

**The following interview with
JENNIFER HIGDON
was conducted by the Library of Congress
on April 2, 2020**



Library of Congress: I always like to ask composers what I call a pure "craft" question: that is, where do you compose?

Jennifer Higdon: I have a studio in my home where I do most of my composing. Though I have written quite a bit while on the road, in artist colonies or when I'm in residence with various orchestras or universities, I prefer to write in my own studio.

LOC: When do you compose? Day? Night? Do you set aside a specific time during the day to work on your music?

JH: I try to compose just about every day. Usually morning is the best time for me, right after yoga and breakfast when my head is still clear. Before I start to compose, I don't read emails or look at the news. I try to get in 4-6 hours a day of writing, so that usually means a chunk in the morning and then a chunk in the afternoon.

LOC: When you began work on Percussion Concerto, did you approach this new piece with something particular in mind? What did you want to create?

JH: I did indeed have some distinctive ideas in addition to the commissioning orchestra's requirements regarding orchestra instrumentation and duration. I met with Colin Currie before writing any music so I had an idea of what particular percussion instruments he loves to play and what he thinks works for percussion. Colin loves the marimba, for example, so the work begins with the soloist playing a quiet marimba solo. Colin is actually skilled at all percussion instruments which is partly why the soloist plays several different types instruments. I knew that Colin would prefer that he have smaller instruments for transporting internationally so one

of his "percussion stations" is a table with several small instruments on it...all things that he can carry in a suitcase. It is always important for me, when writing a concerto, to highlight both the soloist and the instrument being featured. Lastly, I was also focused on demonstrating to the audience that percussion can be very quiet and very musical; percussionists can play beautiful melodies if given to them.

LOC: In performance, did you discover things about the piece that even you didn't realize were there?

JH: This is a good question! Though it has been 15 years since the premiere, I can remember that quite a few things surprised me at the first performances. I was happy that the flow of the piece worked, and that the soloist was able to make it between percussion stations. He has to move quickly from a marimba to a vibraphone, and then over to a table containing a lot of small instruments, and then over to a set of drums and cymbals. It's quite a speedy run for the soloist. I was thrilled that the musical materials worked and that the balances between the soloist and the orchestra worked. I was also thrilled that Colin really loves the work and has given more than 90 performances [of it] around the world.

LOC: What was the audience reaction like the first time you saw the piece performed by a full orchestra?

JH: They were ecstatic! A prolonged standing ovation! I have always been thrilled by the audience's reaction to this piece, but I'm also happy because it acknowledges the soloist, who has worked so hard.

LOC: It was Colin Currie's performance of the Concerto was the one was added to the Registry. I believe that you wrote the piece specifically for him. What do you think Colin brought to the piece that was unique?

JH: I think every performer makes their own mark on a concerto. In particular, Colin brings real dynamic flare to his performances. He's such a skilled musician and there is such beauty and care to his execution. I left the cadenza open for Colin so the cadenza that is performed during the concerto is completely his. The most important thing for any concerto, however, is the inspirational spark for the work to get written...and that's 100% Colin.