SATB, unaccompanied

WW1610

AMARA (Breath of Grace)

SATB with Opt. Saxophone

Music by
John Rommereim

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About the Work

Amara is an Igbo word for "grace." The title for this piece was suggested by my wife Angela Voos, with help from her Nigerian friend Chinyere Ukabiala. After listening to me play and sing it at the piano, she told me that the directness and simplicity of the tune, and especially the calm breaths between phrases, seemed to evoke, for her, a sense of grace. I think this title suits the music perfectly. Since there is no text, and since there's no linkage to any particular belief system or religion, each singer and listener can fill in the blanks on their own as to what grace is, and how this song might enact it.

The moments of silence are an important element of the piece, and they require a sense of calm on everyone's part. Try to let go of any sense of impatience or hurry. In a few spots in the score, the breaths are notated explicitly using crossed note heads. The idea here is just for the singers to be aware of breathing together, and, perhaps, for each singer to think about breathing in a sense of grace. This is not meant to be a theatrical device at all, or anything that is noticeable from the audience's perspective, it's just a suggestion for how the singers might think about their breath in this piece.

Amara can be performed with or without the saxophone solo. The solo part grew out of an improvisation by jazz saxophonist Mark Laver. Mark responded to what the choir was singing, and invented his own solo that rides along and weaves in and out of it. The notated part comes as close as possible to one of Mark's improvisations as it was recorded in concert in April of 2016. We have added chord symbols in the saxophone part to open up the possibility that jazz players may find their own interpretation. It's important that the choir should be together rhythmically, but, especially in the slower parts of the piece, the saxophone can float along without being in lock step with the choir. A recording of the version with saxophone is available at waltonmusic.com.

-John Rommereim

About the Composer

John Rommereim is Blanche Johnson Professor of Music at Grinnell College, where he conducts the Grinnell Singers and the Grinnell Oratorio Society, and teaches composition. His choral works have been performed by distinguished ensembles across the U.S., including Magnum Chorum, the Princeton Singers, VocalEssence, Voces Novae, Roomful of Teeth, and The Rose Ensemble, for whom he served as 2008-09 composer-in-residence. Dr. Rommereim has composed a chamber opera, songs, electronic music, and works for piano, organ, guitar, flute, saxophone quartet, brass quintet, and string quartet. He also regularly performs improvisatory music as a pianist together with jazz saxophonist Mark Laver.

Dr. Rommereim is the recipient of commissions and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the American Composers Forum, the Iowa Choral Directors Association, the Iowa Composers Forum, the Iowa Arts Council, and VocalEssence. He has conducted the Grinnell Singers on concert tours across the U.S., and in Estonia, Finland, Russia, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey. During his early years at Grinnell College, Dr. Rommereim founded a professional early music ensemble, the Baroque Orchestra of Iowa, which employed some of the country's finest baroque specialists.

Dr. Rommereim is also recognized as an accomplished singer. He has performed all three of Schubert's song cycles, and he has appeared as baritone soloist for choral/orchestral works such as Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, Brahms's *German Requiem*, Verdi's *Requiem*, Vaughan Williams's *Dona Nobis Pacem*, Mozart's *Coronation Mass*, J. S. Bach's *Cantata 131,* "*Aus der Tiefe,*" and Orff's *Carmina Burana*.

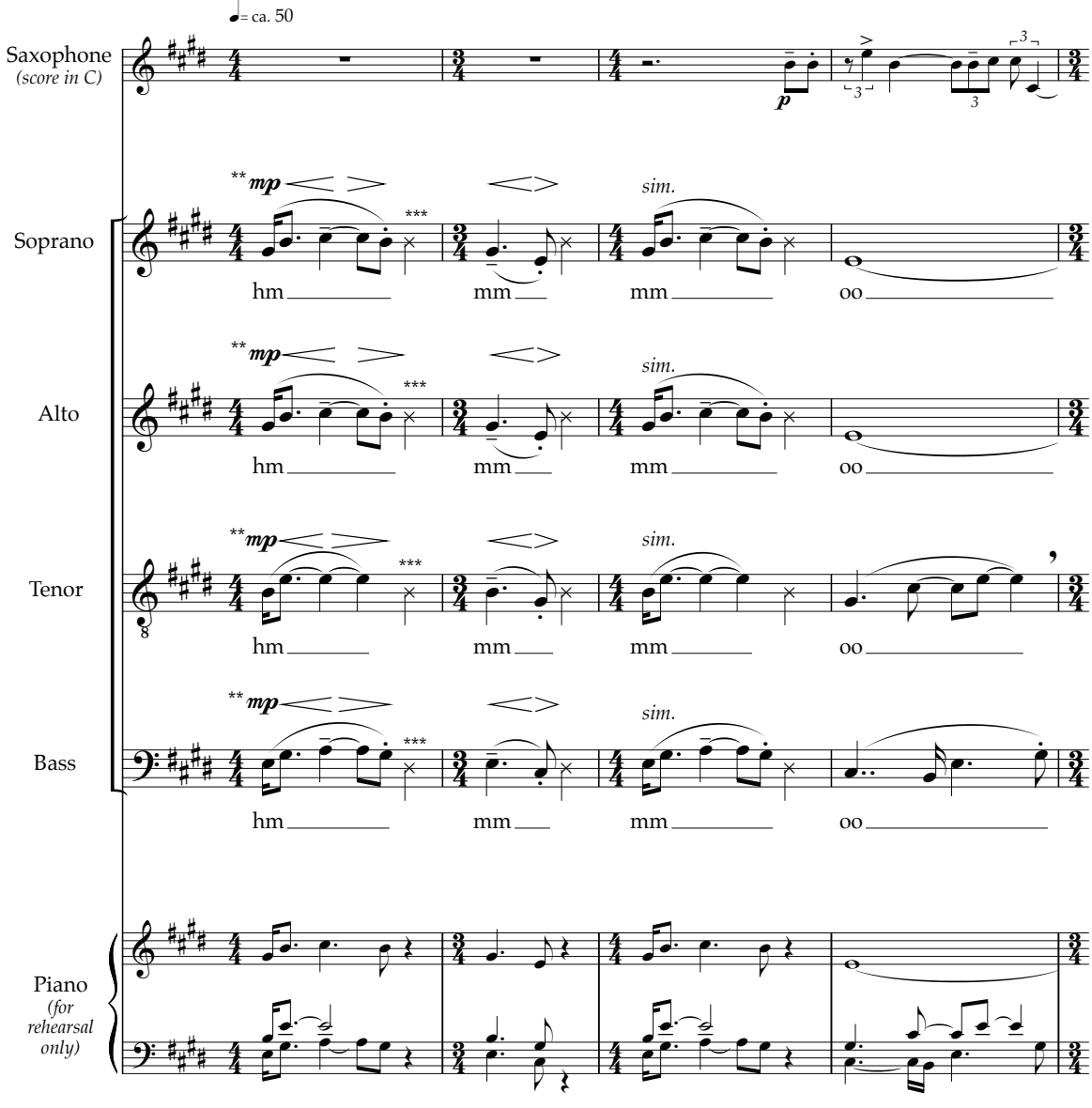
Duration: Approx. 4:45

Amara

(Breath of Grace)

SATB divisi with opt. Saxophone*

Music by
JOHN ROMMEREIM (b. 1958)
Saxophone improvisation by MARK LAVER



* *Separate B♭ and E♭ saxophone parts available for free download at waltonmusic.com.*
** *Each phrase throughout should have shape through dynamics and intensity.*
*** *Gentle breath*

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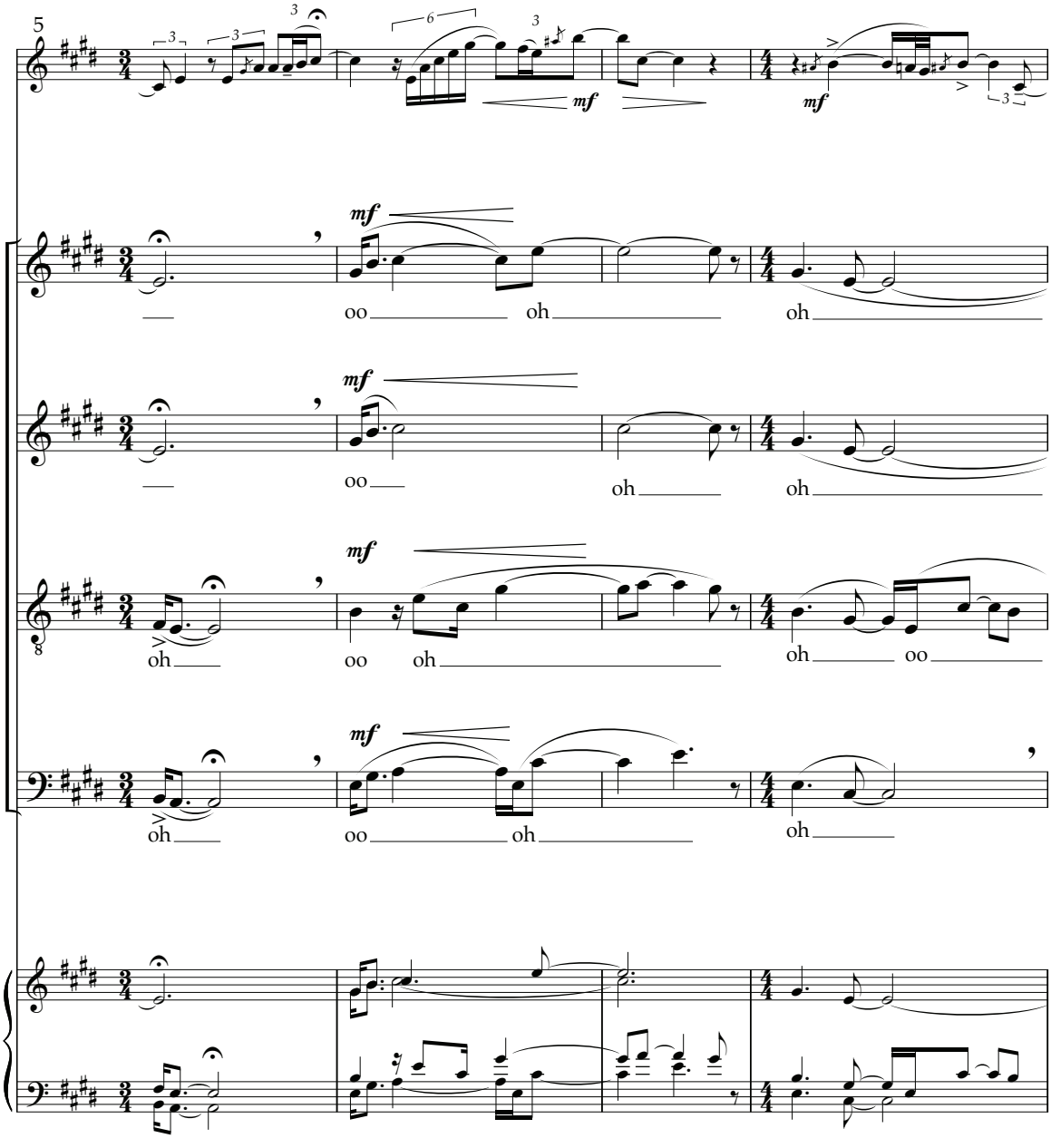
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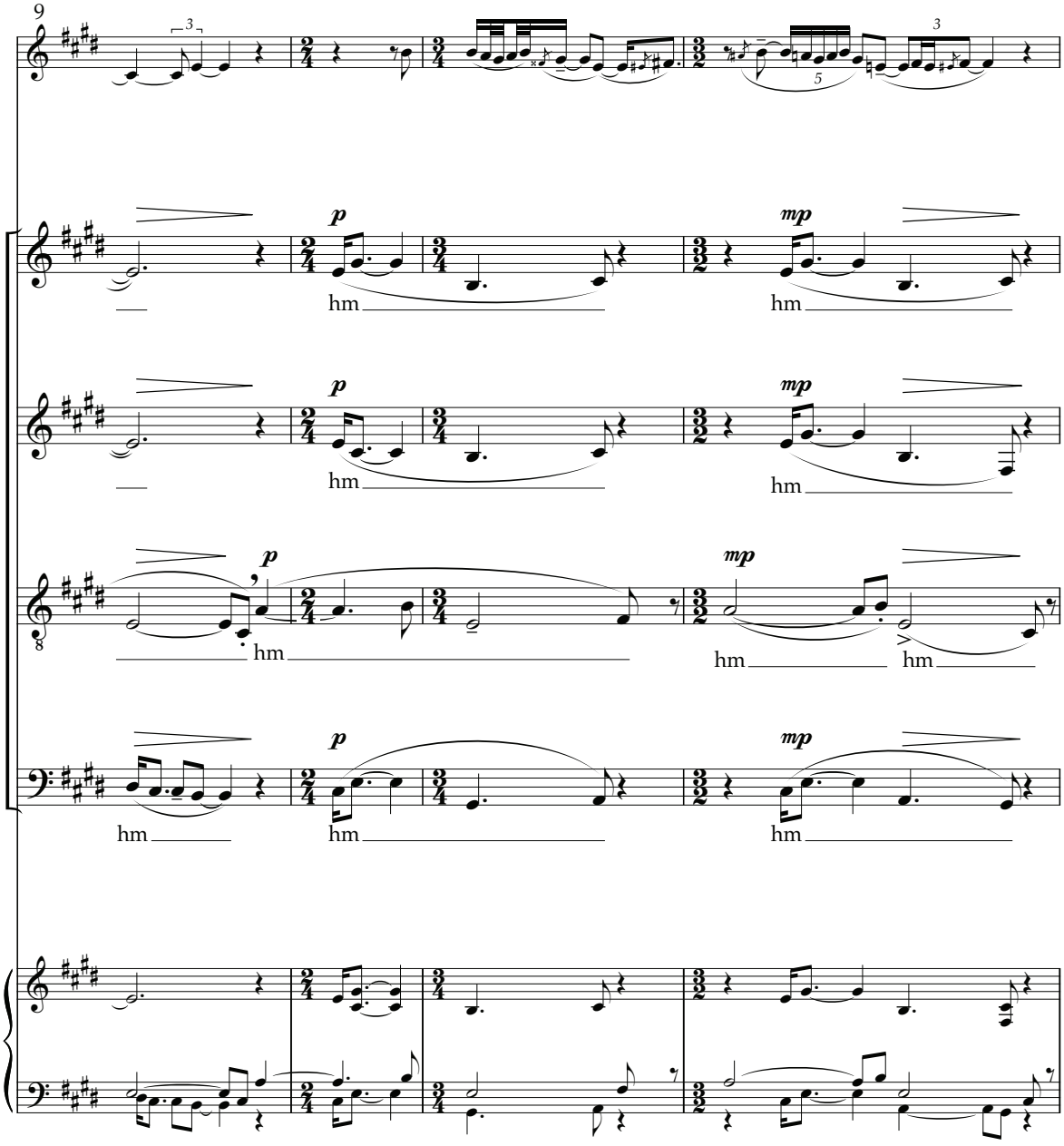
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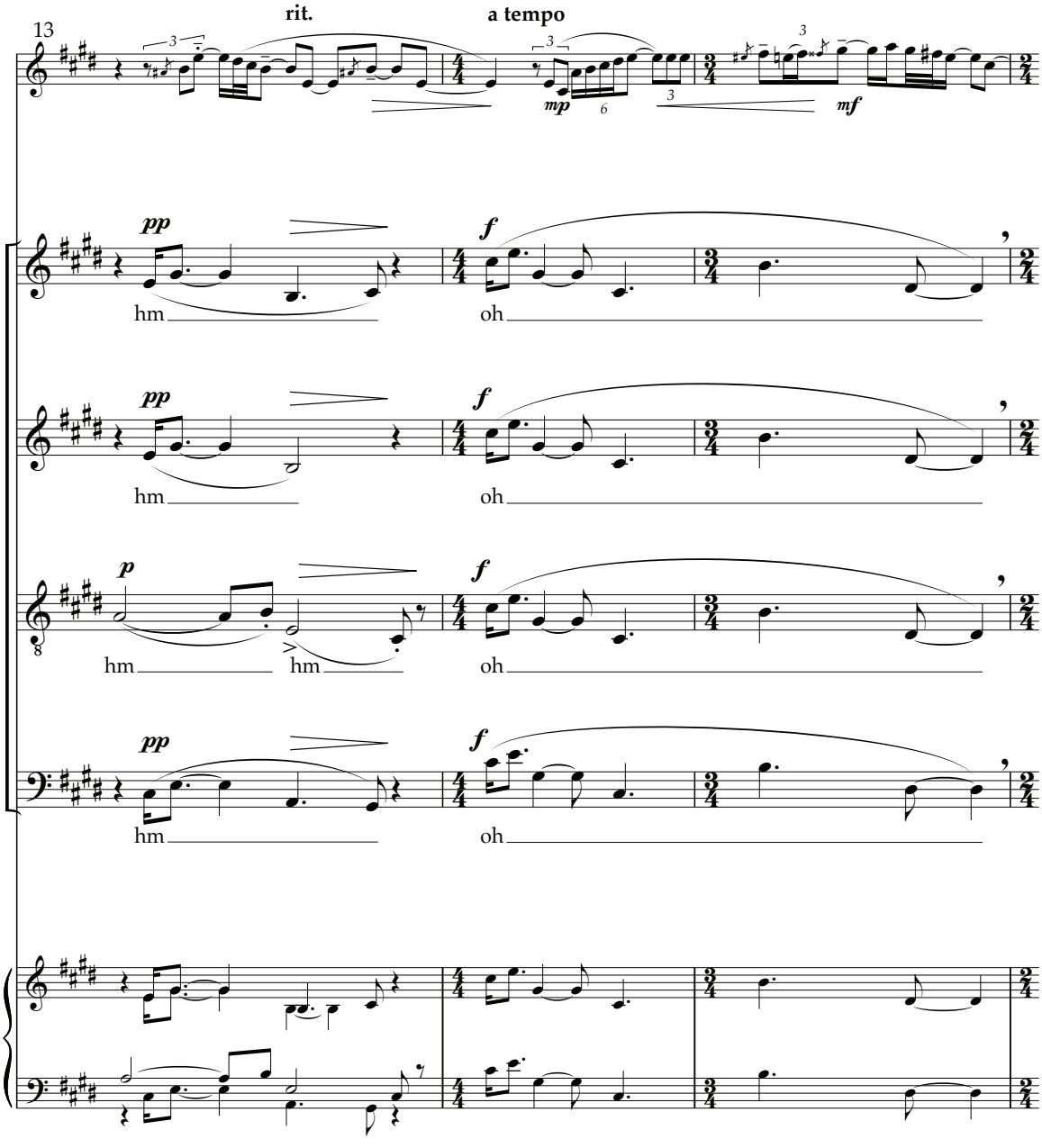
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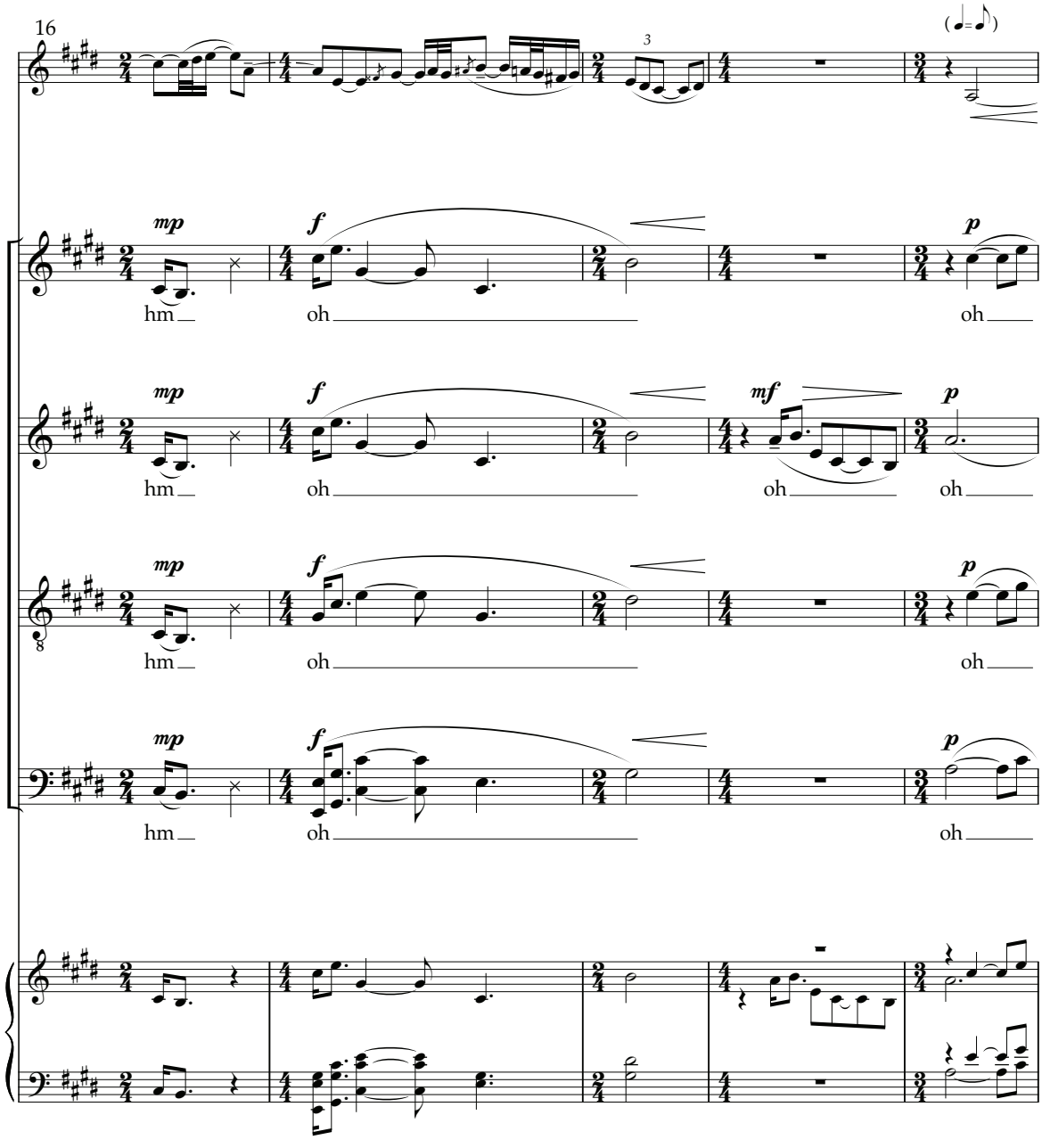
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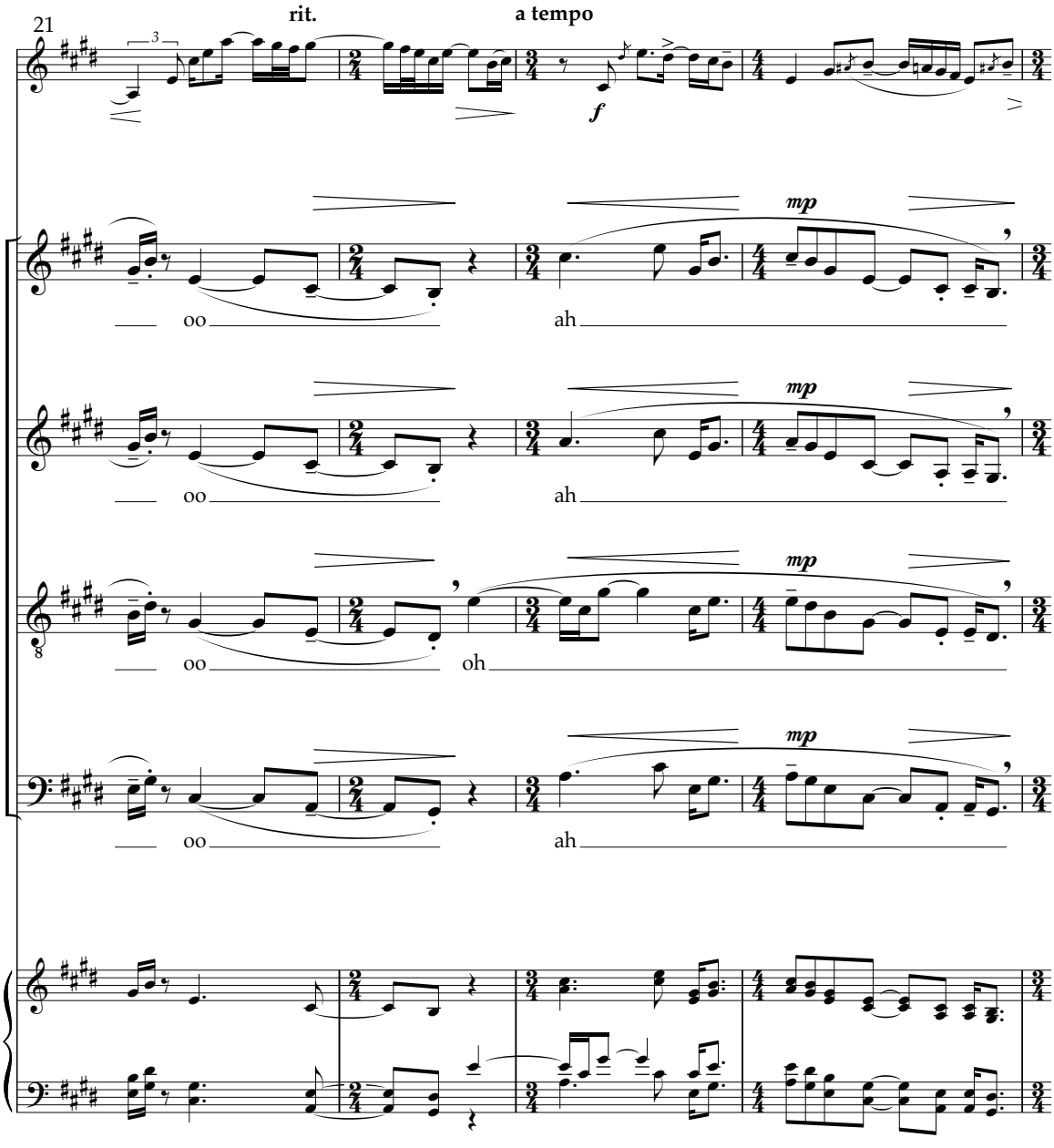
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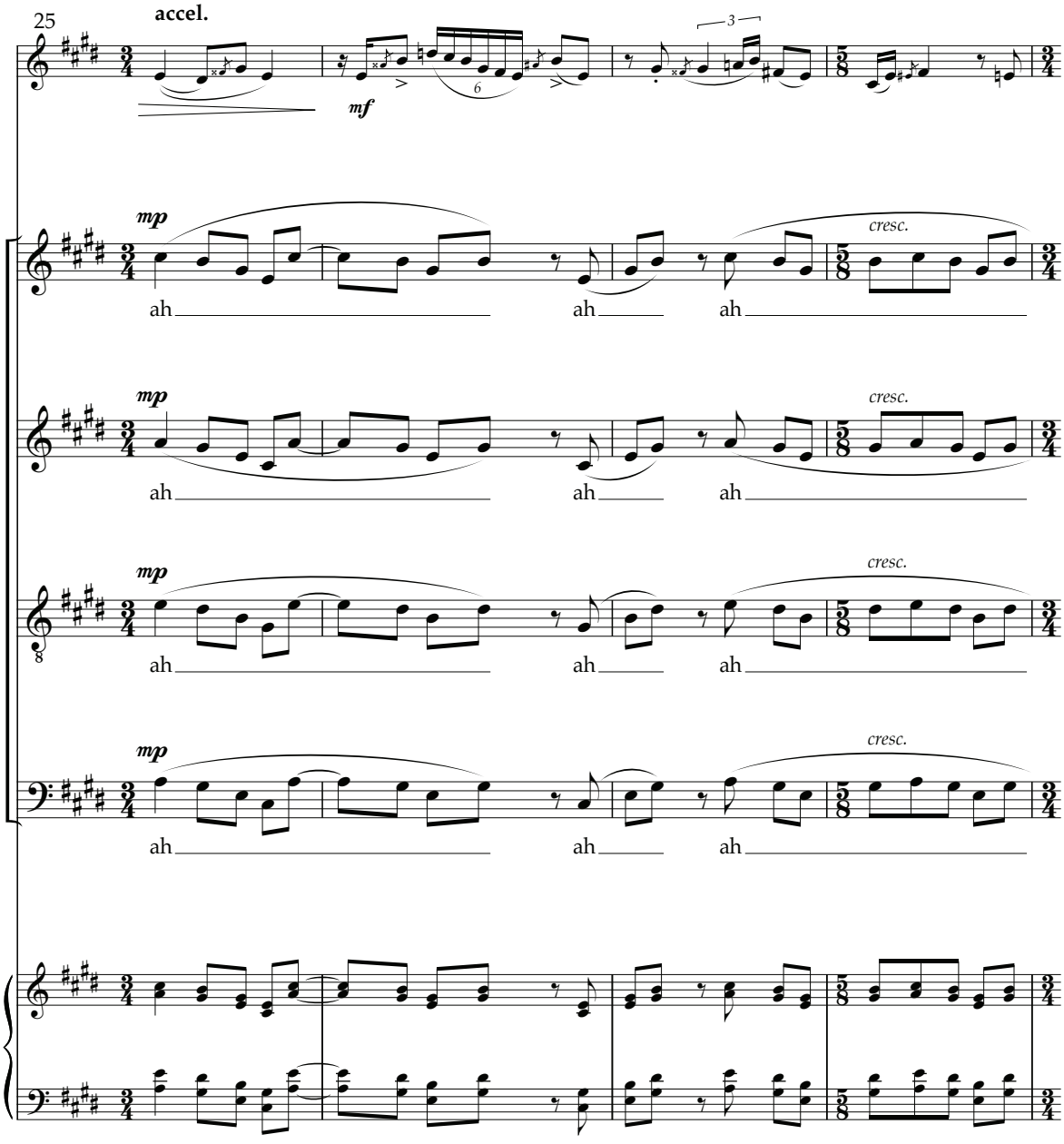
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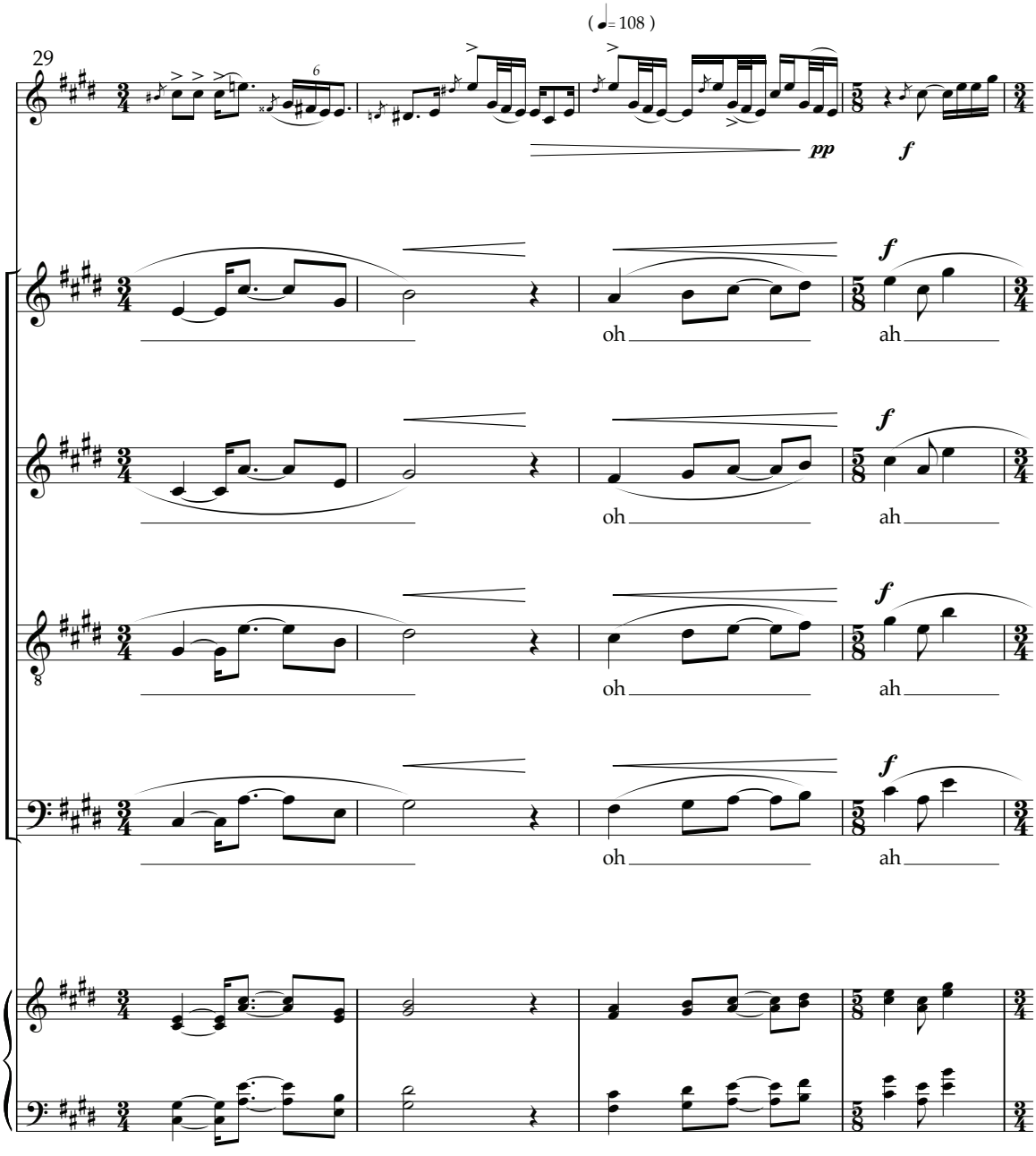
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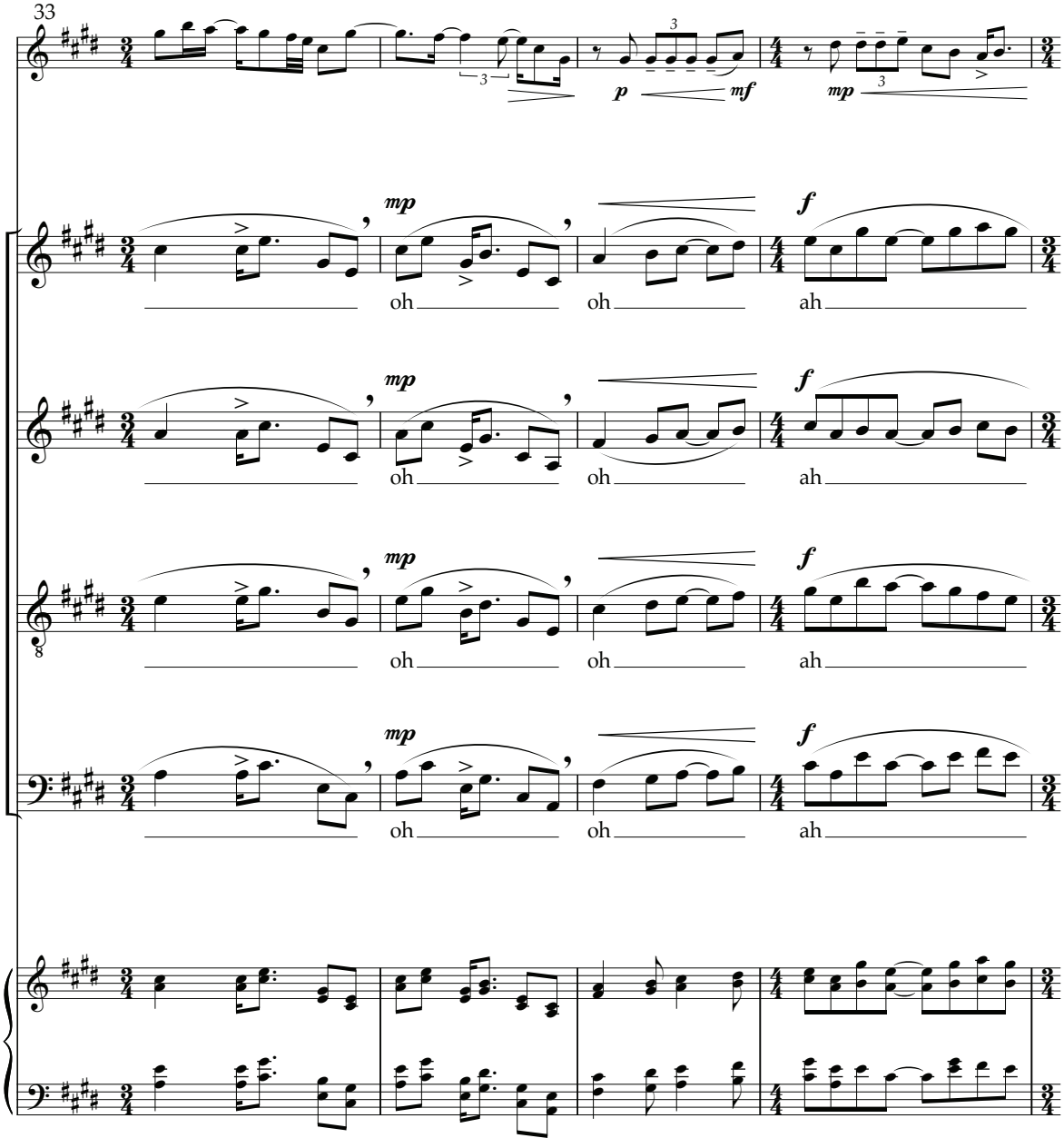
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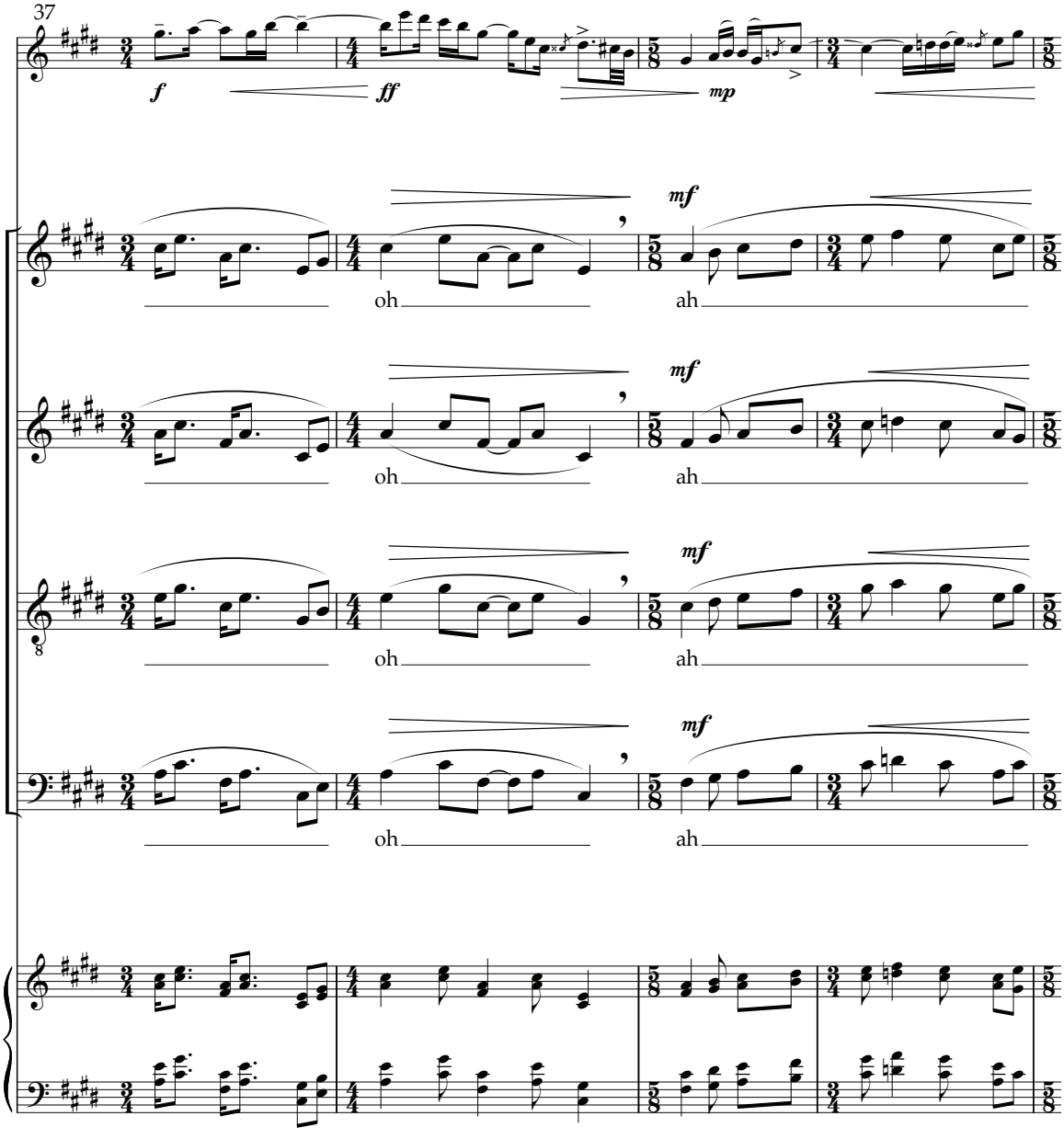
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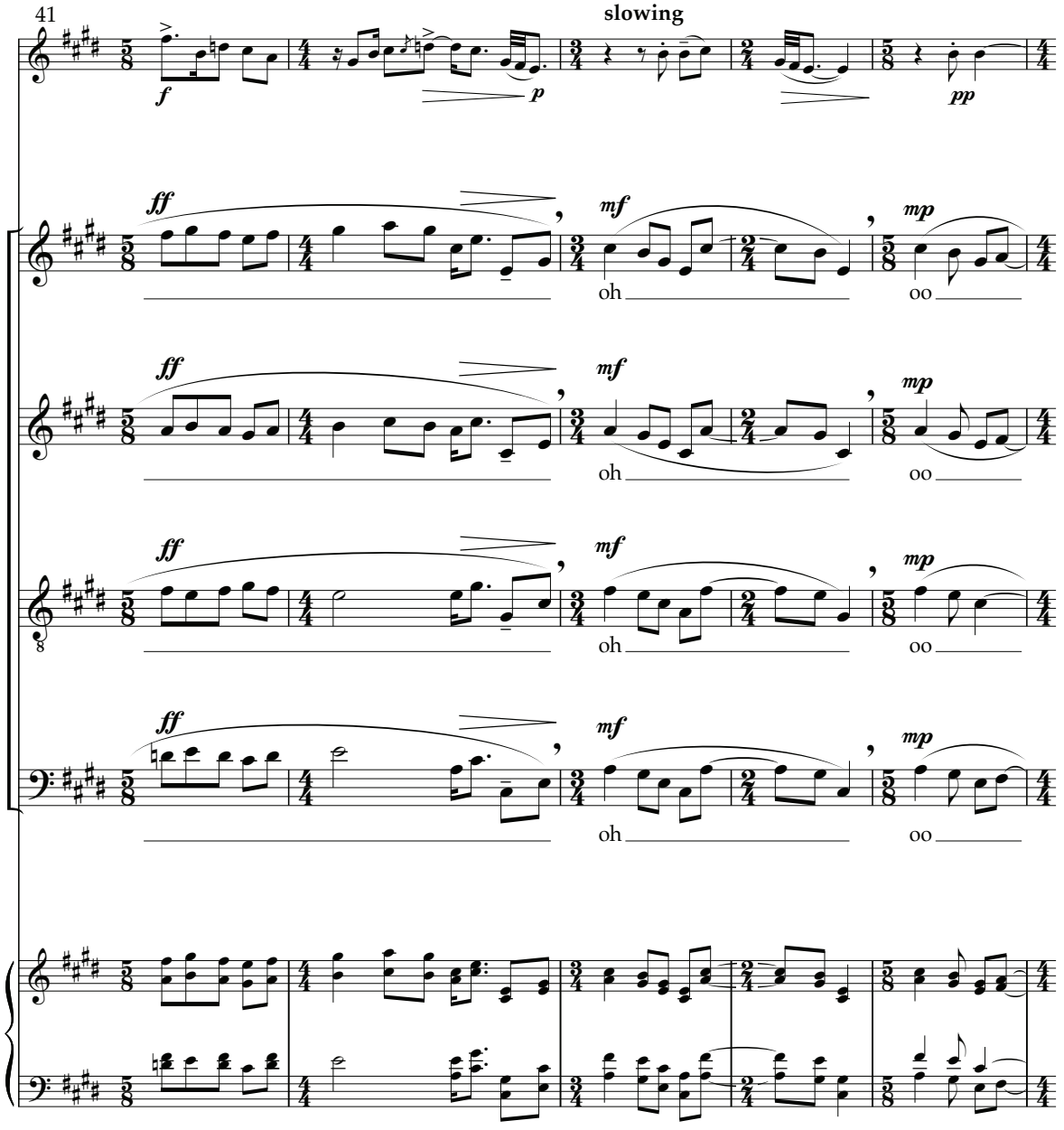
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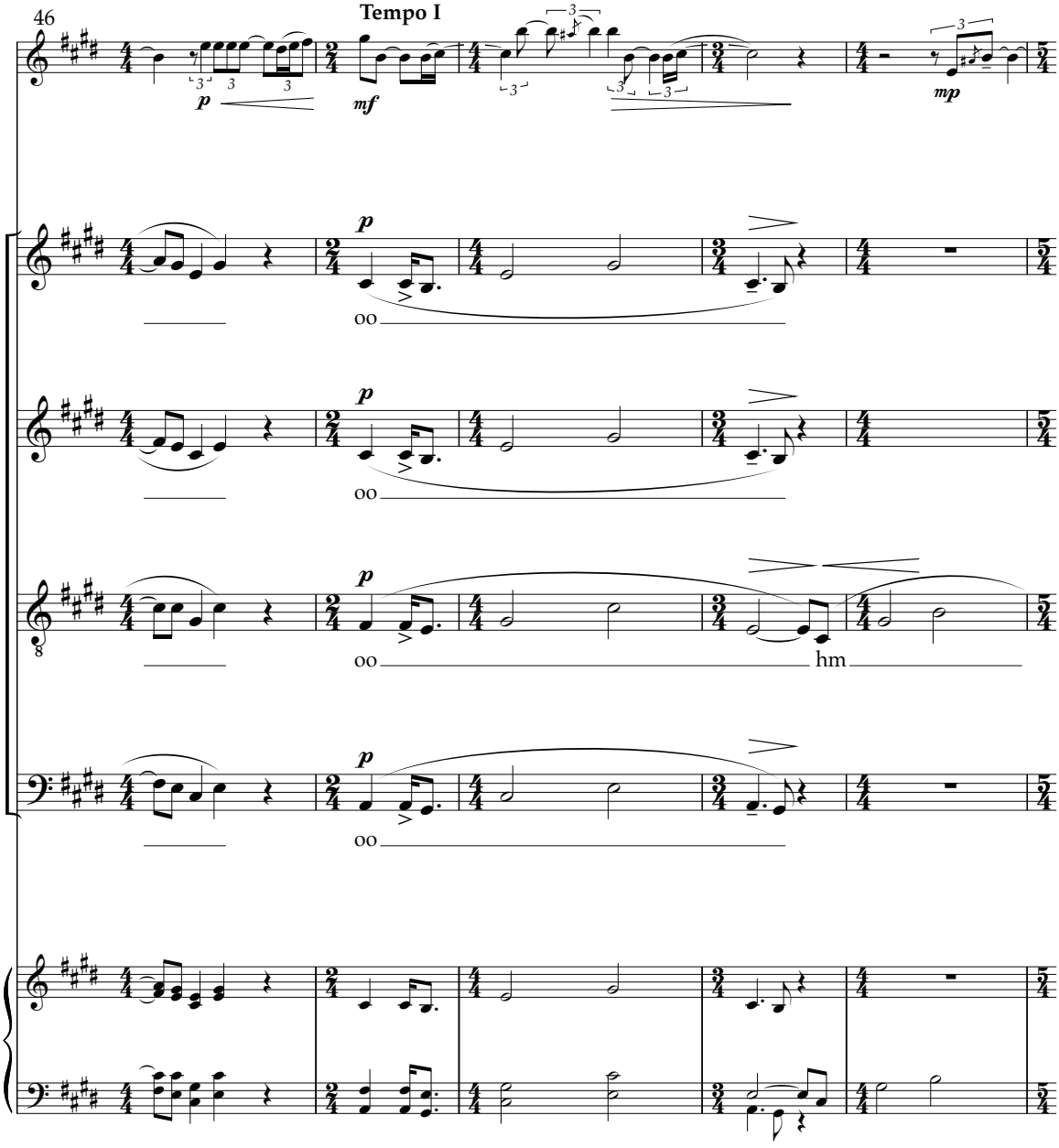
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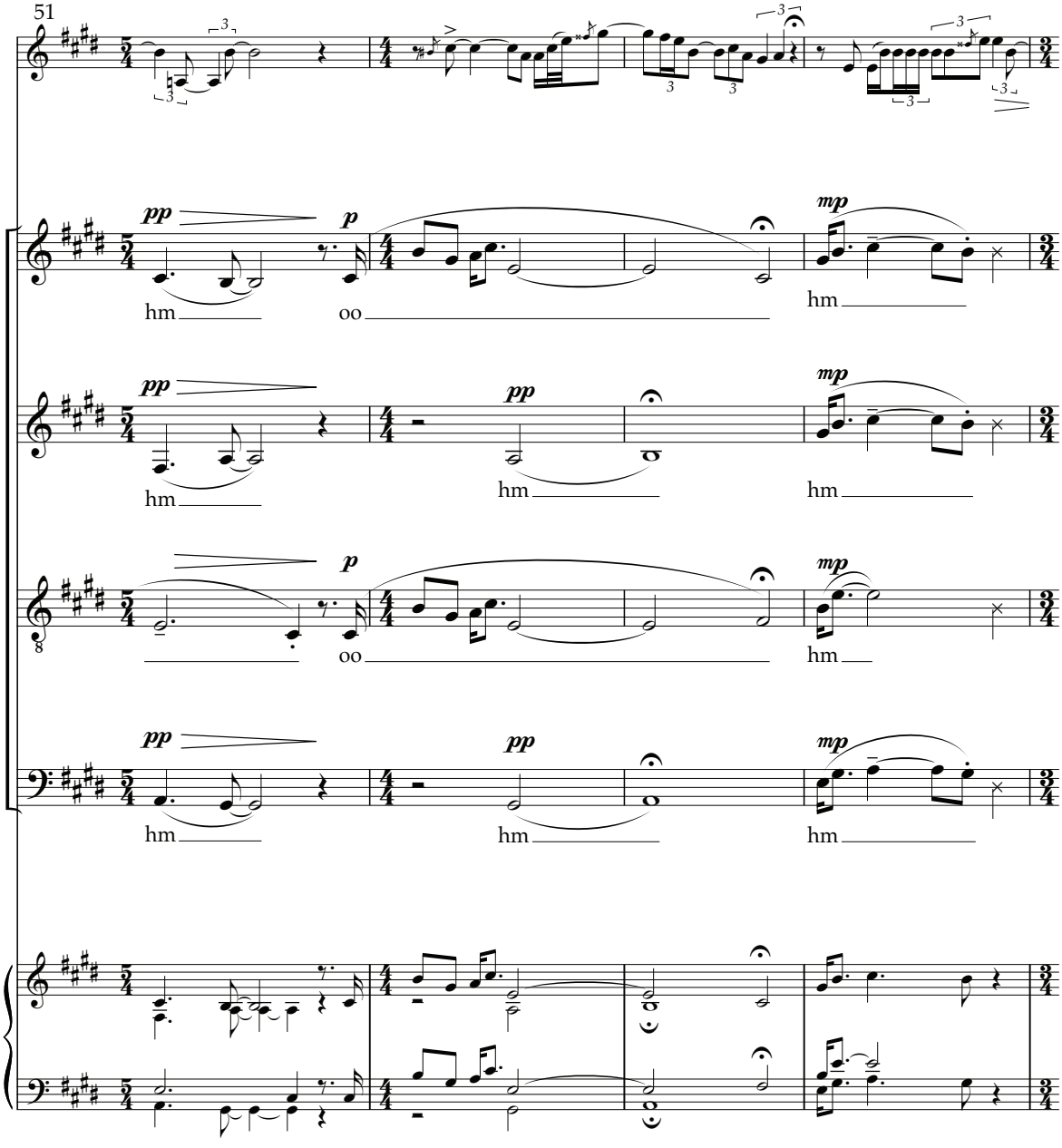
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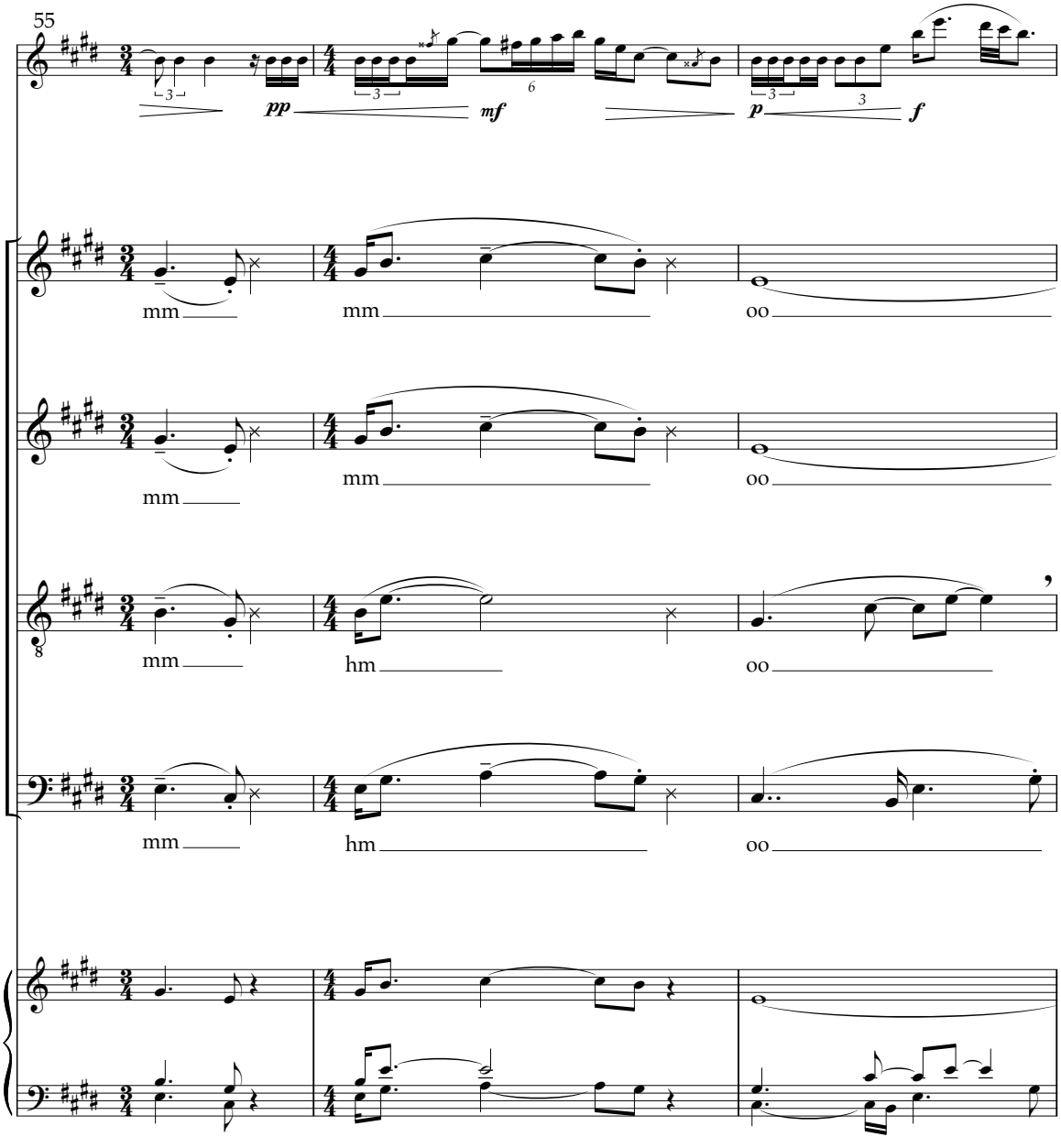
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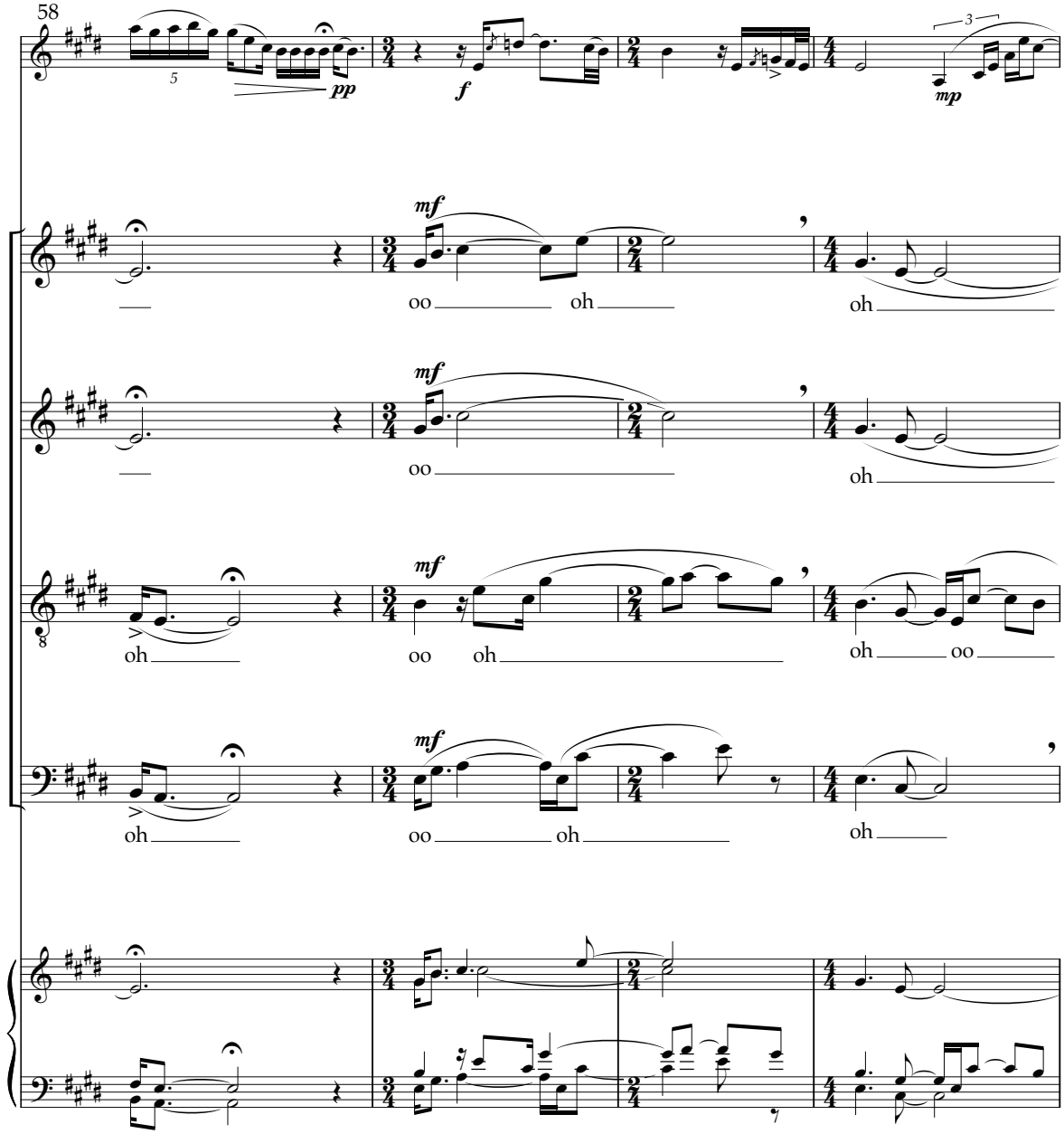
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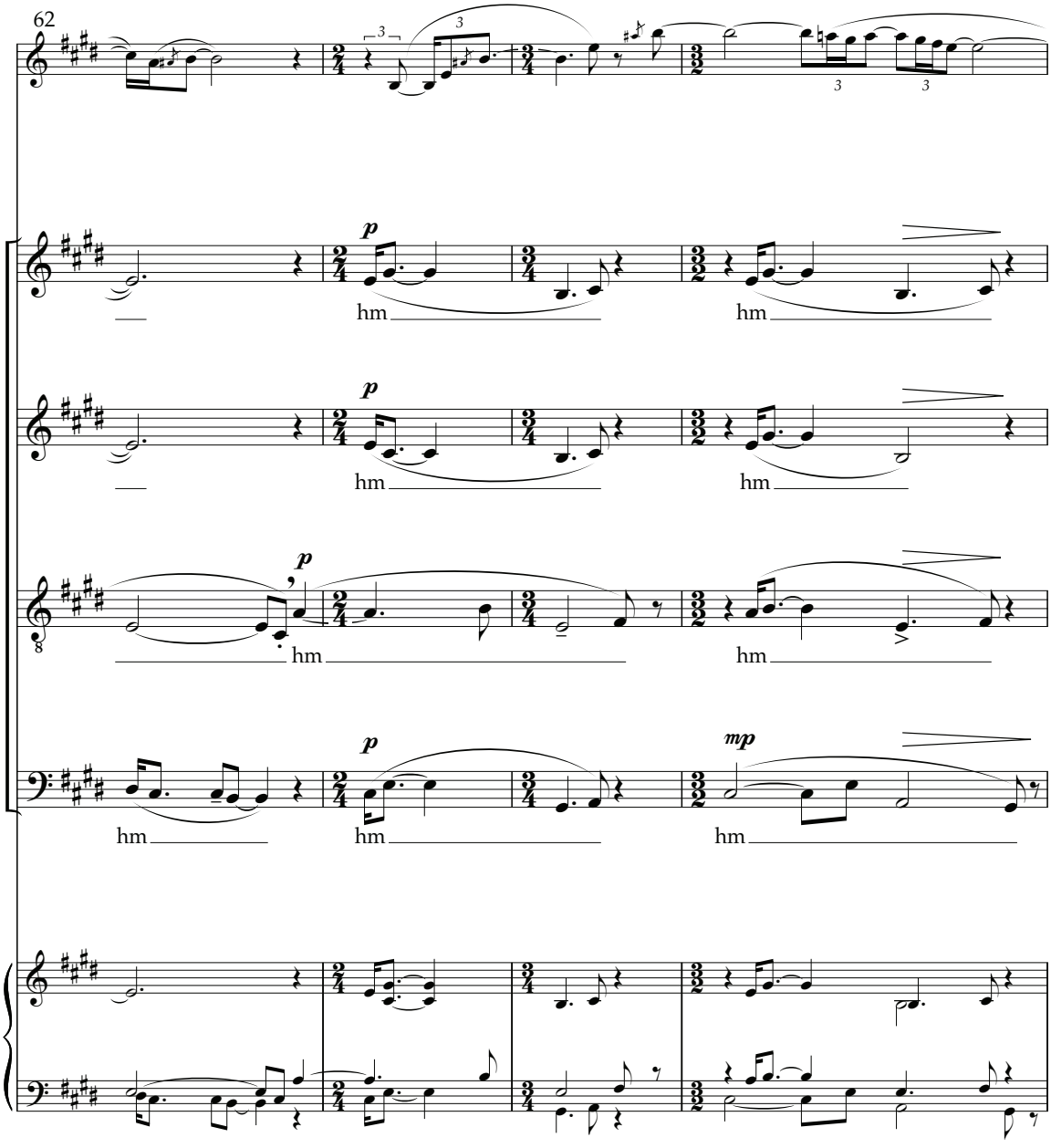
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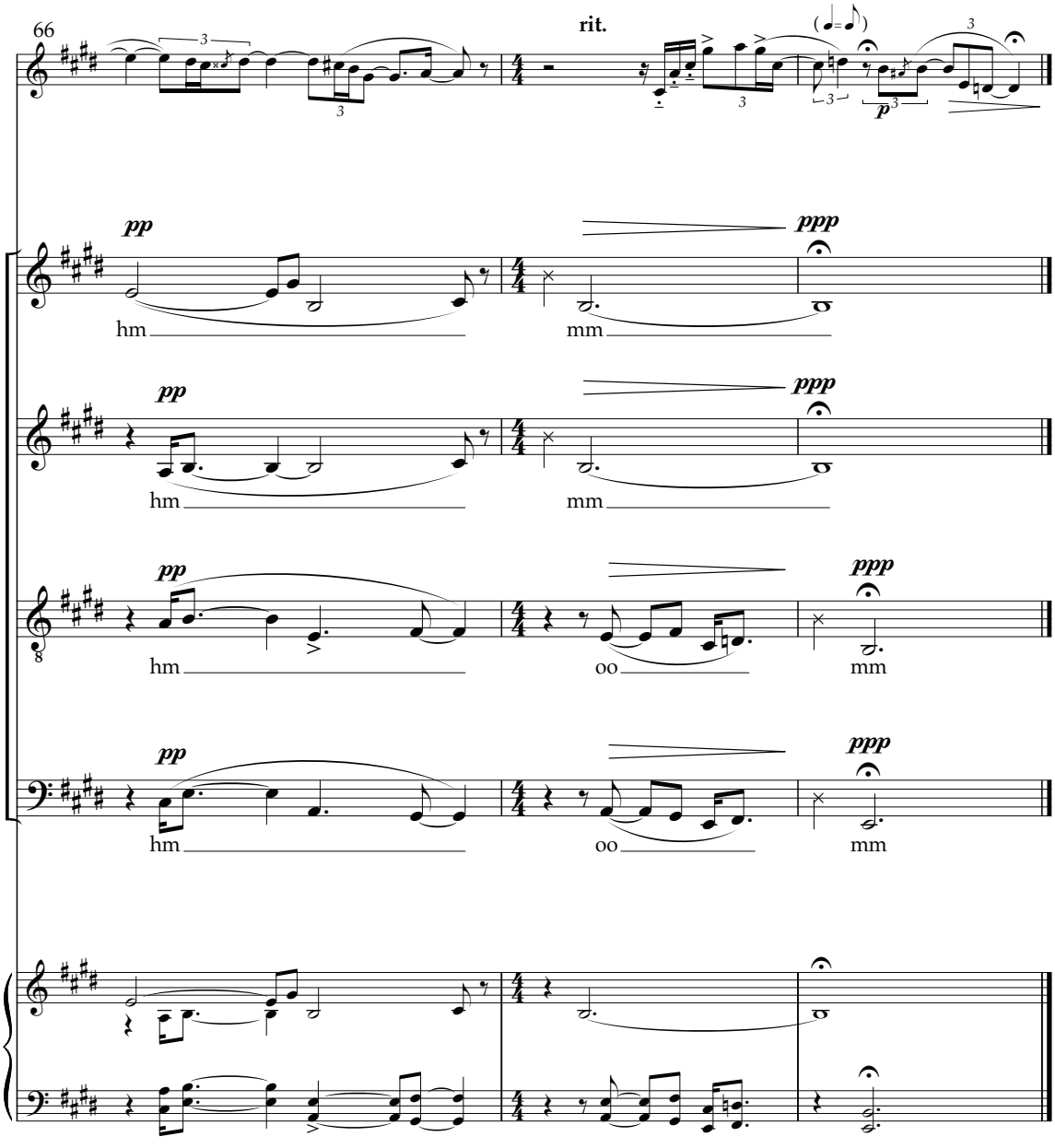
66
rit.
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Ave Maris Stella
Blake Wilson
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Mark Burrows
SATB • WW1614

Cum Sancto Spiritu
Hyo-Won Woo
SATB divisi • WW1637

Dirshu Adonai
Kenneth and Kirsten Lampl
SATB divisi • WW1638

Hallelujah
Patrick Hawes
SATB divisi • WW1644

Kodutee
Pärt Uusberg
SATB divisi • WW1643

The Maid of Culmore
arr. Joseph Gregorio
SATB divisi • WW1618

Remembering
Joan Szymko
SATB divisi • WW1640

Wintertide
arr. Ola Gjeilo
SATB divisi • WW1609

The Wisdom of the Moon
Susan LaBarr
SATB divisi • WW1634

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