Black Nativity Musical Overview

Product Code: B72000

To help you find the perfect musical for your next performance, we have provided this overview of the vocal and orchestral demands for this title.

Solo Songs: No

Ensemble/Large Chorus Songs: Yes

Main Character Details:

Soprano (soloists and chorus) (w): G3-C6 vocals, difficult
Alto (soloists and chorus) (w): G3-A5 vocals, difficult
Tenor (soloists and chorus) (m): F2-G5 vocals, difficult
Baritone (chorus) (m): F2-E4 vocals, moderate

Total Number of Songs: 12

Vocal Demands: Difficult

Orchestral Demands: Difficult

Size of Orchestra: Small (piano only)

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-A short sample is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reviewing the entire score and reading the entire play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity of scripts.

The following pages contain copyright information and at least one page from a variety of songs within the show.

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Musical arrangements by AARON ROBINSON

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NOTES ON THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

Black Nativity – In Concert: A Gospel Celebration premiered on Dec. 11, 2004

Immanuel Baptist Church in Portland, Maine

Aaron Robinson, *conductor-pianist*
Paul Havenstein II, *B-3 Hammond organ*
The *Black Nativity* chorus

On Dec. 11, 1961, at the 41st Street Theatre in New York City, six gospel singers made history. Backed up by only a piano and a B-3 Hammond organ, they performed *Black Nativity* by African-American poet and playwright Langston Hughes. He subtitled it "A Gospel Song Play" because it combined traditional gospel spirituals with narration about the birth of Jesus. After only 50 performances on Broadway, *Black Nativity* closed.

But there was a legacy—a rare recording.

Conductor-pianist and music historian Aaron Robinson, having listened to the album for several years, set to the task of creating a score inspired by the legendary performance. Believing that music is both universal and inclusive, encompassing no barriers of race, creed or color, Robinson offered the opportunity to perform in this premiere concert version to all those who were interested in singing a style of music that was not normally a part of their tradition. The response was overwhelming, and *Black Nativity – In Concert* was born.

These original transcriptions do not include the B-3 Hammond organ part.
The cadenza in "Go, Tell It on the Mountain" is attributed to Danielle Vayenas.

Original Soloists:

Gloria Ledoux – Kristen Martin – Jennifer McLeod – Peter Gray
David Goulet – Heather Sylvester – Lynne McGhee – Sheldon Bird
Richard Gammon – Mariann Holden – David Woodward – Danielle Vayenas

The original cast recording is available on CD.
The documentary of its creation is also available on DVD.
The story is documented in the book *Does God Sing? - A Musical Journey.*

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INTRODUCTION

The term "gospel spiritual" has taken on many different meanings since its origin. The spirituals of the field, otherwise known as "Negro spirituals," were born out of a specific ethnic heritage, direct necessity and personal escape, while gospel spirituals served as religious proclamation and spiritual praise. However, the spirituals within this edition are to be performed exclusively at a certain time of year: Christmas. They are, in a sense, "Christmas gospel spirituals"—which separates them from any definitive culture. They are universal in their message and, therefore, encompass any and all who wish to spread the gospel through song.

This being said, the musical style and form of gospel, as we know it today, has also changed dramatically since these Christmas gospel spirituals were first sung. Soloists have since adopted (and adapted) a distinct style of singing that relies heavily on improvisation. A simple melody becomes more a continuous cadenza of constant invention. This is a very individual style of performing that does not transfer correctly to this style of early music or allow for a combined effort with a supporting chorus.

The gospel spirituals found within this collection are "call-and-response" spirituals, meaning, there is no one performer. It is a collective effort between soloist, chorus, accompanist and conductor. No single performer should stand out among the others. If a soloist improvises too far from the original melody—much like a jazz musician might do—it will defeat the authenticity of sound that these spirituals are capable of producing.

In addition, neither chorus, nor soloist, nor pianist should ever tire of repeating phrases. Regardless of whether a performer sings: "Rise up, shepherd, and follow" one time or one hundred times, these call-and-response spirituals serve to employ, elevate and evoke. One must continually supply energy, excitement, belief and commitment to each and every response in order to engage the listener, soloist and chorus.

In order to successfully produce the correct sound found within these pages, an ensemble should be comprised only of the following: a soloist, a chorus, a single accompanying piano, and a B-3 Hammond organ. Rhythmic percussion and instrumental ensembles will only serve to diminish the original sound.

Finally, in all ways, the soloist's purpose is to "call" the chorus (and audience) to respond with affirmation, and, likewise, the chorus has the job of responding with equal, if not more, declaration and praise. It is this "give-and-take" responsibility of all who perform that will allow the sound to result in a joyous creation of life, faith and song.

Aaron Robinson, arranger
December 2012

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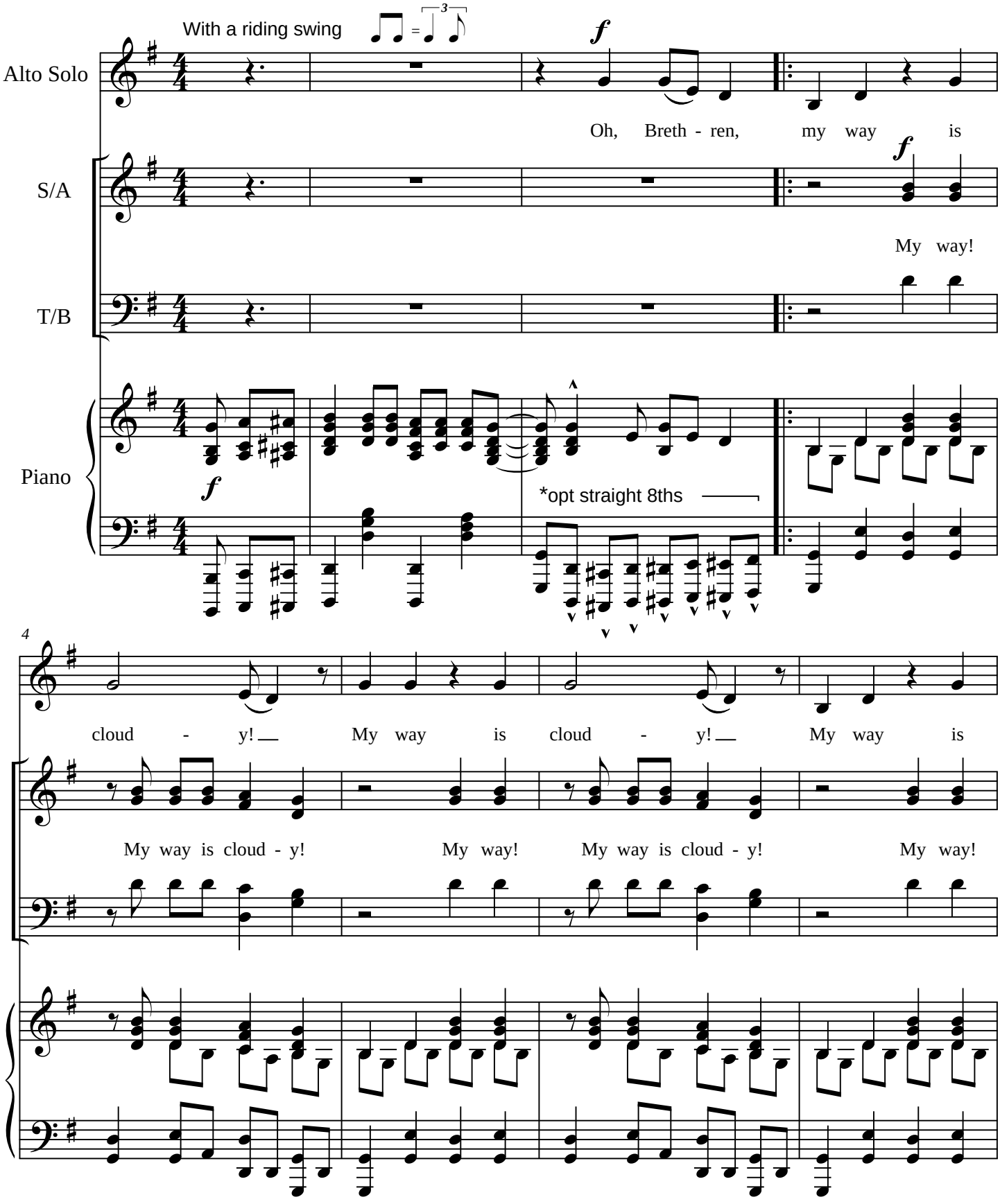
BLACK NATIVITY
1. My Way Is Cloudy

Jubilant ♩ = 127-132

arr. **Aaron Robinson**



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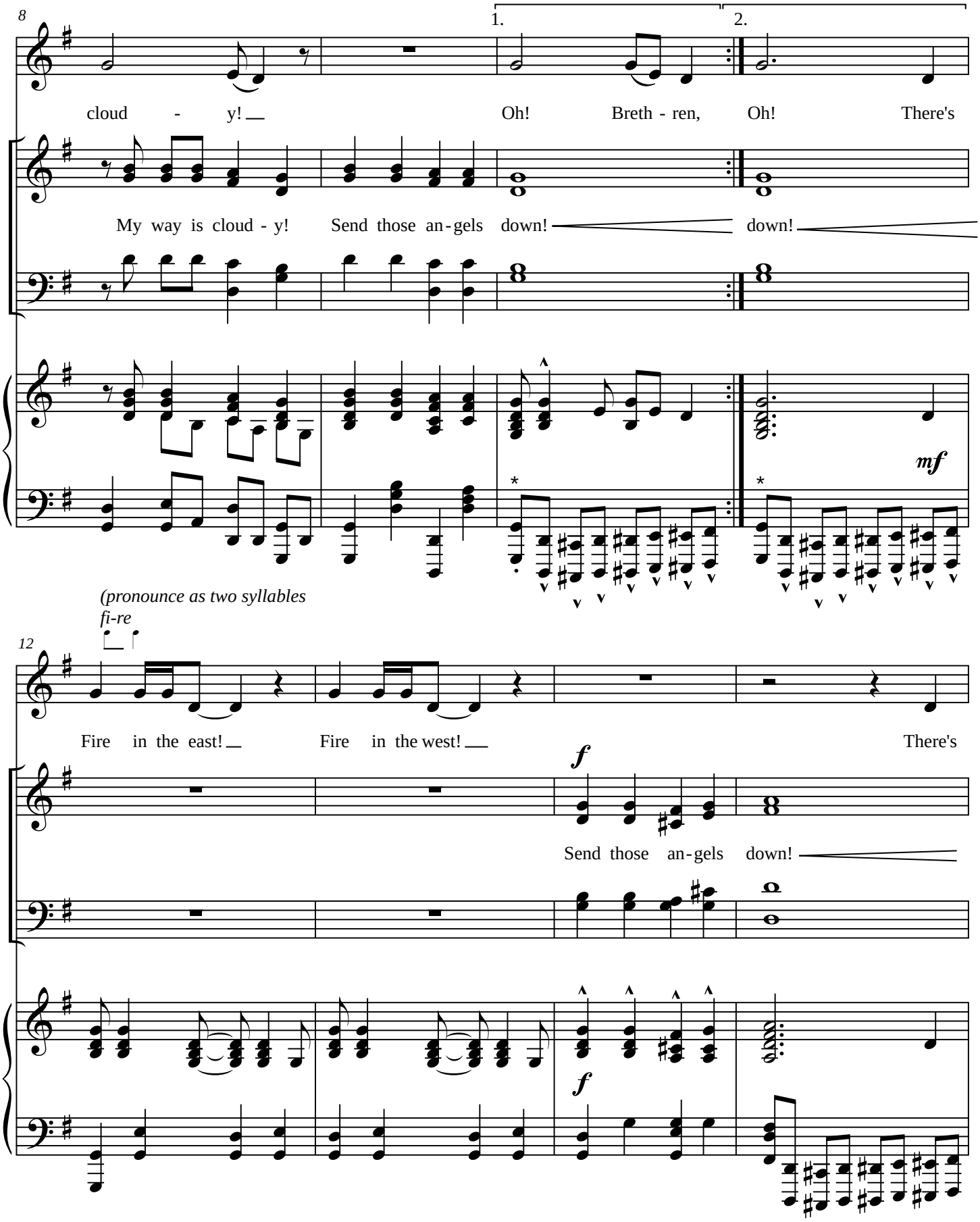

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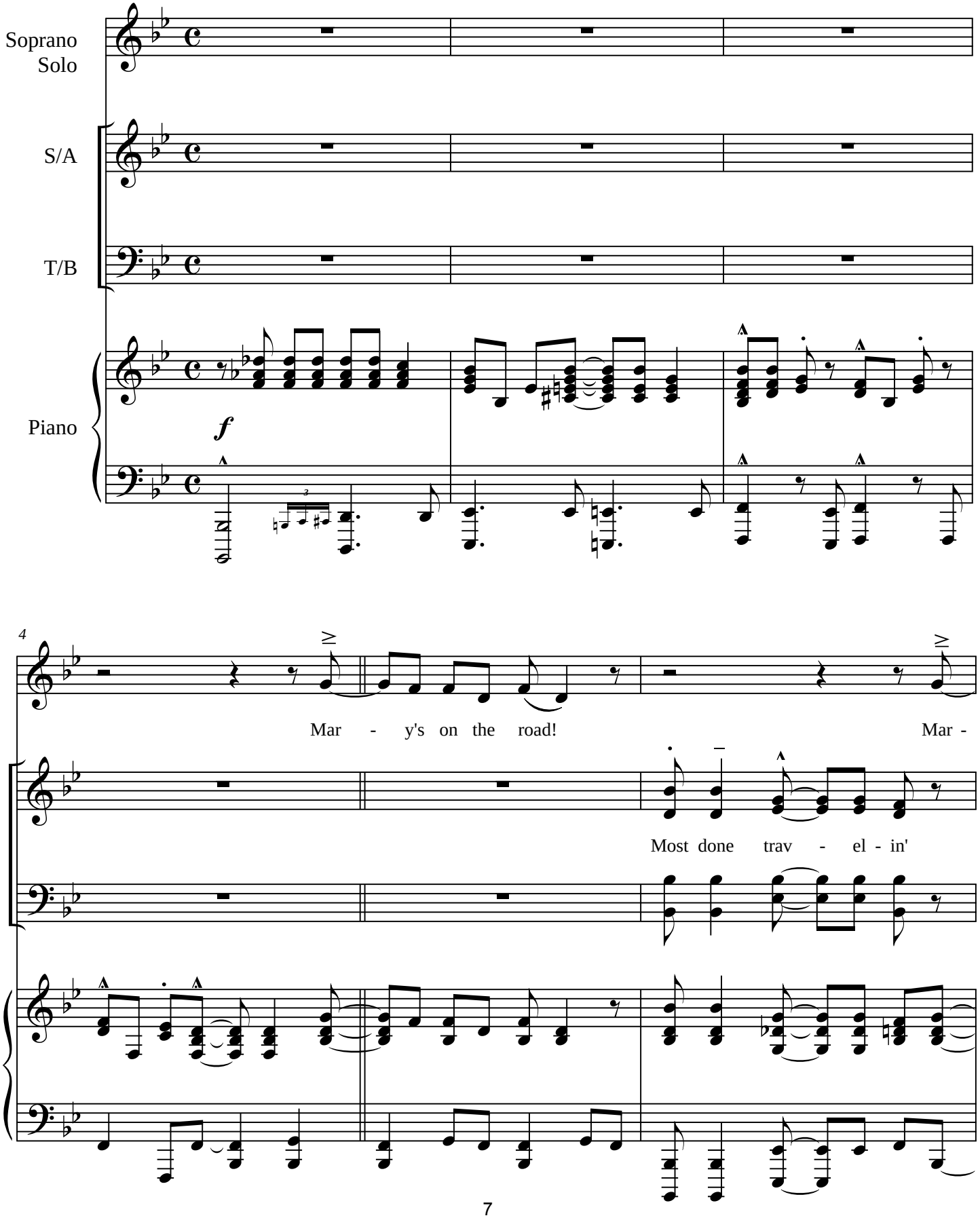
2. Mary's On the Road

Most Done Travellin'

***arr.* Aaron Robinson**

Syncopated Driving Rhythm ♩= 148-152



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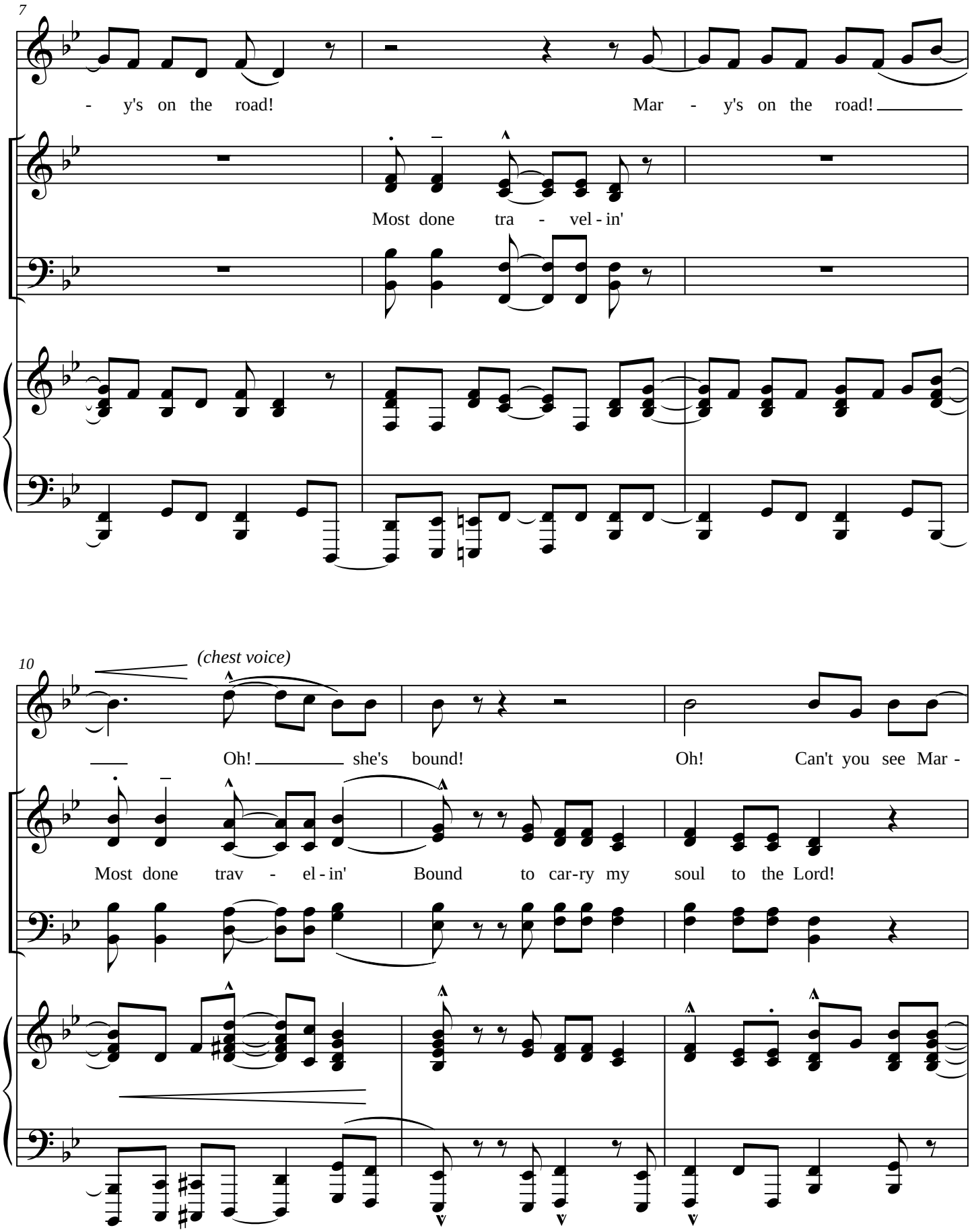

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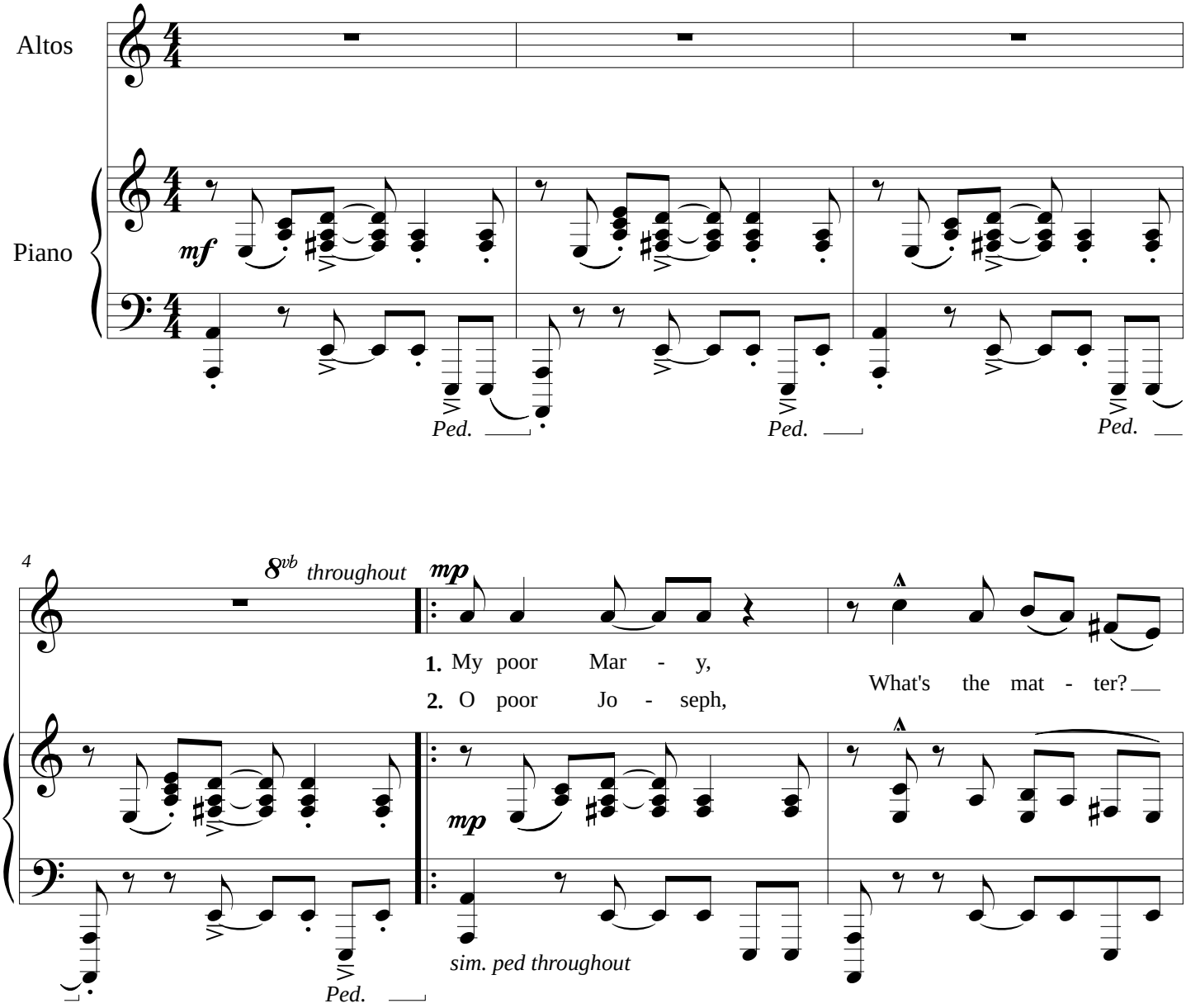
3. My Poor Mary, What's the Matter?

O Jerusalem in the Morning

***arr.* Aaron Robinson**

With a deep Gospel vocal shake ♩=136-138

light riding swing! ♫ = ♩³♪



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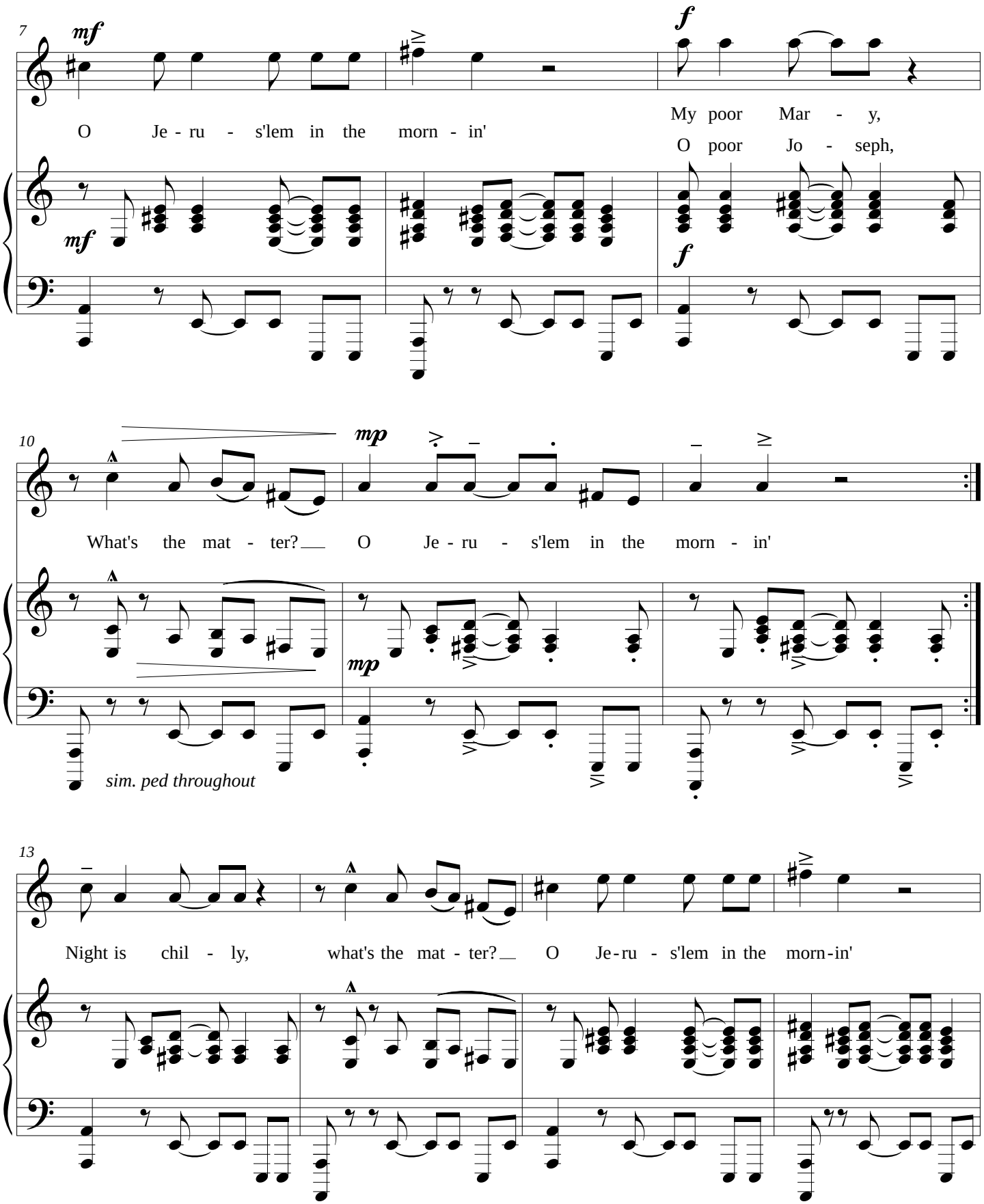

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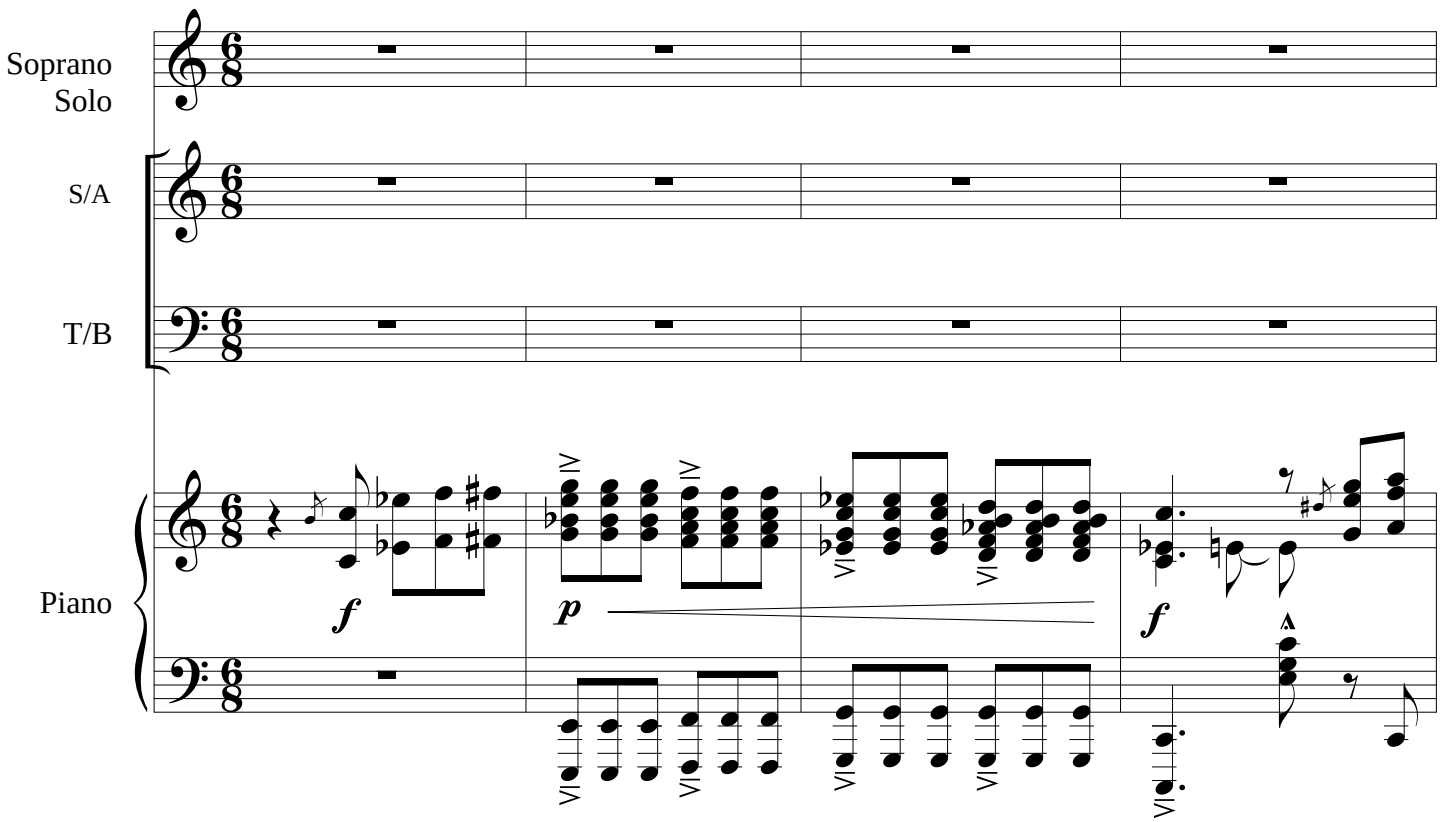
4. Poor Little Jesus

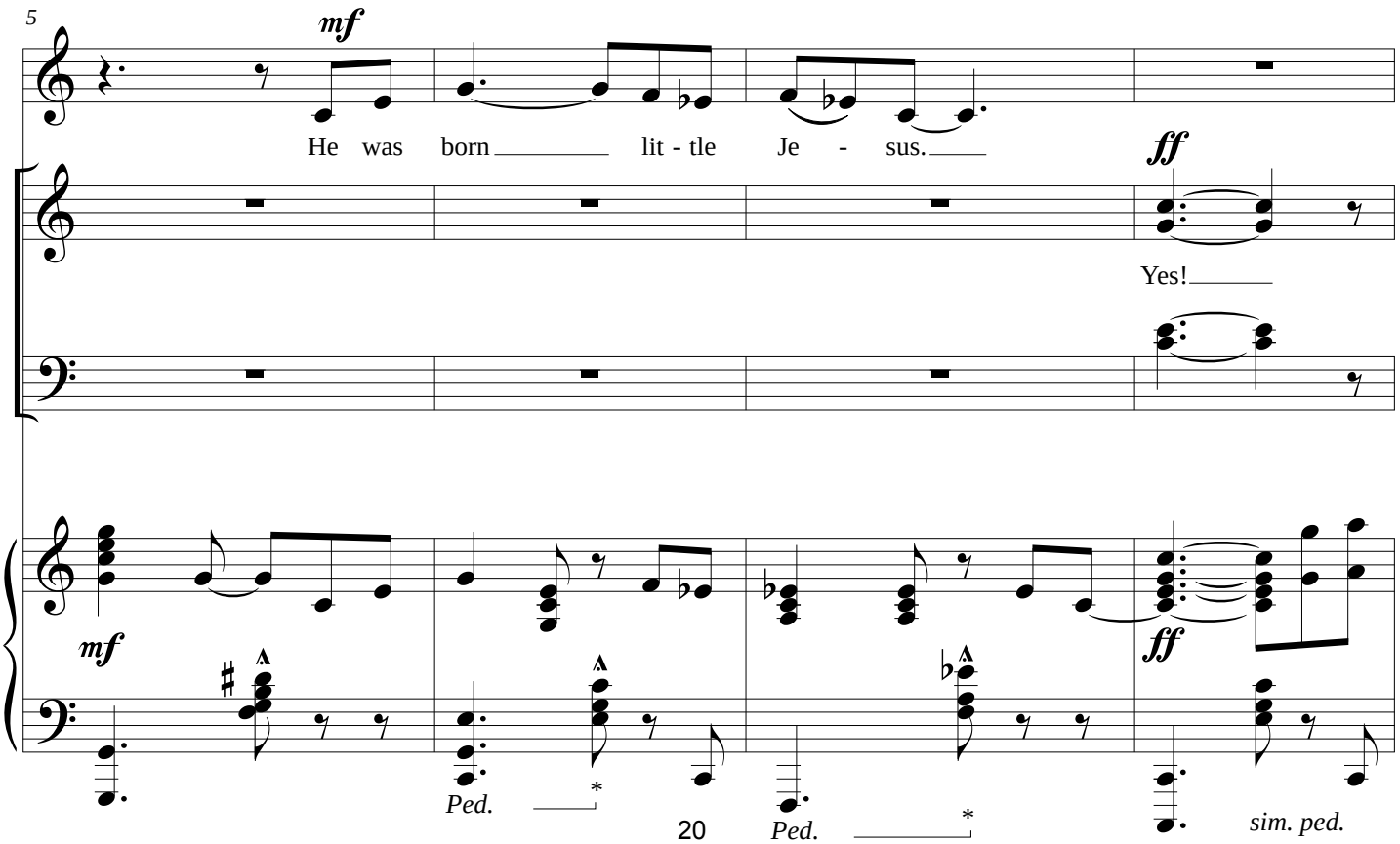
Wasn't That a Pity and a Shame?

***arr.* Aaron Robinson**

Deep, full heavy blues ♩. = 76-80



(sung in chest voice throughout)



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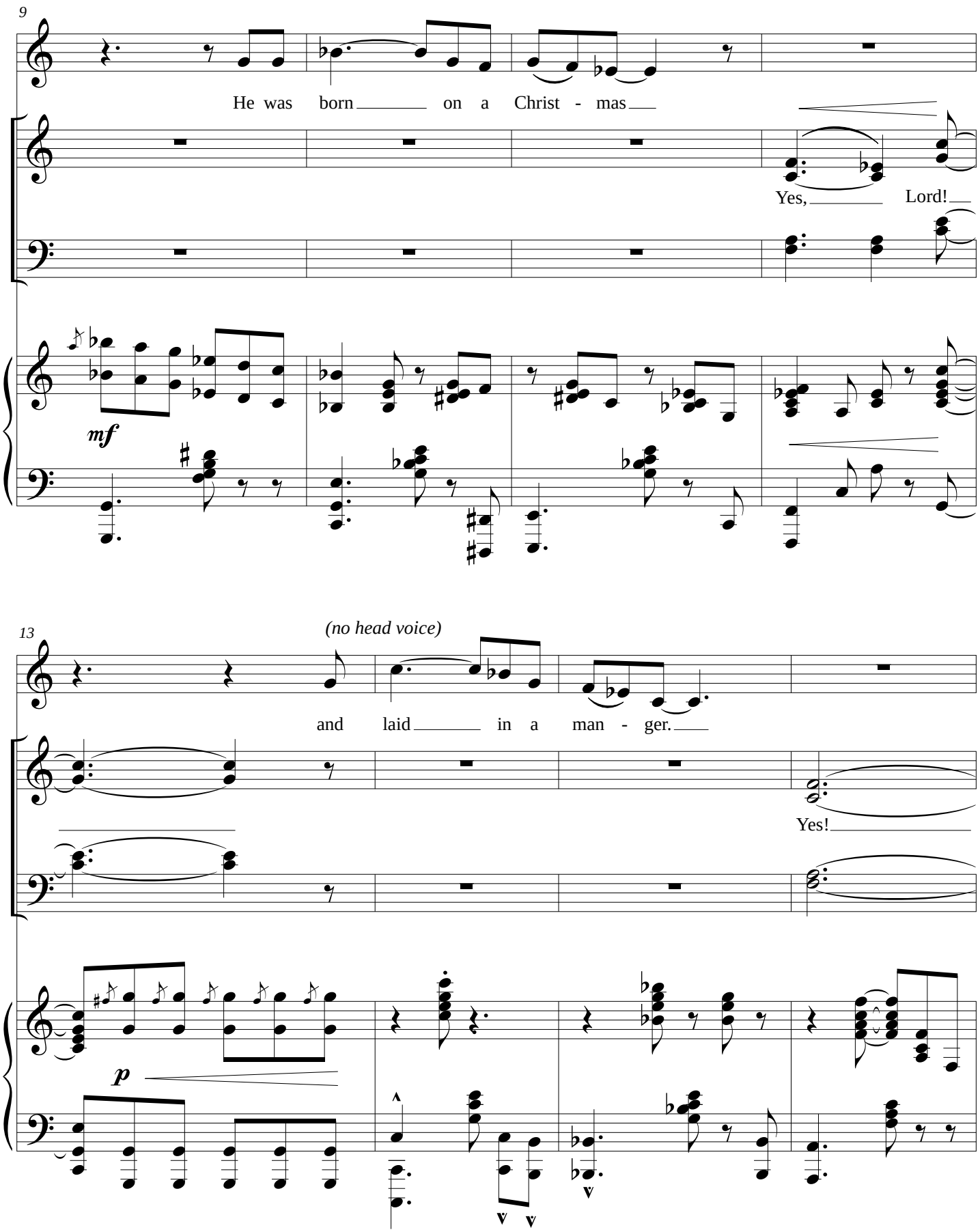

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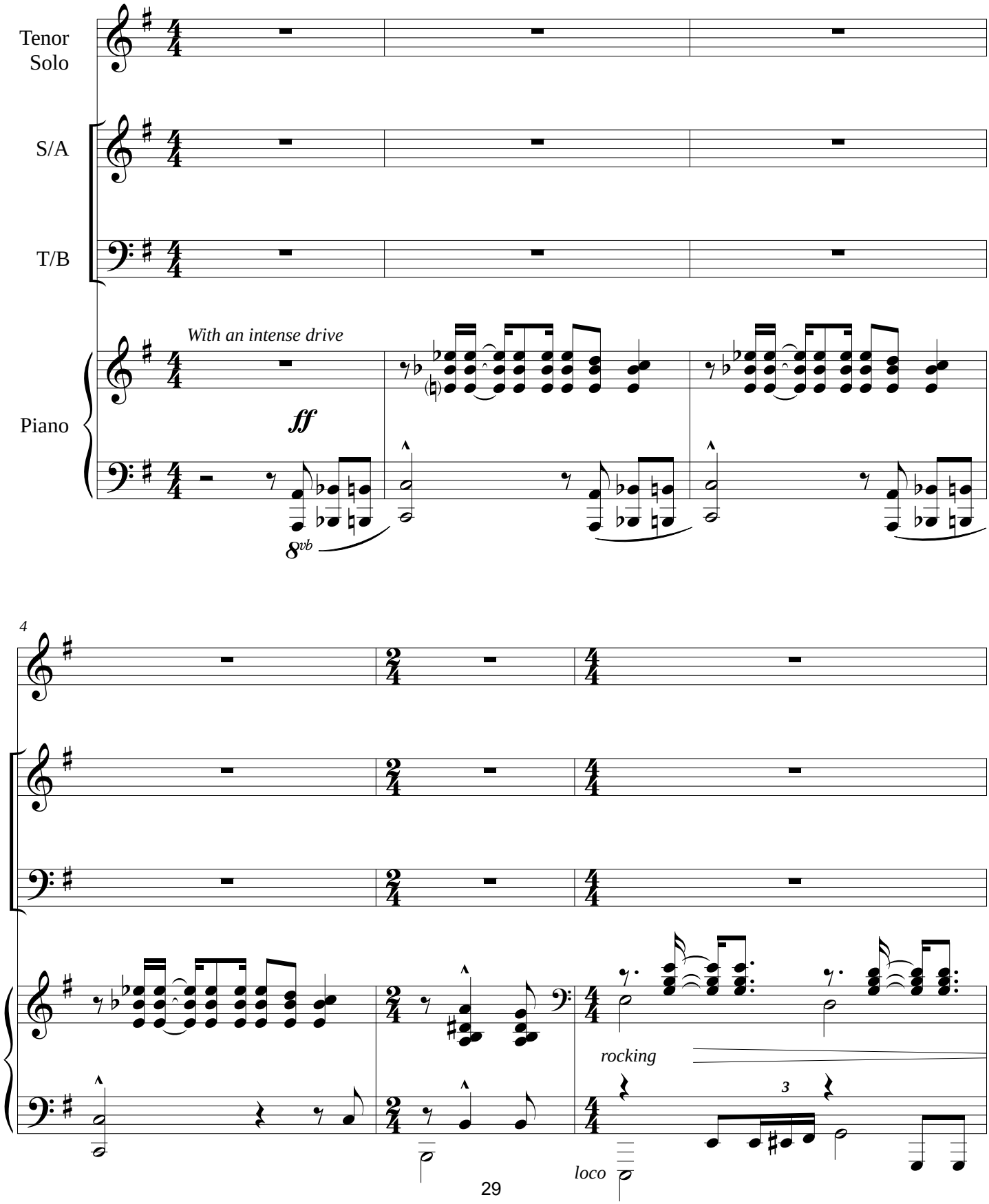
5. Mary, What You Gonna Name Your Baby?

Glory Be To The Newborn King

arr. **Aaron Robinson**

Warm and Rhythmic ♩ = 123-127



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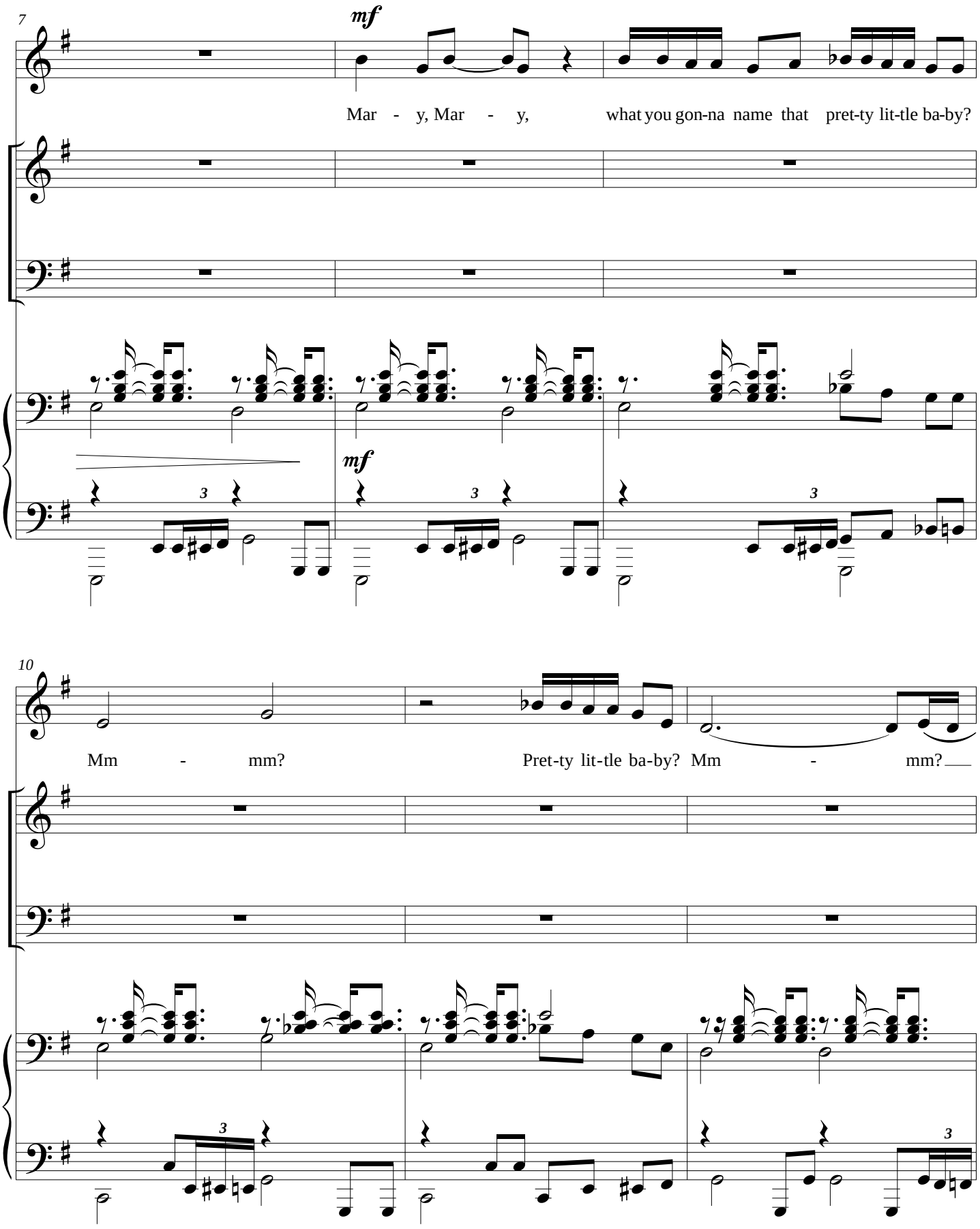

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6. Wasn't That a Mighty Day?

***arr.* Aaron Robinson**

With Great Feeling and Glory ♩ = **86-88** ♫ = ♩ ³ ♪

Tenor Solo

S/A

T/B

With a laid back Gospel swing

Piano

f

5

Was - n't that a might - y day?

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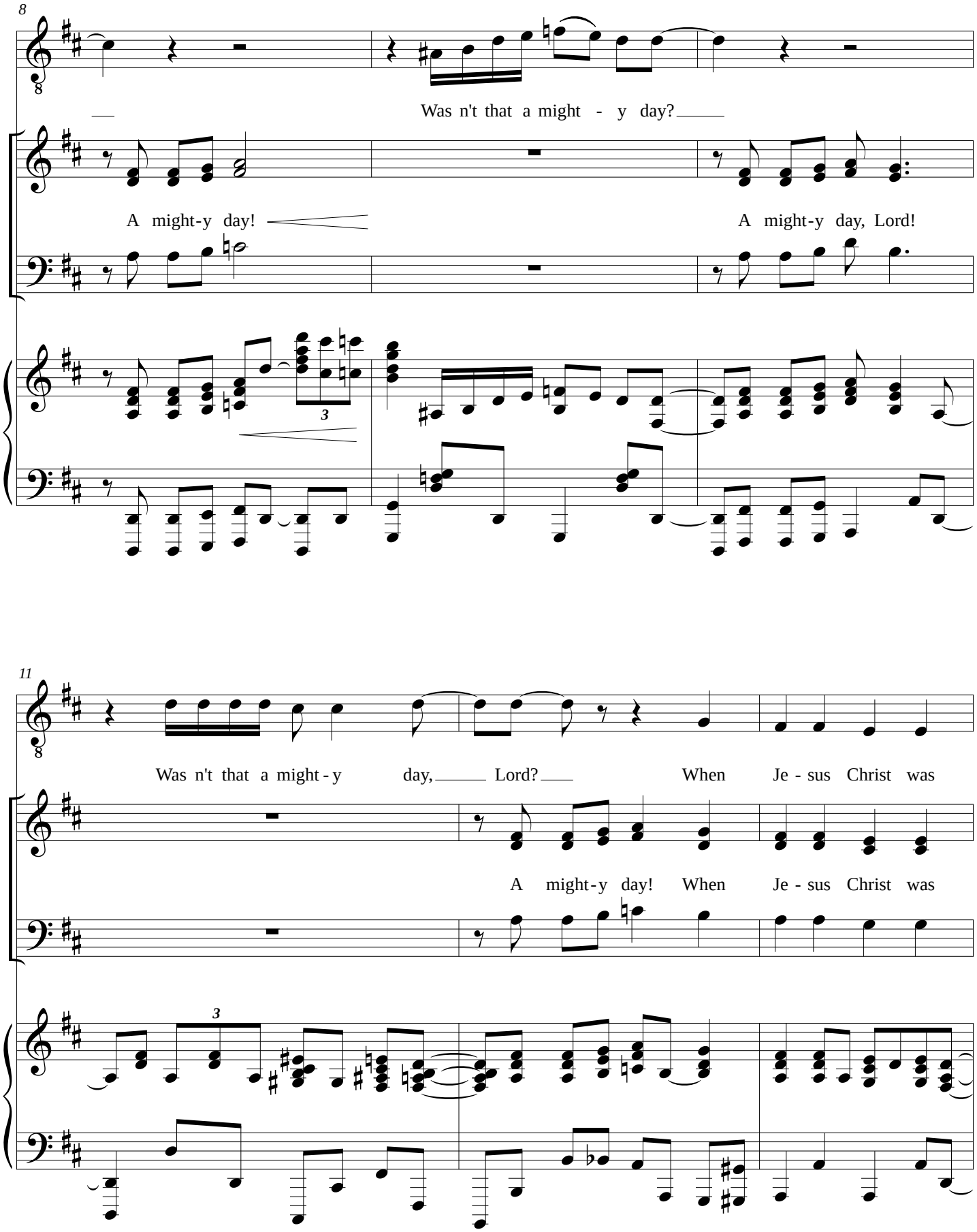

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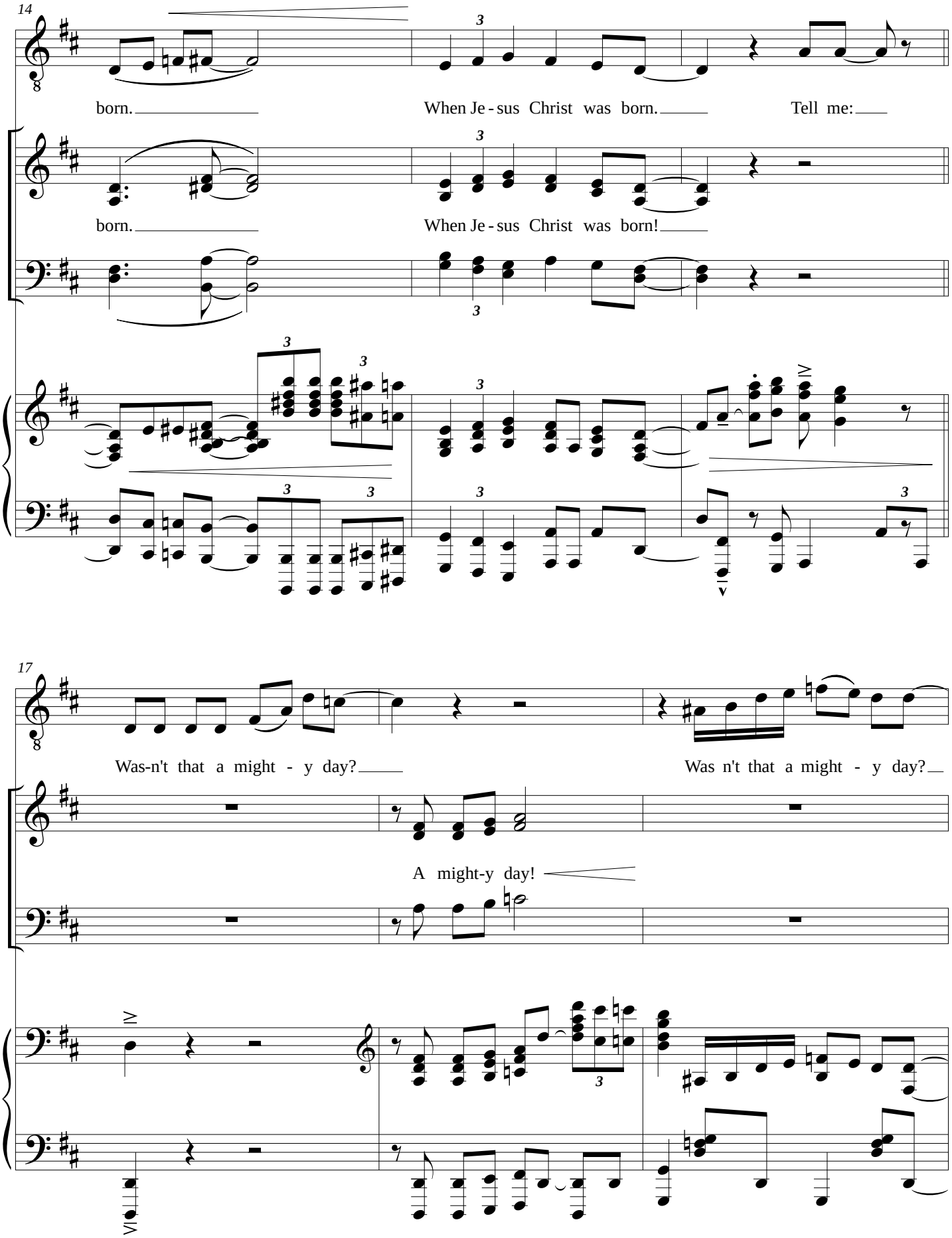

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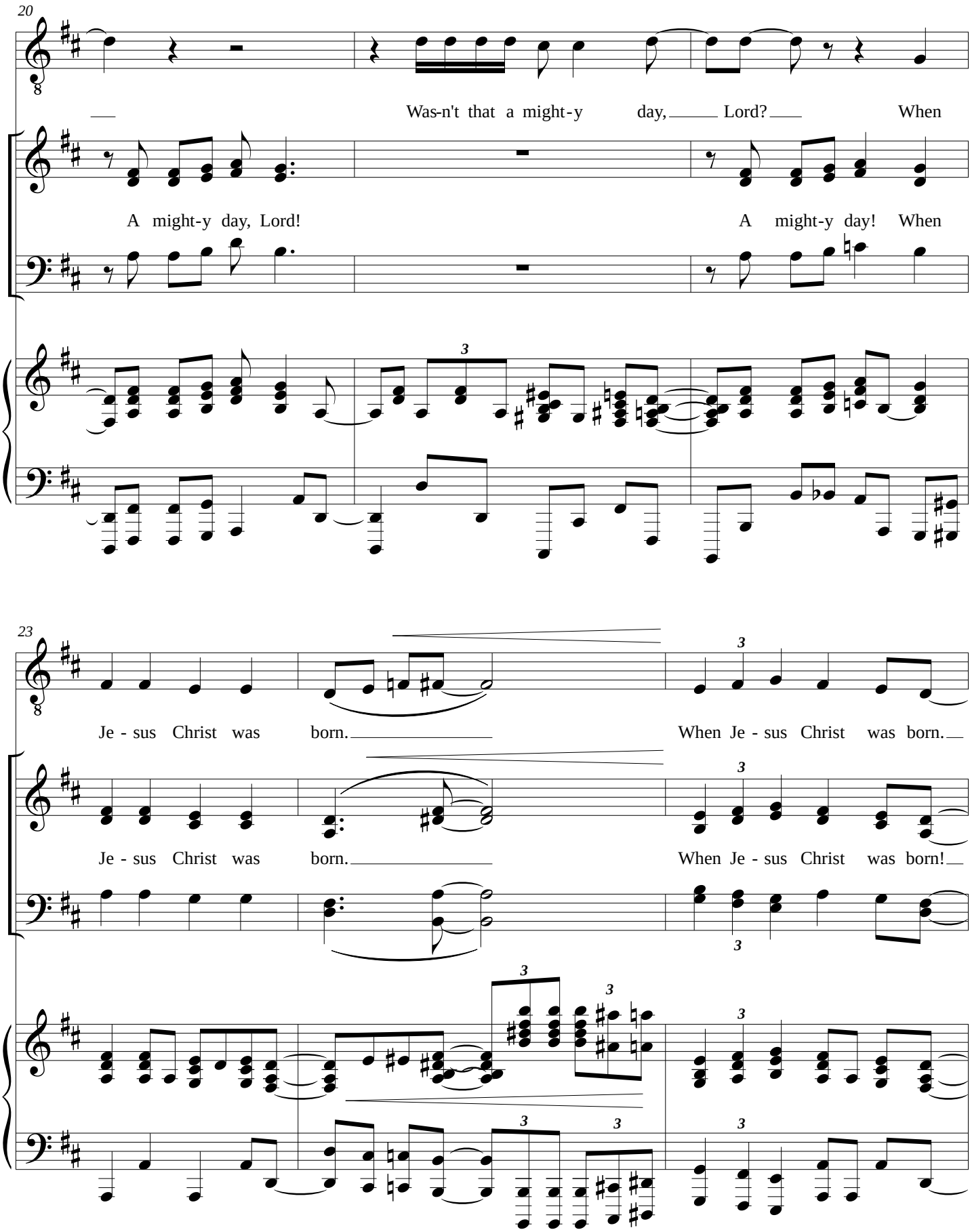

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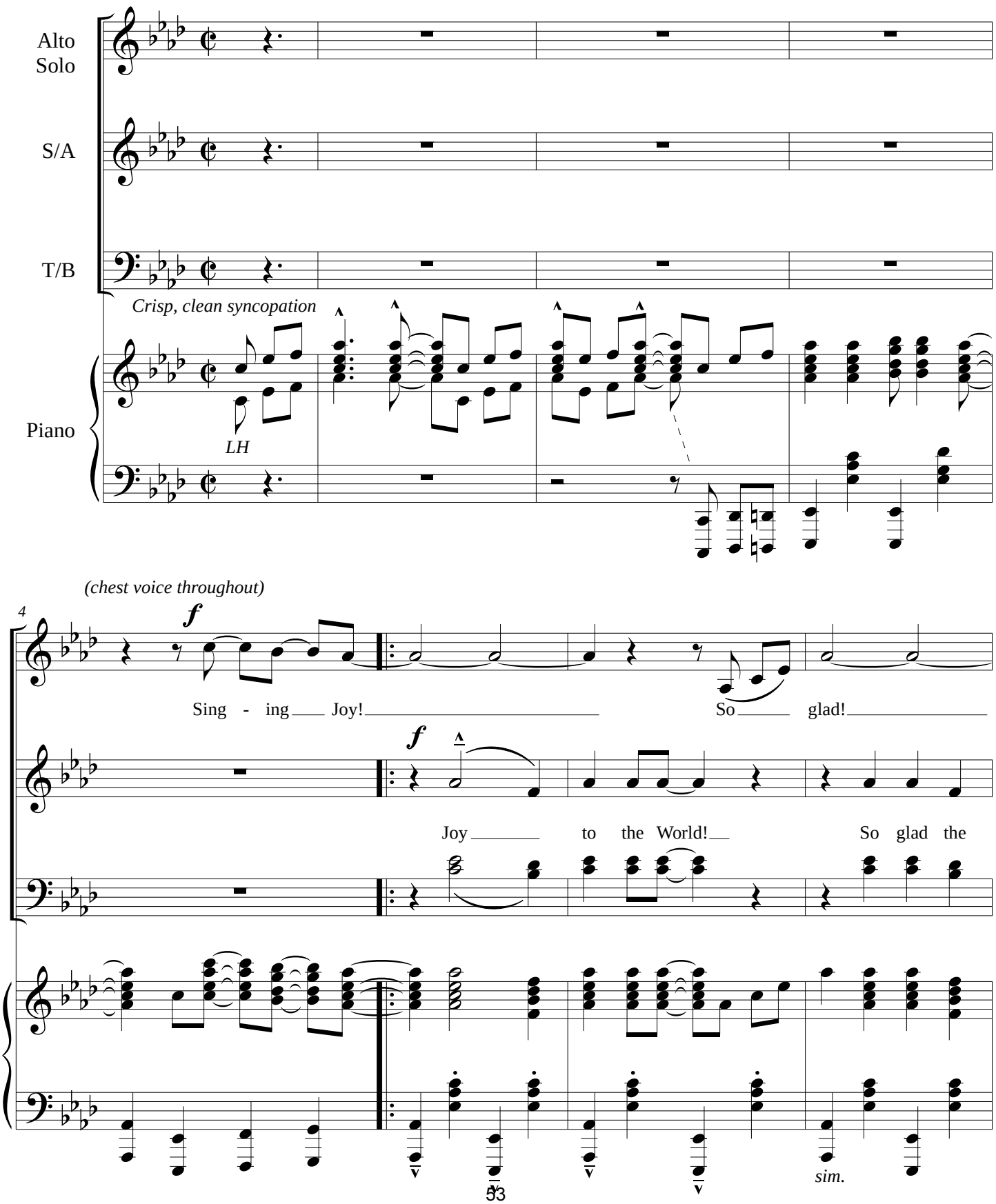
7. Joy To The World!

***arr.* Aaron Robinson**

Joyful and with Great Spirit! ♩ = 87-89



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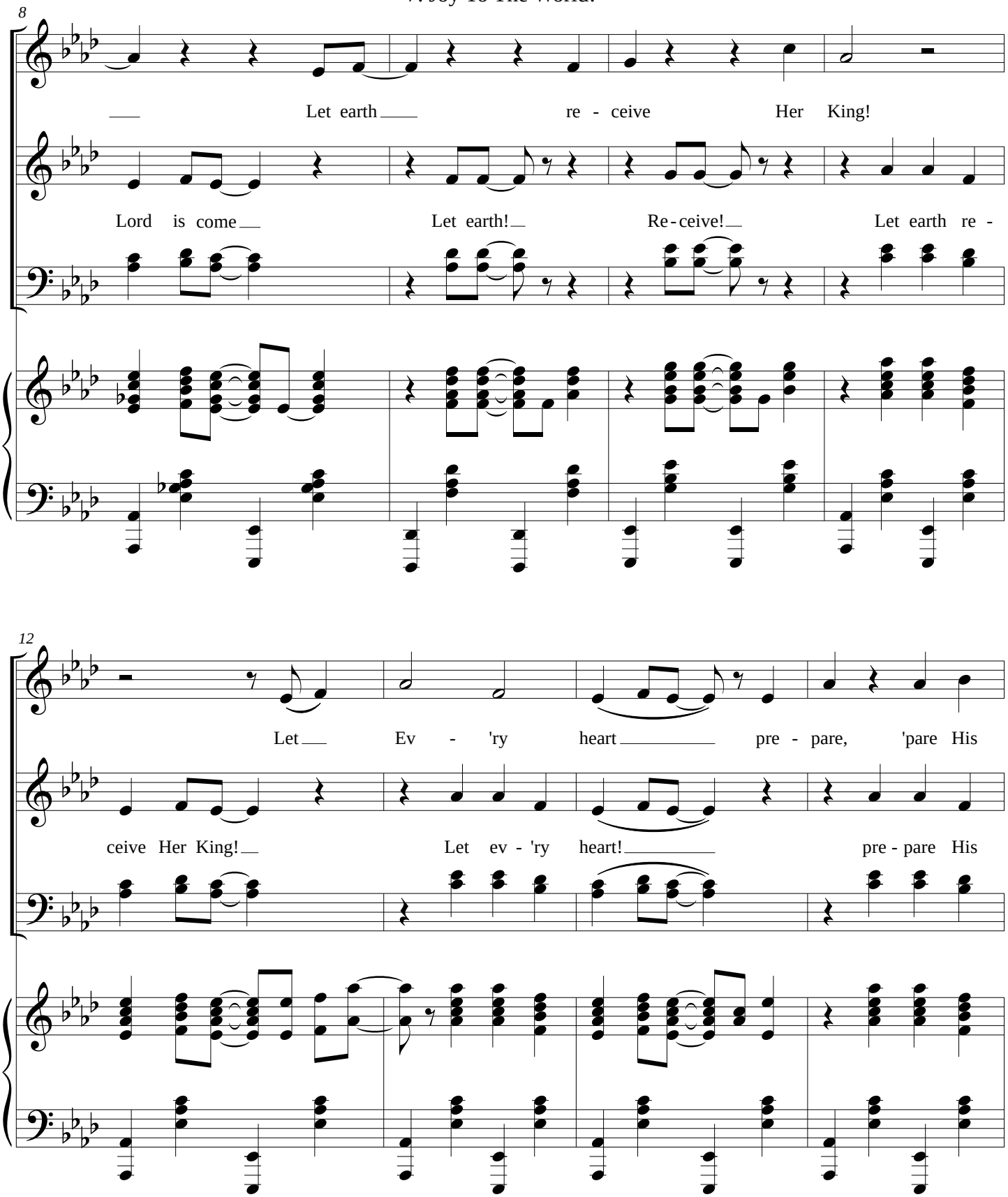

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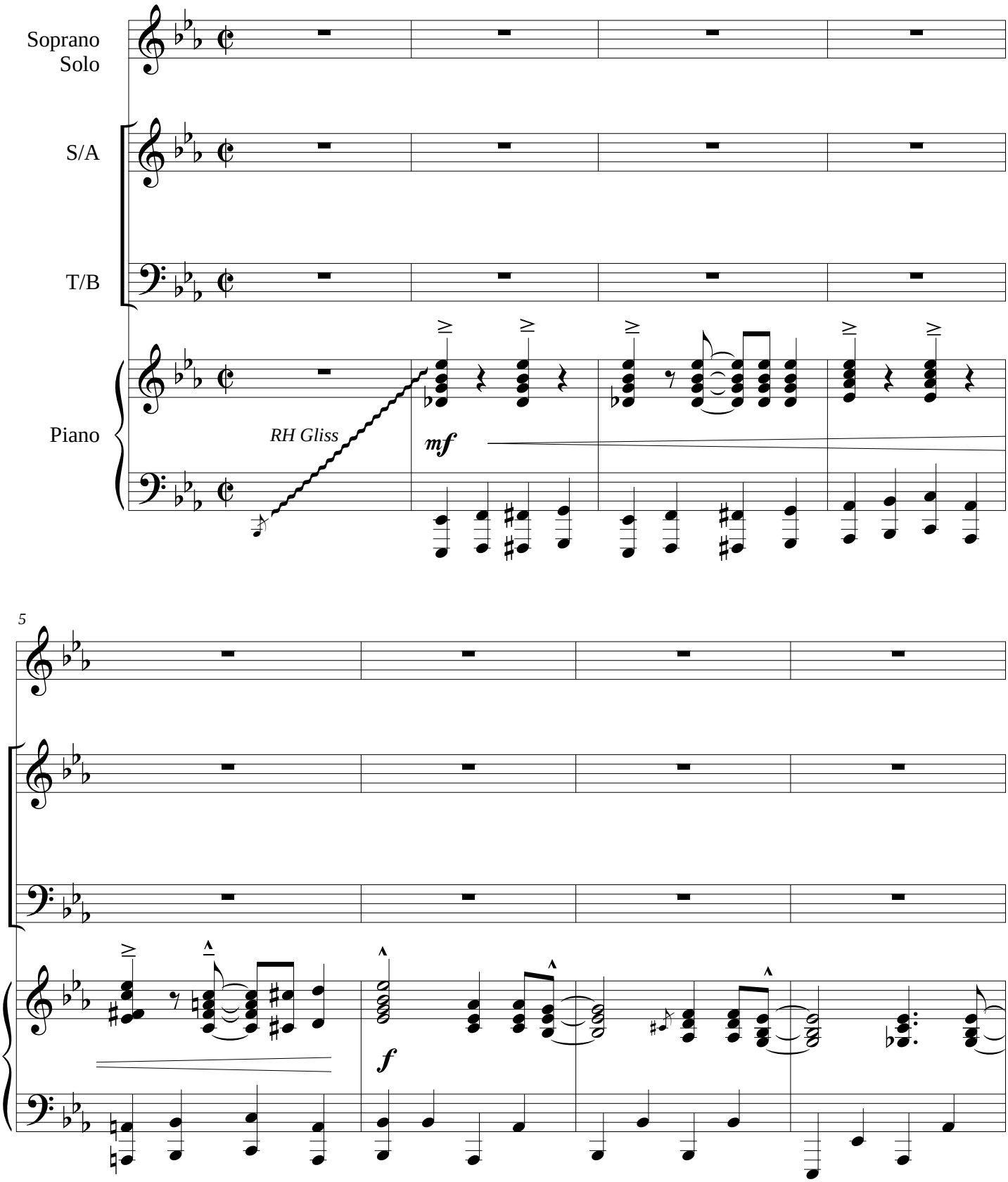
8. Christ Is Born

***arr.* Aaron Robinsnon**

Fast "Jump" Tempo ♩ = 118-120



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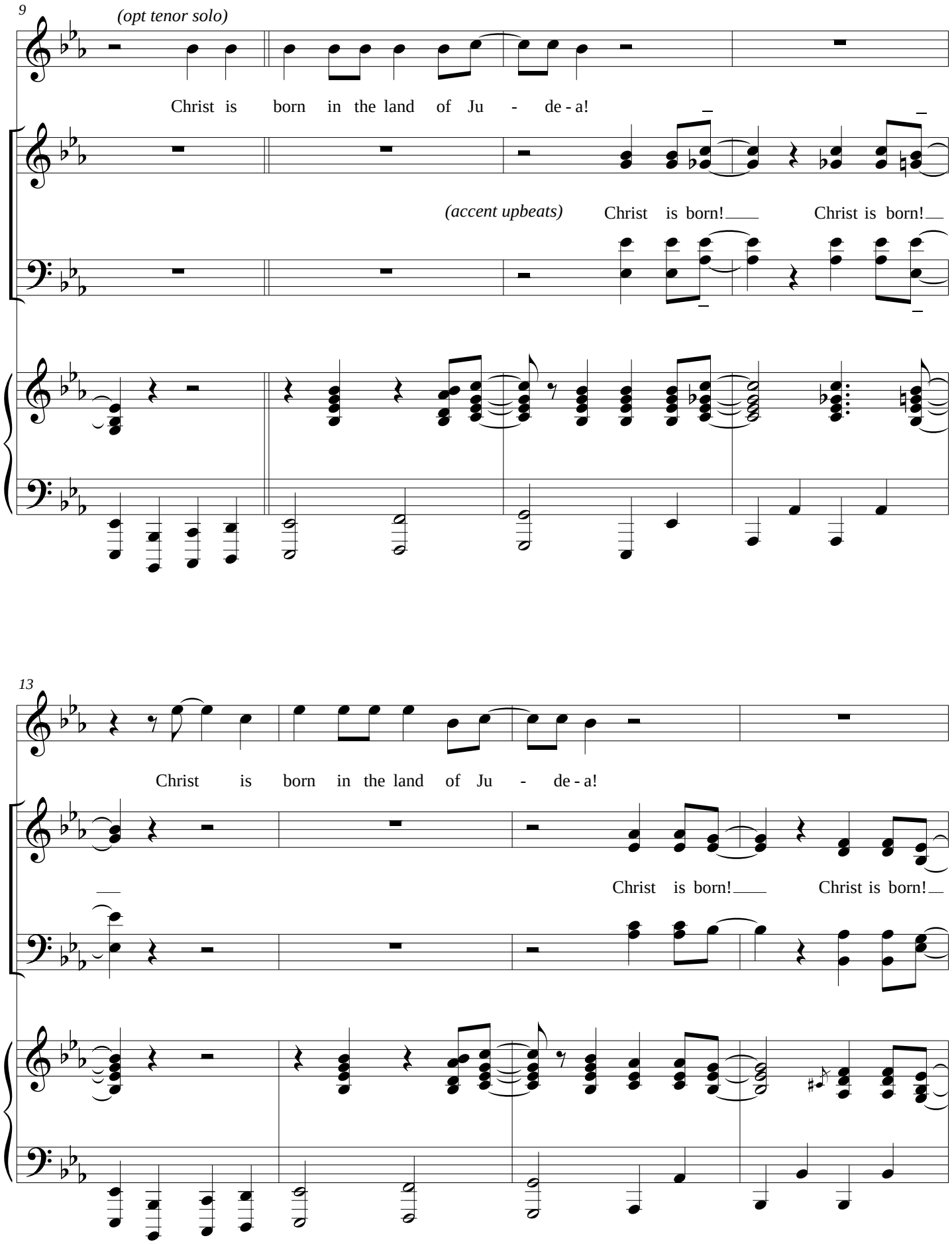

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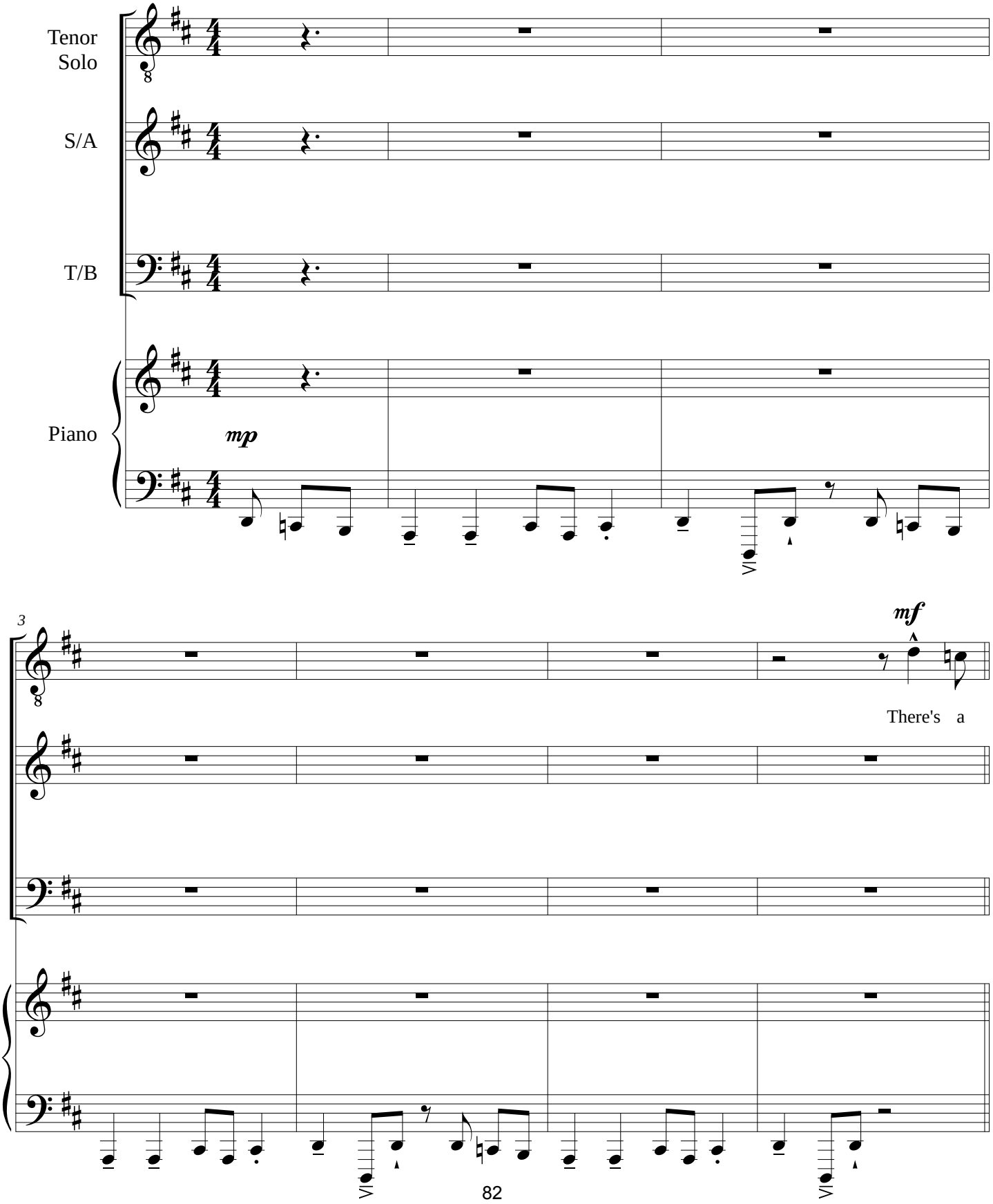
9. Rise Up, Shepherd, and Follow

arr. **Aaron Robinson**

With a relaxed, Gospel swing ♩ = 100-104 ♫ = ♩ ³ ♪



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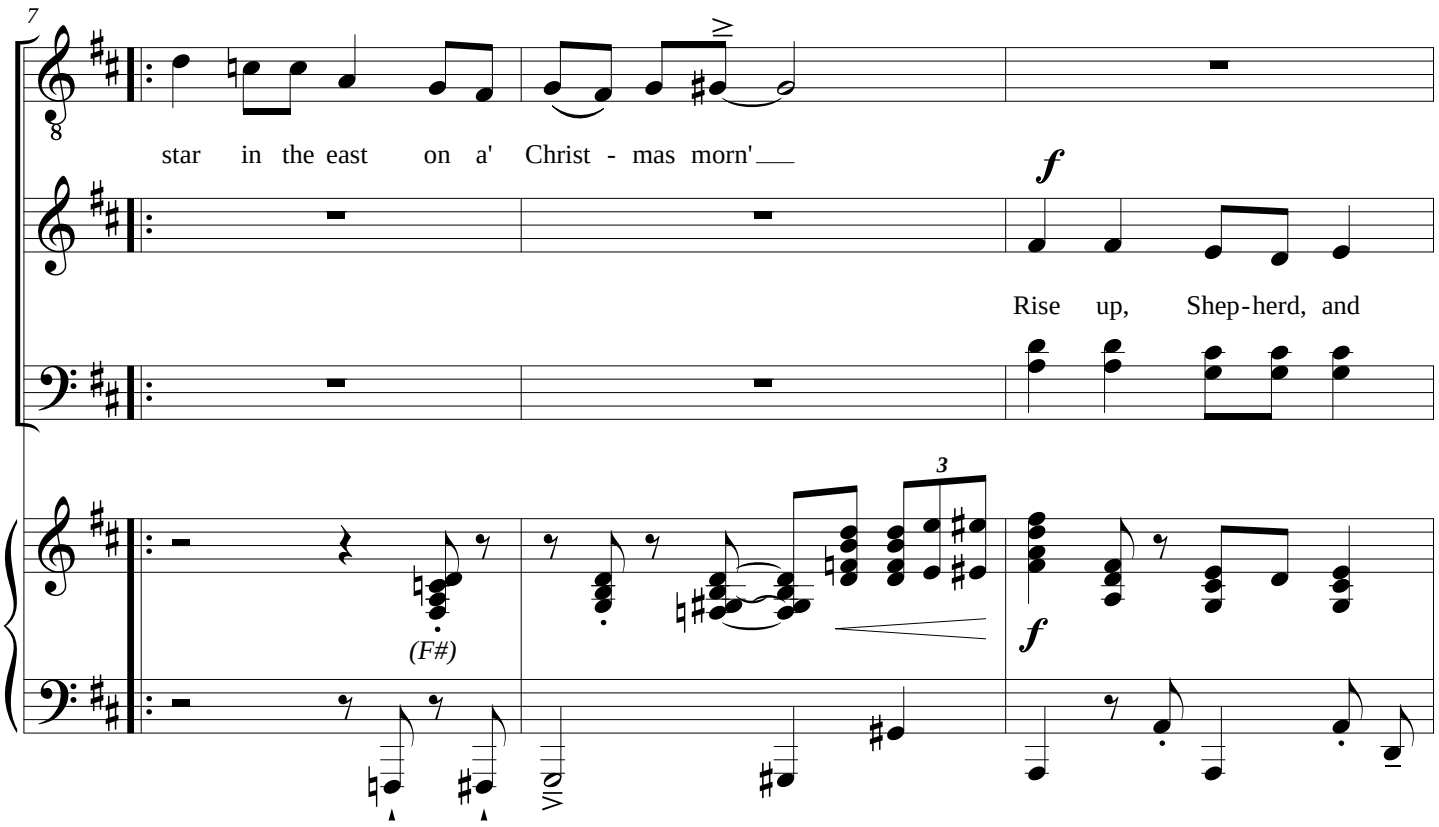

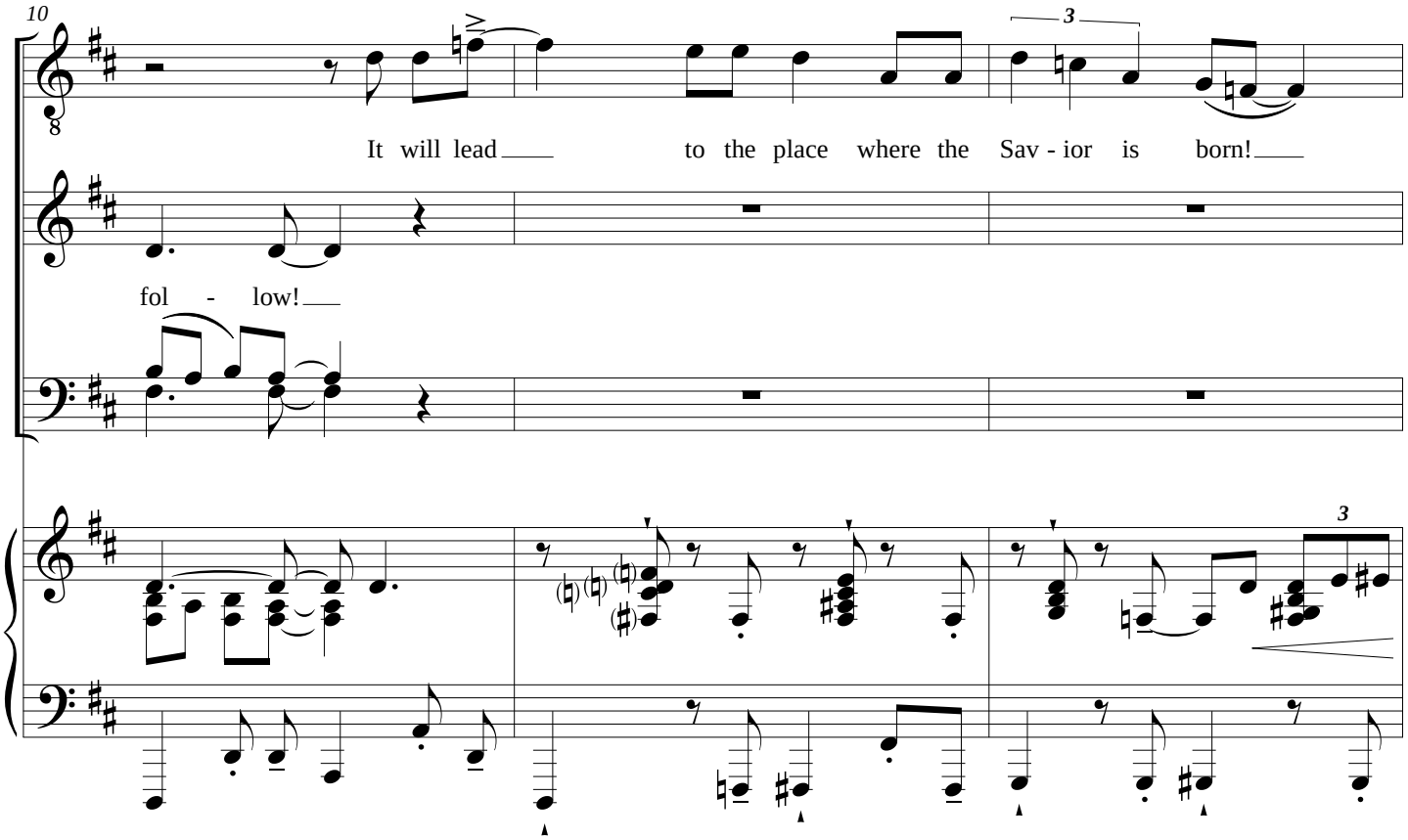

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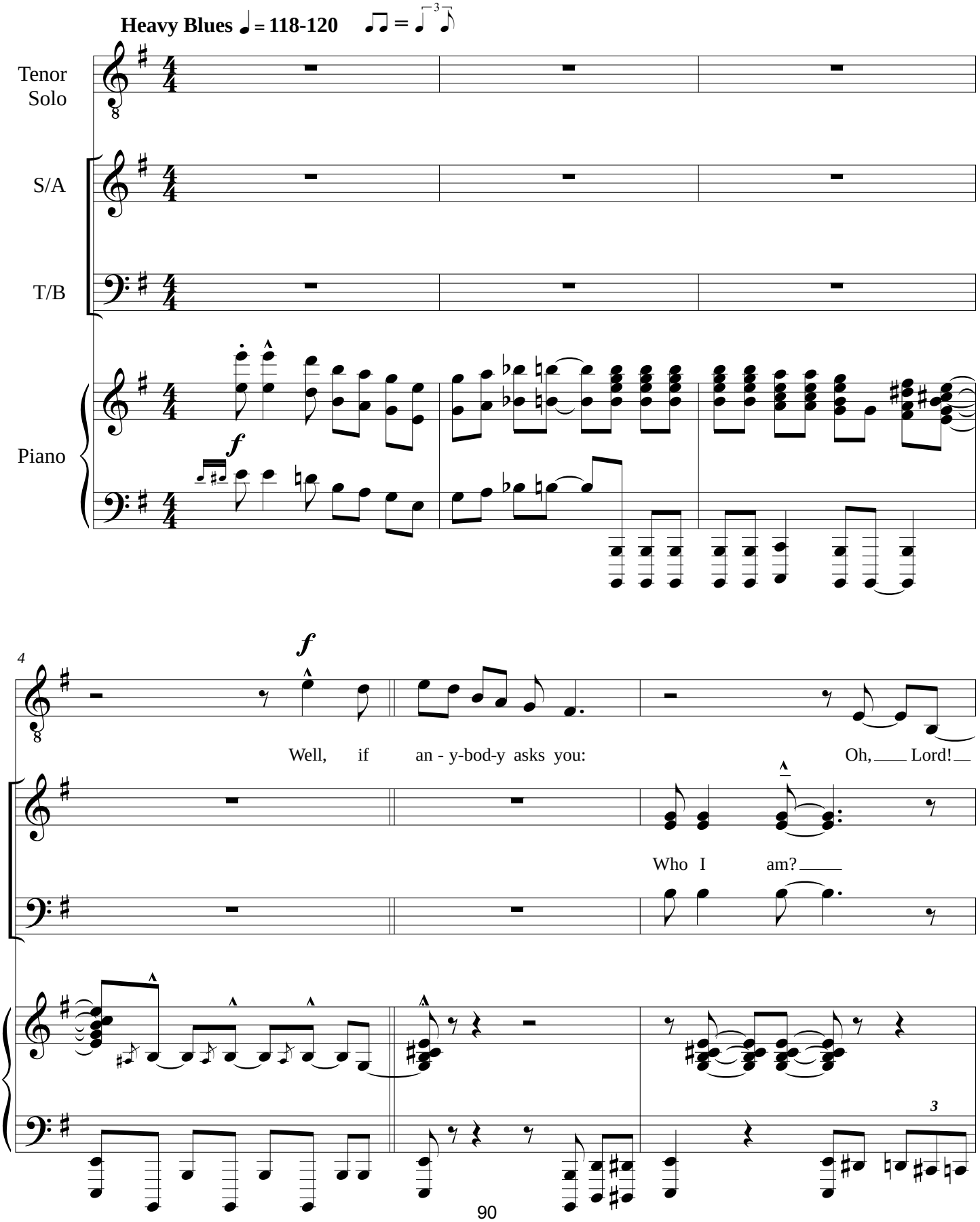
10. If Anybody Asks You
Who I Am?

***arr.* Aaron Robinsnon**



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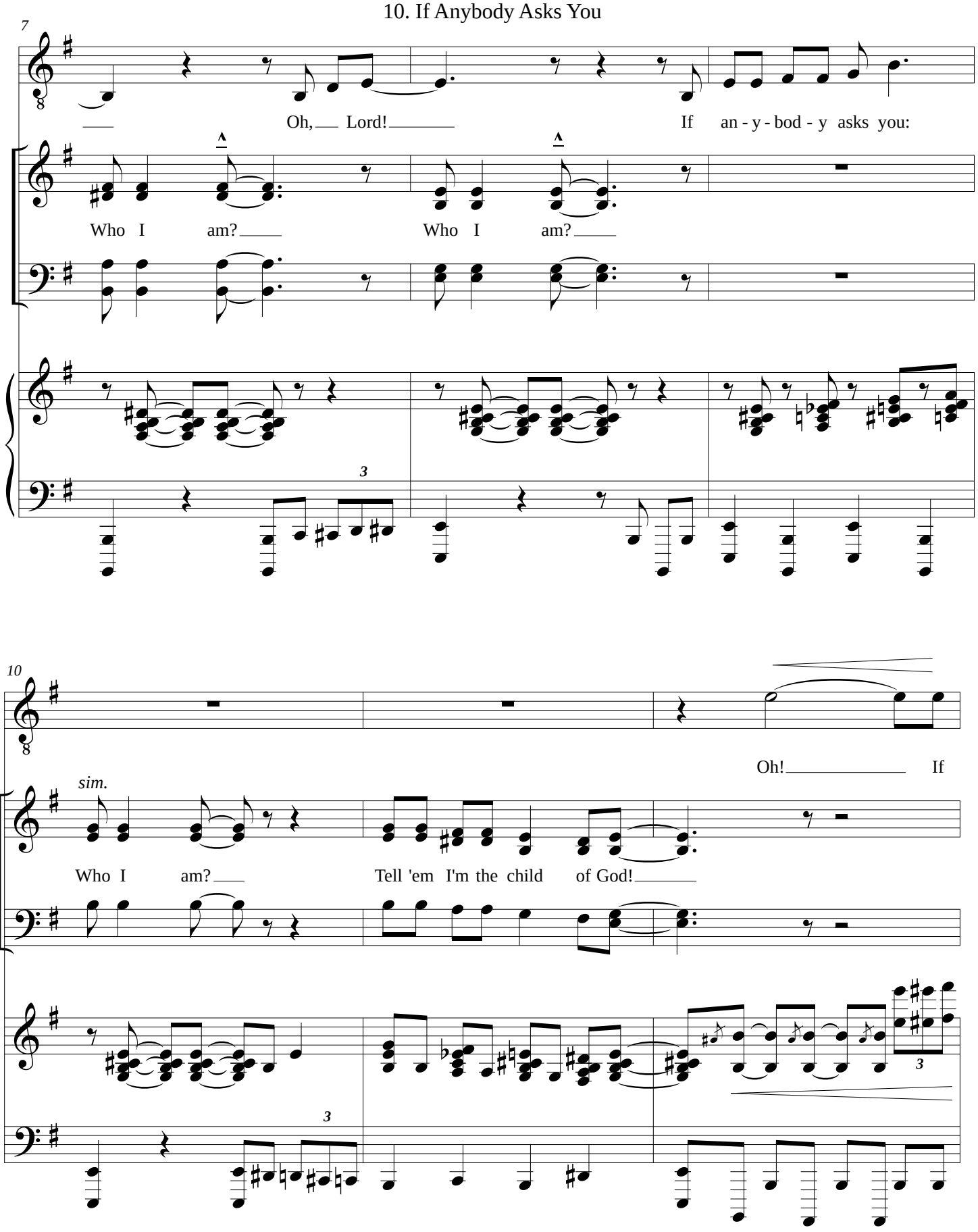

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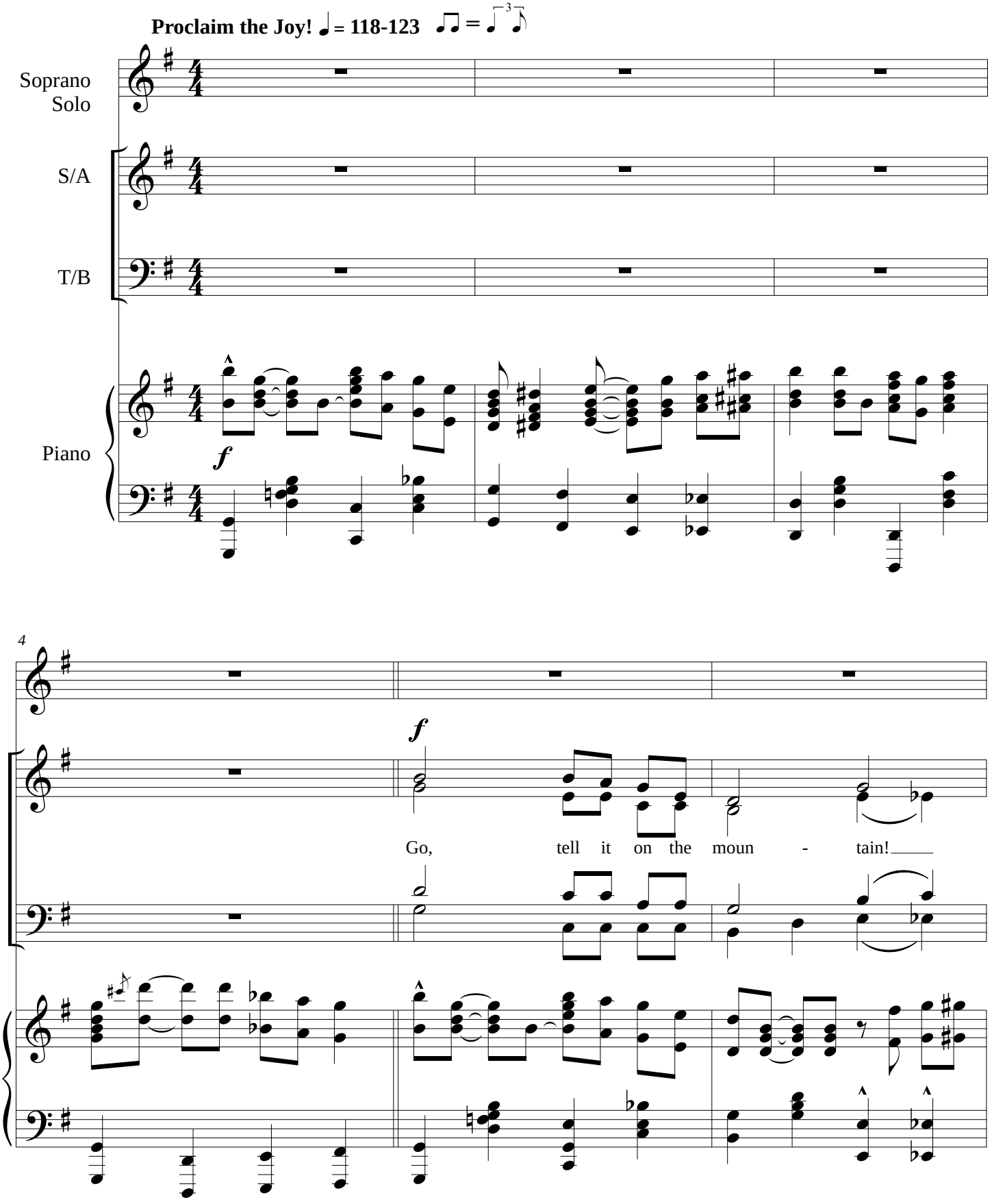
11. Go, Tell It On the Mountain

***arr.* Aaron Robinsnon**



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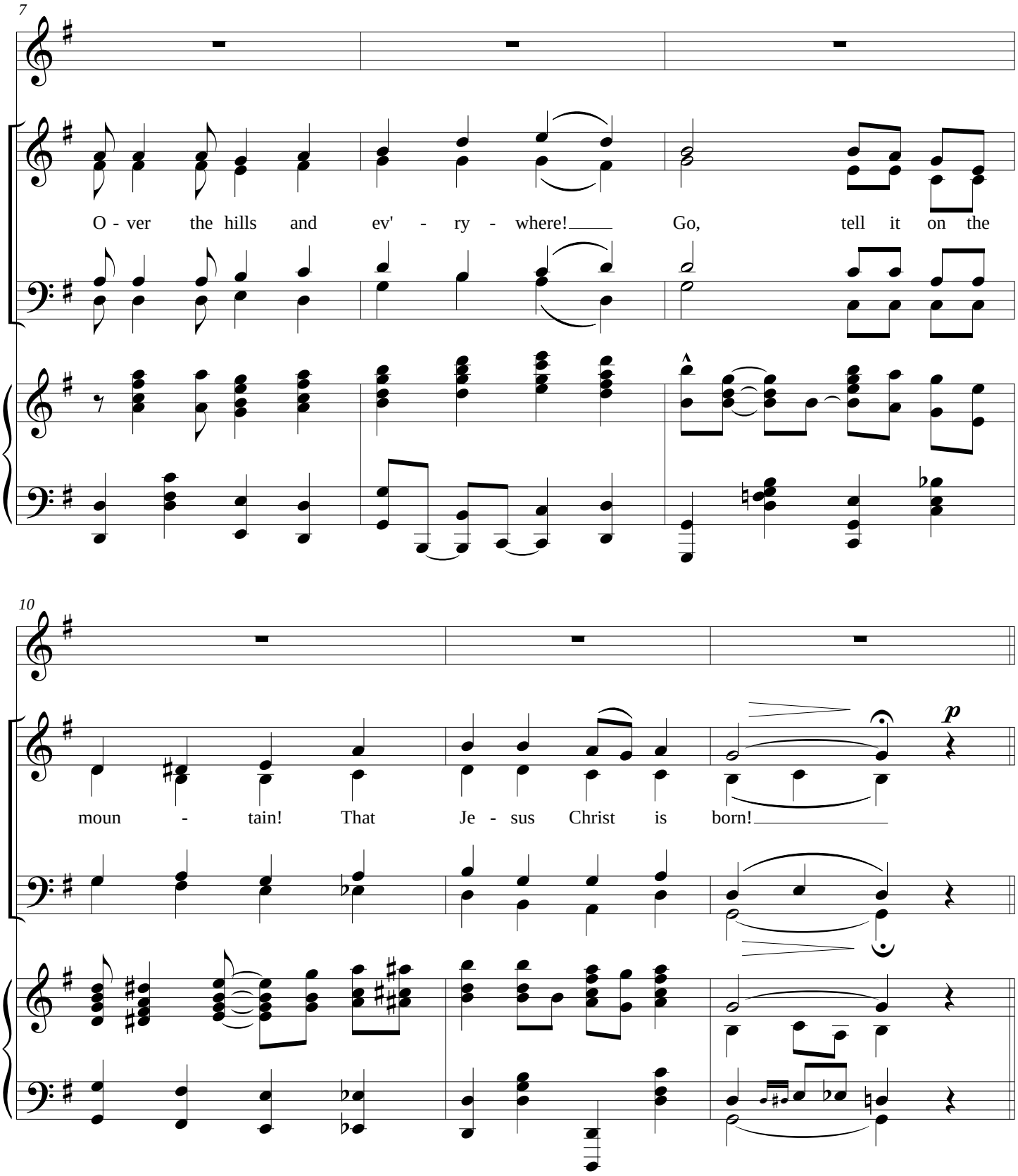

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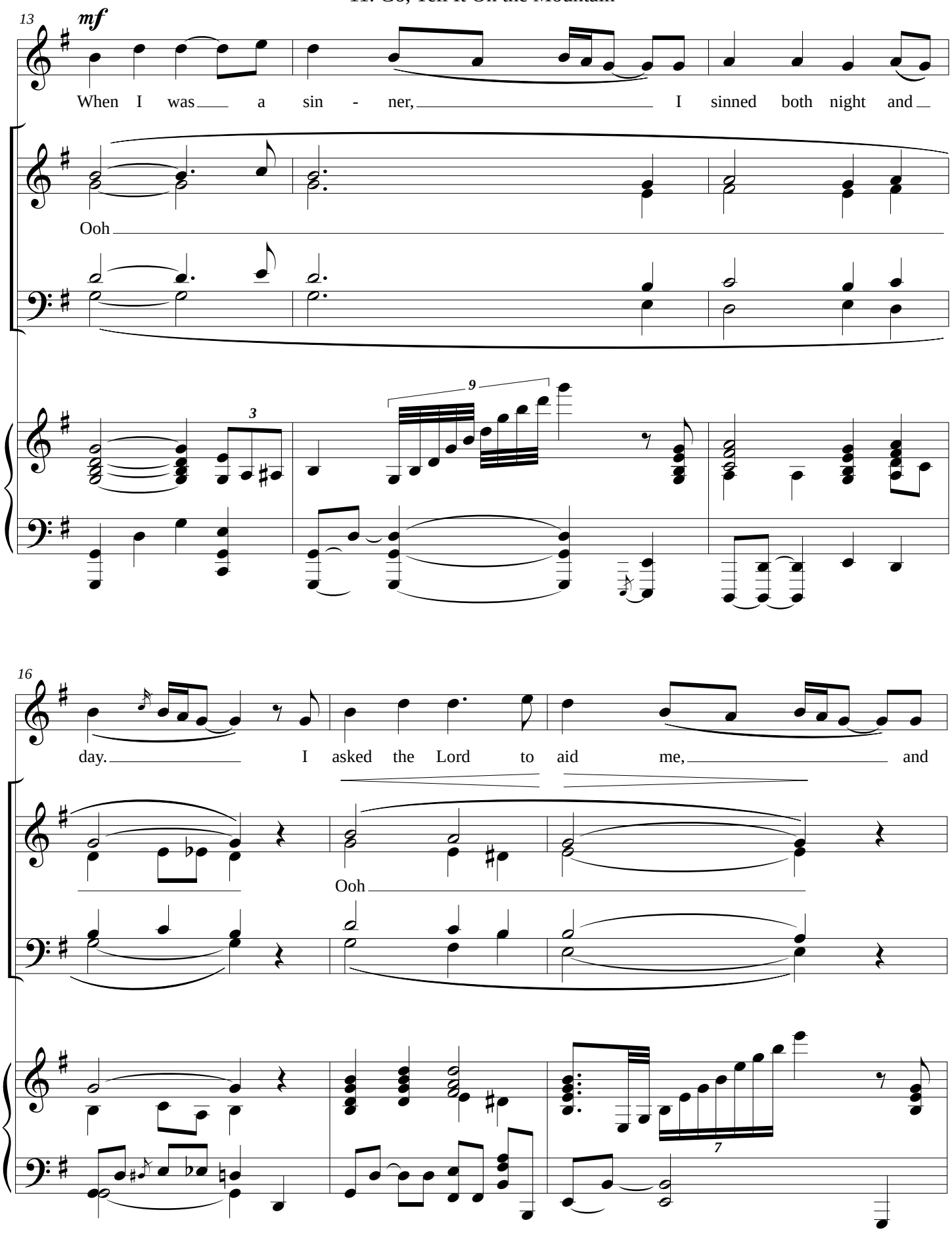

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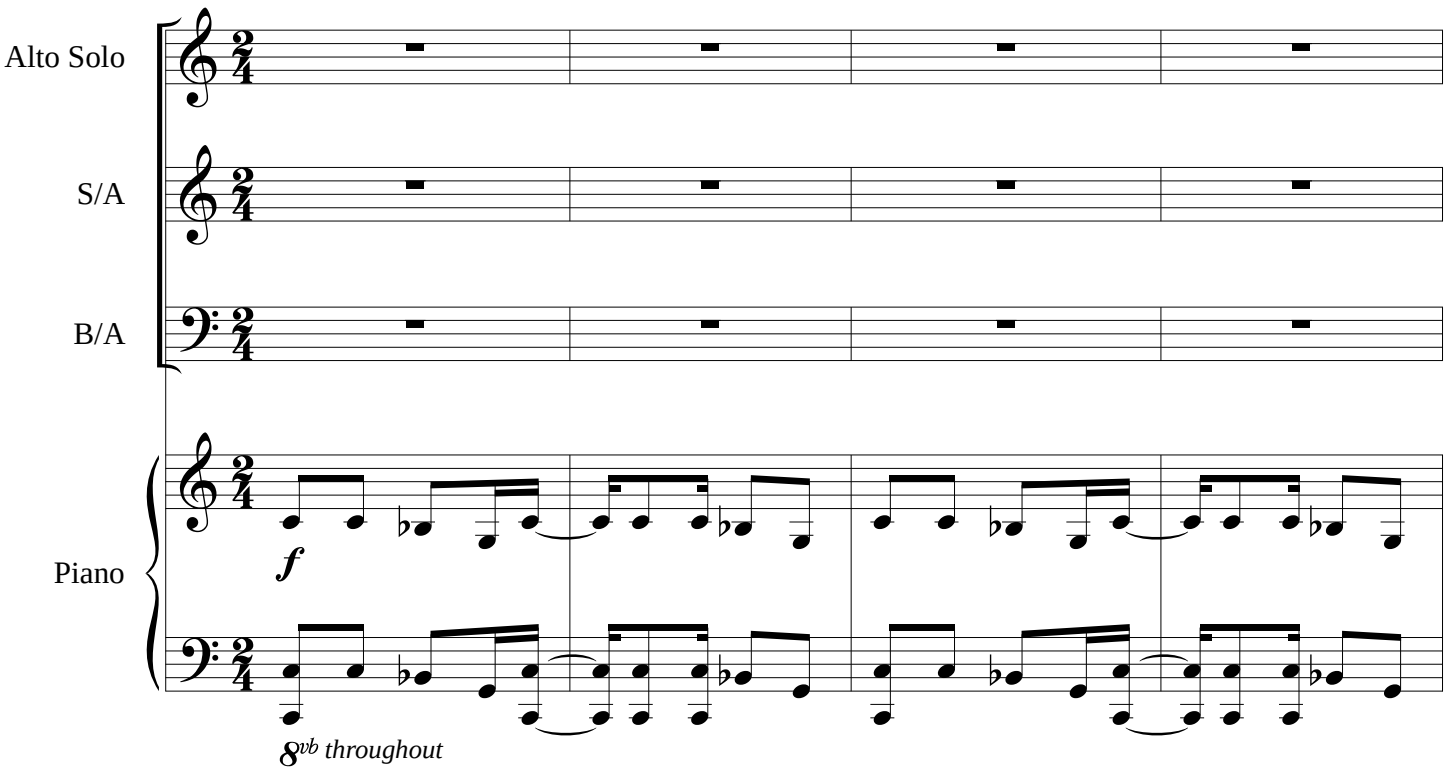
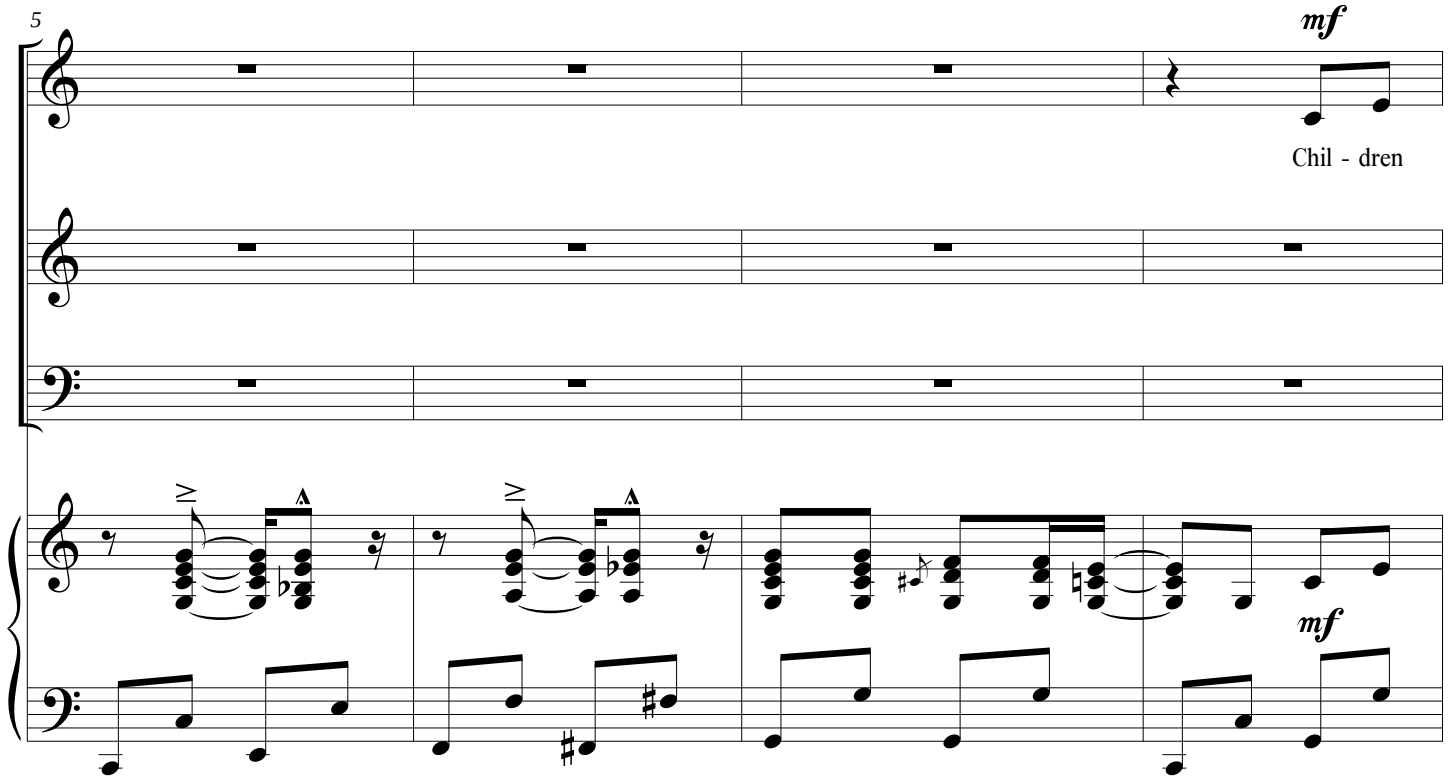
12. Children, Go Where I Send Thee

arr. Aaron Robinson

Hard Drive Gospel (♩ = c. 127)





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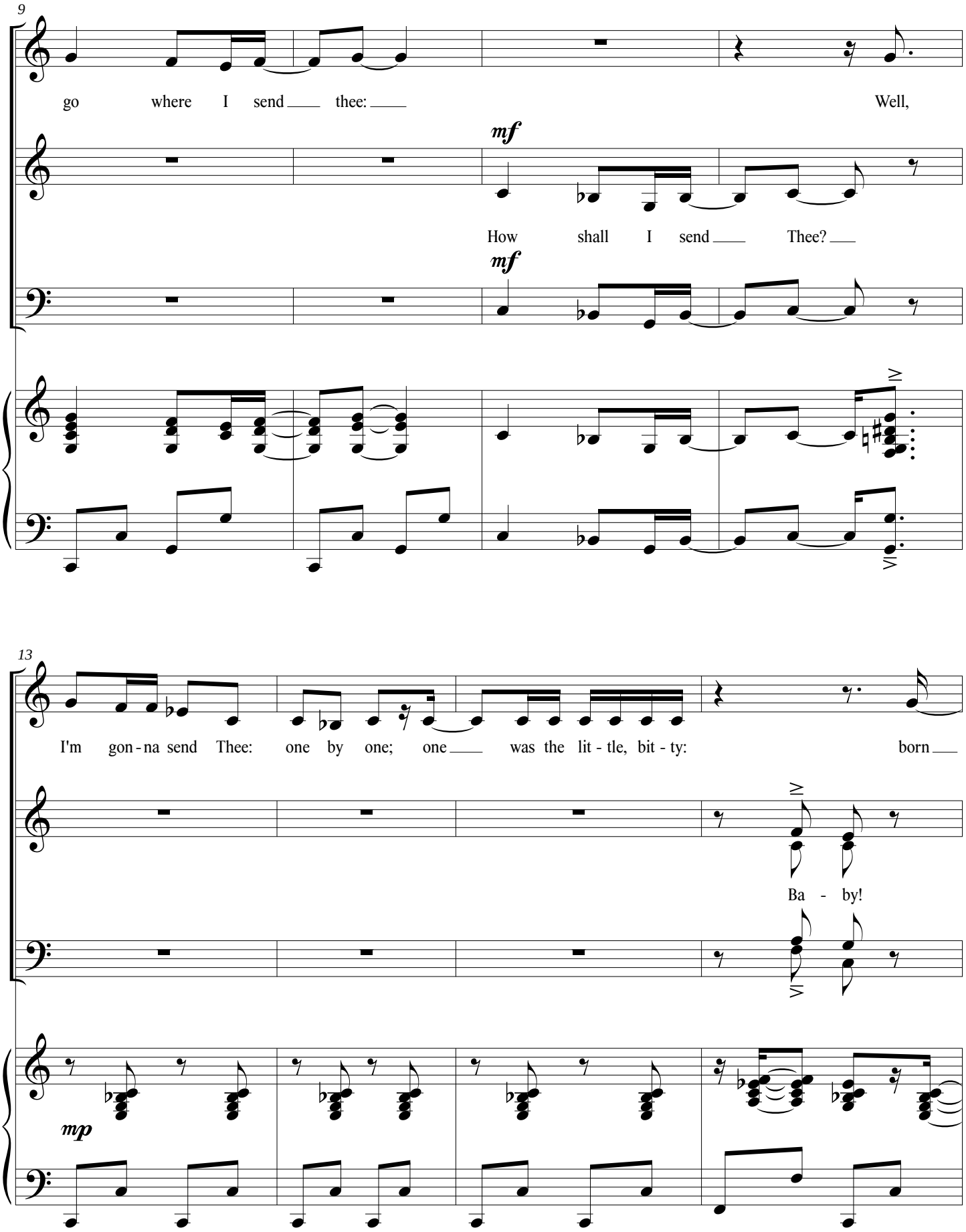

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