Newton Armstrong

The Book of the Sediments

for soprano
and electronic sounds

2022

Credits

The Book of the Sediments was commissioned by Juliet Fraser as part of the Carson Commissions (2021-23).

Commission funds were provided by Arts Council England, PRS Foundation, and the Vaughan Williams Foundation (formerly RVW Trust).

First performance of revised version: *Rainy Days,* Philharmonie Luxembourg, November 2022.

Programme note

In *The Sea Around Us,* Rachel Carson describes the slow accumulation of sediments on the deep sea floor, proceeding over hundres of millions of years to form vast mountains of particulate materials — silt, volcanic dust, meteoric elements, miniscule shells and skeletons — at the bottom of the oceans. For Carson, the sediments form "a sort of epic poem of the earth," an inscription of all that has happened in the geologic and climatic history of our planet. *The Book of the Sediments* stems from these images; not as depiction, but rather as a contemplation of the interactions between the momentary and the vast, and of endless process as a form of saying.

Performance notes

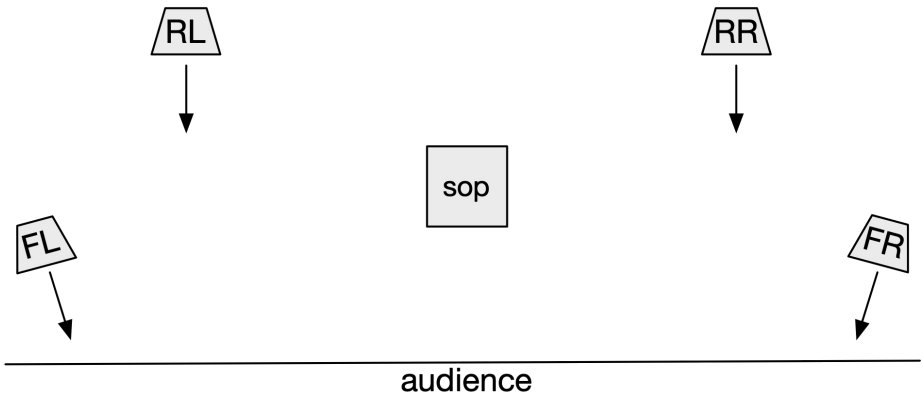
The Book of the Sediments is composed for unamplified solo soprano voice and stereo audio diffused into four loudspeakers (see stage set-up diagram below). The sound technician must be able to independently adjust levels of front and rear (stereo) loudspeaker pairs, and to calibrate the front/rear delay time for optimal phase correlation.

The nature of the piece will vary considerably from one performance environment to the next. As such, no dynamic markings are indicated on the score and cues are minimal. For each new performance, it's key that the vocalist and sound technician develop a working plan conducive to the way in which the room and audio equipment respond.

A click-track should not be used. Rather, the slow 'respiratory' quality that characterises the vocal writing should be thought of as a fifth voice folding into the four-voice electronic texture that runs through most of the piece. It's important that the four-voice texture is present in the rear loudspeakers at all times as listening cues for the vocalist.

Beating phenomena, psychoacoustical roughness, and warping of the spatial image are attributes of the music. They should not be suppressed but nor should they be noticeably foregrounded.

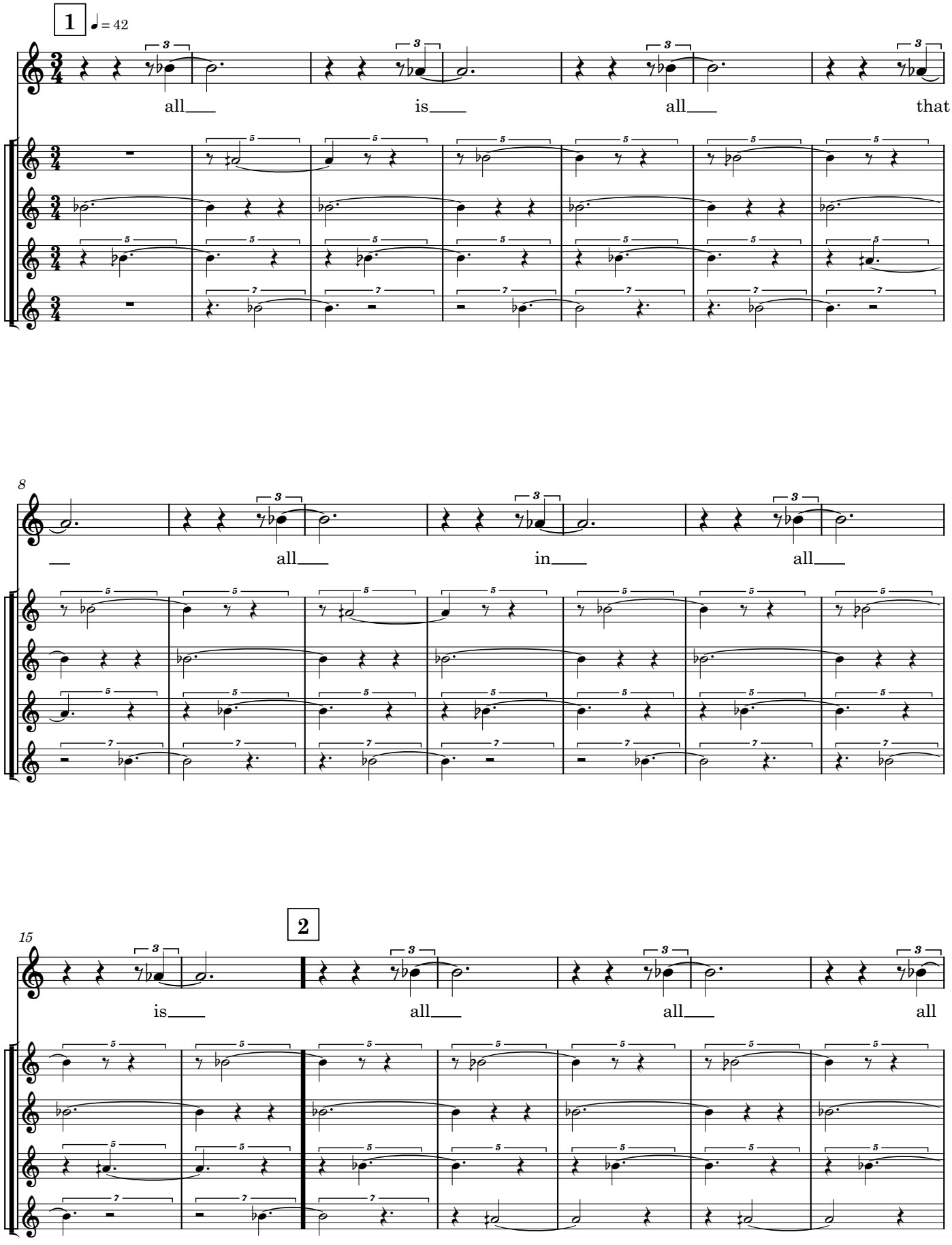
Source soundfiles are available at: http://staff.city.ac.uk/newton.armstrong.1/sediments/.



The Book of the Sediments

For Juliet

Newton Armstrong



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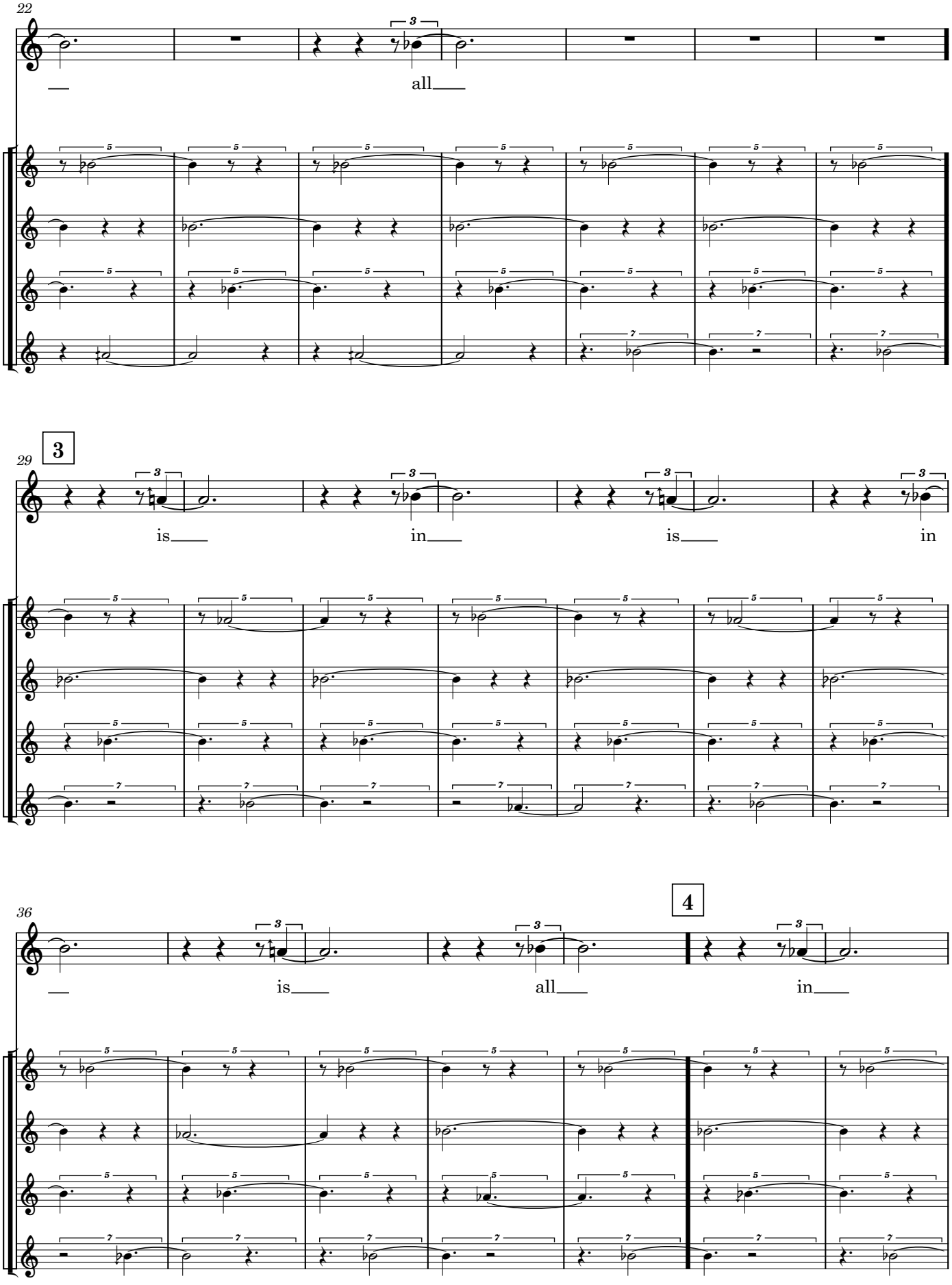
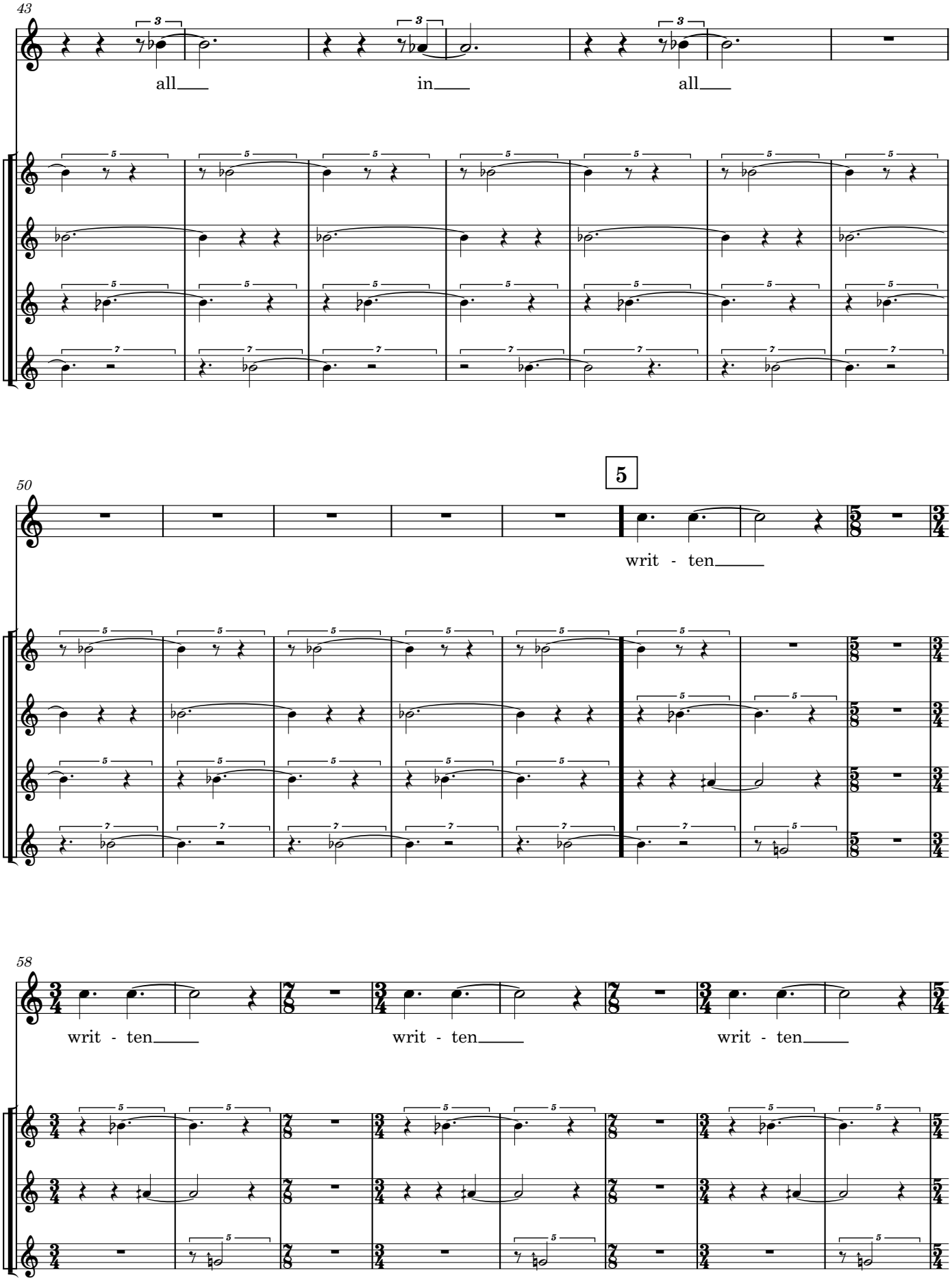
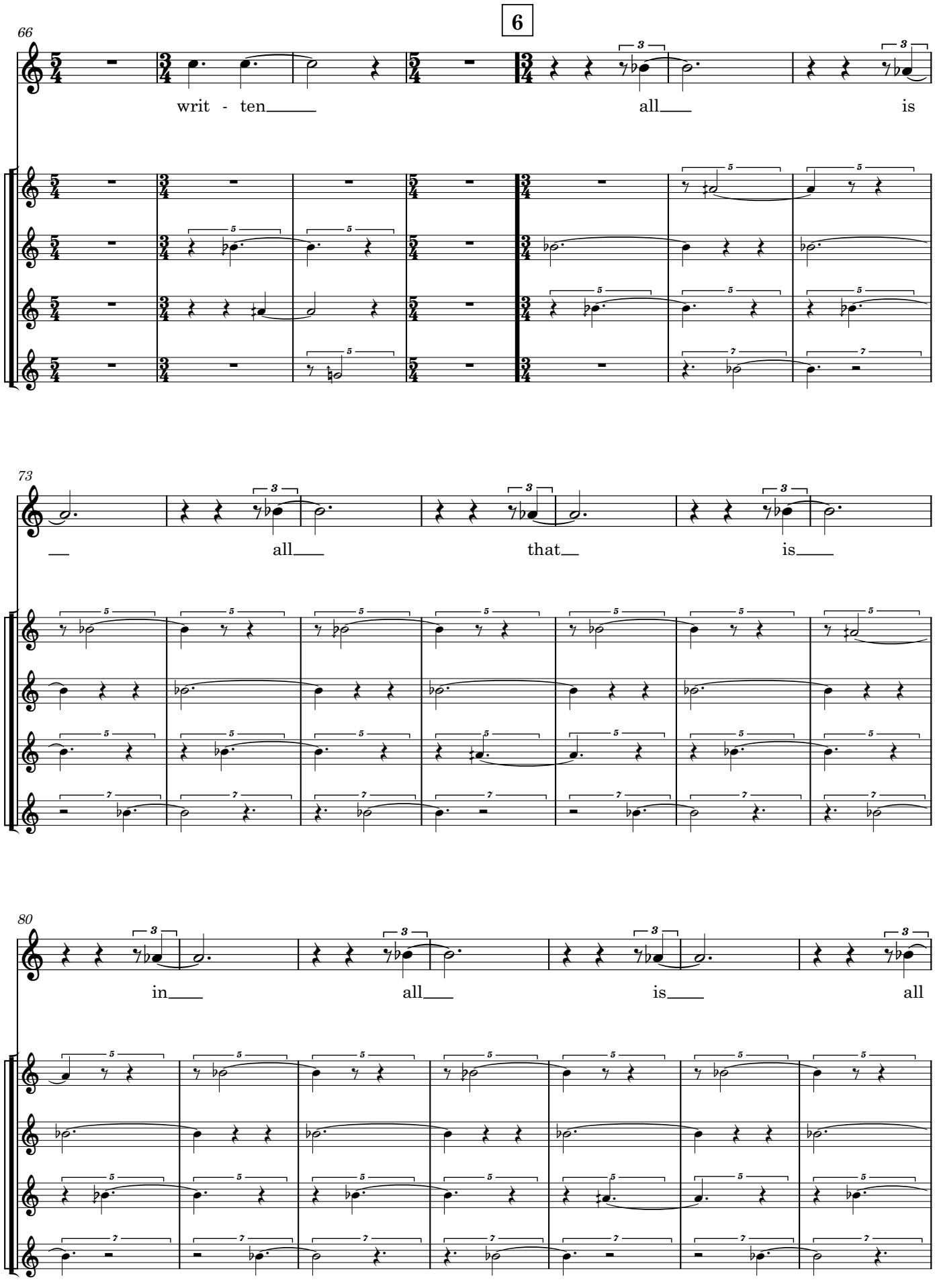
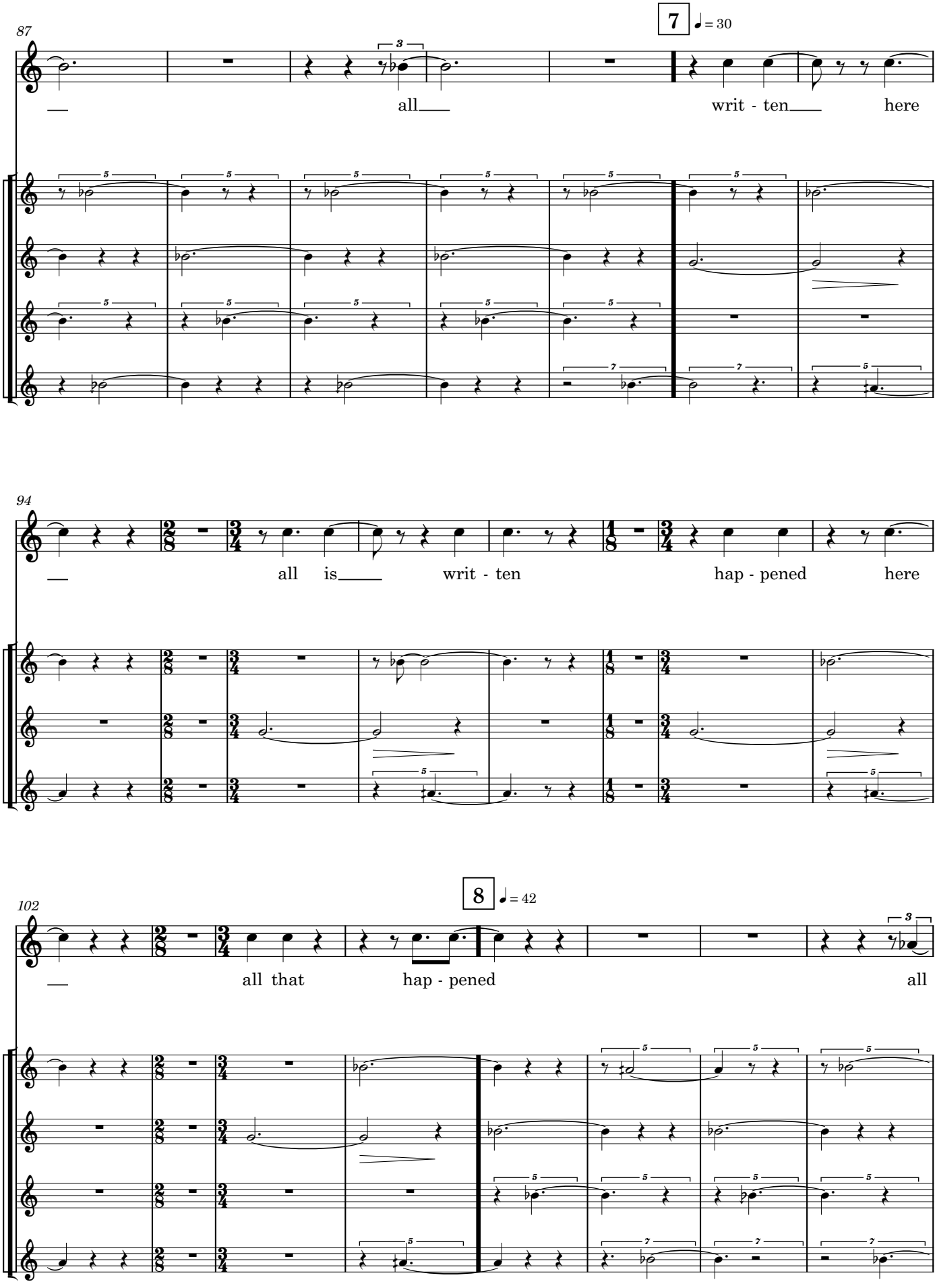
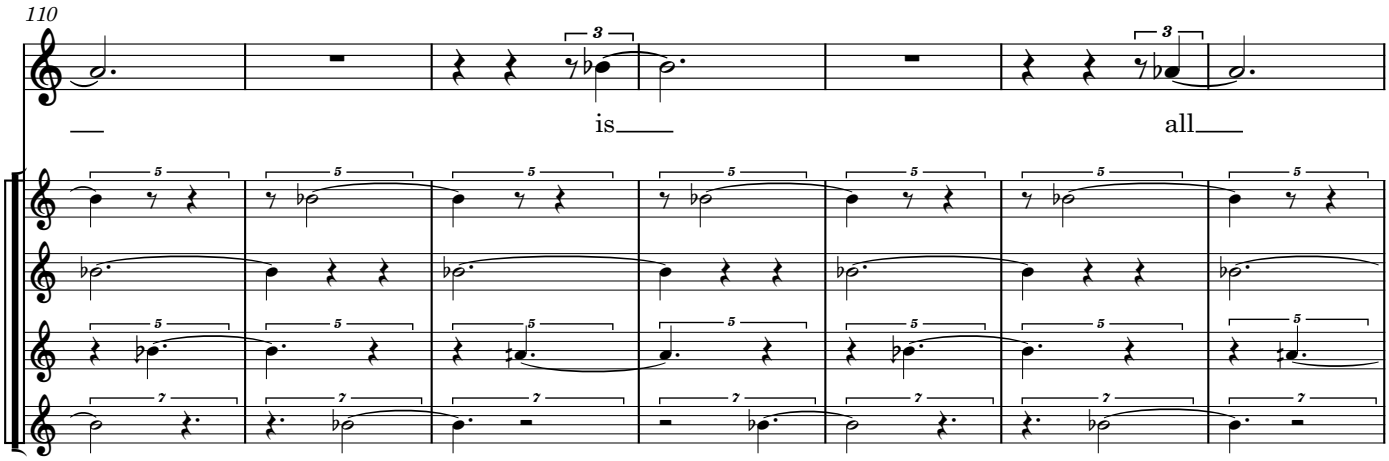
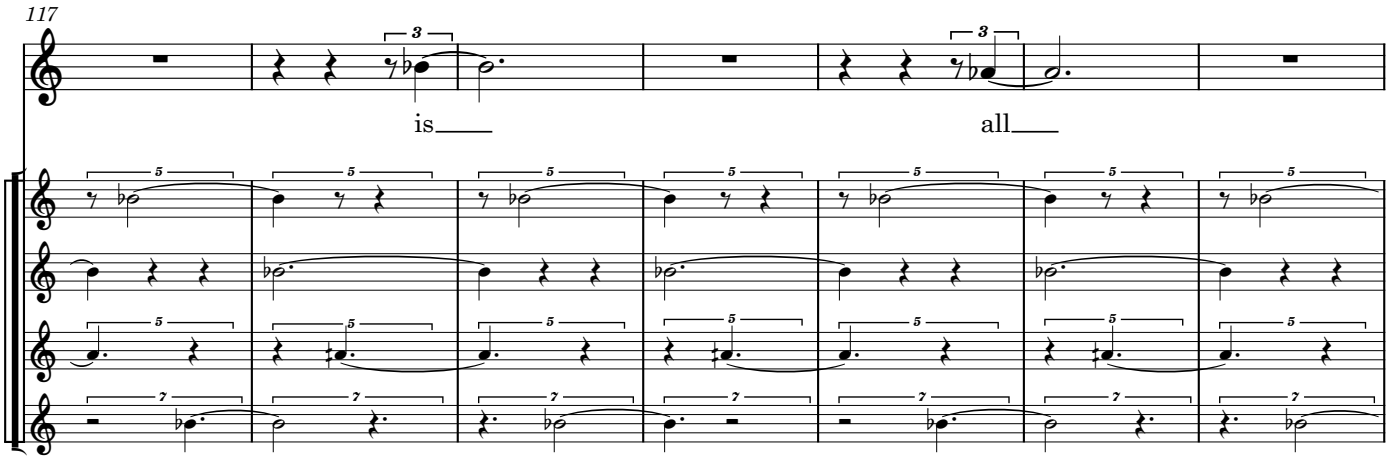

22
all
3
29
is
in
is
in
4
36
is
all
in

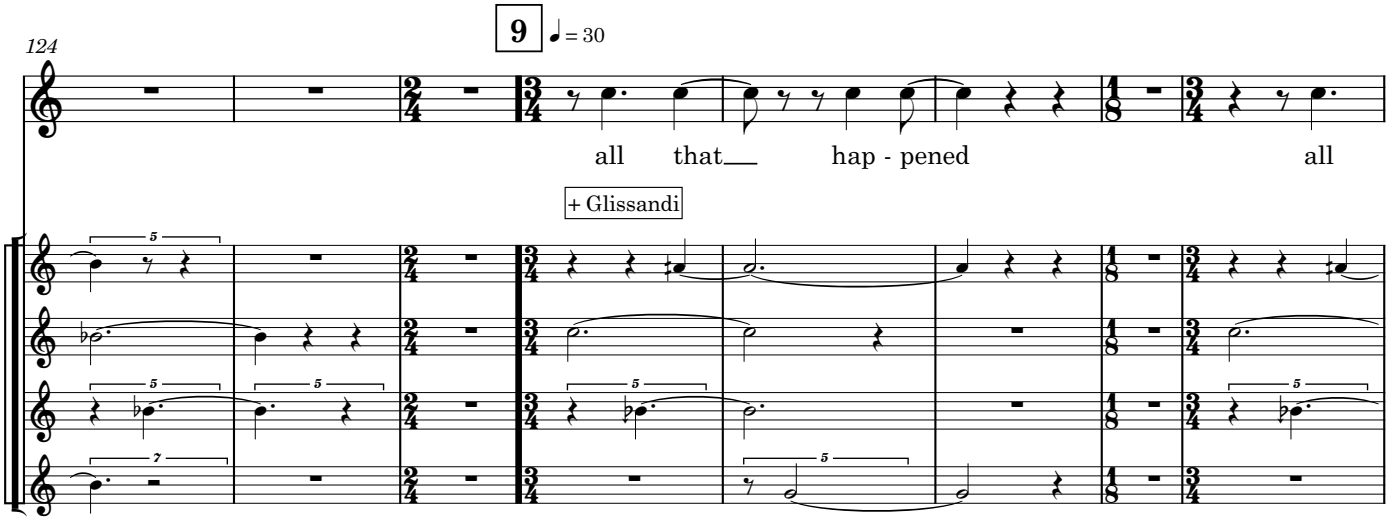

43
all
in
all
50
5
writ - ten
58
writ - ten
writ - ten
writ - ten

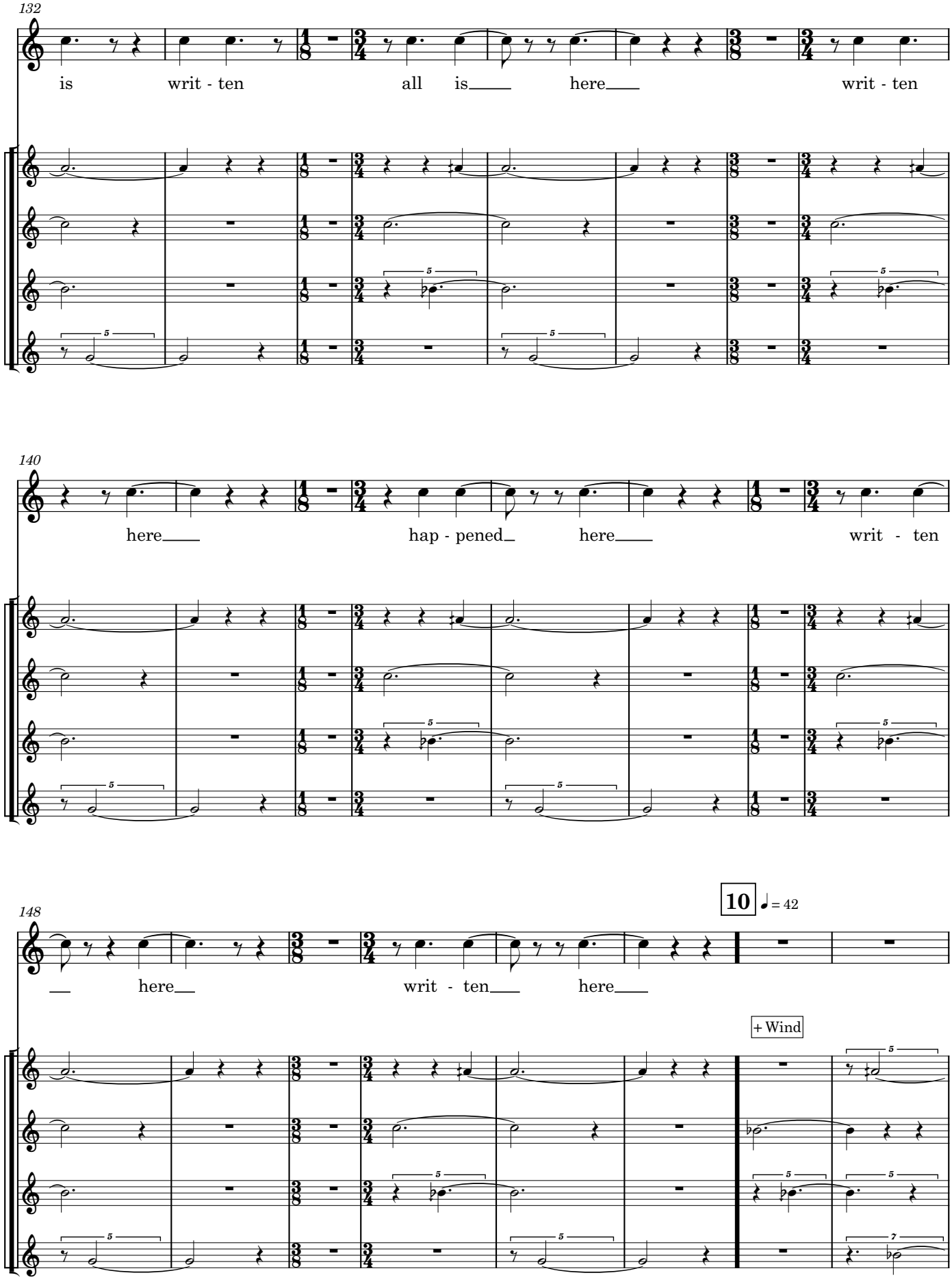

6
66
writ - ten all is
73
all that is
80
in all is all

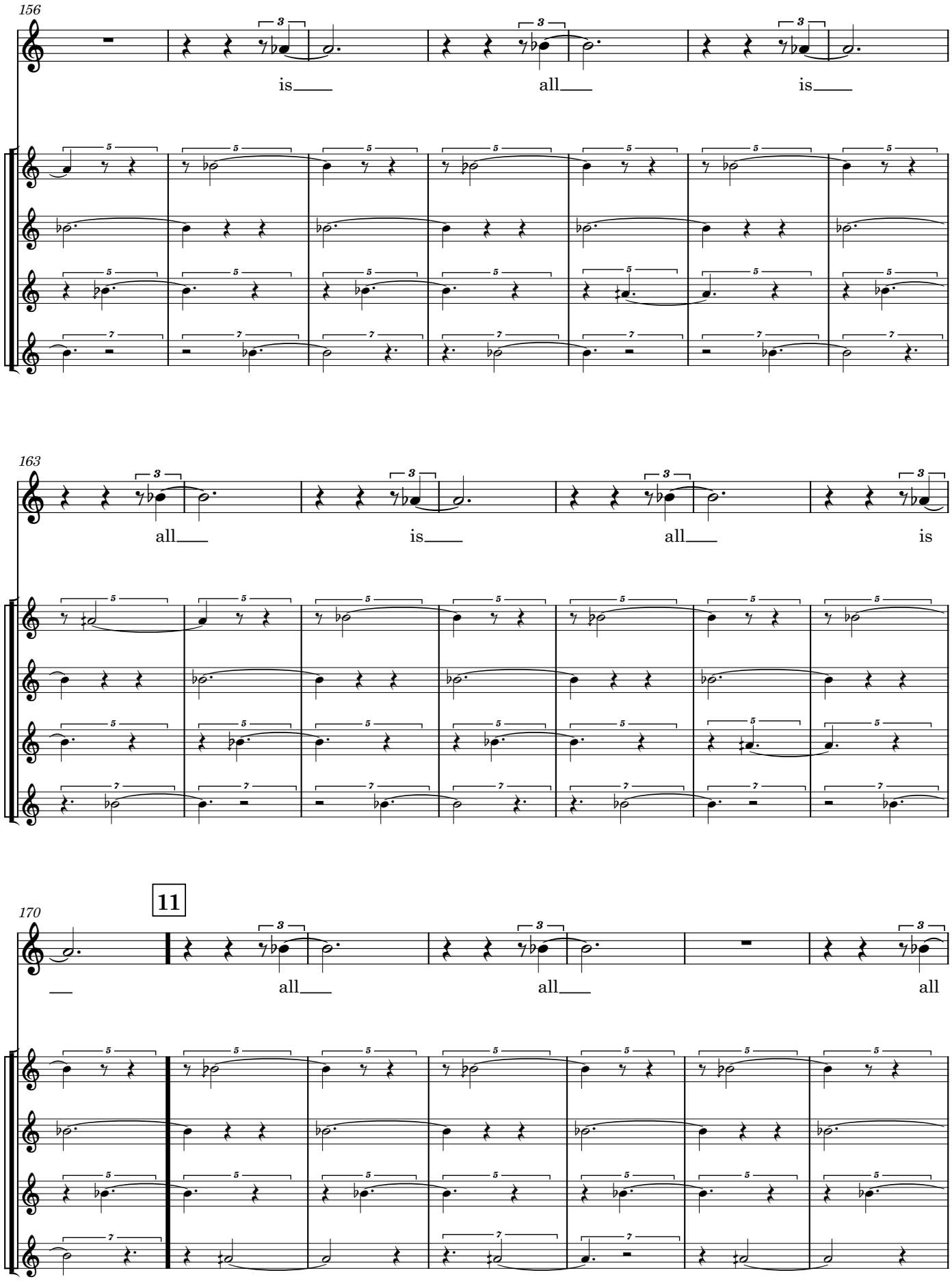

87
7
♩ = 30
all
writ - ten
here
94
all is
writ - ten
hap - pened
here
102
8
♩ = 42
all that
hap - pened
all

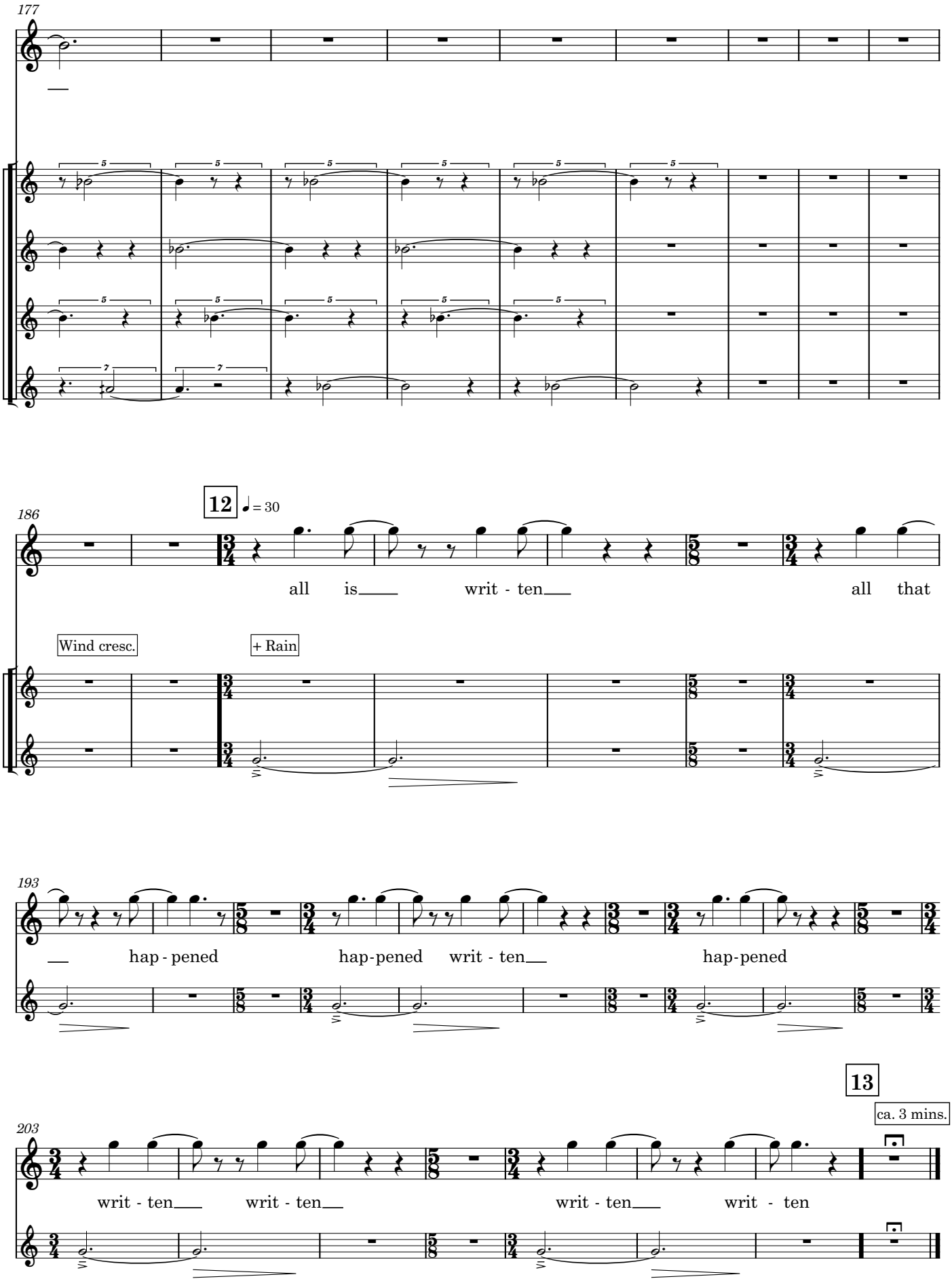

110
is
all


117
is
all


9
♩ = 30
124
all that hap - pened all
+ Glissandi


132
is writ - ten all is here writ - ten
140
here hap - pened here writ - ten
148
here writ - ten here
10
♩ = 42
+ Wind


156
is
all
is
163
all
is
all
is
170
11
all
all
all


177
186
12
♩ = 30
all is writ - ten all that
Wind cresc.
+ Rain
193
hap - pened hap-pened writ - ten hap-pened
13
ca. 3 mins.
203
writ - ten writ - ten writ - ten writ - ten