THE OLD MAN of the SEA

This work for French Horn in F and Piano develops themes from a Music- Theatre piece "THE ORFORD MERMAN", which I wrote in 1988. The present work is a series of free variations.

I had in mind not so much the mysterious East Anglian Merman this time, as Sinbad's alarming tormentor, or the Old Man who wrestles with Odyaseus in the Odyssey: a shape-changer who is as changeable and demanding as the Sea itself.

The piano score shows the Horn part untransposed.
The few unusual notations are fully explained in the Horn part.

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THE OLD MAN OF THE SEA
VARIATIONS ON THEMES FROM 'THE ORFORD MERMAN'

BY Julia Usher

1st performance

The Orford Merman' is a remarkable 13th century folk legend, set in the small medieval village of Orford close to Aldeburgh in Suffolk.
In 1988 I composed a music theatre piece to explore the legend, which was haunting me.

A fisherman trawls up a weird creature in his net, half-man, half fish. A series of characters: lord, soldier, doctor, priest - examine him and decide he is not human. The lord of Orford Castle orders him hung upside down by his heels; and then released back into the sea. Later, he returns to land of his own free will.

In my version of the story, the Merman becomes more and more human the more his tormenters show their inhumanity to a foreign presence. I was fascinated that the Merman returns deliberately - and I could only conclude that the Wild Man was unable to evade his humanity. The Fisherman shares a crust of bread with him.

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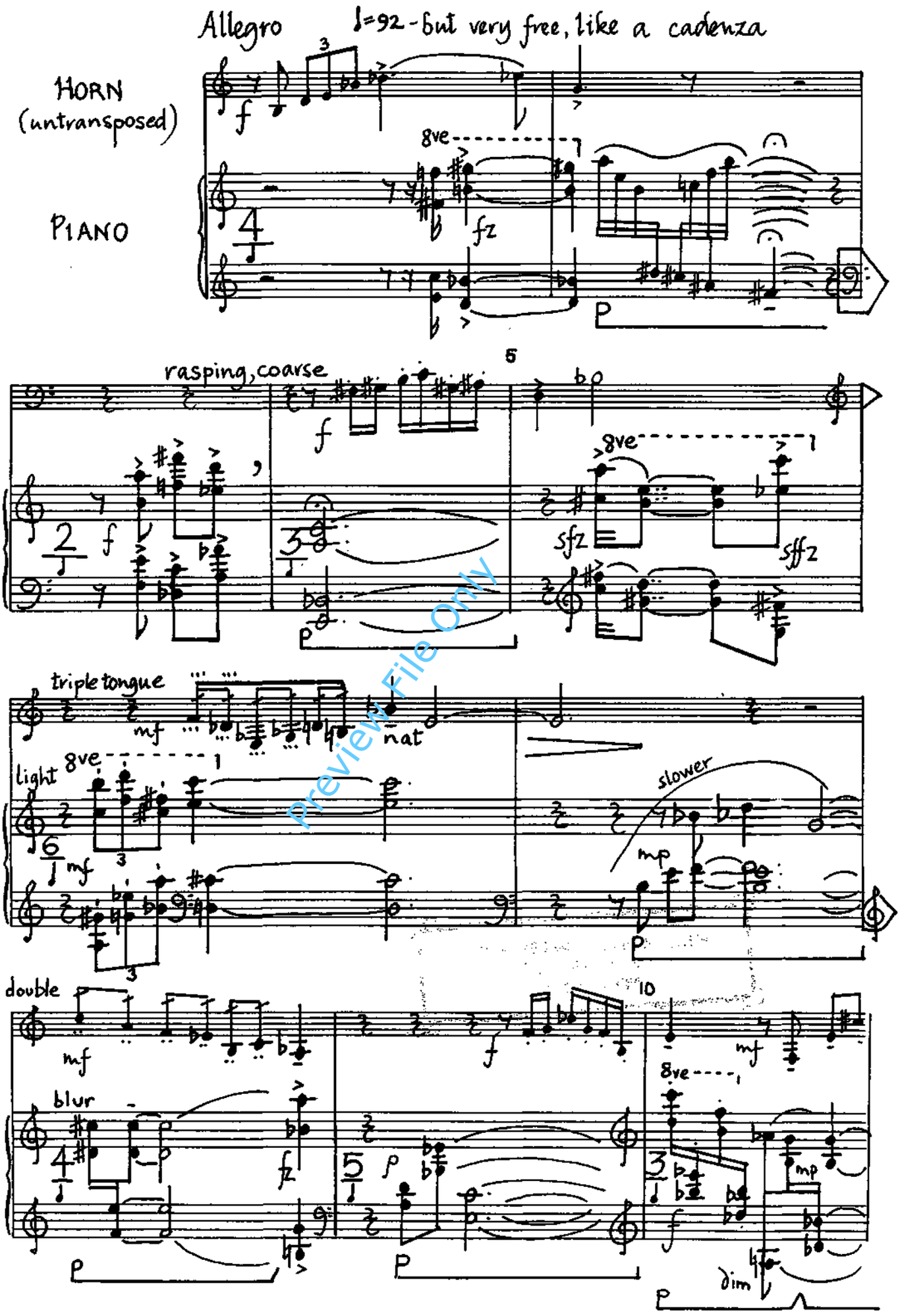
The work received two performances in 1989, at the Greenwich and Arundel Festivals, with Michael Finnissy conducting his ensemble *Focus.* Malcolm Sinclair as actor / singer playing all the parts, and Matthew Hauxwell dancing and miming the silent Merman. His "voice" was represented by a french horn. For the rest of the text, I built up a poetic libretto from vocabularies of words relating to the social status of each person in that period of middle english - not using the old words, but the modern English words which derived from them! This was a very interesting task.

After the performances, I did not want the piece to vanish; and so I wrote these variations on the main motives, harmonies and pitch fields, scoring again for the french horn as the Merman's voice. However this time I was also thinking of that other myth, the Old Man of the Sea, Procrustes, who tortured every man he met to fit his uncomfortable bed.

This piece, *The Old Man of the Sea,* has just been included in the syllabus for the new Performers' diploma for the Associated Board.

Julia Usher, October 2000



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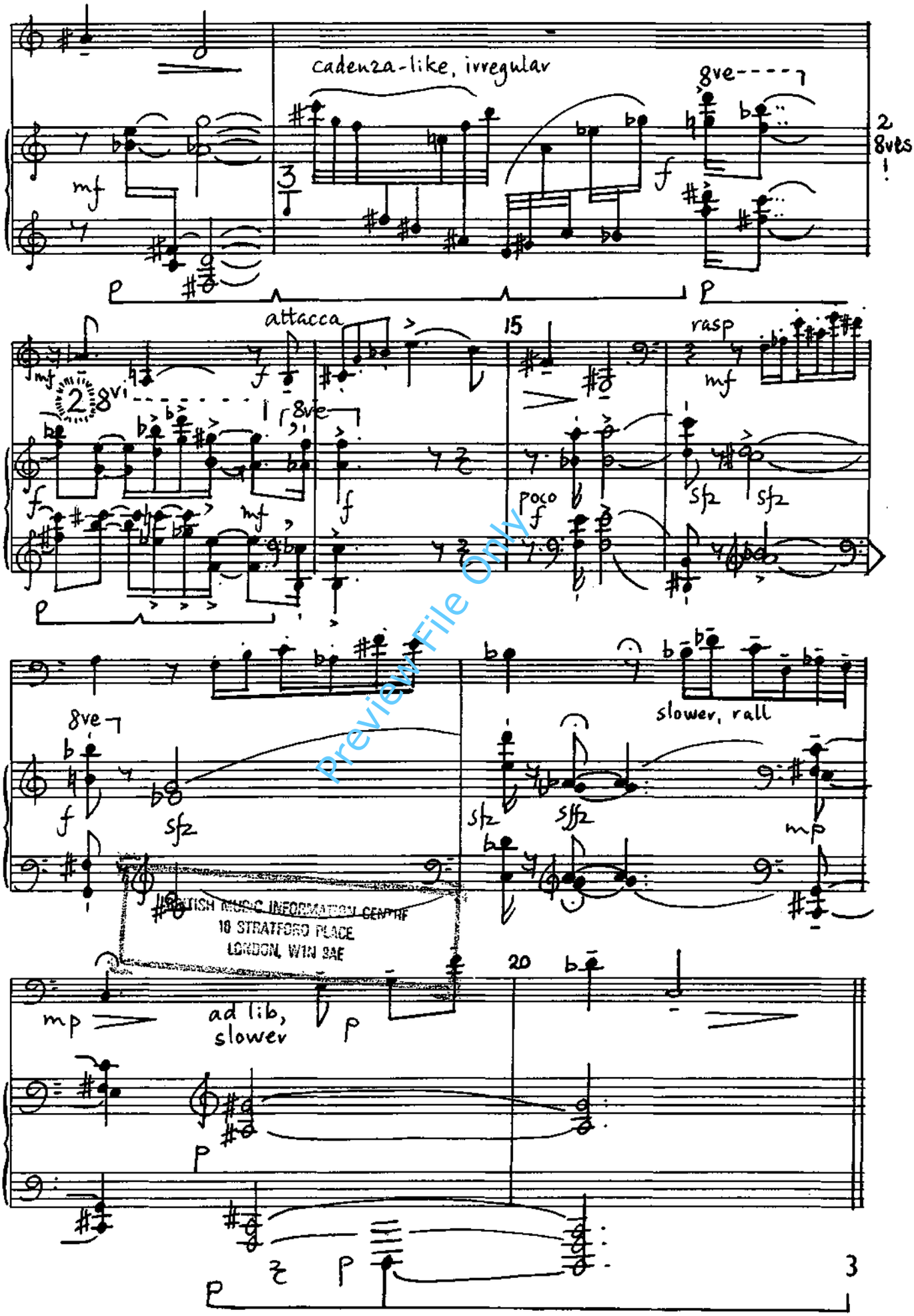

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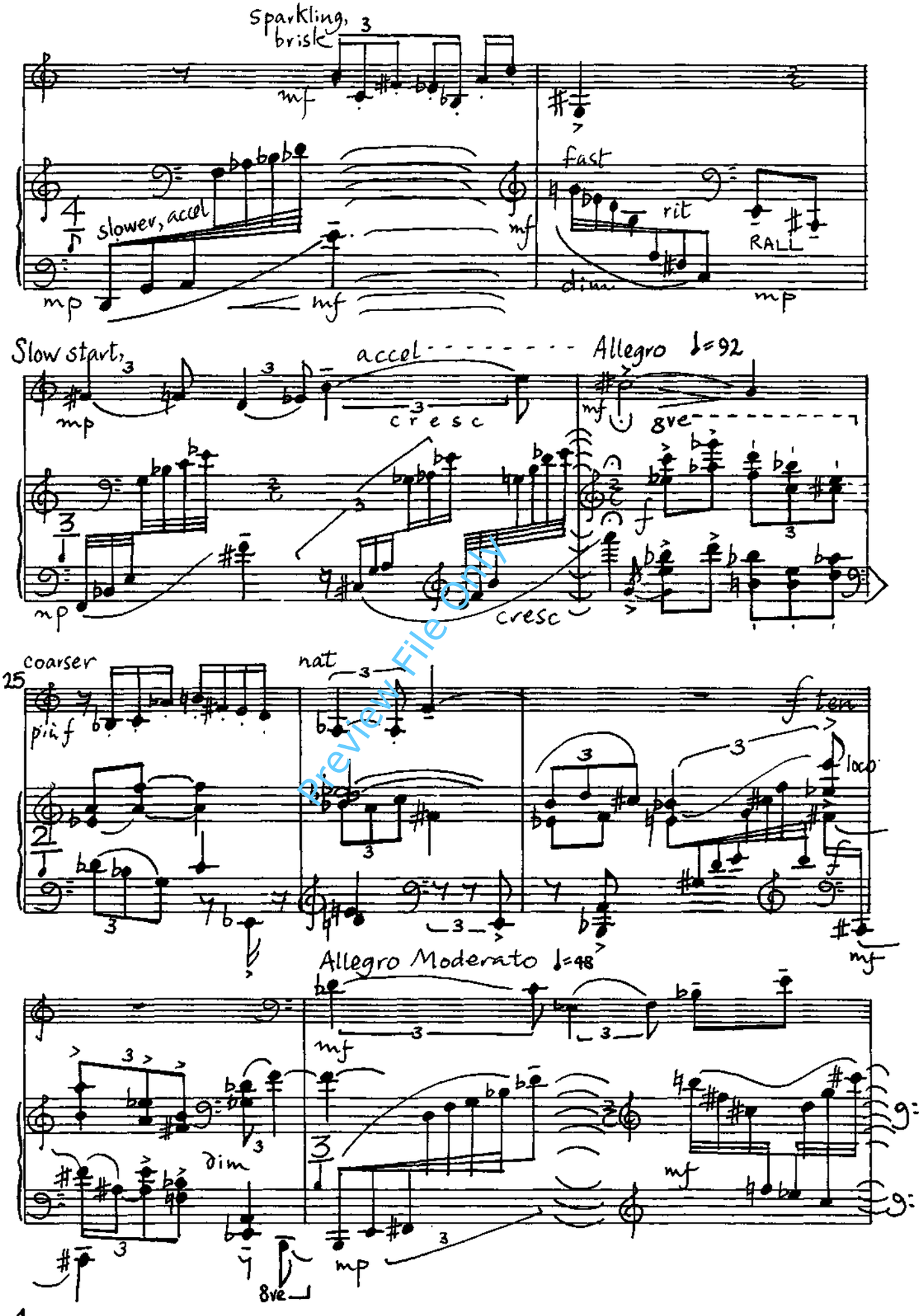

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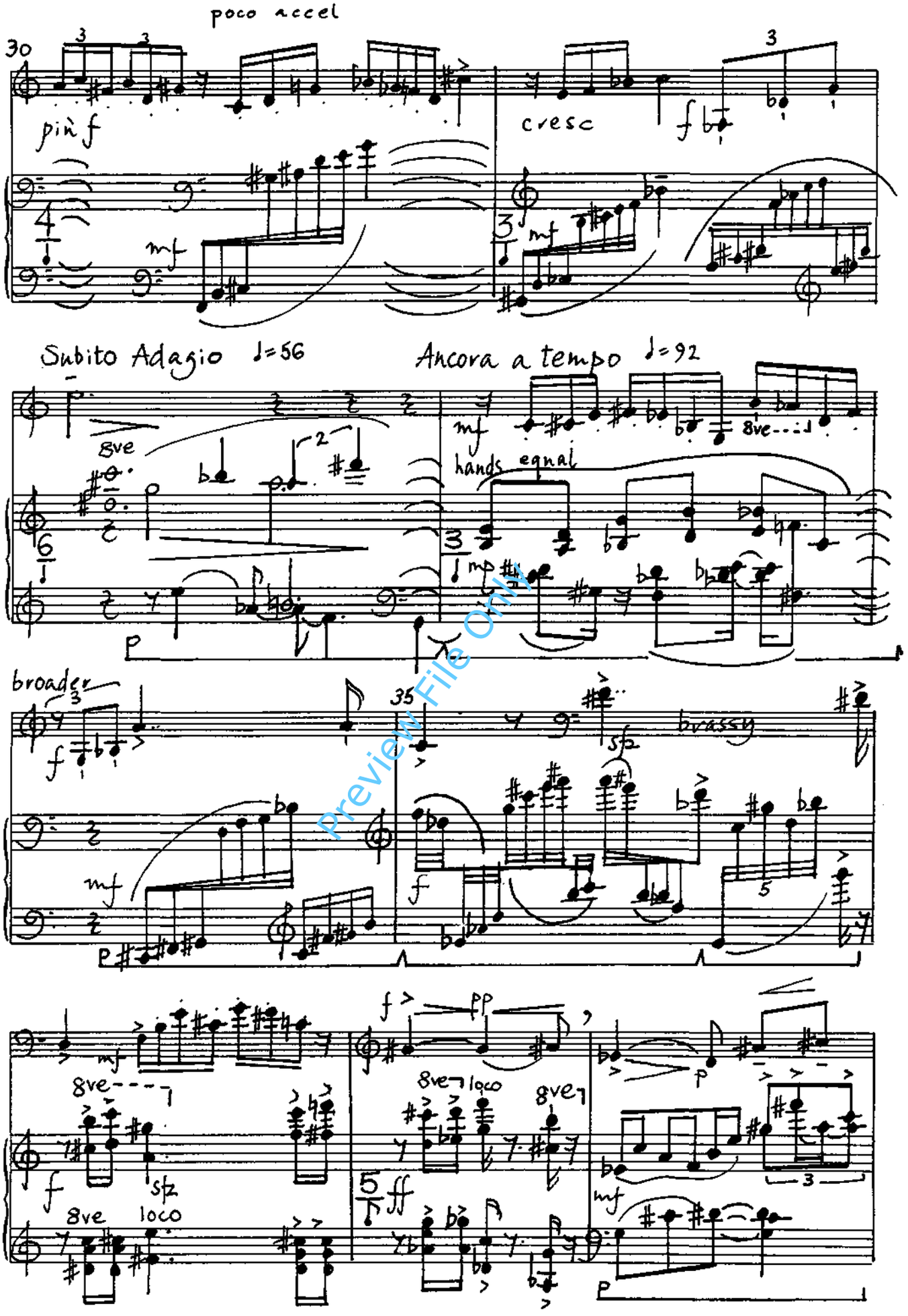

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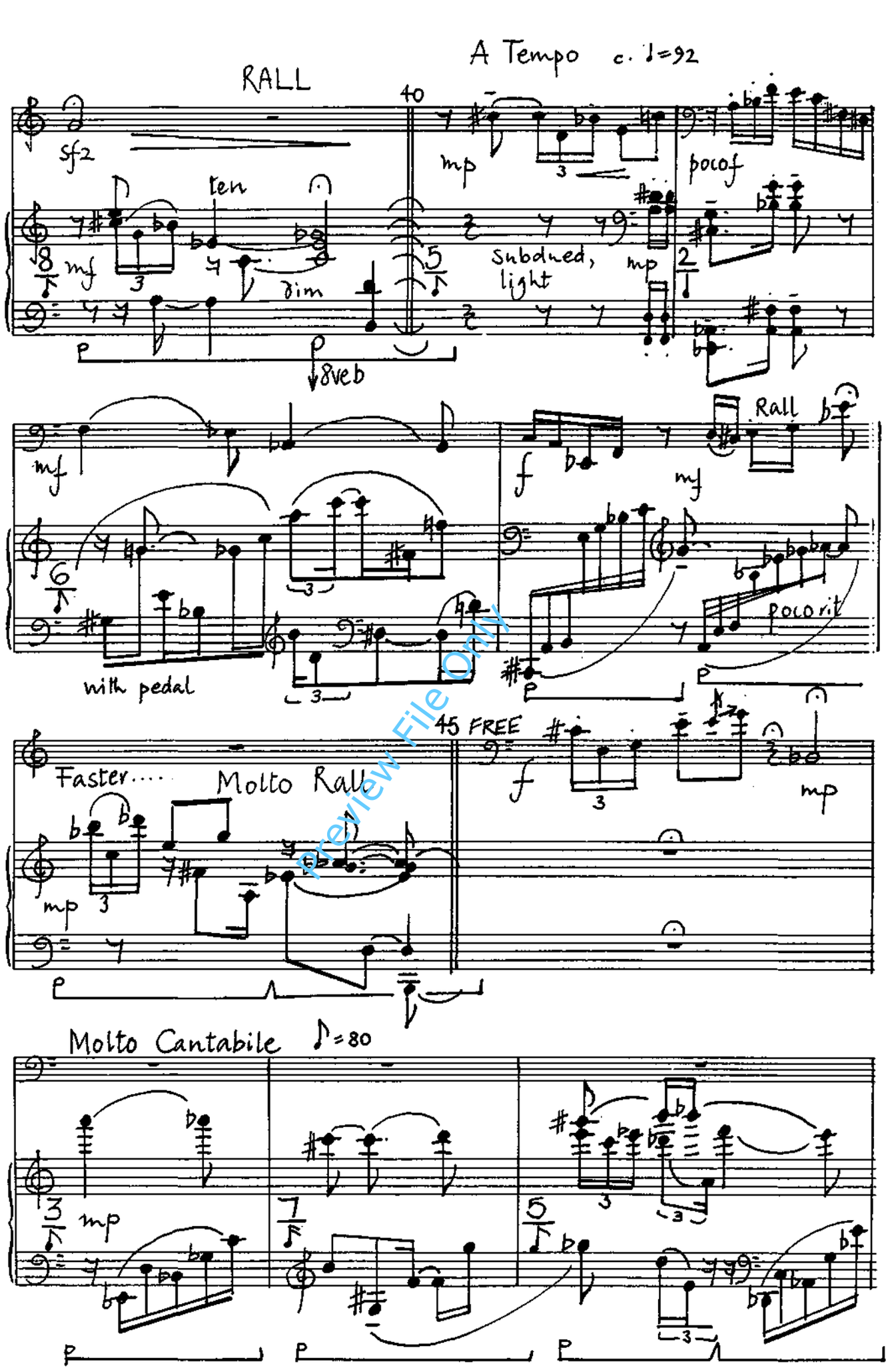

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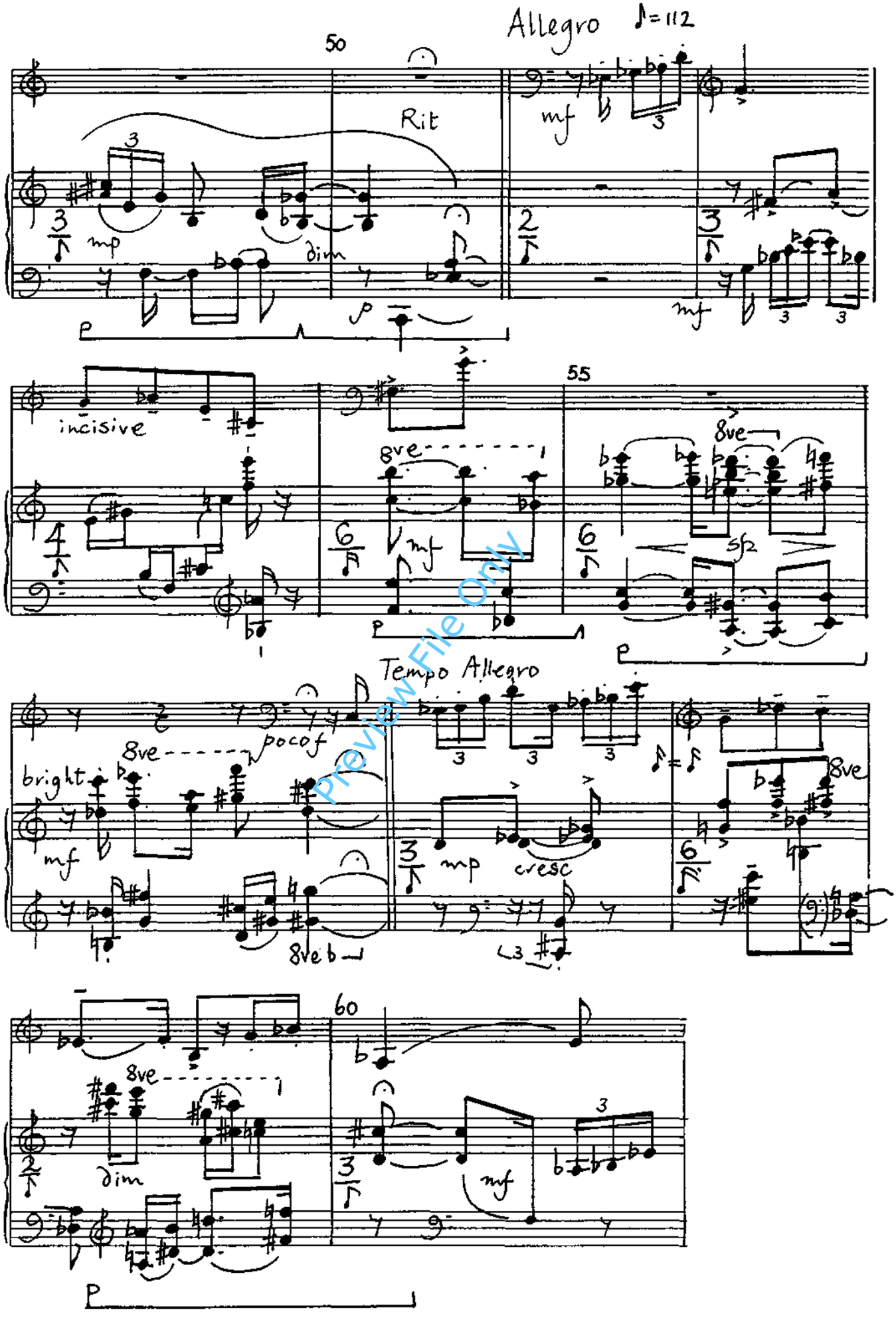

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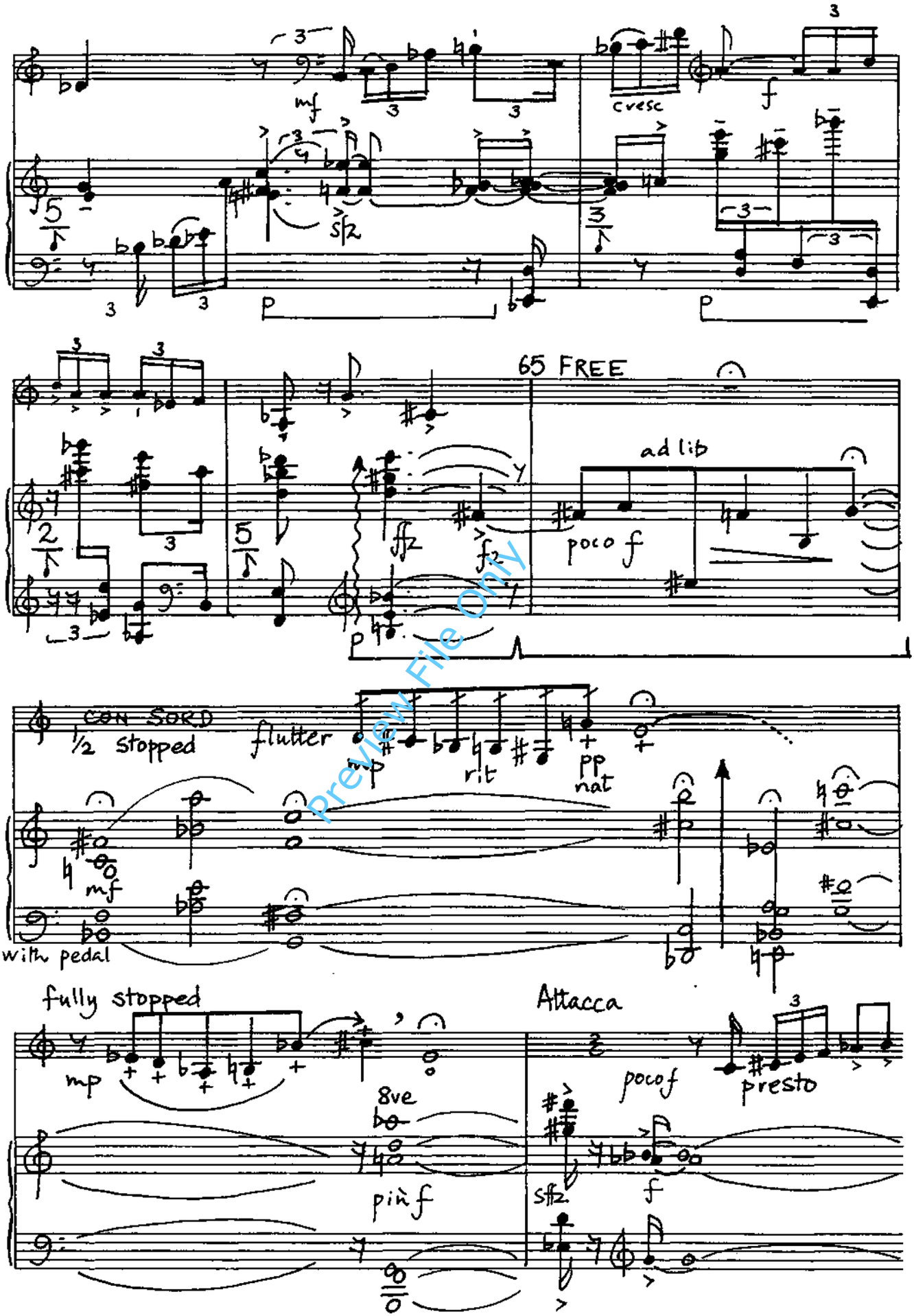

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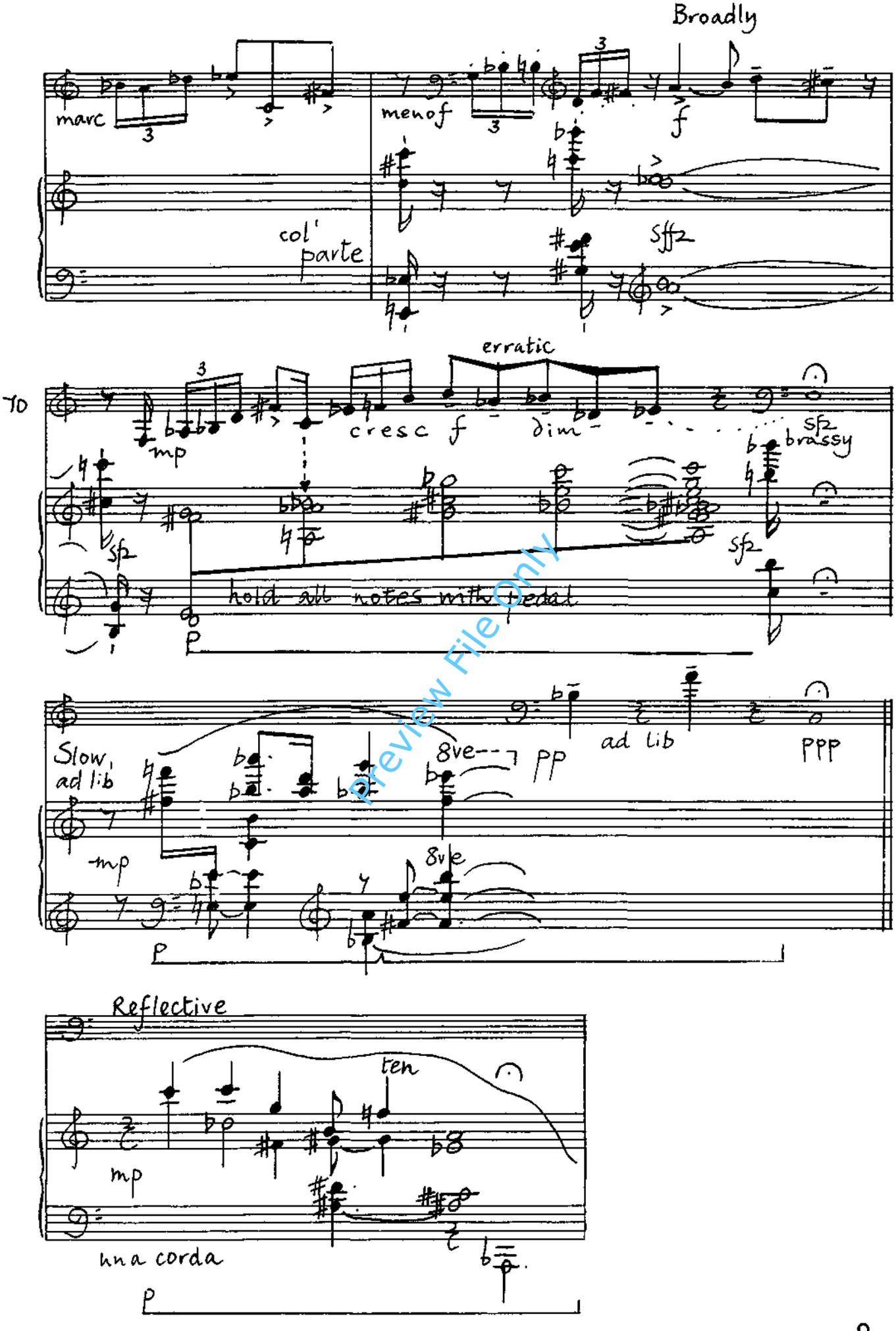

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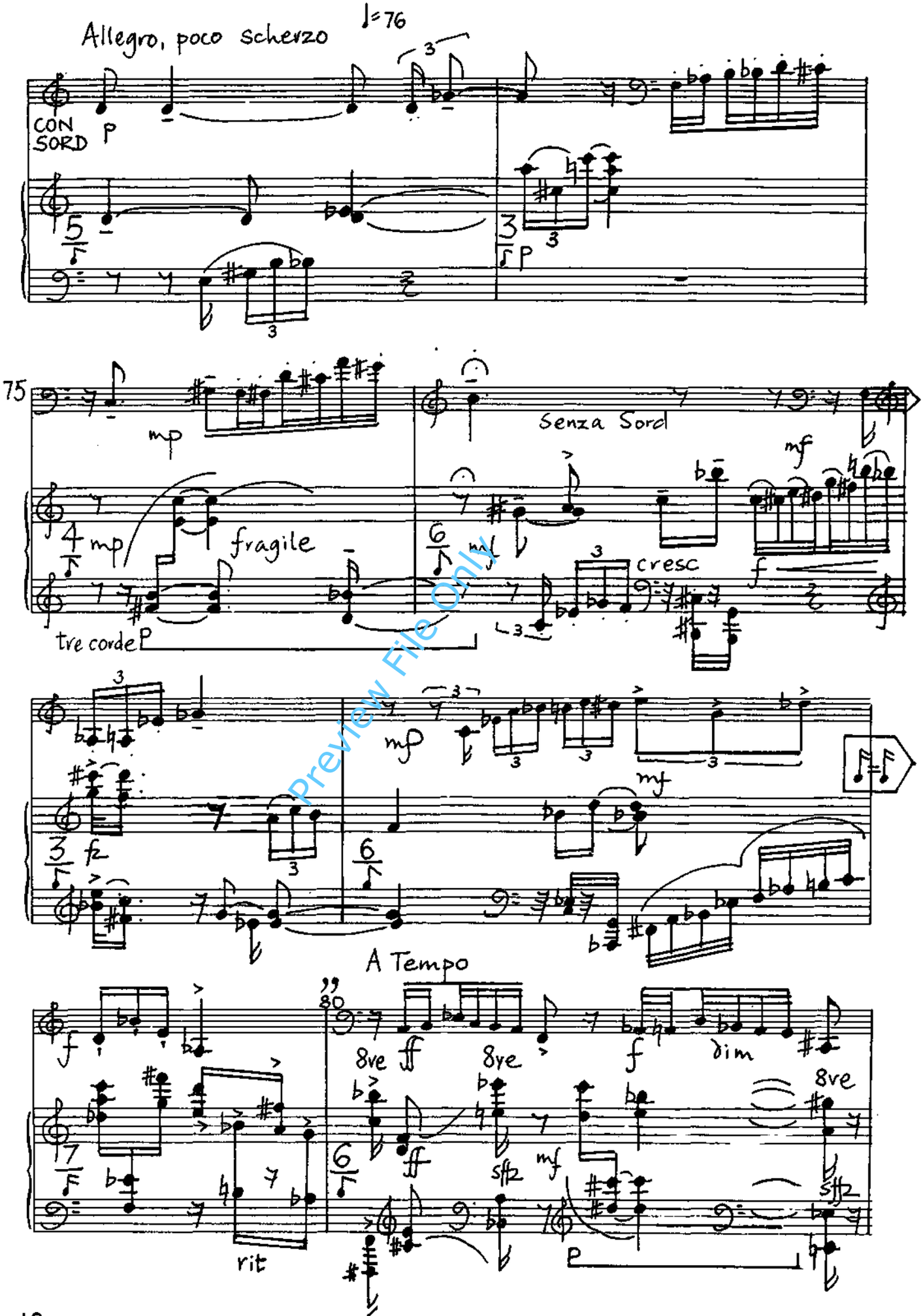

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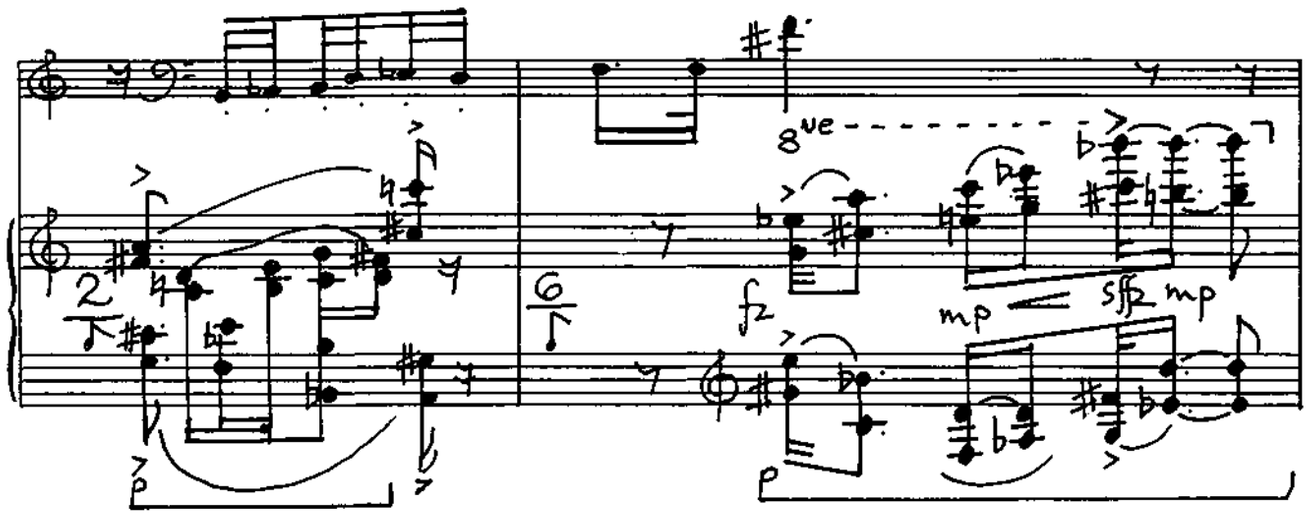

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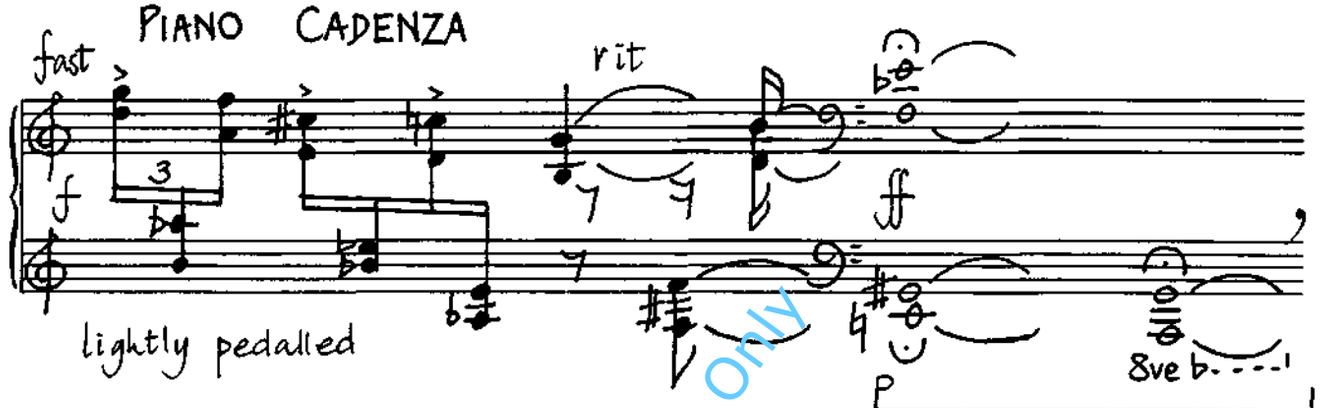

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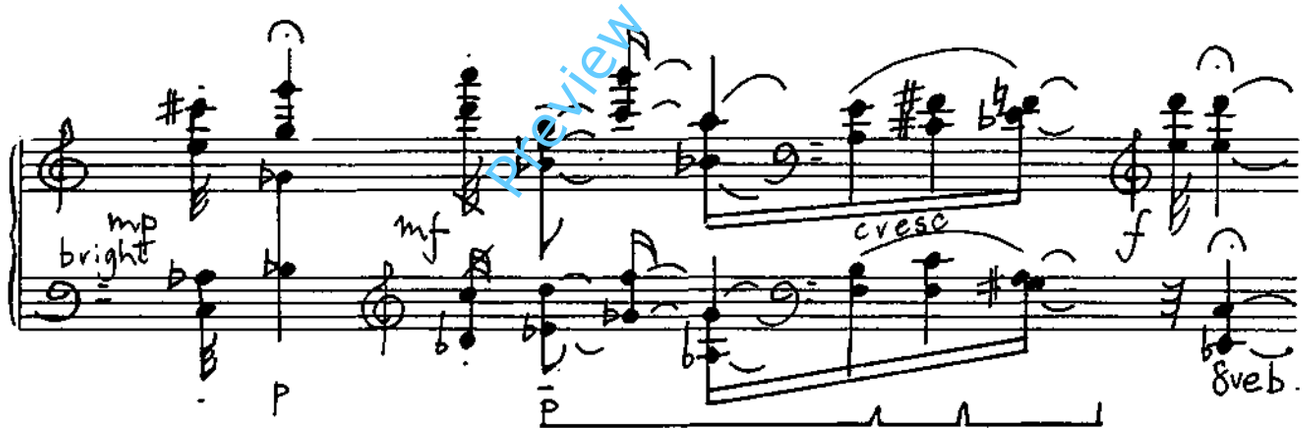

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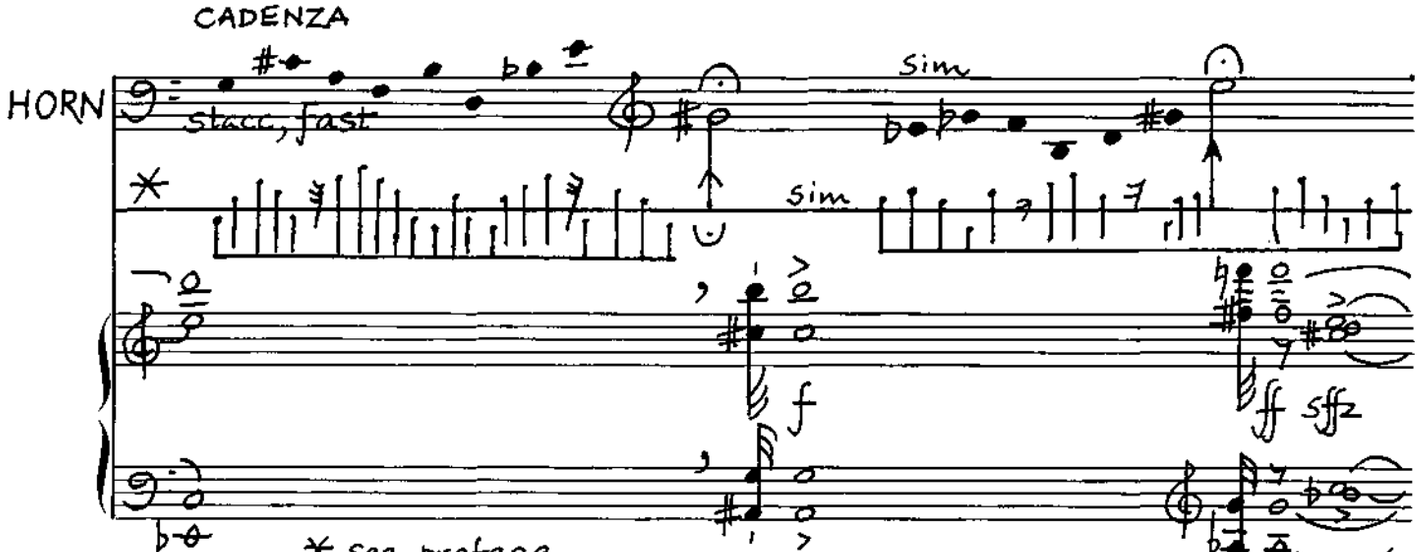

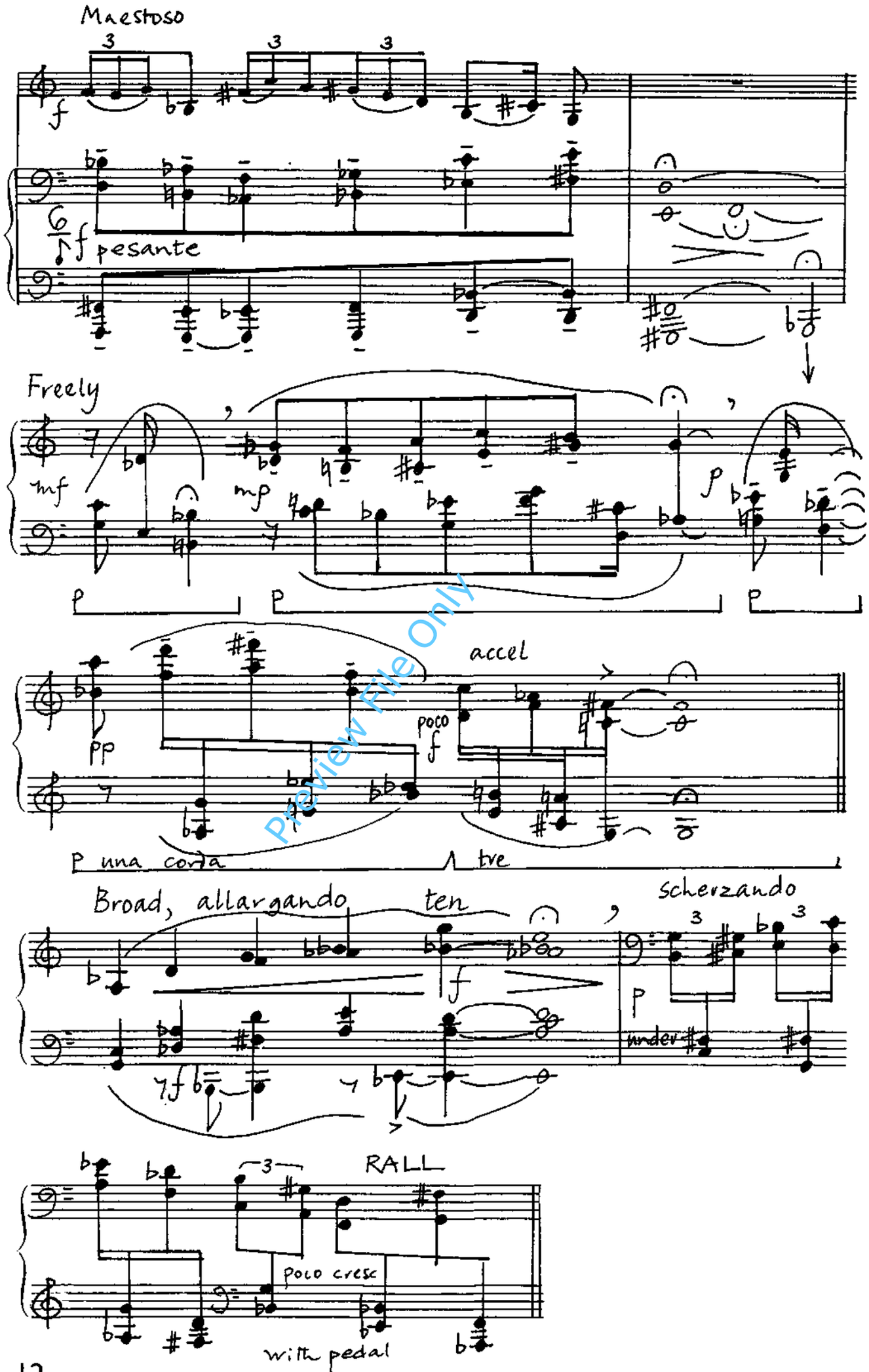

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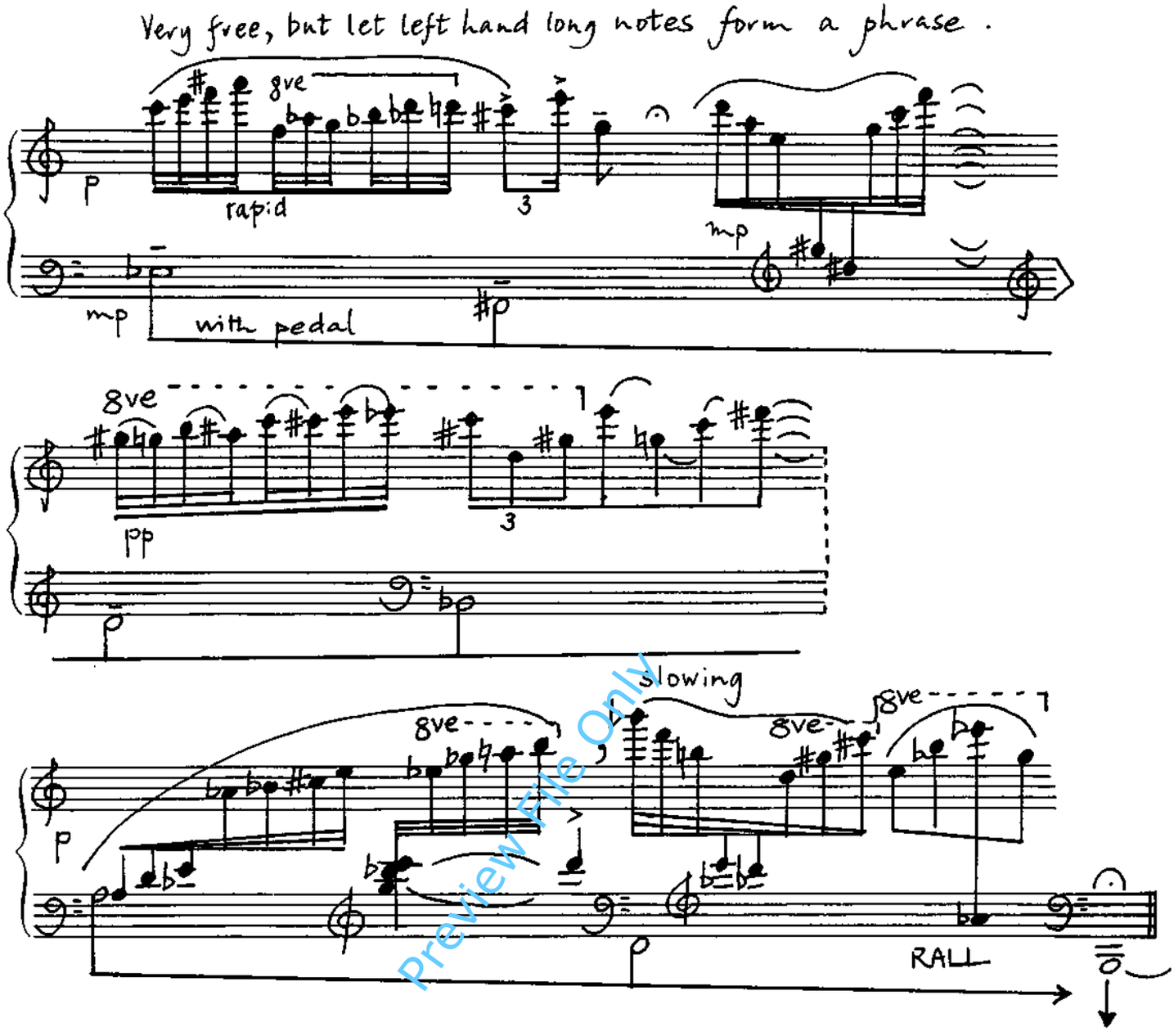

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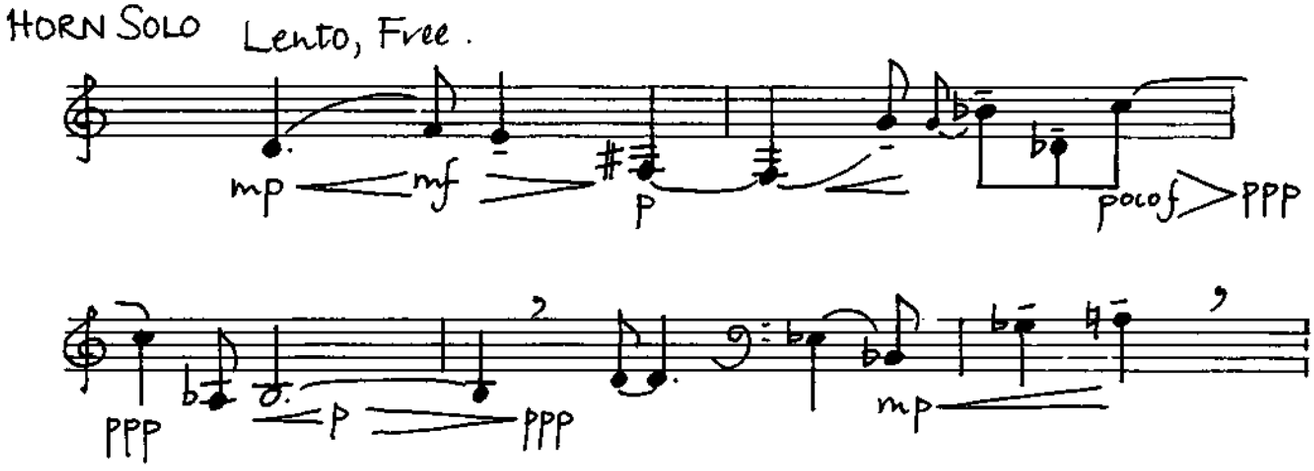

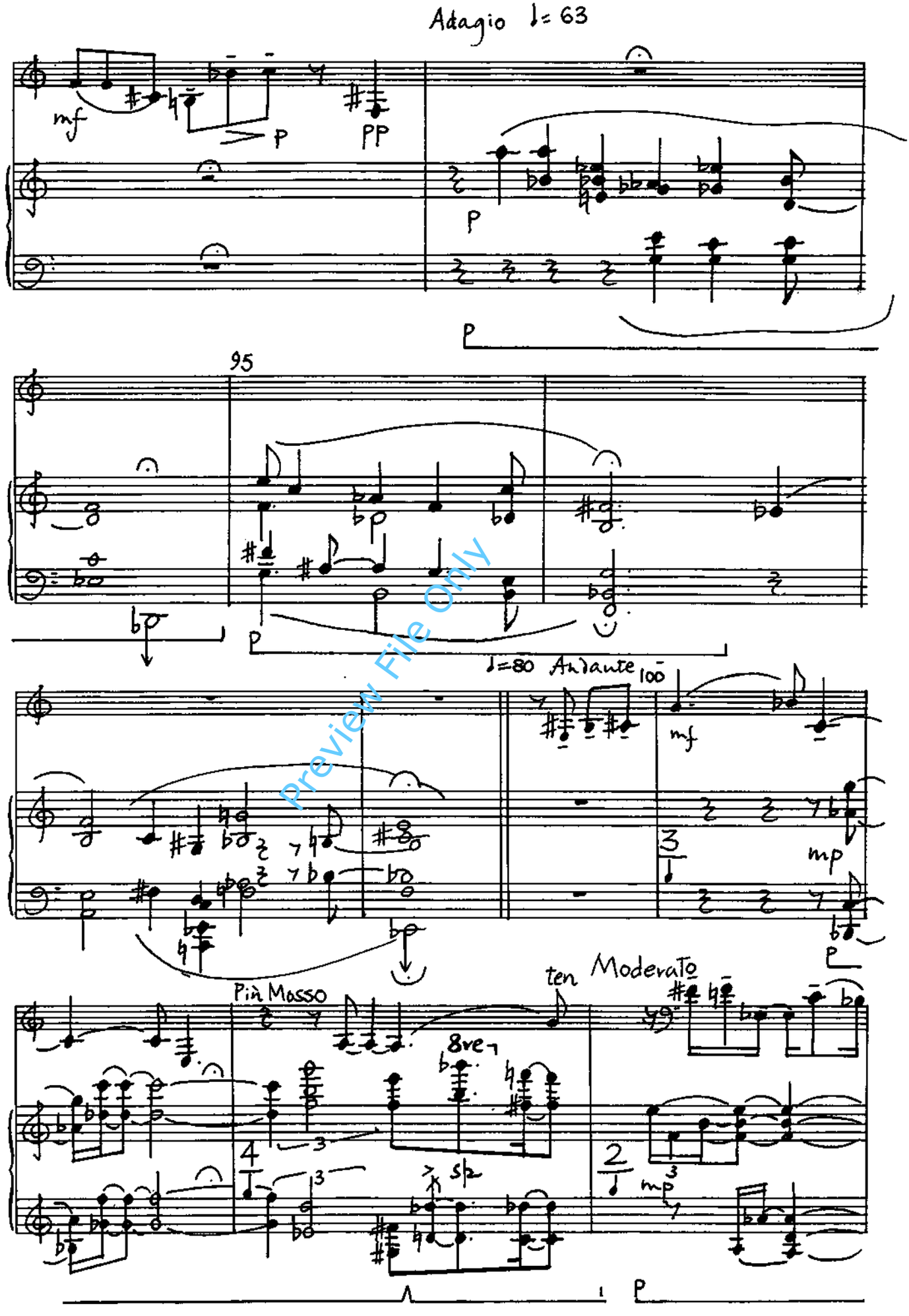

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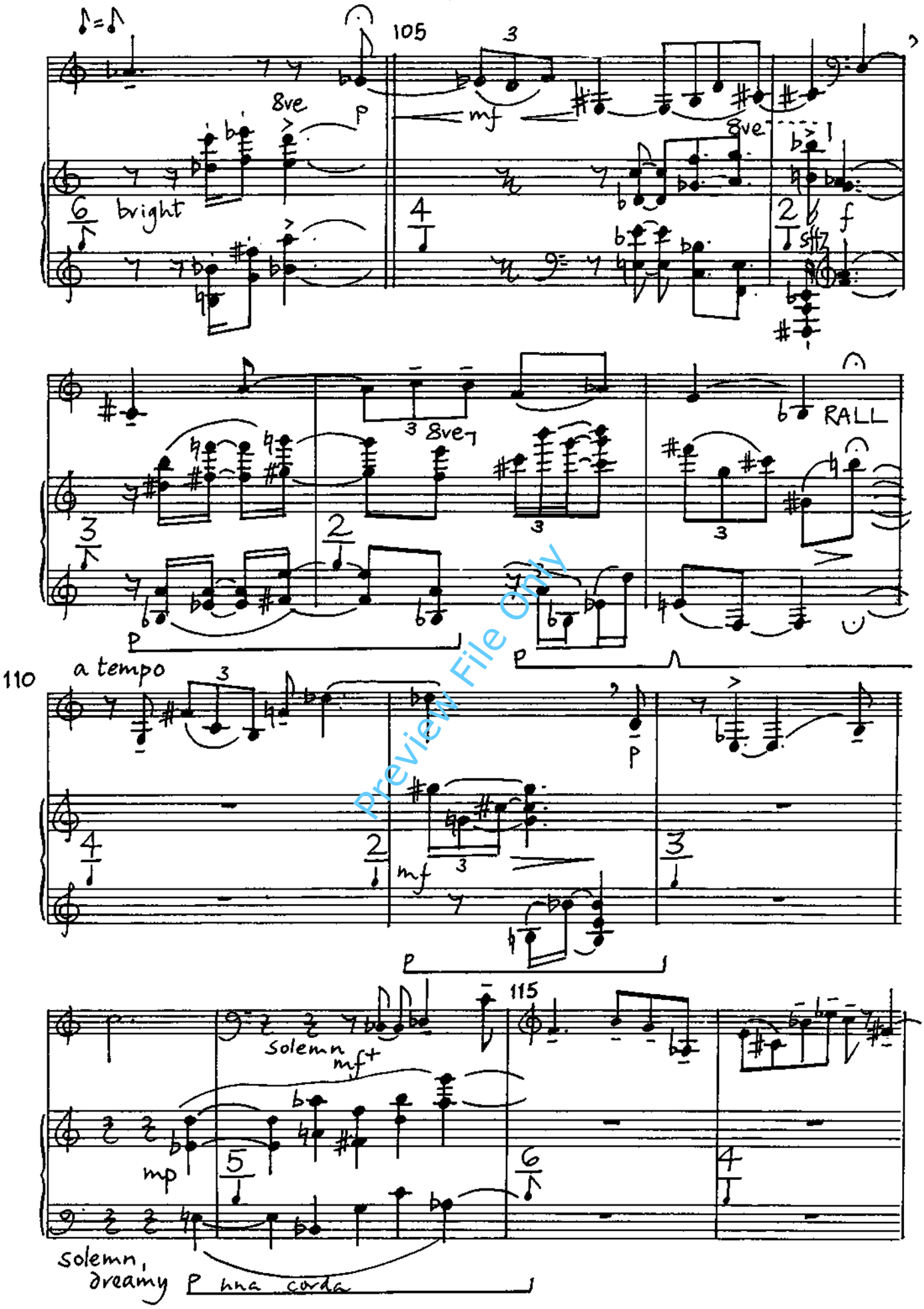

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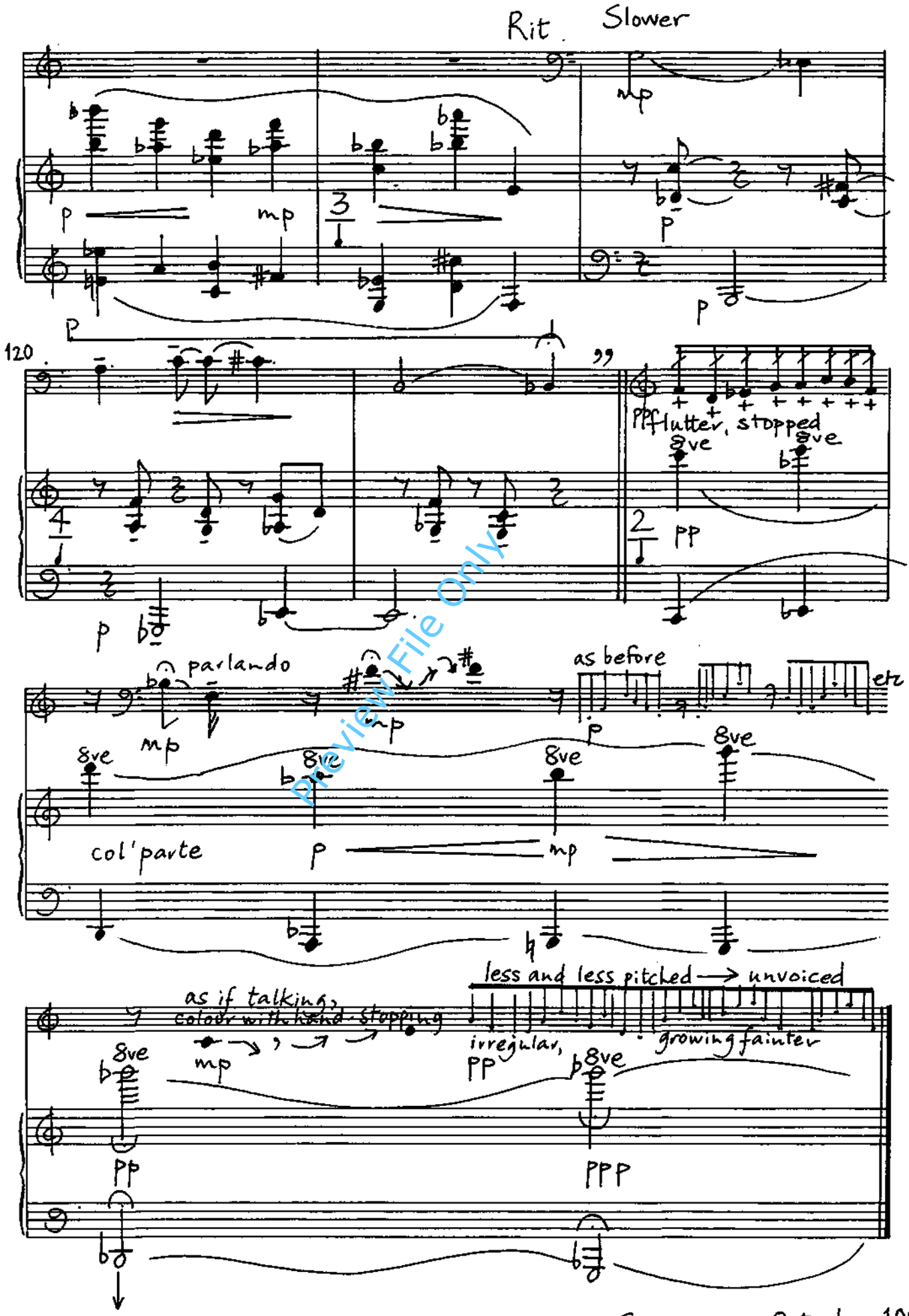

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Streatham, Oct-Jan 1988-1989