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DIERDRE: A SOAP OPERA, FOR SINGERS, DANCERS, PLAYERS, ELECTRONIC SOUNDS AND PROJECTED IMAGES

by

James Schwall

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Music
School of Music

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
April 1991

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DIERDRE: A SOAP OPERA, FOR SINGERS, DANCERS, PLAYERS, ELECTRONIC SOUNDS AND PROJECTED IMAGES

James Schwall, M.M.

Western Michigan University, 1991

Dierdre: A Soap Opera is a chamber opera in one act, with dance, and takes about an hour to perform. There are six singing parts which may be performed by five singers. Two parts are for sopranos or mezzos, two for baritone, and one is designated tenor. All have fairly easy ranges. The piece also requires four percussionists and a pianist. Several interludes, called "breaks," are intended for modern dance. One of these breaks and the overture are for taped electronic music, realized by the composer. The libretto, also by the composer, involves the employees and regulars at a somewhat up-scale night club. The format is taken from a television soap opera. The plot advances during program "segments" which usually involve only the singers and piano. During "breaks," dancers perform with the percussion ensemble or with the taped music.

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This work is respectfully dedicated to Ramon Zupko, without whom I may never have realized that, while anyone can string notes together when the muse hovers near by, a composer must learn to work alone.

Jim Schwall

March, 1991

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Dierdre: A soap opera, for singers, dancers, players, electronic sounds and projected images. [Original opera]

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Western Michigan University, 1991

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SCENARIO

Virtually all of the action of *Dierdre: A Soap Opera* takes place inside a somewhat up-scale night club called "Storyville" which features jazz and probably has a long list of imported beers and wines. The characters include Al, a baritone, the owner of the club and, at forty-something, the oldest member of the ensemble. His employees include his house pianist and bar-room philosopher Clay, a tenor, who should be almost Al's age. Another employee, Dawn, a soprano or mezzo, the youngest member of the cast, is a part-time bartender while attending college. Regular customers include television news anchor-woman Kelley Ackerman, also a soprano or mezzo, who's about Clay's age and, in spite of her considerable experience, expects to be replaced at any time by some fresh-faced college communications major. Gavin VanAcker and his partner in an advertising agency, Walsh, can both be played by the same singer, a baritone. Gavin is a somewhat pathetic character, and Walsh is the story's self-styled ladies' man. Gavin's wife, Dierdre, never appears.

A suggested stage set-up would have the piano stage-right and fairly far down-stage so the area designated as "back bar" can consist of the area near the piano. Characters in scenes in this area could lean on and stand around the piano, and Clay might even sit on the edge of the piano bench. The percussion ensemble may be arranged in a semi-circle from the piano to stage left. Down-stage center are two bar segments, referred to as "front bar" and "middle bar," with the front bar being the section toward stage

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left. If the down-stage ends of these segments almost meet and they angle toward the rear corners, with the customer side facing the audience, a character behind the bar in one scene can simply turn around to be in the other area. The scene in front of Gavin's house and Kelley's telephone call to Clay can be played down-stage, stage-left. For the "Title Music" singers can be placed anywhere that is convenient. Changes of scene are suggested by slides projected behind the singers and players, and dance movements take place down-stage of everything.

The format is taken from a television soap opera. The plot advances during program "segments." With the exception of the "Title Music," these involve only the singers and piano. During "breaks," which, in T. V. jargon include commercials, newsbreaks, station breaks, and all other non-program material, dancers perform with the percussion ensemble, except in Break III, which uses taped electronic music. The Title Music, which happens twice, involves all live performers. There is also an overture, which consists of taped electronic music, and during which performers find their places and house lights slowly fade to black as the first slide comes up behind the stage.

Dierdre is intended to be seamless. Segments always end with held tones in the piano, and percussion breaks always end with ringing metalophones. The overture ends, and Break III begins and ends, with a wind-like sound, which fades in and out. This wind-sound is also used after the last sound dies out as the lights fade to black and the last slide comes up. The piece ends in silence and darkness, except for the final slide.

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The entire piece takes about an hour to perform. The following is a scene-by-scene listing of performers involved with approximate timings:

Overture (terminal break): taped electronic sounds. (4+ minutes)

Segment I, Scene 1: Dawn, Walsh, piano; middle bar.

- Scene 2: Al, Kelley, piano; front bar.

- Title Music: All singers, dancers, piano, percussion. (5 min.)

Break I: Dancers, percussion. (6 1/2 min.)

Segment II, Scene 1: Dawn, Walsh, piano; middle bar.

- Scene 2: Dawn, piano, then Clay; middle bar.

- Scene 3: Al, Kelley, piano; front bar.

- Scene 4: Dawn, Clay, Al, piano, then Kelley; front bar. (5 min.)

Break II: dancers, percussion. (1 min.)

Segment III, Scene 1: Kelley, Gavin, piano; in front of Gavin's house (stage left).

- Scene 2: Clay, Al, piano; back bar.

- Scene 3: Dawn, then Kelley, piano; middle bar. (6 min.)

Break III: Dancers, taped music. (5+ min.)

Segment IV, Scene 1: Kelley, Clay, piano; middle bar.

- Scene 2: Dawn, Al, piano; front bar.

- Scene 3: Clay, piano, then Gavin; back bar. (8 min.)

Break IV: dancers, percussion. (1 min.)

Segment V, Scene 1: Kelley Clay, piano; Kelley stage left, Clay middle bar.

- Scene 2: Dawn, Al, piano; front bar.

- Scene 3: Clay, Gavin, piano, then Dawn; back bar. (3 min.)

Break V: Dancers, percussion. (5 1/2 min.)

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Terminal Segment, Terminal Scene: Clay, Al, piano; front bar.

- Title Music: All singers, dancers, piano, percussion. (2 min.)

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NOTES TO THE PERFORMERS

To all performers:

Dierdre is intended to be a single movement. All "segments" and "breaks" should continue *attacca*.

To the pianist:

All accidentals apply throughout the measure in which they occur, but only in the octave in which they are written. "P" indicates damper pedal, "S" indicates sostenuto pedal, and a wavy line means a partial or flutter pedal.

To the singers:

Notes with "X" heads should have only an approximate pitch, as in "*sprechgesang*." Stems without heads indicate words which should be spoken, but strictly within the notated rhythms. In all sung parts, delivery of the words is paramount. Spoken parts should be done in a sing-song manner; the difference between singing and speaking should not be absolute. Pronunciation should be colloquial. Depending on the number of syllables set, Dierdre is pronounced either "dee-air-druh" or "deer-druh."

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To the percussionists:

Several special signs are used for methods of playing suspended cymbals and tam-tam. An arrow pointed down calls for the instrument to be scraped outward from the center with a triangle beater or other metal object. A triangle above the note means strike it on the edge from the side, with the stick held perpendicular to the instrument. A "Y" means to strike with a wire brush, and an upside-down "U" indicates to hit the cymbal on the bell.

The four percussionists require the following equipment:

Percussion I - chimes (tubular bells), bells (orchestra bells), suspended cymbal, timbales (2), bass drum, and mouth siren. Strikers should include wooden sticks, yarn, felt, and hard rubber mallets, brushes, metal hammer, hard rubber hammer, metal beaters (for bells), bass drum beater, and a bow.

Percussion II - xylophone, small triangle, suspended cymbal, hi-hat, woodblock, and snare drum. Strikers should include wooden sticks, yarn and hard rubber mallets, brushes, and triangle beater.

Percussion III - concert marimba, triangle, tom-toms (2), tam-tam, and police whistle. Strikers should include hard and soft yarn mallets, hard and soft rubber mallets, brushes, and a bow.

Percussion IV - 23", 26", and 29" timpani, suspended cymbal, riveted suspended cymbal, and bird whistle. Strikers should include a variety of felt and yarn mallets, wooden sticks, and brushes.

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OVERTURE

The overture consists of taped electronic sounds. From first audibility to the point at which movement has faded to a soft "wind" sound, duration is approximately four minutes. During this time the performers should find their places as the house lights very slowly fade to black and the first slide, the title slide containing the word "Dierdre," comes up on the screen behind the ensemble

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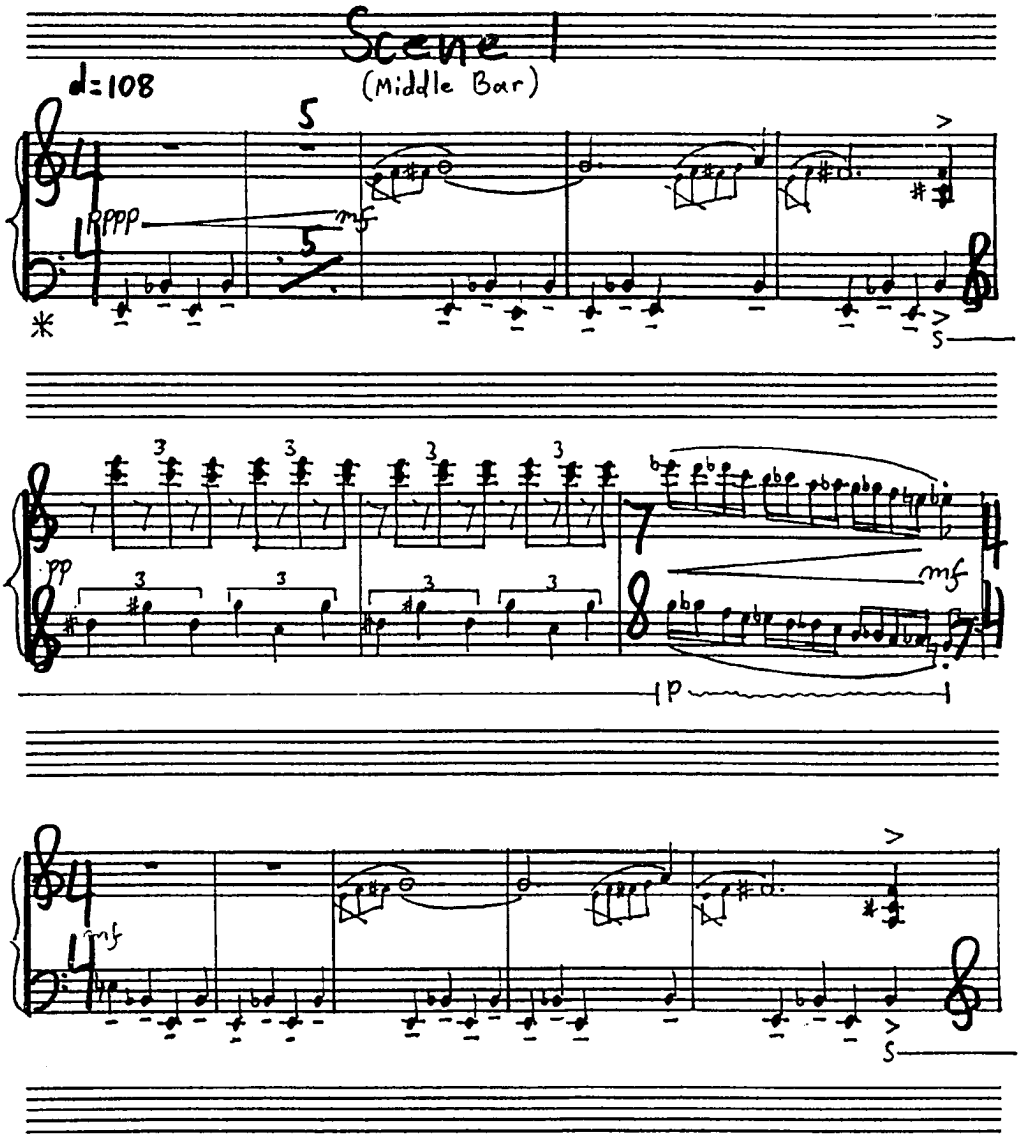
Segment I

Scene 1



* Begin when motion in taped overture stops and fades to "wind" noise.

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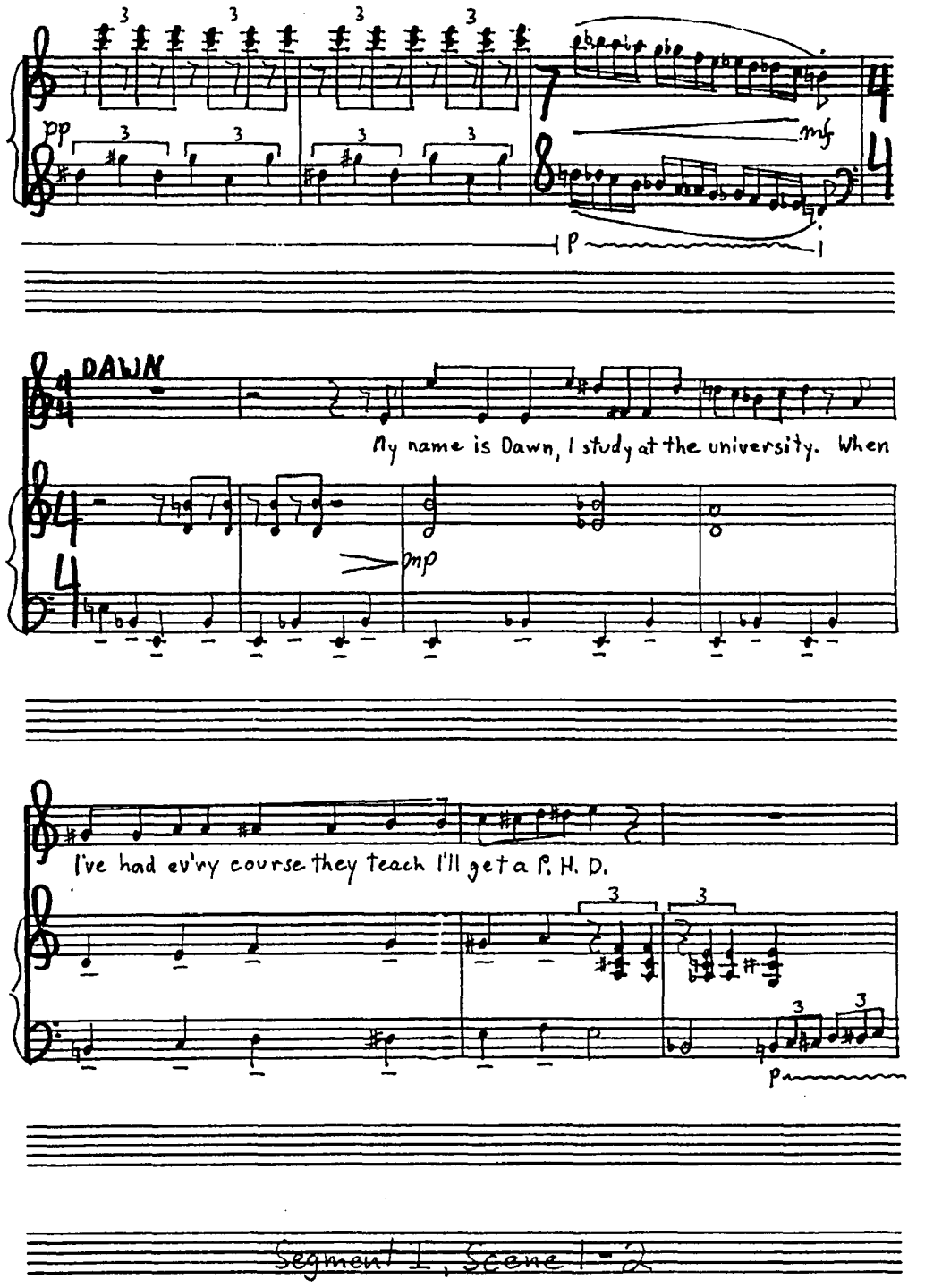

Segment I, Scene 1-2

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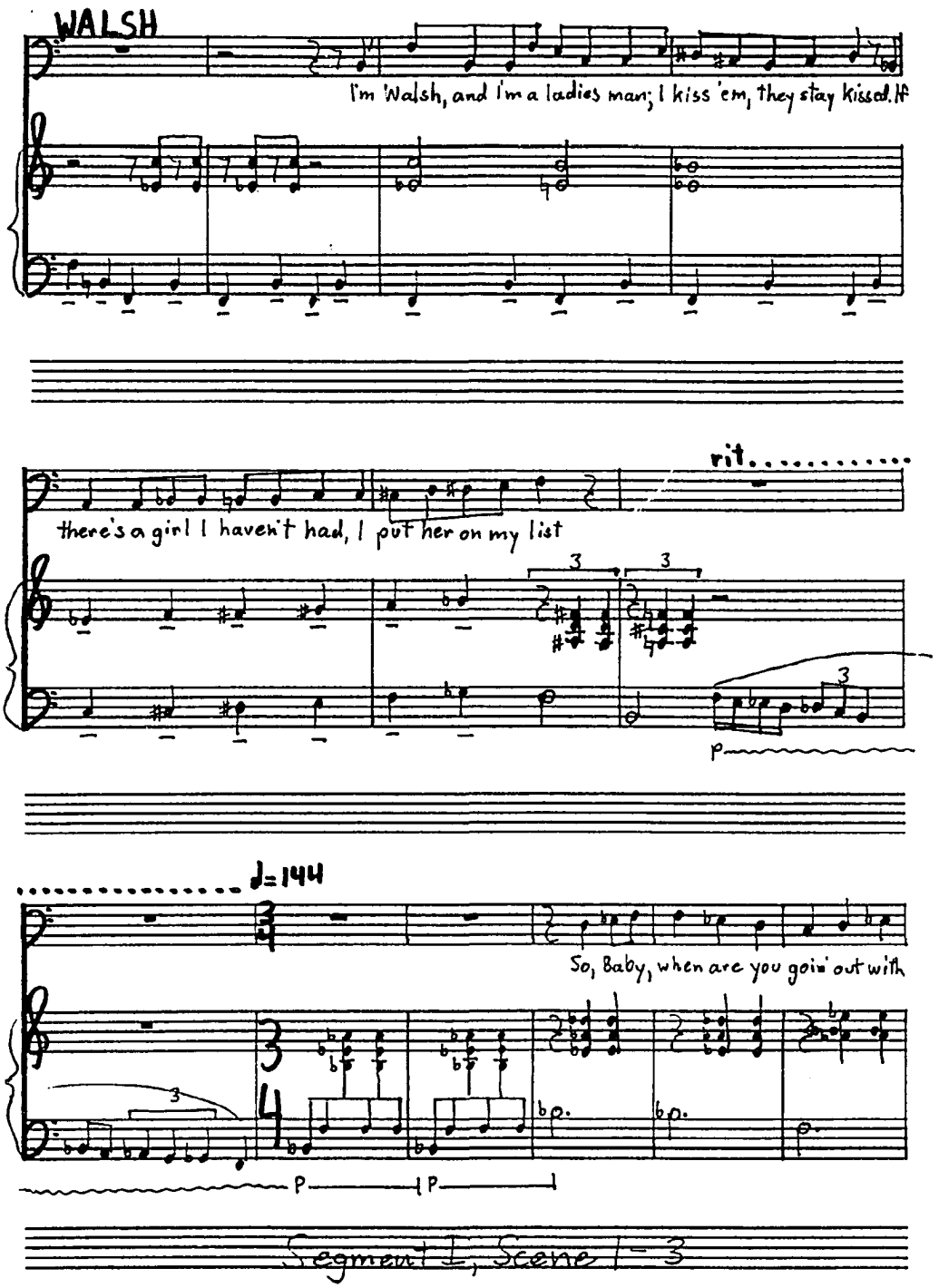

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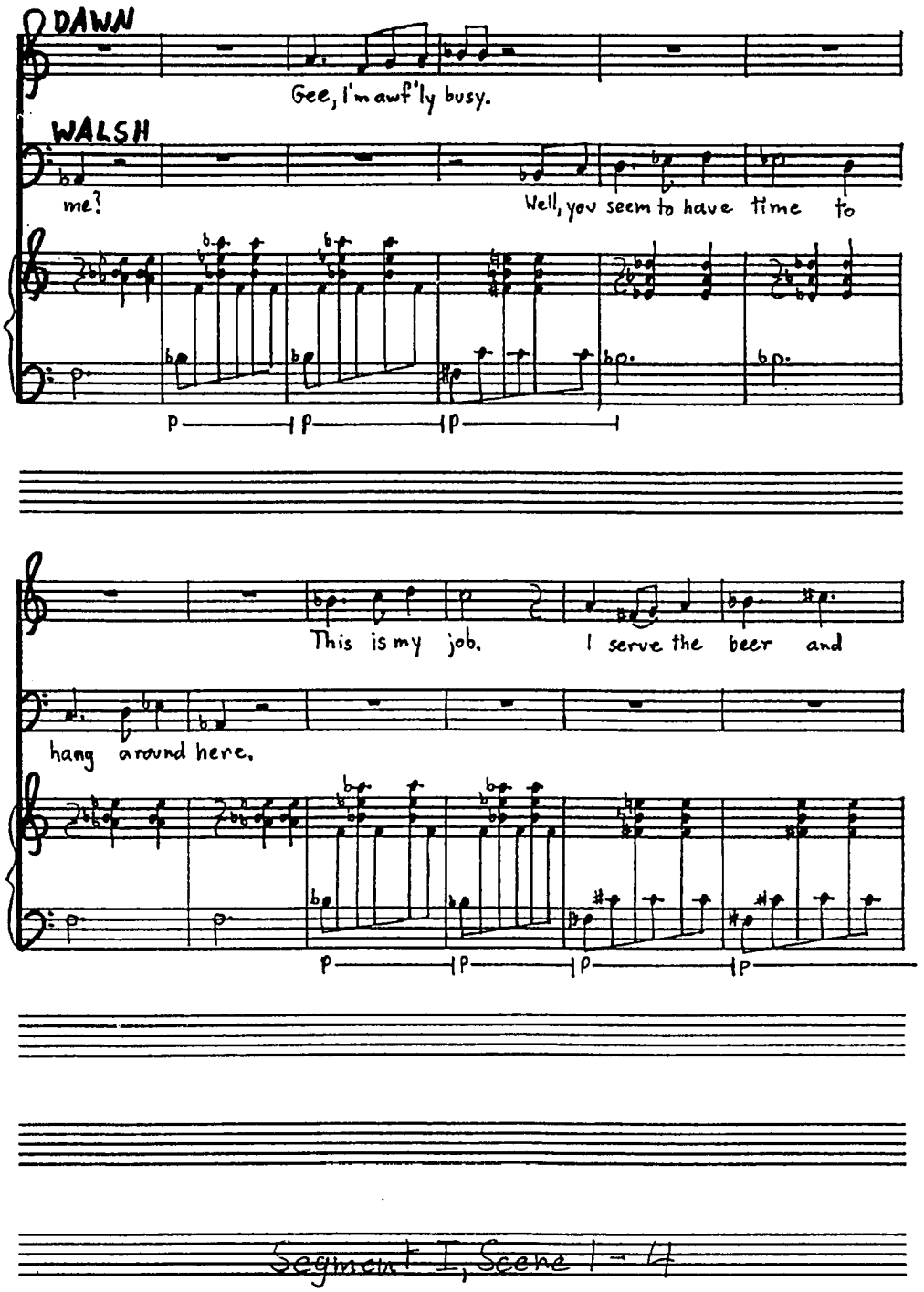

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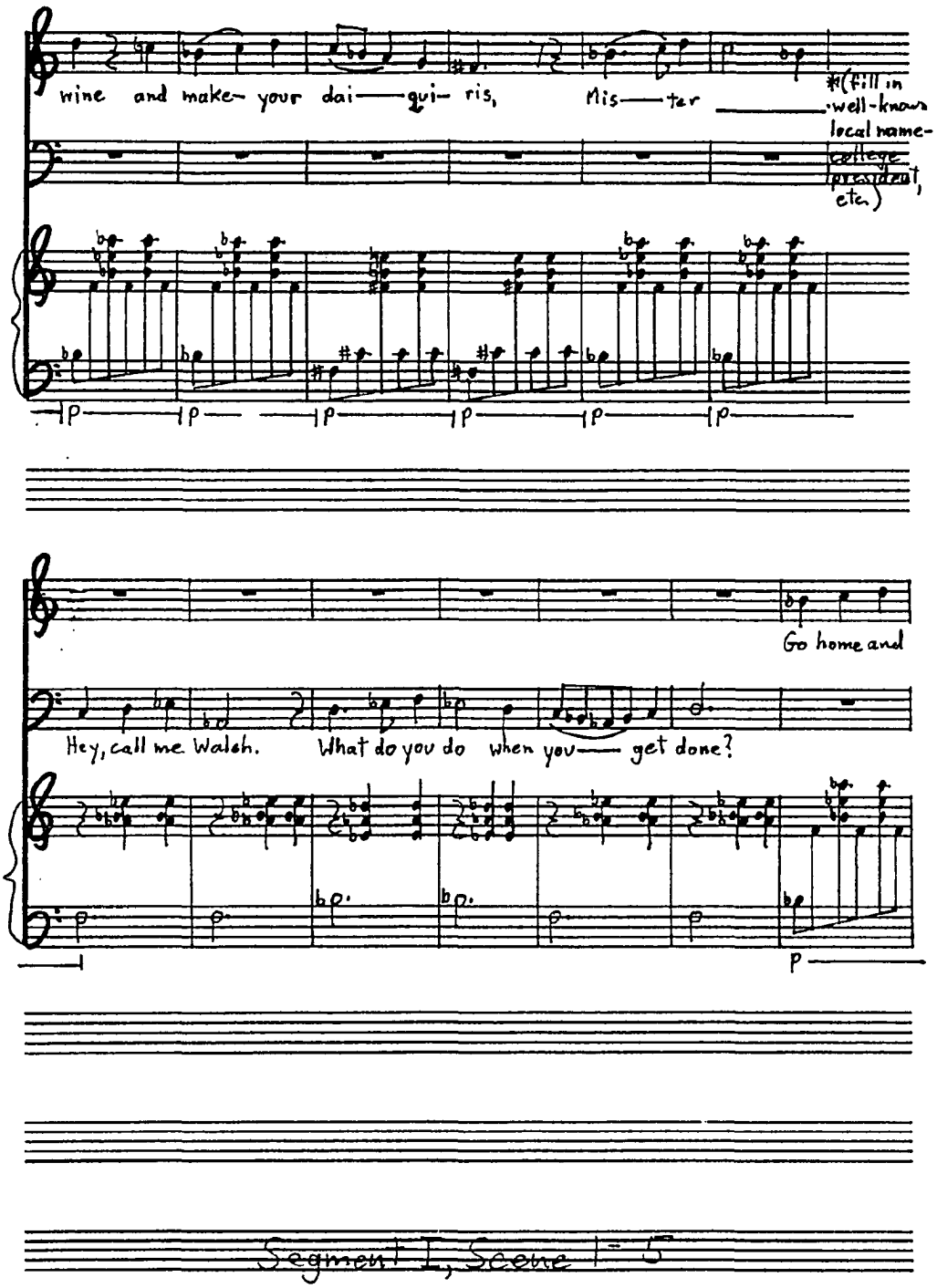

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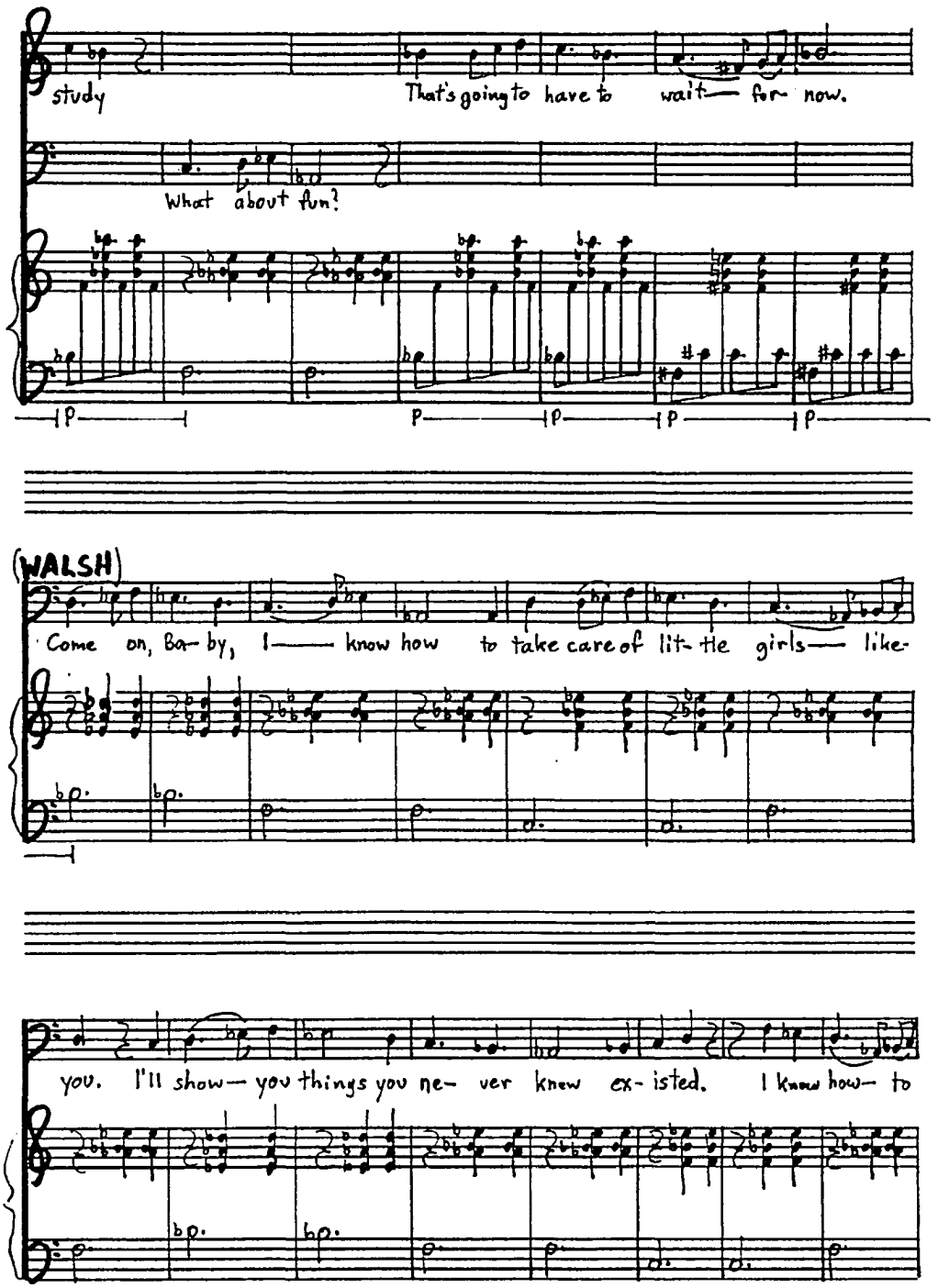

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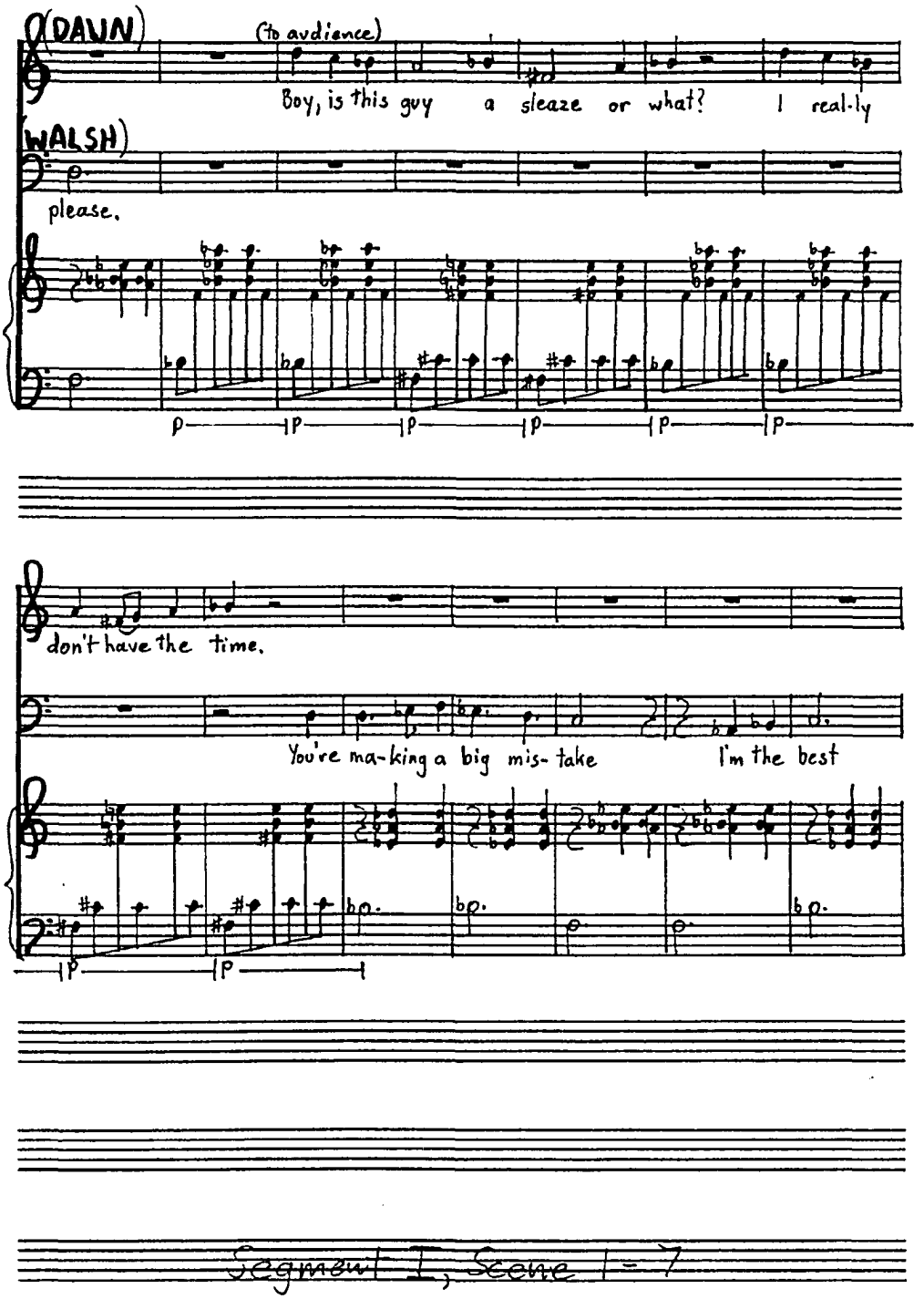

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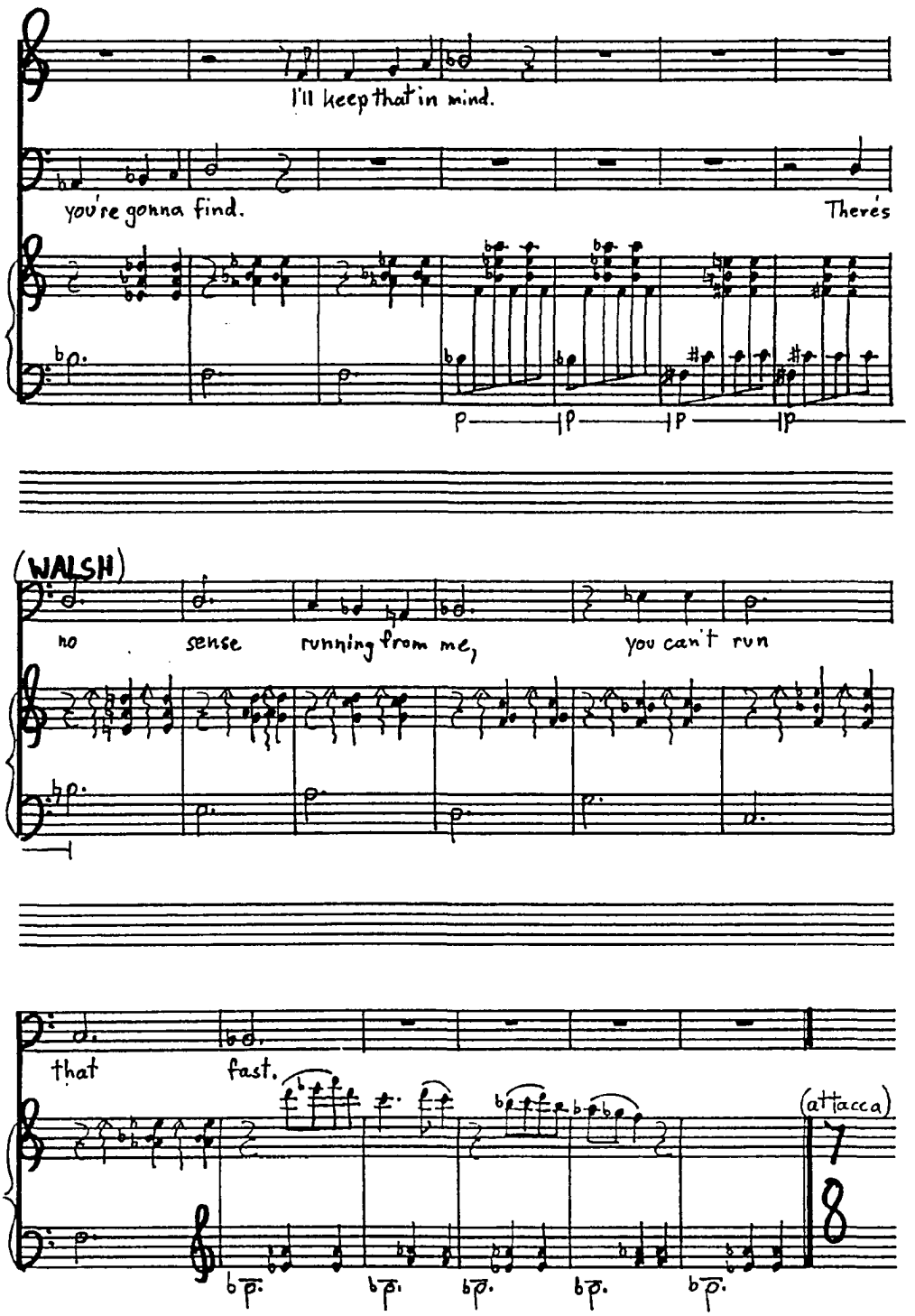

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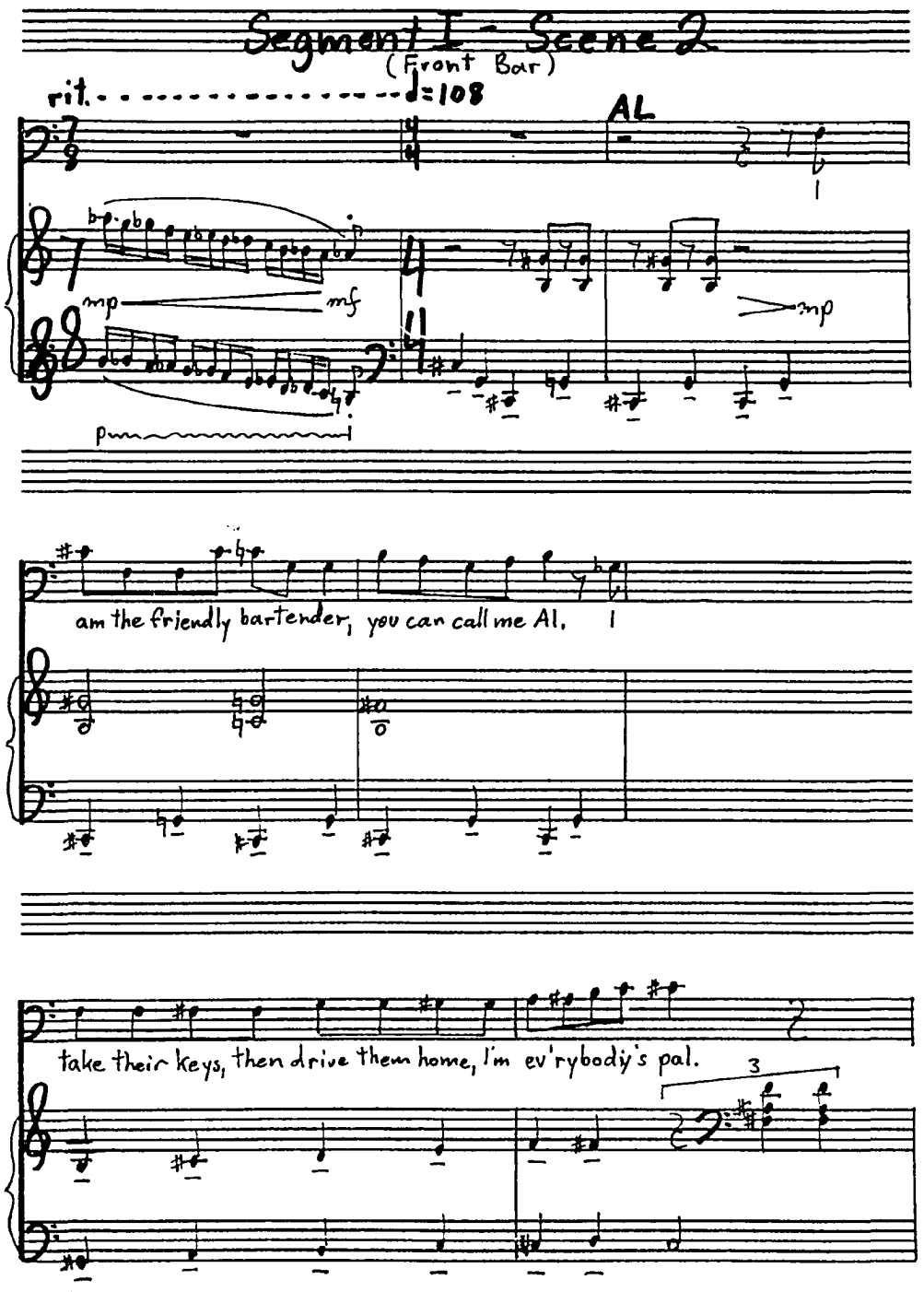

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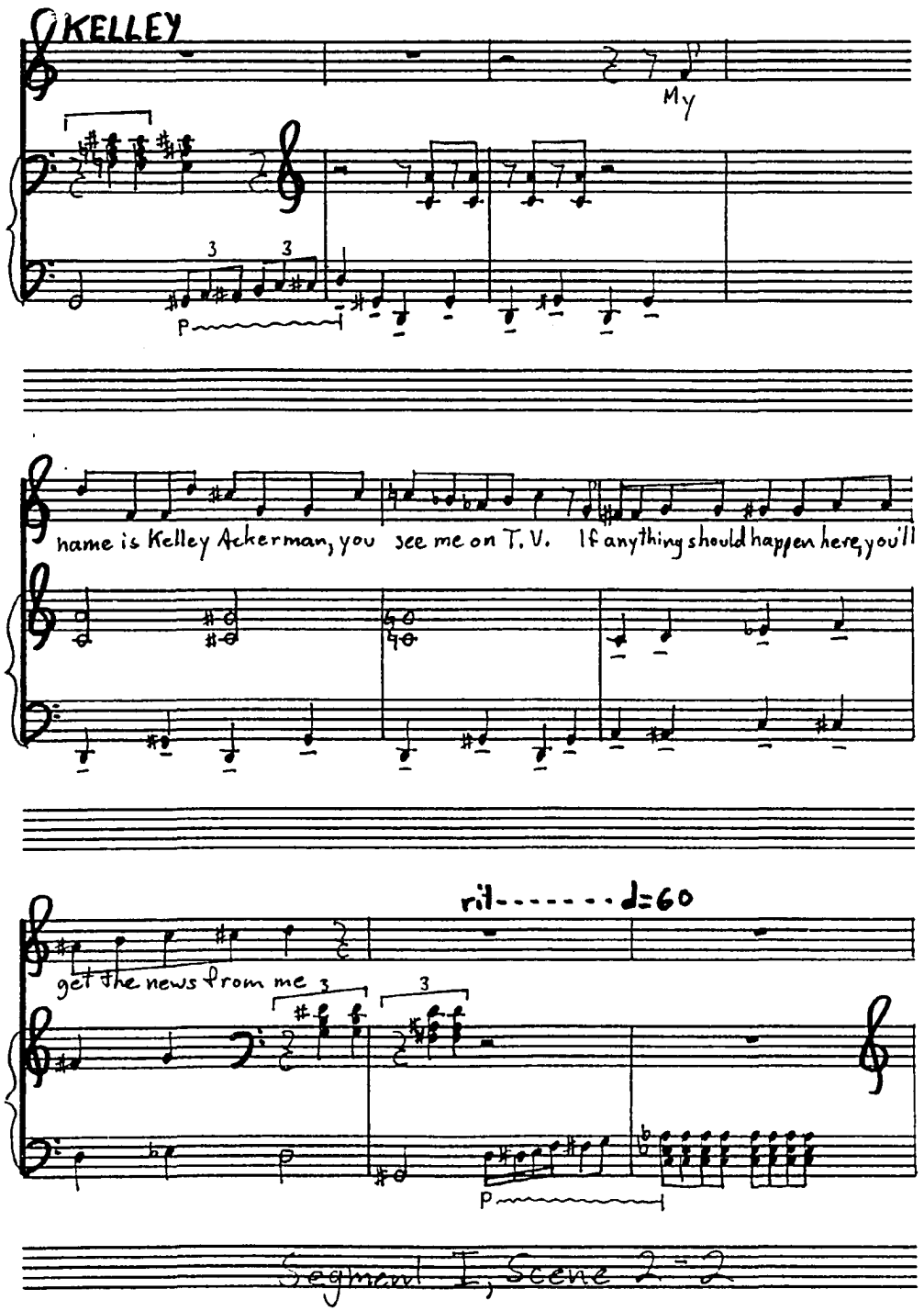

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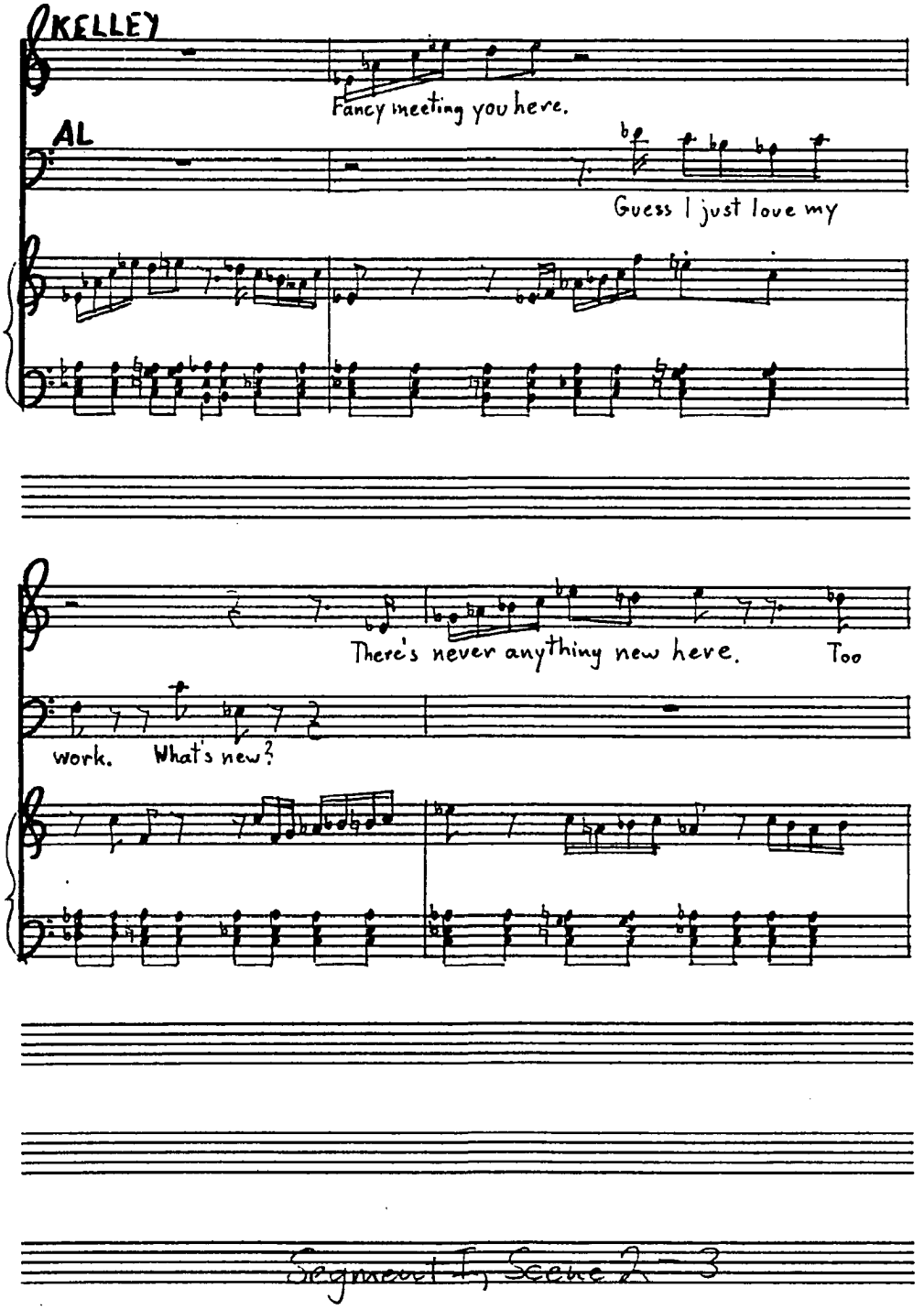

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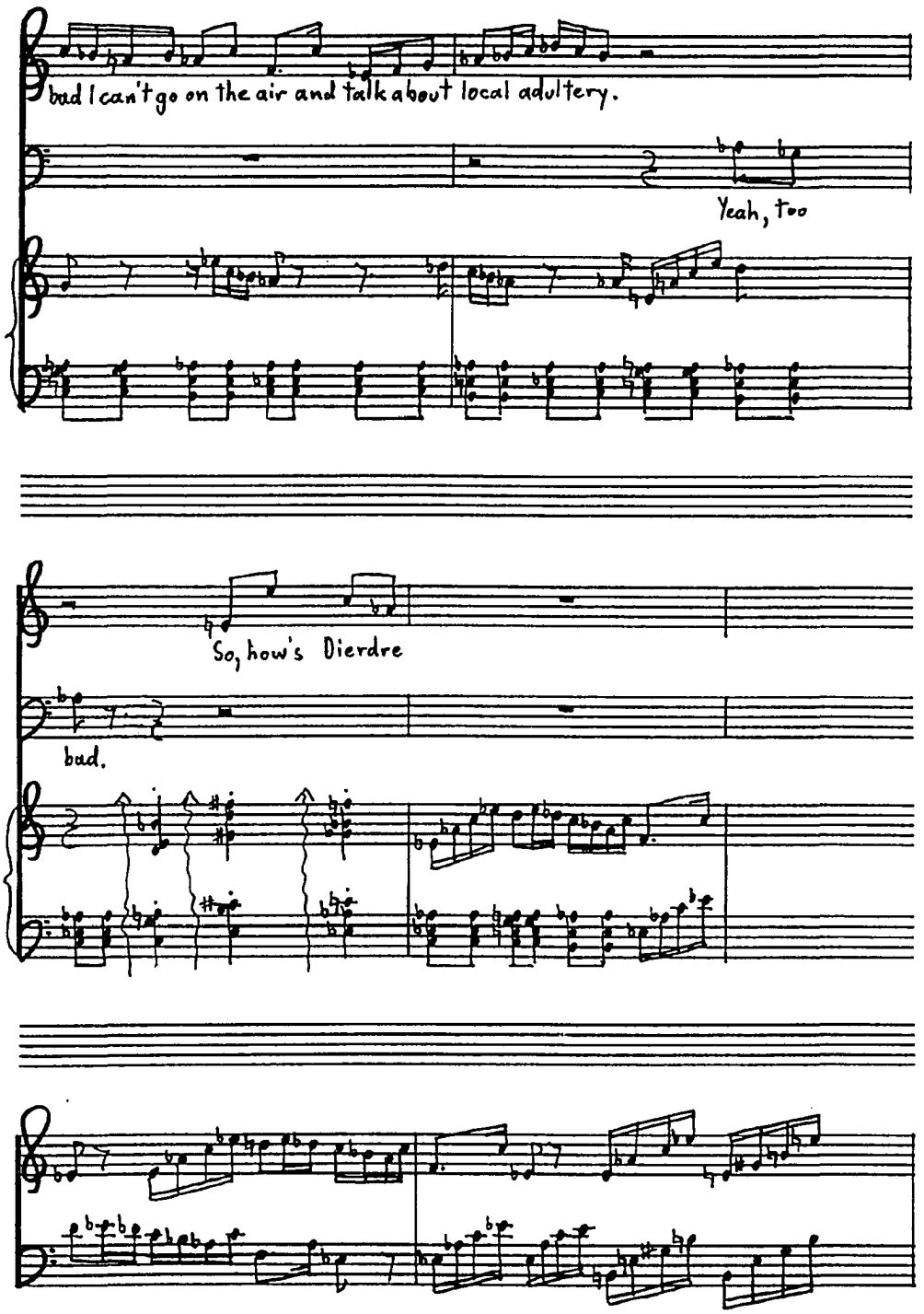

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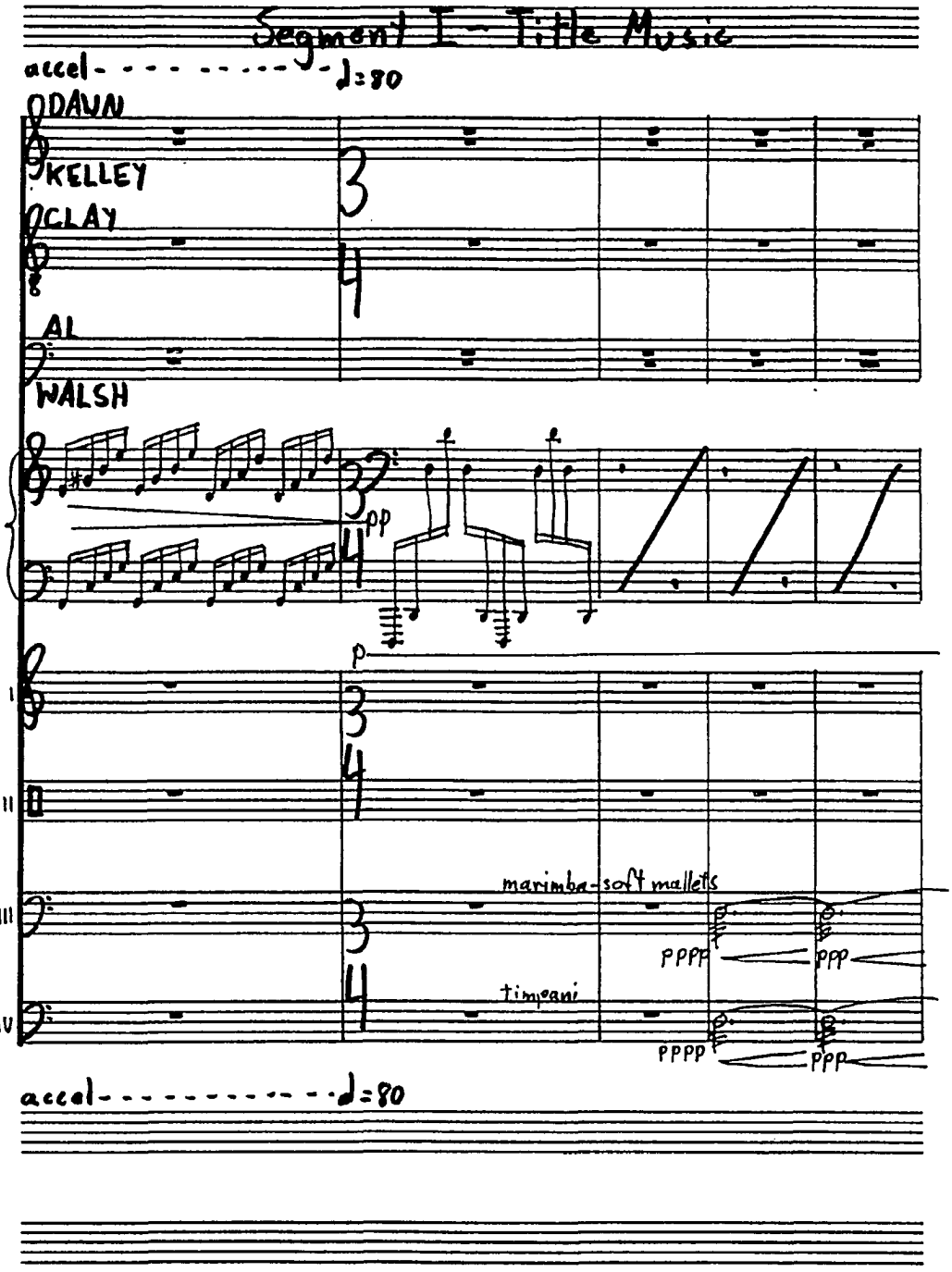

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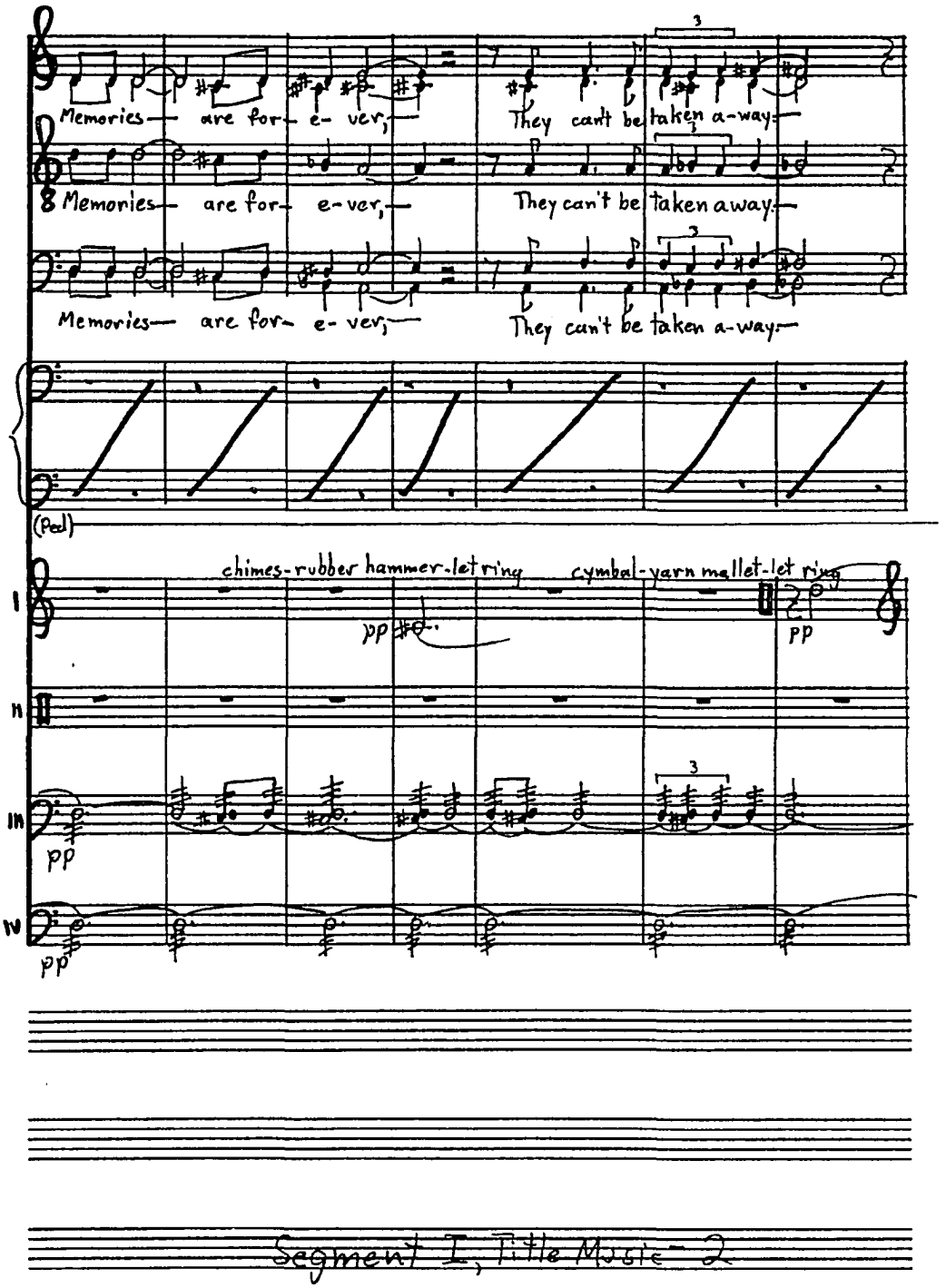

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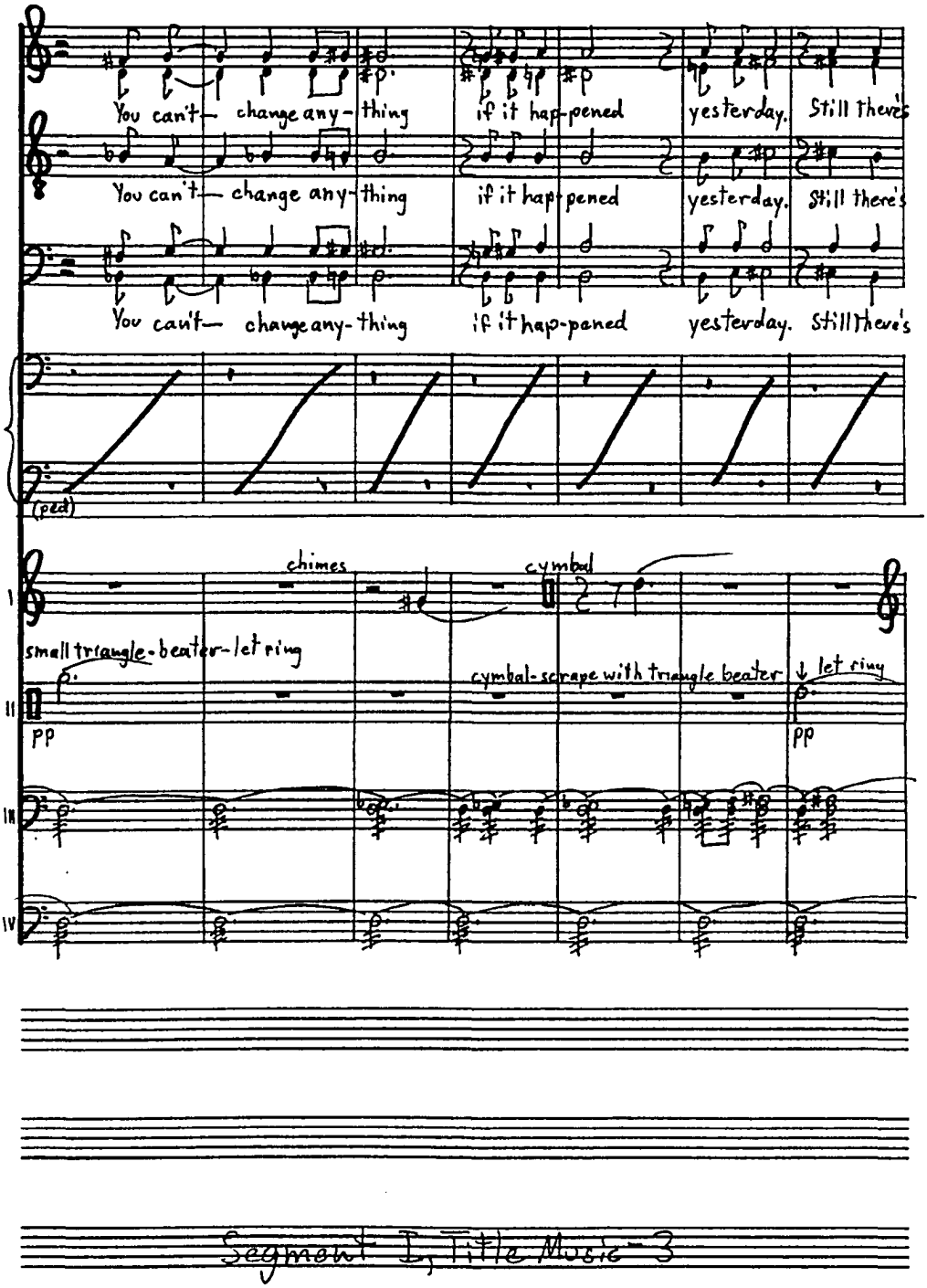

Segment D, Title Music-3

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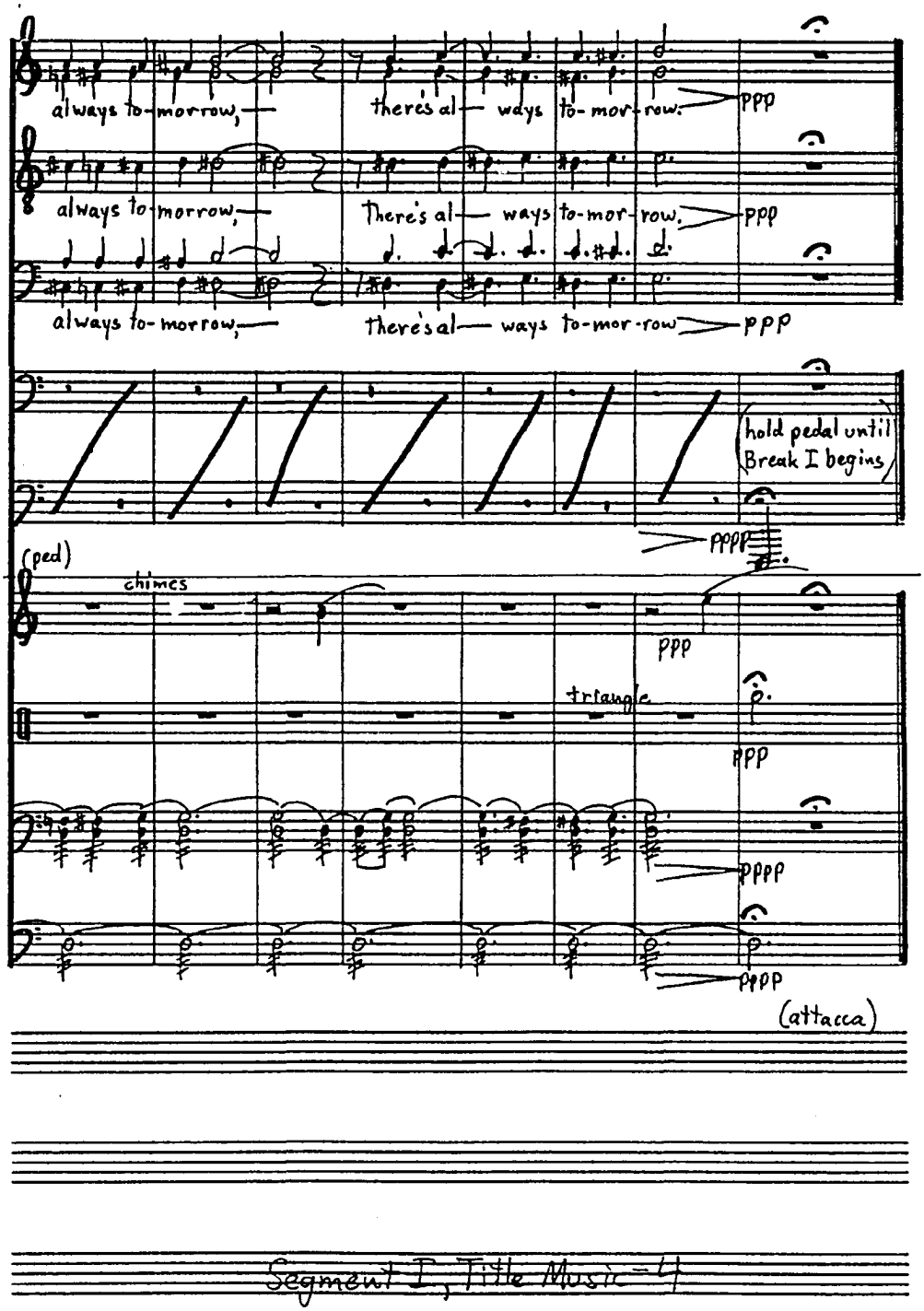

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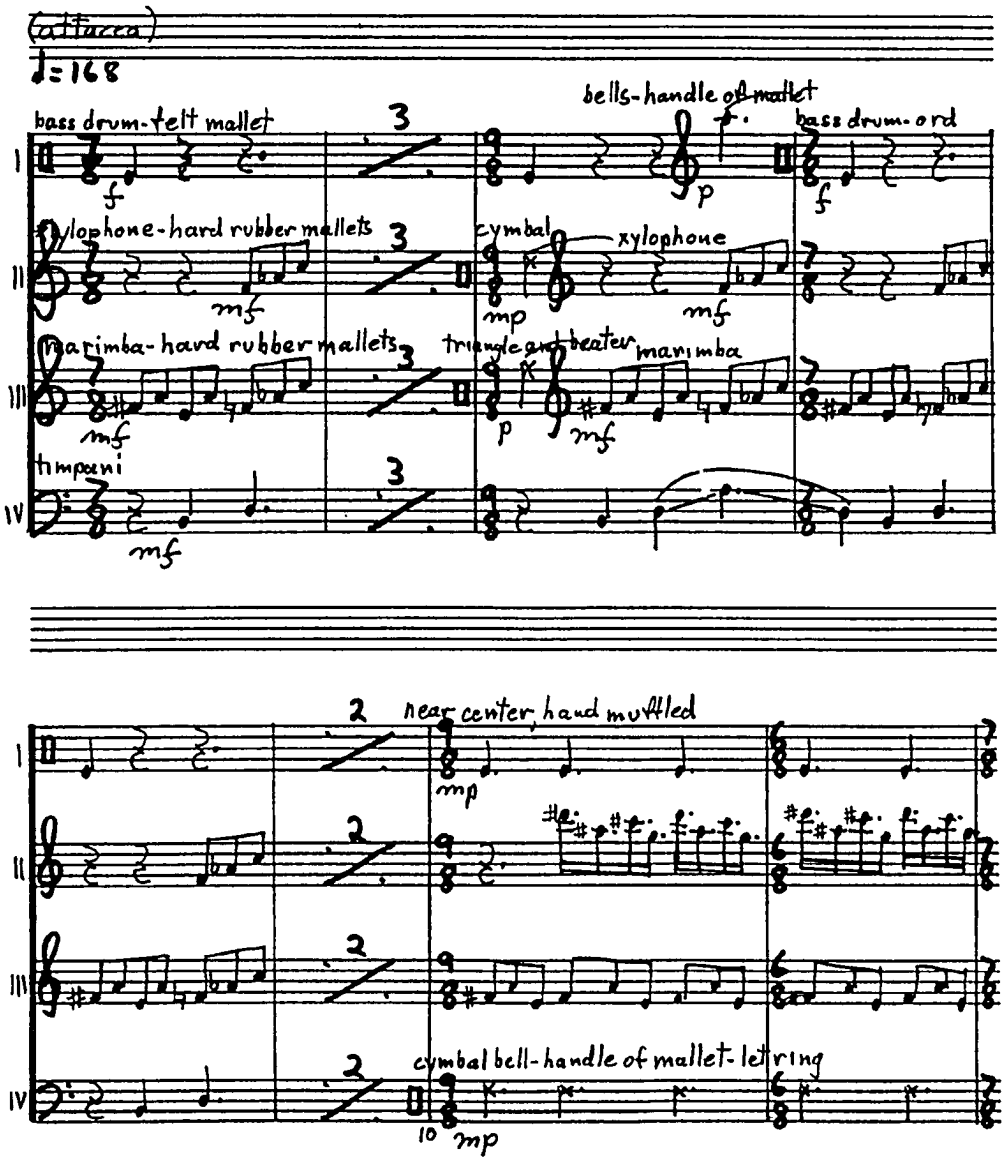
Break I



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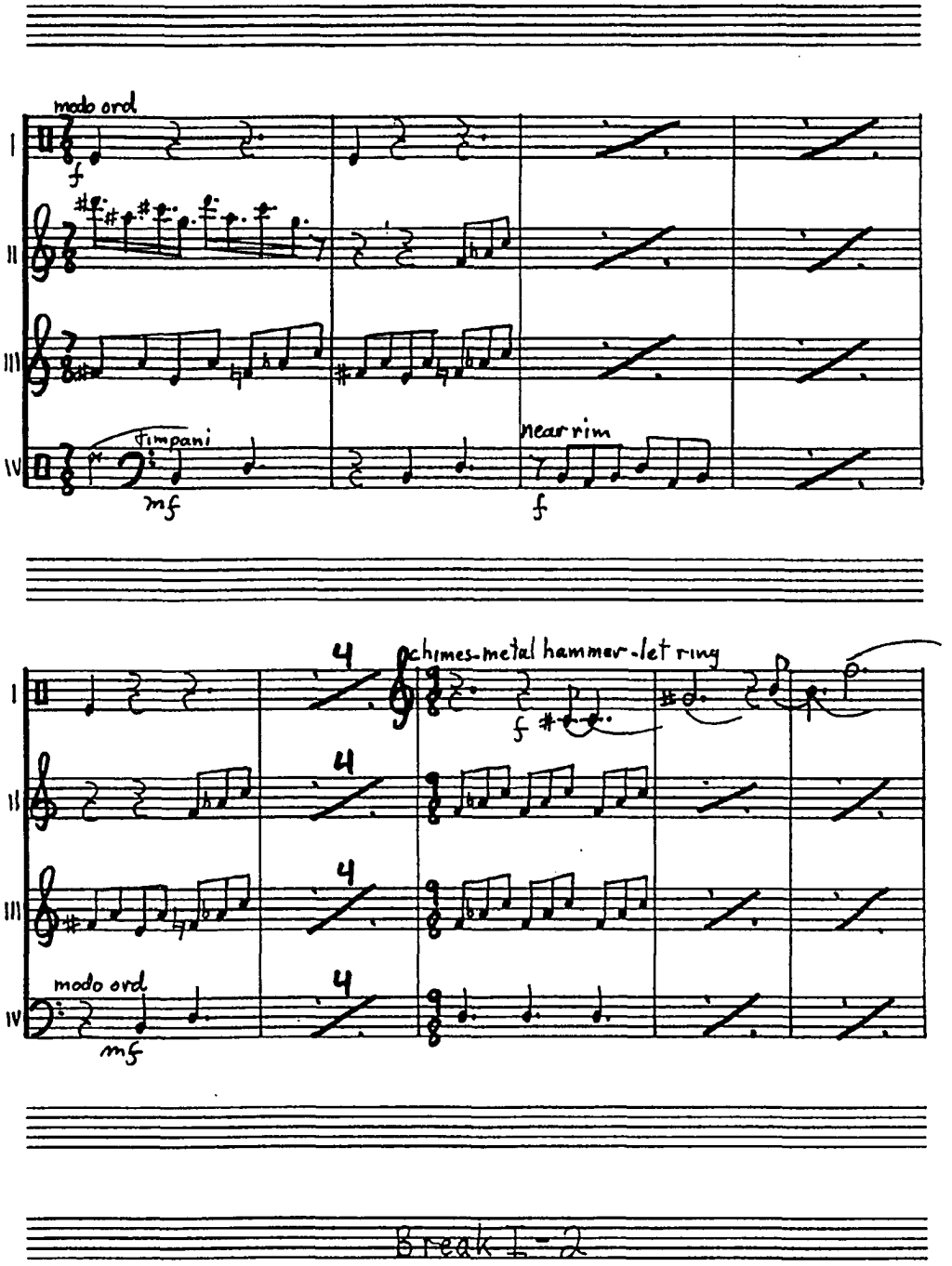

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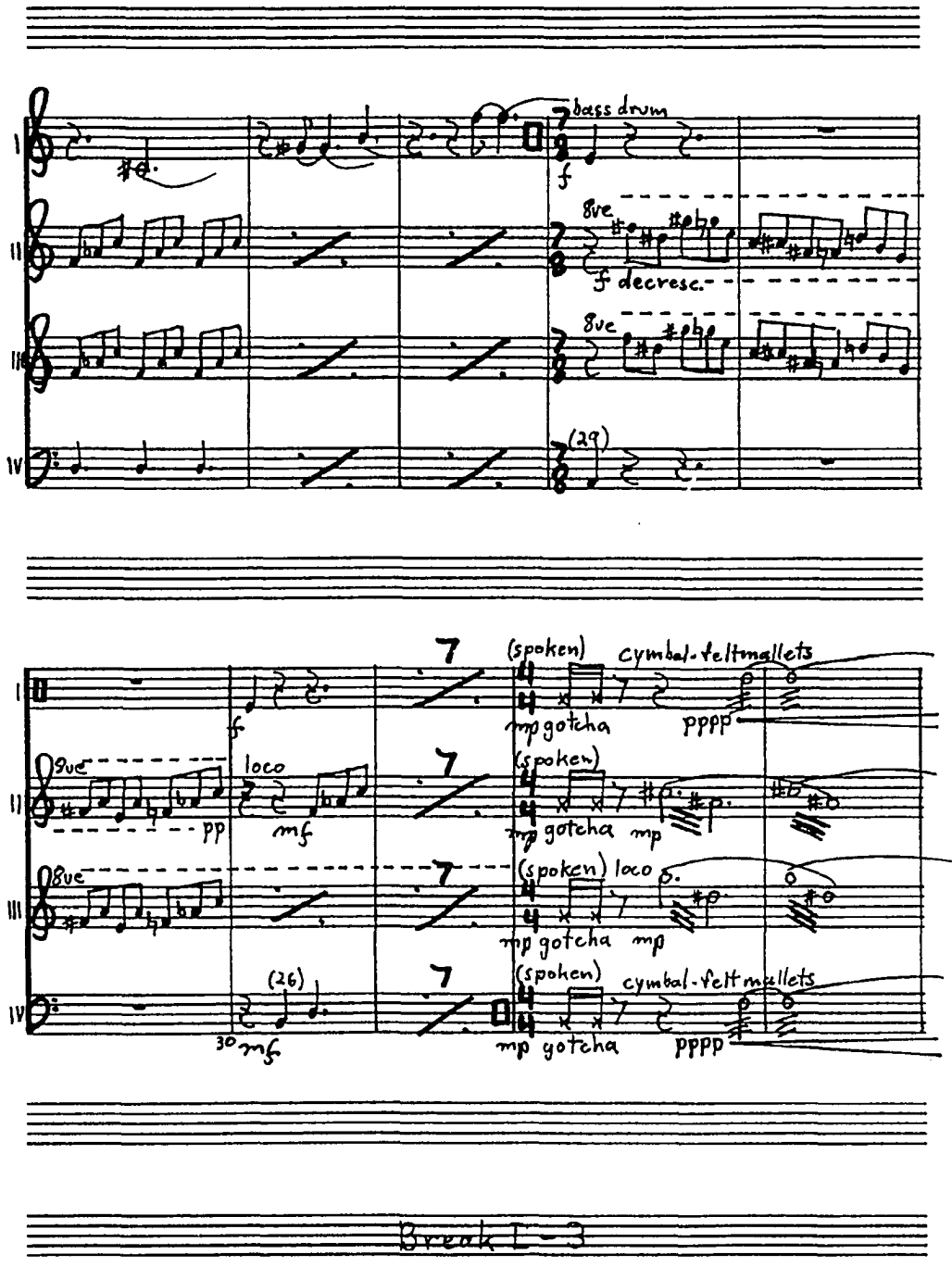

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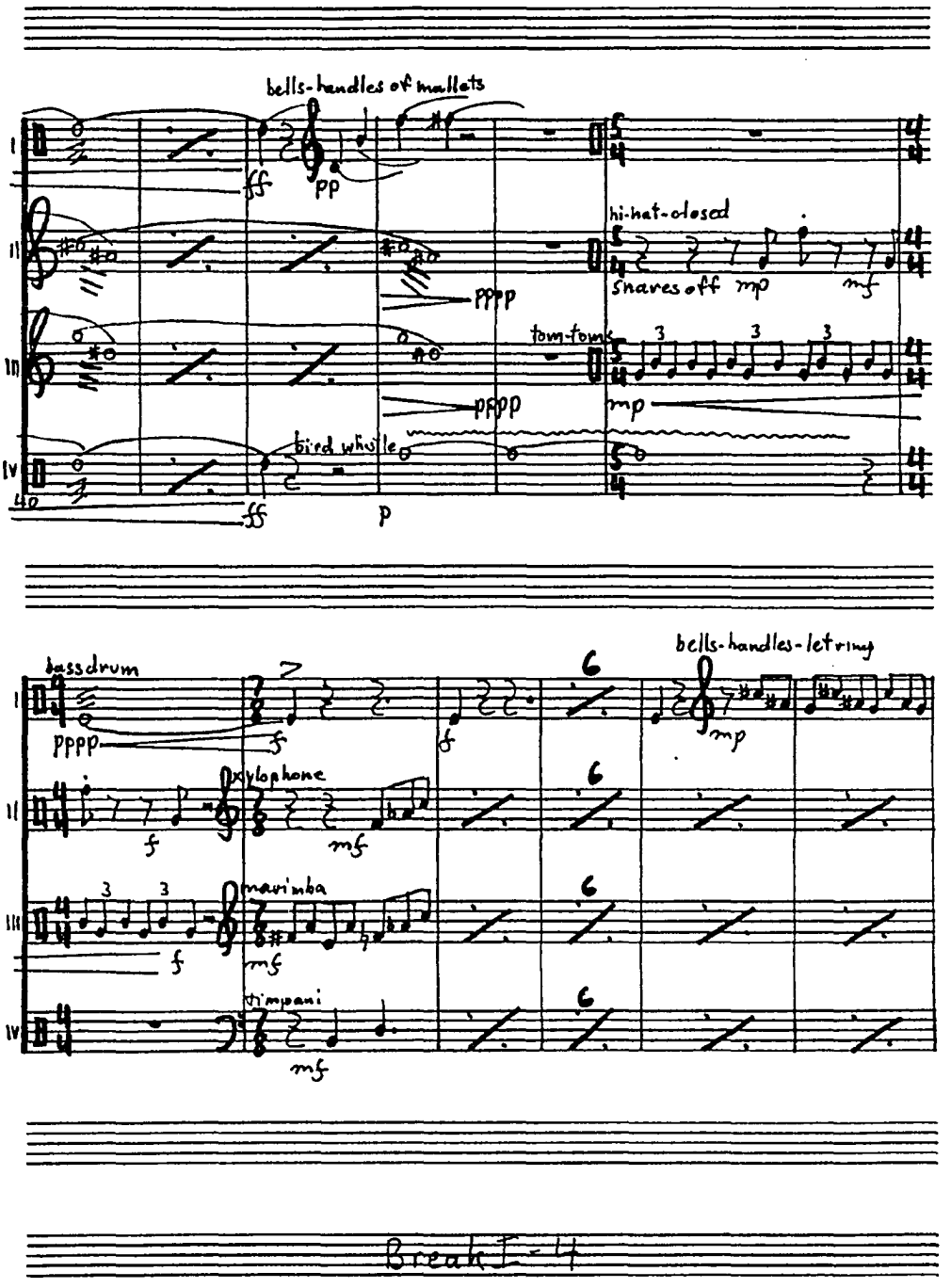

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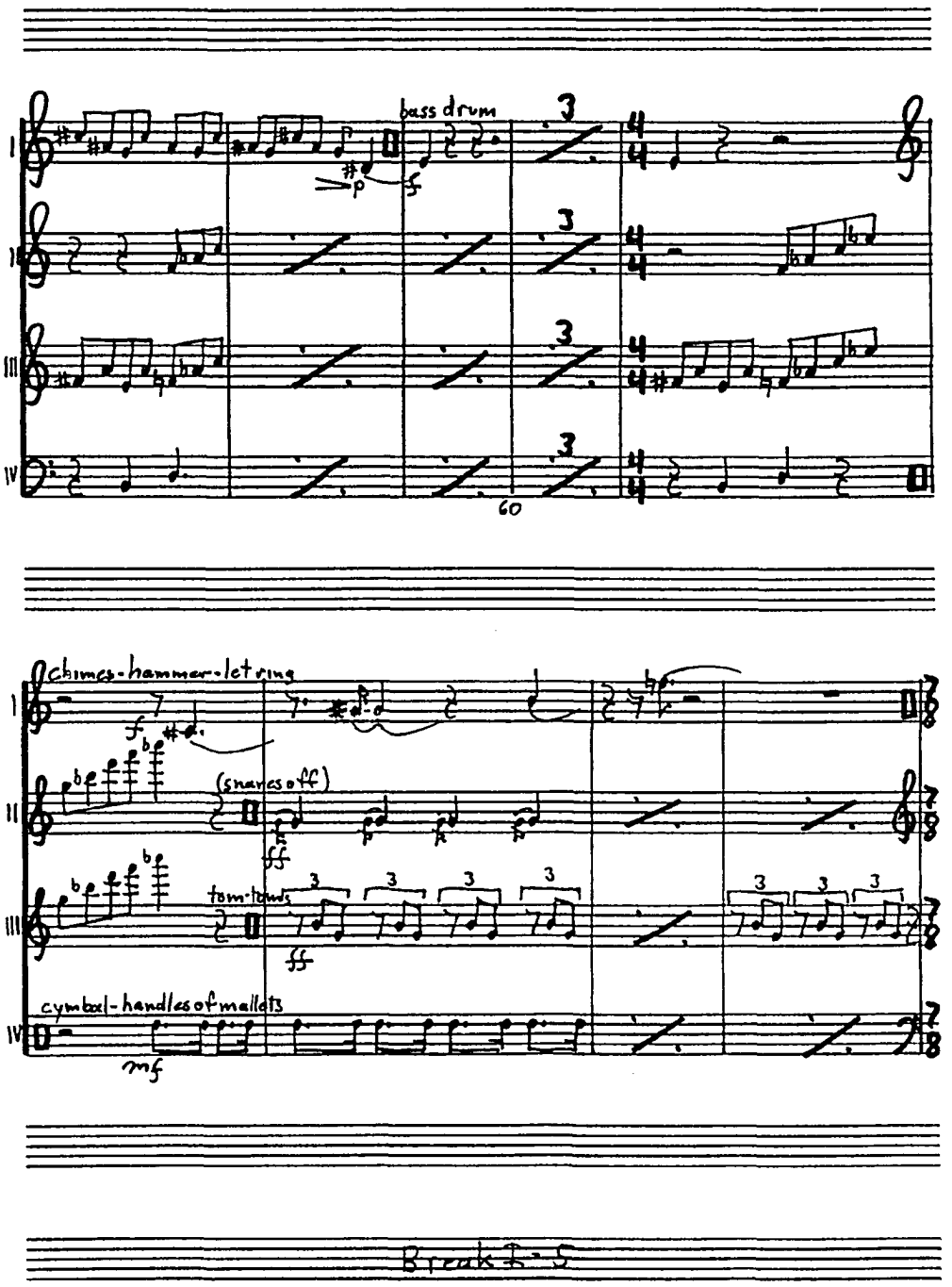

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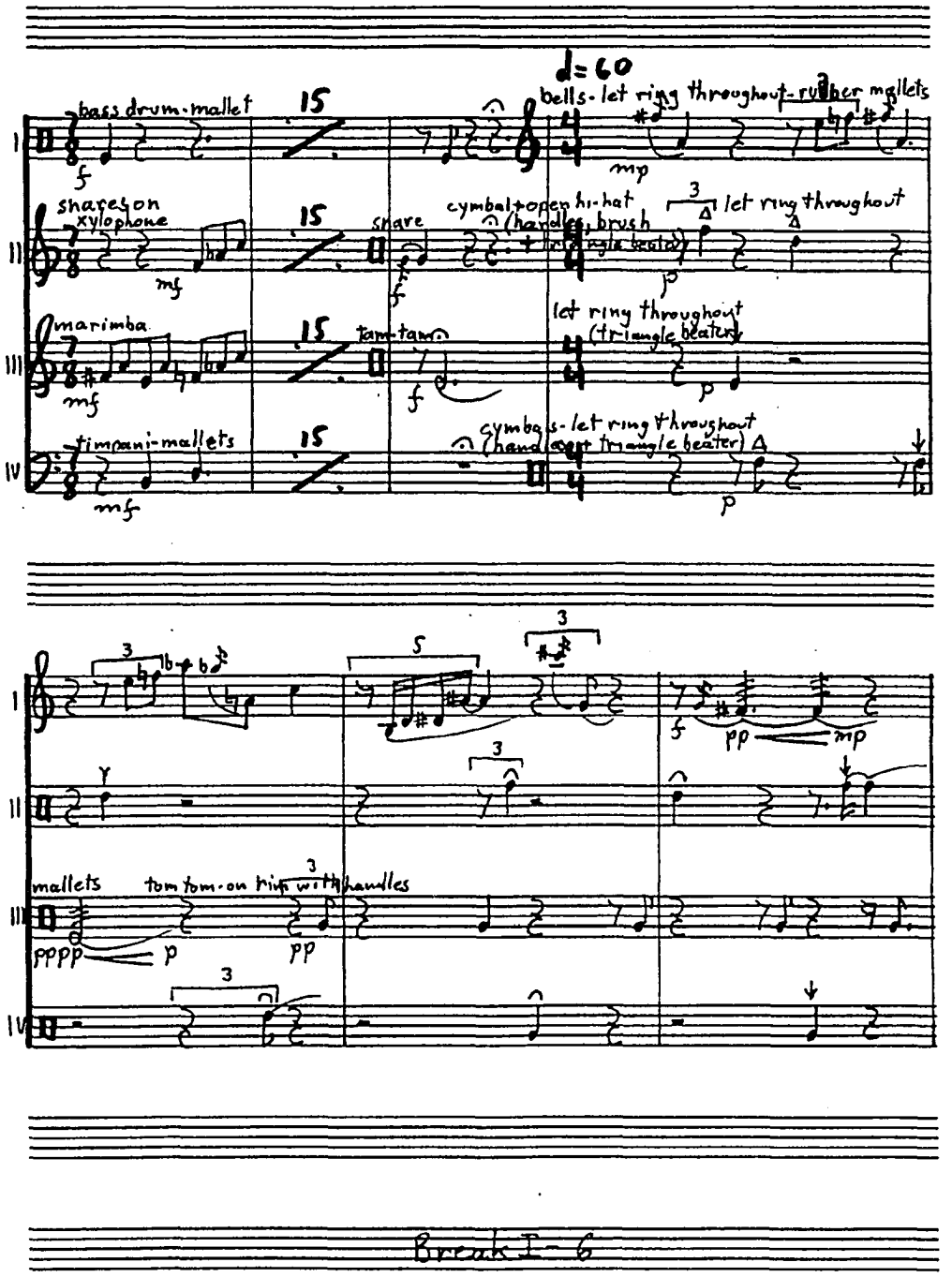

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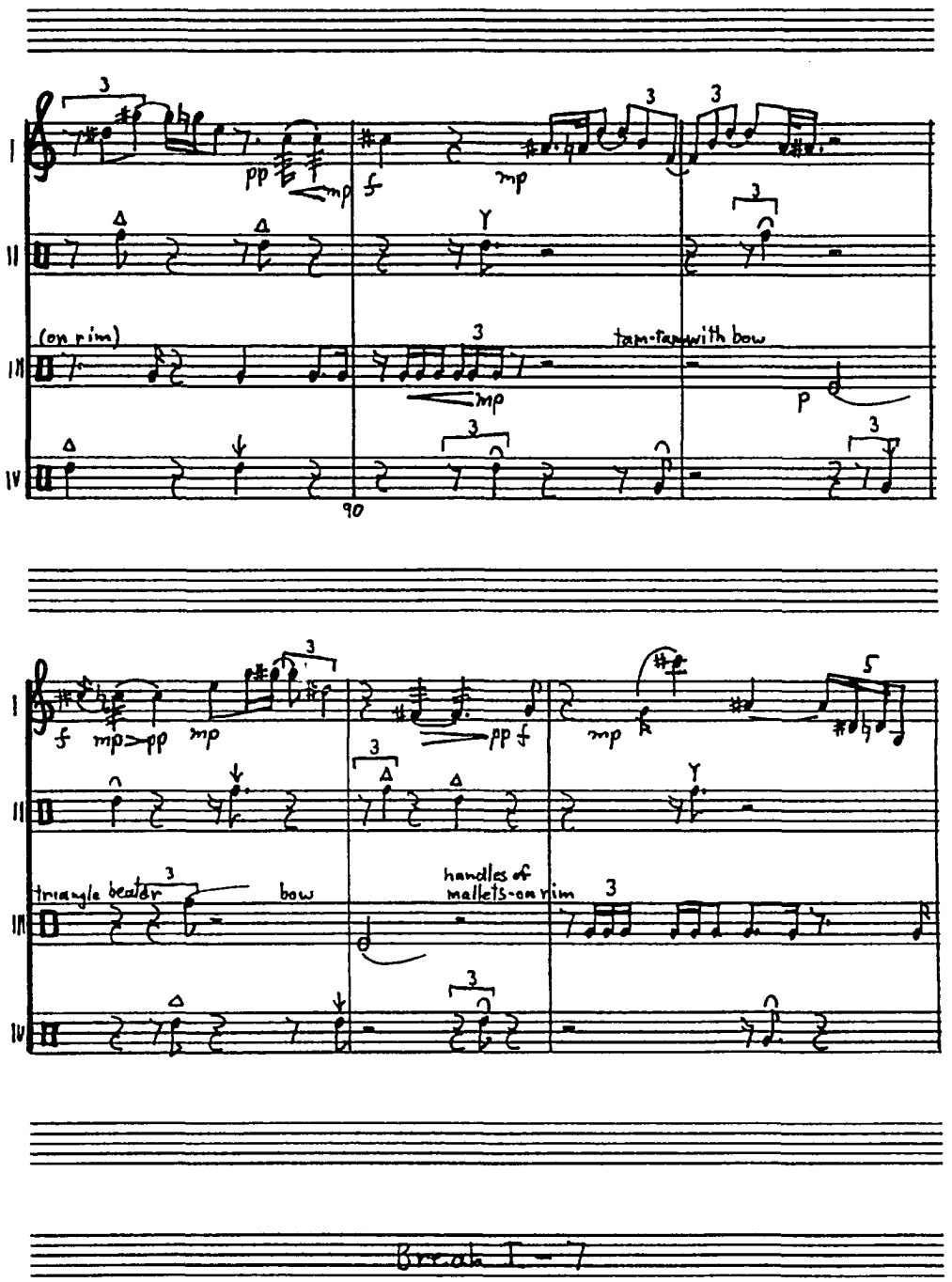

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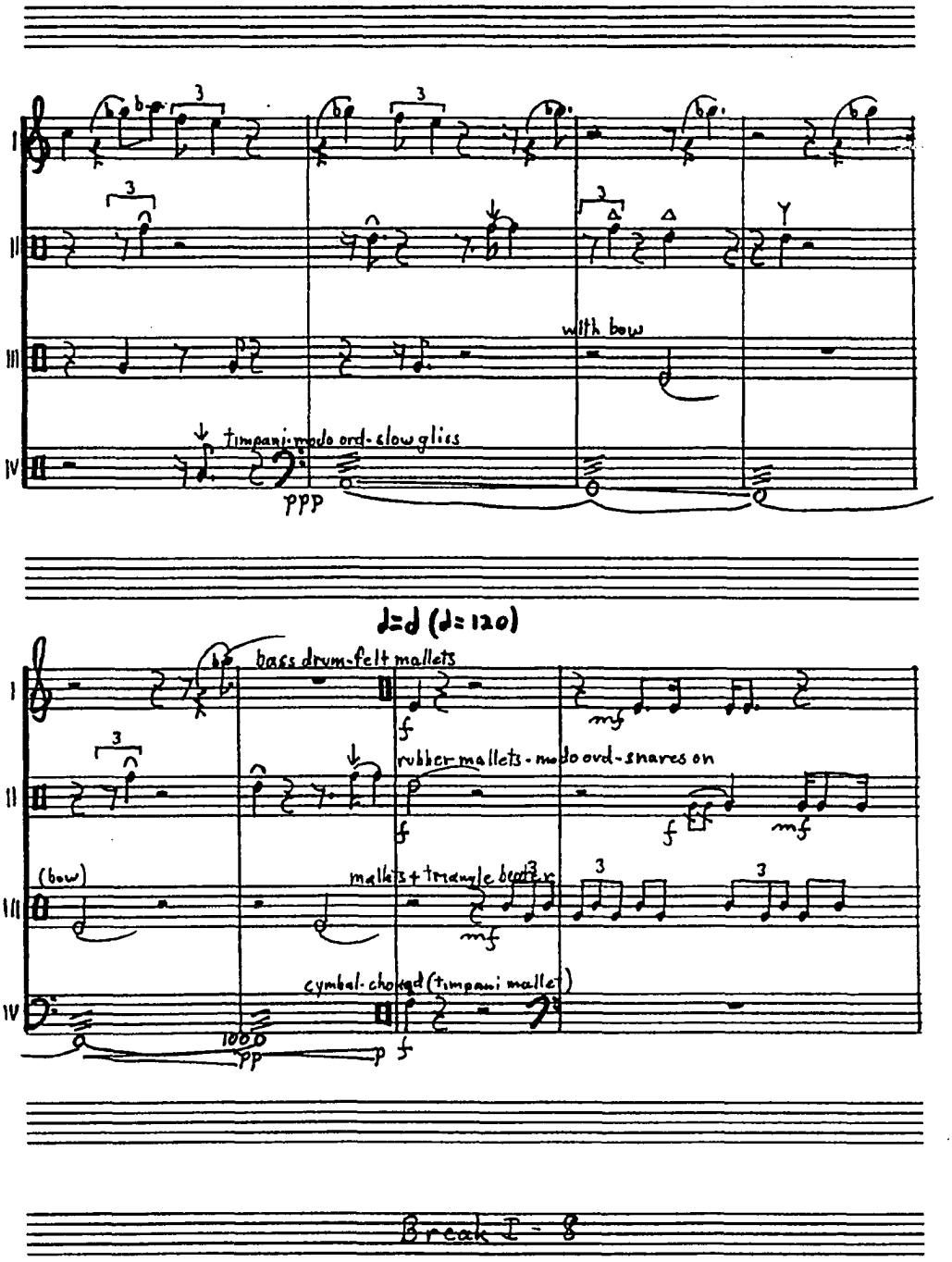

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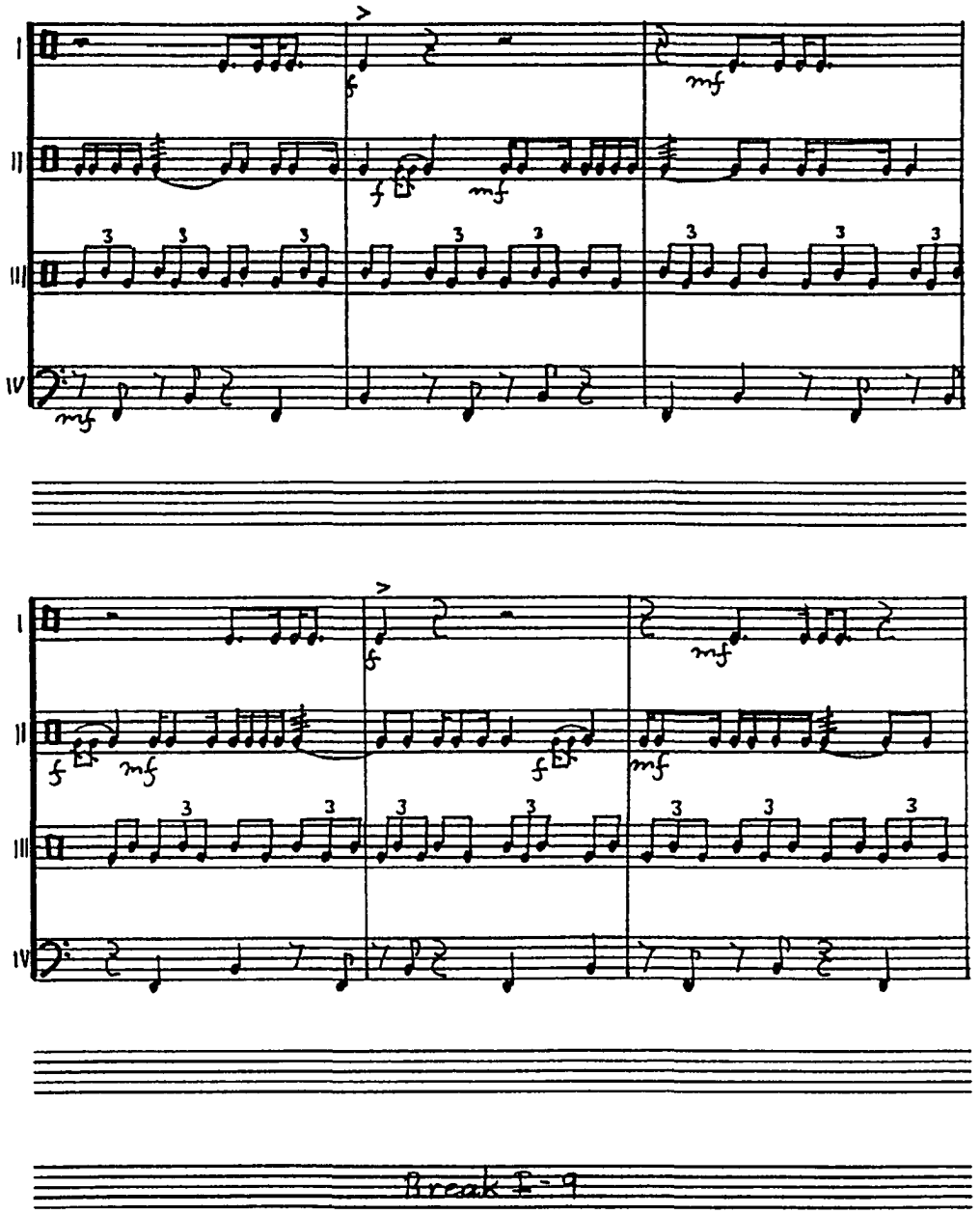

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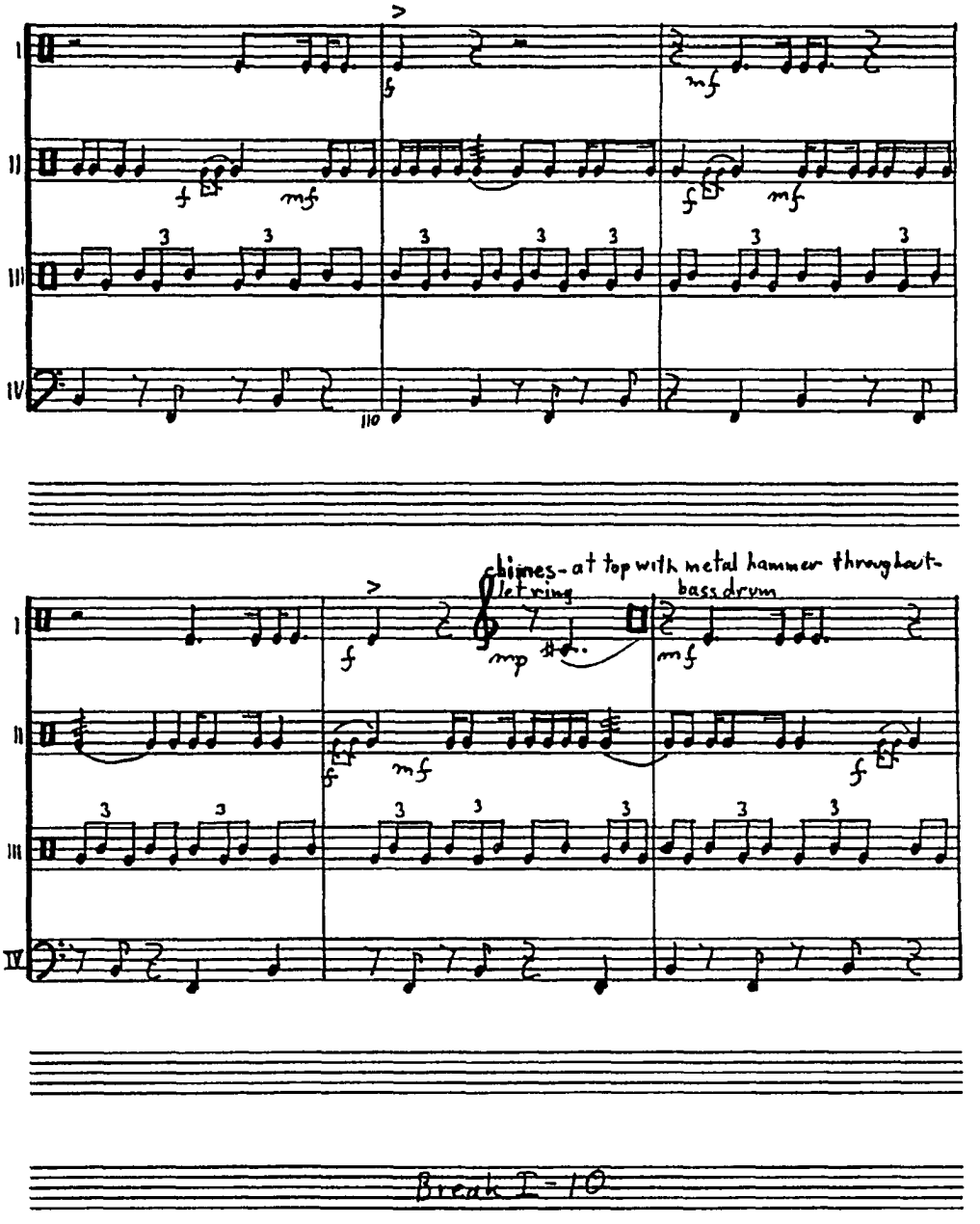

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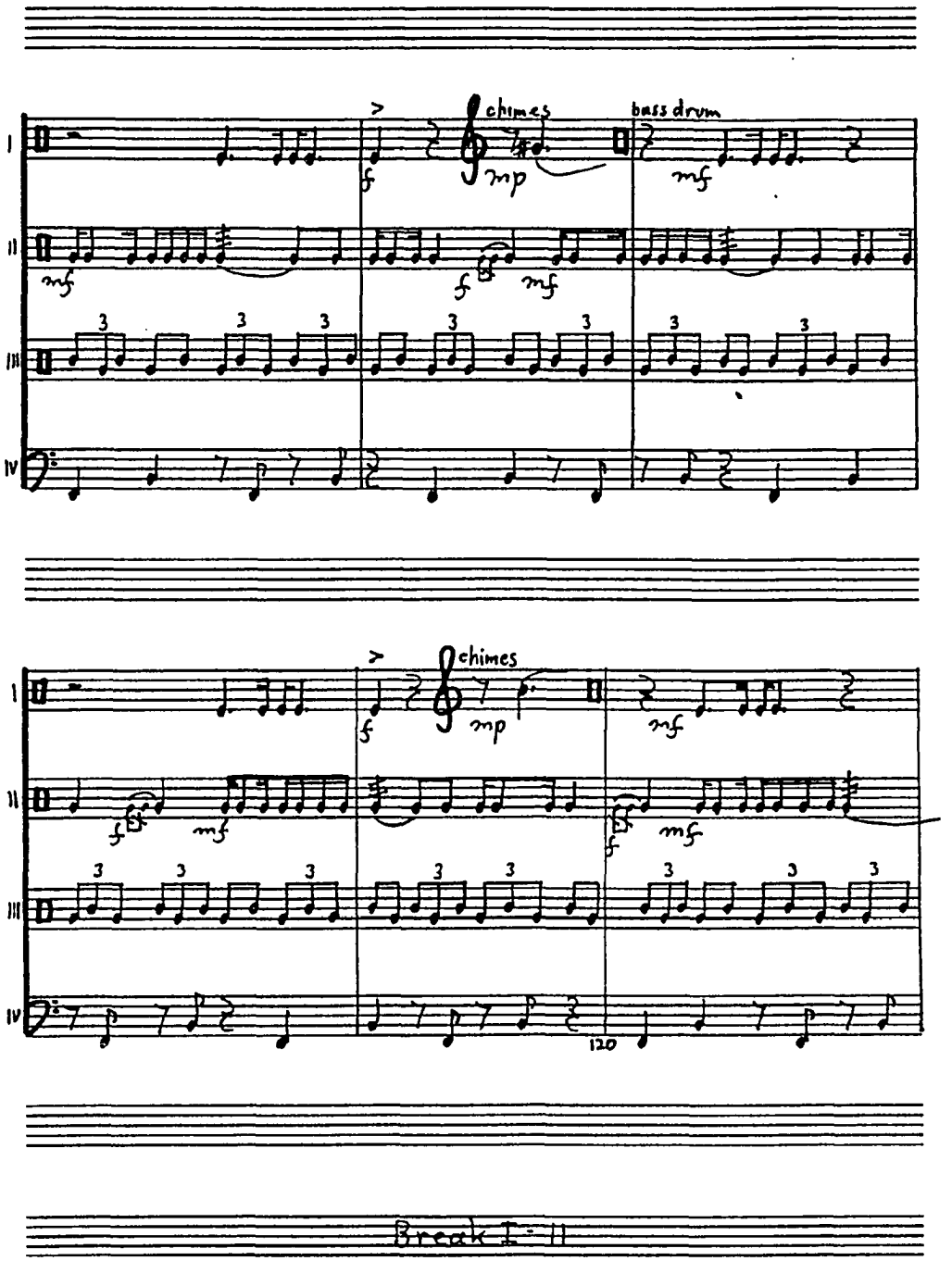

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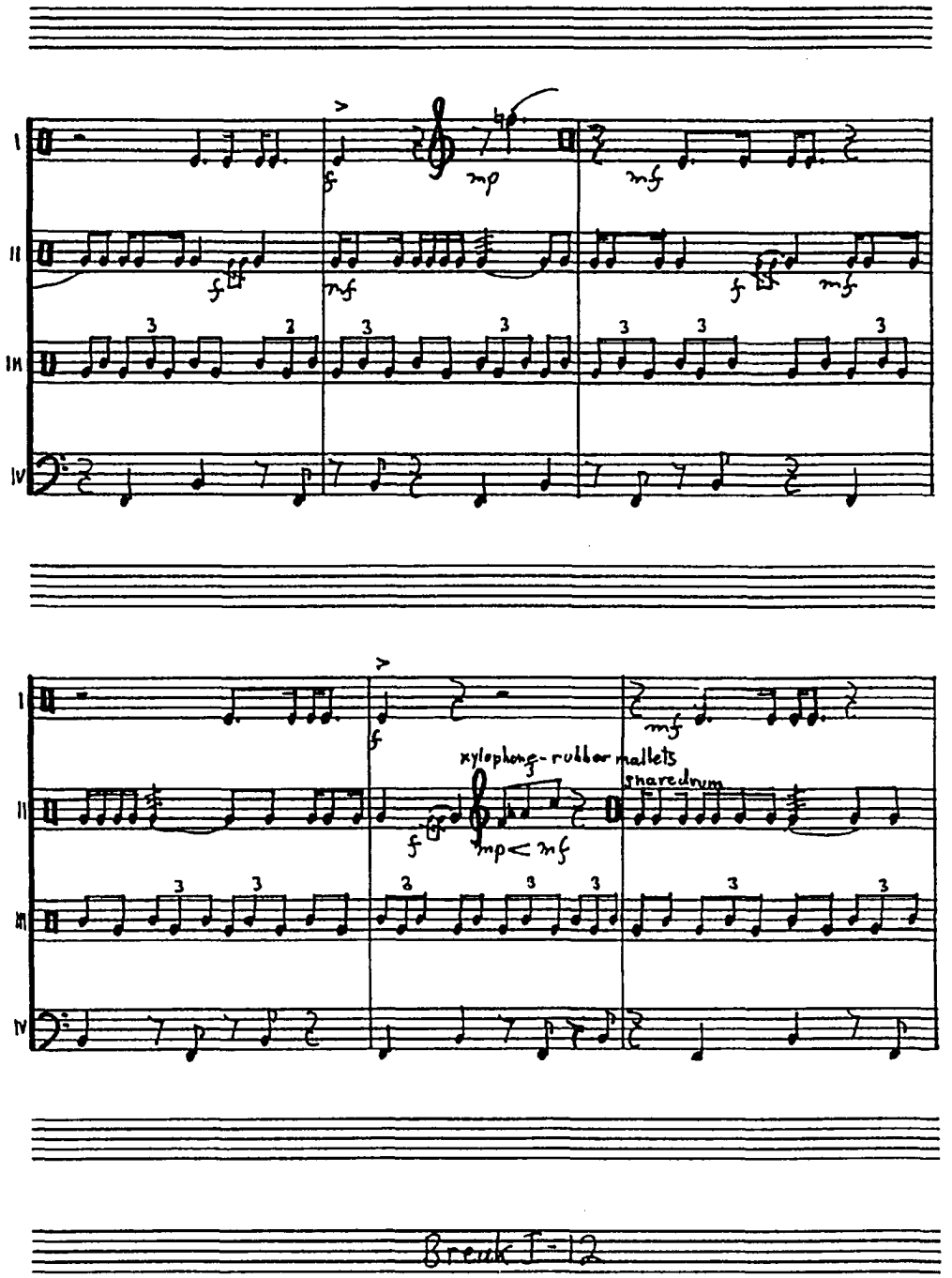

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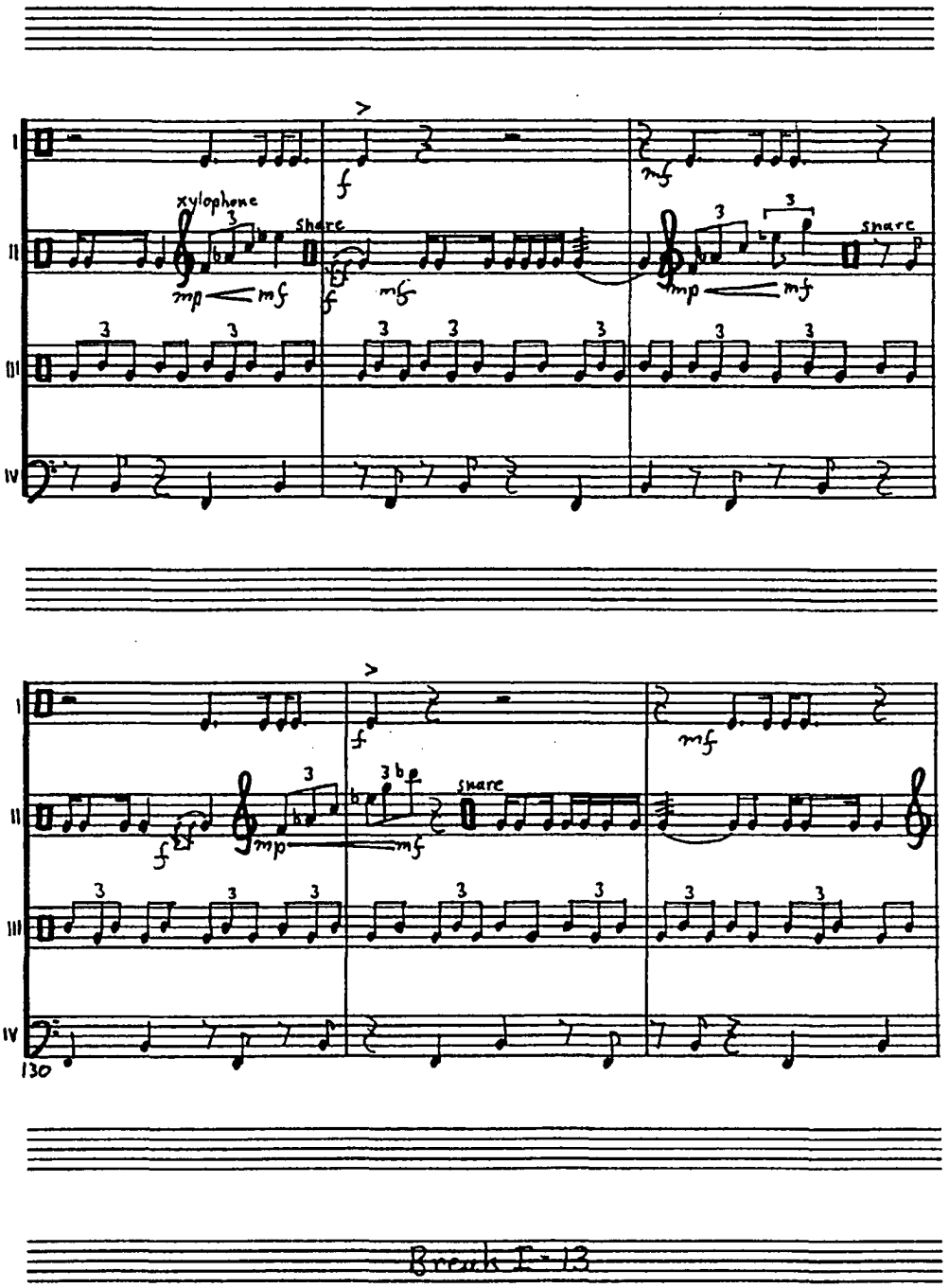

Break I-13

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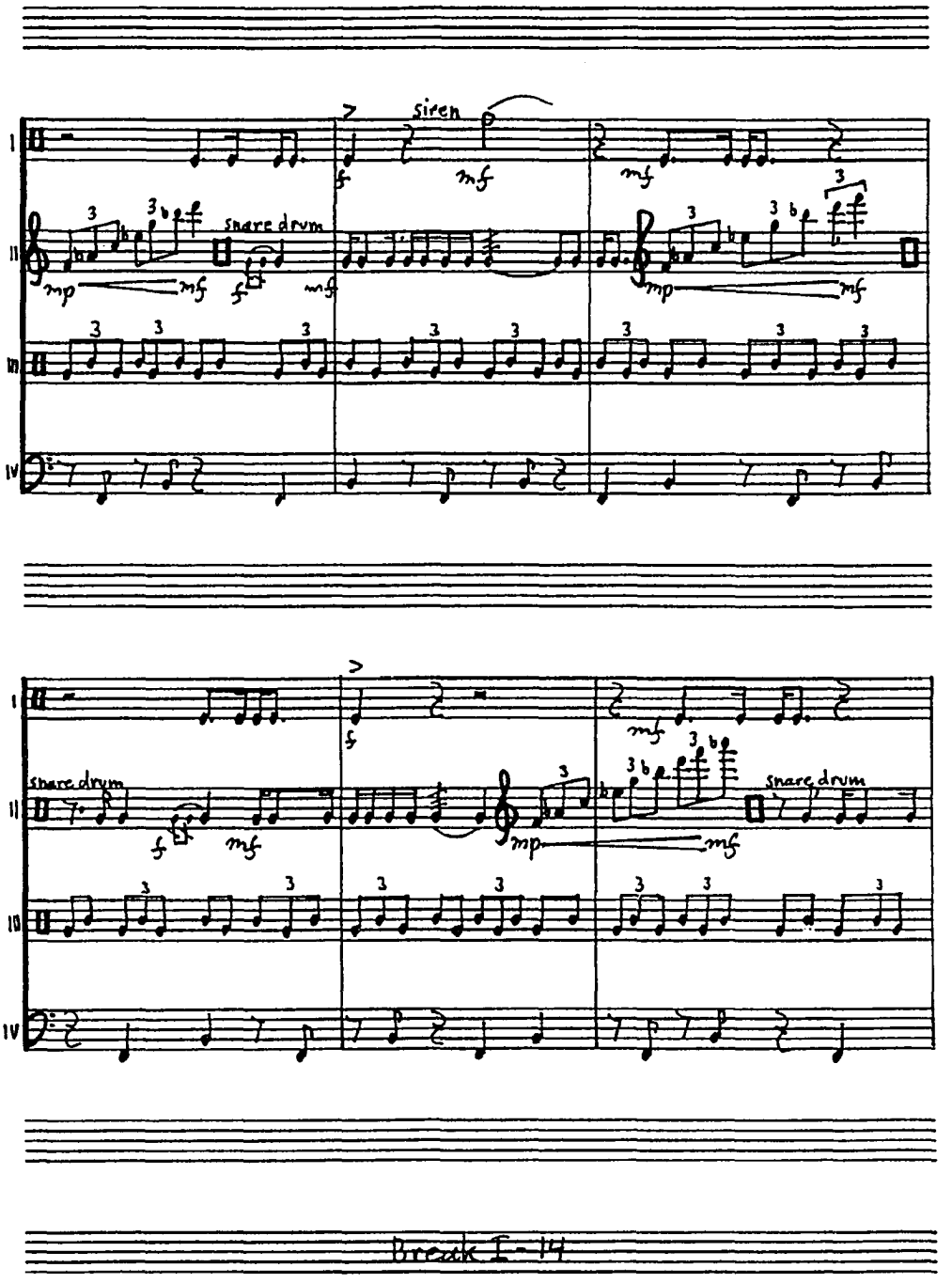

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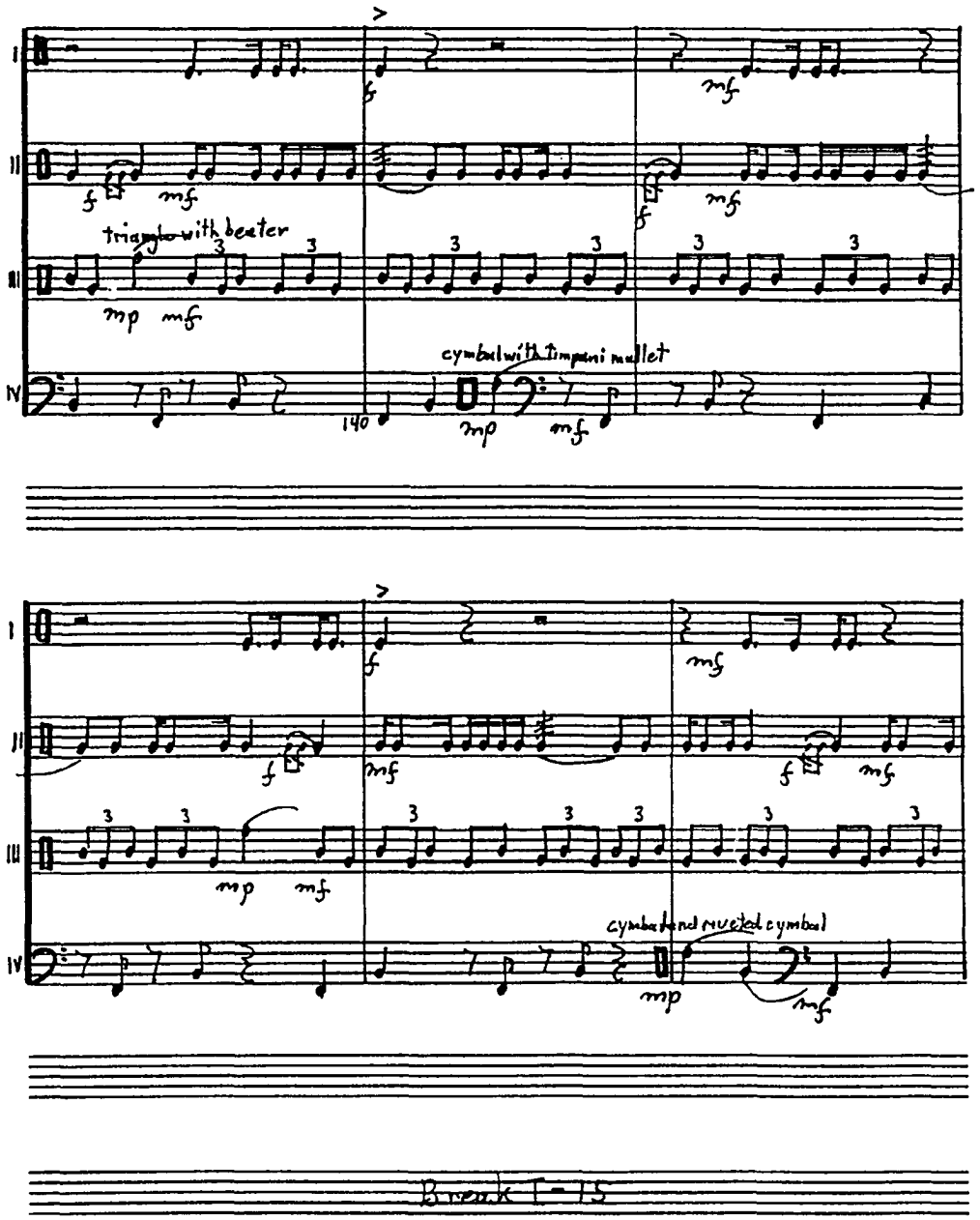

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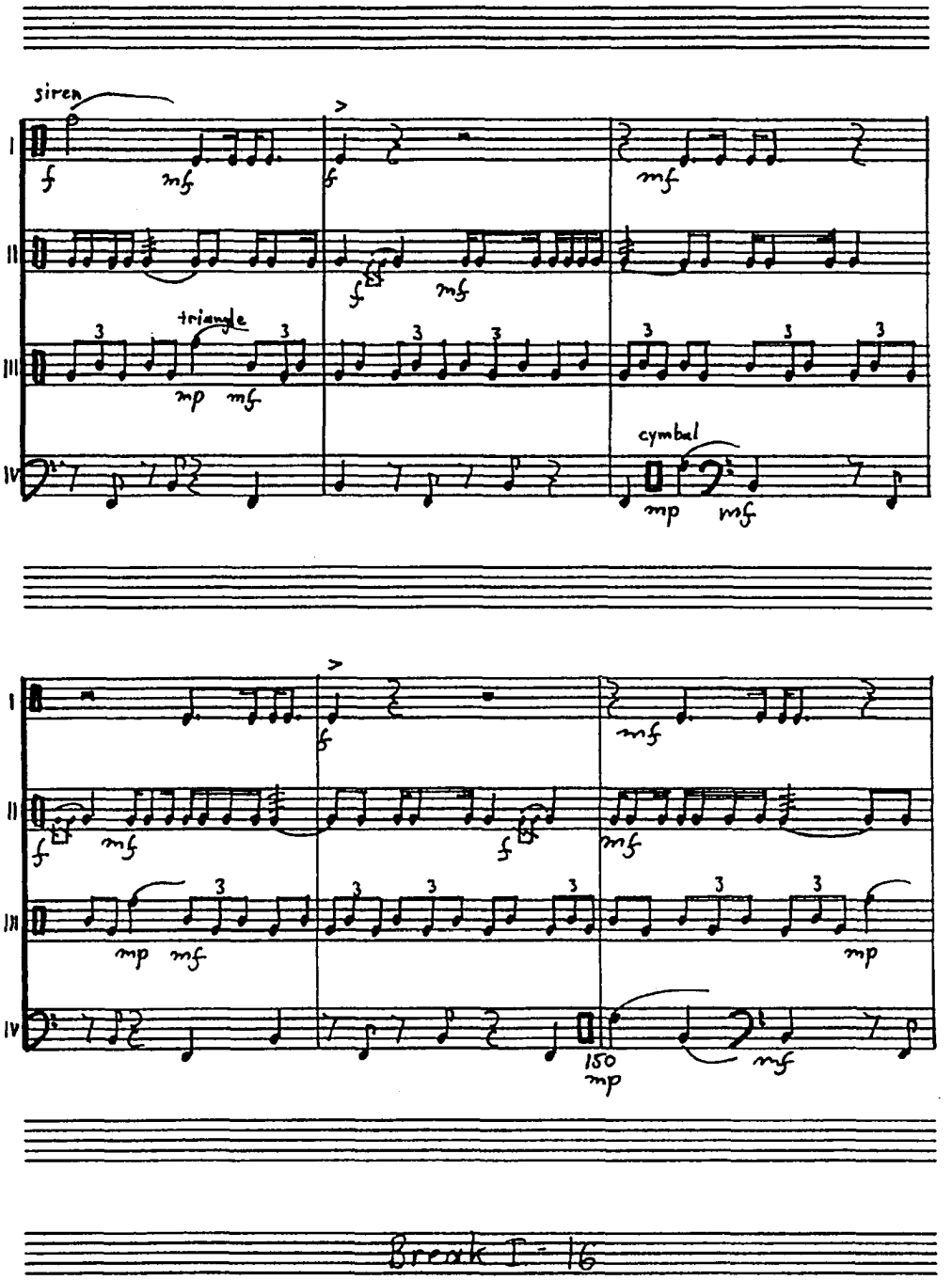

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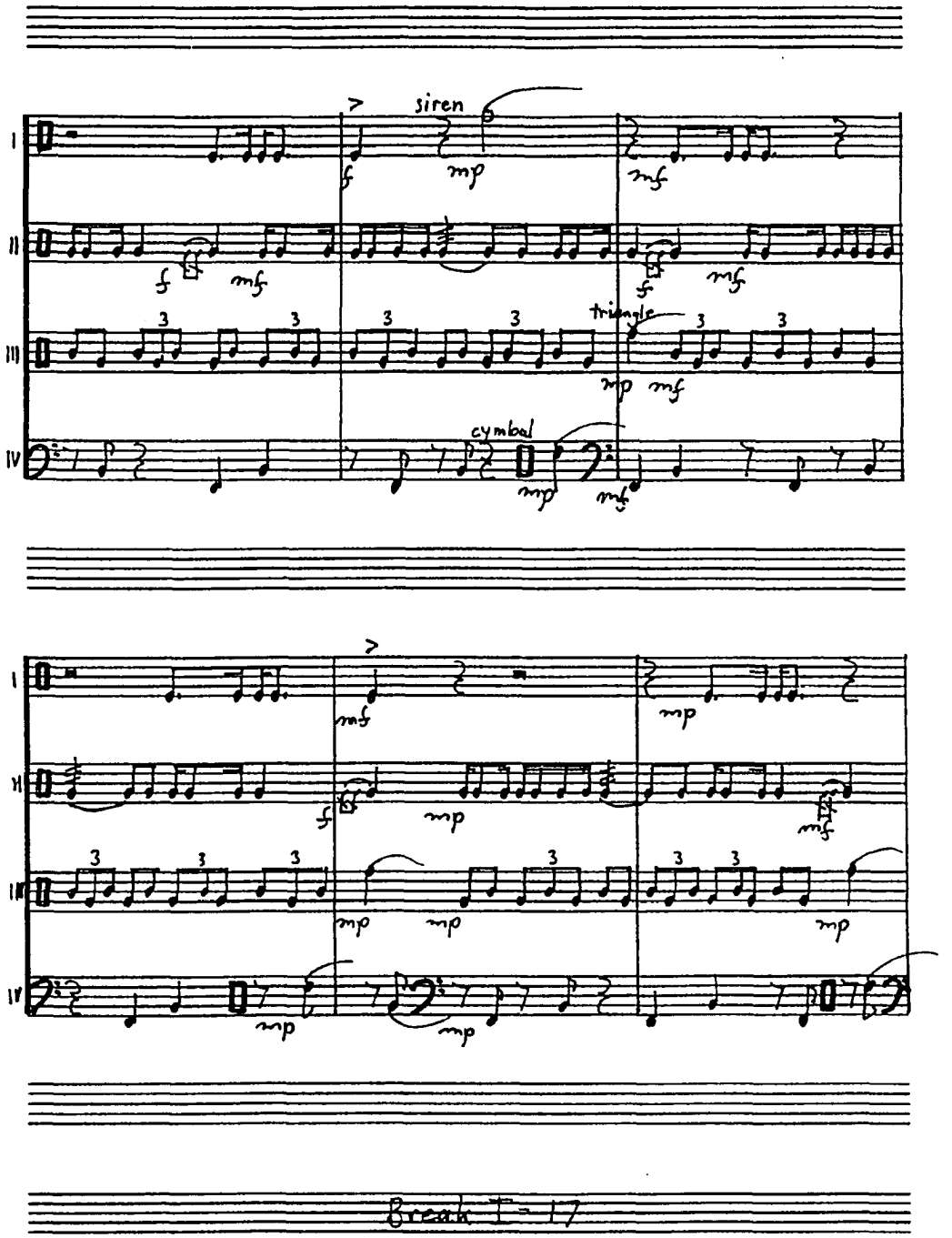

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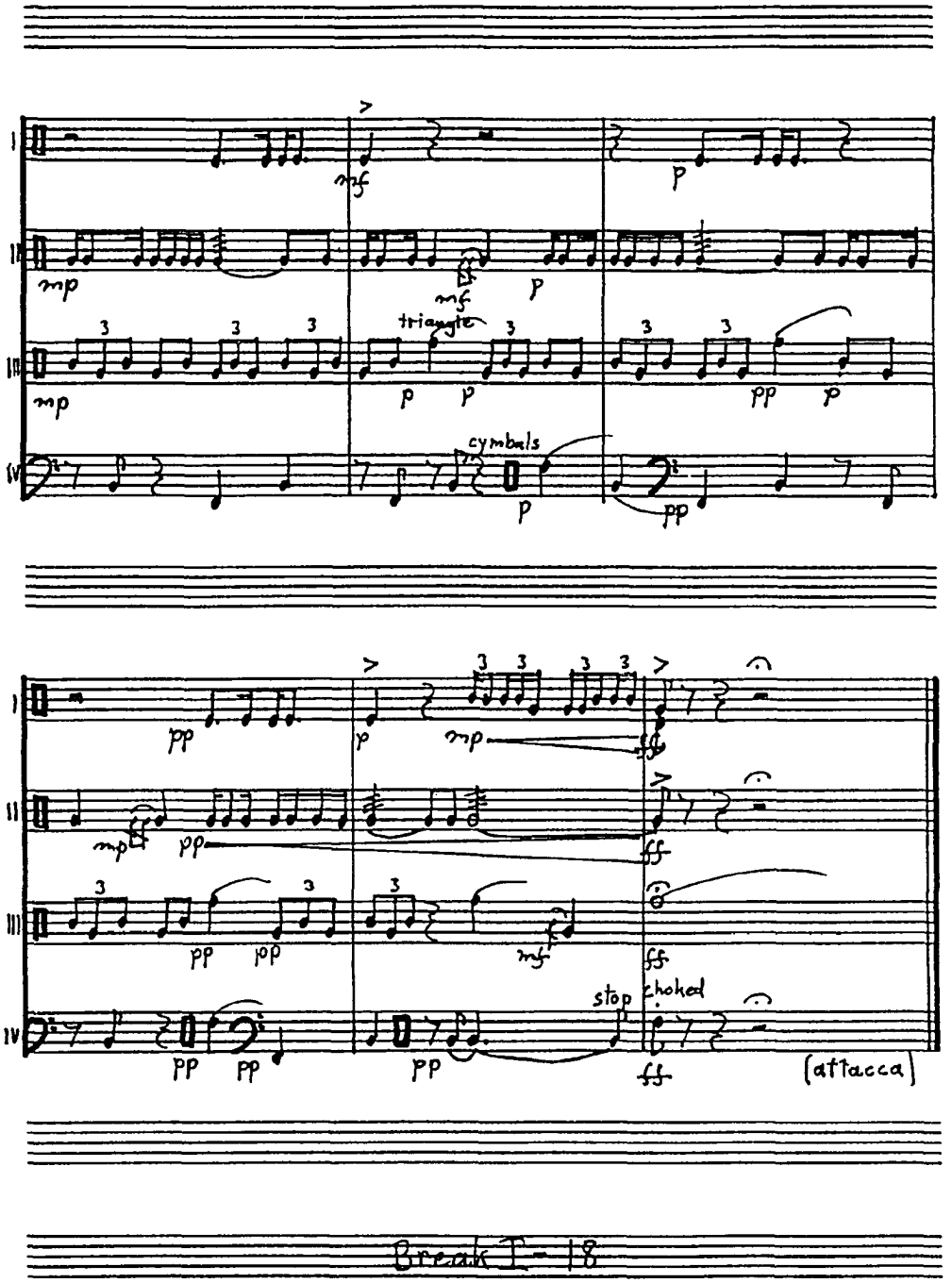

Break I - 18

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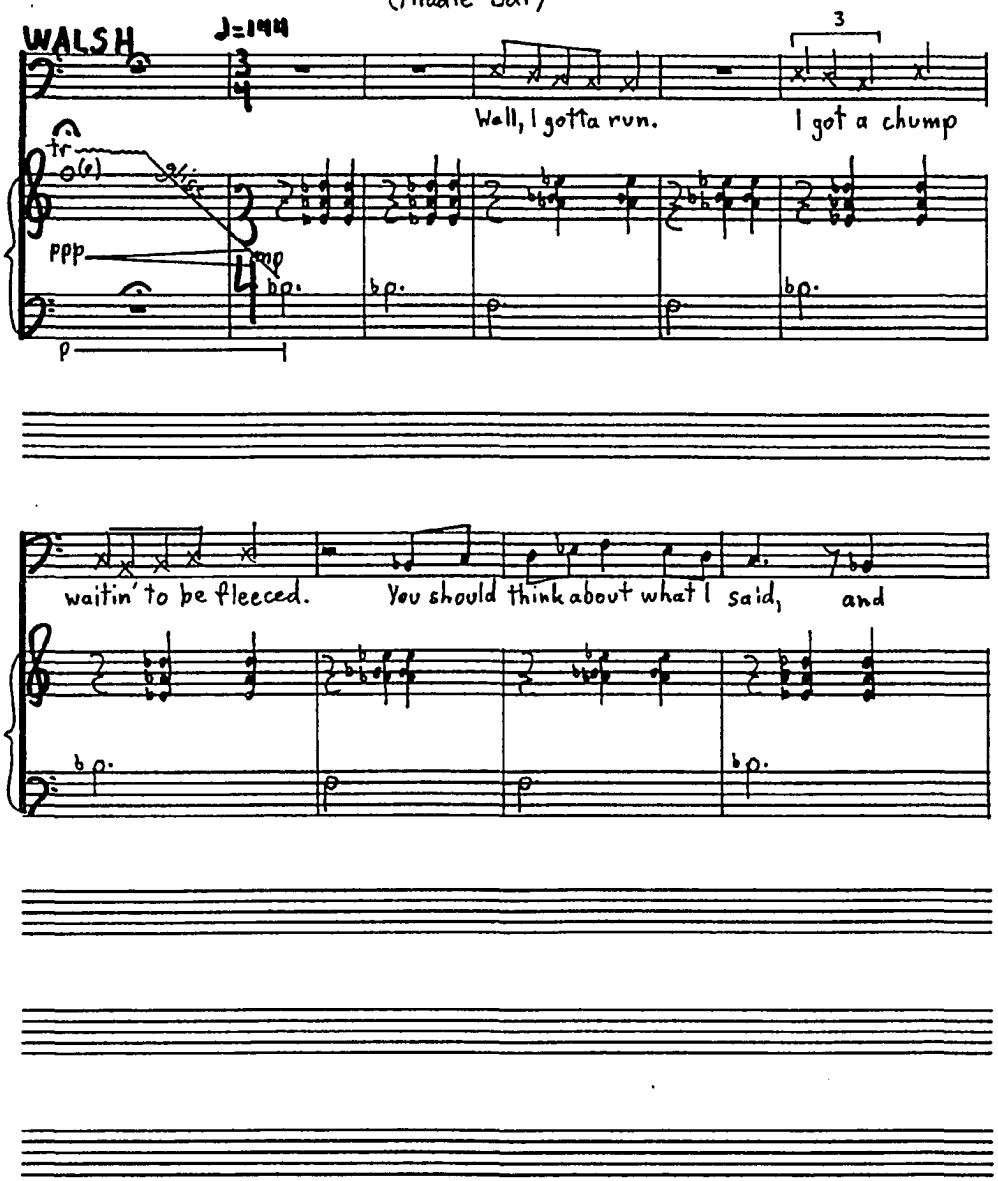
Segment II

(attacca)

Scene I

(Middle Bar)



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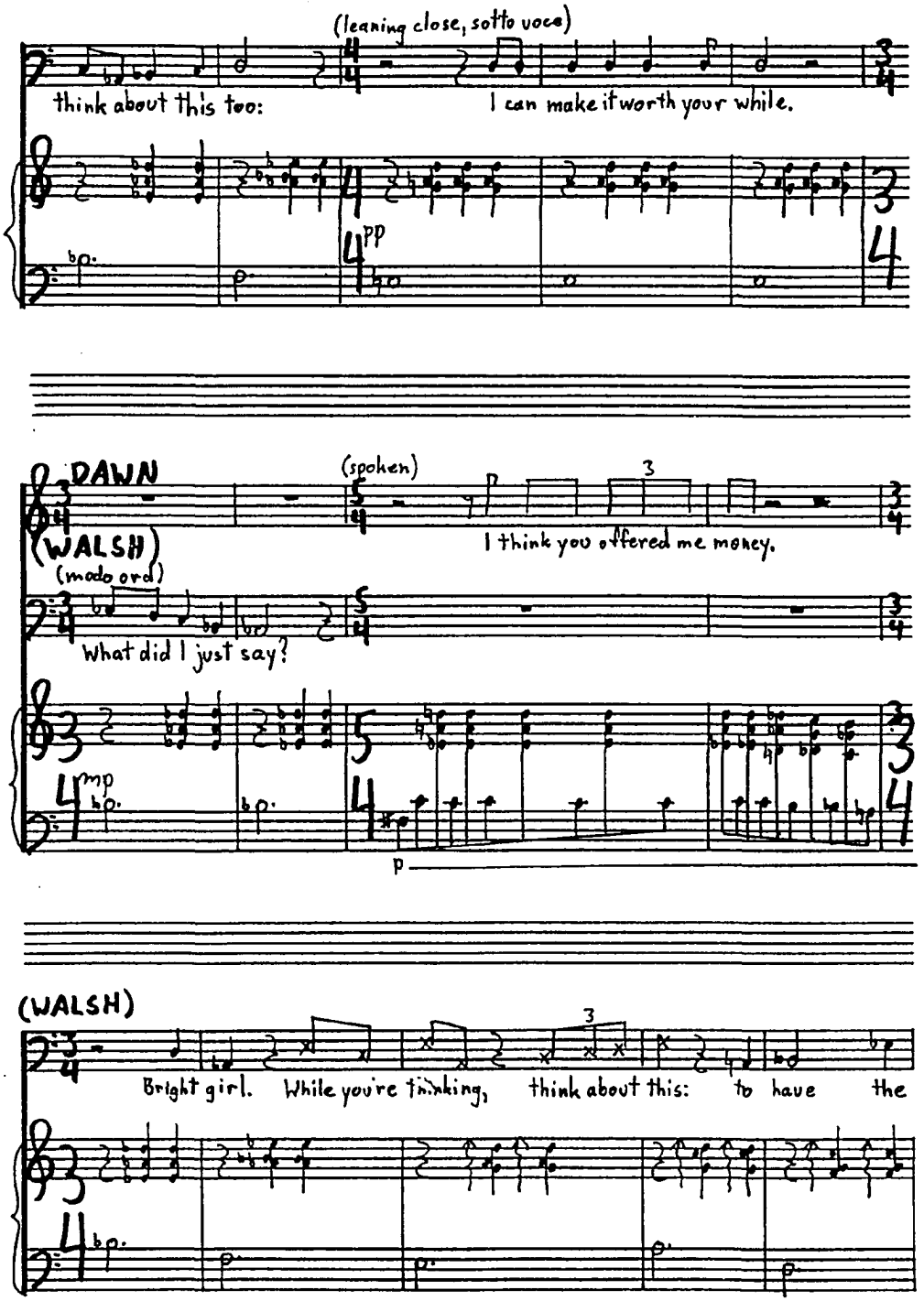

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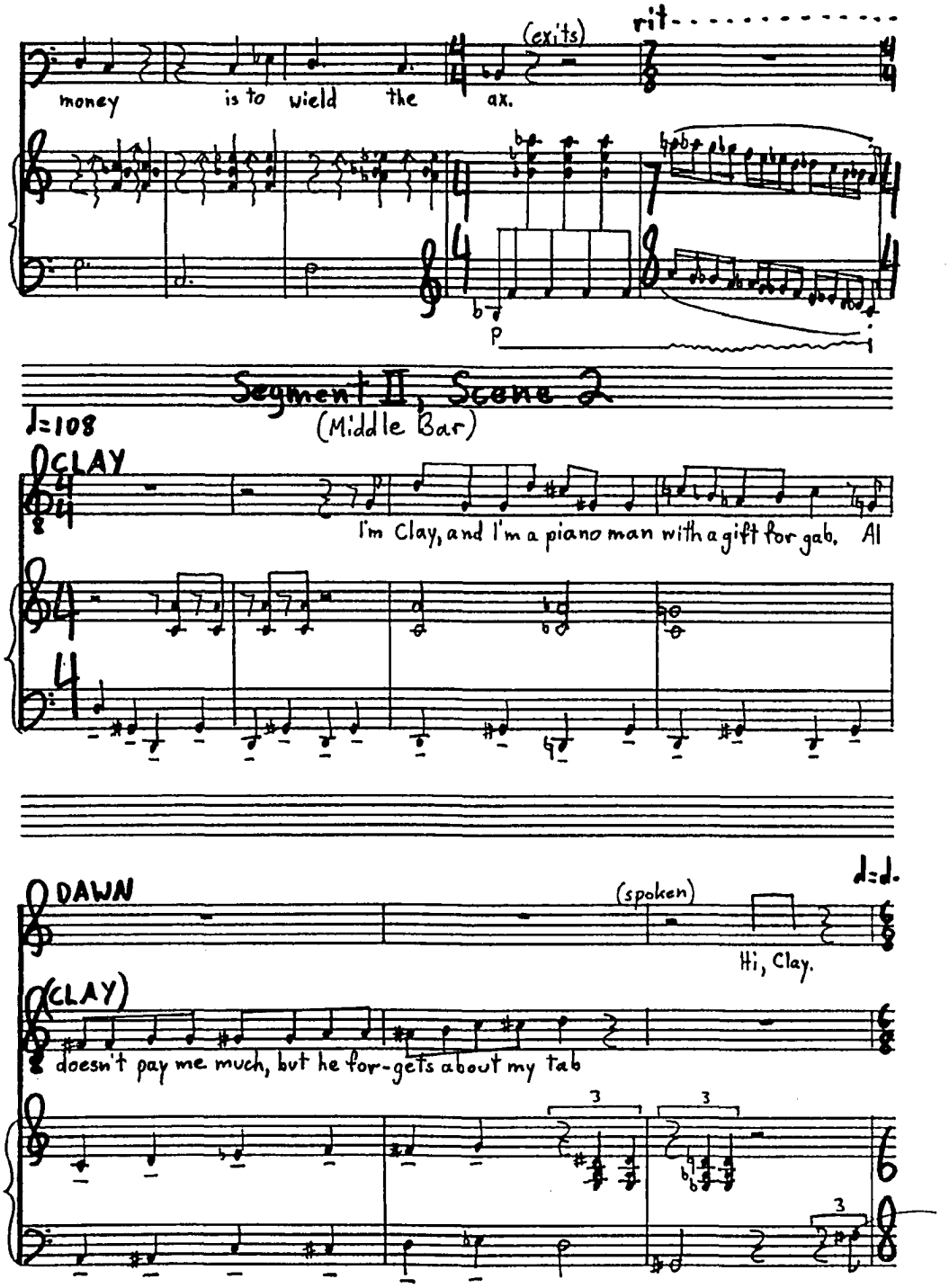

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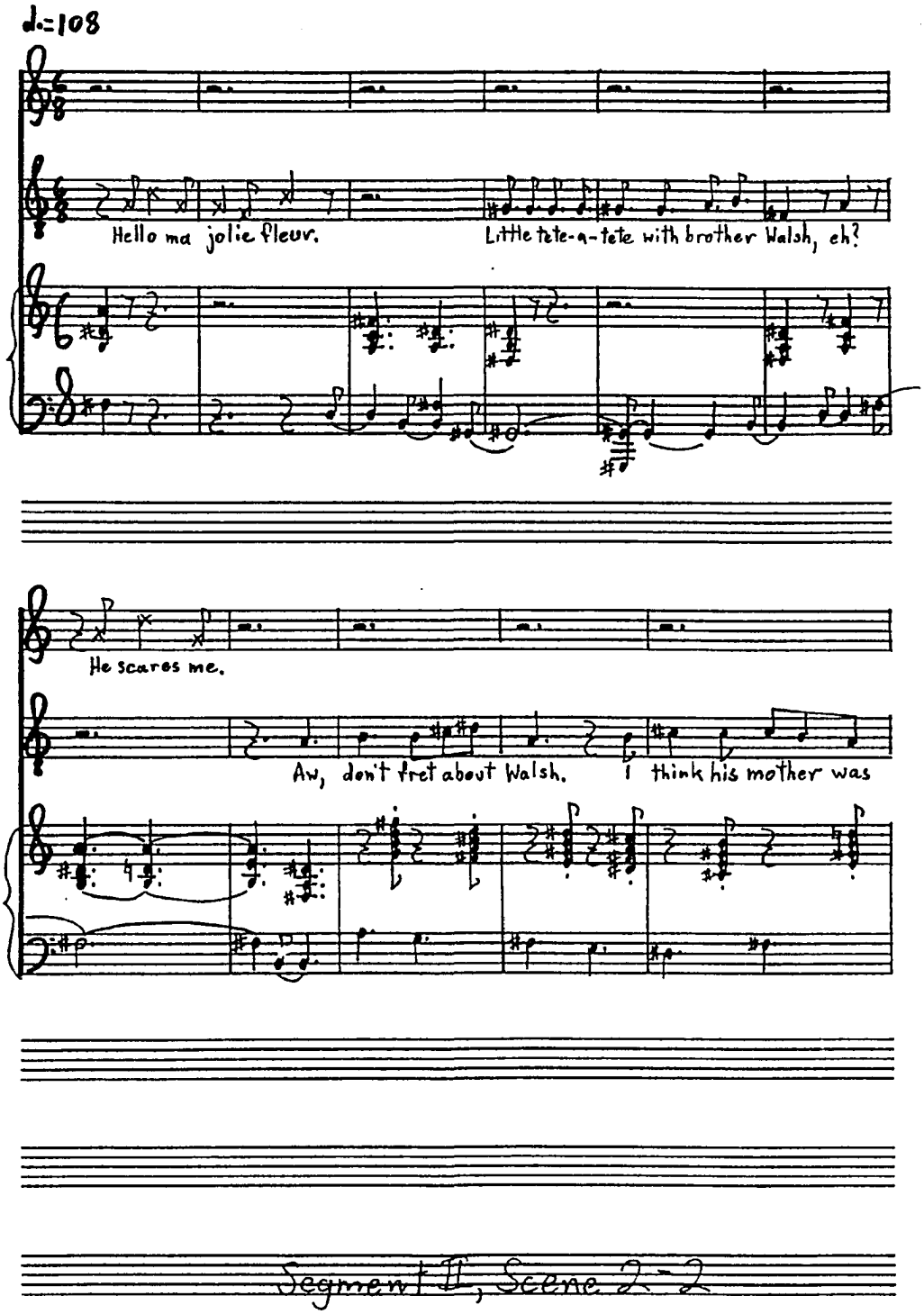

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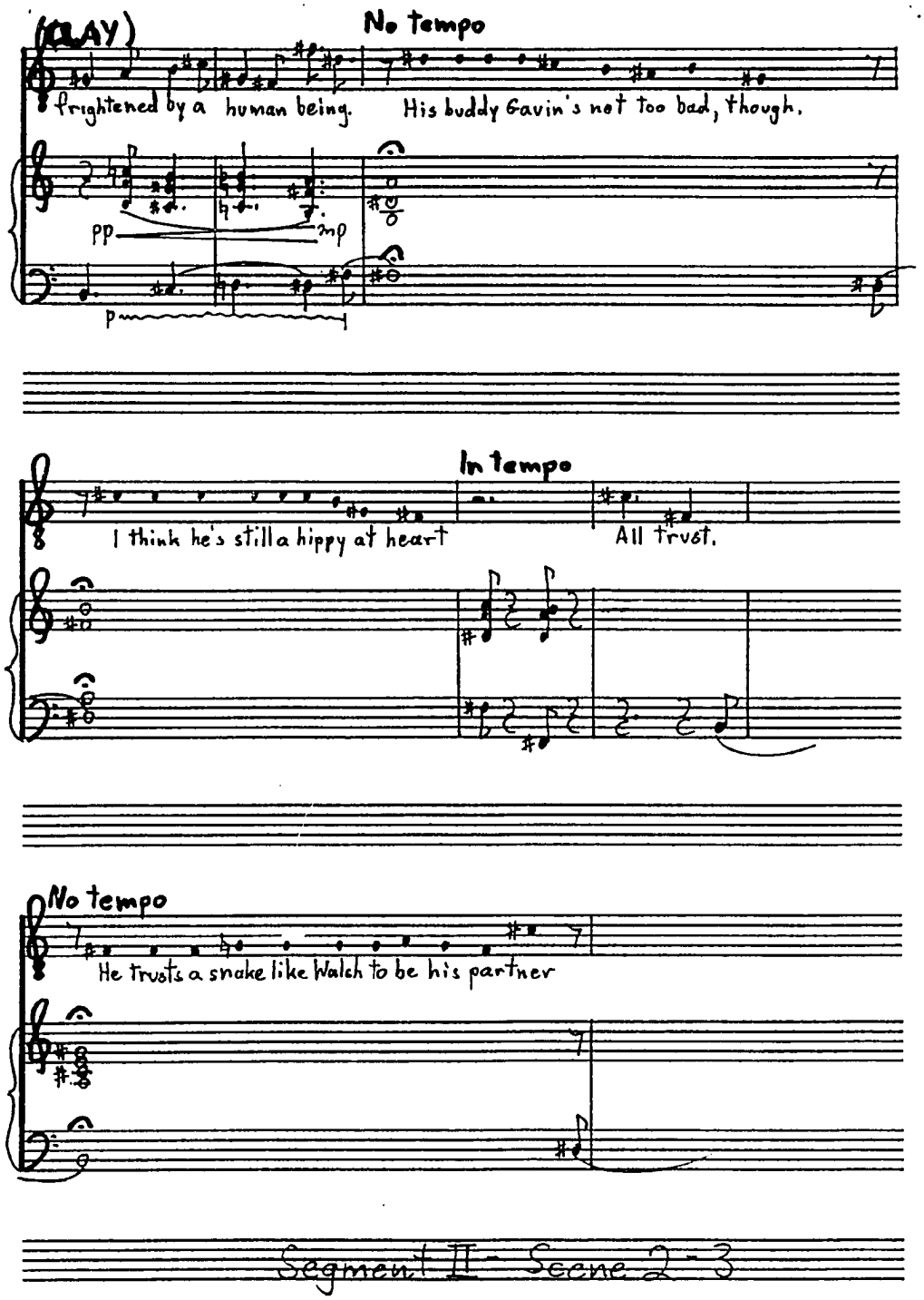

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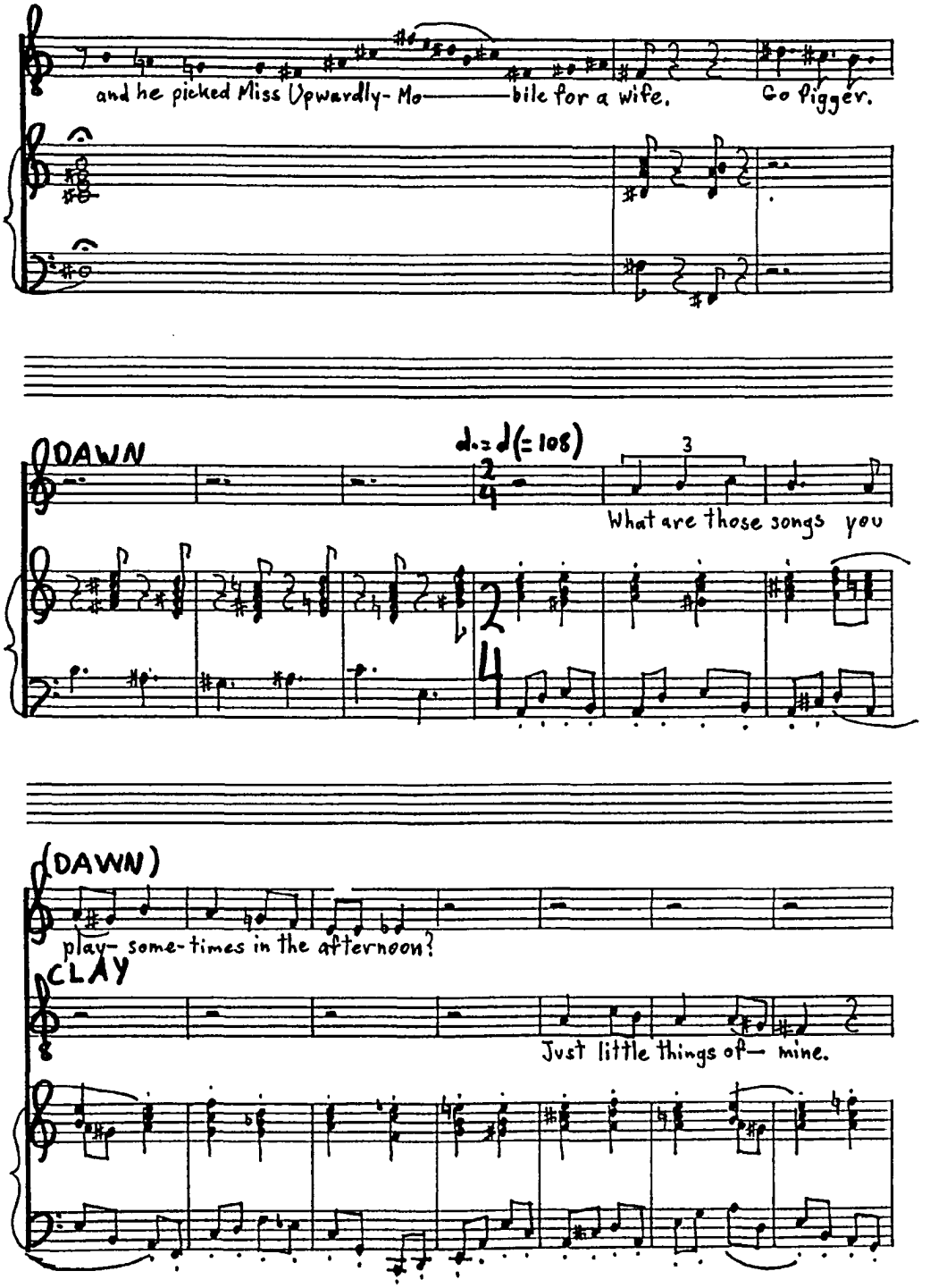

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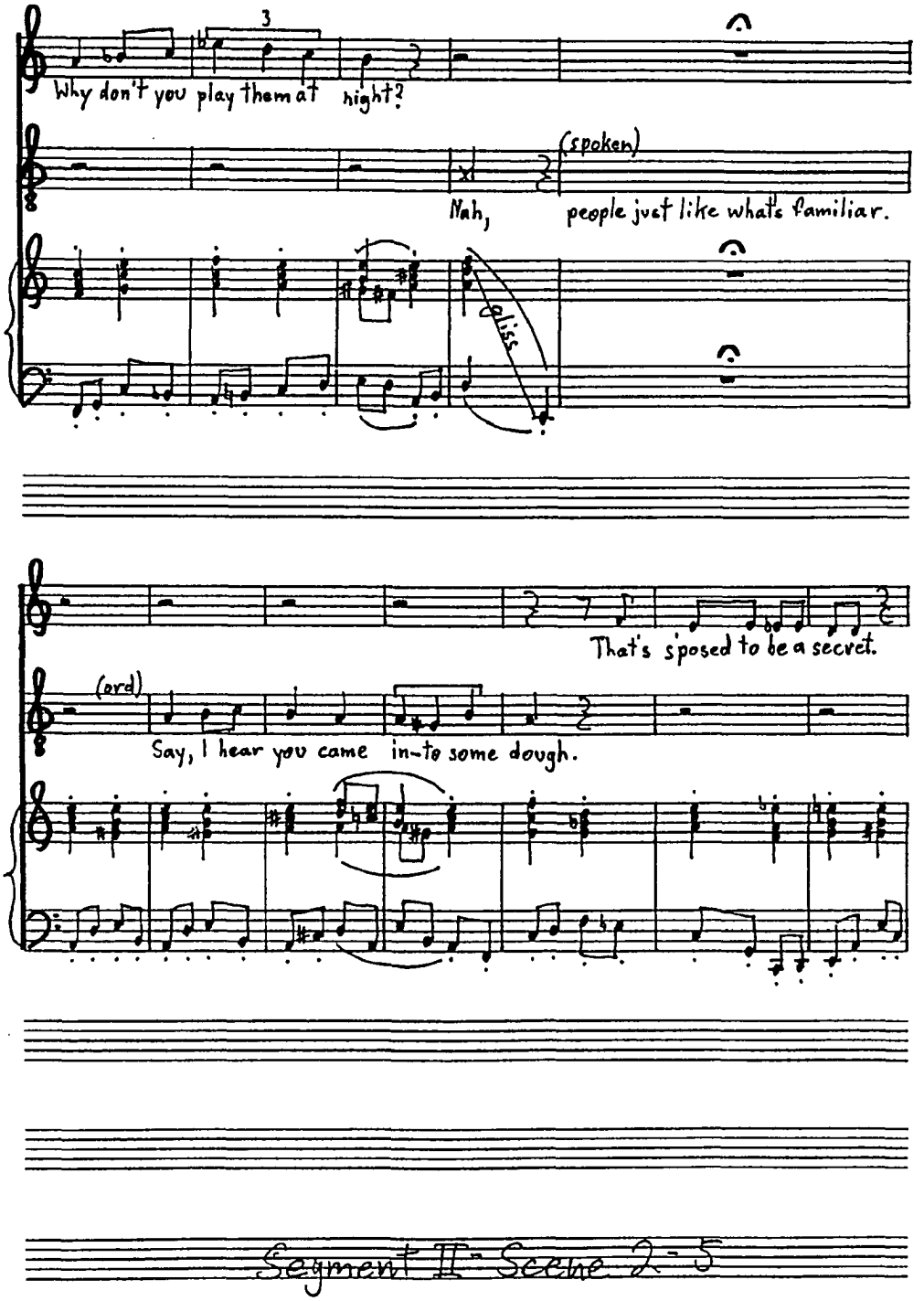

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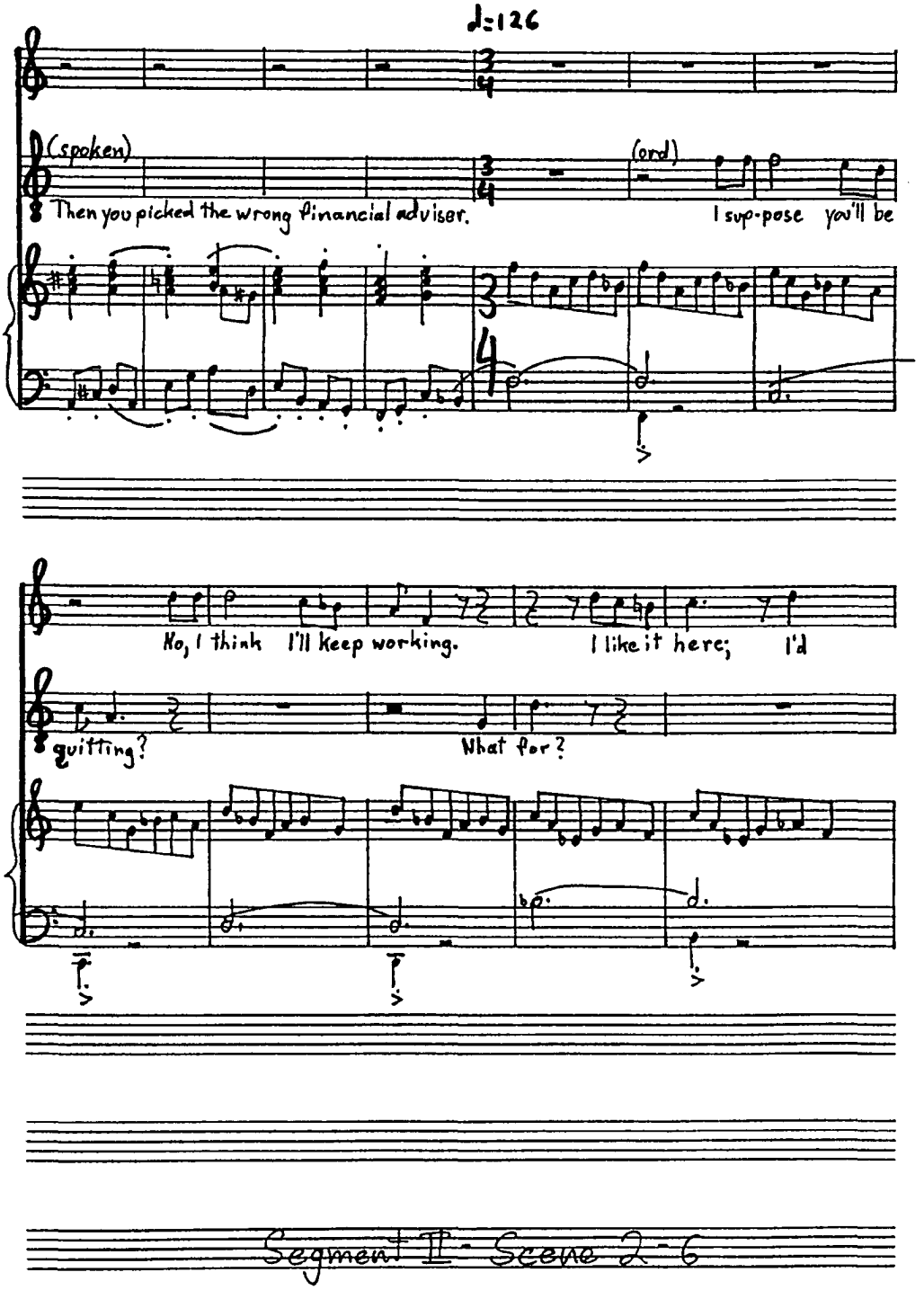

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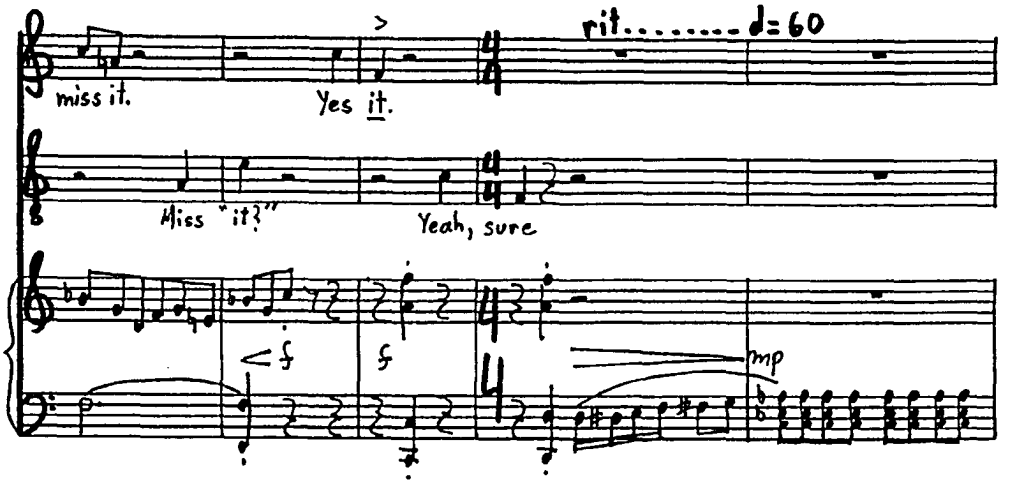
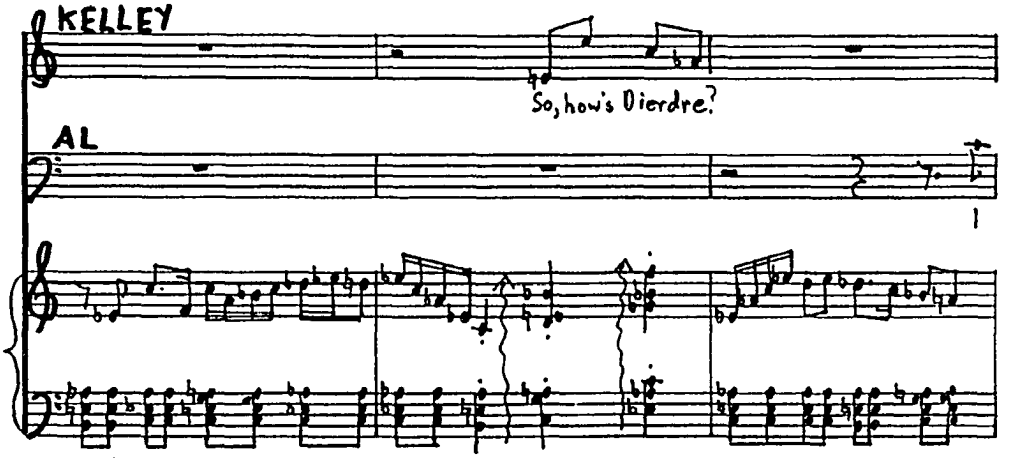


Segment II - Scene 3

(Front Bar)



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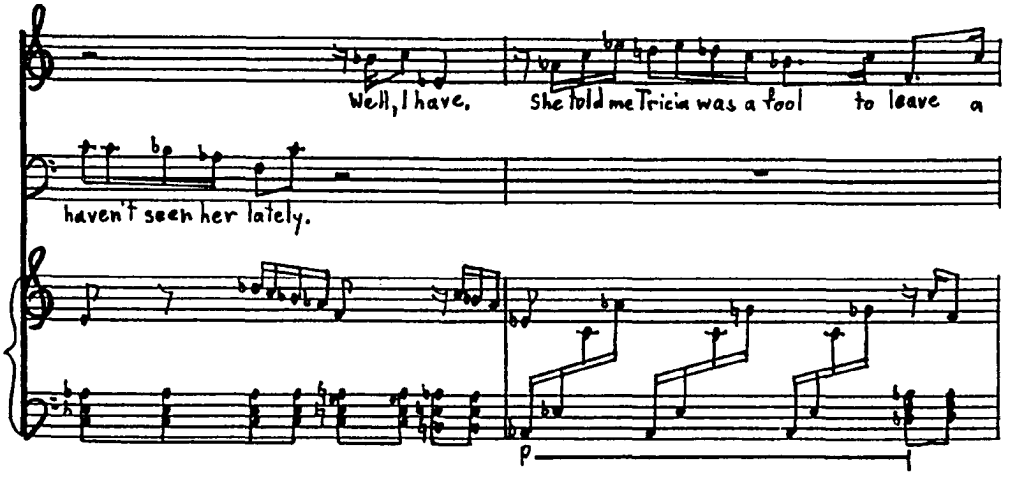

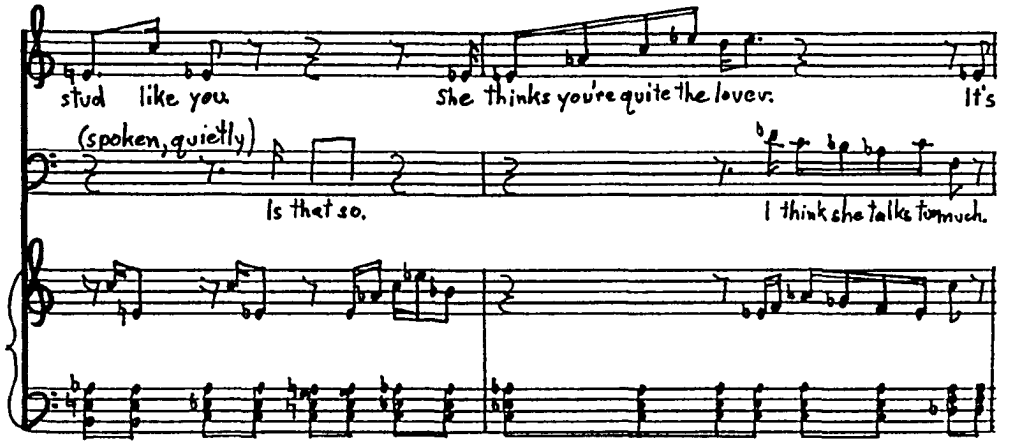

Segment II - Scene 3-2

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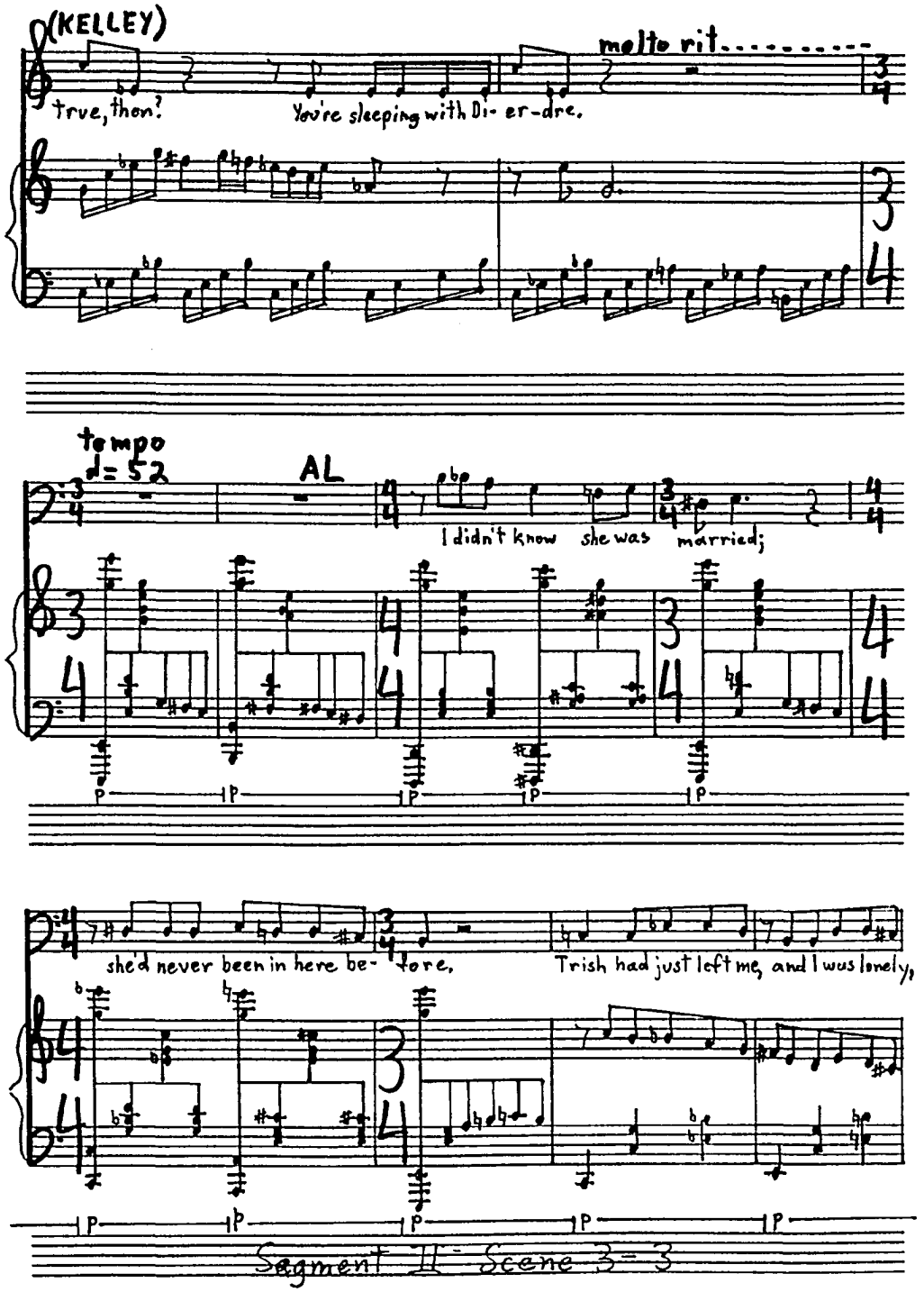

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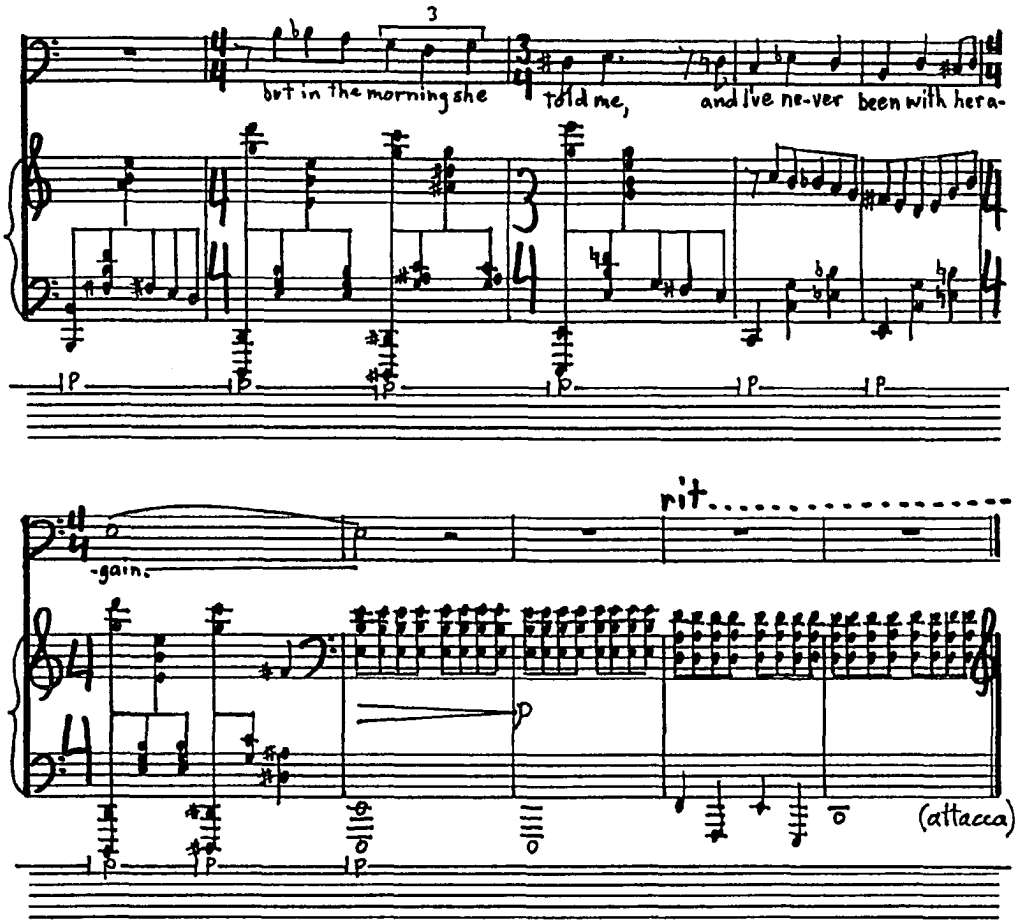

Segment II - Scene 3 - 4

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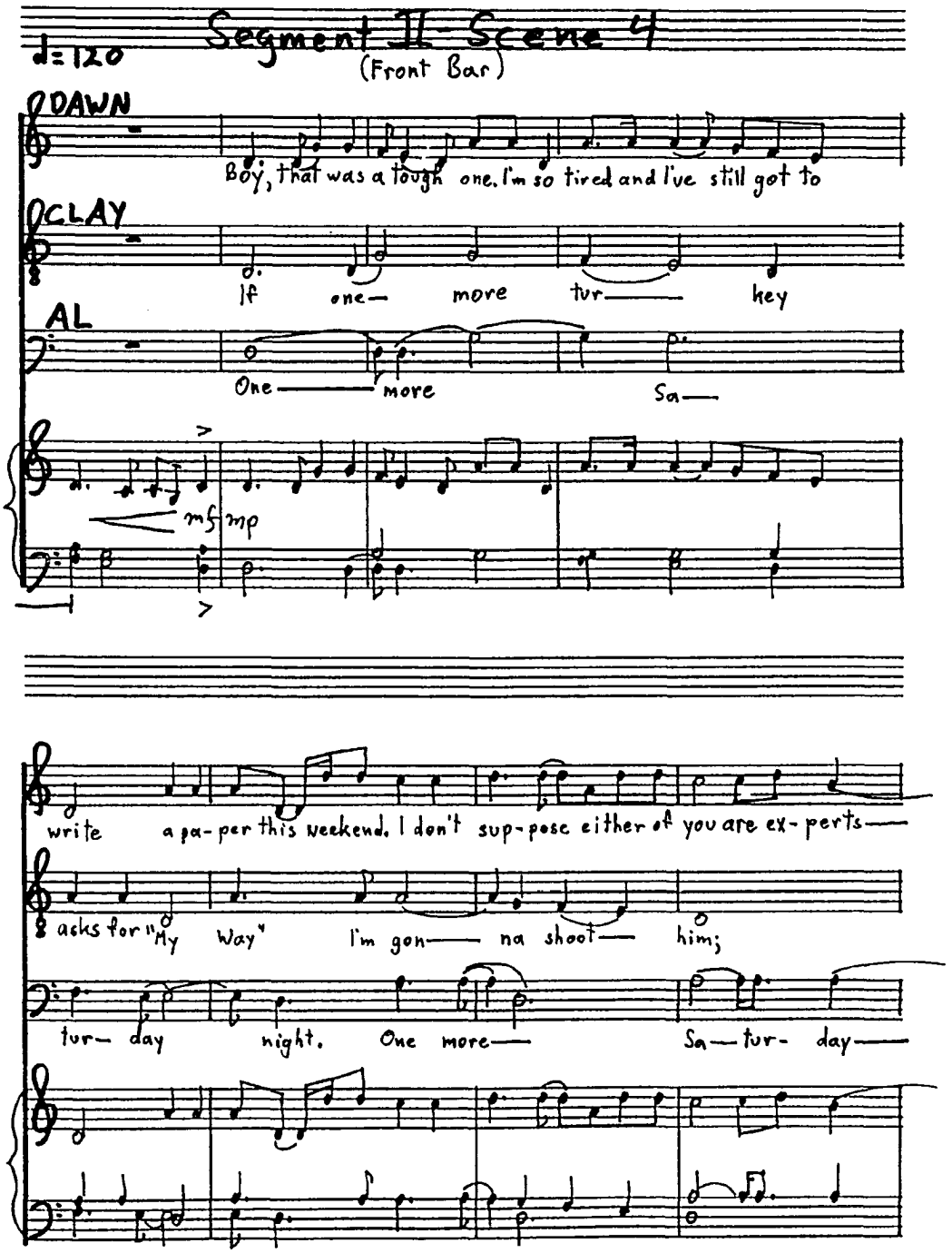

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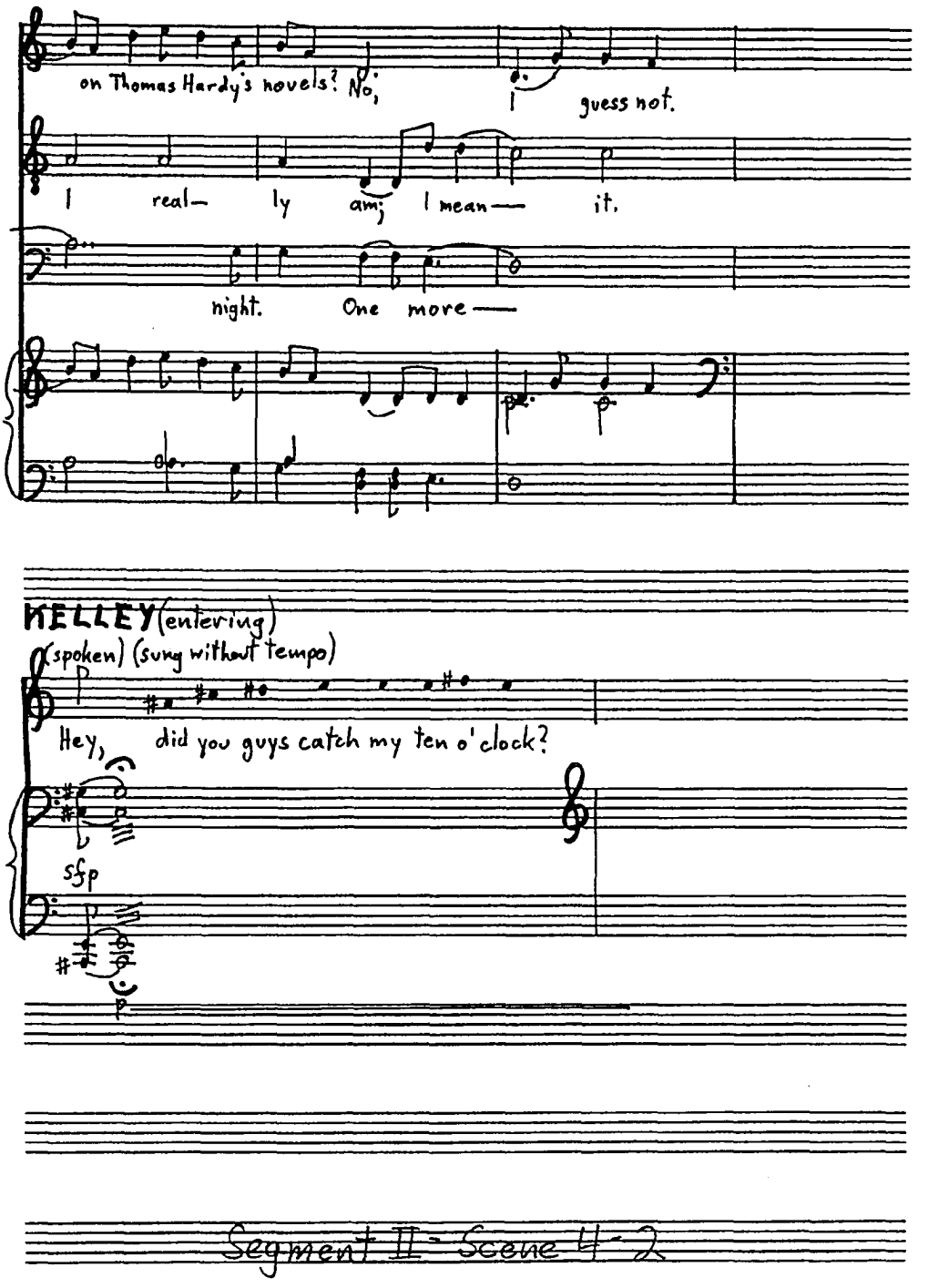

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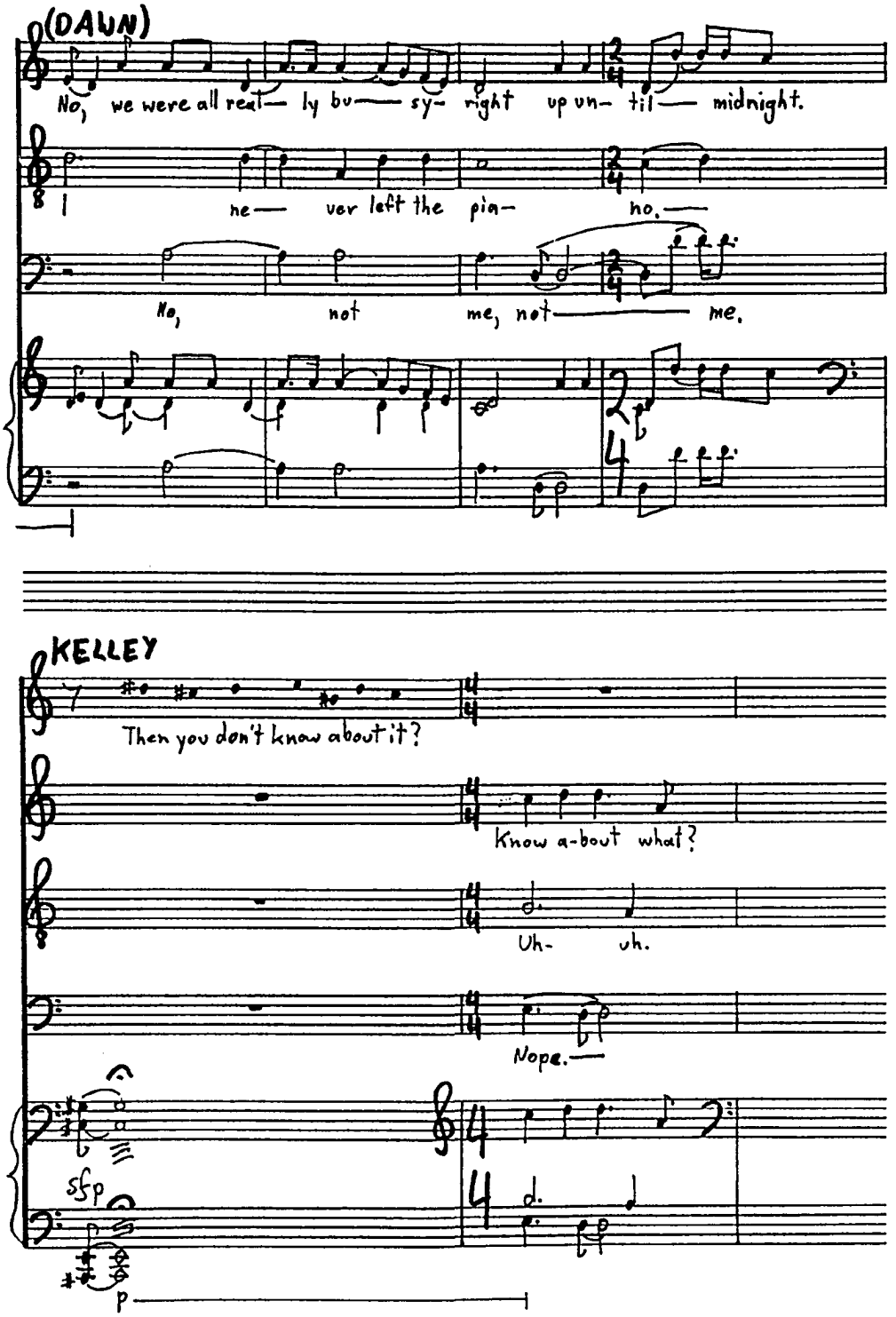

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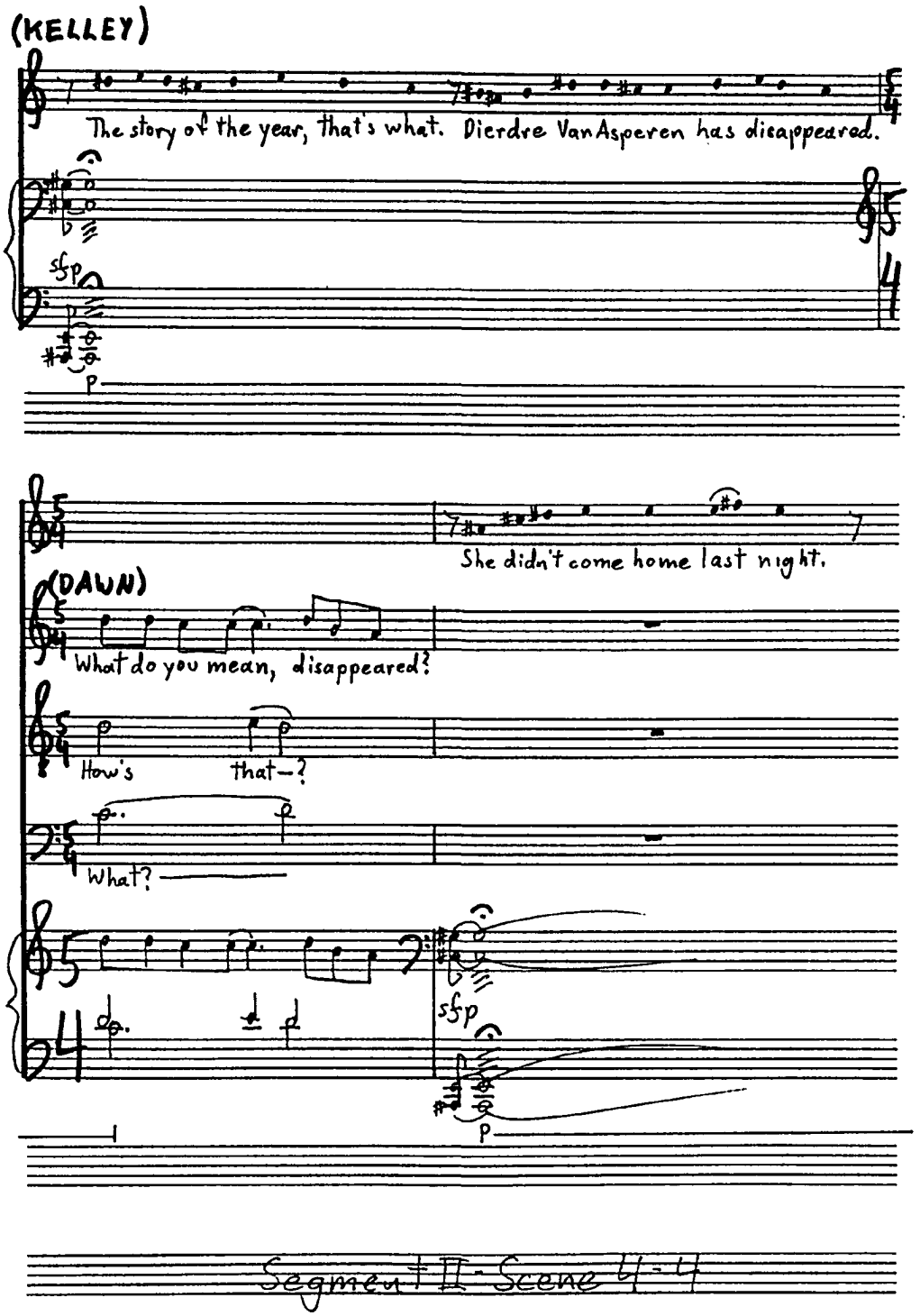

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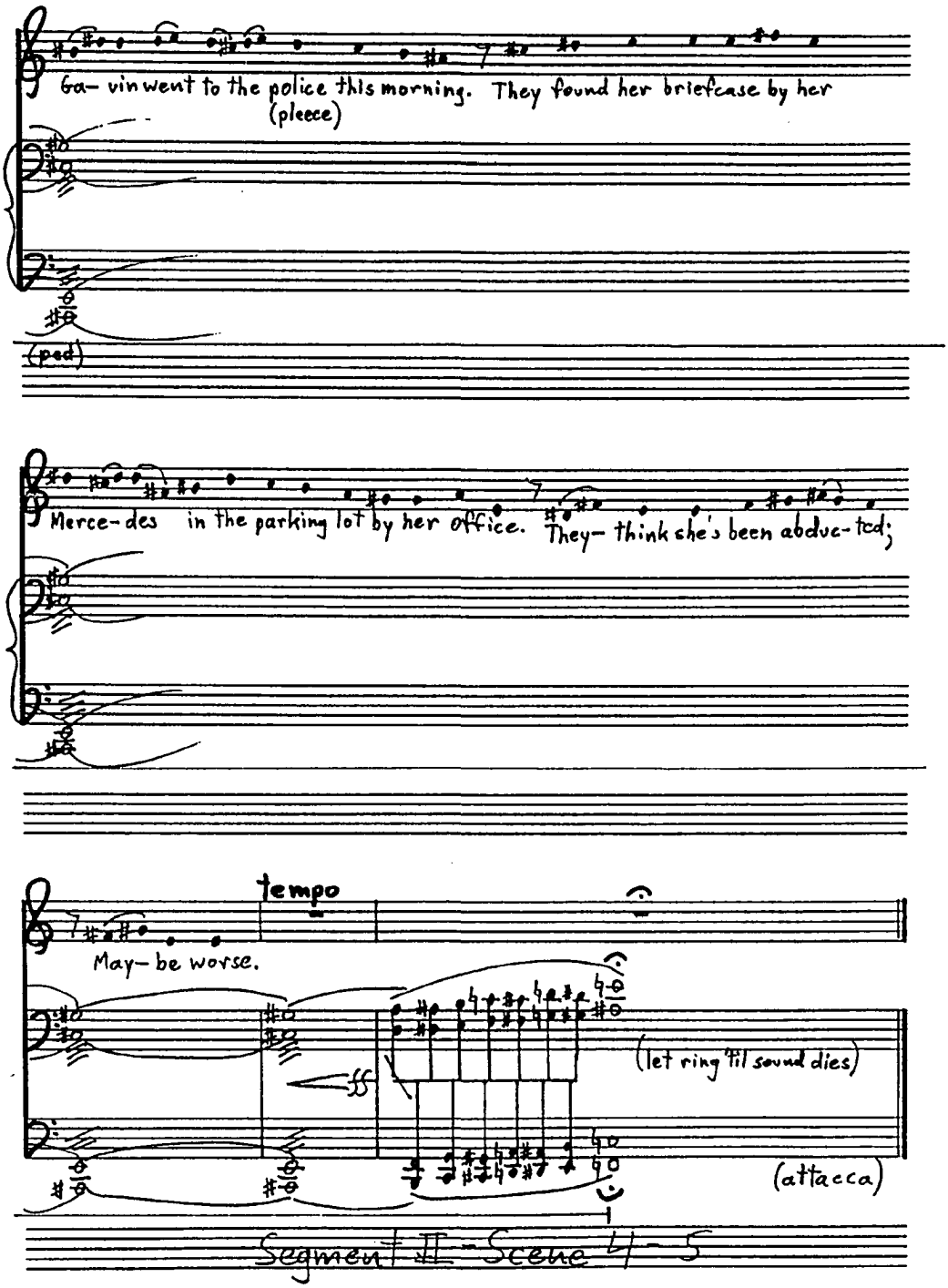

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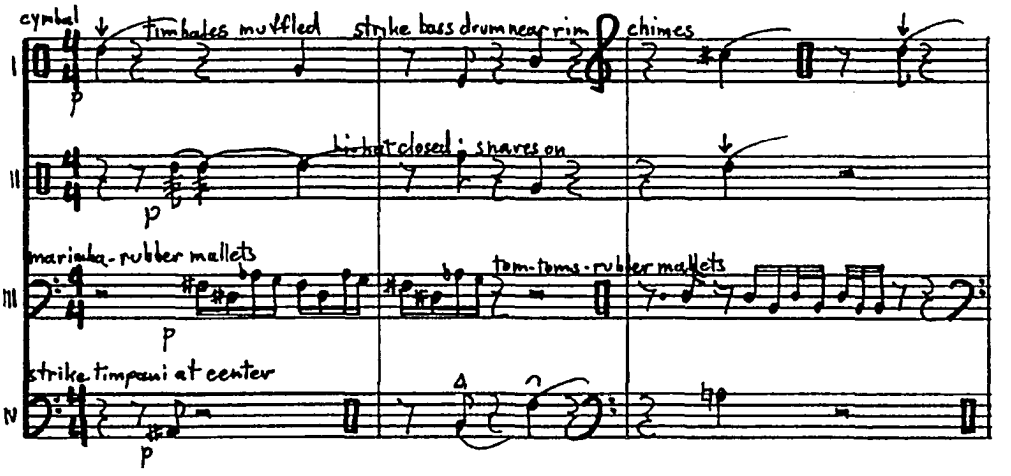
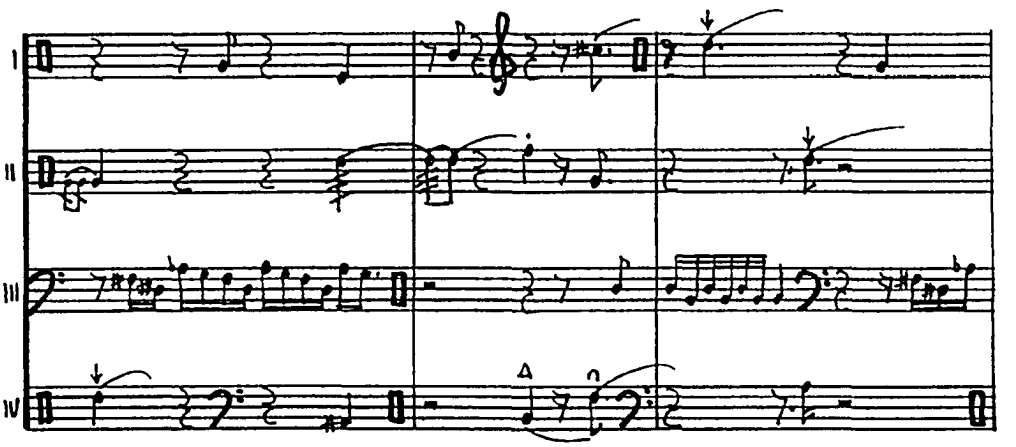
Break II

Players I, II, and IV - wooden sticks on everything; let all sounds ring

(attacca)

♩=75





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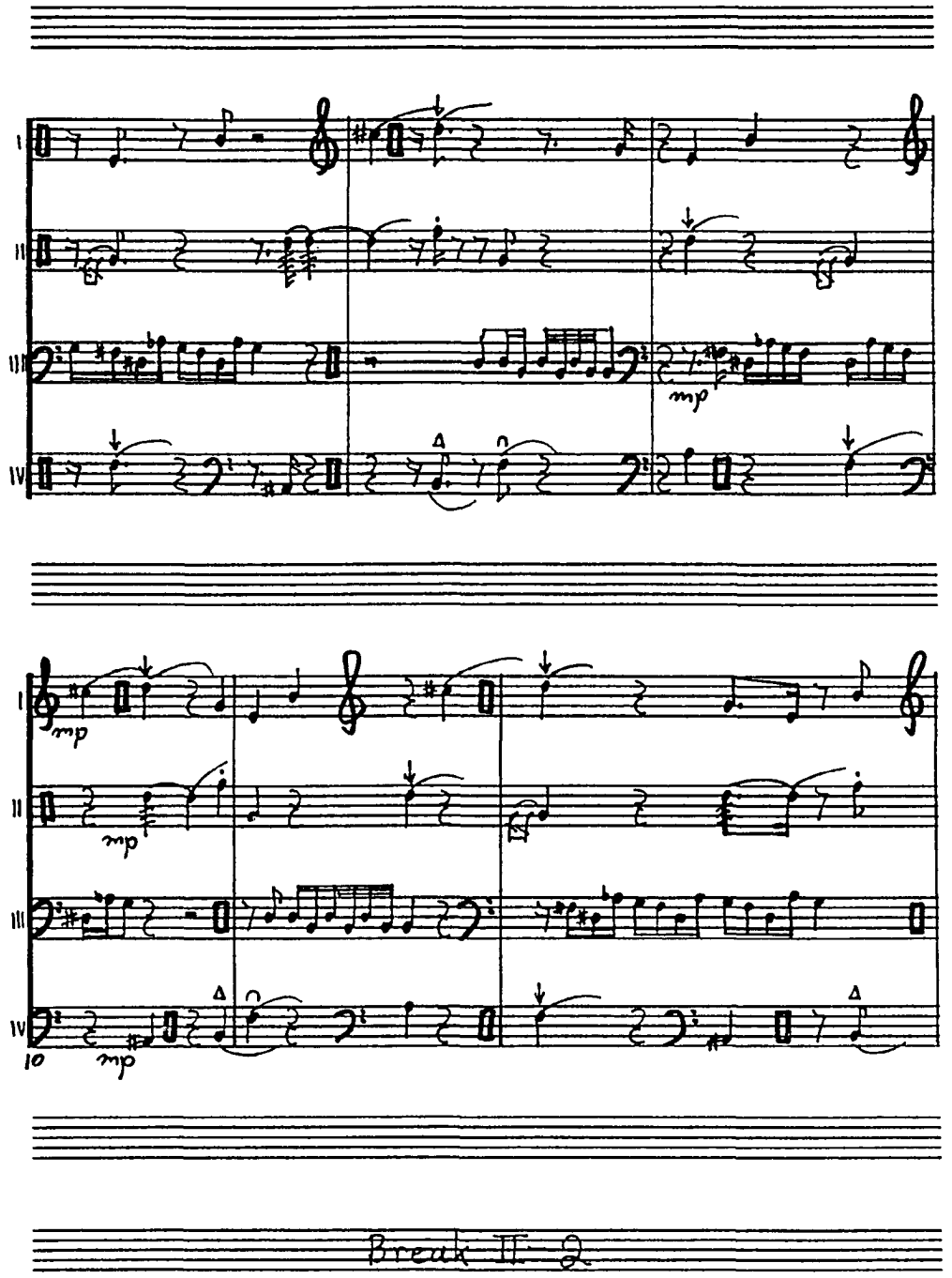

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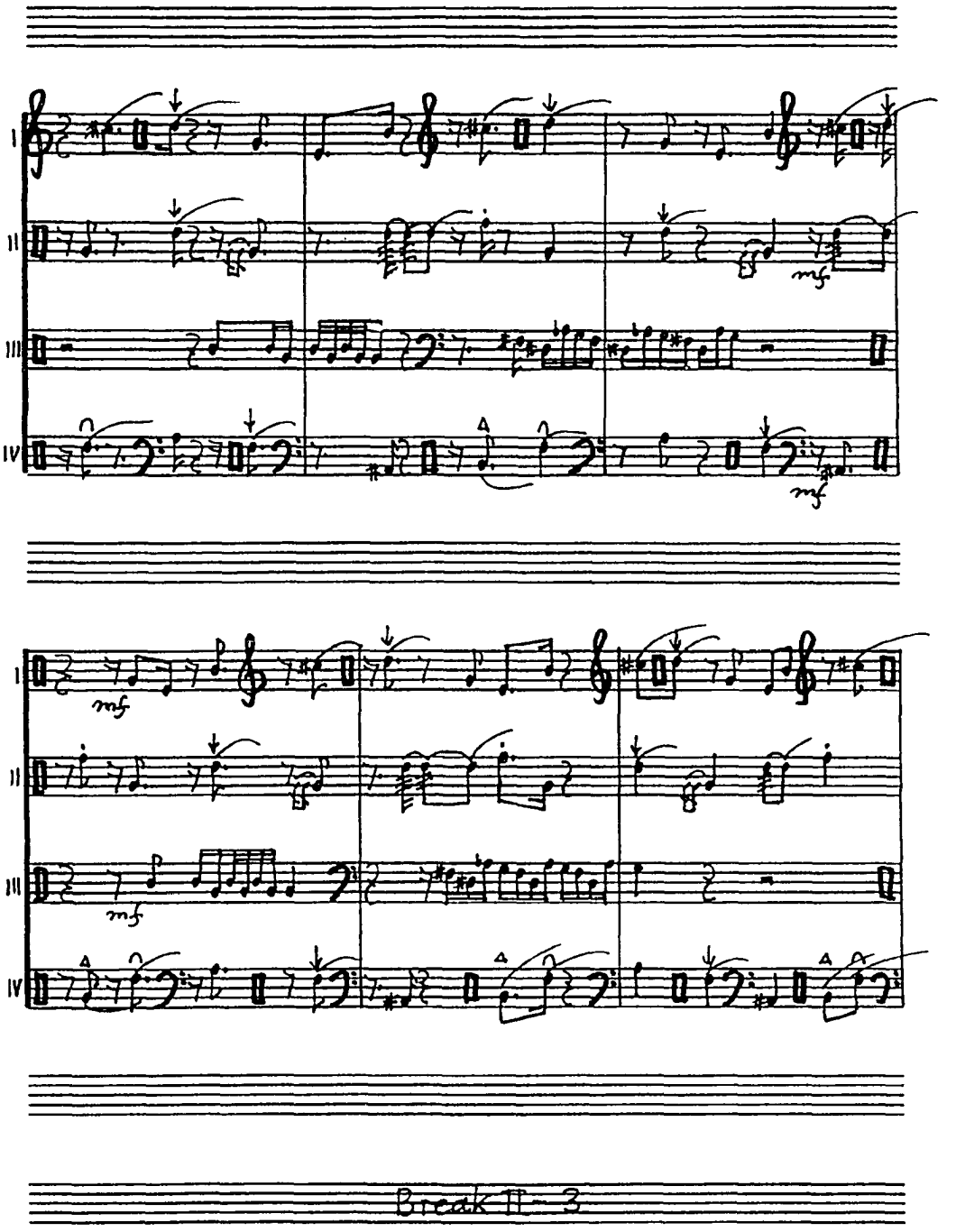

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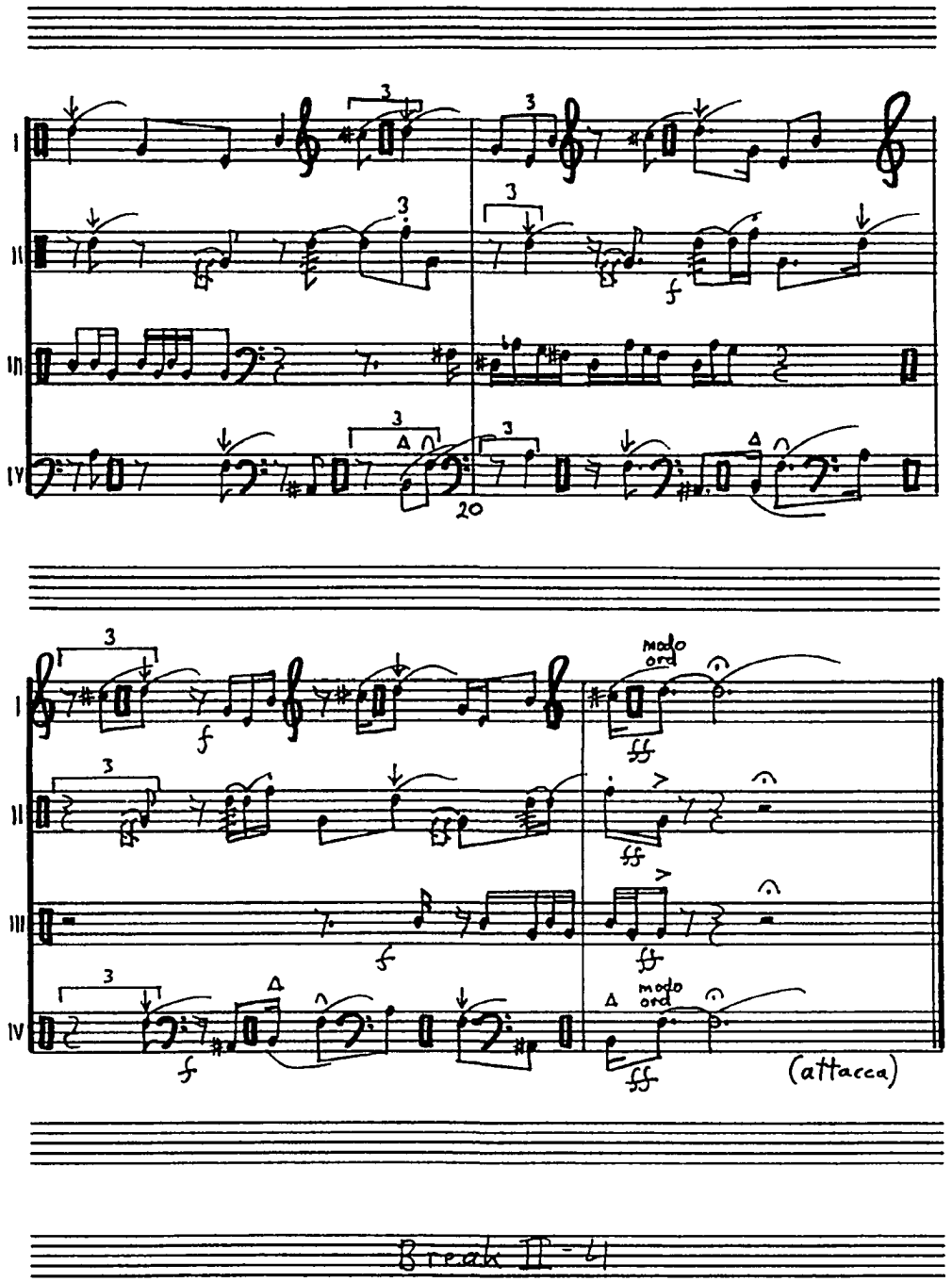

Break II - 61

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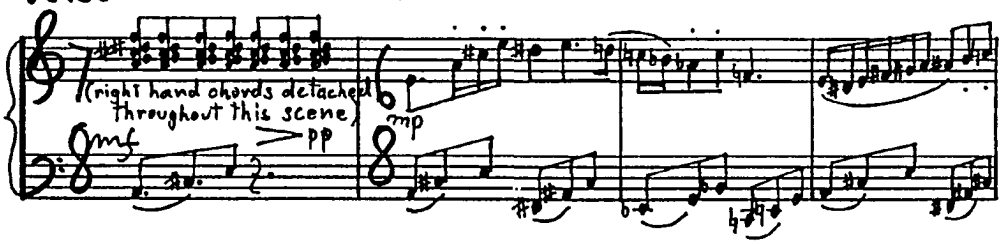
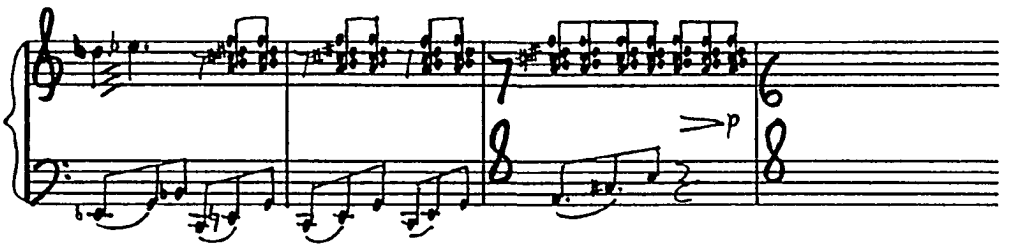
Segment III

(attacca)

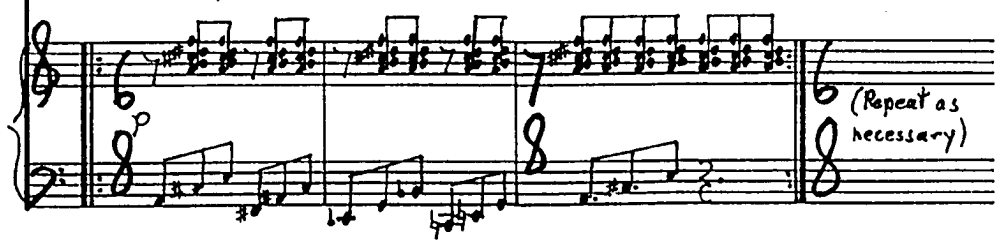
Scene I
(Stage-Left)

♩= 136





KELLEY (Spoken, to audience) This is the home of Gavin and Dierdre VanAsperen. Just four days ago Dierdre mysteriously disappeared from the parking lot of her downtown office building. As of today, police have virtually no clues as to what may have happened. Gavin VanAsperen, who hasn't spoken to the press since the disappearance, has asked us to allow him to tape a message to his wife, in the hope that she, or anyone having information, will see the broadcast. (Turning) Mr. VanAsperen?



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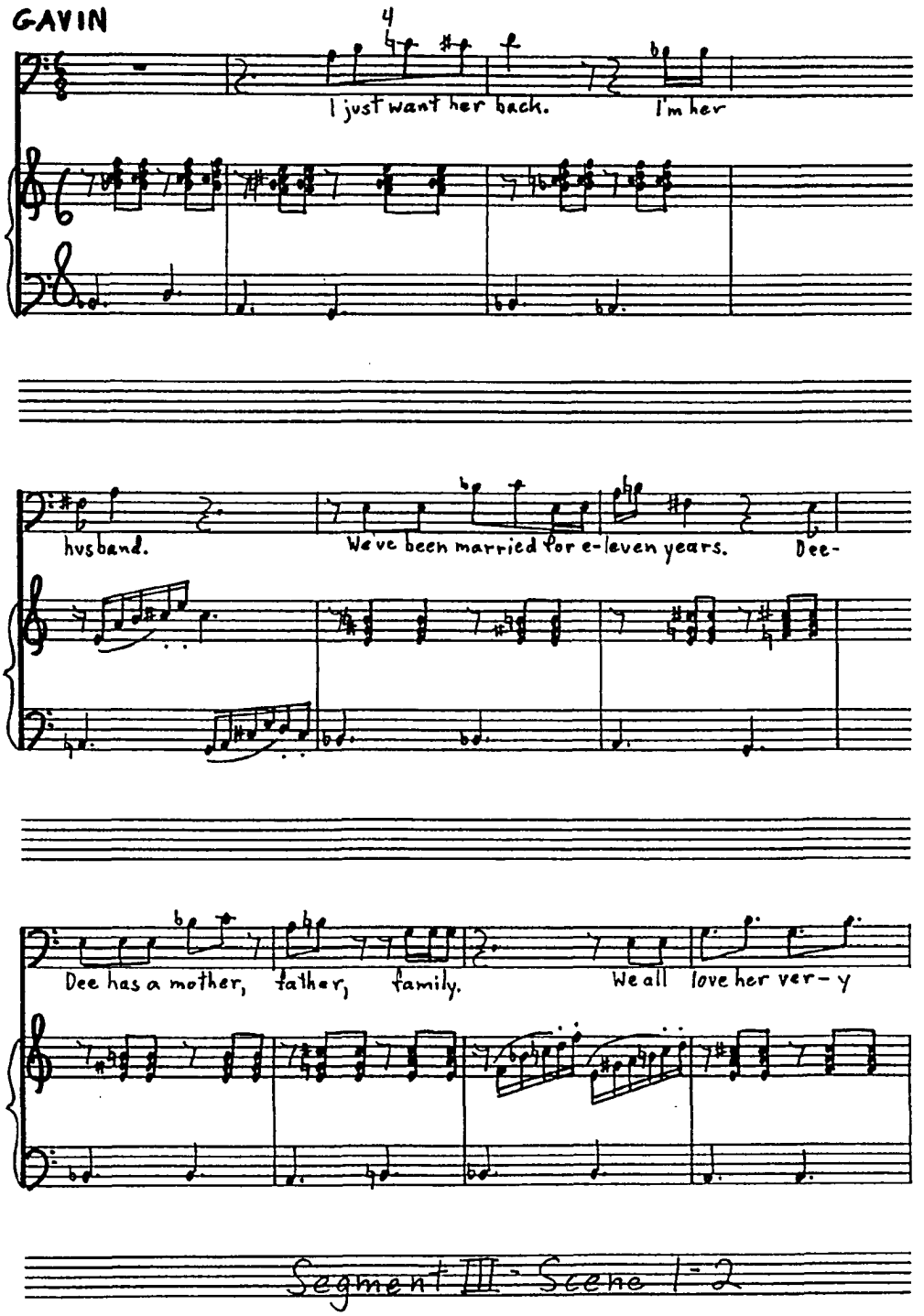

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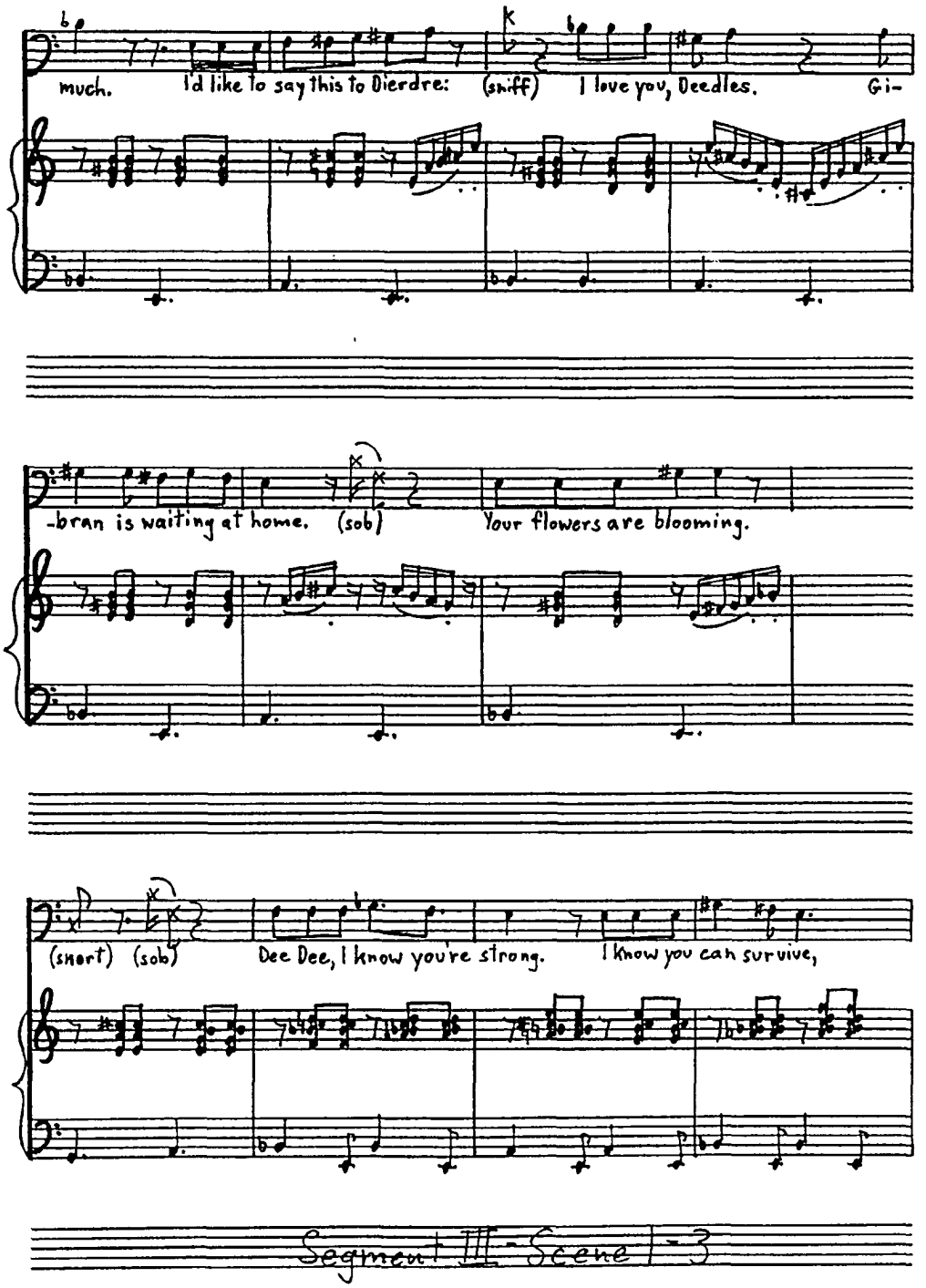

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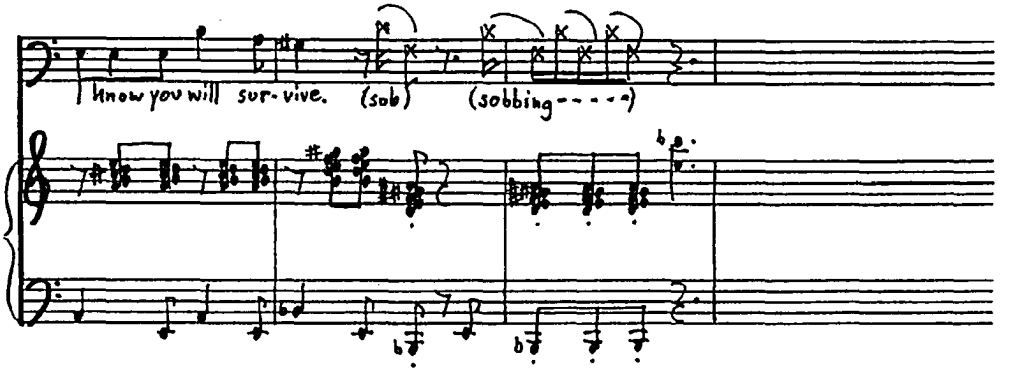

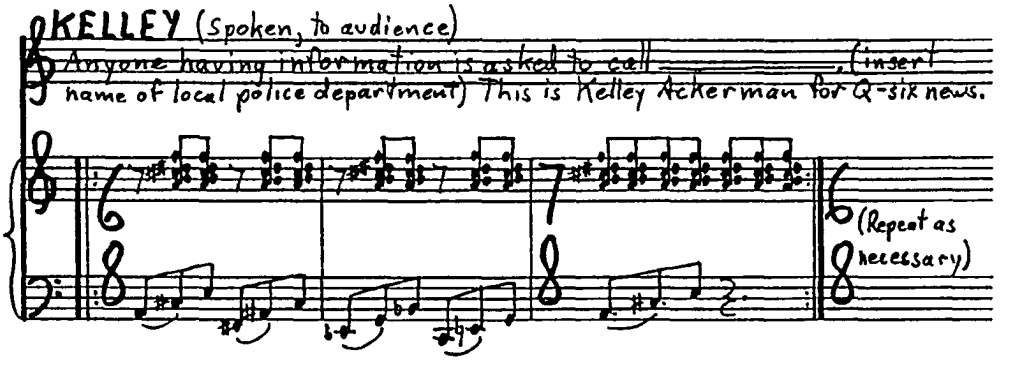

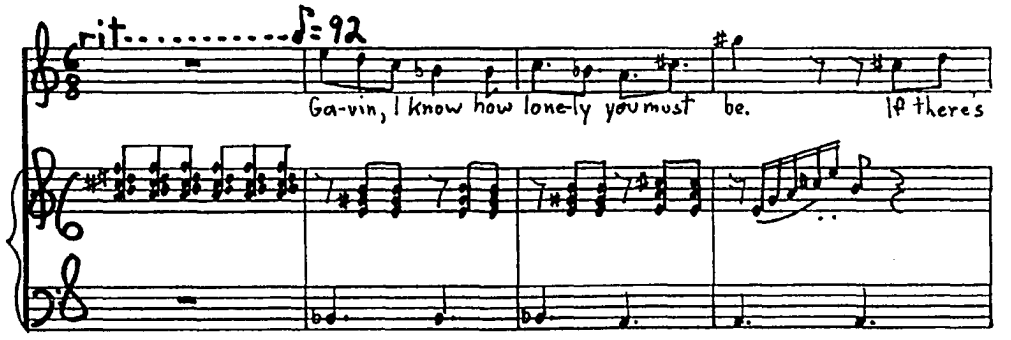

Segment III - Scene 1-4

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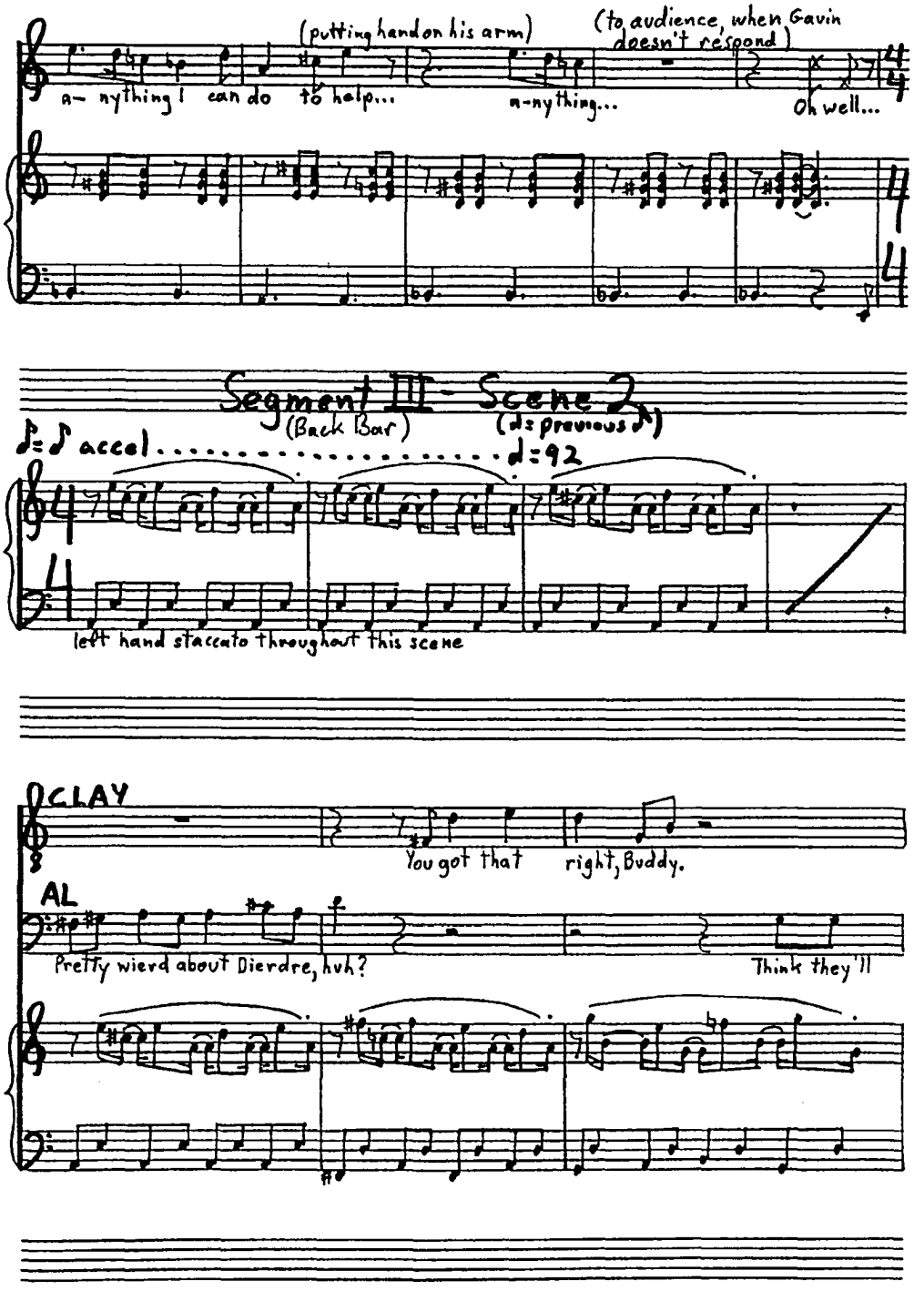

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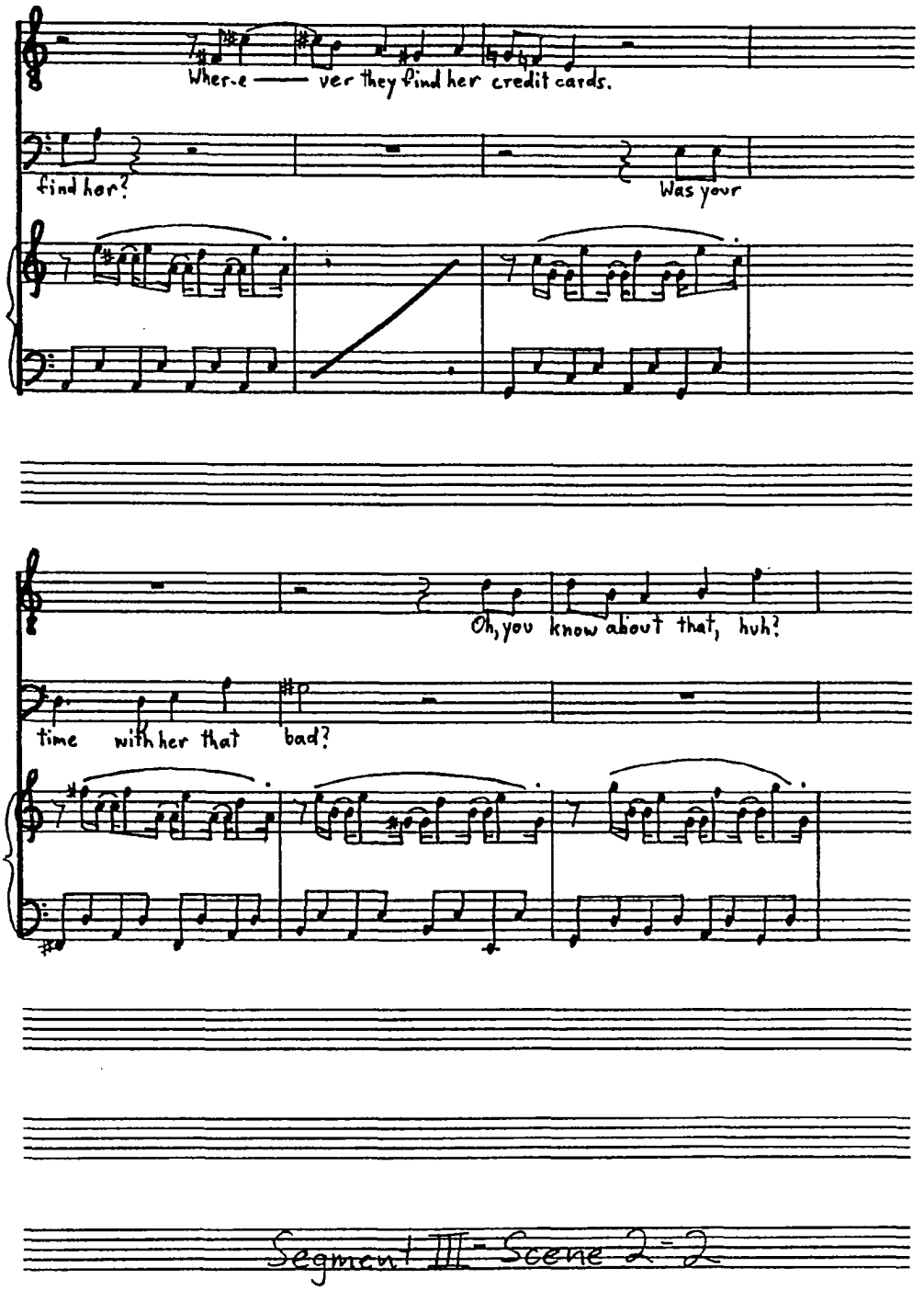

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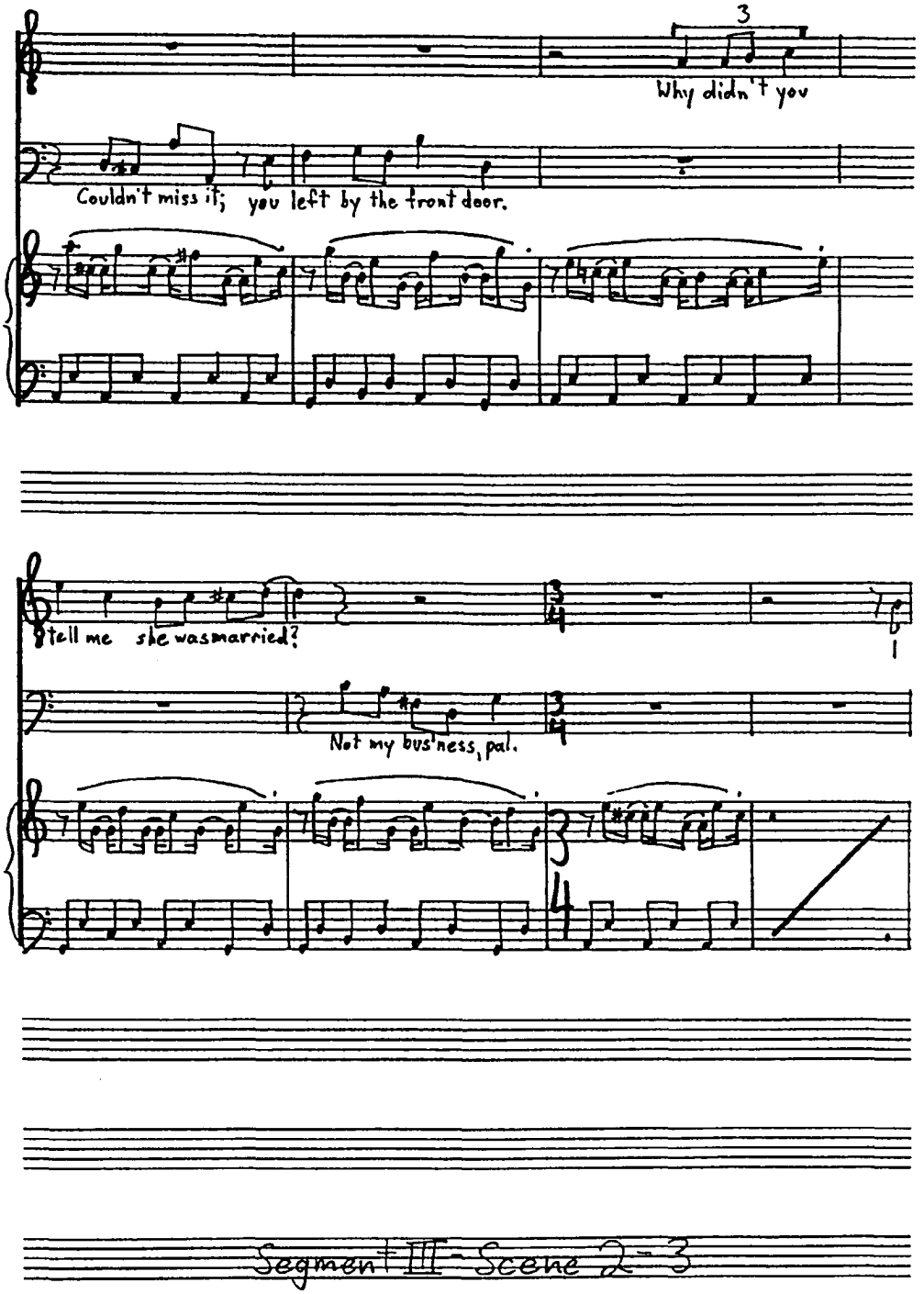

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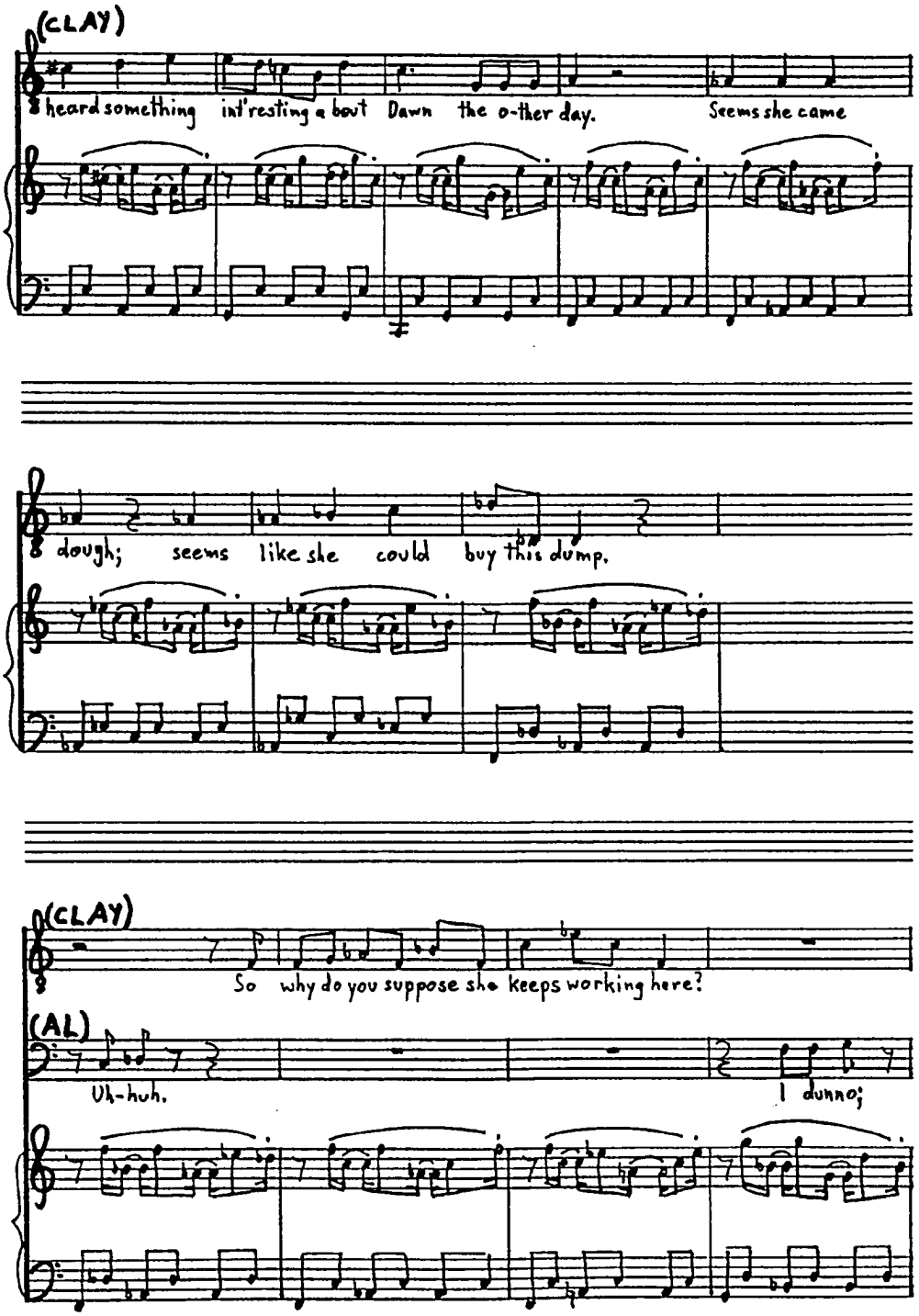

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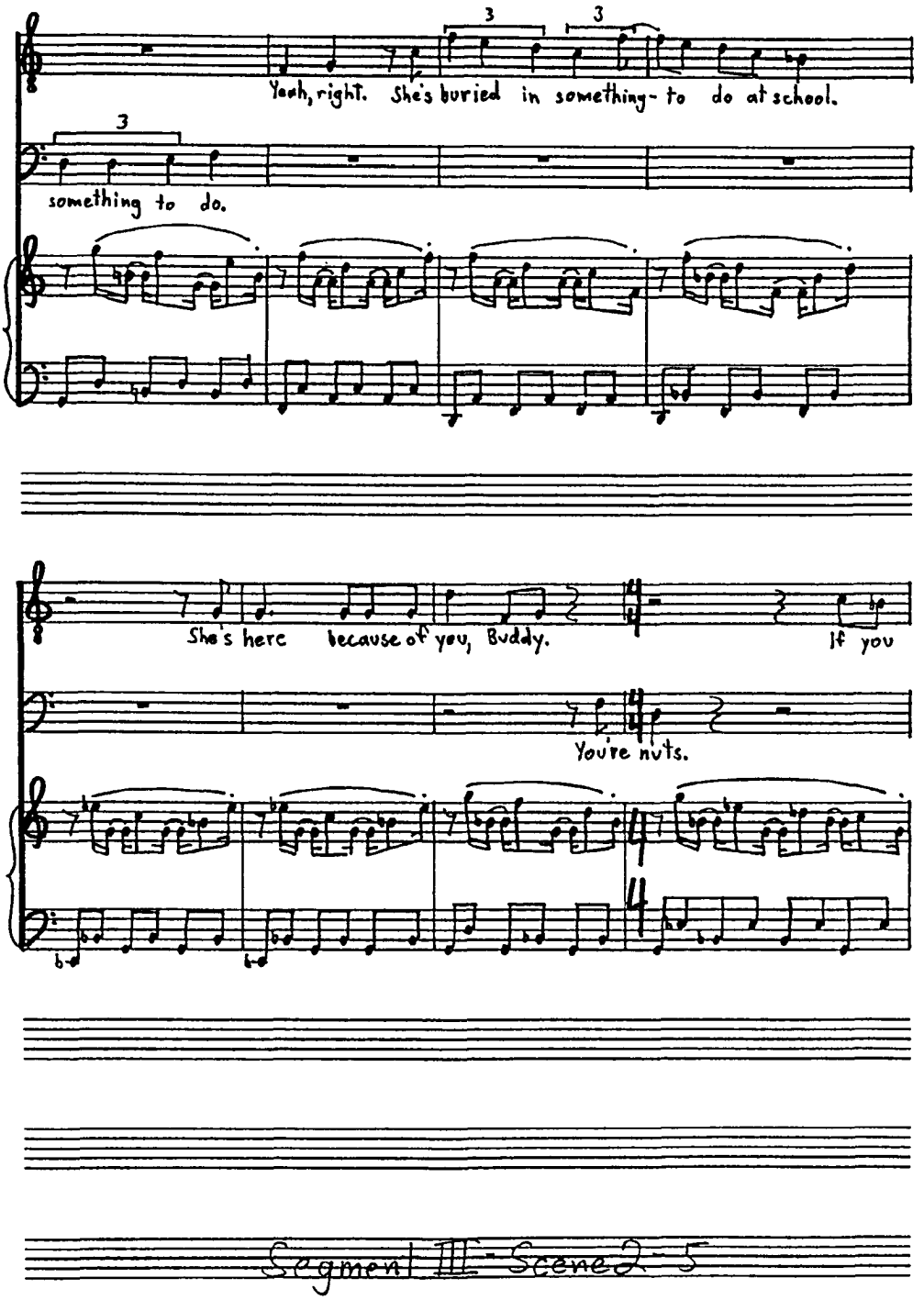

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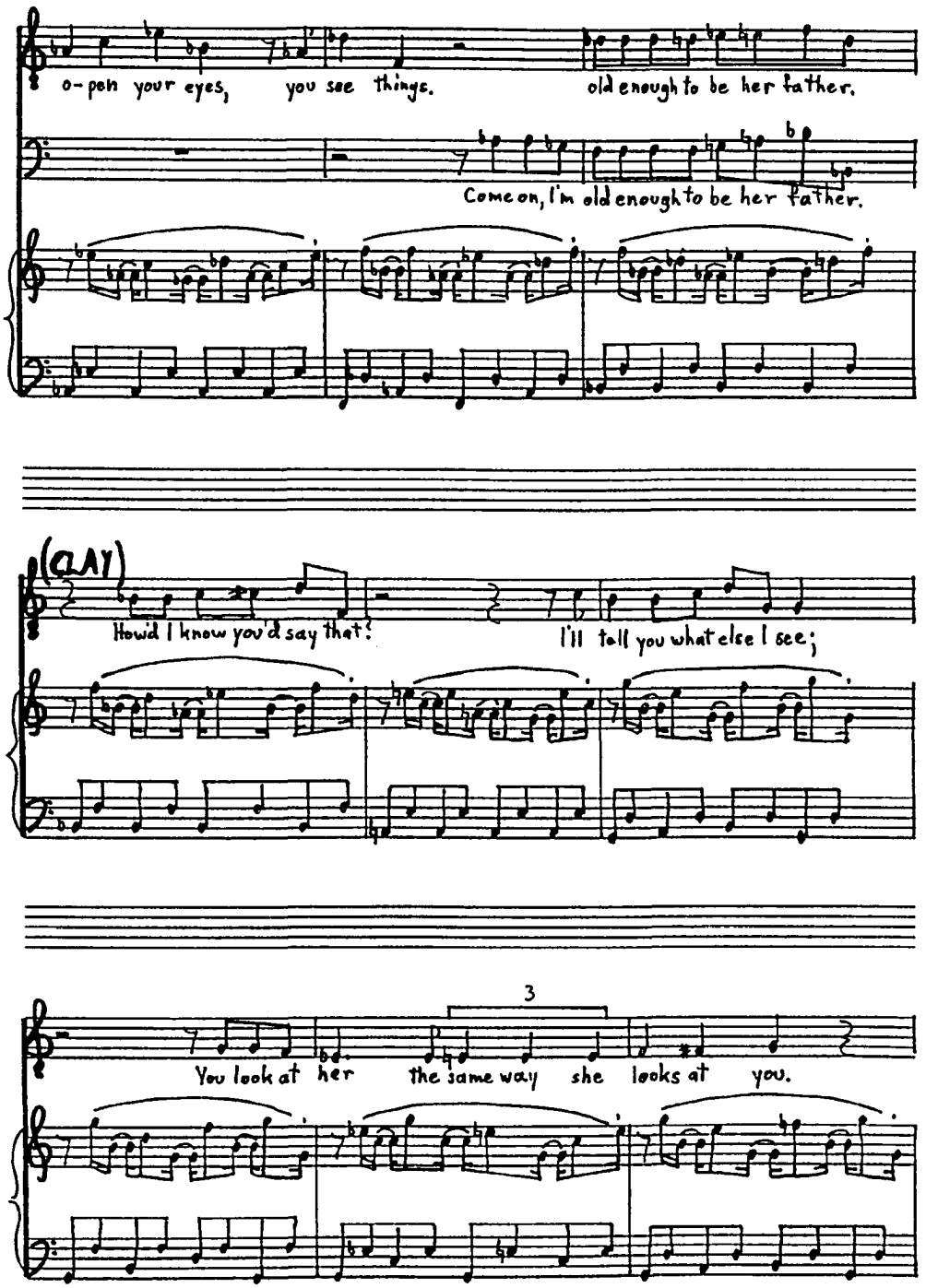

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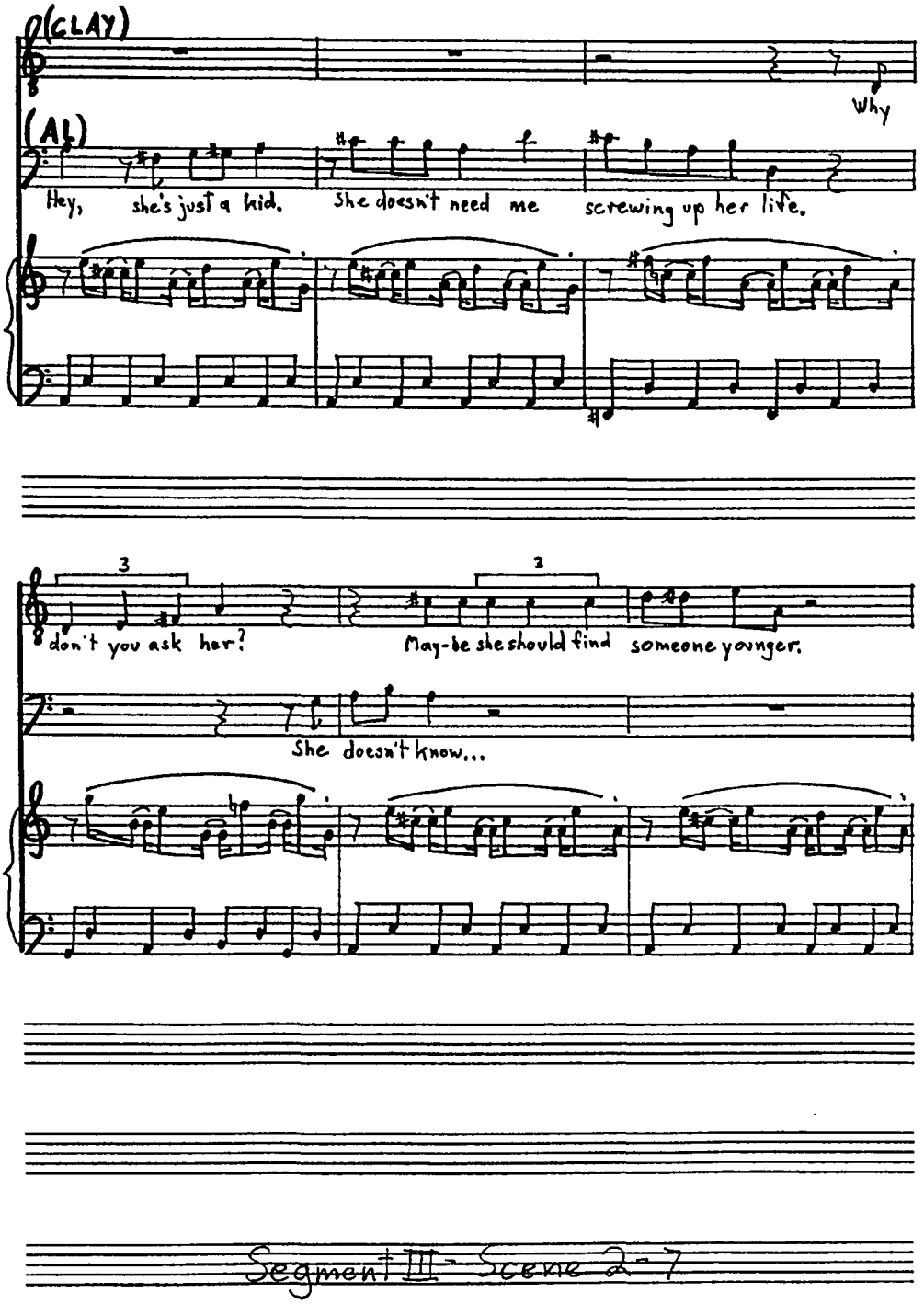

Segment III - Scene 2-7

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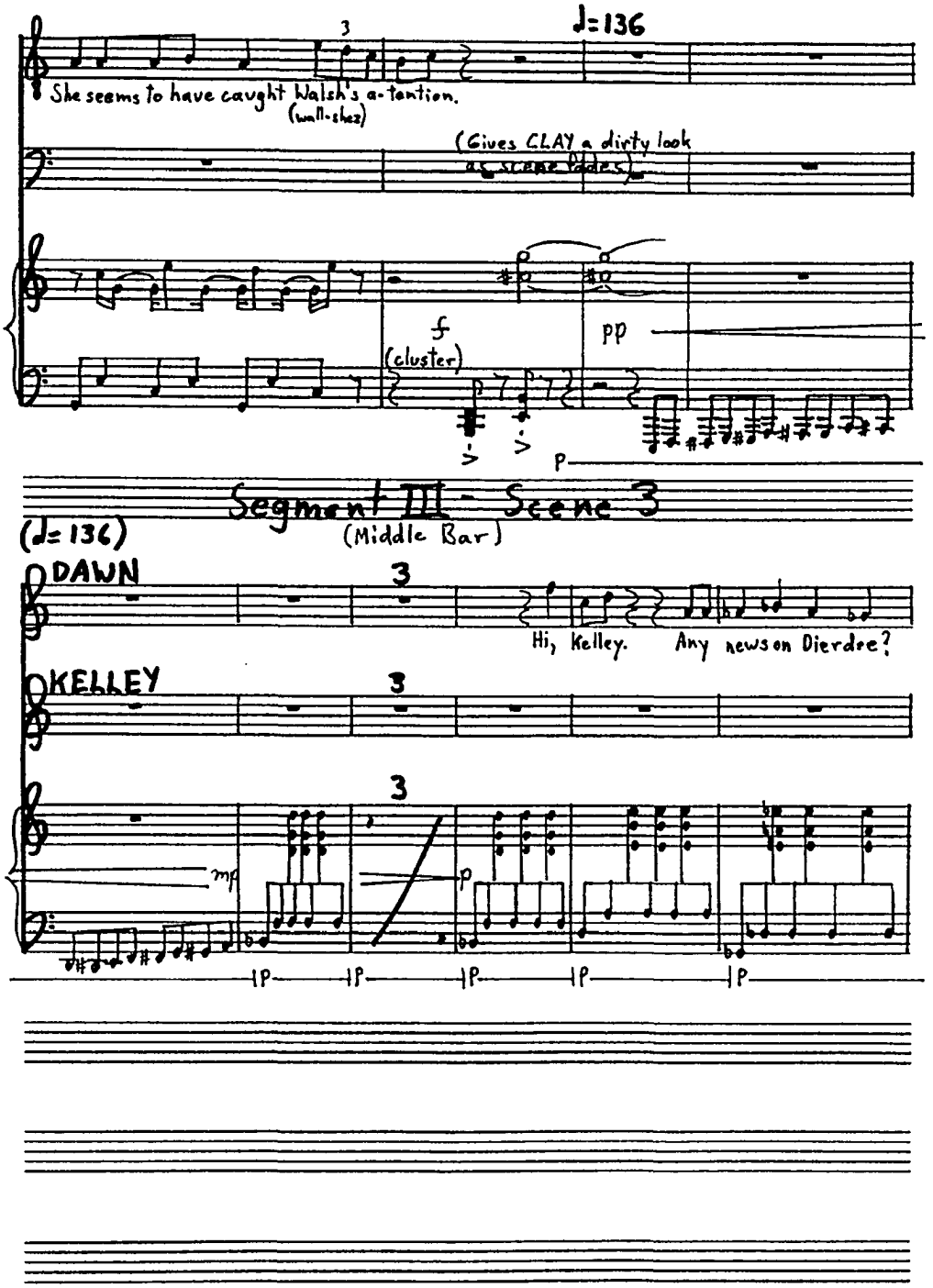

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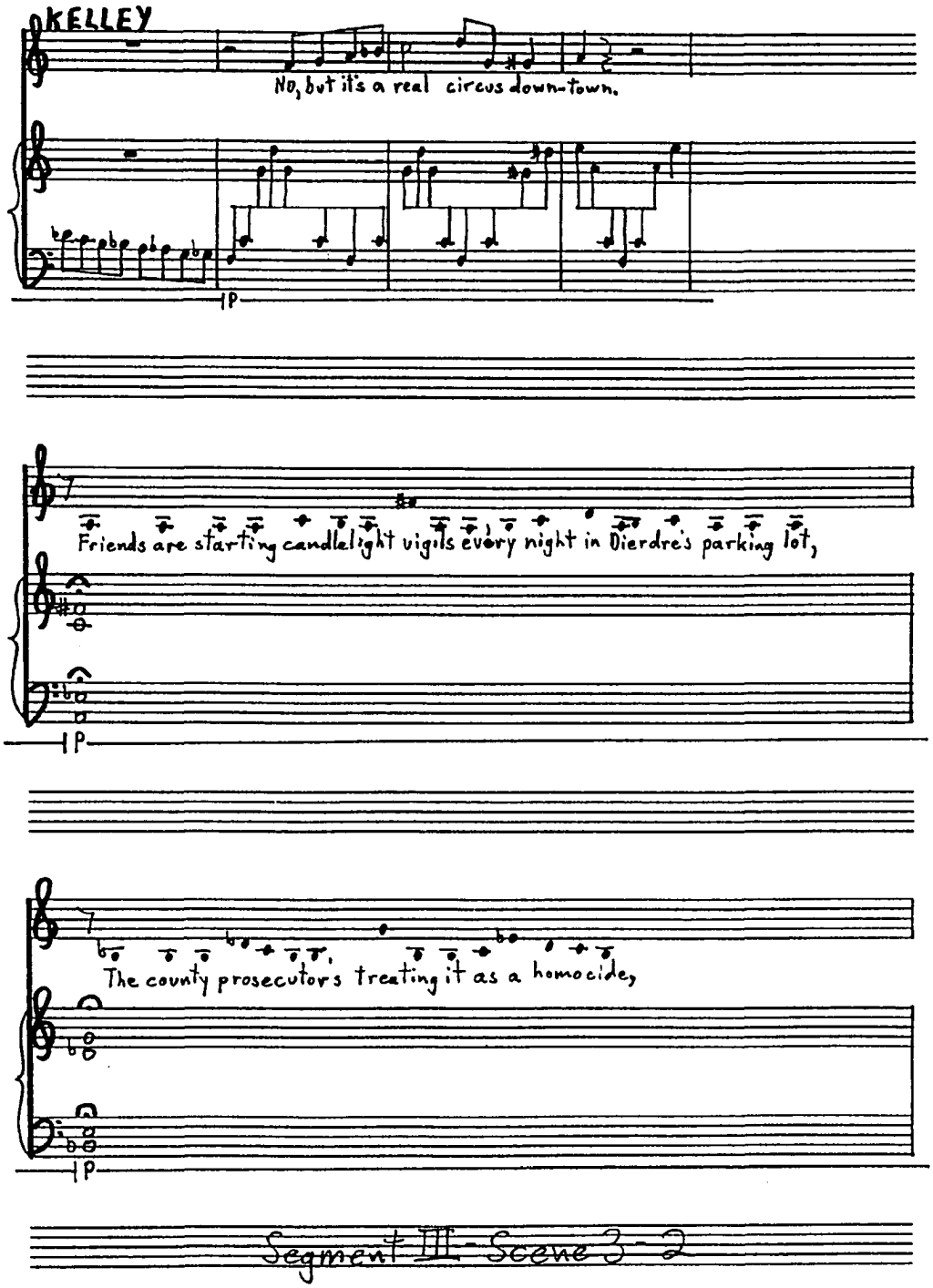

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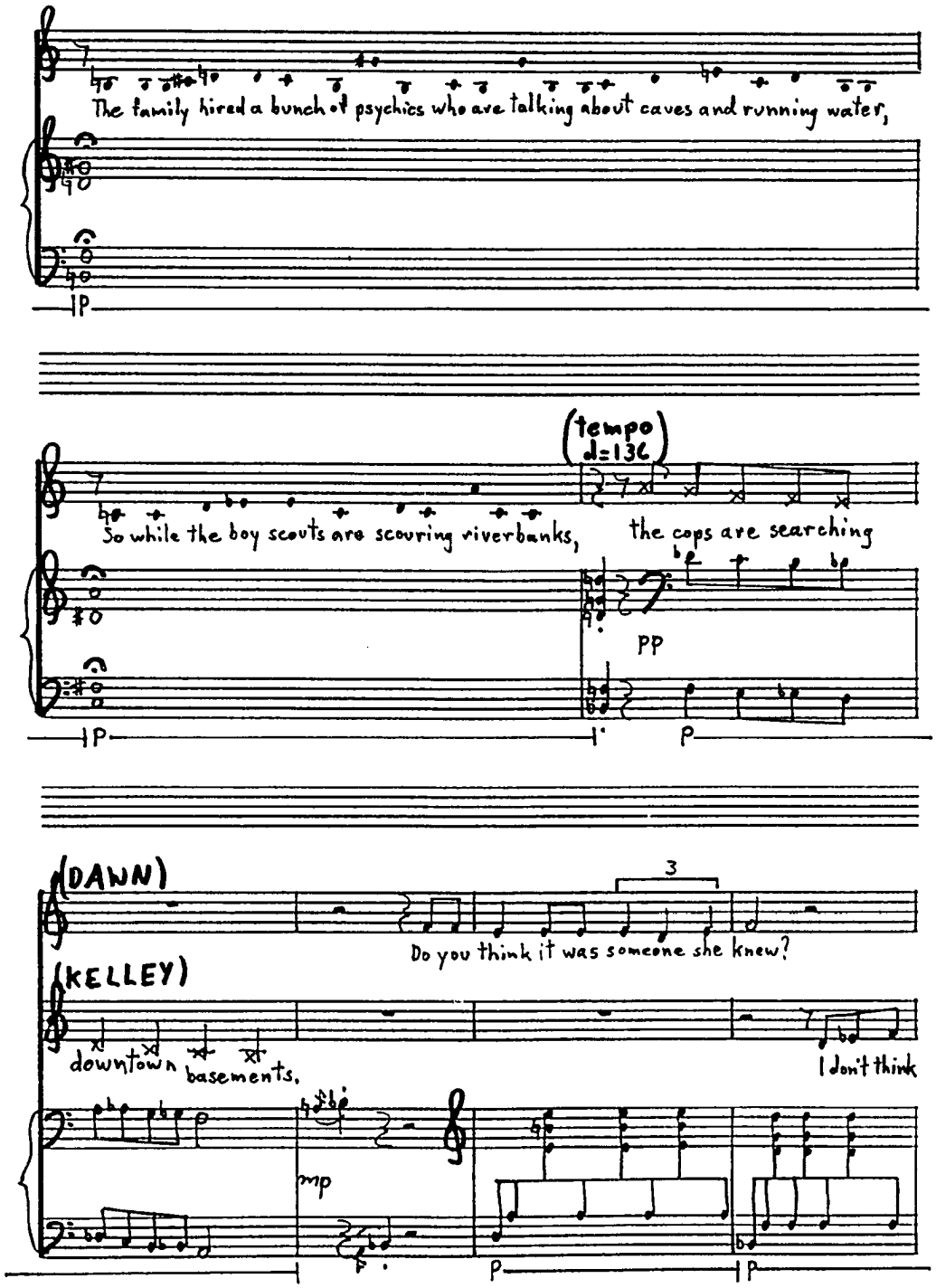

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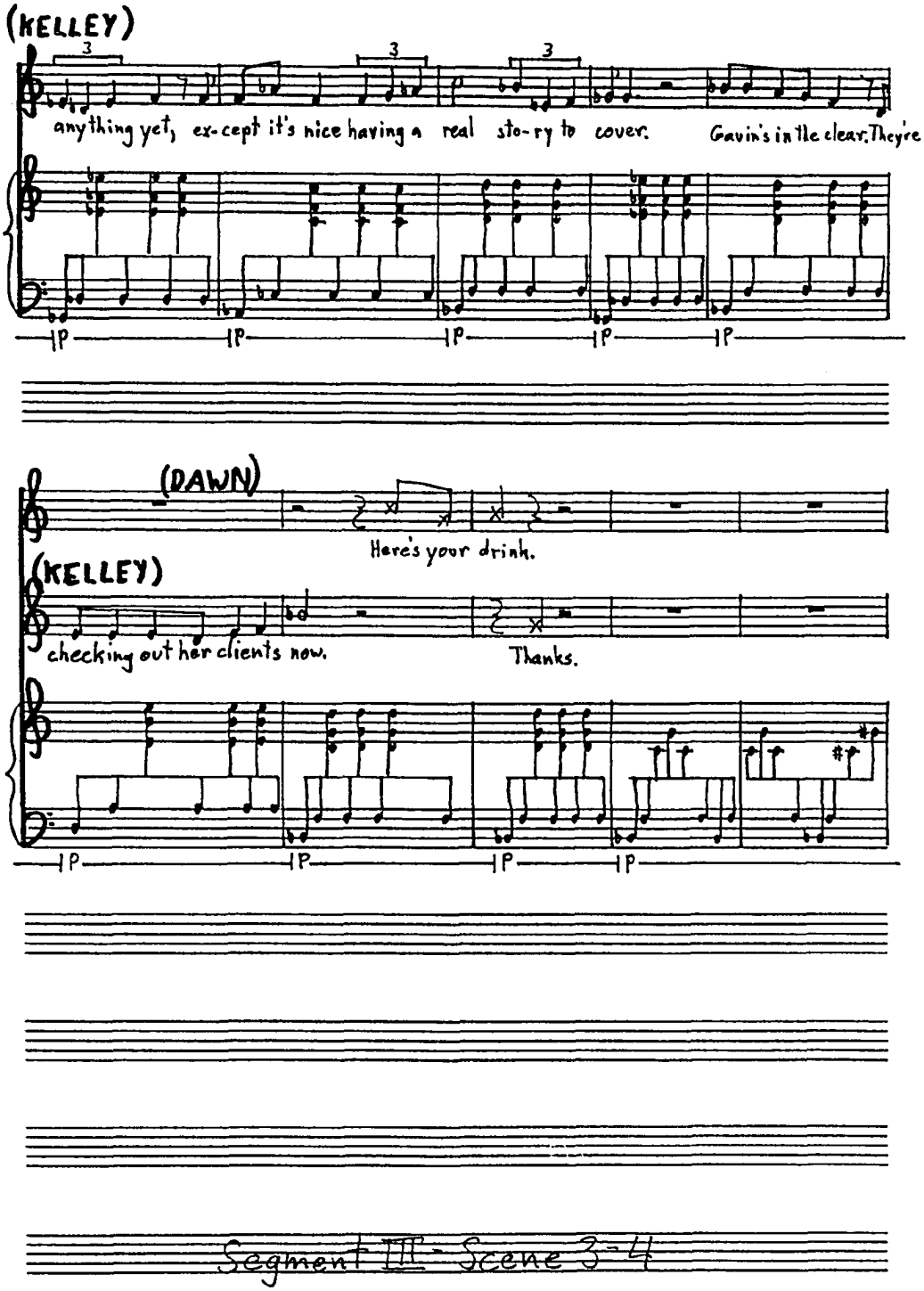

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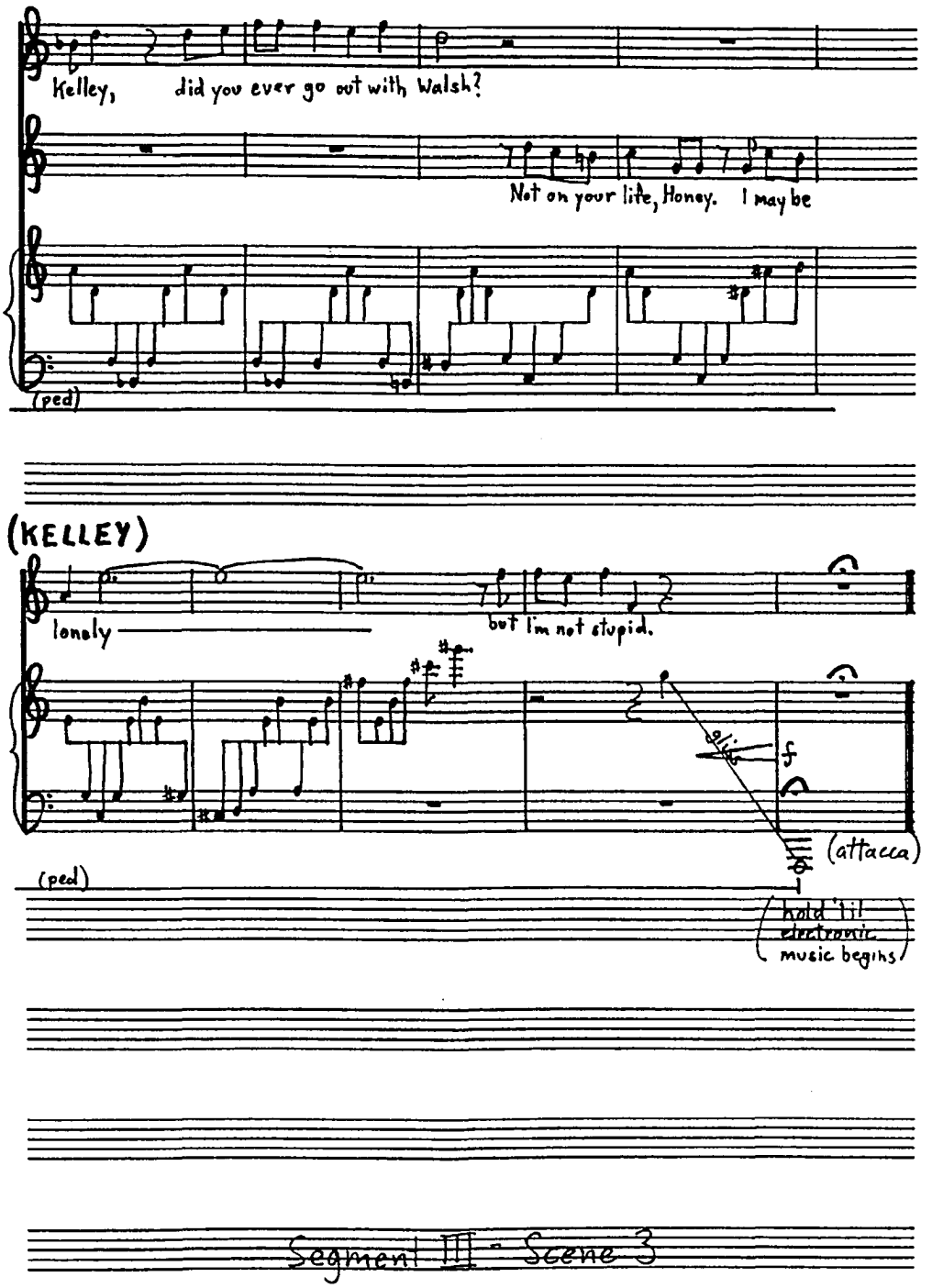

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BREAK III

Break III is for dancers and taped electronic sounds. The taped music begins and ends with a quiet "wind" sound, which is intended to overlap the preceding and following "segments." Duration of the piece, not including this sound, is about five minutes.

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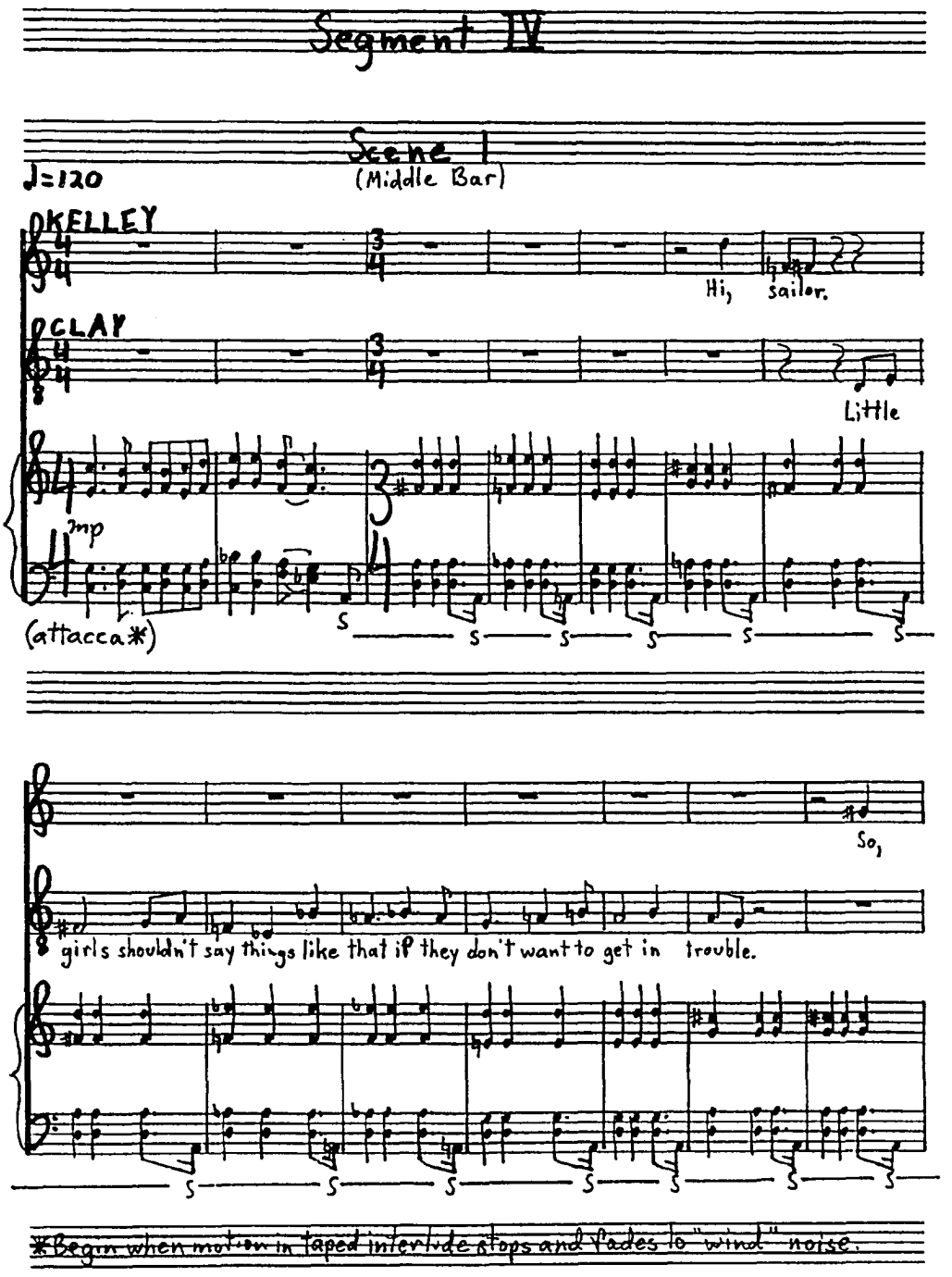

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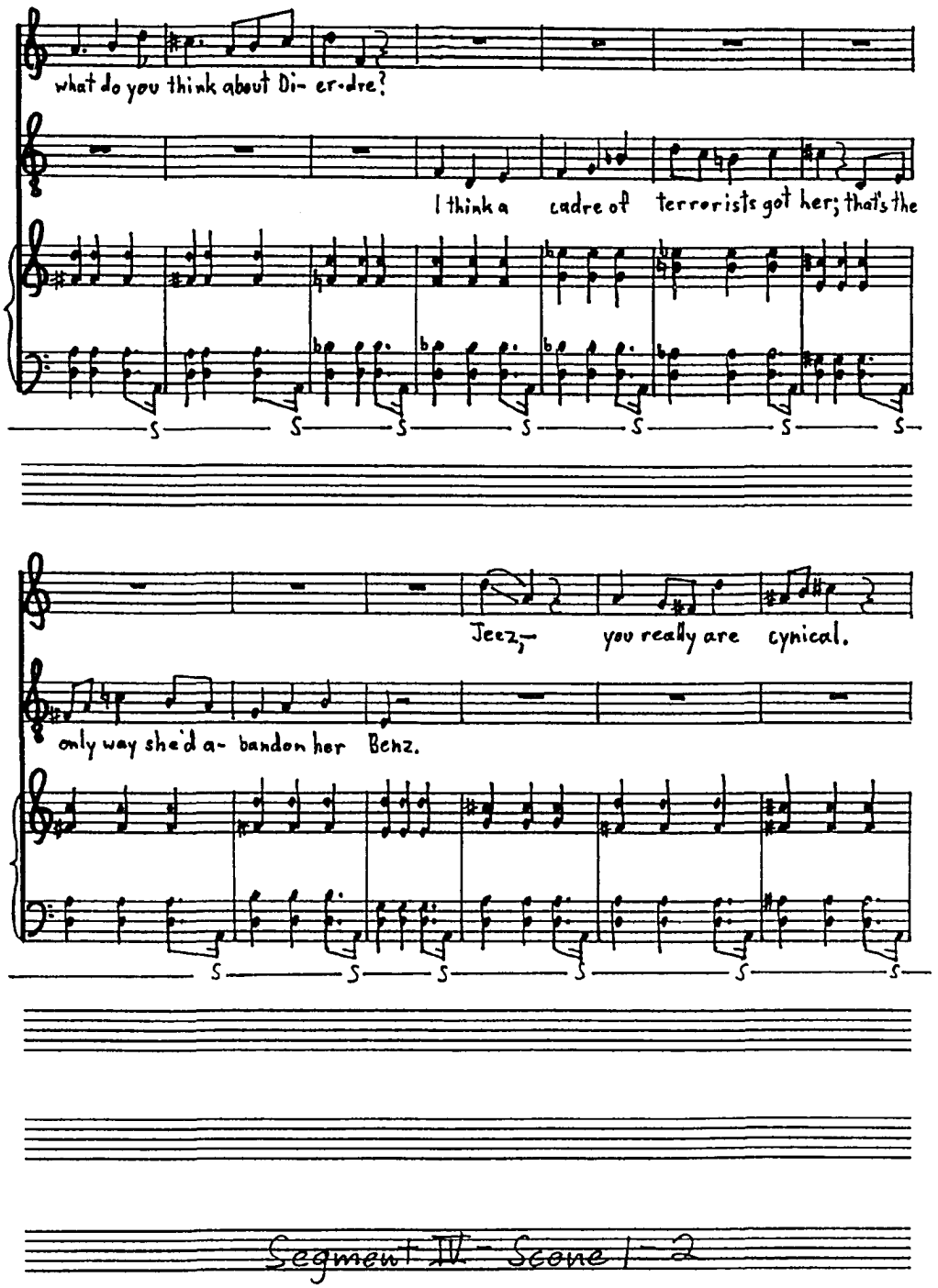

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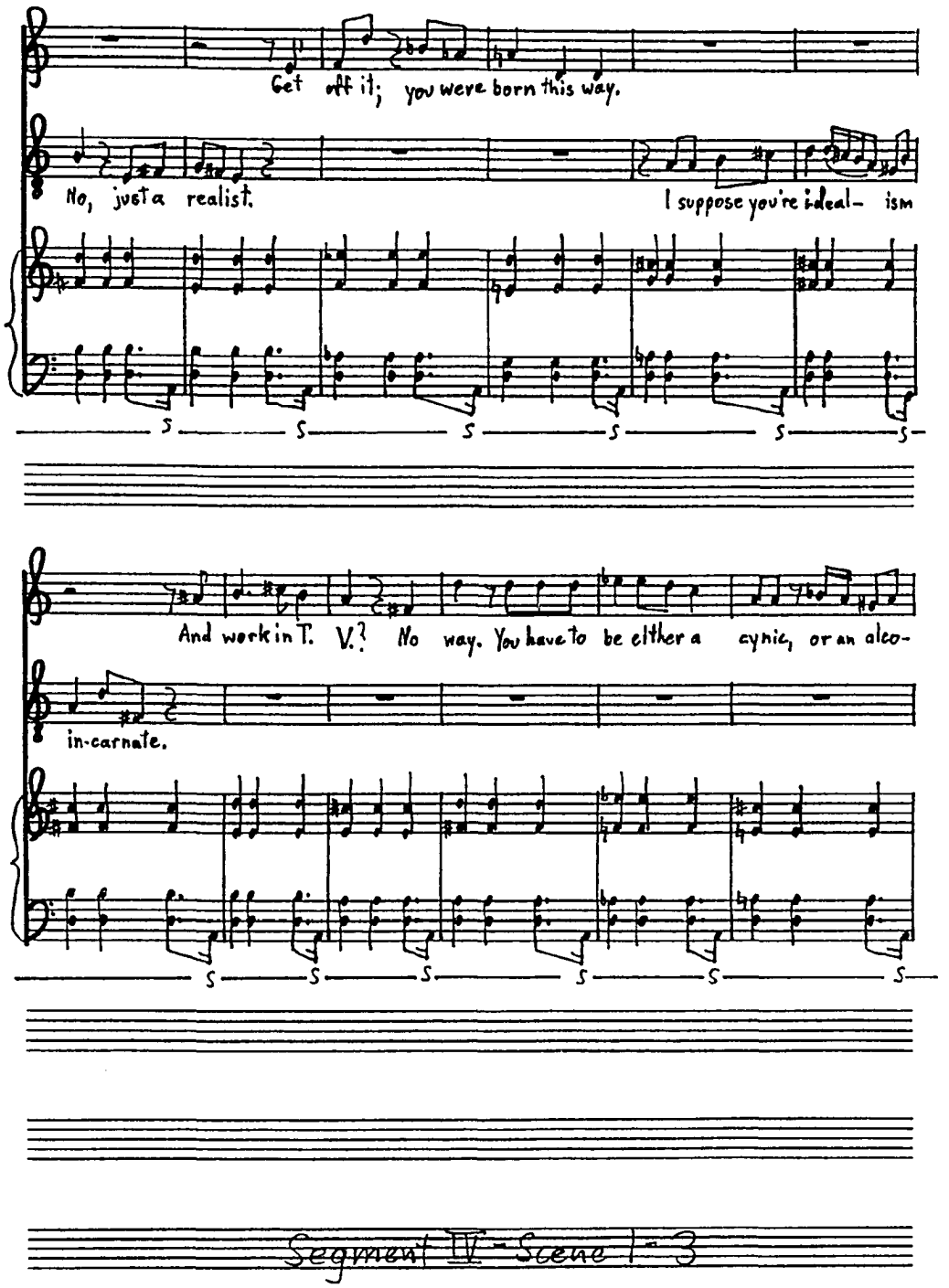

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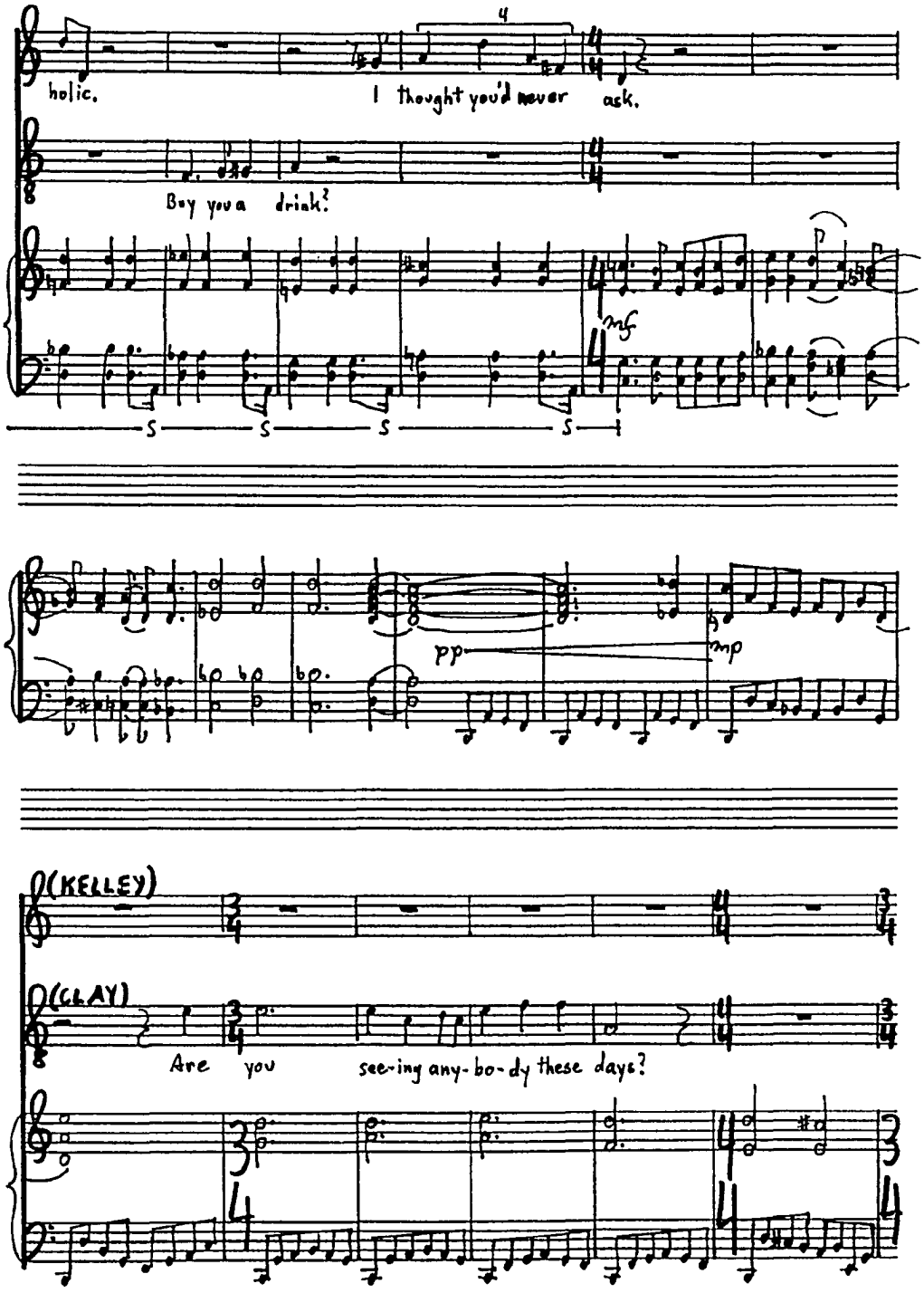

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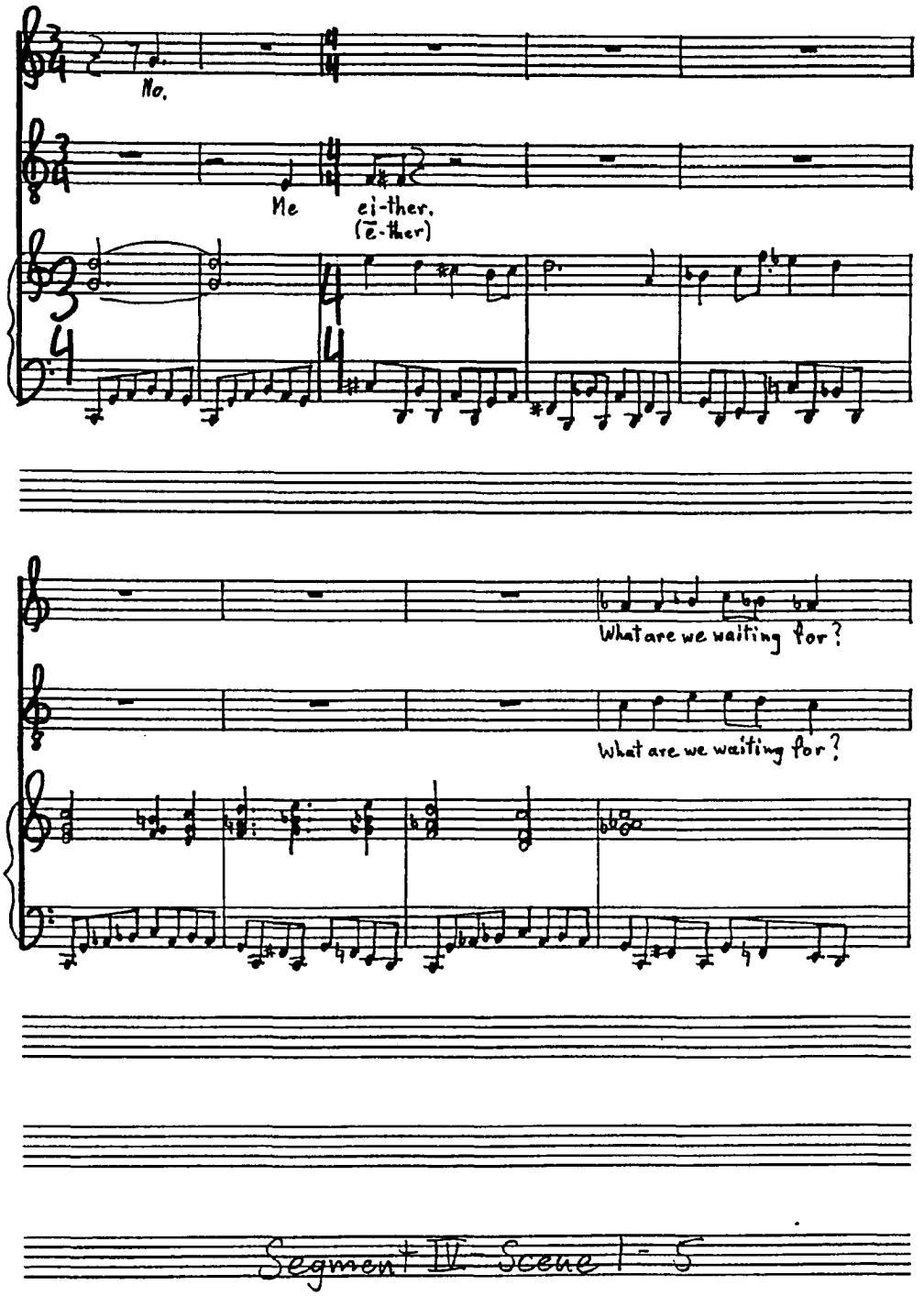

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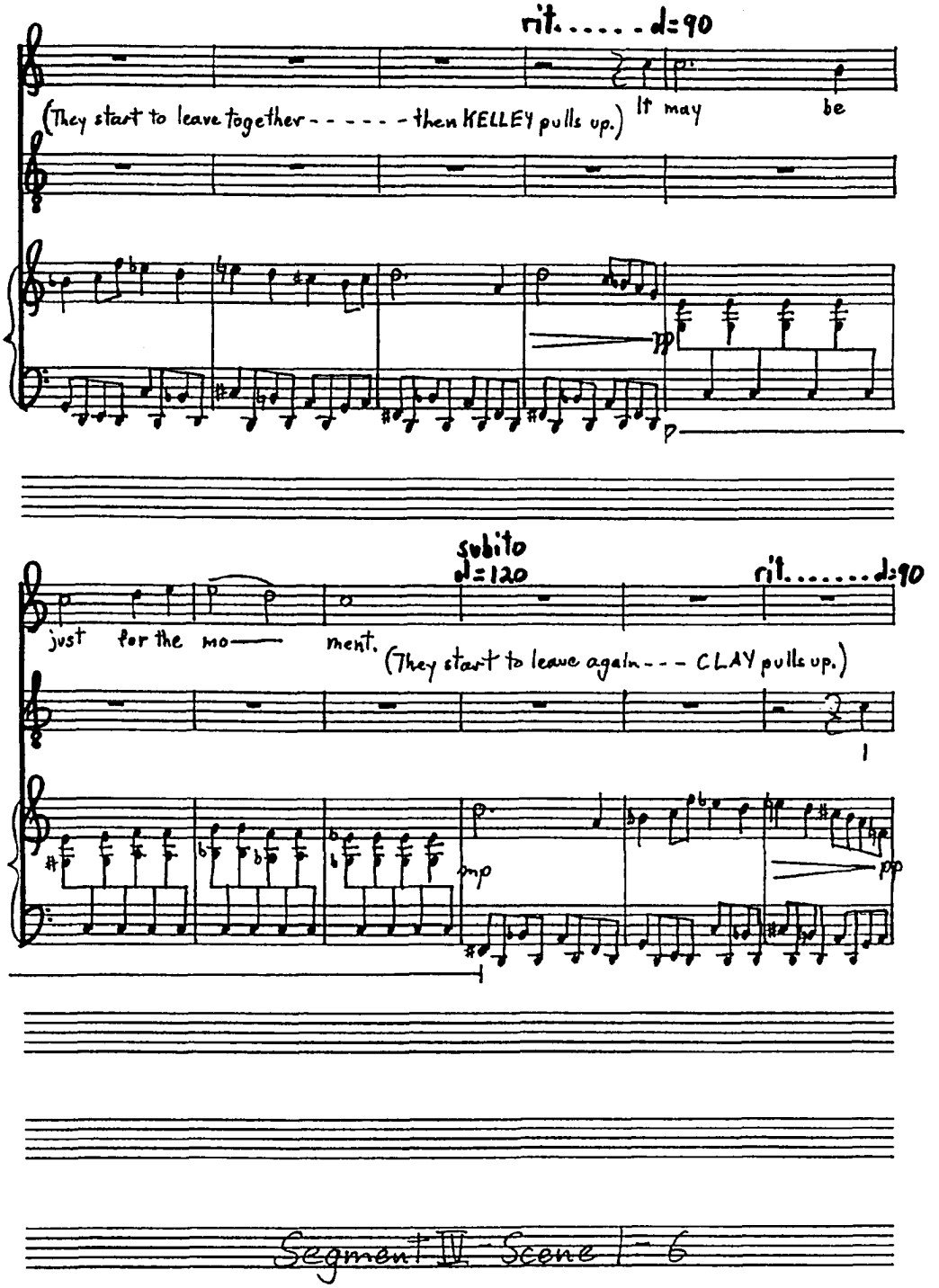

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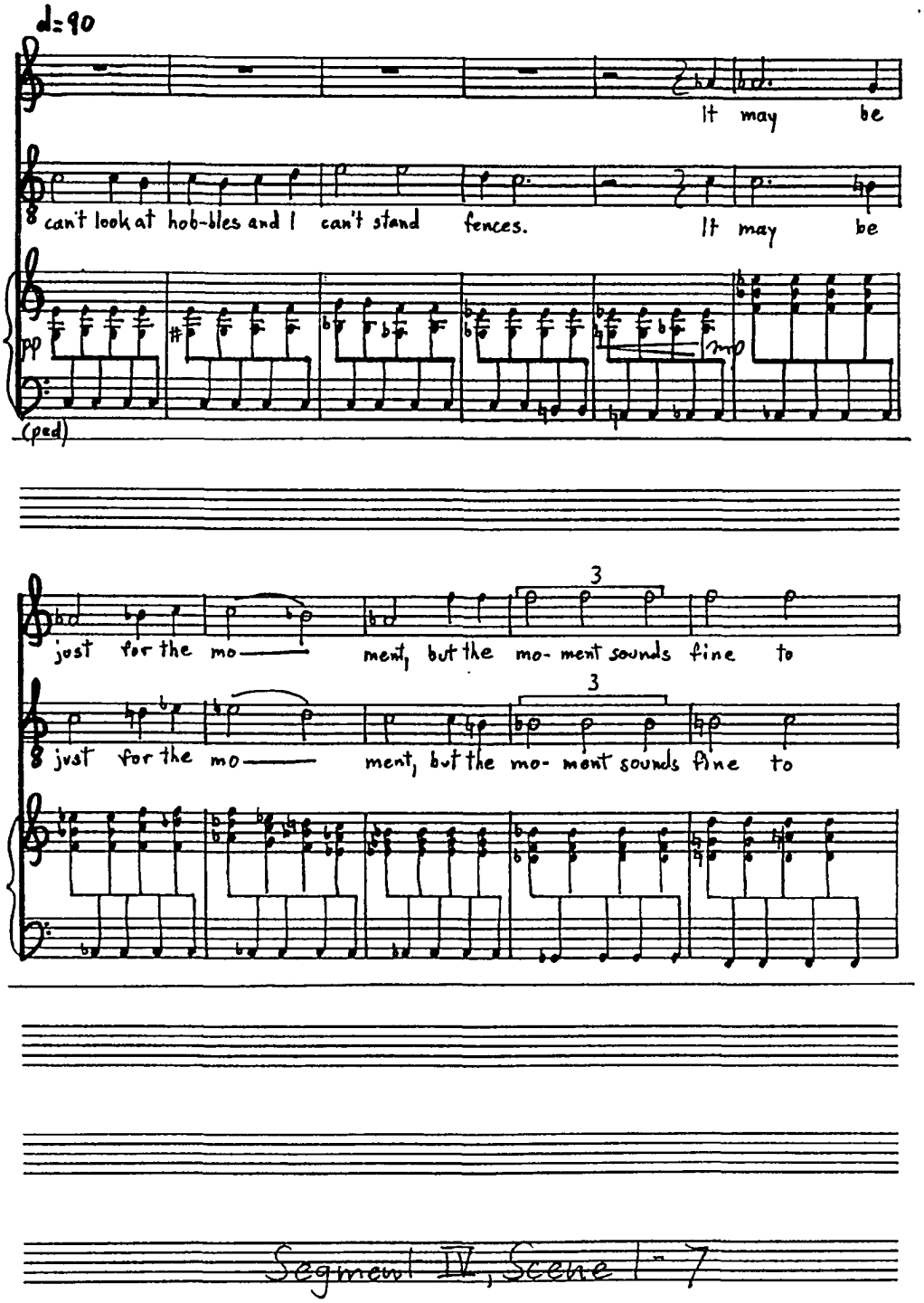

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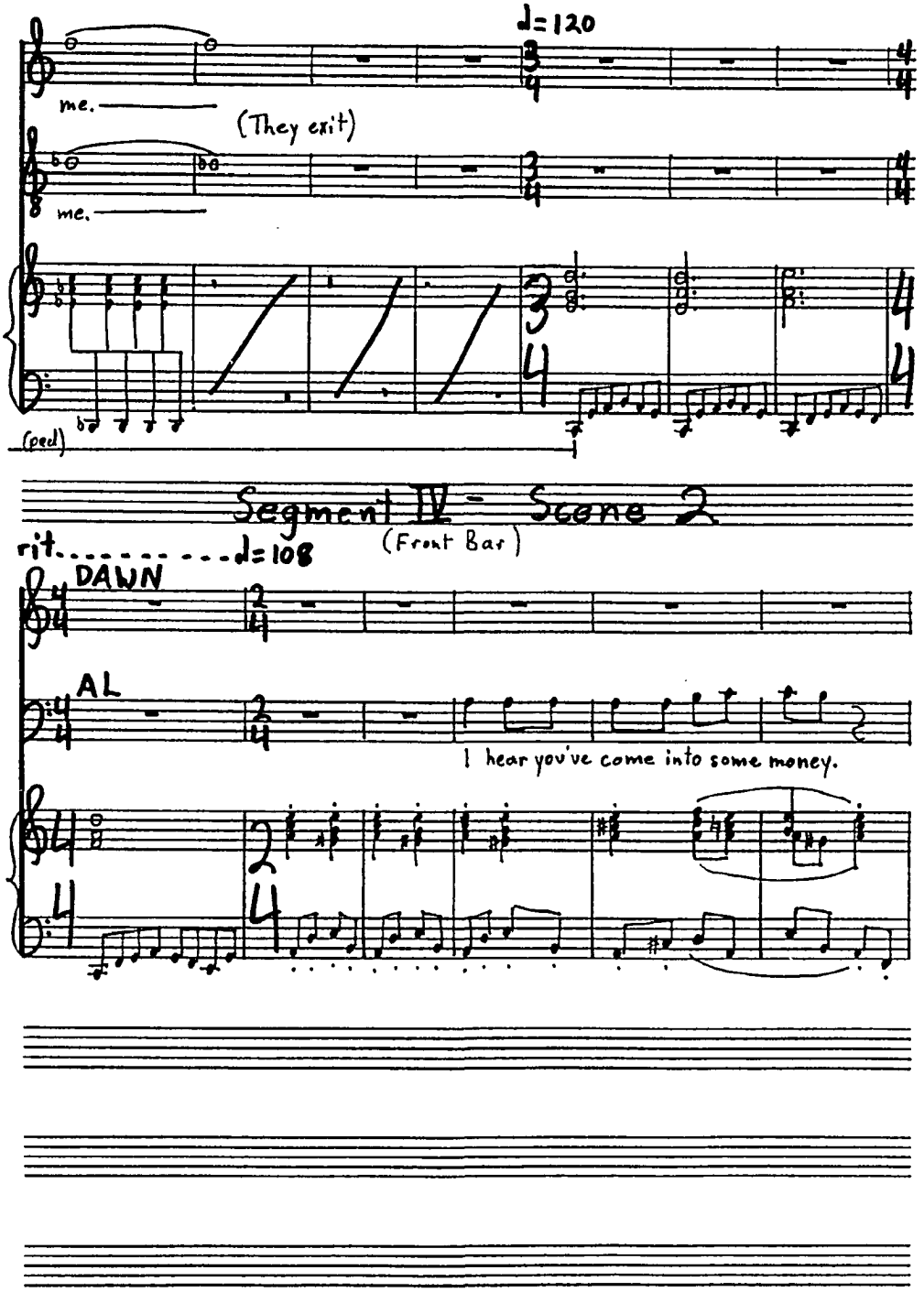

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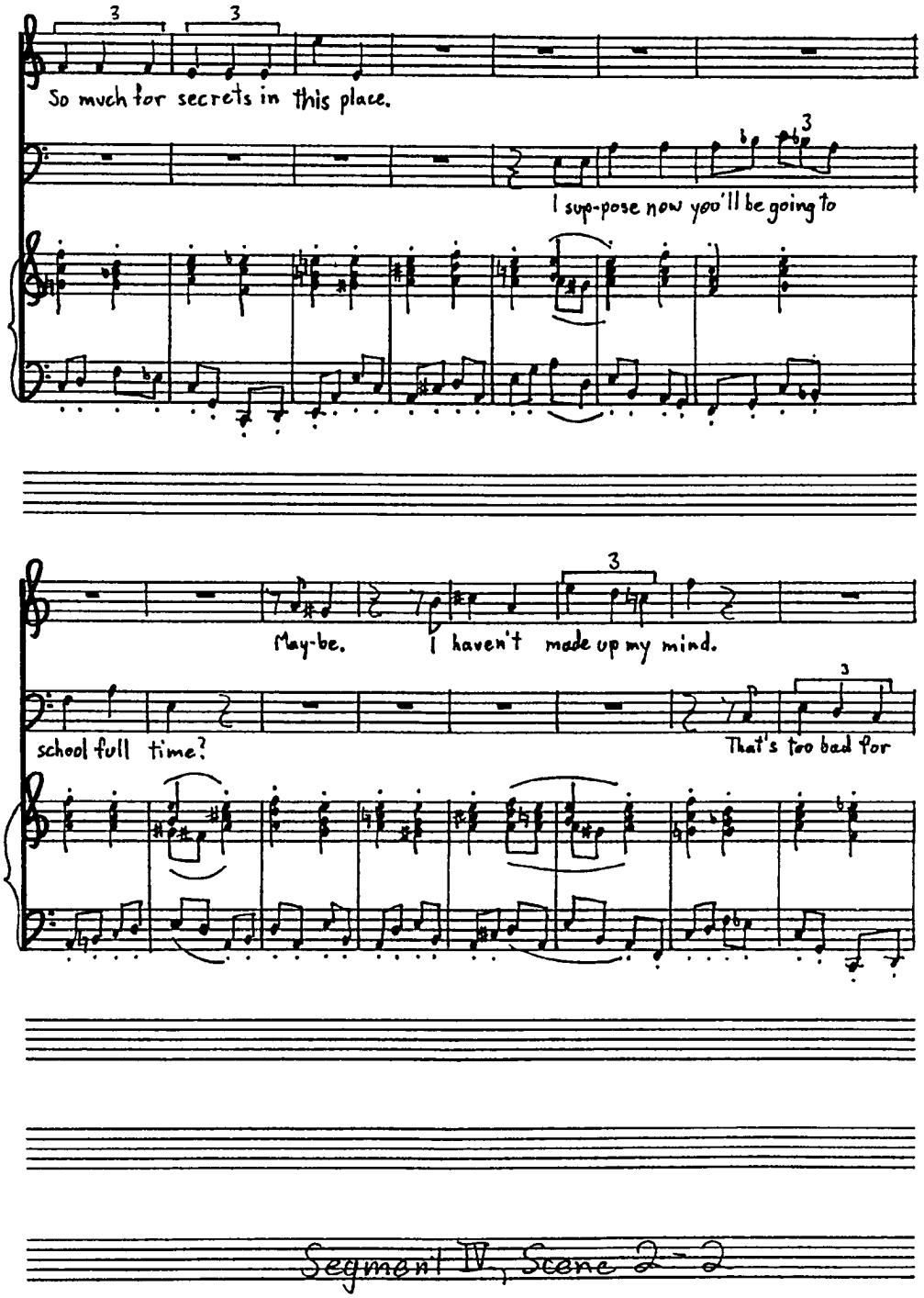

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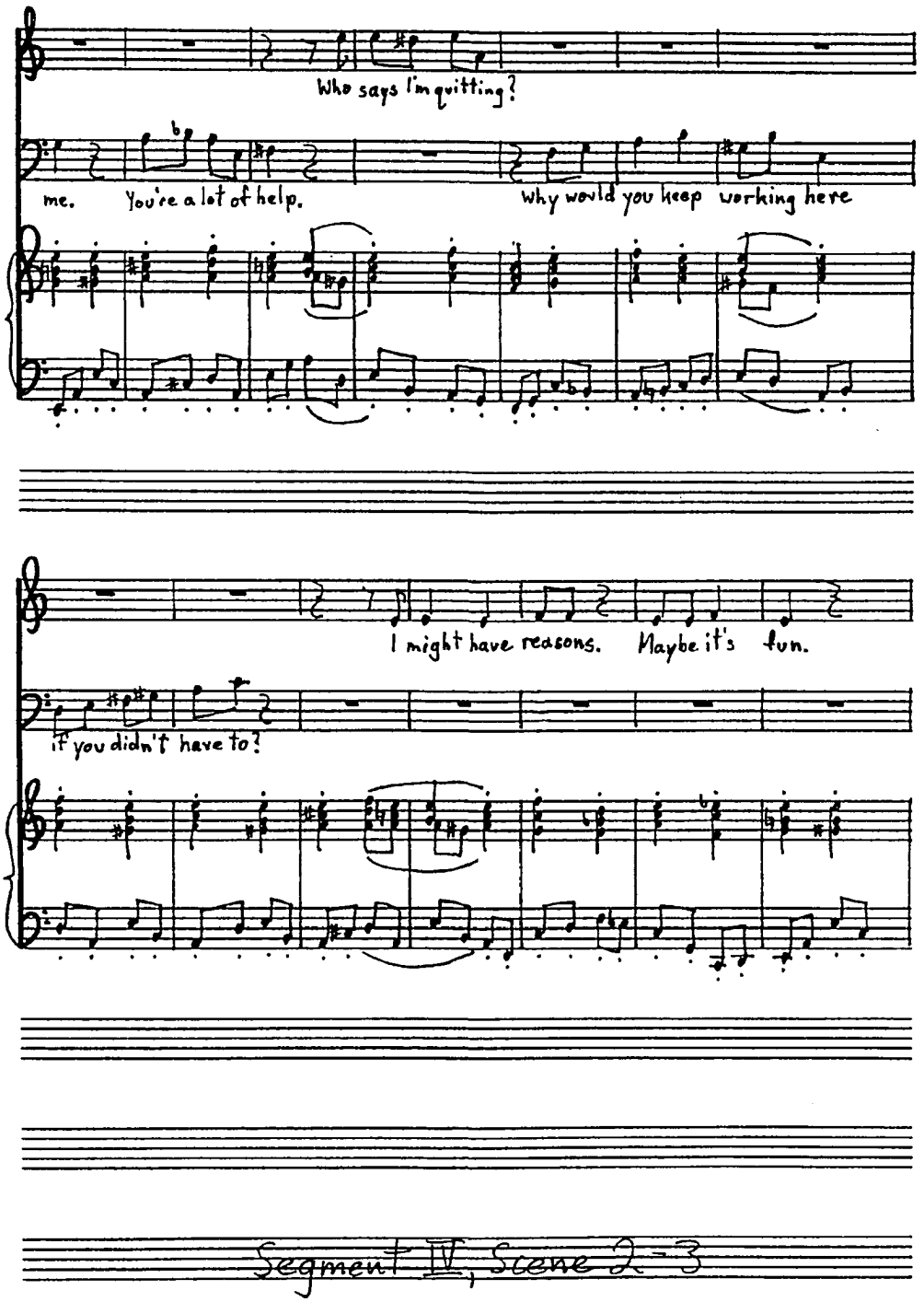

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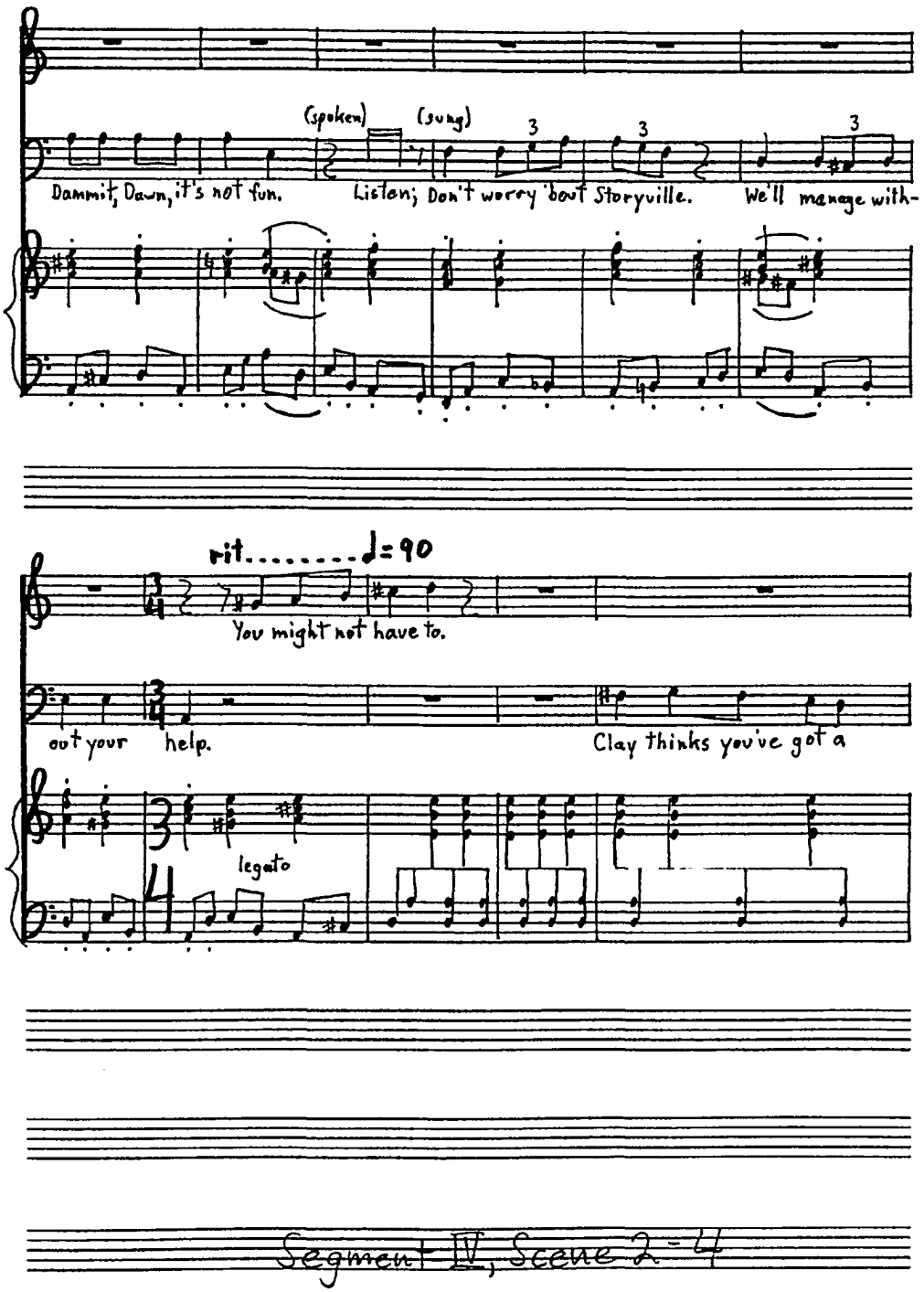

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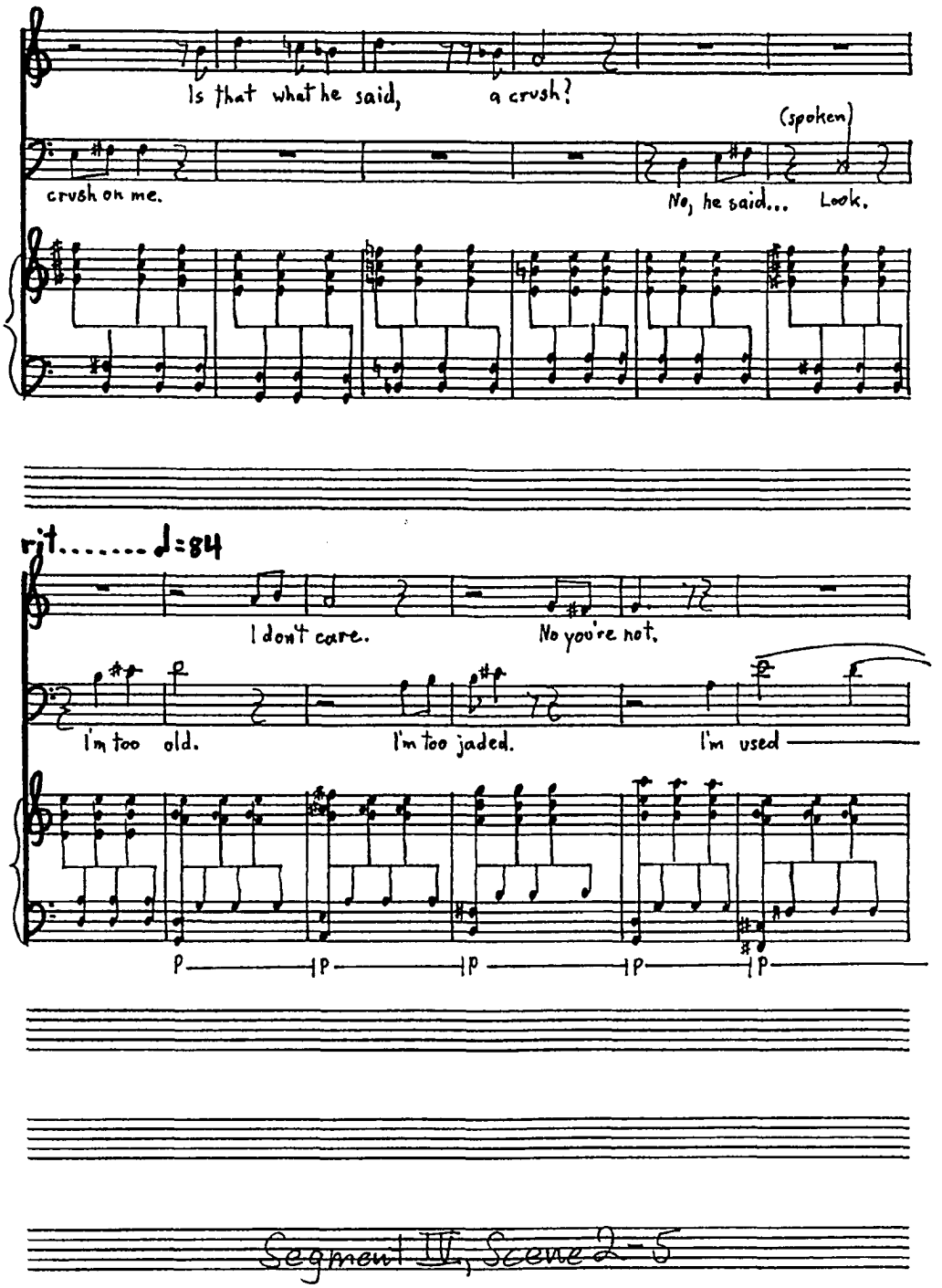

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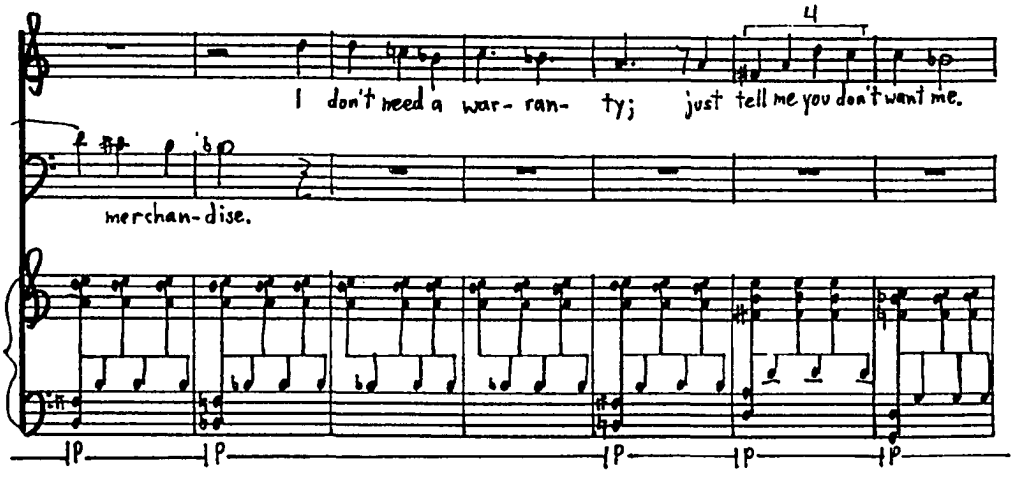

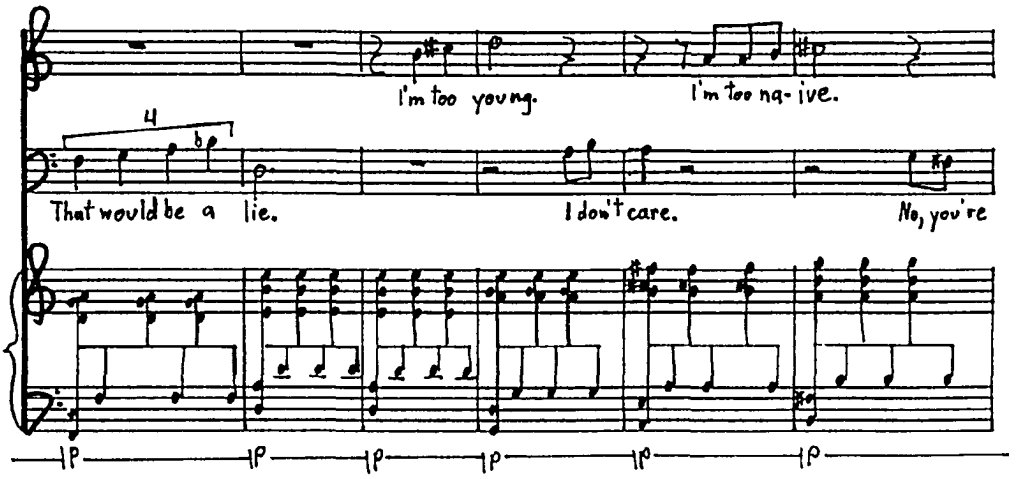

Segment IV, Scene 2-6

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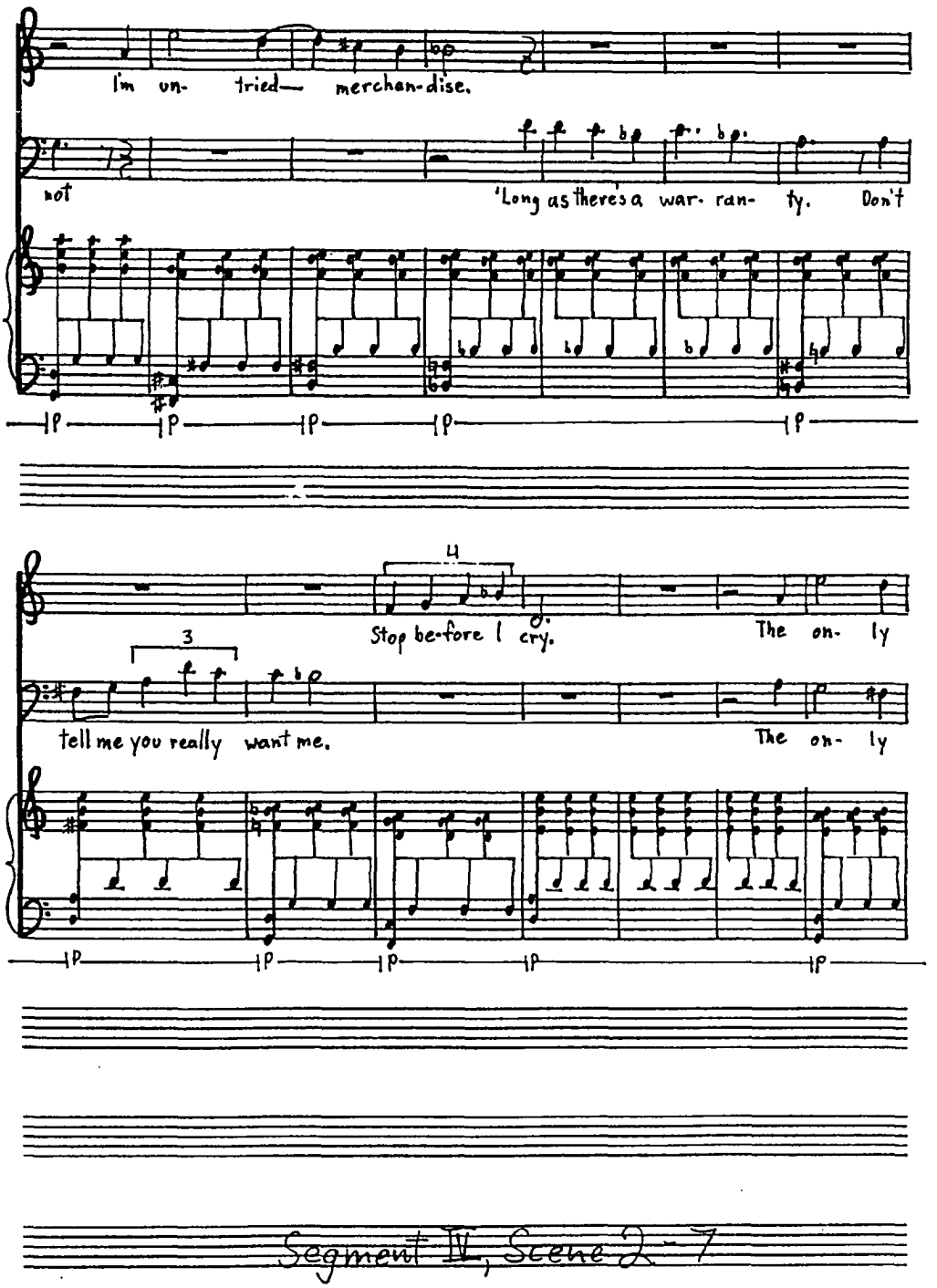

Segment IV, Scene 2 - 7

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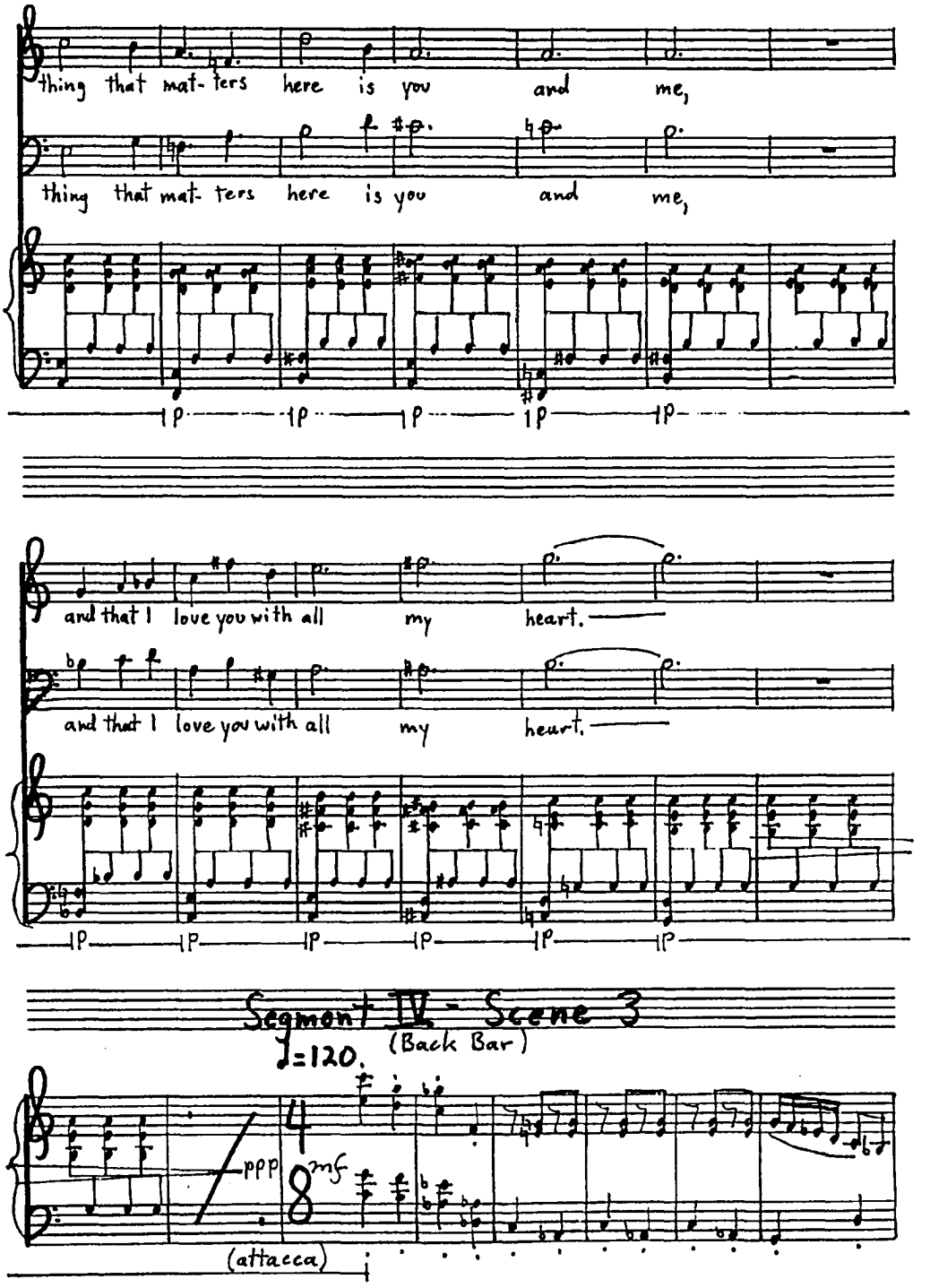

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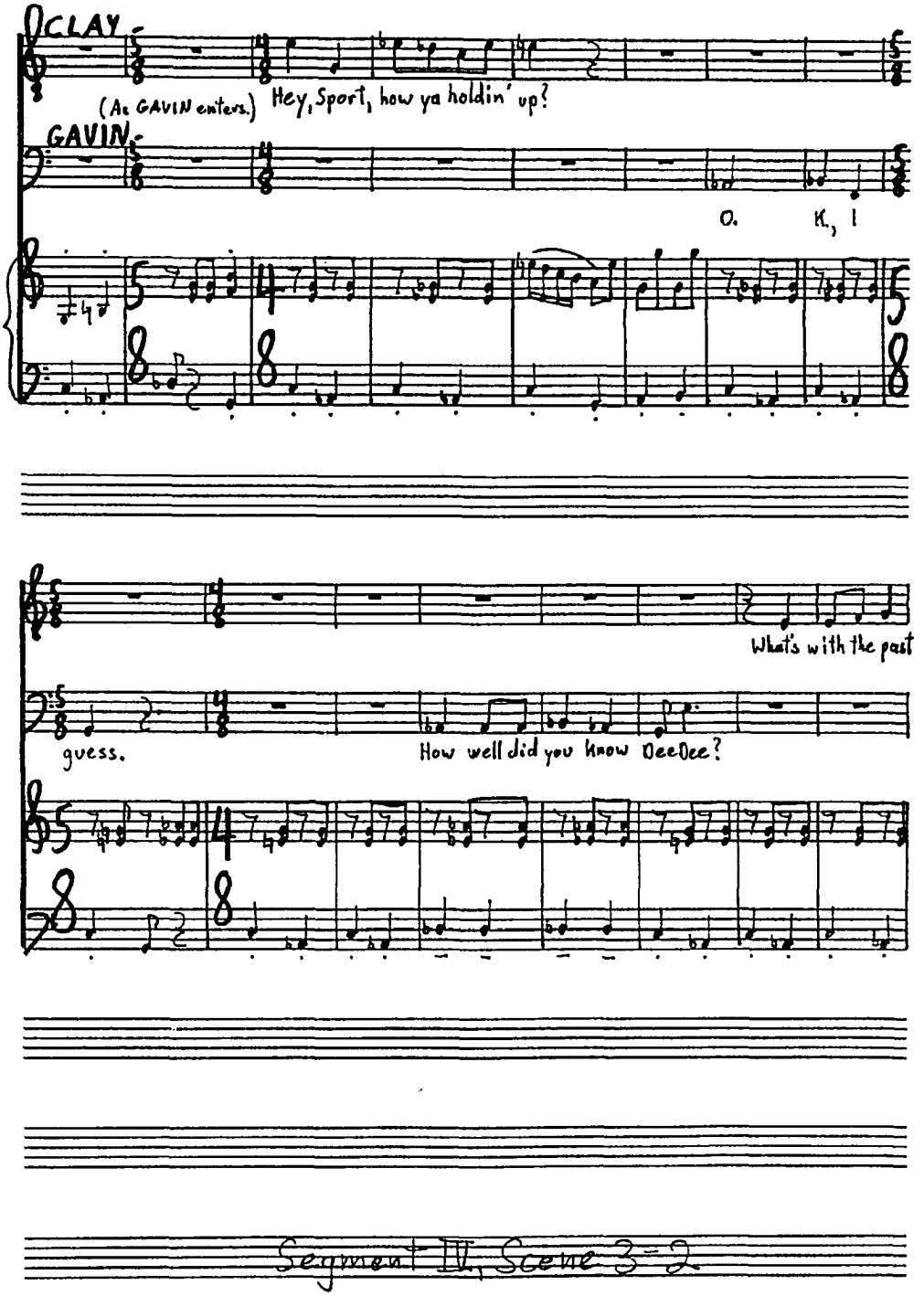

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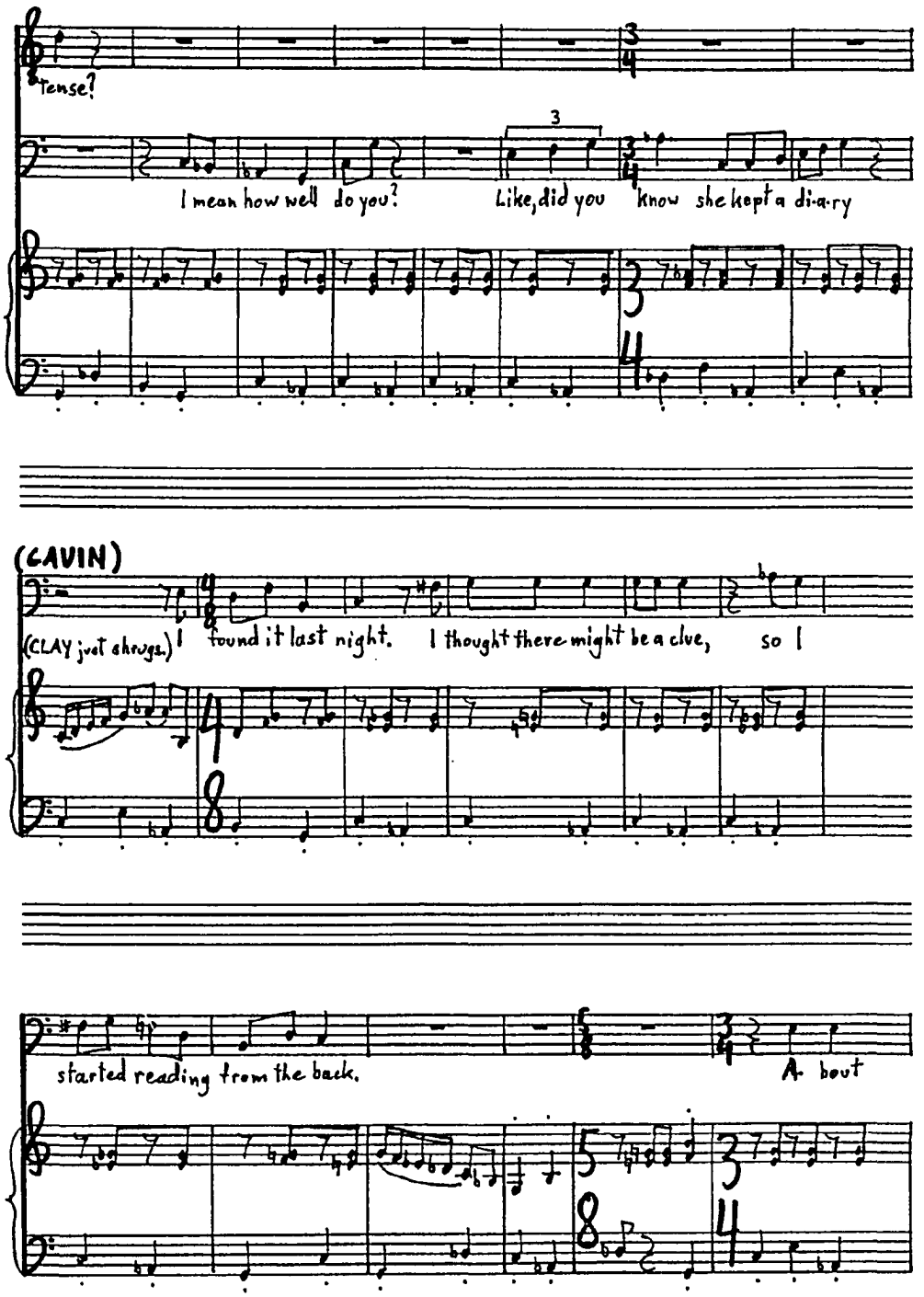

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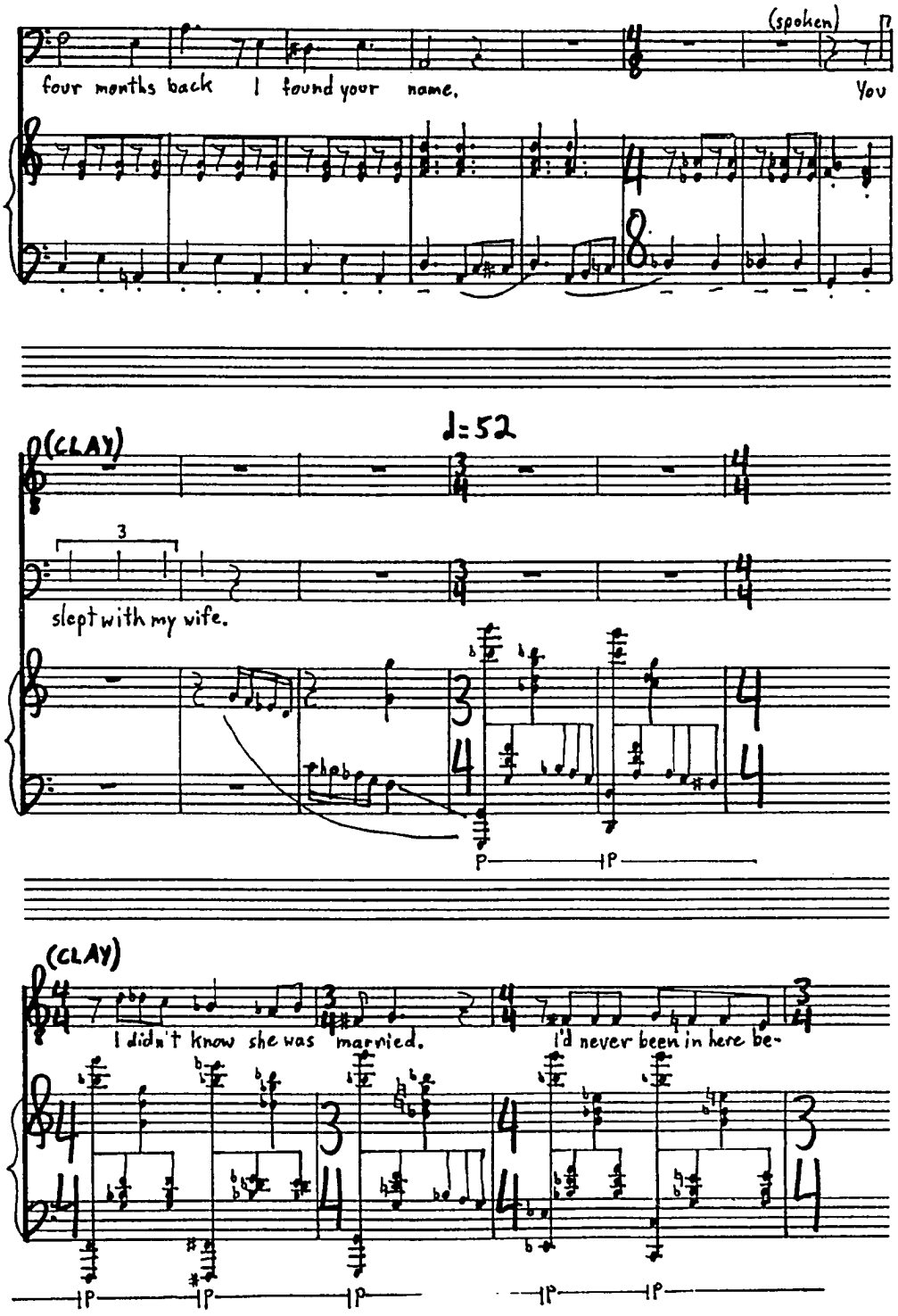

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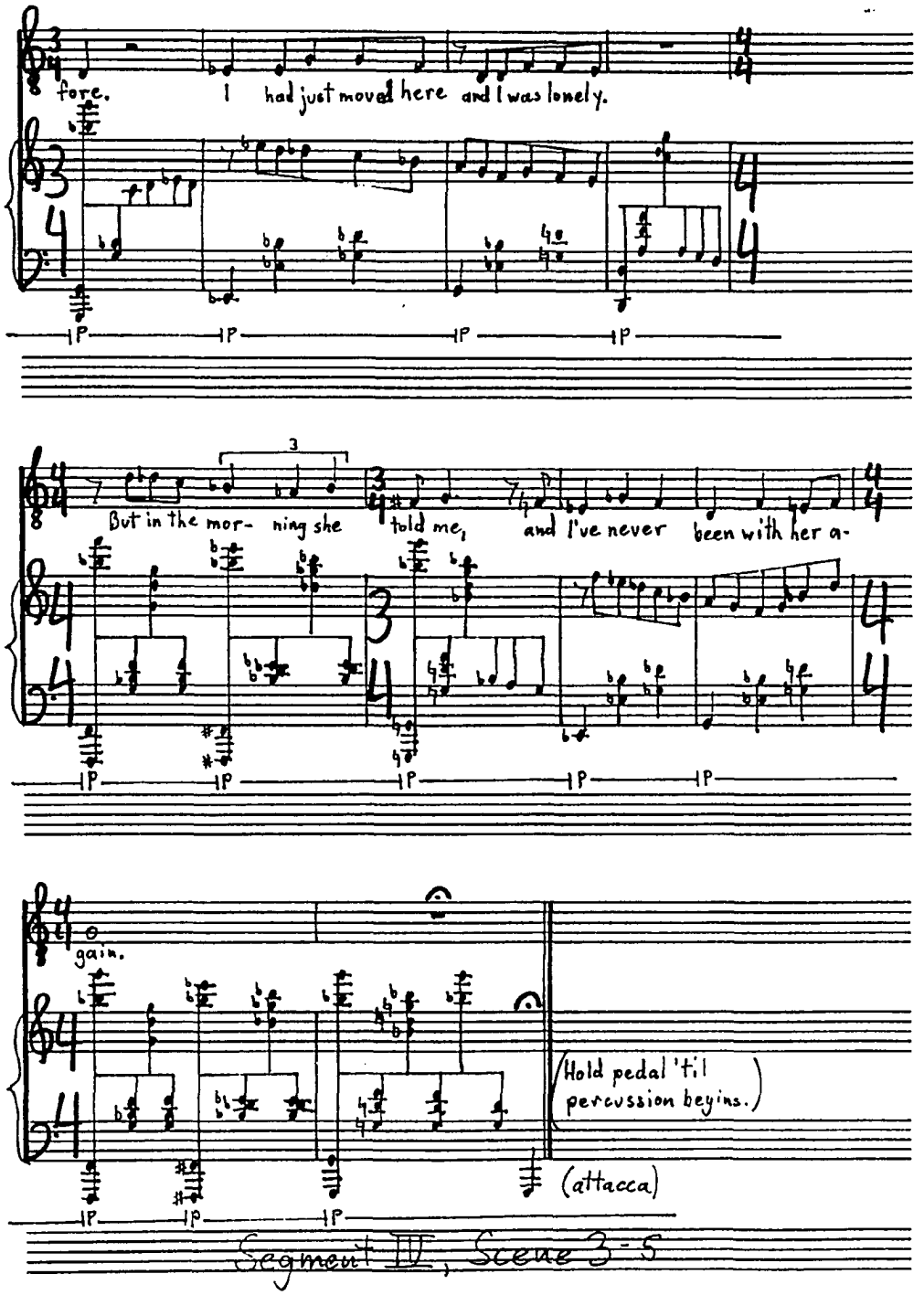

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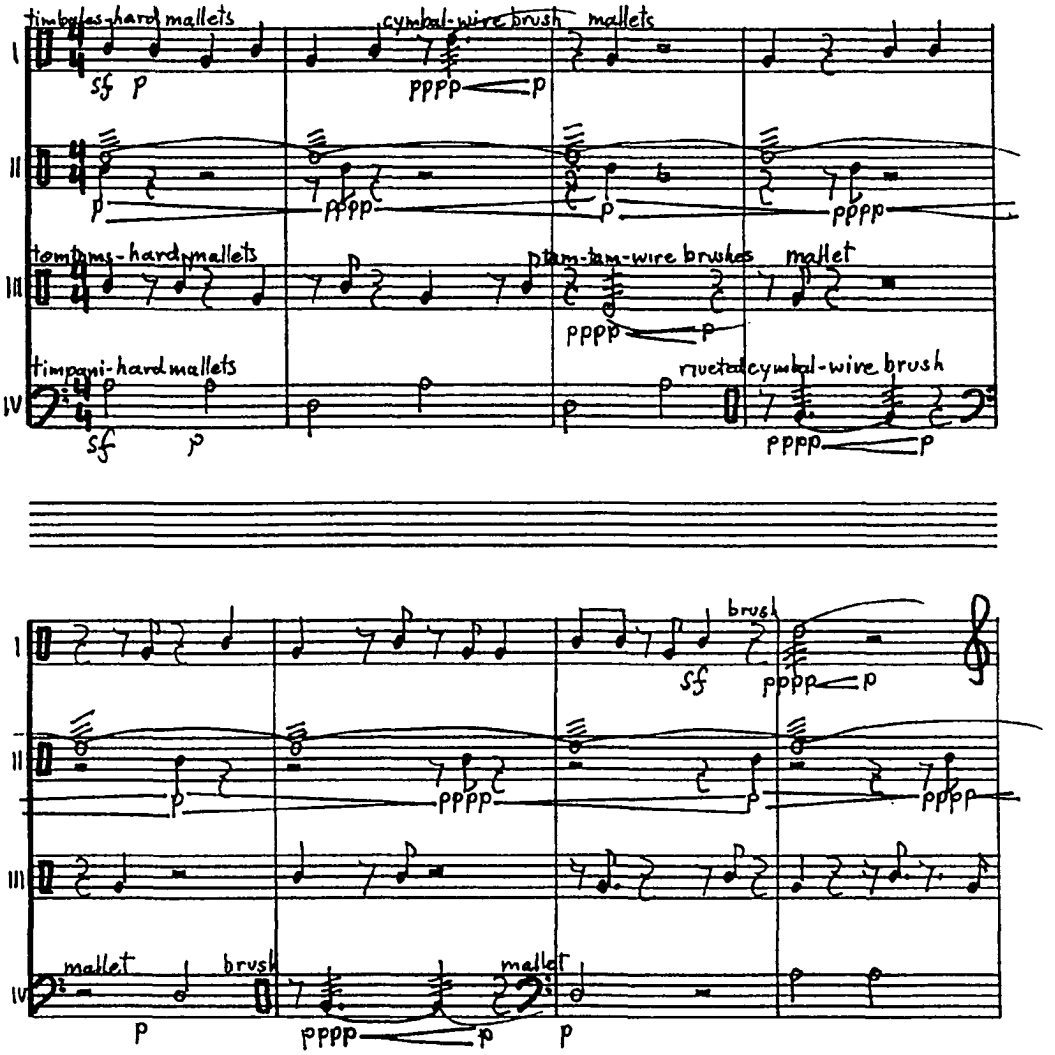
Break IV

Player II- cymbal roll with wire brush, woodblock with wooden mallet- dynamics are for cymbal only- woodblock is p throughout

(attacca)

♩=90



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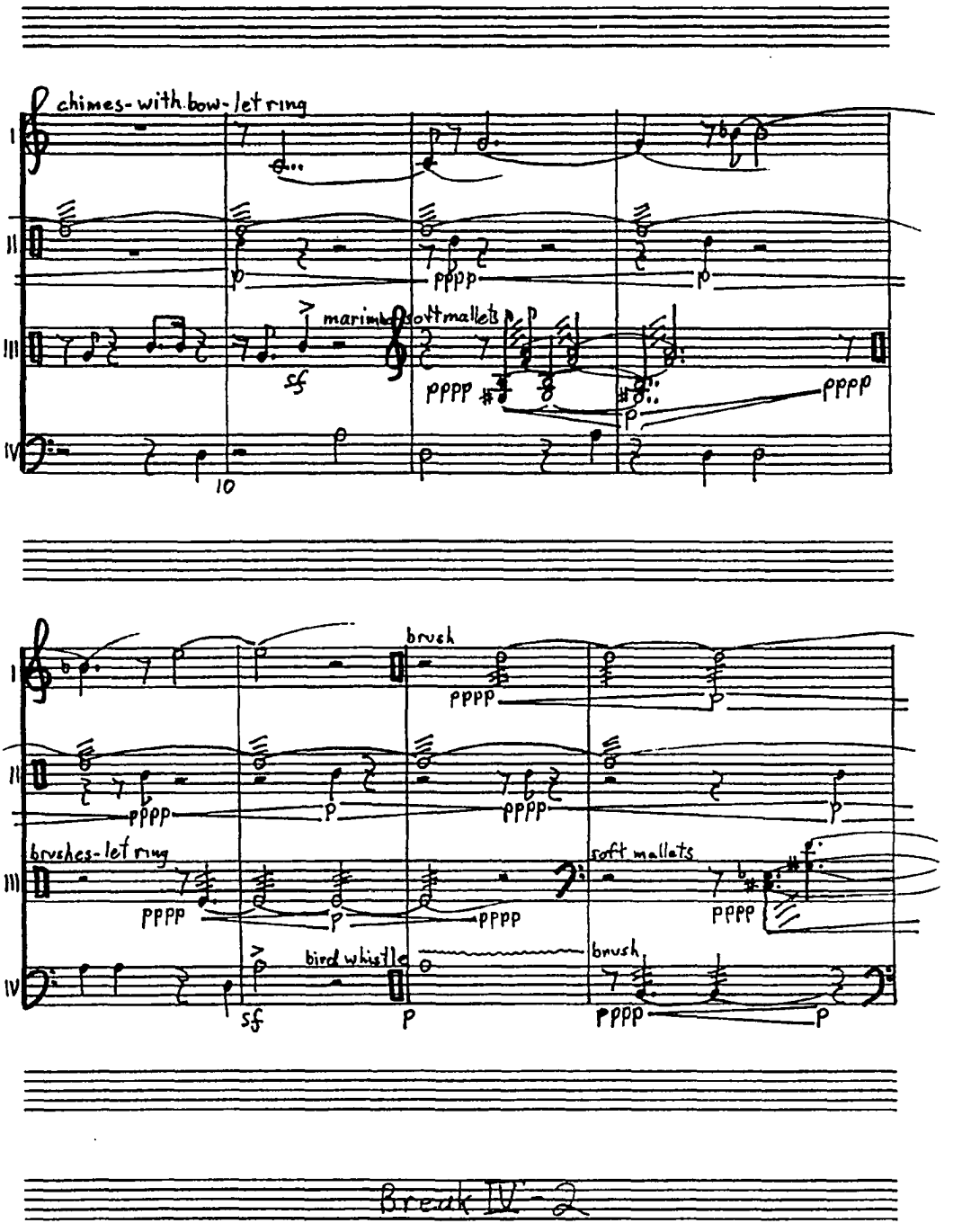

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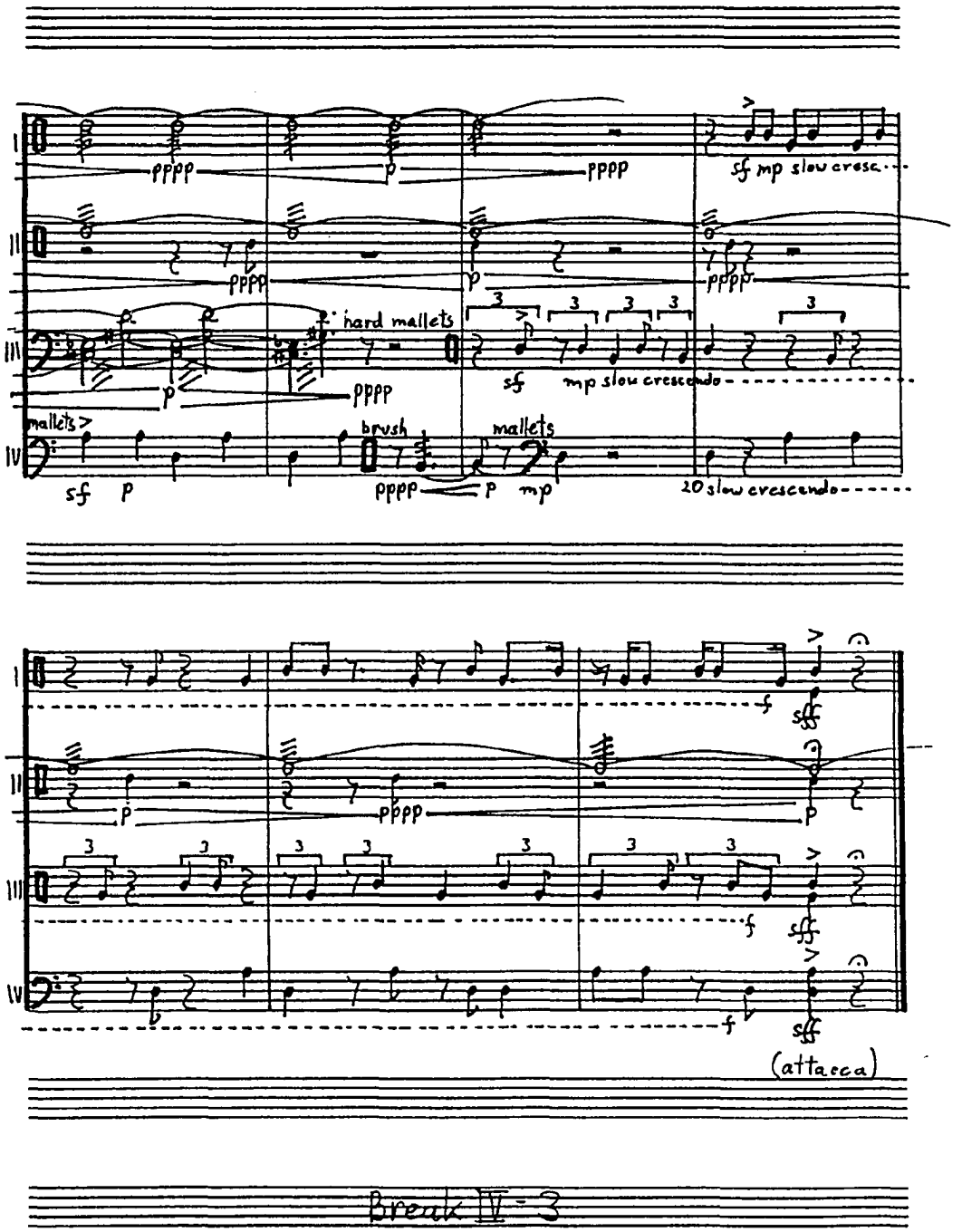

Break IV - 3

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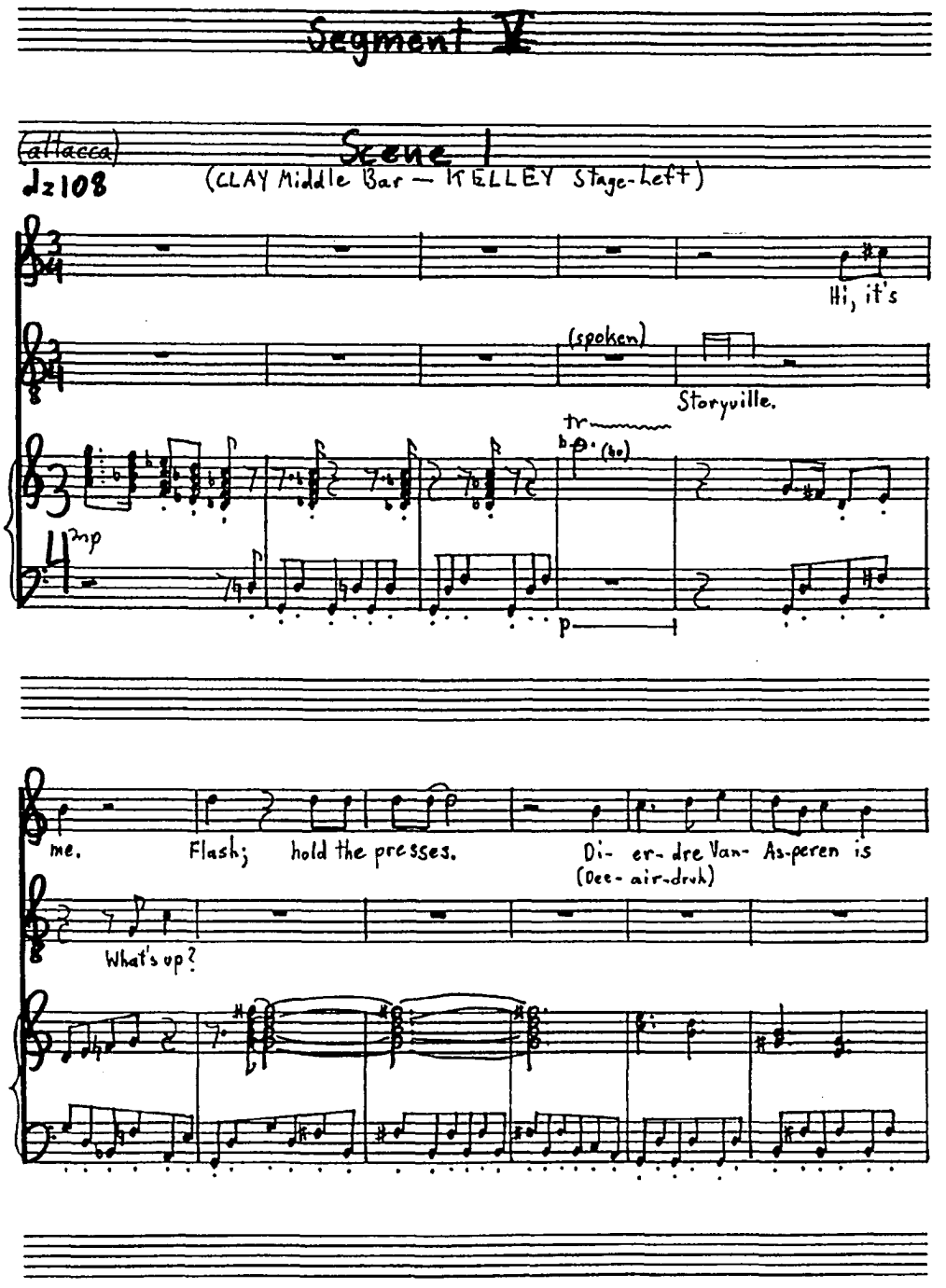

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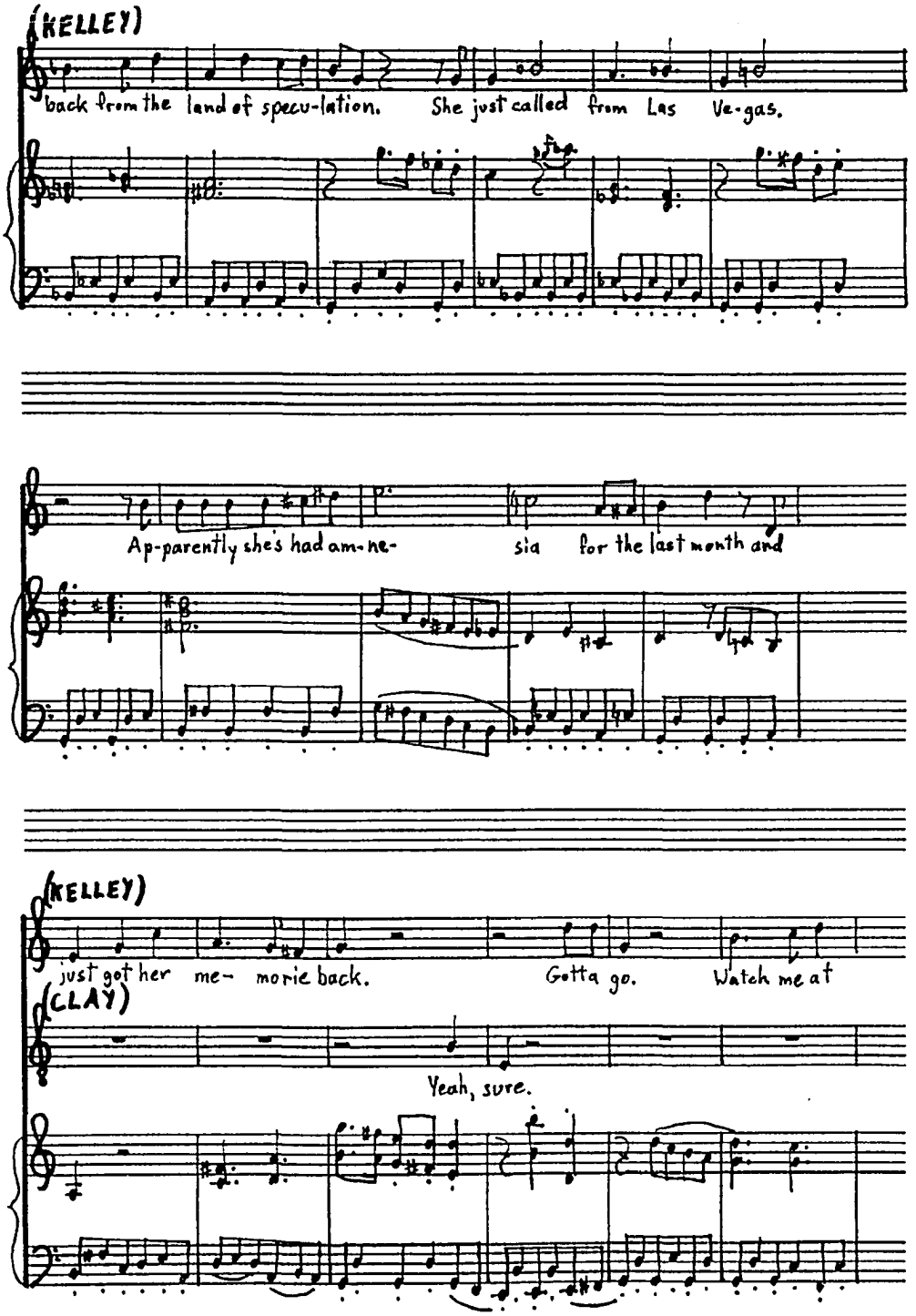

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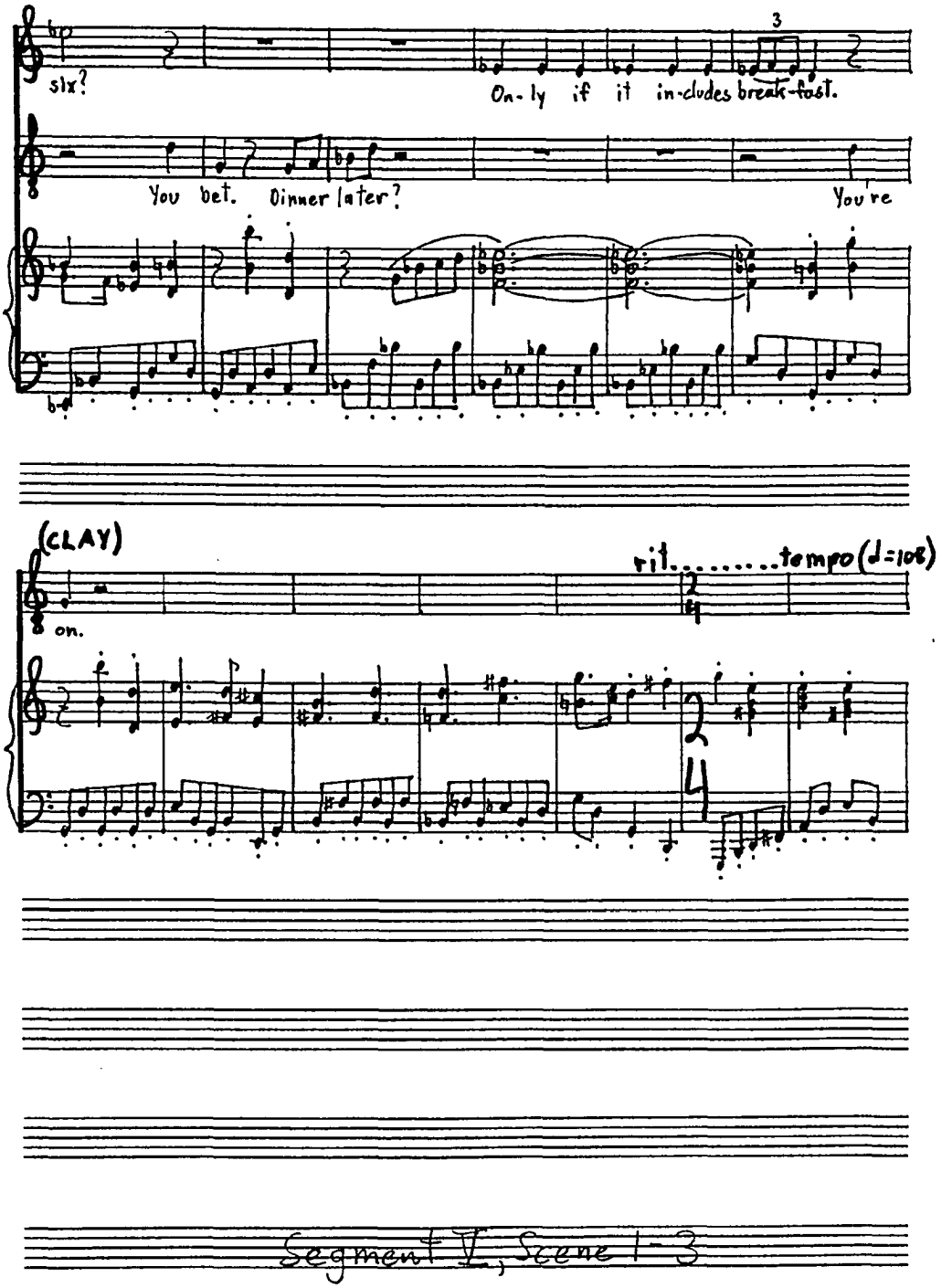

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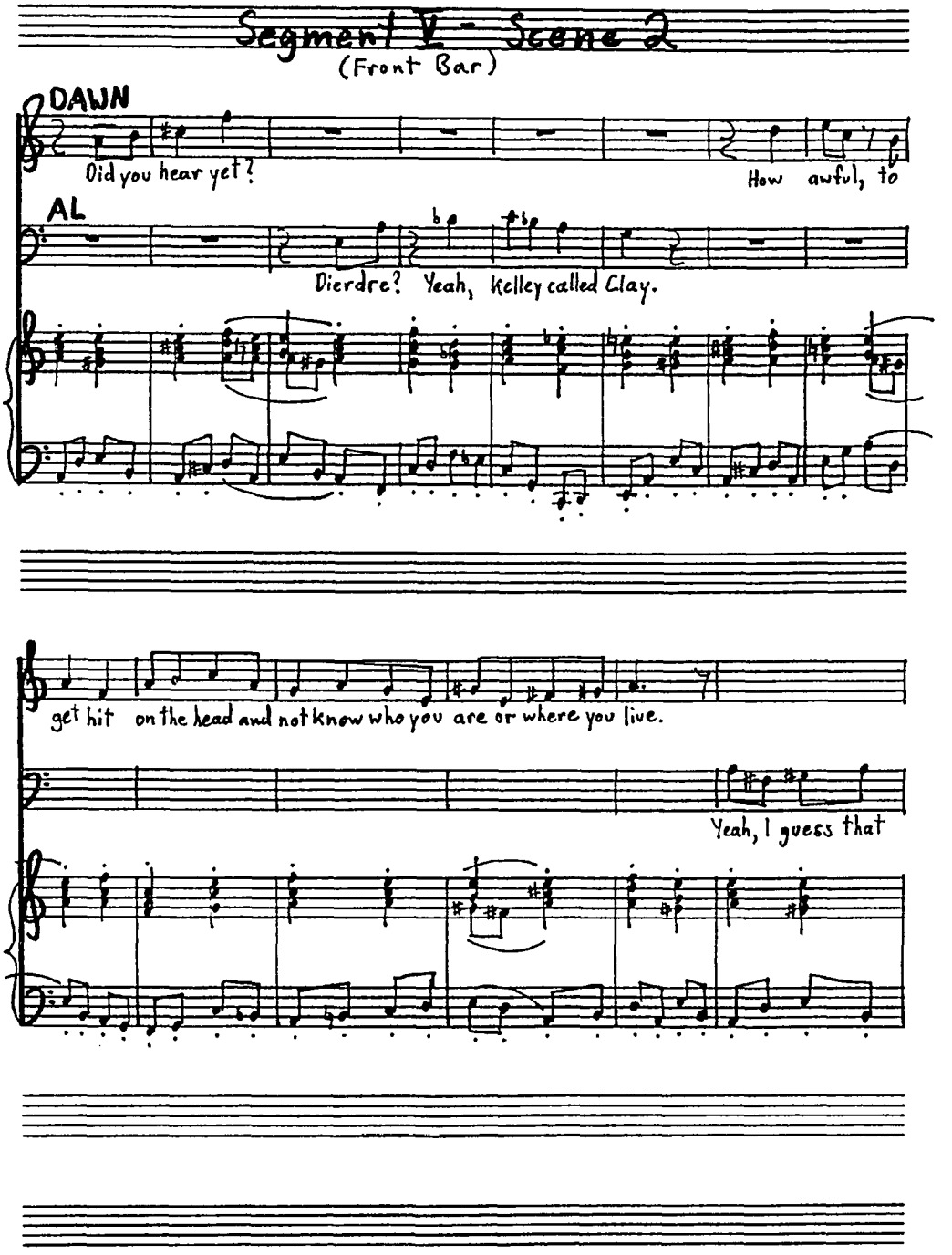

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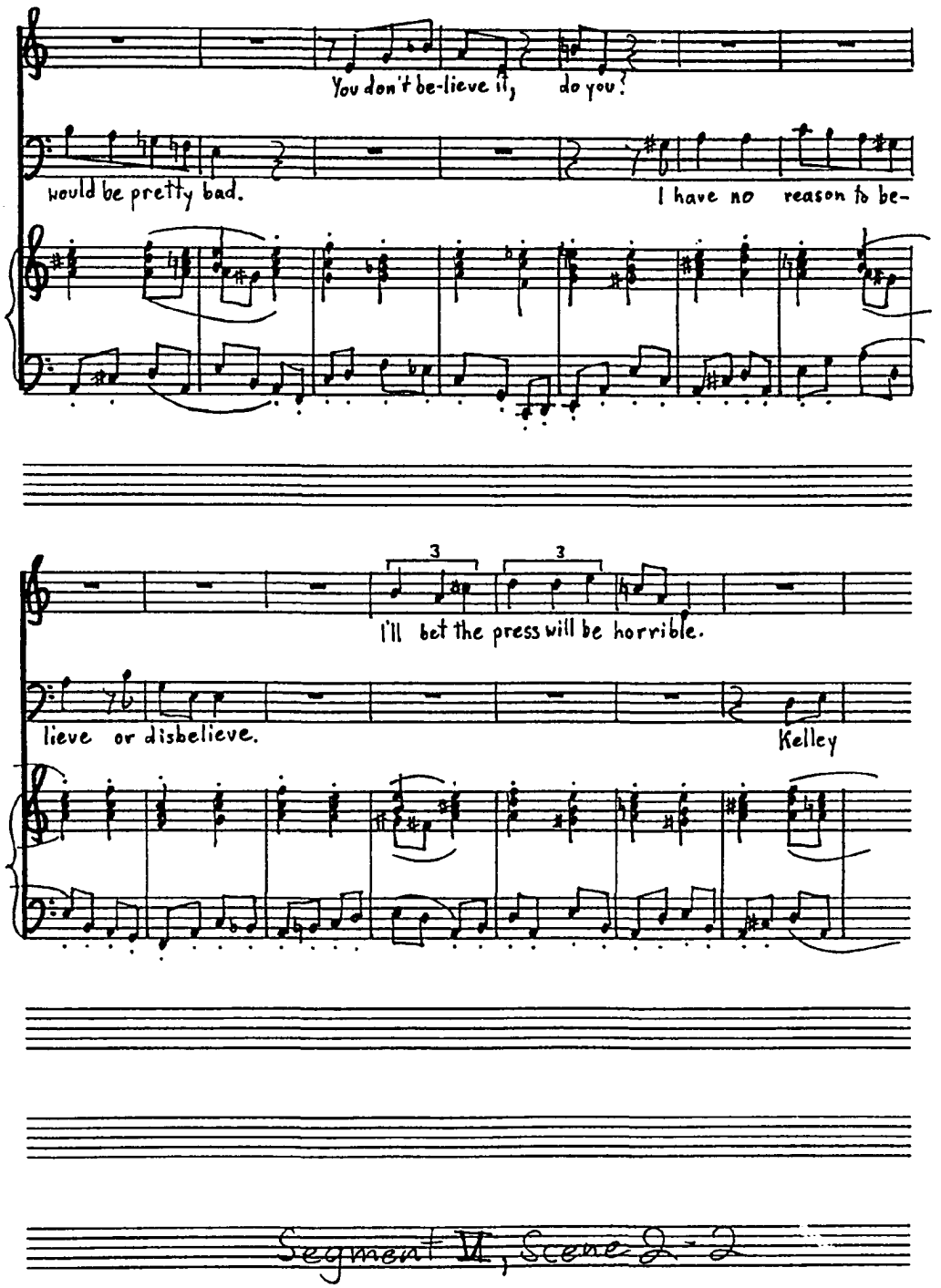

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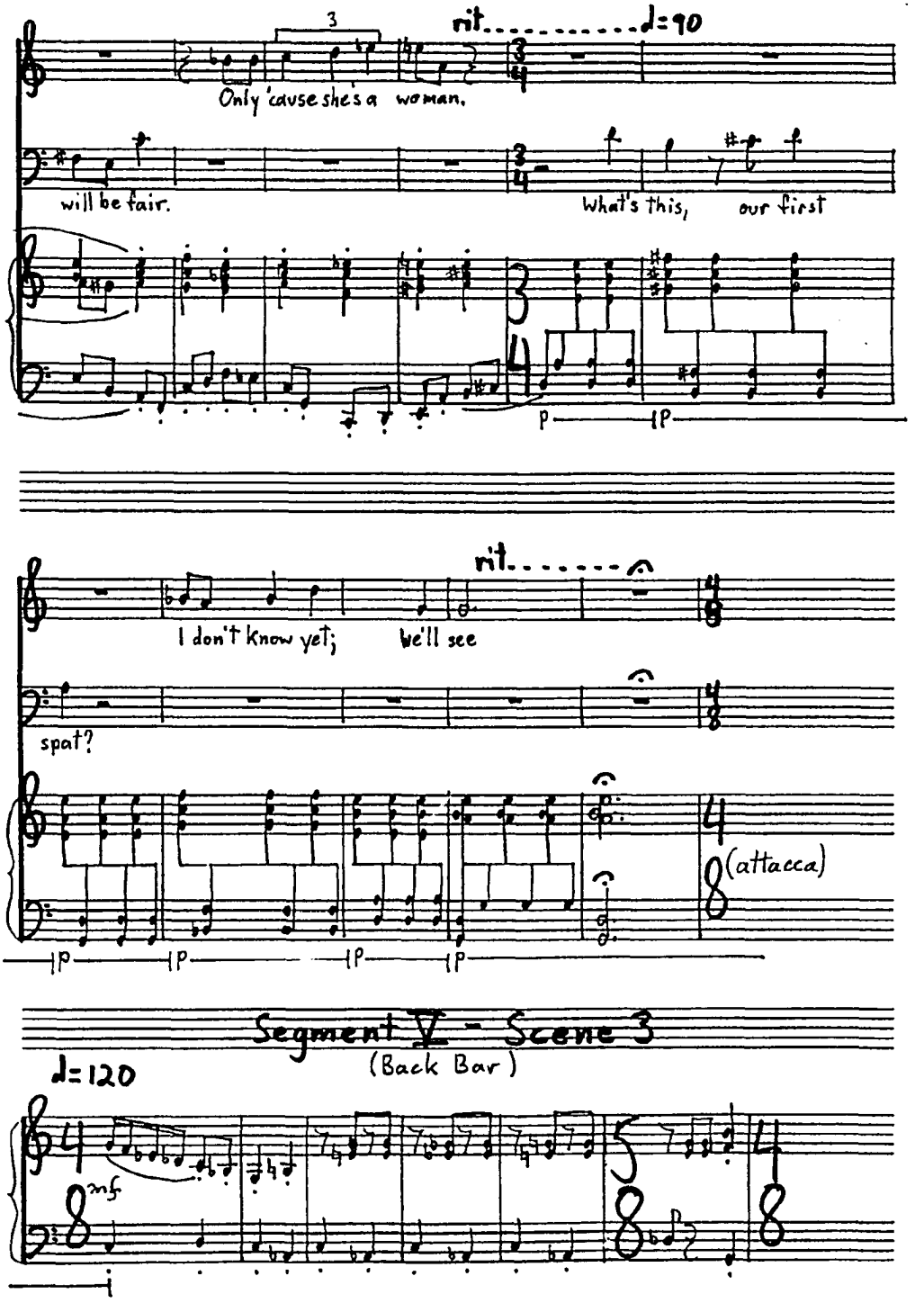

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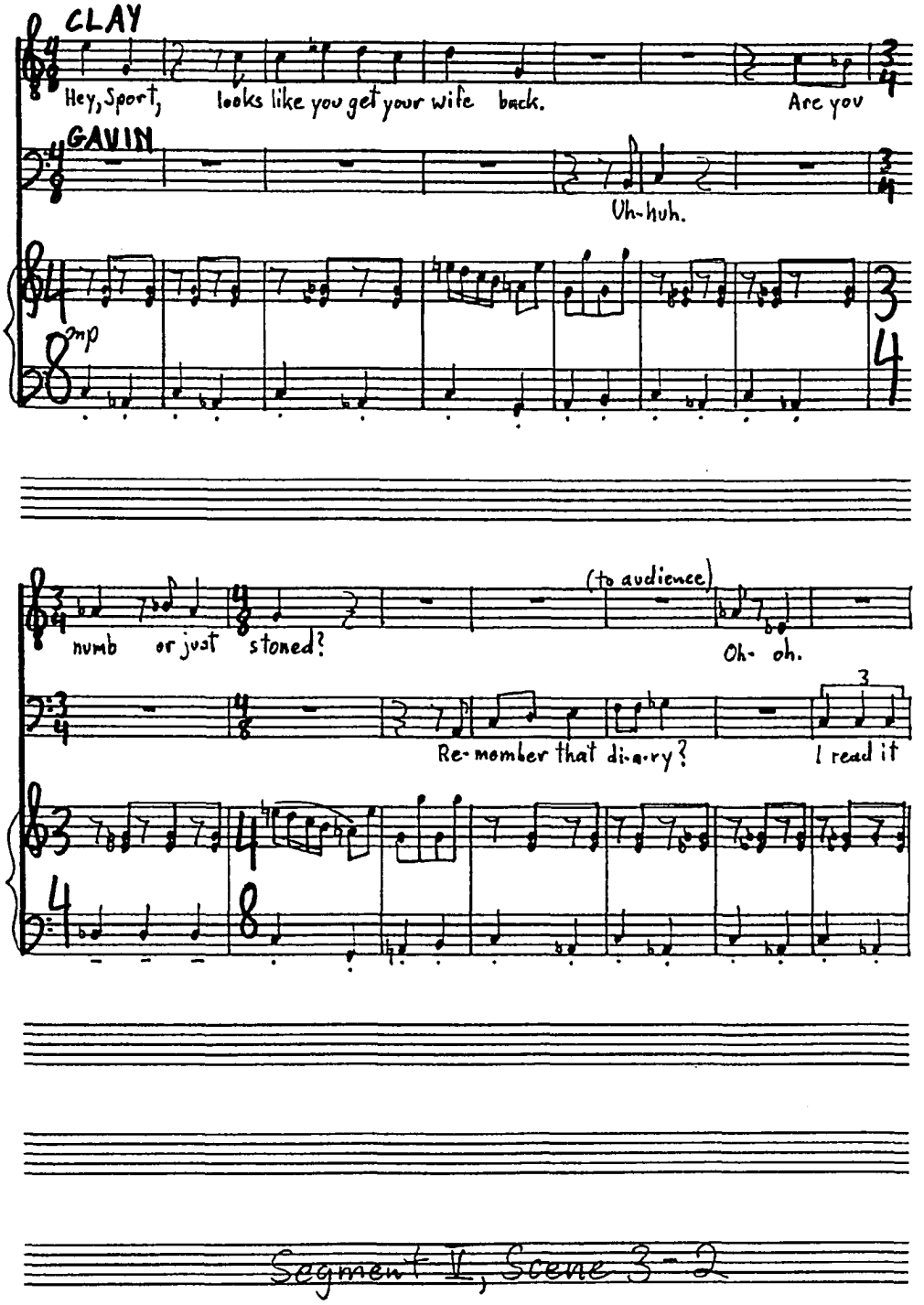

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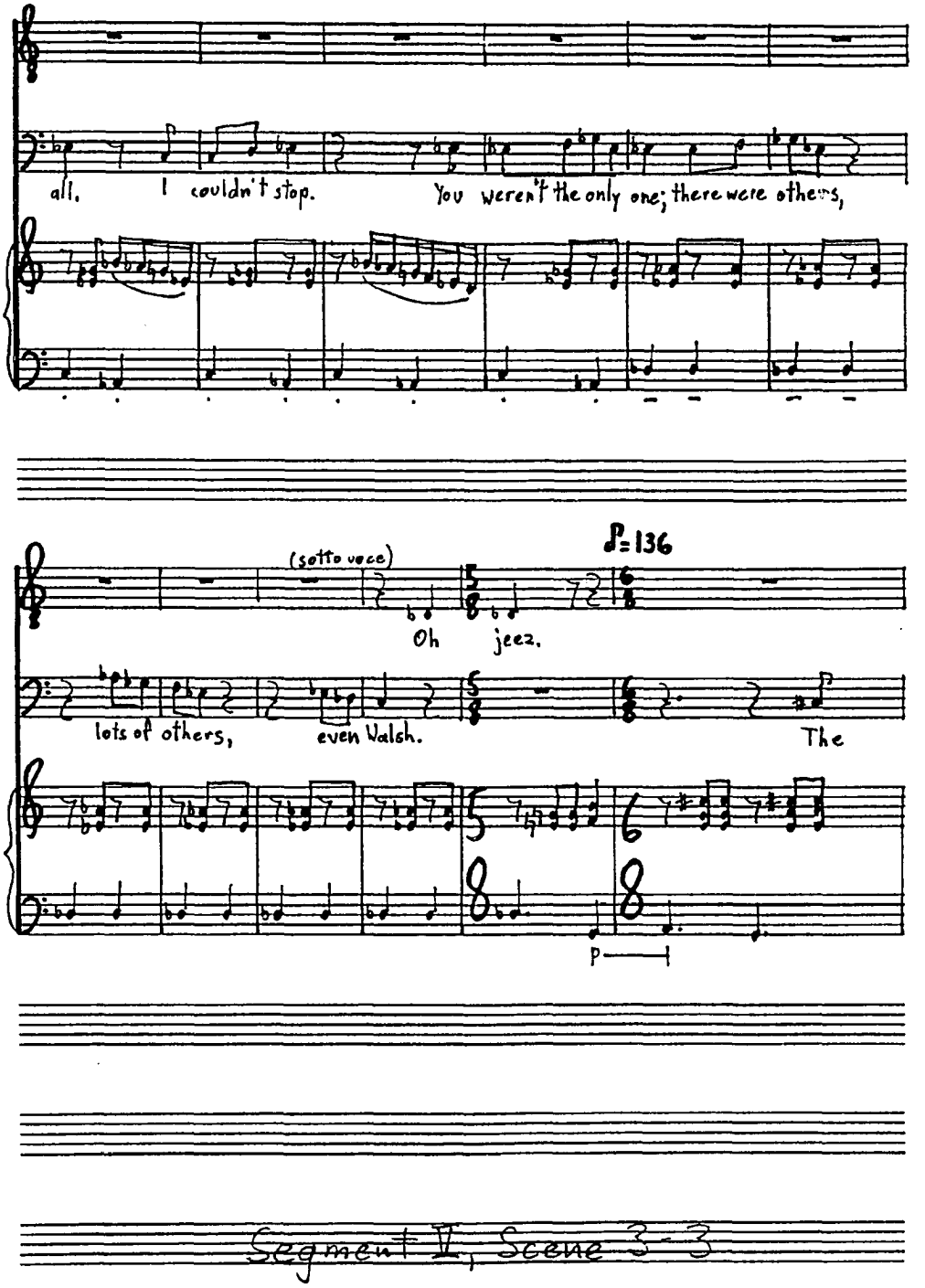

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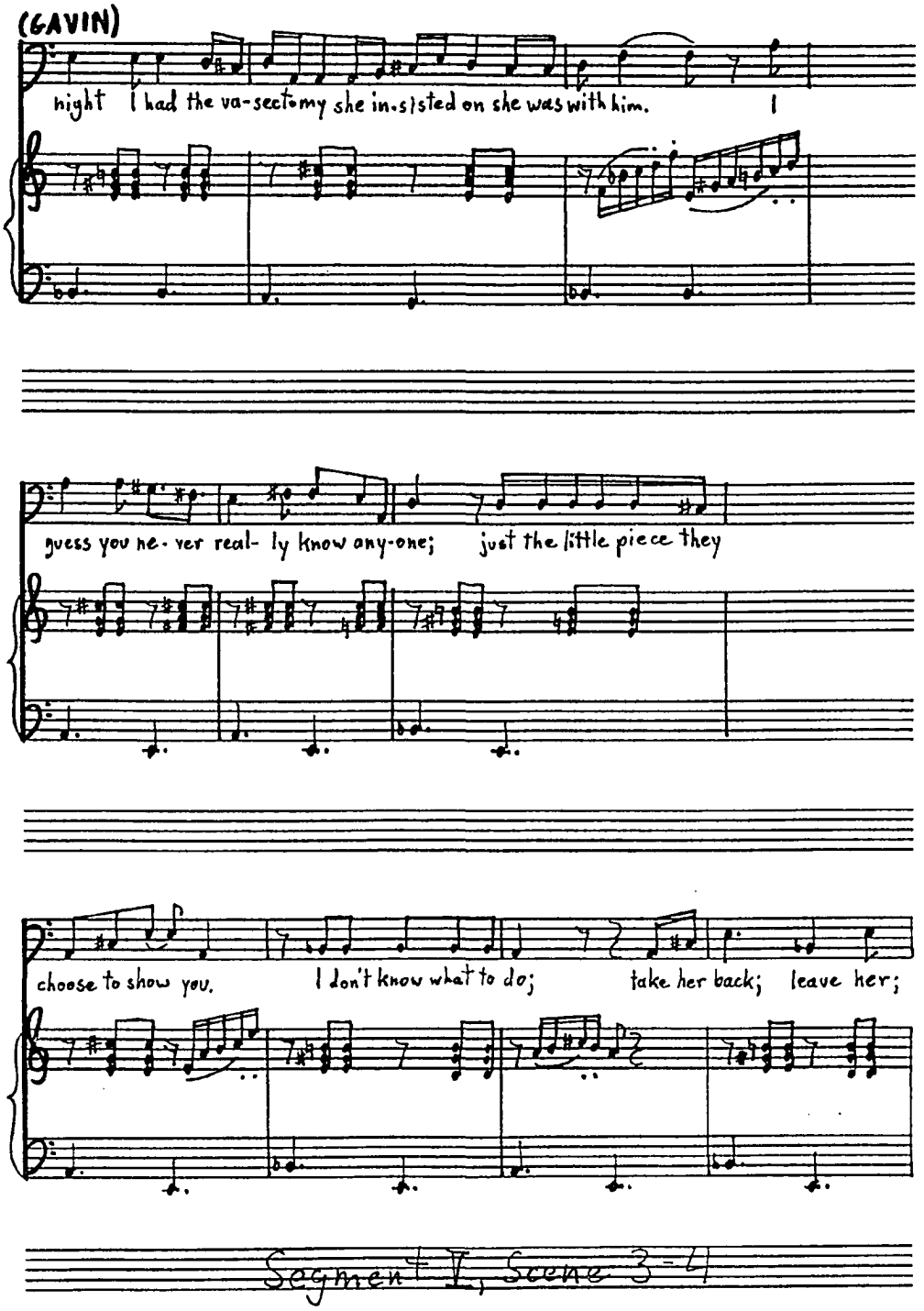

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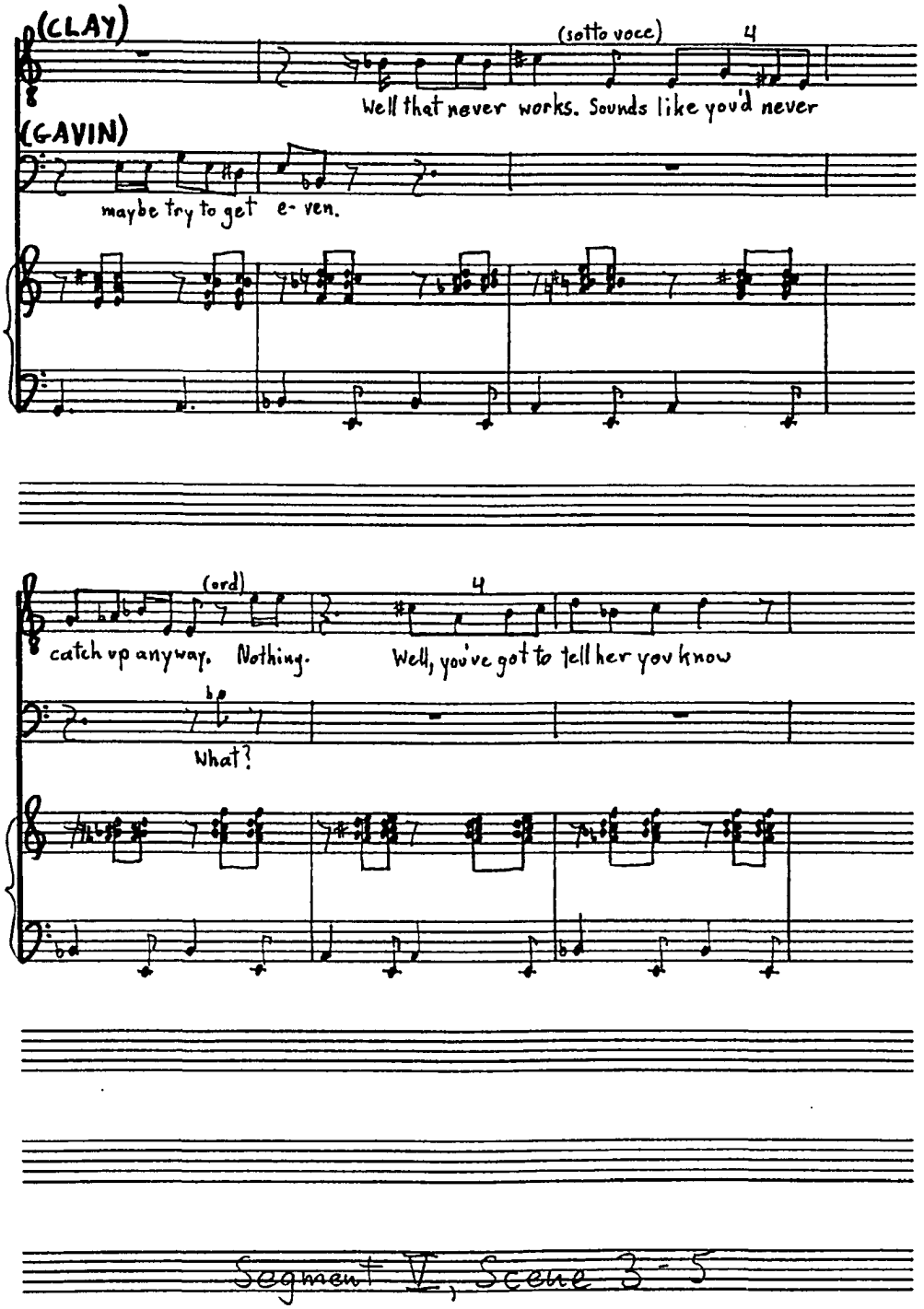

Segment V, Scene 3-5

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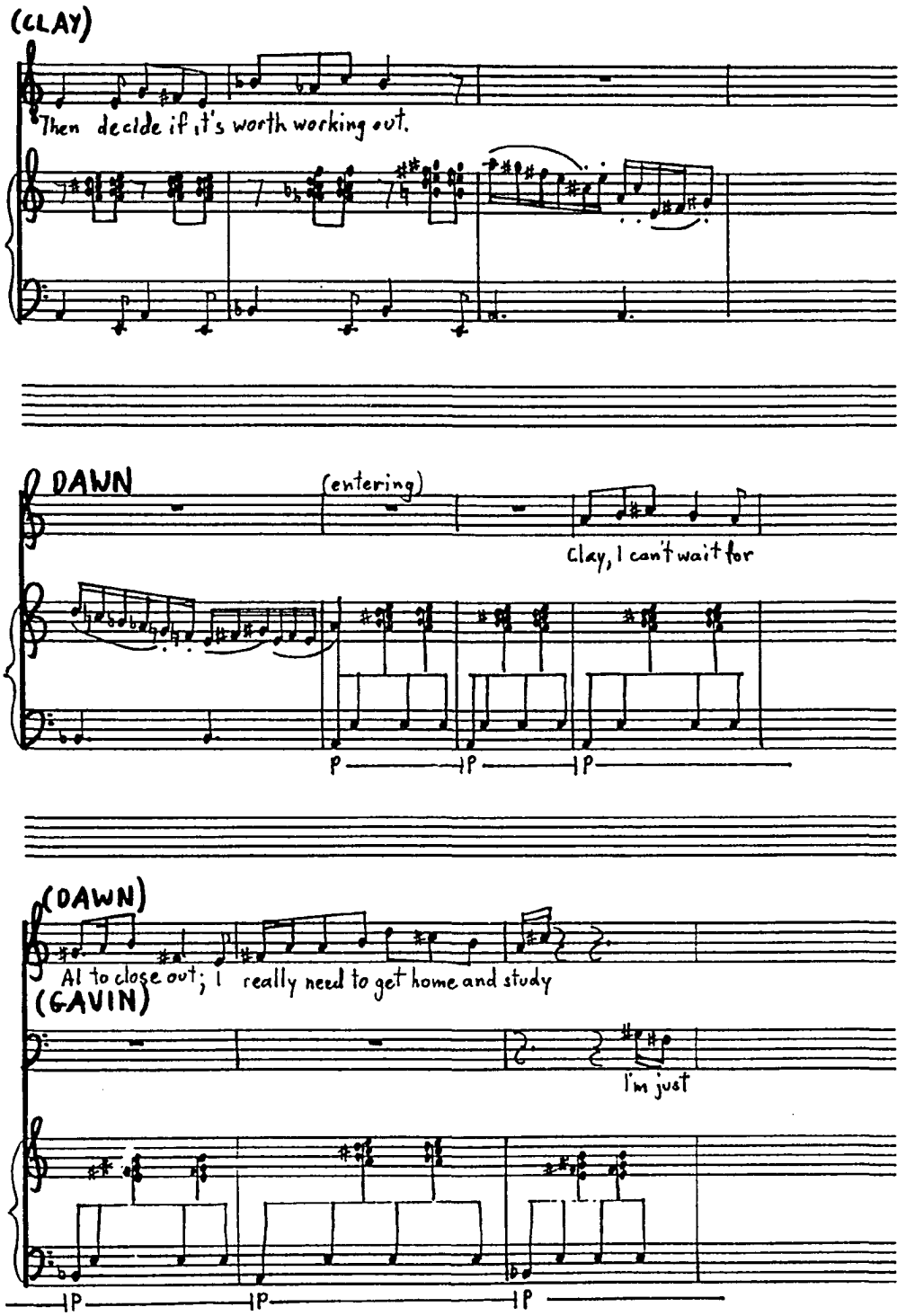

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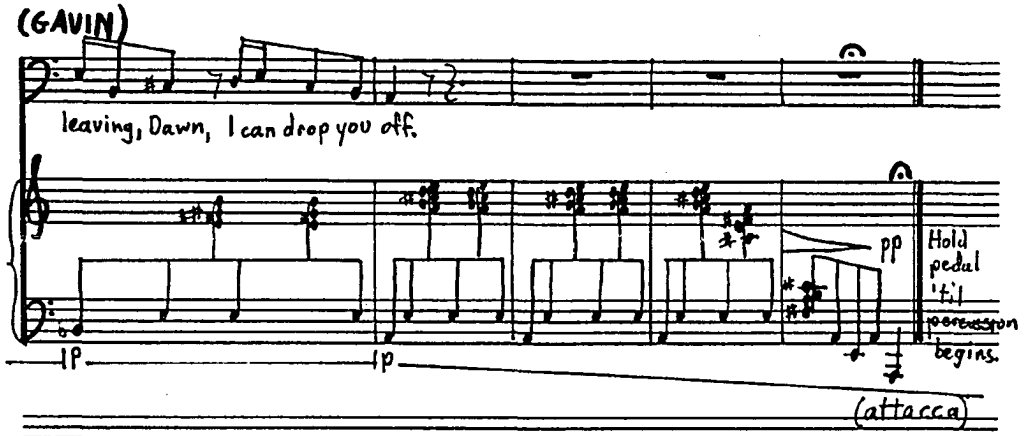

Segment V, Scene 3

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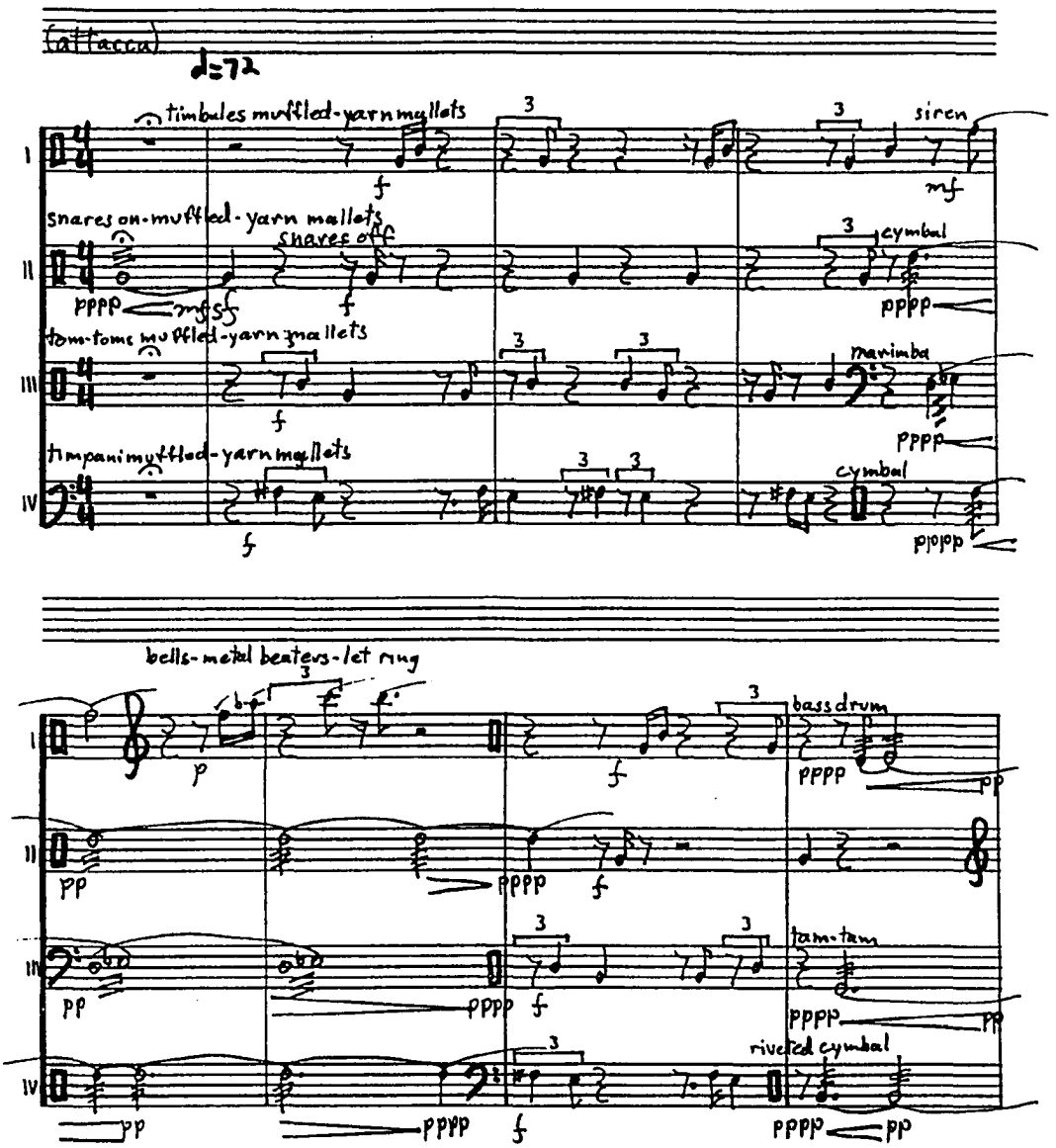
Break V



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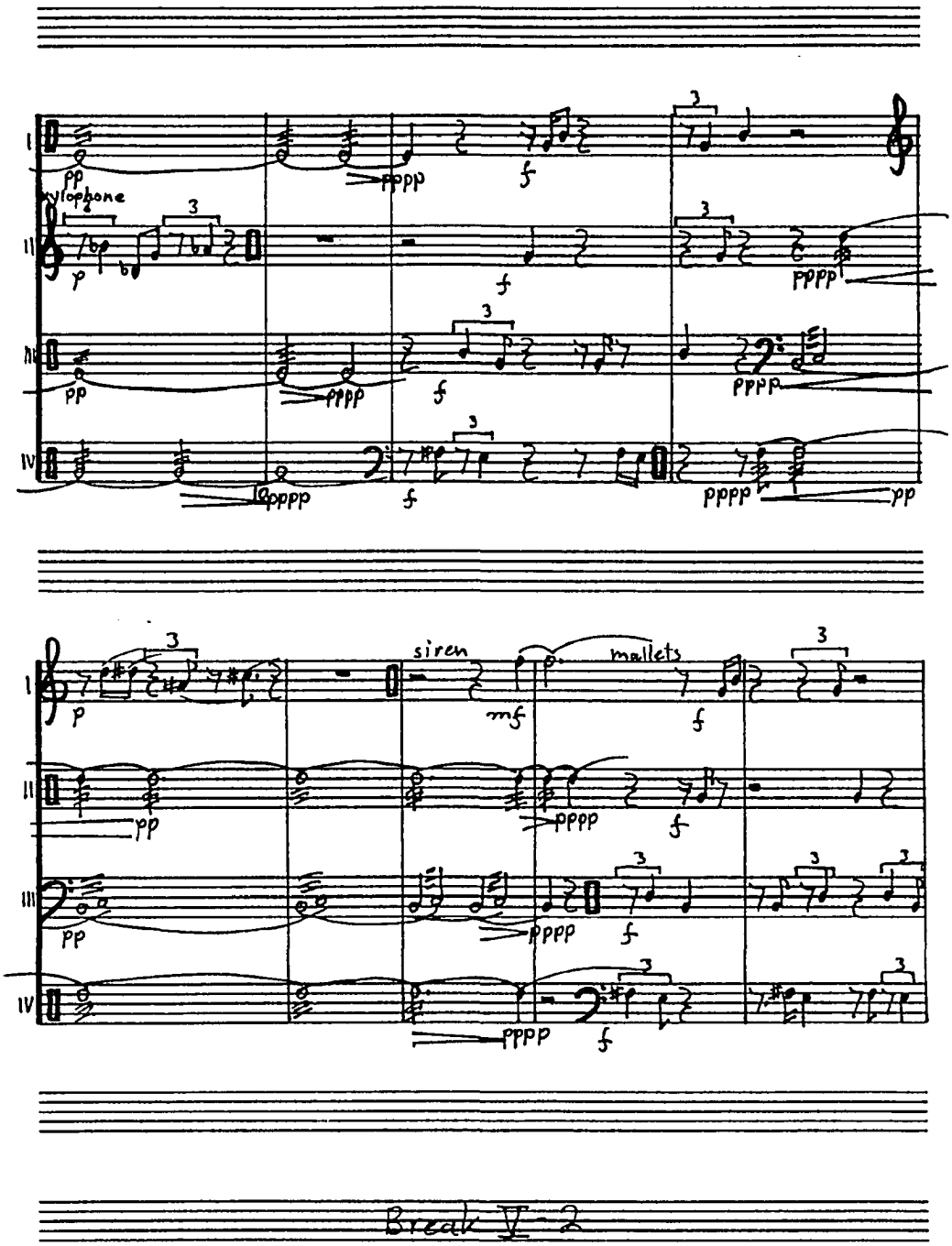

Break V-2

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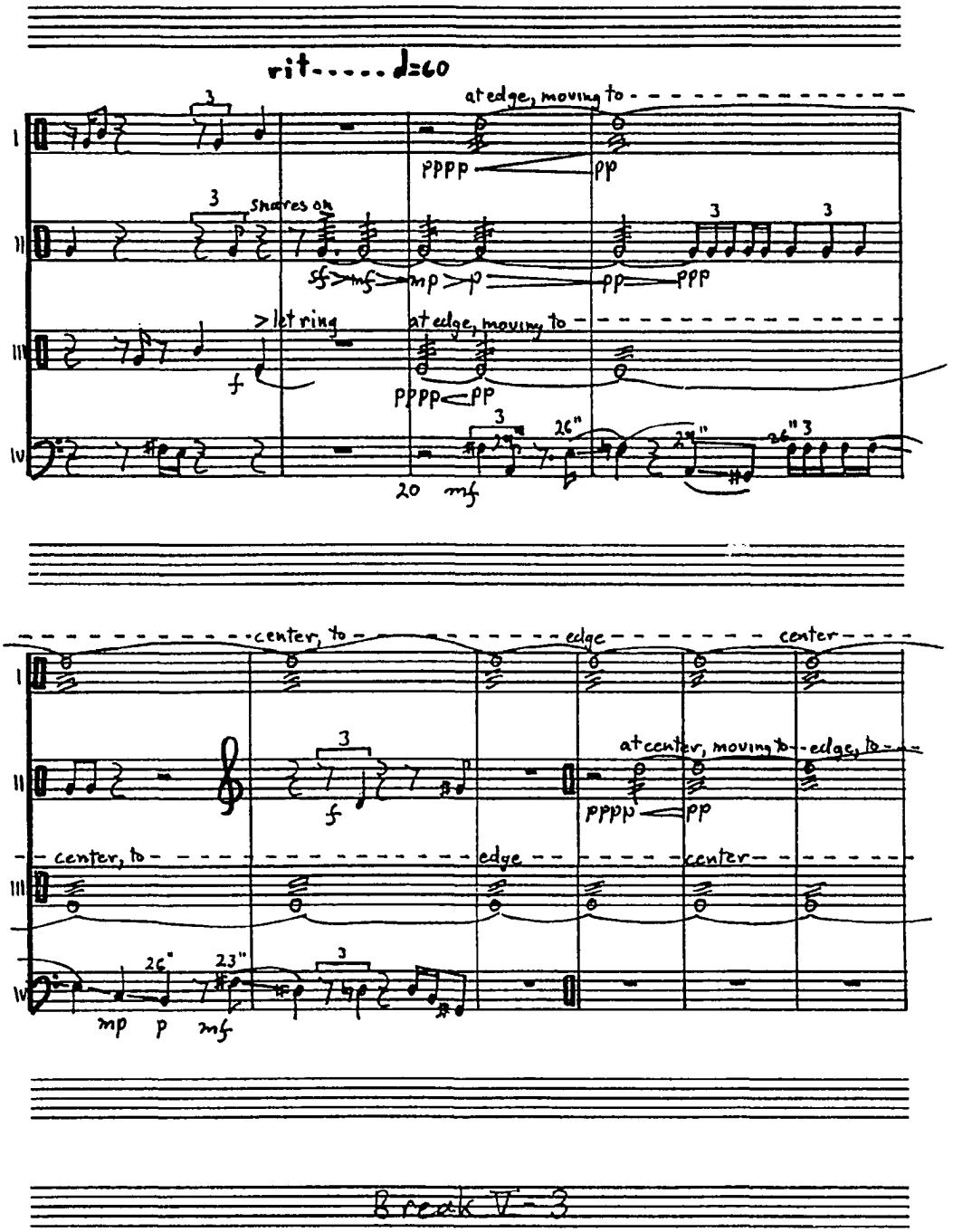

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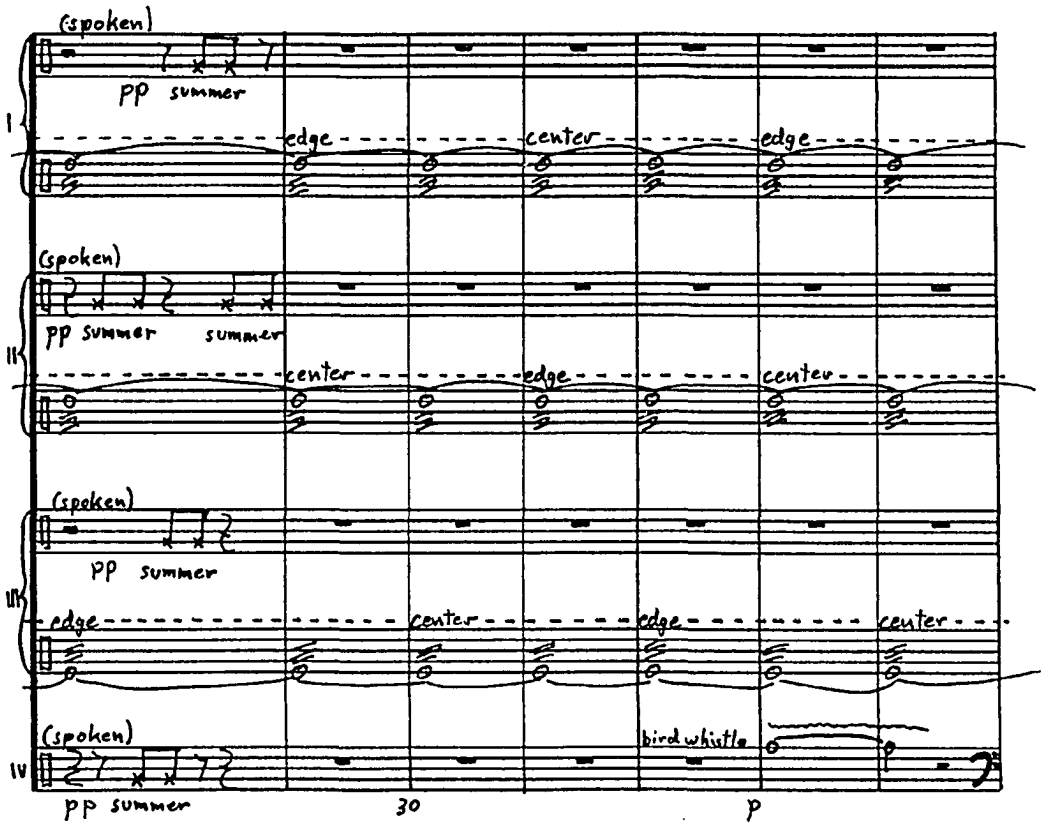

Break ♩= 44

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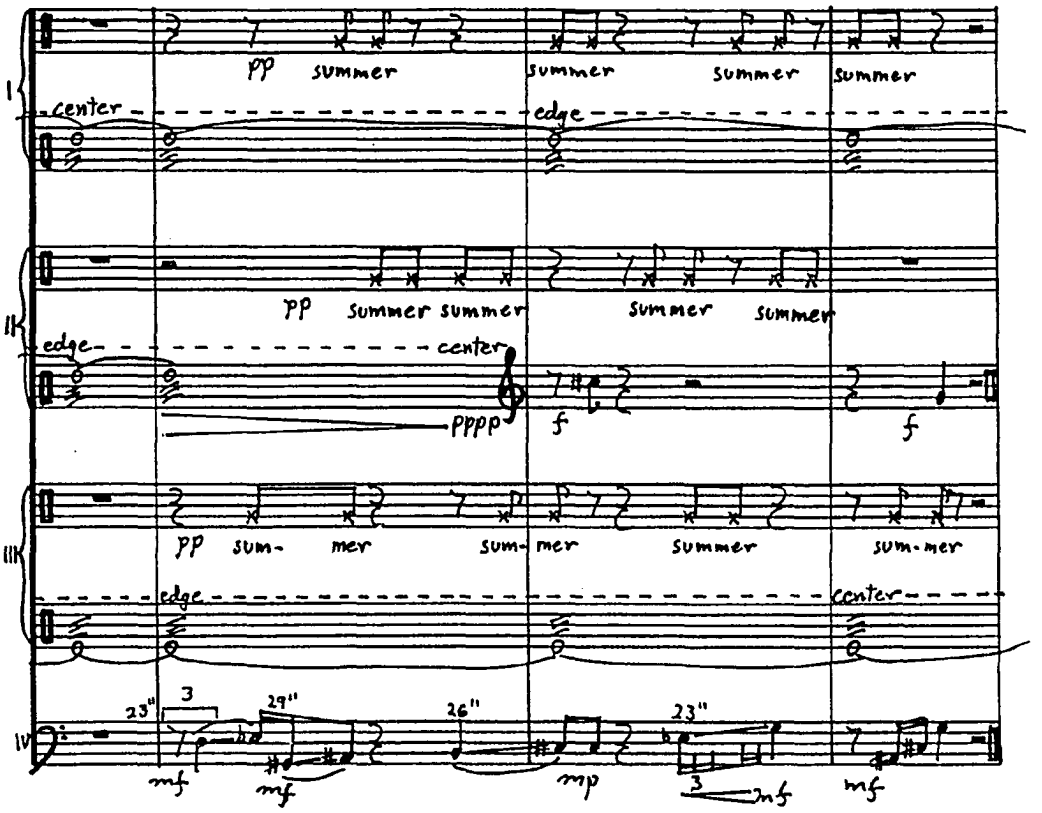

Break V - 5

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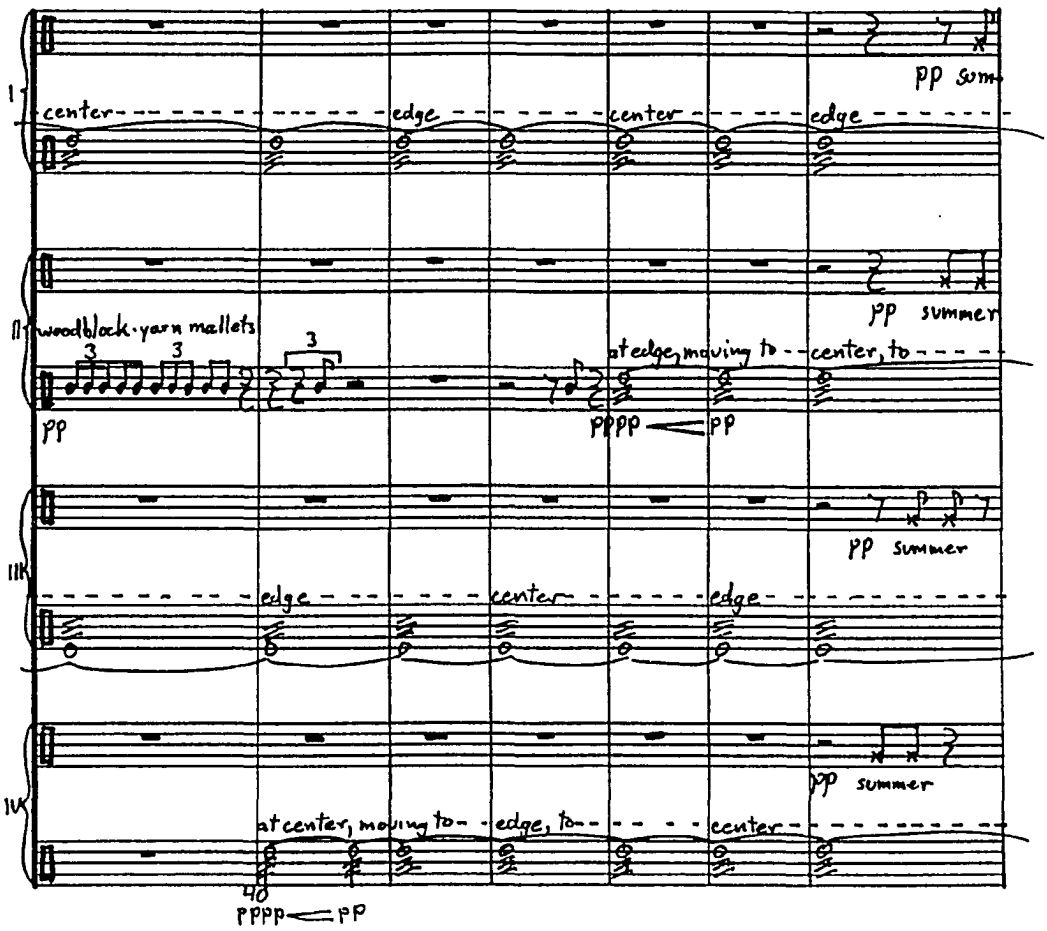

Break V-6

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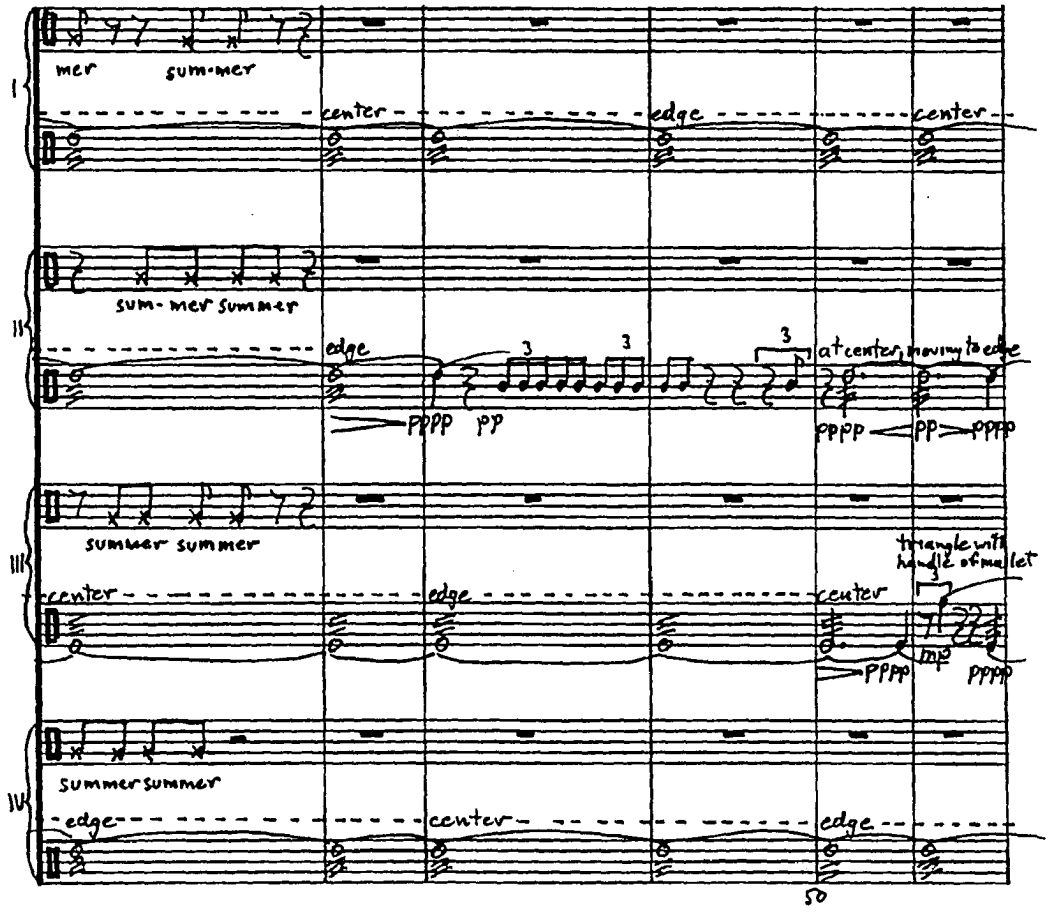

Break V-7

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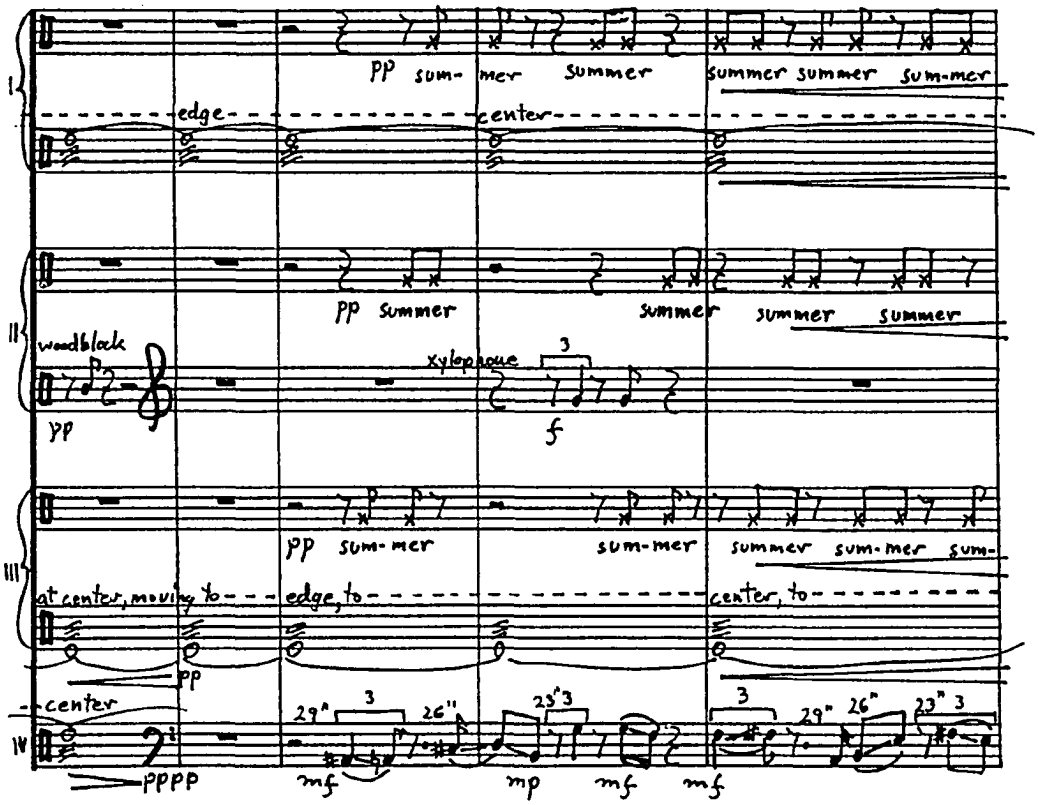

Break V-8

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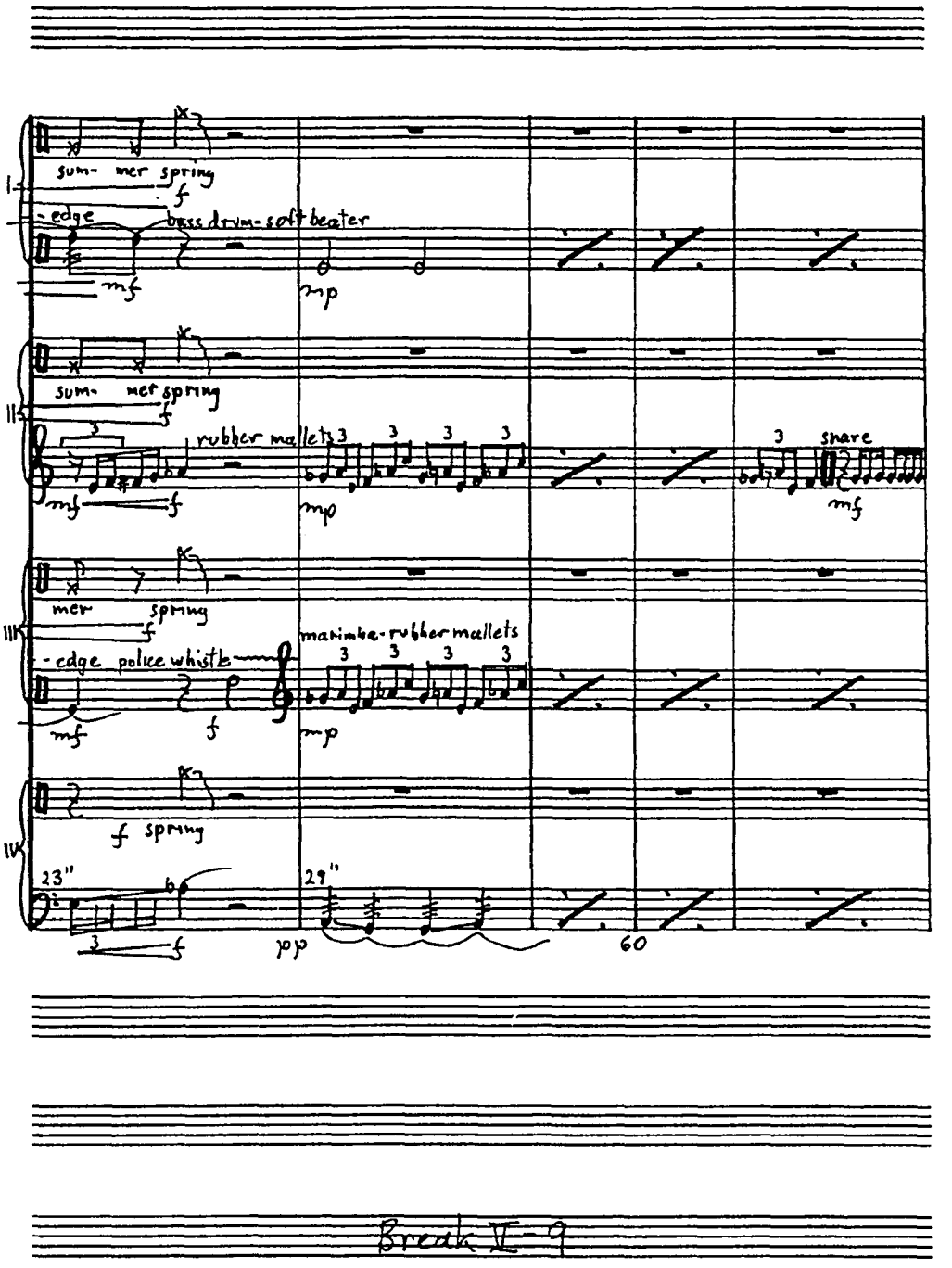

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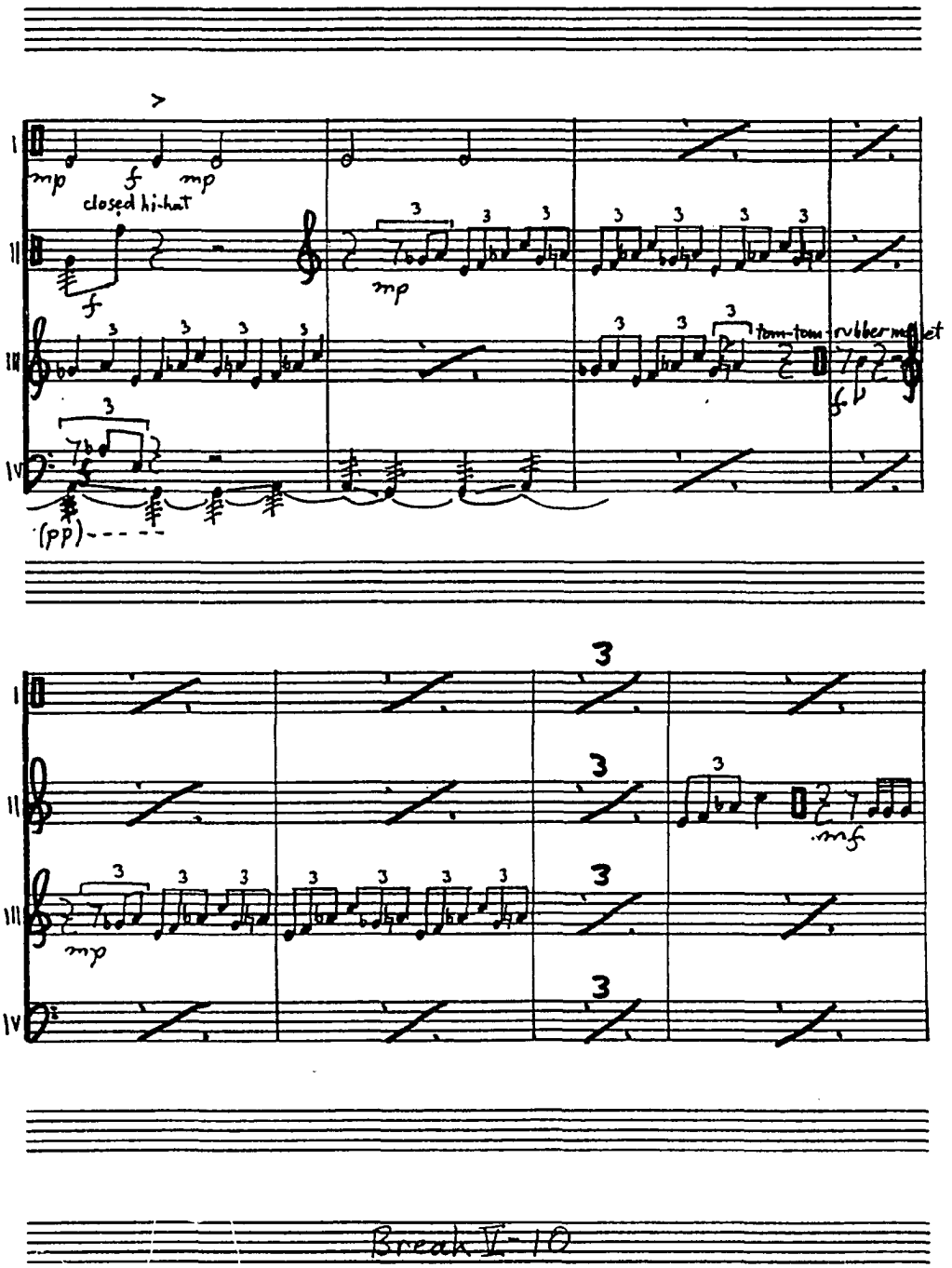

Break V-10

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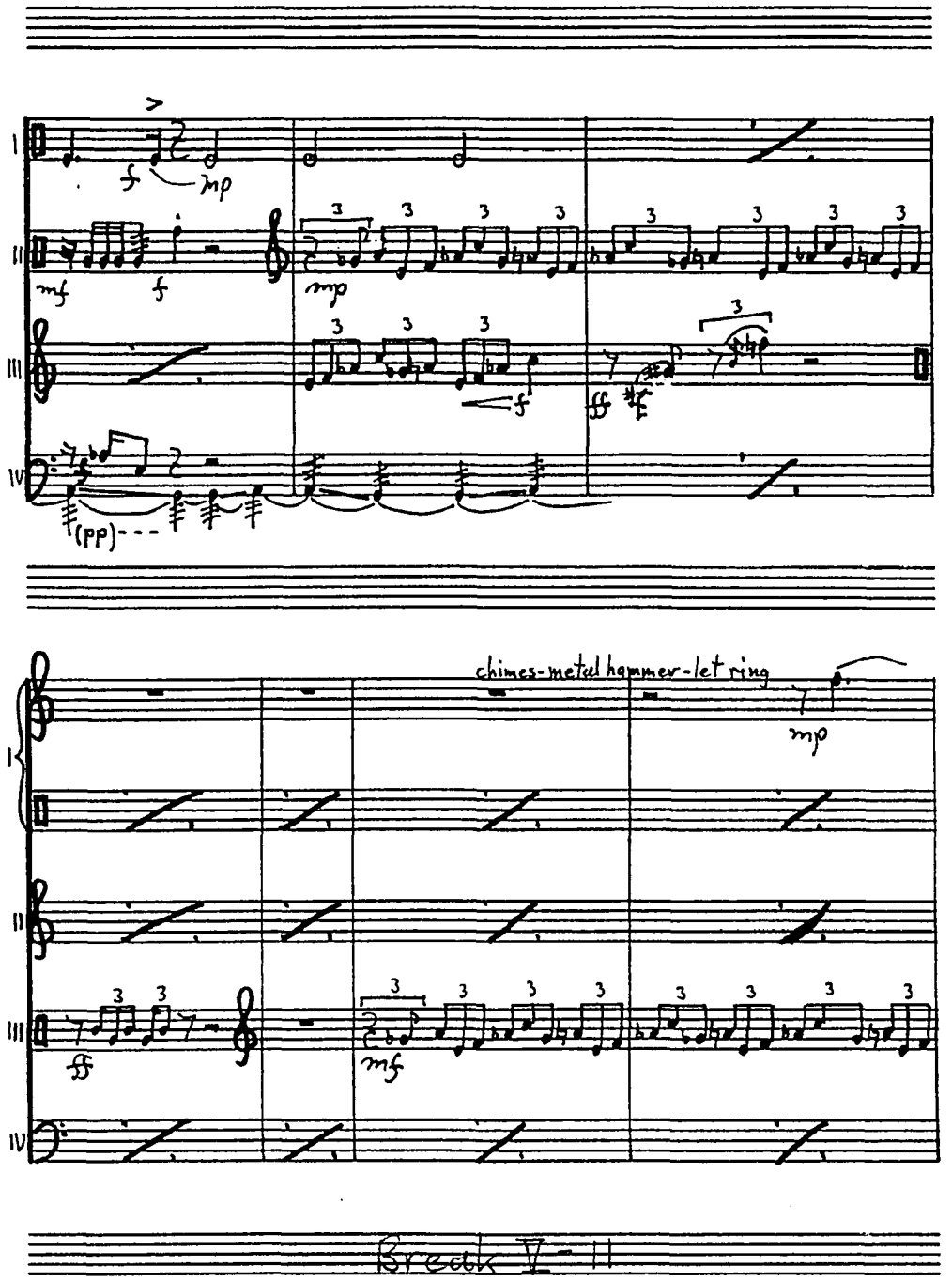

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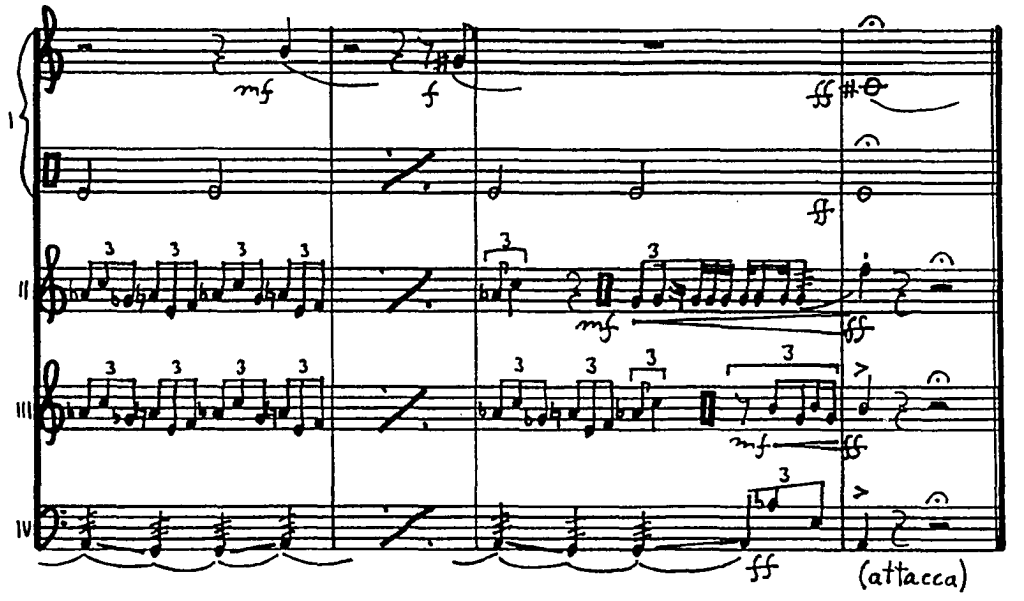

Break V-12

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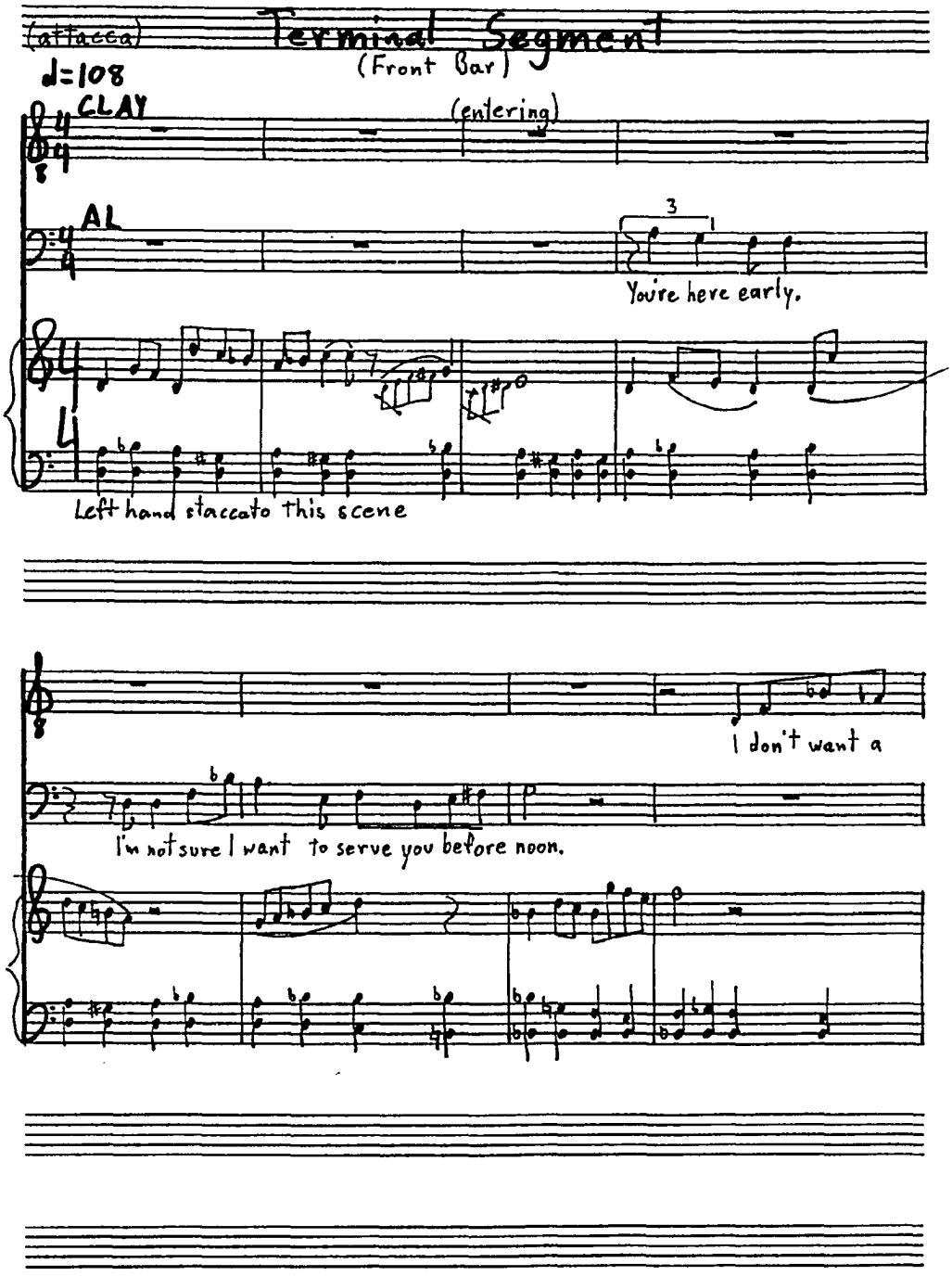

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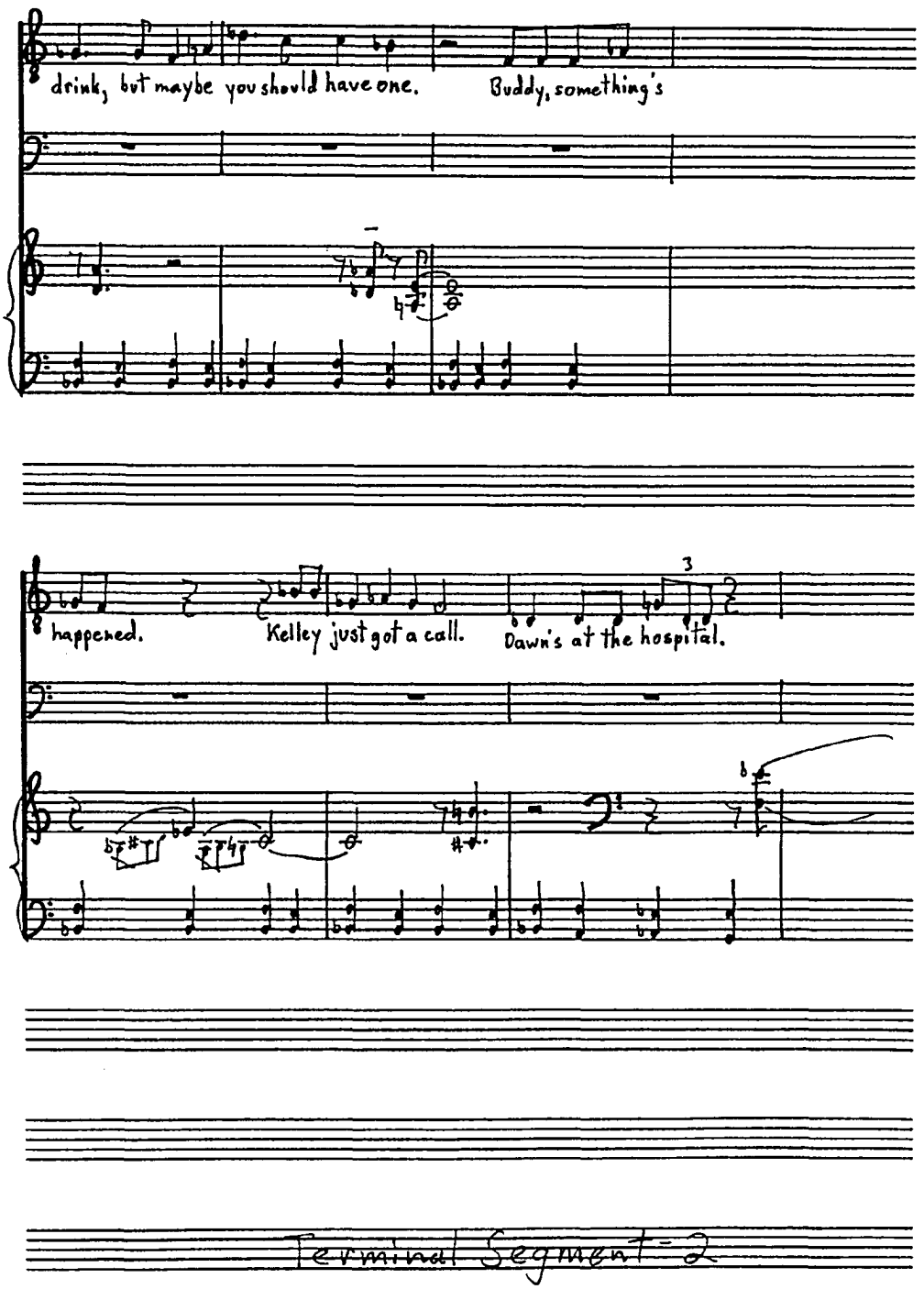

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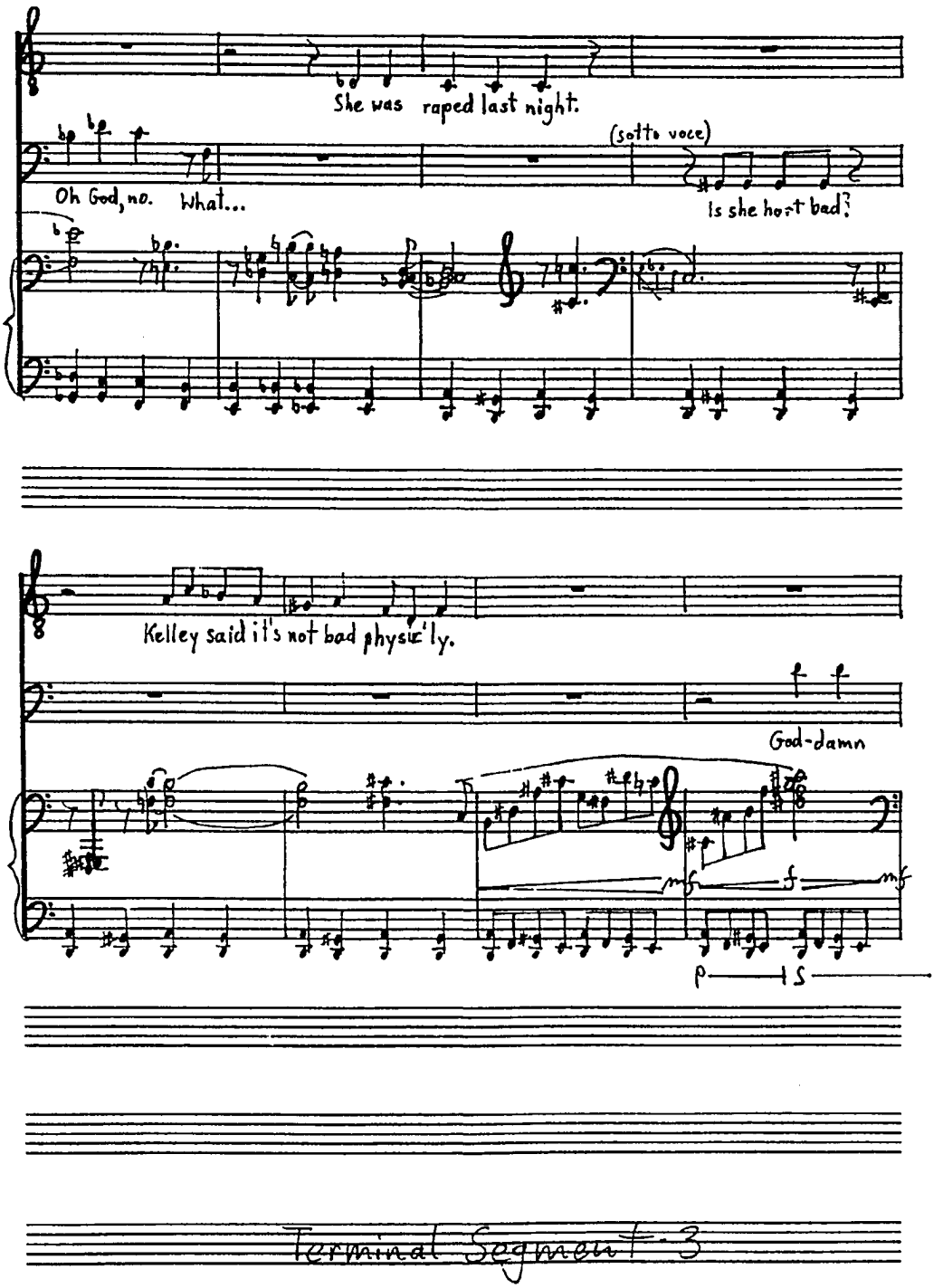

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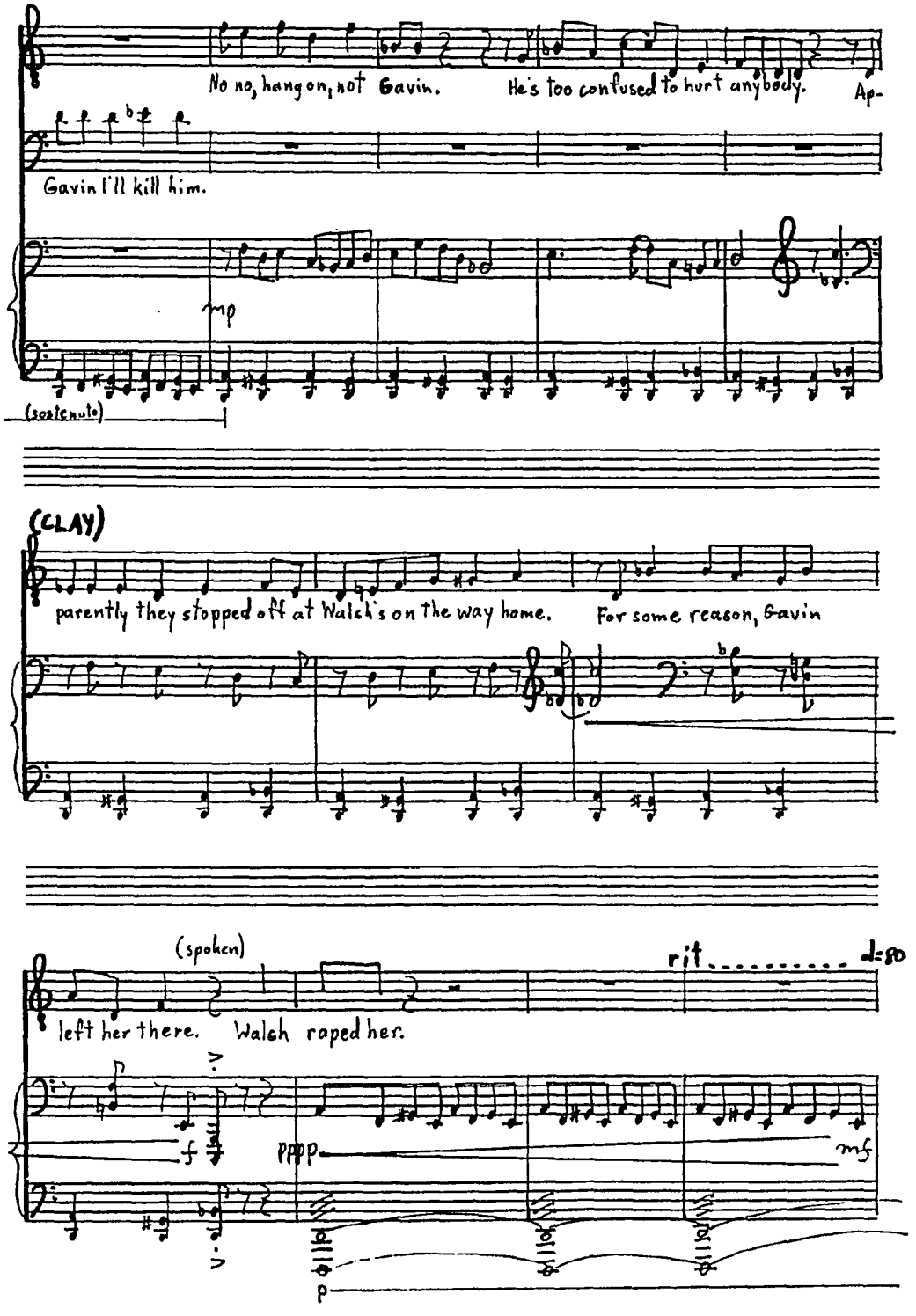

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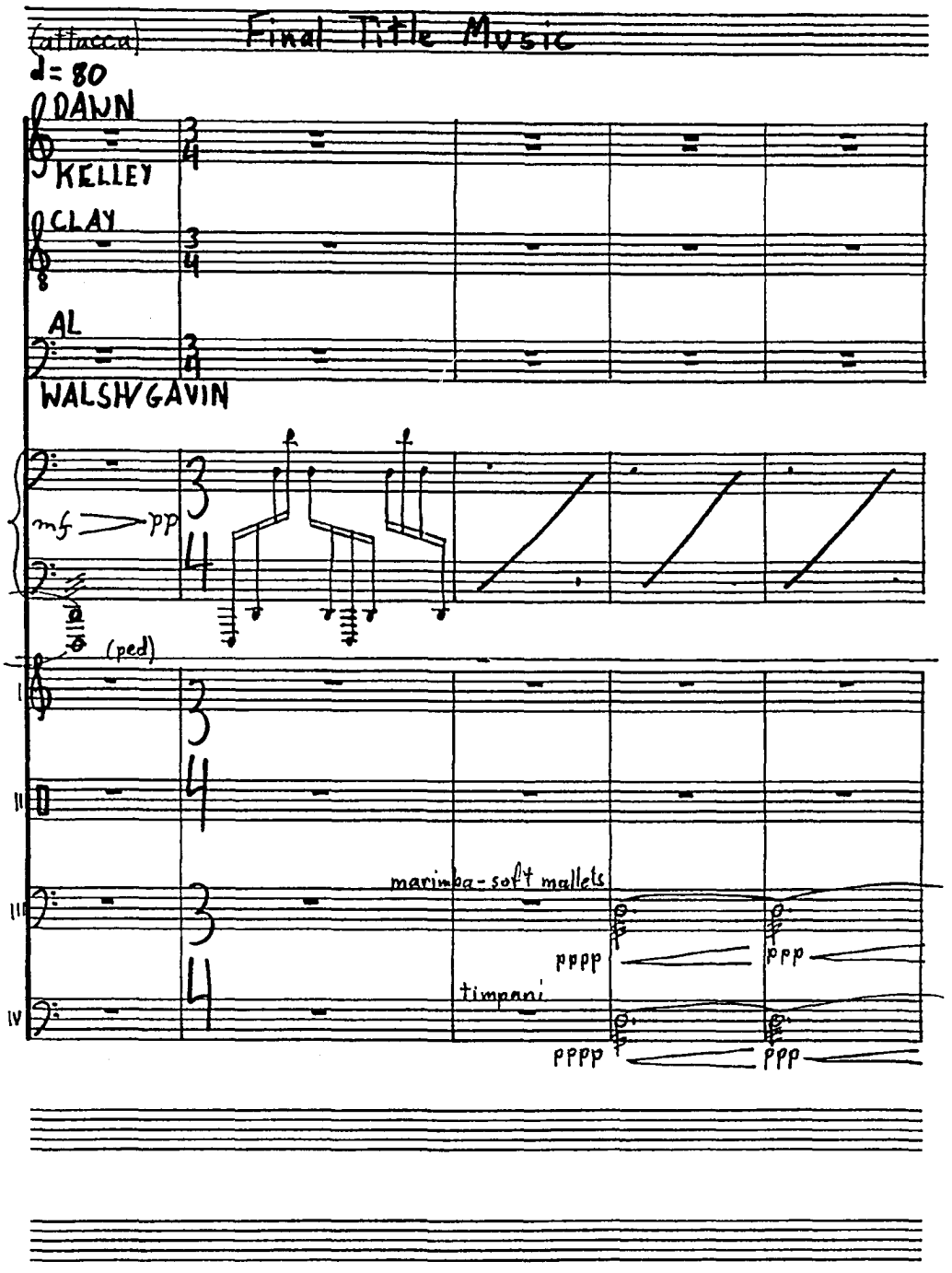

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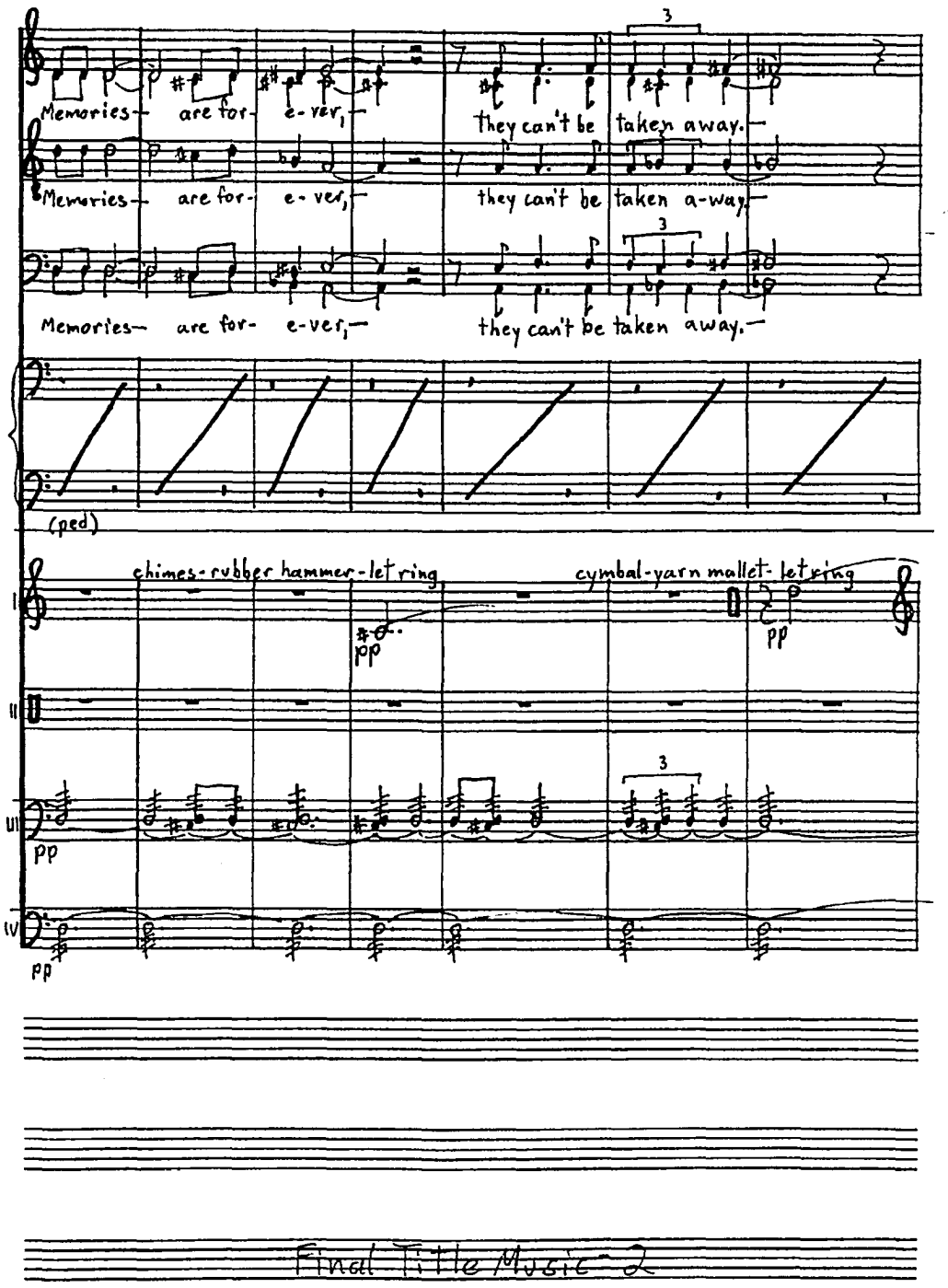

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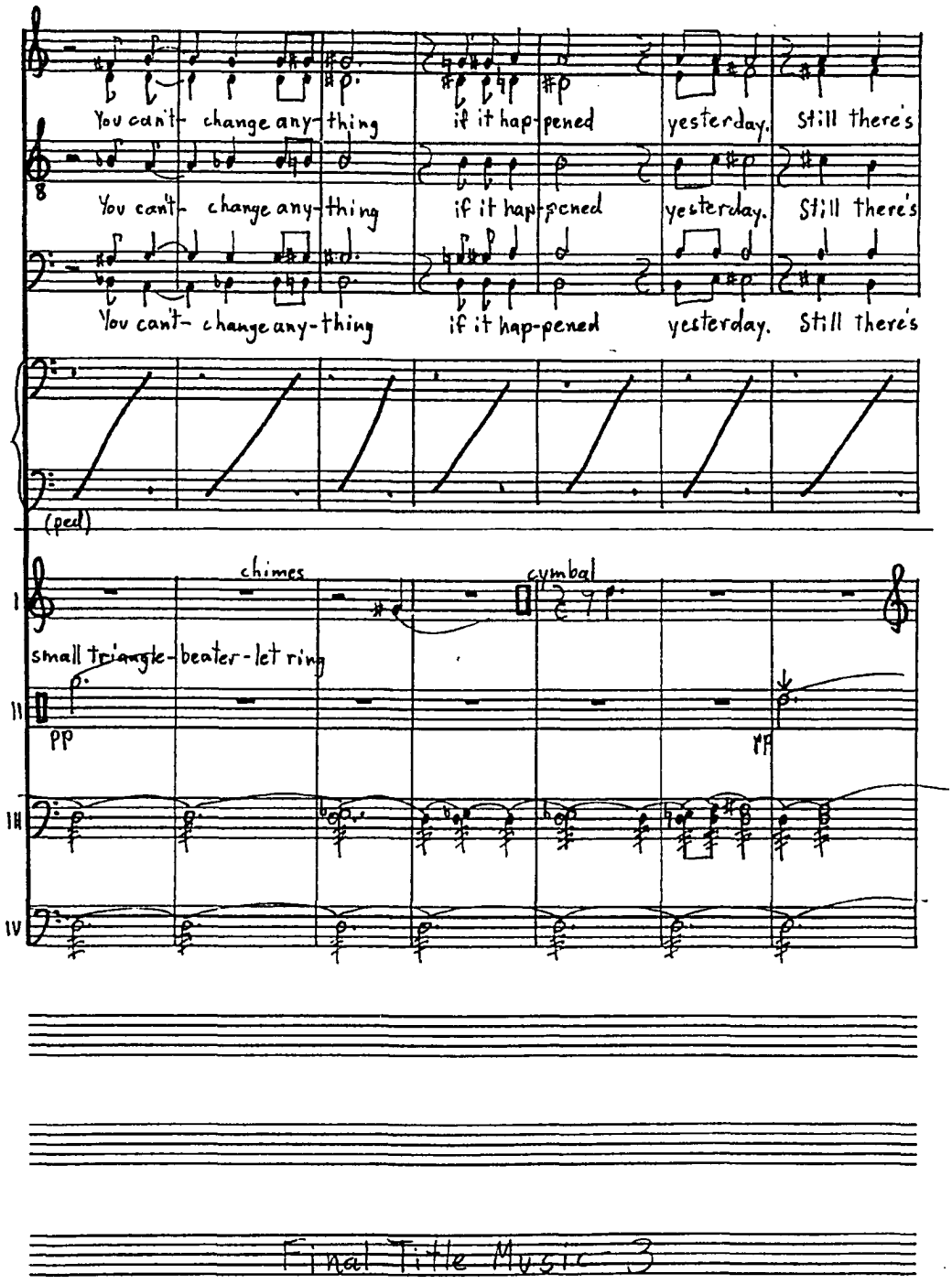

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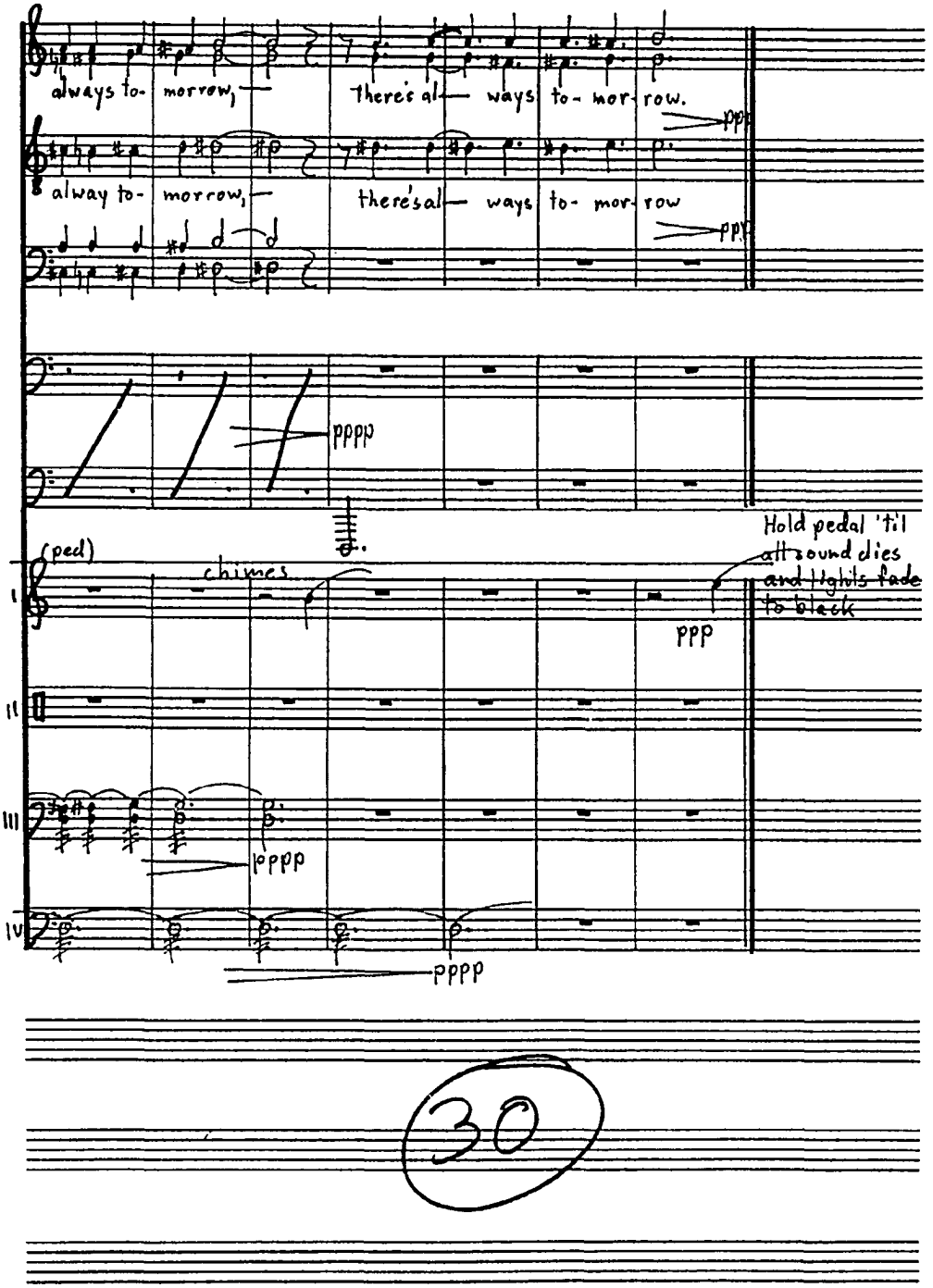

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