Continental Divide

(an American cantata)

Peter Bird
2010

OBOE Parts

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For further information, please visit **http://peterbird.name/choral/**

Program Notes on *Continental Divide*

1. Timberline.....6

This first number is celebratory and could be subtitled, "Awakening of cheerful feelings upon arrival in the country." But, rather than sonata form, it has a loose Mahlerian structure where one main melody is developed while 3 others vie for expression. A certain Romantic instability of key symbolizes enthusiasm that escapes Classical restraint. A final repetition of the initial section makes this structurally a da-capo aria for chorus.

The other 7 numbers of the cantata progress in historical order, from Pleistocene times before humans arrived, through the Arapaho era, the fur trade, pioneer days, arrival of the first tourists, the gold/silver rush, and the modern age of national parks and interstate highways. The central numbers (#3~6) have texts from oral tradition or contemporary accounts; the framing numbers at the start and end incorporate my own attempts at poetry.

2. Yellowstone 9

The strong mantle plume that created Yellowstone has a few peers in the world: Iceland, Afar, and Hawaii. But here alone the volcanic plateau was built on the back of the older Rocky Mountain chain, producing lodgepole forests and parklands at 8,000' elevations and peaks that go much higher. This number depicts a summer dawn along one of the verdant high-altitude river valleys (*e.g.,* Lamar River, or Yellowstone River above the falls) where bison and elk are grazing, until interrupted by wolves. The text is a set of 6 haiku-like nature poems, with 5/7/5-syllable structure but no rhyme.

3. Vision quest 11

The adults of the village sing one of the traditional Arapaho Eagle Songs, with its proud refrain, "My father gave me the song of the eagle." (I did not alter this in any way, except to add some very light instrumental accompaniment.) A young man [or a group of young men; it may be performed either way] drifts off to follow the calls of a distant eagle. He is inspired to climb the mountain Neniisotoyou'u in search of other animal mentors. He is rebuffed by a bear, and then by a cougar, but high on the mountain shoulder he feels the presence and inspiration of Thunderbird. I based his (new) song on the text of a vision-quest song of Chief Yellow Calf: "[Thunder]bird walks about; the sky is turning yellow." (That is: Soon he will fly; prepare for thunder.) Performed in the Arapaho language.

4. Osborne Russell 13

Osborne Russell (1814-1892) was a largely self-taught man from Maine who entered the trapper's life and the Rocky Mountain fur trade at the age of 20. (Later he was a miner, a farmer, a trader, and was elected judge and then triumvir in the provisional government of Oregon Territory.) He recorded his experiences in *Journal of a Trapper…* which was published posthumously. This solo aria takes its text from the book's valedictory poem, *The Hunter's Farewell*, which may be the only extant poem by anyone involved in this chapter of our history. His description of the impact of firearms on the flocks of the mountains and the herds of the plains is sensitive and moving.

5. South Pass.....17

The Sweetwater River route through South Pass is more lonely and barren than scenic, but topography dictated that here the California Trail, the Oregon Trail, and the Mormon Trail necessarily ran together for several days travel as they approached the Divide. I have merged 3 songs of the trail (each in its own meter and its own key) to represent the passage of these 3 distinct kinds of pioneers in the same year. *Ho! for California* represents the gold-miners; both text and tune are authentic, although reharmonized here. The Oregon-Trail text and tune are my own inventions. The text of the LDS hymn *Come, Come Ye Saints* was written by William Clayton (1814-1879) while traveling the trail in 1846; here, I have given it a new tune that better harmonizes with the others. Despite the cultural and musical contrasts, there is no actual dissonance; perhaps I may even suggest that a new kind of polymodal harmony emerges?

6. Isabella Bird 19

Isabella Bird (1831-1904) was a very independent Englishwoman who toured the Sierra Nevada and the Colorado Rockies in 1873: arriving by train, renting a horse, and finding her own way through mountains and plains, come blizzard or sun. Her account, *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*, is well worth reading. This solo number uses a montage of her words to describe her ascent of Longs Peak (which was guided by the colorful and mysterious "Mountain Jim" Nugent). She may have been the first woman of European ancestry to make the ascent; it is certain that later she was the first woman inducted into the Royal Geographical Society, in London in 1892.

7. Silverton 23

Saturday night in a mining town! This turbulent setting with its many conflicting personalities, subplots, and emotions is represented by the overlaying of up to 6 tunes at once. Traditional tunes *An Outlandish Knight* and *Shenandoah* represent the women's point of view, and some new tunes (in the "gaslight" style of the times) represent the men's. An opera-buffa version of the sextet from *Lucia* transported into *La fanciula del West*.

8. Logan Pass 25

Approaching Glacier Park from the East, today's tourists can drive directly from the lonely and pristine rolling prairie of the Blackfeet lands to some of the most spectacular mountain scenery in the world. Chief Mountain, St. Mary Lake, Logan Pass, and the Garden Wall will not be forgotten by anyone who has made this trip, and of course the automobile makes it possible for most. But, travel by car is much too fast for the spirit.

Performance Notes

Continental Divide is scored for 9 instruments: flute, oboe, horn in F, pedal timpani (II, III, IV), violin I, violin II, cello, double-bass, and piano. (Piano parts occur only in numbers 6 & 7.) If the chorus is large, it may be best to amplify the instruments. I would not want to double them, as this would destroy the "rugged individualism" and lonesome timbre of solo performances. The total duration of this cantata is about 51 minutes.

Peter Bird, Los Angeles, 2010

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Continental Divide: 1. Timberline

Peter Bird

PETER BIRD

Allegro (♩=126)

Timp.

f

6

10

15

A

8

2

Hn.

rit.

B

28

Fine

A tempo: Allegro (♩=126)

7

mp

mf

mf

41

f

47

mf

53

rall.

(-15%)

f

mf

f

57

Moderato (♩=108)

mp

63

C

2

mf

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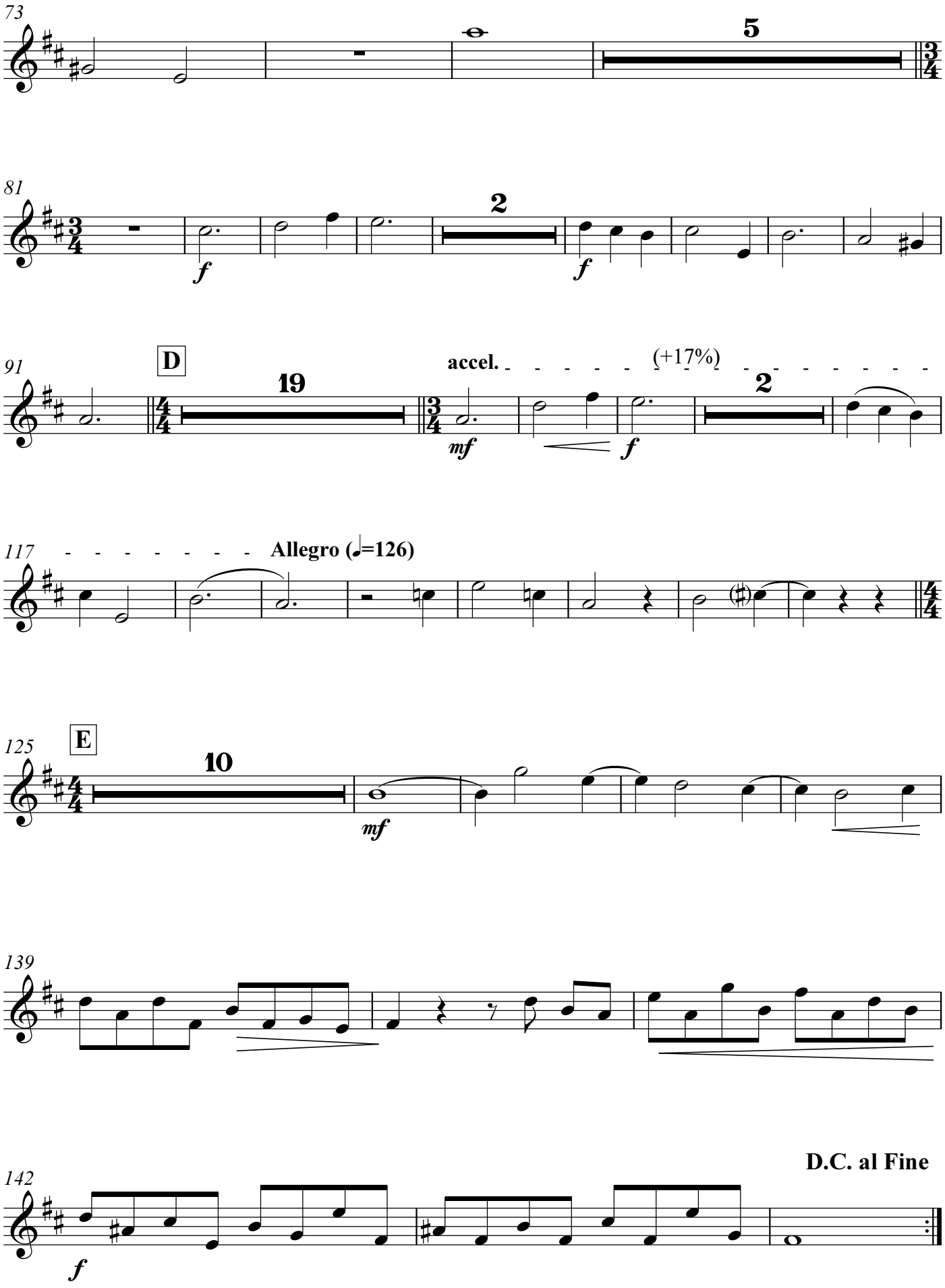
73
5
81
2
f
f
91
D
19
accel.
(+17%)
2
mf
f
117
Allegro (♩=126)
125
E
10
mf
139
142
D.C. al Fine
f

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"Et in Arcadia ego"

Continental Divide: 2. Yellowstone

Peter Bird

PETER BIRD

Largo (♩. = 60)

4

mp

3

10 **A**

6

Tenors

&vb A riv - er winds through.

mf

19

mf

24 **B**

3

mf

3

33

tr

mf

tr

C

38

mf

42

Andante (♪=♪; ♩=90)

46

mf

3

D

52

10

E

7

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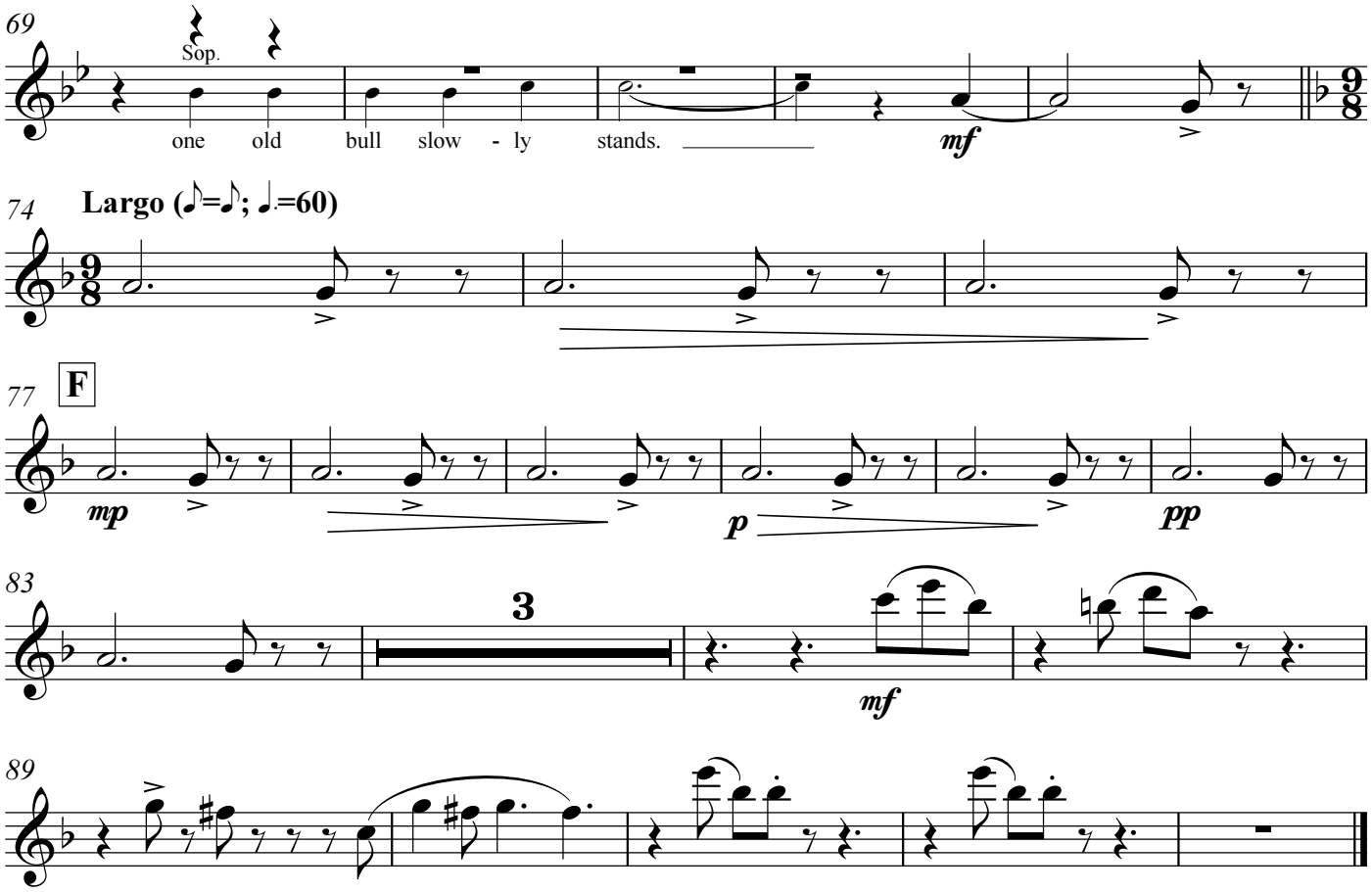
Continental Divide: 2. Yellowstone

Oboe



To the Arapaho

Continental Divide: 3. Vision quest

Traditional Arapaho (Eagle Song),
Peter Bird (seeker),
Chief Yellow Calf (Thunderbird Song)

Traditional Arapaho (Eagle Song),
PETER BIRD (seeker, Thunderbird Song)

Allegro (♩=132)

Timp.

73

p

77

WOMEN

Hey - ya - ya - ya - o, ya, ya, ha - ho - way, ha - ho - way, ay, ay, ay,

81

A

oh, ay. Yah - ho - ha - way, ay, hey, ay, ay.

85

13

Fl.

Hn.

p

102

2

3

mp

110

3

B

118

(♩=♩; 𝅗𝅥=66)

8

Vc.

mp

131

4

mp

C

140

accel.

Andante (𝅗𝅥=80)

3

2

mp

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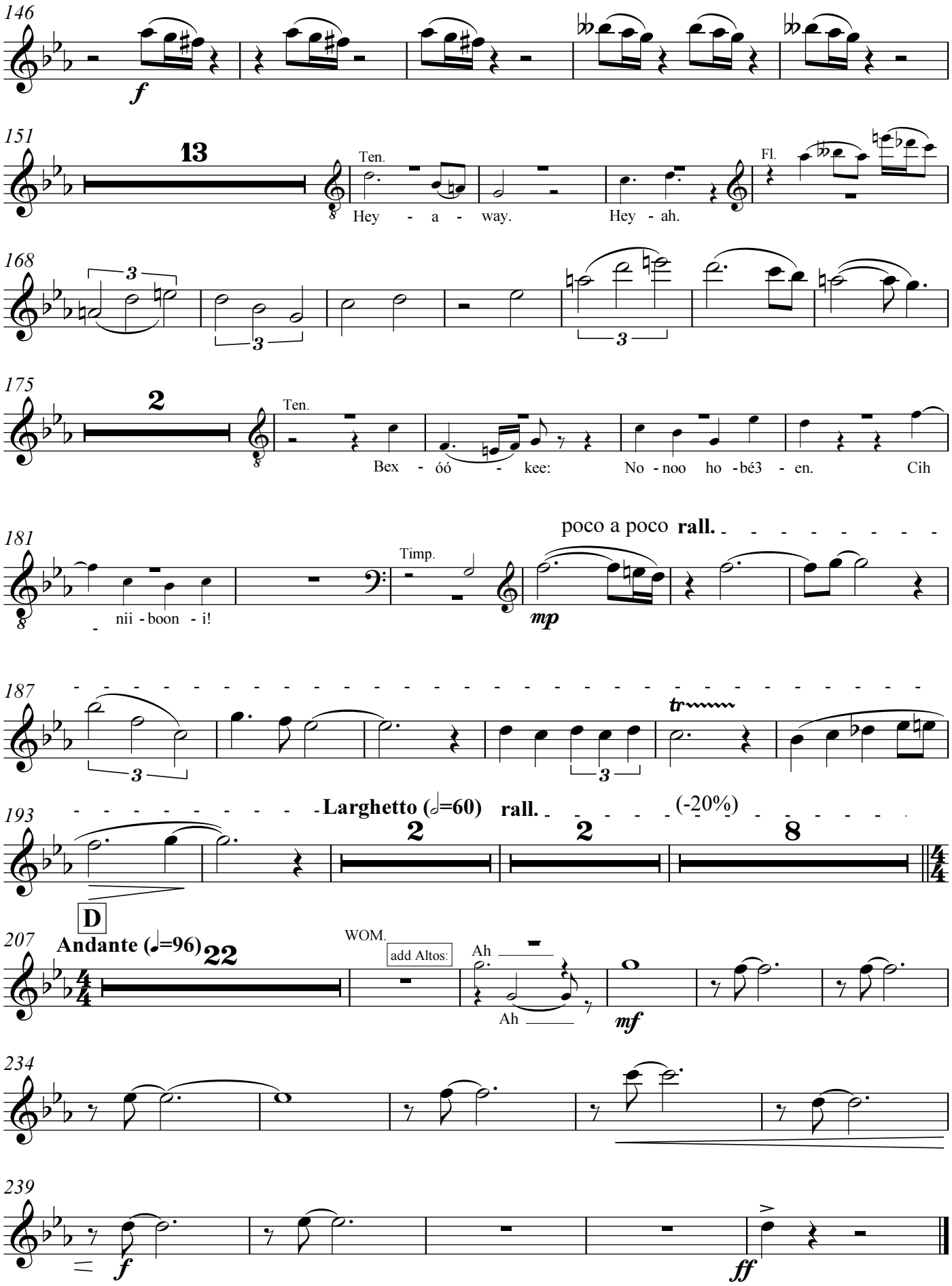
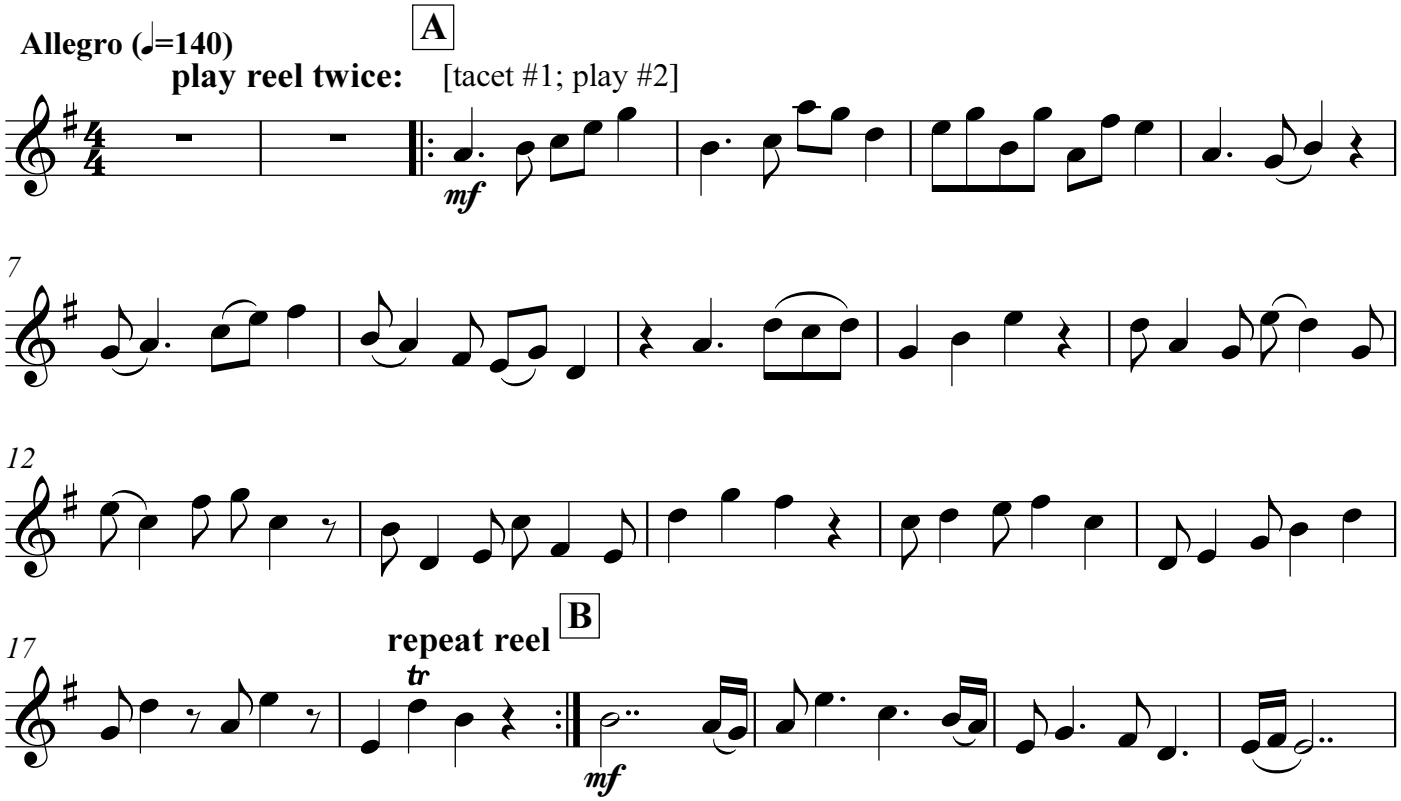

146
f
151
13
Ten.
Hey - a - way.
Hey - ah.
Fl.
168
3
3
3
175
2
Ten.
Bex - óó - kee:
No - noo ho - bé3 - en.
Cih
181
poco a poco rall.
Timp.
nii - boon - i!
mp
187
tr
193
Larghetto (𝅗𝅥=60)
rall.
(-20%)
2
2
8
D
207
Andante (𝅗𝅥=96)
22
WOM.
add Altos:
Ah
Ah
mf
234
239
f
ff

To O. R.: mountain man, settler, judge, & triumvir of Oregon Territory

Continental Divide: 4. Osborne Russell

Osborne Russell (1814-1892)

PETER BIRD



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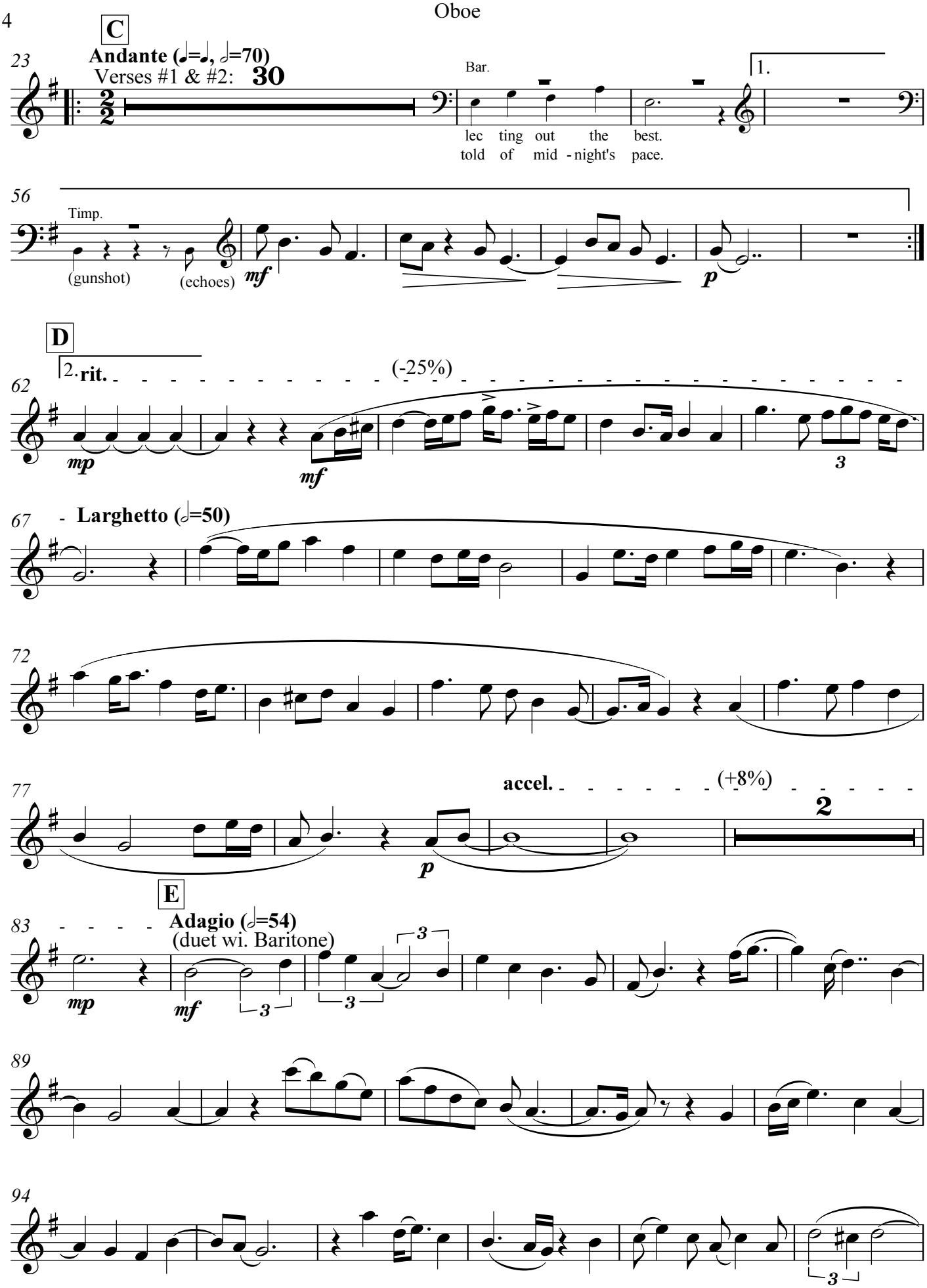
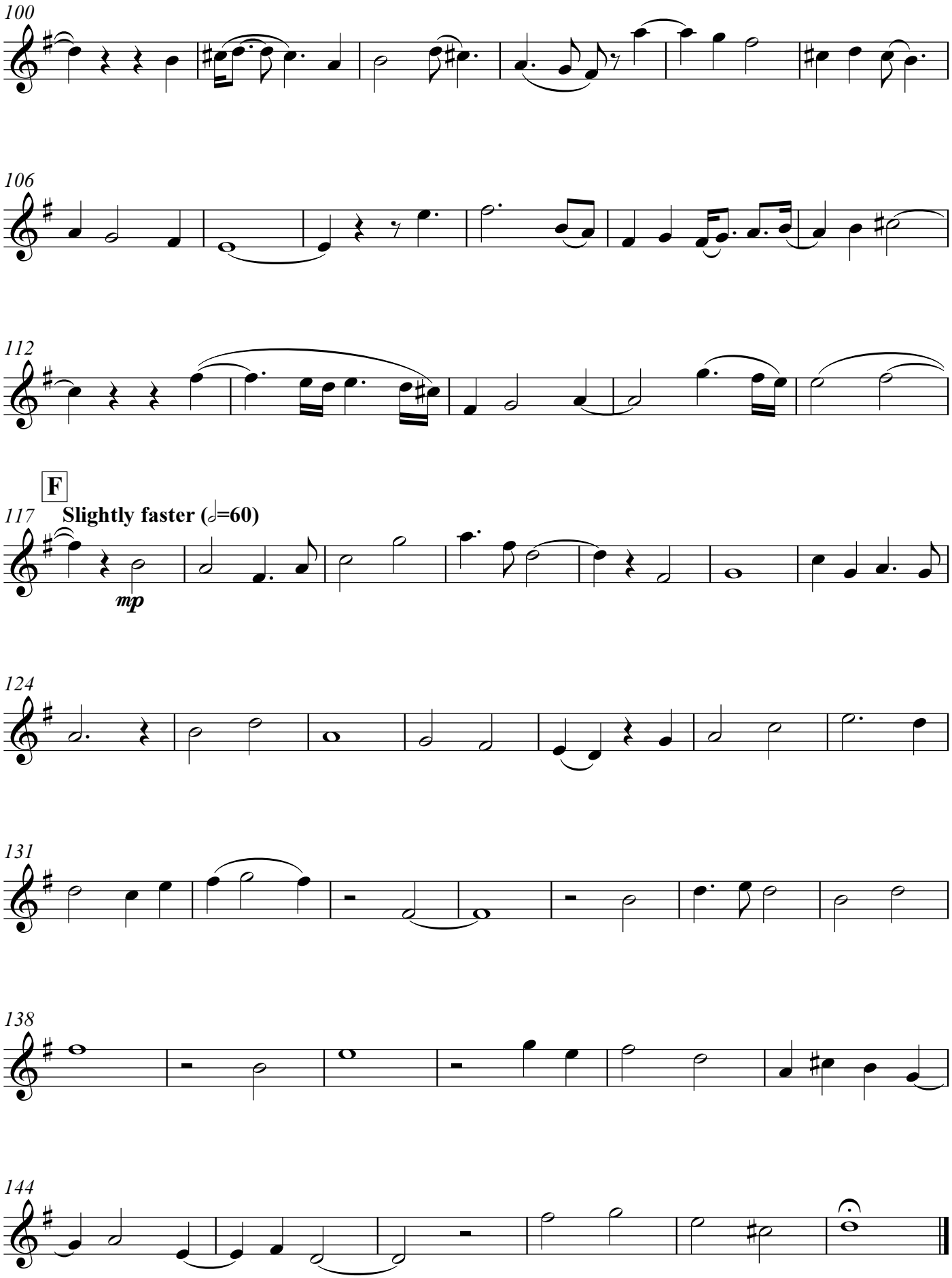

C
Andante (♩=♩, 𝅗𝅥=70)
Verses #1 & #2: 30
23
Bar.
1.
lec ting out the best.
told of mid - night's pace.
56
Timp.
(gunshot)
(echoes)
mf
p
D
2. rit.
(-25%)
62
mp
mf
3
67
Larghetto (𝅗𝅥=50)
72
77
accel.
(+8%)
2
p
E
83
Adagio (𝅗𝅥=54)
(duet wi. Baritone)
mp
mf
3
89
94


100
106
112
F
117
Slightly faster (𝅗𝅥=60)
mp
124
131
138
144

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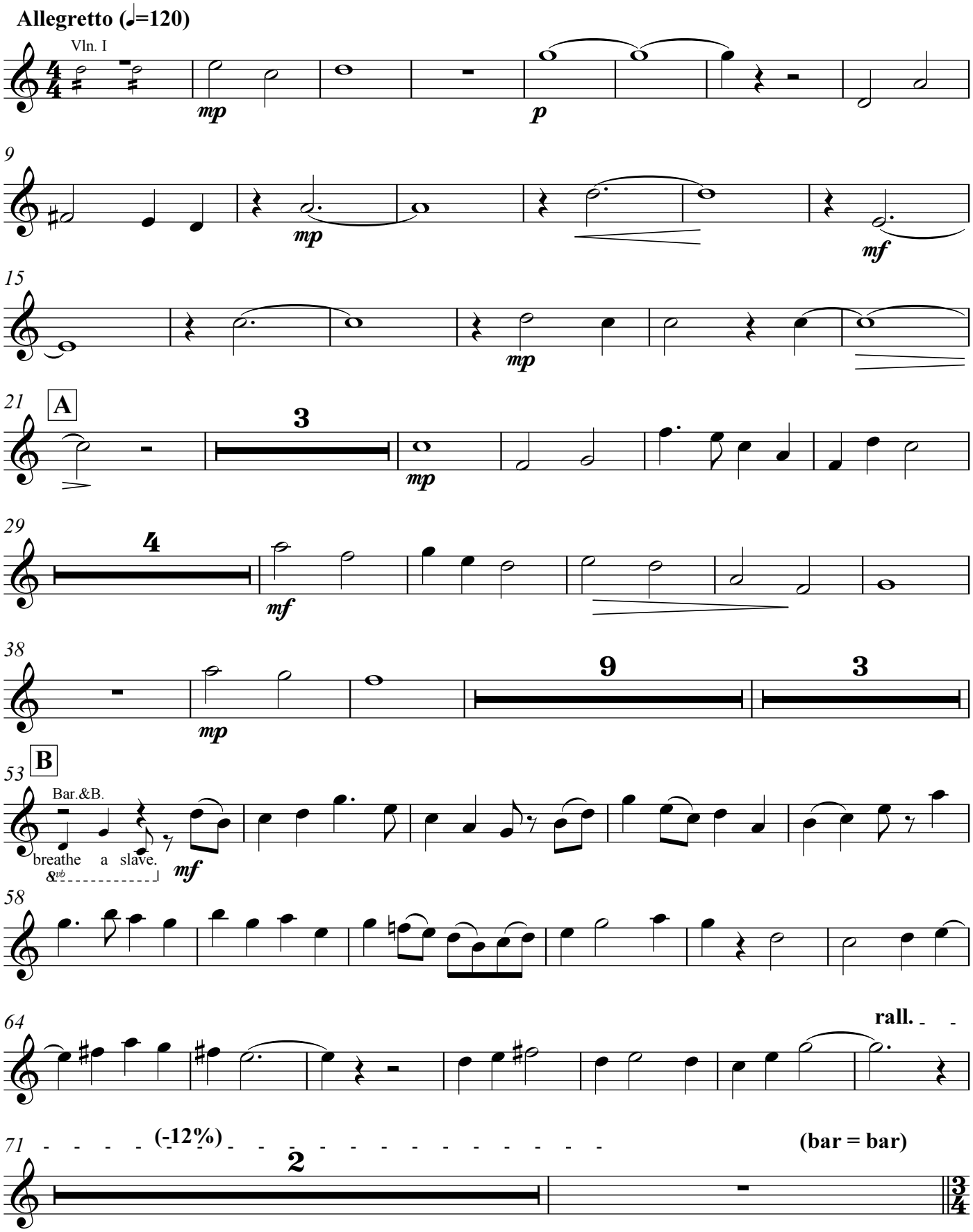
Continental Divide: 5. South Pass

Jesse Hutchinson, Jr. (1813-53: Ho! for California);
Peter Bird (Oregon);
William Clayton (1814-79: All is Well)

Nathan Barker (fl. 1849: Ho! for California);
PETER BIRD (Oregon, All is Well)



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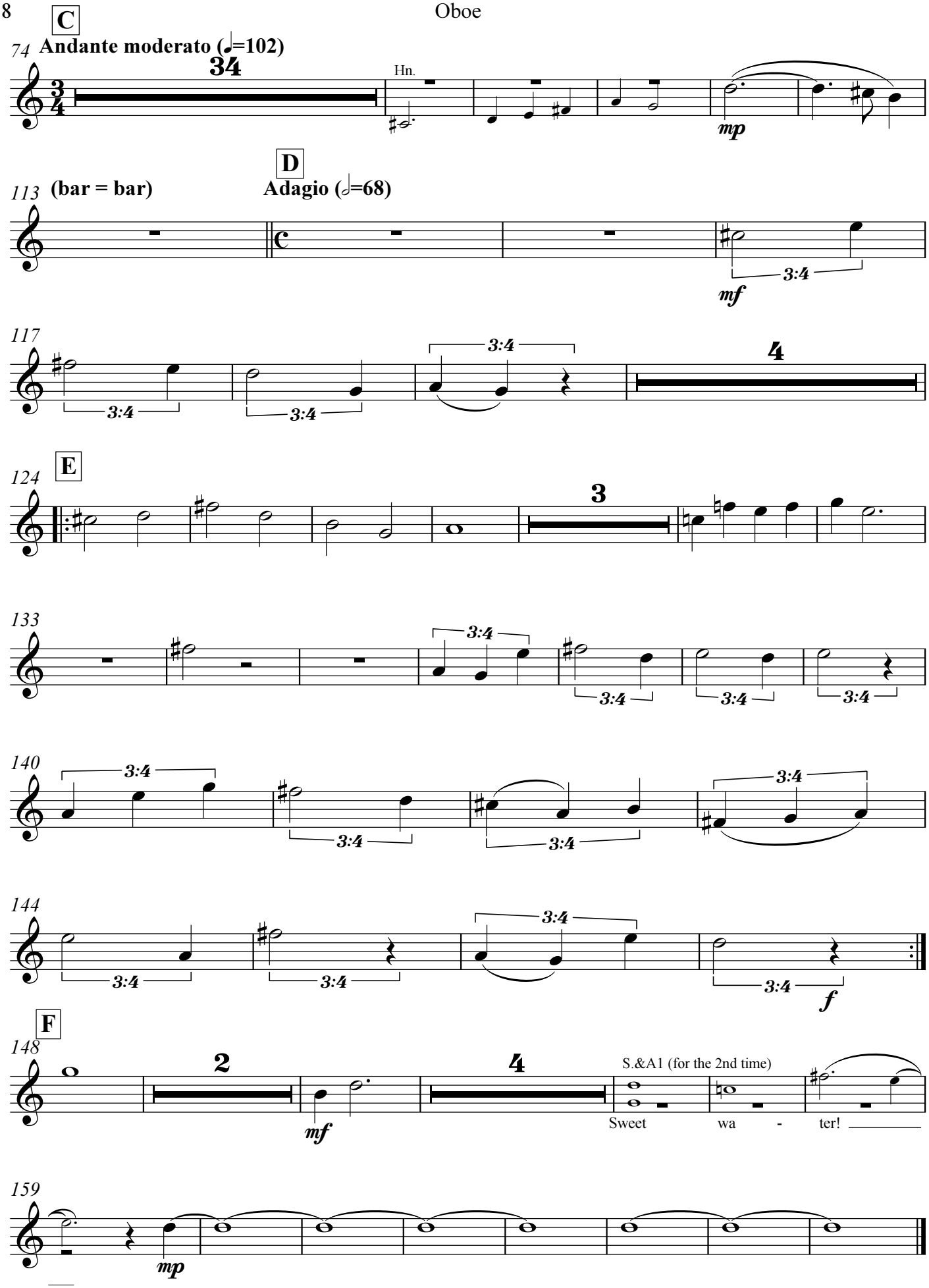
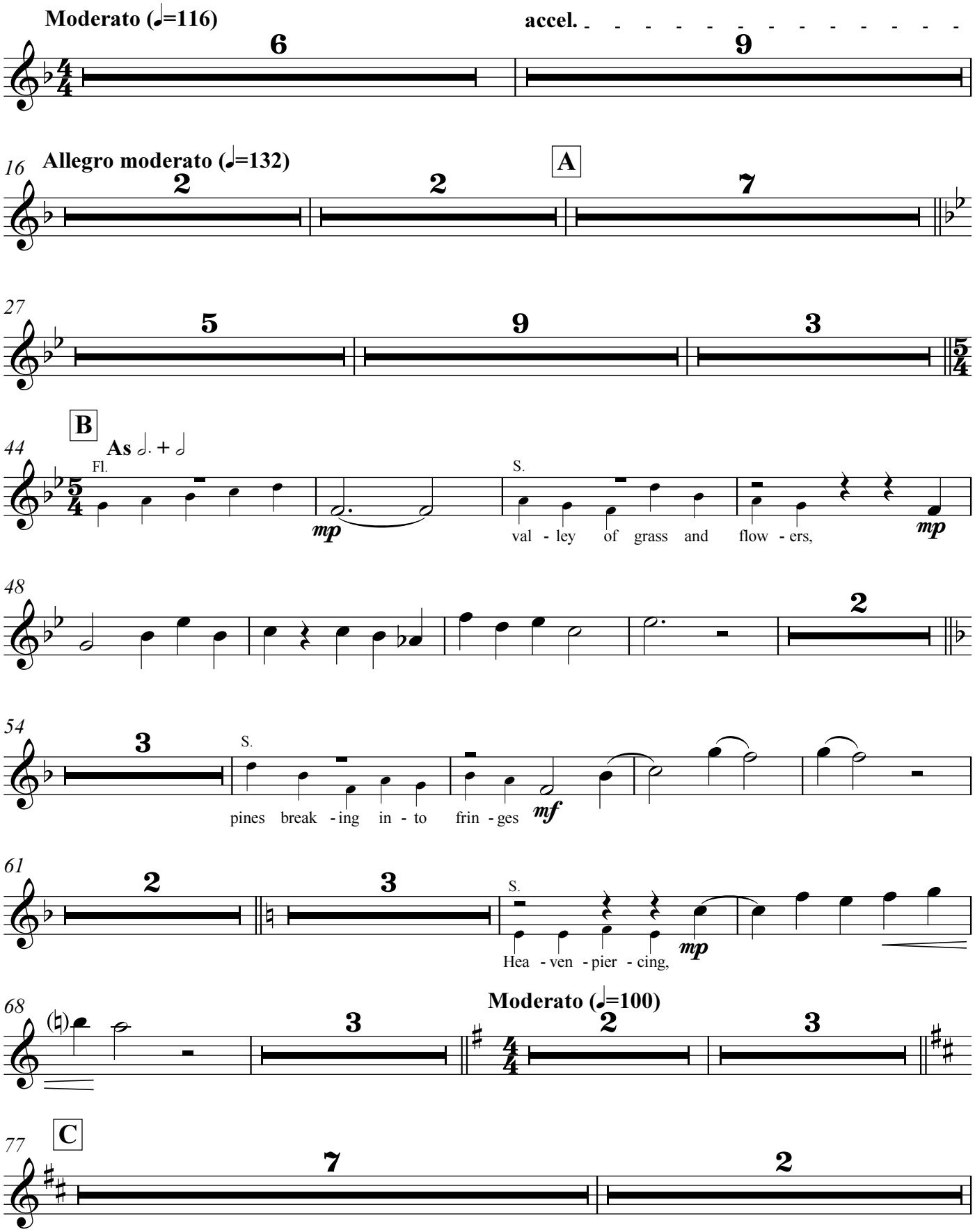

C
74 Andante moderato (♩=102)
34
Hn.
mp
D
113 (bar = bar)
Adagio (𝅗𝅥=68)
mf
3:4
117
4
E
124
3
133
140
144
f
F
148
2
4
S.&A1 (for the 2nd time)
Sweet wa - ter!
159
mp

To ILB, world traveller, writer, natural historian, & Fellow RGS

Continental Divide: 6. Isabella Bird

Isabella Lucy Bird (1831-1904)

PETER BIRD



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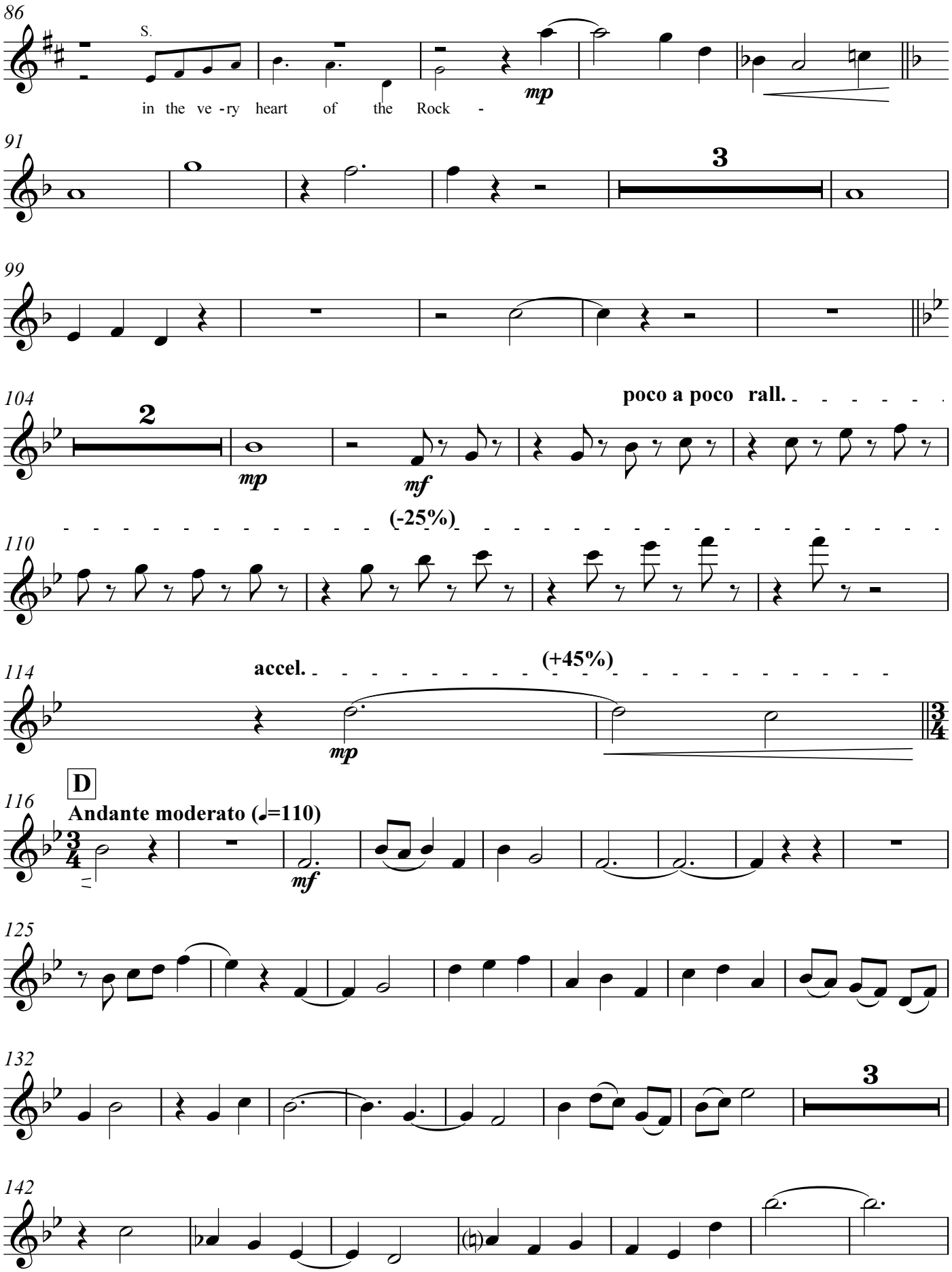
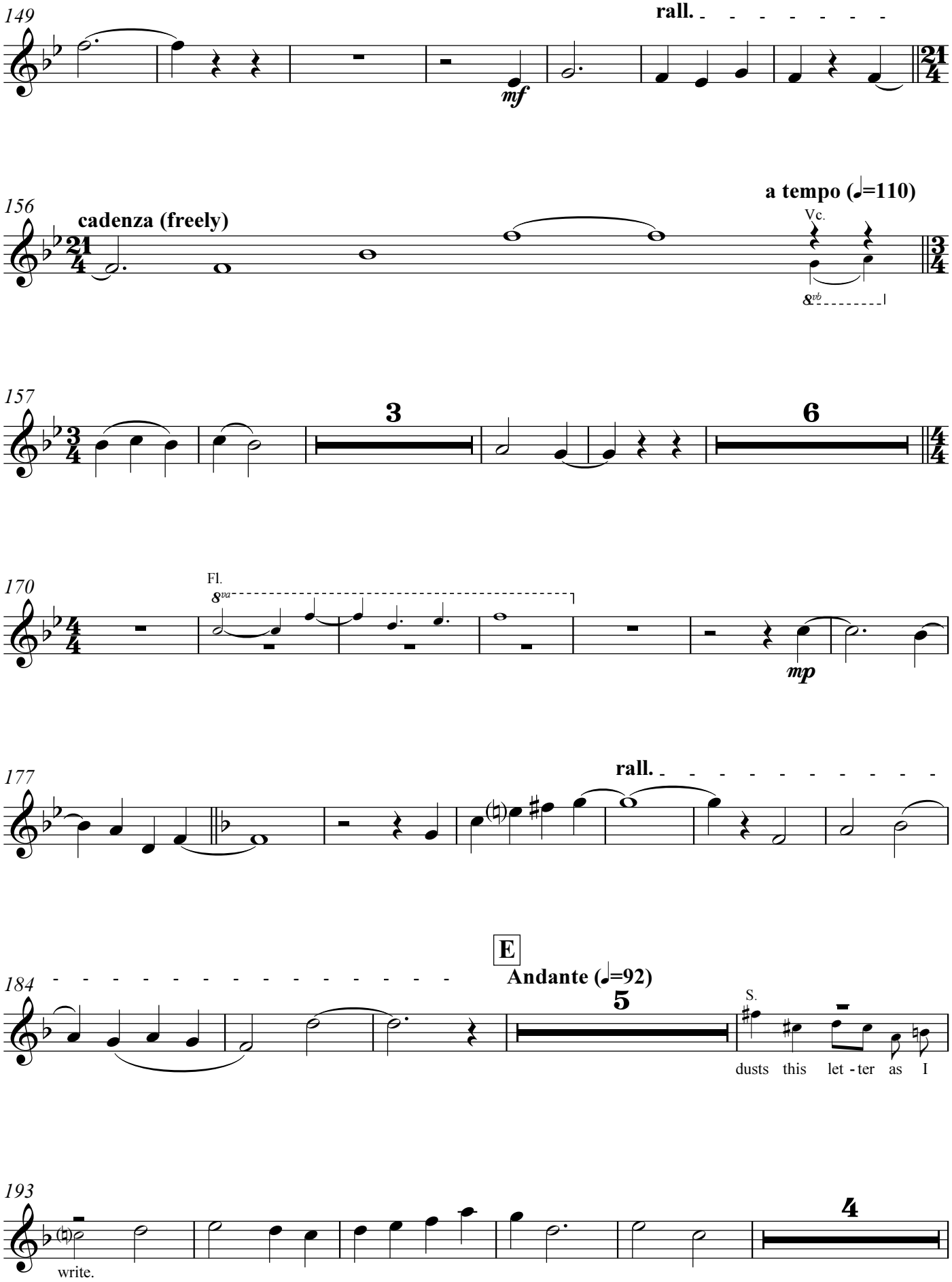
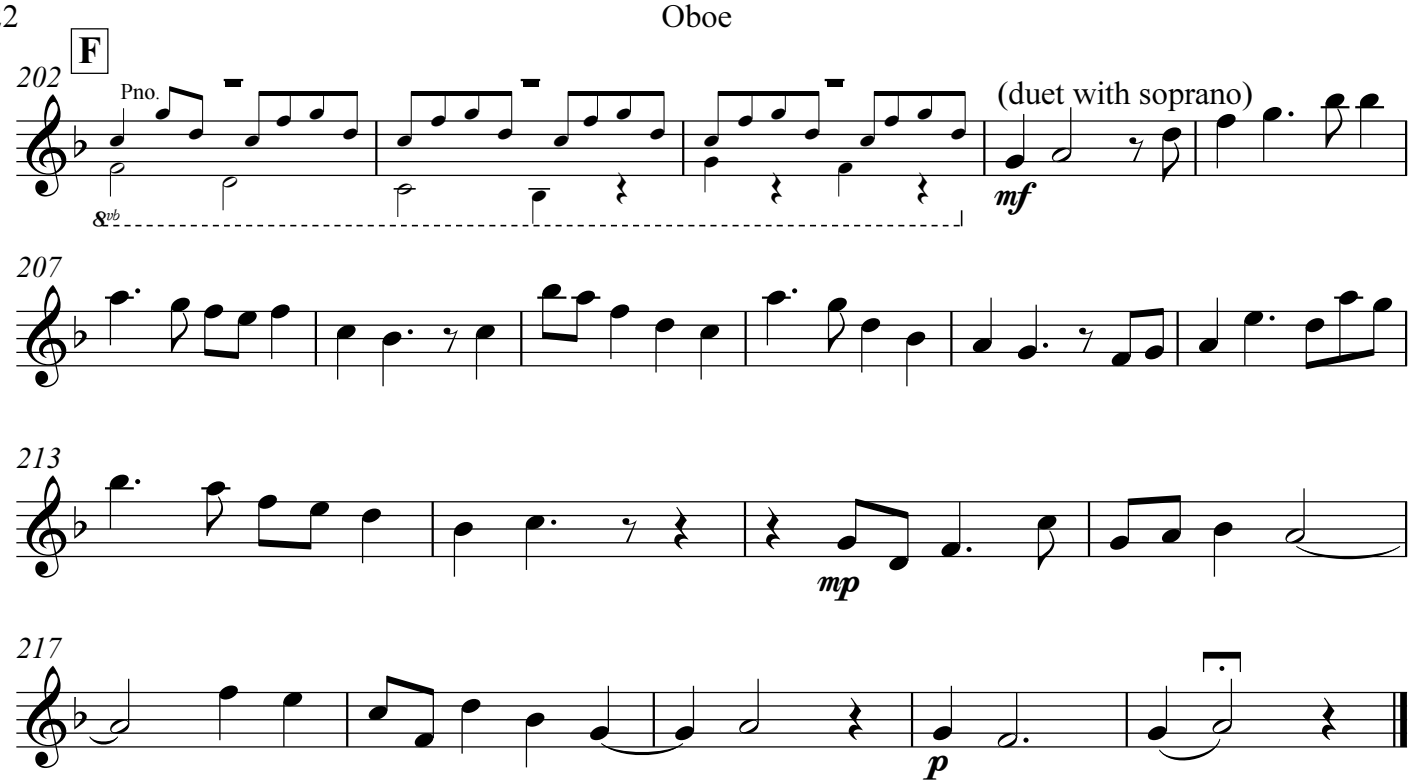

86
S.
in the ve - ry heart of the Rock -
mp
91
3
99
104
poco a poco rall.
2
mp
mf
(-25%)
110
114
accel.
(+45%)
mp
D
116
Andante moderato (♩=110)
mf
125
132
3
142


149
rall.
mf
156
cadenza (freely)
a tempo (♩=110)
Vc.
157
3
6
170
Fl.
mp
177
rall.
E
Andante (♩=92)
184
5
S.
dusts this let - ter as I
193
4
write.

Continental Divide: 6. Isabella Bird

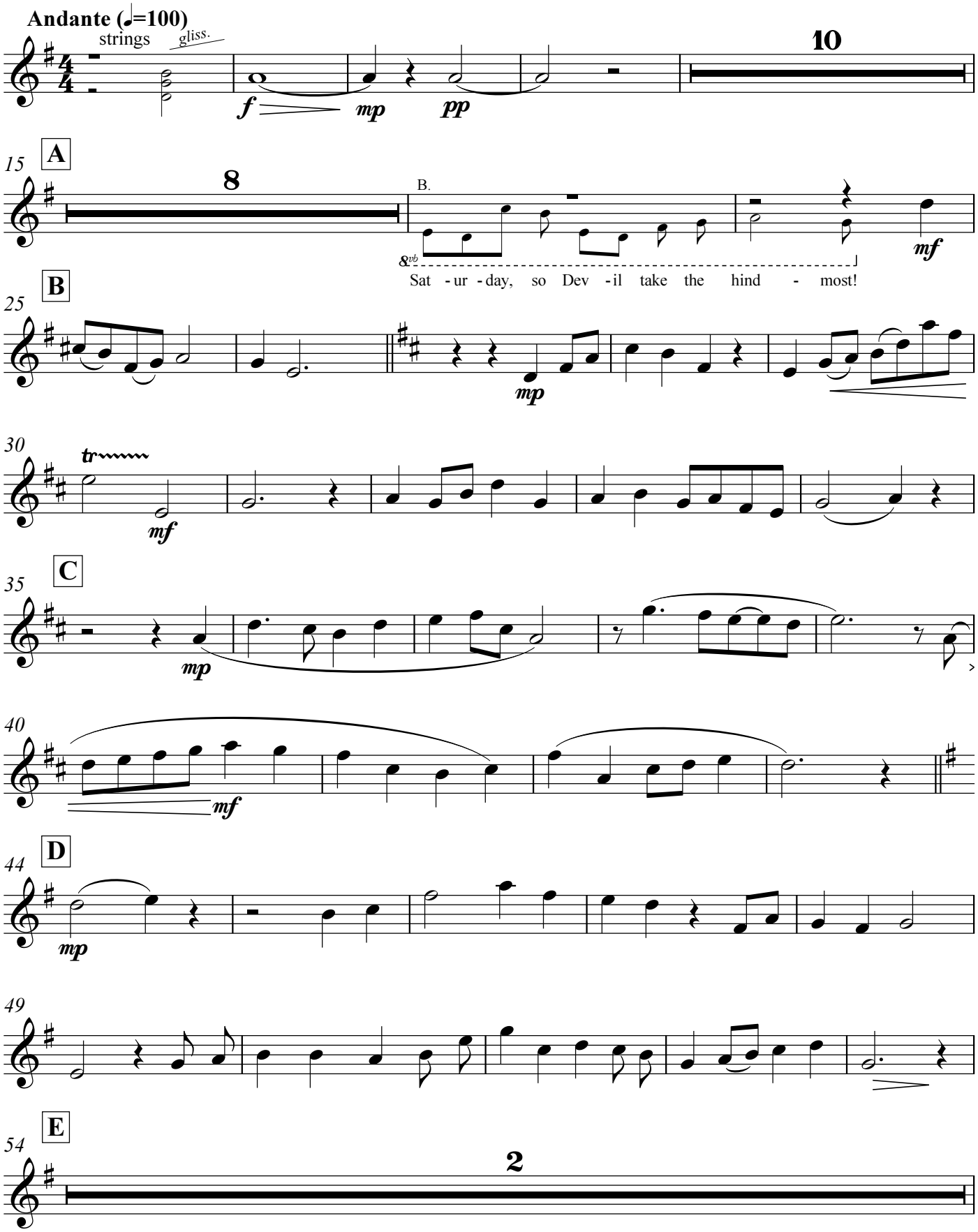
Oboe



Continental Divide: 7. Silverton

Peter Bird & traditional

PETER BIRD & traditional



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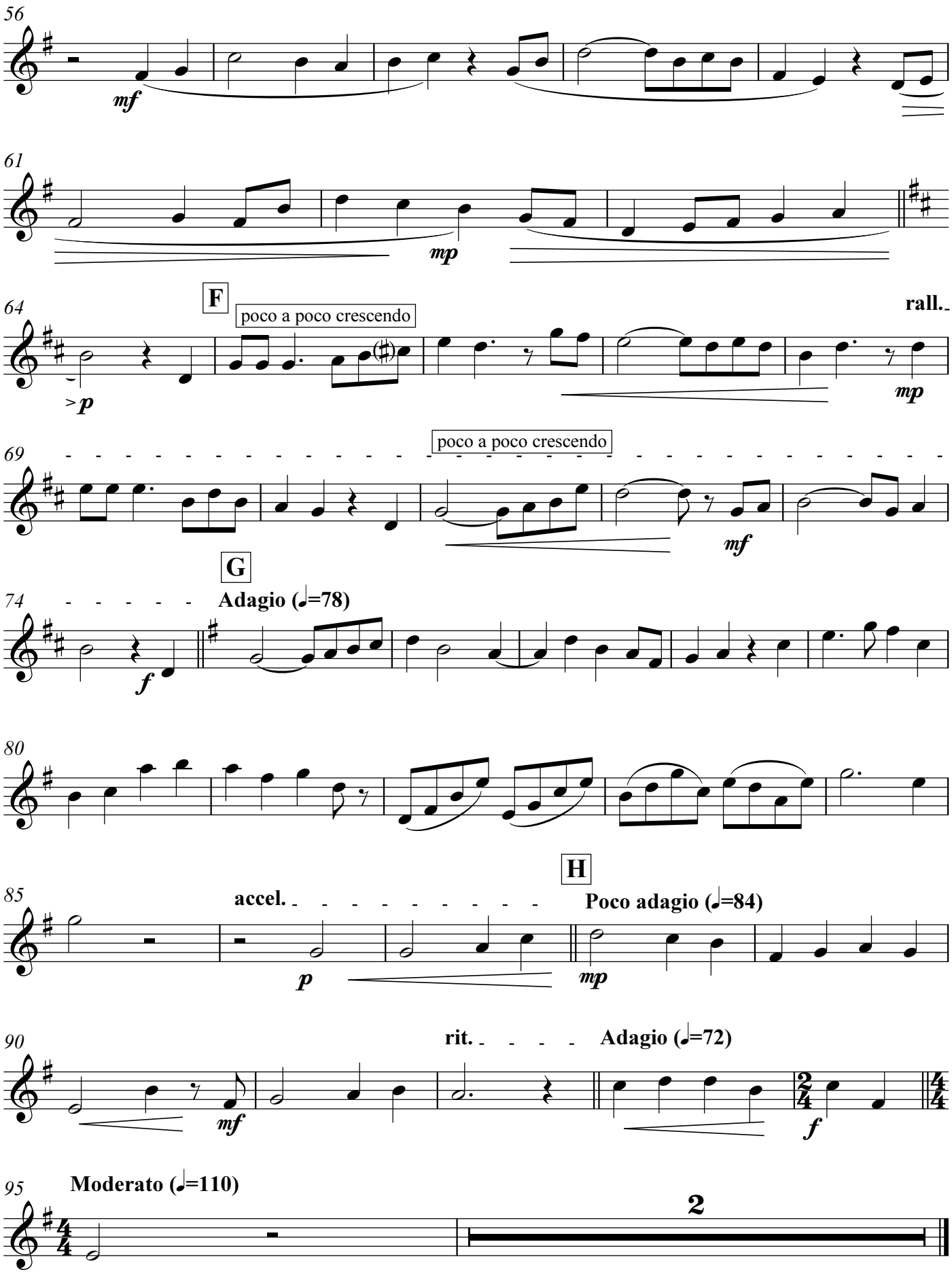
56
mf
61
mp
F
64
poco a poco crescendo
rall.
>p
mp
69
poco a poco crescendo
mf
G
74
Adagio (♩=78)
f
80
H
85
accel.
Poco adagio (♩=84)
p
mp
90
rit.
Adagio (♩=72)
mf
f
95
Moderato (♩=110)
2

To George Bird Grinnell

Continental Divide: 8. Logan Pass

Peter Bird

PETER BIRD

Moderato (♩=120)

Timpani

f

8

f *mf*

14

f *mf*

20

4

mf

29

36

A

p

43 **rall.**

2

mp *f*

50 **a tempo (♩=120)**

mf *p*

55

7

p *p* *p*

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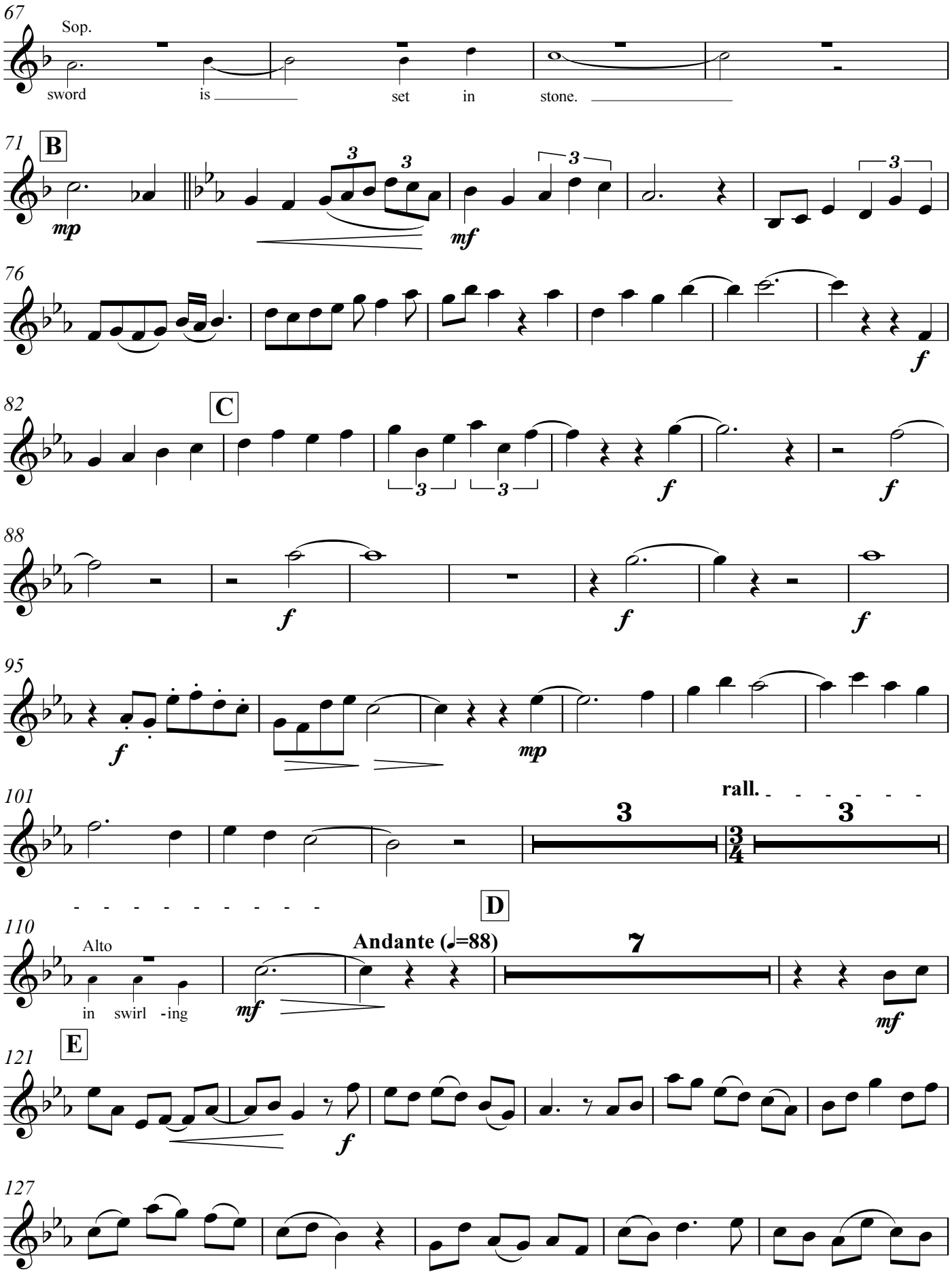
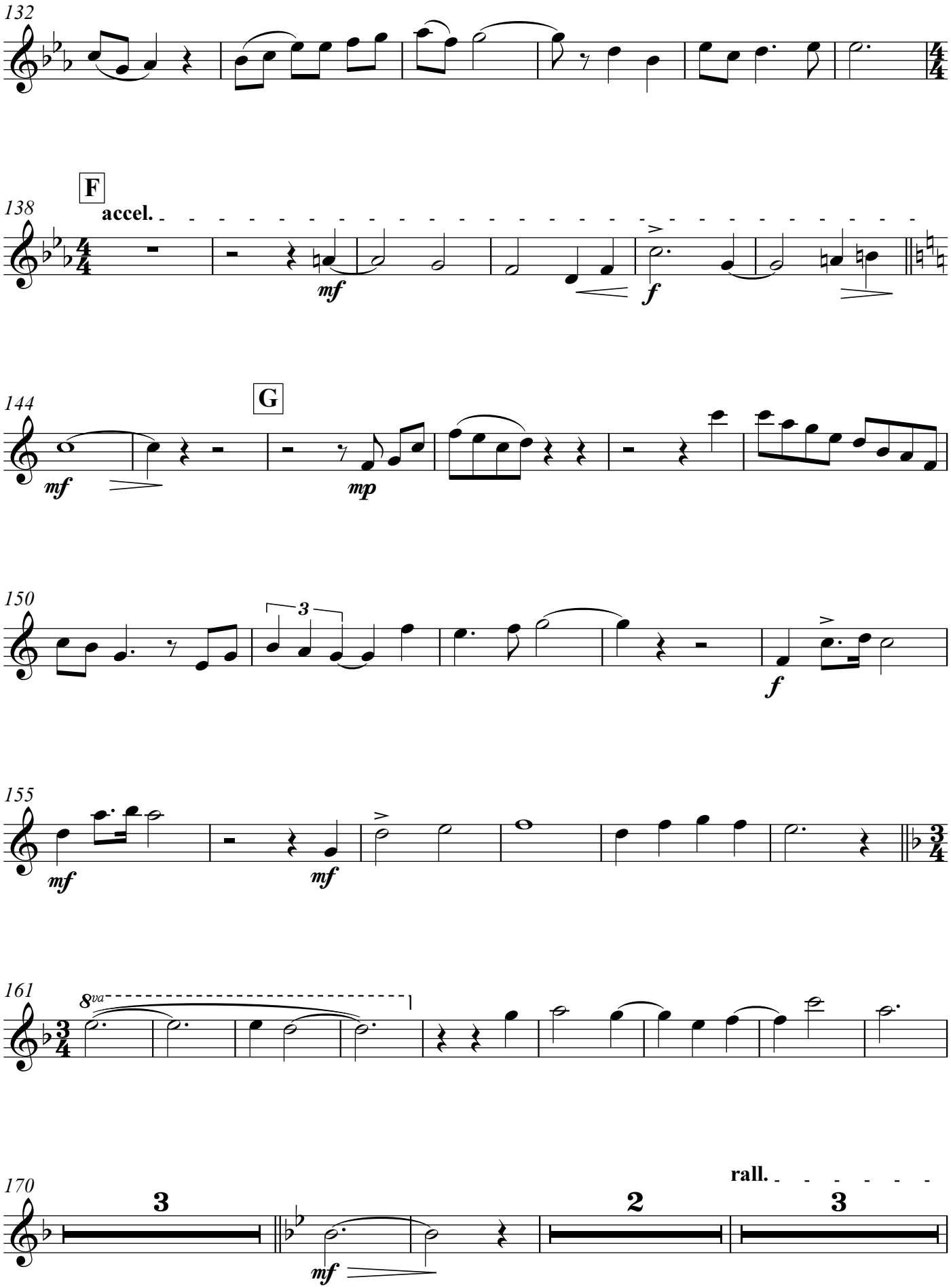
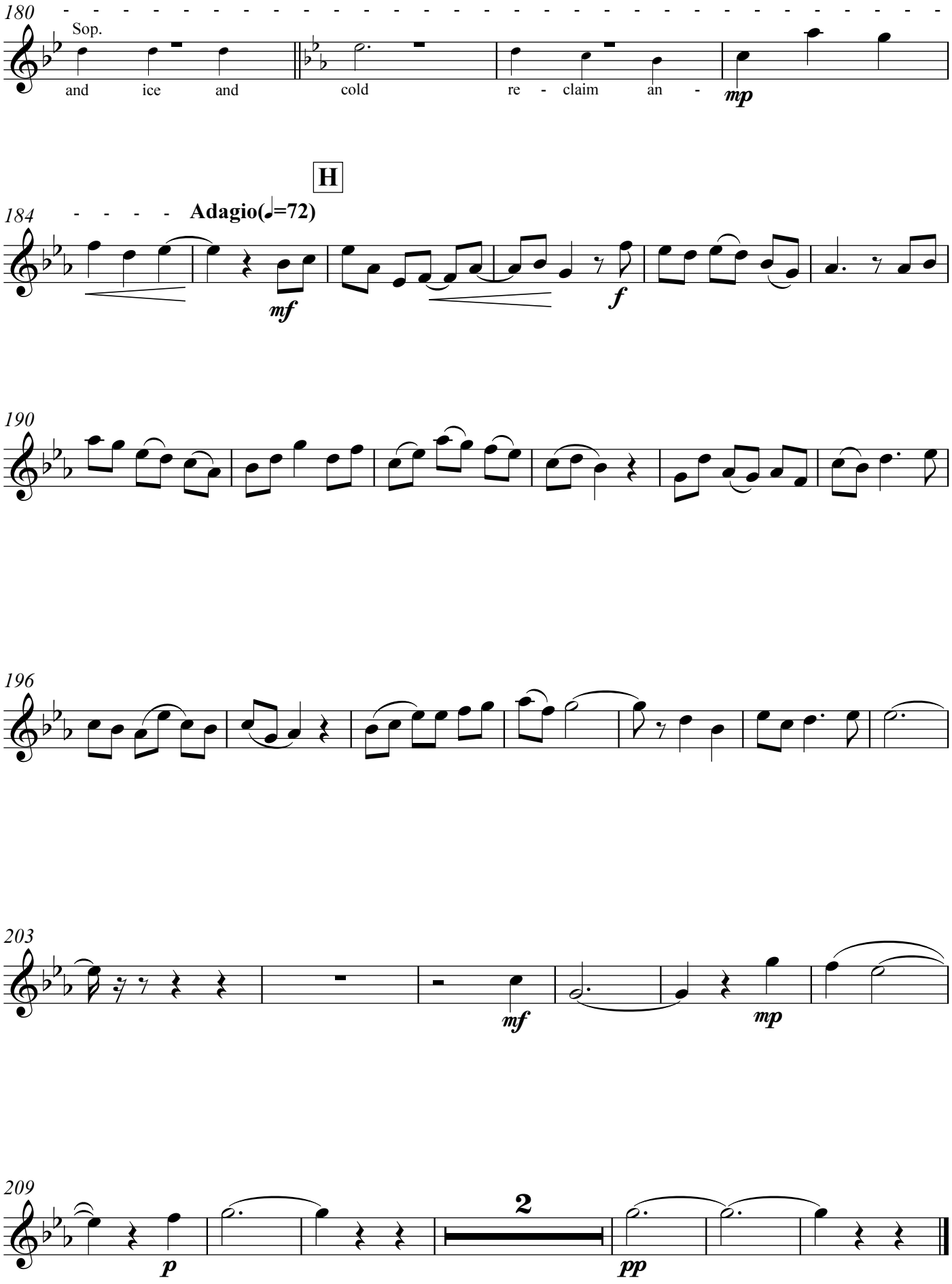

67
Sop.
sword is set in stone.
71
B
mp
mf
76
f
82
C
f
f
88
f
f
f
95
f
mp
101
rall.
3
3
3/4
D
110
Alto
in swirl -ing
Andante (♩=88)
7
mf
mf
E
121
f
127


132
F
138
accel.
mf
f
144
G
mf
mp
150
3
f
155
mf
mf
161
8va
170
3
mf
rall.
2
3


180
Sop.
and ice and cold re - claim an -
mp
H
184
Adagio(♩=72)
mf
f
190
196
203
mf
mp
209
p
2
pp