Six Chorales with Descant

Johann Sebastian Bach

Arranged by Peter Billam

for melody instrument and keyboard

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Bach Chorales, for piano and melody instrument

It is the chorales, not his trademark fugues, that lie at the heart of Bach's technique. Wolff refers to Bach's *collection of 370 four-part chorales that charted the course for tonal harmony.* Donald Francis Tovey observes: *Counterpoint, the art defined by Sir Frederick Gore Ouseley as that of 'combining melodies'. . . This definition is not quite complete. Classical couterpoint is the conveying of a mass of harmony by means of a combination of melodies. Thus the three melodies combined by Wagner in the Meistersinger prelude do not make classical couterpoint, for they require a mass of accompanying harmony to explain them.*

Forkel recounts, in Ernest Newman's translation: *Bach began teaching composition not with dry counterpoint that led nowhere, as was the way with other music teachers of his time ; . . . He went immediately to pure four-part thorough-bass, laying much stress on the setting-out of the voices, since in this way the conception of the pure progression of the harmony was made most intelligible. From there he went to the chorale. In these exercises he himself set the original bass, and made his pupils add only the alto and the tenor. Gradually he let them make the bass also. Everywhere he insisted not only on the utmost purity of the harmony in itself, but also on naturalness of progression and a melodic flow of all the separate voices.*

Bach, in other words, was exploring the frontier between voice-leading and harmony; he worked out how voice-leading should be done so as to give the impression of harmony.

The chorales chosen here all use a melody instrument as a descant above the SATB voices; they come from his cantatas BWV's 12 31 85 136 161 and 172. They are offered here for players of flute, oboe, and violin. The vocal parts have been arranged for keyboard. For ease of sight-reading, and with some regret, crossed voices in the keyboard part have been uncrossed.

- *J. S. Bach, 388 Four-Part Chorales* edited by János Dobra, Editio Musica Budapest
- *Johann Sebastian Bach*, Albert Schweizer, Breitkopf and Härtel
- *Johann Sebastian Bach*, Albert Schweizer, translated by Ernest Newmann, Dover
- *The Forms of Music*, Donald Francis Tovey, Oxford University Press
- *Johann Sebastian Bach*, Christoph Wolff, Oxford University Press

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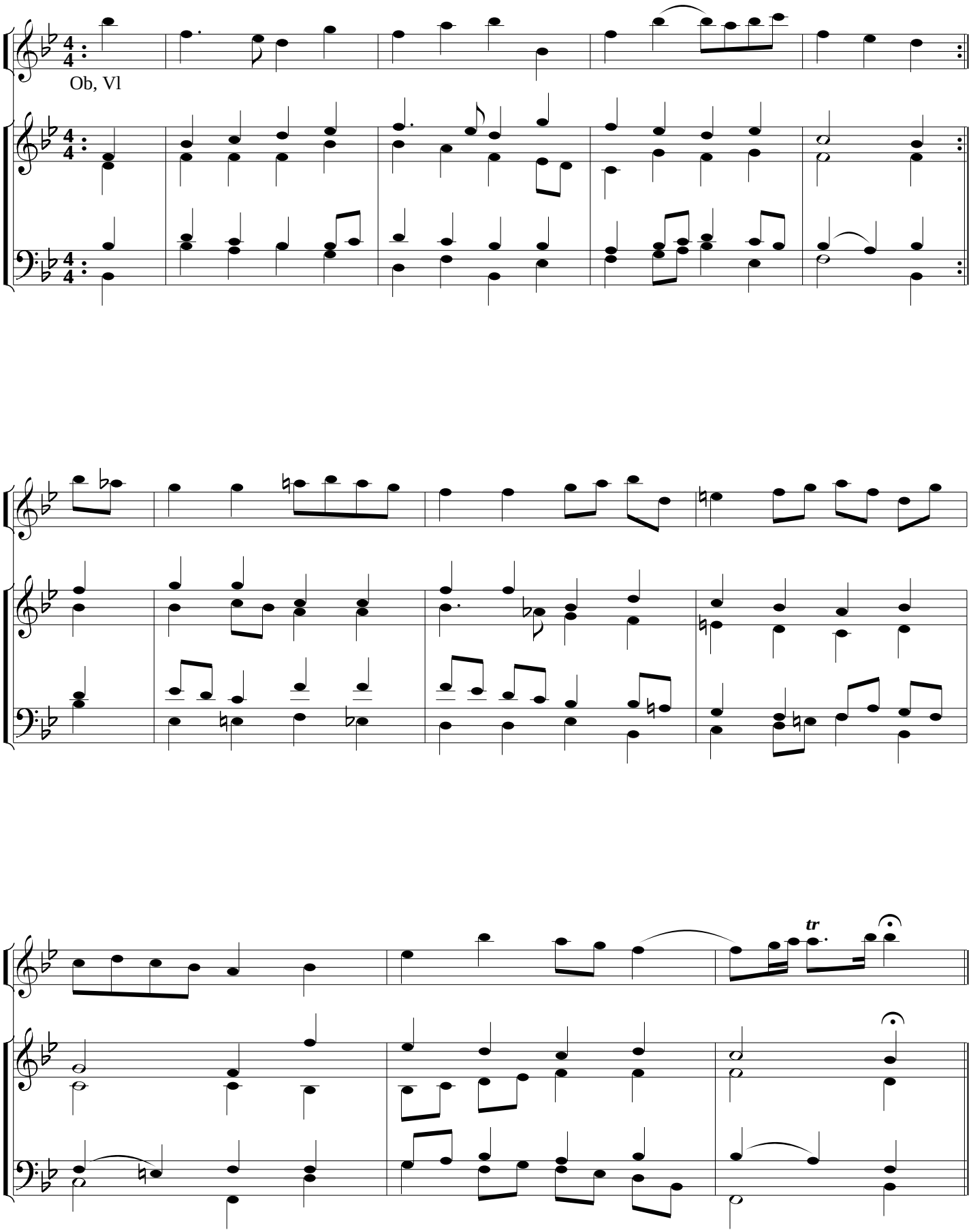
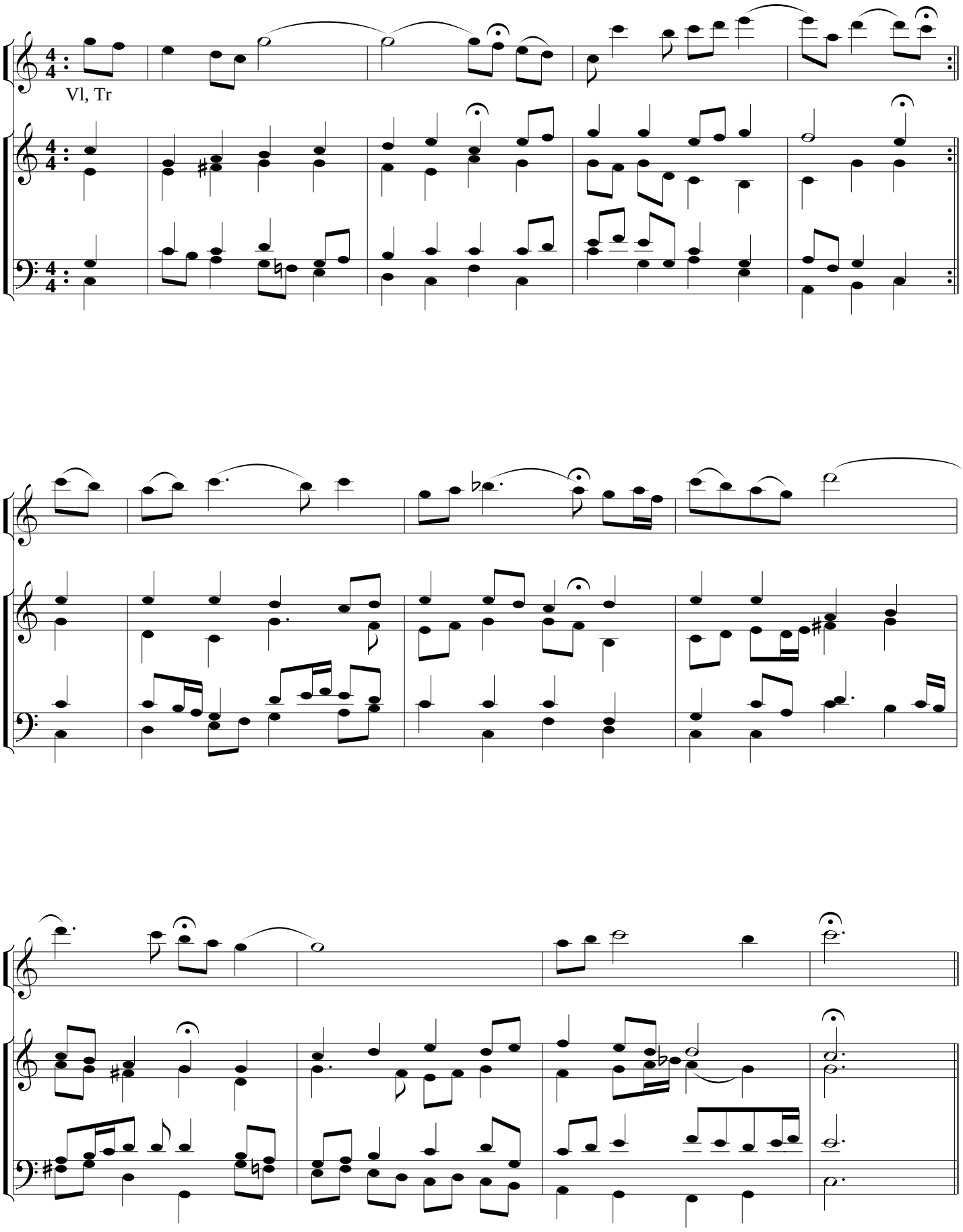
Chorales

BWV 12

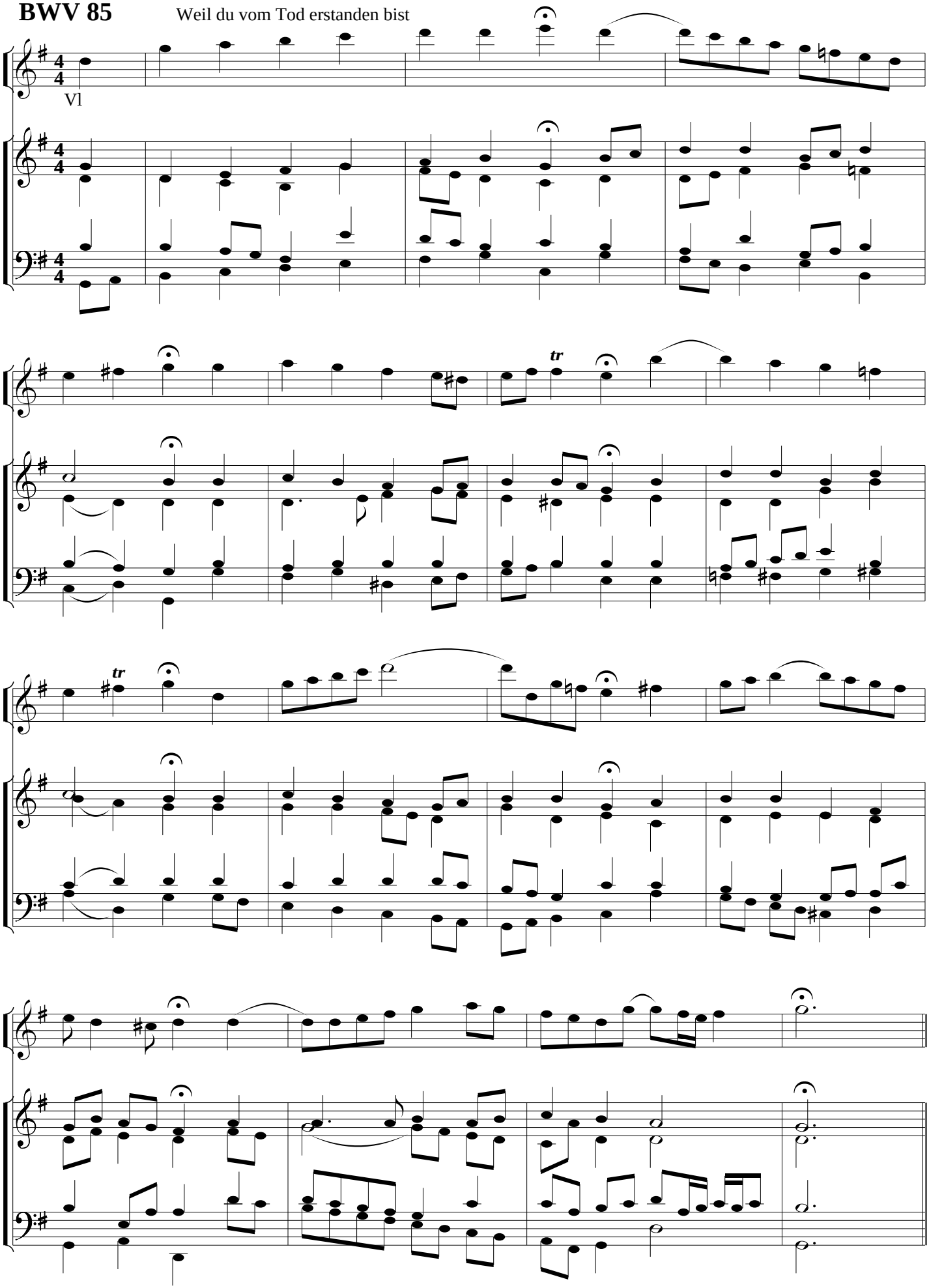
Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan



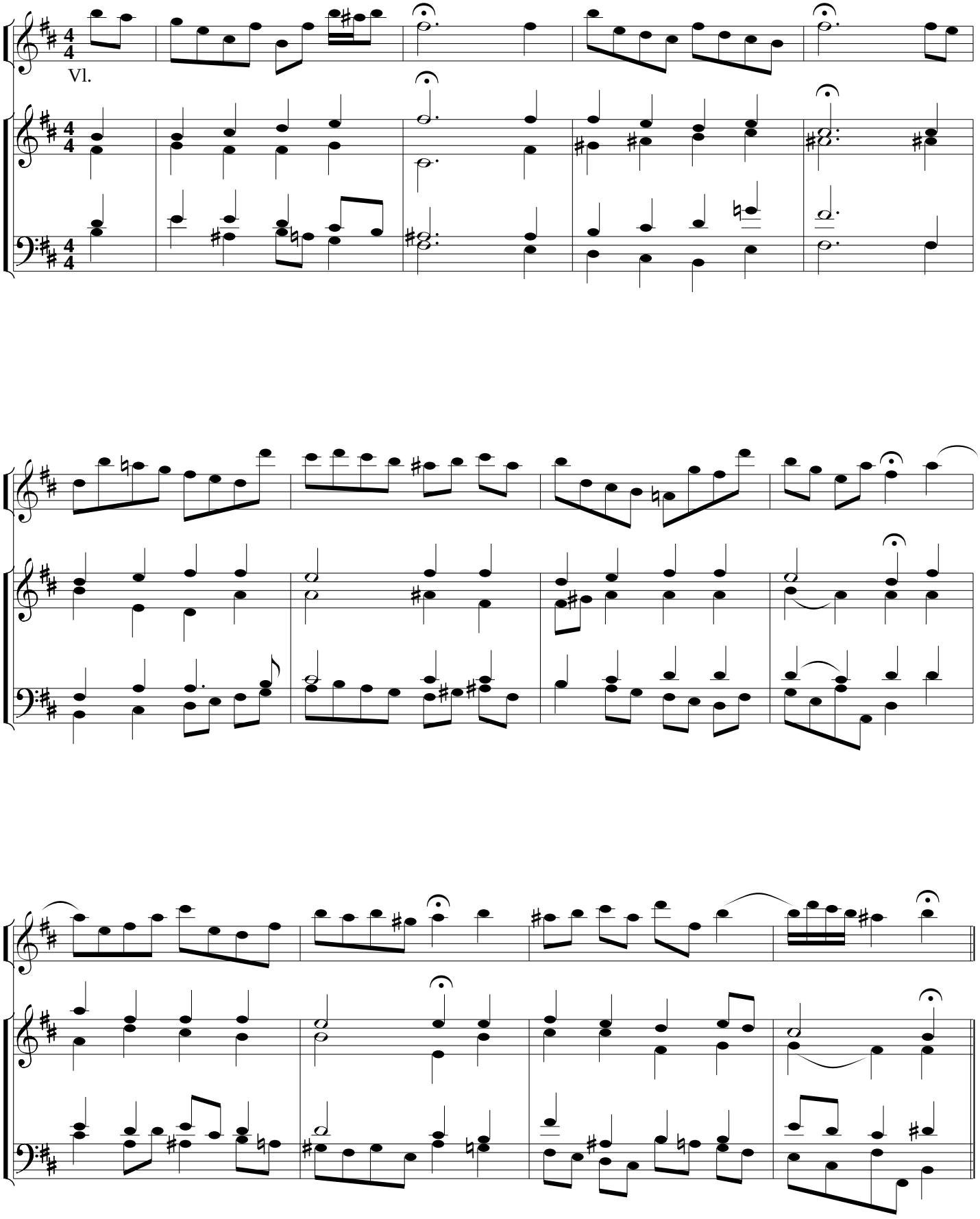
BWV 31 Wenn mein Stündlein vorhanden ist



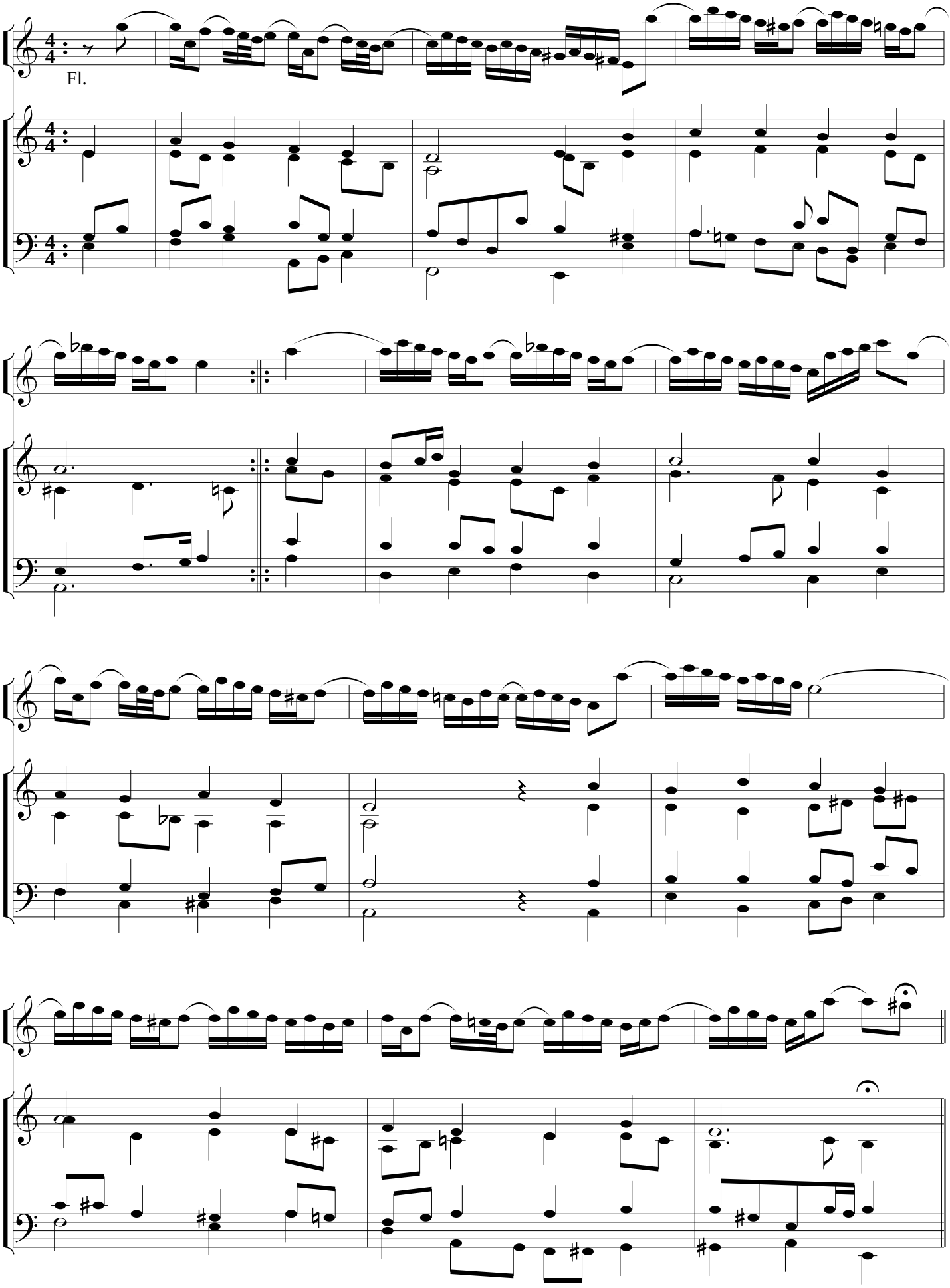
BWV 85 Weil du vom Tod erstanden bist



BWV 136 Auf meinem lieben Gott

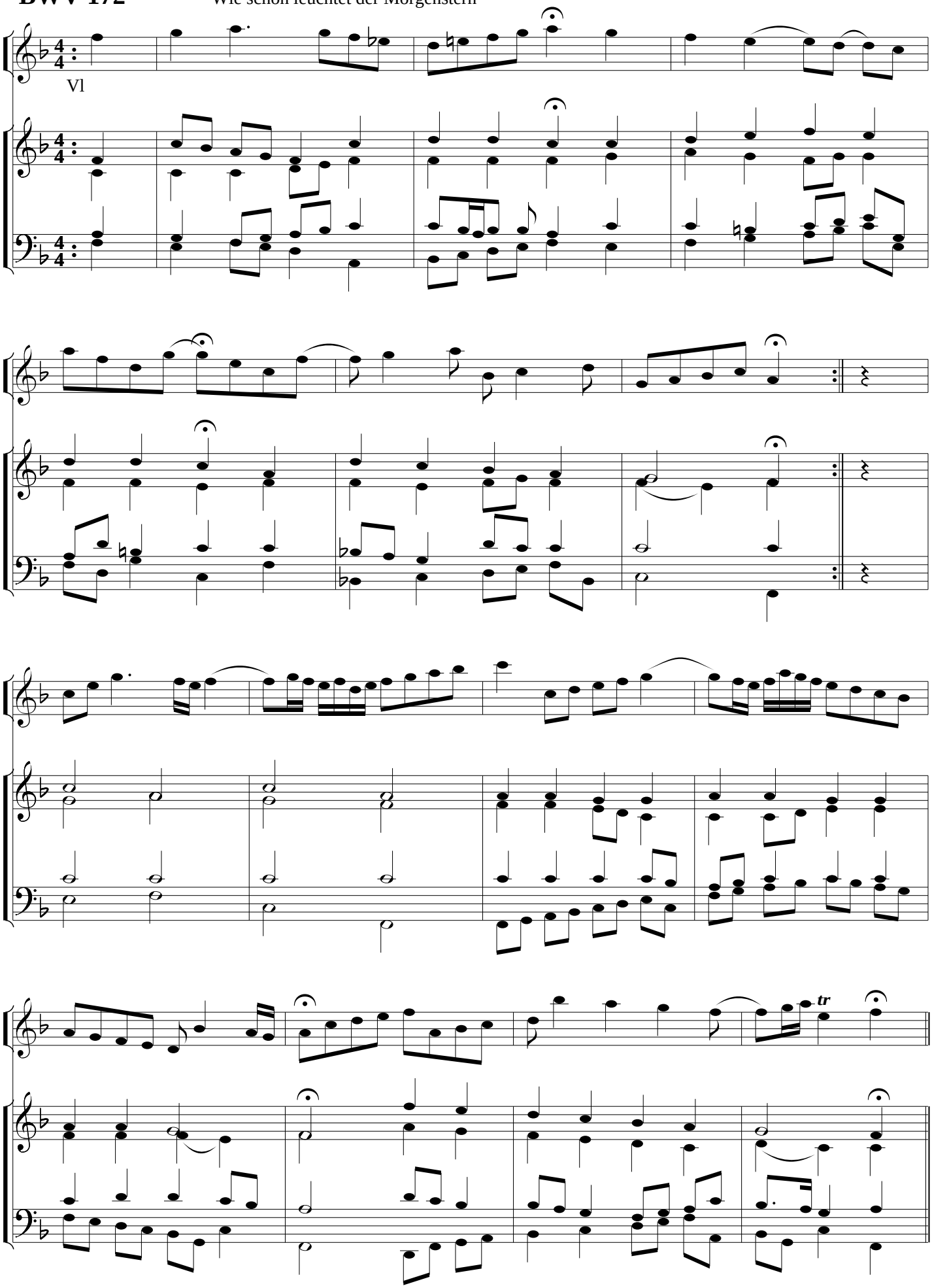


BWV 161 Herzlich tut mich verlangen



BWV 172

Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern



Peter Billam was born in London in 1948, studied piano, and lived in Switzerland from 1973 to 1983, where he studied composition, classical guitar, flute and voice, worked as Musical Director of the *Théâtre Populaire Romand*, and as recording engineer, record producer and computer programmer. He moved to Tasmania in 1983, lectured in composition at the Conservatorium, conducted recorder ensembles and choirs, studied recorder, voice and harpsichord. He founded **www.pjb.com.au**, becoming the first composer to sell scores on-line, with on-line delivery, taking scores from Composer to Performer in one immediate step. *Www.pjb.com.au* offers a new approach to music publishing. These pieces are **written to be read, made to be played !**

Compositions at *www.pjb.com.au* include: *Five Short Pieces*, guitar, 1979; *Divisions on an Italian Ground*, flute and guitar, 1980; *De Profundis* and *Nacht*, on poems by Lama Anagarika Govinda, voice and piano, 1980; *Fünf Bagatellen*, piano, 1980; *Five Rounds*, choir, 1986; *Go Forth and Multiply*, choir, 1986; *Three Violin Duets*, 1987; *Fable*, for piano, 1987; *To Erich Jantsch*, SAATTB recorders, 1988; *A Suite of Curves*, trombone (or horn) and piano, 1990; *Two Recorder Duets*, alto recorders, or other melody instruments, 1991; *Trombone Quintet*, trombone, flute, piano, bass, and percussion, 1994; *Three Songs*, on poems by Jack Kerouac, Vikram Seth and Dylan Thomas, voice and piano (only the first and third of these are available), 1994; *Piano Study*, piano, 1994; *Four Dances*, various ensembles including recorder quartet, string quartet, 1995; *The Poet in the Clouds*, on a poem by S. T. Coleridge, SATB choir, 1995; *Tres Casidas del Diván del Tamarit*, on poems by Federico García Lorca, voice and piano, 1997; *Three Suites*, for the solo line, piano, and piano and a solo line, 2000; *Die Zeiten*, on poems by Kästner, Bachman and Jünger, choir (only the second and third of these are available), 2000; *Three Duets* for flutes, 2001; *For Four Hands* for piano four hands, 2002; *Three Preludes* for piano, 2003; *Second Solo Suite* for flute, violin, viola or cello, 2003; *Guitar Duet* for two guitars, 2006; *We Who Mourn* for choir, 2007; *Trio With Guitar* for guitar and two clarinets or two recorders or two violas, 2008; *Canons* for two- and four-hand piano, 2009; *Flute Trio*, 2012; *Keyboard Studies*, 2013.

Arrangements include: By J. S. Bach: *Trio BWV 655*, piano and flute; *Vor deinen Thron BWV 668*, piano; *Fugue in F minor BWV 689*, SATB recorders; *Four Duets BWV 802-5*, keyboard; *Flute Sonata BWV 1031* transposed into G major for alto recorder and keyboard; *Flute Sonata BWV 1032* completed by Peter Billam for flute and keyboard, also in C major for alto recorder, and in G major for descant; *Ricercare a 3, from the Musikalisches Opfer* for keyboard; *Ricercare a 6*, for sSATBG recorders, or strings, or two keyboards; *Fuga Canonica in Epidiapente* for keyboard and melody instrument; from the *Art of Fugue*: *Contrapuncti 1*, *4* and *9* for keyboard, and *Contrapunctus 14* as completed by D. F. Tovey, for keyboard, or for SATB recorders, or for strings; *Passacaglia and Fugue in c* for piano four hands; *Chorales with Descant* for melody instrument and piano; *Cello Suites I*, *II* and *III* for flute or alto recorder, *Forty Chorales* for piano, *Der Geist hilft* for SATB-SATB recorders. By Johannes Brahms: *Fugue in Ab minor for organ*, for SATB recorders and gamba, in A minor; *Choralvorspiele for organ* plus settings by Isaac, Bach, Praetorius, recorders. *John Carr, Divisions on an Italian Ground*, flute or recorder and guitar. By G. F. Händel: *Concerto Grosso in A minor* op 6 no 4, harpsichord and recorders; *Recorder Sonata in Bb* no 5, in G for tenor recorder and keyboard. *Claudio Monteverdi, Ecco Mormorar l'Onde*, SSATB recorders. By Arnold Schoenberg: *Verklärte Nacht* for piano. By Franz Schubert: *Four Songs*, voice and guitar; *Dances*, recorders and guitar, *Dances*, piano 4 hands. *Scriabin, Two Preludes op.67; Five Preludes op.74*, piano. *Telemann, Twelve Flute Fantasias*, recorder. *John Wilbye, Draw on sweet Night*, SSATTB recorders, and for flute choir. *Twelve Italian Songs*, voice and guitar; *Fourteen Folk Dance Tunes*, recorder and guitar; *Bushband Dances*, violin, piano accordeon and banjo; *Easy Classical Pieces*, Bb trumpet and piano.

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