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CONTEMPORARY ART SONGS FOR SELECTED GHANAIAN LANGUAGES: COMPOSITION AND ANALYSIS

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Abstract

One of the significant musical artefacts that emerged from Ghanaian–European socio-cultural encounters in the nineteenth century was the art song; a composition for solo voice and piano typically set to poetry or narrative text. Art songs provide a platform for individual performers to demonstrate vocal artistry and interpretive skill. In contemporary Ghana, however, art song composition and performance have received limited attention, overshadowed by the proliferation of choral music. Existing scholarship suggests that, apart from the pioneering works of Ephraim Amu and J.H. Kwabena Nketia, relatively few Ghanaian composers have created contemporary art songs suited to the audiences of the twenty-first century. This article presents new art song compositions in different Ghanaian languages and for varied vocal ranges, with the aim of fostering accessibility and appreciation within the Ghanaian context. The study further provides formal analyses of the works to illuminate the compositional techniques and stylistic approaches employed. Using purposive sampling and document analysis of the compositions and related texts, the study highlights creative possibilities in Ghanaian art music. In this regard, it seeks to encourage solo vocal performance, stimulate compositional exploration, and expand research into art song as a vital dimension of Ghana's contemporary art music practice.

Keywords: *Art song, Ghanaian art songs, solo performances, musical analysis, indigenisation*

1. Introduction

The evolution of art music in Ghana has been shaped by the interaction between indigenous musical principles and Western art music traditions. One of the most significant outcomes of this intercultural encounter is the art song, which is a composition for solo voice and piano (Sackey, 2023). Art songs provide an expressive platform for performers, enabling both singer and pianist to demonstrate artistry and interpretive depth. Yet, despite this potential, art song remains relatively underexplored within contemporary Ghanaian musical practice. Historically, the pioneering works of Ephraim Amu and J.H. Kwabena Nketia established a foundation for Ghanaian art song, particularly through their efforts to

indigenise Western compositional forms by incorporating tonal and rhythmic inflections of Ghanaian languages. Their contributions represent a symbiosis of indigenous musical resources and Western idioms, resulting in compositions that have endured in performance and scholarship. However, the predominance of choral ensembles in recent decades has overshadowed solo vocal repertoire, contributing to the marginalisation of indigenous art songs in Ghana's contemporary music scene (Acquah, 2018).

It is worthy of note that many of Amu's and Nketia's compositions were written for tenor voice and set to Twi texts, thereby limiting their accessibility to performers of specific linguistic and vocal backgrounds (Sackey, 2023). Moreover, relatively few Ghanaian composers have attempted to create art songs that engage with the stylistic expectations of 21st-century audiences. This article, therefore, seeks to revitalise interest in Ghanaian art song by presenting and analysing newly composed works that reflect the linguistic diversity and stylistic plurality of Ghana's musical heritage. These compositions build upon the intercultural foundations laid by earlier composers but extend them through the integration of modern compositional devices such as chromaticism, pandiatonicism, modulation, parallelism, and innovative notational techniques (Noor et al., 2025; Ouyang, 2023; Sackey, 2025). Unlike the largely monotonal and diatonic approaches of Amu and Nketia, these new works explore broader harmonic and melodic palettes, thereby expanding the expressive and technical possibilities of Ghanaian art song in the contemporary era.

1. Review of Related Literature

The study of contemporary Ghanaian art songs must be situated within broader discourses that bring together creative ethnomusicology, melodic theory, indigenous African resources, the global art song tradition and the practice of musical analysis. This review highlights these intersecting bodies of scholarship and demonstrates how they inform the present study.

2.1 Creative Ethnomusicology

Creative ethnomusicology has emerged as a discipline that bridges ethnographic documentation with artistic innovation. It involves the collection of musical resources through fieldwork such as observation, transcription and analysis, as well as and their transformation into new compositions (Euba, 1993; Agawu, 2011). The pioneering works of Akin Euba illustrate how intercultural compositions can achieve a balanced synthesis of African and Western idioms (Brukman, 2017). Within the Ghanaian context, J.H. Kwabena Nketia exemplifies this creative trajectory. His works translate ethnomusicological insights into compositions that employ Western harmonic frameworks while preserving Ghanaian melodic and rhythmic sensibilities. Much like Bartók in Europe, Nketia demonstrates how indigenous resources can shape distinctive compositional voices (Lwanga, 2013; Sackey, 2023). Such creative designs establish an important precedent for contemporary art song composers who seek to move beyond transcription towards innovative synthesis.

2.2 Melodic Elements and Indigenous Source Materials

Melody remains a fundamental element of music, serving as the most immediate and recognisable feature to audiences (Forney & Machlis, 2007). Its components such as pitch, rhythm, tonality, form, texture, dynamics, timbre and text define both its structure and expressive capacity. Scholarship has highlighted how pitch and rhythm articulate cultural identity (Goldstein, 2018; Oxenham, 2012), how tonality interacts with cognition and language (Jiang et al., 2023; Silva et al., 2023), and how form and texture provide coherence across diverse musical styles (Smith, 2020; Hernandez-Olivan & Beltrán, 2022).

For Ghanaian art songs, melodic design is particularly significant because it embodies speech-tone contours and cultural aesthetics. The integration of timbre, dynamics and text further extends expressive possibilities, making the solo voice not merely a vehicle of sound but also a conveyor of cultural

meaning (Arvidsson, 2021; Di Stefano, 2023). In the present study, these melodic parameters serve as critical analytical markers for assessing the originality and cultural depth of new compositions.

African musical traditions provide rich compositional resources rooted in communal life, cultural values and language (Nketia, 1984; Sunkett, 1993). Indigenous music is often polyrhythmic, polyphonic, and highly participatory, with rhythm as its most defining characteristic (Agawu, 1995). While rhythm dominates, melodic elements remain significant, shaped by speech-tone patterns, intervallic contours, and the expressive use of timbre (Kazarow, 1993). Other salient features include call-and-response textures, parallel harmonies in thirds and sixths, and ornamental vocal techniques such as glissandi, ululation and falsetto (Amuah, 2012; Bronner, 2002). Music in African societies functions both as social regulation and as communal affirmation, underscoring its embeddedness in everyday life (Cohen, 2012). For Ghanaian composers, these indigenous resources are not simply historical artefacts but living materials that continue to shape modern art song composition.

2.3 Art Song Compositions

Globally, the art song has long represented a refined synthesis of poetry, voice and accompaniment. Schubert's lieder, for example, exemplify the art song's ability to merge piano and voice in a dynamic partnership, where accompaniment assumes a narrational and atmospheric role (Lin, 2020). Beyond Europe, African pianism has reimagined the piano as a percussive instrument, drawing inspiration from drumming patterns, bell timelines, and mbira textures to create intercultural idioms (Dong, 2021). In Ghana, composers such as Ephraim Amu and J.H. Kwabena Nketia have extended this tradition, treating the piano as a dialogic partner while embedding indigenous vocal inflections. Their works, though seminal, remain largely restricted to Twi texts and tenor ranges, limiting their accessibility (Sackey, 2025). Contemporary scholarship therefore calls for new art songs that engage wider linguistic and stylistic pluralities, while also embracing modern techniques such as chromaticism, modulation, and extended vocal devices (Morrison, 2019; Peñalver Vilar & Valles Grau, 2020).

2.4 Musical Analysis

Musical analysis provides the framework through which compositions can be systematically understood. It involves breaking down a piece into its core structural components and examining how these interact to produce coherence and meaning (Agawu, 2004; Bent, 2001). Formal analysis focuses on overall structures, while gestural analysis attends to expressive nuances such as phrasing, dynamics, and articulation. In this study, formal analysis was applied to evaluate scale use, vocal ranges, melodic organisation, harmony and tonality, texture and overall form. This approach does not only reveal technical construction but also uncovers how compositional techniques dramatise form and enhance expressive impact (Marvel, 2021; Mihelač & Povh, 2025). By applying these methods, the study situates Ghanaian art songs within both indigenous frameworks and global art song conventions, highlighting their intercultural hybridity.

The reviewed literature highlights three key points. First, creative ethnomusicology provides a pathway for transforming indigenous materials into new compositional languages. Second, melody and indigenous African resources remain central to Ghanaian identity in art song composition. Third, art song as a genre offers a fertile space for intercultural experimentation, requiring systematic musical analysis to fully appreciate its stylistic innovations. This body of scholarship reveals a clear gap: while Amu and Nketia laid the foundation for Ghanaian art song, few contemporary composers have expanded the repertoire across different Ghanaian languages, vocal ranges, and modern compositional idioms. The present study responds to this gap by creating and analysing new art songs that embody Ghana's linguistic diversity and stylistic plurality, thereby revitalising solo vocal performance within the nation's musical landscape.

3. Methodology

The study employed purposive sampling to select four contemporary art songs representing diverse human voice types and Ghanaian languages. Purposive sampling is particularly valuable in qualitative research because it allows for the deliberate selection of cases most relevant to the research objectives, thereby ensuring the collection of rich and context-specific data (Andrade, 2021; Mulisa, 2022; Patton, 2015; Tajik et al., 2024). In this study, *Mankessim Gua* (Mankessim Market), *Avihawo* (Lamentation), *Tuma Kpansibu* (Work hard), and *Simpa Aboabikyire* (Deer hunt) were chosen to represent the four basic vocal types (soprano, alto, tenor and bass) as well as different Ghanaian languages (Fante, Ewe, Dagbani and Effutu).

In addition, document analysis served as the primary research instrument. This involved a systematic review and interpretation of the selected compositions to uncover their musical elements, compositional techniques, and stylistic features. Document analysis, as a qualitative research tool, entails the critical examination of texts and materials that include scores, books, articles and reports that provide a structured means of extracting meaning and insights (Annan et al., 2024; Bowen, 2009; Morgan, 2022; Patton, 2015).

To deepen interpretation, the study adopted formal analysis as its analytical lens. Formal analysis is concerned with breaking down a musical work into its structural components and examining how these interact to generate meaning and expression (Agawu, 2004; Bent, 2001; Marvel, 2021). Accordingly, the study examined variables such as scale, melodic organisation, vocal range, harmony and tonality, non-chord tones, texture and form. This approach revealed the underlying structural relationships within the songs and illuminated how these elements dramatise musical form and heighten expressive quality (Mihelač & Povh, 2025; Stanley, 2021).

Finally, to ensure trustworthiness, the study emphasised credibility and confirmability. As indicated by Annan et al. (2024), credibility was strengthened through careful cross-checking of analytical findings with existing scholarship on African and Ghanaian art song traditions. Again, confirmability was ensured by grounding interpretations in verifiable musical evidence drawn directly from the scores. Together, these measures enhanced the reliability of the study's findings within a qualitative research framework (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004).

The study adhered to ethical standards in qualitative research. Since the selected songs embody cultural knowledge and linguistic identity, cultural sensitivity was prioritised in the interpretation and discussion of findings. The use of Ghanaian languages (Fante, Ewe, Dagbani and Effutu) was approached with respect to their socio-cultural meanings, ensuring that no misrepresentation occurred. Intellectual property was safeguarded by properly acknowledging composers and scholarly sources consulted. Moreover, the study avoided cultural bias by situating interpretations within Ghanaian and African aesthetic frameworks, rather than imposing only Western analytical paradigms. This ethical stance ensured that the research honoured both the creative integrity of the composers and the cultural heritage embedded in the songs.

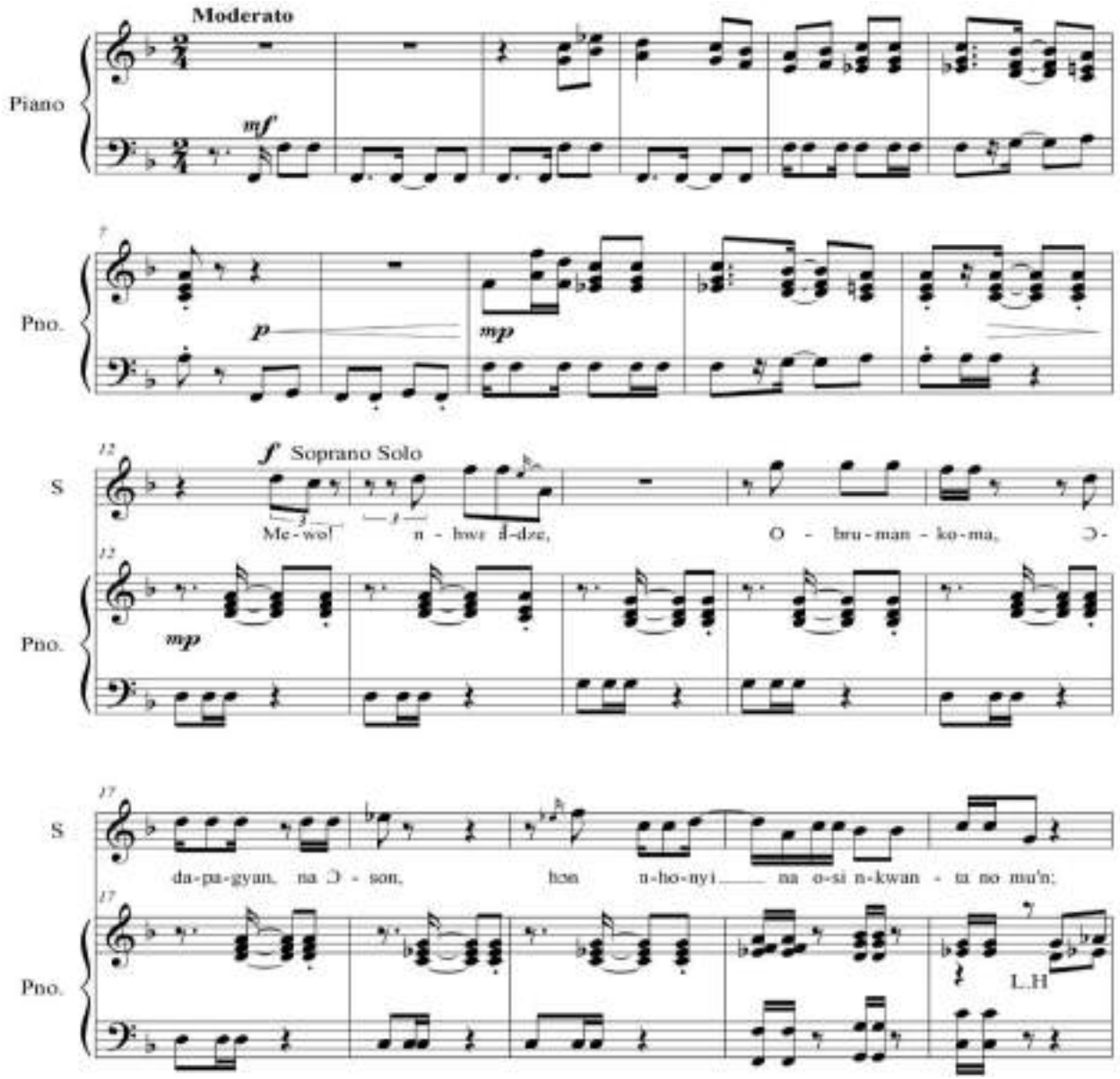
4. Presentation and Analysis

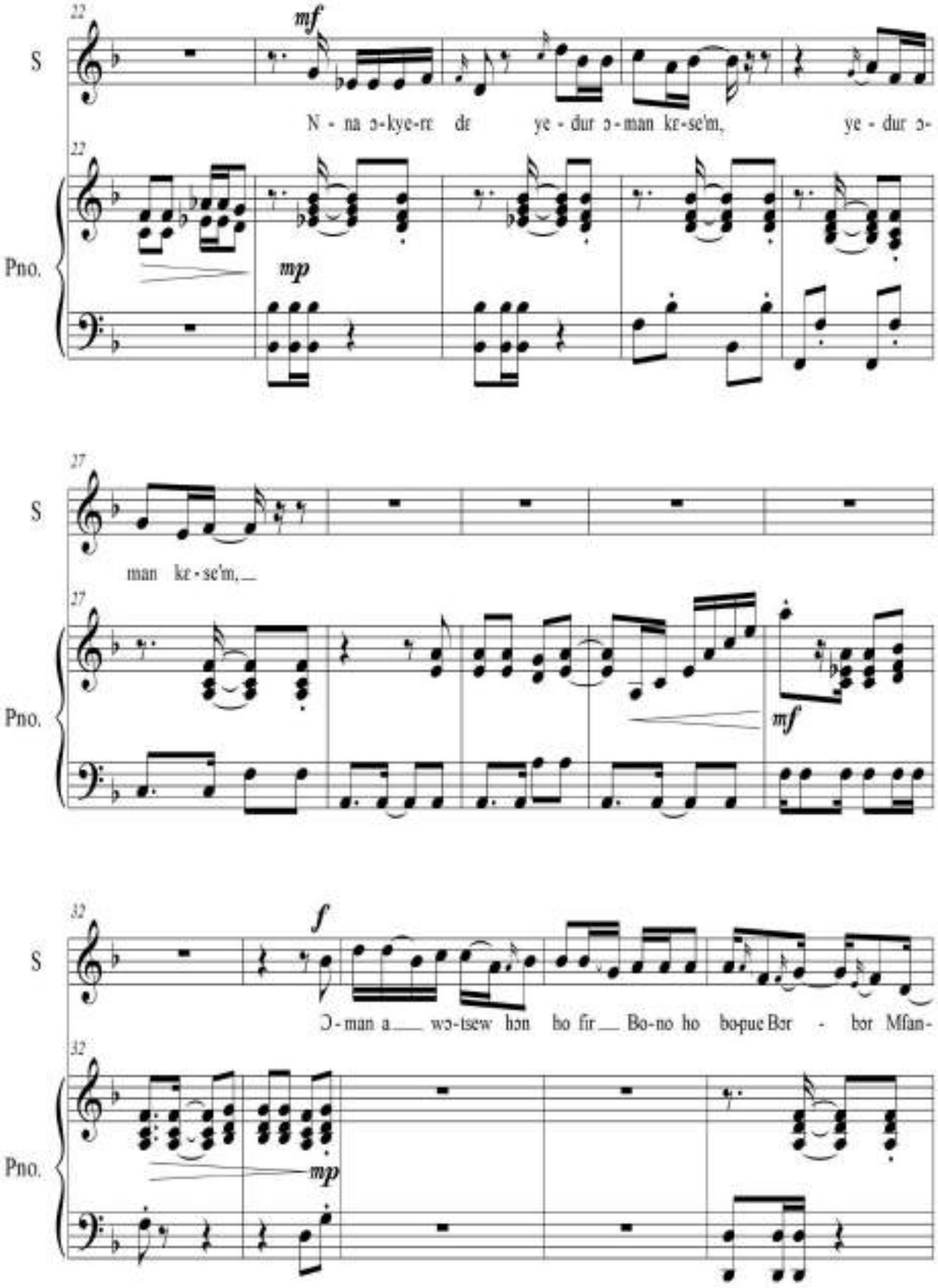
4.1 Presentation

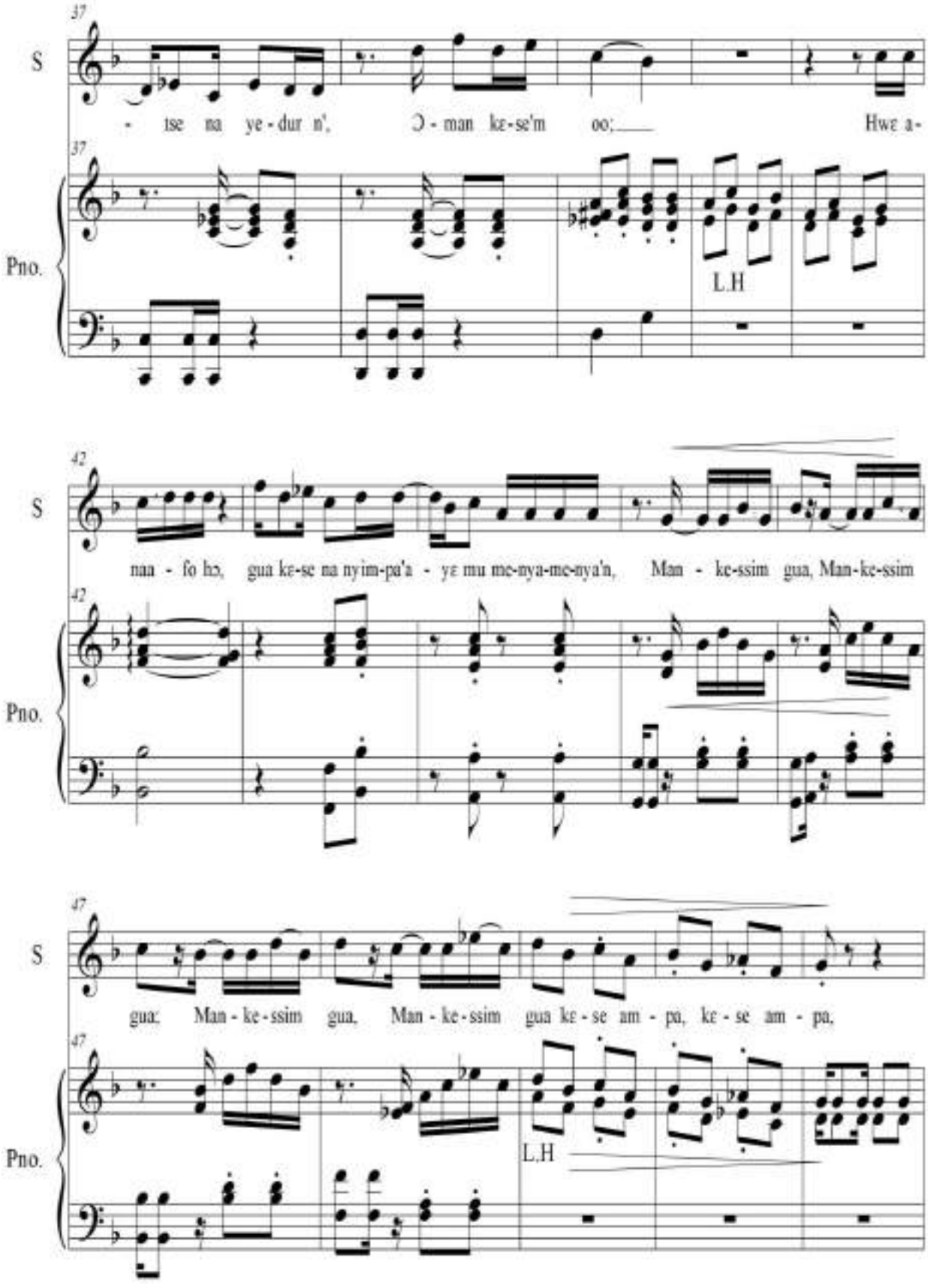
Four Ghanaian art songs for solo voice, specifically written for soprano, alto, tenor and bass were created to demonstrate musical imagination, creative resourcefulness, and mastery of compositional techniques. Rooted in the principles of creative ethnomusicology, the songs draw on indigenous Ghanaian rhythmic, melodic, harmonic and textual resources while engaging with Western art song traditions. In particular, the piano accompaniment functions not merely as a supportive element but as an interactive and interpretive partner to the solo voice, reflecting the dialogic relationship characteristic of art song performance.

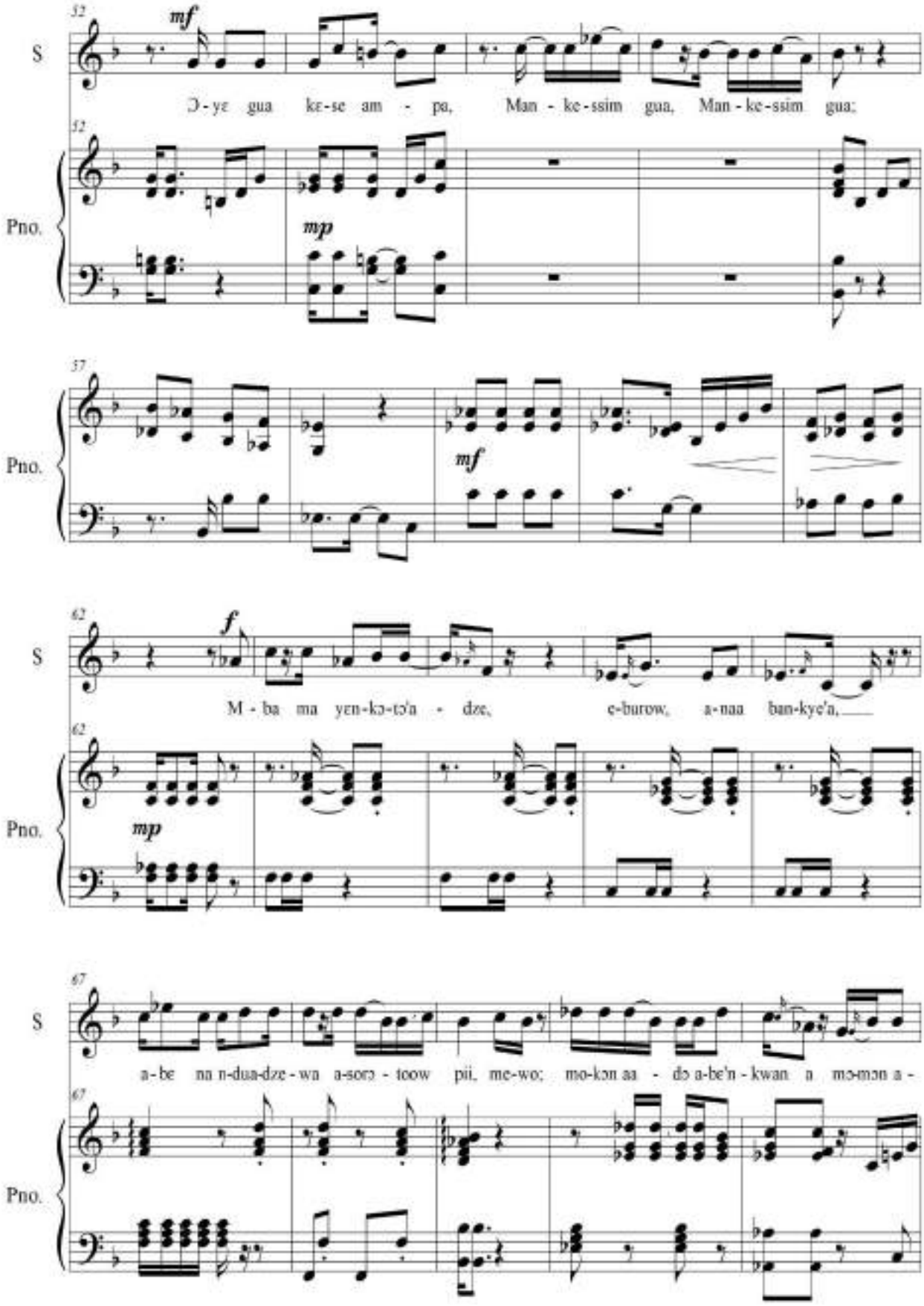
Structurally, the works employ both simple duple and compound duple time signatures and make use of varied key centres, ensuring accessibility and contrast across the four vocal types. The compositional approach reflects a balanced synthesis that integrates indigenous stylistic idioms such as rhythmic vitality and tonal inflections derived from speech patterns, with Western techniques of harmonic progression, counterpoint and formal organisation. In this regard, the songs embody a contemporary Ghanaian voice within the global art song tradition that highlights both cultural identity and creative innovation. The following is the composition.

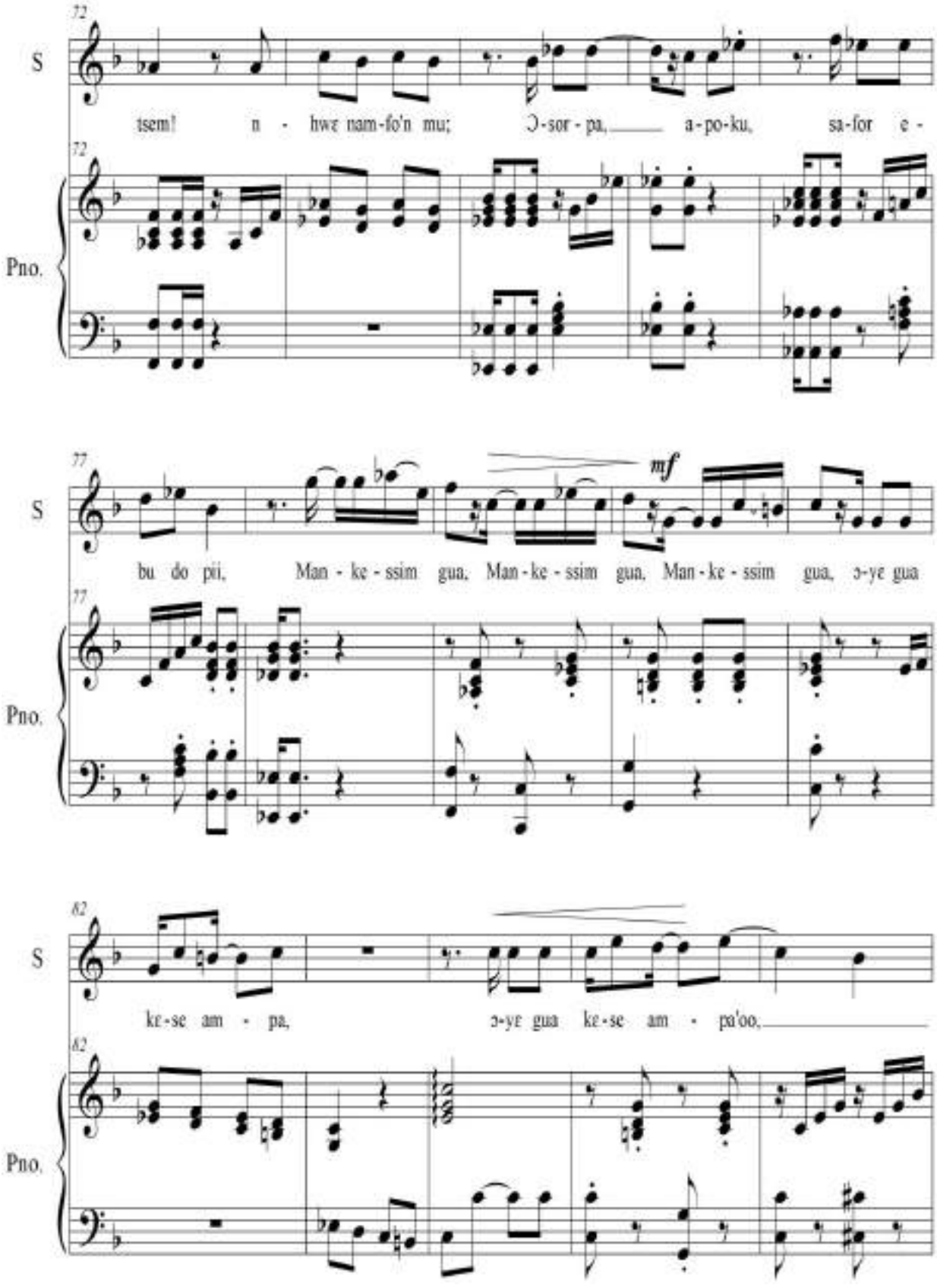
MANKESSIM GUA (Mankessim Market)

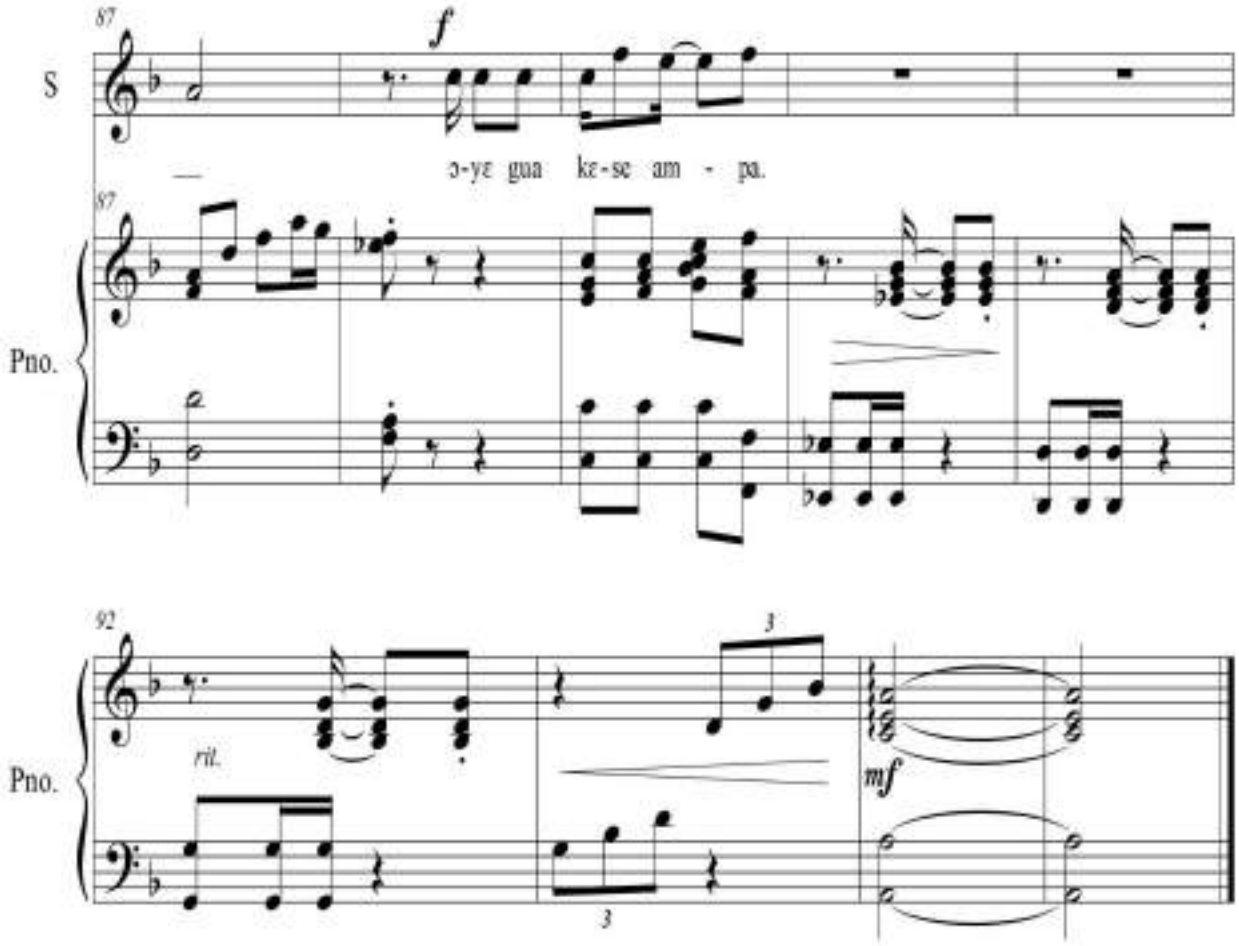



22
mf
S
N - na ɔ-kye-rɛ dɛ ye - dur ɔ - man kɛ-se'm, ye - dur ɔ-
22
Pno.
mp
27
S
man kɛ - se'm,
27
Pno.
mf
32
f
S
Ɔ - man a wɔ-tsew hɔn ho fir Bo-no ho bɔ-pue Bɔr - bor Mfan-
32
Pno.
mp

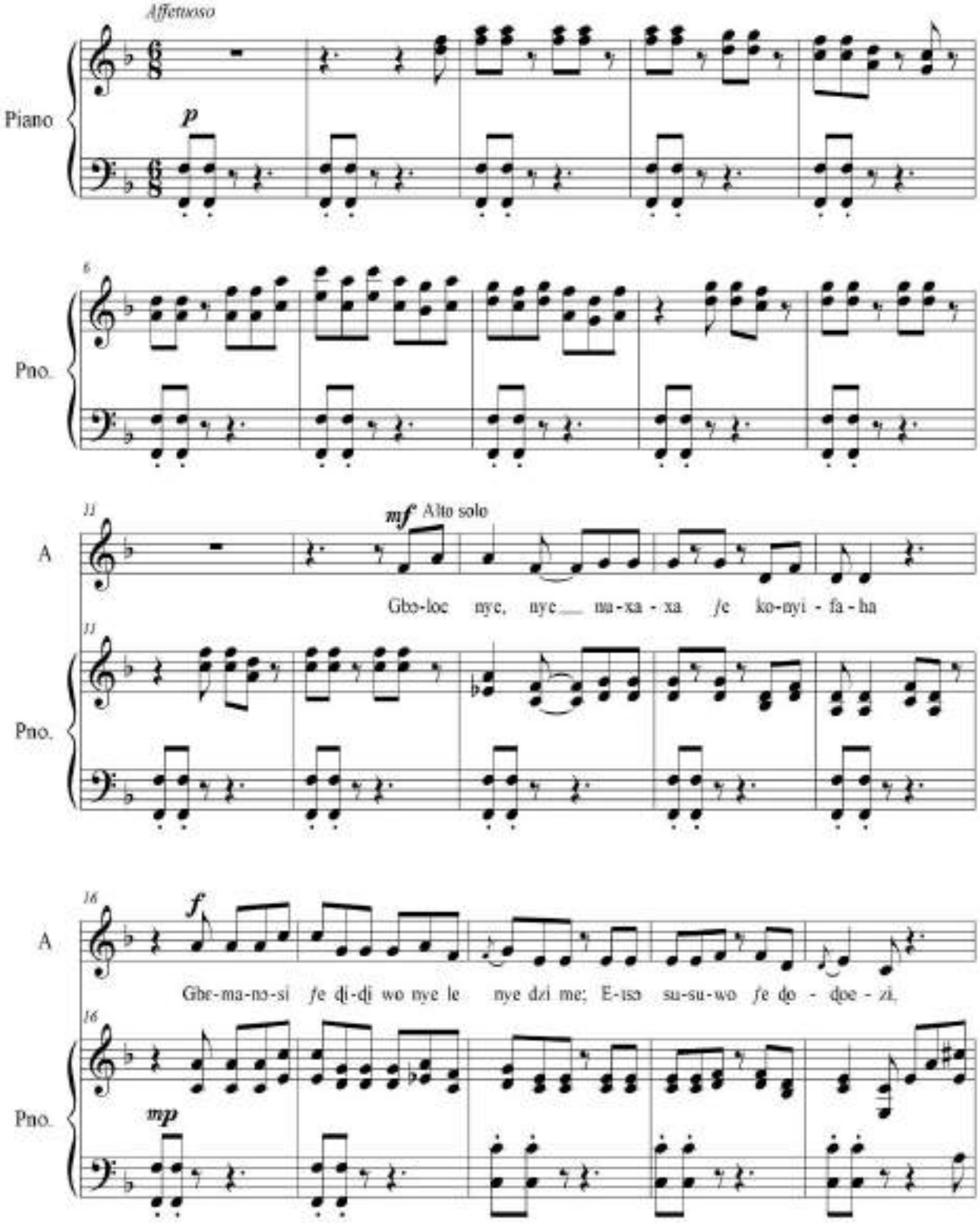

37
S
- tsɛ na ye - dur n', Ɔ - man kɛ - se'm oo; Hwɛ a -
37
Pno.
L.H
42
S
naa - fo hɔ, gua kɛ-se na nyim-pa'a - yɛ mu me-nya-me-nya'n, Man - ke-ssim gua, Man-ke-ssim
42
Pno.
47
S
gua: Man - ke - ssim gua, Man - ke - ssim gua kɛ - se am - pa, kɛ - se am - pa,
47
Pno.
L.H

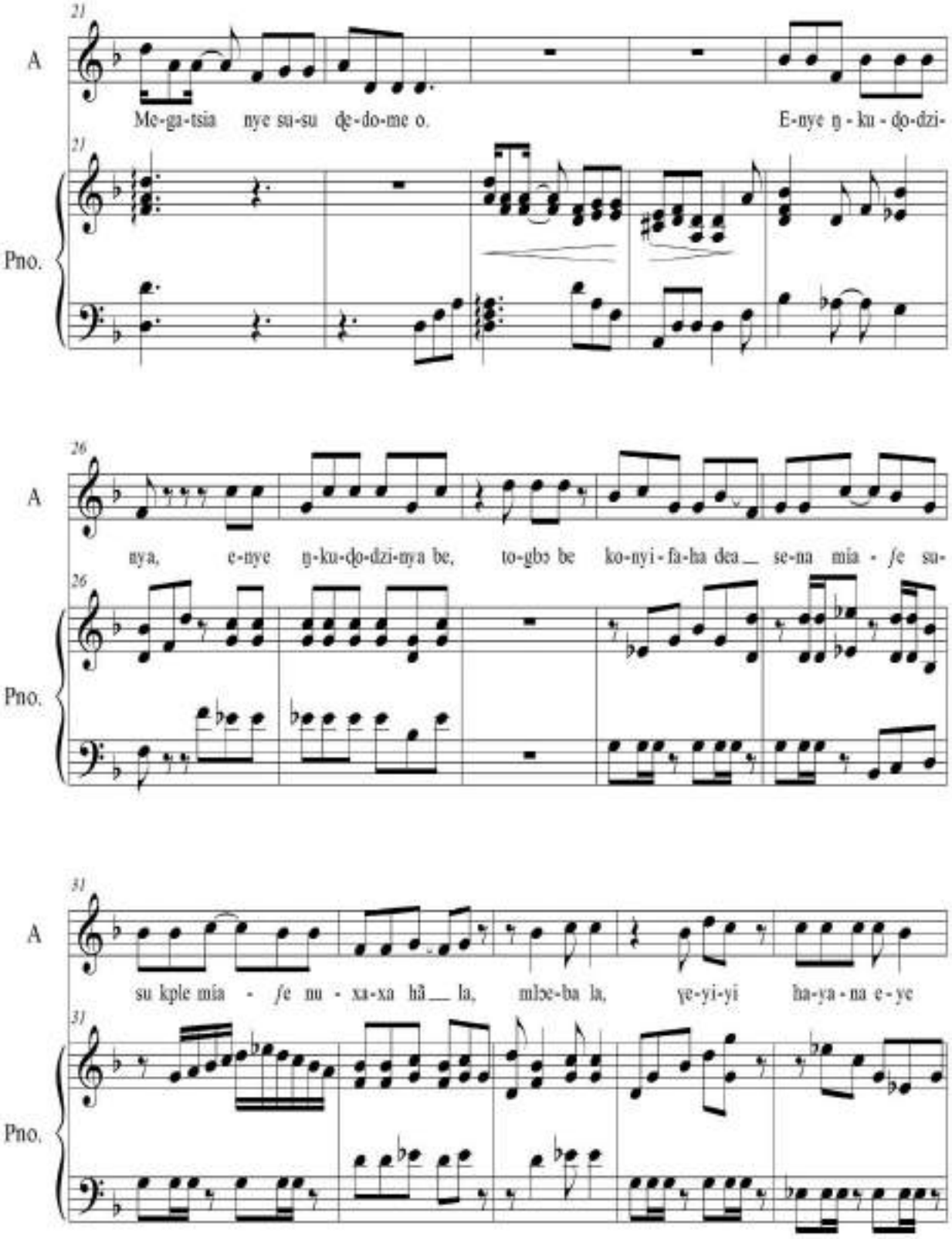

52
mf
S
Ɔ - yɛ gua kɛ - se am - pa, Man - ke - ssim gua, Man - ke - ssim gua;
52
Pno.
mp
57
Pno.
mf
62
f
S
M - ba ma yɛn - kɔ - tɔ'a - dzɛ, e - burow, a - naa ban - kye'a,
62
Pno.
mp
67
S
a - be na n - dua - dzɛ - wa a - sorɔ - toow pii, mɛ - wo; mo - kɔn aa - dɔ a - be'n - kwan a mɔ - mɔn a -
67
Pno.

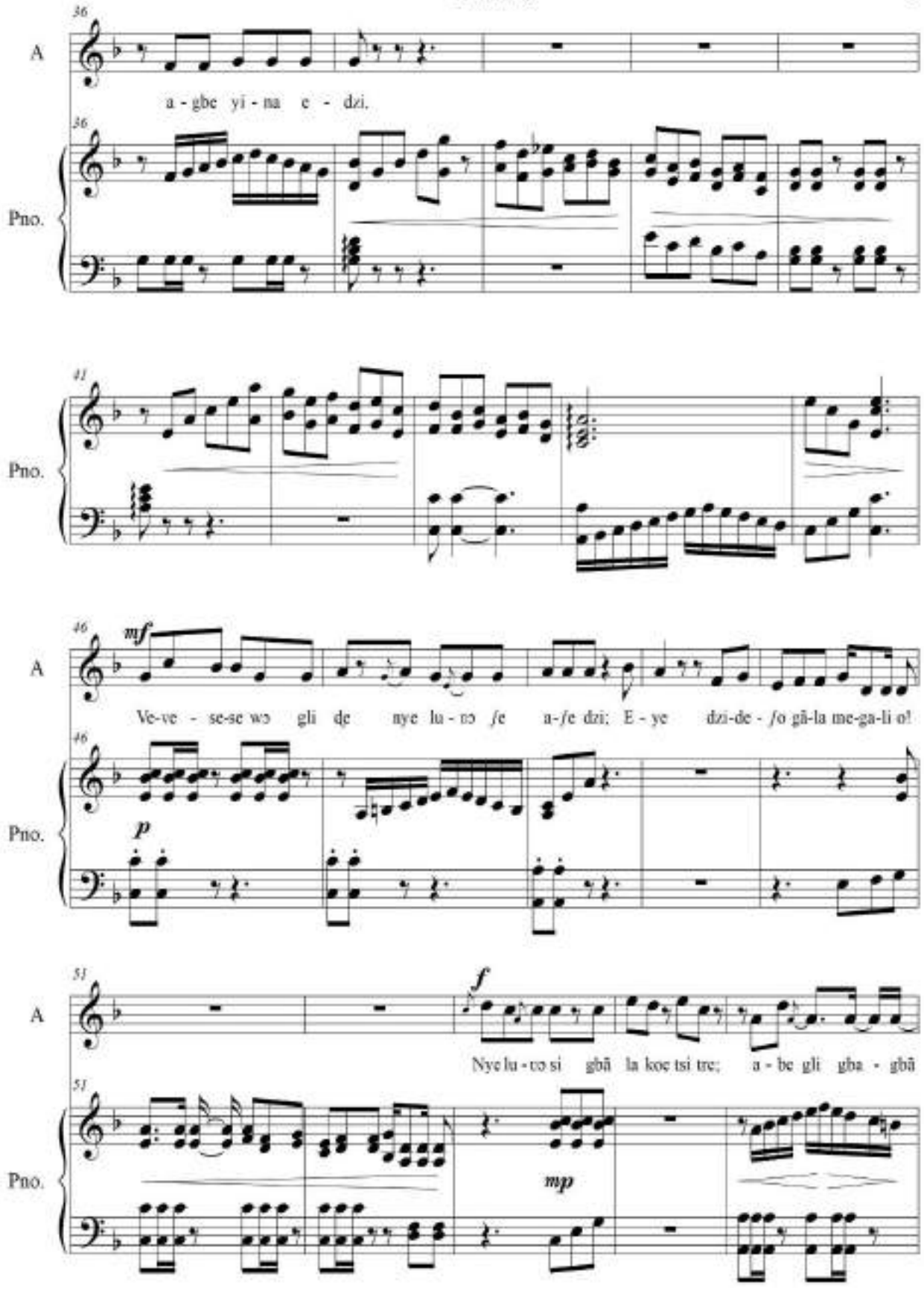

72
S
tsem! n - hwɛ nam-fo'n mu; ɔ-sor - pa, a-po-ku, sa-for e -
Pno.
77
mf
bu do pii, Man - ke - ssim gua, Man - ke - ssim gua, Man - ke - ssim gua, ɔ-yɛ gua
82
kɛ-se am - pa, ɔ-yɛ gua kɛ-se am - pa'oo,

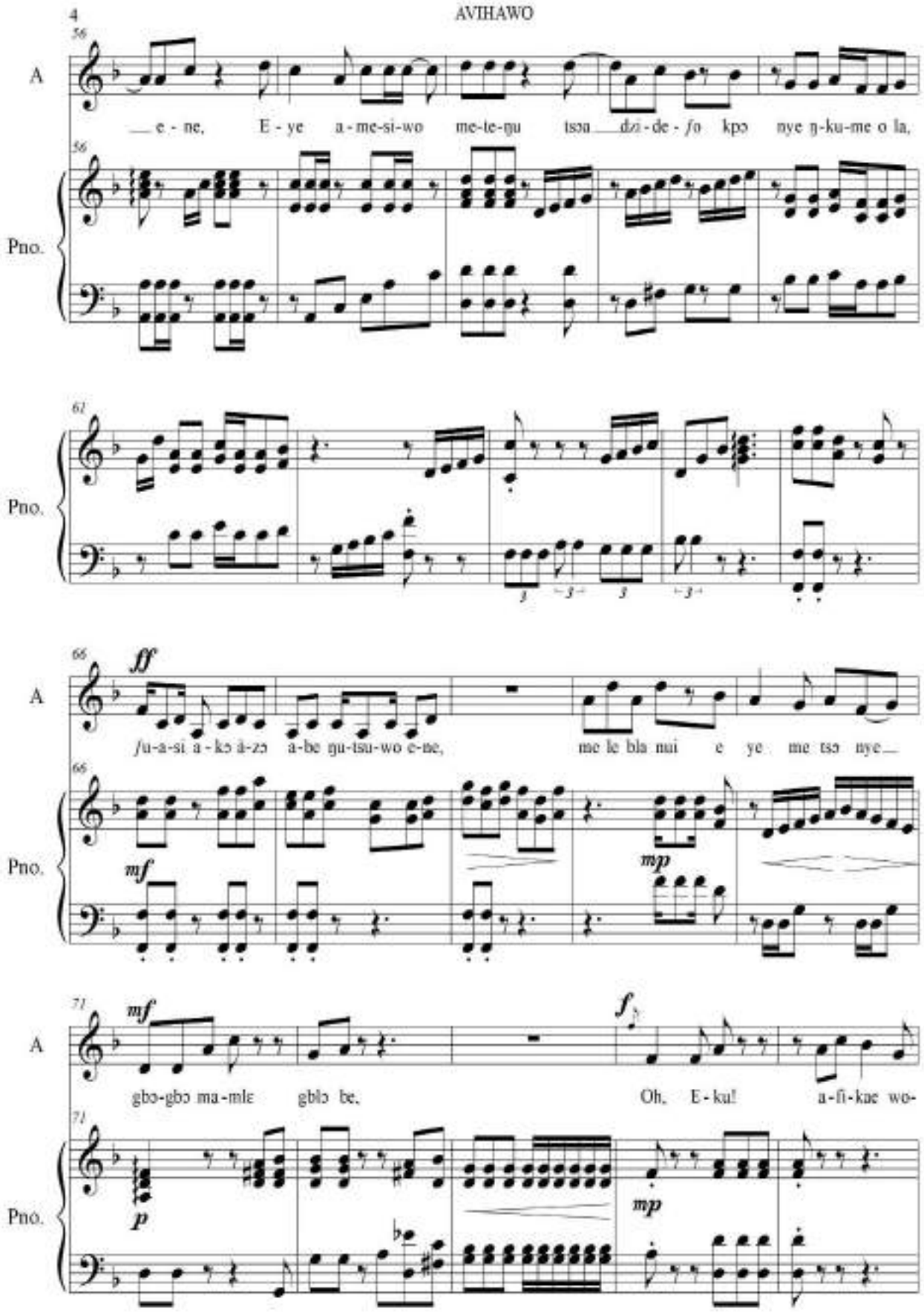

87
S
f
ɔ-yɛ gua kɛ-sɛ am - pa.
87
Pno.
92
Pno.
ril.
3
3
mf

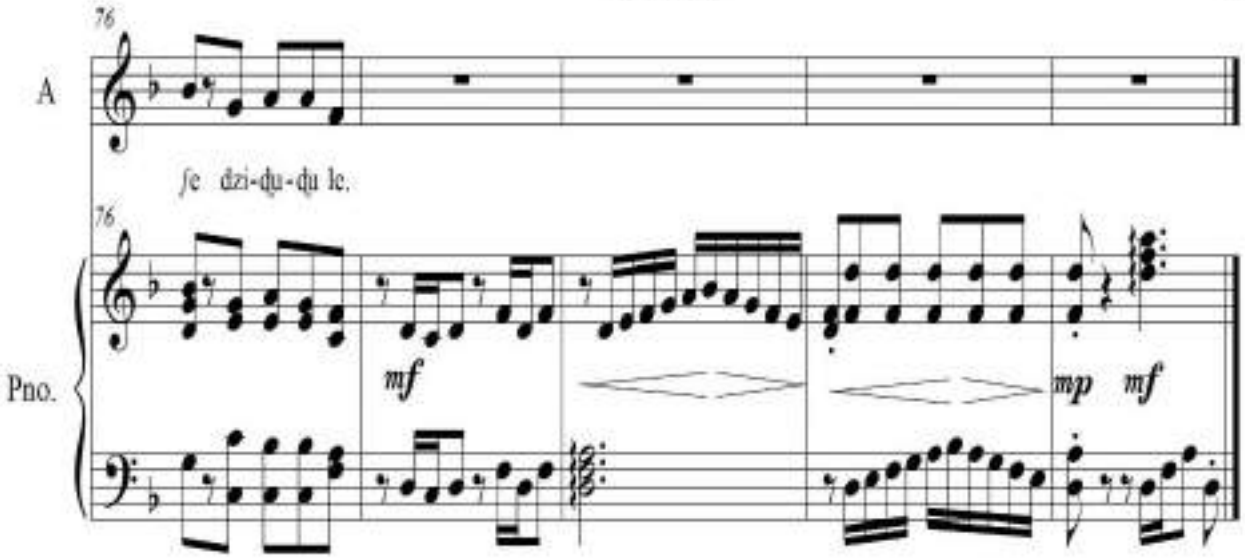
AVIHAWO (Lamentation)



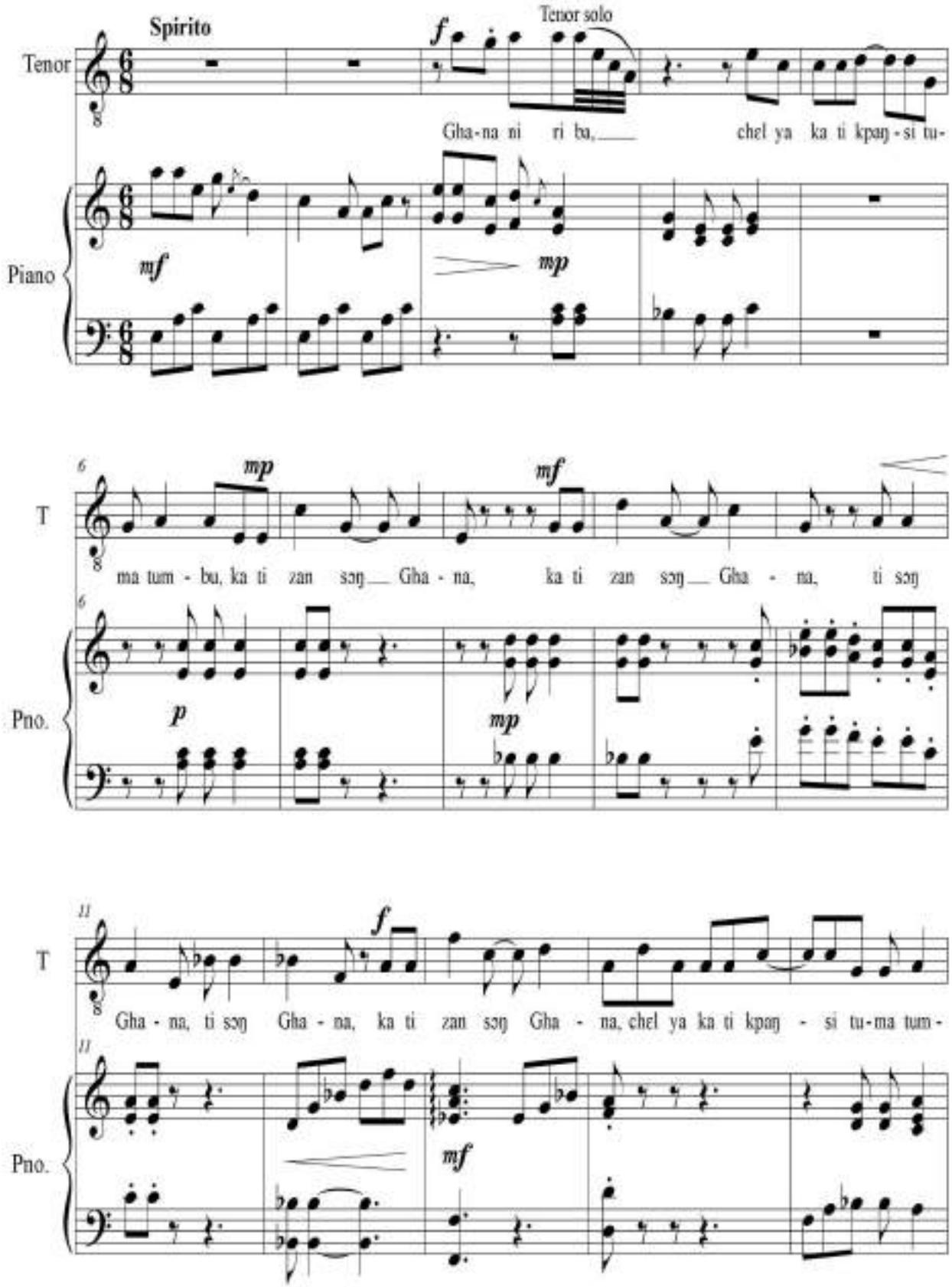

21
A
Me-ga-tsia nye su-su ɖe-do-me o.
E-nye ŋ-ku-ɖo-dzi-
21
Pno.
26
A
nya, e-nye ŋ-ku-ɖo-dzi-nya be, to-gbɔ be ko-nyi-fa-ha dea se-na mia-ʃe su-
26
Pno.
31
A
su kple mia-ʃe nu-xa-xa hã la, mlɔe-ba la, ye-yi-yi ha-ya-na e-ye
31
Pno.

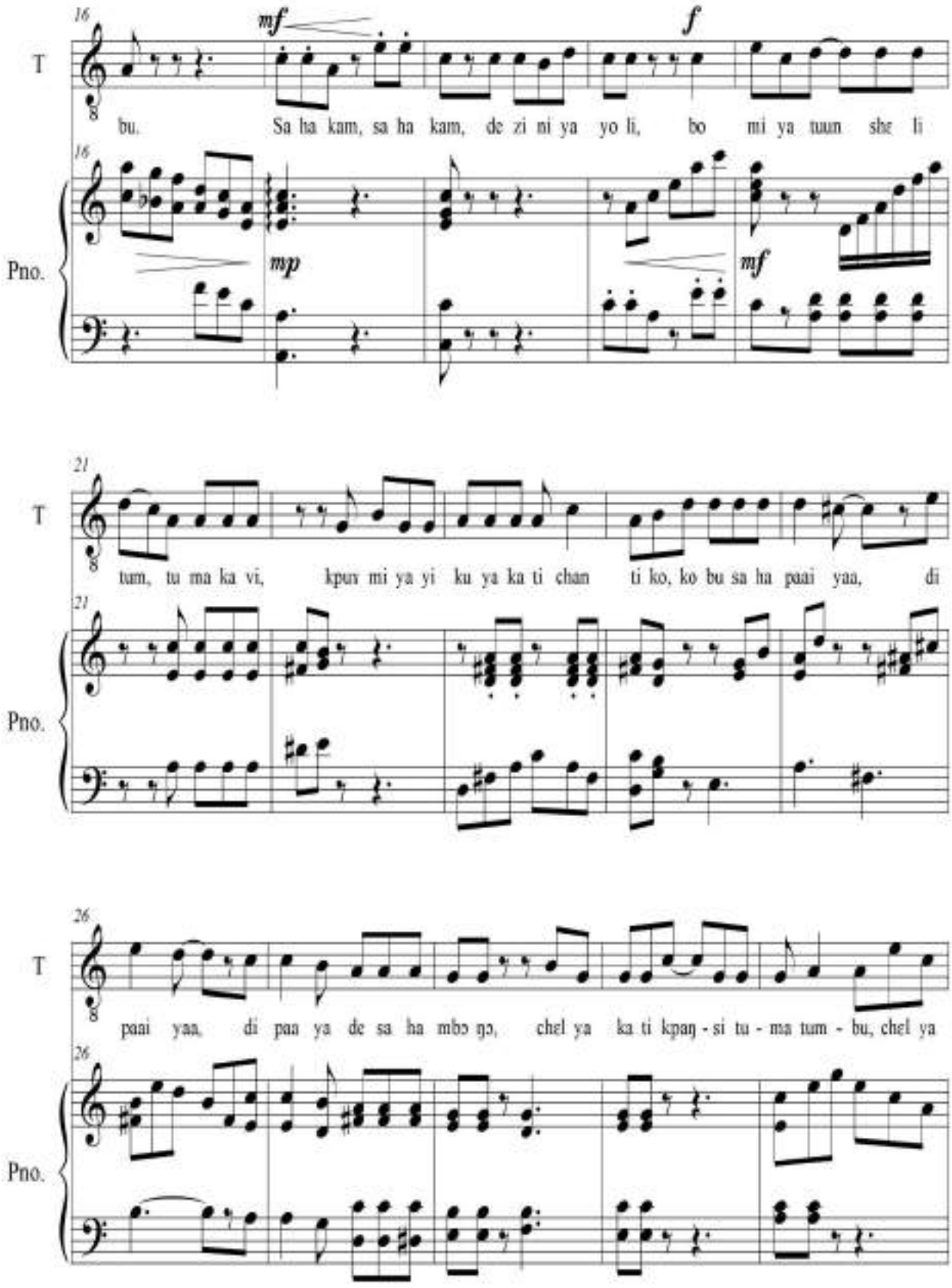

36
A
a - gbe yi - na e - dzi.
36
Pno.
41
Pno.
46
mf
A
Ve-ve - se-se wɔ gli dɛ nye lu - tɔ fe a-fe dzi; E - ye dzi-de - fo gã-la me-ga-li o!
46
Pno.
p
51
f
A
Nye lu - tɔ si gbã la koe tsi tre; a - be gli gba - gbã
51
Pno.
mp

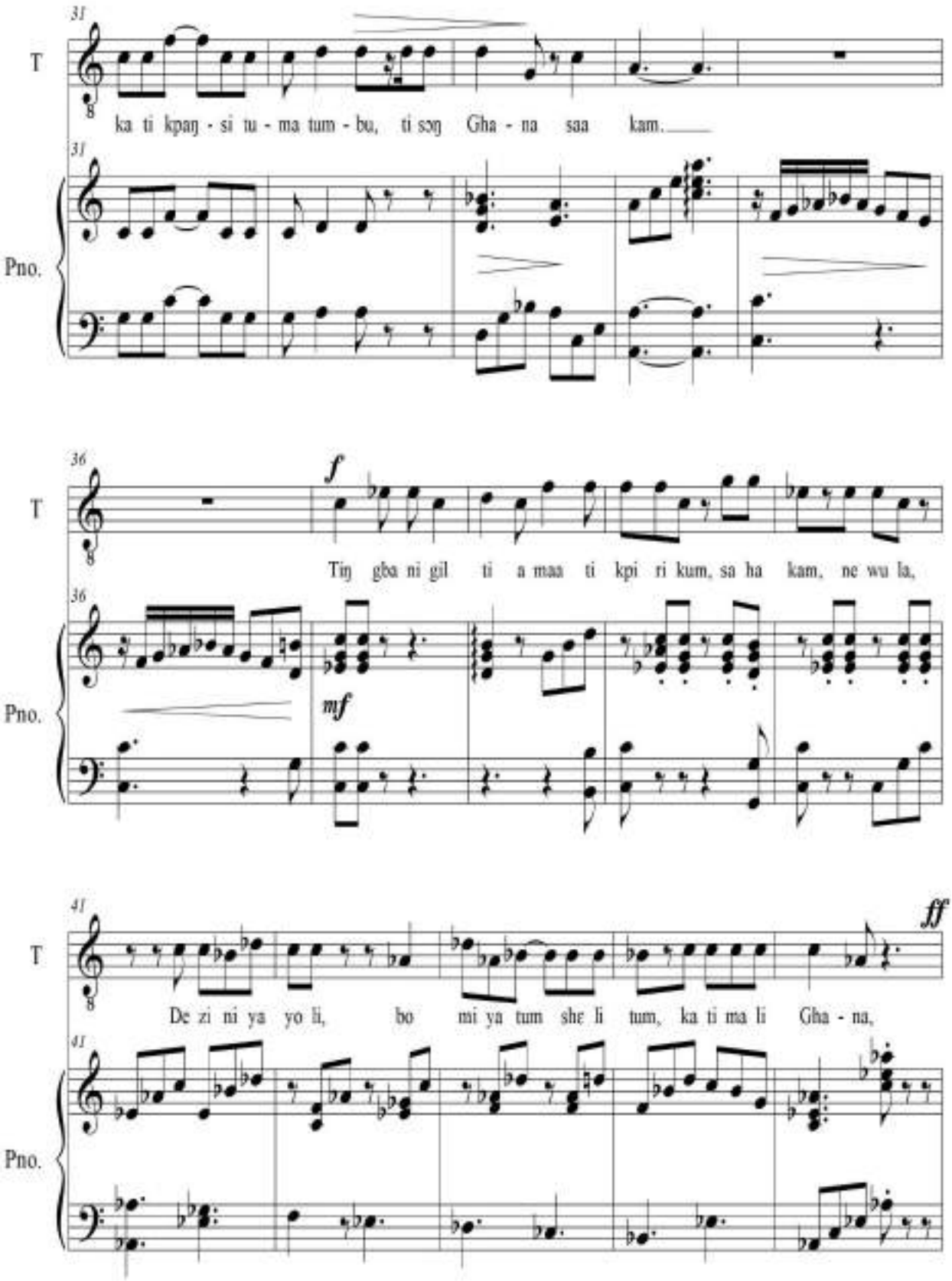

56
A
e - ne, E - ye a - me-si-wo me-te-ŋu tsɔa dzi - de - fo kpɔ nye ŋ-ku-me o la,
Pno.
61
Pno.
66
ff
A
/u-a-si a - kɔ á-zɔ a-be ŋu-tsu-wo e-ne, me le bla nui e ye me tsɔ nye
Pno.
mf
mp
71
mf
f
A
gbɔ-gbɔ ma-mlɛ gblɔ be, Oh, E - ku! a-fi-kae wo-
Pno.
p
mp

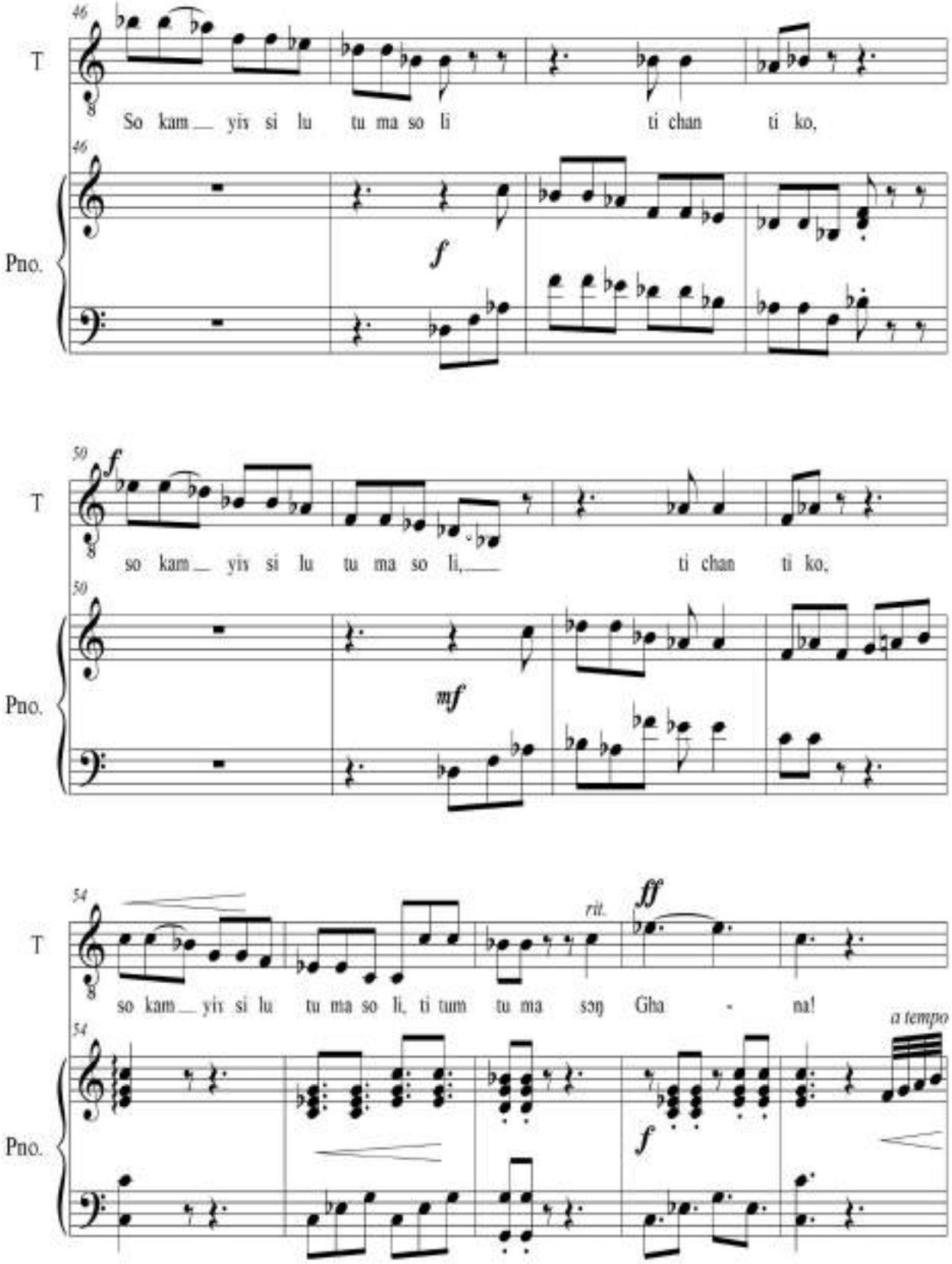

76
A
ʃe dzi-ɖu-ɖu lc.
76
Pno.
mf
mp
mf

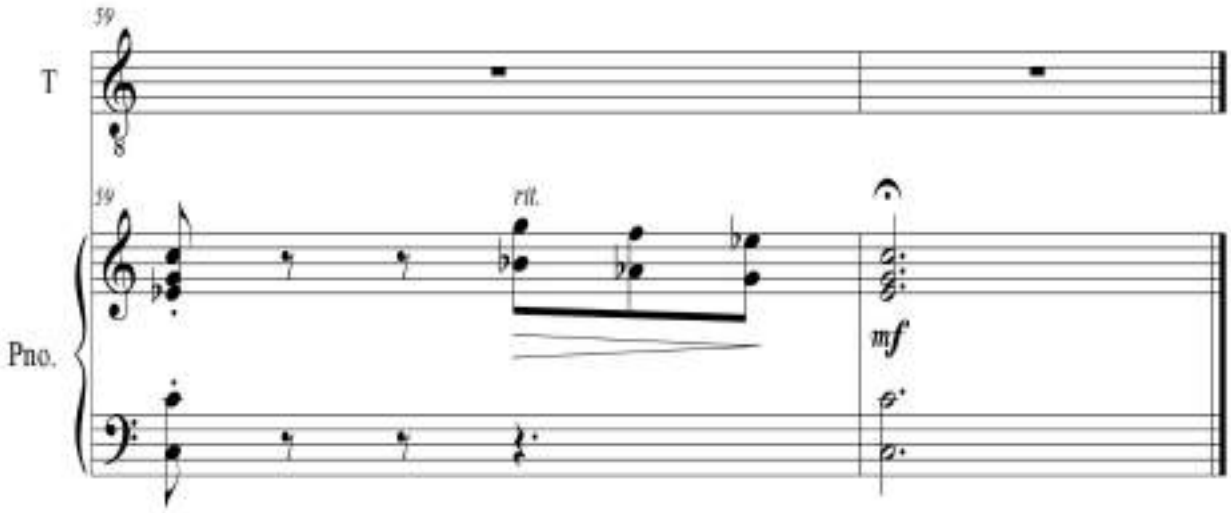
TUMA KPAƆSIBU (Work Hard)



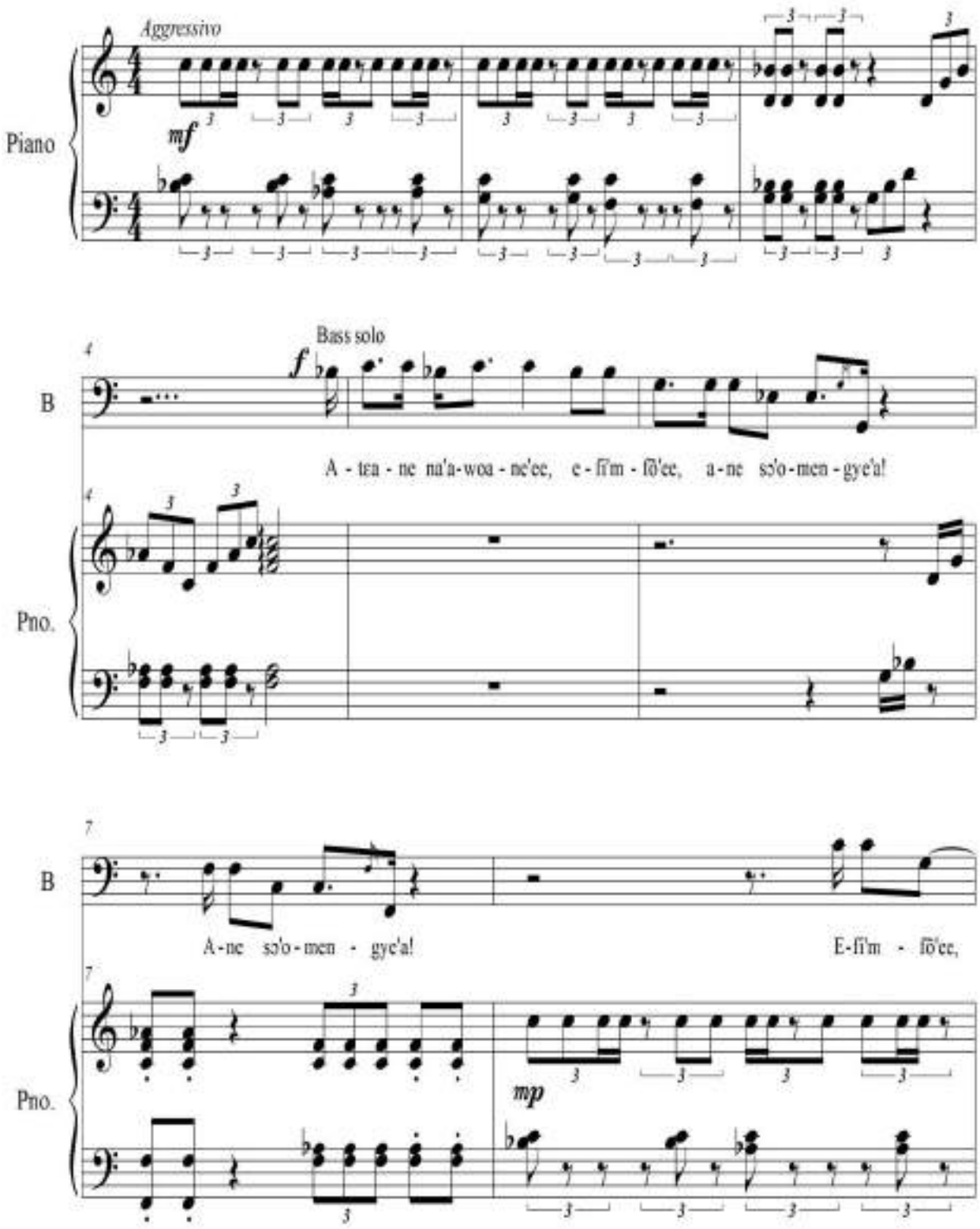

16
mf
f
T
bu. Sa ha kam, sa ha kam, de zi ni ya yo li, bo mi ya tuun shɛ li
Pno.
mp
mf
21
T
tum, tu ma ka vi, kpuv mi ya yi ku ya ka ti chan ti ko, ko bu sa ha paai yaa, di
Pno.
26
T
paai yaa, di paa ya de sa ha mbɔ ŋɔ, chel ya ka ti kpaŋ - si tu - ma tum - bu, chel ya
Pno.

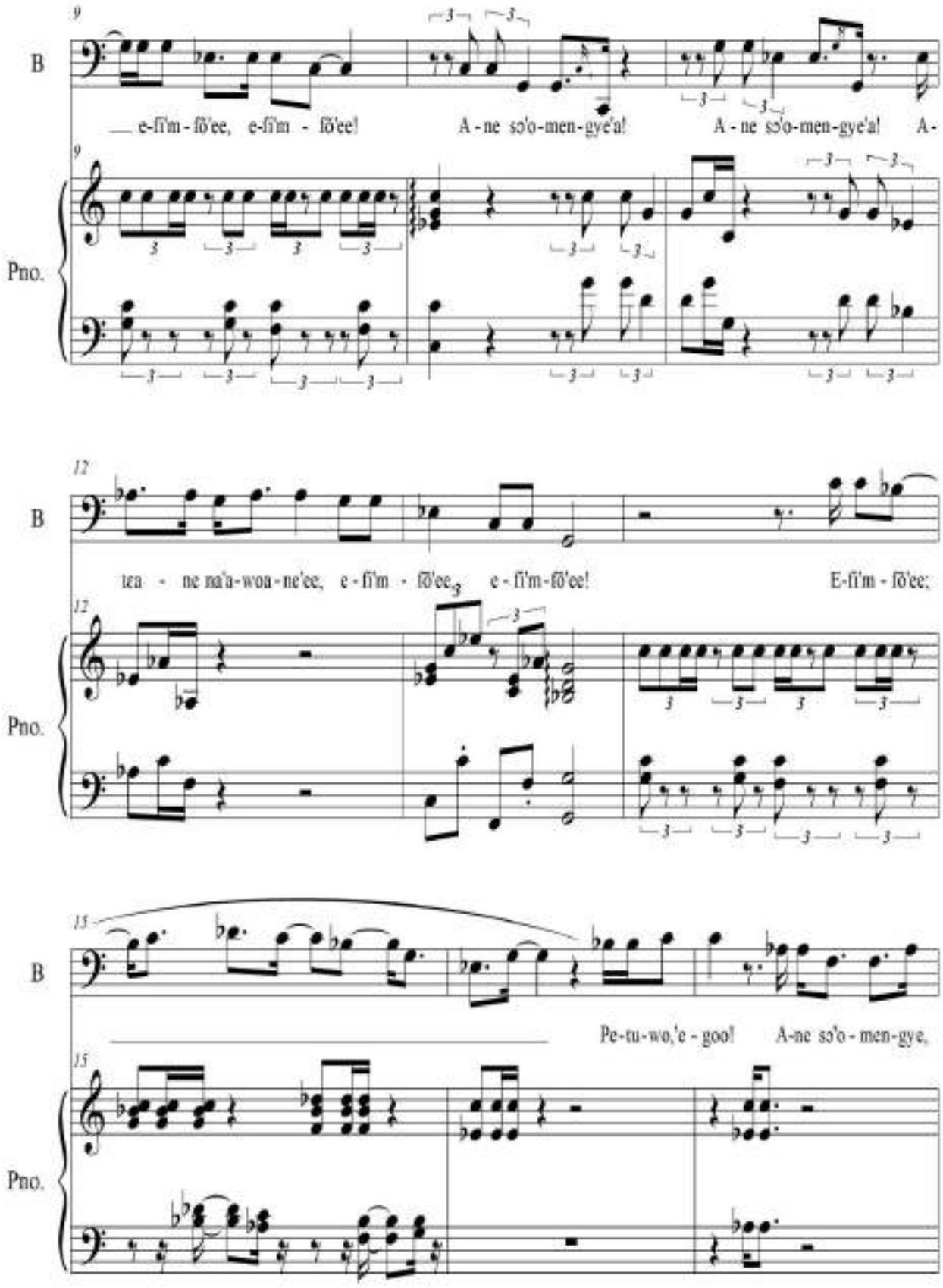

31
T
ka ti kpaŋ - si tu - ma tum - bu, ti sɔŋ Gha - na saa kam.
Pno.
36
f
Tiŋ gba ni gil ti a maa ti kpi ri kum, sa ha kam, ne wu la,
mf
41
ff
De zi ni ya yo li, bo mi ya tum shɛ li tum, ka ti ma li Gha - na,

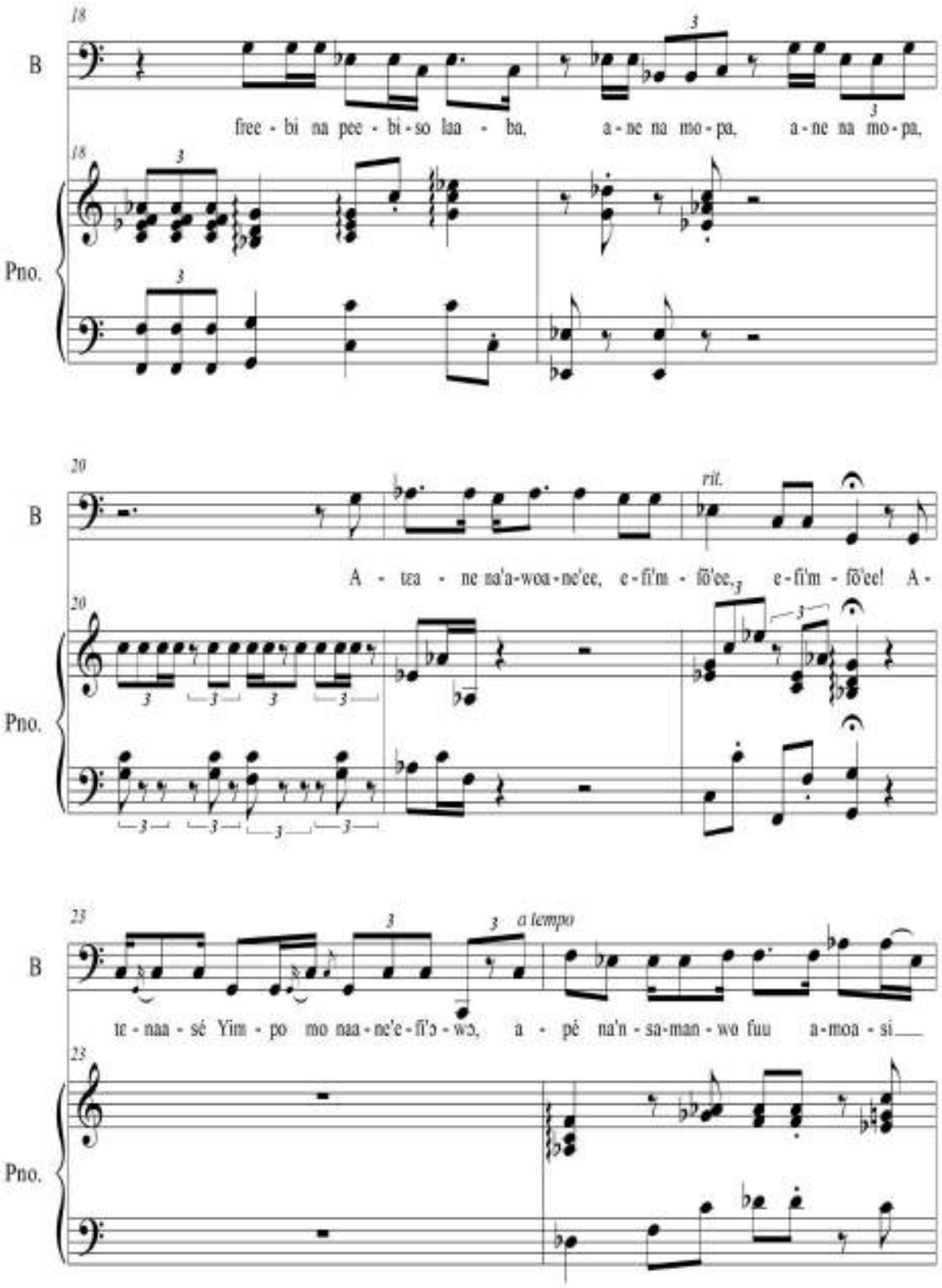

46
T
So kam yiv si lu tu ma so li ti chan ti ko,
Pno.
f
50
so kam yiv si lu tu ma so li, ti chan ti ko,
mf
54
rit.
ff
so kam yiv si lu tu ma so li, ti tum tu ma sɔŋ Gha - na!
a tempo

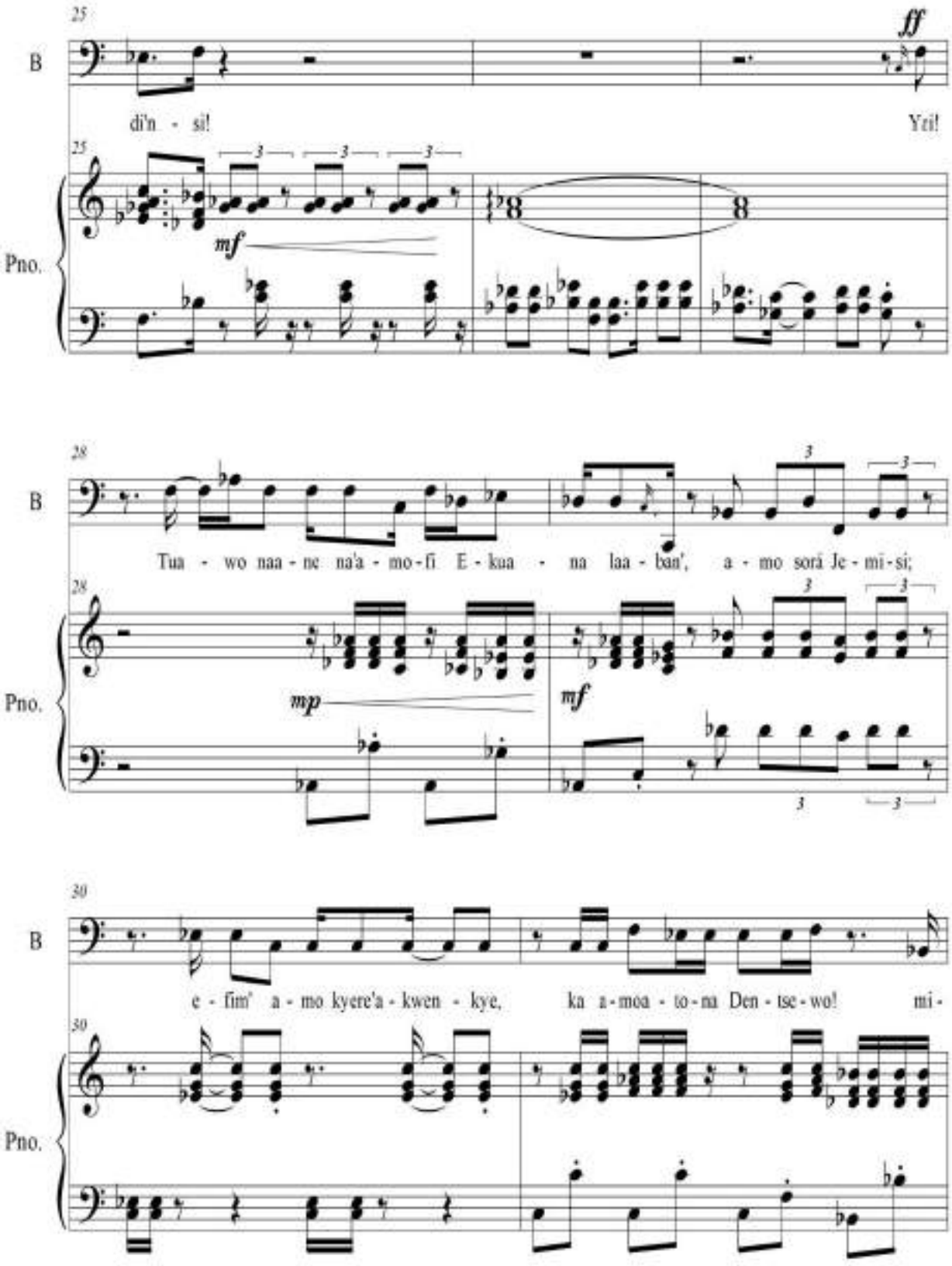

59
T
59
rit.
Pno.
mf

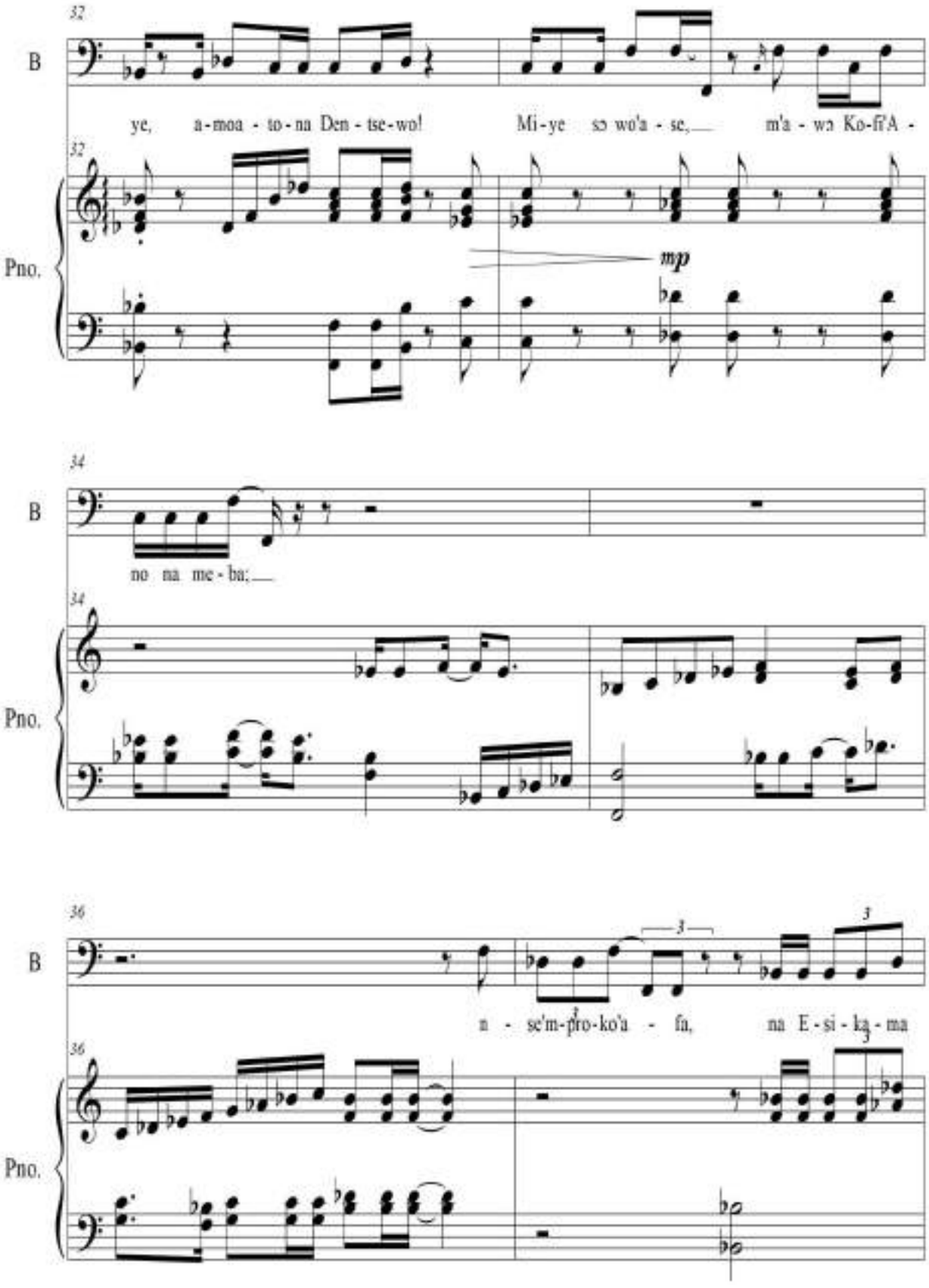
SIMPA ABOABIKYIRE (Winneba Deer Hunt)

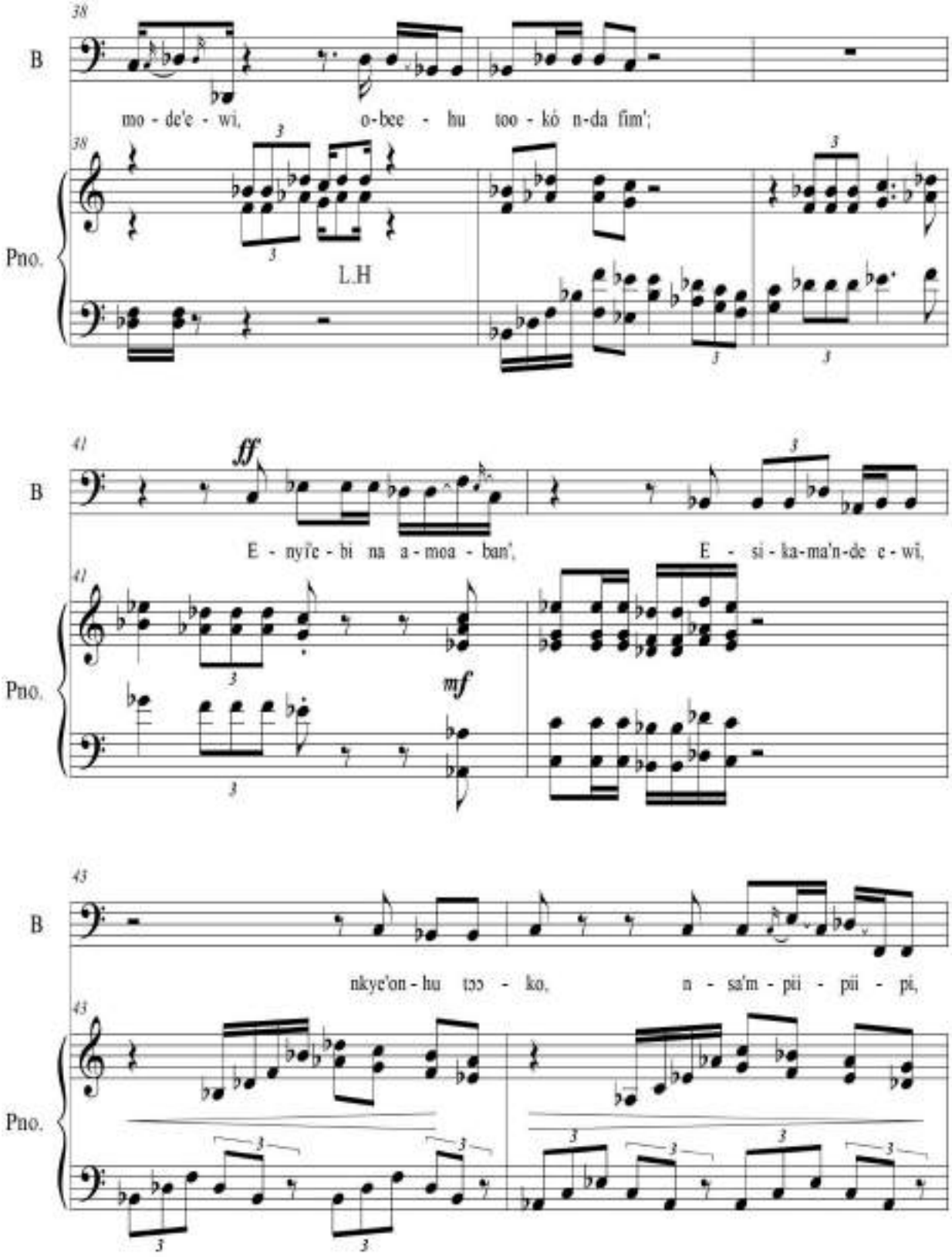


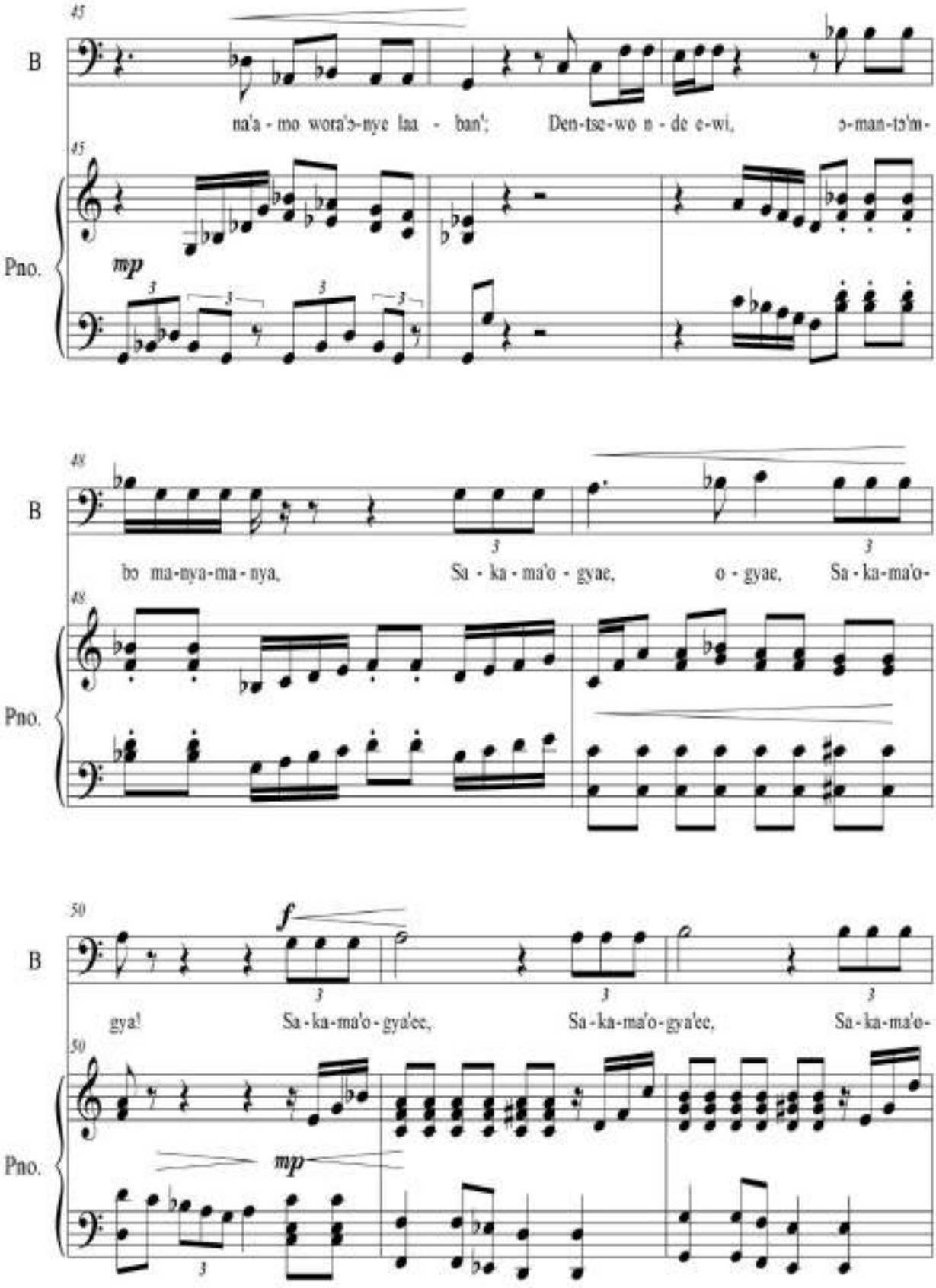

9
B
e-fi'm-fõ'ee, e-fi'm - fõ'ee! A-ne sɔ'o-men-gye'a! A-ne sɔ'o-men-gye'a! A-
9
Pno.
12
B
tea - ne na'a-woa-ne'ee, e-fi'm - fõ'ee, e-fi'm-fõ'ee! E-fi'm-fõ'ee;
12
Pno.
15
B
Pe-tu-wo,'e-goo! A-ne sɔ'o-men-gye,
15
Pno.

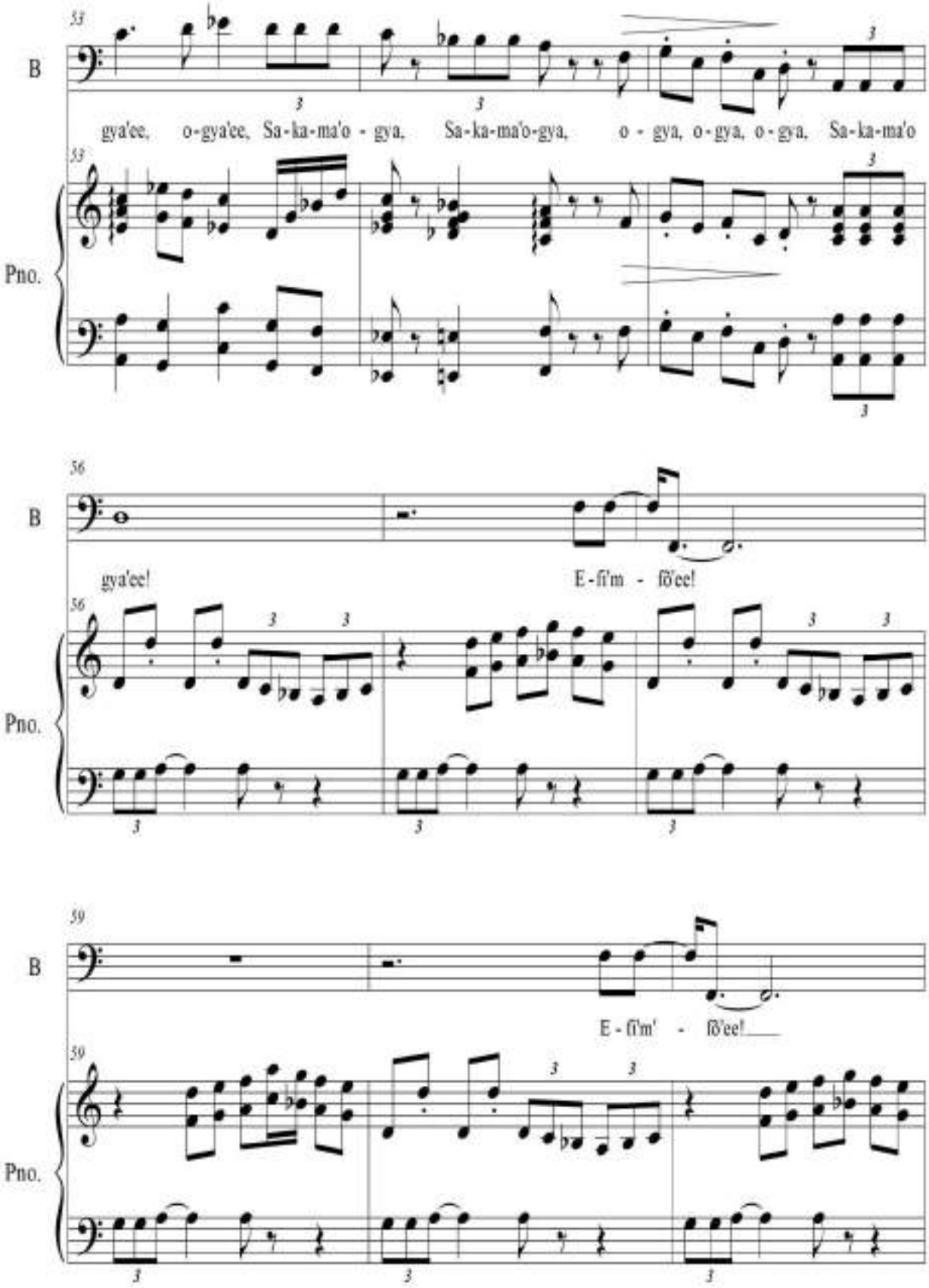

18
B
free - bi na pee - bi - so laa - ba, a - ne na mo - pa, a - ne na mo - pa,
18
Pno.
20
B
rit.
A - tea - ne na'a-woa - ne'ee, e - fi'm - fõ'ee, e - fi'm - fõ'ee! A -
20
Pno.
23
B
a tempo
te - naa - sé Yim - po mo naa - ne'e - fi'ɔ - wɔ, a - pé na'n - sa - man - wo fuu a - moa - si
23
Pno.

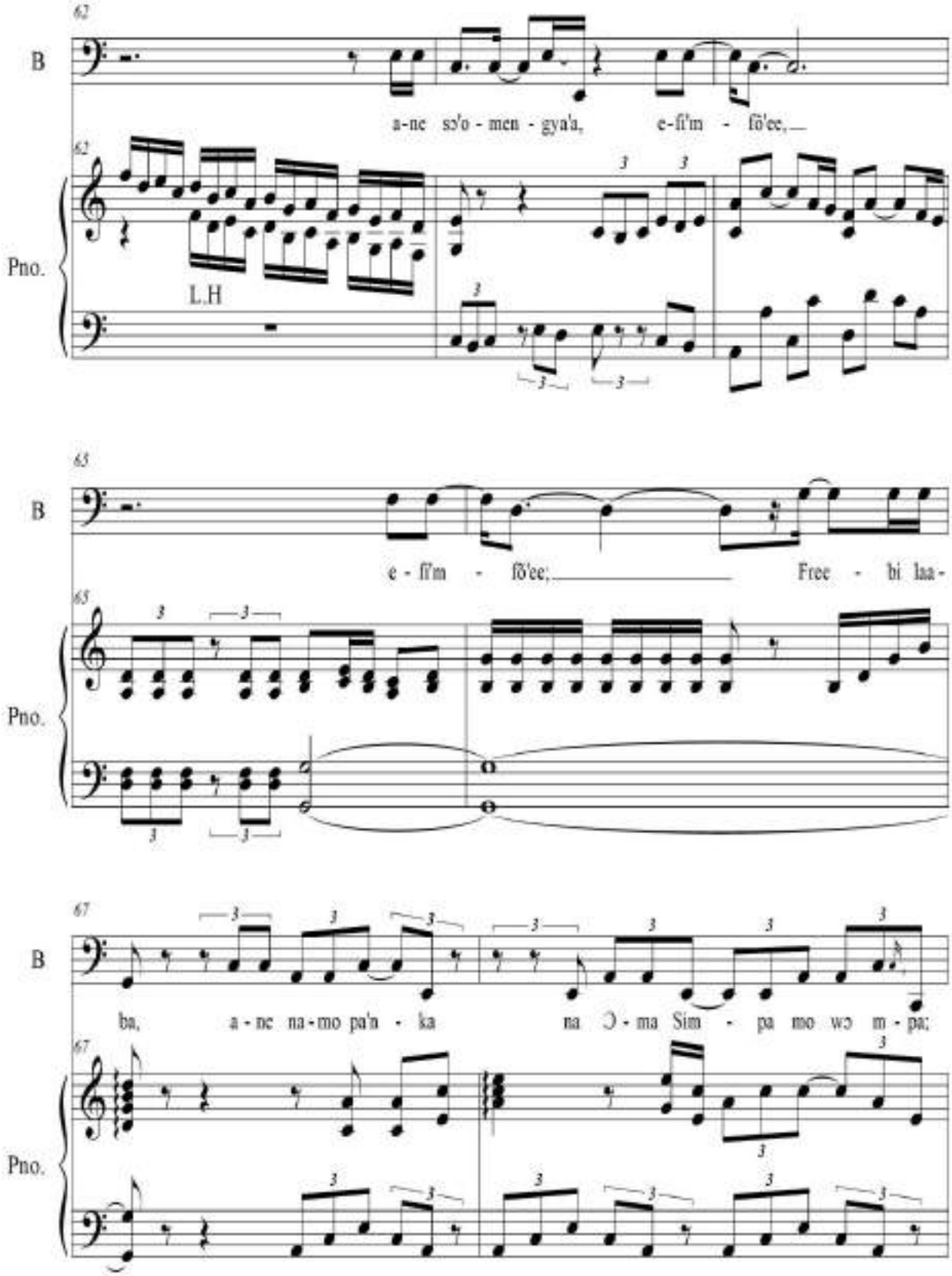

25
B
ff
di'n - si!
Yei!
25
Pno.
mf
28
B
Tua - wo naa - ne na'a - mo - fi E - kua - na laa - ban', a - mo sorá Je - mi - si;
28
Pno.
mp
mf
30
B
e - fim' a - mo kyere'a - kwen - kye, ka a - moa - to - na Den - tse - wo! mi -
30
Pno.

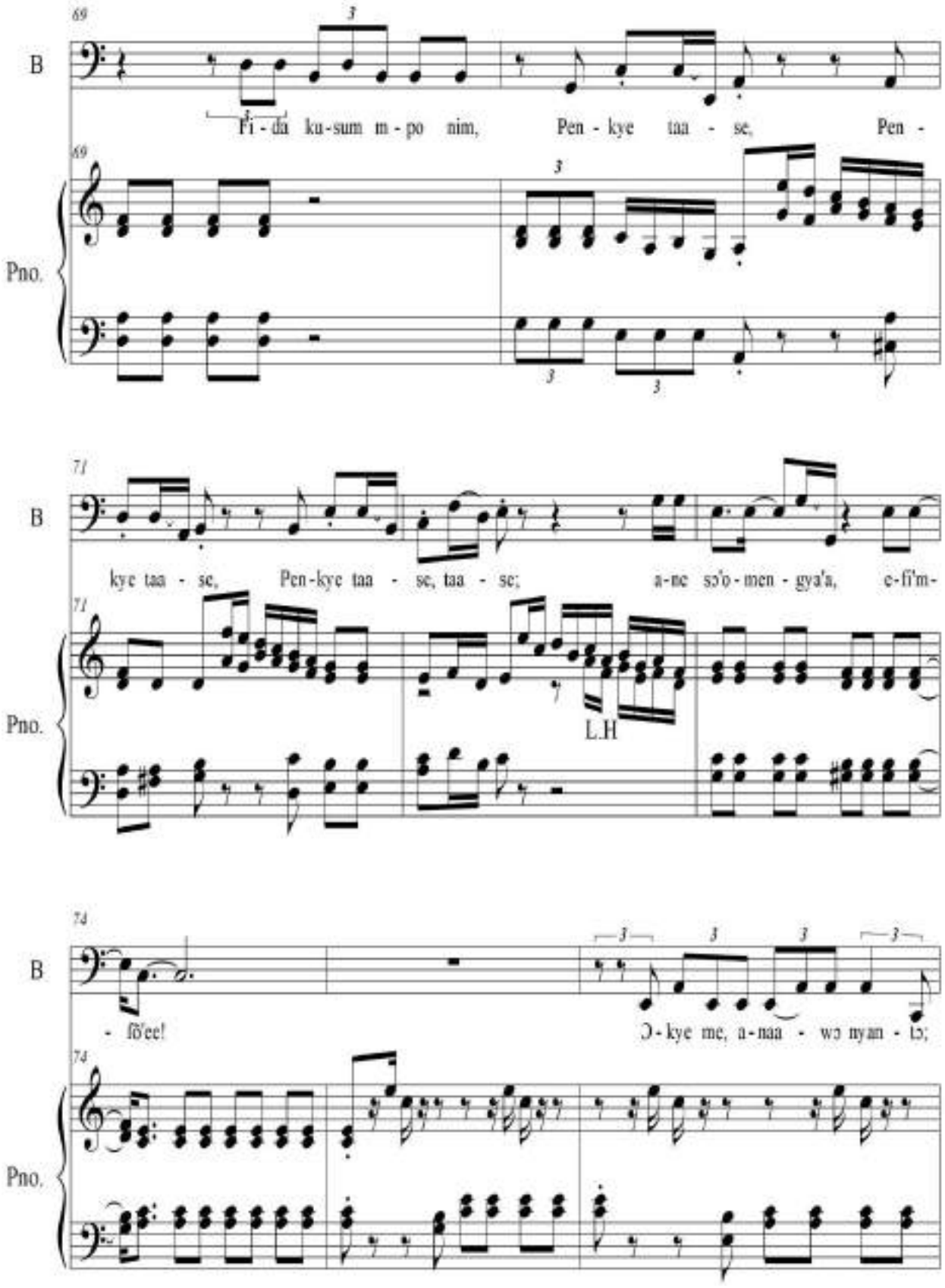

32
B
ye, a-moa - to-na Den - tse-wo! Mi-ye sɔ wo'a - se, m'a - wɔ Ko-fi'A -
32
Pno.
mp
34
B
no na me - ba;
34
Pno.
36
B
3
3
n - se'm-pro-ko'a - fa, na E - si - ka - ma
36
Pno.

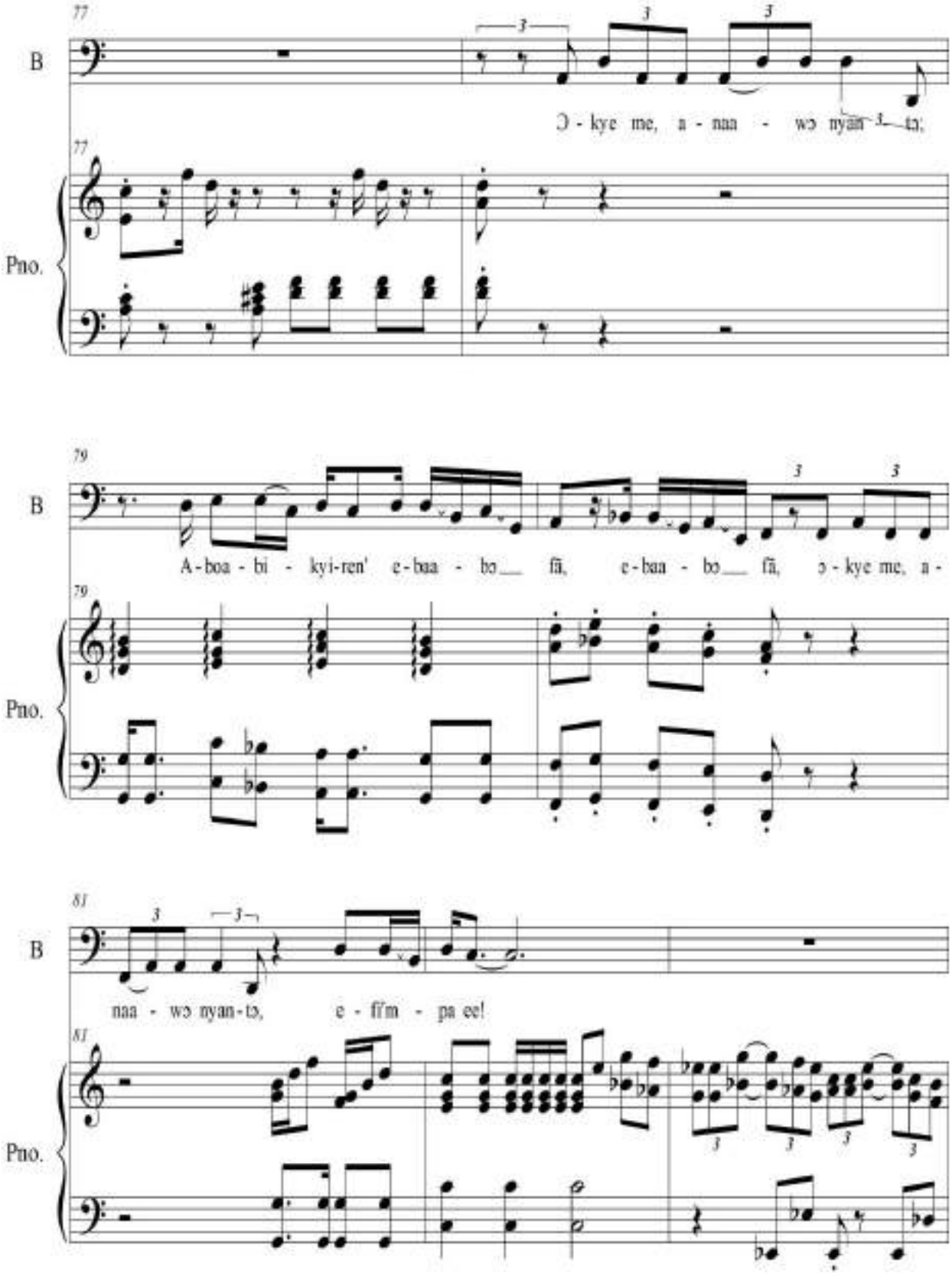

38
B
mo - de'e - wi, o-bee - hu too - kó n-da fim';
Pno.
L.H
41
ff
E - nyĩe - bi na a - moa - ban', E - si - ka-ma'n-de e - wi,
mf
43
nkye'on - hu tɔɔ - ko, n - sa'm - pii - pii - pi,

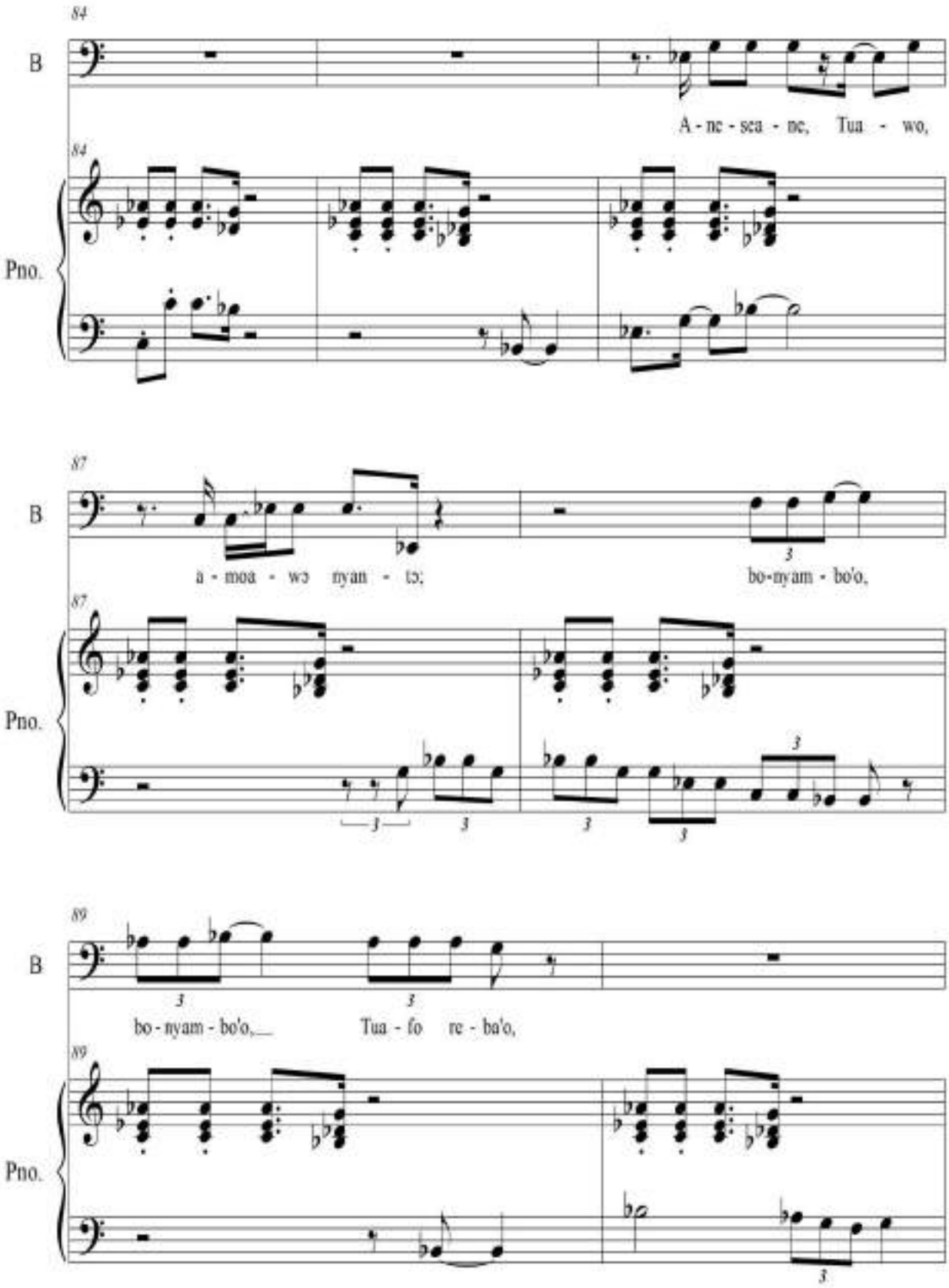

45
B
na'a - mo wora'ɔ-nye laa - ban'; Den-tse-wo n - de e-wi, ɔ-man-tɔ'm-
45
Pno.
mp
48
B
bɔ ma-nya-ma - nya, Sa - ka - ma'o - gyae, o - gyae, Sa - ka-ma'o-
48
Pno.
50
B
f
gya! Sa - ka-ma'o - gya'ee, Sa - ka-ma'o - gya'ee, Sa - ka-ma'o-
50
Pno.
mp

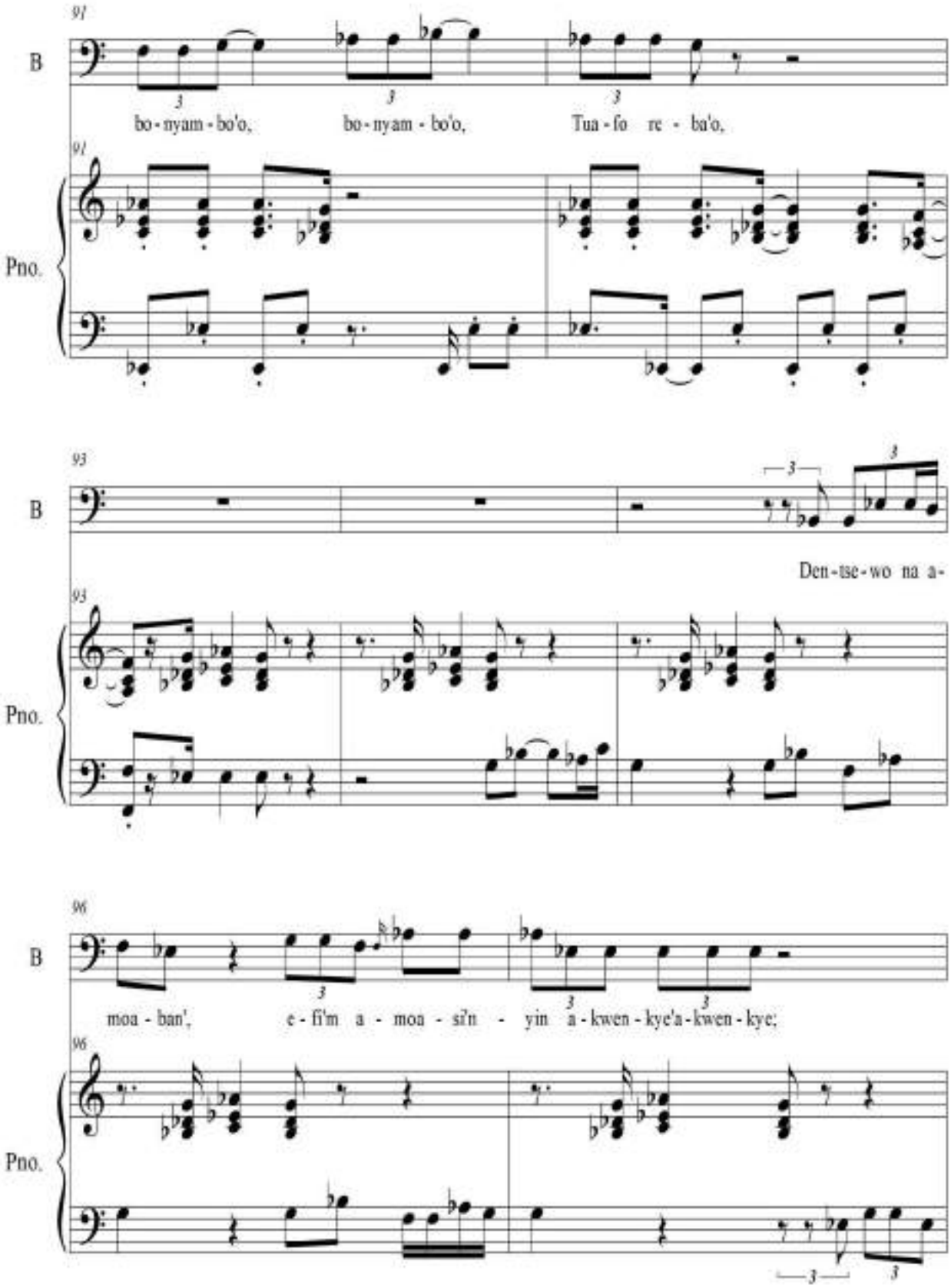

53
B
gya'ee, o-gya'ee, Sa-ka-ma'o - gya, Sa-ka-ma'o-gya, o - gya, o-gya, o-gya, Sa-ka-ma'o
Pno.
56
B
gya'ee! E-fi'm - fõ'ee!
Pno.
59
B
E-fi'm' - fõ'ee!
Pno.

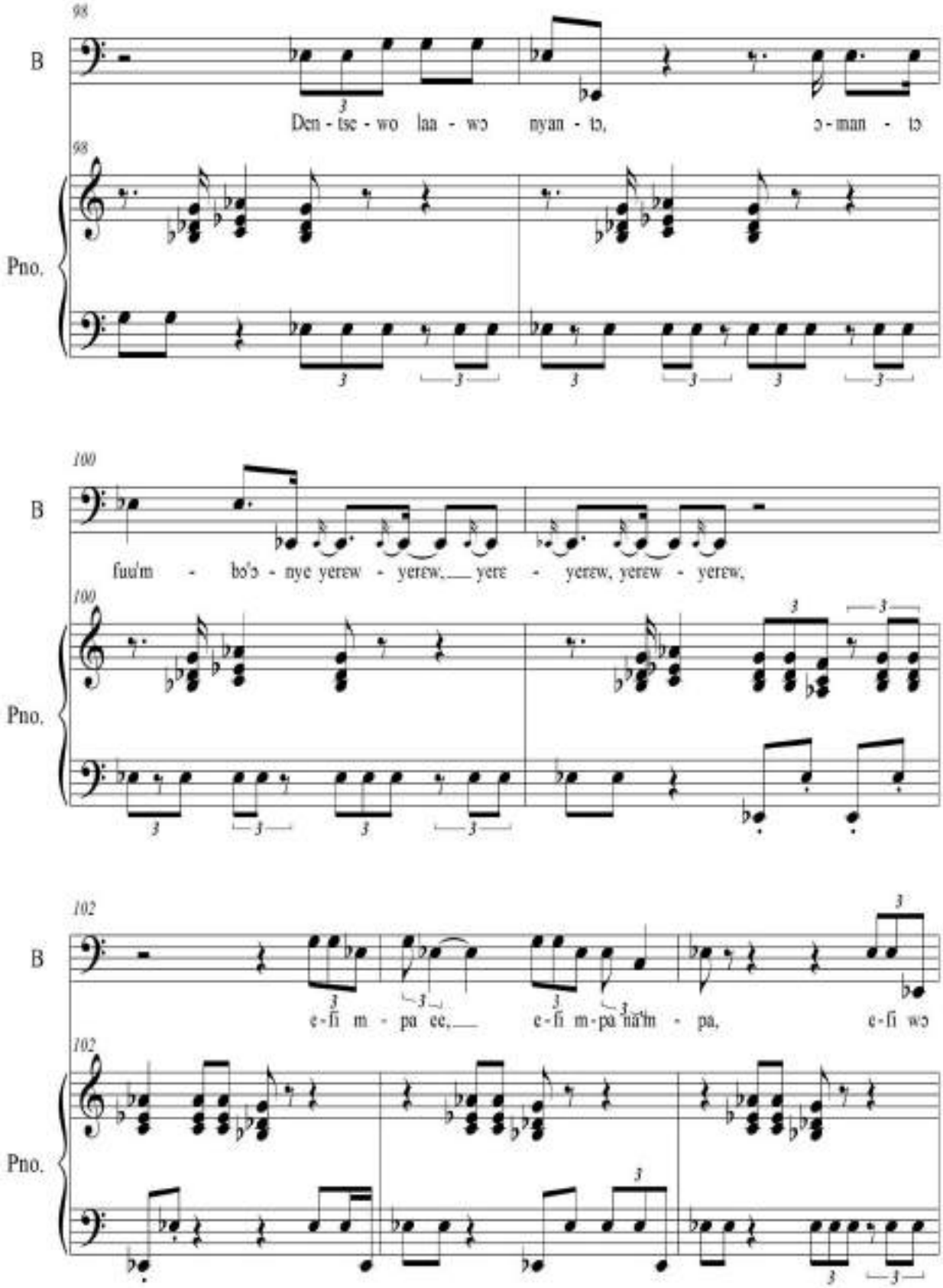

62
B
a-nc sɔ'o - men - gya'a, e-fi'm - fõ'ee,
62
Pno.
L.H
65
B
e - fi'm - fõ'ee; Free - bi laa -
65
Pno.
67
B
ba, a - nc na - mo pa'n - ka na Ɔ - ma Sim - pa mo wɔ m - pa;
67
Pno.

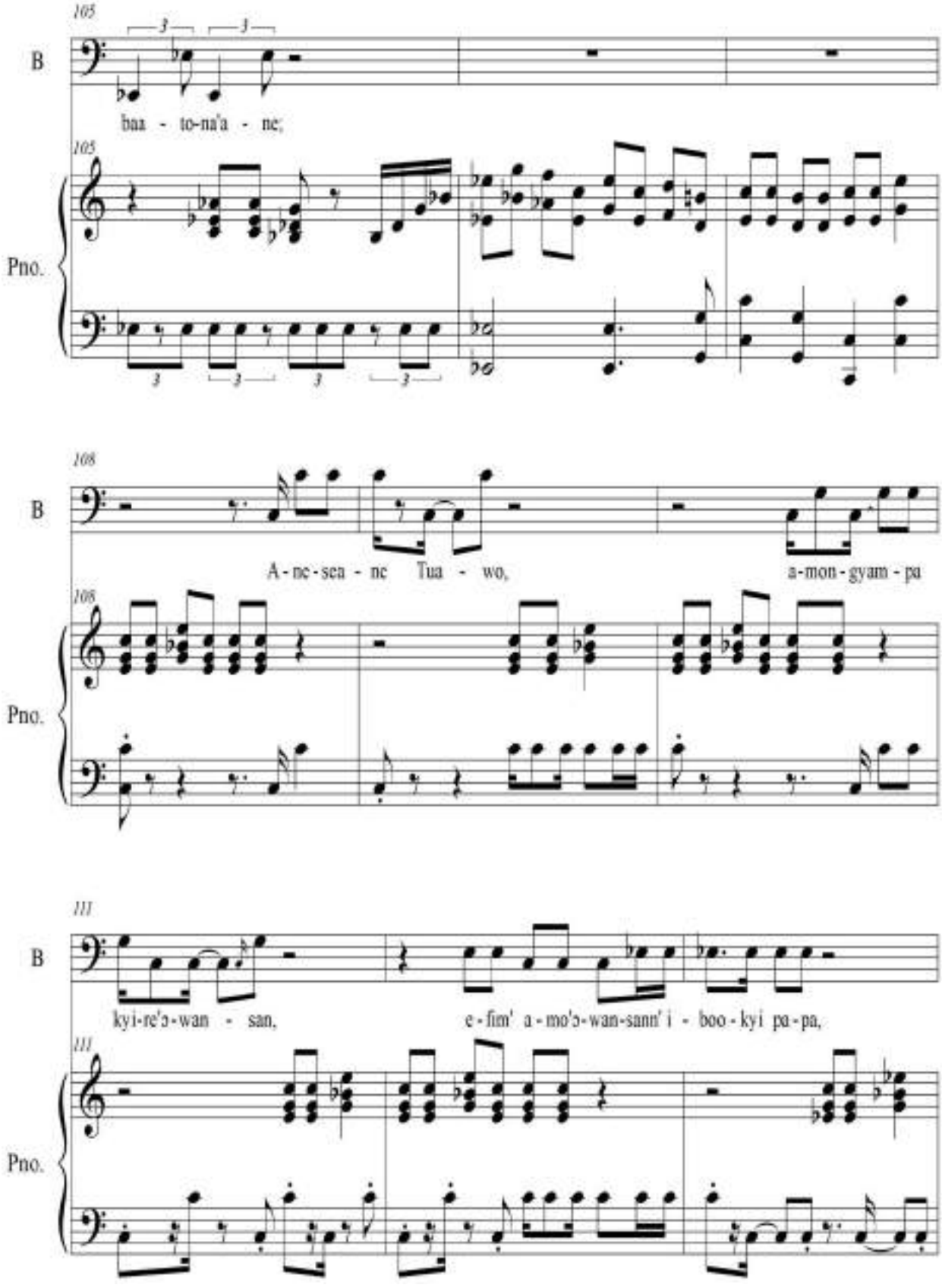

69
B
Fi - da ku - sum m - po nim, Pen - kye taa - se, Pen -
69
Pno.
71
B
kye taa - se, Pen - kye taa - se, taa - se; a - ne sɔ'o - men - gya'a, e - fi'm -
71
Pno.
L.H
74
B
- fõ'ee! Ɔ - kye me, a - naa - wɔ nyan - ɛɔ;
74
Pno.

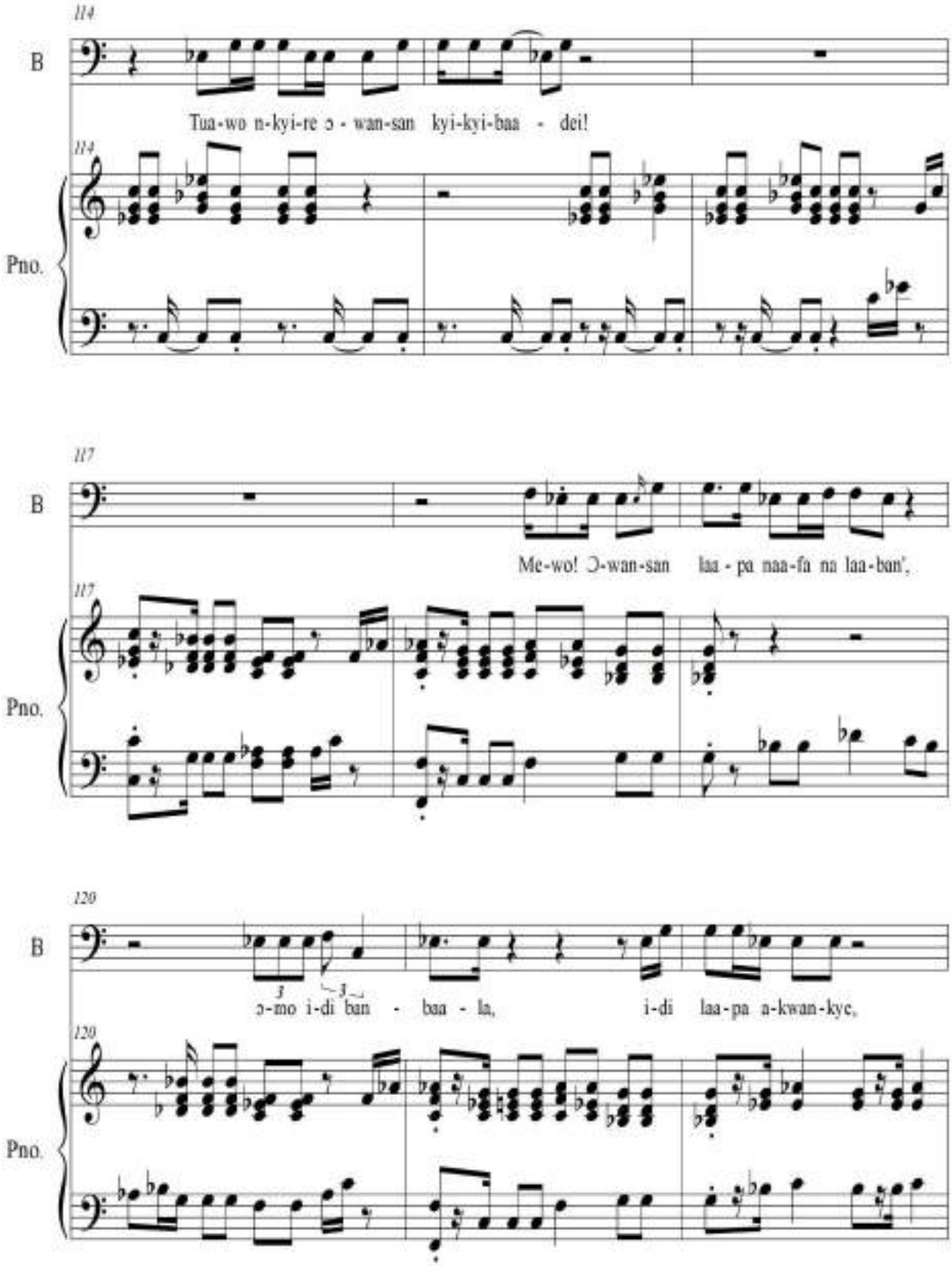

77
B
Ɔ - kye me, a - naa - wɔ nyan - tɔ,
77
Pno.
79
B
A - boa - bi - kyi - ren' e - baa - bɔ fã, e - baa - bɔ fã, ɔ - kye me, a -
79
Pno.
81
B
naa - wɔ nyan - tɔ, e - fi'm - pa ee!
81
Pno.

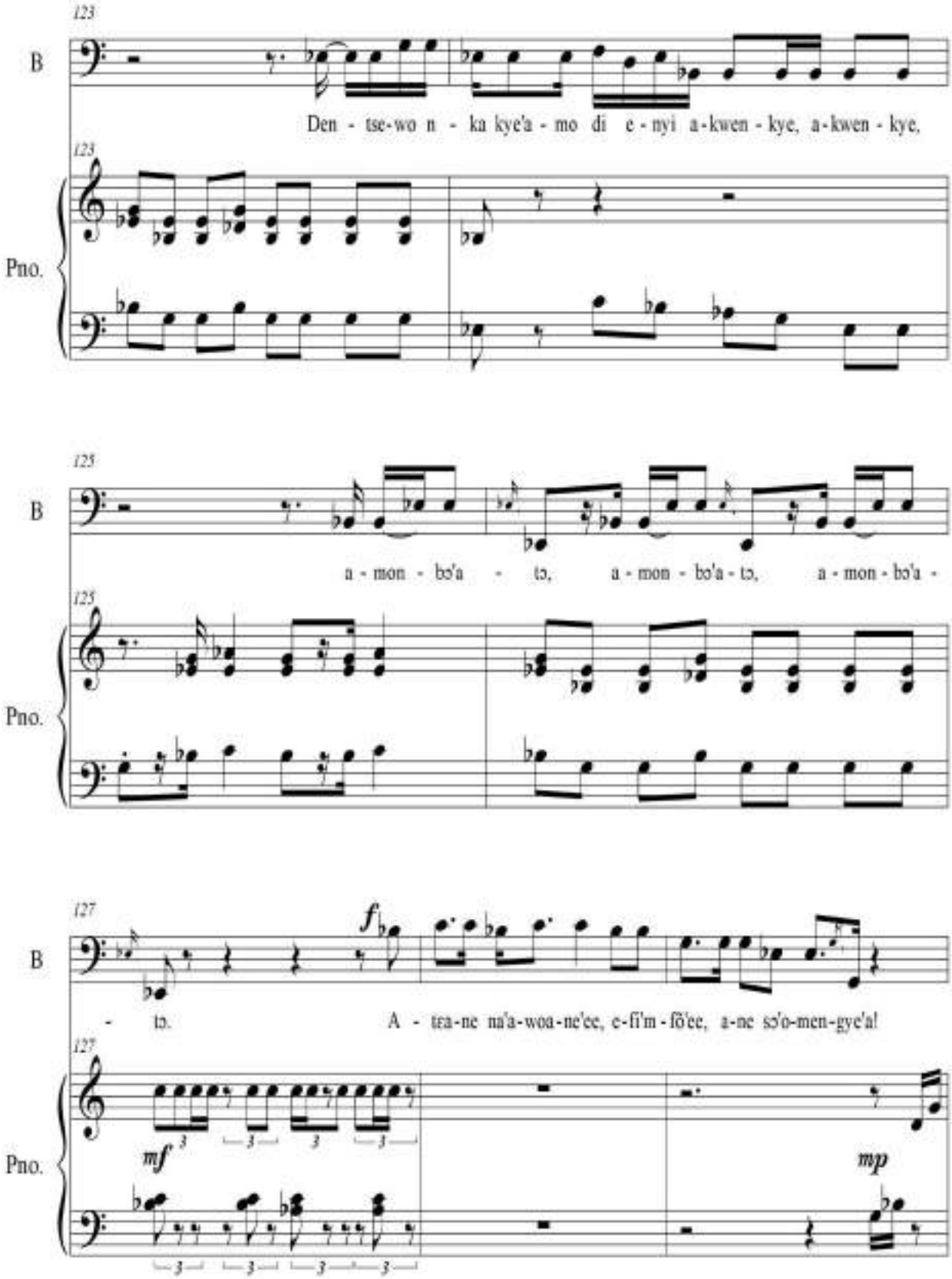

84
B
A - ne - sea - ne, Tua - wo,
84
Pno.
87
B
a - moa - wɔ nyan - tɔ; bo-nyam - bo'o,
87
Pno.
89
B
bo - nyam - bo'o, Tua - fo re - ba'o,
89
Pno.

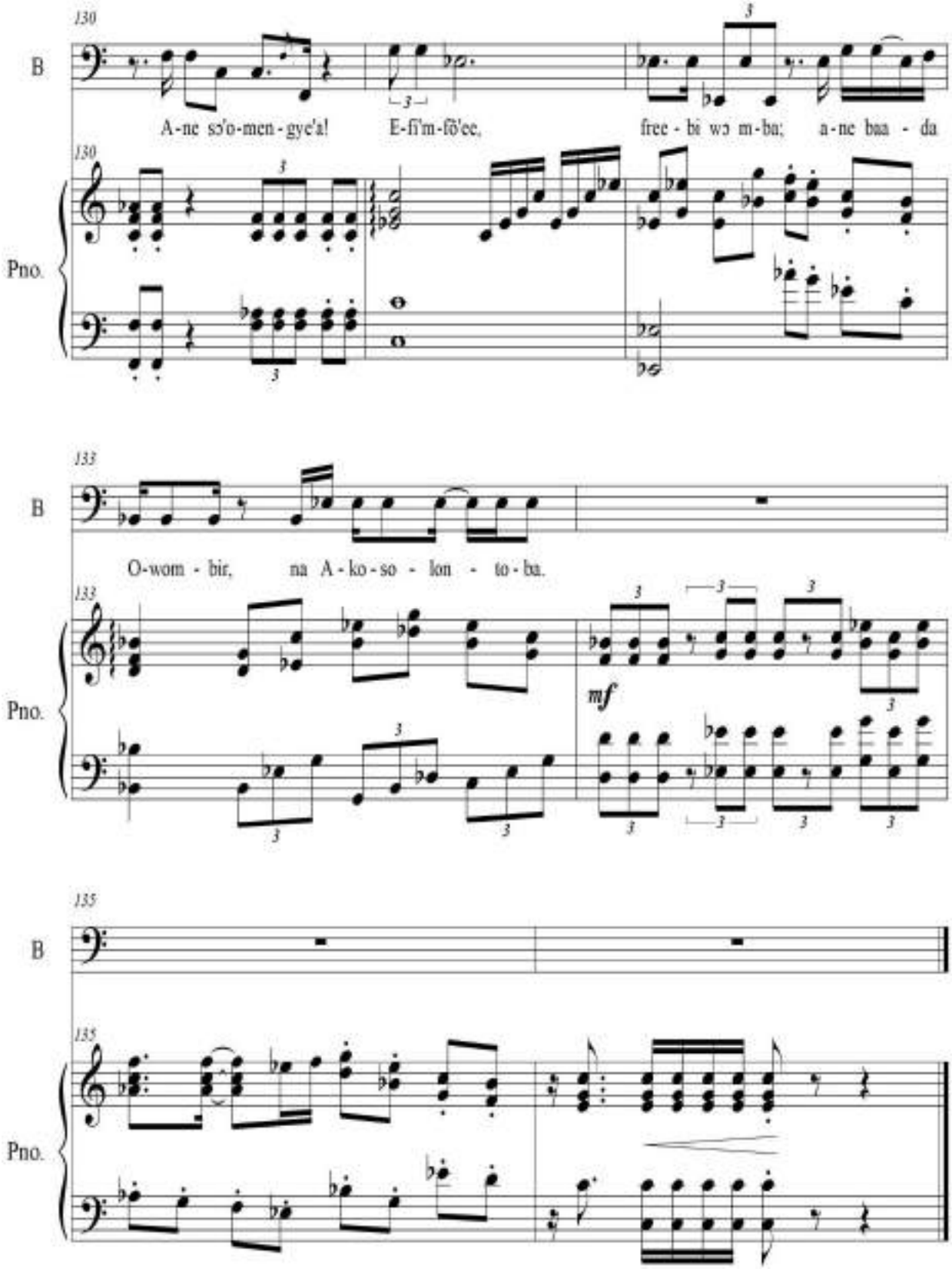

91
B
bo - nyam - bo'o, bo - nyam - bo'o, Tua - fo re - ba'o,
Pno.
93
Den - tse - wo na a -
96
moa - ban', e - fi'm a - moa - si'n - yin a - kwen - kye'a - kwen - kye;


98
B
Den - tse - wo laa - wɔ nyan - tɔ, ɔ - man - tɔ
98
Pno.
100
B
fuu'm - bo'ɔ - nye yerew - yerew, yere - yerew, yerew - yerew,
100
Pno.
102
B
e - fi m - pa ee, e - fi m - pa nã'm - pa, e - fi wɔ
102
Pno.


105
B
baa - to-na'a - ne;
105
Pno.
108
B
A - ne - sea - ne Tua - wo, a - mon - gyam - pa
108
Pno.
111
B
kyi - re'ɔ - wan - san, e - fim' a - mo'ɔ - wan - sann' i - boo - kyi pa - pa,
111
Pno.


114
B
Tua-wo n-kyi-re ɔ - wan-san kyi-kyi-baa - dei!
114
Pno.
117
B
Me-wo! Ɔ-wan-san laa - pa naa-fa na laa-ban',
117
Pno.
120
B
3 3
ɔ-mo i-di ban - baa - la, i-di laa-pa a-kwan-kyɛ,
120
Pno.


123
B
Den - tse-wo n - ka kye'a - mo di e - nyi a-kwen - kye, a-kwen - kye,
123
Pno.
125
B
a - mon - bɔ'a - tɔ, a - mon - bɔ'a - tɔ, a - mon - bɔ'a -
125
Pno.
127
B
f
- tɔ. A - tɛa-ne na'a-woa-ne'ee, e-fi'm - fõ'ee, a-ne sɔ'o-men-gye'a!
127
Pno.
mf
mp

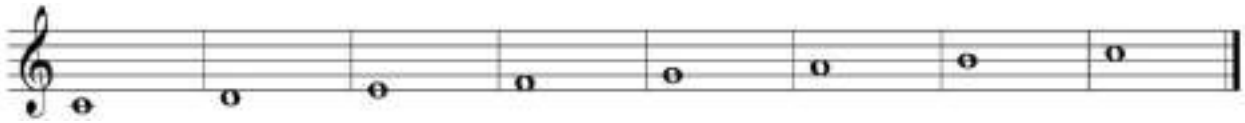

130
B
A-ne sɔ'o-men-gye'a! E-fi'm-fõ'ee, free-bi wɔ m-ba; a-ne baa-da
130
Pno.
133
B
O-wom-bir, na A-ko-so-lon-to-ba.
133
Pno.
mf
135
B
135
Pno.

4.2Analysis

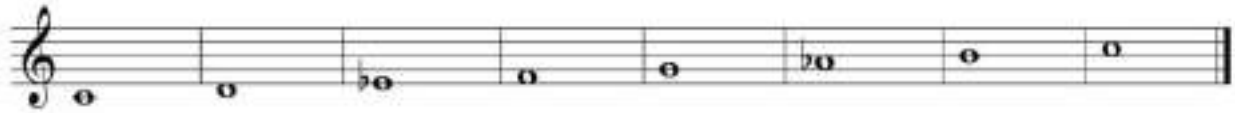
It is important to note that, apart from the texts and vocal ranges, the analytical findings of one composition could, in many respects, be generalised to the others. For this reason, the four selected compositions, namely, *Mankessim Gua*, *Avihawo*, *Tuma Kpaŋsibu* and *Simpa Aboabikyire*, were chosen to represent different vocal types and textual sources. The analysis therefore focused on the following parameters: scale, vocal range, melodic organisation, harmony and tonality, texture, form, text and compositional technique.

4.2.1 Scale

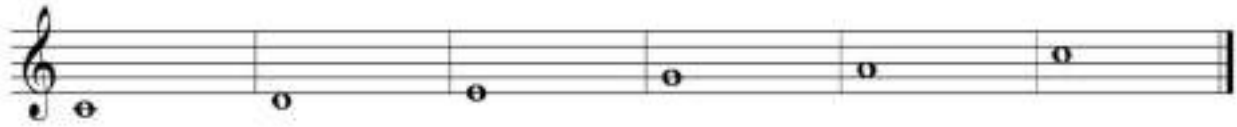
Kwami (2011) defines a scale as "a series of pitches arranged in order from low to high or high to low." In the four art songs under study, the composer employed a variety of scale that included major, minor, pentatonic and heptatonic, while also drew on modal resources such as the Dorian and Phrygian modes to colour specific passages. These scales were not static but functioned as foundational frameworks from which other tonalities were developed, allowing for contrast and expressive depth. For example, in Mankessim Gua, the F heptatonic scale, enriched with inflections from the F Phrygian mode, served as the basis for modulations into B♭ major, A♭ major, E♭ major, and C minor. In Avihawo, the F pentatonic scale provided the tonal foundation, later expanded into B♭ and C pentatonic frameworks. Similarly, in Tuma Kpaŋsibu, the C pentatonic scale generated shifts into F major, G Dorian, E♭ pentatonic, A♭ major, and D♭ pentatonic. Finally, in Simpa Aboabikyire, the E♭ pentatonic scale, enriched with Phrygian inflections, supported tonal excursions into C major, A♭ Phrygian, F major, C minor, and D minor. The creative use of these scales and modes does not only demonstrate the composer's sensitivity to textual and expressive demands but also a deliberate synthesis of indigenous and Western tonal resources. The following examples illustrate the scales employed in the compositions.



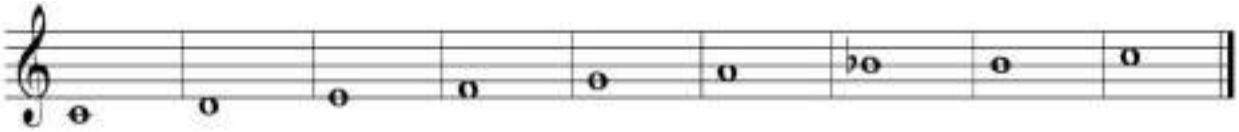
Example 1: Major scale



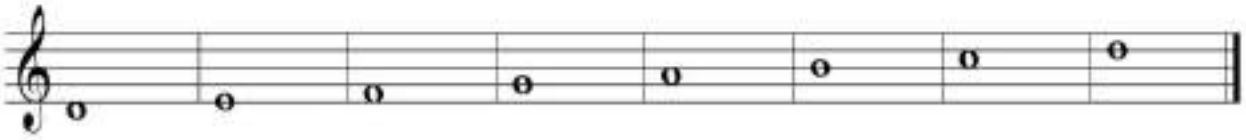
Example 2: Minor scale



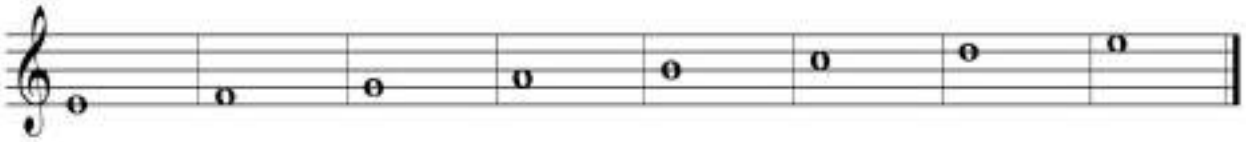
Example 3: Pentatonic scale



Example 4: Heptatonic scale



Example 5: Dorian mode

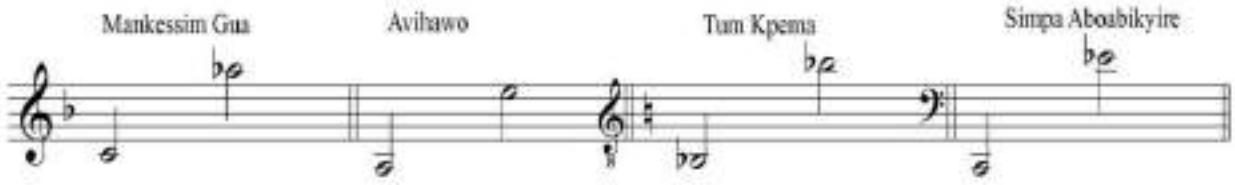


Example 6: Phrygian mode

4.2.2 Vocal Range

Vocal range refers to the span of pitches assigned to vocal parts within a composition. In traditional choral settings, singers are grouped into four main categories: soprano (high female or boy's voice), alto (low female or boy's voice), tenor (high adult male voice), and bass (low adult male voice). Collectively labelled as SATB, these ranges form the structural foundation of most choral and solo-choral arrangements (Annan et al., 2022; Schmidt-Jones & Jones, 2007).

In the contemporary Ghanaian art songs under study, however, the composer deliberately extended the traditional limits of these ranges by employing compound intervals that extend beyond the octave. This approach provides trained singers with the opportunity to demonstrate greater vocal dexterity, while also ensuring that each vocal part resonates with appropriate tessitura and expressive weight. For example, in *Mankessim Gua*, the soprano line spans an interval of thirteen (13), while *Avihawo* utilises a range of twelve (12). In *Tuma Kpaŋsibu*, the vocal writing expands further to cover an interval of fifteen (15), and in *Simpa Aboabikyire*, the most extensive range of seventeen (17) is explored. These extended ranges not only challenge performers technically but also enrich the dramatic and expressive qualities of the art songs. Illustrations of the ranges are provided below.



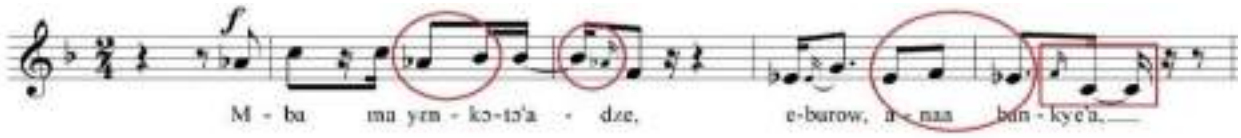
Example 7: Vocal ranges

4.2.3 Melodic Organisation

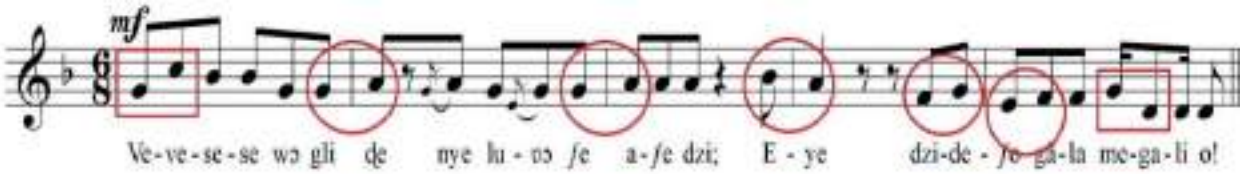
Melody forms the vital core of music, without which the art becomes inconceivable. It may be defined as the linear succession of single pitches perceived as a coherent and meaningful whole. Often regarded as the element that most directly appeals to listeners, melody provides both expressive depth and structural clarity. Etymologically, the word melody derives from the Greek melodia, a combination of the terms for "tune" and "song"—literally translated as "singing tune" (Acquah & Sackey, 2021; Aldridge & Aldridge, 2008; Forney & Machlis, 2007).

In the contemporary Ghanaian art songs, melodic organisation was intentionally crafted to situate the concept of the art song within the Ghanaian context. Accordingly, the melodic themes closely followed the tonal and rhythmic inflections of the selected Ghanaian texts, thereby reflecting the natural speech patterns of the languages. Chromatic notes were introduced strategically, either to facilitate modulation to new tonal centres or to embellish particular passages for expressive effect.

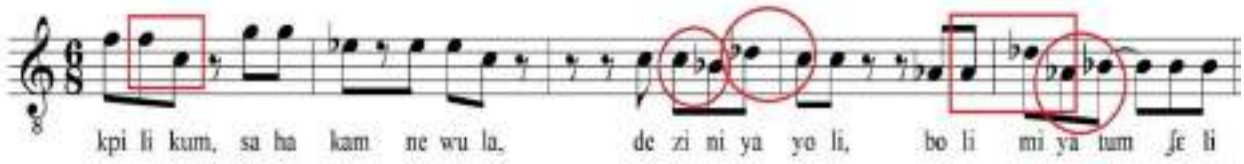
The melodic lines were further shaped through the interplay of steps, skips, and leaps, echoing the speech surrogate qualities inherent in the texts. This approach ensured that the music not only resonated with linguistic authenticity but also expanded the expressive palette of the art song tradition. Excerpts illustrating these melodic designs are provided below.



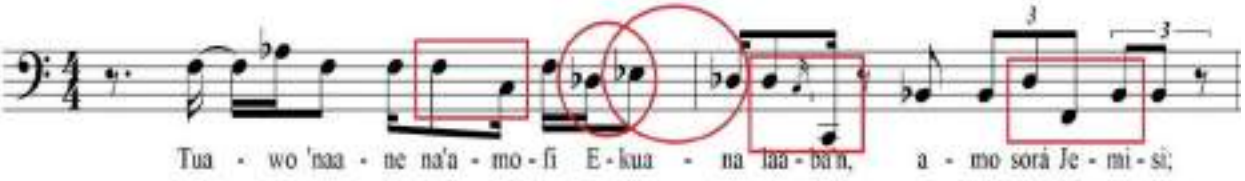
Example 8: Melodic theme from *Mankessim Gua*



Example 9: Melodic theme from *Avihawo*



Example 10: Melodic theme from *Tuma Kpaŋsibu*



Example 11: Melodic theme from *Simpa Aboabikyire*

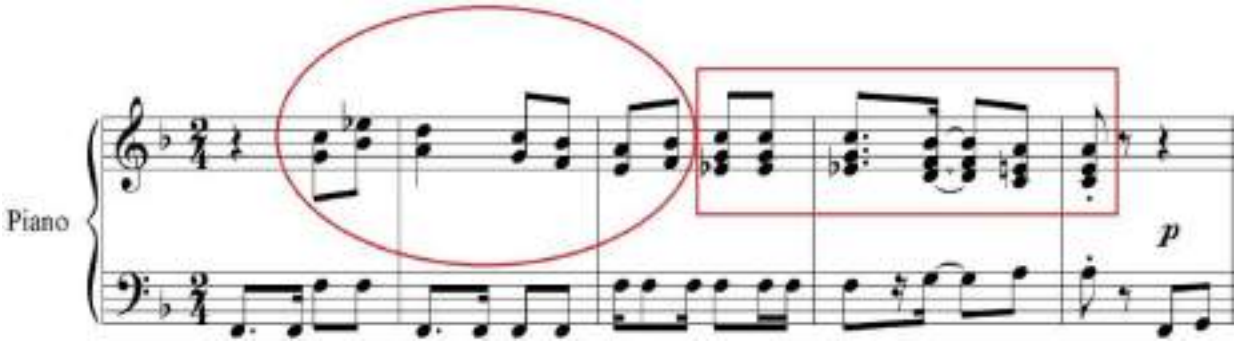
From the Examples above, all indications with square are leaps whilst indications with circle are steps. Skips on the other hand are without any indication. It means that, all intervallic passages without indications are skips. It is obviously clear, also, that chromatic notes in the melodic themes above are for modulation purposes. For instance, in Example 29, the theme has modulated from F major to A flat major and E flat major respectively.

4.2.4 Harmony and Tonality

Harmony may be defined as the simultaneous combination of pitches into chords and the sequential ordering of those chords into progressions. In its simplest sense, harmony arises whenever more than one pitch is sounded at the same time (Schellenberg et al., 2005; Schmidt-Jones & Jones, 2007). While music may exist as pure rhythm or as a single melodic line, the presence of multiple pitches inevitably creates harmonic structures. Tonality, by contrast, refers to the hierarchical system of pitch relationships in which one pitch—the tonic—serves as the central and most stable element around which other pitches and chords are organised (Gutiérrez, 2006, p.16). The interplay between harmony and tonality thus provides both vertical richness and horizontal direction within a composition.

Although the contemporary Ghanaian art song places the solo voice at its centre, the piano accompaniment functions as an indispensable partner, enriching the melodic contours while shaping the harmonic environment. In my compositional approach, I deliberately explored a variety of harmonic resources, including tertian harmony, quartal harmony, and altered chords, to create tonal variety and expressive depth. For instance, in *Mankessim Gua*, the piano introduction begins in F major but, from

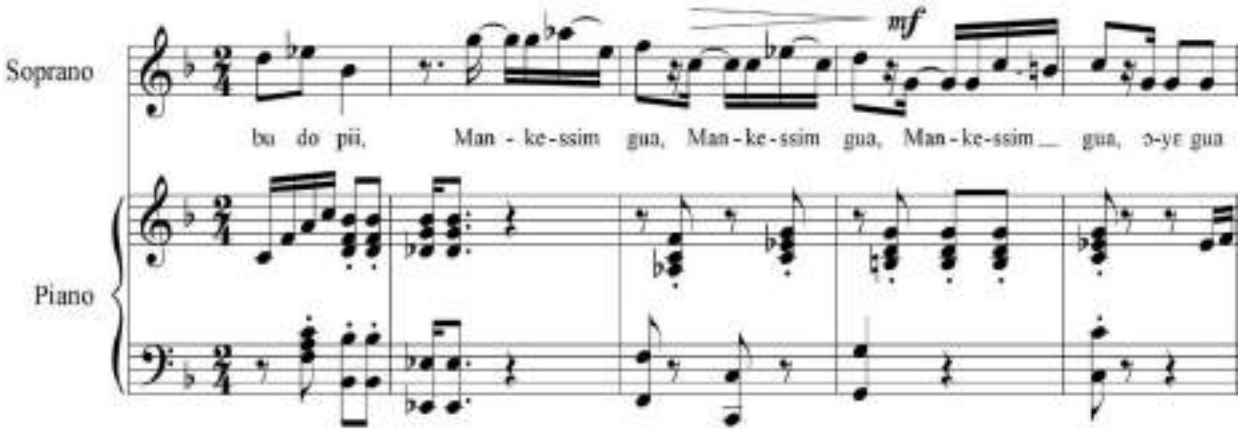
bars 3 to 11, explicitly combines quartal and tertian progressions to effect subtle tonal shifts and establish a dynamic harmonic foundation. The excerpt below illustrates this approach.



Example 12: Quartal and Tertian harmonic progressions

From the example above, the progression with the oval indication is a movement of parallel fourths whilst the progression with the rectangular indication is a combination of parallel fourths and thirds. Of course, the progression ends with F Phrygian mode in bar 11. Similar harmonic progressions are significantly found in other bars throughout the composition.

Mankessim Gua, which commenced in F major modulated to B flat major from bars 19 to 21, from bars 23 to 25 and from bars 53 to 56; E flat major from bars 50 to 51 and from bars 65 to 79; C minor from bars 52 to 53 and from bars 80 to 82; F major from bars 84 to 91, and then through F Dorian mode to F Phrygian mode from bars 92 to 95. Throughout the movement, several altered chords such as secondary dominant ninth of two (V9/ii), secondary dominant seventh of four (V7/IV), secondary dominant of five (V/V) and secondary dominant of six (V/vi) were explored to effect specific shifts in tonal centres. Apparently, harmonic progressions in *Mankessim Gua* are generalisable to all other compositions of the contemporary Ghanaian art songs. See Example 13 for illustration.

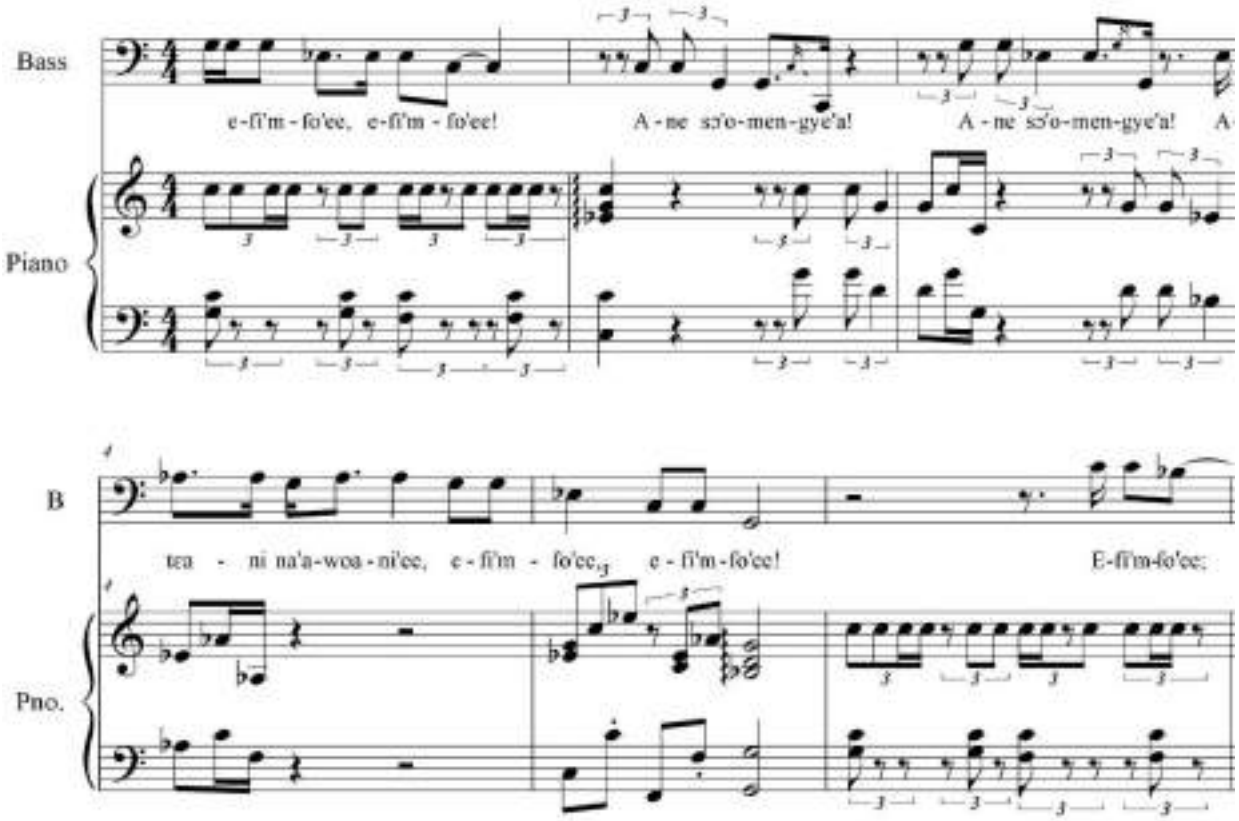


Example 13: Harmonic progression and tonality of *Mankessim Gua*

4.2.5 Texture and Form

In music, texture refers to the manner in which melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic materials are combined, creating layers of sound that vary in density and range. It is often described in terms such as monophonic, homophonic, polyphonic, or heterophonic (Annan et al., 2022; Benward & Saker, 2009). Form, on the other hand, concerns the overall structure or shape of a composition, defined by the way smaller sections are organised into a coherent whole. As Hamilton (2006) observes, form is essentially "the way [music] has been constructed from various smaller sections" (p. 1). In the contemporary Ghanaian art songs, texture cannot be considered in relation to the solo voice alone, since the piano accompaniment plays a crucial interpretive and interactive role. While the vocal line by itself may

appear monophonic, the integration of the piano creates a richer sonic fabric. The deliberate use of counterpoint within the piano accompaniment, woven against harmonic progressions and vocal phrases, gives rise to a polyphonic texture, reinforcing the contrapuntal quality of the works. This textural does not only support the voice but also enhances the expressive and structural dimensions of the compositions. Example 14 illustrates this interplay.

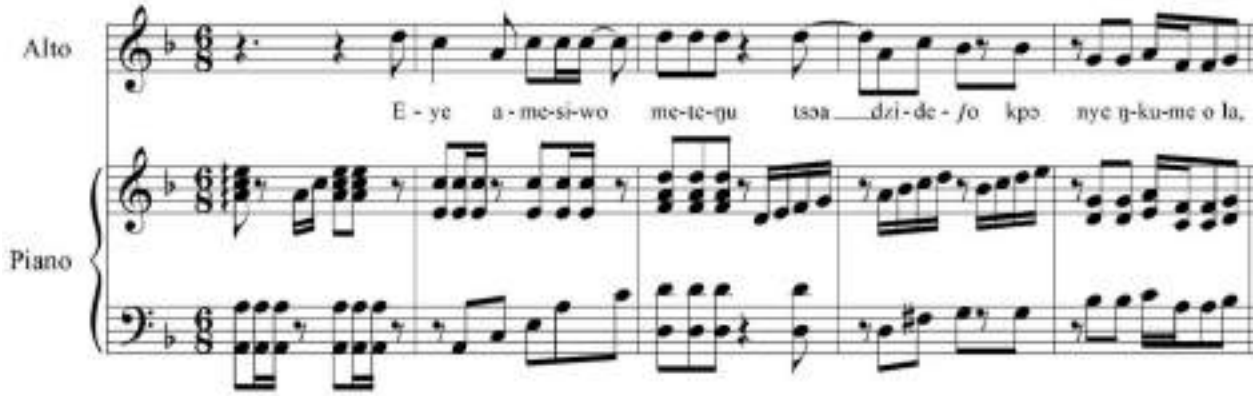


Example 14: Texture of *Simpa Aboabikyire*

Undoubtedly, the form of the contemporary Ghanaian art song compositions is through-composed. In these compositions, however, the return of sections of the music did not occur. In other words, no two parts of the composition could be identified as identical in any respect. Imperatively, the compositions are series of contrasted themes without the return of the themes.

4.2.6 Text

Aleshinskaya (2013) notes that "text is a product of social activity, a result of interaction of social practices and social agents" (p. 231). In vocal music, the text, or lyric, plays a crucial role in shaping comprehension and appreciation. As Willgoss (2012) observes, "music is language. It often has syntax" (p. 426). In the contemporary Ghanaian art songs, the texts were deliberately drawn from sociocultural events to reflect lived experiences and communal values. They were developed across eight Ghanaian languages, each embedded within its own sociocultural context. In this regard, the compositions achieved both contextual authenticity and expressive depth, enabling the songs to convey meaning that resonates beyond the purely musical domain. Example 15 illustrates this textual integration.



Example 15: Excerpt of an Ewe text

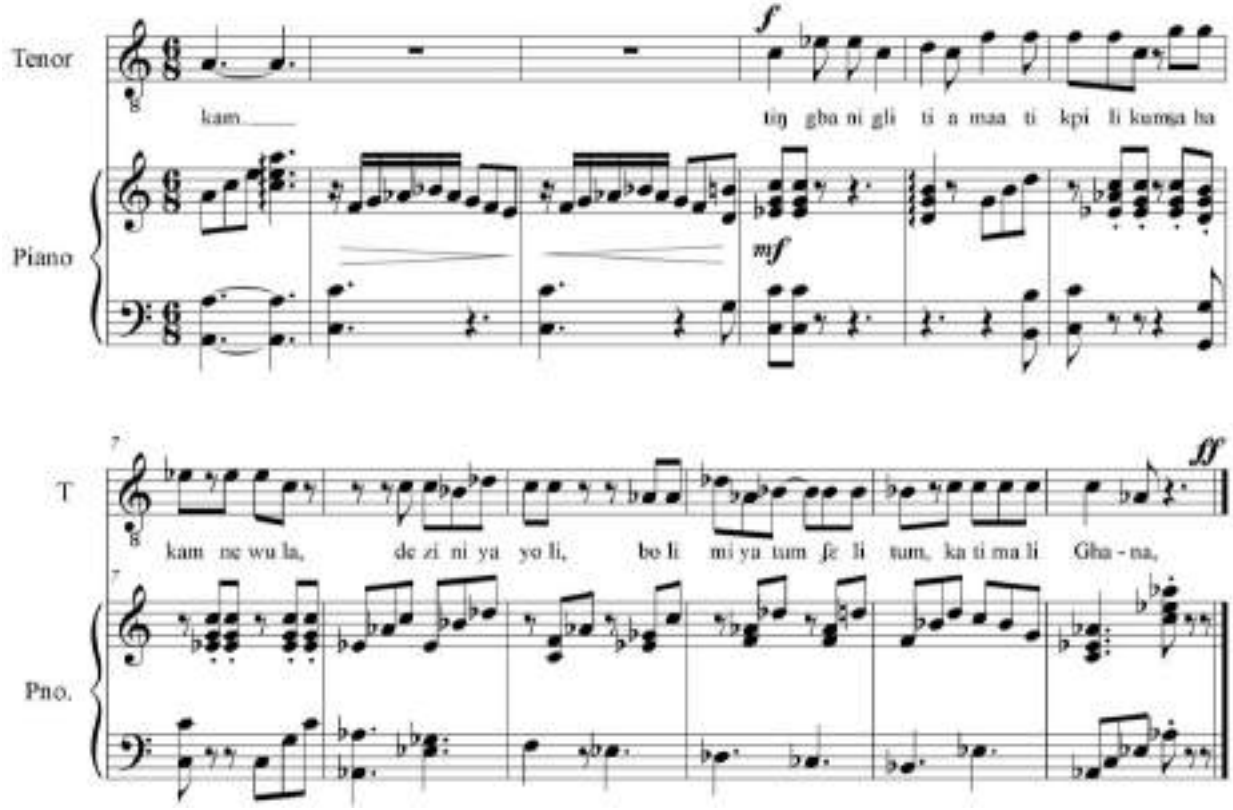
The excerpt above is an ewe text which literally means, "only my shattered soul stands like a broken fence". The speech surrogate and the rhythmic inflection of the text were rigidly considered to create melodic themes that agree with the text.

4.2.7 Compositional Techniques

The contemporary Ghanaian art songs employ a range of compositional techniques, including modulation, counterpoint, call and response, imitation, *Asafo* singing style, polyrhythm and melodic adaptation, to illustrate the synergy between Western art music practices and African indigenous musical resources. One of the most prominent techniques was the use of modulation to create variety and avoid monotony of tonal centres. For example, in *Tuma Kpaŋsibu*, the composition begins in C pentatonic and modulates sequentially to F major (bars 10 to16), then to C major (bars 17 to 21).

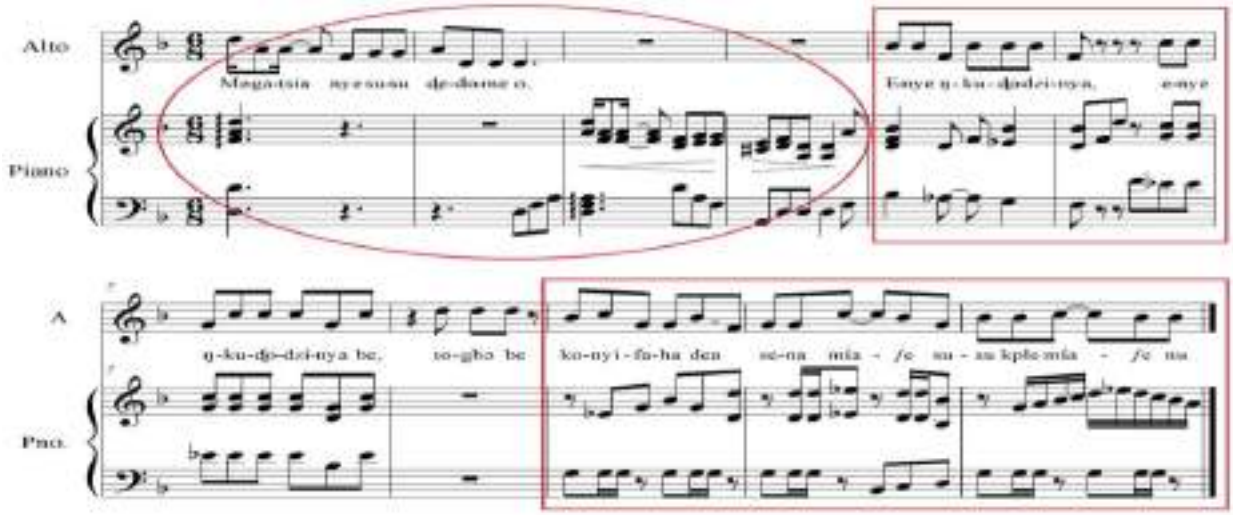
Additional modulations tonicised new tonal centres such as G major, E-flat major, A-flat major, D-flat major, and C major. Beyond modulation, techniques such as counterpoint and imitation were employed to enrich texture, while call and response and the incorporation of the *Asafo* singing style foregrounded communal and dialogic traditions from Ghanaian music. Similarly, the use of polyrhythm highlighted African rhythmic complexity, while melodic adaptation ensured that textual inflections were faithfully preserved. Collectively, these techniques demonstrate the composer's stylistic approach of integrating African and Western resources into a coherent contemporary art song idiom. Example 16 illustrates this

integration.



Example 16: An excerpt of modulation in *Tuma Kpaŋsibu*

Again, techniques such as counterpoints, call and response and imitations were utilised to make the compositions very interactive between the voice and the piano. See illustration in Example 17.

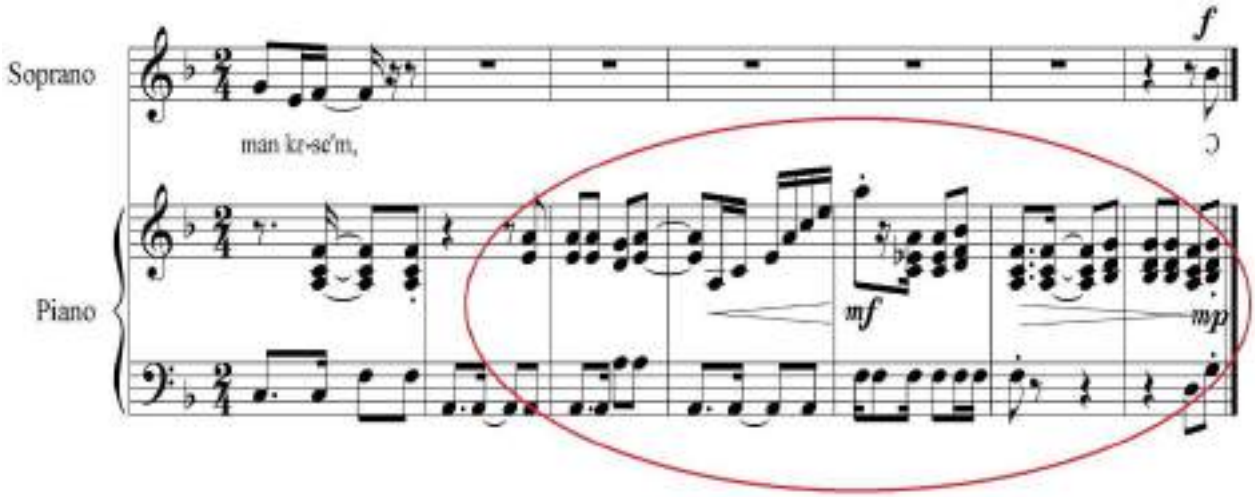


Example 17: Passage of counterpoints, call and response and imitations

From the excerpt, the oval indication is a call and response, and imitation. A call is made by the voice in the first two bars whilst the piano responds in the next two bars. It is also obvious that the first part of the response is an imitation of the first part of the call. Significantly, other indications with square are contrapuntal passages.

Furthermore, the *Asafo* singing style which resulted in polyrhythmic patterns was judiciously used as a compositional technique to effect free rhythm in some aspects of the work. The compositions were

consciously created in either simple duple or compound duple to depict the respective metres of the indigenous resources. Finally, it is important to state that series of melodic themes from the indigenous resources were adapted to create accompaniment for the voice soli. For instance, the piano introduction and other interludes of *Mankessim Gua* are *Asafo* melodic themes which were adapted to create accompaniment for the voice. Of course, these themes were developed melodically as well as harmonically to fit the context and content of the composer's intention. The excerpt, Example 18 is an illustration.



Example 18: Melodic adaptation

5. Conclusion

The novelty of this study lies in its explicit demonstration of how African and Western musical idioms can be fused within a single composition without either identity being diminished. The works integrate indigenous resources with Western musical features, employing heptatonic and pentatonic scales, major and minor tonalities, and occasional use of the Phrygian and Dorian modes. Significantly, the compositions draw on the tonal and rhythmic patterns of Ghanaian spoken texts and mirror the percussive qualities of traditional instruments, thereby affirming their character as African musical artefacts. Contemporary Ghanaian art songs thus open creative avenues for developing more works that reflect Africa's cultural and philosophical contexts, enabling African composers to authentically identify with their art.

The analysis of the compositions further revealed their formal structures and highlighted the interplay of scales, melodic and harmonic devices, textures, and compositional techniques. Together, these findings underscore the creative potential of contemporary Ghanaian art songs as cultural expressions that not only preserve African traditions but also reimagine them within modern artistic frameworks.

Importantly, this study recommends that composers continue to explore the integration of indigenous African idioms with Western techniques in order to enrich the art song repertoire. Music educators are also encouraged to incorporate such compositions into curricula as teaching and performance materials, thereby nurturing cultural pride while sharpening technical competence. Furthermore, cultural policymakers and institutions should support platforms for the performance, publication, and dissemination of these works to sustain their visibility and appreciation both locally and internationally. The study, thus, demonstrates how music can serve as a medium for cultural dialogue, innovation and identity formation.

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