

**The following interview with  
COLIN CURRIE  
was conducted by the Library of Congress  
on April 13, 2020**



**Library of Congress: What did you find to be the most difficult or challenging part of playing this particular piece?**

Colin Currie: This concerto flurries with notes, never more so than the first solo vibraphone lines of the work, which are both quick and loud. As well as taking care of my own accuracy and projection, I have to be completely absorbed in the orchestral activity surrounding me, in terms of balance and integration. For all that, however, the challenges of this piece are thoroughly engaging and rewarding...there are some tight corners but it always feels so good to make it through them! Performing this concerto is a thrilling, energizing experience.

**LOC: What is the least understood part of being a percussionist?**

CC: It seems that, quite understandably, the practical side of being a percussionist holds a great deal of mystery to the public. "Do you own all your own equipment, do you travel with it?" are easily the most floated queries that I receive from the audience! As is often the way, the answers lie somewhere in the middle--I own a lot of percussion instruments but not an exhaustive inventory, and often when I go to an orchestra to premiere a concerto like the Higdon, this will be the first occasion on which all the instruments are assembled together in the same place at the same time! Because I travel widely, week after week, I rely on local instruments as I arrive in new cities. When I started out, this was quite challenging, but as the years have rolled on, the exponential rise of the art form has ensured that there are vast quantities of marimbas, drums, and more available as I go about my itinerant business!

**LOC: What was the audience reaction like the first time you performed the piece?**

CC: Honestly, the Higdon concerto caused a genuine shockwave of excitement upon its premiere. The feel of the work is of immense energy, lyricism and passion, and, of course, it has a brilliantly paced and overwhelming conclusion. We had a huge brace of concerts to launch the work, no fewer than seven in a row with the Philadelphia Orchestra, and the final show was my Carnegie Hall debut. This concert was astonishingly exciting and received one of those huge "roars" from the crowd at the end of the performance--and that tends to be the way with this music--it raises genuine awe and elation!

**LOC: How did you first approach this score?**

CC: I could see that the score was immensely colourful and fast-paced, as soon as I opened it. The music is constantly on the move, either through the switching of percussion sound sources or the brilliant orchestration. I wanted to make sure that for all this fervent activity, there would emerge a steadier, more solid moving-line, from start to finish. It's my hope that, beneath the surface, there is revealed a huge and epic kind of power, linked to a much more gradual transmission of shapes and ideas. This music is of fast--and slow--motion.

I was also given an unusual task in the concerto, namely that I had to create the solo cadenza, myself. This is an entirely unaccompanied section in the work where one is left to one's own devices. I was determined to create a small-ish section that very much reflected Higdon's material very closely, but with kind of "hyper-drummer" powers. So, this section needed to be seamless. Most people can't or don't spot that this section is not written by the composer--that's the ultimate compliment to me.

**LC: What do you think, for this recording, the London Philharmonic Orchestra brought to it and how does their work differ from other orchestras that have played the piece with you?**

CC: The London Philharmonic Orchestra is one of those absolute World Champion groups, that just throws itself into any music set before them. I have premiered numerous works with them, all differing wildly in style, and in each case they have risen perfectly to the stylistic task at hand. In this instance, groove, solid time-keeping, and ensemble-playing came to the fore, and I must also give a big shout-out to the timpani and percussion section who the concerto also relies on to rise up as soloists. Bravo to Rachel, Andy, Sam (one of my oldest percussion buddies) and Simon--couldn't have done it without them!