

## **PROGRAM NOTES: “Percussion Concerto”**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the development of the percussion section grow as no other section in the orchestra. Both the music and the performers grew in visibility as well as in capability. And while the form of the concerto wasn't the least bit new in the century, the appearance and growth of the percussion concerto as a genre exploded during the later half of the century.

My “Percussion Concerto” follows the normal relationship of a dialogue between soloist and orchestra. In this work, however, there is an additional relationship with the soloist interacting extensively with the percussion section. The ability of performers has grown to such an extent that it has become possible to have sections within the orchestra interact at the same level as the soloist.

When writing a concerto I think of two things: the particular soloist for whom I am writing and the nature of the solo instrument. In the case of percussion, this means a large battery of instruments, from vibraphone and marimba (the favorite instrument of soloist Colin Currie), to non-pitched smaller instruments (brake drum, wood blocks, Peking Opera gong), and to the drums themselves. Not only does a percussionist have to perfect playing all of these instruments, but he must make hundreds of decisions regarding the use of sticks and mallets, as there is an infinite variety of possibilities from which to choose. Not to mention the choreography of the movement of the player; where most performers do not have to concern themselves with movement across the stage during a performance, a percussion soloist must have every move memorized. No other instrumentalist has such a large number of variables to challenge and master.

This work begins with the sound of the marimba, as Colin early on informed me that he has a fondness for this instrument. I wanted the opening to be exquisitely quiet and serene, with the focus on the soloist. Then the percussion section enters, mimicking the gestures of the soloist. Only after this dialogue is established does the orchestra enter. There is significant interplay between the soloist and the orchestra with a fairly beefy accompaniment in the orchestral part, but at various times the music comes back down to the sound of the soloist and the percussion section playing together, without orchestra.

Eventually, the music moves through a slow lyrical section, which requires simultaneous bowing and mallet playing by the soloist, and then a return to the fast section, where a cadenza ensues with both the soloist and the percussion section. A dramatic close to the cadenza leads back to the orchestra's opening material and the eventual conclusion of the work.

Written for Colin Currie, this work is dedicated to him.

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--Jennifer Higdon