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**A PERFORMER'S ANALYSIS OF THE COMPOSITIONAL
APPROACHES IN *SHORT STORIES* FOR SAXOPHONE QUARTET
BY JENNIFER HIGDON**

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A PERFORMER'S ANALYSIS OF THE COMPOSITIONAL APPROACHES IN
SHORT STORIES FOR SAXOPHONE QUARTET BY JENNIFER HIGDON

by

Nicholas J. Stow

A DOCTORAL DOCUMENT

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Major: Music

Under the Supervision of Professor Paul Haar

Lincoln, Nebraska

December, 2019

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A PERFORMER'S ANALYSIS OF THE COMPOSITIONAL APPROACHES IN
SHORT STORIES FOR SAXOPHONE QUARTET BY JENNIFER HIGDON

Nicholas J. Stow, D.M.A.

University of Nebraska, 2019

Advisor: Paul Haar

The purpose of this document is to further the saxophonist's understanding of *Short Stories* (1996) for saxophone quartet by Jennifer Higdon. By connecting biographical information with a thorough analysis including a commentary on programmatic influences, the saxophonist can gain a greater awareness of the context surrounding the piece and successfully portray important compositional elements inherent in the work.

Jennifer Higdon is one of the most respected classical composers of the early 21st Century, gaining acclaim through a continually expanding catalogue of works that include operatic, orchestral, choral, and chamber compositions. As a two-time Grammy and Pulitzer Prize awardee, Higdon's music has already received scholarly attention through an investigation of her works to better understand her compositional devices. Previous research focuses on select orchestral works and chamber works for flute while little research exists on the works for saxophone.

This document first presents an overview of Higdon's childhood experiences in the 1960s-70s which influence her compositional style. An overview of Higdon's general style follows with references to some of her most successful works. Next, this document reveals the genesis of *Short Stories* by providing historical information of the

commissioning process gained through interviews with members of the commissioning ensembles and the composer. Lastly, this document investigates the compositional approaches of the piece through an analysis of form, texture, melody, harmony, timbre, and rhythm, including a commentary on key programmatic elements.

For Destini

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the faculty who supported and mentored me along the way, I give my deepest gratitude. To Dr. Victor Mansure for showing me that I am capable of scholarly writing. To Dr. Jennifer Snodgrass for guiding me through my first graduate studies. To Dr. Scott Kallestad for introducing me to saxophone pedagogy. To Dr. Anthony Bushard, Dr. William McMullen, and Steve Kolbe for their guidance through the compositional and revision process of this document. To Dr. Paul Haar for not only his mentorship, but also his friendship which I will forever cherish. Thank you, Dr. Jennifer Higdon, for your involvement in the process and to the members of the ANCIA and PRISM quartets. Thank you, Dr. Griffin Campbell, Dr. Jeffery Heisler, and Dr. Scott Turpen for your valuable input. Lastly, I would like to thank my parents Alicia and Jim Stow, and Sheila and Roy Petitt for their continued support of my academic pursuits. Without them, none of this would be possible.

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CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

Jennifer Higdon (b. December 31, 1962) is recognized as one of the most respected classical composers of the early 21st Century through a continually expanding catalogue of works that include operatic, orchestral, choral, and chamber compositions. Higdon has been awarded the Pulitzer Prize¹ in music and two Grammys for Best Classical Contemporary Composition.² Higdon has also received awards from the Guggenheim Foundation, the American Academy of Arts & Letters, the Koussevitzky Foundation, the Pew Fellowship in the Arts, The Independence Foundation, the NEA, and ASCAP.³ Higdon has engaged in residencies with both prominent orchestras (Philadelphia Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Pittsburgh Orchestra, Fort Worth Symphony) and renowned musical institutions (Northwestern University, the University of Texas - Austin, the University of Missouri - Kansas City, and the University of Wyoming).⁴ Commissions from these and other orchestras have resulted in some of the most frequently programmed contemporary works in the United States today, as Higdon enjoys more than two hundred performances a

¹ In 2010 Higdon won the Pulitzer Prize in music for her Violin Concerto written for Hilary Hahn.

² In 2009 Higdon won the Grammy for Best Classical Contemporary Composition for her Percussion Concerto written for Colin Currie. In 2017 Higdon won the same award for her Viola Concerto written for Roberto Díaz.

³ Jennifer Higdon, "Biography," <http://jenniferhigdon.com/biography.html>, (accessed January 30, 2019).

⁴ Ibid.

year.⁵ Higdon currently holds the Rock Chair in Composition at her alma mater, The Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, a position she has maintained since 1993.⁶

RATIONALE

The purpose of this document is to further the saxophonist's understanding of *Short Stories* (1996) for saxophone quartet by Jennifer Higdon. By connecting biographical information with a thorough analysis including a commentary on programmatic elements, the saxophonist can gain a greater awareness of the context surrounding the piece and successfully portray important compositional elements inherent in the work. An investigation of the compositional approaches of *Short Stories* through an analysis of form, texture, melody, harmony, timbre, and rhythm guides the reader through each movement, including a commentary on key programmatic elements.

Higdon's "intuitive" compositional method creates certain challenges when analyzing her music. Because Higdon composes free from prescribed forms, it is up to the author's interpretation in this analysis to convey the structure of each piece. Likewise, Higdon does not compose with tonal centers in mind, leaving it up to the author to determine how the harmonies function. In order to find patterns of chordal voicing and thematic phrases in Higdon's music, the author applied pitch-class set theory. Set theory

⁵ Statistical data gathered from the League of American Orchestras repertoire reports within a ten year period between 2003/2004-2012/2013 shows Higdon ranks among the top American composers in fields such as "Most Performances of a Contemporary Work (written within the last 25 years)", "Most Performed Works by an American Composer", and "Most Performances by a Living American Composer." <http://www.americanorchestras.org/knowledge-research-innovation/orr-survey/orr-archive.html>, (accessed February 5, 2019).

⁶ Deena K. Reedy, "A Performer's Guide to Creating a Listening Road Map: Applications to Late Twentieth-Century Solo Flute Compositions by American Women Composers Joyce Mekeel and Jennifer Higdon," (D.M.A. document, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2002). 118.

emerged in response to the motivic and contextual nature of post-tonal music, pioneered by theorist Allen Forte and composer Milton Babbitt.⁷ By identifying thematic note groupings as pitch-class sets and arranging them in their prime form, the author was able to identify recurring themes and harmonies, uncovering connections within the form, harmonies, and themes in Higdon's music.

Pitch-class sets are the building blocks of much of post-tonal music.⁸ A pitch-class set is an unordered collection of pitch-classes (a group of pitches one octave or more apart from one another).⁹ Prime form is a method which reorganizes the chord to its smallest intervals then assigns a numerical value to each note beginning with 0. Often the note Higdon voices in the bass is not the "0" in the prime form of the chord. In these cases, the author will ascribe the prime form value for each note of the chord in the figure. Further, because Higdon's harmonic language is neither tonal nor atonal and employs numerous non-functional harmonies, pitch-class set theory proved to be the most useful. Although Higdon did not deliberately compose using set theory,¹⁰ it is appropriate in this document because her ambiguous harmonic language lies somewhere between tonal and atonal. Higdon is adamant about not analyzing her own work, stating:

Theorists always think composers are planning everything out meticulously with chord progressions, but I really have no idea what the chords are. I tell people that you don't have to know any theory to write music. Writing music is just combining sounds with sounds, and that's all it is. That's a very simple way to look at it, but the truth is, you get the best pieces that way.¹¹

⁷ Joseph Straus, *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory* (2nd ed.) Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2000; Joseph Straus, "A Primer for Atonal Set Theory," *CUNY Academic Works*, 1991, https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_pubs/431, (accessed December 5, 2019).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Janice Elizabeth Crews, "Jennifer Higdon's *Oboe Concerto*: The Composition, Transformation, and a Performer's Analysis," (D.M.A. document, Louisiana State University, 2010), 16.

¹¹ As quoted in Crews, 16).

It is the responsibility of the academic community to provide performers with the knowledge necessary to understand how her music connects to her vernacular background, serves the narrative, and communicates with audiences. Through this analytical methodology, the author hopes to uncover connections that Higdon may not have intended. This document serves to add to the existing network of academic research on Higdon and to inform the reader to make appropriate decisions in performance.

BIOGRAPHY

Jennifer Higdon was born in Brooklyn, New York; then the family moved to Atlanta, Georgia when Jennifer was six months old, living there for the first ten years of her childhood.¹² Both of Higdon's parents were artists; her mother was interested in painting and abstract quilting, while her father worked as a freelance commercial artist with an interest in the abstract and avant-garde and taught at the Atlanta College of Art.¹³ Popular music was prominent in Higdon's childhood including a variety of styles from The Beatles, Bob Marley,¹⁴ and Simon and Garfunkel.¹⁵ The Beatles' album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* was the most significant to Higdon.¹⁶ Higdon's father, captivated by the cover art, purchased the album and subsequently gave his kids the record.¹⁷ Higdon played the recording "literally every day for about a year. I think it's infiltrated everything in my head."¹⁸

The *Sgt. Pepper's* album had a lasting effect on Higdon's perception of music, as she recalls being fascinated with the unique "sound world" of each track, stating "when I move from piece to piece, I actually change the sound world, and I'm pretty sure that has to do with the Beatles."¹⁹ The eccentric album contains a mixture of styles, such as rock and roll ("With a Little Help from My Friends"), circus ("Being for the Benefit of Mr.

¹² Donald McKinney. Michael Slayton, ed. *Women of Influence in Contemporary Music* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 142.

¹³ Virginia Broffitt, "The Music of Jennifer Higdon: Perspectives on the Styles and Compositional Approaches in Selected Chamber Compositions," (doc., University of Cincinnati, 2010), 5.

¹⁴ McKinney, *Women of Influence*, 142.

¹⁵ Paula Marantz Cohen, host, "The Drexel InterView," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rKLA_q4aJA, [6:00-7:00], (accessed January 7, 2019).

¹⁶ Reitz, *Composing in Color*, 8.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Jennifer Higdon, "Preconcert Interview with Jennifer Higdon," Library of Congress, March 7, 2015, <https://www.loc.gov/item/webcast-6766>, [36:00-37:00], (accessed February 12, 2019).

¹⁹ Ibid, [36:00-37:00], (accessed February 12, 2019).

Kite!"), orchestral ("Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band"), and Indian instruments ("Within You Without You").

The album would later inspire Higdon to compose with eccentricity in her own music. Higdon's eccentric traits include cross-over genres such as a hybridization of blue grass and classical in *Concerto 4-3*; adding unusual instruments to the orchestra such as water gong, Chinese heath reflex bells, and bowed percussion in *blue cathedral*; writing for prepared piano in *Concerto for Orchestra* and *running the edge*; and writing in unusual genres such as the Low Brass Concerto. Another marker common in Higdon's works is her ability to ascribe each work with a distinctive character and mood, often supplemented with poetic titles and program notes. While The Beatles' experimentation in the *Sgt. Pepper's* album was meaningful to Higdon, other types of art during that time carried a contrasting impression.

When Higdon was young, her father would take her to many "art happenings" in the Atlanta area,²⁰ exposing young Jennifer to contemporary art in the 1960s and 1970s, including the avant-garde movement, leading her to question experimentation for its own sake.²¹ To provide some context of what Higdon witnessed, in one such occurrence Higdon observed a performer strap himself to a black canvas with rubber cement. Higdon explains, "The idea was that they were going to blow white feathers with a fan, and theoretically they would stick on him."²² It is unclear what the canvas and feathers

²⁰ Jennifer Kelly, *In Her Own Words: Conversations with Composers in the United States* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 51.

²¹ Christina L. Reitz, *Jennifer Higdon: Composing in Color* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2018), 7-8.

²² Kelly, *In Her Own Words*, 51.

represented, further confusing Higdon. The ill-fated performance concluded prematurely as the performer passed out from the toxic fumes. As Higdon recalls the experience, she remembers thinking, “What are they doing? They look ridiculous.”²³ This kind of art was clearly not admired by Higdon; instead it would later motivate her to maintain effective communication with her music.

When Higdon was around ten years old, the family moved to Seymour, Tennessee, a rural town at the base of the Great Smoky Mountains. Higdon’s parents wanted their children to be closer to both their maternal and paternal grandparents, while also introducing them to the countryside.²⁴ Elaborating on her parents’ intentions to move, Higdon explains, “I think my parents decided that they wanted us to have the experience of living in the country.”²⁵ Embedded in the iconic Appalachian scenery, Higdon began to develop a love for nature, as her parents intended.

On the farm, Higdon wrote short stories, poetry, created “claymation” films, and constructed “huge cardboard box forts.”²⁶ These activities, along with an appreciation for painting, have significantly influenced Higdon’s artistic perspective and compositional decisions. Higdon’s early compositions reveal these influences. For instance, when Higdon was in graduate school, she marked the movements of her String Trio (1988) with visual titles, “Pale Yellow” and “Fiery Red,” using imagery to suggest contrasting attitudes reflected in the music. The “Pale Yellow” movement is slow and lyrical, while “Fiery Red” is fast and motivic. Later in 1994-96, Higdon drew inspiration from the work

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Christina L. Reitz, “Comprehensive Analysis of Selected Works by Jennifer Higdon” (diss., University of Florida, 2007), 15.

²⁵ McKinney, *Women of Influence*, 142.

²⁶ Reitz, *Composing in Color*, 7.

of Jackson Pollock in writing “Splashing the Canvas” from *Short Stories*. The title alludes to Pollock’s peculiar drip painting technique and stylistic elements suggest the motion of the artist’s hands layering paint on canvas. In each of these compositions, Higdon conveys the narrative through melodic, harmonic, textural, and rhythmic devices along with extended techniques.

Higdon also draws inspiration from her outdoor adventures to create settings for her programmatic music. Narratives from these settings play an important role in how she approaches her character pieces. Poetic titles and accompanying program notes guide the audience as themes, harmonies, and other devices intimate those elements. In *Summer Shimmers* (2008) for woodwind quintet, the short piece is accompanied with a brief poem by the composer:

When I was young
My brother and I used to go fishing
At a beautiful quiet pond amongst fields
It was there that we discovered...
Summer Shimmers
–Jennifer Higdon²⁷

Musically, Higdon applies angular piano figures in a high register which imitate the sparkling water while the wind instruments engage in lyrical counterpoint.

Higdon’s musical background was limited to the avant-garde and popular music through her father’s interests, creating a unique perception of art focused on experimentation. Higdon was aware of art music during her childhood, yet she claims to

²⁷ Jennifer Higdon, “Program notes for *Summer Shimmers*,” <http://www.jenniferhigdon.com/pdf/program-notes/Summer-Shimmers.pdf>, (accessed October 17, 2019).

have no exposure to classical music prior to college.²⁸ When Higdon was of high school age, she debated with her father about the experimental work of John Cage. During Higdon's youth, Cage had already achieved great fame and success. Higdon did not appreciate Cage's work, while her father admired him.²⁹

Higdon's father's interests led her to experimentation. During Higdon's studies at Pennsylvania University, George Crumb gave her the musical means to apply experimental techniques.³⁰ The influence from The Beatles, her father, and training from Crumb is manifested in *blue cathedral* (1999), where Higdon requires many members of the orchestra to play Chinese health reflex bells, water gong, and crystal glasses to create an ethereal atmosphere.³¹ Higdon also wrote for bowed percussion, particularly bells, in *blue cathedral* and *Concerto for Orchestra* (2002), another technique acquired from Crumb. Both works have garnered critical acclaim, gaining Higdon international recognition.³²

Higdon attended Bowling Green State University (BGSU) as a flute performance major studying under Judith Bentley.³³ Although Higdon felt her knowledge of classical music was deficient compared to her peers, she excelled in her lessons, prompting Bentley to propose to Higdon to compose a work for an upcoming masterclass.³⁴ During

²⁸ McKinney, *Women of Influence*, 153.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid, 130.

³¹ Reitz, "Comprehensive Analysis," 39.

³² Ibid, 22.

³³ Ibid, 18.

³⁴ Ibid, 19.

her studies at BGSU, Higdon began to develop an appreciation for Aaron Copland, who she cites as one of her first classical influences.³⁵

When Higdon was in her final year at BGSU, Robert Spano joined the faculty as conductor.³⁶ Higdon gained special approval to enroll in Spano's graduate conducting class, sparking a fateful relationship as Higdon later sought his council when searching for potential graduate programs in conducting.³⁷ Spano, a graduate of The Curtis Institute, encouraged Higdon to attend his alma mater.³⁸

After Higdon received an Artist Diploma from Curtis, she earned both an M.A. and Ph.D. in composition at the University of Pennsylvania.³⁹ As Higdon studied with George Crumb,⁴⁰ a relationship blossomed from common backgrounds and a shared love of nature. Like Higdon, Crumb grew up in the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia.⁴¹ Stylistic influences from Copland and Crumb permeate Higdon's own works. Higdon's contrapuntal texture is reminiscent of Copland, while her experimentation of tonal colors and unconventional techniques reflects Crumb's method. Higdon uses an eclectic approach through extended contrapuntal use, motivic and lyrical melodies, tonal ambiguity, and avoiding musical quotations. Higdon states her style as, "It's almost, to me, the noise in my head."⁴²

³⁵ Reitz, *Composing in Color*, 9.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Reitz, "Comprehensive Analysis," 20.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Jennifer Higdon, "Biography," <http://jenniferhigdon.com/biography.html>, (accessed October 24, 2019).

⁴⁰ Reitz, "Comprehensive Analysis," 22.

⁴¹ Ibid, 21.

⁴² Ibid.

Higdon attributes her curiosity of sound possibilities to Crumb, and refers to “the joy of sound” as a source of inspiration.⁴³ For example, while working on *rapid.fire* (1992) for solo flute, Higdon and Crumb engaged in rigorous discussions over the unorthodox notation and extended techniques in the piece.⁴⁴ The piece was written in response to a deadly shooting, as the vivid title implies, and the music alludes to the violent act through many extended techniques, atonal patterns, and a variety of unconventional articulations. Higdon credits Crumb for teaching her how to listen to music effectively⁴⁵ and how to use color in sound.⁴⁶ These lessons proved quite significant as Higdon explored many sound possibilities when writing the saxophone quartet *Short Stories*, which covers a broad spectrum of colors from one movement to the next through use of altissimo, slap tongue articulations, and a variety of tone clusters.

Higdon employs extended techniques in scenarios which help contribute to the musical story of the piece. In *Short Stories*, Higdon uses altissimo⁴⁷ opportunistically to make the music more accessible to a broader group of performers. The use of the altissimo register in solo works for saxophone dates to the early 20th century with commissions of the German virtuoso Sigurd Rascher, however the extended range was rarely implemented in chamber works. By the 1990s when Higdon began composing for the instrument, altissimo was within the standard range for many concert saxophonists and began to appear in more chamber works.

⁴³ Reitz, *Composing in Color*, 16.

⁴⁴ Reitz, “Comprehensive Analysis,” 11.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 22.

⁴⁶ Donald McKinney, *Women of Influence*, 157.

⁴⁷ The range above the standard fingerings for saxophone beginning with F-sharp above the staff.

Higdon was introduced to the saxophone quartet genre through her interactions with the PRISM Quartet. As one of the premiere ensembles of the idiom, the group promotes “Intriguing programs of great beauty and breadth... seek[ing] to place the saxophone in unexpected contexts, chart fresh musical territory, and to challenge, inspire, and move audiences.”⁴⁸ Higdon gravitated toward PRISM because of their shared musical ideologies and connection with the Curtis Institute. Along with altissimo, Higdon discovered other unconventional methods such as slap tongue and key slap techniques from PRISM and featured these effects in “Stomp & Dance.”

This document explores the saxophone quartet *Short Stories*, a collection of six concise movements, each with a different setting. Clearly arranged as separate character pieces, Higdon ascribes poetic titles to each movement accompanied with program notes directing the attention of the audience to specific locations and moods. A good example in *Short Stories* is “Coyote Nights,” where the title alludes to her impression of Arches National Park. The music implies her sentiments through open fifth harmonies and lyrical, wandering melodies. “Stomp & Dance” is a less specific example; Higdon simply states the movement is a “[r]omp for four saxophones,”⁴⁹ applied through extensive counterpoint, syncopation, and percussive articulations. While each “story” may be unrelated to the others, they all present a snapshot into the compositional mind of Higdon, where she employs contrasting devices to elicit a variety of moods.

⁴⁸ PRISM Quartet, “About: Ensemble,” <https://www.prismquartet.com/about/ensemble/>, (accessed May 30, 2019).

⁴⁹ Jennifer Higdon, “Program Notes for *Short Stories*,” <http://www.jenniferhigdon.com/pdf/program-notes/Short-Stories.pdf>, (accessed February 5th, 2019).

Other collections of short pieces often have connecting themes, such as Schumann's *Davidsbündlertänze* (*Dances of the League of David*) op.6, with the subtitle *18 Characterstücke*. Schumann presents the work, dedicated to Clara Wieck, as an eighteen-part musical dialogue between his fictional characters Florestan and Eusebius, with each piece in the collection ascribed to one or both of them.⁵⁰ It is reasonable to assume Schumann intended the collection to be performed in order. In contrast, Higdon does not number the movements in *Short Stories*, instead she encourages performers to select their own order.⁵¹ This flexibility in arrangement of movements frees the performers to create a variety of experiences to best suit their needs.

Through various commissions, Higdon has pioneered several innovative genres by mixing various styles of music. Higdon's childhood experiences in southern Appalachia allowed her to learn American folk genres such as blue grass and gospel, which have made an impression in her classical writing. Her *Concerto 4-3* for the ensemble Time for Three presents a hybridization between blue grass and classical idioms.⁵² The work highlights the talents of the soloists by blending bluegrass techniques with a classical presentation. *Concerto 4-3* is programmatic as it features poetic titles for each movement titled "The Shallows," "Little River," and "Roaring Smokies."⁵³ In the program notes Higdon states "The movement titles refer to rivers that run through the

⁵⁰ Robert Schumann, *Davidsbündlertänze*, op. 6. (Leipzig: Stich und Druck von Breitkopf & Härtel, 1887). See the "F" or "E" ascribed at the end of each movement in the first edition of the score.

⁵¹ Higdon, "Program Notes for *Short Stories*," <http://www.jenniferhigdon.com/pdf/program-notes/Short-Stories.pdf>, (accessed February 5th, 2019).

⁵² Higdon, "Program Notes for *Concerto 4-3*," www.jenniferhigdon.com/pdf/program-notes/Concerto-4-3.pdf, (accessed October 21, 2019).

⁵³ Ibid.

Smoky Mountains (where growing up, I heard quite a bit of bluegrass) ... I wanted to reference the Smokies, because East Tennessee was the first place that I really experienced bluegrass (or as they call it there, Mountain Music).”⁵⁴

Not all of Higdon’s music is programmatic, however. Many of her concerti are absolute music, Higdon’s Concerto for Orchestra and Low Brass Concerto are examples. Perhaps her most auspicious effort is the Concerto for Orchestra, a genre with limited precedent, which propelled Higdon to international fame after its premiere in 2002.⁵⁵ Higdon’s absolute music comprises many concerti for a variety of instruments, including works for piano, violin, viola, oboe (also arranged for soprano saxophone), trombone, tuba, percussion, and harp.⁵⁶

Higdon is adamant about maintaining a connection between performers and audiences.⁵⁷ The composer’s accessibility in her music originates with her attention to clear melody and rhythm.⁵⁸ Most of her music is contrapuntal, creating avenues for multiple melodies and countering devices, contributing to an active texture and, especially in the faster works, a clear tempo is always present. Higdon also advocates strongly for new music and publicity through her residencies at collegiate institutions, preconcert talks, self-publishing, numerous interviews, and appearances at premieres.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Reitz, “Comprehensive Analysis,” 22.

⁵⁶ Jennifer Higdon, “Orchestral Works,” <http://jenniferhigdon.com/orchestralworks.html>, (accessed October 22, 2019).

⁵⁷ Cohen, host, “The Drexel InterView,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rKLA_q4aJA, (accessed January 7, 2019).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Higdon's friend and colleague, conductor Marin Alsop offers a clear example of what makes composers accessible, "'Accessible' is often a dirty word in the world of art, but Jennifer embraces the concept and explains that a major priority for her is to give listeners a sense of grounding and a feel for where they are in her compositions. She is far less concerned with formality and technique than she is with the final test of a piece: how it sounds."⁵⁹

How a piece sounds is the ultimate test for Higdon, a sentiment she discovered during a lesson with Crumb.⁶⁰ The composer often makes changes during the preliminary rehearsals of a new work. For example, in "Splashing the Canvas," Higdon removed some measures at the end while working with the ANCIA Saxophone Quartet because it sounded more repetitive than she originally planned.⁶¹ Marin Alsop defends Higdon's stance on how new music is supposed to impact its listeners, summarizing the experiences shared with Higdon's music as "evocative and understandable" to audiences.⁶²

Chamber music makes up most of Higdon's early output, much of which features her primary instrument, the flute. Only a handful of her compositions feature the saxophone, many of which are transcriptions including *Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano* (1990), *Dash-* (2001), *Soprano Sax Concerto* (2004), and *Poetic Soprano Sax*

⁵⁹ Marin Alsop, "Jennifer Higdon and Me: A Musical Friendship," May 23, 2009, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=104464863>, (accessed January 7, 2019).

⁶⁰ McKinney, *Women of Influence*, 157-8.

⁶¹ Jenifer Higdon, email interview with author, March 23, 2019.

⁶² Alsop, "Jennifer Higdon and Me," <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=104464863>, (accessed January 7, 2019).

(2006). *Short Stories* (1996) is Higdon's first original composition for saxophone; however, she is currently under commission to write a work for alto saxophone and piano for the North American Saxophone Alliance biennial conference in 2022.⁶³ The composer has shown interest in writing for the instrument through commissions and numerous transcriptions; however, there is not sufficient research on these works.

It is the goal of this document to examine further Higdon's compositional process by analyzing *Short Stories* for saxophone quartet, thus expanding both the literature on the composer and the saxophone quartet idiom. This research reinforces the discoveries made in other idioms by previous Higdon scholars.⁶⁴ Although this research does not find any new discoveries in Higdon's style, it does shed light on how connected her music is in both the chamber and the orchestral works. As an early composition in Higdon's

⁶³ Griffin Campbell, interview with author, January 29, 2019.

⁶⁴ Deena K. Reedy, "A Performer's Guide to Creating a Listening Road Map: Applications to Late Twentieth-Century Solo Flute Compositions by American Women Composers Joyce Mekeel and Jennifer Higdon," (D.M.A. document, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2002); Brenda Rossow Phillips, "Jennifer Higdon: A Stylistic Analysis of Selected Flute and Orchestral Works," (D.M.A. document, Arizona State University, 2005); Ronda Benson Ford, "A Door to Extended Techniques: Five Analyses and Composer Interviews from the National Flute Association's High School Soloist Competition," (D.M.A. document, University of Southern Mississippi, 2005); Christina L. Reitz, "Comprehensive Analysis of Selected Orchestral Works by Jennifer Higdon," (diss., University of Florida, 2007); Virginia Broffitt, "The Music of Jennifer Higdon: Perspectives on the Styles and Compositional Approaches in Selected Chamber Compositions," (D.M.A. document, University of Cincinnati, 2010); Janice Elizabeth Crews, "Jennifer Higdon's Oboe Concerto: The Composition, Transformation, and a Performer's Analysis," (D.M.A. document, Louisiana State University, 2010); Max Brenton Harkey Williams, "Jennifer Higdon's Violin Concerto: The Genesis of a Twenty-First Century Work," (D.M.A. document, Florida State University, 2010); Evangelia Sophia Leontis, "A Discussion of Jennifer Higdon's Setting of the Poetry of Amy Lowell in the Chamber Work *Love Sweet*," (D.M.A. document, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2017); Laura Dallman Rorick, "The Significance of Accessibility in American Orchestral Music," (diss., Indiana University, 2017); Sarah Eckman McIver, "The Music of Flutist/Composers: Performances of Selected Works for Flute Composed between 1852 and 2005," (D.M.A. document, University of Maryland, 2010); Brittney Green, "Comprehensive Analysis of Movement One of Jennifer Higdon's Violin Concerto," (master's thesis, East Carolina University, 2018); Jennifer Kelly, *In Her Own Words: Conversations with Composers in the United States*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014); Donald McKinney, Michael Slayton ed., *Women of Influence in Contemporary Music: Nine American Composers*, (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2011); Christina L. Reitz, *Jennifer Higdon: Composing in Color*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2018).

career, *Short Stories* provides many insights into the developing mind of the composer.

Additional research documents the process of how the piece came into fruition.

COMPOSITIONAL APPROACH

Throughout her professional career, Higdon and her partner Cheryl Lawson have maintained their own personal publishing company, Lawdon Press, a combination of their names. Self-publishing allows Higdon to manage the distribution of her music quickly more effectively than through traditional publishers. This freedom permits the composer to make revisions instantly, which she regularly does to her newer works. Additionally, Higdon has only written on commission, often scheduling new projects years in advance.

For her commissions, Higdon researches the performers or commissioning groups to gather data on what kinds of music they most often perform. Afterwards, the composition process usually begins with daydreaming.⁶⁵ The first notes on the manuscript most often become a theme or melody in the middle of the work.⁶⁶ The introduction is always composed last because Higdon is most concerned with making a good first impression with any piece.⁶⁷

Higdon claims her compositional method is “intuitive,” relying on her subconscious guidance rather than prescribed formulas.⁶⁸ However, several analyses of Higdon’s compositions discover that the form is sectional. Broffitt⁶⁹ and Reitz⁷⁰ have each commented on the sectional quality of Higdon’s music and how the composer does

⁶⁵ Kelly, “In Her Own Words,” 47.

⁶⁶ Reitz, “Comprehensive Analysis,” 39-41.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 26.

⁶⁹ Broffitt, “The Music of Jennifer Higdon,” 21-22.

⁷⁰ Reitz, “Comprehensive Analysis” 39-41.

not create forms consciously. Crews simply states Higdon's compositions are "free in form."⁷¹ Regardless of her intentions, most of Higdon's music is sectional with recurring material following an arch form. Arch forms are nothing new, seen in the style of Bach, Wagner,⁷² and Copland⁷³ to name a few. Within this document, an analysis of each movement reveals this sectional approach, exploring the traits which define the structure, such as changes in texture (activity of each line), dynamics, articulation, and tessitura, resulting in a change in mood.

Following the advice of her mentor George Crumb, Higdon reveals her stylistic decisions are based only on how the music sounds.⁷⁴ During the compositional process, Higdon sketches her ideas on manuscript paper at the piano, then later converts the initial figures to notation software before continuing. During the first rehearsals, she often revises the music, adapting to performer's requests and unexpected outcomes. As mentioned previously, when Higdon was working with the ANCIA Saxophone Quartet before the premiere of *Short Stories*, she removed some of the final measures of the movement "Stomp & Dance" because it sounded more repetitive than she originally envisioned.⁷⁵ Higdon's philosophy to "write things that just sound interesting"⁷⁶ results in a style that constantly shifts in peaks and valleys of texture, dynamics, and tessitura resulting in loose forms that are best described as sectional. Most of Higdon's pieces

⁷¹ Crews, "Jennifer Higdon's *Oboe Concerto*," 21.

⁷² *Tristan und Isolde* and *Parsifal* exhibit ABA arch forms. Derrick Everett, "An Introduction to the Music of Parsifal," <https://www.monsalvat.no/music.htm>, (accessed December 2, 2019).

⁷³ Movement I of the 3rd Symphony. Phillip Huscher, "Program Notes," Chicago Symphony Orchestra, https://cso.org/uploadedFiles/1_Tickets_and_Events/Program_Notes/ProgramNotes_Copland_Symphony3.pdf, (accessed December 2, 2019).

⁷⁴ McKinney, *Women of Influence*, 157-8.

⁷⁵ Angela Wyatt, interview with author, February 1, 2019.

⁷⁶ McKinney, *Women of Influence*, 157-8.

feature recurring thematic material, following an arch form. Higdon's melodies are lyrical and motivic, harmonies alternate between modality and atonality, and she employs extended techniques to portray programmatic elements.

Texture

Higdon often changes the texture to signal structural pillars in the music and is quite consistent in this practice. It is possible Higdon acquired this technique through her appreciation of Copland. In each of the movements of *Short Stories*, texture plays a significant role in determining the sectional breaks. Higdon favors counterpoint between the voices, with two or more voices trading melodic material over various ostinato figures. Additionally, Reitz notes in Higdon's orchestral compositions that Higdon uses texture to generate musical intensity, explaining that during a phrase beginning with a single voice, Higdon adds more layers to a polyphonic climax at the end.⁷⁷ This inner development of texture from solo to ensemble passages within a phrase can be applied to her chamber works as well. Like Copland, Higdon typically begins a phrase with a thin texture, usually a single voice, then gradually adds contrapuntal lines as the phrase develops. Higdon delays the climax to the end of a phrase, peaking at a point of thickest texture, before reducing back to a simple texture to begin the next phrase or section. Commonly paired with a dramatic shift in dynamics, tessitura, and articulation pattern, the transitions between phrases are abrupt.

Harmony

Higdon's harmonies are non-functional; however, certain tonal centers appear. Modulations are frequent, often within a single phrase, moving to unrelated key areas,

⁷⁷ Reitz, "Comprehensive Analysis of Selected Works by Jennifer Higdon." 37.

often by half-step. Broffitt comments on half step modulations in the chamber work *Summer Shimmers* as well.⁷⁸ Sequences of motivic content are common, usually in chromatic motion.⁷⁹

Higdon applies both tonal chords and atonal sets to her pieces, drawing from a mixed harmonic palette. Most often, Higdon alludes to tonal centers through repeated pitches and accidentals notated in the score. Higdon rarely implements key signatures, only applying them to the movement “Lullaby.” Tone clusters are common, comprised of a tonal chord with added non-chord tones to distort the harmonic stability. Another method to emphasize ambiguity is Higdon’s application of the quartal chord (set 0257) which she voices to emphasize fourth and fifth intervals instead of tertiary intervals.

The most prevalent interval in Higdon’s music is the perfect fifth. Previous research has documented the frequency in which this interval appears harmonically in Higdon’s chamber and orchestral compositions. Reitz observes in *blue cathedral* that Higdon uses open fifth harmonies as a consistent accompanying figure throughout the work.⁸⁰ Broffitt locates similar devices in the chamber works *Summer Shimmers* and *Dash*.⁸¹ Donald McKinney discovers vertical and horizontal perfect fifths in Movement I of the Concerto for Orchestra.⁸²

Higdon instigates harmonic ambiguity through consecutive ascending perfect fifths in a chord, resulting in the quartal set 0257. Higdon voices the quartal harmony

⁷⁸ Broffitt, “The Music of Jennifer Higdon,” 29-30.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Reitz, “Comprehensive Analysis,” 52.

⁸¹ Broffitt, “The Music of Jennifer Higdon,” 31-32.

⁸² McKinney, *Women of Influence*, 179.

differently to elicit different moods. Higdon voices the chord in continuous fifth intervals in “Coyote Nights” and ninth, fourth, and second intervals in “Lullaby.” Higdon layers tritones in a chord as well, resulting in set 0167, a subset of the octatonic scale. In “Splashing the Canvas,” Higdon voices set 0167 as two tritones separated by a fifth (F–B and F-sharp–C).

Higdon’s harmonic language lies somewhere between tonal and chromatic, depending on the context of the piece. In “Chase,” *Dash–*, and “Splashing the Canvas,” Higdon favors whole tone and octatonic figures along with set classes 0246 and 0167, which are whole tone and octatonic subsets, respectively. Conversely, in *Bop*, “Lullaby,” and “Coyote Nights” the harmonies hold more major and minor chordal structures with added non-chord tones and frequent chromatic movement.

In “Coyote Nights,” the open fifth interval is quite prominent throughout as the low voices move in parallel motion. Higdon concedes that the openness of the interval helps depict the openness of the Great American West, specifically Arches National Park, and the feeling of expansiveness one has when visiting.⁸³ Parallel chromatic movement in the paired voices indicates more of an inspiration from Copland, rather than medieval practices such as the work of Leonin.

Melody

The melodies in Higdon’s compositions alternate between lyrical and motivic, often containing both elements within the same phrase. Higdon’s lyrical melodies often involve large ascending intervallic leaps, and are rhythmically diverse, with a significant

⁸³ Higdon, email interview with author, March 23, 2019.

mixture of short and long notes. In contrast, Higdon's motivic figures are brief, repeated consecutively, monorhythmic, and are confined to a small range.

In the programmatic works, Higdon's compositional devices aid in eliciting the mood incited by the narrative. In "Chase," the programmatic element of a "running game" permeates the movement as the voices maintain a high energy level throughout that nearly loses control as each line darts toward and away from one another in a contest to "see who wins."⁸⁴ Motivic devices such as oscillation and melodies featuring tritones drive the active texture. In *blue cathedral*, a piece dedicated to Higdon's late brother Andrew Blue Higdon, Reitz states how Higdon connects the narrative to the music through instrumental association, "A specific musical association, however, occurs with the flute and the clarinet. These instruments are utilized as 'characters' portraying the composer and her late brother. An accomplished flutist, she is represented by the flute while Andrew is depicted by the clarinet, his former instrument."⁸⁵

Rhythm

Higdon's rhythmic language emphasizes syncopation, ties across the bar line, polyrhythms, and driving ostinato patterns. The most significant component of Higdon's rhythm is syncopation, pervading both the fast and slow works. Higdon applies ostinato patterns as critical components to the contrapuntal texture in *Short Stories*, *Dash-*, *Zaka*, and *Bop* (2004). In *Short Stories*, syncopated oscillations between two pitches create dissonance in the texture, always at the interval of a second. Contrary to the oscillation patterns, single-pitch ostinatos also drive the energy forward, passing in unison through

⁸⁴ Angela Wyatt, interview with author, February 1, 2019.

⁸⁵ Reitz, "Comprehensive Analysis," 51.

the ensemble. In his analysis of the Concerto for Orchestra, McKinney describes how Higdon adds rhythmic diversity to the contrapuntal lines, acting as what the composer describes as “clocks moving at different speeds.”⁸⁶

Program

A significant amount of Higdon’s music is programmatic, including the collection *Short Stories*. Expressive movement titles such as “Chase,” “Splashing the Canvas,” and “Coyote Nights” certainly evoke musical expectations from the listener. Higdon does not fool listeners with these poetic titles, she intentionally elicits the mood or aesthetic through compositional devices which can reflect narrative aspects of each movement. Extended techniques such as altissimo, slap tongue articulations, and key slap techniques can also strengthen the bond between the music and the story in the piece. In “Stomp & Dance,” Higdon infers a “drum break” section, like in a performance by drum and bugle corps, by initiating key slaps for all four saxophones.⁸⁷ In “Coyote Nights,” Higdon alludes to the twinkling of the stars through an *ad lib.* figure shared between the tenor and baritone saxophones in their upper registers.⁸⁸ Devices such as those listed above aid in suggesting the narrative and can increase the effectiveness of the piece, supplemented by program notes to provide context for the audience. It is the author’s goal that this analysis will help performers understand the connected devices in the piece so that they can successfully execute the necessary techniques and listeners can understand the programmatic associations suggested by the music.

⁸⁶ McKinney, *Women of Influence*, 174.

⁸⁷ Jennifer Higdon, email interview with author, March 23, 2019.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER II - *SHORT STORIES*

Short Stories (1996) for saxophone quartet was commissioned by the ANCIA, Black Swamp, Resounding Winds, and Sax 4th Avenue Saxophone Quartets with a grant from the American Composers Forum (ACF), underwritten by the Jerome Foundation, and with additional funding from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.⁸⁹ It is the first original work by Higdon composed specifically for the saxophone. Consisting of six independent movements entitled “Summer’s Eve,” “Lullaby,” “Coyote Nights,” “Chase,” “Stomp & Dance,” and “Splashing the Canvas,” *Short Stories* provides a variety of material which performers can tailor to the venue or performance duration by selecting a custom order and number of movements for performance.⁹⁰ In the score, Higdon’s instructions for performance are as follows:⁹¹

⁸⁹ Jennifer Higdon, “Program Notes for *Short Stories*,” <http://www.jenniferhigdon.com/pdf/program-notes/Short-Stories.pdf>, (accessed February 5th, 2019).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Copyright used with permission by Lawdon Press.

"Short Stories"

A collection of 6 movements
for saxophone quartet

The Movements Are...

<u>Title</u>	<u>Approx. Dur.</u>	<u>Instr.</u>	<u>Tempo</u>
"Summer's Eve"	4'	SSAT	slow
"Lullaby"	3'	SATB	slow
"Coyote Nights"	4'	SATB	slow
"Chase"	3'	SATB	fast
"Stomp & Dance"	4'	SATB	fast
"Splashing the Canvas"	3'	SATB	fast

Any of the movements can be performed in any number or in any order—they are six separate pieces. These movements have been placed in the score in this order, not as an implied sequence by the composer, but to guarantee that the quartet itself chooses an order of its own preference. The parts have been placed in a notebook to facilitate a choice in the order. The entire work does not have to occur in performance; as little as a single movement can be performed. There is variation in general tempos, durations, and instrumentation throughout; two of the movements share thematic materials in case a quartet wishes to create a performance with the implication of recalled musical materials. Each movement is a different story.

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In the program notes, Higdon explains the commission and provides a brief narrative for each movement:

"Short Stories" is a collection of 6 movements for saxophone quartet, which are flexible in both the order and number in which they can be performed. The piece was written with the idea that a group could tailor their performance according to their venue and the duration they might like to fill on a concert. While being composer-in-residence with the Prism Saxophone Quartet, I had the chance to see how the demands for repertoire change greatly from concert to concert: through school programs with young students, to college-age classical musicians, to formal recitals. So, when I sat down to write a work for the Anicia, Black Swamp, Resounding Winds, and Sax 4th Avenue quartets, I wanted a work with as much diversity in the characters of the movements as possible and I wanted the groups to have freedom in their choices of movements. As a result, there are 6 movements, 3 of which are slow and 3 of which are fast, each telling a different story:

"Summer's Eve" - I had in mind the idyllic summer evening where folks are out sitting on their porches in swings and rocking chairs, listening to the sounds of summer: crickets and children at play, with soft evening breezes. I wanted to capture the essence and the magic of an ideal summer's eve.

"Lullaby" - This movement was originally written as a work for mezzo, flute, and piano, but I kept hearing it as a saxophone quartet in my head. It is a lullaby whose lyrical qualities seem to lend itself to the saxophone very well.

"Coyote Nights" - Many years ago, I took a trip out West, camping out in 8 different National Parks; one of those parks was Arches, in Utah. It is an unusual place where it becomes totally dark at night, with large looming rocks, a million stars above, and with the sound of wild coyotes crying in the night. That crying is peaceful reminder that we are visitors.

"Chase" - A fast movement with much energy and tension, this is a running game that could be through any street, anywhere; where pursuers and prey sometimes come very close to catching up with each other, and when they do, they rough and tumble before sprinting off again.

"Stomp & Dance" – This movement speaks for itself.

"Splashing the Canvas" – Inspired by Jackson Pollock, an artist who splashes paint upon a canvas in a wild and uncontrolled manner, building up layers and constantly changing the resulting structure. Through this piece, many ideas are presented and are thrown about and layered. At the beginning of the movement it takes longer for the ideas to be stated, but as the piece progresses, the themes come back quicker and quicker as if the canvas were building into thick layers of overlapping ideas and becoming more complex.

"Short Stories" was commissioned by the Anicia, Black Swamp, Resounding Winds, and Sax 4th Avenue Quartets, with a grant from the American Composers Forum, underwritten by the Jerome Foundation, with additional funding from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.

--Jennifer Higdon⁹²

Each movement showcases one of Higdon's primary compositional traits.

"Summer's Eve" and "Lullaby" exercise harmonic ambiguity through tone clusters by adding non-chord tones in the key to major chord structures; "Coyote Nights" exhibits open fifth harmonies and lyrical melodies; "Chase" demonstrates rapid oscillations and symmetrical scalar patterns; "Stomp & Dance" explores modality and percussive techniques; and "Splashing the Canvas" layers tritone melodies. During the work's inception Higdon was in residency with the PRISM Quartet, observing their clinics and performances to learn the capabilities of the instrument. One notices PRISM's influence from the rapid tone clusters in "Chase" and the percussive key slap rhythms in "Stomp & Dance" to the solemn melodies in "Coyote Nights" and tone clusters in "Summer's Eve" and "Lullaby."

The result of the commission is a diverse programmatic work which explores and depicts many American scenes. "Chase" suggests a frantic competition between members of the ensemble. ANCIA member Angela Wyatt recalls about the composer's intentions of the movement, "I think Jennifer [Higdon] said she wanted it to be like – I don't know if she said a cartoon – but all the parts are trying to chase each other and trying to see

⁹² Higdon, "Program Notes for *Short Stories*," <http://www.jenniferhigdon.com/pdf/program-notes/Short-Stories.pdf>, (accessed February 5th, 2019).

who wins.”⁹³ Higdon alludes to the “running game” through dissonant counterpoint at a blistering tempo, compact tone clusters, and jarring transitions.

In “Summer’s Eve,” soft tone clusters garner a calming atmosphere as the piece echoes through major and minor chords with added non-chord tones under tonal melodies at a higher tessitura by replacing the baritone saxophone with a soprano saxophone. In the program notes, Higdon likely alludes to her childhood in Tennessee, stating that the music reflects the feeling of sitting on the porch on a pleasant night with friends and family.⁹⁴

“Lullaby” provides soothing duet phrases which meander between tonal areas through homophonic textures.

“Splashing the Canvas” exemplifies Higdon’s appreciation for painting.⁹⁵ Higdon’s inspiration here was the work of mid-century painter Jackson Pollock who pioneered the drip technique in modern painting.⁹⁶

In “Coyote Nights,” Higdon follows Copland’s influence by alluding to the vast scenery of the Great American West through open fifth harmonies and lyrical melodies.

The program notes for “Stomp & Dance” state that the movement “speaks for itself.”⁹⁷ When the author asked the composer if “Stomp & Dance” was inspired by the

⁹³ Angela Wyatt, interview by author, digital recording, February 1, 2019.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Color themes reflect in the movements “Pale Yellow” and “Fiery Red” in Piano Trio; *Color Through; blue cathedral, American Canvas*; “Blue Hills of Mist” from *String Poetic; Impressions*; and *Light Refracted*.

⁹⁶ Higdon, “Program Notes for *Short Stories*,” <http://www.jenniferhigdon.com/pdf/program-notes/Short-Stories.pdf>, (accessed February 5th, 2019).

⁹⁷ Ibid.

theatrical group STOMP,⁹⁸ Higdon replied, “It was indeed.”⁹⁹ The author suspects that Higdon imitates the percussive rhythms of the drum and bugle corps ensemble by applying slap tongue and key slap extended techniques.¹⁰⁰

The main purpose of the commission for *Short Stories* was to generate a collection of small movements which could be performed separately from one another or in any order desired. Higdon did not number the movements for this reason. The work was originally titled *Songbook*, which the ANCIA Saxophone Quartet premiered at St. Patrick’s Catholic Church in Edina, Minnesota¹⁰¹ shortly before performing at the North American Saxophone Alliance’s (NASA) biennial conference in Gainesville, Florida on March 30, 1996.¹⁰² ANCIA only performed one movement from the collection: “Summer’s Eve.”¹⁰³ The title *Short Stories* came after the work was finished. Wyatt explains,

We only played Summer’s Eve [at the 1996 NASA biennial conference]. We had four things on the program but the Higdon we just played Summer’s Eve. On the program it is listed as *Songbook*. That wasn’t the final title, I was asking David [Milne] about this last night, I said, “Isn’t that weird that we left it as *Songbook*?” I guess Jennifer [Higdon] hadn’t named it *Short Stories* yet.¹⁰⁴

The commissioning process began in 1993 and was led by Barry Brahier, manager of the ANCIA Saxophone Quartet. Brahier requested Higdon to write the piece in multiple short movements that vary in character and tempo and could be performed

⁹⁸ A drum and bugle corps ensemble that gives choreographed performances in concert halls.

⁹⁹ Higdon, email interview with author, March 23, 2019.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Angela Wyatt, interview by author, digital recording, February 1, 2019.

¹⁰² NASA biannual conference program, March 30, 1996.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Angela Wyatt, interview by author, digital recording, February 1, 2019.

separately. Variety of material was an important element of the grant proposal submitted by ANCIA manager Barry Brahier, stating that the character, tempo, and instrumentation may vary between movements.¹⁰⁵ Brahier applied for a grant from the ACF in 1993 and the commissioning project was accepted in 1994.¹⁰⁶ The approved contract ACF sent to Higdon and Brahier reads:

This proposal is for a work for saxophone quartet of an approximate duration of 15-20 minutes in length, consisting of 4 to 5 movements. The work would be unique in that any number of movements may be played (in other words, maybe only 2 movements) and in any order, so that a movement could be performed according to a needed occasion (such as a demonstration at a school). The instrumentation of each movement will vary within the saxophone family. For example, a movement might consist of 3 tenors and a baritone saxophone or 3 altos and a soprano.¹⁰⁷ As is usually the case, the character and tempos of the movements would vary. [Brahier's] intent is that this would be as utilitarian a piece as is possible, as well as adding to the repertoire of a genre which is growing rapidly.¹⁰⁸

Although *Short Stories* is the first original work for saxophone by the composer, one of the movements, "Lullaby," was originally written for mezzo-soprano, flute, and piano but Higdon states, "I kept hearing it as a saxophone quartet in my head."¹⁰⁹ There are several other arrangements of "Lullaby" by the composer, including multiple versions with one or more saxophones.¹¹⁰ This document inspects the version for saxophone quartet and refers to the original version for context. The remaining five movements are

¹⁰⁵ Angela Wyatt, interview by author, digital recording, February 1, 2019.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Although the wording implies multiple instances of instrumental variation, Higdon only did so with "Summer's Eve," which uses a non-traditional instrumentation of soprano, soprano, alto, and tenor saxophones.

¹⁰⁸ Contract excerpt provided by ANCIA member Angela Wyatt, with permission.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Four versions of *Lullaby* with saxophone currently exist, scored for soprano saxophone, flute, and piano; two alto saxophones and piano; soprano saxophone, alto saxophone, and piano; and saxophone quartet.

Higdon's original compositions for the saxophone repertoire, in that they are not transcribed from previous sources. Higdon has since arranged "Stomp & Dance" for saxophone octet at the request of the PRISM Quartet.¹¹¹ This document inspects the version for saxophone quartet.

Two published recordings currently display the piece as a whole: the first (2009) by the ANCIA Saxophone Quartet¹¹² and the second (2016) by the PRISM Quartet.¹¹³ In their album titled *Short Stories*, the ANCIA Saxophone Quartet programmed the piece in the following order: "Chase," "Summer's Eve," "Lullaby," "Splashing the Canvas," "Coyote Nights," and "Stomp & Dance." Because ANCIA was the commissioning ensemble and the first to record the piece, the author chose to order the movements in this document in the order on their recording. In PRISM's later recording titled *The Curtis Project*, the program order is "Summer's Eve," "Chase," "Coyote Nights," "Splashing the Canvas," "Lullaby," and "Stomp & Dance."

PRISM and ANCIA both place "Chase" and "Summer's Eve" at the beginning of their programs. ANCIA chose the more aggressive movement, "Chase," as the prologue while PRISM elected to open with the mellow "Summer's Eve." Both ensembles place "Stomp & Dance" last in the program. Further investigation shows some discrepancies in octave placement between the two recordings which the following analysis will discuss.

¹¹¹ The octet was arranged for a reunion concert dedicated to former longstanding University of Michigan saxophone professor Donald Sinta, where many of his students gathered to play the concert.¹¹¹

¹¹² ANCIA Saxophone Quartet. *Short Stories*. Naxos 8.559616. CD. 2009.

¹¹³ PRISM Quartet. *The Curtis Project*. XAS Records XAS101. CD. 2016.

Short Stories continues to appear on concert programs both at the collegiate and professional level, twenty-three years after its premiere. As one of the commissioning ensembles, the ANCIA Saxophone Quartet is currently programming the piece at the time of this writing.¹¹⁴ Selections of the piece were performed by a student ensemble during Higdon's residency at the Northwestern Bienen School of Music in 2018.¹¹⁵ The Classic City Saxophone Quartet performed selections of the piece at the 2017 NASA regional conference.¹¹⁶ The author intends to provide biographical context and a stylistic analysis for readers to better equip themselves for a successful performance by understanding Higdon's compositional devices, allowing for a more authentic performance.

¹¹⁴ Sintchak, Matthew. Interview by author. Tape recording. January 31, 2019.

¹¹⁵ Katelyn Balling and Kingsley Day, "Jennifer Higdon Visits Campus for First Nemmers Prize Residency," *Fanfare*, Spring 2019, Opus 57, <https://www.music.northwestern.edu/sites/default/files/fanfare/2019-03/Spring%202019%20Fanfare.pdf>, (accessed November 16, 2018).

¹¹⁶ Region 6 Conference of the North American Saxophone Alliance, 2017, <https://www.valdosta.edu/colleges/arts/music/woodwinds/saxophone/nasa-program.pdf>, (accessed November 16, 2019).

SHORT STORIES – “CHASE”

“Chase” depicts a scene of high energy and playful anxiety where the instruments characterize pursuers and prey in a “running game that could be through any street, anywhere.”¹¹⁷ The chaotic texture is filled with quickly moving counterpoint, compact tone clusters, octatonic themes, whole tone scales, incessant ostinati, and slap tongue special effects as the form ricochets between two alternating sections contrasting in style and mood.

In the program notes, Higdon states the piece is: “A fast movement with much energy and tension, this is a running game that could be through any street, anywhere; where pursuers and prey sometimes come very close to catching up with each other, and when they do, they rough and tumble before sprinting off again.”¹¹⁸ Each stylistic element contributes to the narrative. Higdon infers a city-streets environment by voicing the quartet in tightly compact intervals. Dissonant tone clusters such as 0246 and 014 dominate the harmony as a result of the narrow voicing rarely expanding beyond an octave. The four voices weave above and below each other in furious whole tone scales, alluding to the opponents chasing each other in the running game. The tempo maintains a ♩ = 152-160 beats per minute pace with consistent sixteenth and triplet polyrhythms driving the intensity throughout.

The form also implies pursuers and prey as the two alternating sections contrast in style. The A sections are more aggressive, dominated by an oscillation pattern, slap tongue articulations, strong dynamics, and frenzied *ad lib.* figures. Conversely, the B

¹¹⁷ Jennifer Higdon, “Program Notes for *Short Stories*,” <http://www.jenniferhigdon.com/pdf/program-notes/Short-Stories.pdf>, (accessed February 5th, 2019).

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

sections are more docile, blanketed by a single-pitch ostinato, shorter in length, softer in dynamics, and display a less active texture. In the A sections, the texture fluctuates between counterpoint and tutti figures, perhaps alluding to moments when runners separate (counterpoint) and collide (tutti). Phrases conclude with overlapping whole tone scales then suddenly dissipate, perhaps alluding to moments of pursuers nearly catching their prey.

The author has identified the form of the piece as Introduction–A1–B1–A2–B2–A3–B3–Coda. The most defining element of the sections are the ostinati. The first ostinato is an oscillating figure between two pitches separated by a major second located in the A sections; the second ostinato is a repeated single pitch located in the B sections. Two themes also support the form, one based on the whole tone scale in the A sections and the other based on the octatonic scale in the B sections. The following table outlines the form with reference to these thematic devices and other contributing elements such as symmetrical scalar passages, slap tongue articulations, and *ad lib.* figures (see [table 2.1](#)).

Table 2.1, Structural outline of “Chase” with reference to thematic material.

Section, Measures	Thematic Material
Introduction: 1-4	Symmetrical scalar passages
A1: 5-24	Oscillation Slap tongue Symmetrical scalar passages Whole tone theme <i>ad lib.</i> figures
B1: 25-31	Single-pitch ostinato Octatonic theme Symmetrical scalar passages
A2: 32-64	Oscillation Whole tone theme Octatonic theme Minor scalar passages <i>ad lib.</i> figures
B2: 65-77	Single-pitch ostinato Octatonic theme Whole tone theme
A3: 78-111	Oscillation Whole tone theme Octatonic theme Symmetrical scalar passages Improvisation Slap tongue <i>ad lib.</i> figures
B3: 112-121	Octatonic theme <i>ad lib.</i> figures
Coda: 122-131	Oscillation Symmetrical scalar passages Slap tongue

Table 2.1 lists Higdon’s compositional devices in “Chase,” many of which connect the A sections together and B sections together. First, the oscillation figure appears in all A sections and the single-pitch ostinato patterns appear in the first two B sections. Second, the themes are connected to their sections. Both sections utilize symmetrical scalar passages as transitional material. Lastly, Higdon implements brief *ad lib.* figures in the A sections and final B section, encouraging performers to “play as

quickly as possible” within a given range.¹¹⁹ These passages mostly occur in conjunction with the slap tongue accompaniment.

The dynamics are soft at the beginning of each section, then crescendo to a climax at the end of each phrase, following a sawtooth contour of gradual growth then sudden, often immediate, decay (see *fig. 2.1*). Texture and tessitura also develop through a single phrase following the sawtooth approach of peaks and valleys, outlining the form aided by alternating themes and rhythm patterns. Each section is segregated by dynamic swells and precipitous intervallic and dynamic drops coupled with shifting textures. Emphasizing these effects, the ensemble unites in rhythmic unison at extreme registers and accented articulations during the cadential climaxes before quickly reducing to start the next section. These syncopated tutti figures help define the structure which instigates the ending climax of each section.

To better explain the “sawtooth” term the author uses to interpret how Higdon develops a phrase, the following tables ascribe numerical values to three defining variables: texture, dynamics, and tessitura. A value of 1 in *table 2.2A* represents a thin texture while a value of 4 is ascribed to a thick texture. A value of 1 in *table 2.2B* signifies a piano dynamic while a value of 4 is ascribed to forte or stronger. A value of 1 in *table 2.2C* indicates the ensemble is in an extreme low register while a value of 4 is ascribed to the ensemble scored in an extreme high register.

¹¹⁹ Indicated by the composer in the score.

Table 2.2A, Criteria for the “Texture” graph.

Activity in Texture	Value
One line	1
Two lines in counterpoint	2
Three lines in counterpoint	3
Four lines in counterpoint	4

Table 2.2B, Criteria for the “Dynamics” graph.

Dynamic level	Value
<i>Piano</i> or less	1
<i>Mezzo piano</i>	2
<i>Mezzo forte</i>	3
<i>Forte</i> or more	4

Table 2.2C, Criteria for the “Tessitura” graph.

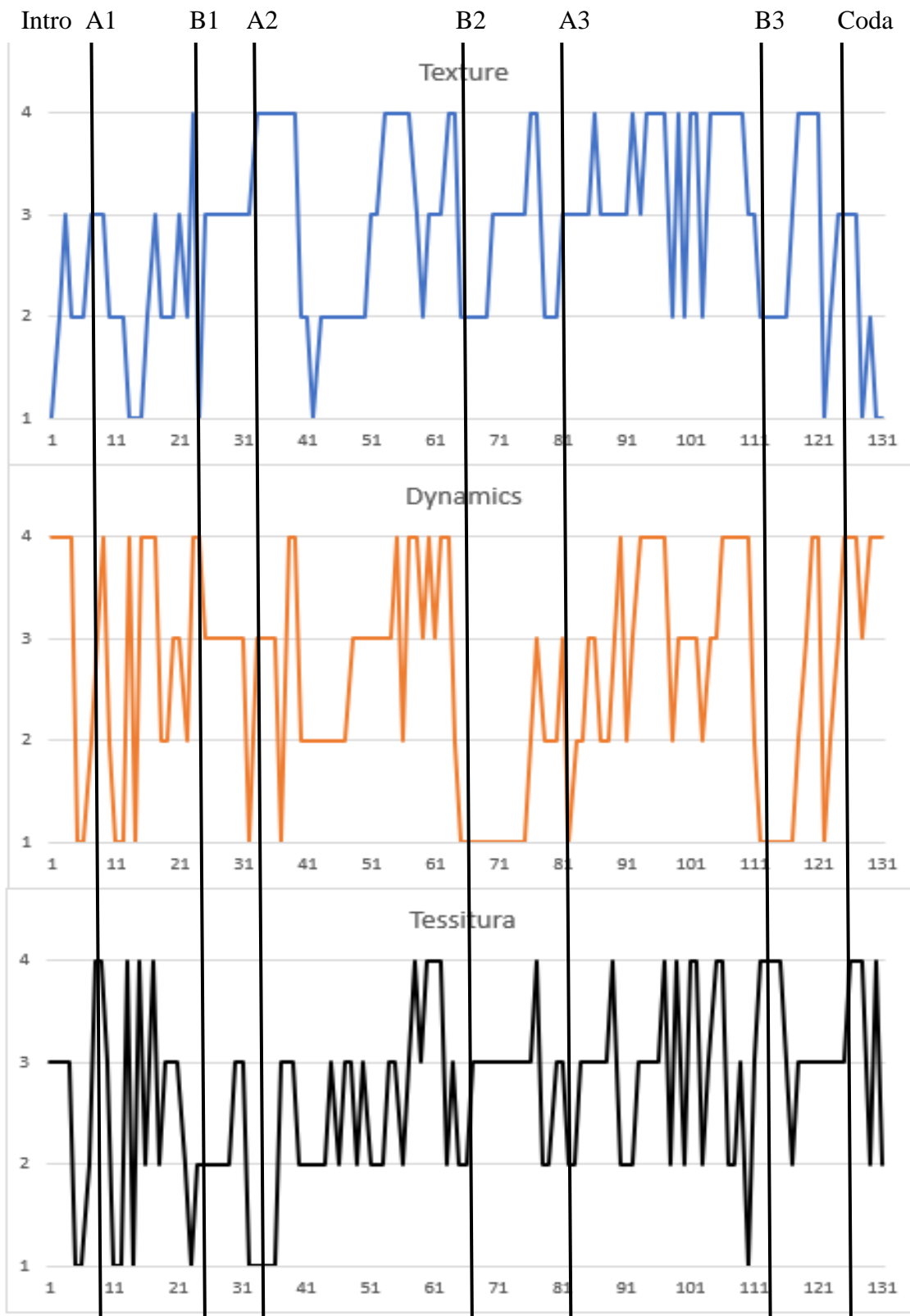
Range of tessitura of the ensemble	Value
Extreme low (below concert D \flat 3)	1
Low (concert D \flat 3– C4)	2
High (concert D \flat 4– D \flat 5)	3
Extreme high (above concert D \flat 5)	4

The standard tessitura for a saxophone quartet ranges from D \flat 2 to E \flat 6, spanning just over four octaves.¹²⁰ In determining the tessitura of the ensemble for each measure in the piece, the author used his best judgement in applying a numerical value to the average tessitura of the ensemble. Exceptions to this method were made when a single voice was in its extreme register, in which case the value ascribed favored the range of that voice only. The following diagrams represent visual references for how Higdon develops texture, dynamics, and tessitura to generate a sawtooth pattern of peaks and valleys which

¹²⁰ This author used the system of pitches with C4 representing middle C.

helps define each section. The author exercised his best judgement in ascribing a numerical value for each element in every measure of the piece to generate the graphs as realistically as possible. Although the graphs may not represent the piece perfectly, it is the author's hope that the visual representation of the music will help the reader understand how the composer utilizes these elements to outline the form of the piece (see *fig. 2.1*).

Figure 2.1, "Chase" for texture, dynamics, and tessitura highlighting the form.



As *figure 2.1* shows, the sections usually begin with a spike (value of 1 or 4) in texture, dynamics, and tessitura. This isn't always the case, as the "Texture" graph doesn't spike to a value of 4 until the B1 section. Instead, the "Dynamics" and "Tessitura" graphs spike at a value of 4 to initiate the A1 section. This form reveals the sawtooth pattern. A new section begins when two or more elements are in their extreme (either 1 or 4 values) representing how tension builds within each section to a climax which abruptly transitions to the next section to begin the process again. Higdon favors this technique in the other fast movements in *Short Stories* and many other fast chamber works such as *Dash-*, *Zaka*, and *running the edge*.

Guided Analysis

The soprano begins in the first measure creating a full octatonic set, which Higdon indicates in the score to play "as fast as possible" (see *fig. 2.2*). The inspiration for this wild gesture comes from Higdon's observations of the PRISM Quartet's performances at elementary school clinics. In order to gather the attention of an audience filled with young children, PRISM member Matthew Levy would erupt with a loud, raucous sound randomly moving fingers before beginning the exhibition.¹²¹ The ensemble's musically playful nature, creativity, and cross-pollination of classical and jazz genres attracted Higdon to their performances, providing the composer with a reference of sound possibilities when writing *Short Stories*. This figure is immediately followed by a series of whole tone, octatonic, and minor scales staggered through the ensemble concluding at m. 4.

¹²¹ Jennifer Higdon, email interview with author, March 23, 2019.

Figure 2.2, "Chase" m.1. Octatonic set with two tritone intervals.

Next, section A1 begins at m. 5 with oscillating figures in the soprano and alto accompanied by *sforzando* slap tongue attacks in the tenor and baritone (see [fig. 2.3](#)).¹²² The contrary motion between both voices of the oscillating figures adds to the dissonance, alternating between 02 and 05 harmonies.

Figure 2.3, "Chase" m. 5. A1 section begins with oscillation in contrary motion accompanied by slap tongue accents.

¹²² All musical examples are in concert pitch as, from top to bottom, soprano, alto, tenor, baritone. Unless otherwise notated, the top two lines are in treble clef and the bottom two lines are in bass clef.

The phrase peaks in dynamics and tessitura at m. 8 as the top three voices come together on a highly voiced 024 chord at a fortissimo dynamic as the ensemble staggers whole tone scales with a crescendo to fortissimo and rising tessitura (see [fig. 2.4](#)).

Figure 2.4, "Chase" mm. 7-8. Climax in dynamics and tessitura with syncopated accents. The tenor is in bass clef at m. 7.

7

The musical score for measures 7 and 8 of "Chase" is presented. It features four staves: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The top three staves are in treble clef, while the bottom staff is in bass clef. Measure 7 begins with a dynamic of *f* and a crescendo to *mp*. Measure 8 reaches a fortissimo (*ff*) climax, marked with a highly voiced 024 chord. The tenor part in measure 8 is in bass clef. The score includes various dynamics (*f*, *mp*, *ff*), accents (>), and slurs. A box labeled "024" is placed below the bass staff in measure 8, indicating the chord.

The soprano begins the whole tone theme in m. 18 with the ascending four-note motive B–F–A–E \flat , indicated as set 0268 (see [fig. 2.5](#)). The prime form of this set is E \flat –F–A–B. This theme begins with whole tone scale subset 0268 in the soprano line followed by the tenor.

Figure 2.5, "Chase" mm. 16-21. Whole tone scales build to fortissimo then the oscillation pattern begins the next phrase with the whole tone theme in the soprano, followed by the tenor.

The musical score is presented in two systems, each with four staves. The first system covers measures 16 to 18. The top staff begins with a whole-tone scale in measure 16, marked with dynamics *f* and *ff*. The second system covers measures 19 to 21. It features a more complex texture with triplets and oscillation patterns. Dynamics range from *p* to *sf*. A circled measure 0268 is highlighted in both systems, showing a specific oscillation pattern. The text 'Play any pitches between and including these pitches, as quickly as possible.' is written above the first staff of the second system. The word 'solo' is written above the soprano staff in the second system, and 'solo' is written above the tenor staff in the second system.

After a syncopated tutti figure on set 024 in an extreme low register, slap tongue and *ad lib.* figures conclude the A1 section. Section B1, begins in m. 25 at a softer dynamic with the introduction of the octatonic theme on the notes A, A-flat, E-flat, and B which create octatonic subset 0137. The octatonic theme begins in the soprano then is repeated by the baritone in canon. The juxtaposition of rhythms (soprano in triplets and baritone in eighths) paired with canonic entrances, creates a counterpoint of textures as

the two melodic lines unravel from each other by their rhythmic disparity.¹²³ Because of the two-against-three polyrhythm between the two lines in m. 25, performers should be confident in their sense of pulse and polyrhythmic subdivision. The triplet single-pitch ostinato on D-flat is sustained through the middle voices for the first five measures of the short segment, providing a more stable harmonic foundation opposed to the shaking of previous oscillating figures (see *fig. 2.6*). Performers should play the ostinato figure as evenly as possible to help keep a consistent tempo for the rest of the ensemble.

Figure 2.6, "Chase," mm. 23-25. Section B1 (m. 25) begins with a D-flat ostinato and the octatonic theme.

The whole tone and octatonic themes contrast each other in both contour and scalar mode; however, they share many commonalities as well. Both themes use the notes A, B and E-flat; share the same triplet rhythm starting on the beat; are spaced between a minor seventh; and contain tritone intervals. Higdon develops both themes throughout the piece, creating variations by altering the contour, starting pitch, and articulation. The

¹²³ Self-described term used by Higdon to describe two melodies progressing at different rates.

following table outlines each occurrence of both themes in their original forms (see [table 2.3](#)).

Table 2.3. Placement of the whole tone and octatonic themes in “Chase”.

Section Measure	Whole Tone Theme (0268): B–F–A–Eb	Octatonic Theme (0137): A–Ab–Eb–B
A1 18-20	Soprano. Improvisation between statements, followed by P5 sequence and whole tone scale. Accompanied by contrary oscillation.	
B1 25		Soprano in triplets, followed by baritone in eighths in canon. Accompanied by ostinato on D-flat. Followed by whole tone scale.
A2 40-43	Alto. Accompanied by 014 syncopated chords.	
A2 54-55	Alto, tenor, baritone in unison. Accompanied by whole tone scale in soprano. Followed by whole tone scale.	
B2 67-69		Alto (altered as E-G-Db-Gb). Accompanied by rhythmic drone on D in baritone.
A3 80	Tenor (altered order of A-Eb-B-F) with descending contour. Accompanied by oscillation.	
A3 99-101	Alto. Accompanied by dotted oscillation in tenor and imitated by soprano in canon. Followed by whole tone scale.	
B3 112		Tenor. Accompanied by syncopation in baritone and 02 harmonic drone in soprano and alto.

As [table 2.3](#) shows, both motivic figures appear in each section in their original form. Higdon establishes a connection between the themes and their respective

accompanying material. In the A sections, the whole tone theme is connected to oscillation patterns (with the exception of mm. 40-43 where the theme is accompanied by syncopated 014 chords, a subset of the octatonic scale). In the B sections, the octatonic theme is accompanied by single-pitch ostinatos and rhythmic drones. While the soprano presents both themes at first, the alto features the material most often. All four voices present the motives to a variety of accompaniments and textures. The whole tone theme is accompanied by oscillation in contrary motion in mm. 18-20, 014 syncopated chords in mm. 40-43, a whole tone scale in mm. 54-55, and a dotted oscillation in mm. 99-101. The octatonic theme is accompanied by a single-pitch ostinato in m. 25, a rhythmic drone in mm. 67-69, and a 02 harmonic drone in m. 112.

As the piece progresses, Higdon mixes the figures together; however, the first appearing figure always defines the section. Every A section begins with the whole tone theme and each B section begins with the octatonic theme. Then, once the “home” theme is established, Higdon mixes the contrasting theme into the texture as the phrase develops. Higdon avoids placing both themes in their original form simultaneously, which helps define the alternating structures more clearly while still allowing for some mixture of the themes through their variations.

The second A section, labeled A2, begins with a sudden reduction in dynamics at m. 32, and returns to oscillating figures (see [fig. 2.7](#)). This time, all three oscillating lines follow the same contour as opposed to the contrary motion in m. 5. The ensemble is now in rhythmic unison for the next eight measures, where the whole tone theme returns and bounces around the ensemble. The segment peaks at m. 54 where the lower three voices

come together in unison on the whole tone melody while the soprano surges through minor and whole tone scalar passages.

Figure 2.7, "Chase" mm. 32-33, 65-66. Oscillation in parallel motion initiating the A2 section and syncopated ostinato initiating the B2 section. Both begin softly in a low register.

A2: mm. 32-33

0246

B2: mm. 65-66

The second B section, labeled B2, appears at m. 65 approached by *decrescendo* and initiated by a single-pitch ostinato, this time a half-step higher on a D-natural (see [fig. 2.7](#)). The rhythm of the single-pitch ostinato here is altered, now more sustained than the previous driving triplets, overlapping between the tenor and baritone saxophones. Performers should articulate their rhythms here clearly to successfully portray the effect. The octatonic melody reemerges in the alto at m. 67 which passes back and forth with the soprano. The contrasting themes begin to gravitate closer together, the whole tone theme joins as a countermelody to the octatonic theme no longer segregated between A and B sections. Towards the end of the B2 section, the texture begins to unite, peaking at m. 76 where all four voices join in rhythmic unison to maintain a 04 diad (subset of the whole tone set) in parallel motion with a crescendo leading to the next segment. The 04 diad is a critical interval in tonal music (major third). Higdon takes the traditionally tonal interval and applies it to the atonal context of the piece (in this case octatonicism) for added harmonic dissonance to further obscure the tonality.

The third A section, labeled A3, begins at m. 78 with a softer dynamic and a return to the oscillating accompaniment in contrary motion in the soprano and alto (see [fig. 2.8](#)).

Figure 2.8, "Chase" mm. 76-78. Climax of the B2 section with syncopated tutti passage in parallel motion on a 04 harmony.

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Chase" from measures 76 to 78. It consists of four staves: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The first three staves are marked with a box labeled "04" and a box labeled "A3 section". The fourth staff is marked with a box labeled "02". The score is in 3/4 time. The first three staves are marked with "f" (forte) and "mp" (mezzo-piano). The fourth staff is marked with "mp" and "f". The score shows a climax of the B2 section with syncopated tutti passage in parallel motion on a 04 harmony.

As the piece progresses, the representative features of opposing sections begin to synthesize. Both whole tone and octatonic melodies appear together, passed between the soprano and tenor in counterpoint. The baritone begins a single-pitch ostinato figure in m. 82, juxtaposed with the oscillation shared between the alto and tenor lines. The texture unites again with a tutti figure at m. 90 on a 024 chord with whole tone interjections by the alto and then baritone until m. 96. The ensemble begins to divide yet again through whole tone figures, peaking at the end of m. 97.

With yet another sudden reduction in dynamics at m. 98, Higdon sets up a sectional break however, an altered oscillation pattern in the tenor and a mixture of both the whole tone and octatonic themes obscure the form. Measure 98 represents a false transition because while the dynamics, texture, and tessitura change suddenly, the altered oscillation pattern in the tenor sustains the A section material. At this point the form is obscured because of the false transition, altered oscillation motive which evolves into a

dotted figure, and the altered themes in m. 99. The soprano figure in m. 99 outlines set 0147 (prime form as descending Eb–D–B–Ab) instead of 0137 used earlier. The alto figure in m. 99 outlines a fragment of the whole tone theme as 026 (prime form as descending B–A–F). The fragmented themes are accompanied by dotted figures in the tenor and long sustained notes in the baritone propelling the anxious mood (see [fig. 2.9](#)).

Figure 2.9, "Chase" mm. 96-100. False transition set by reduction in dynamics and texture followed by altered oscillation pattern and return of both whole tone and octatonic themes.

The musical score consists of four staves. The first system (mm. 96-98) is in 3/4 time and features rapid sixteenth-note passages in the upper staves and dotted rhythms in the lower staves. Dynamics are marked *ff*. The second system (mm. 99-100) is in 4/4 time. The soprano staff in m. 99 contains a motif labeled 0147. The alto staff in m. 99 contains a motif labeled 026. Dynamics in the second system include *ff*, *mp sub.*, *p*, and *mf*.

The texture unifies to tutti figures once more at m. 107 on a 026 chord (descending as B–A–F) under the rapid soprano improvisatory line through m. 109 (see [fig. 2.10](#)). Given the activity of the soprano and accompaniment, m. 109 marks the peak of the entire movement as the texture and tension reach a breaking point, concluding with whole tone passages and a diminuendo to pianissimo.

Figure 2.10, “Chase” mm. 107-109. Apex of the movement with the soprano improvisation against swelling 026 and 024 chordal accompaniment.

ANY NOTES AS FAST AS POSSIBLE

108

MAINTAIN SPEED OF NOTES

026

024/026

026

The third B section, labeled B3, begins at m. 112 with a sustained 02 chord in a high register of the soprano and alto. The tenor reintroduces the octatonic theme, this time altered as subset 0136 (prime form as descending G–G \flat –E–D \flat) (see [fig. 2.11](#)).

Figure 2.11, "Chase" mm. 112-13. The B3 section begins with a sustained 02 chord in an upper register followed by the octatonic theme in a low register.

B3 section 02

The texture unites at m. 118, with the bottom three voices in rhythmic unison and parallel motion as the soprano runs whole tone scales, peaking at m. 121 as the full ensemble joins together on dotted figures at a fortissimo dynamic. A coda immediately follows in m. 122 with a sudden drop to *pianissimo* and a return to oscillating figures originating in the tenor and growing through the alto and soprano as the ensemble crescendos to m. 125. The ensemble ascends with whole tone scalar figures to a high-voiced 026 chord at m. 127 (see [fig. 2.12](#)).

Figure 2.12, “Chase” mm. 120-122. Polyrhythmic soli building to a climax at end of final B section. A Coda follows initiated by oscillating figures and subito pianissimo.

The musical score for Figure 2.12 shows four staves. Measures 120 and 121 are marked with a forte (*ff*) dynamic and contain complex polyrhythmic patterns with triplets. Measure 122 is the beginning of the Coda, indicated by a box labeled "Coda" and a subito pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The Coda consists of oscillating figures in the upper voices and a piano (*pp*) dynamic.

The baritone sustains a D-flat followed by a three-octave syncopated G-flat (enhanced with slap tongue articulation) in the upper voices to end the piece (see [fig. 2.13](#)).

Figure 2.13, “Chase” mm. 129-130. Baritone D-flat followed by syncopated unison G-flat.

The musical score for Figure 2.13 shows four staves. Measure 129 features a baritone part with a D-flat and a forte (*f*) dynamic. Measure 130 shows a syncopated unison G-flat in the upper voices and a forte (*ff*) dynamic.

Conclusion

“Chase” is divided into two alternating and contrasting sections with recurring thematic material. [Figure 2.1](#) displays the sectional structure following a series of peaks

and valleys in texture, dynamics, and tessitura which form in a sawtooth pattern. The peaks and valleys in *figure. 2.1* represent extremes in texture, dynamics, and tessitura (valued as 1 or 4) which often occur as sectional breaks.

Two of the most common intervals in “Chase” are the whole step and the tritone, employed in both the whole tone and octatonic themes. Performers should emphasize this interval by bringing the figures out of the texture. The oscillation patterns accent the whole tone interval as well. Performers should keep the ostinatos in the forefront of the texture, as they are integral in projecting the anxious mood. Higdon applies harmonies from subsets of the whole tone and octatonic sets, such as set 0246 (whole tone) and 0137 (octatonic). Performers should not shy away from the dissonance of these harmonies, instead projecting them confidently. Abbreviated use of the minor mode provides added dissonance to the whole tone scales, punctuating the anxiety of the narrative. The oscillating and single-pitch ostinato rhythmic patterns promote the driving energy throughout much of the piece, only absent in the tutti figures at phrasal climaxes.

The contrapuntal texture is fluid, continually altering as lines emerge and recede at a rapid rate. Higdon’s profound ability to capture vivid imagery within an ephemeral movement exemplifies her abilities as a programmatic composer. In “Chase,” Higdon shows us a glimpse of her playful nature reflected through the equally playful abilities of the PRISM Quartet. The inclusion of slap tongue articulations and *ad lib.* figures, iconic elements associated with the saxophone from vaudeville acts to jazz improvisation, reveals Higdon’s craft to write in the vernacular for the instrument in ways that promote the narrative and in a classical context. These compositional devices connect to Higdon’s vernacular background.

The piece ends as unexpectedly as it began, but with a certain element of finality provided by the D-flat to G-flat cadence. The “running game” concludes definitively with a V-I cadence emerging triumphantly from the dissonant chaos. Much of the piece is obscured by atonality, but Higdon adds glimpses of tonality, such as the 04 tutti figures and the D-flat to G-flat cadence to provide some grounding for the listener.

SHORT STORIES – “SUMMER’S EVE”

Higdon draws from her childhood experiences in East Tennessee as inspiration for “Summer’s Eve.” In this movement, Higdon infers a rural American scene with pleasant weather, children at play, crickets chirping, and gatherings of friends and family.¹²⁴ Describing the piece she writes, “I had in mind the idyllic summer evening where folks are out sitting on their porches in swings and rocking chairs, listening to the sounds of summer: crickets and children at play, with soft evening breezes. I wanted to capture the essence and the magic of an ideal summer's eve.”¹²⁵

A unique aspect of this movement is the instrumentation. A typical quartet is scored for soprano, alto, tenor, and baritone saxophones; however, in “Summer’s Eve” Higdon calls for the baritone player to switch to soprano, creating a soprano 1, soprano 2, alto, and tenor saxophone orchestration. This substitution clusters the tessitura tightly to create a light, bright timbre which Higdon uses to suggest the ambient chirping of crickets or a group of jovial children at play. Higdon’s choice to use a nontraditional instrumentation also serves a more contractual obligation, stemming from the ANCIA Saxophone Quartet’s 1993 proposal to the ACF, where the ensemble’s manager Barry Brahier stipulated at least one movement have a heterodox orchestration instead of the traditional soprano, alto, tenor, baritone scoring. Saxophone performers possess the ability to switch voices within the consort, allowing for prolific composers to invent

¹²⁴ Jennifer Higdon, “Program Notes: *Short Stories*,” <http://www.jenniferhigdon.com/pdf/program-notes/Short-Stories.pdf>, (accessed February 25, 2019).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

creative variations, supplementing the idiom while exploring color and timbre in more ways than traditional instrumentation allows.

Harmonies in “Summer’s Eve” unfold as ambiguous tone clusters within a shifting textural framework. The fluid texture alternates between homophony and various degrees of counterpoint. The melody also passes between solo lines and three-part harmonized solis. By avoiding downbeats, applying multiple tempi, and inserting both an accelerando and ritardando, Higdon obscures the rhythm for much of the piece, promoting an ethereal atmosphere as the lines meander through extensive legato syncopation. Multiple tempo changes occur at structural moments, which Higdon rarely applies to the other movements in *Short Stories*; however, like all the other movements, the form is sectional with recurring thematic material resulting in an arch form structure.

Moments of tension and climax culminate near the end of each section followed by changes in dynamics, texture, and range to begin the next section. Most sections conclude gradually, with an incremental decrease in these elements. The energy of the piece pulses with each phrase, as the dynamics, texture, and tempo are in constant flux. The quick turnover of sections suggests many arrival points, none of which act conclusively due to added dissonances to the chordal harmonies. The whole piece feels transitory because of a lack of tonal resolution, as if the music transfixes its listeners by bathing them in subtle dissonances. The ending sequence exemplifies this transitory sentiment, concluding indistinctly with overlapping, syncopated sustained tones which finish on a closely voiced 0235 tetrachord.

Guided Analysis

“Summer’s Eve” comprises eight sections, which the author has labeled A–B–C–C^I–D–E–A^I–B^I. Three pairs of sections (A–A^I, B–B^I, C–C^I) share connected stylistic elements supporting the arch form structure. In determining where the sections begin, the author found that changes in tempo, texture, dynamics, harmony, and tessitura often occur simultaneously. Higdon inserts three tempo changes with one approached by an *accelerando*, and a *ritardando* placed at the end. Phrases continually shift between homophonic and polyphonic textures. Dynamics gradually build or decay smoothly between sections without sudden contrast (only one section begins with a *subito piano* dynamic as opposed to many sudden shifts in dynamics in “Chase”). The tessitura moves to both high and low extremes. Harmonies modulate between D-flat, D-natural, and A-flat major key areas, occurring at three structural moments (section B, C^I, A^I).

Higdon indicates key areas in the score, which help identify the tonal center of each section. Higdon does not venture to chromatic tones within these key areas; however, the composer inserts stepwise tones within the key into the harmonies to avoid functional harmony. Sustained tone clusters such as tetrachords 0235 and 0135, and trichords 025 and 013 maintain within the key to create a harmonic landscape that the author refers to as “subtle dissonance;” meaning no chromatic notes are added to the chords, which would sound more dissonant.

Previous researchers have identified these chordal applications in Higdon’s other works as well; in her research on *Summer Shimmers*, Virginia Broffitt identified these

chordal settings as “diatonic clusters.”¹²⁶ Reitz identifies “chord clusters” in *City Scope* for orchestra, remarking that they are atypical to Higdon’s style.¹²⁷ Additionally, Reitz notes that Higdon does not purposefully write with key centers in mind;¹²⁸ however, the presence of key signatures, tonal centers, and non-chromatic harmonies in “Summer’s Eve” suggests that the composer was aware of her tonal (although non-functional) approach.

Set 0235 is most significant in the piece because the main theme outlines the tetrachord and the set is the first and last chords of the piece. Subsets 025 and 013 are prominent harmonies, with sets 027, and 037 also contributing as sustained harmonies. The following table shows the formal structure to “Summer’s Eve” with reference to tempo, texture, theme, all sustained harmonies of each section, and dynamics (see [table 2.4](#)).

¹²⁶ Broffitt, “The Music of Jennifer Higdon,” 29.

¹²⁷ Reitz, “Comprehensive Analysis,” 174.

¹²⁸ Reitz, “Comprehensive Analysis,” 32.

Table 2.4. Form of “Summer’s Eve” with reference to texture and sustained harmonies.

Section	A	B	C	C ^I	D	E	A ^I	B ^I
Measure	1	15	29	39	50	56	72	82
Tempo	♩=60	♩=72	♩=120	♩=60		♩=120		
Texture ¹²⁹	H.	P.	Soli Ostinato	H. Ostinato	H.	Soli Ostinato	H.	P.
Theme	0235						0235	
Key area ¹³⁰	D ^b	D	D	A ^b	A ^b	A ^b	D	D
Sustained Harmonies ¹³¹	0235 0358 0157 013	0136	025 027	025 013	015 027	026 037	0135 037 0258 0247	024 0247 0235
Dynamics	<i>p</i>	<i>mp</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>sub. p</i>	<i>pp</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>pp</i>

As [table 2.4](#) shows, “Summer’s Eve” includes eight sections with sections A, B, and C returning in an altered form. The author has connected sections A and A^I due to their shared homophonic texture and the 0235 theme. Sections B and B^I connect through their shared polyphonic texture and key area. Sections C and C^I are connected by the ostinato and set class 025. The most frequent texture is homophonic with one solo line and three lines in harmony, which the author has labeled “H.” Sections A, C^I, D, and A^I follow this scheme. A variation of the “H.” texture is a soli texture labeled “Soli,” where the three lines in harmony act melodically set against an ostinato accompaniment. Sections C and E follow this alternate scheme.

¹²⁹ In the “Texture” row, “H.” designates a purely homophonic texture, “P.” designates a purely polyphonic texture, “Soli” designates a homophonic texture in three-part harmony, and “Ostinato” designates a texture with a single ostinato line.

¹³⁰ In the “Key area” row, the data only reflects the (major) key signature Higdon assigned to that section. It does not insinuate any key area.

¹³¹ In the “Sustained Harmonies” row, all harmonies which hold for one or more beats are included.

The piece begins with a syncopated homophonic texture. The soprano 1 plays the 0235 theme, characterized by large ascending intervals, as the remaining ensemble plays a chordal accompaniment in rhythmic unison. Higdon begins the melody with an ascending fifth interval from A-flat to E-flat, then the intervals increase as the melody leaps out to a larger range.

The opening theme played by the soprano 1 in mm. 1-3 (A \flat –E \flat –G \flat –F) forms the set 0235. Rearranged in prime form, the tetrachord condenses to E-flat (0), F (2), G-flat (3) and A-flat (5). Set 0235 is also created vertically with the help of the accompaniment. In prime form, the chord in m. 2 is spelled B-flat (0), C (2), D-flat (3), and E-flat (5). To prevent the dissonance of set 0235 in prime form, Higdon voices both tetrachords beyond an octave, disguising the minor second as a major seventh.

Set 0235 also appears as a briefly sustained harmony in m. 2 as [B \flat , C, D \flat , E \flat]. 0235 is the only repeated theme, returning later at the largest peak in the movement as [E, F \sharp , G, A], a half-step higher than the original (see [fig. 2.14](#)). Additionally, the final chord [B, C \sharp , D, E] ends the piece as a condensed 0235 motive in a high register, also a half step higher than in m. 2.

Figure 2.14. “Summer’s Eve” mm. 1-3. 0235 motive in soprano 1 melody and accompaniment.

Harmonically, Higdon frequently employs the trichord 025, a subset of 0235, in various voicings. Initially voiced within an octave as [Eb, F, Ab], set 025 begins in the accompaniment in m. 2 embedded in the 0235 tetrachord (see [fig. 2.14](#)). Throughout the piece, Higdon often begins sections and phrases with set class 025 as the harmony, spelled in varying keys and voicings. For example, initiating the phrase at the end of m. 5, the accompaniment shows the 025 harmonic motive quickly (the second triplet of beat four) as [Db, Eb, Gb] spread over two octaves underneath the soprano 1 sustained A-flat (see [fig. 2.15](#)). Then the accompaniment sustains a longer 025 trichord in m. 6. The soprano 1 melody also negotiates set 025 as [Eb, F, Ab] in large ascending intervals characteristic of the 0235 theme.

Figure 2.15, "Summer's Eve" mm. 4-6. Set 025 initiates the phrase across the bar-line. Soprano 1 melody also outlines set 025.

The image shows a musical score for four voices: Soprano 1, Soprano 2, Alto, and Bass. The score is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of three flats. The first measure (m. 4) is marked with a '4' above the staff. The second measure (m. 5) is marked with a '5' above the staff. The third measure (m. 6) is marked with a '0' above the staff. The score includes dynamics like 'p' and articulation like '3'. A box labeled '025' is drawn across the bar-line, highlighting the set 025 motive in the Soprano 1 melody and the accompaniment. The Soprano 1 melody is also outlined with a box. The score includes a key signature change at m. 15, signaling the beginning of section B.

Next, the texture begins to shift from homophonic to polyphonic. The accompaniment lines gradually begin to separate from each other with more rhythmic freedom, creating a more contrapuntal texture. The soprano 1 intensifies through the phrase through quicker rhythms, ascending large intervals. The shift to polyphony continues until the key change at m. 15 where a full polyphonic texture emerges, signaling the beginning of section B (see [fig. 2.16a](#)).

The sustained notes in the upper three voices [D, E, G] in m. 15 create set 025 within the range of a tenth, excluding the C-sharp in the bottom voice. Continuing the phrase, the vertical 025 motive also appears vertically in the next two measures within set class 0136 in mm. 15-17. Set 025 also appears linearly in the soprano 1 figure from mm. 15-18 (see [fig. 2.16b](#)).

Figure 2.16a. "Summer's Eve" mm. 12-15. Conclusion of the A section through gradual evolution in texture from homophonic to polyphonic. Set 025 is nested in the 0136 tetrachord beginning the B section at m. 15. All voices are in treble clef.

Figure 2.16b, "Summer's Eve" mm. 15-18 soprano 1 part in B-flat. The 025 theme spaced over two measures and repeated.

Starting at m. 19, the B section gradually increases in contrapuntal activity through figures of eighth notes, to triplets, and finally to sixteenth-note subdivisions (see [fig. 2.17](#)). The overlapping figures through the ensemble increase in activity pushed by an *accelerando* beginning in m. 23.

Figure 2.17, "Summer's Eve" mm. 19-24. Increasing activity of counterpoint through the B section.

The musical score for "Summer's Eve" mm. 19-24 is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 19-21) shows a four-part setting with dynamics of *mf* and *mp*. The second system (mm. 22-24) features a tempo of 102 and includes markings for *accel.*, *poco a poco accel. al*, and dynamics of *mf*, *f*, and *mp*. The texture becomes more complex with triplets and a *sub.* marking in the third staff.

The B section climaxes at m. 29 where the faster rhythms are paired with stronger dynamics and higher tessitura to crown the phrase. A sudden thinning in texture signals the beginning of the next section (see [fig. 2.18](#)). The C section instantly shifts back to a homophonic texture but this time as a soli. The soprano 1, in an extremely high register, becomes the rhythmic accompaniment to a chordal melody from the lower three homorhythmic voices. Thematic set 025 appears in the harmony at m. 30 as (descending in prime form as F \sharp -E-C \sharp). This texture continues until the climax at m. 39 where a more covert shift in texture and tempo occurs.

Figure 2.18, "Summer's Eve" mm. 28-30. Section C begins with a change in texture to three-part harmony with ostinato accompaniment.

In the ANCIA Saxophone Quartet's 2009 recording *Short Stories*, the ostinato sounds an octave lower than what is marked in m. 39 in the score decreasing the expanding tessitura effect; the ostinato continues in the lower octave for the remainder of the section. In the PRISM Quartet's 2016 recording *The Curtis Project*, the ostinato sounds in the octave indicated by [fig. 2.18](#). Higdon states ANCIA was reading from an old version of the score and that the PRISM recording is the corrected edition, stating:

The ANCIA recording was made without the quartet checking with me for revisions. So they were playing off of old parts. The piece was revised to what I imagine you're probably looking at now. The PRISM Quartet recorded the work a few years ago in a recording called "PRISM Quartet: The Curtis Project." That is actually the correct version.¹³²

Section C¹ is approached by ascending figures reaching a climax at the end of m. 38 (see [fig. 2.19a](#)). The ensemble sustains a 0257 chord voiced in two pairs of fifths (B–

¹³² Higdon, email interview with author, March 23, 2019.

F♯ and A–E) at m. 37. The prime form of the set is E–F♯–A–B. The tenor reaches into the altissimo register through an ascending perfect fifth in m. 38 to maximize the rising tessitura (see *fig. 2.19b*). This section is also marked by a tempo change and return to homophonic texture in m. 39, this time with two accompanying lines and a rhythmic ostinato in a contrastingly extreme low range.

In ANCIA's recording, the ostinato sounds an octave higher than what is marked in m. 39 in the score decreasing the expanding tessitura effect; the ostinato continues in a higher octave for the remainder of the section. The tenor line does not sound in the altissimo in ANCIA's recording. In PRISM's recording, the ostinato and tenor altissimo register sounds in the octave indicated by *fig. 2.19a* and *fig. 2.19b* which Higdon indicates as the correct version.¹³³

¹³³ Higdon, email interview with author, March 23, 2019.

Figure 2.19a, "Summer's Eve" mm. 37-39. Change in tempo, key, and texture to start section C'.

37 0257 J = 60 Section C' 5

Figure 2.19b, "Summer's Eve" mm. 36-38 tenor part in B-flat. The tenor reaches up a P5 to an altissimo A at the climax of the phrase.

The texture in m. 39 is similar to section A with two significant differences: the rhythmic ostinato is carried over from the C section and the melodic solo line is passed to different members of the ensemble. The first trade occurs in m. 41 where the tenor reads *solo* in the score (see [fig 2.20](#)). The tenor then trades the melody back with the soprano 2 at the end of m. 43 and resumes the ostinato in m. 44.

Figure 2.20, "Summer's Eve" mm. 40-45. Solo melody passed between inner voices.

The image displays a musical score for measures 40 through 45 of "Summer's Eve". The score is written for four staves: Soprano 1, Soprano 2, Alto, and Bass. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The music is characterized by a complex texture with multiple voices. In measure 40, the Soprano 1 part has a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The Soprano 2 part features a melodic line with dynamics ranging from *pp* to *p*. The Alto part has a melodic line with dynamics from *pp* to *mp*, including a "solo" section marked with a *6* (sextuplet). The Bass part has a melodic line with dynamics from *pp* to *p*. Measures 43 and 44 show intricate rhythmic patterns with triplets and sextuplets. Measure 45 concludes with a *pp* dynamic. The overall texture is dense and polyphonic, with the solo melody being passed between the inner voices.

Next in m. 46, the ostinato begins to slow down as the figure holds more sustained tones between syncopations (see [fig. 2.21](#)). The C^I section concludes differently than the sections before, as the momentum is instead winding down with more sustained tones, less rhythmic activity, and a gradual diminuendo to pianissimo dynamic. The absence of the soprano 1 line thins the texture, highlighting the lyrical soprano 2 melodic figure supported by a pedal F in the bottom voice and a less active A-flat ostinato. The notes E-flat, A-flat and G make up an 013 harmony scored in a low register, voiced just

over one octave ending the section softly. The prime form of this triad is (descending)
 Ab–G–Eb.

Figure 2.21. “Summer’s Eve” mm. 46-48. Thinning texture with less active ostinato concluding the C’ section.

46

013

1

0

3

The D section begins with a pianissimo dynamic in m. 50 and the original homophonic texture, this time the soprano 2 begins the melody with a large ascending interval (see [fig. 2.22](#)). Due to the atypically smooth transition, the omission of the ostinato figure is the only alteration in texture to signal this new section.

Figure 2.22, "Summer's Eve" mm. 49-51. Change back to "homophonic solo" texture signals section D.

Section D

49

pp *p*

p

pp *p*

pp *p*

Section D serves as a brief six-measure phrase which transitions to a quicker tempo and new ostinato scalar figure at m. 56 signaling the E section (see [fig. 2.23](#)).

Thematic set 025 appears in the harmony at m. 57 (as descending Eb–Db–Bb).

Figure 2.23, "Summer's Eve" mm. 55-57. E section begins with change in tempo and texture. A new ostinato scalar pattern begins in the bottom voice and the three-part melody begins on set 025.

Section E

♩ = 120

025

55

mp *pp*

pp *p*

pp *p*

pp *p*

A brief solo soprano 2 figure with quick rhythms and large intervals ends at m. 55, acting as a whimsical segue. Section E recreates a soli texture similar to section C with a new ostinato line of repeated ascending sixteenth-note figures in the bottom voice.

The E section builds momentum as the range of the ensemble climbs higher and a gradual crescendo to forte at m. 69 leads to a climax at m. 72. Measure 72 marks the peak of the piece as the ensemble is spread through its greatest range (over three octaves) and Higdon marks the return of the 0235 theme (A–E–G–F♯) with the only accent articulations in the piece. The prime form of the set is E–F♯–G–A.

Labeled A^I, the texture in m. 72 also returns to homophonic with solo and accompanying figures like the beginning. The soprano 1 reaches into the altissimo register to land on an F-sharp above the staff (G-sharp transposed). The forte dynamic and high tessitura pulses through the A^I section, concluding with a diminuendo at m. 82 (see [fig. 2.24](#)).

In ANCIA's recording, the 0235 theme sounds an octave lower than what is marked in m. 72 in the score decreasing the expanding tessitura effect; the soprano 1 continues in a lower octave for the remainder of the section. In PRISM's recording, the 0235 theme sounds in the octave indicated by [fig. 2.24](#).

Figure 2.24, "Summer's Eve" mm. 71-74. A^I section begins with the return of the 0235 theme and "homophonic solo" texture.

The musical score for "Summer's Eve" mm. 71-74 is presented in four staves. The first staff, the melody, features a boxed-in section labeled "Section A^I" with the notes G4, A4, B4, and C5, followed by the numbers "5 0 3 2". The second staff is marked with "0235". The third and fourth staves contain accompaniment with triplets and a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic marking. The score concludes at measure 74.

The final section, B^I, begins at m. 82 with a sustained 024 chord (altered 025) on the notes A, B, and G within a parent 0247 set where the texture begins to break apart into polyphonic ostinatos (see [fig. 2.25](#)). The prime form of the 0247 tetrachord is (descending) B–A–G–E.

Figure 2.25, "Summer's Eve" mm. 82-84. The B^I section begins with sustained 024 chord and scalar ostinato patterns.

Starting at m. 86, the texture reaches a peak in complexity, as each line juxtaposes in rhythm (see [fig. 2.26](#)). The top voice slides downward through syncopated eighth and quarter notes, the middle voices slow from sixteenths to triples, and the bottom voice is the most syncopated with oddly placed quarter note triplets. Additionally, Higdon indicates a *poco a poco rit al fine* to distort the rhythms even further.

In ANCIA's recording, the ensemble sounds an octave higher than what is marked in m. 88 in the score enhancing the expanding tessitura effect; the ensemble continues in a higher octave to the end. In PRISM's recording, the ensemble sounds in the octave indicated by [fig. 2.26](#).

Figure 2.26, "Summer's Eve" mm. 85-90. Polyphonic complexity of overlapping polyrhythms.

The musical score consists of two systems, each with four staves. The first system (mm. 85-87) features a melodic line in the top staff with dynamics *p*, *mp*, and *pp*, and a *poco a poco rit al fine* marking. The lower three staves contain complex polyrhythmic patterns with frequent triplets. The second system (mm. 88-90) continues these patterns, with *cresc.* markings in the lower staves and *mp* and *p* markings in the top staff. The piece concludes with a sustained close-voiced chord on notes B-C#-D-E.

The overlapping polyrhythms continue to the end, gradually slowing in tempo and rhythm until the ensemble finishes on a sustained close-voiced 0235 chord on notes B–C#–D–E at the final fermata (see [fig. 2.27](#)). The piece finishes a half-step higher in key than it began (from D-flat to D-natural), the final tone cluster is also much higher in tessitura than the initial 0235 chord from the beginning.

Figure 2.27, "Summer's Eve" mm. 94-97. Ascending polyphonic lines conclude on set 0235 to end the piece.

Conclusion

The program notes for “Summer’s Eve” state that Higdon “wanted to capture the magic and essence of the ideal summer’s eve.”¹³⁴ The composer suggests this sentiment through lyrical melodies which leap through large ascending intervals and surface from a fluctuating texture. Tone cluster harmonies suggest tonality without acting functional and syncopations add rhythmic dissonance. The sectional structure routinely adjusts the harmony, texture, tessitura, and tempo at each section. An arch form connects the piece through a returning 0235 theme and six of the eight sections are connected by their shared textural and harmonic elements.

Higdon’s application of key signatures suggests three separate tonal centers. The piece begins in D-flat, then quickly modulates by half step to D-natural, and lastly

¹³⁴ Jennifer Higdon, “Program Notes: *Short Stories*,” <http://www.jenniferhigdon.com/pdf/program-notes/Short-Stories.pdf>, (accessed February 25, 2019).

modulates by tritone to A-flat. The ending is both rhythmically and harmonically ambiguous, as there is no conclusive cadence in the detached meandering lines which ascend toward a final 0235 tone cluster, leaving the piece unresolved. Performers need to embrace the soft dissonances and maintain a strong sense of pulse. Although the melodies may seem to follow a rubato style, it is essential that performers follow the rhythms notated as closely as possible in order to maintain the tempo. The rhythms at the end (mm. 85-97) can be less precise due to the overlapping of textures and ritardando, in order to achieve the nebulous mood.

SHORT STORIES – “LULLABY”

Higdon composed “Lullaby” in 1990 for mezzo soprano, flute, and piano. Little is documented on the original composition as no published research or recordings currently exist. In Higdon’s program notes, she states, “‘Lullaby’ was written in honor of the birth of Samantha Clausen, the first daughter of my friends, Karen and Marty Clausen.”¹³⁵

Higdon set the piece to her own poem and the text can prove useful in fully understanding the context of the work.

Sleep little one
 while heavens guard you
 feel the stars and peaceful clouds drift with you in dreams
 as you slip through breezes of oceans and sky
 know that stars twinkle down upon you
 from the center of God’s eye
 smile my little baby
 as angels play with you in dreams
 they carry you through green fields
 and play by rivers under trees

Sleep little one
 heavens guard you
 drift in dreams
 you are loved
 Sleep lullaby¹³⁶

Main themes in the text are sleep, the heavens, and nature, insinuating a positive, nurturing mood. Higdon expresses these sentiments musically through tonality in major

¹³⁵ Jennifer Higdon, “Lullaby” *Program Notes*, <http://www.jenniferhigdon.com/pdf/program-notes/Lullaby.pdf>, (accessed May 20, 2019).

¹³⁶ Jennifer Higdon, “Lullaby,” Lawdon Press 1990.

keys, descending melodies, and soft, intimate duet textures between the flute and vocal lines accompanied by the piano.

The composer then transcribed alternate adaptations of the piece; a version of “Lullaby” for two flutes and piano appears on the 1995 recording *rapid.fire*,¹³⁷ with the composer as one of the performers. In the liner notes of the recording, Higdon plainly states the transcription as being the more popular version.¹³⁸ More recently, the HD Duo recorded a version for two alto saxophones and piano on their 2013 album *Incandescence*.¹³⁹ Higdon’s personal publishing website, Lawdon Press, offers eight configurations of “Lullaby.”¹⁴⁰ The analysis in this document refers to both the original and saxophone quartet arrangement in order to investigate compositional approaches.

Merriam-Webster describes a lullaby as, “A song to help a child fall asleep.”¹⁴¹ The New Grove music dictionary embellishes this definition stating, “The lullaby is usually (though not exclusively) sung solo by women and displays musical characteristics that are often archaic, such as a descending melodic line, portamento effects, stylized representations of sighing or weeping, and non-stanzaic text lines.”¹⁴² Lullabies often

¹³⁷ Jennifer Higdon, *rapid.fire*, Virtuosi IVR 501, 1995.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ HD Duo, *Incandescence: music by women composers for saxophone and piano*, Clarinet and Saxophone Classics, 2013.

¹⁴⁰ *Lullaby* arrangements for mezzo soprano, flute, and piano; two flutes and piano; flute quartet; saxophone quartet; soprano saxophone, flute, and piano; two alto saxophones and piano; soprano saxophone, alto saxophone, and piano; and flute, clarinet, and piano.

Jennifer Higdon, “Chamber Works,” <http://jenniferhigdon.com/chamberworks.html>, (accessed May 20, 2019)

¹⁴¹ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lullaby>, (accessed May 7, 2019).

¹⁴² James Porter. 2001 "Lullaby." *Grove Music Online*.

<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000017160>, (accessed May 7, 2019).

contain formulae and refrains such as “rock-a-bye” to invoke divine help and melodies can range between as little as two notes.¹⁴³ Higdon follows the lullaby characteristic style through tonal harmony, slow tempo, soft descending melodies within a narrow range, and a refrain. The composer adds tonal ambiguity to the melodies, quartal and tone cluster harmonies, syncopation, and a fluid texture which moves from polyphonic to homophonic phrases.

The structure is ternary. A four-measure duet between the soprano and tenor initiates the A section and is repeated at the A^I section. As lullabies traditionally contain a refrain, for instance the text “Guten Abend, gut’ Nacht (Good evening, good night)” in Brahms’ *Wiegenlied*,¹⁴⁴ Higdon honors this model by using the duet as the returning figure, paired with the repeated text “Sleep little one, (while) heavens guard you” in the original composition.¹⁴⁵ Higdon does not provide the original text in *Short Stories* and omits the information about the work’s dedication to newborn Samantha Clausen. Instead, she states, “This movement was originally written as a work for mezzo, flute, and piano, but I kept hearing it as a saxophone quartet in my head. It is a lullaby whose lyrical qualities seem to lend itself to the saxophone very well.”¹⁴⁶ The homogeneous saxophone idiom appears to prove quite effective in realizing the composer’s intentions, due to its ability to blend tonal colors.

The harmony of each section is different; the A and A^I sections suggest A-flat, G-flat, and E-flat tonal centers, while the B section emphasizes E and F tonal centers. To

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Johannes Brahms, “Wiegenlied,” Berlin: Simrock’sche Musikhandlung, n.d., 1868.

¹⁴⁵ Jennifer Higdon, “Lullaby,” Lawdon Press 1990.

¹⁴⁶ Jennifer Higdon, “Program Notes: *Short Stories*,” <http://www.jenniferhigdon.com/pdf/program-notes/Short-Stories.pdf>, (accessed February 25, 2019).

avoid functional harmony, Higdon does not construct major or minor chords (except in the final chord) and the counterpoint does not follow functional voice leading practice; instead, the composer adds tonal ambiguity, sustaining quartal harmonies (set 0257) through a voicing of ninth, fourth, and second intervals at the refrain.

Higdon uses set 0257 in other compositions written after *Lullaby*, as noted by Reitz in her analysis of Higdon's orchestral works.¹⁴⁷ Reitz discovers the composer's tendency to write vertical bitonalities by stacking fifths separated by a major second within a chord, resulting in the quartal set.

Higdon's melodic figures in "Lullaby" share common characteristics with her other works, such as large ascending intervals and frequent syncopation set in counterpoint. Contrary motion and momentary unison passages are also prevalent in the counterpoint, creating rich textures. Rhythmically, Higdon writes asymmetrical syncopated phrases with ties across the bar and satiates listeners with frequent legato eighth notes. The composer also includes short deviations for variety, such as a three-measure interlude with a lyrical melody using sixteenths and ornamented figures.

Guided Analysis

Like in "Summer's Eve," the texture in "Lullaby" sustains various layers of counterpoint throughout the movement. Brief reprieves of homophonic textures occur minimally in the B section and at the end. Higdon specifies which lines performers are to bring out of the texture by ascribing "Primary voice" to the phrase. These denotations often overlap between voices, creating instances of solo, duet, trio, and full polyphonic

¹⁴⁷ Reitz, "Comprehensive Analysis," 35.

settings. Unlike most of Higdon's later works, the ternary form in "Lullaby" is defined by the harmony; texture also adjusts with changes in harmony, but not always (see [table 2.5](#)).

Table 2.5. Structure of "Lullaby" with reference to key and texture.

Section	Measures	Tonal Center	Texture
A	(Intro) 1-3	A \flat , G \flat	Duet
	4-8	E \flat	Accompanied Duet
	9-12	G \flat	
B	13-15	E	Accompanied Duet
	16-28	F	Homophonic
A ^I	(Refrain) 29-31	A \flat , G \flat	Duet
	32-36	G \flat	Accompanied Duet
	37-39	E \flat	
End	40-41	A \flat	Homophonic

As [table 2.5](#) shows, Higdon frequently shifts tonal centers between five keys while maintaining a contrapuntal duet texture for much of the movement. The five keys [E \flat , E, F, G \flat , A \flat] are all chromatically connected except for A-flat. In determining the tonal centers, the author relied on the number and frequency of accidentals and pedal tones, because Higdon does not write functional harmony and does not follow traditional voice leading practices with the counterpoint. The B section appears suddenly, with a sharp transition by whole step to E major from the previous G-flat, then shifts to a homophonic texture with another sudden modulation, this time by half step to F major. The final section begins just as the first, then is slightly altered, concluding with harmonic centers E-flat to A-flat, alluding to a V-I cadence. As discussed earlier in this

document, Higdon alludes to a V-I cadence in “Chase” as well, even though much of the harmonic content is atonal.

The opening duet between soprano and tenor follow descending contrapuntal figures which end on ascending unresolved harmonies 06 and 02 spaced beyond an octave. The harmony implies an A-flat tonal center but is obscured by the dissonances between the lines, including the fermata intervals and the chromatic B-natural in the tenor and E-natural, C-flat, and G-flat in the soprano. The second phrase is twice as long as the first, ending with a vague modulation to G-flat supported by the E-natural, C-flat, and G-flat in the soprano.

The tenor begins with a sighing gesture on C to A-flat, then rises to E-flat to fulfill an A-flat major triad. The soprano also initiates a sighing gesture on E to C, creating a tritone with the A-flat in the tenor for the first harmony of the movement; the E to C sighing gesture returns later in the movement. The phrase concludes with a tritone between the D-flat in the tenor and G in the soprano. Normally applied as a dissonant interval, Higdon alleviates the tension through soft dynamics and voicing the tritone greater than an octave.

Both voices repeat their sighing gesture to start the second phrase in m. 2 (the tenor B-flat in m. 2 carries over from the previous fermata). In the second measure, the soprano E forms a major third with the C of the tenor. The second phrase concludes with an E-flat sustained by the tenor as the soprano eventually lands on an F, resulting in a major ninth interval (set 02). The motion of the soprano in m. 3 (C^b–G^b–F) alludes to a tonal shift to G-flat. Although pausing on another a dissonant interval, the sonority is oddly soothing due to the thin texture, wide spacing, and soft dynamic (see [fig. 2.28](#)).

Figure 2.28, “Lullaby” mm. 1-3. Opening duet between tenor and soprano suggest A-flat tonal center then modulates to G-flat, but the phrases are unresolved, ending on an 06 and 02 harmony.

In the duet at the beginning and through much of the piece, the voices are rhythmically detached in counterpoint. Higdon indicates primary voices in the score, creating a variety of solo, duet, soli, and polyphonic textures. In m. 4, E-flat becomes the central harmony; however, the passage remains harmonically ambiguous as the baritone sustains an A-flat pedal and the phrase concludes with a quartal 0257 chord (voiced as Eb–F–Bb–C). Perfect fourth and fifth intervals unfold as the voices all ascend to the quartal set voiced in increasingly smaller intervals (ninth, fourth, and second) at the end of m. 5 (see *fig. 2.29a*). The chord shows that Higdon is experimenting with quartal harmonies early in her career to find “interesting” tone clusters. A comparison between Higdon’s voicing of the 0257 harmony versus a consecutive fifth voicing proves useful in understanding why the chord sounds open or unresolved (*fig. 2.29b*). If the B-flat were an octave lower, the voicing would be in consecutive fifths, instead Higdon uses the altered voicing for added dissonance with smaller intervals at the top.

Figure 2.29a, "Lullaby" mm. 4-6. An accompanied duet texture designated by brackets in the score. An A-flat minor seventh chord and quartal set 0257 causes harmonic uncertainty.

Figure 2.29b, "Lullaby." 0257 in prime form (left) compared to a consecutive fifth voicing (center) and Higdon's voicing in m. 5 (right).

In m. 9 the harmony modulates to tonal center G-flat supported by a pedal G-flat in the baritone but retains some ambiguity as the alto C carries over from the previous measure. There are abbreviated moments of rhythmic unison, binding the work together and serving as climaxes to each phrase. The first of which occurs in m. 9 between the soprano and tenor moving in contrary motion on chord tones D-flat and G-flat to support the G-flat tonality. In m. 12 the soprano and tenor share the melody in unison before parting in the next measure. These two moments outline the final four-measure phrase of the A section (see *fig. 2.30*).

Figure 2.30, "Lullaby" m. 9, 12. Tonal center G-flat supported by G-flat pedal in baritone. Soprano and tenor in contrary motion (m. 9) then in unison (m. 13).

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the piece "Lullaby". The first system, labeled with a measure number '9', shows four staves. The top two staves (Soprano and Alto) contain melodic lines in contrary motion. The bottom two staves (Tenor and Baritone) show a more active melodic line in the Tenor and a sustained G-flat note in the Baritone. The second system, labeled with a measure number '12', shows the Soprano and Tenor staves moving in unison. The Baritone continues to play the G-flat pedal. The Alto staff has some rests and notes. The time signature is 5/4 and the key signature has one flat (B-flat).

Next, m. 13 presents the contrasting B section beginning with a sudden shift to E major and descending melodic lines. All voices are contained to E diatonic figures within one octave each; the soprano and alto create an E major triad to start the phrase, joining in counterpoint as they glide downward against improvised *ad lib.* figures in the tenor and baritone. The soprano begins on E and terminates the phrase on B, further suggesting the tonality. In the *ad lib.* figures, Higdon instructs performers to “play these pitches randomly and quickly, repeating in any order for the duration of the beam.” The composer wanted the *ad lib.* figures to allude to “floating stars,”¹⁴⁸ performed by the piano in the original composition against the text “know that stars twinkle down upon you from the center of God’s eye.”¹⁴⁹ The phrase ends with a 0135 tone cluster voiced at nearly two octaves as the tenor and baritone leap up to a D-sharp and E, respectively, to complete the clustered harmony. This chord contains an open fifth (E and B) with added

¹⁴⁸ Higdon, email interview with author, March 23, 2019.

¹⁴⁹ Jennifer Higdon, “Lullaby,” Lawdon Press 1990.

non-chord tones within the key of E major (D# and C#) leaving the phrase unresolved (see *fig. 2.31*).

Figure 2.31. "Lullaby" mm. 13-15. Accompanied duet in descending figures in E major against ad lib. accompaniment signaling the B section.

E Maj 0135

13 *mf* *decresc.* *rit.* 0
mf *decresc.* *rit.* 1
p *decresc.* Slow Pattern Down *rit.* 3
p *decresc.* Slow Pattern Down *rit.* 5

* *p* * Play these pitches randomly and quickly, repeating in any order for the duration of the beam.

In m. 16 a tonal shift by half-step to F major occurs, paired with a change to a homophonic texture. Measures 16-17 act as a transition for the return of the melody in m. 18. The homophonic texture arrives through repeated figures in the alto, tenor, and baritone voices while the soprano melodic material is more varied (see *fig. 2.32*).

Figure 2.32, "Lullaby" mm. 16-19. Modulation to F major tonal center and a homophonic texture.

16 *a tempo* *mp*

Melody

Accomp.

A sudden shift in dynamics occurs at m. 22 as the baritone voice presents the melody (see [fig. 2.33](#)). The texture remains homophonic, with the upper three voices harmonizing on syncopated figures against the baritone melody.

Figure 2.33. "Lullaby" mm. 20-23. Sudden shift in dynamics and texture as upper voices in rhythmic unison accompany the baritone melody.

20

mp sub.

mp sub.

mp sub.

mp

The homophonic texture continues as the soprano begins a quick and syncopated melodic figure in mm. 25-28 followed by the sighing gestures on E-C from the beginning in both the alto and soprano lines (see [fig. 2.34](#)).

Figure 2.34, "Lullaby" mm. 25-28. A capricious melody (quick and syncopated) followed by sighing gestures of descending major thirds concluding the B section on an Am7 chord.

The musical score for "Lullaby" mm. 25-28 is presented in four staves. The top staff, marked *a tempo* and *solo*, contains a capricious melody with a five-measure phrase and a triplet. The lower three staves are also marked *a tempo*. The bottom section of the score, starting at measure 27, shows a transition to a 4/4 time signature with *Am7* above the staff. This section is marked *rit. dim.* and *molto rit.*

The sustained A minor seventh chord in m. 28 is non-functional, a half-step higher than the A-flat minor seventh chord from m. 4. The phrase ends unresolved with a *ritardando* and *diminuendo* to m. 29. The duet returns in m. 29 identically as in the beginning, acting as a refrain followed by the remaining voices in counterpoint. The harmony maintains on G-flat after the duet refrain.

The quartal harmony returns in m. 33, now a whole step lower than in m. 4 on the notes [B \flat -C-E \flat -F] voiced again at increasingly smaller intervals of a ninth, fourth, and second to create set 0257 (see [fig. 2.35a](#)). Below is a comparison of set 0257 from m. 4 and m. 33 (see [fig. 2.35b](#)).

Figure 2.35a, "Lullaby" mm. 33-35. Quartal set 0257 voiced at increasingly smaller intervals from baritone to soprano.

0257

Figure 2.35b, "Lullaby." Comparison of quartal set 0257 in m.4 and m.33.

m. 4	m. 33

The piece ends softly on an A-flat major triad, approached in counterpoint by a phrase centered in E-flat major. Higdon suggests a V-I cadence in A-flat through contrapuntal tonal centers E-flat to A-flat, allowing the piece to resolve. The ascending fourth in the baritone, although interrupted, helps identify both tonal centers, thus strengthening the cadence (see *fig. 2.36*).

Figure 2.36, "Lullaby" mm. 39-41. E-flat to A-flat cadence ending the piece.

The musical score for "Lullaby" mm. 39-41 is presented in four staves. The first staff (treble clef) begins at measure 39 with a melodic line in E-flat major, featuring a prominent ascending fourth interval. The second staff (treble clef) provides harmonic support with a sustained note. The third staff (treble clef) continues the melodic development. The fourth staff (bass clef) features a descending line that mirrors the ascending fourth in the first staff. The piece concludes in measure 41 with a simple A-flat major triad, achieved through the convergence of the contrapuntal voices.

"Lullaby" is the only movement in *Short Stories* to finish on a major triad, an exception to Higdon's tone cluster and quartal tendencies which also fill the movement. The movement ends as gently as it began, in a quiet dynamic as the contrapuntal voices conclude with a simple A-flat major chord. The ternary form is true to the idiom, tonal centers are supported by contrary motion, unison, and pedal figures, and the syncopated rhythms are unobtrusive due to their legato articulation.

Conclusion

Higdon synthesizes iconic lullaby elements with her own style. According to Higdon, the homogeneous saxophone idiom proves quite effective in realizing the composer's intentions. The author presumes that the homogeneous saxophone quartet is better suited to blend tonal colors, resulting in a pure sonority. "Lullaby" maintains connections to the traditional genre through slow tempo, soft dynamic, descending melodies within a narrow range, and simple rhythms. Higdon deviates from convention through her tonally ambiguous quartal and tone cluster harmonies. The ascending phrasal cadences signify an uplifting sentiment. The structural function of the duets outline the ternary form.

To portray the desired mood, all saxophonists should use vibrato throughout the piece and follow Higdon's notations of primary voice in the score. The melody is often layered in a middle register of the ensemble such as the alto line in mm. 13-15.

All three sections begin with a duet texture with the first and last sections unaccompanied, followed by four-voice counterpoint. The final cadence concludes peacefully, as the tenor line arpeggiates through the chord tones of A-flat major supported by the ensemble. In a genre designed to pacify its audience, Higdon is able to capture our interest through her eclectic vocabulary of tonal and quartal harmony through counterpoint while incorporating many traditional characteristics common to the lullaby idiom.

SHORT STORIES – “SPLASHING THE CANVAS”

Higdon’s inspiration for “Splashing the Canvas” comes from the drip paintings of Jackson Pollock. Higdon’s appreciation for the visual arts stems from her experiences accompanying her father to art shows and exhibitions in Atlanta. In Higdon’s studies with George Crumb, they discussed the use of color in sound regarding textures, instrumentation, and extended or alternate techniques. This movement is an example of the amalgamation of both influences. Higdon conveys her concentration to texture and themes in her notes of the piece.

Inspired by Jackson Pollock, an artist who splashes paint upon a canvas in a wild and uncontrolled manner, building up layers and constantly changing the resulting structure. Through this piece, many ideas are presented and are thrown about and layered. At the beginning of the movement it takes longer for the ideas to be stated, but as the piece progresses, the themes come back quicker and quicker as if the canvas were building into thick layers of overlapping ideas and becoming more complex.¹⁵⁰

Higdon emphasizes that thematic development and textural layering are integral to the structure of the work. The structure is sectional with repeated thematic material in differing combinations which result in a variety of textures. Higdon applies combinations of themes and changes in dynamics, tessitura, and texture as structural pillars, signaling new sections upon their entrance. The piece contains three themes, stated early in the work and then distributed through a variety of textures.

Each phrase typically begins softly with only one or two voices, then builds to full ensemble with each independent line either adding a different layer or combining with

¹⁵⁰ Jennifer Higdon, “Program Notes for *Short Stories*,” <http://www.jenniferhigdon.com/pdf/program-notes/Short-Stories.pdf>, (accessed February 5, 2019).

another voice to create a composite figure. Phrases lead to soli passages acting as cadences in either unison or harmonized in parallel motion leading to a new section, which begins again with minimal voicing and dynamics. Like in “Chase,” Higdon employs whole tone scales and polyrhythms to these critical cadences, adding rhythmic complexity and harmonic dissonance to the climax of the phrase. Higdon harmonizes the non-unison tutti figures in symmetrical sets 0268, 036, and 0167 as accented figures at strong dynamics.

Rhythm, texture, and dynamics play an essential role in suggesting the narrative; the contrapuntal figures are rampant with syncopation and startling dynamics, moving in unpredictable, agitated patterns. Layered themes juxtapose in meter, pitting triplets against sixteenth note figures and sharp *subito* dynamics jolt the listener. The consistent tempo ($\text{♩}=120-142$) is a quality common to Higdon’s faster works, such as *Dash-*, *Bop*, and *running the edge*.

The current published edition of “Splashing the Canvas” is shorter than the original. After working with the ANCIA Saxophone Quartet before the premiere, Higdon decided to remove some measures at the end because it sounded more repetitive than she originally envisioned.¹⁵¹ The repeated figures from mm. 91-97 were reduced to their current form of seven repetitions.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Michael Sintchak, Phone interview with author on January 31, and February 8, 2019.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

Guided Analysis

Like many of Higdon's works, the form in "Splashing the Canvas" is sectional, with recurring thematic material and adjustments in texture, tessitura, and dynamics guiding each section. Higdon uses texture, tessitura, dynamics, and thematic gestures to signal where sections begin, following a sawtooth pattern of peaks and valleys from gradual increase to sudden, often immediate decay in each section (refer to *fig. 2.1*). Higdon emphasizes in her program notes that thematic development and textural layering are significant structural elements of the work, imitating the process Pollock used in his drip paintings.¹⁵³ There are three main themes, each with their own character and function. The themes and changes in texture display the most structural significance while the contours, dynamics, and rhythms also aid in suggesting the narrative. Below is an outline of the structure with reference to theme, texture, and dynamics.

Table 2.6 reveals connections between themes, texture, and dynamics to the form, drawing parallels between sections A and A^I through the tritone and oscillation themes and strong dynamics. The B and B^I sections connect through the spiral theme and soft dynamics. The final section, C, contains all three themes simultaneously in counterpoint. The piece begins and ends on G, however no tonal centers emerge from the chromatic counterpoint; instead, Higdon constructs harmonies from subsets of the whole tone and octatonic scales (see *table 2.6*).

¹⁵³ Jennifer Higdon, "Program Notes for *Short Stories*," <http://www.jenniferhigdon.com/pdf/program-notes/Short-Stories.pdf>, (accessed February 5, 2019).

Table 2.6, Structure of “Splashing the Canvas” with reference to theme.

Section	A	B	A ¹	B ¹	C
Measure	1	20	41	54	66
Theme ¹⁵⁴	Oscillation Tritone	Tritone Spiral	Oscillation Tritone	Spiral	Oscillation Tritone Spiral
Texture ¹⁵⁵	2	2	2	1	2
Dynamics ¹⁵⁶	<i>f</i>	<i>p (sub.)</i>	<i>mf</i>	<i>pp</i>	<i>mp (sub.)</i>

The two most prevalent intervals in “Splashing the Canvas” are seconds and tritones. Higdon uses both intervals thematically; the oscillating and spiral theme feature both major and minor second intervals while the tritone theme begins with a tritone interval. Because each section begins with one or more of the themes, the structure is also influenced by the themes.

The piece begins with a rhythmic motive, which the author will refer to as the oscillation theme, oscillating randomly between the pitches G, A-flat, and A-natural in the tenor and baritone voices. The gyrating figures in [fig. 2.37a](#) accompany a bouncing melody initiated by an ascending tritone (B \flat to E-natural) in contrasting triplets in m. 2, which the author will refer to as the tritone theme. The octatonic melody continues in an upward trajectory through both the alto and soprano voices. The alto plays a fragment of the figure first, as if experimenting with a new idea. Next the soprano responds in the same measure, but still not quite refined. On the third attempt across the bar line between m. 3 and m. 4, the mature pattern finally emerges (see [fig. 2.37a](#)).

¹⁵⁴ The “Theme” row data only reflect the first stated themes of each section.

¹⁵⁵ The “Texture” row data only reflects the number of lines at the beginning of each section.

¹⁵⁶ The “Dynamics” row data only reflects the dynamic marking for the first measure of the section.

Figure 2.37a, “Splashing the Canvas” mm. 1-3. Oscillating theme paired with tritone theme.

The musical score for "Splashing the Canvas" mm. 1-3 is presented in four staves. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 120-142. The top two staves are in treble clef, and the bottom two are in bass clef. The "Oscillation theme" is marked *sfz* and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a dynamic shift from *f* to *mp*. The "Tritone theme" is marked *f* and features a melodic line with tritones and triplets. The score is divided into three measures by vertical bar lines.

Figure 2.37b shows the soprano repeats the complete figure in m. 4 following the correct contour starting on B-natural, a major seventh higher than the alto figure. The first six notes of the tritone theme spell each chord tone of Igor Stravinsky’s *Petrushka* chord (set class 013679). It is interesting that Higdon chose this note grouping, due to Stravinsky’s accomplishments as both composer and painter. The symmetrical set also hints at the octatonic scale, common in Higdon’s music. The tritone theme does not pull toward any tonality, instead following gestural contours which suggest the motion of Pollock’s hands while splattering the paint. Counterpoint of textures run throughout the work,¹⁵⁷ as each theme is presented in multiple voices which progress at different rates, occasionally joining in unison (see [fig 2.37b](#)).

¹⁵⁷ “Counterpoint of textures” is a term Higdon uses to describe how her themes overlap and develop at different rates.

Figure 2.37b, “Splashing the Canvas” m. 4. The mature tritone theme after introductory fragments.

Tritone theme

The musical score for Figure 2.37b shows the mature tritone theme in measure 4. It is presented in four staves. The first two staves (treble clefs) and the last two staves (bass clefs) are each enclosed in a rectangular box. The first staff begins with a measure number '4' above it. The music consists of a tritone theme, characterized by a sequence of notes that are a tritone apart. The theme is presented with triplets in the upper voices and a rhythmic modulation to sixteenth notes in the upper three voices in unison. The score includes a crescendo and an increase in tessitura, culminating in a rhythmic modulation of the tritone theme to sixteenth notes in the upper three voices in unison.

The phrase progressively builds in intensity with a crescendo and increase in tessitura, culminating in a rhythmic modulation of the tritone theme to sixteenth notes in the upper three voices in unison, where the first section climaxes through m. 19 (see *fig. 2.38*).

Figure 2.38, "Splashing the Canvas" mm. 17-19. Tritone theme in unison and crescendo ends the A section.

The image shows a musical score for four staves. The top two staves are in treble clef, and the bottom two are in bass clef. The time signature is 2/4. The music is in unison. A large bracket labeled 'Tritone theme' spans measures 17, 18, and 19. The theme is composed of sixteenth notes and triplets. The score ends at measure 19.

The B section begins in m. 20 with a sudden reduction in dynamics and texture. A new theme emerges, which the author will refer to as the spiral theme. The spiral theme navigates small intervallic movement around the starting central pitch, E, alternating above and below. The thin texture and soft dynamic occur suddenly, signaling the B section. The baritone presents the spiral theme in quarter-eighth triplet syncopations stretching three measures. Constructed with the notes E, D, F-sharp, E-flat, F-natural, and C, the theme spells a nearly chromatic set 012346 within the interval of a tritone as the figure spirals outward from the beginning interval of a second to a final interval of a fourth. The tritone theme remains condensed in sixteenth notes, enhancing the rhythmic contrast to the new spiral theme which is syncopated but longer in duration. More lyrical than the aggressive tritone theme, the spiral theme replaces the oscillation accompaniment to administer a calmer mood (see [fig. 2.39](#)).

Figure 2.39, “Splashing the Canvas” mm. 20-22. Introduction of the spiral theme paired with a rhythmically modulated and syncopated tritone theme to begin the B section.

Higdon establishes all three themes early in the piece, allowing for different theme combinations and textures to develop. The section ends with a climax in texture and dynamics with all three themes present accompanied by whole tone scales. *Figure 2.40* shows how mm. 38-40 act in rhythmic and harmonic dissonance as the ensemble crescendos to a fortissimo dynamic in a dense texture. All three themes overlap in this brief cadence; the alto and baritone figures move in near parallel motion harmonized by set 03 followed by tremolo, whole tone figures, and chromatic oscillation in contrary motion emphasizing the dissonance (see *fig. 2.40*).

Figure 2.40, "Splashing the Canvas" mm. 38-40. Building intensity through dynamics and texture to a climax of the B section.

The image displays a musical score for four staves, numbered 38 to 40. The score is annotated with several musical themes and dynamics. The first staff is labeled 'Tritone theme' and features a melodic line with a tritone interval. The second staff is labeled 'Spiral theme' and shows a more complex, winding melodic line. The third staff is labeled 'Oscillation theme' and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The fourth staff is labeled 'Whole tone' and shows a melodic line with a whole tone interval. The score includes dynamic markings such as *ff* (fortissimo) and *f* (forte). The time signature is 3/4. The score is annotated with various musical notations, including brackets, arrows, and numbers (5, 6) indicating specific intervals or measures.

Next, in m. 41 the tritone theme returns to the original rhythm in triplets. This time with no accompaniment for five measures, the theme begins in the tenor and then is joined by the baritone in counterpoint. After the bottom voices layer two lines of the tritone theme in counterpoint, the upper voices enter with modified figures of the oscillation theme in m. 46. The two themes continue in counterpoint until m. 49 where the contrasting “lyrical” spiral theme enters (see [fig. 2.41](#)).

Figure 2.41, "Splashing the Canvas" mm. 41-49. The A¹ section begins with the tritone theme and mezzo forte dynamic.

A¹ section

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with four staves (two treble and two bass clefs). The first system (mm. 41-43) is labeled "Tritone theme" and features a "solo" marking and a mezzo forte (*mf*) dynamic. The second system (mm. 44-46) is labeled "Oscillation theme" and also features a mezzo forte (*mf*) dynamic. The third system (mm. 47-49) is divided into two parts: the "Spiral theme" in the upper staves, marked "lyrical" and *mf*, and the "Whole tone" theme in the lower staves, marked *mp*. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings.

The whole tone figures in mm. 48-49 bolster the continuing chromatic activity, as the phrase thickens in texture, climaxing to a fortissimo dynamic in an extremely high register at the end of m. 53. The climax of the A^I section is created through the extreme dynamics and tessitura as the soprano crescendos to an altissimo concert F-sharp (transposed to B-flat as G-sharp) with the ensemble at fortissimo. The top voices move in parallel motion, maintaining set 03 voiced a major sixth apart while the bottom voices add octatonic figures in contrary motion (see [fig. 2.42](#)).

Figure 2.42, "Splashing the Canvas" mm. 52-53. The A^I section concludes with harmonic dissonance in parallel motion and contrary motion (set 03), ending with a crescendo to fortissimo.

The image displays a musical score for measures 52 and 53. It features four staves: two vocal staves (Soprano and Alto) and two piano staves (Right and Left Hand). The score is divided into two sections: 'Set 03 in parallel motion' and 'Contrary motion'. The dynamics range from *mf* (mezzo-forte) to *ff* (fortissimo). The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The music consists of chromatic, octatonic-like patterns. The vocal parts move in parallel motion, while the piano parts move in contrary motion. The score concludes with a crescendo to fortissimo.

With another precipitous drop in dynamics and thinning in texture, the B^I section begins in m. 54 as the solo alto presents the spiral theme in a rhythmically condensed pianissimo dynamic. The alto is quickly joined by the ensemble as a tutti figure emerges at the end of m. 56 with all voices moving in parallel motion. Beginning the sequence,

Higdon voices the chord on beat four of m. 56 as notes (in ascending order from the bass) G, E-flat, B-flat, and E-natural. In Higdon's voicing, the intervals include a minor sixth (G to E \flat), perfect fifth (E \flat to B \flat), and tritone (B \flat to E \natural). Because the intervals are large, it can be challenging to understand the function of the chord. In its prime form the chord is arranged as E-flat, E-natural, G, and B-flat, with E-flat assigned 0, E-natural assigned 1, G assigned 4, and B-flat assigned 7. By rearranging the chord in its prime form the author discovered set 0147. Set 0147 is more easily identified as a subset of the octatonic scale than the expanded voicing applied by Higdon. Higdon applies the octatonic scale to the tritone theme, thus the chord connects to her compositional style (see [fig. 2.43](#)).

Figure 2.43, "Splashing the Canvas" mm. 54-57. The B^I section begins softly with a solo spiral theme in the alto then is joined by the ensemble in rhythmic unison.

The musical score for "Splashing the Canvas" mm. 54-57 is presented in four staves: Treble, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The Alto staff begins with a solo section in measure 54, marked *pp sub.* and labeled "solo". The "B^I section" is indicated by a box above the first two staves. The "Spiral theme" is marked above the Alto staff. The ensemble joins in measure 56 with *pp* dynamics. The notes are labeled with set 0147 in parallel motion: 1, 7, 0, 4. The dynamics shift to *f sub.* in measure 57.

The ensemble alternates sharply between subito forte and pianissimo dynamics to intensify the dissonance (see [fig. 2.44](#)).

Figure 2.44, “Splashing the Canvas” mm. 56-59. Aggressive soli in parallel motion on set 0147 with sharp dynamic accents.

The musical score consists of four staves. The first two staves are in treble clef, and the last two are in bass clef. The key signature has two flats. The score is divided into two systems. The first system covers measures 56 and 57, and the second system covers measures 58 and 59. Dynamic markings are placed below the notes: *pp* at the start of each measure, and *f sub.* at the end of each measure. In the second system, there are additional dynamic markings: *pp sub.* and *f* at the start of measures 58 and 59, and a sequence of *pp f pp f pp* at the end of each measure.

The soli figure begins to dissipate as the liberated lines begin pinging with rapid successive pitches until the baritone line recants the spiral theme in m. 64, leading to a climax at the end of m. 65 (see [fig. 2.45a](#)). Reducing again to a soft dynamic and thin texture, the final section, C, begins in m. 66 as the inner voices ricochet between the oscillation and tritone themes and the soprano sustains the spiral theme high above in rhythmic augmentation (see [fig. 2.45b](#)).

Figure 2.45a, "Splashing the Canvas" mm. 64-66. The soli figure dissipates as each line becomes increasingly independent with a crescendo to fortissimo leading to the C section at m. 66.

Figure 2.45b, "Splashing the Canvas" mm. 67-68. All three themes presented at beginning of the final section.

With the entrance of the baritone in m. 73, Higdon sets up another cadential climax; however, the momentum carries through the contrapuntal chaos to a rapid succession of extremities as the phrase rises and falls with vigor (see [fig. 2.46](#)).

Figure 2.46, "Splashing the Canvas" mm. 73-76. Aggressive dynamics and accents in counterpoint against the sustained spiral theme. Then the tritone theme layers in unison.

The musical score is divided into two main sections. The first section, spanning measures 73 to 76, is characterized by aggressive dynamics and accents. It features four staves. The top staff, labeled "Spiral theme", contains a melodic line with a tritone interval. The second and third staves, labeled "Tritone theme", contain rhythmic patterns with accents. The fourth staff is a bass line. A box highlights the final measure of this section, labeled "Whole tone", where all staves play a whole-tone scale. Dynamics include "f" and "ff". The second section, spanning measures 75 to 76, is labeled "Tritone theme in unison" and features four staves where all instruments play the same melodic line in unison. Dynamics range from "mf" to "f".

The ensemble continues the tutti passage by splitting into harmony on octatonic subset 0167 at m. 77 followed by a solo alto passage containing whole tone and octatonic scales. Higdon voices the syncopated tutti 0167 chord as tritone (F to B), perfect fifth (B to F-sharp), and tritone (F-sharp to C) ascending intervals. The prime form of this set is arranged as F-F \sharp -B-C. The alto bursts out of the texture with a polyrhythmic whole tone and octatonic melody. Then in m. 79 the baritone resumes the oscillating theme against

the soprano tritone theme as the phrase quickly builds to a *fortissimo* dynamic at the end of m. 80 (see [fig. 22.47](#)).

Figure 2.47, "Splashing the Canvas" mm. 77-79. Syncopated tutti figures on 0167 harmony interrupted by a solo alto whole tone figure.

The musical score for "Splashing the Canvas" mm. 77-79 is presented in four staves. The first staff (Soprano) is labeled "0167" and contains a syncopated tutti figure. The second staff (Alto) is labeled "solo" and contains a whole tone/octatonic figure with triplets and a 4:3 ratio. The third staff (Tenor) is labeled "6" and contains a syncopated tutti figure. The fourth staff (Bass) is labeled "0" and contains a syncopated tutti figure. The score is divided into three sections: "Whole tone/ octatonic" (mm. 77-78), "Tritone theme" (m. 79), and "Oscillation theme" (m. 80).

All three themes continue in counterpoint as they feverishly layer on top of one another in mixed rhythms throughout the cacophonous closing section. [Figure 2.48](#) shows tutti figures harmonized by symmetrical set 036 in parallel motion preceded by the tritone and oscillation themes in counterpoint and a crescendo to *fortissimo*. Higdon dramatically adjusts dynamics in m. 81 to enhance the contrast in textures (see [fig. 2.48](#)).

Figure 2.48, "Splashing the Canvas" mm. 80-81. Layering themes alternating between counterpoint and tutti with sudden changes in dynamics.

The musical score for measures 80-81 of "Splashing the Canvas" is presented in a four-staff format. The score is divided into two systems by a double bar line. The first system (measures 80-81) features four staves. The top two staves are labeled "Tritone theme" and contain melodic lines with triplets and a quintuplet, marked with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic. The bottom two staves are labeled "Oscillation theme" and contain a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes, also marked with *ff*. The second system (measures 82-83) features four staves. The top two staves are labeled "Oscillation theme harmonized on 036 in parallel motion" and contain melodic lines with triplets, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a crescendo (*cresc.*). The bottom two staves are labeled "Tritone theme" and contain melodic lines with triplets, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a crescendo (*cresc.*). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, brackets, and dynamic markings.

The themes continue to layer on and alternate with one another in contrasting textures and dynamics until a final tutti figure emerges in m. 91 and repeats to the end. The ensemble repeats successive, rapidly ascending figures starting in m. 91, beginning softly then fiercely amplifying to a fortissimo dynamic and accelerando to the end (see [fig. 2.49](#)).

Figure 2.49, “Splashing the Canvas” mm. 91-93. Rapidly ascending repeated figures in counterpoint.

The image shows a musical score for three staves, measures 91-93. The music is in 2/4 time. The first staff (treble clef) features a rapidly ascending repeated figure with a dynamic range from *p* to *ff*. The second and third staves (treble clef) feature similar figures, also with a dynamic range from *p* to *ff*. The fourth staff (bass clef) features a similar figure, also with a dynamic range from *p* to *ff*. The score includes fingerings (5 and 6) and articulation marks (accents and slurs). The overall texture is characterized by counterpoint between the staves.

This pattern repeats for seven measures until the ensemble articulates a symmetrical tone cluster (set 0268) followed by a suspenseful C-sharp emerging from the solo tenor at a subito pianissimo dynamic and crescendo. The lower three voices articulate a unison G-natural (in two octaves) to finish the piece on a tritone interval (C# to G) (see [fig. 2.50](#)).

Figure 2.50, "Splashing the Canvas" mm. 97-100. Symmetrical chord 0268 followed by the sustained C-sharp leads to off-beat unison G, ending the piece on a descending tritone.

Fittingly ending with a descending tritone, the piece finishes in response to how it began (ascending tritone in m. 2). The ascending figures in mm. 91-97 allude to Pollock's drip technique, as the contour of the lines hint at the painter's repeated movements launching paint onto the canvas. Other movements in *Short Stories* end with a suggested V-I cadence ("Chase" and "Lullaby") but in "Splashing the Canvas," Higdon decides to punctuate the mood of the piece by ending on the dissonant tritone.

Conclusion

"Splashing the Canvas" combines Higdon's love of the visual arts with her usual textural complexity to create an exciting work full of energy and depth. Influenced by her childhood art exhibit experiences and her lessons with Crumb, Higdon explores a variety of tone colors through dissonant harmonies sounding at extreme ranges of the ensemble's tessitura. Higdon applies a combination of themes in counterpoint to suggest layers of paint accumulating on the canvas. Writing linearly through polyrhythmic counterpoint,

the texture is active with various degrees of intensity. Higdon emphasizes dissonant tone clusters through construction of melodies and harmonies from subsets of symmetrical scales. Performers should maintain a strong sense of pulse through the polyrhythmic textures. It is important that the ensemble arrive on tutti figures together, to successfully portray their structural significance. Because Higdon features polyrhythms and octatonic figures, it is imperative that performers have a strong pulse and technique in the octatonic scale.

The phrases follow a sawtooth pattern of peaks and valleys through texture, dynamics, and tessitura (refer to *fig. 2.1*). The musical intensity reaches a peak at the end of each section before immediately dissipating to start the next. Syncopated tutti figures and whole tone scales appear at the end of phrases, adding dissonance and accenting the climaxes of each section. The sectional structure contains repeated themes layered in different combinations. Higdon introduces the themes early through layered counterpoint, then unites the lines in unison and tutti harmony. As an homage to the drip paintings of Jackson Pollock, “Splashing the Canvas” is Higdon’s interpretation of the artist’s technique in a musical idiom.

SHORT STORIES – “COYOTE NIGHTS”

Higdon’s love for nature once again finds a programmatic avenue through her music in “Coyote Nights.” The piece acts as a snapshot of her adventures to Arches National Park, one of many national parks she visited in the American West. In the composer’s notes about the piece, she remarks on the solitude one finds when exploring nature’s grandeur.

Many years ago, I took a trip out West, camping out in 8 different National Parks; one of those parks was Arches, in Utah. It is an unusual place where it becomes totally dark at night, with large looming rocks, a million stars above, and with the sound of wild coyotes crying in the night. That crying is peaceful reminder that we are visitors.¹⁵⁸

The structure follows an arch form contour, building from minimal beginnings to a peak of textural and dynamic intensity, then quickly dissipates to a return of opening material. Open fifth harmonies in the accompaniment create a pure sonority quantifying the scope of the Arches park’s landscape, while the sliding melodies follow a contour suggesting the distant howls of wild coyotes. Higdon sets the open fifths in parallel motion, acting as an accompaniment to a lyrical melody. Textures continually shift, growing from one single line to a peak of full polyphony, before concluding with a reduction back to thin origins. The solemn harmonies are tonal, but non-functional with emphasis on fifths and sevenths. The dynamics are mostly soft, with gentle growth within each phrase, then crescendo to a singular forte at the climax of the piece, only to reduce back to soft origins.

¹⁵⁸ Higdon, “Program Notes for *Short Stories*,” <http://www.jenniferhigdon.com/pdf/program-notes/Short-Stories.pdf>, (accessed February 5, 2019).

Guided Analysis

The arch form of “Coyote Nights” connects five sections, which the author has labeled Introduction–A–B–C–D–A^I–Coda. Dynamics and texture play an important structural role, signaling the beginning of new sections. Typically beginning softly with only one or two voices, each section gradually builds in texture and dynamics followed by a sudden reduction to start the next section. Unlike the more aggressive movements in *Short Stories* (“Chase” and “Splashing the Canvas”), the peaks and valleys of texture, dynamics, and tessitura of the form in “Coyote Nights” are less jagged.

The arch form peaks precisely two thirds through with the only forte dynamic of the piece as the ensemble unites in homorhythmic chordal structures. After this climax, the arch form is completed with a return to open fifth harmonies and a lyrical melody like the opening which quietly fades to *niente* on a solo soprano figure.

Common to many of Higdon’s pieces, “Coyote Nights” follows a pattern of gradual growth and sudden decay as textural activity and dynamics build through each section, peaking at the end of the phrase then suddenly resetting to start the next section. Carrying a forte dynamic across sections C and D, Higdon smoothly molds the peak of the arc to a plateau, much like the rock formations in the American West. The table below outlines the structure of “Coyote Nights” with reference to texture and dynamics ([table 2.7](#)).

Table 2.7, The arch form structure of “Coyote Nights” with reference to texture and dynamics.

Section	Intro	A	B	C	D	A ¹	Coda
Measure	1	5	15	21	36	45	53
Texture ¹⁵⁹	solo, duet	H., acc. duet	H., soli	H., acc. duet, soli, polyphonic	soli	solo, H.	solo
Dynamics ¹⁶⁰	<i>p</i>	<i>mp/p</i> → <i>mf</i> <	<i>sub. p</i> → <i>mf</i>	> <i>pp</i> → <i>f</i>	<i>f</i> → <i>pp</i> >	< <i>p</i>	<i>Pp</i>

As [table 2.7](#) shows, texture and dynamics are significant elements in revealing the structure of the sections. Each section begins softly with a thin texture (either solo or homophonic) except for section D, which plateaus on soli figures at a forte dynamic at the climax of the movement. Higdon does not use key signatures in this movement; however, much of the piece suggests a G minor tonal center through B-flat and F-sharp accidentals and occasional harmonic progressions of D7–Gm7 cadences interjected with altered harmonies such as B \flat Maj7 and set 0257 to add tonal ambiguity.

The opening theme presented by the baritone in m.1 returns in the final phrase of the piece by the soprano in retrograde. The rhythm of the opening baritone figure is also significant. Following a quarter, half, quarter note pattern (tied across the bar line), Higdon emphasizes beat two of the measure and obscures the downbeat of the second measure. The syncopated motive returns at other structural moments in the piece (see [table 2.8](#)).

¹⁵⁹ The “Texture” row data reflect the initial texture of each section, followed by subsequent textures as the section develops.

¹⁶⁰ The “Dynamics” row data reflect the initial dynamic marking to begin each section, followed by the final dynamic marking of the section.

Table 2.8, Motives in “Coyote Nights” with reference to measure and significance.


Motive	Measures	Significance
 rhythmic motive	1	Opening phrase of the piece in the F pentatonic figure by the solo baritone (tied across bar line).
	7	Concluding the opening phrase, lower voices through D/G and Bb quartal harmonies one measure before the alto enters.
	15-16	Opening of the B section. Repeated twice through the i7 – III7 – ii ⁶ ₅ – V7 – (III7) – i7 progression in Gm. Presented in three voices.
	20-21	Preceded by a III – IV7 – V7 – i cadence in Gm. Concludes the B section (tied across bar line).
	46	Begins the final section, A ^I . Lower voices only (tied across the bar line).
G minor melodic motive: D–A–B ^b –C–G	5	Beginning of A section.
	8	In the soprano as counterpoint to entrance of the alto.
	14	Climax of the A section.
	34	Climax of the C section.
	46	Opening phrase of the A ^I section.
	50	Conclusion of the A ^I section.

Table 2.8 shows the occurrences of both the rhythmic and G minor motives, which occur at structural moments in the piece. Although much of the lyrical melody appears impulsive, one figure stands out as a returning motive in the soprano line. First appearing in the soprano line in m. 5 as D, A, B-flat, C, and G, the figure is bookended by perfect fifths which construct minor seventh chords with the accompaniment. The syncopated figure appears on an off-beat triplet pattern, beginning on D and ending on G, but Higdon places fragments of the motive near other structural moments as well. There are six occurrences of the motive either in complete or partial forms, beginning at m. 5, then at mm. 8, 14, 34, 46, and 50. The first two examples introduce a new phrase, while the example at m. 34 is near the climax of the piece. The final two examples act similarly to the first, introducing the first two phrases of the second A section.

The most significant interval in “Coyote Nights” is the perfect fifth, which Higdon applies both melodically and harmonically. In ANCIA and PRISM’s recordings of the piece, both groups intentionally do not use vibrato when sustaining the open fifth intervals to protect the harmonic purity.¹⁶¹ Another significant interval is the minor seventh which Higdon applies melodically and harmonically as minor seventh chords. As an inversion of the major second interval popular in Higdon’s faster works, Higdon uses the minor seventh interval for its spacious quality.

On a macro level, the bass notes of the four most common quartal harmonies in the piece themselves make a quartal harmony; quartal chords with bass notes Bb, F, G, and C occur most often, combining to create the quartal set 0257. Through these harmonies, the author discovers Higdon’s harmonic tendency to work around the circle of fifths; Higdon also primarily voices the quartal chord in ascending fifth intervals.

Higdon applies non-chord tones to major and minor triads for an altered tonal quality. Like the four quartal sets, Higdon follows the circle of fifths with her selection of minor seventh chords (set 0358); G, D, A, and E minor seventh chords appear most frequently and the roots of each chord create set 0257. By centering harmonies based on sets 0257 (quartal) and 0358 (minor seventh), chords that are only separated by two half steps, Higdon further obscures the tonal center of G minor.

A solo baritone line begins the first phrase of the piece with an F pentatonic figure. In m. 3 the tenor joins in parallel perfect fifths to sculpt an open harmony (see [fig. 2.51](#)).

¹⁶¹ Michael Sintchak, phone interview with author on January 31, and February 8, 2019; Taimur Sullivan, phone interview with author on March 10, 2019.

Figure 2.51, “Coyote Nights” mm. 1-4. Opening baritone solo outlining an F pentatonic scale.

The first section, labeled A, begins in m. 5 with the entrance of the soprano on a lyrical melody which implies G minor through the F-sharp leading tone and B-flat accidentals. Higdon gradually introduces each line, opening with the baritone solo, then joined by the tenor in parallel fifths, and in m. 5 the soprano introduces a lyrical melody. The rhythms of the melody are diverse, ranging from quarter note triplets to sixteenths, complementing the stoic accompaniment. The melodic contour leaps in large intervals, such as minor sevenths and perfect fifths, a quality common to other slow chamber works such as *Summer Shimmers*.¹⁶²

The melody enters on a dissonant tone (F \sharp) disturbing the C and G open fifth harmony, then resolves up to G to realign in consonance. The phrase progresses through a mixture of tonal (Em7 and FMaj7), quartal (set 0257), and tone cluster (set 0137) chords,

¹⁶² Broffitt, “The Music of Jennifer Higdon,” 35-36.

adding ambiguity to the harmonic structure. Melodic perfect fifth intervals are frequent, combining with the accompaniment to create seventh chords (major and minor) and quartal chords (set 0257).

Quartal chords often appear successively, such as in m. 5. Two 0257 sets appear across the bar line to m. 6, the first of which is constructed in two pairs of fifths (D-A in the accompaniment and C-G in the melody). An F major seventh harmony follows in m. 6 on the notes F-C in the accompaniment and E-A in the melody. After a dissonant 0137 tone cluster in m. 7, Higdon returns to set 0257, this time voiced in consecutive fifths (B \flat , F, C, G).

Minor sevenths occur in melodic phrases to form new harmonies. First ascending from G to D in syncopation to the accompaniment, the soprano completes an E minor seventh chord in m. 5. The soprano continues in m. 6 by descending a minor seventh from C to D to complete a 0257 harmony (see [fig. 2.52a](#)). In mm. 6 and 10, the soprano leaps in fifths and sevenths (see [fig. 2.52b](#)).

Figure 2.52a, "Coyote Nights" mm. 5-7. The A section begins with a lyrical melody set against the open fifth accompaniment. Harmonies include an E minor seventh chord and set 0257.

The musical score for "Coyote Nights" mm. 5-7 is presented. The top staff is the solo melody, marked *solo* and *mp*. The bottom two staves are the open fifth accompaniment. The A section is boxed and labeled "A section". Above the score, chord symbols are provided: Em7 0257, 0257, FMaj7, 0137, and 0257. A "G minor motive" is indicated in the treble clef. Fingerings are shown for both hands.

Figure 2.52b, "Coyote Nights" m. 6, 10. Soprano part in B-flat. Perfect fifth and minor seventh melodic intervals.

The musical score for "Coyote Nights" m. 6 and m. 10 is presented. The score shows the soprano part in B-flat. The intervals are labeled: P5, m7, P5, m7, P5. The dynamics are marked *mf*.

As displayed in *figure 2.52a*, Higdon uses the 0257 chord as a transitional harmony, usually nestled between more functional chords. After the conclusion of the phrase, the alto joins the soprano melody in counterpoint at m. 8 to create an accompanied duet texture. In m. 9 the quartal chord (set 0257) lies between B-flat major and A minor harmonies (see *fig. 2.53*).

Figure 2.53, "Coyote Nights" mm. 8-9. The alto joins in counterpoint, quartal chord between tonal harmonies.

Quartal harmonies return in m. 12 with two sets between a C-sharp half diminished seventh chord and a D minor seventh chord across the bar line. Both 0257 chords are voiced in consecutive fifths, first on notes F, C, G, and D, and the second on notes G, D, A, and E (see [fig. 2.54a](#)).

Figure 2.54a, "Coyote Nights" mm. 12-13. Two consecutive quartal chords.

The section progresses as the contour of the two melodic lines fluctuates against the minimally moving accompaniment. Peaking in m. 14, the ensemble crescendos to the end of the measure followed by a precipitous drop to piano and a new chordal texture across the bar line, signaling a new section. Measure 15 begins a new section, labeled B, as the dynamics suddenly reduce to piano and the texture becomes more homophonic; the soprano and alto join the lower voices to create a chordal texture with brief interjections of melodic movement dispersed in between. The upper voices alternate between parallel and contrary motion to the lower voices to create variety in the texture. Higdon alludes to a G minor tonality through a progression of seventh chords cadencing on a G minor seventh chord in mm. 15-16. The chord progression Gm7 – BbMaj7 – Am7 – D7 – BbMaj7 – Gm7 begins the B section, tonicizing G minor with a ii^6_5 – V7 – (III7) – i7 cadence. The extended seventh harmonies reduce the functionality of the progression; the cadence is interrupted by B-flat major seventh chords and followed by a series of 0257 harmonies in m. 17 to further obscure the progression (m. 17 ends with a 0157 harmony) (see [fig. 2.54b](#)).

Figure 2.54b, "Coyote Nights" mm. 13-17. The phrase climaxes with a crescendo and increased textural activity followed by a sudden reduction to piano and homophonic texture.

Chords: Dm7, B \flat Maj7, C7, Am7 \flat 9, FMaj7 \flat 9

Section B

Chords: Gm7, B \flat Maj7, Am7, D7, B \flat Maj7, Gm7, FMaj7

Guitar Chord Diagram for m. 15:

0	2	0
5	7	5
2	7	1
7	0	6

Chords: Gm: i7, III7, ii $^{\flat}$ ₅, V7, (III7), i7

The new homophonic texture in m. 15 continues for only six measures, climaxing at m. 20 with a crescendo to mezzo forte. Higdon inserts another chordal progression alluding to G minor (III7–V7–i7) in mm. 19-20, this time interrupted by a 0257 chord. The voice leading does not act functionally as the C in the soprano motions up to D instead of resolving down to B-flat; the D in the baritone moves to F instead of resolving

to tonic G; and the tenor contains lyrical ornaments navigating through chord tones A and F-sharp (G-flat in score), adding non-chord tones E and B-flat for dissonance.

Along with a quick diminuendo to pianissimo at the end of m. 21, the chordal harmonic texture shifts askew as the soprano and alto sound on alternating eighth notes across the bar line, signaling the beginning of a new section labeled C. This new texture allows the harmony to unfold across the beat, constantly shifting with the movement of each line. The baritone then enters with a descending fifth melodic figure in m. 22 (see [fig. 2.55](#)).

Figure 2.55, "Coyote Nights" mm. 19-22. Chordal progression in G minor followed by a diminuendo to pianissimo and altered texture.

19 $B\flat$ Maj7 0257 D7 $Gm7$ C $Gm7$

Gm : III7 V7 $i7$ IV $i7$

21 $Dm7$ $B\flat$ Maj7 C section

pp sempre

pp sempre

solo

mp

The phrase continues to build in complexity with the entrance of the tenor and increases in dynamics, peaking at the only forte in the piece at m. 34. The phrase intensifies in counterpoint, applying a mixture of parallel and contrary motion for added

textural emphasis until m. 36, a point which is exactly two thirds through the piece, adhering to the golden ratio found in nature and mathematics. The golden ratio, derived from The Fibonacci series, originated as an arithmetical discovery by mathematician Leonardo da Pisa circa 1202 AD, and has been used to govern rhythms and forms by many composers of the 19th and 20th century.¹⁶³ Here, the structural significance of the golden ratio lies in its placement and context, as Higdon sets the texture, dynamics, and tessitura at their peak. At m. 36 the four voices merge in a chordal tutti at a high register signaling both the climax of the piece and the beginning of section D (see *fig. 2.56*).

¹⁶³ Tatlow, Ruth. 2001 "Fibonacci series." Grove Music Online. 18 Jun. 2019. <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.libproxy.unl.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000049578>. (Accessed June 18, 2019).

Figure 2.56, "Coyote Nights" mm. 33-36. Climax of the movement with forte dynamic, tutti figures, and polyrhythmic counterpoint leading to the D section.

The musical score for "Coyote Nights" mm. 33-36 is presented in four staves. The first system (measures 33-36) is marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The music features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and quintuplets. A bracket labeled "Contrary motion" spans measures 34 and 35. The second system (measures 35-36) is labeled "D section" and continues the complex rhythmic patterns. The score is in 2/4 time and includes various articulations and dynamics.

After its peak in m. 36, the phrase begins to descend in range, paired with a *ritardando* and *decrecendo* to *pianissimo* where the ensemble sustains an A minor chord with added ninth (B-natural) voiced as fifth, sixth, and seventh intervals spread over two octaves. A descending soprano melody emerges from this chord in m. 45, signaling a new section labeled A¹ (see [fig. 2.57](#)).

Figure 2.57, "Coyote Nights" mm. 43-45. The ensemble ends the phrase on an A minor mu chord spaced in two octaves

Am Em7 FMaj7 GMaj7 Am(add9) $\text{♩} = 42$

43 *p* *pp* *solo* *p*

A^I section

The open fifth accompaniment joins the soprano solo in the second measure of the A^I section to recreate the texture of the opening section, but this time the alto remains tacet. The remaining three voices calmly descend in contour, concluding the phrase with a diminuendo to *niente* in a low register at m. 52. After the lower voices dissolve, the solo soprano figure concludes the piece on the same pentatonic pitches as the baritone's introduction, but in retrograde (see [fig. 2.58](#)).

Figure 2.58, "Coyote Nights" mm. 52-54. The ensemble diminishes to niente as the solo soprano concludes with the pentatonic theme in retrograde, spelling a D minor seventh chord to finishing the movement on an unresolved harmony.

52 Dm7 →

Coda

solo
pp

niente

Gm: v7 →

niente

Throughout the piece Higdon suggests G minor but adds dissonances to obscure the tonality; she maintains the ambiguity at the end by outlining a D minor seventh chord (D–A in low voices, F–A–C in soprano), the minor five of G minor, resulting in an unresolved cadence. With the simple melody stated by the soprano to conclude the piece, the arch form is complete, ending symmetrically with material derived from the beginning in retrograde. Both the final section and coda mimic the introduction and opening section in texture, dynamic, and harmonic ambiguity.

Conclusion

Inspired by Arches National Park, Higdon suggests the open landscape of the American West in “Coyote Nights” through melodic, harmonic, and textural imagery. The arch form connects thematic material from the beginning to the ending. Each section

progresses through peaks and valleys through gradual growth of dynamics and texture to a climax at the end of the phrase before quickly reducing to start the next section. The peak of the arch form climaxes exactly two thirds of the way through (revealing the golden ratio found in mathematics and nature) by all voices joining in a homorhythmic soli at the strongest dynamic and highest tessitura of the piece.

“Coyote Nights” exhibits many of Higdon’s lyrical qualities; parallel perfect fifths sustain in a cold accompaniment against an active melody leaping in large intervals, harmonies are tonal but non-functional, and textures shift from homophonic to polyphonic and moments of tutti. As exhibited in the ANCIA and PRISM recordings, performers should not use vibrato in the parallel fifth figures in order to protect the purity of the interval. Quartal and seventh chords are essential to the harmony, structure, and narrative of the work. Performers should balance the harmonies evenly so as to not imply any one pitch as the tonal center.

Higdon features the circle of fifths through extensive use of set classes 0257 (commonly voiced in consecutive fifths on bass notes B \flat , F, C, and G) and 0358 (G, D, A, and E minor seventh chords). The lyrical melodies are syncopated in quick rhythms and emerge against a placid accompaniment which is syncopated in larger rhythms creating rhythmic contrast between lines. Through the compositional elements presented above, Higdon suggests the narrative of the large looming rocks, countless stars, and distant howling coyotes in Arches National Park.

SHORT STORIES – “STOMP & DANCE”

“Stomp & Dance” combines modal minimalism with syncopated rhythms to create a groove-oriented work showcasing the saxophone’s percussive capabilities. Flowing at a steady ♩ = 120 pace, textures fluctuate between hocket, minimalist, polyphonic, and tutti figures. In comparison to the other fast movements of *Short Stories*, the tempo in “Stomp & Dance” is the mildest. Whereas “Chase” and “Splashing the Canvas” maintain a frenzied tempo (up to ♩ = 160), “Stomp & Dance” rests comfortably at a more temperate stride.

In the program notes, Higdon states plainly “[t]his movement speaks for itself.” The composer later elaborates that the piece was inspired by the staged marching group STOMP, a drum and bugle corps ensemble that gives choreographed performances in concert halls.¹⁶⁴ Higdon alludes to the ensemble through slap tongue and key slap articulations.

At the request of the PRISM Quartet, Higdon arranged a version of “Stomp & Dance” for saxophone octet, which was premiered at a concert honoring Professor Donald Sinta for his contributions to the saxophone and academic community during his long tenure at the University of Michigan.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Higdon, email interview with author, March 23, 2019.

¹⁶⁵ Jennifer Higdon, email interview with author, March 23, 2019.

Guided Analysis

The structure of “Stomp & Dance” follows an arch form with two alternating sections which the author has labeled Introduction–A–B–A^I–B^I. The A sections are modal and feature whole step and perfect fourth motion through hocket and minimalist textures. The B sections provide contrast through octatonic and whole tone figures and feature half step tremolos in counterpoint and tutti figures. “Hocket” is a medieval term for a contrapuntal technique of manipulating silence as a mensural value in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries;¹⁶⁶ Higdon uses the technique to gradually introduce each line in minimalist patterns. Material from both the A and B sections return later in the work to support the arch form. Like many of Higdon’s other works, the transitions between segments are abrupt, with sharp contrasts in dynamics, tessitura, articulation, and texture (see *table 2.9*).

¹⁶⁶ Ernest H. Sanders, “Hocket,” *New Grove Online*, 2001, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000013115>, (accessed August 13, 2019).

Table 2.9, “Stomp & Dance” structural outline with reference to thematic material.

Form	Meas.	Harmony¹⁶⁷	Dynamics	Thematic Material
Intro.	1-9	G Dorian	<i>p</i> <i>mp</i>	Hocket texture beginning on pitch G. Downbeat avoidance.
A	10-26	G Dorian	<i>f</i>	Minimalist theme, staccato articulations. Patterns gradually build in activity, and high tessitura.
	27-31	A \flat Dorian	<i>p</i> < <i>mf</i>	Legato articulation, low tessitura.
	32-40	G Dorian	< <i>f</i>	staccato articulations, new double sixteenth note pattern. Ends with tutti accented 0257 chords and slap tongue articulation.
B	41-54	Octatonic	<i>pp</i> <i>mf</i> (<i>sub.</i>) <	Low trill between notes B and C, texture alternates between counterpoint and octatonic tutti figures. Phrase ends with ascending polyrhythmic whole tone scales.
	55-63	Whole tone, Octatonic	<i>p</i> (<i>sub.</i>) < <i>f</i>	Contrapuntal texture, staccato articulations on repeated sixteenth notes. Half step ostinato.
	64-71	Octatonic	<i>f</i> <i>mp</i>	Slap tongue articulations, C ostinato with overlapping tritone figures and staccato articulations.
	72-78	0156	<i>ff</i> (<i>sub.</i>) > <i>pp</i>	Parallel fifths, oscillating by half step. Legato articulations. Texture gradually reduces to single voice.
A ^I	79-93	Non-pitched	<i>ff</i>	“Key slap” interlude with intermittent slap tongue articulations. Descending contour of line and emphasis on downbeats. Tones begin to emerge gradually in D Dorian mode.
	94-114	F Dorian	<i>mp</i> <	Minimalist texture resumes, modulating to F Dorian mode. Material from previous A section transposed down by whole step, then reproduced exactly.
	115-128	A \flat Dorian G Dorian	<i>mp</i> (<i>sub.</i>) < <i>f</i>	Sudden reduction in dynamics, drop in tessitura. Repeated material from previous A section with double sixteenth note patterns. Combination of slurs and staccato articulations.
B ^I	129-139	0156 C	<i>mp</i> (<i>sub.</i>) < <i>ff</i>	Parallel fifths, moving by half step as in previous B section modulated by a fifth.

¹⁶⁷ The “Harmony” column data reflect the tonal center of each section based on number of accidentals and repeated pitches.

				Expanded tessitura both low and high. Intermittent slap tongue articulations. Ascending G major scalar figures leading to an off-beat open fifth C chord.
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As *table 2.9* shows, changes in tonal center and dynamics occur frequently.

Thematic material, such as the minimalist theme and half step oscillation, identifies the alternating sections. Higdon uses different harmonic frameworks for the A and B sections as well. The A sections are modal, favoring the Dorian mode. The contrasting B sections use symmetrical devices such as the whole tone and octatonic scale with figures featuring half steps and tritones. Both B sections conclude with a tutti figure harmonized on the dissonant set 0156, which contains two half steps.

Second (major and minor) and fourth (perfect and augmented) intervals dominate the texture in “Stomp & Dance.” Higdon distinguishes the sections in the form by the quality of interval used. Whole steps and perfect fourths populate the figures in the A sections and, conversely, half steps and tritones constitute the figures of the B sections.

The harmonies in “Stomp & Dance” emerge from the counterpoint. Higdon applies minimalism, allowing modal patterns to unfold and create a cumulative harmony. Phrases modulate by half step, such as G to A-flat Dorian modes in the A sections. Articulation patterns are significant to the structure as well, alternating between staccato and legato patterns. Slap tongue and key slaps contribute to the narrative of the piece, imitating drum and bugle corps.

The piece begins softly with a hocket texture, which Higdon applies to gradually introduce each line of the phrase. Beginning with syncopated, staccato articulations on G

between the lower voices, the hocket texture develops gradually as the alto adds C and B-flat articulations, then the soprano enters articulating an E and D, completing a G minor pentatonic scale and suggesting the G dorian mode. The truncated opening figures conceal any recognizable patterns at first, but then as each line adds more material, repeated patterns begin to emerge. (see [fig. 2.59](#)).

Figure 2.59, “Stomp & Dance” mm. 1-3. Hocket introduction on G.

Beginning at m. 10, each voice repeats individual syncopated figures, thus exposing the steady tempo, while highlighting the Dorian harmony by alternating between two pitches separated by whole step. The patterns combine to create a thematic phrase, which the author has labeled the “minimalist theme” because of the minimalist texture. The pattern establishes the first A section at m. 10 (see [fig. 2.60](#)).

Figure 2.60, “Stomp & Dance” mm. 10-14. Individual repeated patterns create minimalist texture.

10 A section

12

The composite melody created by the four voices gradually augments as the intervals begin to expand, peaking at m. 26. The next phrase begins at m. 27 with a sudden reduction in dynamics and lowering of tessitura combined with smoother articulations and a half step modulation up to the A-flat Dorian mode. At m. 27 the articulation pattern is more legato (see [fig. 2.61](#)).

Figure 2.61, "Stomp & Dance" mm. 26-27. Abrupt transition to A-flat Dorian, lower range, soft dynamic, and legato articulation.

26

27

p sub.

p sub.

p sub.

p sub.

The legato articulation is short lived, returning to staccato attacks at m. 30 and the harmony shifts down by a half step to G Dorian at m. 32, paired with a new articulation pattern using double sixteenth notes, sustaining the A section further (see [fig. 2.62](#)).

Figure 2.62, "Stomp & Dance" mm. 30-32. Sudden staccato articulations and introduction of double sixteenth figures in G Dorian mode.

30

staccato

staccato

staccato

staccato

mf

mf

mf

mf

The phrase builds in tension as the tessitura rises and dynamics crescendo to a tutti *sforzando* accent on three syncopated G quartal 0257 chords in mm. 39-40 ending the first A section. The soprano, alto, and tenor lines produce slap tongue accents on the final *sforzando* chord in m. 40. The percussive attacks place an emphasis on the transition, propelling the music into the contrasting B section. The B section begins in m. 41, introduced by a half step trill between B and C in the tenor at pianissimo (see [fig. 2.63](#)).

Figure 2.63, "Stomp & Dance" mm. 38-41. Building intensity through crescendo and *sforzando* accented 0257 chords concluding the A section.

The trill figure sustains through the B section, traded between all four voices in the same octave. Octatonic melodies gradually emerge, then tutti figures appear for brief moments before returning to counterpoint. Dissonance created by the persistent trill and contrasting octatonic melody establish this section as a deviation from the modal A section. These tutti figures often occur with a sudden change in dynamics as in mm. 51-53 emphasizing their dissonant character (see [fig. 2.64](#)).

Figure 2.64, "Stomp & Dance" mm. 51-53. Octatonic tutti figures accompanied by trill with abrupt dynamics

The image displays a musical score for measures 51, 52, and 53. It features four staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a Bass line. The score is annotated with dynamic markings: *pp*, *p sub.*, *mf sub.*, and *pp*. A box labeled "Octatonic" points to specific melodic lines in measures 51 and 52. The score includes trills and abrupt dynamic changes, as indicated by the caption and the notation.

Next, all four voices swell with ascending whole tone scales as they crescendo to forte, transitioning to syncopated double sixteenth figures at m. 55. The ensemble continues in counterpoint as each line presents a sequence. The baritone begins articulating an F on the first upbeat of mm. 55-58. In the same phrase the tenor repeats a descending B to F figure on the second beat and the alto articulates ascending eighth notes G and A on the downbeat (see [fig. 2.65](#)).

Figure 2.65, “Stomp & Dance” mm. 55-58. Repeated figures in second phrase of the B section.

The phrase builds in tension starting in m. 59 as the ensemble drops to a piano dynamic in a low register and crescendos to forte with a style change at m. 64 ending the second phrase of the B section. The third phrase of the B section begins in m. 64 with accented and syncopated slap tongue articulations in the low voices below a sixteenth note ostinato in the upper voices. The trill figure from the previous phrase now presents as an ostinato on C and B-flat, set against syncopated *sforzando* slap tongue articulations and angular octatonic figures in counterpoint. The octatonic figures emphasize the tritone interval with marcato accent markings and a forte dynamic. The tenor initiates this vexing melody with two aggressive tritone pairings in m. 65, carrying across the bar line. The baritone continues the new motive by overlapping the tenor in m. 66 with two more accented tritones (see [fig. 2.66](#)).

Figure 2.66, “Stomp & Dance” mm. 64-66. Third phrase of B section initiated by ostinato and slap tongue accents. Tritone melody presented in overlapping voices.

This begins a chain reaction with all voices overlapping the tritone motive through m. 69. Then, suddenly, at m. 72 the ensemble bursts with a tutti sixteenth note pattern in parallel fifths at a fortissimo dynamic and oscillating by half step. Higdon applies aggressive sixteenth note tremolos at a fortissimo dynamic voiced in half step parallel motion as C–F and B–E chords which combine to create a 0156 harmony. The tutti figure gradually diminishes in texture and volume as the voices separately recede though a decrescendo to pianissimo (see [fig. 2.67](#)).

Figure 2.67, “Stomp & Dance” mm. 72-73. Fortissimo tremolo figures in parallel motion acting as the coda to the B section.

The image displays a musical score for four staves, likely representing different instruments or voices. The score is divided into two measures by a vertical bar line. Above the first staff, the number '0156' is written, with three vertical lines pointing to the first three notes of the first measure. Each staff begins with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic marking. The music consists of parallel motion figures, with the top staff featuring a tremolo effect indicated by multiple vertical lines over the notes. The bottom staff shows a steady eighth-note pattern. The overall texture is dense and rhythmic, serving as a coda to the B section.

The B section concludes softly with one voice, followed by “key slap” and slap tongue articulations to begin the A¹ section in m. 79. Higdon annotates in the score at m. 79, “Non-specific pitch key slap: Approximate shape of gesture with a choice of notes on your instrument that will produce the most audible effect.” The key slap figures suggest a percussive “drum break” common in drum and bugle corps performances, such as by the ensemble STOMP (see *fig. 2.68*).

Figure 2.68, "Stomp & Dance" mm. 77-79. The B section concludes with parallel tremolos diminishing to pianissimo. The A section begins with key slaps.

77

pp *ff* *ff* *ff*

A^I section

Specific-pitch key slap

Non-specific pitch key slap: Approximate shape of gesture with a choice of notes on your instrument that will produce the most audible effect.

The ensemble maintains the key slap figures on the beat, followed by syncopated slap tongue articulations in counterpoint (see [fig. 2.69](#)).

Figure 2.69, "Stomp & Dance" mm. 83-85. Combination of key slaps and syncopated slap tongue articulations.

ff *ff* *ff*

ϕ ϕ ϕ

Tones gradually begin to emit from the non-pitched texture through syncopated counterpoint. The percussive articulations cease at m. 94, where Higdon recreates a hocket texture similar to the beginning (see [fig. 2.70](#)).

Figure 2.70, "Stomp & Dance" mm. 92-94. Tones emerge from the percussive articulations.

92 47

The musical score for measures 92-94 is presented in four staves. The first staff (treble clef) shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes with dynamic markings *p*, *ff*, *p*, *ff* and articulation marks *norm.* and ϕ . The second staff (bass clef) continues the pattern with dynamics *p*, *ff*, *p*, *ff* and articulation marks *norm.* and ϕ . The third staff (bass clef) features dynamics *ff*, *p*, *ff*, *p*, *ff* and articulation marks *norm.* and ϕ . The fourth staff (bass clef) has dynamics *p*, *ff* and articulation marks *norm.* and ϕ . The final measure (94) shows a change in dynamics to *mp* and articulation to *norm.* across all staves.

Next, mm. 98-102 link back to mm. 10-14 transposed down by one whole step (see [fig. 2.71a](#) and [2.71b](#)).

Figure 2.71a, "Stomp & Dance" mm. 10-11. Minimalist texture in G Dorian mode.

10

Figure 2.71a shows a minimalist texture in G Dorian mode for measures 10-11. The score is in 4/4 time. The first staff (treble clef) contains a melodic line with dynamics *mf* and *p*. The second staff (treble clef) contains a rhythmic accompaniment with dynamics *mf* and *p*. The third staff (bass clef) contains a bass line with dynamics *mf* and *p*. The fourth staff (bass clef) contains a bass line with dynamics *p*, *mf*, *p*, and *mp*.

Figure 2.71b, "Stomp & Dance" mm. 98-99. Minimalist texture in F Dorian mode.

98 99

Figure 2.71b shows a minimalist texture in F Dorian mode for measures 98-99. The score is in 4/4 time. The first staff (treble clef) contains a melodic line. The second staff (treble clef) contains a rhythmic accompaniment. The third staff (bass clef) contains a bass line. The fourth staff (bass clef) contains a bass line.

At mm. 103, Higdon repeats the material directly, now matching exactly to the material from mm. 15, strengthening the arch form of the piece. Higdon then adds a two-

measure transition at m. 127 to conclude the A^I section with a strong dynamic and the soprano in a high tessitura. The tremolo figure from the B section returns in the alto line at m. 129 as the ensemble drops to a subito mezzo-piano dynamic (see [fig. 2.72](#)).

Figure 2.72, "Stomp & Dance" mm. 127-129. The A^I section concludes at a strong dynamic, active texture, and soprano in high tessitura. The B^I section begins with a subito mezzo-piano, and lower tessitura.

The phrase then builds in intensity, gradually rising in tessitura emphasized by a crescendo to fortissimo at m. 134, signaling section B^I. Here, Higdon presents similar material from the B section, further strengthening the structure. The author chose to label the section as B^I because of the connected material (tutti tremolos on set 0156 at a strong dynamic). This time, the half step oscillations are transposed up by a fifth in the upper voices (G–C) and down a fourth in the lower voices (F#–B), expanding the voicing to three and a half octaves (see [fig. 2.73](#)).

Figure 2.73, "Stomp & Dance" mm. 133-134. Sudden transition to parallel tremolo figures on set 0156 voiced in an expanded tessitura and emphasized by a fortissimo dynamic.

The image shows a musical score for four staves. The first staff is in treble clef and begins at measure 133. It contains a melodic line with a quintuplet marked '5'. The second staff is also in treble clef and features a rhythmic accompaniment. The third staff is in treble clef and has a melodic line. The fourth staff is in bass clef and has a rhythmic accompaniment. A box labeled 'Section B¹' encompasses measures 133 and 134. Within this section, a specific measure is labeled '0156' with arrows pointing to it. The dynamic marking 'ff' (fortissimo) is placed below the staves in the highlighted section.

This time Higdon sustains the strong dynamics, adds syncopated slap tongue articulations, and inserts ascending polyrhythmic whole tone scales (borrowed from the previous B section as well), concluding with dynamic, tessitura, and rhythmic emphasis. The polyrhythmic scales lead to an off-beat open fifth C chord which ends the piece (see [fig. 2.74](#)).

Figure 2.74, "Stomp & Dance" mm. 138-139. The conclusion of the movement with polyrhythmic G major scales and a syncopated open fifth C chord voiced in three octaves.

C: V I

Much of the piece maintains harmonic ambiguity through modal and octatonic figures; however, the ending sequence suggests a tonal cadence. G major scales set up a V-I cadence in C. The final open fifth interval concludes the piece, voiced on an offbeat in three octaves.

Conclusion

“Stomp & Dance” features percussive extended techniques in a sectional arch form alternating between two contrasting moods. Inspired by the drum and bugle corps STOMP, Higdon applies slap tongue and key slap articulations to suggest a marching band percussion section. Performers should differentiate between pitched and non-pitched slap tongue articulations to successfully portray the variety of articulations. In the non-pitched articulations, performers are encouraged to use a fingering which best resonates on their instrument.

Higdon sets syncopated rhythms to a moderate tempo allowing for the ensemble to imply the title which “speaks for itself.”¹⁶⁸ Harmonies modulate between modal minimalist figures and atonal contrapuntal textures. Second and fourth intervals dominate the texture. Major second and perfect fourth intervals appear in the minimalist patterns of the A sections. Minor second and augmented fourth intervals appear in the half step ostinato tremolos and tritone melodies of the B sections. Figures in the A sections combine hocket and minimalist textures. The B sections are more contrapuntal with ostinatos against motivic fragments, interrupted by tutti phrases. Therefore, Higdon suggests the title through “stomping” tutti patterns and moments of choreographed dance through minimalism and counterpoint.

¹⁶⁸ Higdon, “Program Notes for *Short Stories*,” <http://www.jenniferhigdon.com/pdf/program-notes/Short-Stories.pdf>, (accessed February 5th, 2019).

CHAPTER III - CONCLUSION

Jennifer Higdon is one of the most popular living composers in the United States today, as her compositions are presented in numerous programs throughout the country every year¹⁶⁹ and are featured on many CD recordings.¹⁷⁰ Higdon has collaborated with the nation's top symphonic orchestras including The Philadelphia Orchestra, The Chicago Symphony, The Atlanta Symphony, The Cleveland Orchestra, The Minnesota Orchestra, The Pittsburgh Symphony, and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra.¹⁷¹ She has also collaborated with many prominent chamber ensembles such as the PRISM Quartet, ANCIA saxophone quartet, Time for Three, the Tokyo String Quartet, the Lark Quartet, and Eighth Blackbird.¹⁷² Her childhood experiences growing up in Atlanta, Georgia and later in Seymour, Tennessee have garnered an eclectic background in urban and rural settings. Her counterculture parents exposed her to the visual, literary, and avant-garde arts and popular music of the 1960s and 70s. These perspectives permeate her compositional output through a creative process which she describes as "intuitive." Rather than constructing her compositions with formulas or preset frameworks, Higdon relies on the "sound in [her] head" to compose more organically, drawing from her creative subconscious thoughts.

¹⁶⁹ See the League of American Orchestras repertoire reports: <http://www.americanorchestras.org/knowledge-research-innovation/orr-survey/orr-archive.html>, (accessed February 5, 2019).

¹⁷⁰ Jennifer Higdon, "Recordings," <http://jenniferhigdon.com/worksrecordings.html>, (accessed January 30, 2019).

¹⁷¹ Jennifer Higdon, "Biography," <http://jenniferhigdon.com/biography.html>, (accessed January 30, 2019).

¹⁷² Ibid.

Short Stories, as the title suggests, takes listeners through six concise movements, each with its own character. The title refers to the composer's childhood interest in writing poetry and short stories. Following the guidelines of the ACF commission, Higdon added variety of color to the piece by scoring "Summer's Eve" in a heterodox orchestration including two sopranos, one alto, and one tenor saxophones. The commission also permitted Higdon to write each movement with an individual style and character. Higdon did not number the movements, allowing for flexibility in performance. Performers can program the piece in any order and number of movements to tailor to the venue and time restraints. Higdon's creative programmatic devices, combined with the guidelines stipulated by the commission, result in a piece which explores many colors and moods that are accessible to a variety of performances.

Higdon evokes vivid imagery through the poetic titles of each movement of *Short Stories*, supplemented by program notes. Higdon suggests the narrative of each movement through compositional devices such as tonal and atonal harmonies, lyrical and motivic melodies, fast and slow tempos, homophonic and polyphonic textures, syncopation, polyrhythms, rhythmic ostinatos, and extended techniques.

The piece continues to be programmed twenty-three years after its premiere both by collegiate and professional ensembles. As an early work in Higdon's oeuvre, *Short Stories* offers insight into the developing mind of the composer, revealing characteristics that researchers observe in the analyses of her later works. Higdon's intuitive compositional style organically creates sectional forms, extensive counterpoint, rhythmic ostinatos, harmonic ambiguity through parallel open fifths, and the absence of quotations from other composers.

Textures in *Short Stories* vary through extensive counterpoint to combine melodies with ostinato figures which develop as the phrase progresses to a climax which instantly transitions into a new section. Higdon's harmonic palette is non-functional, alternating between tonal clusters and purely atonal sets. Melodies often adhere to symmetrical scales, both whole tone and octatonic, which Higdon harmonizes with subsets of the scales. Rhythms are often complex with an emphasis on syncopation and polyrhythmic juxtaposition.

Melodies from Higdon's pieces are both lyrical and motivic. Themes often layer over one another progressing at different rates. Higdon also commonly uses contrasting themes to identify the structure of the work. Contrasting themes often feature perfect fifths or tritones to intimate either lyrical or aggressive moods. Ostinatos, either on the same pitch or oscillation between two pitches at the interval of a second, are present in many of the movements of *Short Stories* as integral layers to creating contrapuntal tension in the texture. Higdon favors the whole tone and octatonic scales which obscure the tonality. Many of the octatonic melodies feature the tritone, and rapid whole tone scales appear at transitional moments.

Higdon draws from a diverse harmonic palette, applying both tonal chords and atonal set classes to each piece. The harmonies are rarely functional; however, the composer prefers to end many works with a reference to the tonal V-I cadence which provides added tonality to the atonal dissonance. One cadential approach Higdon applies is an ascending fourth in the bass to the final chord like in "Chase." Another cadential approach is less direct like in "Stomp & Dance" where the harmony shifts between tonal centers to imply the V-I cadence without following conventional voice leading practices.

Some works do not end tonally, such as “Splashing the Canvas,” ending on a tritone to match the character of the piece. In “Summer’s Eve,” Higdon applies a compact tone cluster as the final chord for an ethereal effect to match the character of the piece. In “Lullaby,” a work Higdon composed much earlier than the other movements, Higdon ends diatonically with a major triad which supports the pleasant mood. “Coyote Nights” is the only movement which ends with a single voice, supporting the lonely mood.

Rhythmic diversity is the most consistent trait in Higdon’s music. *Short Stories* is solely notated in simple meters, with triplets and other borrowed subdivision rhythmic patterns mixed into the measures. The composer often avoids downbeats, especially at structural moments such as the beginning, peak, or ending of the phrase. Syncopation is integral to both the homophonic and contrapuntal textures, creating rhythmic dissonance within the phrase. Higdon also frequently sets triplet figures against sixteenths, adding polyrhythmic dissonance.

Nearly all of Higdon’s chamber compositions feature a programmatic element, conveying a specific mood or scene to the music. *Short Stories* is a prime example of this programmatic emphasis, as each movement refers to an individual visual concept. “Chase” depicts a “running game,” “Summer’s Eve” reflects iconic rural American traditions, “Lullaby” evokes the connection between child and parent, “Splashing the Canvas” portrays the gesticulations of Jackson Pollock, “Coyote Nights” portrays the expansiveness of the American West National Parks, and “Stomp & Dance” exhibits the showmanship of the performing ensemble STOMP.

This document serves to add to the existing research on Higdon’s chamber music output, in an attempt to expand our knowledge of contemporary saxophone music in the

United States. As the first research on Higdon's saxophone compositions, more attention from the academic saxophone community needs to be directed to Higdon in order to fully understand and compile this prolific composer's body of work, which continues to expand at the time of this writing. Higdon has accepted a commission for saxophone, she is set to complete a "seven-to-nine-minute competition piece for alto saxophone and piano for the North American Saxophone Alliance biennial conference in 2022."¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Higdon, email interview with author, March 26, 2019.

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APPENDIX I

PERMISSION FOR USE OF COPYRIGHTED MUSICAL EXCERPTS

As requested, a *gratis* is hereby granted for the use of musical examples from the following compositions of Jennifer Higdon, solely for educational purposes as included in your doctoral monograph entitled *A Performer's Analysis on the Compositional Approaches in Short Stories for Saxophone Quartet by Jennifer Higdon*. Please retain a copy of this letter as evidence of this permission.

Thank you,

Cheryl Lawson

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