

Cypher, a Circle

for two pianos
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Performance Notes

pitch outside circle = P
number inside circle = X

A performance must consist of at least three of the six movements. Movements may be in any order and should be performed without pauses between them. Movements may overlap where possible. Movements may be repeated.

Some notated examples are provided for clarification. Notating more parts may be helpful while exploring the piece. Reading from fully notated parts is discouraged for the performance, however, in order to focus attention on the interaction between performers, their listening and real-time decision making.

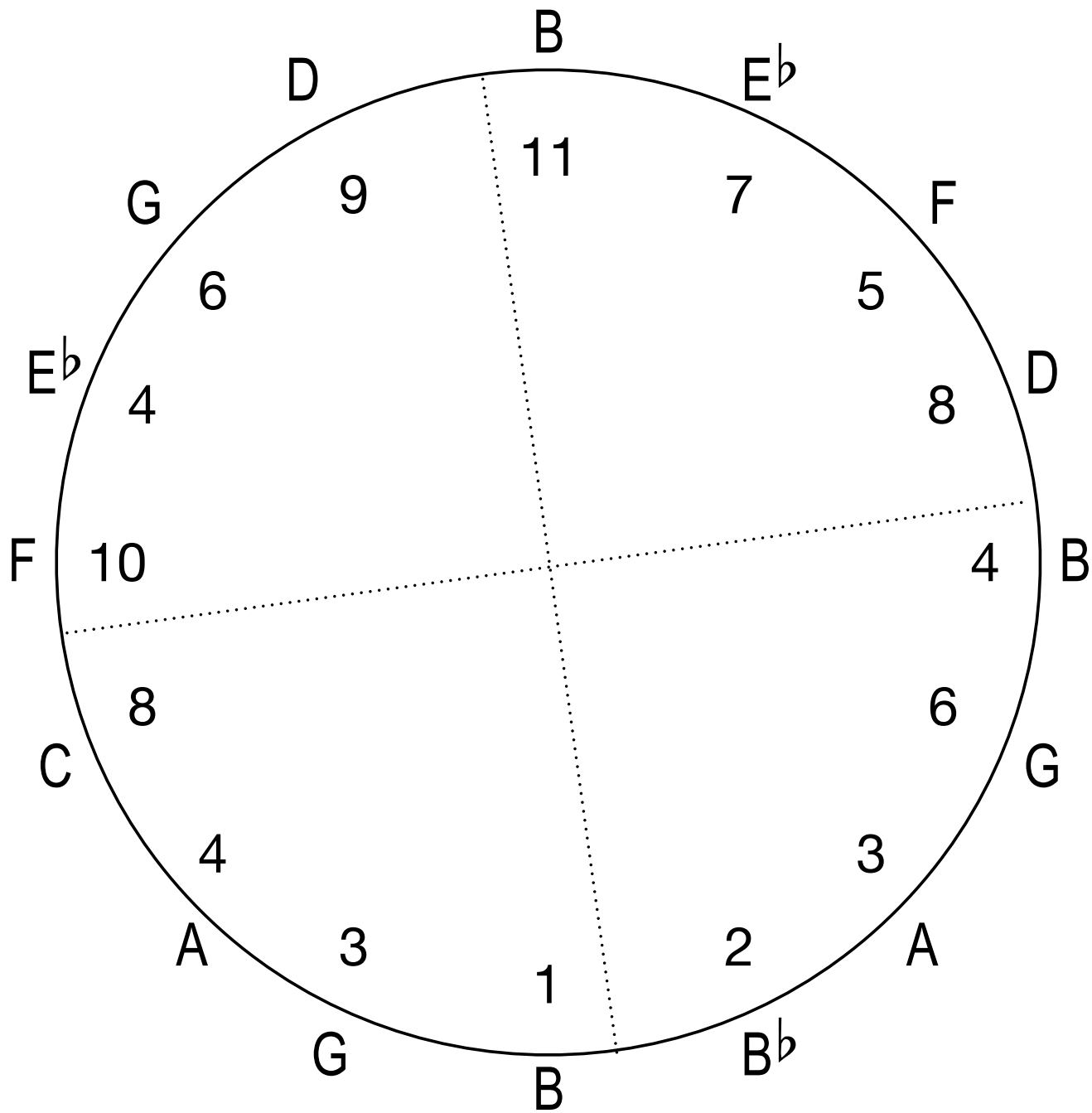
Program Notes

Cypher, a Circle is a piece created from a set of six recipes or movements that all reference a circular figure of note names and numbers. Each recipe specifies a different way for the performers to relate to each other and the given material. Every movement requires musical decisions to be made in the moment of performance; no two performances are alike.

“cypher, a circle in numbering, of no value of it selfe, but serveth to make up the number, and to make other figures of more value”

- Table Alphabeticall, Robert Cawdrey (1604)

cipher, a note that continues to sound in a pipe organ when the organist does not intend for it to sound.



Nimbostratus

Begin together at the top of the circle ($P = B$, $X = 11$).

Piano 1 proceeds clockwise. Piano 2 proceeds counter-clockwise.

Quiet throughout.

With sustain pedal throughout.

Gesture: Octave clouds ending a fifth higher

Play single notes of the given pitch (P) as many times as indicated (X). Change octaves for every new note and avoid returning to a just-sounded octave. At $X+1$ play a note a perfect fifth higher than the last note played.

Proceed at your own pace, playing the notes as quickly or slowly as desired, making sure that the first note of each gesture is still sounding when the last note is played and that the sequence of notes feels like a unified gesture.

Allow your sound to decay to silence then move around the circle to the next P and X and repeat the gesture. If the last pitch of the previous gesture matches another P on the circle, you may choose to move directly to that P .

End when $X = 11$.

Nimbostratus Example Score

The image shows a musical score for two pianos, labeled Pno 1 and Pno 2. The score is written in treble and bass clefs. Pno 1 starts with a *pp* dynamic. The music features long, sweeping melodic lines with various ornaments and articulation marks. Pno 2 also starts with a *pp* dynamic and includes a *δvb* marking. The score concludes with "etc." in both staves.

Waltz

quarter note = 110

medium quiet to medium loud throughout

Piano 2 begins first

Piano 1

choose any pitch P on the circle

Gesture: Ascending into the stratosphere

Begin with the first occurrence of the chosen pitch above middle C. Play pitches clockwise around the circle, always ascending. Durations should be dotted quarters, quarters, eighths. Pedal throughout gesture.

The beginning of each gesture coincides with the beginning of one of Piano 2's two-bar phrases. When you run out of keys on the keyboard, rest for any length of time (including none), then move clockwise one P from the last starting P and repeat gesture as long as Piano 2 is still playing.

Piano 2

choose any pitch P on the circle.

Gesture: Waltz accompaniment on an accordion, accordingly

RH: Play a P major chord in any inversion for 6 quarter notes. Choose any octave above the LH.

LH: Play octaves beginning on P (the root of the chord) for one half note. Play octaves of the fifth or third of the chord for one quarter note. Play octaves of the fifth or third of the chord (whichever hasn't been sounded yet) for one dotted half note.

If the LH ending pitch matches another pitch on the circle (or an enharmonic), move immediately to this new pitch and repeat the gesture.

If the LH ending pitch does not match another pitch on the circle, rest until Piano 1 is no longer playing. Then either repeat gesture with the next clockwise P on the circle or end.

Pedal in 2-bar phrases or freely.

Waltz Example Score

The image shows a musical score for two pianos, labeled Piano 1 and Piano 2. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of five measures. Piano 1 is in the treble clef, and Piano 2 is in the grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature has one flat (B-flat). Dynamics include *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *mp* (mezzo-piano). A *15ma* (15th measure rest) is indicated with a dashed line and a bracket over the first measure of Piano 1. The score ends with "etc." in both staves.

Piano 1
mf
Red.
15ma

Piano 2
mp
Red.

5
etc.
etc.

Mountains Reflected in the Clouds

quarter note = 80, stately

Medium loud to loud throughout

Either piano begins. The other piano enters when ready on any beat at the established tempo

Choose any position on the circle to begin and proceed clockwise

Gesture: Articulating the space between octaves

With one hand, alternate two consecutive octaves of the chosen pitch, sounding each octave once per whole note bar.

The two octaves may divide the whole note evenly or unevenly. Mirror this motion with the other hand in a nearby octave.

The mirroring need not be strict: rhythms, pitch order and contour can be changed to make the gesture fit each hand as long the original octaves remain and the duration of the gesture fills the bar. Each bar begins with the RH and LH sounding P simultaneously.

After 2-6 repetitions add the next (2nd) pitch from the circle. Sound it once between the two octaves and return to it before repeating your starting note to create an undulating up-and-down figure. Note durations may be even or uneven. Mirror this motion with the other hand.

After 2-6 repetitions add the next (3rd) pitch from the circle as above.

After 2-6 repetitions add the next (4th) pitch from the circle as above.

After 2-6 repetitions remove the 2nd pitch. Continue to play the gesture with the first, third and fourth pitches.

After 2-6 repetitions remove the 3rd pitch. Continue to play the gesture with the first and fourth pitches.

After 2-6 repetitions remove the 4th pitch. Play the gesture with the original octaves only.

Repeat the gesture beginning on the next pitch (P + 5).

End at the end of a gesture anytime after all P's on the circle have been sounded (a minimum of four gestures).

Mountains Reflected in the Clouds Example Score

Piano

The image shows a piano score for a piece titled "Mountains Reflected in the Clouds". The score is written in 4/4 time and consists of two systems of music. Each system is for a piano and is written on a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The first system contains four measures, each marked with a double bar line and repeat dots, and each beginning with a "2-6x" guitar-style chord marking. The second system contains three measures, also marked with double bar lines and repeat dots, and the first measure is marked with "2-6x". The final measure of the second system ends with the text "etc.". The music features a mix of chords and melodic lines, with a focus on the 2-6x guitar chord.

Ringling from the Steel Plate in my Head

Loud throughout.

Piano 1 and 2: choose any position on the circle to begin

Gesture: Cluster with a cipher

Always together and always higher than c above middle c, play a staccato cluster of approximately X notes that includes pitch P. Sustain pitch P for 2 or more seconds.

If your sustained pitch is higher than the other piano's sustained pitch, move clockwise around the circle and repeat the gesture.

If your sustained pitch is lower than the other piano's sustained pitch, move counter-clockwise around the circle and repeat the gesture.

If your sustained pitch is the same as the other piano's sustained pitch, return to your original position and repeat the gesture.

End at a unison or at any time after 24 gestures.

Ringling from the Steel Plate in my Head Example Score

The score is for two pianos, Piano 1 and Piano 2, and consists of three measures. Each measure shows a staccato cluster of notes in the right hand, indicated by a black bar above the staff and a 'v' (accents) symbol. The notes are marked with a 'P' and a circled 'c' above them. The left hand plays a sustained note, marked with a circled 'c' and 'l.v.' (labeled 'P' in the first measure, 'b' in the second, and 'P' in the third). The dynamic marking *ff* is present at the bottom of each measure. The score ends with 'etc.' in the second measure of the third measure.

Switch Grass

after David Behrman

Lyrical and expressive

quarter note = 100

Dynamics are free

Piano 1 and 2 choose any quadrant on the circle to begin

Piano 1:

Gesture for when Piano 2 is playing: Glassy static harmony

Play minor chords using the following voicing: root (P), minor 7th, minor 3rd, fifth. Or play chords made from stacks of fourths: root (P), perfect fourth, perfect fourth, perfect fourth, etc. In either case, lower notes of the chord are generally below middle c and upper notes are generally above middle c. Roots of the chords are freely chosen from the quadrant pitches. The duration of the chords are freely chosen from the X numbers of the quadrant which represent either eighth notes or quarter notes.

Gesture for when Piano 2 is resting: Glassy passing chords

Play minor chords or stacks of fourths as above moving mostly stepwise to new chords. Try to choose a chord from a different quadrant each time. Somewhat more active than when Piano 2 is playing.

Piano 2:

Gesture: Melodies

Play melodies of notes freely chosen from the quadrant pitches. X numbers from the quadrant determine the number of notes in each phrase; durations are free. Search for ways to make your given pitches and notes numbers work with the other pianist's harmonies. Melodies may be sequential, simultaneous or overlapping. After 3 or more phrases, rest for a phrase or more. Then choose any quadrant on the circle (including the same one) and repeat.

Pianists may switch roles once or twice during the movement.

End together when ready.

Switch Grass Example Score

available harmonies from upper left quadrant when Piano 2 is playing

Piano 1

or

or

or

or etc.

example harmonies and progression for when Piano 2 is resting

Piano 1

etc.

Inverse Swell

Spare
Tempo is free

Piano 1 and 2: independently choose any position and either of its neighbors on the circle to begin. Begin when ready and proceed independently.

Gesture: Tremolo pairs.

Play a two note chord consisting of the two chosen pitches in any octave for an eighth note. Then invert the pitches, each in any octave as long as the inversion is preserved, and play the inverted two note chord for an eighth note. Choose either of the two X values on the circle and repeat the gesture for a total of X number of times, maintaining the octave choices throughout the phrase. Begin and end each phrase quietly at any desired tempo. Swell to loud or medium loud near the middle of each phrase. You may choose to accelerate toward the middle and decelerate toward the end of each phrase.

When the phrase is completed, rest for any length of time (including none) then:

repeat the phrase

repeat with the other associated X value

or move to a neighboring P in either direction (keeping one P the same) and repeat the gesture.

End anytime after at least one of your starting pitches reoccurs.

Inverse Swell Example Score

Piano

p *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *f*

accel. decel.

etc.