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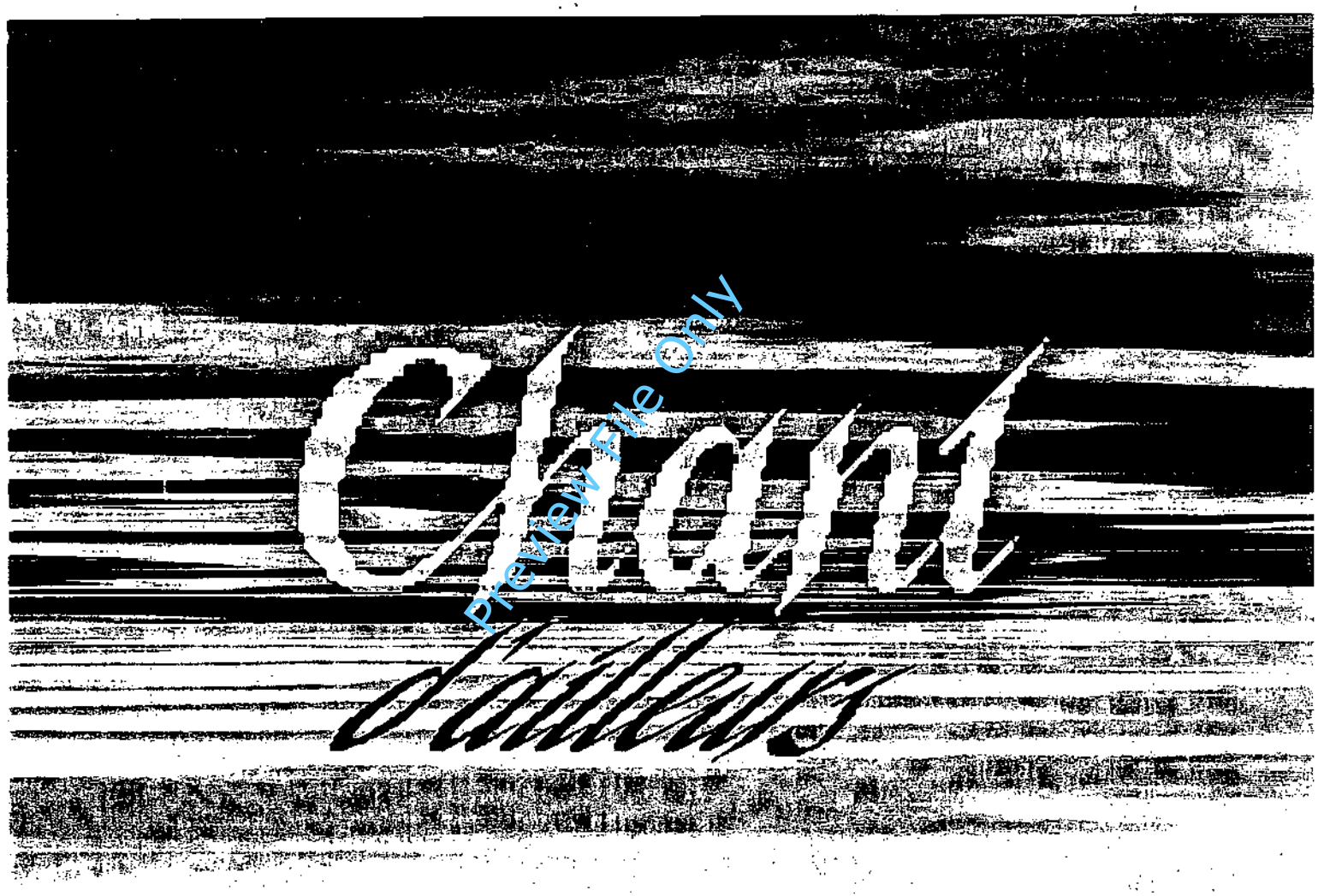


ALEJANDRO VIÑAO

" Chant d'Ailleurs "

for soprano and computer

(1992)

Alejandro Viñao

Chant d'Ailleurs was commissioned by French Government for Group de Recherche Musicales.

The computer part was produced at G.R.M. using a Syter Computer to process original vocal sounds.

Premiere: Grand Auditorium of Radio France, Paris, February 10th, 1992. Performed by Frances Lynch.

Cover by Horacio Monteverde

Published by Crew Studios. 27 Coolhurst Rd. London N8
Printed by Animage.

DURATION: 17 minutes

Chant d'Ailleurs (Chant from Elsewhere) is a set of song-like chants from a fictional culture. I imagined this culture as one which had developed technology in spite of having remained rural. This improbability accounts for the ritualistic and at times monodic nature of the singing, coupled to a computer part which seeks not to harmonize or orchestrate the songs but rather to extend the phrasing and timbre of the voice beyond it natural acoustic means.

Our culture has used each new technological development to further its original musical concerns: harmony, large scale form and timbre. My imaginary culture too, used technology to develop its rural and ethnic singing tradition. Based on this idea, I developed an imaginary singing style, with its own melisma, its own ornamental identity, the identity of a chanting 'tradition' that I invented. In this tradition, the tune of each chant is less important than its ornaments, which can have a much stronger musical profile. Such a tune is difficult to remember. We recall the 'style' of the phrasing but not the phrase itself. The computer is also part of this imaginary style. The vocal sounds it manipulates and the new timbres it creates are articulated and 'performed' in a way which is consistent with the chanting style of the singer. When the computer takes the vocal sound and transforms them into new timbres, it does so following the 'stylistic constrains' of this imaginary culture.

I based the invented singing style on the traditions of different Eastern musics and in particular on one Mongolian folk tune which I specially like for its beautiful use of melisma and glottal vibrato.

The composer strongly recommends that Chant d'Ailleurs be performed from memory and without a score on stage. The aesthetic nature of the piece with its mixture of ethnic Mongolian and an imaginary ritualistic origin require a true 'performance' and not a 'reading'. The soloist, regardless of how familiar she may be with the piece will always deliver the piece in a different way if she has a music stand and a score between herself and the audience.

About the score

Much of the music written in the last 40 years has been notated in order to show with precision the complexity of the musical ideas behind a piece. The score of Chant d'Ailleurs has been notated seeking to achieve the exact opposite effect. The score is presented as a precise set of instructions for performance. In the computer part any information that is not absolutely necessary for the performance of the piece has been deliberately left out so that the score will look to the player a great deal more simple than it really is. Since the score is accompanied by a Training Cassette it is hoped that much of the information about performance will be conveyed through the cassette rather than through the score. Since the collapse of Common Practice and its corresponding tonal system the conventional score has become only partially effective in conveying a precise set of instructions for performance. The performer MUST study the score of Chant d'Ailleur TOGETHER with the training Cassette.

About conventions in notation

a diamond notehead in the computer part indicates a note with inharmonic overtones and/or imprecise fundamental pitch.

an X notehead in the computer part indicates a percussive note with indeterminate pitch.

an arrow pointing up/down next to a notehead indicates a microtonal interval. There are many instances of microtonal intervals in the piece but only in the computer part. They are indicated in the score only when it is necessary for the singer to take them into account, to avoid 'drifting' with the computer part. The singer is never asked to sing microtonal intervals.

About the text

The text in Chant d'Ailleurs has been written by the composer to suite the musical needs of the piece and has little or no semantic meaning beyond the occasional appearance of the words 'chant d'ailleurs'. Most of the

words/phonemes that are used have no intentional semantic meaning and should be understood as the words of an imaginary language, a language from elsewhere (d'ailleurs). Yet, the phonemes have been carefully chosen for their musical qualities vis a vis de particular melismatic phrasing they are attached to as well as to blend with the implicit phonemes in the computer part. They must be carefully executed. An exception is to be made in those cases where the register is so high (top A to top D) that vowels can no longer be clearly differentiated in which case each singer will articulate the notes with whichever vowel sound they are capable of doing so. All words and phonemes in Chants I and II must be pronounced as in Italian with the exception, of course, of 'chant d'ailleurs'. The text in Chant III (somos) is in Spanish and must be pronounced accordingly.

About articulation

The following types of trills and vibratos are marked in the singer's part :

1_ **Vibrato (vib).** A moderate standard frequency vibrato. It is marked in the score as slow vib., fast vib., or simply vib. This vibrato is more restrained than an Operatic vibrato.

2_ **Operatic vibrato.** A broad frequency vibrato commonly used in performances of 19th Century Italian operas. (e.g. Sutherland, Domingo, Pavarotti, etc.)

3_ **Baroque trill (Bar. trill.).** This refers to amplitude vibrato commonly used in early music and it is produced with the diaphragm and not with the glottis. It is in fact a diaphragmatic trill.

4_ **Mongolian vibrato (Mong. vib.).** This is a frequency vibrato articulated using the glottis. The *Chant d'Ailleur Training Cassette* contains examples of Mongolian singers producing this vibrato and an imitation by a western soprano (Frances Lynch) which the performer may use as reference. Frances Lynch premiered Chant d'Ailleurs.

5_**Articulate with glottis (glottis).** A trill produced with the glottis, also known as goat trill.

About phrasing

Slurs are used to indicate phrasing and therefore breathing in those places where the text alone is not enough. The performer must try to follow as strictly as possible the indicated phrasing and must not breath during a phrase encompassed within a broad slur even if the text seems to suggest otherwise. Some singers may not be able to deliver some long phrases without breathing in between, but must do so trying to conceal the breathing point.
This is particularly important in the case of long sustained notes which are followed by a glottal trill and end in some melismatic short phrase.

About the computer part.

The computer part is notated as a mere outline to give precise cues to the singer . It must not be taken as an accurate representation of the music played by the computer. Such representation would be impossible within the limitations of conventional music notation. In many cases the notation of the rhythms in the computer part have been deliberately simplified to look like the rhythms in the soprano part as, for example, in bars 40 to 41. There, the computer plays irrational rhythms which are close enough to the quintuplets in the soprano part to justify the same notation.
Most of the sounds played by the computer have been created using an actual human voice as a departing sound source.

<u>Synchronisity between the singer and the tape.</u>
A click-track is recorded in a separate track of the digital tape recorder (PCM) that contains the computer part. The singer has 2 alternatives:
a) she may receive the click-track via headphones.
b) she may receive the click-track via a small light box (see equipment requirements) concealed on stage on the floor. The light box converts the down beat

of the click-track into a red light blip and the other beats into green light blips. This is by far the best option since is spares the singer the very unmusical experience of having to sing while wearing headphones and listening to a click-track.

About the performance.

The singer and the computer are equally important and the computer sound must never be diffused as an accompaniment. he singer must blend with the computer as much as possible so that it is not often possible to tell which is which. This is particularly important in Chant II, where the singer and the computer can be seen as performing an actual duet.

The overall sound must be warm and reverberant. In most concert halls it will be necessary to add artificial reverberation to the voice and the computer part (fairly long pre-delay and rev. time). For this reason, the computer part has been mixed deliberately 'dry' so that the same reverberation can be added to both computer and voice. If a multi-speaker system is available, the performer at the mixer must make sure that the voice and the computer always share the same speakers and their sound is at all times projected from the same point in space. Nevertheless, the performer at the mixer is free to explore the different possibilities of displacement of sound in space offered by the sound diffusion system and the concert hall provided he is careful not to alter the stereo image in he computer part.

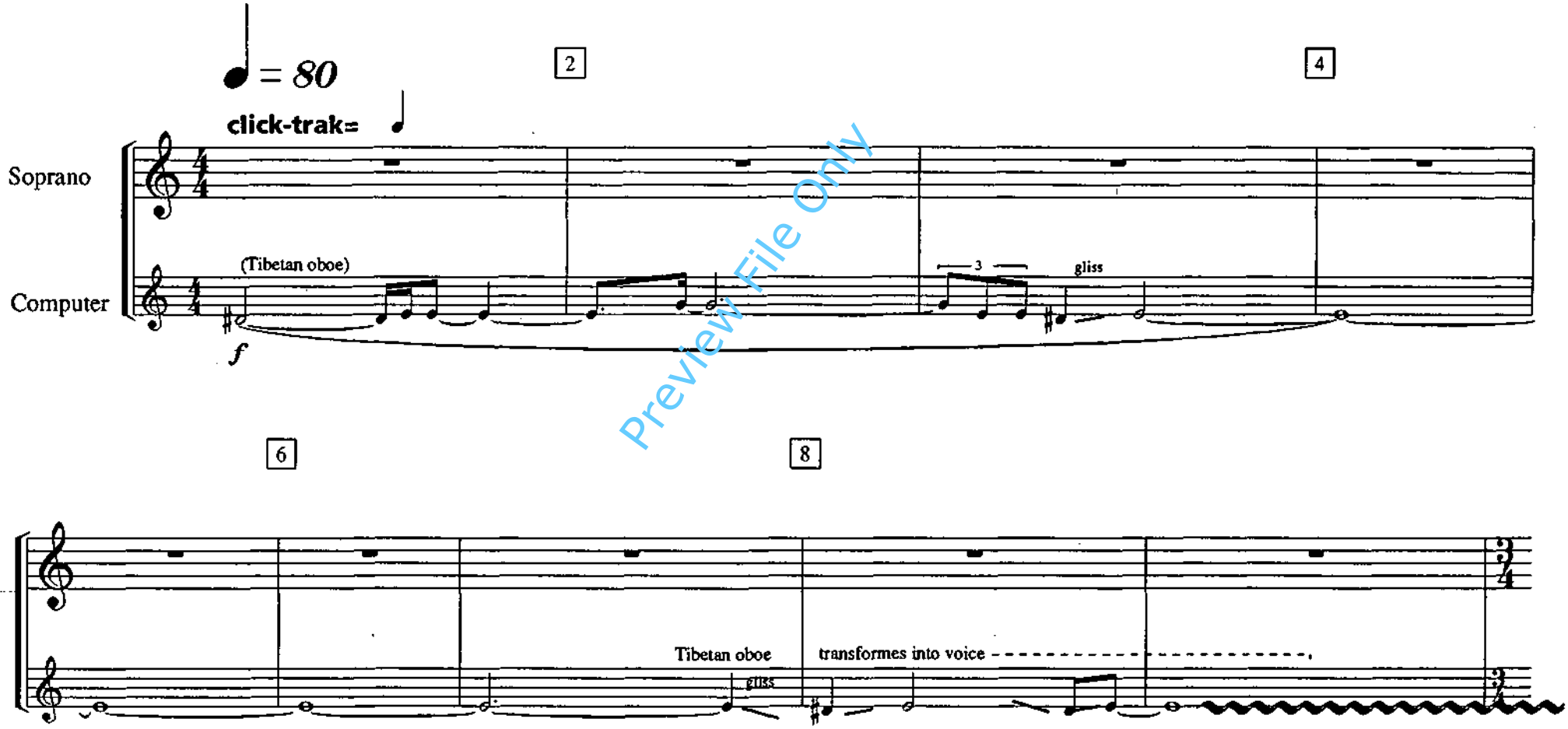
Equipment requirements

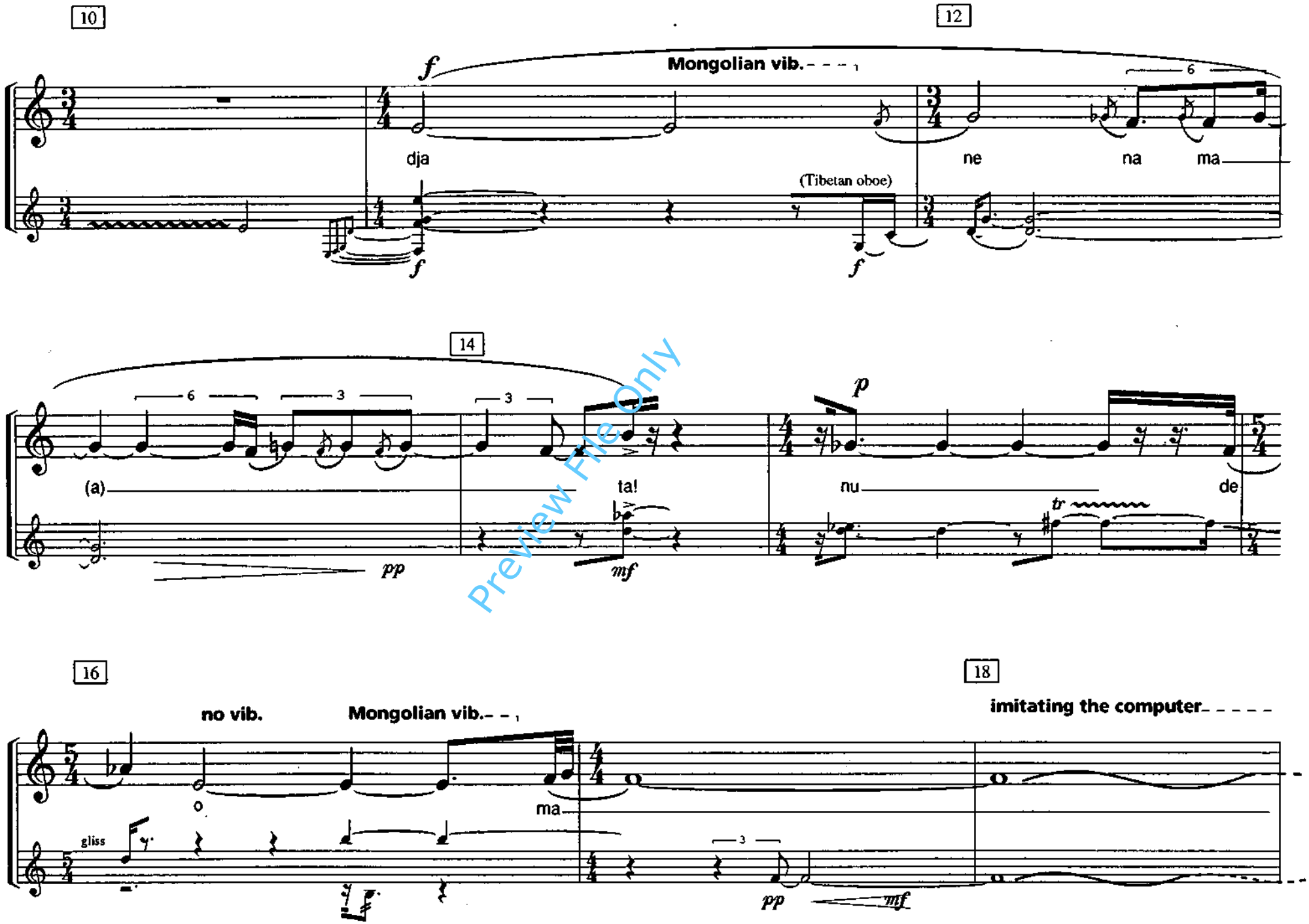
1 high quality condenser directional microphone.
1 reverberation unit
1 PCM digital tape recorder. (Both NTSC and PAL standards are available)
1 Click to light converter box. Provide by the composer.
1 small mixer.
Amplifier and speakers.

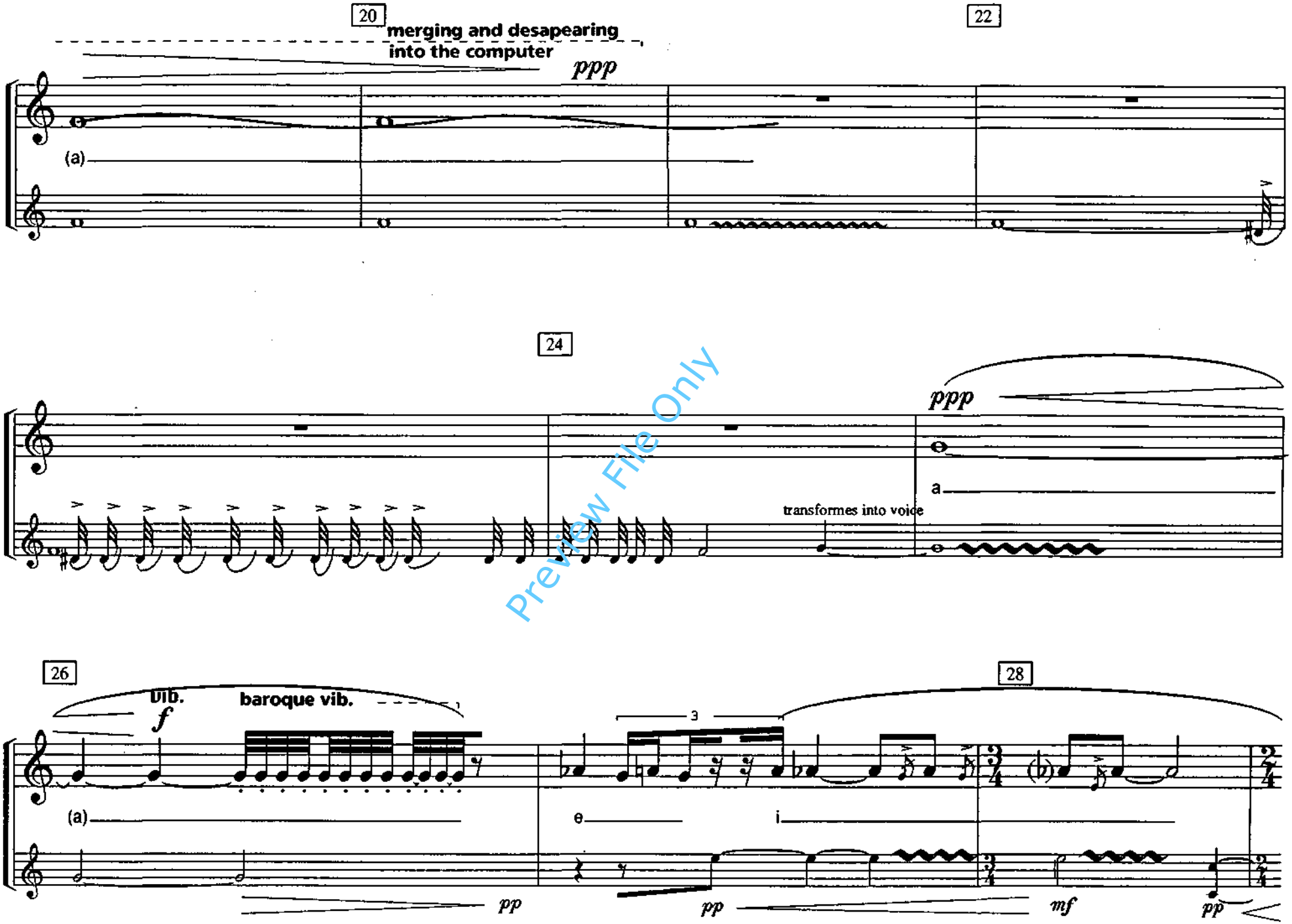
Chant I

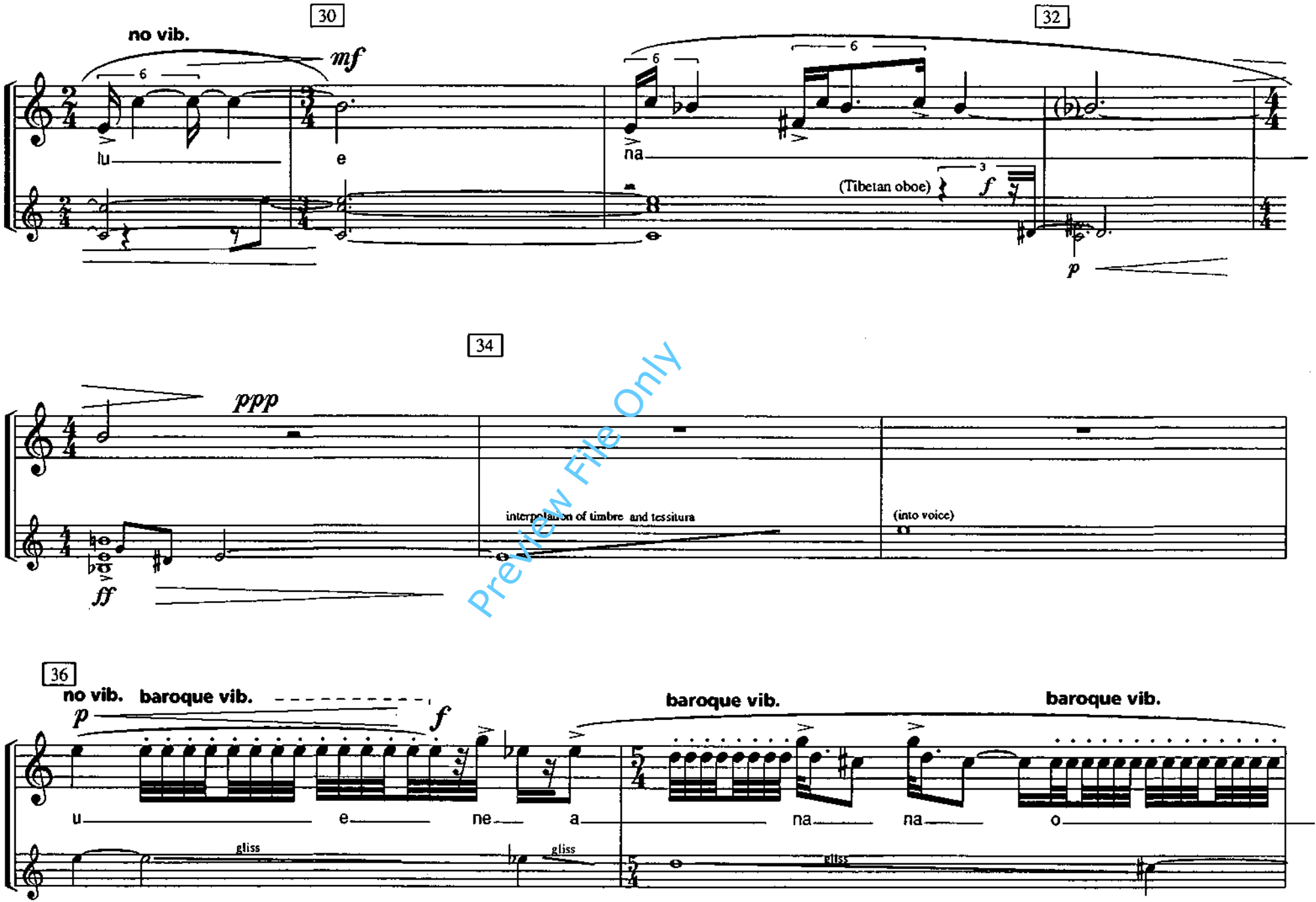
"enchantement du timbre"

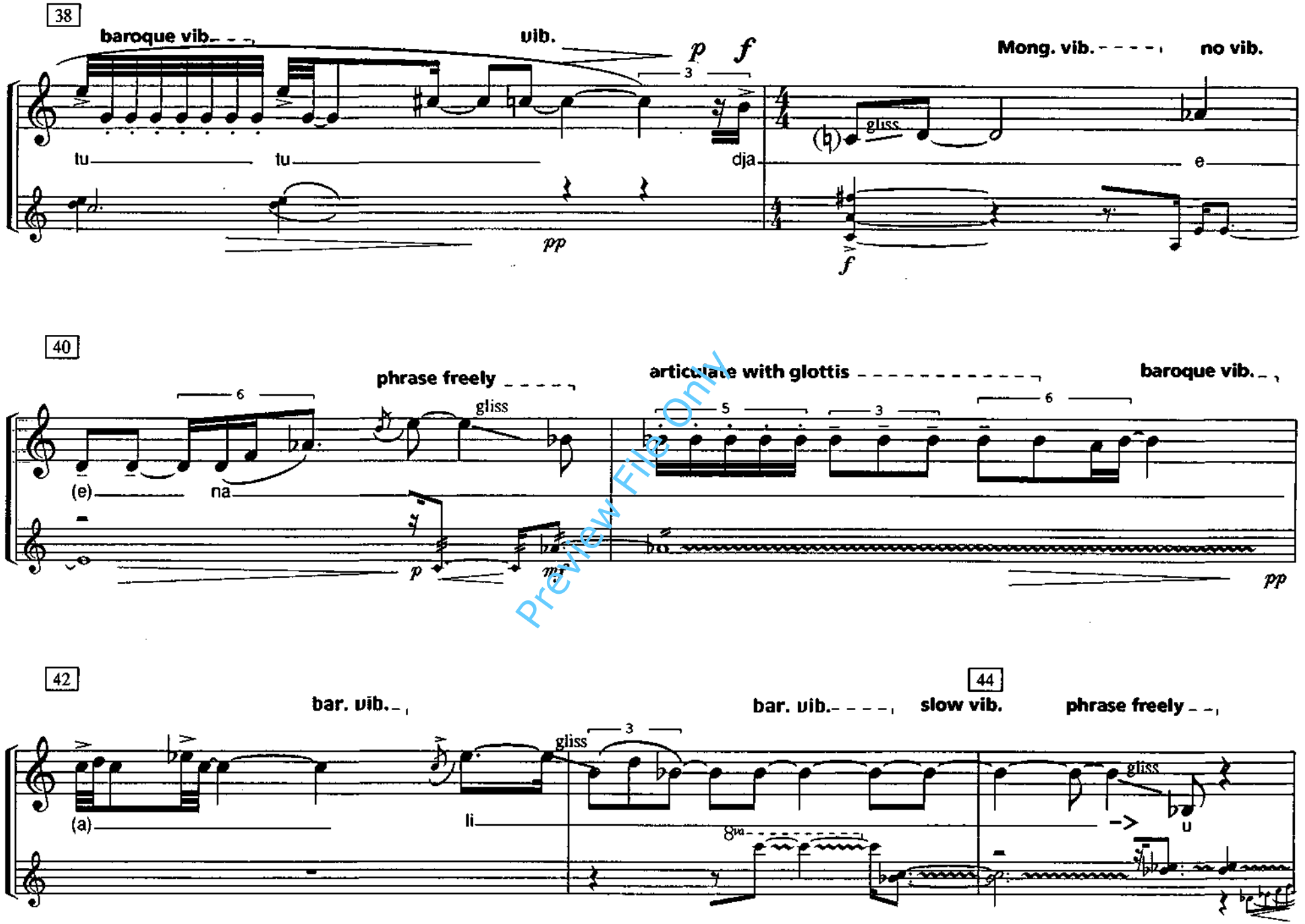
Alejandro Viñao
1991

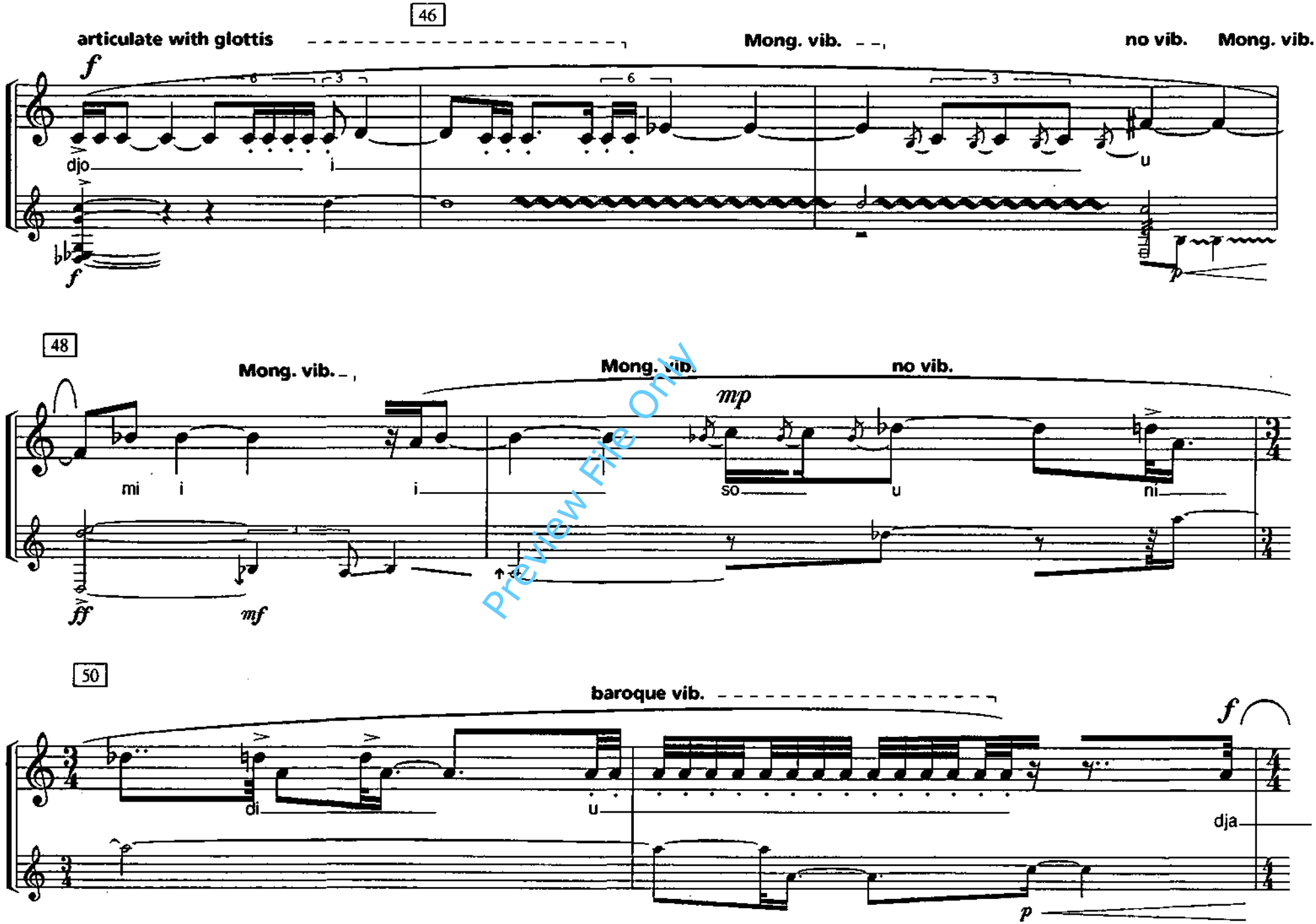


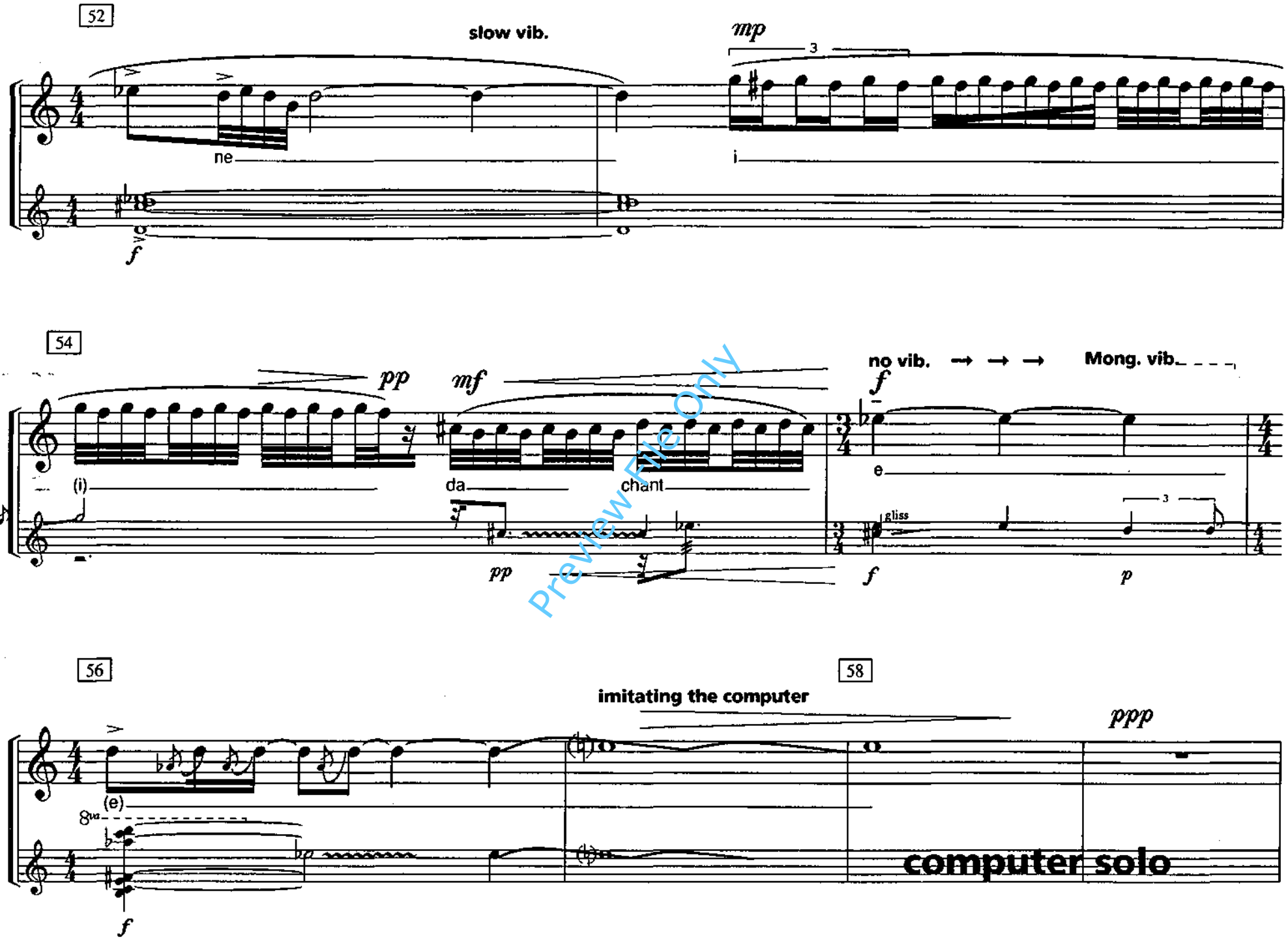


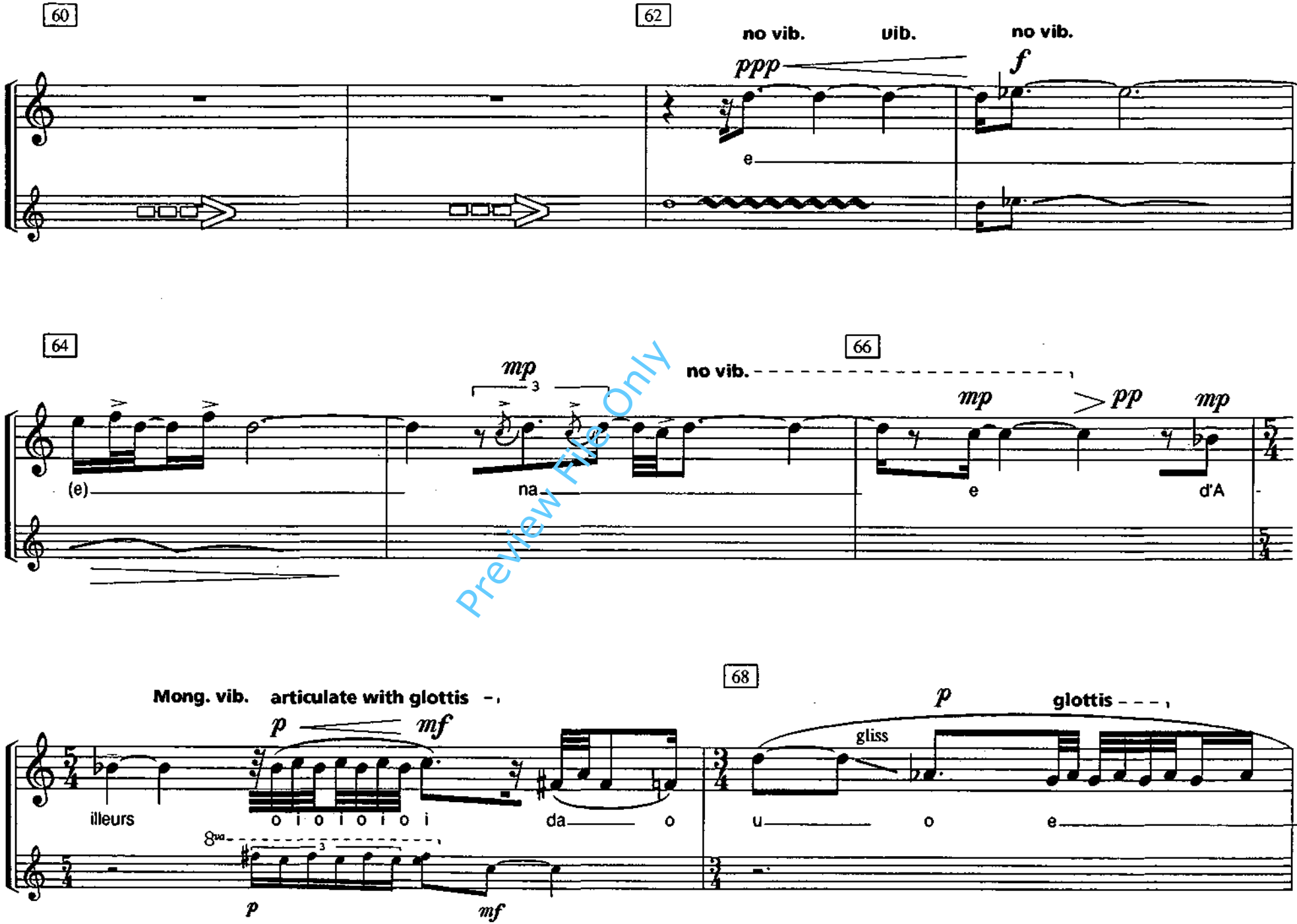


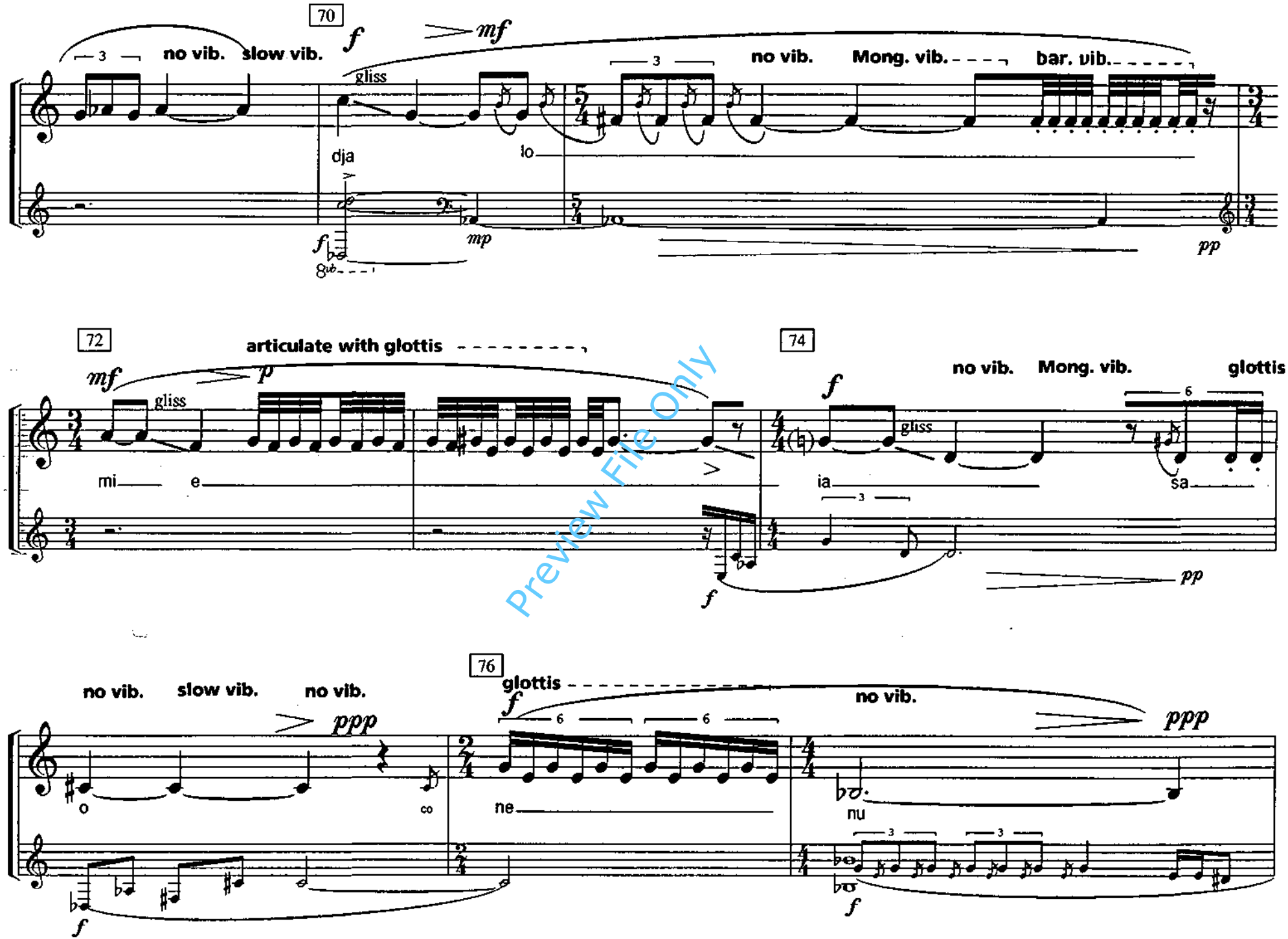


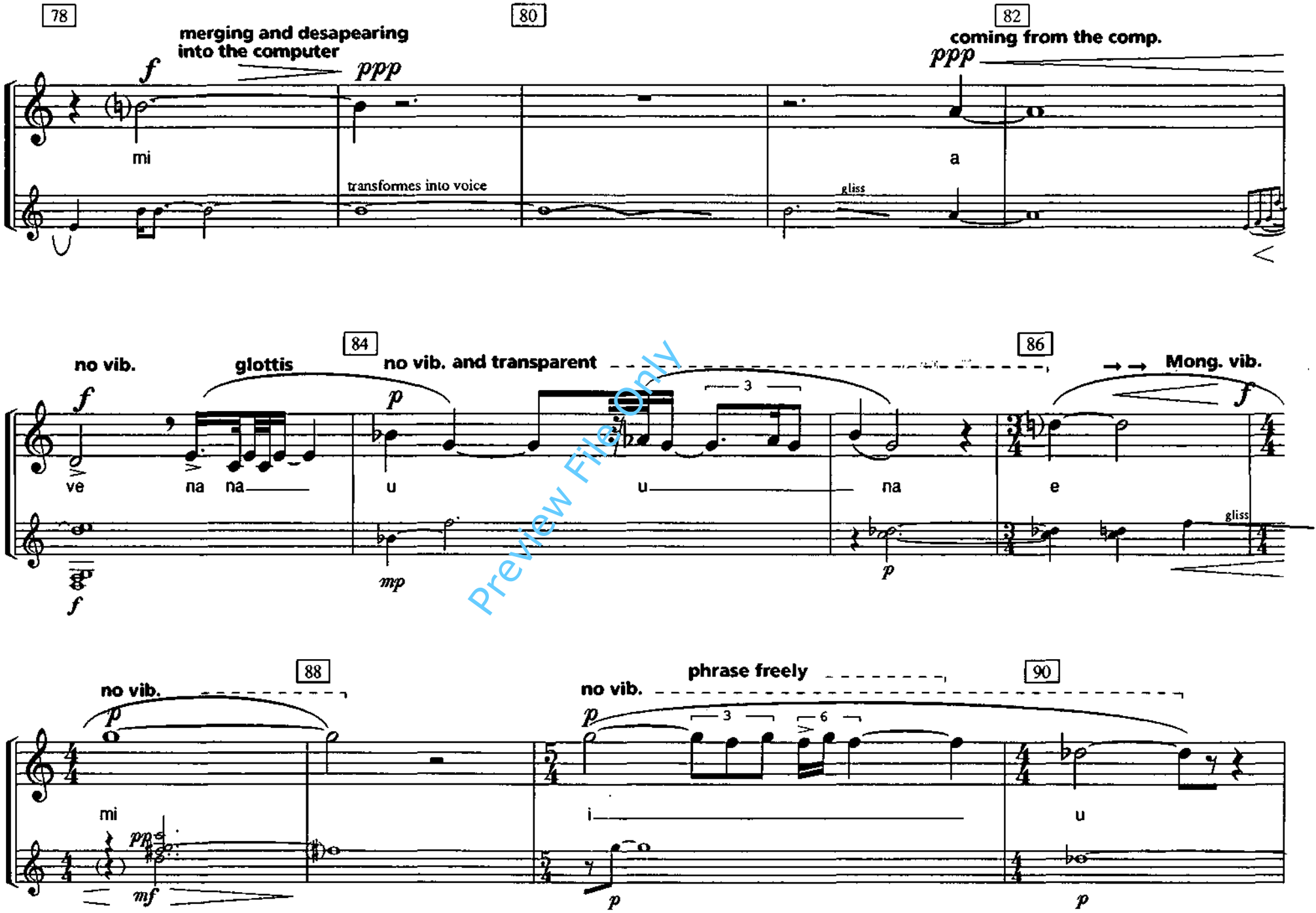


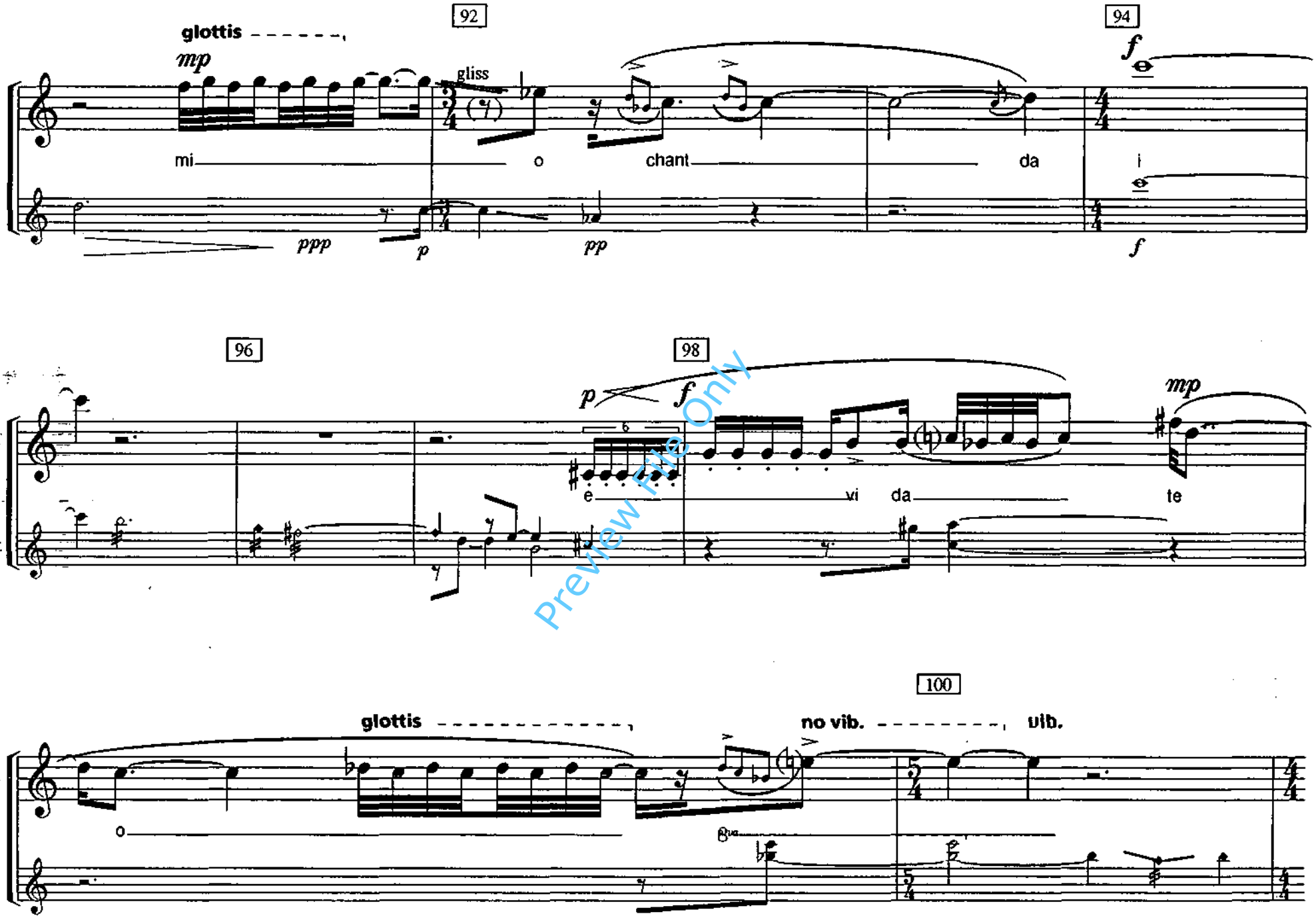


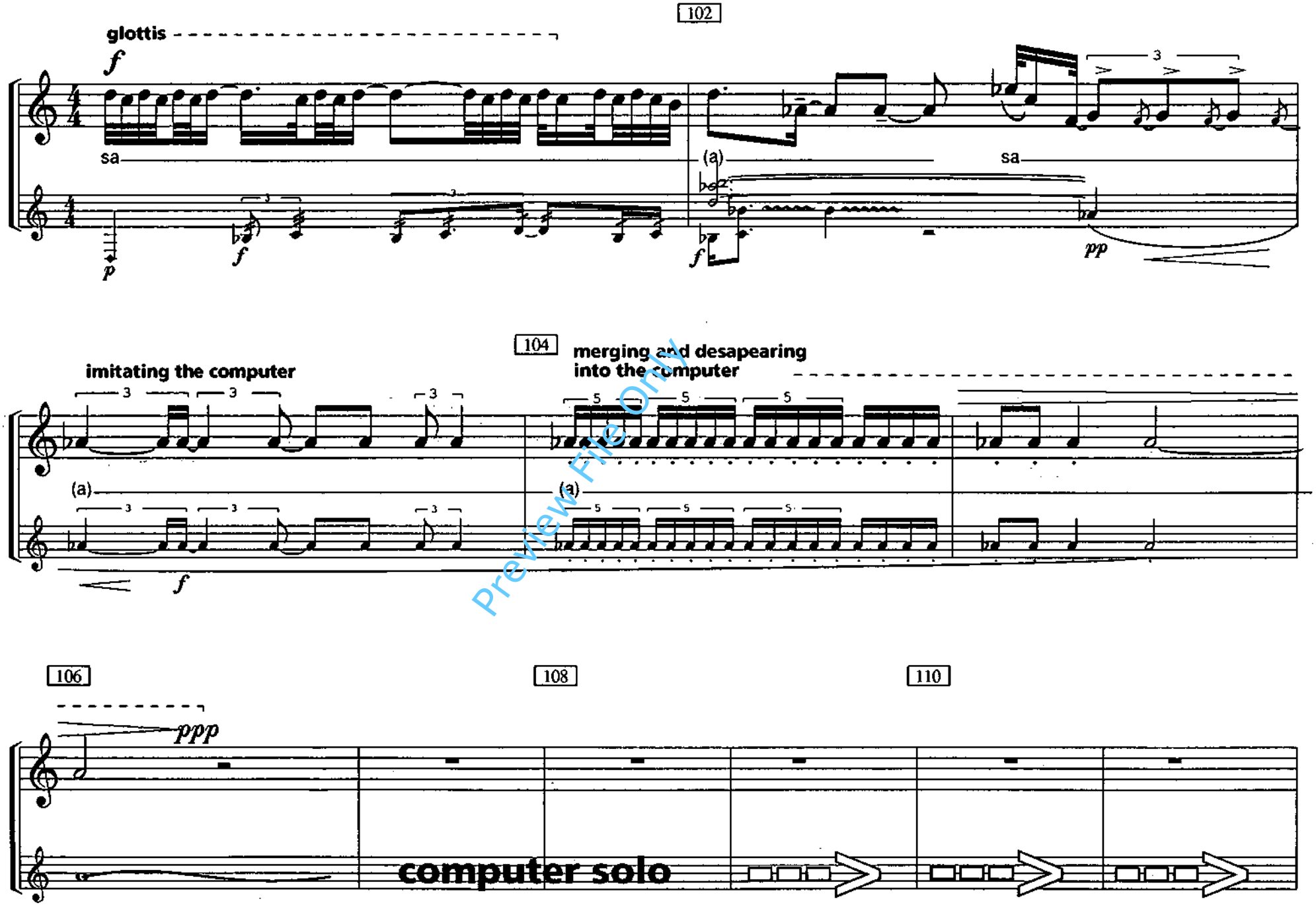


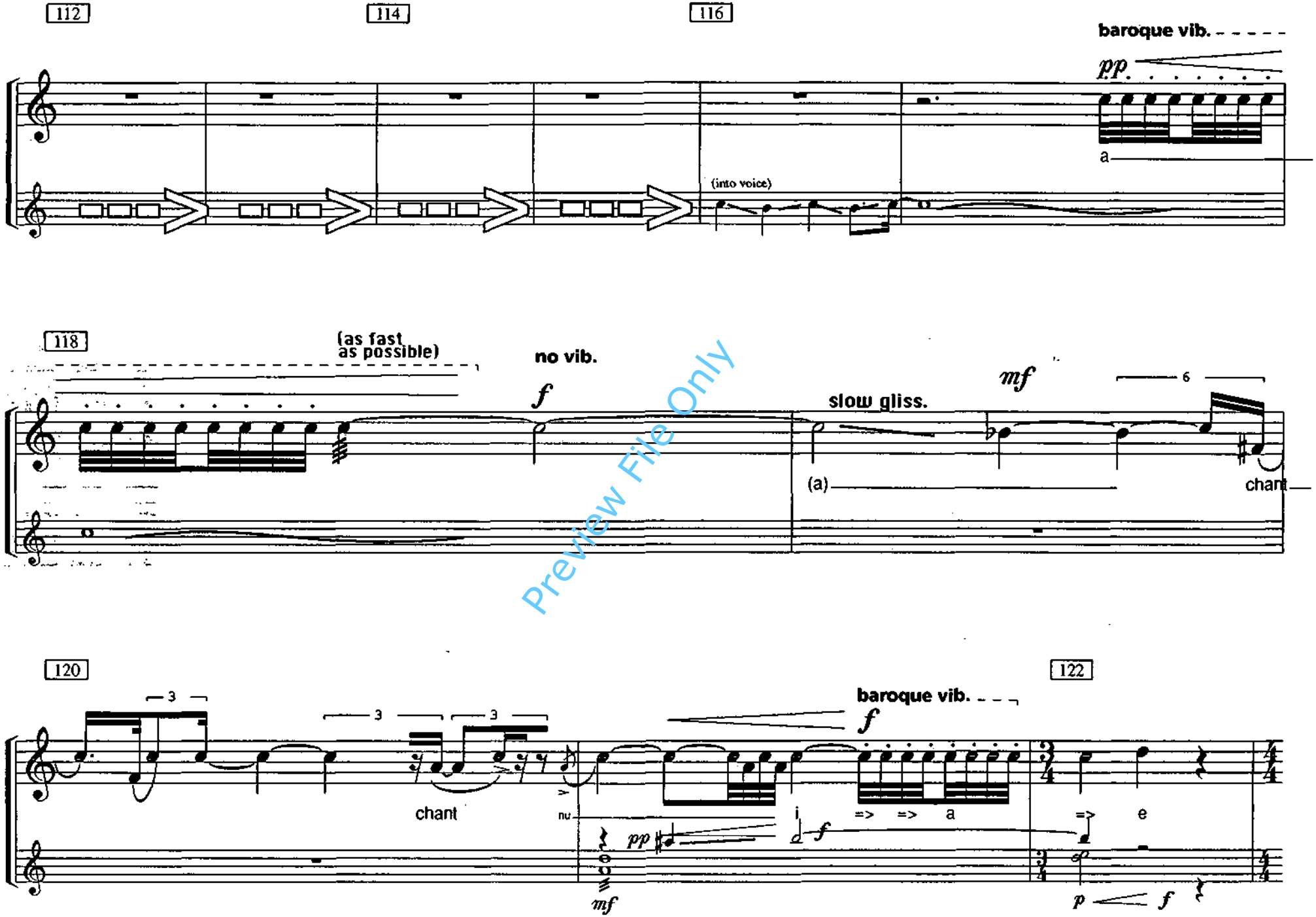


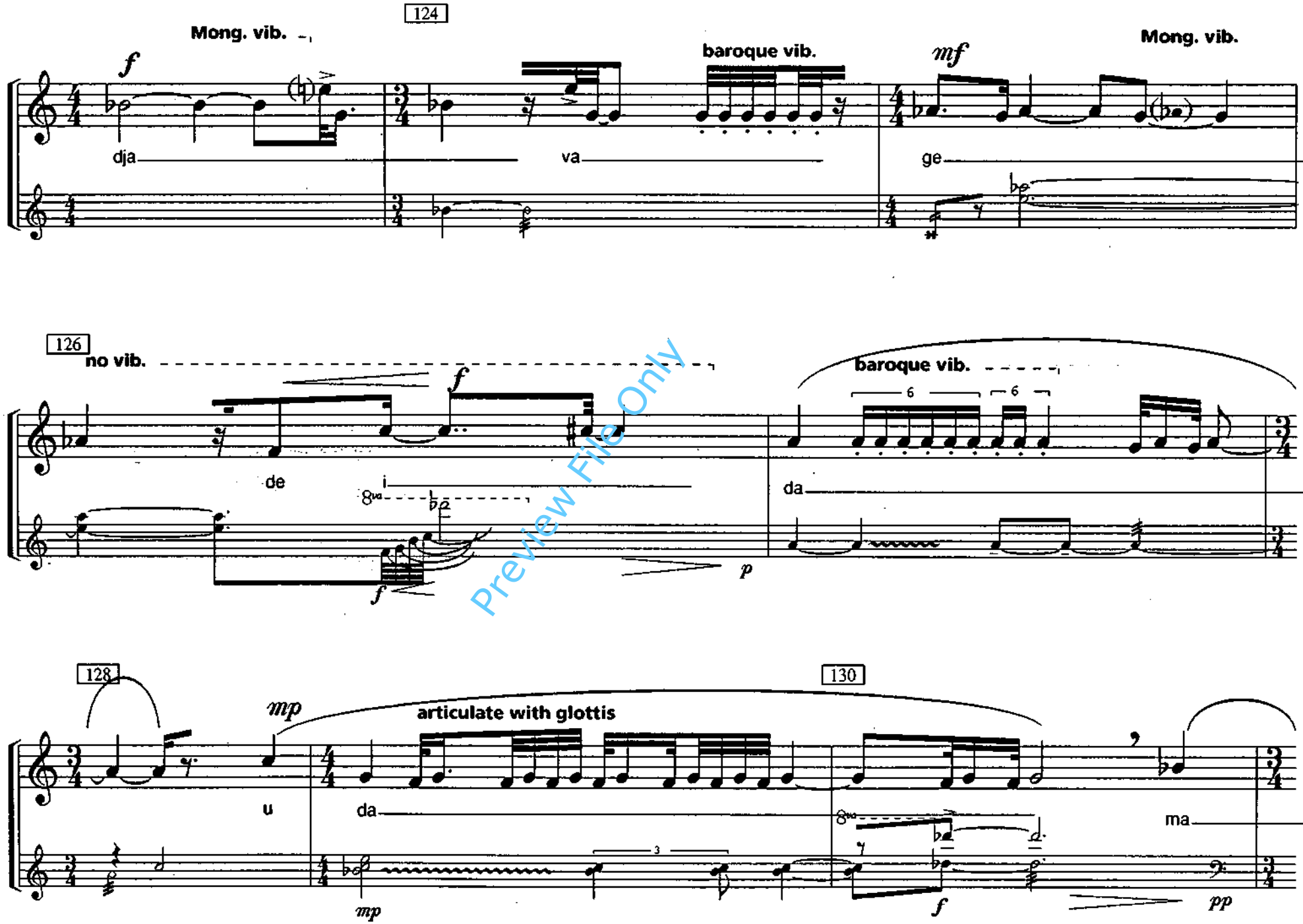


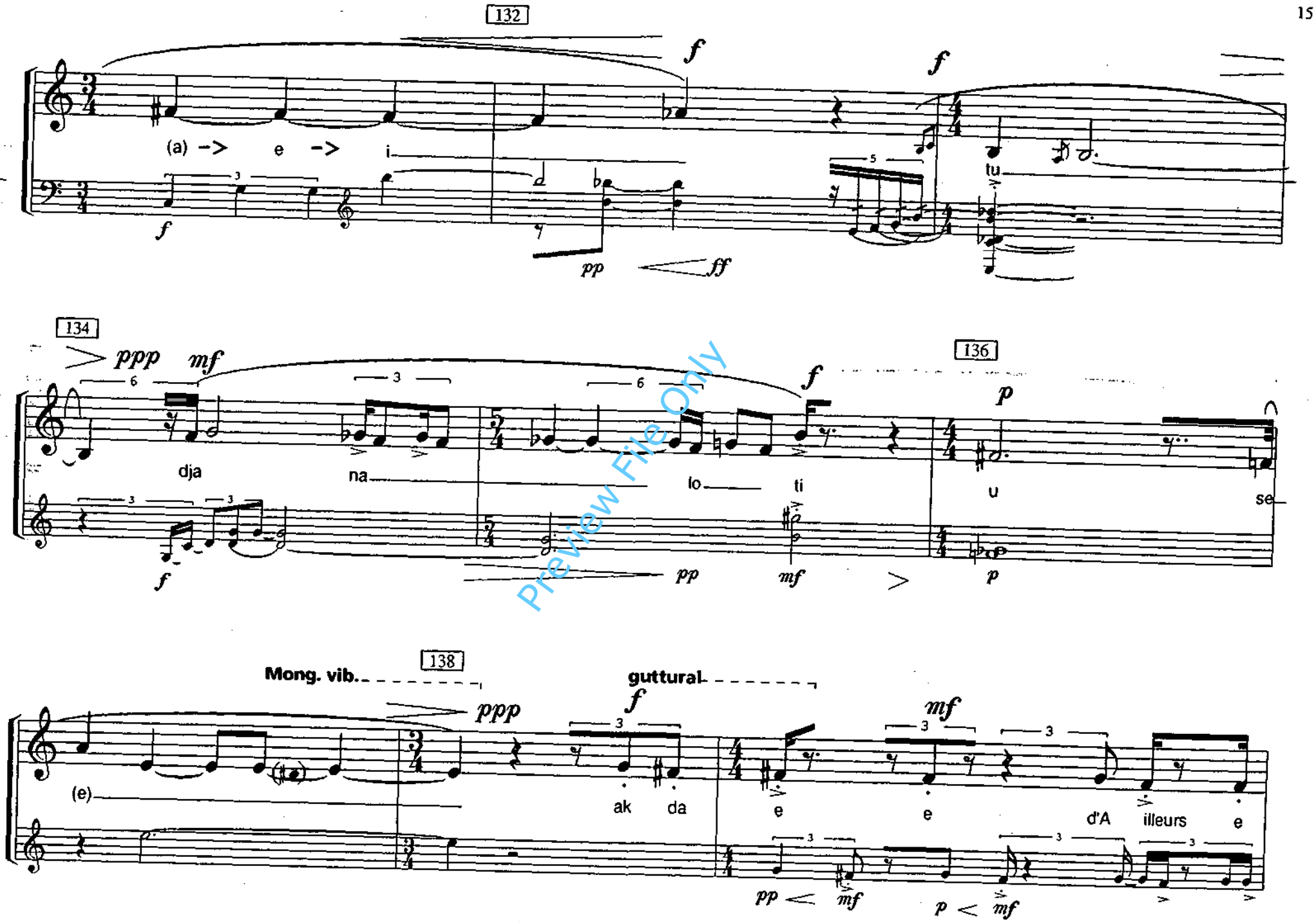






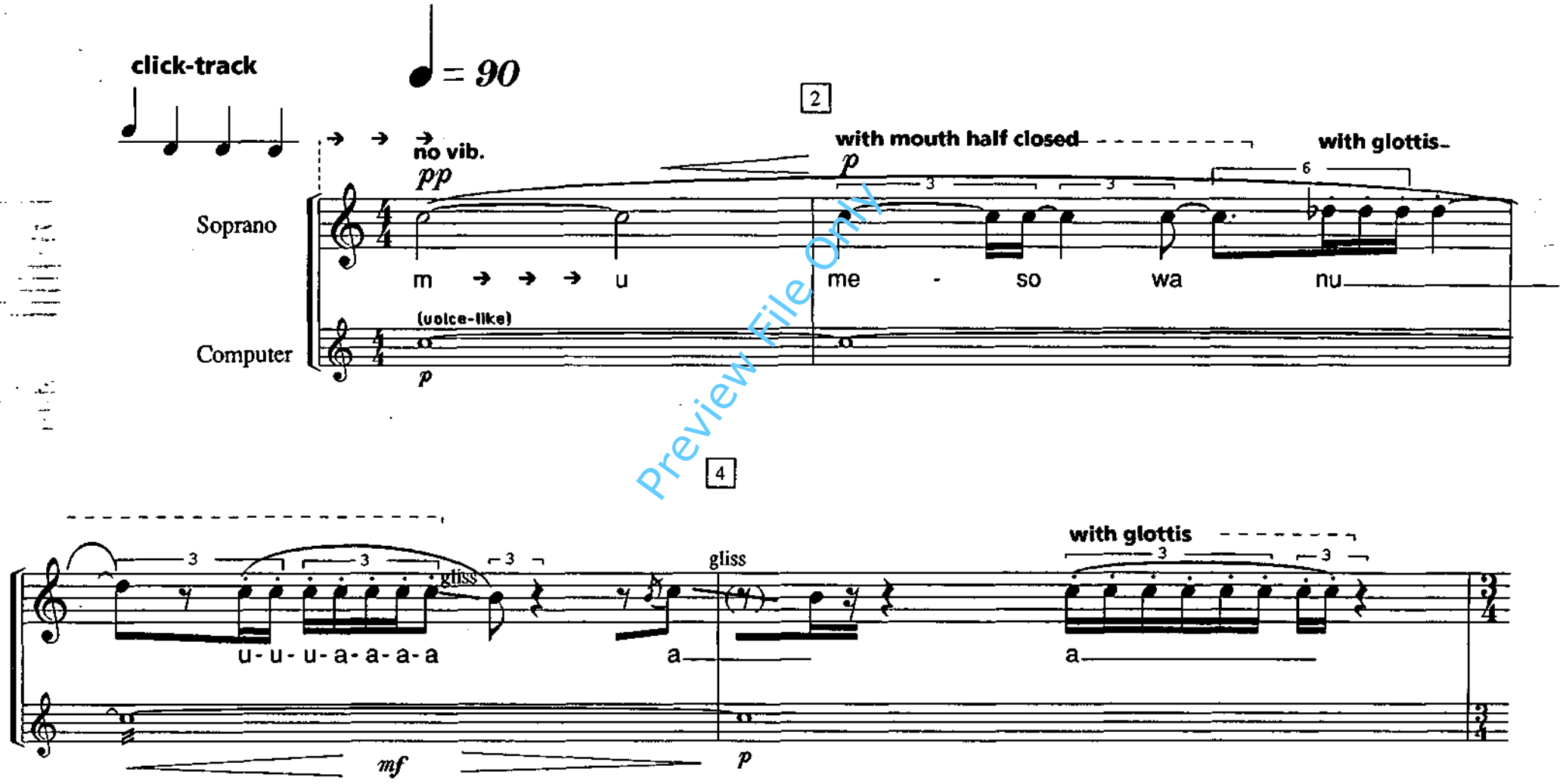


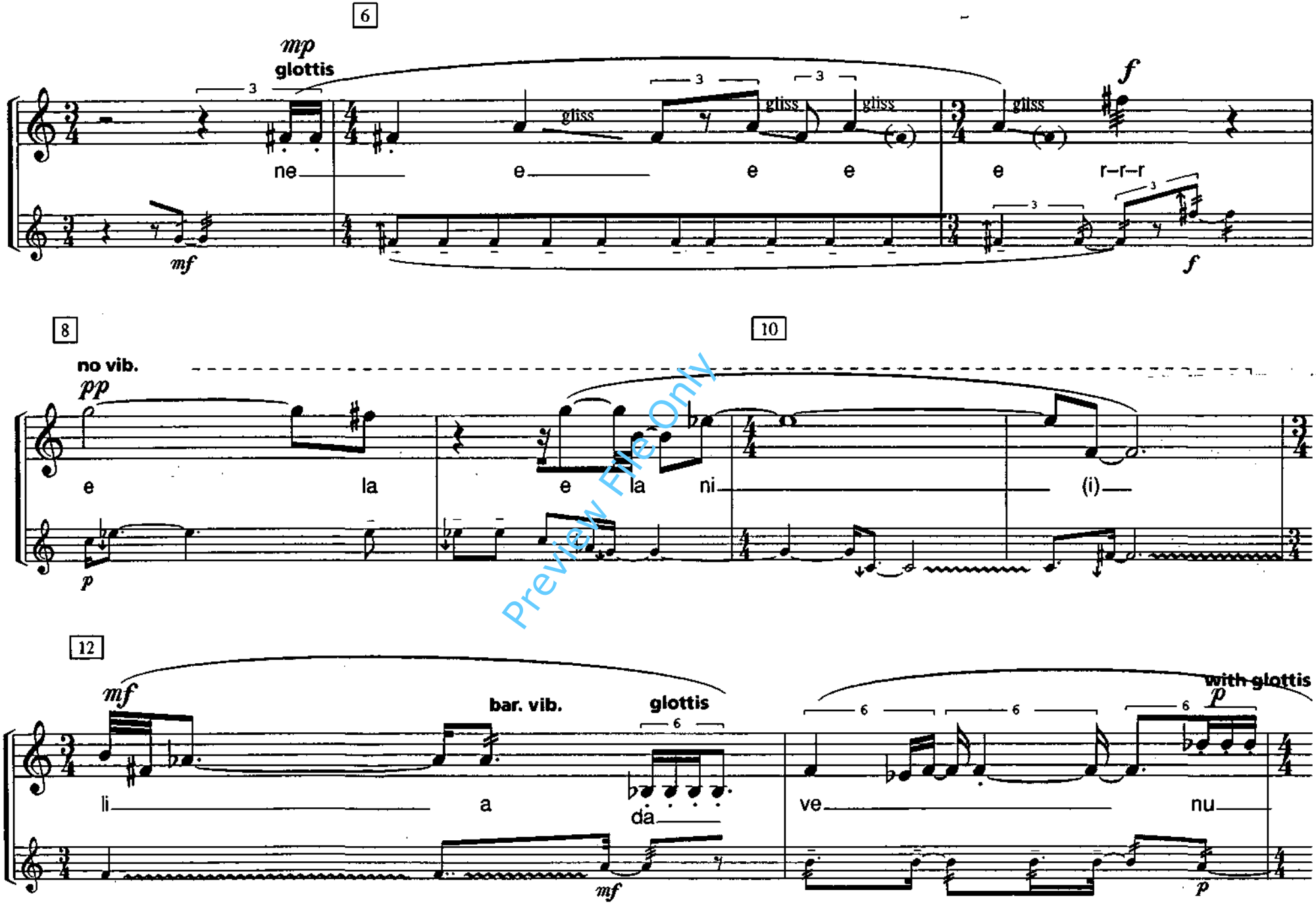


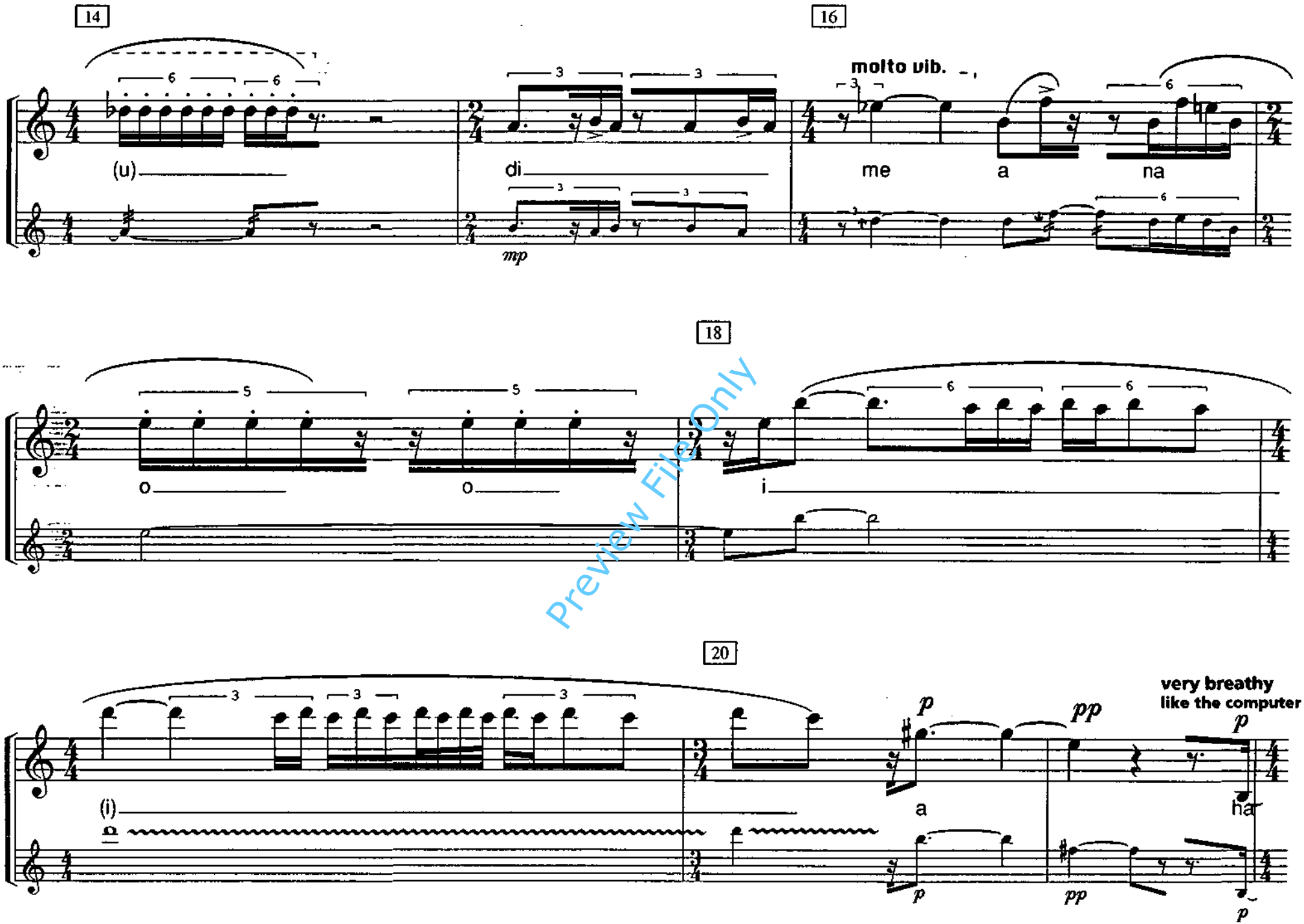


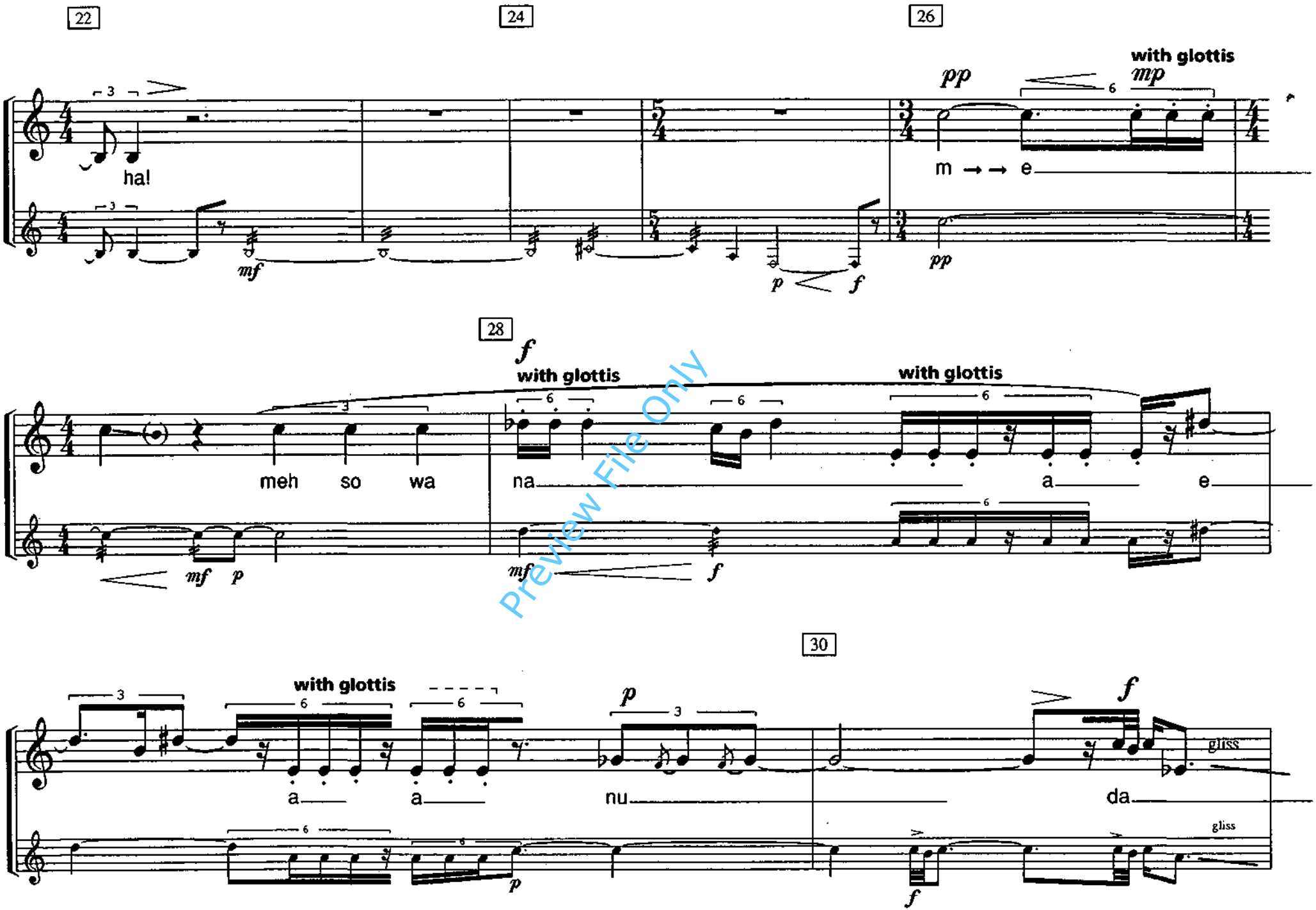
Chant II

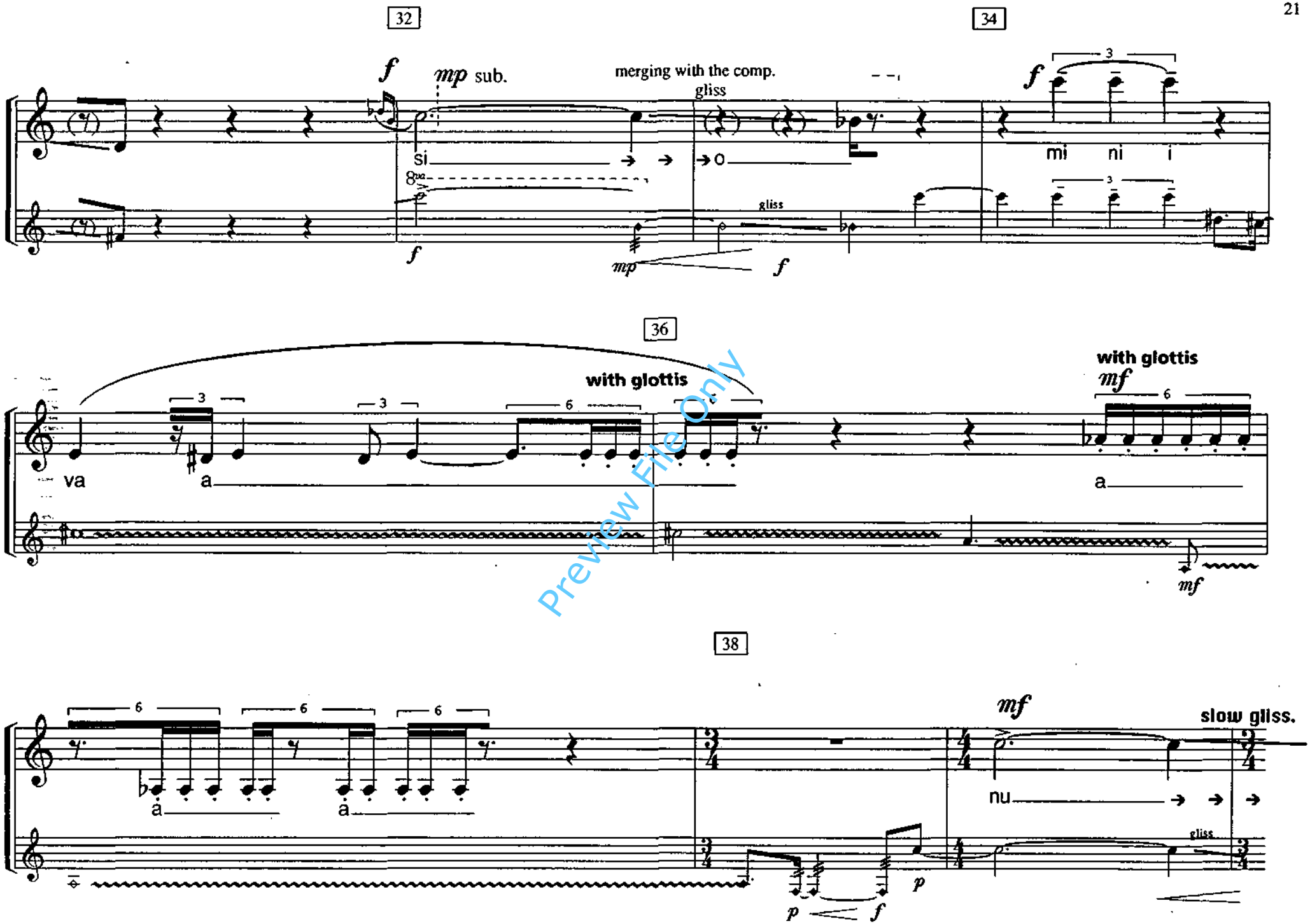
"rituel unconnu"

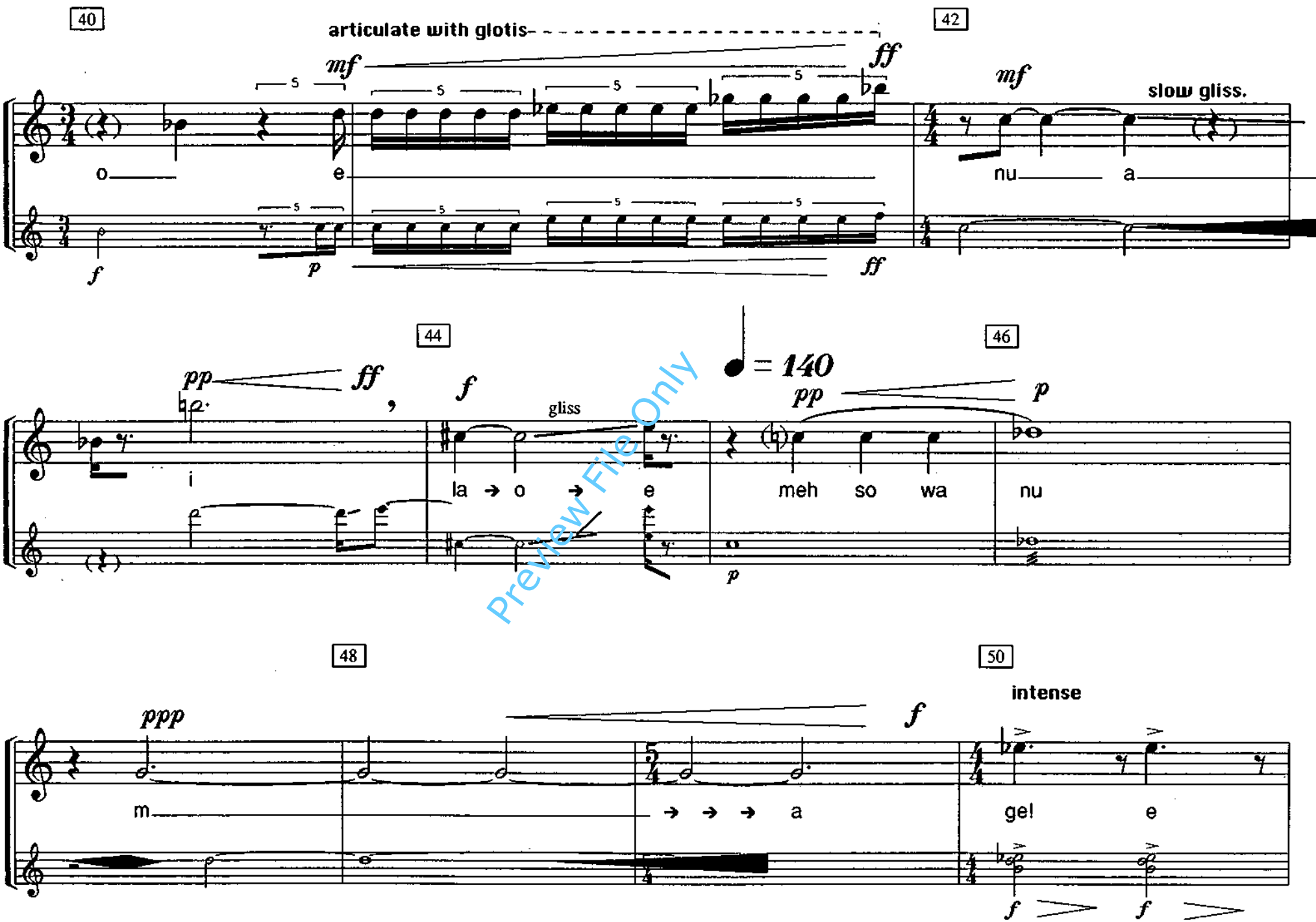


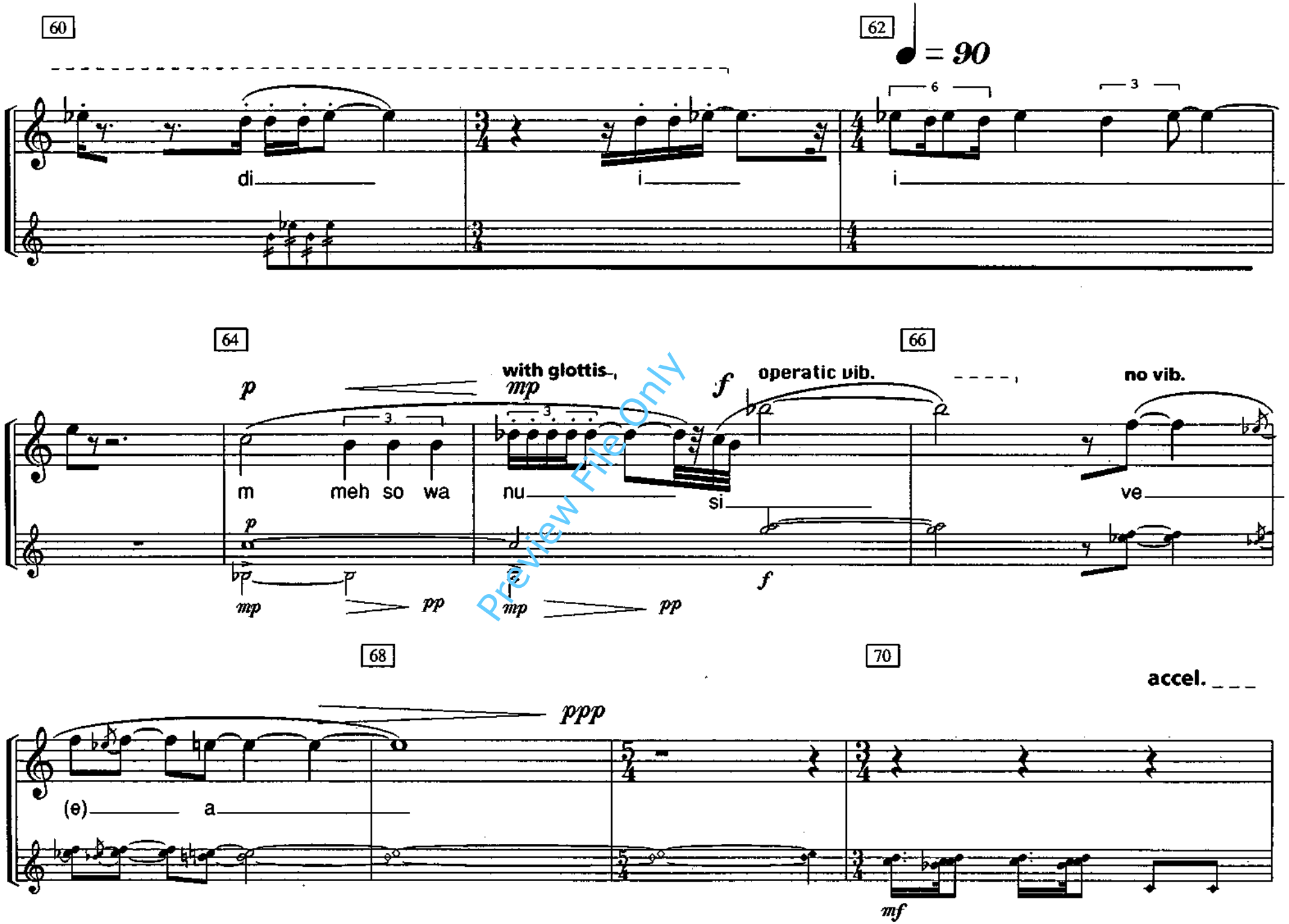


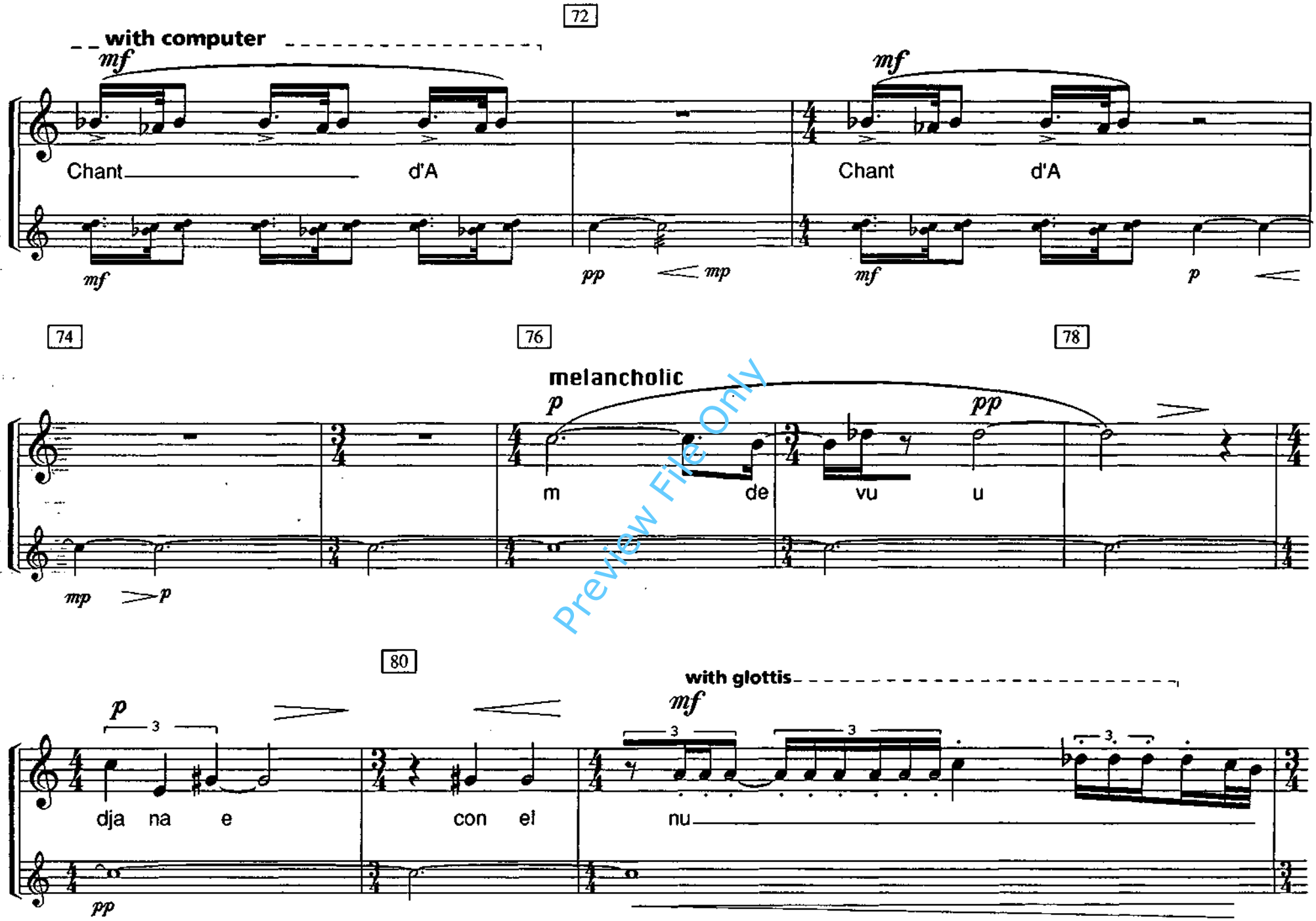


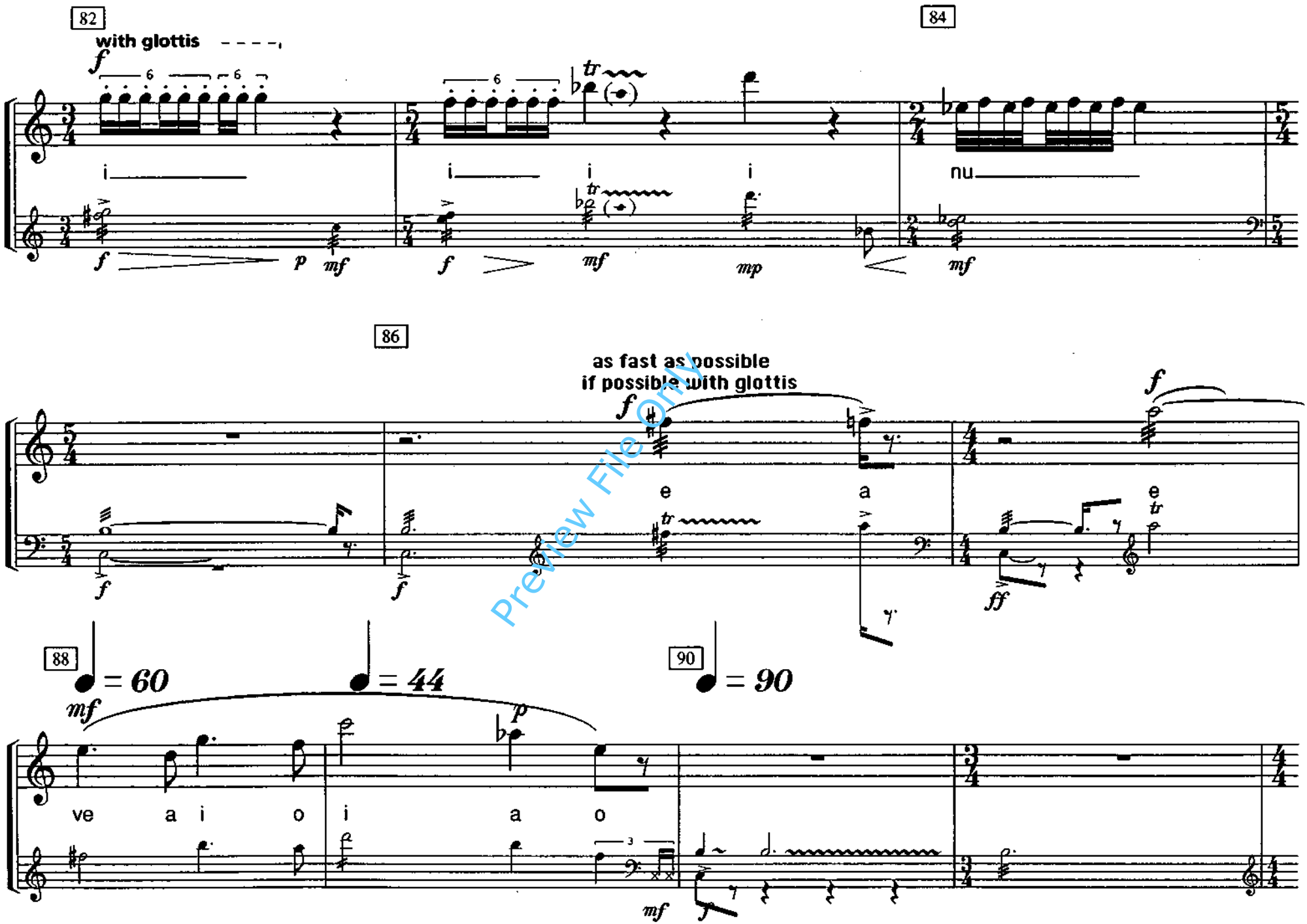


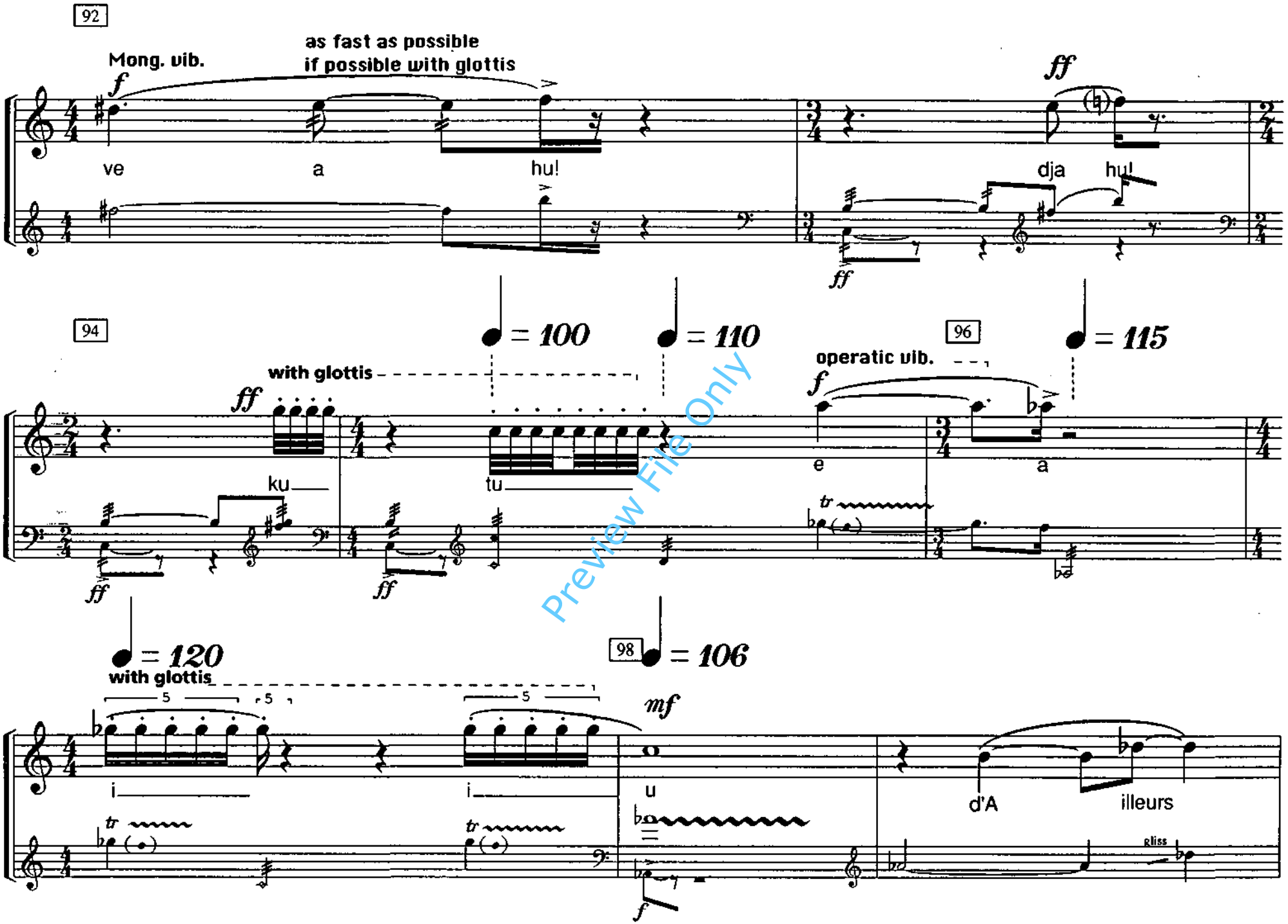


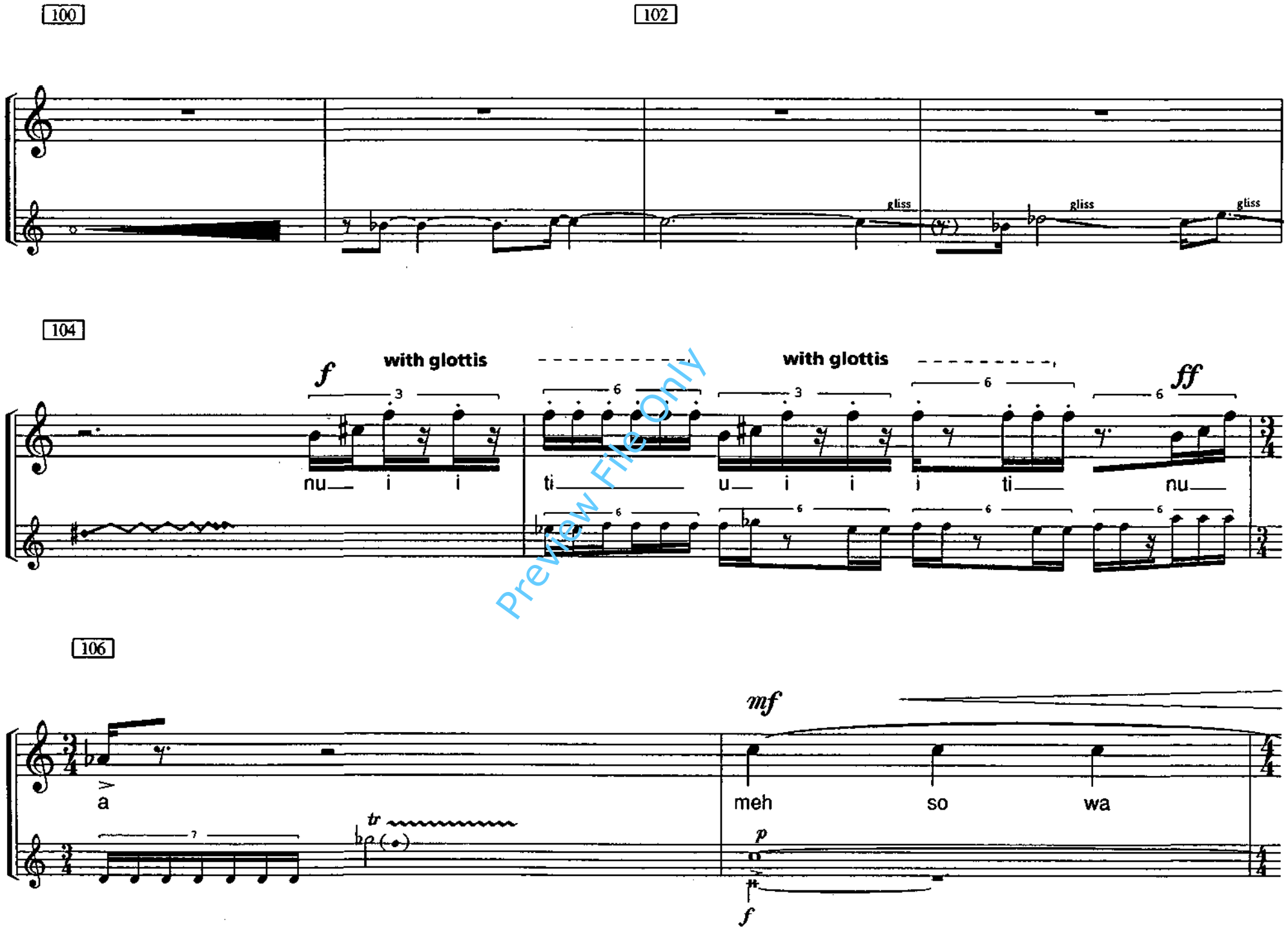


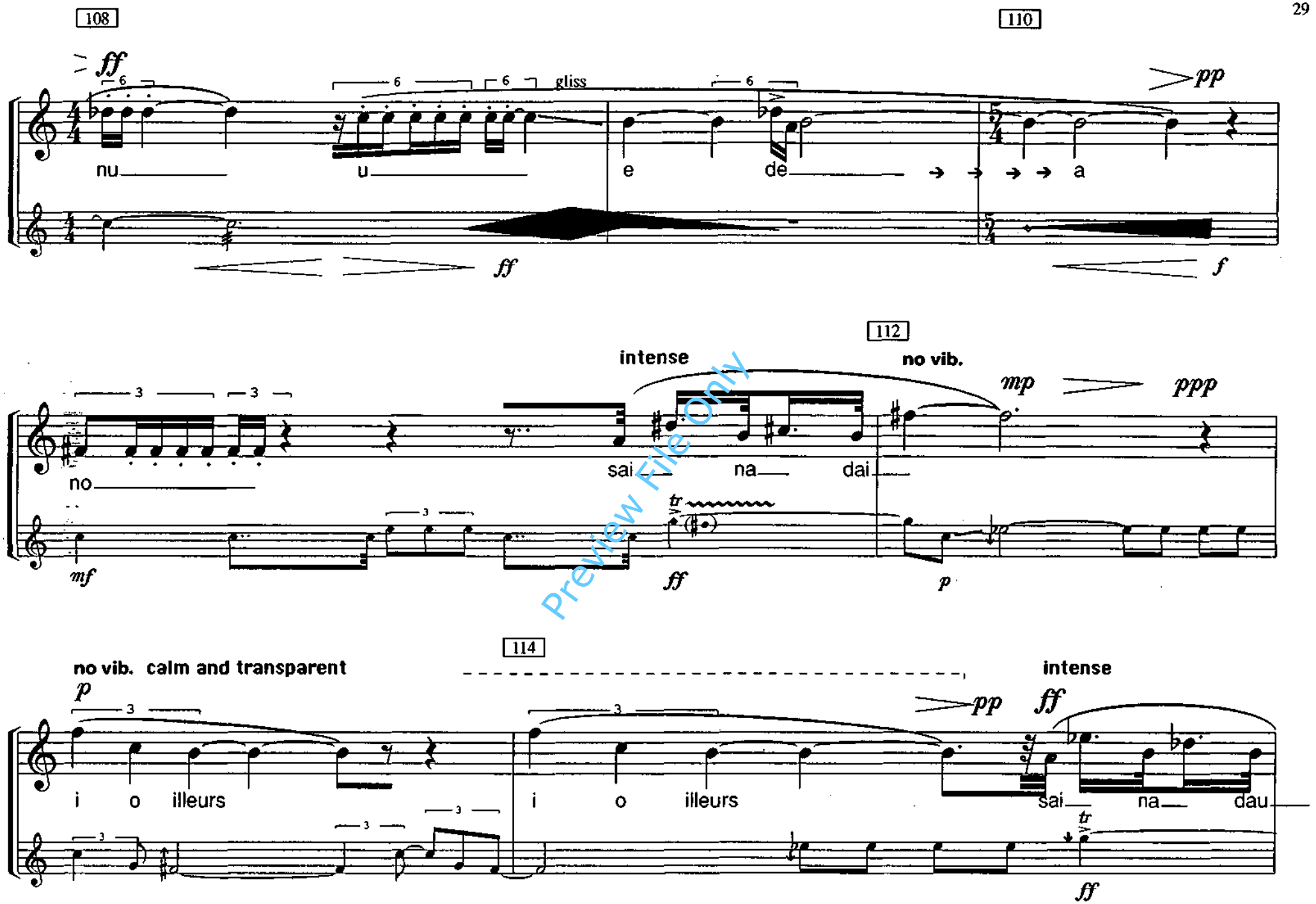


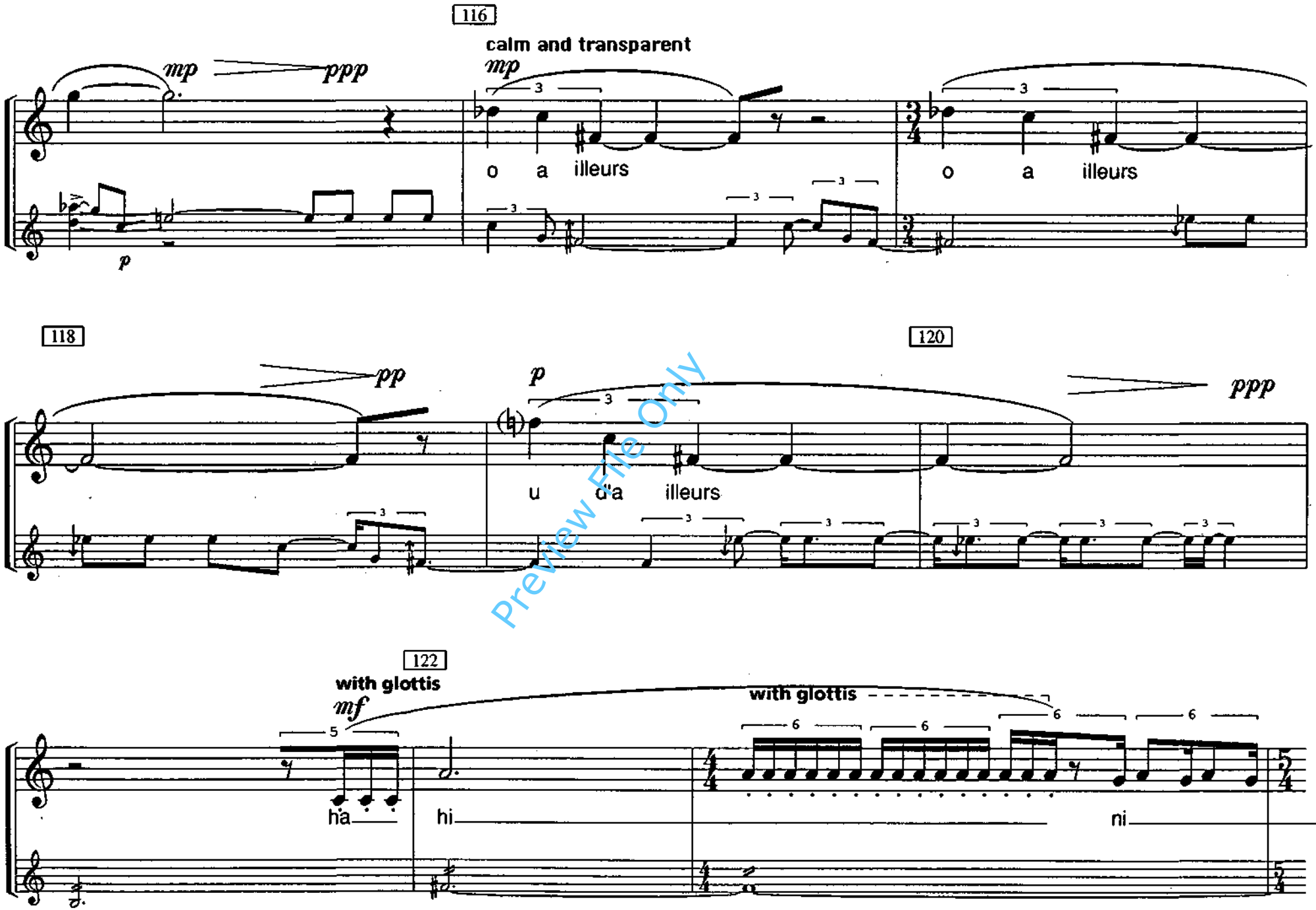












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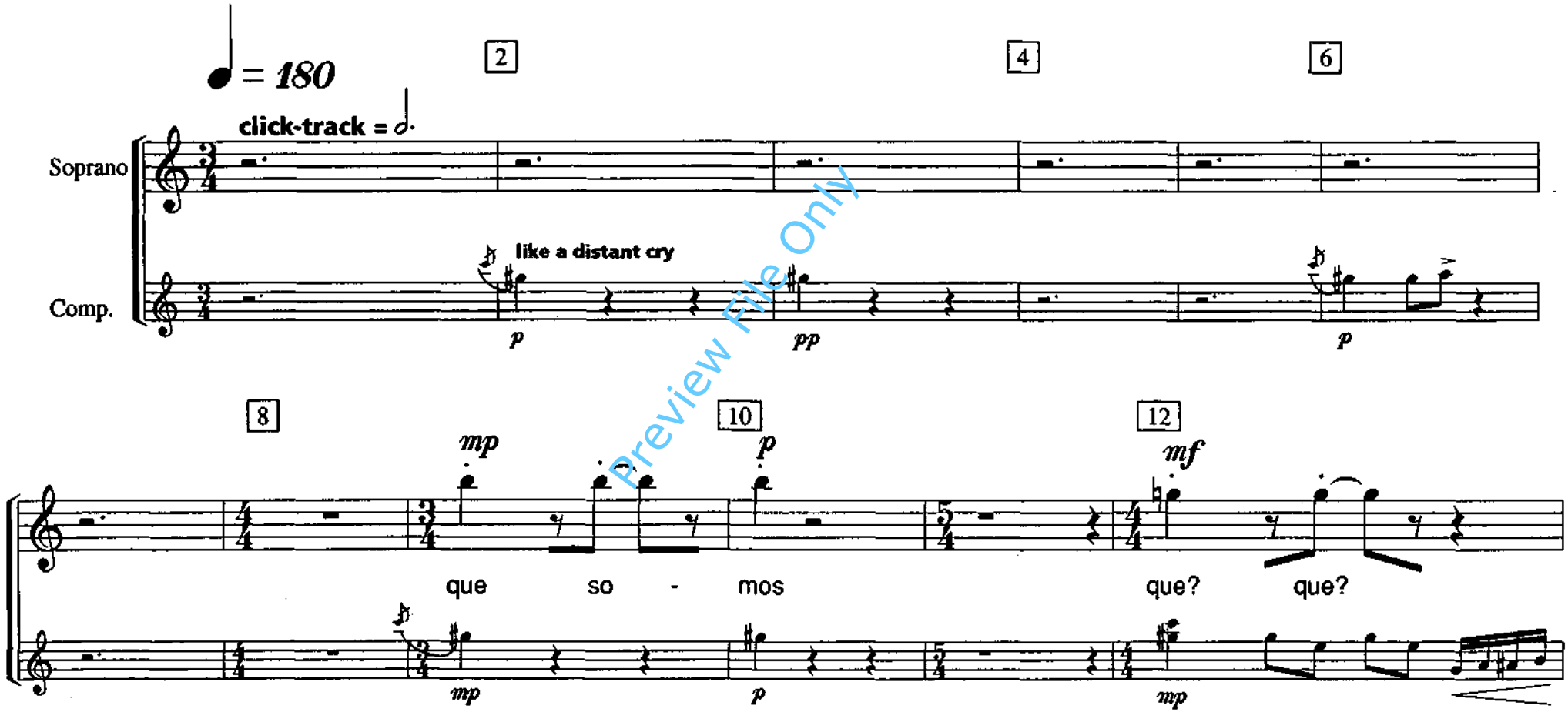
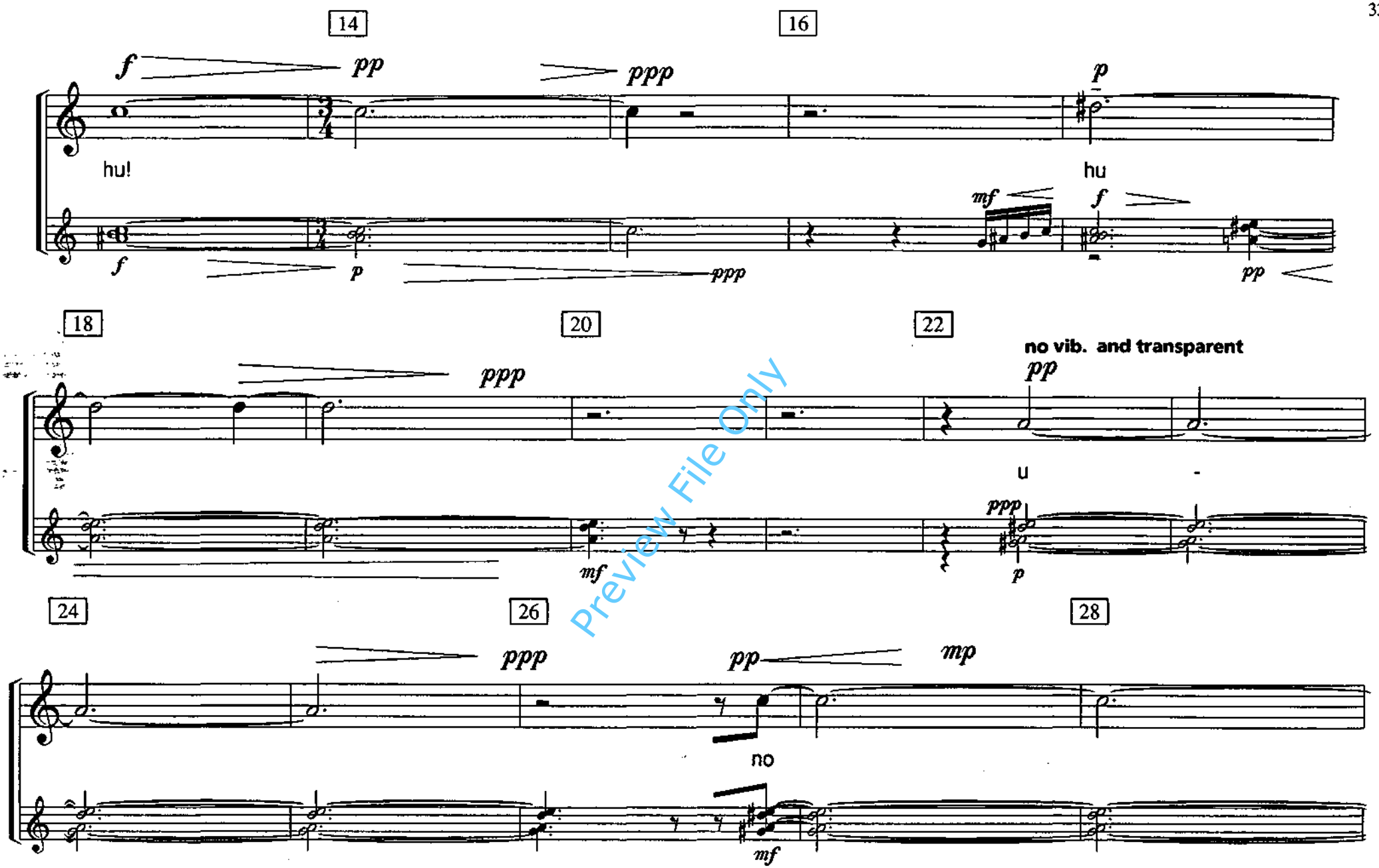
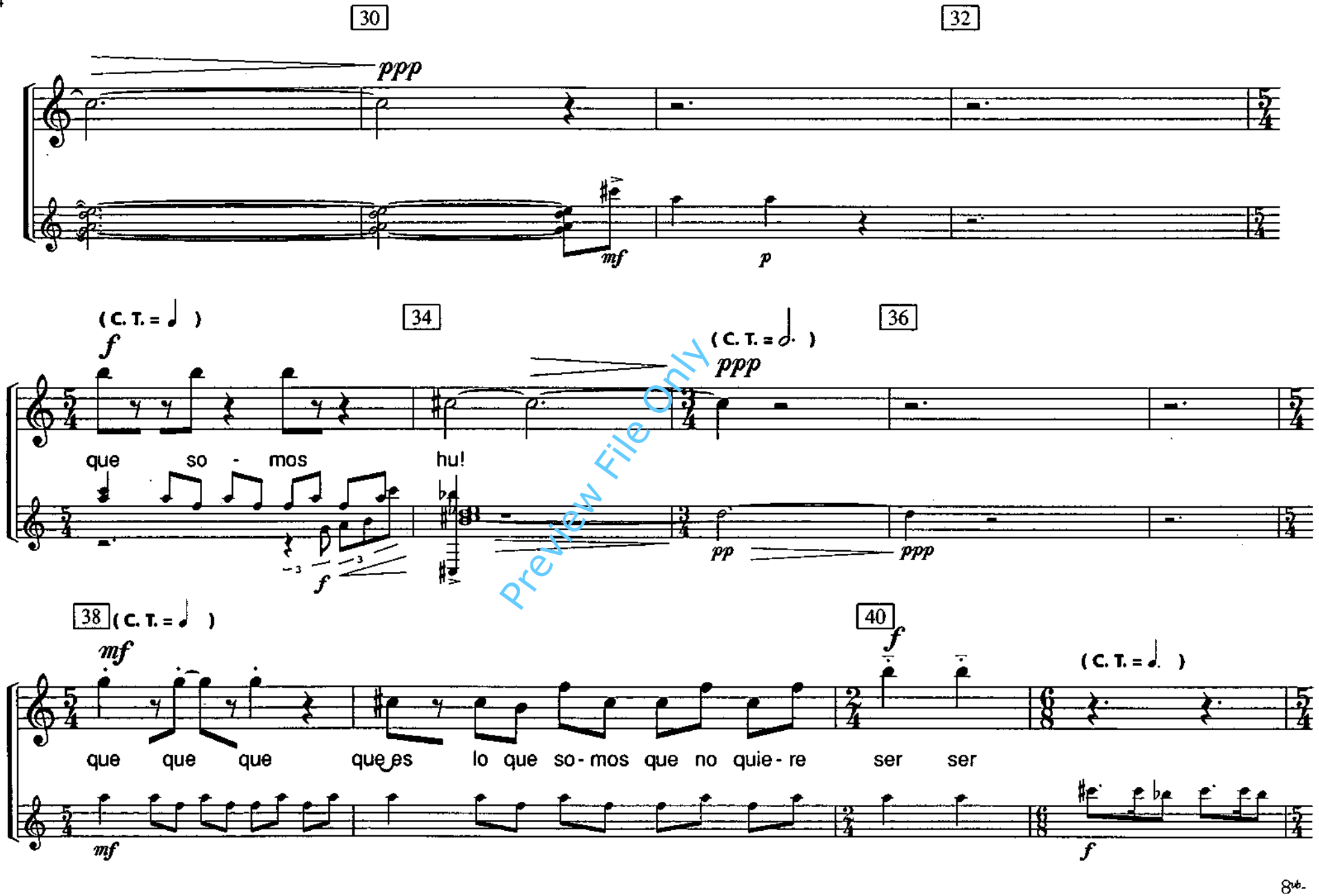
Chant III

"somos"







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