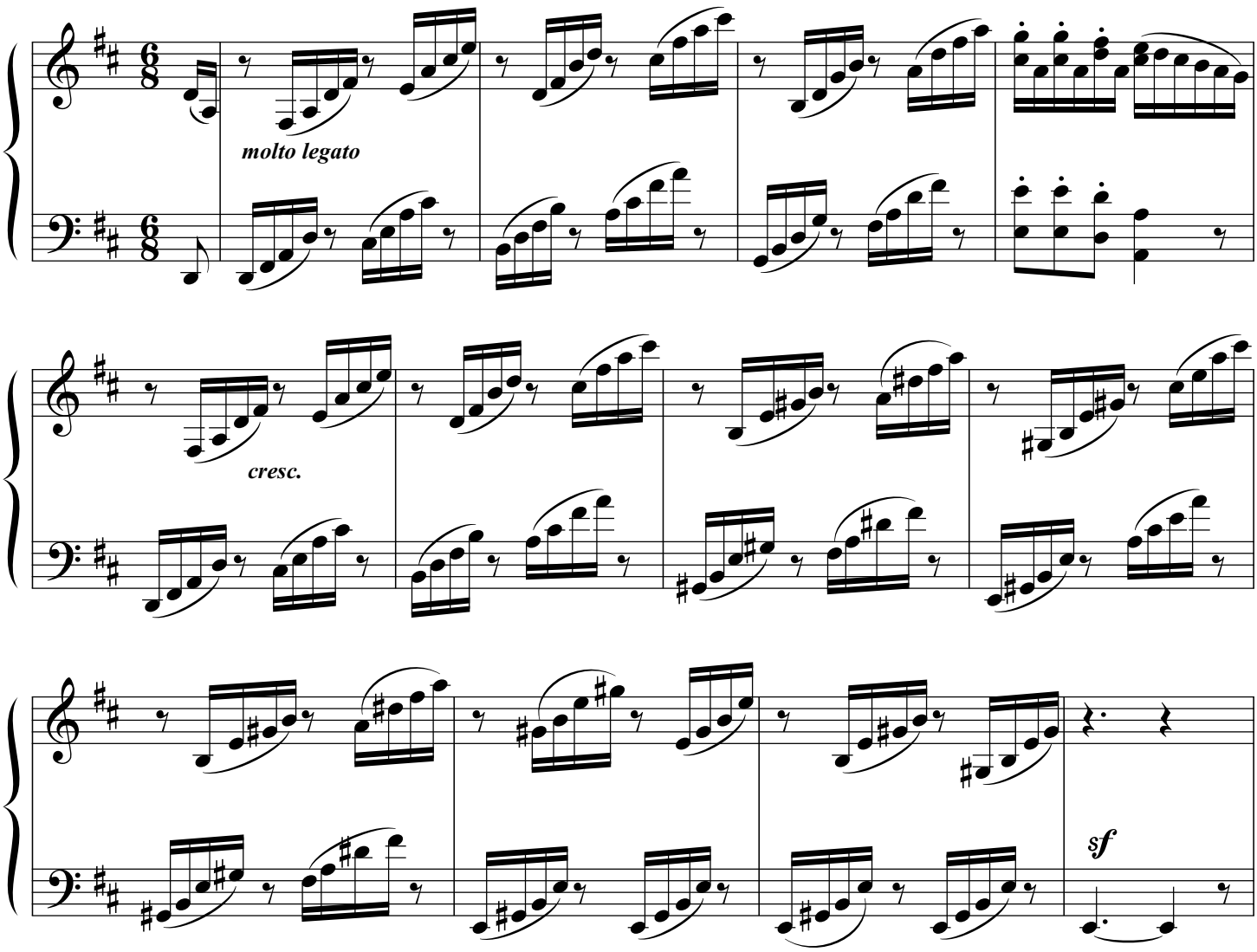
# Musical Plagiarism, Or Is It My Imagination?

by Gail Smith

Have you ever played a composition and then felt that something about it sounded familiar? This happened to me recently as I was playing the Rondo of Beethoven's Grande Sonata, op. 28. There was a series of broken chords that sounded vaguely familiar...

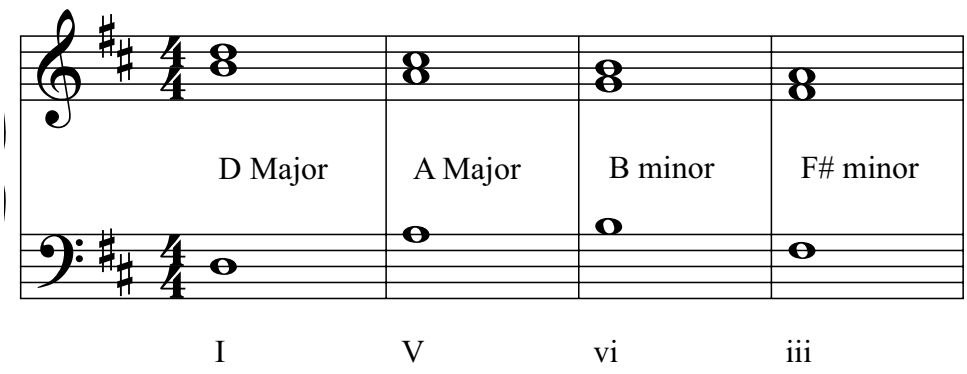



I played the section over several times. Then, when I played the broken notes as a chord...bingo! There was Pachelbel's Canon. I couldn't believe my ears. I was shocked. Was this deliberate plagiarism or had Beethoven subconsciously filed this famous progression away in his brain?

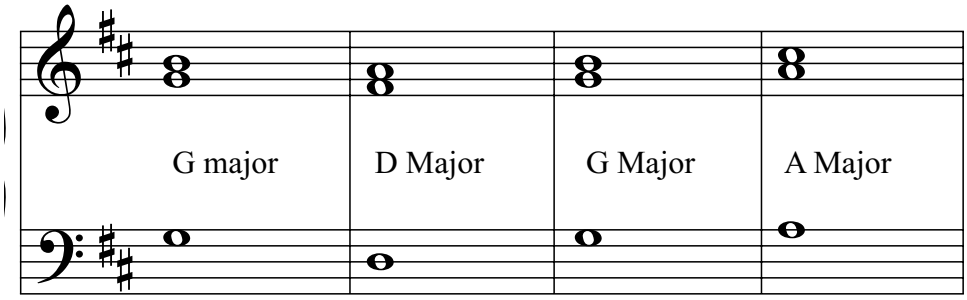
It has been said that when genius steals, he commits a sly little disguise, for he subsequently establishes his right of possession by the magnificent use he makes of his "annexation"; but when Mr. Nobody steals, he is simply a fool. The one single pearl among his trash will arouse suspicion at once; and before he knows it the entire army of musical criticism will be upon him.

Whether Beethoven knew he was using the Pachelbel Canon or just happened to use the same chord progression, we'll never know for sure. I like the way Beethoven used it, however. I would have liked for him to have composed 30 variations on the Pachelbel Canon.

The famous chord progression is I - V- vi - iii -IV - I - IV - V:




I V vi iii




IV I IV V

**Johann Pachelbel**
(September 1, 1653 - March 3, 1706) This magnificent German organist and composer held many important positions during his lifetime. He was church organist in Eisenach and Stuttgart, and also held that position at St. Stephen's in Vienna. Pachelbel was one of J. S. Bach's early models in composition and was the teacher of Bach's older brother, Johann Christoph Bach.

In the hymn arrangement, "Peace Perfect Peace" found in the book *The Complete Church Pianist*, I used the Pachelbel chord progression to harmonize the hymn instead of the natural chord progression of the hymn. The hymn is on page 31 of that book.

This chord progression can take on a life of its own depending on the melody given it and the way it is played or arranged. Why not try to make up several of your own variations on it? Please send us your variations and the most interesting ones will be shared some time in the future (see details below*).

There is a Spanish proverb that says: "One man makes charcoal from his wood and another man carves a Saint out of it." See what you can make out of Pachelbel's Canon. See my arrangement of Pachelbel's Canon below (from Celebrate the Piano Book 2) for inspiration. I transposed the progression to the key of C.

## * How to Submit Your Variations:

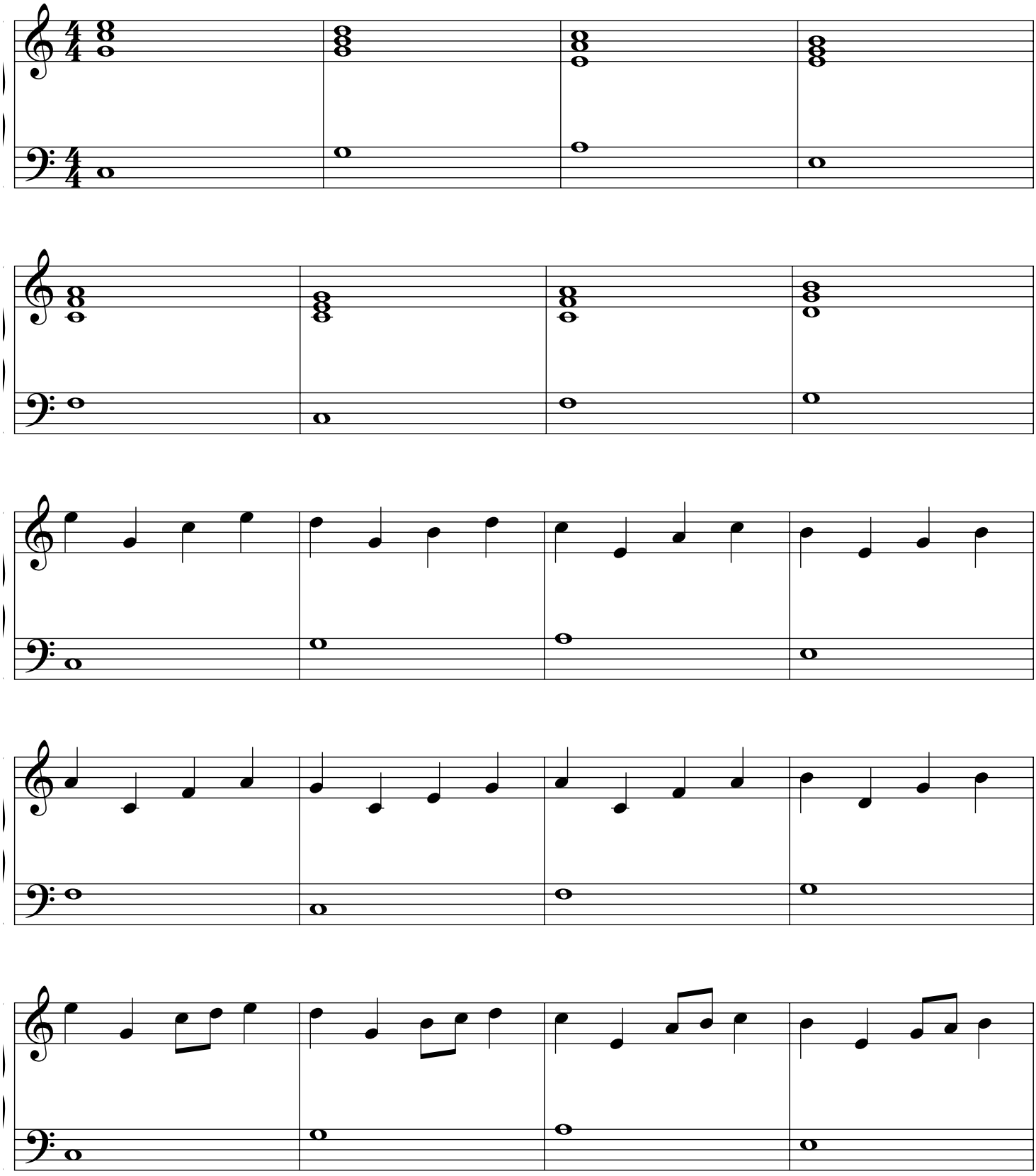
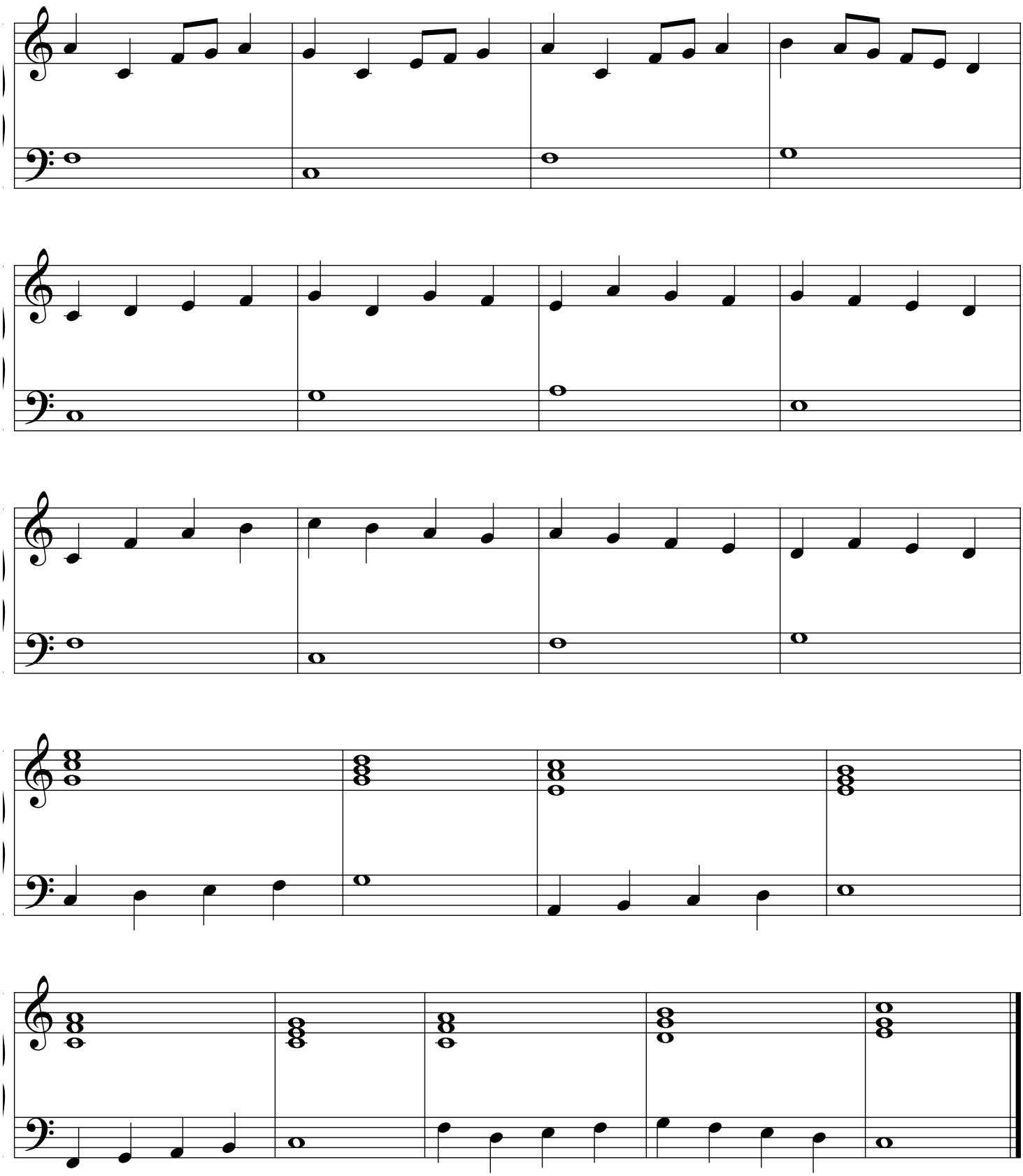
1) Compose a set of variations on the chord progression from Pachelbel's Canon, at least 8 measures long.
2) There are two classifications: Teacher and Student. Please mark your score with your name, address, and the appropriate classification. Students should also include their grade level.
3) Send your neatly handwritten or computer-printed variations to:

Variations on Pachelbel Contest
Gail Smith
P. O. Box 9583
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33310

Submissions should be received no later than August 31, 2001. Selected submissions will appear in a future edition of Creative Keyboard. Publication in the webzine will serve as the entrant's notice of selection. All submissions become the property and copyright of Mel Bay Publications, Inc. and will not be returned.

# Pachelbel's Canon

arranged by Gail Smith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