Mrs. Bixby's Sons

for baritone and piano

David K. Gompper
2004

Text

Executive Mansion, Washington, November 21, 1864.

Mrs. Bixby, Boston, Massachusetts:

DEAR MADAM: I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant-General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save. I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

Abraham Lincoln

Program Notes

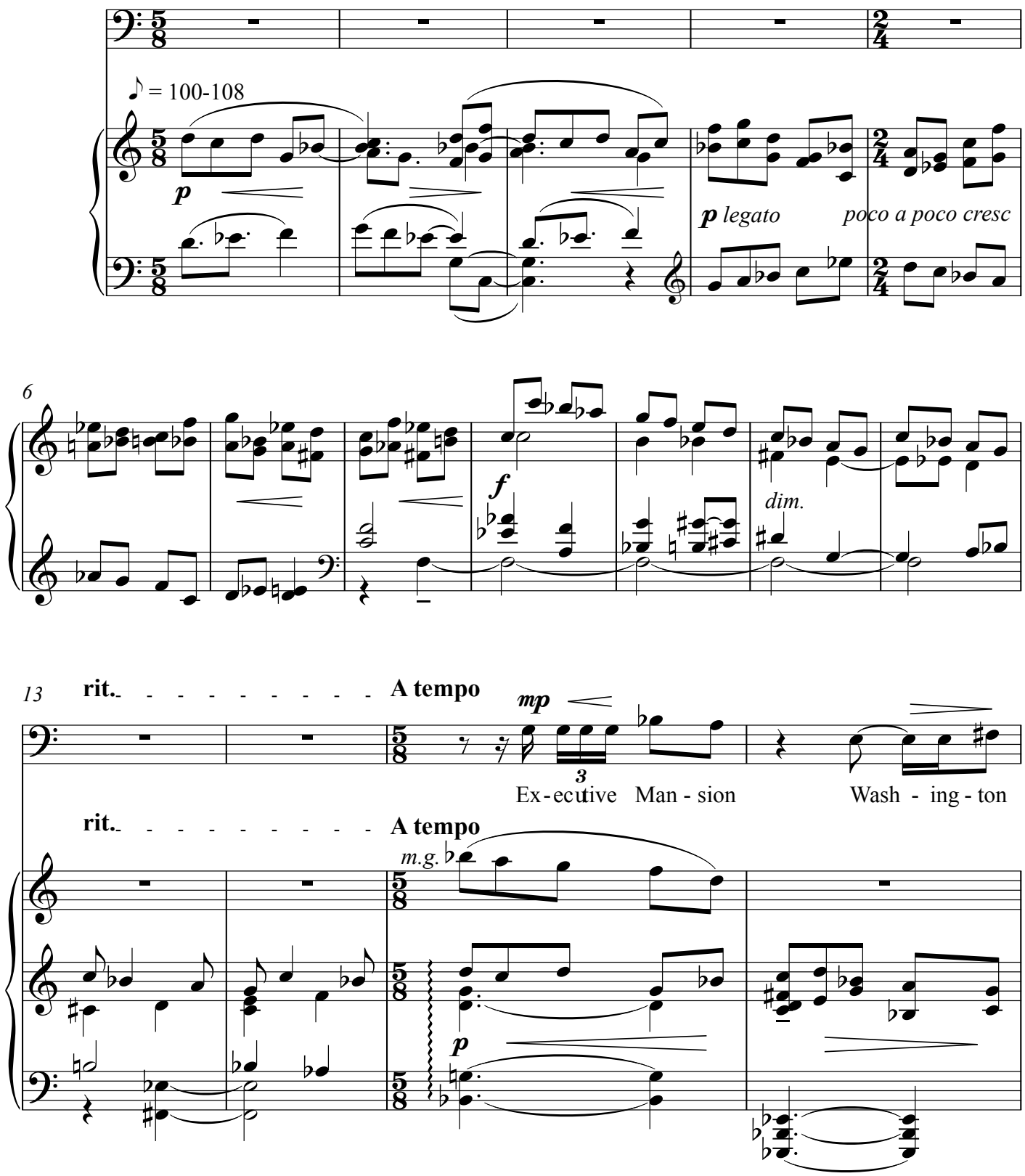
Despite the fact that Mrs. Bixby, a Southern sympathizer, destroyed the letter, that she lost not five but two sons in the Civil War (the War Department misspoke), or that many believe John Hay, one of Lincoln's private secretaries, is the author of the letter, this message of condolence is generally considered unsurpassed. The number five is pervasive in this musical setting, used metrically, rhythmically and intervallically. The song was written for and is decidated to Stephen Swanson, who premiered it 24 October 2004 at the University of Iowa.

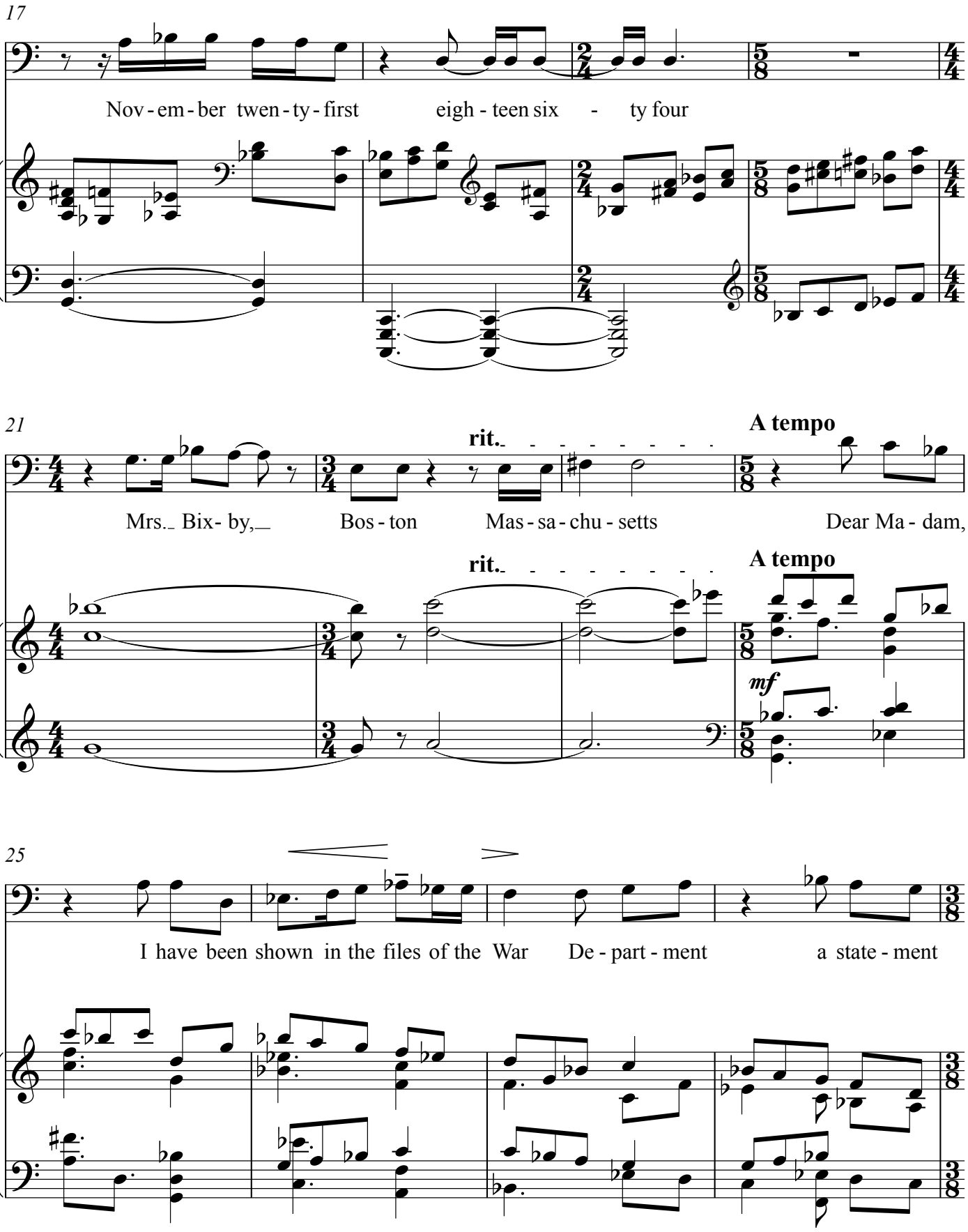
for Stephen Swanson

Mrs. Bixby's Sons

David Gompper

♪ = 100-108




17
Nov - em - ber twen - ty - first eigh - teen six - ty four
21
rit.
A tempo
Mrs. Bix- by, Bos - ton Mas - sa - chu - setts Dear Ma - dam,
rit.
A tempo
mf
25
I have been shown in the files of the War De - part - ment a state - ment

29

of the Ad - ju - tant Gen - er - al of Mas - sa - chu_ setts

34

that you are the mo - ther of five sons who have died

p *tenderly*

38

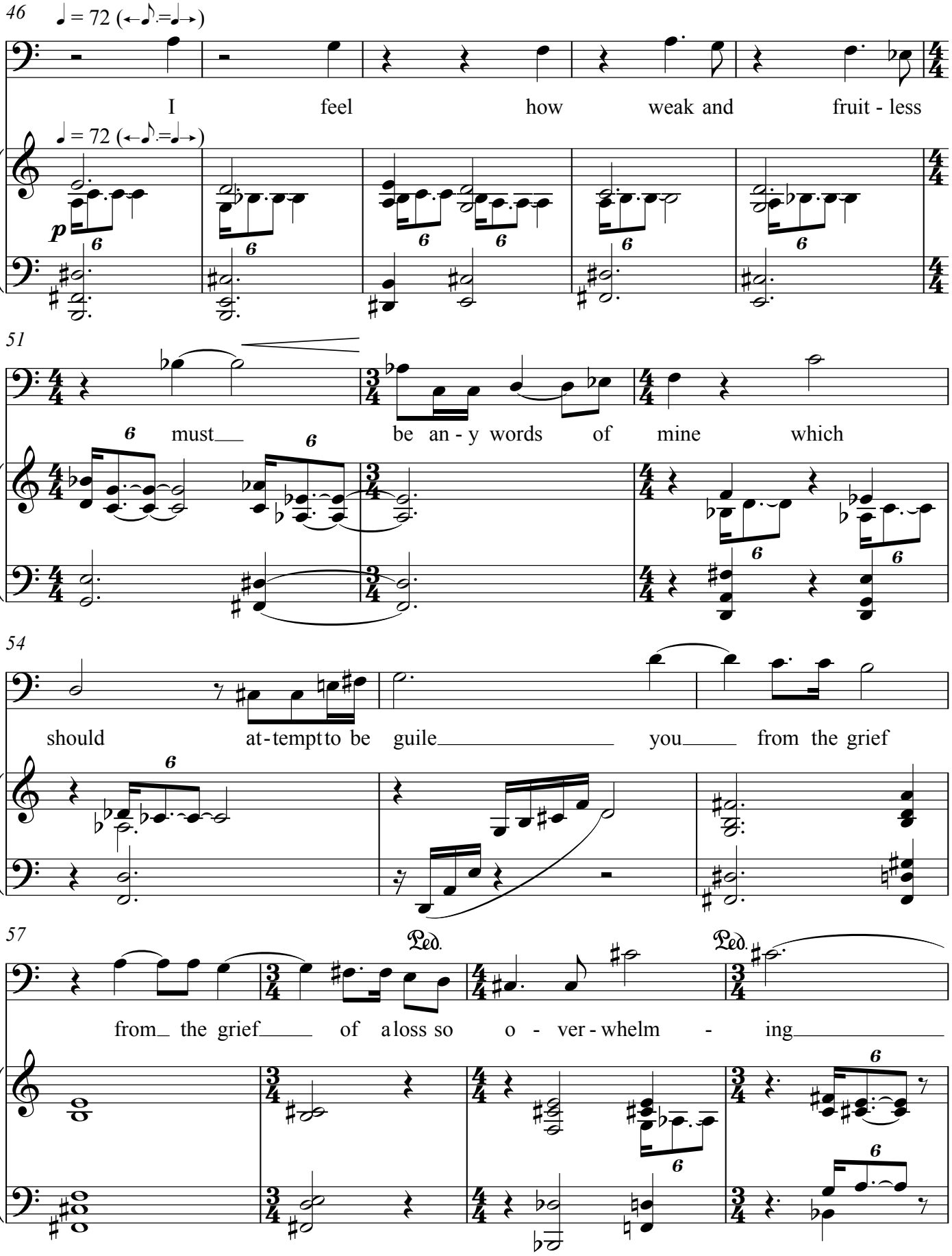
glor - iou - sly on the field of bat - tle

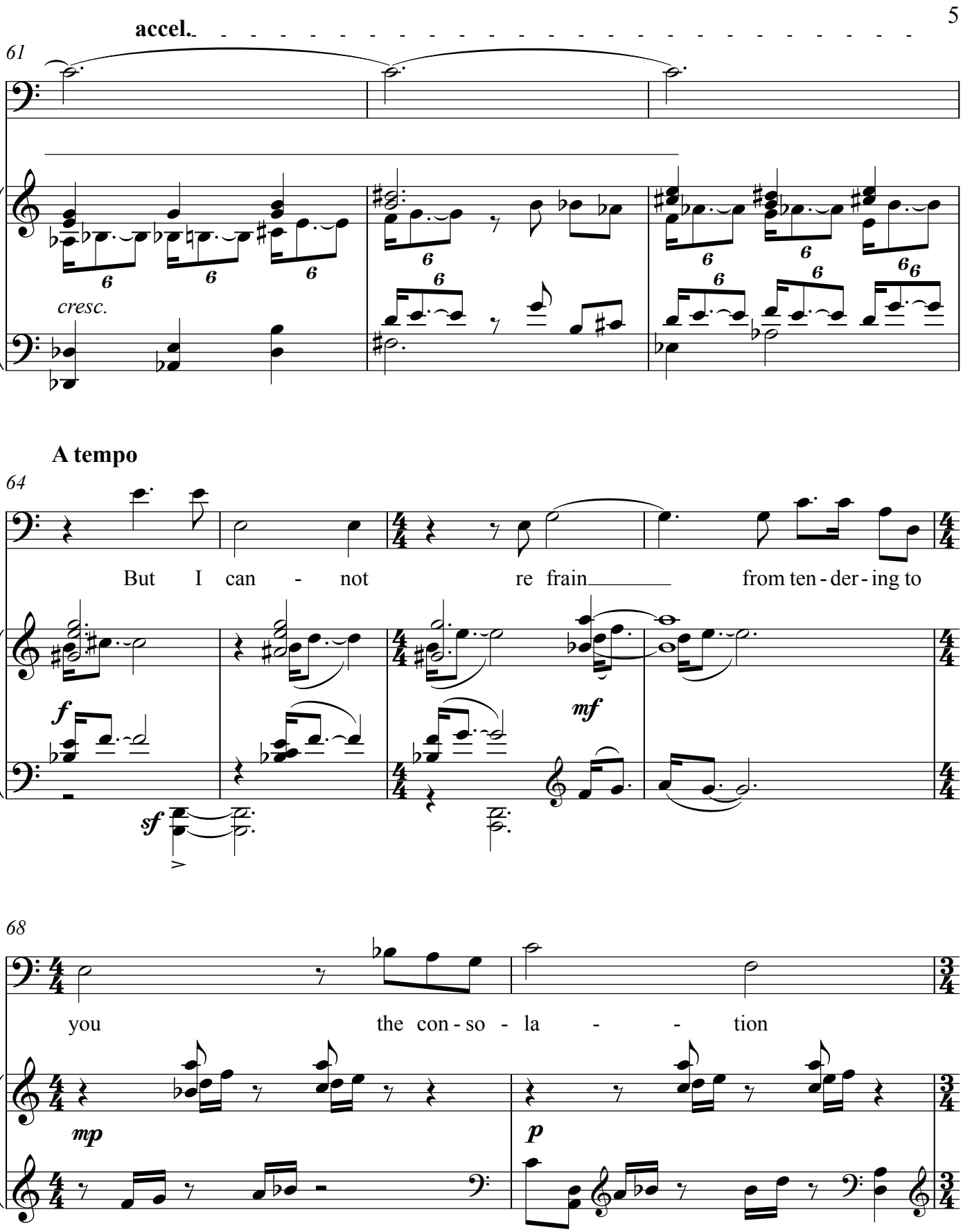
dim.

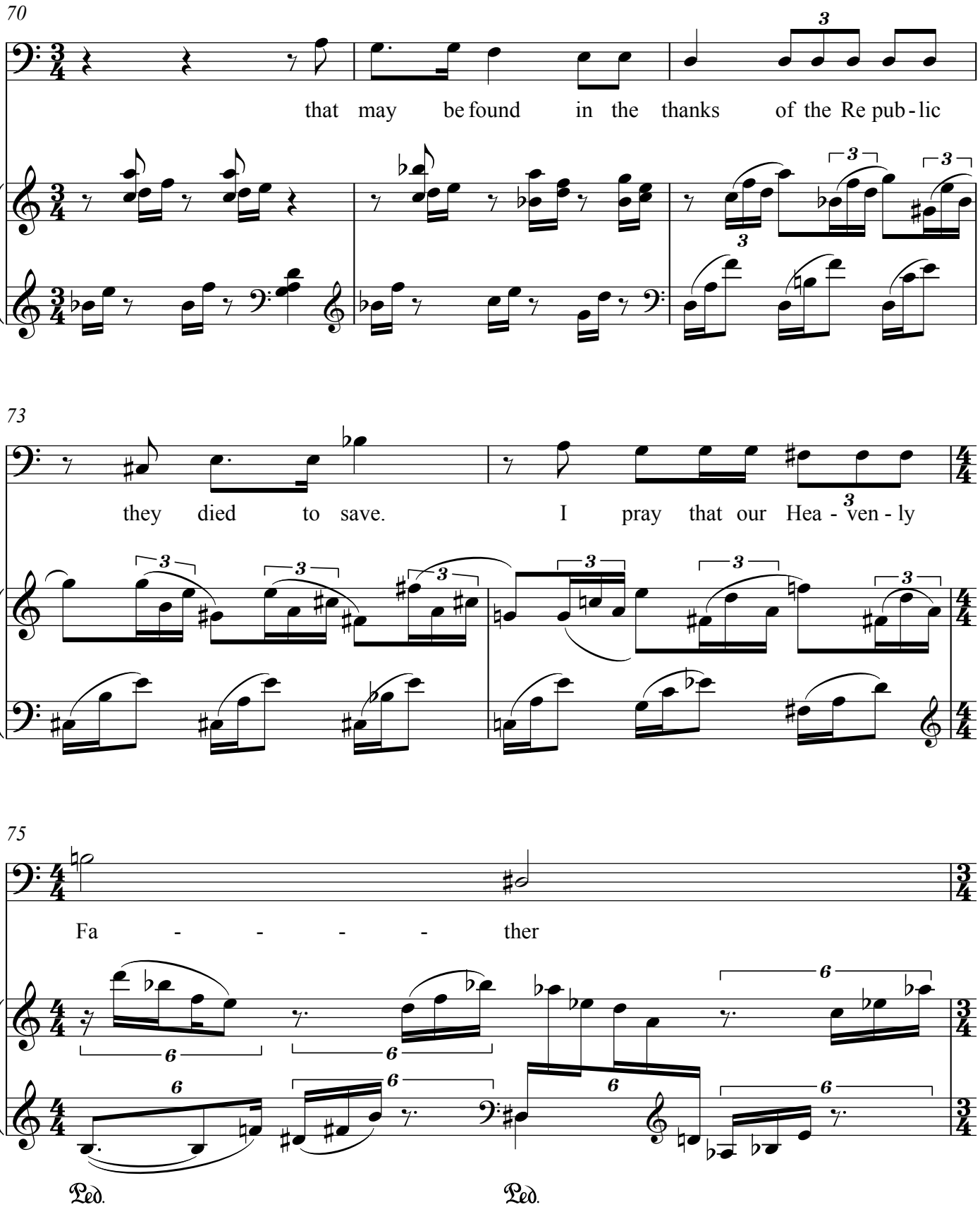
42

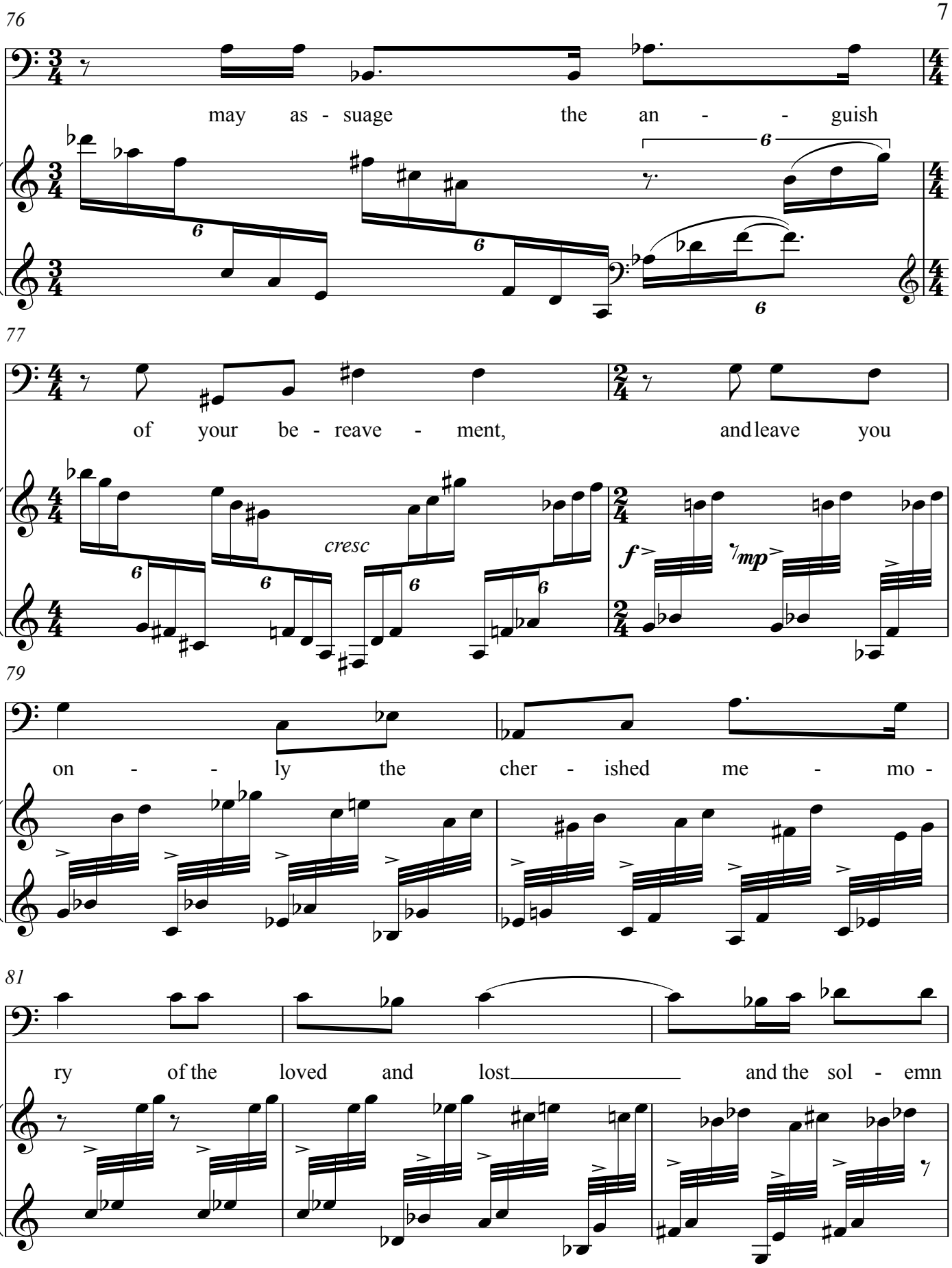
loco

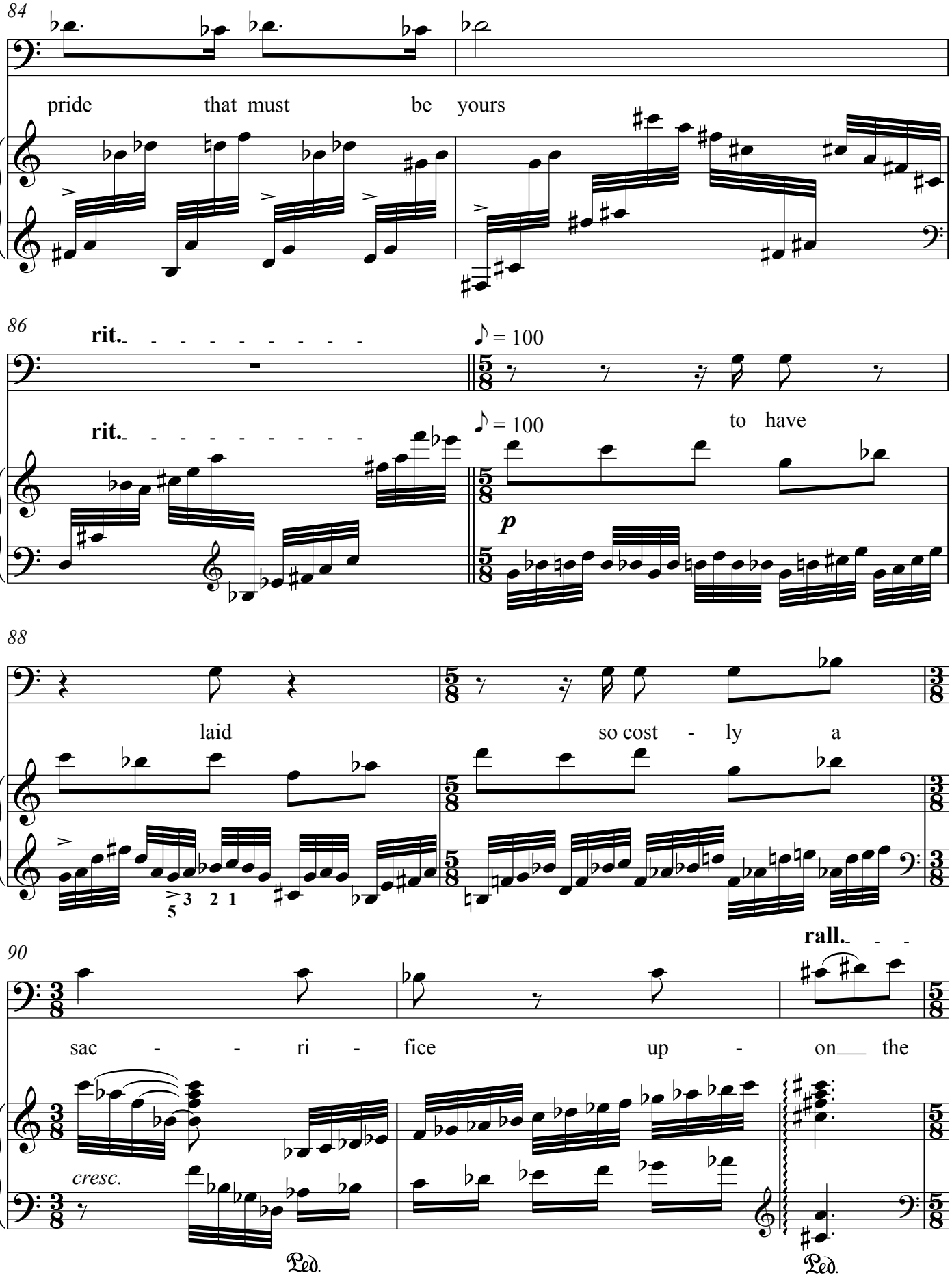
8vb


46
♩ = 72 (♩. = ♩)
I feel how weak and fruit - less
51
must be an - y words of mine which
54
should at - tempt to be guile you from the grief
57
Ped.
Ped.
from the grief of a loss so o - ver - whelm - ing


accel.
61
cresc.
A tempo
64
But I can - not re frain from ten - der - ing to
f
mf
sf
68
you the con - so - la - tion
mp
p


70
that may be found in the thanks of the Re pub - lic
73
they died to save. I pray that our Hea - ven - ly
75
Fa - - - - ther
Ped.
Ped.


76
may as - suage the an - - guish
77
of your be - reave - ment, and leave you
cresc
f
mp
79
on - - ly the cher - ished me - mo -
81
ry of the loved and lost and the sol - emn


84
pride that must be yours
86
rit.
♪ = 100
rit.
♪ = 100
to have
p
88
laid
so cost - ly a
3 2 1
rall.
90
sac - - ri - fice up - on the
cresc.
Ped.
Ped.

A tempo

93

f

al - - - - tar of

f

95

free dom

p

Yours, ve-ry sin-cere - ly

f

p

101

♪ = 132

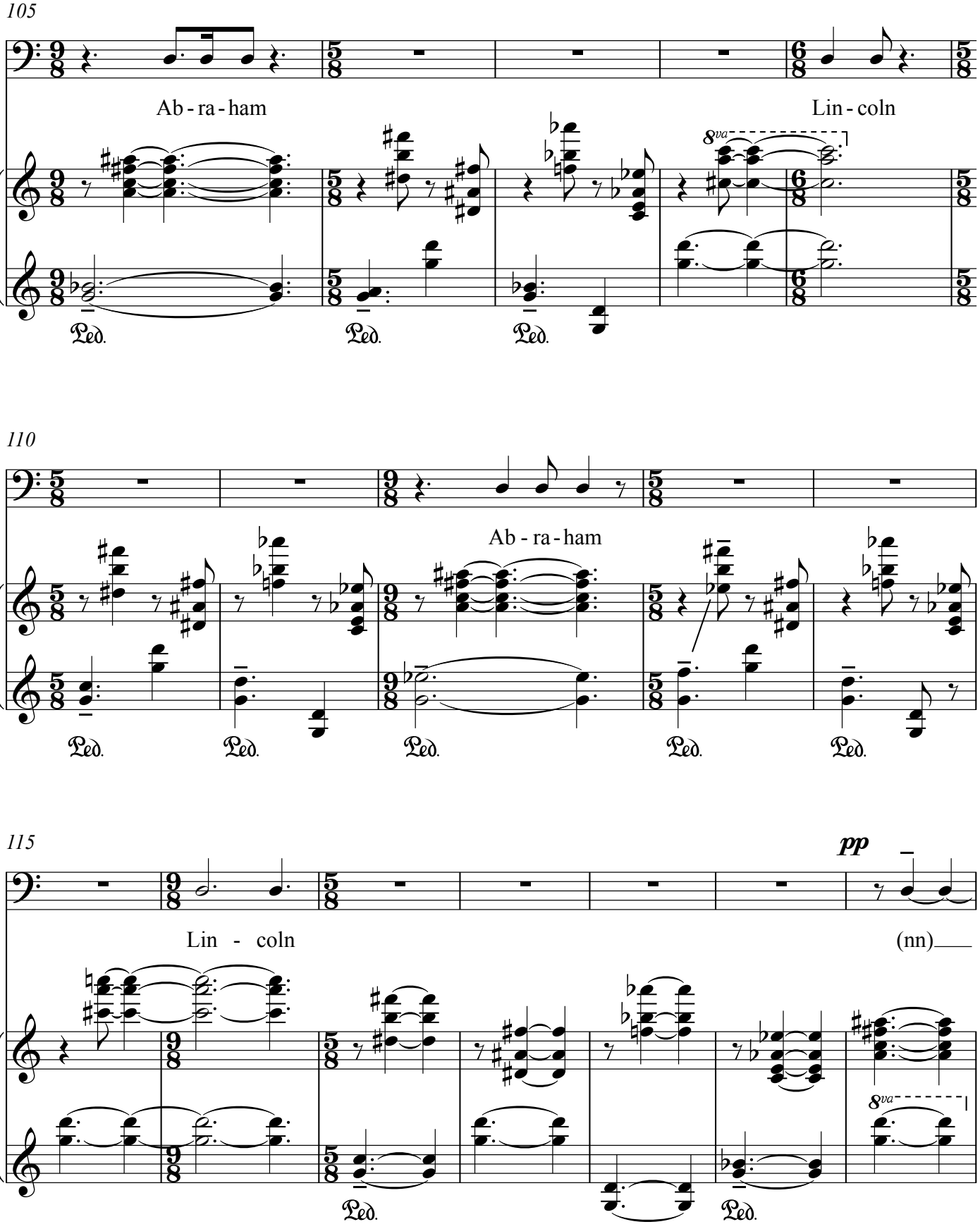
♪ = 132

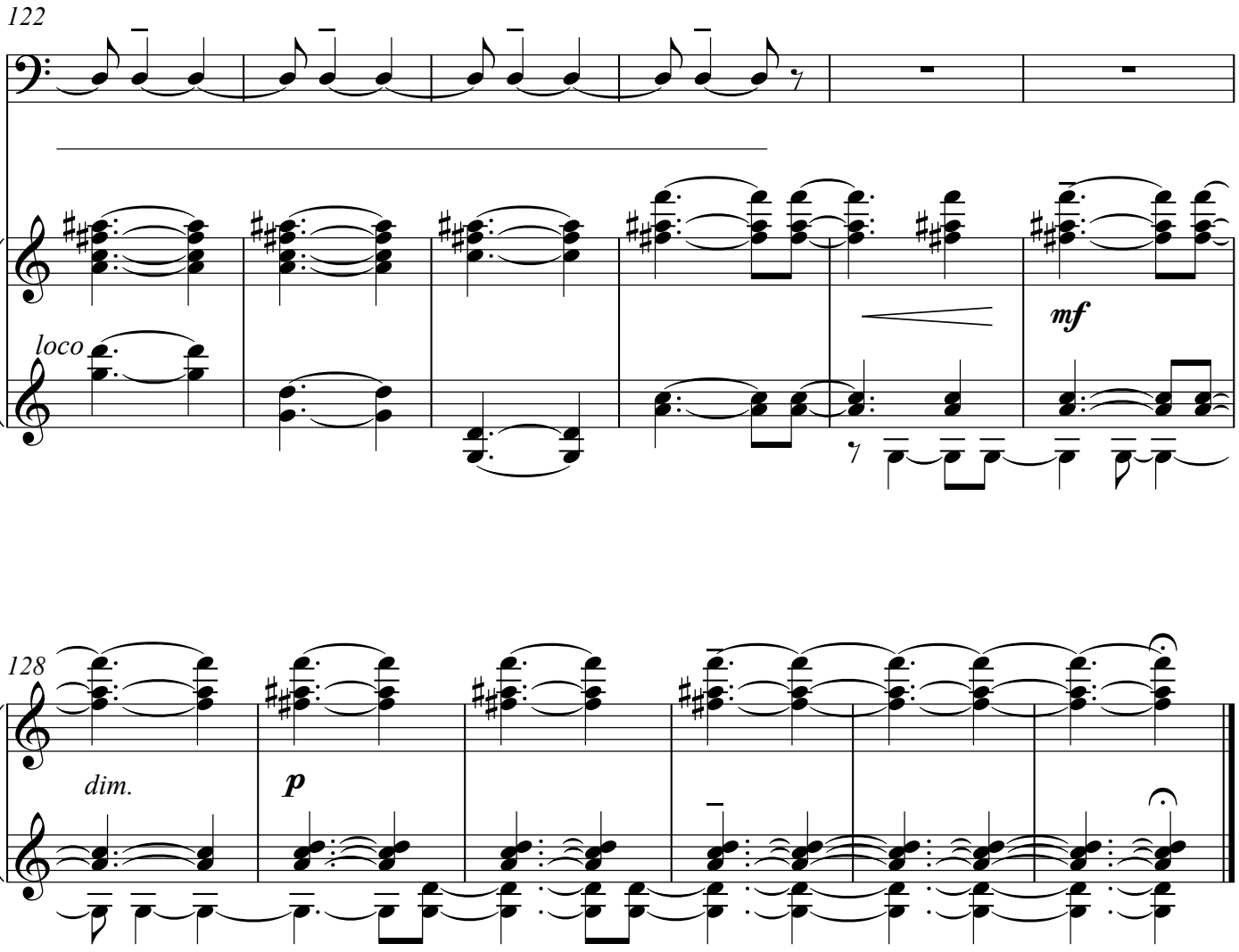
p

mp

pp

Ped. Ped.


105
Ab - ra - ham
Lin - coln
8va
Ped.
110
Ab - ra - ham
115
pp
Lin - coln
(nn)


122
loco
mf
128
dim.
p