A child said,
What is the Grass?

for Choir, Harp, and Vibraphone

Spring 2010
Duration: 11 Minutes

Nick DiBerardino
(b. 1989)

A child said, What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands;
How could I answer the child?. . . .I do not know what it is any more than he.

I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven.

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropped,
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we may see and remark, and say Whose?

Or I guess the grass is itself a child. . . .the produced babe of the vegetation.

Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones,
Growing among black folks as among white,
Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the same, I receive them the same.

And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves.

Tenderly will I use you curling grass,
It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men,
It may be if I had known them I would have loved them;
It may be you are from old people and from women, and from offspring taken soon out of their mother's laps,
And here you are the mother's laps.

This grass is very dark to be from the white heads of old mothers,
Darker than the colorless beards of old men,
Dark to come from under the faint red roofs of mouths.

O I perceive after all so many uttering tongues!
And I perceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths for nothing.

I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men and women,
And the hints about old men and mothers, and the offspring taken soon out of their laps.

What do you think has become of the young and old men?
What do you think has become of the women and children?

They are alive and well somewhere;
The smallest sprouts show there is really no death,
And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it,
And ceased the moment life appeared.

All goes onward and outward. . . .and nothing collapses,
And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier.

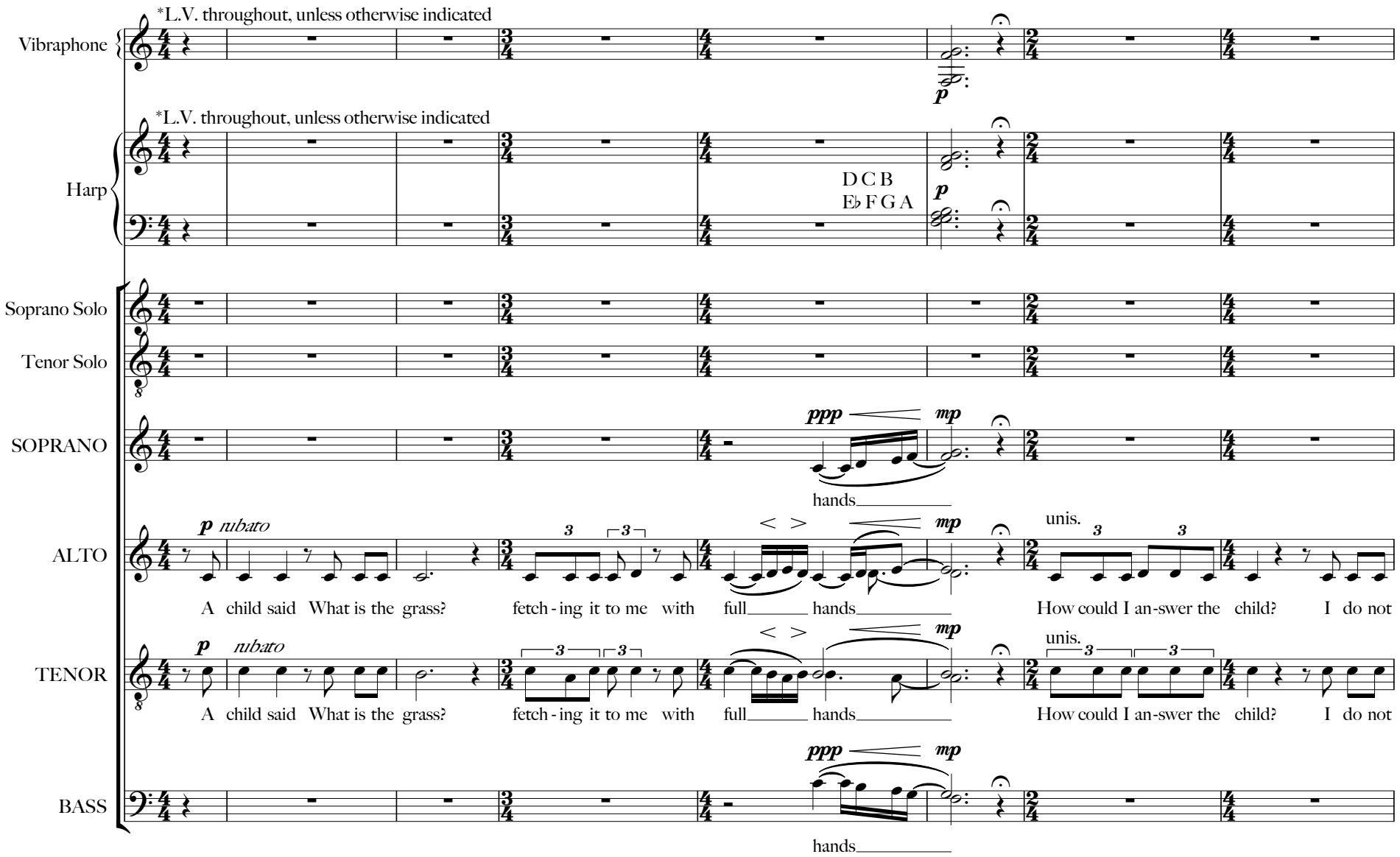
-Walt Whitman

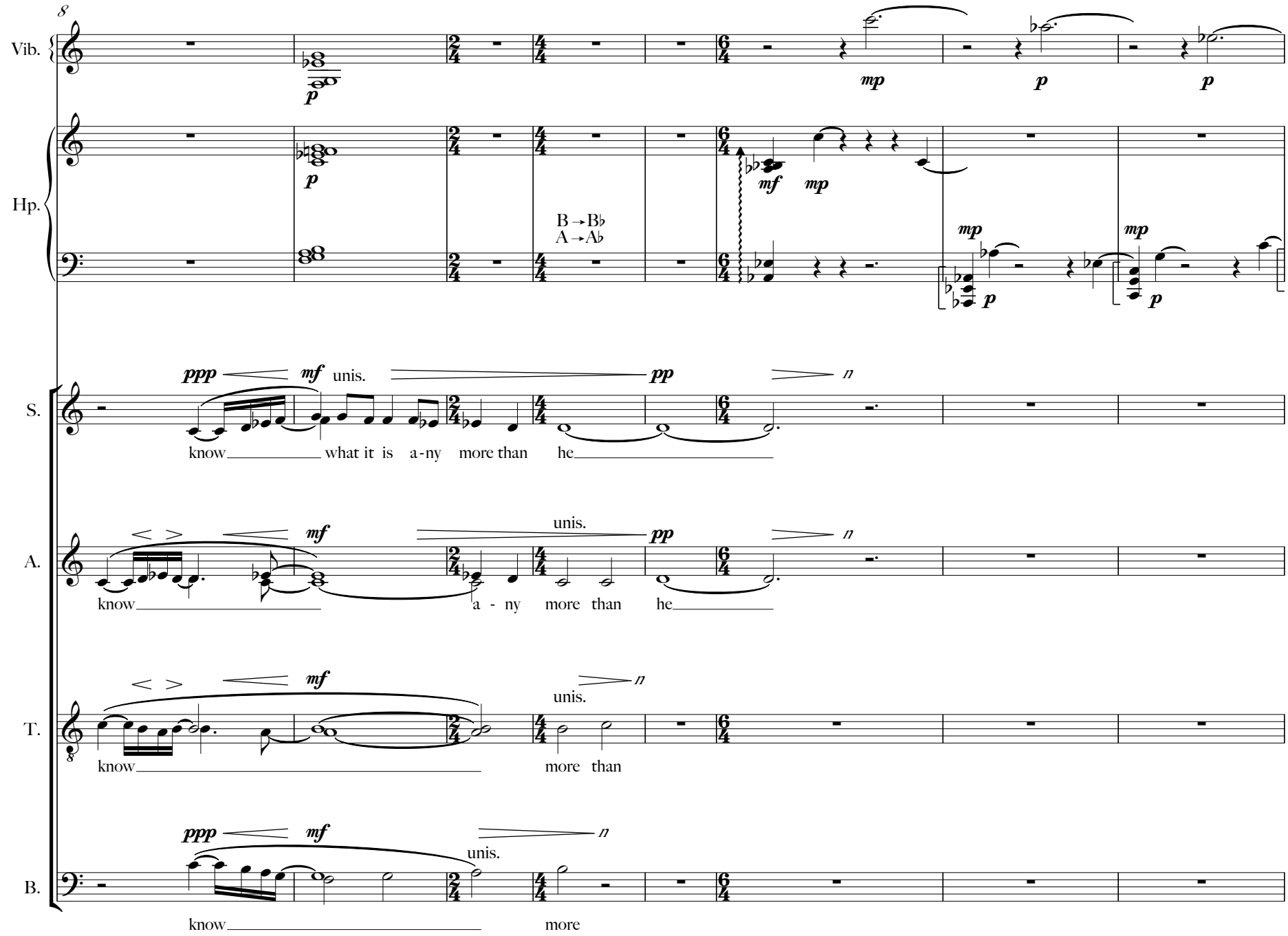
A child said, What is the grass?

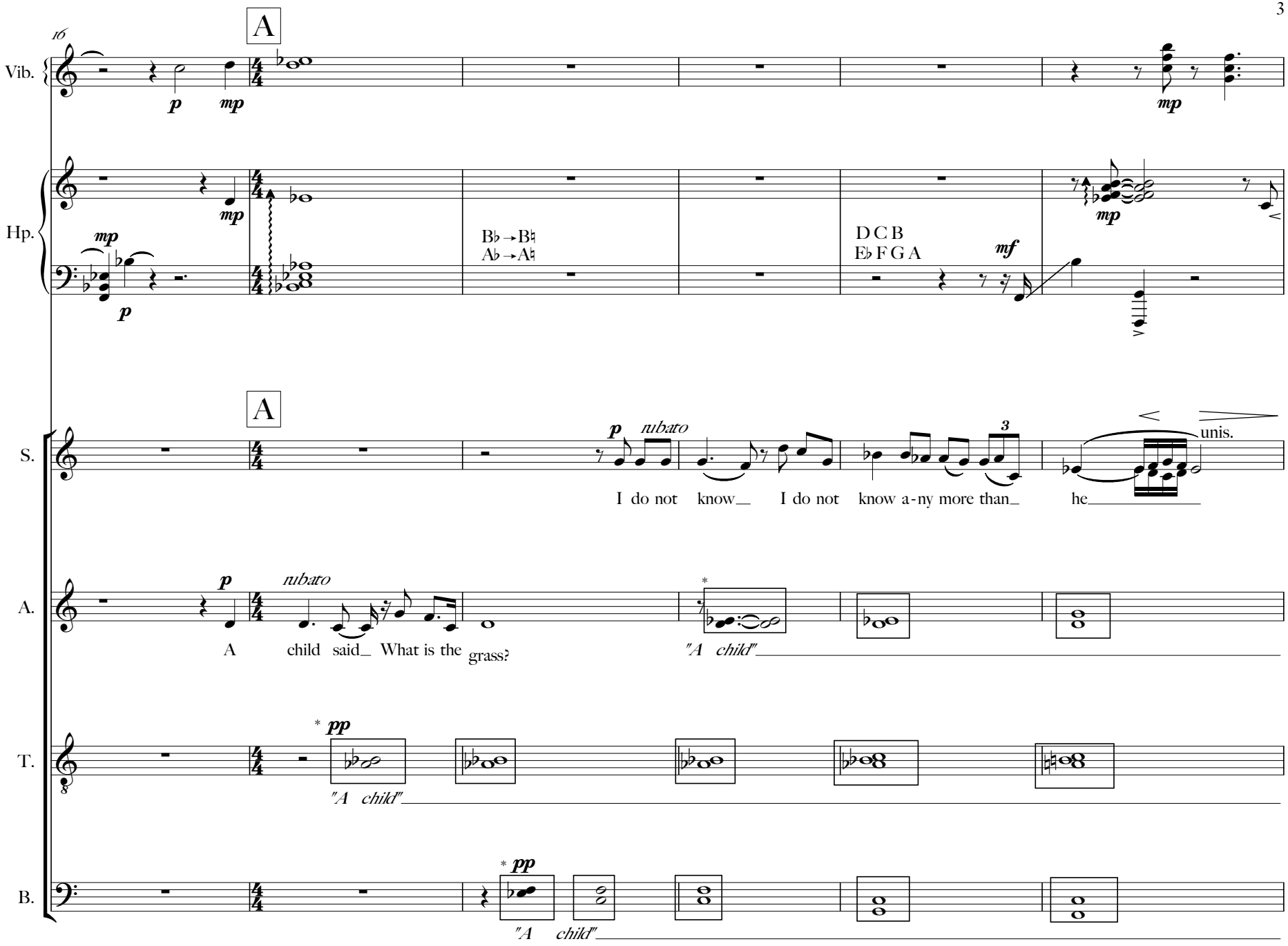
Walt Whitman

Nick DiBerardino

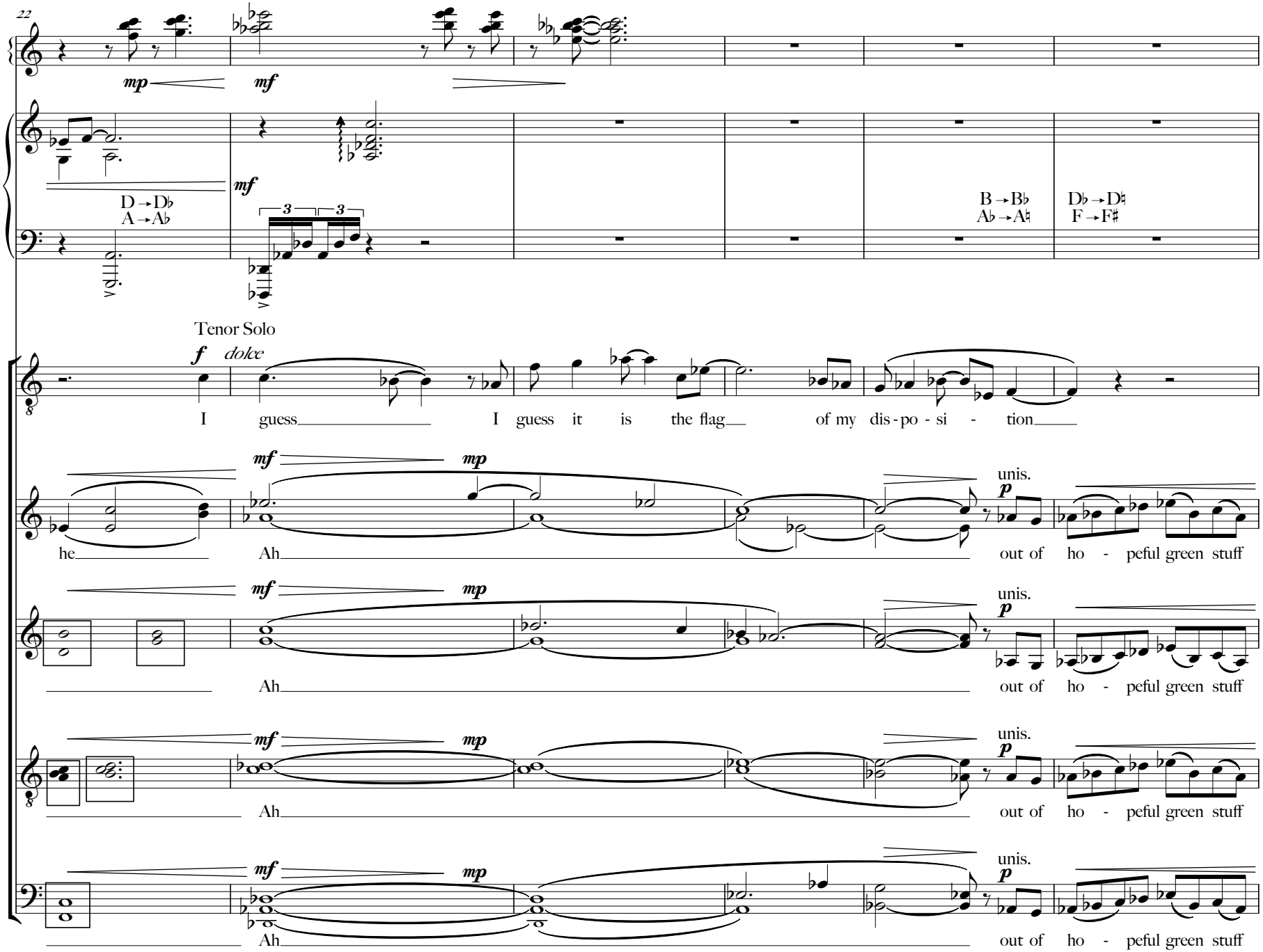
With gentle wonderment ♩ = 56

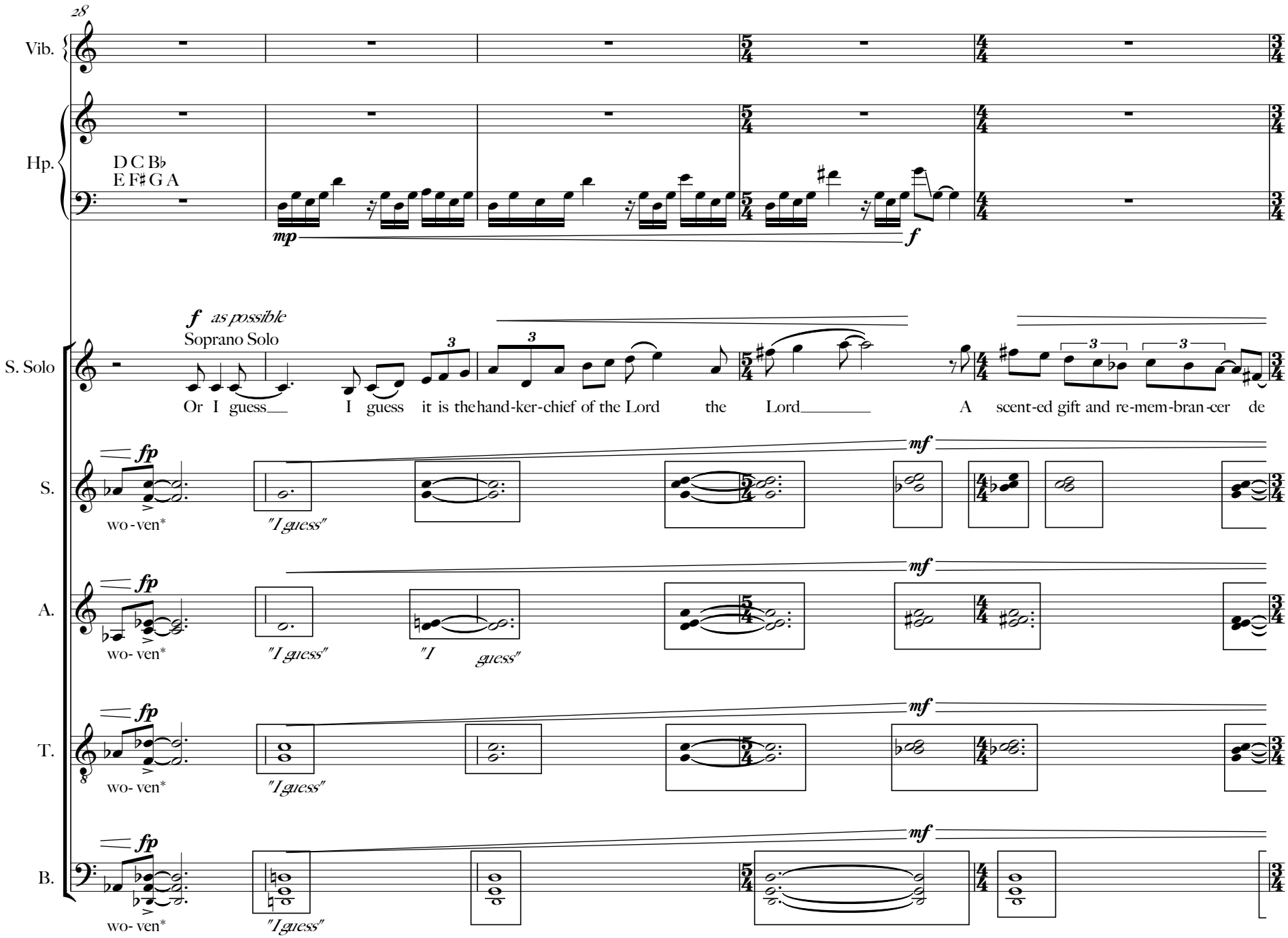


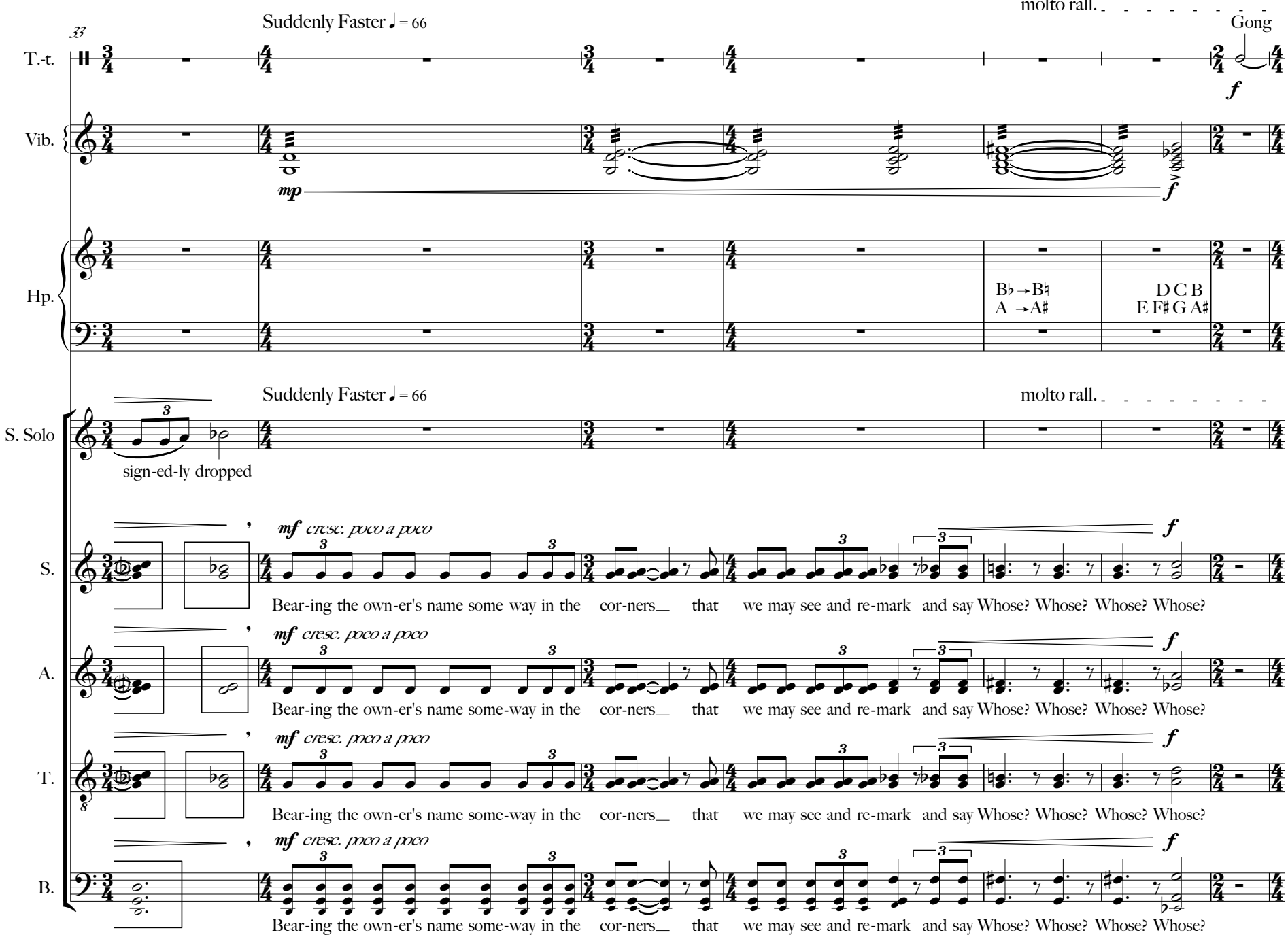

Vib.
Hp.
B → B♭
A → A♭
S.
know what it is a-ny more than he
A.
know a - ny more than he
T.
know more than
B.
know more
unis.



* *The singers should improvise rhythmic fragments on their given pitch, so that the first word (i.e., "a" or "I") is assigned a short rhythmic value and the second word is assigned a long rhythmic value. Individual singers should continue to rearticulate short-long patterns with varied overall duration, overlapping with others to create an ensemble effect of controlled rhythmic randomness in which many consonants quietly sound.*


22
Vib.
mp
mf
Hp.
mf
D → D♭
A → A♭
B → B♭
A♭ → A♮
D♭ → D♮
F → F♯
Tenor Solo
T. Solo
f
dolce
I guess I guess it is the flag of my dis - po - si - tion
S.
A.
T.
B.
mf
mp
unis.
p
he Ah out of ho - peful green stuff
Ah out of ho - peful green stuff
Ah out of ho - peful green stuff
Ah out of ho - peful green stuff


28
Vib.
Hp.
D C B♭
E F♯ G A
mp
f
f as possible
Soprano Solo
S. Solo
Or I guess I guess it is the hand-ker-chief of the Lord the Lord A scent-ed gift and re-mem-bran-cer de
S.
A.
T.
B.
fp
mf
wo-ven*
wo- ven*
"I guess"
"I guess"
"I guess"
"I guess"
*Closed "n"


molto rall.
Gong
Suddenly Faster ♩= 66
T.-t.
Vib.
mp
f
Hp.
B♭ →B♮
A →A♯
D C B
E F♯ G A♯
Suddenly Faster ♩= 66
molto rall.
S. Solo
sign-ed-ly dropped
mf cresc. poco a poco
f
S.
Bear-ing the own-er's name some way in the cor-ners_ that we may see and re-mark and say Whose? Whose? Whose? Whose?
A.
Bear-ing the own-er's name some-way in the cor-ners_ that we may see and re-mark and say Whose? Whose? Whose? Whose?
T.
Bear-ing the own-er's name some-way in the cor-ners_ that we may see and re-mark and say Whose? Whose? Whose? Whose?
B.
Bear-ing the own-er's name some-way in the cor-ners_ that we may see and re-mark and say Whose? Whose? Whose? Whose?

With energy; billowing ♩ = 72

40

T.-t.

Vib.

Hp.

mp

With energy; billowing ♩ = 72

S.

A.

T.

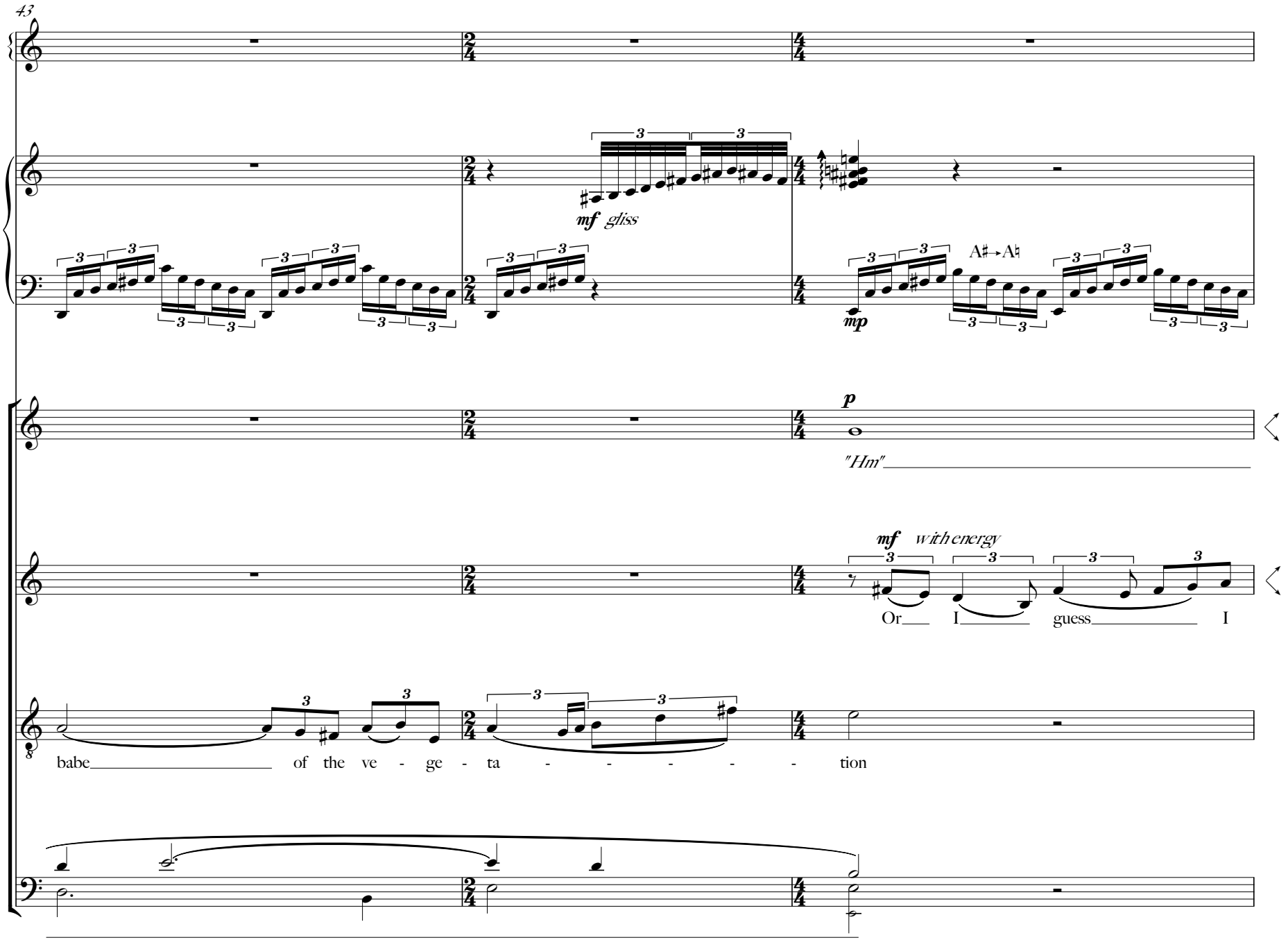
mf unis.

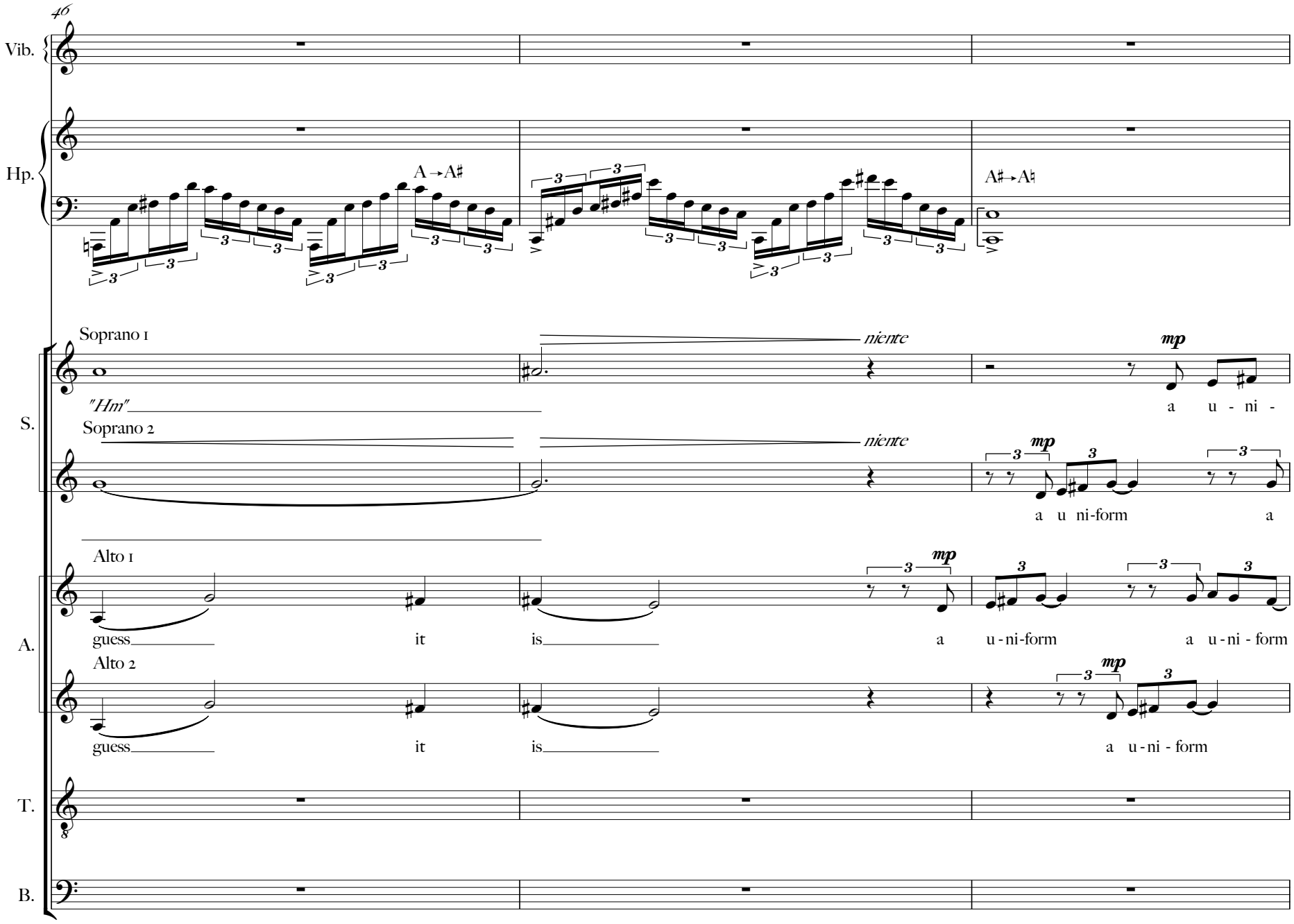
Or I guess the grass it - self is a child the pro- duced

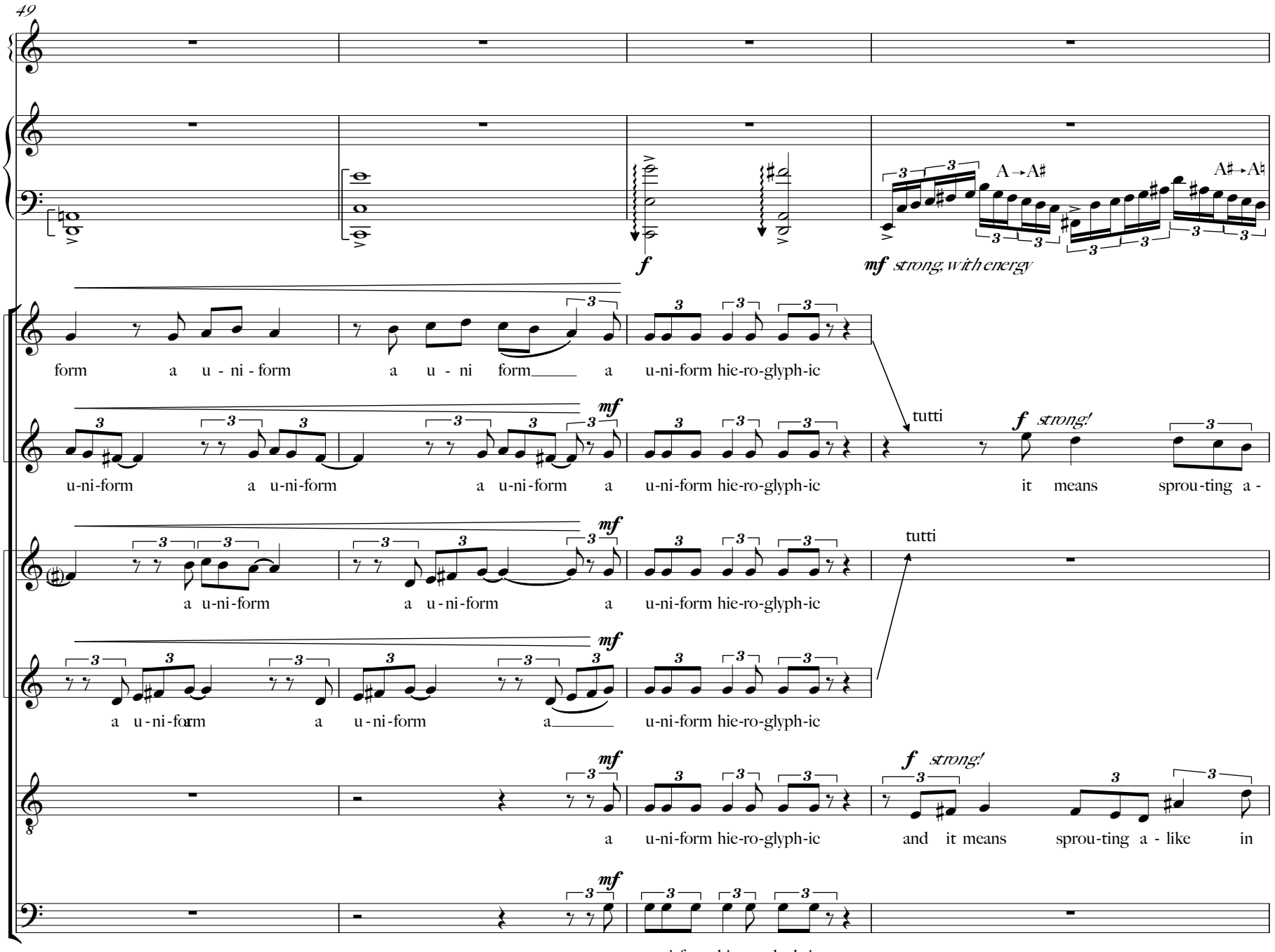
B.

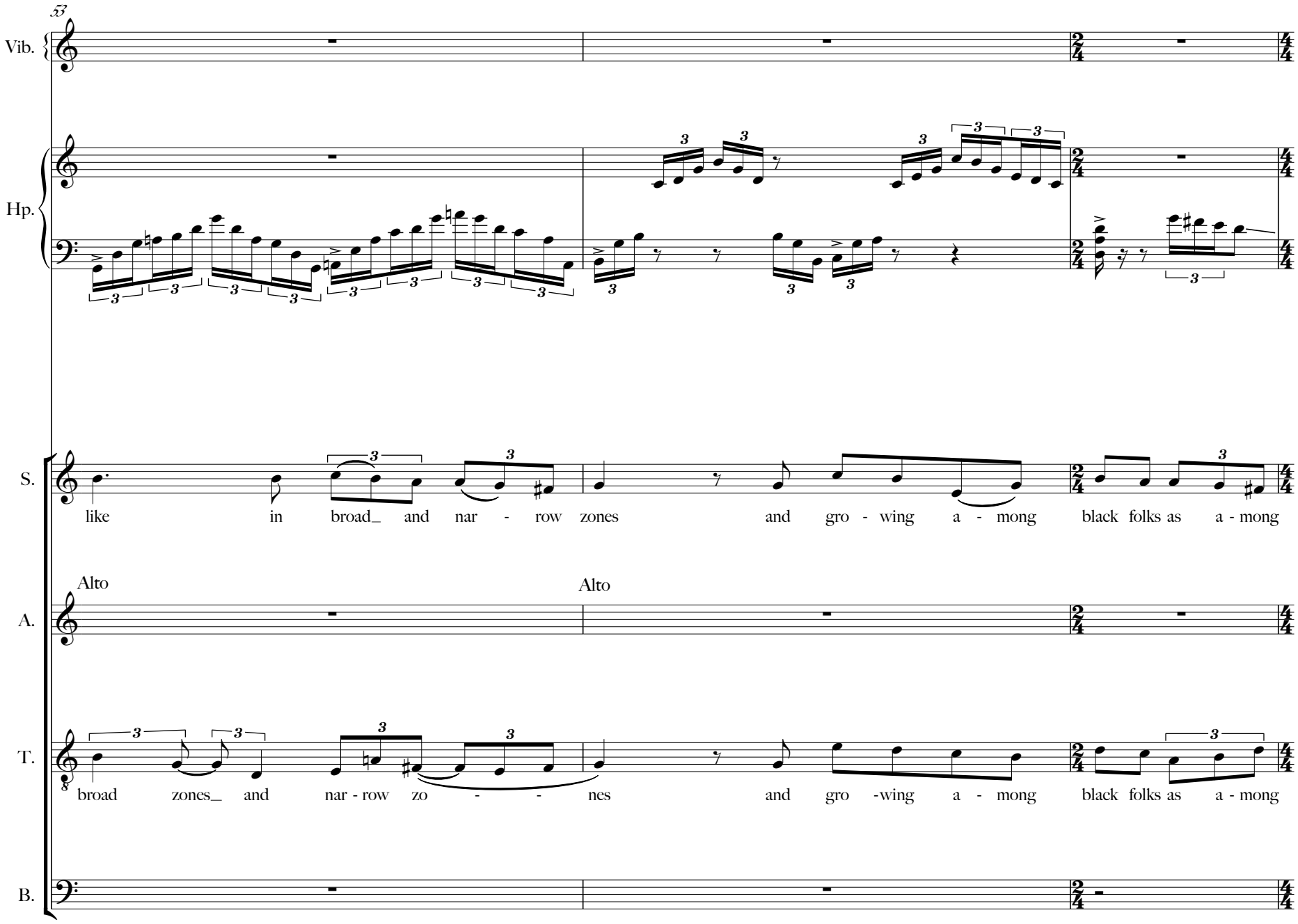
mp

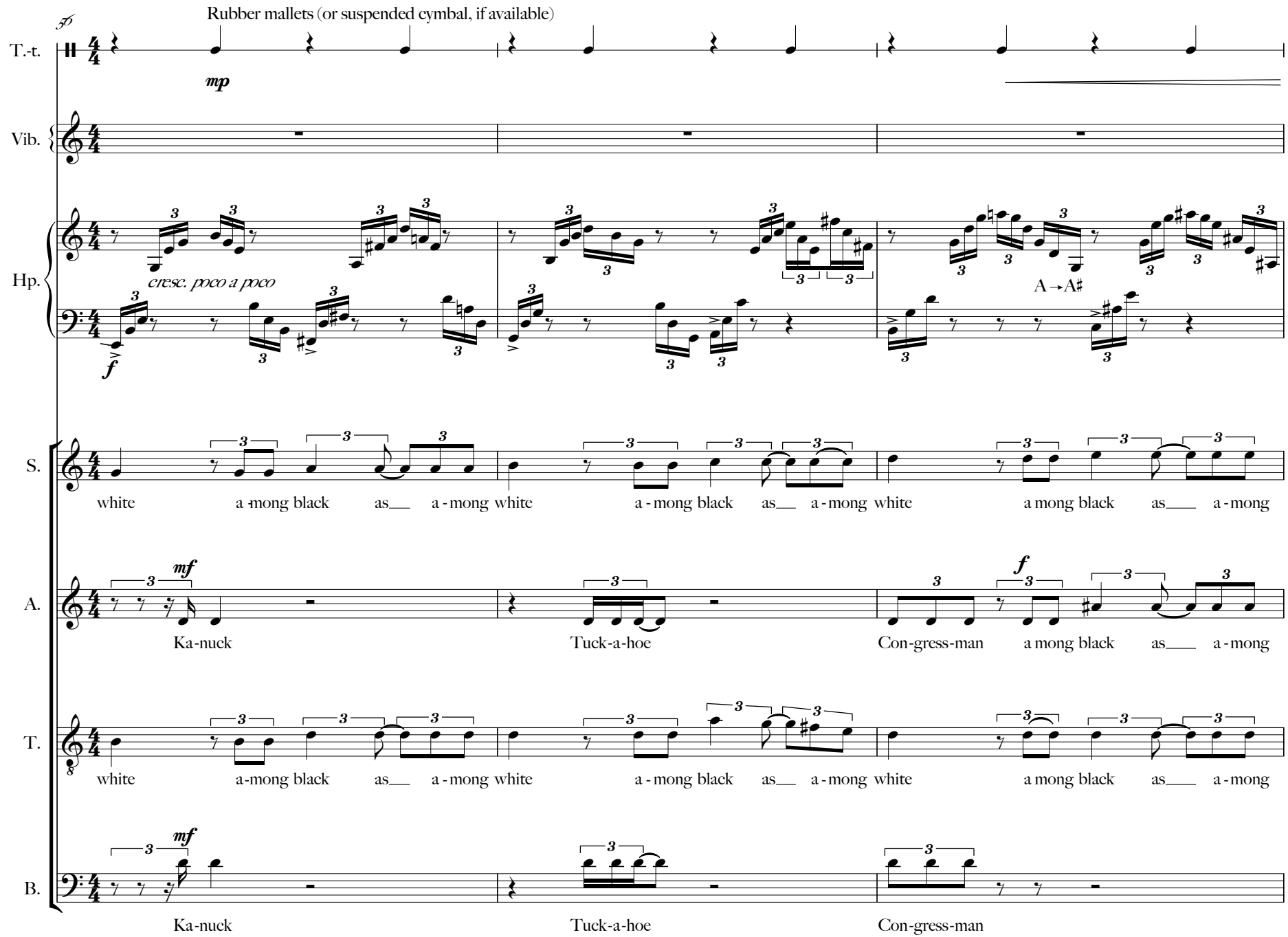
"Hm"

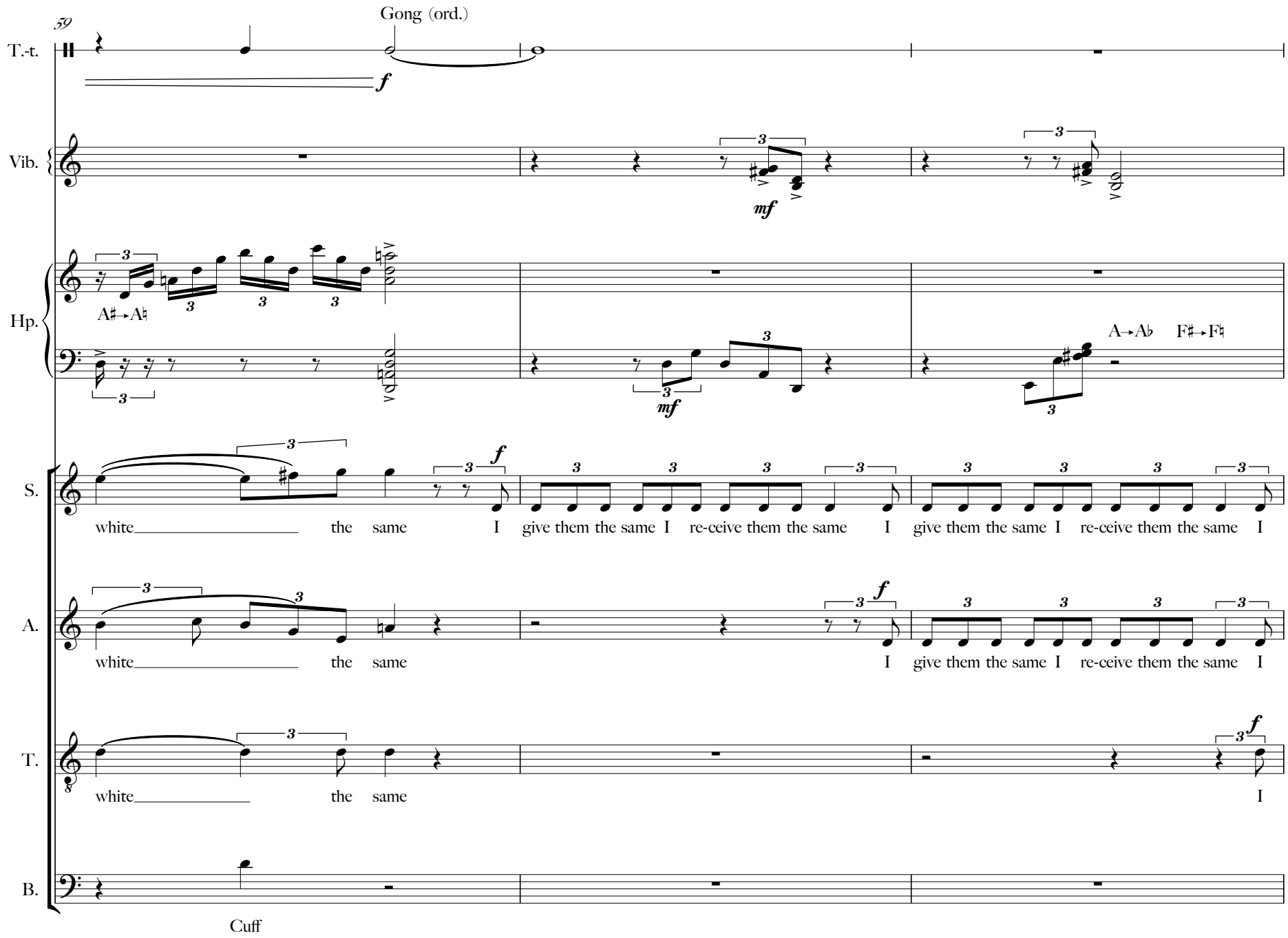

43
Vib.
Hp.
mf gliss
mp
A♯→A♮
S.
p
"Hm"
A.
mf with energy
Or I guess I
T.
babe of the ve - ge - ta - - - - - tion
B.

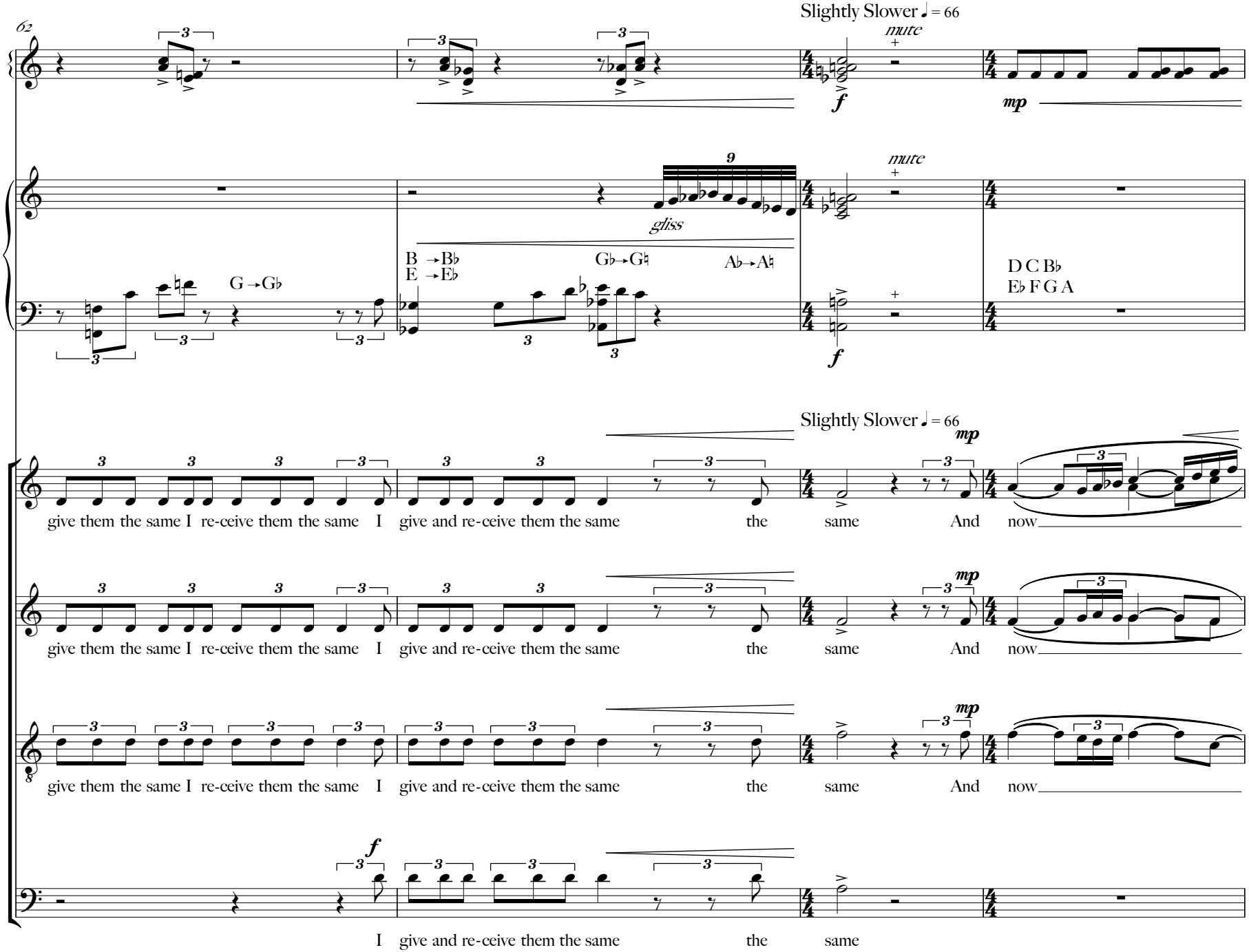

46
Vib.
Hp.
A→A♯
A♯→A♮
S.
Soprano 1
"Hm"
niente
mp
a u - ni -
Soprano 2
niente
mp
a u ni-form a
A.
Alto 1
mp
guess it is a u-ni-form a u-ni - form
Alto 2
mp
guess it is a u-ni - form
T.
B.

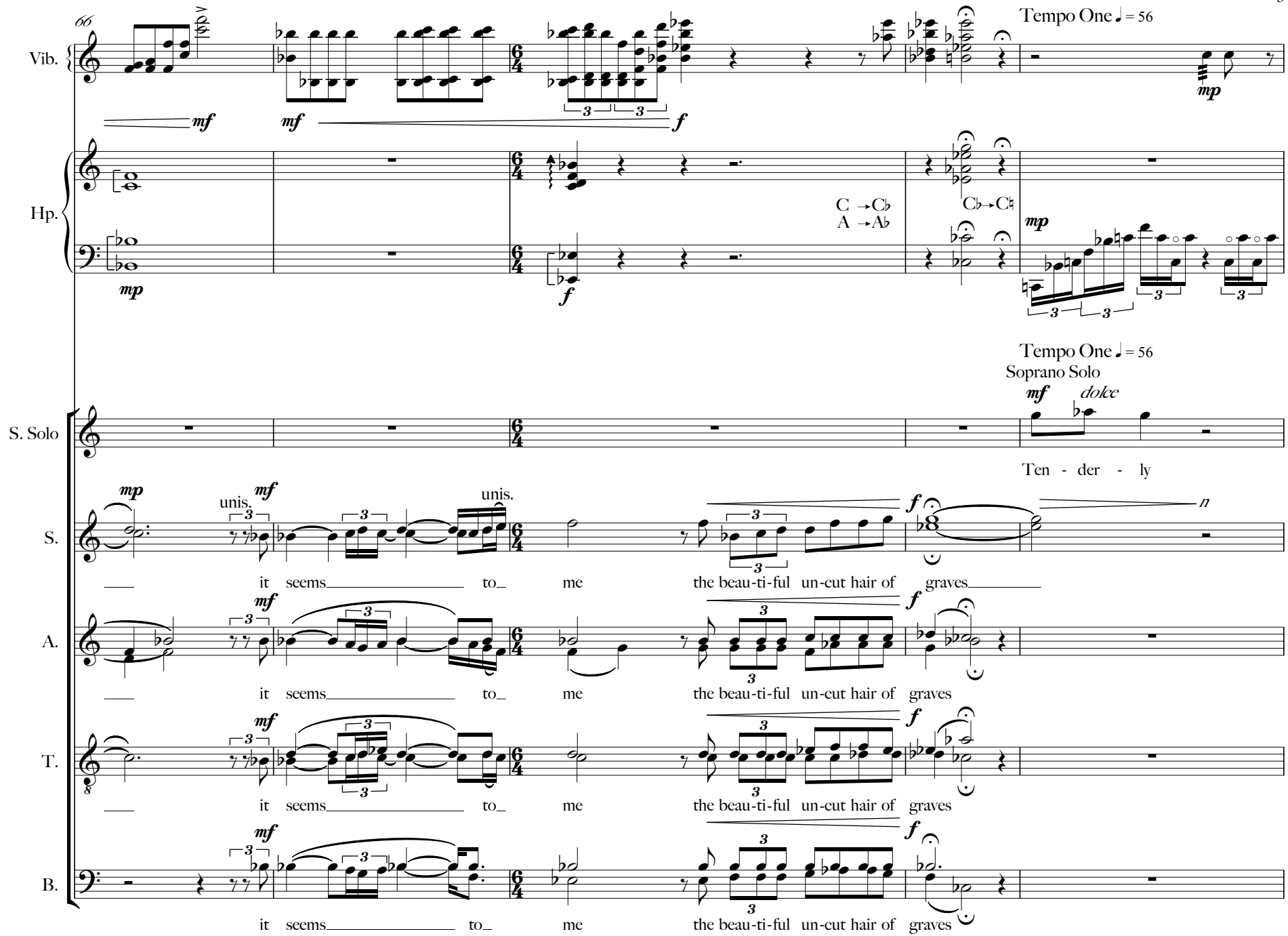

49
Vib.
Hp.
S.
A.
T.
B.
A→A♯
A♯→A♮
mf strong, with energy
f
form a u - ni - form a u - ni form a u-ni-form hie-ro-glyph-ic
u-ni-form a u-ni-form a u-ni-form a u-ni-form hie-ro-glyph-ic it means sprou-ting a -
a u-ni-form a u-ni-form a u-ni-form hie-ro-glyph-ic
a u-ni-form a u-ni-form a u-ni-form hie-ro-glyph-ic
a u-ni-form hie-ro-glyph-ic and it means sprou-ting a - like in
a u-ni-form hie-ro-glyph-ic
tutti
strong!

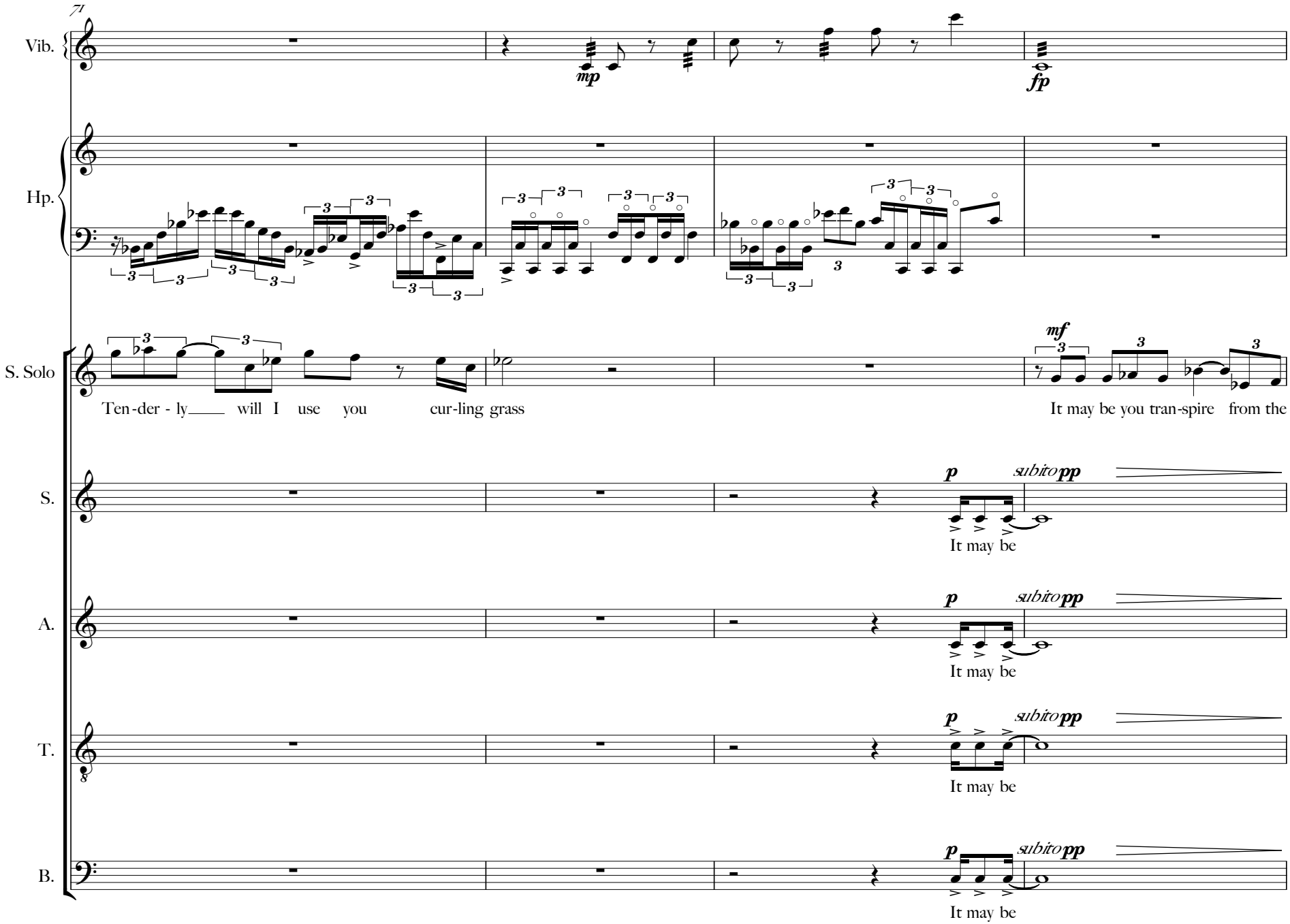

37
Vib.
Hp.
S.
like in broad_ and nar - row zones and gro - wing a - mong black folks as a - mong
Alto
Alto
A.
T.
broad zones_ and nar - row zo - - nes and gro -wing a - mong black folks as a - mong
B.

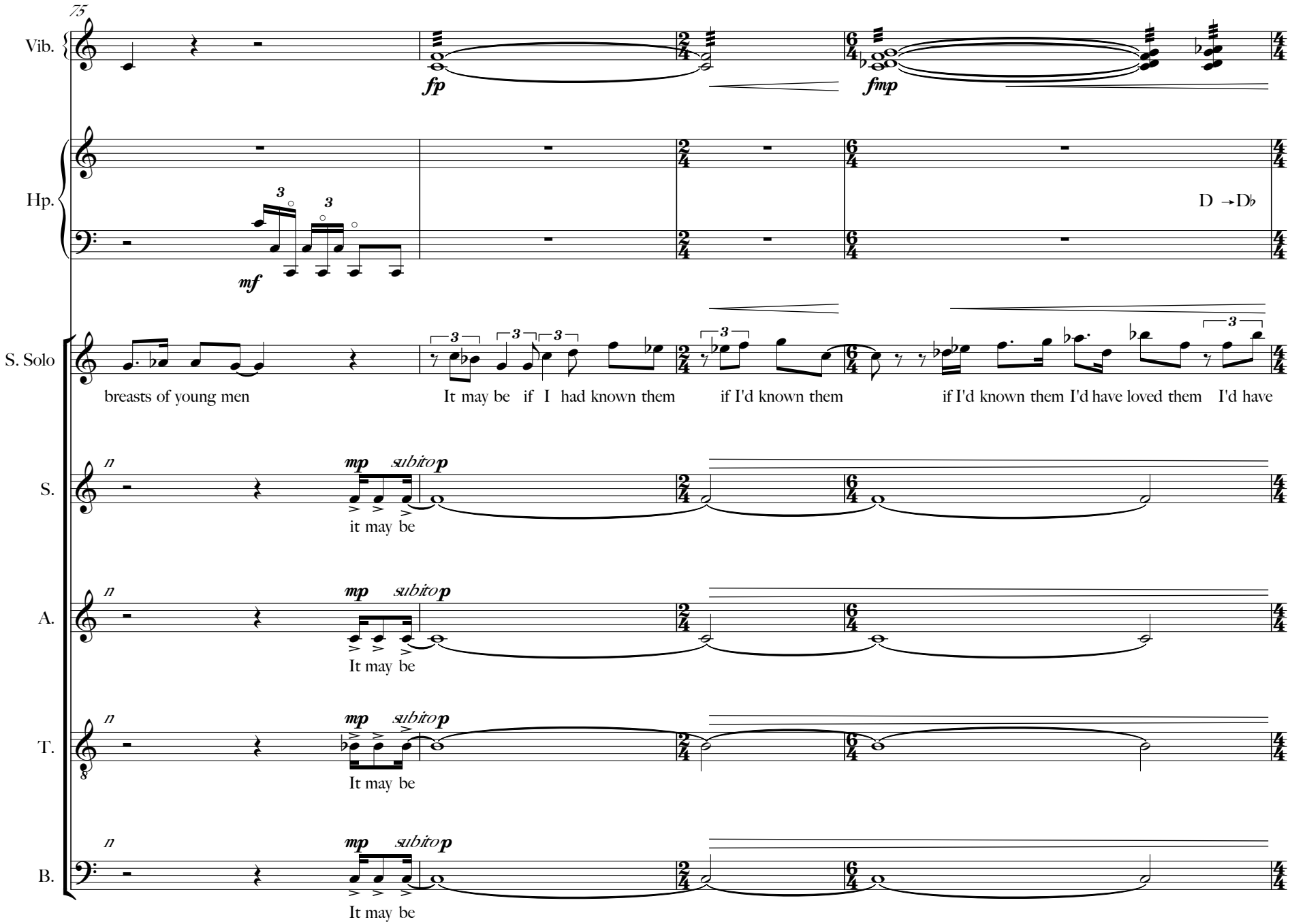

Rubber mallets (or suspended cymbal, if available)
T.-t.
mp
Vib.
Hp.
cresc. poco a poco
f
A→A♯
S.
white a-mong black as__ a-mong white a-mong black as__ a-mong white a mong black as__ a-mong
A.
mf
Ka-nuck
Tuck-a-hoe
Con-gress-man
f
a mong black as__ a-mong
T.
white a-mong black as__ a-mong white a-mong black as__ a-mong white a mong black as__ a-mong
B.
mf
Ka-nuck
Tuck-a-hoe
Con-gress-man

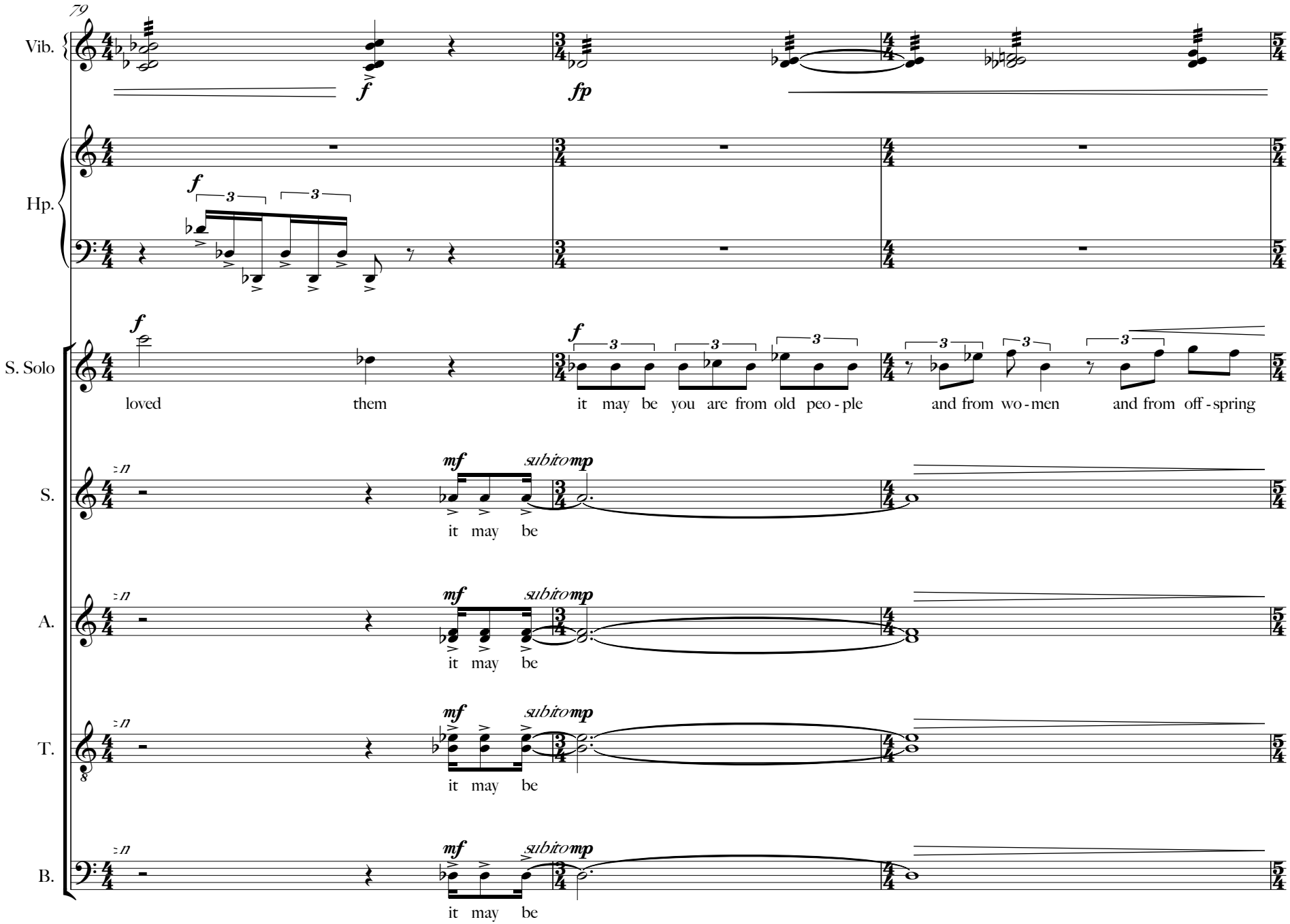

59
Gong (ord.)
T.-t.
Vib.
Hp.
A♯→A♮
A→A♭
F♯→F♮
S.
white the same I give them the same I re-ceive them the same I give them the same I re-ceive them the same I
A.
white the same I give them the same I re-ceive them the same I
T.
white the same I
B.
Cuff

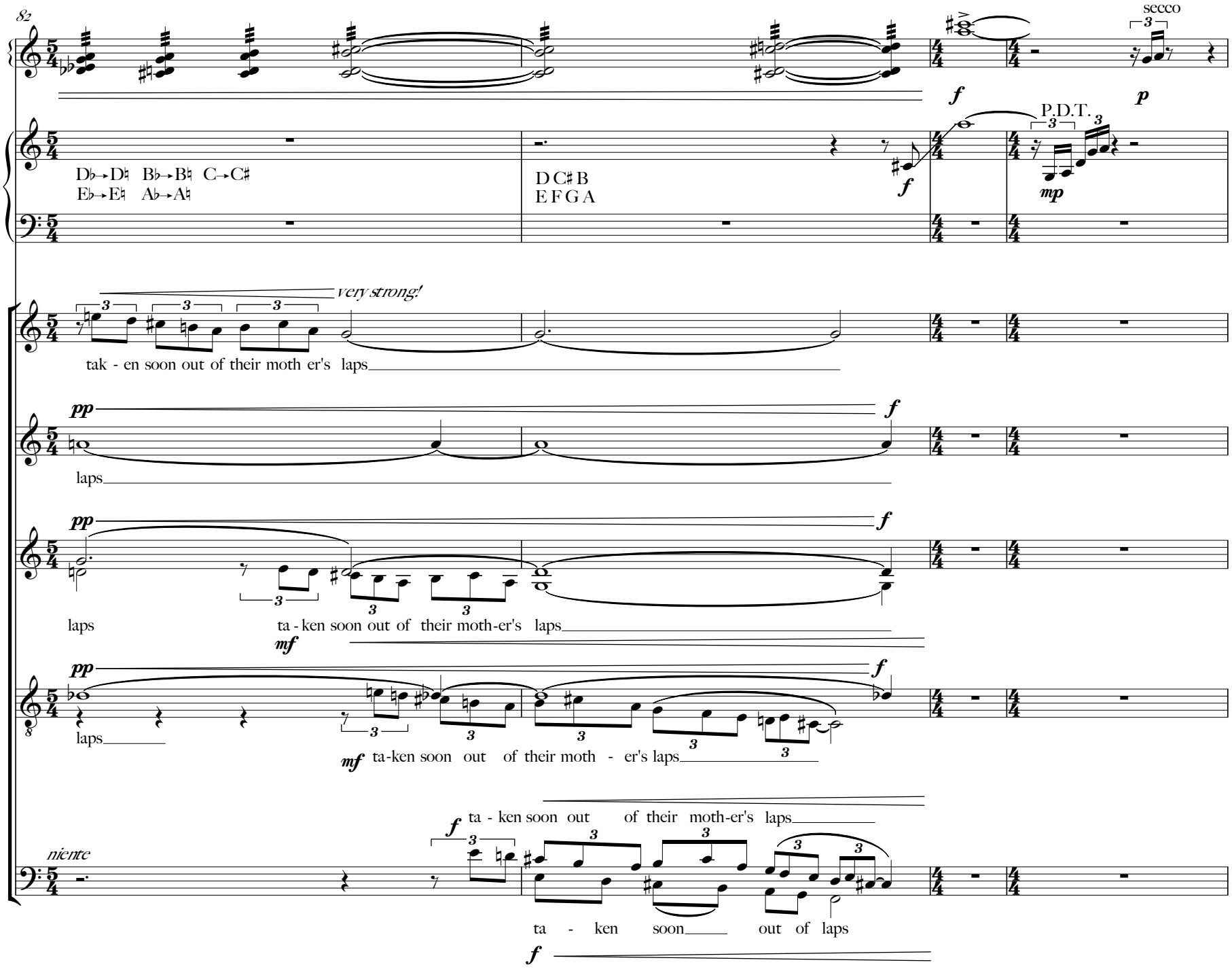

62
Slightly Slower ♩ = 66
Vib.
mute
f
mp
Hp.
gliss
mute
G → G♭
B → B♭
E → E♭
G♭ → G♮
A♭ → A♮
D C B♭
E♭ F G A
f
Slightly Slower ♩ = 66
S.
give them the same I re-ceive them the same I give and re-ceive them the same the same And now
A.
give them the same I re-ceive them the same I give and re-ceive them the same the same And now
T.
give them the same I re-ceive them the same I give and re-ceive them the same the same And now
B.
I give and re-ceive them the same the same

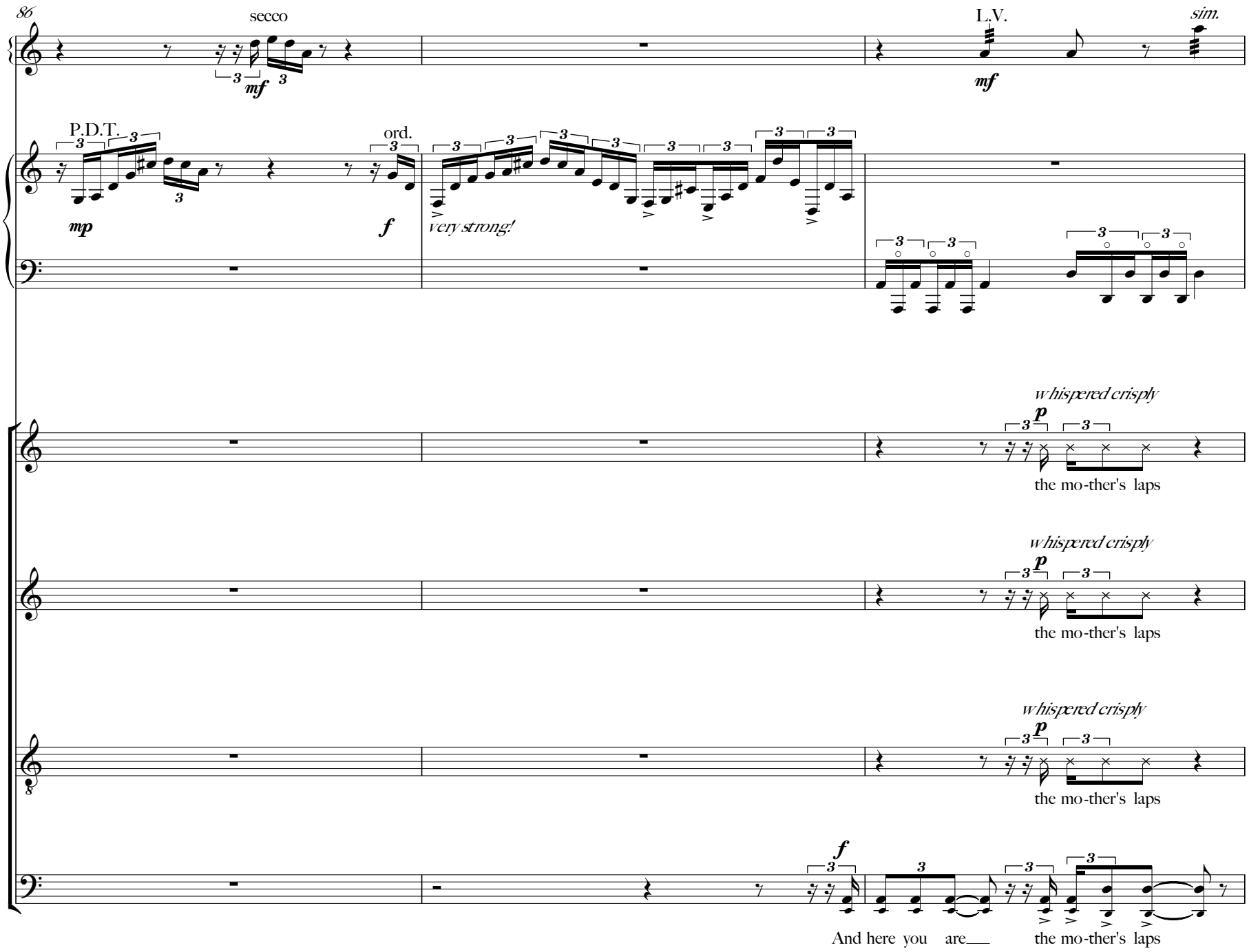

66
Vib.
Hp.
S. Solo
S.
A.
T.
B.
Tempo One ♩= 56
C →C♭
A →A♭
C♭→C♮
Tempo One ♩= 56
Soprano Solo
dolce
Ten - der - ly
unis.
unis.
it seems to me the beau-ti-ful un-cut hair of graves

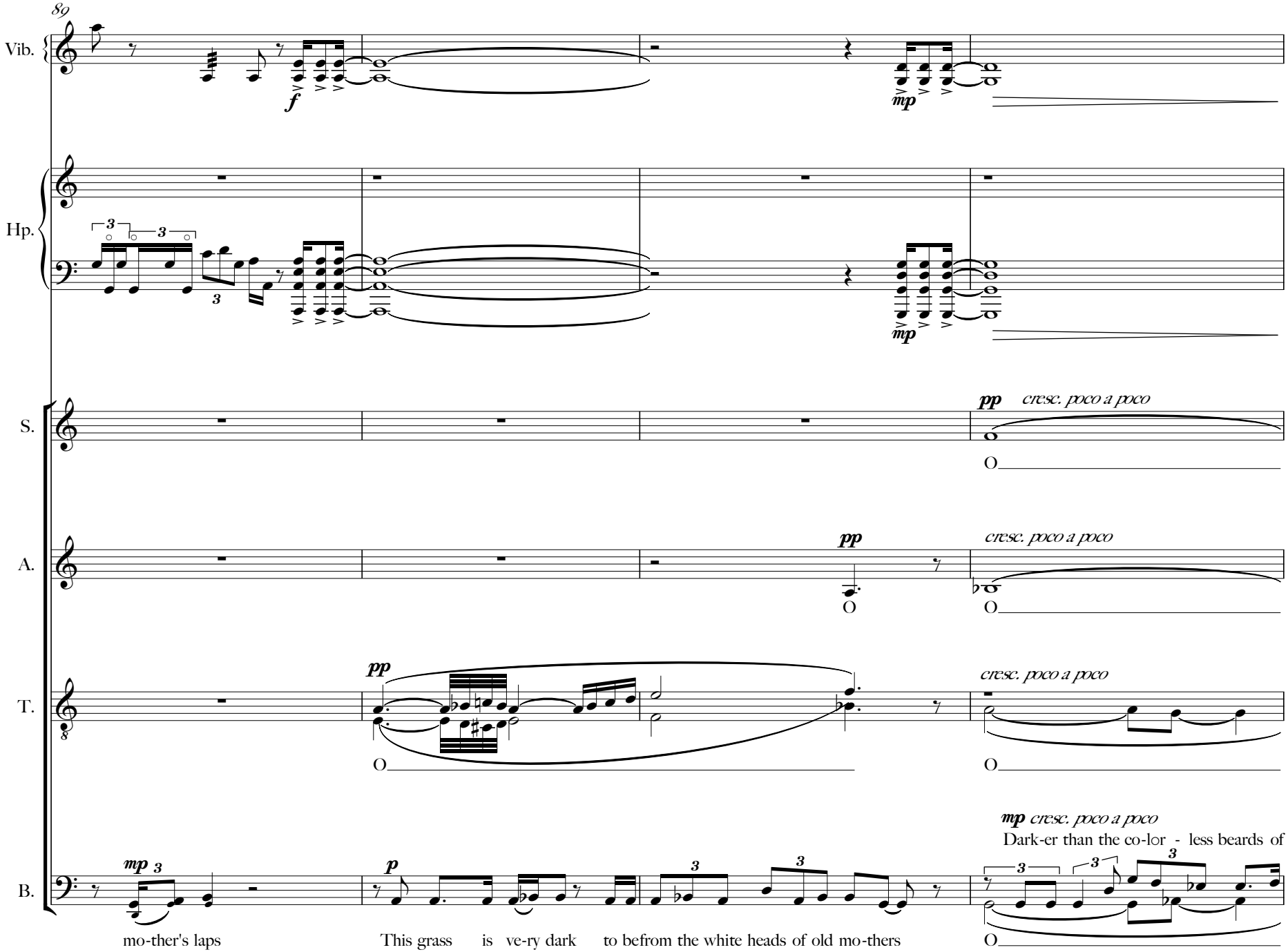

71
Vib.
mp
fp
Hp.
S. Solo
Ten-der - ly___ will I use you cur-ling grass
mf
It may be you tran-spire from the
S.
p
subito pp
It may be
A.
p
subito pp
It may be
T.
p
subito pp
It may be
B.
p
subito pp
It may be

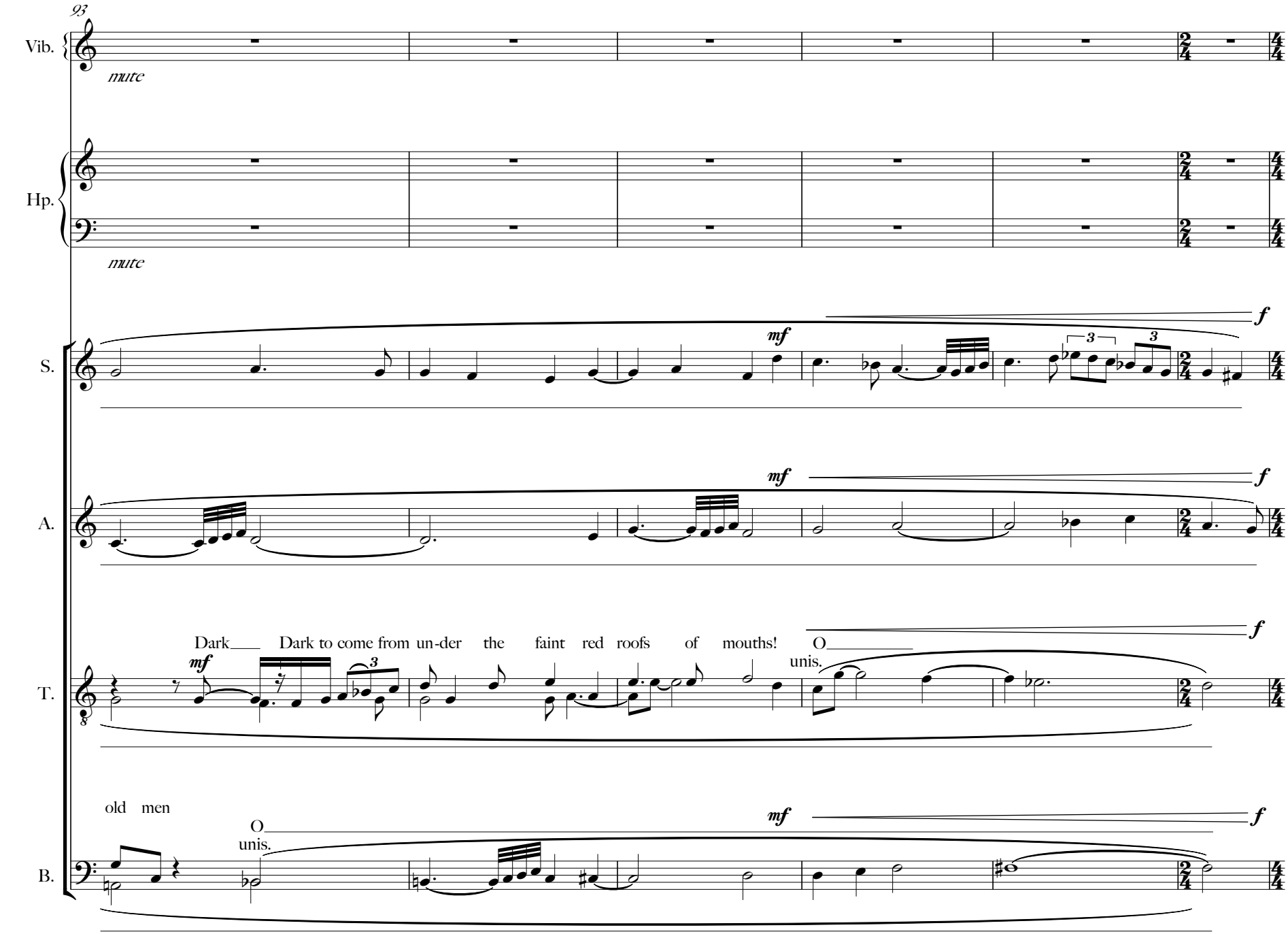

75
Vib.
fp
fmp
Hp.
mf
D →D♭
S. Solo
breasts of young men
It may be if I had known them
if I'd known them
if I'd known them I'd have loved them I'd have
S.
mp subito p
it may be
A.
mp subito p
It may be
T.
mp subito p
It may be
B.
mp subito p
It may be

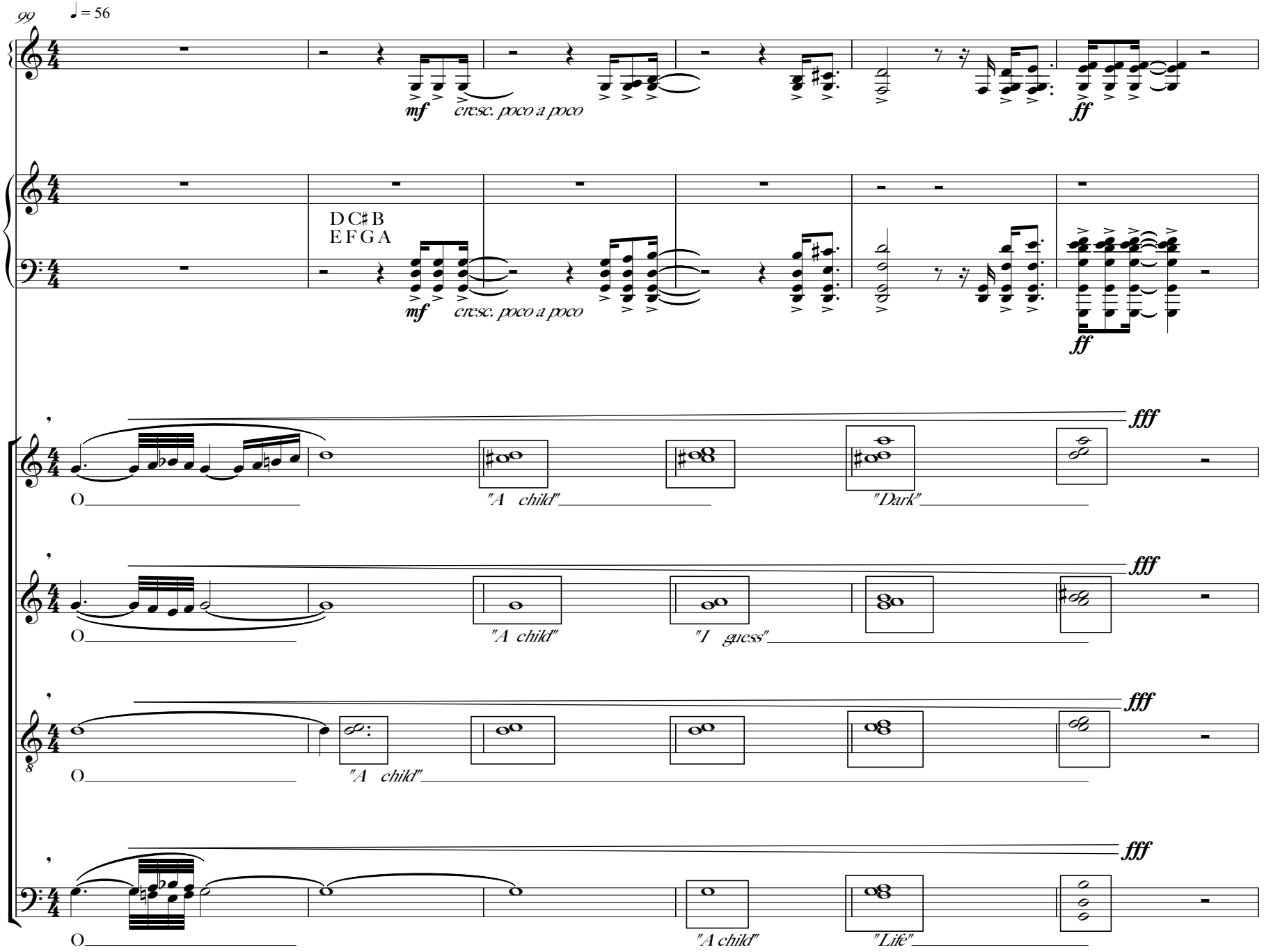

79
Vib.
f
fp
Hp.
f
3
3
S. Solo
f
loved
them
f
3
3
3
it may be you are from old peo - ple
3
3
3
and from wo - men
and from off - spring
S.
mf
subito mp
it may be
A.
mf
subito mp
it may be
T.
8
mf
subito mp
it may be
B.
mf
subito mp
it may be

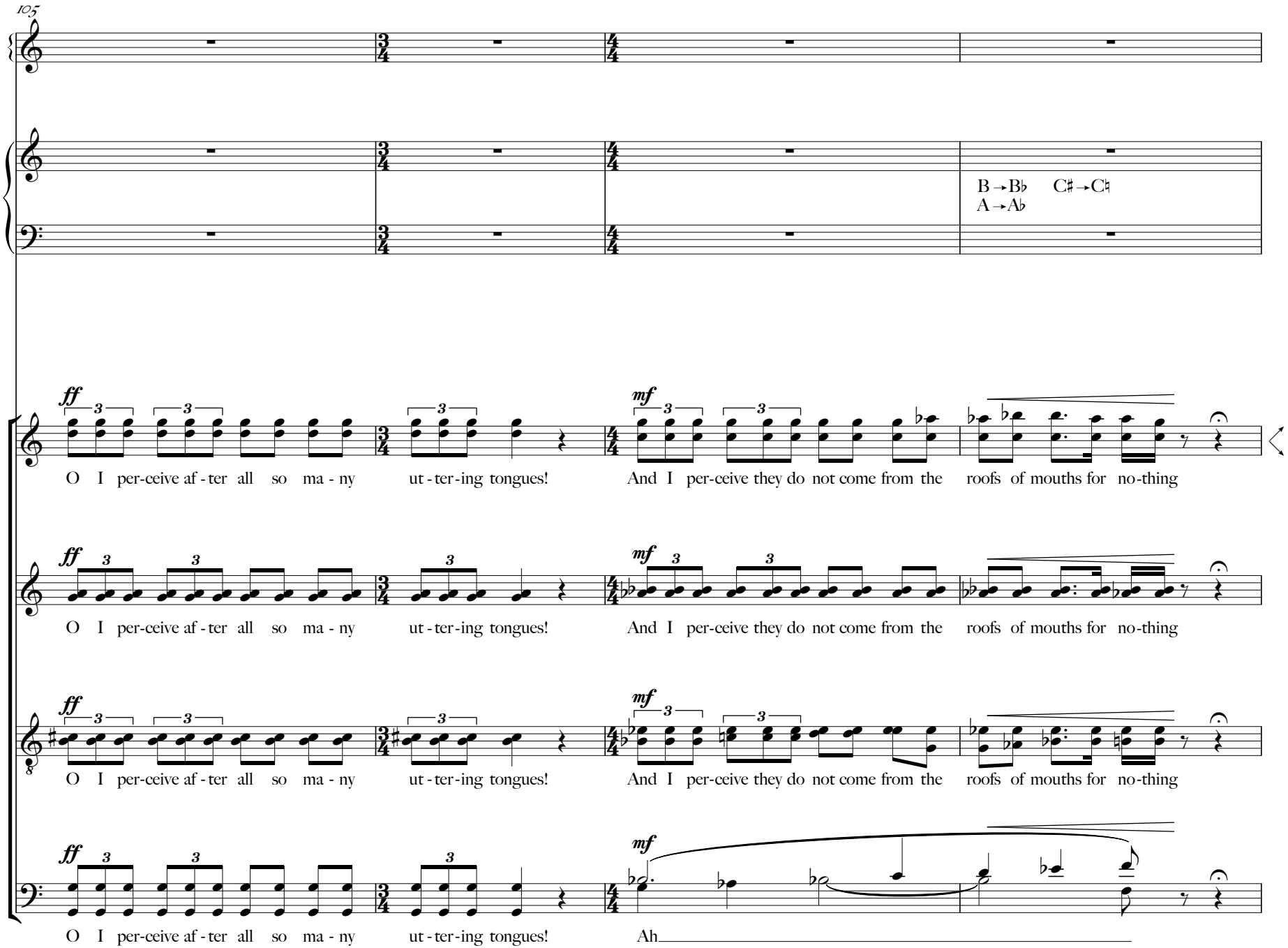

82
Vib.
secco
f
p
Hp.
D♭→D♮ B♭→B♮ C→C♯
E♭→E♮ A♭→A♮
D C♯ B
E F G A
f
P.D.T.
mp
S. Solo
very strong!
tak - en soon out of their moth er's laps
S.
pp
f
laps
A.
pp
f
laps
ta - ken soon out of their moth-er's laps
mf
T.
pp
f
laps
mf ta-ken soon out of their moth - er's laps
f ta - ken soon out of their moth-er's laps
niente
B.
ta - ken soon out of laps
f

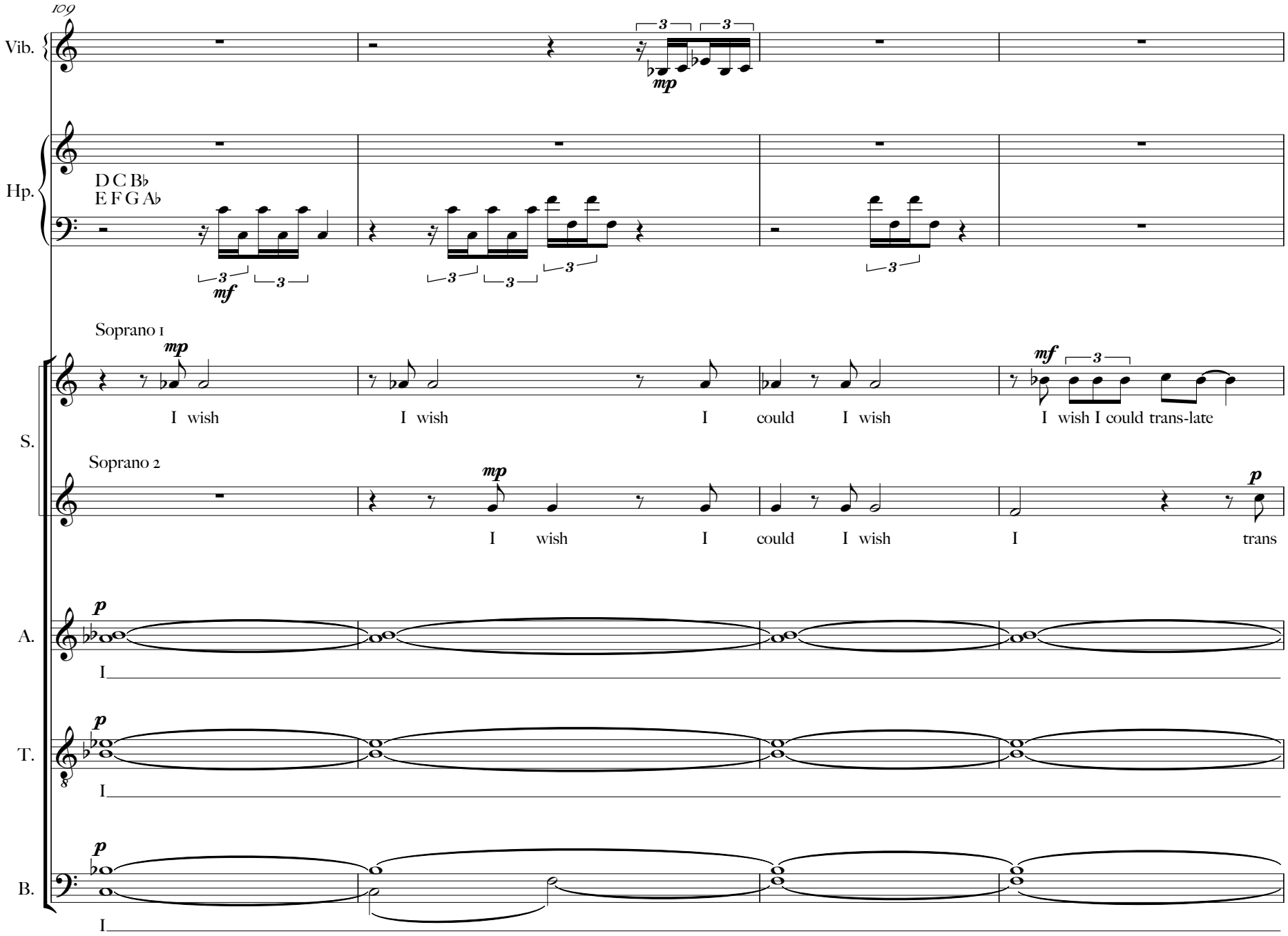

86
Vib.
secco
mf
L.V.
mf
sim.
P.D.T.
ord.
Hp.
mp
f
very strong!
S.
whispered crisply
p
the mo-ther's laps
A.
whispered crisply
p
the mo-ther's laps
T.
whispered crisply
p
the mo-ther's laps
B.
f
And here you are
the mo-ther's laps

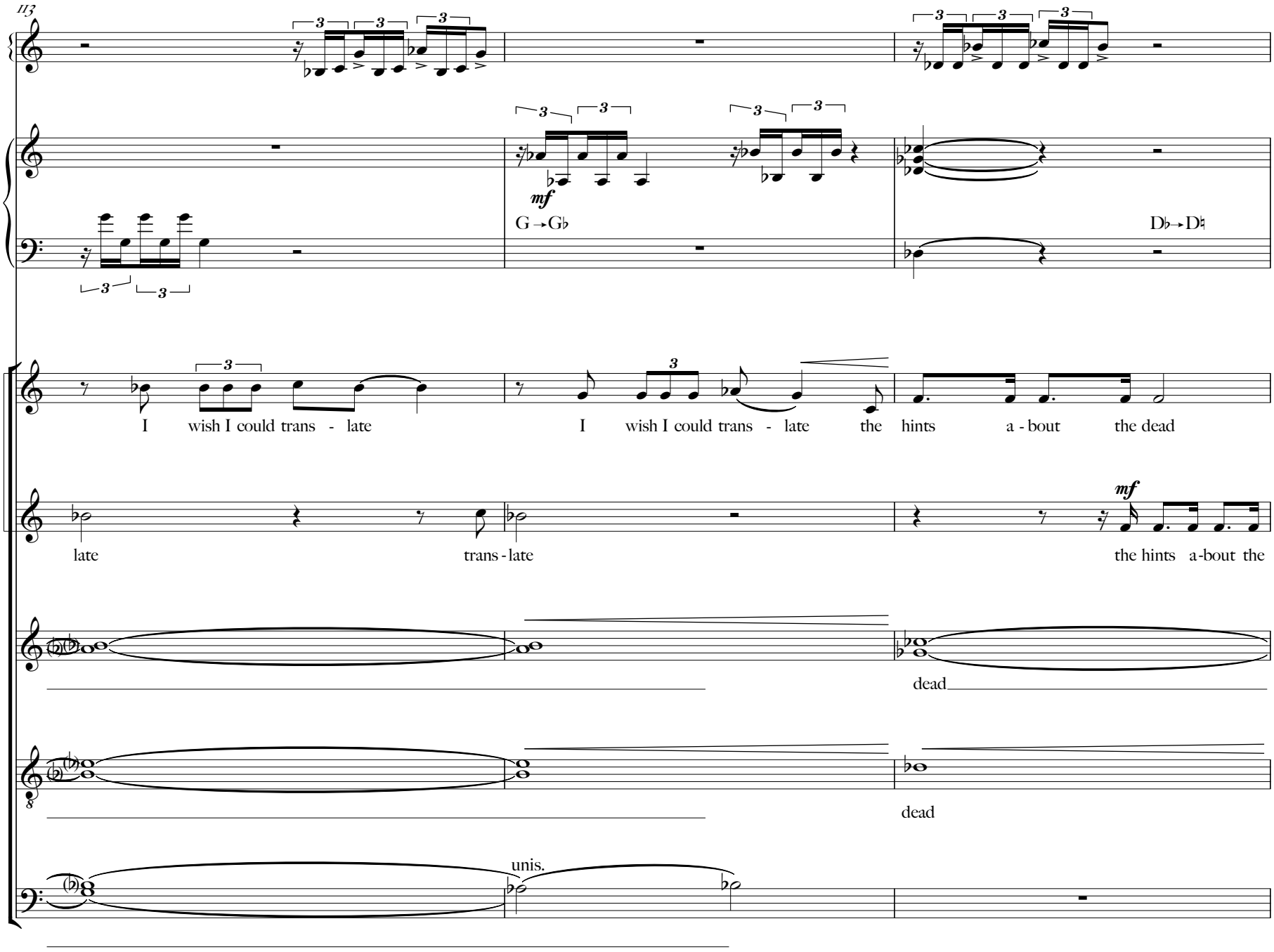

89
Vib.
Hp.
S.
A.
T.
B.
f
mp
pp
cresc. poco a poco
O
mp cresc. poco a poco
Dark-er than the co-lor - less beards of
mo-ther's laps
This grass is ve-ry dark to befrom the white heads of old mo-thers

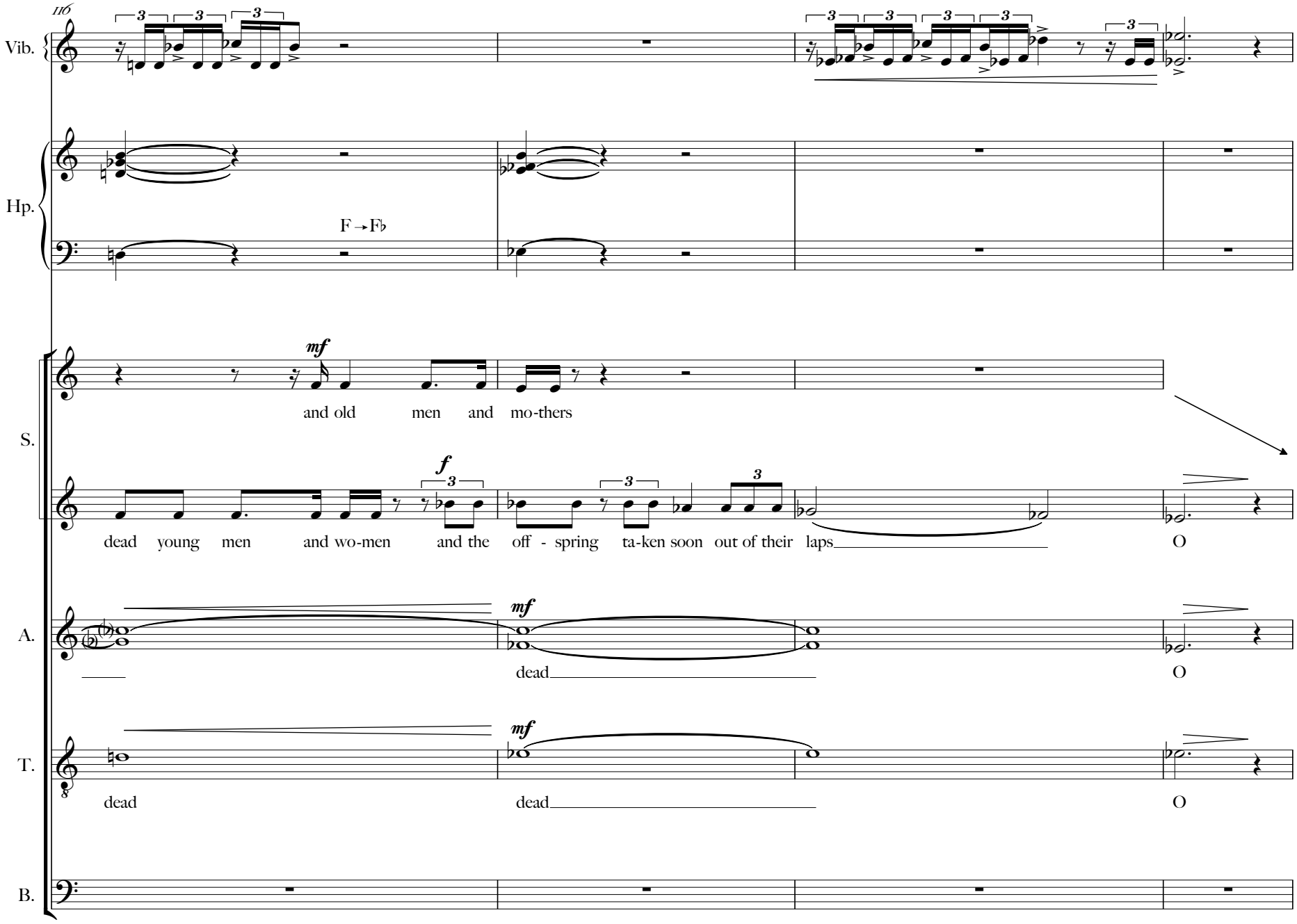

93
Vib.
mute
Hp.
mute
S.
A.
T.
B.
mf
f
Dark Dark to come from un-der the faint red roofs of mouths! O
unis.
old men
O
unis.

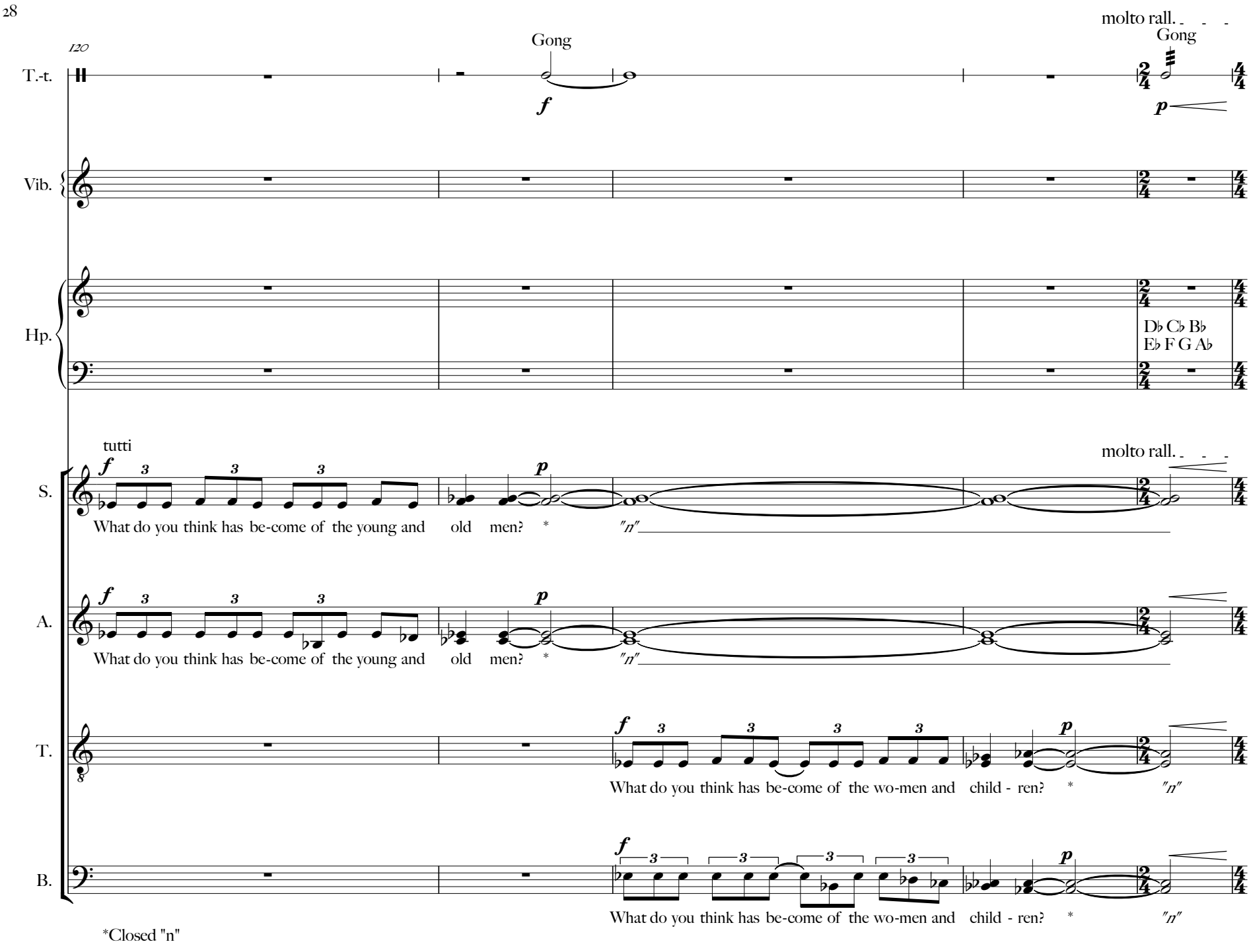

99
♩ = 56
Vib.
mf
cresc. poco a poco
ff
Hp.
D C♯ B
E F G A
mf
cresc. poco a poco
ff
S.
fff
"A child"
"Dark"
A.
fff
"A child"
"I guess"
T.
fff
"A child"
B.
fff
"A child"
"Life"

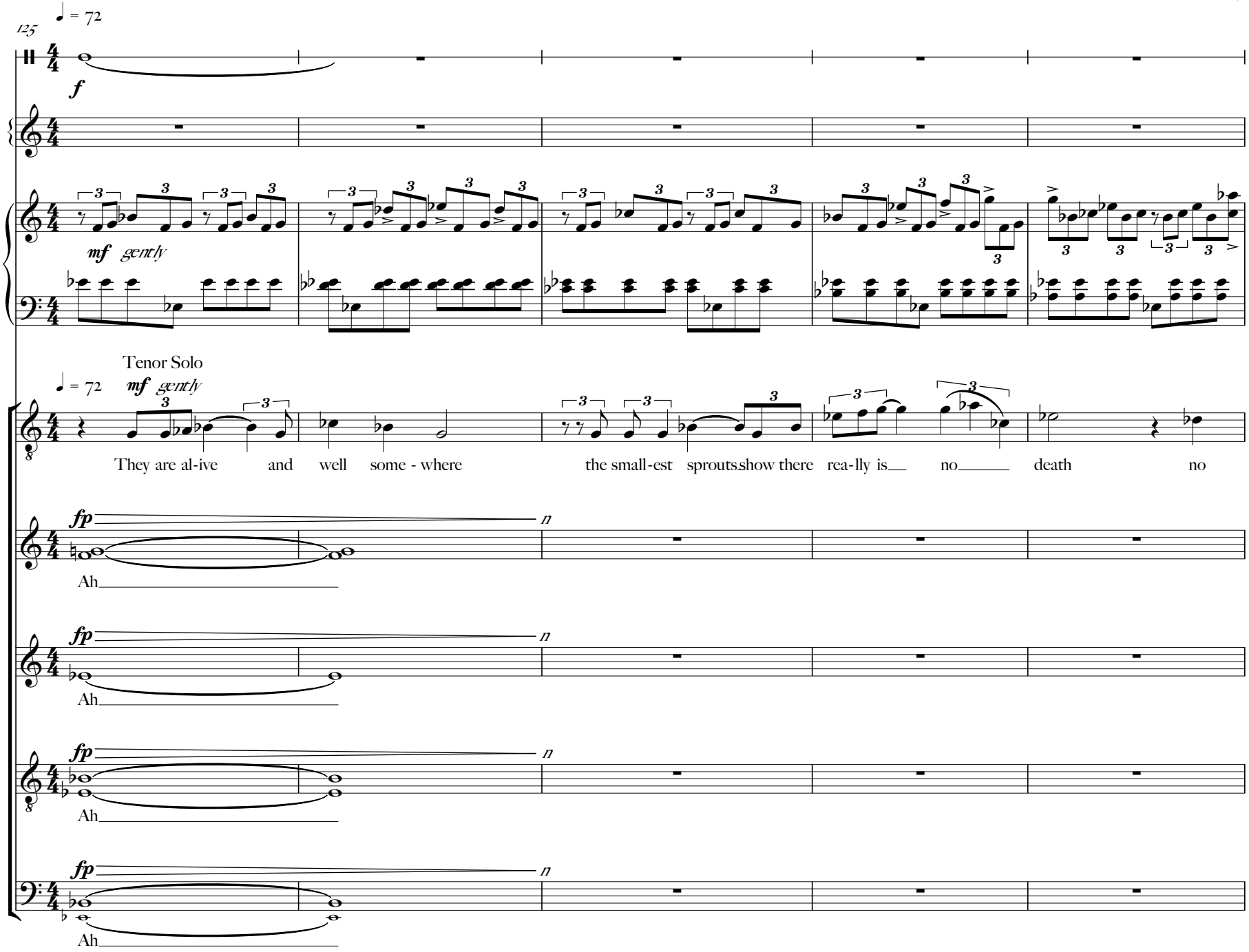

105
Vib.
Hp.
B→B♭ C♯→C♮
A→A♭
S.
A.
T.
B.
ff
mf
O I per-ceive af-ter all so ma-ny ut-ter-ing tongues!
And I per-ceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths for no-thing
Ah

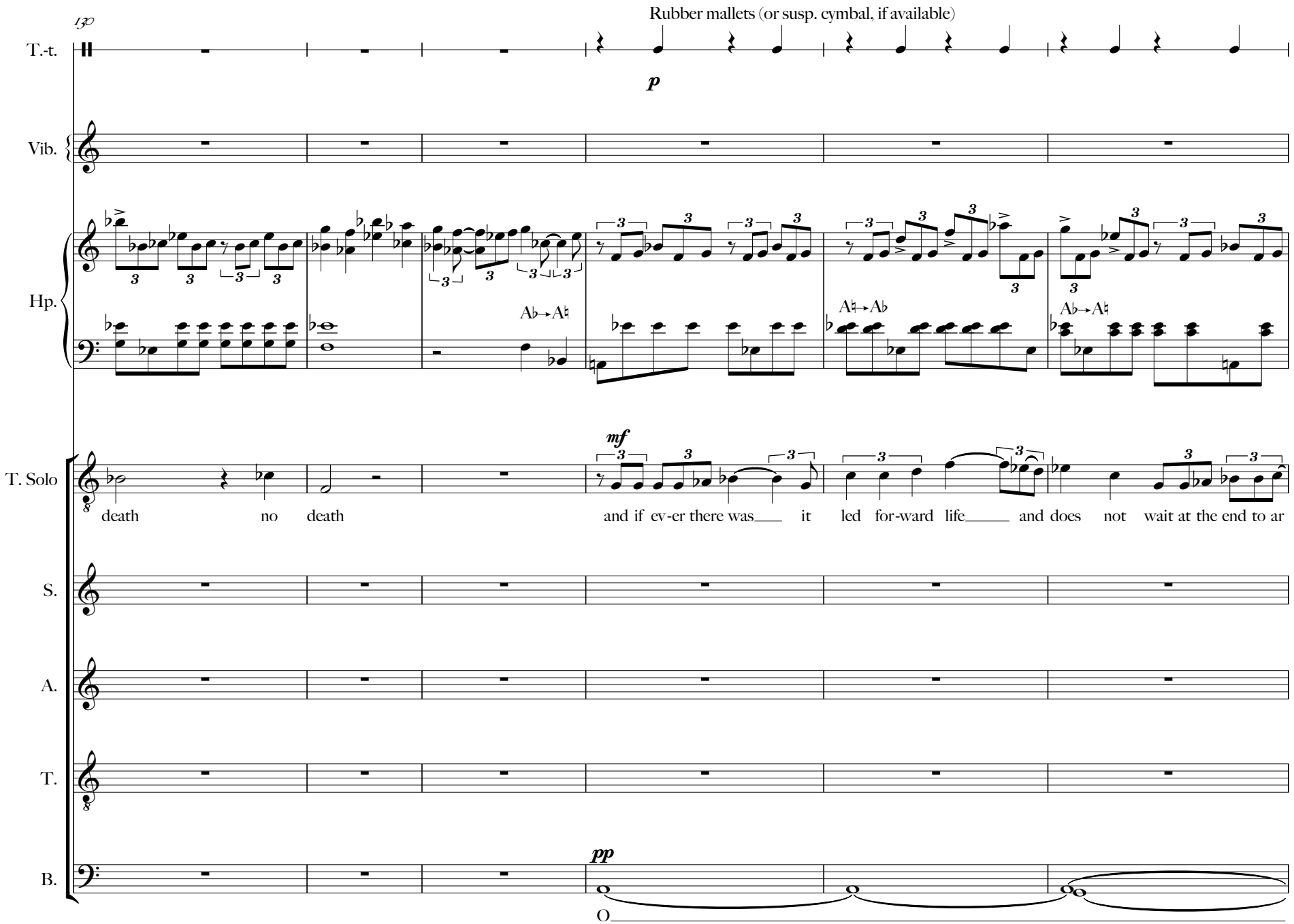

109
Vib.
mp
Hp.
D C B♭
E F G A♭
mf
Soprano 1
mp
I wish
I wish
I
could
I wish
mf
I wish I could trans-late
Soprano 2
mp
I
wish
I
could
I wish
I
p
trans
S.
A.
p
I
T.
p
I
B.
p
I

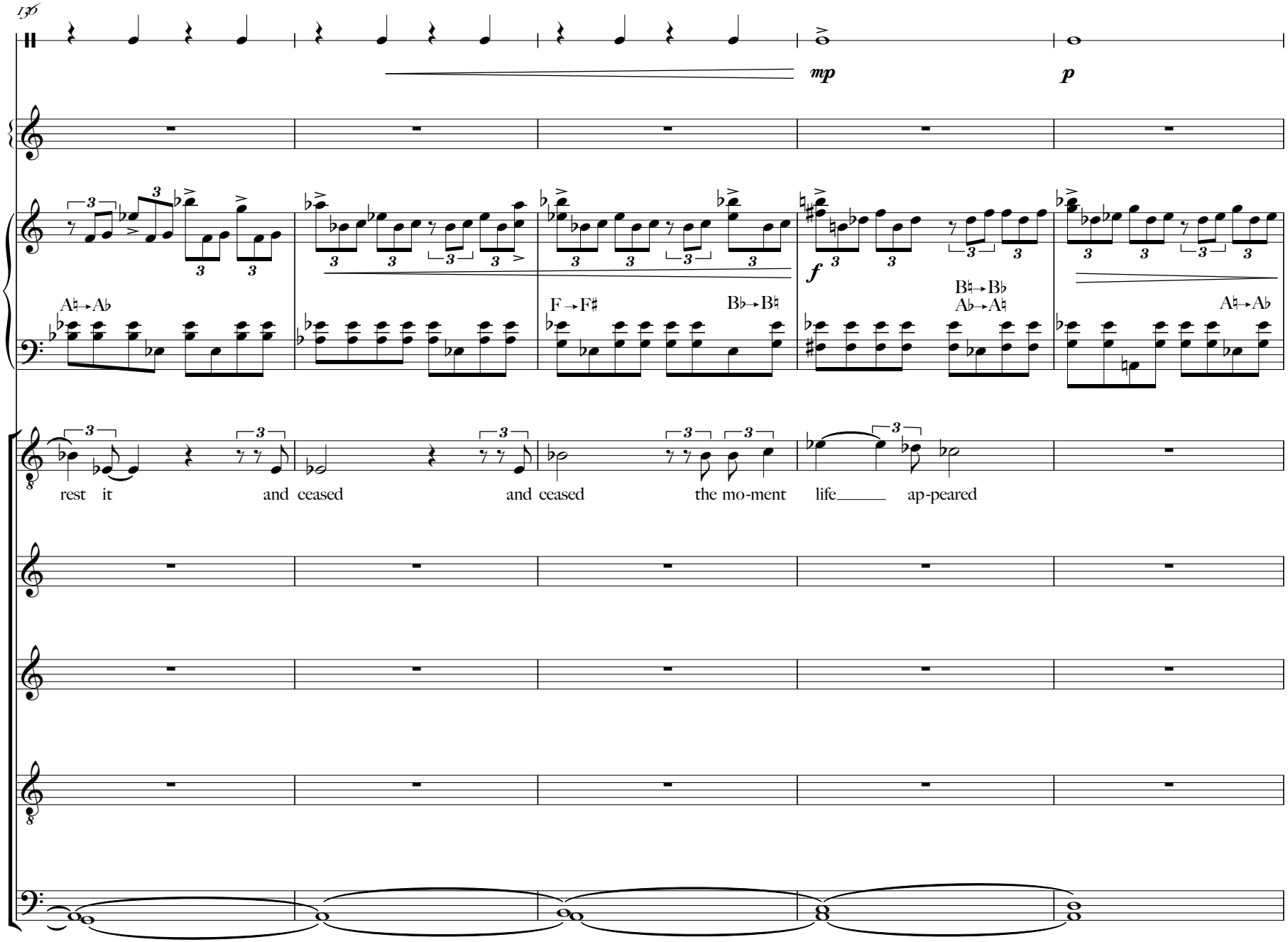

Vib.
Hp.
S.
A.
T.
B.
mf
G → G♭
D♭ → D♮
I wish I could trans - late
I wish I could trans - late the hints a - bout the dead
late
trans - late
mf
the hints a-bout the
dead
dead
unis.

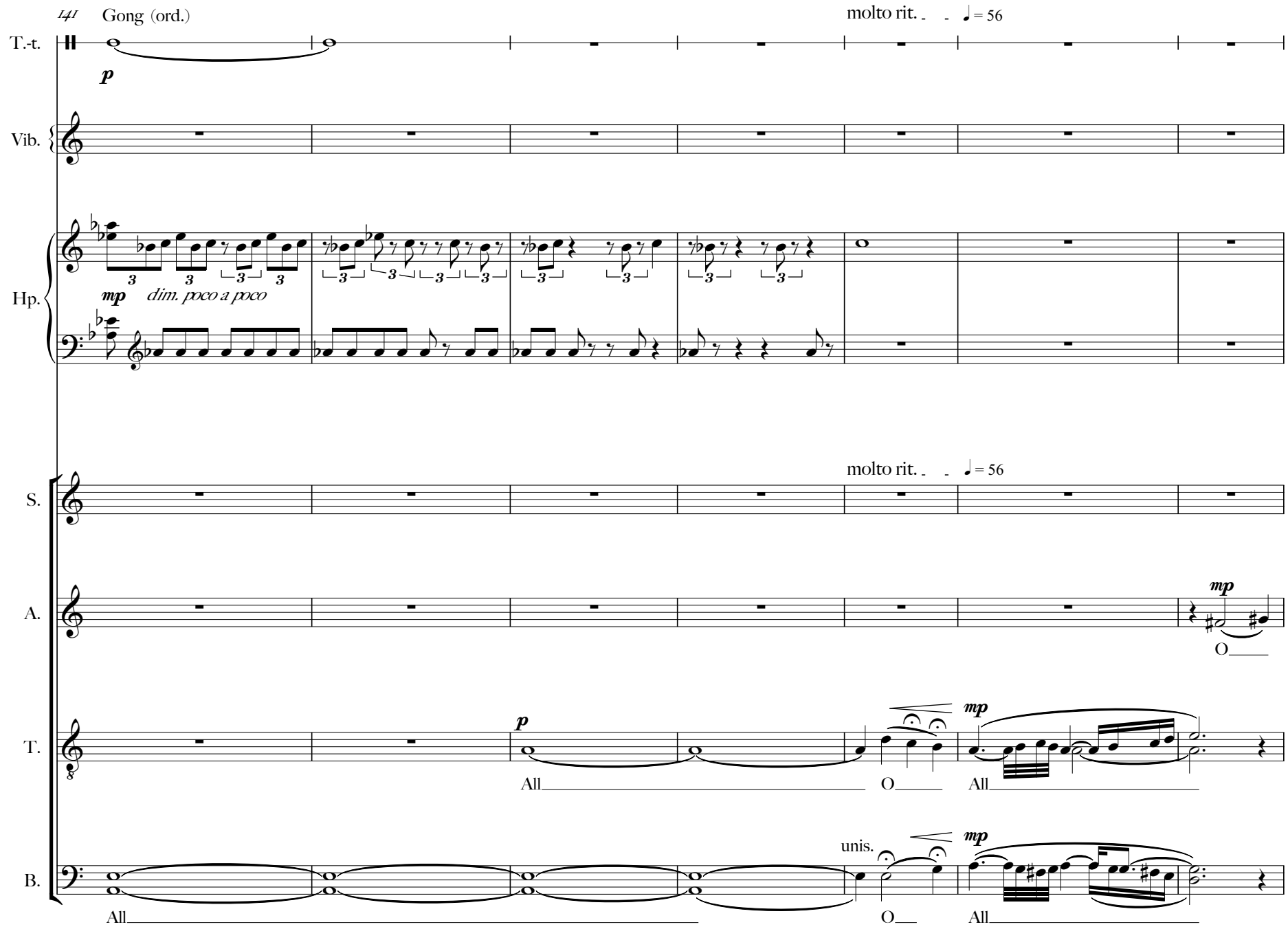

110
Vib.
Hp.
F → F♭
S.
mf
and old men and mo-thers
f
dead young men and wo-men and the off - spring ta-ken soon out of their laps
O
A.
mf
dead
O
T.
mf
dead
dead
O
B.

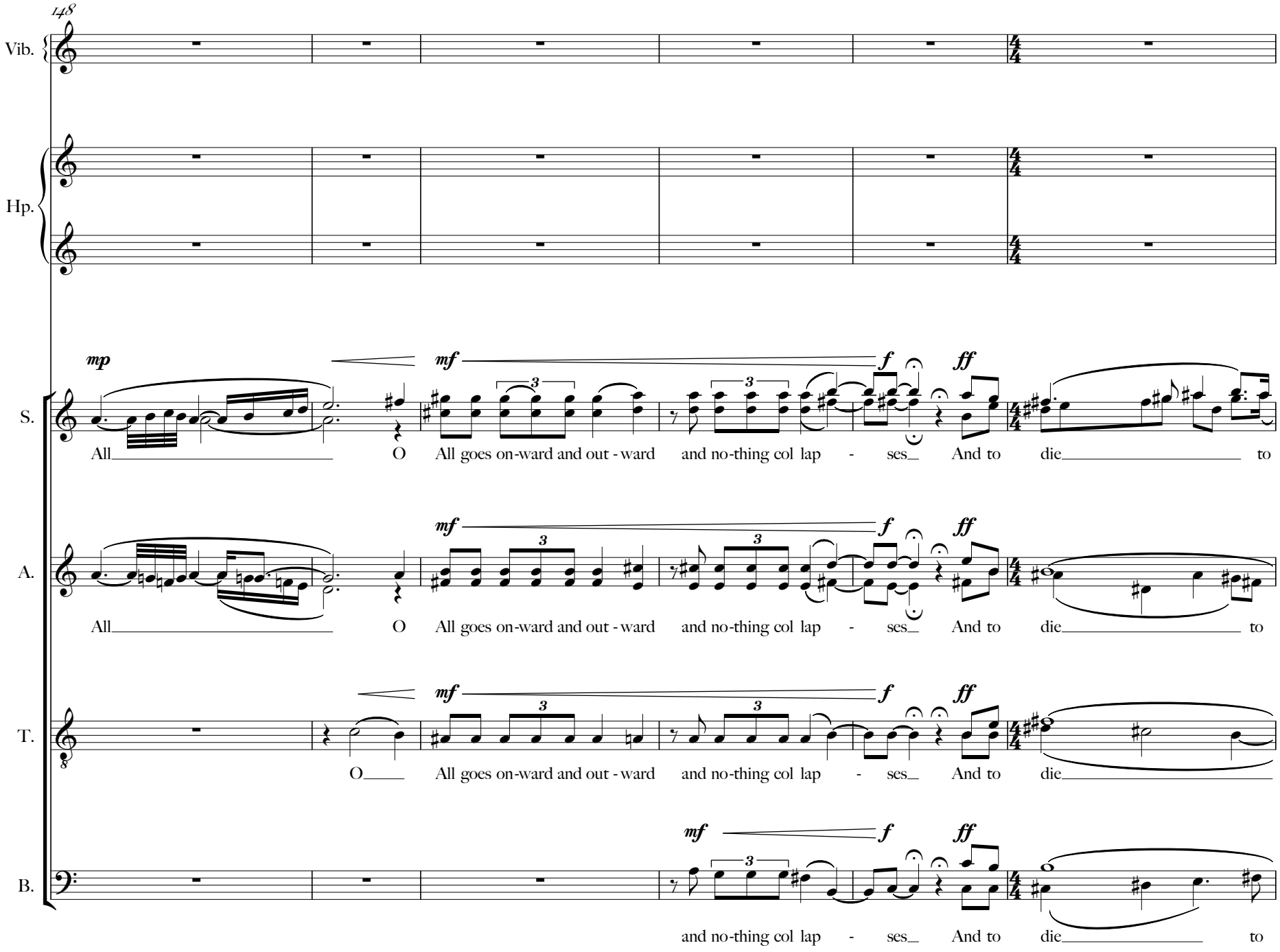

molto rall.
Gong
120
T.-t.
Gong
f
p
Vib.
Hp.
Db Cb Bb
Eb F G Ab
tutti
molto rall.
S.
What do you think has be-come of the young and old men? *
A.
What do you think has be-come of the young and old men? *
T.
What do you think has be-come of the wo-men and child - ren? *
B.
What do you think has be-come of the wo-men and child - ren? *
*Closed "n"

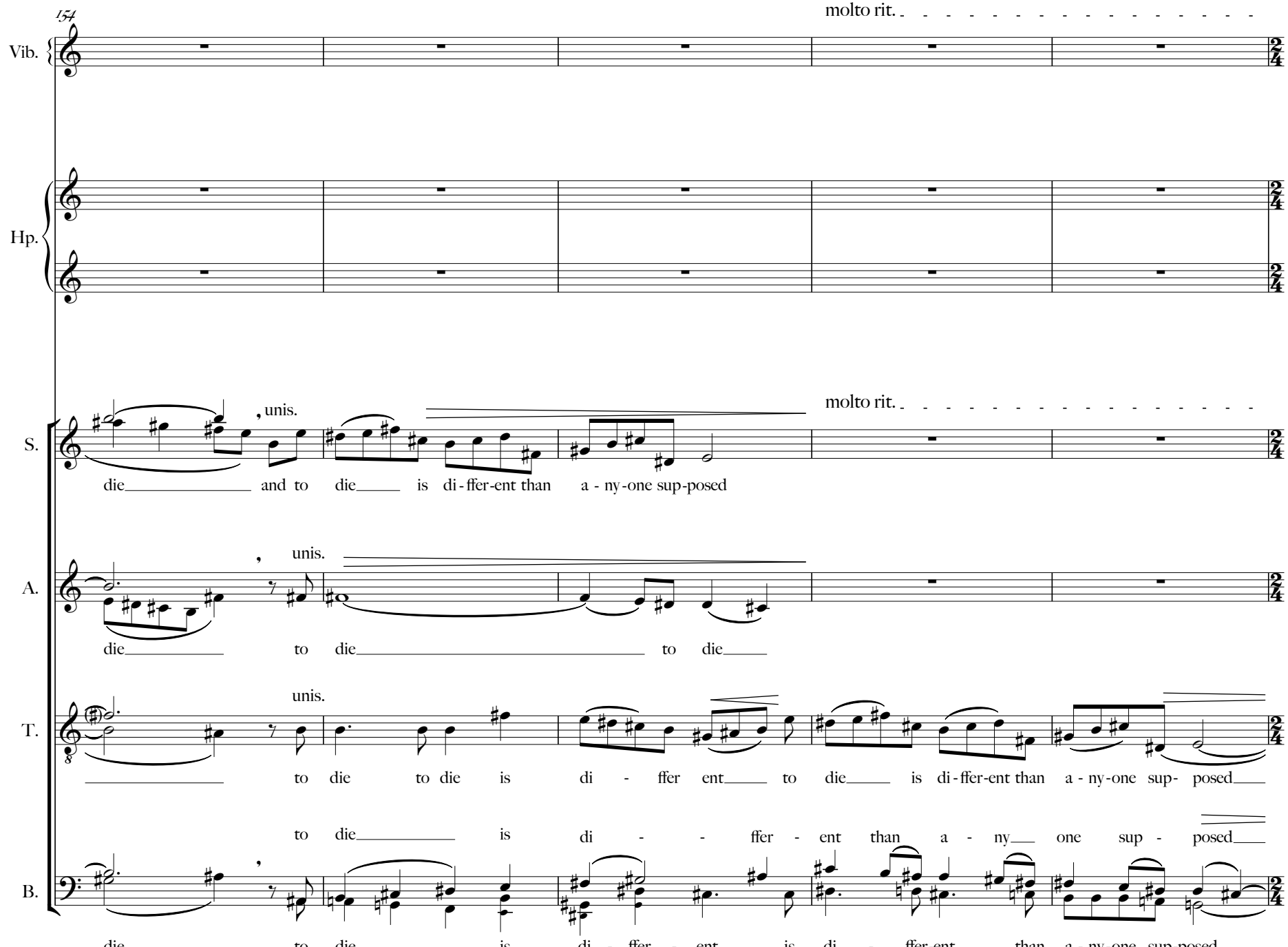

125
♩ = 72
T.-t.
f
Vib.
Hp.
mf gently
Tenor Solo
♩ = 72
mf gently
T. Solo
They are al-ive and well some - where the small-est sprouts show there rea-lly is no death no
S.
fp
Ah
A.
fp
Ah
T.
fp
Ah
B.
fp
Ah

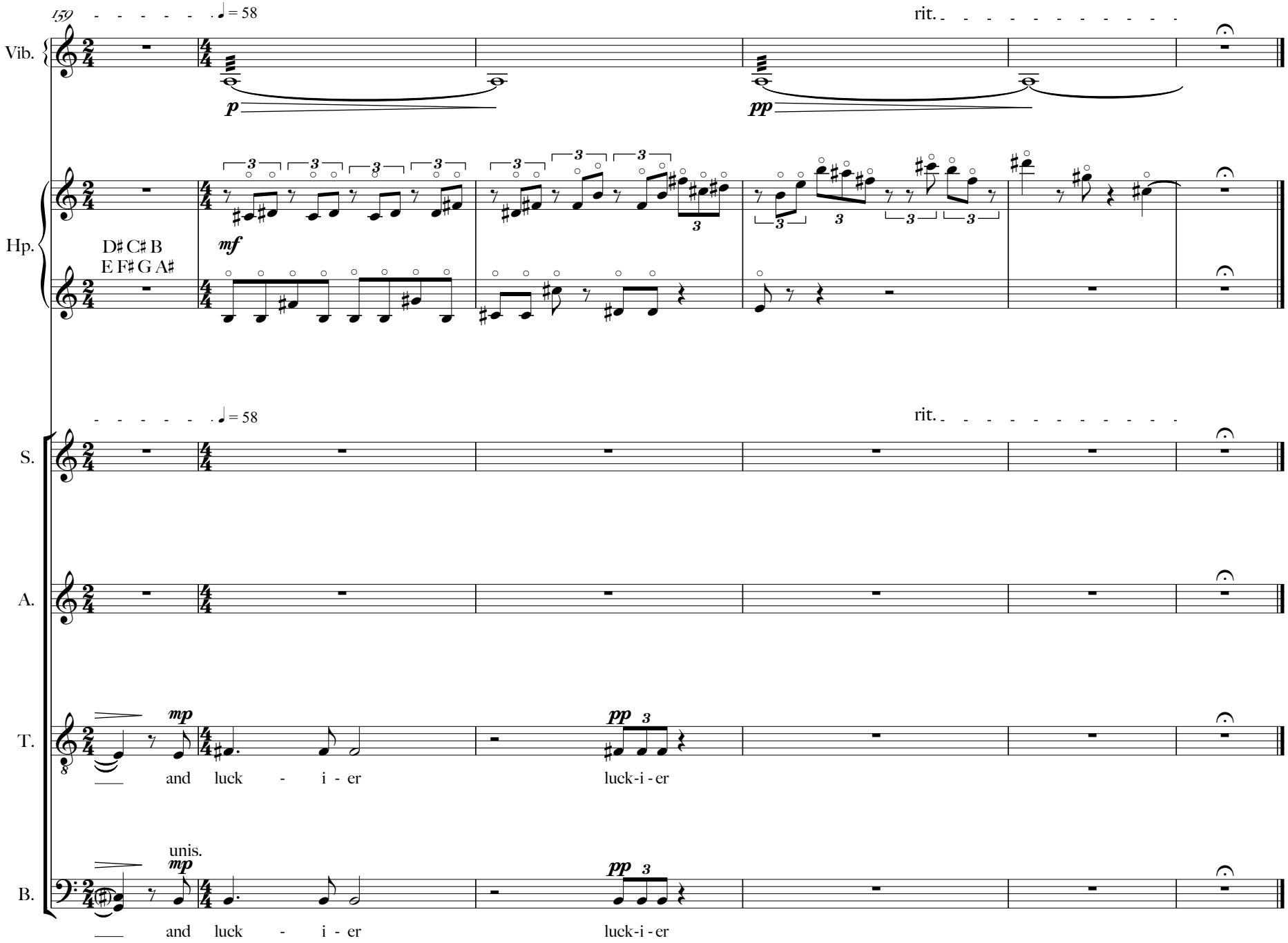

130
Rubber mallets (or susp. cymbal, if available)
T.-t.
p
Vib.
Hp.
Ab→A♮
A♮→Ab
Ab→A♮
T. Solo
mf
death no death and if ev-er there was it led for-ward life and does not wait at the end to ar
S.
A.
T.
B.
pp
O


15
T.-t.
mp
p
Vib.
Hp.
A♮→A♭
F→F♯
B♭→B♮
B♮→B♭
A♭→A♮
A♮→A♭
f
T. Solo
rest it
and ceased
and ceased
the mo-ment
life
ap-peared
S.
A.
T.
B.


141
Gong (ord.)
molto rit.
♩= 56
T.-t.
p
Vib.
Hp.
mp
dim. poco a poco
molto rit.
♩= 56
S.
A.
mp
O
T.
p
All
O
mp
All
unis.
mp
B.
All
O
All


148
Vib.
Hp.
S.
A.
T.
B.
mp
mf
f
ff
All O All goes on-ward and out - ward and no-thing col lap - ses And to die to
O All goes on-ward and out - ward and no-thing col lap - ses And to die
and no-thing col lap - ses And to die to


154
molto rit.
Vib.
Hp.
molto rit.
S.
unis.
die and to die is di-ffer-ent than a-ny-one sup-posed
A.
unis.
die to die to die
T.
unis.
to die to die is di - ffer ent to die is di-ffer-ent than a-ny-one sup- posed
to die is di - - ffer - ent than a - ny one sup - posed
B.
die to die is di - ffer - ent is di - ffer-ent than a-ny-one sup-posed


159
♩ = 58
rit.
Vib.
p
pp
Hp.
D♯ C♯ B
E F♯ G A♯
mf
S.
A.
T.
mp
pp
and luck - i - er
luck-i - er
unis.
B.