Love 1916

for upper voices (SSA) and harp, with soprano solo

by

F L Dunkin Wedd

Poem by May Wedderburn Cannan

with fragments from fallen poets
Gerrit Engelke, Charles Péguy and František Gellner

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Love, 1916

May Wedderburn Cannan, the author of the poem *Love, 1916* recalled in her autobiography the phrase that was current in France when she served there: soldiers said they had come out with Brooke, and gone home with Sassoon.

Many of the early volunteers had seen the conflict as a Christian crusade, so as Brookeian patriotism gave way to the bitterness of Owen, Sassoon and Rosenberg, the connection of the war with Easter was not long in coming and religious imagery was soon turned around - perhaps most overtly by Kipling in his poem *Gethsemane.* The name Passchendaele seemed more than coincidence.

Owen's poetry too is imbued with Christian imagery: 'What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?'. In a letter home he wrote, 'One of Christ's essential commands was, Passivity at any price! Suffer dishonour and disgrace, but never resort to arms. Be bullied, be outraged, be killed; but do not kill…' This is a thought that deserves to be better remembered.

I have set British WWI poetry several times before, and had long thought of a work to include poetry from other combatant countries; it was not until I read again *Love, 1916* that I saw how it could be done.

May Wedderburn Cannan herself moved in literary circles, and was engaged to Bevil, son of Sir Arthur, Quiller-Couch: having survived the war, Bevil died of influenza in 1919. In France, May was unable to accept that all the agony and death were wasted: she could not 'go home with Sassoon'. But her poem suggests that she was fully aware of the terrible price being paid.

F L Dunkin Wedd
Tonbridge, 2006

Sources:

Scars Upon My Heart: Women's Poetry and Verse of the First World War - ed Catherine Reilly, Virago 1981
1914-18 in Poetry – ed E L Black, Hodder & Stoughton, 1970.
The Lost Voices of World War I: an Anthology of Writers Poets & Playwrights – ed Tim Cross, Bloomsbury, 1988
The Tears of War – ed Charlotte Fyfe, Cavalier 2000

Love, 1916

One said to me, 'Seek Love, for he is Joy
Called by another name'.
A Second said, 'Seek Love, for he is Power
Which is called Fame'.
Last said a Third, 'Seek Love, his name is Peace'.
I called him thrice,
And answer came, 'Love now
Is christened Sacrifice'.

- May Wedderburn Cannan, 1896-1973, served in the VAD in WWI

From **An die Soldaten des Grosses Krieges**

Genug der blutbadenden Feindschaft und Mordehre
Enough of this hateful bloodbath and sanctified murder

- Gerrit Engelke, born Hanover 1890, died from wounds 12 October 1918

From **Heureux Ceux**

Heureux les épis mûrs et les blés moissonés
Blessed are the ripe wheat and the harvested corn

- Charles Péguy, born Orléans 1873, died in action 5 September 1914

From **Radosti Života**

Života čiši jsem naklonil ke rtu
Piju z ní smutek a bolest a zmar. *

The goblet of life I tilt to my lips
And I drink from it sadness, pain and failure.

- František Gellner, born Prague 1881, declared missing 13 September 1914
Thanks to Mischa Kelly for translation and advice on pronunciation

** Czech pronunciation:*
Zheevo'ta chee'shi yuh'sem naklon'yil kuhrr'tu
Pee'yoo zuh nyee smoo'tek a bolest a zuhmarr

Zh like French j.
Distinguish between long ee and short clipped i.
All r sounds are Scottish – ie rolled.

Love, 1916

Words by May Wedderburn Cannan et al

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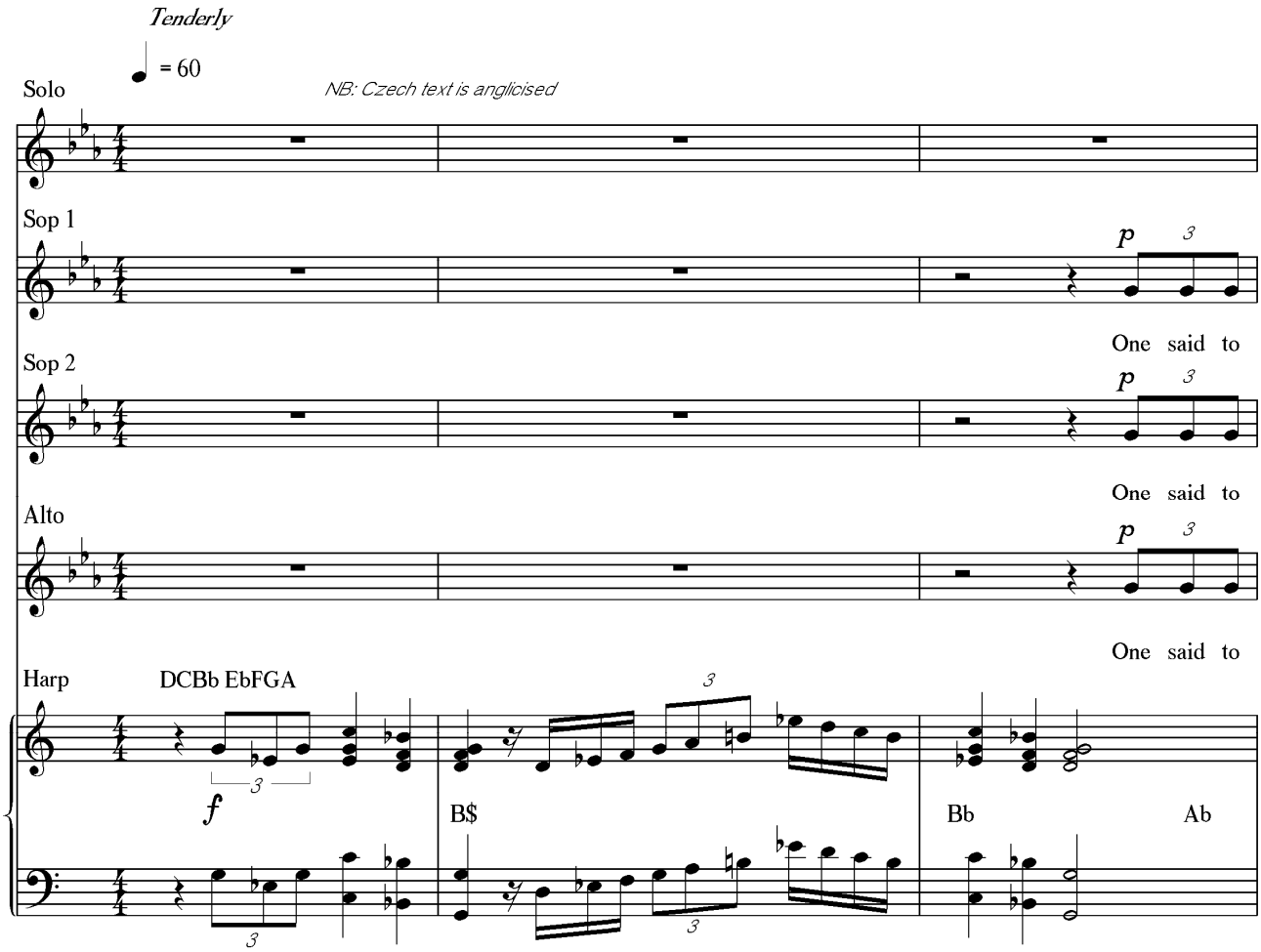

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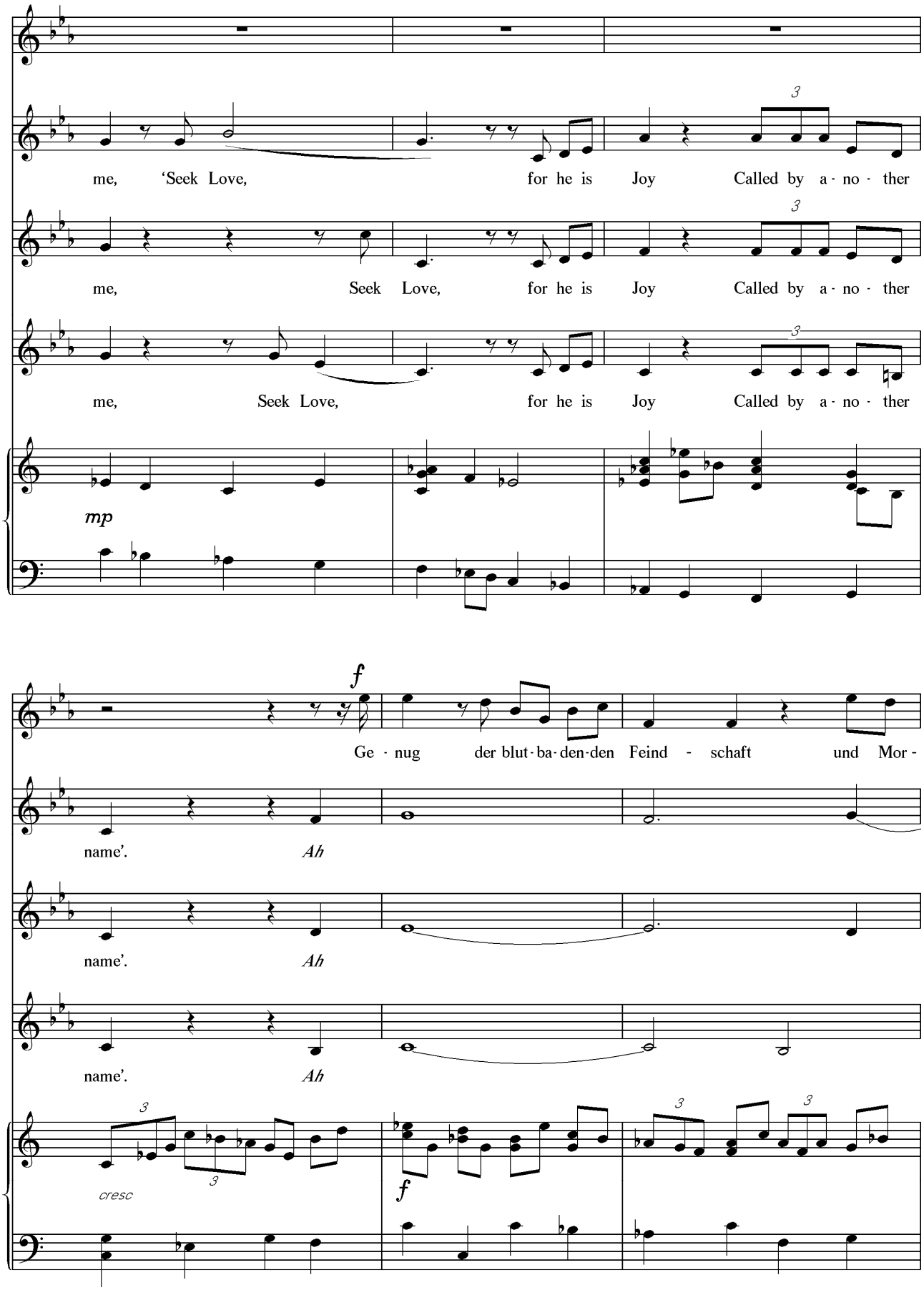

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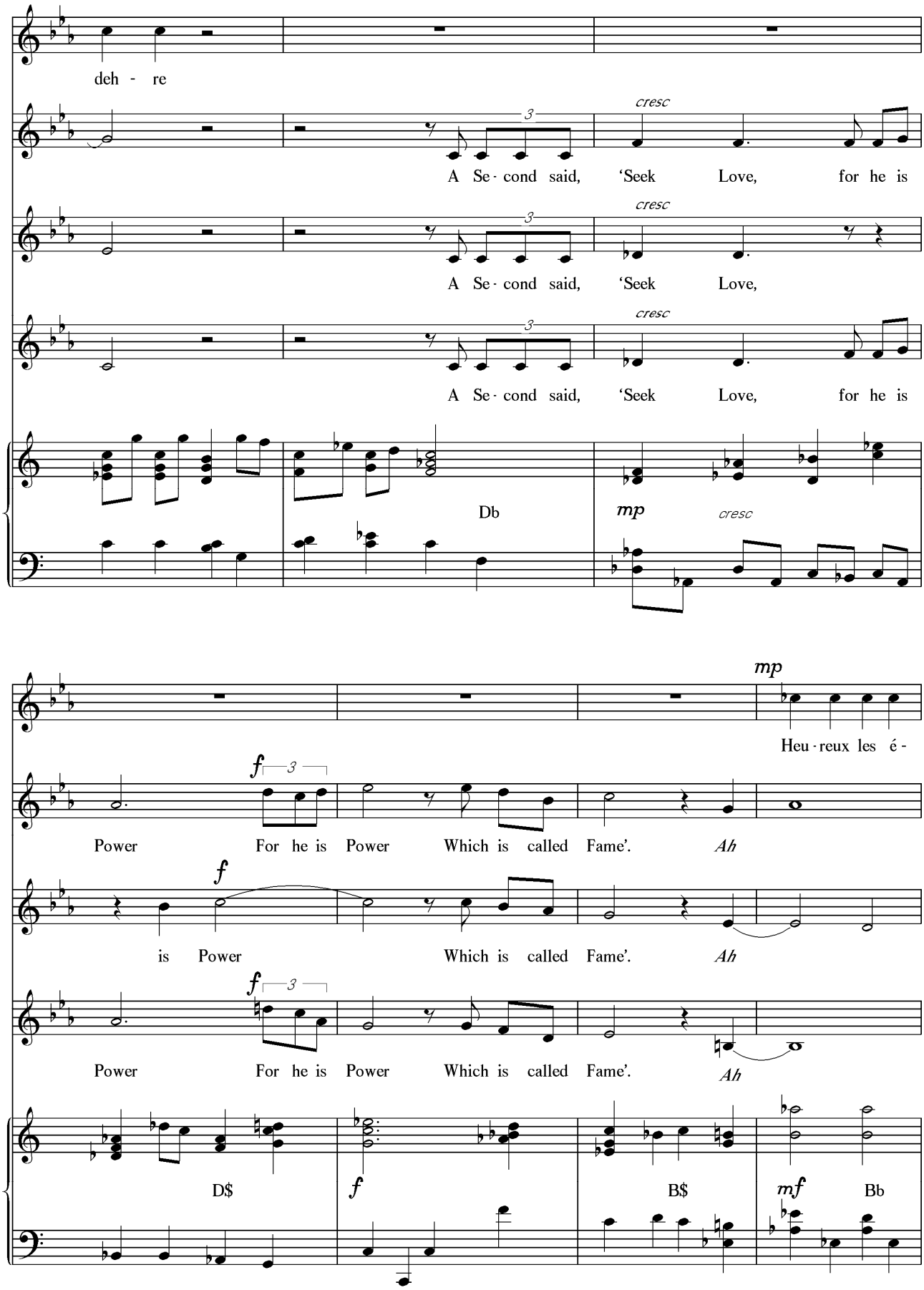

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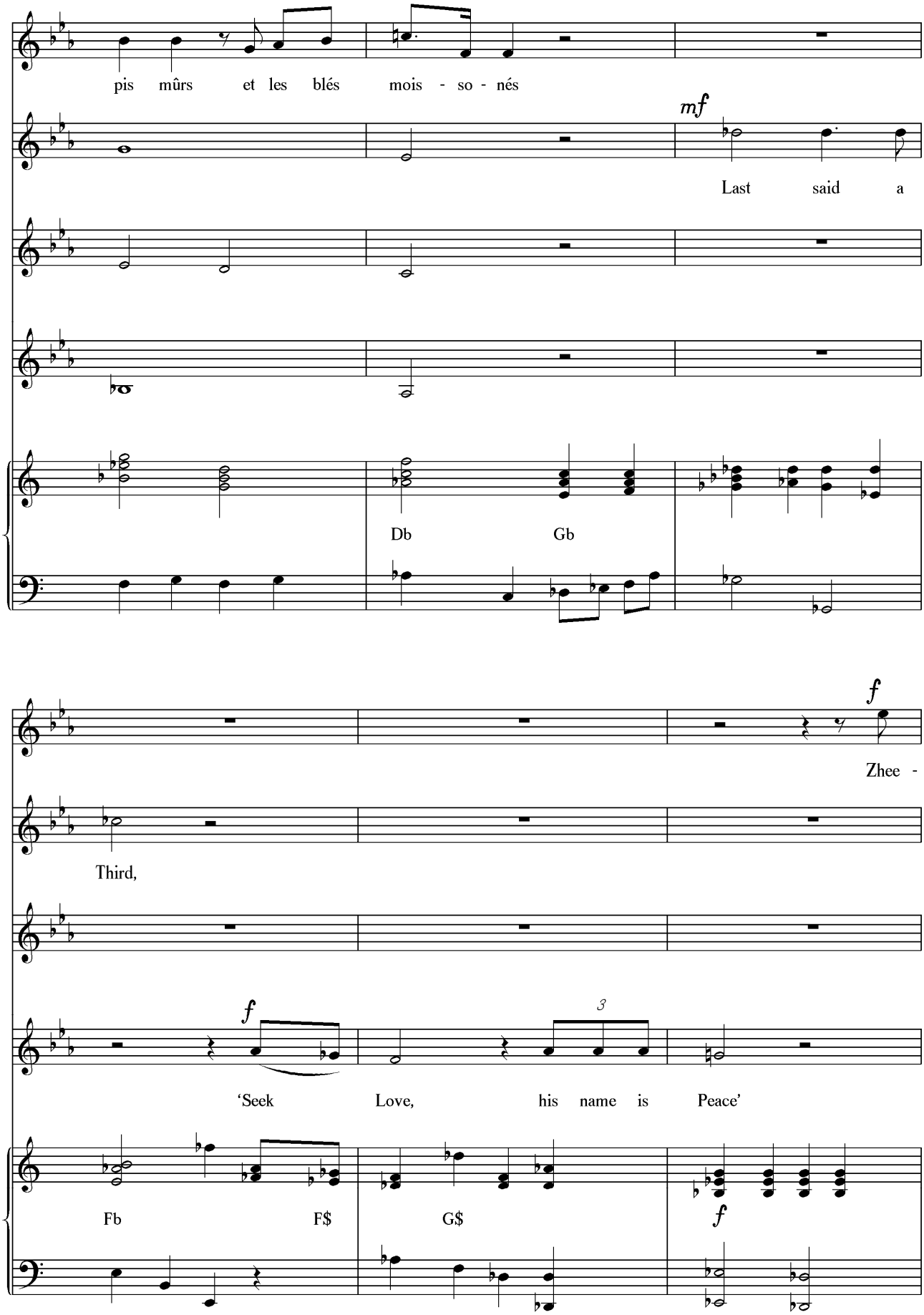

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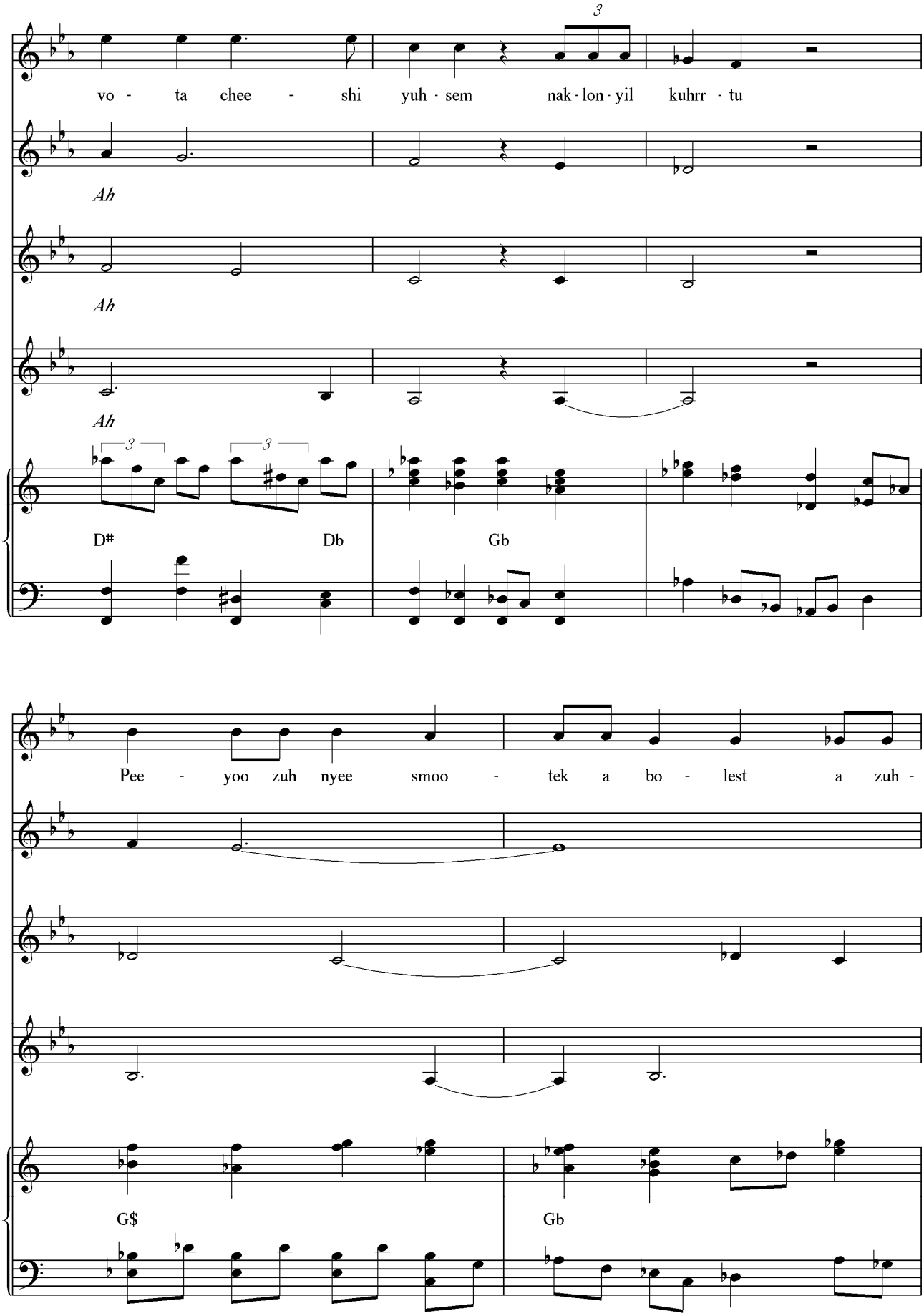

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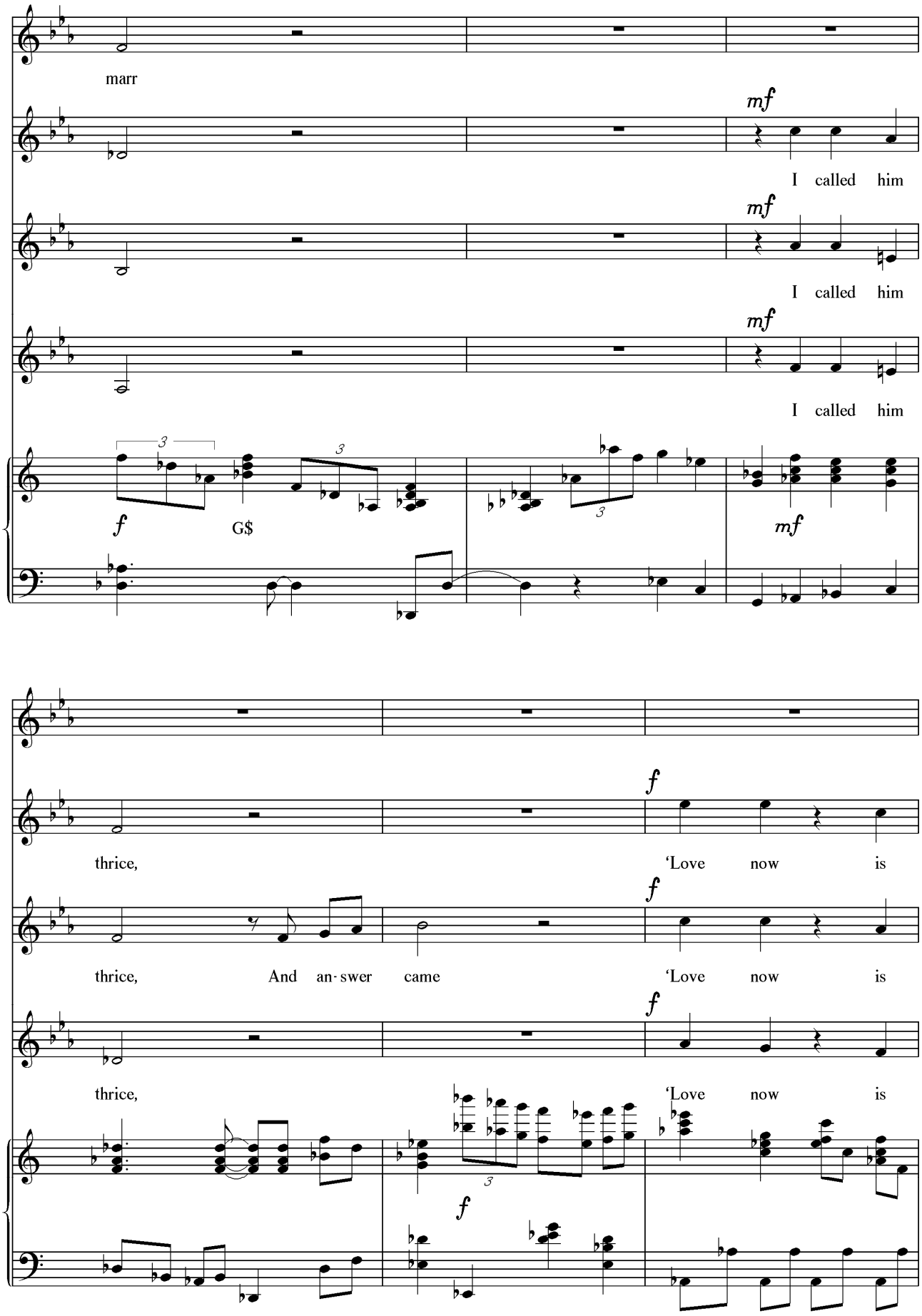

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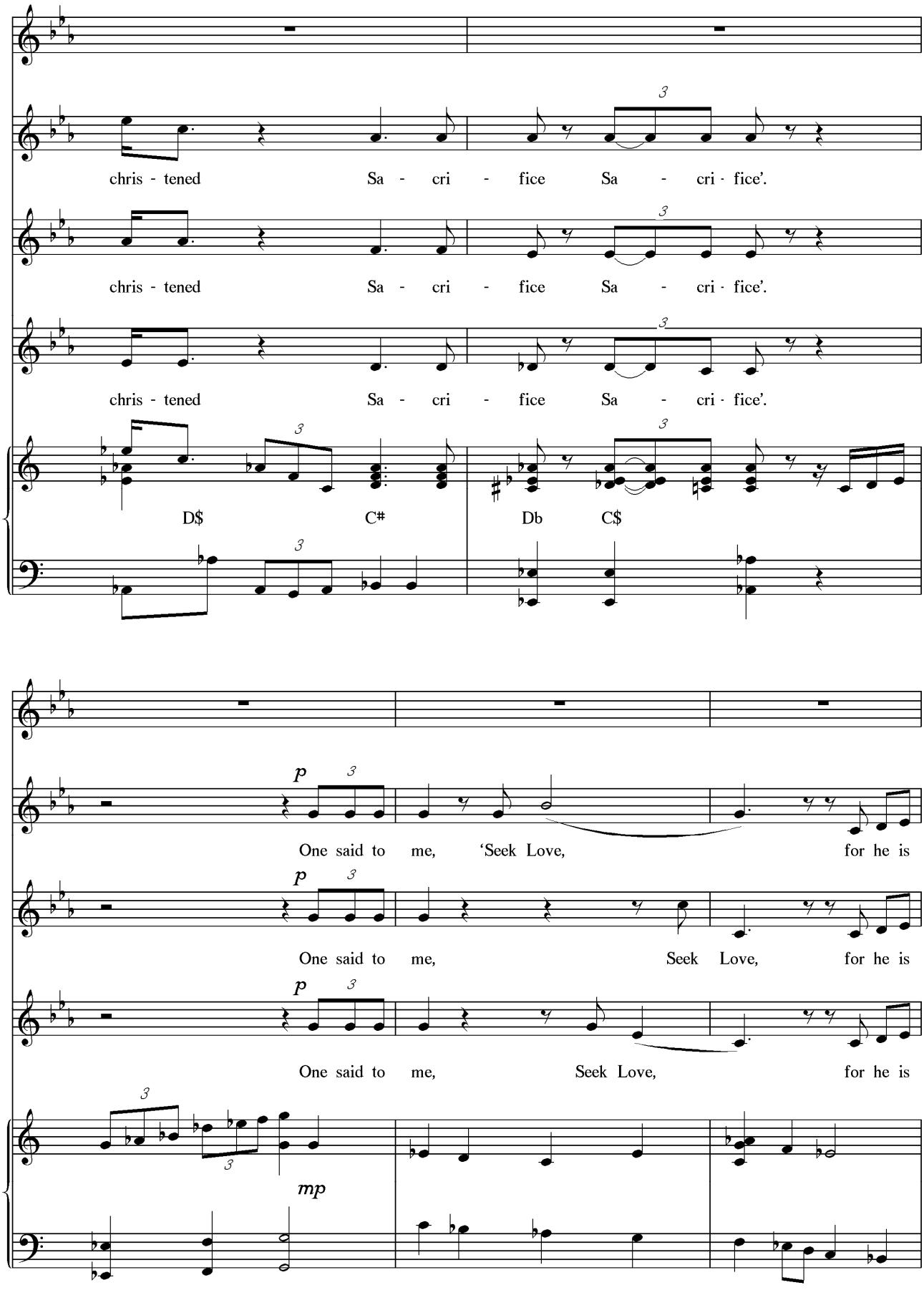

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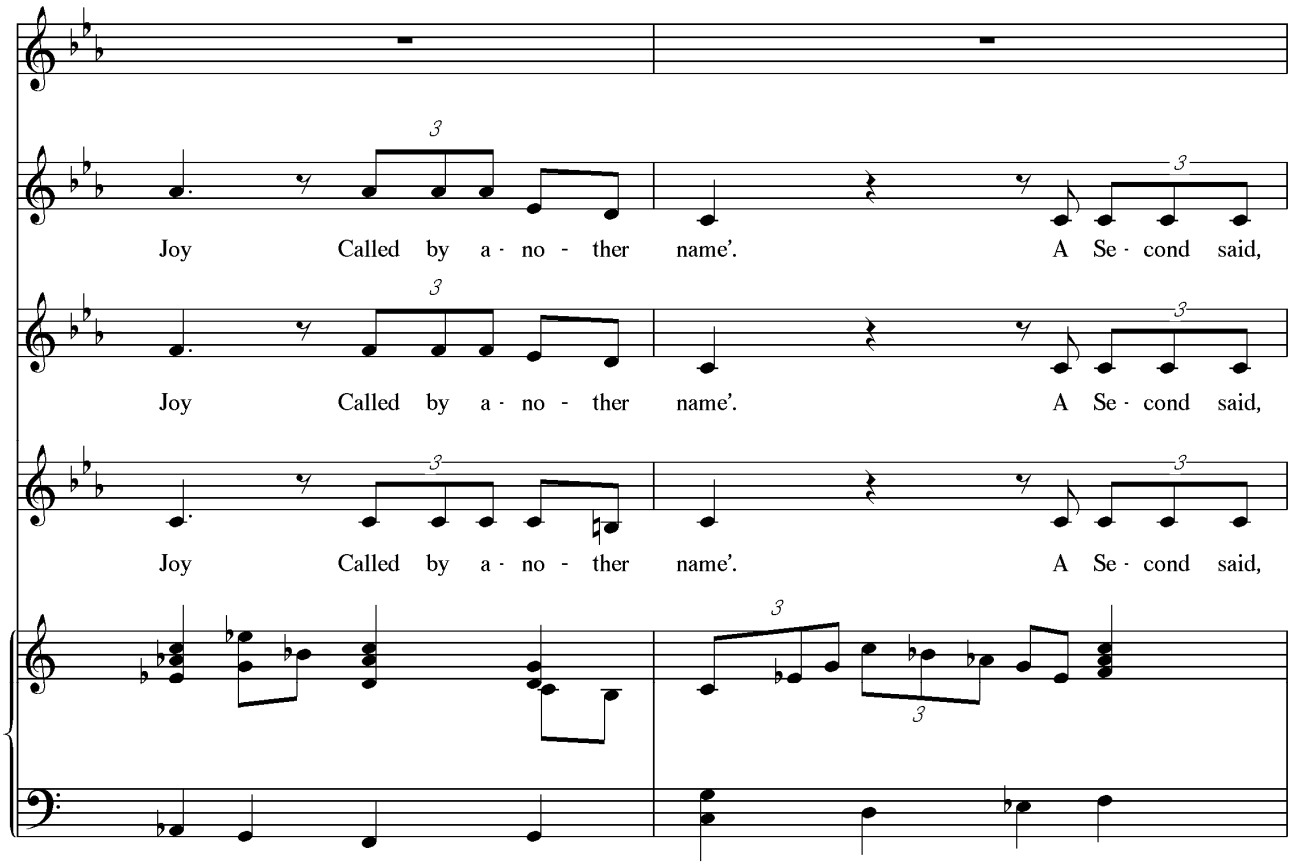

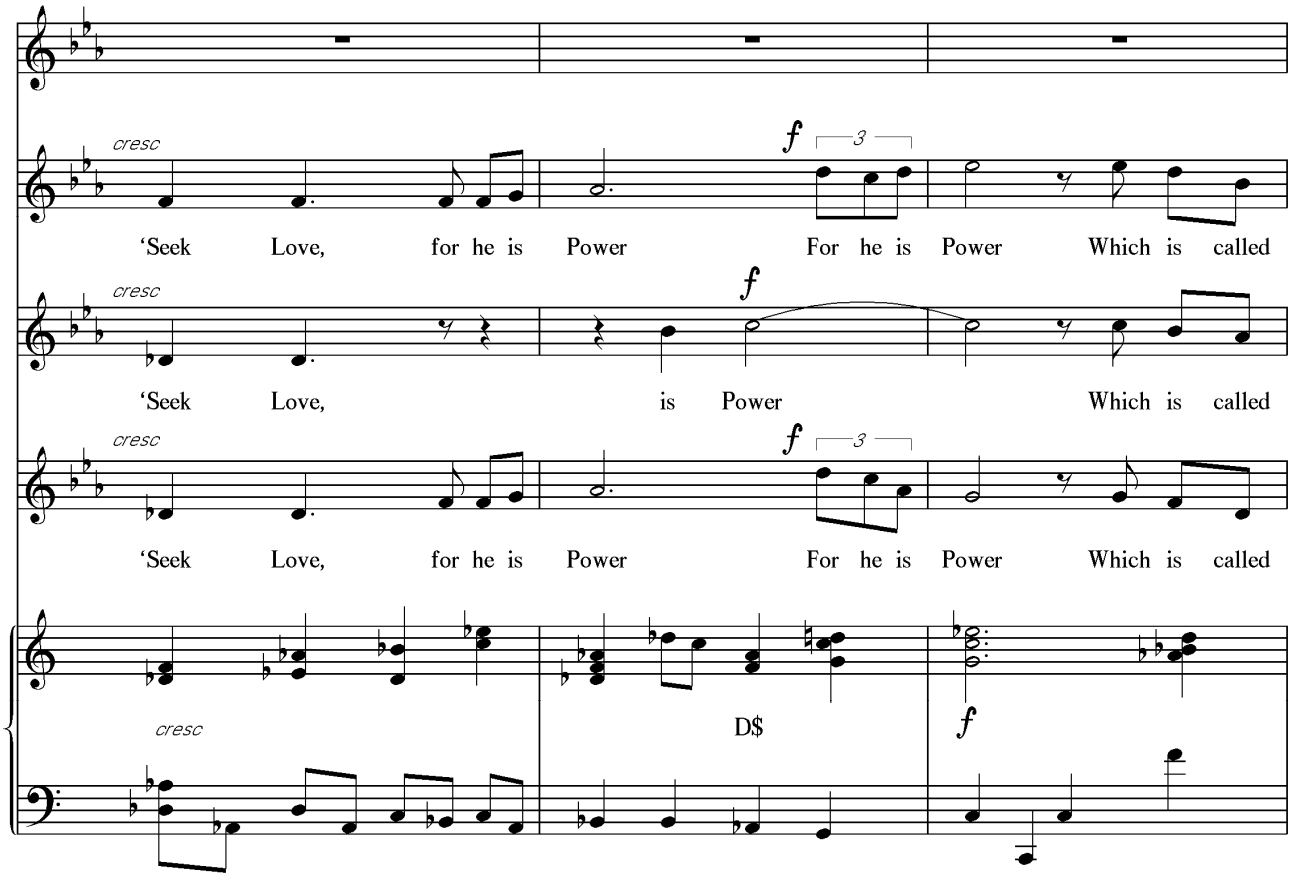

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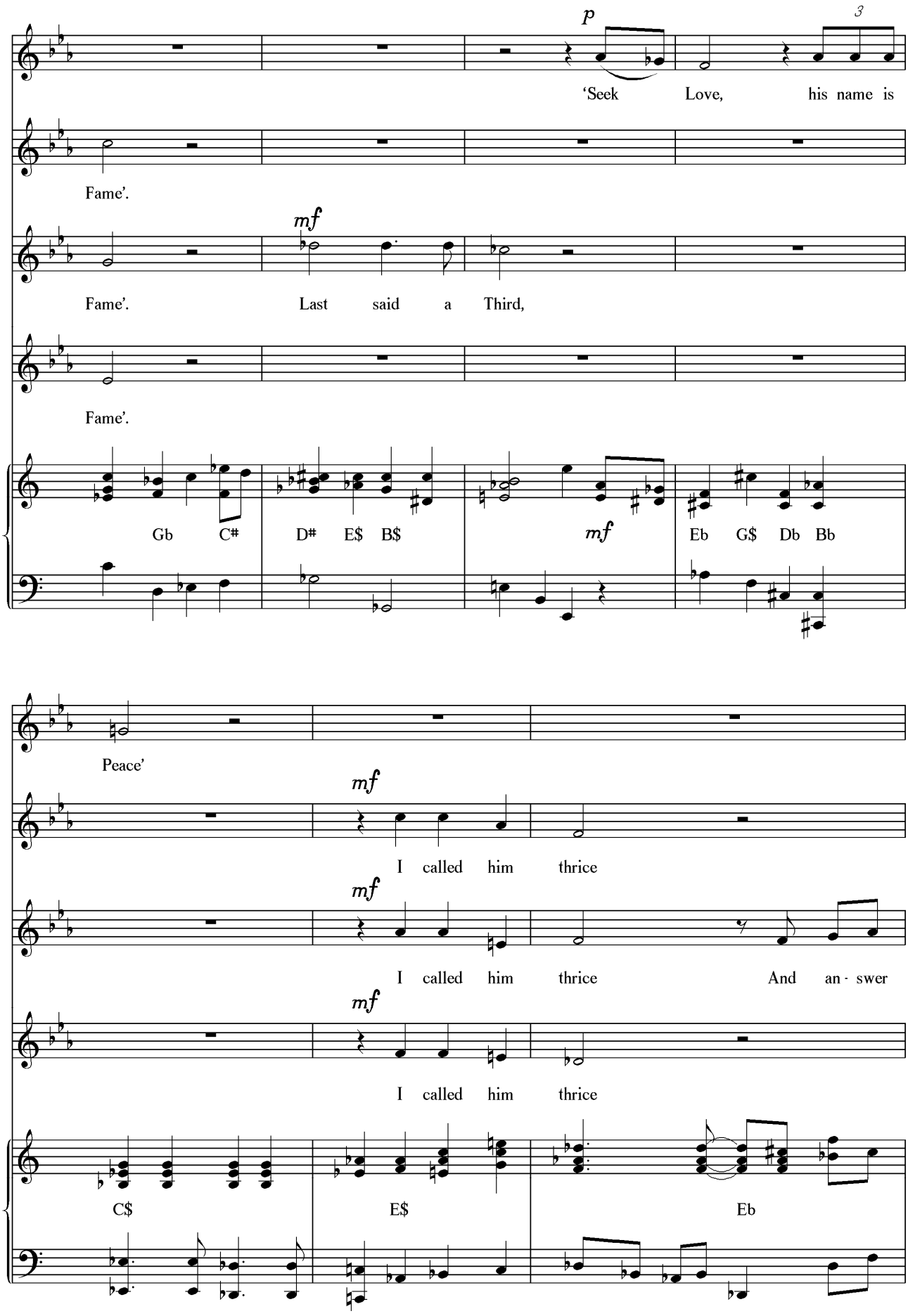

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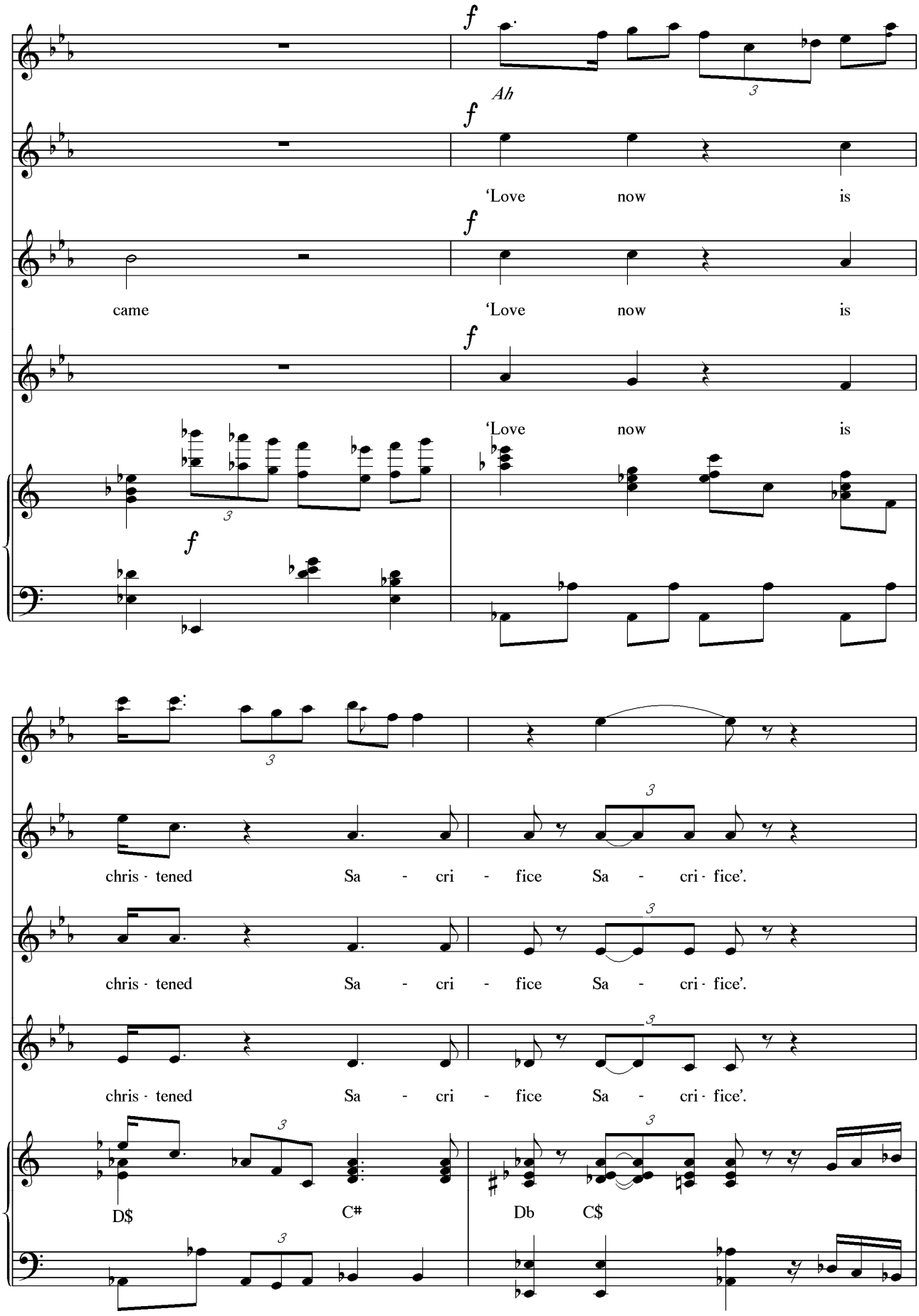

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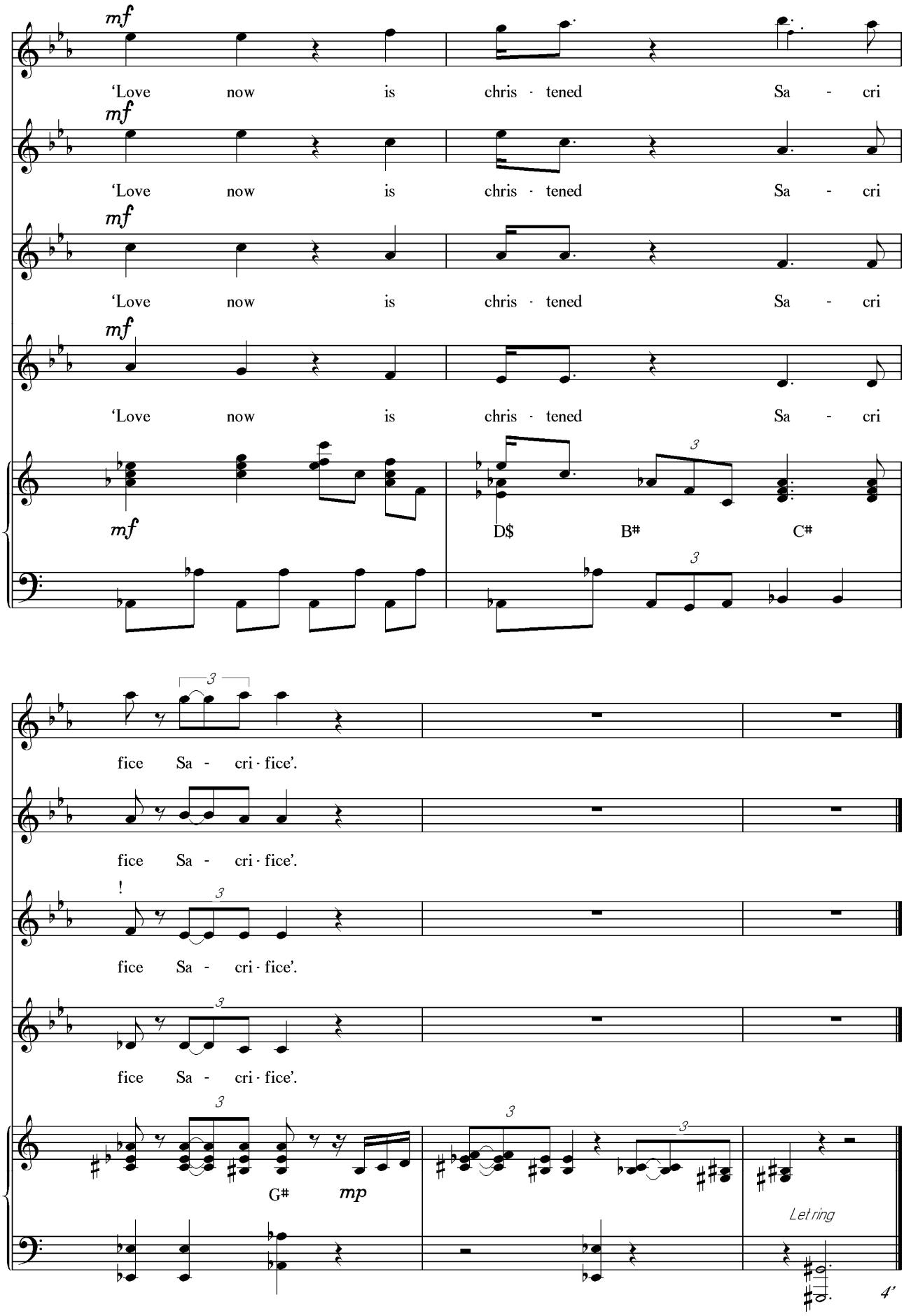

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