

COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED ORCHESTRAL WORKS BY JENNIFER
HIGDON

By

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To Mr. Listopad, my high school calculus teacher, who said I would never amount to anything

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COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF JENNIFER HIGDON'S SELECTED ORCHESTRAL
WORKS

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My research explores the most recent symphonic compositions of Jennifer Higdon that has propelled her to national fame. A stylistic analysis of *blue cathedral*, *Concerto for Orchestra* and *City Scape* reveal compositional traits unique to this composer that differentiates her music from contemporaries. A principal reasoning for such differences is fundamentally related to her compositional philosophy and her self-described intuitive style. This study examines and defines this style with pertinent illustrations of its numerous manifestations in her music. As a living composer, Higdon is able to contribute significantly to numerous questions about her experiences and the analysis of her music. Her intuitive method remains her primary compositional technique and as such, this document places great emphasis on defining this strategy with illustrative examples.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The orchestral music of Jennifer Higdon (b. 1962) has recently achieved great recognition within the contemporary symphonic circuit. Previously known primarily as a composer of chamber works, Higdon is becoming increasingly associated with the nation's leading orchestras through prominent commissions and performances. This popularity has produced a significant need for an academic study of Higdon's compositional style, methods and appeal to contemporary audiences and musicians. The composer has not produced nearly the number of orchestral compositions in comparison to her abundance of chamber works but a comprehensive analysis of her symphonic works reveal distinguishing compositional traits. *blue cathedral* and *Concerto for Orchestra* were chosen by this author due to the plethora of performances received since their respective premieres. Higdon suggested the inclusion of *City Scape*, her most recent composition in the genre, to complement the research. Each of the works emerged as commissions from prestigious ensembles and continues to be performed regularly throughout the United States. This study focused exclusively on these three compositions with careful detail dedicated to harmonic and melodic content, instrumentation and unifying devices.

The primary focus of the research was dedicated to defining Higdon's unique compositional style. As a contemporary composer, Higdon's forms and harmonic language are unrestricted; therefore, a traditional harmonic analysis is not applicable. As a result, this author has elected to locate recurring harmonic trends throughout all three compositions. The methodology throughout the study reconciles accepted musicological approaches with feminist research to place great emphasis on the composer's personal thoughts.

Delving into previously published material on the composer and her works naturally comprised the preliminary stages of the study. A comprehensive analysis of the individual

works followed with focus on recurring elements in an effort to identify compositional characteristics. Simultaneously, examining the originality of the three works was necessary to confidently label this composer as creative, rather than one who simply adheres to successful formulae. An interview and continuing written correspondence was essential in providing a voice for the composer. Higdon's reflections on her thoughts and feelings during the compositional process are critical to achieving a thorough understanding of her music. The woman cannot be separated from her music; therefore, a consistent dialogue from the composer was most advantageous.

Higdon has described herself as an "intuitive" composer in numerous articles and interviews yet with little explanation of what this means. In articles and interviews with the composer, this descriptive term surfaces with little supplemental explanation provided. A portion of this research was dedicated to defining and locating tangible examples in her scores of this compositional method. If Higdon truly writes intuitively, then it would be unlikely that she could provide concrete answers to theoretical inquiries about her music, yet a thorough analysis revealed these aspects clearly. The composer's reaction to a realization of her compositional method proved most fascinating.

Studying a living composer provides the likelihood of receiving direct commentary from the "horse's mouth." Too often in musicological research, questions remain unanswered simply because one may never state with authority the intention of a deceased composer. Countless speculation is frequently the result. Because research is compiled decades after a work's composition, contemporary accounts are sparse and memories of those with a personal connection to the subject have proven questionable and erroneous. Access to a living composer

may not supply answers to all questions but personal contact with Higdon offered valuable insights while providing an opportunity for her voice to be heard.

One particularly fascinating aspect of the study was the identification of cyclical elements within the multi-movement works. Preliminary research did not disclose such components but Higdon's intuitive style did reveal such unifying devices. These results provided a more thorough explanation of her compositional methods.

The primary reason for this study emerged from Higdon's newly acquired fame and as a result, the review of the literature yields limited results. *The Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, oft considered to be the authoritative reference, does not mention Higdon in either the latest printed edition or the online resource. Thus, this author believes that a comprehensive analysis was necessary to complement the existing material of contemporary American female composers.

Newspapers and magazines have published numerous articles on Higdon and she expressed serious concern about the incorrect information that occurs in these sources. Indeed, during the preliminary research, inaccurate statements were frequent. As such, printed statements in these resources needed to be verified by the composer. This author aims to present the authoritative source on Higdon's orchestral music.

Two separate studies have been published recently on her music. It is interesting to note that in both cases the authors were women. The potential role that gender serves in music composition has been examined with inconclusive results in current musicological research. Higdon does not believe that gender factors into her music or her current popularity. This author chose not to speculate further.

The two published studies in existence were produced to fulfill the requirements of a Doctor of Musical Arts Degree. Deena K Reedy's *A performer's guide to creating a listening road map: applications to late twentieth-century solo flute compositions by American women composers Joyce Mekeel and Jennifer Higdon* was completed in 2002 at the University of Nebraska. This author considered Reedy's document insightful in a previous study of Higdon's flute works. Although only *rapid.fire* was included to represent the composer, the methodology consisted largely of e-mail correspondence and telephone interviews that produced valuable primary source material. This study aims to increase accessibility of modern solo flute works to a broad audience; as such, the concept relates to Higdon's compositional doctrine of communicating to her listeners. The document does not attempt to define the parameters of American music or female composers, but the sections dedicated to Higdon's music have proven helpful.

More recently, *Jennifer Higdon: A Stylistic Analysis of Selected Flute and Orchestral Works* by Brenda Rossow Phillips was completed in December 2005 at Arizona State University. The document includes analysis of *Autumn Reflection*, *Legacy* and *blue cathedral*. The *blue cathedral* chapter offered extensive commentary on the programmatic aspects of this work but lacked footnotes and incorporates only minimal references to personal interviews with Higdon. This author excluded these passages from consideration because unreferenced statements were unverifiable. In addition, Phillips' study focused on programmatic aspects while previous research by the present author indicates that Higdon's compositions are not explicitly programmatic. Although the bibliography was not extensive, a plethora of primary source material was a valuable asset.

These two theses represent the entirety of scholarly research dedicated to the music of Higdon. As of this writing, no additional dissertations were registered that explore her music; therefore, a pressing need for a serious study remains. It is the hope of this author that academic institutions will equal the efforts of contemporary musicians in exploring her works. Higdon's orchestral music has elevated her career and reputation to new heights. The subsequent chapters explore the primary elements of her music that have captured the attention of musicians and audiences alike.

CHAPTER 2
JENNIFER HIGDON: BIOGRAPHY, COMPOSITIONAL METHOD AND STYLISTIC
TRAITS

Biography

Jennifer Higdon was born in Brooklyn, New York on December 31, 1962. Six months later, the family moved to Atlanta, Georgia. Reared by artistic parents, she explored numerous creative outlets in her youth, ranging from writing short stories and poetry to experimenting with eight millimeter claymation¹ movies with her brother, Andrew. Her father was an instructor at the Atlanta College of Art while working as a freelance commercial artist.² At the age of 10, Higdon's father and mother, a dabbler in abstract quilting, grew weary of the city's school system; the family relocated to a 40-acre farm³ in Seymour, Tennessee to be nearer to paternal and maternal grandparents.⁴ Although the quality of education was adequate in the Atlanta Public School System and violence was minimal, the parents believed a rural environment would benefit the children. The primary factor in the transfer was to be closer to extended family; indeed, the parents frequently encouraged the Higdon children to visit their grandparents. (Jennifer Higdon, Pers. Comm., emails 10 May 2006 to 25 November 2006) The peaceful nature and mountains that decorate the countryside of Tennessee provided Higdon with a lasting

¹ Claymation describes animation of clay figures.--"Claymation" *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* (Accessed [14 March 2007]) available from <http://209.161.33.50/dictionary/claymation>; Internet.

² Brenda Rossow Phillips, "Jennifer Higdon: A stylistic analysis of selected flute and orchestral works," (DMA doc, Arizona State University, 2005), 2.

³Phillips, op. cit., 3.

⁴Mark Kanny, "Higdon brings energetic works to the city," *Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, 30 October 2005, Arts and Entertainment Section, p. E-2.

compositional inspiration. Nature remains an essential aspect in her compositions and in particular, Higdon states, “I often think a lot of the mountains in all my pieces.”⁵

As a child, Higdon was not introduced to western art music but the family encountered a vast array of culture through experimental films and art exhibits. Such exposure provided an early orientation in relating her surroundings to visual artistic stimuli.⁶ A hobby during the composer’s childhood was photography, an influence initiated by Joel Meyerowitz,⁷ a friend of her parents.⁸ Higdon recalls, “The first photo I ever took was of Joel, sitting on his porch, eating a peach.”⁹ As a child, Higdon’s aspired to writing and according to the composer this passion significantly impacted her music. She states, “Writing poetry and stories taught me about rhythm and pacing. For me, musical themes are like the characters in a play.”¹⁰ Yet few of her compositions are programmatic.

Higdon’s musical influences stem from her counterculture parents who encouraged artistic expression that led her to question experimentation for its own sake. While still in Atlanta, she consciously decided the avant-garde was unnecessarily obscure,¹¹ a philosophy that continues to

⁵Doug Mason, “Prelude in Tennessee: Grammy Winning Composer had her Musical Beginnings in Blount County,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 18 September 2005, sec. E, p.1.

⁶Renate Brosch, “Composing as a creative challenge: Interview with the American Composer Jennifer Higdon,” *Musikzeitschriften*, p. 8 (Accessed [7 May 2006]) available from

<http://magazin.klassik.com/magazines/template.cfm?SEITE=1&START=1&AID=879>); Internet.

⁷Meyerowitz (b. 1938), a “street photographer” in the tradition of Henri Cartier-Bresson and Robert Frank, exclusively utilizes color photography.-- Meyerowitz, Joel, “Joel Meyerowitz photographer,” (Accessed [1 June 2006]) available from <http://www.joelmeyerowitz.com/photography/biography.html>; Internet.

⁸Karen Rile, “The Accidental genius,” *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, July/August 2005 (Accessed [4 June 2006]) available from <http://www.upenn.edu/gazette/0705/feature01sidebar.html>; Internet.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹David Patrick Stearns, “Jennifer Higdon,” *Andante Corporation*, June 2002 (Accessed [5 June 2006]), available from

affect her compositional output. In an interview with *Gramophone*, Higdon humorously agrees that an aversion to experimental music may originate from an overexposure to modern art in her childhood that “got all that out of my system.”¹²

A lack of traditional musical training contributes extensively to Higdon’s creative personality. Higdon states, “My background is completely different than most classical musicians' backgrounds....my background is much more similar to most people who grow up in this country...very, very little Classical, and a lot more of everything else. But because I listened to the Beatles so much, as well as Simon & Garfunkel, reggae, Rolling Stones, Peter, Paul, and Mary, bluegrass, and country, I believe that I have to have been influenced by that music.” (Jennifer Higdon, Pers. Comm., emails 10 May 2006 to 25 November 2006) According to the composer, this unorthodox background provided a freedom from compositional systems and preoccupations. She states, “I tend to work instinctively rather than in standard forms.”¹³

Higdon’s earliest encounter with applied music occurred at age fourteen as a percussionist in her school’s marching band. The composer comments on the rhythmic emphasis, “We weren’t learning to read musical notes in a clef...it was studying rhythm.” (Jennifer Higdon, Pers. Comm., emails 10 May 2006 to 25 November 2006) Rhythmic significance remains crucial in her compositions and undoubtedly originates from her initial experience as a percussionist. A year later,¹⁴ Higdon discovered an inexpensive flute in the attic and through a

<http://www.andante.com/article/article.cfm?id=17341&highlight=1&timeline=1&highlightterms=jenni%2A%7Chigdo%2A&lstKeywords=Jennifer%20Higdon>; Internet.

¹² Vivien Schweitzer, “Christopher Theofanidis and Jennifer Higdon: Two of a Kind,” *Gramophone*, September 2003, p. A1.

¹³ Andrew Clark, “My preoccupation is writing good music,” *The Financial Times* (London, England) 29 March 2004, p. 17

¹⁴ Karen Rile, “The Accidental genius,” *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, July/August 2005 (Accessed [4 June 2006]) available from <http://www.upenn.edu/gazette/0705/feature01sidebar.html>; Internet.

dated instruction manual began teaching herself.¹⁵ After completing the initial book in the series, her mother purchased the next three levels and by the end of the year, Higdon became principal flutist in the high school band.¹⁶ The flute remains her primary instrument. She has recorded her own solo and chamber works for this instrument.¹⁷

Higdon studied only a few months with a flute instructor. In the town of Maryville, Tennessee, Higdon met Jan Vinci (a former Judith Bentley¹⁸ student currently employed at Skidmore College) who informed her of a summer flute camp at Bowling Green State University with Bentley on the faculty. After gaining acceptance, Higdon realized that Bentley “was such an amazing teacher that I knew immediately”¹⁹ this specific environment would produce a rewarding educational experience.²⁰ This extremely concise period of study exposed her to the appropriate audition repertoire.²¹

After completing her secondary education, Higdon began studying with Bentley²² in 1981 in a flute performance curriculum at Bowling Green State University.²³ Although excelling in

¹⁵ Higdon recalls that the flute method book she used was the *First Division Band Method Part 1 C Flute*. (Jennifer Higdon, Pers. Comm., emails 10 May 2006 to 25 November 2006) This pedagogical tool is still in existence and published by Belwin (ISBN 0769219675).

¹⁶Karen Rile, “The Accidental genius,” *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, July/August 2005 (Accessed [4 June 2006]) available from <http://www.upenn.edu/gazette/0705/feature01sidebar.html>; Internet

¹⁷ Recordings in which Higdon performs as a flutist include *I Virtuosi, Volume I*, ASIN: B00000HYY and *rapid.fire*, I Virtuosi-IVR 501, where she collaborates on *Steeley Pause*, *Lullaby* and *The Jeffrey Mode*, and is a soloist on the cover composition.

¹⁸ Bentley is a renowned flute teacher and active performer who spent the majority of her teaching career at Bowling Green State University.

¹⁹Phillips, op. cit., 3-4.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹ David Patrick Stearns, “Jennifer Higdon,” *Andante Corporation*, June 2002 (Accessed [5 June 2006]), available from <http://www.andante.com/article/article.cfm?id=17341&highlight=1&timeline=1&highlightterms=jenni%2A%7Chigdo%2A&lstKeywords=Jennifer%20Higdon>; Internet.

²² www.jenniferhigdon.com/biography.html (Accessed [10 April 2006]).

lessons, Higdon felt insecure in the core musical knowledge due to her minimal exposure to art music. She remarks, “I had no idea what theory was, I had no idea what an interval was. I didn’t know what a major chord was. I was starting at the bottom. The entire time I was studying, I felt I was catching up. The other kids came in knowing the Beethoven symphonies. I didn’t. Talking to students today (at Curtis), I’m shocked at what I didn’t know.”²⁴ She continues, “I had to take theory for dummies and learn what an interval is...I didn’t grow up around classical music and I’m sure that has influenced my choices in musical language and also my love for melody.”²⁵

While at BGSU, a favorite orchestral composition was Maurice Ravel’s *Daphnis et Chloe*, a ballet commissioned by Sergey Diaghilev for the Ballets Russes in 1909. Higdon recalls, “I’ll never forget that feeling of the music flowing around us.”²⁶ She did not perform the solo in the Ravel during her collegiate tenure but as Composer-in-residence at the Bard Conductors’ Institute in 2003, Higdon received another opportunity. “The person who was playing first flute in the orchestra was also one of the conducting students and she was supposed to conduct a little segment of the Ravel. So they asked me if I would sit in and read it. Now, I hadn’t played in an orchestra since Bowling Green and I had not looked at that solo since then.”²⁷ The solo was successful²⁸ and illustrates Higdon’s continuing commitment to performance.

²³ Andrew Clark, “My preoccupation is writing good music,” *The Financial Times* (London, England) 29 March 2004, p. 17.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵ Michael Anthony, “Composing an ode to the oboe; Prolific composer Jennifer Higdon muses on writing her latest concerto, a premiere by the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra.”—*Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), 24 September 2005, Sunday, Metro Edition, p. 2F.

²⁶Andrew Quint, “Speaking with Composer Jennifer Higdon: The Communication Thing,” *Fanfare*, May/June 2004, p. 42-45.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

Higdon's initial exposure to composition originated from Bentley who proposed the young student write a work for a masterclass with flutist/composer Harvey Sollberger.²⁹ Bentley explained the 12 tone method³⁰ and the resulting two-minute piece for flute and piano was titled *Night Creatures*.³¹ Higdon remarks on her budding compositional interest, "I found it fascinating to put sound together. I don't know why that hadn't occurred to me before. I could tell that was something I was going to be doing down the road."³²

During Higdon's second year at BGSU, the university replaced the quarter system with semesters. Several courses previously studied by Higdon were eliminated and supplemental courses were not offered at the time which prevented her from graduating in four years. In the interim, she attempted to satiate her budding interest for composition by petitioning to register for composition courses but was rejected because the classes were restricted to majors.³³

Robert Spano became a conductor at BGSU during Higdon's final year. She requested and received permission to participate in his graduate conducting course. A meeting with Spano facilitated Higdon's transition from performer to composer. The conductor urged her to pursue studies at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.³⁴ Throughout this period,

²⁹ Michael Anthony, "Composing an ode to the oboe; Prolific composer Jennifer Higdon muses on writing her latest concerto, a premiere by the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra."—*Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), 24 September 2005, Sunday, Metro Edition, p 2F.

³⁰ Andrew Clark, "My preoccupation is writing good music," *The Financial Times* (London, England) 29 March 2004, p. 17.

³¹ Curiously, Higdon's first composition was serialistic while her current harmonic idiom contrasts considerably and is frequently labeled neo-romantic.

³² Michael Anthony, "Composing an ode to the oboe; Prolific composer Jennifer Higdon muses on writing her latest concerto, a premiere by the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra."—*Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), 24 September 2005, Sunday, Metro Edition, p 2F.

³³ Phillips, op. cit., 5-7.

³⁴ Mark Kanny, "Higdon brings energetic works to the city," *Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, 30 October 2005, Arts and Entertainment Section, p. E-2.

she continued composing but did not share her efforts with anyone. Eventually, she comprised a portfolio of four to five compositions for graduate submissions³⁵ and was accepted to several prestigious institutions including the Juilliard School, Curtis and the University of Michigan. Seeking counsel, she solicited Spano's advice. A Curtis graduate, Spano believed an Artist Diploma from Curtis would produce the best results and was so adamant that he locked her in his office until she agreed.³⁶

Higdon encountered numerous obstacles on her journey through graduate school. After receiving a Diploma from Curtis,³⁷ she was rejected twice from the University of Pennsylvania but studied free of charge with Jay Reise. Reise offered her encouragement and with her third attempt, she gained admission and completed a Master of Arts Degree in composition.³⁸ Higdon's lack of early training created a significant hurdle during her doctoral qualifying exams. She remarks, "Since I grew up on rock and roll, I just don't know this stuff. Getting through the doctoral exams for me was a nightmare. I took them a lot."³⁹ Her initial doctoral thesis was rejected⁴⁰ and Higdon recalls, "There were members of my doctoral committee who claimed that I was having too much success. I didn't fit the box of what they were expecting." (Jennifer Higdon, Pers. Comm., emails 10 May 2006 to 25 November 2006) Her second effort, a string

³⁵Phillips, op. cit., 5-7.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷www.jenniferhigdon.com/biography.html (Accessed [10 April 2006]).

³⁸Karen Rile, "The Accidental genius," *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, July/August 2005 (Accessed [4 June 2006]) available from <http://www.upenn.edu/gazette/0705/feature01sidebar.html>; Internet.

³⁹Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

⁴⁰Karen Rile, "The Accidental genius," *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, July/August 2005 (Accessed [4 June 2006]) available from <http://www.upenn.edu/gazette/0705/feature01sidebar.html>; Internet.

quartet entitled *Voices*,⁴¹ commissioned by the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society,⁴² was successful which resulted in the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

Her principal composition instructor at the University of Pennsylvania was George Crumb⁴³ whom she credits with teaching her to listen effectively. A personal connection between student and professor stemmed from their similar backgrounds in rural America (Crumb was reared in West Virginia).⁴⁴ Similar to Crumb, Higdon finds great inspiration in the beauty of nature.

Higdon's first orchestral work, *Shine* (1995),⁴⁵ greatly furthered her career. The composition was the result of a grant for young composers by ASCAP to compose their first symphonic work; it was written specifically for conductor James De Preist and the Oregon Symphony.⁴⁶ Higdon submitted *Shine* to the Philadelphia Orchestra as a representative example of her work. The result was the commissioning of *Concerto for Orchestra*, the composition that propelled her to international fame.

As a female composer, Higdon is often consulted regarding the role of women in this historically male-dominated field. As the first American female composer featured at the Festival of Contemporary Music at Tanglewood, MA,⁴⁷ she has transcended the gender barrier. Scholars have been captivated recently by the potential contrasts between "women's music" and

⁴¹Phillips, op. cit., 10.

⁴²Karen Rile, "The Accidental genius," *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, July/August 2005 (Accessed [4 June 2006]) available from <http://www.upenn.edu/gazette/0705/feature01sidebar.html>; Internet.

⁴³www.jenniferhigdon.com/biography.html (Accessed [10 April 2006]).

⁴⁴Wes Blomster, "Jennifer Higdon's New Piano Trio," *MusicalAmerica.com*, July 18, 2003.

⁴⁵<http://www.jenniferhigdon.com/orchestra.html> (Accessed 12 [January 2007]).

⁴⁶Richard Dyer, "Composer has Emotional Reach, Direct Appeal Jennifer Higdon Touches Many with her Work," *The Boston Globe*, 13 July 2003, Sec. Arts/Entertainment, p. N.4.

⁴⁷www.jenniferhigdon.com/biography.html (Accessed [10 April 2006]).

the rarely termed “men’s music.” Higdon rejects such differences and remarked, “That was a topic when I was a student at the University...because all the musicologists there thought that way (that music reflected gender), and us composers would roll our eyes.”⁴⁸ “It was a collective eye roll by all of the composition students to all of the musicology students.” (Jennifer Higdon, Pers. Comm., emails 10 May 2006 to 25 November 2006) Higdon denies any experience with gender discrimination and credits composers from the previous generation, specifically Joan Tower and Libby Larsen, with eradicating the gender barrier that has plagued composition.⁴⁹ Audience members occasionally express surprise that a female could be capable of writing “that kind of music.” Higdon interprets “that kind of music” as energetic with a prevailing rhythmic component.⁵⁰ Women’s role in music does remain a concern to Higdon. An open-minded individual, she encourages gender discussion and continues a curiosity about the perceptions of men and women. Understandably, her particular interest is in composition and performance.⁵¹

Although gender barriers have not affected Higdon, she encountered a negative experience relating to her sexuality. She contributed to a compact disc recording of Lesbian American Composers⁵² that was marketed with a picture of two nude women embracing. Higdon was troubled because the photograph did not adequately illustrate the musical content. She states, “It

⁴⁸ Michael Anthony, “Composing an ode to the oboe; Prolific composer Jennifer Higdon muses on writing her latest concerto, a premiere by the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra.”—*Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), 24 September 2005, Sunday, Metro Edition, p. 2F.

⁴⁹Renate Brosch, “Composing as a creative challenge: Interview with the American Composer Jennifer Higdon,” *Musikzeitschriften*, p. 8 (Accessed [7 May 2006]) available from <http://magazin.klassik.com/magazines/template.cfm?SEITE=1&START=1&AID=879>); Internet.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Renate Brosch, “Composing as a creative challenge: Interview with the American Composer Jennifer Higdon,” *Musikzeitschriften*, p. 8 (Accessed [7 May 2006]) available from <http://magazin.klassik.com/magazines/template.cfm?SEITE=1&START=1&AID=879>); Internet.

⁵² The CD is titled *Lesbian American Composers* and was recorded by CRI with the manufacture number CD 780 CRI. Other composers featured on the album include Pauline Oliveros, Linda Montano and Madelyn Byrne.

looks like it's going to be relaxing and the music is anything but. The cover bothered all of us (composers)-we all registered strong objections. But we didn't have the final say."⁵³ Although the gender/queer discrimination has weakened considerably, the marketing of this recording of women's music as unsophisticated, background music to romantic evenings remains troublesome. For Higdon, and undoubtedly many others, this is a gross misrepresentation of "women's music."

Many composers resist national stereotypes. The United States in particular has struggled with defining elements in music that may be classified as "American." Higdon is uncertain of what comprises an "American" composition due to the various styles present within the country.⁵⁴ She does not encourage such labels.

Openly questioning labels such as "American," "female" or "lesbian" reflects a significant element of third-wave feminism defined by the battle cry of "don't label me." When asked, Higdon provided a surprising response, "I've never heard of a third-wave feminist, and am not sure what this is. I know that I'm American,... female and lesbian. But I don't actually know of any composers who think of themselves as anything but a composer. The labels seem to be applied by lots of other people. Fortunately for me, there was never a time when my parents told me that I couldn't do something because I was a woman or a lesbian. The thought never even occurred to me and the first time someone brought it up, it was a very foreign concept." (Jennifer Higdon, Pers. Comm., emails 10 May 2006 to 25 November 2006) (Higdon has been

⁵³David Patrick Stearns, "Jennifer Higdon," *Andante Corporation*, June 2002 (Accessed [5 June 2006]), available from <http://www.andante.com/article/article.cfm?id=17341&highlight=1&timeline=1&highlightterms=jenni%2A%7Chigdo%2A&lstKeywords=Jennifer%20Higdon>; Internet.

⁵⁴Renate Brosch, "Composing as a creative challenge: Interview with the American Composer Jennifer Higdon," *Musikzeitschriften*, p. 8 (Accessed [7 May 2006]) available from <http://magazin.klassik.com/magazines/template.cfm?SEITE=1&START=1&AID=879>); Internet.

with her lifetime companion, Cheryl Lawson, since high school). (Jennifer Higdon, Pers. Comm., emails 10 May 2006 to 25 November 2006)

Disregarding her gender, sexuality and nationality, “mystical” is an applicable description of many of her orchestral works that is primarily achieved through heterodox instrumentation such as the water gong, Chinese health reflex bells and crystal glasses. Although not associated with any particular religion, Higdon describes herself as a spiritual person with a strong knowledge gleaned from examining numerous literary accounts on the subject.⁵⁵

Higdon currently spends between four to six hours composing daily with the remaining time dedicated to the business aspects of the profession. A member of the faculty at Curtis since 1994,⁵⁶ her duties have consisted of instructing courses in theory, counterpoint, solfege and serving as a private tutor. She recalls with fondness her 20th century music history/theory course required of all students that afforded her the opportunity to become acquainted with each pupil. Once her composition career blossomed in 2002, she reduced her responsibilities at Curtis. (Jennifer Higdon, Pers. Comm., emails 10 May 2006 to 25 November 2006) At the present time, she teaches only private composition lessons.⁵⁷ Higdon’s teaching philosophy encourages students to follow their intuitions with no restrictions on their musical language. Instead, she provides “them (with) tools to write in the way they want and need to write.”⁵⁸ Her advice to her students to follow their intuition is an approach she employs in her own compositions.

⁵⁵David Patrick Stearns, “Jennifer Higdon,” *Andante Corporation*, June 2002 (Accessed [5 June 2006]), available from <http://www.andante.com/article/article.cfm?id=17341&highlight=1&timeline=1&highlightterms=jenni%2A%7Chigdo%2A&lstKeywords=Jennifer%20Higdon>; Internet.

⁵⁶ Phillips, op. cit., 10.

⁵⁷Doug Mason, “Prelude in Tennessee: Grammy Winning Composer had her Musical Beginnings in Blount County,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 18 September 2005, sec. E, p.1.

⁵⁸Vivien Schweitzer, “Christopher Theofanidis and Jennifer Higdon: Two of a Kind,” *Gramophone*, September 2003, p. A1.

Audience appeal remains a significant aspect of Higdon's compositional philosophy. As a composer, she believes accountability to her audience is justified. She states, "I feel a responsibility to be articulate in the music and not waste their time."⁵⁹ She consciously avoids composing systematically and says, "I write intuitively. The academic approach just doesn't work with my brain."⁶⁰ As an avid listener to the Beatles in her youth, she relates with audiences from that generation. Higdon is conscious of music such listeners are likely to enjoy. She remarks on the similarities to the music of her childhood and her own compositions, "What do the...types of music have in common? Melody, Rhythm, Harmony. What they don't have in common...there isn't an exclusivity between either genre, but usually musical events (and the speed in which they unfold) run at different speeds. In terms of writing for a broader audience...I don't think I have more understanding than any other composer. Music is communication. Otherwise, I don't see the point." (Jennifer Higdon, Pers. Comm., emails 10 May 2006 to 25 November 2006)

Higdon remains one of the few self-supporting composers through direct commissions and possesses a keen business sense. As a youth, her father encouraged her to "always question authority" and instilled an enterprising spirit to publish her work.⁶¹ This was further encouraged by American composer Philip Glass who advised her to maintain copyright privileges to enable

⁵⁹Mark Kanny, "Higdon brings energetic works to the city," *Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, 30 October 2005, Arts and Entertainment Section, p. E-2.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹David Patrick Stearns, "Jennifer Higdon," *Andante Corporation*, June 2002 (Accessed [5 June 2006]), available from <http://www.andante.com/article/article.cfm?id=17341&highlight=1&timeline=1&highlightterms=jenni%2A%7Chigdo%2A&lstKeywords=Jennifer%20Higdon>; Internet.

rapid processing that is less expensive to perspective performers.⁶² The result is Lawdon Press, Higdon's personal publishing company. The name originates from the amalgamation of Cheryl Lawson and the composer. Lawson, a former event planner for medical associations, left her career to manage the publishing company in 2005.⁶³

Since Higdon's beginnings in composition, she has received commissions from the most prestigious ensembles and performers to grace the symphony halls and concert stages, including the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony, the Atlanta Symphony, the Pittsburgh Symphony, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, American Composers Orchestra, the Tokyo String Quartet and the American Guild of Organists. A commission by the National Symphony Orchestra for a *Piano Concerto* to be premiered May 17-19 2007 was temporarily delayed,⁶⁴ but a violin concerto from the Indianapolis Symphony with Hilary Hahn is scheduled for the 2008-09 season.⁶⁵ In addition, Higdon has received numerous awards and grants from the Guggenheim Foundation, two from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Pew Fellowship in the Arts, as well as those from Meet-the-Composer, National Endowment for the Arts, International League of Women Composers, Louisville Orchestra New Music Search, ASCAP, the Mary Flagler Charitable Trust Grant and the Pennsylvania Council on Arts.⁶⁶

⁶²Renate Brosch, "Composing as a creative challenge: Interview with the American Composer Jennifer Higdon," *Musikzeitschriften*, p. 8 (Accessed [7 May 2006]) available from <http://magazin.klassik.com/magazines/template.cfm?SEITE=1&START=1&AID=879>); Internet.

⁶³Doug Mason, "Prelude in Tennessee: Grammy Winning Composer had her Musical Beginnings in Blount County," *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 18 September 2005, sec. E, p.1.

⁶⁴ www.jenniferhigdon.com/biography.html (Accessed [10 April 2006]). The premiere was postponed due to artistic differences between the composer and the originally scheduled pianist, Lang Lang. Higdon is searching for a different pianist for an upcoming, but as of yet, unscheduled, premiere.

⁶⁵Karen Rile, "The Accidental genius," *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, July/August 2005 (Accessed [4 June 2006]) available from <http://www.upenn.edu/gazette/0705/feature01sidebar.html>; Internet.

⁶⁶Karen Rile, "The Accidental genius," *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, July/August 2005 (Accessed [4 June 2006]) available from <http://www.upenn.edu/gazette/0705/feature01sidebar.html>; Internet.

Higdon's music enjoys international success with performances numbering more than a hundred per year. *blue cathedral*, a one-movement symphonic poem, received more than fifty performances in the United States in the 2004-05 season, and remains the most performed contemporary symphonic work in the United States. The composition was recorded on the Telarc label in 2003 with the Atlanta Symphony led by Spano. Since its release, the recording has garnered a prominent place on the Classical Billboard Charts. A more recent endeavor, *Higdon: Concerto for Orchestra/City Scape*, was nominated for four Grammy Awards⁶⁷ winning in the category of Best Engineered Album, Classical.

Recordings of her music by various performers exist on several labels. *Postcards from the Center*, featuring the Moran Quartet, recorded *Autumn Music* for Crystal Records (CD754), *Autumn Reflection* performed by Jeffrey Khaner appears in *American Flute Music*, Avie-AVI 0004.⁶⁸

Compositional Method

Higdon's self-described method of composition is frequently defined as intuitive; however, additional commentary is necessary to further explain this meaning. In the subsequent chapters, the term "intuitive" is used regularly by the composer to justify specific musical occurrences. The precise definition of this term is "the power or faculty of attaining to direct knowledge or cognition without evident rational thought and inference."⁶⁹ Although Higdon's childhood included little western art music, throughout years of study, she has gained a solid education of classical music. Yet to infer that her music emerges without "rational thought" would be

⁶⁷ www.jenniferhigdon.com/biography.html (Accessed [10 April 2006]).

⁶⁸ <http://jenniferhigdon.com/rec-title.html> (Accessed [4 June 2006]).

⁶⁹ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, "intuition," (Accessed [16 June 2006]), <<http://m-w.com/dictionary/intuition>>

misleading since she spends much time in thought before she composes. Whether or not “intuitive” is the grammatically correct term for her process, it is the word she uses to describe her approach.

Higdon is capable of composition at a rapid speed that suggests musical ideas are occurring almost immediately. She states, “I’ll spend more hours (writing) than an average composer but because it’s happening at a faster and a shorter time frame, it means a lot of these things have to happen instinctively. I don’t come up with systems; I think things are happening at a subconscious level.”⁷⁰ While reviewing the results of this document, her response was often genuine surprise followed by acceptance. The composer attributed many of these findings to her intuitive approach and she believes such events accurately illustrate her subconscious at work. She remarked, “I think actually what happens is (when) I start working on a piece, I’ll do a lot of sketching, my brain will put these elements together and I don’t know they’re there. I don’t realize it even, it just comes out.”⁷¹

Higdon begins a work with the first forthcoming melodic idea⁷² which scarcely occurs in the opening measures. In the multi-movement works, the interior movements were composed initially while in *blue cathedral* the process originated with the soli in the central sections. Her latest work, a *Piano Concerto*, conformed to a similar process; Higdon composed the second and third movements first. According to the composer, anxiety is the underlying principle for writing the opening movement last. She places much emphasis on the significance of an initial

⁷⁰Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid.

movement. Higdon remains somewhat nervous that the first movement, if not composed correctly, may spoil the remainder of the work.⁷³

She composes consistently each day, but the speed in which she produces music varies depending on the time allocated by the commission. *Concerto for Orchestra* was written over several years while in contrast, the first movement of *City Scope* emerged in only five days. In the latter, the ideas were appearing so quickly and fully formed that she notated the music in short score (6 lines rather than the full 30) and later orchestrated it.⁷⁴ This exceedingly rapid pace of composition is more often the exception rather than the rule with Higdon.

Her recent fame affords her the luxury of composing only by commission. While contemplating the works, she considers the strengths and capabilities of the premiering ensembles. For the three compositions included in this document, Higdon was especially intimate with the premiering orchestras; thus, she wrote with the specific ensembles in mind.

Aesthetic aims vary considerably for each composition. Although *blue cathedral* and *Concerto for Orchestra* were both commissioned as celebrations, the expressive objectives were quite different. *blue cathedral* is the sole orchestral work in which the composer used imagery or representation. The music is not explicitly programmatic but during the compositional process, Higdon utilized imagery for the differing sections. Program notes and previous research reveals a fairly detailed programmatic content, yet she states that the only explicit referential aspects of the music are limited to the woodwind soli that portray the composer and her brother.⁷⁵ These features are explored in greater detail in Chapter Three.

⁷³Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

⁷⁴Pierre Ruhe, "Symphony illuminates soul of city," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 10 November 2002, Sec. ARTS, p. 1M.

⁷⁵Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

Concerto for Orchestra was composed specifically for the Philadelphia Orchestra. Higdon's past and current ties to the city are strong; she resides there currently, attended graduate school in Philadelphia and is a member of the Curtis faculty. As such, she is familiar with many of the individual musicians in the ensemble. Several features of the work resulted from these personal ties including specific instrumental soli and the orchestration of the fourth movement exclusively for percussion. The work celebrates the Philadelphia Orchestra and serves as virtuosic vehicle for the ensemble. The plain title of the work, according to Higdon, emerged because the music was composed specifically for that orchestra and no other label seemed fitting.⁷⁶ The name may appear somewhat unusual since she often opts for poetic and descriptive titles. Her solo concerti, however, utilize similar labels (for example *Oboe Concerto*, *Percussion Concerto*, *Piano Concerto* and *Trombone Concerto*). As a concerto, this title adheres to the trend present in her works of a similar genre.

The primary objective of *City Scope* is to serve as a musical tribute to Atlanta, where Higdon spent her early childhood years. Higdon portrays the diversity and splendor found within the city. In doing so, she concentrates mostly on the features of Atlanta that she remembers from her youth thus providing the work with a personal element.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Higdon's fame is her previously limited exposure to western art music. Although this may have been problematic during her schooling, it has not influenced her career. Because of her self-admitted lack of experience with the standard canon, quotations and references to other composers and their music is nonexistent. A lack of formal training until her collegiate years has resulted in a complete avoidance of systems during the

⁷⁶Renate Brosch, "Composing as a creative challenge: Interview with the American Composer Jennifer Higdon," *Musikzeitschriften*, p. 8 (Accessed [7 May 2006]) available from <http://magazin.klassik.com/magazines/template.cfm?SEITE=1&START=1&AID=879>); Internet.

compositional process; indeed, nearly all of her works emerge from an exploration of sound. She remarks, “I had too many systems taught to me at school and I couldn’t stand it.”⁷⁷ The “joy of sound”⁷⁸ is frequently her rationale for compositional curiosities in her music.

Higdon does not compose with key centers in mind. When a tonality emerges, she explains it as a manifestation of her subconscious.⁷⁹ Particularly noteworthy is the continuous appearance of D major in the three orchestral works examined. Higdon did not consciously choose that tonality but after reviewing the numerous examples, she realized it does occur frequently but, again, she emphasized that it was not a conscious decision.⁸⁰ In the past, this particular key has been associated with rejoicing and triumph or in the case of Brahms’ *Second Symphony*, “sunny.” This author suggests that passages in D major in Higdon’s music reflect her warm and friendly personality, a quality often remarked on by those whom have come in contact with her.

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of her intuitive style is the subtle, yet consistent, appearance of unifying devices. Higdon continually stated that such occurrences were not intentional and in several examples, she was not aware of these musical connections. Yet, separate rhythmic and melodic motives permeate individual movements. That such connections were not purposely included leads one to presume that Higdon’s subconscious is truly responsible.

An isolated example of her intuitive style affecting formal structure is present in the *Concerto for Orchestra*, an arch form that peaks in the third movement. Higdon did not

⁷⁷Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

conceptualize the work as such; in fact, only four movements were initially planned.⁸¹ The second and fourth movements are scored exclusively for strings and percussion respectively. A connection in reduced instrumentation between these movements is evident and provides an even stronger link to the arch form that emerged subconsciously. One may conjecture that this is simply a coincidence since the composer did not intentionally plan the movements to serve as complements to one another. Yet because Higdon attributes unifying rhythmic and melodic factors to her intuitive style, it seems likely that formal structure would also materialize in this manner. In addition to this self-defined aspect of her compositional method, stylistic elements are present in each work. Because such characteristics appear consistently in all three compositions, a brief discussion devoted to her traits may prove helpful to the reader before a comprehensive analysis can be grasped fully.

Stylistic Traits

Harmony

Higdon does not utilize functional harmony, but she incorporates aspects of the Common Practice Period to create her own harmonic idiom. The most prominent feature of her musical language is the consistent use of perfect fifths that, according to the composer, evolved from the employment of major chords in her earlier works. Removing the third emerged from a desire to explore the possibilities within these sounds. *blue cathedral* was the first composition to consistently use perfect fifth intervals,⁸² a characteristic that appears frequently in her subsequent orchestral works. Higdon's parallel fifths generally appear as accompanimental material orchestrated for the lower strings or horns that present sustained harmonies or a progression

⁸¹Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

⁸²Ibid.

moving in stepwise motion. Perfect fourths, an inversion of fifths, occur less prominently, yet several sections are comprised of these quartal harmonies. Passages utilizing such harmonies are fleeting but without question, are directly related to Higdon's use of the perfect fifth.

As Higdon remarked, the employment of the perfect fifth interval stems from her earlier use of major chords, which maintain a significant role in her harmonic language. Like the fifths, the sonorities may be static or move in stepwise motion. When utilizing sustained harmonies, the chords appear frequently in root position. To orchestrate these sections, Higdon divides a single instrumental group into three lines, supplying each with a note of the chord. This scoring occurs in the lower strings with particular emphasis on the violas. Due to a lack of traditional harmony, this researcher is hesitant to use the term "harmonic rhythm," but the rate of chord changes in these passages is frequently quite slow.

Higdon occasionally varies the major chords through modal mixture that provide an emotionally ambiguous sound.⁸³ She finds this process "fascinating" and has begun to explore it only recently in the past several years.⁸⁴ A recent discovery by this composer, it is likely that her subsequent works will explore this avenue further.

Major chords do not only serve as accompanimental material in Higdon's music. Numerous examples abound with melodic scoring for three trumpets utilizing these sonorities that provide a stark difference in timbre from the warm lower strings' accompanimental sustained harmonies. When the composer employs these chords for melodic purposes, the speed of the progression is greatly increased.

⁸³Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006

⁸⁴Ibid.

Higdon's earliest compositions explore juxtaposition of major chords. This feature continues to appear in the mature works to produce brief bitonal passages. These chords, separated by a major second, create tension that counters the consonant sections built on perfect fifths.

Although Higdon's harmonic idiom places great emphasis on fifths and major chords, major and minor seconds comprise an integral aspect of her musical language as well. *Ostinato* patterns frequently alternate rapidly between these intervals to produce dissonance. Similar to the bitonal sections, this tension is released upon the return to harmonic material derived from fifths.

While the composer does not utilize traditional chord progressions, her harmonic language stems from the Common Practice Period. Dominant to tonic progressions, although quite rare, do appear and provide a sense of familiarity to audiences. Glimpses of this tradition possibly offer connections to listeners acquainted with the standard orchestral repertoire. As Higdon has stated numerous times, communication to her audiences remains a primary objective in her music and such links to the past are a likely reason her music remains popular.

Melody

Higdon consistently incorporates several melodic devices that may be labeled compositional traits. Most prevalent is the abundant lyrical soli for various instruments that display colorful orchestration. In these passages, less standard instruments, such as the English horn and the bass clarinet, are featured. While several examples present expansive, lyrical melodies, other soli are greatly truncated and are, in fact, quite short. Regardless of length, many of the solo sections present motivic material that is featured subsequently throughout the

remainder of the composition. This melodic recall of motives is an essential tool to unifying the works.

The composer's melodies generally encompass a small range and, at times, are limited to a perfect fifth. Instrumental lines utilizing a broader range incorporate leaps using this same interval. Ascending lines are accompanied frequently by a gradual *crescendo* that culminates in a *fortissimo* dynamic marking. The result is a building of tension as the music rises in pitch and volume that is subsequently relaxed by the melodic descents and *decrescendi* that consistently follow. Because Higdon's melodies are generally comprised of consonant intervals, tension and release is achieved through the rising and falling pitches and dynamics.

Often, only one theme is featured at a time and is clearly audible above the entire ensemble. Isolated exceptions display a countermelody, but these secondary lines never interfere with the principal melody.

Rhythm

Higdon places significant emphasis on rhythmic motives that frequently function as a unifying device. Their appearances are subtle and not always audible in full ensemble passages; indeed, few music critics have commented on their existence. Although the patterns appear consistently in the same instrumentation, their return may be truncated or otherwise manipulated. Consistent repetition and rapid overlapping of these motives create intensity in the music and complexity in the texture. It is important to note that these motives may be imbedded within the melodic line to permeate the theme with a vibrant rhythmic aspect.

Less common are syncopations and accents. Syncopations may occur in accompanimental material to provide an understated urgency beneath the dominant melody. In contrast, accents

are habitually presented in the melodic line during returning passages to supply variety in rhythm.

In full ensemble passages, rushing sixteenth notes, combined with a gradual *crescendo*, create a powerful intensity that culminates in a *fortissimo* dynamic marking. The tension is subsequently released through a *decrescendo* and substantially slower note values. On the other side of the coin, a strong rhythmic drive is absent throughout the chamber-like sections that results in a sensation of improvisation.

Meter changes are a rarity in Higdon's music. When present, however, they represent significant musical passages that feature a section of the orchestra. Consistently alternating meters create an extended period of metrical flux that contributes to a sense of unpredictability.

Texture

Varying the musical texture to create diversity in the sound is a method employed by many composers. Higdon utilizes this technique as well. Her polyphonic passages often exhibit fugal qualities with overlapping layers of imitation entering at rapid intervals. These sections are frequently paired with a *crescendo* to generate musical intensity. During the loudest dynamic marking, Higdon exchanges the texture to homophony that releases this tension. An essential aspect of her texture is the *basso ostinati* that function as unifying devices. This compositional tool is used primarily in polyphonic passages and may become a catalyst for imitation.

Prominent solo passages are accompanied by a sparse texture. As the solo nears its conclusion, Higdon gradually increases the instrumentation. The result is a steady amplification of volume that enhances anticipation. In the opposite manner, following full ensemble passages, the texture and dynamics decrease to release the tension.

The composer has invented a phrase to define a phenomenon present in *blue cathedral*. “Counterpoint of textures” refers to two independent musical lines progressing at different speeds.⁸⁵ Although not present in her immediately subsequent works, it is possible that the technique will resurface in later compositions.

Orchestration

An appealing factor of Higdon’s music lies in her colorful orchestration. The three works included in this research contain similar instrumentation that resembles a late nineteenth-century ensemble with the exception of the greatly expanded percussion. She provides not only significant rhythmic material for this section, but also melodic themes, a fairly novel idea with roots in the early twentieth-century.

Higdon notates solo lines for a vast array of instrumental timbres. In several examples, melodic lines are doubled by instruments with contrasting colors, such as piccolo and trumpet or oboe and trombones. Ensemble passages also utilize expansive doublings to balance the diminutive chamber-like sound present during instrumental soli. Melodic material performed by a solitary instrument utilizes less orthodox instruments. In doing so, Higdon contributes significantly to the melodic possibilities of these instruments while simultaneously experimenting with the “joy of sound.”

One particularly noteworthy aspect of Higdon’s orchestration is presented in the unusual scoring of string soli. Rather than notating a violin solo for the concertmaster, she provides parts for the assistant concertmaster or the first desk of a section. Higdon believes that second violinists are equally talented⁸⁶ and subsequently, she has distributed solo violin lines

⁸⁵Brenda Rossow Phillips, “Jennifer Higdon: A stylistic analysis of selected flute and orchestral works,” (DMA doc., Arizona State University, 2005), 72.

⁸⁶Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

accordingly. The result is a string sound that emerges out of the depths of the ensemble. In *City Scape*, the composer expands this technique further to include only half of a section. These unique orchestrations are essential to her sound. It is possible that this heterodox scoring endears the composer to those musicians who normally do not receive such opportunities.

The string instrumentation in the accompanying material is likewise significant. The major chords that comprise Higdon's harmonies are divided among the lower strings (viola and cello particularly) with each section sustaining a pitch of the triad. This lush and warm sound permeates each of the orchestral works and maintains a prominent position within a discussion of her compositional style.

Higdon would never be described as an avant-garde composer, but experimental qualities are present in her orchestration. Prepared piano, water gong, Chinese health reflex bells and water glasses are employed subtly to evoke ethereal atmospheres. This heterodox orchestration is included only to create a specific mood.

Previous musical material is frequently recalled and although the returning passage is instantly recognizable, the orchestral color is varied to simultaneously create repetition and contrast. The composer's penchant for changing the symphonic timbre remains one of her most intriguing qualities. The subsequent instrumentation utilized is neither predictable nor pedantic.

Forms

Higdon rarely adheres to strict formal structures; her works are best described as "sectional." *Accelerandi* and *ritardandi* frequently introduce a new section that results in a contrasting tempo and mood. She generally avoids specific musical markings or directions to indicate distinctive qualities of the subsequent passage. An alternate tempo does not necessarily

indicate separate musical content, of course, but with this composer, this is often the case. Upon the commencement of a new section, the texture, dynamics and mood vary substantially.

Codas play a significant role within each composition. In *blue cathedral*, Higdon concludes the work with essential numerical references to herself and her brother that provide a deeply personal aspect. In doing so, this ending contains great meaning rather than functioning solely as a cadential extension.

The multi-movement works adhere to various structures and forms. The *Concerto for Orchestra* is in five movements that utilizes an arch form. The second and fourth movements are scored exclusively for strings and percussion respectively. Curiously, the fourth movement begins with the percussionists playing their instruments with a bow, a musical aspect commonly associated with strings. Higdon did not intentionally compose these movements to balance the form and later, she suggested her subconscious was responsible.⁸⁷

The opening and third movement are scored for the entire ensemble (as is the finale discussed below). These two movements are sectional and separated by passages between the full orchestra and those featuring individual soli or sections of the orchestra. The first movement contains characteristics similar to sonata allegro form yet does not adhere strictly to the definition of that term; therefore, it is best described as sectional.

In the liner notes to the recording, Nick Jones describes the second movement as a scherzo.⁸⁸ A detailed commentary in Chapter Four examines this statement, but without question, the final result is a ternary structure. Although Higdon did not originally conceive the movement as a scherzo, she purposely included a contrasting central section that adheres to

⁸⁷Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

⁸⁸Nick Jones, jacket notes, Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape/Concerto for Orchestra*, Cond. Robert Spano, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Telarc 80620.

ternary form. The second movement provides the singular example in *Concerto for Orchestra* of a traditional structure inherited from the Viennese Classicists.

The finale, performed *attacca*, functions as a coda to the entire work. Previous musical material is recalled throughout this movement to bring the composition full circle. Codas in Higdon's works are extremely significant and in the *Concerto for Orchestra*, the final movement provides a summation of all the essential musical content presented in the preceding movements.

The final movement of *City Scape* also adheres to a traditional form; however, the decision was dictated by the commissioning ensemble. The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra stipulated that the third movement, *Peachtree Street*, serve as an example of form for school children. Higdon opted for a rondo, yet she strays somewhat from formal parameters. Upon subsequent presentations of the primary theme, she does not state it identically to the original. Only the finale of *City Scape* contained such a specification. For the opening two movements, the composer employed sectionalized forms.

Higdon's melodic recall is realized through the return of large sections of the movement. By incorporating new material with the melodic return, she provides repetition and contrast simultaneously. This abundant employment of melodic recall remains a pivotal element of her formal structure.

Program vs. Absolute Music

Titles for *blue cathedral* and *City Scape* suggest a programmatic element that may be misleading. Neither of the works contains an explicit storyline. During the composition of *blue cathedral*, Higdon used images that facilitated the writing, but initially, performances of the work did not necessarily include programmatic explanation in the notes. After these images became public knowledge, the pictorial content was consistently shared with the audience.

Previous research has attempted to locate these events in the music, but the composer has not divulged this information; therefore, such designations remain only speculative. Listening to the work in conjunction with this now well-known imagery, one can easily make assumptions about the whereabouts of these episodes in the score. Yet, without definitive authority from the composer, the task remains an exercise in imagination. Higdon believes the music speaks for itself and with or without the program, audiences react similarly. She maintains that representation in the music is limited strictly to the clarinet and flute soli to depict her brother and herself.⁸⁹

City Scope portrays no explicitly programmatic content despite the colorful titles of all three movements. The work is simply Higdon's musical portrait of Atlanta and exhibits her feelings about the city. The expressive objects of the individual movements are explored in greater detail in Chapter Five.

Concerto for Orchestra is purely absolute music. Commissioned by the Philadelphia Orchestra, the work contains solo passages composed for specific members of the ensemble. While composing, Higdon imagined the musicians' faces.⁹⁰ Since its premiere, the work has gained additional exposure and while audiences may have no knowledge about the premiering instrumentalists, these aspects were integral to the work's conception.

Unifying Devices

Motivic material, introduced previously in a work, reappears throughout the various sections to unify the music. In *blue cathedral*, the perfect fifths in the accompaniment provide a

⁸⁹Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

⁹⁰Ibid.

basis for changes in orchestral color and mood. *Concerto for Orchestra* and *City Scape* employ melodic and rhythmic motives in the individual movements to strengthen the compositions as one complete work. These patterns are originally presented as *ostinati*, but are later expanded and manipulated in each movement. Several of these examples were unknown to the composer and Higdon was surprised by the research. She believes these occurrences are realizations of her intuitive compositional method.⁹¹ Specific motives are discussed in greater length in Chapters Four and Five.

Conclusion

Higdon's lack of early music training is untraditional for a composer who has reached her level of fame. This author believes that her unique style stems from this more common upbringing. In this document, the reader will notice that direct quotations by Higdon are filled with idiomatic expressions and simplified language. The ease and comfort she maintains with the public is transmitted in her music and has likely contributed to her popularity amongst listeners and audiences. Although a genuine person, she should not be mistaken as simple nor should her compositions. This author firmly believes that Higdon contributes significantly to the symphonic canon of American composers.

⁹¹Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

CHAPTER 3 BLUE CATHEDRAL

Jennifer Higdon's one movement orchestral tone poem, *blue cathedral*, was the composition that launched her into recent orchestral fame. According to the American Symphony Orchestra League, *blue cathedral* is performed more frequently than any other contemporary symphonic work in the United States.⁹² Commissioned for the Curtis Institute of Music's 75th Anniversary, the composition was premiered under conductor Robert Spano with the Curtis Symphony Orchestra in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on May 1, 2000.⁹³ In only a few years, 54 ensembles have performed the work; 43 of these performances were presented by professional orchestras.⁹⁴

Originally commissioned as a celebration by Curtis, because of significant events in Higdon's life, the composition quickly became much more personal. The composer's only sibling, a younger brother, Andrew Blue Higdon, died of a virulent form of cancer at the age of 33⁹⁵ in June, 1998. "He died very fast," said Higdon. "We called my mother and said he may die in the next hour."⁹⁶ The score is dedicated "in loving memory of Andrew Blue Higdon."⁹⁷

⁹²Bob Keyes, "New Year, new magic from PSO; The first Tuesday Classical series of 2005 features a guest baton and an ethereal piece by an acclaimed female composer," *Portland Press Herald* (Maine), 30 January 2005, sec. AUDIENCE, p. E1.

⁹³Jennifer Higdon, *blue cathedral* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 1999).

⁹⁴Andrew Druckenbrod, "Composer Making Musical History," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 2 November 2005, p. E-1.

⁹⁵Doug Mason, "Prelude in Tennessee: Grammy Winning Composer had her Musical Beginnings in Blount County," *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 18 September 2005, sec. E, p.1.

⁹⁶Andrew Druckenbrod, "Higdon Poured Grief into blue cathedral," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 2 November 2005, p. E-2.

⁹⁷Jennifer Higdon, *blue cathedral* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 1999).

The descriptive title derives from two different sources. “Blue” was the middle name of her brother and also refers to the color of the sky while “cathedral,” according to Higdon, is representative to many people of birth, death, marriage, knowledge, and learning. In the liner notes to the compact disc recording of the composition, Higdon writes, “Blue—like the sky, where all possibilities soar. Blue represents all potential and the progression of journeys.”⁹⁸ Regarding the use of the term cathedral, Higdon continues, “Cathedrals—a place of thought, growth, spiritual expression, serving as a symbolic doorway into and out of this world. Cathedrals represent a place of beginnings, endings, solitude, fellowship, contemplation, knowledge, and growth.”⁹⁹ The composition in its entirety represents to Higdon, “a story that commemorates living and passing through places of knowledge and of sharing and of that song called life.”¹⁰⁰

The etymology of the term “cathedral” derives from the Latin “chair” (Latin: cathedra)¹⁰¹ and is associated with the Catholic faith. Higdon perceives the term more generally and she subscribes to no specific religion. Because the composer experienced a myriad of faiths throughout her youth, it appears to be simply coincidental. When questioned about these musical occurrences, the composer states, “I don’t really know enough about Catholicism” and then reflecting on her adolescent years in Tennessee, she continues, “There’s no Catholics in Tennessee. It’s all Southern Baptists. They’re true Southern Baptists and Primitive Baptists in Tennessee. No Catholicism there...my parents were a little freaked out by the Baptists...I still

⁹⁸Jennifer Higdon, *Rainbow Body*, Robert Spano, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Telarc CD 80596.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, “cathedra,” (Accessed [20 June 2006]), <<http://m-w.com/dictionary/cathedra>>

am after all these years.”¹⁰² Higdon recalls during the compositional process, however, that because the work was commissioned by Curtis, an institution of learning, the word “cathedral” seemed fitting. Regarding the process of naming the work, the composer states, “I didn’t want to say *blue Curtis* that makes no sense, but cathedral...the idea of the fact that so many things happen in a lifetime. So cathedral was just a general picture. I was originally going to call it *blue* but one of my friends said, ‘That’s not very interesting.’ I don’t know where cathedral came from though sometimes words will come in my mind when I’m writing and I’ll write them on the margins of my sketches and then I’ll go back and something looks like it’s supposed to be the title.”¹⁰³

Andrew lived on Cathedral Street while living in Baltimore. Higdon initially did not connect the street name to the title of the composition; only later, did a person who knew her brother recognize the coincidence. She states, “This shows how I work on a subconscious level...there are connections there that are interlaced that are subconscious.”¹⁰⁴ Throughout this work, Higdon did not consciously achieve many of the end results that appear to be more than links to the past. She regards these findings as valid and believes that many of these elements were instinctual during the compositional process.¹⁰⁵

The intentional small case letters in the title signifies, according to the composer, that she desired the work to be about humanity rather than the music. She believes that the audience need not be aware of the facts surrounding Andrew Higdon to appreciate a performance; the work can

¹⁰²Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

¹⁰³Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

be understood upon an initial hearing.¹⁰⁶ In many publications referencing *blue cathedral*, capital letters are used in the title. According to Higdon, either is acceptable,¹⁰⁷ but in the score, the letters are purposely set in lower case, as is the composer's name. She states, "I'm too bashful to put my name in caps if I'm not putting the title (in capital letters)."¹⁰⁸

Understandably, Higdon struggled emotionally while simultaneously grieving and composing. She states, "I cried as I wrote the last two-thirds of the piece. I couldn't sleep, and I worried that I might have written something incoherent. It wasn't until the first rehearsal that I realized that I had a piece. Writing it was a cathartic and therapeutic experience. I thought about my brother but also about my students. What makes a life? I lost my brother—what can you take from an experience like that?"¹⁰⁹ Because of the situation surrounding its composition, this work contains a highly personal element.

The orchestration for the work is similar to that of a large Romantic ensemble with a few significant exceptions. The woodwinds consist of 2 flutes (the second doubling piccolo), one oboe, one English horn in F, 2 clarinets in Bb and 2 bassoons. The brass section includes 4 horns in F, 3 trumpets in C, 2 tenor trombones, 1 bass trombone and 1 tuba. The strings are divided into the standard five sections of the orchestra (2 violin sections, viola, violincello and contrabass; later the strings are subdivided into separate parts). A harp and piano/celesta part completes the non-percussive instruments of the orchestra.¹¹⁰ The percussionists are comprised

¹⁰⁶Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, *Composer's Corner*, Updated 30 October 2005 (Accessed [13 May 2006]) <http://www.pittsburghsymphony.blogs.com/composers/2005/10/blue_cathedral_.html#more>

¹⁰⁷Brenda Rossow Phillips, "Jennifer Higdon: A stylistic analysis of selected flute and orchestral works," (DMA doc., Arizona State University, 2005), 1.

¹⁰⁸Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

¹⁰⁹Richard Dyer, "Composer has Emotional Reach, Direct Appeal Jennifer Higdon Touches Many with her Work," *The Boston Globe*, 13 July 2003, Sec. Arts/Entertainment, p. N.4

¹¹⁰Jennifer Higdon, *blue cathedral* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 1999).

of three musicians and a timpanist. The third percussionist plays the crotales, marimba and the tam-tam while the second percussionist is stationed at the vibraphone, glockenspiel, bell tree, sizzle cymbal and suspended cymbal. The final percussionist utilizes the chimes, small triangle, large triangle, bass drum, large tom-tom and the tam-tam.¹¹¹ In addition, crystal glasses and Chinese health bells are added to complement the traditional instruments.

The following notes are included for the proper performance of the eight crystal glasses used at the end of the work. “The horns, trombones, and tuba are required to play crystal glasses towards the end of the piece. The glasses should be tuned by adding water. The player runs a wet finger around the edge of the glass, producing a tone. To facilitate the playing of the glass, the player might want to tape the glass to a stand next to him/her. Fine lead crystal produces the best sound.”¹¹²

Chinese health bells, sometimes referred to as Chinese health reflex bells, are performed by a large portion of the players at the end of the composition (simultaneously with the crystal glass sounds produced by members of the wind sections). Chinese health bells are golf-ball sized chrome spheres twirled in the palms of the hands and produce a bright bell-like sound. The instructions for performance of the Chinese health reflex bells listed in the score reads, “The players need only pick up the bells and begin to shake where notated. Approximately 60 bells are required for an appropriate sound.”¹¹³ If needed, the Chinese health reflex bells can be acquired directly through the composer.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹Jennifer Higdon, *blue cathedral* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 1999).

¹¹²Ibid.

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

Two different versions exist on the origins of the Chinese health reflex bells. According to Andrew Druckenbrod from the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Higdon stated, “I was looking for a sound I couldn’t replicate in the orchestra...someone had given me a box of them. I bumped into them at home and said, ‘That’s it!’”¹¹⁵ In Brenda Rossow Phillips’ dissertation, however, Higdon stated, “The cat was playing on the table and bumped the box (with the bells)...I loved the sound and wondered how I could use it. I ended up going to Chinatown to buy 60 boxes, and now I ship them off to orchestras that are performing the piece.”¹¹⁶ When asked for clarification on precisely the discovery of this sound, the composer states, “Was it one of my cats? There was a box of bells on my nightstand and either I hit the stand or...I was playing with the cat, and the cat hit the stand. I can’t remember if it was me or the cat.”¹¹⁷ Regardless of whom or what bumped the box, the unearthing of this instrument was clearly accidental.

The piano is altered from its previous timbre through the application of two screws during the final bars. The concept of “prepared piano” was made famous primarily through the experimentation of American composer, John Cage (1912-1992). The exact preparations of the piano are specifically designated by the composer in the performance notes which state, “The pianist is required, between meas. 130-147, to place 2 screws within the strings of the piano. Place 1 screw between 2 of the strings of the ‘D’ above the treble staff and 1 screw between 2 of the strings of the ‘A’ above that D. The screws should be approximately 1-2” from the hammer. The screws need to be just wide enough to change the timbre and pitch of those notes. Some experimentation in placement may be necessary to achieve the best results. The resulting sound

¹¹⁵ Andrew Druckenbrod, “Composer Making Music History,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 2 November 2005, Sooner Edition, Concert Preview, p. E1.

¹¹⁶Phillips, op. cit., 74.

¹¹⁷Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

should be that of a clock, chiming in the distance. (Specific pitches can be marked with chalk in advance to facilitate locating).”¹¹⁸ With her relaxed sense of humor, Higdon warned audience members that preparing a piano “is NOT SOMETHING TO TRY AT HOME.”¹¹⁹

Fairly detailed imagery was applied during the compositional process that outlines Higdon’s grieving process. In the liner notes of *Rainbow Body*, Higdon writes that while she was composing, she “imagined a journey through a glass cathedral in the sky. Because the walls would be transparent, I saw the image of clouds and blueness permeating from the outside of this church. In my mind’s eye the listener would enter from the back of the sanctuary, floating along the corridor amongst giant crystal pillars, moving in a contemplative stance. The stained glass windows’ figures would start moving with song, singing a heavenly music. The listener would float down the aisle, slowly moving upward at first and then progressing at a quicker pace, rising towards an immense ceiling which would open to the sky. As this journey progressed, the speed of the traveler would increase, rushing forward and upward. I wanted to create the sensation of contemplation and quiet peace at the beginning, moving towards the feeling of celebration and ecstatic expansion of the soul, all the while singing along with that heavenly music.”¹²⁰ Higdon has not included in her description precisely where these events occur in the music.

Originally, the composer did not intend to share the program with the audience since she believed the story was unnecessary to understand the music. The work has been performed without the storyline provided and Higdon remarks that audience reaction is similar. She receives letters following performances that describe the work’s strength in communicating and

¹¹⁸Jennifer Higdon, *blue cathedral* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 1999).

¹¹⁹Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, *Composer’s Corner*, Updated 30 October 2005 (Accessed [13 May 2006]) <http://www.pittsburghsymphony.blogs.com/composers/2005/10/blue_cathedral_.html#more>

¹²⁰Jennifer Higdon, *Rainbow Body*, Robert Spano, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Telarc CD 80596.

audience members have asked if she had lost someone close to her. Higdon believes *blue cathedral* “will speak without any kind of programmatic”¹²¹ explanation. She debated whether or not to include the program in the liner notes to *Rainbow Body*. She voiced her concern to Robert Spano, the conductor of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, who recorded the composition. Apprehensive about possibly playing on the audience’s emotions, Spano told Higdon, “People can decide for themselves.”¹²² The composer recognized that once a reporter published the programmatic material, it would become known to the public and nearly impossible to omit from that point. As author of the liner notes, she declares those words to be the definitive source regarding the issue.¹²³

Years after the death of Andrew, Higdon finds the composition adequately serves as a memorial in any circumstances. Following the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, she realized the work functions as a universal homage to people who have died in various circumstances. “I hadn’t realized how appropriate this piece was...it had been three years since Andy passed away but...it really fit the September 11th ordeal. It was eerie how much...it felt like a memorial sort of piece. Not in a bad way.”¹²⁴ The composer views the work as versatile and open to interpretation.

A specific musical association, however, occurs with the flute and clarinet. These instruments are utilized as “characters” portraying the composer and her late brother. An accomplished flutist, she is represented by the flute while Andrew is depicted by the clarinet, his former instrument.

¹²¹Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Phillips, op. cit., 92.

The composition initially was inspired by Andrew, Higdon's grieving process and the questioning of life's purpose. While writing, the composer reflected on the meaning of life. In the liner notes, she states that she asked herself "the question of what makes a life" and the experience allowed her to "reflect on amazing journeys that we all make in our lives, crossing paths with so many individuals singularly and collectively, learning and growing each step of the way."¹²⁵ Singular individuals are represented musically throughout the composition through various instrumental soli; yet unlike the flute and clarinet, no direct portrayals of specific people are depicted.

These distinct soli were composed to demonstrate the virtuosity and musicianship of the Curtis Orchestra. In measure 24, an extended solo is written for violin that is quite prominent in contrast to the other strings which have been playing *con sordino*. The solo violin ascends gradually and in step-wise motion. When asked about the significance of this part, Higdon states, "I've often pondered that. It felt necessary there. Sometimes I wonder, is it God? Is it fate in the universe? Or is it just representative of something innocent? I don't actually know. It makes sense musically but I have no idea what it is. It felt to me like there needed to be a shift in the sound, an additional voice in the dialogue. It feels right when it comes in but I wonder every time I hear it."¹²⁶ Underneath the violin solo, the celli and basses are playing open fifths, an interval that is featured consistently throughout the work.

Composing a solo violin passage within a large orchestral work is not a modern concept and is consistently found in works by Richard Strauss. Unlike Strauss, however, Higdon's uncertainty as to the exact representation of the violin allows free interpretation. Examples

¹²⁵ Jennifer Higdon, *Rainbow Body*, Robert Spano, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Telarc CD 80596.

¹²⁶Phillips, op. cit., 65-66.

abound of the violin being an instrument mastered by Satan or other supernatural forces from the dark side (such as Igor Stravinsky's *L'histoire du Soldat*). Yet, the violin has also been used to program sacred Catholic works in Heinrich Biber's 15 *Rosary Sonatas* (c. 1676). Whether representing devilish characters or depicting sacred scenarios, solo violin passages remain difficult to characterize.

The solo violin ceases in measure 40 and Phillips refers to this section as the composer questioning whether life is about living or dying. Musically, the uncertainty is depicted through tension and dissonance in the upper strings.¹²⁷ At this point, the strings perform *senza sordino* which contributes to a less dreamy atmosphere than the opening. As Phillips notes, the first and second violins are separated by the interval of a minor seventh that are doubled by the flute, piccolo and keyboard.¹²⁸ In the accompaniment, the lower strings and brass continually present perfect fifths. Although Higdon states that the answer to the question, "Is this composition about life or death?" was uncertain at the beginning of the compositional process, the parallel fifths used so prominently suggests that subconsciously, Higdon may have already known the answer. The persistent use of these consonant intervals provides relaxation from the tension produced by the dissonant upper orchestral parts.

Measures 39-46 features a miniature fanfare played by the horns and trombones. Brief and slightly fragmented, the horns sound minor chords. Upon the trombones' entrance in measure 43, the quality of the triad changes from minor to major to suggest a sense of optimism. (Figure 3-1) Higdon was questioned about this modal change and unaware of the situation, she states, "I was going back and forth..."¹²⁹ Indeed, the modal mixture provides emotional ambiguity.

¹²⁷Phillips, op. cit., 65-66.

¹²⁸Ibid.

¹²⁹Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

The image shows a musical score for measures 40-43 of the piece 'blue cathedral'. It features five staves: two for horns (labeled 'h. 1-3' and 'h. 2-4') and three for trombones (labeled 'trom. 1', 'trom. 2', and 'tr. trom.'). The horns play a fanfare-like pattern with dynamic markings of *mf* and *f*. The trombones play a parallel fifth accompaniment with dynamic markings of *mf* and *mp > p*. The score includes performance instructions such as 'senza sord.' (without mutes) and 'mf'.

Figure 3-1. *blue cathedral*: mm. 40-43, modal ambiguity between horns and trombones.¹³⁰

In measure 39, the horns initially present a b minor chord, but these instruments lead one to consider the true brass fanfare in measure 102. While composing the brass fanfare proper, Higdon recalls, “That’s actually a moment where I really had this revelation where maybe life is going to be about living.”¹³¹ Yet the brief trombone and horn section in addition to the accompanimental parallel fifths in measure 40 possibly offers the optimistic answer much earlier.

Phillips refers to measures 50-55 as a transition section, but the horns present a brief conclusion to the miniature fanfare from measure 40. In measure 43, the horns ended on an A minor chord, yet when they resume playing in bar 50 the parallel major chord is heard to foreshadow the composition’s hopeful nature.

Measure 50 offers a brighter section with the horns’ major chords and the violins performing *fortissimo* (yet remaining quite dissonant). This passage begins a profound use of

¹³⁰ Jennifer Higdon, *blue cathedral* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 1999).

¹³¹ Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

parallel fifth motion in the percussion and bassoon. Higdon states that “these fifths are like church bells ringing in the distance, expressing an empty quality since there is no third in the chord.”¹³² A third of the chord is present, however, on beat three of the second violin section in measure 50; an F#, sustained for eight beats, completes the D major sonority. Although simultaneously played with additional *fortissimo* string parts, the third of the chord is quite prevalent.¹³³

Immediately following this section in measure 52, a more harmonic stable environment emerges. The parallel fifths in the percussion and bassoon outline D major chords while the upper woodwinds present separate major chords in homophonic texture. The accompanying parallel fifths persists throughout this passage to provide a release from the previous dissonant measures. The homophonic texture reveals a striking contrast to the abundant instrumental soli featured subsequently in measure 56.

Higdon began writing the composition with the English horn solo in measures 56-69. The choice of this timbre bears no specific significance other than the composer’s preference for a melancholic sound (Jennifer Higdon, Pers. Comm., emails 10 May 2006 to 25 November 2006) and her admiration for the talented players at Curtis. Higdon states, “Part of that grew out of the fact that the English horn, or oboe teacher at Curtis is so good. Richard Woodhams is the principal oboist of the Philadelphia Orchestra. I noticed when I would hear them (Woodhams’ students) play the English horn, it was so gorgeous (that) I made up my mind early on that I wanted an English horn solo. It wasn’t connected to anything it just fit. So I don’t know what

¹³² Phillips, op. cit., 68.

¹³³The imagery Higdon suggests of church bells is not apparent in the beginning of the section. The music becomes more sonorous to the sounds of church bells in measures 57 and following when the harp, celesta and vibraphone present parallel fifths.

that solo represents. I can remember my initial thought was, ‘I got to have an English horn solo in here.’”¹³⁴

The English horn is relatively new and still somewhat unconventional as a solo instrument. The earliest notable appearance occurs in the Overture to Gioacchino Rossini’s *Guillaume Tell* (1828), a work that was harshly criticized by Hector Berlioz. Curiously, only two years later, Berlioz employed the same instrument into the pastoral movement of *Symphonie Fantastique*. The prominence of the English horn continued throughout the nineteenth century culminating in a pivotal role in the *Symphony in D Minor* (1886-88)¹³⁵ of Cesar Franck that remains one of the most significant soli in orchestral repertoire.

The etymology of the English horn does not correlate to a nationality suggestive of its name. The descriptive terminology for this alto oboe has been bastardized from its original meaning. In this instance, the origins of “English” derive from the Middle or High German term, “engellisch,” translated as “angelic.” The confusion results from the Middle German term for the nation “England,” which is “Engellant” while “engellisch” meant “English”. This double meaning for “engellisch” (“English” and “angelic”) was understandably confounded and the “angel’s horn” eventually became known as the English horn.¹³⁶ Although Higdon did not consciously associate the English horn with its history, it invites speculation on potential reasons why this particular instrument receives such significance. One could conjecture on the potential subconscious use of the “angel’s horn:” it seems not only fitting but appropriate that this instrument serves a vital role in a composition with “cathedral” in the title.

¹³⁴Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

¹³⁵John Trevitt/Joel-Marie Fauquet: “Cesar Franck,” *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed [28 May 2006]), <<http://www.grovemusic.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu>>

¹³⁶Geoffrey Burgess: “Oboe,” *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed [28 May 2006]), <<http://www.grovemusic.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu>>

This section, with its numerous instrumental soli, represents the lives one person touches. Higdon's original idea stemmed from the time of her brother's illness. She stated to Phillips in an interview, "When Andy was sick, we were at a house in Virginia Beach and there were a lot of friends from Baltimore who would drive down to see him and I was very struck. One of the couples was getting ready to have a baby and they decided to name the baby Blue because Andy's middle name was Blue. I thought, 'Andy has crossed the path of a lot of other people and a lot of people have crossed his path in his lifetime and people come and go but in some way they all touch you.' And it is hard to draw a musical portrait of that. You almost have to make little tiny solos but they have to be little. I think the English horn solo is probably longer because that was the first thing I thought of..."¹³⁷ Brief soli appear in the piccolo, oboe, viola, cello and bassoon. The variety of timbres represents "all of the individuals that one crosses paths with in a lifetime." (Jennifer Higdon, Pers. Comm., emails 10 May 2006 to 25 November 2006)

The length of the soli in this section varies. The opening English horn solo is the longest and subsequently, answered by the others. Several of the smaller soli are strikingly similar to one another. (The viola, oboe and cello contain the most parallels through their ascending scalar passages). As the music progresses, the soli overlap to present a polyphonic texture, a style not yet seen in the work.

The accompaniment in measure 56 present perfect fifths transposed to various degrees. The persistent employment of this interval in the preceding and current sections provides a similarity amongst two otherwise quite contrasting passages. Indeed, perfect fifths are a consistent factor in this work and subtly function as a unifying device.

¹³⁷Phillips, op. cit., 67.

Although the use of parallel fifths is no longer “forbidden,” one may speculate on the relevance of this interval in *blue cathedral*. Parallel fifth motion is reminiscent of organum, a term associated with the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. Parallel or consecutive fifths were a common occurrence in the genres of organum and conductus. The progression was not prohibited until Johannes de Grocheo’s (fl. 1300) *Optima introduction in contrapunctum* (c. 1300).¹³⁸ With the end of the Common Practice Period, parallel fifths have again, become accepted and even widespread. One can only marvel at the remarkable coincidence in the use of this interval in *blue cathedral* and a composition with a similar title: Debussy’s piano prelude *La Cathedrale Engloutie* (1910).

“My counterpoint teacher would be having a cow”¹³⁹ was Higdon’s initial response on her extensive use of fifths. Upon further reflection, however, the composer traces the influence to her earlier fascination with major chords. “But in *blue cathedral*, they (fifths) really made a statement for the first time just as fifths and I was thinking about bells.”¹⁴⁰ When questioned specifically about the potential connection to the title of the work and the Notre Dame organum style, Higdon simply states, “It’s not that logical. Someone else brought that up but no, it was much simpler than that I’m afraid.”¹⁴¹ Although she does not associate organum with her own compositional style, the coincidence still proves captivating.

Following the various soli, a new section begins in measure 70 that is clearly delineated by a tempo change (quarter note=72) and a temporary cessation of solo instrumental dialogue. The

¹³⁸ William Drabkin: “Consecutive fifths, consecutive octaves,” *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed [11 June 2006]), <<http://www.grovemusic.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu>>

¹³⁹ Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

unyielding chimes of the keyboard are complemented by sustained parallel fifths in the lower strings and once again, the interval functions as a unifying device between the two disparate passages. (The second violins in measure 72 also present a continuous perfect fifth interval).

Phillips has described this section as the composer demanding answers to her questions about life.¹⁴² (Similarly, Andrew Druckenbrod of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* suggests frustrated emotions).¹⁴³ Phillips cites the violas and violins as the purveyor of Higdon's frustration.¹⁴⁴ In measure 76, the dialogue ensues with a triplet motive presenting identical pitches. The discourse becomes more insistent upon the entrances in measure 78 when the triplets are replaced by sextuplets. Phillips states, "It is not obvious which instrument is going to introduce the next statement. Higdon commented that this dialogue between the two instruments creates a sense of uncertainty, which represents the need for her (Higdon) questions to be answered after her brother's passing."¹⁴⁵ On the contrary, although the phrases are irregular in length, the presentation of the theme is delivered twice by the violas which are imitated precisely by the first violins. Subsequent appearances repeat the order of instrumental entrances that maintain consistency. Only after three imitative entrances do the two string parts achieve independence through a contrapuntal texture.

The harmonic movement in the accompanying instruments continues the parallel fifths in the horns, clarinets and lower strings. Only the trumpets present fully realized descending major chords that contrast the parallel fifth intervals in harmonic content.

¹⁴²Phillips, op. cit., 69.

¹⁴³Andrew Druckenbrod, "Higdon Poured Grief into blue cathedral," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 2 November 2005, p. E-2.

¹⁴⁴Phillips, op. cit., 69.

¹⁴⁵Phillips, op. cit., 70.

During the increasingly complex soli of the viola and violin, the orchestration expands while a *crescendo* increases the musical momentum. This leads directly into the next section (measure 84), demonstrated clearly by a double bar with a new tempo (quarter note=90). This passage, although beginning *forte*, clears the orchestral texture with central focus relegated to the strings, percussion and trombones.

The strings, echoed by the bass trombone, alternate brief rhythmic motives within a narrow range (often no larger than a perfect fifth), while the woodwinds present persistent *sforzando* chords in syncopation to enhance the intensity. The independent percussion section exhibits a new, seemingly unrelated motive of sextuplets. The previous violin and viola dialogue utilized sextuplets frequently and one may consider this a unifying rhythm, although the pitch content differs considerably.

Phillips believes measures 84-101 represent an internal struggle. Indeed, the mood is altered by a new tempo marking (quarter note=90) and unique soli for the trombones. In addition, the timbre of the timpani is altered by covering the drums with a piece of cardboard to “deaden” the sound.¹⁴⁶ This effect eliminates much of the timpani’s pitch and when played *forte*, produces a sound similar to a “field drum used in battle”¹⁴⁷ according to Phillips (presumably representing the inner “battle” of the composer).

Utilizing colorful instrumental timbres remains one of Higdon’s more prevalent compositional traits. The bass trombone and trombone present soli in measures 84-95. Considering the trombone’s historical association with a heralding instrument of the damned, one may erroneously conjecture a myriad of subconscious possibilities for this scoring.

¹⁴⁶Jennifer Higdon, *blue cathedral* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 1999).

¹⁴⁷ Phillips, op. cit., 70.

For centuries, trombones have aided in musical depictions of divine retribution. Group trombone scoring began in the compositions of the Venetian Gabrielis (Andrea and Giovanni) and Heinrich Schutz. By the early 17th century, the trombone's reputation in depicting dramatic scenes was firmly established. Claudio Monteverdi's operatic masterpiece, *Orfeo* (1607), is one of the earliest representative examples and utilizes a large trombone group¹⁴⁸ to portray the Underworld. Other notable examples are present in the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The supper scene in *Don Giovanni* (1787) and the well-known solo in the "Tuba mirum" of the *Requiem*¹⁴⁹ (1791) remain prominent within the trombone repertoire.

The trombone in *blue cathedral*, however, bears no correlation to its colorful history. Higdon chose this scoring simply because she needed more sound and power and insists that the instrument in this instance is not linked to any musical representation (Jennifer Higdon, Pers. Comm., emails 10 May 2006 to 25 November 2006) (perhaps due to the negative pictorial associations with the trombone).

In measure 84, the bass trombone presents a brief recurring rhythmic motive comprised of two sixteenth notes that is additionally manipulated and extended in the contrabass and violincelli. Beneath this solo, the timpani presents repeated notes rapidly while the low tom-tom provides a funeral-like rhythm. It is tempting to compare these rhythms to a funeral march that would lend credence to the concept of the trombone as an instrument of divine retribution. The funeral procession imagery was not intended by the composer but the rhythms that frequent the passage are suggestive of such a scenario.

¹⁴⁸Trevor Herbert: "Trombone," *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed [29 May 2006]), <<http://www.grovemusic.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu>>

¹⁴⁹Anthony C. Baines and Arnold Myers, "Trombone," *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed [29 May 2006]), <<http://www.grovemusic.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu>>

At this point, the principal trombone alternates with the bass trombone in a dialogue that initially encompasses the range of a perfect fifth. When questioned on the narrow range, Higdon states, “That’s instinct by ear...and people find things in my music and I didn’t realize I did it.”¹⁵⁰ The opening pitches repeat with rhythmic variety before the trombone expands to a broader range.

Phillips’ research states that this section (measures 84-102) musically depicts the soul flying toward the ceiling of a cathedral only to realize there is no ceiling.¹⁵¹ This imagery is plausible since the fragmented motives in the violins gradually extend in pitch, but no documentation accompanies the explanation and therefore casts a shadow of speculation on the authenticity.

In measure 95, the meter changes resulting in an obscurity of the downbeat. An omission of a strong metrical pulse combined with the simultaneous presentation of rapid ascending and descending scales by the woodwinds does support Phillips’ imagery of “floating,” but without verification from the composer, the imagery remains questionable. The parallel fifths are replaced by major triads in the lower strings and keyboard to exhibit the following progression: Gb, E, Eb, Db. The upper register of the piano hints at bitonality through a separate major chord progression that if rearranged, outline a chromatic scale: C, Db, D, Eb, E. The harmonic discord combined with the stable progression of the lower strings exudes a sense of ambiguity. Musically, the instruments are “floating” around the entire harmonic spectrum.

This passage erupts into a lively brass fanfare spanning only eight measures (102-09), yet due to the striking instrumentation a stark contrast is immediately present. The trumpets and

¹⁵⁰Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

¹⁵¹ Phillips, op. cit., 63-64.

trombones present unyielding sixteenth notes that provide a driving rhythm. This brass fanfare, according to Phillips, is the realization by the composer that life is about living.¹⁵² The bass trombone part in measure 106 originated from Higdon's student who experienced difficulty with counting. The composer states, "I put that in because of the bass trombone students (sic) at the school (Curtis). [He] was studying solfege with me at the time and I was torturing him a lot about counting. So I put in a counting part for (him)."¹⁵³

Following the brass fanfare, the rhythmic excitement continues with fuller orchestration in measure 110. Four measures later, the flute and strings maintain the unyielding sixteenth notes while the remaining woodwinds and brass present substantially slower rhythms. Higdon refers to these contrasting harmonic rhythms as a "counterpoint of textures."¹⁵⁴ (Figure 3-2)

A prominent solo comprised of a soaring melodic line for the horns commences in measure 115. According to Higdon, this represents the "ultimate flying theme"¹⁵⁵ which progresses to an emotionally climactic section. In Phillips' research, the high instrumental registers symbolize the "characters" reaching the stars,¹⁵⁶ yet no footnote accompanies this description.

Following the climax, a new section begins promptly in measure 128, complete with meter and tempo change (quarter note=72) that decreases further two measures later to the original tempo (quarter note=60). Regarding this passage, Higdon states, "I often think about drawing the audience in, they are in on this and by the time they get to that loud part (measures 100-128), they are with you; no one is sleeping at all. But if you can bring it down to a more intimate

¹⁵²Phillips, op. cit., 71.

¹⁵³Phillips, op. cit., 72.

¹⁵⁴Ibid.

¹⁵⁵Phillips, op. cit., 73.

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

setting really fast you actually pull the audience more with you. They are caught off guard by the flute and the clarinet coming in (measure 131) but because they have heard that material before and it sounds familiar, they are okay with it.”¹⁵⁷

Figure 3-2. *blue cathedral*: mm. 114-117, Higdon’s “counterpoint of textures.”¹⁵⁸

Following the “loud part,” an ethereal environment commences to accompany the Higdon siblings in their final duet. The mysterious aural atmosphere is achieved through the *pianissimo* chimes presented by the three percussionists; each sounds three different notated pitches in “any quick rhythm, without synchronizing with (the) other players.”¹⁵⁹ This imagery according to Phillips represents “bells in the distance.”¹⁶⁰ The nebulous rhythm is further enhanced by the

¹⁵⁷ Phillips, op. cit., 73.

¹⁵⁸ Jennifer Higdon, *blue cathedral* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 1999).

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Phillips, op. cit., 73.

divided second violins' alternation between D & E. To add to the otherworldly effect, Higdon introduces the crystal glasses and Chinese health reflex bells in measure 129. The Chinese bells increase in volume naturally by beginning in the back of the orchestra and gradually progressing to the violins.

In measure 131, the flute and clarinet soli representing the Higdon's return. The flute solo is similar to its predecessor in bar 8, although scored an octave lower. The composer provides a practical rationale for such scoring. "I can see an orchestration reason for putting that an octave lower...if you look at the flute line in the measures leading up to it is high and when I'm writing I try to make sure I vary the high and low to keep it interesting for the listener...I'd be willing to bet this came about because...it was something that practical."¹⁶¹ The clarinet solo enters in the same measure but unlike the flute, the range is unchanged from its initial appearance and represents Andrew continuing his journey upward. As the woodwind dialogue continues in measure 133, two violas and two celli present descending chords. Although not an exact replication, the lower strings recall the opening measures of the composition. Phillips referred to this section as "a return back to earth"¹⁶² based on this progression. Higdon states, "I never really thought of it like that. It's the ending. I knew that Andy's journey was going on. When I was writing the chords, I was thinking I had to get the music to settle down...it's got to feel like it's coming to an end and the descending chords felt like the best way to do that to move toward a resolution. Now the flute cuts out because the clarinet is actually continuing on its journey...This is the part where I said, 'Oh no, I can't really end this.' This piece is not appropriate to end that way. I've got to find a way to bring it down and calm it."¹⁶³ Phillips

¹⁶¹Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

¹⁶²Phillips, *op. cit.*, 75.

¹⁶³Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

detailed programmatic analysis does not explain the similar string progression in the opening measures; therefore, this author suggests the composer's "return to Earth" occurs in the registration change of the flute solo, although any imagery remains speculative.

The unidentified third character represented by the English horn returns in measure 134. Similar to its initial solo in measure 56, the range is quite narrow, yet expands chromatically from its previous presentation. The characterization of this solo remains unclear to the composer. Higdon states, "Could be God, could be the universe. Could be anything. It was there and it seemed logical and it is still as much a mystery to me today as it was when I wrote it."¹⁶⁴

The English horn ceases in measure 140 quickly followed by the flute in 142. In the liner notes, Higdon writes, "At the end of the work, the two instruments continue their dialogue, but it is the flute that drops out and the clarinet that continues on in the upward progressing journey."¹⁶⁵

The final measures comprise the coda in which Higdon has cleverly applied significant numerical associations to enhance a final representation of the siblings. Throughout the coda, the specific numbers are essential, but they also appear in additional sections that illustrate her intuitive compositional style.

The composer included the birthdates of both her brother and herself into the coda of *blue cathedral*,¹⁶⁶ although she has not publicly stated precisely where such occurrences appear. Andrew's birthday was July 13 (7-13) while Higdon was born on December 31 (12-31).

¹⁶⁴ Phillips, op. cit., 74.

¹⁶⁵ Jennifer Higdon, *Rainbow Body*, Robert Spano, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Telarc CD 80596.

¹⁶⁶Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, *Composer's Corner*, Updated 30 October 2005 (Accessed [13 May 2006] <http://www.pittsburghsymphony.blogs.com/composers/2005/10/blue_cathedral_.html#more>

Curiously, the days are palindromes of one another. The composer did not consciously incorporate the years of their births, yet in the beginning of measure 63, the piccolo presents a brief solo. Because Higdon was born on New Year's Eve in 1962, it is possible that this solo bears a subconscious reference to the composer.

In Western society, the number 13 is associated with bad luck or evil. According to Scandinavian legend, 12 demigods hosted a gathering at Valhalla when an uninvited 13th god, Loki, entered and manipulated Holder, the blind god of darkness, into murdering Balder the Beautiful, the god of joy and gladness, with a mistletoe-tipped arrow. Darkness and mourning¹⁶⁷ resulted for the Earth and consequently, misfortune and misery were attributed to this unlucky 13th demigod.¹⁶⁸ A similar rationale for the “unluckiness” of the number 13 derives from Christianity. Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Christ was the 13th guest at the Last Supper¹⁶⁹ and was likewise viewed as an unfortunate. It is also likely that the number 13 was purposely vilified during the indoctrination of the current patriarchal system. In prehistoric goddess-worshipping cultures, the number 13 was highly venerated due to the number of lunar, or menstrual, cycles per year. Once the solar calendar replaced the lunar calendar and the oppressive male dominated societies were solidified, the number 13 lost its former reverence.¹⁷⁰ Due to the optimistic nature of *blue cathedral*, however, any connection with the number 13 as evil is irrelevant; Higdon's positive association with the number remains a point of interest in her rejection of superstitions.

¹⁶⁷ <http://www.corsinet.com/trivia/scary.html> (Accessed [30 May 2006])

¹⁶⁸ http://www.globalpsychics.com/lp/superstition/friday_13th.htm (Accessed [29 May 2006])

¹⁶⁹ <http://www.corsinet.com/trivia/scary.html> (Accessed [30 May 2006])

¹⁷⁰ “Paraskevidekatriaphobia: Fear of Friday the 13th,” *Urban Legends and Folklore*, http://urbanlegends.about.com/cs/historical/a/friday_the_13th.htm (Accessed [11 March 2007])

The performance time of the work varies, of course, but generally spans approximately 13 minutes. Although purely coincidental, the timing warrants mention within the numerical discussion.

The initial flute solo in measure 8 appears before the clarinet because “going first is the privilege of being the older sibling.”¹⁷¹ Numerical significance within the composition commences with the clarinet solo in measure 13, the day of Andrew’s birth. Higdon comments on this author’s discovery, “That was amazing. I was thinking after you mentioned that. I had some distant recollection of the 13 because his birthday was on the 13th...but because it was the first year after his death, my brain was so foggy. I just can’t remember certain things but that felt familiar but I have just not been able to put my finger on it.”¹⁷²

Measure 131 (a hybridization of Andrew and Higdon’s days of birth), features a brief duet between the flute and clarinet. When questioned about this instance, Higdon replied, “In terms of measure 131 architectural (sic) design...I don’t think it was intentional...I hadn’t noticed that...although it is a little amazing.” Although Higdon did not explicitly compose this measure to be numerically meaningful, she has not dismissed the possibility of a subconscious reference. (Jennifer Higdon, Pers. Comm., emails 10 May 2006 to 25 November 2006) She states, “I think there’s probably something to that. I actually have no doubt. I don’t think that was coincidence. It’s a little too much our two birthdays...it makes sense.”¹⁷³

Again, Higdon has not specifically outlined the appearance of the two birthdates in the coda. Phillips’ analysis proves noteworthy but does not include the composer’s birth date, and Higdon stated, “I put in my birth date and Andy’s birth date (mine: 12-31; his 7-13) in the piece

¹⁷¹Phillips, op. cit., 65.

¹⁷²Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

¹⁷³Ibid.

in a very exposed location.”¹⁷⁴ As Phillips’ research demonstrates, the lower crotales presents the third of a D major chord seven times to represent the month of July, while the glockenspiel strikes thirteen times to represent the day.¹⁷⁵ Working with Phillips during the research, Higdon states, “This is hysterical. Brenda (Phillips) asked me about this and she couldn’t figure it out, then I was trying to figure it out. I actually did it and I was trying to figure it out! It was tricky...I did have trouble when Brenda started asking me about it. When I went back to look at the sketches, I couldn’t find where I had written it down...but that had more to do with the fact that I have so many sketches of so many different things. It could have been written on a napkin and I may have lost the napkin.”¹⁷⁶



Figure 3-3. *blue cathedral*: mm. 149-153.¹⁷⁷

There are additional appearances of these numbers in the coda that have not yet been exposed. Not including the final pitch,¹⁷⁸ the vibraphone sounds twelve times to represent

¹⁷⁴Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, *Composer’s Corner*, Updated 30 October 2005 (Accessed [13 May 2006]), <http://www.pittsburghsymphony.blogspot.com/composers/2005/10/blue_cathedral_html#more>

¹⁷⁵Phillips, op. cit., 75.

¹⁷⁶Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

¹⁷⁷Jennifer Higdon, *blue cathedral* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 1999).

¹⁷⁸ Regarding the final pitch, Higdon states, “The last note was also an extension...that was just kind of a closing off but not part of the numerology” therefore substantiating the claim that it need not be included within the numerological discussion.-- Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

Higdon's birth month. A visual aspect of the scores reveals further examples; the number of crotale pitches (including tied notes) with the note stems facing up equals 31 (Higdon's day of birth and a palindrome of 13). The Higdon siblings' birth dates therefore, are presented simultaneously.

Because Andrew died at the age of 33, the composer also assigns significance to this number.¹⁷⁹ Following the final clarinet solo, a prepared piano enters in measure 147 to "chime" a perfect fifth interval 33 times. The Higdon's originally believed Andrew's birthday was July 14th (7-14, rearranged in the measure number). The composer states, "We must have celebrated his birthday on the 14th for 6, 7 or 8 years before my mom found his birth certificate and went, 'Oh, it's the 13th.'"¹⁸⁰

In measure 149, triplets in the vibraphone, glockenspiel and chimes result in a visual realization of the number three, a connection Higdon did not consciously employ. She states, "I always pick up on the auditory sensation of an attack. I don't think of it as a visual element. In fact, I think when I wrote this, I was surprised at how it came out."¹⁸¹ In addition, the final page of the score contains 33 different instrumental lines. The composer can neither confirm nor deny this potential coincidence but stated, "It could be something but I didn't do it intentionally."¹⁸² Finally, the number three appears in measure 149 in the lower triangle and chimes. The triangle presents three pitches while the chimes display three separate pitches in an augmented rhythm. Four beats of rests follow before the pattern repeats with the chimes in diminution. (A similar

¹⁷⁹Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, *Composer's Corner*, Updated 30 October 2005 (Accessed [13 May 2006]), <http://www.pittsburghsymphony.blogs.com/composers/2005/10/blue_cathedral_.html#more>

¹⁸⁰ Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

example transpires between the vibraphone and glockenspiel). Regardless of her conception, the visual frequency of the number three proves significant. (Figure 3-3)

Although Higdon declared openly the representation of Andrew's age at his death through the 33 "chimes" of the piano, all other numerical appearances were discovered by this author. Such finding should not be dismissed as coincidental; the composer validates such discoveries as reflective of her instinctual compositional method.

The opening and concluding measures of the work utilize a similar instrumentation, yet no numerical significance is present in the introduction. Higdon states, "There's nothing there, I was trying to figure out how to start the piece. I wrote that before the ending but this wasn't connected to anything because I hadn't thought about using the numerology at that point. I wrote this first, I didn't get the organization sense until I got to the end...and then I knew I wanted to bring back this material."¹⁸³

Although composed in the wake of Andrew's death, the composition is neither mournful nor a lament. Several passages utilize the tonality of D major, a key associated with vibrancy, triumph and rejoicing.¹⁸⁴ While initially uncertain about her perspective of life, Higdon states, "I was surprised it turned out so positively."¹⁸⁵ Notating passages in the key of D major may suggest that, subconsciously, Higdon harbored positive assumptions. The composer, however, remains skeptical. She states, "That wasn't conscious because when I was writing *blue cathedral*, I was literally trying to figure out whether life was going to be about living or whether it was going to be about death. I was agonizing. When I started that piece, I did not feel like

¹⁸³Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

¹⁸⁴A History of Key Characteristics in the 18th and Early 19th Centuries, trans. Rita Steblin (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983)

¹⁸⁵ Andrew Druckenbrod, "Higdon Poured Grief into blue cathedral," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 2 November 2005, p. E-2.

things were going to be ok.”¹⁸⁶ Higdon does not dismiss the possibility of D major appearing subconsciously, but remains adamant that any positive associations with the key were minimal due her intense grief.¹⁸⁷

Undoubtedly, *blue cathedral* has attained an elevated status among modern symphonic compositions. Several explanations account for its continuing popularity. While the work contains dissonant passages, the composition is aurally pleasing and accessible to those at various stages of musical comprehension. In addition, the underlying programmatic content relates to the human condition. Throughout history, audience acceptance has not guaranteed posterity, of course, but this work is also held in high esteem by trained musicians that implies a level of sophistication beneath the audible pleasantries. Musicians, conductors and critics are drawn to the unique timbres and musicianship required in the individual soli that permeate the composition. *blue cathedral* catapulted the composer into widespread recognition. Paving the way to subsequent orchestral commissions, this work, born from intense grieving, has transformed Higdon’s compositional career into a modern-day fairy tale.

¹⁸⁶Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4 CONCERTO FOR ORCHESTRA

Similar to *blue cathedral*, Higdon's *Concerto for Orchestra* materialized from a celebratory occasion. The Philadelphia Orchestra had substantial plans to inaugurate its centennial year that included commissions of several compositions.¹⁸⁸ Higdon's *Concerto for Orchestra*, the largest work she had yet written, was a result, and has since appeared frequently on orchestral programs throughout the United States.

“Word-of-mouth” is Higdon's primary method of promoting her music. She believes superior compositions will garner recognition, a factor that provided Higdon this opportunity with the Philadelphia Orchestra. A musician¹⁸⁹ in that ensemble had performed her music and heard a recording of her orchestral composition *Shine* (1996). That musician suggested Higdon as a composer worthy of commission to the director of the Philadelphia Orchestra. As a result, she received a telephone call from Simon Woods, the artistic administrator, requesting a score and recording. She recalls, “I didn't know why he was asking. I actually had a couple pieces (sic) but they weren't very good but I had this one piece called *Shine* and I took that to him.”¹⁹⁰

On the composers selected for the commissions, she states, “I know that they were going to have to commission a Philadelphia composer in this mix because they would get a lot of flak. They looked at a lot of people but somehow they came up with me...that was a shock to all of us.”¹⁹¹ Higdon humorously relates how she discovered she was ultimately chosen, “I forgot about it, and about one month later I was walking down the street...and the first flute player,

¹⁸⁸Other compositions resulting from these commissions include Aaron Kernis's *Color Wheel*, Michael Daugherty's *Philadelphia Stories* and Roberto Sierra's *Concierto para orquesta*.

¹⁸⁹Higdon does not know which musician recommended her music. --Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

¹⁹⁰Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

¹⁹¹Ibid.

Jeffrey Khaner was running down the street, jumping up and down motioning to me. He goes tearing across three lanes of traffic, almost getting hit and he said The Philadelphia Orchestra is going to commission you. At which point I promptly fainted. No, just kidding.”¹⁹²

The composer recalls her initial period of uncertainty once Khaner informed her of the startling news. Higdon states, “As soon as I was out of grad school, suddenly I got this commission, I was completely horrified. In fact, really for the next two or three days I just wasn’t sure I heard him correctly. It took a while for that to sink in. And then panic set in, literally for about a year. What have I gotten myself into because all my teachers, all these people were pointing at me saying, ‘She’s the one with the Philadelphia Orchestra commission.’ You could hear the whispering.”¹⁹³ Higdon comments on the potential gossip within the Philadelphian compositional circle at the time, “I’m sure there was probably mumblings and grumblings. There had to be...I’m in a city with... some amazing composers and I had literally just come out of graduate school. I had only graduated four years before. Thank goodness there was a gap from the time they asked me to write it than when the premiere (occurred) because I needed that time to adjust my thinking. It was too much pressure. I would have been in trouble if I had to turn out that piece within a year. I’m glad there was time for me to think about it.”¹⁹⁴ Due to the prestige of the commissioning ensemble and its surrounding circumstances, the composer allowed herself a wide time frame to write. Higdon began the work fairly soon after receiving the unexpected commission and vividly remembers her feelings of uncertainty. She remarks,

¹⁹²“Publishing, self-publishing and the internet,” Transcript of panel during Women’s Philharmonic’s Composing a Career Symposium-6 November 1999, *newmusicbox*, 2/1/2000 (Accessed [7 July 2006]) available from <http://www.newmusicbox.org/article.nmbx?id=537>; Internet.

¹⁹³Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

¹⁹⁴Ibid.

“What the hell am I going to write for the Philadelphia Orchestra? It was scary.”¹⁹⁵ The commission, originally granted in 1998, was not scheduled to premiere until 2002.¹⁹⁶

Early in the composition process, Higdon identified the work as a *Concerto for Orchestra*. Numerous orchestral works by a plethora of composers have been given the same title ranging from Zoltán Kodály, Roger Sessions, Witold Lutosławski and Leonard Bernstein (whose composition is also known as *Jubilee Games* and includes a baritone vocal part), to Joan Tower and Goffredo Petrassi, the latter of whom wrote eight separate works entitled *Concerto for Orchestra* from 1933-1972.¹⁹⁷ Béla Bartók’s composition of the same name is perhaps the most commonly associated with the genre and continues to remain a favorite of orchestral audiences. Because of the extensive popularity of his work, parallels between Bartók and Higdon are frequently drawn by critics regardless of the fact that over twenty compositions bear this same title. Composing a work in the shadow of the well-known Bartók did not deter Higdon, although she consciously strove to be unique. In order to preserve originality, she states, “I stopped listening to the Lutosławski and the Bartók . . . because I love those works. I would never be able to make my own kind of Concerto for Orchestra; I was afraid that my head would be replaying their music. So I intentionally stayed away from those pieces for four years. I was aware of them, but I tried not to think about it.”¹⁹⁸

Similarities between the Bartók and Higdon works are limited to the number of movements and the arch form utilized in each. Higdon comments, “Because I stopped (listening

¹⁹⁵Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

¹⁹⁶Andrew Quint, “Speaking with Composer Jennifer Higdon: The Communication Thing,” *Fanfare*, May/June 2004, p. 42-45.

¹⁹⁷Enzo Restagno, “Goffredo Petrassi,” *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed [11 July 2006]), <<http://www.grovemusic.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu>>

¹⁹⁸ Andrew Quint, “Speaking with Composer Jennifer Higdon: The Communication Thing,” *Fanfare*, May/June 2004, p. 42-45.

to Bartók during the compositional process) and I let that out of my system, I forgot about the fact that the Bartók's in five movements. I honestly didn't realize."¹⁹⁹

It is worth noting, however, that outside of the large formal structure, little similarity can be found between Higdon's and Bartók's compositions. Higdon consciously strove to differentiate her work from that of the Hungarian master. The various parallels drawn between the two composers appear to stem more from a lack of knowledge of additional existing works in the same genre rather than actual similarities. A *Concerto for Orchestra* by any composer will make use of the diverse timbres available in large ensembles. Higdon states that many people are drawn to making comparisons with her music. She recalls, "One reporter said this piece (*Concerto for Orchestra*) reminds me of Lutosławski and Schoenberg and Mozart and Stravinsky. They went on with the whole list and all the composers (were) completely contradictory and I (thought), 'What the hell are they saying? I don't understand what this means.'"²⁰⁰ Although unclear, the journalist may have been referring to a touch of neo-classicism.

In her earlier works, Higdon chose descriptive titles suggestive of a specific mood or character. She abandoned the possibility of a poetic title for this work because, "*Concerto for Orchestra* was so specifically about the Philadelphia Orchestra that commissioned it that after trying to think of a title for several years, I could only see a plain ordinary one in my head. I knew that this could be the only possible title for that piece."²⁰¹ The label is not only fitting but

¹⁹⁹Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

²⁰⁰Ibid.

²⁰¹Renate Brosch, "Composing as a creative challenge: Interview with the American Composer Jennifer Higdon," *Musikzeitschriften*, p. 8 (Accessed [7 May 2006]) available from <http://magazin.klassik.com/magazines/template.cfm?SEITE=1&START=1&AID=879>); Internet.

appropriate since it truly is a concerto for the entire orchestra complete with a plethora of soli that distinguishes the individual five movements.

When asked about this abrupt change, Higdon remarked, “That’s a very unusual thing for me. It’s so absolute that I couldn’t come up with a more original title. They (people) actually said, ‘What the hell’s wrong with you?’...They’re (the compositions) often about the ensemble I’m writing for and I’m thinking about the ensemble. My brain...doesn’t come up with any kind of imagery.”²⁰²

As an active member of Philadelphian musical life since her graduate school years, Higdon has established personal relationships with many of the orchestral members. Intimate knowledge of the differing personalities of the musicians in addition to the familiarity of the style of music preferred by the principal players enhanced the genuineness of the composition. Higdon stated, “I’ve worked with a lot of the Orchestra’s musicians in new-music concerts. I went to school with some at Curtis, or they are former students of mine. I’m tailoring the *Concerto* to the individual players and to the Orchestra as a whole.”²⁰³ Higdon believes this familiarity reinforced sincerity to the specific commission. She states, “I could see their faces when I was writing; I knew who’d be playing what part. I’ve worked with a lot of them and know the kind of music they pick for their recitals.”²⁰⁴

Personal relationships between premiering musicians in large ensembles and contemporary composers are not particularly numerous within the contemporary scene.

²⁰²Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

²⁰³ “Jennifer Higdon’s *Concerto* for Orchestra Highlights Premieres,” *Sequenza 21* 6/3-10, 2002 (Accessed [7 July 2006]) available from <http://www.sequenza21.com/060302.html>.

²⁰⁴David Patrick Stearns, “Jennifer Higdon,” *Andante Corporation*, June 2002 (Accessed [5 June 2006]), available from <http://www.andante.com/article/article.cfm?id=17341&highlight=1&timeline=1&highlightterms=jenni%2A%7Chigdo%2A&lstKeywords=Jennifer%20Higdon>; Internet.

Composing music specifically for musicians does, however, have a strong history as seen in such examples as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's operatic works. In a similar vein, Higdon purposely wrote soli for instrumentalists in *Concerto for Orchestra* based on their musical strengths and personal preferences.²⁰⁵

The composition of this work occurred during Higdon's frenzied travel schedule. The second movement was written in several locations surrounded by large bodies of water. These sights include Pensacola, Florida while at a music festival, Los Angeles, while her partner was involved in a convention, and finally in Chicago. Because of the close proximity of oceans and lakes, the second movement reminds Higdon of wind blowing on the water and even the hotel rooms remain vivid in her memory. Although the composer believes her surroundings had an impact on the music,²⁰⁶ the influence is not pronounced enough for the listener to associate the music with water. Higdon clearly states, "There's no literal reference to water."²⁰⁷ The entire five movements, unlike *blue cathedral*, fall strictly within the genre of absolute music.

The world premiere of Higdon's *Concerto for Orchestra* occurred on June 12, 2002 with Wolfgang Sawallisch leading the Philadelphia Orchestra at the newly opened Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts. Last of all the commissioned compositions to be performed, the work was paired on the program with Richard Strauss's epic tone poem, *Ein Heldenleben*. The orchestral

²⁰⁵ Nick Jones, jacket notes, Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape/Concerto for Orchestra*, Cond. Robert Spano, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Telarc 80620.

²⁰⁶ David Patrick Stearns, "Jennifer Higdon," *Andante Corporation*, June 2002 (Accessed [5 June 2006]), available from <http://www.andante.com/article/article.cfm?id=17341&highlight=1&timeline=1&highlightterms=jenni%2A%7Chigdo%2A&lstKeywords=Jennifer%20Higdon>; Internet.

²⁰⁷ Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

musicians nicknamed Higdon's composition "Ein Higdonleben" after witnessing a more favorable audience response to this work compared to the Strauss.²⁰⁸

Although Higdon's *Concerto for Orchestra* was successful with the audience and musicians at its premiere, an element of added exposure enabled the composer to exhibit her work to the most influential people on the United States' symphonic circuit. The American Symphony Orchestra League was holding their annual conference in Philadelphia at the time. Regarding the potential impact such a respected audience could garner, Higdon states, "There were 3,000 orchestra managers there...If it worked, things were going to go great for the rest of my life, if not it was going to be bad."²⁰⁹ The composition was triumphant, enabling Higdon the opportunity to enjoy higher recognition as a composer. As a result, her compositions are programmed more frequently. This fame was a contributing factor to the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's appointment of Higdon as Composer of the Year²¹⁰ which, in turn resulted in the commissioning of another concerted work, the *Trombone Concerto*.

After the premiere, Higdon comments that her life was completely altered and people have since referred to her as a celebrity. With her customary laid-back personality, she states, "What? Are you kidding me? Oh my God, (John) Corigliano's famous, I'm not. It was totally ridiculous but I never think of myself that way."²¹¹ Regardless of how she views herself, this composition in combination with *blue cathedral* put her name on the orchestral map.

²⁰⁸David Patrick Stearns, "Jennifer Higdon," *Andante Corporation*, June 2002 (Accessed [5 June 2006]), available from <http://www.andante.com/article/article.cfm?id=17341&highlight=1&timeline=1&highlightterms=jenni%2A%7Chigdo%2A&lstKeywords=Jennifer%20Higdon>; Internet.

²⁰⁹Andrew Druckenbrod, "Composer Making Musical History," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 2 November 2005, p. E-1.

²¹⁰Ibid.

²¹¹Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

Since its premiere, *Concerto for Orchestra* has been performed numerous times by professional orchestras including the Dallas Symphony, the National Symphony, the Pittsburgh Symphony and the BBC Orchestra. The work has also been featured on programs of several of the nation's most prominent university orchestral ensembles such as the Cleveland Institute of Music and the Oberlin Conservatory of Music.

In its original conception, the *Concerto for Orchestra* had only four movements²¹² but was quickly expanded to five. The last movement may be interpreted as a continuation of the preceding movement since it is performed *attacca* and contains linking *ostinato* motives in the percussion. In addition, a plethora of musical ideas from previous movements are present throughout the finale that provides credence to interpreting the finale as a large coda to the entire composition.

Formal analysis reveals a symmetrical arch form that, although not abundantly common, occurs in several standard repertoire works.²¹³ Higdon stated that the title infers an accentuation of the entire orchestra in contrast to a solo concerto. According to the composer, the work displays “the talents and the gifts of the players who play in the ensemble—in this particular case I have written a work that shows off the principal players. There (are)...solos for everyone in the group...”²¹⁴ A treatment of varied soli within the orchestra is to be expected of a composition bearing such a title. The featuring of individual sections for entire movements is less so, yet

²¹² David Patrick Stearns, “Jennifer Higdon,” *Andante Corporation*, June 2002 (Accessed [5 June 2006]), available from <http://www.andante.com/article/article.cfm?id=17341&highlight=1&timeline=1&highlightterms=jenni%2A%7Chigdo%2A&lstKeywords=Jennifer%20Higdon>; Internet.

²¹³ Brahms' *Ein Deutes Requiem* and Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra*, both standards in the western art music canon also utilize this form.

²¹⁴ Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, “Jennifer Higdon talks about her Concerto for Orchestra,” (Accessed [7 July 2006] <http://www.pittsburghsymphony.org/pghsymph.nsf/concert+listings/22DD934D488A89548525703500670D45?opendocument>).

examines the possibilities available within like timbres. In contrast, the orchestral movements explore the capabilities of a full symphony.

The orchestration of this work is quite extensive and requires nearly all of the instruments available in a percussionist's arsenal. The orchestration for the percussion section exceeds *blue cathedral*; understandably so, since the fourth movement is solely dedicated to exploring these particular timbres. Three percussionists and a timpanist comprise the required number of musicians for this section. The woodwinds and brass utilize three players per instrument (with exceptions in the scoring for four F horns and a single tuba). A fully scored string section is included and the orchestration is further expanded by a harp and piano/celesta part.

Undoubtedly, the work is full of the energy and rhythmic drive associated with Higdon's music. As a humorous aside Higdon states, "Three people have gotten speeding tickets listening to that (*Concerto for Orchestra*) in the car...one person ran a light. I try to warn people, 'Be careful listening to this in your car.' I was shocked at the first rehearsal. I was completely terrified. My friends who went with me to the rehearsal (said), 'Holy cow, do you realize what you've done?' I (responded with), 'No, what happened?' A totally goofy reaction."²¹⁵

The first movement was the last to be composed. Higdon felt the other movements had to be written before working on the initial movement. She recalls her feelings of anxiety beginning the composition, "The first movement was the last thing I wrote and it was the most terrifying moment. I thought, 'I'm going to mess up all these other movements.'"²¹⁶

The first movement focuses on the complete ensemble separated by episodes that feature entire sections as soloists. Higdon states her purpose was to recognize "the fact that it takes

²¹⁵Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

²¹⁶Ibid.

many individuals to make the whole orchestra.”²¹⁷ Communication with audiences comprises one of the most important aspects of Higdon’s mission as a composer. This disposition is prevalent in an on-line preview to the Pittsburgh Symphony’s performance of the work. Higdon stated, “There’s no way to start this better than having everyone play together and I got a lot of notes in this beginning but I wanted to show you what it sounds like, the mass of the orchestra coming at you.”²¹⁸

The first movement may erroneously be categorized as a sonata form. Upon closer analysis, however, it becomes evident that, even under the most lenient of definitions, this is not the case. Unifying motives are present that link separate sections rather than exploring stark contrasts. As a result, the individual sections share musical elements with each other and continue to build upon one another.

Throughout the composition, Higdon provides few descriptive tempo markings. Instead, approximate metronome markings are supplied. The first movement, typical of many multi-movement compositions, is endowed with a spirited tempo.

Rather than showcasing the full orchestra during the opening measures, Higdon commences with only the timpani, chimes, strings and horns. It bears mentioning the unusual prominence bestowed upon the percussion in the opening. Instructed to play *fortissimo*, these instruments sound the pitches of F and Bb that almost immediately expand to F, Bb and E melodically. (Figure 4-1) Thus the opening is comprised of a perfect fourth followed by an

²¹⁷Nick Jones, jacket notes, Jennifer Higdon, *City Scope/Concerto for Orchestra*, Cond. Robert Spano, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Telarc 80620.

²¹⁸Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, “Jennifer Higdon talks about her Concerto for Orchestra,” (Accessed [7 July 2006] <http://www.pittsburghsymphony.org/pghsymph.nsf/concert+listings/22DD934D488A89548525703500670D45?opendocument>).

augmented fourth. Higdon would never be classified as a serial composer and such atonal implications are unusual. To the current author, she stated, “I’m glad you see (the intervals)...you’re the only one. You know what most people say? ‘I hear a one (tonic).’ There’s several (comments): V-I, IV. When I was writing, I was literally just thinking about the intervals. I want(ed) the intervals to unfold and I thought (they were) more interesting sounding. Instead of going perfect fourth, perfect fifth, I put perfect fourth and a tritone.”²¹⁹ The opening fourth interval plays a prominent role in the subsequent movements and it is significant that this melodic interval begins the composition.

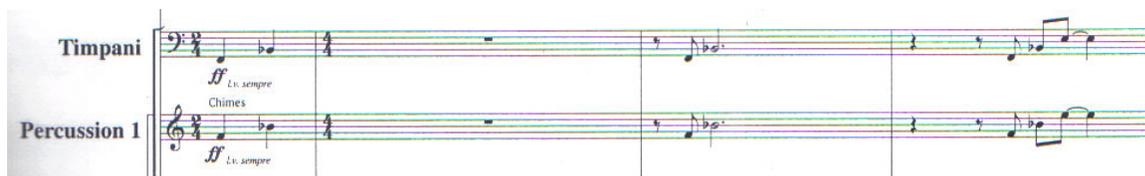


Figure 4-1. *Concerto for Orchestra*, I, mm. 1-4.²²⁰

Arnold Schoenberg also had an affinity for these intervals and frequently composed chords containing a perfect fourth and an augmented fourth in his atonal works. Although Schoenberg’s scoring for these chords generally appears harmonically while Higdon writes these intervals melodically, the similarity remains noteworthy of Higdon’s all-encompassing style.²²¹ She states, “I thought the sound was fascinating, that’s actually it...I knew I needed something

²¹⁹Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

²²⁰Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

²²¹Unlike Schoenberg, Higdon is not a twelve-tone composer. In fact, she states, “I thought it (serialism) was totally uninteresting. I have written 12-tone works, but I thought that whole phase was uninteresting...I had to write it in graduate school, but I pretty much steered clear of it early on.”²²¹ Jason Victor Serinus, “Interview: The Award-Winning Jennifer Higdon,” *Secrets of Home Theater and High Fidelity*, June 2005 (Accessed [8 July 2006]), <http://www.hometheaterhifi.com/volume_12_2/feature-interview-jennifer-higdon-6-2005.html>

that sounded like it was revving up...I thought, ‘Jesus, how am I going to write something...and make it lead logically into all the rest of the stuff.’ So that interval’s got me in trouble. I can’t tell you how many people who prefer atonal music have gotten ticked because they thought it had tonal implications. That’s usually the grief people give me about it... it’s funny because I don’t take it as grief. If it works as music I don’t care what you think about it. If it says something to the audience, that’s all that really matters to me...but people usually look at that in tonal(ity) and I wasn’t thinking that way at all. It was literally intervals.”²²²

The excitement commences immediately with the forceful percussive opening. The following measures are scored primarily for the strings displaying a fugal-like texture. This is not a true fugue, however, because the subject is extended in its various presentations rather than exhibiting itself unchanged as in a proper fugue. Another contrasting factor lies in the opening pitch of each individual presentation of the “subject.” Imitations in these passages occur on the same pitch (B natural) rather than transposed. While the imitations occur within the same pitch class, the opening passages also do not conform to the style of a canon. The initial measures are undoubtedly polyphonic but do not lend themselves particularly well to the strict definitions of polyphonic forms. (Figure 4-2)



Figure 4-2. *Concerto for Orchestra*, I, mm. 2-6.²²³

²²²Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

²²³Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

The B natural is consecutively employed for the opening pitch in the strings' imitative passage. This note is accented in the score, presumably to focus attention on the continuously entering thematic figures. The "subject" passes through the strings before appearing at increasingly rapid intervals.

The horns are the only additional instrumentation scored in the opening measures. Initially, the parts are imitative of the first violins' fugue-like subject. Following only one direct imitation, however, the horns manipulate this material. Their significance in the composition's beginning is reinforced by the *forte* dynamic marking in addition to the notation of accents on each pitch.

Within the string section, the imitation continues to increase in intensity. The climax occurs at the cessation of this polyphonic texture in measure 11. Although the texture changes to homophonic at this point, the persistent rushing sixteenth notes aid in reinforcing the momentum initiated by the "subject." A temporary break in complexity is achieved through unison scoring of the strings.

The homophonic texture lasts only a brief three measures before an interesting harmonic situation arises in measure 14. The strings return to the opening polyphony but the imitative "subject" begins primarily on F#. Within the structural confines of a fugue, the "answer" would typically be transposed to this pitch (a perfect fifth higher than the original B) but Higdon has delayed this harmonic occurrence for an astonishing thirteen measures. The imitation in the strings is similar to the opening with added doublings by select woodwind parts, their first appearance in the composition. The timbral focus, previously found in the strings, is further contrasted with this sudden appearance of woodwind instruments. (Gradually, Higdon

introduces the brass section through imitative passages for trombones one and two in a different context from the strings).

The chimes and timpani continue to sound the opening fourth and tri-tone intervals melodically. The original pitches have been transposed a minor second from F to F# yet the interval remains consistent while drawing attention to the new tonal area introduced by the strings. The continued use of these atonal sounding intervals provides a striking harmonic contrast.

Throughout this imitative string section, the scoring of woodwinds increases to produce a fuller orchestral sound. Since the horns and percussion are tacet, the woodwind timbres are clearly discernible. In addition, the dynamic marking for the woodwinds is *fortissimo* while the strings are marked only *forte* implying more emphasis on the winds. The principal melodic material derives from the “answer” initially provided by the strings. Because this “answer” is derived from the initial “subject,” the entire work is thus far unified by the opening violin measures.

A subsection begins in measure 29 with the incorporation of nearly the full orchestra. The oboes, clarinets, bassoons and piano continue the rushing sixteenth notes. The strings (still doubled by several woodwinds) are sounding minor sixths and perfect fifth intervals in parallel motion. Moving in homophonic texture, this section provides contrast from the earlier polyphonic style of these instruments.

A link between the two subsections is apparent within the horn section. By scoring ascending perfect fourths in measure 29 for this instrument, Higdon recalls the opening percussion interval. The line is somewhat varied through the use of only perfect fourths yet

remains a clear reference to the opening. The ascending motion of the line is a recurring theme in this composition. (Figure 4-3)



Figure 4-3. *Concerto for Orchestra*, I, mm. 29-33.²²⁴

After this concise display by the entire ensemble, the orchestration is minimized by the omission of the trumpets and piano in measure 46. This may imply that a new section is commencing, but the strings (and doubled instruments) continue to sound perfect fifth intervals. Rather than the minor sixth this sound was paired with earlier in measure 29, the interval of a major seventh is now heard in the second violins in combination with the perfect fifth intervals. An orchestration change has also occurred: the clarinets replace the trumpets with the descending major chords and similar rhythmic figures.

To further substantiate returning musical material, the chimes melodically present the opening intervals of perfect and augmented fourths in measure 46. The orchestra at this point is sounding much of the primary musical material presented thus far in the composition that results in an elaborate culmination of themes and motives. The second trombone, bass trombone and contrabass present descending perfect fifths, a musical signature of Higdon. (The horns add to this effect through stationary fifth intervals).

²²⁴Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

Measure 51 begins the second section of the first movement. Rather than featuring the entire ensemble, an immediate contrast is prevalent through the cessation of all instruments except for the vibraphone (doubled by flutes in a low range) and horns. Higdon uses these instruments as accompanimental material to various instrumental soli.

The bass clarinet presents the first solo in the work. While bass clarinet soli are rare, the instrument is featured in several of the most popular compositions of the canon. Tchaikovsky's "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy" from the ballet *The Nutcracker* and Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* both make use of the bass clarinet as a soloist. Flowing from the pen of Schoenberg, the symphonic work *Pelleas und Melisande* (1902-03) also features the instrument. Although strictly coincidental, this similarity adds a curious secondary parallel to the music of Schoenberg in addition to the opening intervals. Higdon uses the bass clarinet in this section to present an expanded version of the original violin subject from measure 2. This solo also exhibits an ascending musical line, a prominent feature throughout all five movements. When asked about the unexpected coincidences to Schoenberg, the composer stated, "When I make decisions in music it's never based on other music because I'm still learning this repertoire. Since I grew up on rock and roll, I just don't know this stuff. My brain doesn't work that way and I don't know the rep(ertoire). I'm learning, I figure it's going to take me the rest of my life 'cause I started so late. I think that surprised people about this piece because they knew I had this disadvantage."²²⁵

The bass clarinet is not the sole purveyor of melodic interest in measure 51 but is paired with a piccolo. The contrast between a low ranged instrument to the extreme high register of the piccolo is striking. The piccolo line balances the bass clarinet through a descending melodic line. The duet results in a question-answer dialogue.

²²⁵Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

Unlike its bass clarinet partner, scoring for piccolo dates back several centuries. This timbre was utilized as early as Jean-Philippe Rameau's *tragédie en musique, Dardanus* (1739) and later by Christoph Willibald Gluck in *Iphigénie en Tauride* (1779). Although scoring for the piccolo began a generation before Beethoven, it remains most recognizable in the symphonies of the great master of Bonn (notably in the finale of the *Fifth Symphony* but also appearing in the *Pastoral* and *Choral* symphonies). The piccolo continues to be a crucial instrument in the repertoire of military bands but has been infrequently included in the works of western art composers. The most prominent example resides in Hector Berlioz's *Grand Symphonie funebre et triomphale* (1840), originally scored for military band but later transcribed for orchestra.²²⁶ In relation to Higdon, the influence most likely stemmed from her earliest musical experiences in the marching band.

While the piccolo and the bass clarinet present their soli, the horns forcefully punctuate brief rhythmic figures recalling their opening motive. At the close of this woodwind duet, the instrumentation increases gradually to include the strings and a full woodwind section. Throughout these measures, music and rhythmic figures return from the opening section. In measure 58, the violins revisit their polyphonic material heard initially in measure 8 while the oboes sound melodically (although with rhythmic variation) the same perfect fourth and augmented fourth intervals heard in the percussion section at the opening. Exploration of the latter interval in transposition continues in the bass and contrabassoon in measure 68 (briefly imitated in measure 70 in the viola). Several measures later, the same instruments sound the

²²⁶Jeremy Montagu, "Piccolo," *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed [12 July 2006]), <<http://www.grovemusic.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu>>

interval of a perfect fourth (also transposed). Thus the presentation of the two intervals although appearing in reverse order is complete.

Fourth intervals also appear in the French horn lines in measure 76. As in measure 29, the intervals ascend and the line is comprised primarily of perfect fourths. This scoring unifies not only the two sections that feature this musical line in the horns but also connects the instrument to the percussion and lower instruments of the orchestra through the continued use of the fourth interval. In addition, Higdon's penchant for rising melodic lines is further revealed.

A new section commences in measure 82 exuding a dream-like quality. This atmosphere is attained through the omission of brass instruments that often adds sharpness and brightness to an ensemble. Consecutive trills in the violins coupled with fast, flowing scalar passages in the woodwinds precede this passage to aid in amplifying this contrasting mood.

Although this dreamy excursion does not involve the full orchestra, the texture contains a sufficient amount of density to provide significant contrast before another soloistic adventure commences. In the first solo section, an accompanying *ostinato* was scored for the vibraphones and flute. This next solo features an *ostinato* pattern with similar instrumentation providing further unification within the movement. The flute, piccolo, glockenspiel and marimba are complemented by the harp and ascending patterns in the celesta continue to enhance the ethereal atmosphere.

Higdon turns her attention to the strings in this new section to diversify the sound. The instrumentation for the four soloists varies from the typical string quartet by using only one violin; the expected second violin is replaced by the bass.²²⁷ The range of the bass is significantly elevated and in several instances, the instrument plays in a range similar to the first

²²⁷ One cannot help but compare this unusual scoring with the "Trout" Quintet of Franz Schubert due to its popularity within the canon, yet little else recalls the music of Schubert.

violin. The texture of the string soli is homophonic and the like timbres are treated as one instrument providing a potential explanation to the similar ranges in all four voices. The function of the strings has changed drastically from initially providing a polyphonic texture with considerable momentum to sounding as one instrument.

Higdon did not originally conceive these soli as a single instrument. She comments, “I didn’t. Once the strings got going I did think of that, I find it fascinating. I thought, ‘What would it sound like to get all the strings moving together?’ And I did something really unusual. They had to play *detache* in places where they normally wouldn’t. They might be doing three bows or three notes per bow and I (thought), ‘Let’s see what it sounds like. How much power would there be with the Philadelphia string section...it was just me wanting to hear what the sound was like.’”²²⁸

The marimba *ostinato* sounds an open fifth interval beginning in measure 82. Only when the solo strings enter in measure 86 does the interval become more insistent and subsequently, is presented consecutively on the beat. The consonant perfect fifth complements the warm string sound yet still remains subtly linked intervallically with the diminished fifths featured previously by the percussion.

Once the strings complete their soli in measure 93, a curious circumstance transpires. A solo rhythmic dialogue ensues in the second violins, the instrument previously omitted in the string quartet solo. This dialogue is notated for divided first desk meaning that not only is the principal second violinist a soloist but also the assistant principal. (Figure 4-4) When asked about the uniqueness of this instrumentation, Higdon stated, “Why not? They’re phenomenal

²²⁸ Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

players and don't get the opportunity."²²⁹ Although marked as a solo, the parts do not constitute a melodic line but rather a continual sounding of the same pitch in a highly rhythmic environment. Higdon's personal connection with the Philadelphia Orchestra and many of its members provided additional motivation for such unorthodox orchestral scoring. Indeed, the composer remarked, "I did know Kim Fisher. I know her very well. Kim...is still the principal second violin of the Philadelphia Orchestra and I had gone to school with her at Curtis. At one point when I was a student and I had a piece performed by the Curtis Orchestra, she was the concertmaster. I couldn't leave her out. Kim would have been very upset with me..."²³⁰

Higdon reiterates and expands upon her belief that second violinists are as equally strong players as the first violinists. "In my head, the second violinists are so good today that they're just as good as the firsts. All six of my string quartets have really prominent second violin parts and sometimes the second violin is higher than the first violin. Composers don't ever do that...I must confess some of the second violinists, often (comment), 'My part's higher than the first violin.' (To which I respond,) 'Why not? You (have) all this training.' I look at them as equal. It's in my chamber music, too but in this particular piece (*Concerto for Orchestra*) it's because I knew the principal player."²³¹

Although Higdon may view all violinists as autonomous, she jokingly recalls that not all the principal second violinists who perform this solo with their respective ensembles enjoy the limelight. "Of course there have been a lot of principal second violinists that have not been too

²²⁹David Patrick Stearns, "Jennifer Higdon," *Andante Corporation*, June 2002 (Accessed [5 June 2006]), available from <http://www.andante.com/article/article.cfm?id=17341&highlight=1&timeline=1&highlightterms=jenni%2A%7Chigdo%2A&lstKeywords=Jennifer%20Higdon>; Internet.

²³⁰Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

²³¹Ibid.

happy with me since then. ‘What are you doing to me?’ (they ask)...another comment (I heard), ‘I could throw you off a roof.’”²³² Always sincere and casual, Higdon laughs at these situations and says, “I promise I won’t do it again.”²³³



Figure 4-4. *Concerto for Orchestra*, I, mm. 94-97.²³⁴

Once the string quartet completes their soloistic venture, the melodic focus is immediately returned to the woodwinds. Higdon provides soli for all four instruments within the section. Unlike the preceding homophonic texture of the strings, Higdon achieves contrast in the wind timbres through independent, individual lines.

The brasses are the next featured soloists in measure 105. Although the solo instruments are fairly independent, the purveyor of melody is undoubtedly the trumpet. Due to Higdon’s tendency to utilize the trumpets for her characteristic major chord progression, it is unsurprising that these instruments would be given the melodic responsibility.

After the brass exhibition, the composer expands the orchestration to combine soli from various sections of the ensemble. The solo string quartet returns in measure 116 with descending major chords similar in pitch and rhythm to the trumpets in measure 29. Between these solo string statements, the woodwinds sound homophonic figures that serve as antecedents

²³²Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

²³³Ibid.

²³⁴ Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

to the strings' consequences. The perfect fifth intervals are transferred to horns two and four. Musical material from previous sections clearly continues with a variety of timbral changes until the end of the section in measure 123.

As touched upon briefly, this movement does not correspond strictly with sonata form despite the fact that the music retains certain formal elements. Within sonata form, a retransition is commonly found to close the development that paves the harmonic road to the recapitulation. In the Classical era, a retransition was frequently characterized by sparse orchestration to reinforce the appearance of the opening themes in the recapitulation. Higdon uses a similar technique by scoring brief statements only in the woodwinds and even smaller melodic fragments in the strings in measure 123. These succinct imitative passages could suggest an anticipated recapitulation. Although the musical material that follows contains similarities to the opening, contrasts are sufficient to evade the sense of familiarity found in a sonata form proper. In addition, throughout the composition thus far, motives and intervallic significance continually build upon one another which do not correspond particularly well to sonata form.

In measure 128, the strings (*tutti*) return to the imitative texture seen in the composition's opening bars but do not simply duplicate the initial musical material. Rather than utilizing the strings' rising sounds heard at the start of the composition, these imitative segments descend in pitch. In measure 133, the second trumpet forcefully plays the ascending fourth melodic line that revisits the horn part previously featured in measure 29. Higdon's proclivity for showcasing the trumpets with her unique compositional style often was displayed in the exhibition of descending major chords. It is noteworthy, therefore, that the composer chooses this timbre for displaying the rising sounds prevalent throughout this entire composition. Additional returning material is heard in the homophonic chords sounded in the second violins and viola (also in measure 133).

Viewing the viola as the foundation, the distance between the pitches in this part and the double stops in the second violins is comprised of a perfect fifth (the inversion of the perfect fourth) and augmented fourth intervals that retained a prominent position in the opening bars. (Figure 4-5)

In measure 138, the horns recall their opening motive from measure 2 (in both instances the dynamic marking is *forte*) and therefore, instantly recognizable. To enhance this entrance, a thin orchestration returns only for bar 138. The composer undoubtedly does not choose to simply restate the opening but to experiment with all of the primary musical material of the movement.



Figure 4-5. *Concerto for Orchestra*, I, mm. 133-136.²³⁵

In measure 153, the ensemble section initially found in measure 29 returns with only slight variations. This permits a stronger sense of familiarity than found in the preceding measures which were marked with an amalgamation of musical motives and themes. This recognition, however, does not last long and the music is transported quickly.

Beginning in measure 168, Higdon applies various compositional techniques to further enhance the intensity of the music. Throughout the ensemble, transposition by a minor second, repetitions and a gradually expanding orchestra are employed to amplify the momentum. After climaxing as much as she dares within the principal movement, Higdon diminishes the sound to “*niente*” and drastically thins the sound in preparation of another soloistic venture.

²³⁵Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

Measure 187 corresponds with measure 51 complete with an *ostinato* figure in the percussion. Rather than utilizing the bass clarinet and piccolo dialogue, the bassoon and oboe are featured. Although the instrumentation differs, the soli correspond directly with measure 51 amid additional scoring for several woodwinds. The result is a section that continues to explore the capabilities of woodwind instruments.

Thus far, three of the core sections of the orchestra have been featured soloists. The percussion makes its anticipated appearance in measure 205, less than fifty measures from the close of the movement. The harp and piano are featured soloists that are complemented by an array of pitched and non-pitched percussion instruments. These include the small triangle, crotales, glockenspiel and vibraphone which alternate rather quickly. This brief section functions as a hors d'oeuvre to the exclusive percussion scoring of the fourth movement.

Thematic material from this section derives from measure 94. As seen numerous times within this movement, Higdon utilizes previous musical material with different instrumental timbres. Her exploration of similar musical content in various instrumental colors is never far removed from her compositions and remains part of her style that stems from her fascination with sound.

As the movement nears its close, the orchestration gradually increases and another corresponding section occurs between measures 215 and 104. Several measures later (bar 237), the oboes recall the trumpets' previous primary melodic material from measure 29. Although such descending chords are a stylistic trait of the composer, the adjustment in timbre and dynamics provides a distinct ambiance from its earlier character that is apposite to this unassuming ending.

With a composition bearing the title *Concerto for Orchestra*, the full ensemble may be expected to close a movement that featured various solo episodes amidst *tutti* statements. Evading predictability in the coda, however, the strings continue their silence in preparation of a stark timbral contrast at the commencement of the second movement that is scored exclusively for strings. Higdon closes the movement in a much different manner than its beginning. Gone from the ending measures is the highly intensive polyphonic texture abounding with rhythmic verve; the movement ends discreetly with a decrease in tempo and dynamics.

The composer's years in Philadelphia afforded her a familiarity with the "traditionally lush string sound of the Philadelphia Orchestra."²³⁶ About the second movement, Higdon states, "The entire movement came from that saying 'the Philadelphia string sound.'"²³⁷ She relished the opportunity to display this talent and thus emerged the exclusive scoring for strings. With a string section famous for its luxuriance, one would anticipate a slower tempo with harmonic richness. Higdon comments on her original conception of the movement, "I wanted that to be a slow movement. I fought that for the longest time...but the only music coming to me was fast and finally...I caved into it. But the entire time I wasn't convinced it was going to work until we got through the first night's performance. I thought I'd write something lush and slow. It wasn't happening probably because I wrote slow music in the third movement."²³⁸

While the grand opening movement showcased the full ensemble, the second movement examines the capabilities within the string section. Higdon remarked, "The strings are...the heart of the orchestra. You hear that sound in any piece you hear when you go to a concert but I

²³⁶Nick Jones, jacket notes, Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape/Concerto for Orchestra*, Cond. Robert Spano, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Telarc 80620.

²³⁷ Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

²³⁸Ibid.

wanted to see what it sounded like to have the strings play *pizzicato* and also *arco*...”²³⁹ As a prominent composer, there can be little doubt that she is quite aware of these contrasts. The exploration of these effects was chosen, in part, to demonstrate the timbres available within a string section. She further states, “I was thinking about *pizz* versus *arco*, thin versus thick, the solo strings. I was debating sound.”²⁴⁰

Her earlier remark reflects an undeniable historical aspect of the symphonic repertoire. As Higdon stated, the violins have often been classified as the heart of the orchestra. In its earliest beginnings, symphonic compositions frequently featured the violins in a primary melodic role while the winds simply reinforced cadences or increased the volume. This scoring continued until the latter section developed further that increased these instruments’ potentiality for melodic independence. A shift in string dominance of orchestral instrumentation began primarily with the mature symphonic settings of Haydn and Mozart and erupted with Beethoven. In conservative Romantic composers, however, traces of the earlier string significance continued as witnessed by the early string symphonies of Felix Mendelssohn.

Because of the likeness in timbre, Higdon utilizes different techniques to enhance contrasts. The alternation from *pizzicato* to *arco* in addition to solo scoring and frequent textural changes accomplishes this diversity. The use of *pizzicato* is scarcely novel, of course but due to rare use in this composition, the sudden change of sound in the opening of the second movement alters the timbre and atmosphere considerably.

²³⁹Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, “Jennifer Higdon talks about her Concerto for Orchestra,” (Accessed [7 July 2006]
<http://www.pittsburghsymphony.org/pghsymph.nsf/concert+listings/22DD934D488A89548525703500670D45?opendocument>.

²⁴⁰ Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

In the liner notes to the recording, Nick Jones describes this movement as similar to a scherzo.²⁴¹ The composer concurs and explains the music as “a little bit of a dance actually, a romp through the string section.”²⁴² The etymology of the term scherzo derives from the German “scherzen” translated to English as the verb “to joke.”²⁴³ The form of a scherzo has remained predominantly ternary and stems directly from the minuet and trio, its earlier dance-movement predecessor. In the early nineteenth century, the scherzo was often performed before and following a trio section resulting in a tripartite structure. Although the structure of this movement is ternary²⁴⁴ and contains a spirited tempo, the score does not suggest any implication of the original jesting character associated with a scherzo. This quality, however, is not essential. In the music of Beethoven, movements marked in this form often lose the jocular association as do Chopin’s four piano scherzi. Higdon comments on the Jones’ liner notes of her recording, “I wasn’t thinking of it that way (as a scherzo) ‘cause my brain was still wanting slow music but it wasn’t coming out that way...it is kind of scherzo-like...it’s kind of (a) romping along sort of feeling. It really is a dance for strings...I came to think of it that way ‘cause the strings roll along. It does have a B section in there.”²⁴⁵

²⁴¹Nick Jones, jacket notes, Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape/Concerto for Orchestra*, Cond. Robert Spano, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Telarc 80620.

²⁴²Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, “Jennifer Higdon talks about her Concerto for Orchestra,” (Accessed [7 July 2006]
<http://www.pittsburghsymphony.org/pghsymph.nsf/concert+listings/22DD934D488A89548525703500670D45?opendocument>.

²⁴³Tilden A. Russell and Hugh MacDonald, “Scherzo,” *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed [14 July 2006]), <<http://www.grovemusic.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu>>

²⁴⁴Early examples of scherzi assume a plethora of forms and do not necessarily correspond to ternary. Correlations between ternary forms and scherzi evade a solid connection and therefore do little to enhance the argument that Higdon’s second movement is a scherzo.

²⁴⁵Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

Initially, a different B section was included, but later Higdon composed an alternative. The latter was chosen to replace the original. She states, “I’m glad I threw out the right one ‘cause the one I ended up with was more appropriate. At one point it (the omitted B section) was just too far off. I can’t even remember the texture but I listened to it...(and thought), ‘It doesn’t work, it doesn’t work.’ And I wrote another one, the one that’s currently there and I thought, ‘I don’t know if I like this as much,’ but it fits better so I left that one.”²⁴⁶

During the eighteenth century when symphonies and concerti were embarking upon their journey as standard concert genres, the tempo of the second movement contrasted with the preceding allegro movement. This pattern gradually changed in the nineteenth century as evidenced by spirited second movements in the symphonies of, among others, Robert Schumann and Mendelssohn. Symphonic poems further challenged the formal structures and tempi of accepted practices and, by the dawn of the twentieth century, a predictable standard of a second movement within a multi-movement composition became elusive. Higdon’s employment of two consecutive fast movements, therefore, is not unorthodox.

The movement begins *pizzicato* and immediately the pitch content stipulates comparison with the first movement. In the composition’s opening, the first violins initiated an imitative passage based on a “subject” comprised of “B-C#-D-E-F.” In the second movement, the unison violins pluck “B-C-D-E.” The motive is then repeated and expanded to include an F#. The openings of the two movements are remarkably similar not only in pitch content but also in instrumentation. Barring pure coincidence, which seems highly unlikely, one must deem these measures as a compositional device to enhance unity between the individual movements.²⁴⁷ The

²⁴⁶Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

²⁴⁷ Higdon did not compose consciously a connection between the first two movements. Due to its striking similarity, however, it seems likely this is her subconscious compositional method at work. She states, “I didn’t

five pitches are the basis for much of the second movement and like the opening movement the primary pitches are eventually treated imitatively in the lower strings.

The violins play in unison only while stating the opening motive. As the only instruments playing in the first measure, this unison scoring provides further emphasis of the borrowed material from the first movement. Immediately following this statement, the violins and viola assume a polyphonic texture. A continuous pedal *pizzicato* note occurs on B in the celli and the bass to counteract the highly intense rhythmic activity in the upper strings. The motives that pass through the strings are quite concise. The composer recalls the purpose for the brevity and the resulting dance-like effects. “I wanted to write longer lines for the strings. I went into Curtis, I wrote it out and I asked the kids in my class, my twentieth century music class, ‘How long can you do these (*pizzicato*) at this speed without hurting yourself?’ They said, ‘Well you better only do it a beat or two because that’s actually pretty fast.’ It was a practical consideration to keep from hurting the players. But what ended up happening when you’re in a live performance of this piece...It looks like a dance because it’s getting handed off and I didn’t realize that because I stayed backstage in most of the performances. I was so nervous but people kept coming up to me afterwards saying, ‘Oh my God, those strings were dancing in the second movement.’ The people who were in the balcony could actually see the trade-offs, but it’s just a practical consideration of what would be dangerous for the players because they could hurt themselves easily at that speed. This is ‘cause the kids at Curtis said, ‘Dr.Higdon, don’t do more

realize the connection between the first and the second movement. I learned something today. Probably on a subconscious level I’d be willing to bet, my brain did make that connection.”-- Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

than this.’ I (thought), ‘Alright, I’ll figure out a way to write it.’ So that’s how we got the motive the way it is.”²⁴⁸ (Figure 4-6)

The image shows a musical score for three string instruments: Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), and Viola (Vla.). The score is written in 12/8 time and consists of two measures. In the first measure, the Violin 1 and Violin 2 parts play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, marked with a dynamic of *mf* and a *pizz.* (pizzicato) instruction. The Viola part is silent. In the second measure, the Violin 1 and Violin 2 parts continue with the same rhythmic pattern, while the Viola part enters with a similar rhythmic pattern, also marked with a dynamic of *mf* and a *pizz.* instruction.

Figure 4-6. *Concerto for Orchestra*, II, mm. 1-2.²⁴⁹

In measure 10, the *ostinato* is lowered by a half step (Bb). The unifying motive from the opening is also transposed down by a minor second. The consistent sounding of motivic phrases combined with the pedal *pizzicato* continues through bar 17.

Although a new section does not commence in measure 17, the instrumentation alternates to provide the bass and cello (combined with the viola) the motivic material initially scored for the violins. The sound assumes a different character not only in the change of instrumentation but also in dynamic contrast (now marked *forte* compared to the opening’s *mezzo forte*), but this is simply a re-statement of the opening material varied in an intelligent manner. This restatement is further enhanced by the return of the harmonic language to the initial “subject’s” B natural.

The violins are entrusted with the purveyor of an *ostinato* pattern similar to the lower strings’ opening. Unlike the initial presentation, the *ostinato* in measure 17 is not performed in unison; Higdon commences to make use of the chordal potential of string instruments by scoring

²⁴⁸ Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

²⁴⁹ Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

double stops in the violins. The composer provides a musical indication, “*ala gitara*” above the violins. The *pizzicato* violins in combination with double stops instantly achieve the desired strumming “guitar” effect.

In measure 21, the lower strings maintain a separate homophonic texture from the violins that provides a brief moment of relaxation from the preceding polyphonic activity. This measure serves as transitional material to a new musical idea beginning in measure 22. The *tutti* strings merge to commence a new *ostinato* beneath the five soloists about to enter.

Higdon’s trademark perfect fifth interval appears in various guises in measure 22. The *ostinato pizzicati* of the violins are separated by this interval. In addition, the first violin solo’s opening pitches sound an ascending perfect fifth. As mentioned in the discussion of the first movement, rising sounds are prevalent throughout this entire composition and hence, it is significant that the initial solo in the second movement begins with this distinguishing feature. Finally, it bears noting that an inversion of the fifth interval is depicted in the *ostinati* of the viola and cello. (Figure 4-7)

The principal soli are performed *arco*, the first appearance of the style in this movement. The soli are neither imitative in pitch content nor rhythm and act as solely independent melodic lines. Higdon conquers inherent balancing obstacles by maintaining *pizzicato (tutti)* beneath the *arco* soloists.

Although the soloists’ material is not imitative, Higdon does incorporate a few compositional curiosities that link the soloists’ melodic lines to one another. The opening pitches of the second violin’s solo in measure 23 are sounded in retrograde by the first violin in the subsequent measure. Also in this bar, an imitative instance occurs in the viola that incorporates a restatement of its initial material in the following bar. Because the tempo is quite

spirited, these occurrences may not be overtly identifiable to the ear yet remains a point of interest in the compositional analysis. Finally, the string bass solo enters with a continuous ascending line that serves as a unifying contour throughout the work. (Figure 4-8)

The image displays a musical score for five string instruments: Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vlc.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The score is for measures 22 of the second movement of the Concerto for Orchestra. The Vln. 1 part is marked 'SOLO f arco' and plays a melodic line. The other instruments play accompaniment patterns. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4.

Figure 4-7. *Concerto for Orchestra*, II, mm. 22.²⁵⁰

The *pizzicato ostinato* pattern in the *tutti* strings gradually appears less consistently before eventually becoming tacet in measure 29. At this point, the homophonic texture of the *ostinato* is transferred to the soloists to contrast another polyphonic episode about to commence. During this homophonic activity, the violins are separated by the interval of a perfect fourth (as are the celli and the basses). The significance of this interval cannot be overstated and is simply an inversion of Higdon's trademark perfect fifth.

²⁵⁰Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

Figure 4-8. *Concerto for Orchestra*, II, mm. 23-24.²⁵¹

In measure 31, the soloists rejoin their respective sections while the *pizzicato* technique is eliminated altogether. A unified *arco* sound combined with a *forte* dynamic result in higher tension than heard previously in the movement. To further enhance the intensity, polyphony once again ensues. The order of entrances and pitch content mirrors the musical material of measure 22 but transposed a minor second higher.²⁵² This once soloistic material has been varied a number of ways. As in measure 22, the significant interval of a fourth separates the voices.

Measure 44 concludes the *tutti* restatement of the solo section and the music returns to the polyphonic activity initially presented in measure 10. Subtle differences are employed for aural contrasts such as independent lines for the lower strings originally played in unison and of course the imitative “subject” now presented through *arco* scoring. This marks the first appearance of

²⁵¹Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

²⁵² This transposition recalls a similar occurrence found in measure 10 that transposed the opening polyphonic material by a lowered minor second.

the “subject” performed in this manner. Although the pitches are almost exact replications of measure 10, the change from *pizzicato* to *arco* grants a stark distinction. In addition, Higdon notates accents in the upper strings’ melodic lines that were absent from the previous corresponding measures. The accents are neither rhythmically consistent nor do they appear to conform to any specific pattern. The effect highly increases the unpredictability, urgency and momentum of the movement.

Measure 51 corresponds to earlier material from measure 17 with several variances to maintain the music’s energy. The homophonic *ostinato* double-stop chords previously sounded in the violins now appear in the celli and bass parts. The intervallic structure of the celli consists of minor thirds which are simply inversions of the previously heard second violins’ major sixths.²⁵³ The “*ala gitara*” indication is omitted in measure 51 and the *ostinato* chords are no longer arpeggiated. Instead, these chords are now performed *arco* in an innovative polyrhythmic pattern. The celli play consecutive eighth notes while the basses utilize duplets that provide higher rhythmic complexity not yet seen in this movement.

Above this altered *ostinato* pattern, the upper strings employ imitation at the octave. Although neither the structure of the melody nor the pacing of the imitation corresponds to measure 17, the *ostinato* pattern and polyphonic texture provide the connecting link while simultaneously allowing the violins and the viola to explore free material.

In measure 55, the *ostinato* pattern in the bass changes abruptly from a perfect fifth interval to a unison E. This pitch is a perfect fourth interval from the original *ostinato* found in the movement’s opening. Although the *ostinati* are simply accompanimental passages, this

²⁵³The use of inversion to vary significant sections appears fairly frequently in Higdon’s orchestral music as noted with the numerous inversions of the perfect fifth.

occurrence seems noteworthy in providing a potential unifying link throughout the entire movement.

New melodic material appears in measure 59 in the upper strings while the celli and bass prolong the *ostinato*. As in measure 22, the *ostinato* gradually occurs less frequently before becoming altogether tacet. The violins and viola return to an imitative polyphonic texture in which the intervals in the viola line are immediately echoed by the second violins and later by the first violins. True to her affinity for certain intervals, Higdon chooses to use the perfect fourth/perfect fifth for such displays.

A previously unseen motive appears in the cello beginning in measure 68 that necessitates commentary. Because this motive is the only material in the lower strings at this juncture, its sudden appearance is quite conspicuous. The new motive is featured several times in the celli before polyphonic manipulation occurs in the bass and eventually the viola. These sightings appear more frequently and ultimately overlap at a rapid pace. In addition, the contour of this new motive utilizes the continuous rising line that permeates the entire composition.

Undoubtedly, this movement is highly polyphonic, even more so than the first movement. The form is not a fugue in structure although certain imitative material is more prominent. Therefore, referring to this cello motive as an occurrence of “stretto” is not entirely accurate. Stretto is technically defined as, “the procedure of beginning a second statement of the subject before the preceding statement has finished, so that the two overlap.”²⁵⁴ Paul Walker also states in his definition that by the mid-seventeenth century, this technique was frequently employed near the conclusion of a composition to increase excitement and intensity.²⁵⁵ Although Higdon

²⁵⁴Paul Walker, “Stretto,” *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed [17 July 2006]),

<<http://www.grovemusic.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu>>

²⁵⁵Ibid.

Although the instrumentation is nearly identical in the latter circumstance, a new verve urgently pushes the music forward. All strings are equally divided between the melody and the *ostinato* rather than utilizing solo lines as in its earlier appearance. This slight change offers a new found momentum that aids the close of this “romp through the string section.”²⁵⁷

The coda commences in measure 115. One of the composer’s unique stylistic elements is included as a personal signature to close the movement. The first violins and cello are playing perfect fifth intervals (although occasionally inverted). The harmonic focus of these two instruments is B and F#. If viewed through the glasses of tonality, this may easily be analyzed as a consistent tonic-dominant harmonic progression. (Figure 4-10) Stressing these two chords at the close of a movement occurs habitually throughout the Common Practice Period and contemporary audiences remain familiar with such an ending. Because communication with audiences ranks high on Higdon’s list of musical importance, it is unsurprising to find the second movement closing in this accepted and time-tested manner.

The incorporation of an *ostinato* bass pattern is fairly characteristic of Higdon and also appears in measure 115. Rather than simply a repeated note as in the beginning, a descending line is used to imply the key of b minor that further strengthens the argument for tonality when combined with the B and F# in the upper strings. The *ostinato* varies after several presentations and by measure 119, only 10 measures from the close, the basses regularly sound the pitches of B and F#.

²⁵⁷Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, “Jennifer Higdon talks about her Concerto for Orchestra,” (Accessed [7 July 2006]
<http://www.pittsburghsymphony.org/pghsymph.nsf/concert+listings/22DD934D488A89548525703500670D45?opendocument>.

Figure 4-10. *Concerto for Orchestra*, II, mm. 115-116.²⁵⁸

The movement closes convincingly with two b minor chords played *fortissimo*. The final pitch of the movement is a unison b scored as a snap *pizzicato* thus bringing the movement full circle to its *pizzicato* opening. Higdon states her purpose in scoring a snap *pizzicato*, “I thought, ‘I’d love to hear the Philadelphia Orchestra do a snap *pizz* together.’ Alright, let’s put it in, that’s actually how it happened. Like a kid in a candy shop to be quite honest. Someone had given me the biggest box of crayons around and I was going to have fun with it. Joy in sound.”²⁵⁹

The composing of *Concerto for Orchestra* began with the third movement. Higdon recalls how various instrumental soli became the primary feature of this movement. “So many of the players were asking me for solos or wanting things specifically so...I decided (that movement) was just going to be solos featuring the principal players...This piece was so big I knew that I had to go with whichever felt instinctively like the first movement to write (and)

²⁵⁸Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

²⁵⁹Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

because I had the most ideas for the solos, I just started there...otherwise I never would have started, I was too nervous about it.”²⁶⁰

Because the work follows an arch-form structure, this movement represents the peak of the entire composition.²⁶¹ Arch-form is loosely defined as “a musical form that is symmetric in time and climaxes in the middle.”²⁶² Higdon remarked that she did not actually conceive the composition as an arch-structure but did consciously strive to make the third movement the heart of the work. The similarities of scoring separate sections of the orchestra in movements two and four add credence to the arch form hypothesis. In the composers’ words, “But it does kind of have an arch. It makes perfect sense. It’s *tutti* orchestra in I, III and V. The faster music’s in I and V. That makes sense.”²⁶³ When asked if she reduced the scoring in the second and fourth movement to enhance the arch form, Higdon states, “No I literally thought, ‘Don Liuzzi wants to play percussion.’”²⁶⁴

The third movement reaches its zenith through featuring not only individual sections of the orchestra but soli for principal players as well. The result is a more extensive exploration between the full ensemble, sections and soloists than seen in the first movement and displays the orchestral capabilities under the hands of a master craftsman. Higdon states that the entire movement is comprised of soli. “All the principal players have their own solo so you get a chance to hear everybody all the way up from the first violins down to the bass player even the

²⁶⁰Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

²⁶¹Nick Jones, jacket notes, Jennifer Higdon, *Cityscape/Concerto for Orchestra*, Cond. Robert Spano, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Telarc 80620.

²⁶²Traditional & Folk Music-Encyclopedic Dictionary, “arch form,” [17 July 2006]
<<http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk/traditional-music/ency/a2.htm>>

²⁶³Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

²⁶⁴Ibid.

principal second violin has a solo which is a little unusual. But there's a lot of talent in an orchestra and I wanted to show it."²⁶⁵

Unlike the opening two movements, the third carries a descriptive adjective rather than a sole metronome marking. The tempo is defined as quarter note=92-108 accompanied by the term "mystical." As noted previously, Higdon does not subscribe to organized religion but describes herself as a spiritual person. Regarding her childhood religious experiences, she states, "No one in the family went to a church regularly, but we had spiritual books around the household, everything from Buddhism to the Bible. I am a really spiritual person, but I don't follow any particular doctrine. Writing music feels a bit like prayer."²⁶⁶

Spirituality may be interpreted in a myriad of ways and Higdon does not specify the precise meaning she ascribes to her use of "mystical" allowing for open interpretation and assumptions. Mystical is technically defined as "having a spiritual meaning or reality that is neither apparent to the senses nor obvious to the intelligence."²⁶⁷ Higdon states that "the number three doesn't have to do with anything (such as a reference to the Holy Trinity); it was a coincidence just because that was the size of orchestra I used. The winds were in threes because...it's too expensive to play a piece if winds (are) in four. It was a practical

²⁶⁵Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, "Jennifer Higdon talks about her Concerto for Orchestra," (Accessed [7 July 2006]
<http://www.pittsburghsymphony.org/pghsymph.nsf/concert+listings/22DD934D488A89548525703500670D45?opendocument>.

²⁶⁶ Jason Victor Serinus, "Interview: The Award-Winning Jennifer Higdon," *Secrets of Home Theater and High Fidelity*, June 2005 (Accessed [8 July 2006]), <http://www.hometheaterhifi.com/volume_12_2/feature-interview-jennifer-higdon-6-2005.html>

²⁶⁷Merriam-Webster OnLine Dictionary, "Mystical," (Accessed [7 July 2006]) <<http://m-w.com/dictionary/Mystical.>>

consideration.”²⁶⁸ When this author mentioned the division by threes in the violas in measure 10, the composer stated, “That’s an accident. Totally subconscious.”²⁶⁹

The first connotation associated with the “mystical” marking and the number three is immediately apparent since only the third movement bears such an adjective. Movements one, two and five simply include a metronome marking (movement four’s tempo also uses a metronome marking along with the directions “Freely & Together”) Featured soloists also appear in groupings of three in the third movement which invites further speculation on Higdon’s subconscious use of spirituality. Finally, instances abound that divide a single instrumental section into three separate lines. A more than merely coincidental phenomenon is not only plausible but likely due to this movement’s generous incorporation of the number three.

The movement begins with a soft dynamic marking to create a mystical atmosphere. Similar to the second movement’s opening link to the first movement, connections are immediately apparent between the second movement and the beginning of the third. The exclusive string sound from the second movement is presented in the initial measures of the third movement complemented by the small triangle, glockenspiel and harp. Additional unity is provided through the alternation in the lower strings from an *arco* to *pizzicato* style, a compositional element utilized extensively in the second movement. Finally, the opening pitches in the strings, harp and piano consistently sound the pitches of F and Bb, both of which figured prominently in the preceding movement. (Figure 4-11)

When asked about a correlation between the *pizzicato* and *arco* sounds in movements two and three, Higdon states that unifying the two movements was not intended initially. Explaining

²⁶⁸Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

²⁶⁹Ibid.

the conception of the eerie ambience of the third movement, she states, “I hadn’t thought about it (the similar alternation of *pizzicato* and *arco* styles in movements two and three) because I was trying to create mysterious sounds and I knew it was like when you whisper, you draw them in. I knew if I did that in the strings it would (increase the attention of) the audience. That’s all it was. I was playing with the audience. That and...I saw a movie around that time (with) a sound effect ...I think part of that must have been from some movie I saw around that time, too. I remember thinking, ‘That’s an interesting sound,’ but (it) is so different that it make(s) you stop in that movement. Everything’s been a straightforward sound up to that point. So, even though I was writing that movement first I thought, ‘Let’s create some magic to set up the solos.’ What would create solo magic? I always find string harmonics interesting, that’s why there’s some natural harmonics in that movement.”²⁷⁰ Regardless of how the composer initially acquired the sound, there is no doubt a similarity between movements two and three.

In measure 7, the piano presents a stylistic Higdon *ostinato*. Almost inaudible, the pattern consists solely of two alternating pitches F and E (the latter acts as a neighboring tone). The vibraphone, consistently sounding an F, continues the significance of this note in relation to third movement’s opening harmonic scheme. Brief imitative passages utilizing a descending perfect fourth occur between the chimes and the piano. It is interesting to note that an ascending perfect fourth, the inversion of Higdon’s favored interval, was the initial sound of the entire work.

The violas, divided into three, produce major triads beginning in measure 10. These chords testify to Higdon’s unique style and were frequent within trumpet passages in the first movement. The viola progression travels slowly in whole tone motion and the scoring for this passage provides a degree of warmth to the music. The exploration of this orchestral section in

²⁷⁰Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

the third movement rather than second may be attributed to the order in which the movements were composed. Since the third movement was written first, the appearance of the lush string sound verifies that Higdon was indeed influenced by the ensemble's reputation.

III

♩ = 92-108 Mystical

Harp

Piano

Percussion 2

Percussion 3

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Cello

Contrabass

Figure 4-11. *Concerto for Orchestra*, III, mm. 1-6.²⁷¹

Measure 12 presents a solo for the principal flute that commences a prominently featured woodwind section. The flute is accompanied by a continuation of earlier material that incorporates several of Higdon's stylistic elements: descending fourths in the chimes, an *ostinato* in the piano and major chords in the violas. In measure 25, the soloist is joined by the

²⁷¹Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

additional two flutes in homophonic texture. These flute soli initiate a pattern followed by subsequent soli that continues throughout the woodwind section.

The flute soli cease in measure 35 followed by a brief transition that recalls the movement's string opening. At bar 39, the major chord accompaniment scored initially for the violas is re-orchestrated for three trombones.

Higdon continues to feature the woodwinds with an oboe solo in measure 42. Similar to the presentation of the flutes, the principal oboist is given a brief melody before being joined by the other players in the section. Only during the principal melody do the trombones continue their major chord progression (in bar 56, upon the entrance of the second oboe, the trombones are replaced by the returning violas). (Figure 4-12)

Blending the timbres of an oboe with three trombones is highly unusual. The composer remained uncertain of this sound until the initial rehearsal. "I worried about the oboe solo accompanied by three trombones, so at the first rehearsal, I tried having (the) trombones muted. But it wasn't a lush sound, so we removed the mutes and I said, 'That's it, right there!'"²⁷²

In measure 56, a change in texture provides a stark contrast between the presentation of the flutes and oboes. While the flutes exhibited homophonic texture, the oboes present polyphonic lines based on the octatonic scale. (Figure 4-13) While the oboes continue their melodic line, the celli and bass join the violas to provide accompanimental material in measure 63.

The clarinets subsequently appear with the solo material in measure 78. In the previous presentation by the flutes and oboes, the principal chairs played a substantial solo line before the

²⁷²David Patrick Stearns, "Jennifer Higdon," *Andante Corporation*, June 2002 (Accessed [5 June 2006]), available from <http://www.andante.com/article/article.cfm?id=17341&highlight=1&timeline=1&highlightterms=jenni%2A%7Chigdo%2A&lstKeywords=Jennifer%20Higdon>; Internet.

remaining members of the section entered. In contrast, the three clarinets enter almost simultaneously. Higdon combines textural elements from both the flute and the oboe sections by scoring the three clarinets imitatively followed by a homophonic texture. In addition, the aural palette is diversified by a varied accompanimental pattern with new instrumentation. Rather than utilizing major chords in the viola or trombones, the second violins alternate major seconds that recall the minor second *ostinato* of the piano during the flute soli. (Figure 4-14)

Figure 4-12. *Concerto for Orchestra*, III, mm. 42-47.²⁷³

The principal solo initially omitted from the clarinet section appears in measure 85. On the variation of the clarinets' order of entry, Higdon states, "The clarinet was reversed...clarinet section first and then the solo. I intentionally reversed that. I often make it hard for players...but it means I get a lot of questions during the break. It happens every time..."²⁷⁴ At this point, the accompaniment returns to the major chords in the trumpets marked *con sordino*, presumably to

²⁷³Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

²⁷⁴Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

lessen the brightness of the timbre against the solo clarinet. The piano joins the second violins to continue the *ostinato* in slower note values but the major second interval has been inverted to a minor seventh.²⁷⁵ The composer remarks on the change, “I did invert that. I do remember doing that intentionally there ‘cause I wanted the same sound but I needed something different. It had to be different enough to clear out for the clarinet to be heard along with the trumpets (since that’s the first time I had separate material on top of a clarinet. I probably just said, ‘What would go with the solo clarinet there?’ And I did look at the second violin and thought, ‘If I do a minor 7th, I’m going to have a problem here because that’s a wide leap, so I (have) to divide the strings to thin the sound enough that the clarinet can break through.’ Every time we rehearse this with an orchestra, we always tell the second violins, ‘Play less, play less.’ It’s a problem; that leap really makes the sound pop out much more than I wanted. I wasn’t thinking theoretically in terms of the harmonic movement but I was thinking (of) the inversion of the major 2nd. I remember thinking, ‘Yeah the 7th would work well... this is one of those spots where I did invert (the interval) because I...(had) to change the sound (to) be interesting’”²⁷⁶

The principal clarinet solo ceases abruptly in measure 95 followed immediately by the presentation of the bassoon. True to the composer’s penchant for creating aural assortment, Higdon varies the manner in which the soloists are featured. The principal bassoon is initially provided with a melodic line that is instantly extended through diminution. Beneath the solo, the second bassoon and the contrabassoon move in thirds in their own rhythm. In the final phrase of this passage, all three bassoons combine to form a homophonic texture. The second bassoon and

²⁷⁵ Several earlier examples of a similar occurrences show the significance Higdon attaches not only to individual intervals but also to their inversions. Although not likely to be noticed by the ear, this compositional curiosity proves captivating from an analytical standpoint.

²⁷⁶ Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

the contrabassoon, previously marked *mezzo piano*, join the principal in a forceful final statement that results in a spirited conclusion to the section featuring the woodwinds.

Figure 4-13. *Concerto for Orchestra*, III, mm. 56-62.²⁷⁷

Figure 4-14. *Concerto for Orchestra*, III, mm. 82-86.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁷Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

²⁷⁸*Ibid.*

Throughout the bassoon-featured section, additional melodies soli are written in the violins for the assistant concertmaster and the first desk of the second violins. This unusual orchestration of soli within the second violins was initially explored in the first movement, but outside of this unorthodox scoring, no musical connection is apparent between the movements. This unusual instrumental choice for soli is a testament that the composition truly is a concerto for the entire orchestra. The three violins present major chords below the bassoon solo; the violin soli cease in measure 106 in anticipation of the bassoons' final phrase.

In measure 106, an accompanimental pattern is found in the second violins that recall their *ostinato* in measure 78. Initially consisting of alternating major seconds, the composer varies the sound in measure 106 by changing the major seconds to minor seconds and placing it in a lower range.²⁷⁹

Although several instances of returning material were present in both solo and accompanying passages, Higdon varied the music convincingly to avoid what could easily become predictable and tiresome in the hands of a less conscientious composer.

Beginning in measure 108, the remainder of the orchestra gradually re-enters. A new section is not immediately apparent since the homophonic texture of the continuing bassoons links the woodwind section to this transitional material. The composer's signature major chords are presented by the flutes and first violins. The intensity gradually increases with additional scoring of major chords and the eventual inclusion of the full orchestra.

Much has been made of the importance of the fifth interval within Higdon's symphonic writing. Within this movement, its first notable appearance occurs in measure 123. The bass, timpani, tuba, contrabassoon, horns, celli, harp and the left hand of the piano consistently sounds

²⁷⁹Noteworthy in comparison is the piano's *ostinato* found in measure 7 that also oscillates between minor seconds.

fifth intervals (or inversions). Because the scoring of these intervals transpires in the bass instruments of the orchestra, the sound is quite prevalent. When asked about her frequent use of fifth intervals, the composer stated, “I use a lot of fourths and fifths. It used to be a lot of tritones, (but) that’s eased out through the years...that was from Bartók actually ‘cause I love that sound but I’m careful about that unless I’m writing something extremely pointy. My tritones evened out the fifths and fourths.”²⁸⁰ (Figure 4-15)



Figure 4-15. *Concerto for Orchestra*, III, mm. 123-126.²⁸¹

The intensity that emerged from the full ensemble is brought to a close in measure 127. The orchestration returns to a sparse texture to complete the final woodwind commentary. The three flutes and two clarinets play a brief passage while the chimes sound the perfect fourth interval found in the opening measures of this movement. Because these intervals are marked at a *piano* dynamic marking, the focus remains clearly on the woodwinds. By recalling the

²⁸⁰Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

²⁸¹Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

beginning interval, the chimes provide unification within a movement intent on displaying timbral contrasts.

In measure 129, the strings return as the primary featured soloists while the woodwinds gradually diminish in number and volume to create a seamless transition. Unlike the polyphonic texture utilized frequently throughout the woodwind soli section, the strings commence immediately with a brief homophonic texture in measure 129. Each of the string instruments appear individually contrary to the trios customarily found previously in the woodwinds.

The composer's inclination toward featuring unexpected instruments continues with a solo for the bass, the first stringed instrument to be featured in the section. The melodic line is scored in a relatively high range and, although not a direct quotation, the contour of the line and rhythmic freedom allude to the opening flute solo of measure 12. The independent statements of the strings are separated by concise homophonic phrases by all five soloists. The second violin solo enters in measure 139 and similar to the bass, is scored in a high range. As the string section progresses, each individual instrument receives a smaller solo. In comparison to the woodwind section, the strings' melodic lines are quite truncated presumably because of the attention this section received in the preceding movement.

While the cello embarks on its melodic sojourn in measure 146, several Higdon stylistic traits appear in the accompanimental passages. Not only is the *ostinato* pattern of alternating major and minor seconds re-orchestrated for the flutes, but the vibraphone sounds a countermelody comprised primarily of perfect fourths. The opening interval consists of the exact same pitches as the descending fourth initially presented by the chimes in measure 8 that exhibits again the composer's predilection for referencing previous material. Higdon extends this concept further through the inclusion of a gradually ascending line in the vibraphone. Although

somewhat difficult to find unifying links between the individual movements, the concept of ascending material may serve as such a device due to its extensive presence in this work.

The only extended solo in the strings occurs in measure 159; the first violin has an ascending passage lasting until bar 171. (Figure 4-16) This solo returns in measure 246 to close the movement. It is interesting to note that, although several unorthodox soli were found in earlier sections, the historically significant role of the concertmaster has not been lost on Higdon.



Figure 4-16. *Concerto for Orchestra*, III, concert master solo, mm. 159-162.²⁸²

To bridge the string soli with the next section, Higdon turns again to the opening motive of this movement characterized by the alternation of *pizzicato* and *arco* in measure 172 that also appeared in measure 35. Although the transition is rhythmically varied from its original statement, the musical material remains quite recognizable and continues a sense of unity within the movement.

Continuing on her quest to feature all orchestral sections, Higdon subsequently turns her attention to the brass in measure 175. In contrast to the woodwinds and strings, Higdon does not present each section of the brass individually. Through consistently varying the manner in which instruments appear, she maintains a high musical interest.

The horns announce the opening of the brass section with major chords while the strings simultaneously complete the transitory passage. (A similar situation occurred during the

²⁸²Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

commencement of the string soli that continued to utilize the woodwinds in an accompanimental role). Higdon employs four horns; yet because horns two and four are doubled only three different pitches sound.

The low brass instruments exhibit an imitative texture stemming from the solo scored for tuba in measure 177, an exact replication of the principal oboe solo in bar 42. This line is subsequently imitated by the trombone and the bass trombone respectively. The French horns also allude to this solo in their opening interval of a minor sixth in measure 180 (the initial melody began with a major sixth). Yet the brass soli do not constitute the only reference to measure 42. The aforementioned string transitory passage provides an additional unifying link since a similar section occurred prior to the oboe solo. Finally, the accompanying passages provide further similarities. In measure 42, the oboe was accompanied by major chords in the trombones. When the material returns in measure 177, the major chords are retained but reorchestrated for the low string instruments.

A variety of brass instruments continue to play similar material to the oboe passage. A true testament to Higdon's masterful craftsmanship is prominently displayed: while introducing familiar material, she imbues it with a sparkle of originality and freshness. Previously, the principal oboe was the sole purveyor of melody, while here Higdon alternates the line between separate brass instruments. In each setting, the passage lasts precisely fourteen measures which does not contain any particular significance but remains a compositional curiosity. (Figure 4-17)

Figure 4-17. *Concerto for Orchestra*, III, mm. 177-182.²⁸³

One could reasonably anticipate a continuing correspondence with the oboe passage throughout the brass-featured section. Higdon does return the imitative texture of the two oboe soli from measure 56 but, as expected of this composer, the second appearance is altered in the corresponding measure of 191. (Figure 4-18) Rather than utilizing two instruments of the same timbre, the dialogue is presented by the third trumpet and the second trombone. The composer complements this passage by an additional solo not found in measure 56: the tuba provides a variation of the third oboe solo from measure 63. Higdon has achieved contrast and repetition simultaneously through a mixture of timbres and varying the placement of musical statements.

²⁸³Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

The image shows a musical score for three brass instruments: Tpt. 3, Tbn. 2, and Tba. Each part is marked 'SOLI' and 'mf'. The Tpt. 3 part is in treble clef, Tbn. 2 in alto clef, and Tba. in bass clef. The score shows a melodic line for each instrument, with some notes tied across measures.

Figure 4-18. *Concerto for Orchestra*, III, mm. 191-192.²⁸⁴

The manipulation and polyphonic treatment of the three borrowed oboe lines continue throughout the brass section culminating in a fairly complex environment. This plethora of musical activity gradually returns the orchestra to its full grandeur in measure 210. Higdon partially references the large orchestral section in measure 116 through rhythmic and melodic similarities. This varied restatement progresses until measure 231 when it is followed by an immediate thinning of the orchestration to enable the final soli to be audibly coherent.

The composer's unorthodox solo scoring of individual strings returns in the celli in measure 234. Initially played by the first two stands, the soli continues in measure 236 utilizing only the first stand. The melodic material at this juncture consists of alternating major seconds.

The coda of the third movement recalls earlier core musical material from the beginning of this movement. In measure 238, the strings sound a truncated version of their opening material. As previously stated, this passage also served as transitional material between larger sections within the movement. Simultaneously, the harp reiterates the *ostinato* (complete with oscillating minor seconds) initially found in the piano in measure 7. (Figure 4-19)

²⁸⁴Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

The image shows a page of a musical score for the third movement of a concerto. The score is for measures 238 to 244. The instruments listed are Fl. 1, Ob. 1, Cl. 1, Bsn. 1, Hp., Perc. 2, Vln. 1, Vln. 2, Vla., Vlc., and Cb. The woodwind parts (Fl. 1, Ob. 1, Cl. 1, Bsn. 1) are marked 'SOLI' and 'mp'. The Harp (Hp.) part is marked 'p' and 'i.e. sempre'. The Percussion 2 part is marked 'p' and 'no pedal'. The Violin 1 part is marked 'mp' and has 'unis.' and 'b2' markings. The Violin 2 part is marked 'mp'. The Viola part is marked 'mp'. The Violoncello part is marked 'mp' and has 'tutti div. e3 con sord.' markings. The Contrabass part is marked 'p' and 'arco'.

Figure 4-19. *Concerto for Orchestra*, III, mm. 238-244.²⁸⁵

Not to be outdone, the cello also provides a link to the opening of the movement in measure 245 that recalls the viola section of measure 10 through the marking *con sordino*, the scoring of a major chord progression and dividing the section in threes. In the final bars of the movement, the chimes sound the ever prominent interval of a perfect fourth. Although transcribed, this familiar sound undoubtedly stems from its initial appearance in measure 8. The principals of each woodwind section have melodic lines as well that recall their earlier featured section. In measure 239, the principal flute exhibits the primary melodic material that is actually a much abbreviated account of its initial solo in measures 12 and 14. The homophonic texture of

²⁸⁵Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

the supporting woodwinds in combination with the mixture of their various timbres emulates a similar orchestration device present in the brass passage. Finally, as stated above, the concertmaster's solo in the closing bars of the movement echoes the similar material in measure 159. (Figure 4-20) Due to plentiful references to the opening of the third movement, the material in the coda harkens to its own beginning that effectively brings the movement full circle.

The image shows a page of a musical score for the third movement of the Concerto for Orchestra, measures 245 to 251. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with staves for Harp (Hp.), Percussion 1 (Perc. 1) and Percussion 2 (Perc. 2), Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), Viola (Vlc.), and Cello (Cb.). Measure 245 is marked with a box. The Harp part has a few notes in the first measure. Perc. 1 has a 'Chimes' part starting in measure 245 with a dynamic of 'p' and 'In tempo'. Perc. 2 has a 'Glock (metal beater)' part starting in measure 245 with a dynamic of 'p' and 'In tempo'. Vln. 1 has a 'SOLO legato' section starting in measure 245 with a dynamic of 'mf'. Vln. 2, Vlc., and Cb. have various parts throughout the measures. Dynamics include 'mf', 'p', 'mp', and 'niente'. There are also performance instructions like 'In tempo' and 'legato'.

Figure 4-20. *Concerto for Orchestra*, III, mm. 245-251.²⁸⁶

Movement four features the percussion section (with additional scoring for harp, piano and celesta). Unlike other sections of the ensemble, the percussion was not highlighted as a section in the previous movement. This movement, therefore, establishes the equality between all instruments needed for a composition to be aptly titled *Concerto for Orchestra*. Because the

²⁸⁶Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

work thus far provided little solo attention to the percussion, an enormous contrast is immediately present at the commencement of this movement. Higdon's exclusive scoring for strings in the second movement and percussion in the fourth enhances the arch-form structure. In addition, the two particular movements occupy similar durations that minister in balancing the elaborate and lengthier full orchestral movements.

On the Pittsburgh Symphony's web-site, Higdon explains her motivation for the unorthodox percussion scoring. "I did this because the percussion section is the one section of the orchestra that has developed the most in the twentieth century. It's the one section that has added instruments, and the skill of the players has probably developed more than in any other section. I decided to make a movement which would have the quietest sounds in this entire piece in the percussion."²⁸⁷ An additional rationale for the movement was simply "because Don Liuzzi the timpanist wanted to play percussion."²⁸⁸ Although a fairly diverse number of percussive instruments have already been displayed periodically in movements one and three, the complete inventory listed in the preface to the score is explored in greater detail in the fourth movement.

The fourth movement bears the slowest tempo of the entire composition (quarter note=42). In doing so, Higdon provides an opportunity to savor the multiple timbres still unfamiliar to many an ear. The movement begins with pitched instruments played by a bow. Higdon states, "Notice the percussionists' beginning when they're bowing their instruments, something that the

²⁸⁷Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, "Jennifer Higdon talks about her Concerto for Orchestra," (Accessed [7 July 2006] <http://www.pittsburghsymphony.org/pghsymph.nsf/concert+listings/22DD934D488A89548525703500670D45?opendocument>).

²⁸⁸Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

string player would normally do.”²⁸⁹ By referring to a technique commonly associated with strings, this statement implies a plausible subconscious connection between movements two and four. Regarding this possible association, the composer remarks, “I hadn’t thought of that. It could very well be. I’m not the first to use bow(ing for percussionists). I probably stole that from George Crumb. All of us were doing it at Penn when we were studying and I did it in *blue cathedral* in the vibes. It worked so well that I thought, ‘What would it be like...to have a bunch of percussionists doing that?’ so it was a curiosity of sound. When I originally wrote it, I actually had written that they (the percussionists) should let (the sound) vibrate through. But in the dress rehearsal, Sawallisch (said), ‘We should stop the sound and make it clearer’ and that was the right decision. It sounds better, not the way I originally wrote it so I changed it. It’s more work for the percussionists but it clears out the chords enough that you can hear them. When they were ringing through, it was noisy.”²⁹⁰

The rationale behind Higdon’s choice of a soft dynamic and slow tempo to open the movement is due in part to Sawallisch. The composer states, “He just didn’t want percussion so I (thought), ‘If I write really slow at the beginning and it’s really quiet maybe he’ll be convinced by it.’ It actually worked. That became one of his more favorite movements. He didn’t want to rehearse that movement; in fact he didn’t rehearse it until the dress rehearsal.”²⁹¹ The composer purposely scored the opening of the fourth movement for bowed percussion to convince Sawallisch of the possibilities within this diverse section. “I wanted him to hear that not all

²⁸⁹Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, “Jennifer Higdon talks about her Concerto for Orchestra,” (Accessed [7 July 2006]
<http://www.pittsburghsymphony.org/pghsymph.nsf/concert+listings/22DD934D488A89548525703500670D45?opendocument>.

²⁹⁰Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

²⁹¹Ibid.

percussion was loud. (The goal was) to make it mysterious. It's like the string opening in the third movement...I wanted to do the same thing with the percussion to make the audience kind of lean in a little and figure out what the sound was."²⁹²

Higdon recalls that the percussionists were delighted to have a movement featuring their instruments exclusively. She comments, "The percussionists were so proud of having their own movement. I finished that movement a whole year before the premiere so I gave them the music saying, 'Tell me, can you do all this?' They passed the parts around (and) said it's do-able, it's hard but it's do-able. I was surprised that movement worked better than I thought it would."²⁹³ So enamored with the music of this movement, the percussionists encouraged Higdon to transcribe the score for percussion ensemble.²⁹⁴

The composer features the instruments in a systematic fashion. Beginning with pitched instruments, a small transitional passage leads to scoring for non-pitched instruments. This alternation of instruments is comparable to the second movement's rotation from *pizzicato* to *arco*. Higdon found this movement to be particularly difficult to compose due to the fact that she "had to find a convincing way to go from pitched to non-pitched instruments and that was hard. The wood-blocks were kind of my in-between. Really, it was difficult."²⁹⁵

Intensity is gradually increased by an acceleration of the tempo in phases, a comparison she likens to a "Victrola"²⁹⁶ being wound up."²⁹⁷ The composer comments, "It was kind of

²⁹²Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

²⁹³Ibid.

²⁹⁴Although the composer had not originally considered this option, she plans to do so in the future.— Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

²⁹⁵Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

²⁹⁶A Victrola is a trademark term for a phonograph.

dangerous doing just percussion in the fourth movement ‘cause...if it’s a concerto for orchestra, it’s the orchestra. I also was fascinated to see if I could speed the orchestra up ‘cause I didn’t know any other piece that did it quite that way so I thought, ‘This’ll probably (be) the last time I’ll ever be asked to write an orchestra piece, so let’s throw that in. Let me see if I can actually make that happen.’ Part of it was actually just a compositional challenge.”²⁹⁸

David Patrick Stearns remarked that this movement reminded him of the *Sixth Symphony* of Danish composer, Carl Nielsen (1865-1931).²⁹⁹ Stearns adds no additional commentary regarding the similarities between Higdon’s composition and Nielsen’s *Sixth Symphony*, subtitled *Sinfonia semplice* (1924-5).³⁰⁰ Rather than the works of Nielsen, Higdon pictured the extended drum cadences of marching bands during the compositional process.³⁰¹ She further comments on Stearns’ statements, “I don’t even know the Nielsen symphonies. David’s my neighbor; he lives next door to me. I should ask him, ‘What the hell were you writing?’”³⁰² When asked specifically about the potential connection to Nielsen’s sixth symphony and the timpani “battle,” Higdon states, “I didn’t know that actually, I only know the Nielsen *Flute Concerto* and I barely remember that from when I studied it. I don’t know any of the Nielsen

²⁹⁷Nick Jones, jacket notes, Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape/Concerto for Orchestra*, Cond. Robert Spano, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Telarc 80620.

²⁹⁸ Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

²⁹⁹David Patrick Stearns, “Jennifer Higdon,” *Andante Corporation*, June 2002 (Accessed [5 June 2006]), available from <http://www.andante.com/article/article.cfm?id=17341&highlight=1&timeline=1&highlightterms=jenni%2A%7Chigdo%2A&lstKeywords=Jennifer%20Higdon>; Internet.

³⁰⁰David Fanning, “Carl Nielsen,” *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed [19 July 2006]), <<http://www.grovemusic.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu>>

³⁰¹David Patrick Stearns, “Jennifer Higdon,” *Andante Corporation*, June 2002 (Accessed [5 June 2006]), available from <http://www.andante.com/article/article.cfm?id=17341&highlight=1&timeline=1&highlightterms=jenni%2A%7Chigdo%2A&lstKeywords=Jennifer%20Higdon>; Internet.

³⁰²Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

symphonies at all. I didn't think of it as a battle, I was thinking in terms of marching band. I played percussion in marching band and I thought, 'Wouldn't it be funny to have a little tribute to marching band in there?' I love watching the audience in that part."³⁰³

The fourth movement's opening texture is homophonic and, as mentioned earlier, the musicians are playing the instruments with a bow. The timpanist and the second percussionist are instructed to play the vibraphones while the first and third percussionists are stationed at the crotales. Commencing immediately with the first pitch, a prominent stylistic element of the composer is prevalent: the interval of a perfect fifth separates the vibraphone lines and also constitutes the distance between the crotales.

Throughout the opening measures, an abundance of musical directions are notated by the composer. Exceptionally specific dynamics are employed within a brief time span that continually grow louder from *mezzo piano* to *forte*. Quick and striking contrasts in volume are atypical of Higdon's orchestral music; the composer tends to favor long, extended *crescendi* culminating in a blossoming orchestral sound. Due to the various possibilities capable with percussion instruments, however, such explicit markings are essential. This opening provides the quietest volume of the entire composition, an unexpected occurrence due to the often erroneous stereotype of percussion instruments performing at a high decibel level. (Figure 4-21)

Entering in measure 6, the harp sounds separate, perfect melodic fifth intervals from the percussionists' opening that further expose Higdon's affinity for this interval. Punctuations of open fifths continue in the music of the four percussionists beneath the fluid harp. Throughout this intervallic activity, tiny melodic fragments in the celesta commence a dialogue with the first

³⁰³Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

percussion crotales part. Because these melodic fragments are extremely concise and similar, the musical lines are not independent; the celesta simply echoes the crotales.

Figure 4-21. *Concerto for Orchestra*, IV, mm. 1-5.³⁰⁴

The harp continues to arpeggiate perfect fifth intervals in measure 10 while the percussion section expands to incorporate a more diverse array of instruments including the small and large triangle and the glockenspiel. During this passage, a new dialogue ensues between the celesta and the vibraphones consisting of additional parallel fifths. The celesta's answer to the vibraphone consists of separate parallel fifths in each hand that creates a certain degree of harmonic complexity to the passage. This dialogue extends to encompass a broader pitch range and continues until measure 20. In its longest statement, the vibraphone sounds a chromatic descending scale in fifths in measure 17. Independent from this percussive conversation, an additional fifth appears in measure 18 in the marimba part that sounds continuous straight eighth notes on this interval. Undoubtedly, the parallel fifths in combination with this *ostinato* provide

³⁰⁴Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

the opening of the movement with a generous sprinkling of several of the composer's individual tendencies.

From its opening arpeggios, the harp sustains a C major tonality until measure 16 at which point similar figurations recur in Eb major. Once the Eb tonal center is established, the harp alternates between the major modes of Eb and C. The marimba reinforces these changing tonalities by outlining parallel harmonies.

The primary focus of the pitched instruments thus far has remained on the perfect fifth interval. To avoid the possibility of the music becoming stagnant or predictable, Higdon alternates the vibraphone and wood block within the second percussionist's part beginning in measure 20. This changing instrumentation anticipates the eventual substitution of the vibraphone by the woodblock and facilitates the transition from pitched to non-pitched instruments. Once the second percussionist initially begins this alternation, the fluctuation occurs at a faster rate. After several statements, the wood block becomes more significant than the melodic vibraphone thus marking the beginning of a new instrumentation soon to permeate the entire ensemble. Between the alteration of harmonies in the harp and the constant shift of vibraphone and wood block in the second percussionist's part, the music is unified through departures and returns to opening material.

Following the trail set by the second percussionist, the timpanist (actually playing the glockenspiel) undergoes a similar transformation. Beginning in measure 22, the musician's scoring changes to temple blocks which, along with the wood blocks, are instructed to play softly so as to enable the musical focus to remain on the melodic instruments.

For the first time in the movement, the harp utters a melodic statement that lasts for only two bars in measure 24. What follows in measure 26, although brief, is characteristic of

Higdon's orchestral writing: the harp sounds homophonic intervals comprised of fourths and fifths.

As stated previously, the tempo undergoes multiple *accelerandi* throughout the movement. The initial increase occurs in measure 29 with a new tempo in the following bar that places the quarter note at 60. The new tempo is accompanied by a section that features only non-pitched instruments including the sizzle cymbal, the guiro, the vibraslap and eventually the snare drum. The highly complex rhythm is balanced by complete silence. Higdon scores one beat rests for all instruments to provide a welcome relaxation to the ever increasing intensity. The changes in tempo begin to occur more frequently and the next employment of an *accelerando* transpires at bar 42. With the quarter note now marked at 80, Higdon has nearly doubled the tempo from the opening.

This section continues the focus on non-pitched instruments with the exception of the piano. Due to the piano's rich history of cultivating melodies, it is surprising to find this instrument included in such a section. Higdon offsets this preconception, however, through her explicit directions in the score, "use other hand to dampen strings very close to hammer...the sound should be very dry."³⁰⁵ The piano part comprises single pitches of consecutive sixteenth notes in its lowest register. The resulting dry sound combined with the low range evokes a more percussive and non-pitched timbre. To further increase the intensity, Higdon notates an extremely quick *crescendo* in the piano that carries the dynamics to its extremes from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo* within a single measure.

In measure 45, the remaining musicians join the piano in a *fortissimo* dynamic. The high rhythmic complexity already attained is further complemented by a solo for the timpani.

³⁰⁵Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

Although the section remains centered upon non-pitched instruments, Higdon's unusual orchestration does not allow the timpani and the piano to detract from the pivotal role of the remaining instruments.

Another *accelerando* appears in measure 50 and the quarter note is increased to 90 in the subsequent measure. Another fast *crescendo* is employed by the percussionists combined with a change in texture that incorporates brief occurrences of homophonic unity beginning in measure 51. These instances provide a succinct moment of relaxation to the high rhythmic tension created thus far. Higdon alters the instrumentation by introducing the tom-toms and the floor tom-toms. To instill additional prominence to non-pitched instruments, the piano is omitted and the timpani no longer presents soloistic material. Throughout this section, the composer utilizes frequent dynamic contrasts that span the gamut of sound possibilities, a trait that remains unusual in her orchestral scoring but further explores the various capabilities of the percussion section.

Measure 64 includes non-traditional scoring for the timpanist and the first percussionist by having them "play rim of drum."³⁰⁶ Although the composer would never be considered avant-garde, she clearly understands the investigational nature of this philosophy and conducts her own experiments through brief moments of unorthodox instrumental techniques.

An introduction of the final set of percussive instruments begins in measure 72 and includes castanets, maracas and sandpaper blocks. The maracas play a consistent eighth-note rhythm (similar to the marimba in measure 18) while the castanets have a syncopated *ostinato*. (Figure 4-22) These rhythms remain consistent until the final bars of the movement further revealing the composer's penchant for *ostinati*.

³⁰⁶Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

As previously noted, the fourth movement leads *attacca* to the full orchestral, final movement. Higdon achieves a seamless transition by introducing new *ostinato* passages in the coda of the percussion movement that continue into the subsequent movement. Because each percussion line figures prominently in this transition, discussion of each of their lines separately will facilitate a more thorough comprehension.

The image shows a musical score for three percussion parts (Perc. 1, Perc. 2, and Perc. 3) in 3/4 time, measures 72-74. Perc. 1 (Sand Paper Blocks) starts in measure 73 with a *mf* dynamic. Perc. 2 (Maraca) starts in measure 72 with a *mf* dynamic. Perc. 3 (Castanet) starts in measure 72 with a *mf* dynamic. In measure 74, Perc. 2 also includes Tmp. Blks. [drum stick] with a *p* dynamic.

Figure 4-22. *Concerto for Orchestra*, IV, mm. 72-74.³⁰⁷

The castanets continue their previous *ostinato* pattern from measure 72 that repeats in two measure intervals. The rhythm changes to consecutive sixteenth notes in bar 89 accompanied by a *forte* dynamic that increases the rhythmic intensity and heightens the anticipation of the final movement. In the opening measure of the fifth movement, the castanets occur less frequently before becoming tacet altogether by measure 2. This instrument's main role, therefore, is to increase tension and rhythmic drive while the other percussionists provide the primary unification between the two movements.

Similar to the castanets, the maraca continues its own rhythm from measure 72. The final three bars of the fourth movement replace the maraca with the tom-toms and initiate a more

³⁰⁷Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

rhythmically complex pattern. It is the latter instrumentation and new *ostinato* that function as the transition between movements and remains unceasing until measure 5 of the finale.

As expected, the sand paper blocks, played by the first percussionist, follow a related path that continues a rhythmic *ostinato* pattern before changing immediately to the transition proper. Beginning in measure 91, the connecting link to the finale is presented through a separate thirty-second note rhythm. (Figure 4-23) The first percussionist along with the timpanist present their respective motives more extensively; both remain true to their transitional material until measure 16 of the finale.

The image shows a musical score for four percussion parts: Timpani (Timp.), Percussion 1 (Perc. 1), Percussion 2 (Perc. 2), and Percussion 3 (Perc. 3). The score is in 2/4 time and spans measures 91 to 95. The Timpani part is written in bass clef and features a melodic line with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents. The Percussion 1 part is written in treble clef and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents. The Percussion 2 part is written in treble clef and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents. The Percussion 3 part is written in treble clef and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents. The score includes performance instructions: '(flip other timp mallet)' for the timpani, '(snare on)' for Perc. 1, and '(pick up other drumstick)' for Perc. 2. The score is marked 'f sub.' at the beginning and 'allacca' at the end.

Figure 4-23. *Concerto for Orchestra*, IV, mm. 91-95.³⁰⁸

During the transitional passage, the timpanist's part does not employ the strict repetition of the *ostinato* that characterized the music of the three percussionists. Because the timpani is a pitched instrument, the transition combines rhythmic and melodic material; however, neither conforms to a strict pattern and a systematic ordering of these fundamentals remains less

³⁰⁸Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

prevalent. In measure 91, a consistent rhythmic and intervallic content emerges that links the two movements yet the patterns vary considerably after the initial transition has been achieved.

Forte dynamics close the fourth movement while the finale opens immediately with a more subdued marking of *mezzo piano*. Regarding this sudden change, Higdon remarks, “It’s interesting when you go into the fifth movement, I originally had loud dynamics in the percussion (but) that didn’t work. I had to have them come down to *piano* to clear out for the strings. That was changed in the rehearsals.”³⁰⁹

Because the musical material that connects the final two movements are similar and played *attacca* (a “radical” notion according to the composer),³¹⁰ this dynamic contrast does not supply reassurance that the finale has begun. Higdon has masterfully crafted a seamless transition and only after the syncopated entrance of the violins does it become obvious that a new movement has commenced.

As mentioned previously, unifying material abounds in Higdon’s orchestral compositions that establishes brief moments of familiarity to the listener. The composer turns to this approach in the finale by incorporating musical material from previous movements that provides a convincing summation. In fact, the final movement may be considered a coda to the entire composition. Higdon responds to this theory, “It is. It had to be something that wrapped everything up. I also want(ed) some swing in that last movement, too but I knew the conductor who was 82 wouldn’t exactly be able to swing so I had to figure out a way to write it so that it would swing on its own...although it’s kind of hard to say because I wrote that first movement

³⁰⁹Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

³¹⁰*Ibid.*

last. I know that everything in my brain was connected from the previous movements though ‘cause that’s just the way my brain works.’³¹¹

The opening measures of the finale continue to build the intensity from the previous movement through unison violin scoring marked *forte* above the percussion *ostinati*. Beginning in measure 4, a reference to earlier musical material arises. The cello line alternates *arco* and *pizzicato* techniques that recall the similar dichotomy of string sounds present in the second and third movement. (Figure 4-24)



Figure 4-24. *Concerto for Orchestra*, V, mm. 1-5.³¹²

The bassoons enter in measure 10 with a trill that encompasses vast dynamic contrasts in only two beats. Immediately following in measure 11, the oboes and flutes sound descending melodic fragments in imitation. These fragments persist until measure 23 and provide a musical balance to the woodwinds’ ascending figures so abundant in the first movement. In the opening

³¹¹Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

³¹²Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

of the finale, therefore, an accumulation of recurring musical material is presented: the continuation of the *ostinato* percussion patterns, the alternation of string techniques in the celli, the wide dynamic contrasts of the bassoons and the imitative woodwind passages.

Following the cessation of the percussion *ostinati* in measure 16, Higdon supplies a new repeating bass pattern in the celli and basses. Unrelated to the material in the percussion, this progression continues until measure 23. The incorporation of two separate *ostinati* reveals the composer's inclination towards this compositional device and is perhaps nowhere more apparent than this opening section of the finale.

A section featuring several prominent woodwind soli begins in measure 24. Unlike the preceding movements that incorporated extensive solo material, such presentations in the finale are greatly reduced in length. It is interesting to note that in the three movements that featured the full ensemble, the initial soli are presented by woodwinds. Beneath the woodwinds, a significant pattern for marimba and glockenspiel emerges that reappears throughout the finale. (Figure 4-25) In the initial presentation, these percussion instruments alternate the pitches of B and Bb that recall the tonal ambiguity of the second movement. The piano and harp assist in developing this harmonic environment through their perpetual sounding F that functions as the fifth to the Bb and the augmented fourth to the B natural.³¹³

Following the brief appearance of woodwinds, the strings reenter in measure 28 with musical material from measure 16 of the finale transposed a major second higher. This passage returns in measure 34 transposed up a minor third from the preceding presentation. The timpani also participate in reminiscences of earlier motives by continuously restating a rhythmic figure

³¹³The use of fifth intervals within Higdon's style need no further explanation but the tri-tone is used more infrequently. Although not generally part of the composer's orchestral style, the latter interval retains a significant place in this composition due to its pivotal role ascribed by Higdon in the opening of the composition.

that dominated the transition between movements four and five. Finally, the marimba and glockenspiel return to the example discussed above and follows the transposition pattern of the strings. The sequencing of earlier musical material at steadily rising pitches increases the momentum and in addition, incorporates the use of rising pitch, a characteristic prevalent to earlier movements of this composition.



Figure 4-25. *Concerto for Orchestra*, V, mm. 24-26.³¹⁴

Higdon features the violins in measure 32 and as seen with the woodwinds, the length of the soli are drastically reduced. Within this section, the violin soli are disrupted by the rising sequences of the entire string section. The “solo” is comprised of four violinists from each section sounding descending major chords in homophonic texture. Between the two groups of soloists, the chords are separated by a major second. An *accelerando* appears in measure 38, the first to be utilized within the finale but clearly a continuing idea from the fourth movement. Once the new tempo (quarter note=120) takes effect in measure 42, no release is provided as the music continues its prescribed path of dramatic bravura.

This separate passage in measure 42 offers both new and returning material. Joining the orchestra for the first time since the third movement, the brass re-enters in a harmonic idiom favored by the composer. The trumpets and trombones sound major chords separated by the

³¹⁴Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

interval of a second. The violin soloists continue to play their respective chords but remain independent of the brass. The pattern is quickly monopolized by the brass, however, when the violins become tacet in measure 44. The major chords in the trumpet and the trombone serve as an extension of the harmonic intensity initially begun in the strings; Higdon has successfully transferred the existing material to a new timbre.

Beneath this relocation of major chords, separate *ostinato* patterns begin in the viola, the vibraphone and the snare. Although melodically and rhythmically independent of the transitional patterns utilized in movements four and five, the employment of percussion instruments for a repeating rhythmic idea vaguely recalls their earlier function in opening the finale. The composer directs the viola section to sound their *ostinato* “angrily.” Such markings are used sparingly within the oeuvre of Higdon’s orchestral compositions but do occur as witnessed in the openings of the third and fourth movements.

Beginning in measure 52, the tonal environment of the second movement is evoked. For eight consecutive beats, the left hand of the piano, the viola and celli alternate quickly between the pitches of B and F. (Figure 4-26) In measure 58, the pattern returns an octave higher and is heard only in the right hand of the piano. (The significance of these pitches was explained previously in the discussion of a similar harmonic idiom found in the piano and percussion lines in measure 24 of the finale).

Following this brief reminiscence, the pianist (doubled by the strings) plays separate major chords in each hand that are separated by the interval of a major second. Not only does this bitonality in measure 60 recall earlier harmonic patterns but is equally meaningful in comparison to the celesta line in bar 13 of the fourth movement. The open fifth intervals separated by a

major second in the celesta are unified profoundly to the finale's piano part since a single musician performs both parts.



Figure 4-26. *Concerto for Orchestra*, V, mm. 52-53.³¹⁵

In measure 65, an *accelerando* is employed while the chords in the piano and strings continue to rise in pitch. Higdon describes this drive as the music moving “up and forward through the orchestra getting faster and faster”³¹⁶ but also maintains the concept of rising sounds featured prominently throughout the entire composition. The new tempo in measure 67 is marked quarter note=138-142. Immediately the trumpets re-enter to double the strings and right hand of the piano in a prolongation of the major chord passage.

A new melodic idea is introduced in the second violins in measure 69 that closely mirrors the tom-toms’ rhythm. The latter plays consistent sixteenth notes to substantiate a rhythmic *ostinato*. The second violins utilize a similar rhythm but the line is more melodic and interspersed generously with rests. In both the percussion and the second violins, the pattern persists until measure 83. Following a brief interruption, the second violins’ melodic pattern returns in measure 101 in the lower strings with additional complexity. The viola and cello present this material in rapid polyphonic exchanges.

³¹⁵Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

³¹⁶Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, “Jennifer Higdon talks about her *Concerto for Orchestra*,” (Accessed [7 July 2006] <http://www.pittsburghsymphony.org/pghsymph.nsf/concert+listings/22DD934D488A8954852573500670D45?open+document>).

Beneath the second violins in measure 73, the alternation of *pizzicato* and *arco* in the cello and bass returns the music to the dichotomy explored in the second movement. Significantly, all *pizzicato* markings in this section are scored as snap *pizzicato*, a scoring used most prominently for the final pitch of the second movement.

In measure 83, the strings continue to reflect upon the second movement. Although sounding a single pitch, the *tutti* strings are instructed to play *col legno battuto*. When “*battuto*” is paired with “*col legno*,” the execution is accomplished through a gentle tapping on the string by the wood of the bow. The actual meaning of “*batutto*,” however is a musical term found in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to describe guitar strumming³¹⁷ and therefore is akin to the second movement’s marking of “*ala gitara*.”

The icing on the proverbial cake to this continuation of previous musical ideas is found in the soli for viola and cello. Each section requires three players to sound ascending major chords that are reminiscent of the rising sounds featured throughout all five movements. Of course, utilizing moving major chords is frequent in Higdon’s compositions yet the specific scoring for viola and cello specifically recalls similar orchestration in the third movement. It also merits mentioning that the distance between the cello and viola soli is the reappearing major second interval. Although brief, this solo passage is instantly recognizable from a similar context of the third movement and hence, unifies the “mystical” movement with the finale.

The percussionists simultaneously reminisce on the fourth movement through the scoring of like timbres. Percussionists one and two are instructed to play the rim of the drum (seen in measure 65 of the preceding movement). In the finale, the parameters are less constricting and

³¹⁷No author, “Battuto,” *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed [20 July 2006]), <<http://www.grovemusic.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu>>

Higdon designates that any drum will suffice.³¹⁸ (A third percussionist is later added with an identical instruction). The sand paper blocks, scored only in the fourth movement, re-enter during this section that also recall the aforementioned passage of the fourth movement. The section closes with an *accelerando* in measure 91 that increases the quarter note to 142-150.

In measure 93, the harp presents a figure that directly correlates to the marimba in measure 24. When the pattern first appeared (originally paired with the glockenspiel), it served to recall the tonal ambiguity of the second movement. After re-orchestration and transposition, however, the pattern is not only a harmonic reminder of the string movement but a unifying device that links the diverse sections of the finale. (Figure 4-27) The piano, reminiscing on its own previous patterns, re-enters by alternating the B and F pitches heard previously in measures 52 and 58 in varied rhythmic presentations.



solo moments, the passage lasts for only 8 measures yet much musical material is included within this brief time span. Imitative and homophonic textures combine with *pizzicato* markings to recall earlier moments in the composition.

In measure 101, the strings return to *tutti* scoring while the aforementioned second violin pattern from measure 69 returns in the viola and the celli. Unlike the initial seed from which this motive blossomed, the pitch content now centers on the notes B and F.³²⁰ The resulting sound has developed upon the earlier motive in several ways. Not only does the musical material recall the previous violin motive but the additional emphasis on the two important pitches refers to various moments of harmonic instability raging throughout the composition. The momentum increases exponentially through a complex dialogue between the two instruments in rapid imitation. To further emphasize the returning material of measure 69, the horns transpose their previous material from the same place in measure 107. In addition, the piano and glockenspiel play various descending melodic fourth intervals which continue to hold a significant position within Higdon's compositions.

Measure 118 commences the next change in tempo that increases the quarter note to 160-180. After a plethora of *accelerandi* sprinkled throughout the fourth and fifth movements, this final increase places the tempo at twice the initial speed of the finale's opening. Due to the continuous intensity and excitement in the final movements, anticipation mounts for a riveting conclusion that Higdon delivers through an explosion of instrumental color. Maintaining the trend set thus far throughout the finale, the closing section continues to develop musical material from preceding movements resulting in a captivating and breathless conclusion.

³²⁰Although the second violins in measure 69 initially sounded a Bb frequently, as the motive progressed, a pattern evolving around a singular pitch was noticeably absent. The subsequent presentation of the similar figurations appearing in measure 101, therefore, has expanded in harmonic complexity.

Beginning in measure 118, Higdon's characteristic employment of an *ostinato* returns in the bass clarinet, celli and double bass that emphasize the pitches of B, Bb and F. This not only revisits the composer's penchant of a fifth interval (and its inversion) but continues the importance of these notes that have been manipulated consistently throughout the composition. Although less prominent, the viola line's countermelody also places a degree of significance on the pitches B and F that continue to declare their intervallic importance. Simultaneously, the glockenspiel and piano span the harmonic gamut but continue the incorporation of perfect fourth and fifth intervals in various guises. The trumpets resume in measure 118 after a prolonged silence and the sudden entry provides exuberance to an already electrifying aural palette. One may reasonably anticipate the composer's characteristic major chord progression in the trumpets' orchestration, yet the triads are varied. Although the majority of the chords are indeed major, Higdon includes augmented and even minor chords that result in fresh sounding music combined with a sense of familiarity.

In measure 134, the harp and marimba recall the original duet in measure 24 that resurged earlier in measure 93. In the final presentation of this material, Higdon combines the timbres of the two previous appearances to produce an outcome that is recognizable yet innovative. The ongoing experimentation of instrumental color displays once again, the composer's great emphasis on the "joy of sound." (Figure 4-28)

In measure 140, an entire earlier section is recalled while simultaneously placing emphasis on the pitches of B & F. The woodwinds, strings, piano and vibraphone sound various patterns of these notes that resemble the material in measure 52. The connection to the corresponding earlier passage is further strengthened through an identical major chord progression sounded by

the trumpets while the trombones vary only slightly. This inventive use of orchestration effectively transports the music of the finale to an earlier segment.

Figure 4-28. *Concerto for Orchestra*, V, mm. 135-141.³²¹

In measure 151, the piano and second violins return to the alternating figure initially presented in measure 52. Rather than shifting between B and F, however, Higdon uses the pitches of G and Db. Although a mere transposition, this passage foreshadows the final tonality of the work.

Beginning in measure 153, the piano and the bassoons introduce a *forte* motive consisting of accented melodic eighth notes that lasts precisely one measure. (Figure 4-29) This brief rhythmically driven line returns an additional two times interspersed with harmonically calm sections. As quickly as it appeared, the motive suddenly vanishes by measure 162 only to appear again in the concluding measures. In placement only, this resembles the concertmaster's solo

³²¹Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

from movement three that presented a solo line once before reiterating the idea in the final measures of its respective movement. In the finale, however, this assertive piano motive is offset by interruptions by the ensemble of a harmonically stable environment consisting of major chords. The orchestration of doublestops in the strings and the doubled piano part is reminiscent of the earlier passage of the finale in measure 60. The latter utilized bitonality, while in this brief moment of recall the chords are in unison. An additional relationship to measure 60 occurs in the woodwinds. Initially scored as imitative ascending and descending scalar passages, this subsequent appearance retains a similar melodic content but with less complexity due to a homophonic texture.



Figure 4-29. *Concerto for Orchestra*, V, mm. 151-154.³²²

The orchestration in measure 154, therefore, results in a vague feeling of déjà vu yet the music neither returns harmonically nor texturally to its initial appearance. The entire passage, however, anticipates the proper return of the bitonal section upon its triumphant entrance in measure 162. After measures of alluding to this occurrence, Higdon's eventual arrival to this destination presents a dazzling artistic climax.

The strings offer a brief reprieve from their bitonal language in measure 164 to recall the opening bars of the third movement. This returning musical idea consisting of a descending,

³²²Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra*, (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

expressive *portamento* figure followed by a *pizzicato* pitch that figured prominently throughout the “mystical” movement; thus, it is not surprising that the composer references this material in the finale. Rather than the standard *pizzicato* to end the *portamento* figures, Higdon scores a snap *pizzicato*. This seemingly slight modification remains significant as a unifying device due to its earlier appearances in the second and fifth movements. (Figure 4-30) Lasting only two measures, the strings quickly resume their previous bitonal material.

The musical score for Figure 4-30 consists of five staves: Vln. 1, Vln. 2, Vla., Vcl., and Cb. The time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into two measures. In the first measure, Vln. 1 and Vln. 2 play a half note with a portamento line and a dynamic marking of *ff*. Vla. and Vcl. play a half note with a portamento line, followed by a pizzicato note with a dynamic marking of *ff*. Cb. plays a half note with a portamento line and a dynamic marking of *ff*. In the second measure, Vln. 1 and Vln. 2 play a half note with a portamento line and a dynamic marking of *ff*. Vla. and Vcl. play a half note with a portamento line, followed by a pizzicato note with a dynamic marking of *ff*. Cb. plays a half note with a portamento line and a dynamic marking of *ff*. The score includes various performance instructions such as 'unis.', 'pizz.', and 'arco'.

Figure 4-30. *Concerto for Orchestra*, V, mm. 164-165.³²³

In measure 166, the woodwinds proclaim their return to independence through the innovative use of an earlier motive in the finale. Initially found in the second violins’ extended line in measure 72 and subsequently in the lower strings in measure 101, this motive reappears greatly truncated with continuous imitation to present a highly manipulated adaptation of the original. The transformation of this material into a multifarious texture combined with a stark

³²³Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra*, (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

contrast in timbre assumes a new character that is decidedly more complex than even its previous statement in the polyphonic lower strings. Undoubtedly, the result is the pinnacle of this musical idea through its abundance in complexity.

The first and third horns recall their previous material in measure 69 to reinforce the recollection of the passage discussed above. Unlike the woodwinds, however, the material does not bear an orchestration change; rather, the horns explore the end of their own motive from this earlier passage. Higdon does not simply restate the material but incorporates considerable variation through rhythmic alteration before culminating in a polyphonic dialogue with the second and fourth horns in measure 173. The final measures of the composition persist in featuring earlier musical material in an elaborate and fully orchestrated conclusion.

As expected of a multi-movement work for large ensemble, all instrumental forces combine to end the composition. In measure 181, the unison strings commence a brief stepwise ascension and upon subsequent repetitions, begins the pattern on a higher pitch. After only two full presentations, the passage is truncated yet continues the rise in pitch appearing at faster intervals to enhance the intensity. The incorporation of rising sounds is significant in this conclusion and its frequent appearances in the previous movements have already been noted previously. The steady increase in momentum provided by the strings is additionally developed through frequent meter changes and a consistent rhythm in the timpani.

In measure 181, the piano returns to thick textured major chords that are doubled in the wind and brass instruments. The bitonality frequently employed in similar passages is noticeably absent in preparation for a harmonious conclusion. These chords do not encompass a discernible pattern but the progression in measure 183 (Bb-F#-B-F#) remains noteworthy due to the significance of the pitches. One may reasonably anticipate an answer to this harmonic ambiguity

that dominated the composition yet the composer does not offer any solutions and in the end, opts for an unforeseen tonality altogether.

In the final bars, Higdon continues to recall musical material from the fifth movement. In measure 186, the piano returns to its earlier aggressive rhythmic motive originally found in bar 153. Heard only once, this reminiscence is brief but fulfills the purpose of transporting the music. The final recollection of previous musical content occurs in the timpani in the penultimate measure. Although brief, the significance is momentous. The timpani sound an interval of an augmented fourth that alludes to the initial presentation of the tritone in the opening measures of the first movement. This interval maintained a prominent role throughout the entire opening movement and with the incorporation of this interval in the conclusion the composer has successfully brought the entire work full circle. (Figure 4-31)

With the exception of the percussion, the full ensemble sounds the final major chord progression (G-G-G-F-G). Curiously, the work concludes on a G major chord, a tonality that has not been utilized significantly. Due to the prominence placed on the pitches of B, B \flat and F throughout the five movements, the final key center is quite unexpected. The keen observer will notice, however, that this was foreshadowed briefly in measure 151 in the alternating pitches of G and D \flat . This pattern originated in measures 52 and returned in 140 with the alternating notes of B and F. The transposition of this material in measure 151 is vital. During this passage, the rationale for a new key center may appear unclear especially since the pitches of B and F remained essential throughout the work. Only after the composition ends in this new tonality does it become clear that this brief moment was prophesying the conclusion.

The image shows a musical score for the fifth movement of Jennifer Higdon's *Concerto for Orchestra*, measures 186-189. The score is arranged in five staves: Piano (Pno.), Timpani (Timp.), Percussion 1 (Perc. 1), Percussion 2 (Perc. 2), and Percussion 3 (Perc. 3). The piano part is in the treble clef and features a complex rhythmic pattern with many accents and dynamic markings, including *ff* and *sfz*. The timpani part is in the bass clef and includes a specific instruction: "B₂ to B₄". The percussion parts are in the bass clef and include instructions for "Tom-toms" and "Floor Tom". Dynamic markings *ff* and *sfz* are used throughout the percussion parts.

Figure 4-31. *Concerto for Orchestra*, V, mm.186-189.³²⁴

Since the premiere of this work in 2002, Higdon's *Concerto for Orchestra* has garnered performances by several of the United States' leading symphonies including the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the National Symphony and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Although this composition contains many of the elements that contributed to the success of *blue cathedral*, it remains unclear why *Concerto for Orchestra* is programmed less frequently. This author can only postulate on possible reasons for such an omission. One undeniable obstacle is that the severe technical demands of this work far exceed those of *blue cathedral*. Although this may account for the lack of performances by second tier orchestras, this rationale is hardly applicable to the nation's leading ensembles. Commenting on this specific issue, Higdon states, "I think the primary reason *Blue Cathedral* has so many performances is because it's a smaller work in duration and instrumentation, and that makes it easier to program the work at the

³²⁴Jennifer Higdon, *Concerto for Orchestra*, (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

beginning of the concert (It fits a standard concert format of opener, concerto, but old symphony at the end). Duration is the prime factor. Also, it's not nearly as hard as the *Concerto for Orchestra*, which is very difficult.” (Jennifer Higdon, Pers. Comm., emails 10 May 2006 to 25 November 2006)

Due to the absolute nature and length of the work, it is plausible that symphonic programmers are unsure of audience reaction. The recent decrease in funds for many performing organizations may also be a contributing factor. Often forced to cater to the perceived (although not necessarily accurate) tastes of a classical audience, programmers may consider a modern composition of this size a potential risk for orchestras already in financial peril. Higdon comment on the modern programming, “I can’t tell you how many orchestras are performing the Brahms Symphony No. 4. I see it on a program and I roll my eyes. I don’t deny its genius, but...do we have to do the same thing over and over again?”³²⁵ The composer staunchly believes, “that orchestras that stick to the standard lit(erature) are the ones driving people away from the concert hall....if they choose, they could completely make orchestral music irrelevant by just doing old standards. For young people wanting a concert experience, it is death. I can't tell you how many times I've had people say they're not interested in the evening’s concert because they've heard it before, so they go to some other form of entertainment.” (Jennifer Higdon, Pers. Comm., emails 10 May 2006 to 25 November 2006) Higdon’s music has consistently found favor with listeners and therefore, offers few risks to programmers. Unlike Milton Babbitt, Higdon does “care if you listen” and has made communication with her audience her primary mission.

³²⁵David Patrick Stearns, “Her Career, Her Recognition and Her Hopes are Zooming—Composer (and Grammy Nominee) Jennifer Higdon,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 6 February 2005 (Accessed [24 November 2006]), available from <http://www.andante.com/article/article.cfm?id=25148>; Internet.

As mentioned previously, the immediate success of *Concerto for Orchestra* stems partly from a plethora of American Symphony Orchestra League members attending the premiere. A commercial recording of the work furthered contributed to the popularity of the composition. In 2005, the disc garnered four Grammy nominations in the categories of Classical Contemporary Composition, Best Orchestral Performance and Classical Album and won for best Engineered Album, Classical. The album also features *City Scape*, another multi-movement orchestral work composed immediately following *Concerto for Orchestra*'s premiere. Featuring the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the recording was conducted by the composer's long-time supporter and former instructor Robert Spano.

blue cathedral may have ignited the proverbial flame of the composer's international stardom but *Concerto for Orchestra* reveals that she has undoubtedly arrived and plans to maintain her presence in the contemporary symphonic circuit. With this second large orchestral work, a unique compositional style becomes attributable to Higdon. Such trademarks do not, however, offer a sense of predictability; the composer's subtle use of variation continues the extensive symphonic tradition of the past combined with modern developments. The current author sincerely hopes this *Concerto for Orchestra* will rival provide programming options for those truly interested in promoting new music and will generate a new spark within symphonic tradition.

CHAPTER 5 CITY SCAPE

Immediately following the premiere of *Concerto for Orchestra* in 2002, Higdon commenced with another equally significant orchestral commission by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and long time Higdon supporter, Robert Spano. *City Scape*, a multi-movement composition, resulted from the composer's second large commission from one of the nation's leading ensembles. With an October 1st deadline (only three and a half months following *Concerto for Orchestra's* premiere), the composer did not experience the luxury of time afforded by the Philadelphia Orchestra's earlier commission. Although *City Scape* is shorter in length than the monumental *Concerto*, and contains only three movements, the work continues to be one of her longest ensemble compositions and was premiered on November 14th, 2002 with the commissioning orchestra. For a variety of reasons explored below, the work has not enjoyed the same popularity as her earlier symphonic compositions. The musical material, however, is consistent with the stylistic traits that frequent Higdon's previous works in the orchestral genre.

The Atlanta Symphony had been noticeably silent in its lack of commissions since 1996 and therefore, much anticipation awaited the premiere of a new work by this ensemble. Spano assumed leadership of the ASO in 2000³²⁶ and unquestionably participated considerably in the choice of Higdon for the commission. The composer was bound by several broad stipulations by the ensemble based on their specific programming needs but the initial concept of a "musical portrait of Atlanta"³²⁷ stemmed from Higdon herself. Frank Dans, the artistic adviser of the Atlanta Symphony stated, "We gave her the utmost flexibility, and were delighted when she

³²⁶Mark Gresham, "Sounds like home," 13 November 2002 (Accessed [9 July 2006]), available from <http://atlanta.creativeloafing.com/gyrobase/Content?oid=oid%3A10585>; Internet.

³²⁷Nick Jones, jacket notes, Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape/Concerto for Orchestra*, Cond. Robert Spano, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Telarc 80620.

proposed Atlanta as the subject matter. The fact that she's a former Atlantan never played into the initial discussion."³²⁸ Higdon chose her experiences and memories of the city as the basis of the composition's three movements. Higdon stated, "I have so many memories of Atlanta—playing around Lenox [Square], running around the Woodruff Arts Center as a kid...after Bob [Spano] came to me, I knew I had a lot of inspiration there, in the city itself, and it was a natural fit."³²⁹ Higdon continued in a separate interview, "The reason I decided to do something about Atlanta was that I have such a strong association with that city, having lived there for 10 years when I was growing up. In fact, the Atlanta Symphony was the first orchestra that I ever heard live. It came very naturally."³³⁰

Higdon's family relocated from Brooklyn to Atlanta in 1963, partly because the location would be beneficial to her father's career. Friends of the composers' parents also moved to Atlanta and the relative proximity of grandparents living in Tennessee³³¹ facilitated the decision to transfer the family. Although born in Brooklyn, Higdon's childhood memories stem from Atlanta and the city maintains a special fondness for her.

As stated previously, the idea of a musical depiction of Atlanta initiated with the composer but the terms stipulated that the composition consist of three movements that could be performed together or individually. One movement was to function as a "concert opener," while another movement was to be programmed for youth-oriented concerts as a lesson in musical form.³³²

³²⁸Pierre Ruhe, "Symphony illuminates soul of city," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 10 November 2002, Sec. ARTS, p. 1M.

³²⁹*Ibid.*

³³⁰Andrew Quint, "Speaking with Composer Jennifer Higdon: The Communication Thing," *Fanfare*, May/June 2004, p. 42-45.

³³¹Mark Gresham, "Sounds like home," 13 November 2002 (Accessed [9 July 2006]), available from <http://atlanta.creativeoafing.com/gyrobase/Content?oid=oid%3A10585>; Internet.

³³²*Ibid.*

SkyLine and *Peachtree Street* were composed respectively with these ideals in mind. The composer recalls, “They told me they wanted the first movement to be a piece that would be done on tour and they wanted the last piece for their educational program. The kids were studying form and that last movement is a rondo. They left the middle movement up to me.”³³³

Poetic titles are characteristic in both Higdon’s orchestral and chamber music compositions.³³⁴ The title, *City Scape*, embraces the three individual movements, each of which provides its own descriptive title. “Cityscape” is one word and technically defined as “an artistic representation of a city,”³³⁵ thus making the title appropriate. The composer’s subtitles for the individual movements, however, remain uniquely her own in the experimentation of the English language exhibited in this instance by separating the standard term into two specific words. Higdon states, “I like to change words and spellings to make them my own.”³³⁶ This trend continues in the subtitles as well. The three individual movements are titled *SkyLine*, *river sings a song to trees*³³⁷ and *Peachtree Street*.

As a result of being raised by artistic parents, the composer maintained visual images in her mind throughout the compositional process. She states, “When I was writing this piece, I had concrete images in my head of different aspects of Atlanta. It makes it easy to write, having

³³³Andrew Quint, “Speaking with Composer Jennifer Higdon: The Communication Thing,” *Fanfare*, May/June 2004, p. 42-45.

³³⁴The *Concerto for Orchestra* was distinctive in its eschewing of such devices; the rationale for the lack of poetic titles in the earlier piece has been expounded upon at length in the previous chapter.

³³⁵Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, “cityscape,” [5 January 2007] <http://m-w.com/dictionary/cityscape>.

³³⁶Pierre Ruhe, “Symphony illuminates soul of city,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 10 November 2002, Sec. ARTS, p. 1M.

³³⁷The omission of capital letters in the second movement is reminiscent of the composer’s earlier tone poem *blue cathedral*.

those images there.”³³⁸ As with *blue cathedral*, the images employed by the composer do not necessarily translate musically to the audience, nor were they intended to do so. The work is not explicitly programmatic and similar to the works of Debussy, frequently offers only an “impression” of the environment rather than a precise detailing of specific events or images. Such music leaves an open interpretation to the listener although the “bustle of traffic and the intensity of moving down the street”³³⁹ were consciously included in the score.

The close proximity of the premieres of *Concerto for Orchestra* and *City Scape* exerted considerable pressure on Higdon. Time restraints for the Atlanta Symphony commission were severe and the work was completed in only a few months. Regarding the speed with which she was forced to write, Higdon states, “I’ve never written anything this size in so short a time. I spent all July and August writing six hours a day, every day. You have to be careful because your brain turns to mush after about four hours. Adrenalin and sheer panic are what kept me going. Thankfully, I never hit a creative block.”³⁴⁰

Higdon rarely begins composing a work with the first movement and true to this format *river sings a song to trees*, the second movement, was the first to be penned. As witnessed in the *Concerto for Orchestra* discussion, Higdon starts a composition based on the specific ideas that materialize to her. Indeed, with each of the three orchestral works included in this research, she did not begin the compositional process with the opening section or movement.³⁴¹

³³⁸Mark Gresham, “Sounds like home,” 13 November 2002 (Accessed [9 July 2006]), available from <http://atlanta.creativeloafing.com/gyrobase/Content?oid=oid%3A10585>; Internet.

³³⁹Pierre Ruhe, “Symphony illuminates soul of city,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 10 November 2002, Sec. ARTS, p. 1M.

³⁴⁰Ibid.

³⁴¹The *Piano Concerto* (scheduled to premiere in 2007) was conceived in the same manner and the first movement was finished only after the final two movements were written. -- Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

As one of the primary influences behind this commission, Spano continues to serve a pivotal role in the life, career and exposure of Higdon and her works. *City Scape* was dedicated to him and premiered under his baton on November 14, 2002³⁴² with the commissioning ensemble. The funding originated from the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra's budget but the exact fee remains confidential.³⁴³

City Scape requires an extensive ensemble including a large percussion section that is typical of Higdon's works. The orchestration of the three movements varies slightly but generally maintains the instrumentation of the previous two works. The woodwind section includes the English horn, an instrument that sustains high favor in this composer's oeuvre. It is curious that Higdon, although highly enamored by this instrument, omits the English horn entirely from *Concerto for Orchestra*. Such diverse and unique orchestration is indicative of her intimate knowledge of symphonic writing and attests to her individuality as a composer. The woodwinds in number and timbre, however, more closely resemble *Concerto for Orchestra*, primarily through the use of bass clarinet and contrabassoon, both of which are absent in *blue cathedral*.

The brass sections are identical in the three orchestral works discussed that infer a standardization of Higdon's orchestration likely to appear in future compositions. As expected, the strings are divided into the customary five sections typical of symphonic music. Finally, Higdon utilizes a timpanist and an additional three percussionists in each of the compositions analyzed; however, the inventory of instruments varies. Although this orchestral section has greatly expanded throughout the past century, the instruments Higdon utilizes throughout her

³⁴²The entire work was finished one day before the October 1st 2002 deadline.

³⁴³Mark Gresham, "Sounds like home," 13 November 2002 (Accessed [9 July 2006]), available from <http://atlanta.creativeloafing.com/gyrobase/Content?oid=oid%3A10585>; Internet.

works would not be considered standard. Percussion instruments employed in all three orchestral works include the crotales, marimba (both of which appear only in the second movement of *City Scope*), glockenspiel (occurring only in the final movement of *City Scope*), suspended cymbal, triangle (of various types), tom-tom, tam-tam, vibraphone, bass drum, suspended cymbal and the sizzle cymbal.

An exploration of sounds within the orchestra is a frequent quality in this composer's music. Like its predecessors, *City Scope* incorporates heterodox instrumentation through the inclusion of a water gong in the second movement. The score instructs the percussionist to raise the instrument from the water that causes an elevation of pitch. Several similarities in instrumentation and experimentation with orchestral color exist between *City Scope* and *Concerto for Orchestra* which is not surprising due to the close proximity in which they were composed. Higdon, however, consciously strived to write an individual work in *City Scope* and stated that she "made sure that [*City Scope*] didn't live in the shadow of the concerto. I was watching at every step to make sure the ASO piece was strong on its own, different at every step."³⁴⁴

SkyLine, the composition's opening movement, was written in only five days. Higdon recalls, "The ideas were coming intact and so fast, I put it down in short score—six lines instead of the full 30—and orchestrated it later."³⁴⁵ In the liner notes to the recording (paired with *Concerto for Orchestra*), Higdon provides commentary on each of the three movements. Of *SkyLine*, she says, "Over the past four decades I've watched the skyline change and grow, rising up distinctly into its own identifiable shape, projecting an image of boldness, strength, and

³⁴⁴Pierre Ruhe, "Symphony illuminates soul of city," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 10 November 2002, Sec. ARTS, p. 1M.

³⁴⁵Ibid.

growth. Every city's skyline is a fingerprint that the rest of the world recognizes at a distance; Atlanta has developed a powerful, distinctively metropolitan image, recognizable around the world."³⁴⁶

During the composer's childhood, her father was contracted by Southern Bell to recreate a model of Atlanta's skyline. She states, "Dad did something for Southern Bell—a replica of the skyline out of yards and yards of telephone wire...(It made me) hyperaware of what the downtown skyline looked like."³⁴⁷ Like her father's earlier work, Higdon's artistic venture depicts the skyscrapers of the downtown, Midtown, and Lenox regions.³⁴⁸ Although skyscrapers are of course commonplace in international cities, Higdon comments on the individuality of each city's skyline, "A city's skyline is its fingerprint, in a way, and Atlanta's has grown very bold in the years I've known it. I made the music bold, too."³⁴⁹ This boldness is immediately apparent in the lively tempo and forceful dynamic markings that are present throughout the movement.

SkyLine served one of the prerequisites of the commission through its functionality as an opening concert piece. Higdon imbued this movement with a high amount of energy that provides an abundance of excitement, an ideal manner in which to begin any concert. The spirited tempo is designated with a simple metronome marking of quarter note=142. The

³⁴⁶Nick Jones, jacket notes, Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape/Concerto for Orchestra*, Cond. Robert Spano, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Telarc 80620.

³⁴⁷Mark Gresham, "Sounds like home," 13 November 2002 (Accessed [9 July 2006]), available from <http://atlanta.creativeloafing.com/gyrobase/Content?oid=oid%3A10585>; Internet.

³⁴⁸Nick Jones, jacket notes, Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape/Concerto for Orchestra*, Cond. Robert Spano, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Telarc 80620.

³⁴⁹Pierre Ruhe, "Symphony illuminates soul of city," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 10 November 2002, Sec. ARTS, p. 1M.

opening dynamics are *fortissimo*, and paired with a lively tempo this provides an exuberant and energetic beginning.

The movement opens with the trumpets sounding stationary major chords, while the horns, bassoons and vibraphone play descending fifth intervals. In measure four, additional major chords and fifths appear with the entrance of the remaining woodwinds.

The strings' entrance in measure 8 doubles the woodwinds and brass to continue the emphasis of major chords and perfect fifth intervals. Such doublings are utilized for a fuller sound that is additionally intensified by the continued *fortissimo* markings. With the exception of the percussion, the ensemble performs in homophonic texture that provides a clear statement of the composer's opening musical idea.

Beginning in bar 13, the progression accelerates to increase the already heightened momentum while distinctive stylistic traits continue to appear throughout the passage. The principal flute, second oboe and the two Bb clarinets sound rapidly ascending and descending scalar passages. In addition, the principal oboe, doubled by the English horn, alternates continuously between two pitches. Finally, the bass, doubled by the contrabassoon and tuba, sustains an E pedal tone below the increasingly complex texture. Throughout these measures, the composer masterfully transforms the texture from homophonic to polyphonic yet maintains consistency through the major chords and open fifths persisting in the brass and bassoons. Without question, the composer has stamped her musical signature on the opening of *City Scape*.

Beginning in measure 21, the scalar figures of the woodwinds abruptly cease and the texture is briefly thinned to expose perhaps two of the most crucial lines of the entire composition. The trumpet and piccolo sound a brief yet significant motive consisting of five ascending sixteenth notes in stepwise motion. Perhaps not particularly remarkable in its initial

context, this motive appears throughout all three movements and serves a pivotal role in unifying the composition. An equally crucial motive appears simultaneously in the timpani employing a rhythm of an eighth note followed by sixteenth-note triplets. The motive “infects” the entire movement similar to the “germ” motive in the opening movement of Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony*. The rhythm appears frequently in the second movement as well and although absent from the final movement, serves a prominent function in *SkyLine* and *river sings a song to trees* that may be viewed as a unifying device. The initial content of these two motives is hardly extraordinary but Higdon’s method of reintroducing the material in various guises is quite astonishing. (Figure 5-1)



Figure 5-1. *SkyLine*, mm.19-24.³⁵⁰

The remainder of the woodwinds returns to a homophonic texture with extreme dynamic contrasts occurring within a single measure. The abrupt dynamic changes in measure 21 are uncharacteristic of the composer and therefore warrant mention.³⁵¹

Beneath these dynamic contrasts, the string section thins considerably leaving only the violas and celli presenting major chords. The pairing of these two instruments appeared

³⁵⁰Jennifer Higdon, *City Scope* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

³⁵¹The opening measures of *Concerto for Orchestra*'s fourth movement offer one of the few comparable passages of such dynamic use. It is necessary to state that the chamber music of Higdon differs considerably in the employment of dynamic markings and extremes occur more frequently in these works in comparison to the symphonic compositions.

consistently in *blue cathedral* and *Concerto for Orchestra*, yet in this passage the musical content differs considerably. The harmonic rhythm here does not utilize the sustained chords that produced the serene ambiance of the earlier works; rather the section abounds with syncopations and accents providing a highly rhythmic accompaniment figure.

Beginning in measure 29, the orchestral texture becomes even sparser employing only the piccolo, doubled by the principal clarinet, the principal bassoon and the horns. The initial pitch content of the piccolo and clarinet is identical to the principal oboe and English horn in measure 15. Likewise, the rhythm and the alternation between major seconds are utilized in both sections while the notes gradually vary. In this specific instance, none of the other musical lines reflect the earlier passage and the similarities in pitch are likely coincidental.

Beneath these oscillating pitch figures, string soli commence in measure 31. The violas and celli initially present the solo material in unison and as the theme rises, the celli are replaced by the second violin in the subsequent measure. For this concise passage, Higdon includes only the first desk of the respective sections. (Figure 5-2)

The image shows a musical score for strings, measures 31-33. It consists of four staves: Vln. 1, Vln. 2, Vla., and Vlc. The Vln. 1 and Vln. 2 staves are in treble clef, while the Vla. and Vlc. staves are in bass clef. The music features a rhythmic accompaniment figure with syncopations and accents. The first desk of each section is indicated by 'FIRST DESK' and 'ff' markings. Performance instructions include 'div. con sord.' and 'gli altri con sord.'

Figure 5-2. *SkyLine*, mm. 31-33.³⁵²

³⁵²Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

The two motives previously discussed return frequently throughout this solo passage. At the commencement of these soli, the celli and violas immediately recall the melodic content and opening rhythm of the material initially presented by the trumpet and the piccolo in measure 21. The sixteenth note triplet motive introduced by the timpani also in measure 21 appears frequently from bars 32-40.³⁵³ The repeated notes of the original timpani motive are replaced by a melodic character that ascends and descends in stepwise motion. The figure is extended in measure 39 to two successive sixteenth note triplets and while notated differently than the original motive, the rhythms are undoubtedly related. This expansion of the triplet becomes increasingly significant throughout the duration of the movement. Curiously, this motive appears only in the soli scored for second violins and violas and is absent from the introductory and concluding measures of the soli for cello and viola. (Figure 5-3)

In measure 33, the soloists are briefly replaced by the remainder of their respective sections, notated “*div. con sord. gli altri*,”³⁵⁴ that present various sonorities of major and minor chords in a slow harmonic progression. The soloists reenter in measure 36 with a quotation of the piccolo and trumpet material from measure 21. The recollection is limited to the opening five pitches before returning to the rhythmic motive of the sixteenth note triplets that quickly dominates the passage.

After the string soli cease in measure 40, the woodwinds display open fifths with a more complex dynamic range than customary for this composer. Beginning *fortissimo*, the sound diminishes quickly only to begin the subsequent measure with another *forte* marking. During this section, the temple blocks also exhibit a diverse dynamic range unrelated to the woodwinds

³⁵³The eighth note initially accompanying this motive is varied to a sixteenth note followed by a sixteenth rest.

³⁵⁴The term *gli altri* appears rarely and simply means “the other.”-- Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

that consistently runs the gamut of dynamic possibilities from *pianississimo* to *fortissimo*. Beneath the woodwinds, the bass clarinet and the double bass exhibit a fragmented melodic idea; the latter is notated in treble clef, a scoring that is not altogether rare in Higdon's compositions. Finally, the celli and violas return to an accompanimental role that recalls their previous material from measure 21. Although not nearly as pivotal as the two motives that also appeared in this passage, it is noteworthy that the composer continues to reference this section. The harmonic scheme is somewhat varied from the preceding corresponding measures; the celli sound major chords while the violas present open fifths separate from the celli's chords.



Figure 5-3. *SkyLine*, mm. 37-40.³⁵⁵

In measure 49, the celli and violas cease the pattern previously mentioned to thin the texture and focus the attention on the significant lines of the violins. Beginning with the second violins and immediately imitated by the firsts, the melodic material for this section references the piccolo and trumpet from measure 21. Indeed, the five opening pitches comprise the entire content of the violins' dialogue. This imitative polyphony presents the only reference to the earlier corresponding passage yet the importance of returning to this material can not be

³⁵⁵Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

understated due to its functions as one of the primary unifying devices of the composition.

(Figure 5-4)



Figure 5-4. *SkyLine*, mm. 49-51.³⁵⁶

The double bass line continues with its accented melodic line, but the former partnership with the bass clarinet is subsequently replaced by the second bassoon. Higdon's penchant for alternating patterns between intervals of a major or minor second returns in the homophonic texture of the doubled clarinets and flutes. The second clarinet and flute shift between major and minor seconds. In contrast, the principal clarinet and flute vacillate to the same pitch as the second instrumentalists but begin the pattern a major second higher resulting in brief moments of bitonality.

In measure 54, the violas, *sans celli*, return to the open fifth intervals derived from bar 42. Although slightly varied, the basic content of this line repeats at two-measure intervals.³⁵⁷ True to the composer's tendency to feature percussion instruments, the high and low bongos present a solo featuring the rhythmic motive of triplet sixteenth notes followed by an eighth note. The

³⁵⁶Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

³⁵⁷It is interesting to note that Higdon also repeated the percussion *ostinato* at two measure intervals in the transition between movements four and five in *Concerto for Orchestra*. The author does not deem to authorize such an occurrence as a stylistic trait yet believes the incident warrants mention.

actual melodic material of this passage, however, occurs in the unison woodwinds providing rhythmic vitality through syncopations and accents.

While the violas complete their parallel fifths statement, the cello and double bass present sustained open fifths that function as the harmonic basis of the subsequent section. By measure 62, the tonality has clearly stabilized to b minor. Naturally, these elongated pitches are not the primary musical content and it is unlikely that Higdon consciously utilized the key of b minor since she rarely considers tonalities during the compositional process. She explains, “When I’m doing sketches, I don’t have perfect pitch but something will occur to me and I try to find it on the piano. I never pay attention to the key. People will tell me, ‘Oh, this is in such-and-such key,’ I have to go back and look at the score. I don’t know. At no point at any time when I’m composing, do I ever think, ‘This is in the key of...’ It’s very rare that I plan things out. When it comes to key areas, I never think about that.”³⁵⁸

Above the sustained harmonies, the first violins return to the *ostinato* passage previously sounded by the clarinets and flutes in measure 49 that maintains moments of bitonality. Simultaneously, the woodwinds display an imitative texture derived from the violins in measure 49 that initially originated from the trumpet and piccolo motive in measure 21. Substitutions in orchestration of previous material occur frequently in Higdon’s works. As already discussed at length, such sections often incorporate new material as well, and in measure 63, this is revealed through soli designated for the trombones and the principal trumpet. The former consists primarily of sustained chords that solidify the b minor tonality while the latter is the primary purveyor of melody. The solo trumpet line is largely comprised of second, fourth and fifth intervals that remain characteristic of this composer.

³⁵⁸Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

In measure 70, the complexity of the preceding passage immediately ceases and a drastically thinner orchestral texture remains. The melodic interest is found in the first violins, divided into four sections that employ Higdon's characteristic major chords in root position. In the second violins, a new *ostinato* comprised of shifting e minor and d major chords emerges concurrently in the second violins. The second violins, therefore, exhibit two of Higdon's primary compositional traits: alternating rapidly between two pitches and utilizing chords whose roots are separated by a major second.

The woodwinds reenter in measure 74 with a flourish of ascending sextuplets, the extension of the triplet rhythmic motive from measure 21. Before exploring the musical capabilities of this motive, however, the composer returns to previous material in measure 75 that corresponds to measure 41 with subtle instrumentation changes that varies the material yet does not mask its recognizable qualities. The violins and celli manipulate the chromatic line initially scored for the bassoons in measure 44. What was once a continuous chromatic line now appears fragmented and in imitation. The music does not dwell on the past extensively and the quotation ceases only eight measures later. The triplet sixteenth motive hinted in measure 74 by the woodwinds appears in its proper form in the first violins in measure 82 that is followed by the rising sextuplet figure. This motive becomes increasingly significant and the brief foreshadowing demonstrates Higdon's intentions to feature it abundantly in the subsequent passage.

The aforementioned measures gradually increase in textural complexity but in measure 84, Higdon again severely reduces the instrumental resources to provide a clear presentation of a solo string passage. Accompanied only by a consistent rhythm in the guiro, the principal strings play brief melodies. The opening solo in measure 83, scored for the concertmaster, incorporates

the triplet sixteenth motive. (Figure 5-5) This solo is particularly significant not only because of the use of rhythmic motive but also because the material reappears in measure 147. A returning concertmaster solo also occurred in the third movement of *Concerto for Orchestra*. In the latter, the solo material initially appeared in measure 159 and returned nearly identically at the close of the movement. The incorporation of a reappearing concertmaster solo, however, comprises the only similarity as the musical content of the material is unique in each composition.

The image shows a musical score for five string instruments: Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vlc.), and Contrabasso (Cb.). The score is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of two flats. Each instrument has a solo section marked with 'SOLO' and 'ff' (fortissimo). The Violin 1 solo begins in measure 83 with a triplet of sixteenth notes. The Violin 2 solo begins in measure 85 with a triplet of sixteenth notes. The Viola solo begins in measure 87 with a triplet of sixteenth notes. The Violoncello solo begins in measure 89 with a triplet of sixteenth notes. The Contrabasso solo begins in measure 91 with a triplet of sixteenth notes. The score is arranged in five staves, with the Violin 1 staff at the top and the Contrabasso staff at the bottom.

Figure 5-5. *SkyLine*, mm. 83-87.³⁵⁹

Each of the principal strings presents a brief solo before a transformation to homophonic texture occurs in measure 88. The rhythmic motive plays an ever increasing role of importance throughout these opening string soli. The concertmaster presents the motive only once, but in the second violin solo it appears twice and three times in the viola. Once the solo strings unite in homophonic texture, the shape of their respective lines is continually rising and is subsequently answered by solo woodwinds with a descending line. This miniature interruption by the woodwinds is surprising within a passage dedicated to the strings but confirms the

³⁵⁹Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

composer's skill in straying from predictability. In measure 93, the string solo section ends with another brief solo for the concertmaster thus bringing the passage full circle.

In measure 94, the triplet motive continues in the wood block yet this constitutes only the beginning of a passage that incorporates significant musical content. The material presented by the oboes may simply be interpreted as descending scalar figures which is common in the composer's woodwind writing. Yet, the sextuplet figure functions as an extension of the triplet motive that constitutes a rhythmic dialogue between the oboes and the wood block. The sextuplets conform to the triplet sixteenth note motive in measures 98-99 that provide further evidence to this link.

Several instances have occurred thus far presenting accented and syncopated melodic lines for bass instruments. This pattern reemerges and as is customary of the composer, the instrumentation varies to include the contrabassoon, bass clarinet and tuba.

In many of Higdon's compositions, the violas are entrusted with a critical role in displaying accompanying material, a scoring that persists throughout this section. Beginning in measure 95, the *tutti* violas present chord clusters in a repetitive rhythm. Although rare, chord clusters do appear in Higdon's music and in this instance continue to rise in pitch until measure 100. The atypical clusters in the violas are subsequently followed by the composer's characteristic *ostinato* figure of alternating pitches lasting until measure 104. The violas, however, are not the sole purveyor of accompaniment material. The horns and second bassoon employ a pedal tone on the pitch of D beginning in bar 94 and, although sustained notes are fairly common for this composer, the instrumentation in this instance is a trifle unusual. Finally, in measure 98, the trumpets display various major and minor chords, an instrumentation that is pure Higdon.

In measure 100, the harmonic palette is expanded to include the trombones, principal bassoon and eventually the lower strings. The trombones and bassoons are doubled and sound rising perfect fifth intervals that are unrelated to the harmonies presented by the trumpets. These differing sonorities persist until measure 108 and, due to Higdon's penchant for such harmonies the result is an aural signature of the composer.

The previous wood block presentation of the motive is subsequently transferred to the vibraphone in measure 100. Since the motive has already been clearly stated by the wood block, there is no reason for the composer to continually focus on the triplets which appear only subtly in the vibraphone. As a painter of sound, Higdon's substitution of tone color and the new rhythmic guise exemplify her gift for variation.

The brass is temporarily tacet beginning in measure 108; the major and minor chord progressions often orchestrated for these instruments continue to prevail in the low woodwinds. Simultaneously, Higdon has incorporated a new accompanying figure in the violins. Due to the inclusion of double stops, the texture is more complex than the oscillating figures found previously in the violas yet the basic idea of alternating between minor seconds remains consistent.

In bar 116, the major chord progression returns to Higdon's characteristic scoring in the trumpets that is further complemented by an alternation between two pitches in the second violin (D and C in this instance). The violas, marked *pizzicato* and sounding on the beat, provide a consistent pedal tone on D lasting until measure 132. To prevent a potential redundancy of this straightforward rhythm, the tambourine presents syncopated eighth notes. The key of D major is unmistakable. As mentioned earlier, the composer does not intentionally compose in specific key centers but the consistent use of a D major tonality is evident. The same key appeared was

featured prominently in *blue cathedral*. When asked about the potential significance of this key, she stated, “I noticed D appearing more. The more people like you I talk to, I start realizing when I write, ‘There’s that D again,’ so it could be subconscious.”³⁶⁰

Above the *ostinato* of the violas, a more complex pattern emerges beginning in measure 117. The second clarinet presents an ascending three note motive that is subsequently answered by the flute and piccolo with a descending motive. This dialogue persists throughout the section and becomes further enhanced through various instrumental doublings. Simultaneously, the return of the unifying triplet motive materializes in the flutes. The orchestration has gradually become more elaborate through Higdon’s astute exploration of only a few small motives.

(Figure 5-6)

The music continues to heighten in intensity beginning in measure 123. The celli, previously tacet, double the second violins’ unyielding *ostinato*. At this point, half of the first violin section continues to double the second clarinet motive while the remainder of the section exhibits the three note motive of the first clarinets.

A rare Higdon stylistic trait emerges beginning in measure 127. The composer generally maintains a consistent meter; however, when metrical changes are employed, they occur at every measure to signify vital musical moments.³⁶¹ In this instance, the meter alternates between 4/4 and 2/4 and is paired with a *fortissimo* dynamic marking that utilizes nearly the entire ensemble. This passage is one of the major climactic points of the first movement and the metrical changes enhance the intensity.

³⁶⁰Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, tape recording, Atlanta, Ga., 19 September 2006.

³⁶¹This is especially true in the third movement. The meter consistently changes in each bar between 5/4 and 4/4 to separate the solo instrumental sections from ensemble passages.

The image shows a musical score for the piece 'SkyLine' by Jennifer Higdon, measures 117-122. The score is arranged in two systems. The first system contains parts for Flute 1, Flute 2, Piccolo, Oboe 1, Oboe 2, English Horn, Clarinet 1, and Clarinet 2. The second system contains parts for Violin 1, Violin 2, and Viola. The score includes various dynamics such as *ff*, *f*, *ff sub.*, and *mf*. There are also markings for 'div.' and '1/2 of section'.

Figure 5-6. *SkyLine*, mm. 117-122.³⁶²

Typical of Higdon's orchestral style, new and previous material are combined in measure 127 that results in music that is engaging yet familiar. *Fortissimo* trills in the woodwinds and lower strings comprise the new music. The references to earlier sections appear in the continuing *ostinato* pattern of the second violins transposed a major second higher but maintaining the D major tonality. The purveyor of melody is entrusted to the horns (doubled by the violins) that produce open fifths recalling the opening of the movement. The harmonic motion of the horns is nearly identical in the two sections and the reference is solidified through the instrumentation of the trumpets' consecutive D major chords that also appeared in the beginning measures of the movement.

³⁶² Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

Following this climactic section, the ensemble is instantly reduced in measure 134 to include initially only the vibraphone and first violins. The vibraphone alternates between the pitches of C and D that continues to demonstrate Higdon's penchant for the major second interval. This material may be interpreted as an extension of the second violins' *ostinato* from the previous section. The note values are augmented to eighth notes that decrease the tension and intensity of the music. The first violins are divided into threes to produce a B major chord in syncopation, a pattern that is subsequently transferred to the lower strings. In measure 138, the second violins play E major chords followed by the violas with Db major chords.

The composer has made no secret that she enjoys experimenting with orchestral colors and her curiosity is realized throughout this passage. The first violins' major chords are answered by the clarinets with G major chords. Following the second violins, the answer appears in the horns on a Bb major chord. Finally, the violas' dark timbre is contrasted by the answer in the flutes on a Gb major chord. In these question and answer passages, the harmonic progression is fairly slow to contrast the flurry of activity that occurred previously.

Alterations of the vibraphone's *ostinato* pattern appear in the third trumpet in measure 137. Although the note values are increased, the pitches are identical. The celli augment the rhythm of the *ostinato* in measure 138 and the transposed pitches (G and A) separate the lines of the celli and vibraphone by Higdon's characteristic perfect fifth. In measure 141, the first violins sound a repetitive C in consecutive sixteenth notes and, due to similar pitch content remains related to the *ostinato* of the vibraphone. The dynamics in these measures never exceed *mezzo forte* and thus, offers a clear representation of the "more earthbound, human-scale sections in between"³⁶³ the skyscrapers.

³⁶³Pierre Ruhe, "Symphony illuminates soul of city," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 10 November 2002, Sec. ARTS, p. 1M.

As mentioned previously, the concertmaster's solo in measure 147 corresponds to the earlier solo in measure 83 and subsequently repeats three measures later. In measure 148, the first violin section (*sans* concertmaster) sustains a C major chord. These chords prove to be noteworthy because of the composer's fondness for exhibiting such sonorities in one string section. The second violin solo in measure 149 functions as an echo of the concertmaster and does not otherwise relate musically to measure 83. Noticeably absent are the triplet sixteenth notes that frequented the earlier string soli section. The woodwinds initially present major chords but the third of the chord is eventually omitted to exhibit Higdon's characteristic perfect fifth intervals. Unity between the two passages is achieved through the celli's additional statement of the augmented rhythm as well as the continuous seconds of the vibraphone.

In measure 153, Higdon expands the concept of incorporating earlier material by recalling an entire section. As expected, she alters the orchestration yet the majority of the music corresponds to the passage beginning in measure 54. The initial bongo solo reappears and is paired with timpani and wood block in a highly imitative texture that exhibits a greater prominence of the triplet sixteenth note motive. This polyphonic treatment of the percussion constitutes the primary difference between the two corresponding sections.

The quotation of the previous passage ceases in measure 161 but Higdon immediately incorporates another excerpt from measure 29. The heterodox scoring for the first desks of the strings return paired with a new rhythmic *ostinato* pattern in the guiro and a solo for the principal clarinet. The ascending and descending contour of the clarinet solo as well as the inclusion of the sixteenth note triplet motive are unmistakably connected to the strings and provide a change of color. Measure 173 continues to correspond to the previous section through the accompaniment pattern of the woodwinds and melodic bass that recall bar 41. Similar patterns

also appeared in measure 75 and the material here corresponds more closely to the latter due to the imitative texture of the strings. Although Higdon continues to toy with the order of musical ideas, simplistically speaking, measures 75-82 corresponds to 174-180. Higdon next returns to a separate section quoting measures 49-53 in bars 181-185. Another parallel section follows immediately in measure 186-193 that is closely related to measures 62-69. Thus the entire passage quickly summarizes the primary musical material throughout the composition in whimsical and unpredictable sequences.

After an extensive review of earlier material, the composer presents new music beginning in measure 194. The consistent meter changes throughout this passage signify another climactic point within the movement that is further enhanced through the *fortississimo* dynamic marking. Instruments are doubled to produce an orchestral sound full of grandeur and not since the opening have all of the instrumental forces been utilized simultaneously. True to Higdon's style, previous musical material returns in the passage. The violas and several members of the woodwind section present an ascending scalar figure incorporating the unifying five note motive from measure 21. Curiously, the major and minor chord sonorities return in the trombones and third trumpet (doubled by the two bassoons and bass clarinet). Higdon typically instruments such chords with identical timbres and rarely does a mixture of tone colors appear.

An additional point of interest lies in the perfect fifths of the trumpets, flutes and violins. It is customary for Higdon to score major and minor chords for the trumpets while horns are often entrusted with fifth intervals. In this section, however, the composer is experimenting with her own characteristics through slight adjustments of orchestration. Finally, a rapid alternation between two pitches occurs in the violins doubled by the principal clarinet. Although not an identical quotation to the woodwind material of measure 49, the harmonic implications are

similar through the separation of parts by a major second interval. Temporarily displaying bitonality, these different parts oscillate to the same pitches to sound in unison thus providing a brief release to the harmonic tension. Thus, minute moments of bitonality and unison scoring appear that suggests a kinship to the previous passage.

In measure 212, Higdon thins the texture by omitting the brass and nearly all of the percussion. Instrumental doublings continue as the movement nears its conclusion. The sparse orchestration constitutes the final “earthbound, human-scale section”³⁶⁴ that lead to the final climax in measure 216 through a return of the full ensemble with *fortississimo* dynamic markings. This concluding musical depiction of skyscrapers is unmistakable through the great volume levels and elevated range of the first violins.

The triplet sixteenth note motive, absent in the preceding passages, reappears subtly in this *bravura* coda. The rhythms of Higdon’s customary ascending and descending woodwind figures employ triplets and sextuplets, an extension of the original motive. The inclusion of this unifying device in the final measures not only indicates its significance within *SkyLine* but simultaneously reintroduces the triplets that feature prominently in subsequent movements. (Figure 5-7)

The trombones present repeated pitches in varied rhythms that recall the celli in measure 15 to link the coda to the introductory passage. Finally, the remaining ensemble parts exhibit an abundance of Higdon’s characteristic perfect fifth intervals. Her typical orchestration returns to place the intervals in the horns while simultaneously featuring major chords in the trumpets. Such instrumentation is intrinsically linked with the composer and, like Atlanta’s “fingerprint,” Higdon has stamped her own unique signature on the music.

³⁶⁴Pierre Ruhe, “Symphony illuminates soul of city,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 10 November 2002, Sec. ARTS, p. 1M.

The image shows a page of a musical score for the piece 'SkyLine' by Jennifer Higdon, measures 216-220. The score is arranged in a system of eight staves. From top to bottom, the staves are labeled: Fl. 1, Fl. 2, Picc., Ob. 1, Ob. 2, E. Hn., Cl. 1, and Cl. 2. The woodwind parts (Flutes, Piccolo, Oboes, English Horn, and Clarinets) feature complex, rhythmic patterns with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, often grouped with slurs and accents. The brass parts (Trumpets and Trombones) are mostly silent in this section, indicated by rests. The score is written in 4/4 time and includes dynamic markings such as *ff* (fortissimo) and *f* (forte). Vertical lines are drawn through the score to indicate measure boundaries.

Figure 5-7. *SkyLine*, mm. 216-220.³⁶⁵

In measure 225, Higdon returns to the material from bar 119 and the tonality of D major to conclude the movement. Without question, the woodwinds provide the most concrete link through nearly identical figurations. The chords initially sounded only by the trumpets reappear doubled by the trombones and violins. The inclusion of additional instruments creates an environment of grandeur expected of a movement designated as a concert opener. Although the harmonic pattern and rhythm vary from the earlier corresponding passage, the employment of major and minor chords in similar instrumentation correlates to measure 120.

The composer extends this passage through repetition to generate intensity and anticipation. The movement closes *fortississimo* with the full ensemble sounding a D major chord.

As expected, the second movement contrasts substantially from the exterior movements. *river sings a song to trees* embraces the natural environment of Atlanta and the surrounding areas. Pierre Ruhe of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* describes this movement as “an homage

³⁶⁵Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

to the city's arboreal treasures and to the creek that ran through her family's yard on Ferncliff Road in Buckhead."³⁶⁶ Likewise, Mark Gresham refers to the second movement as a "tone poem, remembrance of the proliferation of green around their Lenox home, (a) beloved creek in the front yard, and woodlands behind a second home on Mason Mill Road."³⁶⁷ In the same interview, the composer states, "I thought of the opening as kind of an homage to nature...but a little bit is almost a call to worship...in the middle movement, nature is such a prominent thing."³⁶⁸

Higdon extends these thoughts in the liner notes of the recording. "*river sings a song to trees* commemorates the Nature that is such a presence in this city. Trees, parks, and streams add a lush carpet to the landscape, infusing the atmosphere with intense and gorgeous greens that connect neighborhoods and businesses. The presence of Peachtree Creek (I used to play in one of the tributaries that ran through my front yard in the Lenox area) reflects moving life and serves as a reminder of the city's having risen from the Earth itself. The creek also symbolizes constant change, under calm water and over powerful currents, doing so with exquisite beauty."³⁶⁹ Higdon's capitalization of nature indicates a great reverence for the environment.

As stated above, the composer was expected to adhere to specific guidelines for the outer movements. The second movement contained no such stipulations allowing complete compositional freedom. Higdon stated, "I had the luxury in the second movement of writing a tone poem, which is why it's so much longer, so much more reflective. There are so many trees

³⁶⁶Pierre Ruhe, "Symphony illuminates soul of city," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 10 November 2002, Sec. ARTS, p. 1M.

³⁶⁷Mark Gresham, "Sounds like home," 13 November 2002 (Accessed [9 July 2006]), available from <http://atlanta.creativeloafing.com/gyrobase/Content?oid=oid%3A10585>; Internet.

³⁶⁸Ibid.

³⁶⁹Nick Jones, jacket notes, Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape/Concerto for Orchestra*, Cond. Robert Spano, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Telarc 80620.

in Atlanta, and a lot of little creeks, which you don't usually encounter in a city. When you're flying into Atlanta, it looks like a giant, lush, green carpet with a city poking out of it."³⁷⁰

The orchestration of this movement conforms to Higdon's earlier orchestral scores complete with a full percussion section. The water gong, a fairly heterodox instrument, is utilized in the opening and concluding measures, an inclusion credited to her former teacher, George Crumb.³⁷¹ The instrument is found in Crumb's *Mundis Canis* (A Dog's Life), a work in five movements depicting personalities of dogs he once owned. Crumb describes the dog, Heidel, as having a "philosophical disposition and confounding depths of personality."³⁷² It is this movement that utilizes in Crumb's words, "the water-gong *glissando* effect."³⁷³

Higdon explained the employment of percussive instruments in the movement's opening, "I have a water gong—a gong that's submerged in water that they're doing a roll on and lift out of a tub of water...It makes this bizarre, rising sound. Also, the timpani player has certain crotales sitting on the head of the timpani. He strikes the crotale with a hard mallet—not the timpani, but the crotale—and then moves the pedal so that ...it's a weird sound. You've got a very high-pitched crystal sound (from) the crotale and the waveform is altered by the timpani head being retuned. Detuned and retuned over and over again. At one point, I have a sizzle cymbal, which is basically a cymbal with little rivets in it, little screws that vibrate when you

³⁷⁰Andrew Farach-Colton, "Jennifer Higdon's Concerto Keeps Orchestras on Their Toes and Audiences on Their Feet," March 2004 (Accessed [16 December 2006]), <<http://music.barnesandnoble.com/features/interview.asp?z=y&NID=782926>>

³⁷¹Andrew Quint, "Speaking with Composer Jennifer Higdon: The Communication Thing," *Fanfare*, May/June 2004, p. 42-45.

³⁷²George Crumb, jacket notes, George Crumb, *70th Birthday Album*, Cond. Thomas Conlin, The Warsaw Philharmonic and Choir, Bridge Records 9095.

³⁷³Ibid.

touch it. The combination of the three sounds...sets up the magic of that movement.”³⁷⁴

Although Higdon jokingly remarks that she “stole” the water gong instrumentation from Crumb,³⁷⁵ there can be no mistaking her unique use of percussion that is prevalent among her compositions.

The high-paced intensity of *SkyLine* is contrasted through the second movement’s tempo (quarter note=60) and dynamic range which rarely rises above *mezzo forte*. The timpani maintain the D major harmony of the previous movement and continue to explore Higdon’s characteristic open fifth intervals. Rhythmically, this instrument consistently presents triplets spanning an entire beat to subtly return the motive of the first movement, and demonstrates the composer’s subtle unification. (Figure 5-8)

The second movement begins mysteriously with the percussion and the atmosphere continues in measure 8 upon the entrance of the strings. While Higdon has clearly demonstrated an experimental nature in the orchestration of percussion, the strings rarely exhibit less conventional techniques. Yet the *sul tasto* marking in their entrance is a somewhat unusual scoring for this composer. The muted trills in the viola, cello and second violin contribute to the ethereal environment initiated by the percussion.

The composer’s stylistic soli for a myriad of instruments abounds throughout the movement. The principal flute provides the initial appearance of solo material in measure 16 and unassumingly presents a crucial aspect of the composition. While melodically displaying the composer’s fondness for perfect fifths, the rhythm is comprised of a triplet followed by a sextuplet. Similar to the timpani’s opening, the triplet occupies an entire beat rather than the

³⁷⁴Andrew Quint, “Speaking with Composer Jennifer Higdon: The Communication Thing,” *Fanfare*, May/June 2004, p. 42-45.

³⁷⁵Ibid.

eighth note triplets that dominated the first movement. Although slightly varied, these rhythms function as a unifying element of *City Scope*.

The score for Percussion 1, 2, and 3, and Timpani includes the following performance instructions:

- Timpani:** Crotals are placed (upside down) on the membrane of the timpani (near the center). Immediately after striking the crotale (with a hard crotale beater), timpanist executes the glissando figure on the timpani pedal, thereby bending pitch of crotale. Note: Pedal mechanism must function noiselessly. Crotale (on timp. membrane) [plastic material].
- Percussion 1:** Vibes (bowed bass bow). Dynamics: *p*, *mf*, *p*, *mf*, *p*, *mf*.
- Percussion 2:** High Triangle (tri. beater), Lo Tri. Dynamics: *mp*, *mf*, *mp*, *mf*, *mp*. Includes Crotales (tri. beater) and Tri. Dynamics: *mf*, *mp*.
- Percussion 3:** Water Gong (tut), Sizzle Cym., WG. (lower). Dynamics: *p*, *mf*, *p*, *mf*, *mp*.

*RAISE GONG OUT OF WATER TO RAISE PITCH

Figure 5-8. *river sings a song to trees*, mm. 1-6.³⁷⁶

The score for Flute 1, English Horn, and Clarinet 1 includes the following performance instructions:

- Fl. 1:** SOLO. Dynamics: *mp*, *f*, *pmp*, *f*, *f*.
- E. Hn.:** SOLO. Dynamics: *p*, *mf*, *sf*.
- Cl. 1:** SOLO. Dynamics: *mp*, *mf*, *mp*.

Figure 5-9. *river sings a song to trees*, measures 16-21.³⁷⁷

Subsequent woodwind soli are scored for the English horn and principal clarinet. Like the flute, the ranges are narrow, constituting only a fifth. (Figure 5-9) The soli consist of rising melodic lines that continue until bar 32 that consequently descend as if to answer their own questions. The first two desks of the first violins also contribute solo material comprised of major chords in a slow harmonic progression. (Figure 5-10) Following the decay of the violins'

³⁷⁶Jennifer Higdon, *City Scope* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

³⁷⁷Ibid.

soli, the bassoons enter in measure 22 displaying an eighth note-triplet that recalls the motive of the preceding movement.

Figure 5-10. *river sings a song to trees*, mm. 15-21.³⁷⁸

Following the cessation of woodwind soli, a metrical change to 2/4 occurs in bar 35 before immediately returning to 4/4 in the subsequent measure. As stated previously, meter changes in the works of Higdon typically designate significant musical passages that often feature extended soli. Although brief, this occurrence is noteworthy and may be interpreted as a foreshadowing of the solo viola and cello that appear in measure 40. First, however, a transition begins in measure 36 scored solely for the strings with increased dynamics and a faster harmonic progression. The first violins are joined by the remainder of their section and continue the major chords of the previous passage. A subtle *accelerando* is notated in the transition that increases the quarter note to 66. The woodwinds reenter in measure 38 with the flute and oboe presenting an ascending line answered by the principal clarinet and bassoon displaying the unifying triplet eighth note motive. The solo for viola and cello follows and continues to explore the sextuplets and triplet

³⁷⁸Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

sixteenth note rhythms. (Figure 5-11) Below this montage of activity, the lower strings continue the trill figures from the earlier section.

Figure 5-11. *river sings a song to trees*, mm. 40-41.³⁷⁹

An additional *accelerando* appears in measure 50 that increases the quarter note to 72. Thus begins a section that incorporates a plethora of new material. Repeated patterns occur rapidly in the clarinets in a sextuplet rhythm while the second bassoon alternates between major second intervals. The three trombones, scored a major second apart, initiate a dialogue with the horns' consonant fifth intervals. In measure 50, the previous string soli cease and the section is reduced to the viola and celli in unison. The lines of these lower strings are characterized by double dotted rhythms. The principal trumpet eventually participates in the double dotted rhythms resulting in a mixture of bright and dark timbres. The violins reenter in measure 57 with similar rhythms to initiate an increasingly complex texture.

A *ritardando* occurs in measure 63 followed immediately by an extended *accelerando* that increases the tempo substantially in measure 68 (quarter note=92). The dotted rhythms gravitate to the trombones while the previous polyphonic texture of the strings, flutes, oboes and trumpets

³⁷⁹Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

converges to homophonic texture. The triplet sixteenth note and sextuplet motives return in the horns. Marked *fortissimo*, the motive displays unyielding repeated notes. (Figure 5-12)

The harmonic rhythm gradually increases as the passage progresses to a moment of great climax. Throughout this section, metrical changes appear frequently. Until measure 104, the meter is in constant flux and the unifying triplet sixteenth motive from the preceding movement is featured consistently.



Figure 5-12. *river sings a song to trees*, mm. 64-66.³⁸⁰

The musical climax lasts briefly and in measure 76, a *ritardando* returns the tempo to quarter note=72. The dynamics decrease to further diminish the intensity of the preceding passage. In bar 78, the trumpets display Higdon's characteristic major chords while the trombones sound minor chords a third lower. This muted brass entrance commences a dialogue with the strings that persists until the stabilization of the meter in measure 104. To avoid predictability, a principal clarinet solo is incorporated above this dialogue in measure 84. The solo, albeit brief, recalls the woodwinds' opening of the movement through its rhythm and narrow range. The scoring for the violins remains typical of Higdon. The principal second and the first desk of first violinists are included and following the initial statement, only the principals continue. Worthy of note, the opening violin lines in measure 81 are separated by a

³⁸⁰Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

perfect fourth. (Figure 5-13) Throughout this passage, the composer continues to greatly utilize this interval and its inversion; the latter also appears extensively in the vibraphone.



Figure 5-13. *river sings a song to trees*, mm. 81-82.³⁸¹

Between the dialogue of strings and brass, a solo section emerges for the woodwinds in measure 88. The principal bassoon, clarinet and oboe present a homophonic texture separated by perfect fourths that is harmonically similar to the strings. The frequent appearances of the fourth and fifth intervals rarely culminate in the quartal harmonies found in this passage yet such occurrences attests to Higdon's continuous variation.

The principal clarinet and English horn present new and independent solo material in measure 92. The fifth interval comprises the primary melodic content that recalls the opening of the movement. Of particular interest is the triplet sixteenth-note motive introduced by the clarinet. The woodwind instrumentation increases in the following measures to maintain their earlier homophonic texture. Simultaneously, in the strings, Higdon returns to the solo scoring of the concertmaster, assistant concertmaster and principal second violinist that continues the distinctive quartal harmony. In measure 99, the solo clarinet and English horn resume their soli and the sixteenth triplet motive now gravitates to the English horn. Following the cessation of these woodwind soli, the meter stabilizes and the unifying motive once again becomes dormant.

³⁸¹Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

The return of a consistent meter does not conclude a musical section and in fact, a continuation of earlier musical ideas persists. The strings retain their reduced scoring of violins and celli consisting primarily of fourths and fifths while the woodwinds return to the instrumentation and quartal harmony of measure 88. In measure 107, as in the previous section, soli for the concertmaster and principal second violinist commence. Initially, this material does not exude great importance; the instruments are separated at the octave and simply present two descending intervals. In measure 115, however, the concertmaster continues alone with an extensive solo featuring triplet sixteenth notes and a sextuplet that foreshadows the widespread employment of these significant rhythmic motives in the subsequent measures. (Figure 5-14)



Figure 5-14. *river sings a song to trees*, mm. 115-124.³⁸²

The accompaniment to this solo represents quintessential Higdon in the employment of perfect fifth intervals. The cello and viola lines present these intervals in homophonic texture while a similar scoring occurs in the woodwinds between the second flute, oboe and the two clarinets. The harmonic spectrum becomes further complicated in the principal oboe and flute scored a fourth above the clarinets and a major second from the second flute and oboe.

Once the concertmaster has reintroduced the unifying rhythmic motives, the figures are transferred to the remainder of ensemble. Although the motive appears occasionally in the woodwinds, the strings feature the rhythm most prominently with the triplets occurring in nearly

³⁸²Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

every measure. The melodic content of this crucial motive ascends by step to contrast the repeated notes of the earlier concertmaster solo.

In measure 134, the motive expands to include the sextuplet rhythm. Previous passages that combined these two rhythms often featured the triplet followed by the sextuplet. These measures, however, do not conform to the prototype and the figures appear abundantly in no systematic order. (Figure 5-15) In measure 140, a dialogue commences between the strings and woodwinds comprised of the unifying motives. The discourse ceases immediately in measure 146 and woodwind declamations of the motive are separated by ascending scalar figures, another frequent characteristic of Higdon. The low brass exhibit a separate homophonic melody that recalls the orchestration of the woodwinds in measure 105. The second trombone is scored a perfect fifth higher than the bass trombone and tuba while the principal trombone appears a fifth higher than the second trombone.

The image shows a musical score for measures 133-138, featuring four staves: Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vlc.). The score is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The music is characterized by complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sextuplets, and dynamic markings such as 'cresc.' and 'dim.'. The notation includes various articulations like slurs and accents, and the measures are numbered at the bottom of each staff.

Figure 5-15. *river sings a song to trees*, mm. 133-138.³⁸³

The entire ensemble returns in measure 154 for a climactic presentation of the rhythmic motive. The woodwinds, in a *forte* dynamic and homophonic texture, repeatedly display the triplet motive. The previously featured sextuplet rhythm is noticeably absent which recalls the opening of this passage. The horns exhibit the ever present stationary perfect fifth intervals. The

³⁸³Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

timpani also display a well-known characteristic of the composer by alternating between two pitches. Often such passages are scored for woodwinds or strings shifting between intervals of a second but Higdon varies her style and the interval of choice for the timpani is a minor third.

The dynamics diminish to *niente* to separate a starkly contrasting section commencing in measure 158. Although the ensemble is greatly reduced, each of the musical lines represents a significant aspect of Higdon's style. An *ostinato* pattern appears in the marimba and the harp, an unusual instrumental pairing also utilized in *Concerto for Orchestra* (measure 134 of the final movement). Because *City Scape* was composed immediately following *Concerto for Orchestra*, several critics have commented on the similarities between the two scores; the likeness in orchestration of this passage may initially appear to support such observations. Further commentary on this matter is explored in Chapter Six.

Although a harp and marimba *ostinato* appears in *City Scape* and *Concerto for Orchestra*, the musical content differs considerably. (Figure 5-16) The marimba line is comprised of a single pitch in a variety of rhythms that undergoes augmentation before complete exclusion in measure 170. The viola shares the musical idea of repeated notes. To counteract the augmentation of the marimba, the viola line presents the pitches slowly before increasing in tempo. (Figure 5-17) The harp line presents a unifying link between the first and second movements. Four ascending major seconds consecutively alternate throughout the entire section that is remarkably similar to the trumpet and piccolo entrance in measure 21 of the first movement. The ascending figures are doubled by the second flute and clarinet that further emphasize the motive.



Figure 5-16. *river sings a song to trees*, mm. 158-163.³⁸⁴

Simultaneously, the second violins, divided into three, present major and minor sonorities. In Higdon's earlier compositions, such scoring was often found in the violas' sustained accompaniments. In this instance, the chords portray a melodic line and progress quite rapidly. As noted earlier, the composer occasionally duplicates musical material in two-measure intervals. The string pattern conforms to this manner of repetition with modal variation. In addition, individual soli are scored for the bassoon and piccolo in bar 166, the latter exhibiting the unifying triplet motive. Although slightly varied, the music also repeats after two measures and ceases immediately afterwards.



Figure 5-17. *river sings a song to trees*, mm. 166-169.³⁸⁵

In measure 170, the harp *ostinato* is slightly modified yet the sixteenth notes persist relentlessly. The woodwind doubling returns more prominently in varied instrumentation. The violas display a separate *ostinato* consisting of a repetitive descending pattern to contrast the

³⁸⁴Jennifer Higdon, *City Scope* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

³⁸⁵*Ibid.*

rising harp line. Higdon's penchant for major and minor seconds continues to be revealed in the violas (Db, B, Bb and B).

The melodic content is presented by the trumpet solo that repeats the material two measures later with rhythmic alterations. A cello solo occurs simultaneously featuring the triplet motive and accompanying sextuplet. The pairing of the trumpet and cello soli aptly demonstrates Higdon's experimentation with orchestral colors.

Following a brief *ritardando*, a new section of music commences in measure 179 that increases the quarter note to 92 and is marked *A Piacere*. Instances of *rubato* are unusual in Higdon's works and *ritardandi* or *accelerandi* appear only to facilitate tempo changes. Yet, due to the romantic atmosphere of the second movement's homage to nature, the marking *A Piacere* is quite appropriate. As stated above, meter changes often distinguish significant musical sections. In this passage, such changes occur in nearly every measure that foreshadows momentous subsequent solo material.

The woodwinds maintain a homophonic texture with an abundance of two-note slurs. The principal bassoon and second clarinet are separated by the fifth that so frequently occurs in Higdon's music. The flutes and oboe adhere to this intervallic separation less consistently but its appearance is more than fleeting and worthy of mention. The sextuplet rhythmic motive briefly emerges in measure 183 in the oboe (Figure 5-18), 189 in the clarinet and 197 in the bassoon at which point the rhythm is varied to quintuplets and septuplets. These sextuplets in the woodwinds present a curious harmonic pattern in the repeated pitches of B, D and G respectively that comprise a G major chord. As witnessed earlier, the composer does not consciously compose in tonalities but the succession of these notes cannot simply be coincidental. In

addition, these motives undoubtedly recall the opening flute solo in measure 18 that initially presented these rhythms on a repeated note.



Figure 5-18. *river sings a song to trees*, mm. 183-184.³⁸⁶

As hinted by the consistent metrical changes, a prominent solo section commences in measure 198. The principal strings, doubled by woodwinds, present a homophonic texture that continually rises in pitch to increase the intensity. For further enhancement, a *crescendo* culminating in *fortissimo* dynamics is employed that concludes the solo portion. The meter achieves stability much earlier in measure 203, however, that suggests the solo passage will conclude shortly thereafter.

Beginning in measure 211, the horns re-enter to present their characteristic fifth intervals that are eventually doubled by the bassoons and clarinets. These instruments are entrusted with the critical rhythmic motives. (Figure 5-19) The order of the motives is varied and the sextuplet rhythm appears twice before the triplet emerges, yet the triplet is featured consistently until measure 239.

The strings continue their homophonic texture as the ensemble enlarges to include the low brass and timpani. Of particular interest is the principal trumpet material in measure 213. Each individual phrase begins with a descending fourth (subsequently varied to a fifth) that constitutes a clear trademark of the composer. This descending interval was also utilized in measures 63

³⁸⁶ Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

and 187 of the opening movement's trumpet solo. In both movements, the rhythms are an eighth note followed by a sustained note. This author does not presume that such a minute detail was consciously included by the composer nor is there any real likelihood that she purposely composed these sections to serve as a unifying link. Yet this "coincidence" speaks to the instinctual compositional style of Higdon.



Figure 5-19. *river sings a song to trees*, mm. 220-227.³⁸⁷

Following an additional *accelerando* in measure 222, the tempo increases to quarter note=102, the fastest tempo marking in the movement. The surge in speed coupled with a *fortissimo* dynamic marking undoubtedly represents the most climactic section of *river sings a song to trees*. An *ostinato* of repeated notes is scored for marimba and bass that continues until measure 243. These unyielding sixteenth notes provide a consistent rhythmic drive that further enhances the intensity. The floor tom supplies additional rhythmic support through consistent sixteenth notes interrupted by the ever noteworthy sextuplet motive.

Significant musical material occurs simultaneously in the remainder of the ensemble. The woodwinds and violins project the major and minor chords characteristic of Higdon's style while the trumpets and trombones imitate polyphonically the descending perfect fourth interval initially present in the principal trumpet in measure 213. The intervals appear in rapid

³⁸⁷Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

succession to provide a textural contrast to the homophonic woodwinds and strings. A particularly poignant moment appears in the part of the second trumpet. In measure 224, an ascending perfect fifth interval (E-B) appears four times in the rhythm of a sixteenth note followed by a dotted eighth note. Although hardly an exact quotation, the similar pitch content and Lombardic rhythm recalls the earlier trumpet solo in measure 213.

The unison viola and cello scoring in bar 228 is comprised of a rapid alternation between two pitches. In place of the major and minor second intervals often used in her accompaniments, the composer chose the less often used minor third interval. Although not nearly as prevalent, the third appeared in measures 49 and 181 of the opening movement in similar patterns. The two pitches gradually expand to include ascending scalar figures and the triplet sixteenth note motive. Higdon vaguely references the first movement through the melodic content of the motive. In measures 120 and 225 of the opening movement, the sixteenth notes consisted of the ascending pitches B, C and D. In the second movement, the triplet features the same pitches in varying order. This minimal reference most likely results from Higdon's intuitive process rather than a conscious decision by the composer.

The woodwinds and strings become independent in measure 243 and, once again, Higdon experiments with orchestral colors. A subtle change of orchestration presents string doubling by the brass. The omission of the *ostinato* pattern in the percussion and bass also contribute to a new aural environment. The horns (doubled by the bassoons) return to their standard open fifths that incorporate brief appearances of the triplet rhythm. The sextuplet partner appears in the woodwinds while both rhythms are featured in the timpani.

In connection with the first movement, the consistent pulse of the second trombone in measure 255 is particularly noteworthy. In measure 120 of *SkyLine*, the beat is emphasized by

the bass clarinet's rhythm: a dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth rest. This precise rhythm reappears in the second movement in the trombones and although the pitches are not identical, both sections present repeated notes that provide a potentially subconscious, yet extremely subtle, unifying link between the two movements.

The coda is prefaced by a *molto ritardando* that decreases the tempo to the initial marking of quarter note=60. The return of large musical sections, a trend common in Higdon's works, has been noticeably absent in *river sings a song to trees*, but the composer reintroduces this technique extensively in the conclusion. In measure 263, the principal flute reiterates the opening solo from measure 16 with emphasis on the triplet rhythm in measure 270. The English horn and principal clarinet vary their respective opening soli while the accompanying muted trills of the violins and violas correspond to measures 8-24. Unlike the entire ensemble, the solo violins do not reference the opening but rather the quartal harmony of measure 81. Measure 273 corresponds to measure 159 in the identical scoring of a harp and marimba *ostinato*. The marimba, independent in the previous passage, doubles the harp through augmented rhythms. The ascending motives continue to comprise the patterns in the harp but the coda utilizes figurations separated by a perfect fifth rather than the major second of the earlier section. Therefore, when the patterns alternate in the coda, the result is an extended ascending scale figure. The mystical beginning is referenced through the reappearance of the water gong presenting descending and ascending pitches and thus the movement closes in the manner in which it began. As witnessed in the *Concerto for Orchestra*, Higdon often includes a variety of previous musical material in her codas. Frequently, these passages reference the opening measures as well as other significant sections to bring the music full circle while simultaneously serving as a final summation of the movement.

The formal design of *Peachtree Street*, a rondo, was stipulated by the commissioning ensemble which, according to Higdon, actually facilitated the compositional process. “They asked for the last movement to be a rondo, so I knew all I needed to do was find material to fill in the blanks.”³⁸⁸ The “blanks” feature individual sections of the orchestra separated by the rondo theme. Since the premiere, *Peachtree Street* has been programmed on children’s concerts as an example of rondo form³⁸⁹ and explores various orchestral instruments in a manner comparably taken by Benjamin Britten in his *Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra*.

The title of the movement derives from the primary thoroughfare in Atlanta. Higdon describes the music from the perspective of a native Atlantan in the liner notes, “The final movement is ‘Peachtree Street,’ in honor of this primary artery that runs through the city. With its narrow lanes and winding character, this street is so full of life and energy, forever changing and growing, moving slowly and moving fast, that it serves as a reflection on us. Every turn brings something new and different, and carries us to places and people that have meaning in our lives.”³⁹⁰ The music adheres strictly to this program with the “new and different” portrayed in the episodes while the “life and energy” is the rondo theme.

The instrumentation of *Peachtree Street* is less extensive than the preceding movements primarily in the woodwind and percussion sections. Although the reduction of percussion instruments in this movement is atypical, the variation continues to exhibit Higdon’s capacity for contrast within her orchestral scores.

³⁸⁸Pierre Ruhe, “Symphony illuminates soul of city,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 10 November 2002, Sec. ARTS, p. 1M.

³⁸⁹Nick Jones, jacket notes, Jennifer Higdon, *City Scope/Concerto for Orchestra*, Cond. Robert Spano, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Telarc 80620.

³⁹⁰*Ibid.*

Extensive solo passages for individual sections appear in *Concerto for Orchestra* and *City Scape*. Significant soli are a prevalent aspect of Higdon's style, but those unfamiliar with her works, have mistakenly dismissed *City Scape* as a miniature duplicate of *Concerto for Orchestra*. On the contrary, the manner in which Higdon employs this technique varies considerably to serve as a testament to her creativity that again, is further investigated in Chapter Six.

Higdon continues to eschew descriptive terms in favor of metronome markings with the tempo of the finale designated as quarter note=142-152. The movement commences with a juxtaposition of two major chords resulting in the bitonality that frequently occurs within her compositions.

A brief, one-measure introduction by the trombones and percussion presents unyielding sixteenth notes that *crescendo* rapidly to the rondo theme. As mentioned previously, this theme is comprised of a juxtaposition of two separate major tonalities that remain a harmonic characteristic of the rondo theme throughout subsequent presentations. The higher instruments appear in D major while the viola, celli, horns and bassoons simultaneously begin in C major. The *fortissimo* rondo theme abounds with syncopation and contains a plethora of rests, yet intensity is maintained through interjections of sixteenth notes on repeated pitches by the trumpets.

In measure 8, the flutes cease doubling the violins to become independent rhythmically and melodically. The flutes are accented and explore a high range while alternating between the pitches of C and A. Although such patterns occur frequently in Higdon's works, in this instance the chosen interval is a minor third rather than a second and the rhythm is considerably slower in comparison to the rapid oscillation commonly employed.

In measure 16, the sixteenth notes scored for the trumpets gravitate to the horns and violas with a varied rhythm comprised of eighth note triplets. The repeated notes are replaced by three recurring pitches (G, A and B) that emphasize Higdon's favored major second interval. These triplets bear no relation to the unifying motives that frequented the previous two movements and are simply a variation of the original trumpet declaration. This adjustment in instrumentation is fleeting and in measure 20, the trumpets resume their opening material.

Although the general mood of excitement prevails, a slightly subdued portion of the rondo theme begins in measure 20. The dynamic marking diminishes somewhat and the articulation of two-note slurs comprised of descending pitches offers a lyricism that contrasts the opening's syncopated rhythmic intensity. (Figure 5-20) Curiously, only half of the second violin section is employed but in subsequent presentations, Higdon scores the entire section to enrich the orchestration.



Figure 5-20. *Peachtree Street*, mm. 20-24.³⁹¹

The opening syncopated material returns in measure 26 that serves as a brief reminder of the primary melodic content of the rondo theme. In comparison to Higdon's other orchestral compositions, the scoring in the brass at this point is unusual. The composer frequently entrusts

³⁹¹Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

major chord progressions to the trumpets yet because this movement utilizes only two trumpets, such scoring is impossible. Higdon maintains the major sonorities but for practical reasons, the instrumentation is comprised of two trumpets and the principal trombone. These chords consist of two-note slurs in a descending line that recalls the slightly more expressive, earlier passage. The lyrical quality and rhythmic intensity of the rondo theme, therefore, are masterfully combined to conclude the first large section of the movement.

Metrical changes in Higdon's work signify prominent musical sections. While the rondo theme consistently appears in 4/4, the meter alternates between 4/4 and 5/4 in episodic passages. Beginning in measure 30, the first episode explores the string section through a polyphonic texture comprised of tremendously significant material. The cello introduces a subject-like statement that opens with five ascending pitches clearly referencing the piccolo and third trumpet motive in measure 21 of *SkyLine*. Returning unabashedly, this motive comprises nearly the entire melodic content of the first episode and continues to unify the three separate movements.

In measure 30, the cello presents the motive twice consecutively. The "subject" is retained briefly before the second violins introduce the material in measure 32. The violas commence two measures later omitting the subject in favor of a shifting pattern between two pitches. (Figure 5-21) Only in measure 36 do the violas explore the possibilities of the subject through an unrelenting repetition of the motive.

As noted earlier, Higdon repeats patterns frequently in two-measure intervals. In this first episode, the individual entrances adhere to this formula and because the meter alternates consistently, each begins in a 4/4 measure. Following the violas, the first violins commence in measure 36 to display the motive twice before evolving into a brief melodic passage. The accompanying material of the lower instruments comprises various manipulations of the motive.

Between measures 38-42, the violas and celli briefly lose their independence and present unison material, an orchestration consistently employed by the composer. In measure 40, a change to homophonic texture offers a short-lived moment of relaxation to contrast the previous polyphonic splendor.

The image shows a musical score for five string parts: Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The score covers measures 30 through 34. The time signature is 3/4. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score shows a unison passage for the violas and cellos in measures 30-31, followed by a crescendo leading to fortissimo dynamics in measures 32-34. The violins and viola continue the homophonic texture.

Figure 5-21. *Peachtree Street*, mm. 30-34.³⁹²

The basses enter in the final bars of the episode and the motive, presented previously in each of the strings, is curiously absent. The violins and viola continue the homophonic texture, while the cello and basses, separated by a fifth, present a different ascending line. A *crescendo* culminating in a *fortissimo* dynamic leads to the return of the rondo theme in measure 45.

The full ensemble returns with the primary thematic content and slight variations accompany this considerably truncated presentation. In the opening, the rondo theme extends 29 bars while in this subsequent passage, the material lasts only 12 measures. The sixteenth notes previously featured solely by the trumpets are shared by the principal horn to maintain the rhythmic drive characteristic of the theme. The flutes return to the alternating C and A syncopation of measure 8 to avoid direct quotation from the opening. These subtle changes fail

³⁹²Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

to detract from the distinctive qualities of the rondo section and the arrival of the material is aurally unmistakable. The final measures of the theme are nearly an exact repetition of the bars preceding the string solo and appropriately lead to the second episode.

The woodwind section is featured beginning in measure 57. Similar to the string episode, an extensive polyphonic texture is maintained throughout the episode to contrast the homophonic rondo theme. The initial soli are presented by the principal bassoon and clarinet in unison while the principal flute and second bassoon provide accompaniment material. The flute exhibits a repetition of consecutive sixteenth notes separated by a minor second interval. The second bassoon presents a countermelody to the solo material of the clarinet and principal bassoon which repeats four measures later in measure 61, a somewhat unusual occurrence since Higdon generally opts for two measure repeating patterns. (Figure 5-22)

In measure 61, the initial clarinet and bassoon solo is imitated precisely by the flute and therefore, provides a likely rationale for the repetition of the second bassoon countermelody. Additional accompanying material, however, varies considerably. The principal bassoon presents a repeated pitch that replaces the alternating flute line while the clarinets, in thirds, exhibit ascending two note slurs. The rhythm and articulation of the latter resemble the rondo theme in measure 20 and anticipate the lyrical oboe solo that follows in measure 65. The oboe does not participate in imitating the previous soli and displays an expressive line with slower moving note values that gradually evolve to the consistent sixteenth note rhythms characteristic of the episodic soli. The accompaniment beneath the oboe solo presents another Higdon harmonic trait; trills for the upper woodwinds separated by intervals of a major second and perfect fourth. The second episode concludes with the unyielding sixteenth notes typical of her woodwind orchestration.

The image shows a page of a musical score for measures 57-61 of the piece 'Peachtree Street'. The score is arranged in a system with eight staves. From top to bottom, the staves are: Flute 1 (Fl. 1), Flute 2 (Fl. 2), Oboe 1 (Ob. 1), Oboe 2 (Ob. 2), Clarinet 1 (Cl. 1), Clarinet 2 (Cl. 2), Bassoon 1 (Bsn. 1), and Bassoon 2 (Bsn. 2). The music is in 3/4 time. Flute 2 has a forte (f) dynamic marking. Clarinet 1 and Bassoon 1 have 'SOLI' markings above them, indicating solo passages. Clarinet 2 has a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic marking. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and slurs.

Figure 5-22. *Peachtree Street*, mm. 57-61.³⁹³

As expected, the rondo theme returns in measure 73. Rather than quoting the syncopated opening, Higdon introduces the material from measure 20 that utilized only half of the second violin section. In this encounter, however, the orchestration and texture is greatly enriched through the scoring of both violin sections with double stops. In measure 79, the more distinctive aspects of the rondo theme return but her quest for variety continues in the brass. The trumpets and principal trombone present ascending major chords in a homophonic texture that repeats after only six beats. Truncated additionally from the previous two appearances, the rondo section spans only 10 measures and concludes with the material that preceded the earlier episodes.

The subsequent solo passage begins in measure 83 and features the timpani, glockenspiel and xylophone to represent the percussion section. Due to Higdon's penchant for a vast array of

³⁹³Jennifer Higdon, *City Scope* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

percussion instruments, the employment of only three instruments in this episode is a noteworthy contrast. The timpani part is comprised primarily of the composer's characteristic intervals of a perfect fifth and major second in a continuous eighth note rhythm. A repetitive pattern is initially introduced in measures 83-85 yet the composer eschews predictability by altering the order in which the measures appear. Only in the final bars of the episode does the pattern return to the original order.

Figure 5-23. *Peachtree Street*, mm. 83-85.³⁹⁴

The glockenspiel and the xylophone present a fragmented melodic dialogue in an imitative texture that continues to be a hallmark of the episodic material. The melodic instruments are marked *forte* while the timpani encompass only a *mezzo forte* dynamic. This disparity is undoubtedly due to the limited range in volume of the glockenspiel and the xylophone in comparison to the timpani. (Figure 5-23) In the final bar of the episode, the glockenspiel is replaced by the snare to present repetitive sixteenth-notes with the xylophone. The dynamics are reduced substantially during this conclusion to facilitate the gradual entrance of the full ensemble.

³⁹⁴Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

An interesting phenomenon during this passage invites comparison between *Peachtree Street* and *Concerto for Orchestra*. The percussion lines of the former provide continuous *ostinato* patterns throughout the reemergence of the full ensemble. A similar use of the percussion appeared between the fourth and fifth movements of *Concerto for Orchestra*. One may be tempted to view this section of *City Scape* as an imitation of a successful formula used in *Concerto for Orchestra*. The current author maintains that these occurrences bolster the uniqueness of the composer.

In measure 100, the full ensemble gradually reenters beginning with the strings, the principal oboe and the continuing percussion from the preceding section. The oboe presents a brief *ostinato* comprised of two alternating pitches separated by an octave in an eighth note rhythm. The horns enter in the subsequent measure on the pitches of A and C to display the repeated sixteenth notes initially associated with the trumpets. These brass punctuations aid in referencing the returning section since the primary melodic material of the woodwinds and strings do not directly quote the rondo theme. As in earlier passages, the higher ranged instruments are doubled and present major chords while the lower ranged instruments display major chords a second lower. The material corresponds particularly to measure 20 (and 73) of the rondo theme. Although the musical lines in the earlier passages descend, the contour is reversed in measure 100 to radiate a gradually soaring line. The two sections are undoubtedly related, however, through similarities in the horn, the bitonal harmonic idiom, lack of syncopations and the multitude of articulated two note slurs. This relaxed portion of the rondo is enhanced through an extended *crescendo* that culminates in a *fortissimo* dynamic marking in measure 104. (Figure 5-24)

The image shows a page of a musical score for measures 100-104. The score is arranged in a system with seven staves. From top to bottom, the staves are: Timp. (Tympani), Perc. 1 (Percussion 1), Perc. 2 (Percussion 2), Vln. 1 (Violin 1), Vln. 2 (Violin 2), Vla. (Viola), and Cb. (Cello). A box containing the number '100' is positioned above the Vln. 1 staff. The Vln. 1 staff has a dynamic marking of *mp*. The Vln. 2 staff has a dynamic marking of *mp* and includes the instruction 'unis.'. The Vla. staff has a dynamic marking of *mp*. The Vlc. staff has a dynamic marking of *mp*. The Cb. staff has a dynamic marking of *mp* and includes the instruction 'pizz.'. The Perc. 2 staff has a dynamic marking of *pp*. The Timp. staff has a dynamic marking of *fort*. The Perc. 1 staff has a dynamic marking of *mf*. The score is written in a key signature of one flat and a time signature of 4/4. The music features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests.

Figure 5-24. *Peachtree Street*, mm. 100-104.³⁹⁵

An additional increase in dynamics heightens the volume to *fortississimo* in measure 108 and is further enlarged by the entrance of the trumpets and trombones that simply double the string and woodwind material. With the exception of the horns, the entire ensemble presents a unified homophonic texture that persists until measure 113.

At this point, an unexpected transition between the rondo section and the subsequent episode commences. Previous episodic material was preceded only by the rondo theme with the full ensemble but in measure 113, the instrumentation is reduced to woodwinds, one percussionist and half of the cello section. The cello doubles the bassoons with a line comprised

³⁹⁵Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

of perfect fifth and minor seventh intervals that is comparable to the timpani part of the percussion episode.

The image shows a page of a musical score for woodwinds, specifically measures 114-119. The score is arranged in eight staves, labeled from top to bottom as Fl. 1, Fl. 2, Ob. 1, Ob. 2, Cl. 1, Cl. 2, Bsn. 1, and Bsn. 2. Each staff contains musical notation with notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The dynamic marking 'ppp' (pianissimo) is visible at the end of each staff. The notation includes various note values, including quarter and eighth notes, and rests. The score is written in a key signature with one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature (C). The woodwinds are playing a melodic line that gradually diminishes in volume towards the end of the passage.

Figure 5-25. *Peachtree Street*, mm. 114-119.³⁹⁶

The upper woodwinds provide the primary melodic material and gradually diminish in volume. Although a *ritardando* is not present, a reduction in the note values produces the same effect. The descending major chords in the flutes and oboes are paired with separate major chords presented by the clarinets and principal bassoon. Although Higdon frequently juxtaposes major chords separated by a second, this is not the case during the transition; the lines of each section are truly independent. The melodic content of the lower woodwinds consists of new material yet the opening articulation is reminiscent of measures 20, 73 and 100. Otherwise, few commonalities exist between the rondo theme and transition. (Figure 5-25)

³⁹⁶Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

The brass episode commences in measure 119 and continues the soft dynamics of the transition. The tuba, second trombone and three horns initially begin the passage with a homophonic texture, a stark contrast to the earlier highly polyphonic episodes. The second trombone and principal horn present the melody in thirds while the remaining horns and tuba consist of major and minor chords. The result is a somewhat bitonal passage, a distinctive element of the rondo theme.

In measure 120, the tuba establishes Higdon's characteristic pattern of alternating pitches separated by a major second. Simultaneously, the trumpets and principal trombone enter with the primary melodic material consisting of an ascending line separated by rests. A *crescendo* enhances the intensity while the texture becomes increasingly more complex. Beginning in measure 125, a homophonic texture emerges for horns two and four, the second trumpet, the trombones and tuba presenting varying intervals with no distinguishable harmonic pattern. The continuous eighth note rhythm unifies the episode despite frequent transformations in the melodic content.

A highly polyphonic texture initiated by the trumpet commences in measure 125. An unassuming motive comprised of four ascending sixteenth notes (initially spanning from B-E) serves as the basis for subsequent imitation while simultaneously unifying the entire composition. A similar motive appeared in *river sings a song to trees* in the harp *ostinato* of measure 159 and in the five note figure in measure 21 of *SkyLine*. Like the finale, the motive in the opening movement begins on B and is presented by the trumpet.

Above this motive, the third horn displays Higdon's characteristic *ostinato* of alternation between minor seconds. Unlike earlier examples, an abundance of rests are incorporated to foster intensity. The entire brass section rises in pitch accompanied by a *crescendo* to increase

the momentum that ushers in the polyphonic imitation distinctive of episodic material. (Figure 5-26)

The second trombone enters the dialogue by echoing the tail of the trumpet line of measure 128. The imitation between the horn, trumpet and trombone continue in two measure intervals and ascends in pitch until bar 134 when the motive becomes dormant. In the final two measures of the episode, the eighth note accompaniment continues while horns one and three display triplets congruent to the rondo theme in preparation for the return of the primary theme.

The image shows a musical score for measures 125-129 of the piece 'Peachtree Street'. The score is arranged in a system with seven staves. From top to bottom, the staves are: Horns 1-3 (Hn. 1-3), Horns 2-4 (Hn. 2-4), Trumpet 1 (Tpt. 1), Trumpet 2 (Tpt. 2), Trombone 1 (Tbn. 1), Trombone 2 (Tbn. 2), and Tuba (Tba.). The music is in 4/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and triplets. Dynamics markings include *mp* (mezzo-piano), *mf* (mezzo-forte), and *f* (forte). The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines, with some measures containing rests. The overall texture is polyphonic, with various instruments imitating each other's lines.

Figure 5-26. *Peachtree Street*, mm. 125-129.³⁹⁷

The entire ensemble returns to the rondo theme in measure 135. Curiously, the alternation of meters previously relegated to the episodes continues until measure 137 when the meter stabilizes. Without question, these measures constitute the return of the rondo theme and the rationale is unclear for the initial metrical changes.

³⁹⁷Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

In measure 137, the musical material, although transposed, returns to a separate section of the rondo theme that corresponds to measure 26. Straying from the order of the initial presentation is characteristic of Higdon, yet it is noteworthy that she does so within a highly structuralized rondo. Clearly, the composer does not restrict herself to textbook definitions of this form. Four measures later, Higdon again transposes the material to repeat the passage with a new harmonic idiom. Of particular interest is the consecutively accented pitch of D presented by the violas that places emphasis on the composer's seemingly favored tonality. Once again, the rondo theme is greatly truncated, spanning only 10 measure before ceasing in 145.

After the previous four episodes featured the individual orchestral sections, the movement could reasonably conclude with a final presentation of the rondo theme yet Higdon's music remains unpredictable. In measure 145, the transition from measure 113 reappears in transposition with subtle changes in instrumentation as well as an additional musical line. The principal flute displays the new material that consists of a descending stepwise melody. At the close of this transition, the composer includes a *molto ritardando* which was absent from the earlier corresponding section. The gradually lengthened rhythms from the initial material are retained but with the *ritardando*, the dramatic elements are greatly enhanced. In the final bar of the transition the meter changes again to 5/4 that implies an additional subsequent episode.

The foreshadowing metrical change does indeed begin another episode that includes the entire ensemble. Greatly expanded, the episode continues to feature orchestral sections and maintains the initial order of each individual appearance. The strings enter in measure 151 to recall the trumpet and piccolo motive from *SkyLine*. (Figure 5-27) The string portion of the episode lasts a brief six measures before the woodwind entrance in measure 157.

One may reasonably anticipate a solo woodwind section but the strings continue with a nearly identical repeat of the immediately preceding material. Similar to the strings, the woodwinds recall its earlier episode with few alterations. The material lasts four measures and is repeated before the percussion commences in measure 165.

As the instrumentation expands, the texture becomes gradually more complex. The strings continue to present material derived from the ascending sixteenth note motive with the exception of the violas which double the clarinets in the accompanying material from the woodwind episode. This line was absent in the preceding measures and only reappears in measure 165. The string section, therefore, simultaneously combines its previous episodic material with that of the woodwinds. The percussionists, however, comprise the primary musical content with a return to the trio instrumentation of timpani, glockenspiel and xylophone.

The image shows a musical score for five string instruments: Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vlc.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The score is in 4/4 time and spans four measures. The Vln. 1 and Vln. 2 staves are mostly silent, with Vln. 1 starting in measure 3 with a dynamic marking of *f* and a 'unis.' instruction. The Vla. and Vlc. staves play a rhythmic pattern of ascending sixteenth notes, also marked *f* and 'unis.'. The Cb. staff is silent throughout. Vertical lines mark the beginning of each measure.

Figure 5-27. *Peachtree Street*, mm.151-154.³⁹⁸

The brass instruments commence promptly in measure 169 in an accompanying role. The presentation of material from their respective episode is delayed until measure 173 and then lasts only four measures. Unlike the corresponding episode, the trumpets are paired with the

³⁹⁸Jennifer Higdon, *City Scape* (Philadelphia, PA: Lawdon Press, 2002).

trombones to present major chords while the horns sound separate chords from the trumpets that are separated by a major second. The violins double the woodwinds in rapidly ascending and descending figurations. The lower strings double the brass while curiously, the percussion instruments are tacet. Aided by a *crescendo*, the gradually enlarged ensemble increases the volume to enhance the excitement for the final return of the rondo theme. The final episode, therefore, serves as a summation of all previous episodic material. The concept of returning musical ideas in new guises is typical of Higdon and although the motivic connection to earlier movements is subtle, such links create a strong case for performing the work in its entirety.

Measures 177-178 function as a brief transition to the return of the rondo theme. The meter returns to 4/4 with musical material borrowed from the opening of the rondo theme in transposition. With the exception of the trumpets and principal trombone, the entire ensemble displays a homophonic texture associated with the principal theme. In earlier passages, the trumpets presented repeated sixteenth notes. This rhythm is maintained by the trumpets and trombones in this subsequent section but the repeated pitches are replaced by ascending and descending major chords. These sonorities provide cohesiveness to the previous section while the sixteenth note rhythm references the opening material.

The rondo theme commences in measure 179 with a nearly exact quotation of the opening. After a clear association to the theme is cemented, the material varies immediately in measure 180. As is customary for Higdon, the return of significant sections is presented in a myriad of orders and variations in orchestration.

The final three measures continue aspects of the theme complete with the trumpets, trombones and tuba exhibiting the repeated sixteenth notes affiliated with the rondo section. The meter in the concluding two measures changes to 5/4, a curious choice since the rondo theme

appeared consistently in 4/4. A homophonic descending scalar figure precedes a *sforzato* D major chord, a tonality prevalent in Higdon's orchestral works. Unquestionably, the composition ends with the excitement and intensity characteristic of finales.

In each of the three movements, rhythmic and melodic motives are present that unify the composition despite the stipulations of the commission to be able to perform the movements independently. The unifying elements greatly enhance the composition and as such, *City Scope* deserves complete performances. Besides the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, only the Green Bay Symphony Orchestra and the National Symphony Orchestra have programmed the entire work. *SkyLine*, commissioned to serve as a concert opener, has been performed by the Allentown Symphony Orchestra while *Peachtree Street* has received exposure by orchestras of higher repute including the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, the Houston Symphony Orchestra and the Charleston Symphony Orchestra.³⁹⁹ A preference for the finale amongst programmers is clear. This author proposes that a rondo form provides audience familiarity; *SkyLine* does not conform to a rigorous classical structure. *river sings a song to trees* is lengthier and less likely to be incorporated into the standard concert program of opener, concerto and symphony and has yet to be performed separately.

Although the reviews have largely been positive, as discussed in Chapter Six, the ultimate assessment of the strength of the work must be left to the test of time. The possibility of performing the composition piecemeal is an advantage for ensembles concerned with conservative audience's reactions to new music. Both *SkyLine* and *Peachtree Street* may adequately serve as concert openers and similar to *blue cathedral* have garnered more performances likely because of their smaller length. Although the individual movements are

³⁹⁹Jennifer Higdon, Complimentary Press Kit, 2006.

musically interesting enough to stand independently, the work as a unified whole produces a more comprehensive understanding of the composer's stylistic tendencies and her subtle use of unifying devices are more pronounced in a complete performance. Throughout the three movements, the characteristics of Higdon's orchestral writing become universally defined and the majority of her stylistic traits witnessed in *blue cathedral* and *Concerto for Orchestra* continues to find a unique place within *City Scape*.

CHAPTER 6 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critical reviews of Higdon's orchestral compositions remain somewhat sparse due to her recent exposure on the national symphonic circuit. Without question, the majority of criticisms published are quite positive and these laudatory praises often comment on compositional characteristics that separate Higdon from her contemporaries. Yet as with all composers, not all critics are enamored of her compositions. Despite the present author's favorable opinion, all reactions to her works must be included to present a complete account of Higdon's critical reception.

blue cathedral remains the most performed symphonic composition of Higdon and as such, more reviews have been published on this particular work. Throughout history, reactions from the public and the critics have varied substantially but in the case of *blue cathedral*, these often conflicting factions both responded positively which likely accounts for the numerous performances the work has garnered since the premiere.

In *The San Francisco Classical Voice*, Jeff Dunn called this symphonic poem "magical," and stated, "Higdon is an expert at varying soloistic opportunities among instruments."⁴⁰⁰ In the same journal, Scott MacClelland reviewed a performance at the Cabrillo Music Festival and remarked, "The program opened with orchestrally opulent *Blue Cathedral*...a lushy (sic) and colorful edifice that rises from the intimate and personal to a high-flying fireworks show..."⁴⁰¹ *The San Francisco Classical Voice* has consistently published stellar reviews of this composition by various music critics. The most glowing review in this periodical stems from the pen of

⁴⁰⁰ Jeff Dunn, "Warhorseless," *San Francisco Classical Voice*, 12 June 2003 (Accessed [27 May 2006]), <http://www.sfcv.org/arts_revs/starosasy_m_12_9_03.php>

⁴⁰¹ Scott MacClelland, "Strong Current Works," *San Francisco Classical Voice*, 15 August 2004 (Accessed [27 May 2006]) <http://www.sfcv.org/arts_revs/cabrillo2_8_17_04.php>

Benjamin Frandzel, who opined the “strongest sensation it creates is pleasure in its sheer aural beauty...”⁴⁰²

The San Francisco Classical Voice is not alone in its praise. Bob Keyes of the *Portland Press Herald* (Maine) proclaimed *blue cathedral* “as among the most daring and inventive new compositions to surface in years”⁴⁰³ and William Furtwangler of the *Post and Courier Review* (Charleston) stated that *blue cathedral* “fascinates and inspires, in a mid-20th century American style.”⁴⁰⁴ Finally, while reviewing the Annapolis Symphony Orchestra’s performance of the work, David Lindauer commented, “This is a remarkable piece of music, not only beautifully crafted and full of special effects, but communicating intensely personal feeling as well.”⁴⁰⁵

Although the above reviews contain perhaps the most praiseworthy adjectives available in the English language, few of the writers comment specifically about which aspects of the music they found appealing. Jeff Dunn’s mention of Higdon’s penchant for colorful soli remains an isolated exception. The reviews, however, are noteworthy despite the omission of detailed accounts of the work.

Negative reviews of *blue cathedral* continue to be a rarity, although Joshua Kosman, a music critic for *The San Francisco Chronicle* opined, “Certainly ‘*Blue Cathedral*’ for all its coloristic invention doesn’t boast much musical substance that lingers in the memory. Some flute and clarinet solo lines representing the composer and her late brother, wind around each

⁴⁰² Benjamin Frandzel, “Winners All,” *San Francisco Classical Voice*, 3 July 2004 (Accessed [27 May 2006]), <http://www.sfcv.org/arts_revs/marinsym_3_9_04.php>

⁴⁰³ Bob Keyes, “New Year, new magic from PSO; The first Tuesday Classical series of 2005 features a guest baton and an ethereal piece by an acclaimed female composer,” *Portland Press Herald* (Maine), 30 January 2005, sec. AUDIENCE, p. E1.

⁴⁰⁴ William Furtwangler, “Orchestra displays ‘unbridled convention,’” *Post and Courier Review*, 19 March 2006, Nation Section, p. A-2.

⁴⁰⁵ David Lindauer, “Review: ASO’s ‘Ode to Joy’-musical, masterful, and majestic,” *The Capital* (Annapolis, MD), 11 May 2006, Entertainment section, p. A-10.

other beguilingly, but otherwise the writing is generic.”⁴⁰⁶ This commentary could certainly never be mistaken as praise, yet Kosman’s history reveals a plethora of scathing commentaries. Reviewing a recording of Verdi’s *La Traviata* released by Deutsche Grammophon, he stated, “It’s not every day that a major record label releases a train wreck like this ‘Traviata,’ the musical performance captured here is close to a fiasco...the chief malefactor is conductor Carlo Rizzi...the singers aren’t much help either, with Netrebko’s ferocious but labored Violetta and Thomas Hampson’s smarmy, maudlin Germont...Sad, sad, sad.”⁴⁰⁷ Like all critics, Kosman is subjective, of course but when unkindly disposed towards a work, he utilizes extreme adjectives. Particularly troubling about his comments on *blue cathedral* is the lack of precise detail on which aspects he disliked explicitly. It is difficult to ascertain what Kosman means by his characterization of the work as “generic.” Curiously, the lack of specifics in both the positive and negative reviews is strangely similar.

Reviews for the multi-movement orchestral works are less abundant primarily because they have received fewer performances. Of the published commentaries, reviews of *Concerto for Orchestra* appear highly favorable; indeed the praise seems almost excessive. For example, *The Classical Voice of North Carolina*’s Jeffrey Rossman writes, “When one sees the title ‘Concerto for Orchestra,’ most people would immediately associate it with Bartók. Well, move over Bela, you’re going to have some competition from now on because Jennifer Higdon has usurped your title and may surpass even you.”⁴⁰⁸ Armed with a more objective viewpoint, David Hurwitz from *ClassicsToday.com* writes of the work and composer, “Jennifer Higdon’s lively

⁴⁰⁶ Joshua Kosman, “Neale makes most of Saint-Saens symphony,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 10 March 2004, p. D-3.

⁴⁰⁷ Joshua Kosman, “CD Reviews,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 11 December 2005, Sunday datebook section p. 47.

⁴⁰⁸ Jeffrey Rossman, “An Evening of Baby-Boomer Composer,” *Classical Voice of North Carolina*, n.d. (Accessed [9 July 2006]) <<http://www.cvnc.org/reviews/2006/012006/NCScrossing1.html>>

allegros and poetic slow movements, modern in conception and technique yet approachable and not afraid of a good tune now and then, strikes me as some of the best work being done on the contemporary music scene.”⁴⁰⁹ Perry Tannenbaum from the *American Record Guide* opined, “Higdon is so brilliant a colorist that her music teems with beguiling ideas. It would be churlish to criticize. A rigorous sense of purpose sparks this concerto from the outset.”⁴¹⁰ Finally, Andrew Clark’s assessment from across the pond states, “This was its UK premiere, and a fine impression it made, thanks to Higdon's tingling sonorities, her superb technical confidence and the bright, blazing energy of her idiom. Although the five-movement concerto lasts 35 minutes, Higdon uses her material with such variety and resourcefulness that nothing outstays its welcome.”⁴¹¹

Unlike commentaries available for *blue cathedral*, the reviews of this composition include specific detail about not only the work but also the prominent aspects of Higdon’s style. The musical energy in the allegro movements, referenced above, remains one of her most appealing characteristics to audiences. More importantly, however, the mention of orchestration and instrumental coloring is significant, for without question this attention to timbre is the *sine qua non* of her music. Although the current writer is particularly fond of *Concerto for Orchestra*, it is premature to conjecture that this composition may surpass Bartók’s work as suggested by Rossman; a comparison between the compositions is unnecessary. Neither did Higdon “usurp” the title from Bartók. Numerous works utilize this designation.

⁴⁰⁹David Hurwitz, review of *City Scape/Concerto for Orchestra*, by Jennifer Higdon, *ClassicsToday.com*, 17 March 2004 (Accessed [10 July 2006]) <<http://www.classicstoday.com/review.asp?ReviewNum=7480>>

⁴¹⁰Perry Tanenbaum, “North Carolina Symphony,” *American Record Guide*, 69:3, May-June 2006, p.17-18.

⁴¹¹Andrew Clark, “BBC Symphony/Slatkin Barbican,” *Financial Times* (London, England) 8 April 2004, p. 16.

This author believes that Higdon's *Concerto for Orchestra* is truly a masterpiece through its unique scoring, its evocation of abundant moods and its many brilliant solo excursions. Certainly, this work truly is a "Concerto for Orchestra" in the best sense of the term.

Of the three works researched, *City Scape* has received the least number of performances largely due to the newness of the composition. The current author believes the work is only beginning to gain momentum with the public and symphonic programmers. For example, the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington D.C. performed the entire three movements as recently as May 17th, 2007 under the baton of Leonard Slatkin. This latest national exposure from a leading orchestra will likely inspire other orchestras to consider the work.

As mentioned previously, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra premiered the complete composition, although the commission stipulated that the three movements be able to function independently. As a result, the movements are more often performed separately.

The reviews are generally favorable but never attain the level of praise present in commentaries of the earlier works. Particularly noteworthy is the detailed level of criticism that provides the reader with specific knowledge regarding the aspects of Higdon's music that attracted or disenchanted the various writers.

In response to the above mentioned performance by the National Symphony Orchestra, Robert Battey provided an objective and detailed description of the complete work. "Higdon's music is lithe and expert. Although not all the thematic material is particularly memorable, there is no empty note-spinning, and her snazzy pieces stick in the mind. She is particularly expert in her percussion writing...and 'City Scape' features extremely imaginative passages for an extensive battery in all three pieces. The percussion does not simply add color and flavor to the

orchestra; it has its own idiomatic themes as part of the music's basic material.”⁴¹² Battey then offers sparse additional commentary on the individual movements.

About the opening movement, C. Michael Bailey writes, “Skyline (sic) is a musical profile of the city texture. It is busy but not nervous, achieving *crescendo* and *diminuendo* in all of the right places and conveying a vibrantly alive and living organism in her fanfare horns.”⁴¹³

Curiously, Bailey offers very vague commentary on the remaining two movements. A writer based in Philadelphia, David Patrick Stearns, regularly publishes reviews and articles on Jennifer Higdon, who is coincidentally his neighbor. Despite the personal relationship, his opinion on her music remains objective and his judgment of this movement differs considerably from Bailey.

“The first movement is a smaller but more obvious move toward a traditional format... In between lies a carefully planned arc that seems to have no inhibiting effect on Higdon's sense of invention. Still, ‘SkyLine’ lacks the carefully distilled quality of the *Concerto for Orchestra* (a deficit that wouldn't be conspicuous if you didn't know the earlier piece).”⁴¹⁴

The second movement, *river sings a song to trees*, consistently received the most laudatory responses of the three movements, although it is performed the least. Stearns comments, “This music is frankly and unabashedly beautiful, but it never seems like a concession to audience conservatism. It’s sincere stuff—and unlike similarly inviting works ranging from Gabriel Fauré to Lowell Liebermann, the ear doesn’t grow sated early on. There’s so much variety, so many

⁴¹²Robert Battey, “From NSO, the Energy of a ‘City,’” *The Washington Post*, 18 May 2006, p. C06.

⁴¹³C. Michael Bailey, “Jennifer Higdon? City Scape/Concerto for Orchestra,” (Accessed [21 January 2007]), available from <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=13412>; Internet.

⁴¹⁴David Patrick Stearns, “Jennifer Higdon’s Exterior/Interior *City Scape*,” *Andante Corporation*, November 2002, (Accessed [21 January 2007]), available from <http://www.andante.com/article/article.cfm?id=19228&highlight=1&highlightterms=&1stKeywords=>; Internet.

beguiling sounds that you've never previously heard, that you can't tear your ears away."⁴¹⁵

Bathey's impression of the movement is likewise positive stating, "The second, 'river sings a song to trees,' is particularly original; fluttering, shimmering sounds gradually give way to several haunting, primal-sounding themes building to a well-developed climax. Some woodwind chorales evoke Barber, but this piece, at the very least, should have an active life of its own after these initial premieres."⁴¹⁶

The final movement received mixed reviews. Bailey writes, "The final piece, 'Peachtree Street' is a bouncy summertime celebration with thundering percussion and lightening strings. Higdon's phrasing is appropriate, but it also is very smart."⁴¹⁷ It remains unclear precisely what Bailey finds appropriate and smart about Higdon's musical phrasing and no additional commentary is included. Stearns, on the contrary, found this movement to be the weakest of the triptych. He comments, "And though that movement takes off from busy traffic into more inward landscapes, it's the one part of *City Scape* that seems short-winded and perhaps in need of revision."⁴¹⁸

Anthony Burton from *BBC Music Magazine* provides one of the rare reviews of the entire composition, but he was not particularly enamored with the music. "The first movement brash and thrusting like the Atlanta skyline, the second an over-long hymn to nature, the last urban again, and reverting to concerto-for-orchestra mode to feature strings, woodwind, percussion,

⁴¹⁵David Patrick Stearns, "Jennifer Higdon's Exterior/Interior *City Scape*," *Andante Corporation*, November 2002, (Accessed [21 January 2007]), available from <http://www.andante.com/article/article.cfm?id=19228&highlight=1&highlightterms=&1stKeywords=>; Internet.

⁴¹⁶Robert Bathey, "From NSO, the Energy of a 'City,'" *The Washington Post*, 18 May 2006, p. C06.

⁴¹⁷C. Michael Bailey, "Jennifer Higdon? *City Scape*/Concerto for Orchestra," (Accessed [21 January 2007]), available from <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=13412>; Internet.

⁴¹⁸David Patrick Stearns, "Jennifer Higdon's Exterior/Interior *City Scape*," *Andante Corporation*, November 2002 (Accessed [21 January 2007]), available from <http://www.andante.com/article/article.cfm?id=19228&highlight=1&highlightterms=&1stKeywords=>; Internet.

and brass in turn.”⁴¹⁹ Noteworthy are the stark differences between the American critics and Burton in regards to the second movement. The aforementioned reviews commented specifically on the beauty of the second movement while Burton clearly disagreed.

Burton poses a significant concern in regards to the similarities of *Peachtree Street* and the *Concerto for Orchestra*, both of which feature individual orchestral sections. These two works are likely to be linked together for several reasons and it is curious that other reviewers did not comment on the parallels. Because the two works were premiered in close proximity, one may reasonably conjecture that Higdon utilized similar formulae. In addition, the compositions are paired together on a recording and if listening to the works in succession, the parallels are unmistakable.

Connections do exist between *Concerto for Orchestra* and *City Scape*, yet these similarities comprise Higdon’s unique approach. The extensive soli for orchestral instruments remain a significant aspect of her style and serves as a personal signature to her work. Soloistic ventures also appeared in *blue cathedral*, although the orchestration varied considerably from the multi-movement works. While orchestration alone may not be a highly compelling factor for comparison, the functions of the featured orchestral sections in the later works are also related. In *Concerto for Orchestra*, the primary purpose of these passages demonstrates instrumental capabilities while in *City Scape*, the orchestral sections constitute episodic material that contrasts the rondo theme. In both works, the subsequent result is a dialogue between the individual sections and the full ensemble. *Concerto for Orchestra* and *City Scape* clearly have these factors in common, yet the musical content varies exponentially. Although conforming to similar

⁴¹⁹Anthony Burton, “Higdon; ORCHESTRAL REVIEWS,” *BBC Music Magazine*, 1 June 2004, p. 62.

structural patterns, these works offer significant musical contrast that sufficiently classifies each composition as unique.

The current author believes *City Scape* fares considerably better when the three movements are performed together. The unifying elements present in the work provide a stronger coherence and structure that is unachievable when the individual movements are performed piecemeal. It is curious that reviewers who experienced the entire composition did not mention these significant elements and it is possible that these aspects remained unrecognized during an initial hearing. True to Higdon's style, the unifying elements are never stated blatantly and she frequently imbeds such motives deep within the texture; therefore, it remains quite possible that the critics were unable to identify these components.

The music of Higdon has received in general, positive reviews and responses. The public view tends to support the favorable comments. In the annals of history, discrepancies of opinion between the general public and music critics are quite common and, once again, one must wait with patience for the ultimate test of time to determine the music's longevity.

CHAPTER 7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The orchestral works of Jennifer Higdon reveal a contemporary composer adept at pleasing both audiences and musicians and thus, has already garnered a firm position in the standard concert repertoire. Within the past decade, her career has escalated in large part due to recent exposure from the nation's leading ensembles. As such, Higdon's music rightfully deserved a thorough research analysis to fully comprehend her style. It is the hope of this author that this study will further the understanding of both the composer and her symphonic compositions.

Performing this music requires an orchestra of considerable talent. Not only are the technical demands daunting (such as in *Concerto for Orchestra*, the most difficult of the three works studied), but extensive solo material abounds for numerous musicians within the ensemble. Historically, the concertmaster receives a plethora of soli, but, in the compositions of Higdon, significant solo excursions are scored also for the assistant concertmaster and second-stand musicians in the violin and cello sections. This unorthodox instrumentation provides opportunities for excellently-trained musicians, but is likely to surpass the capabilities of many amateur orchestras; however, regional and collegiate orchestras continually program her compositions which suggest they are not relegated only to the upper echelon of symphonic ensembles.

Higdon describes her compositional method as "intuitive" and, therefore, many of the findings in this research surprised the composer. Unifying elements within the multi-movement works in particular were astonishing to her, yet the abundances of these occurrences eliminate even the possibility of a coincidence. It is outside the realm of this author's expertise to speculate on the manner in which the composer's mind binds these elements, but without question, a subconscious component is evident in her works. In nearly all of the examples

presented to Higdon, she considered these results remarkable and was unable to explain the phenomena, but she affirms her mind functions in precisely this manner. Although one may never state with confidence that composers in the past benefited from subconscious compositional methods, there can be little question that Higdon relies heavily on this mysterious aspect.

The compositional style of this composer is remarkably similar to those of centuries past. During a time when composers enjoy technological advances that may facilitate the process, her method remains somewhat conservative. In her own words, she states, “I use both pencil and paper, and the computer. I don’t do the kind of playback that a lot of people might expect, because computers cannot reproduce the sounds that I’m trying to achieve. I sketch and keep a notebook and I write a lot of verbal notes to myself, thematic materials for both instruments, and then I put things into the computer. I do not hear large chunks of music in my head. I tend to hear ideas and then try to find a way to present those musical ideas and craft them in such a way that they’ll be engaging to listen to, which means I do a lot of erasing and deleting and rewriting. I’m constantly changing from day to day trying to make the music more interesting.”⁴²⁰

Although separated by centuries, Higdon’s method links her significantly to a plethora of composers from the past and through her, the symphonic genre continues to evolve.

While the modernity of Higdon’s fame has inspired this author’s studies, various avenues of research on her music remain unexplored and deserve consideration. A comprehensive analysis of her chamber works would prove indispensable in further identifying compositional characteristics. The possibility of locating intuitive elements in her smaller works is possible and may shine additional light on her musical style. In addition, the commissioning ensembles of

⁴²⁰Kirk Noreen, “Y Music Talk: Composer Jennifer Higdon,” *92 Y Blog* (Accessed [16 May 2007]) available from http://blog.92y.org/index.php/weblog/item/interview_with_composer_jennifer_higdon/.

Higdon's chamber music regularly feature works by modern composers and are frequently dedicated to promoting new music. In this genre, Higdon has employed more avant-garde techniques. Without question, new music aficionados' tastes differ substantially from the often more conservative symphonic audiences. In this author's previous, yet limited research of Higdon's flute works, extended techniques and unorthodox notation appeared frequently; both of these contemporary elements are omitted from the orchestral scores. In this manner, Higdon's concern for audience comprehension becomes reality. She understands thoroughly the differing flavor of audiences in each specific venue but further study on the chamber works is necessary for a more thorough grasp of this composer.

Relating the music of Higdon in the context of queer studies may appeal to some investigators. The composer is adamant that gender discrimination has not affected her career; theories pertaining to her sexuality are likely to garner a negative response. With the number of performances her works receive, it is quite clear that these factors have not created an obstacle. Yet a potential connection between sexuality and gender in music cannot be completely eliminated since numerous neurological questions remain unanswered regarding such areas. In the recent past, historical musicology has dedicated much effort and research on these topics with inconclusive results. Perhaps in the future, equipped with new information from the sciences, a comprehensive study would produce concrete findings.

Currently a national phenomenon in western art music, Jennifer Higdon has enjoyed a fame that most composers never experience during their lives. This recognition is principally due to the publicity surrounding these specific orchestral works that continue to appear on concert programs throughout the nation. At the time of this writing, few purely orchestral works have been composed subsequently by Higdon and certainly none with the length of the three

compositions examined in this research.⁴²¹ Although the test of time continues to be the ultimate factor in determining a composer's longevity, her recent prominence within a typically conservative genre is beyond noteworthy. Comprehending specifics on audience appeal often proves mysterious and inexact, yet this composer has undoubtedly attracted the attention of the public. As such, a thorough analysis of her orchestral compositions was necessary. This author believes that Higdon's music provides an optimistic outlook to the potentially grim future of western art music. While her music may be termed populist and accessible, such descriptions should not suggest a pejorative connotation. The composer places great emphasis on reaching new and modern audiences, a concern that resounds throughout the entire classical music community. Jennifer Higdon has proven that new life within a tradition centuries old is possible. At this time, her star is luminous and continues to rise.

⁴²¹*Light*, composed in 2006, is the only pure orchestral composition to emerge recently and in contrast to the extensive works discussed in this document, spans only four minutes.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Christina Reitz (b. 1978) received a B.M. in piano performance from the Dana School of Music in Youngstown, Ohio where her principal instructors included Dr. Caroline Oltmanns and Dr. Timothy Ehlen. During her undergraduate studies, she received the Mary P. Rigo Memorial Scholarship for Outstanding Keyboard Major and won an honorable mention at the Dana Concerto/Aria Competition. In 2002, Ms. Reitz graduated from the University of Florida with an Master of Music in Piano Pedagogy studying with Dr. Kevin R. Orr.

Her concentration in doctoral studies, also at the University of Florida, was in musicology studying under Dr. David Z. Kushner with external cognates in piano performance and women's Studies. During her graduate work, Ms. Reitz was the recipient of the John V. D'Albora Scholarship for Excellence in Graduate Research (2002-03). She was also nominated for a University Teaching Assistant Award (2005) and for the Phyllis M. Meek Spirit of Susan B. Anthony Award for promoting the opportunities, rights and advancement of women at the University of Florida and in the Gainesville community (2006). A frequent present at the College Music Society's Southern Chapter, she received the Outstanding Student Paper Award in 2004 for her research on Maria Szymanowska.

The primary interest of Ms. Reitz is female composers. She has presented lectures and lecture-recitals at the local, regional, national and international level on Maria Szymanowska, Lili Boulanger, Alma Mahler, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich and Jennifer Higdon. Conference appearances include the College Music Society's Southern Chapter, Nineteenth Century National Studies Association, International Festival of Women Composers and the University of Florida's Graduate Student Forum.

An active pianist, Ms. Reitz has performed in numerous masterclasses and solo recitals. She attended the Aspen Music Festival and the *Recontres musicales en Lorraine* in Nancy

France. Her performances and an interview on competition preparation have been broadcast on WYSU in Youngstown, Ohio. Ms. Reitz has competed in the Beethoven Piano Sonata Competition, the Donna Turner Smith Memorial Competition, the Wideman International Piano Competition and the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition. As a collaborative musician, she has accompanied various faculty and guest artist recitals at the University of Florida and was a member of the Palm Trio, a piano and wind group that presented recitals throughout Northern Florida. A diverse pianist, Ms. Reitz has performed in Early Music Concerts on harpsichord and New Music Concerts on piano.

Her teaching experience at the University of Florida includes Graduate Music History Review, Introduction to Music Literature, Musical Styles, Piano Skills, Private Studio Piano as a Secondary Instrument, and assisted in the Music Theory Department. She has also served on the panel of organ juries at all levels and substituted for Dr. Kevin R. Orr for piano study at the major levels. At Youngstown State University, she was the instructor of technique for piano majors.