Gerald Cohen

Lo Vashamayim Hi
(It is not in the heavens)

for solo voice and piano
(2021)

PERUSAL SCORE

Gerald Cohen Music
www.geraldcohenmusic.com

Program note by composer Gerald Cohen:
"Lo Vashamayim Hi" (It is not in the heavens) was composed in 2021 for the *Noli Me Tangere* project of the Center for Religion and the Human, Indiana University, Bloomington.

The prompt for the project begins as follows:
Noli me tangere—"touch me not" (or "Do not hold/grasp me" in the Greek). The words from John 20:17, spoken by Jesus to Mary Magdalene after her discovery of the empty tomb, take on curious resonances in the epoch of COVID-19, with its prohibitions on touching and imperatives around social distancing. We wish to ask how we might consider *noli me tangere* in this moment—this long moment being shaped by the pandemic.
The project leaders then encouraged all participants to use the prompt of the text to act as a jumping-off point to explore whatever felt significant to them in the words and their resonances.

As a composer and cantor, I am quite steeped in the Hebrew Bible, and much less so in the New Testament. It has been fascinating for me to use the prompt of this project as an impetus to explore new texts. When I learned that the Greek of "noli me tangere" could perhaps be better translated as "do not cling to me," the words suddenly resonated with me quite deeply, and also created connections in my mind with both Jewish and Christian and mystical traditions—of God being truly within each one of us—and with Buddhist ideas of non-attachment.

After an exploration of many texts, including several of the non-canonical Gnostic Gospels, and poems of Rilke and Tagore, I found myself drawn back to a favorite text from the most familiar part of my own religious tradition—the Torah. In Deuteronomy, Chap 30, Moses instructs the people: "It is not in the heavens, that you should say, 'Who will go up for us to the heavens and take it for us and let us hear it, that we may do it?'…. But the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it." This saying is also echoed by Jesus, presumably referring directly to the text from Deuteronomy, in both the canonic and the gnostic gospels.

The first two sections of the piece, relating the quest to find the divine in the heavens or beyond the sea, are heard as dramatic, energetic outpourings, these then resolve into the gentle extended meditation of "But the thing is very close to you…".

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Text: Deuteronomy 30:12-14

Lo vashamayim hi leimor:
"Mi ya'aleh lanu hashamaymah v'yikacheha lanu v'yashmi'enu otah v'na'asenah?"

V'lo me'ever layam hi leimor:
"Mi ya'avor lanu el ever hayam v'yikacheha lanu v'yashmi'enu otah v'na'asenah?"

Ki karov eilecha hadavar me'od, beficha uvilvavcha la'asoto.

It is not in the heavens, that you should say:
"Who will go up for us to the heavens and take it for us and let us hear it, that we may do it?"

And it is not beyond the sea, that you should say:
"Who will cross over for us beyond the sea and take it for us and let us hear it, that we may do it?"

But the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it.

Deuteronomy 30:12-14

Lo Vashamayim Hi

(It is not in the heavens)

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Moderate ♩ = 72 *It is not in the heavens,*

Voice

Lo va-sha - ma-yim hi, Lo va-sha - ma - yim hi,

Piano

Moderate ♩ = 72

p

with Ped.

5

Lo va-sha - ma - yim hi - lai - mor:

Quite fast, with energy ♩ = 138

that you should say:

Quite fast, with energy ♩ = 138

p *16th notes: sempre legato*

let blur with Ped.

9

simile—all upstemmed notes in these figures are brought out

12

p *"Who will go up for us to the heavens and take it for us*

Mi ya-a-leh la - nu ha-sha - may - mah v' - yi - ka - che - ha

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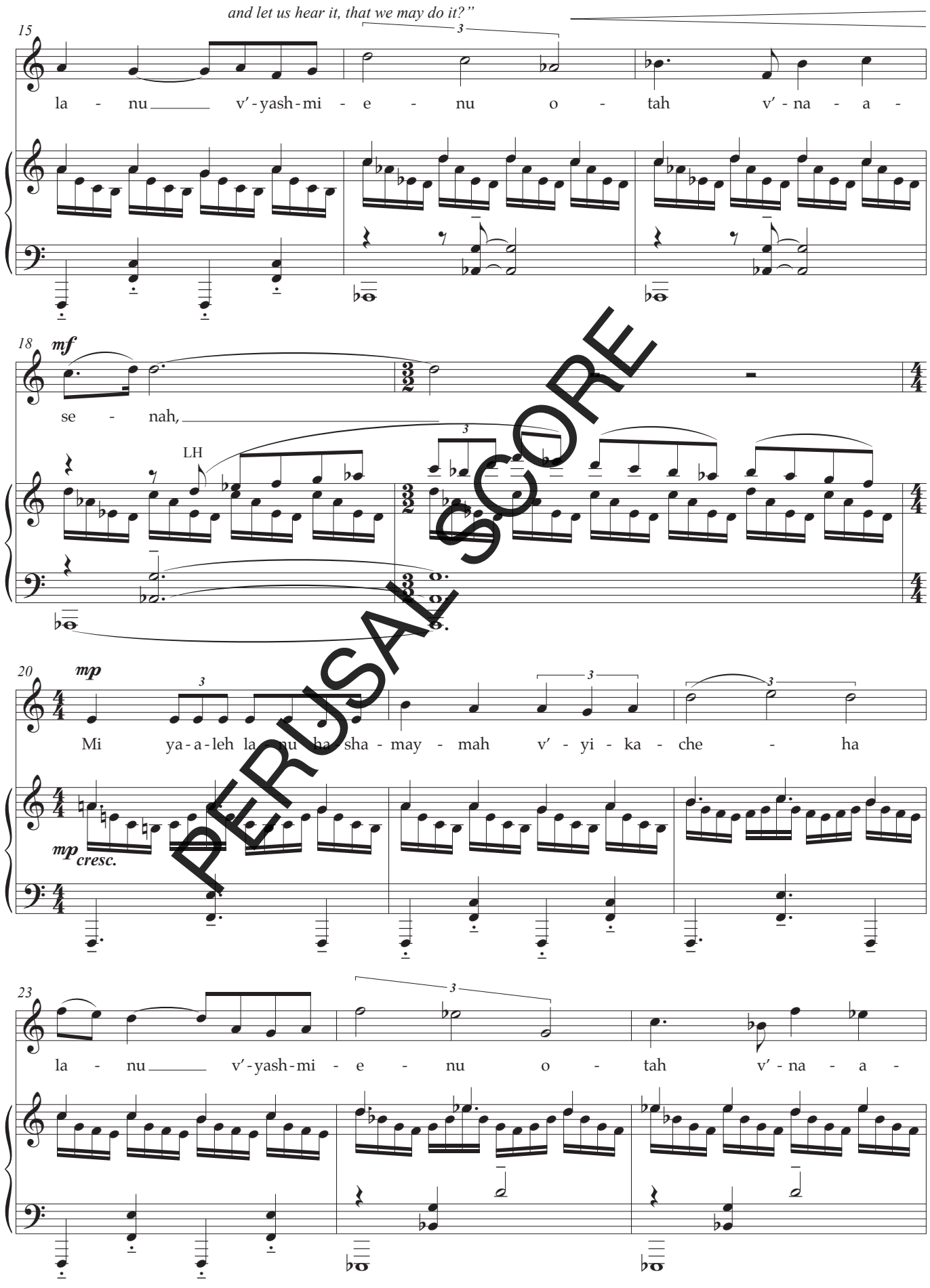

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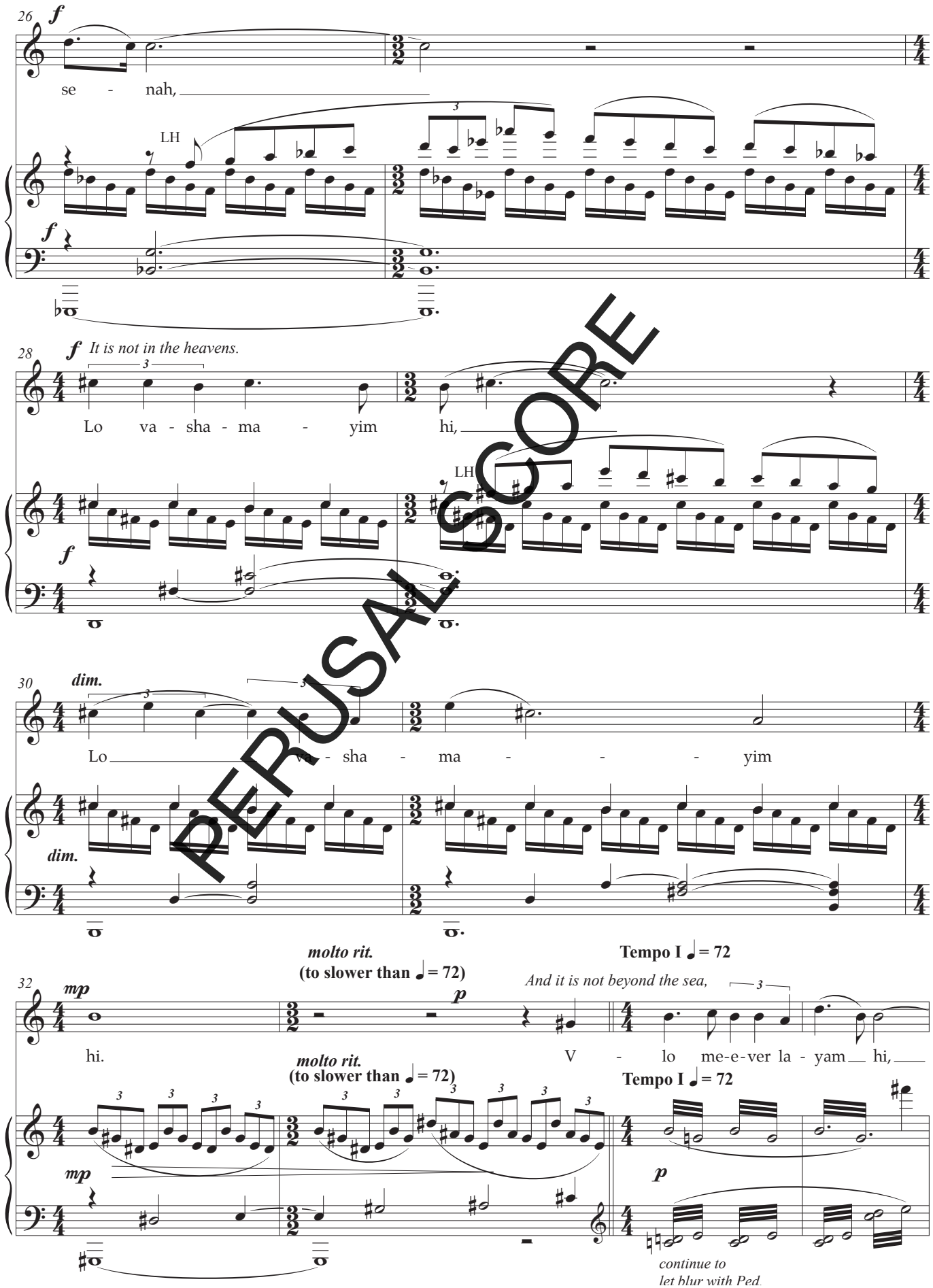

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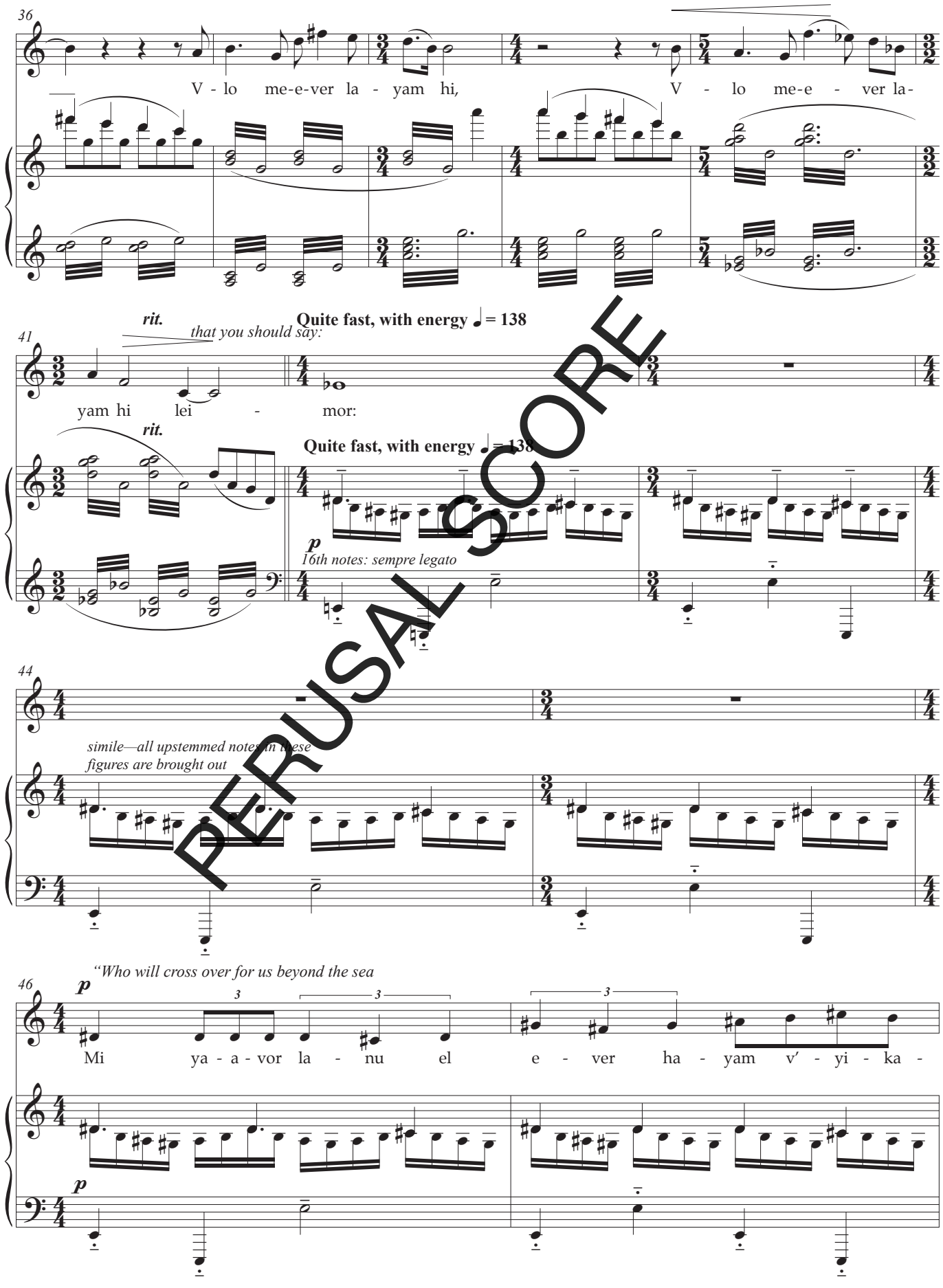

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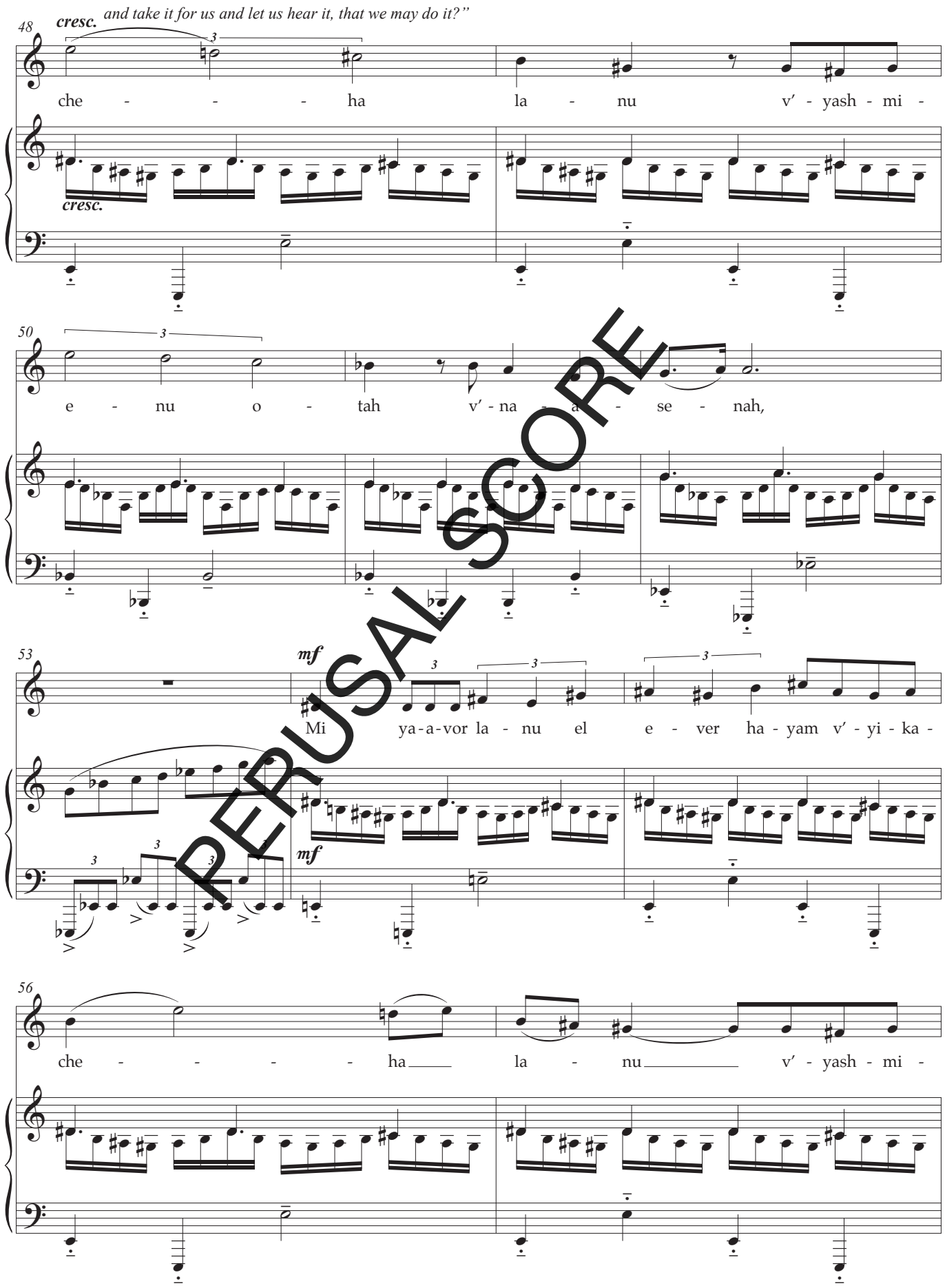

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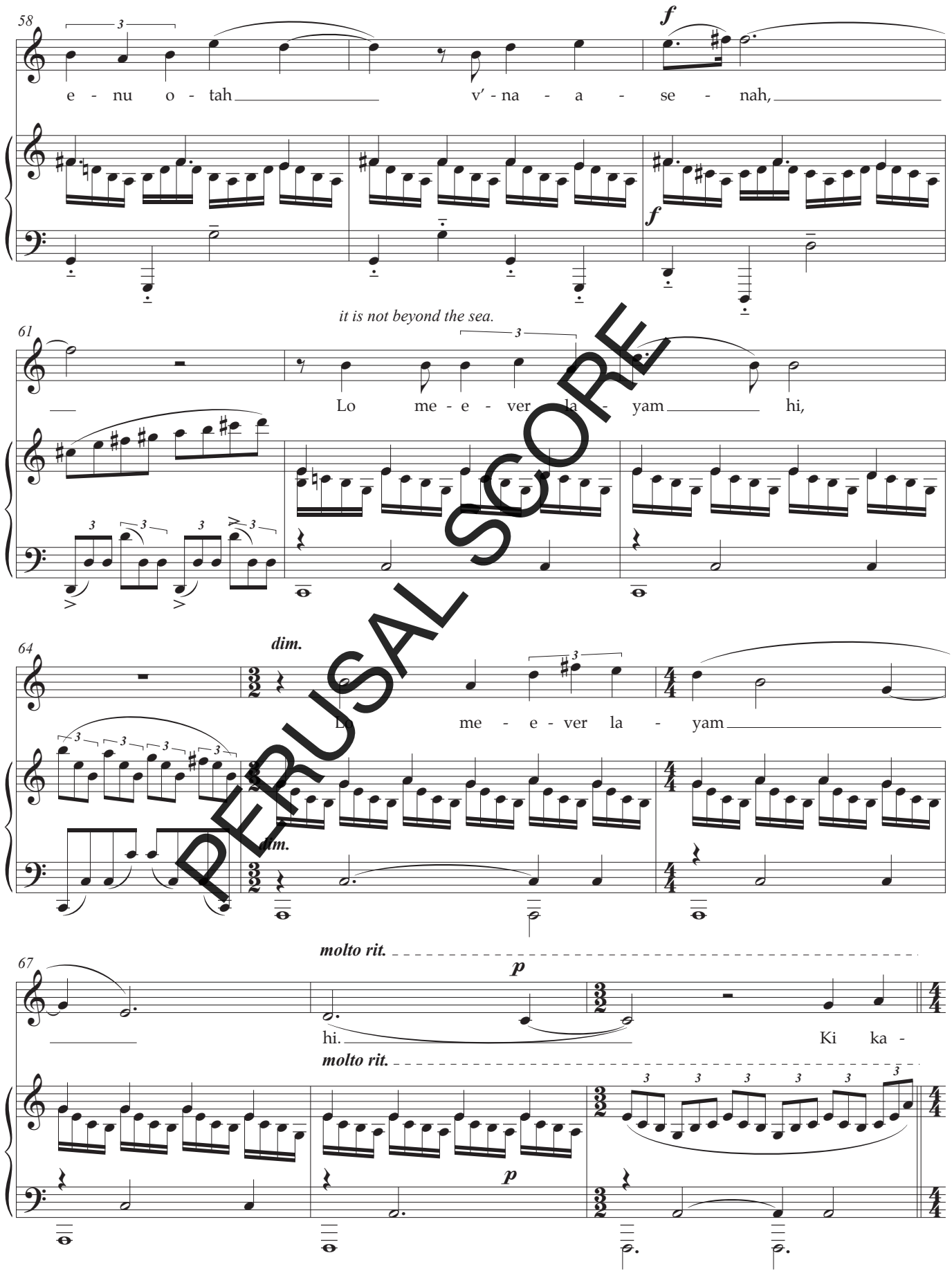

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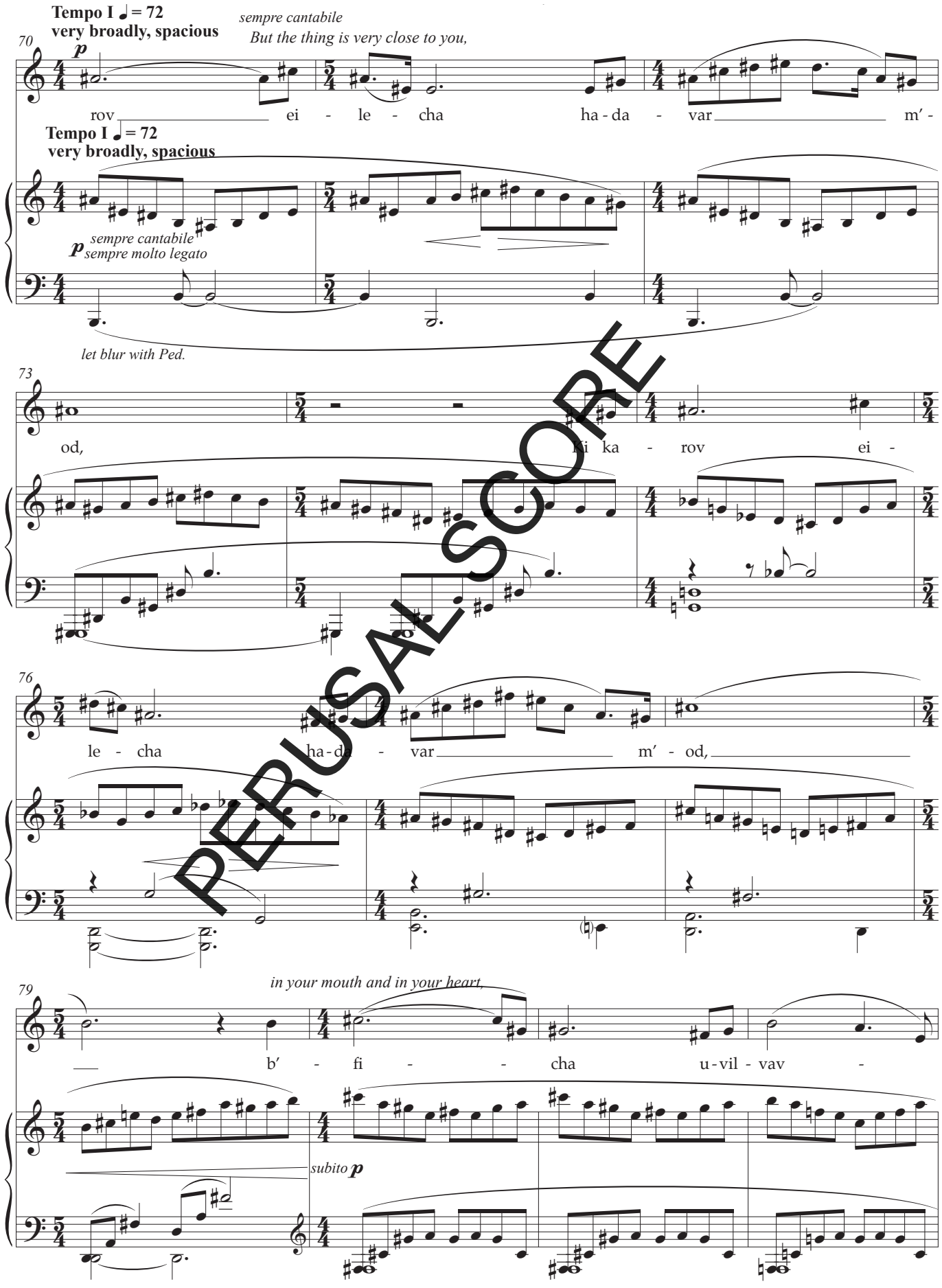

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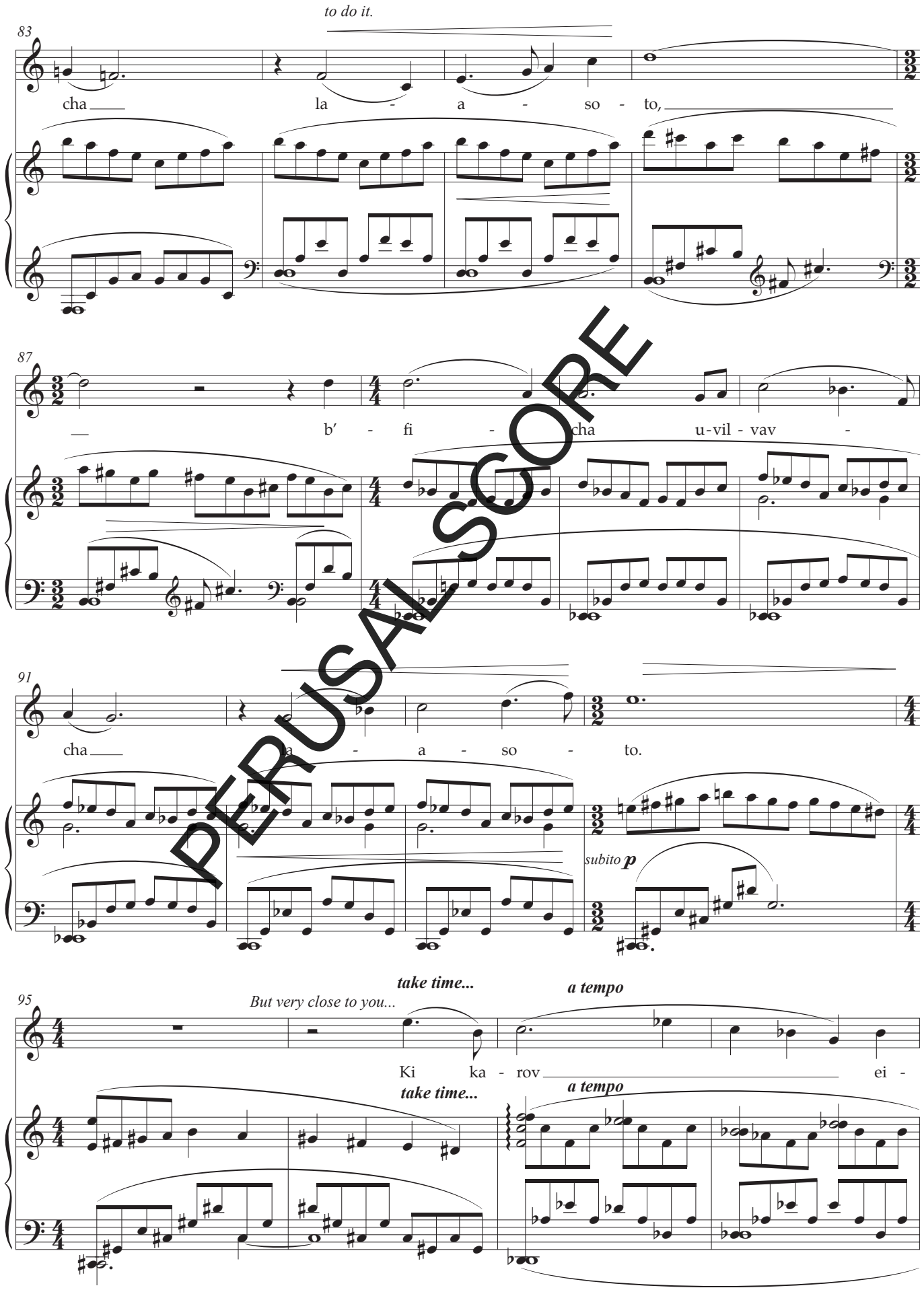

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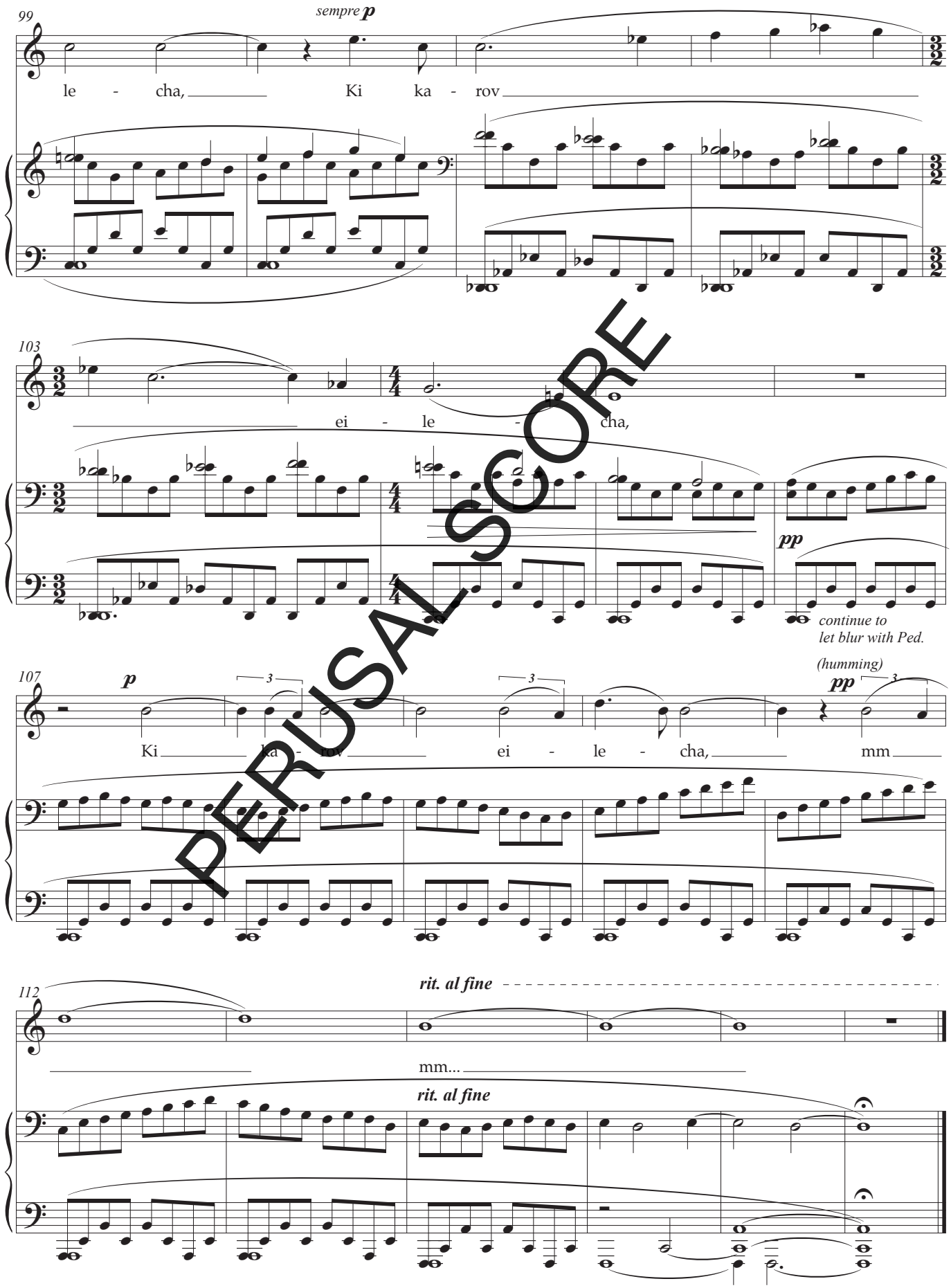

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