

Orbital Resonance

for three retuned, computer-driven pianos

by Kyle Gann
2015

Orbital Resonance (2015)

When the New Horizons spacecraft took its historic photos of Pluto in July 2015, there was a lot written about Pluto. I learned, for instance, for the first time, that although the orbits of Pluto and Neptune overlap, they are prevented from colliding by the 2-to-3 ratio in their rotations around the sun; Pluto goes around the sun in 247.94 earth years, and Neptune in 164.8, and $247.94/164.8 = 1.50449\dots$. This kind of mutually influenced periodicity, as it turns out (how was I an astrologer for thirty years without learning this?), is common among pairs, trios, quadruples of planets, moons, asteroids, and so on, and is called *orbital resonance*. Three of the moons of Jupiter exhibit rotational ratios of 1:2:4, and there's even an asteroid that has a 5:8 dance going with respect to the earth. This is truly the harmony of the spheres, the surprisingly simple mathematical relations that planets in a rotational system fall into in response to each other's gravity.

Chalk it up to my personal eccentricities that this suddenly gave me a new way to compose. For 35 years I'd been writing repeating cycles at different tempos, and it has sometimes been an aesthetic problem for me when the articulation points of those cycles coincide by chance. But the solution, as it turned out, was already in our stars. Inspired by this new knowledge, I started using much simpler ratios than I had been using (3:4, 5:6:7 instead of 17:19:23), but shifting each one a slight amount so that the articulated beats would *never* coincide. It gave me a new way to create melody from the articulated beats among the different cycles. I immediately started a piece titled *Orbital Resonance*.

Orbital Resonance is for three computer-controlled pianos (Disklaviers, for instance), retuned to include 33 pitches to the octave, the result of eight harmonic series' on the first eight odd-numbered harmonics of Eb. Although the piece is fairly continuous within its moment form, its successive panels fall into six sections whose progression makes the derivation of the characteristic rhythm increasingly clear:

1. Articulation of the characteristic rhythm by various pitches in the scale less than a quarter-tone apart, with harmonizations (taking advantage of where such pitches in the scale differ by less than a quarter-tone) (mm. 1-103).
2. Articulation of the characteristic rhythm by dyads from different harmonic series' (mm. 103-132).
3. The characteristic rhythm fused into a single melody, accompanied by chords outlining the rhythmic derivation (mm. 133-191).
4. Articulation of the characteristic rhythm by widely-spaced sonorities separated by extremely parsimonious voice-leading (expansion of the 1st section and 2nd section ideas) (mm. 192-249).
5. Articulation of the characteristic rhythm divided out among increasingly audible independent melodic ostinatos (expansion of the 3rd section idea) (mm. 249-273).

6. A coda returning to the initial idea, with sparser harmonization (mm. 274-301).

This is a kind of broken symmetry characteristic of my music: the first section is paralleled with the sixth, the fourth combines the first and second, and the fifth expands on the third. I provide the plan not to suggest that the piece should be heard in a corresponding way, but merely to draw attention to the presence of an internal logic that might not be immediately evident.

For years I'd been trying to write something more elaborate both microtonally and polyrhythmically (and polytonally) than *Custer and Sitting Bull* (1999), and this is it: Nancarrow fused with Ben Johnston and La Monte Young with a dash of *Piano Phase* thrown in. And as with *Custer*, I've dedicated it to Ben, who in 1984 started me down this incredibly labor-intensive road.

- Kyle Gann
August, 2015
Germantown, NY

Technical Specifications

The 33-pitch tuning of the three pianos (the same in every octave) is as follows, given first in the number of cents above E-flat, and then as ratios to the E-flat 1/1:

Piano	1	2	3			
D	1088	15/8	977	225/128	1044	117/64
Db	969	7/4	938	55/32	906	27/16
C	857	105/64	773	25/16	840	13/8
B	738	49/32	755	99/64	729	195/128
Bb	702	3/2	590	45/32	609	91/64
A	551	11/8	551	11/8	481	169/128
Ab	471	21/16	440	165/128	408	81/64
G	386	5/4	320	77/64	342	39/32
Gb	204	9/8	275	75/64	275	75/64
F	155	35/32	192	143/128	192	143/128
E	92	135/128	53	33/32	27	65/64
Eb	0	1/1	1103	121/64	1173	63/32

Note that no string needs to be raised higher than its natural tuning except for the B-flat on piano 1, which is 2¢ sharp (or if one prefers, 2¢ could be subtracted from all quantities).

For electronic realization of the piece, it can prove helpful to reconfigure the tuning as a reference pitch in cycles per second for each piano, and ratios derived from that standard:

Tuning pitch: 38.891 cps	36.7641 cps	38.2833 cps	
D	15/8	225/121	13/7
Db	7/4	20/11	12/7
C	105/64	200/121	104/63
B	49/32	18/11	65/42
Bb	3/2	180/121	13/9
A	11/8	16/11	169/126
Ab	21/16	15/11	9/7
G	5/4	14/11	26/21
F#	9/8	150/121	25/21
F	35/32	13/11	143/126
E	135/128	12/11	65/63
Eb	1/1	1/1	1/1

In the configuration of certain tuning softwares, the following sequences might facilitate getting the required tuning:

Piano 1:

38.891 = Eb0

1/1, 135/128, 35/32, 9/8, 5/4, 21/16, 11/8, 3/2, 49/32, 105/64, 7/4, 15/8

Piano 2:

36.7641485 = Eb0

1/1, 12/11, 13/11, 150/121, 14/11, 15/11, 16/11, 180/121, 18/11, 200/121, 20/11, 225/121

Piano 3:

38.283333 = Eb0

1/1, 65/63, 143/126, 25/21, 26/21, 9/7, 169/126, 13/9, 65/42, 104/63, 12/7, 13/7

For purposes of analysis, the entire scale (which I refer to as my 8x8 scale) is given below, grouping its pitches into eight harmonic series' on the 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, 11th, 13th, and 15th harmonics of E-flat, and naming each pitch in a typographical equivalent of Ben Johnston's just-intonation notation:

Pitch name	Ratio	Cents	1/1	3/2	5/4	7/4	9/8	11/8	13/8	15/8
Db ⁺⁺ -	121/64	1103						11		
D	15/8	1088	15	5	3				1	
Db13	117/64	1044					13		9	
C#+	225/128	977								15
Db7	7/4	969	7			1				
C^	55/32	938			11			5		
C+	27/16	906		9			3			
C7+	105/64	857				15			7	
Cb13	13/8	840	13					1		
B	25/16	773			5					
Bb^	99/64	755					11	9		
Cb77+	49/32	738				7				
Bb13	195/128	729						15	13	
Bb	3/2	702	3	1						
Bbb713	91/64	609				13		7		
A+	45/32	590		15	9		5			3
Ab^	11/8	551	11					1		
Abb1313	169/128	481						13		
Ab7+	21/16	471		7		3				
G^	165/128	440					15		11	
G+	81/64	408					9			
G	5/4	386	5		1				3	
Gb13	39/32	342		13						
Gb7^	77/64	320				11		7		
F#+	75/64	275			15					5
F+	9/8	204	9	3			1			
Fb13^	143/128	192						13	11	
F7+	35/32	155			7	5				
E+	135/128	92					15			9
Eb^	33/32	53		11				3		
Eb13	65/64	27			13				5	
Eb	1/1	0	1							
Eb7+	63/32	1173				9	7			

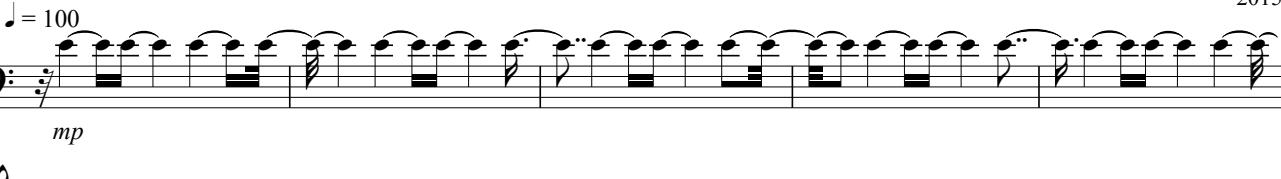
In Johnston's notation, + raises a pitch by 81/80, # raises it by 25/24, b lowers it by 24/25, 7 lowers it by 35/36, ^ raises it by 33/32, 13 raises it by 65/64, and F-A-C, C-E-G, and G-B-D are all perfectly tuned 4:5:6 major triads.

to Ben Johnston

Orbital Resonance

Kyle Gann
2015

J = 100

Piano 2 { 

Piano 3 { 

≡

Pno2 { 

Pno3 { 

≡

Pno2 { 

Pno3 { 

≡

Pno2 { 

Pno3 { 

18

Pno2

Pno3

This section shows two staves. The top staff (Pno2) has a treble clef and consists of six measures. The first measure has eighth-note pairs. The second measure has eighth-note pairs. The third measure has eighth-note pairs. The fourth measure has eighth-note pairs. The fifth measure has eighth-note pairs. The sixth measure has eighth-note pairs. The bottom staff (Pno3) has a treble clef and consists of six measures. The first measure has quarter notes. The second measure has quarter notes. The third measure has quarter notes. The fourth measure has quarter notes. The fifth measure has quarter notes. The sixth measure has quarter notes.

=

22

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

This section shows three staves. The top staff (Pno1) has a treble clef and consists of four measures. The first measure has a rest. The second measure has eighth-note pairs. The third measure has eighth-note pairs. The fourth measure has eighth-note pairs. The middle staff (Pno2) has a treble clef and consists of four measures. The first measure has eighth-note pairs. The second measure has eighth-note pairs. The third measure has eighth-note pairs. The fourth measure has eighth-note pairs. The bottom staff (Pno3) has a treble clef and consists of four measures. The first measure has quarter notes. The second measure has quarter notes. The third measure has quarter notes. The fourth measure has quarter notes.

Orbital Resonance

26

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

3

29

Pno1

Pno2

Orbital Resonance

4

32

This section shows two staves for Pno1 and Pno2. Pno1's top staff consists of three groups of six eighth-note pairs each, with a bracket under each group labeled '3'. Its bottom staff has three groups of three eighth-note pairs each, also with a bracket labeled '3'. Pno2's top staff has three groups of three eighth-note pairs each, with a bracket labeled '3'. Its bottom staff has three groups of three eighth-note pairs each, with a bracket labeled '3'.

Pno2

This section continues the musical score for Pno2. It shows three groups of three eighth-note pairs each, with a bracket labeled '3' under each group. The key signature changes to one sharp (F#) at the beginning of this section.



35

This section continues the musical score for both Pno1 and Pno2. Pno1's top staff has three groups of six eighth-note pairs each, with a bracket labeled '3' under each group. Its bottom staff has three groups of three eighth-note pairs each, with a bracket labeled '3' under each group. Pno2's top staff has three groups of three eighth-note pairs each, with a bracket labeled '3' under each group. Its bottom staff has three groups of three eighth-note pairs each, with a bracket labeled '3' under each group.

This section continues the musical score for both Pno1 and Pno2. Pno1's top staff has three groups of six eighth-note pairs each, with a bracket labeled '3' under each group. Its bottom staff has three groups of three eighth-note pairs each, with a bracket labeled '3' under each group. Pno2's top staff has three groups of three eighth-note pairs each, with a bracket labeled '3' under each group. Its bottom staff has three groups of three eighth-note pairs each, with a bracket labeled '3' under each group.

Orbital Resonance

38

Pno1

Pno2

42

Pno1

Pno2

47

Pno1 {

Pno2 {

Pno3 {



51

Pno1 {

Pno2 {

Pno3 {

Orbital Resonance

55

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

60

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

66

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

This section contains three staves for Pno1, Pno2, and Pno3. The music consists of five measures. Measure 66 starts with eighth-note pairs in Pno1 and sixteenth-note pairs in Pno2. Measures 67-70 feature eighth-note pairs in Pno1 and sixteenth-note pairs in Pno2. Measure 71 begins with eighth-note pairs in Pno1 and sixteenth-note pairs in Pno2.

≡

71

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

This section contains three staves for Pno1, Pno2, and Pno3. The music consists of five measures. Measure 71 starts with eighth-note pairs in Pno1 and sixteenth-note pairs in Pno2. Measures 72-75 feature eighth-note pairs in Pno1 and sixteenth-note pairs in Pno2. Measure 76 begins with eighth-note pairs in Pno1 and sixteenth-note pairs in Pno2.

Orbital Resonance

76

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

82

The musical score consists of three staves, each representing a piano part (Pno1, Pno2, and Pno3). The score is in common time.

- Pno1:** Treble clef. The first two measures show eighth-note patterns with grace notes. From measure 3 onwards, the patterns become more complex, featuring sixteenth-note figures and sustained notes with grace notes.
- Pno2:** Bass clef. The bass line consists of eighth-note patterns with grace notes throughout the measures shown.
- Pno3:** Treble clef. The first two measures show eighth-note patterns with grace notes. From measure 3 onwards, the patterns become more complex, featuring sixteenth-note figures and sustained notes with grace notes.

87

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

91

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Musical score for three pianos (Pno1, Pno2, Pno3) in 9 measures. The score consists of three systems of piano staves. The first system (measures 95-96) shows Pno1 playing eighth-note chords in the treble and bass staves, while Pno2 and Pno3 play eighth-note patterns in the treble staff. The second system (measures 97-98) shows Pno1 playing eighth-note chords in the treble and bass staves, while Pno2 and Pno3 play eighth-note patterns in the treble staff. The third system (measures 99-100) shows Pno1 playing eighth-note chords in the treble and bass staves, while Pno2 and Pno3 play eighth-note patterns in the treble staff.

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

99

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

103

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

17

Orbital Resonance

106

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

108

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Rd.

mf

Rd.

mf

Orbital Resonance

110

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Ped.

113

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

117

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

120

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

5

13

124

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

127

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

130

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

Musical score for three pianos (Pno1, Pno2, Pno3) at measure 133. The tempo is $= 180$. The score consists of four systems of music.

Pno1: Treble clef. Dynamics: mf , mp , mp . Measures 133-134 show eighth-note patterns. Measure 135 shows sixteenth-note patterns. Measure 136 contains rests. Measure 137 ends with a fermata over the bass line.

Pno2: Treble clef. Dynamics: mf , mp . Measures 133-134 show eighth-note patterns. Measure 135 shows sixteenth-note patterns. Measure 136 contains rests. Measure 137 ends with a fermata over the bass line.

Pno3: Treble clef. Dynamics: mp . Measures 133-134 show eighth-note patterns. Measure 135 shows sixteenth-note patterns. Measure 136 contains rests. Measure 137 ends with a fermata over the bass line.

137

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

141

Pno1

This musical score page shows three staves for the piano. The top staff uses a treble clef, the middle staff a treble clef, and the bottom staff a bass clef. Measure 5 begins with eighth-note pairs in the treble clef staff. Measure 6 starts with eighth-note pairs in the bass clef staff, followed by eighth-note pairs in the treble clef staff. Measure 7 continues with eighth-note pairs in the bass clef staff, followed by eighth-note pairs in the treble clef staff.

Pno2

This musical score page shows two staves for the piano. The top staff uses a treble clef and the bottom staff a treble clef. Both staves begin with eighth-note pairs. Measures 5 and 6 feature eighth-note pairs in both staves. Measure 7 begins with eighth-note pairs in the bottom staff, followed by eighth-note pairs in the top staff.

Pno3

This musical score page shows three staves for the piano. The top staff uses a treble clef, the middle staff a treble clef, and the bottom staff a bass clef. Measures 5 and 6 are mostly silent. Measure 7 begins with eighth-note pairs in the bass clef staff, followed by eighth-note pairs in the treble clef staff.

Orbital Resonance

145

Pno1

Pno3

148

This musical score page contains three staves, each representing a piano part (Pno1, Pno2, and Pno3). The score is set in common time. Measure 148 begins with a dynamic of $\frac{3}{4}$. The first staff (Pno1) features a treble clef and consists of six measures of eighth-note patterns. The second staff (Pno2) has a bass clef and also contains six measures of eighth-note patterns. The third staff (Pno3) has a treble clef and includes six measures of eighth-note patterns. Measures 149 through 154 are indicated by vertical bar lines. Measure 155 begins with a dynamic of $\frac{5}{4}$, followed by five measures of eighth-note patterns for each piano.

151

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

5

154

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

$\text{♩} = 100$

Orbital Resonance

156

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

f

f

5

158

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

160

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

163 $\text{♩} = 100$

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

$\text{♩} = 100$

166 (b)

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

169

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

Pno1 {

172

Pno2 {

=

Pno1 {

176

Pno2 {

Orbital Resonance

180 $\text{♩} = 140$

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

184

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

188

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

192 $\text{♩} = 100$ 43

Pno1
 f
 Pno2
 f
 Pno3
 f

Orbital Resonance

196

Pno1

This musical score page shows two staves for the piano. The top staff (Pno1) has a treble clef and includes dynamic markings like f , ff , and b . The bottom staff (Pno1) has a bass clef. Measures 196 and 197 feature complex rhythmic patterns with many eighth and sixteenth notes, often grouped by vertical bar lines.

Pno2

This musical score page shows two staves for the piano. The top staff (Pno2) has a treble clef. The bottom staff (Pno2) has a bass clef. Measures 198 and 199 continue the rhythmic patterns established in the previous measures, with a focus on eighth and sixteenth-note figures.

Pno3

This musical score page shows two staves for the piano. The top staff (Pno3) has a treble clef. The bottom staff (Pno3) has a bass clef. Measures 200 and 201 show a continuation of the rhythmic patterns, with measure 201 featuring a prominent eighth-note figure in the bass clef staff.

200

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

45

Orbital Resonance

203

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

206

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

Orbital Resonance

This musical score page, numbered 47, shows measures 206 through the end of the section. The score is divided into three staves: Pno1 (top), Pno2 (middle), and Pno3 (bottom). Each staff has two treble clef staves. Measure 206 starts with a dynamic ff. Measures 207 and 208 show sustained chords followed by eighth-note patterns. Measures 209 and 210 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 211 and 212 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 213 and 214 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 215 and 216 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 217 and 218 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 219 and 220 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 221 and 222 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 223 and 224 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 225 and 226 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 227 and 228 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 229 and 230 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 231 and 232 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 233 and 234 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 235 and 236 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 237 and 238 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 239 and 240 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 241 and 242 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 243 and 244 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 245 and 246 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 247 and 248 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 249 and 250 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 251 and 252 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 253 and 254 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 255 and 256 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 257 and 258 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 259 and 260 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 261 and 262 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 263 and 264 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 265 and 266 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 267 and 268 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 269 and 270 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 271 and 272 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 273 and 274 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 275 and 276 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 277 and 278 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 279 and 280 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 281 and 282 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 283 and 284 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 285 and 286 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 287 and 288 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 289 and 290 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 291 and 292 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 293 and 294 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 295 and 296 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords. Measures 297 and 298 feature eighth-note patterns with ff dynamics. Measures 299 and 300 show eighth-note patterns followed by sustained chords.

209

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

212

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

214

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

216

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

51

Orbital Resonance

218

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

221

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

223

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

225

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

227

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

5

5

mf

mf

mf

230

Pno1

57

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

Musical score for three pianos (Pno1, Pno2, Pno3) on three staves, showing measures 58-60.

Pno1: Treble clef. Measures 58-59: Bassoon-like notes (B-flat, A-flat, G). Measure 60: Bassoon-like notes (B-flat, A-flat, G), followed by a piano dynamic.

Pno2: Treble clef. Measures 58-59: Bassoon-like notes (B-flat, A-flat, G). Measure 60: Bassoon-like notes (B-flat, A-flat, G), followed by a piano dynamic.

Pno3: Treble clef. Measures 58-59: Bassoon-like notes (B-flat, A-flat, G). Measure 60: Bassoon-like notes (B-flat, A-flat, G), followed by a piano dynamic.

Orbital Resonance

236

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

239

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

242

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

245

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

248

63

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

251

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

254

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

257

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

260

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

263

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

266

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

270

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

275

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

p

Orbital Resonance

279

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

p

p

p

Orbital Resonance

283

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

Orbital Resonance

287

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

291

This section contains three staves for Pno1, Pno2, and Pno3. The music consists of four measures. Pno1 starts with a sustained note followed by eighth-note pairs. Pno2 and Pno3 play eighth-note patterns primarily in the lower half of their respective staves. Measures 3 and 4 are identical for all three pianos.

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3



295

This section contains three staves for Pno1, Pno2, and Pno3. The music consists of four measures. Pno1 has a eighth-note pattern in the first measure. Pno2 and Pno3 play eighth-note patterns primarily in the lower half of their respective staves. Measures 3 and 4 are identical for all three pianos.

Pno1

Pno2

Pno3

July 15 - August 18, 2015
Germantown, NY

Orbital Resonance