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## SECTION TWO—VOCALISES FOR BUILDING THE BEAUTIFUL VOICE


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Chapter III

# *Making the First Sounds*

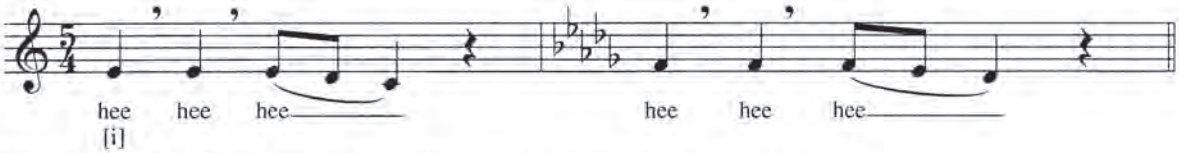
Phonation that is free from muscular interference is the goal of all breathing exercises. The most fundamental act of phonation is that of starting the tone without an initial consonant, a process often referred to as the "attack", although Richard Miller's "onset" is perhaps a more appropriate term.[2] Vocal onset can be considered to have three basic types. The first type—one of two which are generally considered undesirable—is the soft or aspirate (breathy) onset in which the valve at the top of the trachea remains too loose and breath is wasted, causing the resultant tone to lack clarity. The second type of improper onset is the hard or glottal onset, known in phonetic terms as the "glottal plosive." This onset occurs when the glottis (the space between the vocal folds) is closed before breath pressure is applied resulting in an audible catch or click in the initial tone. Voice instructors and laryngologists commonly view this type of onset as one which causes unhealthy laryngeal tension and can be potentially damaging to the voice. The type of onset which is considered to be the most desirable from both a physical and aesthetic standpoint is what Miller terms the "balanced onset." It is a physiological middle ground between the soft onset and the hard attack and is the kind of onset which most completely promotes laryngeal freedom. In the balanced onset the complete closure of the glottis is brought about by breath pressure in a process of physics known as the Bernoulli effect, but without any escaping of breath at the outset of the tone as occurs in the soft onset.

One approach that can help to promote a balanced onset involves the speaking or singing of certain sounds such as the affirmation, "m-hm," or a repeated "ha, ha, ha, ha." Such uses of the [h] aspirate encourage a commencement of the tone which closely resembles the soft onset. It is common for voice instructors to recommend a slight escape of breath in this manner prior to the actual making of tone as an initial step toward the development of a balanced onset capability. The use of the audible [h] at this early stage is both justifiable and encouraged because it promotes the inducement of breath activity prior to phonation. Once sufficient skill has been developed in the use of the audible [h], the singer is directed to precede the tone with an imaginary or nearly audible [h] in further spoken exercises or in any onset vocalizations as a means for promoting the true balanced onset.

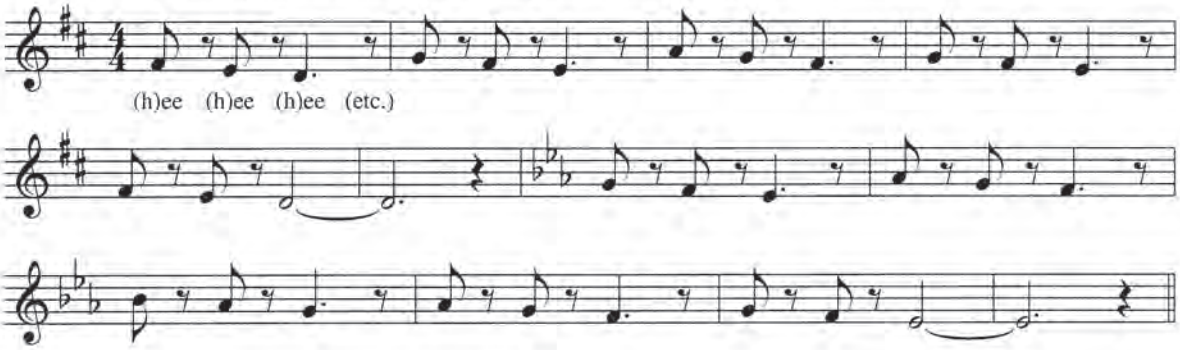
Vocalises 1 and 2 which follow are intended to be used in the development of the balanced onset. It can be highly effective, especially in the early stages of vocal development, to precede these vocalises with the slow exhalation and inhalation exercises (Breathing Exercises No. 1 a-d, pages 5-7) as a means of encouraging the proper breath activity as the tone is produced. When using this procedure, the singing tone in a vocalise can be thought of as being simply an added feature of the exhalation part of the breathing exercises.

2 Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1986) 1.

Vocalise No. 1 (Complete exercise with accompaniment is on page 38 )




Vocalise No. 2 (Complete exercise with accompaniment is on page 40 )




When sung without initial consonants, Vocalise No. 22 in Section Two may be used to practice a balanced onset that is sung in an accented fashion, relying on a somewhat more vigorous abdominal action. The first voiceless consonant articulation exercise (Breathing Exercise No. 3a, page 8) should precede early work with this vocalise since it encourages the kind of breath activity necessary for an effective, freely-produced accented onset. The relationship between the breathing exercise and the vocalises can be made especially clear to singers by having them articulate the consonants using the same rhythm as in the vocalise to be sung.

Another type of balanced onset, the *staccato* onset, will be considered as a part of the discussion of flexibility in Chapter 10.

Chapter IX

# *Consonants*

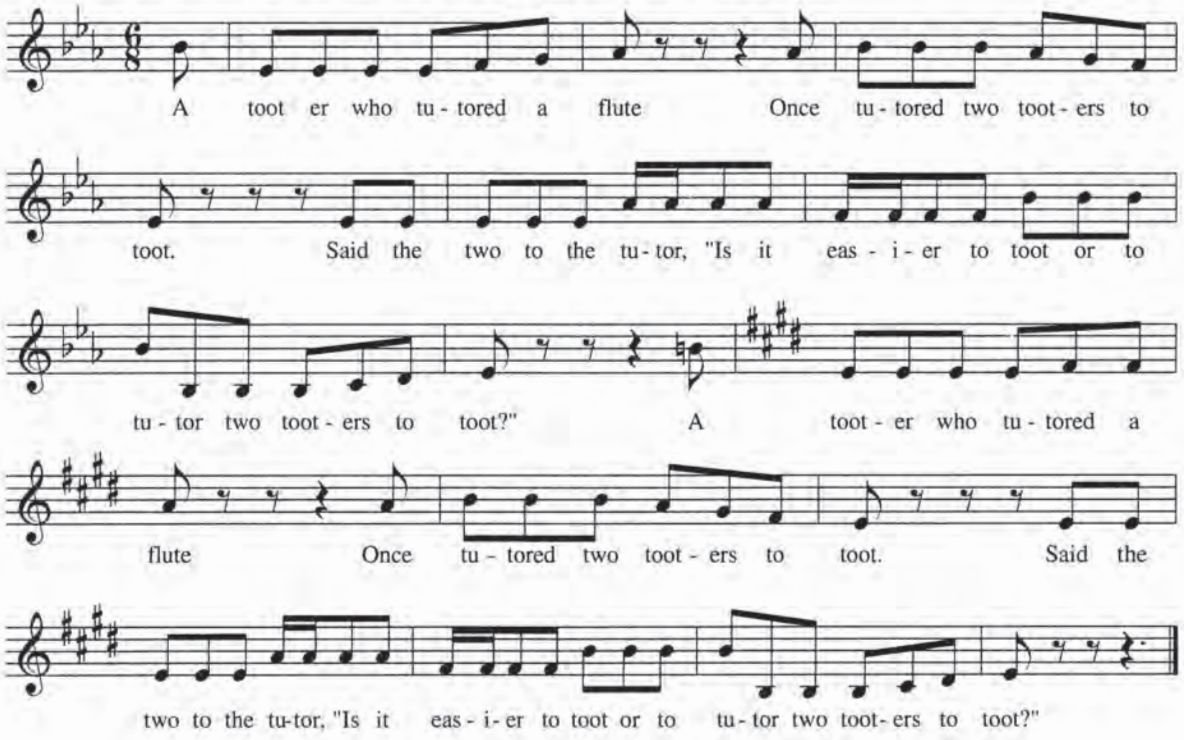
Vocalises can be extremely effective in developing consonant articulation capabilities. Through vocalization any and all consonants can be isolated in combination with vowels. This offers singers the opportunity to become aware of the acoustical nature of the consonants, such as their qualities of being voiced or voiceless, plosive or continuant, etc. Vocalises with consonants can also serve to develop the independence of the jaw, tongue and lips which is necessary for clear, coordinated articulation.

The benefits of vocalizing with consonants are not limited solely to matters of text articulation. The influence of the nasal consonants on breath activity and resonance has already been discussed. Most of the other consonants can have the same kinds of effects in their own characteristic ways. Miller writes, "Singers have long recognized the value of prefacing vowels with some specific consonant that improves subsequent timbre. Even those consonants that require concerted action from tongue, lips, and soft palate may assist the ensuing vowel."[12] For example, voiceless consonants such as [t] are less likely to encourage tension in a succeeding vowel than voiced consonants such as [d]. Therefore, using voiceless consonants can serve in a transitional way to encourage an absence of tension in their voiced counterparts. The consonants [z], [ð] ("th" voiced), and [v] can be particularly valuable in encouraging resonant tone and sensations of "sympathetic" resonance.[13]

An excellent aid for teaching crisp articulation is the "tongue-twister." Tongue-twisters awaken the articulators and encourage intense mental activity in singers. Tongue-twisters are made up of phrases that contain either relentless alliteration, two or more consonant sounds in alternation, or a series of rhyming or nearly-rhyming words. They nearly always live up to their name and consequently are usually a source of enjoyment and amusement for a choir. They may be spoken but are perhaps most effective in a choral setting when sung, as in Example No. 10.

12 Miller 79.
13 Miller 90-105.

Vocalise No. 35 (Complete exercise with accompaniment is on page 122 )




Example No. 10

Other "tongue-twisting" exercises include Nos. 26-34 in Section Two.

Chapter XI

# *Synthesis*

While the development of isolated skills into positive habits is one of the primary functions of vocalization, it is not yet a full realization of vocalization's ultimate goal. William Vennard states: "A knowledge of the various processes involved in singing is like a disjointed skeleton until their interrelation is understood. An organism is greater than the sum of all its parts, and no analytical study discovers the whole truth until it leads to synthesis."[15] Likewise, Leon Thurman writes:

> *. . basic skills must be developed, sometimes separately from other skills, but at some point a singer must 'go with the flow' or the synergy of the total act of singing. Exercises usually simplify complex skills into subparts at first, then should gradually combine the subparts into the increasingly complex, synergized skills of singing.*[16]

Vocalization is intended to lead the singer toward this synthesis of skills characteristic of a fully developed technique which is capable of satisfying any expressive demand. Surely choral and solo literature provides abundant opportunity for such a synthesis to occur. Vocalises, however, can and should contribute toward the same end.

Many of the vocalises in this book are specifically intended to promote such a synthesis by incorporating elements into a single exercise that encourage the development of a number of skills. For example, the following vocalise begins with the word "sing" which contains the consonant [s] to stimulate breath activity and the nasal consonant [ŋ] to help establish ring in the tone. Tonal brilliance is further encouraged by the bright vowels [i] and [e] with the intent that the inherent brilliance in those vowels will be maintained in the final vowel [ɑ]. The brief, rapidly-moving melismas provide an opportunity to combine work toward timbre development with the practice of flexibility technique. The final three notes of the exercise require a sudden adjustment from articulated *legato* singing to standard *legato* (Example No. 14) (see Vocalise No. 58).

Vocalise No. 58 (Complete exercise with accompaniment is on page 184)

Example No. 14

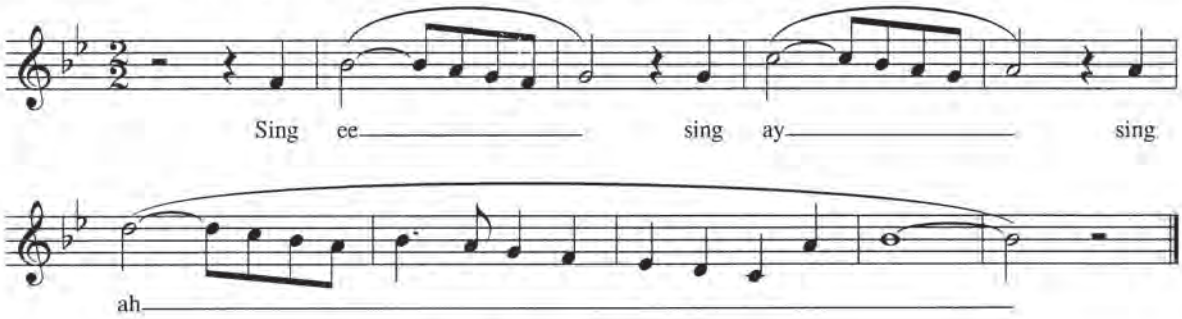
The next exercise encourages similar results by virtue of its identical consonant and vowel combinations. However, the nature of its melody makes it useful in the development of *legato* and

15 Vennard 191.

16 Leon Thurman, "Spring Training for Singers," *Choristers Guild Letters* 33 (1982): 142.

advanced *sostenuto* technique. By alternating the articulation of the vocalise during successive repetitions it can encourage vocal and mental versatility and provide all of the technical benefits of *staccato* articulation (Example No. 15).

Vocalise No. 59 (Complete exercise with accompaniment is on page 186 )

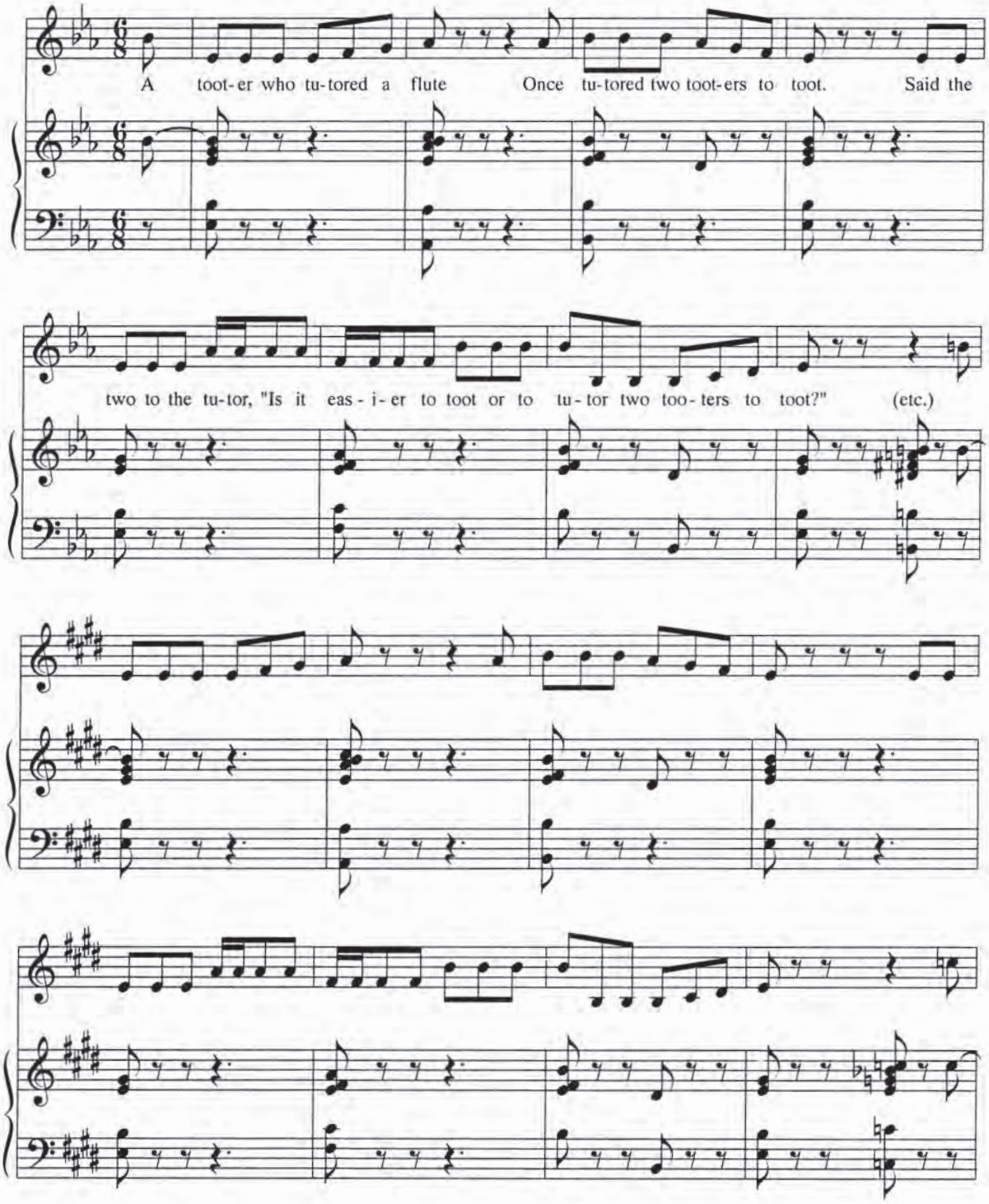


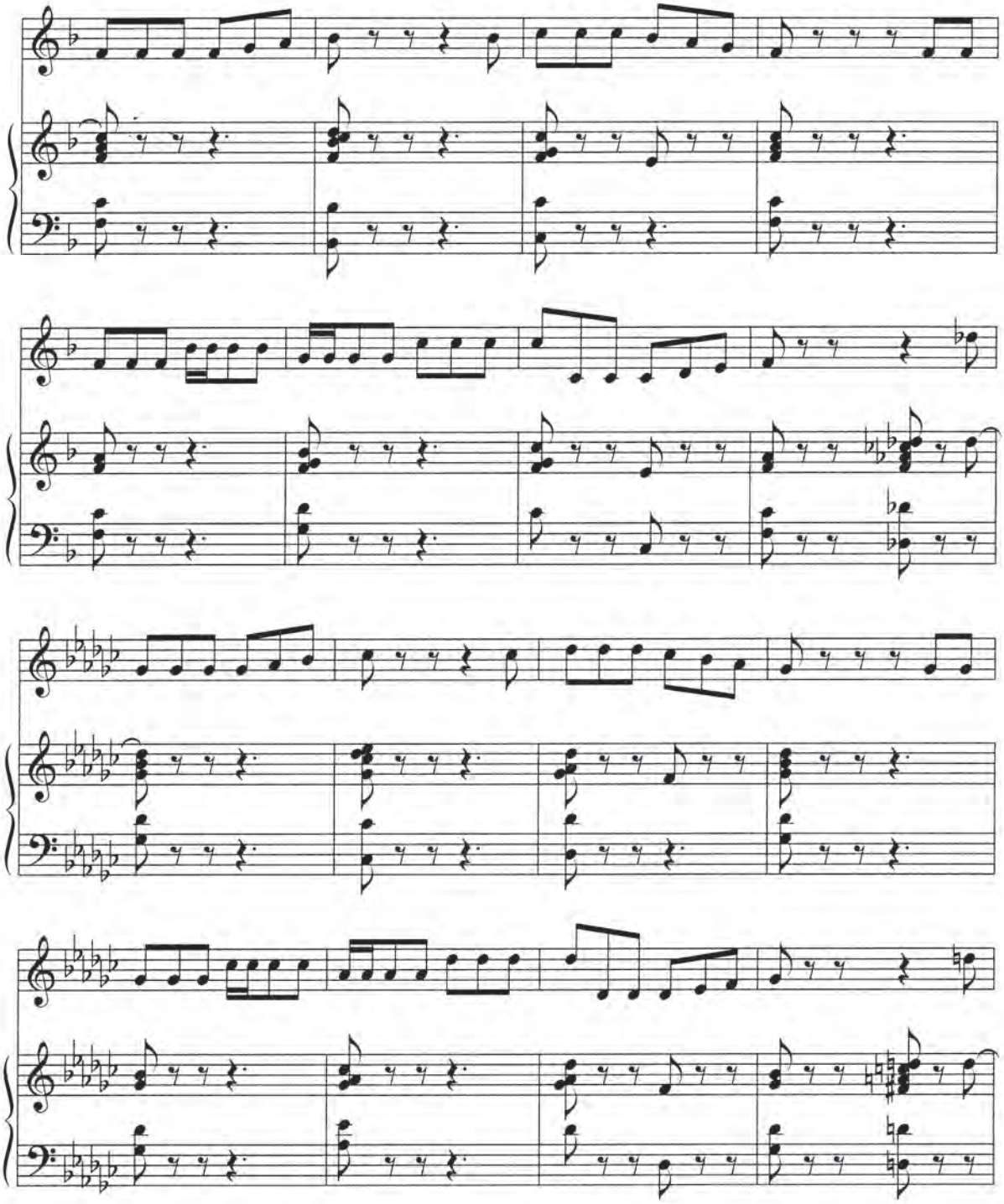

Example No. 15

Vocalises 51-60 in Section Two are designed to synthesize elements of vocal technique.

**Vocalise No. 35**

Suggested tempo range: ♩. = 92-126



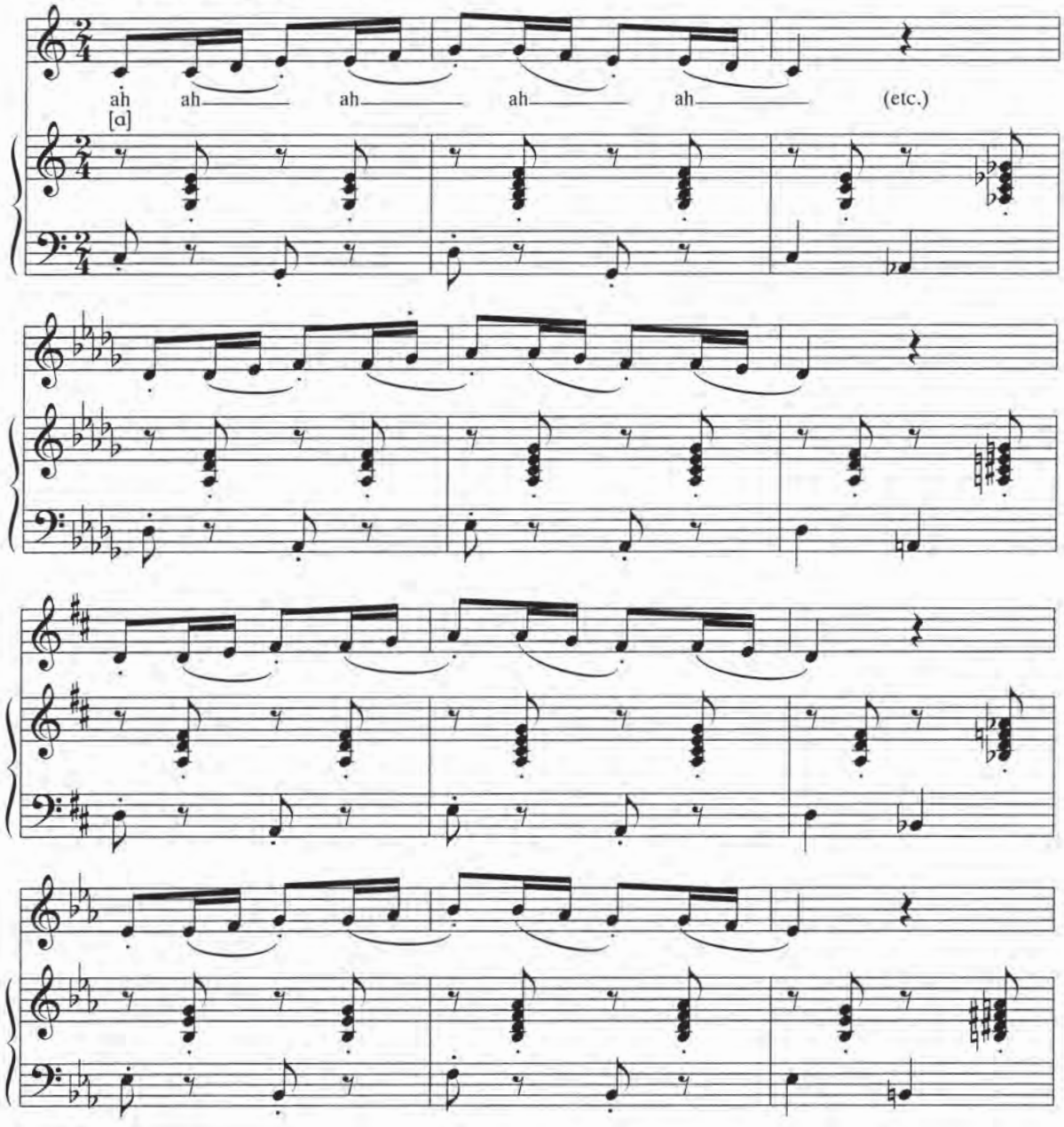


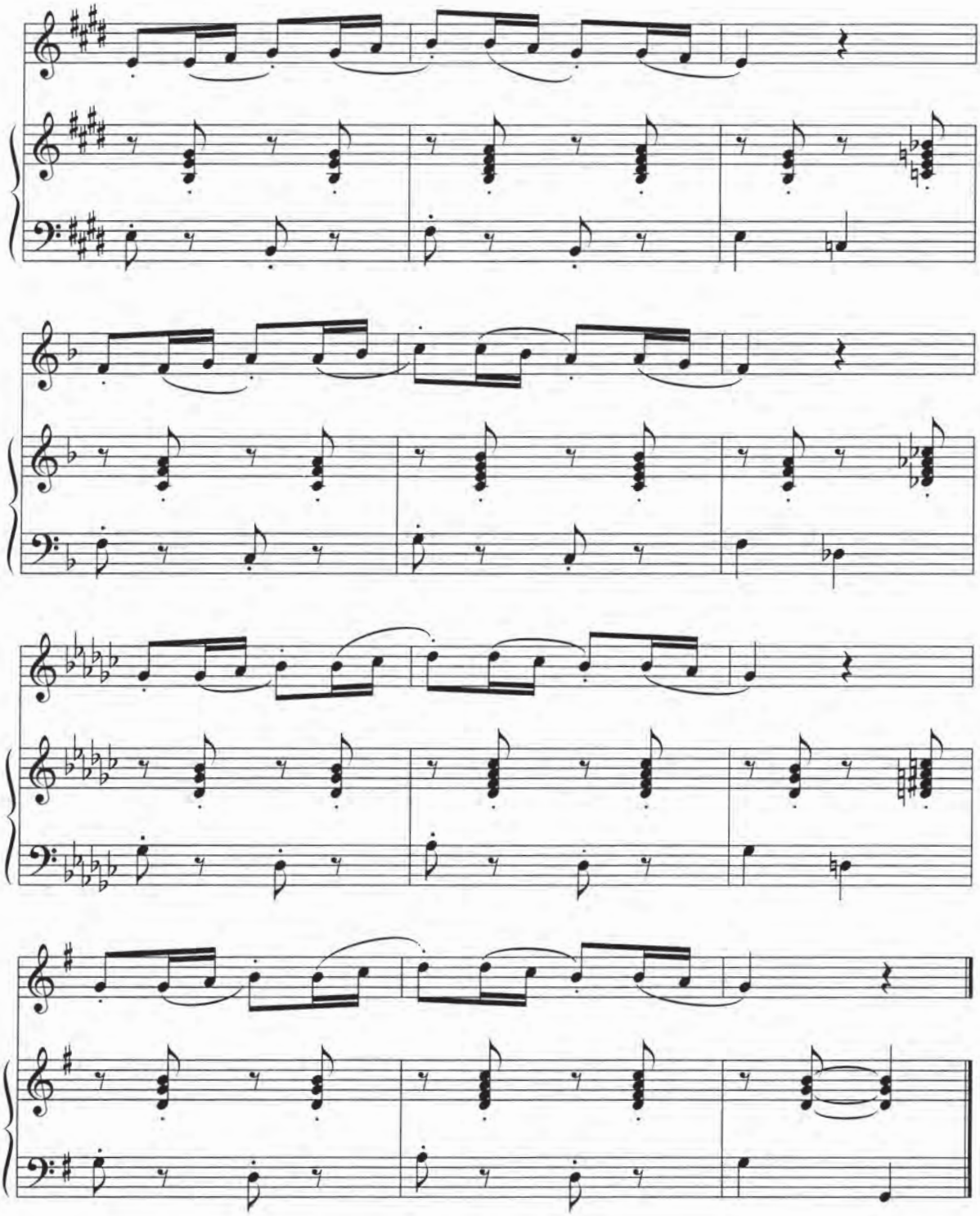
## 2. Articulated *Legato*

### Vocalise No. 43

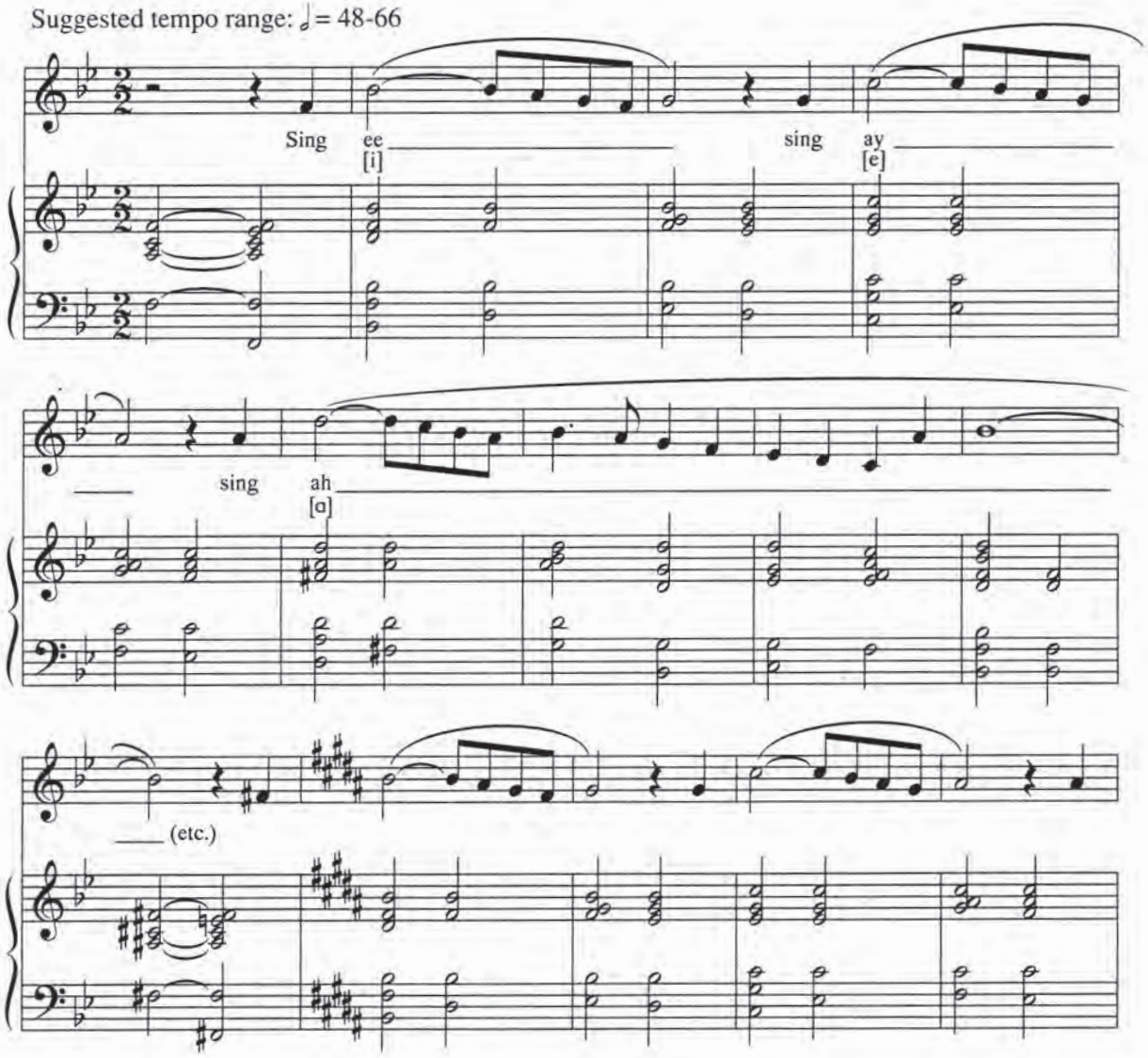
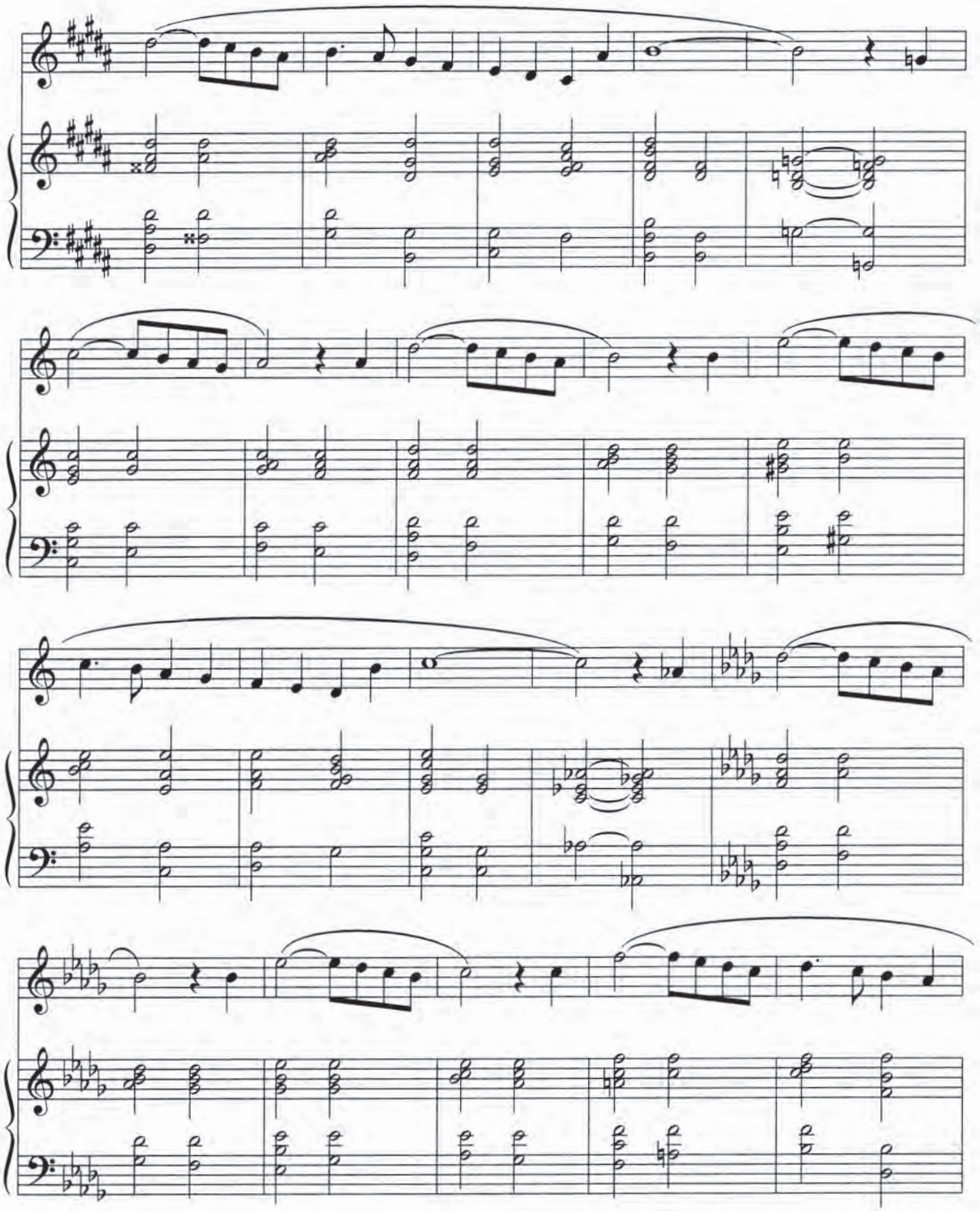
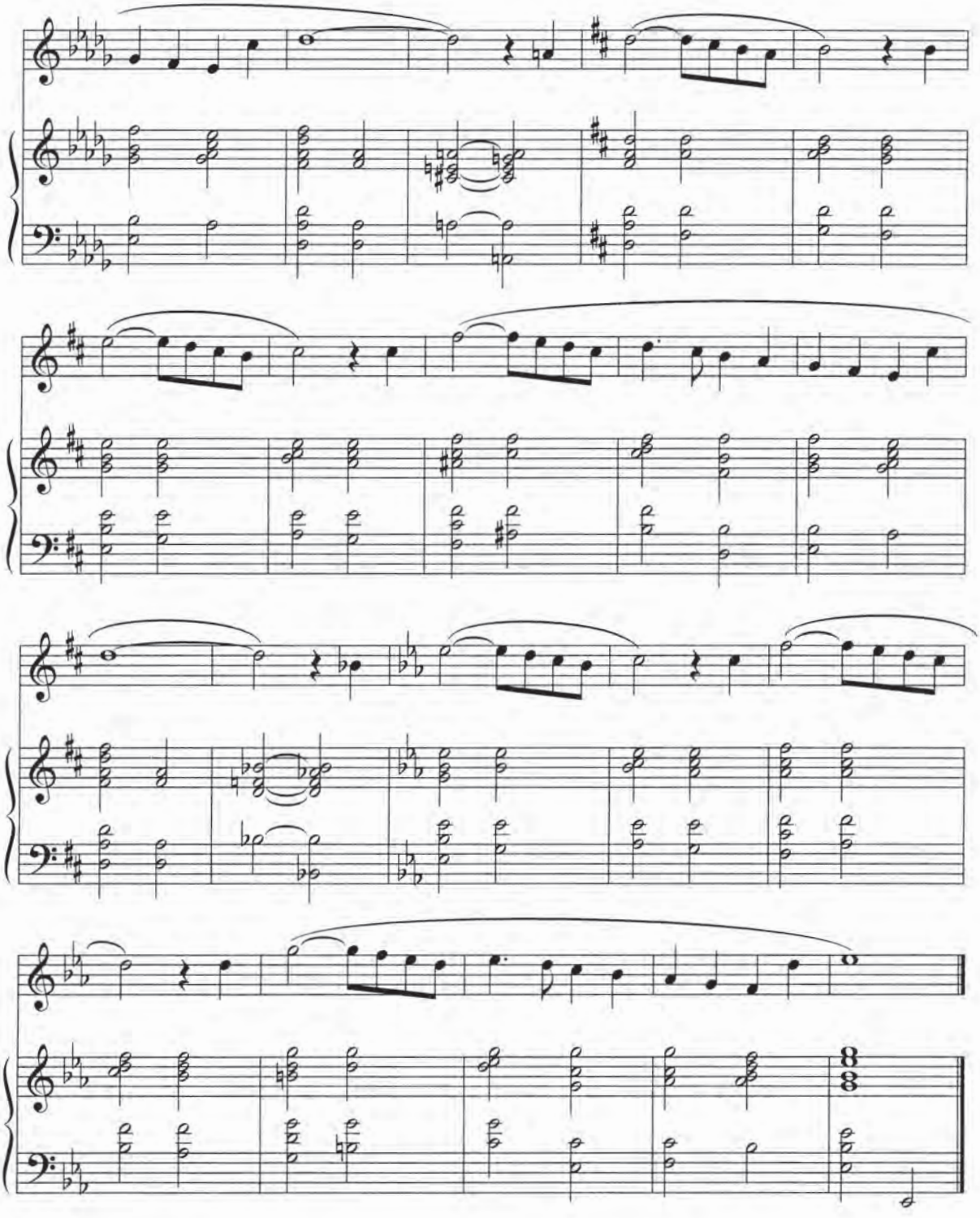
- Refer to the comments regarding this vocalise on page 25.
- The sixteenth notes should be sung using the articulated *legato* style.
- It may be helpful to precede this vocalise with consonant articulations in the manner of Breathing Exercise 3b, but using the rhythm of the vocalise.
- Any of a number of vowels or vowel combinations may be used.

Suggested tempo range: ♩ = 72-92





### Vocalise No. 59

- Promote expressive singing in this vocalise by encouraging *legato* singing and dynamic variation. For example, begin each of the three phrases at a *piano* to *mezzo-piano* dynamic, followed by subtle *crescendos* and *dimenuendos* at appropriate times. Also, the *messa di voce* technique might be incorporated into the last note of each phrase by giving the note a slight sense of *crescendo* and then *diminuendo*.
- Be sure that the [ŋ] consonant is given sufficient length so that it might have maximum benefit on the tone quality of the vowel.
- Maintain steady breath pressure throughout, especially during the transition from the [ŋ] consonant to the vowel.
- The vocalise may be sung in a *staccato* fashion, as well. When the vocalise is sung *staccato* the chords in the accompaniment should be played *staccato*, as well. Consider having each repetition of the melody alternate between *legato* and *staccato*.

Suggested tempo range: 𝅗𝅥 = 48-66