Conrad Cummings

Denouement

for Two Amplified Harpsichords

1988 revised 2013

Performance Notes:

– Denouement is written for two double-manual harpsichords. If there's a choice, the more aggressive, Italian sound would be best. Contrast in color between the two instruments is a plus so long as one doesn't overbalance the other. And the more contrast between the upper and lower 8-foot stops, the better.

– Deployment of manuals, stops, and coupling is marked in the score.

– The best seat in the house for this piece has always seemed to me to be at one of the keyboards. For this reason both instruments should be amplified if the piece is played in any space larger than a living room. The audience should feel the sound totally engulfing them. If the sound design can accentuate the separation of the sounds of the two instruments, that's even better. It doesn't have to be crazy loud, but it should completely embrace the listener.

Program Note:

Imagine walking into the middle of the final act of a classical tragedy you don't know – right off the street, straight into the point of highest agitation. You have no idea how things got to this point. All that is left is for you to watch the action play out to its final, fatal conclusion.

Denouement for Two Harpsichords was commissioned by Karen and Peter Flint for Brandywine Baroque of Wilmington, Delaware and premiered by Karen Flint and Ray Urwin in April 1988. It went on to form the starting point for a piece of the same title for large orchestra, premiered by Robert Spano and the Oberlin Orchestra with later performances under Spano with the New Jersey and Louisville Orchestras. This revised version was created for a residency by the composer at the Oberlin Conservatory in November 2013.

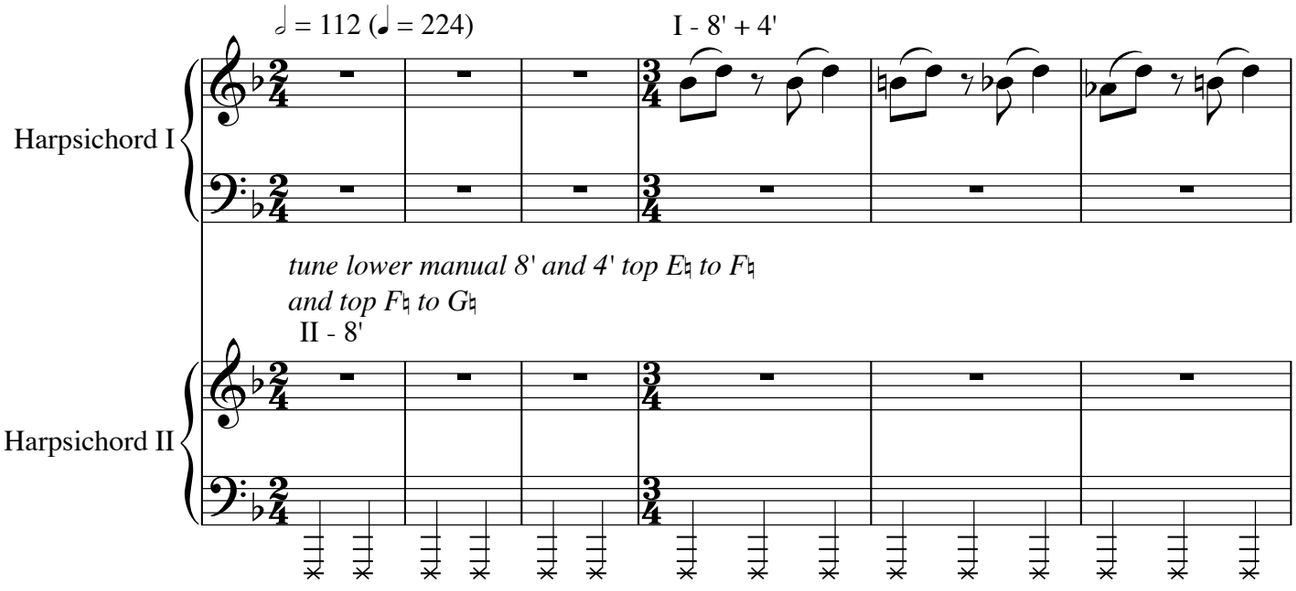
Having written the piece at the keyboard of a grand harpsichord and having performed in it myself on occasion, I've always felt that the best seat in the house is at one of the keyboards, where the sound is totally enveloping. That's why I've asked that in any space larger than a living room, the instruments should be amplified to provide that same sense of total embrace of sound to every listener.

Denouement for Two Preferably Amplified Harpsichords

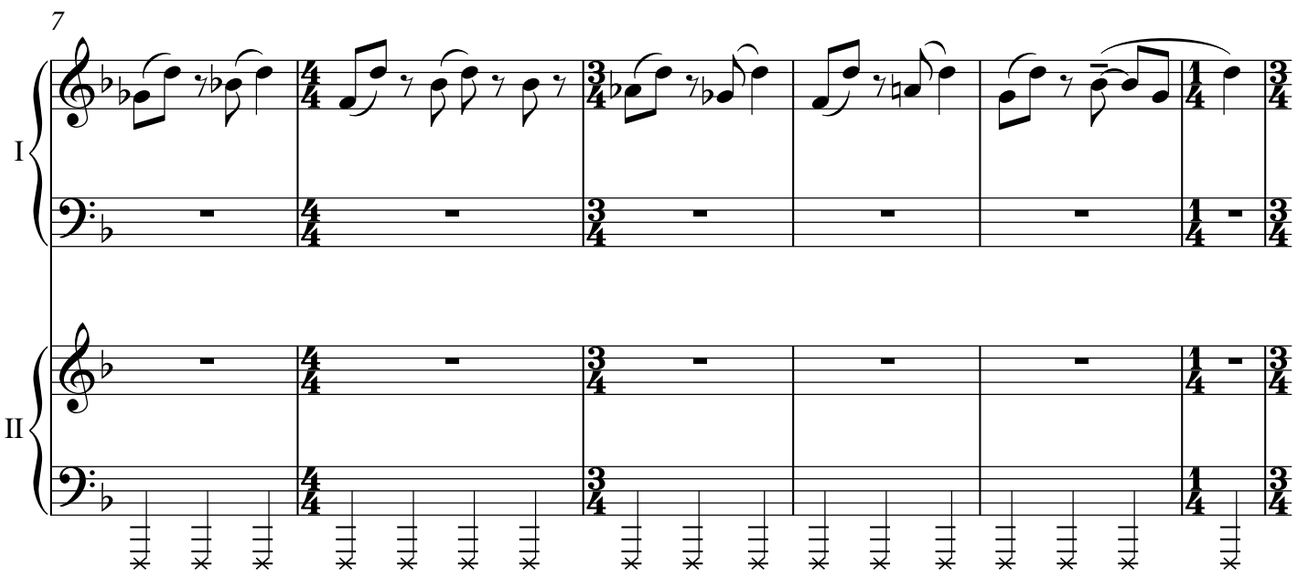
Version 11/4/13

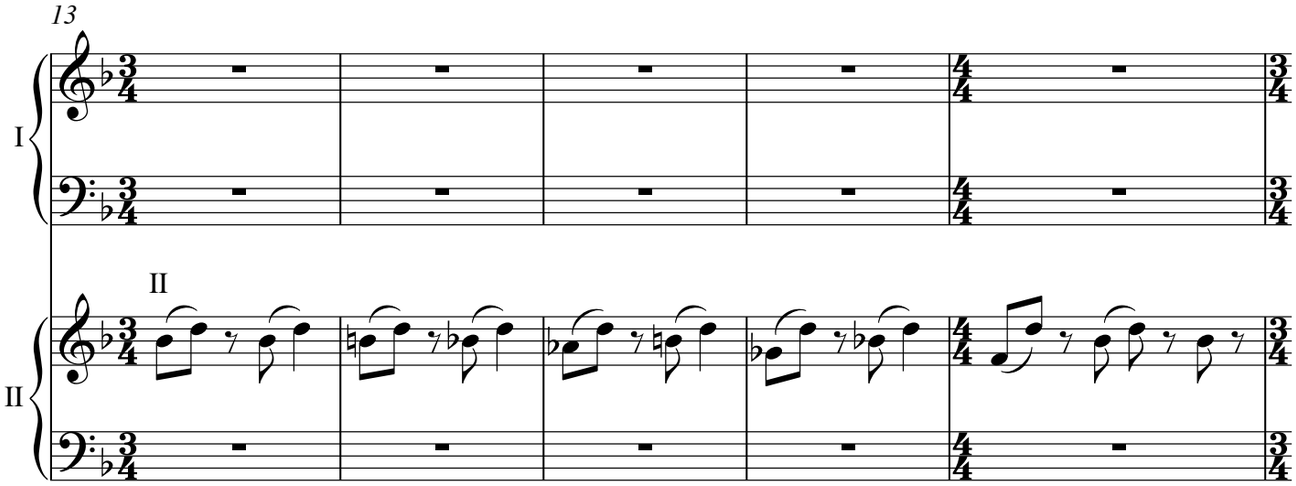
tune lower manual 8' and 4' top E♮ to F♮
and top F♮ to G♮

Conrad Cummings



mute the upper manual low F-natural with your finger or with a pink eraser between the bottom two strings





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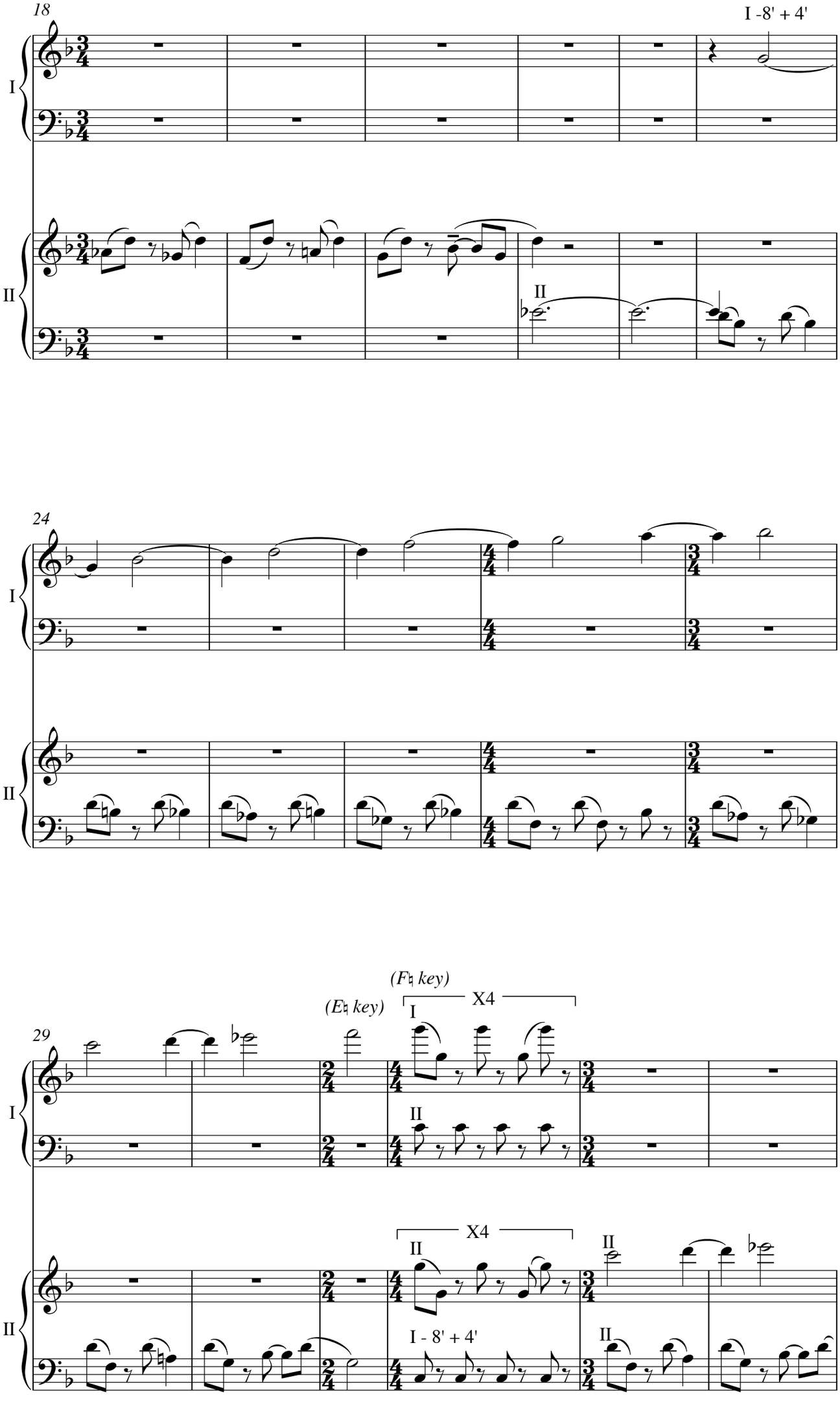
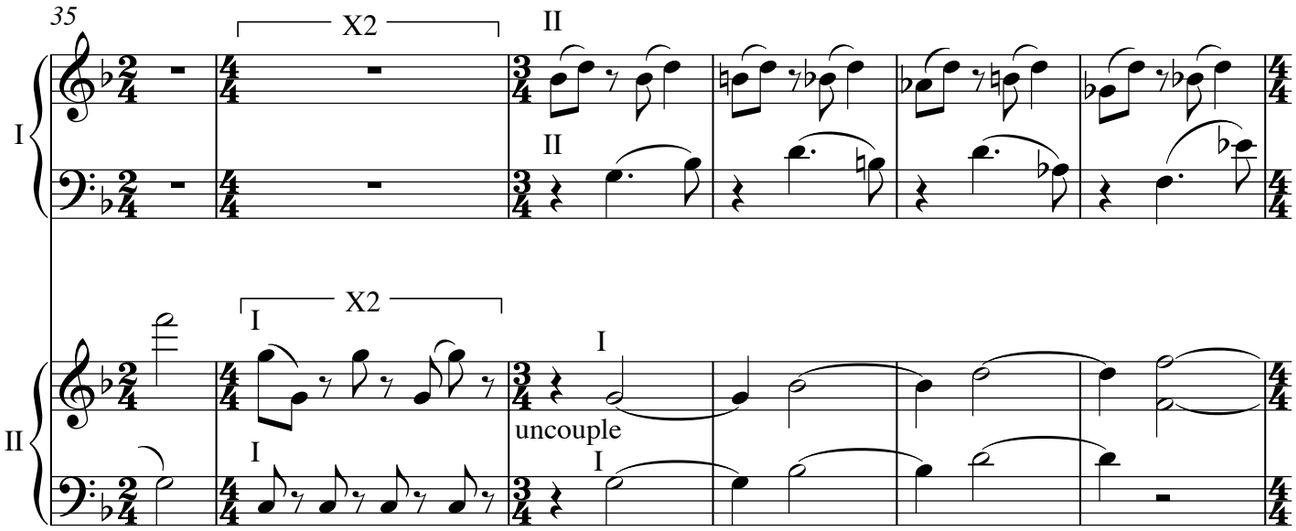
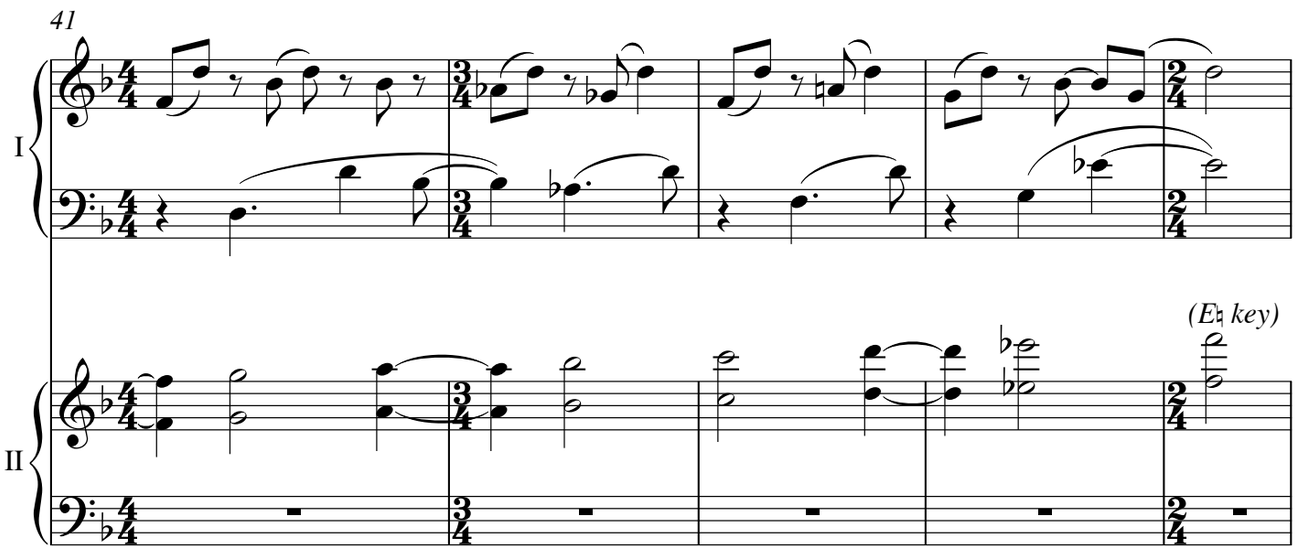
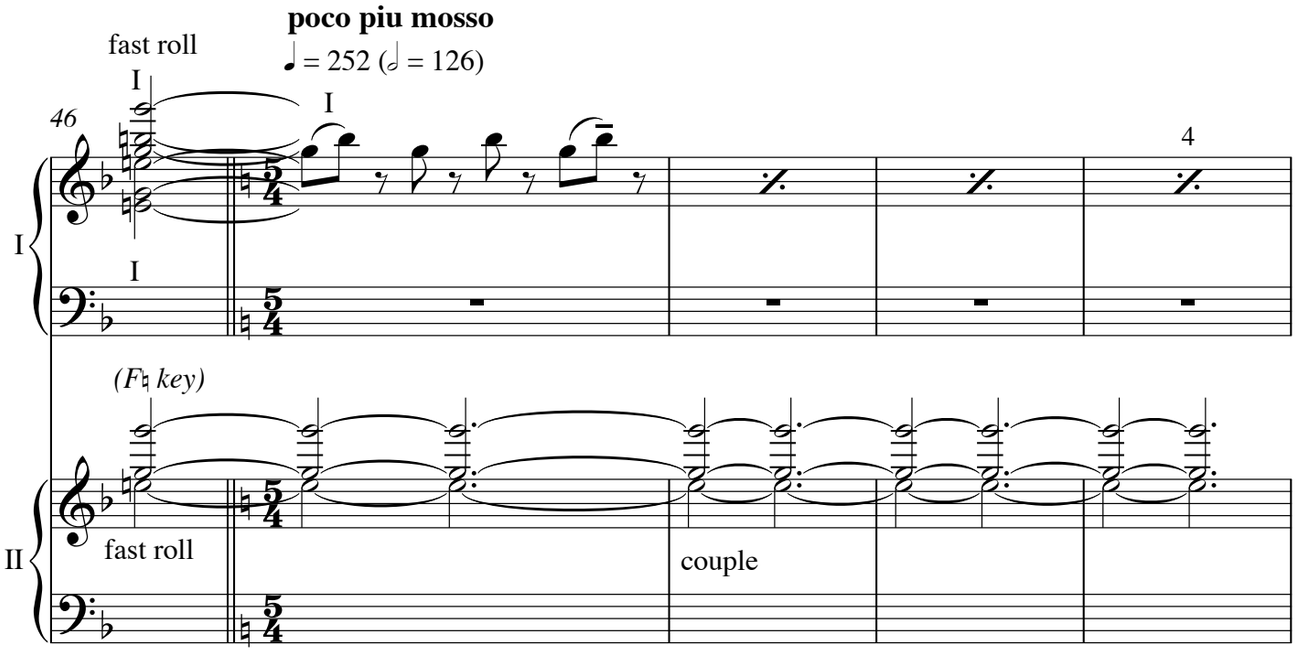
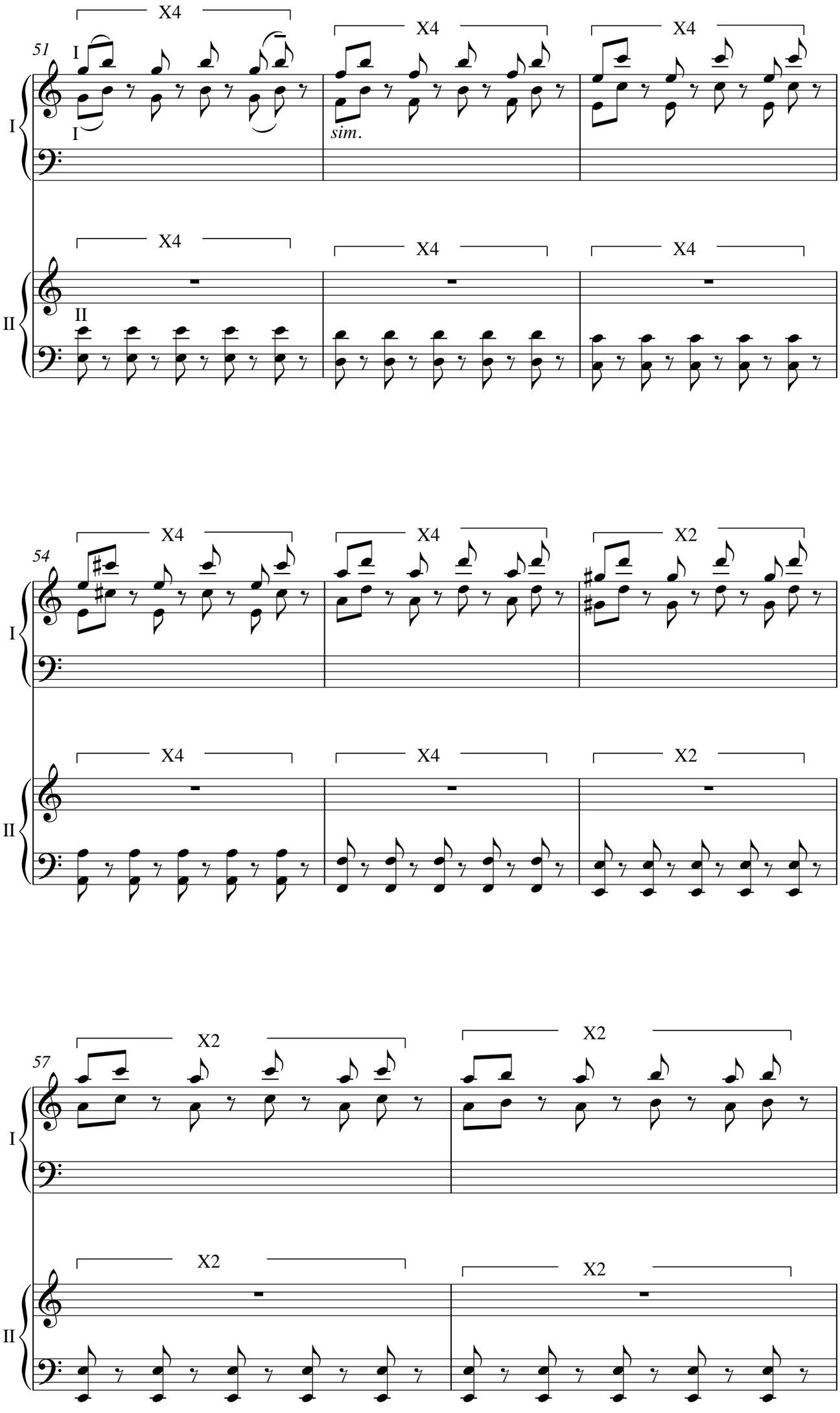
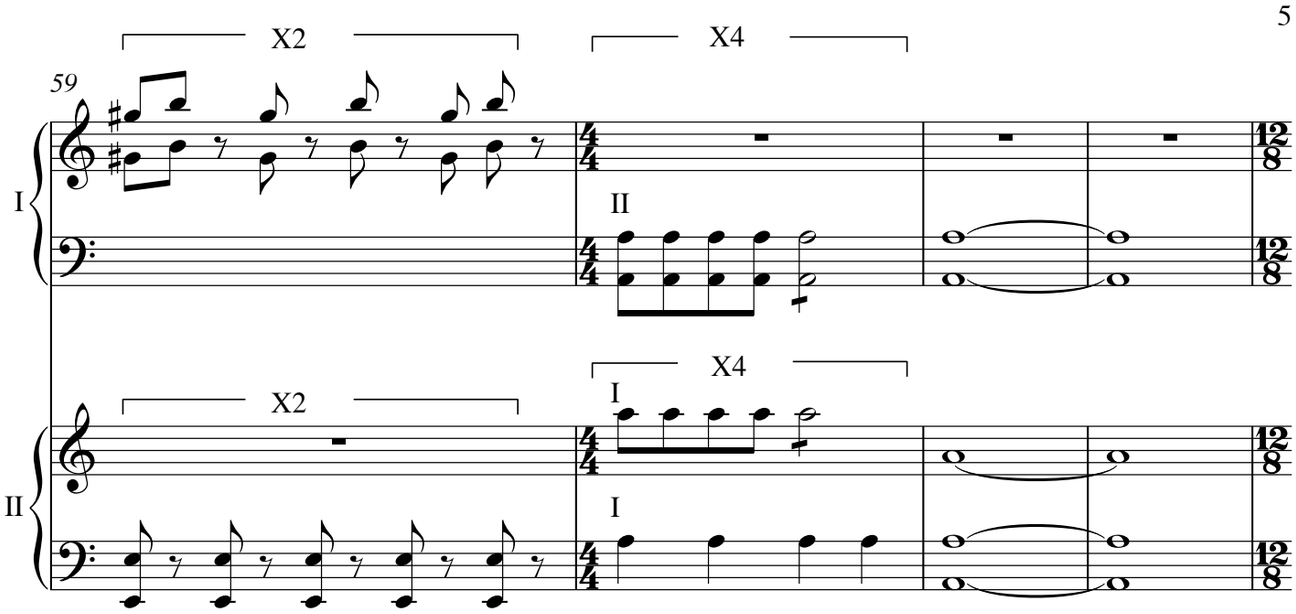

18
I -8' + 4'
I
II
II
24
I
II
29
(E♮ key)
(F♮ key)
X4
I
II
X4
II
II
I - 8' + 4'
II
I
II

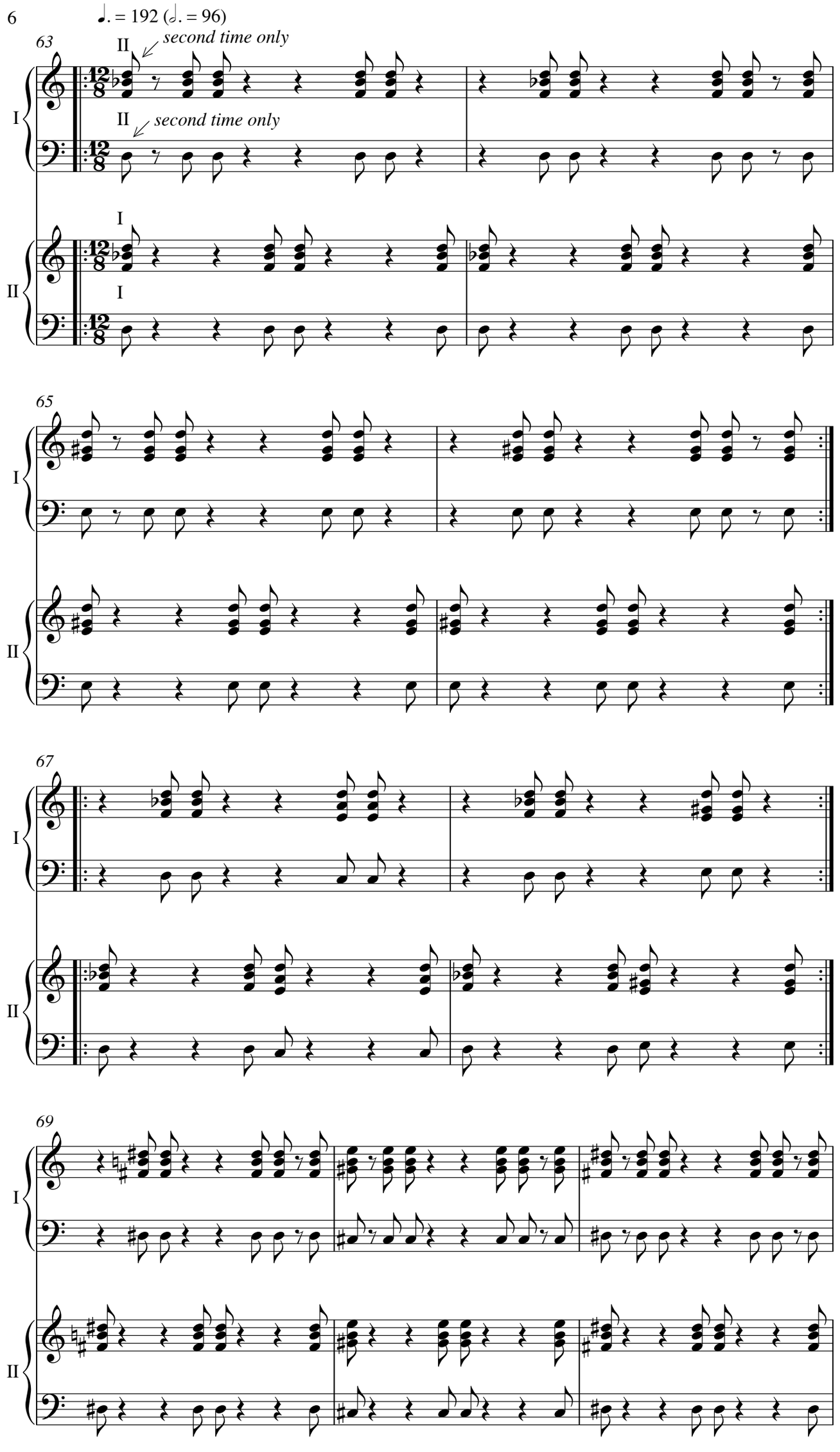

35
X2
II
I
X2
I
uncouple

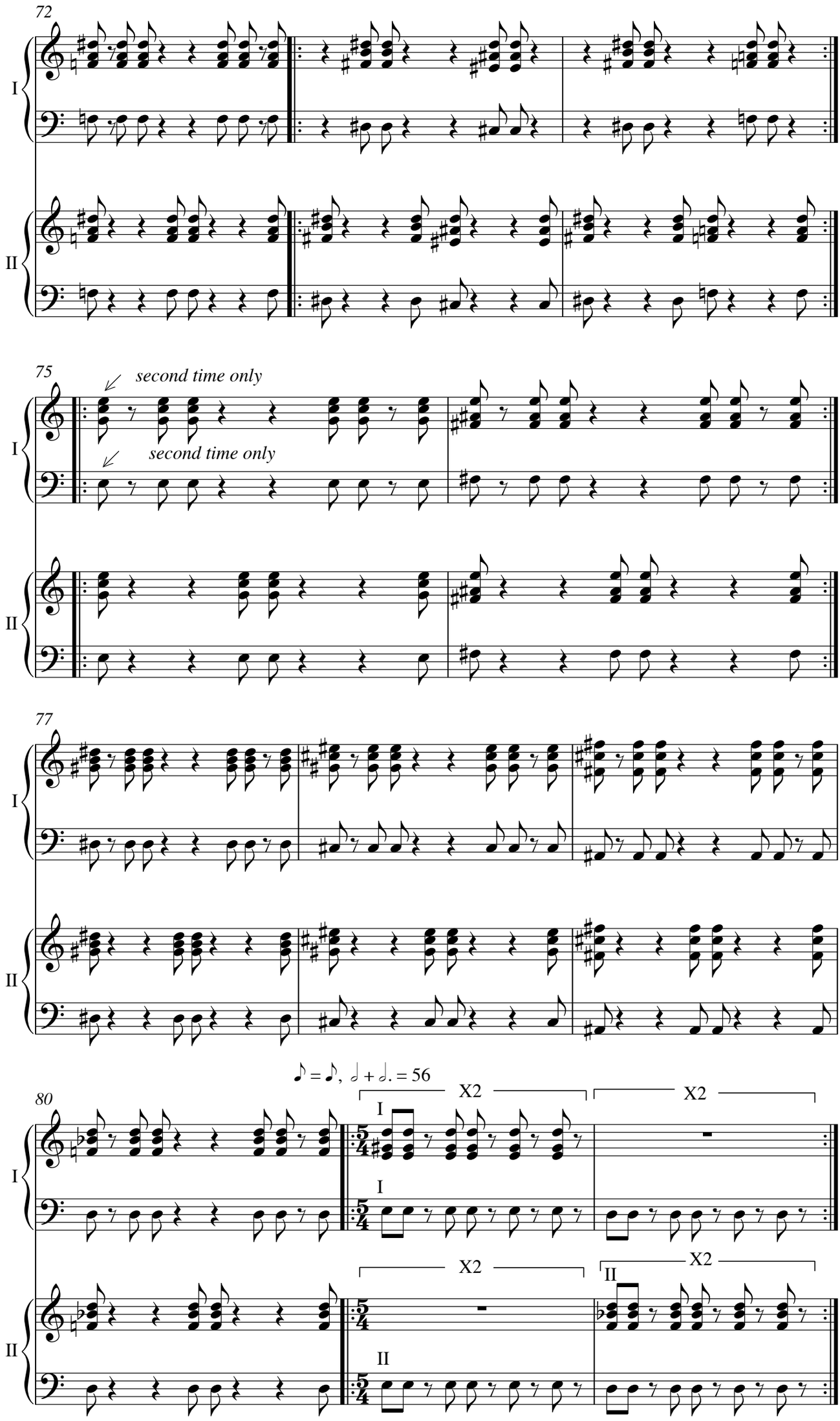

41
(E♮ key)

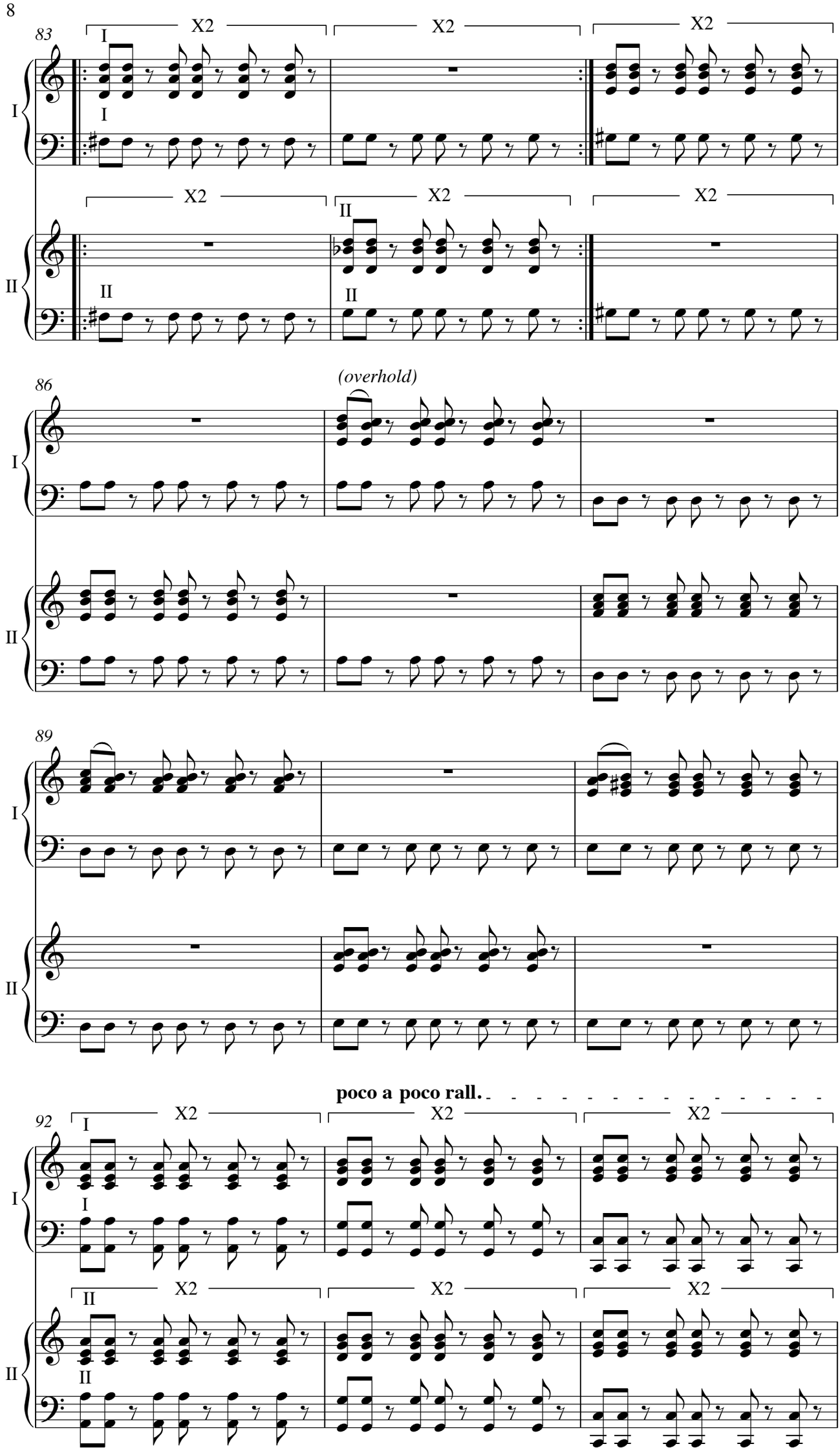

poco piu mosso
♩ = 252 (𝅗𝅥 = 126)
fast roll
46
4
(F♮ key)
fast roll
couple

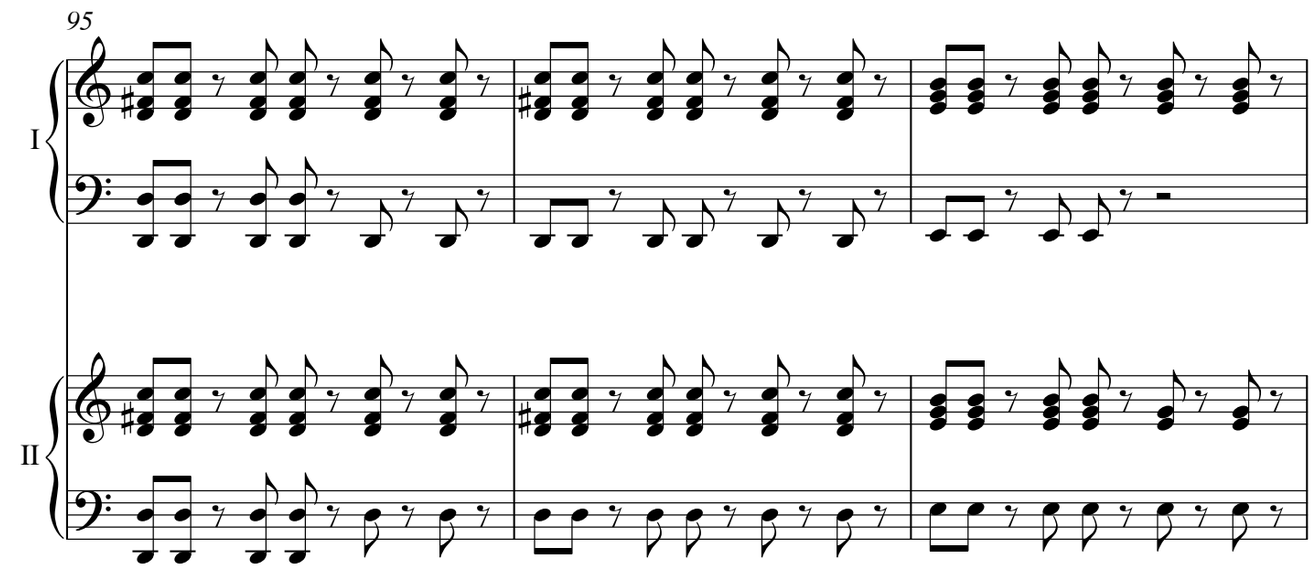

51
X4
I
sim.
II
54
X2
57

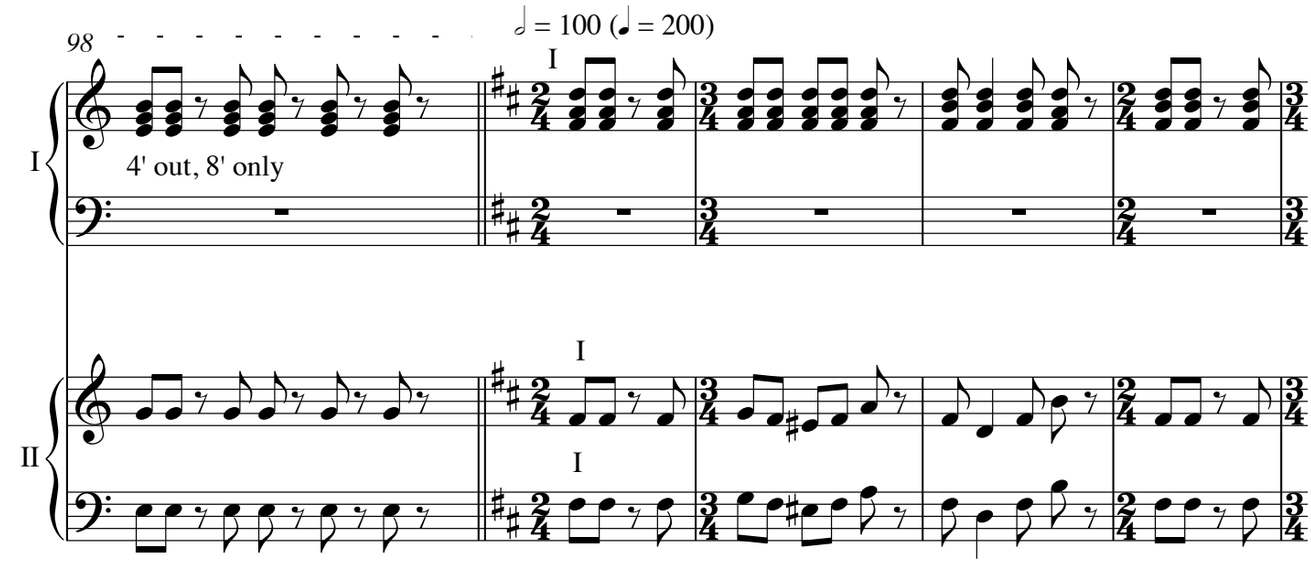

X2
X4
59
I
II
X4
X2
I
II
I

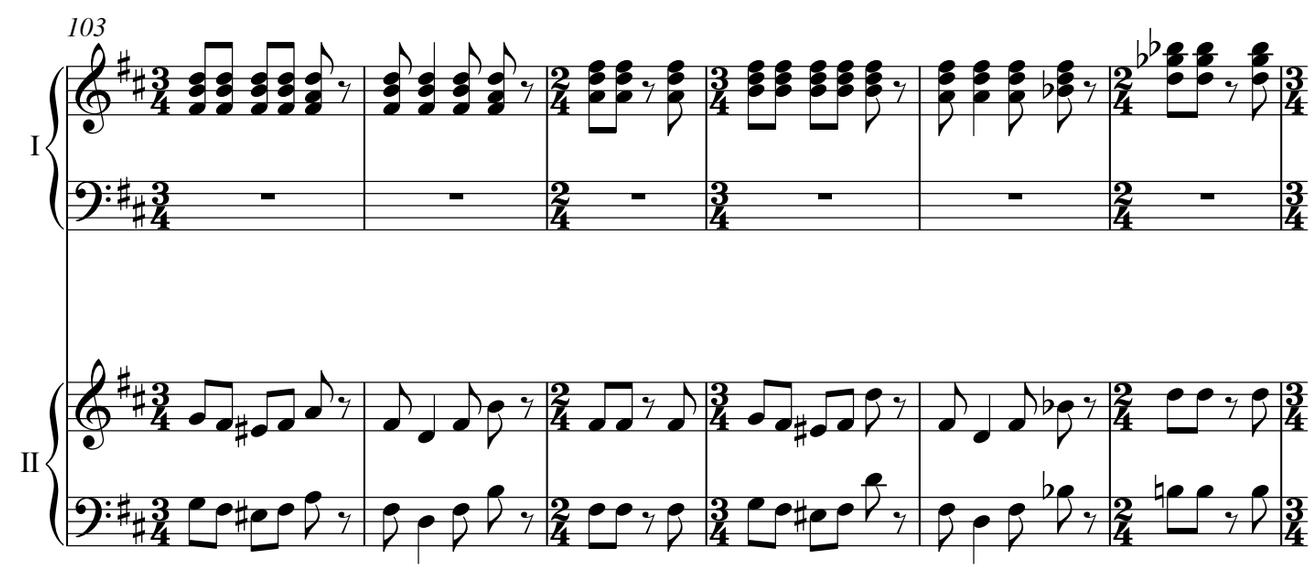

♩. = 192 (𝅗𝅥. = 96)
63
II
second time only
II
second time only
I
I
I
II
65
67
69

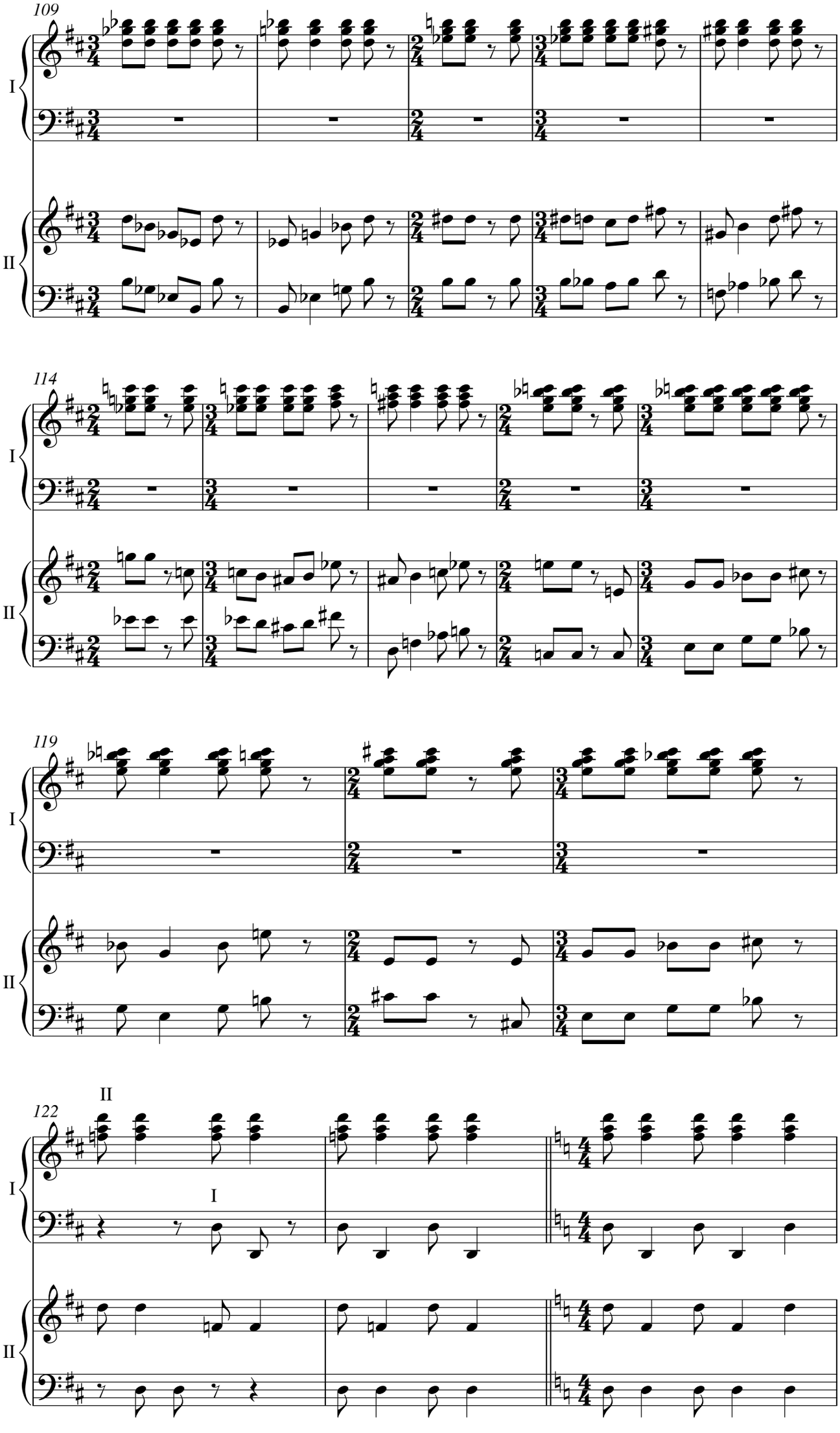

72
I
II
75
second time only
second time only
77
80
♪ = ♪, 𝅗𝅥 + 𝅗𝅥. = 56
X2
X2
X2
X2

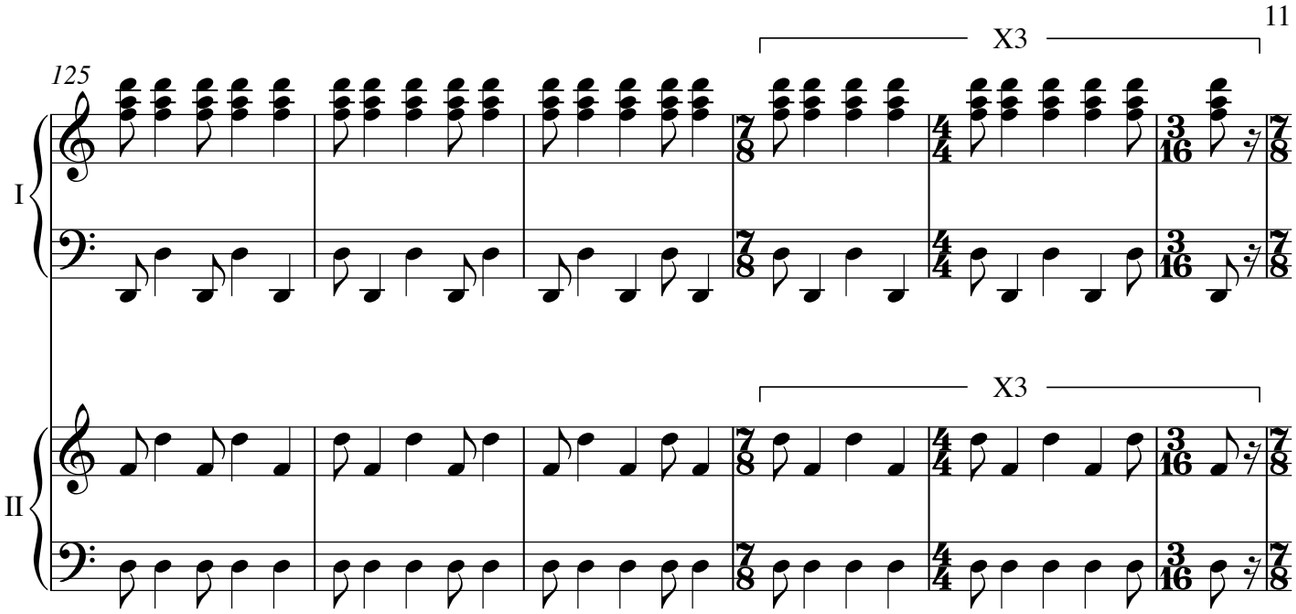

83
I
X2
X2
X2
I
II
X2
X2
X2
II
86
(overhold)
89
92
poco a poco rall.

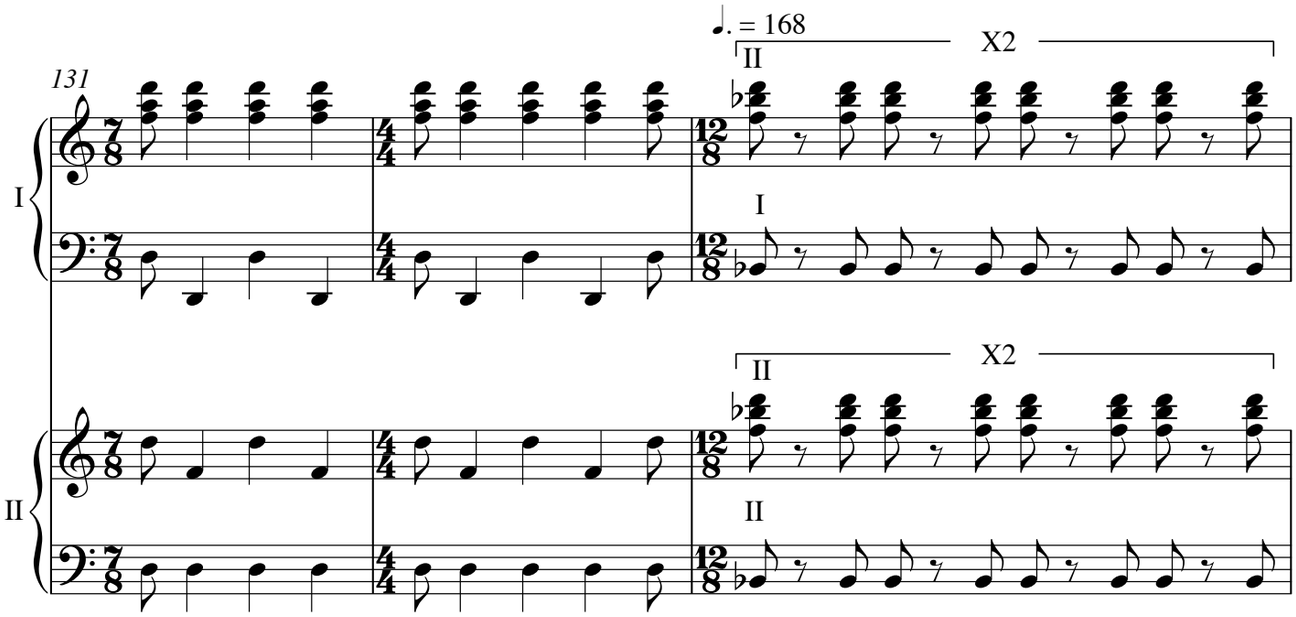

95
I
II

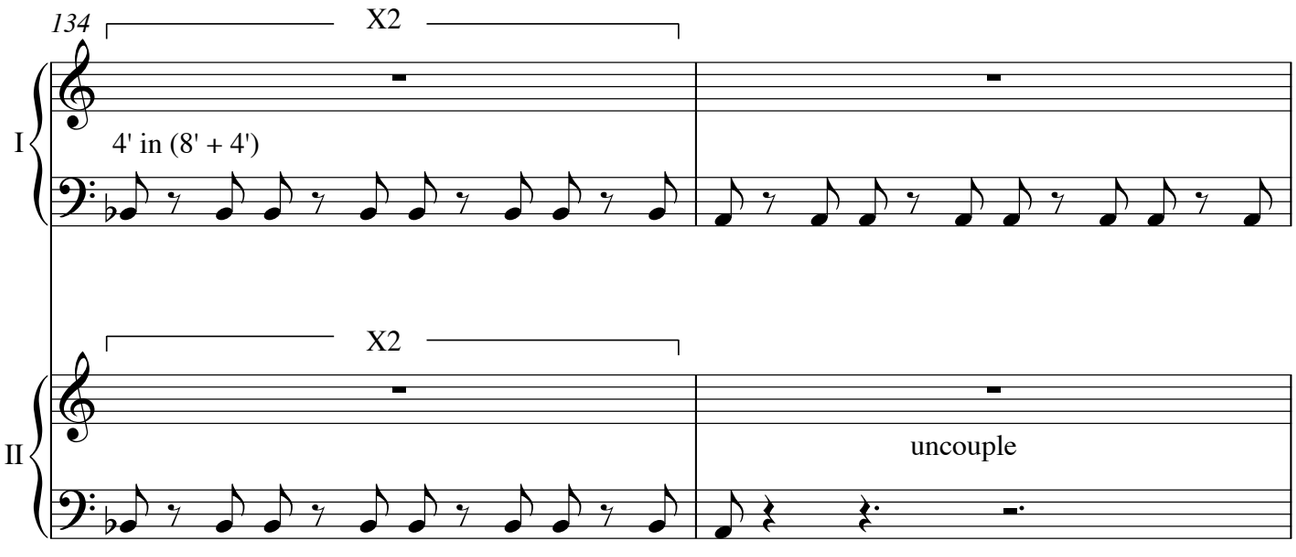

98
♩ = 100 (♩ = 200)
I
4' out, 8' only
I
I
I
II

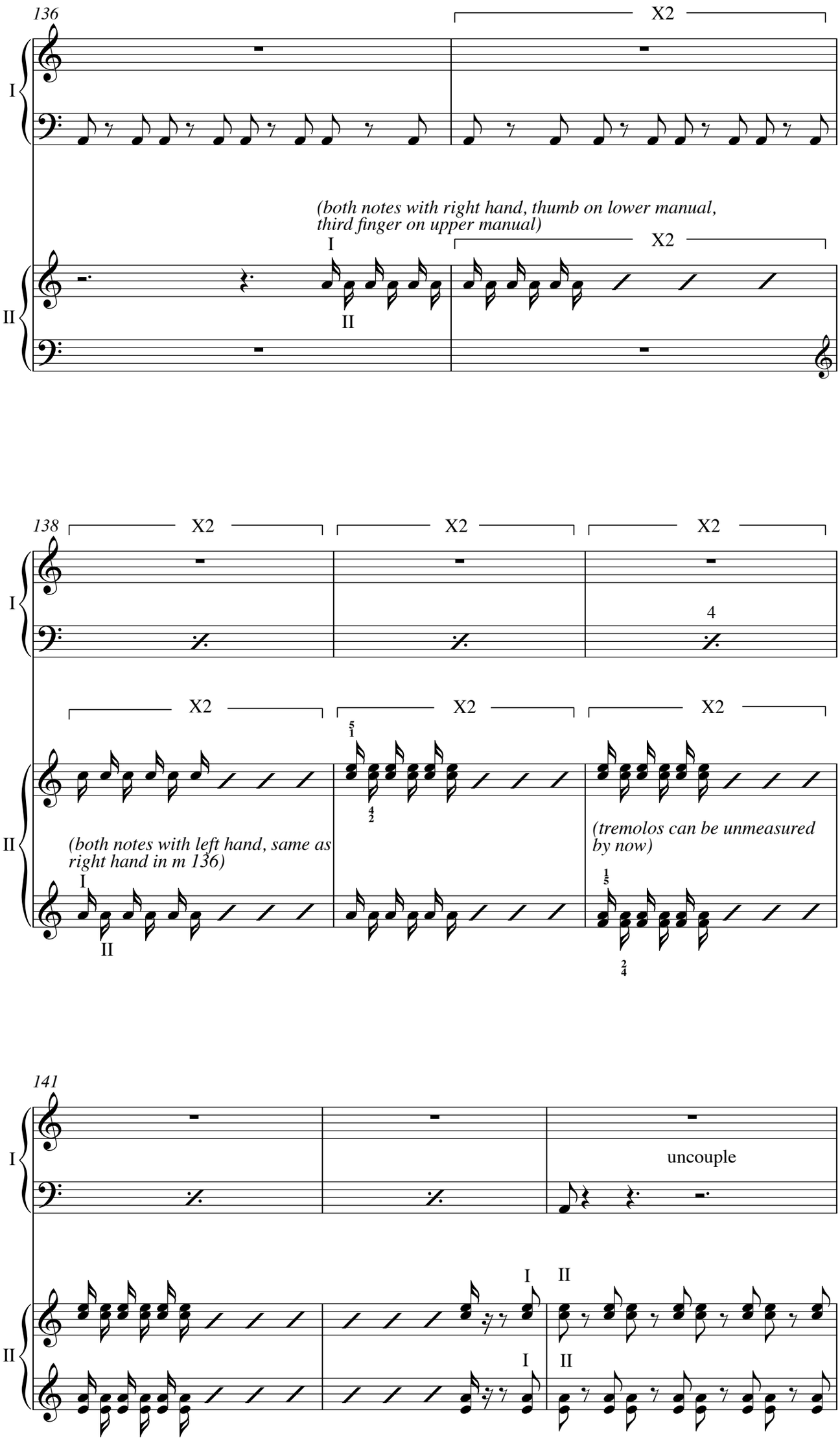

103
I
II

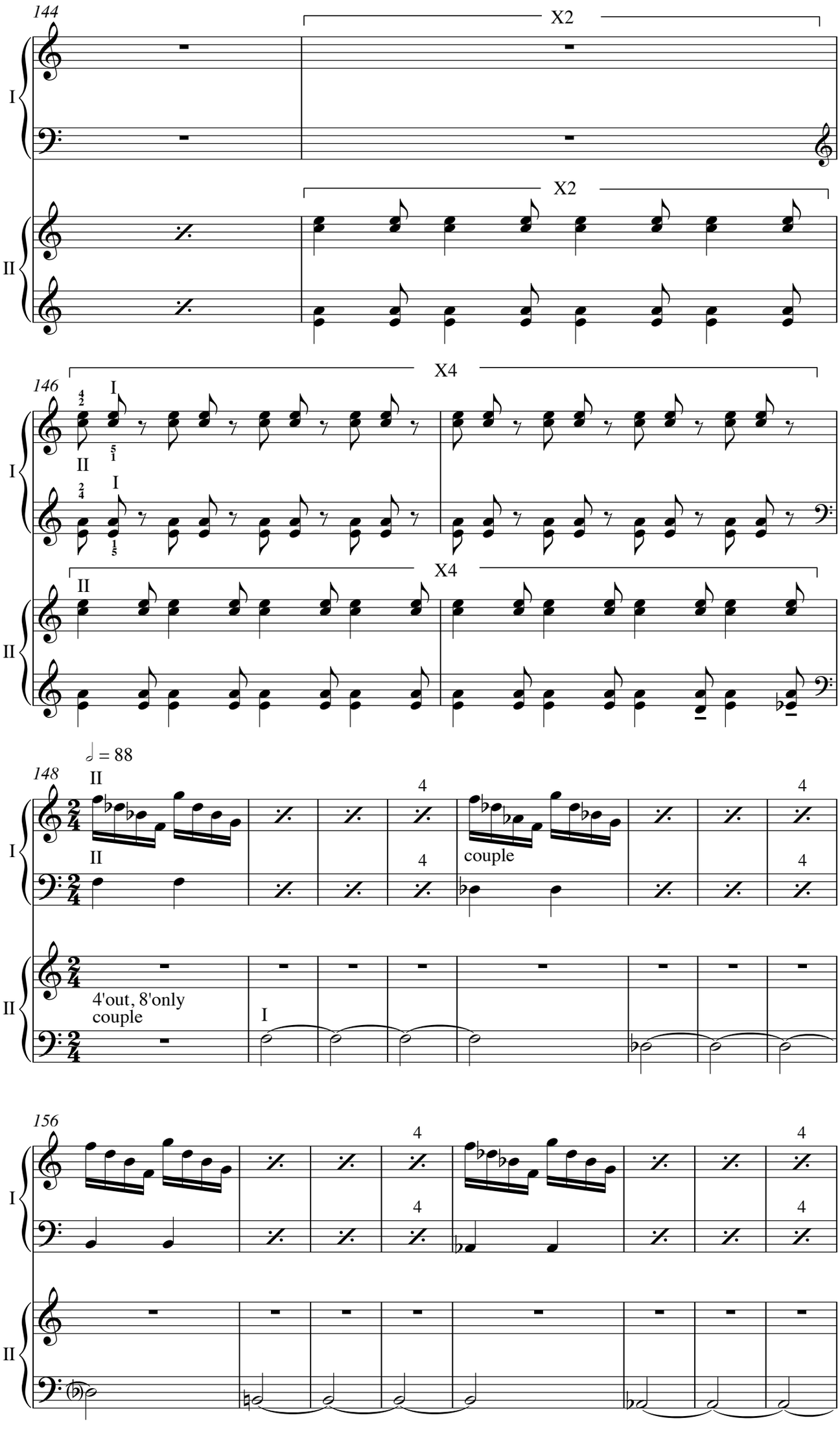

109
I
II
114
I
II
119
I
II
122
II
I
I
II

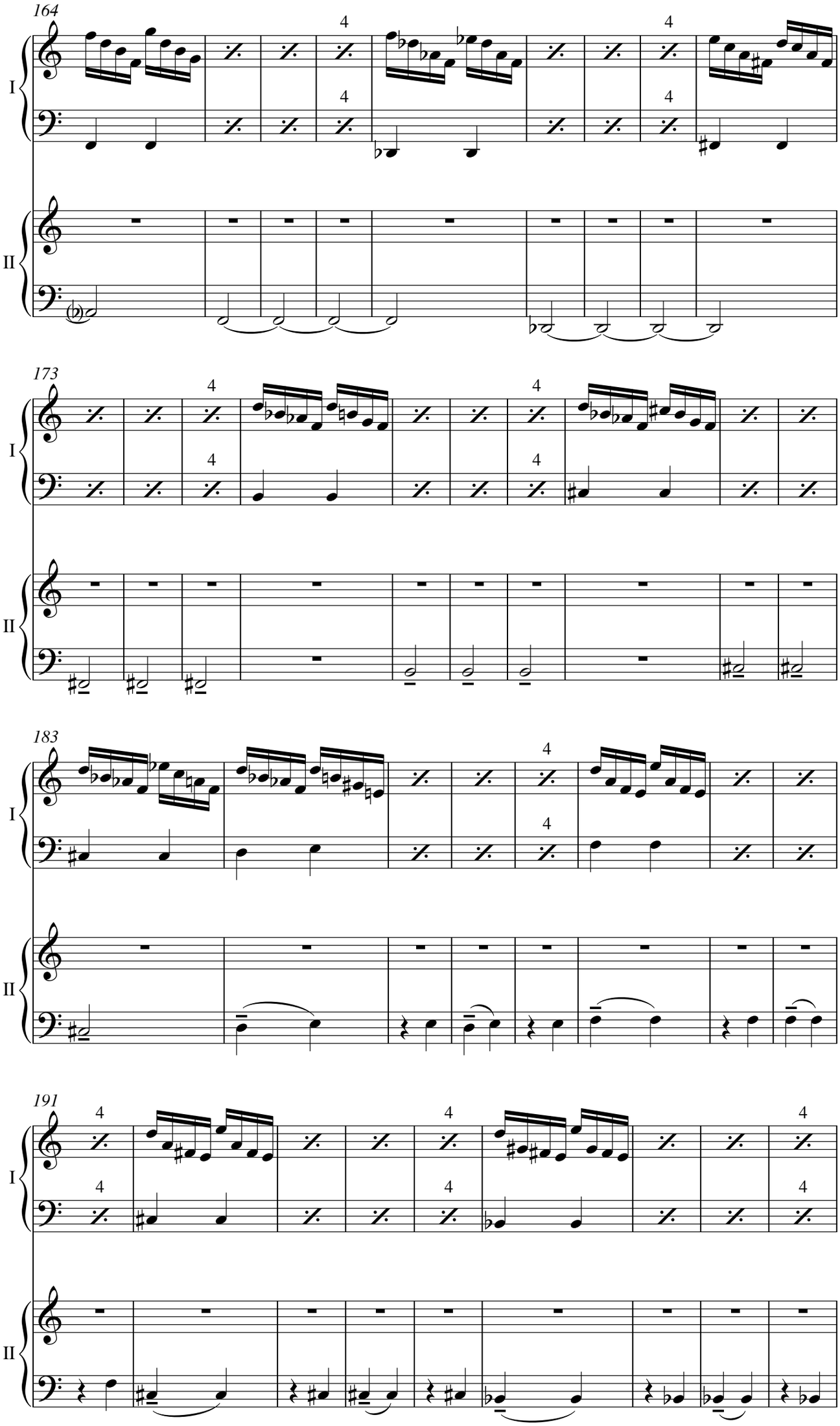

125
X3
I
X3
II

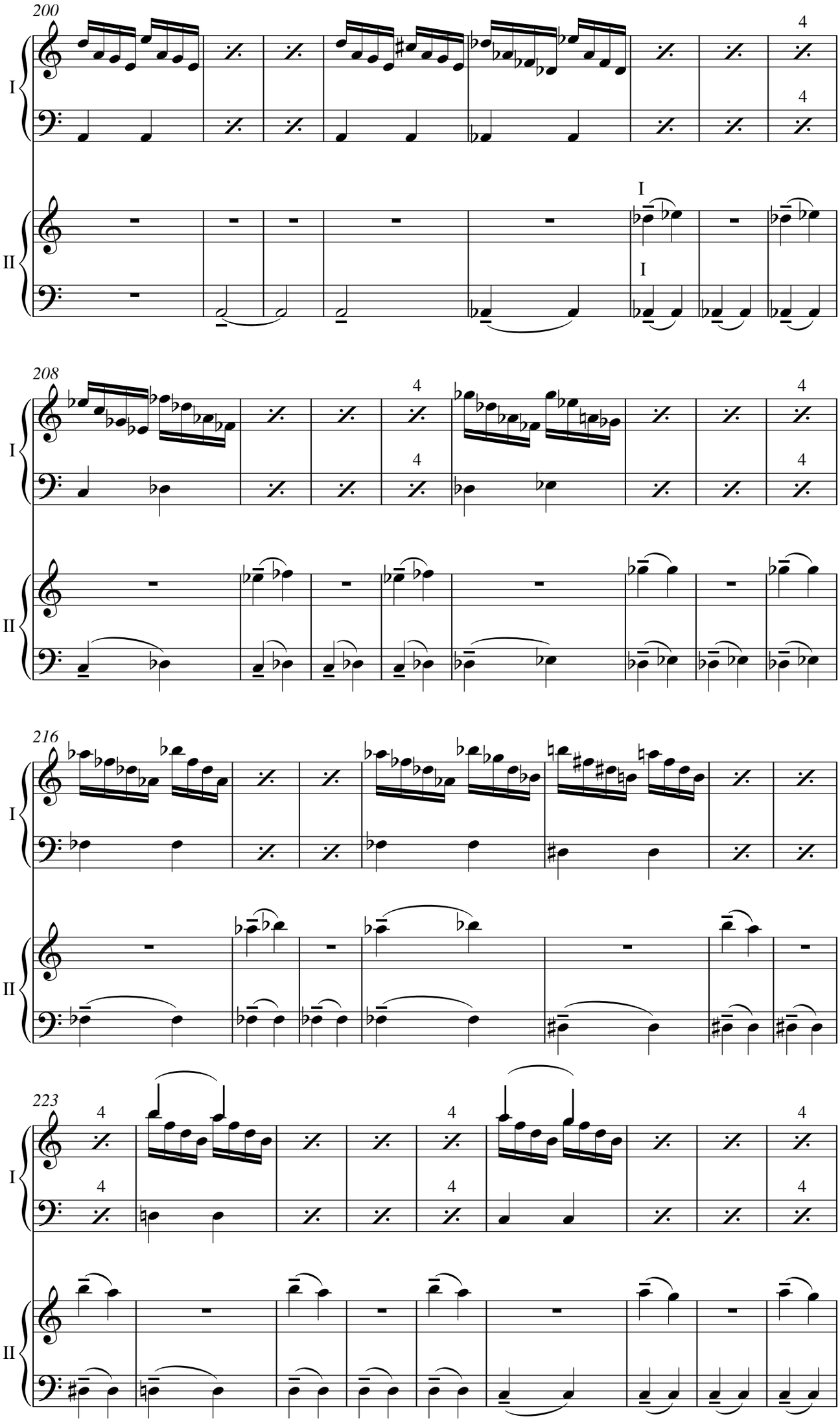

131
♩. = 168
X2
II
I
X2
II
II

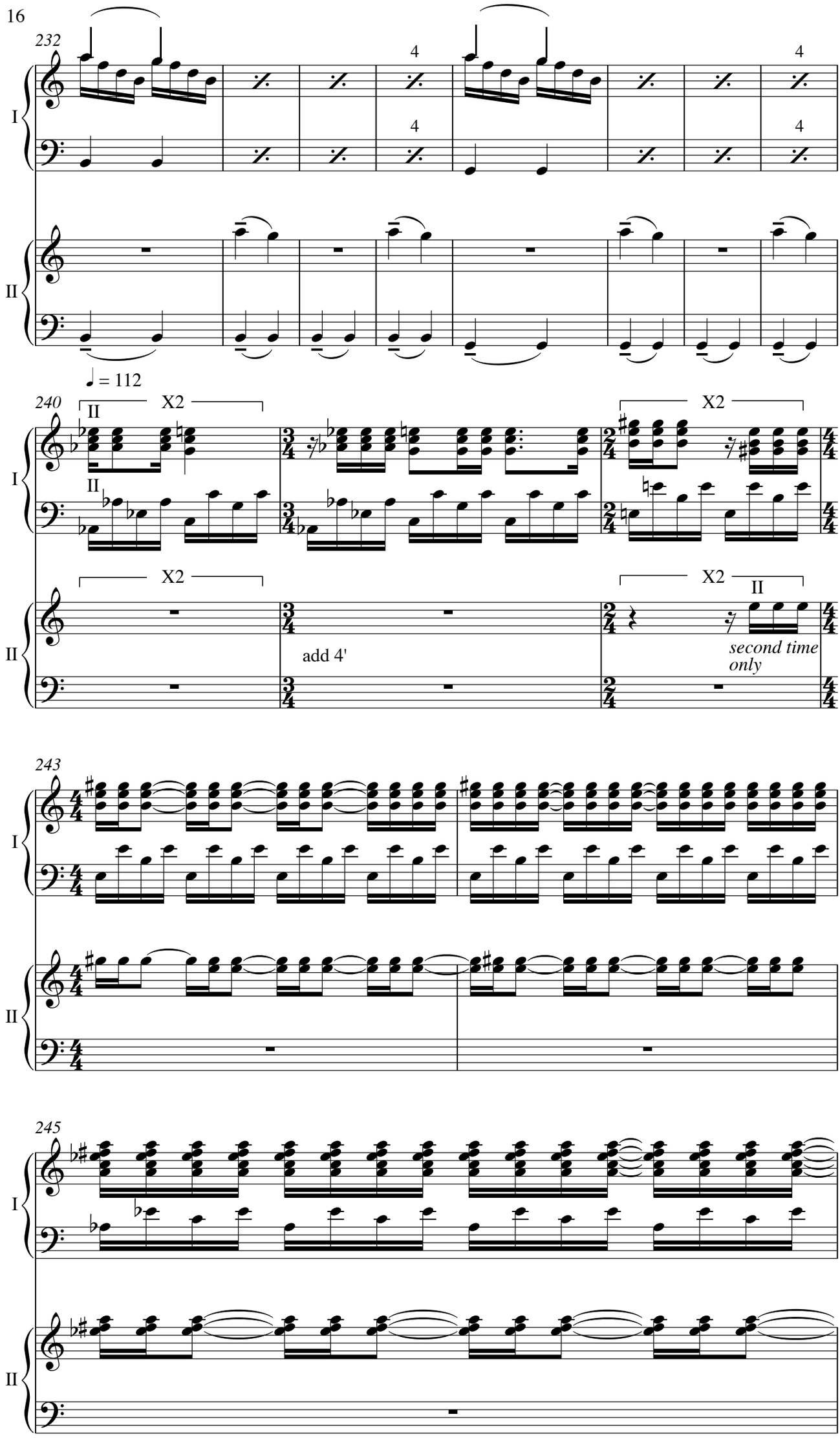

134
X2
I
4' in (8' + 4')
X2
II
uncouple

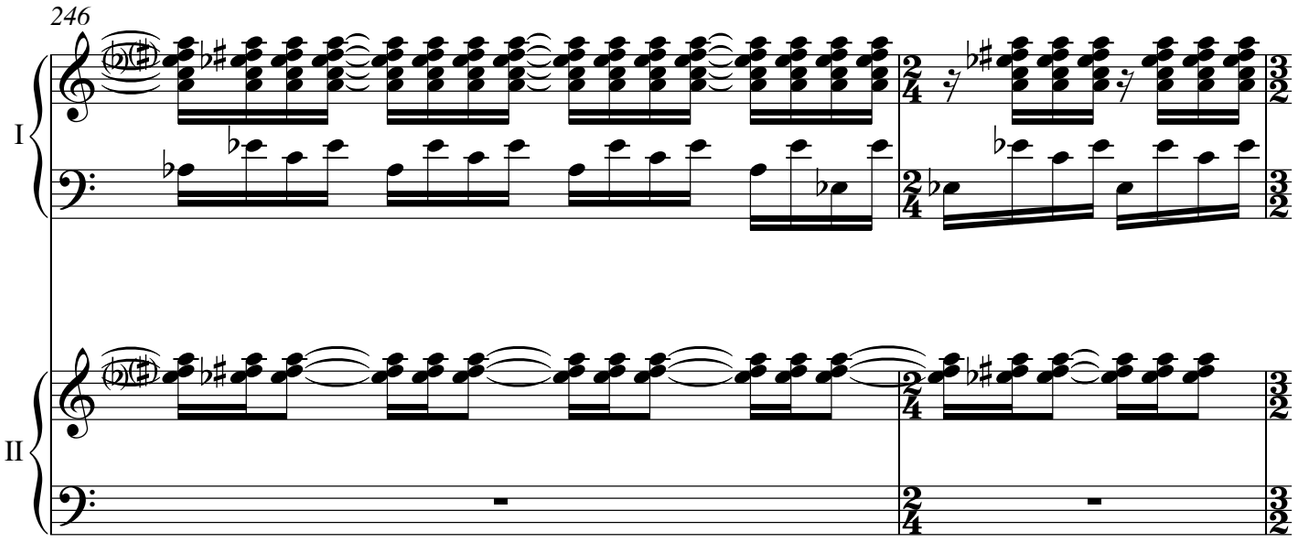

136
X2
I
II
(both notes with right hand, thumb on lower manual, third finger on upper manual)
138
X2
X2
X2
4
(both notes with left hand, same as right hand in m 136)
(tremolos can be unmeasured by now)
141
uncouple

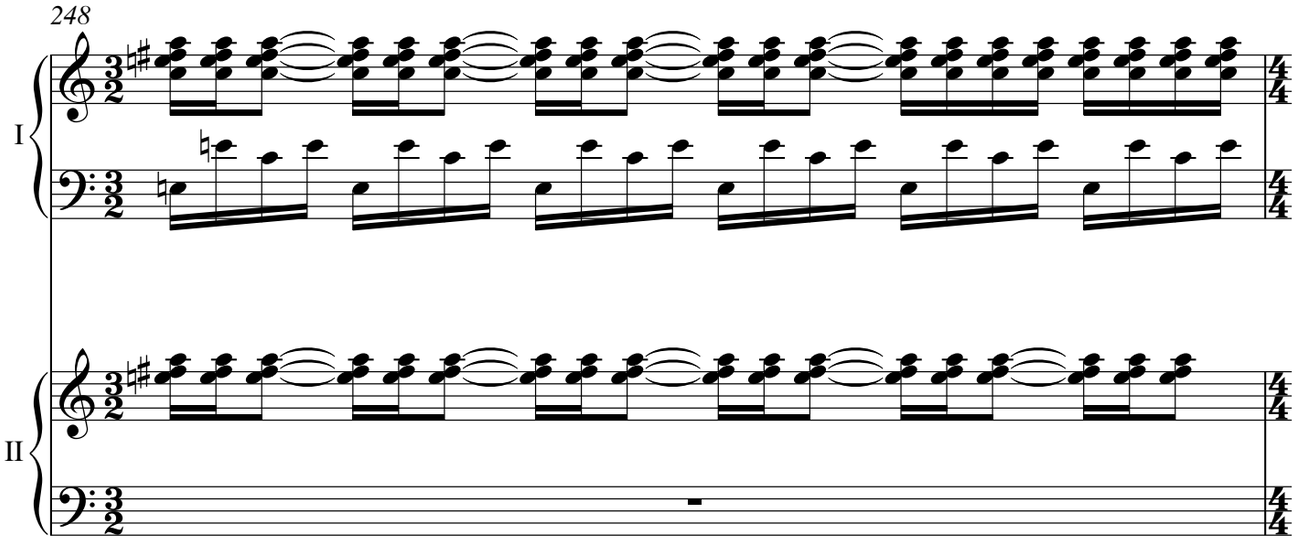

144
X2
I
X2
II
146
X4
I
II
X4
II
148
♩ = 88
II
4
couple
4'out, 8'only
couple
I
156

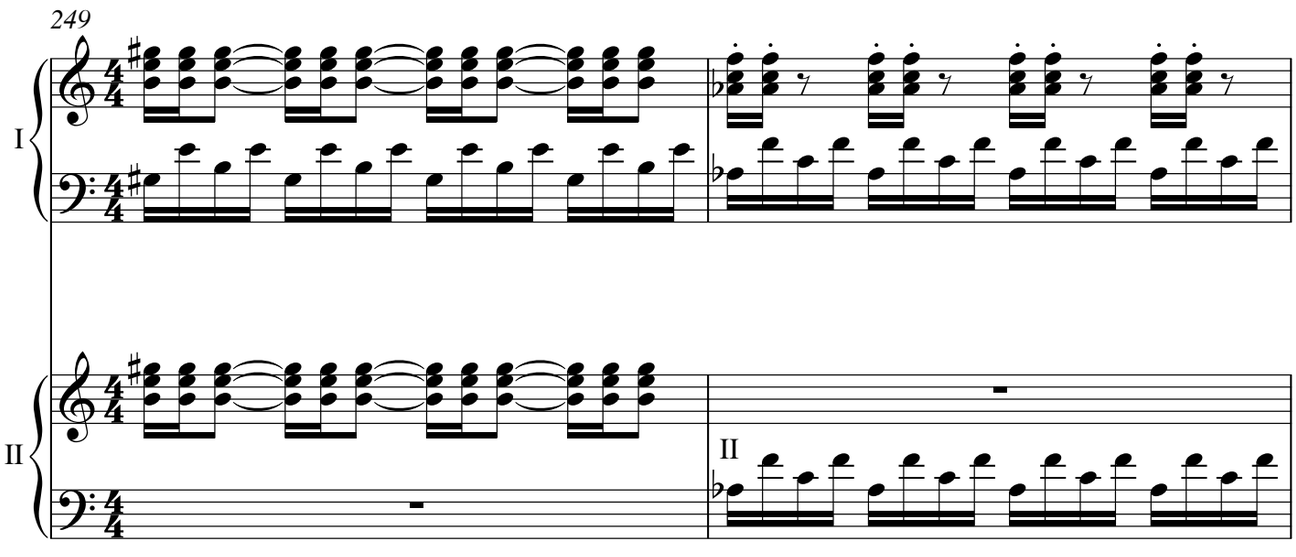

164
173
183
191
I
II

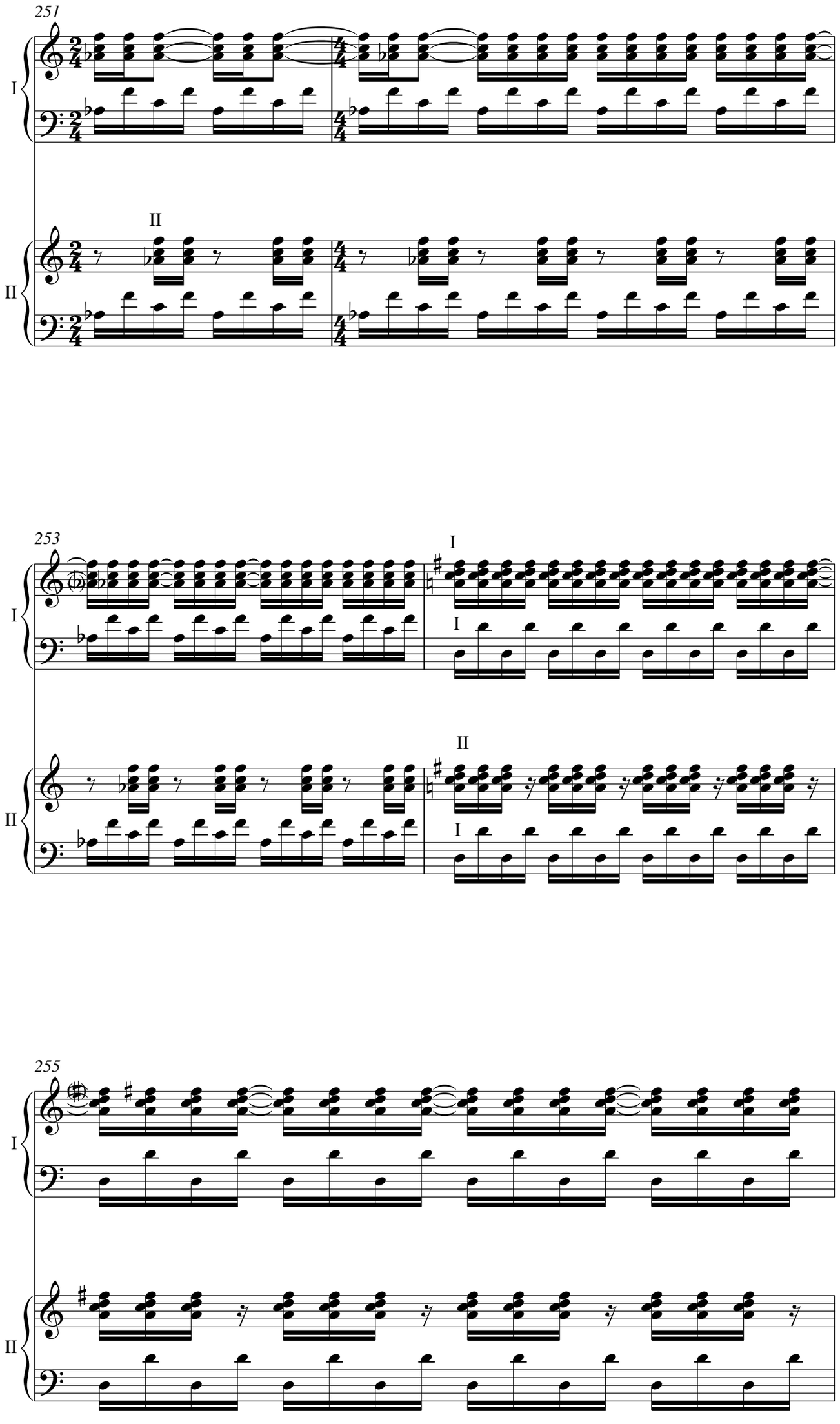

200
208
216
223
I
II

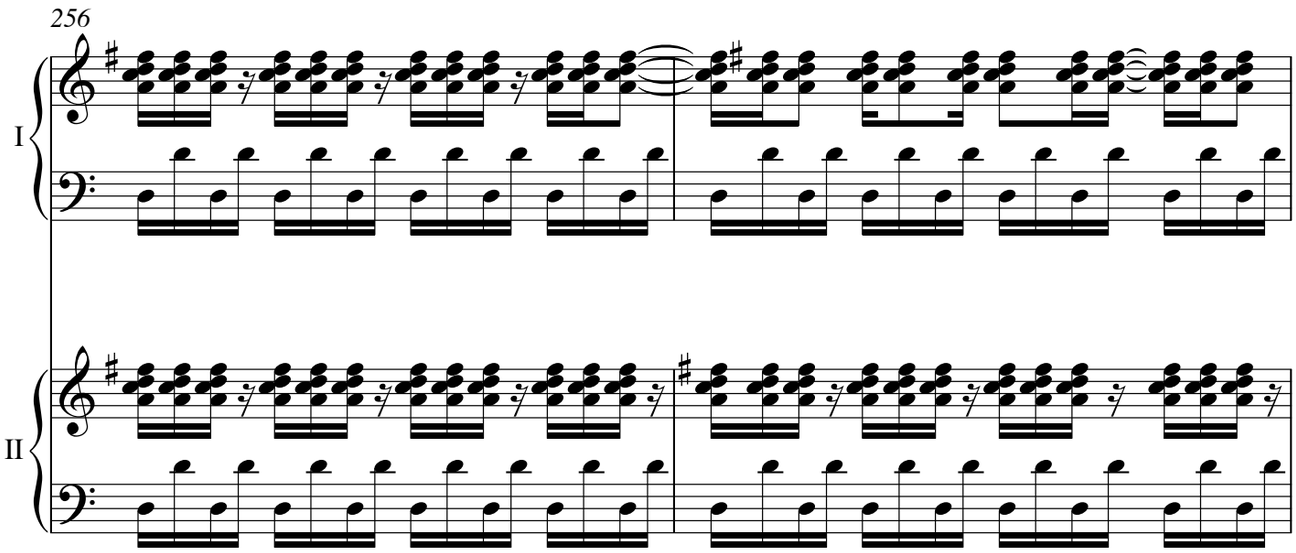

232
4
4
4
4
I
II
240
♩ = 112
II
X2
X2
X2
X2
II
add 4'
second time only
243
245

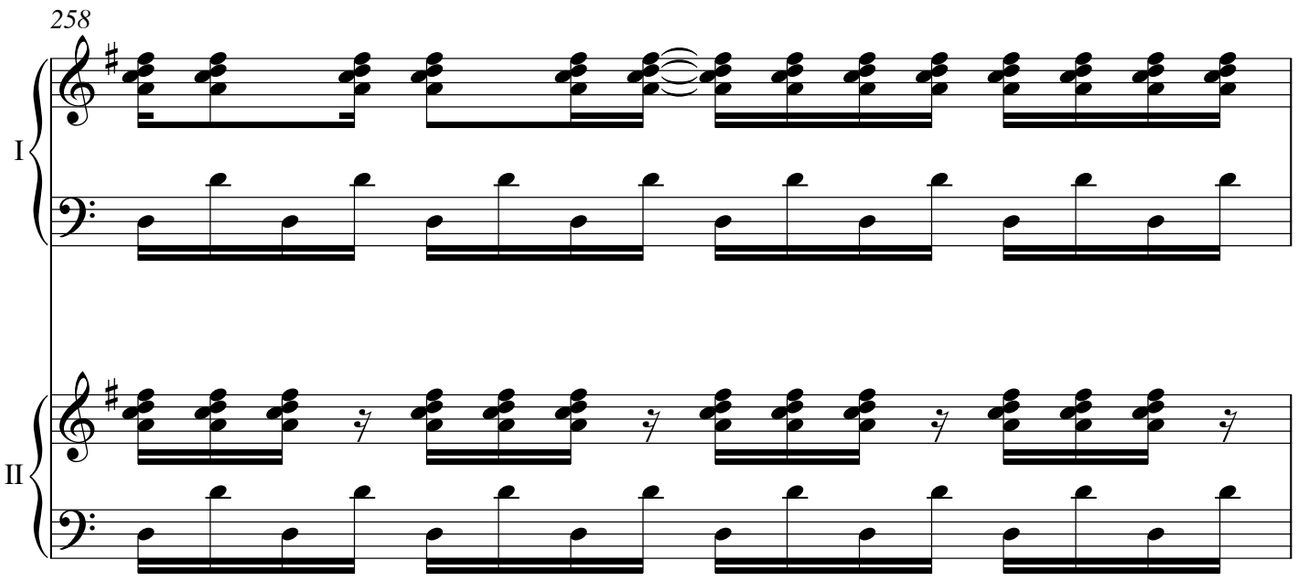

246
I
II

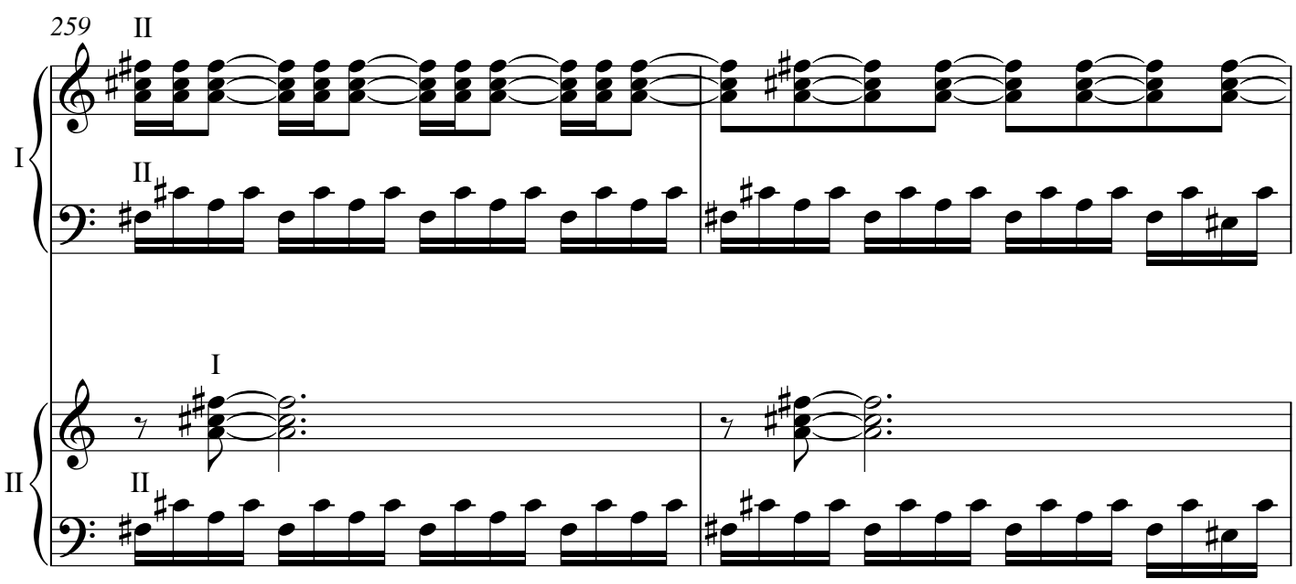

248
I
II

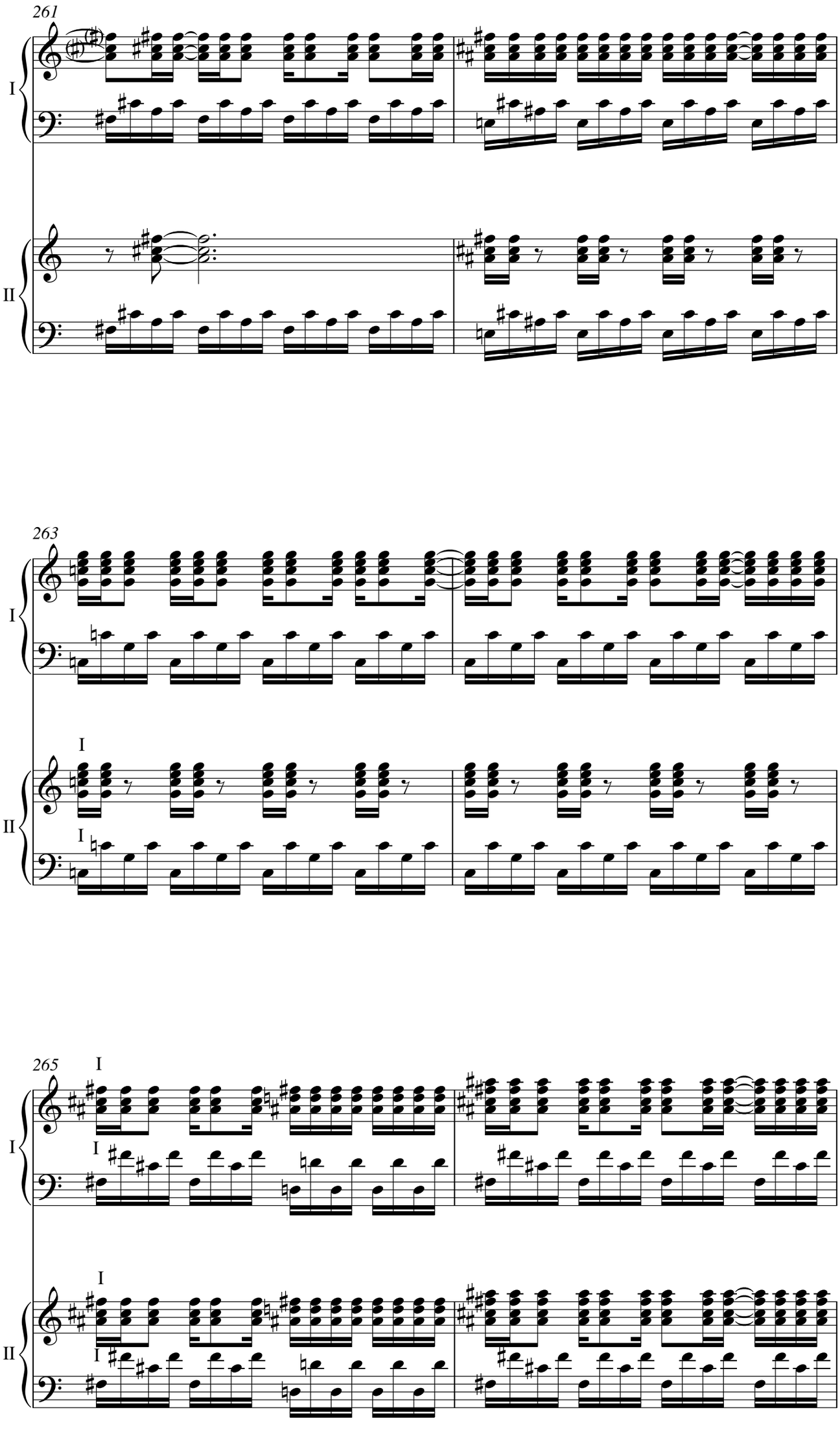

249
I
II
II

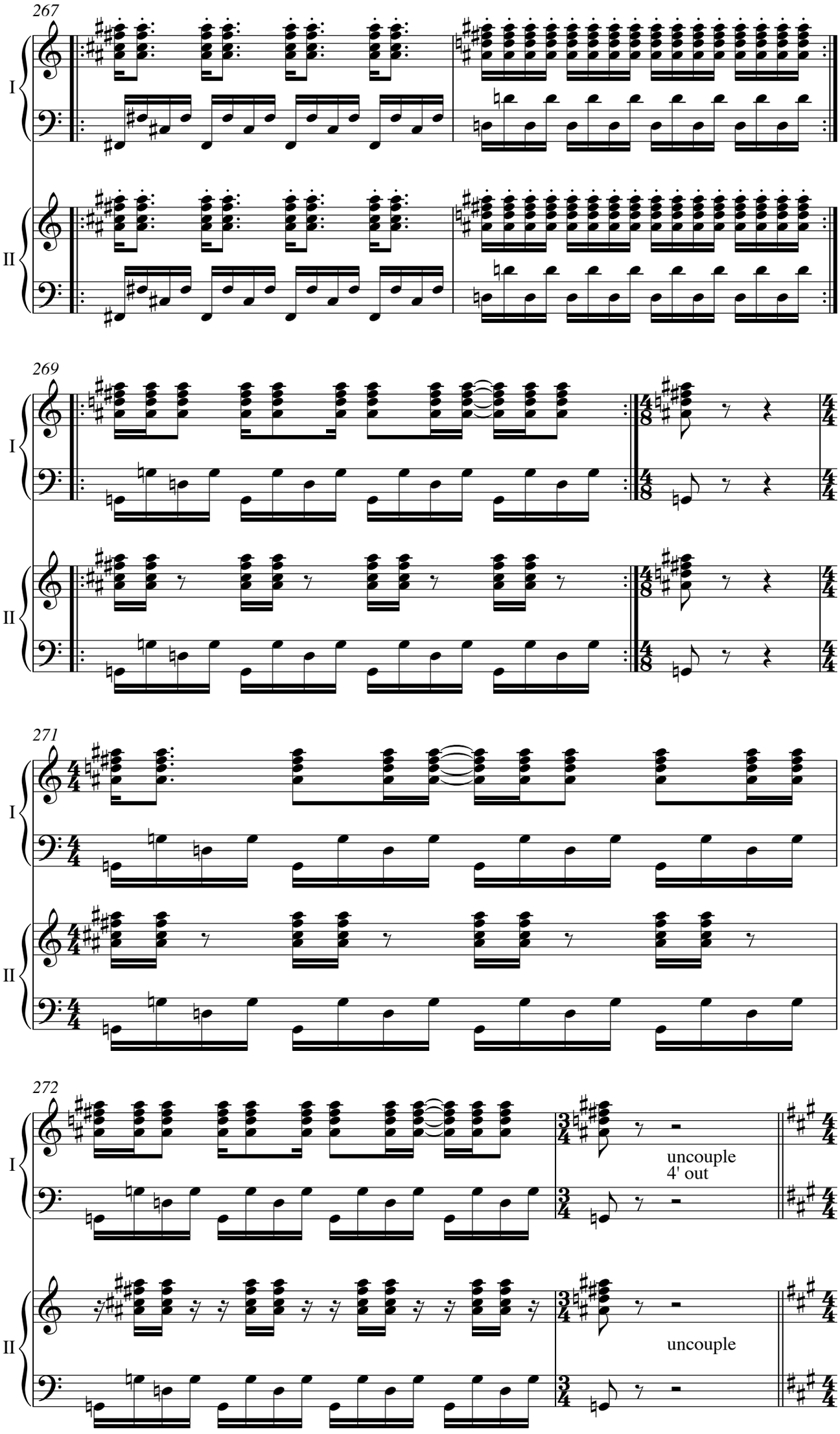

251
I
II
II
253
I
I
II
I
255
I
II

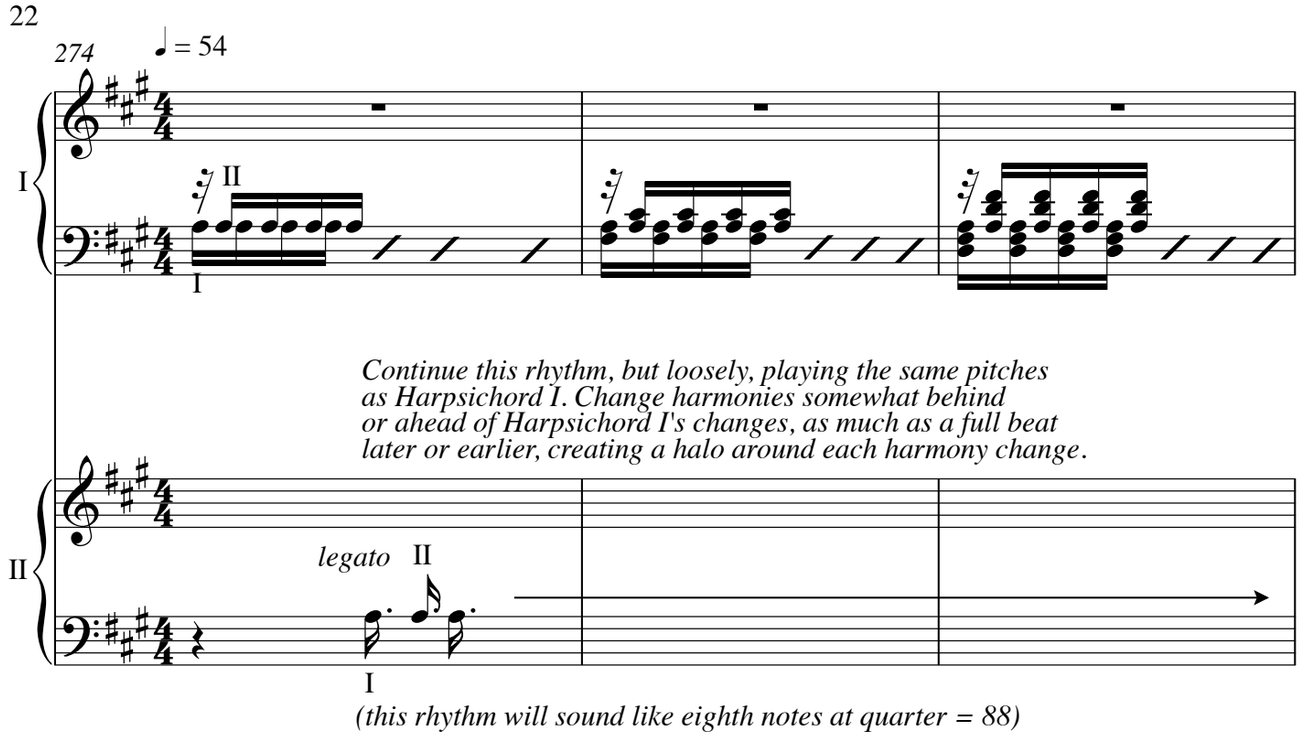

256
I
II

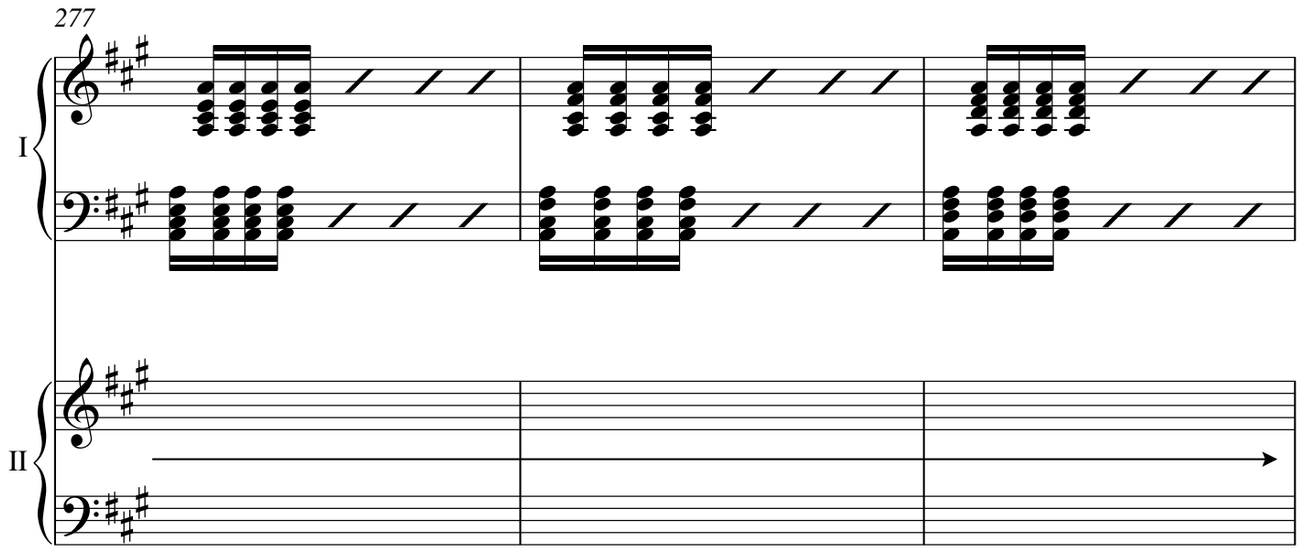

258
I
II

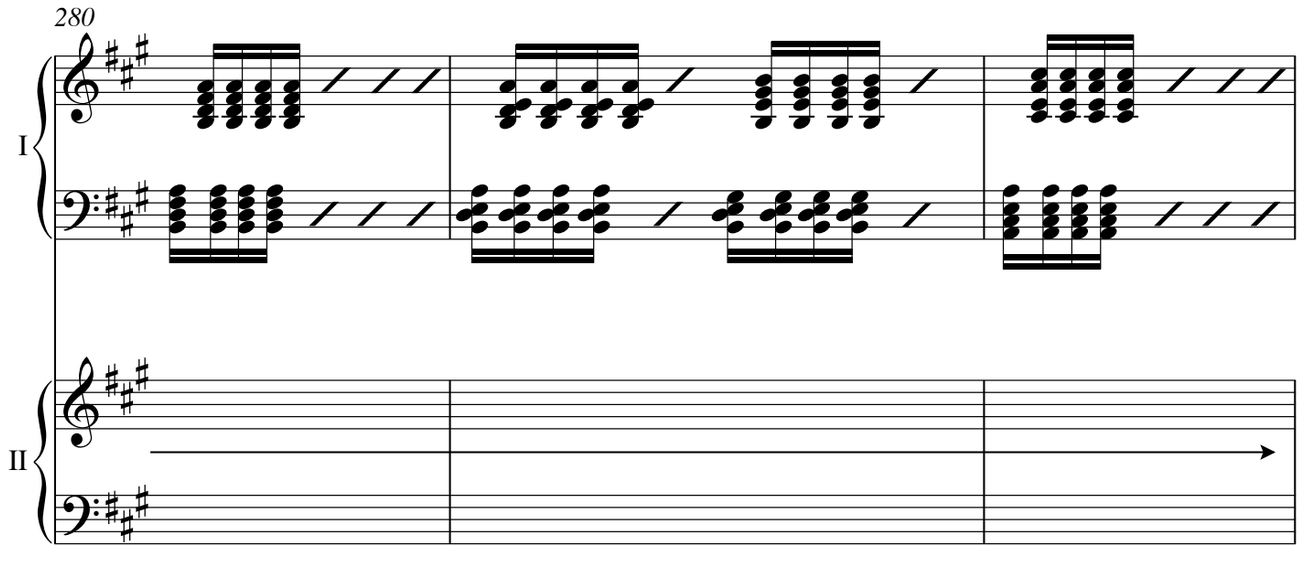

259
II
I
II
II

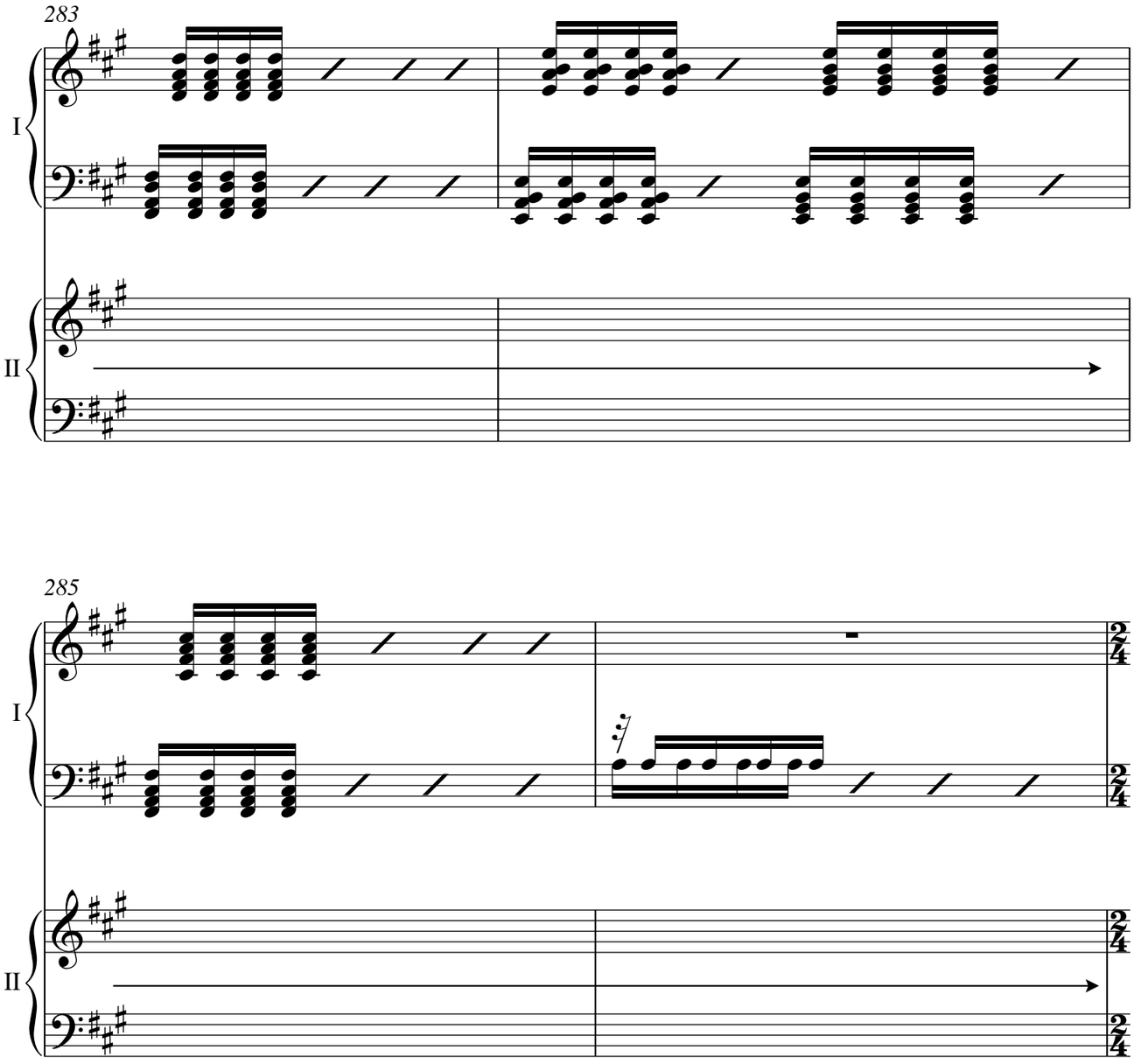

261
I
II
263
I
II
I
I
265
I
I
I
I
II
I
I


267
I
II
269
I
II
271
I
II
272
I
uncouple
4' out
II
uncouple

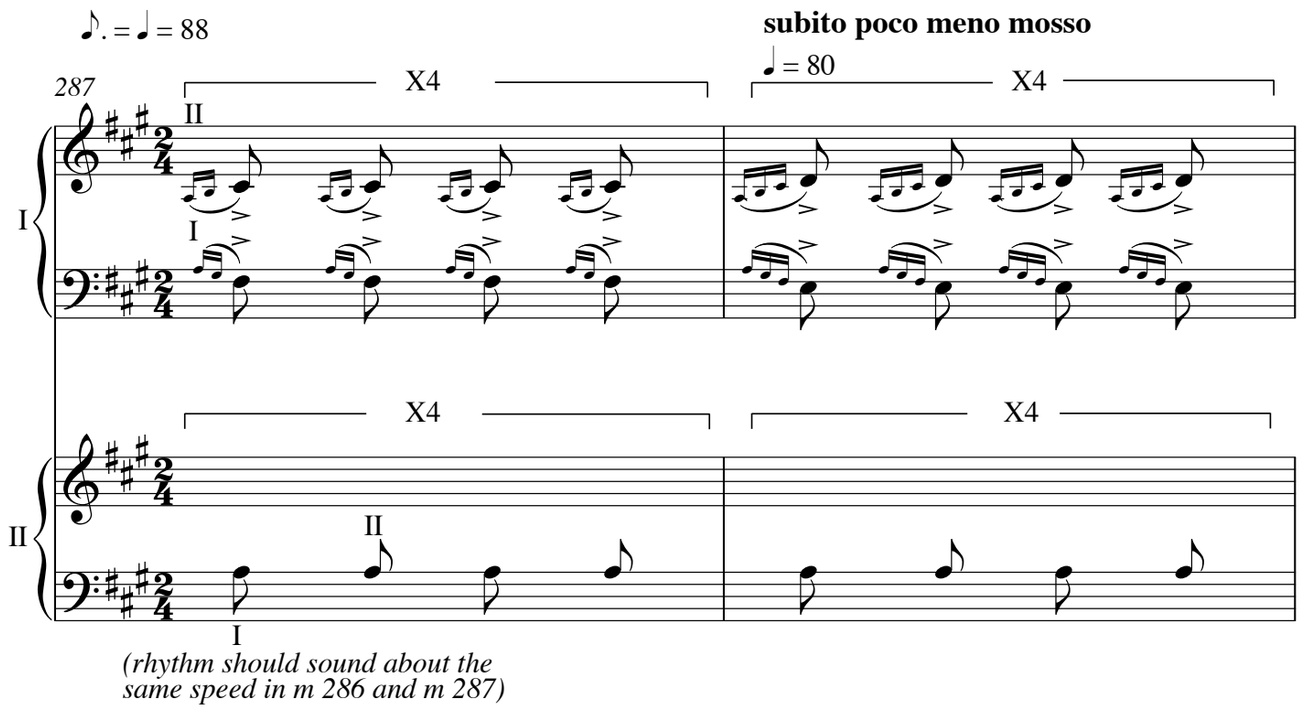

274
♩ = 54
I
II
I
Continue this rhythm, but loosely, playing the same pitches
as Harpsichord I. Change harmonies somewhat behind
or ahead of Harpsichord I's changes, as much as a full beat
later or earlier, creating a halo around each harmony change.
II
legato
II
I
(this rhythm will sound like eighth notes at quarter = 88)

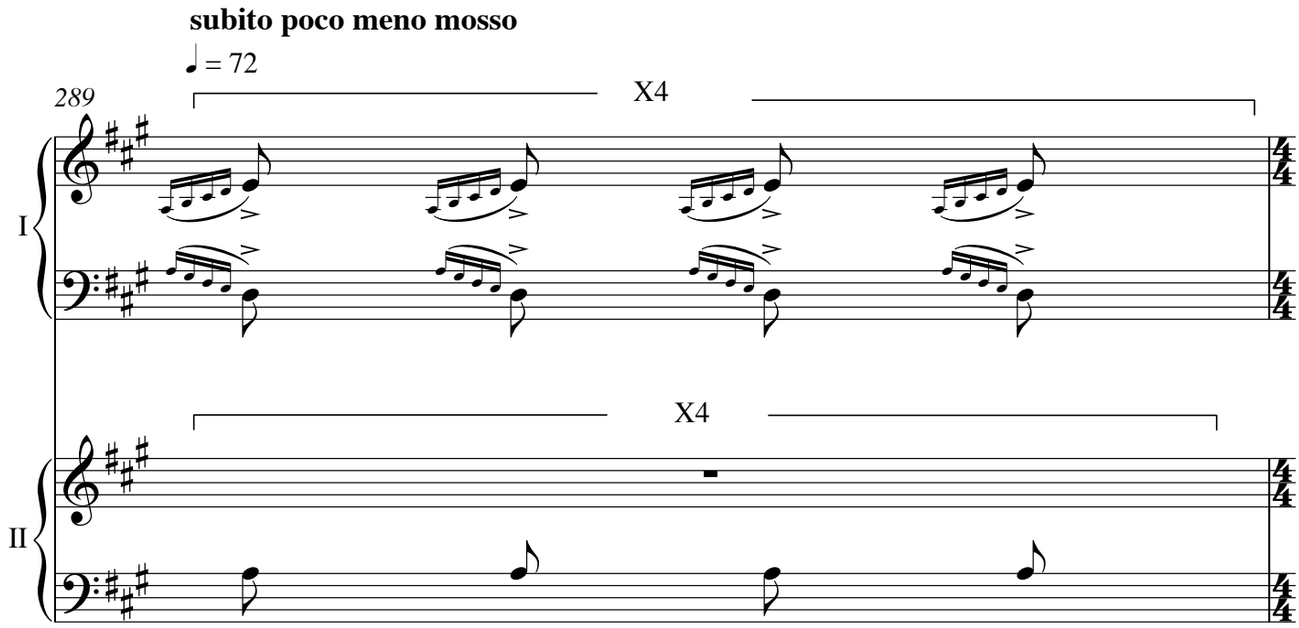

277
I
II

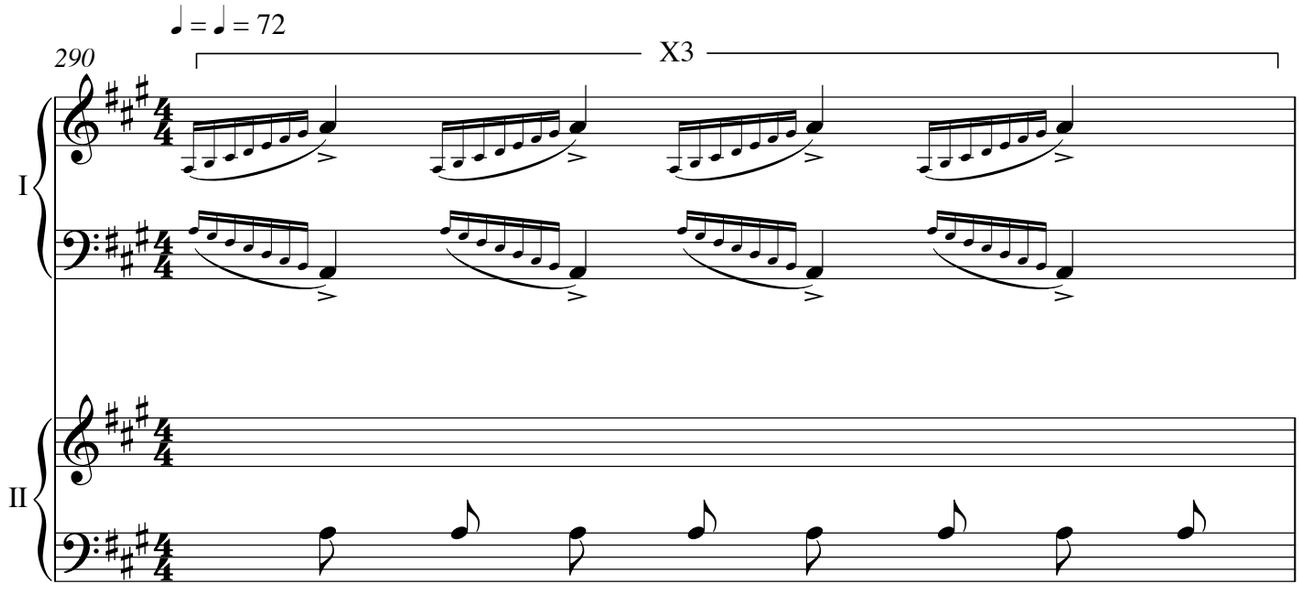

280
I
II

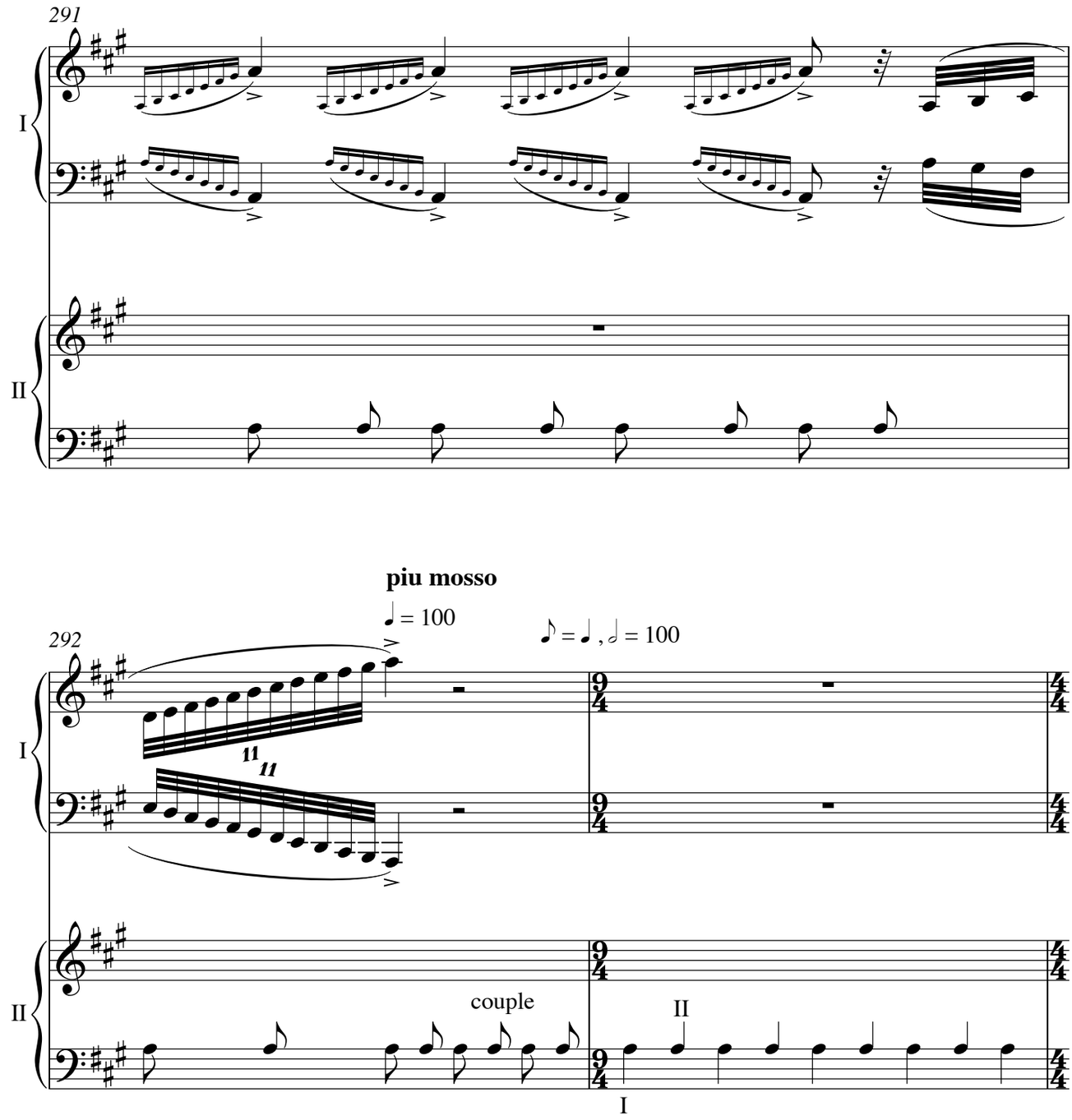

283
I
II

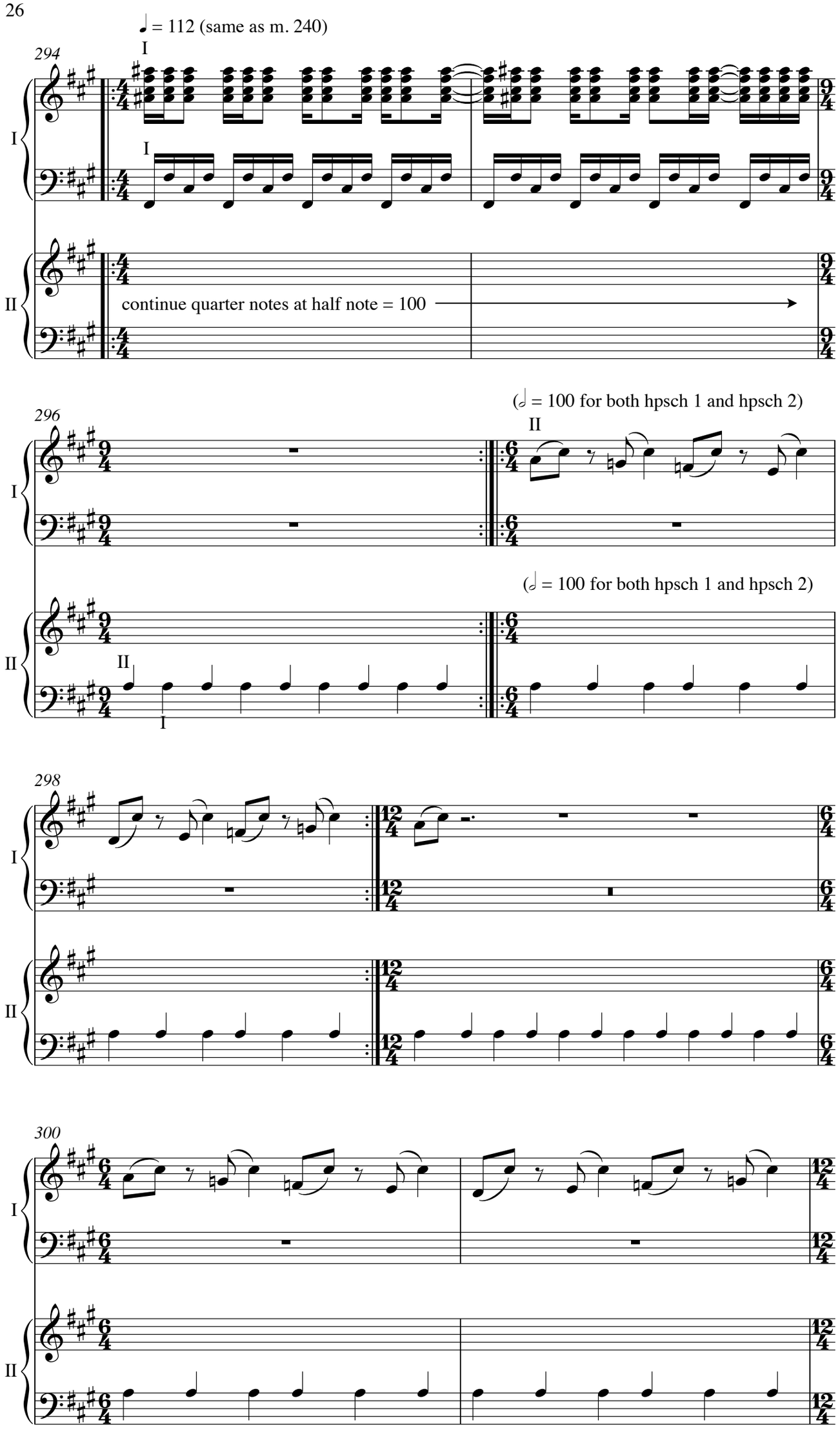
285
I
II
2/4

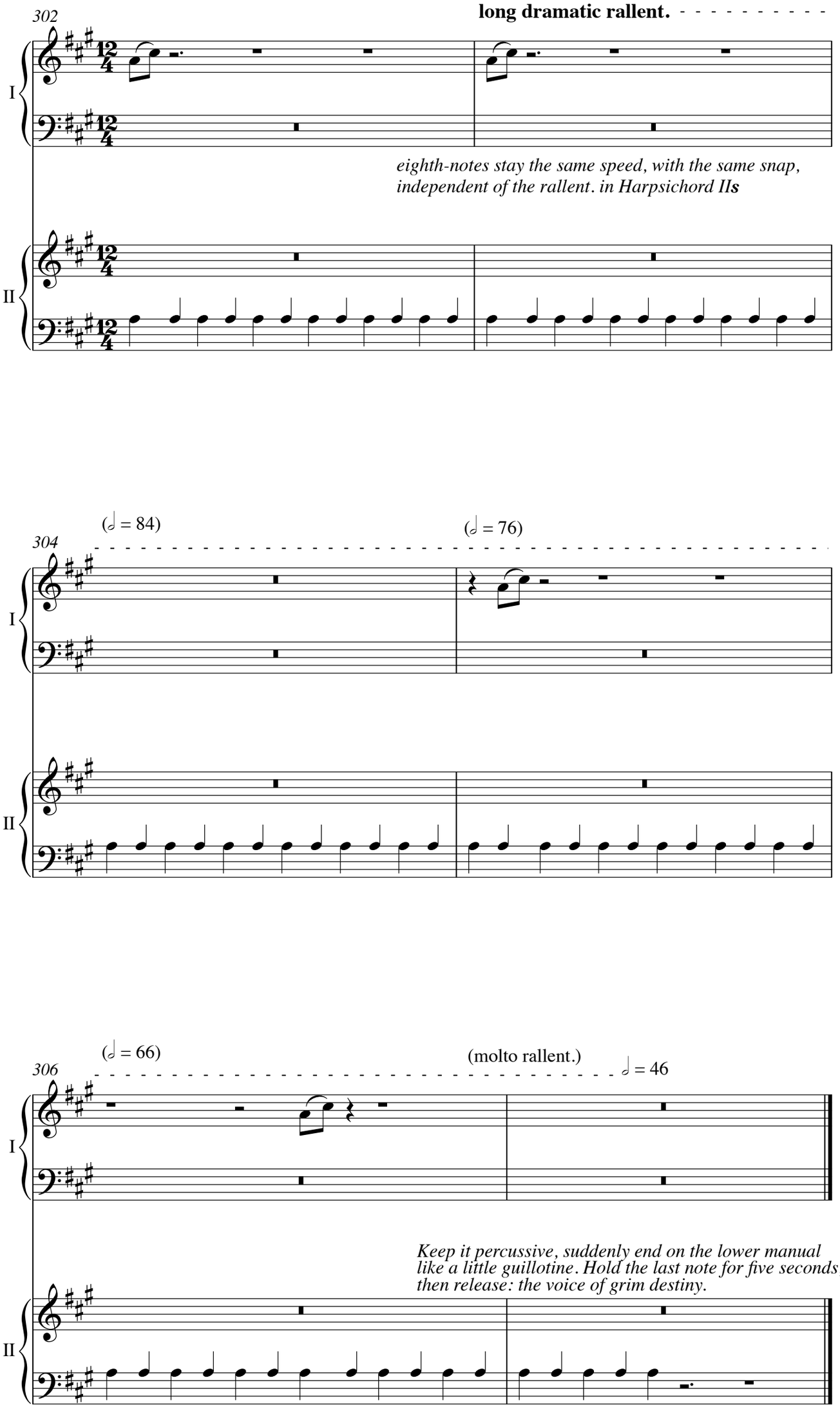

♪. = ♩ = 88
287
X4
II
I
I
X4
II
I
(rhythm should sound about the same speed in m 286 and m 287)
subito poco meno mosso
♩ = 80
X4
X4
II


subito poco meno mosso
♩ = 72
289
X4
I
X4
II


♩ = ♩ = 72
290
X3
I
II


291
I
II
piu mosso
♩ = 100
292
♪ = ♩ , 𝅗𝅥 = 100
I
II
couple
II
I


♩ = 112 (same as m. 240)
294
I
I
II
continue quarter notes at half note = 100
296
(𝅗𝅥 = 100 for both hpsch 1 and hpsch 2)
II
(𝅗𝅥 = 100 for both hpsch 1 and hpsch 2)
II
I
298
300


302
long dramatic rallent.
I
II
eighth-notes stay the same speed, with the same snap,
independent of the rallent. in Harpsichord IIs
(𝅗𝅥 = 84)
304
(𝅗𝅥 = 76)
(𝅗𝅥 = 66)
306
(molto rallent.)
𝅗𝅥 = 46
Keep it percussive, suddenly end on the lower manual
like a little guillotine. Hold the last note for five seconds,
then release: the voice of grim destiny.