

Jennifer Higdon (b. 1962): *Fanfare Ritmico* (2000)

With a Pulitzer Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and several Grammys under her belt, Jennifer Higdon is also among the most frequently programmed living composers. Her professional journey is all the more remarkable as she got a bit of a late start in music. She taught herself to play flute at age 15, and she only wrote her first compositions in her early 20s. Incredibly prolific since, her compositions include orchestral music, an opera, chamber works, and music for symphonic wind ensemble. Ensuring that her works are accessible to a general listening audience is a particular priority. She writes “I always tell people that my music should speak to them... and that they shouldn’t feel obligated to say why or how. All reactions are valid; the important thing is to have the experience.”

Fanfare Ritmico was commissioned in 1999 by the Women’s Philharmonic, a San Francisco-based orchestra made up entirely of women and dedicated to performing works solely by women. As she composed the work, Higdon found herself “reflecting on how all things have quickened as time has progressed. Our lives now move at speeds much greater than what I believe anyone would have ever imagined in years past... This fanfare celebrates the rhythmic motion, of man and machine, and the energy which permeates every moment of our being in the new century.” And, as it turns out, our lives haven’t gotten any slower in the nearly quarter century since the work’s premiere. In this virtuosic piece, listen particularly for the spatial distribution of musical sounds across the orchestra. Higdon scored it in such a way that the music often moves across the stage from one side to the other, similar to the effect you might get listening to a stereo recording on headphones.