Piano Reduction

Gwyneth Walker

Let America Be America Again

for Narrator and Orchestra

Based on the poem by Langston Hughes

Program Notes

Let America Be America Again is a powerful poem by African-American poet/playwright, Langston Hughes (1902-1967). The strength of the message and language are well-suited to presentation by narrator and orchestra.

This is a dramatic and varied text, ranging from peaceful (dreamlike) passages to angry explosions. The author begins by speaking of the dream of America, a land where pioneers sought their freedom. [Hughes then acknowledges that, as a black American, “America never was America to me.”] There is the hope for liberty and equality. Yet for black Americans, and the downtrodden of all races, the American experience has all too often been one of persecution.

Speaking now in the first person, the author identifies with all struggling Americans. “I am the farmer... the worker...the Negro...I am the people.” “Yet I’m the one who dreamt the basic dream...to build a homeland of the free.” Despite their labors, these Americans have nothing except “the dream that’s almost dead today.”

With the strength of enduring hope, the author exhorts “We, the people, must reclaim the land...and make America again!”

The musical expression, which has thus far essentially provided a background and commentary to the reading, now comes forth with a closing hymn titled “Let America Be America Again!” The theme, which enters after a 12-measure introduction, is stated in low octaves, with a rhythm aligned with the words “Let America be America.” The theme returns several times, including in the closing section, where the ascending pitches are held through. This gathering of many notes expresses a “land for all!”

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Dr. Gwyneth Walker (b. 1947) is a graduate of Brown University and the Hartt School of Music. She holds B.A., M.M. and D.M.A. Degrees in Music Composition. A former faculty member of the Oberlin College Conservatory, she resigned from academic employment in 1982 in order to pursue a career as a full-time composer. For nearly 30 years, she lived on a dairy farm in Braintree, Vermont. She has now returned to her childhood hometown of New Canaan, Connecticut.

Gwyneth Walker has been a proud resident of Vermont. She is the recipient of the Year 2000 “Lifetime Achievement Award” from the Vermont Arts Council as well as the 2008 “Athenaeum Award for Achievement in the Arts and Humanities” from the St. Johnsbury (VT) Athenaeum.

Walker's catalog includes over 200 commissioned works for orchestra, chamber ensembles, chorus and solo voice. The music of Gwyneth Walker is published by E. C. Schirmer (choral and vocal music) and Lauren Keiser Music (orchestral and instrumental music).

Further information concerning Gwyneth Walker and her works is available at www.gwynethwalker.com
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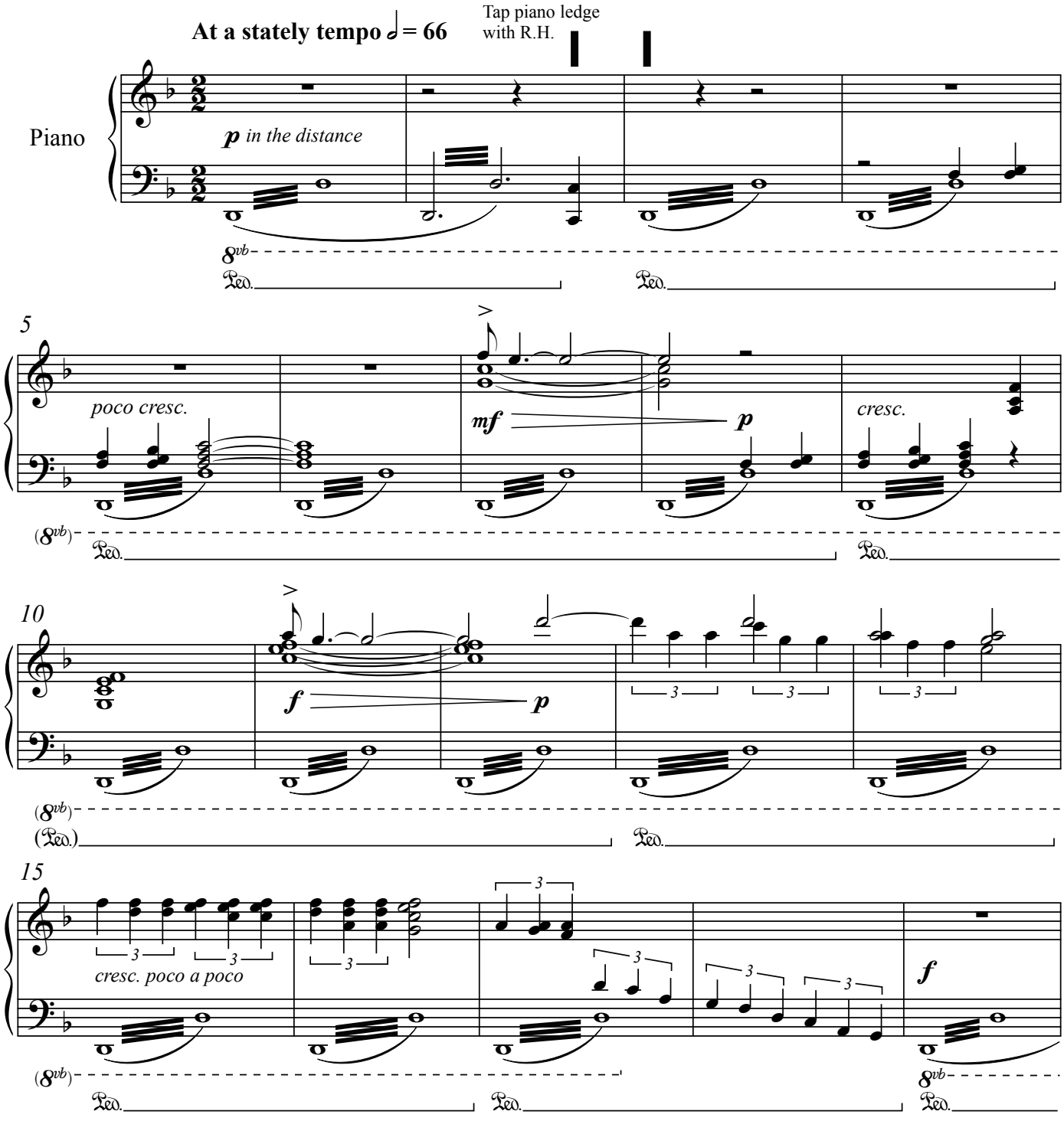
Let America Be America Again

for Narrator and Orchestra

(based on the poem by Langston Hughes)

Langston Hughes (1902 - 1967) Gwyneth Walker



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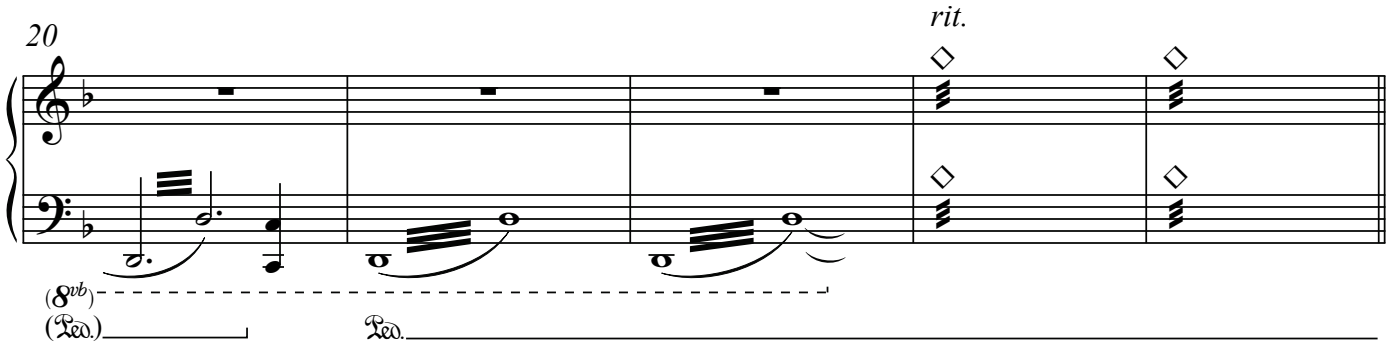
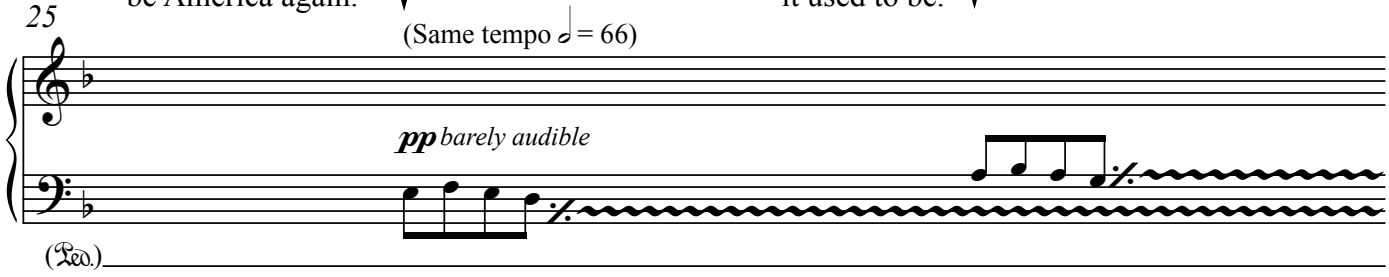
Roll fingers (tremolo) of both hands on piano ledge
[as a dramatic introduction to NARRATOR]



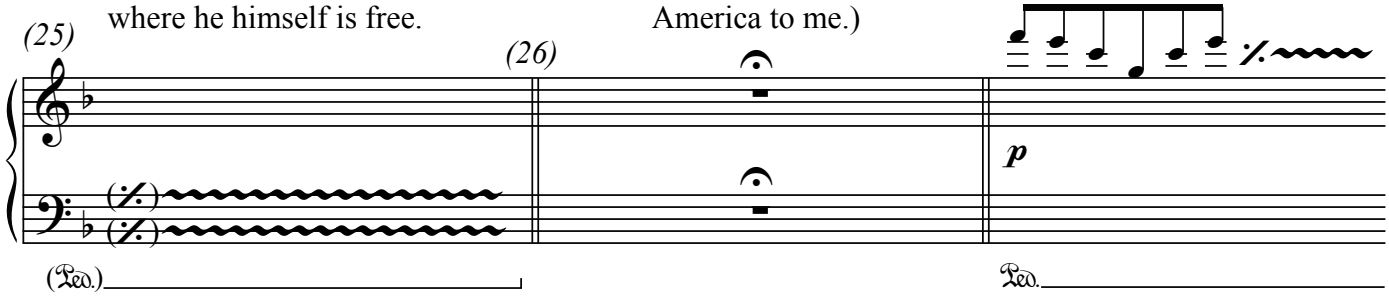
A **A.1** **A.2**

Narr: Let America be America again. Let it be the dream it used to be. Let it be the pioneer



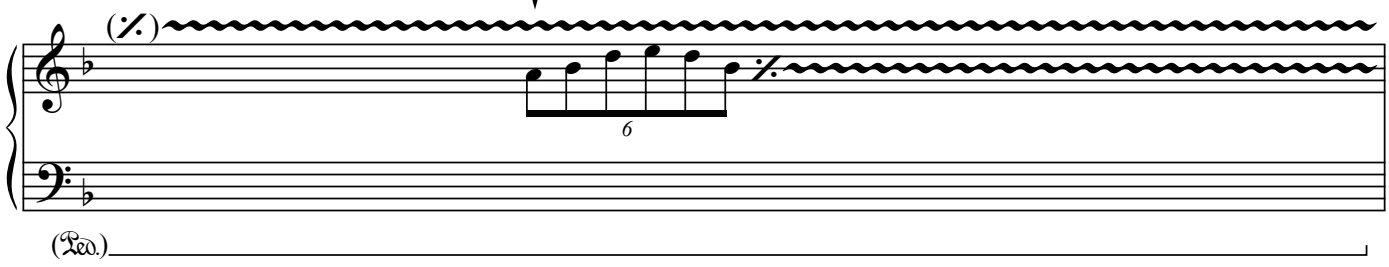
on the plain seeking a home where he himself is free. (America never was America to me.)

B *gently, dreamlike*



B.1

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed – Let it be the *<u>great strong land</u> of love Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme That any man be crushed by one above.



*Underlined words indicate new musical patterns

O, let my land be a land where Liberty Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
But opportunity is real,
and life is free,

28

Ped.

C Equality is in
the air we breathe.

34

("breathing free air" motive)

p

slight pedal

cresc.

(There's never been
equality for me,
Nor freedom in this
"homeland of the free.")

D

36

rit.

f

Ped.

Say, who are you that
mumbles in the dark?
And who are you that draws
your veil across the stars?

(Same tempo ♩ = 66)

39

Tap piano ledge with R.H.

(continue during reading)

f *p*

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,

(Same tempo)

p

Ped.

41

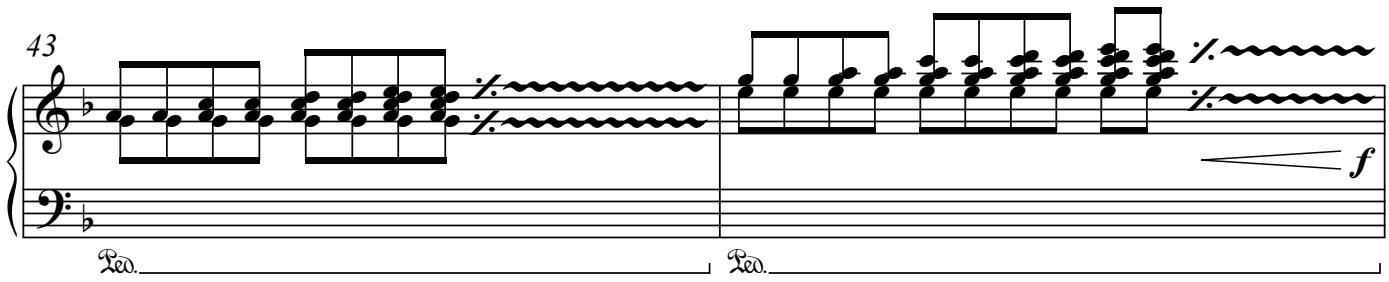
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.

I am the red man driven from the land,

Ped. Ped.

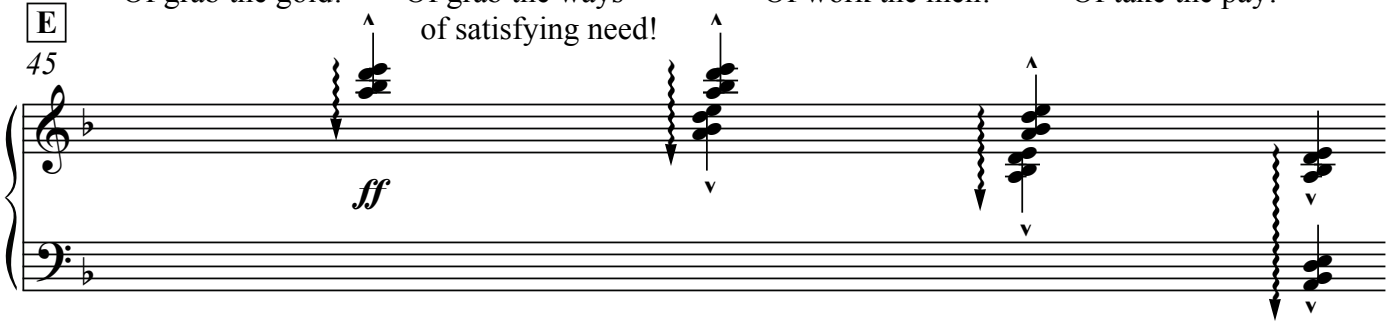
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek –
And finding only the same old stupid plan
of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,
Tangled in that ancient endless chain
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!



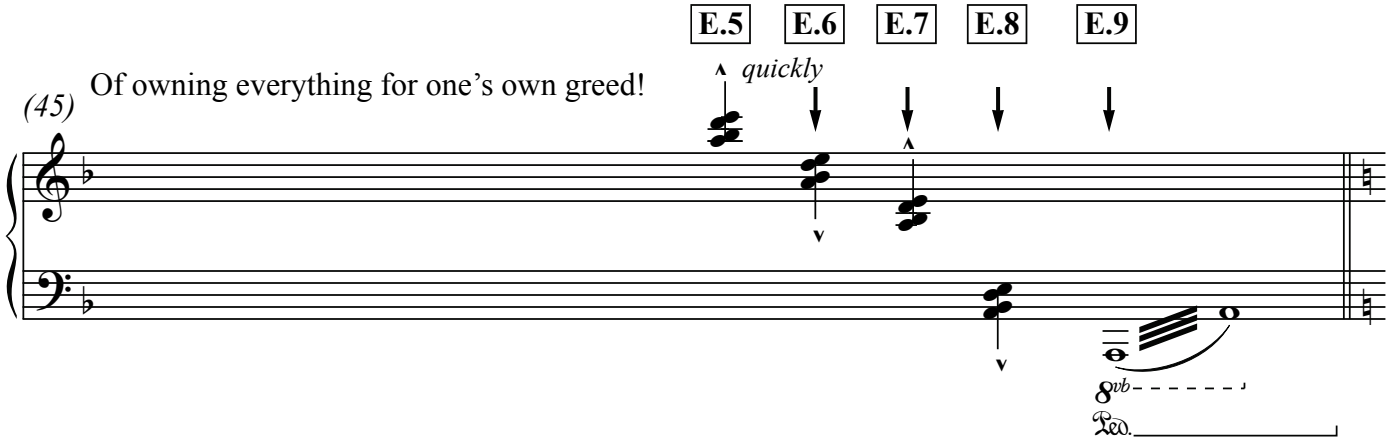
E.1 E.2 E.3 E.4

Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need! Of work the men! Of take the pay!



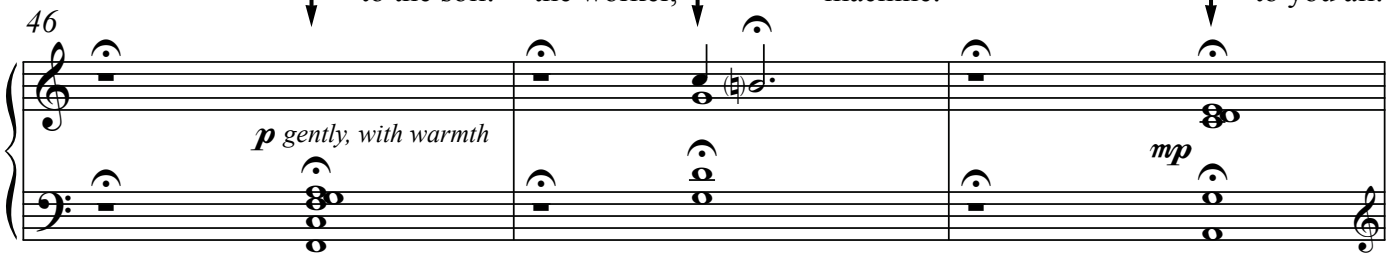
E.5 E.6 E.7 E.8 E.9

Of owning everything for one's own greed!



F.1 F.2 F.3

F I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil. I am the worker, sold to the machine. I am the Negro, servant to you all.



I am the people, **F.4** humble, hungry, mean –
Hungry yet today,
despite the dream.
Beaten yet today –
O, Pioneers! **F.5** I am the man
who never got ahead.
The poorest worker
bartered through the years.

49

f

Ped.

[approximately coordinate reading with music.
Words in bold print fall at the start of measures]

G **Same tempo (𝅗𝅥 = 66)**

gently roll chords
(to suggest dreaming)

Yet **I'm** the one who
dreamt our basic **dream** In the

50

p

Ped. Ped.

Old World while still a serf of **kings,** who **dreamt** a dream so strong, so brave,

54

Ped. *simile*

so **true,** That even **yet** its mighty daring **sings** In every **brick** and stone,
in every furrow

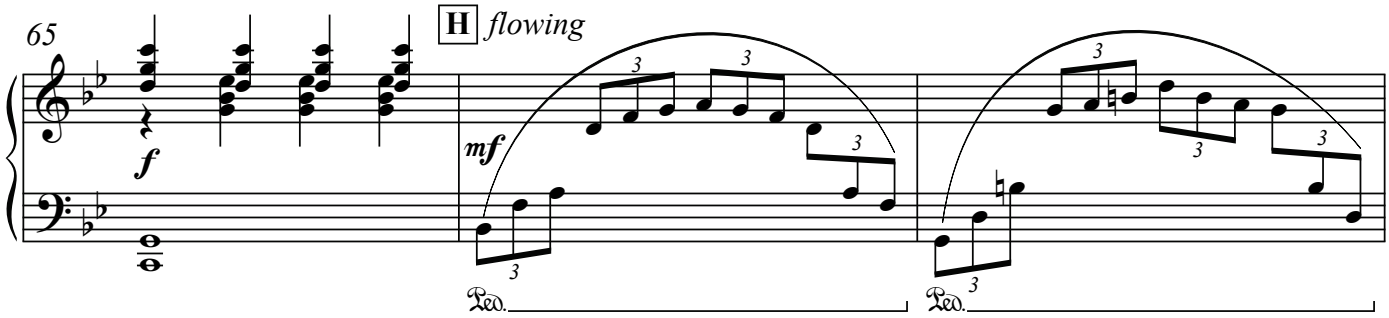
57

(stop rolling chords)

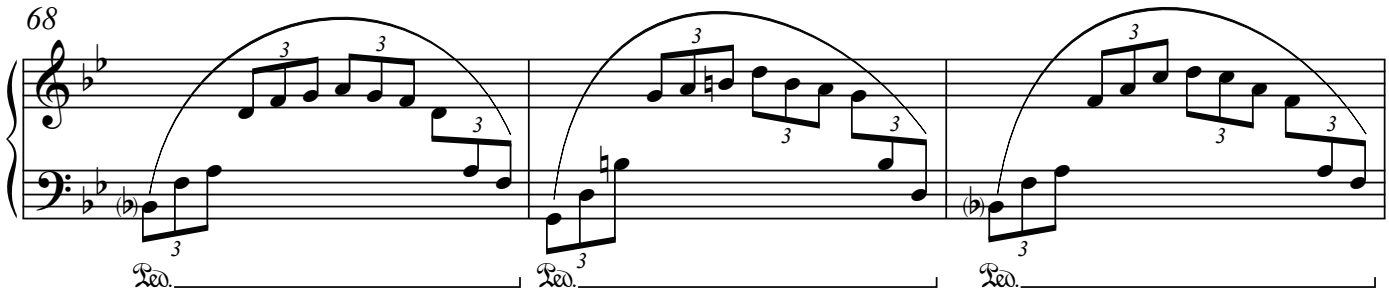
61 **turned** That's made **America** the land it has **become.**

cresc.

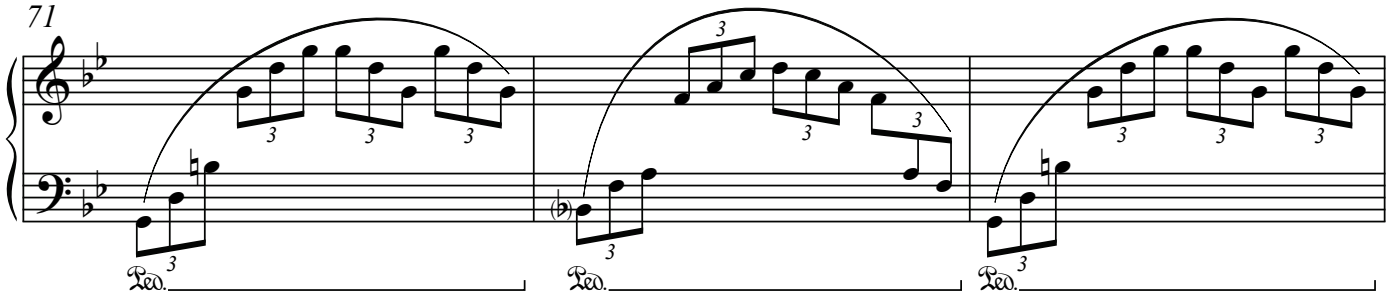
O, **I'm** the man who sailed those **early seas** In



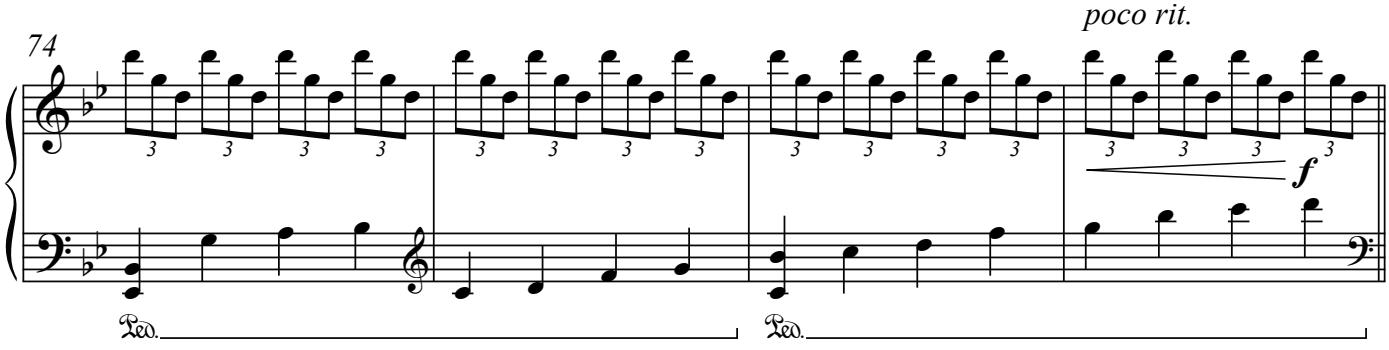
search of what I meant to be my **home** – For **I'm** the one who left dark

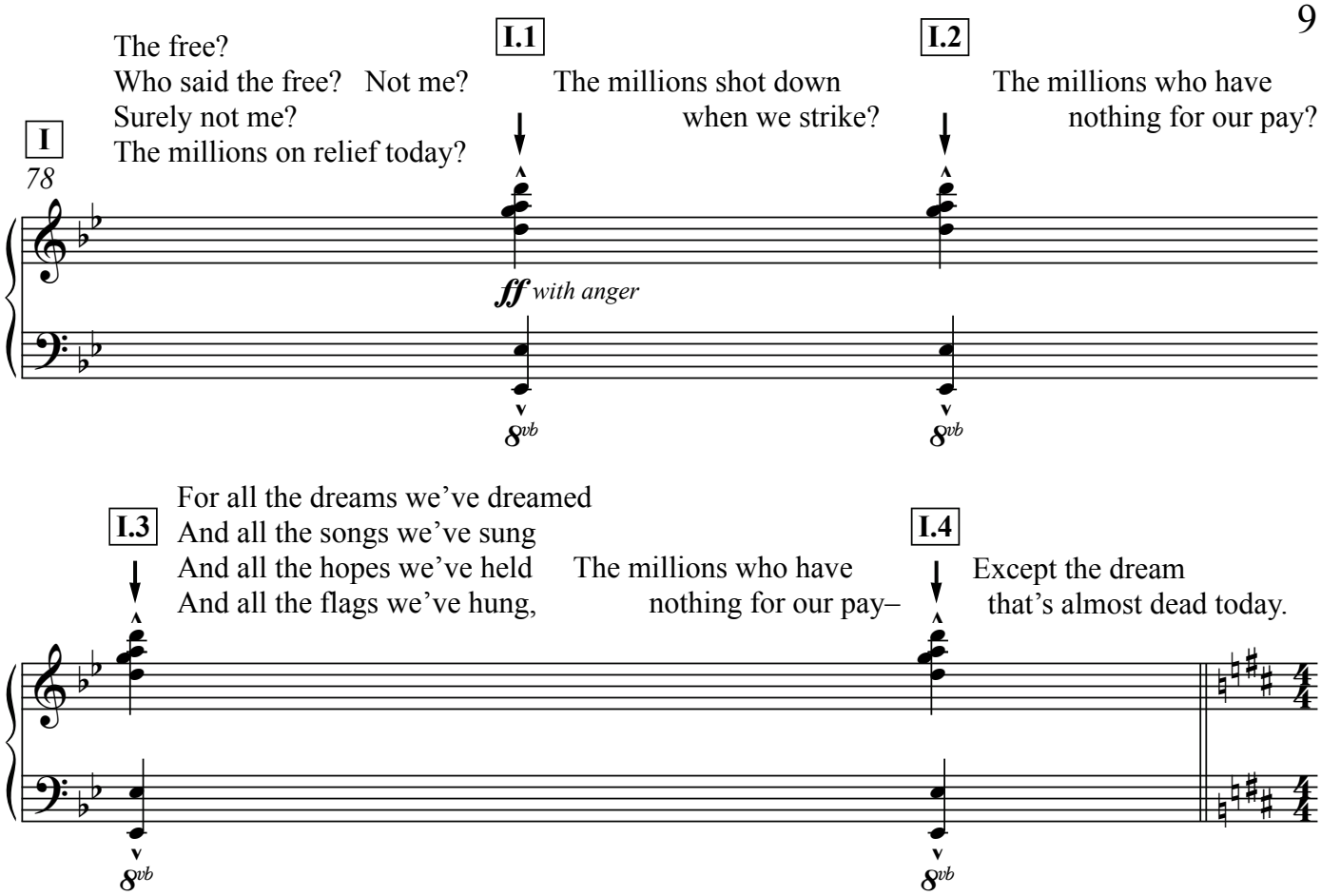


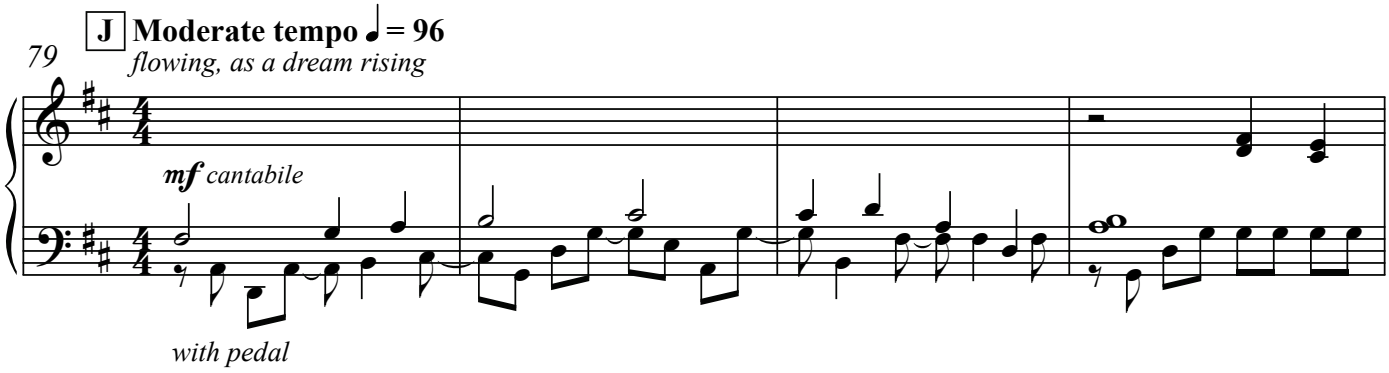
Ireland's shore, And **Poland's** plain, and **England's** grassy lea, And



torn from Black Africa's **strand** I came To build a **"homeland** of the free."

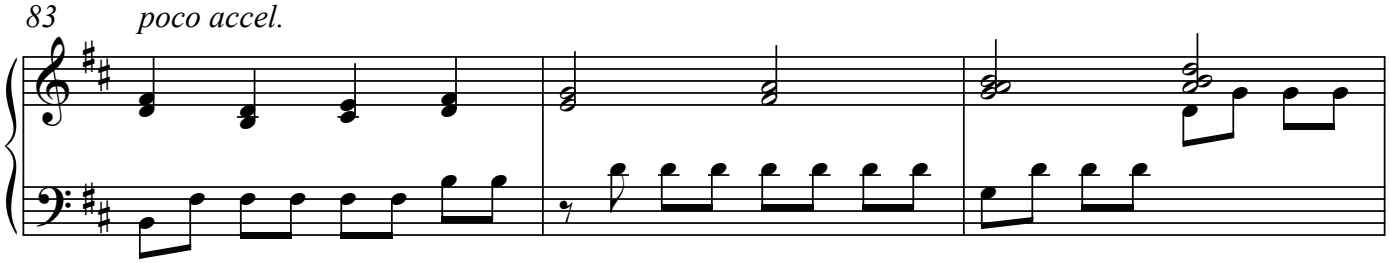






[approximately coordinate reading with music.
Words in bold print fall at the start of measures]

O, let America be **America** again – The **land** that never has been yet –



And yet must be – the **land** where *every* **man** is free. The **land** that's mine – The

Slightly faster ♩ = 108

86

poor man's, **Indian's,** Negro's, **ME –** Who made

rit.

K ♩ = 96

90

p

America, Whose **sweat** and blood, whose **faith** and pain, Whose

94

hand at the foundry, whose **plow** in the rain, Must **bring** back our mighty dream again.

97

poco cresc.

Ped.

rit.

101

mf

p

(Ped.)

L.1 L.2

Sure, call me any ugly
name you choose –
The steel of freedom does not stain.
From those who live like leeches
on the people's lives
We must take back our land again, America!

L

103

8va (short)

O, yes, I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath –
America will be!

M

104

N

Out of the rack and ruin
of our gangster death,

gliss. loco

8vb

The rape and rot of
graft, and stealth, lies,

106

gliss. higher

We, the people, must redeem
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.

gliss. even higher

The mountains and the endless plain –
All, all the stretch of these great green states –
And make America again!

108

Closing Hymn

"Let America Be America Again!"

O

109

Grandly. slowly

accel.

p *f*

Ped.

114

a tempo ♩ = **80**

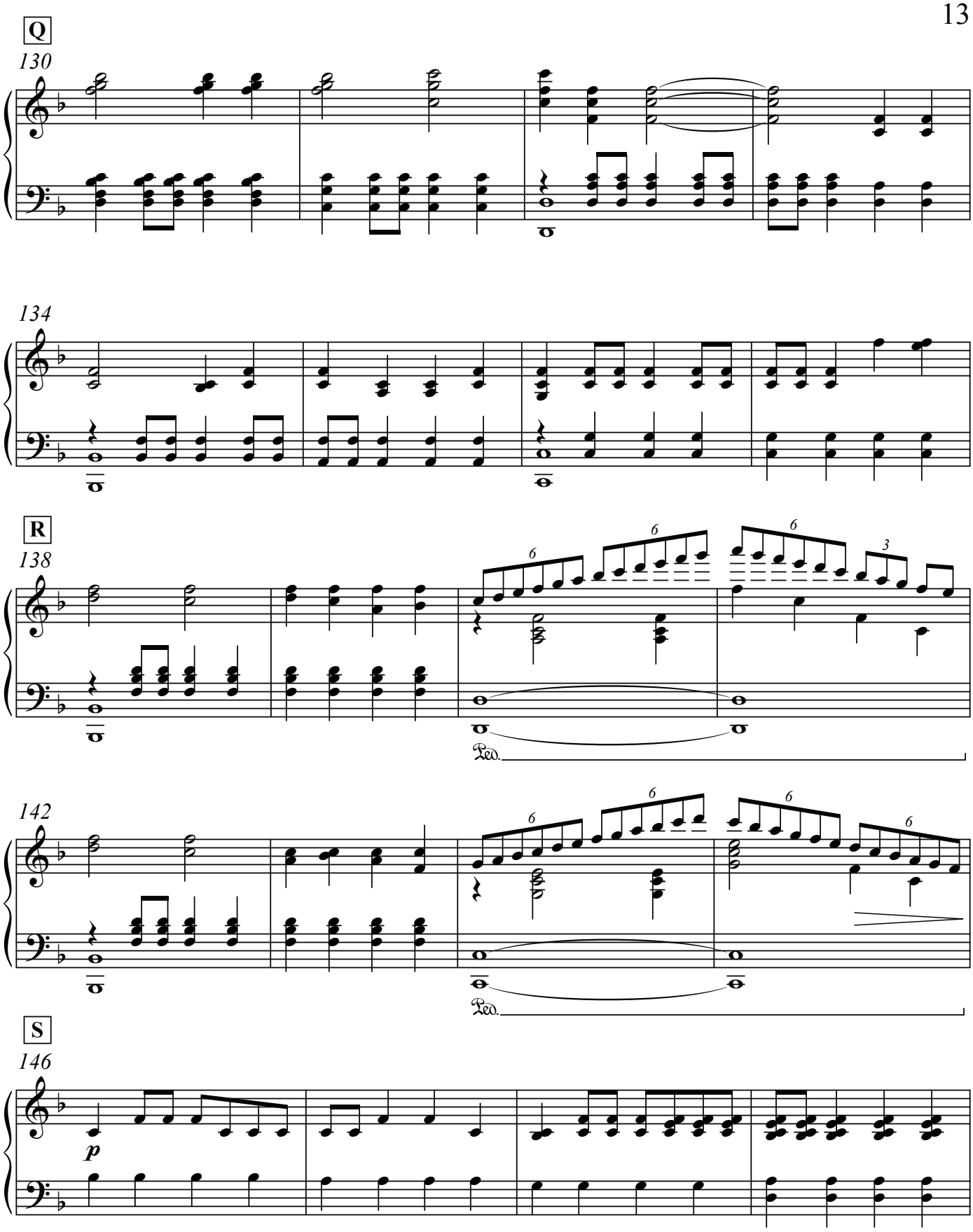
with pedal

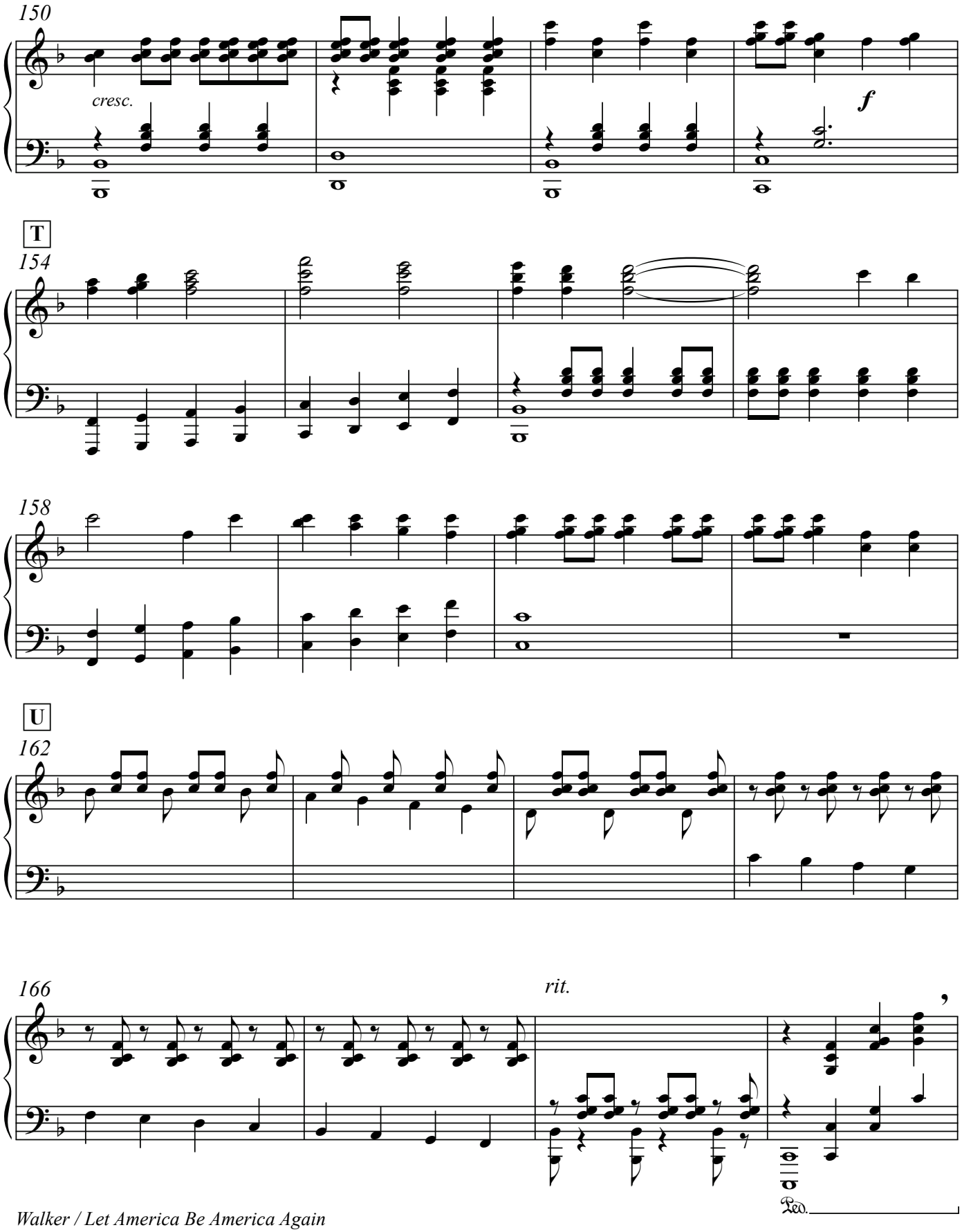
118

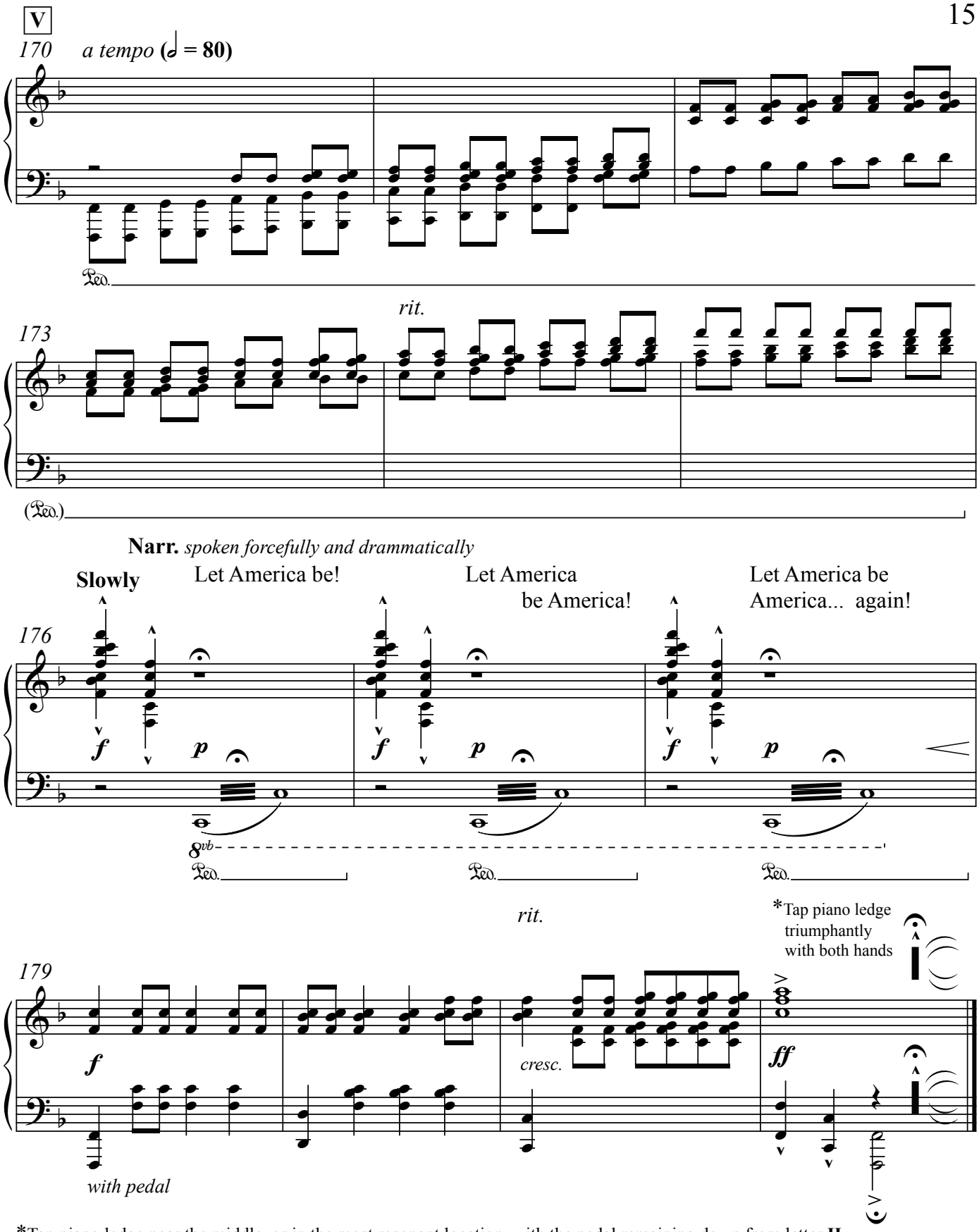
P

122

126


Q
130
134
R
138
6
6
6
3
Ped.
142
6
6
6
6
Ped.
S
146
p


150
cresc.
f
T
154
158
U
162
166
rit.
Ped.



*Tap piano ledge near the middle, or in the most resonant location, with the pedal remaining down from letter **H**.
This ought to produce a ringing of the strings.

10'30"
July 18, 2011
Braintree, Vermont