



COREA • HIGDON • WARNAAR

Brass Concertos

José Sibaja, Cornet

Joseph Alessi, Paul Jenkins, Derek W. Hawkes, Trombone

Steven Brown, Bass trombone • Gilbert Long, Tuba

Nashville Symphony • Giancarlo Guerrero



	Brad Warnaar (b. 1950)	
	Cornet Concerto (2017–19)	19:31
1	I. “and you are?...” –	1:34
2	Jubilee Waltz –	5:41
3	Bailey’s Gallop	1:03
4	II. Bill Moore	5:49
5	III. The Ta-ca-Ta-ca-Toccata	5:24
	Chick Corea (1941–2021)	
	Concerto for Trombone and Orchestra (2020)	24:35
	(orch. with additional music by John Dickson)	
6	A Stroll Opening –	3:30
7	I. A Stroll	7:08
8	II. Waltse for Joe	3:03
9	III. Hysteria	3:31
10	IV. Joe’s Tango	7:23
	Jennifer Higdon (b. 1962)	
11	Low Brass Concerto (2017)	15:17

Recorded: 6–7 March 2020 11, 17–18 March 2022 1–5
and 1–4 November 2023 6–10 at the Laura Turner Concert Hall,
Schermerhorn Symphony Center, Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Brad Warnaar (b. 1950) • Chick Corea (1941–2021) • Jennifer Higdon (b. 1962)

Brass Concertos

Concertos have long showcased the virtuosity and expressive range of solo instruments – yet the brass family, especially beyond the trumpet and horn, remains surprisingly underexplored in this repertoire. Under music director Giancarlo Guerrero, the Nashville Symphony has expanded this repertoire in bold directions – including a notable commitment to contemporary American concertos.

That mission takes tangible form here with this anthology of three recent concertos by American composers, each spotlighting a different facet of the brass family. Brad Warnaar's *Cornet Concerto*, given its world premiere recording, draws on a rich heritage of 19th-century band music with wit and heartfelt homage, while Chick Corea's *Trombone Concerto*, his final completed composition, fuses lyricism, jazz spontaneity, and orchestral drama. Also appearing on disc for the first time, Jennifer Higdon's *Low Brass Concerto* honors the ensemble spirit of this often taken-for-granted orchestral section through a single-movement work of majesty, clarity, and resonance. Together, these pieces expand the expressive possibilities of the brass concerto in ways that are both surprising and deeply engaging.

Brad Warnaar, born in Flint, Michigan, grew up in a musical family and trained as a French horn player, later performing with a variety of American and Canadian orchestras. In 1980, he relocated to Los Angeles to focus on work in the entertainment industry, eventually contributing to more than 1,000 film soundtracks. In parallel with this prolific studio career, he has written original concert music ranging from chamber works to full-scale symphonic compositions.

Jeff Bailey, the Nashville Symphony's now-retired principal trumpet, initiated the idea of commissioning a new concerto for his instrument. "As we discussed the possibilities, we hit upon the idea of featuring the close cousin of the trumpet: the cornet," recalls Warnaar. He completed the score in late 2019; the onset of the coronavirus pandemic caused the work's premiere to be delayed until 2022.

Despite their visual similarity, the trumpet and cornet differ significantly in sound. The cornet's conical bore gives it a more singing, rounded tone, while the trumpet remains brighter and more piercing. Warnaar became fascinated by the cornet's historical role as a featured solo instrument. "During the heyday of the concert bands led by John Philip Sousa and others, the cornet was arguably the most popular solo instrument in the world, most famously in the hands of virtuoso performer-composer Herbert L. Clarke," he explains. "During his tenure as principal cornet of the Sousa band, Clarke created a large repertoire of music featuring the instrument. Typically, these were airs or waltzes with a series of increasingly difficult and showy variations."

To ready himself for composing the concerto, Warnaar immersed himself in Clarke's repertoire: "I listened closely to Clarke's music to get the sound of the horn in my head; after a while, the sound of the cornet became inextricably linked to that style of music. I decided to have some fun with it." That playful sensibility permeates the concerto.

The first movement, titled "*and you are?...*" imagines a dramatic scenario: a cornet walks into a 21st-century orchestra, channeling the flamboyant spirit of Clarke, and is met with suspicion. "The orchestra, already suspicious of this stranger in their midst... very quickly becomes confrontational," Warnaar notes. "The cornet wants to be in the 19th century, while the orchestra will have none of it, insisting on the 21st." Amid the clash, an agreement is briefly achieved with the nostalgic *Jubilee Waltz* (named for Jeff Bailey's pet pig) and the circus-like *Bailey's Gallop*. A humorous chaos ensues, ending with a reprise of the cornet's opening B flat major fanfare.

The second movement, *Bill Moore*, offers a meditative exploration of "the singing, lyrical quality of the cornet," according to Warnaar. About halfway through composing it, he learned that his high school friend Bill Moore – "one of the finest cornetists I had ever heard" – had passed away unexpectedly, and the movement became a tribute to Moore's memory. Near the end, shimmering textures graced with celeste may evoke what Warnaar calls, paraphrasing from his colleague John Adams, "the transmigration of a soul."

A casual remark from Bailey sparked the finale. While discussing what kind of concerto the piece might become, Bailey pointed out that in his usual role in the back of the orchestra, he tended not to be showy, but added: “Don’t get me wrong – I *can* double-tongue!” Warnaar laughed and decided, “You, sir, will definitely be doing some double-tonguing!” The result is an exuberant finale built around the technique of rapidly repeated notes, titled *The Ta-ca-Ta-ca-Toccata*.

Armando Anthony “Chick” Corea (1941–2021) was one of the most versatile and prolific musical figures of the past century. As a pianist, composer, and bandleader, he reshaped the boundaries of jazz while forging meaningful connections with classical music and Latin American traditions. From his early work with Miles Davis and the birth of jazz fusion to his genre-defying solo output, Corea maintained a deep commitment to exploration and reinvention. He was also classically trained, and from an early age was immersed in both Mozart and Stravinsky as much as in bebop and improvisation.

The *Concerto for Trombone*, Corea’s final completed composition, originated from a chance encounter in 2017, when New York Philharmonic principal trombonist Joseph Alessi attended a performance at Manhattan’s Birdland Jazz Club and was struck by Corea’s *Brasilia*. Moved by the music, he reached out – via jazz pianist Makoto Ozone, also performing that night – to ask whether Corea might consider writing a trombone concerto. Although Corea initially hesitated, he found himself intrigued by the challenge. “Timing is everything in life,” notes Alessi. “The timing of me asking Chick Corea was the right time for him.”

What followed was a collaboration that blossomed through frequent text exchanges and shared musical passions. Both musicians discovered common ground in their Italian heritage and their love for New York City, Mozart, and Stravinsky. Corea finished the composition in late 2020 and planned to attend the premiere scheduled in Brazil in August 2021, even hoping to perform the piano part himself. However, shortly after finishing the piece, he informed Alessi that he would be “out of touch” while receiving cancer treatment. “It was devastating for me to learn on February 9, 2021, that he had died,” Alessi wrote in a Facebook post.

The composer, pianist, and French horn player John Dickson, Corea’s longtime arranger, prepared the orchestration. Giancarlo Guerrero, who led the premiere in São Paulo and has conducted the concerto multiple times since, emphasizes that Dickson was “Chick’s right-hand man as this piece was being composed, so he’s a great source of information who brings another degree of historical importance to this recording.”

“I’m putting my love of music together in one package to write this trombone concerto,” Corea said in a video interview about the work-in-progress that would become his final masterpiece. Each of the concerto’s four movements explores distinct facets of his musical imagination. The work opens with an extended improvisatory monologue that establishes a ruminative tone and leads into *A Stroll*, as the first movement is titled. Inspired by Corea’s fond memories of walking the length of Manhattan, north to south, it unfolds as a musical portrait of the city’s vibrant neighborhoods and urban rhythms.

Waltze for Joe – as Corea idiosyncratically spelled the dance – illuminates the lyrical side of the instrument. “He described it to me as a ‘leisured waltz,’ not a typical waltz,” says Alessi. “Taking time and enjoying the easy groove and feel. A bit like Erik Satie.” The trombone sings here with graceful phrasing and unhurried charm.

The third movement, *Hysteria*, captures the anxiety and chaos of the early pandemic era. *Joe’s Tango*, the final movement, was initially conceived with a subdued ending – “like the other movements,” Alessi recalls. “I summoned the courage to ask Chick to rewrite the coda in a big way.” Corea obliged, crafting a virtuosic conclusion that sends the trombone into the stratosphere. The concerto ends with exuberantly repeated high F sharps, a fitting final gesture from a composer whose music always reached for joy, invention, and expressive freedom.

Jennifer Higdon is one of the most acclaimed and frequently performed American composers working today. Born in Brooklyn in 1962 and raised in Atlanta and rural Tennessee, Higdon did not come to classical music through a traditional path. She taught herself to play the flute at 15, and it wasn’t until college that she began composing – an experiment encouraged by her flute professor that quickly became an all-consuming passion. Higdon describes the experience of composing as “arranging sounds” and found it so compelling that it soon took over her life.

Her music, characterized by luminous colors, rhythmic vitality, and lyrical directness, has garnered a vast array of major honors, including the Pulitzer

Prize for Music for her *Violin Concerto* (2010) and GRAMMY Awards for concertos for percussion, viola, and harp. Her tone poem *blue cathedral* is among the most performed contemporary orchestral works of the 21st century. Higdon's first opera, *Cold Mountain*, based on the novel by Charles Frazier, won the International Opera Award for Best World Premiere and received two GRAMMY nominations.

The *Low Brass Concerto*, composed in 2017, was commissioned to celebrate the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's acclaimed section. Higdon was attracted to the unusual opportunity to highlight not just one instrument but a quartet of low brass soloists – two tenor trombones, a bass trombone, and a tuba. "Normally, when people think of brass, they think of power, which is not an inaccurate assessment," writes Higdon. "But brass players are quick to tell you that they also can play beautiful melodies, and do so quietly and with exquisite control. So early on in the planning process for this concerto, I decided to think about the music as reflections of the qualities of majesty, grace, and power."

Writing for four featured players rather than one added to the compositional challenge but also allowed for a wider palette of expressive and textural possibilities. Higdon had prior experience writing concertos for multiple soloists, including *Concerto 4-3*, a hybrid of bluegrass and classical idioms for string trio and orchestra, and *On a Wire* for the ensemble eighth blackbird. Following her usual practice, Higdon gave considerable thought to the personalities of the players involved: "I have, after decades of writing music, learned that the low brass players are always fun to work with. They bring an infectious joy to everything they play, which in itself is inspiring."

The concerto is structured as a single movement and organized in a sequence of alternating slow and fast sections. Higdon focuses on melodic clarity and harmonic richness rather than extended techniques or novel effects. "It is sometimes the most challenging thing for a composer to do: to compose a melody or chorale, with no special effects or colors, just focusing on the moving line," she notes.

Each player is given solo moments in the spotlight; the concerto also comprises duets and sonorous chorales. Higdon sums it up as "a musical portrait of four extraordinary players, each working individually and as a group, bringing to the front of the stage all of their majesty, grace, and power."

Thomas May

José Sibaja



José Sibaja is one of the most versatile and acclaimed trumpet players of his generation, performing across classical, Latin, jazz, and pop genres. He has held positions as principal trumpet with the Miami Symphony Orchestra, Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de Costa Rica, and Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela. Sibaja has toured globally with Ricky Martin and Boston Brass, alongside international solo appearances. His recording credits include Marc Anthony, Gloria Estefan, and Celia Cruz. A frequent guest on international television and award shows, Sibaja is a Yamaha performing artist and associate professor of trumpet at Vanderbilt University's Blair School of Music. He studied at the New World School of the Arts and the University of Miami.

www.josesibaja.com

Joseph Alessi



Joseph Alessi is principal trombone of the New York Philharmonic and a faculty member at The Juilliard School. He began his musical studies with his father and later trained at the Curtis Institute of Music. Before joining the Philharmonic, he performed with The Philadelphia Orchestra and Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, and as guest principal with the London Symphony Orchestra under Pierre Boulez. Alessi premiered Christopher Rouse's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Trombone Concerto* and Chick Corea's *Trombone Concerto*. He has appeared with major orchestras worldwide and recorded extensively. Alessi is also a renowned master teacher, recitalist, and former president of the International Trombone Association.

www.slidearea.com

Paul Jenkins



Paul Jenkins is the principal trombonist of the Nashville Symphony Orchestra, a position he has held since the 2014/15 season. Before joining the Nashville Symphony, Jenkins served one year as acting associate principal of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, and was a frequent guest with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. He studied trombone at Northwestern University with Michael Mulcahy, at the Colburn School with Mark Lawrence, and with James Wallace in his hometown of Plano, Texas. Alongside his work with the Nashville Symphony, Jenkins is also an active studio musician in Nashville having recorded for numerous film, television, and video game soundtracks.

www.nashvillesymphony.org/about/orchestra-conductors/paul-jenkins

Derek W. Hawkes



Trombonist Derek W. Hawkes studied with John Kitzman, H. Dennis Smith, and Toby Oft. He performed with the Dallas, Boston and Fort Worth Symphony Orchestras, served as principal trombone of the Bangor Symphony Orchestra and second trombone of the Jacksonville Symphony, and was formerly assistant principal/second trombone of the Nashville Symphony. Hawkes graduated from Southern Methodist University and pursued graduate studies at the New England Conservatory of Music. He performed on a restored 1979 Bach 42B trombone. This recording of Jennifer Higdon's *Low Brass Concerto* was his final performances as an orchestral trombonist; he retired from the industry in 2022.

Photo: Kurt Heinecke

Steven Brown



Bass trombonist Steven Brown served as a member of the Nashville Symphony from 1998 through 2022. A native of Hays, Kansas, he has previously performed with the Richmond Symphony, the AIMS Opera Festival in Austria, and the Ohio Light Opera. He has served as a substitute with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Columbus Symphony, and Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in music education from the University of Illinois, and a Master's Degree in trombone performance from the Peabody Conservatory.

www.nashvillesymphony.org/about/orchestra-conductors/steven-brown

Gilbert Long



Photo: Kurt Heinecke

Gilbert Long served as principal tuba of the Nashville Symphony from 1978 to 2023. He earned his Bachelor's Degree in tuba performance from the University of Louisville and pursued graduate studies at Austin Peay State University. His principal teachers included Arnold Jacobs, Abe Torchinsky, and Art Hicks. Long is a founding member of Tri Star Brass. As a tuba instructor Long influenced generations of tuba students and served many universities, including Vanderbilt University's Blair School of Music where he regularly performed as a member of the Blair Brass Quintet. An active freelancer and studio musician, his credits include recordings with Garth Brooks, Amy Grant, Matchbox Twenty, Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens), and Michael W. Smith.

www.nashvillesymphony.org/about/orchestra-conductors/gilbert-long

Nashville Symphony



Photo: Chris Lee

Founded in 1946, the Nashville Symphony is integral to Music City's vibrant musical landscape. Led by music director Giancarlo Guerrero and president and CEO Alan D. Valentine, the 83-member orchestra performs more than 130 concerts annually, with a strong commitment to contemporary American orchestral music. Recognised for championing new works, the Nashville Symphony has collaborated with leading composers such as Jennifer Higdon, Terry Riley, Joan Tower, Aaron Jay Kernis, Michael Daugherty, John Harbison, Julia Wolfe and Hannibal Lokumbe. The orchestra is also known for its commissioning and recording projects with Nashville-based artists, including Edgar Meyer, Béla Fleck, Ben Folds, Victor Wooten and Kip Winger. One of the most active recording orchestras in the US, the Nashville Symphony has released over 40 recordings, earning 27 GRAMMY nominations and winning 14 GRAMMY Awards, including two

for Best Orchestral Performance. Schermerhorn Symphony Center is home to the Nashville Symphony and widely regarded as one of the finest concert halls in the nation.

www.nashvillesymphony.org

Giancarlo Guerrero



Photo: Chris Lee

Giancarlo Guerrero is a six-time GRAMMY Award-winning conductor known for his imaginative programming. As music director for the Nashville Symphony for 16 seasons, he championed contemporary American music through commissions, recordings and performances. Under his leadership, the Nashville Symphony premiered 24 works by composers including Béla Fleck, Ben Folds, Jennifer Higdon, Hannibal Lokumbe, Terry Riley, Wayne Shorter and Victor Wooten. He also helped launch the Composer Lab and Workshop with Aaron Jay Kernis, supporting emerging American composers. Currently serving as music director for Sarasota Orchestra and Chicago's Grant Park Music Festival, Guerrero is also a sought-after guest conductor who has led numerous orchestras, including the Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, San Francisco, Seattle,

Toronto, Sydney and Frankfurt Symphonies; The Philadelphia Orchestra; and the New York and London Philharmonics. Guerrero's significant discography includes 21 recordings with the Nashville Symphony. A passionate advocate for music education, he is particularly engaged with conducting training orchestras and has worked with the Curtis Institute of Music, Colburn School in Los Angeles, National Youth Orchestra (NYO2) and Yale Philharmonia.

www.giancarlo-guerrero.com

BRASS CONCERTOS

- 1-5** Brad Warnaar (b. 1950)
Cornet Concerto (2017-19)* **19:31**
- 6-10** Chick Corea (1941-2021)
Concerto for Trombone and Orchestra
(2020) (orch. with additional music
by John Dickson) **24:35**
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*WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

José Sibaja, Cornet 1-5
Joseph Alessi 6-10, Paul Jenkins† 11,
Derek W. Hawkes† 11, Trombone
Steven Brown†, Bass trombone 11
Gilbert Long†, Tuba 11

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† Members of Nashville Symphony (in 2020)

A detailed track list and full recording details
can be found inside the booklet.

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Engineer: Trevor Wilkinson

Booklet notes: Thomas May

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AMERICAN CLASSICS

This album represents part of Giancarlo Guerrero and the Nashville Symphony's mission to expand the contemporary American concerto repertoire, with each of these three works spotlighting a different facet of the relatively underexplored brass instrument family. Brad Warnaar's *Cornet Concerto* draws on a rich heritage of 19th-century band music with wit and heartfelt homage, while Chick Corea's *Trombone Concerto*, his final completed composition, fuses lyricism, jazz spontaneity, and orchestral drama. Jennifer Higdon's *Low Brass Concerto* honors the spirit of this orchestral section through a majestic single-movement work of clarity and resonance. All of these pieces expand the expressive possibilities of the brass concerto in ways that are both surprising and deeply engaging.

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Playing
Time:
59:29