HIGHLAND VARIATIONS for string quartet **Michael Parsons**

Highland Variations was written in 1972. The melodic structure is based on that of pibroch (Gaelic: piobaireachd), the classical music of the Scots highland bagpipe. This is an austere, slow-moving and formalised music based on fixed melodic conventions, traditionally associated with the MacCrimmons, clan pipers to the MacLeods of Dunvegan in the Isle of Skye.

The work makes use of some of the features characteristic of pibroch, such as the drone and the systematic repetition of a single type of figuration in each section. The theme is based on a hexatonic version of the modal scale of the Scots bagpipe, and is built up in three lines of 6, 6 and 4 bars, with internal repetitions characteristic of a pibroch melody. As in the traditional form, the variations are constructed not on the theme itself but on a melodic outline or 'skeleton' (stated in the 1st violin part in Variation 1). There are eight variations, the seventh of which is for solo violin. After the eighth variation the work concludes with a restatement of the opening theme.

Preview File Only

Performing instructions:

The tempo should remain constant at ♩ = 30 throughout the statement of the theme and in Variations 1 and 2. In Variation 3 there should be a very gradual increase in tempo to ♩ = 40 at the beginning of Variation 4. The original tempo is resumed (with new note value, ♩. = 30) in Variation 5.

The work is to be played continuously, without breaks between sections, except for a pause at the end of Variation 7 (violin solo).

Double bars indicate structural divisions, not pauses. The restatement of the theme follows the end of Variation 8 without a break.
To end: the last note in bar 16 of the theme should be sustained in all parts for an extra tied minim, making this in effect a 3/2 bar.

Vibrato should be used very sparingly in the statement of the theme (violin 1) and in Variations 1 and 2 (inner parts), and not at all in Variation 8. Sustained long notes in the lower parts are generally to be played close to the bridge. A fuller tone with some controlled vibrato may be introduced in Variations 3 and 4, which may be treated more freely and expansively.

Parts II and III may be played either by violin or viola.

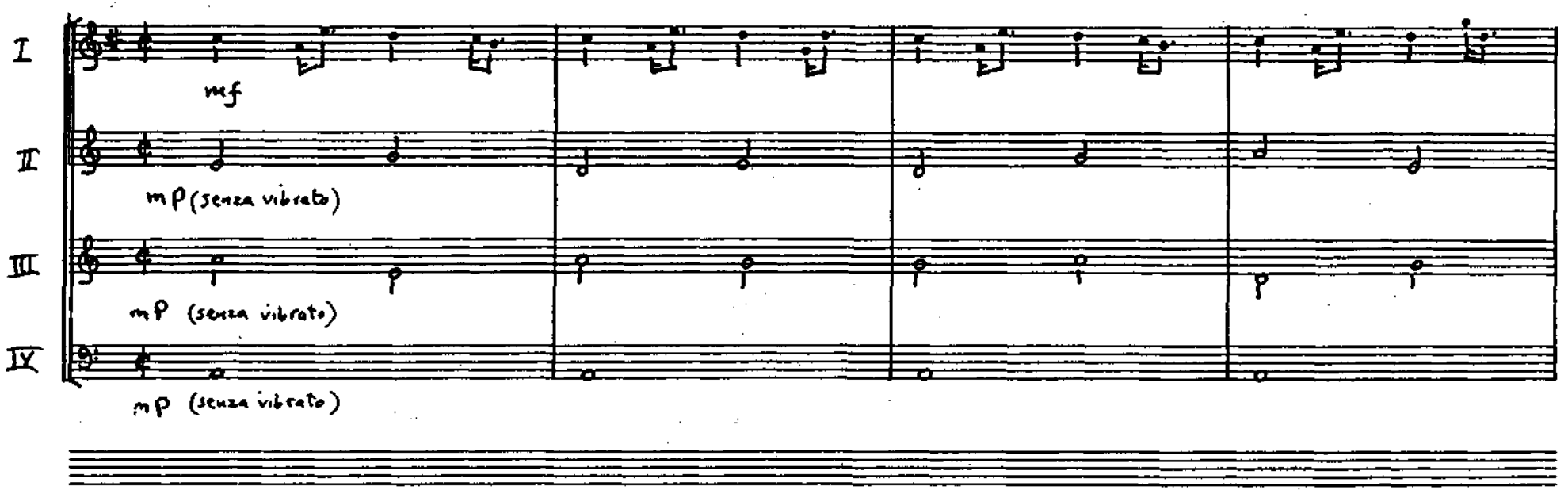
The duration of a performance is between 9 and 10 minutes.

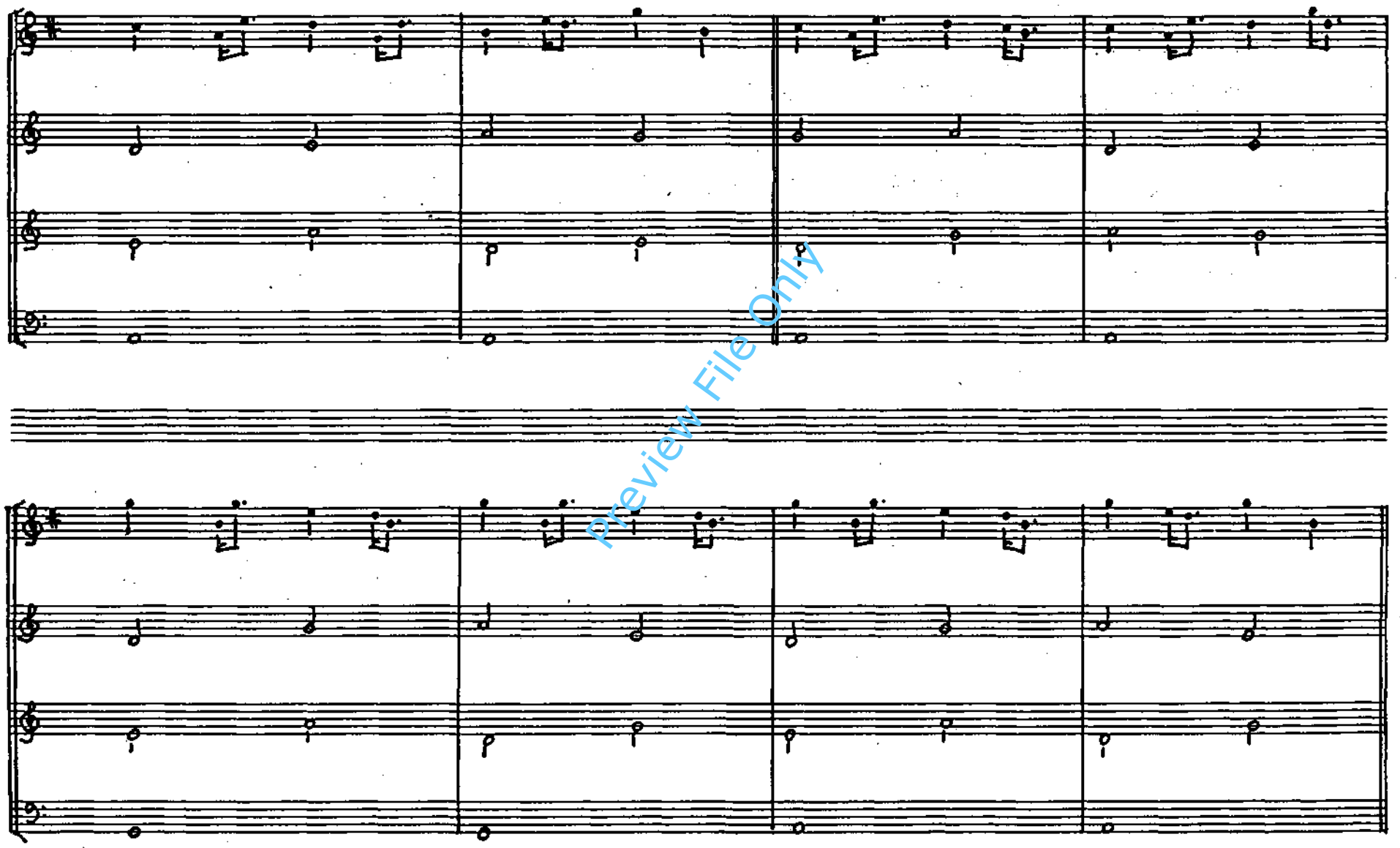
Highland Variations for string quartet

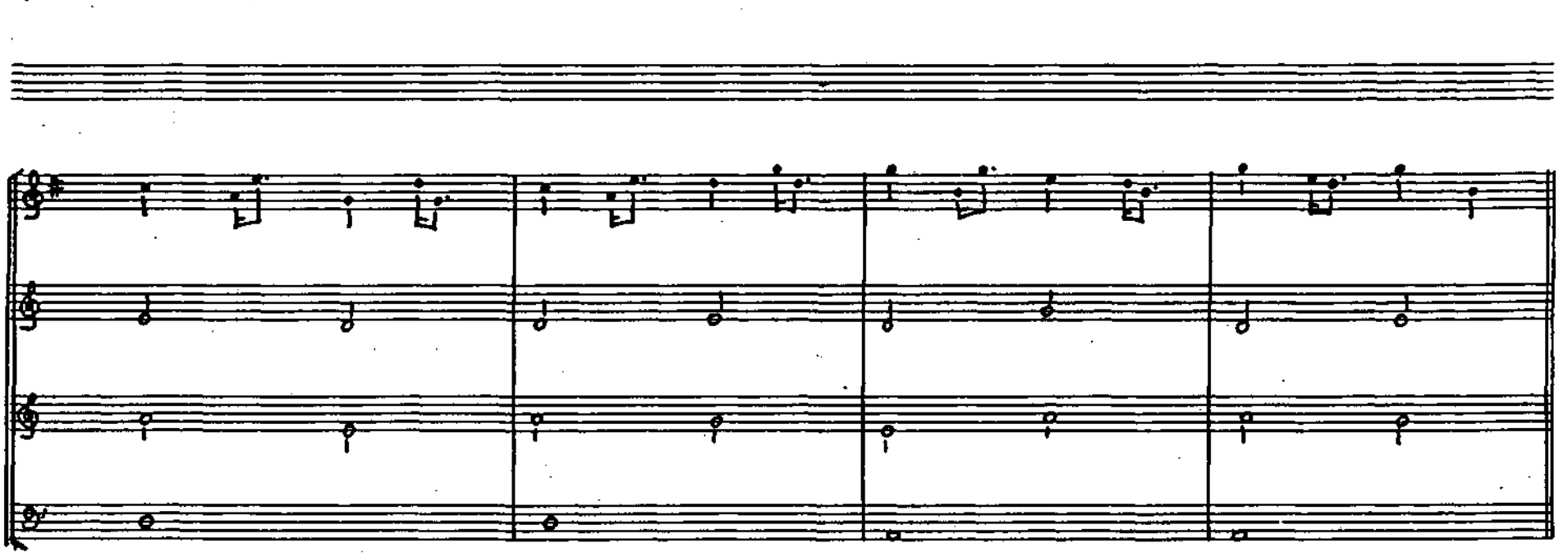
Michael Parsons (1972)

Theme

Lento Sostenuto (d = 30)







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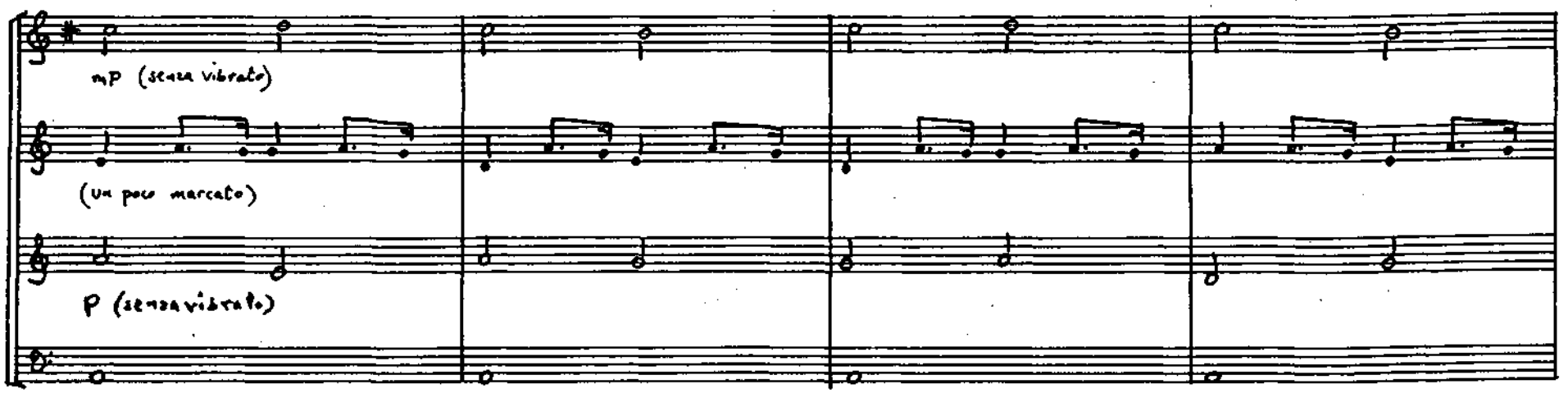
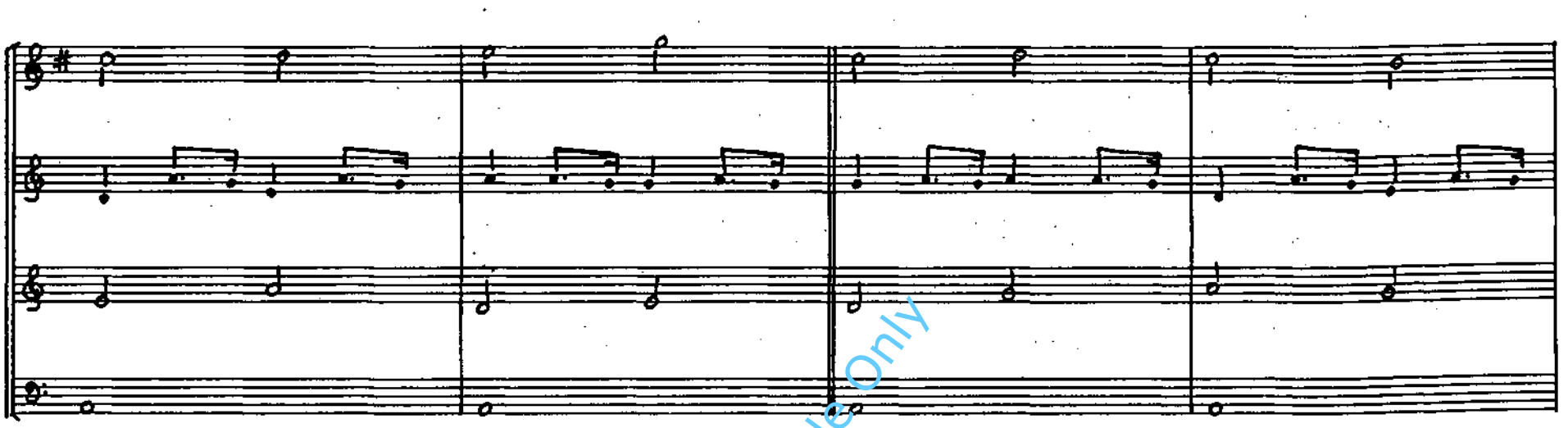
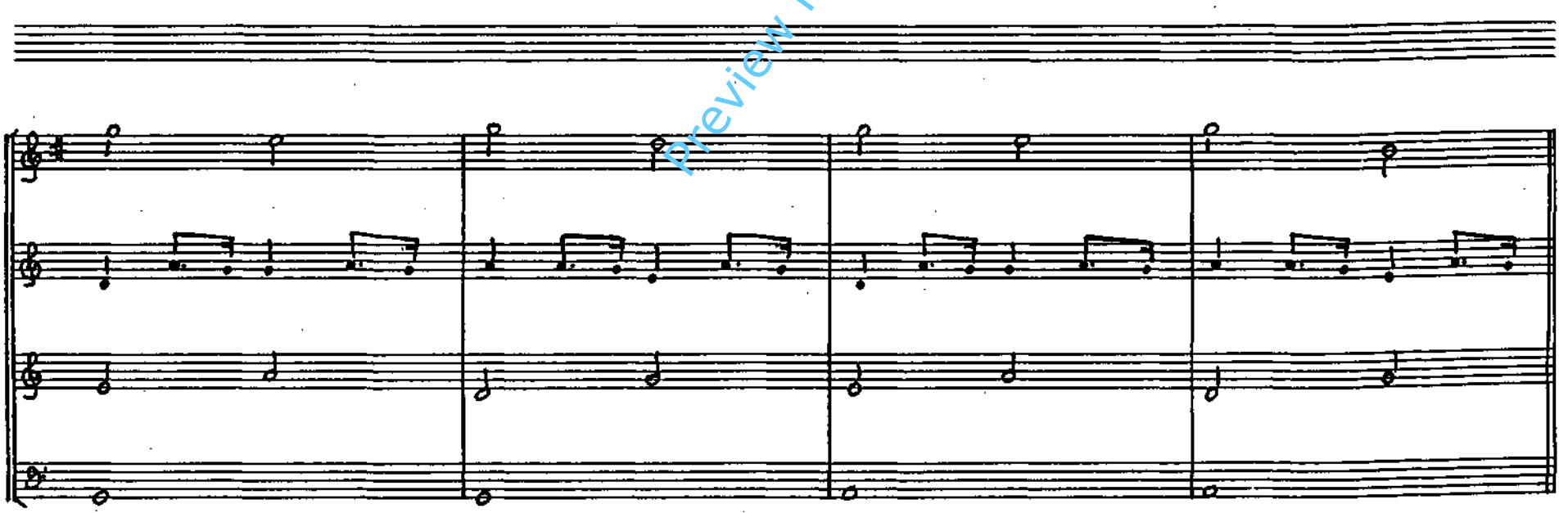
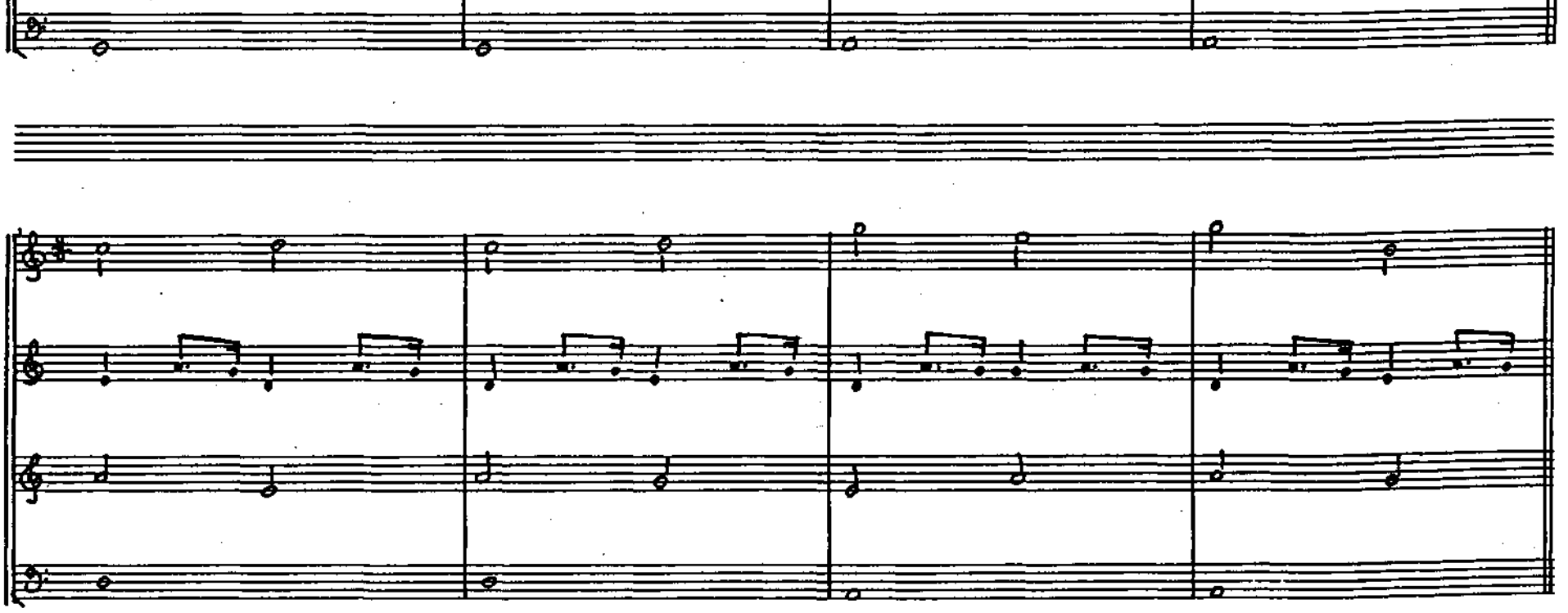
Variation 1

(d = 30)









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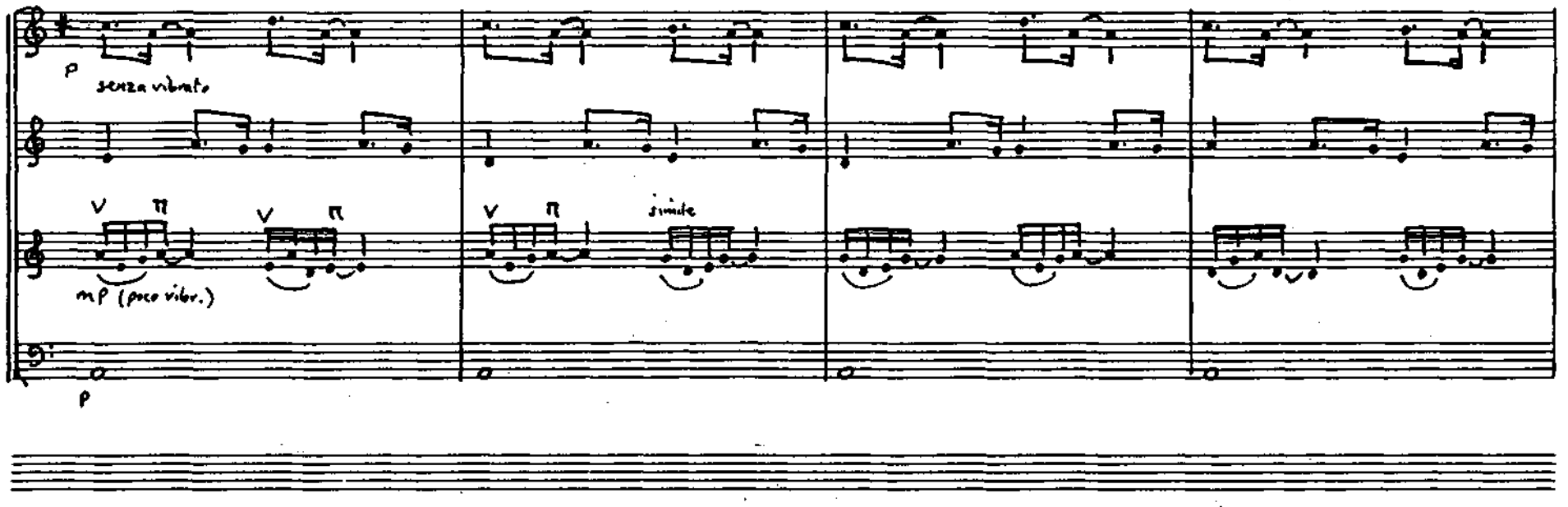
Variation 2



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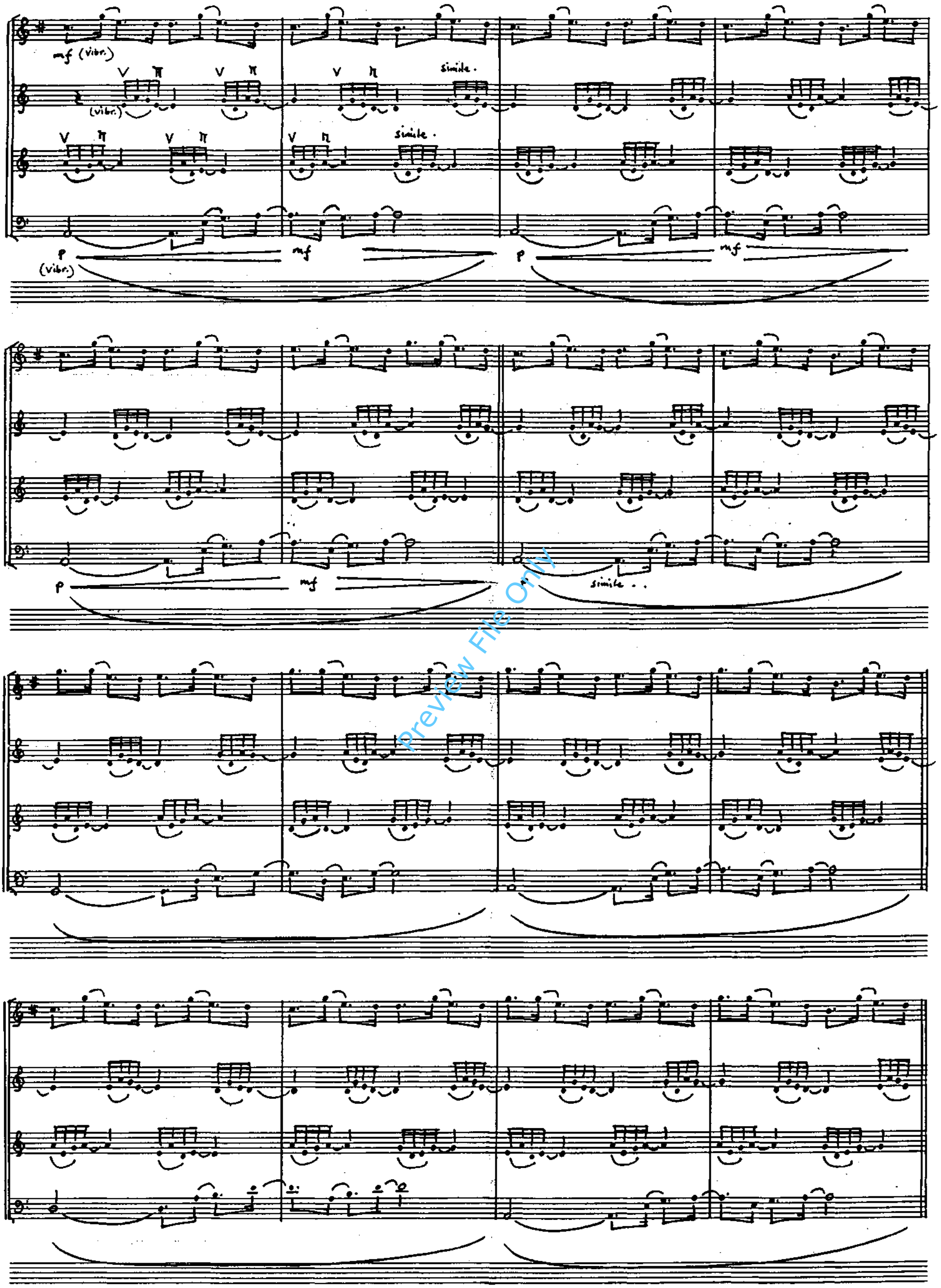
Variation 3 (più risoluto) (♩ = 30, gradually increasing to ♩ = 40 at beginning of Variation 4)



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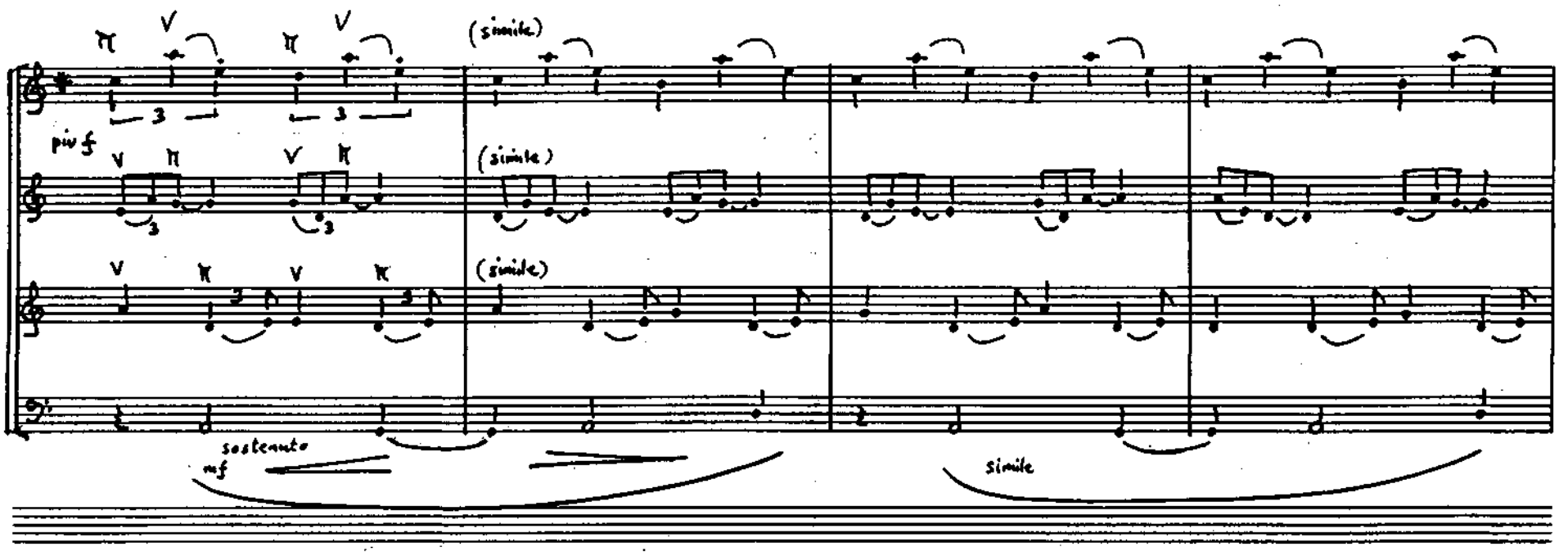
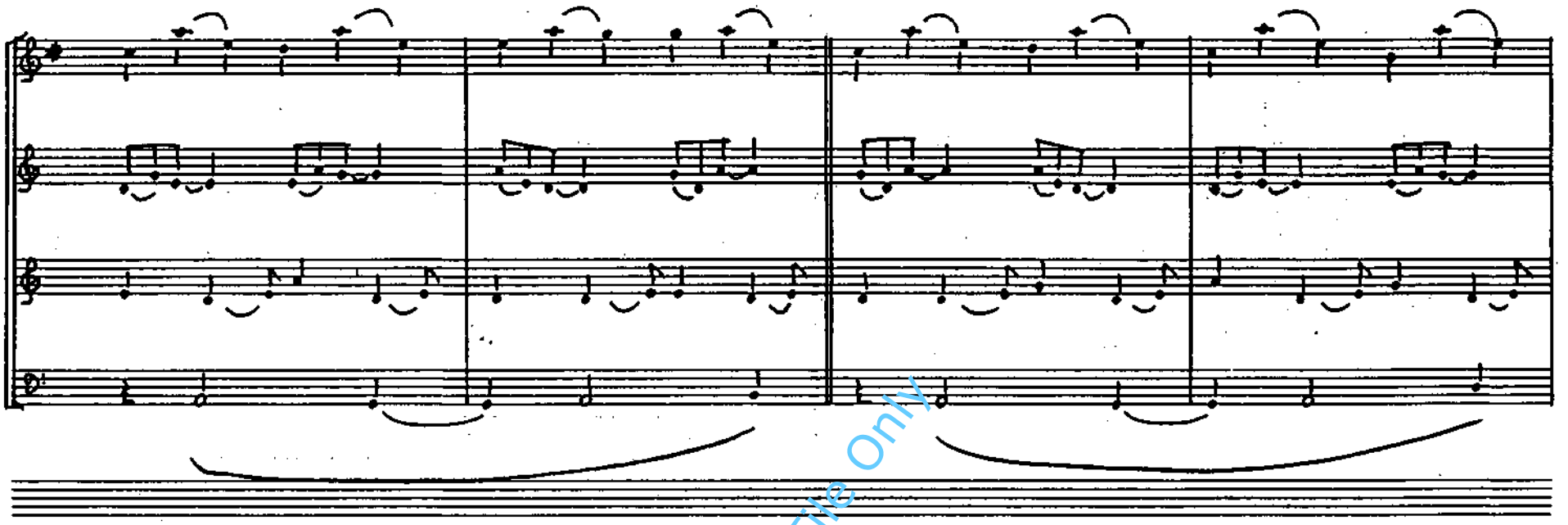
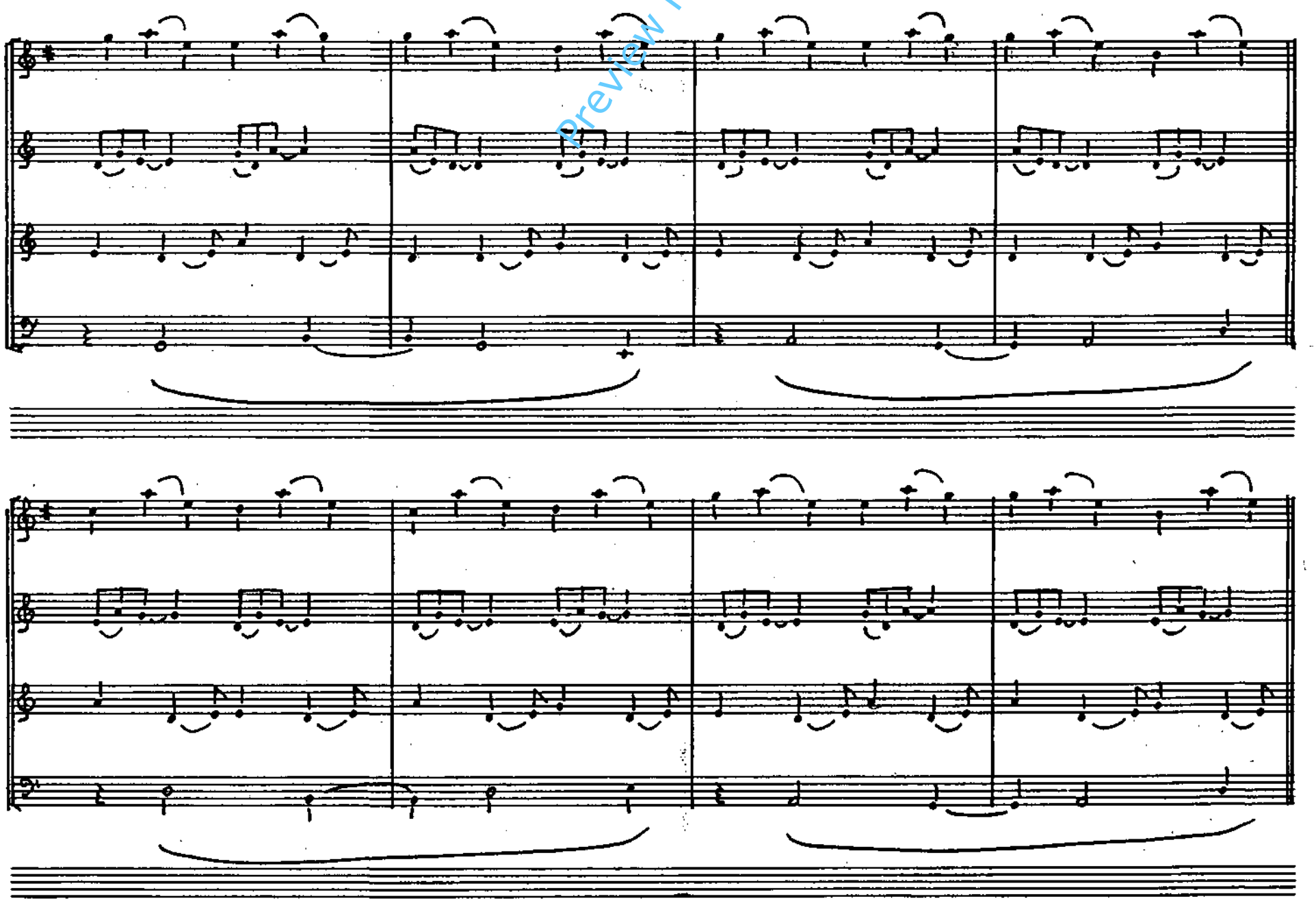
Variation 4 (♩ = 40)







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Variation 5

più lento (d. = 30)

calmo

II V

P subito

(senza vibr.)

(II tacet)

Variation 6

(d. = 30)

II V

I

P

III

Preview File ONLY

Variation 7 - violin solo

(♩. = 60)

(similar)

I

mf

Variation 8
(d=30)

II

P senza vibrato

III

P senza vibrato

IV

Preview File ONLY

(Repeat Theme)