BRITISH MUSIC INFORMATION CENTRE,
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# Cornelius Cardew

## 1936~81

# Boolavogue for two pianos

The composer's untimely death prevented the completion of this work which was to have had four movements and would have been entitled **Boolavogue Sonata**.

*Boolavogue*, a song of the Irish freedom fighters of 1798, forms the basis of the first movement; the finale is based on the *Blackleg Miner*, a militant song of the miners in the late 19th century.

The work was commissioned by The New Macnaghten Concerts with funds made available by the Arts Council of Great Britain and was first performed by Susan Bradshaw and John Tilbury at the Wigmore Hall on 13 March 1981.

In the programme notes the composer described the three movements as "attempts at handling folk material in classical terms; in particular they give expression to the passion and drive of the working people's struggle against the barbarity of national oppression and wage-slavery".

# The composer

Cornelius Cardew was born in 1936. He was educated musically as a chorister at Canterbury Cathedral (1943-50), and at the Royal Academy of Music (1953-7) where he studied 'cello, piano (with Percy Waller) and composition (with Howard Ferguson). He received an RAM Scholarship to study electronic music in Cologne (1957-8), and worked as assistant to Stockhausen (1958-60), collaborating with him in the composition of 'Carre' for four choruses and orchestras. In 1961 he returned to London, took a course in graphic design, and worked intermittently as a graphic artist. In 1964 he received an Italian Government bursary to study in Rome with Petrassi (Corso di Perfezionamento Diploma, 1965).

From 1966-71 he was a member of the free improvisation group AMM. He was elected FRAM in 1966, and in 1967 was appointed Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music. From 1966-7 he was associate at the Center for Creative and Performing Arts at the State University of New York at Buffalo, USA, working on the graphic score 'Treatise'. In 1968 he began teaching an experimental music class at Morley College. His work here with other experimental musicians, and in particular work on a section of the 'Great Learning', led to the formation in 1969 of the Scratch Orchestra, a large experimental group.

In 1971 he began to study Marxism and became interested in a music of political commitment. He subjected his own earlier work, and that of Stockhausen and Cage, to strong criticism, resulting later in the book 'Stockhausen Serves Imperialism' (1974). In 1973 he received a grant from the City of West Berlin to live and work there for a year. Returning to London, he was active in the formation of 'Peoples Liberation Music', a revolutionary rock band, and ran a workshop-class at Goldsmiths College entitled 'Songs for Our Society' (1975-7). He toured and lectured extensively and in 1974 produced the 'Thälmann Sonata', the first in a series of major piano works. In 1975 he played a leading role in uniting democratic artists in the Progressive Cultural Association. His political commitment grew and in 1979 he was a founding member and member of the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist). He wrote songs for and performed in many international festivals of popular culture, including the Second All Canada Youth Festival (1980), and was working to organise the Second International Sports and Cultural Festival held in Britain 20-30 August 1982. In September 1981 he began a Master's Degree in Musical Analysis at King's College, London.

On 13 December 1981 he was killed, near to his home in Leyton, East London, by a hit and run driver.

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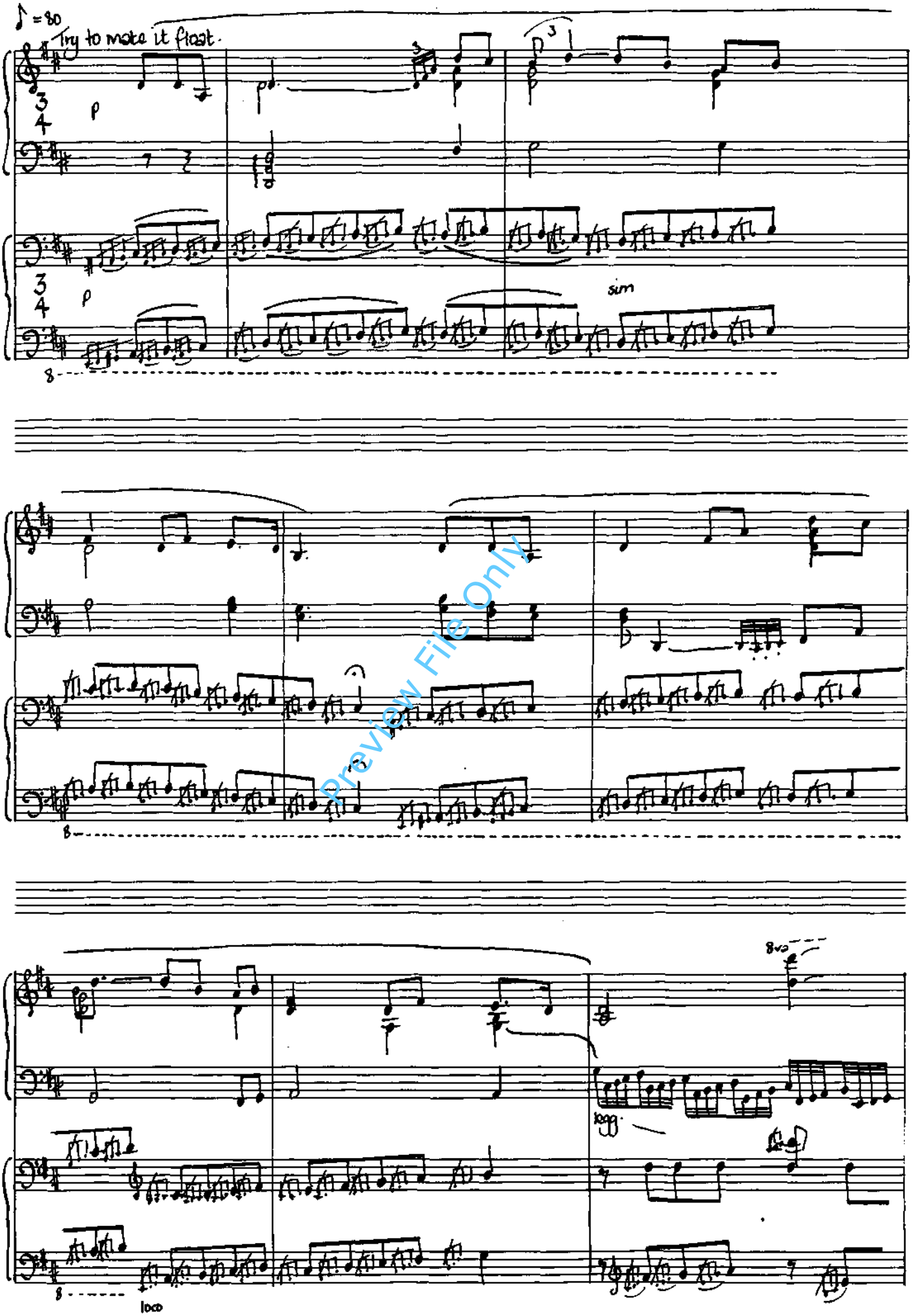


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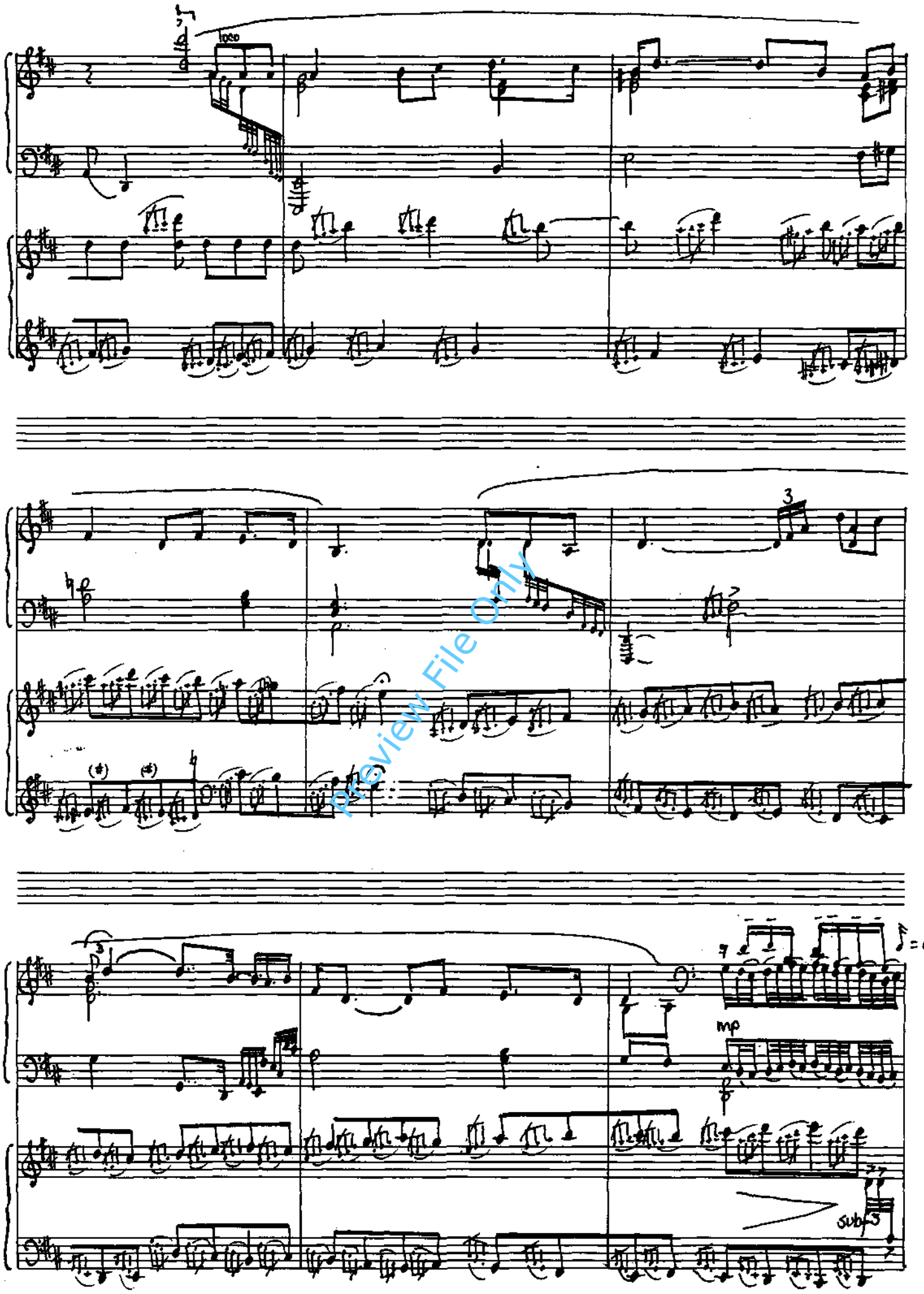


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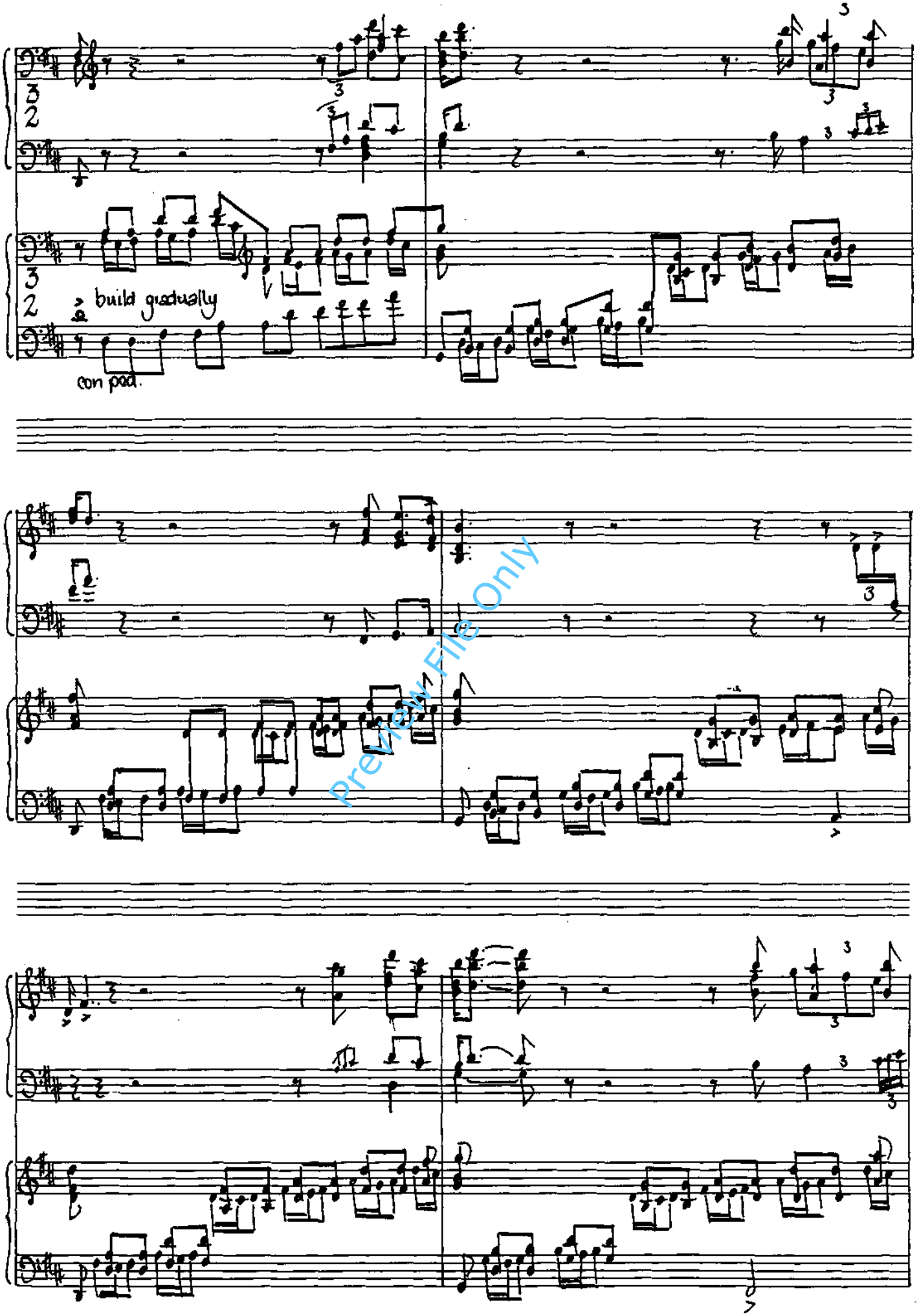


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