

Tuba Concerto

Jennifer Higdon (b. 1962)

There is a reason why Jennifer Higdon's concertos have garnered so much praise: Their depth and attention to detail grows from the enormous amount of time and energy she has spent getting to know the timbres, ranges, and technical capabilities of each and every instrument of the orchestra. This process began early on in her career, but gathered steam when the Philadelphia Orchestra asked her to contribute a major work to its Centennial Commissions project, resulting in the Concerto for Orchestra. Similarly, when writing her Percussion Concerto she solicited copious feedback from soloist Colin Currie. His recording of the work won it a Grammy Award for best contemporary classical composition. A Curtis Institute of Music alumna who joined the school's faculty in 1994, Dr. Higdon was deeply familiar with the artistry of fellow alumna Hilary Hahn (once a student in her musical studies classes) while writing the Violin Concerto that won the 2010 Pulitzer Prize in Music; and with that of Curtis President and CEO Roberto Díaz, for whom she crafted the Viola Concerto that won her second Grammy Award for best contemporary classical composition.

It was during the recent creation of the Tuba Concerto (for Pittsburgh Symphony Principal Tuba Craig Knox) and the Low Brass Concerto (for the principal players of the Chicago Symphony, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and the Baltimore Symphony) that Dr. Higdon got to know the ins and outs of writing solo parts for brass instruments. Composing for tuba and orchestra is surprisingly complex, she said in an interview with the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. "It's important for the orchestra to be thin, to clear the octave where the tuba is playing. I didn't

"Low brass players are always fun to work with ...They bring an infectious joy to everything they play, which in itself is inspiring."

— JENNIFER HIGDON

want other brass instruments playing at the same time as the tuba, and there have to be enough breaks to breathe and rest the embouchure."

The Tuba Concerto was commissioned by the Pittsburgh Symphony, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, and the Curtis Institute of Music, where soloist Craig Knox serves on the faculty. He and the Pittsburgh Symphony performed the premiere on March 16, 2018, with Robert Spano on the podium. This performance marks the Philadelphia premiere of the work. The composer has written the following about the concerto:

"The latter half of the 20th century has seen the virtuosity of tuba players develop to the point where they can play the most agile lines and the most beautiful melodies with great sensitivity and real power. As a composer this is a dream, because there's a certain inspiration that is to be derived from the idea of creating new repertoire for excellent performers who are hungry for just such a thing. This concerto explores various aspects of this gentle giant of an instrument, from fast-moving notes, to slow-moving melodic lines. In addition to big sections where the tuba gets to soar over the orchestra playing full-out, I also have the soloist engaged in chamber-like settings with colleagues. It is a thrill to be able to bring to the front of the stage the gift of a performer who usually sits at the back of the ensemble...and to showcase the extraordinary skill of the tubist." ✕

19 minutes ■ 3 movements