

Augusta Read Thomas

Augusta Read Thomas is one of the most critically acclaimed, important, and widely performed composers working today. According to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, she “has become one of the most recognizable and widely loved figures in American Music.” Thomas was the longest-serving Mead Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony, for Barenboim and Boulez, from 1997 through 2006. This residency culminated in the premiere of *Astral Canticle*, one of two finalists for the 2007 Pulitzer Prize in Music. She has won the Ernst von Siemens Music Prize, among many other coveted awards. Augusta is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Her music is nuanced, majestic, elegant, capricious, lyrical, and colorful — “it is boldly considered music that celebrates the sound of the instruments and reaffirms the vitality of orchestral music” (*Philadelphia Inquirer*). *The New Yorker Magazine* called Augusta “a true virtuoso composer.” Donald Rosenberg of *Gramophone* wrote, “Heart and soul in the breathtaking music of a thoughtful contemporary composer reveals a lively, probing mind allied to a beating heart.”

Augusta founded and directs the Center for Contemporary Composition and the Grossman Ensemble at the University of Chicago. Her compositions are released on over 90 commercial recordings. Selected recent commissions include those from the BBC Proms, Boston Symphony, Philharmonie de Paris, New York Philharmonic, Sejong Soloists, NOIS Saxophone Quartet, Quartet Diotima, National Cathedral Chorus, Santa Fe Opera, Utah Symphony, Juilliard School, Orchestra de Chambre de Paris, Peak Performances with Martha Graham Dance Company, Indianapolis Symphony, Tanglewood Music Festival, Wigmore Hall, Third Coast Percussion, and Aspen Music Festival.

world premiere of

Augusta Read Thomas’s Bebop Riddle V

**Hutchinson Courtyard
The University of Chicago
1131 E 57th St, Chicago, IL 60637**

Bebop Riddle V, for clarinet and alto saxophone
Augusta Read Thomas

Katie Jimoh, clarinet
Julian Velasco, alto saxophone

Bebop Riddle V, for clarinet and alto saxophone, is a sparkling, lively, and radiant fanfare lasting three minutes and fifteen seconds. This version for clarinet and alto saxophone is dedicated with admiration and gratitude to Jessica Stockholder.

Thomas has been composing a series of “Bebop Riddles,” all of which are completely independent, unique works. *Bebop Riddle I* is for solo marimba. *Bebop Riddle II* is for cello (playing only pizzicato) and piano. *Bebop Riddle IIb*, for bassoon and piano, is a transformation and elaboration of the pizzicato cello version. *Bebop Riddle IV* is for reed quintet.

Thomas’ works always spark and catch fire from spontaneous improvisations. It is music always in the act of becoming. She has a vivid sense that the process of the creative journey (rather than a predictable fixed point of arrival) is the essence.

Thomas sings and dances when she composes and likes her music to be and to feel organic, self-propelled — as if we listeners are overhearing (capturing) a spontaneously embodied improvisation: “*For me, music and dance must be alive; they have to jump off the page and out of the instrument and body as if something big is at stake.*”

Bebop Riddle V is by turns sprightly, spry, energetic, and spirited. Thomas crafted animated, traveling, flexible, versatile, changing, fluid, and buoyant sonic adventures — a bit like two hummingbirds darting around a field of wild flowers.

Iridescent, bold, and scintillating, the carefully sculpted and fashioned musical materials of **Bebop Riddle V** are agile and vivacious, and their flexibility allows pathways to braid harmonic, rhythmic, and contrapuntal elements that are constantly transformed — at times whimsical, jazzy and be-bop-like, layered, and reverberating, with lyrical resonance, pirouettes, fulcrum points, and vitality.

The two equally virtuosic parts — which require highly characterized dynamics, articulations, and fast fingering changes — sparkle forth. The music is organic and, at every level, concerned with transformations and connections. Poetically (not scientifically) speaking, this composition has a kind of fractal quality to it in that each part has similar flair, twirl, whirl, pivot, and character as the whole.

“Collaborating with Katie Jimoh and Julian Velasco has been a most exhilarating experience,” Thomas remarked. *“It is difficult to express how grateful I am to them and to the many extraordinary colleagues who have made this project possible.”*