Catalog 20788-HB

3 - 6 octaves handbells
3 - 6 octaves handchimes

Level 3

A Highland Blessing

(A Highland Hymn)

Red deer stag and does above Loch Tulla - The Highlands of Scotland

Derek K. Hakes

From the Top Music
Albuquerque, NM
www.FromTheTopMusic.com

A Highland Blessing

Performance Notes

Story Behind the Composition

I have never been to Scotland, although it remains as one of my top-most bucket list items. Further, even though I was not born in Scotland, its roots run in my blood. As a sort of natural consequence I find myself inherently drawn to Celtic and Irish music. One of the most unique aspects of this type of music seems to be its almost otherworldly ability to embody any given emotion.

This piece was not written over a period of several days or weeks like many of my pieces. The original idea for this piece was born approximately a year prior to the final version being completed. While the original melody for the "A" section remained mostly unchanged into the new version, nevertheless it underwent some changes to make it sound more like a Scottish or Irish air. For example, the original "B" section was in a minor key with a malleted accompaniment. When I went to work on the new "B" section, I kept the minor key intact while removing the rhythmic, percussive underscoring. However, neither of the two original "B" sections seemed to work, since they didn't fit the character of the piece. The new "B" section is structured so that it more closely sounds like and resembles a hymn, perhaps what one might hear sung in a Highlands church. Further, the whole piece is composed so that each section contains brief echoes of Scottish tunes, with remnants of the "B" section heard during the final measures of the piece.

After the working draft was completed, I began looking for poetry that was reflective of the Highlands. One such poem/song, *My Heart's in the Highlands* (Robert Burns, 1789), provides particularly meaningful and moving sensory images of the region. Its words/lyrics, beloved by Scots both young and old, are included below:

My Heart's in the Highlands (1789)

My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here,
My heart's in the Highlands, a-chasing the deer;
Chasing the wild-deer, and following the roe,
My heart's in the Highlands, wherever I go.

Farewell to the Highlands, farewell to the North,
The birth-place of Valour, the country of Worth ;
Wherever I wander, wherever I rove,
The hills of the Highlands for ever I love.

Farewell to the mountains, high-cover'd with snow,
Farewell to the straths and green vallies below;
Farewell to the forests and wild-hanging woods,
Farewell to the torrents and loud-pouring floods.

My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here,
My heart's in the Highlands, a-chasing the deer;
Chasing the wild-deer, and following the roe,
My heart's in the Highlands, wherever I go.

You can imagine my surprise when I discovered this poem is associated with an event that left a permanent scar on the soul of the Highlands: the *Highland Clearances*, a period in Scottish history affecting both the direction and appearance of the landscape for several decades. In total, approximately 15,000 people were displaced – sometimes through violent means – and many would never return.

Performance Suggestions

Musical Comments

Although the piece was written with a flute in mind, any treble C-instrument can be used. Optionally, any instrument that can play with a more Celtic flavor is preferred, but not required.

Measure 64 is an example of a serendipitous moment in composing. On the "and" of beat four, during the engraving process, I meant to change the E-natural back to the E-flat, but I forgot to do so. After I played this section back, I realized my "mistake." I changed it back to E-flat, but it didn't have the same flavor. As a result, although I prefer the E-natural to be played, I leave the choice up to the performing group.

Final Remarks

I encourage you to research more information about the *Highland Clearances*, especially some of the firsthand written accounts.

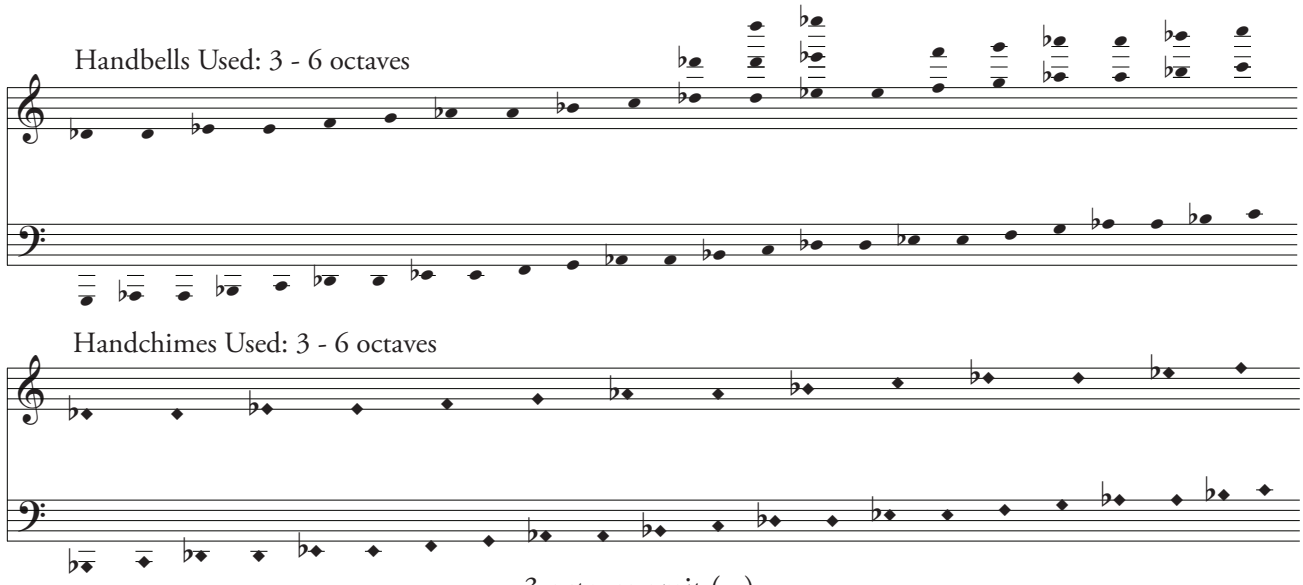
Included at the end of the score is the vocal rendition of the melody I wrote to Robert Burns' lyrics/poem in addition to a C-instrument score of this same melody (NOTE: both scores are in different keys so the vocal is meant to be sung acapella, if used). You may wish to have the C-instrument play this melody before the piece begins, especially from a hidden location.

Finally, I leave you with this Scottish blessing:

May your past be a pleasant memory,
Your future filled with delight and mystery,
Your now a glorious moment,
That fills your life with deep contentment.

Beannachd Dia dhuit (blessings of God be with you),

Derek K. Hakes
Indianapolis, IN



3 octaves omit ( )
4 octaves omit [ ]
3 and 4 octaves omit < >
5 octaves omit { }
G3 not used by 4-octave groups

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Alt title: ***A Highland Hymn***

optional flute or C-instrument

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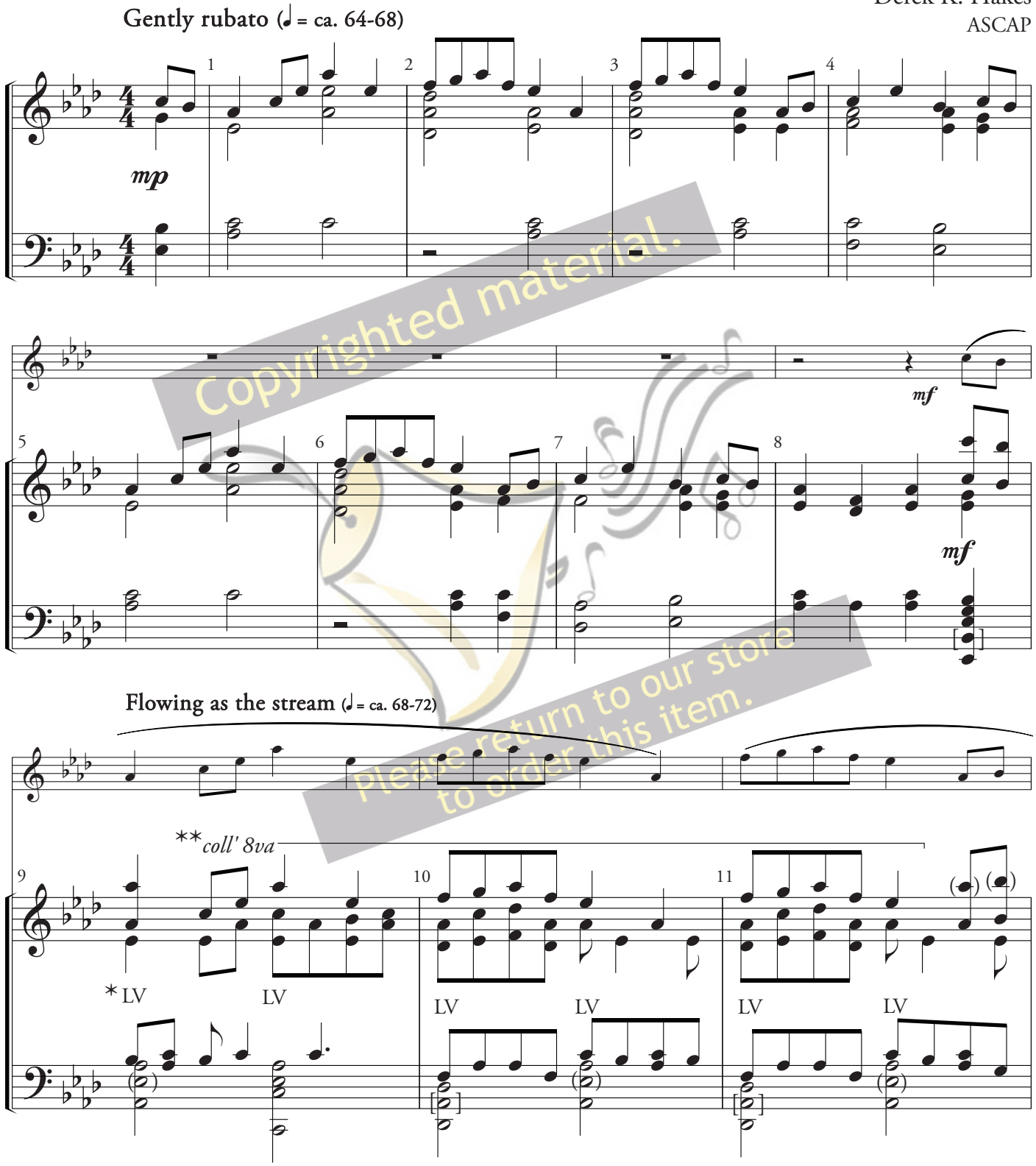
ASCAP



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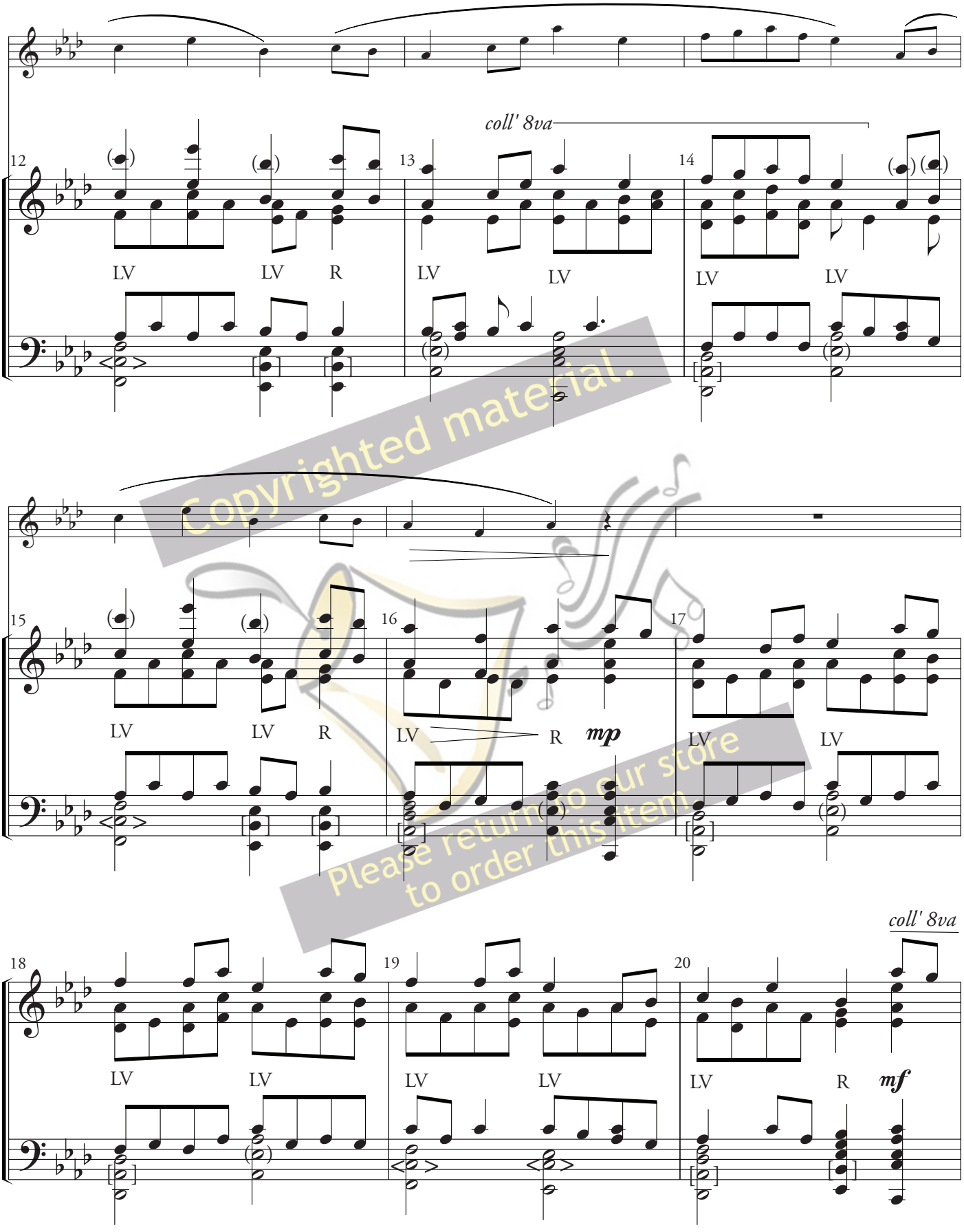
* LV and R centered between staves applies to stems-down treble and stems-up bass notes

** *coll' 8va*: double top note, 5 & 6 octaves



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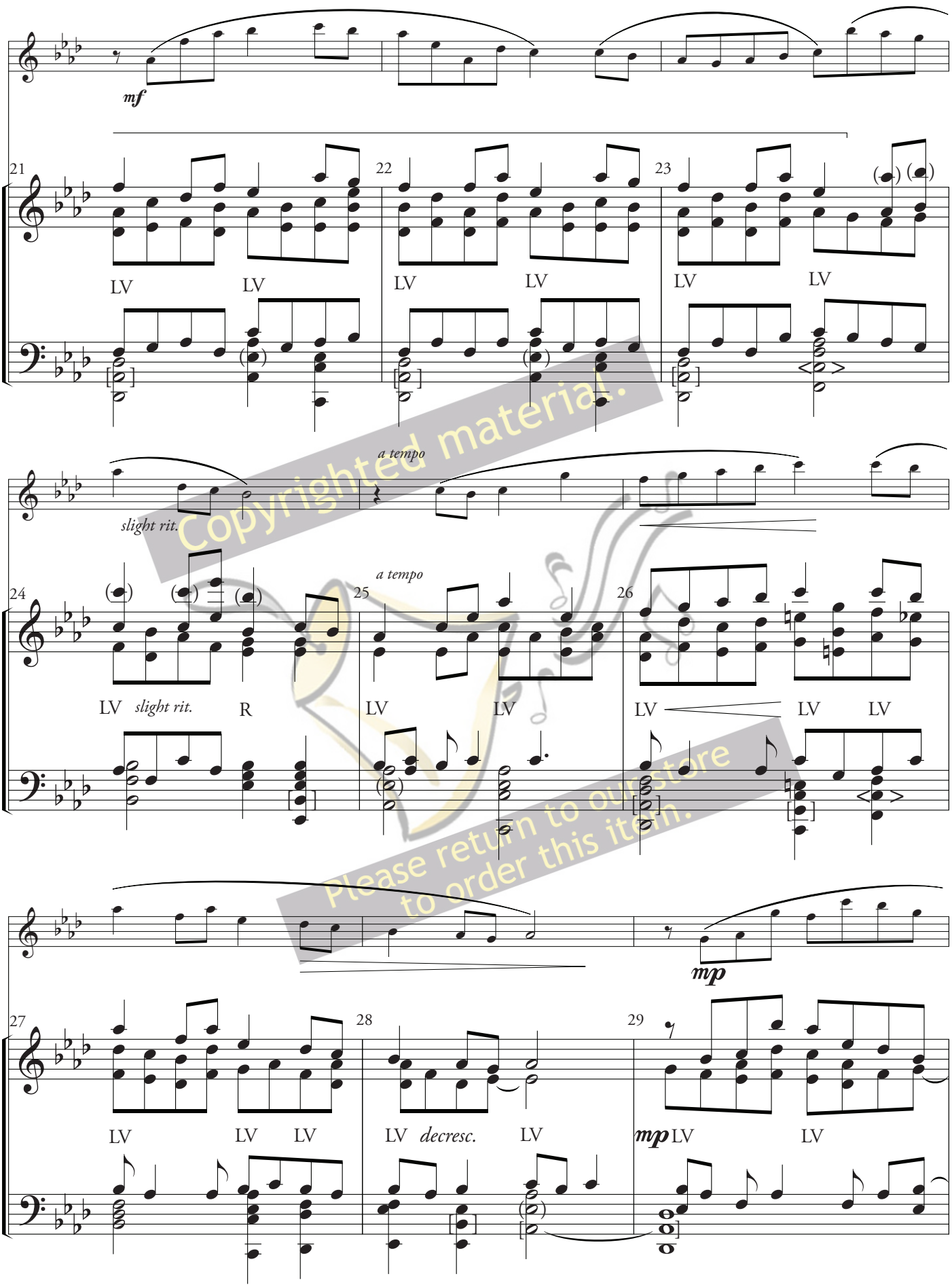

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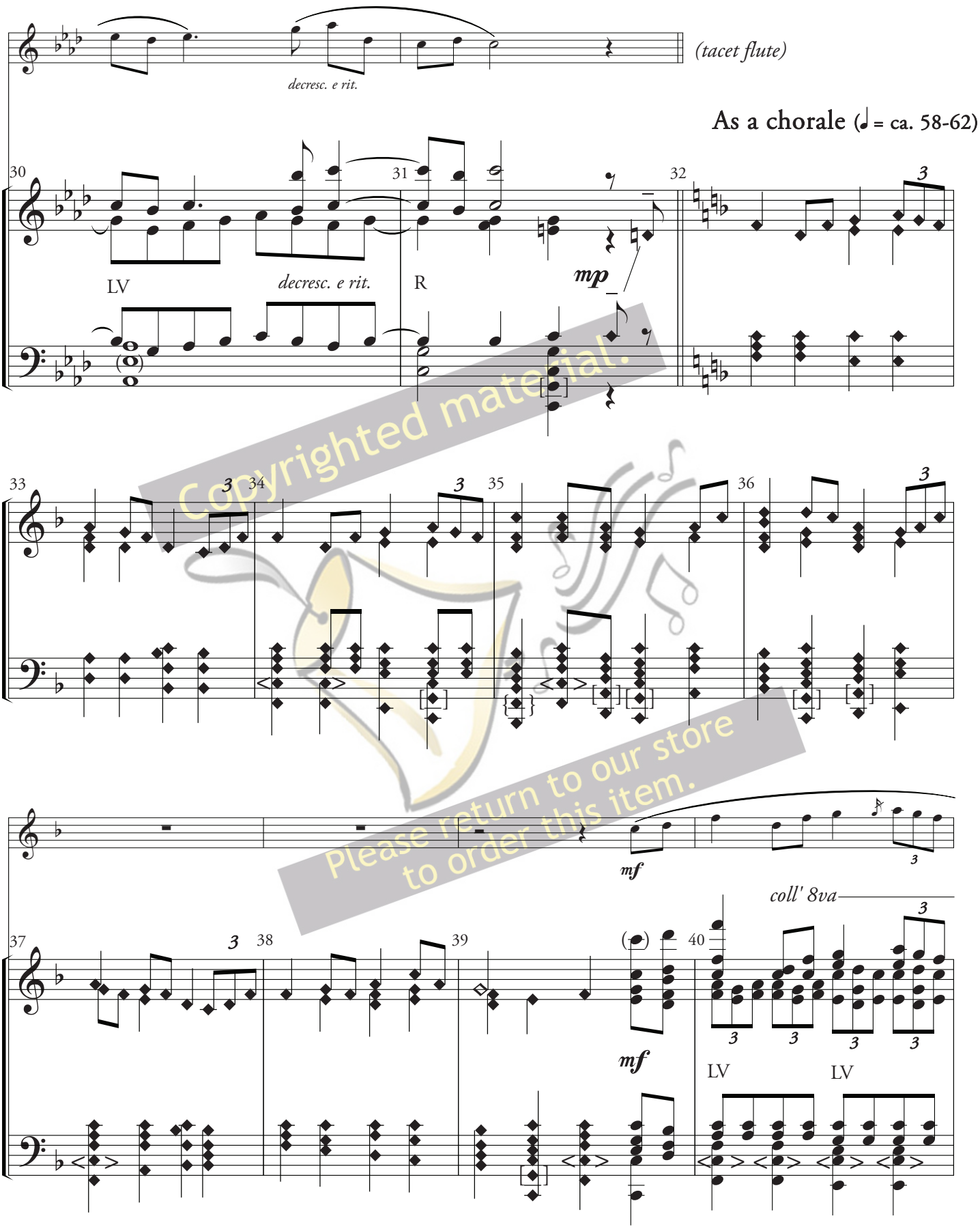

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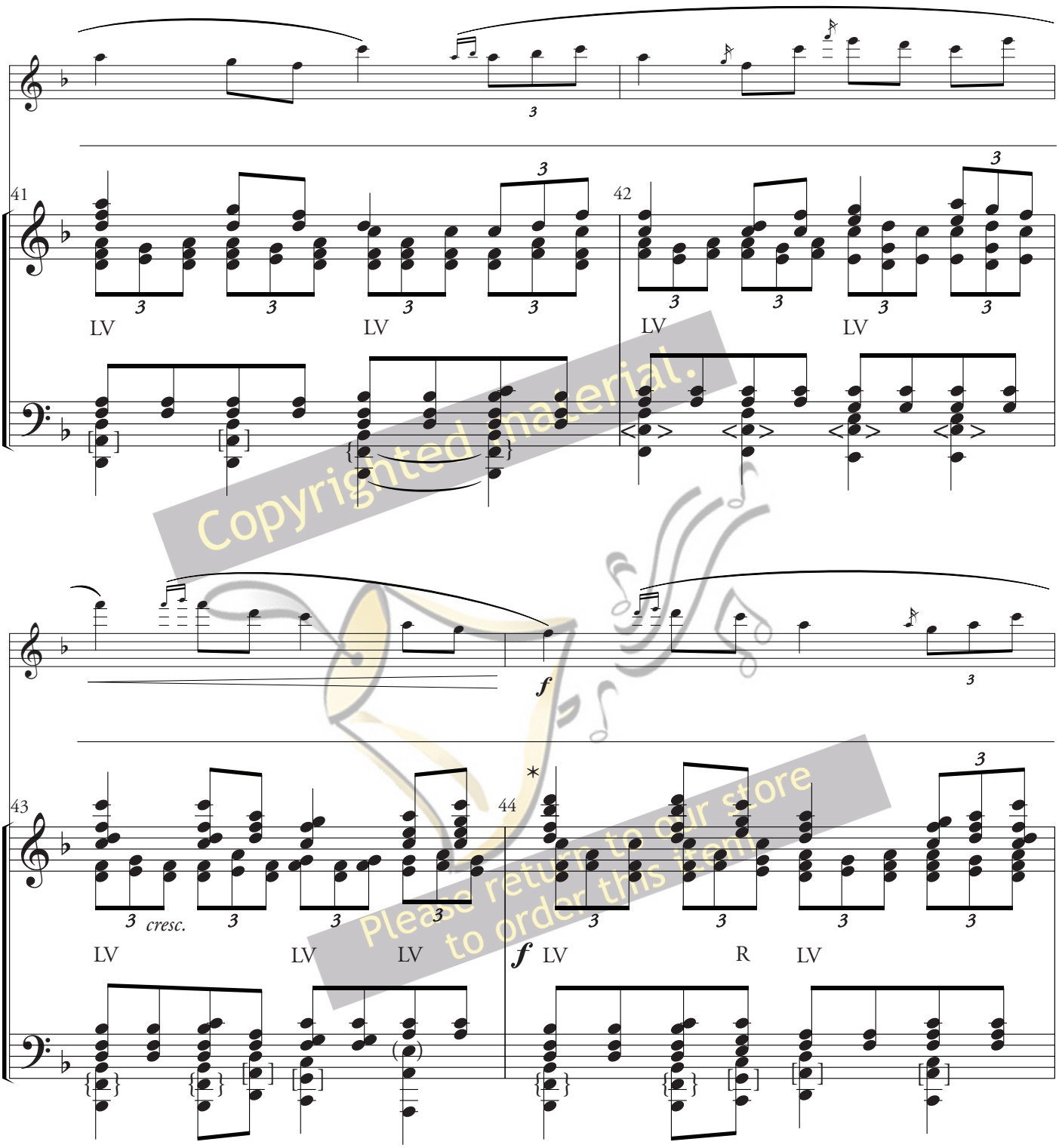

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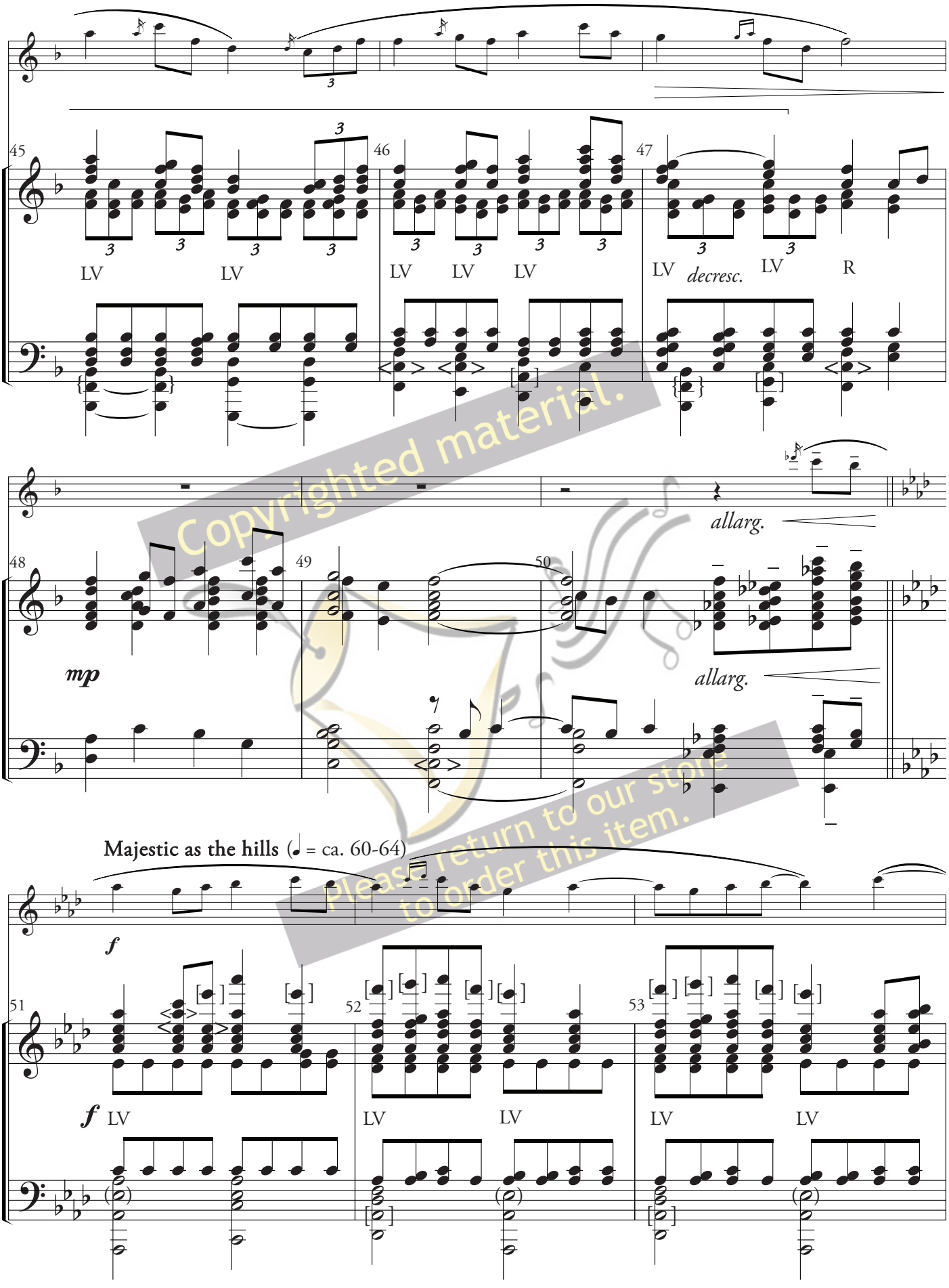
∗ 3 octave ensembles play the Bb6
4 octave ensembles play *both* the Bb6 and D7
5 octave ensembles play the Bb6 and Bb7
6 octave ensembles play *both* the Bb6 and Bb7 with the D7 and D8



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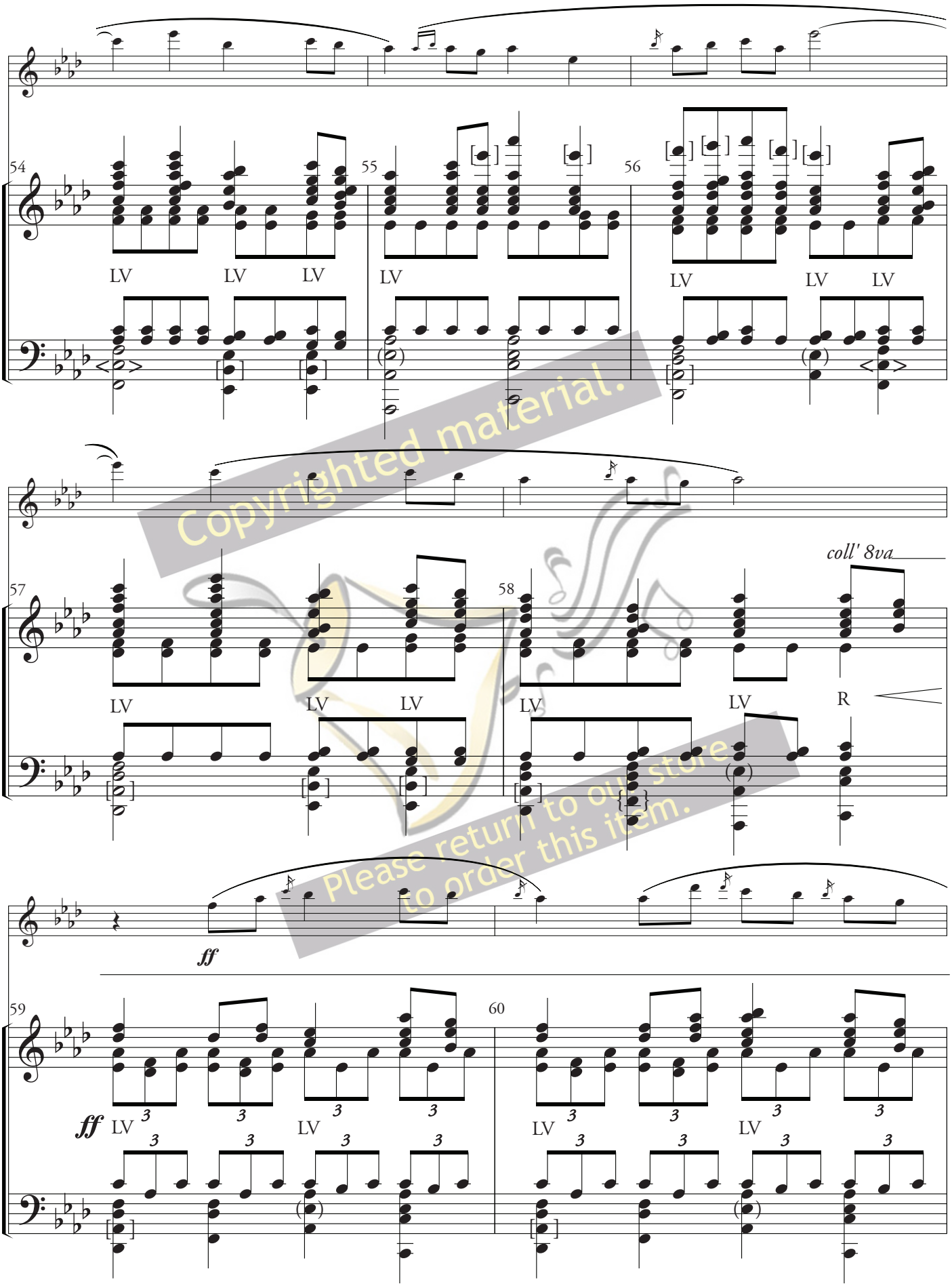

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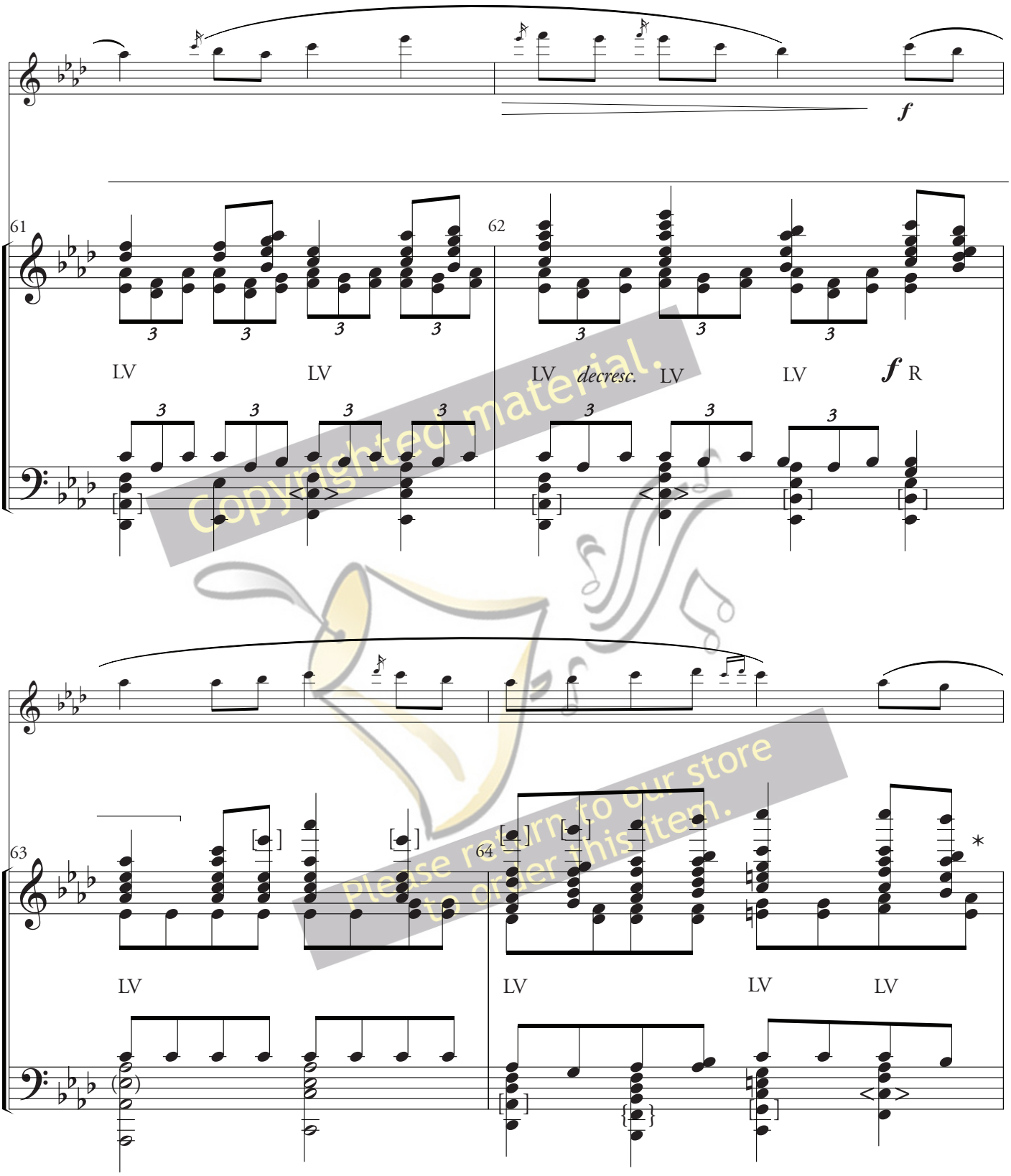

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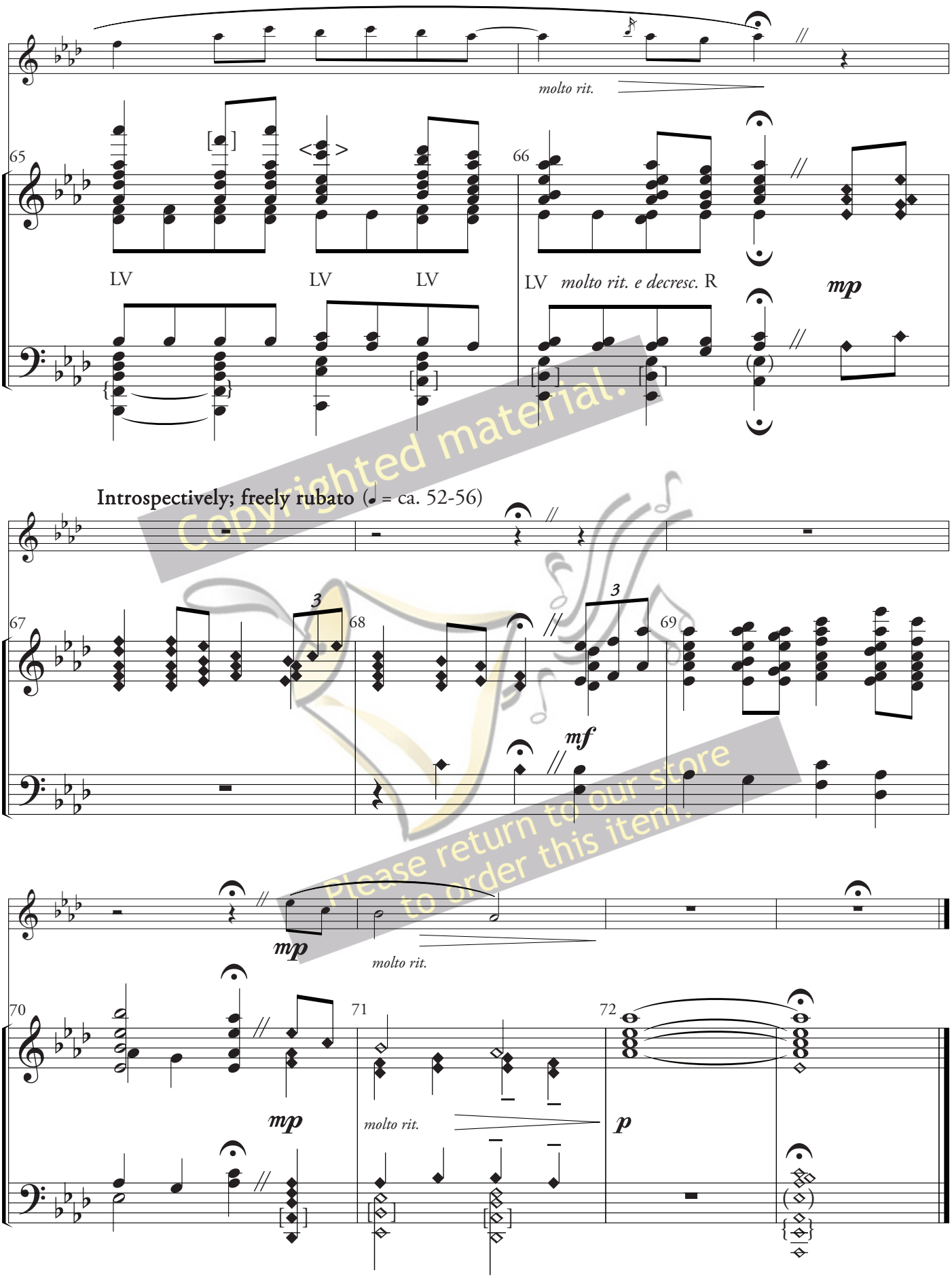
*See Performance Notes re m.64



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