

Sound & Silence

Soprano & Violin

LUKE CARLSON MUSIC

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(2016)

Duration: 6 minutes

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Program Notes

Alfred Lord Tennyson created some of the most memorable poetry of the 19th century. This piece is inspired by four short excerpts from some of his masterworks.

The texts share a common theme of sound, silence, and allusions to music. Exploring these qualities through text painting was enjoyable, as was finding ways to have the voice and violin interact intimately with each other.

The first poem, “Sweet is every sound,” is a beautifully innocent yet subtly deep account of natural sounds and their inherent sweetness. Tennyson deftly describes how the moaning doves and murmuring bees are sweet indeed—but not as sweet as the voice…

“Him who sings” is a requiem for Tennyson’s friend Arthur Henry Hallam who died suddenly of a cerebral hemorrhage. The violin is thin and ethereal, full of memory; the voice mimics the sweet but melancholic melody with an air of plaintive remembrance.

Movement and harmonic rhythm are important in these settings and the third movement, like the first, employs a rolling ostinato, this time in a compound meter. The voice and violin engage in unabashed text painting when describing the flute, violin, bassoon, and the sudden appearance of silence.

The final movement is the most abstract of the set. The text mentions a “rift within the lute that by and by will make the music mute.” The imagery of a rift is supported by quarter tone bends in the violin and sharp, accented gestures in the voice. Silence again is mentioned and again with the word “mute,” the movement and cycle come to a close.

Texts

Four miniatures on poetic fragments of Alfred Lord Tennyson

I. Sweet is every sound
from The Princess, Canto VII

Sweet is every sound,
Sweeter thy voice, but every sound is sweet;
Myriads of rivulets hurrying through the lawn,
The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
And murmuring of innumerable bees.

II. Him who sings
from In Memoriam A.H.H., Part I

I held it truth, with him who sings
To one clear harp in divers tones,
That men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.

III. Till a silence fell
from Maud, Part XII

All night have the roses heard
    The flute, violin, bassoon;
All night has the casement jessamine stirr'd
    To the dancers dancing in tune;
Till a silence fell with the waking bird,
    And a hush with the setting moon.

IV. Make the music mute
from Idylls of the King: Merlin and Vivien, Part I

'It is the little rift within the lute,
That by and by will make the music mute,
And ever widening slowly silence all.

Sound & Silence

for voice & violin

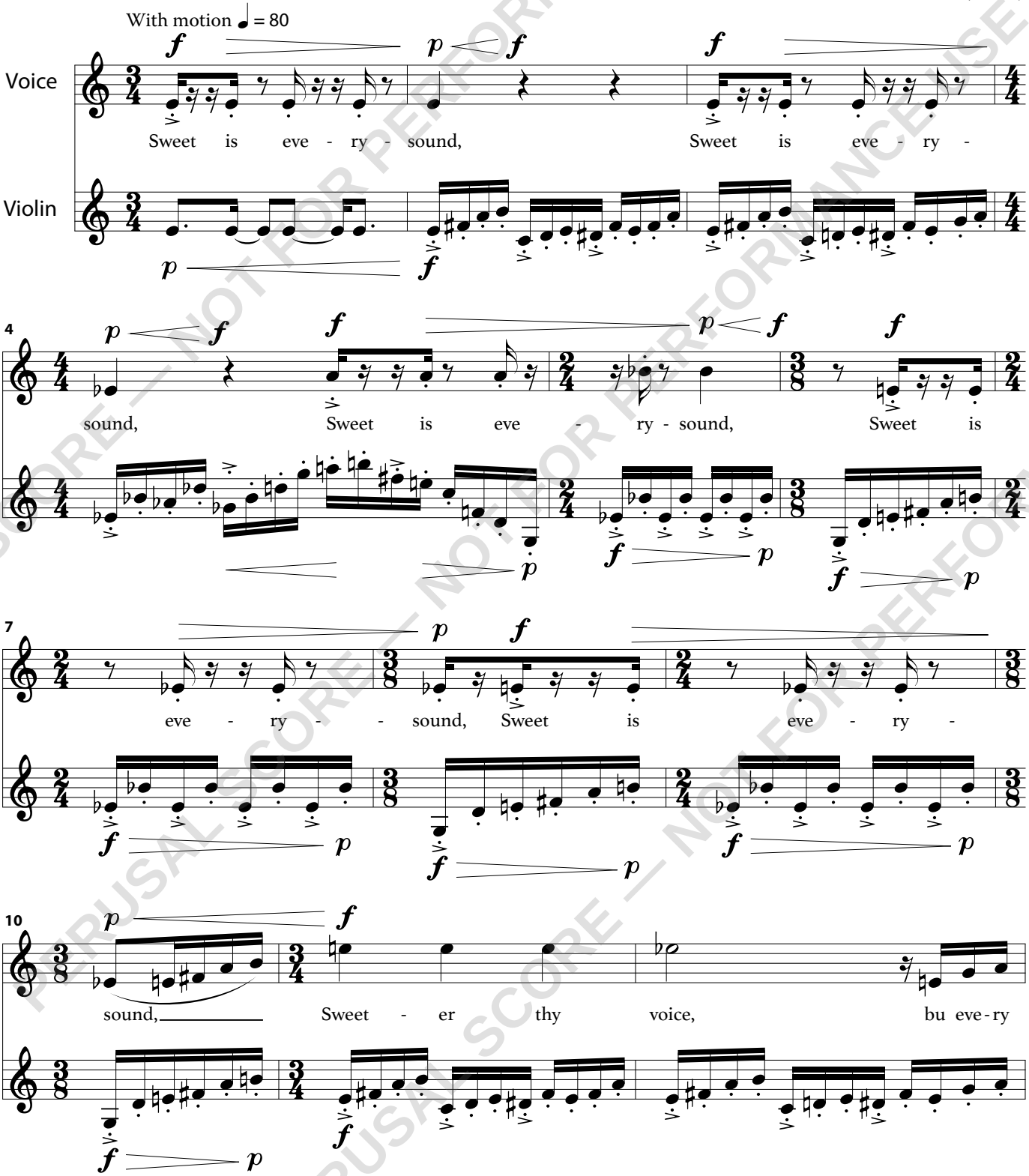
four miniatures on poetic fragments of Alfred Lord Tennyson

I. Sweet is every sound…

from *The Princess,* Canto VII

Alfred Lord Tennyson

Luke Carlson (2016)



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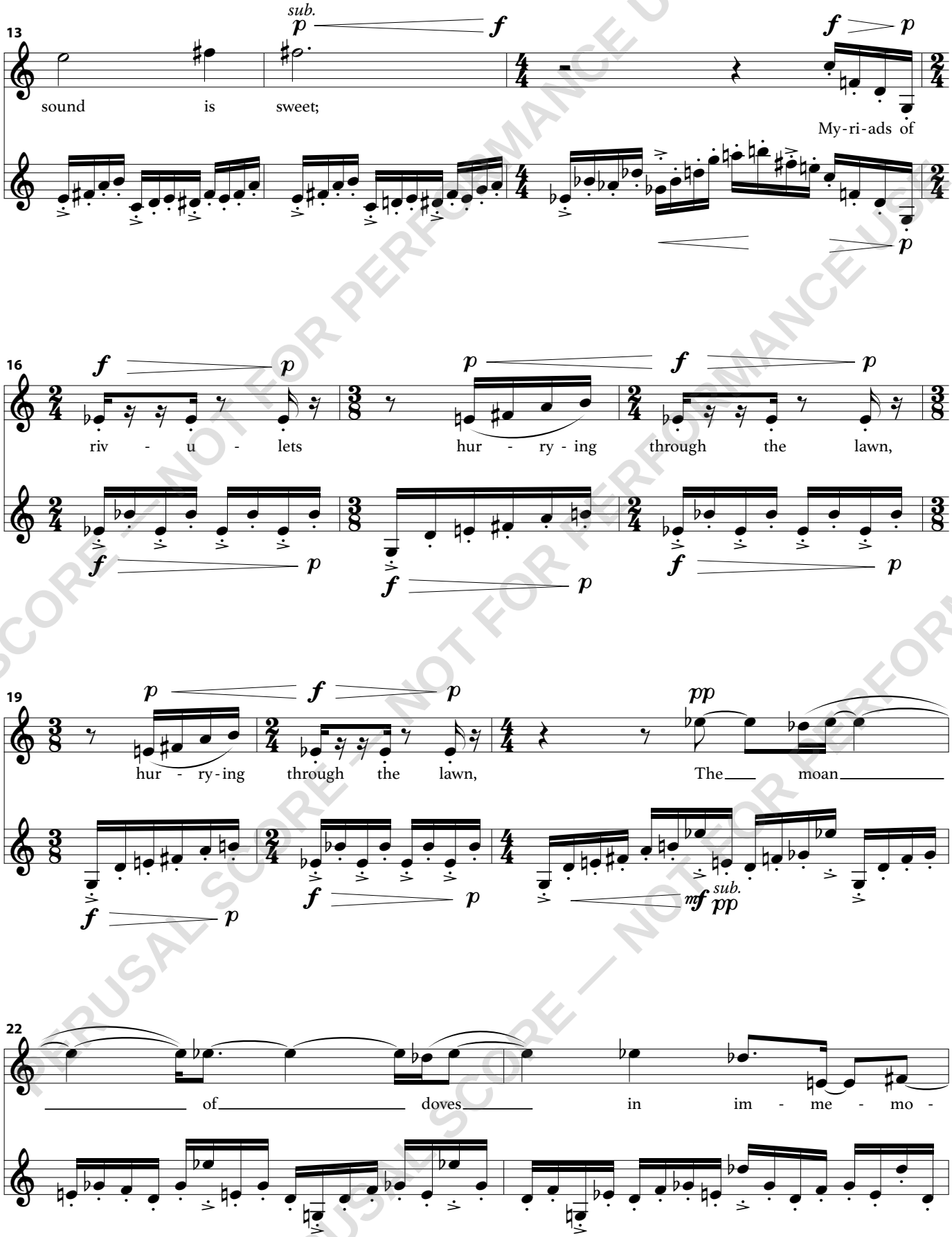

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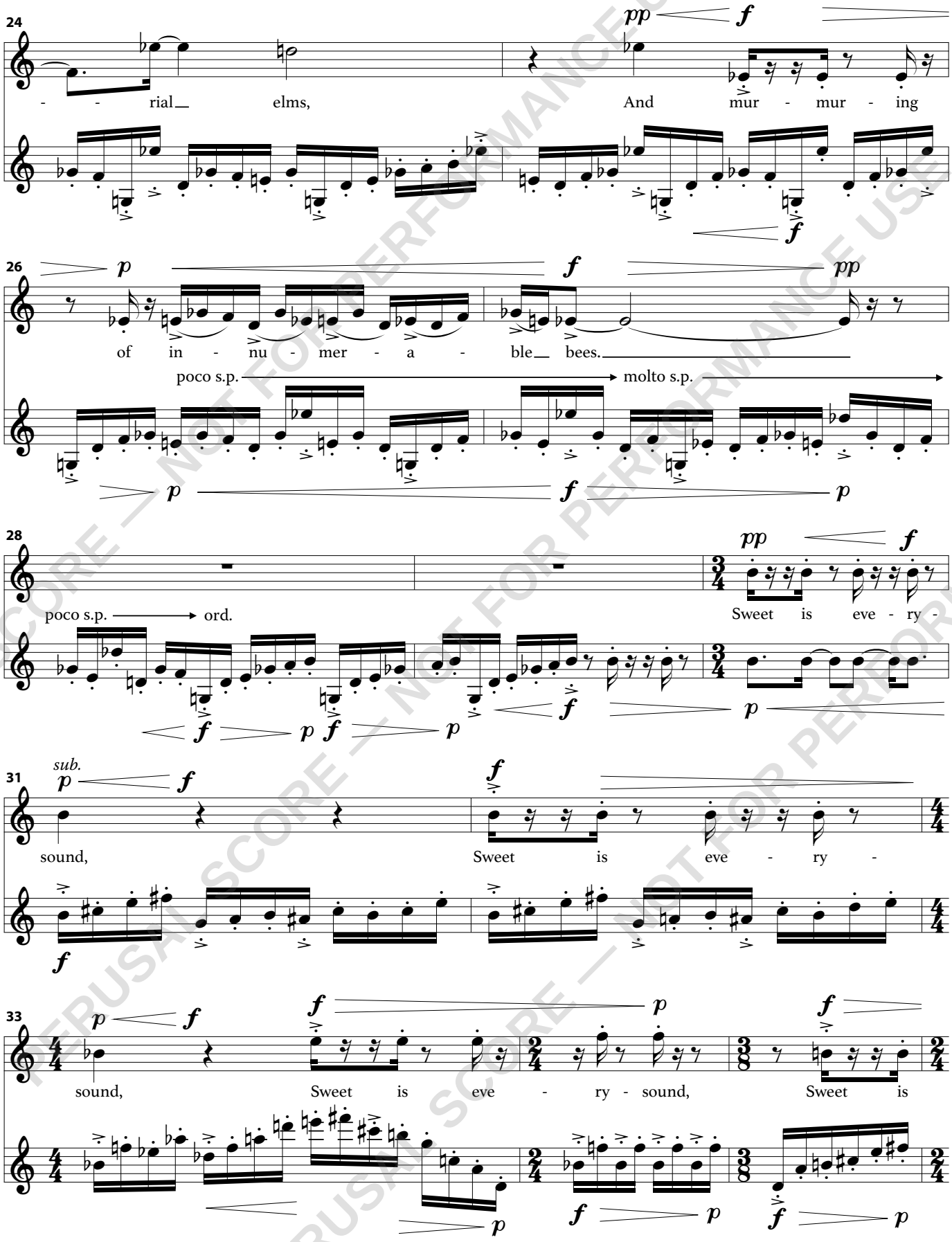

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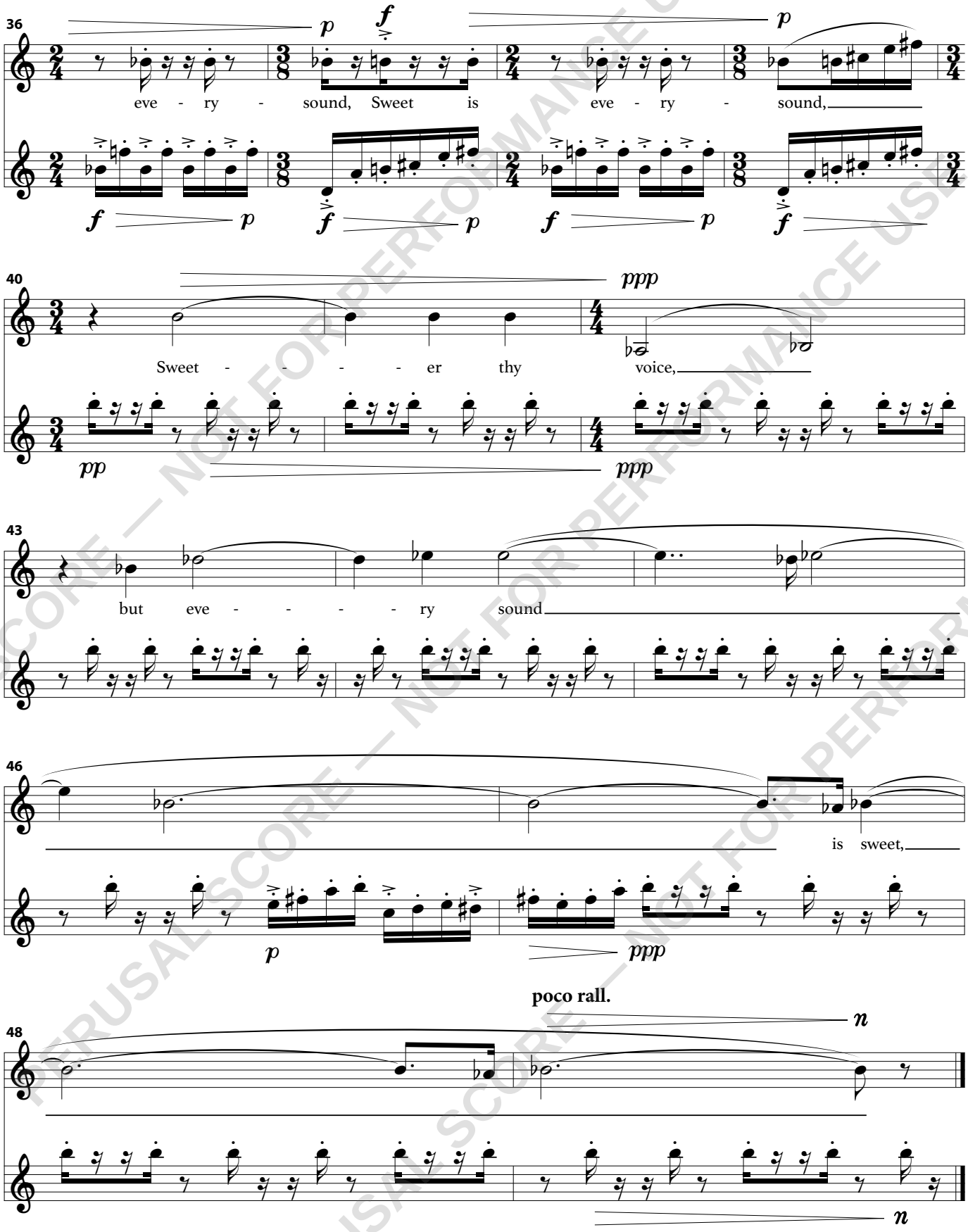

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