Gwyneth Walker

Sportsongs

a new look at athletic accomplishment!

for Narrator and Piano

1. Analysis of Baseball
2. Holding the Towel
3. Summary By the Pawns
4. The Football Fumbler

Sportsongs

a new look at athletic accomplishment!

duration: 10’40”

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Sportsongs are dramatizations (narratives with music) on the topic of athletics. The poems, by May Swenson and Virginia Hamilton Adair, explore the intricacies of sport in a knowledgeable, quizzical and sometimes confused (!) manner. This poetic approach to sports is infused with fanciful imagination!

In the opening scene, “Analysis of Baseball” (poem by May Swenson), the narrator explains to the audience the function of baseball equipment – ball, bat and mitt. Non-athletic associations arise frequently. “Bat waits for ball to mate...ball flirts...don’t keep the date.” The narrator attempts to catch a fly ball hit beyond reach. “Mitt has to quit in disgrace.” The elements and details of baseball seem to overwhelm the narrator. Yet, there is a joyful conclusion that “It’s done on a diamond, and for fun. It’s about home, and its about run.”

The narrator, probably not an adventurous swimmer, stands on the beach, “Holding the Towel” while searching the waves for a friend. The only clue to locating the friend is an orange bathing cap, which the narrator often confuses with a buoy. Many “round heads” are seen “dipping, rising, tipping.” Alas, they are only floats. Narrator gives up on the search and leaves the beach (doing a mock breast stroke).

The game of chess is now described – from the viewpoint of the smallest chess piece – in “Summary by the Pawns” (poem by Virginia Hamilton Adair). With the stage transformed into an imaginary chess board, the pawn (Narrator) takes short steps, moving from spot to spot. “First the black square, then a white...” The steps are rigid. Yet the pawn observes the more varied movements of the larger pieces. “While around us with free gaits move the taller potentates.” The pawn can occasionally dislodge another piece (“remove a man”). Yet, without warning, the pawn is knocked from the board. “Off, off, off, we go!”

“The Football Fumbler” is based on May Swenson’s charming poem, “Watching the Jets Lose to Buffalo at Shea.” The poet, not a knowledgeable football fan, has attended a game with the New York Jets at their home field, Shea Stadium. Ms. Swenson immediately forms a “nurturing bond” with the football, which she refers to as a “leather baby.” She hugs the ball as she runs down the field, “to deliver the baby to a cradle of grass at the goalposts.” Oh, but it is knocked away. She fumbles!!! Chastising herself, she laments, “Oh, what a blooper and a fumbler you are...” She pretends to cuddle her “leather baby” at the goal posts. Imagination triumphs over reality as she raises the football aloft in triumph, accompanied by the Notre Dame Cheer Song!

With this focus on sports, a narrator with athletic experience might deliver a suitable and comfortable presentation. However, a narrator entirely unfamiliar with sports might present a highly entertaining rendition. This would truly be “a new look athletic accomplishment!”

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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. She now lives on a dairy farm in Braintree, Vermont.

Gwyneth Walker is 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 of Boston (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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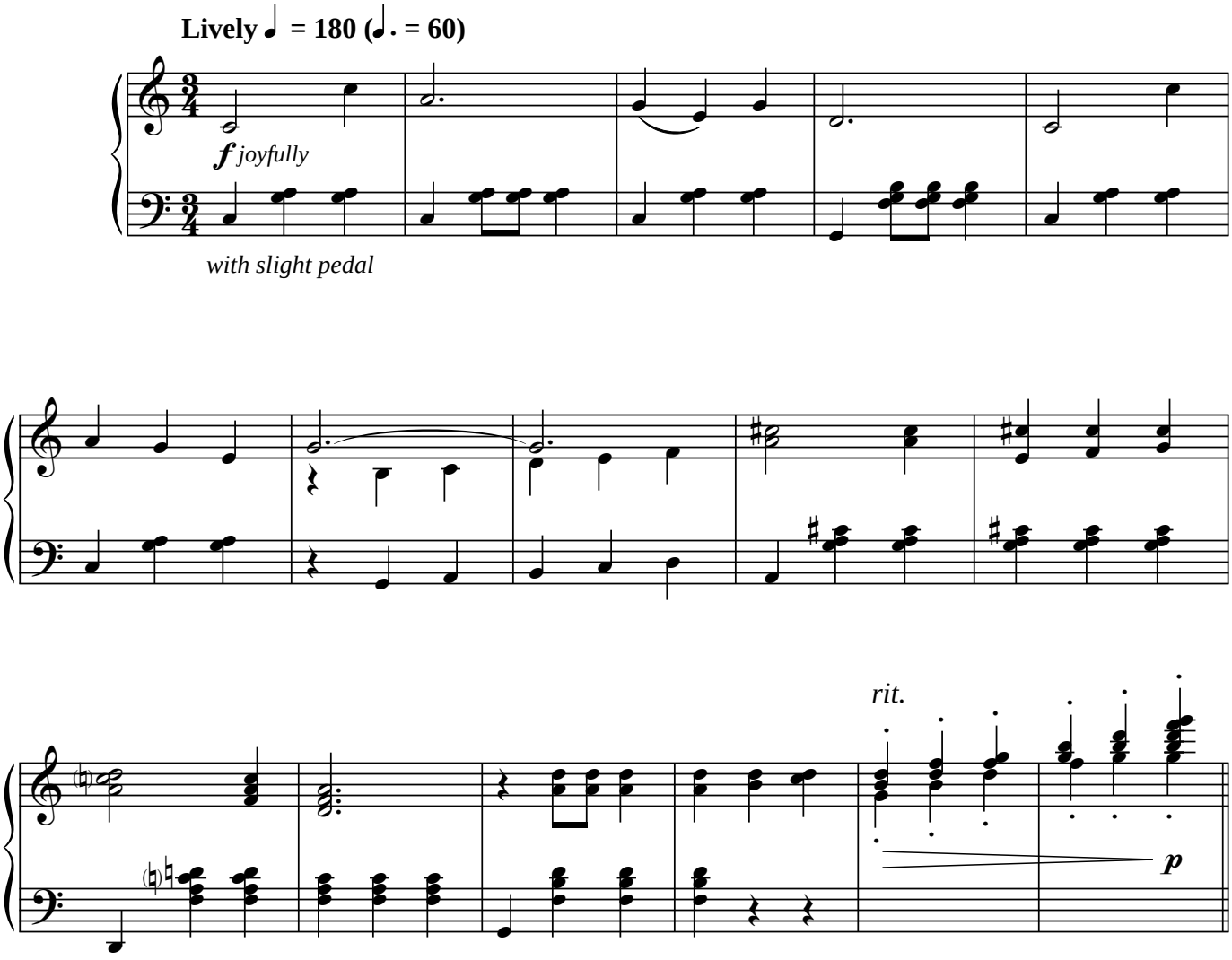
Sportsongs

a new look at athletic accomplishment!
for Narrator and Piano

Analysis of Baseball

May Swenson (1913 - 1989) Gwyneth Walker

During the piano introduction, the NARRATOR comes onstage, wearing a baseball cap and carrying a ball, bat and mitt. These items are (lovingly) placed on stage in front of the NARRATOR, for the audience to view.*



*The performance of "Analysis of Baseball" might be especially entertaining if the Narrator is not very familiar with baseball!

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NARRATOR points to props, to explain baseball to the audience.

Pounds fist into palm,
as if preparing to play.

Takes a nice, slow
practice swing

It's about the ball,
the bat, and the mitt.

Ball hits the bat,
or it hits mitt.

Bat doesn't hit ball,
bat meets it.

A

(aside)

Ball bounces off bat, flies air,
or thuds ground (dud)
or it fits mitt.

Narrator moves in time to the music,
perhaps "rounding the basses"
(running around the bases on stage).

B *a tempo* (♩.= **60)**

f

rit.

p

8vb

Bat waits
for ball to mate.

Ball hates to
take ball's bait.

Ball flirts, bat's late
don't keep the date.

C

(very short tremolo)

8va

p flirtatiously

(slightly longer tremolo)

8va

Ball goes in (thwack) to mitt, and goes out (thwack) back to mitt.

(quick, high, ascending clusters)

NARRATOR continues activity from **B**

D *a tempo* **(♩. = 60)**

f

Ball fits mitt,
but not all of the time.

poco rit.

E

p

p

Ped.

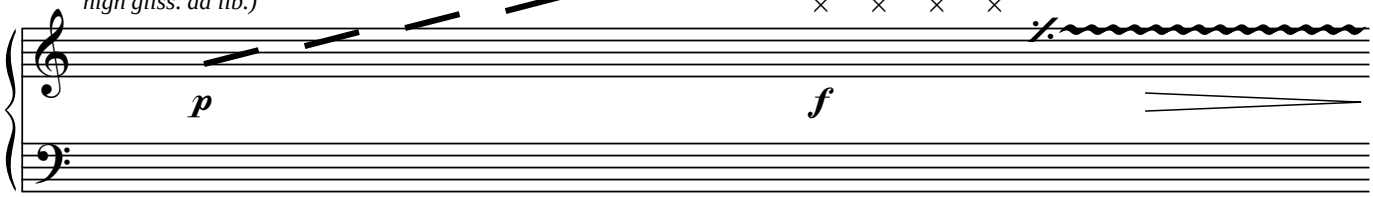
Sometimes ball gets hit (pow) when bat meets it, and sails to a place where mitt has to quit in disgrace.

mf

NARRATOR attempts to catch ball,
which is hit over the head, beyond reach.
Narrator is disappointed.

[tap piano ledge, upper end]
(as background excitement)

(a series of short, high gliss. ad lib.)



NARRATOR picks up
all three props, perhaps
struggling to hold all at once!

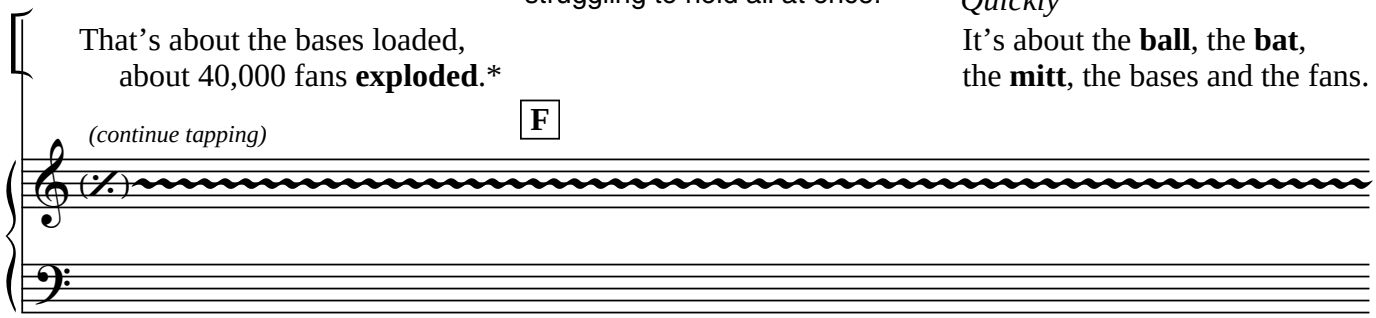
NARRATOR
displays each item as mentioned.

That's about the bases loaded,
about 40,000 fans **exploded**.*

Quickly
It's about the **ball**, the **bat**,
the **mitt**, the bases and the fans.

F

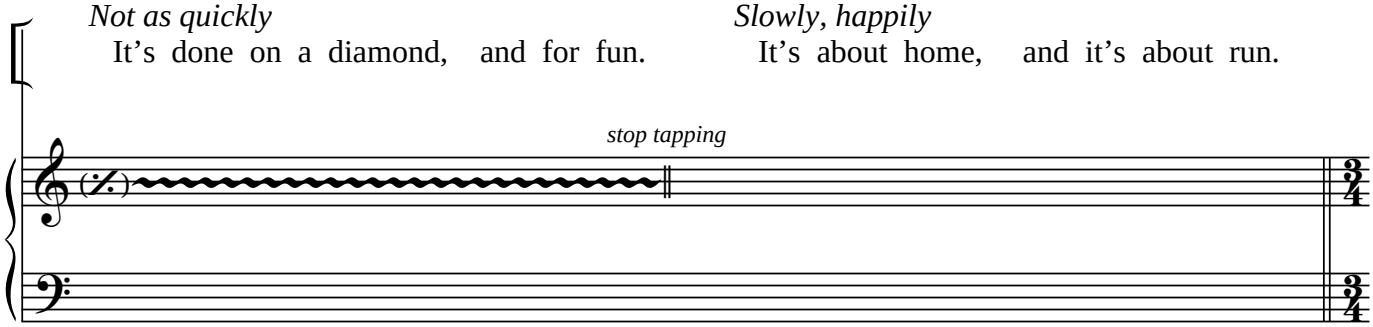
(continue tapping)



Not as quickly
It's done on a diamond, and for fun.

Slowly, happily
It's about home, and it's about run.

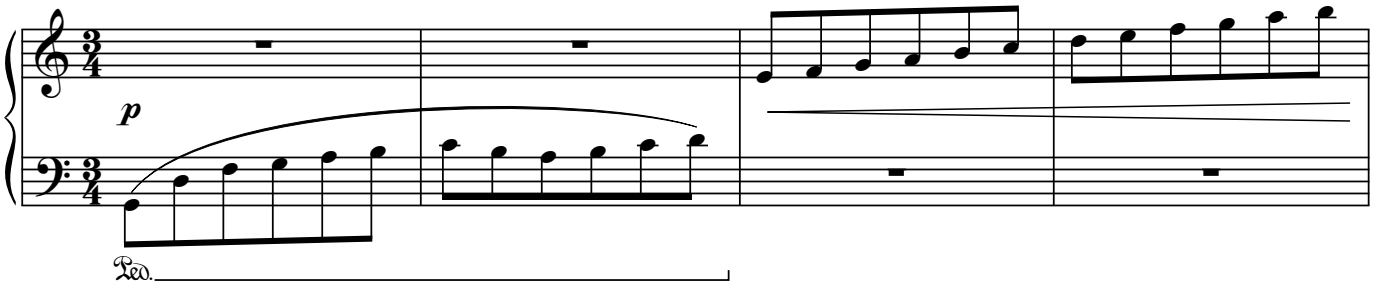
stop tapping



NARRATOR prepares

G **Slower**

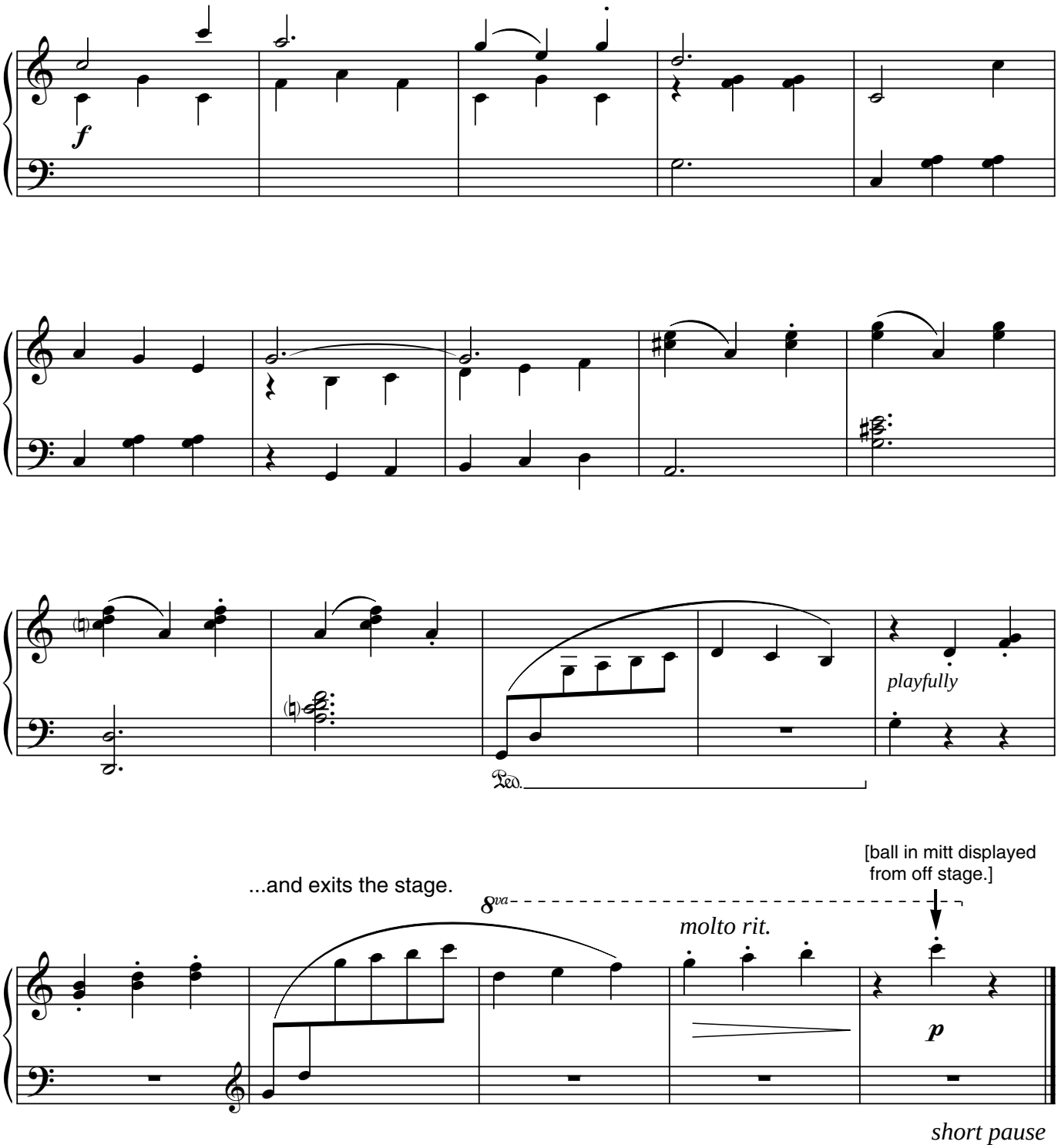
accel.



*Pianist may pump left fist a few times as a cheer!

and then runs around the bases one last time...

a tempo **(𝅗𝅥.= 60)**



short pause

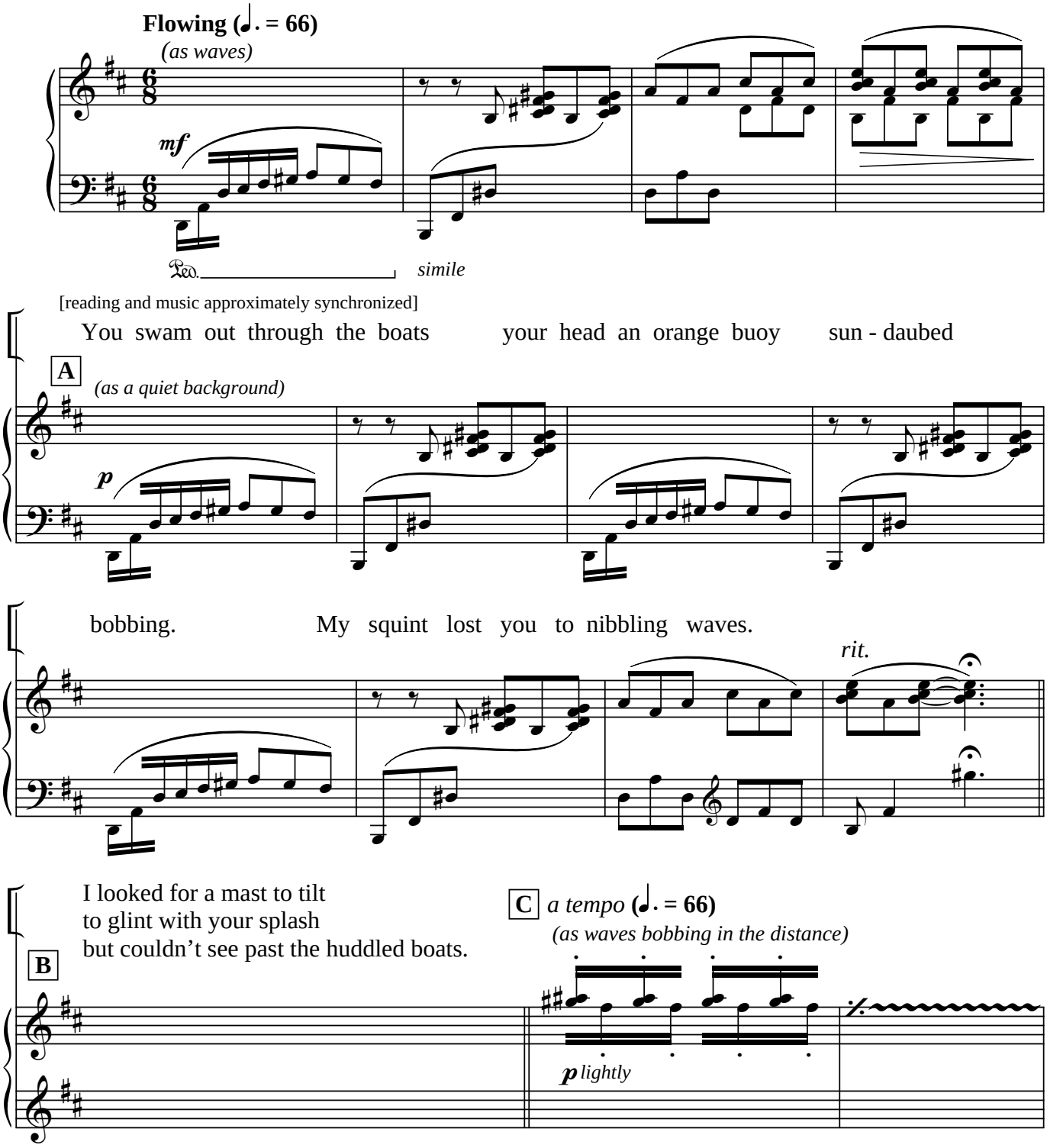
3'00"

Holding the Towel

May Swenson (1913 - 1989)

Before the music starts, NARRATOR comes on stage carrying an orange bathing cap. The cap is (lovingly) placed at the front of the stage for the audience to see. NARRATOR is holding a large beach towel.

NARRATOR scans the horizon looking for a friend who has gone swimming in the ocean.



I found round heads sun - red dipping rising tipping. [pause] They were tethered floats.

[high black-note cluster]

[pause]

p

When you dove from the stovepipe buoy
in the far furrow of the channel
I was still scanning the nearby nowhere - going boats.

D

E *a tempo* (♩. = 66)
(as waves)

mf *dim.*

NARRATOR approximates a breaststroke and "swims" around the stage.

dipping rising tipping... dipping rising tipping...

p

NARRATOR exits the stage, stopping to pick up the orange cap en route.

dipping rising tipping... dipping rising tipping.

rit.

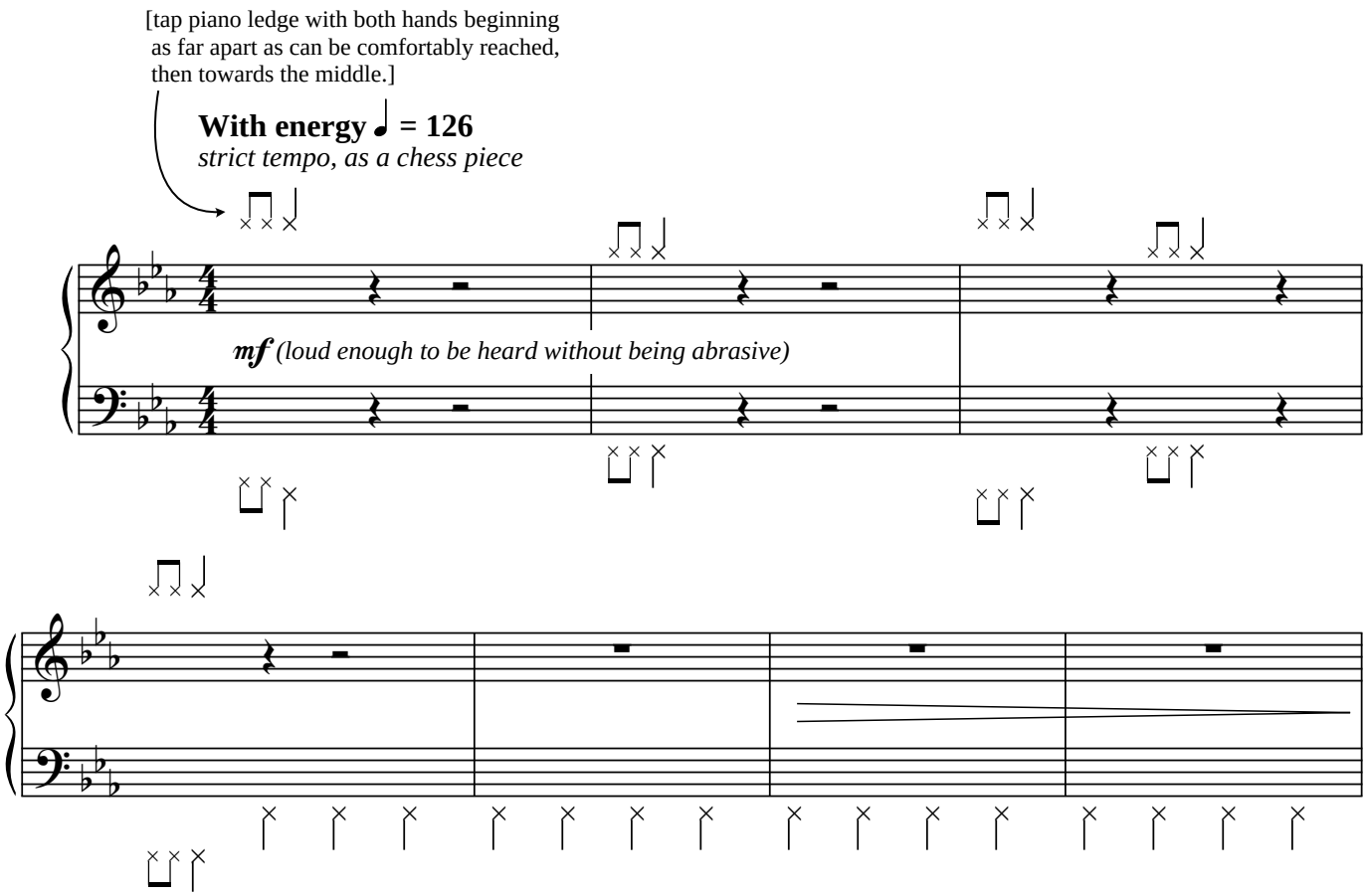
slow tremolo
(as waves)

Ped. Ped.

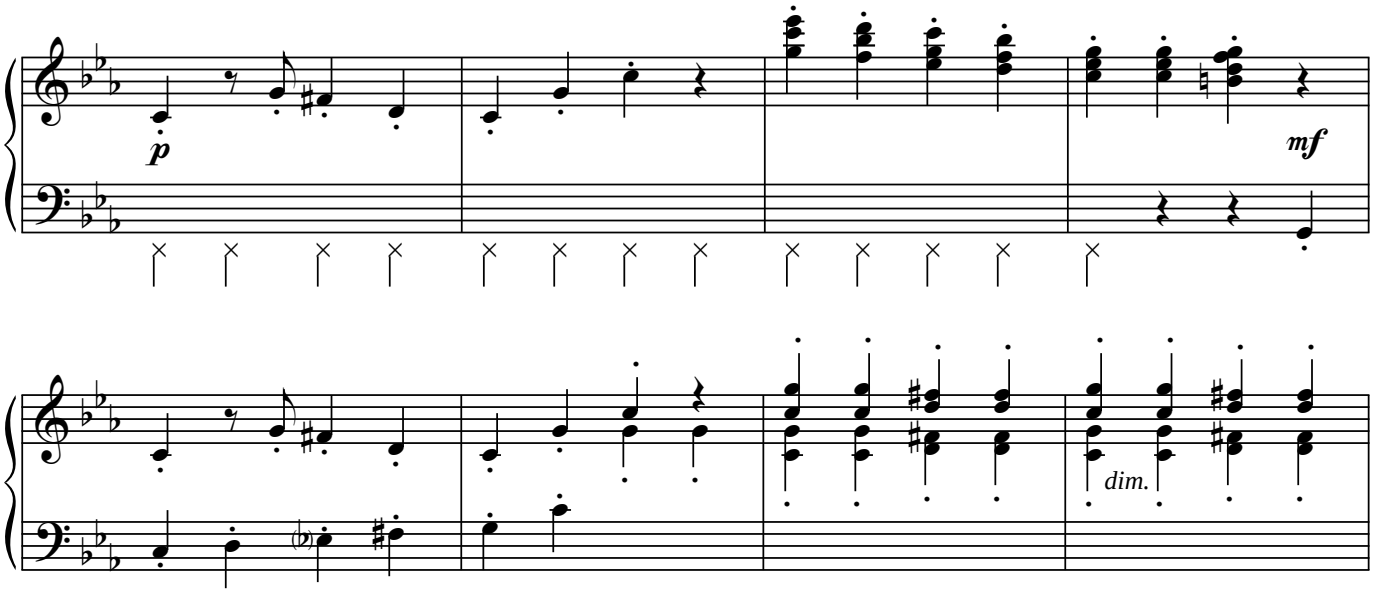
short pause

Summary By the Pawns

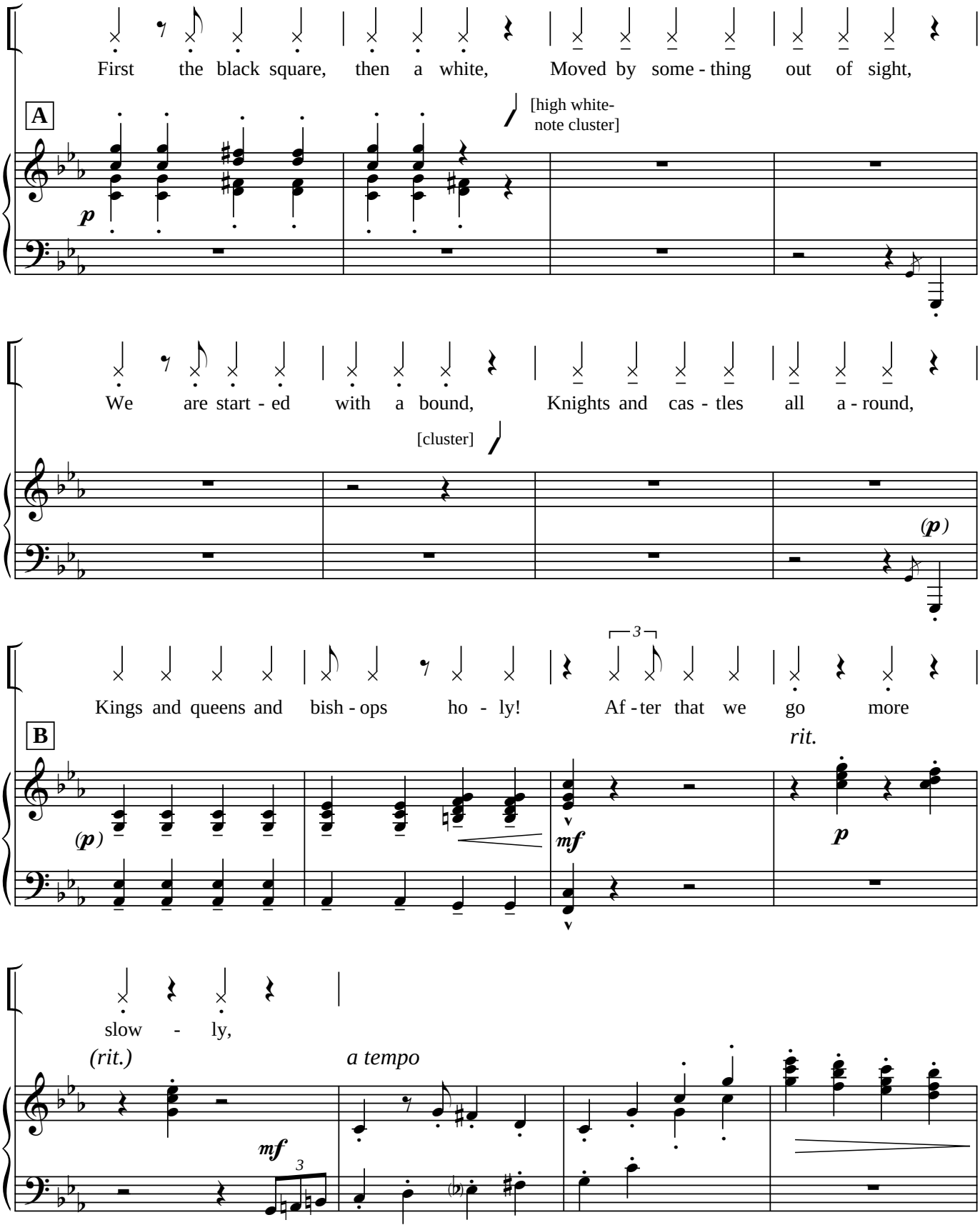
Virginia Hamilton Adair (1913-2004)

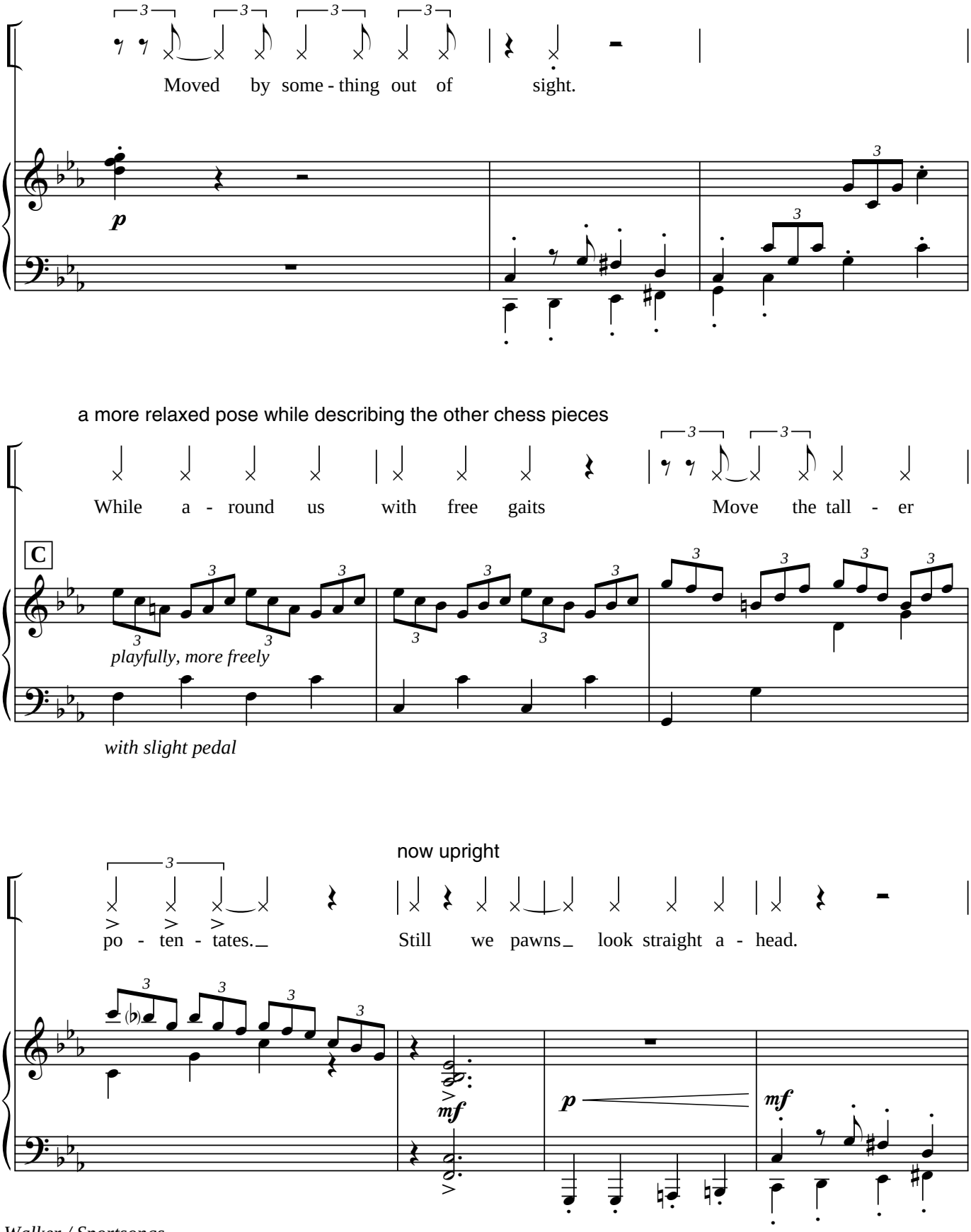


NARRATOR steps on to stage, taking one step per measure, as a chess pawn moving.

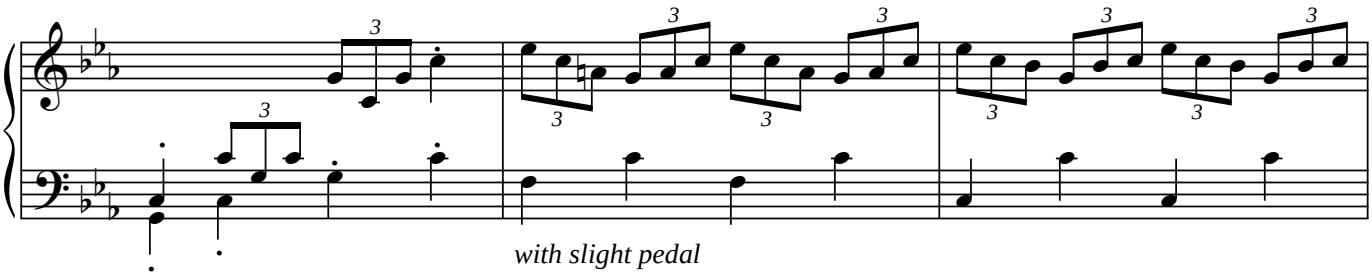


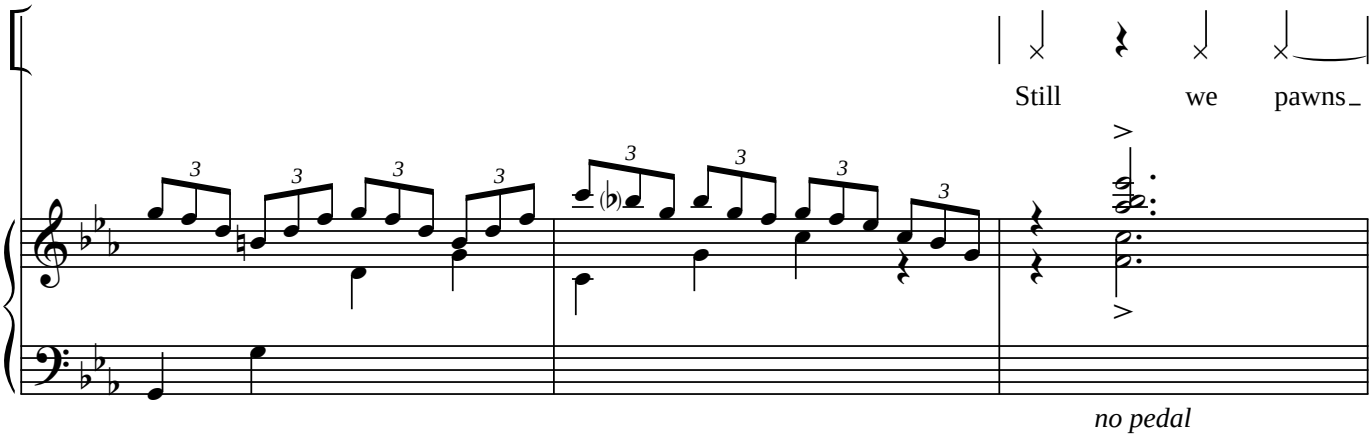
Spoken in rhythm while standing very upright, as a chess pawn.

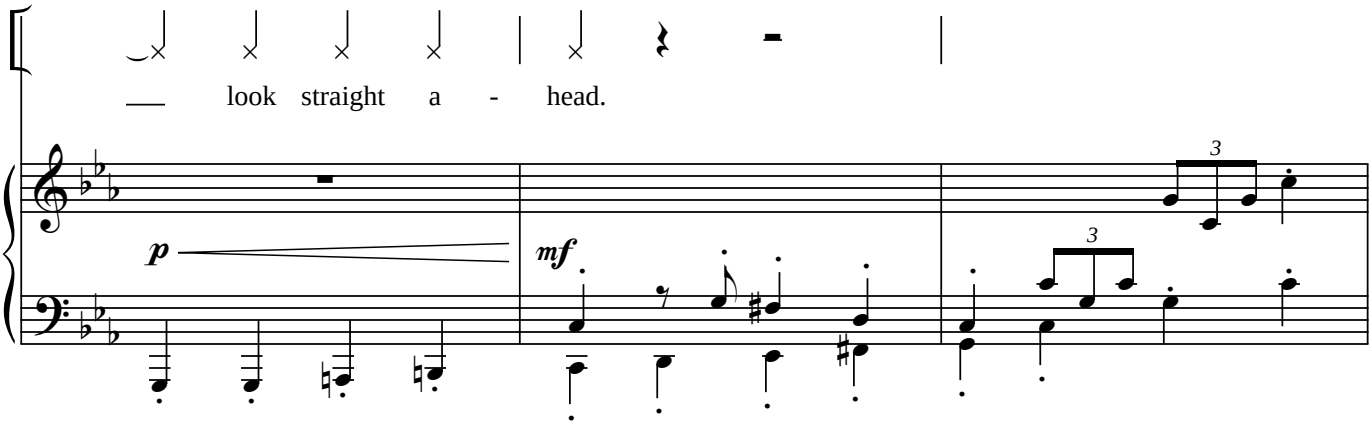



Moved by some - thing out of sight.
p
a more relaxed pose while describing the other chess pieces
While a - round us with free gaits Move the tall - er
C
playfully, more freely
with slight pedal
now upright
po - ten - tates.
Still we pawns look straight a - head.
mf
p
mf

D flowing gestures describing
the “taller potentates” moving in “free gaits”

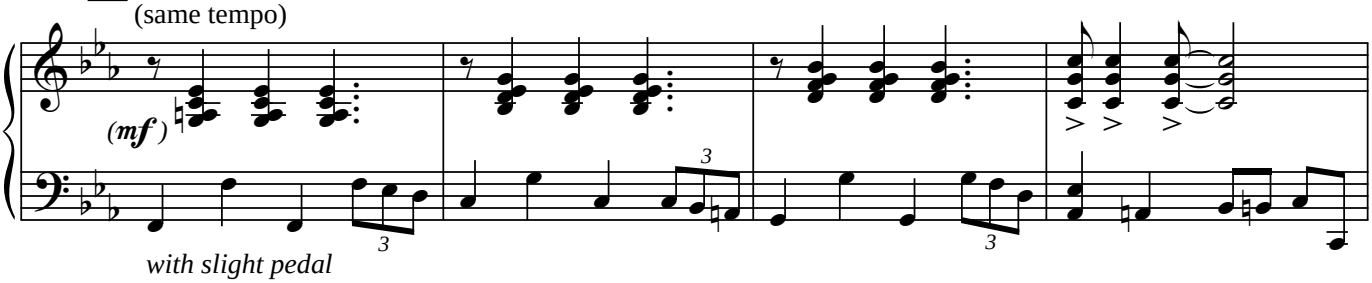


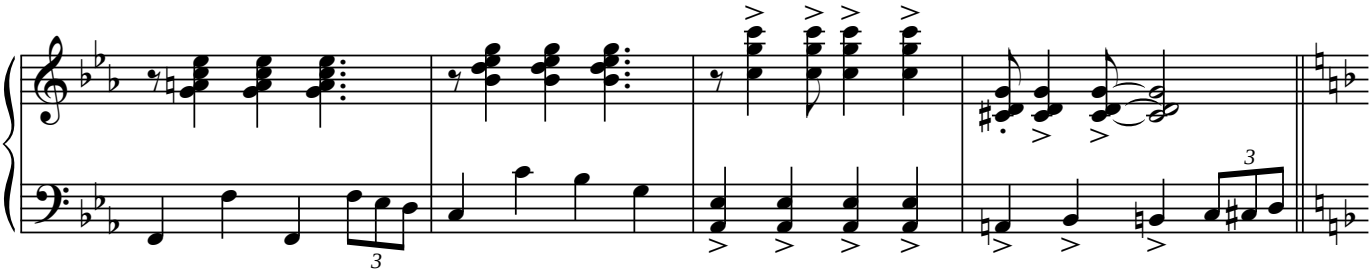




NARRATOR moves from one square to another on an (imaginary) chess board.
(diagonal moves might be included)

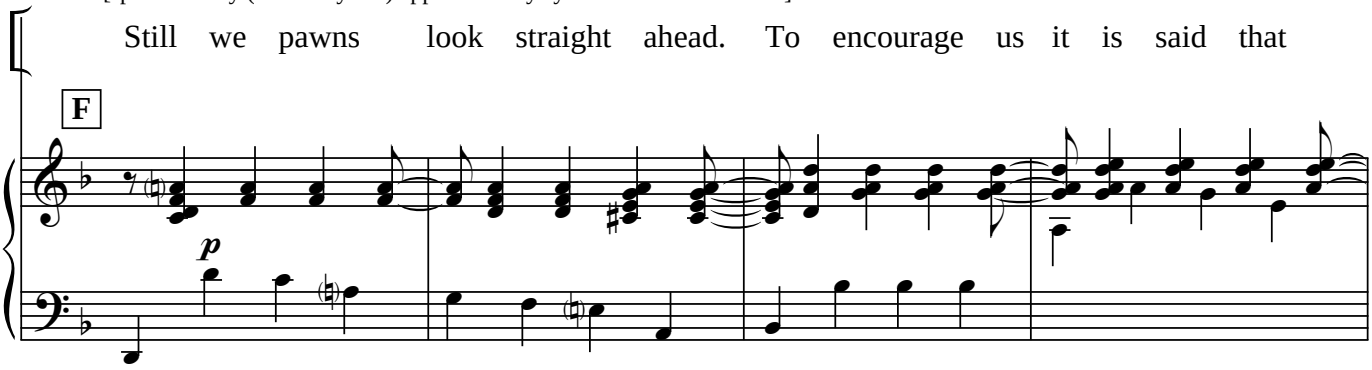
E **Swing rhythm (♫ = ♩ ♪)**
(same tempo)



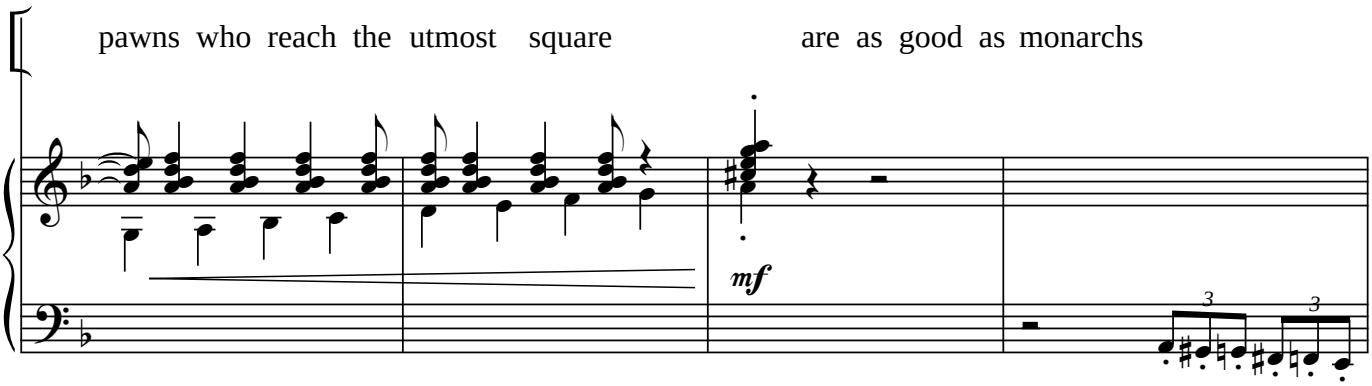


[spoken freely (not in rhythm) approximately synchronized with music]

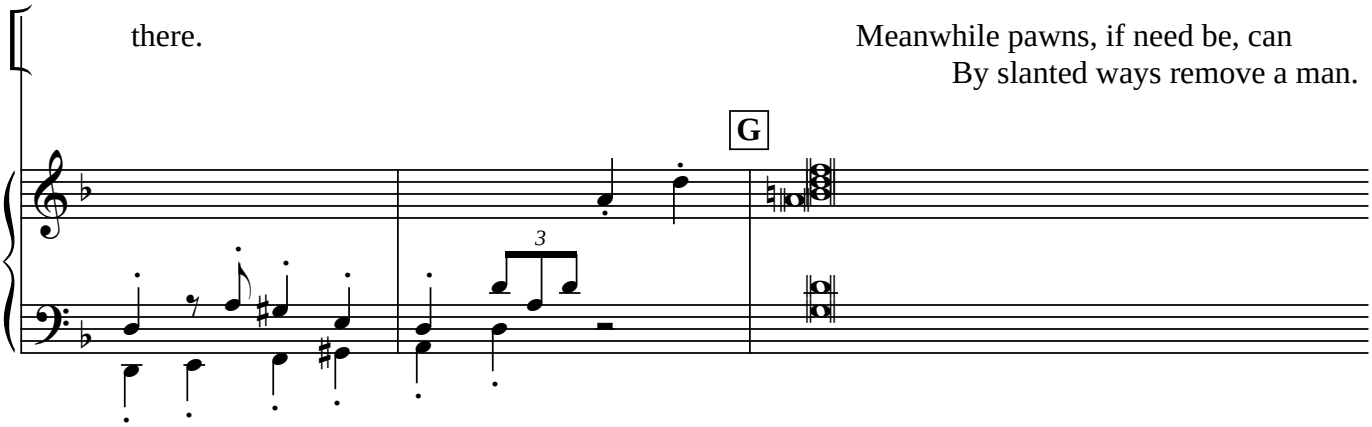
Still we pawns look straight ahead. To encourage us it is said that

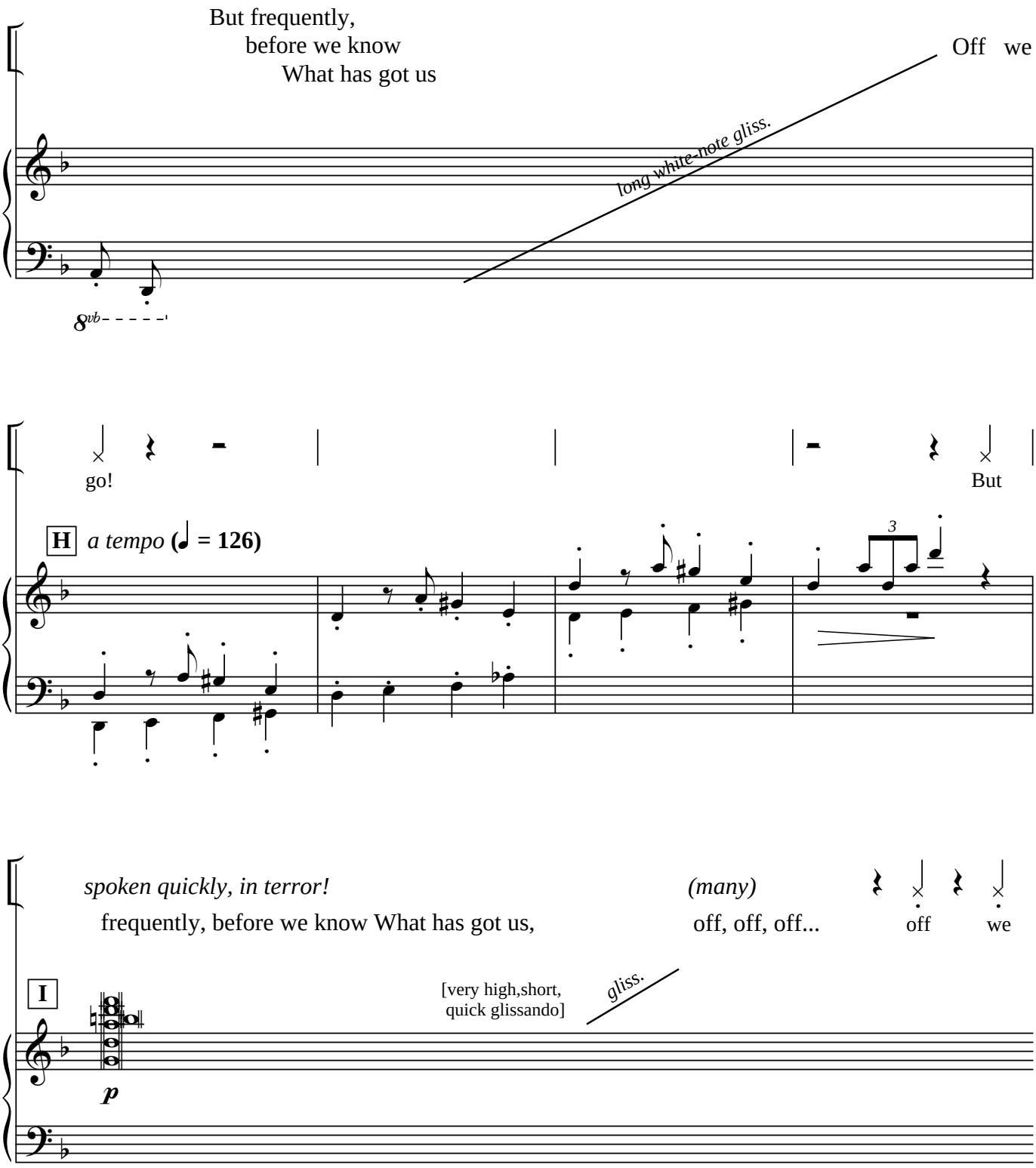


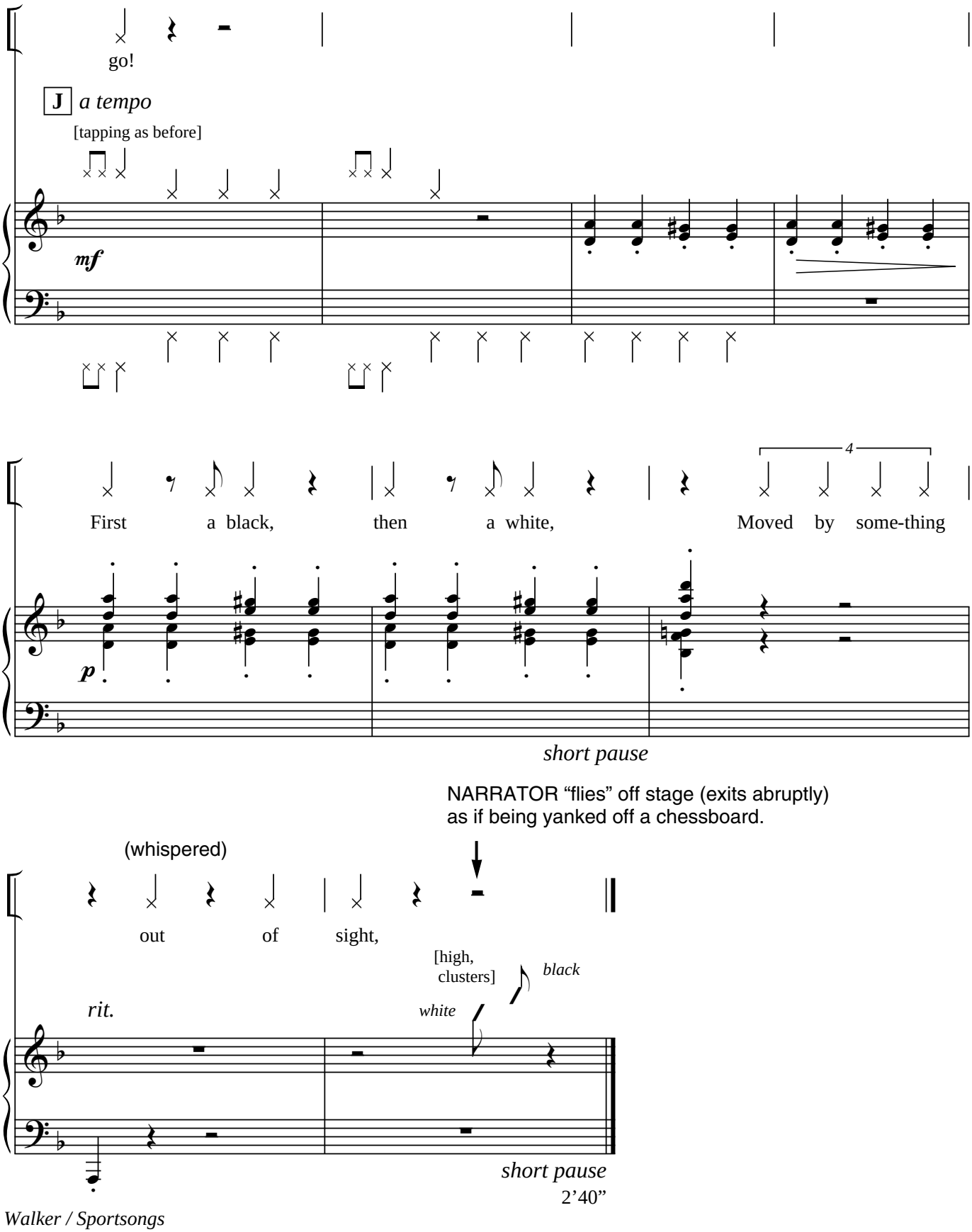
pawns who reach the utmost square are as good as monarchs



there. Meanwhile pawns, if need be, can
By slanted ways remove a man.




But frequently,
before we know
What has got us
Off we
long white-note gliss.
8vb
go!
But
H
a tempo (♩ = 126)
3
spoken quickly, in terror!
frequently, before we know What has got us,
(many)
off, off, off...
off
we
I
[very high,short,
quick glissando]
gliss.
p

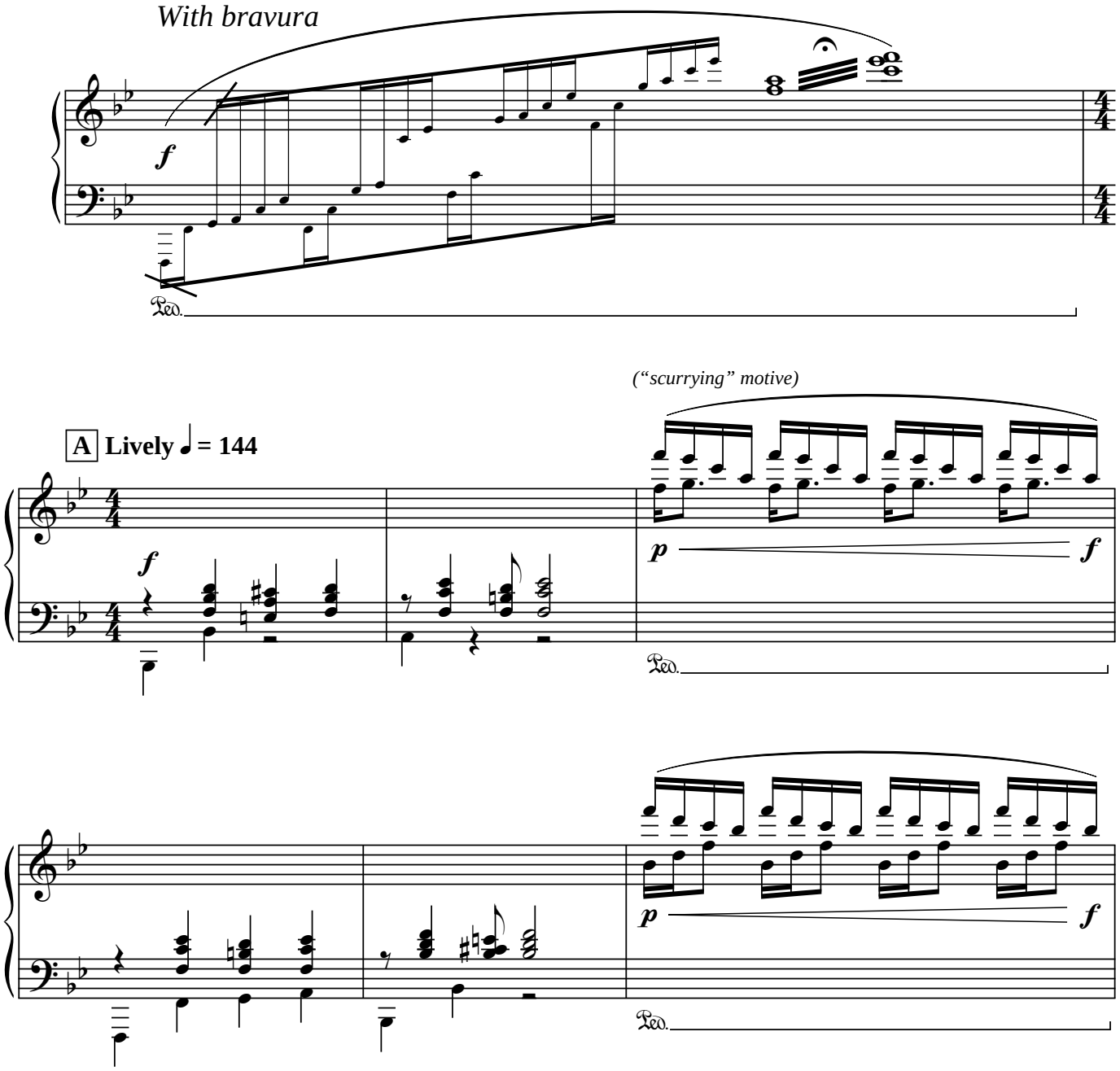

go!
J a tempo
[tapping as before]
mf
4
First a black, then a white, Moved by some-thing
p
short pause
NARRATOR "flies" off stage (exits abruptly)
as if being yanked off a chessboard.
(whispered)
out of sight,
[high, clusters]
black
white
rit.
short pause
2'40"

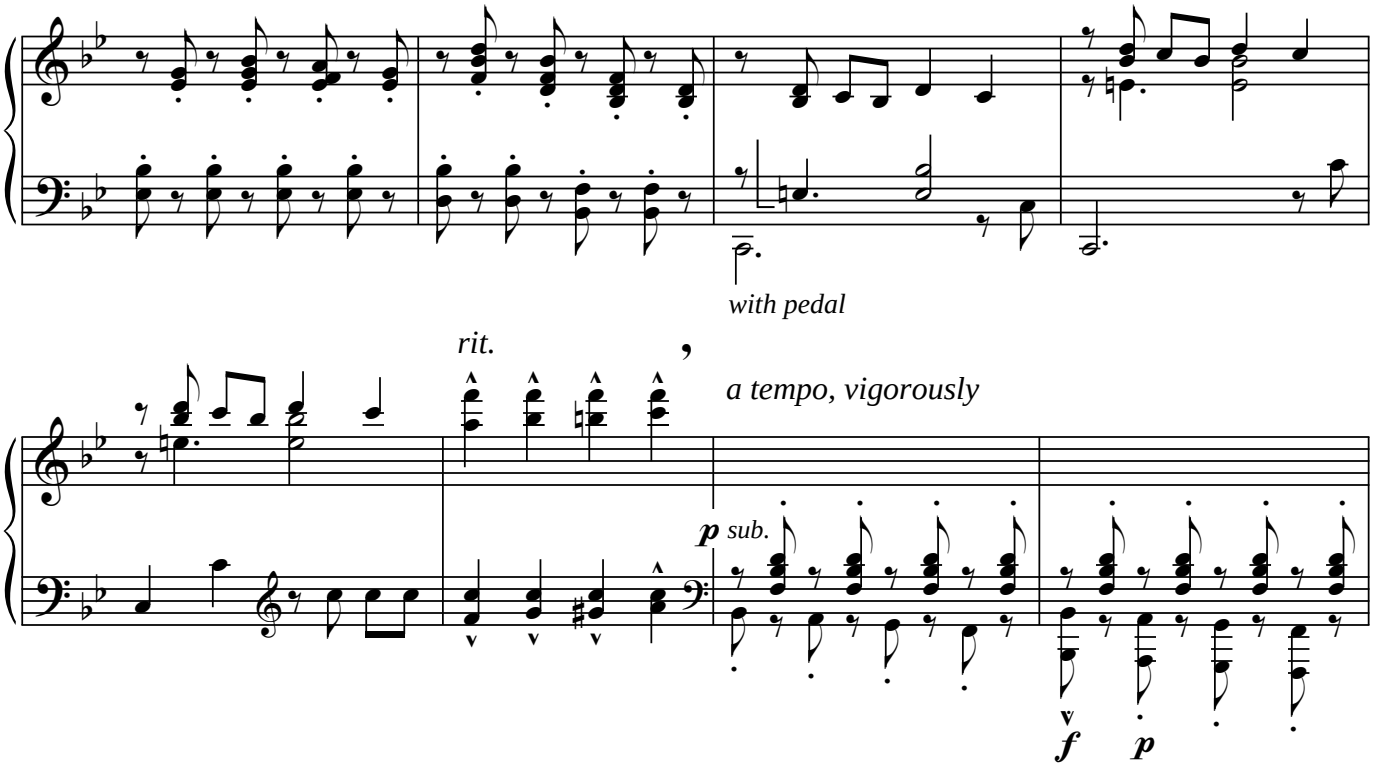
The Football Fumbler

"Watching The Jets Lose to Buffalo at Shea"

May Swenson (1913 - 1989)

Suggested props: football helmet, football (can be fake, foam football), pseudo goalposts placed on stage.

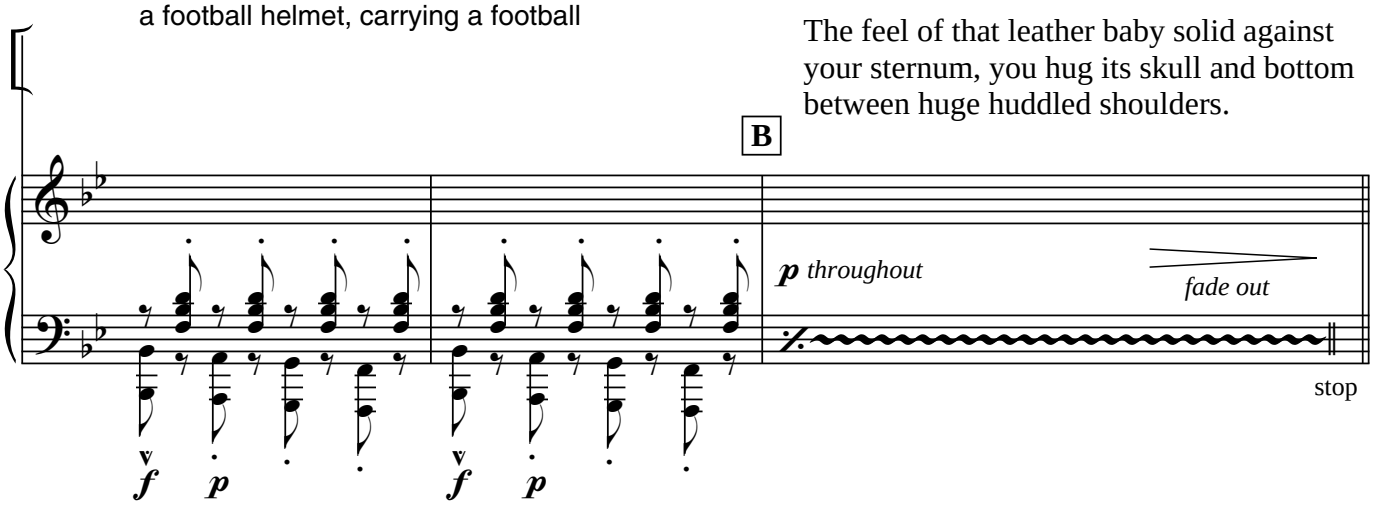




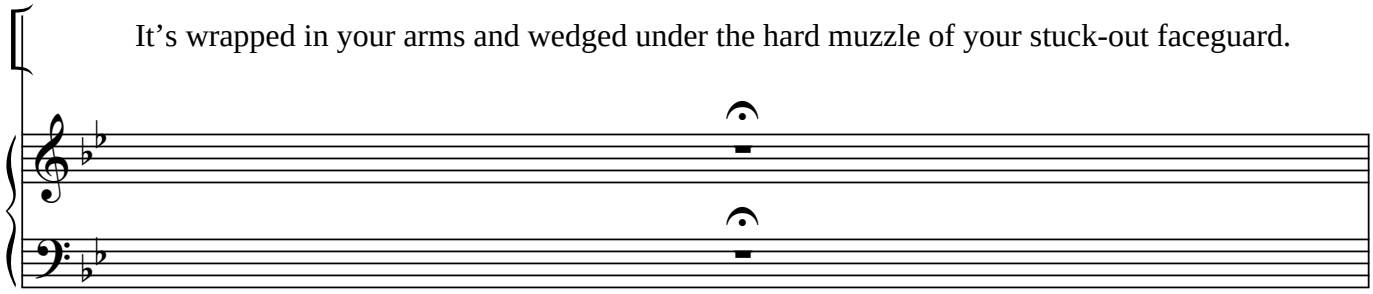
NARRATOR runs on stage, wearing a football helmet, carrying a football

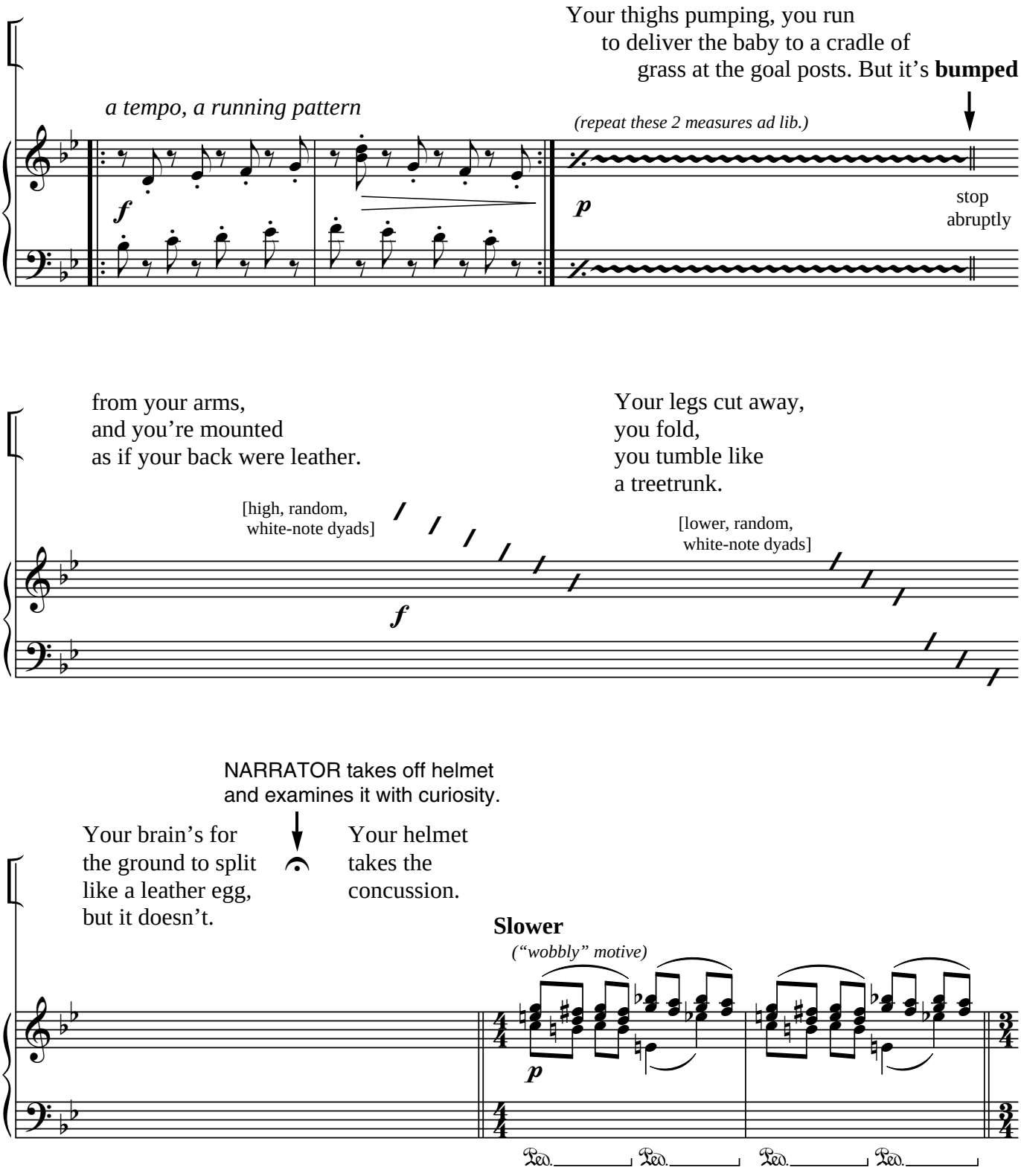
spoken lovingly, while holding a football

The feel of that leather baby solid against your sternum, you hug its skull and bottom between huge huddled shoulders.



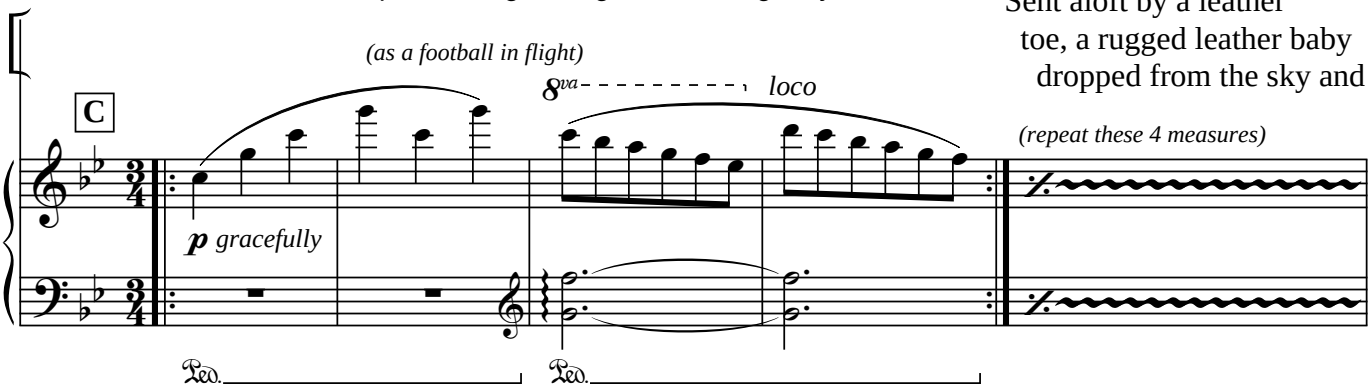
It's wrapped in your arms and wedged under the hard muzzle of your stuck-out faceguard.



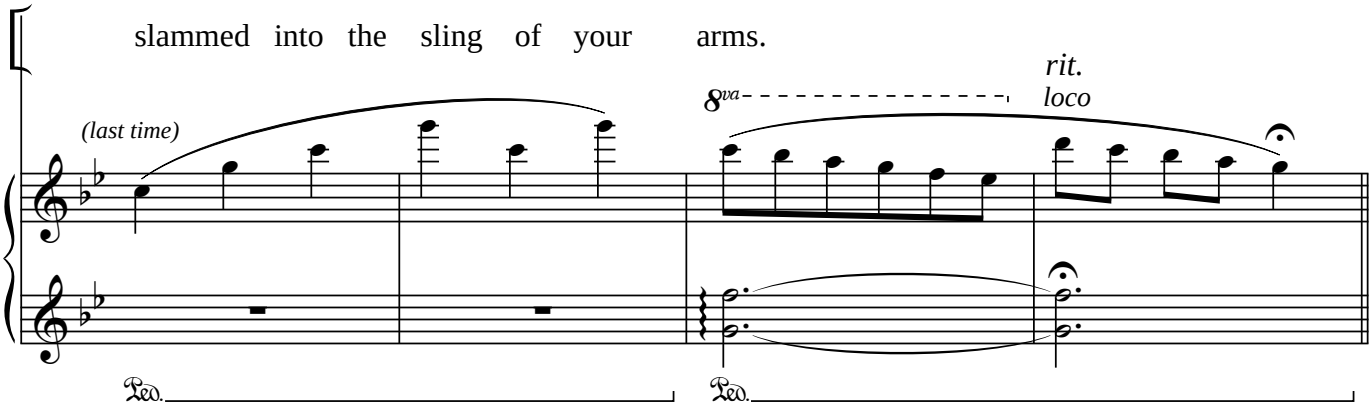

Your thighs pumping, you run
to deliver the baby to a cradle of
grass at the goal posts. But it's **bumped**
a tempo, a running pattern
(repeat these 2 measures ad lib.)
f
p
stop
abruptly
from your arms,
and you're mounted
as if your back were leather.
Your legs cut away,
you fold,
you tumble like
a treetrunk.
[high, random,
white-note dyads]
[lower, random,
white-note dyads]
f
NARRATOR takes off helmet
and examines it with curiosity.
Your brain's for
the ground to split
like a leather egg,
but it doesn't.
Your helmet
takes the
concussion.
Slower
("wobbly" motive)
p
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.

NARRATOR looks up, following the flight of an imaginary kickoff.

Sent aloft by a leather
toe, a rugged leather baby
dropped from the sky and

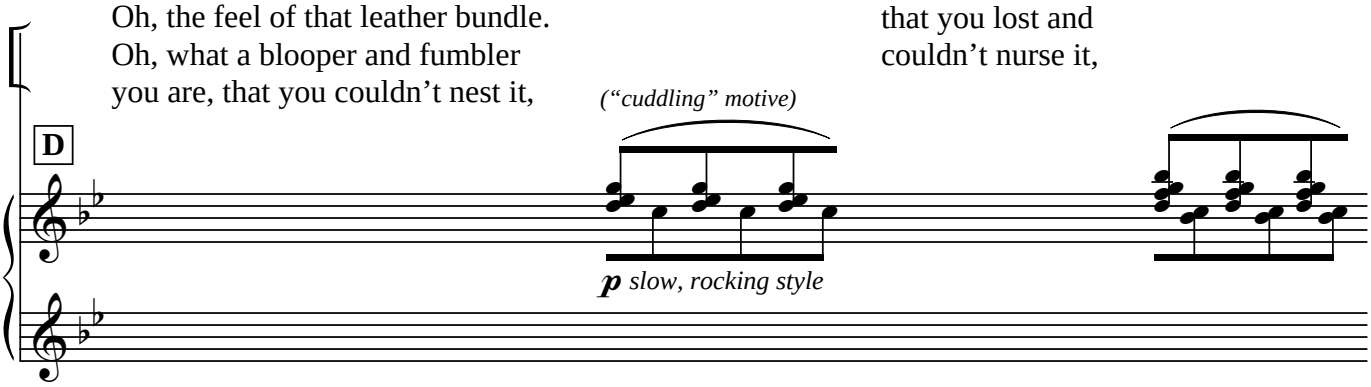


slammed into the sling of your arms.



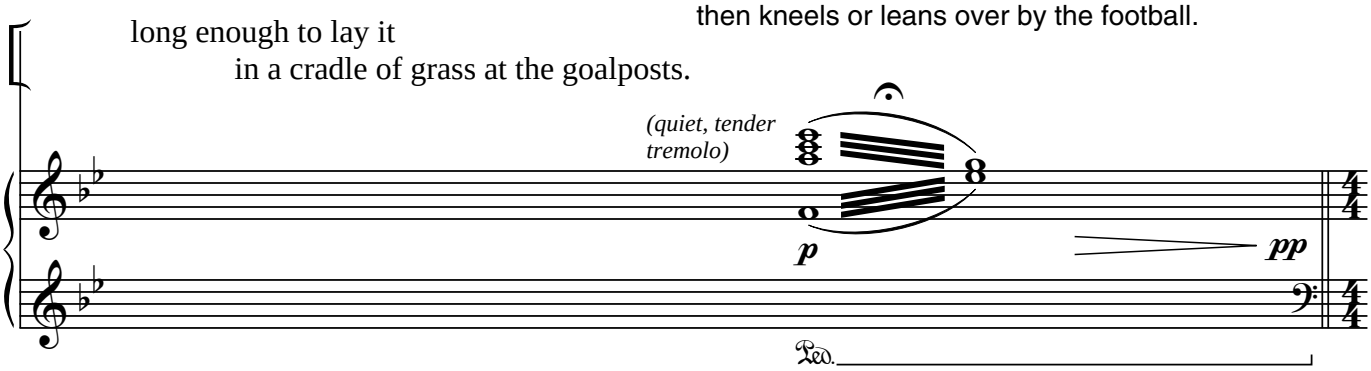
rapturously
Oh, the feel of that leather bundle.
Oh, what a blooper and fumbler
you are, that you couldn't nest it,

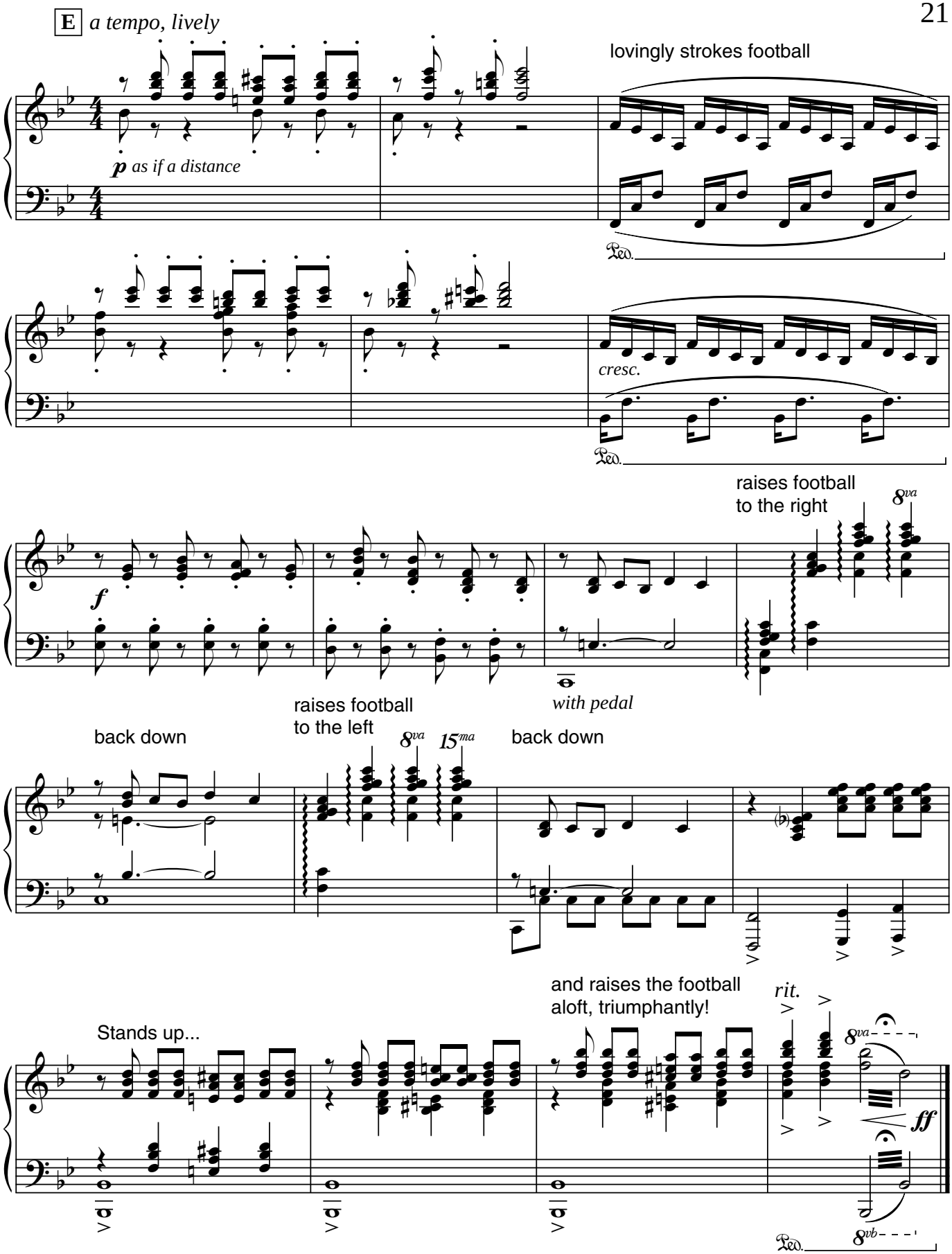
that you lost and
couldn't nurse it,



NARRATOR tenderly places the ball on the ground,
then kneels or leans over by the football.

long enough to lay it
in a cradle of grass at the goalposts.




E a tempo, lively
lovingly strokes football
p as if a distance
Ped.
cresc.
Ped.
raises football
to the right
8va
f
with pedal
back down
raises football
to the left
8va
15ma
back down
and raises the football
aloft, triumphantly!
rit.
Stands up...
8va
ff
8vb
Ped.