Programme note

Both Ebb and Floe were written in 2000 and are designed as linked works which can be played consecutively, with other works in between them, or indeed in separate, linked concerts. They draw their inspiration from features of baroque harspichord music and also from analysing the interpretive approaches used by today's early instrument performers when playing baroque music. A particular inspiration has been Gary Cooper's intensely expressive playing, and in some ways these works are an attempt to create a showcase for his expressivity in a 20th Century idiom.

Floe was commissioned by the King of Hearts Centre for People and the Arts in Norwich; one of several works commissioned for their tenth anniversary. The musical material in the piece is taken from the first 8 bars of the Sarabande from Bach's G minor suite for solo cello. The general melodic shapes of these bars are used for the rhythmically free introduction and this material is then used as a basis for the rest of the piece. But this cello piece is not the only baroque influence, two others are also in evidence. The first is Bach's C major Prelude from the '48' (the one to which Gounod set his *Ave Maria*). The work is basically a harmonic progression with each chord played in the same arpeggiated pattern. The result is a very sustained piece of harpsichord writing - each note of the arpeggio being held until the next harmonic change. This approach is often in direct contrast to 20th Century harpsichord writing, which treats the instrument as percussion, ignoring its excellent lyrical sustaining qualities. I aimed to develop this *sostenuto* quality, asking the player to hold onto as many of the notes as possible for much of the work.

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This approach to the harpsichord is also evident in the work's other influence - the freely notated harpsichord pieces of D'Angelbert (1653-1691). In these works, D'Angelbert indicates the notes to be played and the ones to be sustained, but gives no indication of the rhythm. This allows the performer to interpret the works very freely and very expressively, highlighting the fluctuating intensity of the harmonies through the use of rubato. However in Floe, this rubato is written in to the music: the musical patterns expand and contract to create a sense of changing momentum without much alteration in the tempo. This creates the musical floe of the title: the performer is allowed a limited scope for rubato, but if they use too much it will actually detract from the music's sense of flow.

By contrast in 'Ebb' I actively encourage the performer to use as much rubato as possible thus creating an ebbing quality. Rubato is often used by early music performers today to create an expressive, lively interpretation. This is especially true of harpsichordists, as the instrument is more limited in dynamics and tone colour. The work is built upon a very long ground bass constructed from a series of descending scales which hint at various keys (a link to Bach's use of keys in the 48 to show off the benefits of the new tuning system). The upper part is either a single melodic line, in which some notes are sustained to create accompanimental chords, or a series of changing keyboard figurations. Whereas Floe is quite an extrovert, lively work, Eb is more introverted and gentle.

Performance notes

Ebb

1 (Please read in conjunction with programme note). Ebb should be played with a great deal of rubato. The most important ritenutos, accelerandi, etc are given in the score, but the performer should in no way feel limited to just these. For instance, during the first bars the performer would probably push on during the first downward scale, hesitate slightly at the beginning of the new bar, push on again during the next two descending scales and ritenuto towards the bottom E in bar three. This amount of rubato is quite appropriate in the piece.

2 Tempo indications are given as guidelines - it's unlikely that there are many places in the piece which will be played with a totally steady tempo for more than a 2-3 bars (44-46 might be an example). The ± sign indicate that the tempo given is the suggested average for that passage: ± 66 means tempo should fluctuate around crotchet = 66 (so possibly between 63 and 69).

3 indicates a momentary hesitation before the note is played (in French baroque music *suspension*). Therefore in bar 56, the d right hand will be played slightly later than the f sharp in the left.

4 A two manual harpsichord is necessary for the piece . Use of manuals is indicated.

5 The use of stops is left to the discretion of the performer, but their use must not disrupt the music's flow in any way, and it may be necessary for the performer's page turner to help!

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Floe

1 Floe should be performed on a two-manual harpsichord which is uncoupled throughout.

2 Accidentals apply only to the note indicated (ie. they do not continue through the whole bar).

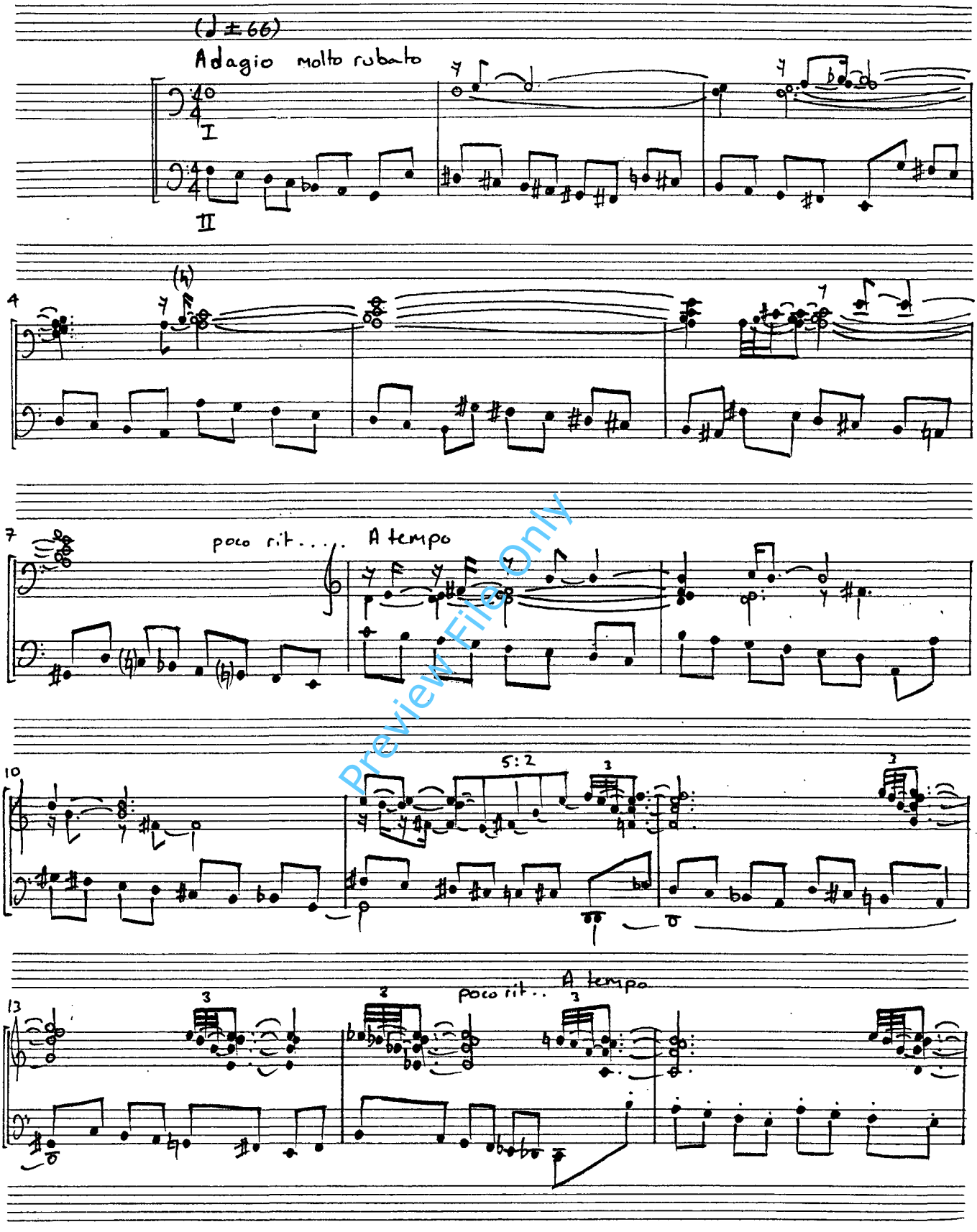
3 The first section is to be played freely, but a general indication of duration is given by the distance between consecutive notes (ie. time-space notation). This is only a guideline and should not be interpreted too fastidiously. Please be musical.

4 Unlike Ebb, Floe should be played at a basically steady tempo (the use of rubato in this case will detract from the music's flow). Deviations from this are marked.

Ebb

for solo Harpsichord

John Webb
(1969-)



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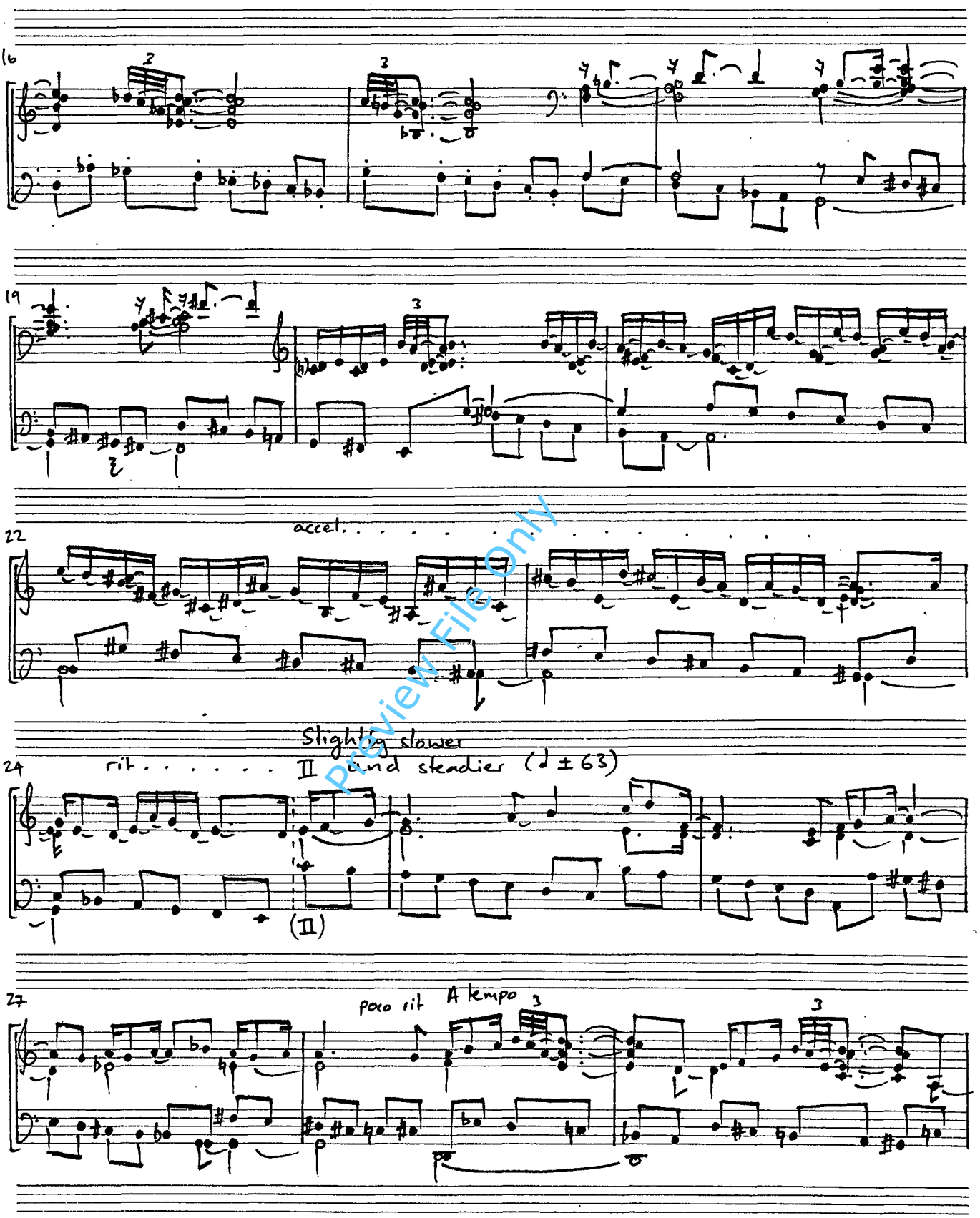

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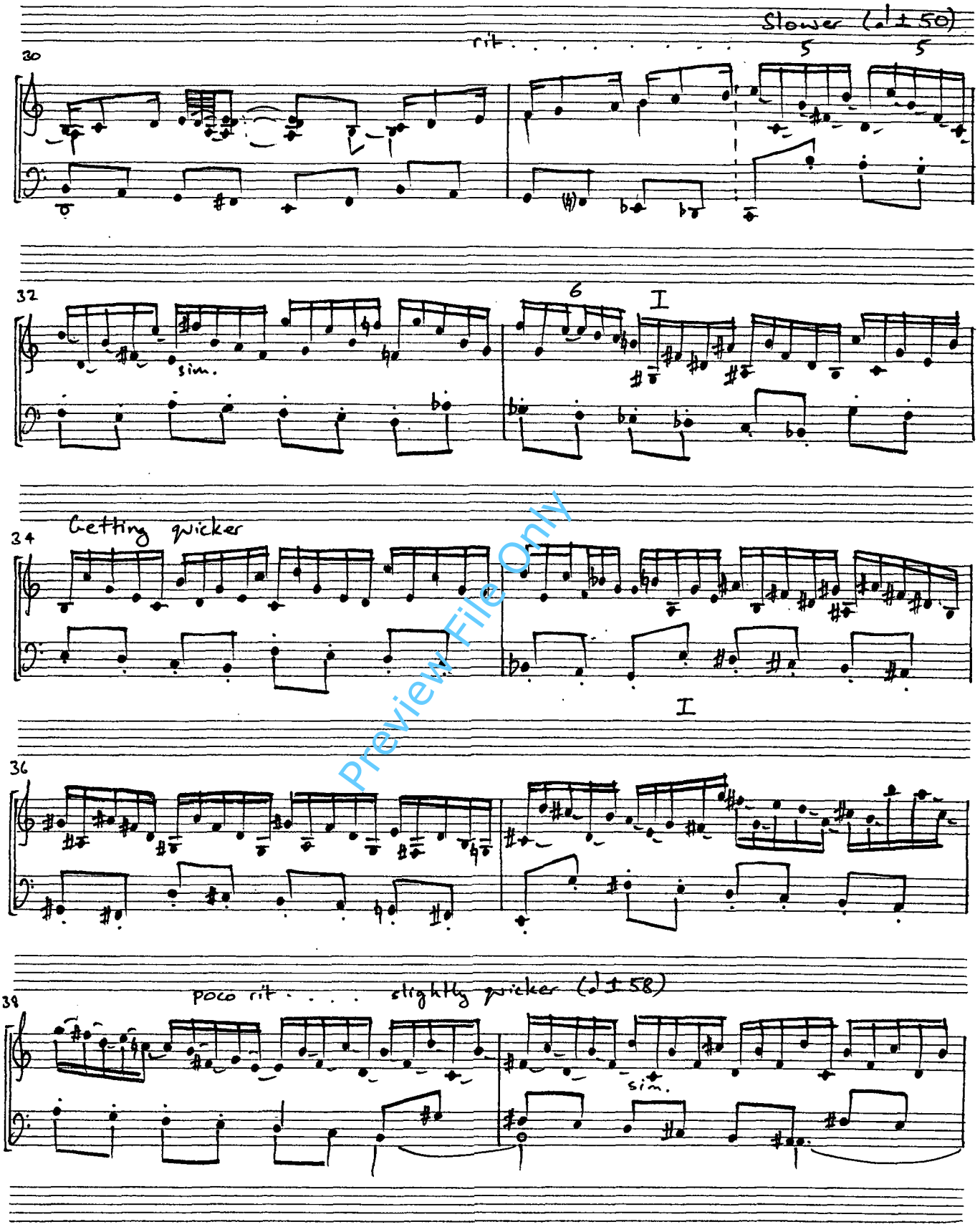

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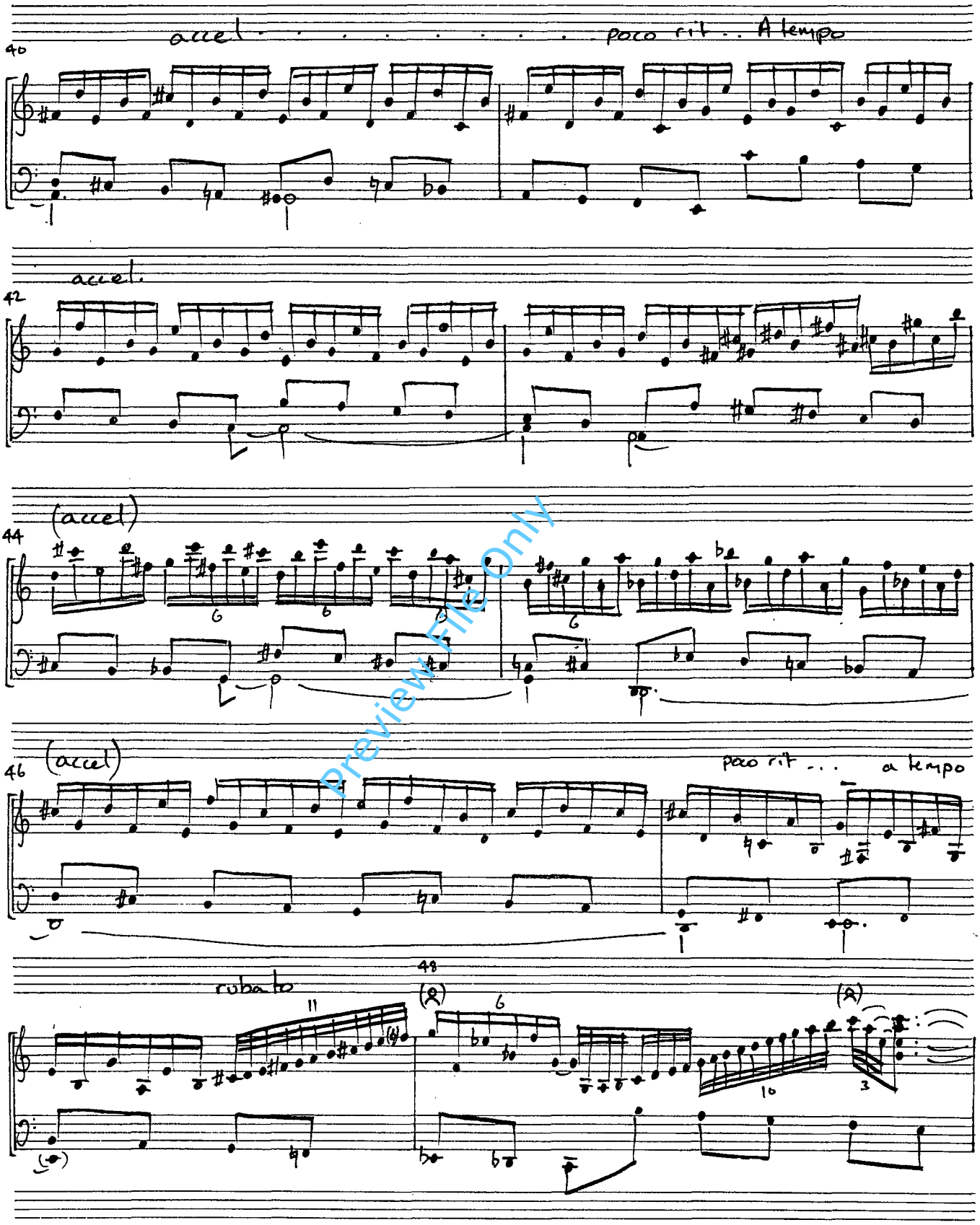

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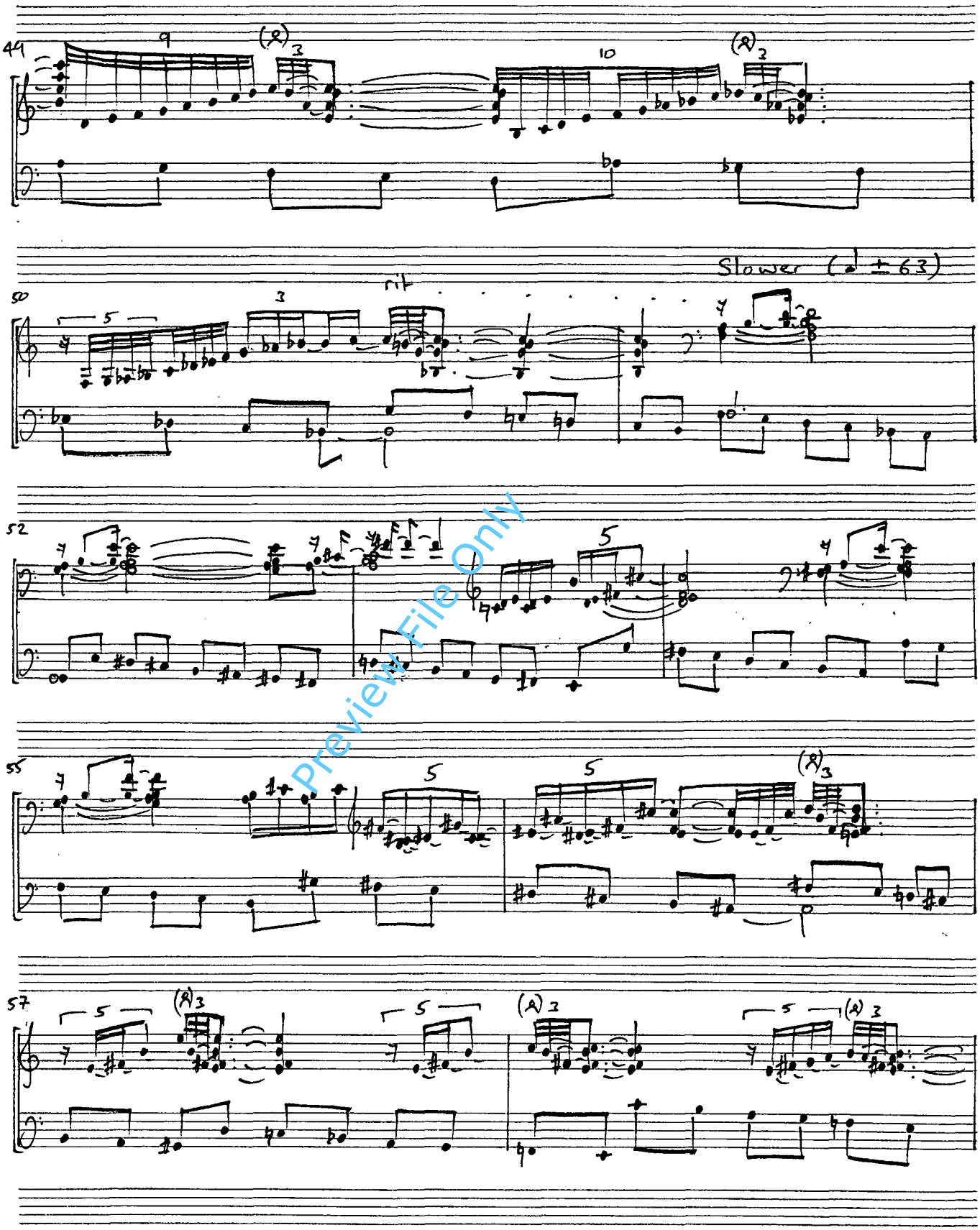

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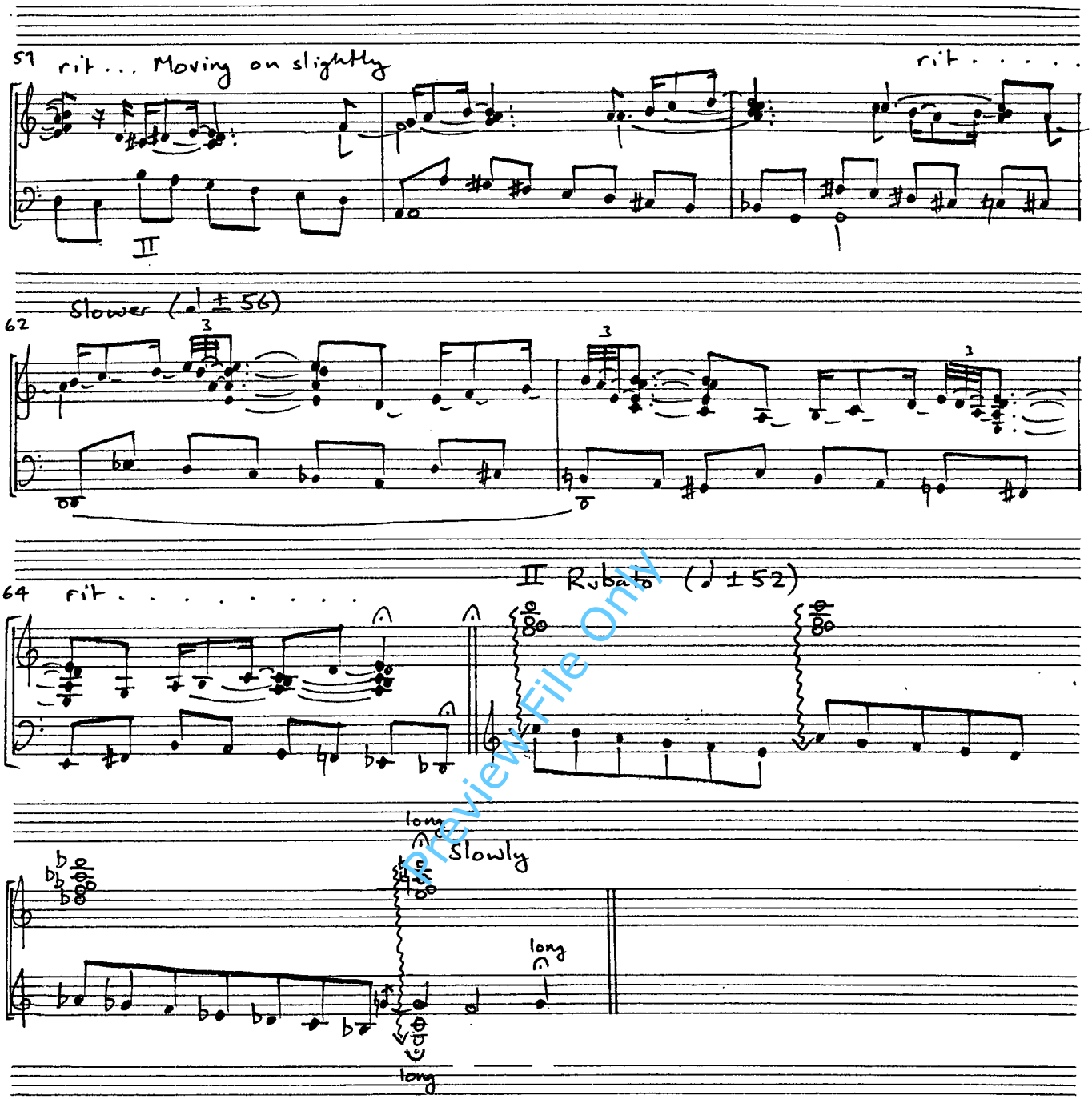

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Floe was commissioned by The King of Hearts Arts Centre, Norwich, for Gary Cooper. Premiered 25 March 2000, and performed July 8 2000.

The work is based on the first 8 bars of J S Bach's Sarabande from the D minor suite for unaccompanied Cello.

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FLOE

John Webb
(1969–)

II Freely; Without metre

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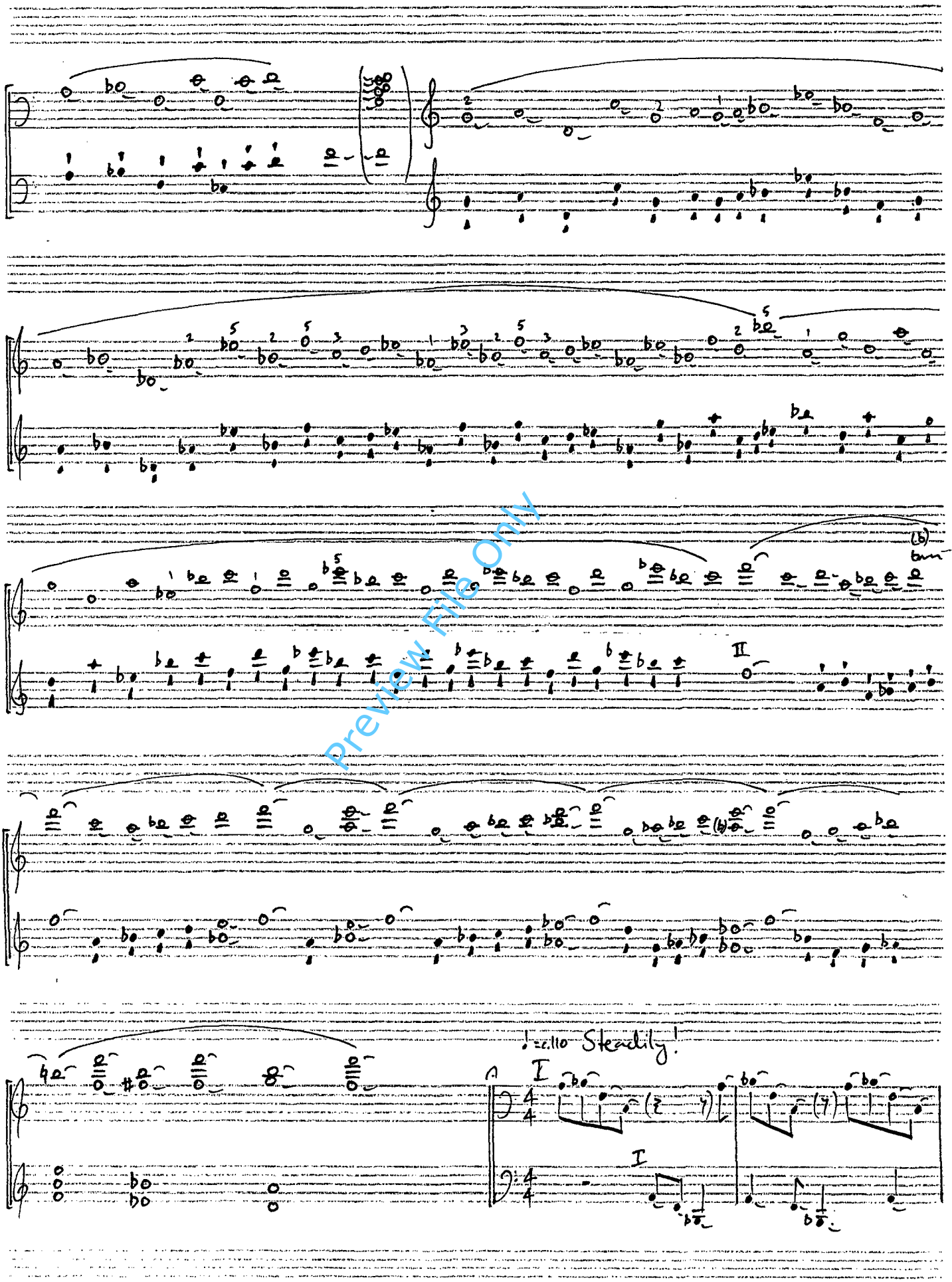

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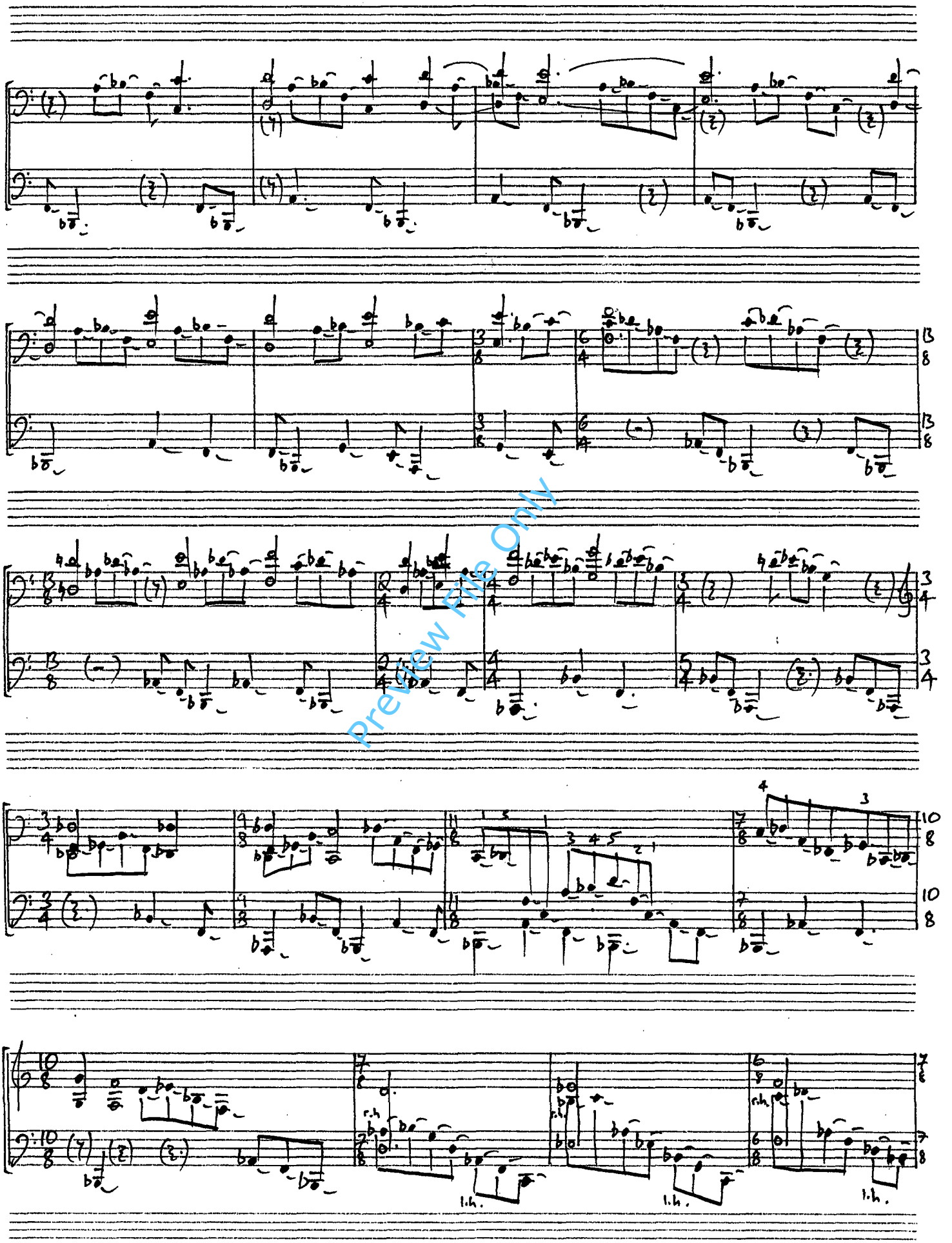
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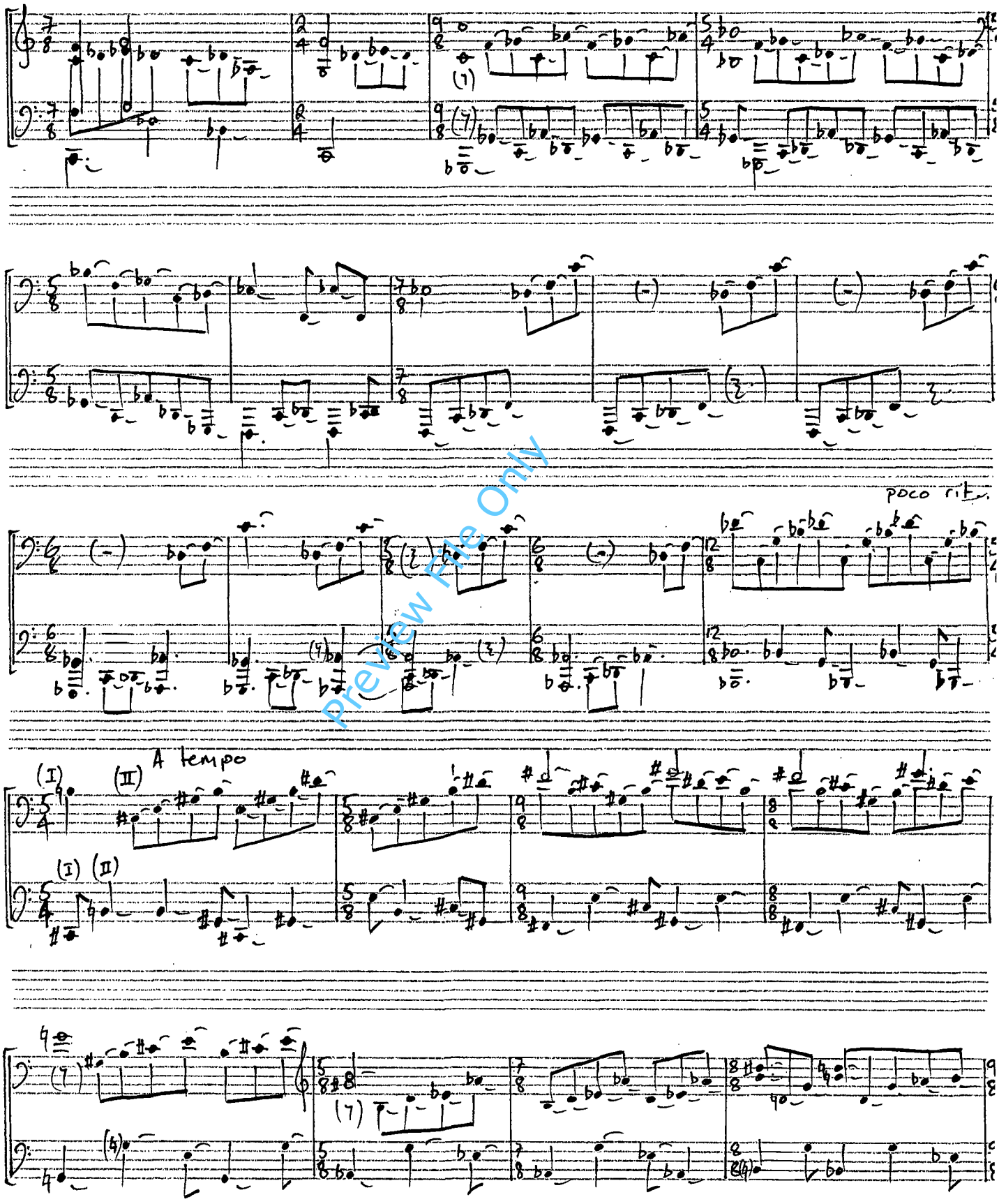

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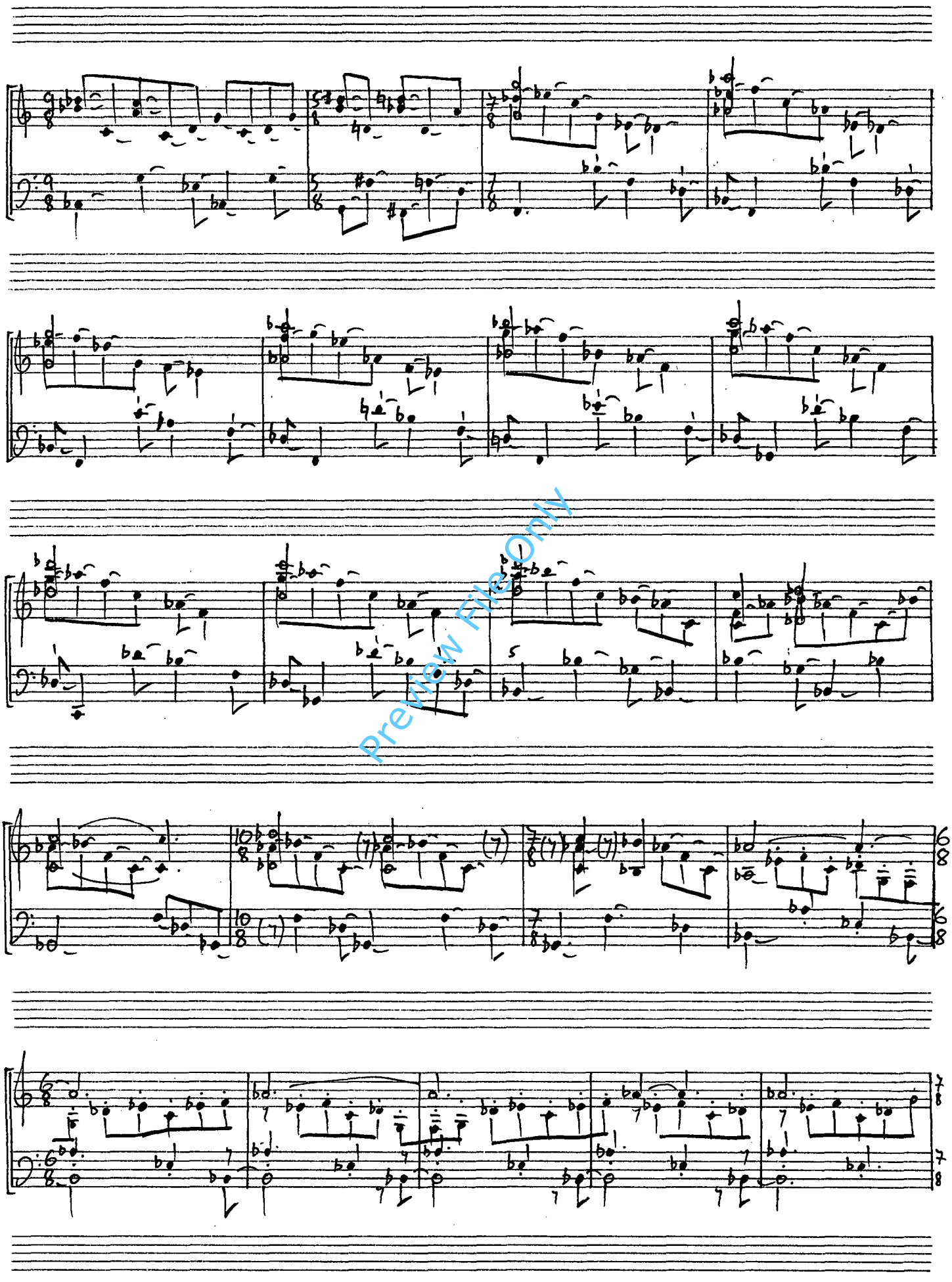

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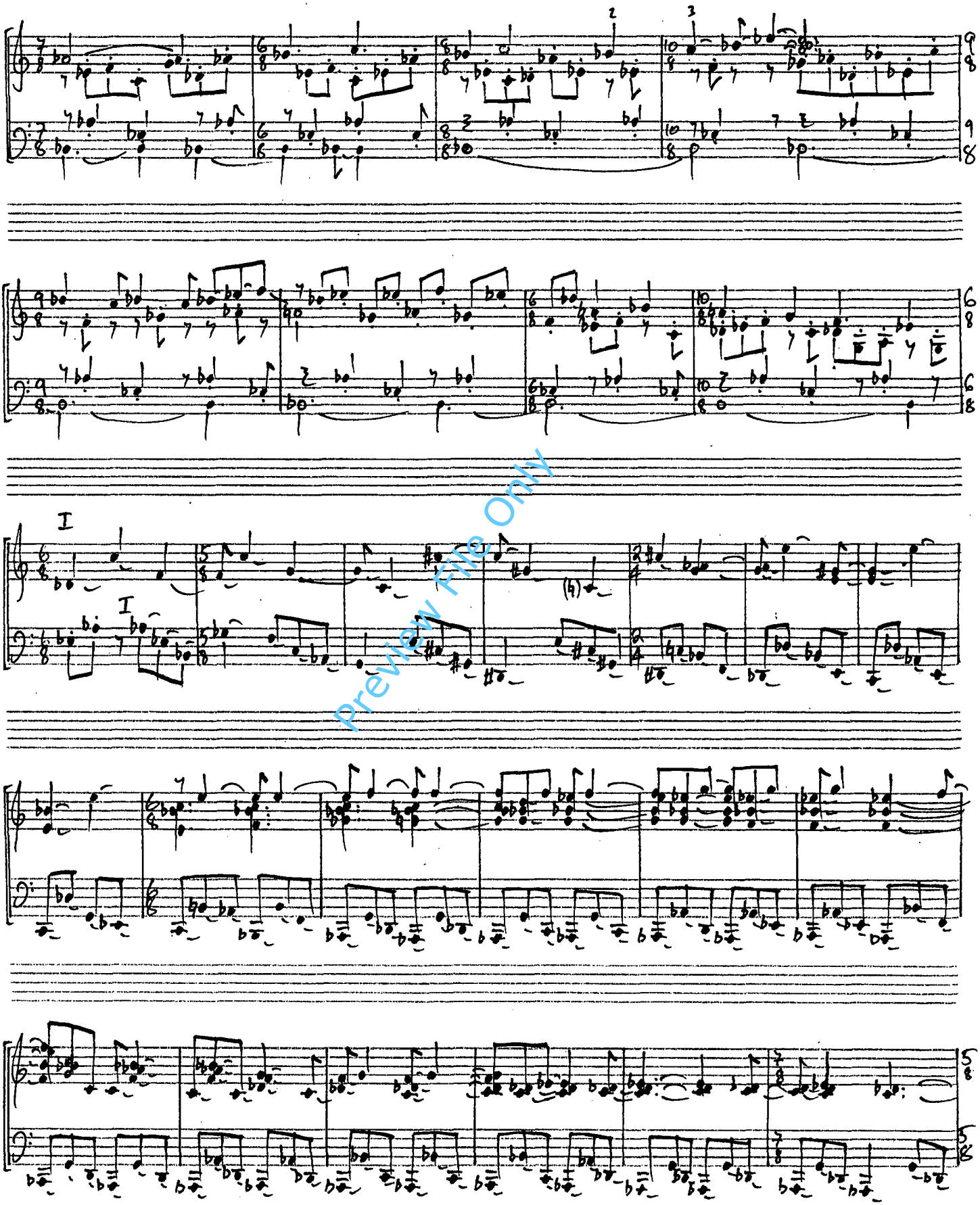

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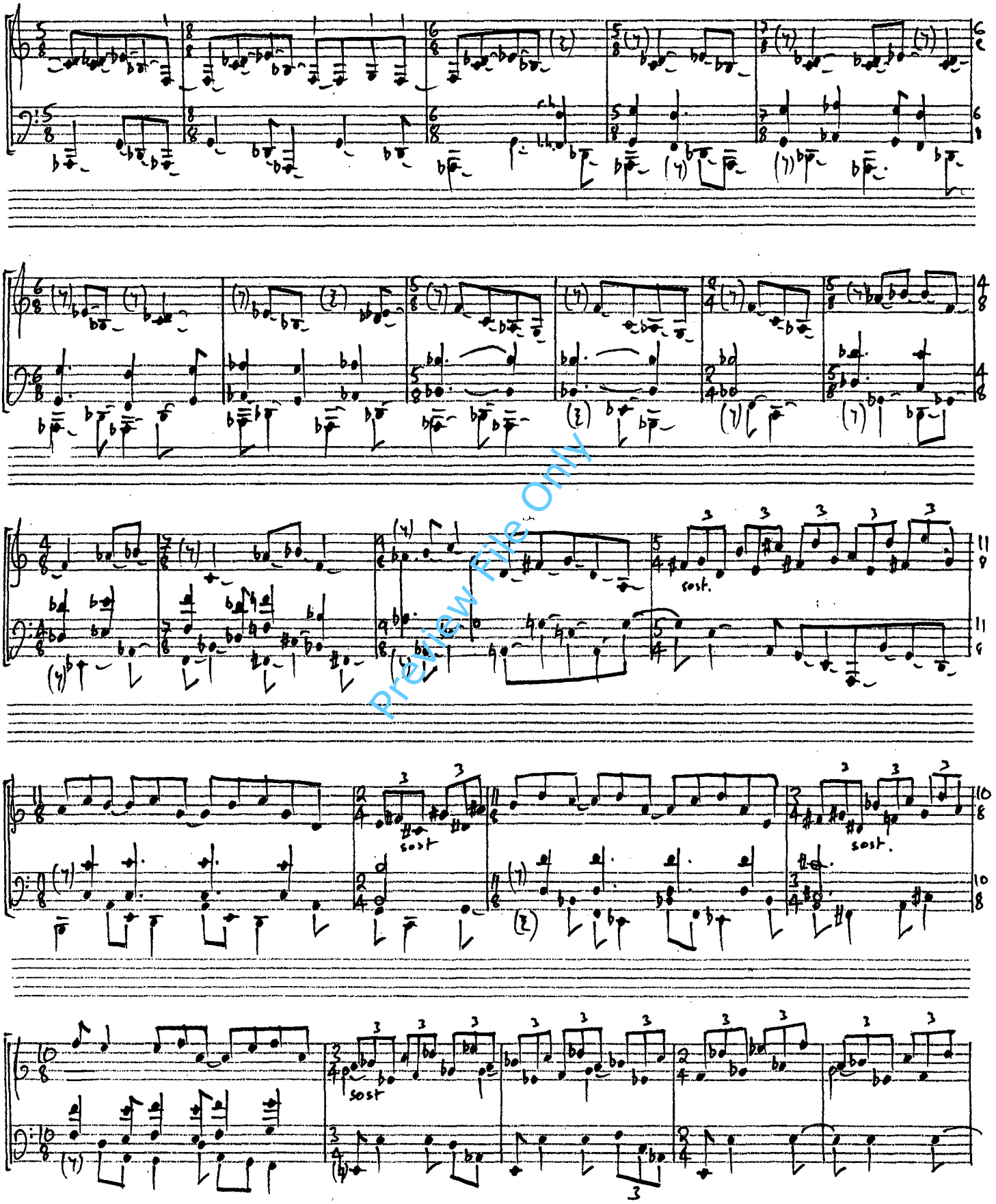

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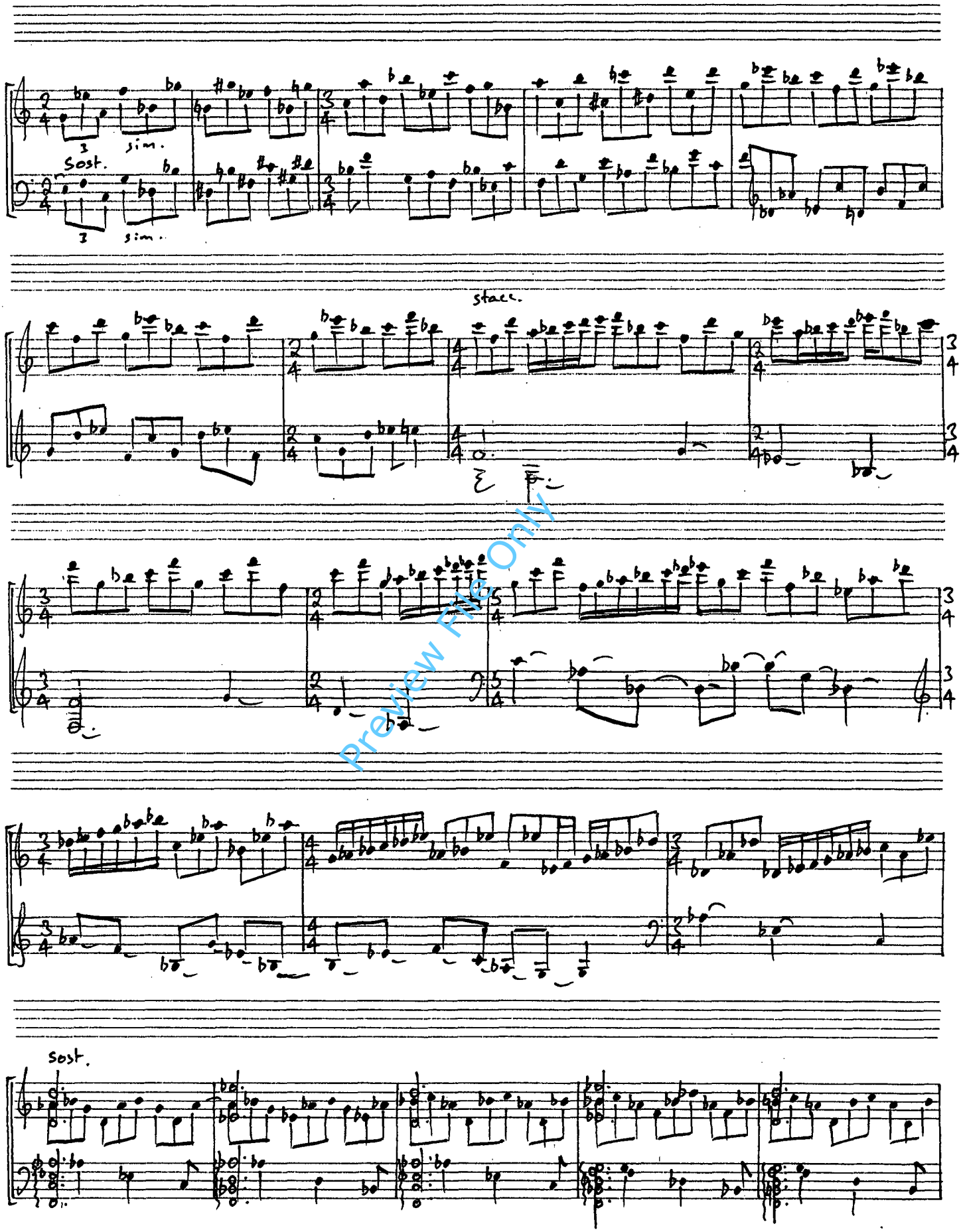

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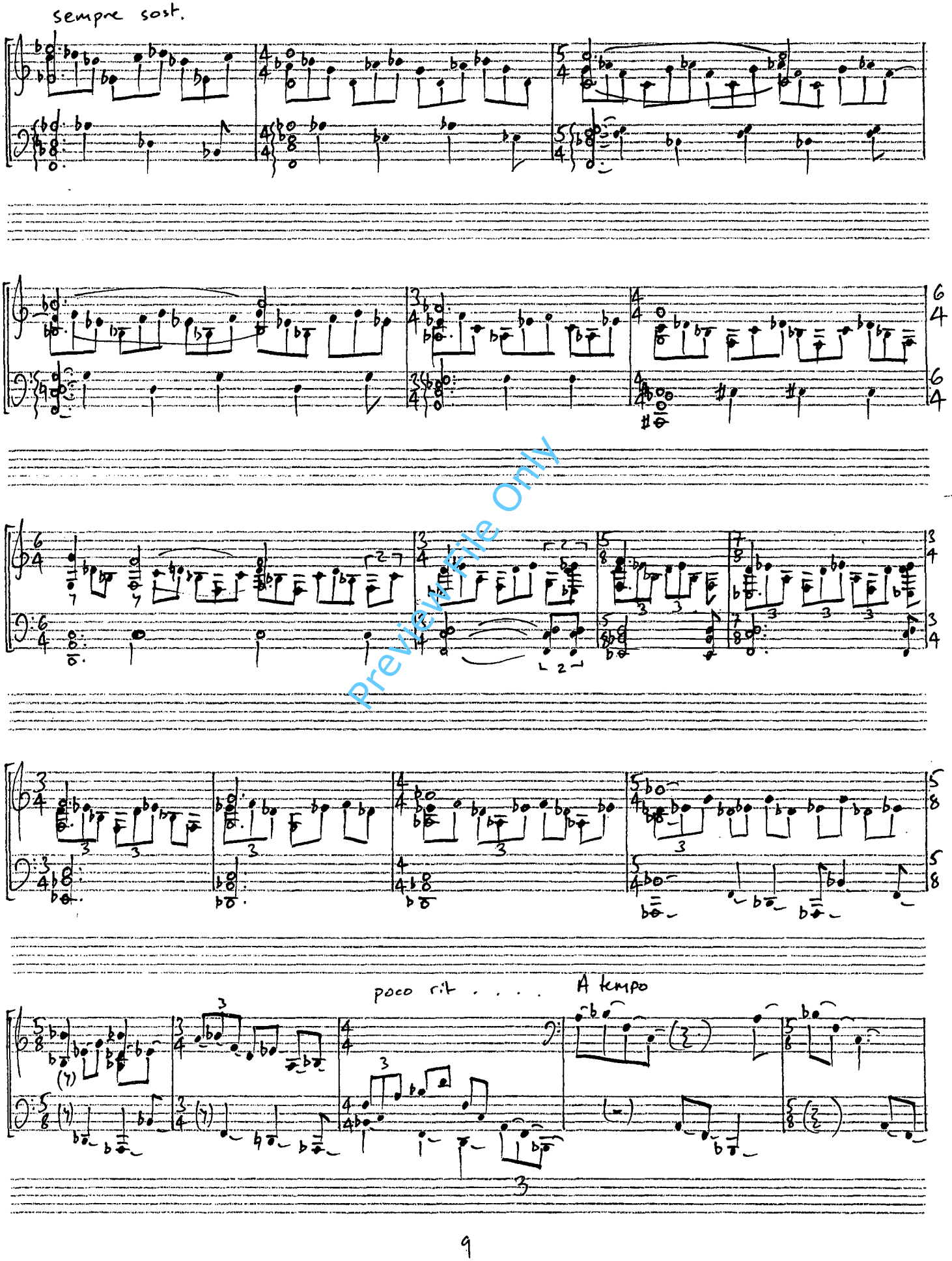

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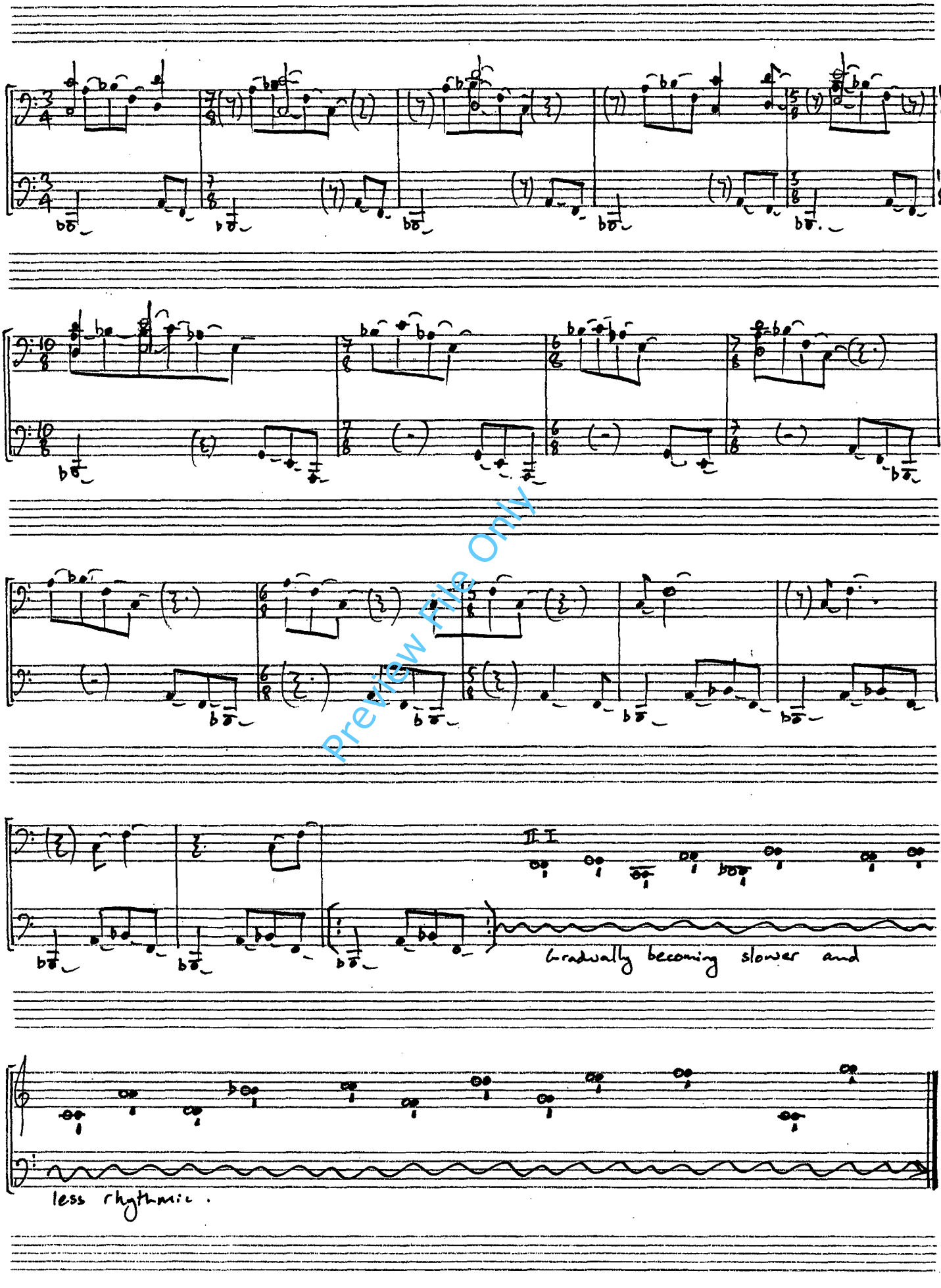

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