The Winchester Widow

For Soprano and Piano, with optional Musical Saw and String Bass or Chamber Ensemble

Music by
BRUCE TRINKLEY

Words by
JASON CHARNESKY

The Winchester Widow

for Soprano and Piano, with optional Musical Saw and String Bass or Chamber Ensemble

CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

Flute
Oboe
Clarinet in Bb and A
String Quartet (2 Violins, Viola, Violoncello)
Musical Saw

The Winchester Widow is based on the true story of Sara Winchester (1836-1922) whose husband, William, manufactured the rifle that came to bear their family name. The Winchester rifle, which was revolutionary in its ability to fire off many shots before needing to be reloaded, gave frontiersmen an unbeatable weapon against the Indians; so much so that the Winchester become known as "the gun that won the West." The rifle, though, was totally non-discriminatory, and thousands of Easterners also met their deaths as victims of this "repeating rifle." Sales of the firearm made the Winchesters fabulously wealthy. Sara's life seemed blessed when she gave birth to a child, Annie, in 1866. But from this moment a dark cloud of tragedy seemed to haunt Sara Winchester. Her daughter died at six months old, her husband died of tuberculosis, and Sara was gripped by the belief that the thousands of souls dispatched by her family's invention were intent on destroying her. On the advice of a spiritualist medium, Sara fled west to California to elude the pursuing ghosts of those her family's rifle had killed. In San Jose she bought a house and did as the medium told her she must do if she hoped to escape the wrath of all those murdered ghosts: she began to reconstruct the house. And every day she expanded, revised, reversed and extended the floor plans of the house so that the ghosts would become confused and trapped in the maze which she constructed as her mansion. Every night Sara sat in her séance room, conversing with the spirits who were so intent on harming her. And every morning she sketched new plans for new rooms, stairwells, floors and basements that her work crew then constructed. Over the course of 38 years Sara's architects worked 365 days a year, creating a seven storey labyrinth of uncounted numbers of rooms, all so that the Winchester widow could avoid her ghosts. The house still stands today, a monument to the human need to trick those prowling ghosts of our own mortality.

The ghost choruses in the opera are to be pre-recorded by the soprano who sings the role of Sara Winchester.

Composition of *The Winchester Widow* was begun at Hospitalfield House in Arbroath, Scotland, in September 2005 and was completed in State College , Pennsylvania, in December 2005. The composer is grateful to the Patrick Allan-Fraser of Hospitalfield Trust for his residency there.

The Winchester Widow was commissioned by Mary Kay McGarvey and is dedicated to her, through whose art are exorcised the darkest spirits of the fearful mind by the power of beauty and the excellence of music.

Approximate duration is 22 minutes.

THE WINCHESTER WIDOW

(Sara alone in her seance room. She is seated, reading a book.)

Con brio ♩ = 128

mf *cresc.*

f

5

ff

mp molto cresc.

9

ff

14 **Largo cantabile** ♩. = 46

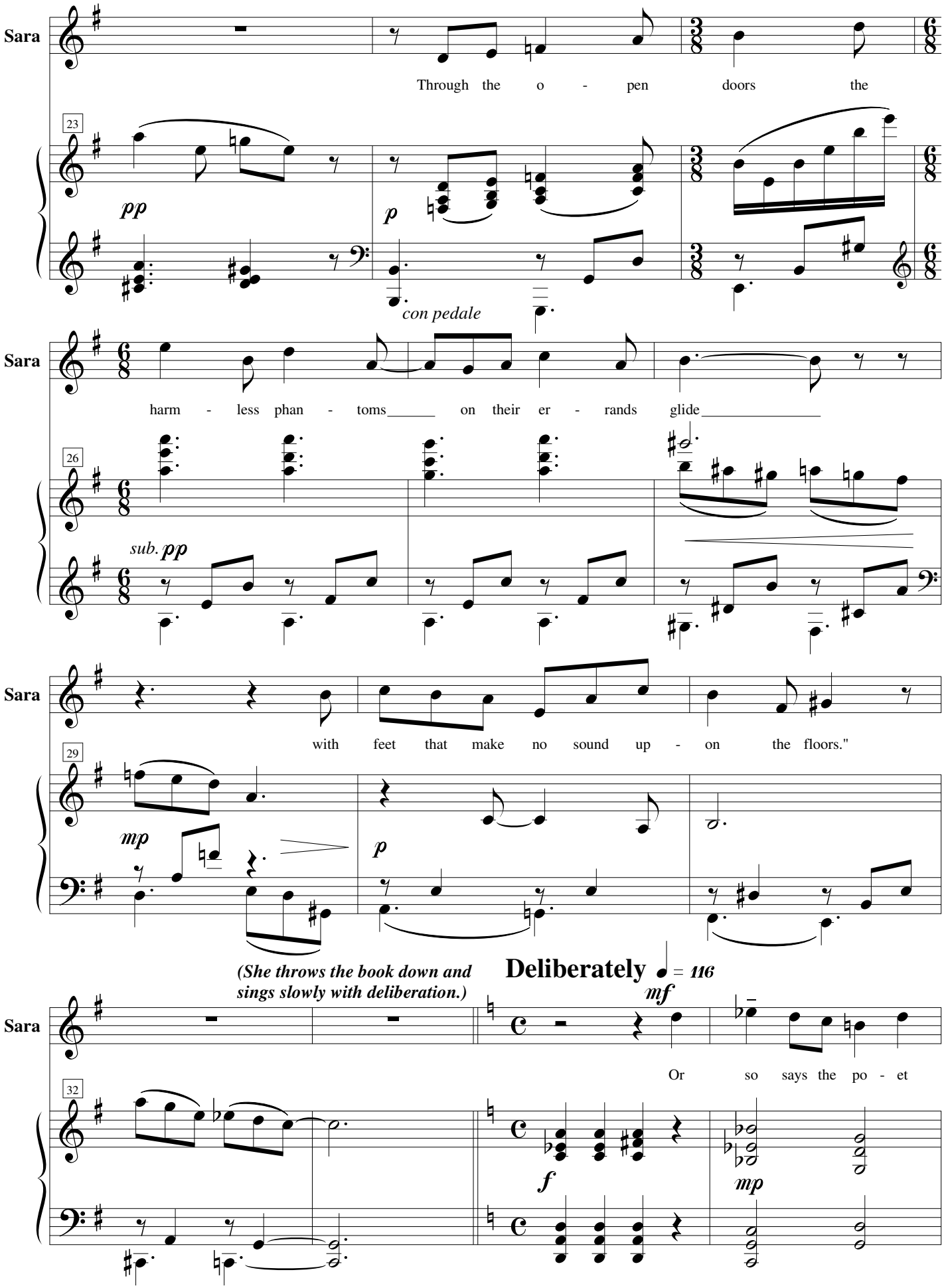
p

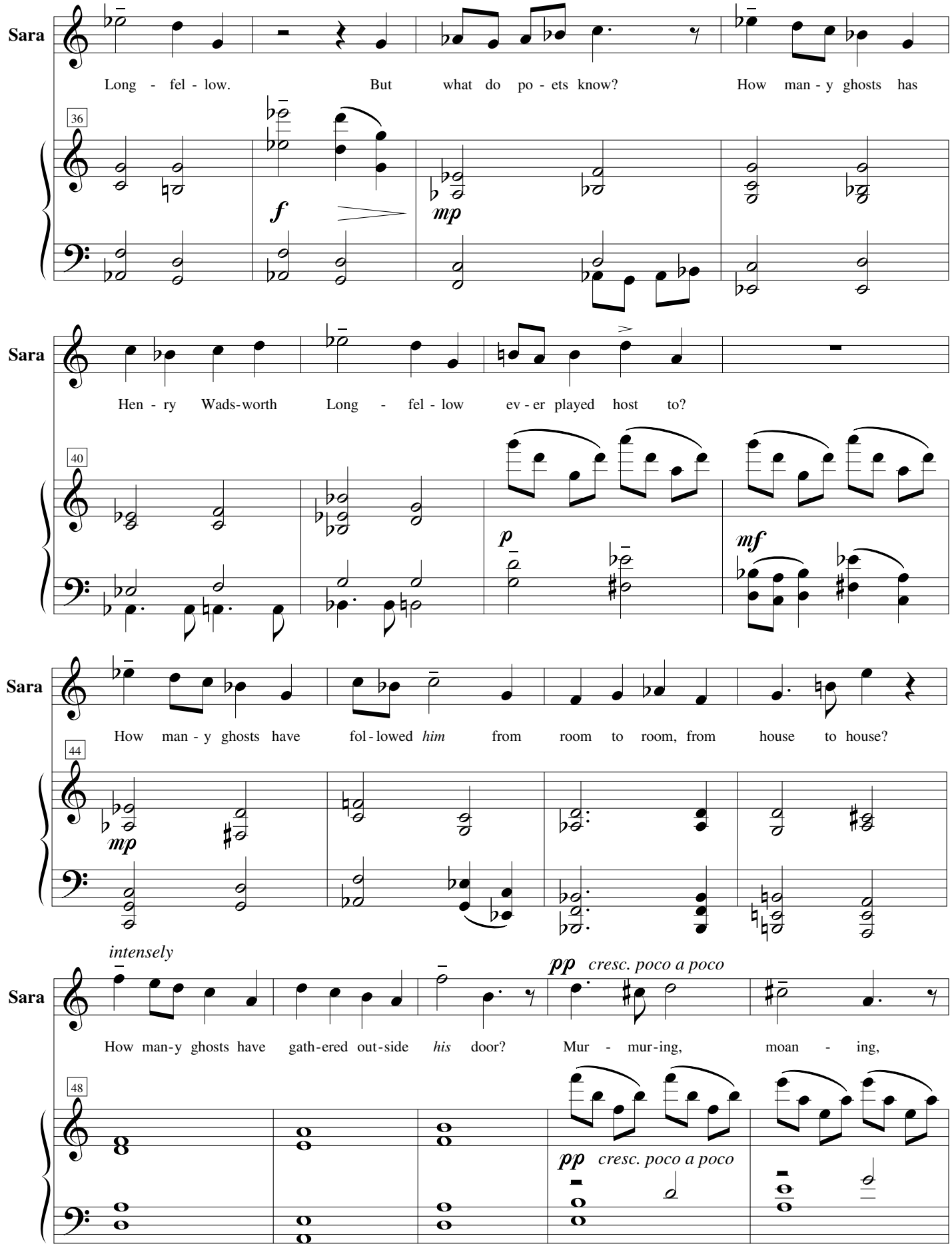
Sara

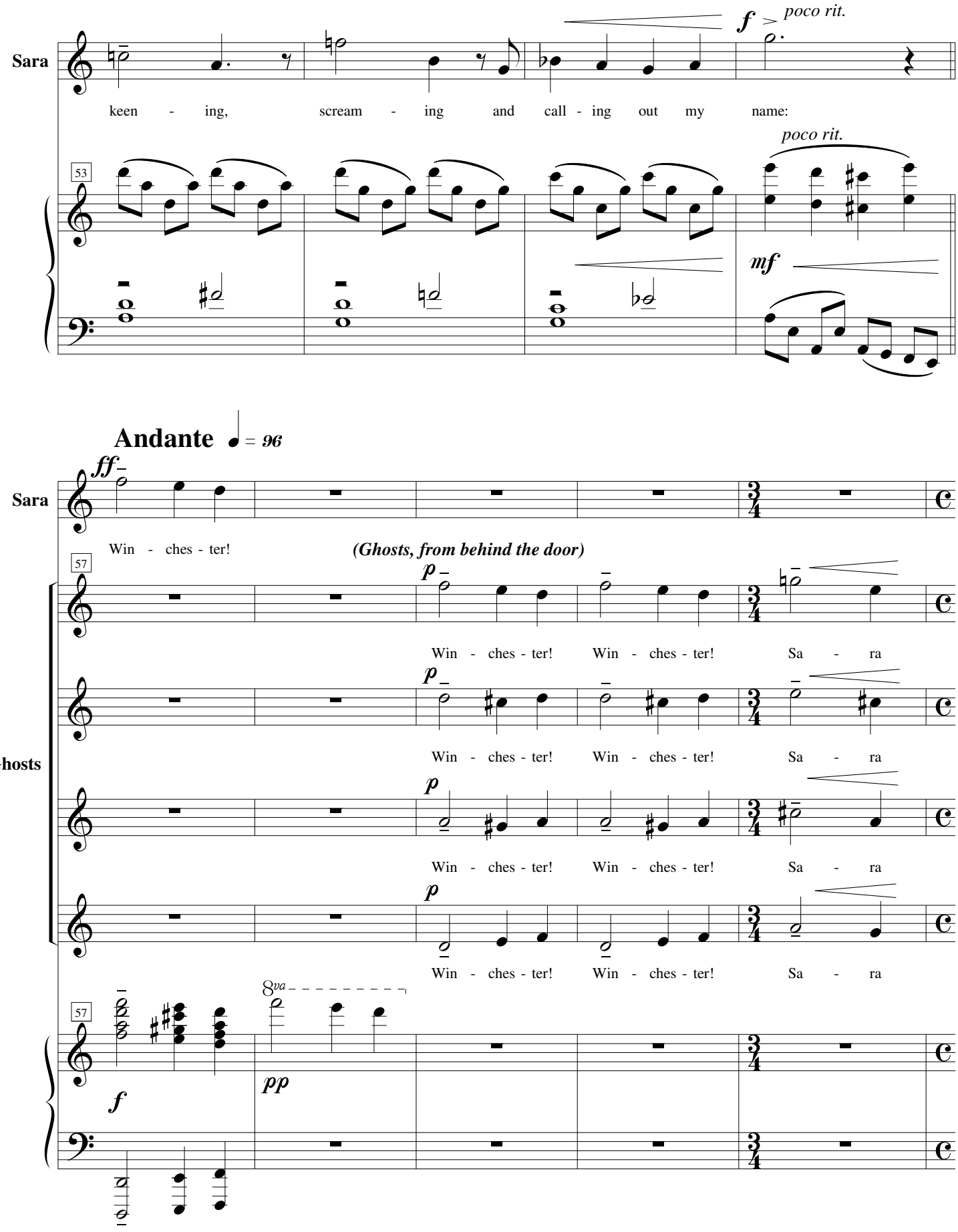
p

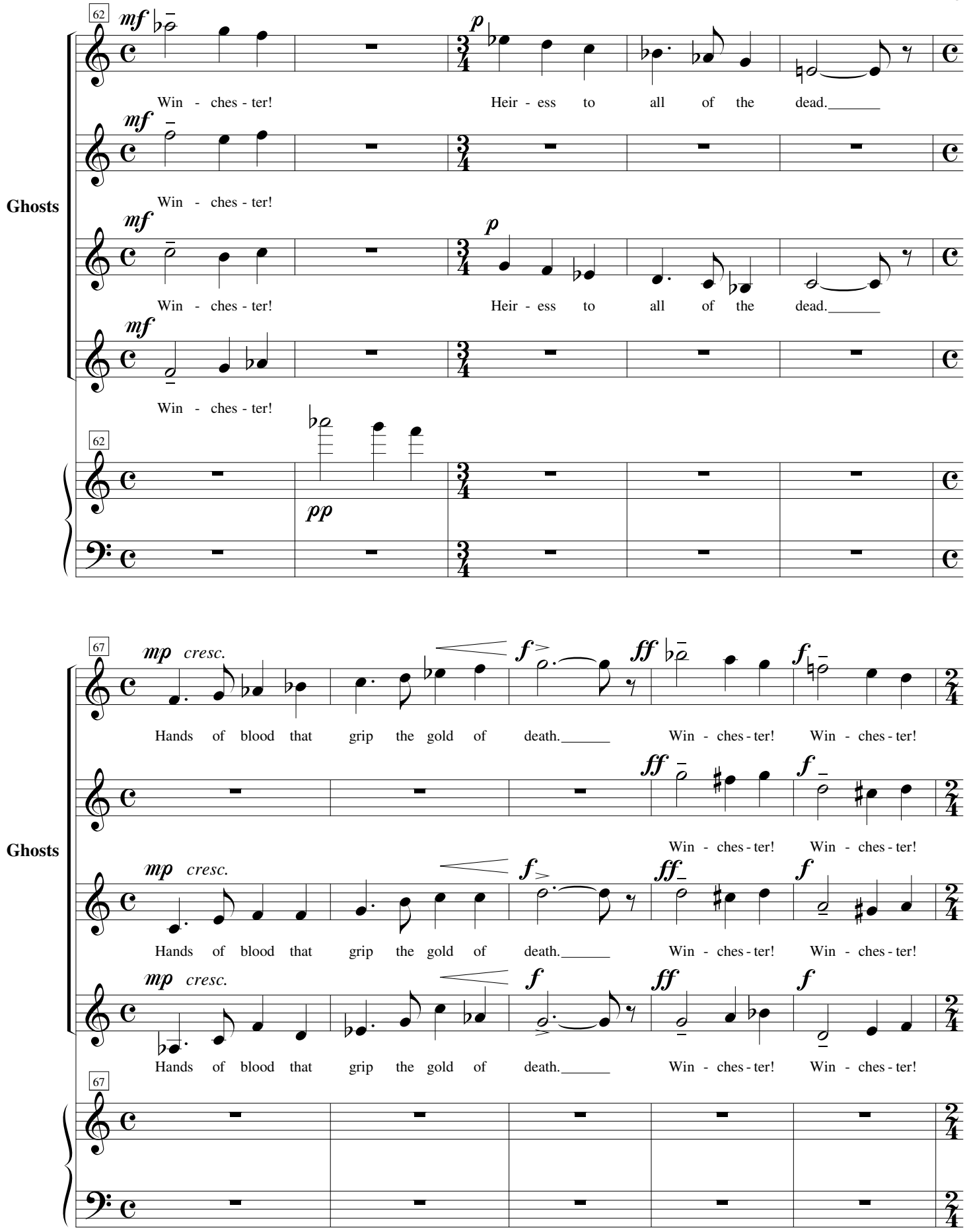
"All hous - es where - in men have lived and died are haunt - ed hous - es.

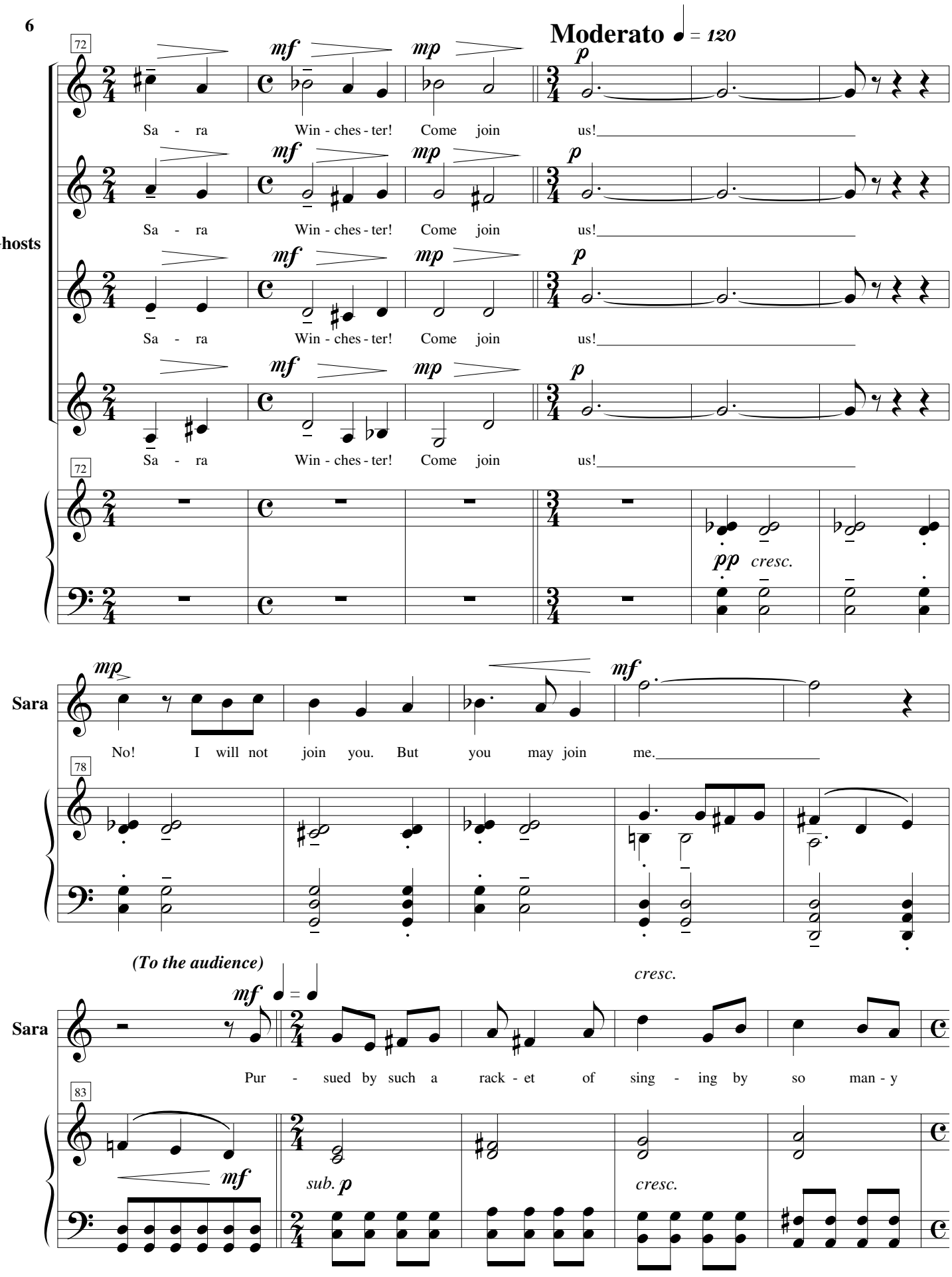
19

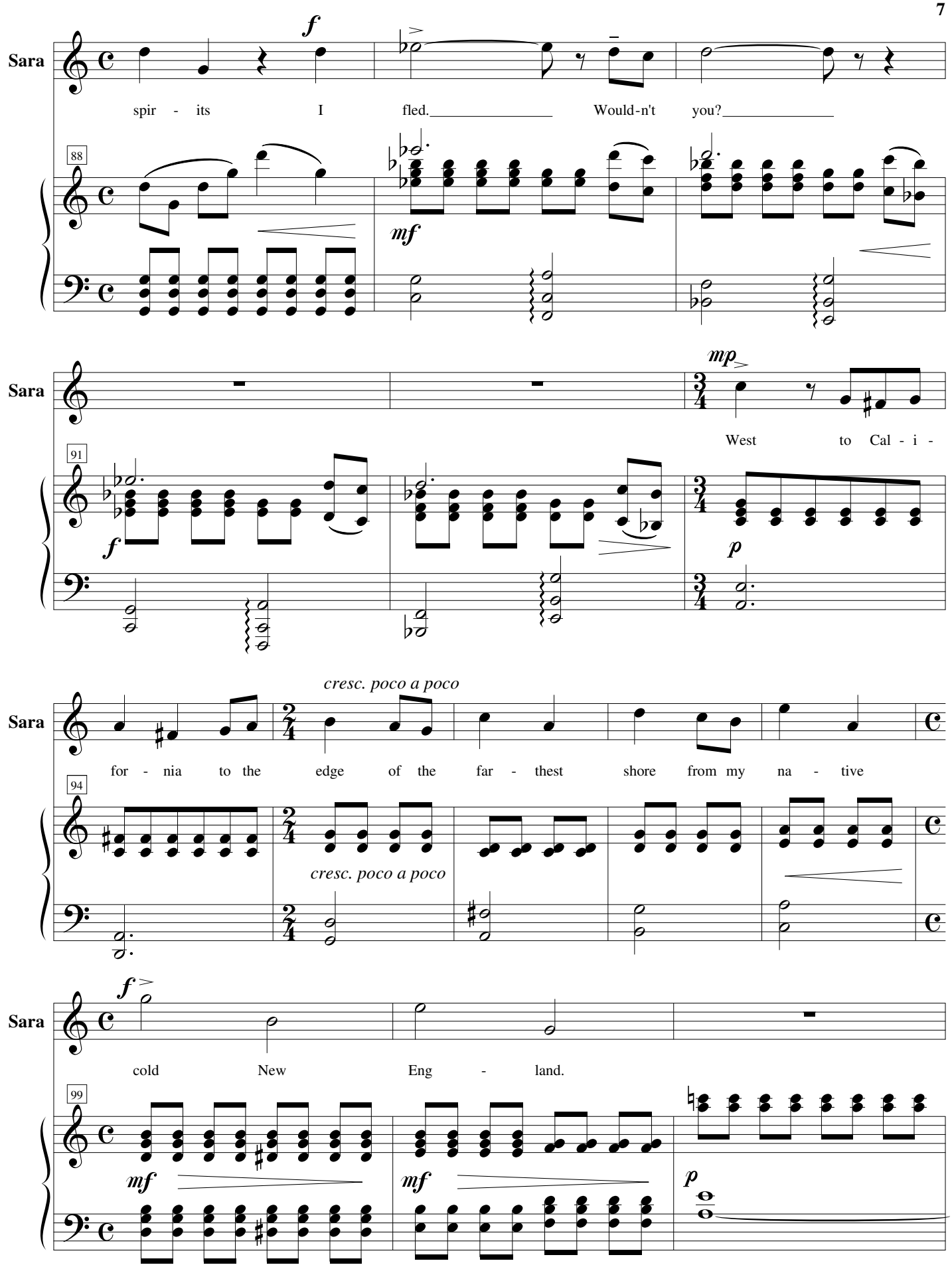

Sara
Through the o - pen doors the
23
pp
p
con pedale
Sara
harm - less phan - toms on their er - rands glide
26
sub. pp
Sara
with feet that make no sound up - on the floors."
29
mp
p
(She throws the book down and sings slowly with deliberation.)
Deliberately ♩ = 116
mf
Sara
Or so says the po - et
32
f
mp

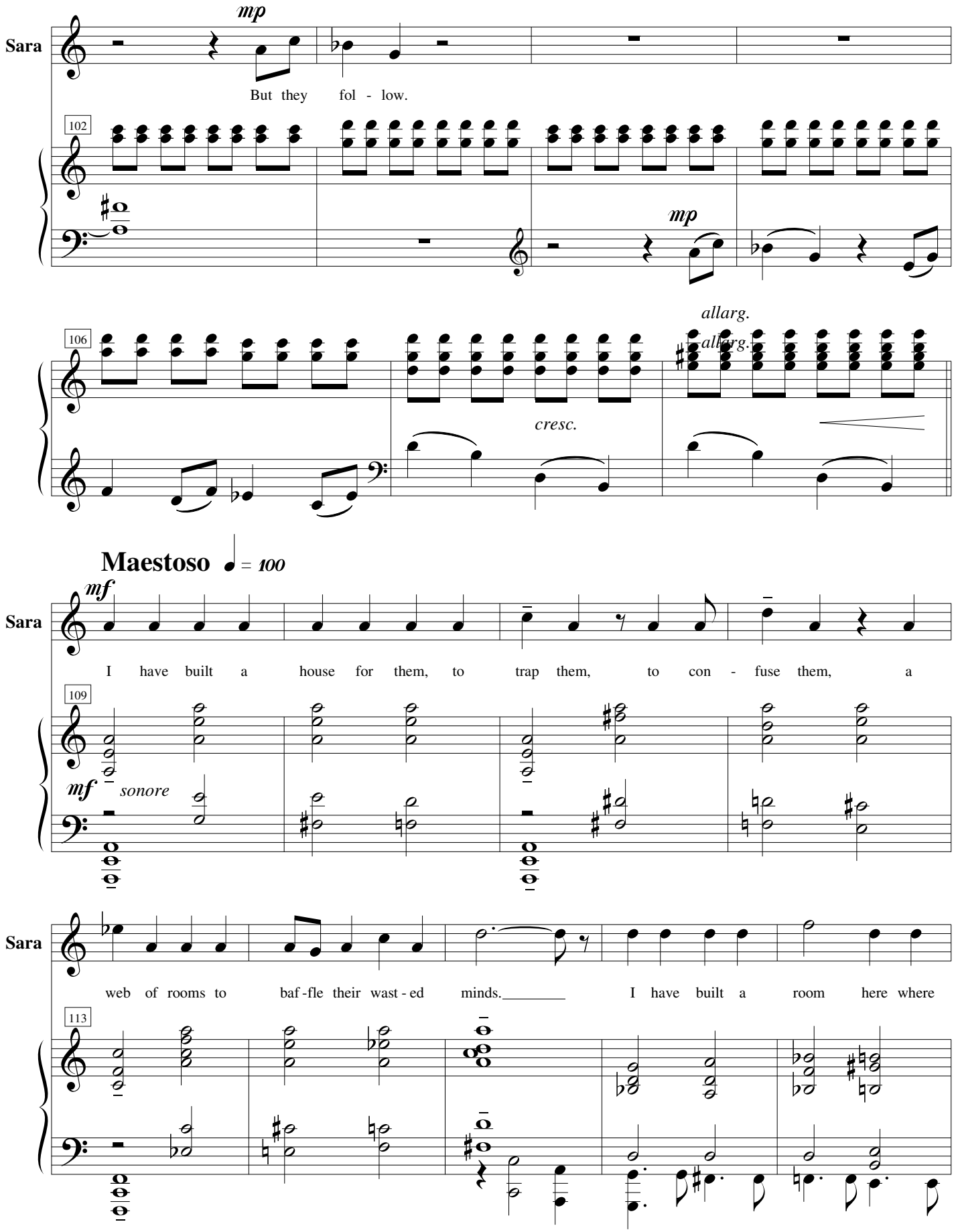

Sara
Long - fel - low. But what do po - ets know? How man - y ghosts has
36
f
mp
Sara
Hen - ry Wads-worth Long - fel - low ev - er played host to?
40
p
mf
Sara
How man - y ghosts have fol - lowed *him* from room to room, from house to house?
44
mp
intensely
Sara
How man-y ghosts have gath-ered out-side *his* door? Mur - mur-ing, moan - ing,
pp cresc. poco a poco
48
pp cresc. poco a poco

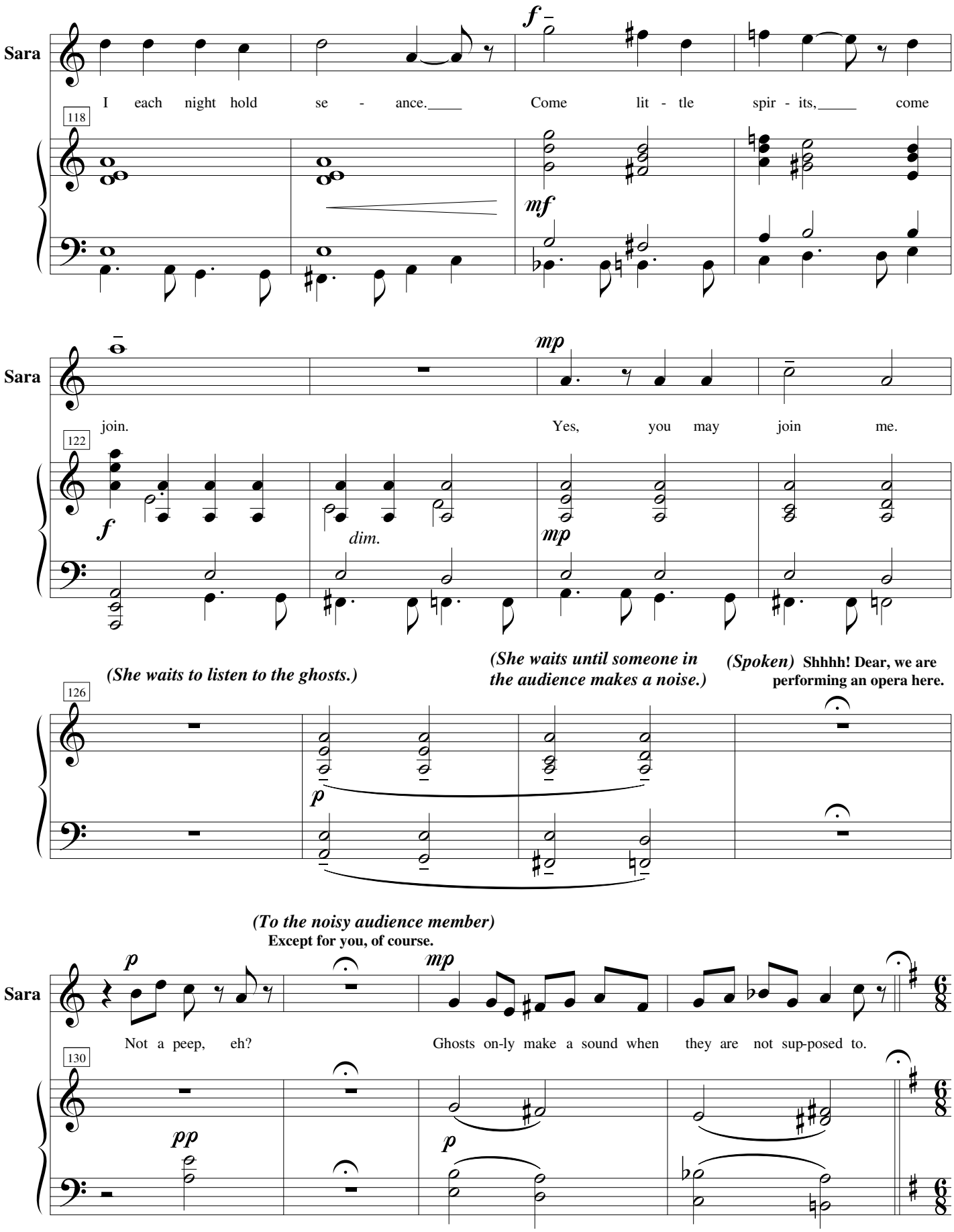

Sara
keen - ing, scream - ing and call - ing out my name:
f
poco rit.
53
poco rit.
mf
Andante ♩ = 96
ff
Win - ches - ter!
(Ghosts, from behind the door)
57
p
Win - ches - ter! Win - ches - ter! Sa - ra
Ghosts
Win - ches - ter! Win - ches - ter! Sa - ra
Win - ches - ter! Win - ches - ter! Sa - ra
Win - ches - ter! Win - ches - ter! Sa - ra
8va
pp
f

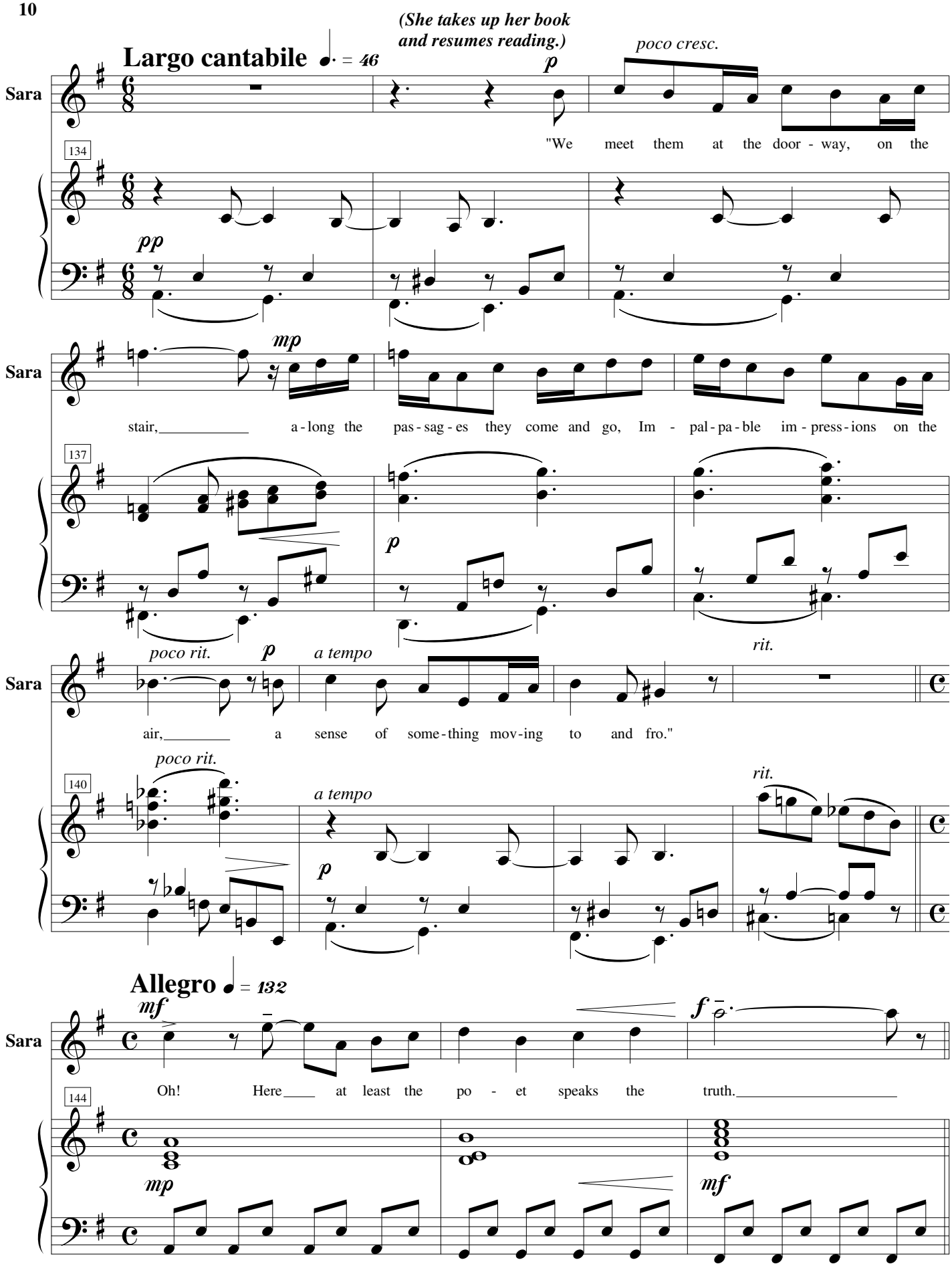

62
mf
p
Win - ches - ter!
Heir - ess to all of the dead.
Ghosts
pp
67
mp cresc.
f
ff
Hands of blood that grip the gold of death.
Win - ches - ter!

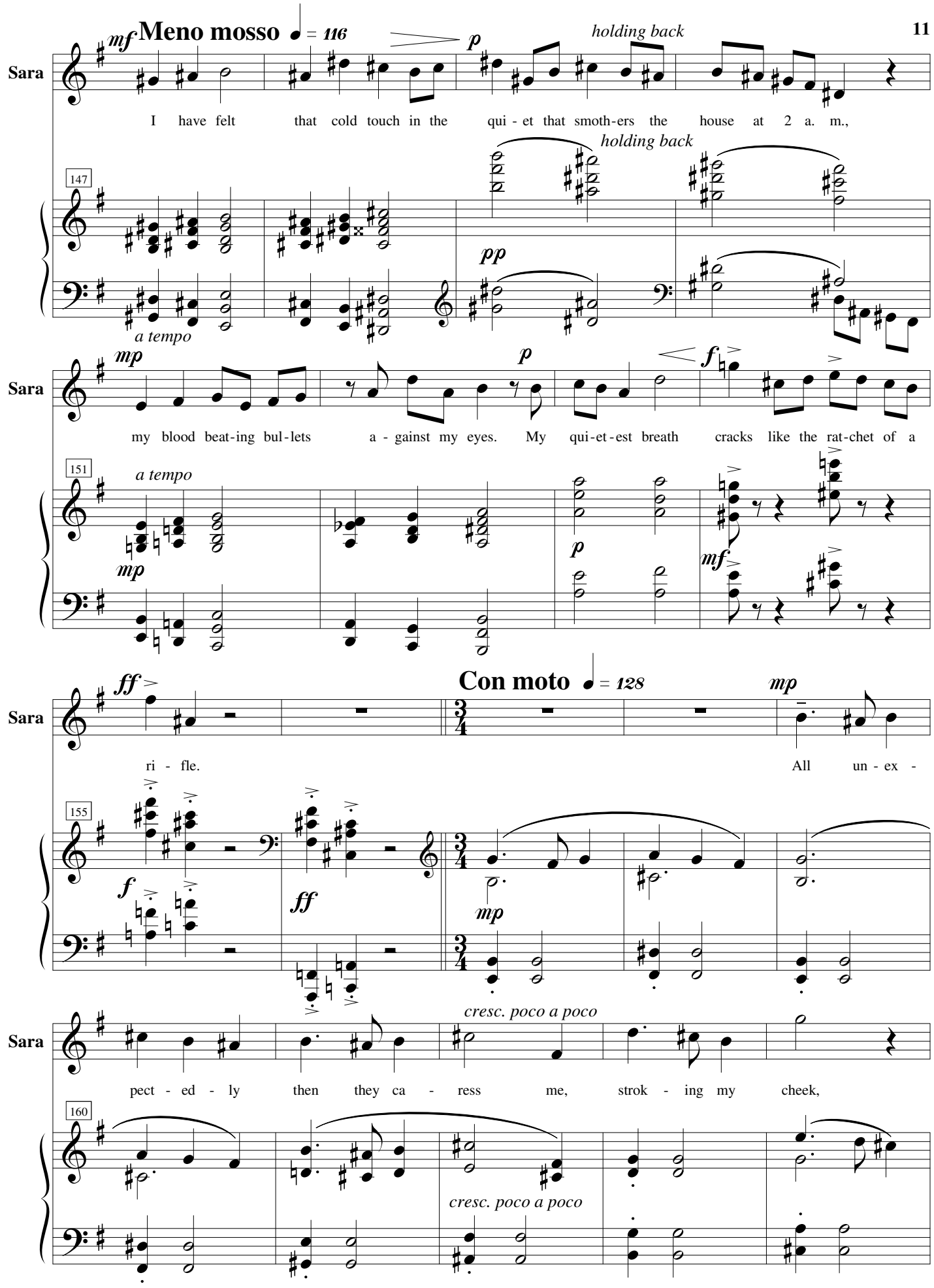

Moderato ♩ = 120
72
mf
mp
p
Sa - ra Win - ches - ter! Come join us!
Ghosts
pp cresc.
Sara
No! I will not join you. But you may join me.
78
(To the audience)
cresc.
Pur - sued by such a rack - et of sing - ing by so man - y
83
sub. p

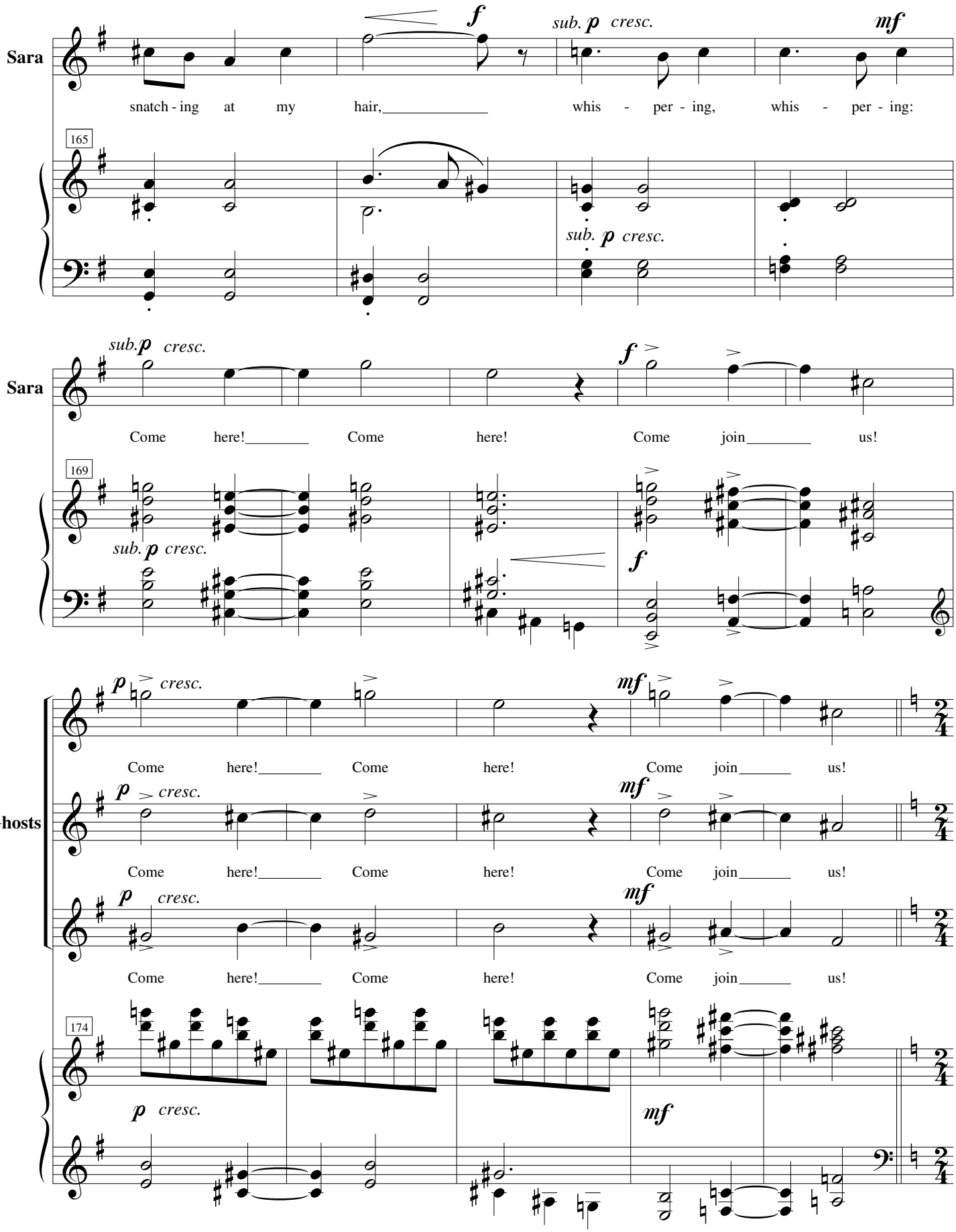

Sara
f
spir - its I fled. Would-n't you?
88
mf
Sara
mp
West to Cal - i -
91
f
p
cresc. poco a poco
Sara
for - nia to the edge of the far - thest shore from my na - tive
94
cresc. poco a poco
Sara
f
cold New Eng - land.
99
mf
mf
p

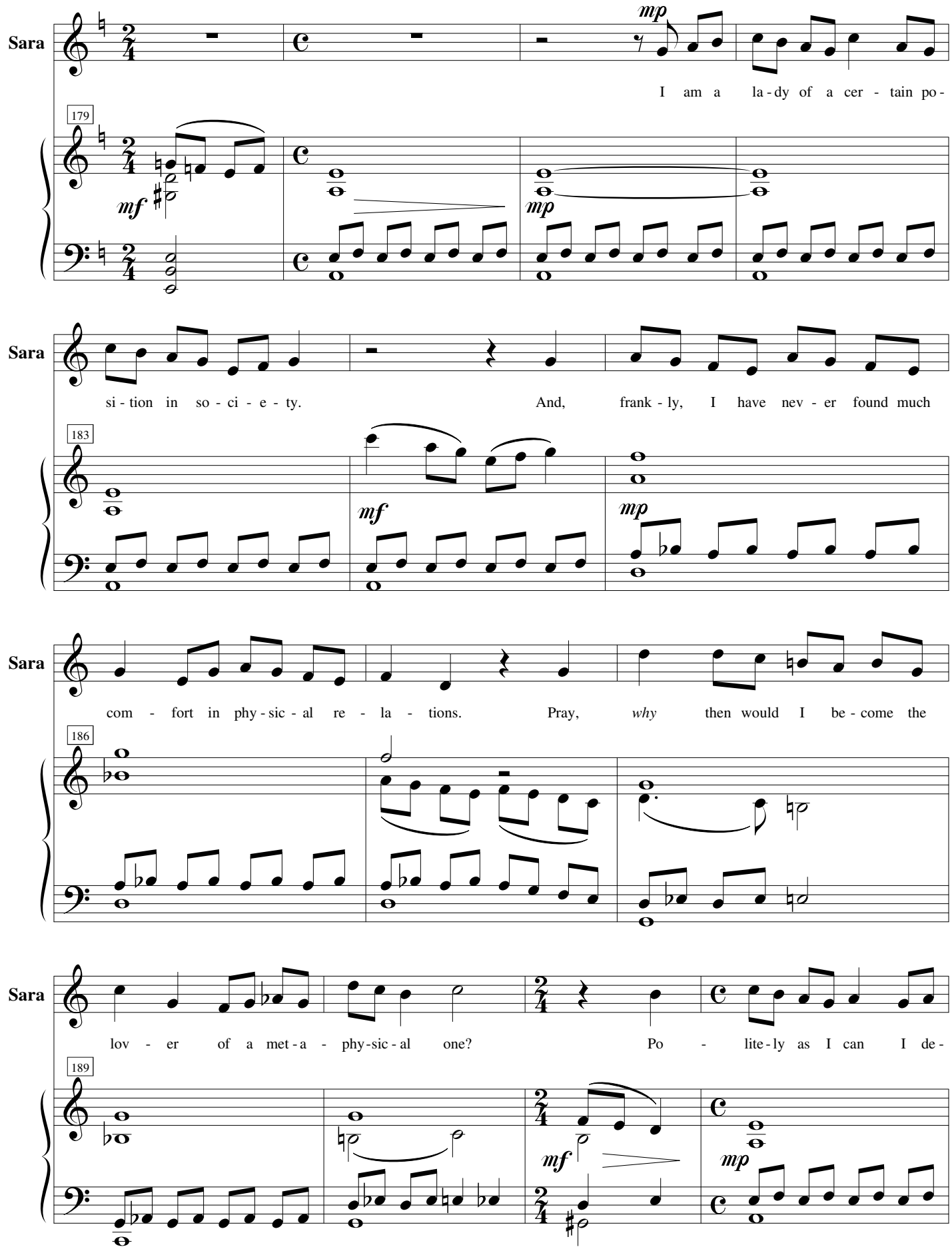

Sara
mp
But they fol - low.
102
mp
allarg.
allarg.
106
cresc.
Maestoso ♩ = 100
Sara
mf
I have built a house for them, to trap them, to con - fuse them, a
109
mf sonore
Sara
web of rooms to baf - fle their wast - ed minds. I have built a room here where
113

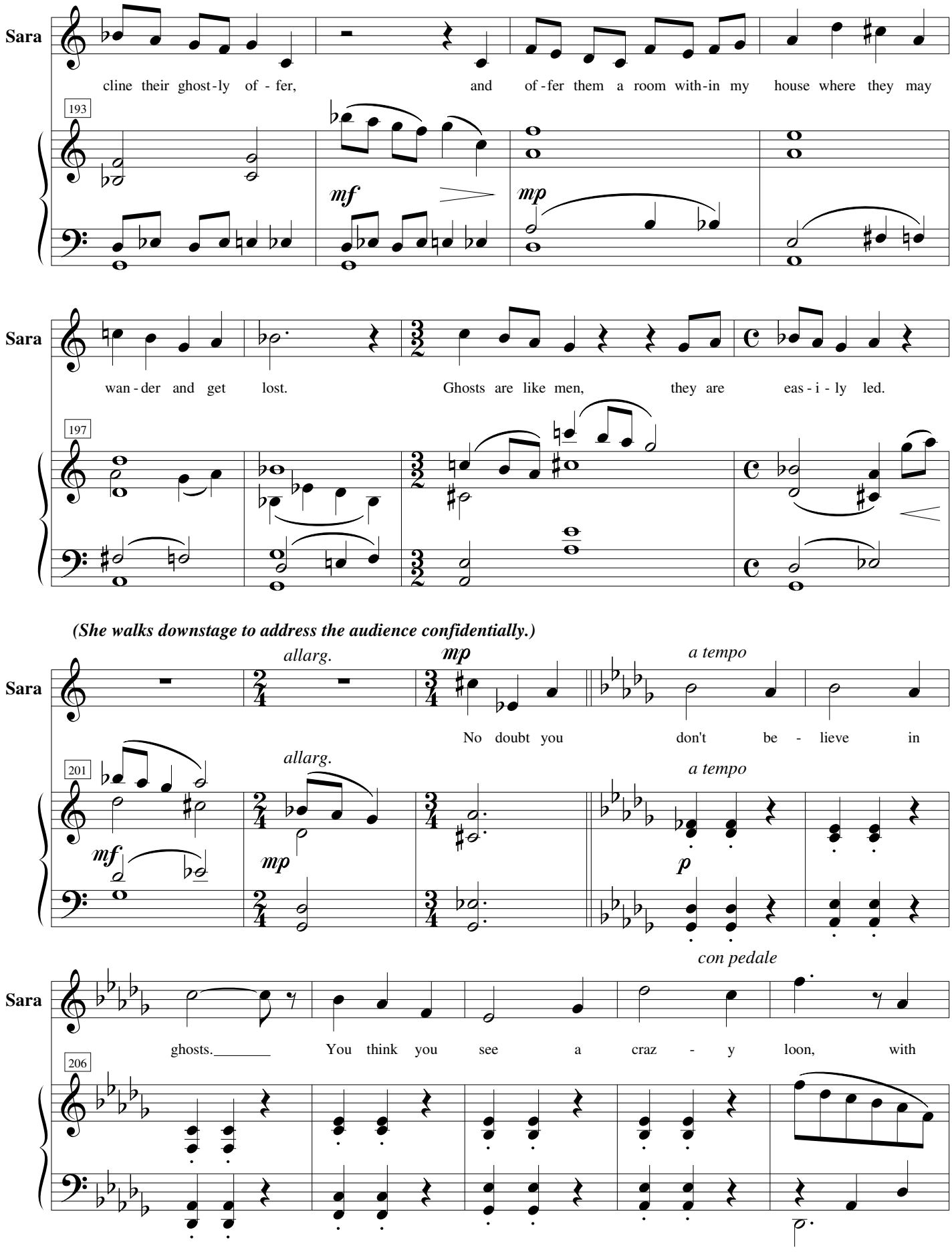

Sara
I each night hold se - ance.
Come lit - tle spir - its,
come
118
f
mf
Sara
join.
Yes, you may join me.
122
f
dim.
mp
mp
(She waits to listen to the ghosts.)
(She waits until someone in the audience makes a noise.)
(Spoken) Shhhh! Dear, we are performing an opera here.
126
p
(To the noisy audience member)
Except for you, of course.
Sara
p
mp
Not a peep, eh?
Ghosts on-ly make a sound when they are not sup-posed to.
130
pp
p

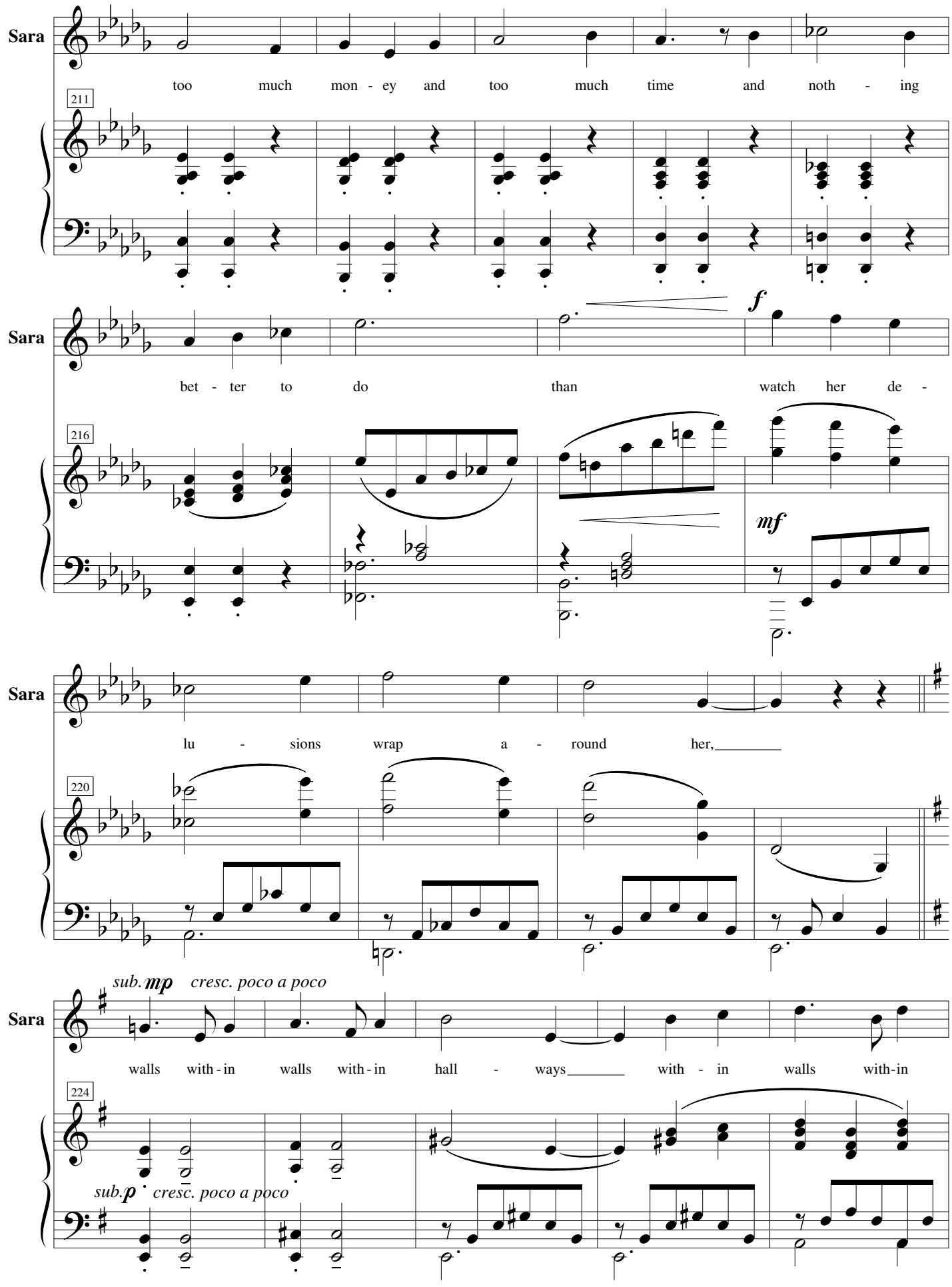

(She takes up her book and resumes reading.)
Largo cantabile ♩. = 46
p
poco cresc.
Sara
"We meet them at the door - way, on the
134
pp
mp
stair, a - long the pas - sag - es they come and go, Im - pal - pa - ble im - press - ions on the
137
p
poco rit.
a tempo
rit.
air, a sense of some - thing mov - ing to and fro."
140
Allegro ♩ = 132
mf
f
Oh! Here at least the po - et speaks the truth.
144

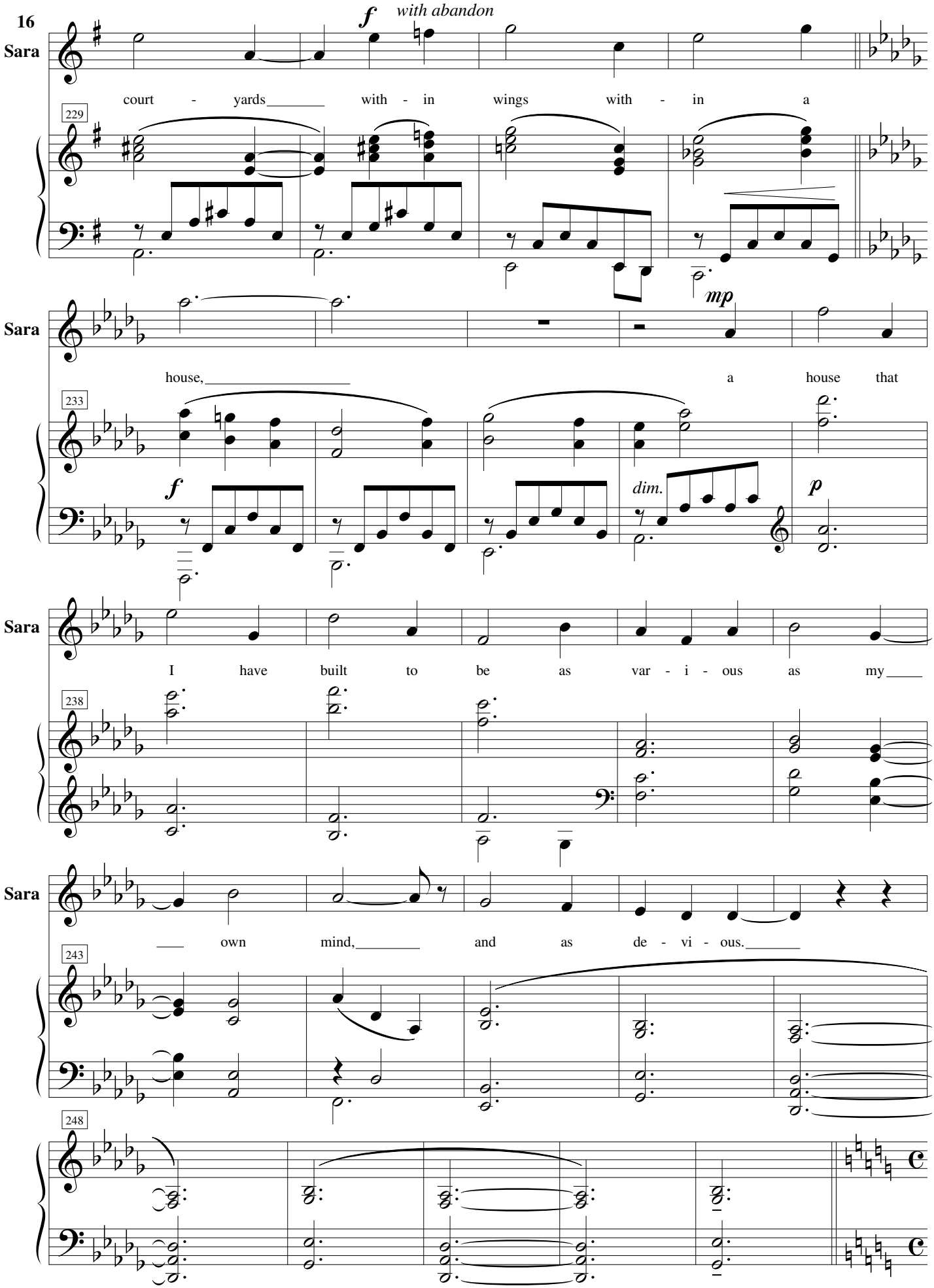

Meno mosso ♩ = 116
mf
p
holding back
Sara
I have felt that cold touch in the qui - et that smoth-ers the house at 2 a. m.,
147
pp
a tempo
mp
my blood beat-ing bul-lets a - gainst my eyes. My qui-et-est breath cracks like the rat-chet of a
151
f
ff
ri - fle.
Con moto ♩ = 128
All un - ex -
155
cresc. poco a poco
pect - ed - ly then they ca - ress me, strok - ing my cheek,
160

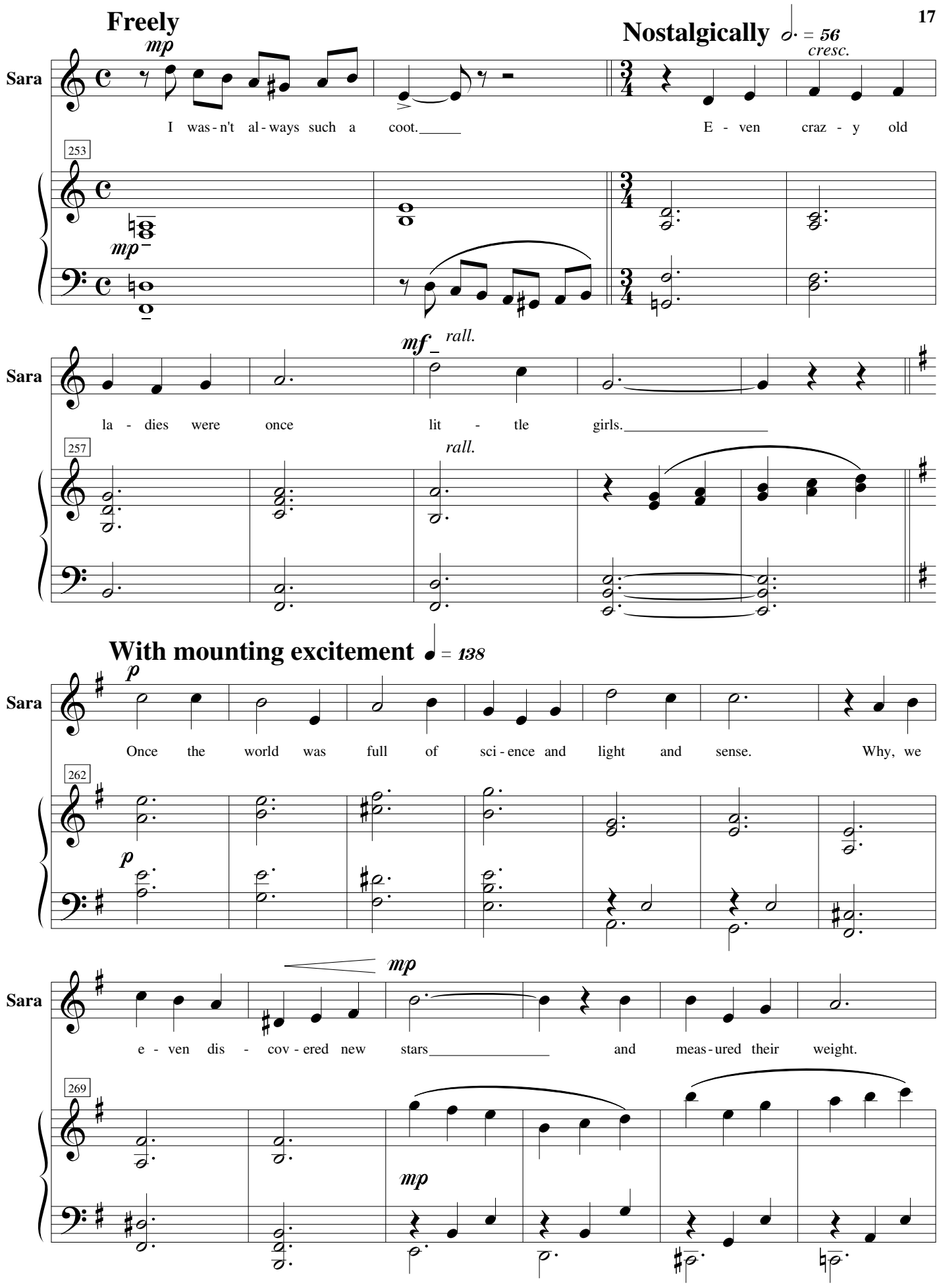

Sara
snatch - ing at my hair, whis - per - ing, whis - per - ing:
f
sub. p cresc.
mf
165
Sara
Come here! Come here! Come join us!
sub. p cresc.
f
169
Ghosts
Come here! Come here! Come join us!
p cresc.
mf
174

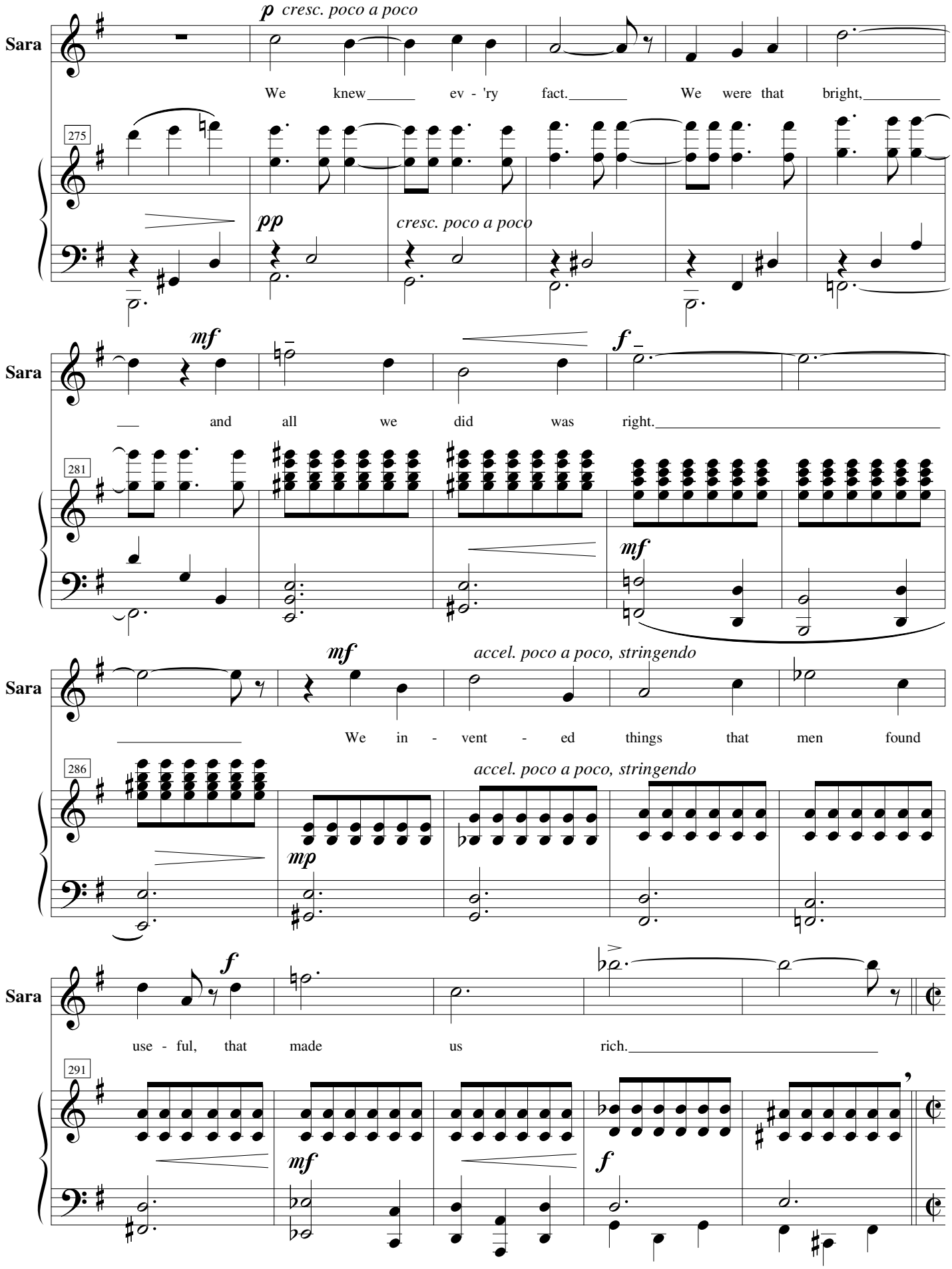

Sara
mp
I am a la-dy of a cer-tain po-
179
mf
mp
Sara
si-tion in so-ci-e-ty. And, frank-ly, I have nev-er found much
183
mf
mp
Sara
com-fort in phy-sic-al re-la-tions. Pray, why then would I be-come the
186
Sara
lov-er of a met-a-phy-sic-al one? Po-lite-ly as I can I de-
189
mf
mp

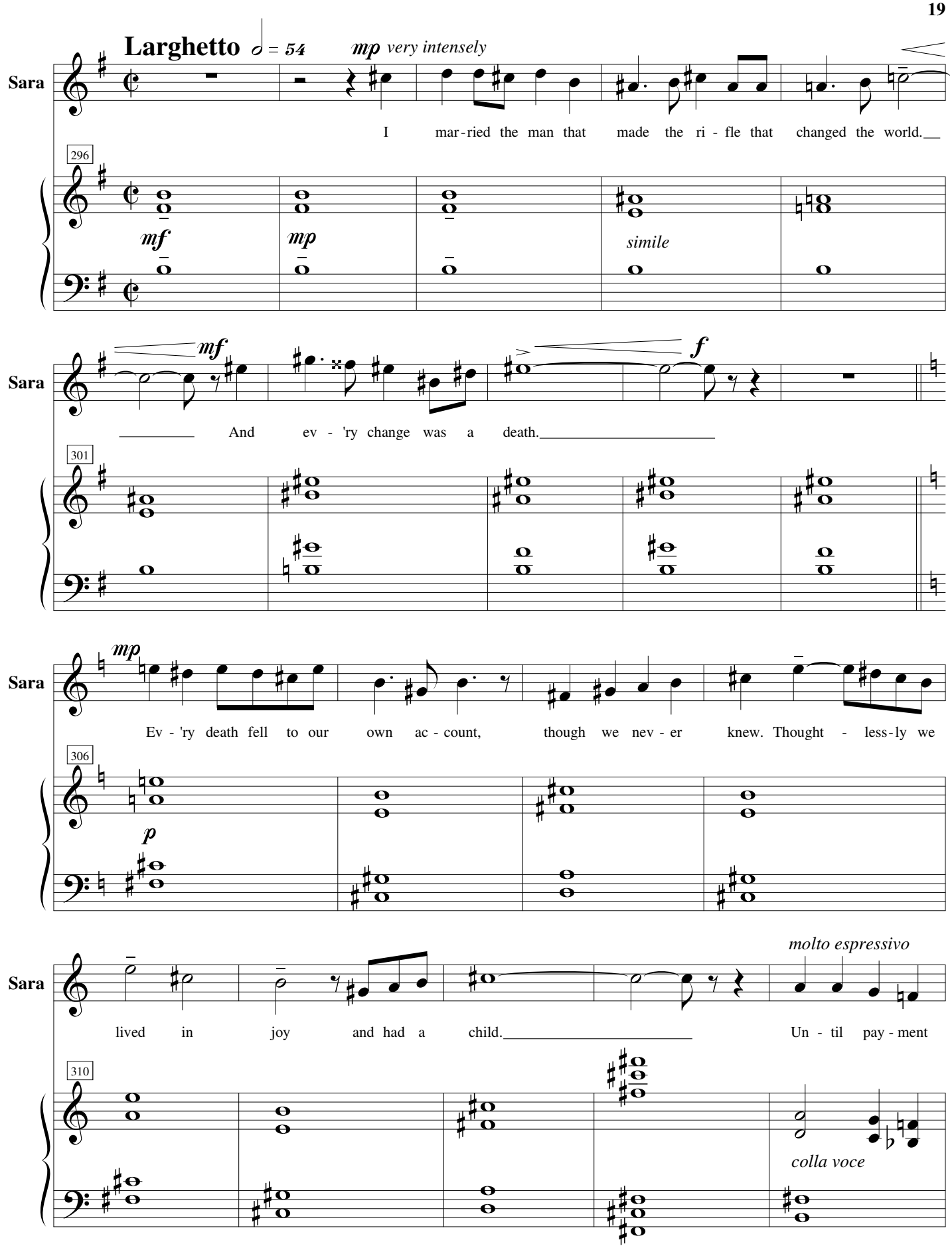

Sara
cline their ghost-ly of - fer, and of-fer them a room with-in my house where they may
193
mf
mp
Sara
wan-der and get lost. Ghosts are like men, they are eas-i-ly led.
197
(She walks downstage to address the audience confidentially.)
allarg.
mp
a tempo
Sara
No doubt you don't be - lieve in
201
allarg.
a tempo
mf
mp
p
con pedale
Sara
ghosts. You think you see a craz - y loon, with
206

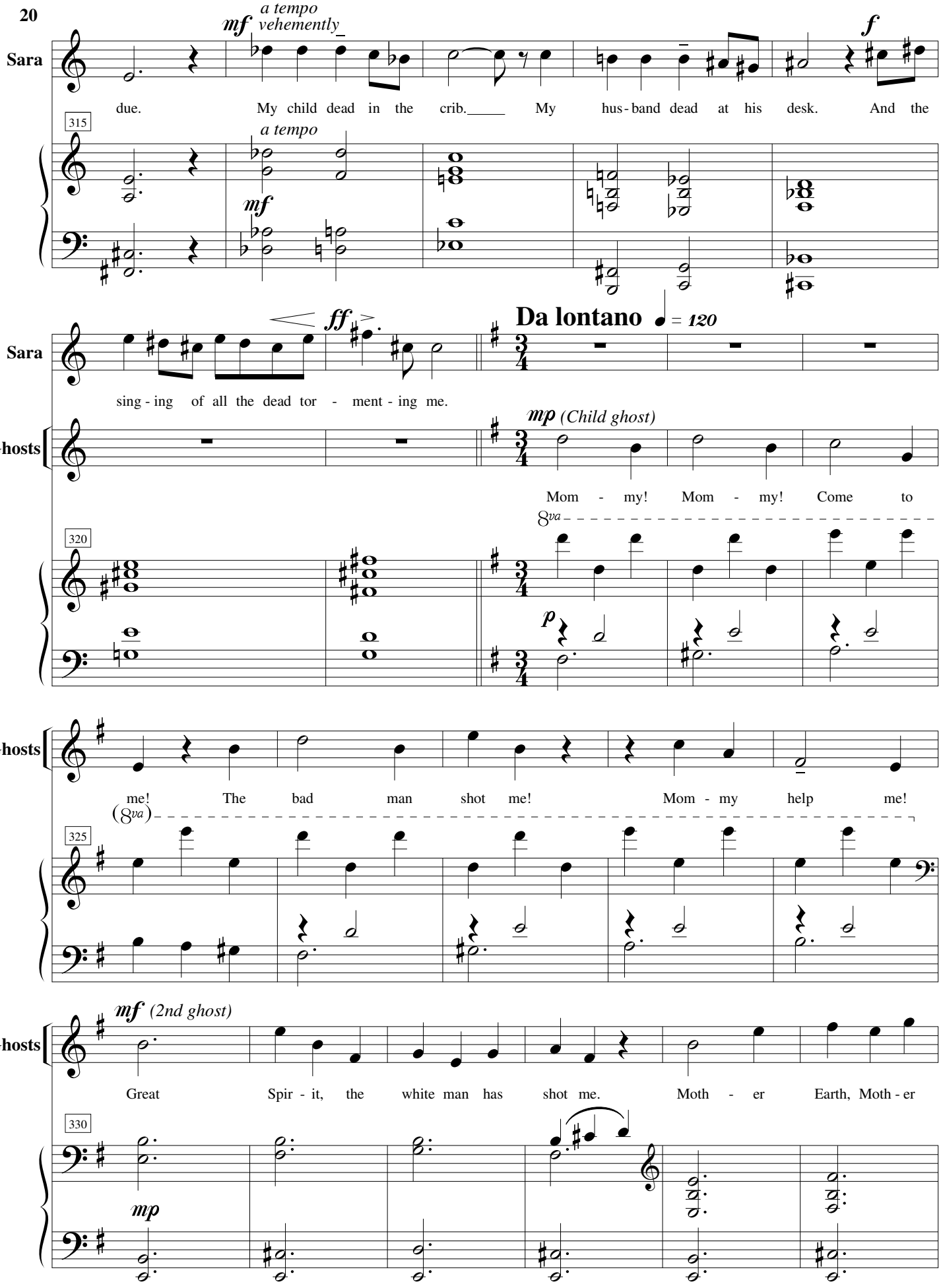

Sara
too much mon - ey and too much time and noth - ing
211
Sara
f
bet - ter to do than watch her de -
216
mf
Sara
lu - sions wrap a - round her,
220
sub. mp cresc. poco a poco
Sara
walls with - in walls with - in hall - ways with - in walls with-in
224
sub. p cresc. poco a poco

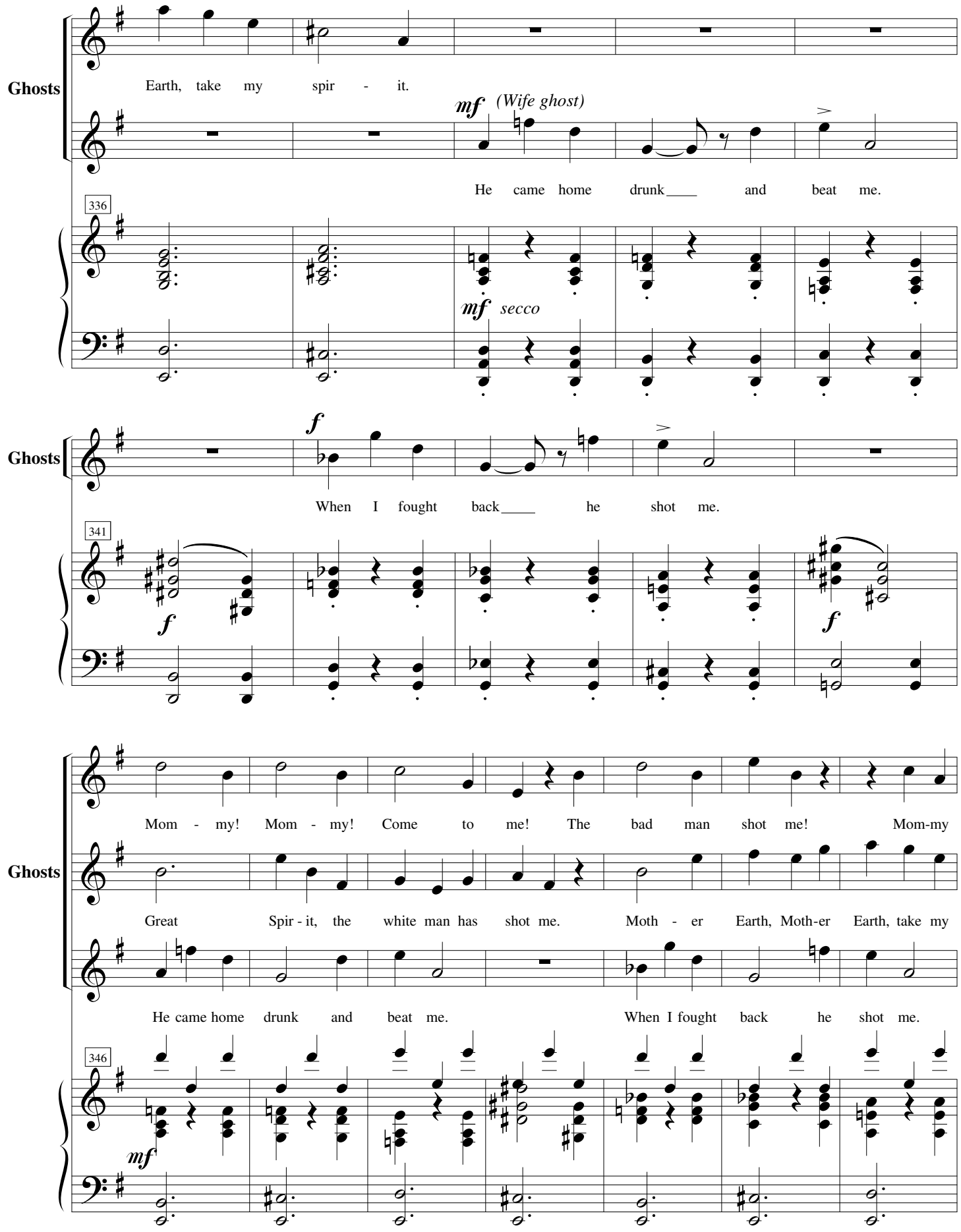

16
Sara
f
with abandon
court - yards with - in wings with - in a
229
Sara
mp
house, a house that
233
f
dim.
p
Sara
I have built to be as var - i - ous as my
238
Sara
own mind, and as de - vi - ous.
243
248

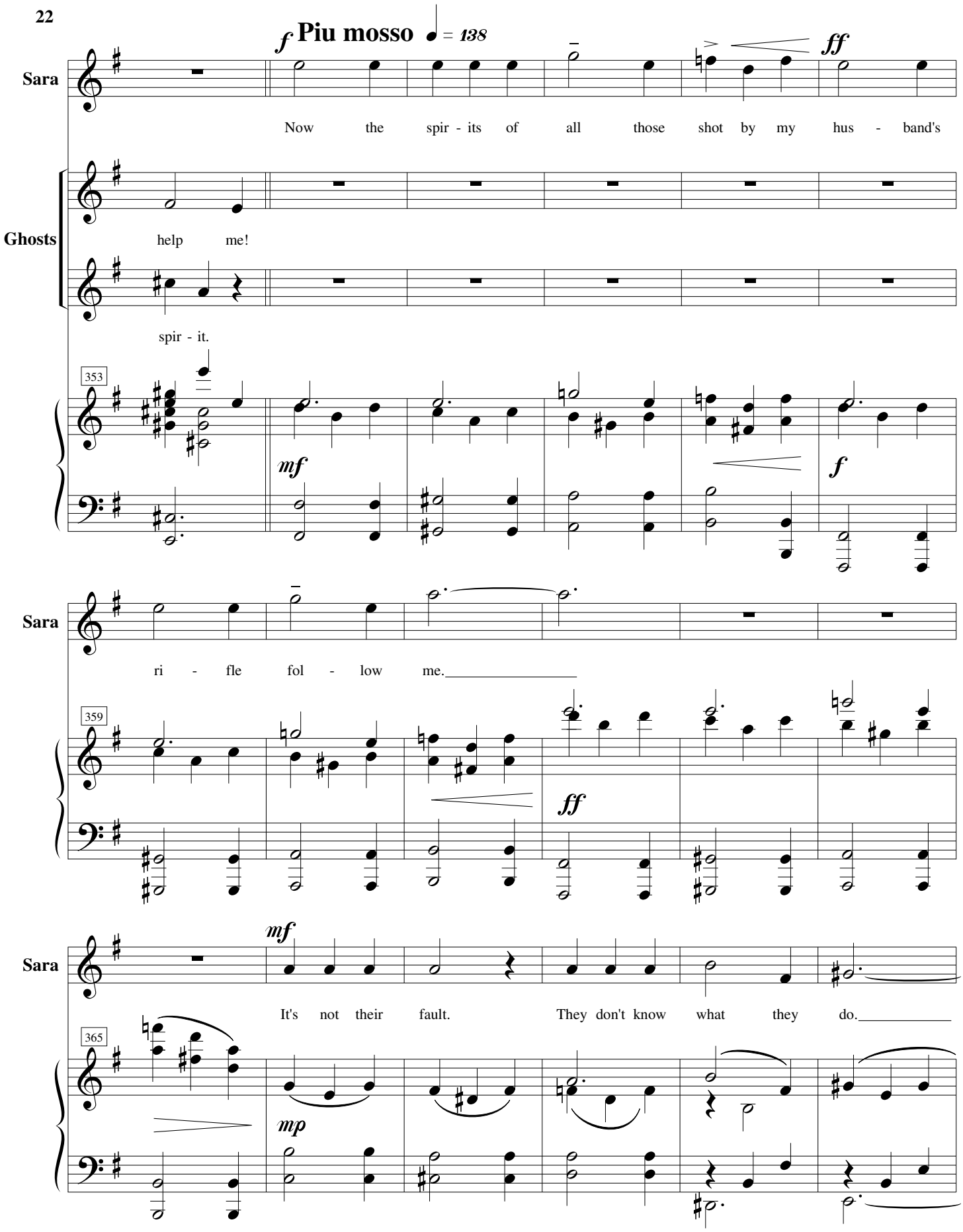

Freely
mp
Nostalgically
cresc.
Sara
I was-n't al-ways such a coot.
E - ven craz - y old
253
mp
mf
rall.
la - dies were once lit - tle girls.
257
rall.
With mounting excitement
p
Once the world was full of sci-ence and light and sense. Why, we
262
p
mp
e - ven dis - cov-ered new stars and meas-ured their weight.
269
mp

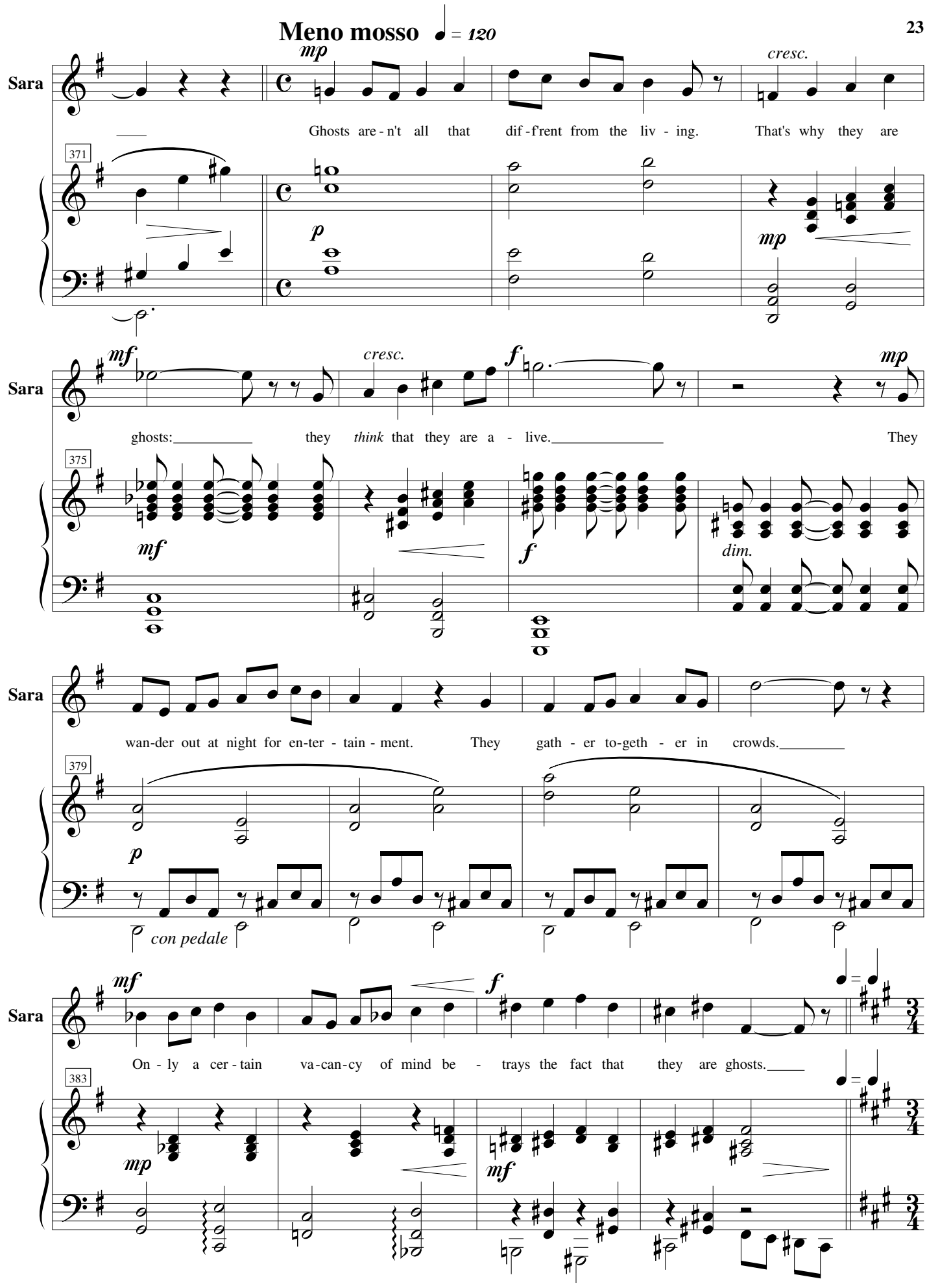

Sara
p cresc. poco a poco
We knew ev - 'ry fact. We were that bright,
275
pp
cresc. poco a poco
Sara
mf
f
and all we did was right.
281
mf
Sara
mf
accel. poco a poco, stringendo
We in - vent - ed things that men found
286
mp
accel. poco a poco, stringendo
Sara
f
use - ful, that made us rich.
291
mf
f

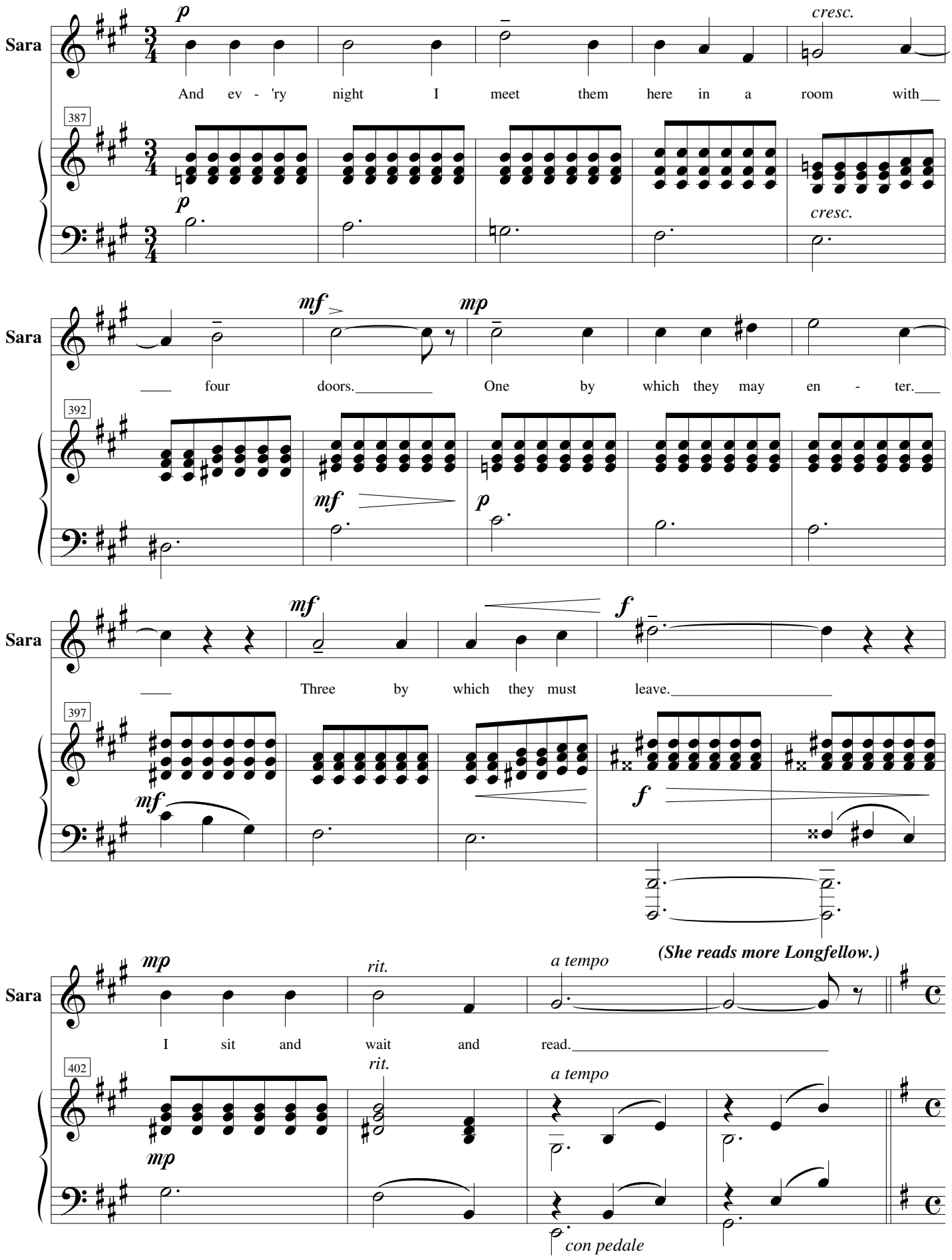

Larghetto
mp very intensely
Sara
I mar-ried the man that made the ri - fle that changed the world.
296
mf
mp
simile
mf
f
Sara
And ev - 'ry change was a death.
301
mp
Sara
Ev - 'ry death fell to our own ac - count, though we nev - er knew. Thought - less-ly we
306
p
molto espressivo
Sara
lived in joy and had a child. Un - til pay - ment
310
colla voce


Sara
mf a tempo vehemently
f
due. My child dead in the crib. My hus - band dead at his desk. And the
315
a tempo
mf
Sara
ff
Da lontano ♩ = 120
sing - ing of all the dead tor - ment - ing me.
Ghosts
mp (Child ghost)
Mom - my! Mom - my! Come to
8va
320
p
Ghosts
me! The bad man shot me! Mom - my help me!
(8va)
325
Ghosts
mf (2nd ghost)
Great Spir - it, the white man has shot me. Moth - er Earth, Moth - er
330
mp


Ghosts
Earth, take my spir - it.
mf (Wife ghost)
He came home drunk___ and beat me.
336
mf secco
Ghosts
f
When I fought back___ he shot me.
341
f
f
Ghosts
Mom - my! Mom - my! Come to me! The bad man shot me! Mom-my
Great Spir - it, the white man has shot me. Moth - er Earth, Moth-er Earth, take my
He came home drunk and beat me. When I fought back he shot me.
346
mf


f Piu mosso ♩ = 138
ff
Sara
Now the spir - its of all those shot by my hus - band's
Ghosts
help me!
spir - it.
353
mf
f
Sara
ri - fle fol - low me.
359
ff
Sara
mf
It's not their fault. They don't know what they do.
365
mp


Meno mosso ♩ = 120
Sara
mp
cresc.
Ghosts are - n't all that dif - f'rent from the liv - ing. That's why they are
371
p
mp
Sara
mf
cresc.
f
mp
ghosts: they think that they are a - live. They
375
mf
f
dim.
Sara
wan-der out at night for en-ter - tain - ment. They gath - er to-geth - er in crowds.
379
p
con pedale
Sara
mf
f
On - ly a cer - tain va-can-cy of mind be - trays the fact that they are ghosts.
383
mp
mf


Sara
p
cresc.
And ev - 'ry night I meet them here in a room with
387
p
cresc.
Sara
mf
mp
four doors. One by which they may en - ter.
392
mf
p
Sara
mf
f
Three by which they must leave.
397
mf
f
(She reads more Longfellow.)
Sara
mp
rit.
a tempo
I sit and wait and read.
402
rit.
a tempo
mp
con pedale

Poco agitato ♩ = 126

Sara

p *ossia*

lone! stran - ger at my fire - side can - not

406

p

cresc. poco a poco

Sara

see The forms I see, nor hear the sounds I hear;

409

cresc. poco a poco

mf *rit. e dim. poco a poco*

Sara

He but per-ceives what is; while un - to me All that has been is vis - i - ble

412

mf *rit. e dim. poco a poco*

Maestoso ♩ = 104 ***(To the audience)***

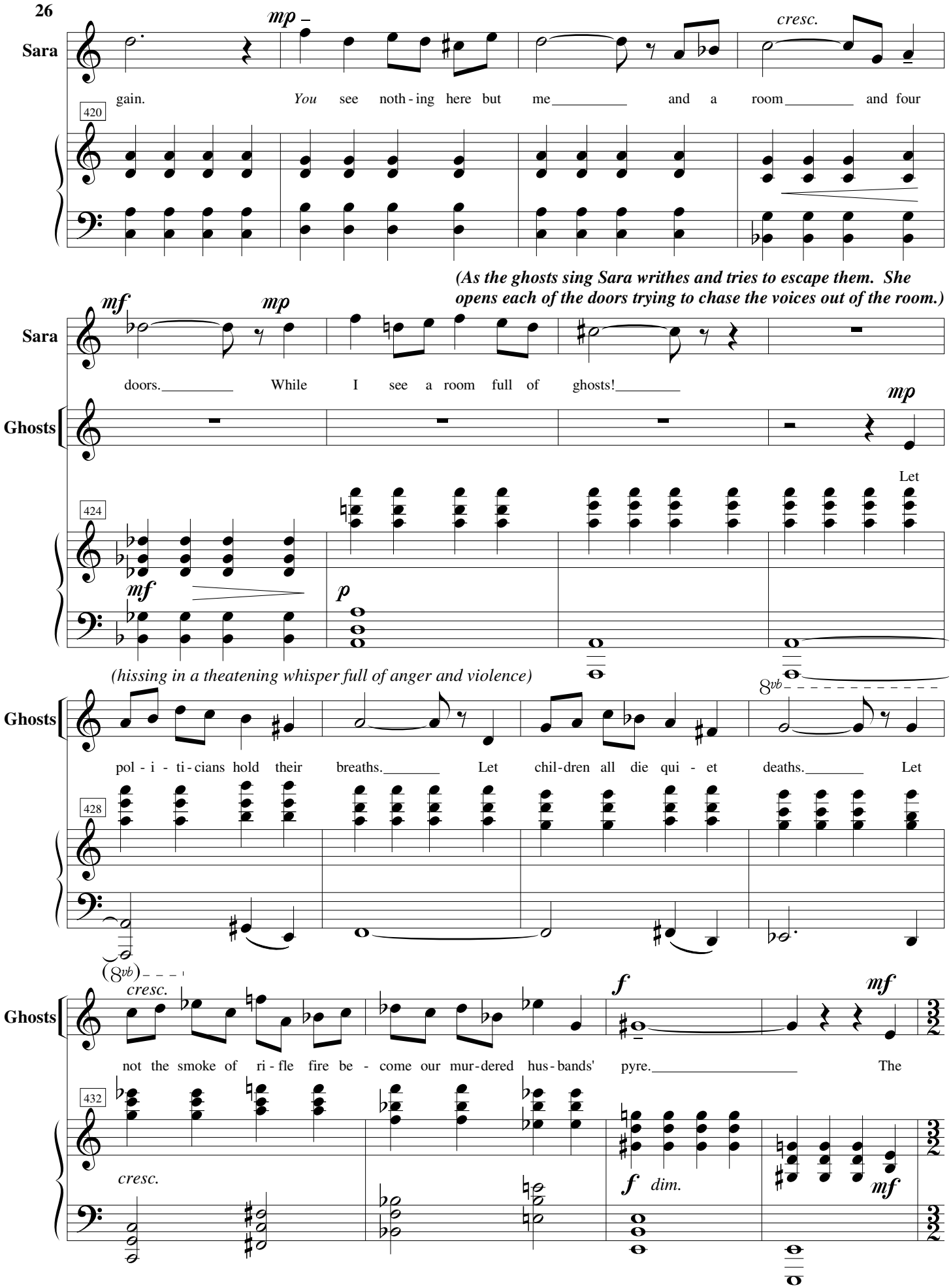
Sara

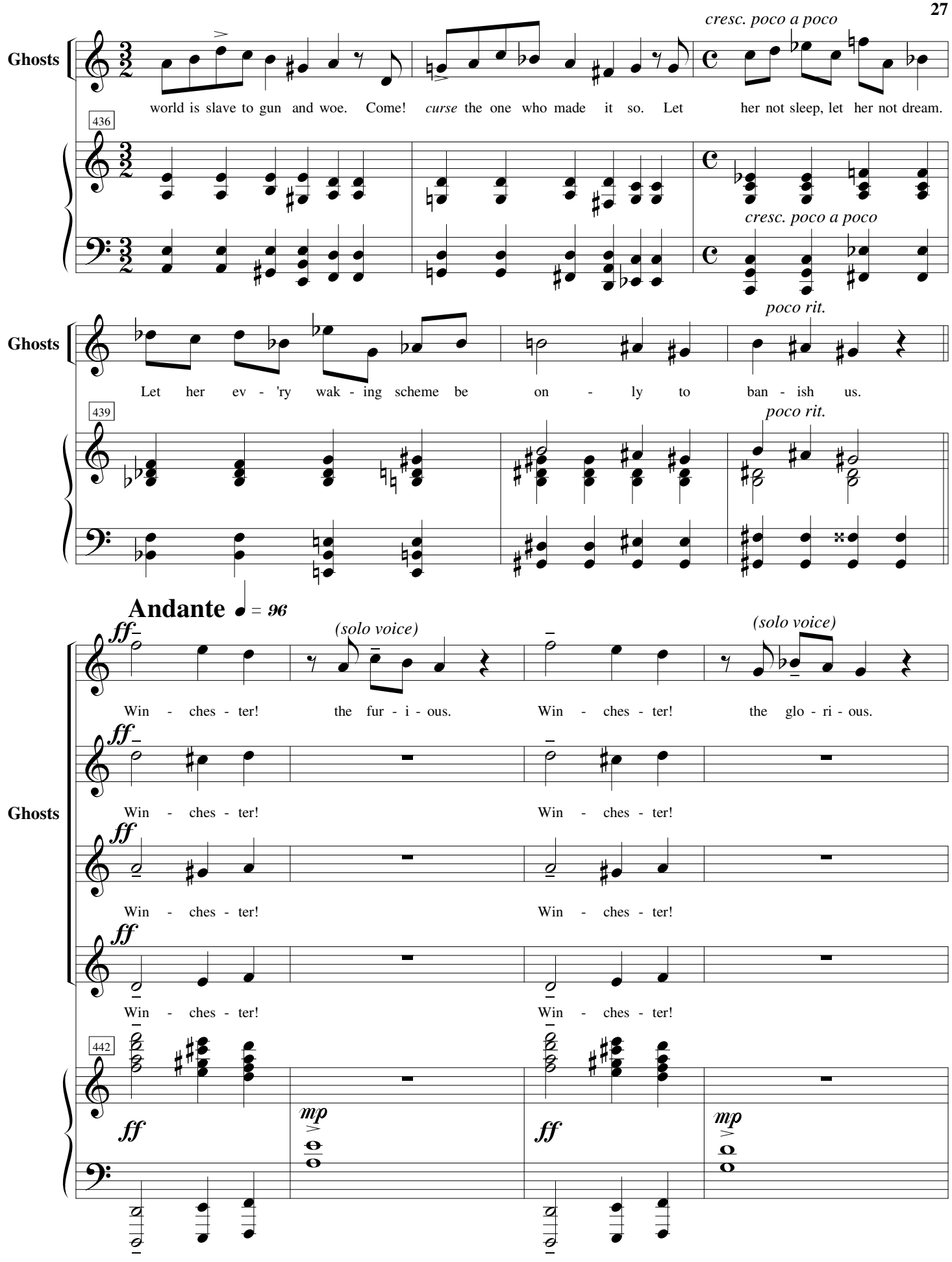
p

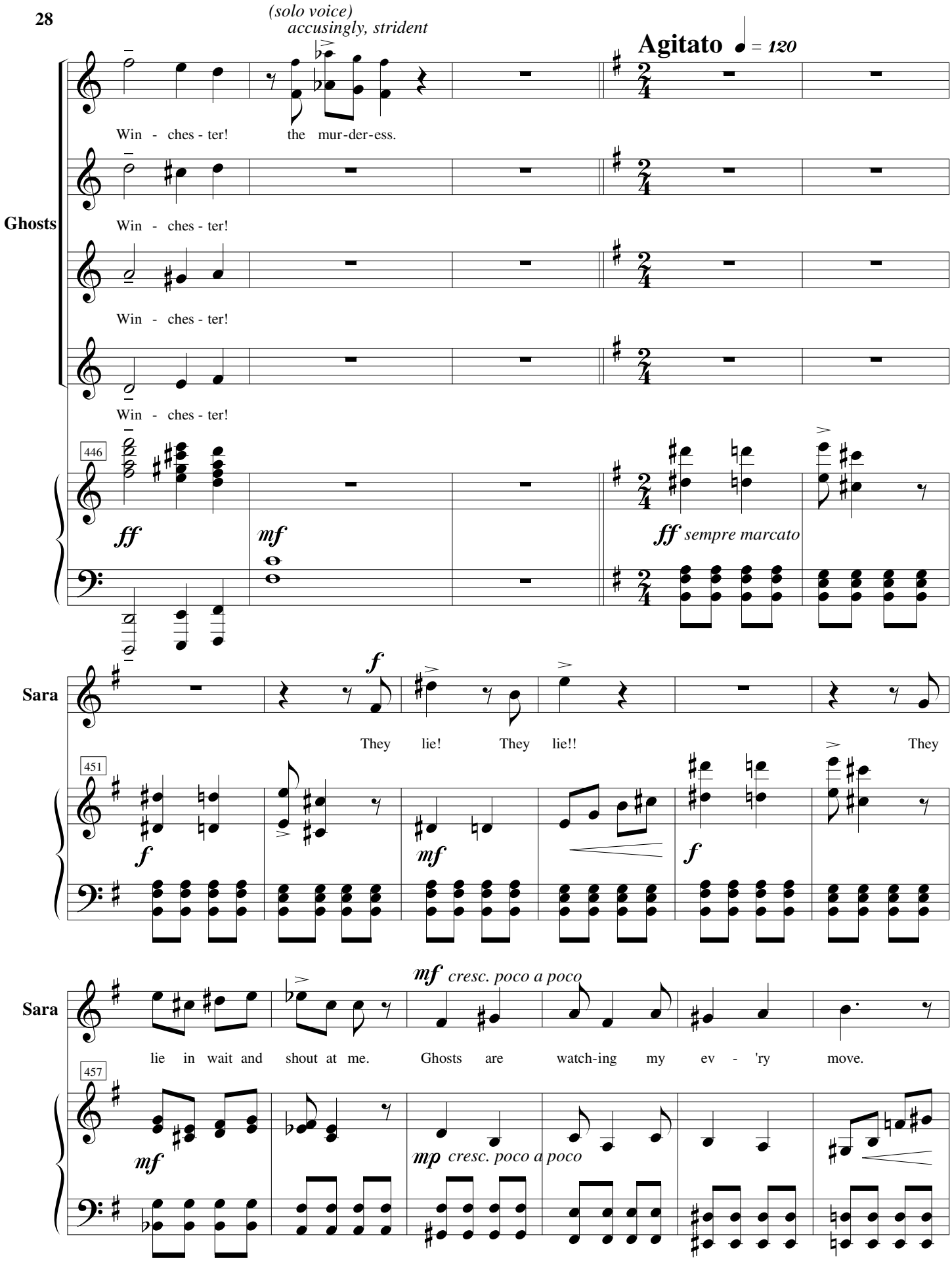
and clear." You see, the po - et got it right a -

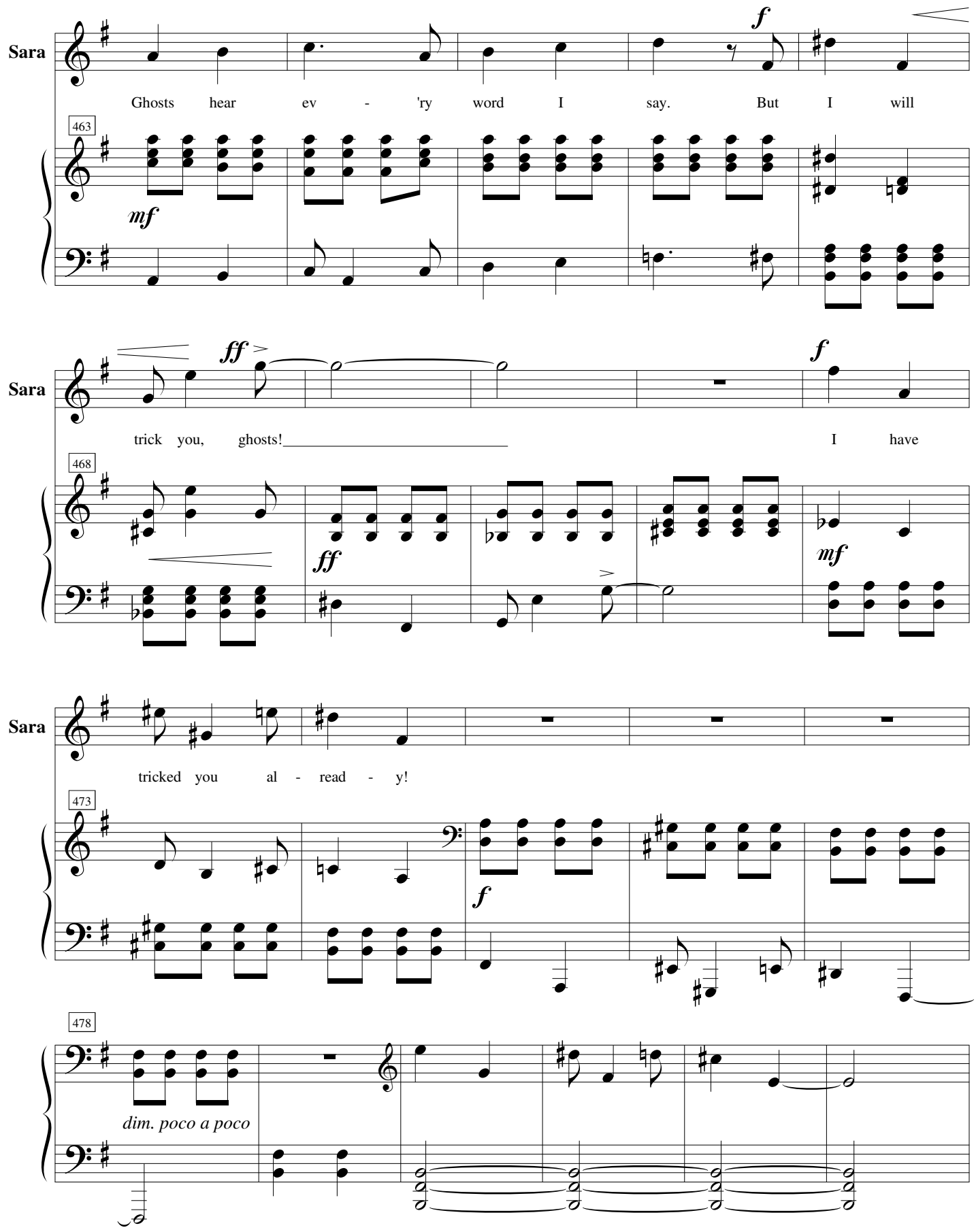
416

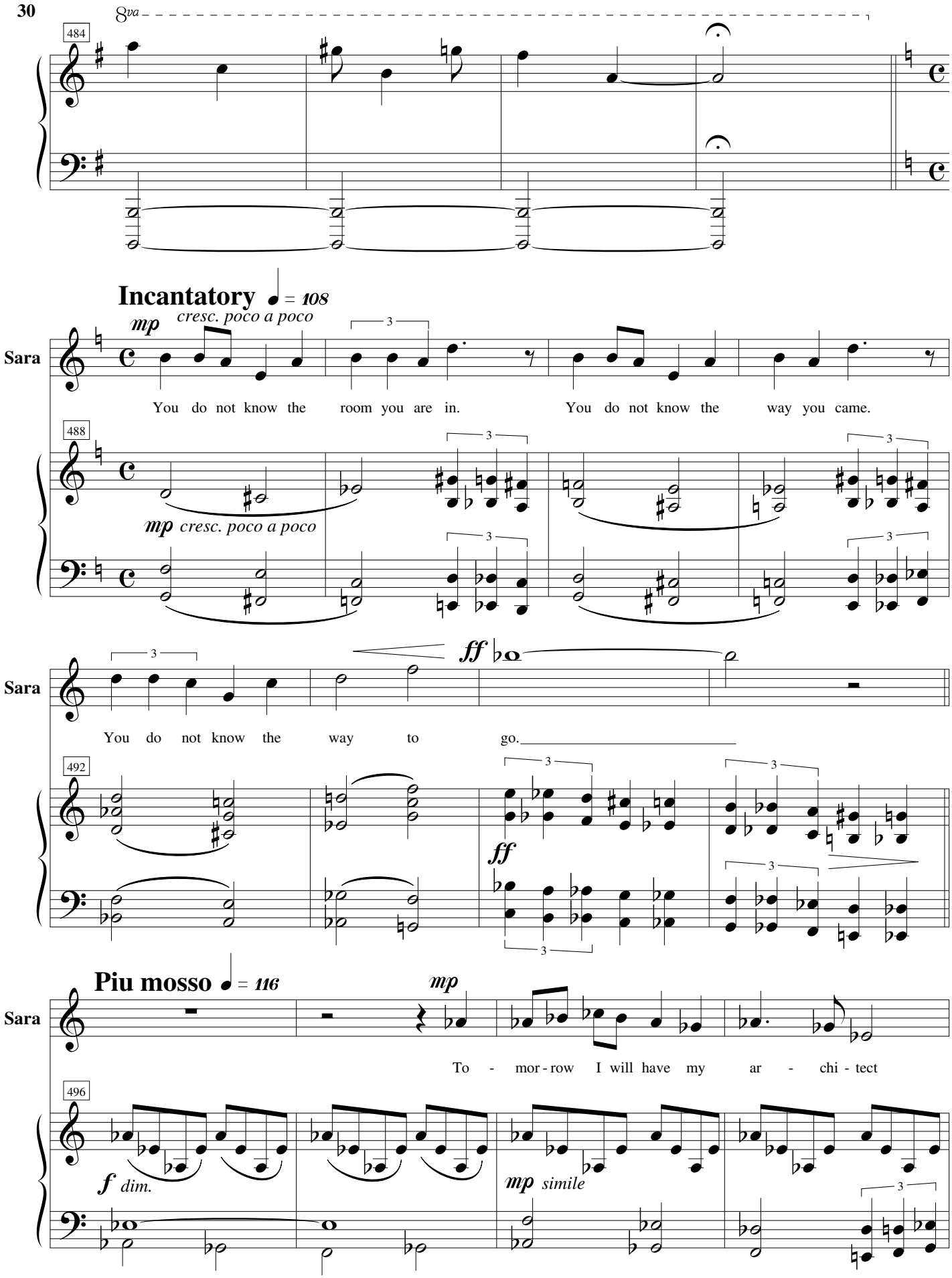
p *sonore*

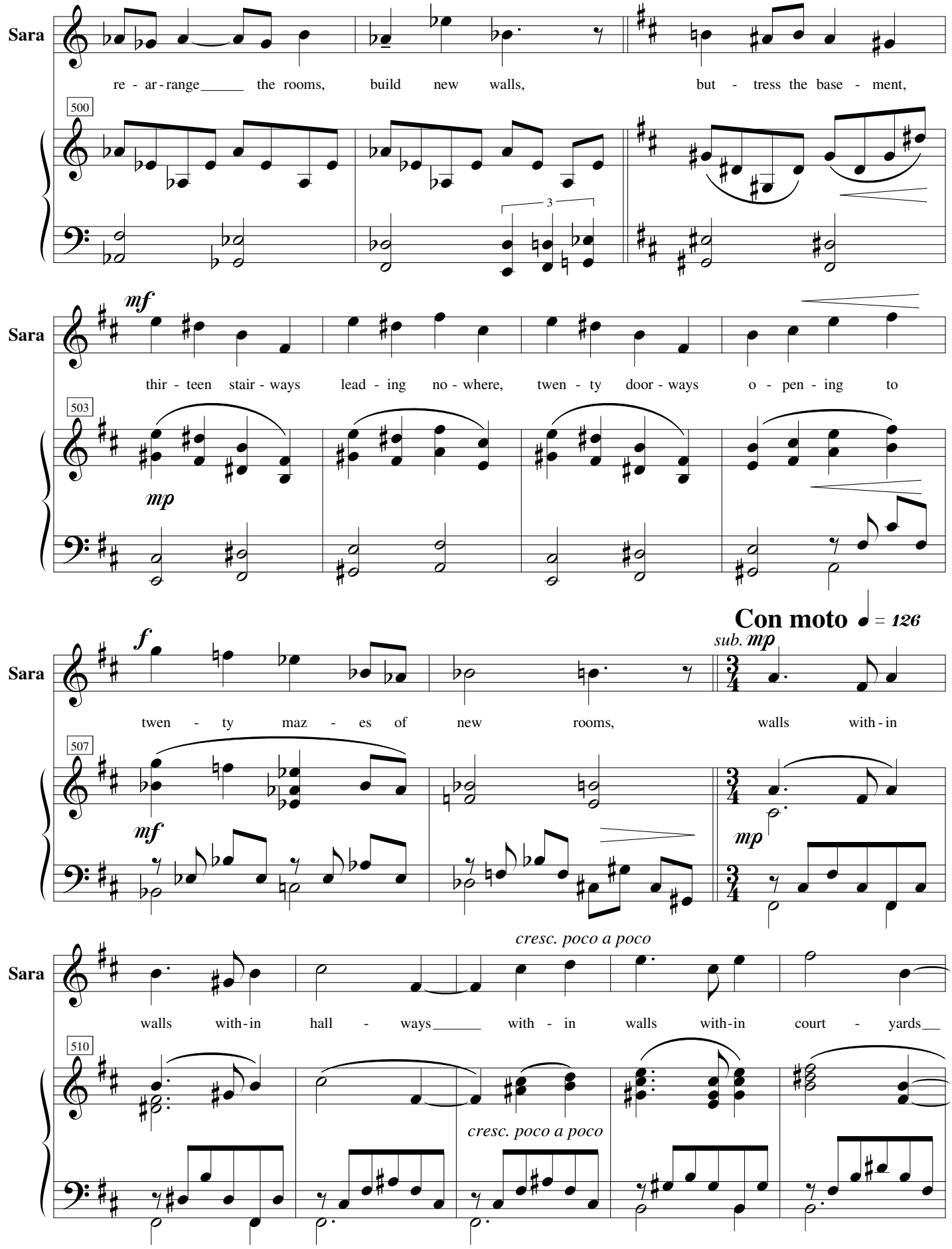

Sara
mp
cresc.
gain. You see noth - ing here but me and a room and four
420
(As the ghosts sing Sara writhes and tries to escape them. She opens each of the doors trying to chase the voices out of the room.)
mf
mp
Sara
doors. While I see a room full of ghosts!
Ghosts
mp
Let
424
mf
p
(hissing in a theatening whisper full of anger and violence)
Ghosts
8vb
pol - i - ti - cians hold their breaths. Let chil - dren all die qui - et deaths. Let
428
(8vb)
cresc.
Ghosts
f
mf
not the smoke of ri - fle fire be - come our mur - dered hus - bands' pyre. The
432
cresc.
f dim.
mf

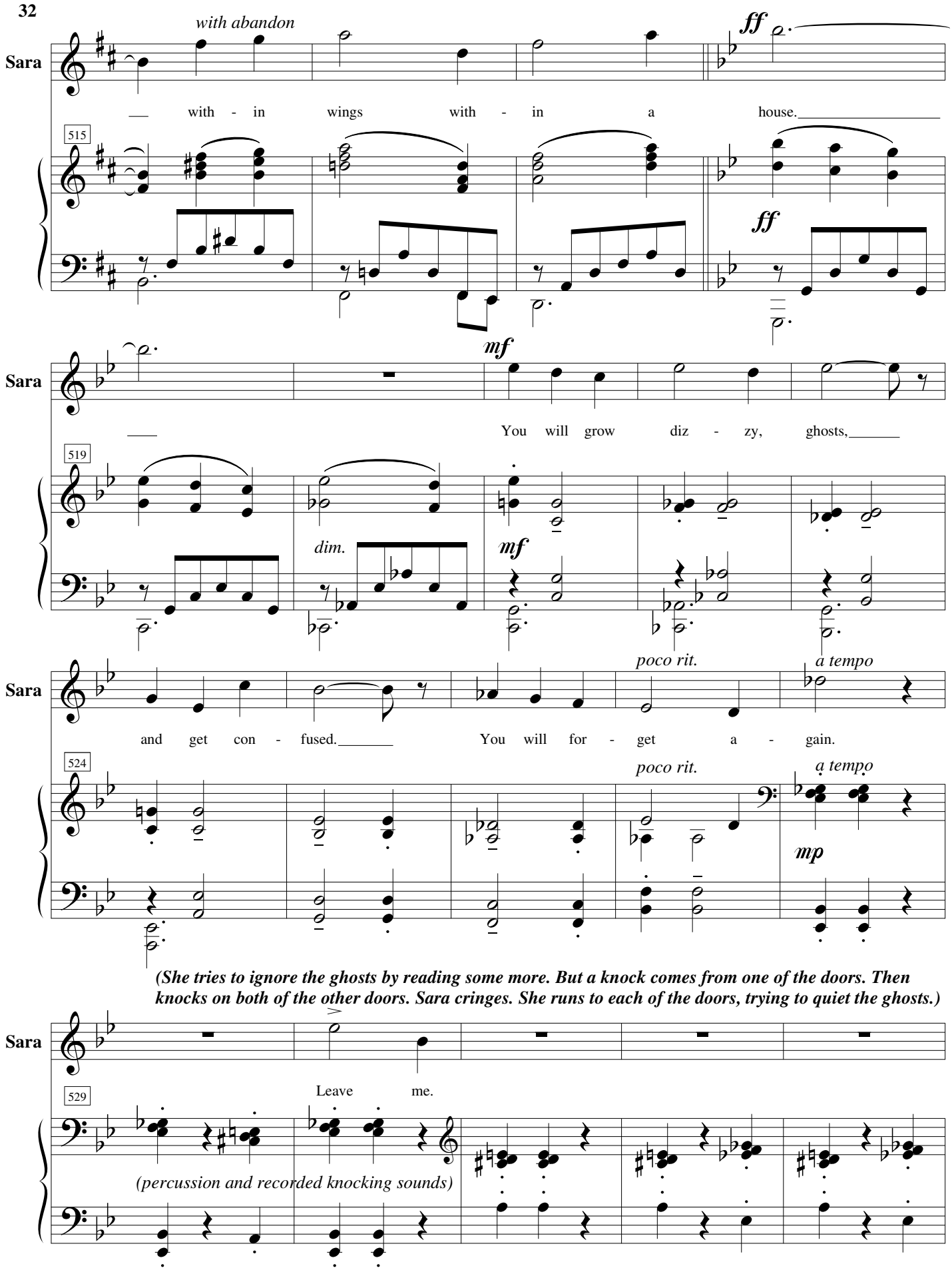

Ghosts
cresc. poco a poco
world is slave to gun and woe. Come! curse the one who made it so. Let her not sleep, let her not dream.
436
cresc. poco a poco
Ghosts
poco rit.
Let her ev - 'ry wak - ing scheme be on - ly to ban - ish us.
439
poco rit.
Andante ♩ = 96
ff
(solo voice)
(solo voice)
Win - ches - ter! the fur - i - ous. Win - ches - ter! the glo - ri - ous.
Ghosts
Win - ches - ter! Win - ches - ter!
Win - ches - ter! Win - ches - ter!
Win - ches - ter! Win - ches - ter!
442
mp
mp

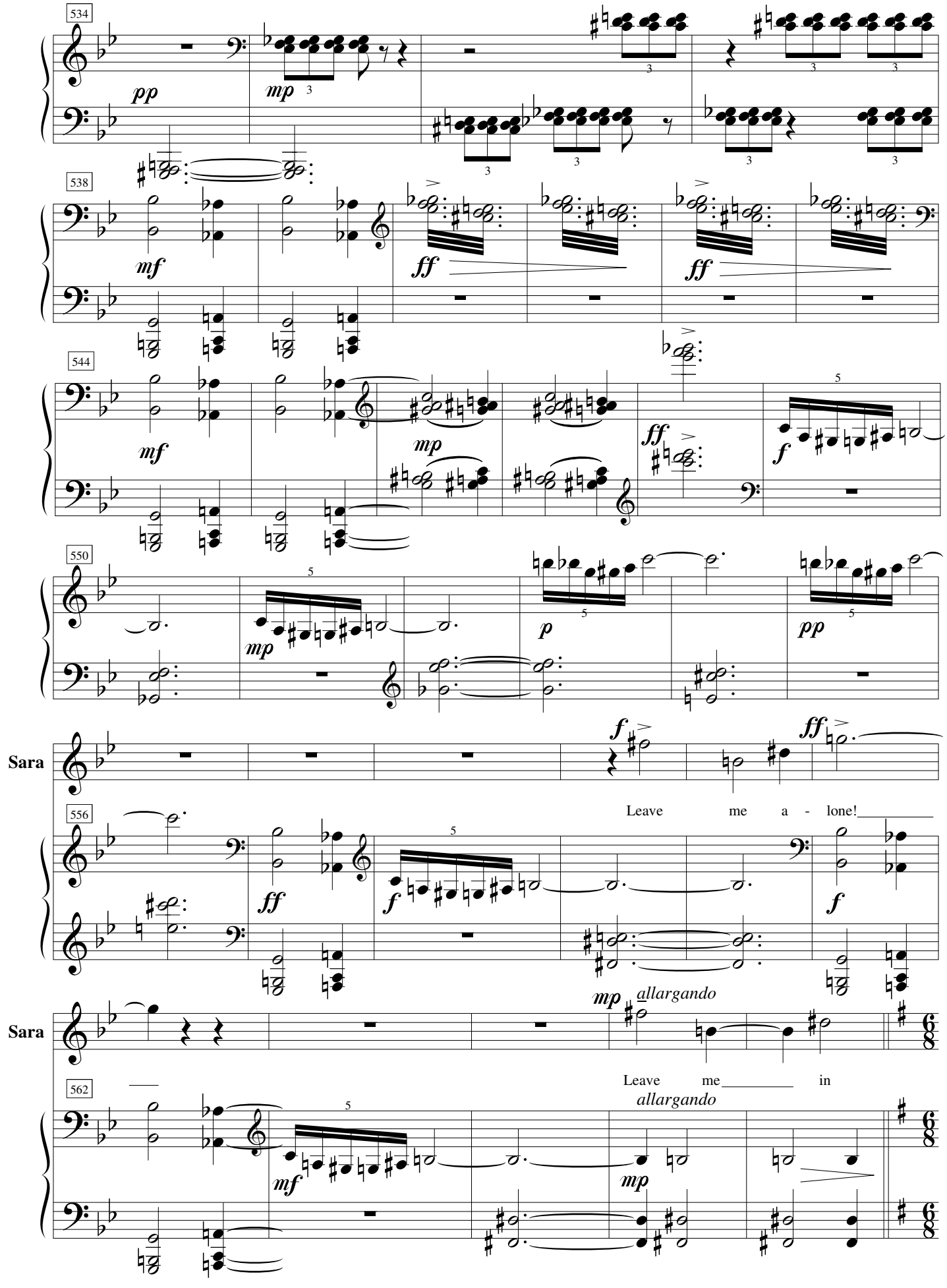

(solo voice)
accusingly, strident
Agitato ♩ = 120
Win - ches - ter! the mur-der-ess.
Ghosts
Win - ches - ter!
Win - ches - ter!
Win - ches - ter!
446
ff
mf
ff sempre marcato
Sara
f
They lie! They lie!! They
451
f
mf
f
Sara
mf cresc. poco a poco
lie in wait and shout at me. Ghosts are watch-ing my ev - 'ry move.
457
mf
mp cresc. poco a poco


Sara
Ghosts hear ev - 'ry word I say. But I will
463
mf
f
Sara
trick you, ghosts! I have
468
ff
ff
f
mf
Sara
tricked you al - read - y!
473
f
478
dim. poco a poco


8va
484
Incantatory ♩ = 108
mp cresc. poco a poco
Sara
You do not know the room you are in. You do not know the way you came.
488
mp cresc. poco a poco
Sara
ff
You do not know the way to go.
492
ff
Piu mosso ♩ = 116
mp
Sara
To - mor - row I will have my ar - chi - tect
496
f dim.
mp simile


Sara
re - ar - range_____ the rooms, build new walls, but - tress the base - ment,
500
3
Sara
mf
thir - teen stair - ways lead - ing no - where, twen - ty door - ways o - pen - ing to
503
mp
Con moto ♩ = 126
Sara
f
sub. mp
twen - ty maz - es of new rooms, walls with - in
507
mf
mp
cresc. poco a poco
Sara
walls with - in hall - ways_____ with - in walls with - in court - yards__
510
cresc. poco a poco


with abandon
ff
Sara
with - in wings with - in a house.
515
ff
mf
Sara
You will grow diz - zy, ghosts,
519
dim.
mf
poco rit.
a tempo
Sara
and get con - fused. You will for - get a - gain.
524
poco rit.
a tempo
mp
(She tries to ignore the ghosts by reading some more. But a knock comes from one of the doors. Then knocks on both of the other doors. Sara cringes. She runs to each of the doors, trying to quiet the ghosts.)
Sara
Leave me.
529
(percussion and recorded knocking sounds)


534
pp
mp
538
mf
ff
ff
544
mf
mp
ff
f
550
mp
p
pp
Sara
f
ff
Leave me a - lone!
556
ff
f
f
Sara
mp
allargando
562
Leave me in
allargando
mf
mp

(Sara walks slowly back to her chair, settles in, and then, after a pause, begins to read again.)

Largo cantabile ♩. = 46

optional repeat

Sara

peace!

567

mp

dim.

Sara

mp

"So from the world of spir - its there de-scends A bridge of light,

570

p

con pedale

Sara

con - nect - ing it with this, O'er whose un-stead - y

573

pp

p *cresc.*

Sara

mf

mp

floor, that sways and bends, Wan - der our thoughts a - bove the dark a -

577

mf

p

(She looks up queerly towards the audience. It is clear she is quite mad.)

Piu mosso ♩. = 58

mf *mp*

Sara

byss." So true. This is like all of life. What

580

Sara

Lon - fel - low wrote in this poem is hap - pen - ing here with us. You there lis - ten - ing to

585

Sara

me here on stage. Your thoughts, and my thoughts, a - cross the dark pit be - tween this

589

Sara

stage and your seats. And with the liv - ing and with the

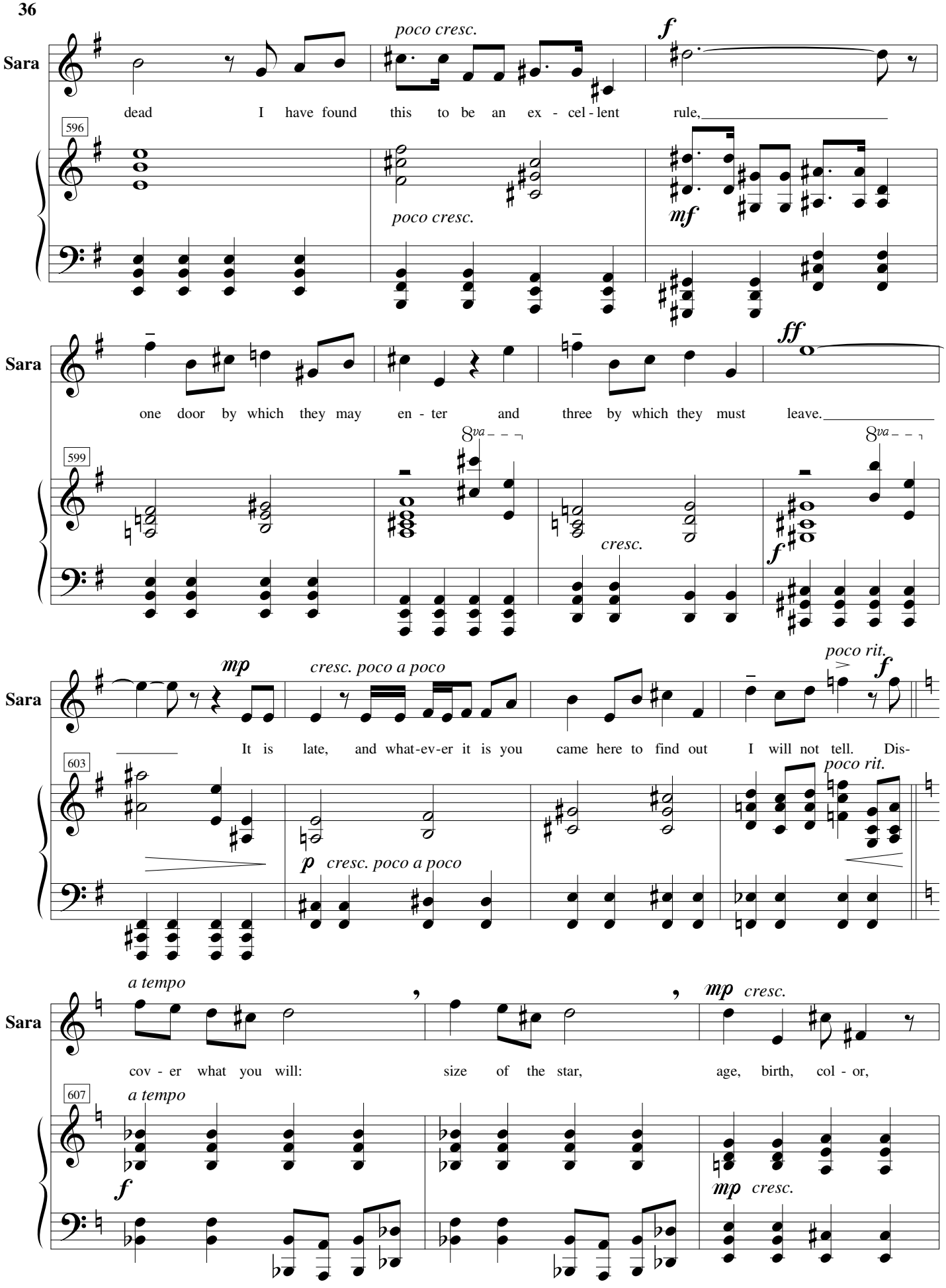
♩. = ♩

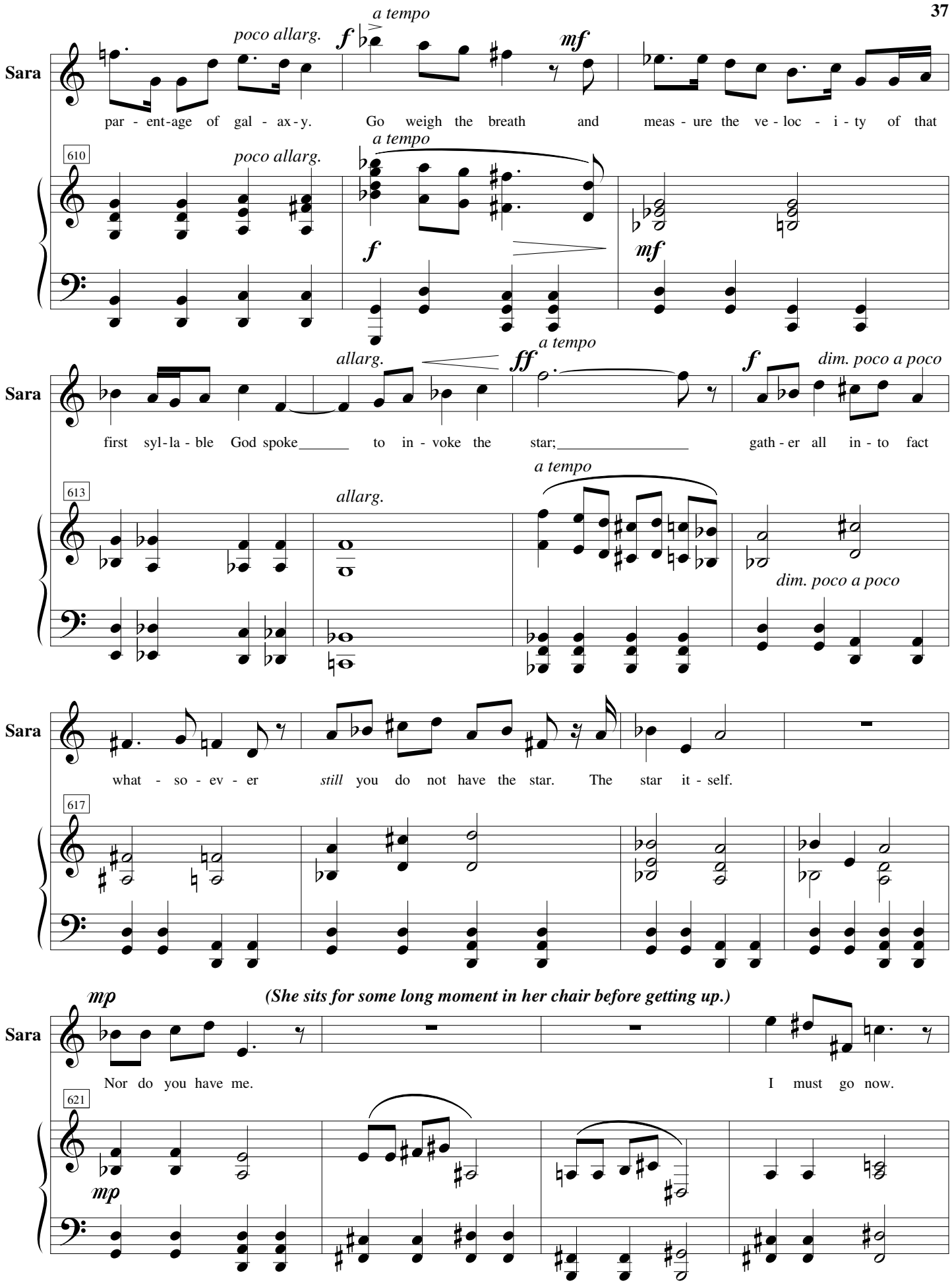
mp

593

♩. = ♩

mp


Sara
poco cresc.
f
dead I have found this to be an ex - cel - lent rule,
596
poco cresc.
mf
Sara
ff
one door by which they may en - ter and three by which they must leave.
599
8va
cresc.
f
Sara
mp
cresc. poco a poco
poco rit.
f
It is late, and what-ev-er it is you came here to find out I will not tell. Dis-
603
poco rit.
p
cresc. poco a poco
Sara
a tempo
mp cresc.
cov - er what you will: size of the star, age, birth, col - or,
607
a tempo
f
mp cresc.


Sara
poco allarg.
a tempo
f
mf
par - ent-age of gal - ax-y. Go weigh the breath and meas - ure the ve - loc - i - ty of that
610
poco allarg.
a tempo
f
mf
Sara
allarg.
ff
a tempo
f
dim. poco a poco
first syl-la - ble God spoke to in - voke the star; gath - er all in - to fact
613
allarg.
a tempo
dim. poco a poco
Sara
what - so - ev - er still you do not have the star. The star it - self.
617
Sara
mp
(She sits for some long moment in her chair before getting up.)
Nor do you have me. I must go now.
621
mp

(She walks towards the door to exit. She stops, turns, and notices the audience is still there.)

(She waits a long moment. Then, looking peeved, she walks downstage.)

Sara

I must go.

625

dim. poco a poco

(She sighs and looks completely exasperated.)

mf *mp* **Piu mosso** ♩. = 58

Sara

You are dis - missed.___ Why must I re-mind you

630

p

mf *mp*

Sara

ev - 'ry night? You all have for - got - ten a - gain, hav-en't you? You

634

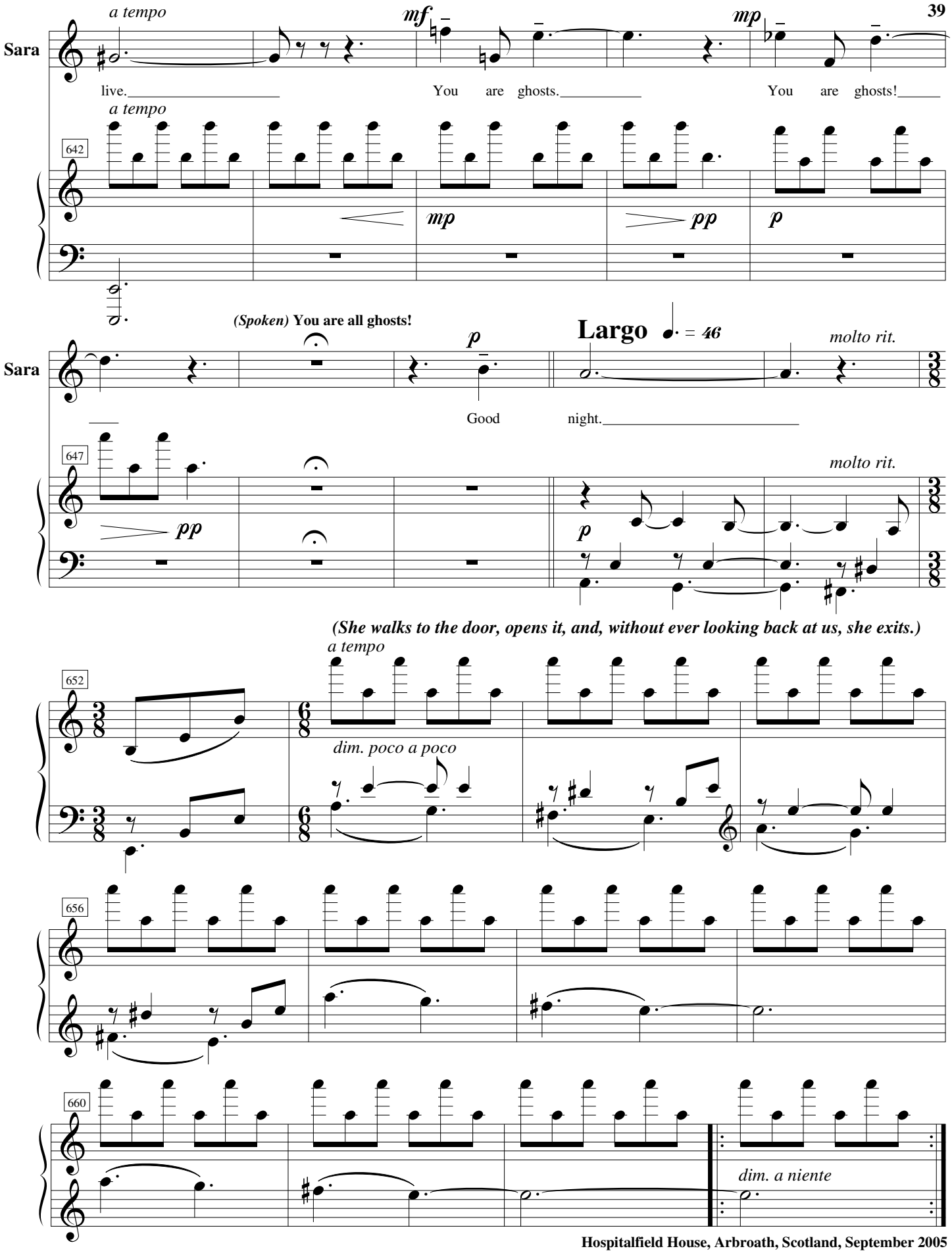
espressivo

Sara

think you are sit - ting there watch-ing me here on stage.___ You think you are a -

638

colla voce



Hospitalfield House, Arbroath, Scotland, September 2005
State College, Pennsylvania, October - December 2005