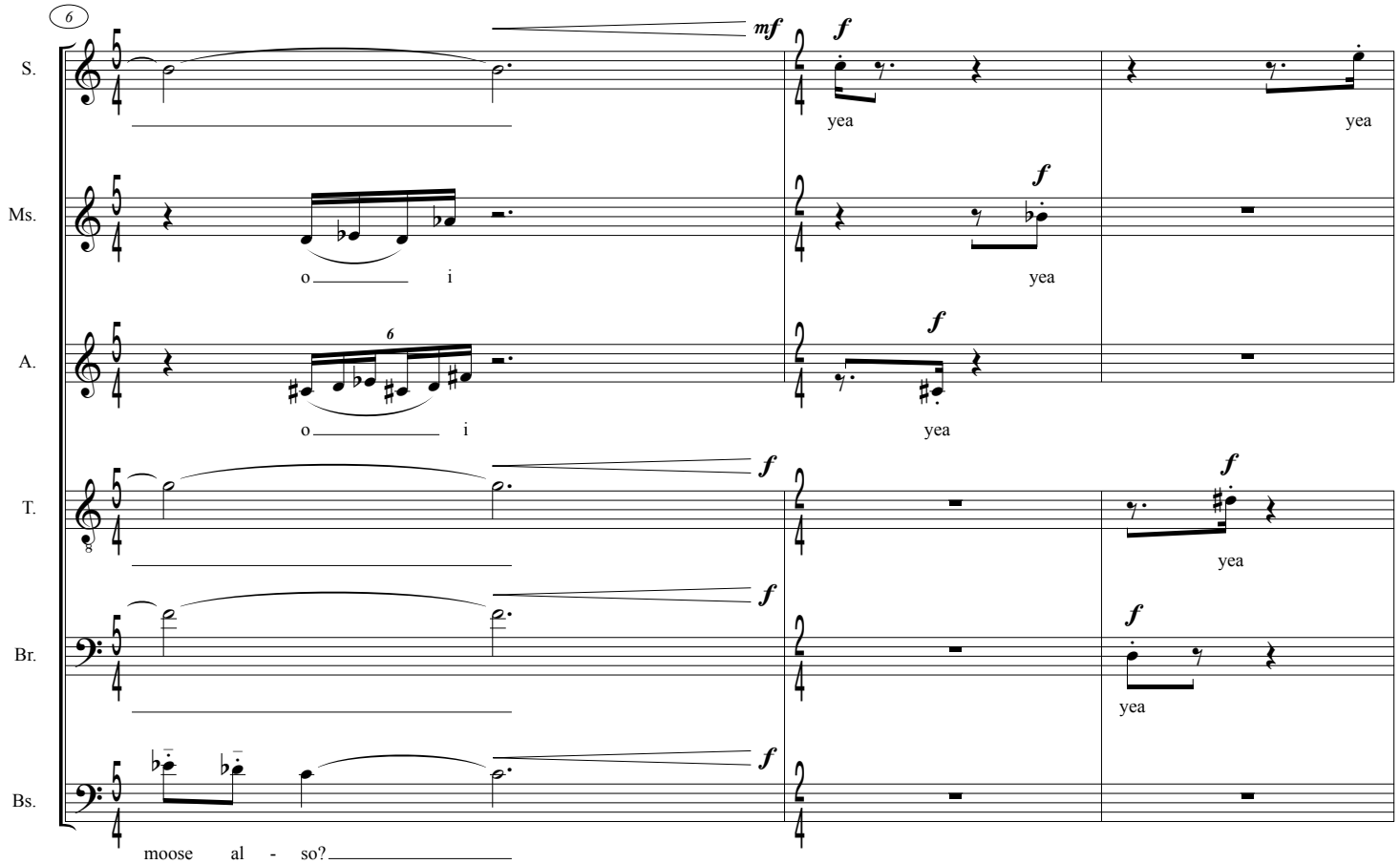
duration: ~0:30

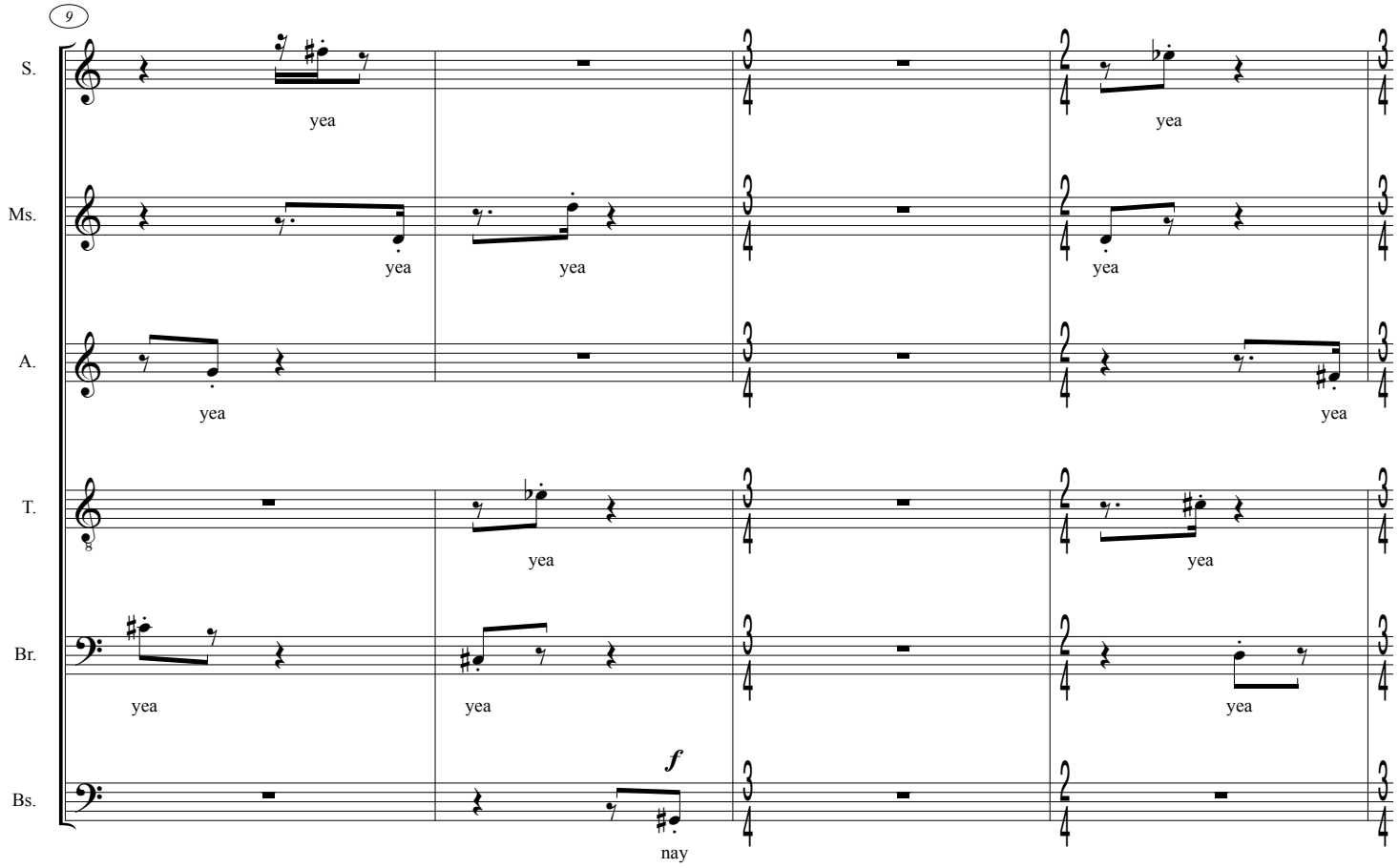
N. 10 *Thrifty carrion zoos*

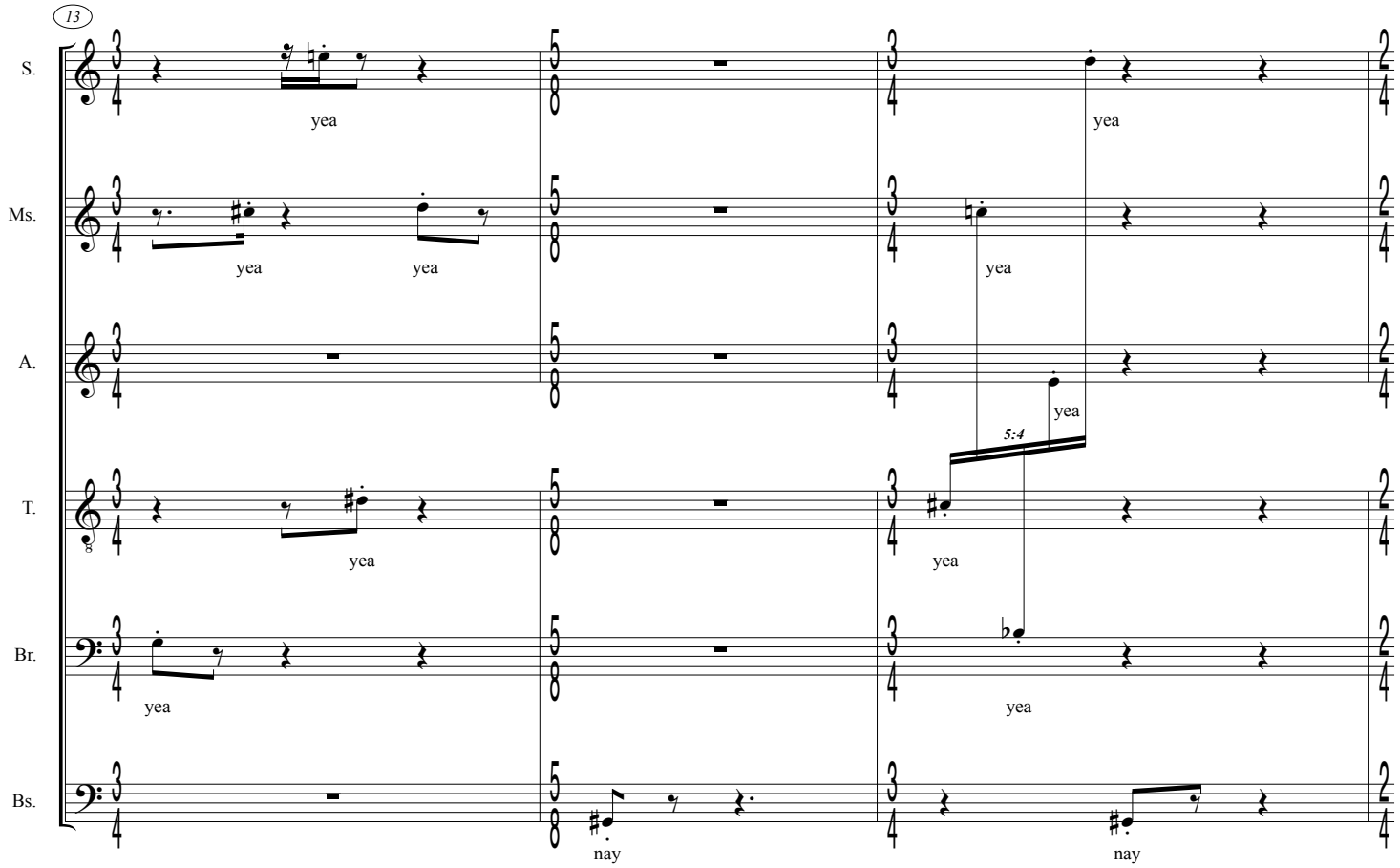
♩ = 108 **Persistently inquisitive**

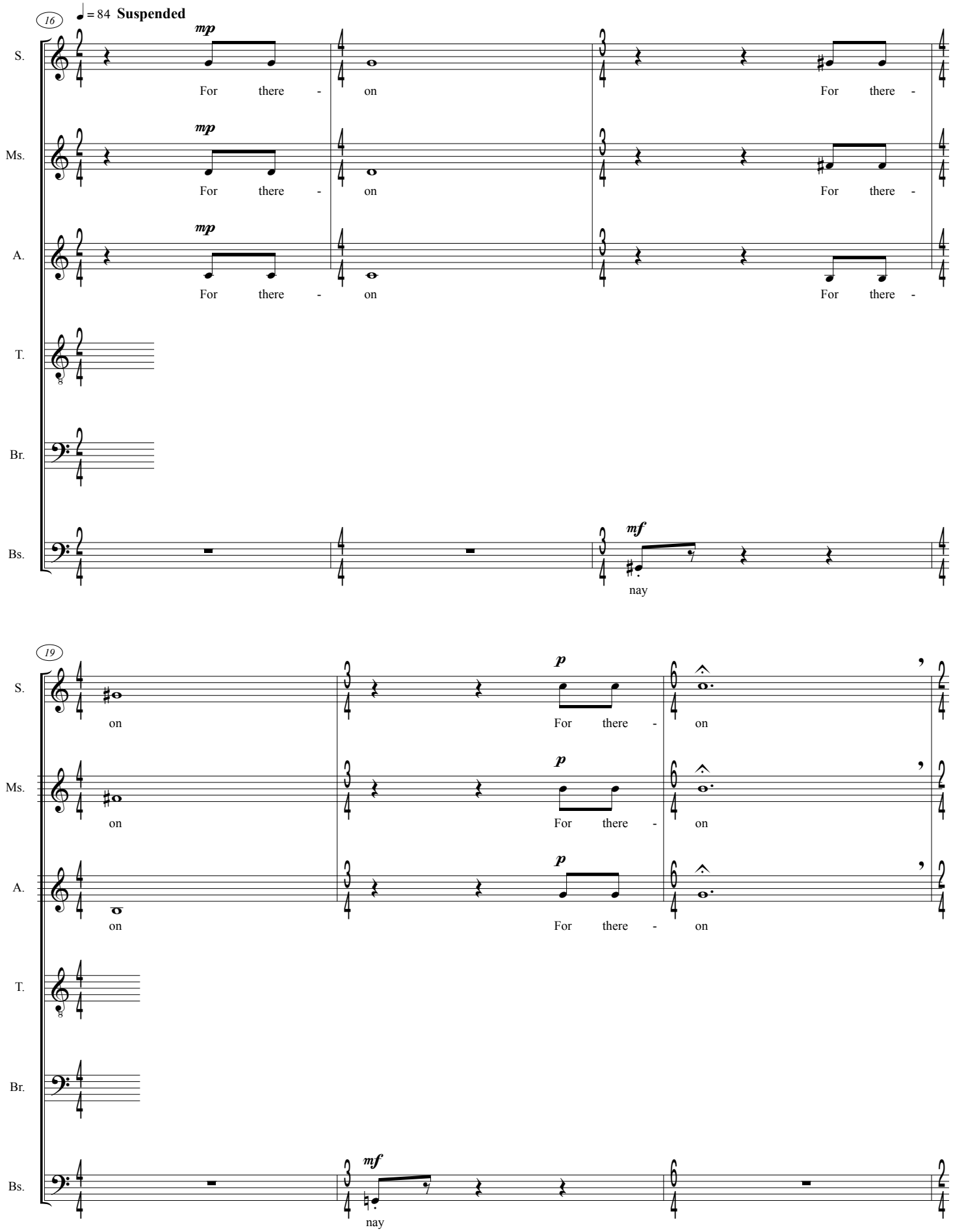


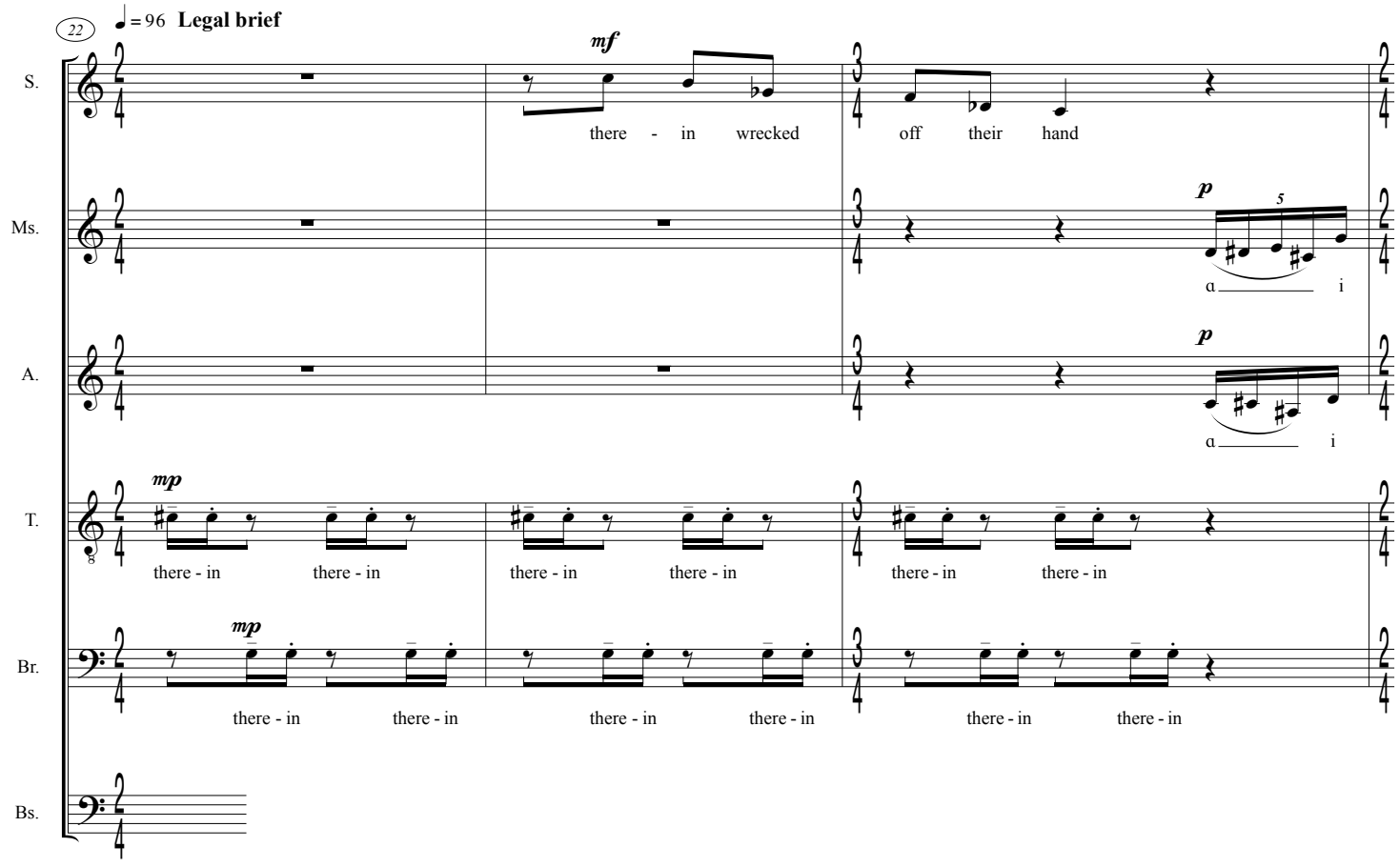

4
mp
S.
Ea - ger
Ms.
5
ɑ i o i
A.
6
ɑ i o i
T.
mf
ad - vise a moose al - so?
Br.
mf
ad - vise a moose al - so?
Bs.
mf
ad - vise a

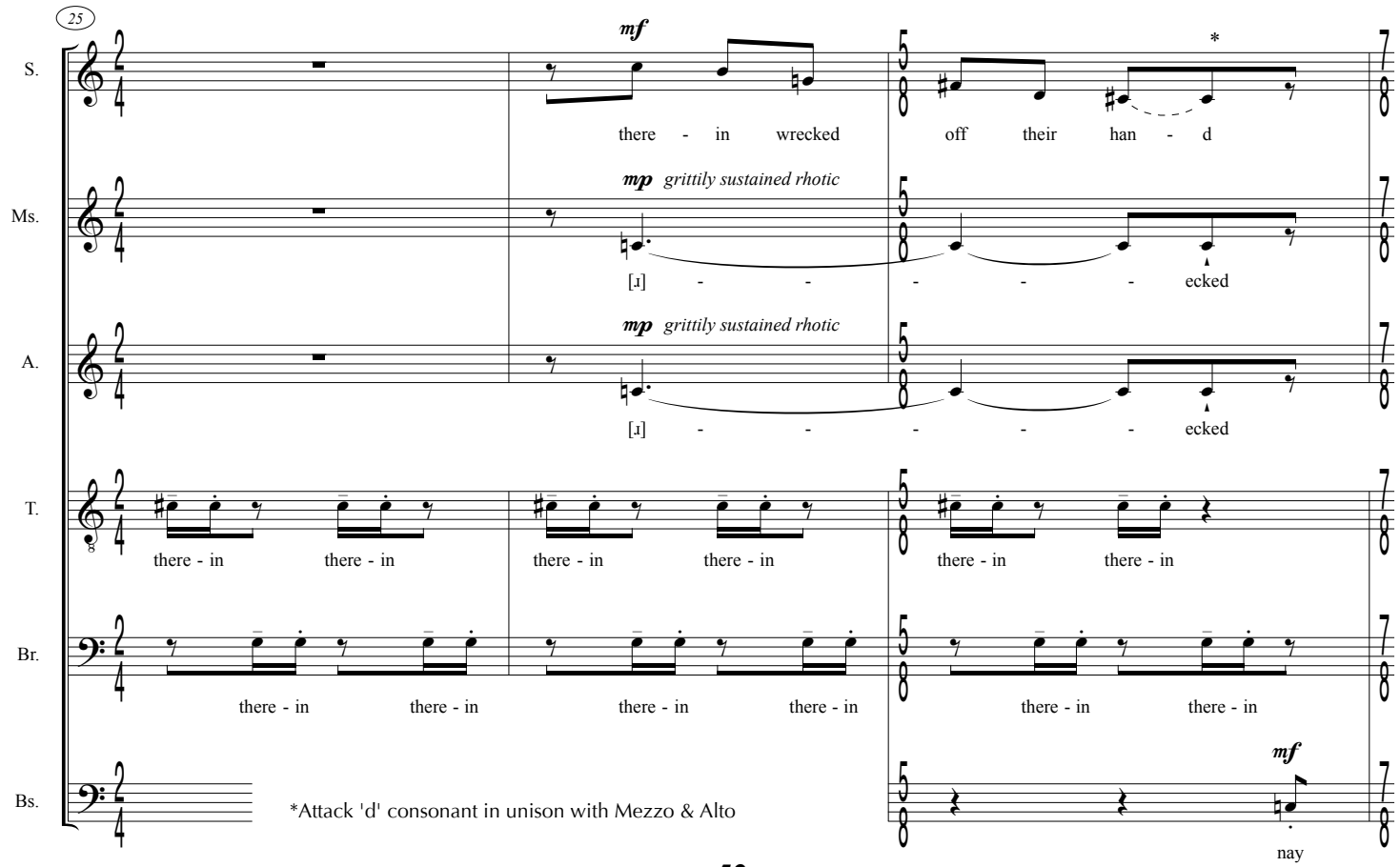

6
S.
mf
f
yea
yea
Ms.
o i
f
yea
A.
6
o i
f
yea
T.
f
f
yea
Br.
f
yea
Bs.
f
moose al - so?


9
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
Br.
Bs.
yea
yea
yea
yea
yea
yea
yea
yea
yea
yea
yea
yea
yea
f
nay

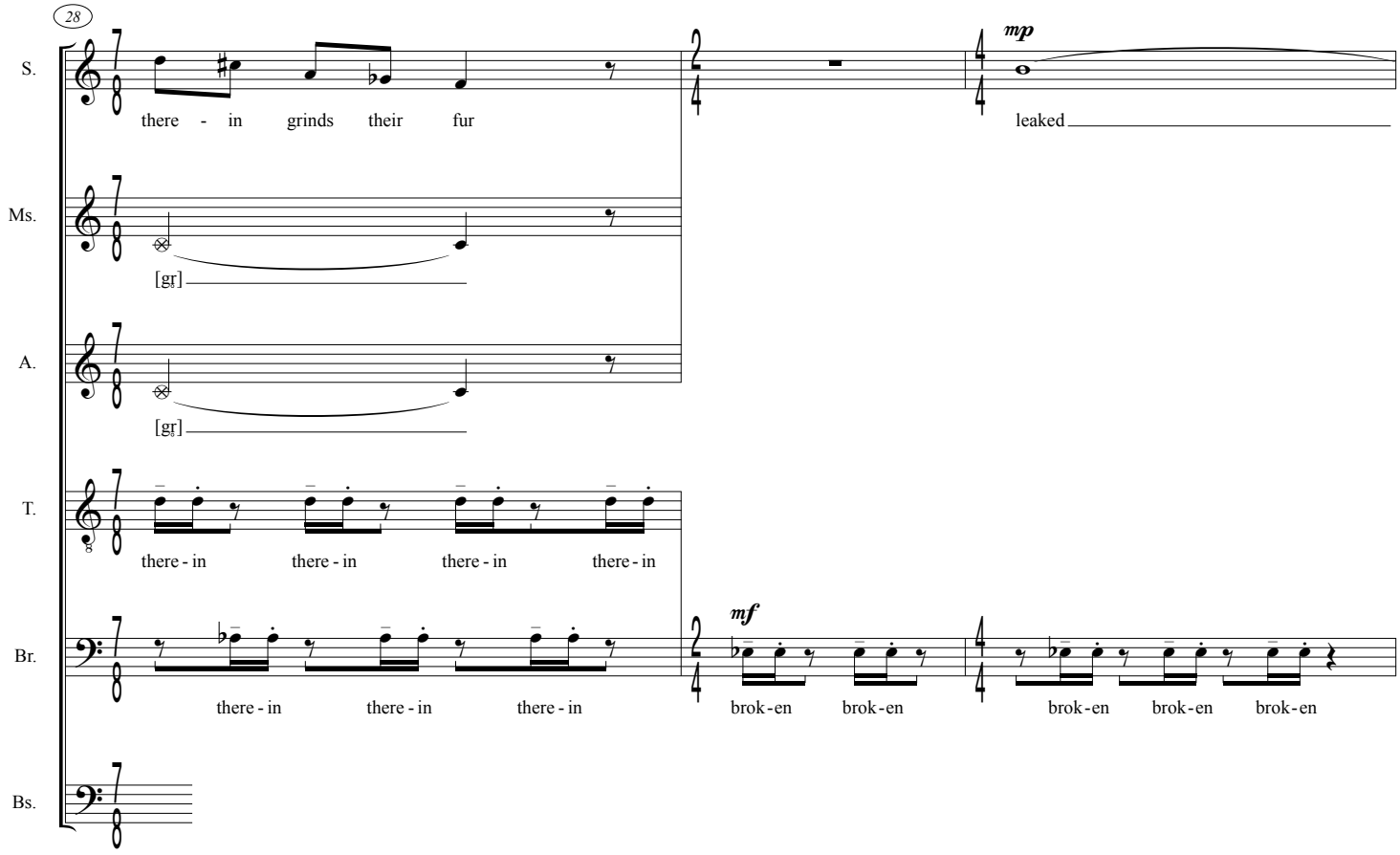

13
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
Br.
Bs.
yea
yea
yea
yea
yea
yea
yea
yea
yea
yea
5:4
yea
yea
nay
nay

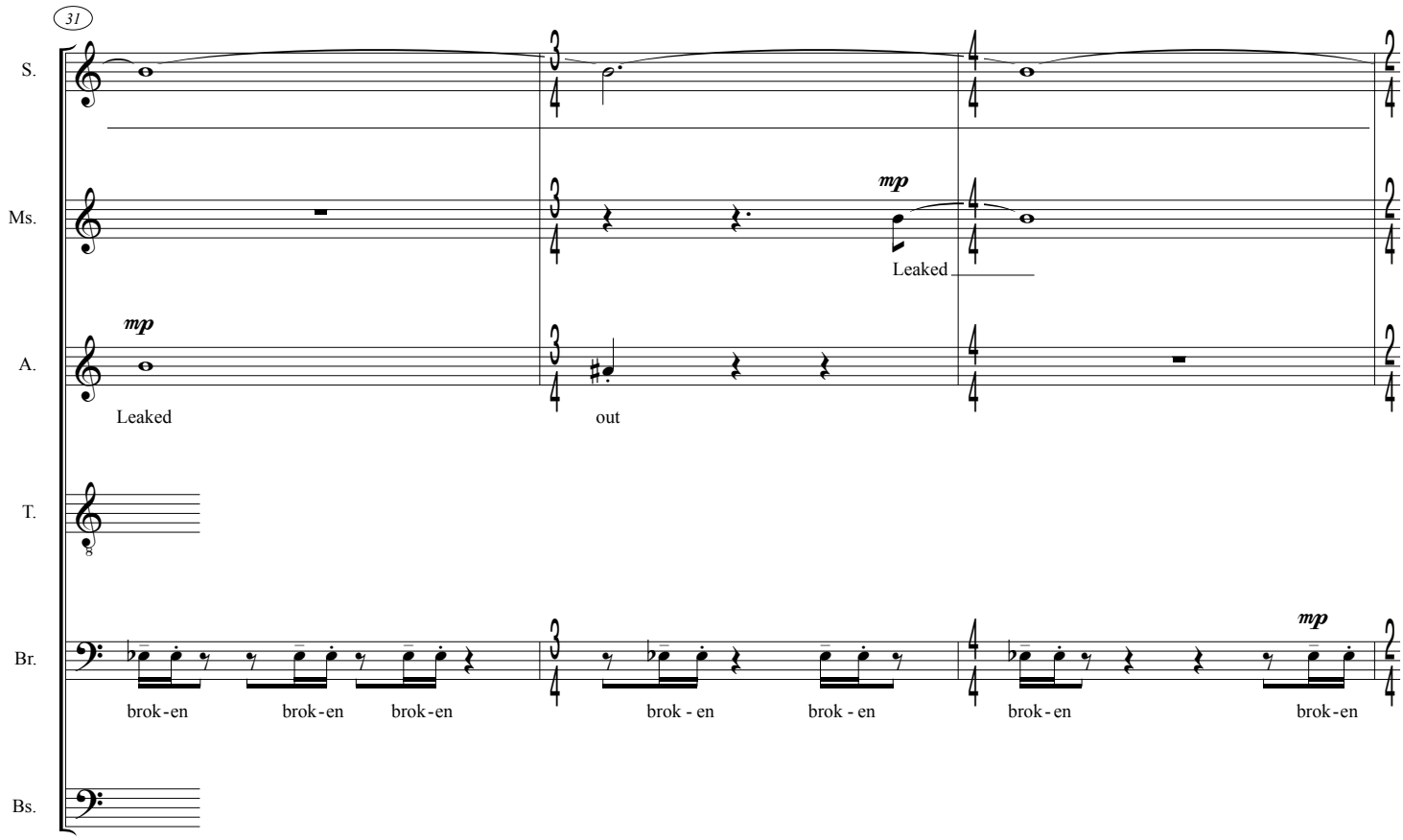

16
♩ = 84 Suspended
S.
Ms.
A.
T.
Br.
Bs.
mp
For there - on For there -
mf
nay
19
p
on For there - on





*Attack 'd' consonant in unison with Mezzo & Alto


28
S.
there - in grinds their fur
mp
leaked
Ms.
[gr]
A.
[gr]
T.
there - in there - in there - in there - in
Br.
there - in there - in there - in
mf
brok - en brok - en
brok - en brok - en brok - en
Bs.


31
S.
Ms.
mp
Leaked
A.
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Leaked
out
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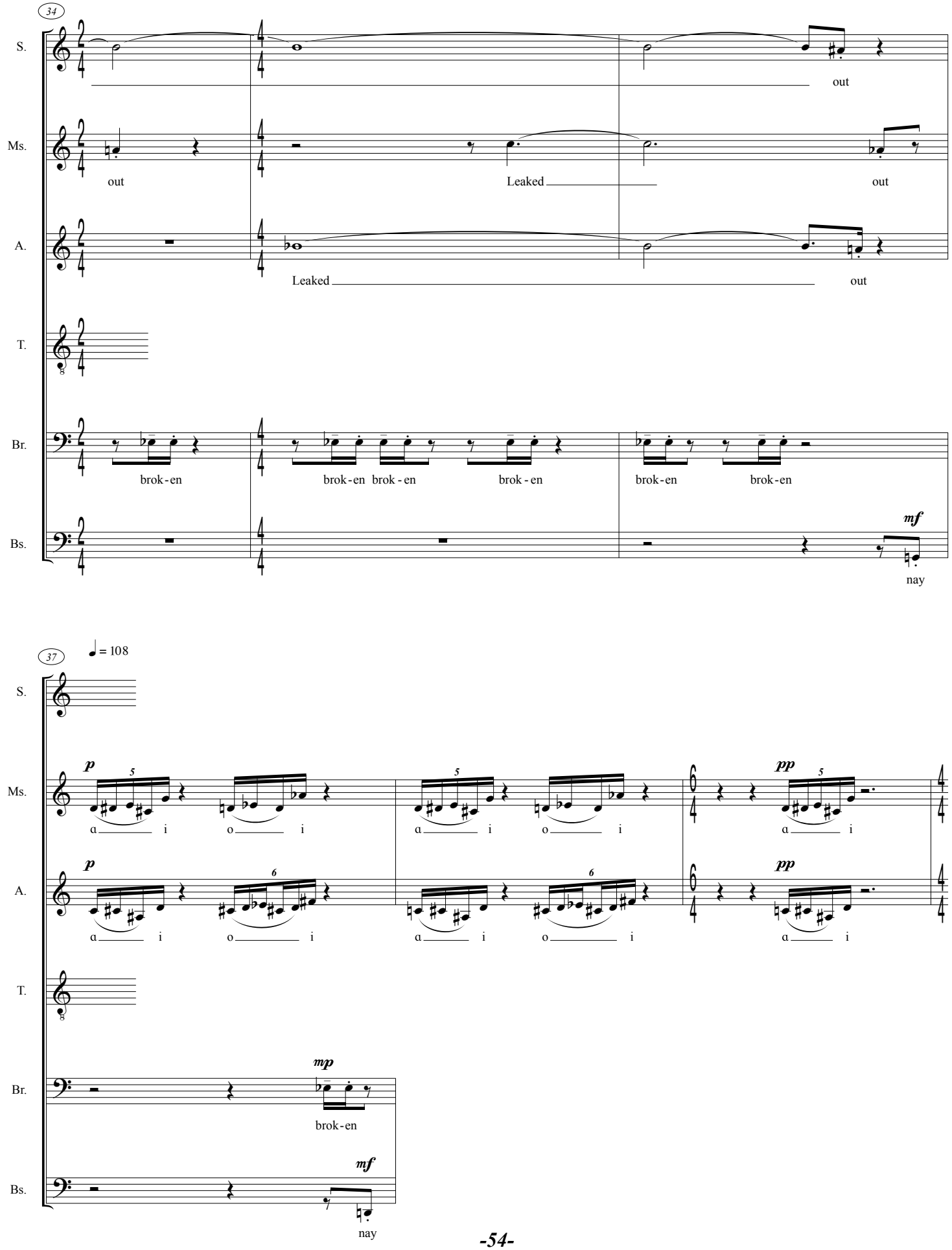
brok - en brok - en brok - en
brok - en brok - en
brok - en
mp
brok - en
Bs.


34
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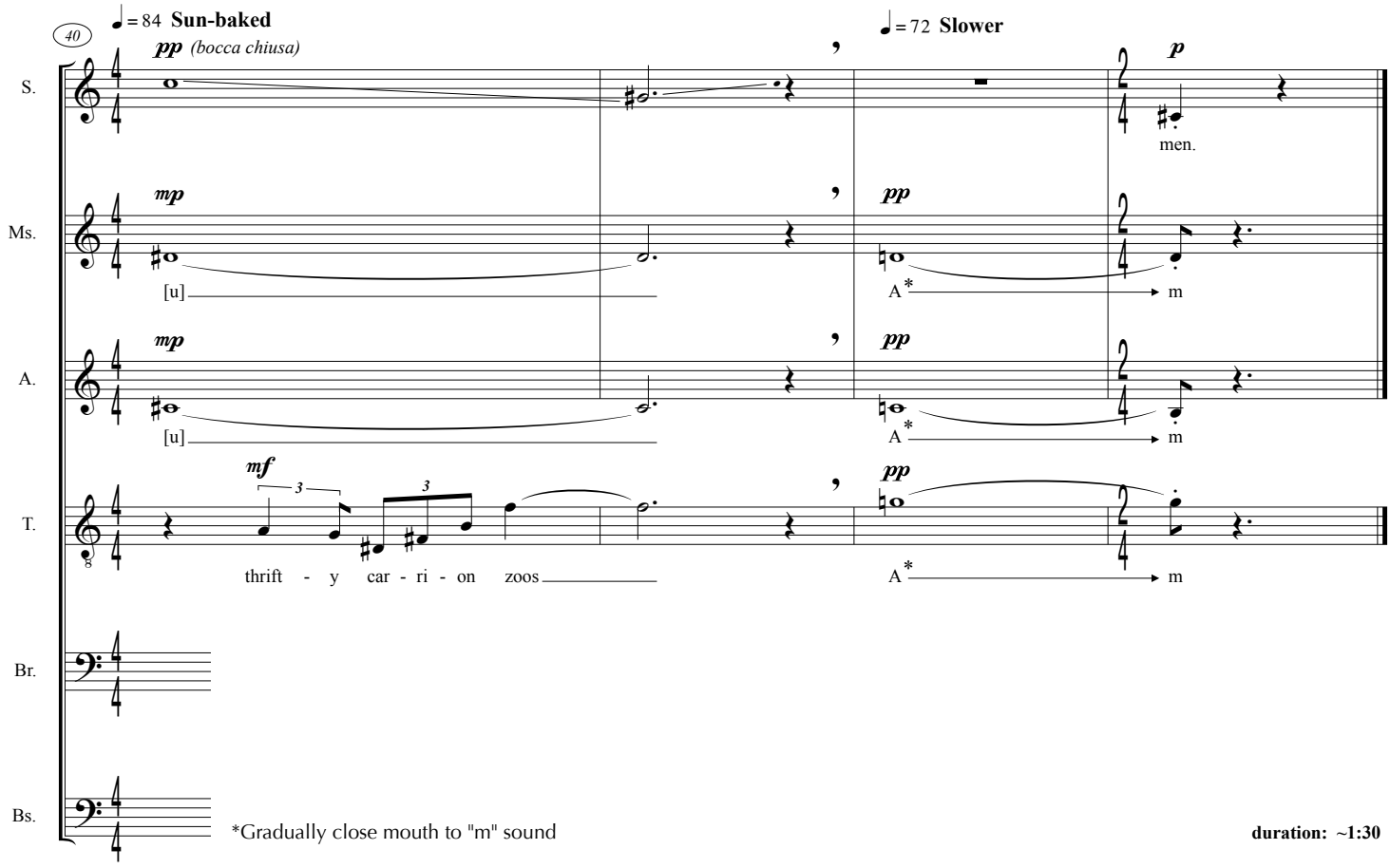
40
♩= 84 Sun-baked
pp (bocca chiusa)
♩= 72 Slower
p
men.
S.
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Ms.
mp
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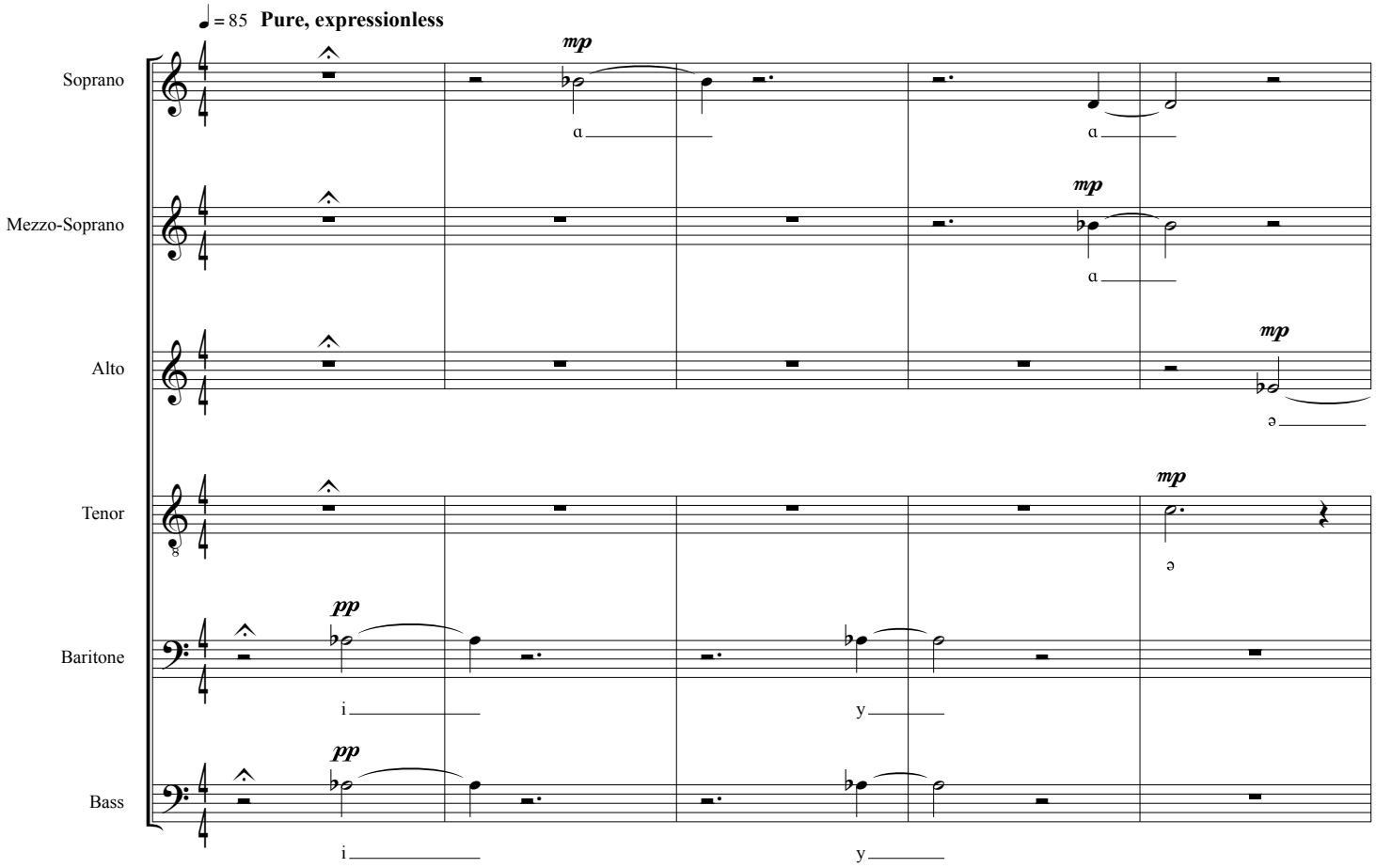
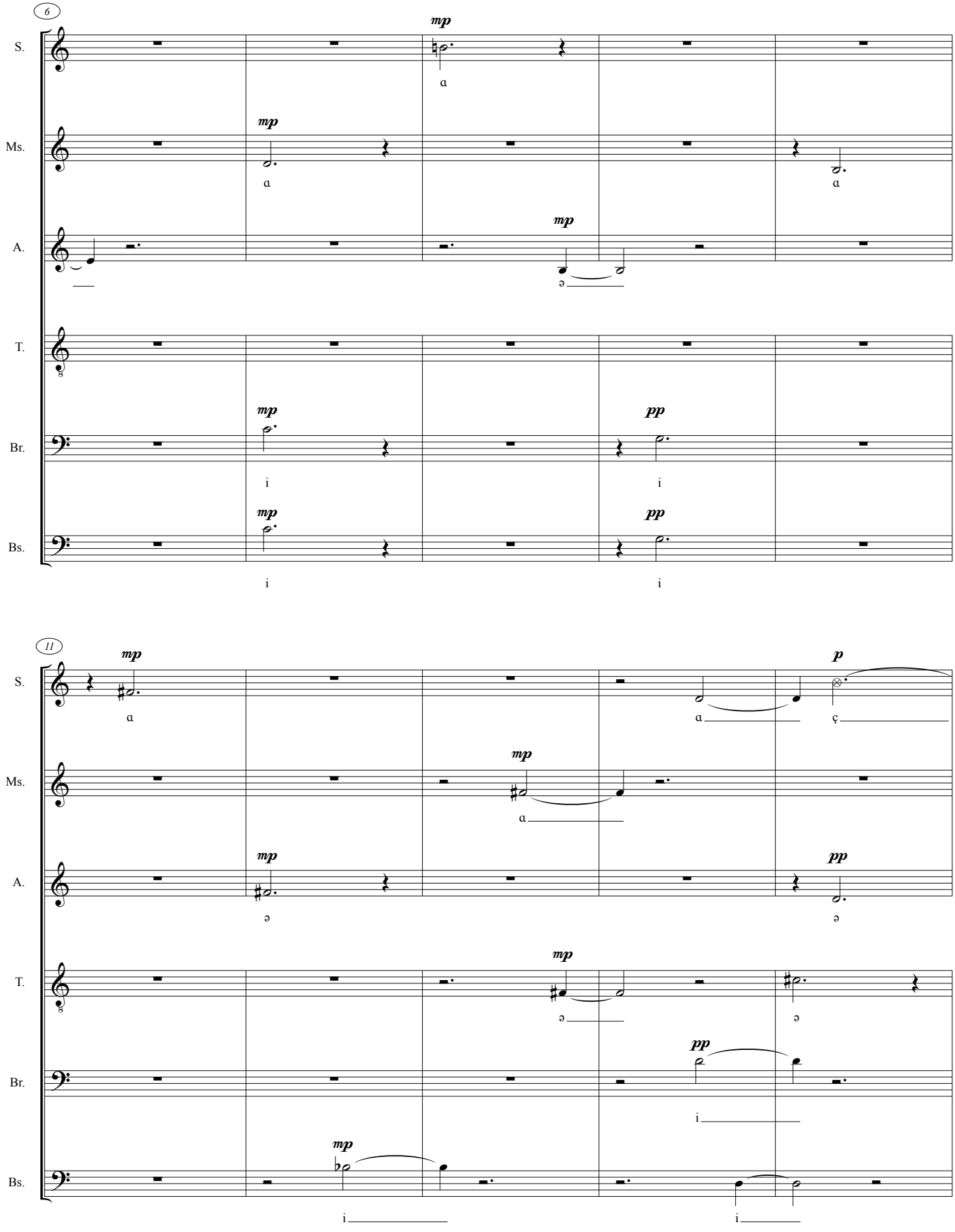
Bs.
*Gradually close mouth to "m" sound
duration: ~1:30

N. 11 *Wörtlich III / "Babel d'escaliers et d'arcades"*

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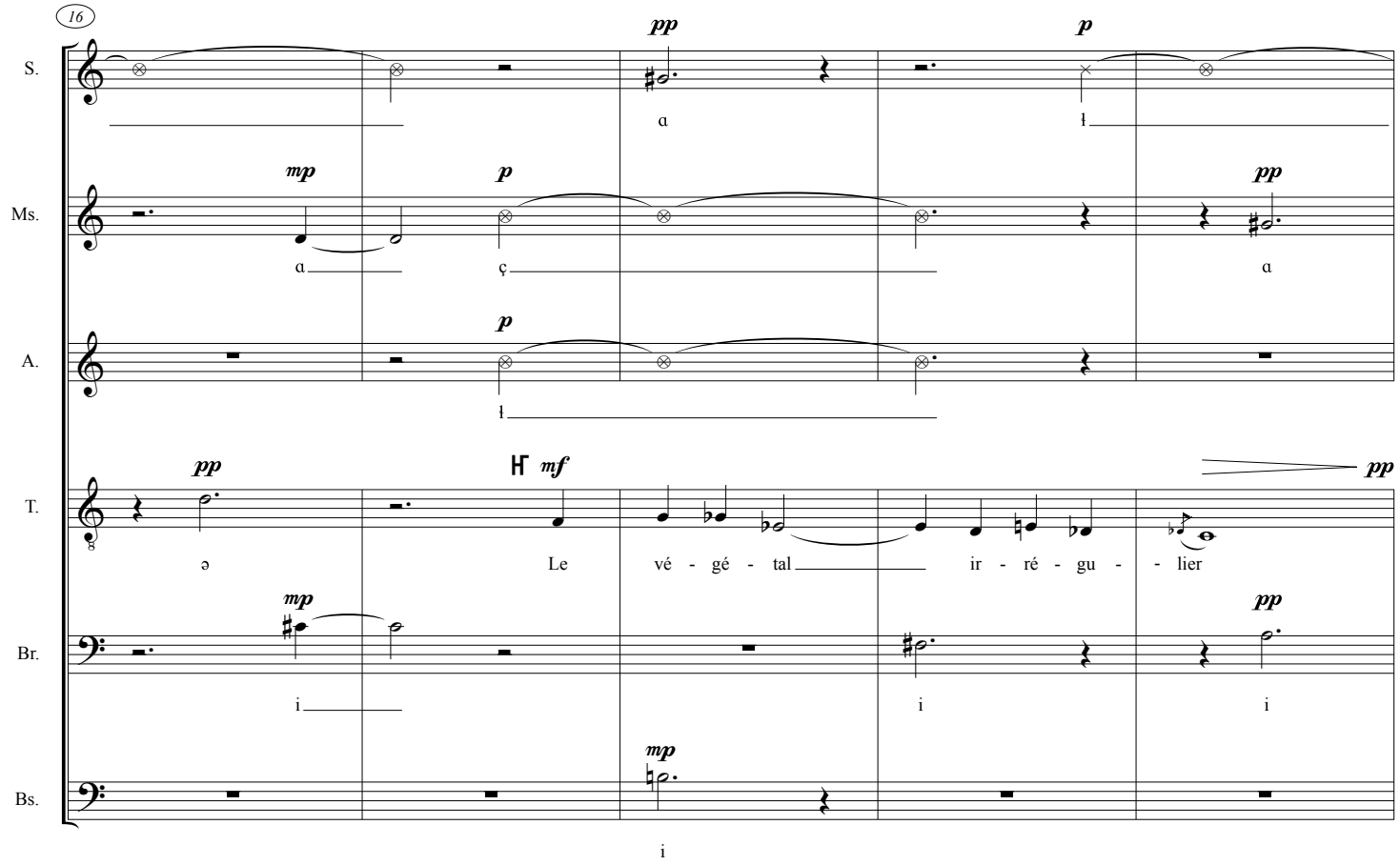
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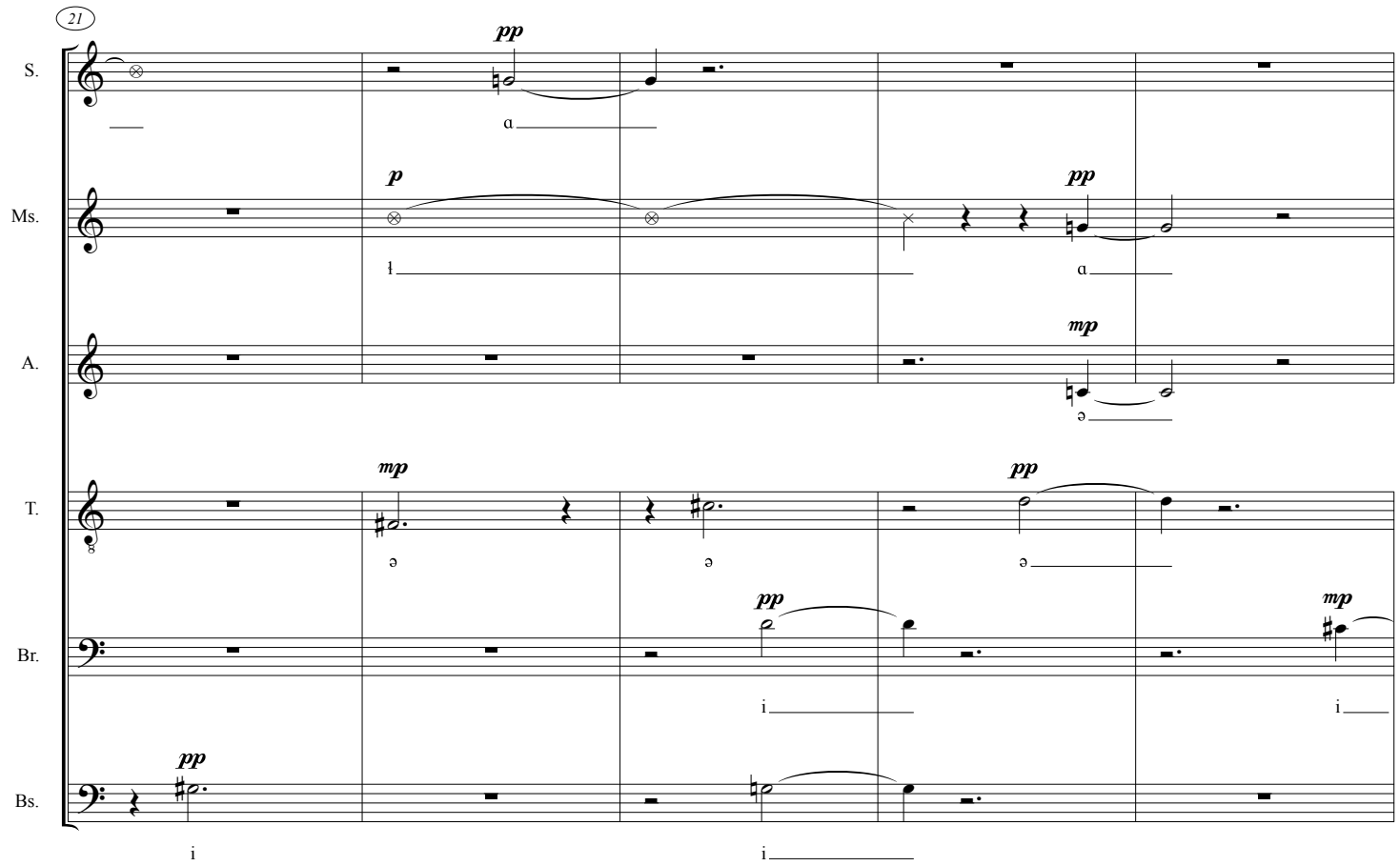
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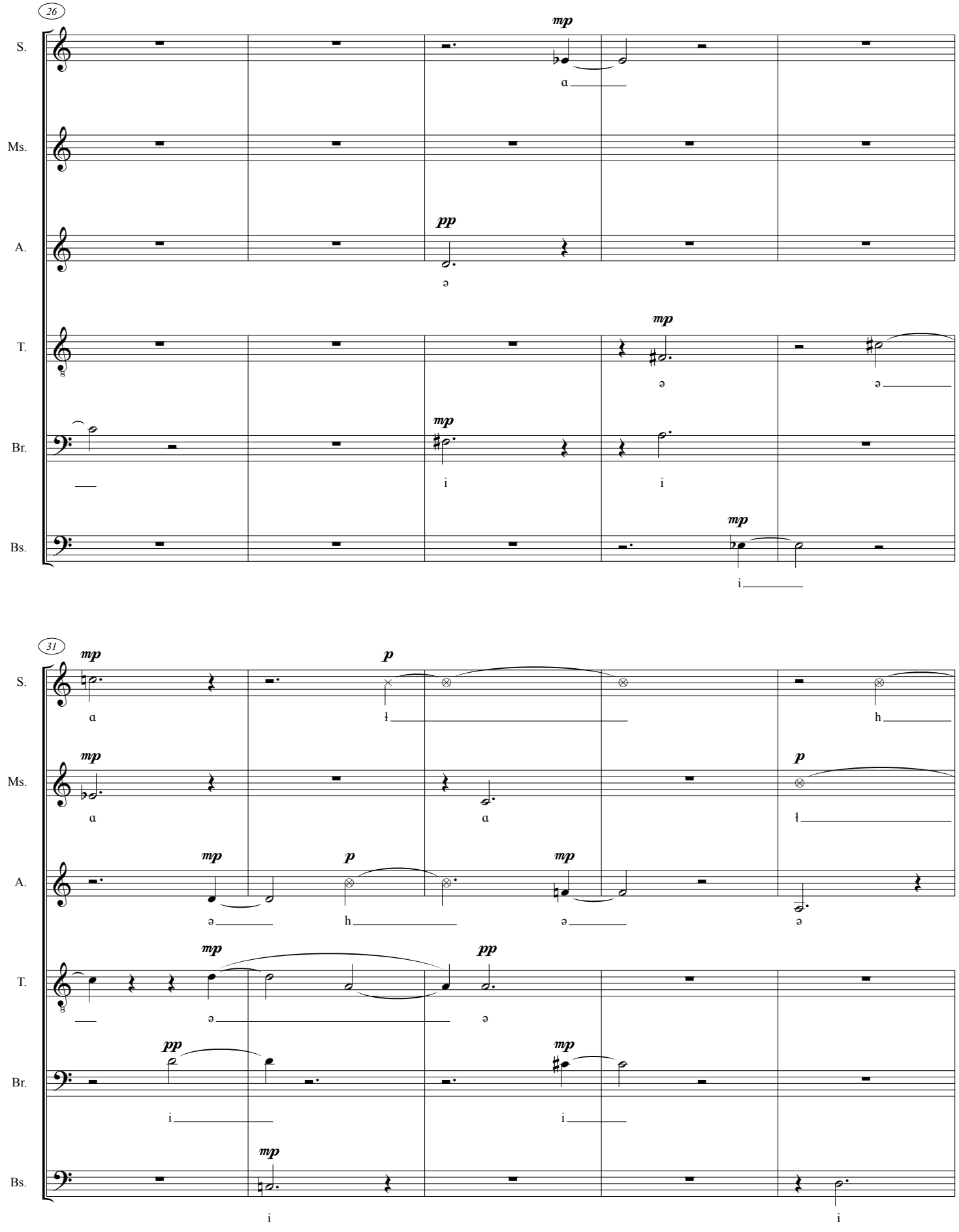
26
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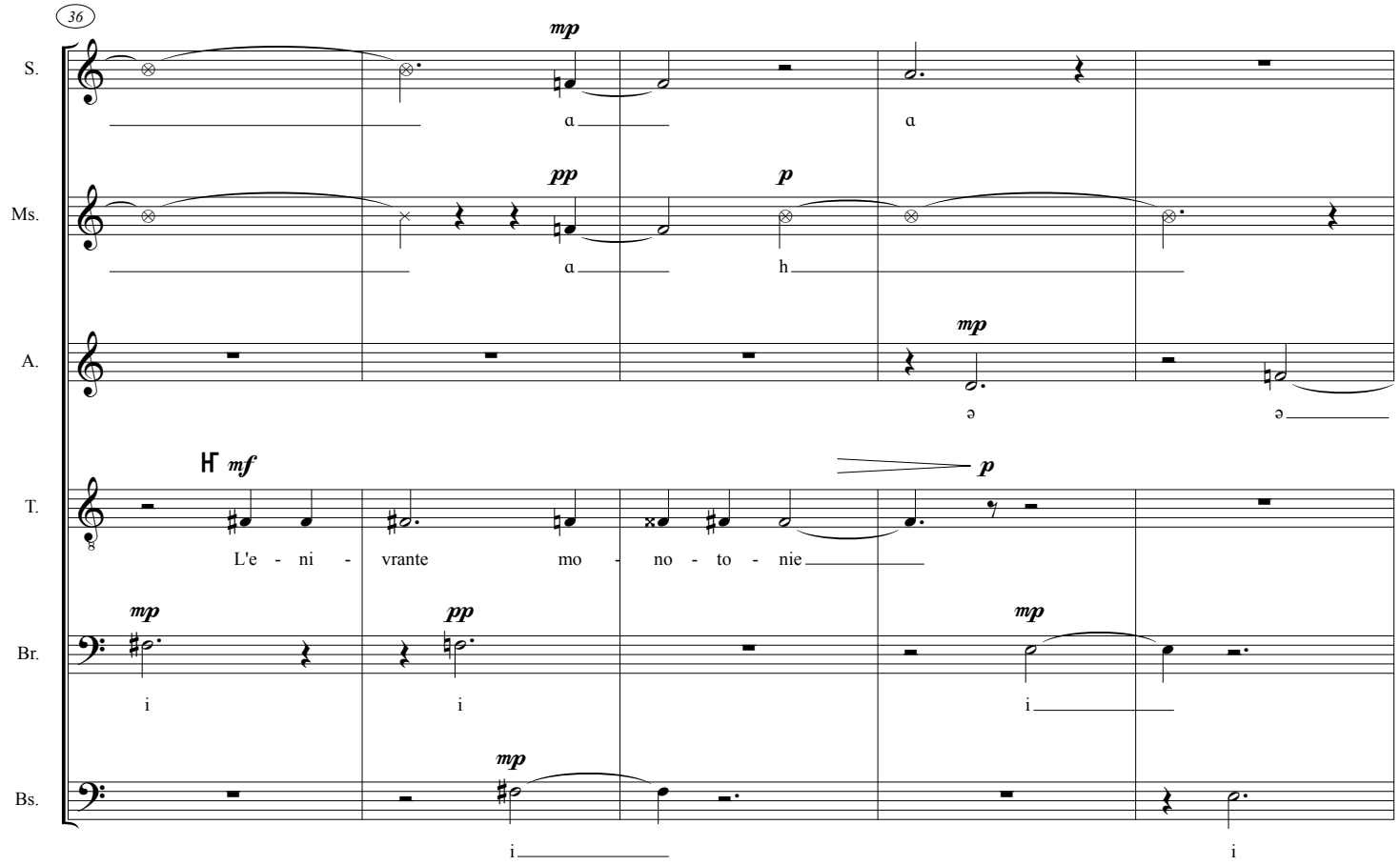
36
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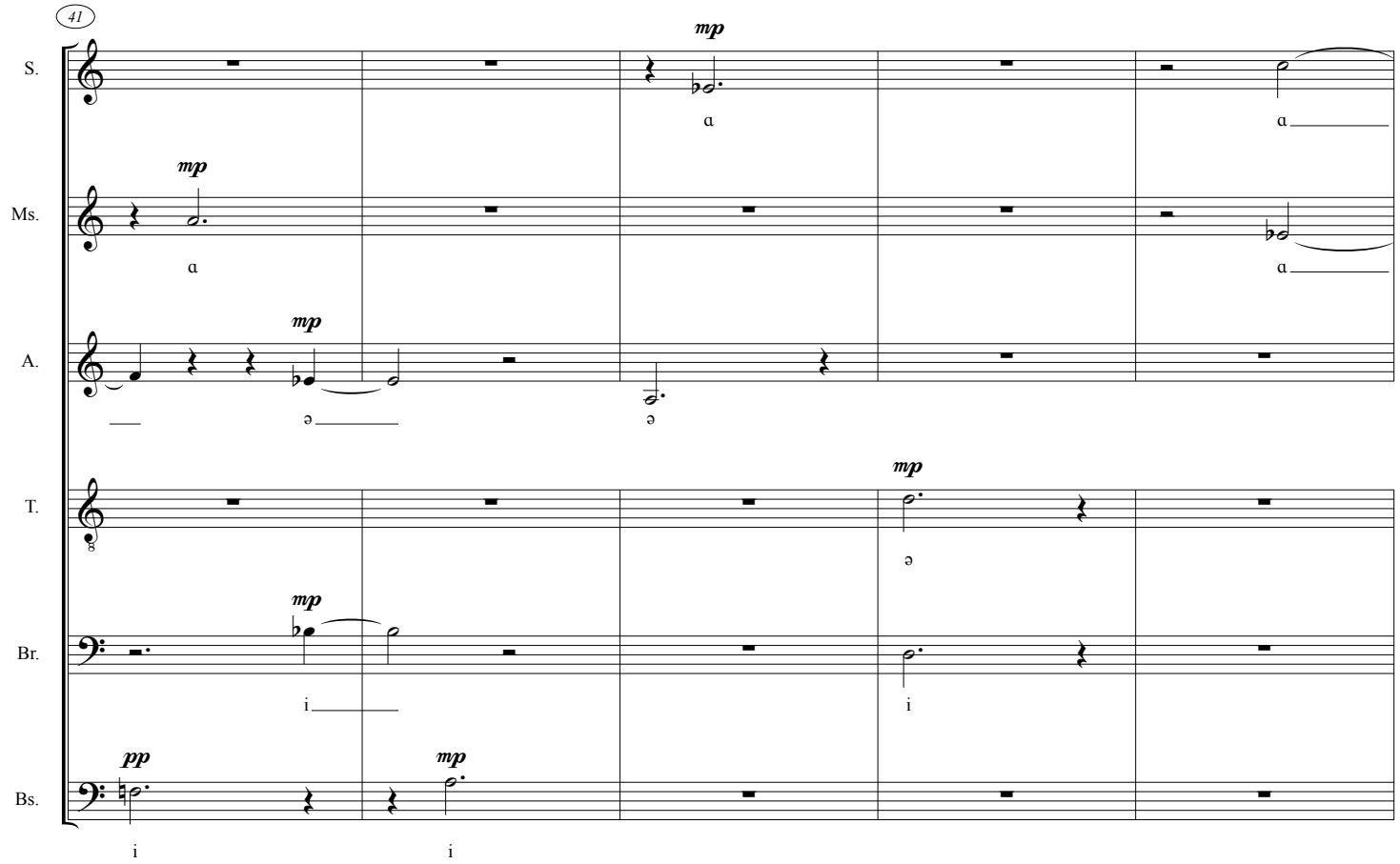
41
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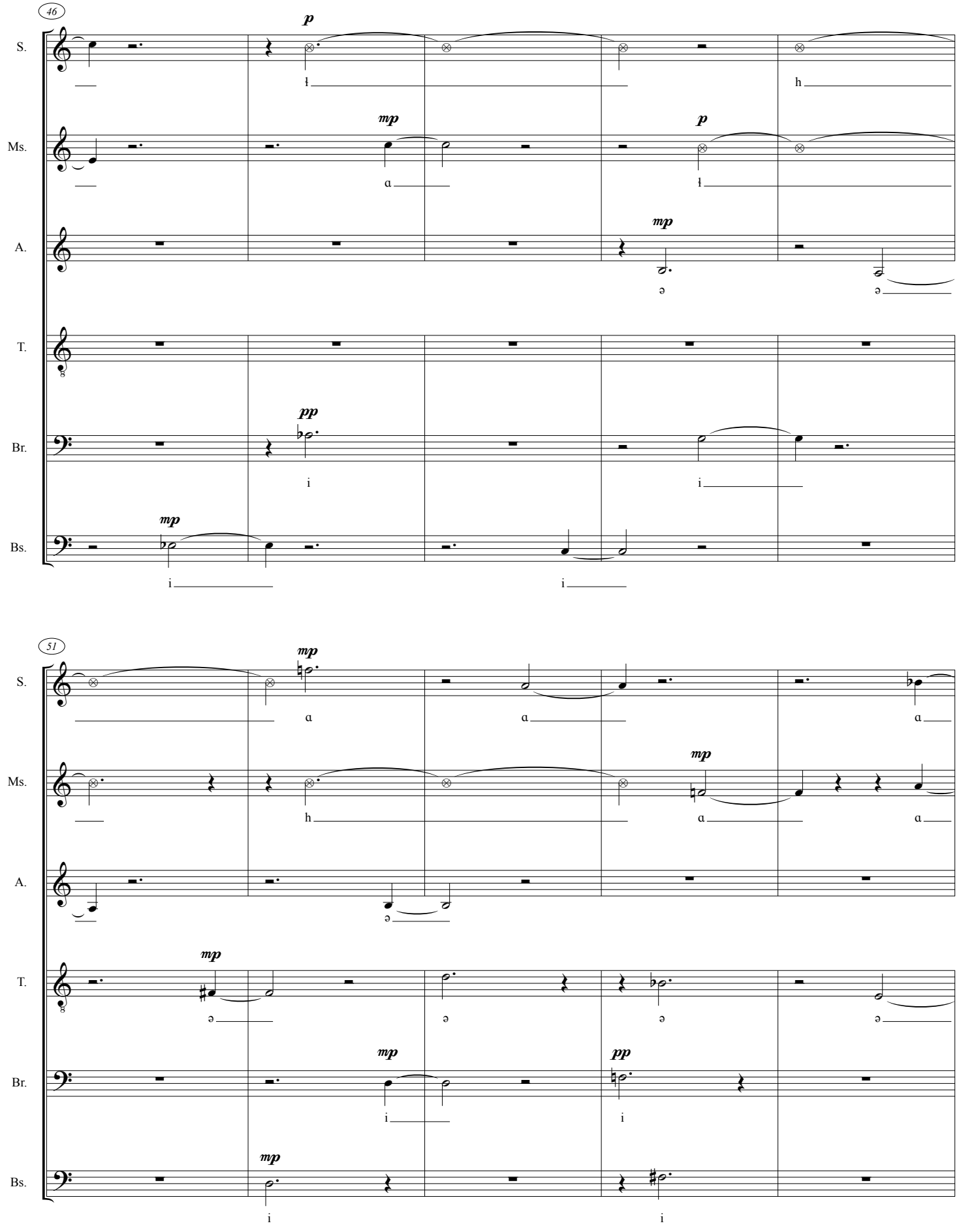
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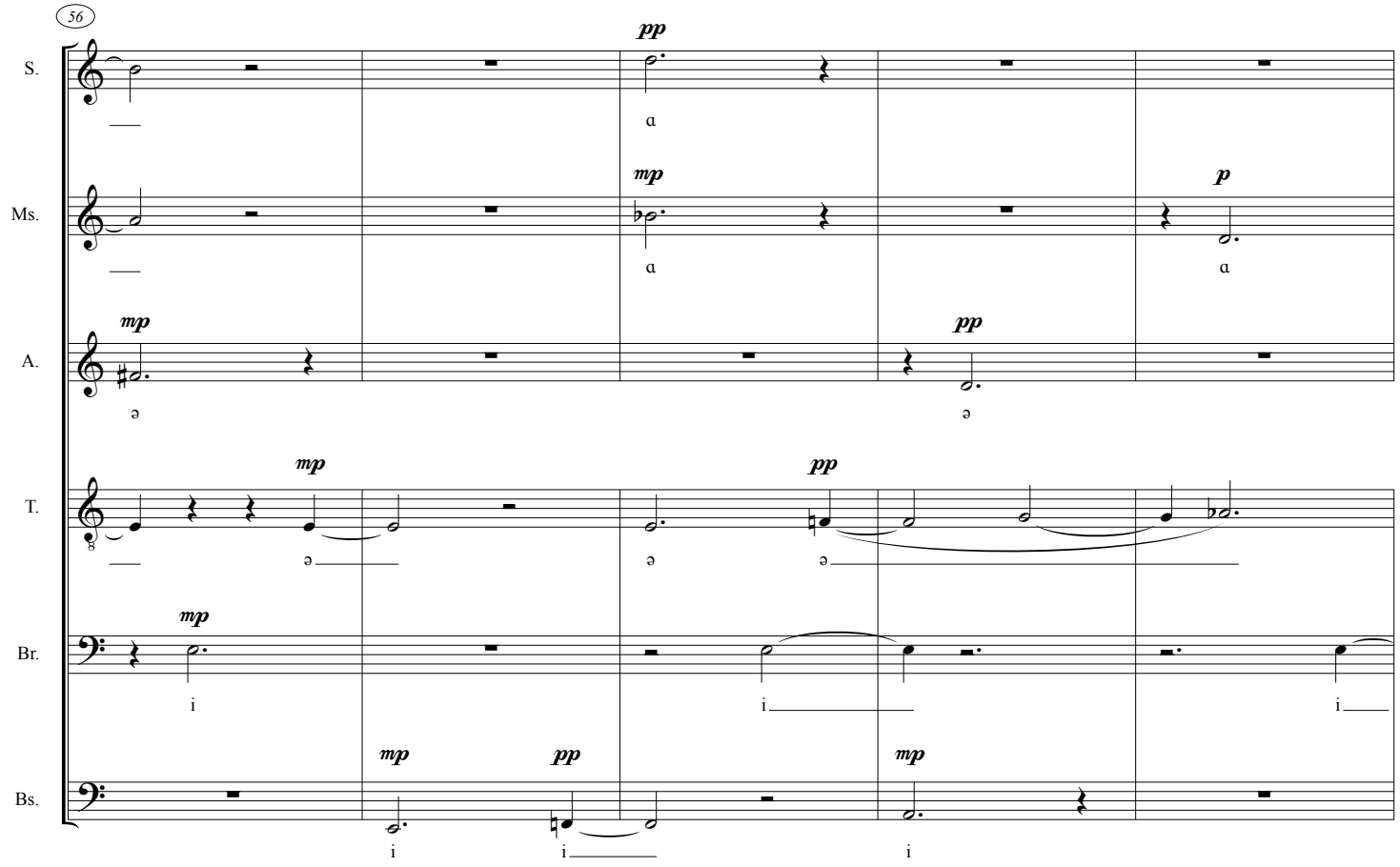
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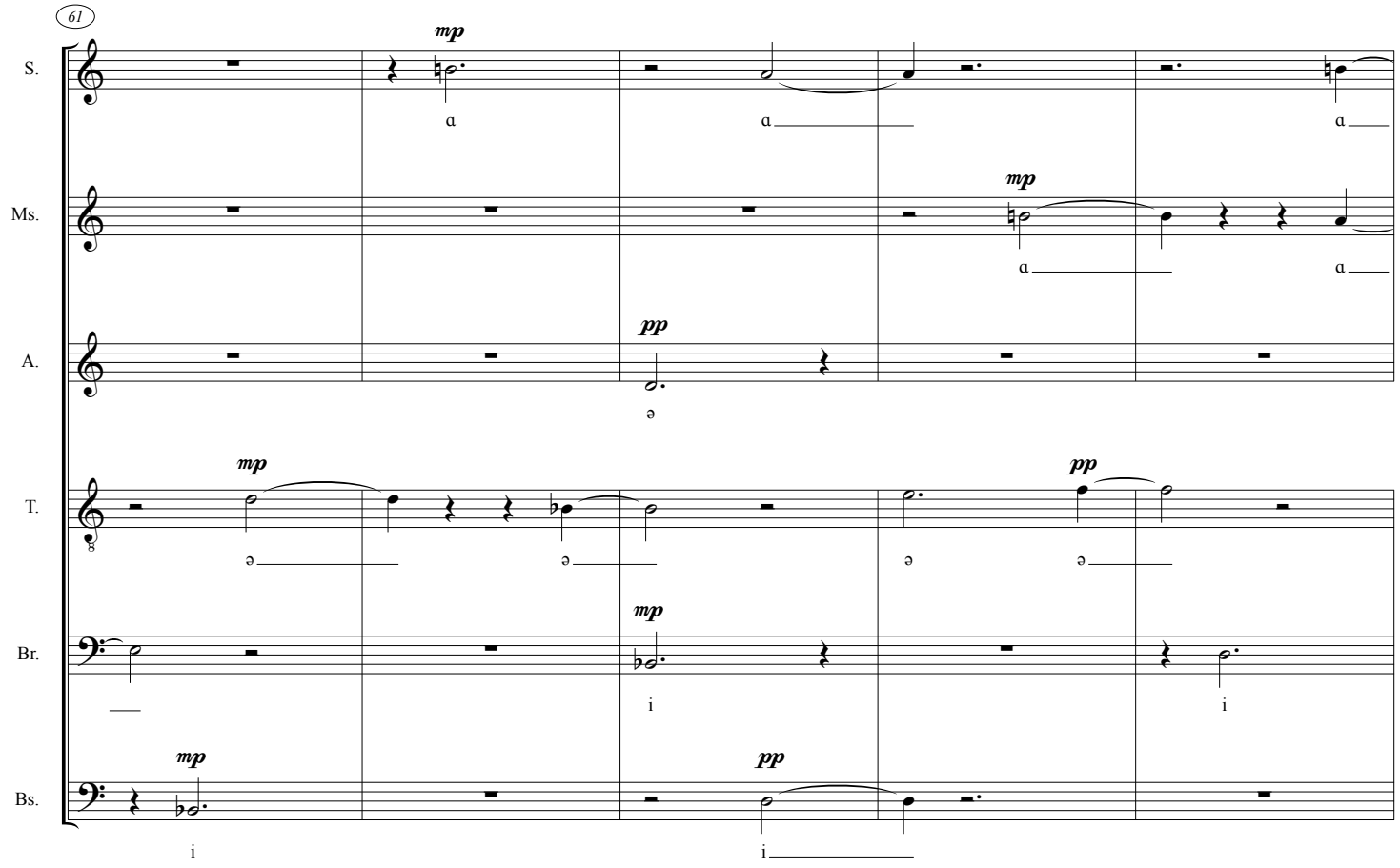
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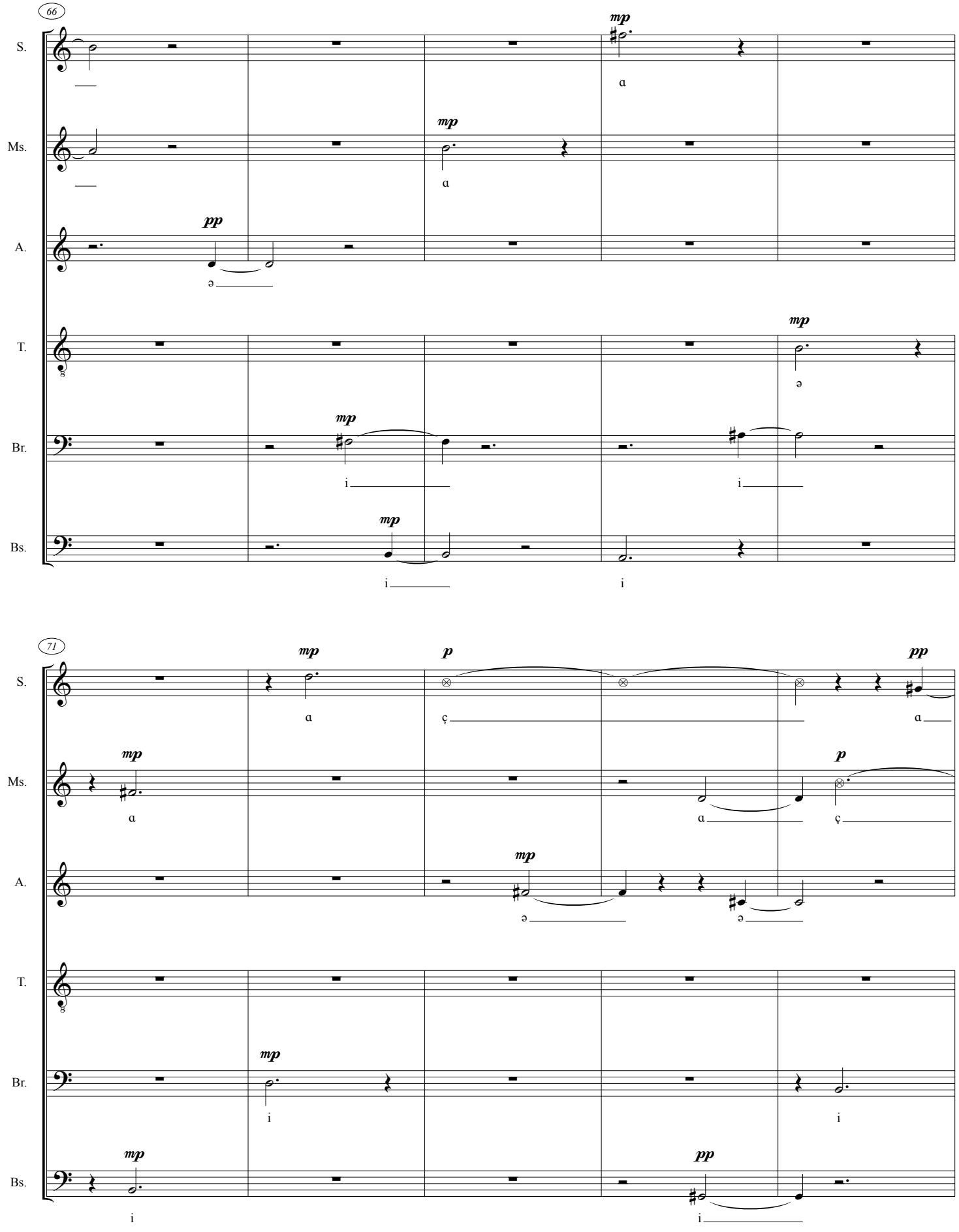
66
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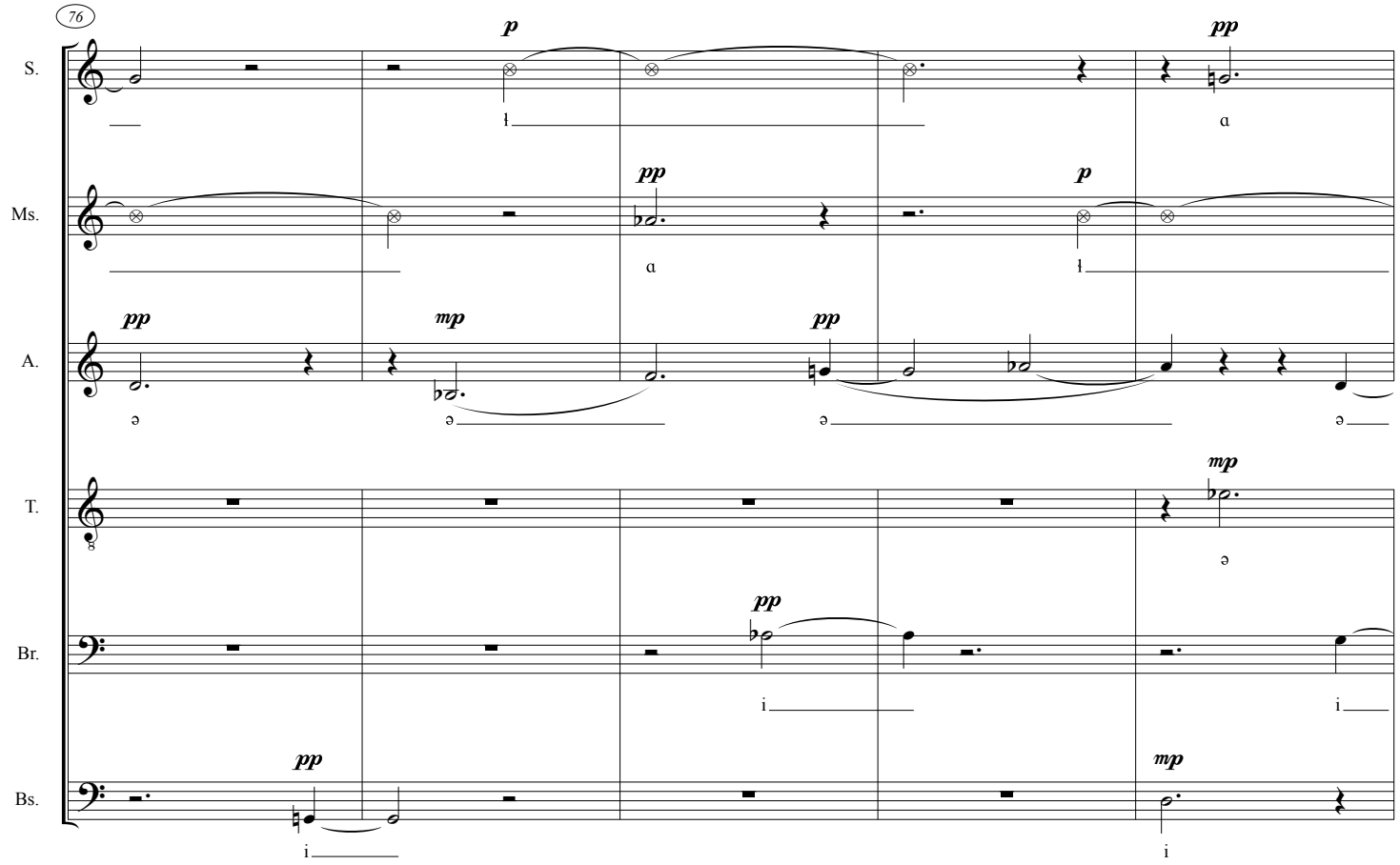
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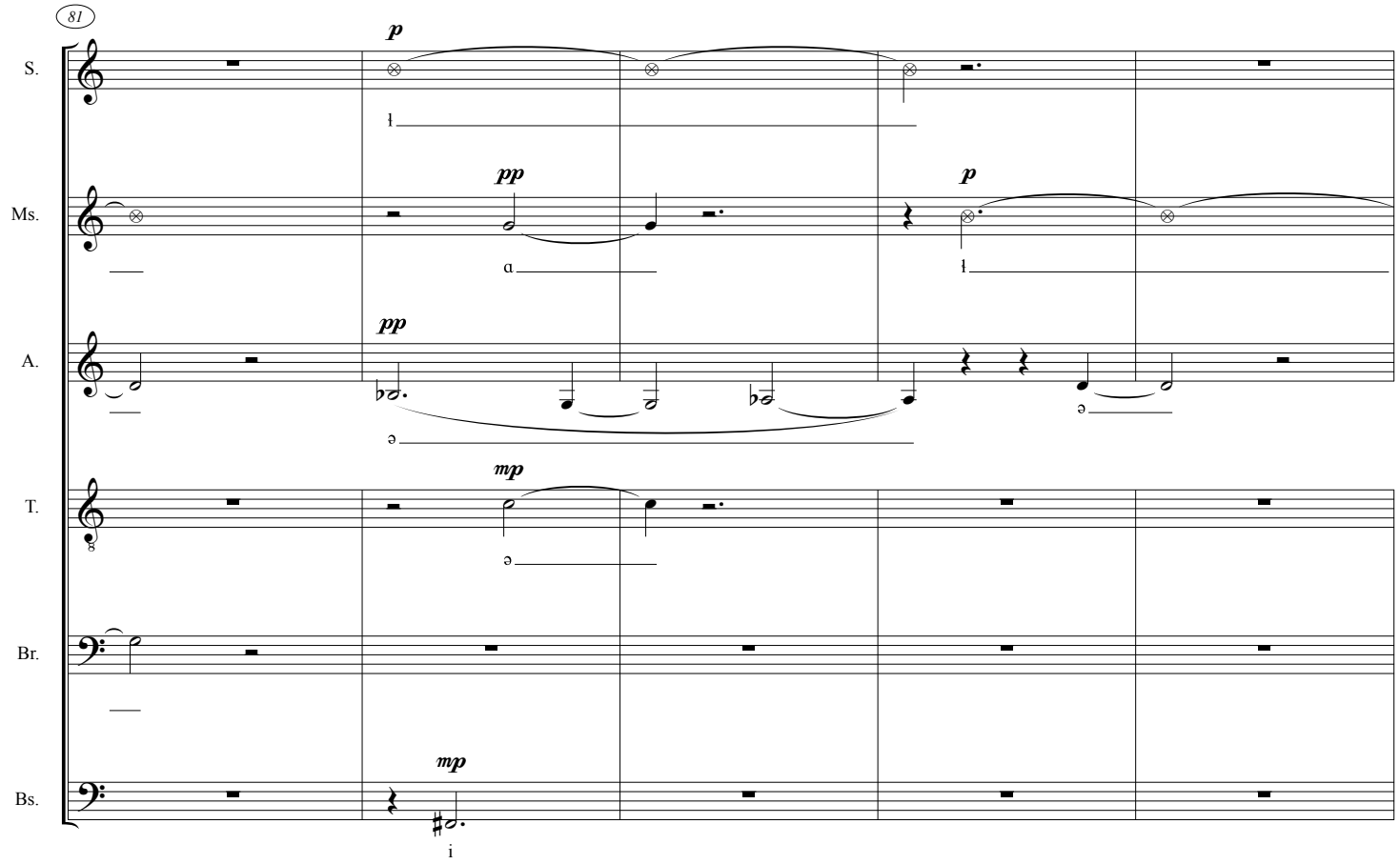
81
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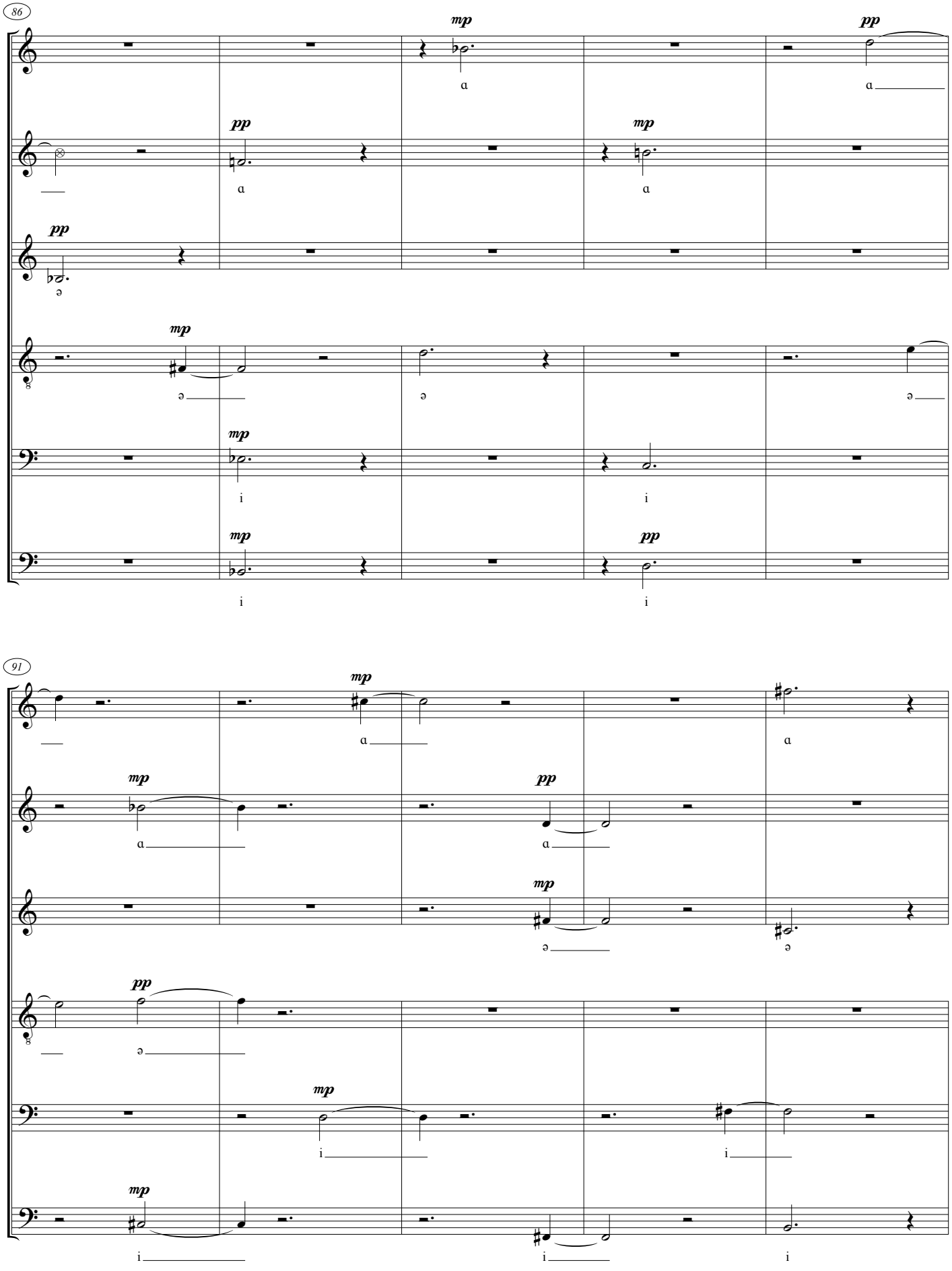
86
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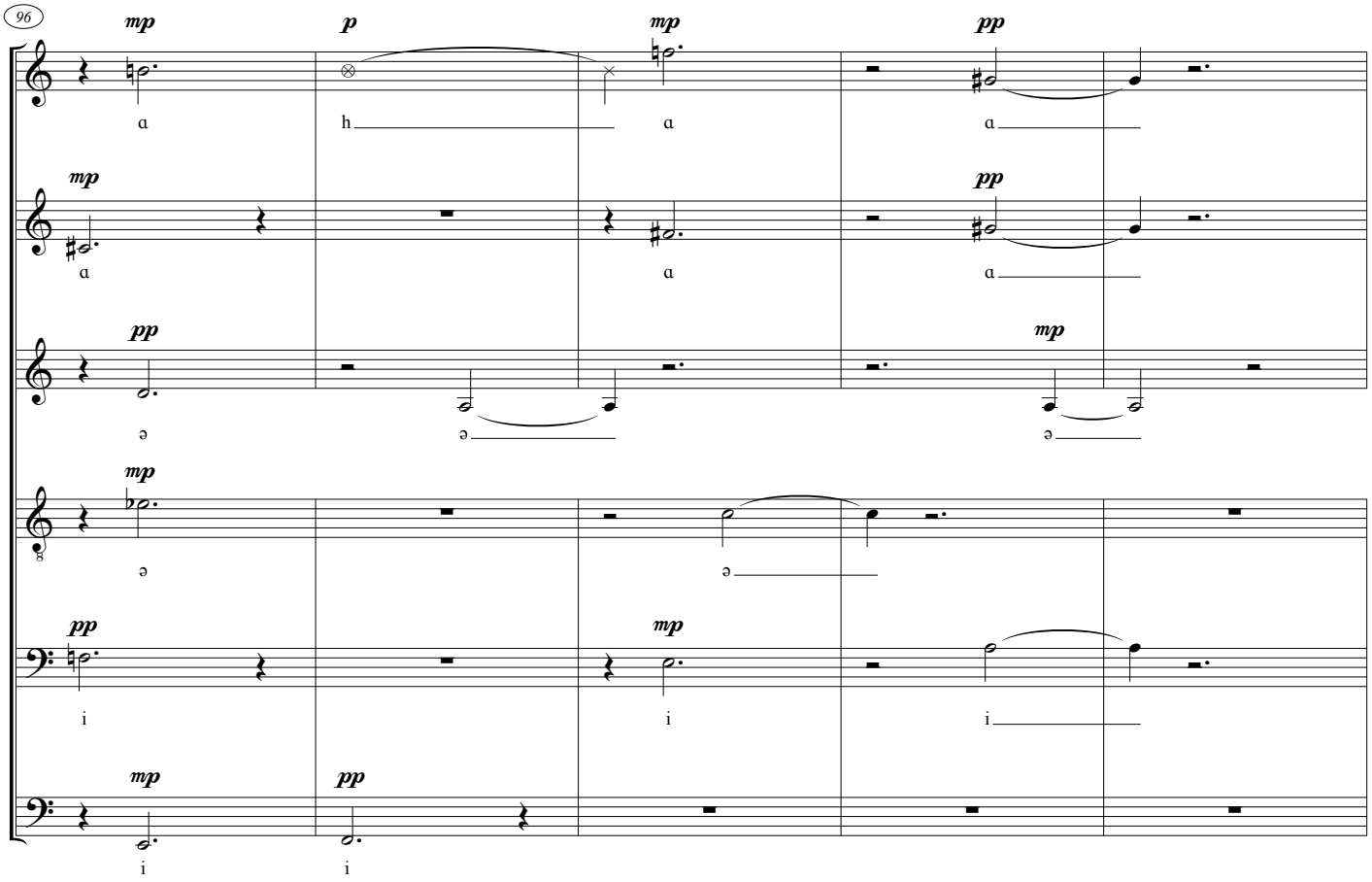
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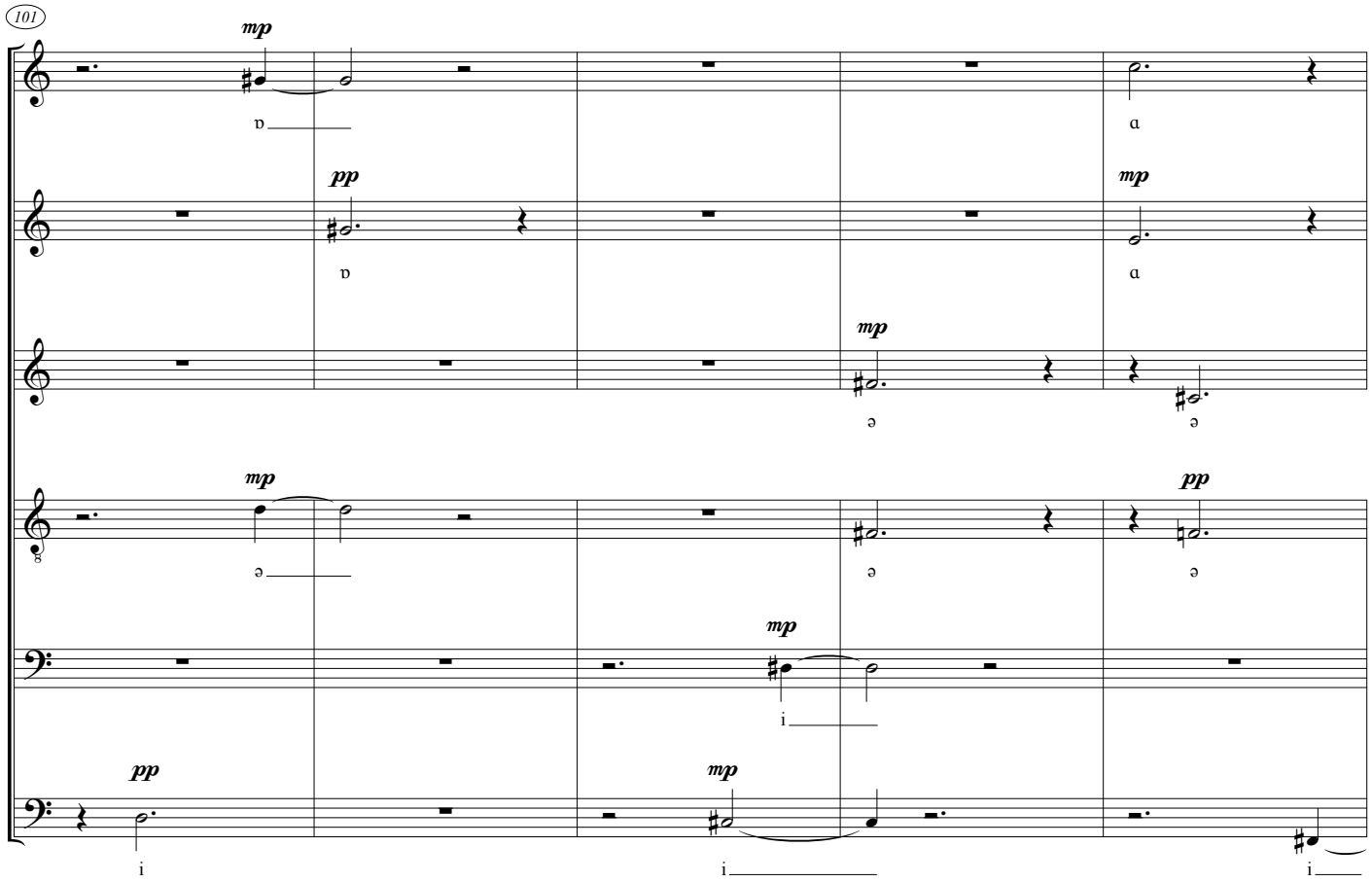
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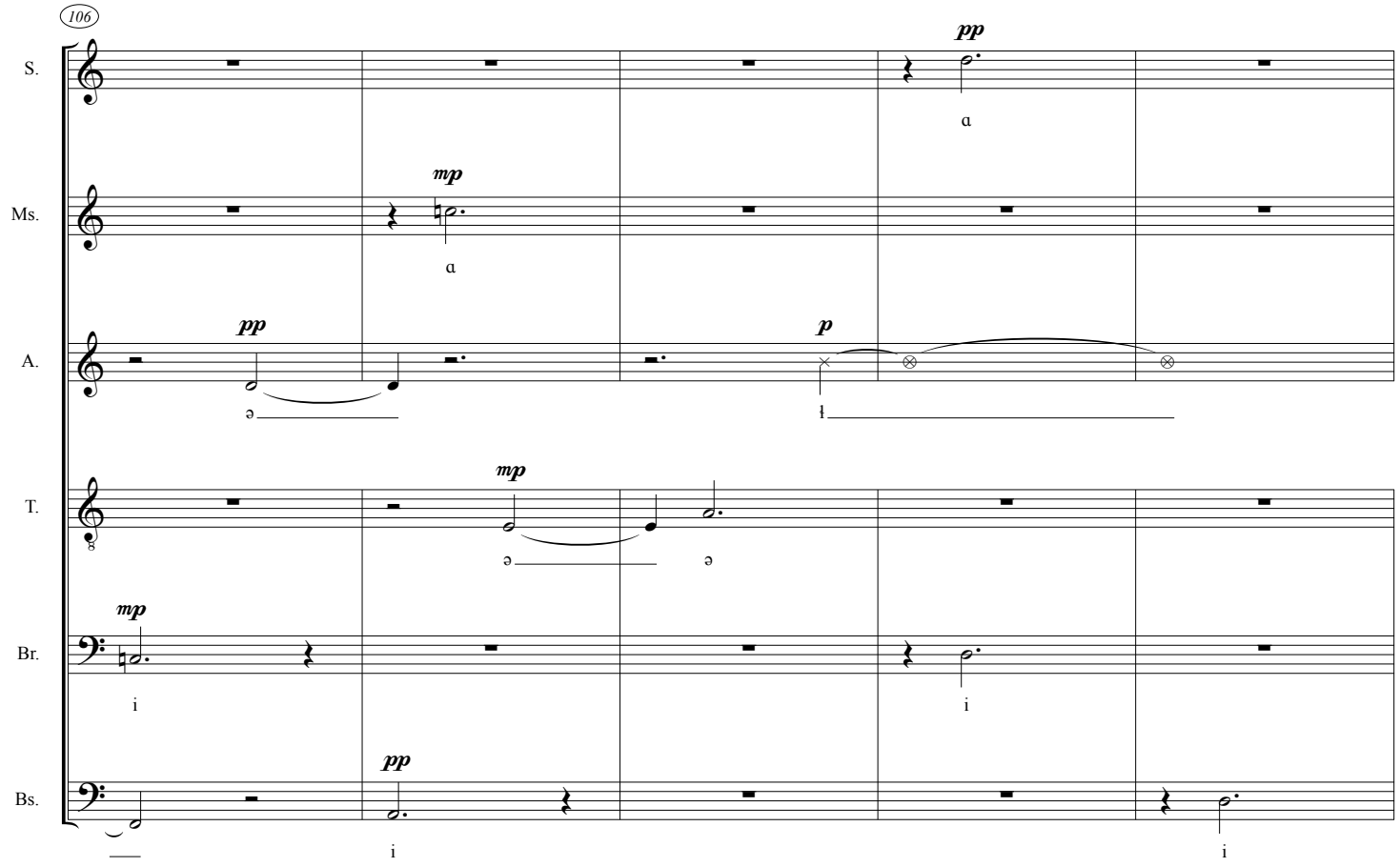
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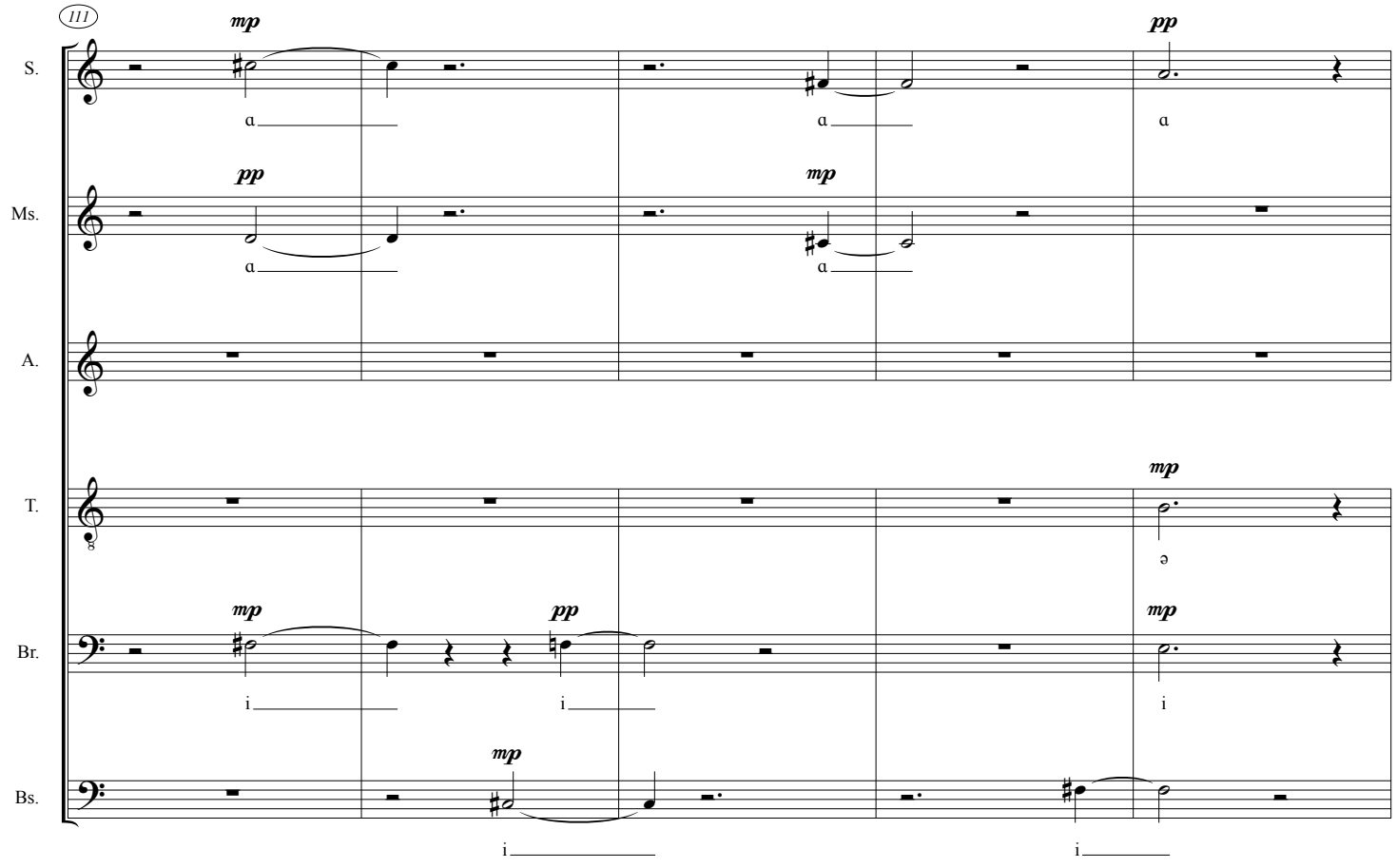
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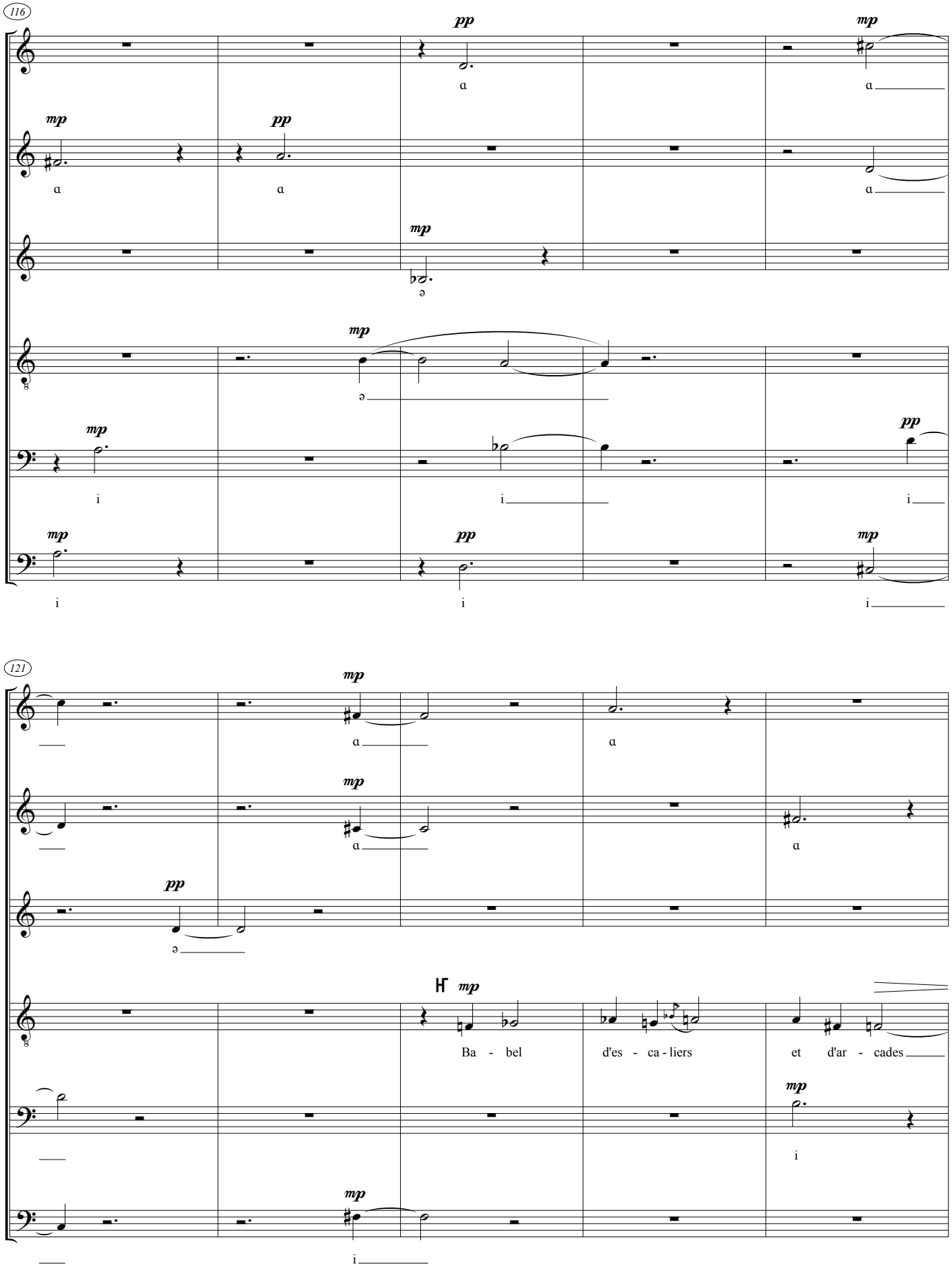
116
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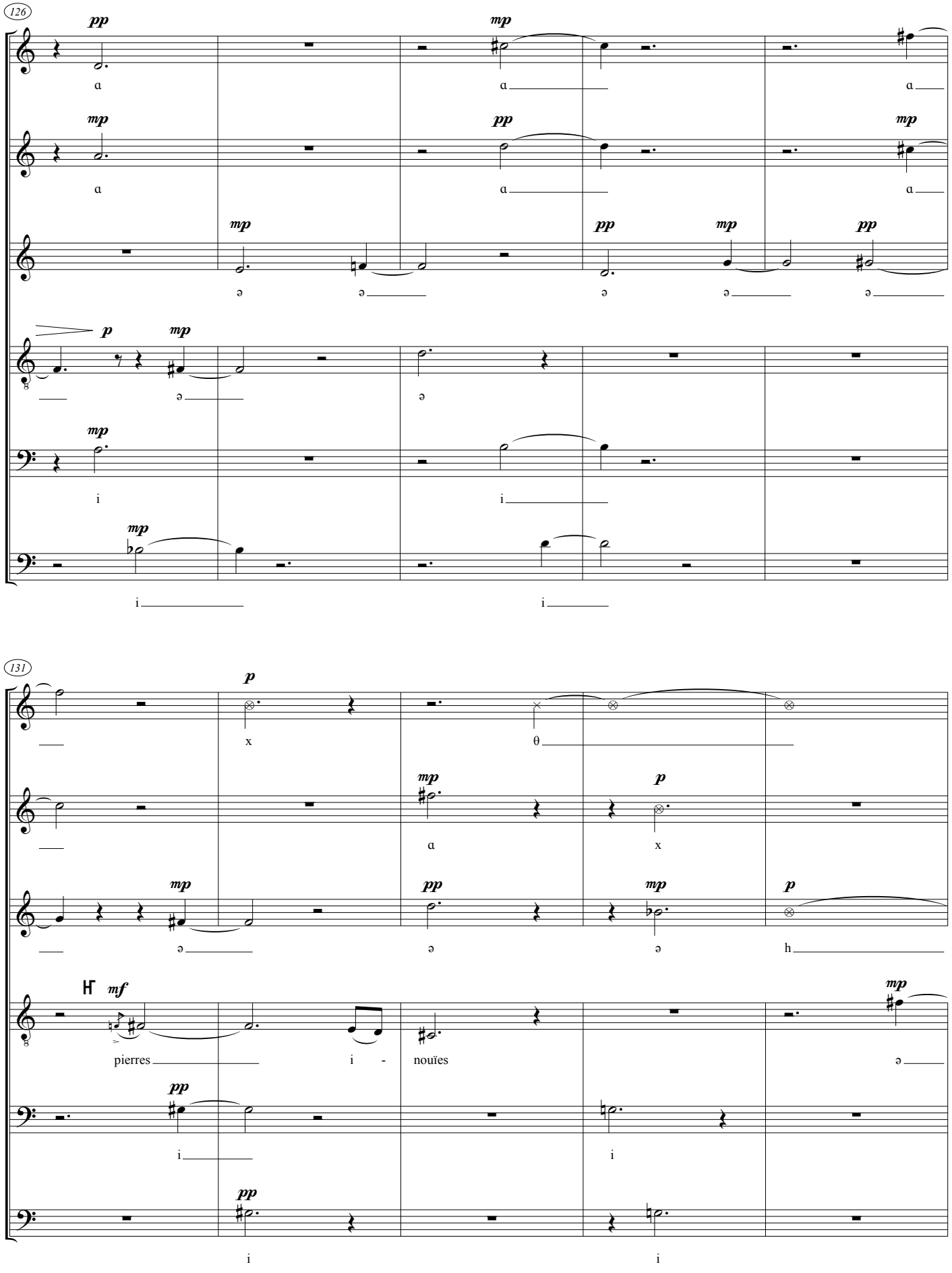
126
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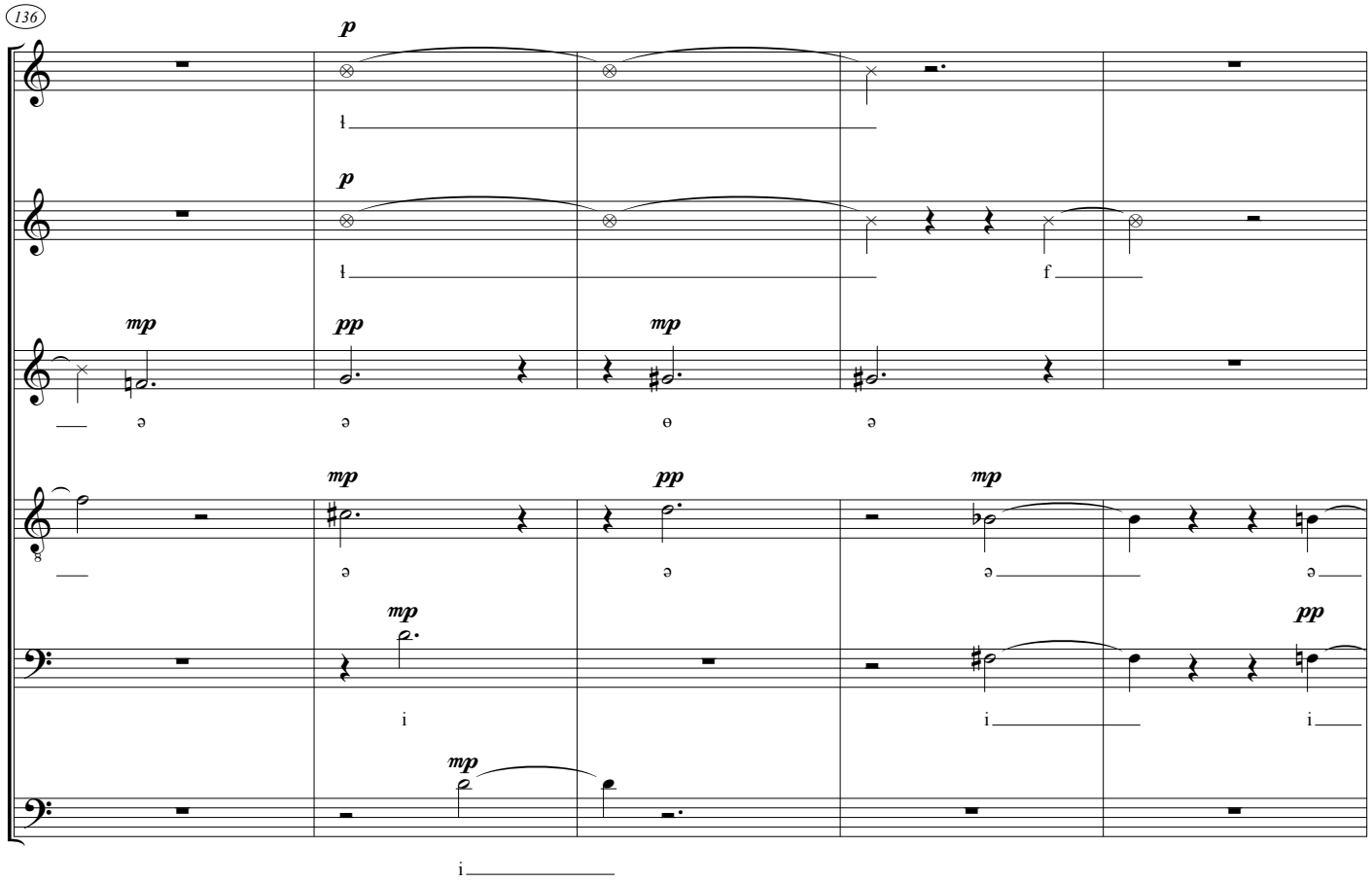
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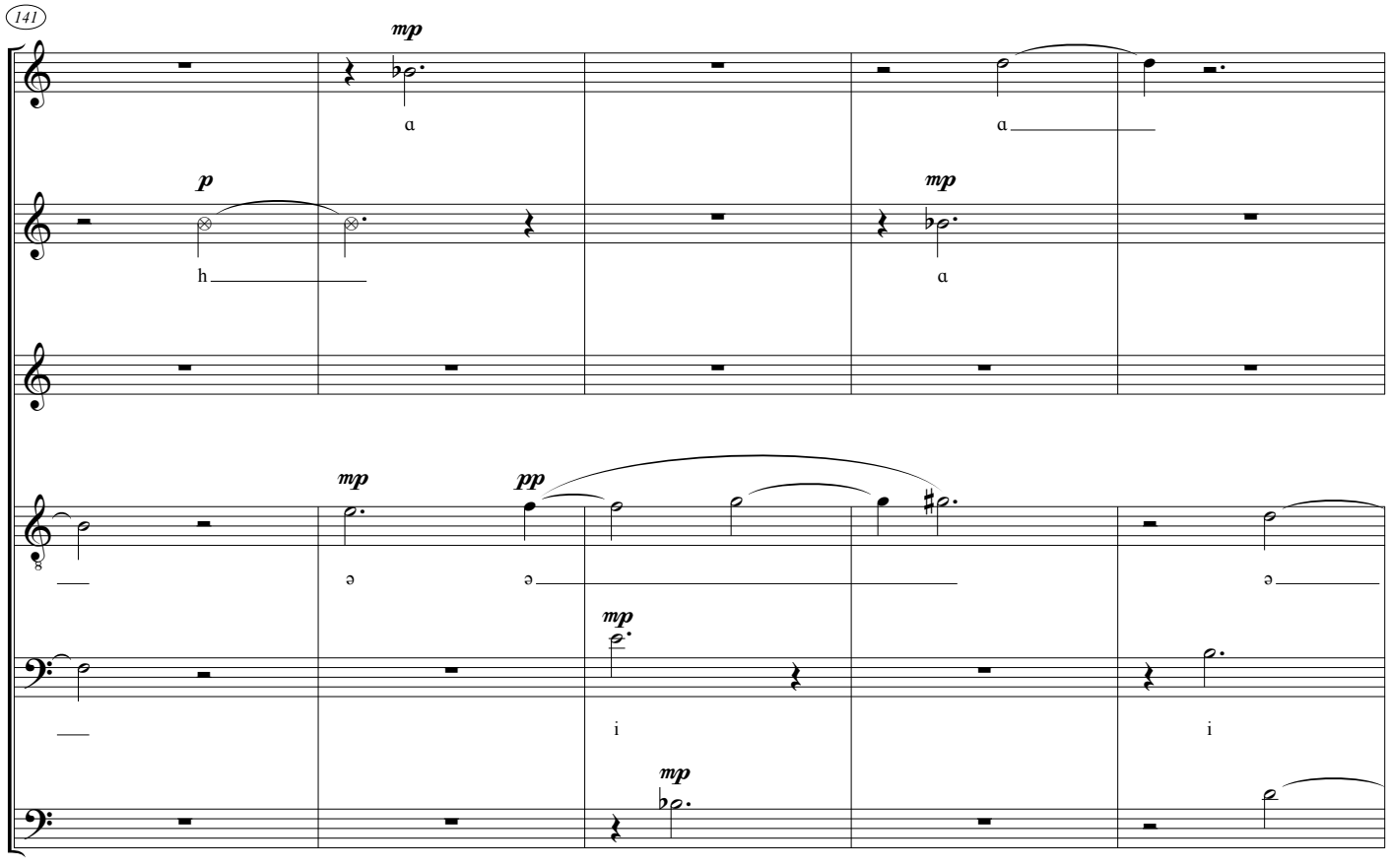
141
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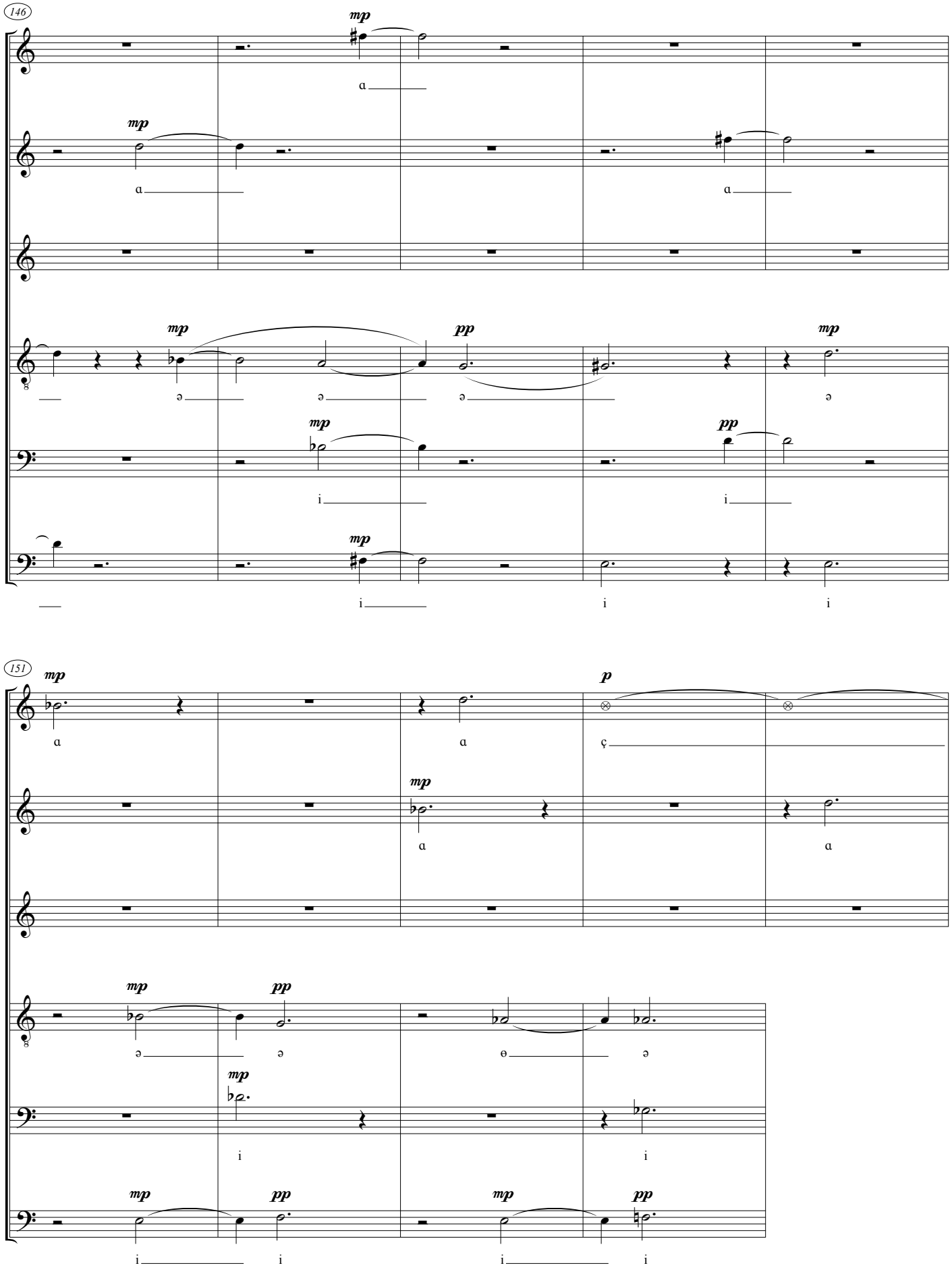
146
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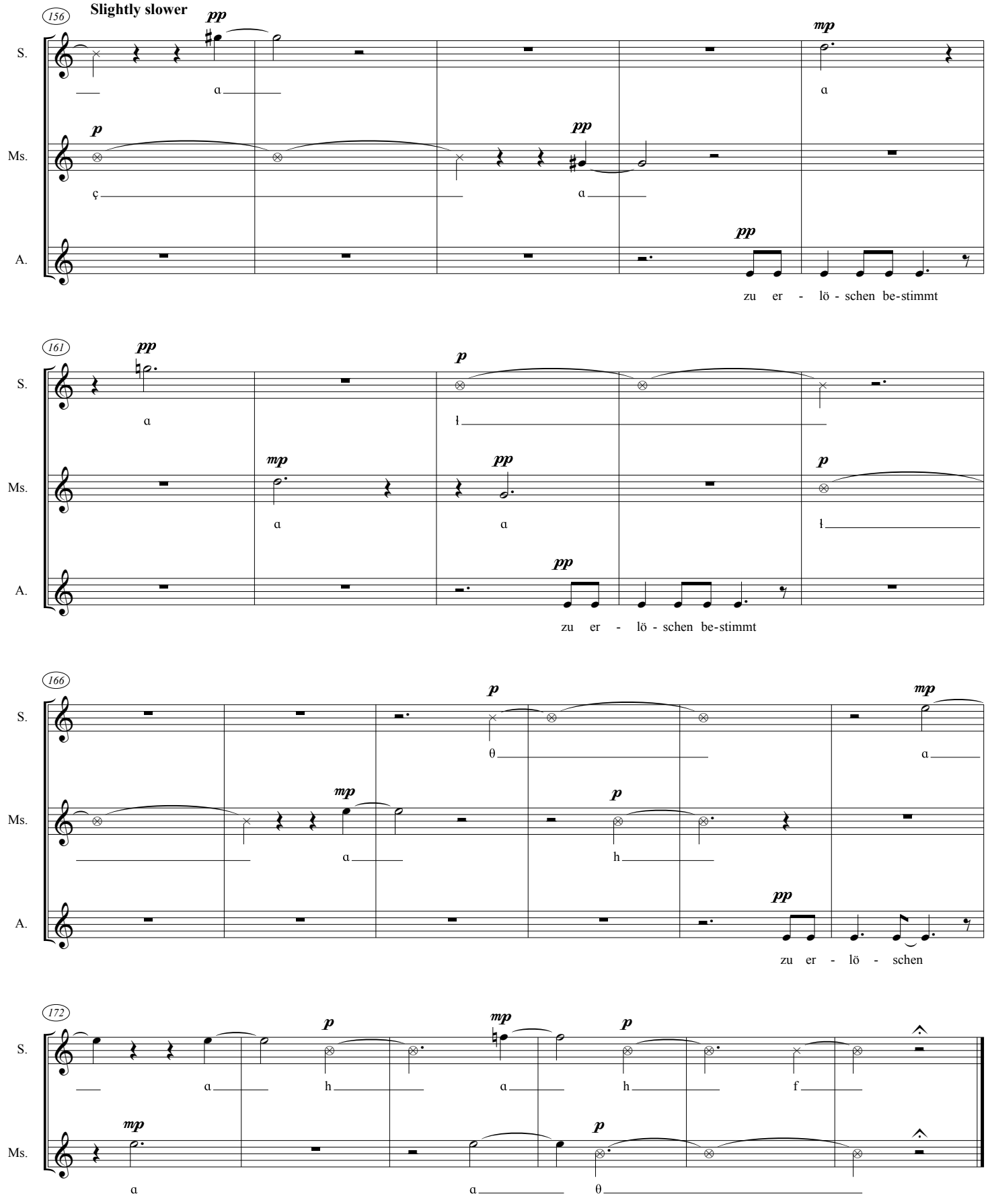

duration: ~8:20'