

CHAPTER FIVE

TRUMPET SONGS BY JENNIFER HIGDON

Year of Composition: 2004

Duration: ~9 minutes

Movements: 6 (“Morning Opens,” “To Home,” “In Our Quiet,” “Hop & Toe Dance,” “Threaded,” “Breaking”)

Range: G3 - G5

Instrumentation: Trumpet in Bb or C, Piano

Composer Biographical Background:

Jennifer Higdon is a Pulitzer Prize and Grammy Award winning composer who has written numerous solo, chamber, orchestral, and vocal works. Her orchestral composition, *blue cathedral*, has been performed over six-hundred times since the year 2000, making it one of the most performed contemporary works for orchestra. She is frequently commissioned to write for well-known ensembles, including the Chicago Symphony, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Minnesota Orchestra, and the President’s Own United States Marine Band. Higdon’s chamber works with trumpet include *Sky Rising* for five trumpets and flugelhorn, as well as *Fanfare Quintet* for brass quintet.⁵²

Higdon spent most of her early childhood in Georgia and credits her exposure to bluegrass and rock music as having a significant influence on her compositional style. Artists she listened to included The Beatles, Bob Marley, and Simon and Garfunkel.⁵³ Her father was a freelance illustrator who would frequently play music in the house,⁵⁴ and The Beatles and their

⁵²“Jennifer Higdon,” Jennifer Higdon, 2019, <http://jenniferhigdon.com/>

⁵³Nicholas J. Stow, "A Performer's Analysis of the Compositional Approaches in Short Stories for Saxophone Quartet by Jennifer Higdon," Ph.D. diss., (The University of Nebraska - Lincoln, 2019), 5.

⁵⁴Jennifer Higdon, email message to author, August 29, 2022.

Sgt. Pepper's Only Hearts Club album, in particular, heavily influenced her. Higdon listened to the record on repeat and describes the unique “sound world” of each track likely contributing to her tendency to change the sound worlds between her pieces.⁵⁵

At the age of ten, Higdon’s family moved to the Tennessee countryside and she spent her time there appreciating nature and being creative. She wrote her own poetry, painted, made claymation films, and liked to construct forts. Her visual arts influences are suggested in the titles of some of her compositions, which occasionally have movements named after colors or referencing art techniques.⁵⁶ In high school, Higdon began playing percussion in band class and started taking some lessons on the flute.⁵⁷ She largely credits her competitive marching band as guiding her down the path of studying music and her weekends were often spent competing in festivals. Regarding her marching band experience, Higdon says, “I fell in love with music when I felt the rush and excitement coming from the audience when we performed.”⁵⁸

After attending a summer flute camp at Bowling Green State University, Higdon began her undergraduate studies in flute performance there,⁵⁹ also starting her exploration of composition under the direction of Marilyn Shrude, Wallace DePue, and Harvey Sollberger.⁶⁰ Entering music school proved to be a challenge, as Higdon felt behind not knowing about classical music and began her studies in all remedial classes. Her peers had mostly had theory classes during high school and held prior knowledge of major classical works. While Higdon had

⁵⁵Stow, "A Performer's Analysis of the Compositional Approaches in Short Stories for Saxophone Quartet by Jennifer Higdon," 5.

⁵⁶Ibid, 7-8.

⁵⁷Janice Elizabeth Crews, "Jennifer Higdon's Oboe Concerto: The Composition, Transformation, and a Performer's Analysis," Ph.D. diss., (Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College, 2010), 6.

⁵⁸Jennifer Higdon, email message to author, August 29, 2022.

⁵⁹Crews, "Jennifer Higdon's Oboe Concerto: The Composition, Transformation, and a Performer's Analysis," 6.

⁶⁰Brittany Green, "Comprehensive Analysis of Movement One of Jennifer Higdon's Violin Concerto," Ph.D. diss., (East Carolina University, 2018), 6-10.

no formal training beyond a few flute lessons, she says, “my advantage was that I was so hungry and excited about music that I didn't mind doing the extra work it took to catch up (which actually lasted through my Ph.D.).”⁶¹

Higdon’s first composition was a short, solo piece for flute titled *Night Creatures* that she wrote at the age of twenty-one following the encouragement of her undergraduate flute professor, Judith Bentley. Higdon was inspired to continue composing after writing *Night Creatures*, claiming, “I loved the exercise and knew this was something I wanted to do.”⁶² This work, along with many of her other early compositions, has been removed from her canon and is not available for purchase, as many of her earlier works utilize twelve-tone systems and other compositional formulas that are no longer representative of her compositional style.⁶³ Upon completing her undergraduate degree, Higdon went on to study composition at the Curtis Institute of Music with David Loeb and Ned Rorem, earning an artist diploma, then earning her M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania and studying with George Crumb. She later returned to the Curtis Institute of Music as a professor, teaching Composition, Counterpoint, and 20th-Century Music.⁶⁴

Higdon’s fame as a composer began with her orchestral work, *Shine*, which was premiered in 1996.⁶⁵ She is known for her eccentricity and blending of styles and describes herself as an intuitive composer who does not utilize traditional forms. Her *Concerto 4-3* implements both bluegrass and classical elements and her popular orchestral work, *blue cathedral*, utilizes unconventional orchestral instruments such as water gong and bowed

⁶¹Jennifer Higdon, email message to author, August 29, 2022.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Crews, "Jennifer Higdon's Oboe Concerto: The Composition, Transformation, and a Performer's Analysis," 6-7.

⁶⁴Green, "Comprehensive Analysis of Movement One of Jennifer Higdon's Violin Concerto," 6-10.

⁶⁵Ibid, 6-10.

percussion.⁶⁶ Higdon writes on commission and finds inspiration from the musicians for whom she is writing. Knowing who the soloists and groups are going to be allows her to tailor compositions to performers' strengths, explore what they like in their music, and determine the message of the work overall.⁶⁷

Higdon and her wife have been together since high school and, throughout her career, her wife has always been there to support her and motivate her to continue composing. During times when Higdon doubted her abilities or was unsure if she would be able to catch up to her peers, her wife was a source of encouragement to continue and to persevere. When asked to comment on obstacles she faced in her career, Higdon described the challenges of entering college without prior formal classical music training and also said, "The second obstacle, although one that was not usually overt, was being a woman composer. There were instances when I was overlooked or ignored and I knew it was because I was a woman. It's just that it wasn't usually discussed. I always found a way to go around the obstacle."⁶⁸ According to the League of American Orchestras, Higdon is among America's most frequently performed composers today.⁶⁹

Overview of Work and Pedagogical Notes:

Featuring soaring melodies, Jennifer Higdon's *Trumpet Songs* are a beautiful collection of six lyrical movements for trumpet that correspond to text. Originally written for soprano voice and similar in nature to often-performed vocalise sets, these songs are valuable for developing musicianship and beauty of sound. Recordings of vocal performances of each song can be found on Higdon's website, and provide an invaluable resource to trumpeters looking for phrasing inspiration. Higdon's *Trumpet Songs* are approachable to trumpet players with a range of playing

⁶⁶Stow, "A Performer's Analysis of the Compositional Approaches in Short Stories for Saxophone Quartet by Jennifer Higdon," 6.

⁶⁷Jennifer Higdon, email message to author, August 29, 2022.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹"Jennifer Higdon," Jennifer Higdon, 2019, <http://jenniferhigdon.com/>

abilities, as even an advanced trumpeter will be challenged to artistically phrase these songs. With available versions for both Bb and C Trumpet, this piece can also be used as an introduction to playing C Trumpet.

A level of value is added if the performer takes the time to write the text into their sheet music. These songs are an exercise in telling a story with the trumpet and determining phrasing based on text. Especially for students who tend to focus heavily on the mechanics of playing the trumpet, songs such as Higdon's *Trumpet Songs* provide an opportunity to focus on musical direction and which notes might be emphasized based on the typical inflections of speech. Taking the time to read and map out the text provides the performer with a backstory and a message to convey. The text to the first song, "Morning Opens," contains vivid imagery of a crisp morning, depicting the rainbows cast by sprinklers, the dwindling of starlight, and the sun's rays. With this imagery in mind, the performer may choose to play the piece delicately and lightly. The fourth song, however, is more dance-like. Titled "Hop & Toe Dance," it details a "sprightly jig" and rising "to leap, jump, and dance out loud." These types of directives provide opportunities to bring out the character of the songs through text-based phrasing and varied articulation.

Regular practice of Giuseppe Concone's *Lyrical Studies*, transcribed for trumpet by John F. Sawyer, can help the performer develop their phrasing skills and musicality in preparation to work on Higdon's *Trumpet Songs*. These etudes stay mostly in the middle register of the trumpet and are effective for developing musicianship. Like *Trumpet Songs*, most of these studies are not technically demanding and therefore allow the performer to focus on sound quality and phrasing. A student preparing to perform *Trumpet Songs* will benefit from extensive work out of Concone's book, especially on C Trumpet if they plan to perform Higdon's work on C Trumpet.

The range of Higdon's *Trumpet Songs* is approachable for college trumpet students of varying ability levels. With an upper pitch of a G5, this piece is ideal for students looking for a substantial piece that will not challenge their upper register. Students are able to focus on musicality above range considerations, and the short duration of each movement allows for rest time between each song. Students looking to develop resonance in the lower register may find the third song, "In Our Quiet," to be effective. There are several instances of G3 in slurred and sustained passages, requiring the performer to maintain consistent air flow and tone throughout. The movement ends on G3 as well, while the other movements do not emphasize lower register playing as heavily. Beyond musicality and lower register challenges, there are few difficulties presented with flexibility, technique, or articulation.

Vocalise sets are a popular addition to trumpet recitals—both for students and professionals. Principal Trumpet of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Thomas Hooten's, arrangement of Sergei Rachmaninoff's *When Silent Night Doth Hold Me, Op. 4 No. 3, Oh, Never Sing to Me Again, Op. 4 No. 4, and Arion, Op. 34 No. 5* are frequently programmed on recitals. Higdon's *Trumpet Songs* are similar in difficulty, endurance demands, and lyrical style to these selections and the performer can choose to play all six songs or select movements to fit the program.

Figure 5.1: Text Connected to Jennifer Higdon's *Trumpet Songs*
Text by Jennifer Higdon

“Morning Opens”

The morning opens like a flower from night
I see the stars go to sleep in the light
and as I walk into the morning air thinking of you
in cracks of sidewalks I pick up flowers moist with
truth

I amble on now through rainbows from sprinklers
I cross the street and wave to neighbors and strangers
I feel I'm floating and I'm flying, I'm the flower
from the night
slowly opens, feels the sun's rays, from your morning
light

A window opens, your face comes in sight
I wave good morning, you face beaming bright
I feel my day start from the sunshine in you
the flowers open in love and morning's light dew

“To Home”

strings in sweet air
the pines do sing
under pointed lights of stars
my heart has wings

for my love has crossed my path
ahead of me tonight
as we wander through the woods
under moon and evening's light

whippoorwills call
i hear her voice ahead
sweetly call my name
to home to crawl in bed

“in our quiet...”

Now I lay me down to sleep
 in our quiet safety...
Peaceful clock and shadows mark
 the timelessness of our love...
Your warmth and our dreams
 dance together tonight...
And I can drift in your arms
 knowing... knowing... knowing...
The quilt connects us both

 But heart connects us all...
And I reach out to feel you
 Just as our souls once did...
 in our quiet safety.

“Hop & Toe Dance”

Hop & Toe Dance, heel and sing
a sprightly jig my sweetheart brings
to fly & light upon the clouds
I rise to leap, jump and dance out loud
you ask, I see, of what is this?
from me, I cry, it was a kiss
and then you see, I fly like doves
I spring up skywards, I'm in love

“Threaded”

threaded days like stems of roses
crawl, entwine in sunray poses
we rock in song on wood-crossed floors
in tip-toe dancing with love-struck chords

threaded nights
stars like pearls
shift night-time rays
in love we curl

we sing a dance
in whispered needs
a loving flower
a rose's seed

“Breaking”

Floating down
Through clouds wet with dark
My hands outstretch to feel
Where I will grasp a limb to
Stop my falling down,
My falling down heavily down
And the grace of your hand
Grips my soul
Pulling up gently
Through breaking rays
In the gray dappled sky
And the rain becomes
Dew as I grasp you