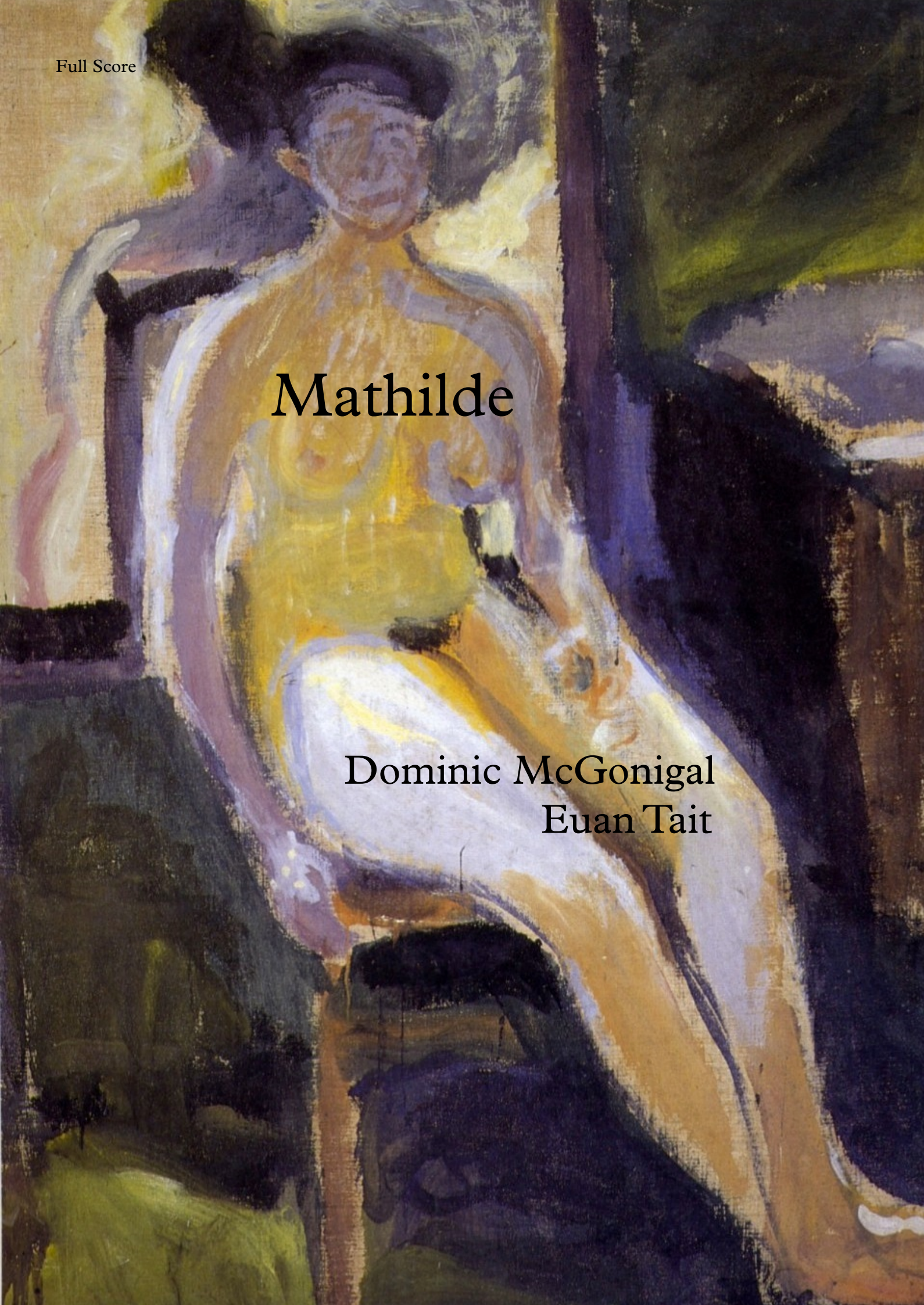
Full Score



Mathilde

Dominic McGonigal
Euan Tait

Mathilde

"Innerst im grunde wacht noch ein schrei."
Stefan George, *Der siebente Ring*

Dominic McGonigal: String Quartet no. 2
Text: Euan Tait

SYNOPSIS

Richard Gerstl, Arnold Schoenberg and Mathilde Schoenberg wove their stores together from the spring of 1906 until the early winter of 1908, when these threads suddenly, agonisingly, snapped. Their shared story is largely hidden behind the greatness of Schoenberg's music, and behind the frustrated Expressionist anger of Gerstl's Mathilde-myself paintings. We can only know this story if one listens for the hawthorn hedge-shreds of whispers from those months, when for a while Richard was Arnold's art teacher – Arnold's self-portraits from the period include one where his face is a haunted, isolated glare – and, thereafter, Mathilde's lover. When the affair was ended – partly through the persuasion of Anton Webern – and Richard found himself excluded from the artistic circle that had come to form the core of his sense of belonging – the twenty-five year old gathered his paintings and papers together, set light to them, tore into himself with a knife, and then hung himself in his choked, smoke-wisp Liechtensteinstraße 20 studio.

In 2017, Dominic and I sat working on this project amid the subsoil thunder of London's streets, next to the higher-than-any-shout east wall of Charing Cross Station on Villiers Street. We conceived this work as almost speaking directly to the protagonists of this story – we were moved to speak to them, and to sing of their inner life as we imagined it. We have shaped the details of their story according to our personal responses to it. Thus Mathilde at first is alone in her marital home, lonely, frustrated, voiceless; she observes Arnold and Richard working together, and watches her husband come alive in his company, and she falls in love with the artist; she and Richard rejoice for a moment in their shared physical love; they are sought by Arnold's friends after they elope; finally, she mourns over Richard's destroyed life.

A fragment of the score of Schoenberg's second string quartet, torn from an otherwise partial, broken copy of this great work, hangs on my wall, where the first violin sings a high, strange music, a newly heard language, under the soprano's call: "Ich fühle luft von anderem planeten." I have longed for a companion piece to this work that might also breathe this air, and the current work is both string quartet, dramatic cantata for soprano and quartet, even a mini opera suggesting a larger work.

This is primarily a work inspired by friendship, between myself and these two distant lives, between myself and the composer Dominic McGonigal, shaped by his insight and remarkable imagination. Our talk on that late autumn day ended with us imagining ourselves accounting for our work, our exploration of their long ago pain, to Richard and Mathilde themselves. This work is a song of respect and compassion for them, an imagining of their mutual brokenness that lead to their broken attempt at love; and as we left that place and that day, and I walked towards Southwark's once shattered St. Mary Overie, Stefan George's words from *Der siebente Ring*, set by Schoenberg in his quartet, came to me: "Mir blassen durch das dunkel die gesichter/Die freundlich eben noch sich zu mir drehten." There is darkness - yet faintly, through that darkness, there is recognition in this very human story, a friendly, known face turns towards us – and human beings find they can speak, each to each, of what they know.

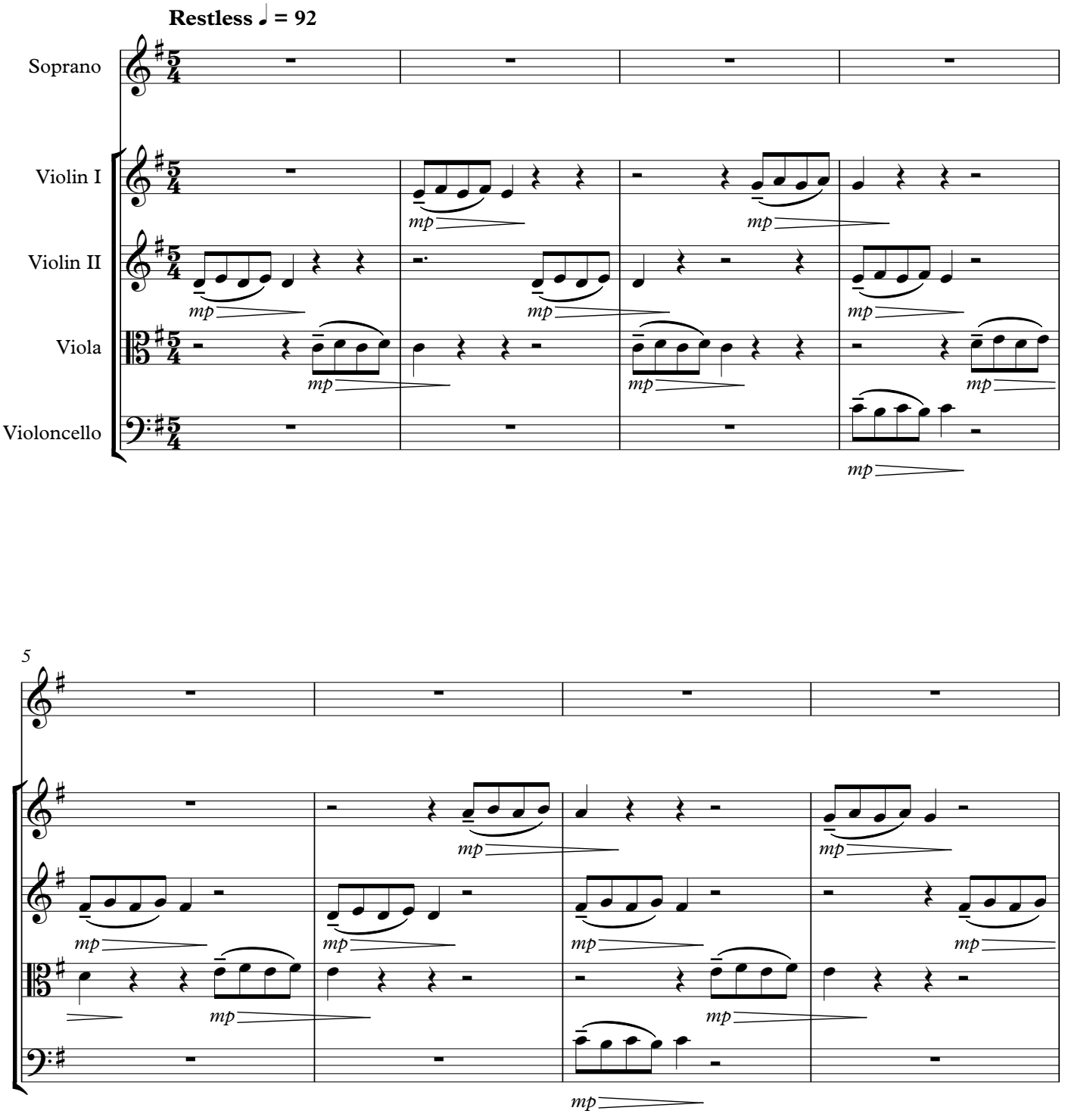
Mathilde

Commissioned by and dedicated to Pat Halling

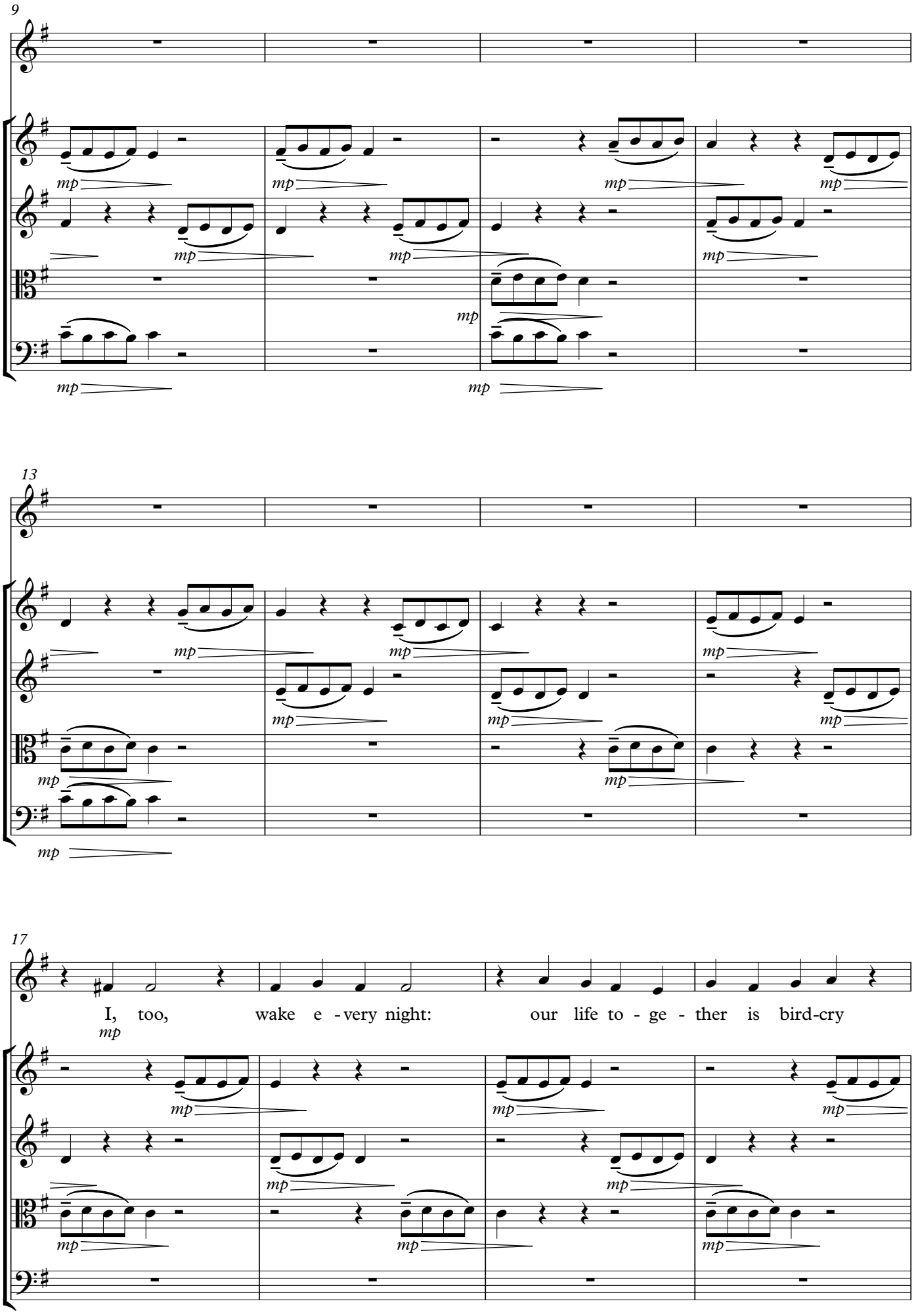
1. Mathilde and Arnold

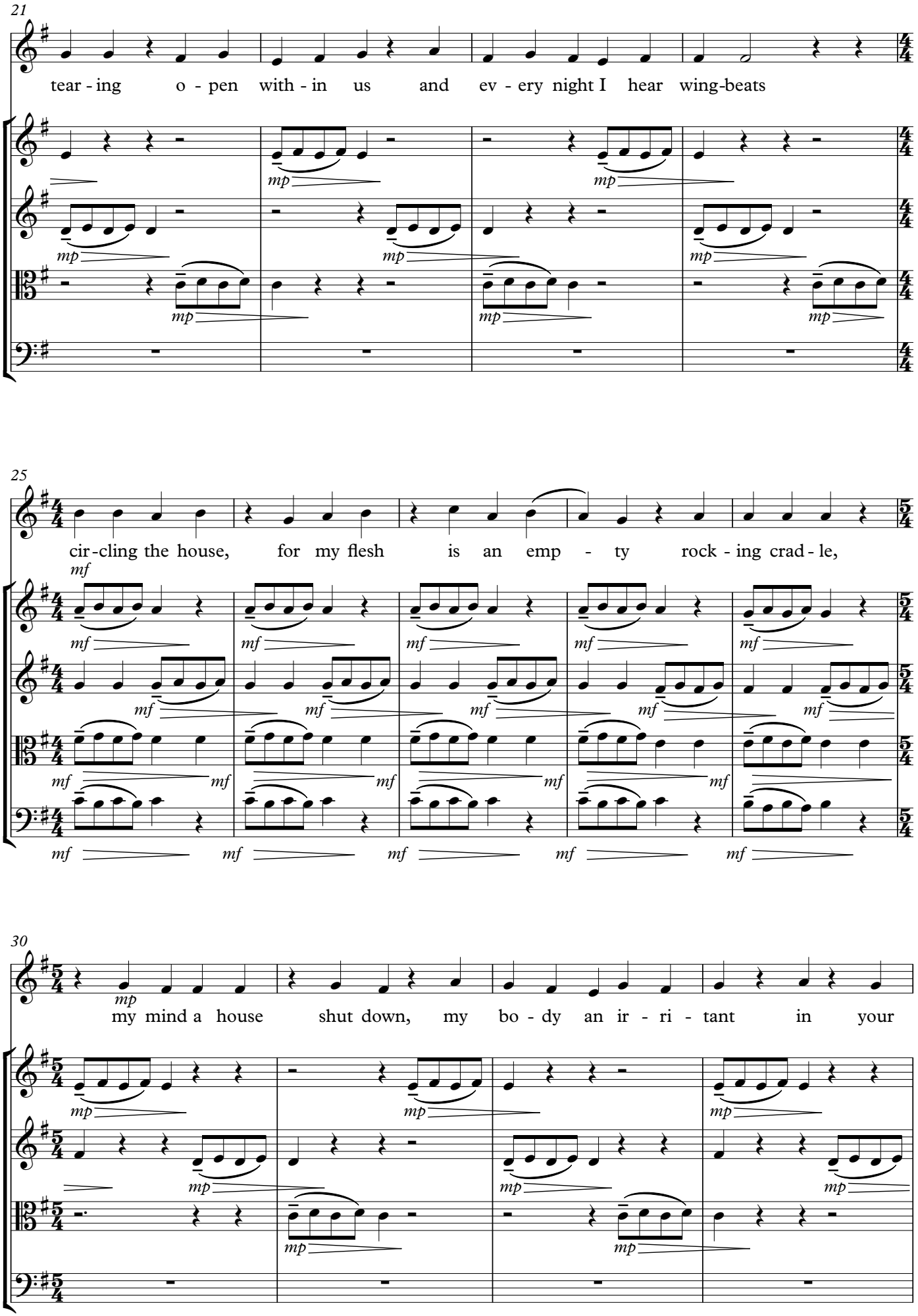
Euan Tait

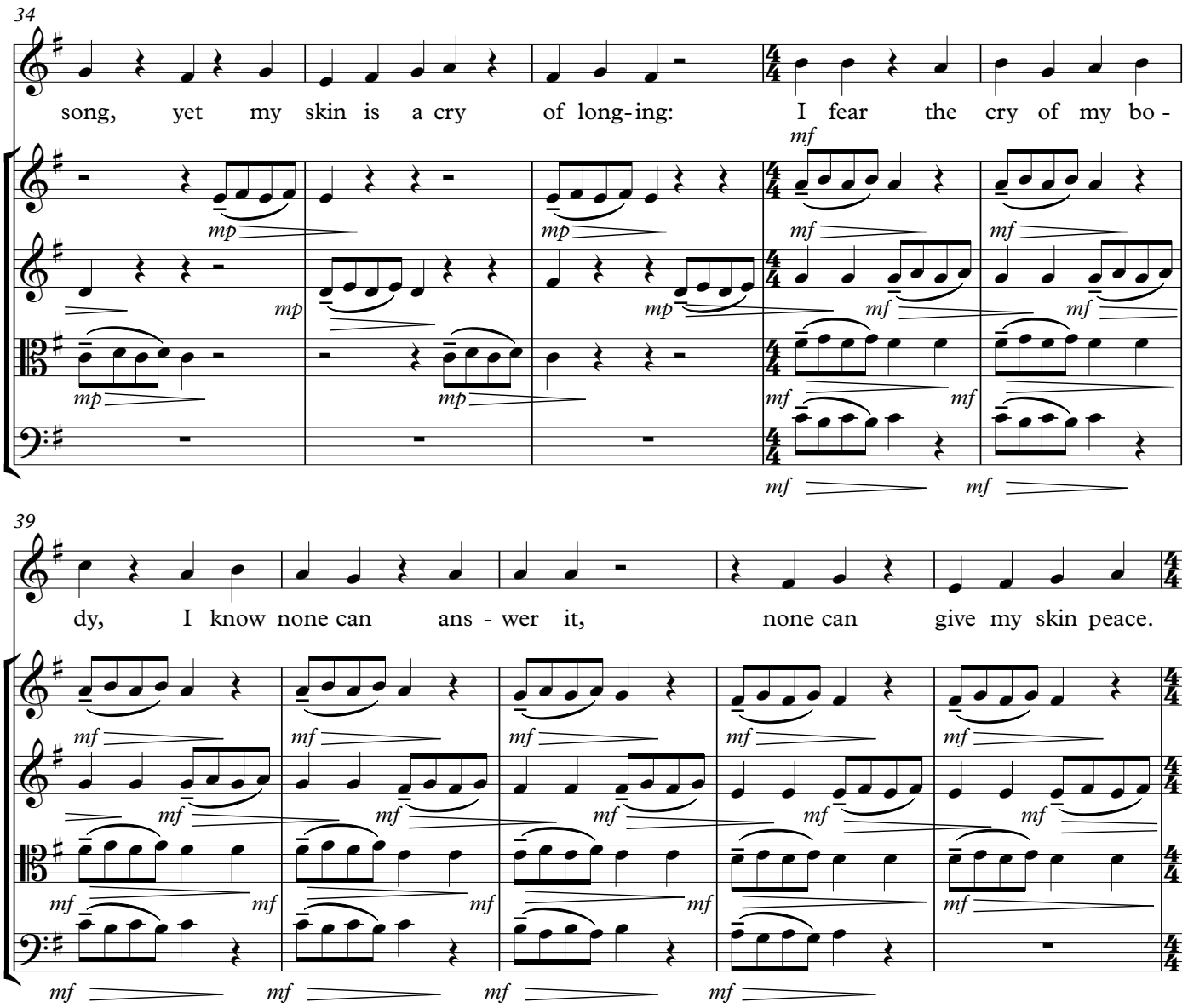
Dominic McGonigal



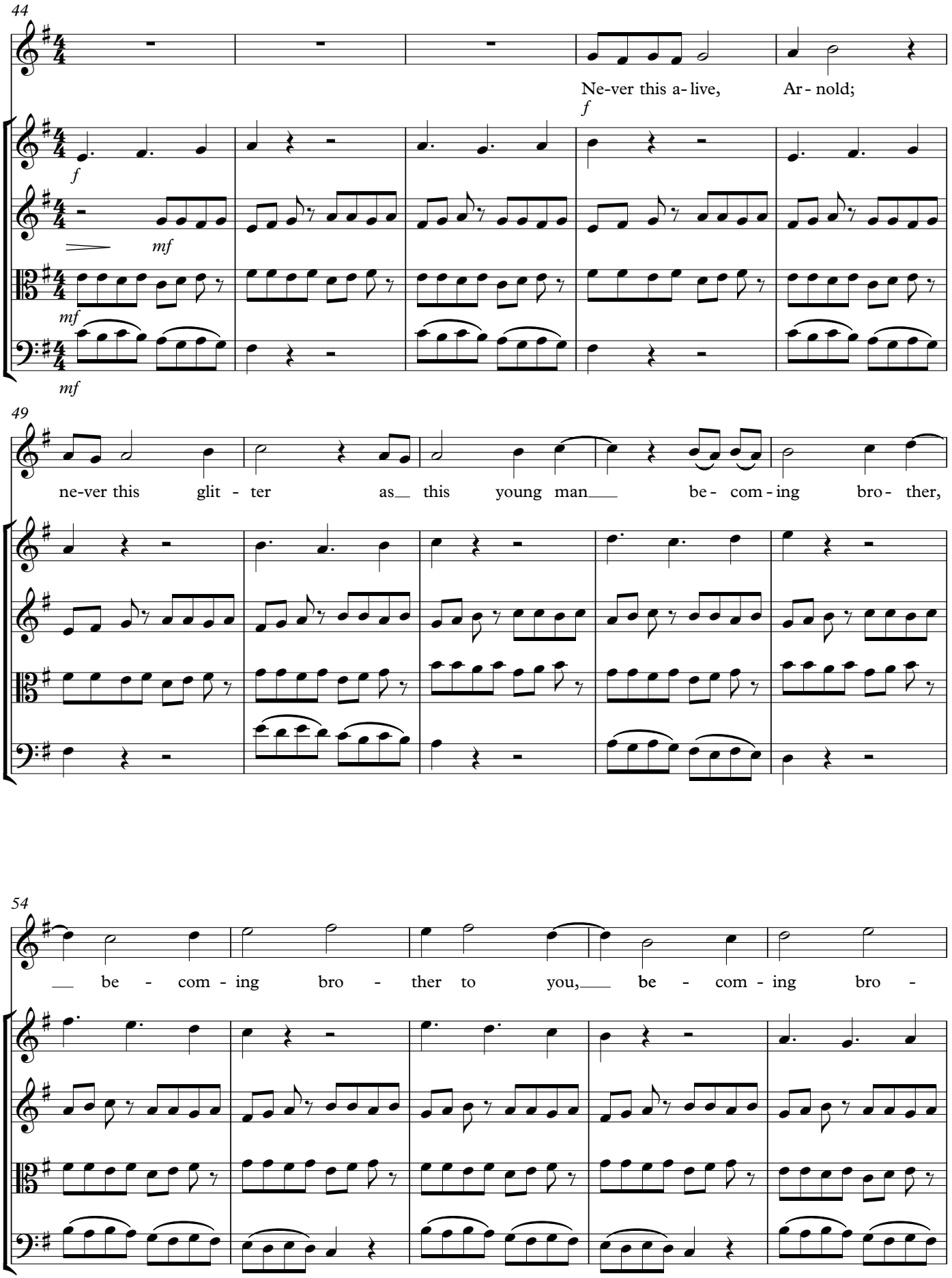
© Euan Tait, Dominic McGonigal, 2017

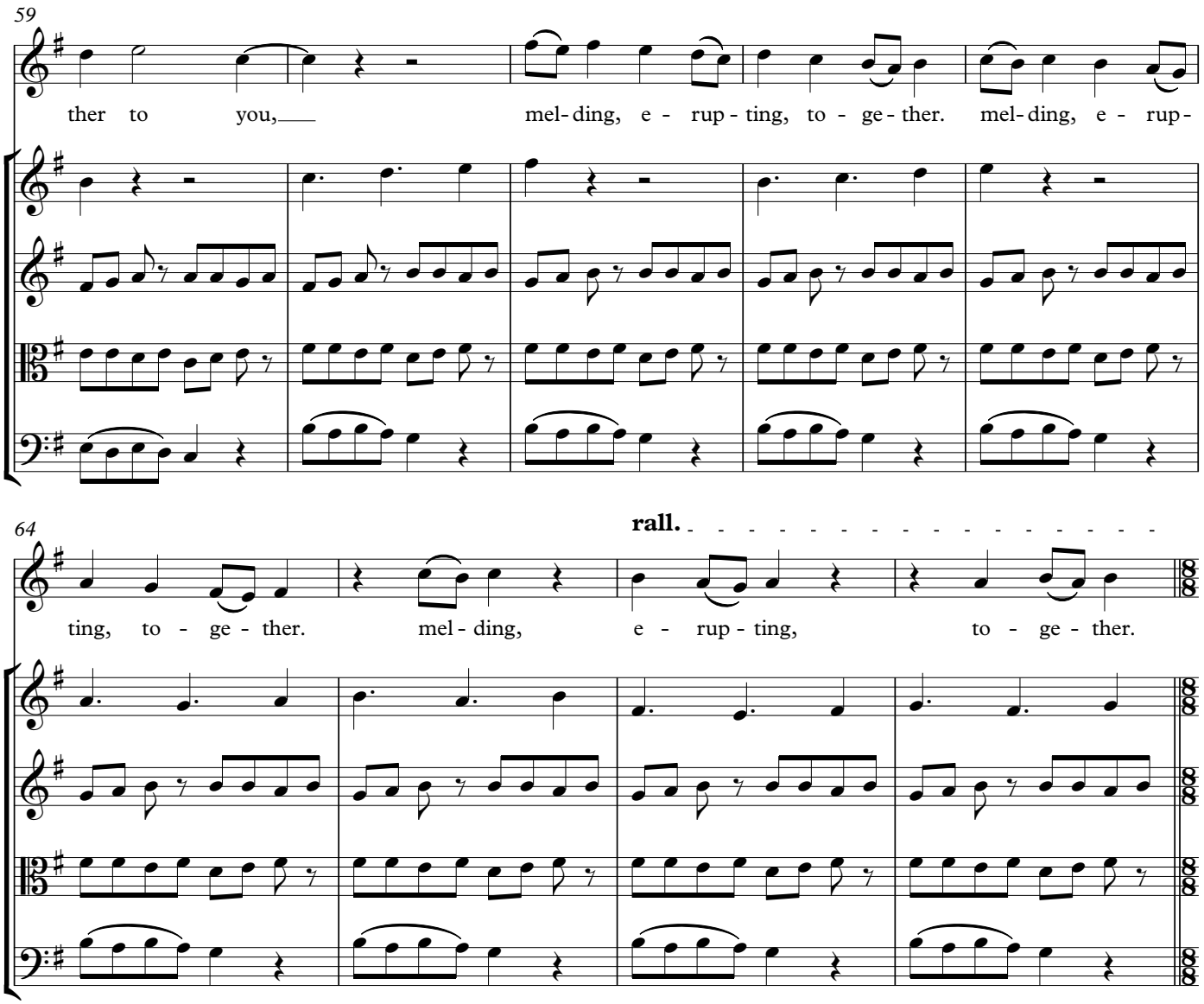

9
13
17
I, too, wake e - very night: our life to - ge - ther is bird-cry
mp


21
tear - ing o - pen with - in us and ev - ery night I hear wing-beats
25
cir - cling the house, for my flesh is an emp - ty rock - ing crad - le,
30
my mind a house shut down, my bo - dy an ir - ri - tant in your

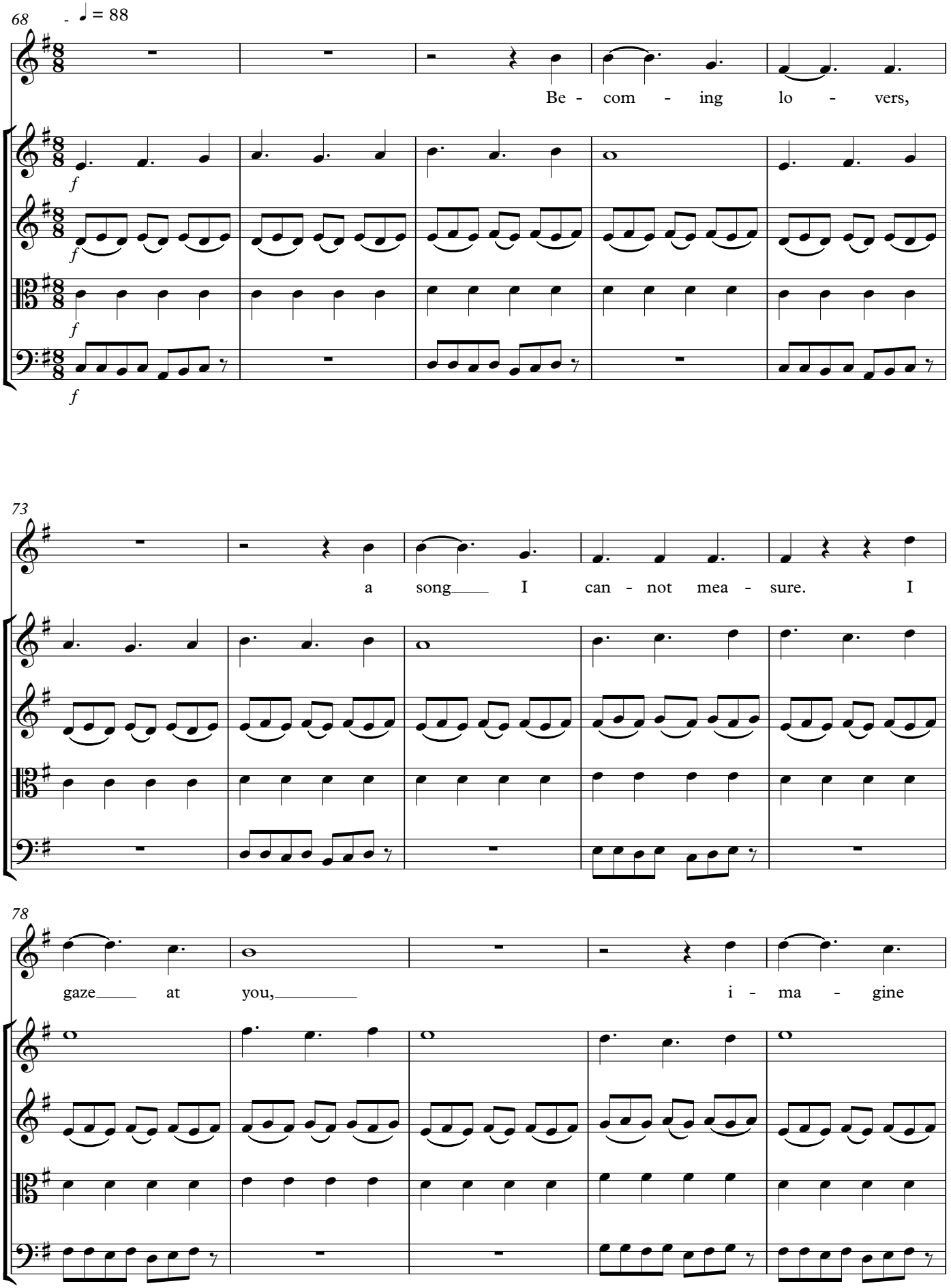

34
song, yet my skin is a cry of long-ing: I fear the cry of my bo -
39
dy, I know none can ans - wer it, none can give my skin peace.

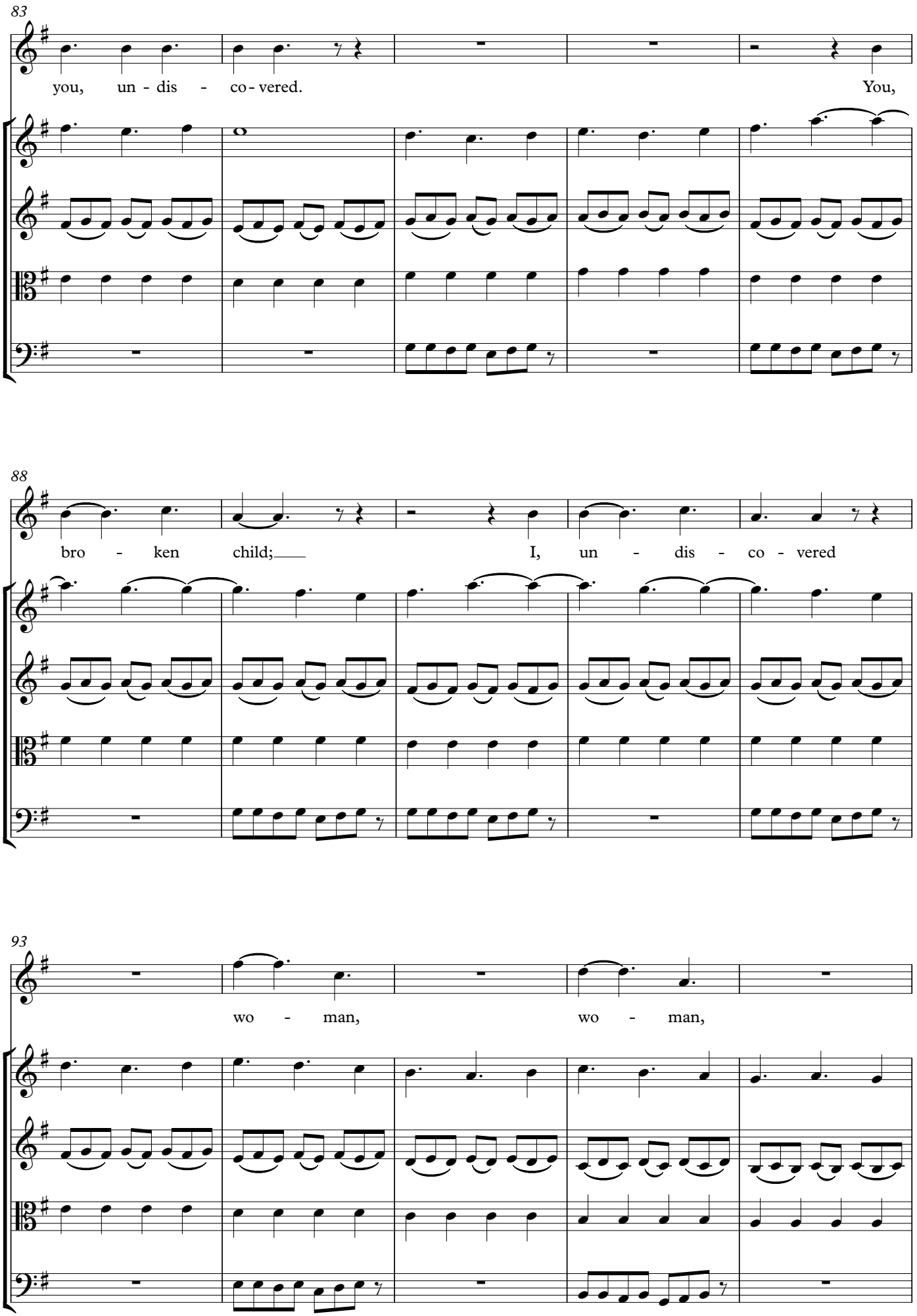
2. Arnold and Richard

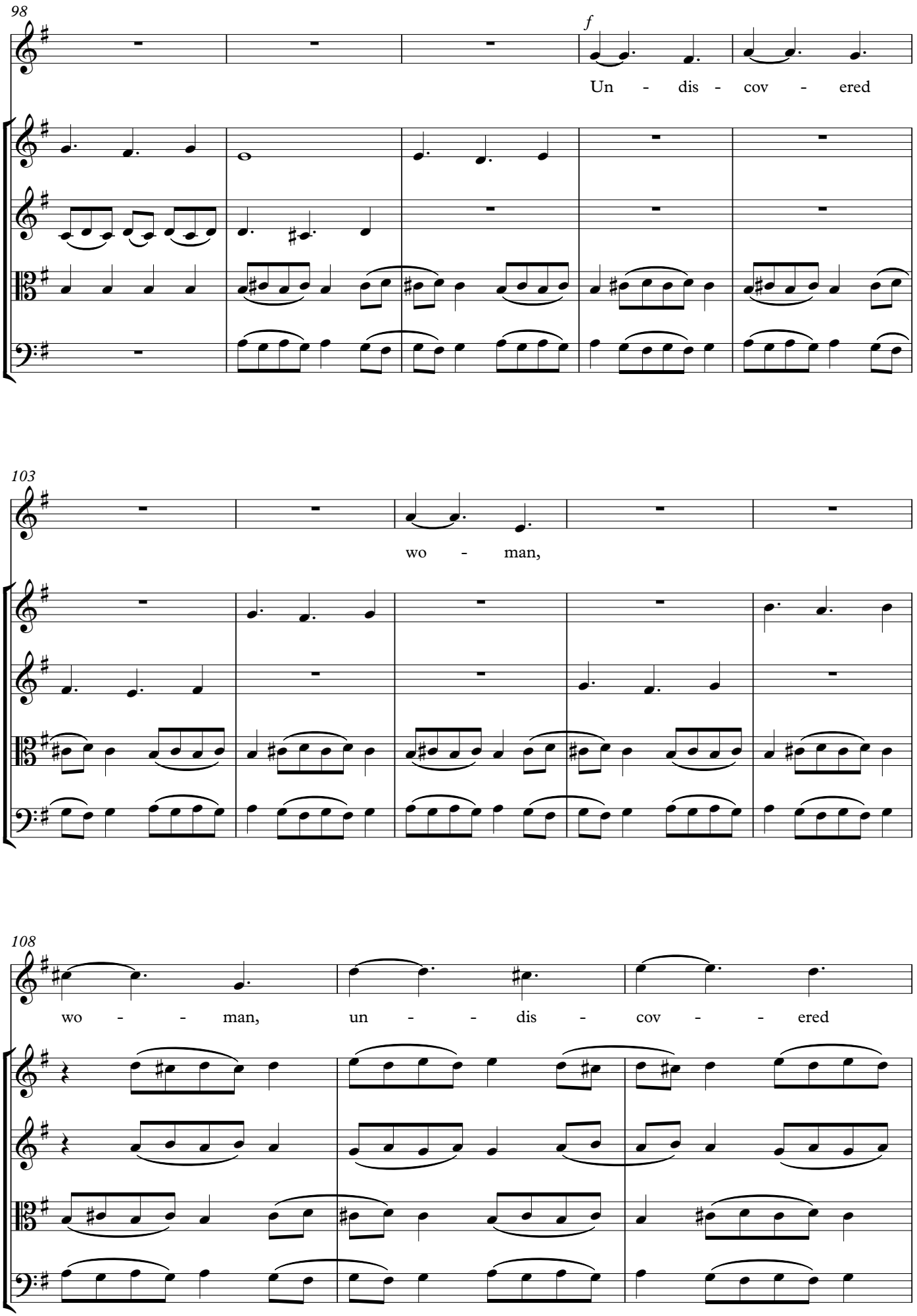


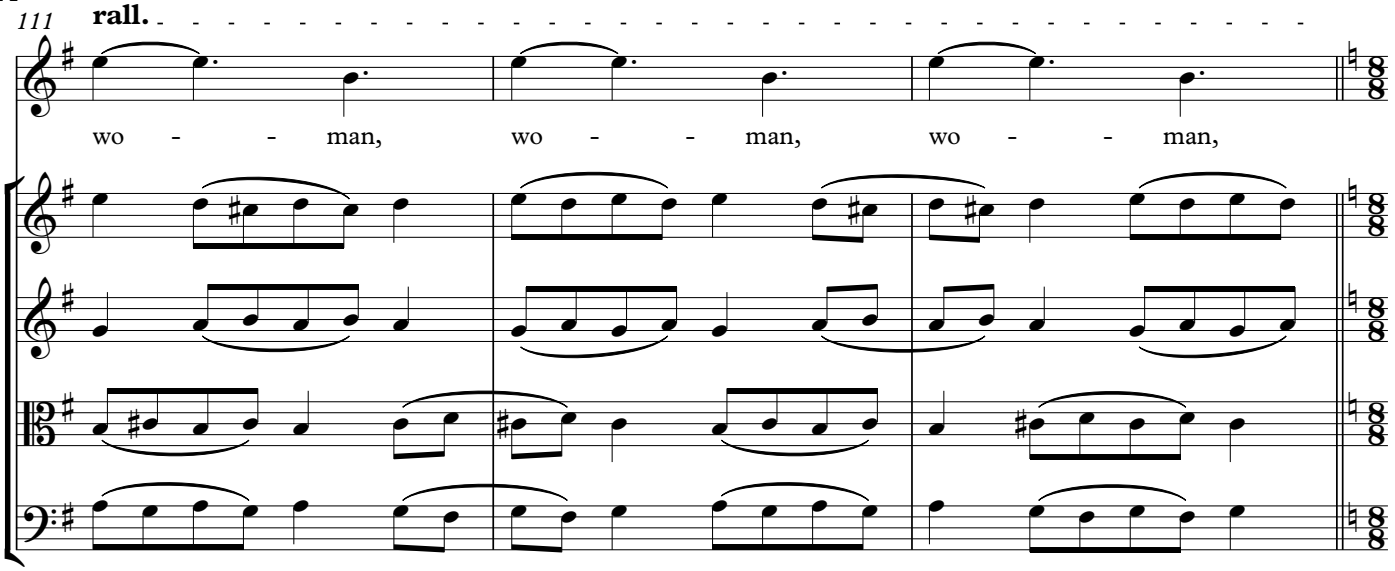

59
ther to you,
mel- ding, e - rup - ting, to - ge - ther. mel- ding, e - rup-
64
rall.
ting, to - ge - ther.
mel - ding,
e - rup - ting,
to - ge - ther.

3. Mathilde falling in love with Richard

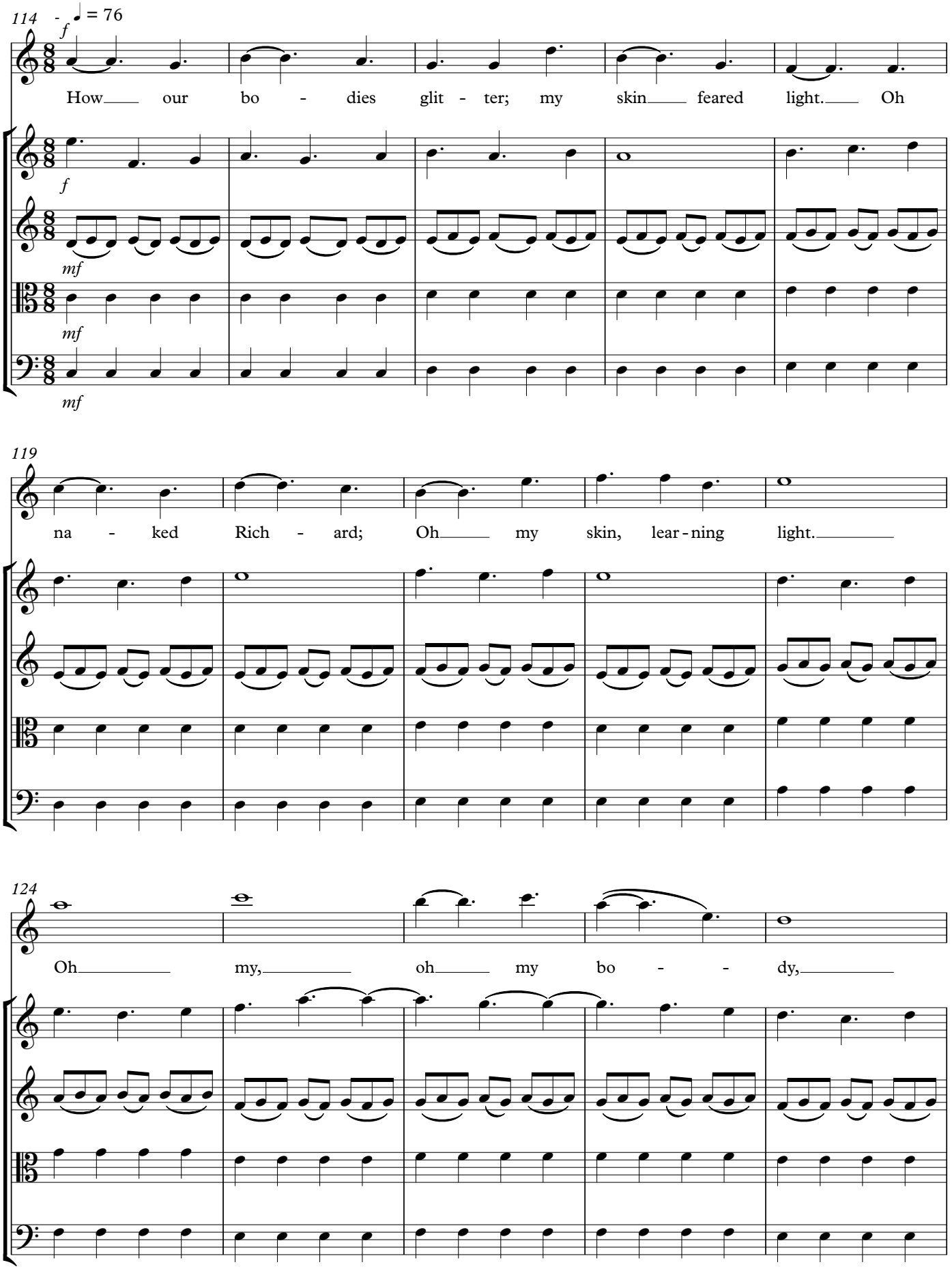


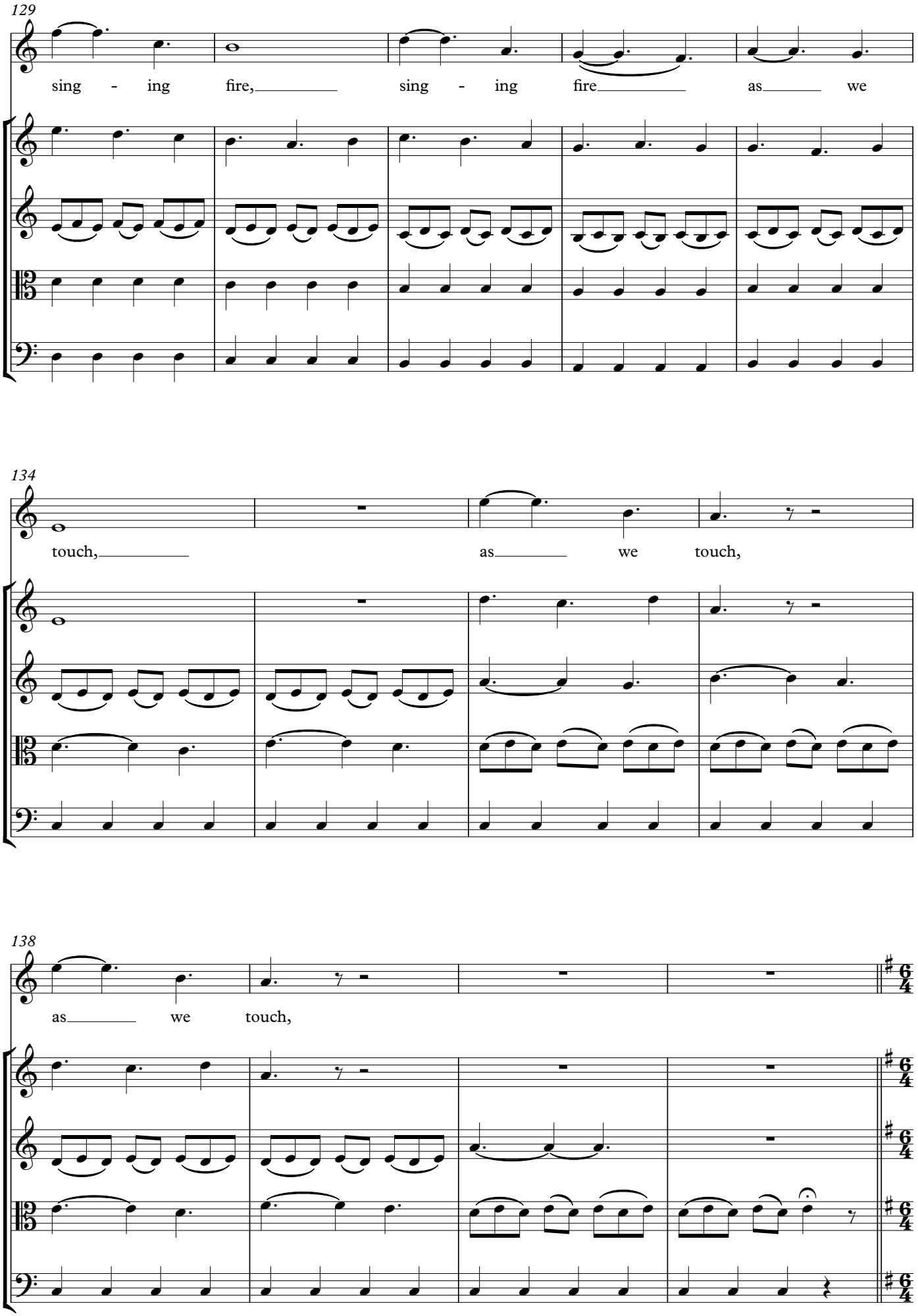

83
you, un - dis - co - vered.
You,
88
bro - ken child;
I, un - dis - co - vered
93
wo - man,
wo - man,


98
f
Un - dis - cov - ered
103
wo - man,
108
wo - - man, un - - dis - cov - - ered

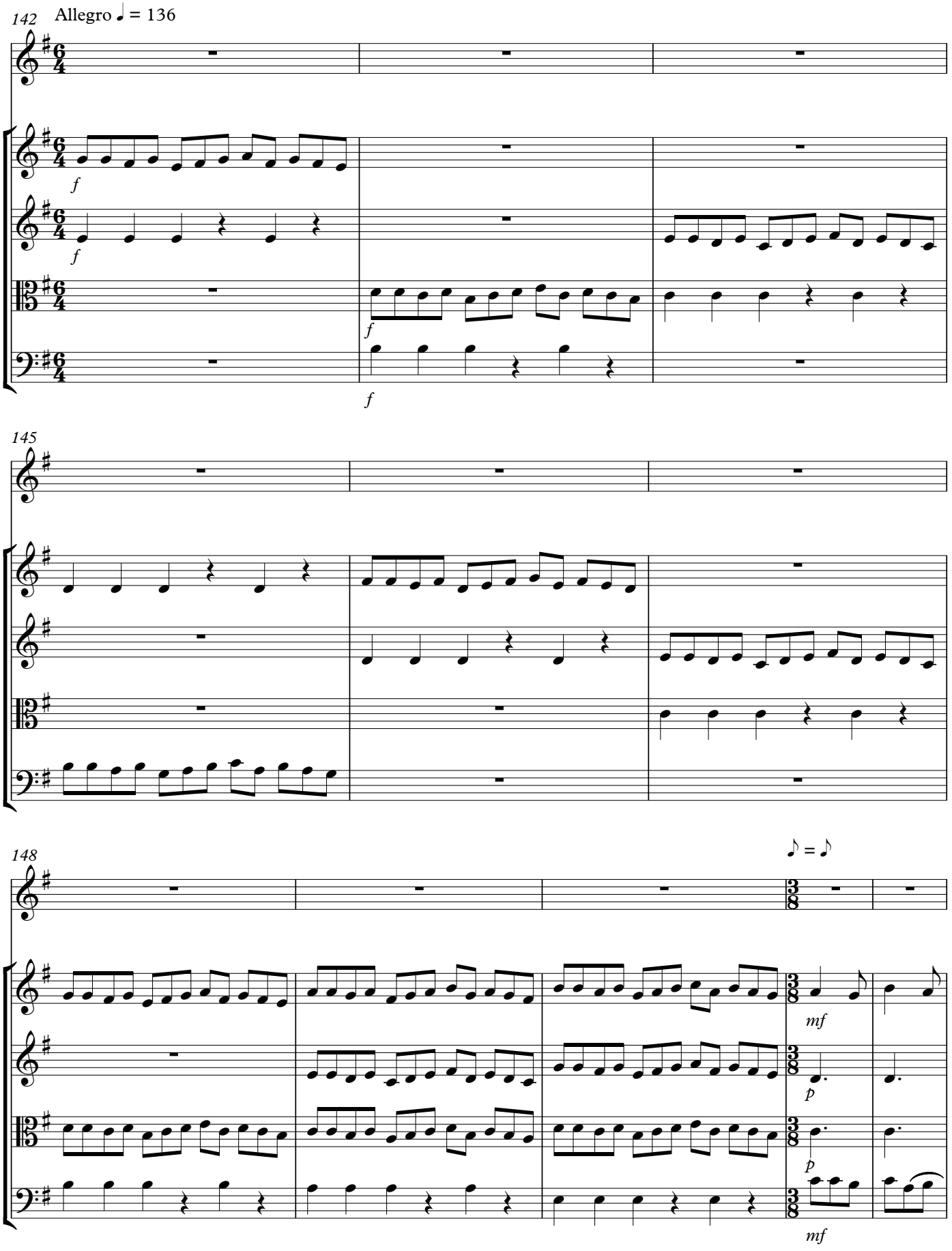

111
rall.
wo - - man, wo - - man, wo - - man,

4. Mathilde and Richard, Together




129
sing - ing fire, sing - ing fire as we
134
touch, as we touch,
138
as we touch,

5. The Chase



153

♪ = ♪

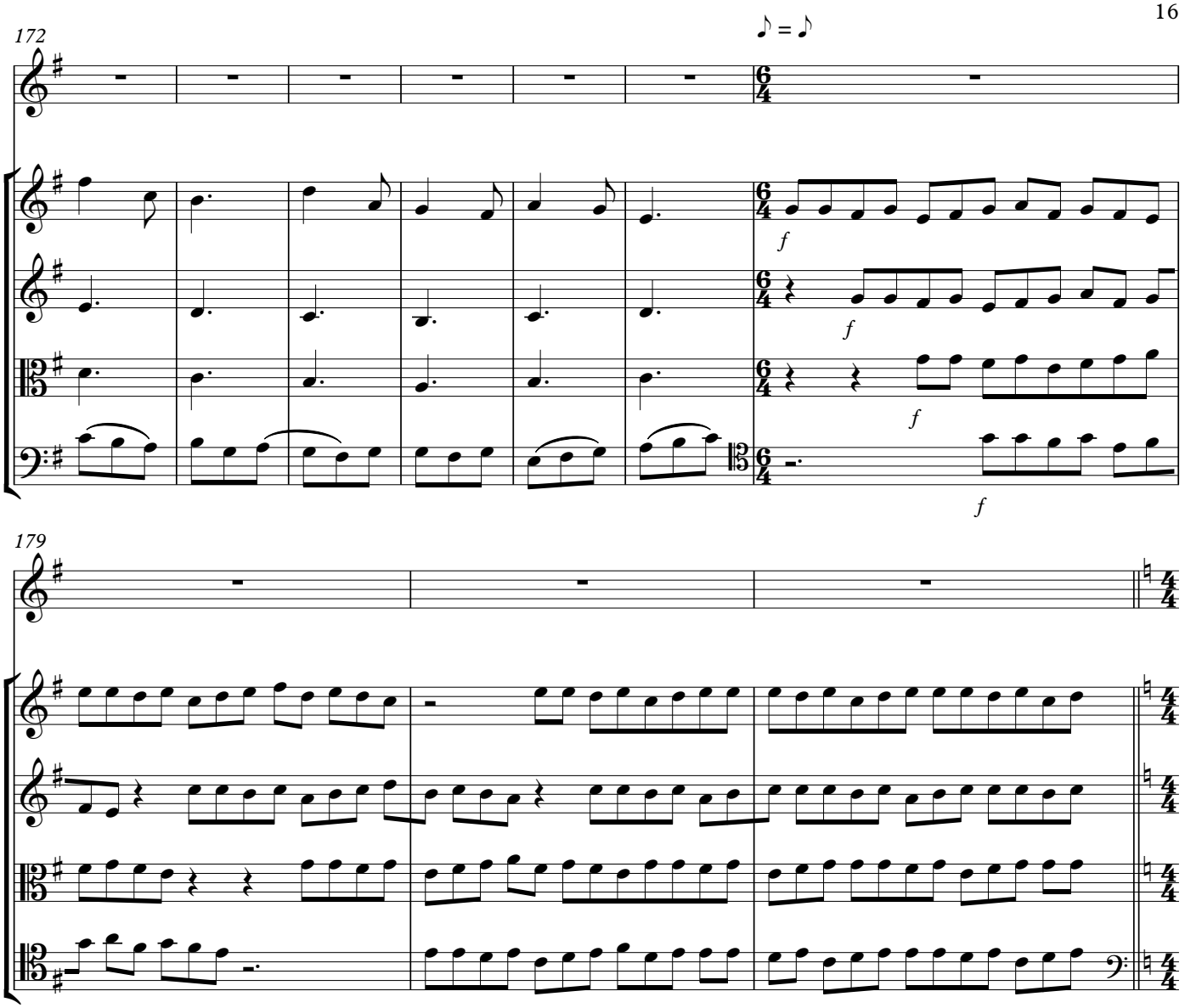
158

♪ = ♪

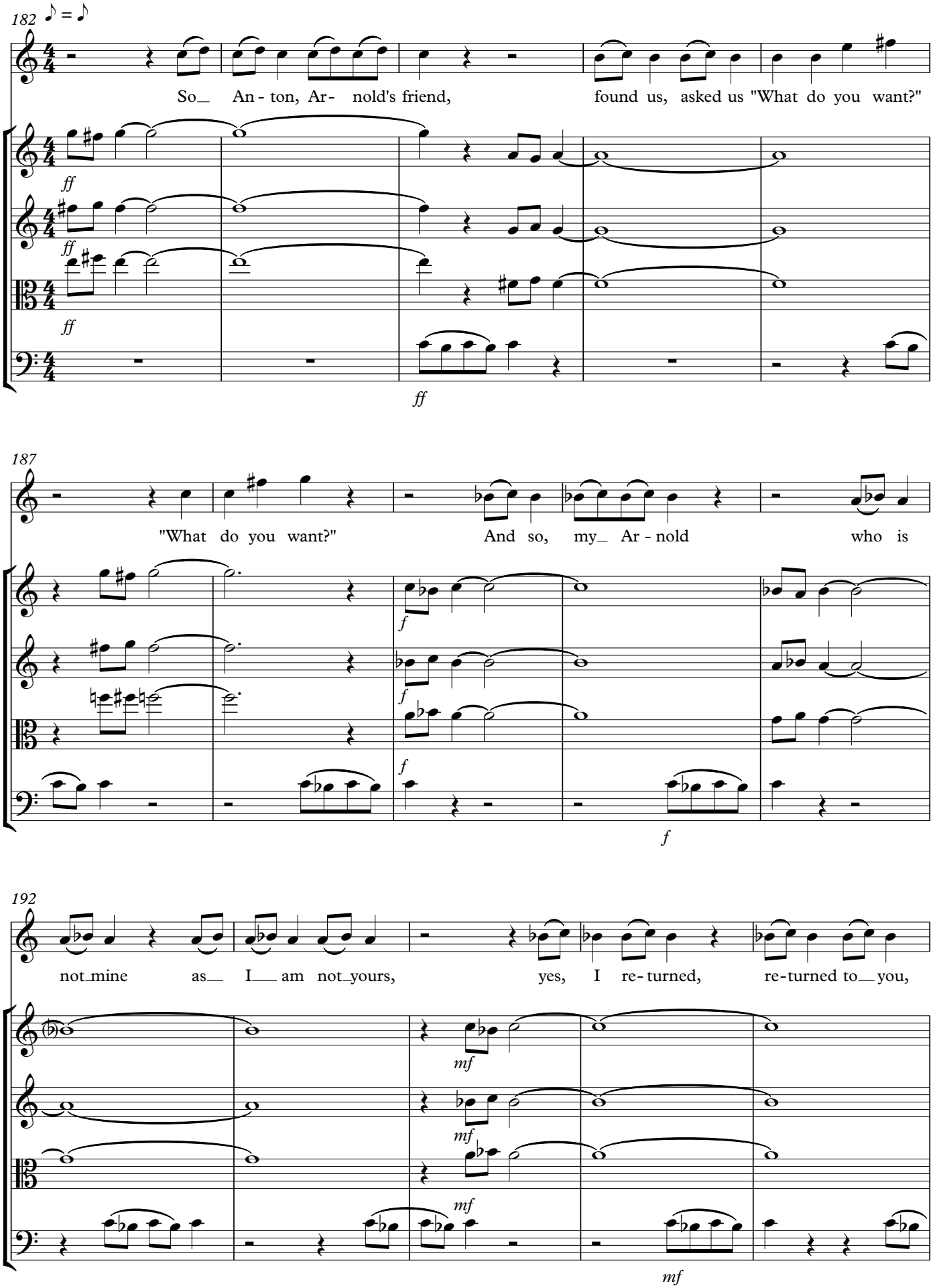
165

♪ = ♪

♪ = ♪


172
♪ = ♪
f
f
f
f
179

6. Mathilde confronted by Anton Webern



197

Slower ♩ = 108

to our track less days. Are we ans - wered

mp p

mp p

mp p

p

203

Rich - ard? Is this peace? I have seen the

210

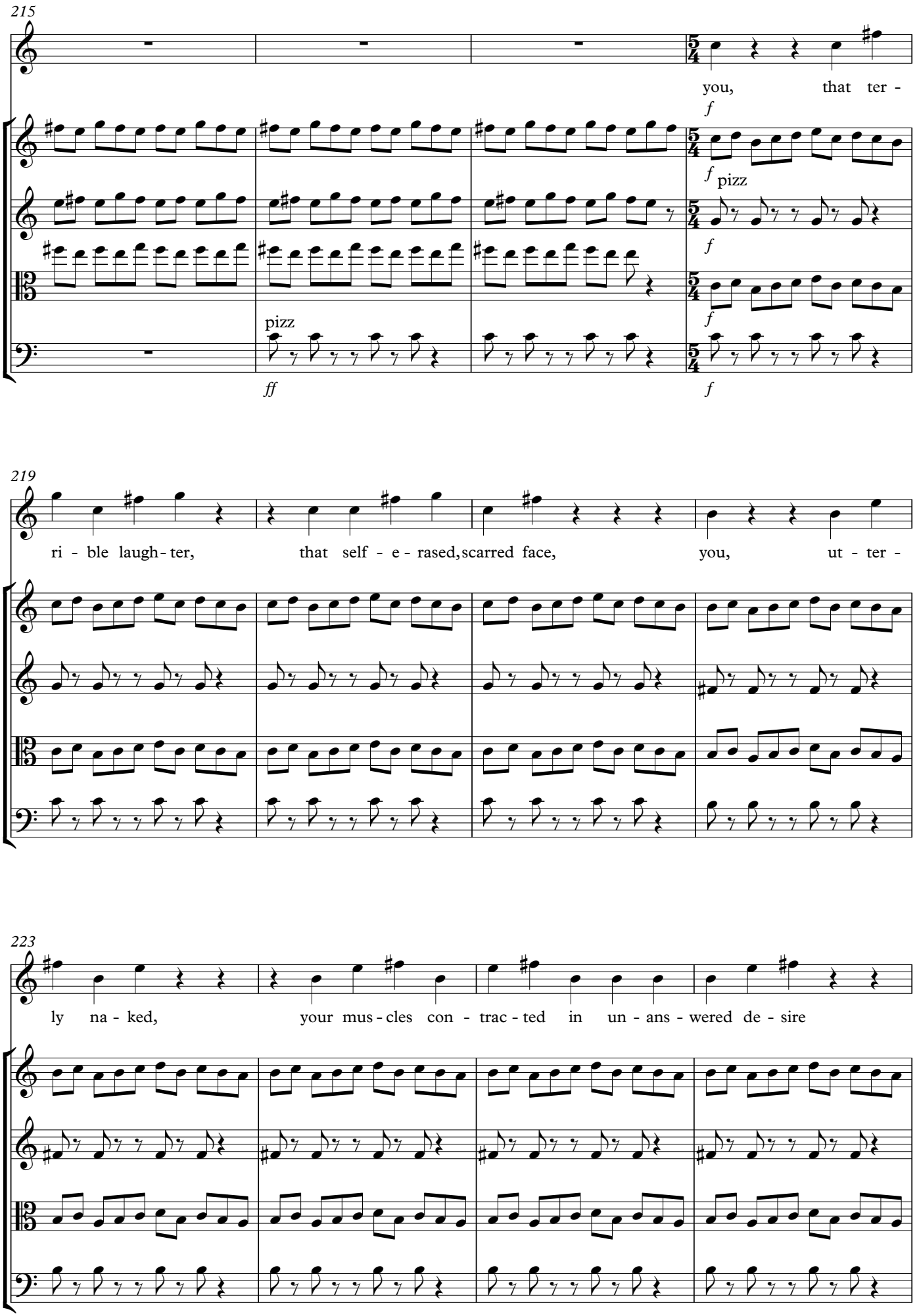
Allegro ♩ = 136

ways you search your heart, your be - ing:

ff

ff

ff


215
you, that ter -
f
f pizz
f
f
pizz
ff
f
219
ri - ble laugh - ter, that self - e - rased, scarred face, you, ut - ter -
223
ly na - ked, your mus - cles con - trac - ted in un - ans - wered de - sire

227

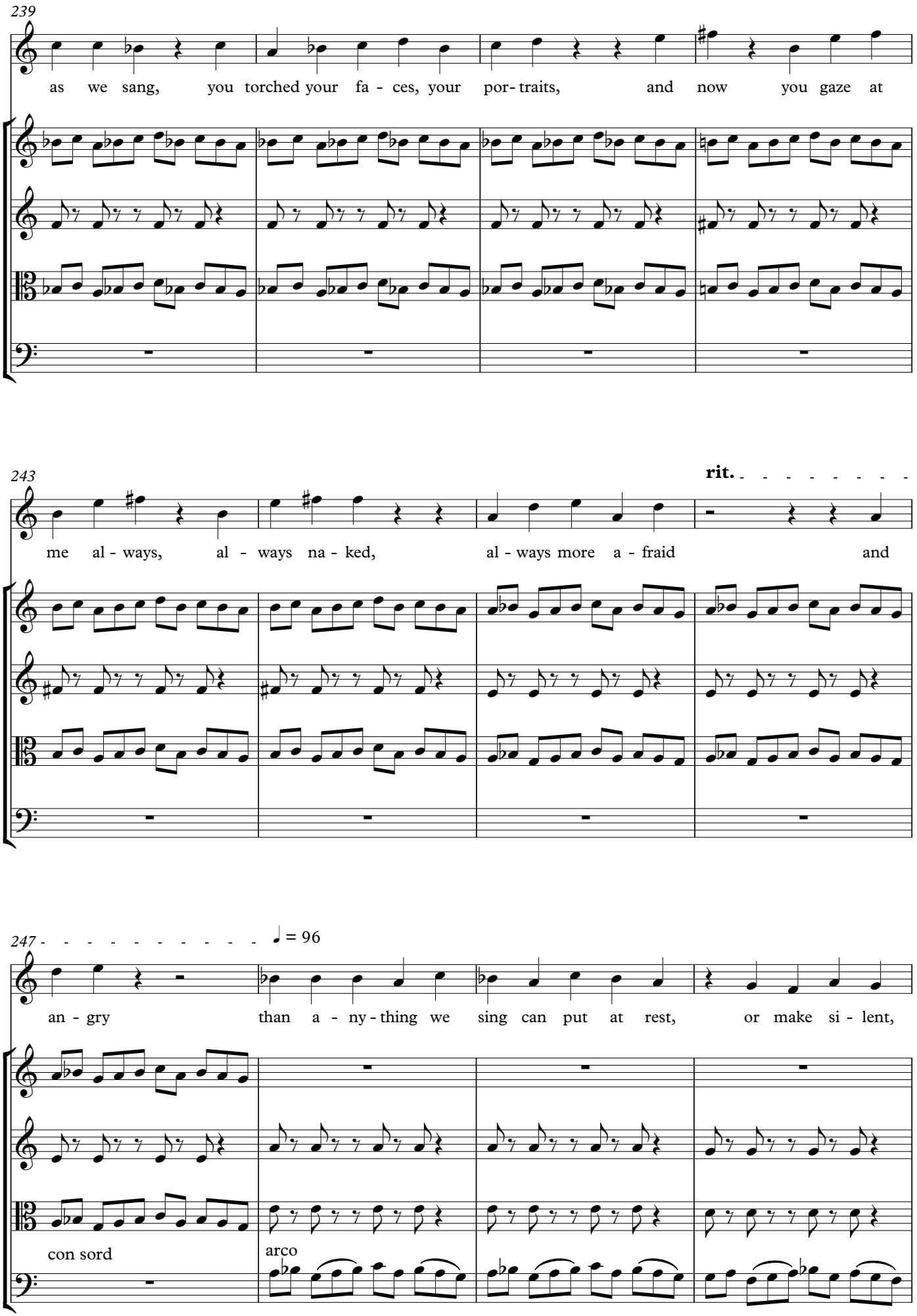
the love in your bo - dy frac - tu - ring un - der the fear I've placed on you,

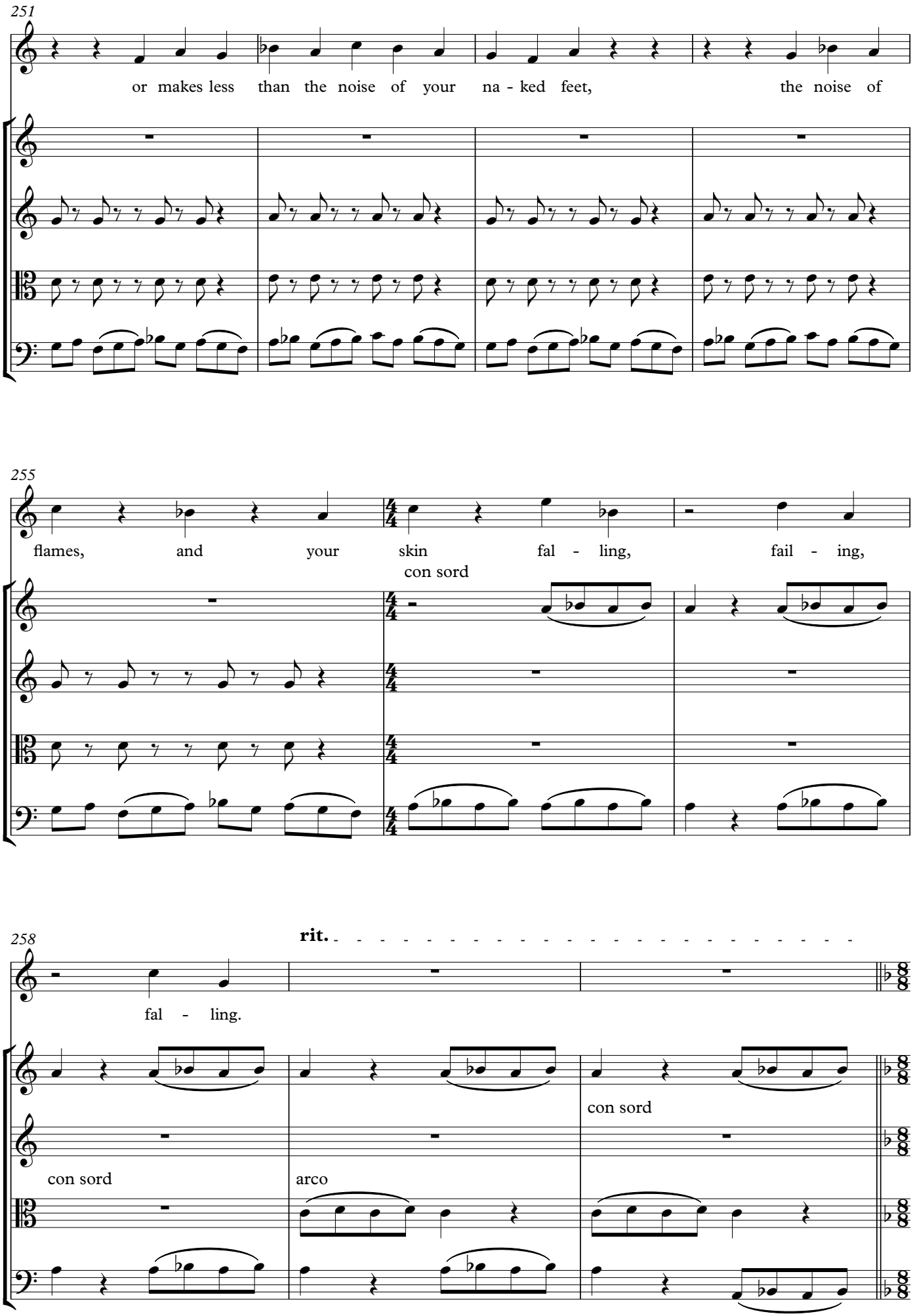
231

and tear - ing. My heart, the emp - ty i - mage of your skin, and

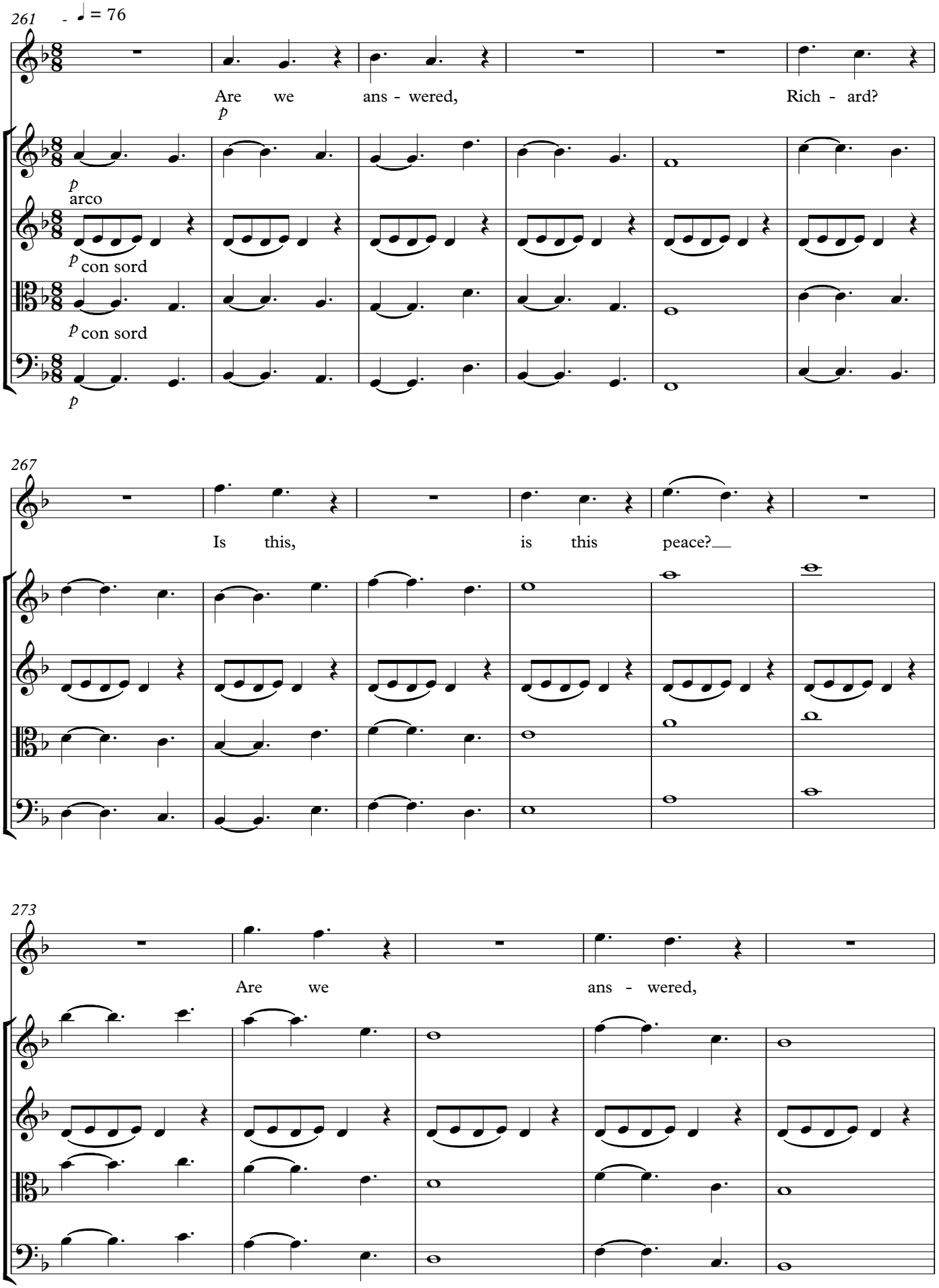
235

you are dri - ven from us, from all our friends, chased out to your death:

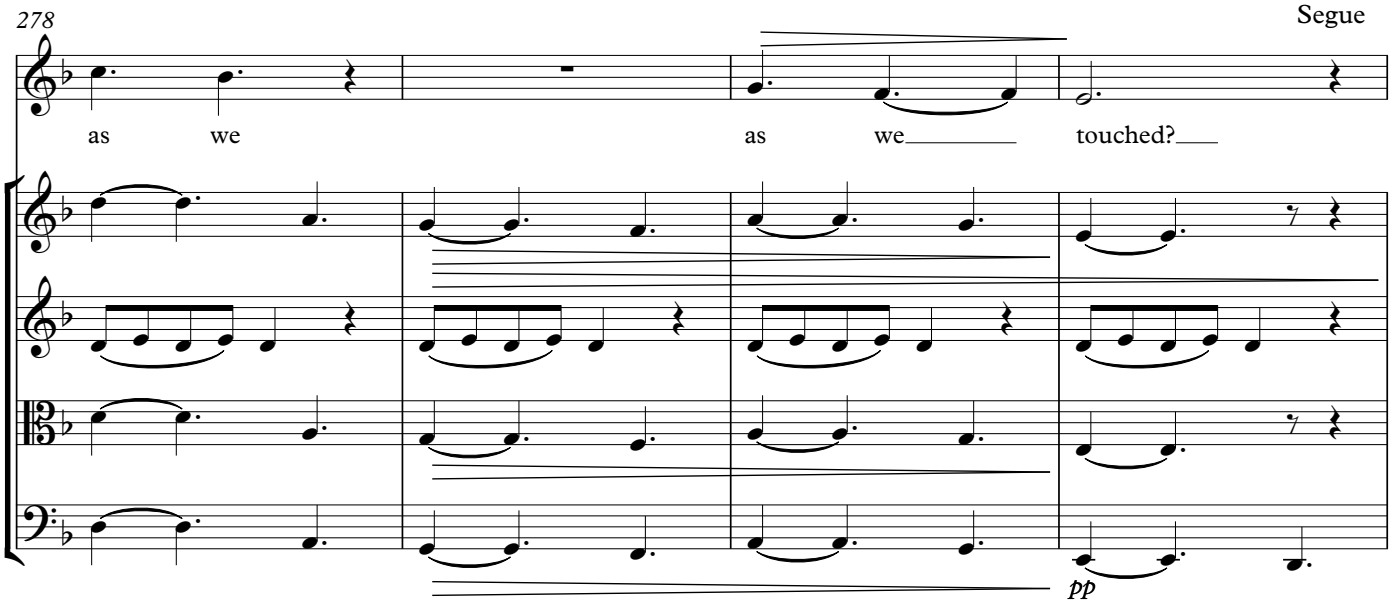

239
as we sang, you torched your fa - ces, your por- traits, and now you gaze at
243
rit.
me al - ways, al - ways na - ked, al - ways more a - fraid and
247
♩ = 96
an - gry than a - ny - thing we sing can put at rest, or make si - lent,
con sord
arco


251
or makes less than the noise of your na - ked feet, the noise of
255
flames, and your skin fal - ling, fail - ing,
con sord
258
rit.
fal - ling.
con sord
arco
con sord

7. Mathilde, Mourning

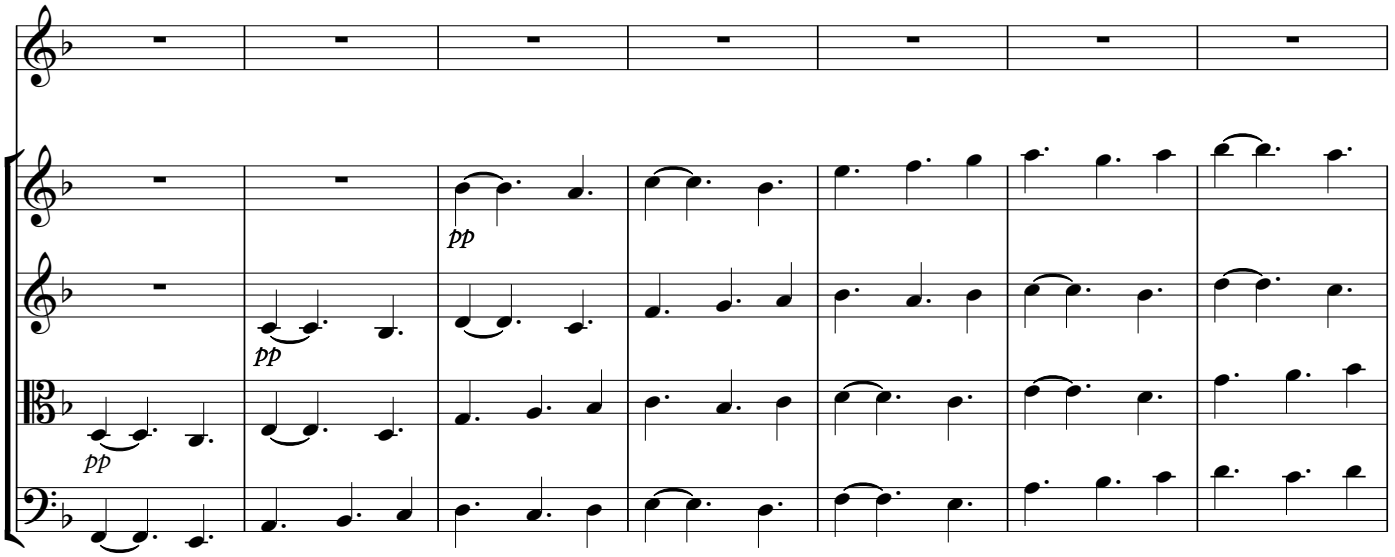


Segue

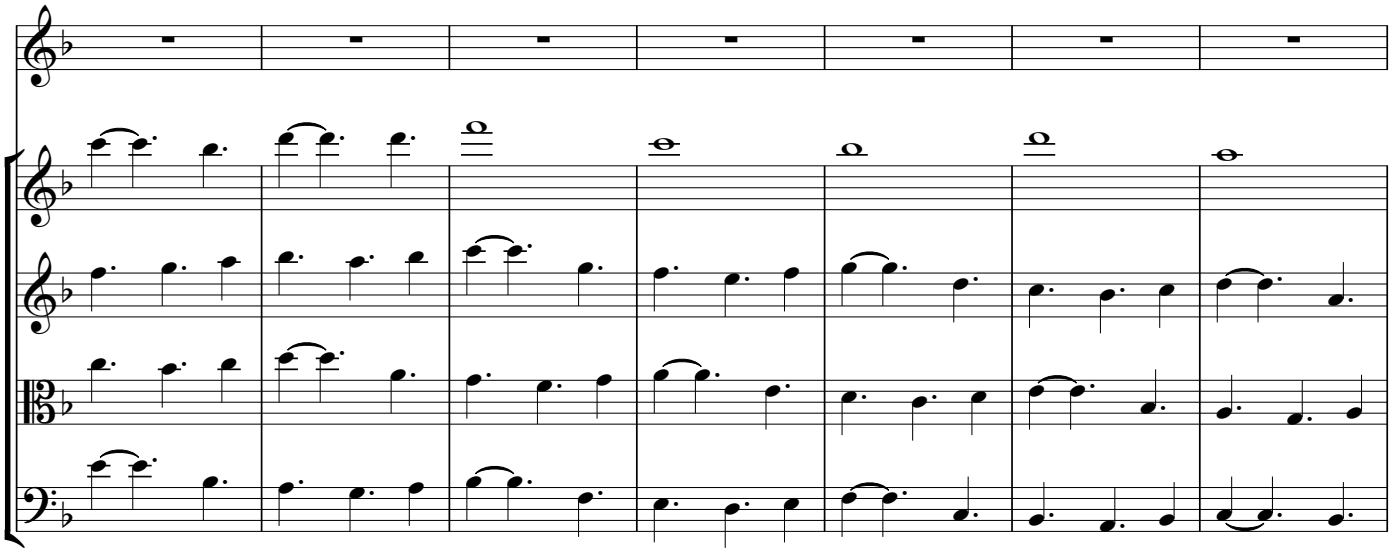


8. Song Of Tribute To Mathilde And Richard

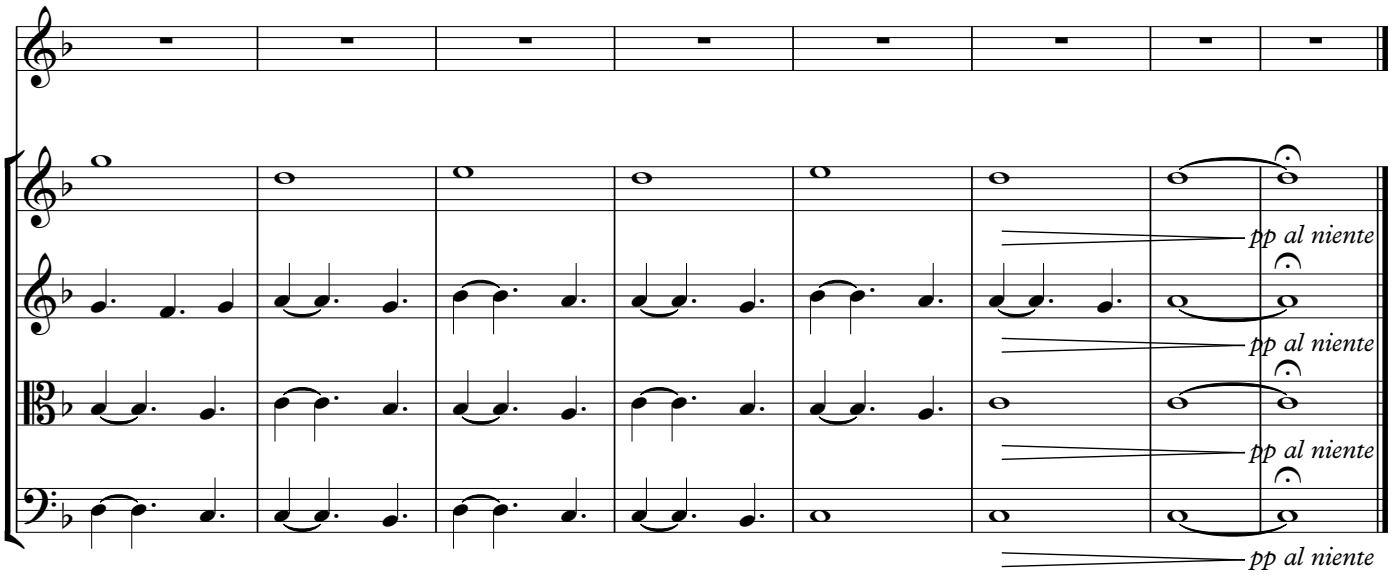
282 L'Istesso Tempo



289



296



TEXT

1. Mathilde and Arnold

MATHILDE

I, too, wake every night:
our life together is bird-cry

tearing open within us,
and every night I hear wingbeats

circling the house, for my flesh
is an empty rocking cradle, my mind

a house shut down, my body
an irritant in your song, yet

my skin is a cry of longing:
I fear the cry of my body,

I know none can answer it,
none give my skin peace.

2. Arnold and Richard.
Never this alive, Arnold;
never this glitter,

as this young man
becoming brother,

becoming brother
to you, like fires

melding, erupting
together.

TEXT

3. Mathilde falling in love with Richard

Becoming lovers,
a song I cannot measure.

I gaze at you,
imagine you, undiscovered.

You, broken child;
I, undiscovered woman.

4. Mathilde and Richard, together.

How our bodies glitter;
my skin feared light.

Oh naked Richard;
Oh my skin, learning light.

Oh my body,
singing fire

as we touch.

5. The chase [instrumental]

TEXT

6. Mathilde confronted by Anton Webern.

So Anton, Arnold's friend,
found us, asked us

"What do you want?
What do you want?"

And so, my Arnold
who is not mine

as I am not yours,
yes, I returned,

returned to you,
to our trackless days.
*
Are we answered, Richard?
Is this peace?

I have seen the ways
you search your heart, your being: *

you, that terrible laughter,
that self-erased, scarred face,

you, utterly naked, your muscles
contracted in unanswered desire,

the love in your body fracturing
under the fear I've placed on you,

and tearing. My heart,
the empty image of your skin,

and you are driven from us,
from all our friends, chased out

to your death: as we sang, you torched
your faces, your portraits, and now

you gaze at me always, always naked,
always more afraid and angry

than anything we sing can put at rest,
or make silent, or makes less

than the sound of your naked feet,
the noise of flames, and your skin

falling, failing, falling.

TEXT

7. Mathilde, mourning.

Are we answered,
Richard?

Is this
peace?

Are we
Answered?

As we
touched?

8. Song of tribute to Richard and Mathilde [instrumental]