C H A R M E S

for soprano and piano

Eric Choate

I discovered the poetry of Paul Valéry while studying composition in Paris. I immersed myself in the poetry of the great French Symbolists: Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Valéry. When I discovered Valéry's collection Charmes, I knew immediately that I wanted to set some of it to music.

Each poem in this collection uses objects and experiences to describe a poet waiting for his inspiration. Very often in French Symbolism the poet will choose words and sounds that have many different meanings, which inform one's interpretation of the poetry. For example, "Les Grenades," the title of the first of this cycle, means both "the pomegranates" and "the grenades." While these are completely different objects, the poem reveals Valéry's implication of both meanings. The poet is awaiting inspiration, which comes in the form of a grenade exploding with ideas, or a pomegranate bursting with creative juices. Similarly, on the surface level, "Les Pas" suggests "footsteps;" however, "pas" is also a word used for negation. This expresses an existential question: was it the footsteps of a lover approaching a vigilant bed, or was it a nonexistence contained only in the mind of the poet? Again this poem is a metaphor for inspiration, now coming to the poet seductively in the night. "Le Vin Perdu" describes a scene in which the poet tosses wine into the sea (for reasons of which he is unsure) and in a trance, watches as the translucent red becomes enveloped in the salty water. "La Ceinture" describes a sash fluttering gracefully in the dim evening's light, which disappears as the night darkens. The double meaning here is "the belt," referring not only to the sash, but the band of light at a sunset.

To underline the double meanings that happen so frequently in these texts, my settings of these texts employ many musical "double meanings." Cross relations (chromatic contradictions between two simultaneously sounding tones) play an important role in the entire work by suggesting not either major or minor sonorities, but both. Likewise, the dialectical argument between key areas, as well as the way I chose to settle in tonalities that synthesize these arguments, suggests multiple intentions and musical meanings. All of these compositional devices exist within a sound world of gestures, harmonic patterns, and styles that allude to music of the great Fin de Siècle French composers, contemporaries of Mr. Valéry, and my own poetic muses: Debussy, Ravel, and Lili Boulanger.

Eric Choate

for Ellen

CHARMES

I. Les Grenades

Text: Paul Valéry (1871 - 1945)

Eric Choate

With energy contained, about to burst ♩. = 52

poco rit. *a tempo*

espress.

p *mf* *mp* *p*

5

mp

Du - res gre - na - des en - tr'ou - ver - tes Cé - dant à l'ex - cès de vos

9

grains, Je crois voir des fronts sou - ve - rains É - cla -

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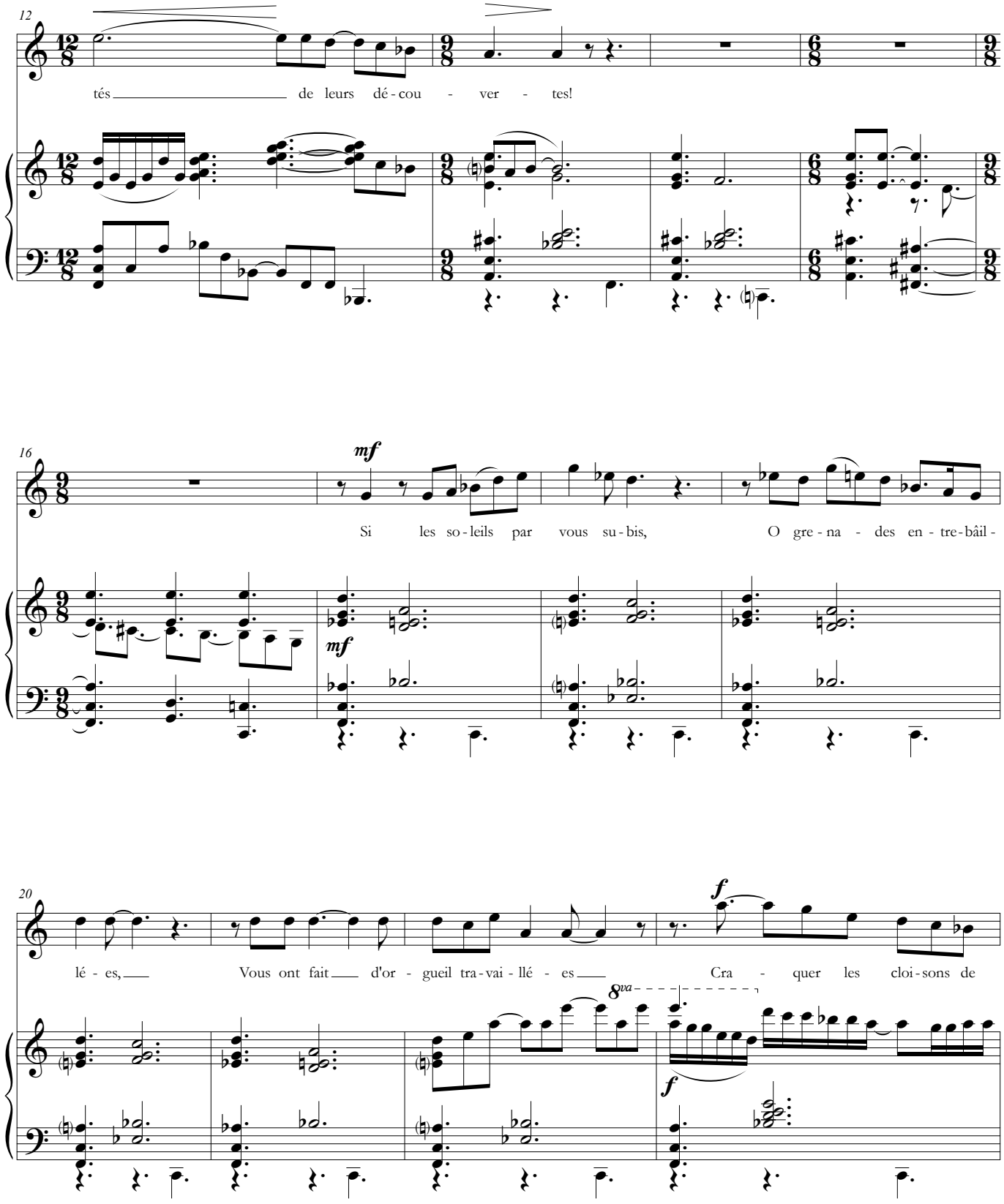
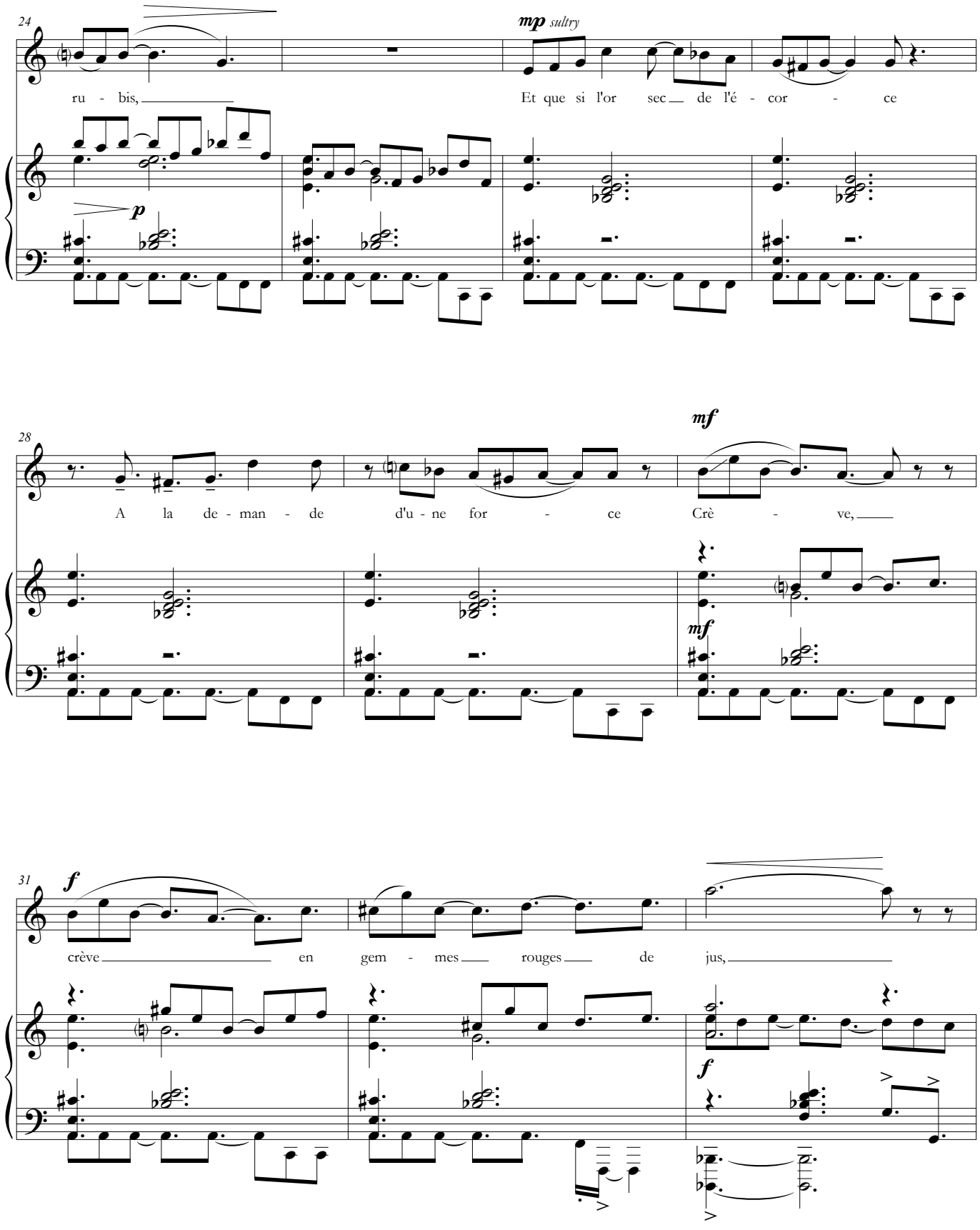
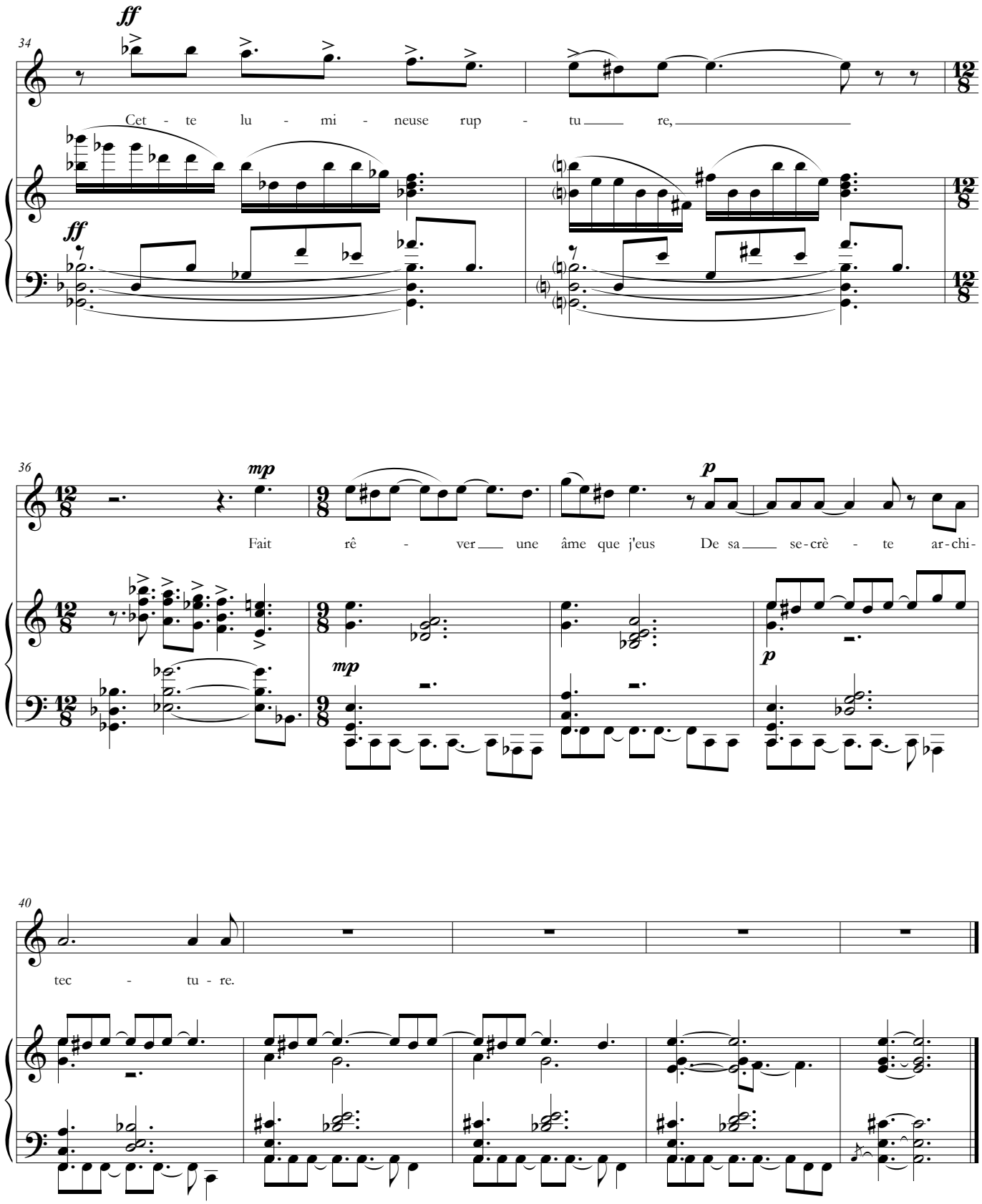
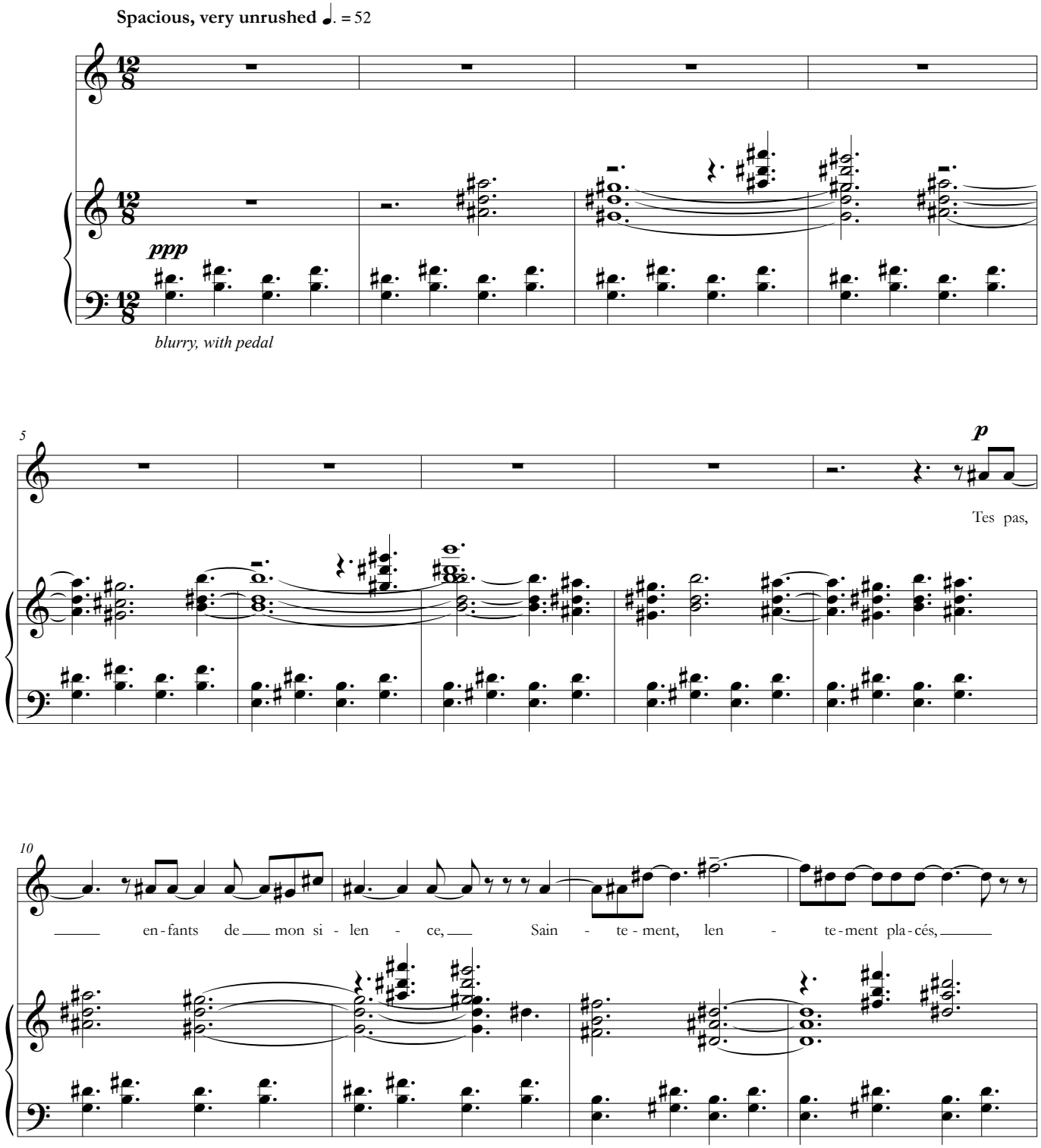
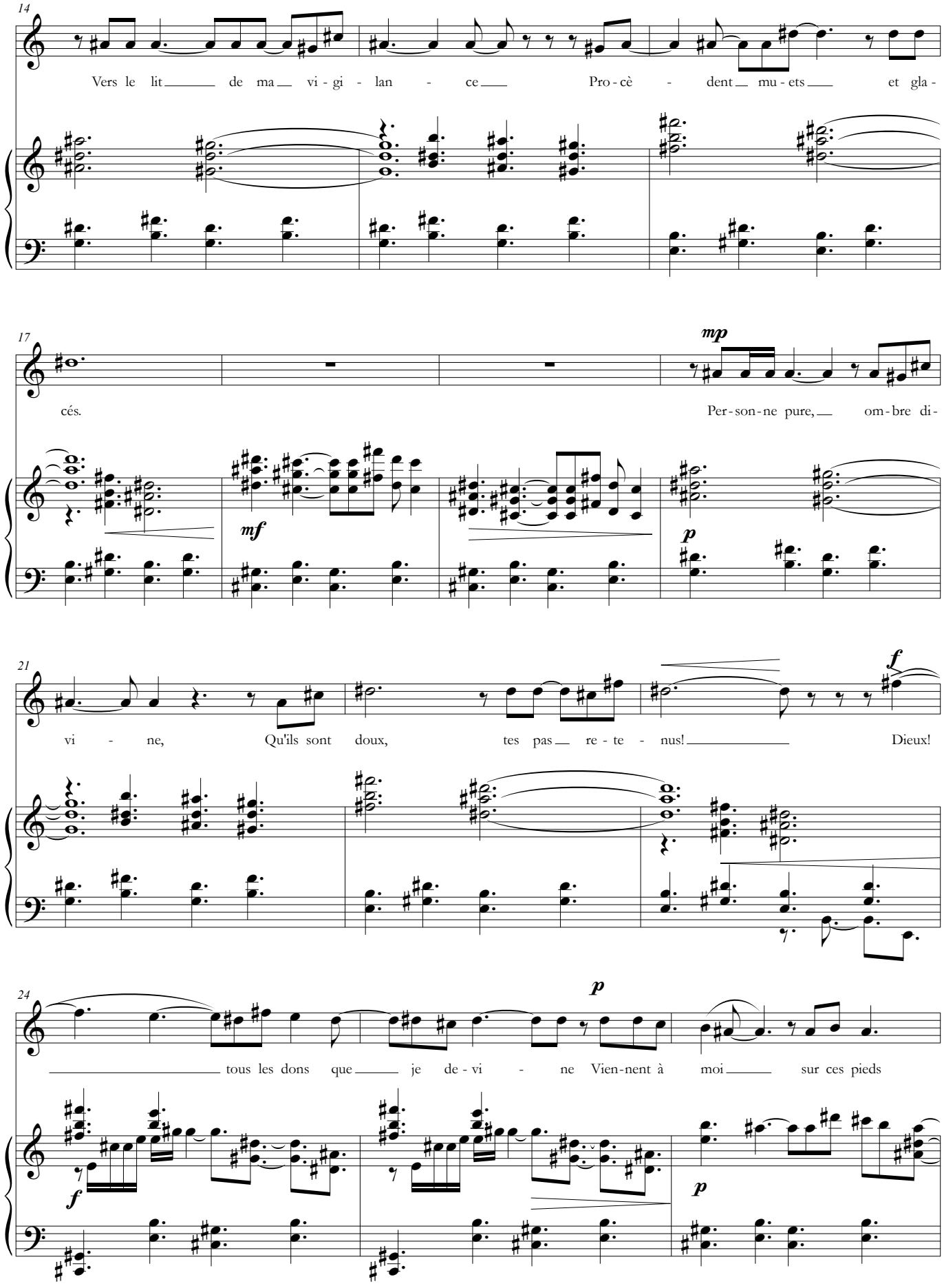

12
tés de leurs dé - cou - ver - tes!
16
mf
Si les so - leils par vous su - bis,
O gre - na - des en - tre - bâil -
mf
20
lé - es, Vous ont fait d'or - gueil tra - vai - llé - es
Cra - quer les cloi - sons de
f
8va
f

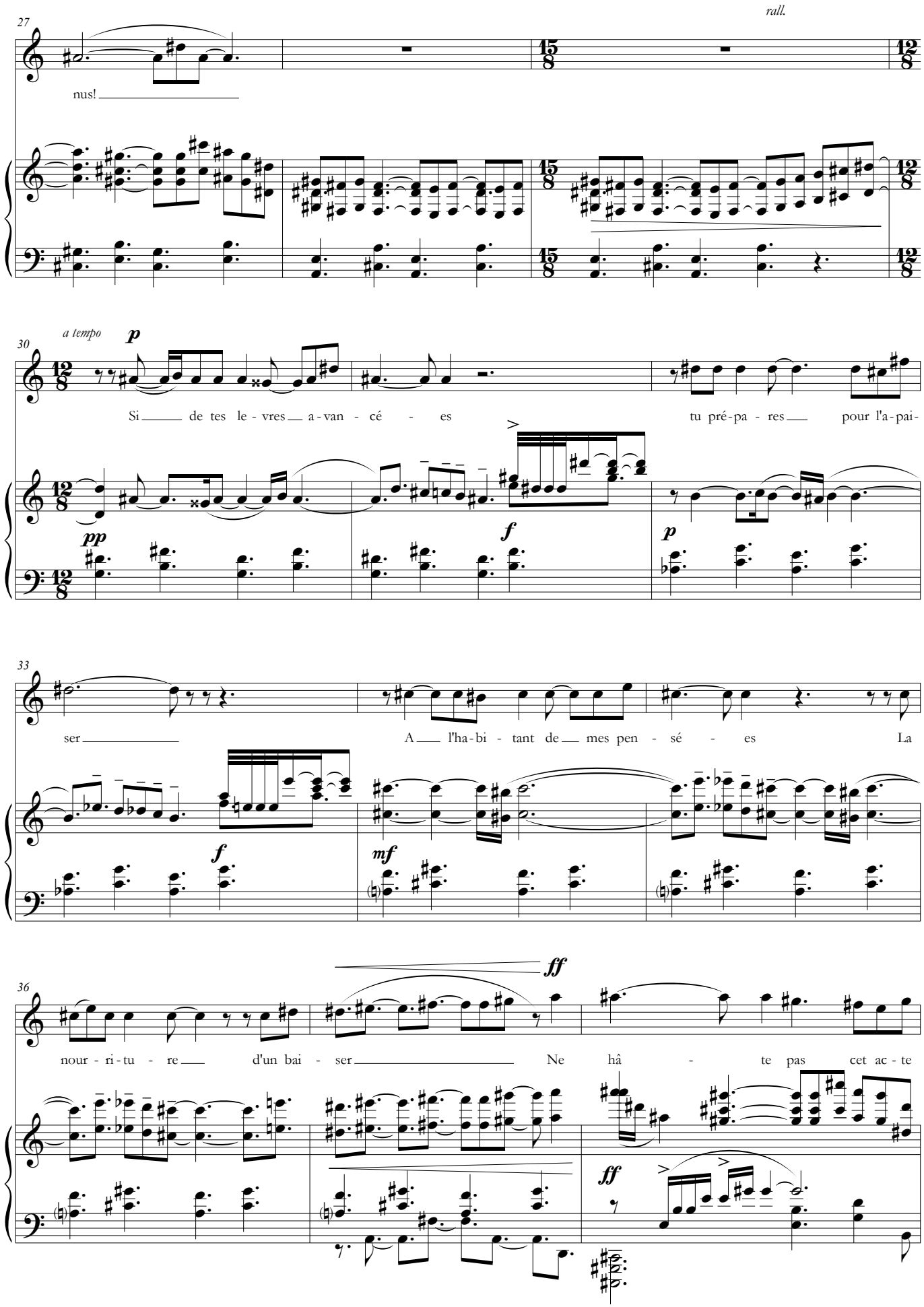

24
mp sultry
ru - bis,
Et que si l'or sec de l'é - cor - ce
p
28
mf
A la de - man - de d'u - ne for - ce Crè - ve,
mf
31
f
crève en gem - mes rouges de jus,
f

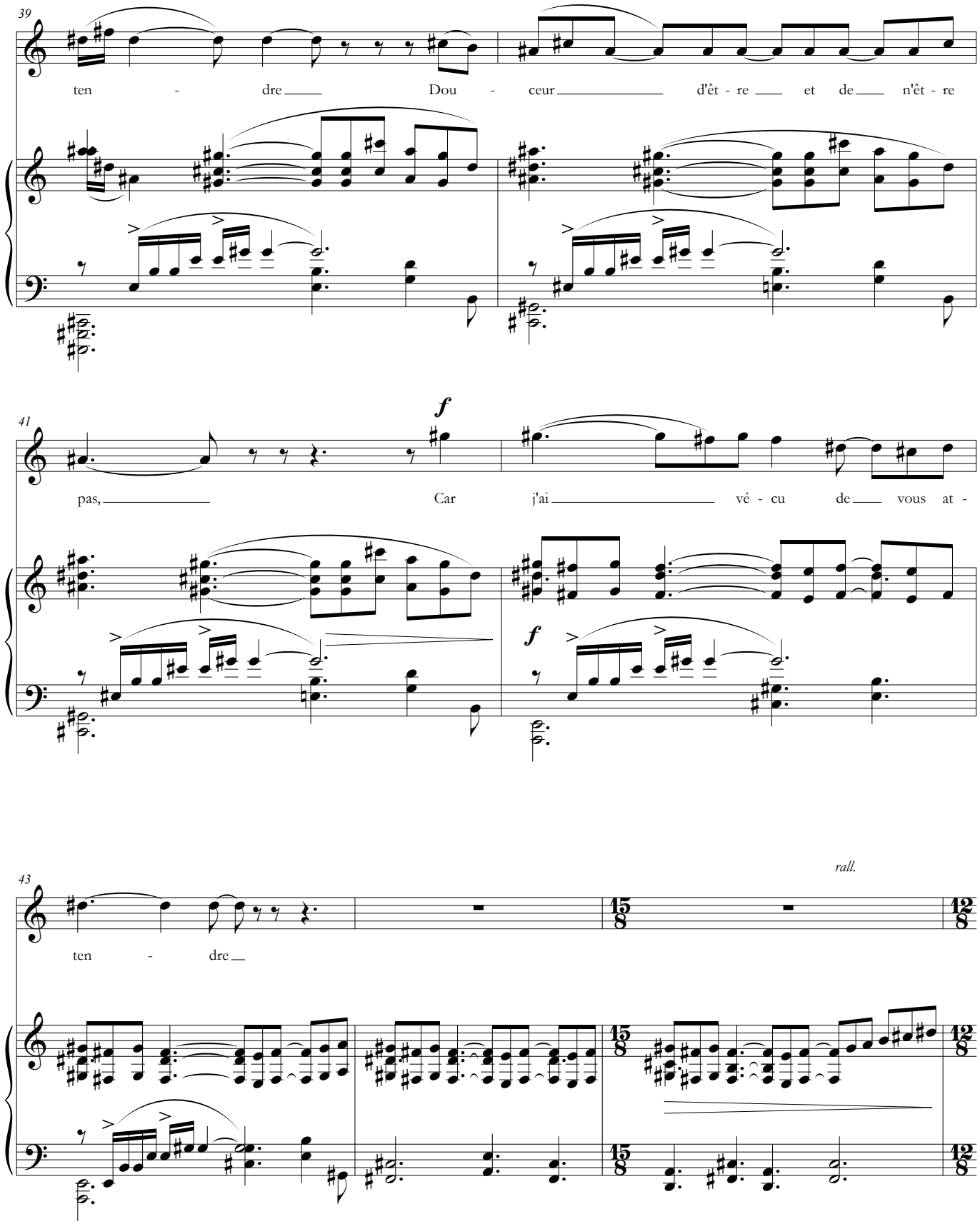

34
ff
Cet - te lu - mi - neuse rup - tu re,
36
mp
Fait rê - ver une âme que j'eus De sa se-crè - te ar-chi-
p
40
tec - tu - re.

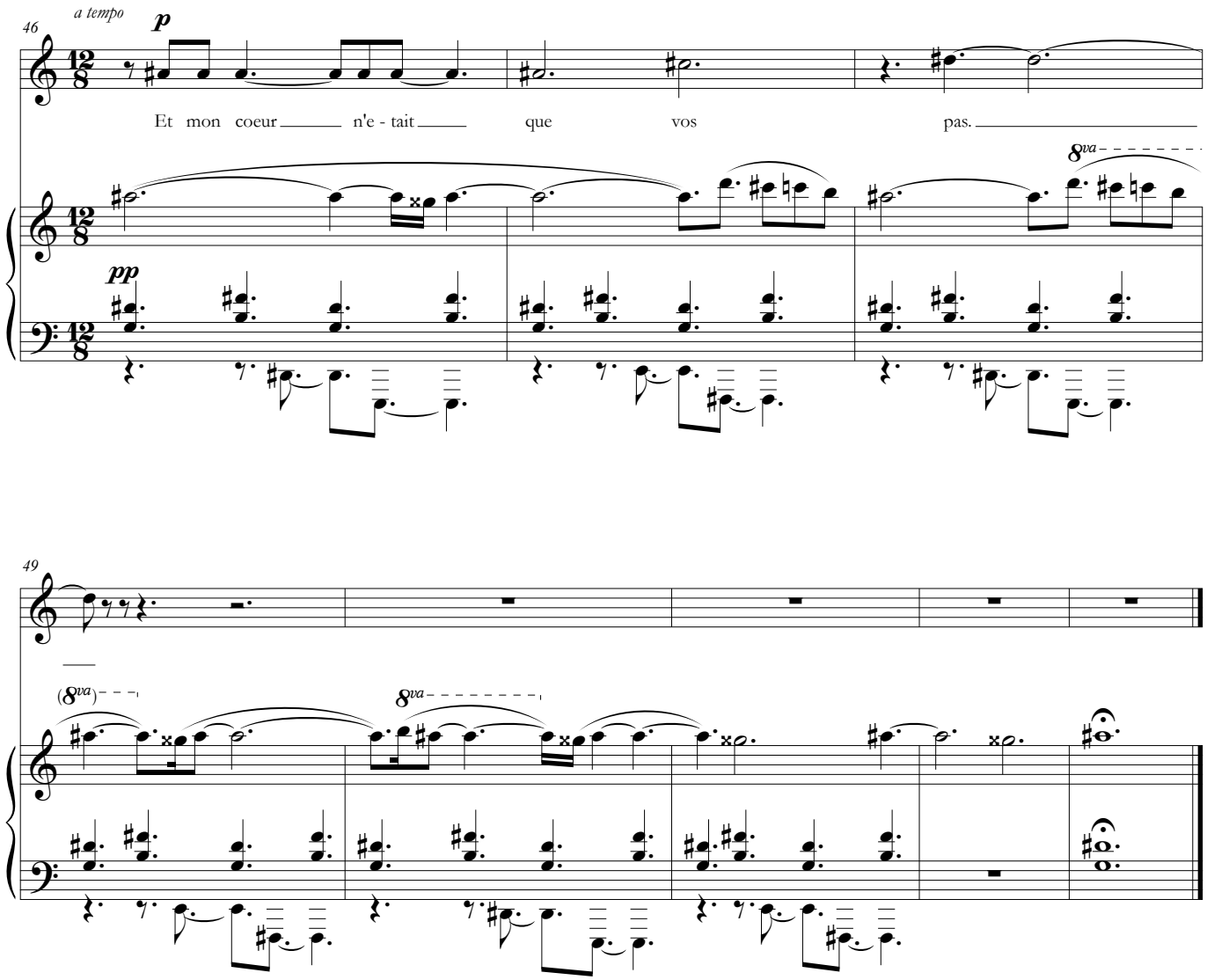
II. Les Pas


Spacious, very unrushed ♩. = 52
ppp
blurry, with pedal
5
p
Tes pas,
10
en-fants de mon si-len-ce, Sain-te-ment, len-te-ment pla-cés,

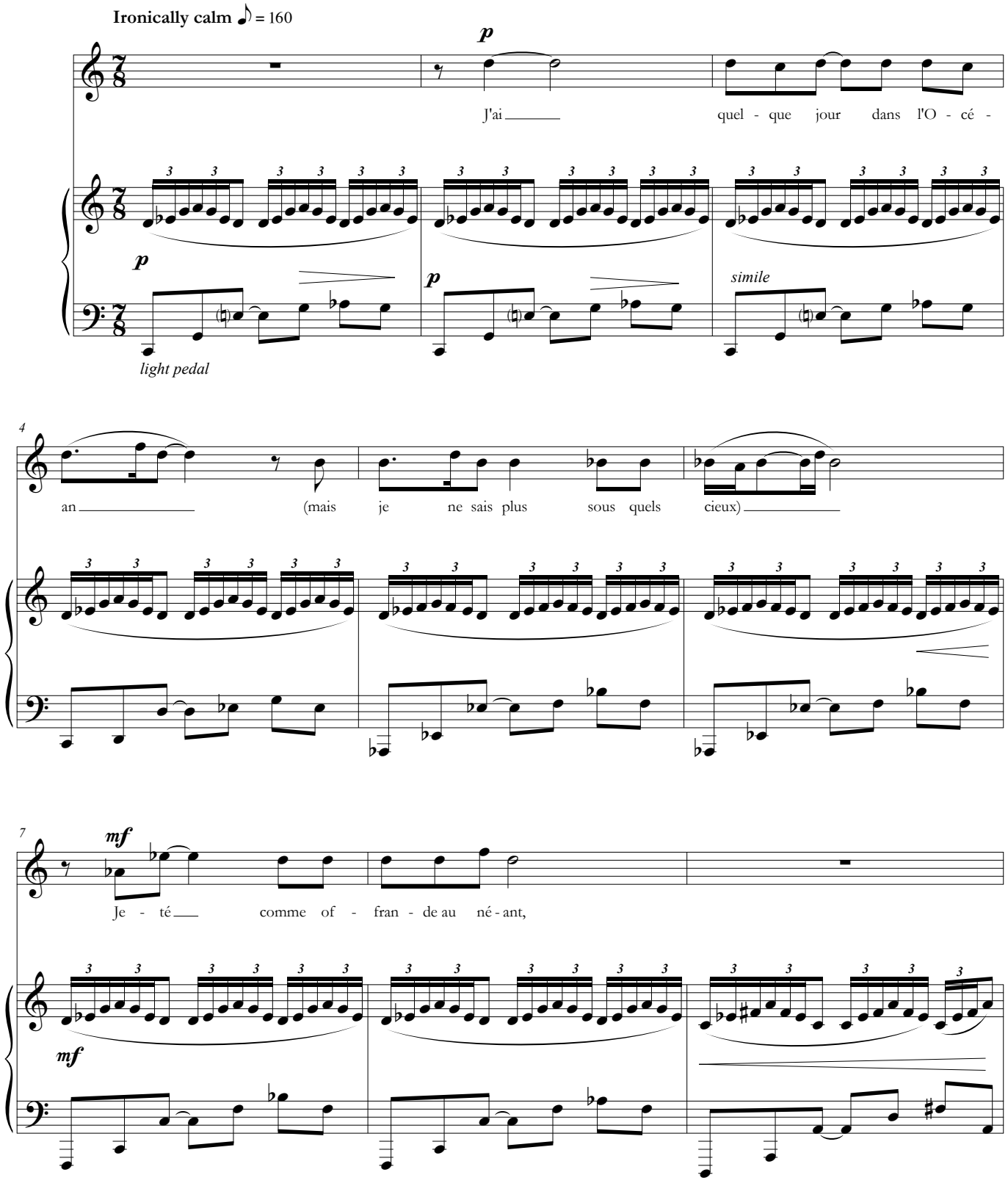

14
Vers le lit de ma vi - gi - lan - ce Pro - cè - dent mu - ets et gla -
17
mp
cés.
Per - son - ne pure, om - bre di -
mf
p
21
f
vi - ne, Qu'ils sont doux, tes pas re - te - nus! Dieux!
24
p
tous les dons que je de - vi - ne Vien - nent à moi sur ces pieds
f
p

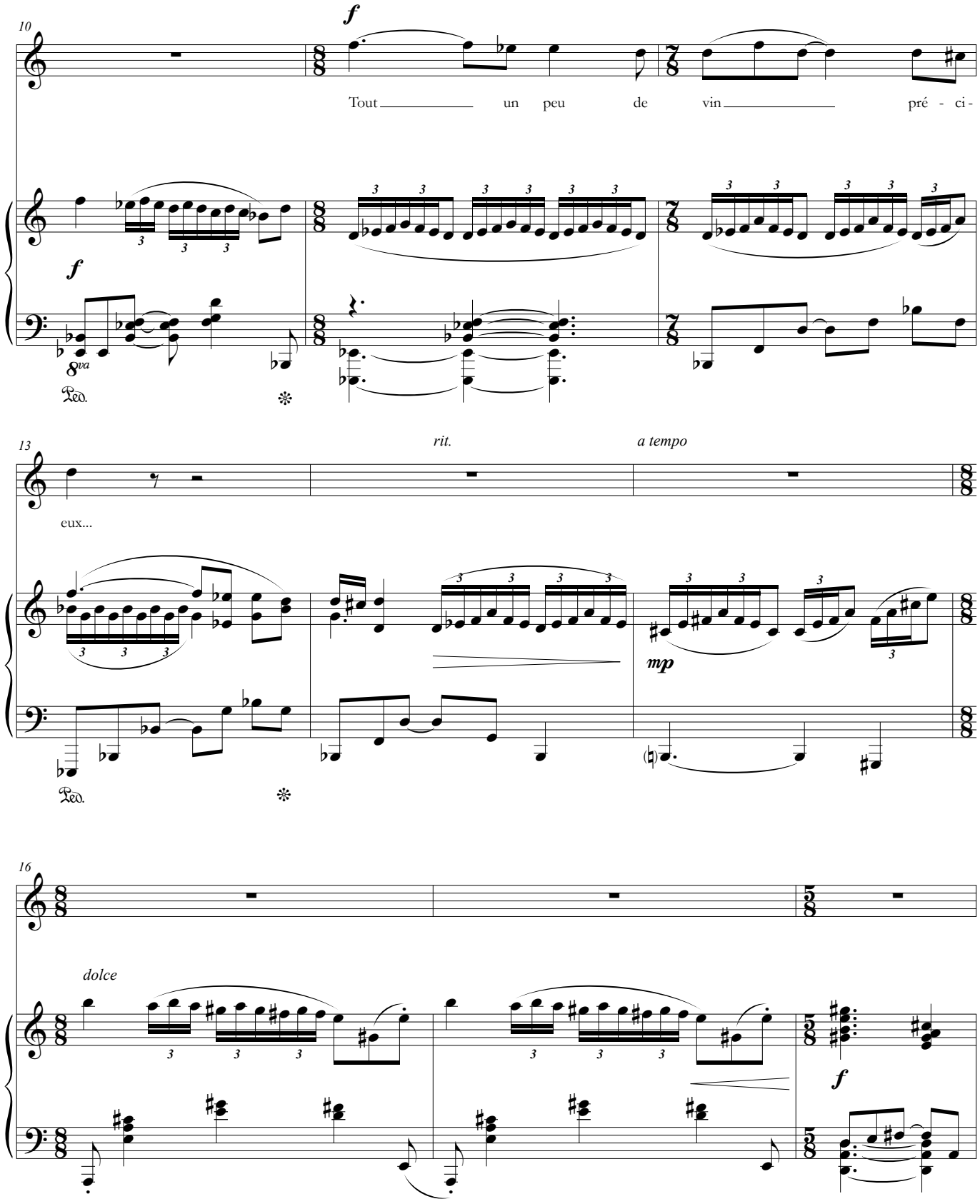

rall.
27
nus!
15/8
12/8
a tempo
p
30
Si de tes le - vres a - van - cé - es tu pré-pa - res pour l'a-pai-
pp
f
p
33
ser A l'ha-bi - tant de mes pen - sé - es La
f
mf
ff
36
nour - ri-tu - re d'un bai - ser Ne hâ - te pas cet ac-te
ff

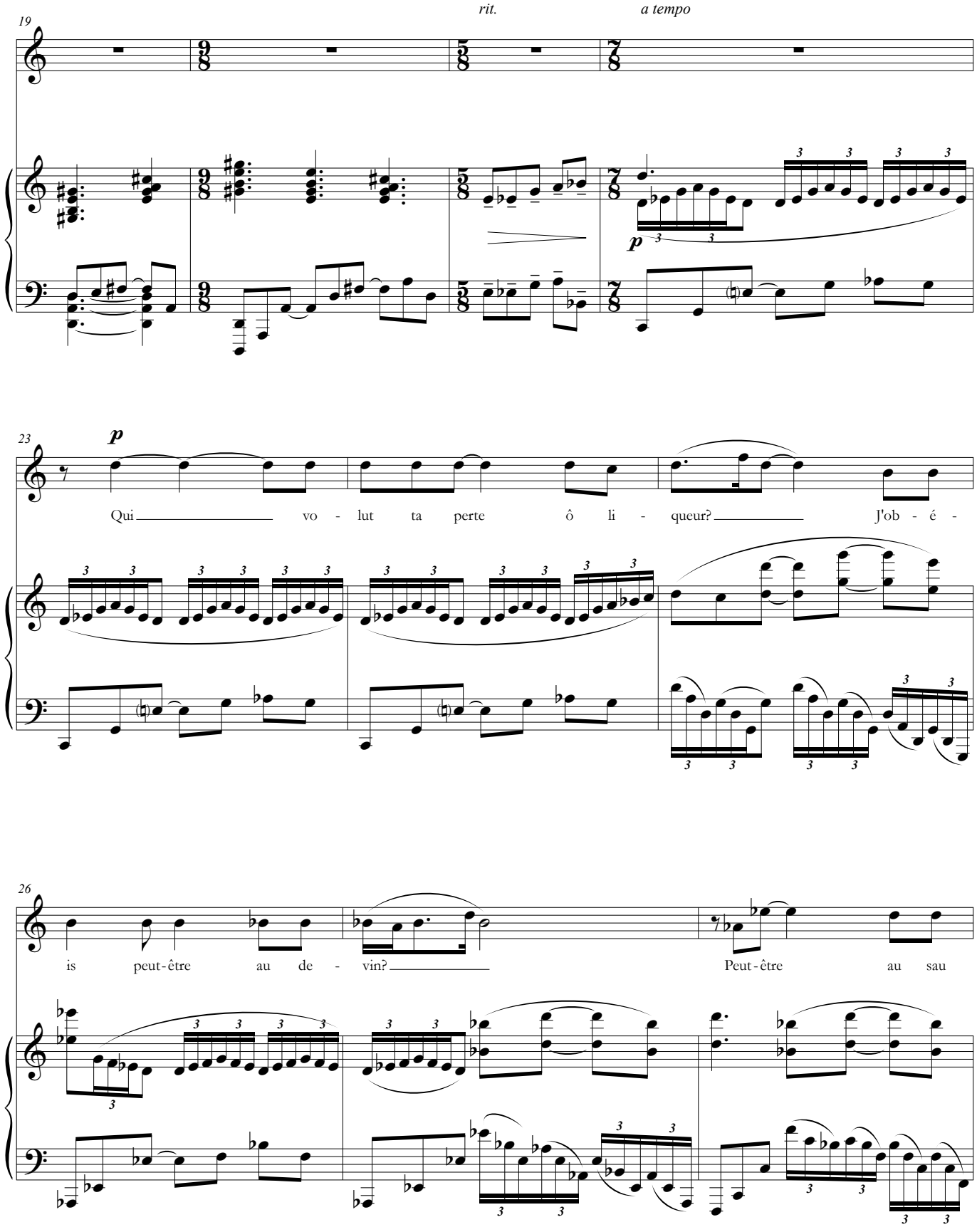

39
ten - dre Dou - ceur d'êt - re et de n'êt - re
41
f
pas, Car j'ai vé - cu de vous at -
f
43
rall.
ten - dre
15/8
12/8

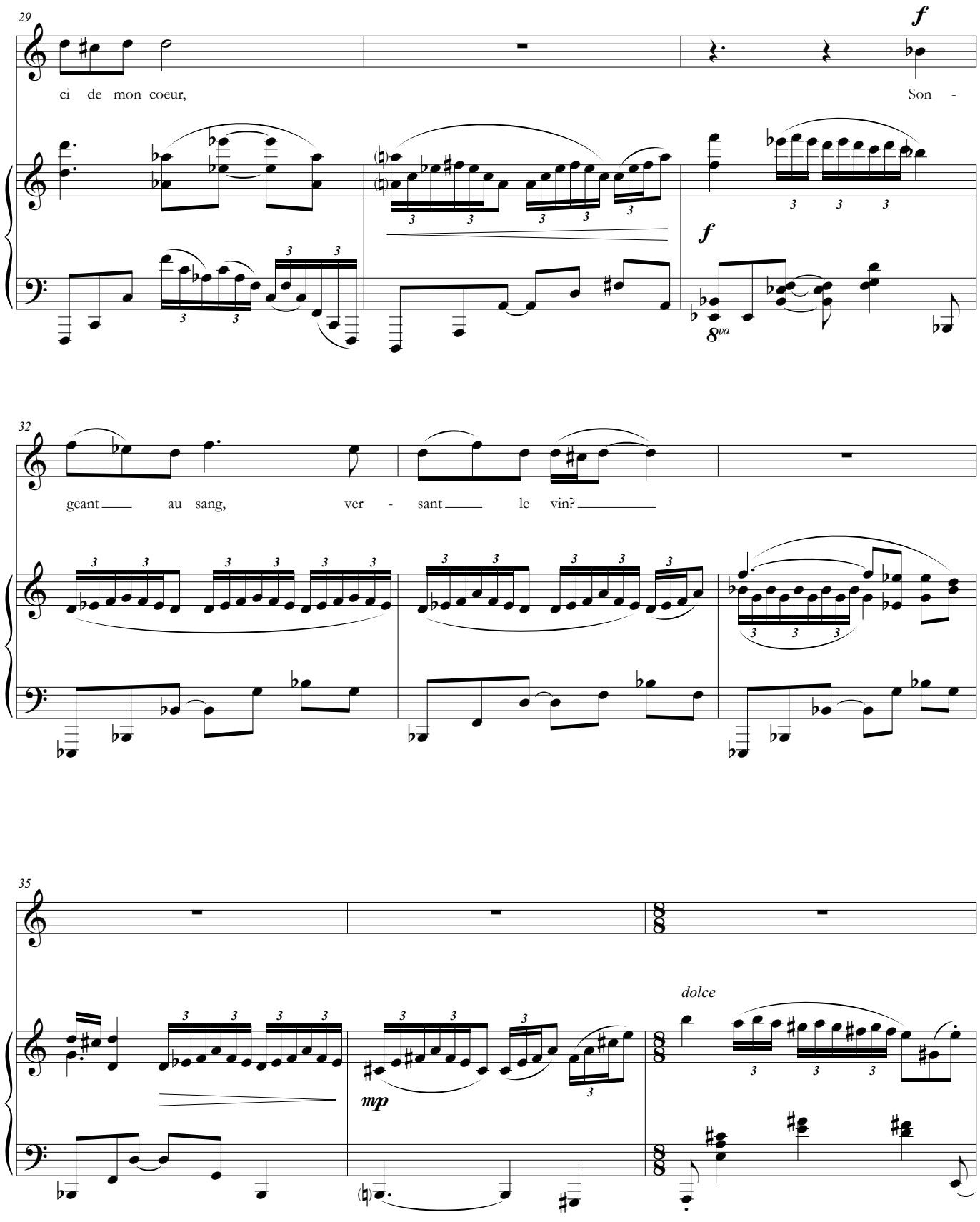

46
a tempo
p
Et mon coeur n'e - tait que vos pas.
8va
pp
49
(8va)
8va

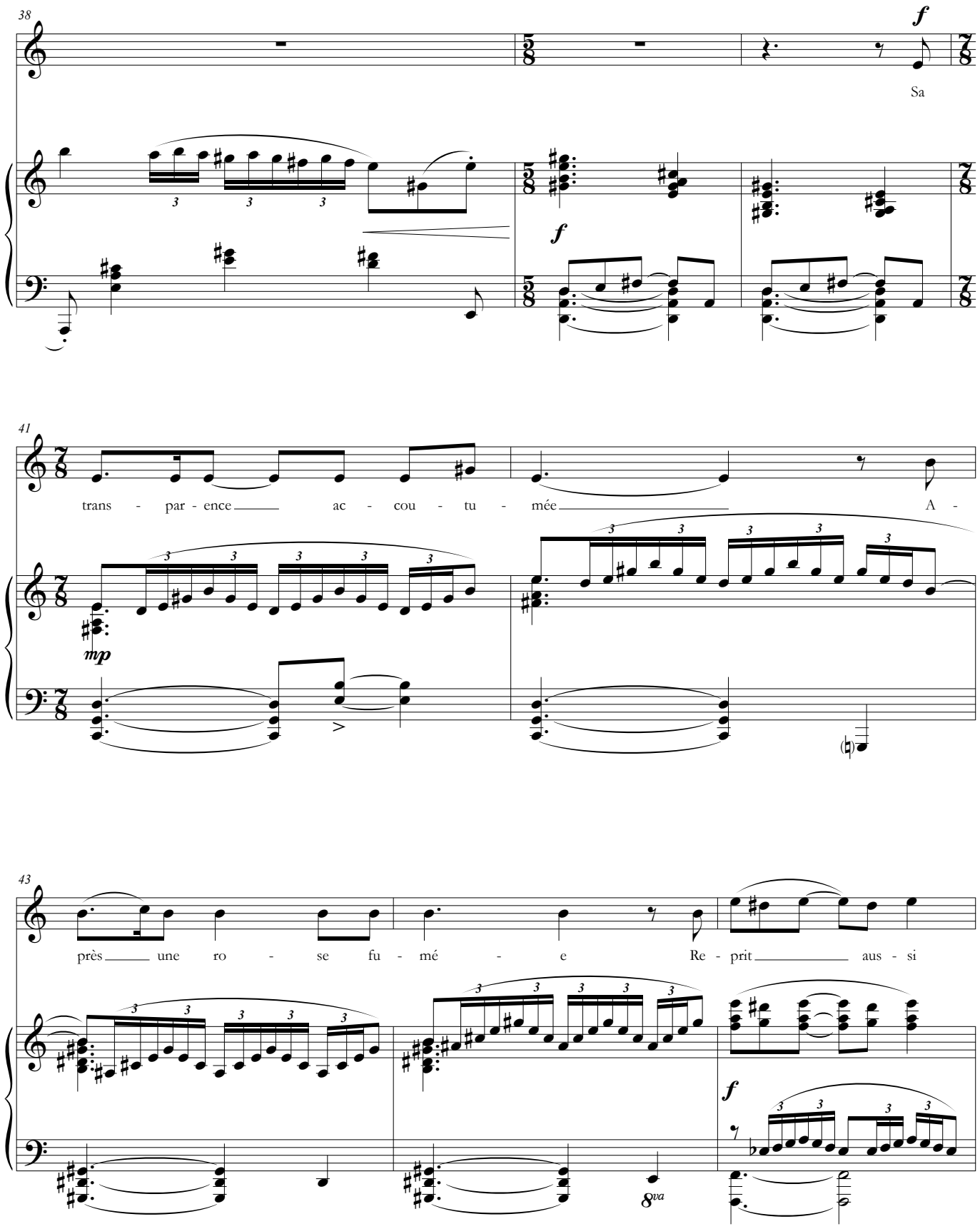
III. Le Vin Perdu

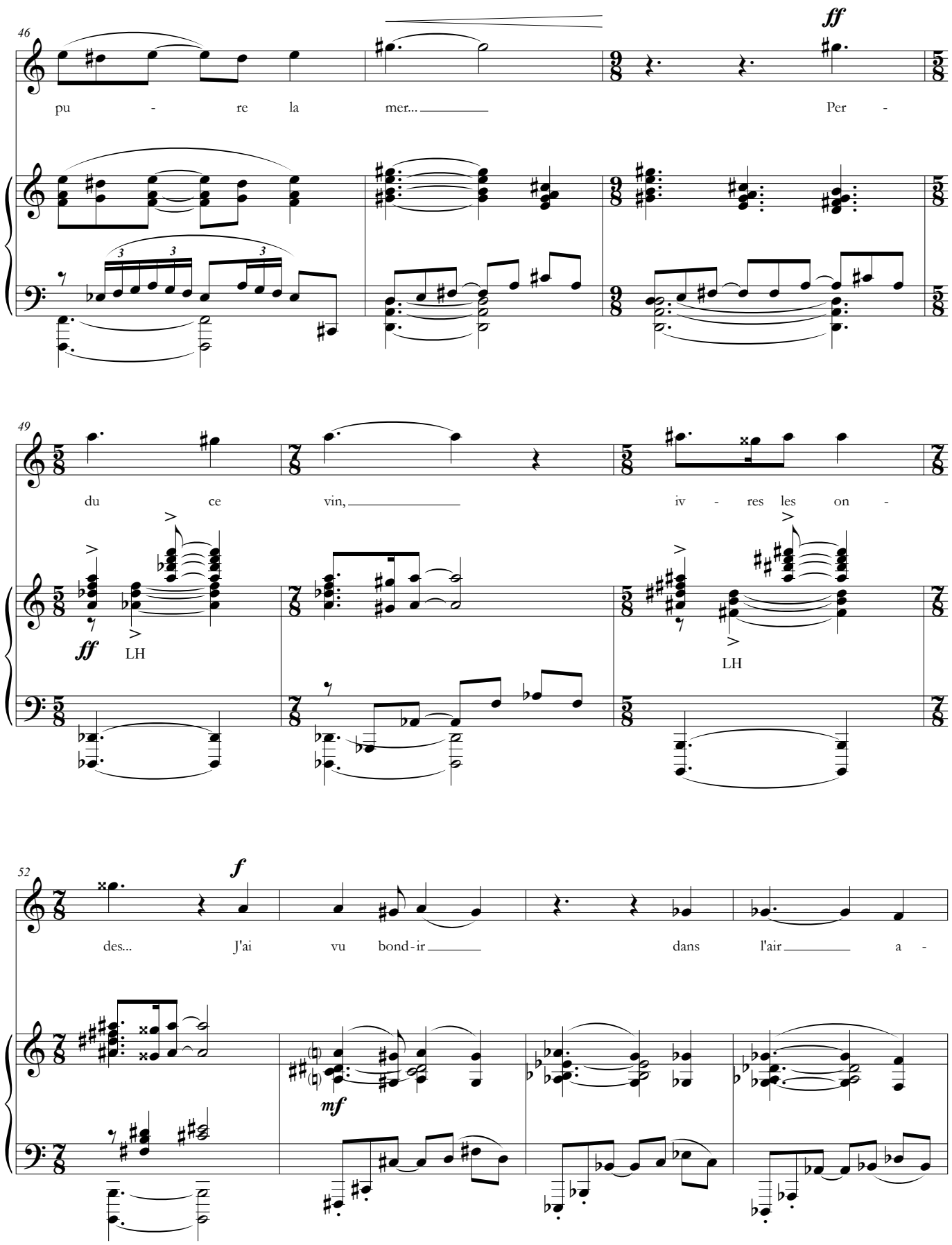


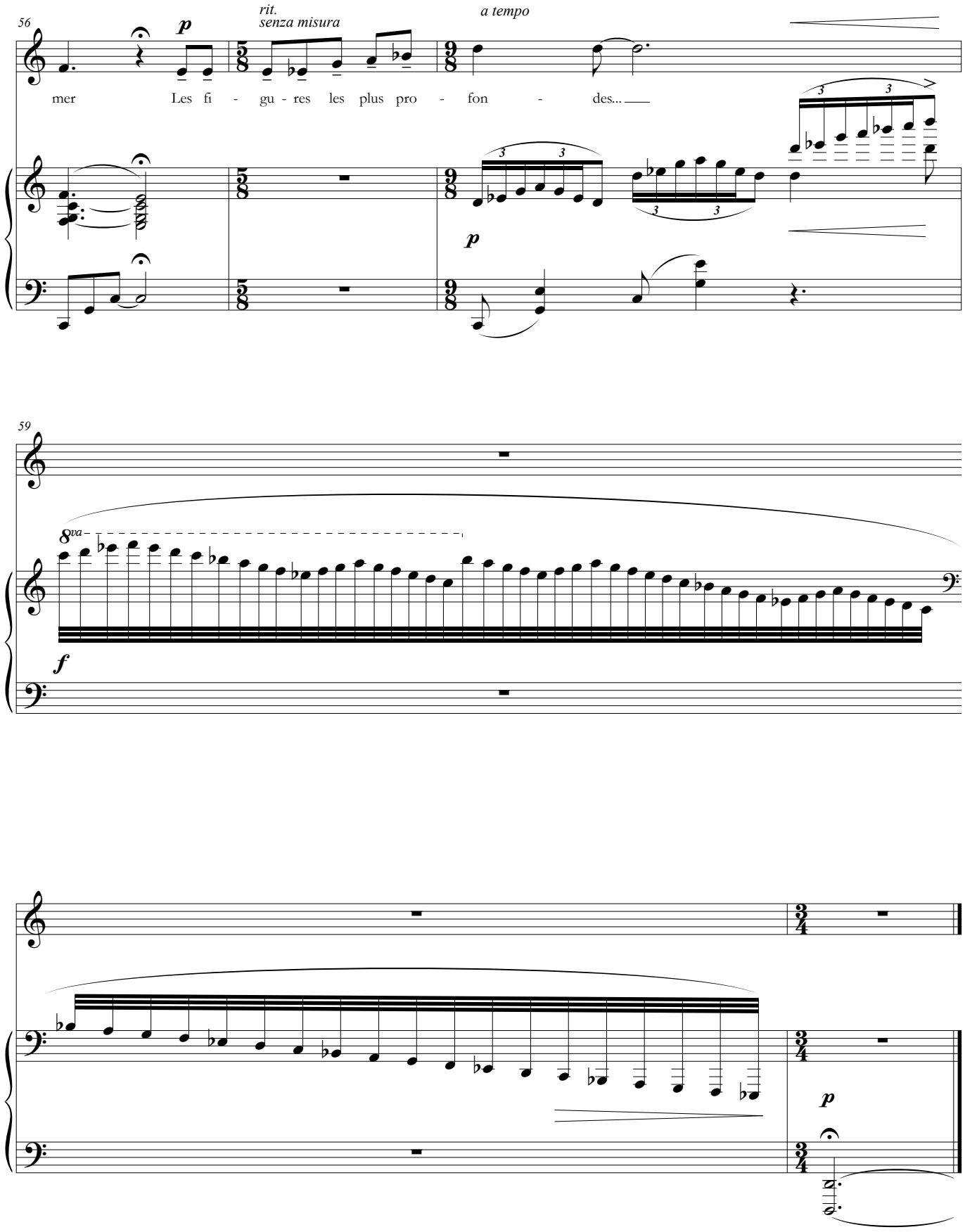

10
f
Tout un peu de vin pré - ci -
f
8va
Ped.
13
rit.
a tempo
eux...
mp
Ped.
16
dolce
f


19
rit.
a tempo
p
23
p
Qui vo - lut ta perte ô li - queur? J'ob - é -
26
is peut-être au de - vin? Peut-être au sau

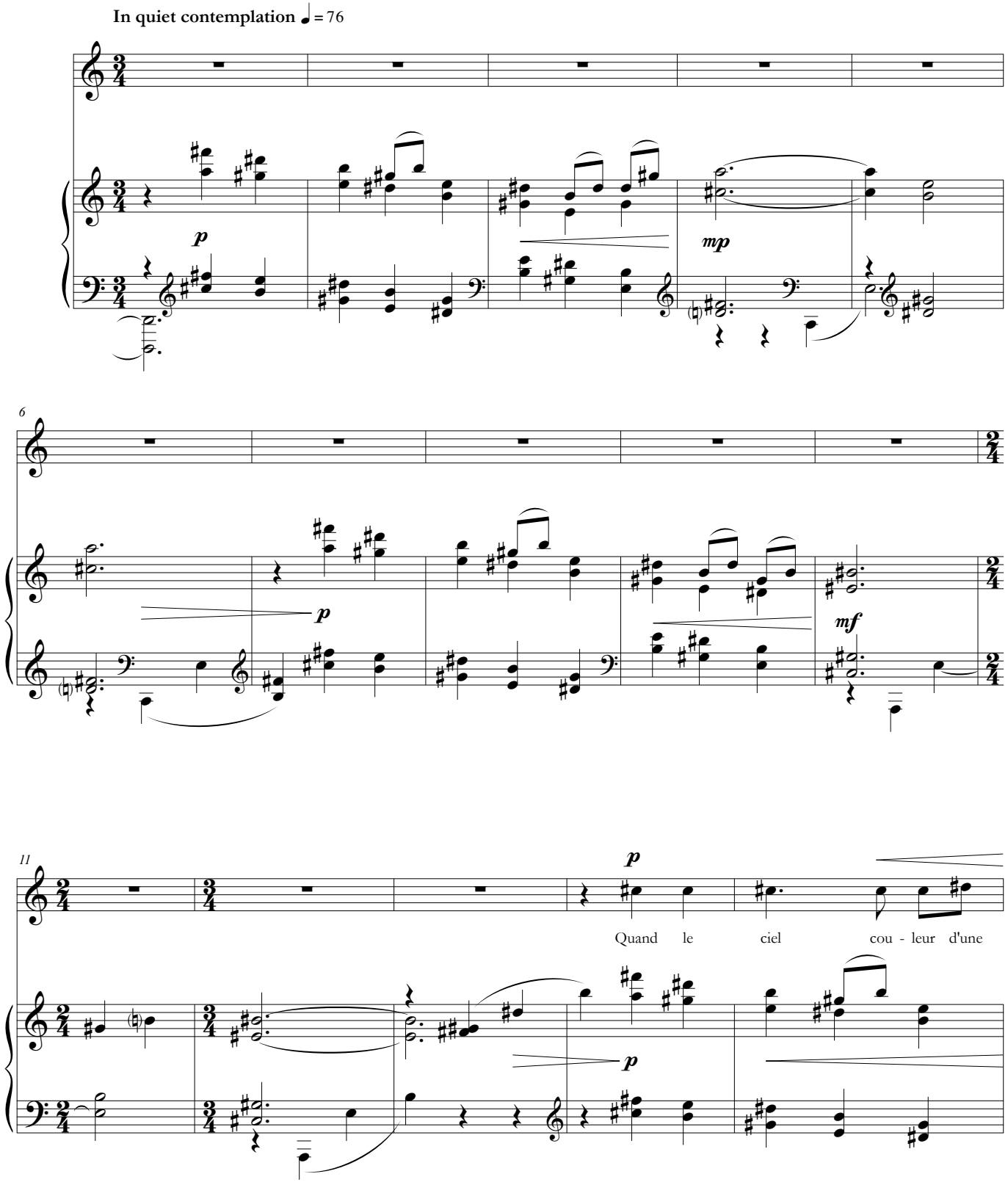

29
f
ci de mon coeur,
Son -
f
8va
32
geant au sang, ver - sant le vin?
35
dolce
mp

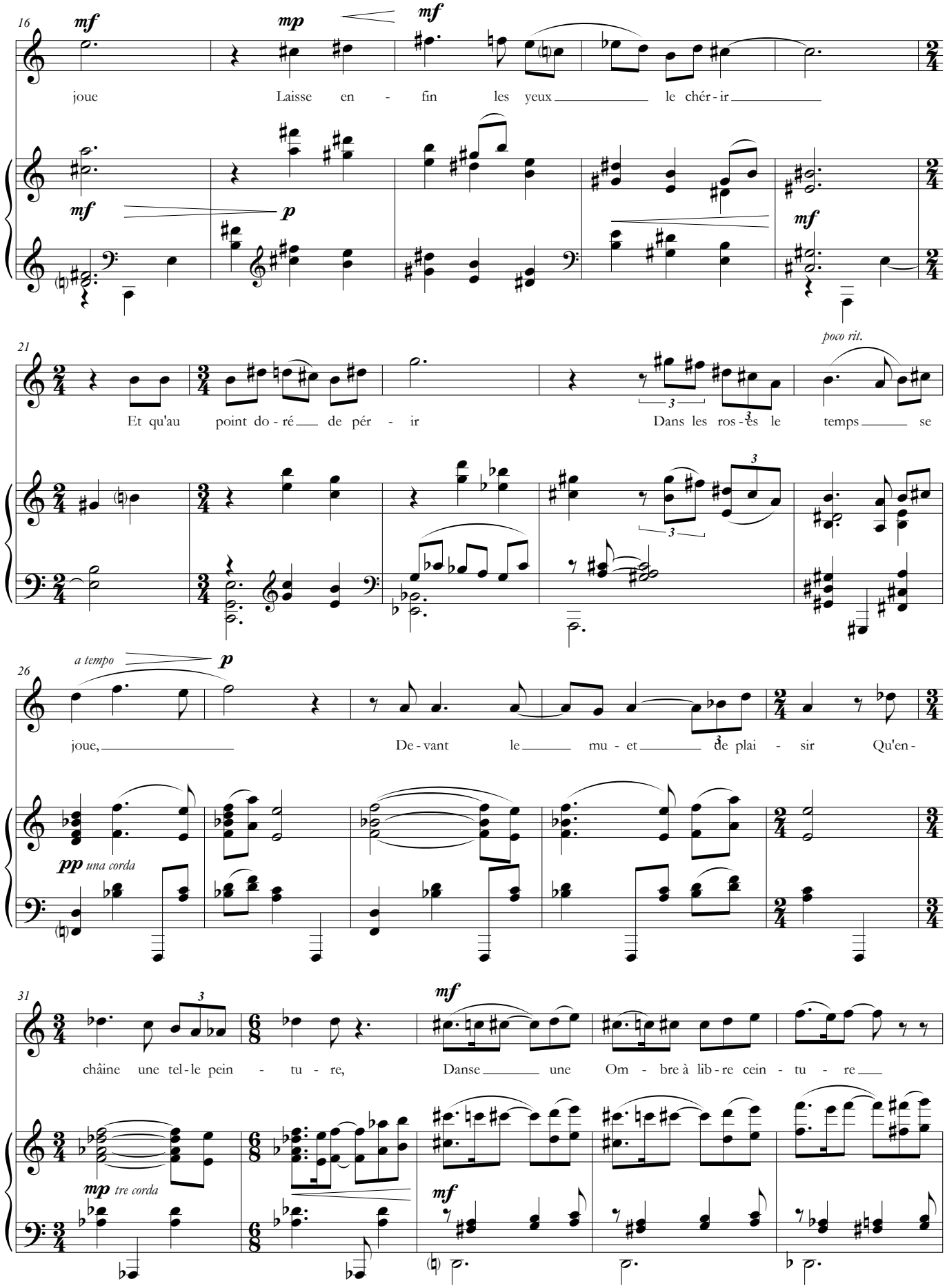

38
f
Sa
f
41
trans - par - ence ac - cou - tu - mée A -
mp
43
près une ro - se fu - mé - e Re - prit aus - si
f
8va

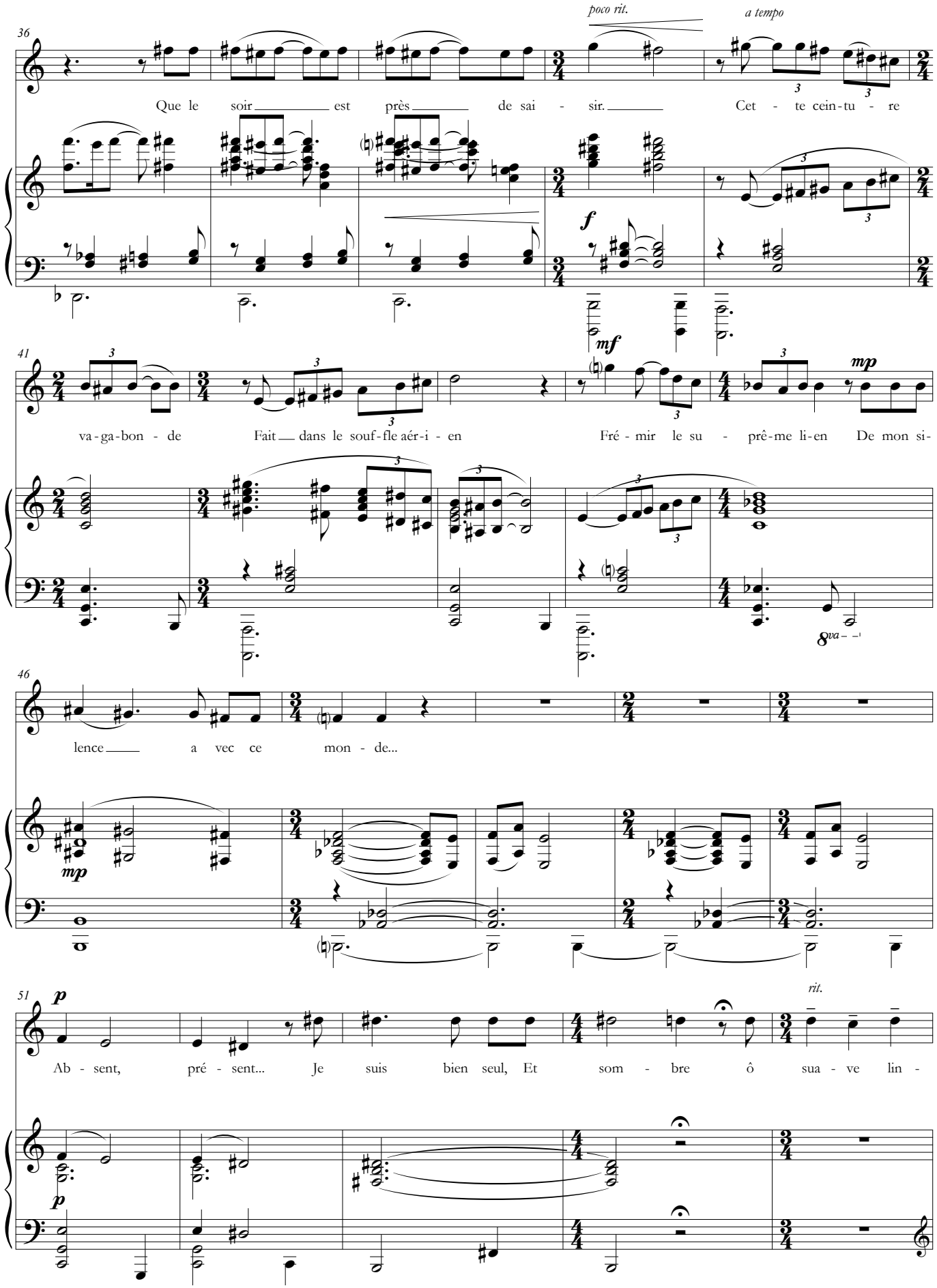

46
ff
pu - re la mer... Per -
49
du ce vin, iv - res les on -
ff
LH
LH
52
f
des... J'ai vu bond-ir dans l'air a -
mf

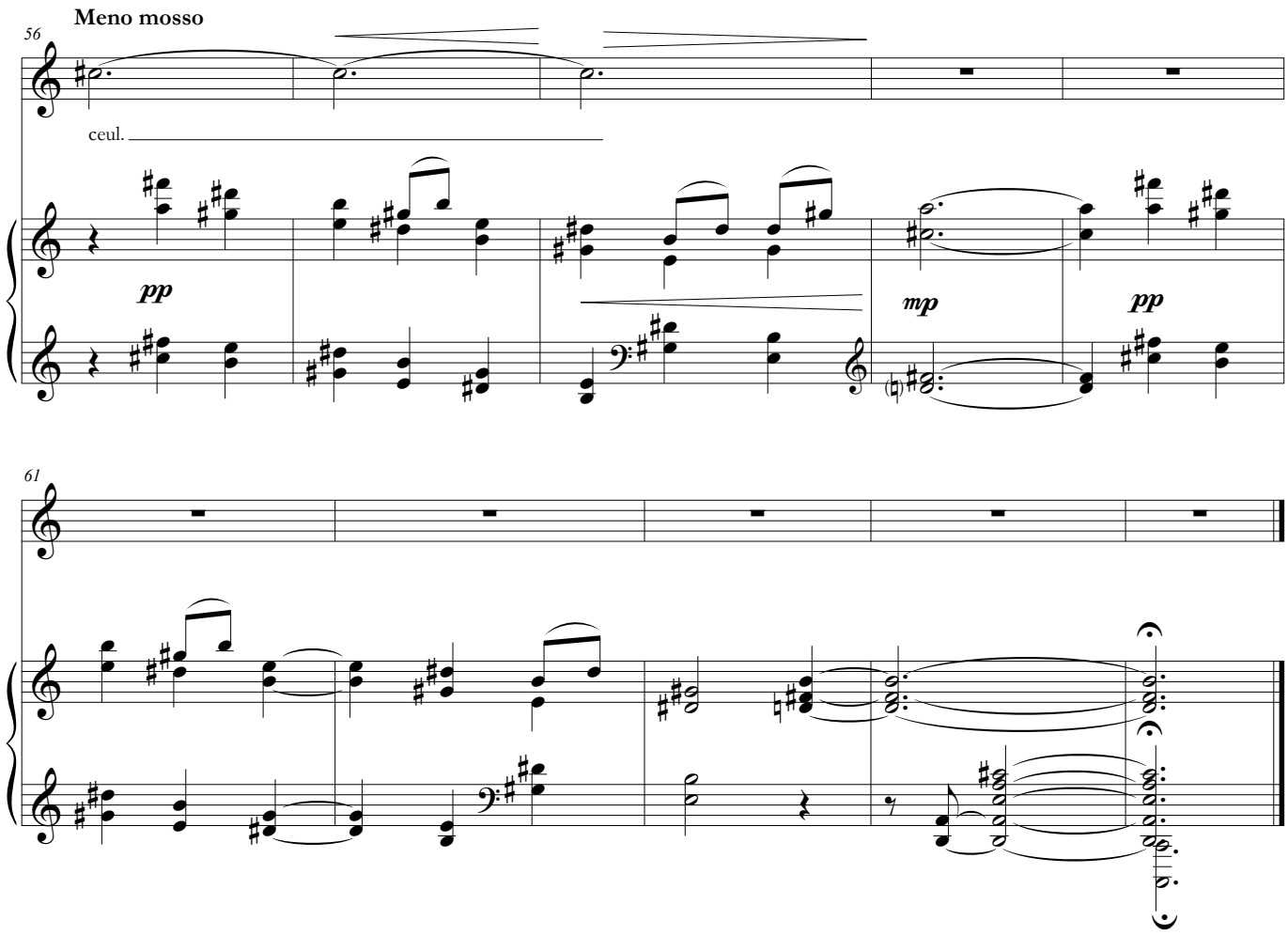

56
p
rit.
senza misura
a tempo
mer Les fi - gu - res les plus pro - fon - des...
p
59
8va
f
p

IV. La Ceinture




16
mf
mp
mf
joue
Laisse en - fin les yeux le chér - ir
mf
p
mf
21
poco rit.
Et qu'au point do - ré de pér - ir
Dans les ros - es le temps se
26
a tempo
p
joue,
De - vant le mu - et de plai - sir Qu'en -
pp una corda
31
mf
châine une tel - le pein - tu - re,
Danse une Om - bre à lib - re cein - tu - re
mp tre corda
mf


36
poco rit.
a tempo
Que le soir est près de sai - sir. Cet - te cein-tu - re
f
41
mf
va-ga-bon - de Fait dans le souf-fle aér-i - en Fré - mir le su - prê-me li-en De mon si-
mp
8va
46
lence a vec ce mon - de...
mp
51
p
rit.
Ab - sent, pré - sent... Je suis bien seul, Et som - bre ô sua - ve lin -
p



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