NEW HORIZONS

OXFORD

Secular
SSATB unaccompanied

CECILIA McDOWALL

On the Air

(Dear Vaccine)

Composer's note

I was delighted when the Cleveland Chamber Choir, Ohio, and Scott MacPherson, Artistic Director, commissioned me to write a piece for their concerts on 26 and 27 February 2022. I always enjoy exploring possible texts to set and the process, this time, was most unusual and interesting. I was guided to the newly created website, the Global Vaccine Poem project, a platform imaginatively devised by David Hassler, Director of the Kent State University Wick Poetry Center, and Tyler Meier, Executive Director of the University of Arizona Poetry Center. People around the world were encouraged to express their hopes and expectations on this website, in poetic language, for a future after vaccination as we emerge from the pandemic.

I asked the British poet, writer, and broadcaster, Seán Street, to select some poetic strands from this rich collection of texts. He and I have collaborated many times before but this commission was very different. Seán treated each line he drew on, from the 'Dear Vaccine' website, with the greatest delicacy; of course, every expression was submitted as a cherished wish in the midst of our very bleak, pre-vaccine landscape. Seán then shaped these extracts into his own poetic form, opening with a spoken address to 'Dear Vaccine', brimming with anticipation. What follows is a progression of increasingly uplifting stanzas, culminating in the lines, 'We are the choir—unmasked, unveiled, unmuted. Breathe air ... and sing!' Of course, when we conceived the new work we were hopeful that the pandemic would have faded into the shadows. But alas, in February 2022, it was still with us and, though the singers were necessarily masked and veiled, thankfully they were unmuted.

Text

(Spoken) Dear Vaccine, please invite the singers back to the stage, and welcome audiences
to sit closely together once more, and let all be as it was … and always new.

Enough of searching strangers' eyes for what smiles reveal.
To let a child explore a face with their tiny fingers,
to taste the sun on lips, to walk in a garden,
to stand close, and best of all, kiss.

It's birdsong in the morning after rain,
the fragile shoot that promises a flower,
the new bud on the basswood tree
after winter, in the spring, it's opportunity.

Bring me my dancing shoes,
let me wear a lipstick kiss,
bring me the sharing of breath,
bring me my mother, my grandchild, to hold.

To broadcast is to sow a seed—
It's on the air we breathe,
and in the air we sing,
exhaling seeds of sound to plant a garden.

We are the choir—unmasked, unveiled, unmuted.
Breathe air … and sing!

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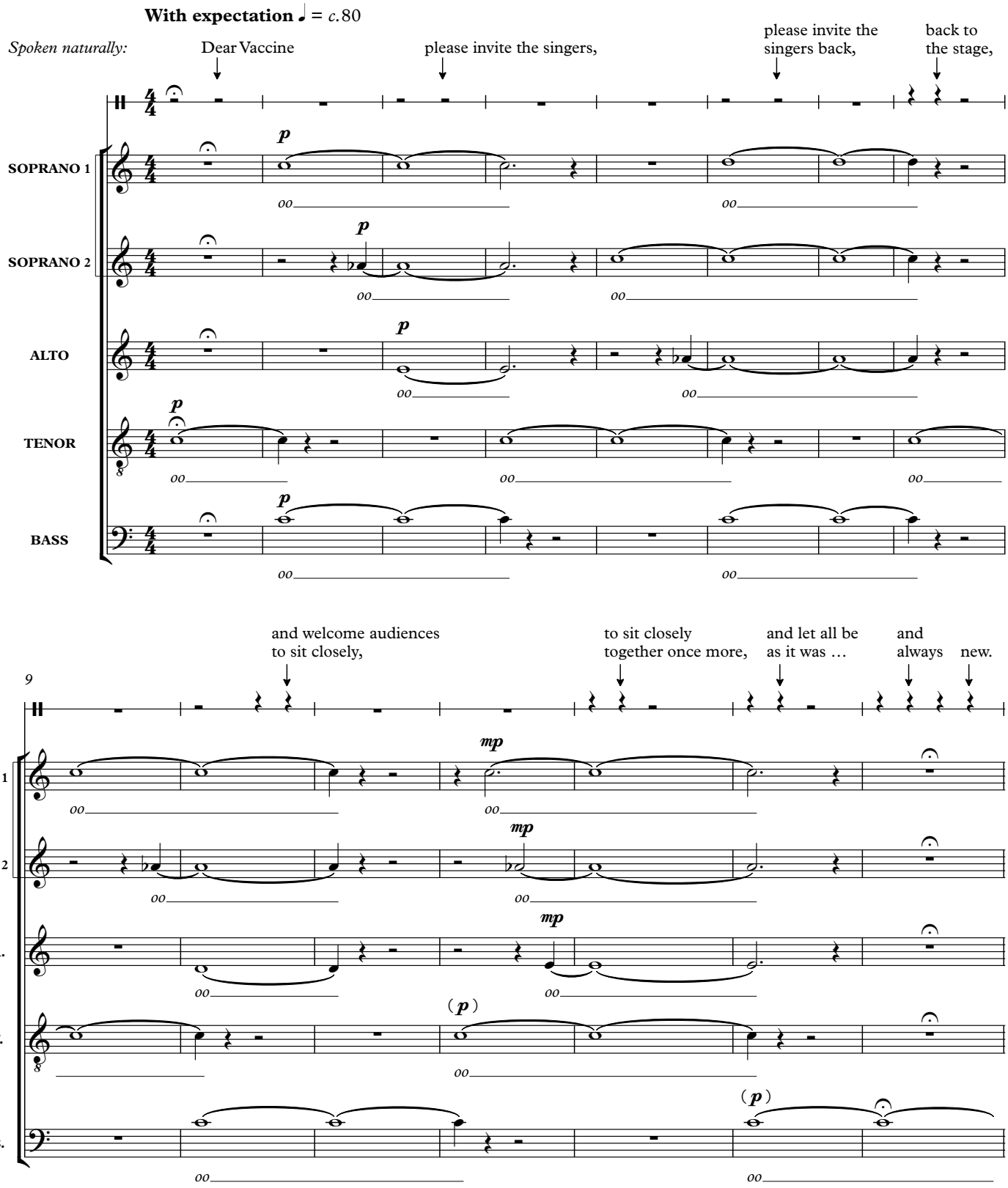
[After Kate, New York/ Kathy Shen, Tucson, AZ/ Sonnet Coggins, Makawao, HI/ Suzanne Kilkus, Madison, WI/ Fran Hillyer, Glorieta, NM/ Anndee Hochman, Philadelphia, PA/ Lori Ann Doyon, Brooklyn, NY/ WK Krueger, Maine/ Scott MacPherson, Cleveland, OH]

Commissioned by Sabrina and Peter Vanden Broeck
in honour of Ellen Vanden Broeck for the Cleveland Chamber Choir, Scott MacPherson, Artistic Director

On the Air
(Dear Vaccine)

Seán Street
(freely adapted from poetic entries from the 'Dear Vaccine' website)

CECILIA McDOWALL



Duration: 6 mins

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Gently rocking ♩. = *c.*72

16

mp *mf* *mp*

oo

search - ing

mp *mf* *mp*

oo

search - ing

oo

mp *mf* *mp*

mp *oo*

search - ing

mp *mf*

oo

E - nough of search-ing stran - gers' eyes, eyes

mf

E - nough of search-ing stran - gers' eyes, eyes

Gently rocking ♩. = *c.*72

*

mp

mf

22

poco *mp* *p*

stran - - - gers' eyes

poco *mp* *p*

stran - - - gers' eyes

poco *mp* *p*

stran - - - gers' eyes

poco *mp*

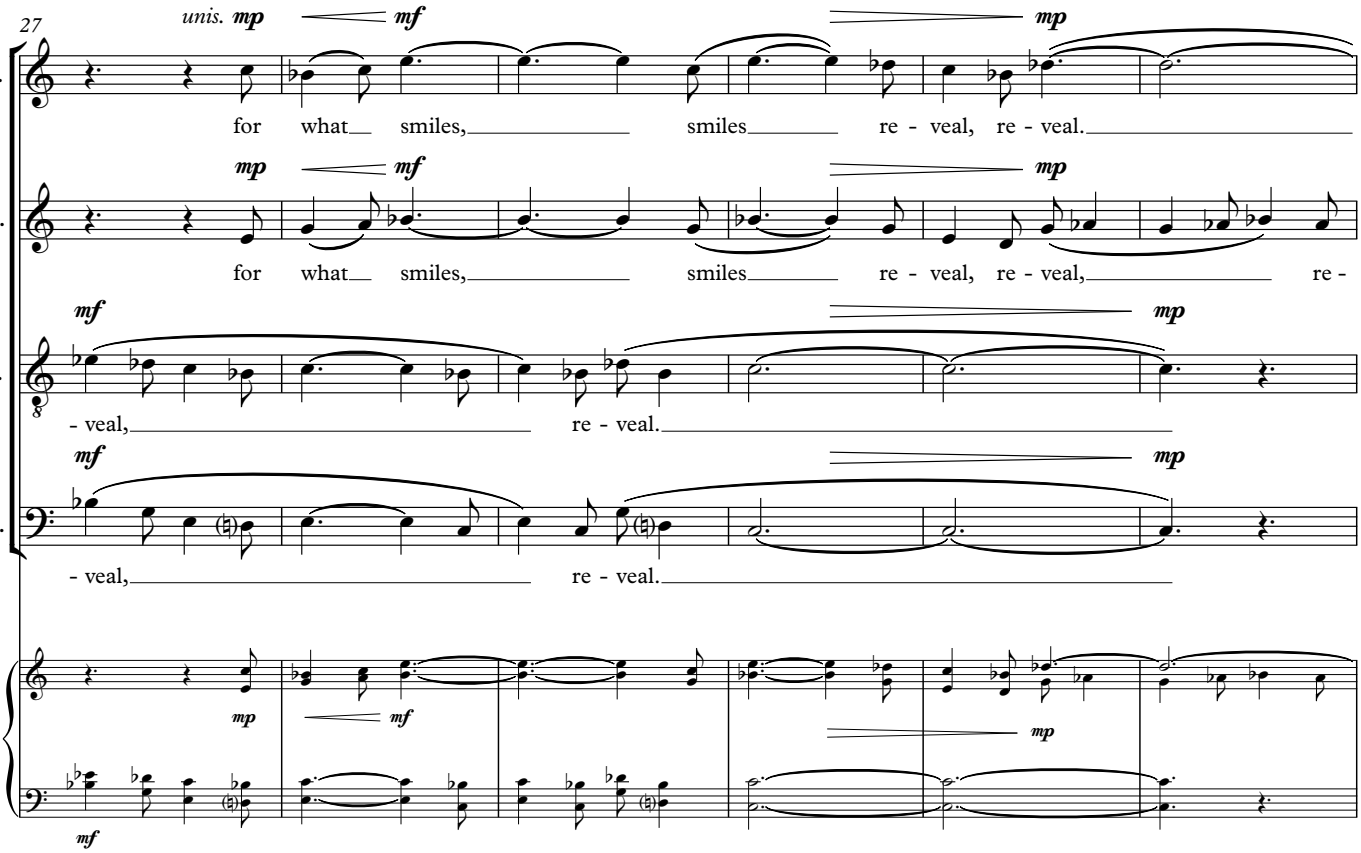
for what smiles re - veal, re -

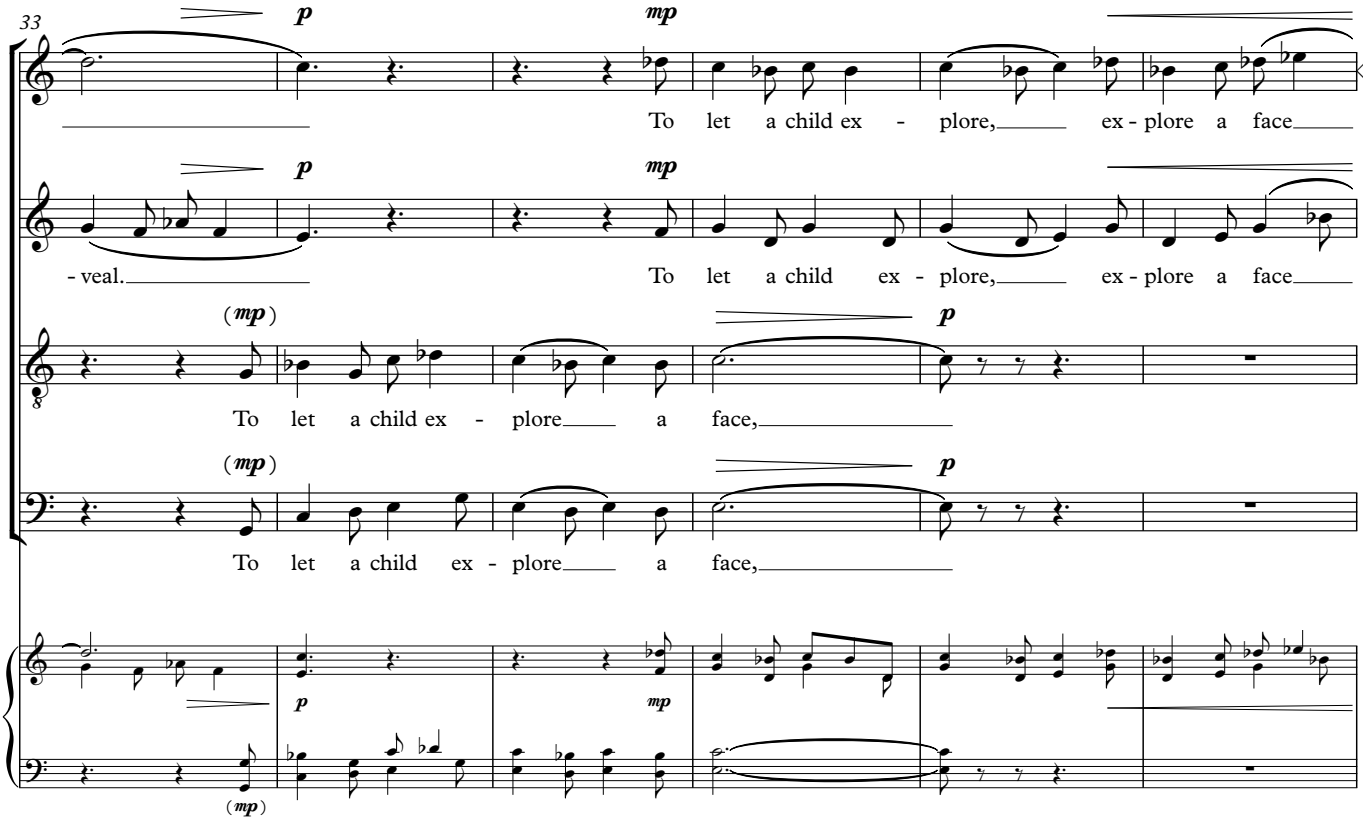
poco *mp*

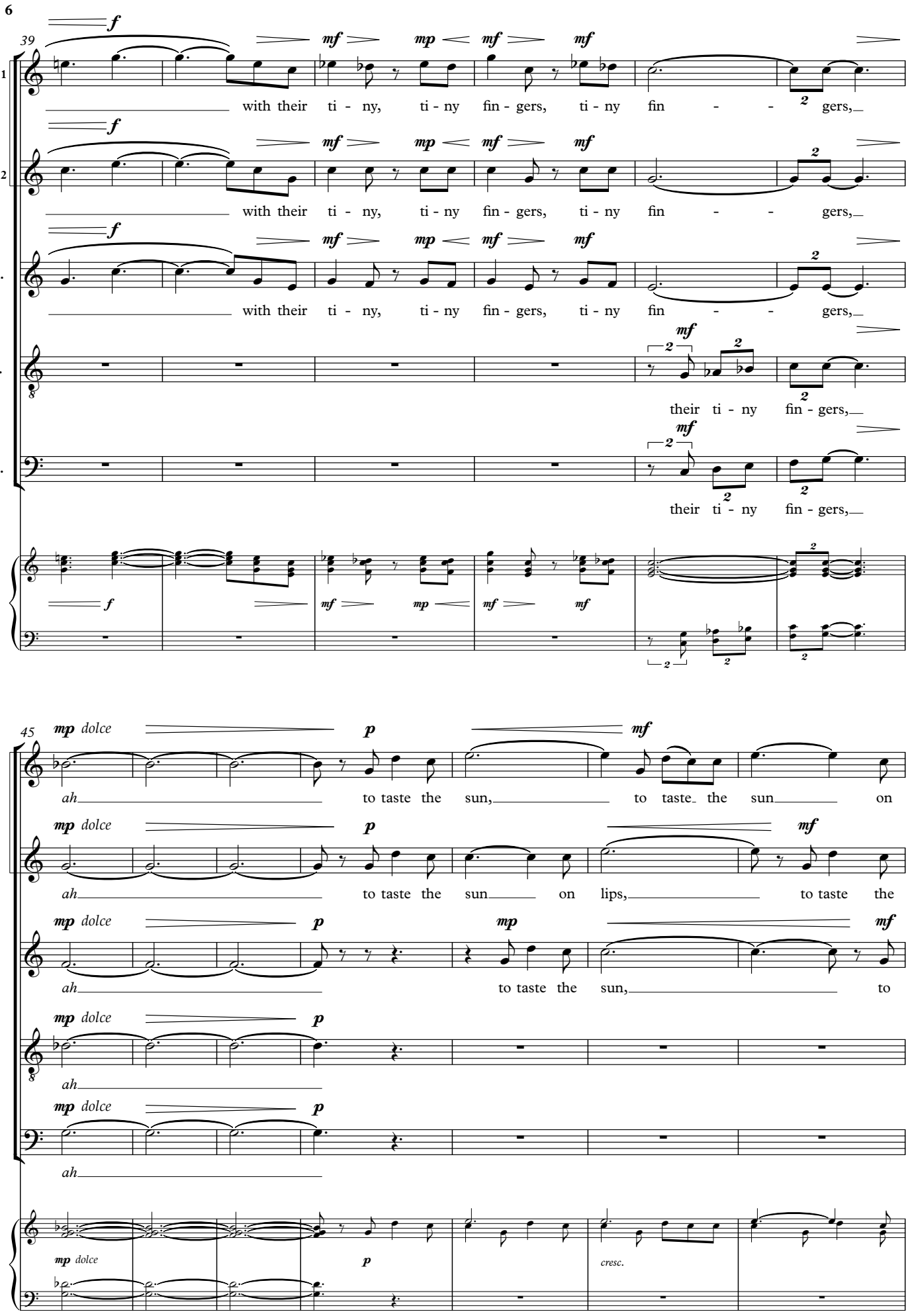
for what smiles re - veal, re -

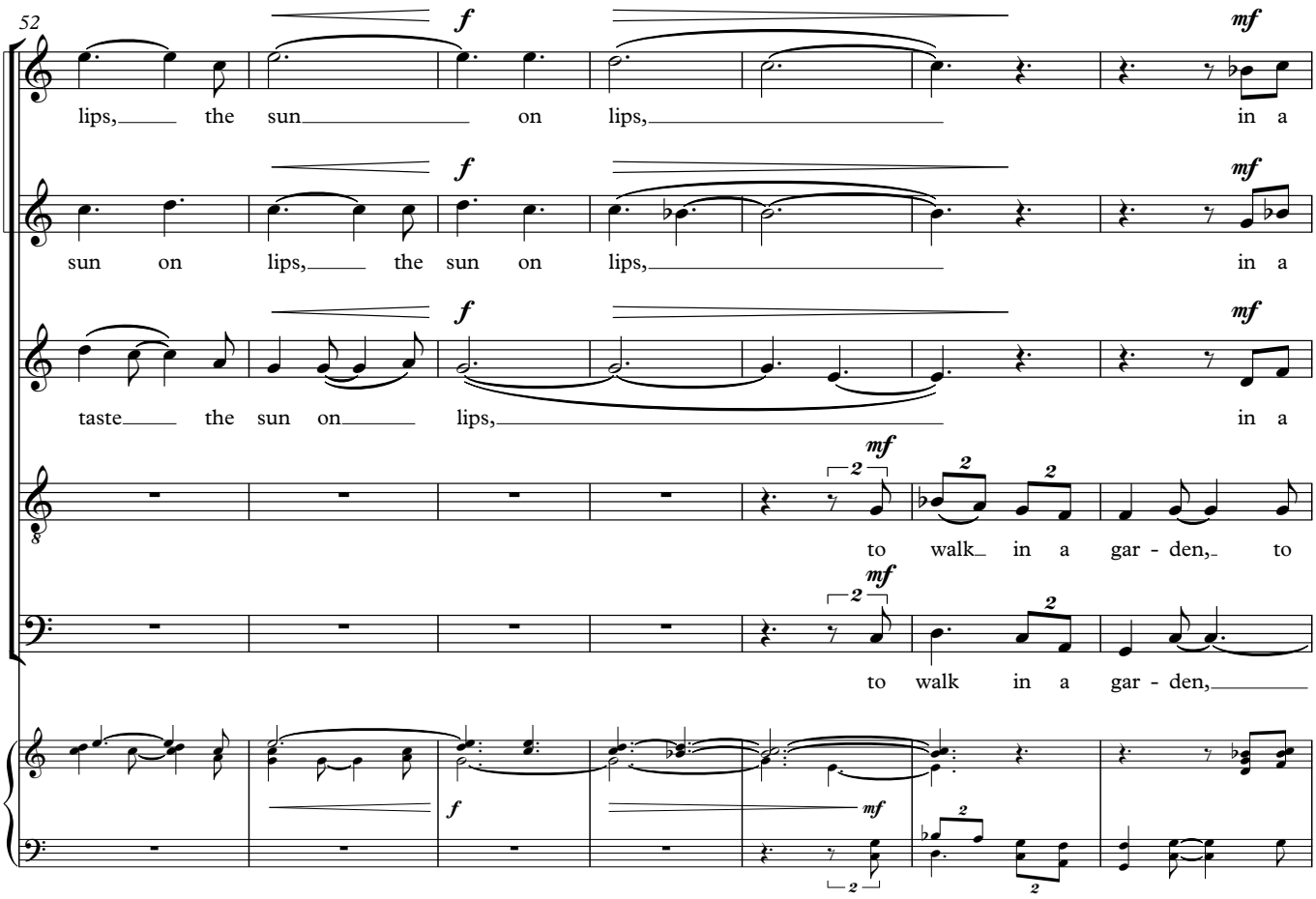
mp

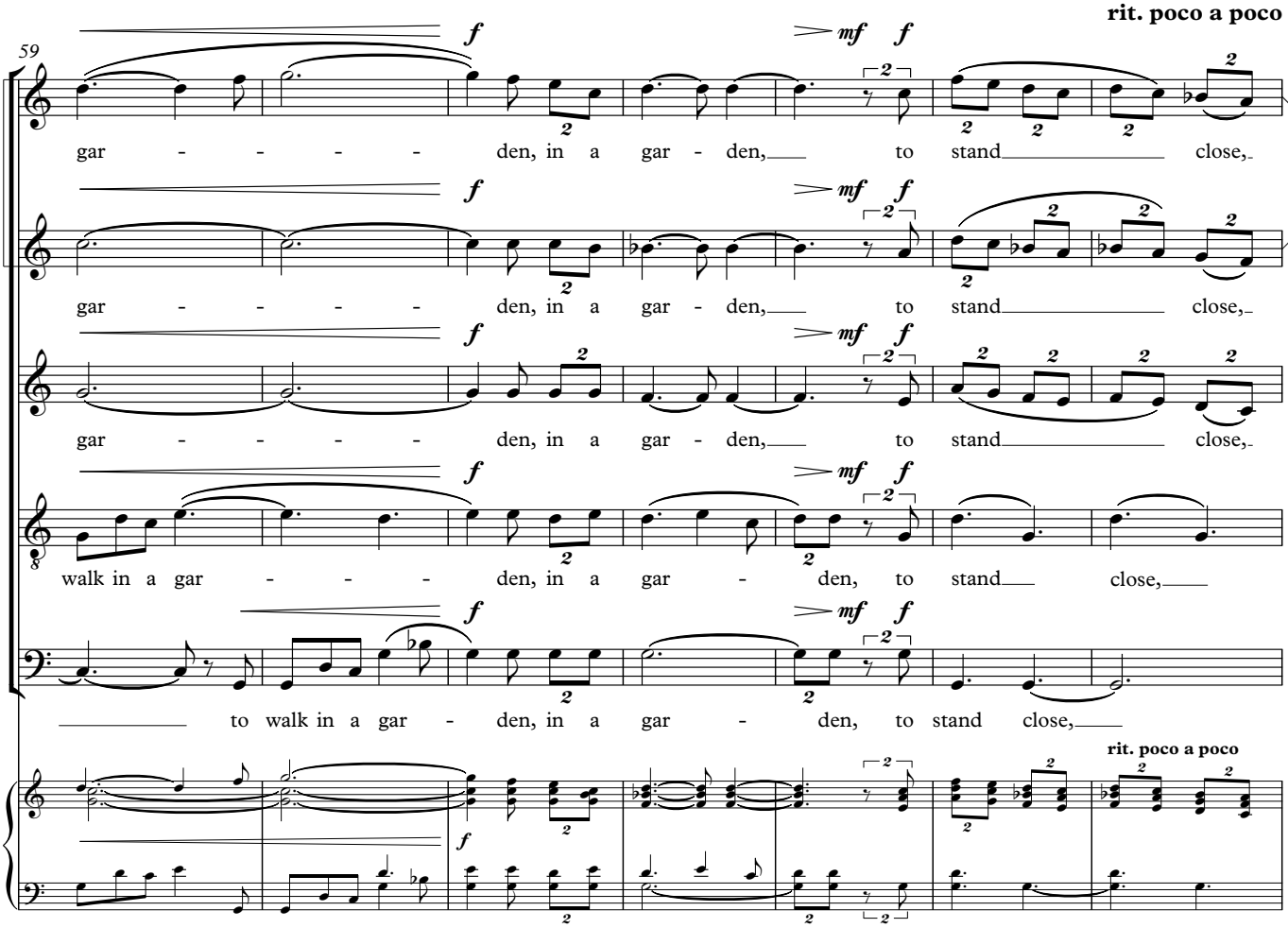
* Keyboard reduction for rehearsal only

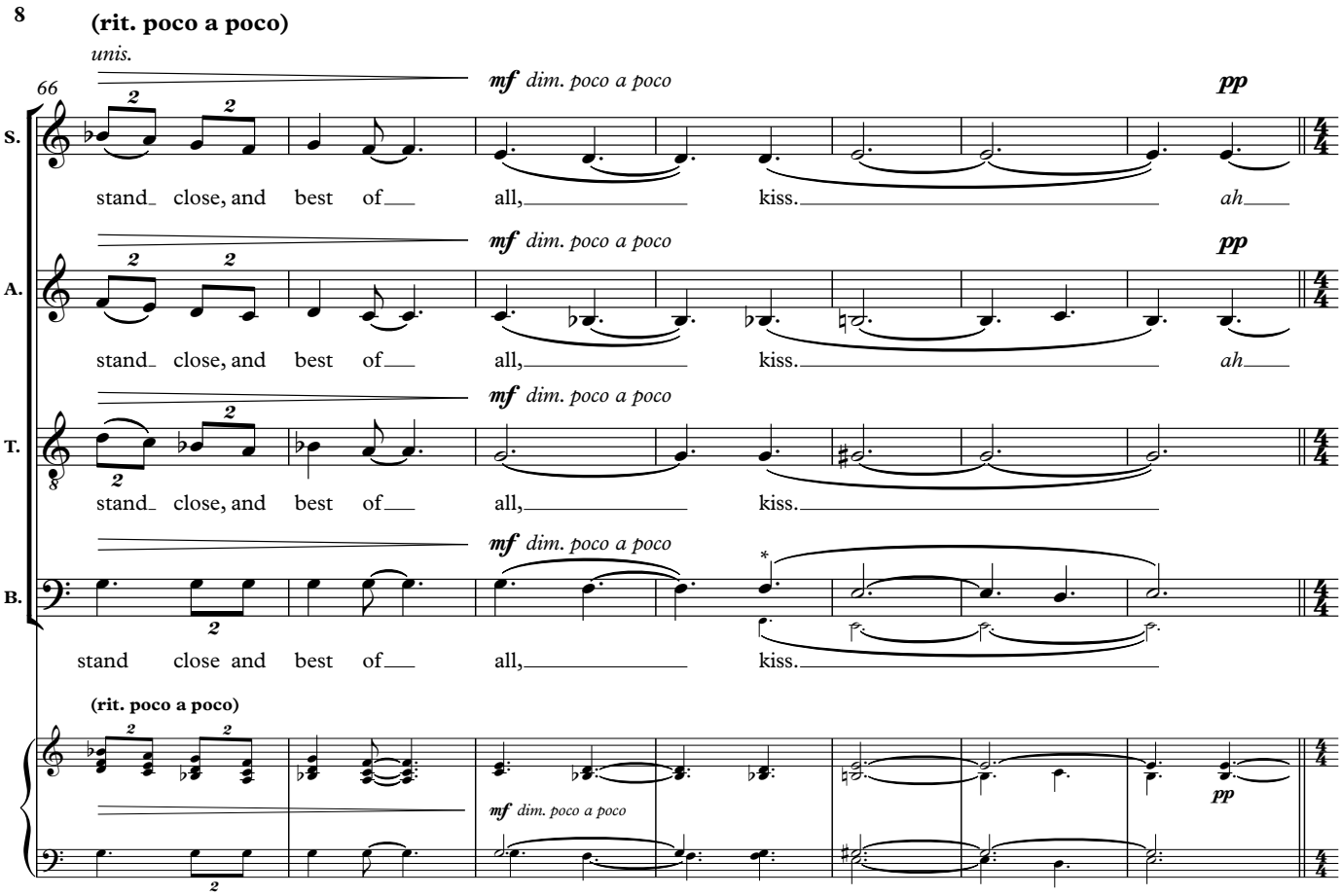

27
unis.
S.
A.
T.
B.
for what smiles, smiles re - veal, re - veal.
for what smiles, smiles re - veal, re - veal, re -
- veal, re - veal.
- veal, re - veal.

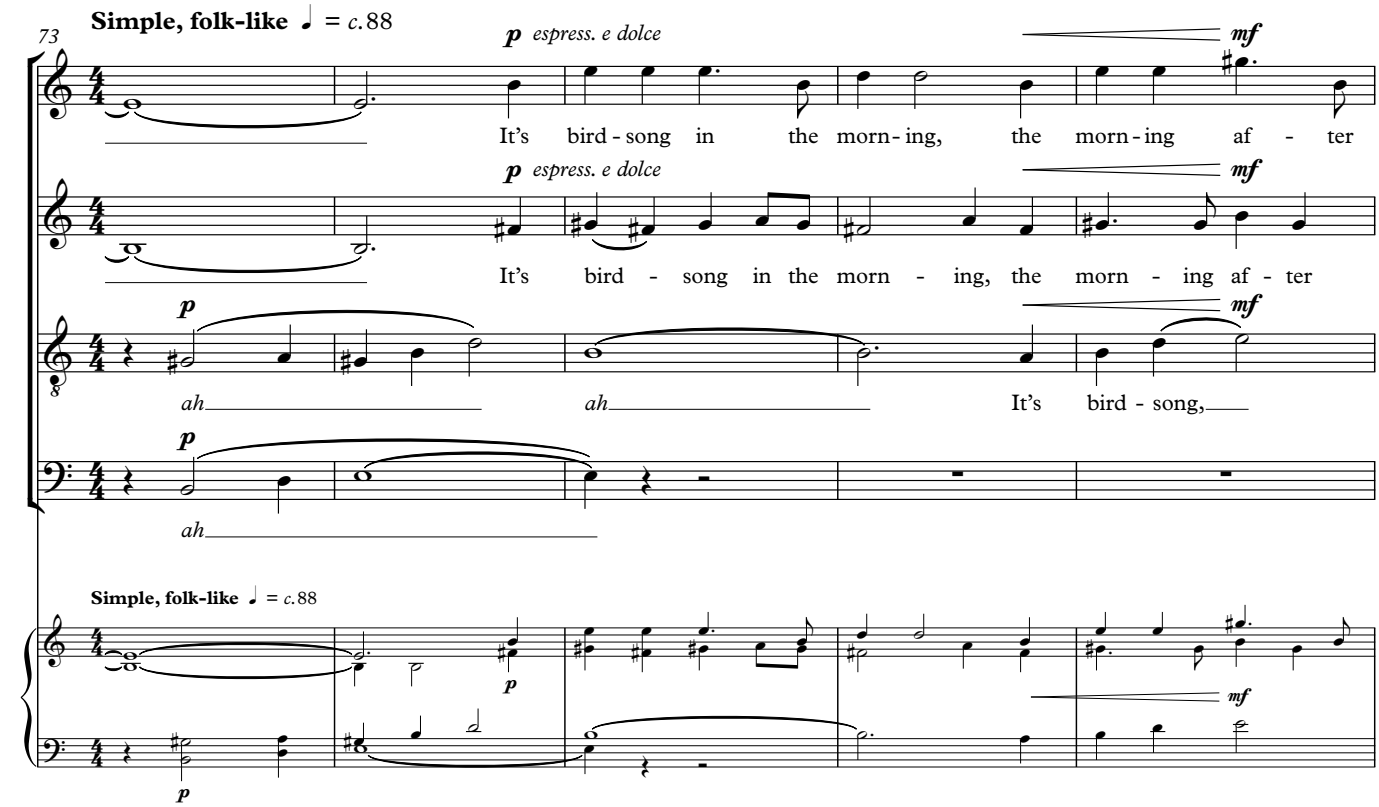

33
To let a child ex - plore, ex - plore a face
- veal. To let a child ex - plore, ex - plore a face
To let a child ex - plore a face,
To let a child ex - plore a face,


39
S. 1
S. 2
A.
T.
B.
f
mf
mp
with their ti - ny, ti - ny fin - gers, ti - ny fin - - gers,
their ti - ny fin - gers,
45
mp dolce
p
mf
ah
to taste the sun, to taste the sun on
to taste the sun on lips, to taste the
to taste the sun, to
cresc.

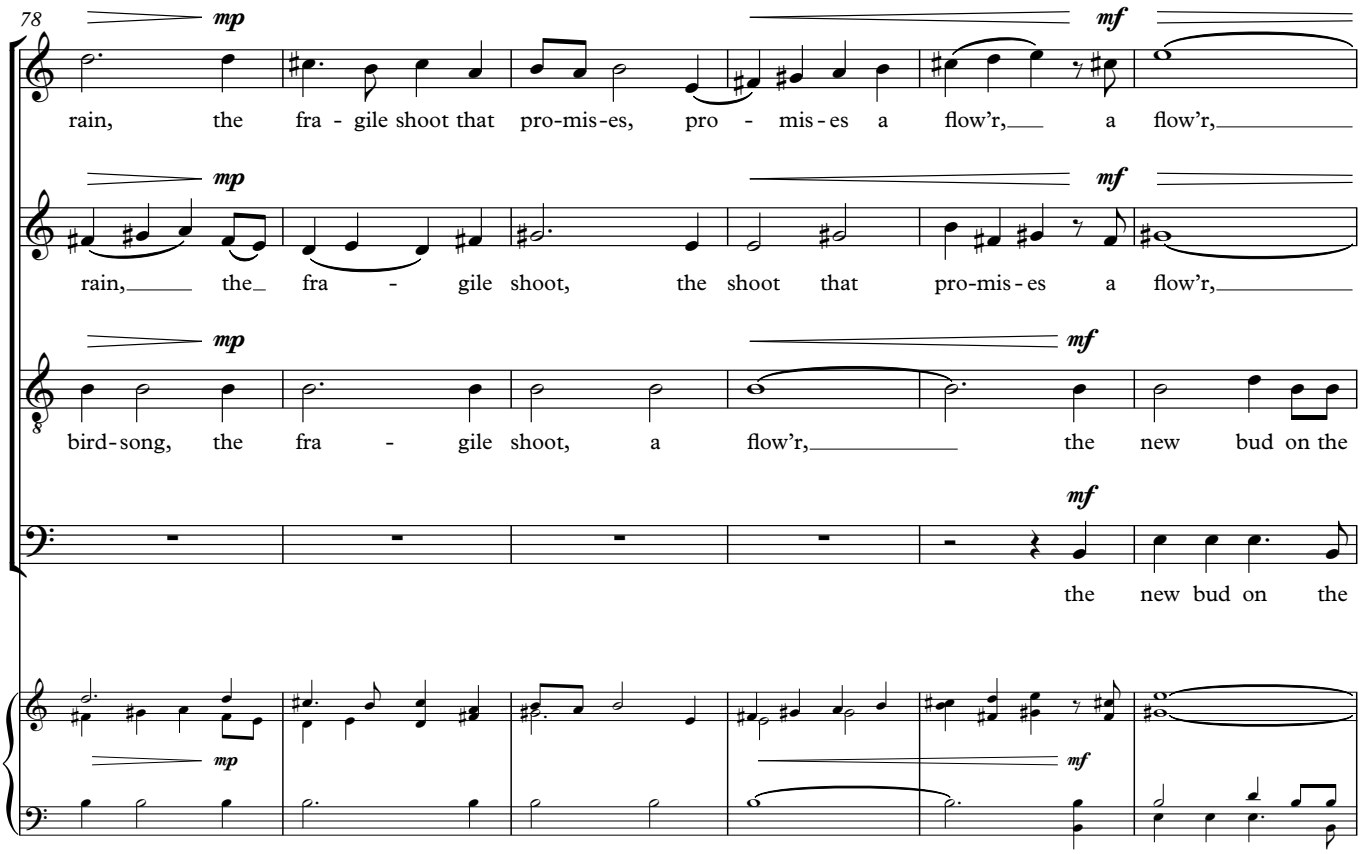

52
lips, the sun on lips, in a
sun on lips, the sun on lips, in a
taste the sun on lips, in a
to walk in a gar - den, to
to walk in a gar - den,

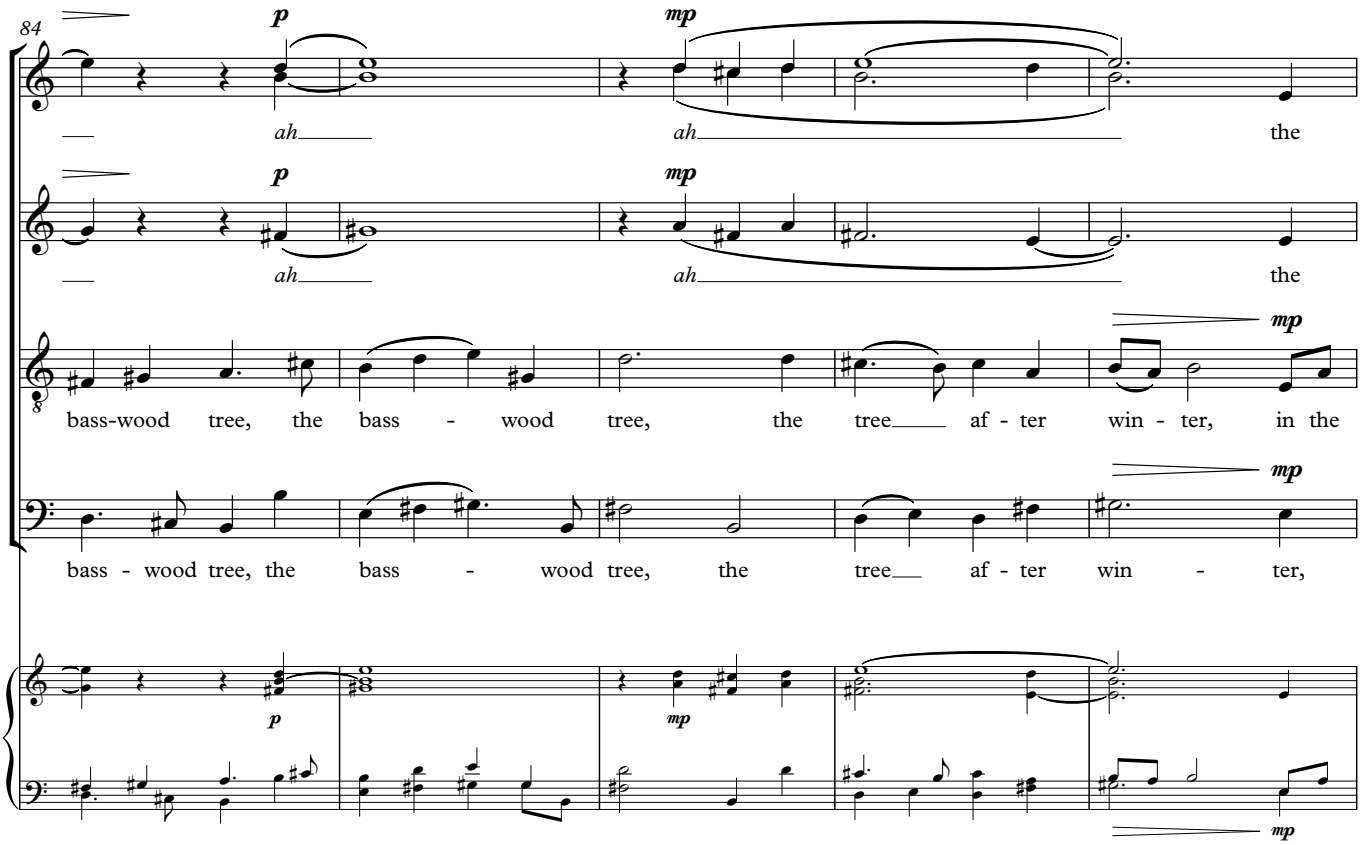

rit. poco a poco
59
gar - - - - den, in a gar - den, to stand close,
gar - - - - den, in a gar - den, to stand close,
gar - - - - den, in a gar - den, to stand close,
walk in a gar - - - den, in a gar - den, to stand close,
to walk in a gar - den, in a gar - den, to stand close,
rit. poco a poco

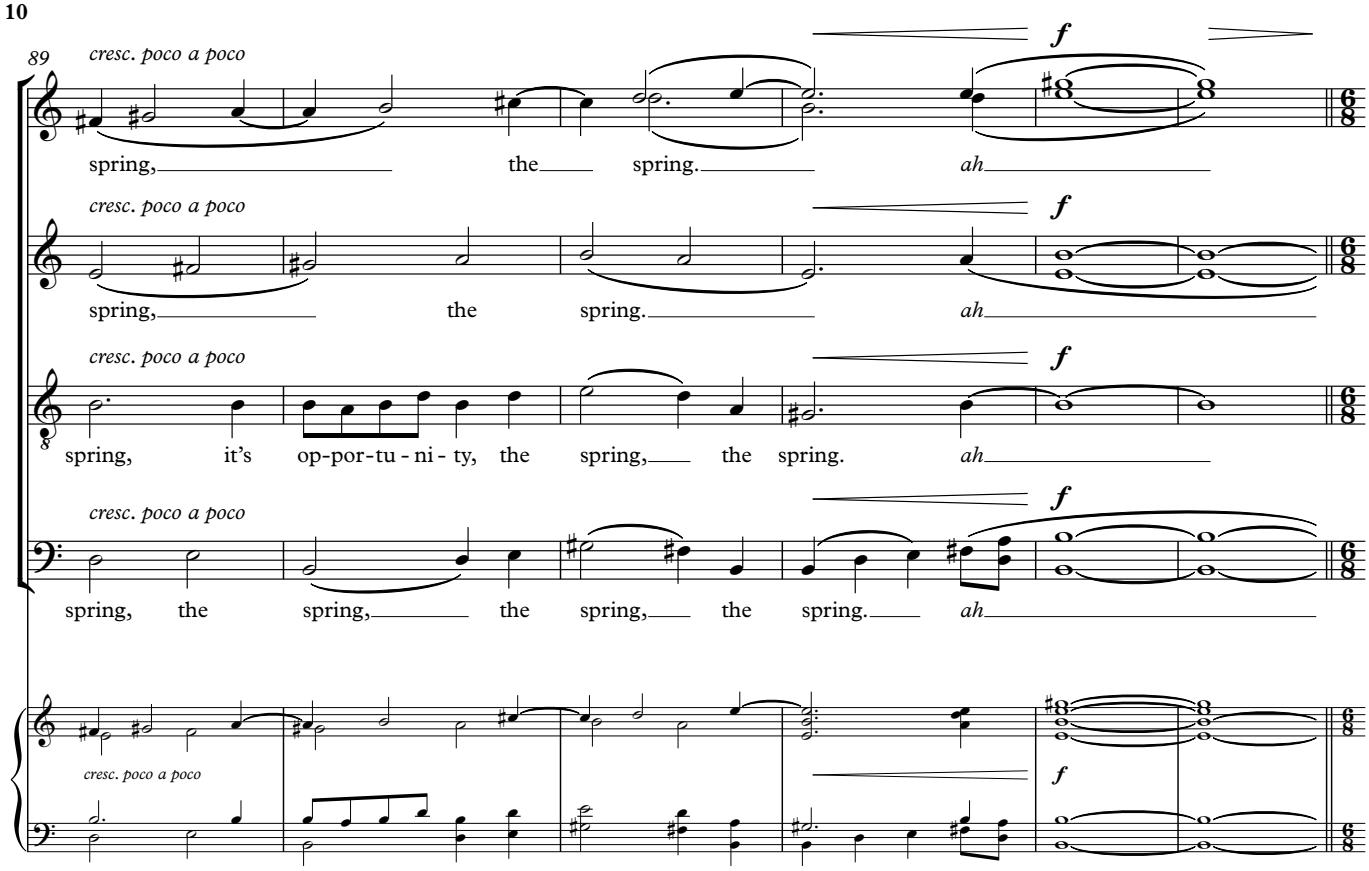


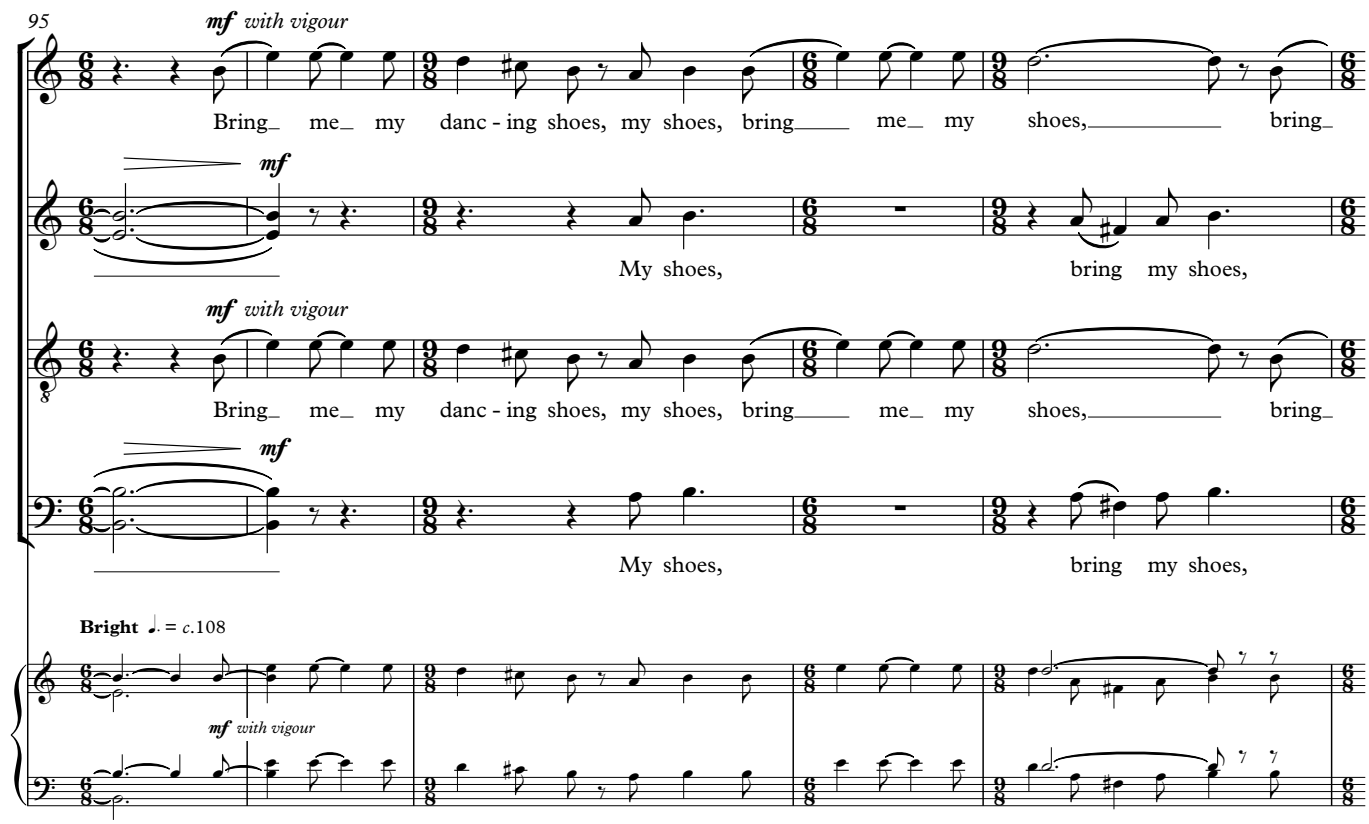


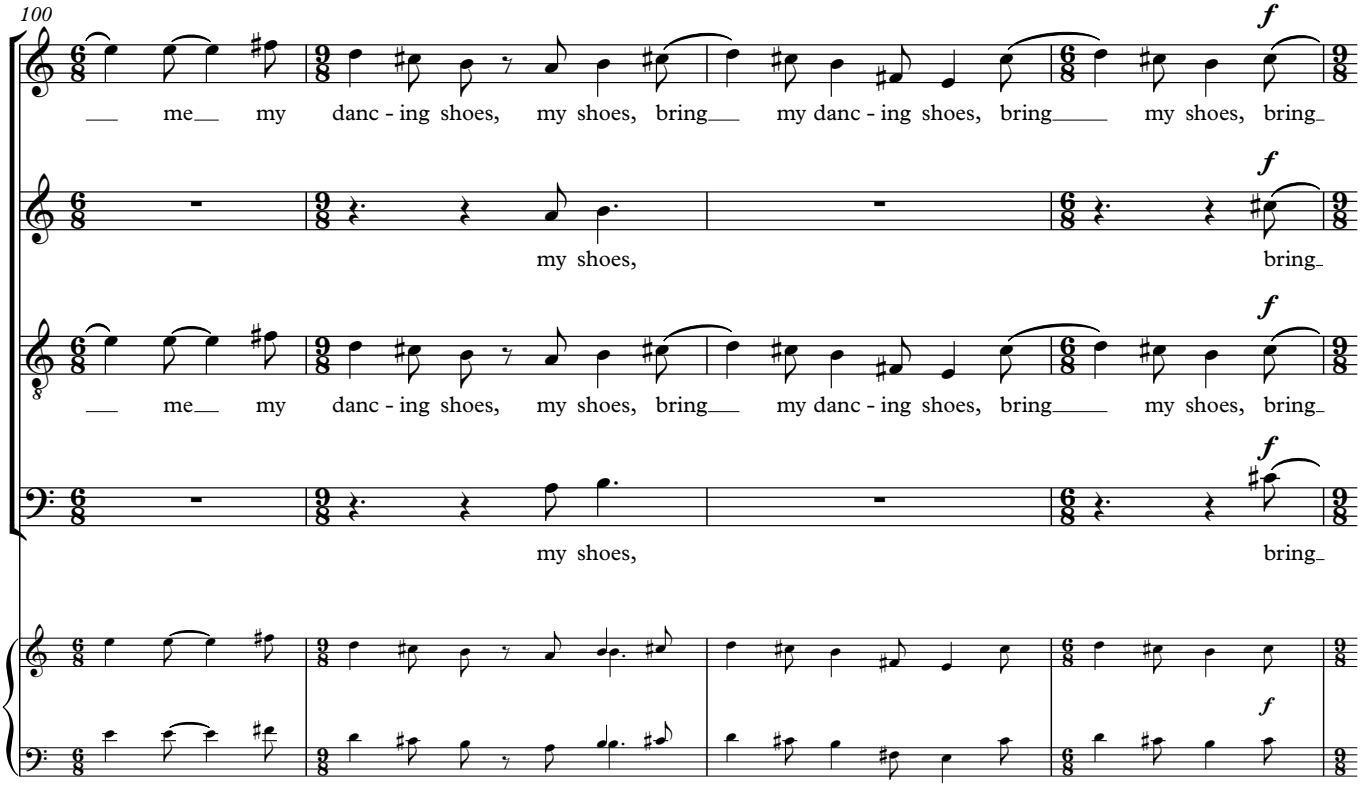
* optional *divisi*

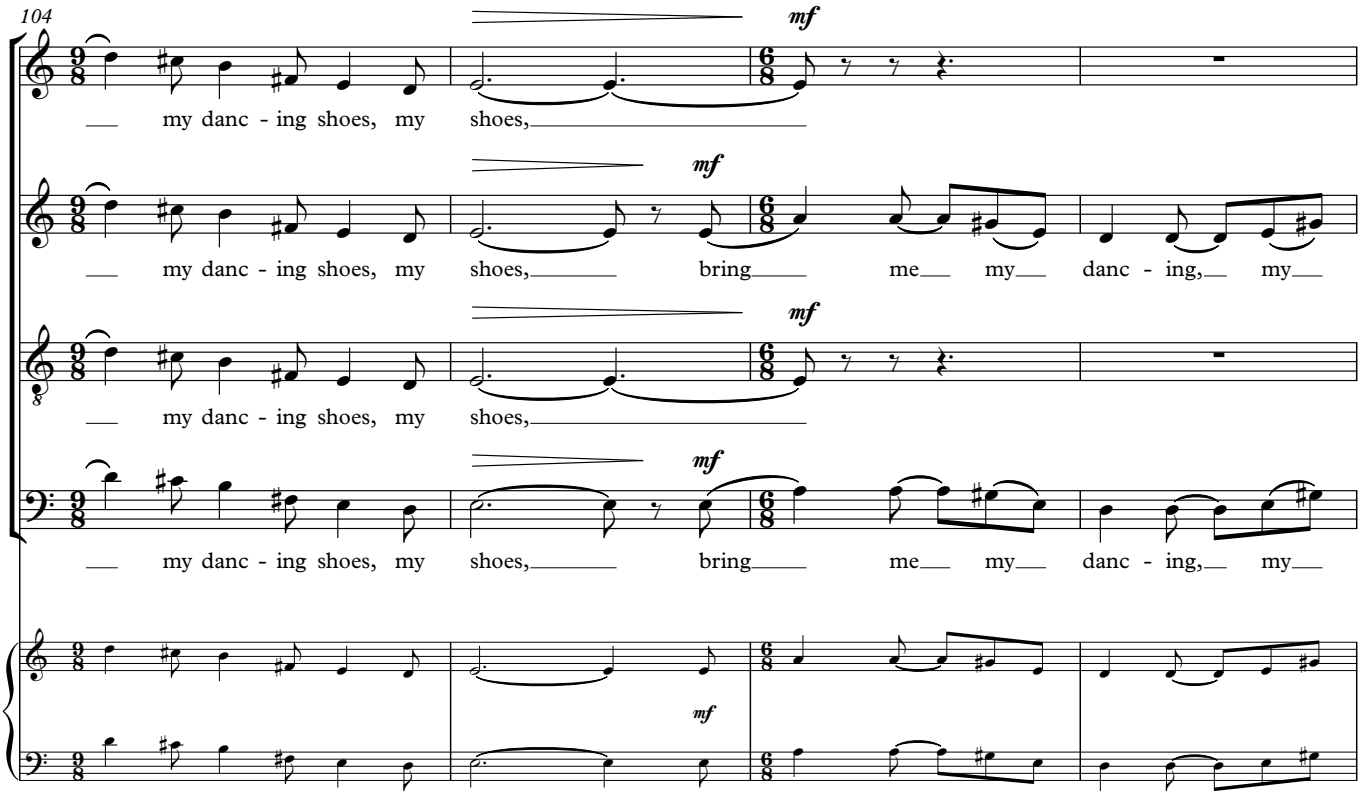

78
mp
mf
rain, the fra - gile shoot that pro-mis-es, pro - mis - es a flow'r, a flow'r,
rain, the fra - gile shoot, the shoot that pro-mis - es a flow'r,
bird-song, the fra - gile shoot, a flow'r, the new bud on the
the new bud on the

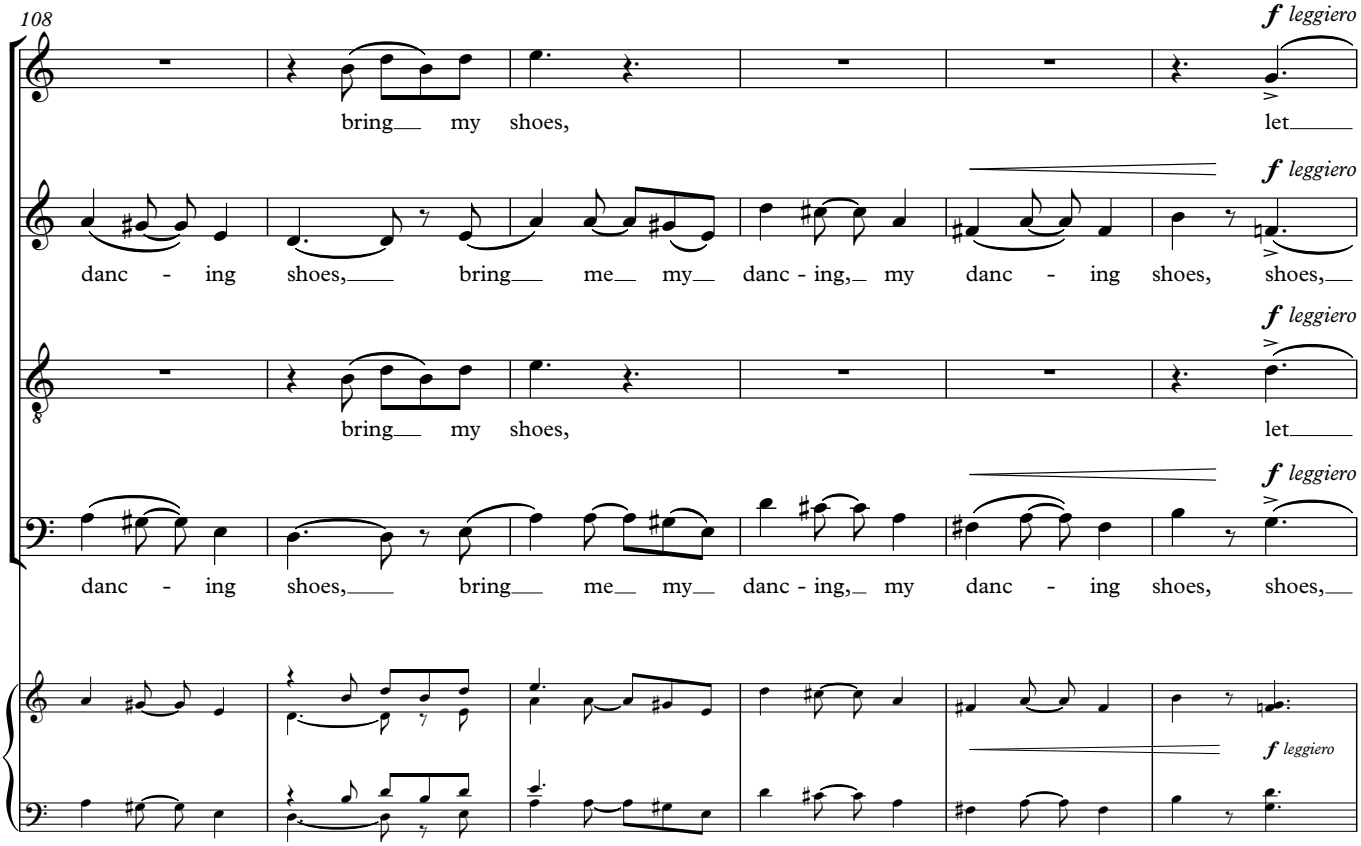

84
p
mp
ah
ah
the
bass-wood tree, the bass - wood tree, the tree af - ter win - ter, in the
bass - wood tree, the bass - wood tree, the tree af - ter win - ter,

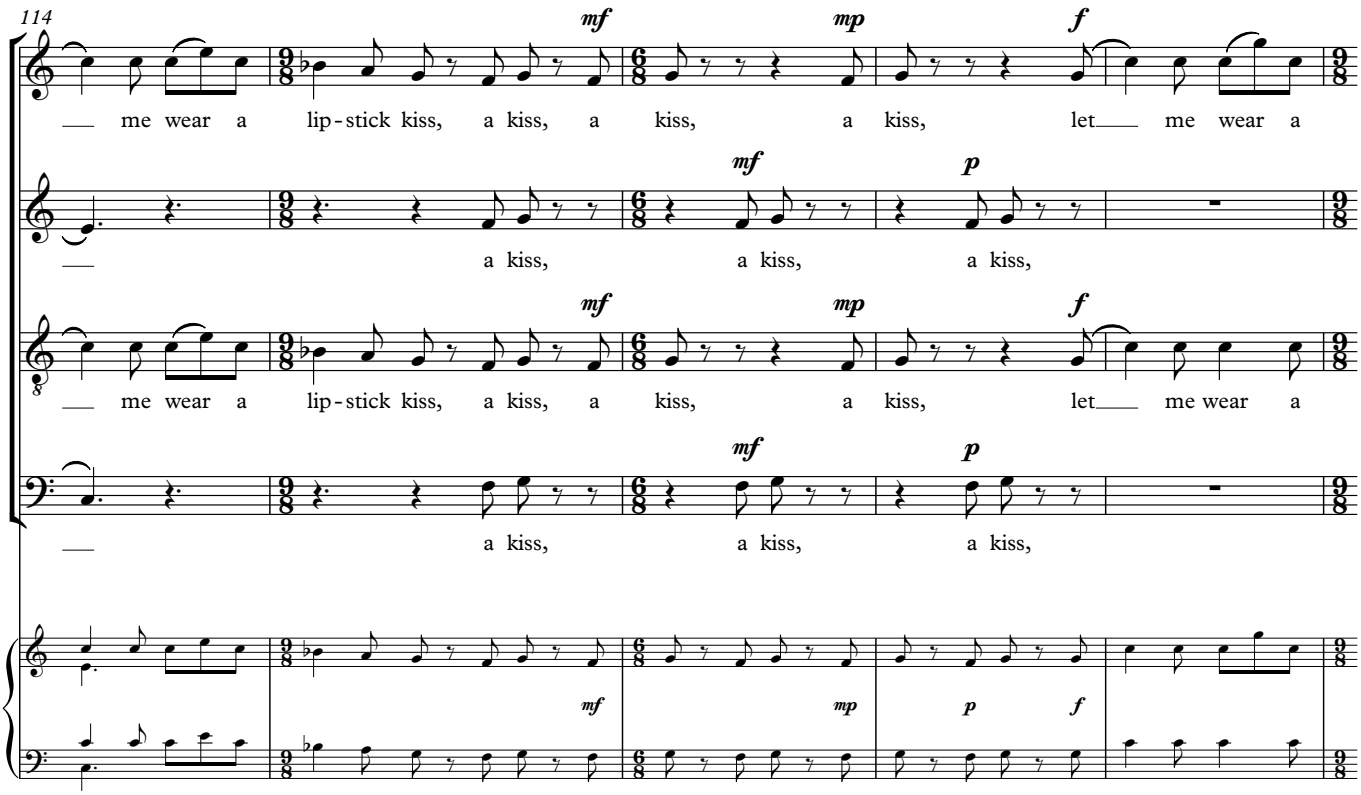

89
cresc. poco a poco
f
spring, the spring. ah
spring, the spring. ah
spring, it's op-por-tu-ni-ty, the spring, the spring. ah
spring, the spring, the spring, the spring. ah

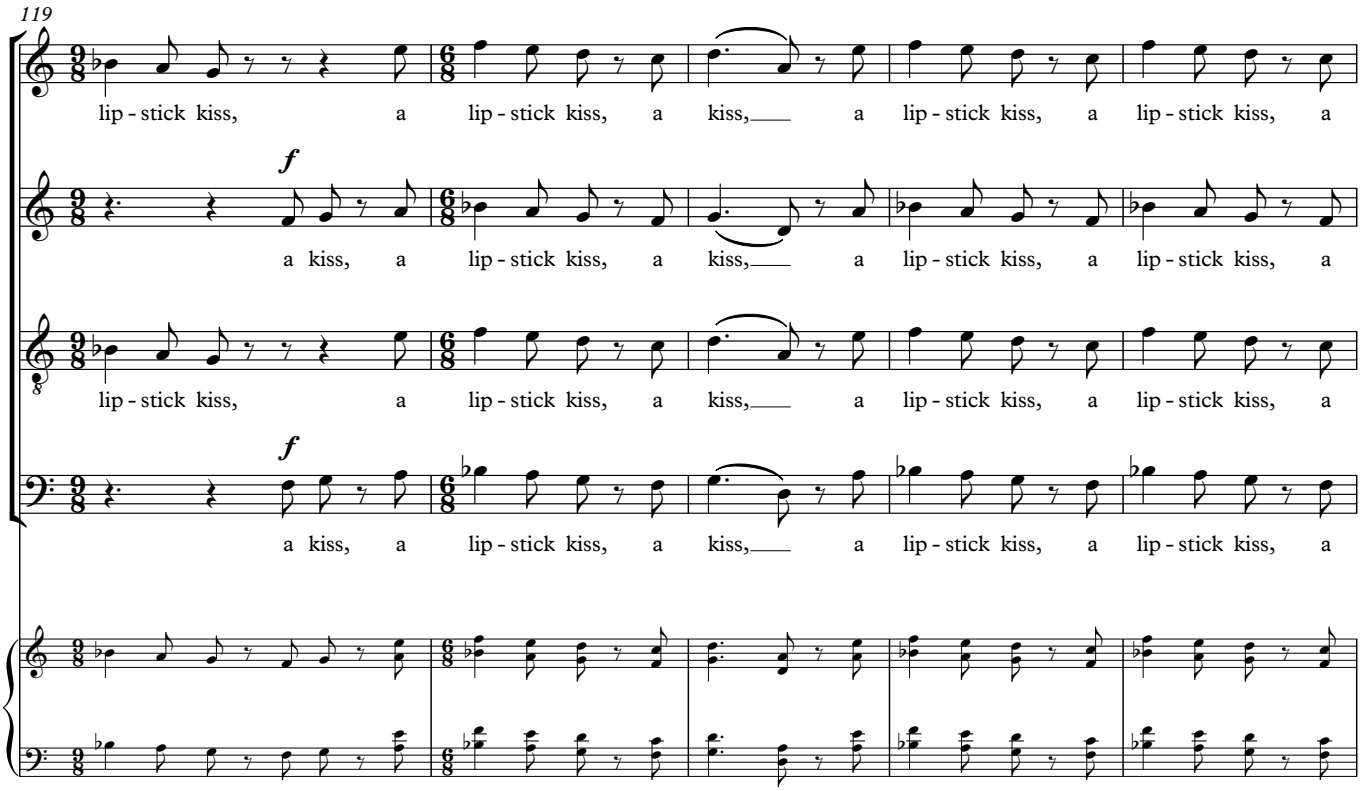

Bright ♩. = c.108
95
mf with vigour
Bring me my danc-ing shoes, my shoes, bring me my shoes, bring
mf
My shoes, bring my shoes,

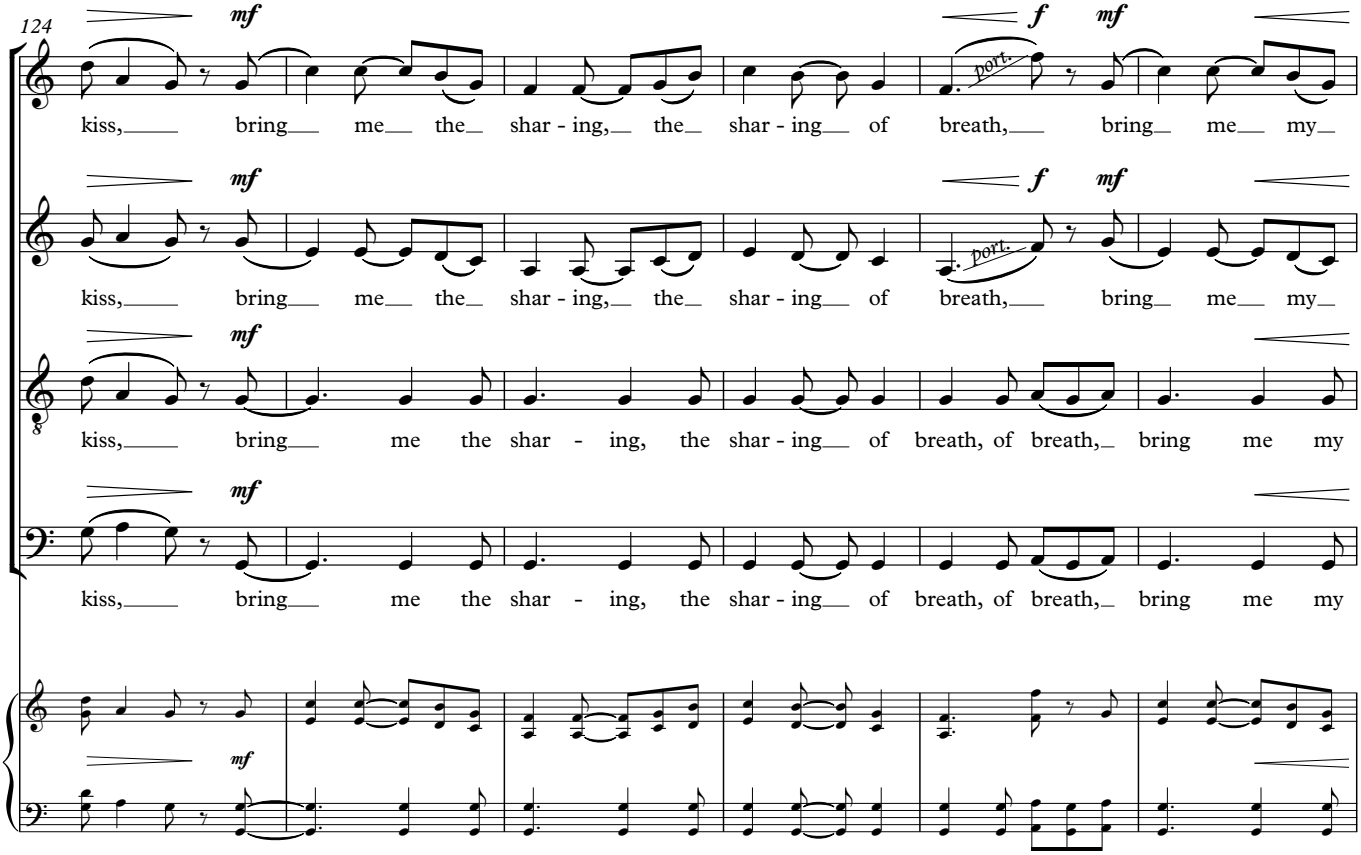

100
f
me my danc - ing shoes, my shoes, bring my danc - ing shoes, bring my shoes, bring
my shoes, bring
me my danc - ing shoes, my shoes, bring my danc - ing shoes, bring my shoes, bring
my shoes, bring

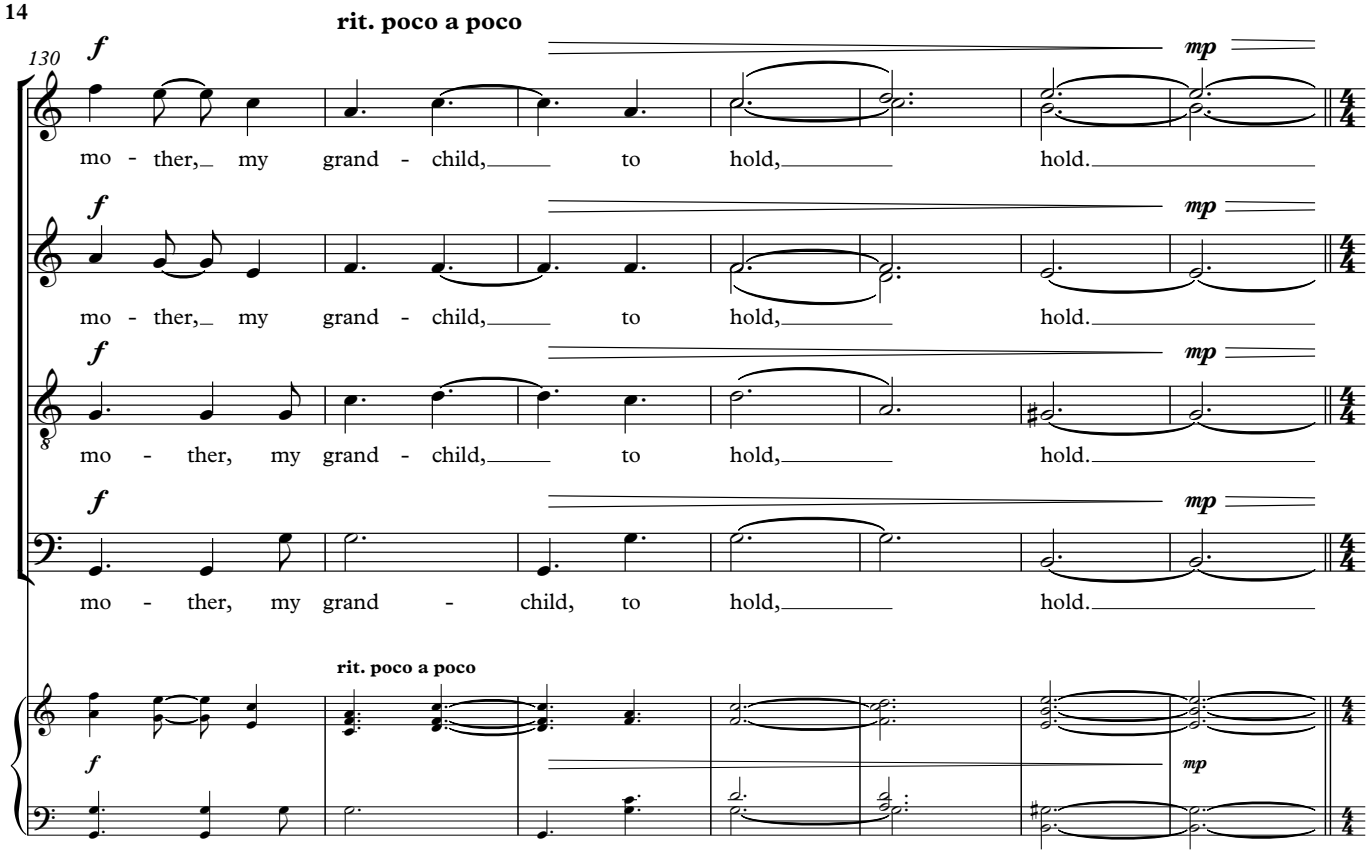

104
mf
my danc - ing shoes, my shoes, bring me my danc - ing, my
my danc - ing shoes, my shoes, bring me my danc - ing, my

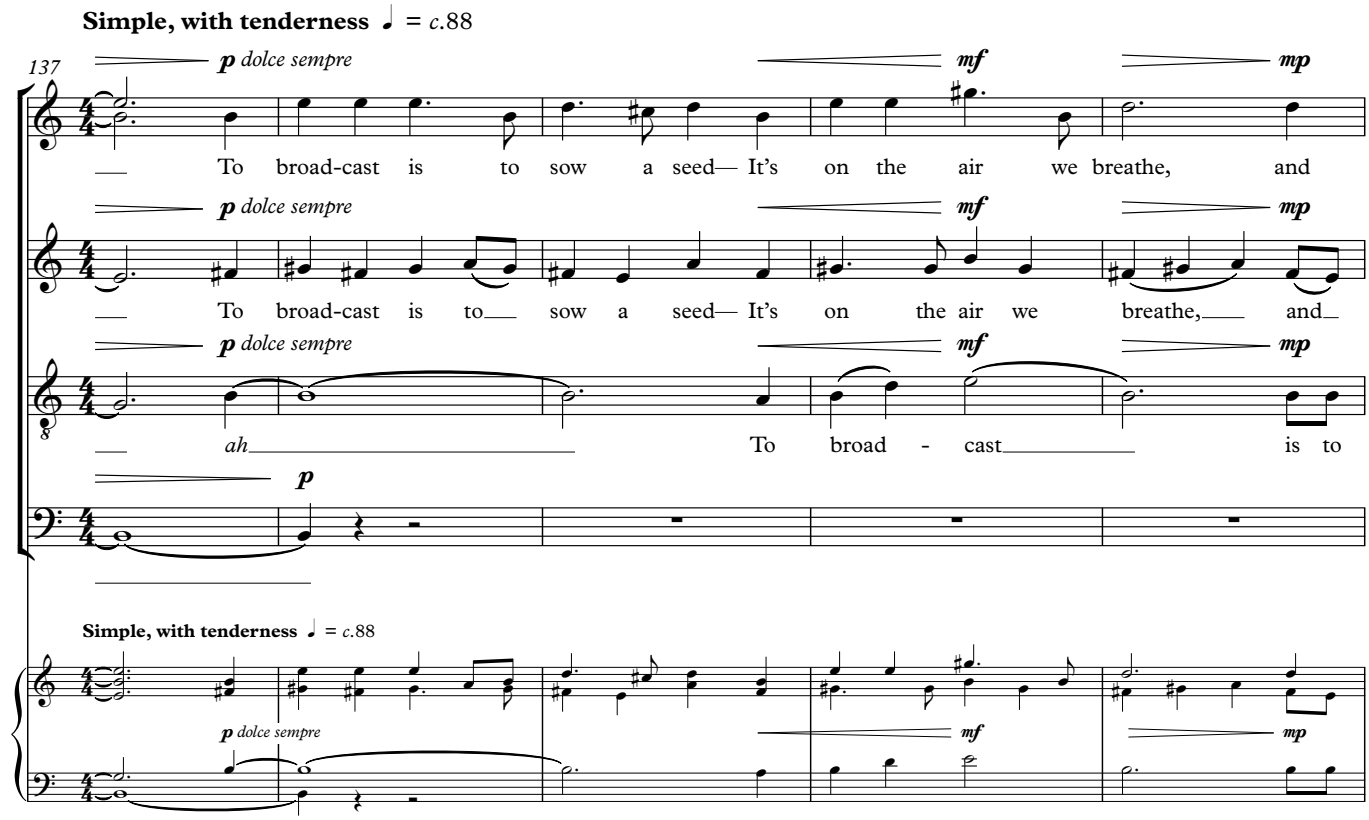

108
f leggiero
bring my shoes, let
danc - ing shoes, bring me my danc - ing, my danc - ing shoes, shoes,
bring my shoes, let
danc - ing shoes, bring me my danc - ing, my danc - ing shoes, shoes,

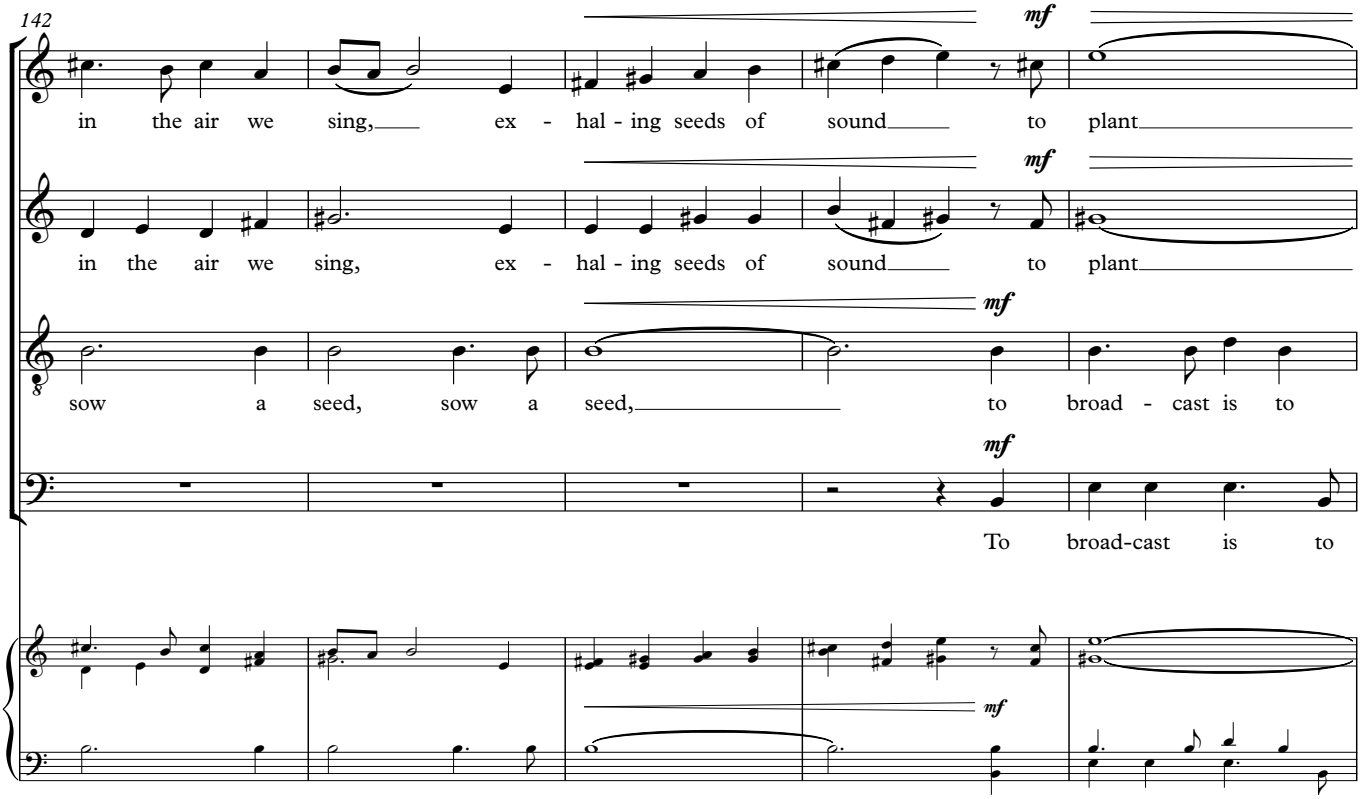

114
mf mp f
me wear a lip-stick kiss, a kiss, a kiss, a kiss, let me wear a
mf p
a kiss, a kiss, a kiss,
mf mp f
me wear a lip-stick kiss, a kiss, a kiss, a kiss, let me wear a
mf p
a kiss, a kiss, a kiss,
mf mp p f

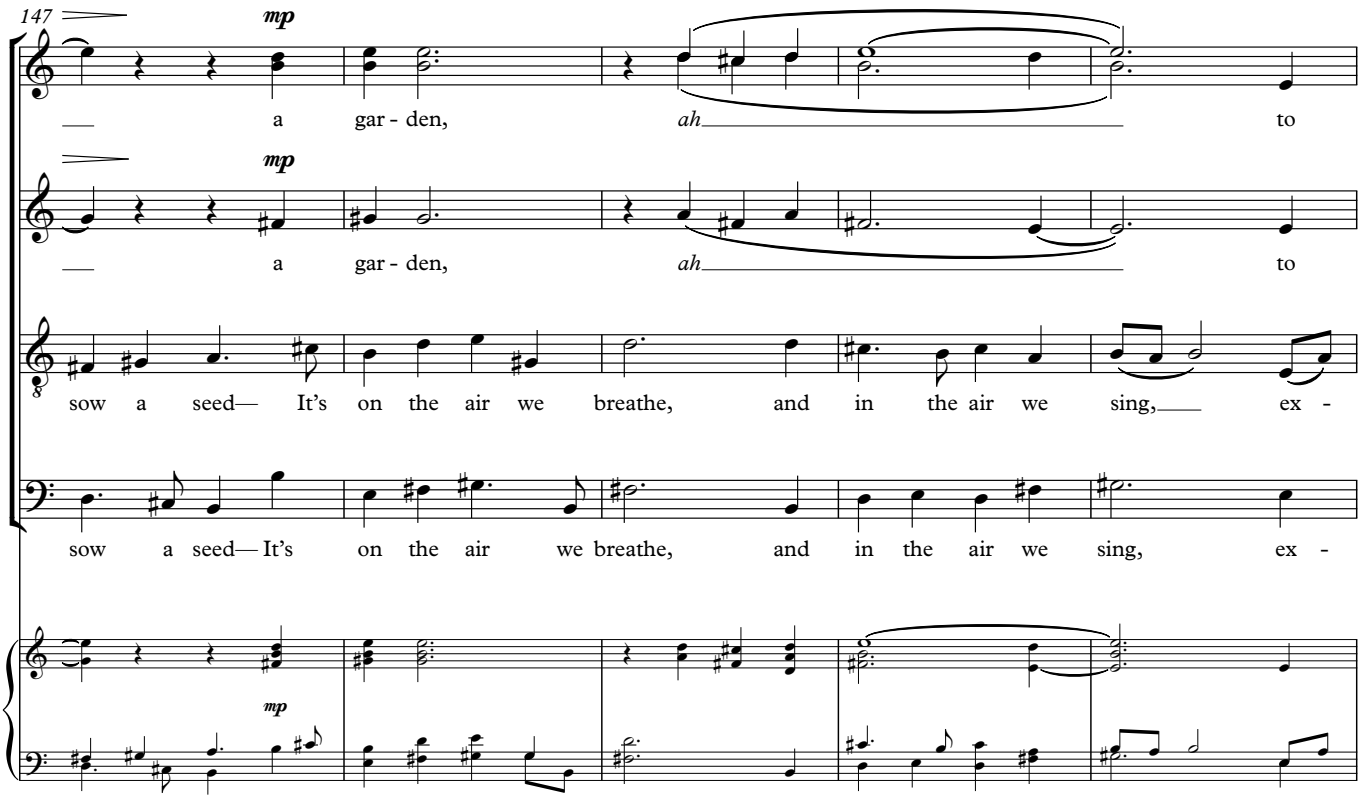

119
lip - stick kiss, a lip - stick kiss, a kiss, a lip - stick kiss, a lip - stick kiss, a
f
a kiss, a lip - stick kiss, a kiss, a lip - stick kiss, a lip - stick kiss, a
lip - stick kiss, a lip - stick kiss, a kiss, a lip - stick kiss, a lip - stick kiss, a
f
a kiss, a lip - stick kiss, a kiss, a lip - stick kiss, a lip - stick kiss, a

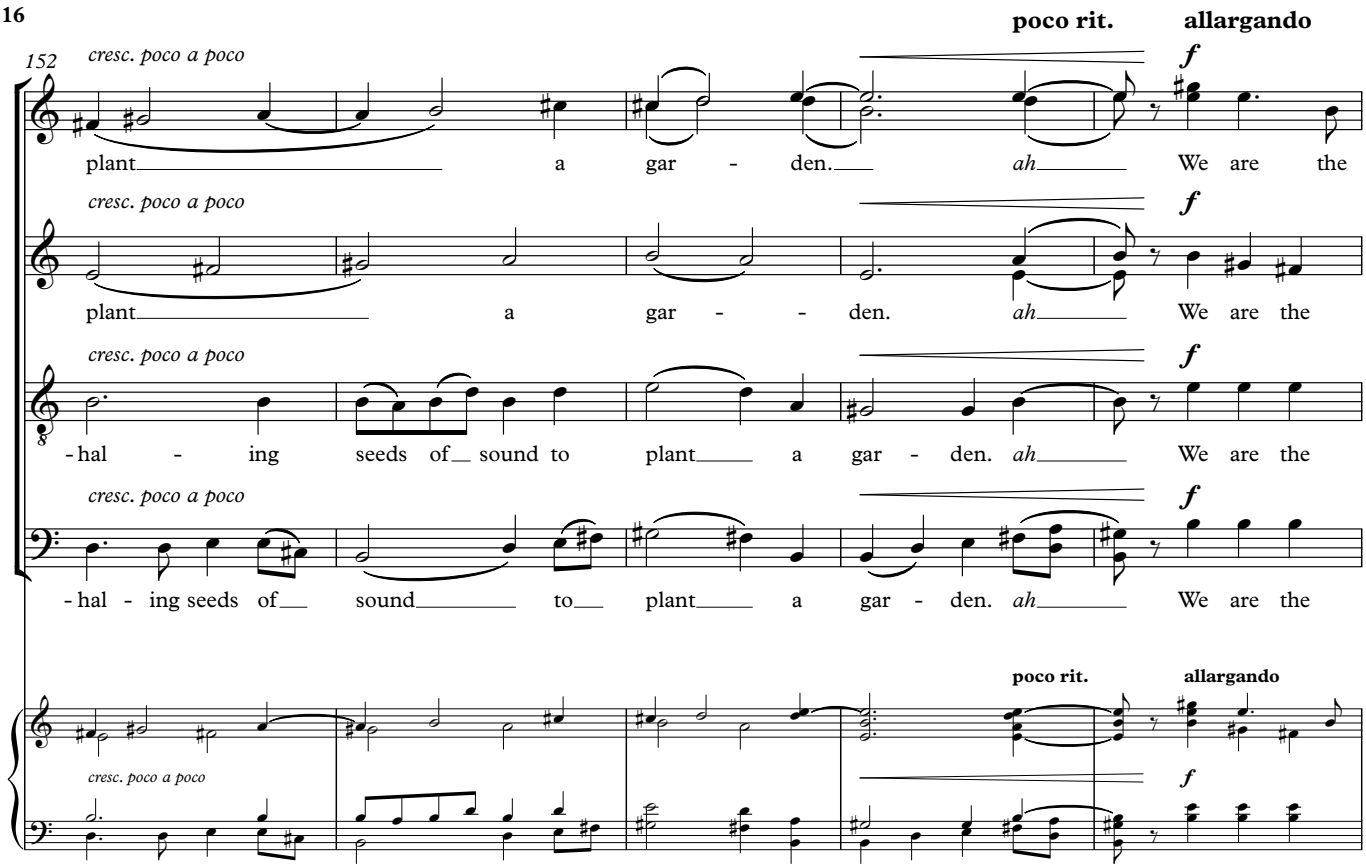

124
mf
f
mf
port.
kiss, bring me the shar - ing, the shar - ing of breath, bring me my
kiss, bring me the shar - ing, the shar - ing of breath, of breath, bring me my

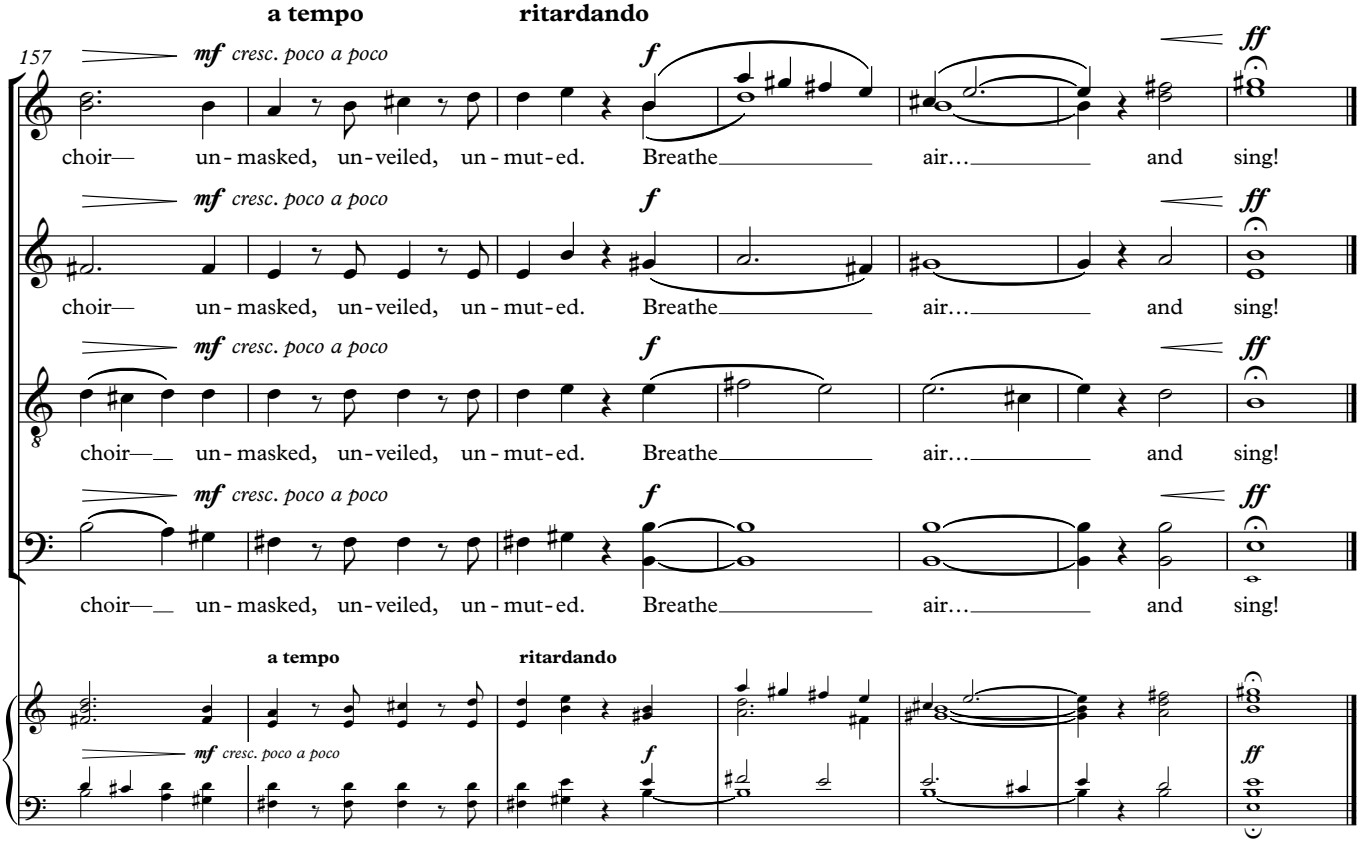

rit. poco a poco
130
f
mp
mo - ther, my grand - child, to hold, hold.
mo - ther, my grand - child, to hold, hold.
mo - ther, my grand - child, to hold, hold.
mo - ther, my grand - child, to hold, hold.
rit. poco a poco


Simple, with tenderness ♩ = c.88
137
p dolce sempre
mf
mp
To broad-cast is to sow a seed— It's on the air we breathe, and
To broad-cast is to sow a seed— It's on the air we breathe, and
ah To broad - cast is to
Simple, with tenderness ♩ = c.88


142
mf
in the air we sing, ex - hal - ing seeds of sound to plant
mf
in the air we sing, ex - hal - ing seeds of sound to plant
mf
sow a seed, sow a seed, to broad - cast is to
mf
To broad-cast is to
mf


147
mp
a gar - den, ah to
mp
a gar - den, ah to
sow a seed— It's on the air we breathe, and in the air we sing, ex -
sow a seed— It's on the air we breathe, and in the air we sing, ex -
mp





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