Jennifer HIGDON
Piano Trio • Voices • Impressions
Meyers • Weilerstein • Neiman • Kitchen • Kleinbart
Huang • Smith • Cypress String Quartet
Jennifer Higdon (b. 1962)

Piano Trio • Voices • Impressions

Jennifer Higdon started late in music, teaching herself to play the flute at the age of fifteen and then beginning formal musical studies at eighteen, with an even later start in composition at the age of 21. Despite this late start, she has become a major figure in contemporary classical music and is able to make her living from commissions and on average completes between five and ten pieces a year. These works run the range of genres from orchestral to chamber, and from choral to vocal. She is the recipient of many awards, including a Pew Fellowship, a Guggenheim Fellowship and two awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In the summer of 2003 she was the first woman to be a featured composer at the Tanglewood Contemporary Music Festival. The 2005 Van Cliburn Competition also featured her work, Secret and Glass Gardens as part of its semi-final rounds. Her commissions have included works for such major groups as the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Atlanta Symphony, the Dallas Symphony, the Indianapolis Symphony, National Symphony, the Pittsburgh Symphony, and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra; for the new music ensemble, eighth blackbird, the Tokyo String Quartet, the Ying Quartet, and the Lark Quartet; and for such soloists as Colin Currie, Gary Graffman and Lang Lang. Jennifer Higdon’s works enjoy more than one hundred performances annually. Her orchestral work, blue cathedral, has become one of the most performed contemporary orchestral works in the United States. Her music appeals to a wide-ranging audience in both classical experience and age. Matt Groening, creator of the popular The Simpsons series, singled out her disc, the Grammy-award winning Higdon: Concerto for Orchestra/City Scape, as one of his top-ten favorites of 2004. She is on the composition faculty at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia.

Composer’s Notes

Can music reflect colors and can colors be reflected in music? I have always been fascinated with the connection between painting and music. In my composing, I often picture colors as if I were spreading them on a canvas, except I do so with melodies, harmonies and through the peculiar sounds of the instruments themselves. The colors that I have chosen in both of the movement titles of my Piano Trio, Pale Yellow and Fiery Red, and in the music itself, reflect very different moods and energy levels, which I find fascinating, as it begs the question, can colors (in music, word and painting) actually convey a mood? The work was commissioned by the Bravo! Vail Music Festival.

Voices is the telling of three different images. The first image, Blitz, carries a tremendous amount of relentless, frenzied energy. It describes a high level of intensity, always on the verge of explosion. The second image, Soft Enlacing, carries a much more vague meaning, and is a calming contrast from the first movement. It may be very much like a walk through the house in the middle of the night: while the floor feels solid under foot, the rest of the world, to the eyes and ears, seems to be moving shadows. It may also be a gentle hug or the warm emotional embrace of a loved one. Again, its image is not meant to be clear-cut and depends upon the listener’s ‘viewing’. The final movement, Grace, is the calmest and carries the greatest possible number of meanings: the giving of thanks at a meal; the grace seen in behavior or in a personality; grace in one’s movement; the bestowing of one’s self unto others; the quiet presence that exists in a being’s soul. The telling of these images is from manic and frenzied to calm and quiet, from specific to vague, and from dark to light. Voices was commissioned by the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society.
Impressions is a musical response to the artists of the Impressionist period in both music (Debussy and Ravel) and painting (Monet and Seurat). This work, like the Debussy and Ravel quartets, is in four movements. Bright Palette, the first movement, refers both to the bright harmonic language of these composers and the brilliance of the paintings from this era, where light and brighter colors are the focus. The second movement, Quiet Art, is about the solitude in which artists work, and the passion and consistency that help to create a work of art. To The Point is a direct response to the Debussy and Ravel second movements, which address the Gamelan of the 1889 World Exposition (the use of ‘point’ in the title also refers to the tip of the brush in the pointillistic painting style used in the Impressionist era). The final movement, Noted Canvas is a musical portrait of painting (in tribute to the many well-known canvases from this period). The chromatic, edgy language reflects the intensity of the Ravel fourth movement, and one of the motives is shaped similarly to one of the principal themes from the fourth movement of the Debussy. Musical materials from both the first and second movements are recalled in tribute to these two composers’ craftsmanship in their own thematic development. Impressions was commissioned by the Cypress String Quartet.

Jennifer Higdon
Anne Akiko Meyers

Anne Akiko Meyers is an international artist renowned for her impassioned music-making, technical brilliance and compelling stage presence. She has soloed with major orchestras from around the world, including the Boston Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. She has also performed on television in many live concerts and appeared on The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson. She has been a consistent champion of living composers’ works, a noted interpreter of traditional repertoire, and in 1993 was the sole recipient of the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant.

Alisa Weilerstein

Alisa Weilerstein has won increasing recognition and critical acclaim for playing that combines natural virtuosity with impassioned musicianship. She has appeared with major American and European orchestras as a soloist in the past several seasons. In 2000 she was the recipient of an Avery Fisher Career Grant and has been selected for two prestigious young artist programs, the ECHO Rising Stars recital series, presenting her throughout Europe in various concert halls, and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center’s Chamber Music Society Two. She has also released an acclaimed recording in EMI Classics’ Début series.

Adam Neiman

Adam Neiman has rapidly established a reputation as an artist who delivers performances in a vast range of repertoire and genres. He has performed with the symphony orchestras of Chicago, San Francisco, Saint Louis, Indianapolis, Dallas, Houston, Cincinnati and other prestigious groups around the world. His first broadcast with National Public Radio’s Performance Today was nominated for a Grammy Award. A frequent repeat guest at numerous music festivals, he is also recognized as a composer. He is the recipient of an Avery Fisher Career Grant.

Nicholas Kitchen

Nicholas Kitchen is a founding member of the Borromeo String Quartet. With a multifaceted career as soloist, chamber musician, recording artist, teacher, arts administrator, and media innovator, he is one of the country’s most active musicians. His appearances as a soloist and chamber musician have taken him across the United States and to more than 25 countries both with the quartet and as a guest artist. Artistic director of the Cape Cod Chamber Music Festival, he is the recipient of the Albert Schweitzer Medallion for Artistry.

Melissa Kleinbart

Melissa Kleinbart is presently a member of the San Francisco Symphony. Her previous positions include Associate Concertmaster of the San Francisco Opera Orchestra and Assistant Concertmaster of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra. As a soloist she has appeared with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, Una Voce Chamber Orchestra and the New York Symphonic Ensemble. She is also an avid chamber musician on both violin and viola. Melissa Kleinbart performed at Tanglewood as concertmaster under Leonard Bernstein and Seiji Ozawa, subsequently receiving the Pierre Mayer award as an Outstanding Violinist.
Hsin-Yun Huang

Hsin-Yun Huang is an active viola soloist and chamber musician in the United States, the Far East and Europe. She is in constant demand in her native Taiwan, appearing annually with the National Symphony of Taiwan. She was a member of the Borromeo String Quartet from 1994 to 2000, and is active in commissioning and giving premières of large chamber works for viola and mixed ensemble. She was the recipient of the prestigious Bunkamura Orchard Hall Award, top prizes in the ARD International Music Competition, and the youngest-ever gold medallist in the 1988 Lionel Tertis International Competition.

Wilhelmina Smith

Wilhelmina Smith has performed as a solo recitalist and with orchestras in the United States and abroad. She made her solo début with the Philadelphia Orchestra while still a student at Curtis, and is much in demand by chamber groups, performing with major artists such as YoYo Ma, Joshua Bell and Dawn Upshaw, and at festivals throughout the country. She is the founder and artistic director of the Salt Bay Chamberfest, and is artistic director of the Pensacola Chamber Festival in Florida. She was a prizewinner in the 1997 International Leonard Rose Competition.

Cypress String Quartet

The Cypress String Quartet has performed to great acclaim at prominent venues worldwide, including appearances at the Kennedy Center, the Chautauqua Institute, the Ravinia Festival, and Stanford Lively Arts. Quartet members Cecily Ward and Tom Stone, violins, Ethan Filner, viola, and Jennifer Kloetzel, cello, have been celebrated for their virtuoso performances, innovative programming and dedication to education and outreach. Since its inception in 1996, the San Francisco based quartet has commissioned and given premières of over 25 works from America’s leading composers. Two of the last three composers have been nominated for Grammy Awards: Benjamin Lees (2003) and Jennifer Higdon (2004), and four of the Cypress-commissioned works made Chamber Music America’s list of 101 Great American Ensemble Works. In 2006 the quartet gave the first performance of a new commission from the American composer and Grawemeyer Award-winner, George Tsontakis. In recognition of their work both commissioning and championing contemporary music, the Cypress Quartet won the prestigious Aaron Copland Award.

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Jennifer Higdon’s philosophy in composing is simple: make sure the music communicates. It is her goal to write music that speaks not only to the seasoned professional performer, but also to audiences that come to this music with all types of understanding, from the first-time listener to the most sophisticated Classical connoisseur. For her, music is purely a reflection of life and should be enjoyed as such. In her Piano Trio, Higdon explores the relationship between sound and color, and the potential for such elements to convey different moods. The three movements of Voices depict contrasting states of mind, from highly agitated to serene. In Impressions for string quartet, the composer returns to the world of impressionist painting as her source of inspiration.

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Piano Trio (2003) 13:21
1. Pale Yellow 7:56
2. Fiery Red 5:25
Live première performance from the Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival
Anne Akiko Meyers, Violin • Alisa Weilerstein, Cello
Adam Neiman, Piano

Voices (1993) 17:31
3. Blitz – 6:20
4. Soft Enlacing – 6:17
5. Grace 4:55
Nicholas Kitchen and Melissa Kleinbart, Violins
Hsin-Yun Huang, Viola • Wilhelmina Smith, Cello

Impressions (2003) 26:50
6. Bright Palette 8:44
7. Quiet Art 8:08
8. To The Point 3:35
9. Noted Canvas 6:23

The Cypress String Quartet:
Cecily Ward and Tom Stone, Violins
Ethan Filner, Viola • Jennifer Kloetzel, Cello

Piano Trio recorded at Vilar Center for the Arts, Beaver Creek, Colorado, on July 15th, 2003 • Engineer and producer: David Wilson
Voices recorded at Adrian Carr Studios, New York, in February 1995
Producer: David Berends • Engineer: Adrian Carr
Impressions recorded at Skywalker Ranch, California, in May 2003
Producer: Cecily Ward • Engineer: Mark Willsher
Additional engineering of final disc: George Blood and Seth B. Winner
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