Robert G. Patterson

Life Signs

six songs on texts by Emily Dickinson
for soprano, horn, percussion, and piano
(1999)

Great River Music
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GRM–01012
Memphis, TN

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Percussion

Bongos (2)
Vibraslap
Temple Blocks (5)

Finger Cymbals
Small Tam-tam (Water Gong)
Medium Tam-tam
Suspended Cymbal

Glockenspiel
Vibraphone

Texts by Emily Dickinson

1

Surgeons must be very careful
When they take the knife!
Underneath their fine incisions
Stirs the Culprit – *Life!*

2

I Years had been from Home
And now before the Door
I dared not enter, lest a Face
I never saw before

Stare stolid into mine
And ask my Business there –
"My Business but a Life I left
Was such remaining there?"

I leaned upon the Awe –
I lingered with Before –
The Second like an Ocean rolled
And broke against my ear –

I laughed a crumbling Laugh
That I could fear a Door
Who Consternation compassed
And never winced before.

I fitted to the Latch
My Hand, with trembling care
Lest back the awful Door should spring
And leave me in the Floor –
Then moved my Fingers off
As cautiously as Glass
And held my ears, and like a Thief
Fled gasping from the House –

3

The Drop, that wrestles in the Sea –
Forgets her own locality –
As I – toward Thee –

She knows herself an incense small –
Yet *small* – she sighs – if *All* – is *All* –
How *larger* – be?

The Ocean – smiles – at her Conceit –
But *she*, forgetting Amphitrite –
Pleads – "Me"?

4

A little Snow was here and there
Disseminated in her Hair –
Since she and I had met and played
Decade had gathered to Decade –

But Time had added not obtained
Impregnable the Rose
For summer too indelible
Too obdurate for Snows –

5

I'm Nobody! Who are you?
Are you – Nobody – Too?
Then there's a pair of us?
Don't tell! they'd advertise – you know!

How dreary – to be – Somebody!
How public – like a Frog –
To tell one's name – the livelong June –
To an admiring Bog!

6

I should not dare to leave my friend,
Because – because if he should die
While I was gone – and I – too late –
Should reach the Heart that wanted me –

If I should disappoint the eyes
That hunted – hunted so – to see –
And could not bear to shut until
They "noticed" me – they noticed me –

If I should stab the patient faith
So sure I'd come – so sure I'd come –
It *listening* – listening – went to sleep –
Telling my tardy name –

My Heart would wish it broke before –
Since breaking then – since breaking then –
Were useless as next morning's sun –
Where midnight frosts – had lain!

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Life Signs

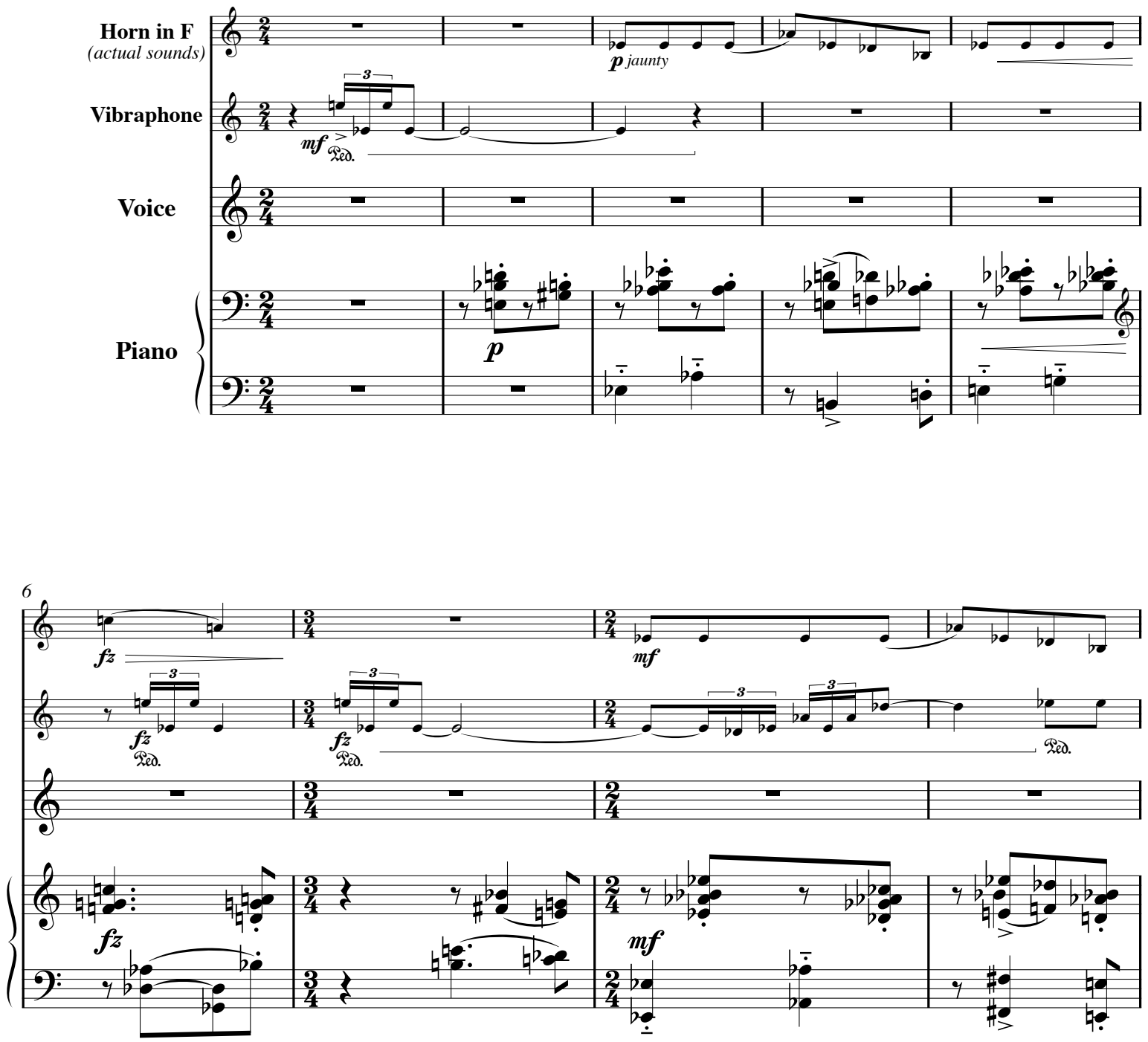
for soprano, horn, percussion, & piano

Text by
EMILY DICKINSON

Music by
R. G. PATTERSON
(1999)

I.

Breezy and didactic (♩=120)



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10

fz *fz* *fz*

fz *fz* *fz*

Ped. Ped. Ped.

p *jaunty*

Sur - geons must be ve - ry care - ful

p

15

fz ***mf*** ***f***

3

Ped.

When they take the knife! Un - der - neath their fine in - ci - sions

fz ***mf***

19

stopped

pp

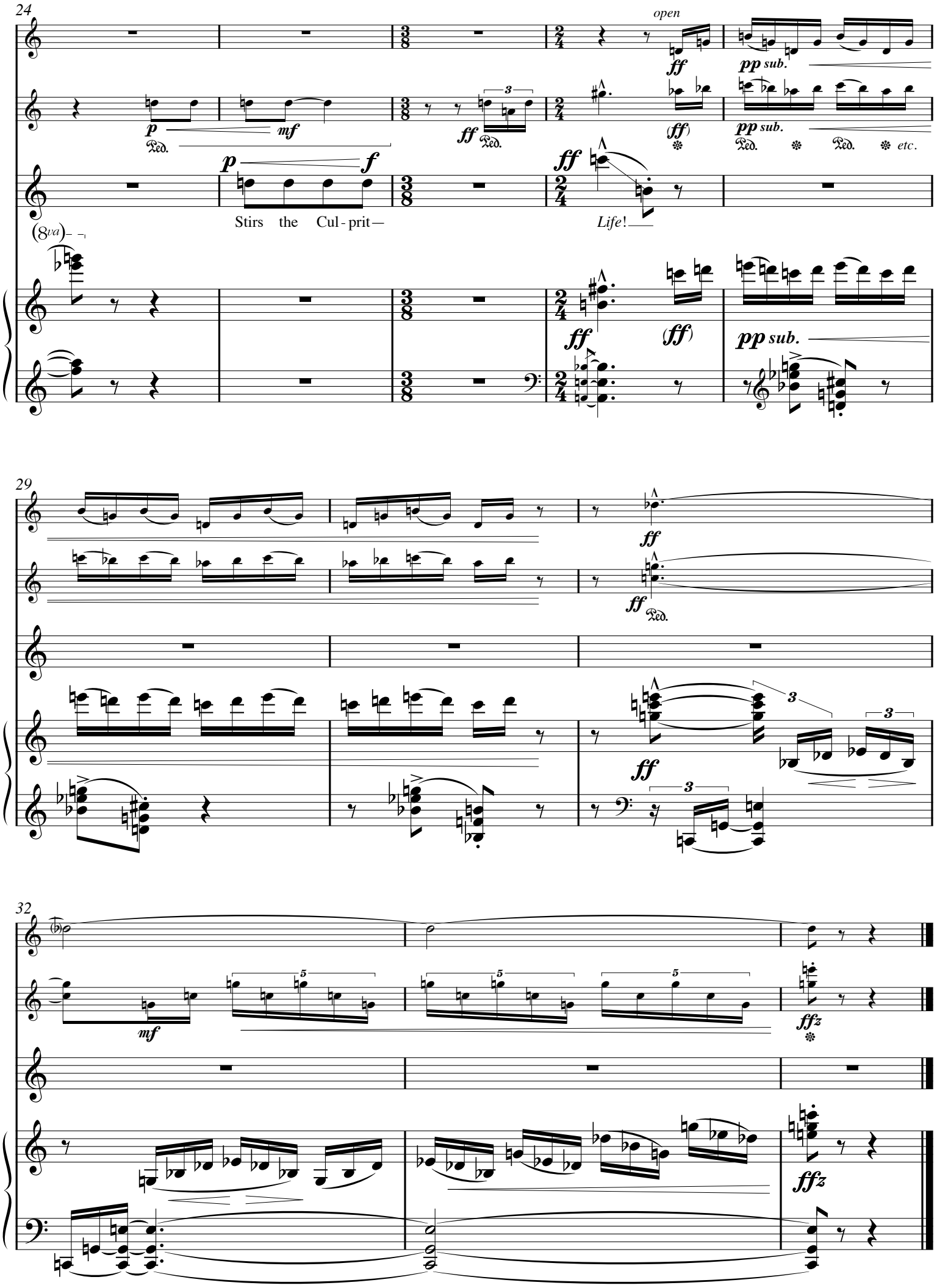
3

mp

Stirs the Cul - prit—

8va

pp


24
open
ff
pp sub.
p
mf
Ped.
ff
(ff)
etc.
p
f
Stirs the Cul-prit—
Life!
(8va)
29
32
mf
ffz

II.

Deliberate and Reflective (♩=80)

Horn in F
(actual sounds)

Vibraslap

Voice

Piano

l.v.

fz *(poco)*

p poco marc.

I Years had been from Home

f ***fz*** ***p poco marc.***

Ped. sempre

5

pp *menacing*

Vslp.

fz *(poco)*

f ***fz***

Ped.

9

yarn mallets
(one-handed roll)

S.Tam.

pp *gliss. by dipping in water*

p

And now be - fore the Door

p ***p***

Ped.

15

S.Tam.

pp

pp

f

I dared not

f

f

Ped.

20

mf quasi recit.

en - ter,

lest a Face I nev-er saw be - fore Stare stol-id in-to mine

fz

p

f

Ped.

23

muted

p

Vslp.

T.Blk.

(>)

p

yarn mallets

p

insistent

And ask my Busi - ness there

fz

p

Ped.

28

mute out

M.Tam.

(yarn mallet)

p

naive, simple tone

pp *(imitate a child singing)*

"My Busi-ness but a Life I left Was such re-main-ing there?"

8va

pp

32

stopped

mf

T.Blk.

(yarn mallets)

mf

fp

più f

più f

(normal tone) ***mf poco marc.***

più f

I leaned up - on the Awe— I ling - ered

(8va)

5

mf

5

più f

Ped.

Ped.

36

fz

T.Blk.

fp

fz

f *somewhat free*

6

with Be - fore— The Sec - ond like an O - - - - -

3

7

7

7

7

7

3

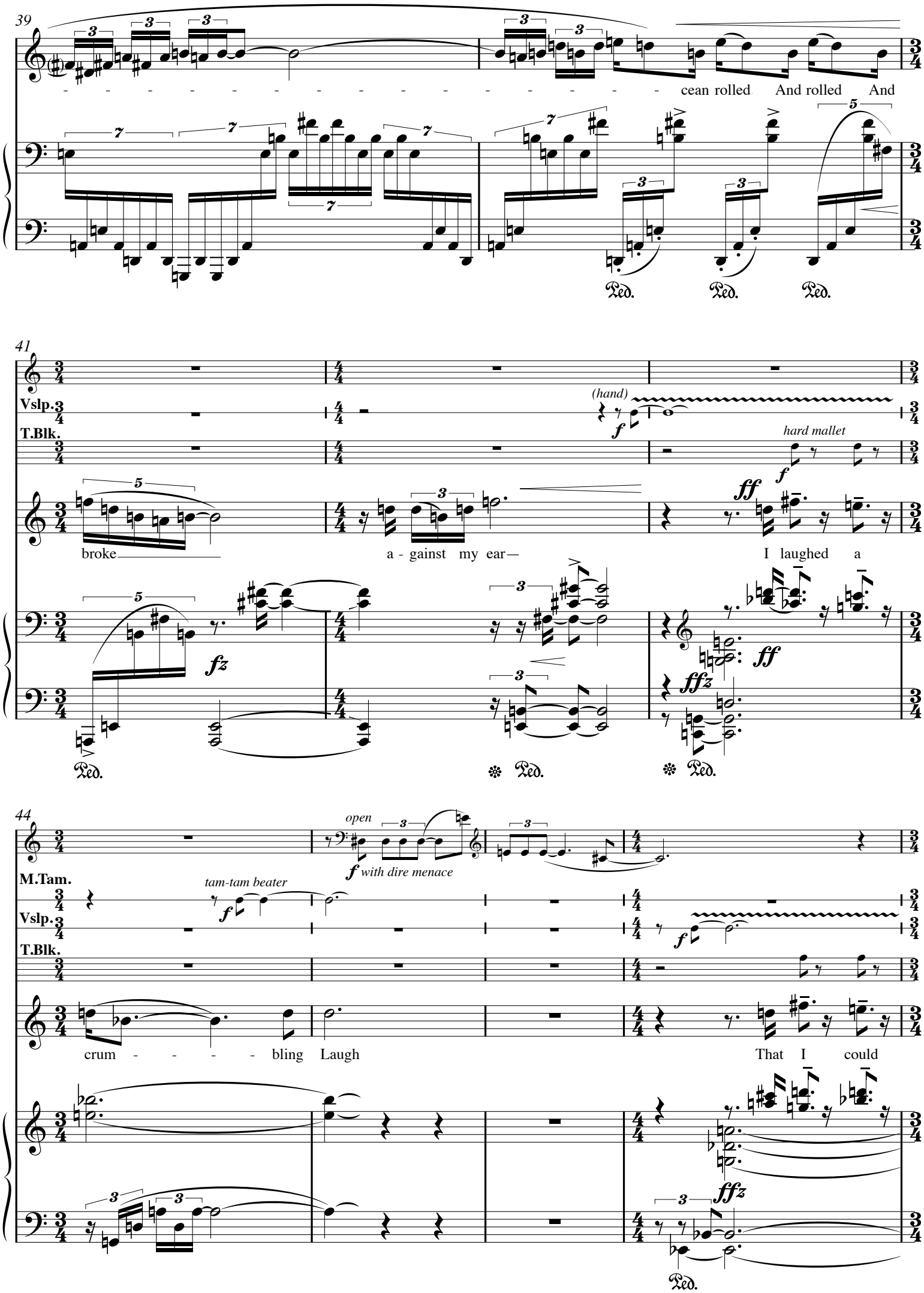
mf

indistinct

Ped.

8vab

Ped. ***sempre***


39
cean rolled And rolled And
41
Vslp.
T.Blk.
(hand)
hard mallet
broke a - gainst my ear— I laughed a
44
M.Tam.
Vslp.
T.Blk.
open
with dire menace
tam-tam beater
crum - - - - bling Laugh That I could

48

M.Tam.

Vslp.

fear a Door Who Con - - - -

ffz

Ped. Ped. *sempre*

51

- - ster - na - tion com - - - passed And

53

M.Tam.

Vslp.

nev - er winced be - - - - - fore. I fit-ted to the Latch My

ff *ffz* *ff* *ffz* *ffz*

continue holding pedal thru rests

Ped. Ped.

57

Vslp.

Hand, with trem - bling

Ped.

59

T.Blk.

soft mallets

care Lest back the aw - - - ful

Ped.

62

T.Blk.

(soft mallets)

Door should spring And leave me in the Floor

continue holding
pedal thru rests

Ped.

68

M.Tam. *pp*

soft yarn mallet

pp

pp (poco marc.)

Then moved my Fing - - - ers off As cau - tious -

pp

l.v.

Ped.

73

Glock.

trgl. beaters

pp

pp sotto voce quasi recit.

ly as Glass And held my ears, and like a

78

Glock.

(poco accel.)

Thief Fled gasp - ing from the House

III.

Breathless (♪.=152)

Finger Cymbals

Voice

Piano

p *delicate, flighty*

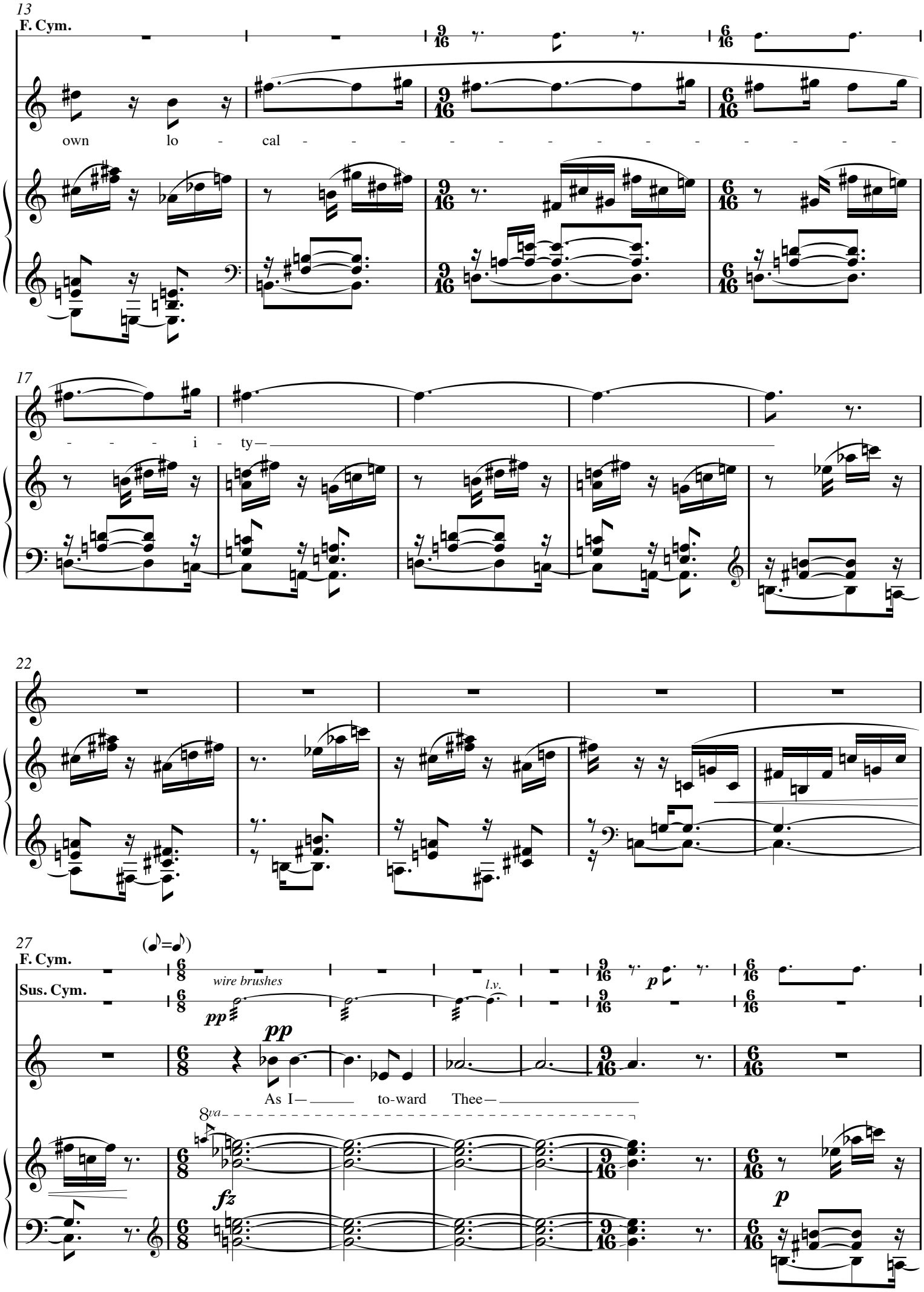
5 F. Cym.

p *coy*

The Drop, that wres - tles

9 F. Cym.

in the Sea For - gets her


13
F. Cym.
own lo - cal - - - - - - - - - - - - - -
17
- - - i - ty—
22
27
F. Cym.
Sus. Cym.
wire brushes
pp
l.v.
p
As I— to-ward Thee—
8va
fz
p

34

She knows her-

39

self an in - cense small—

44

Yet *small*— she sighs— if *All*— is

49

All—

pp

54

pp

How *larg - er—* be?

61

Sus. Cym.

felt mallets

p

f

l.v.

f

The O - - - - - cean— smiles— at

f

67

her Con - ceit— But *she*,—

mp

72

F. Cym.

ff

pp sub.

p

for-get-ting Am-phi-tri-te—

8va

mf

ffz

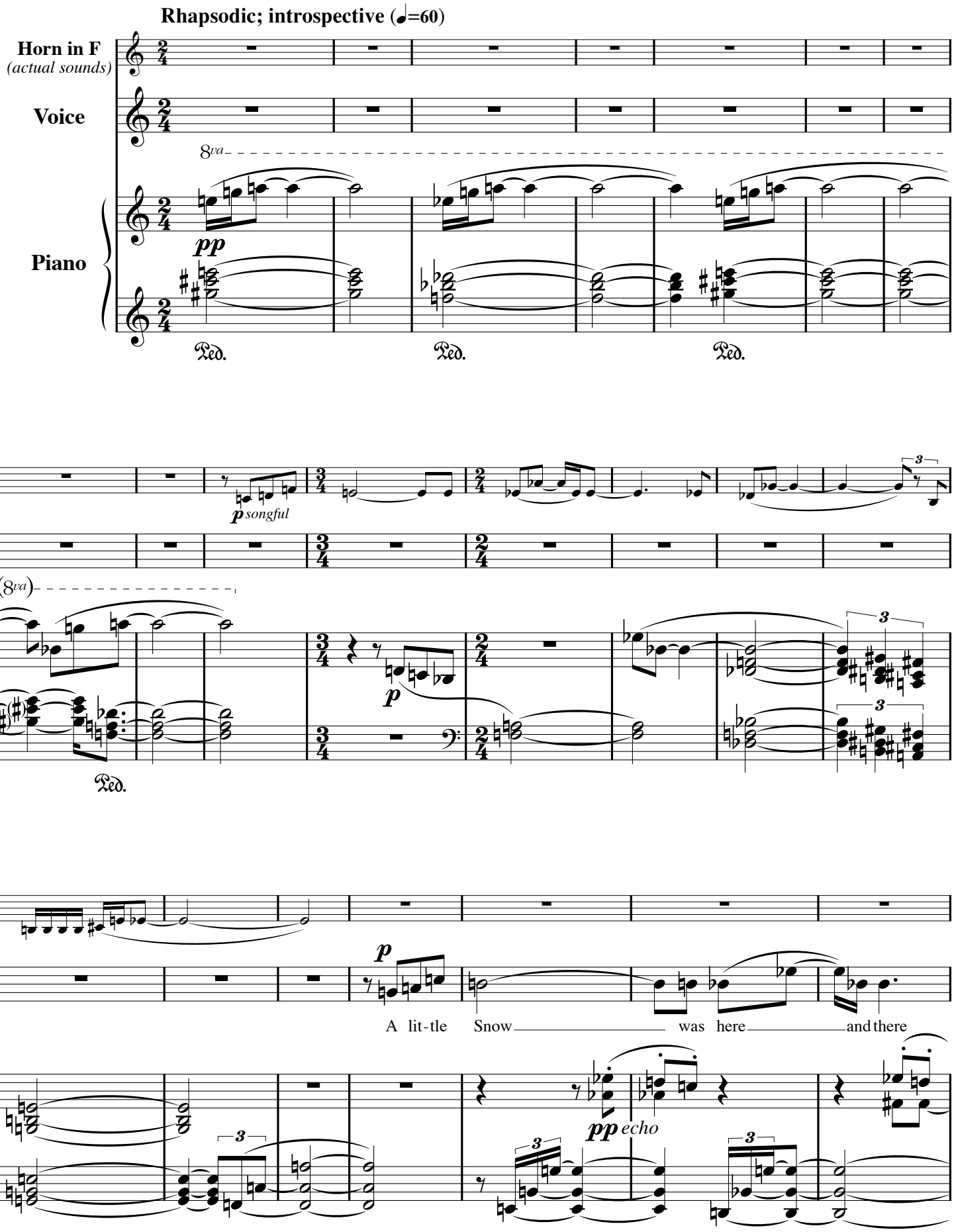
80
F. Cym.
p
Pleads—
(8va)
"Me"?
f
Pleads—

91
F. Cym.
9/16
f
6/16
9/16
f
6/16

96
"Me"?
9/16
9/16

102 Sus. Cym.
dead stroke
snare stick
fz
felt mallet
kill sound
8va
fffz

IV.


Rhapsodic; introspective (♩=60)
Horn in F
(actual sounds)
Voice
Piano
8va
pp
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
8
p songful
(8va)
p
Ped.
3
16
p
A lit-tle Snow was here and there
pp echo

23

A lit-tle Snow

Dis - sem-i-nat-ed in her Hair

Ped.

30

8va

pp extremely delicate

37

Since she and I had met

42

f

f

and played

De-cade had gath-ered to

De-cade

f

p

47

p songful

8va

mf

54

p

62

poco accel.

a tempo

pp

But

70

p

Time had add - ed But Time had add - ed

pp

77

mf

f

mf

f

not ob - tained Im - preg - na - ble the

mf

f

Ped. Ped. Ped.

81

Rose

84

For sum - mer

91

— too in - del - i - ble — For sum - - - mer too — in - del - i - ble

96

— For sum - mer — too in - del - i - ble — For

104

mf

f

sum - mer too in - del - i - ble Too ob - dur - ate for

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

109

fz *pp*

fz *pp*

Snows— Too ob - dur - ate

fz *pp*

Ped.

119

muted

pp

for Snows—

pp

Ped.

V.

Primitive and throbbing (♩=120)

Horn in F
(actual sounds)

Bongos

hands:
× = heel
● = fingers

pp ***mf*** ***fz*** ***pp***

Voice

7

pp ***pp*** ***pp*** ***mf***

p *but energetic*

I'm No-bod-y! Who are you?

12

mp ***p*** ***mf*** ***p*** ***mf*** ***fz*** ***p***

Are you— No-bod-y— Too? Then there's a

16

mf ***p*** ***mp*** ***fz*** ***mf*** ***mp***

pair of us? Don't tell! they'd- ad - ver - tise—

20

mf

fz

pp

you know!

26

mf

mp

mf

f

f

How drear - y— to be—

32

mf

p

mf

fz

f

Some - bod - - - - y!

How pub - lic—

37

p

pp

fz

p

pp

fz

like a Frog—

43

mf *mf* *p*

To tell one's name— the live - - - long June—

49

f *fz* *fz* *p* *f* *f* *ff*

To tell one's name— To an ad -

54

ff *p* *fp* *pp* *fp*

mir - - - - - - - - ing Bog! - - - - - - - - -

59

ff *mf* *pp* *ff* *ff*

- (g!)

VI.

Instrospective (♩=50)

Horn in F
(actual sounds)

Voice

Piano

ff *desolate; declamatory*

3

Ped. ***sempre***

4

Tam.

tam-tam beater
l.v.
ppp

Vib.

bowed
l.v.
ppp
Ped. ***sempre***

ppp

ppp

pp *tranquil*

(Ped.)

9

muted
pp

Tam.

ppp

Vib.

ppp

ppp

pp

medium mallets
pp
(Ped. sempre)

I should not dare to leave my friend,

13

Vib.

I should not dare to leave my friend, Be -

17

Vib.

cause— be-cause if he should die While I was gone—

21

Vib.

mute out

and I— too late— Should

24

Vib.

pp mf pp pp mf pp mp

mf f

reach the Heart that want - ed me

26

Tam.

tam-tam beater

ppp

ff very declamatory

pp

(Ped. sempre)

29

Vib.

muted

pp

(medium mallets)

pp (Ped. sempre)

pp

If I should

(pp)

33

Vib.

Sus. Cym.

(vib. mallet)

ppp

dis - ap - point — the eyes — That hun - ted —

8va b

37

Vib.

(pp)

the eyes — That hun - ted —

8va b

40

Vib.

— hun - ted so — to see — —

hun - ted — to see —

43

Vib.

p songful

mf

mf

– And could not bear to shut un - til They "no - ticed"— me—

46

f

– they no - - - - - ticed— me—

f

Ped. *sempre*

49

(still muted)

Tam. *(vib. mallet)*

Vib.

f

mf Ped. *sempre*

f

f

mf

If I— If I—

mf

mf

f

51

Tam.

Vib.

Glock.

should stab the pa - - - tient faith

53

Tam.

Vib.

Glock.

the pa - - - - - tient faith

55

Vib.

Glock.

ff marc.

mf

soft rubber mallets

ff marc.

mf

– So sure I'd come— so sure I'd come—

(8va)

ff marc.

58

Vib.

Glock.

pp

(Ped. sempre)

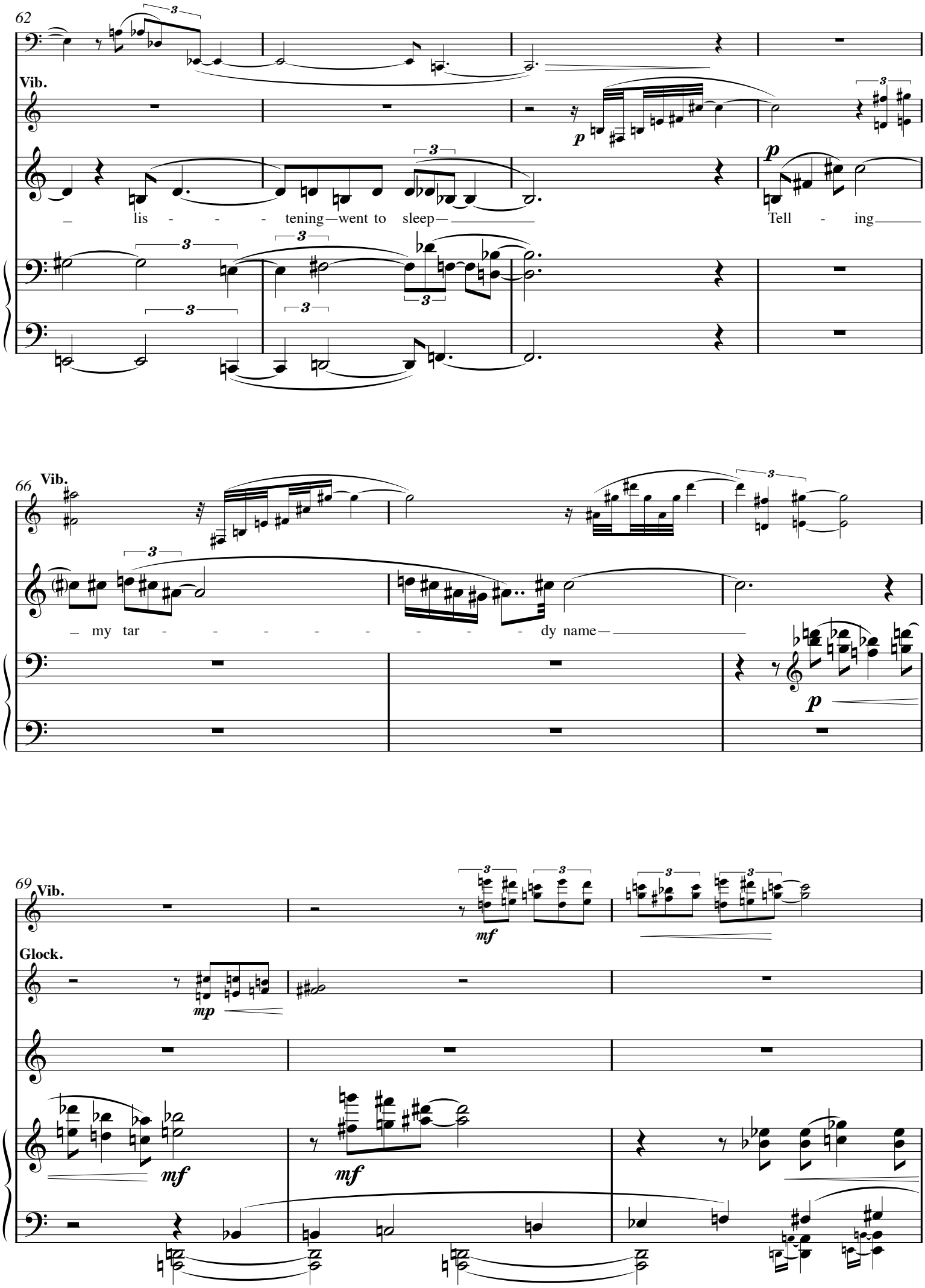
pp

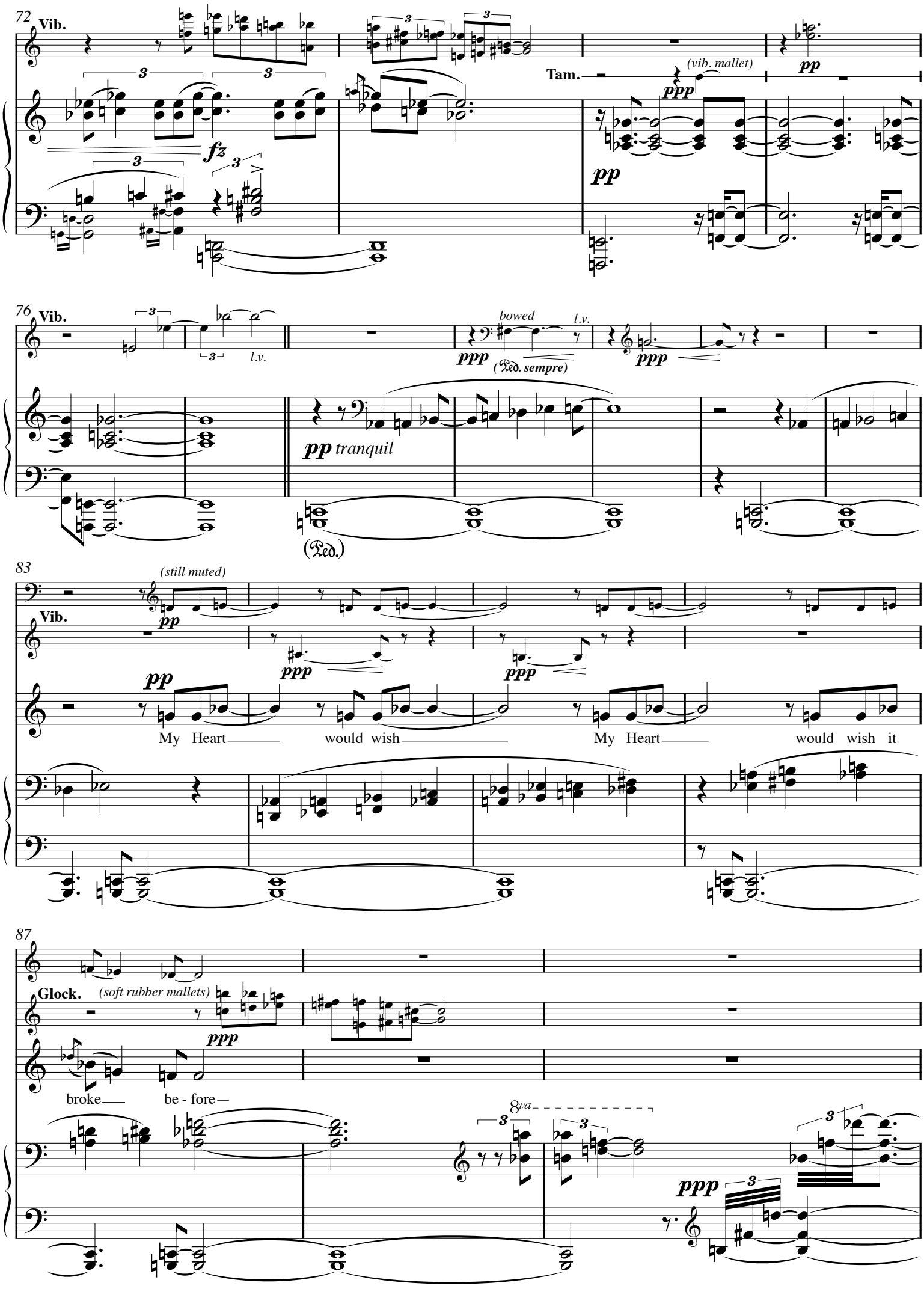
pp

It *lis - tening—*

mf *p*

pp


62
Vib.
lis - - - tening—went to sleep—
Tell - ing
66
Vib.
my tar - - - - - - - - dy name—
69
Vib.
Glock.


72
Vib.
fz
Tam.
(vib. mallet)
ppp
pp
76
Vib.
l.v.
bowed
l.v.
ppp
(Ped. sempre)
pp tranquil
(Ped.)
83
(still muted)
Vib.
pp
ppp
My Heart would wish My Heart would wish it
87
Glock.
(soft rubber mallets)
ppp
broke be - fore
8va
ppp

90

Glock.

ppp

Since break - ing then— since break - ing then— Were use - less

94

ppp

Cym. *(vib. mallet)*

ppp

— as next morn - ing's sun— Where mid-night

ppp

98

ppp

Vib.

(bowed)

ppp

ppp

— Where mid - night frosts— had lain!

ppp