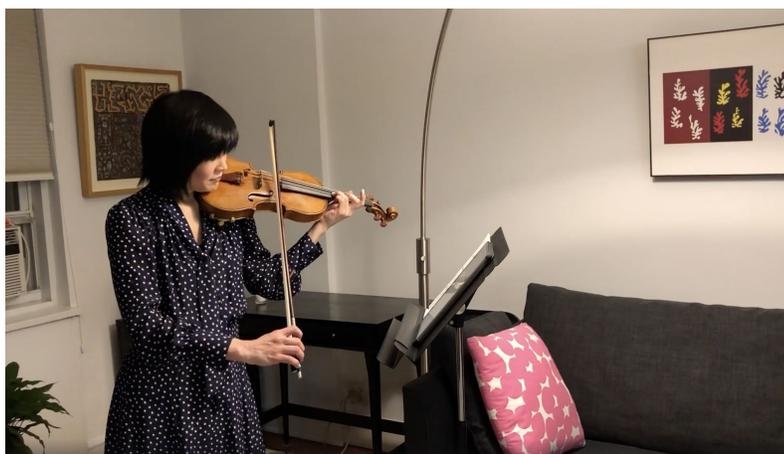


Four premieres in ten minutes: Jennifer Koh launches “Alone Together” (Apr. 4)

by Jarrett Hoffman



One thing that’s interesting about the live-streamed, audience-less concerts that are happening during the pandemic: they can vary wildly in length.

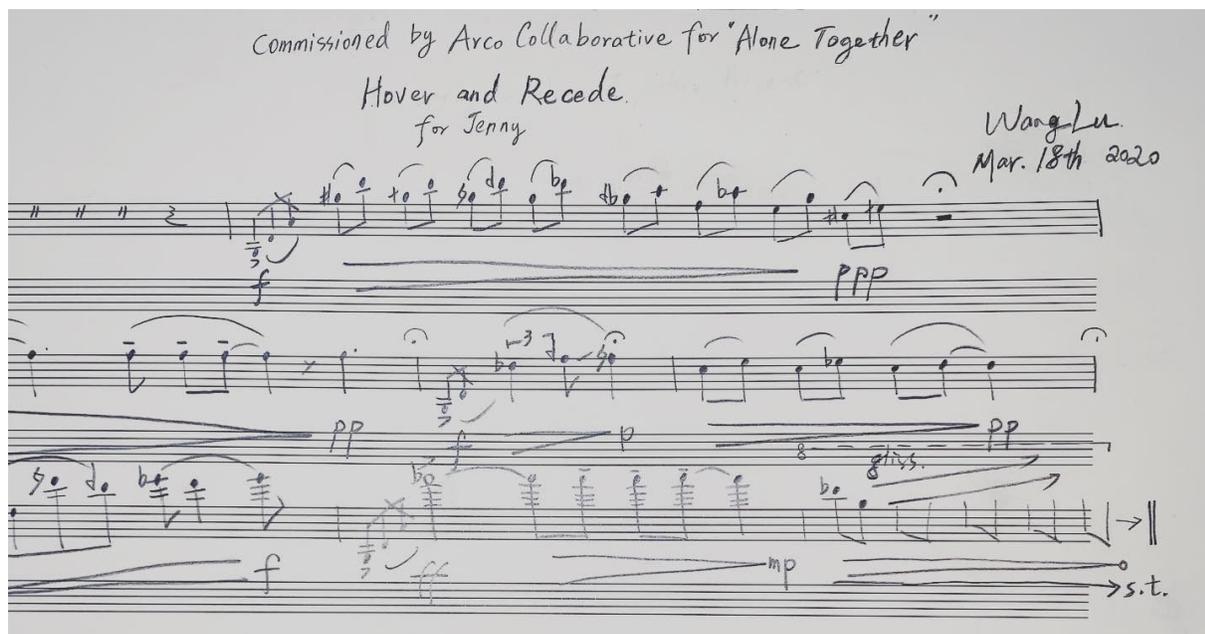
Some musicians are playing three-hour sets devoted to Bach. On Saturday, April 4, violinist Jennifer Koh gave four world premieres in less than ten minutes.

Streamed live over [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#), and still available on-demand through [YouTube](#), this was the first concert of “Alone Together,” Koh’s new commissioning project and performance series in support of composers during the COVID-19 crisis. New concerts take place on Saturdays at 7:00 pm Eastern Time.

Each premiere will be a “micro-work” for solo violin. Half of the composers, most of whom have salaried positions or other forms of institutional support, have agreed to donate their work. Each of those artists is also recommending a freelance composer to write a short piece on paid commission from the ARCO Collaborative, a nonprofit founded and directed by Koh that advocates for inclusivity in classical music.

For this past Saturday’s performance, Koh played four pieces with only a short silence between them.

The captivating opening was Wang Lu’s story-like *Hover and Recede*. Its structure — short gestures separated by silence, like gusts of wind — allows you to clearly follow the drama as it escalates to the end, where it teeters on an edge with whispery high notes. Koh’s pacing was masterful.



Joungbum Lee's *Hovering Green* was commissioned at the recommendation of Wang. The longest piece on the program at about three minutes, it alternates between spurts of momentum and a halting lack thereof. The fascinating climax brings motion and stillness together: a beautiful melody played over an airy pedal tone.

Recommended by Vijay Iyer, composer Morgan Guerin contributed his minute-long *Together, But Alone (In Quarantine)*, which brings instant energy with its racing thoughts. A patch of elegance returns to more jagged gestures, and a minor chord ends it compellingly.

Introducing a mute was the perfect choice for Iyer's *For Violin Alone*. The writing is both contemplative, angry, and restrained, a complex mix of emotions that's not easy to put across — unless you're Jennifer Koh.

Iyer's final cadence borrows from the jazz standard *Alone Together*, as he explains in one of the short videos that Koh posted on social media leading up to Saturday. In those clips, the composers talk about their new pieces and share in a very honest way what it's like to write music during the pandemic.

It can be hard to focus these days. You might think that a 10-minute concert is a good solution, but beware: blink once and you miss a large percentage of a short work. It's helpful not only to take in the interviews and scores that Koh is sharing in advance, but also to watch the performances again. As is always the case with art — but especially right now — you surely missed something.

Jennifer Koh is a graduate of Oberlin College, as well as the recipient of awards such as Musical America's 2016 Instrumentalist of the Year, an Avery Fisher Career Grant, and the top prizes in Moscow's International Tchaikovsky Competition and the Concert Artists Guild Competition.

The following is a list of commissioned composers and their respective recommending/donating composers who are taking part in "Alone Together":

[Katherine Balch](#) — [Andrew Norman](#)
[Hanna Benn](#) — [Rafiq Bhatia](#)
[Layale Chaker](#) — [Anjna Swaminathan](#)
[Caroline Davis](#) — [Qasim Naqvi](#)
[Adeliia Faizullina](#) — [Nina C. Young](#)
[Inti Figgis-Vizueta](#) — [Jen Shyu](#)
[Tomás Gueglio-Saccone](#) — [Anthony Cheung](#)
[Morgan Guerin](#) — [Vijay Iyer](#)
[Tonia Ko](#) — [Sarah Gibson and Thomas Kotcheff](#)
[Joungbum Lee](#) — [Wang Lu](#)
[Angelica Négron](#) — [Tania León](#)
[Nina Shekhar](#) — [Ted Hearne](#)
[Lester St. Louis](#) — [George Lewis](#)
[Rajna Swaminathan](#) — [Ellen Reid](#)
[Darian Donovan Thomas](#) — [Ian Chang](#)
[Cassie Wieland](#) — [Missy Mazzoli](#)
[Elizabeth Younan](#) — [David Ludwig](#)
To be announced — [Kati Agócs](#)
To be announced — [Marcos Balter](#)
To be announced — [Du Yun](#)
To be announced — [Augusta Gross](#)

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