

***Machine* —Jennifer Higdon**

Higdon's career is booming right now with commissions from a variety of distinguished symphony orchestras and virtuosi. She has a degree in flute performance and was graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with an MA and a PhD. She went on to study composition at the Curtis Institute; her composition teachers include the distinguished composers George Crumb and Ned Rorem. She was a relatively late bloomer—she points to musical influences from Peter, Paul and Mary, the Beatles, and Simon and Garfunkel. With four Grammy nominations under her belt, she is also a winner of the Pulitzer Prize for her *Violin Concerto*. It would be hard, indeed, to think of many contemporary American composers whose compositions are played more frequently than are hers. She's won just about every important award for music composition, and is a member of the faculty of the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia.

Machine began life as an encore not printed in the program; but it will open this concert. It's a short composition—less than three minutes—and was one of a series of “encores” commissioned by the National Symphony Orchestra to surprise folks at the end of each of the concerts in the 2002-2003 season. Premiered in March of 2003, it takes its cue from the composers represented on the main program that night—Mozart and Tchaikovsky. Higdon says that the composition is a “tribute to composers like Mozart and Tchaikovsky, who seemed to be able to write so many notes and so much music that it seems like they were machines”! Well, it's a vigorous work, all right, and zips in a frenzy, in a thick din of accents, ripping glissandi, and motoric rhythms, to a bang of a quick end. It's all in good fun, and just shows that musicians and composers have a good sense of humor. Hold on to your seats!

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