ECCLESIASTES IN WORDS AND SONG: MODERN COMPOSERS MEET ANCIENT TEXT

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Thesis Summary

The goal and contribution of this thesis is to shed new light on this ancient book through in depth research on the book's background, and detailed musical and textual analysis. The thesis also illustrates the timeless pervasiveness of Ecclesiastes' message by exploring the book's themes as they appear in popular culture, including music, poetry, and television. In writing this thesis, I sought to dispel the commonly held notion (overheard from many colleagues and friends in the community) that Ecclesiastes is a wholly bleak and depressing book. I aimed to highlight the book's life-affirming qualities, such as Koheleth's repeated directive to live life fully and joyfully.

The thesis is comprised of four chapters, divided as follows: Chapter 1: Introduction: Echoes of Ecclesiastes in Popular Culture, Chapter 2: Background, Chapter 3: Musical and Textual Analysis, and Chapter 4: The Contributions of Ecclesiastes.

The textual analysis focuses on Ecc. 3:1-8, and the music analysis includes three settings of Ecc. 3: Ben Steinberg's *LaKol Zman*, Aminadav Aloni's "To Everything There is a Season" (from his larger work *Koheleth*) and Yehezkiel Braun's "Part IV" (from his larger work *Divrei Koheleth*). The textual analysis centers on Michael Fox' JPS Commentary on the book, and also incorporates a variety of additional commentaries. The musical analysis is based on musical scores and audio recordings.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction: Echoes of Koheleth in Popular Culture

"For of all I have ever seen or learned, this book seems to me the noblest, the wisest, and the most powerful expression of man's life upon this earth – and also the highest flower of poetry, eloquence, and truth. I am not given to dogmatic judgments in the matter of literary creation, but if I had to make one I could say that Ecclesiastes is the greatest single piece of writing I have ever known, and the wisdom expressed in it the most lasting and profound." – Thomas Wolfe, *You Can't Go Home Again*

When I first closely read the book of Ecclesiastes as a first year cantorial student in Jerusalem, I fell immediately in love with its wisdom and boldness. I was captivated by the powerful truths contained within its words, and I had that profound experience of seeing my own thoughts and feelings articulated in an ancient holy text. "Yes!" I thought, silently cheering for Koheleth: "there *is* nothing new under the sun, and we do not live in an infinitely just and consistent world." Many of my classmates and teachers found these concepts cynical and depressing, but for me they were enlivening and exciting. Even in my limited and relatively privileged life experience thus far, I had seen clearly that the world was not always fair, the just not always rewarded. I was uninterested in platitudes that claimed otherwise. So many years after the book was written, this ancient sage's words rang true for me in 2007, as if to further confirm his assertion: "Only that shall happen which has happened, only that occur which has occurred" (1:9).[1]

The text not only mirrored the troubling truths I had seen in the world, but it also reflected an inspiring, life affirming sentiment. I saw in Koheleth's words the directive to live life fully and with joy. I delighted in reading verses like: "Go, eat your bread in gladness, and drink you wine in joy; for your action was long ago approved by God

[1] This and all subsequent biblical citations are from the Jewish Publication Society translation of the *Tanakh*.

(9:7)." I understood that Koheleth implored us to live for today, because no one knows for certain what lies ahead. To me, this remains an uplifting and exciting concept.

Many others do not share these same positive associations with the book. Some may hear "Koheleth" and immediately call to mind some of the book's bleaker and more challenging messages, for example, the phrase most frequently repeated throughout the book: *hevel havelim, hakol hevel*, which literally means "vapors of vapors" (1:2). The King James version translates this phrase as "vanity of vanities," while the JPS translation renders it as "Utter futility! All is futile!" Michael Fox prefers "utterly senseless" or "utterly absurd" (Fox, *The JPS Bible Commentary: Ecclesiastes*, 3). Robert Alter uses "merest breath," since "Qohelet is preoccupied with entities that exhibit movement but can't be seen or grasped" (Alter, *The Wisdom Books*, 340). All of these translations seem to present a troubling and depressing perspective, as they imply a kind of pointlessness to life. In a world (particularly in the religious community of which I am a part) where many are searching for greater meaning and purpose in their lives, the idea that everything is futile is discomfiting to say the least. People may wonder, "Is Koheleth dismissing my quest for meaning in my life as somehow self serving and useless?"

One may or may not agree with the concept that life is pointless because it ends in death, but this idea has nevertheless found its way into popular culture, along side many of Koheleth's other messages and teachings. Koheleth lamented, "The wise man, just like the fool, is not remembered forever; for, as the succeeding days roll by, both are forgotten. Alas, the wise man dies, just like the fool!" (2:16). Several centuries later, in the first episode of TV show Mad Men, the main character Don Draper echoes this sentiment as he intones dryly, "We're born alone and we die alone and this world just

drops a bunch of rules on top of you to make you forget those facts, but I never forget. I'm living like there's no tomorrow, because there isn't one. In this, Koheleth and Don Draper agree: life inevitably concludes in death, and we are entirely limited to our experience of the here and now. We cannot know what awaits us, but we know that our lives will inevitably conclude in death. Does this knowledge render our entire lives futile?

Happily, this bitterness at life's inevitable conclusion is not the only message in Koheleth that has made its way into our culture. In parts of the book, Koheleth embraces the powerful link between transience and joy, concluding that if all of life is fleeting, then it is our happy task to live life with as much zest and enjoyment as possible. For example, Koheleth declares: "Let your heart lead you to enjoyment in the days of your youth. Follow the desires of your heart and the glances of your eyes... Banish care from your mind, and pluck sorrow out of your flesh!" (11:9-10). We hear echoes of this sentiment in the closing song "For Now" from the hit Broadway musical "Avenue Q," when characters sing of the comfort that can be derived from life's transience. Nothing will last, so why worry about that which is not perfect in your life? A side-by-side comparison of the lyrics from "For Now," written in 2003, with Koheleth's words, written in the 2nd or 3rd century, conveys the timelessness of Koheleth's teachings.

At the start of the song, Avenue Q's characters affirm to their friend (the character Princeton) who, like Koheleth, is struggling to make meaning in his life, that we might not always understand life's purpose.

Why does everything have to be so hard?
Maybe you'll never find your purpose.
Lots of people don't.
But then- I don't know why I'm even alive!

> For there is a time for every experience, including the doom; for a man's calamity overwhelms him. Indeed, he does not know what is to happen; even when it is on the point of happening, who can tell him? (8:6-7)

Well, who does, really?

Then they comfort him, explaining that the frustration he feels is only temporary:

Take a breath,
Look around,
Swallow your pride,
For now...

> Don't let your spirit be quickly vexed, for vexation abides in the breasts of fools. Don't say "How was it happened that former times were better than these?" For it is not wise of you to ask that question. (7:9-10)

And ultimately they remind him and the audience that we should love our lives fully and with joy, because nothing lasts:

For now there's life!
For now there's love!
For now there's work!
For now there's happiness!
For now discomfort!
For now there's friendship!
Only for now!

> So in a time of good fortune enjoy the good fortune; and in a time of misfortune, reflect. (7:14)

Sex! Your hair! George Bush!
Is only for now!

> For youth and black hair are fleeting. (10:10)

Don't stress,
Relax,
Let life roll off your backs
Except for death and paying taxes,
Everything in life is only for now! [2]

> Go, eat your bread in gladness, and drink you wine in joy; for your action was long ago approved by God. (9:7)

Perhaps the most pervasive and frequently quoted message of the book is that there is a designated time for every human experience. Koheleth observes: "A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven" (3:1). We see this concept echoed in the famous poem T.S. Eliot wrote in 1920 entitled "The Love Song of J. Alfred

[2] Robert Lopez and Jeff Marx, *For Now*, "Avenue Q" (RCA Victor, Broadway, 2003).

Prufrock." [3] In many ways the poem reverberates with Koheleth's words, as Eliot wonders about the point of life, "would it have been worthwhile?" and affirms that there is a time for many experiences: "and indeed there will be time to wonder." At one point, he directly quotes Koheleth, saying: "There will be a time to murder and a time to create."

In the context of T.S. Eliot's bleak poem, the concept that there is a time for everything may not necessarily bring comfort to the reader. Fortunately, the 1960's American rock band The Byrds provides us with a more positive interpretation of Koheleth's claim that "a season is set for everything." In their hit song "Turn Turn Turn" they sing that although there is a time for war, there is also "a time for peace, I swear its not too late."[4] The song's rock rhythms and upbeat tempo are far from mournful. Rather the song conveys a joyful tone that would be more likely to inspire listeners to dance than to despair.

Like the Byrds, I also find the idea that there is a time for everything a comforting one. This idea could bring people relief by assuring them that the events in their lives are unfolding along a timeline which has been approved by God. Koheleth's words can also affirm for people that it is acceptable to feel pain and sadness, that there is a place for these emotions in their lives, along side their joy and rejoicing.

The fact that both The Byrds and T.S. Eliot drew inspiration from this ancient text so many years after it was canonized speaks to Eccleasiastes' timelessness. Today, we

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[3] Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Prufrock and Other Observations.* From Poems (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1920; Bartleby.com, 2011).

[4] Byrds, the. "Turn Turn Turn." audio recording. Sony, 1996.

have an opportunity to experience expressions of the book's eternal messages through modalities of text and music. Both modalities hold a valuable place in helping us to interact with the text. The musical modality possesses a unique power to bring the text to life in a way that transcends the written word. Music's boundless expressive power lies in its ability to articulate the ineffable. It gives voice to emotions and sensations that might otherwise remain unexpressed. Musical settings of Ecclesiastes by the Byrds and many other composers provide us with a special way of interacting with the text.

In the pages that follow, I provide background information on the book of Ecclesiastes and its formation. Next I offer a detailed textual analysis, focusing on Ecc. 3:1-8. These famous verses provided inspiration for many composers who have set them to music. Each composer created his own musical midrash, or interpretation of the text, and each unique setting illustrates a different facet of Koheleth's ancient words. I compare and contrast three settings of Ecc. 3:1-8, by Jewish composers Ben Steinberg, Aminadav Aloni, and Yehezkiel Braun. I also offer a survey of other musical settings of the same text, both from within the Jewish world and from other musical and religious traditions. In the final section, I explore some of the book's critiques and offer a rationale for why it holds a vital and meaningful place in our sacred canon.

Chapter 2: Background

The Name of the Book

Ecclesiastes belongs to a section of the Bible called Writings (*Ketuvim*). Writings, the third section of Bible, is preceded by the five books of the Torah (also known as the Five Books of Moses) and the Prophets. The book's English title, "Ecclesiastes" means "member of the assembly" and comes from the Greek translation of *Koheleth,* the name given to the speaker whose search for meaning is the book's framing narrative. Another title for the book, "the Preacher," represents an understanding of *Koheleth* as a derivation of the word *kahal* (meaning "assembly"). Therefore, some interpret *Koheleth* to mean one who addresses the assembly. In Fox's words, *Koheleth* means "one who teaches the public" (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, ix).

Alter agrees with Fox that the title of Koheleth is related to the Hebrew word *kahal,* and translates Koheleth as "one who assembles" (Alter, 337). This meaning is similar to Fox's "one who teaches the public," although Fox's translation explicitly states that Koheleth engages in the act of teaching. At face value, Alter's translation of "one who assembles" could simply refer to Koheleth as one who is able to draw together a group of people. Alter tells us that while some understand this drawing together as a drawing together of sayings (writings), the true meaning of the root *kof hey lamed, "kehal,"* refers to assembling people and not things (Alter, 337).

Alter also wonders about the feminine form of the word *Koheleth* (the word in its masculine form is *kohel*). One explanation he finds for this is that there are some examples of the suffix "*eth*" being used to refer to a vocation (Alter, 337). Alternatively, is it not possible that *Koheleth* was a woman, or at least influenced by a strong female

character? Certainly for my purposes this possibility is an intriguing one. My recital, whose guiding narrative is Koheleth's search for meaning, will take audience members through Koheleth's journey as seen from a necessarily feminine point of view since I am female singer.

However, Fox discounts the possibility of a feminine voice in Koheleth. He explains in his commentary on the book that the speaker in Koheleth, like the speaker in almost all Wisdom Literature is a male speaking to a male audience. Fox tells us that "while most of what he says is true of all humans, he simply does not seem to have women in mind" (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, xi).

In sum, scholars cannot agree on the meaning of the title. As Alter explains, "We are not entirely sure what Qohelet means, and whether it is a title… or perhaps a proper name. All this uncertainty, and possibly also the ponderousness of 'Ecclesiastes,' has led most modern scholars to use the un-translated Hebrew name." (Alter, 337). For purposes of this thesis, I employ Fox's practice of referring to the speaker as "Koheleth" and the book as "Ecclesiastes" (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, x).

Koheleth the Individual

No one can agree on the meaning of the title, but what of the man himself? The opening verse of Koheleth states that the book contains "the words of Koheleth, son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1). Due to this very clear designation, Jewish and Christian traditions alike have historically understood the speaker as Solomon. This has been offered as one justification for the book's inclusion in the Tanakh (May, 805). Tradition holds that Solomon wrote Song of Songs in his youth, Proverbs in his middle age, and

Ecclesiastes at the end of his life. This interpretation is plausible as it does follow a believable ark of one's life experience – delighted excitement with love leads to thoughtful musings on life which in turn leads to a troubled and earnest search for meaning in a world where all is fleeting.

Today, however, many scholars reject the idea that Solomon wrote Koheleth. Fox offers several items of proof on the matter (Fox, *Ecclesiastes,* x). He explains that the book's language indicates that it was written in post-exilic times. Also, the book's epilogue (12:9-14) does not refer to Koheleth as king. In fact, Koheleth places some blame for social injustice on the ruling class (see Ecc. 10:5-7); blame that he likely would not place were he himself a member of this class. Fox also asks, if we are to believe that the book was written by Solomon, why does the name Solomon never appear as it does in Proverbs 1:1 and Song of Songs 1:1? We do know from the text that the speaker was a man who enjoyed much material wealth – he writes of his many houses and gardens (Ecc. 2:4-9). Therefore, Fox suggests that we view him as a non-royal member of the wealthy class who was acquainted with the dealings of the monarchs (Fox, *Ecclesiastes,* x). Both Fox and Alter encourage readers to think of Koheleth as simply a "literary persona" (Alter, 337; Fox, *Ecclesiastes,* x).

While Fox asserts that Ecclesiastes reflects a single narrative voice (Fox, *Ecclesiastes,* xvi), one notable exception to this single voice can be found is the book's epilogue (12:9-14). Majority opinion holds that an author other that Koheleth penned the epilogue because it reflects a shift in content and tone from the rest of the book. While traditional scholars did not question that Koheleth wrote the epilogue since it clearly exists within the book of Ecclesiastes, modern scholars challenge this notion. One

obvious reason for attributing the epilogue to a different voice is that fact that it refers to Koheleth in the third person. Many modern scholars have also reasoned that an editor who was uncomfortable with much of the book's content wrote the epilogue. In this theory, the editor sought to soften what he considered a cynical book that flirted with hedonism.

Dating

Much has been written about the possible dating of the book, though most scholars agree that the book is post-exilic. Alter places the book's writing "a few decades before the conquest of Palestine by Alexander the Great in 333 BCE" (Alter, 338). Robert Gordis is broader in his dating, speculating that the book was written between 500 BCE and 100 CE (Gordis, 5). Fox asserts that "a third century B.C.E. dating is most likely" (Fox, xiv).

Language

On the book's language, Alter writes that the book contains some words of Persian influence but no Greek words. However Michael Fox argues that the book's content does contain Greek influence, as discussed below. Since Aramaic the widely use vernacular by 6th and 5th century BCE, it follows that book's language shows Aramaic influences (Alter, 338).

Greek Influence

Alter points to the significance of the fact that one of the widely accepted titles for the book is in Greek – "Ecclesiastes." In fact, some scholars have noted Greek influences throughout the book in its epicurean endorsement of living a pleasurable life. Alter admits: "The possibility cannot be excluded that Qohelet indirectly picked up some motifs of Greek thought" (Alter, 338). However, he maintains that on the whole the book is "a stubborn and prickly original" (Alter, 338)." Fox too writes of the Greek connection in his the *JPS Bible Commentary*. He also sees overlap with Koheleth and popular Hellenistic philosophy, as both encourage people to seek pleasure perhaps to the exclusion of other more altruistic pursuits (Fox, *Ecclesisates*, xii). These ideas are also prominent in Epicureanism, which asserts that sensory pleasure is the only worthwhile pursuit. Koheleth's messages are in keeping with this idea.

Fox points out that Koheleth focuses deeply on the experience of the individual. Koheleth stands out as the lone voice in the Bible insisting fervently that each of us should pursue a personal truth in our own unique way. This belief that one can "discover what is good to do in life by acquiring wisdom and using it to examine and contemplate the world" also predominates in Greek philosophy (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, xii).

Wisdom Literature

Ecclesiastes belongs to the broader category of sacred writing known as Wisdom Literature, a body of work that offers readers advice on some of life's puzzling

conundrums as well as reflections on life's meaning.[5] Alter also suggests that there are wisdom motifs in Genesis' story of Joseph (Alter, xv). Ecclesiastes resembles Proverbs in its abundance of practical advice. For example in 9:18 Koheleth asserts: "Wisdom is more valuable than weapons of war, but a single error destroys much of value." While pithy phrases such as these resemble Proverbs, the content of these two books remains generally strikingly different, mostly Koheleth's writing is more philosophic than Proverbs and takes the form of poetic prose (Alter, 339).

Ecclesiastes also resembles Job in its musings on the difficult questions concerning the meaning of life and religion's role in it (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, xi). However, the similarities may end there. Alter writes that these three books (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job) are profoundly different from one another: "What is most striking about Job, Proverbs, and Qohelet is that they are drastically different not only from almost all other biblical texts but also from each other" (Alter, xvi).

We now know through archeological evidence that Wisdom writing was a popular genre in the ancient Near East (Alter, xiii) (Fox, *Ecclesiastes,* xi). Since wisdom writing is rich with universally relatable advice and ideas on the meaning and value of life and morality, it is easy to understand why it became such a widespread practice in Koheleth's time. Historically, Wisdom Literature spans the biblical period through the early centuries of the Christian era. We cannot know for certain how Wisdom texts originated. One possibility that Alter relays is that the texts were created in Wisdom schools, institutions aimed at studying and creating Wisdom literature. However, he later explains

[5] Other biblical books that fall into the category of Wisdom Literature include Proverbs, Job, and some of the Psalms.

that Proverbs is the only book that could possibly have originated in such a Wisdom School (Alter, xv).

As previously mentioned, Ecclesiastes bears some linguistic and topical similarity to Greek philosophy. Alter affirms that "wisdom literature is as close as the ancient Near East came to Greek philosophy, which was nearly contemporaneous with the latest Wisdom texts of the Hebrew bible." Both Greek philosophy and Wisdom Literature contain probing questions on the quest for meaning and the import of moral living. Of our three Wisdom books, Ecclesiastes is the most philosophical, although its language differs from that of Greek philosophy in that it does not reflect systematic thought (Alter, xvi).

Structure and Form

Ecclesiastes embodies a variety of different literary forms and generally meanders topically, creating a challenge for scholars searching for structure and unity within the book. Fox voices this frustration: "The question of an overarching structure and cohesiveness is one of the most vexing issues in the study of Ecclesiastes" (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, xv). One way we find harmony in the book is through its framing: it opens and closes with the same phrase: *hevel havelim* (1:2 and 12:8). Raymond Van Leeuwen explains in the *Harper Collins Study Bible* that this form wherein the end repeats the beginning is called an "inclusio" (Van Leeuwen, 986).

Van Leeuwen also suggests that Ecclesiastes' unity is apparent in its use of repetition. For example, "utter futility" not only serves as an inclusio but also appears frequently throughout the book (Van Leeuwen, 987). In addition, Fox notes that the book's structure is clarified at times through repeated introductory phrases such as, "I

said to myself" (1:16, 2:1) "I further observed" (3:14, 4:1) and "There is an evil I have observed under the sun" (5:12, 6:1,10:5) (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, xvi).

Even with these framing phrases, many scholars assert that the book lacks a clearly discernable structure. In one notable exception, the scholar A. Wright offers the following structure that Fox lays out in the JPS commentary (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, xvi):

I. Koheleth's investigation of life (1:12-6:9)
II. Koheleth's conclusions (6:10-11:6)
Introduction (6:10-12)
A. Man cannot find out what is good for him to do (7:1-8:17)
B. Man does not know what will come after him (9:1-11:6)

While some embrace this structure, Fox argues that this categorization is too neat and that the book does not fit into any sort of clearly notable structure. Fox would likely also voice the same critique of the structure that scholar Ethan Dor Shav offers in his article "Ecclesiastes: Fleeting and Timeless." In the article, he claims that Koheleth's journey exists in three stages, each stage exploring his relationship to the word *hevel*, which Dor Shav translates as "transience." The first stage portrays Koheleth as frustrated with and bitter towards life's transience. It is precisely this frustration that leads him to embark on a quest for meaning, bringing him to the second stage of the book: acceptance. The final stage shows Koheleth's discovery of the link between transience and joy.

Although Fox and others might take issue with Dor Shav's categorizations, claiming that the book does not portray a clear structure, Fox nonetheless claims that the book does "display a deep cohesiveness... that shows above all in the constant presence of a single consciousness mediating all the book's observations, counsels, and evaluations" (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, xvi). According to Fox then, Ecclesiastes' unity lies in the consistency of narrative voice. Koheleth's teachings and musing may prove

inconsistent from one verse and chapter to the next, but his singular narrative voice remains constant.

In fact, much of the book's effectiveness lies in the first person voice and his topical meandering. Van Leeuwen observes that Koheleth articulates themes in a "spiral pattern": He introduces a theme, meanders away from it, and returns to it a few verses or chapters later (Van Leeuwen, 987). Through this wandering, Koheleth enables us to observe and participate in his very human journey as a he searches for answers. While Koheleth does form some conclusions in his wanderings, the wisdom lies in the wanderings themselves. As Fox explains, "His readers are not only to absorb Koheleth's teachings, they are also to observe him as he walks a rocky and winding path toward understanding and acceptance of life's frustrations and uncertainties. The journey itself is important" (Fox, *Ecclesiastes,* xiii).

Since Ecclesiastes is concerned primarily with sharing and searching for wisdom, it is fitting that much of its writing takes the literary form of proverbs, as discussed above. Proverbs, short phrases offering moral advice, make up one of the main literary forms of wisdom literature (Alter, 338). For example, in 4:6 Koheleth states: "Better is a handful of gratification than two fistfuls of labor which is pursuit of wind."

Another literary form found in Ecclesiastes is autobiography, where the speaker searches for meaning through his life experiences. Van Leeuwen calls this "royal didactic autobiography" (Van Leeuwen, 986), meaning autobiography from one within the ruling class. Fox explains that Koheleth's contemporary precedent or model for fictional autobiography originated in Mesopotamia. In this type of writing, a character (often someone from the ruling class) shares his life experiences and gleans teachings from

them (Fox, xiii). Fox suggests that in general, readers should experience Ecclesiastes as a narrative and "not simply a collection of proverbs and epigrams" Fox, xiii). Koheleth allows us to follow his honest reflections as he works through life's challenging questions. We may or may not glean conclusive answers from his wanderings, but maybe that is not the point. As the frequently quoted Ralph Waldo Emerson teaches, "Life is a journey, not a destination."

Debates about Canonization

In rabbinic literature, the most famous Talmudic discourse on the book show us that the ancient Rabbis, like many of Koheleth's contemporary readers, were deeply puzzled by its inclusion in the Bible. Since the Bible was entirely canonized (with Koheleth included) while the Rabbis debated its merits, they were not actually questioning whether or not the book should be included in the sacred canon; its presence there was already established. Rather, although perplexed and concerned by much of the book's content, they recognized it as holy and thus sought to legitimize its inclusion in the Bible (Fox, *Ecclesiastes,* xiv).

For example, in Yadayim 3:5, the Mishnah recounts a debate raised by sages in the time of Hillel and Shamai asking whether or not Ecclesiastes "makes the hands ritually unclean." This designation ("making the hands ritually unclean") means that the book is considered sacred, meaning that Ecclesiastes had attained sacred status. In a similar vein, B. Shabbat 30b, noting the abundant inconsistencies, posits that perhaps the book had at one time been removed from the public domain. B. Megillah 7a further challenges Ecclesiastes' divine authorship, citing Solomon's authorship of the book as

proof that it was not divinely inspired. The Rabbis also worried that Koheleth's encouraging people to seek out pleasure in life would cause them to live hedonistic, immoral lives (Fox, *Ecclesiastes,* xiv).

Ultimately the Rabbis made peace with Ecclesiastes' undeniable inclusion in the Bible through what they interpret as his praise of sacred study. They conclude that Ecclesiastes is framed by affirmations of the Torah's merits, beginning with 1:3, "What real value is there for a man in all the gains he makes beneath the sun?" In Koheleth Rabbah, Rav Benjamin ben Levi recounts how the sages concluded that this verse affirms that labor (*amal*) in Torah is profitable (Fox, *Ecclesiastes,* 4). Then towards the book's conclusion comes the second part of the frame, "When all is said and done: Revere God and observe his Commandments!" (12:13-14), which clearly calls for fear of God and adherence to the commandments (Fox, *Ecclesiastes,* xv).

Fox offers a reason for the book's inclusion in our canon. He writes that the Bible was formed through an historical rather than an intentional process, meaning that different sections of the Bible were canonized little by little over a long period of time (Fox, xv). Robert Alter confirms this, explaining that "the [Hebrew Bible] is not a book but an anthology spanning almost a millennium and incorporating widely different views of human nature, God, history, and even the natural world" (Alter, xvii). The idea that the Bible is a collection of writings, accumulated over history and encompassing a variety of perspectives, explain how Ecclesiastes came to be included in the Bible. Furthermore, Fox suggests that the book's opening attribution to King Solomon validates its presence in the Bible (Fox, *Ecclesiastes,* xv). How could the Bible neglect to include the words of King Solomon, one of the major players in the collective story of the Jewish people?

Ecclesiastes In the Liturgy

Beginning in the 11th century and continuing today, Ashkenazic and some Sephardic and Mizrachi Jews read Ecclesiastes on the holiday of Sukkot. Ecclesiastes' topical connection to Sukkot may not be immediately apparent. Fox suggests that we read Ecclesiastes on Sukkot simply because the other *megillot* (scrolls) were "taken" (Song of Songs was already assigned to Passover, Lamentations to the 9th of Av, and so forth) (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, xv). However, one can find some thematic connections between Ecclesiastes and the Festival of Booths. For example, both the book and the holiday center on transience: we build temporary dwellings on the holiday to remind us of our nomadic ancestors, just as Koheleth clearly affirms the ultimate transience of life. Furthermore, Sukkot is *zeman simchateinu*, a time of rejoicing in life, just as Koheleth recommends, for example in 9:7: "Go, eat your bread in gladness, and drink you wine in joy; for your action was long ago approved by God" (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, xv).

Connection to Eastern Teachings and the Buddha

Regarding Koheleth's character, scholars Ethan Dor Shav and most notably Daniel Polish have compared him to the Buddha. In his book, *The Buddha as a Lens for Reading Koheleth,* Daniel Polish argues that by viewing Ecclesiastes through lens of the Buddha and his teachings, we gain greater understanding into Koheleth and his message. The overlapping themes between the men and their teachings include the impermanence of all things, the pervasiveness of suffering (Buddha calls this *dukkah*), and the futility of craving. Buddha was born into a life of privilege, and only after

sneaking outside the walls of his palace as a young man were his eyes opened to the suffering of the world. Koheleth too was likely born into a life of privilege and royalty. Both men questioned their upbringing and sought answers outside of the familiar and comfortable. Neither found answers, and both re-entered life as teachers, ultimately renowned for their wisdom.

The solution that Buddha and Koheleth offer to a life of suffering is what Buddha calls "disinterested action," or action for the sake of the action itself. Koheleth urges people to drink wine, eat bread, and enjoy life because nothing will last. Rather than viewing this as pessimistic or nihilistic, as others have, Polish encourages us to view it simply as freedom from attachment.

The yearning to understand life's secrets and purpose makes the book attractive and intriguing for many, including several talented composers. Ecclesiastes provided inspiration for several talented Jewish composers, including as Ben Steinberg, Yehezkiel Braun and Aminadav Aloni, to wrestle with the biblical text and ultimately create their unique musical midrashim on the book.

Chapter 3: Musical and Textual Analysis

Why Is Ecclesiastes 3 So Frequently Quoted and Set to Music?

As stated in the introduction, one of the most popular and frequently quoted sections from Ecclesiastes is 3:1-8, "A time is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven..." What factors contributes to the seemingly universal appeal of these verses? For many, the idea that the events of their lives take place at the exact appropriate time is comforting. It implies that our lives follow some sort of over arching narrative arc that adheres to a meaningful pattern. From Koheleth we learn that we are meant to experience every aspect of our personal unfolding story, from the devastating to the ecstatic.

This idea might be particularly comforting in times of sadness. The text tells us not only that we are "allowed" to experience suffering and sadness, but that this is a natural and appropriate part of life, something sanctioned and approved by God. Clergy often quote this text at funerals, for it teaches mourners not to run away from their grief and reminds them that they will eventually feel joy again. Every experience in life will ultimately give way to another contrasting experience. Koheleth teaches us that for every moment of weeping and wailing, there will be a moment of laughing and dancing (3:4-5).

Survey of Musical Settings of Ecclesiastes 3

For these reasons and additional personal ones, many composers have set this text to music. While The Byrds composed the most universally known rendition, many composers from the Jewish world have also lent their own creative voices to the text. Ben Steinberg composed "*LaKol Zman*" in 1979 for solo voice and organ based on 3:1-3.

Cantor Gerald Cohen also composed a *"LaKol Zman"*[6] for piano, soprano and baritone soli, and unison choir. In addition, Yehezkiel Braun and Aminadav Aloni both set the entire book of Ecclesiastes, including chapter 3. For his work, entitled *Divrei Koheleth* (2009)[7], for choir, piano, and soloists, Braun set every word of the book. Aminadav Aloni based his 6-sectioned composition for choir, soloists, and two pianos, entitled *"Koheleth"*[8] (1972), on his own translation of the book. Unlike Braun, he did not set each word verbatim but rather captured what he felt were the post poignant and meaningful sections of the book.

Survey of Other Sections of Koheleth Set to Music

Although the highest number of musical settings of the text center on chapter 3, several more Jewish composers wrote their own interpretations of other sections of the book. Cantor Benjie Ellen Schiller wrote "One Generation"[9] (1986) for solo voice and piano based on 1:4-7: "One generation goes, another comes, but the earth remains the same forever. The sun rises, the sun sets – and glides back to where it rises… all streams flow into the sea… to the place from which they flow the streams flow back again." Ernst Krenek also set 1:4, 5, and 7 in his work entitled "The Earth Abideth"[10] (1961) (this composition is part of a set of three motets – the last two motets are based on psalm texts).

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[6] Cantor Gerald Cohen. *LaKol Zman* (Octavo, 2007).
[7] Yehezkiel Braun. *Divrei Koheleth Ben David* (Octavo, 2009).
[8] Aminadav Aloni. *Koheleth* (Octavo, 1972).
[9] Cantor Benjie Ellen Schiller. *One Generation* (Octavo,1986).
[10] Ernst Krenek. "Three Motets." (Octavo. New York: Rongwen Music, Inc. 1961).

Craig Taumban's song entitled "Koheleth"[11] (2001) touches on a few different verses, including 1:9: "There is nothing new under the sun." The overall message of his song is the charge "to live for today," as expressed throughout the book most notably in 3:22: "I saw that there is nothing better for man than to enjoy his possessions, since that is his portion. For who can enable him to see what will happen afterward?" and 4:17: "Be not over-eager to go to the House of God."

Textual Analysis of Chapter 3:1-8

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 contains rich meaning such that each composer created his or her own musical midrash based on a unique, individual understanding of the text. In order to understand each composer's approach, I will first delve into the biblical text and its commentaries. According to Alter, these eight verses embody the first instance of formal poetry in Ecclesiastes. He explains that there are seven verses (3:2-8) containing pairs of opposites, and "the number seven [was] pointedly chosen because of its traditional association with the sacred" (Alter, 354). He also notes that each set of pairs contains only two accented syllables, a fact that will become more interesting when analyzing musical settings of the text.

Fox writes that the word *eit* which appears fourteen times in 3:1-8, does not connote a specific time on the calendar or the clock, but rather a particular situation. He argues that Koheleth does not mean to say that our moments of joy and sadness are preordained; instead, such moments happen when the circumstances are ripe for them, and each requires a specific response from us. For example, a *simcha* such as a wedding

[11] Craig Taubman *Koheleth* Audio CD: "The Best of the Rest" (Craig 'n Co, 2001).

represents a time of joy, a time when it is appropriate to laugh a dance, whereas a funeral represents a time of sadness when one may weep and wail. For these reasons, Fox prefers to translate 3:1, as "There is a season...there is a time," rather than "A time is set..." (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 20)."

Van Leeuwen offers a contrasting interpretation when he writes that these eight verses refer to "life's good and evil conditioned by God's *time*" (Van Leeuwen, 990). Van Leeuwen understands all of the experiences described in these verses as "inscrutably in God's hands" (Van Leeuwen, 990). The discrepancy between Fox and Van Leeuwen's understanding of *eit* may stem from their theological differences, with Judaism and Christianity possessing different understandings of destiny, preordination of life events, and God's role in both of these. That said, we can find overlapping ideas from Christian and Jewish theology, so one might also encounter Jewish commentators who agree with Van Leeuwen.

For his part, Fox goes on to explain that verse 2, " time for being born and a time for dying," does not say that the time of birth and death is pre-determined, but rather that these events occur when the circumstances are right. Fox writes in his commentary that while some ancient Jewish interpreters believed that each person's life span is predetermined, biblical commentary teaches instead that people's life spans are "predetermined but alterable" (Fox, *Ecclesiastes,* 21). In other words, a righteous person may be able to extend his predetermined life span through fulfillment of *mitzvot*, whereas a sinner may shorten his through sinful, immoral acts.

Of the second part of verse 2, "a time to plant and a time to uproot the planted," Fox explains that the verb *la'akor*, "to uproot," connotes a particularly violent kind of

uprooting, often associated with war or even death. Therefore, these two pairs (birth and death, planting and uprooting) both speak to significant beginnings and endings in the human experience. The ending may be as permanent as death or refer to a life-altering change in one's personal narrative (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 21).

Verse 4, "a time for weeping and a time for laughing, a time for wailing and a time for dancing," also deals with death, as "wailing" refers to mourning the dead at a funeral. Koheleth Rabba see both of these pairs as related to experiences surrounding death and mourning: "weeping and wailing belong to the period of mourning, laughing and dancing, to the time afterwards" (Fox, *Ecclesiastes,* 21) (Rashi on Ecclesiastes 3:4).

Some commentators, including Fox and Alter, write that verse 5, "a time for throwing stones and a time for gathering stones, a time for embracing and a time for shunning embraces" is concerned entirely with romantic and sexual love. According to Koheleth Rabba, "throwing stones" refers to the time when a wife is ritually unclean, and "gathering stones" refers to the time when a wife is pure once more (Fox, *Ecclesiastes,* 21) (Rashi on Ecclesiastes 3:5). Alter recounts commentator Gordis' assertion that throwing and gathering stones is a metaphor for ejaculation and self-restriction from ejaculation (Alter, 355). In *The Jewish Study Bible*, Peter Machinist offers one possible and more literal interpretation of "gathering… throwing stones," explaining that the verse might refer to demolishing or constructing a building (Machinist, 1609).

The second part of the verse refers directly to "embracing," so the connection to romantic love is more immediately apparent there. "Embracing" and "refraining from embracing" might also refer to ritual purity and impurity, or the instruction to refrain from sexual intimacy during a time of mourning.

Verse 6 asserts that there is "a time for seeking and a time for losing." Some commentators questioned the idea that there could be an acceptable or correct time for losing something. Therefore, they translated *le'abbed* as "to declare that something is lost," rather than simply "to lose" (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 21). Similarly, Alter suggests the translation of *le'abbed* as "to give up for lost" (Alter, 355). According to ancient commentators and Alter, "a time to lose" does not refer to the actual moment of loss but rather to the acknowledgement of loss. However, Fox reads the text more literally, pointing out that elsewhere Koheleth clearly asserts that there is a time for other negative experiences, such as death and mourning. If there is a time for these painful moments, why could there not also be a time for losing? Clearly the text is not teaching us there "there is a time" for only those pleasant occurrences in life.

The second half of verses 6, "a time for keeping and time for discarding" and the first half of verse 7, "a time for ripping and a time for sewing," continue to expand upon ideas of obtaining and losing. While at face value, "discarding" may seem to carry a negative connotation, Koheleth Rabba explains that there times when discarding is ultimately beneficial (Rashi on Ecclesiastes 3:6). The idea that discarding something could be positive resonates with the connections between Koheleth and the Buddha. Polish suggests that Koheleth, like Buddha, advocates freedom from attachment. We can view the second half of verse 6 through this lens. One way to understand Koheleth's "time for discarding," is that there are times when discarding our material possessions and our attachments to the outside world can ultimately help us obtain inner peace.

Of the second half of verse 7, "a time for ripping and a time for sewing," both Alter and Fox posit that "ripping" refers to the ritual ripping of one's garments during a

time of mourning (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 22; Alter, 355). These pairs (ripping/sewing), like verse 6's "keeping/discarding," are related to loss, although in this case loss holds more of an obvious negative connotation than "discarding." While one could in certain circumstances view death as a positive event (if death relieves the dying person of great physical pain, for example), our Western culture and the Bible tends view death as a sad event.

Verse 8 tells us that there is "a time for loving and a time for hating; a time for war and time for peace." A midrash explains that this pair, war and peace, encapsulates the meaning of several other preceding pairs, such as uprooting/planting, seeking/losing, tearing down/building up, slaying/health, ripping/sewing, and hating/loving (*Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 3:10). One can understand war on a literal level as a time when two nations or groups engage in battle. I suggest an alternate meaning of war as inner turmoil on a personal, internal level. Many of the experiences described in previous verses, such as weeping, wailing, and losing, could relate to times when one feels angst and inner pain and experiences a sort of "internal war." Similarly, "peace" could refer to peace between nations or the inner peace one might feel at a time of love, planting, or healing.

Musical Analysis of Ecclesiastes 3:1-3: Steinberg

In the world of Jewish music in the Reform movement, one of the more well-known and beloved settings of Ecclesiastes 3 is Ben Steinberg's "*LaKol Zman*"[12] (1979). An analysis of this piece shows Steinberg's unique approach to text and music, as he

[12] Benjamin Steinberg. "*LaKol Zman*" (Octavo. New York: Transcontinental Music Publications, 1979).

brings his own interpretation of Ecclesiastes 3:1-3 to life in an accessible and meaningful way. In analyzing the piece, I noted with fascination the following words underneath the title: "written for the Bat-Mitzvah of Lori Weingort." Earlier in the chapter I discuss why clergy might quote the text at funerals, but this is the first time I have heard of this text appearing at a Bat Mitzvah. This designation informs my understanding of Steinberg's setting of the text. I have never known a Bar or Bat Mitzvah to be a somber or mournful occasion – rather, a time of joy and celebration. Therefore one can infer that Steinberg did not find Ecc. 3:1-3 particularly disheartening. Perhaps he was drawn to the reflective or thoughtful qualities of the text. One could connect those qualities to the occasion of a Bat Mitzvah, a time that is a clearly a *simcha* but also a moment when children and especially parents stop to reflect on the passage of time. Any joyous life cycle occasion might also contain elements of sadness or longing, because they can call to mind loved ones who have died but would have been present at the occasion.

Tonally, "*LaKol Zman*" remains entirely in the key of G minor. In fact, neither the vocal nor the organ part contains any accidentals. One can only speculate as to the reasons for this musical choice. Perhaps Steinberg wanted to highlight the idea that throughout the ebbing and flowing currents of one's life, there remains a single constant element: change itself. Ecclesiastes as a whole speaks a great deal about life's ultimate fleetingness and transience. In Steinberg's "*LaKol Zman*" the tonal center stays consistent, just as in Koheleth's world change remains reliable.

One aspect of his composition that proves easier to interpret is his musical midrash on the cyclical nature of time. Steinberg opens and closes "*LaKol* Zman" with the same melodic figure in the piano (measures 1 and 2, and 44 and 45). The concept of

introducing a musical motif and then bringing it back towards the end of the piece (much like the textual *inclusio* Van Leeuwen describes in the biblical text) adheres to conventional musical patterns. This practice adds structure to musical compositions, creating a clear beginning and then a sense of closure at the end when the opening motif returns. That said, one may detect deeper meaning in Steinberg's use of repetition here: this could be his way of saying that wherever our experiences take us, we all ultimately succumb to the preordained cycle of life.

Steinberg uses the element of textual repetition to further illustrate life's natural rhythms and cycles. He repeats the text "*lakol zman v'eit lchol cheifets tachat hashamayim*" five times through this short piece, even though in the three verse unit, these words only occur once (in v. 1). Through his repetition of these words, Steinberg reminds listeners that there is truly an appropriate time for every kind of experience, and that painful moments are as holy as joyful ones. To further emphasize the words "*tachat hashamayim*," the piano often echoes the melody of the vocal line for those words. The repetition of "*tachat hashamayim*" might emphasize God's role in life, if one translates "*shamayim*" as "heaven," the place where God dwells. Steinberg could be telling us that God sanctions *all* life's moments and experiences.

We can see the pervasiveness of the text "*lakol zman v'eit lchol cheifets tachat hashamayim*" in the following analysis of the piece, where A = Ecc. 3:1 etc. and B = Ecc: 3:2-3.

Text	**Melody**	**Measure Numbers**
A	A	5-8
A	A1	9-14
B in Hebrew	B	15-21
A	A	22-24
A	A1	25-30

B in English	B	31-37
A	A2	38-44

Steinberg's use of both the English and the Hebrew makes "*LaKol Zman*" accessible to a wider audience. Although the words *lakol zman* etc. only occur in Hebrew, the presence of the English for verses 2 and 3 helps non-Hebrew speakers gain a deeper understanding of the message within the text and music.

As one can see in the chart above, the vocal line follows this pattern: A, A1, B, A, A1, B, A2. After the piano's opening motif and before the vocal line begins, the piano plays a few measures (measures 3 and 4) that introduce the musical idea of "A" without giving it away. Then at measure 5 the vocal line enters, allowing listeners to hear a fully realized melody. After the "A" melody, the "A" text (*lakol zman* etc.) repeats as we hear a development of the "A" melody – a phrase very close melodically to "A" but with some small changes, hence the designation "A1."

As stated earlier, the entire piece remains in G minor. However, the "B" melody provides us with some harmonic interest by touching upon the key of B flat. At measure 21 as "B" draws to a close there is a half cadence on a D minor chord. As confirmed by this cadence, "B" never fully moves into B flat, leaving listeners wondering where the piece will lead next. This half cadence leaves the phrase incomplete, nicely setting up the return to the "A" section.

The song climaxes with the words "*lakol zman*" in measure 38. This measure represents an obvious peak as it contains the singer's highest note (a "G"), and the only instance of a *fortissimo* dynamic marking. Harmonic devices further contribute to the sense of climax. With the text "a time to build" (measure 37) we hear a cadence with a G minor chord. This unexpected G minor cadence adds to the dramatic intensity

of the moment - until this point (measures 37 and 38) the phrase remains virtually identical to measures 21 and 22. Measure 22 concludes on a half cadence with a D major chord, creating the expectation that its corresponding measure, measure 38, will conclude in a similar way. The fact that this expectation is met at this point of climax creates a striking contrast between measures 21-22 and measures 37-38.

Measure 38 marks a very dramatic moment and conveys a kind of wrestling and unrest. The measure portrays musically the internal war that I mention earlier as one understanding of the words "a time for war." This climactic measure seems to correspond to times in life when one does not feel inner peace. After the sustained high note on a "G" at measure 37, we see a *ritardando* and an eventual return to a *piano* dynamic marking with the repetition of the words "*tachat hashamayim.*" This repetition is almost identical to previous measures containing the same text (12-13 and 28-29). However, at this final repetition of *"tachat hashamayim,"* we hear a slowing of the melody's rhythm as the piece draws to a close. The piano's opening melody repeats as the *LaKol Zman* concludes, and listeners are left with a sense a peace and acceptance.

LaKol Zman presents listeners with a highly concise and masterful commentary on the cyclical nature of life. In the course of three short pages, he brings us through a journey that touches upon a wide range of human experiences, ultimately concluding in the same way it began. He employs musical tools such as repetition and tonal consistency (remaining in a single key through the piece) to communicate Koheleth's words, shedding new light on this ancient text.

Musical Analysis of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8: Aloni

Aminadav Aloni's composition entitled "To Everything There is a Season"[13] (1972) provides us with another musical interpretation of the same ancient text. This piece is part of his larger work comprised of six settings for choir and piano from the book of Ecclesiastes. Unlike Steinberg, Aloni used only the English translation and none of the original Hebrew. This choice contributes to the accessibility of the piece for English speakers and also allows Aloni the freedom to shape the text, using his own translation. Although his translation generally follows other translations, he tends to simplify the biblical verses while still conveying the basic meaning of each original phrase. For example, he pares down Ecc. 3:3 to "a time to kill, a time to heal, a time to wreck, a time to build," creating a terser translation than Fox's more literal: "a time for slaying and a time for healing, a time for tearing down and a time for building up."

The most striking musical theme that emerges from Aloni's piece is the interplay between slower and faster tempos and rhythms, conveying his way of understanding the passage of time and the cycles of life. This chart provides a musical and textual overview of the piece; an explanation of the contrast mentioned above will follow.

Text	**Melody**	**Measure Numbers**
A (Ecc. 3:1)	A	1-9
B (Ecc. 3:2)	B	10-17
C (Ecc. 3:3)	C	18-22
D (Ecc. 3:4)	B	22-30

[13] Aminadav Aloni. *Koheleth* (Octavo, 1972).

N/A	Piano interlude	30-33
E (Ecc. 3:5)	D	33-41
A (Ecc. 3:1)	A	42-49
F (Ecc. 3:6)	B1	50-64
G (Ecc. 3:7-8)	C1	65-69

Since "To Everything There is a Season" functions as part of a larger whole, exploring its surrounding musical context proves informative to the musical analysis. Immediately preceding "To Everything There is a Season" we hear the ending of section two with the words "*there's nothing new under the sun, hevel havalim, hakol hevel.*" In Aloni's setting, the words "under the sun" convey a sense of peace and finality, with all four voice parts singing sustained notes on the word "sun." As the choir sustains their final notes, the tenor solo concludes with the unsettling words "*hakol hevel,*" adding an element of unrest to what would otherwise be a tranquil moment. After hearing the tenor's unsettling proclamation ("Everything is vanity!"), listeners are ready to absorb the comforting text of chapter 3, and to hear music that assures them that for every moment of pain, there will also be a moment of joy.

Tonally, the piece bares similarity to *LaKol Zman* in that Aloni's retains the same key (A minor, in this case) throughout. Aloni does occasional use accidentals to provide color. An F sharp is added, which we hear most notably in measures 18-20 and 65-67. The section preceding measures 18-20 concludes in measure 17 with a clear A minor chord. This small sub-section (measures 18-20) retains the note "A" as a pedal tone in the base, and concludes in measure 22 with an A dominant 7^{th} chord. This creates a half

cadence, giving the measure a bright quality and telling us that the musical thought has not yet concluded. The next section continues in D major.

The opening phrase provides the first example of the aforementioned interplay between contrasting tempos. The tenor solo (the "A" melody) that opens the piece and then repeats again in the middle of the piece in measure 42, begins with a fast series of quarter note triplets. Immediately following this we hear two measures (measures 3-4 and 43-44) containing more sustained notes, creating a clear contrast between acceleration and expansion.

Aloni based the text for this "A" melody on Ecc. 3:1. His translation, "To everything everything everything there is a season, and a time and a time and a time for every purpose under the heavens" employs repetition for dramatic effect. His reiteration of "everything" and "time" emphasizes Koheleth's notion that absolutely every event in our lives occurs in its proper time, and will eventually give way to a completely different experience.

This sort of contrast we hear in the opening phrase continues through the piece. After the tenor solo, the choir enters with the text of verses two through five. In the "B" section, we see a constant shift in meter that contributes to the feeling of acceleration and propels us forward into the "C" section. "C" employs a sort of call and response between the base and the upper three voices, and the tempo remains lively. Then, as we reach measure 30 and the words "a time to dance," the texture changes and we hear more sustained notes in the instrumentation. This "C" section clearly ends in the key of A minor, as we see an A minor chord at measure 30. In the piano interlude that follows,

Aloni uses text painting (measures 30-33) by bringing the words "a time to dance" to life with dance-like melodies.

Following this, the choir re-enters with the text of verse five, continuing the "D" melody. Here Aloni uses both slow and faster textures together in measures 34-41, with the upper three voices using quarter notes while the base sustains notes with longer rhythmic value. Although the text of Ecclesiastes does not describe experiencing the passage of time in slow or fast tempos, Aloni uses music to paint a midrash of these two different ways of experiencing time. As stated earlier, we experience fast and slow moments in life, but there are also moments when time seems to be moving simultaneously slowly and quickly. Aloni expresses this sort of moment here.

The tenor solo then enters again with the repetition of "A" melody at measure 42. This repetition bares similarity to Steinberg's use of the same piano motif for the beginning and ending of *LaKol Zman.* Both Steinberg and Aloni's use of repetition illustrate the cyclical nature of time and Koheleth's repeated assertion that "there is nothing new under the sun."

After the "A" melody, the choir re-enters with a variation of the "B" and "C" melodies that I refer to as "B1" and "C1." Once more, the texture of quarter notes creates a feeling of acceleration until the piece draws to a conclusion. During the last three measures of C1, we hear a *ritardando* and finally the words "of peace" in a sustained whole note with a *fermata.* Much like Steinberg's ending, Aloni's conclusion breathes life into the word "peace" and leaves listeners with a sense of calm and resolution.

The feeling of tranquility provided by the final measures of "To Everything There is a Season" prepares listeners for the next section, entitled "Go Eat Your Bread." For

this section, Aloni set 9:7-9, which includes some of the most positive and uplifting verses in Ecclesiastes (Aloni's translation: "Go eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a glad heart, for God has favored your actions..."). Since the end of the previous section, "To Everything There is a Season" provides listeners with a feeling of peace, they are then primed to absorb the life-affirming sentiments of "Go Eat Your Bread."

Aloni's use of slower and faster tempos and textures through the piece conveys his midrash on the way in which we experience the passage of time. We live through moments when everything seems to be moving very quickly – for some, this occurs during times of joy or excitement. Many of us have reached the end of happy occasion and only then stopped to wonder, "Did I enjoy that?" Conversely, we experience other moments in our lives where time seems to be moving with painful slowness. Sometimes people perceive the unfolding of a traumatic event in slow motion, and with great clarity. Koheleth teaches us about the appropriateness of experiencing life in its wide range of tempos and colors; and Aloni illustrates this dialogue between the sluggish and rapid moments of life with his music.

Musical Analysis of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8: Braun

Like Aloni's "To Everything There is a Season," Braun's setting of Ecc. 3:1-8 exists in the context of a larger work. His composition *"Divrei Koheleth"*[14] (2009) provides us with a musical setting of the entire book of Ecclesiastes in Hebrew, for five-

[14] Yehezkiel Braun. *Divrei Koheleth Ben David* (Octavo, 2009).

part choir (SSATB) and piano. Preceding Braun's setting of Ecc.3: 1-8, called simply "Part IV," we hear the closing words of the previous chapter, "*gam ze hevel hu.*" JPS translates this as "that too is futile and pursuit of wind." These words make up the ending of "Part III," which concludes with a *piano* and then *pianissimo* dynamic marking with a *fermata* on the last note, creating a sense of mournful contemplation.

"Part IV" immediately provides a sharp departure from this mood. We hear a drastic tempo shift with an *allegretto* indication, as all five voice parts enter in unison rhythm with the words "*lakol zman, v'eit l'chol cheifetz, tachat hashamayim.*" The chart below provides the structure for the entire piece and a detailed analysis of Braun's interpretation of the text follows.

Text	**Melody**	**Measure Numbers**
A (Ecc. 3:1)	A	1-9
B (Ecc. 3:2)	B (tenor and bass)	10-14
B (Ecc. 3:2)	B (sopranos and alto)	15-18
C (Ecc. 3:6-8 - half of verse eight)	C	19-25
C (Ecc 3:3-5 - half of verse five)	C1	26-32
D (Ecc. 3:6-8 - half of verse eight)	C2	33-42
E (Ecc. 3:8 - half of verse 8)	D	43-52

Like Aloni, Braun also plays with ideas of expansion and contraction through texture and tempo. However, Braun's composition weighs much more heavily on the side of acceleration, with fast tempos and full, busy textures. His setting of the text spans seven pages of music, but to the listener these seven pages seem to fly by at a dizzying pace. As stated earlier, Aloni's midrash on the text paints two different ways of experiencing the passage of time: one where time hurls speedily forward, and the other where time moves with inching slowness. For his part, Braun's composition clearly leans toward the former. His interpretation conveys a life experience bursting with activity and abundance, characterized by an almost frenzied sense of multi-tasking. This corresponds to the vast middle stages of a life span for one whose life is rich with responsibilities, challenges and accomplishments (family, children, career, personal fulfillment, etc.).

As stated earlier, the piece begins with the fast tempo marking *allegretto*, but the first two sections ("A" and "B") provide a relatively calm texture compared to the sections that follow. Both section "A" and section "B" are comprised of vocal lines singing together in unison rhythm. In "A," all five voice parts sing the opening words of Ecc. 3:1 together. In "B" we hear a dialogue between male and female voices. First the men sing the text of the second verse, maintaining a *piano* dynamic marking. Next, the momentum builds as the women repeat that melody in their octave, this time with a *forte* dynamic marking.

When we reach the "C" section at measure 18, we enter bustling middle section of the piece, which paints the hectic stages of middle life describe above. Braun accomplishes this sense of busyness by creating a two-part fast moving canon, or round, between male and female voices. The men begin the canon at measure 19 with the words

"*eit laharog*," and the women follow two beats later with the same text and melody. The canon consists of a single repeated rhythmic pattern and a slightly varying melody. This canon continues through measure 29, and at measure 30 we hear a brief reprieve from this busy texture as all five voice parts join together with the word "*avanim.*"

Following this we hear a short piano interlude, and then the canon begins again with "C2." "C2," provides a modification of the "C" melody. The "C2" phrase retains an identical rhythmic pattern to the C and C1 phrases and a very similar melody to the C and C1 phrases. In general, "C2" perpetuates the busy texture of the previous section, although the tone softens with a *piano* dynamic marking in measure 30.

In the concluding measures of the piece (section "E") we finally hear a slower and more leisurely tempo and texture with a *largamente* indication and the words "*eit milchama, v'eit shalom* (a time for war and time for peace)." This marks Braun's portrayal of the final stages of life (retirement, for many) and with it a sense of peace and settling. At measure 43, we hear an imitation, as the upper voices first sing "*eit milchama*" and then the lower voices repeat this. However at this point the notes have longer rhythmic values and the frantic pace has been abandoned. In measure 46, all five voices join together with the words "*v'eit shalom.*" We see a *decrescendo* and a sustained "G" in all four voices. Like Steinberg and Aloni, Braun concludes with a feeling of calm and resolution, bringing home the meaning of the words "*v'eit shalom,*" "a time for peace."

Like Steinberg and Aloni, Braun employs musical tools to convey his personal understanding of the text. His interpretation provides us with another way of perceiving the passage of time. Braun's composition paints a mature life of fullness and activity that

only settles down at the very end, ultimately conveying a sense of peace. Koheleth teaches, "To everything there is a season," which for Braun means seasons of abundance followed by seasons of tranquility.

Conclusion

As we have seen, music offers us a way to connect with the text that transcends speech alone. Ben Steinberg, Aminadav Aloni and Yehezkiel Braun used powerful musical tools to provide us with three unique understandings of Koheleth's words. Of all three pieces, Steinberg's "*LaKol Zman*" is the most frequently performed, probably due to the succinctness of the composition – Steinberg set only three verses of text compared to Aloni and Braun's eight – as well as practical considerations: Steinberg's composition requires only one singer and one pianist, whereas Aloni and Braun's compositions require an entire choir of voices.

Aloni's composition offers an interesting musical midrash that illustrates the power of music in illuminating a text. As detailed in the chart, he repeats melodic phrases "B," and "C." Initially, "B" corresponds to verse 2 and "C" corresponds to verse 3, but in the repetition of "B" and "C" (called "B1" and "C1"), "B1" corresponds to verse 6 and "C1" corresponds to verses 7 and 8. In this way, he draws a fascinating parallel between verses 2 and 3 and 6-8, encouraging listeners to explore the text in a new way.

Braun provides us with a completely new perspective on the first eight verses of chapter three. He uses a fast tempo and busy texture to create a dramatic portrayal of a full and hectic life. Anyone who has experienced the challenges and rewards of a packed schedule and an overflowing list of responsibilities can relate to Braun's musical

interpretation. After this frenzied activity, we can also appreciate his eventual slowing and resolution at the piece's conclusion. All three composers inform our understanding by showing us different facets of the same ancient text.

Chapter 4:

Conclusion: The Contributions of Koheleth

This thesis has explored the universality and timelessness of Ecclesiastes through the eyes of learned scholars and composers. While some ancient and contemporary readers are bothered by certain elements in the book and question its inclusion in the Tanakh, this thesis has aimed to highlight the rich and redeeming aspects of this biblical text.

Ecclesiastes contains many inconsistencies, just as the world in which we inhabit is not itself devoid of contradictions. Thus, these inconsistencies realistically reflect an imperfect world. We live in difficult times—times when, in Koheleth's words, "a man's calamity overwhelms him" (8:6), and if we expect a flawless world, we will be endlessly disappointed. Fox asserts:

> A life with strict correspondence between deed and consequence... would make sense. But Koheleth sees this does not happen, and he is weighed down by the collapse of meaning, as revealed by the contradictions that pervade life... He is not consistent because the world he sees is not consistent (Fox, xxx).

Specifically, Ecc. 3:1-8 illustrates life's inconsistency by painting a broad range of human experiences, varying in tone from thrilling to depressing. In these verses, Koheleth acknowledges that life necessarily includes pain, but he also assures us that we will inevitably find our way from despair to joy. As we have seen, several different composers offer their own understanding of these famous eight verses. Each musical setting, uniquely compelling, allows us to understand a different facet of the text, and help us to absorb its meaning on a deeper level. As noted earlier, music provides us with a powerful mode of expression that can surpass spoken or written words. The Byrds'

"Turn Turn Turn" offers a decidedly upbeat and irresistibly catchy perspective on the text. Aloni and Braun both masterfully illustrate the nature of the passing of time, using musical devices such as tempo and texture to bring their interpretations to life. Steinberg's *"LaKol Zman"* reminds us of the cyclical nature of time through his brilliantly constructed musical composition. All of these composers offer proof of the book's appeal and universality. Each composer, drawn to the text on a personal level, created musical expressions of those elements they found appealing in Koheleth's words. These musical expressions offer us an additional point of entry, another moving way of interacting with the text.

In response to concerns about Koheleth's character and claims about his skeptic nature, it should be noted that for all his other inconsistencies, Koheleth's faith in God remains firm through the book. In fact, Koheleth's faith becomes all the more admirable considering his deep and painful and awareness of all that is meaningless and unjust in the world. Koheleth can serve as a model of one who retains his belief even in the face of challenges and inconsistencies. Fox explains:

> Koheleth sees things that are distressing to observe: the distortions and inequities that pervade the world; the ineffectuality of human deeds; the frailty and limitations of human wisdom and righteousness. This awareness coexists with a firm belief in God—whose power, justice, and unpredictability are sovereign (Fox, ix).

Van Leeuwen echoes this concept in one concise statement. "Qoheleth is an utter realist, yet he will not let go of God" (987). Throughout Koheleth's despair and meanderings, knowledge of God's existence remains constant in his life.

While some worry that Koheleth's words may cause people to feel depressed, it is important to remember the numerous passages that list the pleasures that make life

ultimately good and worth living. Koheleth teaches us that the pain and injustice undeniably present in the world do not negate life's joys. As Fox explains:

> Koheleth does find some things worthwhile... these valuable things are brief, limited, and uncertain, but they are enough to make life worth living. Thus Koheleth comes to realize that despite all its unfairness and absurdity, life itself is good, to be grasped all the more eagerly for its brevity, given death's finality (Fox, xxx).

To this end, Koheleth charges us to pursue pleasure, love deeply, and live passionately, as is God's will, because life is a fleeting gift:

> Go, eat your bread in gladness, and drink your wine in joy; for your action was long approved by God. Let your clothes always be freshly washed, and your head never lack ointment. Enjoy happiness with a woman you love all the fleeting days of life all the fleeting days of life that have been granted to you under the sun—all your fleeting days. For that alone is what you can get out of life and out of the means you acquire under the sun. Whatever it is in your power to do, do with all your might (9:7-10).

Lest this life-affirming and positive message be lost to some of the book's more challenging passages, Braun and Aloni bring this uplifting sentiment to life with their musical interpretations of Koheleth's words. Other composers, such as Robert Lopez and Jeff Marx, while not directly quoting the book, echo this sentiment in the musical "Avenue Q." As previously illustrated, the musical's closing number "For Now" says something akin to Koheleth's "Eat your bread in gladness..." with the words "Don't stress, relax, Let life roll off your backs. Except for death and paying taxes, everything in life is only for now!" Lopez and Marx may not have encountered Ecclesiastes prior to composing "For Now," but their articulation of a similar ancient sentiment centuries later illustrates Koheleth's timelessness.

Kohelet's words can serve as a great comfort to those who find themselves doubting or unsure of their place in the world. We know that pain and suffering are

abundant, and naturally, we try to extract meaning from all life's seemingly senseless trials. People may find solace in seeing their thoughts and fears reflected in Koheleth's reflections, as Fox asserts:

> Kohelet faces life's inequities and absurdities—and refuses to impose pat and reassuring "meanings" on them. Yet he maintains a faith in God's rule and fundamental justness, and he looks for ways to create a meaningful life in a world where so much is senseless. He presence of the Book of Ecclesiastes in the canon of sacred scripture brings this type of thought into the compass of authentic Jewish religious reflection (Fox, ix).

In summary, Koheleth honestly portrays the world as he sees it, with all of its injustices and discrepancies. In spite of the meaninglessness and grief that Koheleth witnesses, his faith in God remains consistently strong. He encourages us to live joyfully and fully, and provides comfort to those who are struggling with life's trials. The powerful musical settings inspired by this ancient sage only further enhance and amplify the invaluable wisdom and meaning we can derive from this invaluable biblical book.

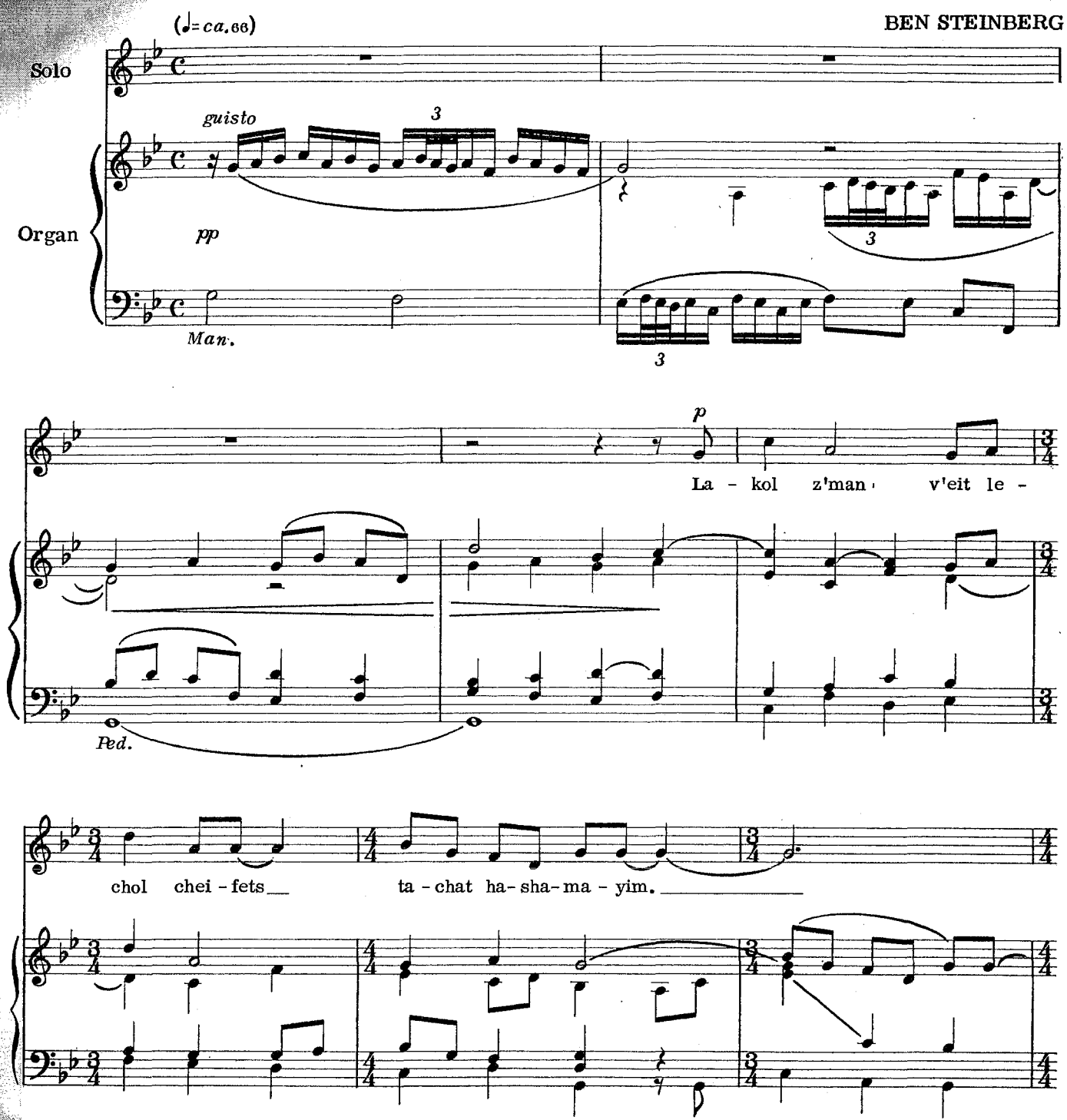
Lakol Z'man

(To Everything There Is A Season)

For Solo Voice and Organ

Written for the Bat-Mitzvah of Lori Weingort

Text: Ecclesiastes 3: 1-3



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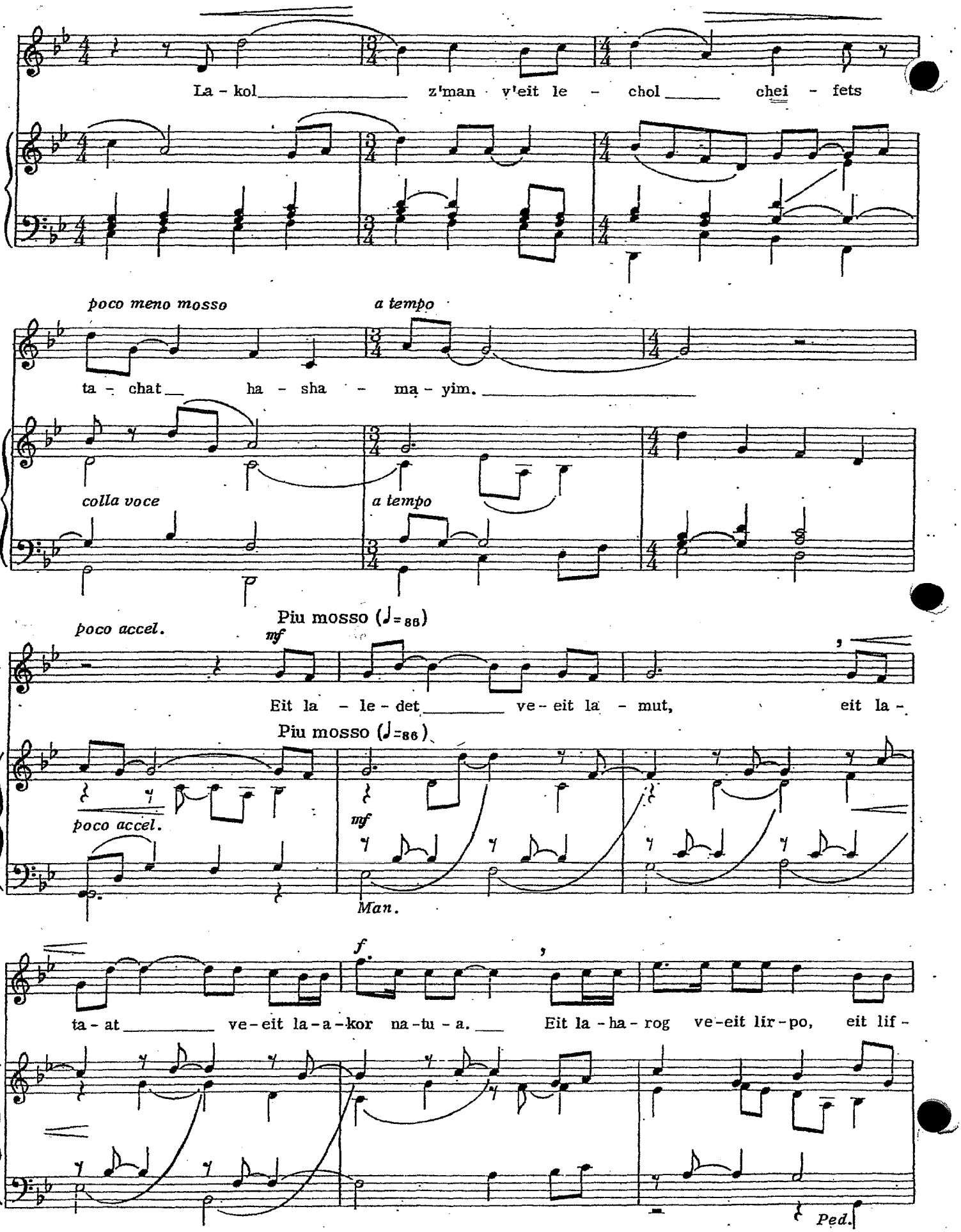
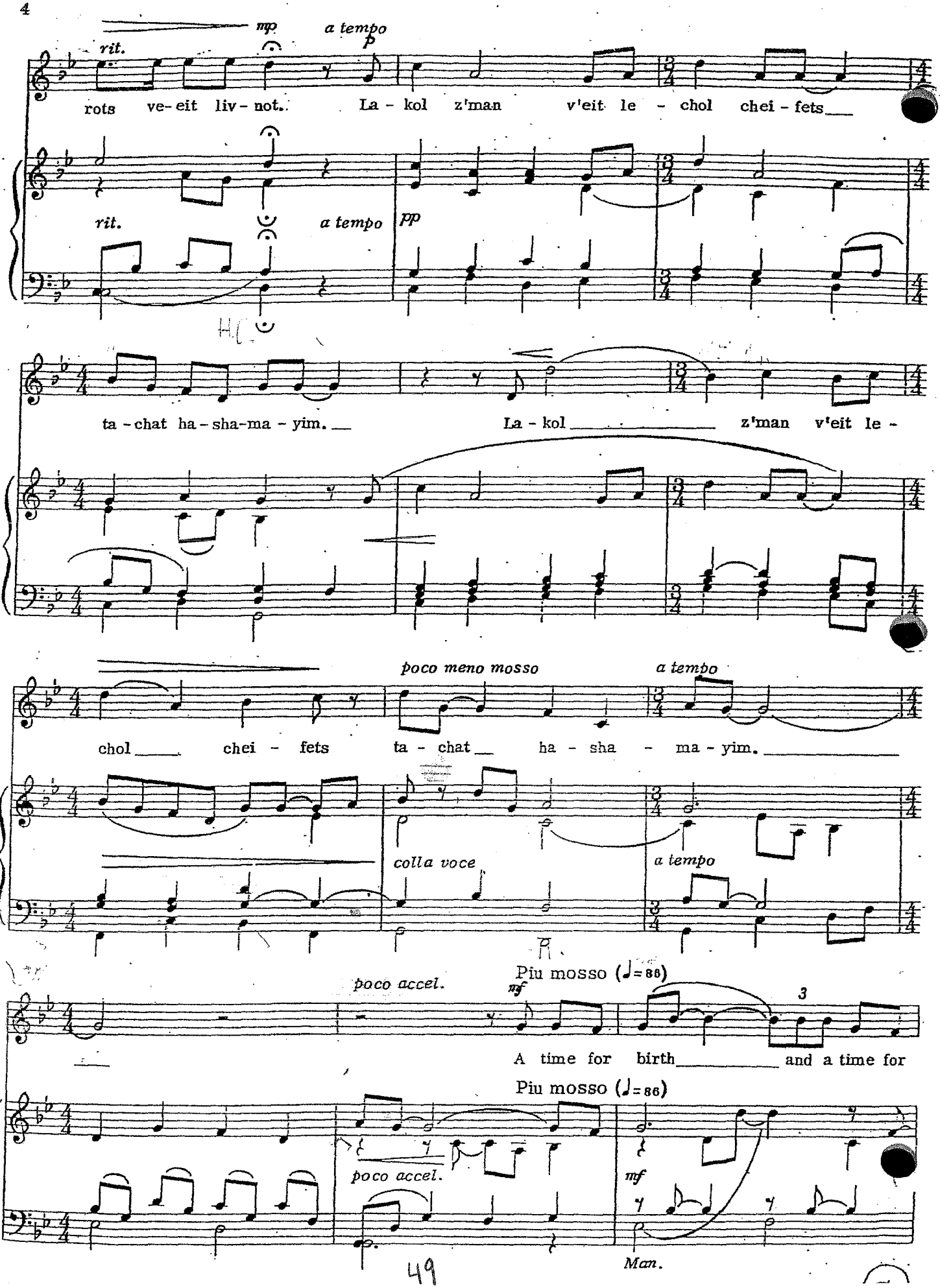
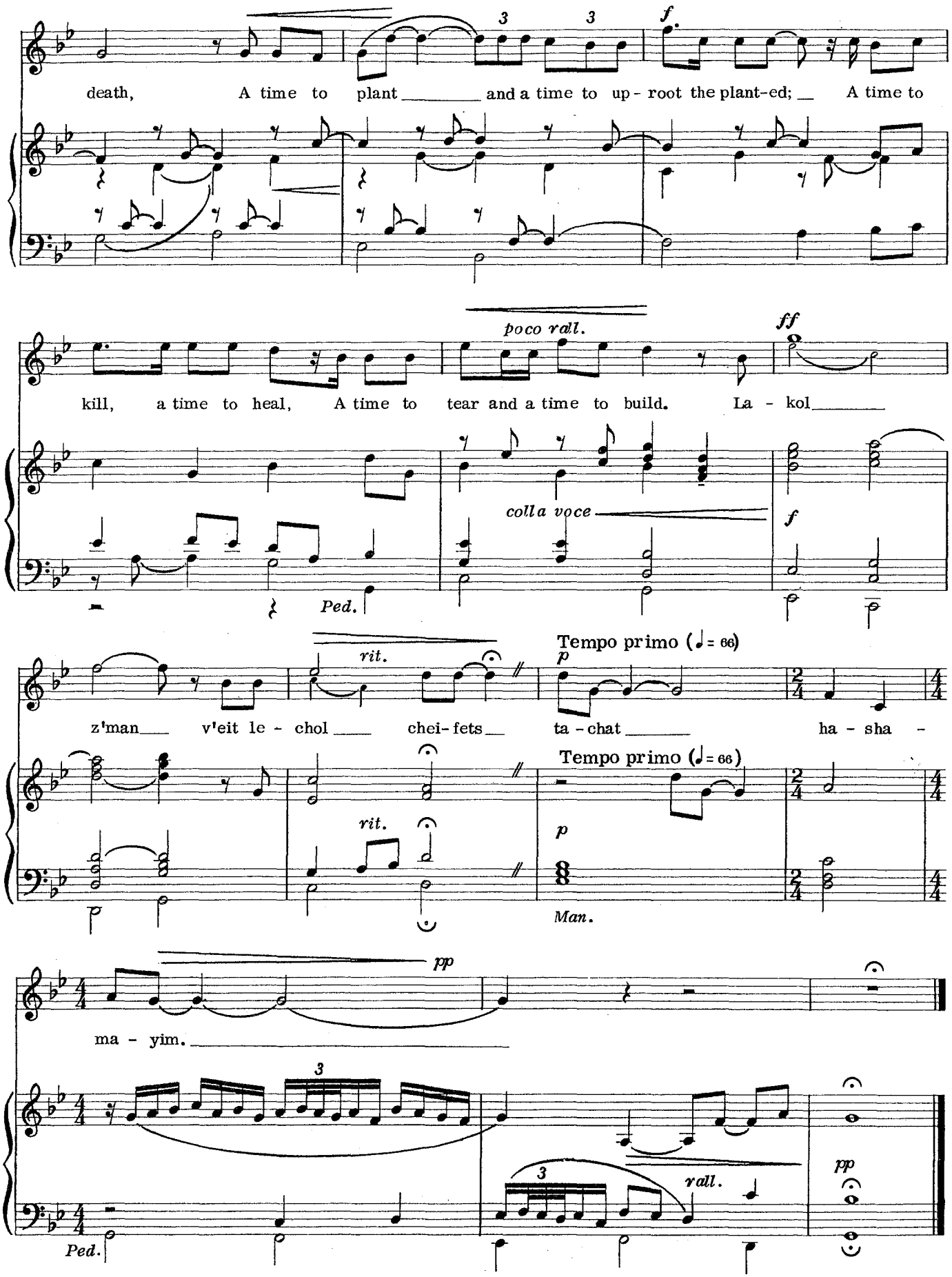
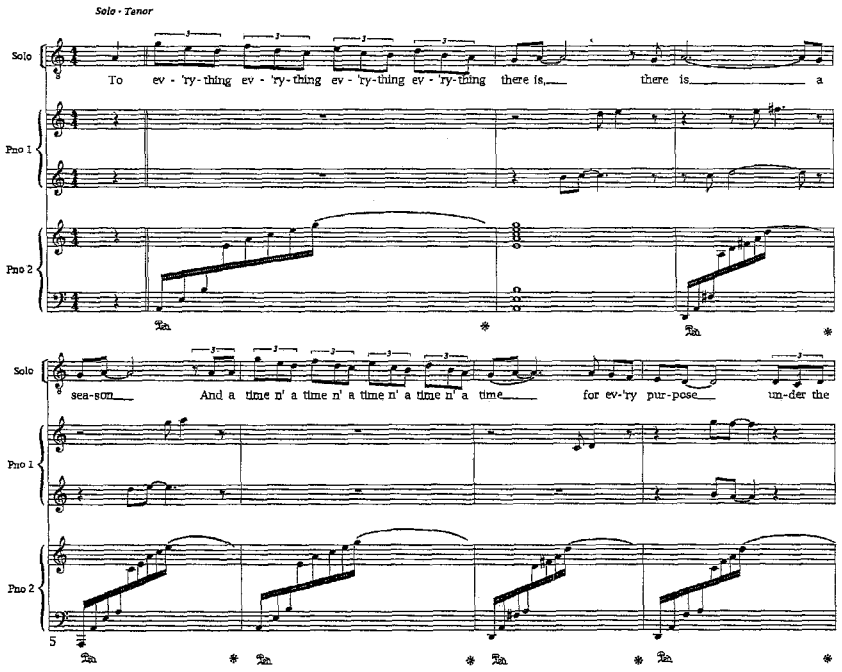
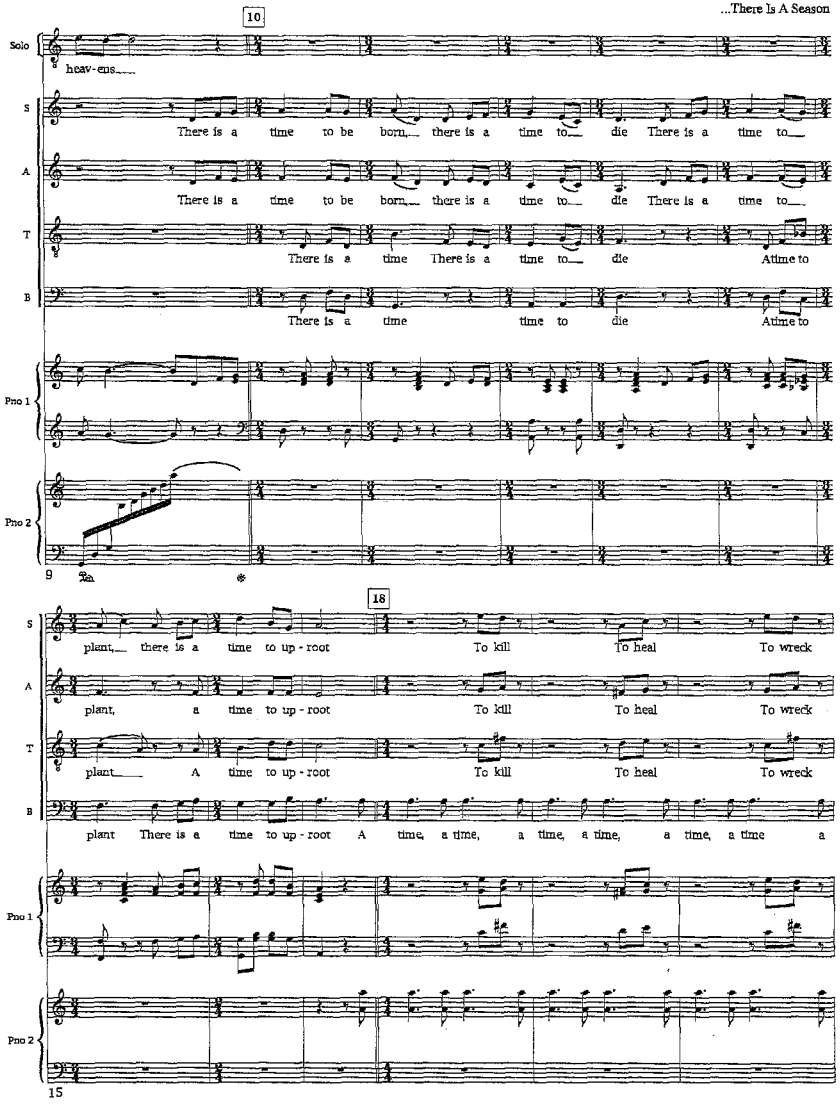

La - kol z'man v'eit le - chol chei - fets
poco meno mosso
a tempo
ta - chat ha - sha - ma - yim.
colla voce
a tempo
poco accel.
Piu mosso (♩=86)
mf
Eit la - le - det ve - eit la - mut, eit la -
Piu mosso (♩=86)
poco accel.
mf
Man.
f
ta - at ve - eit la - a - kor na - tu - a. Eit la - ha - rog ve - eit lir - po, eit lif -
Ped.

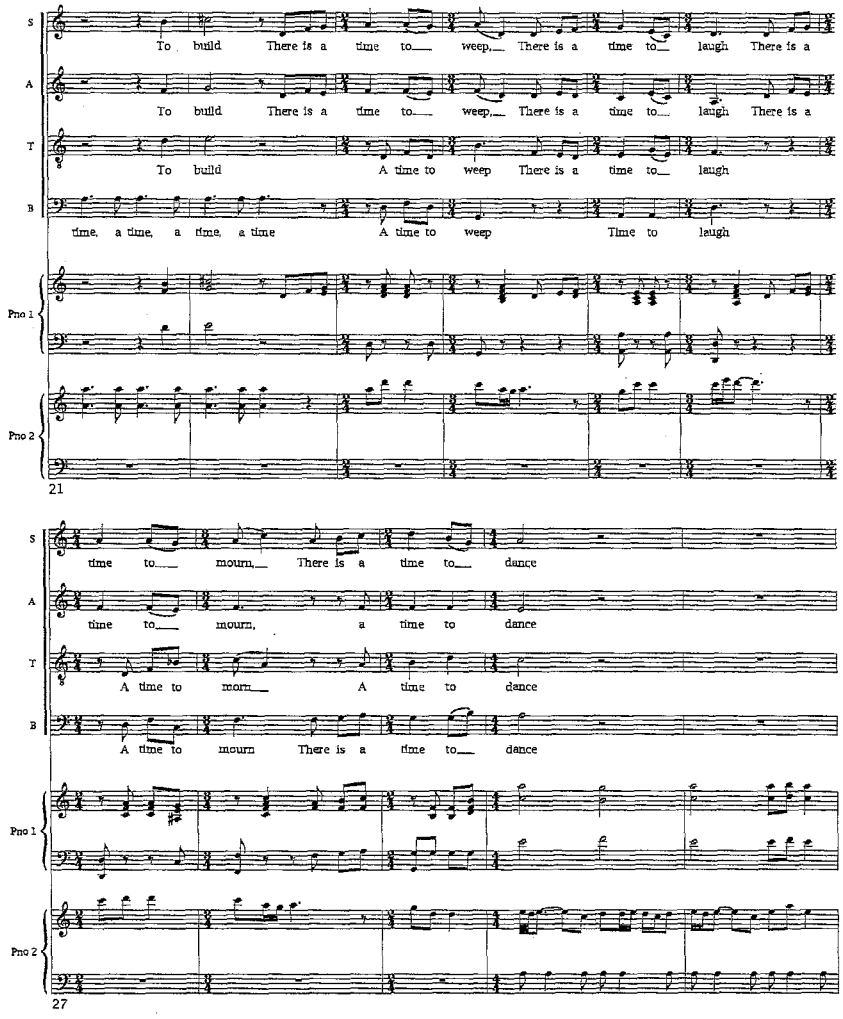

mp
a tempo
p
rit.
rots ve-eit liv-not.. La-kol z'man v'eit le-chol chei-fets
rit.
a tempo
pp
ta-chat ha-sha-ma-yim. La-kol z'man v'eit le-
poco meno mosso
a tempo
chol chei-fets ta-chat ha-sha-ma-yim.
colla voce
a tempo
Piu mosso (♩=86)
poco accel.
mf
3
A time for birth and a time for
Piu mosso (♩=86)
poco accel.
mf
Man.

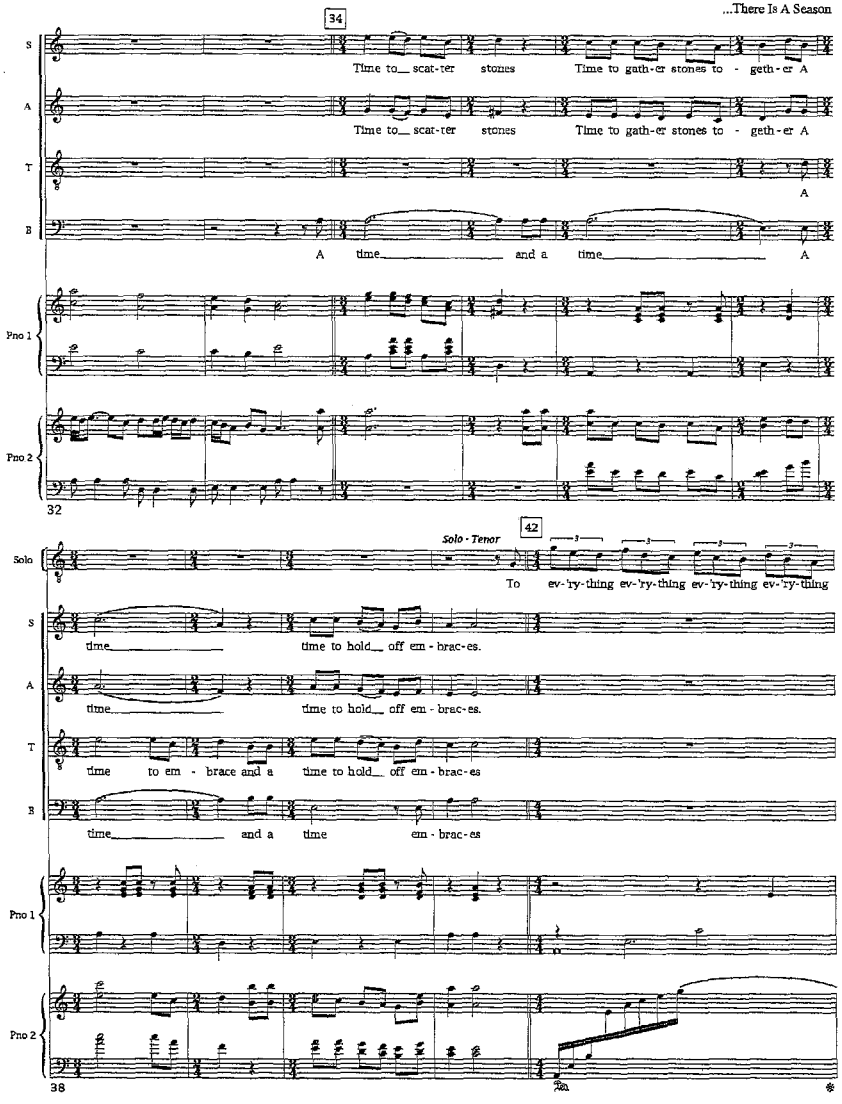

death, A time to plant and a time to up - root the plant-ed; A time to
f
3
3
kill, a time to heal, A time to tear and a time to build. La - kol
poco rall.
ff
colla voce
f
Ped.
z'man v'eit le - chol chei-fets ta - chat ha - sha -
rit.
Tempo primo (♩= 66)
p
Man.
ma - yim.
pp
rall.
Ped.

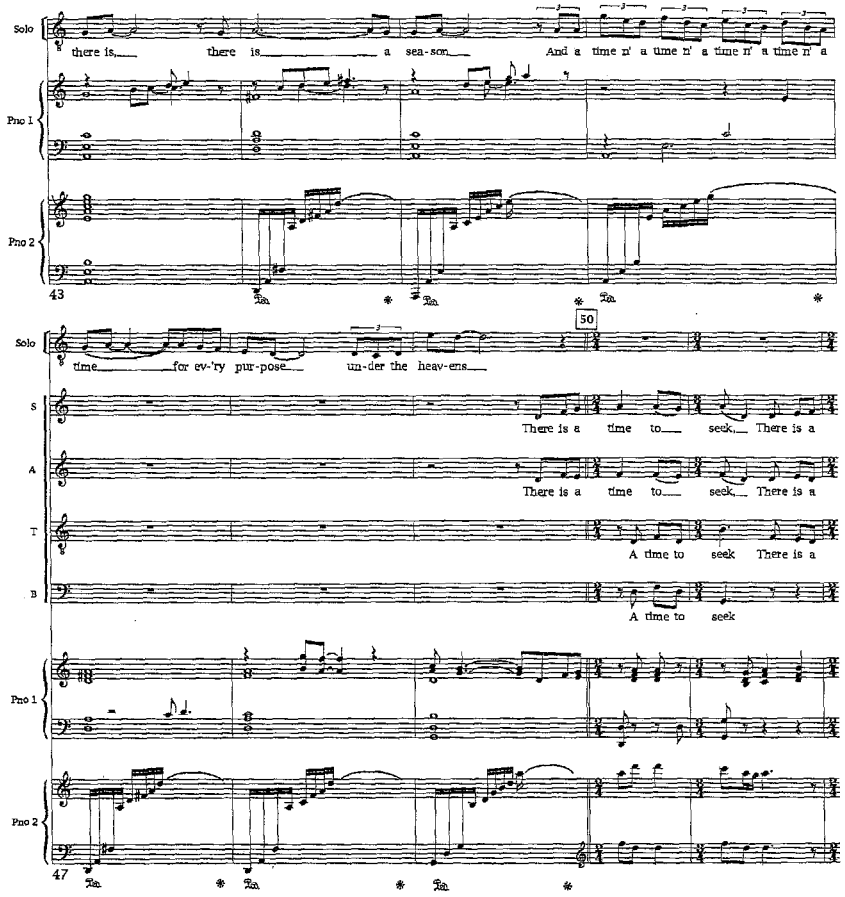
III To Everything There Is A Season

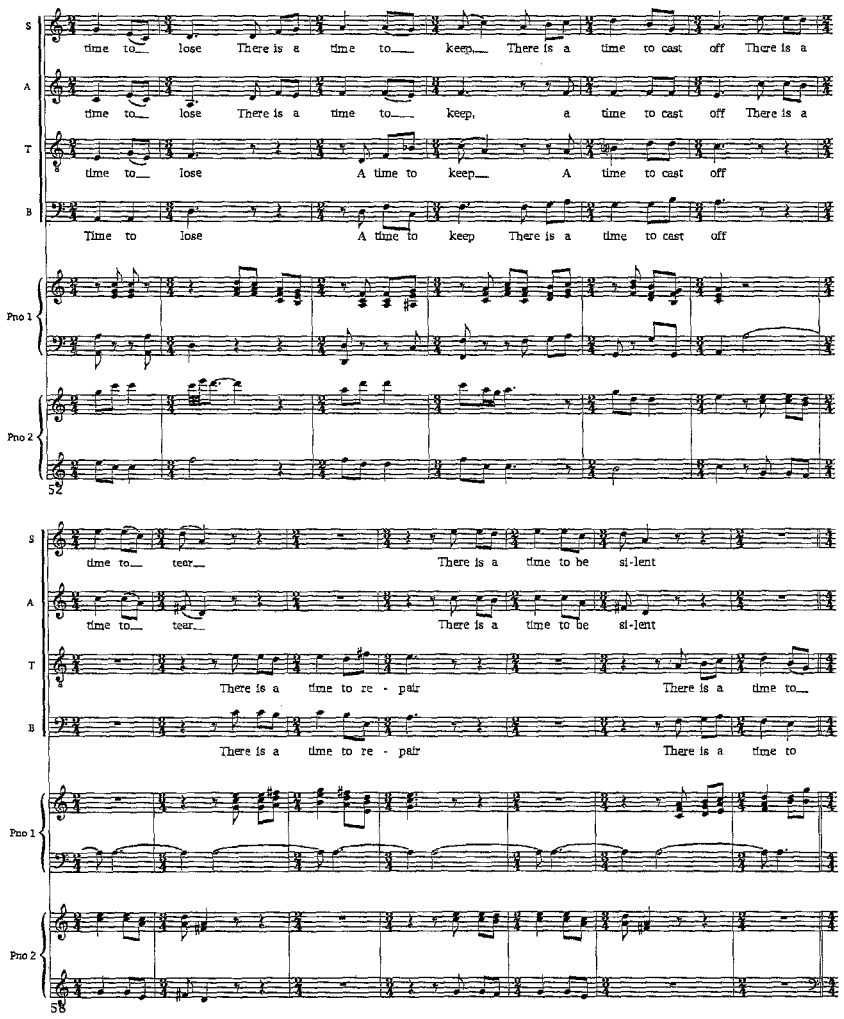


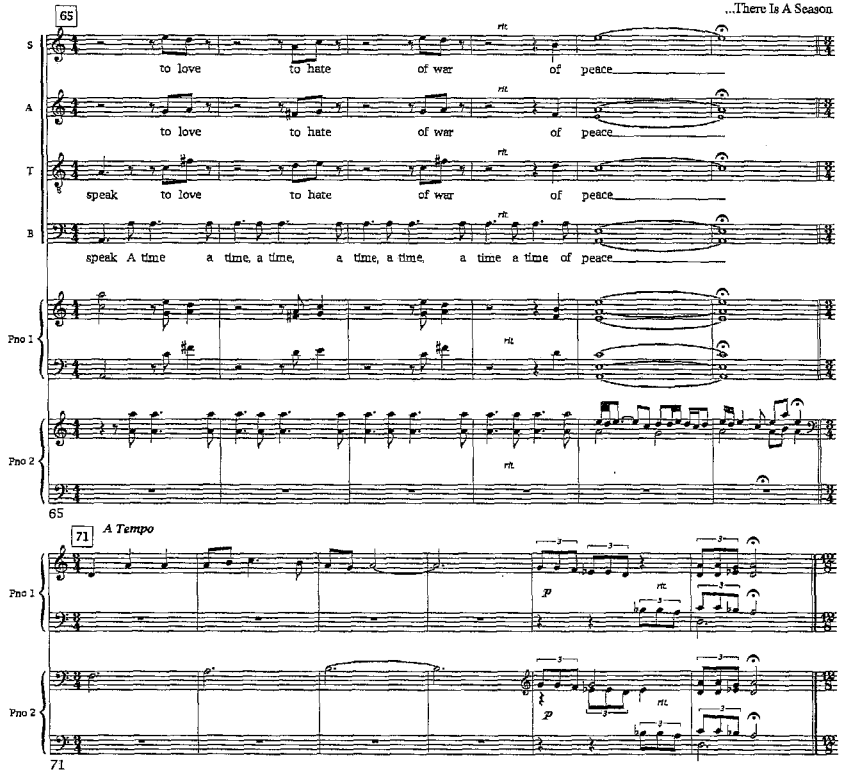


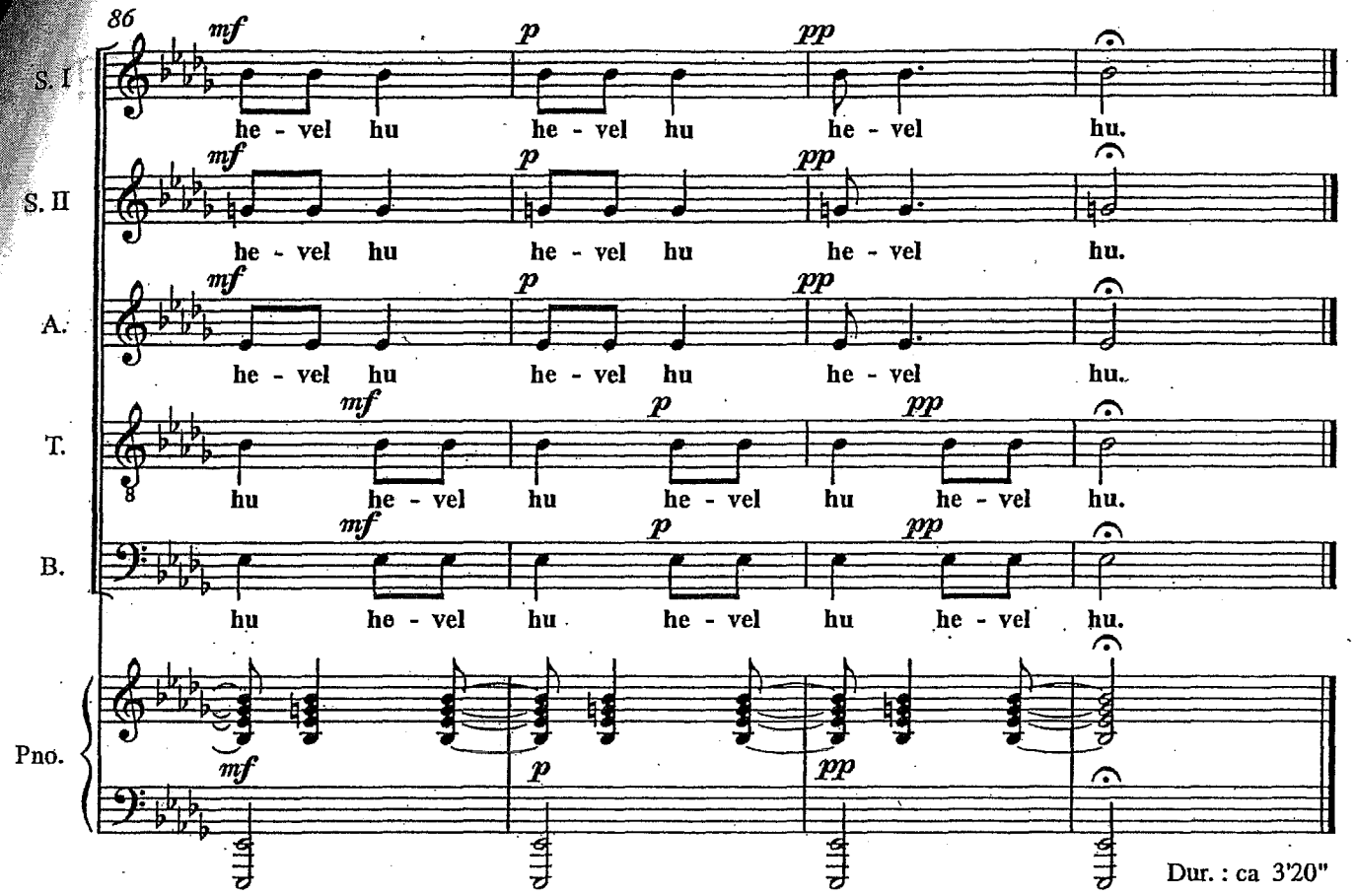

S
To build There is a time to weep, There is a time to laugh There is a
A
To build There is a time to weep, There is a time to laugh There is a
T
To build A time to weep There is a time to laugh
B
time, a time, a time, a time A time to weep Time to laugh
Pno 1
Pno 2
21
S
time to mourn, There is a time to dance
A
time to mourn, a time to dance
T
A time to mourn A time to dance
B
A time to mourn There is a time to dance
Pno 1
Pno 2
27


34
S
Time to scat-ter stones Time to gath-er stones to - geth-er A
A
Time to scat-ter stones Time to gath-er stones to - geth-er A
T
A
B
A time and a time A
Pno 1
Pno 2
32
Solo · Tenor
42
Solo
To ev-'ry-thing ev-'ry-thing ev-'ry-thing ev-'ry-thing
S
time time to hold off em - brac-es.
A
time time to hold off em - brac-es.
T
time to em - brace and a time to hold off em - brac-es
B
time and a time em - brac-es
Pno 1
Pno 2
38

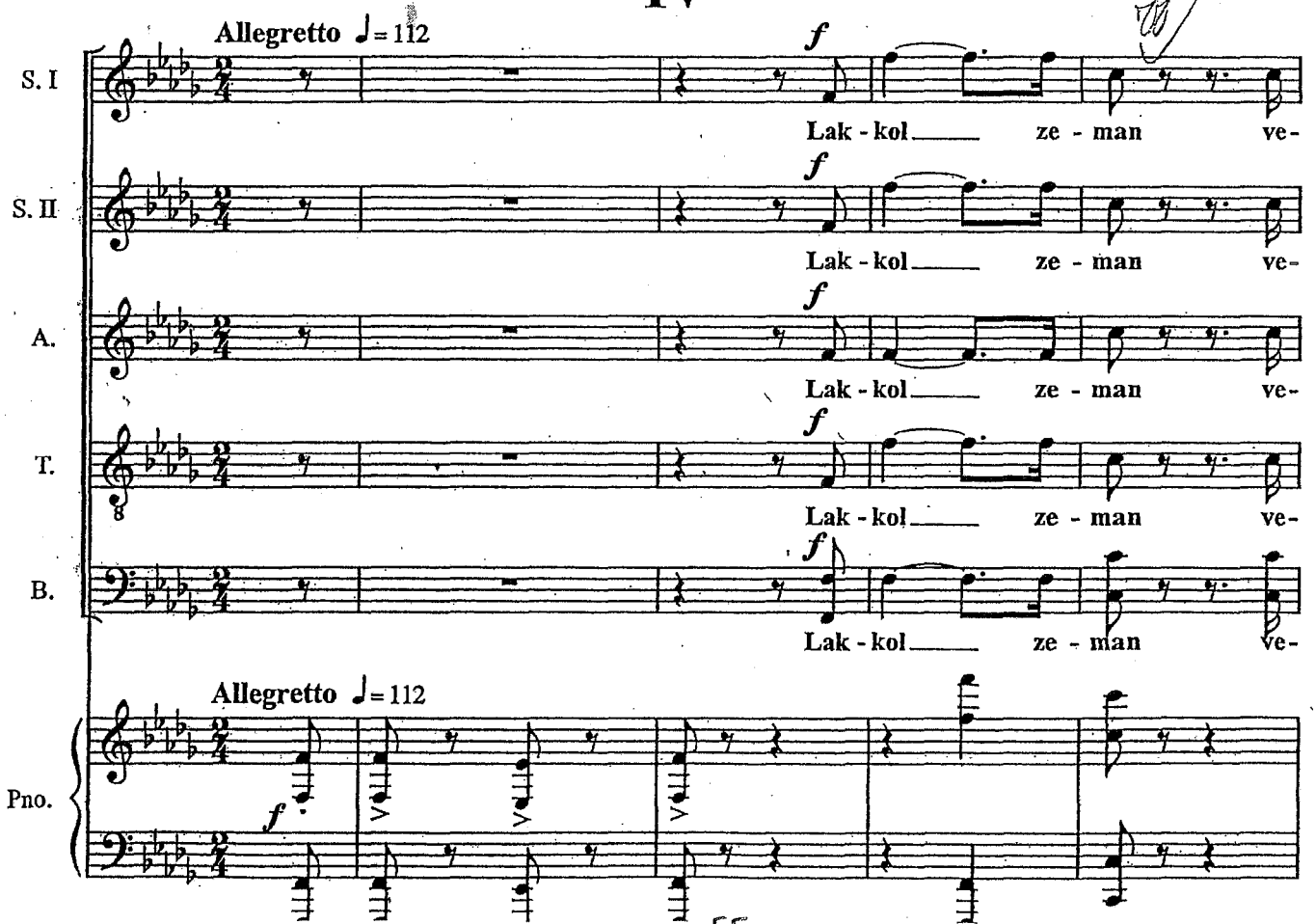

Solo
there is, there is a sea-son And a time n' a time n' a time n' a time n' a
Pno 1
Pno 2
43
50
Solo
time for ev-'ry pur-pose un-der the heav-ens
S
There is a time to seek, There is a
A
There is a time to seek, There is a
T
A time to seek There is a
B
A time to seek
Pno 1
Pno 2
47

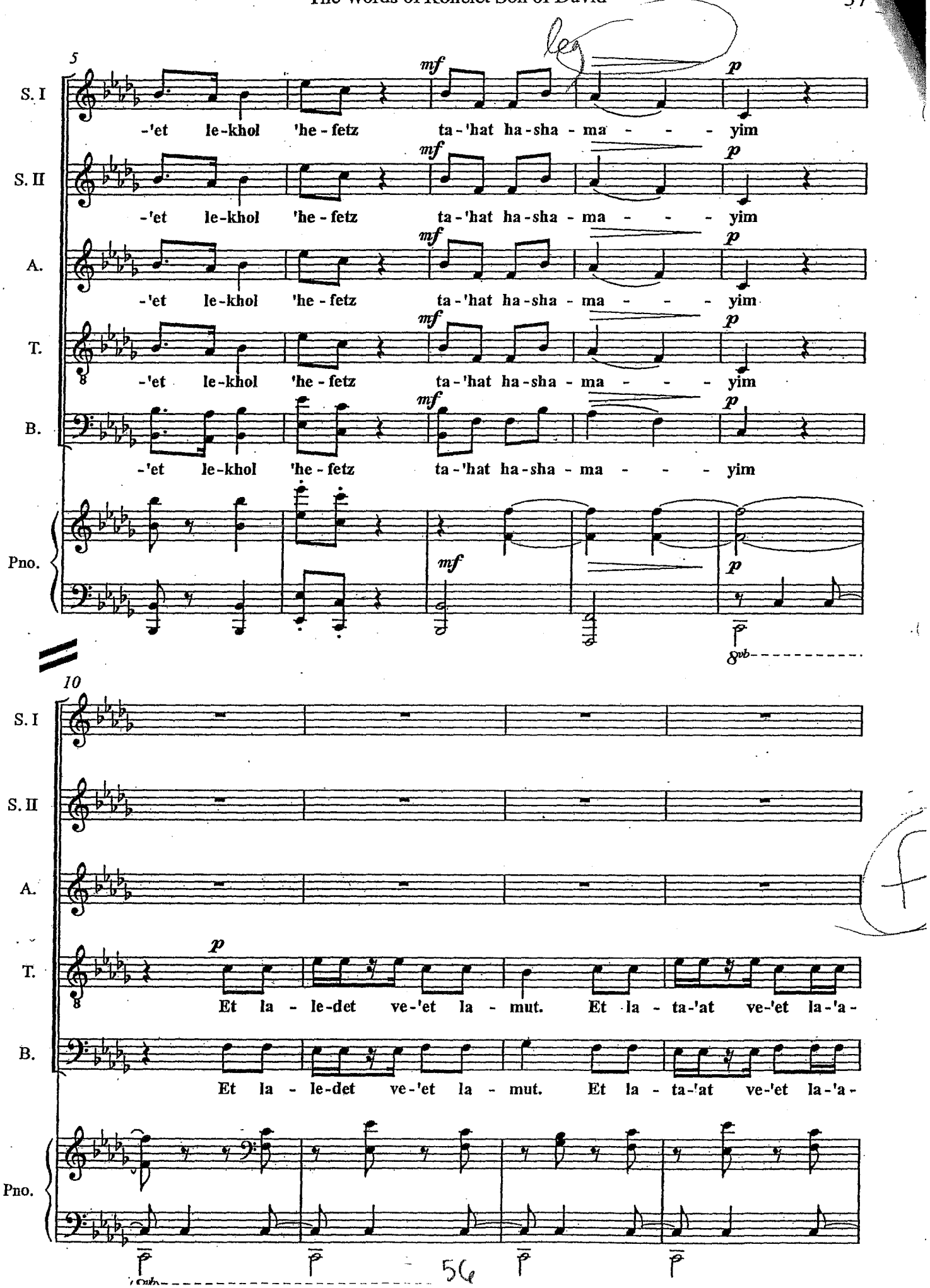

S
time to lose There is a time to keep, There is a time to cast off There is a
A
time to lose There is a time to keep, a time to cast off There is a
T
time to lose A time to keep A time to cast off
B
Time to lose A time to keep There is a time to cast off
Pno 1
Pno 2
52
S
time to tear There is a time to be si-lent
A
time to tear There is a time to be si-lent
T
There is a time to re - pair There is a time to
B
There is a time to re - pair There is a time to
Pno 1
Pno 2
58

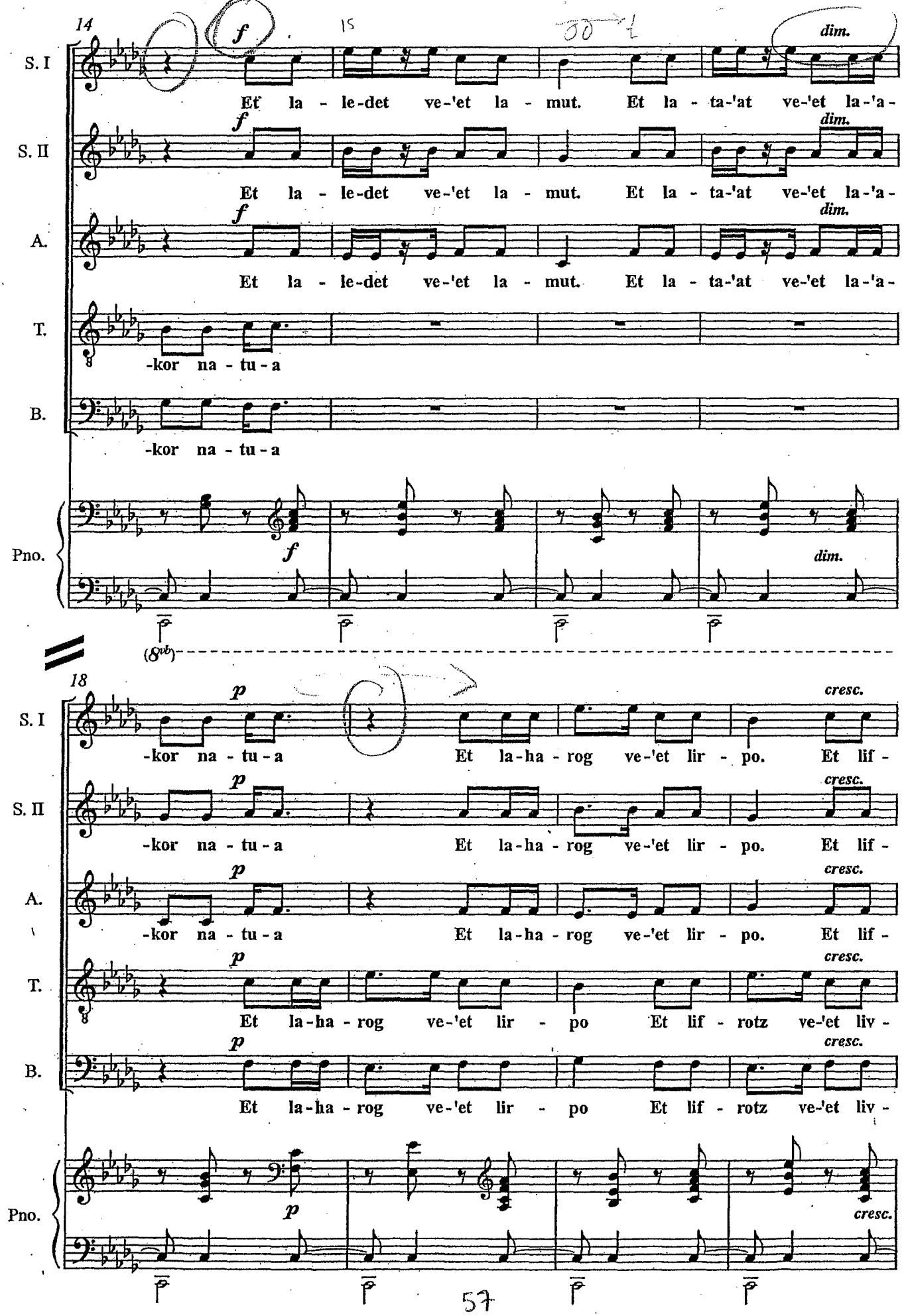

65
S
to love to hate of war of peace
A
to love to hate of war of peace
T
speak to love to hate of war of peace
B
speak A time a time, a time, a time, a time, a time a time of peace
Pno 1
Pno 2
rit.
65
71
A Tempo
Pno 1
Pno 2
p
rit.
71

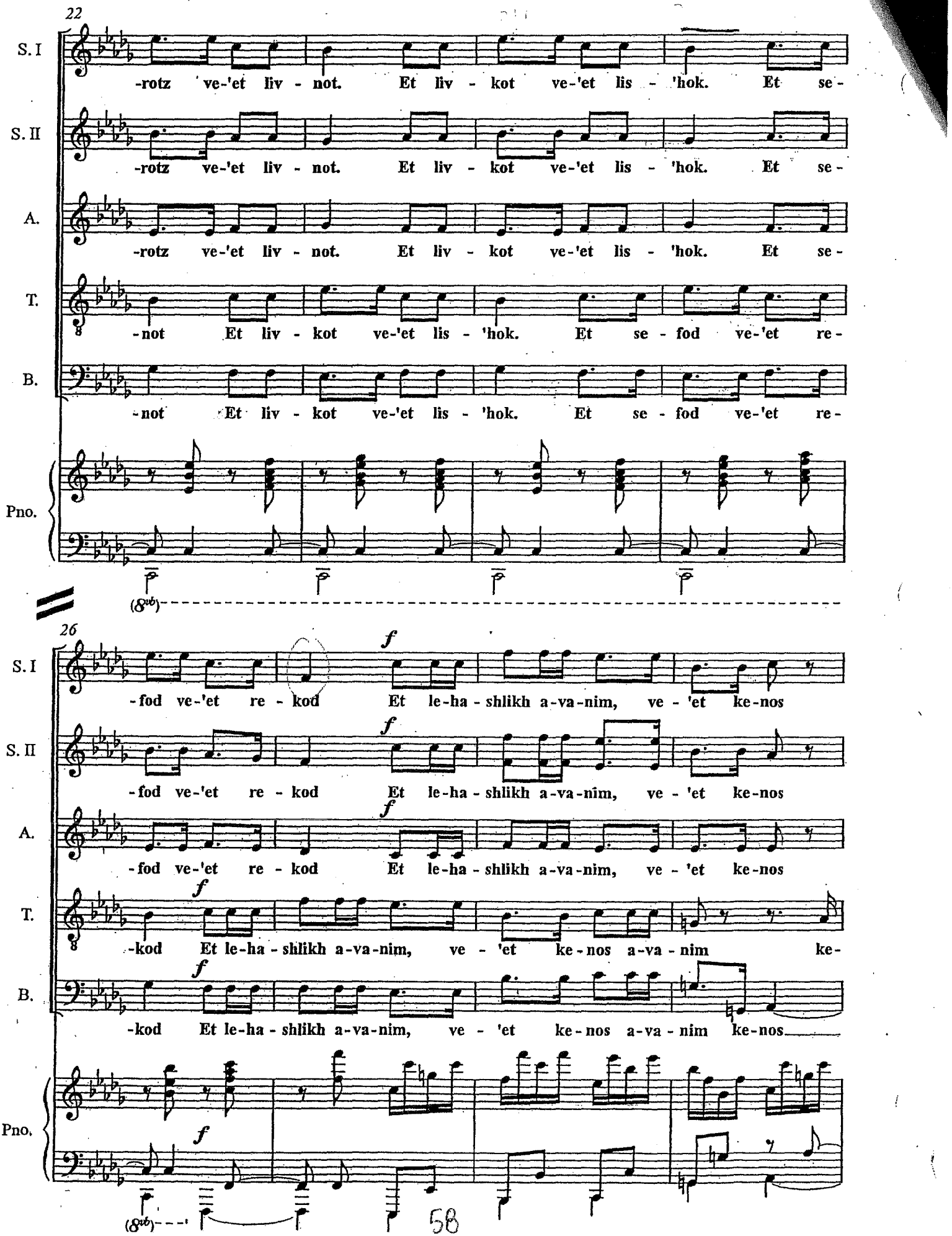

86
S. I
S. II
A.
T.
B.
Pno.
mf p pp
he - vel hu he - vel hu he - vel hu.
hu he - vel hu he - vel hu he - vel hu.
Dur. : ca 3'20"

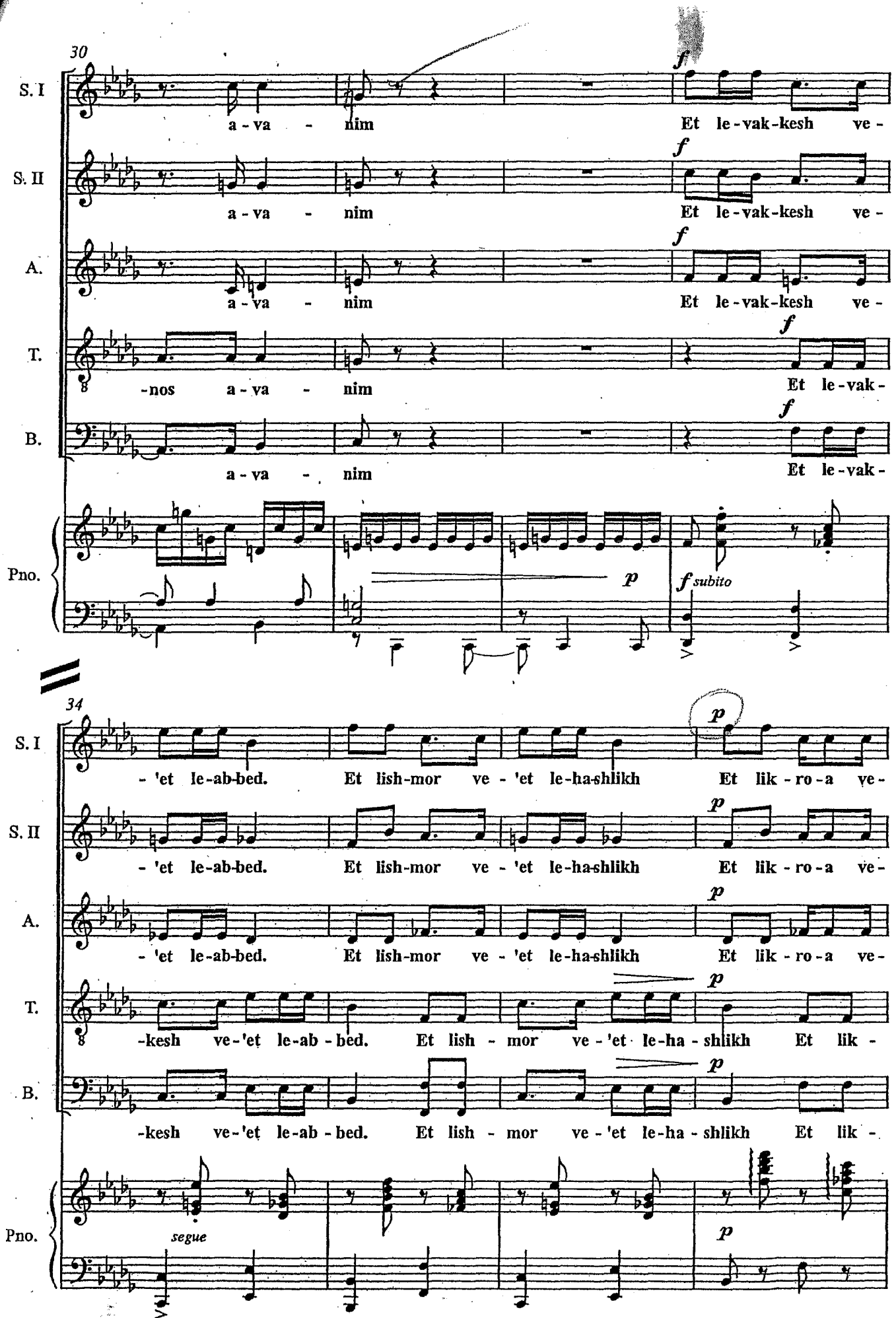
IV

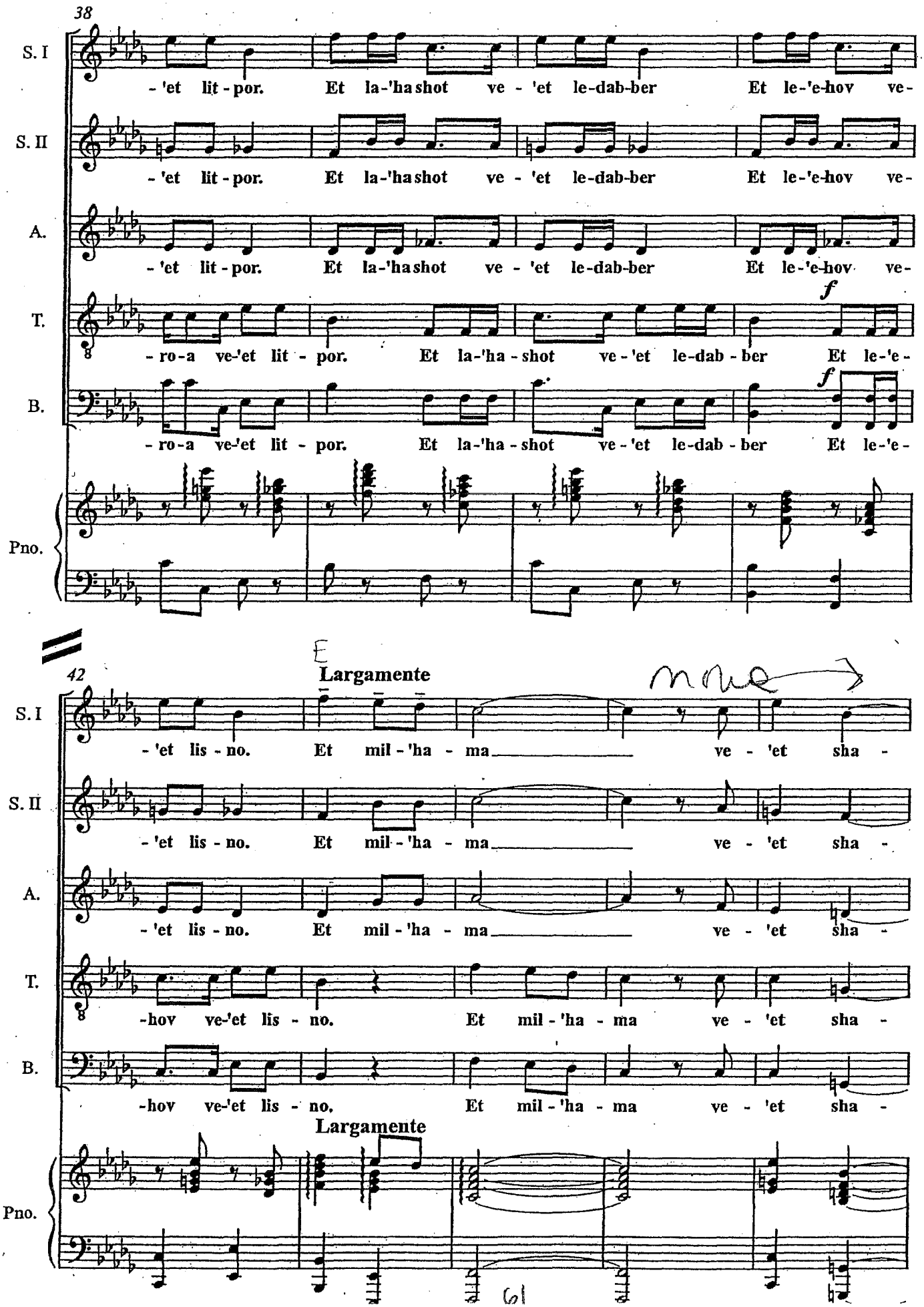

Allegretto ♩= 112
S. I
S. II
A.
T.
B.
Pno.
f
Lak - kol ze - man ve-

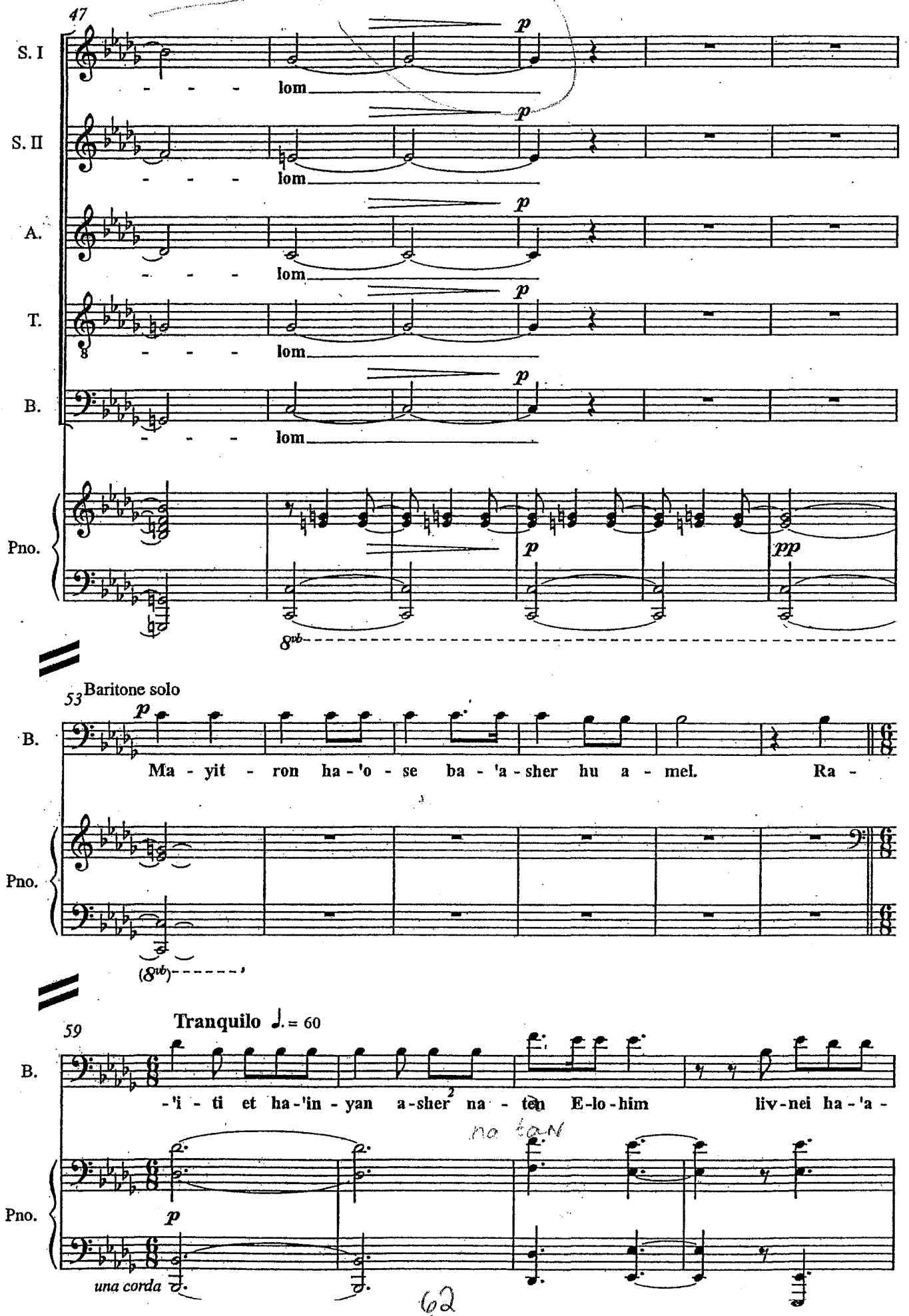

5
S. I
S. II
A.
T.
B.
Pno.
mf
p
-'et le-khol 'he-fetz ta-'hat ha-sha-ma - - - yim
8vb
10
Et la-le-det ve-'et la-mut. Et la-ta-'at ve-'et la-'a-


14
S. I
S. II
A.
T.
B.
Pno.
f
dim.
Et la - le-det ve-'et la - mut. Et la - ta-'at ve-'et la-'a-
-kor na - tu - a
(8vb)
18
p
cresc.
-kor na - tu - a Et la-ha - rog ve-'et lir - po. Et lif -
Et la-ha - rog ve-'et lir - po Et lif - rotz ve-'et liv -


22
S. I
-rotz ve-'et liv - not. Et liv - kot ve-'et lis - 'hok. Et se-
S. II
-rotz ve-'et liv - not. Et liv - kot ve-'et lis - 'hok. Et se-
A.
-rotz ve-'et liv - not. Et liv - kot ve-'et lis - 'hok. Et se-
T.
-not Et liv - kot ve-'et lis - 'hok. Et se - fod ve-'et re-
B.
-not Et liv - kot ve-'et lis - 'hok. Et se - fod ve-'et re-
Pno.
(8vb)
26
S. I
-fod ve-'et re - kod Et le-ha - shlikh a-va-nim, ve - 'et ke-nos
S. II
-fod ve-'et re - kod Et le-ha - shlikh a-va-nim, ve - 'et ke-nos
A.
-fod ve-'et re - kod Et le-ha - shlikh a-va-nim, ve - 'et ke-nos
T.
-kod Et le-ha - shlikh a-va-nim, ve - 'et ke-nos a-va - nim ke-
B.
-kod Et le-ha - shlikh a-va-nim, ve - 'et ke-nos a-va - nim ke-nos
Pno.
(8vb)
58


30
S. I
a - va - nim
f
Et le - vak - kesh ve -
S. II
a - va - nim
f
Et le - vak - kesh ve -
A.
a - va - nim
f
Et le - vak - kesh ve -
T.
-nos a - va - nim
f
Et le - vak -
B.
a - va - nim
f
Et le - vak -
Pno.
p
f subito
34
S. I
- 'et le - ab - bed. Et lish - mor ve - 'et le - ha - shlikh
p
Et lik - ro - a ve -
S. II
- 'et le - ab - bed. Et lish - mor ve - 'et le - ha - shlikh
p
Et lik - ro - a ve -
A.
- 'et le - ab - bed. Et lish - mor ve - 'et le - ha - shlikh
p
Et lik - ro - a ve -
T.
-kesh ve - 'et le - ab - bed. Et lish - mor ve - 'et le - ha - shlikh
p
Et lik -
B.
-kesh ve - 'et le - ab - bed. Et lish - mor ve - 'et le - ha - shlikh
p
Et lik -
Pno.
segue
p


38
S. I
-'et lit-por. Et la-'ha shot ve-'et le-dab-ber Et le-'e-hov ve-
S. II
-'et lit-por. Et la-'ha shot ve-'et le-dab-ber Et le-'e-hov ve-
A.
-'et lit-por. Et la-'ha shot ve-'et le-dab-ber Et le-'e-hov ve-
T.
f
-ro-a ve-'et lit-por. Et la-'ha-shot ve-'et le-dab-ber Et le-'e-
B.
f
-ro-a ve-'et lit-por. Et la-'ha-shot ve-'et le-dab-ber Et le-'e-
Pno.
42
Largamente
S. I
-'et lis-no. Et mil-'ha-ma ve-'et sha-
S. II
-'et lis-no. Et mil-'ha-ma ve-'et sha-
A.
-'et lis-no. Et mil-'ha-ma ve-'et sha-
T.
-hov ve-'et lis-no. Et mil-'ha-ma ve-'et sha-
B.
-hov ve-'et lis-no. Et mil-'ha-ma ve-'et sha-
Largamente
Pno.


47
S. I
S. II
A.
T.
B.
Pno.
lom
p
pp
8vb
53 Baritone solo
Ma - yit - ron ha - 'o - se ba - 'a - sher hu a - mel. Ra -
59
Tranquilo ♩. = 60
-'i - ti et ha-'in - yan a-sher na - tan E-lo-him liv-nei ha - 'a -
una corda
62

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