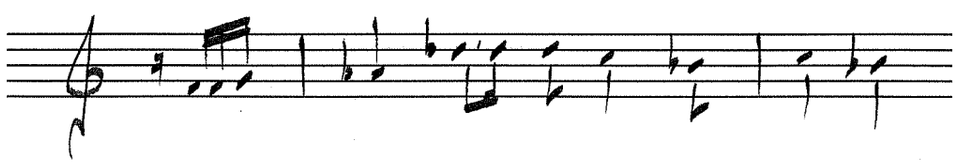
Donald Cobb

Boats in a Fog

Songs on Poetry of Robinson Jeffers

for voice and piano

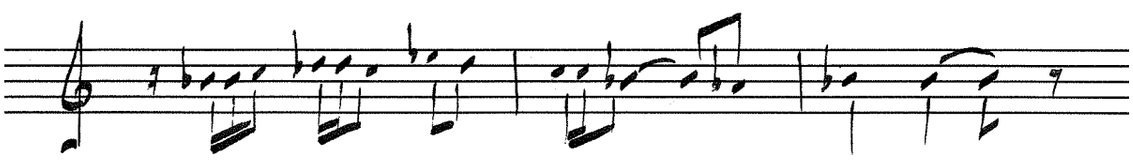


Donald Cobb was born in 1936 in Oakland, California. His music-making began in the family home, and at age 15 in a hotel summer band. He studied with composers Richard Donovan, Leon Kirchner and Darius Milhaud. He has taught and led musical ensembles in many schools and colleges, including Mills College, the Athenian School, Wildshaw School in San Francisco and Friendsville Academy in Tennessee. Community and traditional song has been an abiding study. In the 1970's, he was musical director of the Oakland Museum Spring Concerts, highlighting music of American and California composers.

The composer's path of finding musical expression through poetic language and the contours of our spoken language led first to the Irish poet, W. B. Yeats, and his *Crazy Jane Poems*, and followed over years to the possibilities for song in the work of admired American poets, including Walt Whitman, Vachel Lindsay, Robinson Jeffers, whose poems are the basis for the current volume, *Boats in a Fog,* and Gary Snyder, whose translation of *Cold Mountain Poems* by Han-shan is the basis of another recent volume, *Cold Mountain Songs*, scored for high voice, violin and piano.

for Steve

Boats in a Fog



BY DONALD COBB:

Crazy Jane Songs *
Six songs on poems of W. B. Yeats
for voice and piano

Confucian Odes
Translations by Ezra Pound
Three SATB choruses, unaccompanied

Cold Mountain Songs *
Poems by Han-shan, translation by Gary Snyder
for voice, violin and piano

The Town of American Visions
The Springfield of the Far Future
Poetry of Vachel Lindsay
for SATB chorus, with piano

Come, Said the Muse *
Three songs on poetry of Walt Whitman
for voice and piano

Five Orchestral Songs
for orchestra

Children's Songs *
On poetry of Vachel Lindsay, James Stephens, Christina Rossetti,
James Hogg, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Whitcomb Riley
for voice and piano

Paths
A four movement work for orchestra

Remnants
9 pieces, for violin, clarinet, double bass and piano

Boats in a Fog *
Songs on the poetry of Robinson Jeffers
for voice and piano

Seven Songs *
Billy Boy, The Curtains of Night, The Old Ship of Zion,
Colorado Trail, A Life on the Ocean Wave, Brave Wolfe, Polly Wolly Doodle
Arranged for voice and piano

In Countryside
A set of seven pieces – for clarinet, trumpet, trombone and piano

Fiddler Jones, Pastoral and other songs
On poetry of Thoreau, Melville, Masters, cummings,
Frost, Sandburg and Williams
for voice and piano

* Engraved song publications available from the composer.

Children's Songs with illustrations by Josy Cobb,
Crazy Jane Songs and Come, Said the Muse with illustrations by Diane Cobb,
Seven Songs with illustrations by Thomas Eakins

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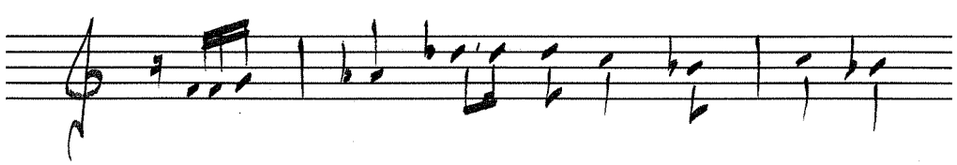
Donald Cobb

Boats in a Fog

Songs on Poetry of Robinson Jeffers

for voice and piano



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Summer Holiday *5*
The Place for No Story *9*
Boats in a Fog *14*
The Bed by the Window *18*
Return *22*
Texts of Lyrics *2*

SUMMER HOLIDAY

When the sun shouts and people abound
One thinks there were the ages of stone and the age of bronze
And the iron age; iron the unstable metal;
Steel made of iron, unstable as his mother; the towered-up cities
Will be stains of rust on mounds of plaster.
Roots will not pierce the heaps for a time, kind rains will cure them,
Then nothing will remain of the iron age
And all these people but a thigh-bone or so, a poem
Stuck in the world's thought, splinters of glass
In the rubbish dumps, a concrete dam far off in the mountain...

The Roan Stallion (1924-25)

THE PLACE FOR NO STORY

The coast hills at Sovranes Creek;
No trees, but dark scant pasture drawn thin
Over rock shaped like flame;
The old ocean at the land's foot, the vast
Gray extension beyond the long white violence;
A herd of cows and the bull
Far distant, hardly apparent up the dark slope;
And the gray air haunted with hawks:
This place is the noblest thing I have ever seen. No imaginable
Human presence here could do anything
But dilute the lonely self-watchful passion.

Thurso's Landing (1930-31)

BOATS IN A FOG

Sports and gallantries, the stage, the arts, the antics of dancers,
The exuberant voices of music,
Have charm for children but lack nobility; it is bitter earnestness
That makes beauty; the mind
Knows, grown adult.
A sudden fog-drift muffled the ocean,
A throbbing of engines moved in it,
At length, a stone's throw out, between the rocks and the vapor,
One by one moved shadows
Out of the mystery, shadows, fishing-boats, trailing each other
Following the cliff for guidance,
Holding a difficult path between the peril of the sea-fog
And the foam on the shore granite.

One by one, trailing their leader, six crept by me,
Out of the vapor and into it,
The throb of their engines subdued by the fog, patient and cautious,
Coasting all round the peninsula
Back to the buoys in Monterey harbor. A flight of pelicans
Is nothing lovelier to look at;
The flight of the planets is nothing nobler; all the arts lose virtue
Against the essential reality
Of creatures going about their business among the equally
Earnest elements of nature.

The Roan Stallion (1924-25)

THE BED BY THE WINDOW

I chose the bed downstairs by the sea-window for a good death-bed
When we built the house; it is ready waiting,
Unused unless by some guest in a twelvemonth, who hardly suspects
Its latter purpose. I often regard it,
With neither dislike nor desire; rather with both, so equalled
That they kill each other and a crystalline interest
Remains alone. We are safe to finish what we have to finish;
And then it will sound rather like music
When the patient daemon behind the screen of sea-rock and sky
Thumps with his staff, and calls thrice: "Come, Jeffers."

Thurso's Landing (1930-31)

RETURN

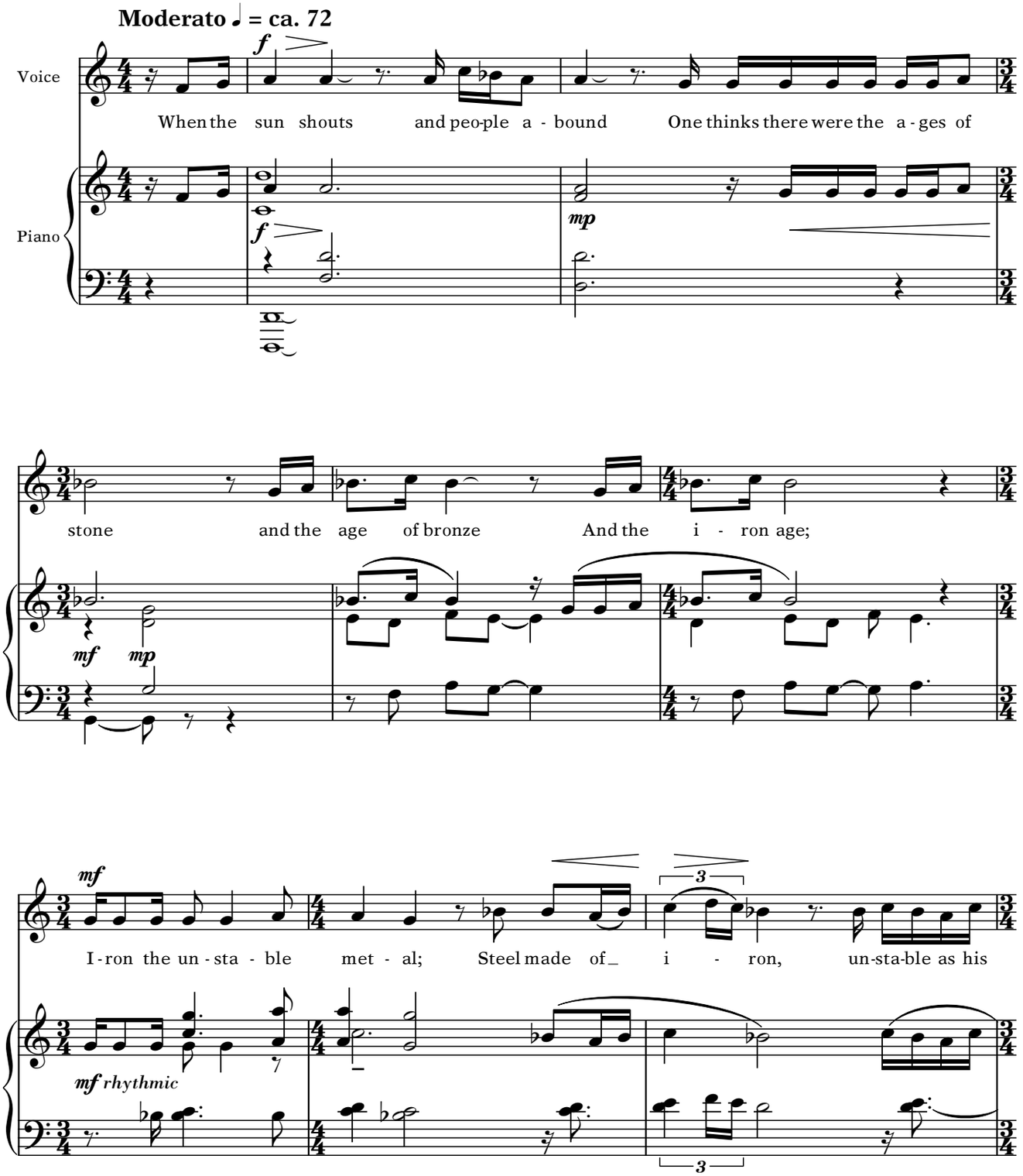
A little too abstract, a little too wise,
It is time for us to kiss the earth again,
It is time to let the leaves rain from the skies,
Let the rich life run to the roots again.
I will go down to the lovely Sur Rivers
And dip my arms in them up to the shoulders.
I will find my accounting where the alder leaf quivers
In the ocean wind over the river boulders.
I will touch things and things and no more thoughts,
That breed like mouthless May-flies darkening the sky,
The insect clouds that blind our passionate hawks
So that they cannot strike, hardly can fly.
Things are the hawk's food and noble is the mountain, Oh noble
Pico Blanco, steep sea-wave of marble.

Solstice (1933-35)

1. Summer Holiday

Robinson Jeffers

Donald Cobb



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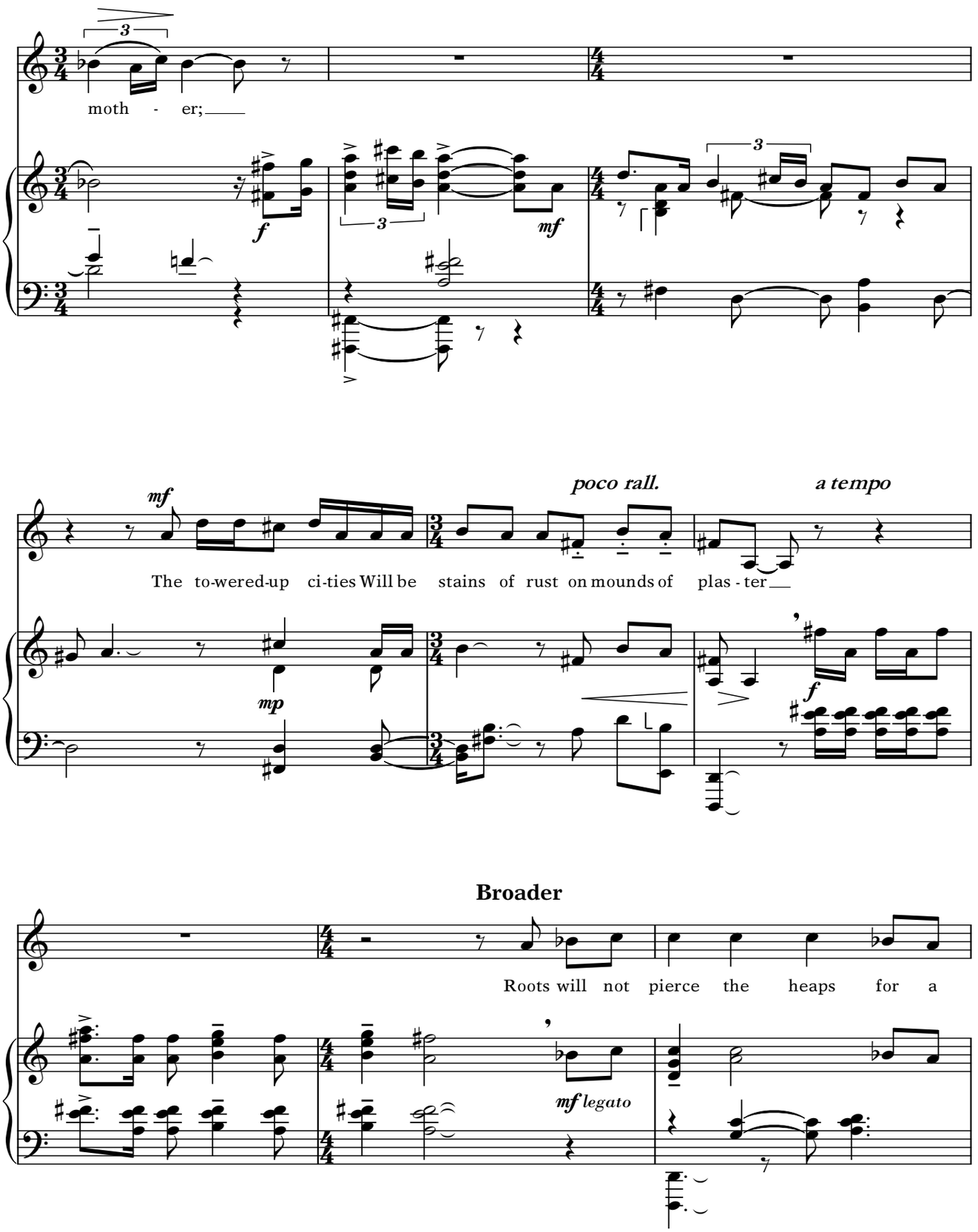
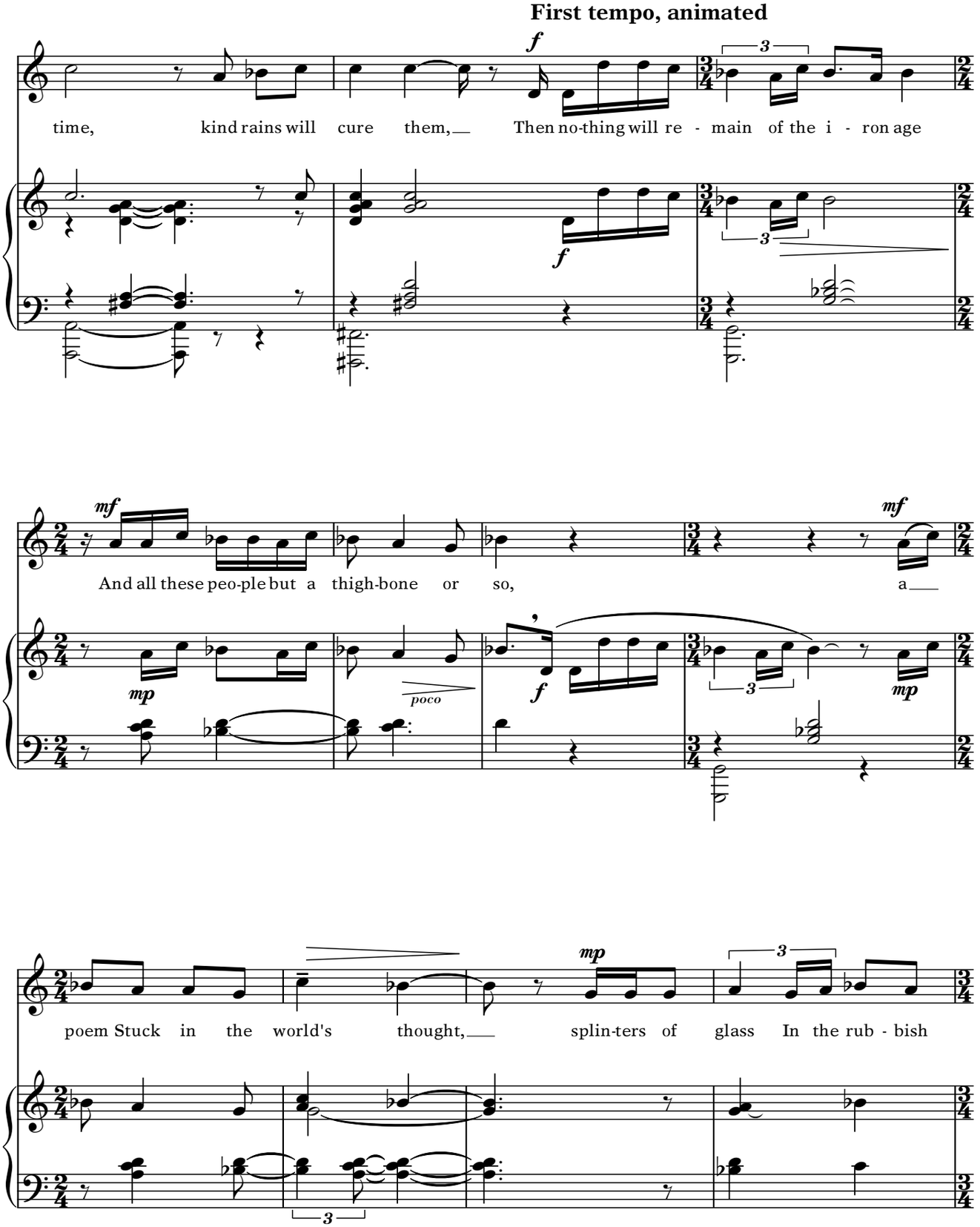
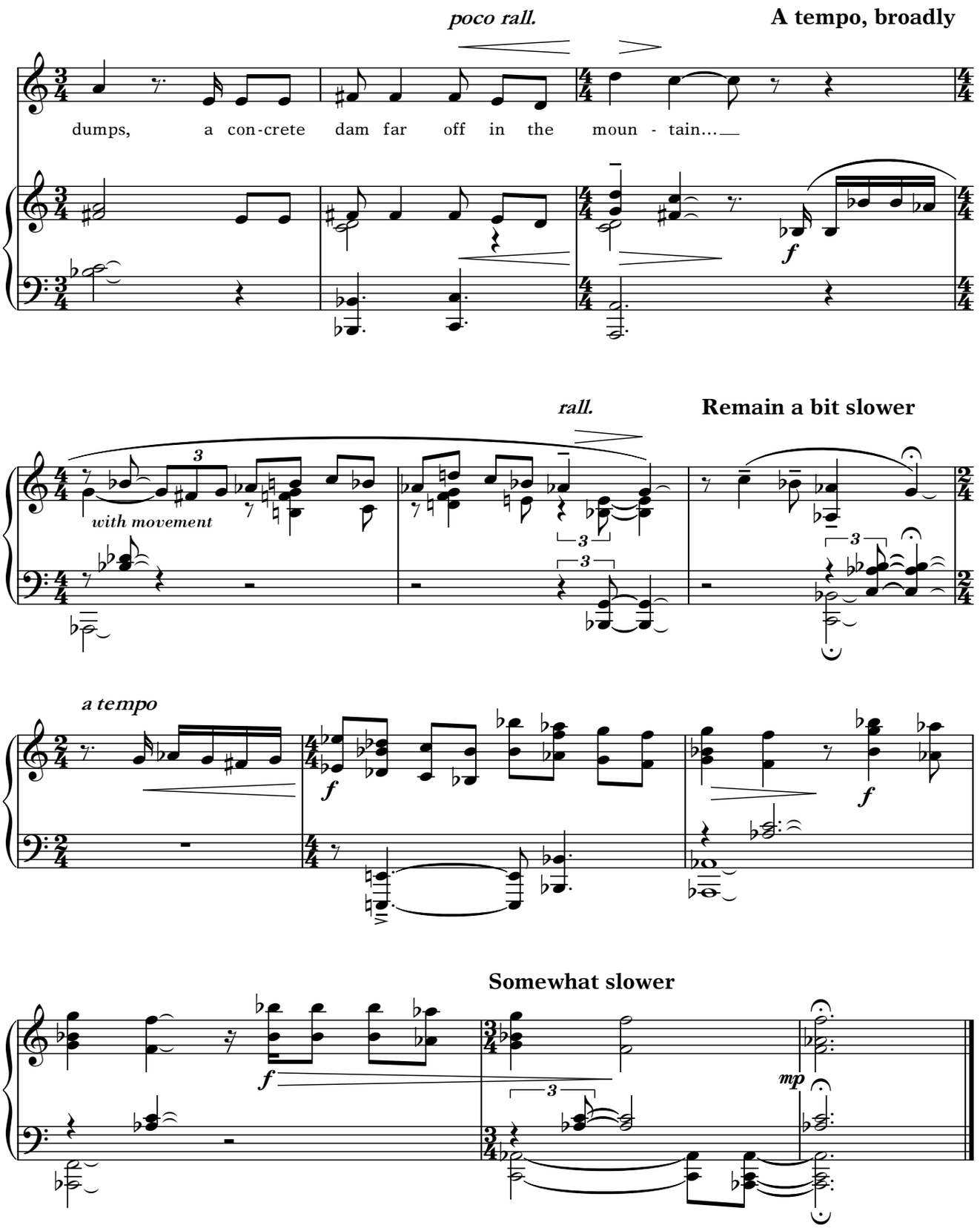
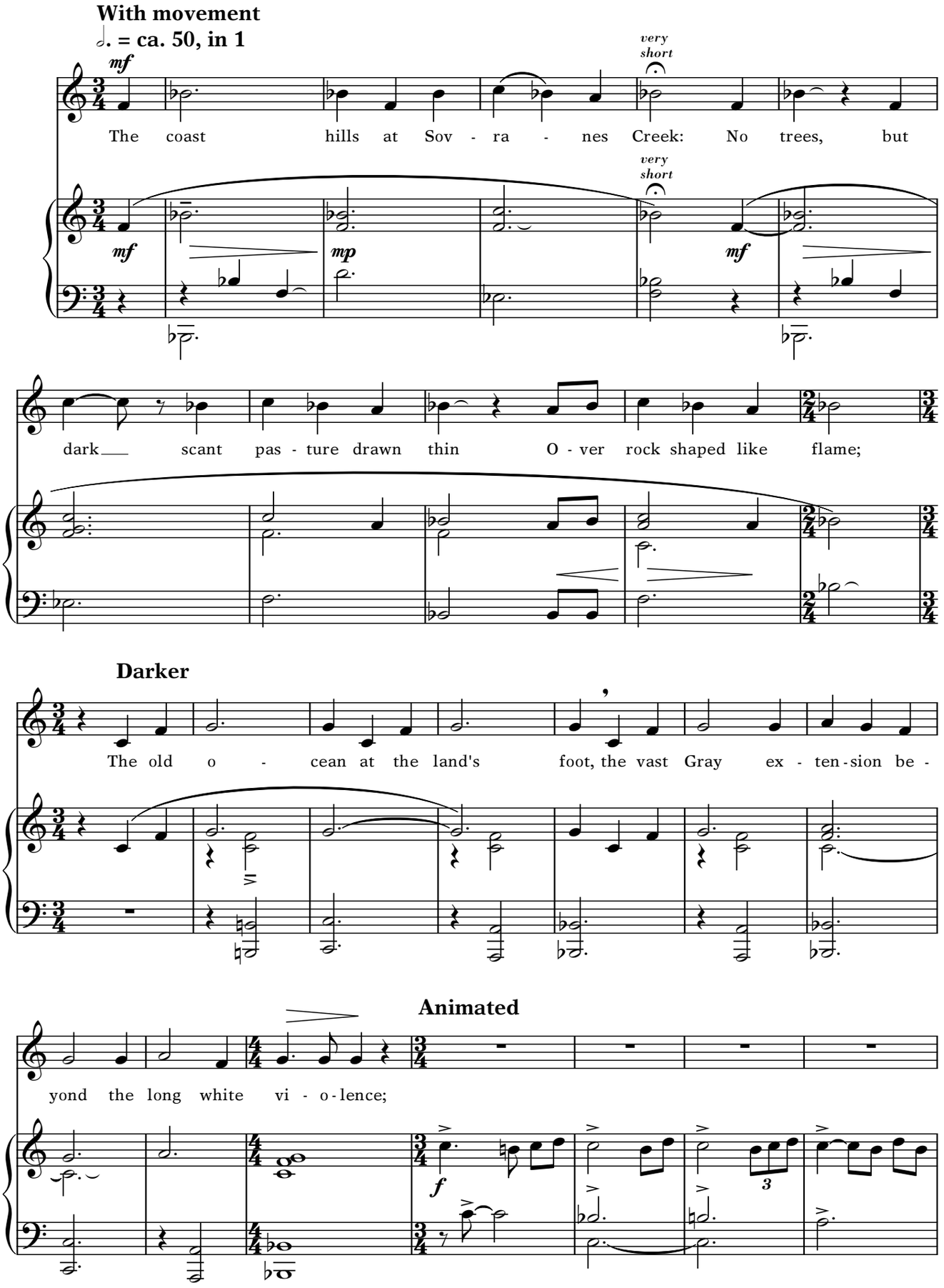
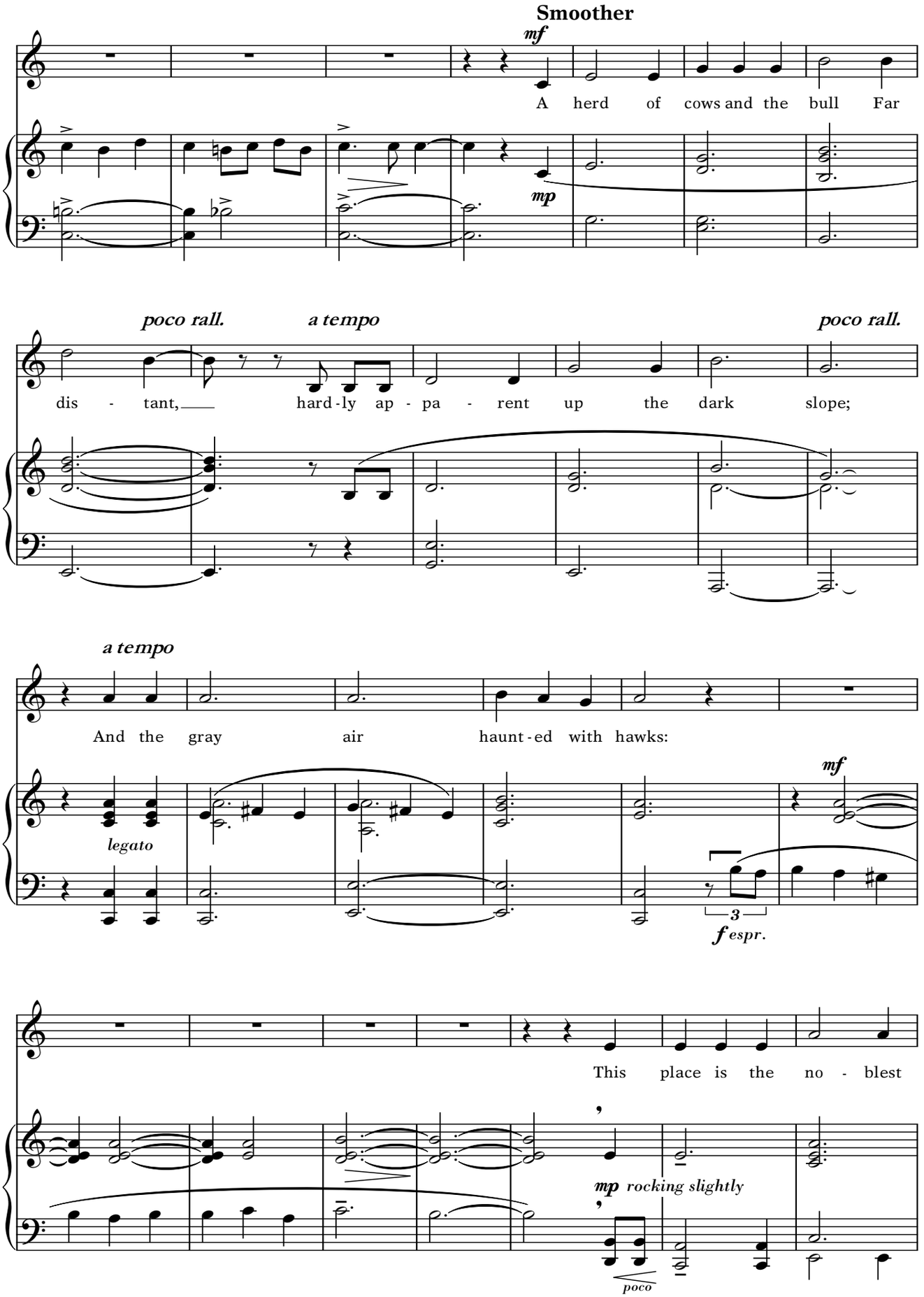

moth - er;
f
mf
mf
poco rall.
a tempo
The to-wered-up ci-ties Will be stains of rust on mounds of plas - ter
mp
f
Broader
Roots will not pierce the heaps for a
mf legato

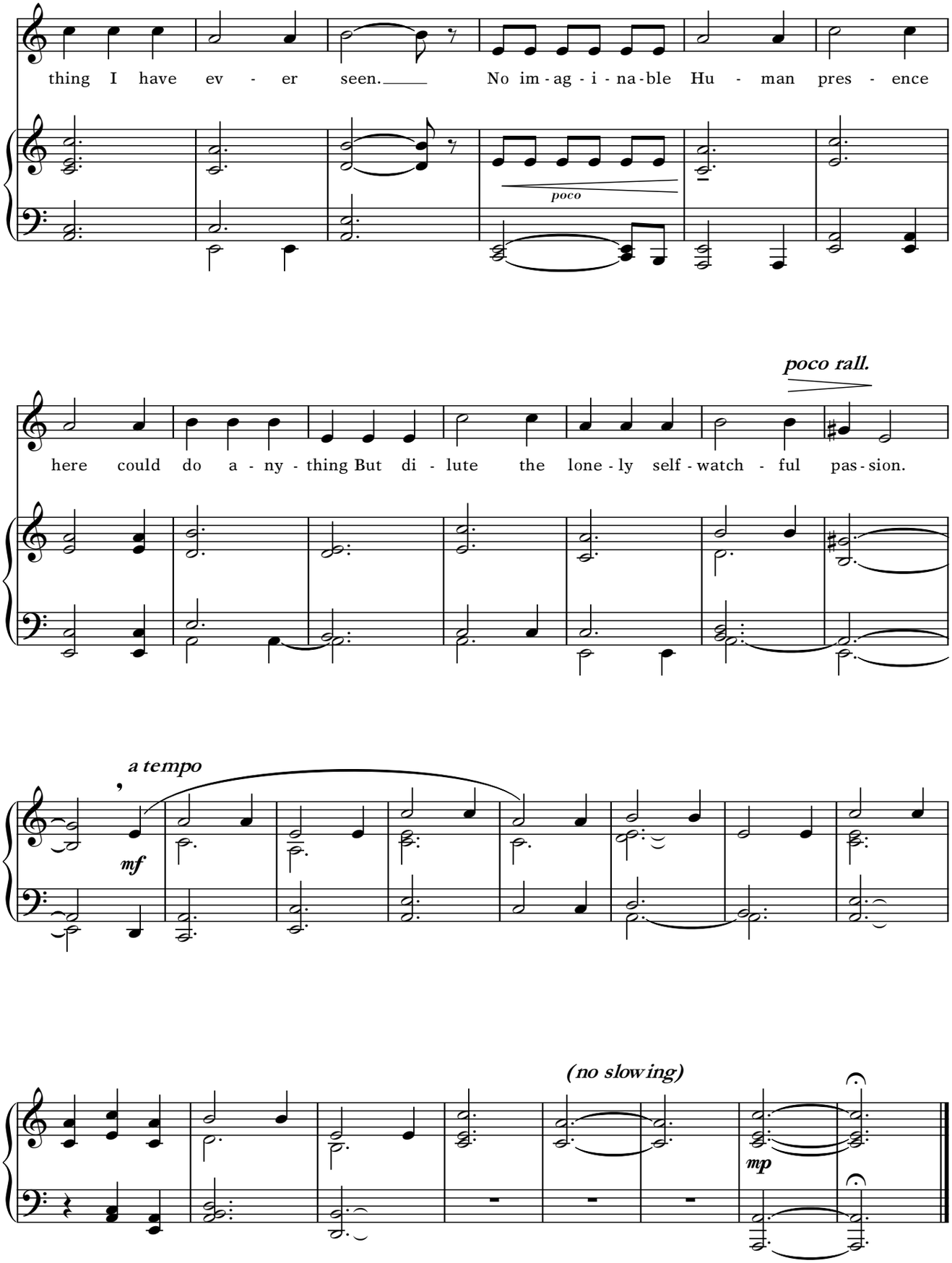

First tempo, animated
time, kind rains will cure them, Then no-thing will re - main of the i - ron age
And all these peo-ple but a thigh-bone or so, a
poem Stuck in the world's thought, splin-ters of glass In the rub - bish


poco rall.
A tempo, broadly
dumps, a con-crete dam far off in the moun - tain...
f
rall.
Remain a bit slower
with movement
3
a tempo
f
Somewhat slower
mp

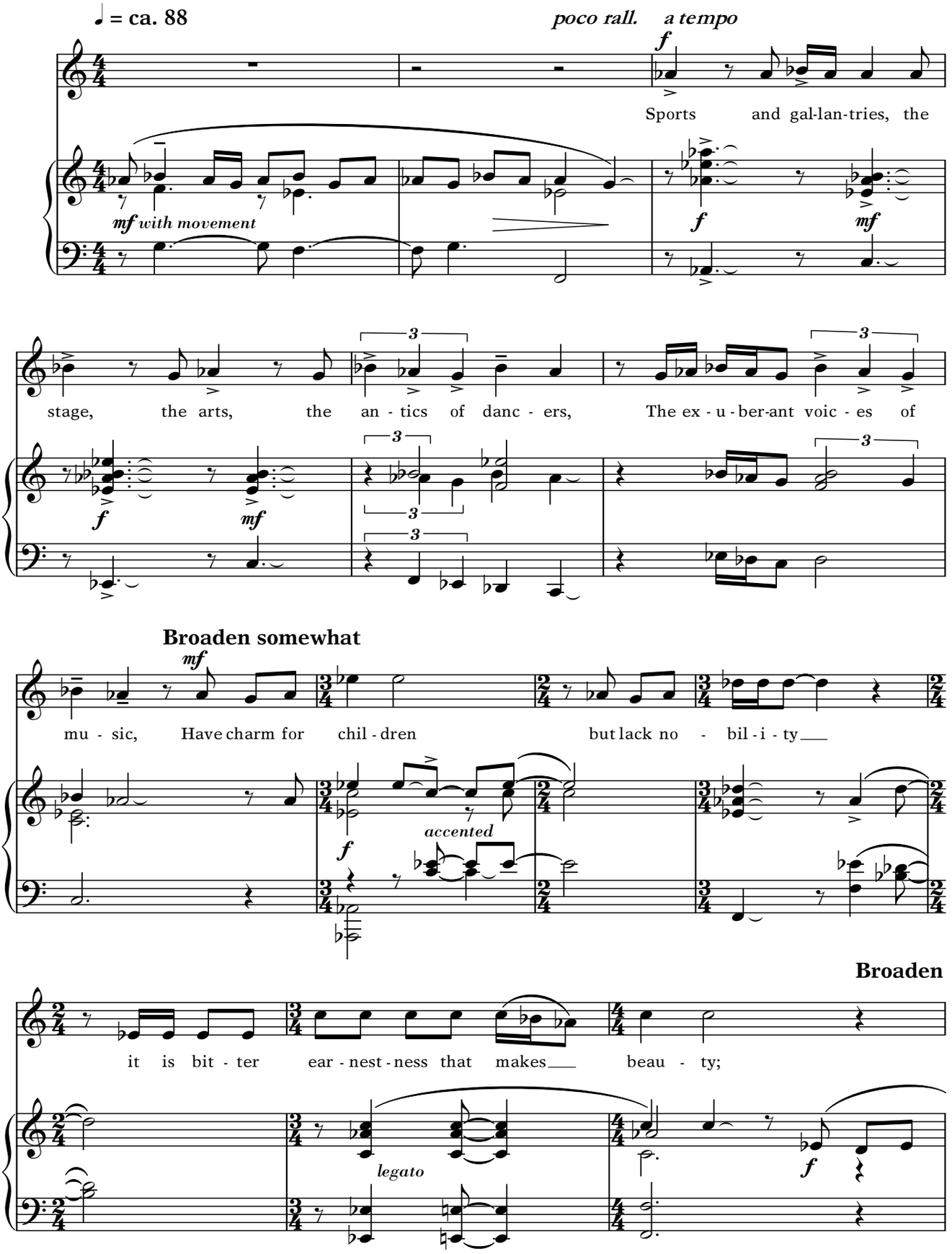
2. The Place for No Story

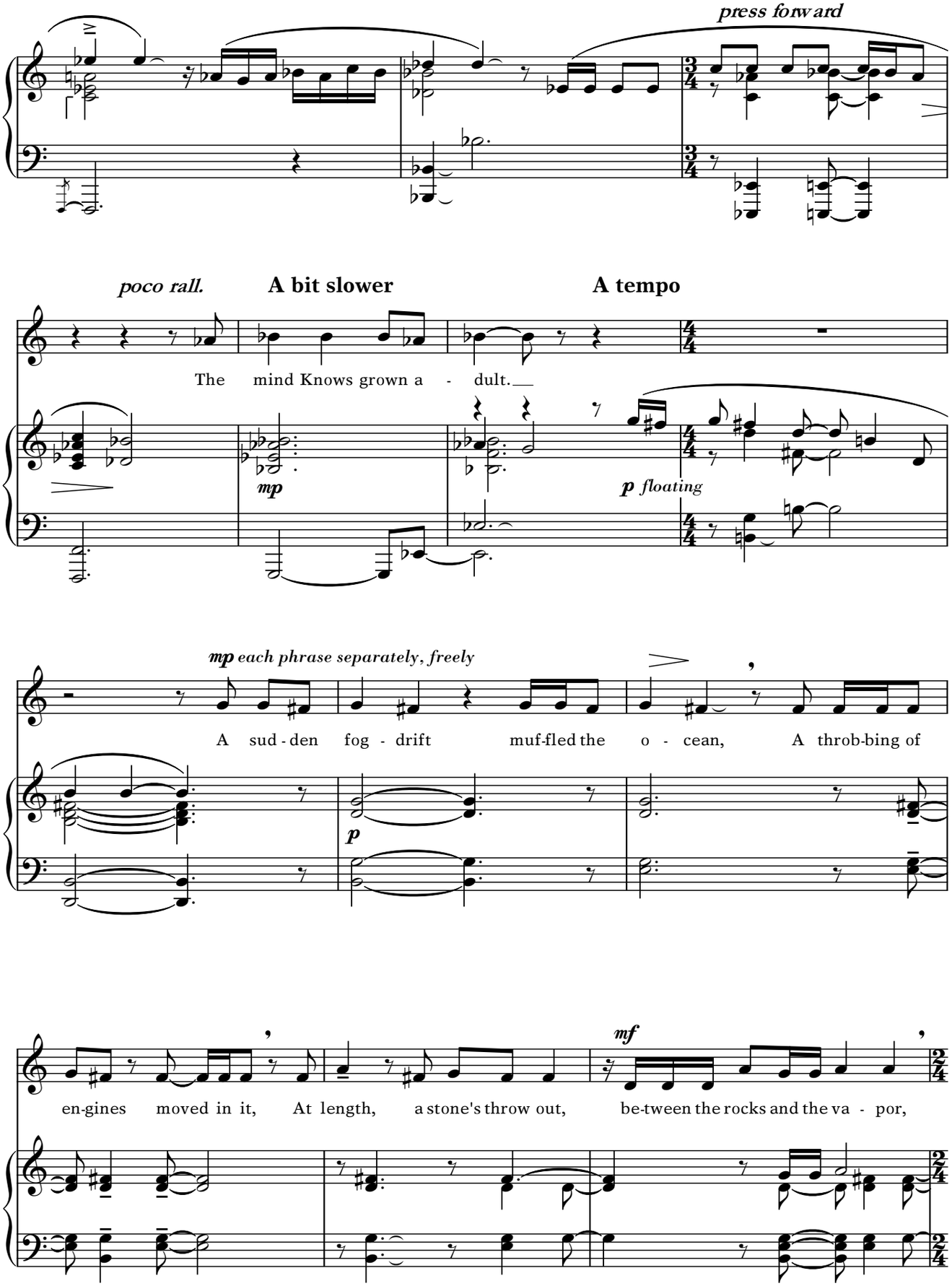


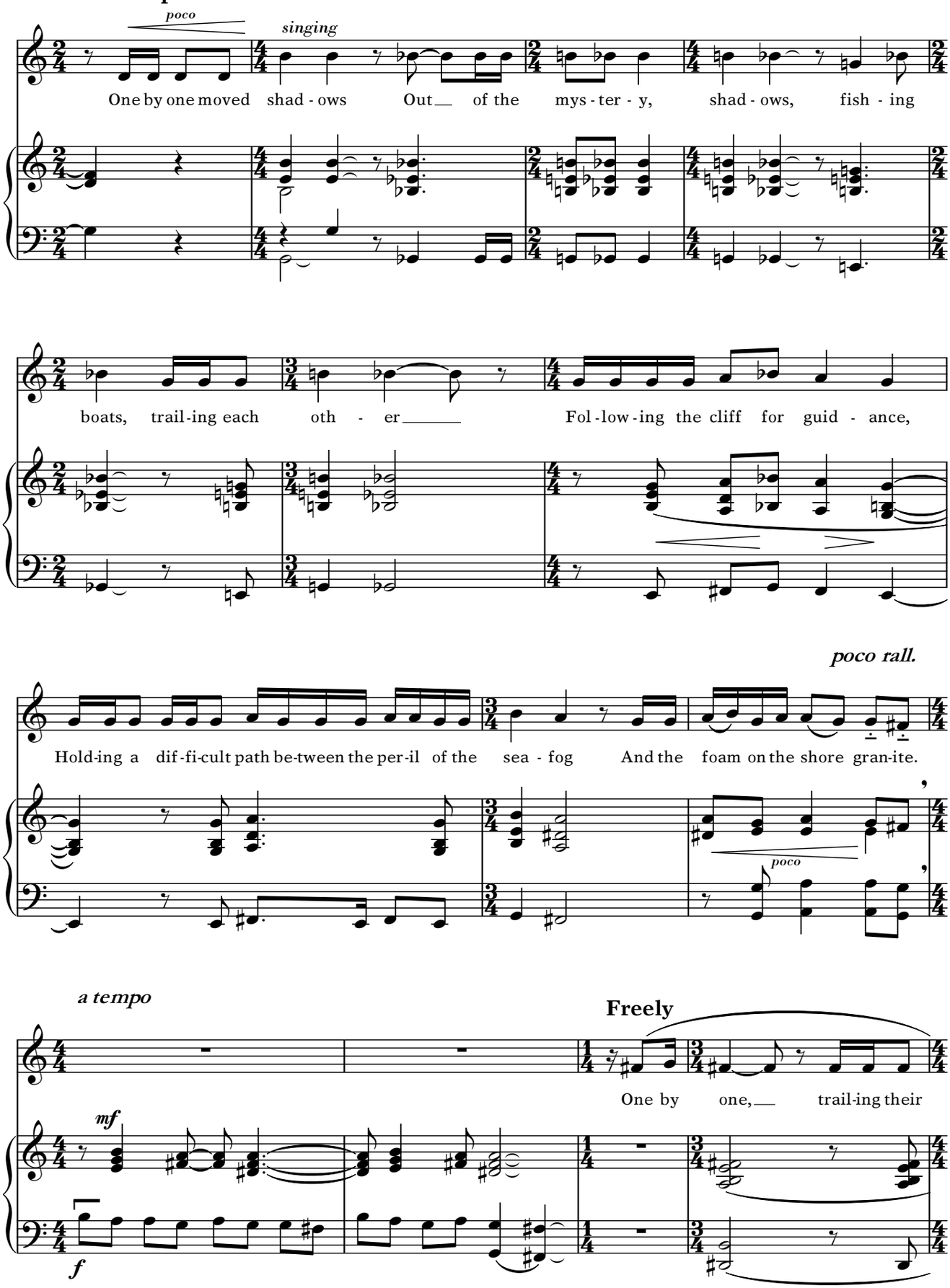

Smoother
mf
A herd of cows and the bull Far
mp
poco rall.
a tempo
poco rall.
dis - tant, hard-ly ap - pa - rent up the dark slope;
a tempo
And the gray air haunt-ed with hawks:
legato
mf
3
f espr.
This place is the no - blest
mp rocking slightly
poco

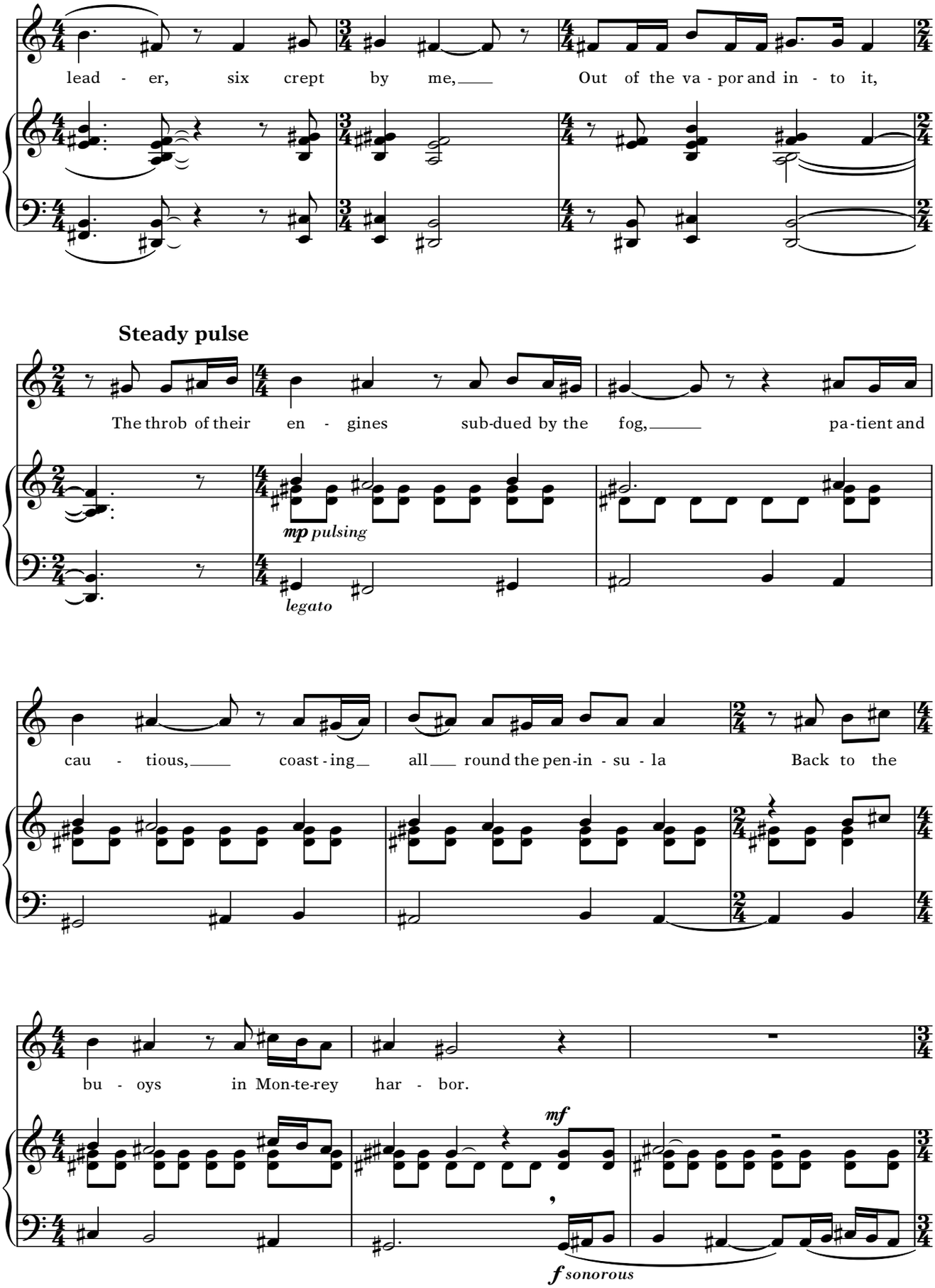

thing I have ev - er seen. No im - ag - i - na - ble Hu - man pres - ence
poco
poco rall.
here could do a - ny - thing But di - lute the lone - ly self - watch - ful pas - sion.
a tempo
mf
(no slowing)
mp

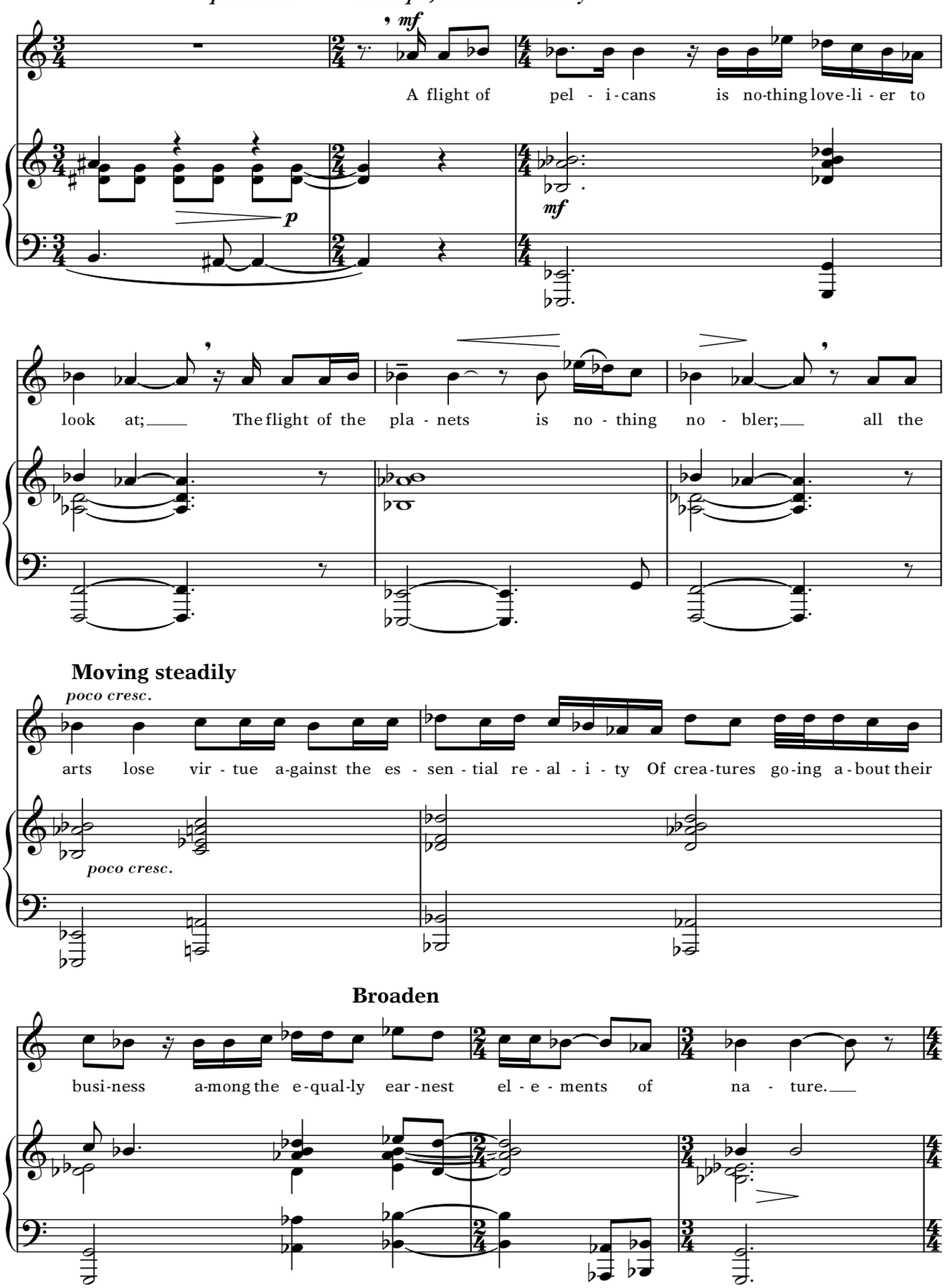
3. Boats in a Fog

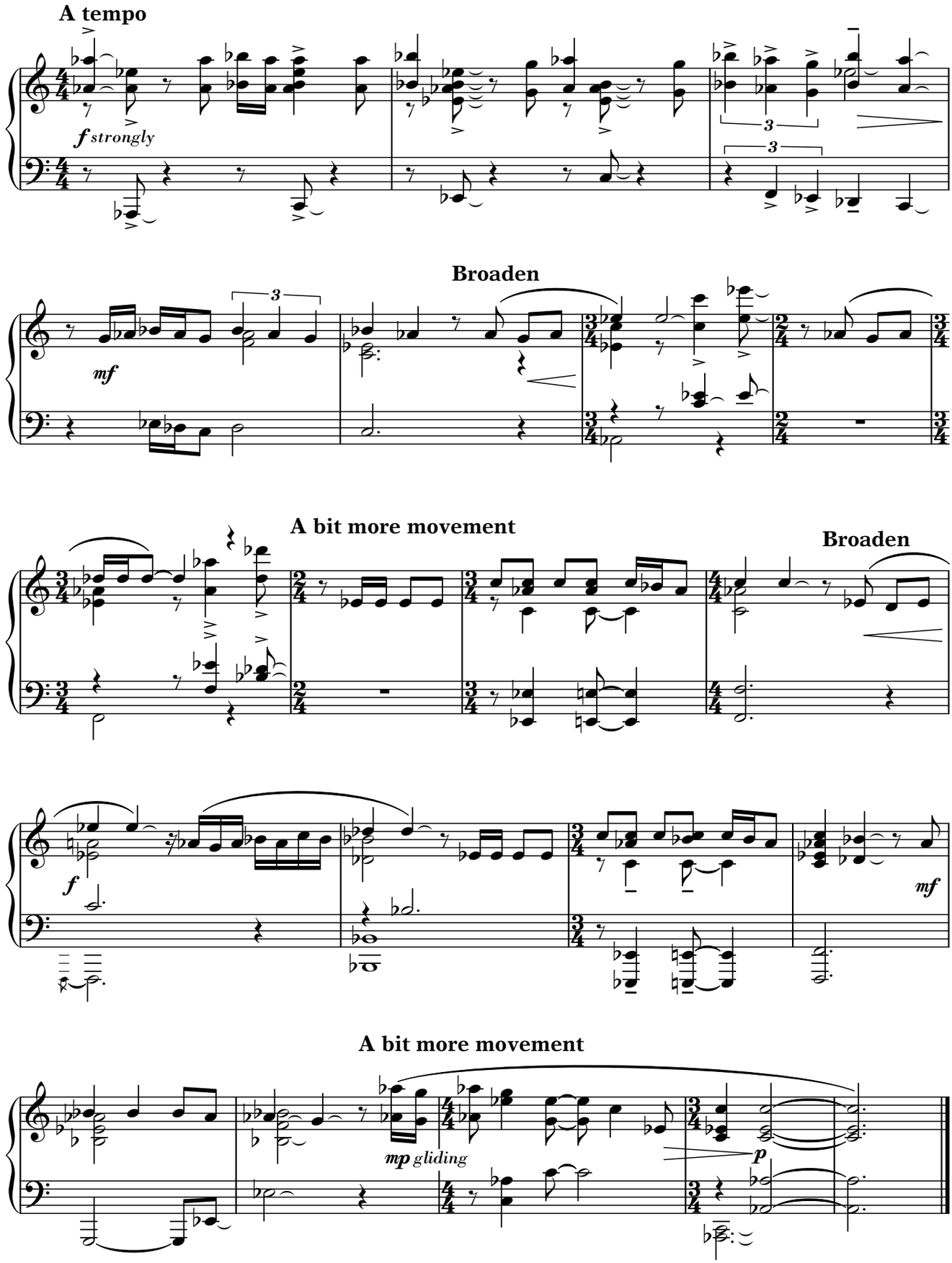



press forward
poco rall.
A bit slower
A tempo
The mind Knows grown a - dult.
mp
p floating
mp each phrase separately, freely
A sud - den fog - drift muf-fled the o - cean, A throb-bing of
p
mf
en-gines moved in it, At length, a stone's throw out, be-tween the rocks and the va - por,

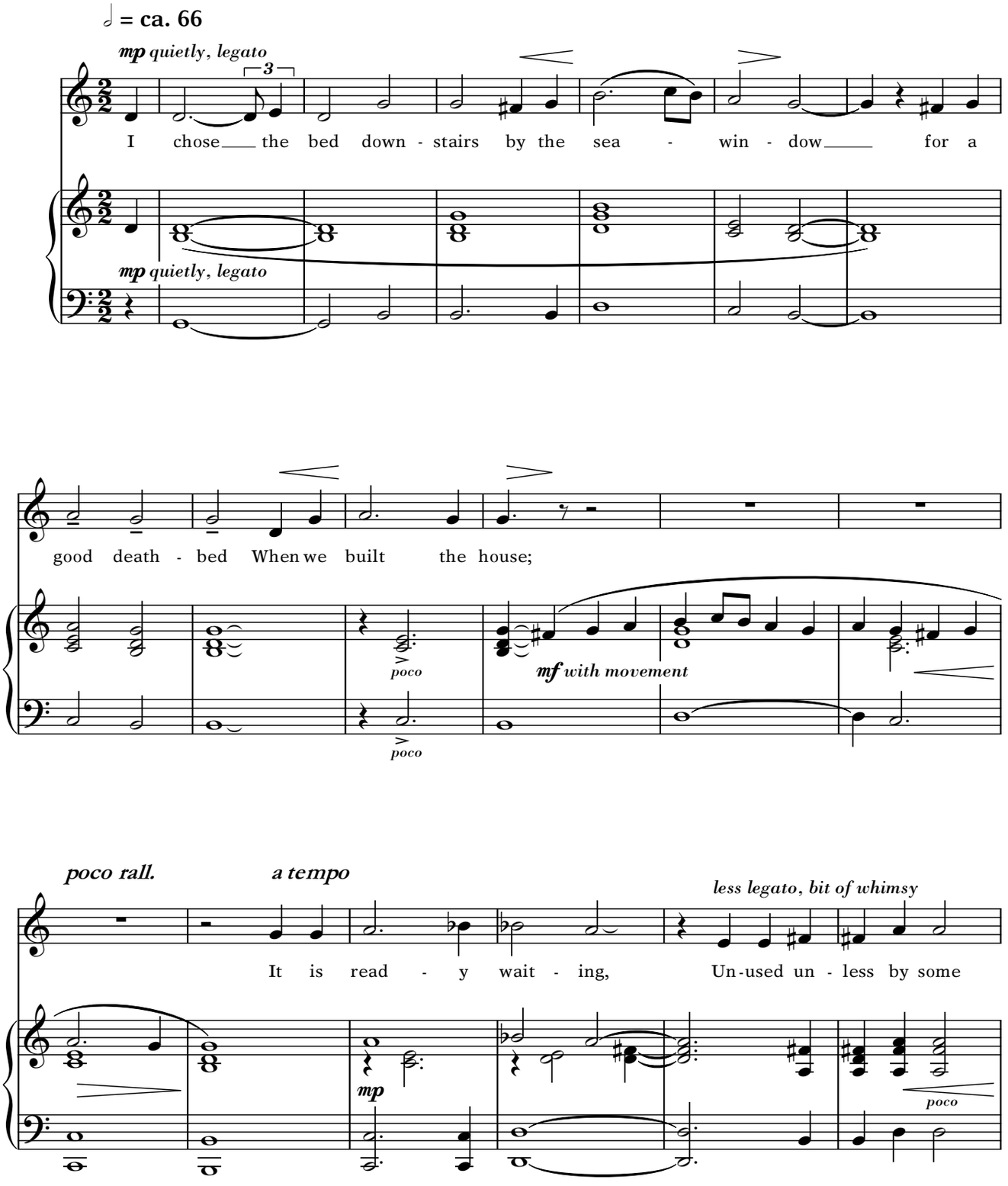

Even tempo
poco
singing
One by one moved shad - ows Out of the mys - ter - y, shad - ows, fish - ing
boats, trail-ing each oth - er Fol - low - ing the cliff for guid - ance,
poco rall.
Hold-ing a dif-fi-cult path be-tween the per-il of the sea - fog And the foam on the shore gran-ite.
poco
a tempo
Freely
One by one, trail-ing their
mf
f

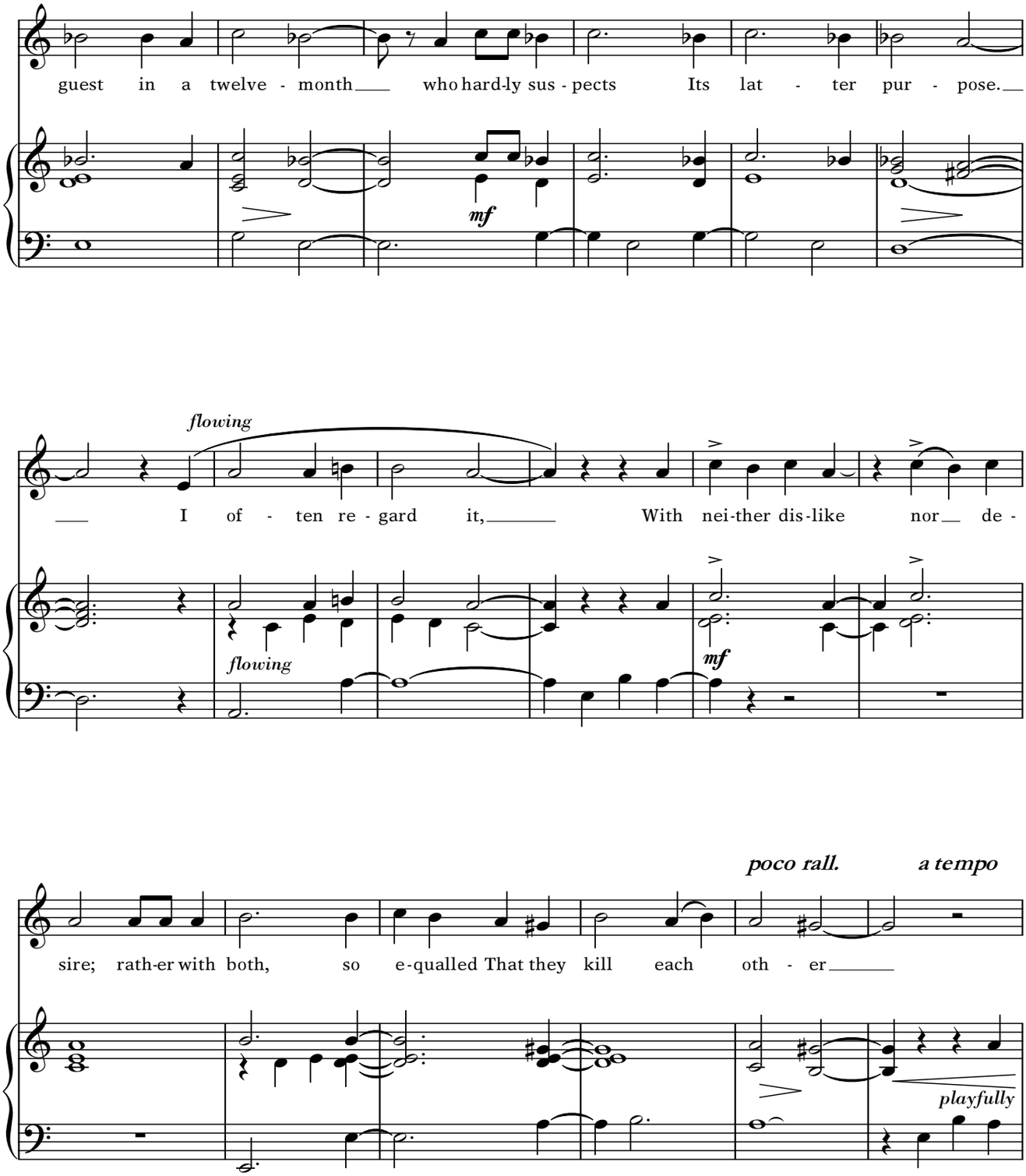

lead - er, six crept by me, Out of the va - por and in - to it,
Steady pulse
The throb of their en - gines sub-dued by the fog, pa-tient and
mp pulsing
legato
cau - tious, coast - ing all round the pen-in - su - la Back to the
bu - oys in Mon-te-rey har - bor.
mf
f sonorous

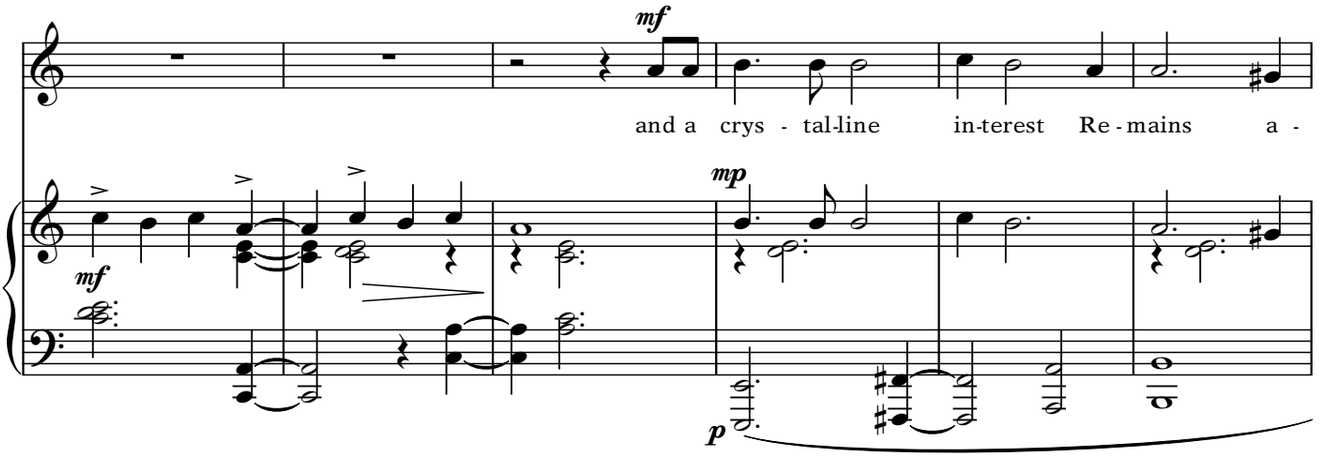

poco rall.
a tempo, somewhat freely
mf
A flight of pel - i - cans is no-thing love-li - er to
p
mf
look at; The flight of the pla - nets is no - thing no - bler; all the
Moving steadily
poco cresc.
arts lose vir - tue a-gainst the es - sen - tial re - al - i - ty Of crea-tures go-ing a - bout their
poco cresc.
Broaden
busi-ness a-mong the e-qual-ly ear-nest el - e - ments of na - ture.

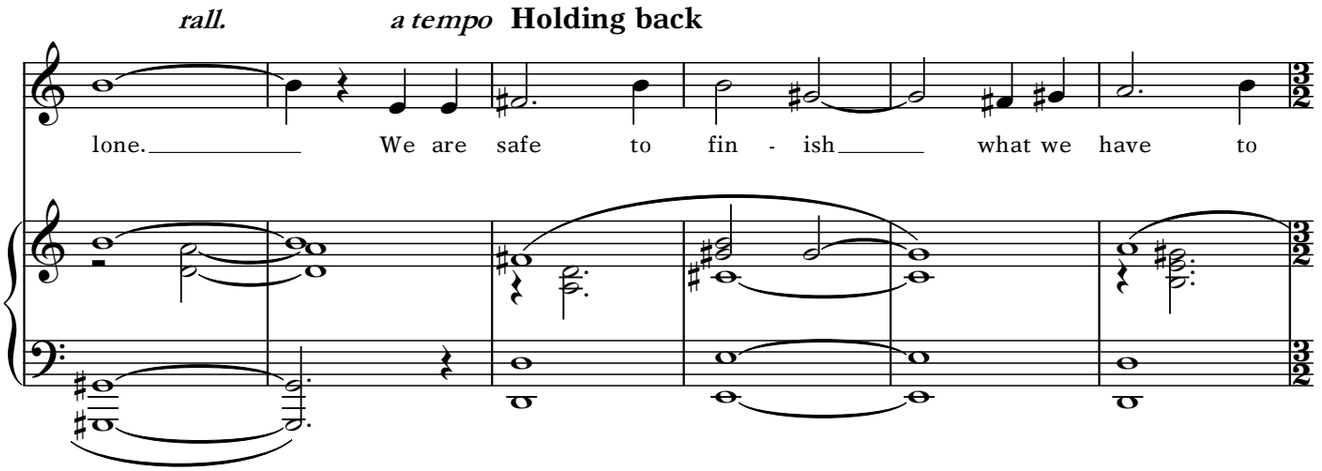

A tempo
f strongly
Broaden
mf
A bit more movement
Broaden
f
mf
A bit more movement
mp gliding
p

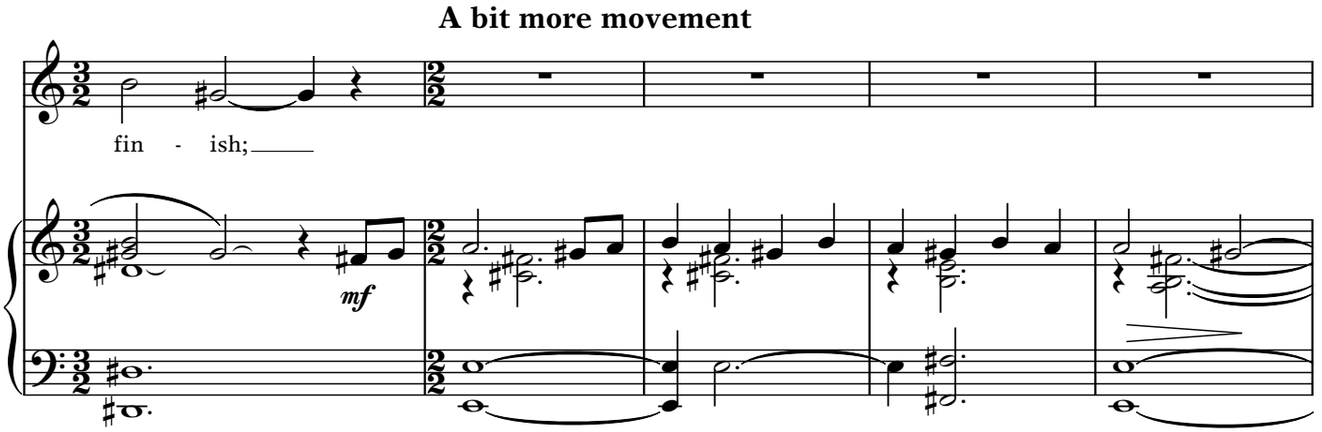
4. The Bed by the Window

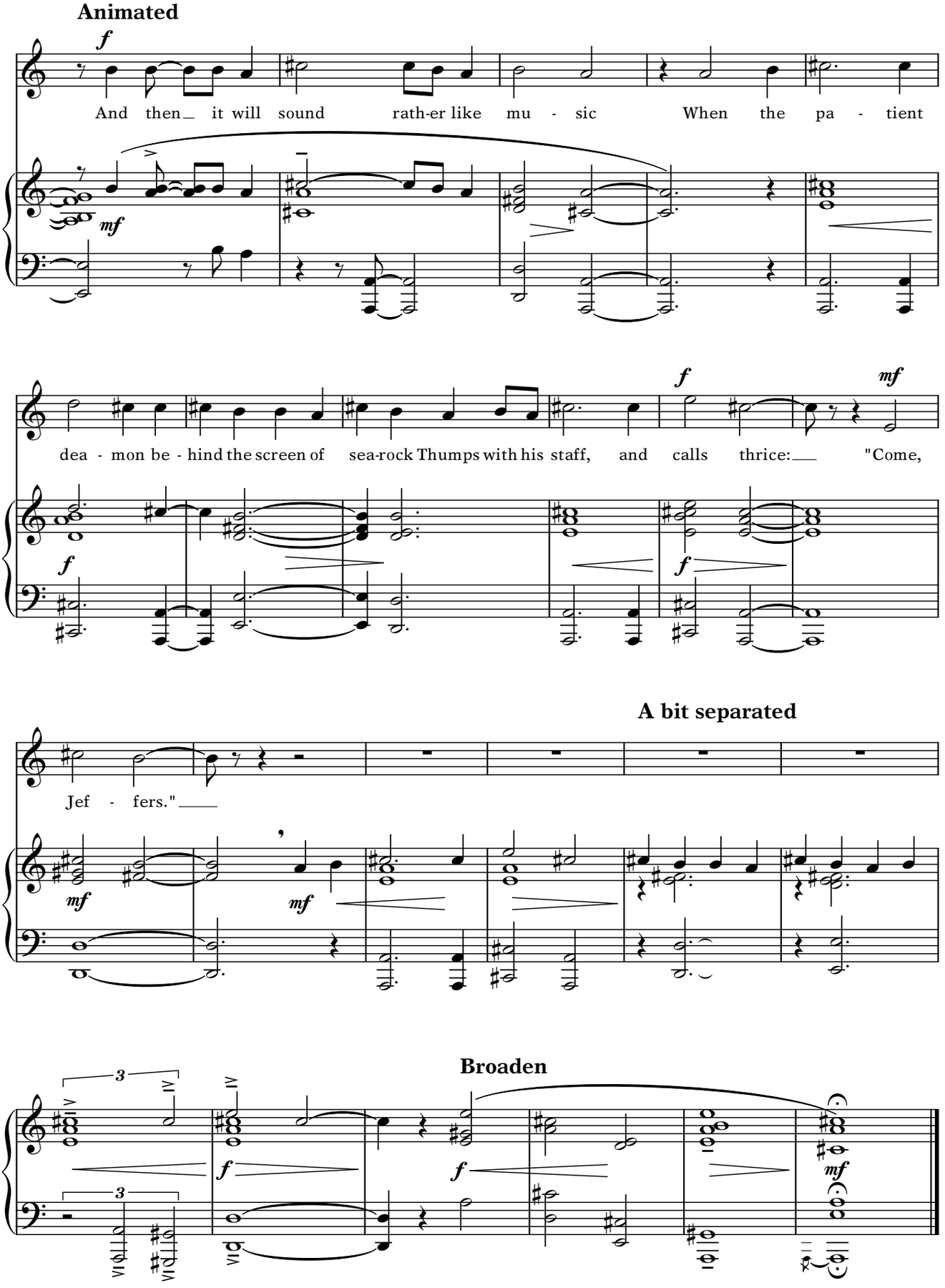



guest in a twelve - month who hard-ly sus - pects Its lat - ter pur - pose.
mf
flowing
I of - ten re - gard it, With nei-ther dis-like nor de -
flowing
mf
poco rall.
a tempo
sire; rath-er with both, so e-qualled That they kill each oth - er
playfully

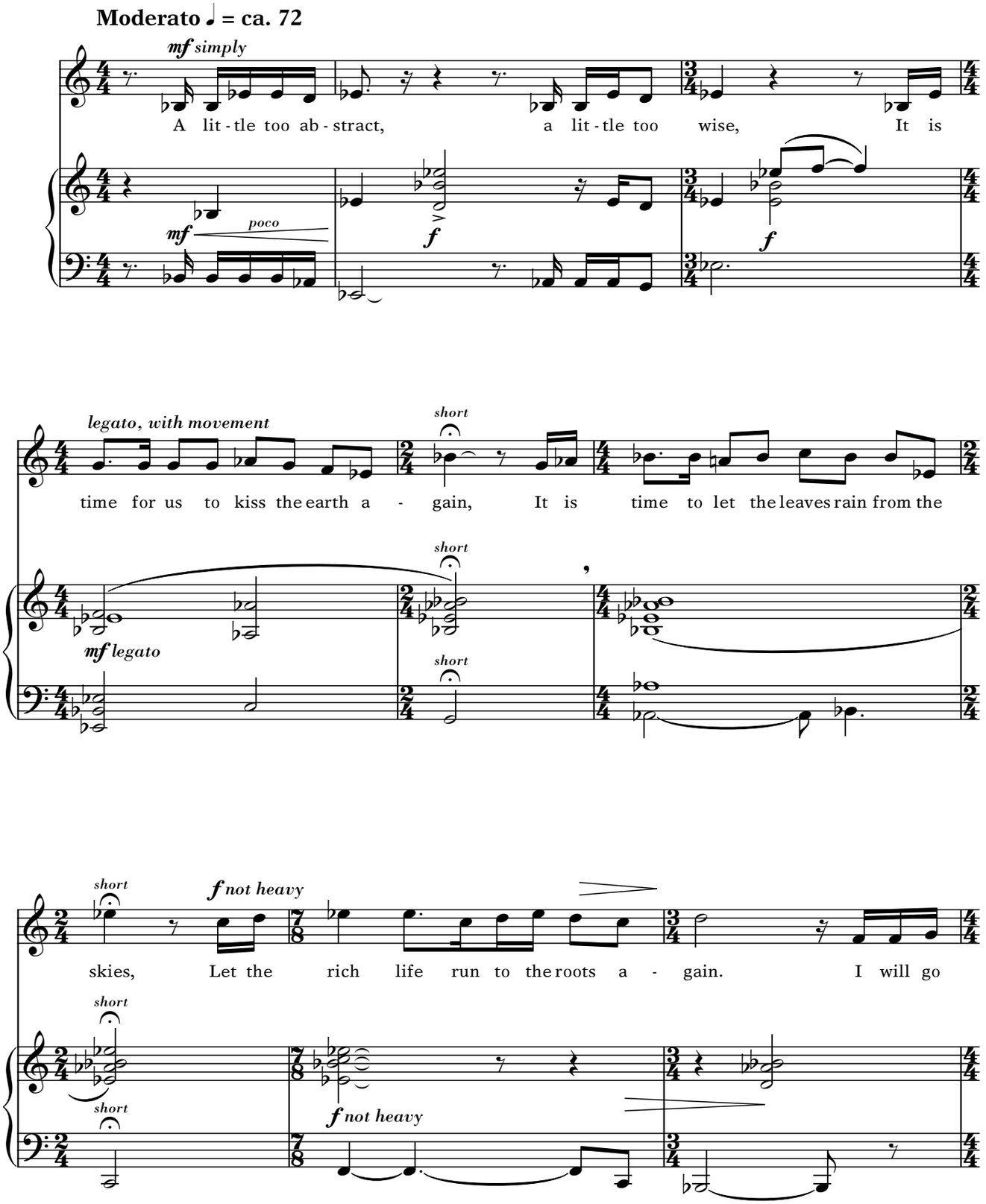

mf
and a crys - tal-line in-terest Re - mains a -
mf
mp
p

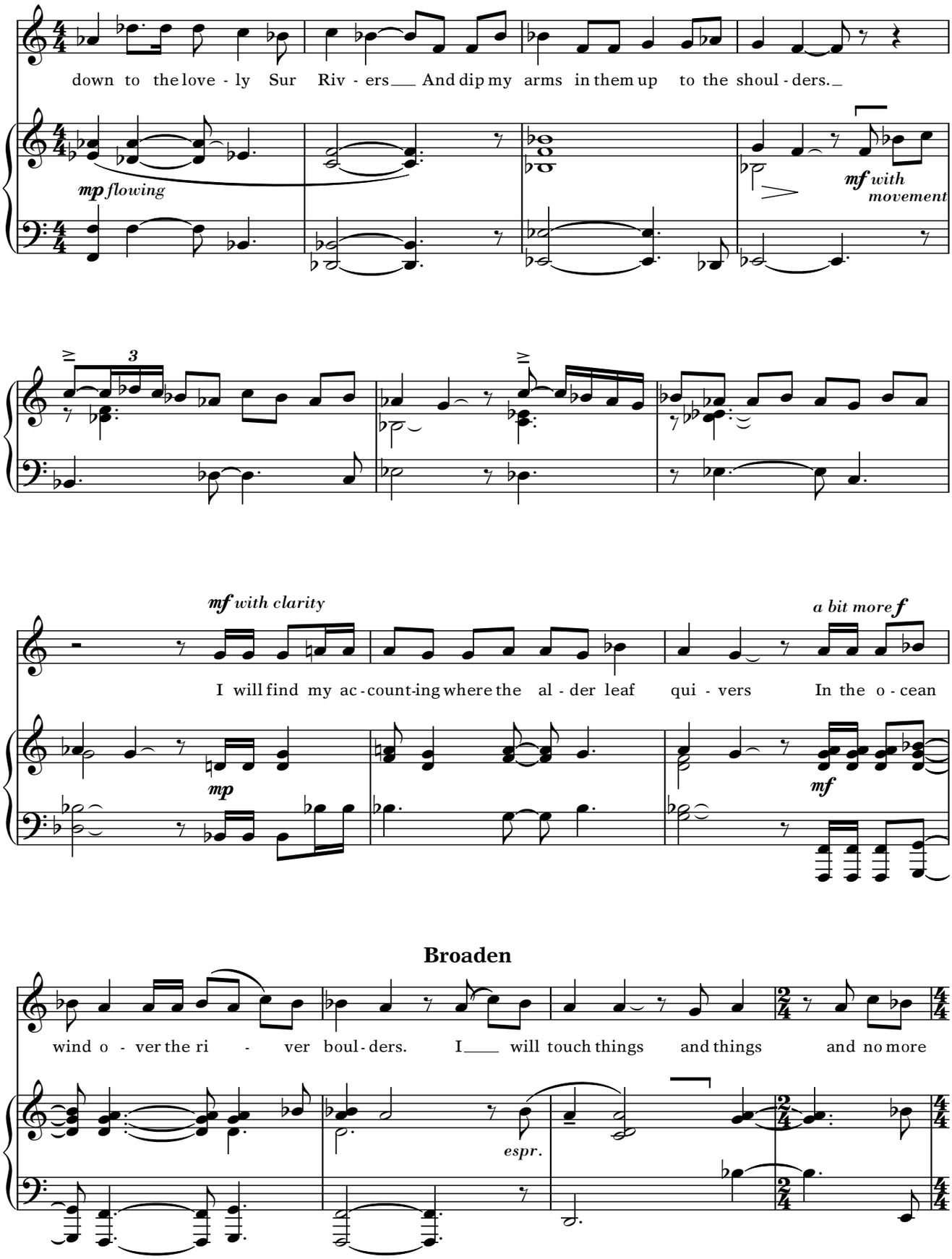

rall.
a tempo
Holding back
lone. We are safe to fin - ish what we have to

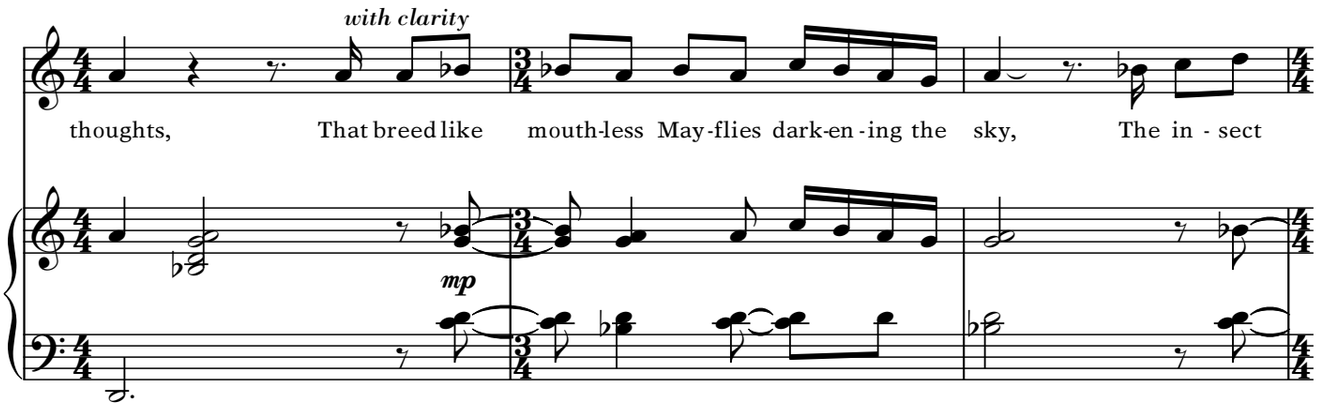

A bit more movement
fin - ish;
mf

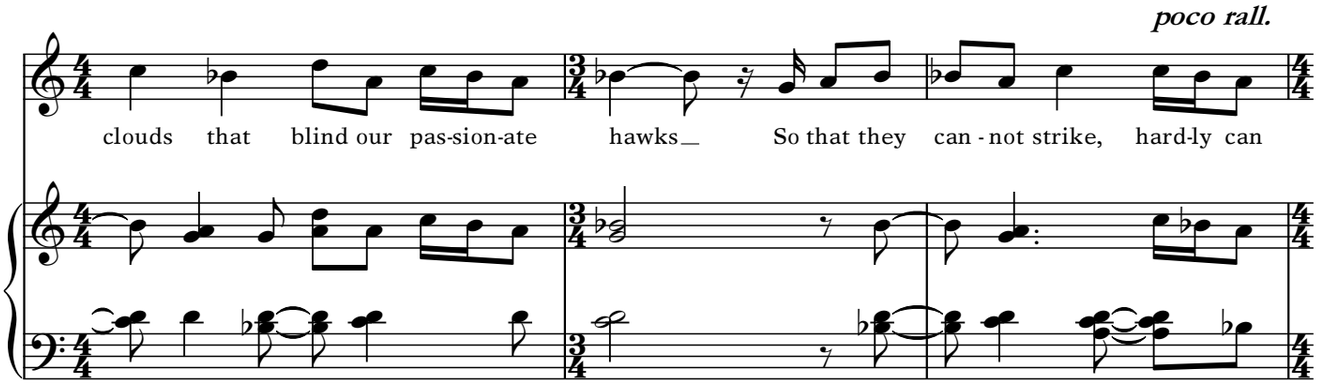

Animated
f
And then it will sound rath-er like mu - sic When the pa - tient
mf
dea - mon be - hind the screen of sea-rock Thumps with his staff, and calls thrice: "Come,
f
mf
Jef - fers."
A bit separated
mf
mf
Broaden
f
f
mf

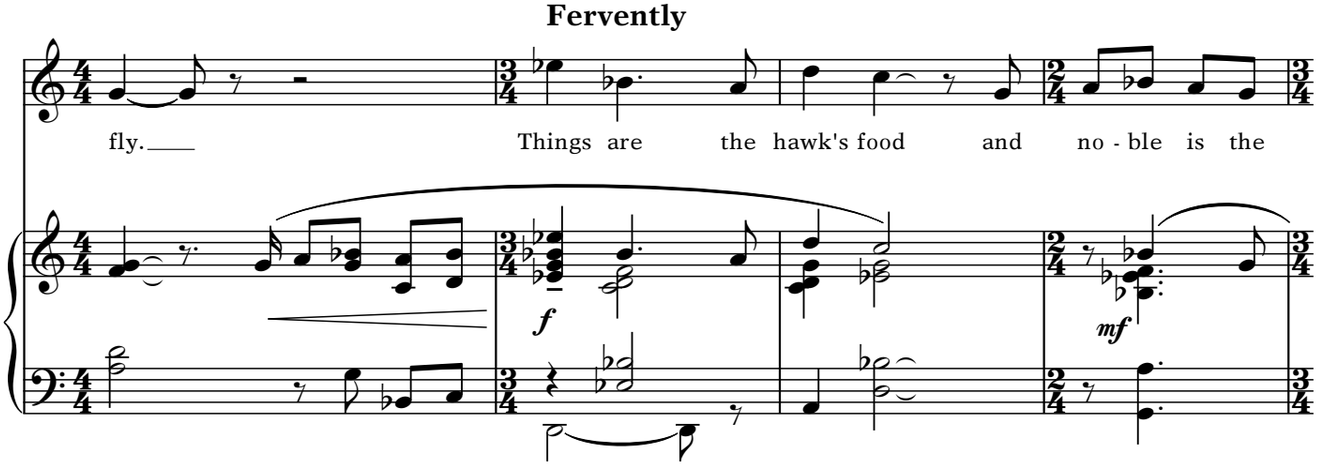
5. Return

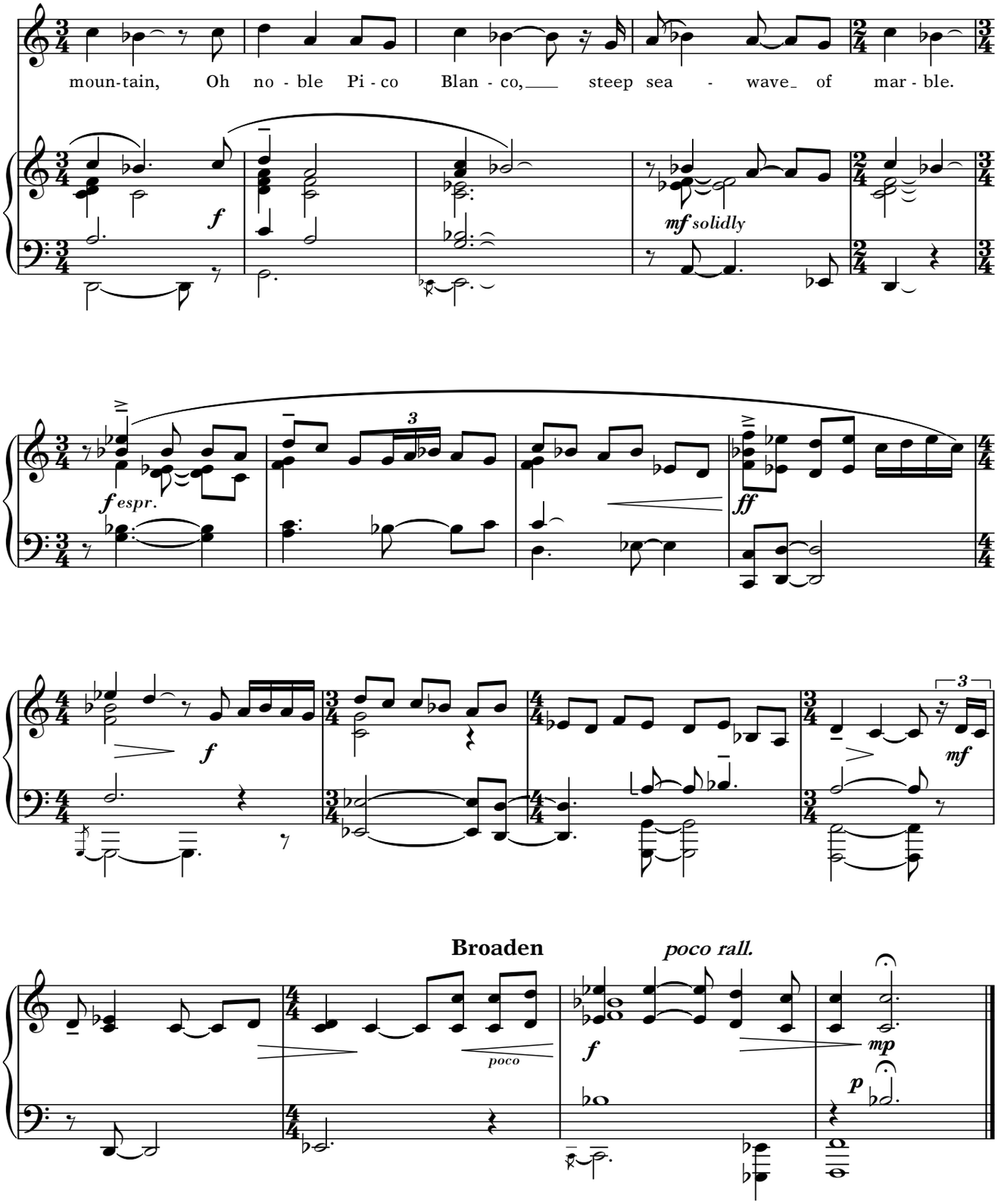

Moderato ♩ = ca. 72
mf simply
A lit - tle too ab - stract, a lit - tle too wise, It is
mf poco
f
f
legato, with movement
short
time for us to kiss the earth a - gain, It is time to let the leaves rain from the
short
mf legato
short
short
f not heavy
skies, Let the rich life run to the roots a - gain. I will go
short
short
f not heavy

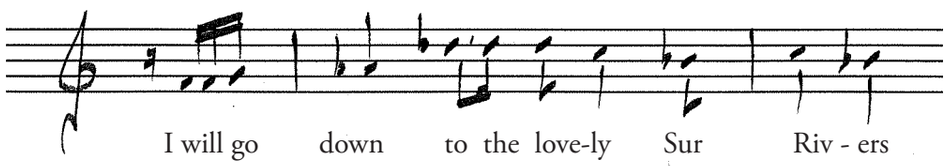

down to the love - ly Sur Riv - ers And dip my arms in them up to the shoul - ders.
mp flowing
mf with movement
3
mf with clarity
a bit more f
I will find my ac - count-ing where the al - der leaf qui - vers In the o - cean
mp
mf
Broaden
wind o - ver the ri - ver boul - ders. I will touch things and things and no more
espr.


with clarity
thoughts, That breed like mouth-less May-flies dark-en-ing the sky, The in - sect
mp


poco rall.
clouds that blind our pas-sion-ate hawks So that they can - not strike, hard-ly can


Fervently
fly. Things are the hawk's food and no - ble is the
f
mf


moun-tain, Oh no - ble Pi - co Blan - co, steep sea - wave of mar - ble.
f
mf solidly
f espr.
ff
f
mf
Broaden
poco rall.
poco
f
mp
p



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