Evenly Spaced Waves of Irony

for baritone & piano

I. The Willies
II. Flames
III. Weighing the Dog
IV. Embrace

ca. 14 minutes

text by:
Billy Collins

music by:
David Cutler

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I. **The Willies**

There is no known cure for them,
unlike the heeby-jeebies
or the shakes

which Russian vodka and a hot bath
will smooth out.

The drifties can be licked,
though the vapors often spell trouble.

The whips-and-jangles
go away in time. So do the fantods.
And good company will put the blues
to flight

and do much to relieve the flips,
the quivers and the screamies.

But the willies are another matter.

Anything can give them to you:
electric chairs, raw meat, manta rays,
public restrooms, a footprint,
and every case of the willies
is a bad one.

Some say flow with them, ride them out,
but this is useless advice
once you are in their grip.

There is no way to get on top
of the willies. Valium
is ineffective. Hospitals
are not the answer.

Keeping still
and emitting, thin, evenly spaced
waves of irony
may help

but don't expect miracles:
the willies are the willies.

II. **Flames**

Smokey the Bear heads
into the autumn woods
with a red can of gasoline
and a box of wooden matches.

His ranger's hat is cocked
at a disturbing angle.

His brown fur gleams
under the high sun
as his paws, the size
of catcher's mitts,
crackle into the distance.

He is sick of dispensing
warnings to the careless,
the half-wit camper,
the dumbbell hiker.

He is going to show them
how a professional does it.

III. **Weighing the Dog**

It is awkward for me and bewildering for him
as I hold him in my arms in the small bathroom,
balancing our weight on the shaky blue scale,

but this is the way to weigh a dog and easier
than training him to sit obediently on one spot
with his tongue out, waiting for the cookie.

With pencil and paper I subtract my weight
from our total to find out the remainder that is his,
and I start to wonder if there is an analogy here.

It could not have to do with my leaving you
though I never figured out what you amounted to
until I subtracted myself from our combination.

You held me in your arms more than I held you
through all those awkward and bewildering months
and now we are both lost in strange and distant
neighborhoods.

IV. **Embrace**

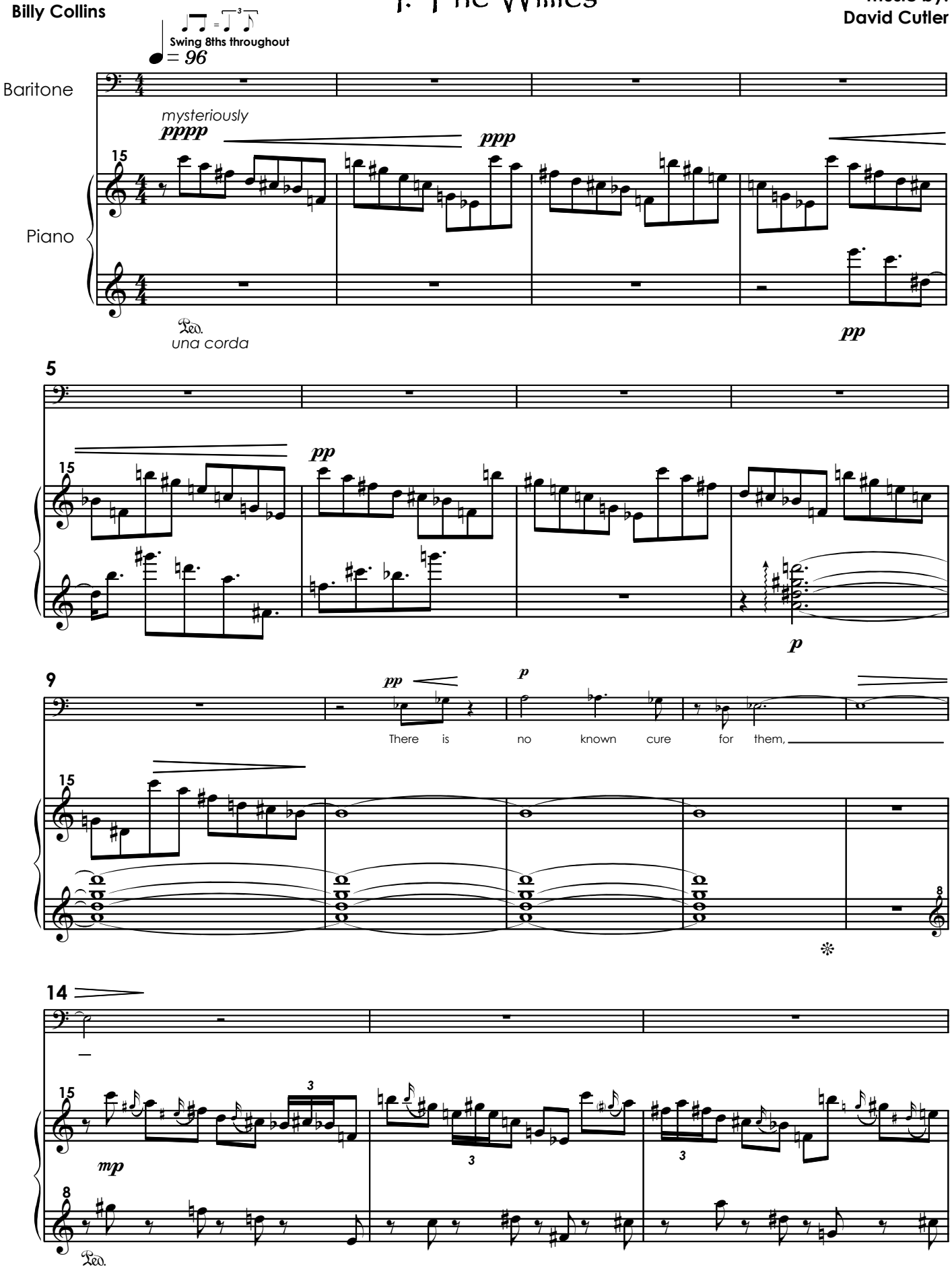
You know the parlor trick.
Wrap your arms around your own body
and from the back it looks like
someone is embracing you,
her hands grasping your shirt,
her fingernails teasing your neck.

From the front it is another story.
You never looked so alone,
your crossed elbows and screwy grin.
You could be waiting for a tailor
to fit you for a straightjacket,
one that would hold you really tight.

words by:
Billy Collins

I. The Willies

music by:
David Cutler



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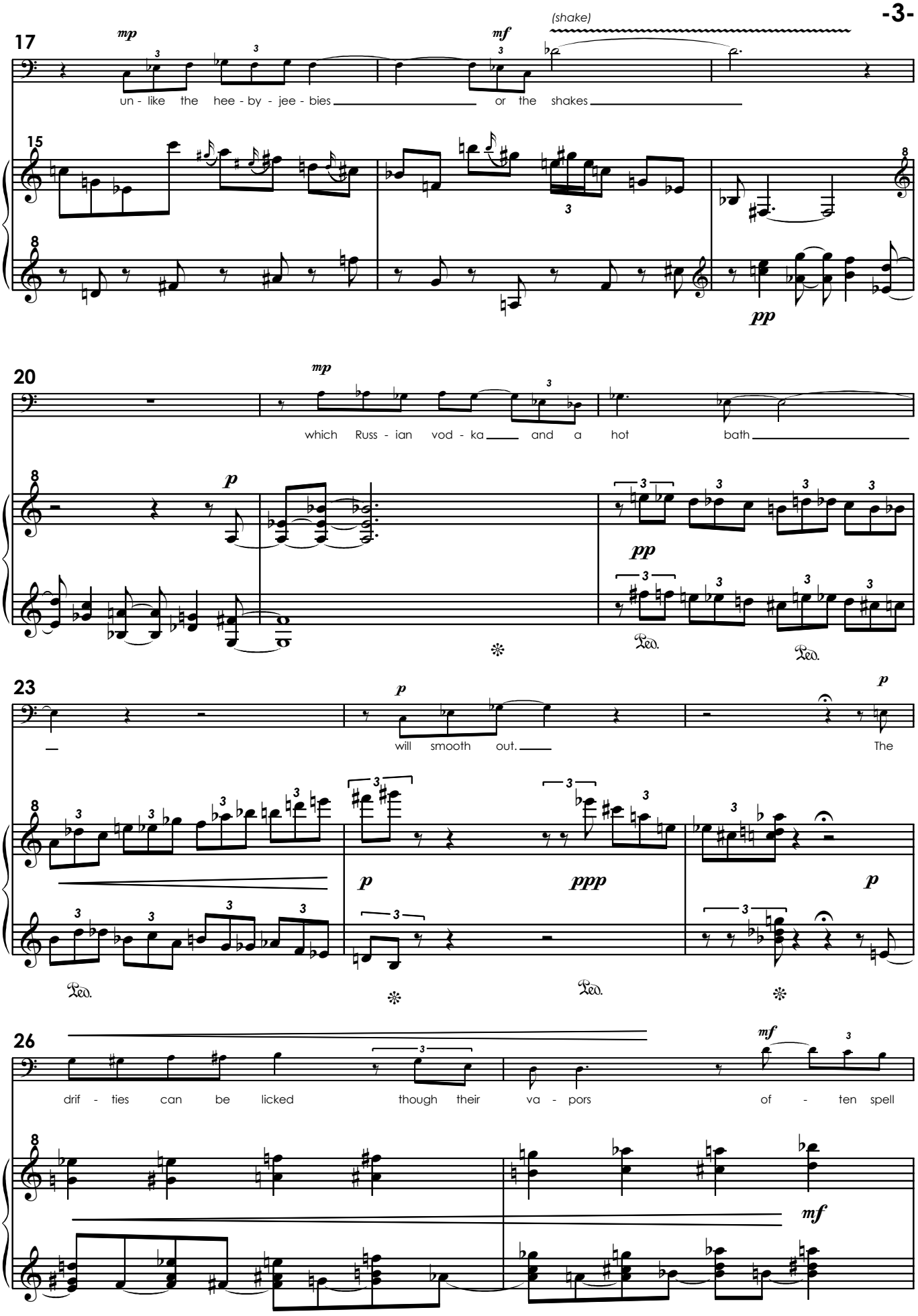
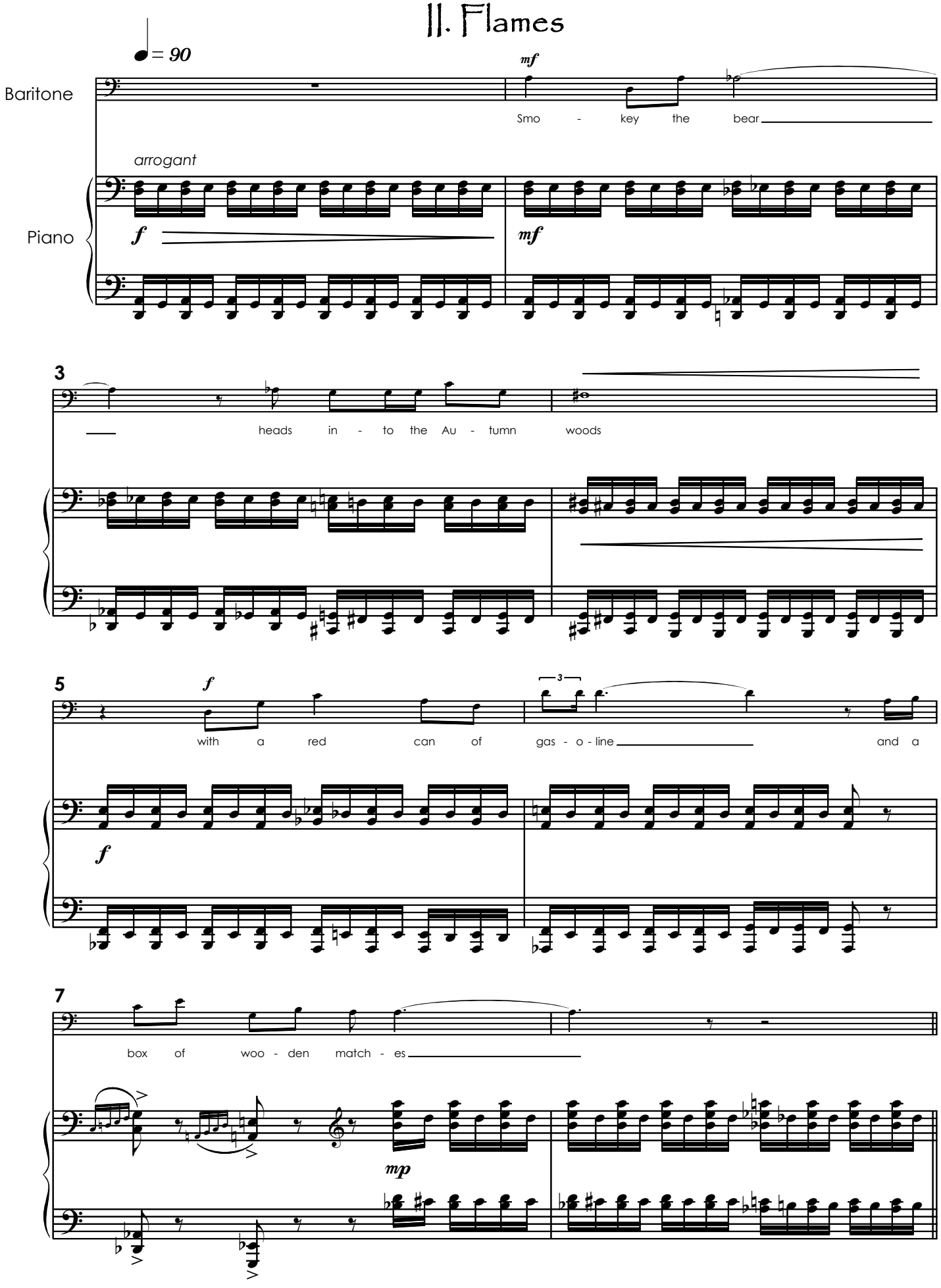
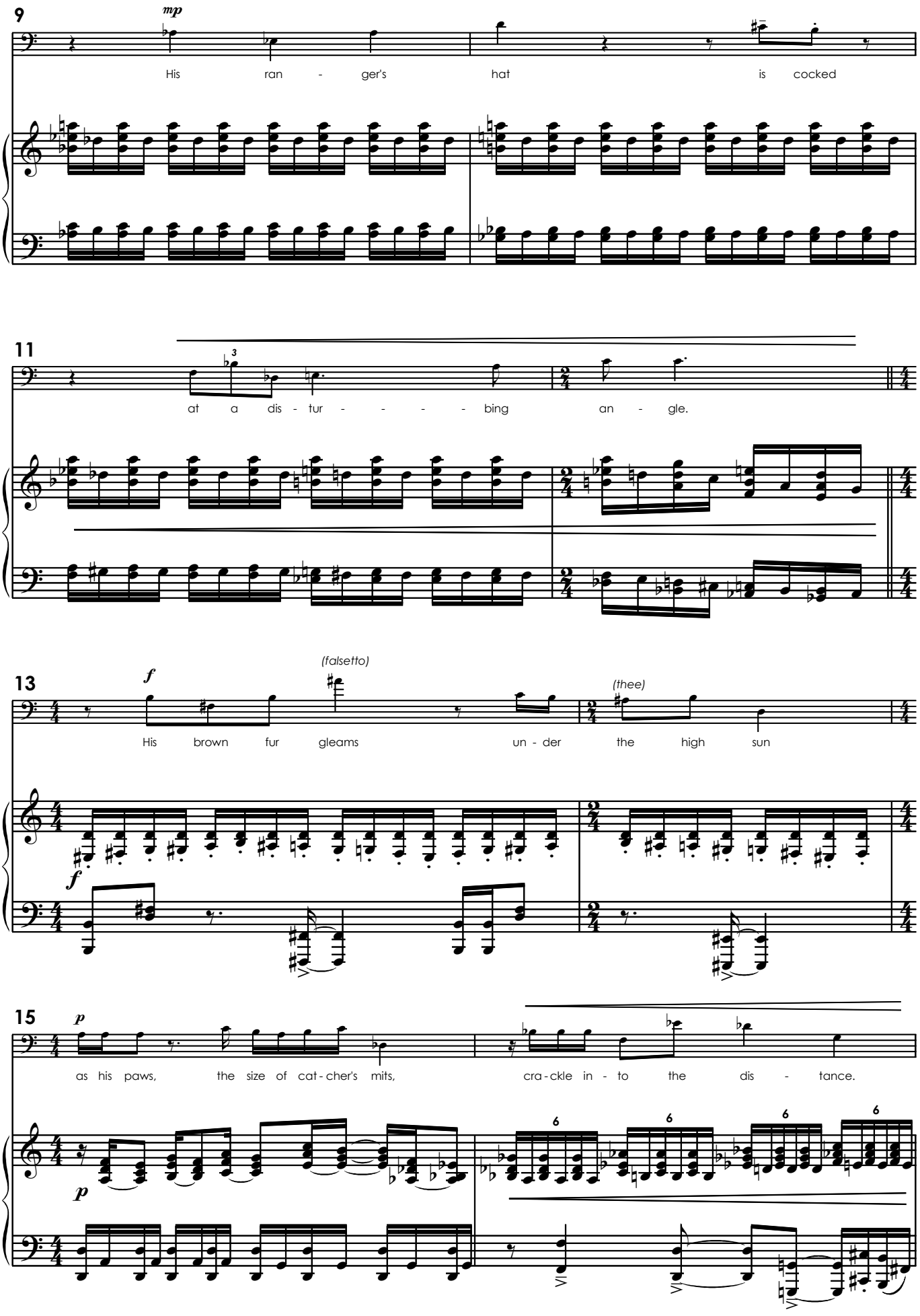
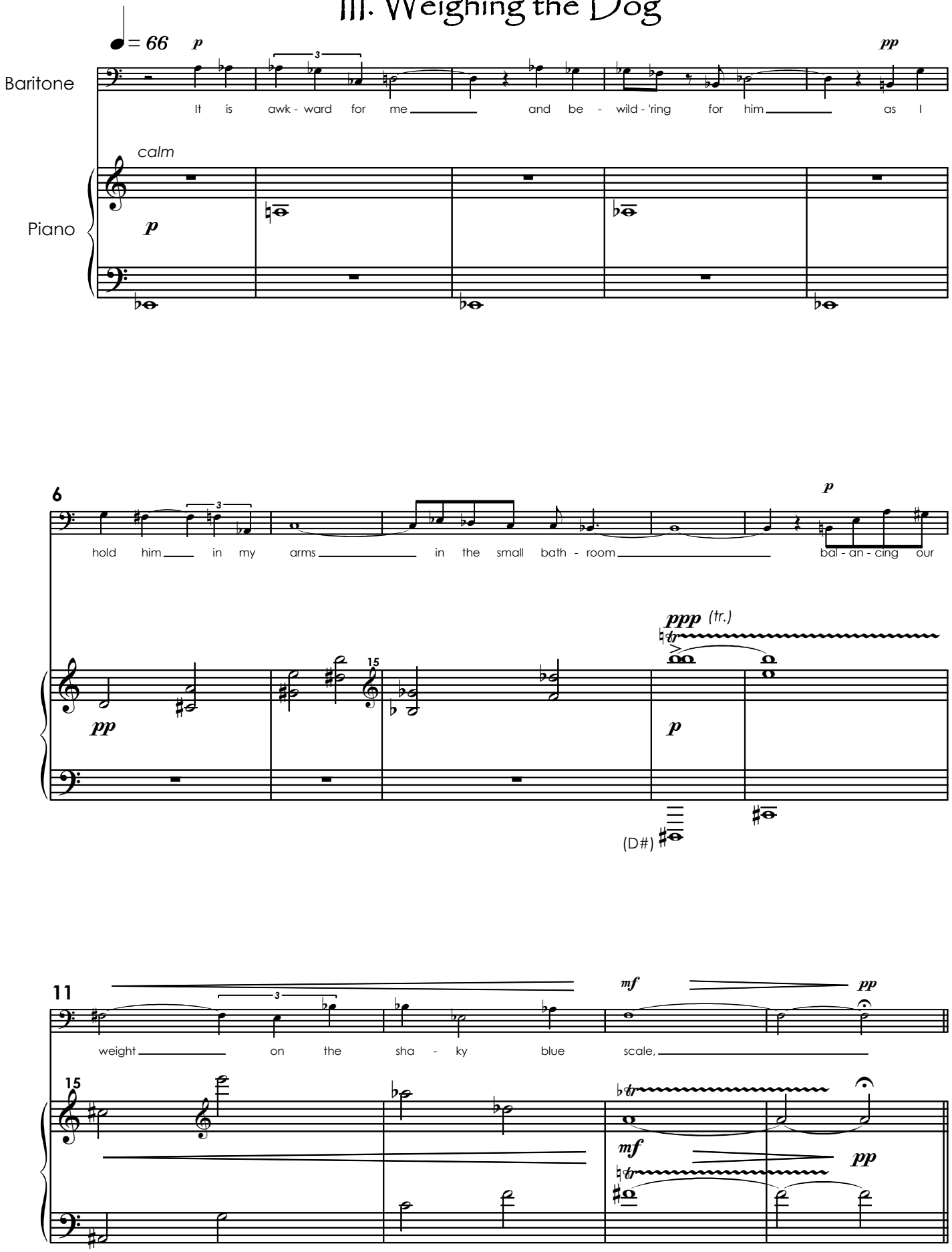

17
mp
mf
(shake)
un - like the hee - by - jee - bies
or the shakes
15
8
pp
20
mp
which Russ - ian vod - ka
and a hot bath
p
pp
Ped.
Ped.
23
p
will smooth out.
The
p
ppp
p
Ped.
Ped.
26
mf
drif - ties can be licked
though their va - pors
of - ten spell
mf

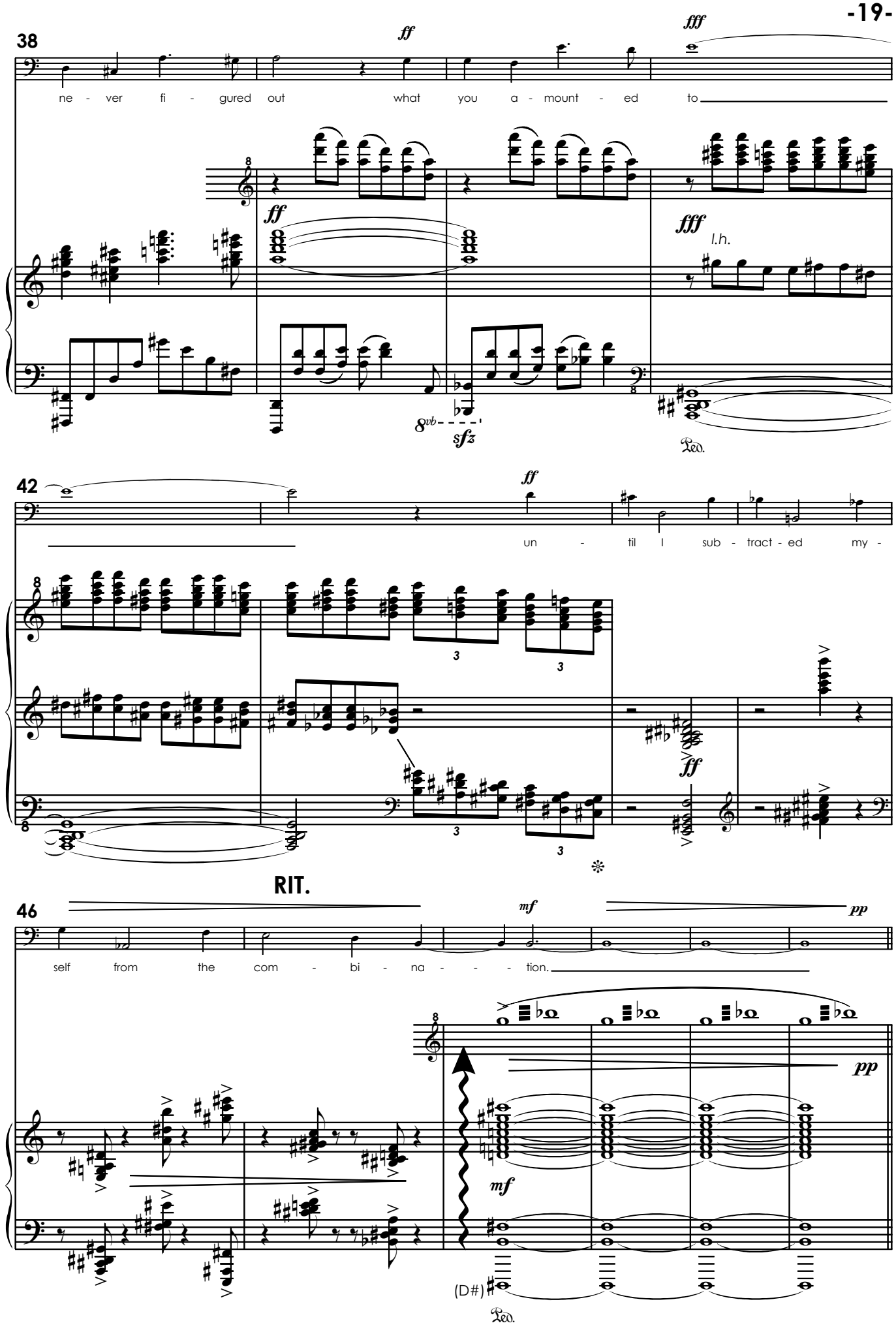
II. Flames


♩ = 90
Baritone
mf
Smo - key the bear
arrogant
Piano
f
mf
3
heads in - to the Au - tumn woods
5
f
with a red can of gas - o - line and a
3
f
7
box of woo - den match - es
mp


9
mp
His ran - ger's hat is cocked
11
at a dis - tur - - - - - bing an - gle.
13
f
(falsetto)
(thee)
His brown fur gleams un - der the high sun
15
p
as his paws, the size of cat - cher's mits, cra - ckle in - to the dis - tance.

III. Weighing the Dog




38
ff
fff
ne - ver fi - gured out what you a - mount - ed to
8
ff
fff
l.h.
8vb
sfz
Ped.
42
ff
un - til I sub - tract - ed my -
3
3
ff
3
3
RIT.
46
mf
pp
self from the com - bi - na - - - tion.
8
pp
mf
(D#)
Ped.

IV. Embrace

♩ = 148

Baritone

Piano

psychotically playful

mf

5

f

9

mp

You know the par - lor

p

f

p

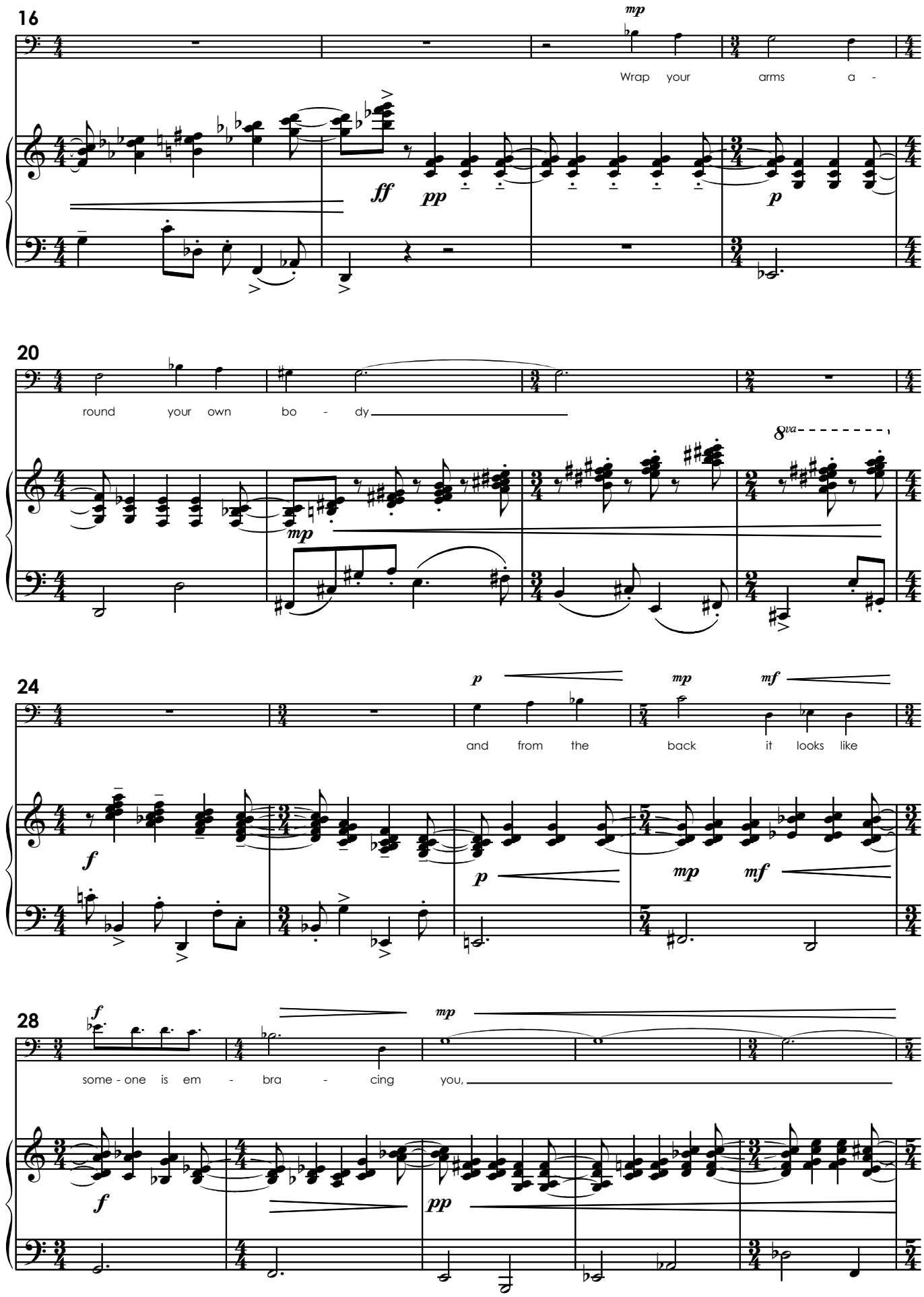
13

trick.

p

mf

mp


16
mp
Wrap your arms a -
ff
pp
p
20
round your own bo - dy
mp
8va
24
p
mp
mf
and from the back it looks like
f
p
mp
mf
28
f
mp
some - one is em - bra - cing you,
f
pp