

Sleep, Comrades, Sleep

SSAATTBB Choir

LUKE CARLSON MUSIC

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(2017)

Duration: 6 minutes

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Program Notes

It is impossible to escape feelings of profound humility and deep gratitude when reflecting on the sacrifice that our men and women have made over the years in defense of this country. Their efforts must never be forgotten; their achievements never maligned.

Longfellow's "Decoration Day" is a work of poignant simplicity. He reminds us that the bloody battles of the past are over and that we, the readers, are beneficiaries of a peaceful present.

His observations touch on several evocative images and ideas: the sonic intensity of battle, "the cannon's sudden roar…the drum's redoubling beat," the serene aftermath of the battlefield, "all is repose and peace…the shouts of battle cease," and perhaps the crux of the entire poem, a realization that true peace can only come from the Almighty—the "Truce of God."

Projecting a sense of reverence and serenity in the music was paramount. Longfellow's intoning of the words "rest," "sleep," and "peace" give me the impression of a dream-like state of reflection and respect. To convey this, the music is structured on the repetition of a gently cascading scale. The scale is slightly ambiguous; neither major nor minor. This bittersweet quality is also present in the predominantly thick harmonies, creating a complex of conflicting emotions.

Partly reflection, partly prayer, this piece is really a thank-you to our soldiers, our comrades. Recognizing their sacrifice and acknowledging their loss, we hope and pray for rest, tranquility, and peace.

Text

“Decoration Day”

Sleep, comrades, sleep and rest
    On this Field of the Grounded Arms,
Where foes no more molest,
    Nor sentry’s shot alarms!

Ye have slept on the ground before,
    And started to your feet
At the cannon’s sudden roar,
    Or the drum’s redoubling beat.

But in this camp of Death
    No sound your slumber breaks;
Here is no fevered breath,
    No wound that bleeds and aches.

All is repose and peace,
    Untrampled lies the sod;
The shouts of battle cease,
    It is the Truce of God!

Rest, comrades, rest and sleep!
    The thoughts of men shall be
As sentinels to keep
    Your rest from danger free.

Your silent tents of green
    We deck with fragrant flowers;
Yours has the suffering been,
    The memory shall be ours.

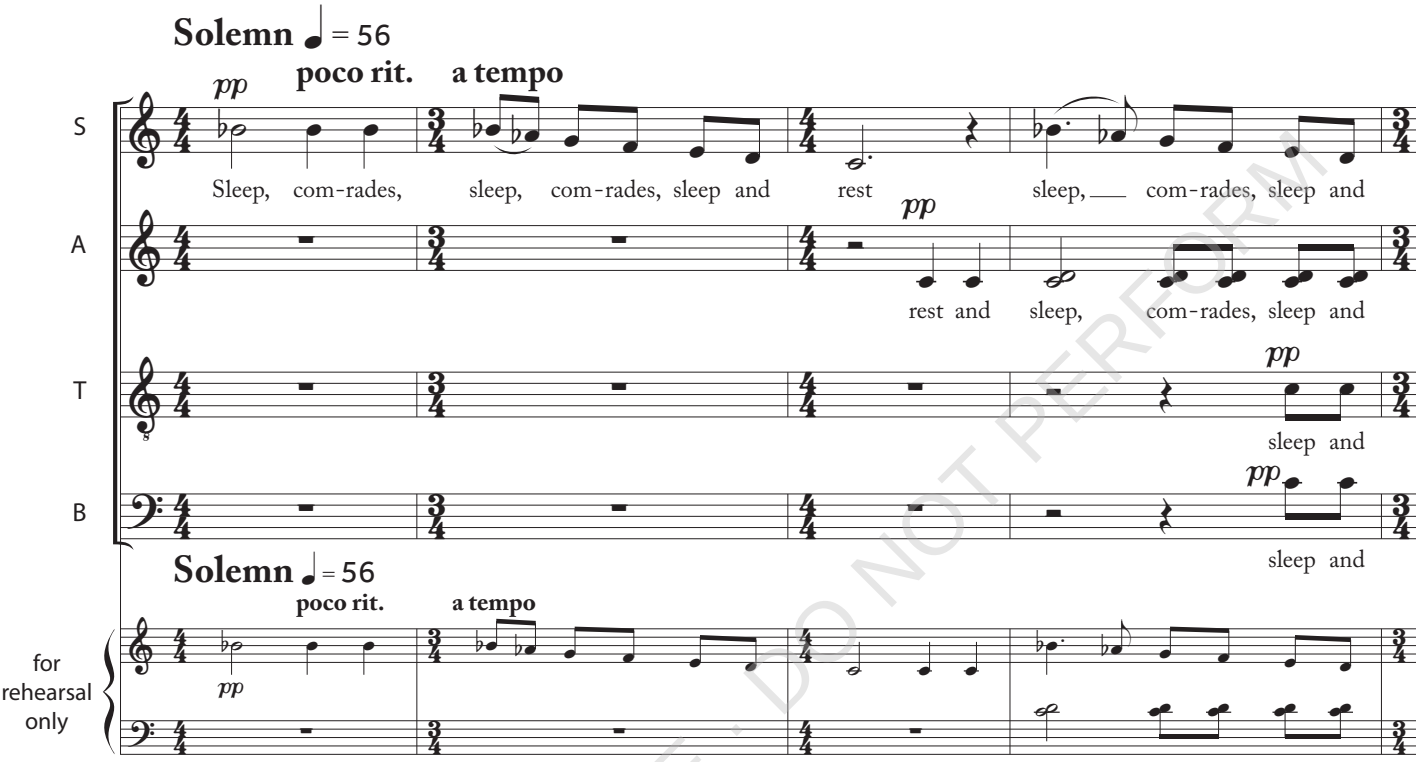
—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

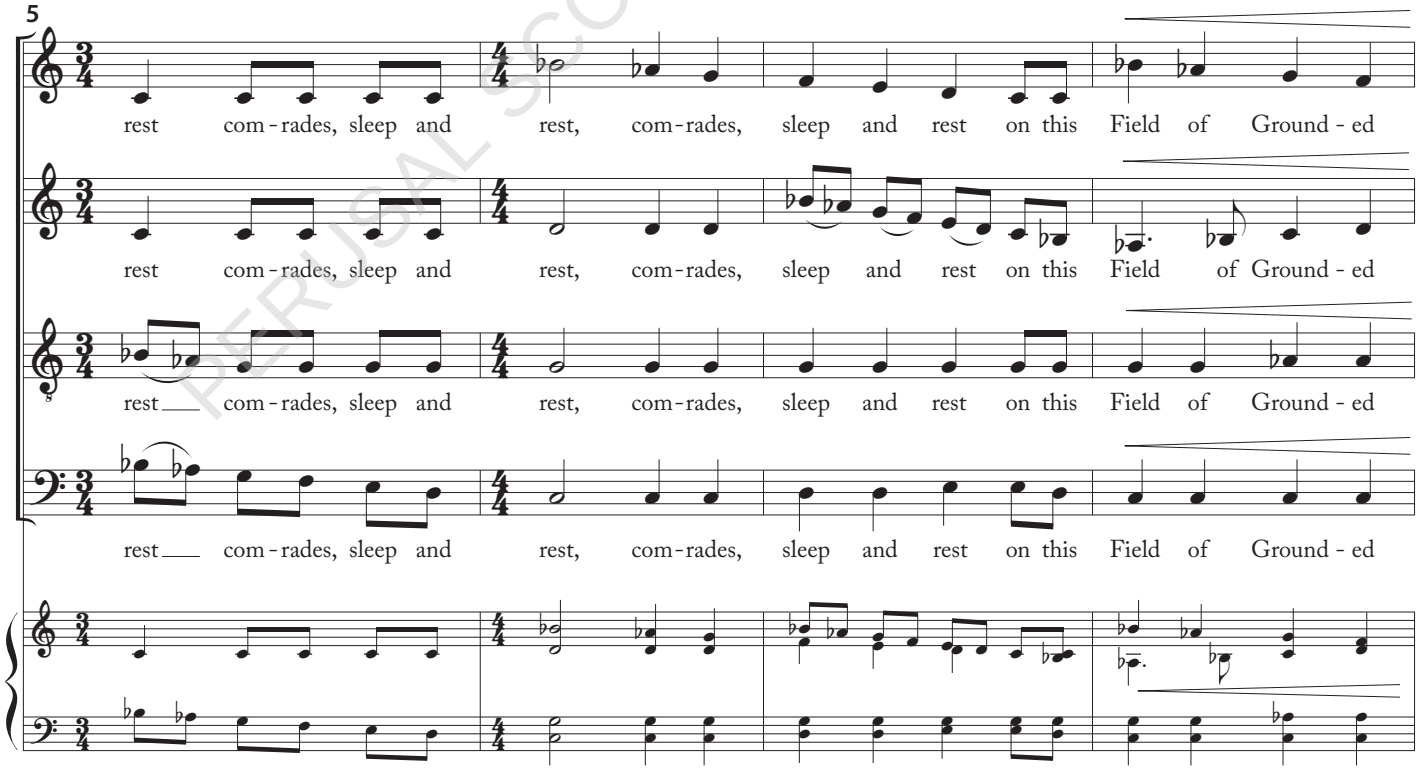
for John Cornish and the College of the Ozarks Chorale

Sleep, Comrades, Sleep

SSAATTBB CHOIR

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow — Luke Carlson





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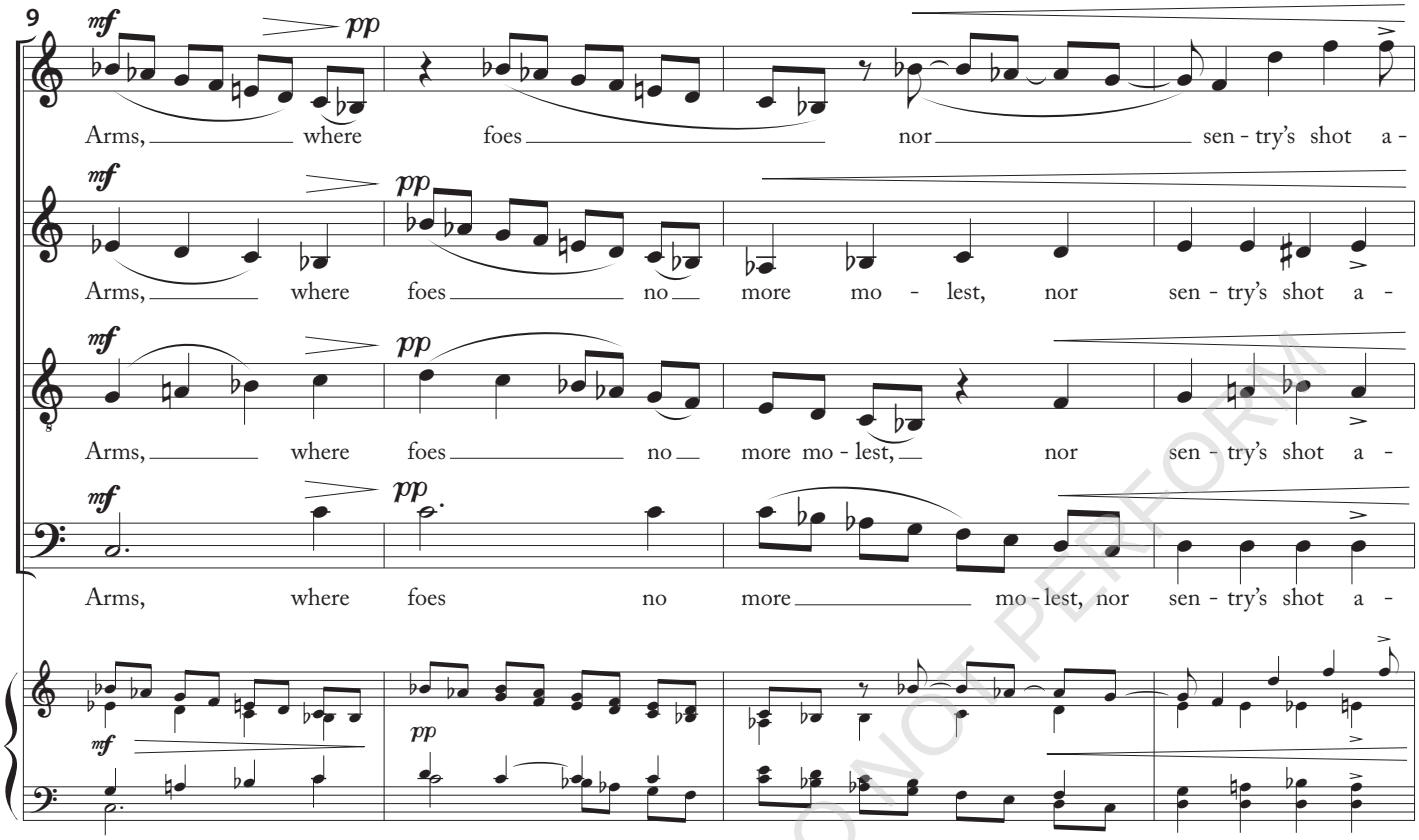

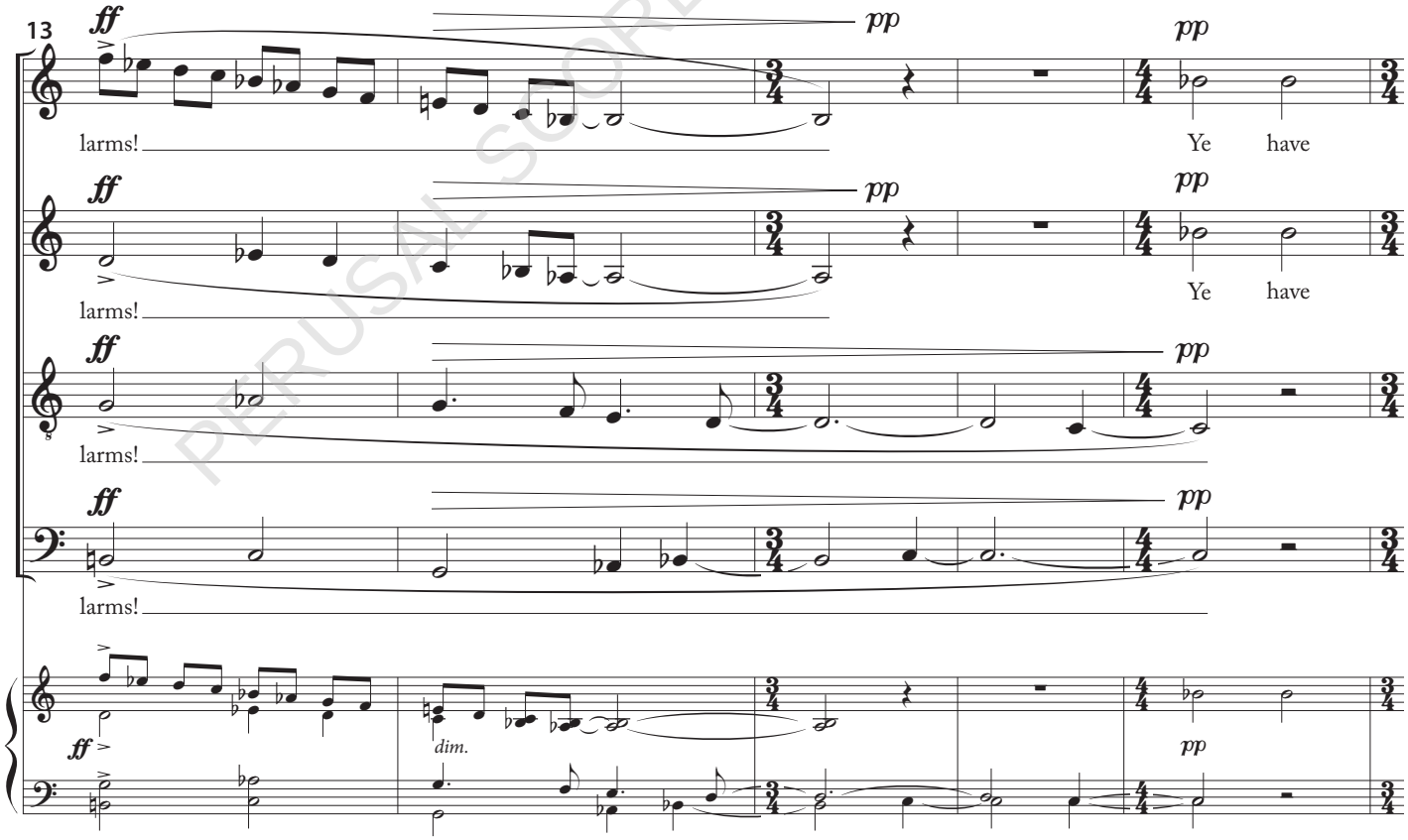

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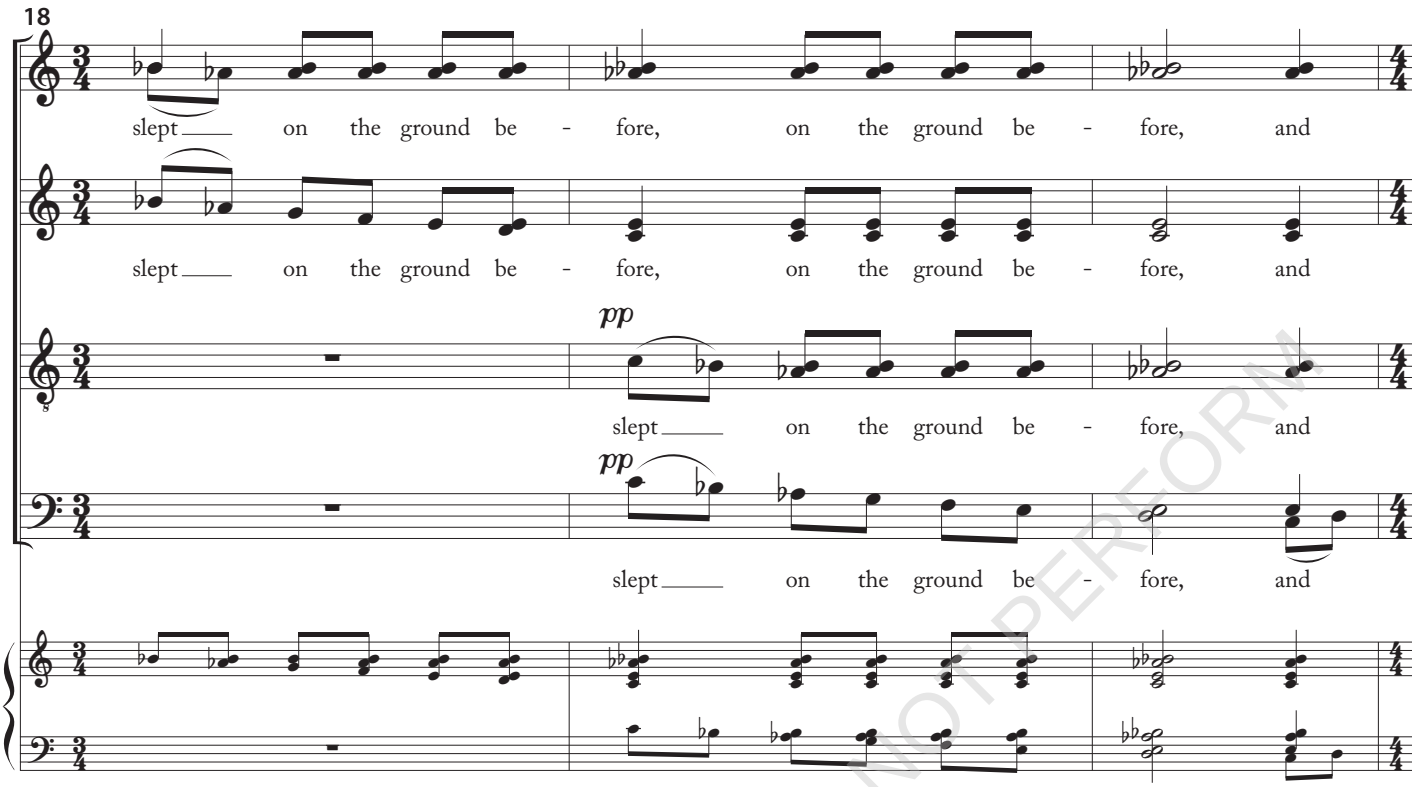

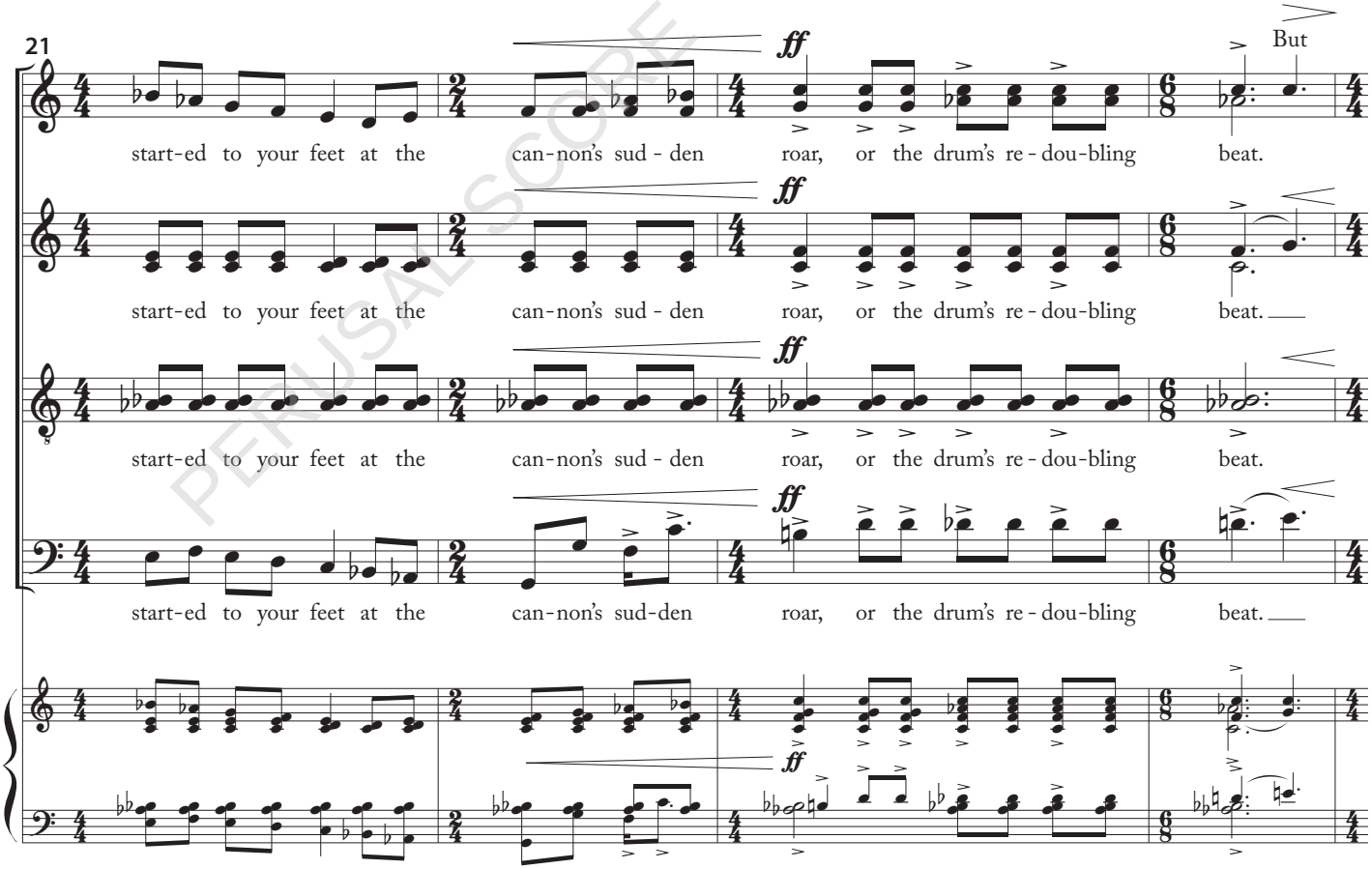

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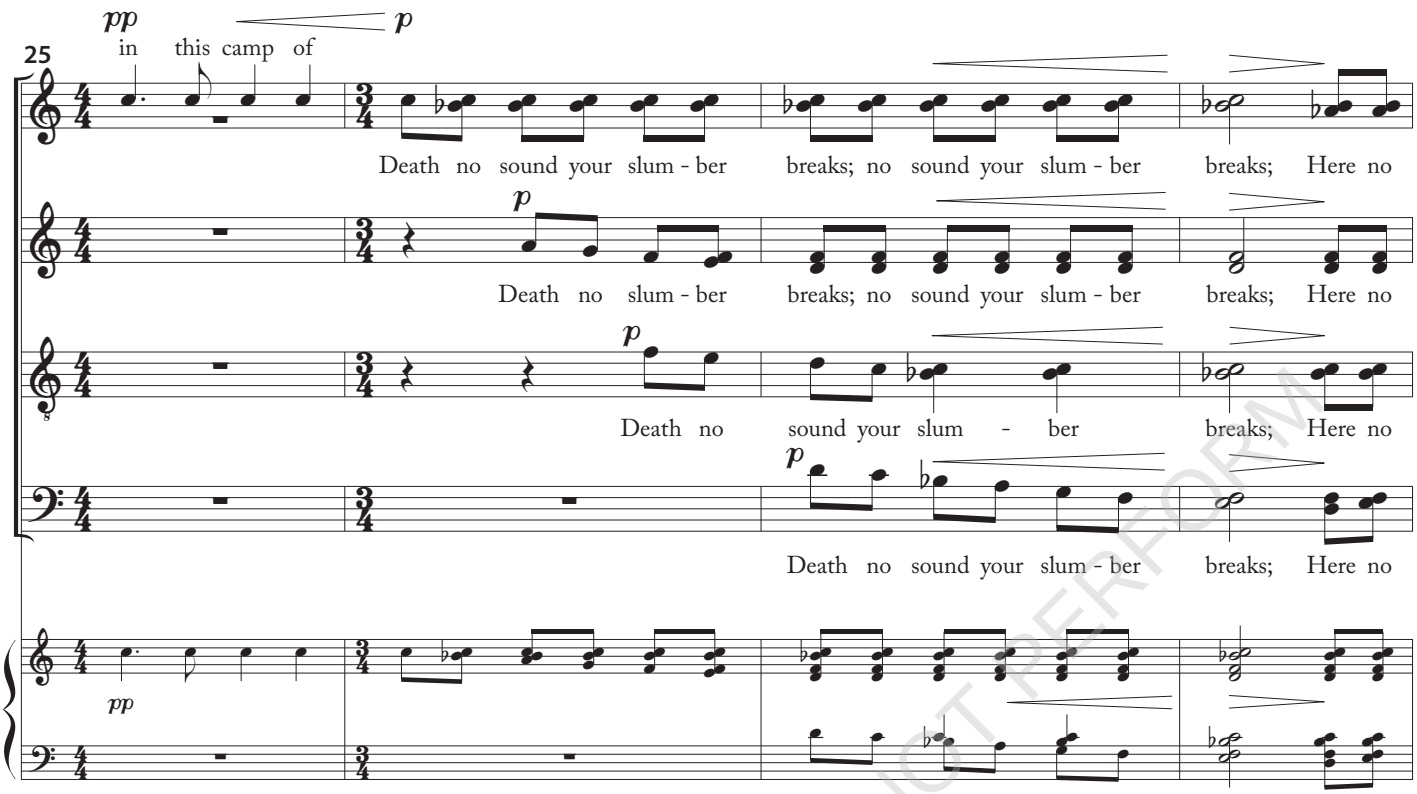

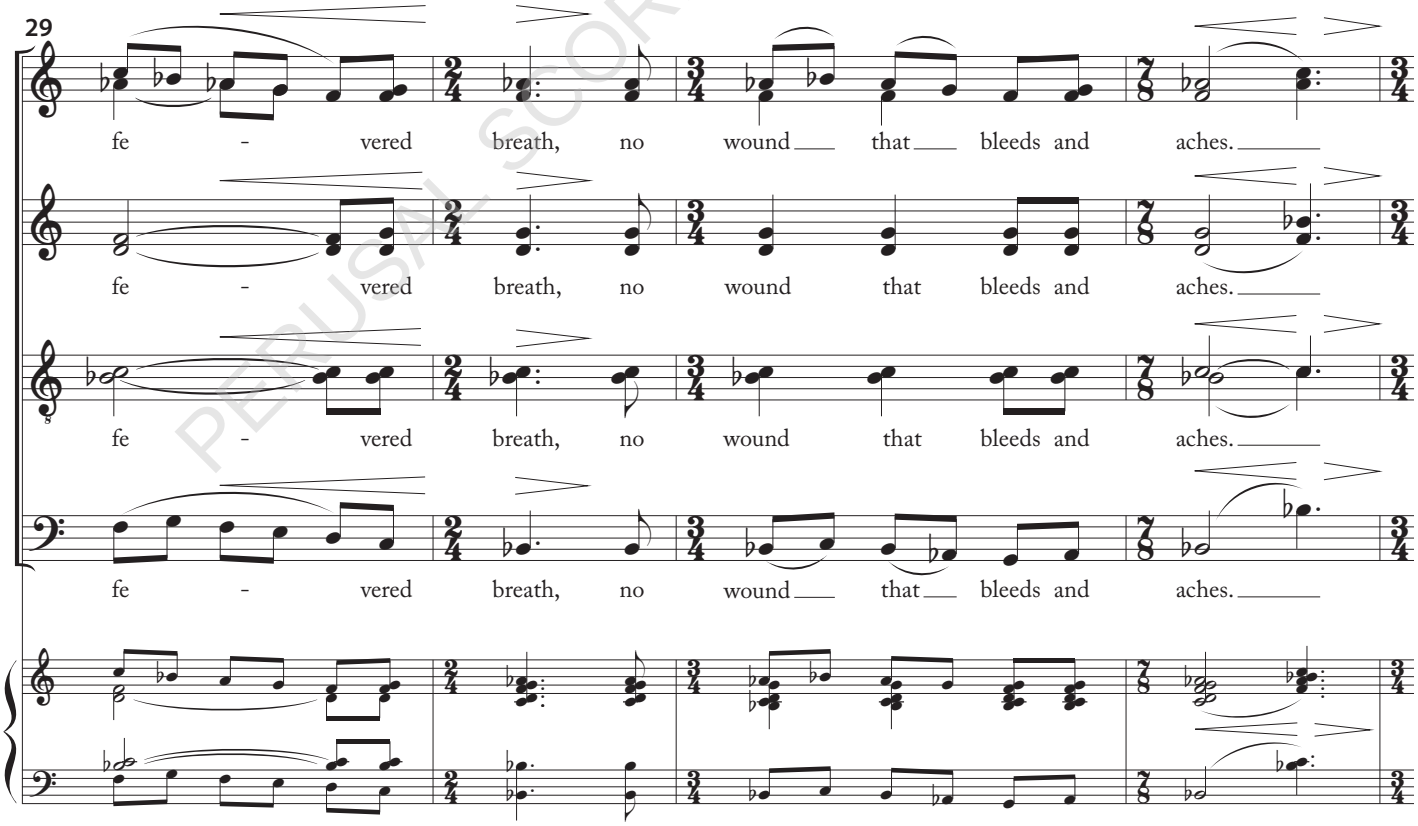

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