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I, Lori E Baruth, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of:
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in Clarinet

It is entitled:
Joan Tower And The Clarinet: An Examination of Her Compositional Style
and a Performer's Guide to
RAIN WAVES (1997) and A GIFT (2007)

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Joan Tower And The Clarinet: An Examination of Her Compositional Style and a Performer’s Guide to 
RAIN WAVES (1997) and A GIFT (2007)

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of the University of Cincinnati

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May 28, 2010

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ABSTRACT

A study of the literature written about Joan Tower and her works in the past fifteen years shows scholarly interest, but no one has yet attempted to trace Tower’s treatment of the clarinet in her recent works. Her vibrancy is evident in her music, and her melodies are colorful and organic. In this document I examine her “compositional profile” from her departure from serialism in 1974 and investigate how her current perception of the clarinet relates to her previous treatment of the instrument with regard to color and power.

Tower’s contributions to the repertory of woodwind and orchestral literature, and solo instrumental works, have placed her in the forefront of contemporary American music. Her works have a distinctive style and sound, each bringing interest and reward for audiences and performers alike. Clarinet virtuosos such as Laura Flax, David Shifrin, Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr, and Richard Stoltzman have been intrigued by Tower’s music and have commissioned works from her. Tower obliged, and thus has given clarinetists numerous varied and challenging pieces to perform. In addition, Tower’s involvement with her chamber group, Da Capo Chamber Players, persuaded her to grow the chamber music library with works for flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano.

Her two most recent works with clarinet included are Rain Waves (1997) for clarinet, violin, and piano, and A Gift (2007) for wind quartet and piano. The latter work is based on a short duet for flute and clarinet entitled A Little Gift (2006). These two chamber works differ in instrumentation as well as period of composition for the composer compared with her many chamber works composed for her former group, the Da Capo Chamber Players. Her use of
motives, seamless transitions, and organic sense of melody (often in an octatonic framework) is unique and colorful. It is the goal of this document that clarinetists and other musicians alike get to know Joan Tower’s music and the craft behind these works.
May 26, 2010

Lori Elizabeth Baruth
409 Fairholme Way
Winchester, KY 40391

RE: A GIFT (A LITTLE GIFT)
RAIN WAVES
By Joan Tower

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I would next like to thank my other readers on this committee, Dr. Robert Zierolf and Professor Richie Hawley, for their time in reading through this document and expert comments on my writing. I feel very blessed to have had the opportunity to have had such a wonderful advisor and committee.

I would not be the clarinetist I am today without the advice, support, and help from my clarinet teachers from over the years. I would like to acknowledge Richie Hawley, Steve Cohen, Jim Pyne, Donald McGinnis, and Kathleen Mulcahy for pushing me to be the best that I can be.
in each lesson, and for the gifts of musicality, artistry, technical precision, and excellent musicianship I learned from each of them. I am so thankful for each of you in my life.

I would like to thank Associated Music Publishers, Inc./G. Schirmer, Inc. for their permission to use excerpts of Joan Tower’s *Rain Waves* (1997) and *A Gift* (2007) as musical examples in this document.

To Joan Tower, whose music inspired me to want to write this document, I am extremely grateful. She has been very generous with her time in interview and email correspondence. Her vibrant personality shines through in her interview responses, and she shared so many helpful insights into her compositions. Her music for clarinet is a joy to perform, listen to, and to study. The craft with which she composes is an amazing gift, and I am glad she allowed me the opportunity to study it, her characteristics, and to consider why clarinetists choose to commission new works from her. She is truly an American gem, and I am grateful to know her and her music.

Next, I wish to thank the clarinetists who made themselves available for interviews, questions, and email correspondence. Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr, Robert Spring, and David Shifrin were each so generous with their time in answering my questions, and I thank them profusely. The recollections and enlightening words of wisdom so generously provided in interviews have been immensely helpful in this study. I am grateful to have been able to work with such talented performers and master teachers.

To my family, I am extremely grateful for all of the sacrifices, encouragement, love, and support from each of you as I told you many years ago that I wanted to embark on this journey. Through many years of graduate school and finishing the degree while teaching full time, you have all provided words of support, and I am eternally grateful. Each of you has helped me along the way, and I thank all of you so much. My mom, Pat, sister, Cathy, and mother-in-law,
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stay with me forever.
CONTENTS

List of Figures ............................................................................................................................................. 1
List of Musical Examples ............................................................................................................................. 2
Introduction .................................................................................................................................................. 4

Chapter

1. Brief Biographical Discussion of Joan Tower ................................................................. 8
2. Tower’s Compositional Profile .............................................................................. 20
3. Tower’s Prominent Use of Clarinet in Her Works ............................................. 45
4. Clarinetists’ Appreciation for Joan Tower ..................................................... 59

Conclusion ................................................................................................................................................... 142

Appendices

A. Works Featuring Clarinet by Joan Tower and Their Dedicatees ............. 143
B. Transcript of Interview with Joan Tower ...................................................... 144
C. Transcript of Interview with David Shifrin ..................................................... 165
D. Transcript of Interview with Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr ................................ 172
E. Transcript of Interview with Robert Spring .................................................... 188

Bibliography of Sources ......................................................................................................................... 202
LIST OF FIGURES

| Figure 5.1 | Energy-Line Analysis of *Rain Waves* | 85 |
| Figure 6.1 | Energy-Line Analysis of *A Gift*, Movement I, *With Memories* | 133 |
| Figure 6.2 | Energy-Line Analysis of *A Gift*, Movement II, *With Song* | 134 |
| Figure 6.3 | Energy-Line Analysis of *A Gift*, Movement III, *With Feeling* | 135 |
| Figure 6.4 | Energy-Line Analysis of *A Gift*, Movement IV, *To Dance With* | 136 |
LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Example 5.1  Tower, *Rain Waves*, mm. 1–5: Tower’s Original Raindrop Motive 77
Example 5.2  Tower, *Rain Waves*, mm. 28–34: First Variation of Raindrop Motive 78
Example 5.3  Tower, *Rain Waves*, mm. 67–70 and 72–74: Second and Third Variations of Raindrop Motive 79
Example 5.4  Tower, *Rain Waves*, mm. 96–112: Fourth Variation of Raindrop Motive 80
Example 5.5  Tower, *Rain Waves*, mm. 113–121: Fifth Variation of Raindrop Motive 81
Example 5.6  Tower, *Rain Waves*, mm. 126–129: Abrupt and Extreme Use of Dynamics that Coincide with a Drop in Intensity Level 86
Example 5.7  Tower, *Rain Waves*, mm. 148–151: Another Example of Use of Abrupt and Extreme Dynamics that Coincide with a Drop in Intensity of the Musical Line 87
Example 5.8  Tower, *Rain Waves*, mm. 194–198: Example of Use of Extreme Soft Dynamics and Abrupt Changes in Dynamic and Intensity Levels 87
Example 5.9  Tower, *Rain Waves*, mm. 314–317: Most Intense Arrival Point in *Rain Waves* 89
Example 5.10  Tower, *Rain Waves*, mm. 51–55: Seamless Timbral Shift Between the Three Instruments 90
Example 5.11  Tower, *Rain Waves*, mm. 113–128: Static, or Staying Energy 93
Example 5.12  Tower, *Rain Waves*, mm. 152–166: Another Example of Static Energy 94
Example 5.13  Tower, *Rain Waves*, mm. 101–103: Raindrop Motive Passed Throughout the Ensemble 95
Example 5.15  Tower, *Rain Waves*, mm. 129–136: Contrasting Style Soft Section 99
Example 5.16  Tower, *Rain Waves*, mm. 307–311: Stacked Octaves and Tritone Clusters 106
| Example 6.1 | Tower, *A Gift*, Movement I, mm. 1–6: My *Funny Valentine* Fragment Presented in the Flute and Clarinet Parts |
| Example 6.3 | Tower, *A Gift*, Movement III, mm. 89–91: Suggestion of *Valentine* Theme |
| Example 6.4 | Tower, *A Gift*, Movement IV, mm. 100–102: Soaring *Valentine* Theme |
| Example 6.5 | Tower, *A Gift*, Movement IV, mm. 133–36: All Winds State Version of *Valentine* Theme at Various Rhythmic Intervals |
| Example 6.6 | Tower, *A Gift*, Movement II, mm. 1–6: Opening Bassoon Solo |
| Example 6.7 | Tower, *A Gift*, Movement III, mm. 1–5: Opening Horn Solo |
| Example 6.9 | Tower, *A Gift*, Movement IV, mm. 81–83: Use of Octaves on Downbeats |
| Example 6.10 | Tower, *A Gift*, Movement IV, mm. 101–103: Flute and Clarinet State Theme in Octaves |
| Example 6.13 | Tower, *A Gift*, Movement IV, mm. 190–97: Clarinet *Quasi Cadenza* |
| Example 6.14 | Tower, *A Gift*, Movement II, mm. 109–112: Flute in Altissimo Register while Clarinet is in Clarion Register |
INTRODUCTION

A study of the literature written about Joan Tower and her works in the past fifteen years shows scholarly interest, but no one has yet attempted to trace Tower’s treatment of the clarinet. Tower’s vitality is evident in her music, and her melodies are colorful and organic. In this document I examine her “compositional profile” from her departure of serialism in 1974 and to investigate how her current perception of the clarinet relates to her previous treatment of the instrument with regard to color and power.

Through interviews with the composer and several prominent clarinetists, I provide insight as to why prominent clarinetists have flocked to Tower for new repertoire. The performer’s guide to Rain Waves (1997) and A Gift (2007) demonstrates how best to approach a work by Tower (through energy line and overall shape), give hints for rehearsal and balance rooted in background information of the music, and finally, contextualize Tower’s current writing with her previous works involving clarinet.

American composer Joan Tower has become one of the most popular and sought-after composers of her generation. Her contributions to the repertory of woodwind and orchestral literature, and solo instrumental works have placed her in the forefront of contemporary American music. Her works have a distinctive style and sound, each bringing interest and reward for audiences and performers alike. This composer has a personal vibrancy that shines through in all of her music, and she employs the clarinet simultaneously in modern and traditional ways,
demanding extensive virtuosity and control of performers without the use of extended techniques.\footnote{Barring the unwritten yet optional use of the technique called circular breathing in her solo clarinet work \textit{Wings} (1981), Tower does not write music requiring multiphonics, flutter tonguing, or other extended techniques.}

Prominent performers, orchestras, and music festivals have called upon Tower for works. In the clarinet world, such clarinet virtuosos as Laura Flax, Charles Neidich, David Shifrin, and Richard Stoltzman have been intrigued by Tower’s music and have commissioned works from her. Tower obliged, thus gave clarinetists of today several varied and challenging pieces to perform. In addition, Tower’s involvement with her chamber group, Da Capo Chamber Players, persuaded her to grow the chamber music library with works for flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano.

The goal of this project is to bring to light the most recent of Tower’s offerings featuring clarinet and to share with clarinetists and others the artistry and power in Tower’s works. Her two most recent works with clarinet included are \textit{Rain Waves} (1997) for clarinet, violin, and piano, and \textit{A Gift} (2007) for wind quartet and piano. The latter work is based on a short duet for flute and clarinet entitled \textit{A Little Gift} (2006). These two chamber works differ in instrumentation as well as period of composition.

To date, scholarly writing about Tower has mainly included either a theoretical analysis of a particular work or biographical information on her Latin American upbringing, referencing her admiration of dance rhythms and visual art. Tower calls herself a “choreographer of sound” in many interviews.\footnote{Rochelle Lynn Oddo, “Joan Tower’s Compositional Profile, Use of the Clarinet, and Collaboration in \textit{Turning Points} for Clarinet and String Quartet” (DMA thesis, Rice University, 2004), 15.} She balances the actions (intensifying, static, or de-intensifying) in a work,
and listens to where the music goes, allowing it to take on a life of its own. These aspects of her composition will be examined briefly, but to date no one has provided comprehensive study of her works for clarinet. One of Tower’s most performed and admired works, *Wings* for solo clarinet, has received scholarly attention while ensconcing itself in the core clarinet repertoire.

Nancy Bonds’s document on *Wings* (1981) provides a helpful and often-cited analysis and introduction to Joan Tower’s style and personality.3 Robert Janssen’s document on *Fantasy (… those harbor lights)* (1983) studies how four prominent clarinet performers formulate interpretations of a modern work (in this case Tower’s *Fantasy*).4 He then provides his own interpretation of the work. Oddo provides a structural analysis of Tower’s quintet for clarinet and strings, *Turning Points* (1995), and includes how Tower employs the clarinet as the instrument to introduce new material and textural changes within the work.5 However, clarinetists today are without any information on the most recent of Tower’s contributions to the clarinet repertory.

Of related interest to this topic is why clarinetists have chosen Tower for new works, and why each piece has been so successful. Of the many contemporary works that clarinetists now have available, Tower’s are among the most well crafted and enjoyed by performers and audiences alike. Some may say it is due to Tower’s willingness to take risks, as she demonstrated in her turn from serialism in the mid-1970s, in addition to her confidence to let her inspiration take her wherever it may lead. Margo Jones comments, “[Tower] seeks to create a unique


5 Oddo, 15.
musical language … including the reduction of instrumentation and the limitation of
compositional elements, creating a simple melody and accompaniment texture.6 Tower told
Jones in phone interview, “[My] objective as a composer, however, is to appeal to a broad
audience and to make music accessible to the general listener.”7

In this age of digital and electronic media, with composers exploring music through
extended techniques, Tower demonstrates in works for various combinations of instruments that
she does not need to incorporate contemporary techniques such as multiphonics to write
contemporary music. With her works spanning many decades, we are now able to gain an
appreciation of how Tower exploits both the powerful and delicate abilities of the clarinet.

6 Margo Sue Jones, “Joan Tower’s Hexachords for Solo Flute: An Analysis and
Comparison of Its Flute Writing to Tower’s Flute Concerto: with Three Recitals of Selected

7 Ibid.
Chapter 1

Brief Biographical Discussion of Joan Tower

To get a clear view of composer Joan Tower, the woman behind many successful musical works, one should know about her upbringing. Although she is the middle child of three in the Tower family, one might say that the middle-child syndrome, where one feels as if one does not belong, could have been true for Joan Tower at least for two points in her life. First, when she moved with her family to South America for many years as a child, and years later when she struggled to find her niche with the popular composers in New York just out of college in the 1960s. Tower took risks and found her voice by following her instinct and beginning to compose music in her own unique style. Although several sources are helpful in attaining information about Joan Tower’s childhood, upbringing, and education, Ellen K. Grolman’s recent book “Joan Tower: The Comprehensive Bio-Bibliography” is the most concise and densely packed source.

Joan Peabody Tower was born on September 6, 1938 to parents George Warren Tower III and Anna Peabody Robinson. According to Grolman, Joan Tower grew up in “upscale Larchmont, New York,” and “began piano at an early age.” Grolman also mentions that Tower grew up with an older sister, Ellen, nine years older, and a younger brother, George IV, nine years younger. There must be something about the number nine with the Tower family, as not only were the children nine years apart in age, but when Joan was age nine, she moved with her

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9 Ibid., 4.
family to La Paz, Bolivia, where her father was a mining engineer. Later, Joan was married to her first husband for nine years before divorcing him.

Growing up in South America, Tower had to adjust to everything around her—a new language, home, school, and culture. Grolman writes, “In Bolivia, Joan’s family had five Indian servants, and as a result, Joan learned Spanish and Aymara, which is a direct descendant of the Incan language.” Many authors note in biographical discussions that she felt displaced for a time in Bolivia due to being uprooted from all that she knew and required to learn and accept a new home and language once her family moved. Additionally, because her sister was almost a decade older, Joan did not feel extremely close to her (she stayed in the United States to start college when the family moved to South America). Similarly, her brother was almost a decade younger. Thus, she was not close with her siblings. Grolman writes of how Joan “attended many local celebrations of Saints’ days with her nanny, Aida. There was much music, dancing, and use of percussion instruments with indigenous rhythms and dances at these festivals. Tower credits these experiences with establishing her life-long affinity for the muscular, vital rhythms which characterize the majority of her compositions.”

Although Joan played some percussion instruments at these Bolivian festivals, her father made sure that she also continued her piano studies. Perhaps this was because he was not only a mining engineer, but also an amateur violinist, and he could already see how talented Joan was. Tower may have become a concert pianist had she not had to leave her teacher from her youth.

10 Ibid., 5.

11 Ibid.

Later, after Joan became a composer, elements of the South American cultures she experienced can be found in her music—the strong influence of rhythm, percussion, and dance rhythms.

Tower’s family also moved to Santiago, Chile and Lima, Peru for her father’s job, and finally moved back to the United States in Joan’s late teenage years where she finished high school. In 1957 she attended Bennington College in Vermont, where she studied physics and then music. Tower believes that Bennington was a great fit for her personality. According to Oddo, while at Bennington, Tower took music courses, and “stumbled into composition when asked to write a piece for a class.” Tower said to Oddo:

[I decided to become a composer] when I was eighteen, when I heard my first piece. Actually, I didn’t decide to become a composer. There was so much wrong with the piece that I had to fix it. And it was the beginning of a trap, actually, because I wanted to write something that made some sense, that had something interesting about it. There is a lot of guesswork. The reality of the page versus the sound is always different.

Tower studied composition with Professors Henry Brant, Louis Calabro, and others. Tower is quoted in Grolman’s book as stating that her first works were in the “Bartokian–Hindemithian style,” like her teachers’. Tower graduated from Bennington in 1961 with a Bachelor of Music degree, and moved to New York City.

In New York, Tower fell into step with such leading composers of the time as Mario Davidovsky, Charles Wuorinen, and Milton Babbitt. Well known for their twelve-tone or serial, works, these mentors to Tower welcomed her in both their musical and social circles. Tower was introduced to her first husband through her connection and friendship with Wuorinen. These

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13 Myrna Frances Schloss, “Out of the Twentieth Century: Three Composers, Three Musics, One Femininity” (Ph.D. diss., Wesleyan University, 1993), 221.


15 Grolman, 8.
composers with whom Tower spent her time also wrote recommendations for her grant applications. Grolman states that “Babbitt’s recommendation for Joan in the mid-1970s for an National Endowment for the Arts Grant called her ‘one of the most knowing and accomplished composers and musicians of her generation,’ and in a recommendation by Mario Davidovsky, he wrote that ‘Tower’s music is consistently strong structurally and most sensitive. She is a most imaginative and intelligent composer … and is a performer of great competence … to enhance the cause of American contemporary music’.”16 Davidovsky was referring to Tower’s involvement with the Da Capo Chamber Players, a group she co-founded in 1969.

In 1964, Tower graduated from Columbia University with a Master of Music degree in composition. She had been a graduate teaching assistant for Charles Wuorinen.17 While at Columbia, Tower studied composition with Jack Beeson, Otto Luening, Benjamin Boretz, Chou Wen-Chung, and Vladimir Ussachevsky. According to Grolman, Tower also studied privately with Darius Milhaud, Wallingford Riegger, Alan Sapp, and Ralph Shapey.18 Throughout this period in her life, Tower wrote exclusively “fully-serial” works, such as Hexachords (1972) for solo flute and other works for the Da Capo Chamber Players, such as the first movement of Breakfast Rhythms (1974). Grolman also writes that Tower “grew increasingly unhappy with musical rewards of the twelve-tone system,” feeling “it was too intellectual, with not enough musical intuition, and she did not like the elitism with the audience for which serial music is now

16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
known.\textsuperscript{19} Tower finished her Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Columbia University in 1978, and wrote her document on her chamber work \textit{Breakfast Rhythms I and II}. In McCutchan’s book, Tower states, “I [also] think I should not have gone for a doctorate, which took me fourteen years and was generally a waste of time. But at that time, you had to have a doctorate to get a teaching job. I did it as slowly as possible, because I hated being in the library. I wanted to be out making music. That’s what kept me going.”\textsuperscript{20}

Throughout her college musical education and just after, Tower wrote serial works. This style of composition was popular among Babbitt, Wuorinen, and others in the academic circles in which Tower circulated in New York in the 1960s and early ‘70s. Because she looked up to these accomplished composers, Tower wrote in this style as well.

However, in many interviews Tower states that she began to feel dissatisfied with the level of detachment of the music to the audience and the lack of flexibility as to where a musical line wants to go, and felt confined by the strict rules of serialism. Tower began to experiment with breaking formerly followed rules, and as Tower now says in interviews, to “go for broke.”\textsuperscript{21} Starting with the second movement of \textit{Breakfast Rhythms} (1975) and with \textit{Black Topaz} (1976), she composed music according to no pre-compositionally set rules. In composing \textit{Black Topaz}, Tower says that she decided to write what she felt rather than what a row and strict pre-compositional map determined that she could write. All of her composer friends were quite

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 9.

\textsuperscript{20} Ann McCutchan, \textit{The Muse That Sings: Composers Speak About the Creative Process} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 59.

\textsuperscript{21} Oddo, 9.
confused by her risk-taking and new steps toward a new style. As Tower puts it, at the premiere of *Black Topaz*, “[They] were in horror and thought I had totally flipped out.”22

Tower credits being intrigued by Olivier Messiaen’s *Quartor pour le fin du Temps* (1940) and George Crumb’s *Voice of a Whale*23 with her change of her compositional voice. According to Schloss, Tower believes that Messiaen and Crumb “had courage to write simple music with some strength to it.”24 Through performing the Messiaen work with Da Capo Chamber Players, Tower notes in many interviews her attraction to the way that Messiaen suspended the sense of time through use of long-note durations, as well as his use of extreme levels of dynamics and range that drastically changed and enhanced melodies. She freely admits that she was heavily influenced by these two works, especially by Messiaen’s ideas and concepts of what music could be.

Other composers that were influential in Tower’s life were Ludwig van Beethoven (she claims to still love his piano works, as she grew up playing many of them), Igor Stravinsky for his use of rhythmic drive and color, and Arnold Schoenberg, whose music Tower did not like, yet she was drawn to his use of quartal chords in his *Kammersymphonie* Op. 9.25 With a quick glance at Tower’s several works for clarinet, one can easily find use of Messiaen’s use of extreme dynamics and range, Schoenberg’s quartal chords and arpeggios, and sections akin to Stravinsky’s colorful rhythms. Although not listed as an influence on Tower, the play with color in all of her writing could be analyzed as a Messiaen-like quality, or perhaps similar to that of

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22 Ibid.

23 McCutchan, 59.

24 Schloss, 190.

Claude Debussy’s scores. However, just as Debussy disliked being labeled impressionistic, Tower does not wish to have a label placed upon her style. In fact, Sylvia Glickman and Martha Furman Schleifer would say that Tower should not be labeled as a neo-Romantic. Those who would label her as such may be somewhat correct, but Tower’s music is her own, and her music is relevant without such a label.

Tower co-founded the Da Capo Chamber Players, formally known as the Empire Chamber Players, to have a group to perform her works. Creating and performing in one’s own chamber ensemble can be one avenue for contemporary composers to have their music heard by others. Philip Glass and Steve Reich have followed the same trajectory. Tower is quoted in Grolman saying, “I hate [sending out scores] … I don’t like the rejection syndrome.”

According to Grolman, in the first year the group made $4,038.83 “for a series of five concerts, including payment for performers, recording, piano, percussion, music rentals, and postage.”

The ensemble name, Da Capo Chamber Players, revealed its manner of programming: they would perform one work on each program twice so the audience would have a better chance to take it in and perhaps remember it. Tower wore many hats in getting this ensemble off the ground. Grolman writes, “Tower founded the group and handled fundraising, grant-writing, receptions, correspondence, promotion, piano-moving, scheduling, program duplication, marketing, and hosting duties as well.”

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26 Glickman and Furman Schleifer, 276.

27 Grolman, 9.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., 9.
Tower states:

I couldn’t wait around for people to play my music so I formed my own group…the instrumentation of the group just happened. I wanted to keep it small so we would be mobile, and do between fifteen and thirty concerts per year. I view Da Capo as my musical education. I wanted to make music from both a playing and a compositional point of view.\(^{31}\)

The original members of the Da Capo Chamber Players were Joan Tower (piano), Patricia Spencer (flute), Allen Blustine (clarinet), Joel Lester (violin), and Helen Harbison (‘cello). In 1973, Da Capo won the prestigious Walter W. Naumburg Chamber Music Award for chamber music. Joan Tower performed and composed for the Da Capo Chamber Players from 1969–1984, and her time with this ensemble gave her a working knowledge of chamber instrumentation. In fact, Da Capo became Tower’s laboratory ensemble in which she says she received her compositional education.\(^{32}\) Tower’s participation as a pianist in Da Capo Chamber Players was a strong advantage for her compositional career, as she learned more intricacies about other instruments than a non-performing composer could through this hands-on experience.

Tower’s idiomatic writing and use of the best attributes of each of these instruments is immediately heard in the many works she has now composed for solo or chamber ensembles involving flute, clarinet, piano, violin, ‘cello (and percussion, which was at times added to the Da Capo instrumentation). According to Grolman, “Da Capo certainly influenced [Tower’s] compositional aesthetic and output, and she feels strongly that had she not been a performer, she


\(^{32}\) Ibid.
would have been a very different composer.”

In her tenure with Da Capo Chamber Players, which still exists although with some different personnel, Tower composed a solo work for each member of the ensemble. For violinist Joel Lester, Tower wrote *Platinum Spirals* (1976); for clarinetist Allen Blustine, *Breakfast Rhythms I and II for Clarinet and Five Instruments* (1974 and 1975); for ’cellist Helen Harbison, *Six Variations for solo cello* (1971), which was later withdrawn and Tower replaced it with *Music for Cello and Orchestra* (1984) for André Emelianoff; for flutist Patricia Spencer, *Hexachords for solo flute* (1972). For herself, Tower wrote her first piano concerto, *Homage to Beethoven* (1985). Tower wrote her doctoral dissertation from Columbia University on the analysis of her work for Blustine, *Breakfast Rhythms I and II* (1974 and 1975), which is the pivotal work in her output that demonstrates her serial work in the first movement and her steps to break away from dodecaphony in the second movement.

According to Grolman, Tower received “several National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships (1974, 1975, and 1980), MacDowell Colony and Guggenheim Fellowships in 1974 and 1975, respectively, and was selected by the Naumburg Foundation to write a concerto for Charles Neidich, winner of the Naumburg Clarinet Competition in 1987.” Nancy Bonds writes that in 1990, Tower received the Grawemeyer Award for her orchestral work *Silver Ladders*.

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33 Grolman, 10.


35 Grolman, 10.

36 Ibid.
(1986), which is “the most prestigious award for composition” with an award of $150,000. Tower was the first female recipient of this award, and according to Grolman, Tower was later inducted into the Academy of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University. Additionally, Tower has won the Koussevitsky Award (1982) and Kennedy Center Freidheim Award in 1988. Bonds lists many of the other awards that Tower has won: Jerome foundations, AT&T foundation, Barlow Foundation (1990), the New York and Massachusetts State Arts Councils, selected for the Meet the Composer, Inc. program with the St. Louis Symphony in 1985–1988, was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1983), the Schubert Club, and the Contemporary Music Society, and was named Musician of the Month by Musical America in September 1982.

Professional symphonies, ensembles, and soloists throughout the country and abroad have performed Tower’s music, and she has recently been involved with major festivals such as Tanglewood (where she was the featured composer in 2000 and 2002) and the Norfolk Chamber Festival. Prominent chamber ensembles, including eighth blackbird and the Emerson String Quartet, are among her champions, as well as the Milwaukee Ballet Company, who premiered her only ballet score thus far, Stepping Stones. In 2003, Tower was named the inaugural composer for the “Made in America” consortium program, in which symphonies of all sizes from all fifty states were involved in premiering her work, Made in America.

Other achievements which have been bestowed upon Tower that Grolman lists in her bibliography include having Petroushskates be listed as “one of the 101 most significant

37 Bonds, 10–11.

38 Ibid.,12.

39 Grolman, 18.
compositions for small ensembles” by Chamber Music America, being the subject of the January 2004 Carnegie Hall “Making Music” series, having recordings included on the Naxos database in 2005 and 2006, winning the Medora King Award for Musical Composition, a $25,000 prize from the University of Texas in Austin in 2006, and being awarded an honorary doctorate by the New England Conservatory in 2006. Ellen Grolman writes that “to date (2007), there are twenty-two theses and dissertations focusing on Tower, some with detailed analyses of specific works, some with a focus on her personal musical language, and a few written as performers’ or conductors’ guides.

In addition to her professional successes as a composer, Joan Tower has been a professor of composition at Bard College since 1972. According to Grolman, Tower began teaching there part-time (one day per week), and upon returning from her tenure as Composer-in-Residence with the St. Louis Orchestra and conductor Leonard Slatkin from 1985–88, Tower joined the Bard faculty full time. Grolman continues that Tower “was offered the endowed Asher Edelman Professorship position, and was soon Department Chair, a position she held for eight years.” In her book, Grolman writes that Joan Tower considers herself to be a self-taught composer, as she believes that it is “essentially impossible to teach composition.” Tower is quoted as saying, “you can teach around it [composition], the theoretical things, harmony, and counterpoint … but everything I learned about writing music that was meaningful came from writing it and hearing

40 Ibid., 19.
41 Ibid., 45.
42 Ibid., 12.
43 Ibid., 13.
Tower has begun to do some conducting in recent years, and perhaps this may become part of her musical career as well.

Tower has composed in most genres except opera and solo or chamber voice. Chiefly, she has produced a great many chamber works for the instrumentation of Da Capo Chamber Players (with and without the addition of percussion), other chamber works for brass, percussion, string quartet, and now with *A Gift*, piano quintet, and *Rain Waves*, clarinet trio with violin and piano. She has many solo works to her credit including those for piano, flute, clarinet, violin, viola, cello, guitar, and alto saxophone (arrangement of the clarinet work, *Wings*). With thirteen symphonic works, she has proven herself a successful orchestral composer, whose works are included in the repertoire of many major symphonies, and she has two works for wind ensemble. After her ballet, *Stepping Stones*, she has even now ventured into the realm of lyrics, with *Can I* (2007) for SSAA choral ensemble. This is a step that Tower had originally thought she would not take.

Tower now resides in Red Hook, New York with her husband Jeff Litfin. She and Mr. Litfin, a retired businessman, writer, and jazz pianist, have been married for seven years, although they had been close for over thirty years before their nuptials in 2002. Although she is now seventy-two, Tower shows no signs of desiring to retire.

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44 Ibid.

45 Grolman, 20.
Chapter 2

Tower’s Compositional Profile

After sixty plus years of composing and performing, I believe more than ever in the extraordinary power of music. In this day of fast information and communication, music nourishes our inner souls. As tensions between nations continue, music reaches beyond borders. At weddings, funerals, inaugurations and parades, music gives us public permission to feel and share things. In fact, music has always been a shared thing—between the creator, the performer, and the audience. Music connects me to people I don’t even know.

—Joan Tower, quoted in “Music Makes Me Come Alive” on All Things Considered, National Public Radio, 27 November 2006

Joan Tower’s music is easily recognizable as her own. Rhythmic vitality, use of color, momentum changes within the musical line, distortion of a consistent pulse often accomplished through use of frequent meter changes, strong contrasts, and virtuosic writing make her works demanding yet accessible to the audience and performers. Ellen K. Grolman asserts that typical traits of Tower works include “a brilliant color palette, elements of virtuosity, a varied and striking rhythmic profile, prominent use of percussion, evocative titles, and precise attention to pacing and balance.”

Schloss notes that Tower sets the stage for contrasts in the areas of color, texture, and rhythm in the title images. These concepts are echoed in most accounts of Tower’s writing style, and rightly so. The use of color, rhythm, and melody are the most immediately

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striking when listening to a composition by Tower, and they seem to combine with one another to make her music aurally recognizable as “Tower,” just as one thinks immediately of Copland when hearing Copland, or Stravinsky when hearing Stravinsky. Music critic Richard Buell of the *Boston Globe* writes of Tower’s music, “to judge from this sampling of her work from the 1980s and 1990s, a Tower piece is idiomatic, practical, and ingratiating for the performer (even when that performer was being worked awfully hard) and—crucially—none too scarifying for the average, decently curious concertgoer.”

After she found her way out of the twelve-tone system of composition, Tower broke free and began to find her own voice. It just took, as she says in interviews, a “ten-year detour” to get there. Here I will discuss Tower’s “compositional profile,” a term she tells many interviewers she prefers to “style.” As she considers herself a “choreographer of sound,” Tower’s focus on balance, energy and action of a melody in addition to harmony and rhythm, will be explored here as well as in subsequent chapters dealing with her use of the clarinet in *Rain Waves* (1997) and *A Gift* (2007).

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When first starting in the 1960s, Tower organized all aspects of her music in a pre-compositional map for her serial compositions, including the plot and structure of each work before she composed it.\(^5\) Nancy Bonds remarks in her document that before 1974:

"Tower relied on what she refers to as ‘maps’ as guides when composing, charts of serial procedures and complex structures. She claims that as a young composer, the insecurity and infinity of choices she had to make when composing forced her to create pre-compositional maps for the pitch (and sometimes for the time structures) of a piece. This gave her more time to spend on the decision-making process of rhythm, register, texture, and spacing."

*Hexachords* (1972) for solo flute is a well-known work from her early style. Margo Jones writes in her dissertation on this work:

"Rhythmic variety and rapid meter change are fundamental to Tower’s style. The incorporation of a variety of meters in rapid succession often avoids the development of recurring rhythmic patterns; therefore, a continuous pulse marking the meter is not perceived. This disruption of metric continuity is a constant characteristic of Tower’s overall style and can be seen as a link between her pre-1974 and post-1974 works."

The abstract and non-imaginative titles from Tower’s early period (pre-1974) were like the works themselves—academic and elitist, not meant to communicate with the audience. Examples include *Hexachords* (1972) and *Prelude for Five Instruments* (1970). Not only did the titles Tower gives her works post *Breakfast Rhythms I and II* change, but the type of music and compositional process as well.

Tower began to experiment with how she composed music, and she used the compositional maps only to help with some of the outlining details such as the length of time of a

\(^5\) Grolman, 27.


work. Eventually, she let go of even this type of planning and let the music tell her where it was headed next.\textsuperscript{54} Schloss notes that Tower felt alone when taking the risk to experiment and break away from serialism, but that she used her “musical talent, strength of character and desire to be true to herself no matter what the outcome, and she took whatever risks she needed to accomplish these goals.”\textsuperscript{55} Bonds writes, “Tower claims that the twelve-tone composition (of her earlier years) turned out to be too gray for her—like dealing with the same soup all the time.”\textsuperscript{56}

Tower’s change of compositional style occurred between the first and second movements of \textit{Breakfast Rhythms} (1974 and 1975). Grolman notes, the “strict serialism of the [first movement] gives way to a more fluid, impressionistic style dotted with tone clusters in the second movement,” and that “in [Tower’s] dissertation, she says she stopped composing for a year between the two works and went through a big change of style.”\textsuperscript{57} Her first work to be entirely in her new style was \textit{Black Topaz} (1976), where Grolman claims that Tower’s “natural voice began to emerge: simpler, less dissonant, and somewhat impressionistic.”\textsuperscript{58}

Tower discusses her change in her compositional style in Nancy Bonds’s thesis: “At first I was interested primarily in the energy of a musical line but then I became fascinated with how lines acquire direction and shape. Music has to be counterbalanced. It’s like physics—if you throw a ball at a certain angle and speed, it will fall a certain way.”\textsuperscript{59} In her post-1975 style,

\textsuperscript{54} Grolman, 27.
\textsuperscript{55} Schloss, 221.
\textsuperscript{56} Bonds, 19.
\textsuperscript{57} Grolman, 27.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{59} Bonds, 20.
Tower emphasizes “timing, pacing, context, and balance.” Tower often discusses the energy of her melodies or “lines” and the overall shape of the energy within her works. Although abstract, this concept has begun to be explored by scholars interested in Tower’s works. Bonds and Oddo have discussed with Tower her use of this phrase, and Bonds has created the first study of energy and momentum in one of Tower’s works. In interviews, Tower often states that she much prefers that musicians study the energy lines of her works rather than dissecting them in the traditional theoretical method of harmonic analysis. She says that she just writes and does not purposefully subscribe to a methodology or pattern. Her works are organically notated based on where she feels the work is coming from, where it is, and where it is going next. This concept is found in several discussions on Tower’s works, and it will likely be found in future studies of her music.

Although the idea of an energy line may seem obtuse or perhaps elementary to music theorists, for performers of Tower works it must be of utmost importance. Her works have a momentum that runs through them from the beginning to the end, and since this is how she composes the music, it is the performer’s responsibility to find this momentum to perform the work as she conceived it. Tower’s background as a performer first and composer second is evident, as the care she takes in creating a musical statement is heard in each phrase. Her goal in writing is not to follow any theoretical rules or formulas, but to write what she feels. Such an abstract concept is difficult to define and describe, but by expanding upon Bonds’s idea, I have assigned each measure of her two most recent Tower chamber works involving clarinet a numeric value based on the level of intensity. My energy-line analyses visually demonstrate the momentum and energy increases, decreases, sudden drops, and gradual changes. My goal with providing these tangible figures is to for performers to see the shape and form.

60 Grolman, 29.
Tower’s post-1975 compositional voice is more organic, eclectic, colorful and sometimes impressionistic. Authors often use the words free and fluid to describe Tower’s music. Kyle Gann notes a slight variant to a more meditative tone in Tower’s compositional style in the 1990s, with the string quartet Night Fields.\(^{61}\) Although it is true that because that was Tower’s first string quartet, she was learning about this type of chamber ensemble and perhaps chose a different type of atmosphere. Tower’s Turning Points (1995) is also a more static piece. However, after eight years of works produced since Gann’s article, one can conclude that Tower stayed in a meditative mood. Her works often involve those softer, contemplative sections, but the rhythmic vitality of a work such as Rain Waves (1997) has both gentle and agitated moments. Tower weaves together the docile and the authoritative, the timeless and the directed.

Tower says, “Being a performer has greatly influenced my writing; … I’ve picked things up right and left that have affected my music.”\(^{62}\) Nancy Bonds provides detail from Tower about learning about what the clarinet could do well through her listening to and working with Laura Flax, to whom Wings (1981) is dedicated. Tower used the Da Capo Chamber Players as her laboratory ensemble. Through trying out and performing other modern composers’ works, Tower was quickly able to discern what types of sounds, concepts, and musical ideas were effective, which were idiomatic, and to what limit one could push extremes of dynamics, range, and lengths of articulation, to name a few. Tower has noted in the past that not all pieces that they read through seemed to work, and from playing so much contemporary music as the pianist in this ensemble, she learned what worked for her instrument, the other instruments, as well as the ensemble as a whole.

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\(^{62}\) Bonds, 197.
Tower tells Ann McCutchan:

It was like having a laboratory, but also a family, because we were like siblings. Making music with them and for them, in addition to lifting the music of the other contemporary composers we worked with off the page, was an invaluable musical education for me. It taught me how to think about written music in relation to the players—how to try to make a very finite set of notated instructions come alive for a performer.63

Even before her role in Da Capo Chamber Players, Tower had grown up a pianist, and thus had played a great deal of piano literature from different musical eras.

Composers who have influenced Joan Tower are often found as quotations—hidden, or sometimes obvious—within her works. Strong influences such as Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Beethoven, and Messiaen are found in several different works, and are either alluded to in colorful context or with melodic or harmonic quotations. According to Susan McClary, Tower’s work may be overlooked by critical authors due to her use of traditional materials and methods in a modern musical society. McClary claims that Tower misreads these past composers in an effort to overcome anxiety or inferiority.64 Rather than hide from them and their large shadows, she illuminates, re-interprets, and combines them, and in so doing, overcomes such anxiety. As McClary says, her music “speaks for itself … and she does not call attention to difference.”65 McClary discusses Tower’s orchestral work Silver Ladders, but this phenomenon of quotation is found elsewhere in Tower’s music. Some examples of outright quotation include Stravinsky’s renowned chord from Rite of Spring in Black Topaz, Petrushka obviously in Petrushskates, fragments of three Beethoven Piano Sonatas: Tempest, Waldstein, and C Minor, Op. 111 in her


65 Ibid., 83.
Homage to Beethoven (her first Piano Concerto), Schoenberg’s ascending quartal arpeggios in Wings, Island Prelude, Breakfast Rhythms I and II, and the Clarinet Concerto. Tower’s distortion of time and pulse in Wings, Rain Waves, and A Gift among many others, finds its roots in Messiaen’s Quartor pour le fin du Temps. Some influences have become part of who Tower is and appear in most all of her works, and some are specific quotations she has chosen to use to make a contemporary statement.

Melody

Tower’s current approach to composition is an organic one, in which she works slowly, and makes sure that “the music’s present is consistent both with its past and with the future she has in mind for it.” Through her careful manipulation and following of the musical line, or melody, each of her pieces has its own organic shape. John Fletcher calls Tower’s style as of the early 1980s one of “organic and intuitive” work. According to Bonds, Joan Tower does not use sketches. “She works from note to note very carefully and tries to build an organic structure.” In this respect, Oddo argues that the cognitively constructed balancing and shaping of a work as in Turning Points (1995) has some serial-like thought processes in the use of repeated intervals

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66 Grolman, 38.
67 Ibid., 37.
68 Schloss, 171.
70 Bonds, 216.
and the “orderly use of the serial elements of intervals, rhythm, dynamics, and register which lead to ‘holding,’ intensifying, and de-intensifying actions.”71 Conclusively, Oddo states “Tower’s endeavors with serialism allowed her to use unifying elements to create an organic and improvisatory-sounding quality to her music.”72

Tower’s careful planning is not done in advance; it occurs in the time and space of whatever measure she happens to be in while writing the music. Although she takes the time to write music that flows in consecutive order (from the first to the last measure), this is not strictly a serialist action. She is a careful designer, but her control is not restrictive. She could choose other paths, if she chose to do so.

Tower does not use computer programs such as Finale or Sibelius when composing a new work. Rather, she works carefully and slowly by hand while sitting at the piano. According to Grolman and others, Tower works on her compositions for four to five hours each day, completing about three minutes of music per month. She works on one piece at a time, keeping the work to herself until she has finished it.73 Due to this slow but meticulous work, she takes on only one or two compositions per year. It is evident that her dedication is worthwhile, as Tower has been awarded numerous prestigious honors and awards.

Tower’s compositional process involves improvising with an idea at the piano, sculpting it bit by bit, and then writing it down.74 She told Grolman, “the music creates itself,” but that she

71 Oddo, 69–70.
72 Ibid., 71.
73 Grolman, 39.
74 Bonds, 24.
is “especially focused on seamless action,”75 which is found in many of her works. In an interview with Jeanyne Bezoler Slettom in the *St. Paul Dispatch* in October 1984, Tower states, “What I like about composing is that it starts with an image or idea, then it’s the composer’s task to discover the identities and feelings of things and to give them musical shape and form.”76 This quote holds true today as well, as Tower still composes in the way she has for many decades now, in her own manner.

Frequently, Tower will use small motives upon which to build a work. This is highly audible in *Rain Waves*, where a two-note raindrop motive is transformed and used in various ways throughout the work, in both relaxed and intense moments. Her motives may be melodic or harmonic, as is the case in the fourth movement of *A Gift*, especially in the piano part. Schloss mentions that Tower “relates her compositional process to the slow kind of sculpting or shaping of clay.” She continues, “[Tower] writes a passage, then taking a look at what she’s done and reshaping it until it’s the way she thinks she wants it to be.”77 Tower also relates her compositional process to being in charge of a baby, where she must listen to it and let it tell her what to do.78

Many authors of Tower literature discuss her focus on the line of the music. Tower told Grolman, “Creating ‘high energy’ music is one of my special talents; I like to see just how high I can push a work’s energy level without making it chaotic or incoherent. But my lyrical nature

75 Grolman, 30.
76 Schloss, 185.
77 Schloss, 187.
78 Ibid., 188.
has been emerging in snippets over the years, too.”\textsuperscript{79} Schloss states, “Tower is most interested in the action, energy, color, texture, and particularly the line—the motivation [of her music].”\textsuperscript{80}

In all of her works, Tower uses what she labels as the three actions of a line: a holding, or static action, one that intensifies, or one that de-intensifies. Bonds and Oddo cover this concept in their theses. Performers need to be aware of these three actions the line is doing at any particular point, so as to properly portray the momentum. For example, Oddo learned that a \textit{crescendo} does not necessarily mean intensifying, and a slowing of the rhythm and tempo does not necessarily mean the line is relaxing, or de-intensifying.\textsuperscript{81} There are many examples of these in both \textit{Rain Waves} and \textit{A Gift}. Bonds also mentions that “Tower discusses various small-scale actions within the three types of actions: dry (\textit{secco}), sustained, elaborative, and one-dimensional.”\textsuperscript{82} Almost thirty years after she penned \textit{Wings}, Tower is still employing these types of actions in both \textit{Rain Waves} and \textit{A Gift}.

\textbf{Rhythm}

Rhythm is central to Tower’s style. It drives the intense sections of her works, creates a blurry backdrop of color, and slows or speeds the momentum of her melodies. Tower agrees that rhythm is the most important thing. She says, “The sense of moving from one place to another—within the rhythm, within the line—is very important, because the dynamics and the register all

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{79} Grolman, 28.
\item \textsuperscript{80} Schloss, 188.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Oddo, 89.
\item \textsuperscript{82} Bonds, 169.
\end{itemize}
come out of that sense of flowing, driving, and falling.”83 In addition to the expected agitated and aggressive rhythmic sections one imagines when the word rhythm is discussed, Tower employs rhythmic augmentation and diminution. She heightens the intensity in many places in both *Rain Waves* and *A Gift* with the use of a dramatic slowing of the rhythmic energy. Her use of duple versus triple subdivisions of the beat frequently occurs in these two recent works, especially in the piano part. However, she does pit the individual wind or string instruments against one another in groups from time to time, blurring the pulse and sense of time for performer and audience alike.

Often, in writings about Tower’s music, scholars note Tower’s fondness for physics and how she applies the “action-reaction” physical law to her works. Many authors have mentioned this with regard to Tower’s work compositional process, the musical line, ranges and dynamics used, and even the motion throughout a movement. Tamara Bernstein of the Canadian *Globe and Mail* agrees, stating, “[Tower’s] music is … celebrated for its vitality and directness.”84 According to Grolman, “Tower’s self-description as a choreographer of sound” fits this law of physics as well, as “the spatial-physical reactions are very closely related between dance and music.”85

Tower is quoted on the subject:

The rhythm of the line is very much tied up with the rhythm of the action. So if the action is falling, and is turbulent and high energy, well, the rhythm is going to be that, too. I think very much in terms of dancing. I think very much in terms of physics, too. So if you throw a ball with

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85 Grolman, 31.
a certain action, how does it fall? Where does it fall? How fast does it fall? Those are questions I’m always thinking about. What is the action to the reaction? Just like a dancer.

Tower’s obsession with energy and action is a main thread in her interviews about her music and can be most likely be traced to her affinity for science, and also her youth in South America. The prominence of rhythm in her works is undeniable. From playing percussion and dancing in festivals in the streets of La Paz, her internal rhythmic sense was heightened, thus complex and repetitive rhythms abound in her works. Grolman explains, “[Tower’s] early exposure to the complex meters of South American dance music and her interest in percussion, and the rhythmically intricate serial music she performed for so many years” caused rhythm to be extremely important in her works. Tower has “a keen ear for forward, driving rhythms and appropriately harnessed fury but also a concern for the balance between the singular event and the host of implications that result from its development and transformation.”

**Harmony**

Grolman notes that since leaving serialism, “Tower’s compositions are largely based on octatonic, chromatic, and whole-tone scales, with prominent tritones.” This continues to be true of Tower’s two most recent chamber offerings involving clarinet, *Rain Waves* (1997) and *A Gift* (2007). Both works are based almost entirely on the octatonic scale, usually beginning with a

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86 Schloss, 184.

87 Grolman, 36.


89 Grolman, 29.
half step, with only a moment or two of chromaticism in the melody. Tower most certainly utilizes the tritone in these recent works, as well as showcases augmented chords and descending minor thirds. In Grolman’s book, Tower refers to the type of scale she chooses for a work as building materials, “bricks, stone, wood, tile, or grass.” According to Grolman, Tower thinks simply about her building materials, how she will heat [it] up, and the type of action involved [to do so].”

Harmonically speaking, Tower writes pitch-centered music that is not categorized as tonal or atonal. Her works tend to use a particular type of scale, often octatonic, involve dissonant intervals such as tritones, seconds, or sevenths, and seem to give the illusion of a tonal center through repeated use of thematic material using a particular tone cluster or interval. In A Gift, for example, she uses a B–D or E–G interval, thus leading one’s ear to a tonal center through use of a minor third, but then erases it with the next cluster of tones that does not involve those pitches. Grolman mentions that music reviewer Robert S. Clark “describes Tower’s signature style as including phrases and note combinations that imply but stop short of tonal procedures.”

Tower’s employment of octatonic scales, polytonality, and modality combined with traditional use of melody, harmony, and rhythm is exhibited in many of her works. The musical elements of composers who have influenced Tower’s writing are obvious in many of her works. Many of her solo, chamber, and orchestral works are built upon the octatonic scale, including both Rain Waves and A Gift. She often alludes to a tonal center through repeated intervals or

90 Ibid., 28.
91 Grolman, 40.
92 Jones, 4.
pitch classes, but never settles into a key in the traditional sense of the term. This aspect of Tower’s compositional voice provides a modern dialect on a traditional language.

Form

Formally, Tower’s works are mainly one-movement works. Even in the symphonic realm, she does not use the typical four-movement form. Schloss explains that Tower’s works “are extended one-movement works with several themes and changes of tonal centers.”93 This is one reason that although it does not follow the traditional order of tempo markings, A Gift’s (2007) four-movement form is thus atypical. For example, the first movement is the slowest of the four movements. Rain Waves, however, does follow the typical one-movement Tower structure. Grolman remarks that Tower “has a long-time fondness for the one-movement form because she says they are one-movement experiences,” and “she prefers that there is always motion, a sense of moving forward.”94 This is true of almost all of Tower’s music. Her attention to the shape and direction of the line is more important than the placement of a theme. Schloss also notes that Tower does not employ sonata form in her symphonic works. She writes that Tower sticks with the use of a “traditional orchestra and forces, but makes use of the octatonic scale and harmonies.”95 Of interest with her concerto writing, Tower has often paired the soloist

93 Ibid., 194.
94 Grolman, 34.
95 Schloss, 194.
with the principal player of the same instrument for a duet or two. She says that it is to “help break down barriers between soloist and orchestra, and create collegial relationships.”96

Discussions of Tower’s compositions often include the overall shape of her works, and her common use of rising motives. Performers and theorists alike agree that Tower’s music has an overall, or global, shape, encompassing all of the smaller hills and valleys of the phrases. Her fluid music may often be viewed in sections, separated by motive or tempo, but each area flows to the next and grows from the previous with structure. Her organic compositional process allows her works to be fluid rather than disjunct—structured with purpose. When teaching composition students at Bard College, Tower tells Thomas Erdmann, “I want you to write a piece that you care deeply about. I keep circling around the idea of caring.”97 It is evident when playing or listening to Tower’s works that she cares about each and every one of them. She has even called her works her children on several occasions.

Purposeful repetition of material is a technique that Tower employs in her works. From works from the early 1980s such as *Wings* (1981) to the most recent of her musical offerings such as *Rain Waves* and *A Gift*, Tower has used both melodic and harmonic repetition to propel her music forward or perhaps maintain a static energy line. Judith Lockhead finds interesting cases of repetition in Tower’s *Wing* and *Breakfast Rhythms I and II*. Lockhead has discovered that the gradual repetition of previous material in *Wings* is not simply what it may seem to be on the surface. She found that slight variations of repeated material which seem to be part of a current line echoing a past phrase might actually be a repetition of a different section already in

96 Grolman, 34.

progress. She describes a “subconscious musical existence” when Tower immediately repeats “an internal (not an initial) section.”

In *Breakfast Rhythms I and II*, Lockhead investigates the relationship between repetitions of passages with their formal functions. The first movement of *Breakfast Rhythms* is in Tower’s serial style. Although Tower may no longer be transposing repeated pitch classes within the structured serialist format, her current works demonstrate the same use of intellect and craft, as will be shown in both *Rain Waves* and *A Gift*. Lockhead’s analysis of the second movement of *Breakfast Rhythms* includes the use of clock diagrams to examine what chords Tower used. Balance is not only extraordinary, it is visually clear. Tower’s organic and meticulous writing is fluid, balanced, and seamless—a trait she has continued to maintain in her current works from the past decade. Tower’s sense of flow, energy with momentum, and balanced structures are integral parts of what makes her music her own.

Tower’s music often dances, including even the non-rhythmically intense melodies. One might also consider Tower a cautious and committed architect, one who makes sure all aspects of the structures she designs are stable, safe, and enjoyable. Tower agrees, as she calls the composing process “creating architecture, in which the score is the blueprint.” She said to Grolman, “After a year of laboring, the blueprints get passed to an orchestra, who plays it … and the building goes up.” She says that she will then second guess “those windows are too big or that side of the house, etc.”

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In the following chapters pertaining to *Rain Waves* and *A Gift*, I will argue that Tower’s overall line and structure are what help make her works stand out from other modern works, and this is evidence as to why prominent performers such as David Shifrin, Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr, Richard Stoltzman, and Charles Neidich have asked Tower for a new work to perform. Her vivid melodies with challenging passages are structured to allow for the overall shape of the work to take the listener on a satisfying musical journey.

**Texture**

One cannot read about Tower’s music without becoming quickly immersed in discussions of color, texture, and balance. In the Glickman and Furman Schleifer book *From Convent to Concert Hall: A Guide to Women Composers*, Millefoglie writes of Tower’s music:

[Works other than those in her mineral series] display geological properties; an extended solo or single tone can attract surrounding material like a magnet or, like a crystal, organically reproduce itself in three dimensions. A dense and busy texture may suddenly give way to an aural ‘clearing,’ in which a single tall chord is built up triad by triad as though a bright light were shined on it for detailed observation.

She continues, “Unsurprisingly, one frequently finds gemological words such as ‘clarity’ and ‘brilliance’ in literature about Tower.”\(^{100}\) Others mention color when describing Tower’s music and vibrant personality. Kirstin Dougan remarks that Tower’s “bold and colorful personality is readily apparent in her music.”\(^{101}\)

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\(^{100}\) Sylvia Glickman and Martha Furman Schleifer, 276.

Quotation

While maintaining her own sound, Tower has incorporated the styles of Stravinsky, Messiaen, Debussy, Copland, Schoenberg, Schwantner, Beethoven, Glass, and Bartók into her music. The octatonicism of Stravinsky, Bartók, and Messiaen is found in most works, including *Rain Waves* and *A Gift*. The open chord structure of Copland; the modality of Bartók; the balanced phrases, general juxtaposition, and direction of line of Beethoven; the colors of Debussy and Messiaen; “sound attacks of Schwantner;”\(^{102}\) the emphasis on rhythmic vitality and repetition of Stravinsky and Glass and motivic transformation of Beethoven and Glass, are all intricate parts of Tower’s style.

Imagery and Titles

Tower’s break with serial composition was also the beginning of her use of imagery both as a source of inspiration for her works, as is the case with a drawing that became *Black Topaz*, and to aid the audience with something tangible to visualize. Her drawing used for her inspiration for *Black Topaz* is now the compact disc cover for the album on which the work was first recorded. At times, Tower used to draw or dance as inspiration for composing, but now she says that she draws more for therapy, and that those drawings do not make it into the pieces on which she is working.\(^{103}\) Post 1974, Tower’s works have been given descriptive titles that provide vibrant imagery of nature, minerals, full of action and juxtaposition of size and balance.

\(^{102}\) Grolman, 38.

\(^{103}\) Joan Tower, telephone interview with author, 22 May 2009.
Tower says that the title always follows the music and not the other way around. She has discussed this in a couple of interviews, and she told the author that this has not changed as of 2009. The music goes where it leads, she follows it and writes it down, and the titles are discovered after the music; the music is not prescribed by the title.


Tower also has a category of works that refer to typical musical forms: *Concerto for Clarinet* (1988), *Concerto for Flute* (1989), *Concerto for Violin* (1992), *Concerto for Piano (Homage to Beethoven)* (1985), *Concerto for Orchestra* (1991), *Toccanta* (1997), *Duets* (1994), and *Chamber Dance* (2006). There is also a category that no one seems to have noticed, which is


¹⁰⁵ Schloss, 222.
one of tributes or memorials: In Memory (2002), Angels (String Quartet No. 4) (2008), Elegy (1993), For Daniel (2004), A Little Gift (2006), and A Gift (2007). One might also include the works that are subtitled with an homage to composers by whom Tower was greatly influenced: Très Lent (Hommage à Messiaen) (1994), Concerto for Piano (Homage to Beethoven) (1985), Paganini Trills (1996), and Petroushskates (1980).

Tower wrote several solo piano works with titles taken from John Ashbery poems,\textsuperscript{106} such as Holding a Daisy (1996), No Longer Very Clear (2005), Or Like a ... an Engine (1994), and Vast Antique Cubes/Throbbing Still (2000). Tower obviously connects the viola with the color purple, as she wrote two works for solo viola with this color in the title: Simply Purple (2008) and Wild Purple (1998). There are others, of course, and one could also combine several of Tower’s works into a group of celebration (several different fanfares and Fascinating Ribbons [2001] would fit into this category), a group of works inspired by dance, and John Fletcher’s observation that many of Tower’s works involve not only motion, but specifically upward motion.\textsuperscript{107} Even titles of her works suggest this phenomenon—Wings, Silver Ladders, and Sequoia are examples. Even in Rain Waves although rain falls downward, Tower makes use of upward motion in moments of strong intensity. In A Gift, she builds chords in an upward fashion in the third movement several times.

The notion of love could also connect several of Tower’s works, including Valentine Trills (1996), Fantasy (... those harbor lights) (1983), as well as A Little Gift (2006) and thus A Gift (2007), which are both connected through their use of the Rodgers and Hart tune “My Funny Valentine.” One last idea for ideas that tie Tower works together is quotation, similar to that of

\textsuperscript{106} Grolman, 34.

\textsuperscript{107} Fletcher, 63.
an homage. The piano concerto *en hommage* to Beethoven, as well as the ‘cello work *en hommage* to Messiaen are obvious members of this category, but also included are *Fascinating Ribbons* (which uses quotation of George Gershwin’s famous tune *Fascinating Rhythm*), *Fantasy* (*... those harbor lights*), which uses the standard “Harbor Lights,” as well as *A Little Gift* and *A Gift*, which incorporate the standard “My Funny Valentine.”

**Other Characteristics**

Tower integrates modern idioms with traditional genres and techniques. She does not incorporate techniques such as multiphonics, flutter tonguing, squeaking on mouthpieces, or recordings of extraneous sounds like rain or fax machines to write intriguing contemporary music. According to Margo Jones, “Tower’s recent works exhibit a more traditional emphasis on tonal centers, melody, harmony, and rhythm; Tower … combines these traditional elements in a contemporary fashion, creating polytonality, modality, and octatonic formations.”¹⁰⁸

Schloss compares Tower’s use of “traditional music materials in new ways” to the ways Meredith Monk and Pauline Oliveros use other media and found sounds, respectively in their works. Schloss claims, “All three composers are reacting against the abstract, academic intellectualism of the music of the 1950s and ’60s, which was traditionally male-dominated.”¹⁰⁹ Schloss continues that Tower also refrains from requesting that performers be located in “unusual concert spaces, such as in lofts or underground, and does not explore the space in which

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¹⁰⁸ Jones, 4.

¹⁰⁹ Schloss, x.
sounds are heard, either aurally or visually.”110 Perhaps this is because Tower was first a pianist who took up composition and has also played much contemporary music as part of the Da Capo Chamber Players.

Virtuosity is common in Tower’s music. Whether a solo work, chamber ensemble, or orchestral score, one finds that Tower is constantly demanding of her performers. She pushes the envelope with indications for dynamic levels on far ends of the spectrum, requires large leaps, long, provides flowing phrases with no place to breathe, moments of heightened intensity, sudden changes in intensity and/or volume, use of notes up in the stratosphere, or reaching low into the basement, and relentless rhythmic patterns as well as complex and intricate polyrhythms, making pulse and counting quite tricky for performers. However, although Tower demands much of musicians, she does not believe in virtuosity for virtuosity’s sake. Complexities have a musical purpose to help fulfill the direction and energy of the line. Elmar Oliveira claims, “[It is] flashiness an audience can relate to. Joan doesn’t need avant-garde gimmicks, because now she’s completely comfortable speaking her own language, one that is expressive and natural to her.”111 In an article discussing Tower’s Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman IV, Rosemary Killam describes the “rhythmic and timbral complexity of Towers music.”112

Tower does recall, however, being challenged when meeting Charles Neidich, clarinetist for whom she wrote the extremely challenging Clarinet Concerto (1988). She notes that he said to her, “you can write anything, you know. Anything. I can play anything, so feel free to write

110 Ibid., 166.


whatever you like.”

Tower remembers feeling a little uneasy about such a comment, as she believed she had to make the piece challenging. She mentions revising it as she wrote to make it more and more difficult, all the while maintaining the same level of musicality. Tower herself admits that this work is probably her most challenging of all pieces to date.

Most musicians enjoy the challenge that Tower puts forth for performers because it is not merely technical or without reward. Tower’s standards of excellent musical line and shape remain intact when she adds more technical or control challenges for performers. Whether one is required to work hard for one musical reason or another (fast passages, repetitive patterns, floating high notes, bold rhythmic drive to extreme dynamic levels, counting complex rhythmic notation against another’s conflicting subdivision, or sustaining a line when one would really like to get a breath), Tower’s care to always write a beautifully shaped line makes the challenges worth the effort.

Like many modern composers, Tower gives specific instructions to musicians, but remains flexible in order to allow performers to put their own stamp on her works. All parts are often virtuosic, exploiting a wide spectrum of dynamic levels, range, rhythmic virtuosity, vitality, and control. Nowhere is this more evident than in her compositions for clarinet. Tower writes specific instructions in places where she is adamant about a particular volume or level of clarity, but she still allows for performers to make their own interpretations. In her thesis, Bonds quotes Tower as saying, “Wings will bring out the personality of the player right away. I can tell a lot about a person’s playing when the play my Wings.”

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113 Joan Tower, telephone interview with author, 22 May 2009.

114 Bonds, 204.
In *A Gift*, Tower writes specific directions for the pianist throughout most of the fourth movement not only about use of the pedal, but of the level of blurriness or clarity she wants from the piano’s complex rhythmic patterns. This impressionistic, or perhaps minimalistic approach to this section allows the performers to be artists, but Tower gives the performers an idea of what she had in mind. Tower says about her notation, “The good performer will get off the page, listen to the music, and get behind the energies of the line. That is, they will let the music come alive and not be restricted to the notation.”

Knowledge of how Tower composes allows the performer to better relate her work to an audience. During a coaching with Tower on *Wings* (1981), Nancy Bonds writes of Tower’s discussion of the opening and the landscape that “is to be inhabited,” and how “the activity increases, but the spatial landscape is not expanded until the end of the first page, where three octaves are covered at once.” Bonds reminds performers to not only be aware of the space, but of the action within each space, as this is important to the composer. Tower remarks: “In writing music, you’re dealing with a whole range of complex parameters at once, right from the start. You have to consider time, space, rhythm, dynamics, pitches, color, all of which together create the personality of the piece.” The same is true for performers—one must be aware of all that is around in order to convey phrases well to the audience.

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116 Bonds, 167.

117 Ibid., 168.

Chapter 3
Tower’s Prominent Use of Clarinet in Her Works

Tower has had an ongoing love affair with the clarinet for decades.

—Ellen Grolman, author of *Joan Tower: The Comprehensive Bio-Bibliography*

Joan Tower’s close relationship with the clarinet and clarinetists goes back to 1974 to her days with Da Capo Chamber Players, when she worked with clarinetists Allen Blustine and later Laura Flax. This was the beginning of a unique and special connection that has provided many works for the clarinet repertoire that marry the traditional with the modern. Of the clarinet, Tower says: “It is just an instrument that I seem to go towards. I love the instrument. I think it is one of the most spectacular instruments.”\(^{119}\) In this chapter, I will focus on those moments in which Tower has provided some insight as to why she has chosen to write so many works for featuring the clarinet over the past three decades, and how the qualities she likes about the instrument have been a prominent feature in her works.

Tower’s list of works for clarinet is extensive and continues to grow. In the current generation of composers, Tower stands out as a major contributor to the clarinet repertory. As of 2009, Tower has written twelve works for clarinet, both solo and chamber works: *Breakfast*

Rhythms I and II (1974), Black Topaz (1976), Amazon I (1977), Petroushskates (1980), Wings (1981), Noon Dance (1982), Fantasy (... those harbor lights) (1983), Concerto for Clarinet (1988), Turning Points (1995), Rain Waves (1997), A Little Gift (2006), and A Gift (2007). Of these, Wings is Tower’s most often performed solo work.\textsuperscript{120} Fantasy (... those harbor lights) is a sonata for clarinet and piano; Concerto for clarinet and orchestra; Turning Points for clarinet quintet; Rain Waves for clarinet, violin and piano; A Little Gift a short duet for clarinet and flute; and A Gift for flute, clarinet, horn, bassoon, and piano. With the exception of Wings, all works listed above with dates up through 1982 are works Tower composed for Da Capo Chamber Players during her tenure as pianist with that group.

Tower attributes Laura Flax’s clarinet playing as the foundation for her love of the sound of the clarinet. For Flax, Tower produced the solo work Wings, known for its silky, fluid lines and soaring passages showcasing the extremes in range of which Flax was capable of playing when Tower worked with her in Da Capo. There was much communication and collaboration in the development of that work between composer and performing artist, and Tower states that this kind of close partnership has not been repeated since her composing of this popular piece.\textsuperscript{121} Wings became so beloved by performers that Tower lists that it may be performed on bass clarinet, and she has even had published her own arrangement of the work for alto saxophone at the request of saxophonists who wanted to play it.

Of the works composed after the Da Capo years (of which Tower was a part from 1969–1984), all were commissioned by or for a specific clarinetist. The renowned clarinetists involved

\textsuperscript{120} Ellen Grolman, Joan Tower: The Comprehensive Bio-Bibliography (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 12.

\textsuperscript{121} Joan Tower, telephone interview with author, 22 May 2009.
with these commissions include Richard Stoltzman, Charles Neidich, David Shifrin, and Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr. In the commissioning and composing of these works for clarinet subsequent to *Wings*, Tower states in each case that she was either not familiar, or only vaguely familiar with the clarinetists’ playing when composing the work. Tower had heard recordings of Stoltzman, but she says her knowledge of his style of playing did not influence her compositional process.\(^{122}\) Neither was she familiar with Charles Neidich’s playing, although she had heard him perform *Wings*.\(^{123}\) Thus, the musical personalities of Stoltzman, Neidich, Shifrin, and Ludewig-Verdehr were not as well known to Tower as that of Flax.

Tower mentions that she has had many clarinet friends in New York over the years, which gave her some insight to the workings of the clarinet as an instrument. Tower lists Laura Flax, Allen Blustine, David Krakauer, and Jerry Kirkbride as some of the clarinetists with whom she has worked.\(^{124}\) In addition, the fifteen years spent working in a chamber ensemble involving clarinet gave her immeasurable knowledge and appreciation for those aspects of the clarinet that the instrument does well.

However, when generally speaking of writing for an instrument, Tower states, “It’s definitely a personality thing too…. When you’re around certain good players who are excited about music or … their instrument or both, preferably both….\(^{125}\) Tower enjoys the reciprocal musical energy and excitement of performers. This idea is similar to listening to a good jazz combo—great musicians prefer to feed off of one another’s excitement for the music. Certainly

\(^{122}\) Bonds, 16.

\(^{123}\) Ibid., 18.

\(^{124}\) Ibid., 203.

\(^{125}\) Joan Tower, quoted in Bonds, 204.
in her conversations about the commissions with some of these artists, they have become friends or friendly, and the personality of the person may be an influence on Tower’s writing, even if his or her clarinet playing is not. The clarinetists with whom I have had the pleasure to interview for this document have all spoken of the friendship that blossomed through working with Tower on the commissioned work. Tower has mentioned in interview with me her appreciation for the clarinetists for whom she has now written pieces and her ongoing friendship with them.

Tower’s personality comes through in all of her works for clarinet, so the specific attributes of the commissioning artists are not as important. After her tenure with Da Capo Chamber Players and *Wings*, she has come to know the clarinet’s attributes so well that she is capable of writing colorful, fluid, challenging, and rewarding works. Since most professional clarinetists making a living performing today (including Stoltzman, Neidich, Shifrin, and Ludewig-Verdehr) with many of the lyrical, exciting, and technically challenging repertoire, Tower’s music works well for these players. A musician’s specific tone and charisma will add a personal flair to works that he or she performs, but since all Tower works for clarinet are challenging and well crafted, clarinetists have found themselves satisfied with them.

When composing for the clarinet, Tower exploits many contrasts and wide ranges. When examining those contrasts, colors, extremes, and fluidity in all registers, one cannot help but think of the influence of Olivier Messiaen’s *Quartor pour le fin du Temps* (*Quartet for the End of Time*), specifically the third movement, *Abîme des oiseaux* (*Abyss of the Birds*). In this movement for clarinet solo, Messiaen explores many contrasts and extremes. Dynamics range from *ppp* to *fff* in relatively short spaces of time, all registers are explored with fluidity, connection, and in such slow tempos that one’s sense of time is suspended. This mood is contrasted with bird sounds in a brighter, lighter color. Thus, Messiaen also explores various
colors and types of attacks of notes in this solo movement in addition to sounds that emerge from silence to an almost out of control, forceful, loud sustained note. These types of effects and colors are found in most Tower’s works for clarinet, not just in _Wings_. Nancy Bonds discusses the Messiaenic influence on Tower’s writing in great detail when analyzing _Wings_ in her thesis.\textsuperscript{126}

Tower compares the clarinet’s strengths to those of the piano, the instrument she knows better than any other. Tower says, “I think of the clarinet as a powerful, flexible, virtuosic instrument that can compete with anything…. It’s similar to the piano in that it has an incredible dynamic range. It can be percussive, and it can be lyrical at the same time. Not all instruments have that capability … I like the range of that, which I try to get in my music.”\textsuperscript{127} At times, her dynamics are like those found in Messiaen’s _Abîme des oiseaux_—tones that emerge from nowhere and grow to the loudest controllable point possible via a slow crescendo. Other times, they are _subito_ changes that bring about a drastic change in momentum and color. This last type abounds in _Rain Waves_ and _A Gift_.

In writing for the clarinet, Tower uses not only her knowledge of the clarinet’s best attributes and capabilities; she also incorporates her knowledge of the piano’s as well. This may account for some of the extremely long, sustained passages in _Wings_ and other works, such as _A Little Gift_, in which the melodic line is so slow and long that control of the air is difficult for a wind player, which is not a problem encountered when one plays the piano. For example, Laura Flax found _Wings_ (the piece written for her) challenging, and she mentions air and breath control as the number one issue—one that Flax and performers since then have sometimes chosen to

\textsuperscript{126} Bonds, 13.

\textsuperscript{127} Joan Tower, quoted in Grolman, 11.
overcome by learning to circular breathe in order to perform *Wings*.\textsuperscript{128} Robert Spring also mentions this when discussing his experience with this solo work.\textsuperscript{129}

In a lecture at the St. Louis Clarinet Society on September 27, 1987, Tower said:

I’ve had a pretty extensive career in clarinet, with clarinetists, and I love the clarinet, as I said originally, because it has the kind of dynamic range that I need. My music tends to be a fairly forceful and fairly out front kind of range of expression in terms of attack, quality, and dynamics. The clarinet is one of the few instruments in the wind section that has that kind of power, that kind of flexibility.\textsuperscript{130}

The forcefulness of which Tower speaks is evident in most of her works for clarinet, as she pushes the envelope of intensity and volume at climactic moments. This is found in *Rain Waves* in two moments of torrential downpours, and also several times in *A Gift*. Details of each of these works will be provided in subsequent chapters to demonstrate how Tower marries the energy of her musical lines with the concept of tension-and-release. Often, she asks the clarinetist to emerge from *niente* to a forceful, pressing intensity, and at other times abruptly cuts the intensity from an extremely high level to *ppp* because she knows that the clarinet is able to handle vast and sudden changes in volume and color.

In *A Gift*, Tower gives the piano musical lines that incorporate percussiveness and lyricism and gives the clarinet mainly lyrical melodies. However, in *Rain Waves*, the piano and clarinet both have moments at the beginnings of sections that showcase both percussive and lyrical capabilities. Tower re-affirms this: “I like the ability to go from a staccato attack-type texture to a lyrical-type texture. The clarinet is very good at both of those so that’s another thing I like about the clarinet. Also the fact that it has such a dynamic range all the way through on

\textsuperscript{128} Laura Flax, quoted in Grolman, 12.

\textsuperscript{129} Robert Spring, quoted in Bonds, 142–43.

\textsuperscript{130} Joan Tower, quoted in Bonds, 231.
both sides—both loud and soft is very attractive.”¹³¹ Rain Waves is an excellent example of how Tower is still using this unique characteristic of the clarinet in works composed many years after Wings.

Other qualities of the clarinet that Tower calls unique include “the ability to start extremely softly and crescendo to a powerful, loud sound, and the ability to jump wide leaps [intervals].”¹³² All of these abilities are found in Wings. Seventeen years later, Tower’s Rain Waves also has alternating sections that seem heavily influenced by Messiaen. It seems that the qualities that Tower heard Messiaen explore in Quartet for the End of Time have stayed with Tower throughout her career, as many of her works share similar color treatments, linear language, and extremes of dynamics. Other composers who have influenced Tower are also still found in her music, but the influence of Messiaen is easily heard in her works for the clarinet.

According to Bonds, Tower tests out passages she has written for clarinet “either by the dedicatee, or more often a friend who plays clarinet (of whom she asks, ‘is this possible or impossible?’”).¹³³ Although she has had much experience writing for the clarinet in solo, chamber, and orchestral arenas, and is quite comfortable doing so, she still checks with an actual clarinetist to be certain that her music will work on the instrument. This shows Tower’s careful consideration for her work, the performers, and the importance of melodic line. She will revise passages that do not work well on the instrument in order to make sure that her ideas can come across without the interruption of a mechanical impossibility.

¹³¹ Ibid., 236.
¹³² Ibid., 15.
¹³³ Ibid., 203.
This does not mean that Tower composes only idiomatic and technically easy passages. However, the piece and the performers can have successful experiences only if the piece is playable. Bear in mind that Tower’s clarinet friends are fine musicians. It is frustrating for performers to have a physically impossible issue in a work, such as an overblown partial or fingering issue, or a slur that will not work due to the natural construction of the instrument being built on a closed tube, and the fact that it overblows a twelfth not an octave.

Tower has told in many interviews of how she was first moved by the clarinet: its tone and flexibility, when she heard Laura Flax’s playing. Tower tells Schloss: “[Flax’s clarinet playing is] ... kind of like pulling molasses. It has a tensile kind of strength about it. I wrote this piece [Wings] for Laura, and this is one piece where the playing of the performer really affected my thinking.” According to Grolman, Tower refers to Laura Flax’s sound as “liquid; absolutely phenomenal … and I wanted to write something for that.”

Prominent clarinetists Richard Stoltzman, David Shifrin, Charles Neidich, and Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr are known in the clarinet world for convincing interpretations, beautiful tone qualities, solid and controlled execution of rapid and articulated passages, and passionate, fluid phrases. Robert Spring is the only clarinetist to date to record a compact disc of all Tower works, and he had to obtain her permission to do so. Since he has worked closely with Tower and has received her feedback on his performance of her works, I have included him in the group of clarinetists that I consider in this document.

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135 Grolman, 12.

Each of the dedicatees of Tower’s clarinet works has had extremely successful performing careers in addition to teaching at the collegiate level. These performers come from varying pedagogical family trees of clarinet teachers, and each has enjoyed fame with the clarinet for many years. Richard Stoltzman approached Tower about a work and commissioned *Fantasy (… those harbor lights)* in 1983. Similar to Johannes Brahms’s two Sonatas for Clarinet (Op. 120), this work showcases both the clarinet and the piano, interweaving the melodies between the clarinet and piano, blurring the distinction of the clarinetist as soloist and pianist as accompanist. There is much for both performers to do in *Fantasy*, and the piano cadenza in a clarinet sonata is testimony to Tower’s view of this work as a chamber work, rather than a solo sonata. Robert Janssen has produced an interesting study involving this work and the concept of interpretation of new, or contemporary, clarinet works. His interview with Charles Neidich provides helpful information to performers looking to interpret Tower’s *Fantasy*.  

Tower composed the *Concerto for Clarinet* (1988) for Charles Neidich, winner of the 1985 Naumburg Clarinet Competition. Although he did not personally approach her for the composition, he did play for her. In meeting Tower, Neidich told her to write anything and, in not-so-many words, challenged her to write the most demanding concerto she could. Tower recalls this encounter and says she did rise to the occasion, as she freely admits that this work is most likely her most difficult piece to play.  

David Shifrin became involved with Tower’s music when he approached her about composing a quintet for clarinet and string quartet, as his goal was to grow that repertory and

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138 Joan Tower, telephone interview with author, 22 May 2009.
record an album of clarinet quintets. Tower obliged and completed *Turning Points* in 1995. As she did with the two works above, Tower dedicated *Turning Points* to the commissioning clarinetist. Rochelle Oddo has written about the details of the composition from an analytical standpoint through a performer’s eyes. As part of her findings, Oddo notes that the clarinet introduces each of the four main themes and that the notes keep turning on one another, as Tower said the title suggested. Oddo maintains that Tower’s background in serialism is still evident in her current works.

The Verdehr Trio, of which Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr is a founding member, commissioned Tower for a chamber work for clarinet, violin, and piano. Along with her husband and a couple of pianists through the years, the Verdehr Trio has made it is mission to build the repertory for ensembles of this instrumentation. In fact, Ludewig-Verdehr says that the trio has commissioned more than two hundred new works for clarinet, violin, and piano. After the Verdehr Trio asked Tower for a piece, she produced *Rain Waves* (1997). This exciting work takes the listener on a journey through various intensities of rain, ranging from lackadaisical sprinkles falling with no apparent pattern to full-blown thunderstorms and torrential downpours. Tower alternates the intense with the relaxed in this work, and the soft, gentle sections are reminiscent of Messiaen’s *Quartor pour le fin du Temps*, although not just to the solo clarinet movement from *Abîme des oiseaux* (*Abyss of the Birds*), but in the violin solos in *Louange à l' Immortalité de Jésus* (*Praise to the Immortality of Jesus*). The soft moments are tender, and the agitated sections are

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140 Ibid.

141 Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr in interview with author, 7 August 2009.
tumultuous. Tower’s colors and rhythmic energy are integral parts of this work. She has not needed to change how she writes emotionally charged and intimate music from her early years in this style. It appears that since Tower found her voice in 1975, she has not changed it.

David Shifrin called upon Tower again when he wanted a new woodwind chamber work for the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. He is the only clarinetist to have commissioned two works from Tower. In addition to Lincoln Center, Shifrin also performs with Chamber Music Northwest. Premieres of *A Gift* (2007) took place with both of these ensembles, in addition to two others that summer. Because of their amicable professional relationship, Tower was happy to write for Shifrin again, although the timeline that he originally gave her was too short to be able to write an entire woodwind quintet. Thus, they compromised, and Tower penned *A Little Gift* in 2006.

In *A Little Gift* (2006) and *A Gift* (2007), Tower puts to use her artistic ability of writing beautiful, fluid melodies for the clarinet. Like all of her works for clarinet before it, *A Gift*, stemming directly from *A Little Gift*, is full of silky, soaring, and rhythmically exciting melodies. The energy of Tower’s melodies is similar to that of her other works, but her use of the instruments within the quintet is quite different from most other works that wind players will find in either a woodwind or piano quintet.

Although she says she is most comfortable writing for percussion, the piano is a comfortable and familiar place for Tower, and this is evident in the fourth movement of *A Gift*. Tower gives all instruments virtuosic solo moments, and her control of color and intensity is immediately evident when studying her music. In *Rain Waves*, there are instances where one does not notice the timbral shift that has just occurred until the tones develop and move to the

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142 Tower, telephone interview with author, 22 May 2009.
next place. Musicians often talk about Tower’s architecture, and *A Gift* will be added to these conversations soon, as the craft with which she has built this work creates a seamless and exciting new composition for wind quintet with piano.

Since Tower composed *Wings* (1981), Bonds relates, “Tower claims that the clarinet is one of her favorite instruments and since she has worked with many clarinetists over the years, she understands how to write for the instrument.”143 Tower’s extensive experience working with clarinetists taught her about what the clarinet (and most clarinetists) could do well and what seemed to not work so well. In twelve works that prominently feature the clarinet, she has most certainly carefully considered what types of effects, connections, and colors work well on the clarinet.

Since composing *Wings*, Tower’s works featuring clarinet abound with examples that exploit the unique characteristics and strengths of the instrument. In *Fantasy (... those harbor lights)* (1983), the opening clarinet melody immediately demonstrates the instrument’s capability of producing sound at extreme soft dynamic levels and making smooth connections over large leaps into new registers (mm. 12–22). Tower often calls for extended use of the clarinet’s altissimo register and demands that the player perform ostinato patterns in this register (mm. 132–34). Tower also employs the clarinet’s ability to quickly move from smooth, legato passages to percussive tones (mm. 43–47). The grace and power that Tower likes in the clarinet are especially evident in the clarinet’s cadenza at the end of the work (mm. 347–75). She incorporates many ostinato-like patterns that gradually change and grow in intensity. As the range rises, the articulation grows from smooth and slurred to angular and accented.

143 Bonds, 15.
In her *Clarinet Concerto* (1988), Tower employs the *chalumeau* and *clarion* registers for many measures before incorporating the altissimo range. However, once explored, Tower pushes the altissimo register into its extreme (mm.142–52 and 185–90), and, reaching up to written C-flat (mm. 292–97). Lyricism and request for extreme soft playing is incorporated as a main element for sustained passages, and trilled notes abound in the loud and dramatic sections. This work’s challenges include the highly stylized and complex rhythmic patterns, often in large leaps, and its many fast technical passages, of which several are in the highest altissimo register. Technically speaking, *Clarinet Concerto* is Tower’s most challenging work, which she mentions when discussing this piece.\(^{144}\) Her knowledge of the instrument’s capabilities allows this complex concerto to work technically, and she successfully incorporates the power, grace, percussive and lyric capabilities that she cherishes and enjoys about the clarinet.

Her two most recent offerings involving clarinet, *Rain Waves* (1997) and *A Gift* (2007), follow in the tradition of excellence of craft, sensibility and color manipulation. Since she has composed twelve works that incorporate clarinet, including six commissions from clarinetists (if one counts *Wings*, written for Flax in Da Capo), one can conclude that she likes writing for the instrument. Of course, she likes writing for other instruments as well, as evidenced by her works list, but to date Tower has not composed for any other wind instrument as much as she has for the clarinet. Certainly, it would be hard to find another contemporary composer who has composed this much literature for clarinet. Tower’s works have greatly enhanced the clarinet repertory for twentieth and twenty-first century works.

Tower’s cohesive and compelling writing for wind chamber ensembles may stem from her love of writing for string quartet. To date, Tower has written four string quartets with a fifth

\(^{144}\) Tower, telephone interview with author, 22 May 2009.
on the way,\textsuperscript{145} and several quintets for an instrument with string quartet: a clarinet quintet, oboe quintet, piano quintet, and is currently composing a flute quintet.\textsuperscript{146} Tower’s skill and love for chamber ensembles involving strings likely stems from her comparison of the string quartet to four composers who constantly need to have a clear vision of their musical ideas and can polish and make changes along the way. As a composer, it must be very comforting to consider the musicians themselves as composers. With the sharing of melodic material between all instruments in her wind chamber works, Tower treats her works in this genre with the same craft and level of perfection as her string quartets. She considers wind writing to be more challenging, as the mix of timbres can be challenging for composers. She states that a blend such as that found in a string quartet or even a clarinet quartet would be easier, as the colors blend better and more easily than the timbres of different wind instruments.\textsuperscript{147}

Tower considers the clarinet’s many attributes when writing a work for this instrument. The grace, power, range, and flexibility she has loved since her days of working with Laura Flax remain prominent in her works for clarinet today. With her many works featuring the clarinet, Tower continues to push the instrument to new levels while still exploiting all of its characteristics. Her involvement with some of the finest musicians performing today has allowed her to write without creative or technical limitations. Tower’s love of the clarinet has resulted in a significant and challenging body of works.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
Chapter 4

Clarinetists’ Appreciation for Joan Tower

Prominent clarinetists have commissioned most of Joan Tower’s works for clarinet. Some came about because the performer wanted a new work by this composer, and some from the desire to expand the clarinet repertory. Certainly, all of Tower’s works for clarinet, whether solo or chamber, have increased the clarinet literature and most have made their way into the core repertory for twentieth and twenty-first century works.

Tower’s works for clarinet include *Wings* (1981), *Fantasy (... those harbor lights)* (1983), *Clarinet Concerto* (1988), *Turning Points* (1995), *Rain Waves* (1997), *A Little Gift* (2006), and *A Gift* (2007). In this chapter, I purposely excluded those chamber works that do not specifically feature clarinet, which includes most for Da Capo Chamber Players, as well as *Breakfast Rhythms I and II*. Additionally, with the exception of the *Clarinet Concerto* and *Wings*, all other works listed above were requested of Tower by prominent clarinetists after 1975. In the case of *Wings*, Tower composed and dedicated it to clarinetist Laura Flax, and although there was much collaboration between Tower and Flax, Tower composed the work as part of her project of composing a solo work for members of the Da Capo Chamber Players. *Clarinet Concerto* was commissioned not by Charles Neidich, for whom the work is dedicated and with whom she consulted, but rather by the Naumburg Foundation for its Clarinet Competition winner that year. Since Neidich did not specifically commission a work from Tower, I have not included *Clarinet Concerto* in this chapter.
The clarinetists involved with the major Tower commissions are Richard Stoltzman, David Shifrin, and Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr. Also to be included in the current discussion is Robert Spring, who to date has recorded the only album of solely Joan Tower works for clarinet. Because Dr. Spring had such a close collaboration in the recording of that compact disc with Tower, I felt it prudent to include him in this section.

Although I will add insights from the most current collaborators with Joan Tower on works for the clarinet, I will also include a short summary of the comments of Flax, Stoltzman, and Neidich regarding their work with her. However, since these prominent clarinetists have already provided their recollections and thoughts on their relationship with Tower and the genesis of the works Tower dedicated to them, I believe it unnecessary to re-interview them. Hence, the focus below is on Tower’s late twentieth-century- and twenty-first-century works for clarinet.

Composed for clarinetist Laura Flax while a member of the Da Capo Chamber Players, *Wings* (1981) was the first work Tower wrote specifically for solo clarinet. Two years later, she completed the composition requested by soloist Richard Stoltzman entitled *Fantasy (… those harbor lights)* (1983). It was twelve years later, after much composing for orchestras and other ensembles that David Shifrin asked Tower for a work. He contacted Tower to specifically request a new clarinet quintet for his upcoming album of works for clarinet and string quartet. His goal was to bring about a new work to the repertory for this combination of instruments.148

Just two years after the completion of *Turning Points* (1995) for clarinet and string quartet, the Verdehr Trio contacted Tower for a new work. Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr, the clarinetist

of this ensemble, requested this new piece in order to add to the repertory for her ensemble, which includes clarinet, violin, and piano. This resulted in Rain Waves (1997) (to be considered in chapter 5). Nine years later, Shifrin returned to Tower, this time asking for a woodwind chamber work and instead got two works: A Little Gift (2006) and A Gift (2007).

Since many of the most prominent solo and recording clarinetists have sought out Tower for new works in recent decades, there must be a reason. Many of these clarinetists cite their enjoyment of Tower’s colorful language, expressive qualities, and challenging virtuosity. Laura Flax told Robert Janssen: “Tower’s pieces have a natural shape. There are usually wonderful, slow, unfolding sections that build up with more and more momentum and they can either go back to that unfolding or resolution, or end with a bang.”\textsuperscript{149} In an interview with Rochelle Oddo, Flax said of Wings, “[One] has to have a comfort zone with the whole piece, but still be able to project that kind of intensity and focus and direction.” She continues, “I think Joan really did that—really taxed [the performer] to the extremes [which was my strength].”\textsuperscript{150}

Richard Stoltzman requested Fantasy from Tower for a program of fantasies he was preparing.\textsuperscript{151} He and Tower had not previously known each other or worked together, according to several sources that discuss the Fantasy. Although Robert Janssen interviewed several clarinetists for his thesis on Tower’s Fantasy, no interview with Stoltzman was included. I have found no interview with Stoltzman in any source, which makes one wonder if Stoltzman is


\textsuperscript{150} Oddo, 105–106.

unavailable for interviews or written statements in general. In a short video clip discussing contemporary music and working with a living composer, however, Stoltzman mentions the extreme pleasure and attraction of working with one whose music “will continue to live even after we are all dead” and that “it’s almost like touching the essence of creativity, which is God-like.”\(^{152}\)

In an interview with Robert Janssen, Charles Neidich said, “[Tower] uses three things: rhythmic vitality … where things will speed up and slow down in ways to create a sense of instability, … rising figures, … and big crescendos.” Neidich continues: “Joan’s *Fantasy* … has a very clear overall structure. She is very aware of dramatic shape, and has a funny idea of keeping performers happy. For instance, in the *Fantasy* she has two cadenzas [referring to the piano and clarinet cadenzas]. It’s a very democratic piece.”\(^{153}\) Later, Neidich remarks: “[Tower’s] music doesn’t contain melodies in the traditional sense. It contains shapes, smaller motives, like waves, that sometimes can be in the form of a melody, but it could also be a curve or link in a painting, a streak of gray.”\(^{154}\) Neidich remarked in an interview with Nancy Bonds: “It is probably because Joan Tower is a performer and a composer that she works so well with performers…She is sensitive to performers’ ideas and [also to] the audience.”\(^{155}\)

Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr said of *Rain Waves*:

I also think it’s one of our strongest pieces, because I think it does a lot of what I find so admirable in her writing. For example, I love the way she merges from slow tempos to a fast


\(^{153}\) Janssen, 172.

\(^{154}\) Ibid., 181.

\(^{155}\) Bonds, 26.
tempo, and also the way she changes textures so that you hardly know what has happened, and then it already has happened! It’s building to a certain point, and then building to the next and the next one. That’s one of the reasons I love to teach Wings and the Fantasy because you can just see her mind working, and it’s just brilliant the way she’s figured things out. One sees certain repetitions, which she adds on to, and the change of textures and—well, I think that she is one of our original voices. It must be difficult for a composer to be really original these days, but I think Joan Tower is one who is. Also, it’s music that an audience can really appreciate, even though it’s rather intellectual writing—one can sense the structure, and the momentum carries a listener along.156

Ludewig-Verdehr later said:

I think her writing for the clarinet is excellent. I mean, she really does challenge us, but with the exception of having those long, soft, high passages as in Wings, I feel that she writes very well for the clarinet. It’s the clarity with her intentions when she writes, and clarity also within the ensemble, and the balance, and so forth. Anyway, I’m a big Joan Tower fan, as you can see.157

Robert Spring’s insight of Tower’s works for clarinet from recording several of them on the same album says of Tower’s writing:

As a player, I think that she challenges the performer on all levels—almost threatens the performer on all levels. It forces us to re-think how we play the instrument. I find that challenge incredibly desirable. If we don’t constantly strive to grow in new directions, then we become staid and we don’t change. The only way our art is going to continue to grow and flourish is if we try to take it to new levels. Joan challenges us technically and musically with her music. Her music doesn’t play itself. You need to take things to a new level by increasing your technical prowess, and your musical prowess. Perhaps that sounds like a “take no prisoners approach,” but it’s just that she demands things from us that are not part of our vocabulary until she has exposed us to them. I don’t think the extreme high register of the clarinet, or the circular breathing aspect would have necessarily gone as far as it has at this point if it had not been for Joan pushing things at a time we needed to be pushed.

From the audience standpoint, I think that if her music is done well, it’s very listenable. There is a sense of tonality, not defined perhaps by I–V–I, but defined by repetition and revolving around pitches. I’ve found that most audiences, even community concert series goers, enjoy listening to what she writes.

That’s all on a technical level, but there is also an emotional level of involvement on the parts of both the performers and the composer, that is not often found in music by all composers. She [Joan] tries to bring the performer and the audience to an emotional point, in other words—

156 Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr, telephone interview with author 7 August 2009.

157 Ibid.
the technical requirements are used to take the music to an emotional level, perhaps more than you find with a lot of other composers.\textsuperscript{158}

David Shifrin told Janssen what he appreciates about Tower’s writing:

She has a very distinctive style. You could probably hear a work for the first time and have a pretty good chance of identifying it as a work by Joan Tower, especially a work for the clarinet. She has a distinctive way of writing for the instrument and she knows the instrument and is able to take advantage of the dramatic and contrasting capabilities of the instrument … extreme registers and dynamics, [writing] expressively and acrobatically for the clarinet. Her sense of line, as well as motive and gesture, are quite identifiable.\textsuperscript{159}

Shifrin said in Oddo: “I have always enjoyed the range of fluid, lyric, and virtuosic qualities in Joan’s writing for clarinet.” He later said, “Realizing that Joan was a master at writing for the clarinet but had not yet written anything specifically for me, I asked her for a quintet.”\textsuperscript{160}

Shifrin told Ellen Grolman: “Each generation has composers who work with performers to extend what instruments can do, and Joan is one of those composers. Her Concerto pushes the limit of the clarinet; everything’s higher, faster, louder, more extreme.”\textsuperscript{161} He continues:

Joan Tower has made one of the most significant contributions to the repertory of the clarinet in a generation. She has contributed masterfully to every important genre for the instrument. From solo, to duo with piano, to quintet with strings to her brilliant Concerto, she honors past traditions while bringing new depths, horizons, and challenges to every clarinetist and audience member. Her wonderful sense of expression, color, and kinetic energy combined with a wonderful understanding of form and proportion makes her a truly great composer. Her empathy for her fellow performers is evident in her instrumental writing, even when she presents us with enormous challenges. I am sure that her years as pianist in a chamber group with clarinet have a lot to do with the sensitivity and brilliance she brings to her compositions for clarinet.\textsuperscript{162}

\textsuperscript{158} Robert Spring, telephone interview with author, 16 August 2009.
\textsuperscript{159} Janssen, 183.
\textsuperscript{160} Oddo, 107.
\textsuperscript{161} Grolman, 12.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 135–36.
Shifrin’s admiration and appreciation for Tower’s compositions for clarinet is evident in these quotations. He has requested two works from Tower with different instrumentations, and the fruition of these three works has greatly enhanced the clarinet chamber repertory.

Perhaps like centuries past in which a special composer-performer relationship brought about some of the most treasured works for clarinet, such as Mozart and Stadler, H. Baermann and Weber and Mendelssohn, and Brahms and Mühlfeld, clarinetists may look back on this generation and find Tower’s relationship with these clarinetists as equally significant.

Tower herself loves the performer-composer relationship when a writing a piece. Being a performer, she not only understands music from the performer’s standpoint but also from that of the audience. She is an adamant promoter of performers trying their hand at composing and composers at performing,\textsuperscript{163} and she believes that the more this is accomplished, the better each can understand the other. Since she has done both professionally, she has learned much from one position to enhance her work in the other. Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr remarks, “In general, it gives her an appreciation of the many difficulties that performers encounter, as for example, the piano passages near the end of \textit{Rain Waves}, which are certainly difficult but not impossible, and provide a wonderful challenge.”\textsuperscript{164} These technical and expressive challenges are found in all of Tower’s works for clarinet, and not just in the piano part. Although trained as a pianist, she knows how to challenge each musician regardless of the instrument being played. It seems evident that Tower likes to keep the performers happy, and most enjoy a mental, emotional, or technical challenge.

\textsuperscript{163} Joan Tower, telephone interview with author, 22 May 2009.

\textsuperscript{164} Ludewig-Verdehr, telephone interview with author, 7 August 2009.
Although she has not worked closely with each performer to whom her clarinet works are
dedicated, she does have some special relationships with other clarinetists and has developed
these friendly, collegial relationships with others after the commissioning project was completed.
For example, the special relationship between Flax and Tower while writing *Wings* helped shape
the work, as Flax was able to provide input while the work was in progress. The two had had
several years working together in Da Capo Chamber Players, and both knew the other extremely
well, both musically and personally. Tower and Flax wrote back and forth, with Flax sending
recordings of segments of the work from the drafts Tower sent her as the piece took shape.165

The relationship between Shifrin and Tower has existed for nearly fifteen years, and the
two are friendly and respectful of one another’s professional work and for what the other has
done to build the repertory for specific genres and the clarinet itself. Shifrin mentions in
commissioning *A Gift* that Tower was wonderful to work with, and that he and Paul King both
found Tower as their common denominator when choosing a composer for their project.166 It
speaks volumes when a performer returns to a composer for a second project. Ludewig-Verdehr
states that if the opportunity presented itself, the Verdehr Trio would love a second work from
Tower, who is booked so far in advance that this has proven difficult.167 Tower controls her
compositional output by taking the care and time to perfect each piece, composing only two
works per year due to the slow, meticulous, organic process with which she creates her works.

Nearly all clarinetists who have been interviewed at one time or another regarding
Tower’s clarinet works mention the virtuosic, yet rewarding, writing that characterizes Tower’s

165 Oddo, 105.

166 David Shifrin, telephone interview with author, 14 September 2009.

167 Ludewig-Verdehr, telephone interview with author, 7 August 2009.
works, especially those featuring clarinet. Tower mentions it when discussing *Clarinet Concerto*,¹⁶⁸ and nearly all interviewees about Tower’s music mention the virtuosic aspect of her music. Tower often refers in interviews to the technically proficiency required of performers of some contemporary works. However, she composes with the goal of writing music, not virtuosic music. Perhaps with the exception of the *Clarinet Concerto*, for which Neidich challenged her to create an extremely demanding piece, she does not write virtuosity for the sake of making a work difficult. Rather, in creating the colors she desires, a virtuosic work frequently results.

At times it is not the technical facility aspect of her works that is most difficult to prepare it is the ability to musically grasp the embedded germ around which the rhythmic and technical passage is built. The interweaving of parts is fluid and equal, bringing to mind a Brahmsian effect of intra-ensemble dependence to make the music sing with the kind of energy and character that Tower meant when notating the music. This organic, fluid, seamless, and vibrant music comprises her musical style. When listening to one of Tower’s works, one does not hear a challenging series of notes. Instead, the rich colors, striking sonorities, and rhythmic structure often predominate. Although the works are challenging to learn and put together as part of an ensemble, what results are the impressionistic colors moving through motives and themes.

Clarinetists have been commissioning Joan Tower for almost thirty years; almost the length of time she has spent composing in her post-1975 style. Each clarinetist interviewed regarding Tower’s music mentions many of the same attributes they appreciate, reflecting their love of Tower’s music: the colors, virtuosity, craftsmanship of how to write well for the instrument, and the challenge of finding the long, organic energy line. Being able to carry an extremely long line in extreme registers, careful attention to breath marks, and having the

¹⁶⁸ Tower, telephone interview with author, 22 May 2009.
endurance to perform one of Tower’s works, can be physically taxing to the performer. Both Robert Spring and Laura Flax have mentioned in interviews that the reason they learned to circular breathe was in order to convincingly play one of Tower’s works, such as *Wings*, *Fantasy*, or the *Concerto*. Her mental and physical demands on a player attracted performers who wish to continue to grow and develop as musicians. Her music pushes the envelope in many ways for the performer, taking him or her to a new level of musicianship.
Chapter 5

Joan Tower’s *Rain Waves* for clarinet, violin, and piano may be regarded as one of Tower’s best works. Written in 1997, this is one of her most recent works for clarinet, violin, and piano, an instrumentation first made well known by Béla Bartók with his *Contrasts* (1938). *Rain Waves* is full of many of the elements one would expect of a typical post-1974 work of Tower including timbral shifts of colors, rhythmic drive and complexities, extremes in dynamics and range, smooth melodies, and an overall wave of energy full of moments of tension and release.

The Verdehr Trio, comprised of violinist Walter Verdehr, his wife, clarinetist Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr, and pianist Silvia Roederer, commissioned this work from Tower. This ensemble has almost solely built the recent repertory for this instrumentation through their ongoing commitment to commission works from contemporary composers. In fact, in the past 35 years, the Verdehr Trio has commissioned over two hundred works\(^ {169} \) from many composers who are, or have become, prominent. In addition to Joan Tower, the ensemble has commissioned works by Leslie Bassett, William Bolcolm, Jennifer Higdon, Gian Carlo Menotti, Ned Rorem, Bright Sheng, Libby Larsen, Karel Husa, Alexander Arutiunian, Peter Sculthorpe, and Peter

\(^{169}\) Ludewig-Verdehr, telephone interview with author, 7 August 2009.
Schickele. The Verdehr Trio even commissions numerous doctoral students before they establish themselves. In order to be able to provide diverse programs to their audiences, the Verdehr Trio has collected a great variety of compositional styles in their commissions.

The premiere of *Rain Waves* took place at the Frick Museum in New York, and Tower attended. Ludewig-Verdehr says this of the first time Tower heard the work, just before it was premiered:

> When she [Tower] first heard it [*Rain Waves*], it had been a year since she wrote it and she said, “Oh my gosh, I’ve almost forgotten this piece!” And then she had us play it again, and she said, “Yeah, it’s too long. I’ve got to think about that.” So we performed the premiere as she had originally written, but then as she thought about it a few days later, she did cut out two places. One was a beautiful, slow place, and the cut was about twenty bars. She just didn’t feel that the piece should come back at a slow tempo again, and actually, she’s right. I have always felt that the Nielsen *Concerto* suffers a bit from the two or three slow–fast–slow–fasts on the last page. But in any case, she cut that section (about a minute’s worth), and it really is more concise, which is what she was looking for.

From correspondence with Ludewig-Verdehr, I have gleaned information regarding *Rain Waves* in both its published and pre-published versions. The original *Rain Waves* score given to the Verdehr Trio dated December 1996 is 389 measures in length, and the revised version dated January 1998 is 325 measures. Tower’s decision to omit a total of 64 measures, about one minute of music was made to improve the pacing of the overall energy line. To Ludewig-Verdehr, “The material she cut was repetitious, so I think she was absolutely right to do that.”

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171 Ludewig-Verdehr, telephone interview with author, 7 August 2009.

172 Ibid.

173 Ibid.

174 Ibid.
In addition to the two cuts, Tower made other changes. These alterations occur mainly in the piano part and appear in various locations in the score. Tower changed some dynamics, adding an octave as part of a tone cluster, and some pedaling. For the most part, the additions to the piano part involving the raindrop motive were to double the violin, as in m. 66 and mm. 73–78. Tower also added the lower octave of the sextuplet run in the piano part in mm. 263–67 in the original score, mm. 266–71 in the revised score.

The changes to the violin and clarinet parts were minor and few between. For example, Tower added to the violin part the instruction “on the string” for the solo in m. 207, which is m. 210 of the revised score, later marking “off the string” in m. 214 of the original score. This shows Tower’s attention to detail with expecting specific colors and timbres at specific moments. The only observed note change in the violin part is four measures from the end of the piece, m. 322 in the revised score. Here, Tower adds to the violin a double stop up to A from the original G-flat. In this same measure, Tower changes the octave of the clarinet to its altissimo F, rather than its throat tone register F.

In the Bb-clarinet part, a few pitches were re-notated with their enharmonic equivalents. For example, in the revised score the D-flat in m. 10 was notated as a C-sharp in the original score; the A-sharp in m. 62 was formally printed B-flat. The G-flat in m. 82 was originally written F-sharp; the G-sharp in m. 135 was first printed A-flat; the G-sharp and B in m. 138 were first A-flat and C-flat, respectively. The A-sharp in measure 147 was originally printed B-flat, and in m. 148, the A-sharp was B-flat. Much later in the piece, other enharmonic equivalents were substituted, such as the D-sharp in mm. 250–53 of the revised score was first printed as E-
flat, and the A-sharp in mm. 257–58 was originally written as B-flat. It is unclear whether Tower made those enharmonic changes or the publisher took that liberty.

One can observe a few changed, yet often equivalent, notations of rhythms between the original and revised scores. For instance, in the Bb-clarinet part, the quarter note tied to the dotted-quarter note C-natural in m. 91 of the revised score was originally printed as a half note tied to an eighth note. A few rhythmic changes can be found when reviewing the two scores, such as in m. 128, where the clarinet originally held a half note with a fermata, but the note was changed to a dotted-quarter note, and the fermata was placed on an eighth-note rest. Other clarity and color changes were made, but were “mainly cosmetic,” as Tower calls them. For example, the altissimo E in the Bb-clarinet part of the revised score was originally the B below that in the original; the term dolce was added in m. 198 of the revised score; and a grand pause was inserted in m. 205 of the revised score. The last three measures of the piece have some changes in the clarinet part, where the rhythm of m. 323 of the revised score was changed to a more active, driving repetition of a variation of the raindrop motive, and a grace note was added in the penultimate measure, thus also giving an effect of the raindrop motive. Only two dynamic changes are noted, including the addition of a ffp crescendo in m. 128 of the revised score, and the increased dynamic in m. 224 of the revised score from ffp crescendo to fffp crescendo.

Additionally, a few meter changes are observed when comparing the two scores. In m. 145 of the revised score, Tower changed 5/4 meter to 4/4. In mm. 165–66 of the revised score, meters are 4/4 and 2/4, but in the original score Tower had written 3/4 and 2/4 measures. Similarly, m. 278 of the revised score is in 3/4 but was originally a 4/4 measure.

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175 Joan Tower, telephone interview with author, 22 May 2009.
When looking at the revised score, the two cuts that Tower made after hearing the piece and deciding it was too long are at the end of m. 293 (here she omitted three measures), and at the end of m. 306, where she omitted twenty-eight measures. The first section that was eliminated from the score was a similar group of measures to the preceding three measures, and thus could be considered redundant. The second cut that Tower made, which was quite substantial, was a slow section.

Ludewig-Verdehr had one request of Tower regarding the trio. She said:

For a long time, Joan and I laughed about the fact that I objected to her cutting out what I thought was that lovely slow section—that twenty bars near the end. But, before she wrote the piece I had asked her was, “Please don’t end soft and don’t end soft and high on the clarinet,” for instance, you know the way Wings ends, and she said, “Why, is that hard?” I said, “Well, I find it hard. I’m not really a high note player—I don’t mind going up to our ultra high Bb, but after that I don’t like it. And I’m not crazy about playing soft [up there] for any length of time.” For as you know, the end of Wings is a little bit hard to control and challenging. Additionally, there is another section like that in Wings but I don’t think she was really totally aware that it was difficult.

There was an occasion during one of the times after one of the times she was there [Michigan State University] that Joan, I, and the students went out to a local pizza place. The flute teacher also came, and brought his score to the flute concerto to be autographed by Joan. I said, “Wait a minute—let me see that.” I turned to the end, and I said, “See Joan, you end loud here, and it’s in a good range.” She laughed, and I said, “Why don’t you do that for the Clarinet Concerto? You could have an ossia ending.” I think it’s always nice if a concerto ends loud. She thought about it for a while but then said, “Nah, I don’t think I can do that.”176

Regarding her one request to Tower to avoid ending the trio soft and in the extreme altissimo register of the clarinet, Ludewig-Verdehr continues:

I know that sounds trivial, but it really is interesting how that can make a difference. For example, I once planned a program of works written for us, and four of the five pieces ended softly. Let me tell you, that program just didn’t go over. So, I’m very careful now. I usually program something that’s lively to begin with, like Dash by Jennifer Higdon, a wonderful four-and-a-half-minute piece written for us, and then I’ll plan a work that will end softly, and then just before intermission something like Joan’s piece. After intermission, we might begin with a work

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that ends softly, but of course, the final work has to end loud. So, I’ve learned my lesson from that.177

The combination of clarinet, violin, and piano is an interesting timbral combination. Walter Verdehr describes the pros and cons of the unique instrumentation of Rain Waves as follows: “The personality of this ensemble is unique, because you have the three sort of perfect instruments working together. The piano is an entity by itself. The violin is the perfect acoustical string instrument, capable of brilliance and cantabile playing and all sorts of colors in between. The clarinet is a unique personality in the woodwind world, capable of a vast range of dynamics, and it has a wide coloristic range, too. Together they make a group with a very vital personality, with no weak links.” He continues: “Our dynamic range exceeds that of a string quartet because you have the piano and the clarinet, so it can be a very grand, powerful sound, and you have again all sorts of coloristic possibilities, when you include the percussive inside–the–piano playing that modern composers often like to use. Joan Tower has said it’s almost like having a miniature orchestra.”178

Regarding the challenges faced by the Verdehr Trio, Walter Verdehr mentions blend, balance, matching of intensity and strength of attacks of notes, and color matching between the three instruments in the group.179 Interestingly, in a separate interview on the Verdehr DVD, which includes Rain Waves, Tower discusses the difficulty faced by the composer when writing

177 Ibid.


179 Ibid., 31.
for this instrumentation. According to James Reel, Tower states, “It’s like three separate entities competing for the same space.”

Through close examination of this work from several viewpoints, I hope to provide insight to performers who wish to get to know this work, and thus Tower’s organic and energetic style of composition. From a performer’s point of view, I have analyzed this work with regard to formal sections, relation to the imagery of rainfall, and have included a measure-by-measure energy line analysis chart to show the pacing and levels of intensity to aid in understanding and interpretation of the work. With the assistance of insight and expertise from Ludewig-Verdehr, I will present places to consider the challenges mentioned above by Walter Verdehr to help other musicians who desire to learn and perform this work to make it more accessible and a more rewarding learning and performance experience.

In beginning to work on a piece of modern music, I find it most helpful to perform a descriptive analysis listening for themes or motives as well as possible sections to determine the structure of the piece. Identification of textural changes, arrival points, and overall mood or moods chosen by the composer should be considered. Of course, if provided, the preface to the score can be of assistance. For instance, with *Rain Waves* Tower has provided to the performers a detailed program note describing a wave-form. In conversation with Tower via a phone interview with the author, she downplayed the importance of this program note in this

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181 N.B. As mentioned in above, Tower prefers her works be analyzed not in typical theoretical fashion, as with harmonic analysis, but instead prefers performers and analysts study the organic use of energy and momentum within her works.
instance,\textsuperscript{182} but after analyzing the score, I have found that the notes included in the score are helpful. There is a wave-like form as a whole, with many sudden rises and falls to the energy and abrupt dynamic changes. In doing the aforementioned steps to become familiar with this work, I provide my analysis and thoughts for performers on \textit{Rain Waves}.

\textit{Rain Waves} can be viewed in six sections that combine to form a fluid wave of energy. An overview of these main sections reveals the following information. The first section (mm. 1–51) is rhythmically based and introduces what I will refer to as the raindrop motive. The second section (mm. 52–112) is can be viewed as similar to Messiaen’s \textit{Abîme des oiseaux}, with sustained pitches helping to distort the feeling of meter. The momentum grows and drives into the strong arrival of the third section (mm. 113–54). Here, the raindrop motive has been slightly modified to a dotted-eighth note tied to a quarter note. However, within this section Tower inserts a short change back to the smooth, Messiaen-like material from mm. 129–34. The fourth section (mm. 152–98) is again Messiaen-like, with sustained, soft entrances. Included here is a sub-section from mm. 184–98 of a \textit{dolce} and descending arpeggiated passage in which Tower slows all momentum with an extremely gradual rhythmic augmentation of the falling line. The fifth section can be viewed as three subsections (mm. 199–209, mm. 210–24, and mm. 219–230, which includes a clarinet solo). The original raindrop motive introduced at the opening of the piece returns, but starts by clarinet rather than the violin this time. This fifth section becomes stormy and agitated, and includes the most intense material in the work. The sixth section (mm. 243–325) begins with a new mood. It returns to sustained, Messiaen-like material that eventually grows into a violent storm, culminating in m. 271. In m. 300, the transformed raindrop motive, which is now a sixteenth followed by a dotted eighth, returns. In the final measure of the piece,

\textsuperscript{182} Tower, telephone interview with author, 22 May 2009.
Tower presents the original, even-rhythm raindrop motive as it was in the beginning, but this time at an extremely authoritative $fff$ dynamic level. To create the wave shape and flowing energy, Tower’s organic approach to composition has created a pattern of alternating soft, ethereal sections with vigorously rhythmic sections.

_Rain Waves_ begins with what I have labeled the raindrop motive. At the opening of the work, this motive is a two-note repeated pitch that gives the illusion of gentle drops of water lightly falling. Throughout the work this “raindrop motive” undergoes several variations. This motive is introduced as two sixteenth notes in common time. Next, it is presented as two eighth notes in 3/8 meter, and later has an added, sustained second pitch. It is re-introduced as triplets, is later transformed to an eighth followed by a quarter or dotted-quarter note, and even makes an appearance as a sixteenth followed by a dotted-eighth tied to a quarter note. Through each variation of the repeated single-pitch motive, Tower makes clear the presentation of this motive as derivative of the original. See Examples 5.1–5.5 for musical examples of these six motives.

Example 5.1. Joan Tower, _Rain Waves_, mm. 1–5.
Example 5.2. First Variation of the Raindrop Motive, mm. 28–34.

Example 5.3. Second and Third Variations of the Raindrop Motive, mm. 67–70 and mm. 72–74.
Example 5.4. Fourth Variation of the Raindrop Motive, mm. 96–112.

Example 5.5. Fifth Variation of the Raindrop Motive, mm. 113–21.

Tower combines some of the rhythmic variations of the two-note repeated pitch motive. For example, at the climax reached on the downbeat of m. 144. The raindrop motive suggests a recapitulation of sorts in m. 199, as the mood and rhythm of the opening is presented in a shortened version. The raindrop motive returns in the sixteenth followed by a dotted-eighth note variation several more times, as in m. 238 and the climactic moment in m. 300.

Tower also changes the location of the motive within a measure, thus distorting the sense of meter. For example, after m. 300, the raindrop motive is prominently displayed on the first beat of seven measures in succession, before being displaced to the second, and then also the last beats of the next ten measures as it culminates in repeated, yet rhythmically augmented patterns to arrive at the downbeat of m. 317. The motive returns several measures later, first as an elaboration of quarter-note triplets in m. 323, then to have the final word in the last measure of the published score, m. 325.

A second motive that is briefly prominent in Rain Waves occurs from mm. 218–28. This ascending three-note pattern in both simple and compound meters is used by Tower to create a distortion of meter with the ratio of 2:3. The eighth notes in the duple meters are heard in groups of ascending threes, often implying the lilt of 6/8. Tower finally notates this pattern of threes in triplet form in m. 228 to drive to the apex of the phrase on the downbeat of m. 229. With its statement of mostly staccato notes, the three-note motive does give the feeling of rain, similar to the two-note raindrop motive, but because it aurally comes across to the audience as triplets, the motion of this motive is that of constant rainfall, as in a spring shower. Its presentation in a pointilistic manner assists in the illusion of the water droplets falling, even though the pattern of notes is an ascending one.
An informed performer is able to give a convincing performance of a work. Knowledge of the work as a whole, not just an individual’s own part, is essential in the successful and masterful performance of any work, but is especially helpful in many contemporary works, which may be unfamiliar to the instrumentalist. Thus, I created an energy line analysis of *Rain Waves*. This sort of analysis of her works is the one preferred by Tower over the traditional harmonic analysis. She compares reading a traditional theoretical analysis of her work to a doctor telling her about specific measurements of her organs. Tower says:

I don’t analyze my music—I leave that for others. And oh, boy—they drive me nuts too! It is a little bit like getting a doctor’s report on your insides, you know? ‘Your intestine is forty inches long, and there’s some interesting stuff in your intestine that you might want to know about,’ and you’re reading this stuff, and you’re going, I don’t think I really want to know this!183

As mentioned in earlier chapters, Tower strongly believes the relationship of music to the physical law that every action has a reaction, and *Rain Waves* is exemplary of the care with which writes her works, starting with a firm knowledge of the past, present, and future. The pacing and energy of musical lines are of extreme importance to Tower. Hence, the overall energy line should also be recognized in order to give the appropriate levels of energy at appropriate times in the music. It is the performer’s responsibility to convey through performance where the music is most intense, where it is static and distorts the sense of time and where it is de-intensifying.

Nancy Bonds writes, “According to Tower, there are three actions in *Wings*: holding, intensifying, and de-intensifying. [Tower] feels it is important for a performer to be clear about

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183 Ibid.
where each of these actions exists.”

Bonds continues, “Tower discusses that within each of the three types of actions, exist various small-scale actions: Dry (secco), sustained, elaborative, and one-dimensional.”

Bonds performed four separate types of analyses for Tower’s work for solo clarinet *Wings* (1981) in order to find the overall intensity growth and decay within that work: “a form analysis, Hindemithian melodic analysis, graphic analysis, and a linear analysis based on Schenkerian techniques.” For my study of *Rain Waves*, I created an energy-line analysis to find where the music’s momentum and direction seemed to be going throughout the work. I highly recommend this type of analysis to others when first learning a work by Tower, as it clearly shows where, how much, and for how long a section is either growing, holding (static), or decreasing in intensity at any given point. Additionally, it also enables one to discover and make good musical decisions about the hierarchy of high points by visually demonstrating the aural phenomena within a work. How many climaxes are in a particular work? Which is the primary high point? Which is secondary? How does one successfully carry the musical line from one section to another without losing Tower’s intended level of intensity?

In creating an energy-line analysis, one must be sure to distinguish dynamic level from energy level. A section marked *forte* may be intense, but its energy may be static, rather than intensifying. It may also be possible that a section marked in the score *piano* or *pianissimo* is quite intense. (Use words, e.g., forte, OR abbreviations, e.g., F, but be consistent.)

For the following energy-line analysis of *Rain Waves* (1997), I have entered the data for each individual measure for the entire work, so that each measure has its own data point. The


185 Ibid., 169.

186 Ibid., 8.
The goal of creating this type of analysis is to see what the energy of the material does in this piece from start to finish. Each measure (or set of measures, if they remained static in intensity) was assigned a level of intensity from zero to ten based upon my interpretation of the piece after listening to and playing it, and careful score review. See Figure 5.1 for the energy line of my interpretation of *Rain Waves*.

Figure 5.1. Energy-Line Analysis of *Rain Waves*. 

![Energy-Line Analysis of Rain Waves](image-url)
As one can quickly see, the piece has several high points of intensity of varying levels and several sudden drops in intensity. Tower exploited the abrupt and extreme use of dynamics, which did at times coincide with the drop in intensity level, as seen in Examples 5.6–5.8.

Example 5.6. Abrupt and Extreme Use of Dynamics that Coincide with a Drop in Intensity Level, mm.126–29.

Example 5.7. Another Example of Use of Extreme Dynamics Used Abruptly that Coincide with a Drop in Intensity of the Musical Line, mm. 148–51.


Example 5.8. Example of Use of Extreme Soft Dynamics and Abrupt Changes in Dynamic and Intensity Levels, mm. 194–98.

Tower’s use of colors and the blending of those colors from the three instruments in this trio is enhanced by these *subito* changes in intensity. The opening measures and the section that ends in m. 198 are the two softest and most *dolce* moments in the piece, while the most intense climax occurs in m. 317, although it is not the loudest or at the end of a sextuplet run of notes. Rather, this highest point of intensity builds from m. 298, growing in intensity until the line exhausts itself in a dramatic augmentation of rhythm in mm. 316 and 317. This is one of several extremely intense moments. Several sections grow to the dynamic level of *fortissimo*, and other moments of intensity may also involve accents, but aurally, the arrival in m. 317 is the most intense and dramatic in the work, as exemplified in Example 5.9.
Other times, Tower plays with timbral shifts that cause an extremely fluid and completely seamless transfer of sound from one instrument to another. An example of this type of connection and blending of colors occurs in mm. 51–55. The pianist’s measured trill, notated as
sixteenth notes leads to a trill one half step higher, from C#\textsubscript{4} to D\textsubscript{4}.\textsuperscript{187} Tower has the clarinet enter on the same D\textsubscript{4}, and in m. 55 the violin enters to continue the piano’s C# to D trill in the same register. The sharing of the same pitch between the three different instrumental timbres creates a unique musical effect in which it is difficult for the listener to distinguish one instrument color from the other. This moment is enhanced, too, by the use of \textit{piano} and \textit{pianissimo} dynamic levels as shown in Example 5.10.

Example 5.10. Seamless Timbral Shift Between the Three Instruments, mm. 51–55.


\textsuperscript{187} N.B. In this and future references in this document, I use the octave identification system that locates C\textsubscript{4} as middle C.
This aural phenomenon is visible in the energy-line analysis above (Figure 5.1), and for the performer, it enables one to pace the energy of the work to ensure that the individual moments of intensity have a sense of direction within themselves to avoid having the entire work reach the climax too soon, lose momentum too early, or create a sense of stasis. By knowing not only where moments in a work are more or less intense, but also the hierarchy of those moments of intensity, the performer is able to then shape the energy and direction of the work as a whole.

Tower is highly interested in her works maintaining the correct level of intensity in all moments, so that the energy does not flag in the middle of the work, as she remarked in previous interviews with Nancy Bonds. For example, in a discussion of fermatas in *Wings*, Tower explains to Bonds that there are “those that occur on notes that die, stop, and then go on to the next thing, and some that have momentum that actually go through the hold to the next thing. If the second type is not treated properly, the piece dies at that point because there is no resultant action.”188 This is an example of Tower’s belief of how energy and phrases need to be performed to ensure the proper execution of musical lines, and knowledge of those lines within a context of the rest of the work on a global level is imperative to provide the most convincing performance of one of Tower’s works.

Between each of the seven most intense moments (the sixth being the most intense) that reach a level of five or above on the intensity axis of the energy line analysis chart for this work, there are sections that are much more relaxed and scattered throughout following moments of heightened volume, almost to clear the air and make one wonder if the intense moments that one heard were actually present just the moment before. For instance, after a long stretch of building intensity with repeated appearances of the raindrop motive from mm. 113–28, Tower begins a

188 Bonds, 170.
new mood and theme after a fermata over an eighth-note rest. This new section abruptly changes the mood from intense, strong, and authoritative to one of eerie tenderness. The articulation, dynamic level, and intervallic intervals dramatically contrast with those in the previous section. Tower utilizes sudden oppositions at play throughout *Rain Waves*, constantly cleansing the aural palate for something new from which to again rebuild intensity.

The use of color and juxtaposition of mood and intensity help create a constant feeling of motion in this work. In fact, there are only two brief moments where the piece seems to be static, or the energy is of the stasis type, and the energy line analysis above clearly shows these places. The two moments are in mm. 113–28 and later at a low intensity level in mm. 152–66, as shown in Examples 5.11 and 5.12. There are other shorter moments that do not drastically change intensity, but the two longest are the two mentioned above. As a performer it is important to note these two sections, to be sure that both the intense and non-intense moments are delineated, as such contrast will make for a more effective performance.
Example 5.11. Static, or Staying Energy, mm. 113–28.

Example 5.12. Another Example of Static Energy, mm. 152–66.

*Rain Waves* involves prominent use of dissonant intervals such as tritones, sevenths, and seconds, as well as octatonicism found in many of Tower’s other post-1975 works. Although one may choose to avoid much theoretical analysis of this work, as Tower contends that this is not as important as finding the lines and making sure that the energy of each line is well-known by performer and therefore audience,\(^{189}\) score knowledge is still of great importance. It does help to know some information about the kinds of material that comprises a work. The balance of the parts and structure of the score (and not just one’s own part) are helpful strategies to know what motive or interval may be present throughout all parts, and thus how to ensure that is brought out in performance. Example 5.13 demonstrates how the raindrop motive is passed throughout the three parts to create a thick texture in mm. 101–03.

Example 5.13. Raindrop Motive Passed Throughout the Ensemble, mm. 101–103.

\(^{189}\) Tower, telephone interview with author, 22 May 2009.
In first learning one’s own part it is helpful to do a descriptive analysis of melodic material or melodies that involve challenging passages of sixteenth notes, sextuplets, or the like. With a quick glance at these passages in the clarinet and piano parts in this work, one can immediately identify that they are all based on octatonic scales starting on various pitches. This makes for more effective sight reading, and it is a good way to work some of these patterns into one’s daily warm up to solidify these patterns. It is also helpful to have the octatonic-scale passages as familiar sounds in one’s ear, so that the overall listening and understanding of the colors are not disturbed by being distracted by the sound of octatonicism. As with performing all music, the more familiar sounds and muscle patterns are, the sooner one can get to a deeper level of detail and a more acute sense interpretation and shape of line.

Robert Spring, well-known clarinetist and pedagogue, said the following in a telephone interview with the author on the subject of learning and practicing a work by Tower:

If you can’t play them [Tower’s pieces] technically, you won’t be able to play them musically. The technical sections have to be worked out slowly and extremely accurately. A lot of metronome practice is vitally important. That sounds mechanical, but you must get beyond the mechanics. I am a big fan of Leslie Bassett’s music, and with his music it’s the same thing: you simply have to get beyond the technique before you can get into the music. I have so many students who might want to play her [Tower’s] pieces, but they do not want to get to the level that it takes technically in order to be effective musically. I just think it takes a lot of woodshedding. You simply cannot be at all limited technically in order to play her music. You simply have to be over that hump so that you can produce the music. 190

Tower’s use of extreme soft dynamic levels is helpful to recover from the intense sections that precede these gentle sections. A comparison between these soft, sustained passages and Olivier Messiaen’s Quatuor pour le fin du Temps (1940) can be made, especially with the third movement for solo clarinet entitled Abîme des oiseaux, or “Abyss of the Birds.” Tower has often remarked about the influence this piece has exerted on her composition. Messiaen’s work, like

190 Robert Spring, telephone interview with author, 15 August 2009.
Rain Waves, has three of the same instruments—violin, clarinet, and piano. Thus, the ‘cello, used in Messiaen’s famed quartet, is the only instrument from that quartet not in use in Rain Waves. However, Tower achieves the same type of mystic, celestial mood that Messiaen’s work employed throughout. The section that begins in m. 52 in Rain Waves is an example of one of these Messiaen-like moments, where a sense of time has been distorted and notes are used as colors that are sustained and blended with one another. See Example 5.10 from earlier in this chapter.

Another section that contrasts with preceding energetic and pointilistic material begins in m. 154, which is extremely similar in color and mood to the last movement of Messiaen’s Quartor pour le fin du Temps, with special regard to the use of solo violin. This final movement is translated as Praise to the Immortality of Jesus, which is for solo violin with piano accompaniment. At the beginning of this solo, Tower uses colors, dynamic levels, and extreme high range of the violin, which directly relate to Messiaen’s use of violin in his quartet. Tower’s violin solo does not stay in this mood, as it grows in intensity as it soon crescendos and descends to the instrument’s low range by m. 167 (see Example 5.14).
Figure 5.14. Messiaen-like Violin Solo, mm. 152–68.

Sustained pitches help create a distortion of time in these Messiaen-like sections, as does the layering of a slow-moving line of energy combined with a dark quality of the tones produced in low registers of the violin and clarinet. The intervallic make-up of these two sections (beginning mm. 154 and 169) is quite dark indeed, similar to an abyss, yet the solo violin sections explore the extreme *altissimo* register with sustained pitches that evoke images of heavenly beings and post-rainstorm natural beauty.

In addition to the two sections influenced by Messiaen’s *Quartor pour le fin du Temps*, there is a separate soft section that is again a change of mood after a strong and stormy section. In mm. 129–36 Tower abruptly changes volume, intensity, and articulation. The beginning of this section is shown in Example 5.15.

Example 5.15. Contrasting Style Soft Section, mm. 129–36.

This short section is part of a longer line, and although it is soft and contrasts with previously energetic material, it is different from the Messiaen-like moments discussed above. This material brings about an eerie mood reminiscent of Bernard Herrmann’s music from many of his Alfred Hitchcock film scores. The mood is one of uneasiness, and the slurred minor third descending motive expands and grows to a rhythmically energetic outburst. Nowhere in my research on Tower have I come across any mentioned influence of Bernard Herrmann, but his music, too, often made use of dissonant intervals such as tritones, seconds, and sevenths. Tower starts with minor thirds, but quickly expands the slurred material to include several tense tritones and sevenths (see Example 5.15).

At a performance of Rain Waves in 2004, Tower told an audience of how the music “reflected aspects of rain–drops, sheets [of rain], and hail.” Ludewig-Verdehr commented:

For instance, what I like so much in our piece, Rain Waves, is that it starts with just a few drops of rain, and then suddenly the fury of the heavens is unleashed on you. It’s as if sometimes, you know, when you’re riding on a freeway and it starts to rain so hard that you can barely see. If you’re lucky, you go under an underpass and you stay there for a while until the fury of the rain passes. There are a few places in the piece that are like that. It’s just like torrents of rain are being thrown at you.

Since the title Rain Waves evokes imagery of nature, I decided to not only look at the energy line (or waves) in this piece, but to also examine the work with analogies to various types of raindrops, showers, and rainstorms. I wanted to investigate whether the most intense moments in the work coincided with what sounded like the heaviest aural rainstorms, and to see if the dynamics reinforced this concept, since intensity does not always align with volume. In the following discussion I will describe the many types of rain portrayed by Tower, from gentle

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192 Ludewig-Verdehr, telephone interview with author, 7 August 2009.
sprinkles or soft showers to torrential downpours and gusty storms, with the hope that the use of clear imagery will enable performers to feel and project these feelings as they play the work.

The piece opens with large raindrops, which begin to fall and grow closer together. Next (in m. 7), a rain shower begins, but lets up (m. 14). After the repeat sign, the raindrops start back up and the previous material is thus repeated until m. 23. Delicate rain in the piano part begins (in m. 23), intensifying (to m. 32) with pouring rain. In m. 44, harder rain occurs, like hail or a thunderstorm.

The rain dies away (mm. 49–51) and the momentum almost comes to a halt. However, there is a color/timbre exchange from clarinet to violin to piano while the same unison notes are maintained (in mm. 48–52). Light, delicate rain emerges (mm. 64–66). The piano provides a cascading waterfall; like water running off of leaves to the wet ground below. The clarinet introduces a new eighth-note raindrop motive (mm. 67–72) where the rain is soft and gentle. This motive is passed through all three parts in various rhythmic forms. The rain starts to intensify greatly (m. 73). As the dynamics drop to subito ppp, pp, and p (m. 76), Tower portrays imagery of the wet and misty air experienced after a rainstorm. Next, raindrops are heard by the piano and after a clarinet solo, a three-note descending motive becomes a new type of rain motive (mm. 87–94). The effect of this motive that has been passed from clarinet to violin to piano is one of swooping or swirling.

The raindrop motive is again transformed rhythmically (m. 96), and is found in this section in all three instruments. These bouncing raindrops are passed from instrument to instrument and grow closer together, eventually resulting in a dialogue between the clarinet and violin (m. 107). This mood continues with constant scalar (octatonic) triplets and quarter-note triplets by the piano.
An intense arrival is reached with the clarinet and violin in opposition to the piano in the newly transformed raindrop motive that gives the allusion of a water droplet that falls then immediately creates ripples (notated as a sixteenth followed by dotted-eighth note). This motive gives the listener the effect of ripples in puddles, fitting at this moment in the piece because it has already been raining and water has gathered into puddles. The motive undergoes rhythmic diminution (mm. 120–21 and returns (mm. 122), but this time with piano in the lead and clarinet and violin following in unison. The motive grows more exciting with the closer succession of the raindrops and the higher registers as it ascends in all three parts. In m. 125, the raindrop motive starts again with piano, but all instruments are in extreme low registers.

A smooth change and new theme is presented (m.129), conjuring imagery of a misty or foggy evening. With the change to 3/4 meter, more tied- and long-note durations, the music sways like one is in a boat that sits on deep water. The focus to this point has been on individual raindrops, not on the effect that the result of so much rain may cause.

Next, Tower begins to forecast a storm (mm. 132–36), and at the arrival in the second half of m. 136, the storm has arrived. Thunderclaps can be heard three times in mm. 137–39. Tower gives the image of heavy rain with constant unison rhythm in all parts (the piano fills in with constant sixteenth notes in mm. 139–141), and unisons for the clarinet and violin. In m. 141, thunder is created again with extended and dotted rhythms for clarinet and violin, while the piano continues the constant repeated two-note sixteenth-note motive from mm. 139–41. Big, heavy raindrops continue until the intense climax is reached (m. 144), aided by augmented rhythmic patterns by the piano right hand. In m. 145, all three parts have unison rhythm in a descending pattern until the new section is reached at m. 149. It seems as though rain has almost stopped except for just a few stray sprinkles by the piano in m. 154.
Next, a new rain motive of a minor third is heard, and the tonal center later shifts from B–D to B–D# (m. 167). Tower also often uses minor thirds and tritones in the clarinet melody marked dolce espressivo (m. 169). In m. 180, marcato unison rhythm and homophony becomes a clarinet and violin duet. The two instruments play at first in unison rhythm, but then the texture transforms to a call-and-response dialogue, creating the image of slow sprinkles of raindrops. Gentle, soft rain returns (m. 184), and intensity decreases as Tower employs rhythmic augmentation of the descending triplet pattern while exploring the lower registers of the clarinet and violin. The violin shifts to an ascending minor third (G#–B), thus sustaining the current “tonal center” B (m. 188). Motion and momentum come to a gradual, rolling stop, aided by the marking rit. poco a poco. The rain stops with the clarinet pitch Bb₃ resolving to B₃, the “pitch center” for this section. This section is an excellent example of Tower’s compositional craft.

The opening raindrop-theme material returns in m. 199, this time in the upper register, and is re-introduced by the clarinet rather than the violin did in the opening of the piece. The mood is soft, like a new shower may be beginning, as each instrument plays the full or half of the original raindrop motive. However, Tower again utilizes motivic transformation, a technique employed by many composers, notably Beethoven, one of Tower’s influences. This new version of the motive is light, quick, and the last note is sustained (mm. 206–208).

Next, a light shower occurs by the violin (m. 210), accompanied by sporadic raindrops by the piano. The constant change of contour and direction of the violin raindrop sixteenth notes and quarter-note triplets provides imagery for a light shower that becomes a good, healthy rainfall. The momentum builds as the rain continues and gets a bit heavier in m. 218 when the piano takes over for one measure with a continued three-note pattern. In m. 222, the clarinet solo moves back to triplets, this time in 6/8 meter.
Intensity increases to the clarinet’s first of two outbursts (m. 224), which gives imagery of strong rain and wind gusts culminating in a musical downpour as the clarinet continues a three-note pattern. Tower employs rhythmic diminution as the clarinetist’s eighth-notes shift to triplets, which lead to a second climactic outburst (m. 228) as the clarinet plays a virtuosic three-beat sequential descending sextuplet pattern in an extended range of pitches than in the first outburst just a few measures earlier.

The “ripple” raindrop motive (sixteenth note followed by a dotted-eighth) makes a re-appearance next with sporadic raindrops by the clarinet and violin. Fluid, cascading waterfalls of sixteenth notes by the piano (mm. 243–56) are colored with sustained unison and major second intervals in clarinet and violin. Ascending and descending piano roulades sweep and stretch to extended ranges, inviting a powerful storm (m. 266). It remains highly intense, exemplified by Tower’s use of altissimo registers, accents, dissonant intervallic leaps of sevenths and seconds, double stops for the violin, and continuous octatonic scalar patterns for the piano.

The tutti release of tension occurs in m. 269 in which all three instruments layer octatonic scalar patterns. The constant ascending and descending evokes thunder, lightning, strong wind gusts, and sheets of rain. The calm after the storm arrives with clear texture in m. 275. Tower later again increases the intensity with a repeated tritone (C₆ and F#₅) by the violin and clarinet, respectively (m. 294–95) and quarter-note triplets by the piano. At this point the rainstorm explodes with intense gusto.

In m. 295, Tower reverses the tritone pitches of C and F# for the clarinet and violin. This dissonant interval grows in volume to lead to an upper-register octatonic scale by the clarinet. The piano supports the second half of the measure by joining the clarinet an octave lower to arrive at m. 297. This arrival point is stormy, but continues on to more high-register sustained
tritones. After a big crescendo, the solo clarinet octatonic scale swirls first down, then up, again supported in the last two beats of the measure by the piano one octave below to provide a push into the arrival of the most intense raindrops yet at the downbeat of m. 300.

From mm. 300–307, Tower has created a stormy atmosphere. A severe thunderstorm warning is perhaps in effect as the piano takes control of strong gusts of wind that swirl in sextuplet form and reach into the extreme high register. The clarinet and violin here only punctuate the downbeats of each measure with high, accented, loud raindrops full of tension (with tritones, seconds or major sevenths in the violin’s double stops). Tower notates constant use of pedal in the piano part, smearing the scalar runs into a severe weather pattern. There is a powerful arrival point at m. 307, which sustains intensity through m. 317. All three parts play in octaves in unison rhythm, evoking large raindrops. In m. 304, the piano alternates these big raindrops with clarinet and violin duo. This begins a call-and-response effect of the same sonorities. Tower alternates stacked octaves and tritone clusters (comprised of tritones and major sevenths) in each measure as shown in Example 5.16.
In m. 316, rhythmic augmentation is employed, creating growth of intensity of the raindrops. In m. 317, the biggest climax of the work occurs. The piano continues to augment the rhythm in octaves in each hand, resulting in a four-octave, accented slowing of the momentum. In m. 321, the energy intensifies further due to many descending seconds, which sounds perhaps a bit akin to a cat on the piano keyboard. In mm. 322–25, the intensity increases more as the...
raindrop motive ascends by the piano to be joined by clarinet and violin. Rhythm is augmented all the way to the upper register of each instrument. The last measure is marked \textit{fff} as the clarinet and violin parts play unison D$_4$, G#$_4$ and A$_3$ (with piano on the same pitches one and two octaves below) on the original raindrop motive, as Tower gets in one last tritone to end the piece with authoritative fervor.

Throughout \textit{Rain Waves}, Tower uses each of the three instruments in various roles. At times, each instrument is a soloist performing virtuosic or lyric phrases, often in the extreme high register for the violin. Other times, the instruments are employed in pairs, with the clarinet and violin acting as one melodic line poised against the piano material. This is sometimes heard as homophony, with a solo violin or clarinet line accompanied by piano. Other times, however, all three instruments are treated as equal and individual layers of color, which are woven together to create varying types of rain droplets or storms.

Although each instrument is given the role of soloist for brief moments in \textit{Rain Waves}, the clarinet is not used as a virtuosic solo instrument until late in the work. The first clarinet solo appears in m. 219. Technical passages are of the octatonic scalar variety and appear several times. For example, in mm. 271–99 the clarinet is in dialogue with the violin and piano, but this section is densely scored and stormy in which no single run is an entity in itself, but rather a gesture to create the effect of a dark and heavy storm. Additionally, the clarinet is given a solo prior to this section that is reminiscent of the \textit{Abîme des oiseaux} from Messiaen’s \textit{Quartor pour le fin du Temps}. The clarinet takes over from the solo violin, maintaining the same celestial and deep abyss feeling of the distortion of time.

The violin solo moments in \textit{Rain Waves} are soft, in the \textit{altissimo} register, and paint the picture of mystic, celestial realms. To relate it to water, it blends Messiaen mysticism with an
evening after a storm. The violin is given two solos in *Rain Waves*, with the first in mm. 152–68 and the second in mm. 210–16. Each of these is the start of a new section and brings a contrasting change of mood from the previous section.

The role of the piano in *Rain Waves* varies. At times it is a soloist, at times it speaks in opposition with a clarinet and violin duet, and at other times it provides punctuation during clarinet or violin solo material. However, the main difference in Tower’s employment of the piano in this work is during its solo passages. The piano presents much more virtuosic and busy running sextuplets, and reflects Tower’s training as a pianist. Although she has a knowledge of violin and clarinet capabilities from her years of experience with the Da Capo Chamber Players, the difficulty of the piano part in *Rain Waves* demands a highly skilled pianist. This is not to say that the violin or clarinet parts should be taken lightly. Rather, Tower’s piano writing is indicative of her career as a professional pianist.

When asked if she had any advice for others learning *Rain Waves*, Ludewig-Verdehr said the following:

I think the main thing is to go with the different personalities and characters that she depicts in the various sections. For instance, it starts at m. 25. The articulation and the gradual agitation there—go with it. In fact, I even have in my m. 45 “Let it go!” I think that’s really it—to capture all of her different personifications of something really soft and lovely, and something really exciting and driving. Like for instance, it’s so beautiful at m. 52, where the clarinet sneaks in with the piano and then we sort of go on, and you don’t quite know what’s happening when you’re listening—it’s such a marvelous merge.193

In rehearsing *Rain Waves*, I found that the slow tempos and ambiguous rhythmic values are most challenging when putting the work together. The parts are not difficult when played or read individually, but when the three parts are to be played together, a firm knowledge and understanding of all parts is required. Of course, this is true for most chamber works, but it

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193 Ibid.
seemed even more critical for *Rain Waves*. Tower’s rhythmic sections, which have a strong pulse, are followed by slow, ethereal sections that seem to distort the sense of meter and time. The seamless quality with which Tower has weaved the trio proves challenging reading for even experienced and skilled performers, as there are no clear indications of when to enter, or what the pulse may be in several spots in the work.

Compared with her other chamber works since the mid-1970s, *Rain Waves* is an exciting addition to Tower’s works list. It is the first and only work for this instrumentation that Tower has produced. Her use of color, and motivic repetition and variation drives the momentum and interest throughout the work. Her use of contrasting sections and constant rhythmic drive in contrast with timeless, ethereal melodies is striking. This work is in the typical Tower one-movement format, yet similar to a composer like Poulenc, one finds clear differentiation between melodic material within that one movement. However, unlike a composer such as Poulenc, Tower’s seamless transfers of colors and motivic ideas from instrument to instrument draw the listener in not only to discover where the line is directed, but at times, which instrument is playing.

Tower has controlled the balance of the violin, clarinet, and piano timbres for a sense of blended color. Solo moments are set up and exited masterfully, and the work is challenging yet rewarding for performers and audience alike.
**Chapter 6**


*A Gift*, the most recent work composed by Joan Tower for winds, is a quintet for piano and four winds. When asked for a new woodwind chamber piece involving flute, clarinet and bassoon by clarinetist David Shifrin and consortium member Paul King, Tower agreed, but requested to add piano and French horn to round out the ensemble.\(^{194}\) According to Shifrin:

Joan was so busy, and she knew that she wouldn’t have it in for the actual birthday [of King’s sister]. I think I gave her a year’s leeway, but she was working on her American orchestral work [*Made in America*] at that time. But, she did agree to write a movement for flute and clarinet. The germ of the quintet was this duet for flutist Tara Helen O’Connor and myself on the clarinet. And then she decided she would add bassoon because King himself played bassoon when he was younger and his sister played flute. So, that gave us flute, clarinet, and bassoon in the work. Then, we discussed whether to add horn. Joan wanted to add piano [to that group], and she thought that adding horn rather than oboe would best round out the ensemble. So, it wound up being the instrumentation of the Mozart and Beethoven quintets, but with a flute rather than an oboe.\(^{195}\)

Tower mentioned in interview with the author that she hoped that when Shifrin asked her for a wind work involving flute, clarinet, and bassoon, that he did not want a traditional woodwind quintet ensemble work.\(^{196}\) Tower states, “I cringed because he (Shifrin) said, “I want something with flute, bassoon, and, of course, clarinet in it.” And I said, “Ugh—you want a wind quintet!” He said, “That would be great.” I said, “Well, could I throw a piano in there, because

\(^{194}\) David Shifrin, telephone interview with author, 14 September 2009.

\(^{195}\) Ibid.

\(^{196}\) Joan Tower, telephone interview with author, 22 May 2009.
piano makes me feel a little more comfortable?” “O.k.” I said, “Could I take out the oboe?”

“Ok.” So that’s how A Gift came about.”

When asked why the consortium led by King and Shifrin chose Tower as the composer to write a new wind chamber work, Shifrin stated:

The reason that we picked Joan is that Paul King and I talked about a number of composers that we both admired, and Joan was the common denominator. She was the one that we both mentioned that we liked very much and thought it would be a wonderful collaboration. Of course, I’ve worked with Joan so many times and had previously commissioned Turning Points (1995). However, before that I recorded her Clarinet Concerto with the Louisville Orchestra and performed the Fantasy for clarinet and piano several times, and Joan was at those performances. We became friends and colleagues.

When asked for a wind chamber work involving flute, clarinet, bassoon and possibly piano, heads of the commissioning consortium Paul King and David Shifrin gave Tower a deadline to finish the work in time for a birthday gift for King’s sister. Since Tower knew she could not compose an entire quintet on such short notice, she first composed a short duet for flute and clarinet, A Little Gift (2006), then began work on the requested chamber work. Tower originally proposed Valentine as the title since the work was commissioned as a gift from a man to a woman and she had included a quotation of the Rodgers and Hart Broadway ballad “My Funny Valentine.” Upon hearing the proposed title, Shifrin immediately called Tower and told her that this title would not work—the piece was to be a birthday gift not from one love to another, but from a brother to a sister. With this misunderstanding out of the way, Tower immediately changed the title to A Little Gift.

After the short duet was completed, Tower was able to then get to work on the entire project, with no pressing deadline. The resulting quintet is an eighteen-minute, four-movement

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197 Ibid.

198 Shifrin, telephone interview with author, 14 September 2009.
work, which was premiered in February 2008 in New York by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Three more performances followed in Portland, Oregon with Chamber Music Northwest; in Santa Fe, New Mexico at the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival; and in Angel Fire, New Mexico at the Music from Angel Fire Festival. According to Shifrin and Tower, the musicians for the premieres around the country changed a bit from performance to performance. Shifrin comments, “I think Tara O’Connor was the only musician from the first two performances involved in the Santa Fe premiere—there were different groups each time. In addition, we had a different bassoonist at the New York and Portland performances.”

Tower recalls:

Well, that whole trip was really interesting. The commissioning body was a consortium, and we had terrific players—the best in the United States! The first premiere was at Lincoln Center, and Deutsche Grammophon was going to record it the next day, which I really didn’t want to do because I like to live with a piece, tweak it, change it; but they were so set on me being on this disc, and they had first rate players, recording engineer, and recording company, so I thought, “Maybe I should just go with this.” So, I did. There was a lot of pressure to get it right, so I said to the players, “Look, we’ve got to have an early rehearsal, like a month ahead of time, because I have to see how this thing is working—what’s working, and what’s not.” So they agreed. We met a month earlier, and I immediately made some changes, and then I worked with them very heavily for four days. [The performers were] Tara O’Connor, David Shifrin, Bill Purvis, Milan Turkovich, and Anne Marie McDermott.

Tower continues:

Well, these are about the best people you can get, and they worked so hard—they just wanted to do a good job. So, the premiere took place in New York, and then it went to Portland, with the same players except the bassoonist, who was replaced by the Seattle Symphony’s bassoonist. Then the piece went to Santa Fe, and that included again Tara O’Connor, Jeremy Denk on piano, the horn player was a terrific horn player from New Mexico...and the clarinetist was not David Shifrin. The bassoonist was Nancy Goeres, principal of the Pittsburgh Symphony—fantastic player. That was a very good group. Then it went to Angel Fire (in New Mexico), and we were back to David [Shifrin], Tara [O’Connor], Bill [Purvis], Peter Kolkay the young bassoonist from USC, and Melvin Chen on piano. So that was the birth of this piece,
which was quite exciting because I was able to go to all of these performances. Interestingly, at every one I attended I made changes—I’m still making changes!  

A Gift maintains Tower’s organic style involving a continuous melodic line, in addition to her personal sense of color and vivacious rhythmic and motivic play. However, it is unique to other works in her catalogue in several ways. First, it is a work in four movements, which is atypical of any Tower work—chamber, solo, or orchestral. Tower tends to prefer works in a one-movement format, as she likes to maintain the energy and intensity from section to section without large breaks. Second, this work is near twenty minutes in length, which is unusual for her chamber writing, as many of her works are between five and twelve minutes. Typically, only her large ensemble works are in the eighteen-to-twenty minute range. Third, Tower’s use of a standard, or popular tune in quotation in A Gift is only one of three instances in her compositional output. The only other two are Fantasy (… those harbor lights) (1983) for clarinet and piano, which uses the popular tune from the 1930s, “Harbor Lights,” and Made in America (2004), an orchestral work in which Tower incorporated the patriotic tune “America the Beautiful.”

Tower first incorporated “My Funny Valentine” into the duet, A Little Gift. She liked the duet so well that she decided that for the first movement, she would keep the flute and clarinet duet intact and made no changes to either part. To create the quintet version around this duet, she added the horn, bassoon, and piano parts. Thus, the first movement of A Gift, entitled “With Memories,” is literally her duet A Little Gift (2006) for flute and clarinet with accompaniment. Some of the quotation used in this duet presents the melody of “My Funny Valentine,” while some of the quotation is strategically embedded into the texture of the octatonic melodies.

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201 Tower, telephone interview with author, 22 May 2009.
Tower gives new roles to each of the instruments in this quintet. She uses the piano as virtuoso, accompanist, and equal ensemble member throughout. She does the same for all instruments. Tower has incorporated solos for each player, with the pianist favored with longest solo moment, 45 measures in Movement IV. The clarinet receives the second highest amount of time as soloist, with a short three measure and longer twenty measure solo in Movement IV. Next are the flute followed by bassoon and horn in terms of number of total measures devoted to solo playing. She reserves tutti playing for strategic and intense moments.

Tower extends equally shared melodic importance to all five instruments in this quintet. No one instrument or pair of instruments is featured more than the others. The flute is the highest instrument, but it is not given a sole melodic role as in most other quintets for piano and winds. Nor is the piano only soloist or accompanist to the winds. All five instruments are used as soloist, accompanist, and inner voice. For example, at some point in the work each instrument is given a pedal point, or drone, to provide an interval or color behind foreground material. The bassoon and piano spend the most time sustaining a tone as a pedal point, but the horn and clarinet are also used. Tower’s use of the piccolo in the low register in mm. 94 and 95 of Movement IV is an unusual way to incorporate this high voice.

One may call this quintet cyclical, as Tower also uses quotation of “My Funny Valentine” in each of the four movements. Composers such as Tchaikovsky and Berlioz, among others, may be known for this type of structure within a work, but this is new territory for Tower. She has incorporated the tune in such a fashion that in most instances the melody of “My Funny Valentine” is only heard in four- or five-note fragments, so one may not notice the quotation at all. In the first movement, the tune is presented immediately by the flute in mm. 1–2. Only four notes of the melody are used, and since they are all stepwise (concert D₄, E₄, F₄, and E₄), it is
easy to see why this quotation may go unnoticed to the uninformed listener or performer. In mm. 3–5, Tower hides the quotation of the first six notes of “My Funny Valentine,” but the slight distortion of the rhythm and the fact that the fourth note ascends rather than descends keeps the tune from being immediately recognized. In addition, the canonic treatment of the flute and clarinet melodies of this theme further blurs the borrowed melody. Note how in Example 6.1 the rhythm of the end of m. 5 to the beginning of m. 6 is clearly reminiscent of the word “Valentine” in the original melody.

Example 6.1. “My Funny Valentine” Fragment in the Flute and Clarinet Parts, mm. 1–6.

A GIFT
I. With Memories

Tower plainly states “My Funny Valentine” in mm. 10–11 in the clarinet part in the chalumeau register. This theme returns at the end of the movement in mm. 33–35, again in the clarinet part. However, Tower modifies the original borrowed melody so that the fifth note of the well-known tune ascends rather than descends. Maintaining the rhythmic integrity of the last three notes makes clear the reference, just as in the opening few measures of the piece.

In the second movement, Tower waits until mm. 33–39 to bring back “My Funny Valentine.” Here, the clarinet and bassoon play, at the interval of a tritone, the first four notes of the tune in a rhythmically augmented presentation, and in m. 44 Tower plays with the rhythmic statement of the word “Valentine.” Her employment of both melodic and rhythmic components of the borrowed material combined with slight variations and textural interest occurring simultaneously makes her use of quotation unexpected. Another occurrence of the quoted tune is in mm. 61–63, where the clarinet, horn, and piano have the tune at the interval of a minor third from one another. A variation may also be heard in the bassoon in mm. 72–74, accompanied by the horn with unison rhythm. Example 6.2 shows that in mm. 110–12, Tower has conditioned the listener to accept a melodically altered version of the “Valentine” tune, which often has a rhythmically augmented form of the melody. In this place, the presence of three held chords gives the illusion of the actual “Valentine” melody. The moving line for the clarinet in mm. 113–15 again alludes to the quoted melody. The presentation of four descending pitches can, at this point, provide the listener with one last varied statement of the “My Funny Valentine” melody for this movement.
Example 6.2. Melodically Altered Fragment of “My Funny Valentine” in Movement II, mm. 110–12 and Further Altered Fragment in mm. 113–15

The third movement, “With Feeling,” begins with a horn solo stating another varied quotation of the “My Funny Valentine” theme. The rhythm is highly suggestive of this theme, but Tower has yet again used a descending octatonic scalar passage rather than the actual melody penned by Richard Rodgers. Because the original theme is comprised of notes that themselves fit into a transposition of the octatonic scale with an ascending whole step followed by an ascending half step, then back down the same half step, this is most likely why it was so easy for Tower to transform this melody while still providing the illusion of the original theme. The third movement does not make great use of quotation, but Example 6.3 shows that one may be drawn to hear the “Valentine” theme in the closing three measures, as the piano’s F₃ and F₂ layered atop the held horn and bassoon pedal Ebs creates the first interval of the original “Valentine” melody. Tower resolves this major second in the final measure as the piano moves to Ebs in octaves with the bassoon and horn.

Example 6.3. Suggestion of “Valentine” Theme in Movement III, mm. 89–91.
The final movement of the quintet, “To Dance With,” opens with an extended piano solo whose first melodic material is the presentation of the first three pitches of the “Valentine” theme by the left hand under a blurry measured trill (sixteenths) by the right hand in mm. 3–5. The theme reappears in mm. 9–10 in the left hand of the piano part, this time up the octave. Throughout this movement, the piano has other allusions to the quoted melody, usually in the left-hand part, and the winds also share presentations of these “Valentine” fragments, which typically occur in the inner parts of the texture. In mm. 100–102 Tower presents the quoted melody, using it as an arrival point after rhythmic and scalar complexities as it soars in the flute part above a *subito* and clear texture (see Example 6.4).

Example 6.4. Soaring “Valentine” Theme in Movement IV, mm. 100–102.

After embedding the theme for most of the quintet, Tower gives the flute a statement of the theme not once, but twice, in succession with the fifth note of the theme finally heard the second time the flute plays the theme. The clarinet is next to get the theme, although only the first three pitches in mm. 115–16. As Example 6.5 shows, in mm. 133–36, all four winds start the theme (first three notes only) but in four different rhythmic patterns. Flute, clarinet, and bassoon start on concert D₆, D₅, and D₃, respectively, while the horn starts on concert F₃. Tower has created a thick texture in which her control of the pacing of each line gives an overall illusion of the theme as all four winds contribute to it.

Example 6.5. All Winds State Version of “Valentine” Theme at Various Rhythmic Intervals in Movement IV, mm. 133–36.

The horn is next to play the first three pitches of the theme in measures 164–166 under an intense and fully sustained texture of the rest of the ensemble. Tower hints at the theme in the next section, but it is not until after the clarinet cadenza in mm. 196–97 that the bassoon states the typical four-note “Valentine” theme. The last appearance of the four-note “Valentine” theme is for the clarinet and horn in mm. 207–209. Because octatonicism is used in both the buildup from the bassoon and the “Valentine” theme, it sounds to the listener as though the theme is layered on top of itself or that it may start at any time, but Tower only gives the resolution of the descending half note that provides the fourth note of the awaited theme after several possible entrances of the quoted melody.

Tower’s characteristic use of octatonicism is the basis of this work. Tower states that she does not choose to write in a particular mode or fashion, but that her melodies and harmonies come to her organically by listening to the music as she writes it.202 The color created by the alternating whole and half steps in this scale permeates the quintet when Tower layers multiple octatonic scales at the octave or tritone. This concept is one that Tower employs in each movement of the quintet, although at times the rhythmic energy is slow so the listener does not hear an octatonic scale, but rather the tritones or tone clusters created by the vertical stacking of the individual octatonic parts. It may not be too much of a stretch to state that at times, Tower’s writing is akin to Baroque counterpoint but in an octatonic realm.

The octatonic pattern lends itself well to the tone clusters and intervals of seconds and thirds that Tower tends to use when not using tritones or added ninth chords. Themes in all four movements of the quintet involve the octatonic scale. For example, the “Valentine” theme heard throughout the work is octatonic in its first three pitches. Example 6.6 shows that the bassoon

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202 Ibid.
solo, on which many themes in the second movement are based, is a descending octatonic melody, opposite the ascending one found in the first movement. Example 6.7 shows that the horn melody in the opening of the third movement is also a descending octatonic theme, mimicking the bassoon melody from the second movement in both contour and rhythmic variation. This occurs simultaneously as the clarinet states a variation of the “Valentine” melody in mm. 1–4.

Example 6.6. Movement II Opening Bassoon Solo, mm. 1–6.

The flute solo in m. 25 of the third movement is octatonicly based, and it continues the descending motion of the horn theme from the beginning of the movement. The flute solo is more intense than the horn’s previous statement, however, as Tower starts the theme and then breaks it up through the use of octave displacement with the leap of a tenth to restart the octatonic scalar passage. This concept is carried further when the horn states the same theme again in m. 68, this time making the jump of the tenth to restart the scale as the flute did earlier in the movement. The soaring melody in m. 100 of the fourth movement contains the octatonic
scale as its theme and is a restatement of the four-note “Valentine” fragment from the first movement.

Tower’s harmonic language in A Gif is typical of her other post-1974 chamber works. She uses colorful, minimalistic repetitions of eighth notes or triplets in intervals of seconds, thirds, or fourths in place of any functional harmonic progressions. This is not to say that her compositions are atonal. Rather, they are tonally centered, and often the intervals or chords contain dissonant sonorities such as tritones, seconds, sevenths, fully diminished or augmented seventh chords with the ninth added and the fifth or seventh omitted. Examples of this abound throughout the quintet, especially in Movements II, III, and IV.

Tower makes use of octaves to add depth and strength to chosen sonorities. This may be for the left hand of the piano part, or in multiple wind parts that sustain the same pitch in different registers. Tower uses octaves in another manner, in which all parts in their respective independent lines align on a single pitch class in octaves with one another on the downbeat of a measure. This trait can be found many places in this work, but most notably in Movement IV, mm. 71–73 (see Example 6.8), mm. 81–83 (see Example 6.9), and when the piccolo and clarinet parts join forces to play the same melody in octaves from mm. 101–103 (see Example 6.10).
Example 6.8. Tower’s Use of Octaves in Movement IV, mm. 71–73.

Example 6.9. Tower’s Use of Octaves on Downbeats in Movement IV, mm. 81–83.

The second harmonic feature Tower employs in each movement of *A Gift*, following the use of the tritone, is the tone cluster. Tower employs many clusters of minor and major seconds and minor thirds. Movements I, II and IV are full of these tone clusters, whereas the third movement has heavier use of major and diminished triads. Movement I is built almost solely of close tone clusters, 35 of the 123 measures in Movement II use them, Movement III has only six measures with clusters, and Movement IV has 25 measures of tone clusters.

The minor third seems to be a favored interval in *A Gift*. When she does not employ tritones or other clustered tones, Tower enjoys the color of the minor third. Examples are most numerous in the second and fourth movements, with 25 and 33 measures involving minor thirds,
respectively. Typically, Tower uses this interval as a tonal center, and stays with each one for a long period of time before moving to a new tonal center.

Each movement of *A Gift* varies from those that surround it, and she creates the overall architectural scheme of a through-composed, organic energy that weaves itself from the beginning to the end of the work. The first movement, *With Memories,* only 37 measures, is the shortest of the four and is essentially a flute and clarinet duet.

The second movement, *With Song,* begins not with a flute and clarinet duet as in the first movement, but with a twenty-measure duet between the bassoon and horn. It is as though Tower is appeasing all performers, making sure all parts are on an equal playing field. Through the many tritones and tone clusters, Tower eventually adds chords rather than open intervals or single melodic lines in the piano part in mm. 56–57. Later in the movement, she includes the timbre of the piccolo. Tower alternates the use of winds versus piano in short statements not longer than four or five measures in this movement, surrounded by tutti moments of color that are just as brief. The movement is a bit of a bell curve, in that the dense and dissonant colors in the middle of the movement are surrounded on both sides by dyadic intervals. Tower’s placement of the bassoon solo at the end of Movement II rounds out the structure with the same color found in the beginning of the movement, adding to the bell curve.

The third movement, “*With Feeling,*” is the shortest in terms of alternations of color. Tower chose to compose longer segments of timbral combinations in this movement than in any other. She creates multiple extended chamber and solo moments that transition to either a shared wind melody that is built harmonically from the lowest voice to the highest in mm. 8–14 and 51–60, or rolled piano chord interludes as in mm. 21–24 and 60–64. The single line shared by the four winds is also alternated with solo piano on colorful rolled chords (see Example 6.11).
With a sixteen-measure flute solo, eleven-measure horn solo, and ten-measure bassoon solo in this movement, it is the most virtuosic for the individual instruments. The clarinet and piano have prolonged solo moments in the fourth movement. With the clarinet, horn, and bassoon trio that makes an appearance twice in the opening twenty measures of wind work, and the unaccompanied ten-measure clarinet and horn duet, the third movement is not only wind heavy but is sub-group dominated. The piano takes a background role to the winds in this movement, providing mainly interlude and accompaniment colors, which shows how Tower has found various ways to alter and re-combine the mixed timbres in this ensemble.

Since the piano was not used with prominence in the third movement, Tower makes up for it by giving the piano a 45-measure unaccompanied solo at the opening of the fourth
movement. Now that four of the five instruments have had a virtuosic solo moment, Tower blends the timbres more often and in shorter timbral strokes, almost as watercolors blur and blend in a painting. Between the many one- or two-measure combinations, Tower puts to use more tutti playing, but usually in four- or five-measure intense moments. The rhythmic energy is busiest in this movement, and the dynamic range is stretched more often than in the preceding three movements. Clarinet and bassoon each have brief solos, but the clarinet is also given a twenty-measure solo (see Example 6.12) near the end of the work that is marked Quasi Cadenza for the last part of the solo (see Example 6.13). This solo is the most virtuosic display of expression of the five solos in the piece, most likely stemming from Tower’s close friendship with clarinetist David Shifrin.

Example 6.12. Beginning of Extended Clarinet Solo in Movement IV, mm. 177–80

Example 6.13. Clarinet *Quasi Cadenza* near end of Movement IV.

The movement winds down with almost exclusively single-measure timbral alternations to end the work as it began, on a single pitch class. Overall, the work as a whole has variance in density, color, and texture, but it starts and ends low and soft with unison pitches.

The clarinet is the most used and most often combined wind in the quintet. It receives the greatest level of exposure and excitement of all solo moments given to the instruments, and it is the only instrument combined in duet with each of the other winds. Trios occur most often in this work, and the clarinet is involved with five of the seven trios. The piano and horn are also involved in five of these trios, but as the piano is at times doubling one of the other voices in the trios, it seems that Tower chose the clarinet and horn timbres to mix most with the other voices. In terms of quartet sub-ensembles, Tower chose to use clarinet, horn, bassoon, and piano for a total of five times in Movements II and IV. She briefly paints with the color produced by the flute, horn, bassoon, and piano, but only for a single measure in the fourth movement.

The clarinet seems to have a more prominent role than the flute in this work, although it is not the highest soprano voice available to Tower. The full range of the instrument is explored, from the lowest possible tone (concert D₃) on the instrument up to a normal altissimo, concert F#. This highest part of the range is somewhat difficult to play in tune and with smooth transitions between notes, but is not beyond the normal required range for advanced college and professional level players. Tower does not always mimic the use of altissimo playing between the flute and clarinet. Often, the flute is in its extreme high range while the clarinet is not as high (see Example 6.14). Generally, the clarinet seems to be most used as an inner voice, second as a solo voice, and third for prominent passages in the opening and closing measures of the work.
Example 6.14. Flute in Altissimo Register while Clarinet is in Clarion Register in Movement II, mm. 109–12.

![Musical notation image]


In order to understand the overall momentum of the energy of this work, I have included energy-line analyses of each of the movements. As discussed in Chapter Five for Rain Waves, performers of Tower’s works should comprehend the flow of the organic line that weaves itself throughout the piece. When clarinetist Robert Spring wanted to record works by Tower, she required that he send her a recording of his performance of Debussy’s Premiere Rhapsodie to ensure that he would be able to carry a long melodic line without breaking it. 203 Figures 6.1–6.4 are four energy-line analyses, one for each of the movements of A Gift. The horizontal axis

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203 Robert Spring, telephone interview with author, 16 August 2009.
indicates measure numbers and the vertical axis depicts the level of intensity from 1–10 with ten being highest possible level of intensity.

Figure 6.1. Energy-Line Analysis for Movement I, *With Memories.*
Figure 6.2. Energy-Line Analysis for Movement II, *With Song*.
Figure 6.3. Energy-Line Analysis for Movement III, *With Feeling*. 
Based upon my description of the work, the energy lines of the four quintet movements suggest the following. First, after Tower reaches a climactic arrival point with great intensity, she immediately and abruptly drops the intensity to a low level. Only a few times does she sustain the intensity peak for several measures. However, after such a sustain, or use of “holding” energy as Tower refers to it, the intensity is still drastically reduced. Additionally, one can clearly see that she normally takes many measures to build to a high point. Rarely does she immediately increase the intensity level several levels at a time.
When building intensity over a period of time, Tower tends to work up to a certain point, then drop the intensity before building it higher than she recently left it. It is almost as though one could fill in the dropped space on the energy line to reveal that the line continues upward. For example, in the energy-line analysis of Movement II, m. 48 drops down, but when Tower rebuilds up to m. 76 she picks the energy level back up in the gap from m. 45 to m. 64 in what could have been a continuous and steady build up. Each drop in intensity rebuilds to a higher level than from which it came. The only non-drastic decreases in intensity occur in mm. 98–105 in Movement II and mm. 2–11 and 20–25 of Movement III.

Layered on my initial energy-line analyses, I noted any tempo, rhythmic, or orchestrational change to see if changes in the intensity in this work align with any other musical factor. From my study, I note that many changes in intensity occur simultaneously with either a change in timbre or rhythmic grouping. For example, in m. 48 of Movement II the intensity drops abruptly as the bassoon solo begins. Later in the same movement in mm. 109–113, Tower brings the timbre of the flute back into the mix as opposed to the color of the piccolo she used in previous measures. In Movement III, the drop in intensity from mm. 50–51 coincides with the start of the woodwind quartet’s shared melody. In m. 65 of the same movement, the intensity drops abruptly as the piano ends its rolled chords from the previous four measures. In Movement IV, the intensity drops from mm. 42–43 as the texture evens out with the piano solo, moving to a 3/8 pattern to begin a build up to the entrance of the winds with the opening melody. In m. 115 of the Movement IV, the intensity falls for the start of the short clarinet solo.

All four movements end with low intensity and most times unison pitch class soft tones from one or two remaining instruments. Although the Movements I and II begin in a relaxed manner, Movements III and IV open with intensity from the first motive. Movement I has a
single high point, while the other movements have multiple intense moments. With regard to high points of the most passionate colors and textures of Movements II, III, and IV, the highest and most powerful moment occurs last and usually near the end of the movement. The exception to this is the third movement, whose highest moment is in m. 75.

Movement III stands out from the others. It’s the least intense, the second shortest in number of measures, and structurally different from the other three with regard to how often timbres change and the winds are used in conjunction with one another. The longer solo, duet, and trio melodies lead from one to another with wind quartet statements between some of them. This movement is mainly a showcase for the winds, as the piano is not used for the first twenty measures, and when it arrives, it has a secondary role to the solos or duets it accompanies. With regard to intensity, the third movement also takes longer than any other movement to relax after the longest arrival.

Most of Tower’s works are in a one-movement format, regardless of size of ensemble. Her orchestral, solo, and most chamber works have been written without a break in the piece. Tower chose to write a four-movement work for this project rather than her usual one-movement scheme. When asked why she did so, Tower stated, “That’s a hard question. I’m not sure. I think it’s because I know the winds have to breathe and relax [laughs], and take breaks; they need to take time to recover and all that. And I think also the listener needs to do the same thing with winds. So, I don’t know. There’s something operating there.”

Tower’s keen awareness of the needs of the performers plays a part in determining how her works are structured, but I believe that the second part of her statement is most telling. Tower’s knowledge of what the listener needs based upon the timbres, colors, and intensities is

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204 Tower, telephone interview with author, 22 May 2009.
important to her. She composes her music so that audience members can comprehend what she has to say musically.

Most of her chamber works over fifteen minutes in length involve string players who do not need to physically breathe to produce sound, nor do they need to swab moisture out of their instruments. Although *A Gift* exists in four separate movements, Tower has controlled the energy from movement to movement so that the flow of the work still feels like a continuous piece. Performers should bear this in mind when performing *A Gift* not take too long to swab out their instruments and rest in order to maintain the flow of the work as a whole.

In becoming familiar with both *Rain Waves* and *A Gift*, two of Tower’s most recent works for winds, I have found some similarities and differences in the ways in which she has written for a wind chamber group versus when strings are present. All of the Da Capo Chamber Players works involve string players (violin and ’cello), so I have compared these to *Rain Waves*. A constant in Tower’s writing in her post-1974 chamber works is colorful language. She employs many of the same harmonic colors such as tritones, sevenths, and tone clusters of seconds and thirds. Her melodies tend to be octatonic, and make use of not just the same pitches, but the scalar order of those pitches.

Virtuosity remains a trademark in Tower’s compositions as well. Her demand of the performer with regard to technical facility and rhythmic precision is high; however, the virtuosity is not for a purely technical reason. It serves a musical and timely purpose, unlike the purely serialist writing she used for her pre-1975 works. Each performer in her chamber works is challenged. Although she provides solo moments for each instrument, no one part is secondary to the others in either *Rain Waves* or *A Gift*. The rhythmic complexity of her works is interwoven in all parts, and the overall melodic line makes its way from the beginning to the end. With the four
movements in *A Gift*, the momentum is carried by one all-encompassing energy line from start to finish. There are waves along the way, as in *Rain Waves*, but the intensity levels in the work show how Tower’s organic style of writing allows for one statement.

Differences in Tower’s writing for chamber works involving strings, versus those with no strings, are few. She takes advantage of the color possibilities with string bowing choices and available range. In *Rain Waves*, she uses many Messiaen-like characteristics in the violin solo moments, whereas in *A Gift* she uses varying combinations as timbral possibilities. Of course, in a trio there are not as many options as there are with a quintet; however, Tower does tend to treat the wind group differently in this way. Tower is comfortable with strings\(^{205}\) and makes use of how easily they blend with other instruments, whether in a trio or sextet setting as in her Da Capo Chamber Players days. Because the timbres of a wind chamber group are so varied, she was unable to treat this group as if it were a homogeneous quartet or quintet. She created new and novel timbral changes and combinations to make this ensemble have a cohesive sound, each instrument doing its part to seamlessly carry the melodic line.

In conclusion, knowledge of Tower’s harmonic and orchestrational language in *A Gift*, in addition to creating an energy line analysis of each movement, can aid in getting to know this work. Having a mental picture of where the momentum goes will help with knowing where to breathe, where to be aware of elisions of pitches from flute solo to clarinet and horn duet. One good example is in m. 40 of Movement III where the clarinet must emerge to take over the same concert E that the flute solo ends upon, thus eliding both the pitch and the melodic line.

Intonation, in general, must be carefully observed in this work, as Tower’s use of many open sonorities, whether they be consonant thirds or dissonant tritones, will require attention

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\(^{205}\) Ibid.
from all musicians. The tritones and perfect fifths must be held exactly in tune, as must the many octaves and seconds. It will also be helpful to know where the many diminished-seventh chords with added ninths and omitted fifths occur to aid with balance and intonation.

The energy-line analyses are helpful with learning the structure of each movement and the entire work, and they also point out where the most intense moments occur. Performers should be aware of where these moments are, and more importantly, which intense moment in the work is the most powerful. When this is known, it is possible to shape one’s interpretation of the work. It can make rehearsals more effective as well, as these analyses are almost like maps of Tower’s musical line. Although these graphs are a subjective interpretation, it is easy to see why Tower prefers this type of analysis of her works instead of a harmonic analysis. The line graphs provide a window into Tower’s compositional craft of blend, balance, and timbral shifts.
Conclusion

Tower told interviewer Kyle Gann, “Chamber music is my passion.”206 She has composed many chamber works over the past four decades, and the two works examined in this document are in some ways typical of her color choices and craft. Yet because of their unique instrumentation, they provide challenges of timbral balance and gave Tower various options for color combinations. Tower’s musical language allows her to balance virtuosity with the fluidity of her long, wave-like melodies. Myrna Francis Schloss writes, “Through Tower’s use of orchestration, form, and musical materials, her final product which combines these elements is not simply a repetition or imitation of what has been written, but an intertwining of these characteristics into the context of her own new musical work.”207 Tower’s orchestration comprises unique timbral combinations that give her work a recognizable profile. This aspect, combined with her organic style of melodic writing, produces powerful and rich musical works.

It is hoped that this document provides clarinetists with information on two of Tower’s most recent compositions for the instrument. The information presented here has provided an interpretive guide to these two works, including words of the composer, information on each clarinetist for whom each work was written, and an energy line for each piece. Tower’s wonderful craftsmanship is exemplary in Rain Waves and A Gift, and these works exemplify her current compositional style.


Appendix A

Works Featuring Clarinet by Joan Tower and Their Dedicatees

*Breakfast Rhythms I and II* (1974–75), (clarinetist Alan Blustine of the Da Capo Chamber Players first played this work, although it is not formally dedicated to him)

*Wings* (1981) for clarinet solo, Laura Flax

*Fantasy (... those harbor lights)* (1983) for clarinet and piano, Richard Stoltzman

*Clarinet Concerto* (1988), Charles Neidich

*Turning Points* (1995) for clarinet and string quartet, David Shifrin

*Rain Waves* (1997) for clarinet, violin, and piano, the Verdehr Trio

*A Little Gift* (2006) for flute and clarinet, David Shifrin

*A Gift* (2007) quintet for piano and winds, David Shifrin
Appendix B

Telephone Interview with Joan Tower
Friday, May 22, 2009
Lori Baruth

LB: I would like to start with general information about writing for the clarinet. You have given clarinetists so many wonderful chamber works, now that you have written so many, what features do you feel are the clarinet’s best attributes, and how do you like to employ those in your works?

JT: One reason composers get involved with instruments is that they either hook up with a player who plays that instrument, they grew up with it somehow, or they play it themselves. So for example in the guitar or brass worlds, you get a lot of music written by guitarist composers, and the same goes with the brass [composers/performers].

The reason I sort of fell in love with the clarinet is because I was around so many really great clarinetists, starting with Laura Flax, and then all of the others including David Shifrin, Charles Neidich, and Richard Stoltzman. So, as I was traveling around the clarinet world, I was intrigued with these players who could play so many different things as well as the versatility of the instrument itself, because it could do anything. It can play softly; it can play loudly; it can play fast; it can play slow. It’s a tremendously versatile instrument.

Plus, there was a piece that Laura used to play, the slow movement from Messiaen’s *Quartet for the End of Time*, and I listened to that for many years because we [Da Capo Chamber Players] played it a lot. It’s such an impressive piece. Messiaen used the clarinet in extraordinary ways. So, that answers the first part of the question. And the second part was?
LB: How do you like to employ what you find the clarinet can do best in your works?

JT: Well, that was sort of answered by the first question. I use the clarinet with a lot of range, a lot of power, and a lot of different gages.

LB: When writing for the clarinet, do you think of the same qualities (silky, powerful) for most of the pieces you write, or do the specific characteristics of the clarinetist for whom you are writing become more of an influence on the piece? I know that with Richard Stoltzman, you were not familiar with his playing when he first contacted you for a piece (which turned out to be Fantasy), but what about with David Shifrin, since you’ve composed three pieces for him now [Turning Points, A Little Gift, and A Gift]?

JT: Not really. Well, this is a problem all composers have. You have a player that you’re writing for, whom you adore, and they play a certain way. But you also have a piece of music you have to write. So, those two things interact—the piece of music has to override anything else [laughs], because you have to make the best piece you can. But I think that in terms of Laura’s playing, I did incorporate that silky, slithery, panther–like quality of her playing, and it did definitely influence the way I started that piece [Wings], as you can tell.

LB: O.k., but that was a unique situation, and that hasn’t really happened since then?
JT: Well, yes and no. That’s a hard question. It’s not as easy as it seems on the surface.

Regarding Neidich [Charles Neidich, for whom Tower wrote her Clarinet Concerto (1988)]—I didn’t know him when I wrote the Concerto. I met him once, and I remember him going out the door and saying, “You can write anything for me. So don’t worry about it. Just write anything.” So I started to feel like I had to write something virtuosic for him. I kept saying, “this piece is too easy,” and I kept making it more and more difficult [laughs]. I think it’s one of the hardest pieces I’ve ever written for anybody [laughs], and yes, there is some effect that a player can have on you.

LB: O.k., great. I’d like to move on to your use of visual art or dance for inspiration in your music. It is widely known that the majority of your most current works have visual imagery in their titles. Some of the older interviews with you that I have read mention your drawings, and how some of these have even made it to CD covers – for example, Black Topaz and Wings. Do you still use visual art as a source of inspiration in starting to compose a work?

JT: I like to draw. I still draw. I draw while I’m writing certain pieces, but I used to think that the picture would affect the piece, and that doesn’t work. It’s a separate art; it has separate parameters. I mean, you could draw a straight line up, and then write a piece that goes straight up, and yes, there are certain connections you can make, but it’s not in time, and there are so many differences. So, now I don’t do that. I actually draw as therapy. It’s sort of like a different creative activity that I do when I’m getting hung up with the piece. It’s like a little break, I think.

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208 Laura Flax, quoted in Oddo, 103.
LB: So, do you find that it ever works its way from what you drew during a break back into your
music, or is that something that you keep separate?

JT: No.

LB: [Laughs] I was just curious.

JT: It depends on how they play off of each other—only if I do them in the same hour or time
frame.

LB: I’d like to ask about David Shifrin, as you’ve now written three pieces for him.

JT: Yes, he’s played all my pieces except for *Wings*.

LB: Oh, that’s interesting.

JT: Yes, but he’s taught it so much that he feels like he could play it in his sleep!

LB: I’m sure!

JT: [laughs]
LB: What about Elsa Verdehr? I’d like to talk about the Verdehr Trio and *Rain Waves*. Did you know her [Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr] at all before they commissioned that work from you?

JT: Oh, yes. Elsa and I are good friends. She’s a dynamite teacher and clarinetist. And many of her students have played my pieces.

LB: Of course!

JT: I went to Michigan and they all played everything—all of the pieces.

LB: Great! She has a great studio up there.

JT: You studied with her?

LB: No, I studied with a colleague of hers, Jim Pyne. They were at Eastman together, and I know of her pretty well.

JT: Oh, I see. Well, they did a farewell concert for her in Canada, did you know about that?

LB: I did read about that.
JT: Yes, and they took my *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman No. 5*, which is for four trumpets, and they turned it into [a piece for] clarinet choir. I didn’t hear it, but I would have loved to hear that sound!

LB: Wow, that’s pretty cool!

JT: Yes.

LB: I’ve read a lot about your advocacy not only for new music, but also for the composer/performer relationship. You’ve often talked about composers that perform and performers that compose.

JT: Yes.

LB: Have you seen a change in the separation of those two things over the years—has that gotten any better?

JT: Well, not really. The conservatories still produce performers, and the universities, mostly composers. The structures are different. There are very rarely active composers who are also performers, and most of them are on the downtown [NY] scene. They have their own group, like Phil Glass and Meredith Monk, for example. But in our classical music world, there is too much separation—way too much separation.
LB: I would agree. As someone with performance degrees myself, I would be terrified of composing things [laughs].

JT: Yes, but you can be terrified of performing, too, but that shouldn’t stop you, you know what I mean? [laughs]

LB: Yes, that’s true. My husband’s a good writer; he’s a jazz musician.

JT: Oh, well jazz musicians are always writing and creating. It’s part of the job.

LB: O.k. Can I talk a little about the organic process of your compositional approach?

JT: Yes.

LB: How do get started when writing chamber music today? Is this different from how you wrote pieces in the 1970s, 1980s, or 1990s? (i.e., do you think differently today about writing chamber music than in years past?)

JT: A chamber music piece as opposed to what kind of piece?

LB: Orchestral pieces, or large genres.
JT: I don’t think there’s a lot of difference. The culture is different, but not the writing of the piece. It’s the same. Whatever piece you write, it’s pretty much the same. You may have more experience with one than the other, but you still have to produce a piece of music that works. And that’s essentially the same for whatever genre for which you write. Some instruments are more frustrating than others. For example, the guitar is a pain in the ass, pardon the expression [both laugh], because the guitar is so unusual—it’s not like any other instrument. And the organ’s not easy…but you still have to write a piece.

LB: O.k. Would you say the same thing for solo works?

JT: Yes. It’s the same thing. It’s a little easier, because you have fewer notes to write down [both laugh].

LB: Do you think there’s a difference in writing for wind chamber music versus brass, percussion, or string chamber music?

JT: Not really, except again, if you’re more comfortable with winds. Some feel more comfortable with strings. Some don’t feel comfortable with anything [laughs]. I happen to love percussion, so I’ve made a determined effort to know percussion. I feel more comfortable with percussion than with anything.

LB: So, with even all of the pieces you wrote for Da Capo—only a couple of them use percussion—
JT: Yes. Well, I think the Da Capo combination is not easy because it involves two winds, two strings, and piano. It’s like a mini orchestra. I love the string quartet. I’m really into that. I’ve written four works in that genre, and I’m going to write a fifth. Additionally, I’ve done a clarinet quintet, and an oboe quintet, piano quintet, I’m writing a flute quintet right now. So, I love strings, and I think it’s partly to do with the world, the culture. I think the string quartet world is a phenomenal world because first of all, they’re like four composers. They have to be very creative with what they do. In addition, it’s such a competitive world—they must know what they’re doing. But they also have to know musically what they’re doing. So when you go in as the composer and make changes, it’s perfectly natural to them, because they’re making changes all the time, you know! It’s a wonderful world.

The wind world is harder, as you know. There’s less repertoire, and fewer composers are willing to write wind quintets because it’s a very big challenge. The timbres are so mixed. I think composers would rather write for four clarinets or four flutes than for a wind quintet. Would you like me to talk about *A Gift*?

LB: Yes, that would be great.

JT: O.k. *A Gift* was a very recent piece commissioned by David Shifrin. And if David commissions me, I will do it, because he is someone whom I think has really worked hard for the literature; he creates a lot of literature, so I’ll do it right away. However, I cringed because he said, “I want something with flute, bassoon, and of course, clarinet in it.” And I said, “Ugh – you want a wind quintet!” He said, “That would be great.” I said, “Well, could I throw a piano in
there, because piano makes me feel a little more comfortable?” “O.k.” I said, “Could I take out
the oboe?” “O.k.” So that’s how A Gift came about.

It was for the commissioner [Paul King], a bassoonist. He and his sister played bassoon
and flute, respectively. He wanted to give a her a gift for her sixtieth birthday. I thought it was
his wife, so I wrote a piece based on “My Funny Valentine,” and I called it Valentine. David
called, and said, “You can’t call it Valentine; it’s for his sister!” I said, “Why didn’t you tell me
that in the first place?” He said, “I did tell you that in the first place.” I replied, “Oh, I forgot.”
“O.k.” So, we switched it to A Gift.

LB: Got it. O.k. [both laugh] So the A Little Gift, the flute/clarinet duet was first, obviously…

JT: Well, David [Shifrin] wanted something to celebrate that summer, and I couldn’t compose a
full quintet in that amount of time. So, I gave him the duet, which became the basis of the first
movement. Do you have a score to that?

LB: Yes, I do.

JT: And a recording?

LB: I do not yet. I was going to ask you if you happen to have a recording, as I’ve not been able
to find one on iTunes or Schirmer.

JT: Oh, did Schirmer not have one?
LB: No, I don’t think so. I will double check with them, but I didn’t see it anywhere.

JT: Oh, maybe I haven’t sent them one yet. I have a recording. The reason that I didn’t send it to them is because it keeps changing. I’m one of those composers who doesn’t give the piece up until I’ve really nailed it. [Takes down author’s address]

LB: Thank you. That will be a gift, that’s for sure. [Both laugh]

JT: Well, that whole trip was really interesting. The commissioning body was a consortium, and we had terrific players. The best in the United States! The first premiere was at Lincoln Center, and Deutsche Grammophon was going to record it the next day, which I really didn’t want to do because I like to live with a piece, tweak it, change it; but they were so set on me being on this disc, and they had first rate players, recording engineer, and recording company, so I thought, “Maybe I should just go with this.” So, I did. There was a lot of pressure to get it right, so I said to the players, “Look, we’ve got to have an early rehearsal, like a month ahead of time, because I have to see how this thing is working—what’s working, and what’s not.” So they agreed. We met a month earlier, and I immediately made some changes [laughs], and then I worked with them very heavily for four days. I worked with Tara O’Connor, David Shifrin, Bill Purvis, Milan Turkovich, and Anne Marie McDermott. Do you know any of these people?

LB: Yes.
JT: Well, these are about the best people you can get, and they worked so hard—they just wanted to do a good job. So, the premiere took place in New York, and then it went to Portland, with the same players except the bassoonist, who was replaced by the Seattle Symphony’s bassoonist. She was very sick, but she pulled it off, I don’t know how. But then the piece went to Santa Fe, and that included again Tara O’Connor, Jeremy Denk on piano, the horn player was from New Mexico—I can’t remember—terrific horn player; unbelievable. And the clarinetist was not David Shifrin. The bassoonist was Nancy Goeres, who is principal of the Pittsburgh Symphony—fantastic player. That was a very good group.

Then it went to Angel Fire [in New Mexico], and we were back to David, Tara, Bill, Peter Kolkay the unbelievable young bassoonist from USC, and Melvin Chen on piano. So that was the birth of this piece, which was quite exciting [laughs] because I was able to go to all of these performances. Interestingly, at every one I attended I made changes [laughs]. I’m still making changes!

LB: Are they little changes, or big changes?

JT: Initially, I think I made a big change, but I don’t remember what it was. But after that it was more cosmetic, I call it.

LB: O.k.

JT: But it was quite an experience.
LB: That sounds exciting. How close together were those four premieres?

JT: They all occurred within the year. The premiere was in February at Lincoln Center, and then it went to all of the previously mentioned summer festivals.

LB: So, you used “My Funny Valentine” because you thought it was his wife, but it was his sister, and you also used “Harbor Lights” in Fantasy. Are those the only two examples of using popular tunes in your works?

JT: No, well popular, yes.

LB: Not like in Petroushskates, where you quoted Stravinsky.

JT: Well, Made In America is based on “America the Beautiful.”

LB: That’s true.

JT: But that’s more a patriotic tune.

LB: For the duet, A Little Gift, did David Shifrin come to you and ask for a flute/clarinet duet, or did he just want a chamber work and that instrumentation is what you chose first?
JT: No, I told him that there was no way I could write the chamber piece by the summer for Paul King’s sister’s birthday; I just couldn’t do it. Instead, I said that I would write a little duet, and he could play that first. So that’s what they did. And then I found that I liked the duet enough that I kept it in tact, and then I added the ensemble to it for the quintet.

LB: O.k.

JT: David came to the first rehearsal and said, “Whoa! It was the same piece!” [laughs]

LB: Yes, I thought that was really neat!

JT: It’s exactly the same [laughs] [the flute and clarinet parts in the first movement of A Gift].

LB: When you were writing the other three parts on top of the duet, did you find that easier or more challenging to work from within a skeleton than when you normally compose a piece?

JT: It’s very hard. It’s not something I recommend. My students try to do it every once in a while. It’s like the Bach style, where you write one line, and then you add another line, and you add another line, and then you send it to California to have them add another line [laughs]. I don’t think that works because every time you add something, it affects the piece—it turns it into another piece. So basically what the ensemble does in the first movement of A Gift, and that’s the only time I’ve ever done that kind of composing, is to support the duet, basically. It’s accompanying or enhancing it, trying not to detract from it.
LB: And then for the other three movements, it changes.

JT: Yes, then the music is all new. Just the first movement is the same.

LB: How did you come up with the movement titles?

JT: I don’t know. Titles are not that important, but I do try to give interesting titles. It was just trying to keep the idea of “My Funny Valentine” in there somehow, you know, “With Memories,” “With Song,” “With Feeling,” “To Dance With.” It’s just a tie-in, that’s all.

LB: O.k. So the music came first, and then the titles?

JT: Yes, always.

LB: O.k. With A Gift being a multi-movement work, whereas many of your works are one-movement works…

JT: Yes, actually, that’s the only one, except for the Piano Suite, but that is kind of a different idea.

LB: Would you count Breakfast Rhythms I and II in that list, too?
JT: Oh, I try to forget about that piece. That’s from my serial style.

LB: But you wrote your D.M.A. document on that piece.

JT: Well, I don’t want to acknowledge it too much.

LB: O.k. [laughs] What made you choose to write four separate movements for *A Gift*, rather than keeping it in your typical one-movement form?

JT: That’s a hard question. I’m not sure. I think it’s because I know the winds have to breathe and relax, [laughs] and take breaks; they need to take time to recover and all that.

LB: And swab out!

JT: And I think also the listener needs to do the same thing with winds. So, I don’t know, you know. There’s something operating there.

LB: When you were working “My Funny Valentine” into the duet, I noticed that you only used four or five-note fragments. Did you work around the tune, or did you work the tune into your other ideas first?

JT: I sort of worked around it. It’s very hidden. You don’t hear that tune very blatantly anywhere.
LB: Right. I thought it was very interestingly done.

JT: Right. It’s very buried.

LB: May I ask you a few questions on *Rain Waves*?

JT: Yes.

LB: The Verdehr Trio commissioned *Rain Waves*. Although there are now quite a few works written for this combination of instruments (most everyone instantly remembers Bartók’s *Contrasts* first, but the Verdehr Trio has commissioned many works), what challenges did you find regarding balance and blend in writing for the instrumentation of violin, clarinet, and piano?

JT: Keeping the violin and clarinet equal was very difficult because the clarinet tends to predominate in that setting. It’s a tough combination.

LB: You gave a very specific program note for *Rain Waves*. In this program note, you give not just imagery, but specific imagery. [“*Rain Waves* explores the motion of a wave form. Starting with a pointilistic rain–like pattern, the notes float upwards and downwards in increasing intensities. In the less staccato and more flowing sections, there is a sense of a wind pushing the notes into longer and wider arched patterns—perhaps like the undulating sheets of rain created in a light tropical rainfall”]
JT: Yes, don’t pay too much attention to that. [Laughs] I think program notes can be very misleading. Some people can write terrific program notes and the piece doesn’t make any sense in relation to the program notes, you know, and other people can write terrific music, but they don’t know how to write program notes. I’m one of those in the latter group. I don’t like writing program notes—I hate it. And when I get verbalizing like that, it’s probably because somebody helped me.

LB: O.k. So, is this something they made you do, or is this something that you wanted to have printed in the score?

JT: Nobody makes me do anything [both laugh]. I think, maybe. I don’t know.

LB: I have another general question for you to see if there are any similarities between *Rain Waves* and *A Gift* and your previous chamber works for clarinet. When you wrote *Turning Points*, Michelle Oddo [who wrote her DMA document on that piece], said that the clarinet introduces the thematic material each time it changes, rather than any of the strings. Do you normally think of a certain instrument as having a certain role, or do you approach each piece or phrase with an open mind as far as what each instrument can portray? Is there any similarity to *Rain Waves* or *A Gift*?

JT: A role in what sense? Do you mean a role of introducing the material?
LB: Yes.

JT: I don’t know. The piece could probably tell you the answer to that question. In *Turning Points* it is true, the clarinet introduces the material, but I couldn’t tell you what the others do, because I don’t analyze my music [laughs]. I leave that for others [both laugh]. And oh, boy—they drive me nuts too! It’s a little bit like getting a doctor’s report on your insides, you know? “Um, your intestine is 40 inches long, and there’s some interesting stuff in your intestine that you might want to know about,” and you’re read this stuff, and you say, “I don’t think I really want to know this.” [laughs]

LB: Well, I am trying to stay away from any kind of theoretical analysis.

JT: Oh, good.

LB: I’m more interested in you, and how your vibrant personality finds its way into your works.

JT: Oh, good. Well, I’ll just tell you one thing, and then I have to go.

LB: Ok.

JT: The way I think about music has very much to do with the way I think about action and reaction, and it’s in terms of a novel. So, here for example, is the one I’ve been using recently: your first idea is a guy who works in a bank, and he’s kind of cynical and kind of bored, and not
very happy. Then a beautiful woman walks in the bank, who is really together, and very happy, and upbeat—the opposite of what he is. And somehow, they wind up going to lunch. O.k., so what happens to him, what happens to her? They start interacting; he gets affected by her, and she gets affected by him. Who knows where this is going to go, but that’s the way I think about music. Music has a specific time—a very strong element of time involved, whereas in a story, the time could be more fluid. But music is very precise; so a couple of beats too long or something; it’s felt—if it’s a strong beat. So you have to be careful of the pacing. There are three things that I work on: one is the profile, two is how that is put into context that is interacting with other ideas which play against each other, and how does that architecture unfold. So, there is a lot of time spent on pacing of those ideas. Thirdly, how does one get from one group to the other? So basically, that’s my approach that I’ve worked many years on [laughs].

LB: Thank you for your time today. Your music is a joy to play and to listen to. I really appreciate your time and expertise.

JT: Well, thank you, and good luck. Let me see how it turns out.

LB: O.k. If I come up with a question or two along the way, may I email you?

JT: Absolutely.

LB: O.k. Thank you again for your time today.
JT: Good luck.
Appendix C

Telephone Interview with David Shifrin
Discussing Joan Tower’s *A Gift* (2007)
9/14/09
Lori Baruth

LB: I would like to get information on why you approached Tower for *A Gift*, the birth of that piece including the premieres, your thoughts on her compositional style, and if you have any tips for others in rehearsing that work.

DS: Sure, I’ll give you the background that I have. As far as working on it, I don’t know what I can say about that. We had the privilege of having Joan Tower there at the rehearsals. She was pretty specific about what she wants, but mainly, her suggestions were about mood and articulation, and getting the right expressive qualities.

As far as approach, it’s music that is pretty accessible and understandable, which doesn’t mean that it’s easy. Instrumentally, everyone has to come to rehearsal knowing their own part, and of course like so many things, working slowly, and gradually pushing the tempo in the faster things. One also needs to understand what works dynamically with the instruments. For example, the bassoon had to play very soft and very low with the horn. The way she uses the instruments creates some very, very interesting colors. Just knowing what is possible dynamically speaking, and experimenting with dynamics and balance helps with this piece [*A Gift*]. The piano part, like so many of her [Tower’s] works with piano is really a solo part, and requires a real virtuoso pianist.
The genesis of the piece came with a conversation with a man named Paul King. Do you know all of this from the inscription?

LB: There’s nothing really on the inscription of the score I have, but I did speak to her [Tower] in May, and she said that you came to her with a commission, and she also mentioned the “Valentine” scenario. Was it for Paul King’s sister that the piece was written?

DS: Yes. Joan thought it was to be a gift for his [Paul King’s] wife, and based the piece on “My Funny Valentine.” I can’t remember the original title — I think it was Valentine, but she changed the title when I told her it was not for his wife, but his sister, thus it became A Gift.

Joan was so busy, that she knew that she wouldn’t have it in for the actual birthday. I think I gave her a year’s leeway, but she was working on her American orchestral work [Made in America] at that time. But, she did agree to write a movement for flute and clarinet. The germ of the quintet was this duet for flutist Tara Helen O’Connor and myself on the clarinet. And then she decided she would add bassoon because Paul King himself played bassoon when he was younger and his sister played flute. So, that gave us flute, clarinet, and bassoon in the work. Then, we discussed whether to add horn. Joan wanted to add piano [to that group], and she thought that adding horn rather than oboe would best round out the ensemble. So, it wound up being the instrumentation of the Mozart and Beethoven Quintets, but with a flute rather than an oboe.
LB: Yeah. It’s interesting—I thought of that, too. So, when you asked her for the piece, did you just ask her for a work for Paul King’s sister’s birthday, or did you specifically say that want a woodwind quintet and she wanted to change that?

DS: No, no. I said I wanted to commission her to write a piece that would include flute, clarinet, and bassoon. But, she wanted to add piano and horn. And, the first version of the first movement was for just flute and clarinet. And about a year later at the first rehearsal…

LB: You knew your part already! [laughs]

DS: Yeah, well, my part is easier in the quintet. Or actually, not really. It’s very similar to the duet, but there are more instruments playing. It [the first movement] is almost exactly the same music; she just added three other parts. Which in a way made it harder, because there are more things to coordinate and balance.

So that’s really the history of how the commission came around, and the reason that we picked Joan is that Paul King and I talked about a number of composers that we both admired, and Joan was the common denominator. She was the one that we both mentioned that we liked very much, and thought it would be a wonderful collaboration. Of course, I’ve worked with Joan so many times, and commissioned Turning Points. However, before that, I recorded her [Clarinet] Concerto with the Louisville Orchestra, and performed the Fantasy for clarinet and piano several times, and Joan was at those performances, and we became friends and colleagues. So, I think I’ve told you everything about that.
LB: When I spoke to Joan in May, she mentioned that there were four premieres last summer [2008].

DS: Yes, we did it in New York at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, in Portland, Oregon at Chamber Music Northwest. It was programmed at Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, although I was not involved in that performance—but some of the original musicians were. I think Tara O’Connor was the only musician from the first two performances involved with that one. So, there were different groups each time—we had a different bassoonist at the New York and Portland performances. Then we did it at another festival in Angel Fire, New Mexico at Music From Angel Fire. So, yeah, four premieres. That’s something that I try to do, and something Paul King was very much in favor of—once it’s commissioned, try to find as many places to perform it, so it’s not just a world premiere and forgotten.

LB: Definitely. So, I was not able to find a recording of this work anywhere yet. Tower mentioned that she had not sent one to Schirmer yet, either as she was making changes. She was kind enough to send me a recording, though. She said that it is from the DG [Deutsche Grammophon] recording. Is this the same group from New York—you, O’Connor, Purvis, Turkovich, and McDermott?

DS: Yes, that was from Lincoln Center. It’s on iTunes, though, isn’t it?

LB: It wasn’t when I checked before, but I’ll check again.
DS: Really? I thought it was.

LB: O.k. So, since you had the previous relationship with Tower, were you the one who went to her asking for this piece?

DS: Yes.

LB: Did you put any restrictions or requests for the piece, or did you just ask for a work with flute, clarinet, and bassoon?

DS: No, I did ask her for a work that would involve an instrumentation that would include flute, clarinet, and bassoon.

LB: Were there any changes made from that first rehearsal and what ended up being published?

DS: Yeah, well not terribly many. Mostly she changed the octave in some passages, but nothing drastic.

LB: When you’re rehearsing any Tower work, do you approach it differently than other contemporary works in the mainstream repertory? Is there something that you try to make most prominent when playing a Tower piece?
DS: Well, I think that just knowing Joan and her music, and what her values are: she’d want it to be expressive, virtuosic, colorful, and have lots of contrasts, but you can say that about any number of composers’ works. It’s hard to describe in words, but her notation is quite precise. It’s all in the music.

LB: Regarding “My Funny Valentine,” and that this work also has four movements, which is also unusual of Tower works…

DS: Sure, she usually writes one-movement works.

LB: Right, and in this piece, if you know that “My Funny Valentine” is in the work, you can hear it, although it’s embedded at times. What are your thoughts on this? Did it come up in rehearsal?

DS: Well, we talked about it, and we were amused by it, and also the reason that she originally did that. But, the work is so beautiful—not like it’s an arrangement of a pop song. The lovely duet, the entire work.

LB: O.k. Since you have such an extensive background in working with her on several of her pieces, how would you describe Tower’s work, whether playing or teaching her music?

DS: Well, I think I would use some of those words I used already: dramatic, virtuosic, kinetic, and colorful.
LB: Ok. Thank you. If I come up with any questions, may I contact you again?

DS: Yes, of course. You can send me an email.

LB: Mr. Shifrin, thank you so much for your time today. I really appreciate your expertise, and certainly your time today to get some of this to put in the document. Thank you very much.

DS: My pleasure.
Appendix D

Telephone Interview Discussing Joan Tower’s *Rain Waves*
with Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr
8/7/09
Lori Baruth

LB: I’d like to discuss *Rain Waves*, including both general and some specific inquiries, please.

EV: Yes. First, do you have the latest program notes?

LB: I do, the ones printed in the score, anyway.

EV: I wonder if they the same ones I have? Does it say it was dedicated to us? I’ll send you the one we have.

LB: Yes, and thank you. That would be great—extremely helpful.

EV: It was very nice for her to dedicate the piece to us. Anyway, before you ask your questions, let me just say what’s on top of my head concerning Joan and *Rain Waves*. First of all, after she [Tower] sent it to us, it was a year before we actually performed it. The premiere was at the Frick Museum in New York, and she attended that performance. At the same time, we also did the New York premiere of [Gian Carlo] Menotti’s trio for us, and he also attended. So, we had those two wonderful composers in the audience. But the thing I remember most of all was that I had a dreadful cold, and I could really hardly hear at all. So, I will never really know how that concert went! You know, it was one of those colds that after you fly, your ears become completely
stopped up. But anyway, we also went out after the rehearsal to talk about the piece. We went out and ordered some wine. She said, “Oh, I just cut to the chase, and I get red wine.” I’m a big red wine fan, so I right away knew we’d get along, and we’ve actually become quite good friends.

She’s just really a wonderful character, as I think you know. I’ve invited her come to Michigan State three times to coach my students in her Clarinet Concerto, Sonata (the Fantasy), and Wings, of course, as well as Petroushskates, and we’ve always had a great time with her.

So, in any case, when she [Tower] first heard it [Rain Waves], it had been a year since she wrote it, and she said, “Oh my gosh, I’ve almost forgotten this piece!” And then she had us play it again, and she said, “Yeah, it’s too long. I’ve got to think about that.” So we performed the premiere as she had originally written, but then as she thought about, it a few days later, she did cut out two places. One was a beautiful, slow place, and the cut was about twenty bars. She just didn’t feel that the piece should come back at a slow tempo again, and actually, she’s right. I have always felt that the Nielsen Concerto suffers a bit from the two or three slow–fast–slow–fasts on the last page. But in any case, she cut that section (about a minute’s worth), and it really is more concise, which is what she was looking for.

LB: O.k. Do you know exactly which measures she cut out?

EV: Well, let’s see—I’m looking at the old and the new versions. She cut from measure 307 to measure 310 (in your part that’s published). The material she cut was repetitious, so I think she
was absolutely right to do that. I’ll copy and mail you the original parts. Now the work is around 11’40”, per the recording time on our CD that includes this work.\footnote{209 Joan Tower, \textit{The Making of a Medium}, vol. 13, \textit{American Images 2}, Verdehr Trio, Crystal Records CD943, 2002.}

LB: O.k.

EV: Let’s see: the score I have says “Composer revised January 1998,” and originally the timing was about twelve minutes or a little longer, and after the cuts, it’s down to roughly 11’40”, or just under twelve minutes.

So in any case, we premiered it there in New York, and since then, we’ve played it a great deal. It’s one of the staples of our repertoire. I also think it’s one of our strongest pieces, because I think it does a lot of what I find so admirable in her writing. For example, I love the way she merges from slow tempos to a fast tempo, and also the way she changes textures so that you hardly know what has happened, and then it already has happened! It’s building to a certain point, and then building to the next and the next one. That’s one of the reasons I love to teach \textit{Wings} and the \textit{Fantasy} because you can just see her mind working, and it’s just brilliant the way she’s figured things out. One sees certain repetitions, which she adds on to, and the change of textures and—well, I think that she is one of our original voices. It must be difficult for a composer to be really original these days, but I think Joan Tower is one who is. Also, it’s music that an audience can really appreciate, even though it’s rather intellectual writing—one can sense the structure, and the momentum carries a listener along.
LB: Right. It’s accessible to those even if they are not musically inclined, or are not musicians themselves.

EV: Exactly. For instance, what I like so much in our piece, Rain Waves, is that it starts with just a few drops of rain, and then suddenly the fury of the heavens is unleashed on you. It’s as if sometimes, you know, when you’re riding on a freeway and it starts to rain so hard that you can barely see. If you’re lucky, you go under an underpass and you stay there for a while until the fury of the rain passes. There are a few places in the piece that are like that. It’s just like torrents of rain are being thrown at you. But, Joan didn’t necessarily start out with that idea, as she says in our DVD interview. Also, she says she finds titles to be “difficult,” but she certainly has come up with apt ones.

LB: [Laughs]

EV: For a long time, Joan and I laughed about the fact that I objected to her cutting out what I thought was that lovely slow section—that twenty bars near the end. But, before she wrote the piece I had asked her was, “Please don’t end soft and don’t end soft and high on the clarinet.” And she said, “Why, is that hard?” [Both laugh] For instance, you know the way Wings ends, and I said, “Well, I find it hard. I’m not really a high note player—I don’t mind going up to our ultra high Bb, but after that I don’t like it. And I’m not crazy about playing soft [up there] for any length of time. For, as you know, the end of Wings is a little bit hard to control and challenging.

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Additionally, there is another section like that in Wings but I don’t think she was really totally aware that it was difficult.

There was an occasion during one of the times after one of the times she was there [Michigan State University] that Joan, I, and the students went out to a local pizza place. The flute teacher also came, and brought his score to the flute concerto to be autographed by Joan. I said, “Wait a minute—let me see that.” I turned to the end, and I said, “See Joan, you end loud here, and it’s in a good range.” She laughed, and I said, “Why don’t you do that for the Clarinet Concerto? You could have an ossia ending.” I think it’s always nice if a concerto ends loud. She thought about it for a while but then said, “Nah, I don’t think I can do that.” [Both laugh] But anyway, I just really enjoyed that. I mean, she gave it some thought, but then she decided that no, that wasn’t what she had in mind. Anyhow, she did what I requested in Rain Waves; she ended loud for us, and she ended low for me—I play a high E just at the end there, which of course is totally unproblematic, and it’s loud, then the piece ends quickly and fast in the chalumeau register. So, that’s just a bit about the piece and Joan that I recall off the cuff.

In general about her writing, not only is she one of the really fabulous composers, but also I think her writing for the clarinet is excellent. I mean, she really does challenge us, but with the exception of having those long, soft, high passages as in Wings, I feel that she writes very well for the clarinet. It’s the clarity with her intentions when she writes, and clarity also within the ensemble, and the balance, and so forth. Anyway, I’m a big Joan Tower fan, as you can see.

LB: That’s wonderful. I’ve enjoyed all of the pieces I’ve been looking at, but I definitely think that Rain Waves is a lot of fun. I was glad to hear you start talking in terms of how it was raining because that’s the first way I went analyzed the piece—what kind of rain is happening here? I
know she doesn’t write that way; she starts with a motive and assigns a title at the end of the compositional process, but I found that this work is very visual; almost tactile.

EV: Yes.

LB: Could I ask you a couple of questions about how the Verdehr Trio came to commission the work from her, and if you gave her any parameters for the work?

EV: Well, as you probably know, we’ve commissioned over two hundred pieces for this combination. She was one of the people whose music we really liked, and we wanted to have something from her. At one point, one of my students asked me why we hadn’t commissioned Joan Tower? And I said, “My goodness, why haven’t we?” It was just a pure oversight, because I was already teaching her clarinet pieces.

Anyway, I guess none of that is important. She is one of our major composers, and we really wanted a piece from her. We try to try to have diversity in our commissions. We aim to have some very accessible pieces, some avant-garde pieces, and all sorts of styles in the middle. And as I say, I feel Joan has a voice all of her own. So, that’s basically how we came to commission her. Of course, she was known; she was a woman—partly that, but mostly because she is a wonderful composer, and of course it turned out to be a great piece. Plus, it’s a lot of fun to play. In any case, that’s how the piece came about. We’ve been trying to make as an eclectic repertoire as we can for this combination. She is one of the composers we’ve been lucky enough to commission.
LB: Great. When you contacted Tower to commission the piece, did you give her any parameters?

EV: No, none at all. I think the only thing was, “Joan, if you could possibly not end soft and high, that would be nice.” I know that sounds trivial, but it really is interesting how that can make a difference. For example, I once planned a program of works written for us, and four of the five pieces ended softly. Let me tell you, that program just didn’t go over. So, I’m very careful now. I usually program something that’s lively to begin with, like Dash by Jennifer Higdon, a wonderful four-and-a-half-minute piece written for us, and then I’ll plan a work that will end softly, and then just before intermission something like Joan’s piece. After intermission, we might begin with a work that ends softly, but of course, the final work has to end loud. So, I’ve learned my lesson from that. [Both laugh]

So, I suppose we often play pieces that end louder more than the ones that don’t, depending on how the program is built. Because at times we have certain parameters with our programs to suit the presenters, and we also try to play all of our composers as much as possible, so it’s sometimes it’s difficult to work things out. That’s what I mean—that one program ended up being not the best, and it was my fault because of the way I programmed it. But to get back to your question, we didn’t really give her any instructions. We didn’t think that Joan Tower needed any instructions, and sure enough, she gave us a wonderful piece.

LB: Was there any collaboration along the way, or did you let her go and do her own thing?
EV: Yes, she did her own thing—no collaboration. And we’ve done that with most of our composers. When Walter conversed with Rick Sowash about a commission, he asked what sort of piece we wanted, and Walter said, “Well, we travel a lot, maybe something having to do with that.” So Rick chose “the island of Corsica” and wrote a wonderful piece for us. However, we’ve never been to Corsica. But when you hear or play that piece you think, “I’m going, I’m going. I’ve got to see that island!” [Both laugh]

LB: O.k., great. Thank you. So when Joan heard the piece and wanted to make the two cuts to make the piece more concise and shorter, were there any changes that you requested for her to change?

EV: Not really. As I say, I think it’s so well done. I love that little section in the middle with the clarinet and violin. Again, just imagine, starting as soft as it does, in my part it’s measure 169, and coming in on that half-step off from the violin pitch, and then gradually it all rises to the top dynamic—I mean, it’s just a terrific section.

LB: Yes.

EV: There is one thing, in measure 180, when we did that, we did it [sings the material] really loud, and sort of marcato, and she wanted a little bit lighter [sings it lighter], and of course, we did it. And, then also in measure 184, she changed the articulation. What do you have? Originally, the articulation was [sings material] two notes slurred, and two articulated. Now, all three notes of the triplet are slurred.
LB: Actually, the violin still has that on the first one, but the second one does not. I wonder if that’s an oversight.

EV: Oh, well, that’s interesting. But anyway, she changed a few very small things like that. Mostly, it worked out just fine the way she wrote it.

LB: O.k. I wonder if you have any advice for others or any specific challenges you found when playing the piece.

EV: I don’t really think I have a lot. I think the main thing is to go with the different personalities and characters that she depicts in the various sections. For instance, it starts at measure 25 [sings] the articulation and the gradual agitation there; go with it. In fact, I even have in my measure 45 “Let it go!” [Sings that material energetically] I think that’s really it—to capture all of her different personifications of something really soft and lovely, and something really exciting and driving. Like for instance, it’s so beautiful at measure 52, where the clarinet sneaks in with the piano and then we sort of go on, and you don’t quite know what’s happening when you’re listening—it’s such a marvelous merge, right?

LB: Yes, it really is. I have that spot marked, too.

EV: And then it crescendos but doesn’t really do too much, and then [sings the motive] and then [sings the next motive], and then [sings the next motive]. You know, all sorts of a little
scherzando here, and then very smooth, and then very exciting. That’s just what Joan does, and to me that’s so exciting in her music, is that she creates so many different moods. And that is something really important in all music making: that you bring out whatever implied personalities, moods or characters there are, and to me she makes it easy because it’s so clear. So, follow what she does. Just get a reed that glides right in at measure 169. I try to really emerge from nowhere, so no one really knows what happened. What is the word…

LB: Kind of like *niente*?

EV: Yes, of course, *niente*. In other words, like an “N.” Personify that right there at measure 169. Well, I’m on vacation—otherwise I’d have thought of the term! [Both laugh]

LB: May I ask one other question—it is obvious that you really like the piece, but did the other two members of the Verdehr Trio also feel the same way, that they were musically satisfied with their parts?

EV: Oh yes. There are some really gorgeous and really touching lines for the violin. And the pianist has that huge challenge with that big run near the end, as well as in a number of other passages.

LB: Measure 299?
EV: Right. That’s a difficult run for the piano. I think this is such a super piece, and I hope you get to meet her soon.

LB: I do, too! She has a great personality.

EV: Yes. The one thing about her is that whenever she’s in the audience, we don’t play her piece as well, largely because she makes me nervous [both laugh] because I like and respect her so much. I’ve almost gotten over that now. [Laughs]

LB: So performers like the piece, but what kinds of things have you heard back from the audiences?

EV: Oh yes, they like it too, indeed. It’s just stunningly exciting; the gorgeous violin solo in the middle, and the violin and clarinet duet is terrific, and it’s so exciting with the piano and those big thrashing chords at the end. I mean, what more could you want in a piece? So, yes, the audiences do like it.

LB: Would you consider commissioning a second work from Joan Tower?

EV: If only we could get her to do it, yes. In fact, we wanted her to do a double concerto, but she’s booked so far in advance. We’ve had some people write second pieces, and even third and fourth pieces, and she’s somebody that we’d certainly like to, but she just didn’t think she could do a double concerto, and that’s what we really would have liked. Actually, it looks like Bill
Bolcom is to write a double concerto for us in a couple years. But, I’d love a piece [by Tower]. In fact, she’s got a trio called *And They’re Off* for violin, cello, and piano. I bought it just so I could look at to see if she would let us arrange that, or if she herself would arrange it, but I just haven’t gotten around to taking care of that either.

LB: Yeah, I haven’t thought about that. That would be a neat idea!

EV: Yeah. So, I’m interested in checking into that. There’s something else that she wrote, some sort of duo. Is there something with violin or something like that?

LB: Well, there’s a short duet called *A Little Gift* for flute and clarinet.

EV: Exactly. Do you have a copy of that?

LB: I do.

EV: Would you mind sending me a copy of that to take a look at it? I want to ask her if either of those pieces might be possible for us to do. She might say yes, and she might say no. [In December 2009 Walter and Elsa performed the duo *A Little Gift* in four concerts in Hanoi, Vietnam.]

You probably know what she did for me, which was incredibly nice: in 2007, I was to be given the International Clarinet Association Lifetime Achievement Award at the annual conference. One of my students knew that Joan and I were friends and wrote to Joan asking if
they could arrange her *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman* for clarinet choir. She said, “Yes,”

and some fifty of my former students played it for me during a concert in my honor at the

Vancouver conference.

LB: You know, when I spoke to Joan, she mentioned that.

EV: Did she? Anyway, I was so touched that she would have allowed that arrangement and that
she would be into it. So, I’m glad to know that she remembers that she did that because I’ll
never forget it!

LB: Oh yeah, she said it was really great; she really enjoyed it.

EV: Yeah, well we did too. I was knocked out by that gesture. But anyway, that’s the kind of
person she is.

LB: Definitely. You have taught other works by Tower to your students.

EV: I’ve taught *Wings* and the *Fantasy* over and over again, and two of my students have played
her *Concerto* and played it really well. I also had a student play her quintet with strings [*Turning
Points*], a while ago.

LB: My paper deals mainly with her *Rain Waves* and *A Gift*, a quintet for piano and winds (flute,
clarinet, horn, and bassoon) from 2007.
EV: Oh! I don’t know that quintet. You know, I’ve been sort of retired for about three years, and it’s bad, but I’ve not kept up in the way that I used to keep up with things. What we’re trying to do is to tie up loose ends with the Trio. We have two CDs that have already been recorded that I’m trying to edit this summer, and DVDs that we’re trying to edit, and I still teach, and we concertize and we are our own managers, etc.

LB: So you have lots of free time, then? [Laughs]

EV: Yes, even retired, there’s just not enough time for everything. So, I’m ashamed that I don’t know that piece.

LB: That’s o.k. My question was about your coaching of all Tower works and what you find most rewarding about Tower’s music.

EV: Well, I think we’ve kind of dealt with that to a certain extent. Remember, when I said “what more could one ask” and also about all of the different moods, personalities, and characters that come up over and over in her music, and particularly in this piece [Rain Waves]. It kind of reminds me of the Nielsen Concerto a little, and that’s why I think the Nielsen is one of the great pieces written for us—the changes in personality after four or eight bars, suddenly you’re in a slightly different world, or a different character. You can almost imagine that someone’s angry and it sounds like someone is shouting at someone else, back and forth [sings the motive]—you know that place near the bottom of the second page of the Concerto and throughout. With Joan’s
music too, I feel that she doesn’t stay in the same mood for a long time; she bridges into something else, and then into something else. I think it makes it really interesting for the performers to play.

Her pieces give us so much to work with, as in *Rain Waves*, the lovely violin solo, which merges into that wonderful duet between violin and clarinet, or near the end as the piano comes thundering through; and just generally, the torrents of waves and suggestions of all sorts of water activity throughout—there is so much variety in the piece and as well a variety of challenges musically and technically. I think the clarinet pieces are absolutely wonderful and when I'm coaching my students on them, including *Rain Waves*, I try to help them appreciate how her pieces are put together, and show how clear her intentions are as well as help them to define the different characters and moods I mentioned earlier. Actually that's my basic approach in teaching other works in the clarinet repertoire too, now that I think about it!

LB: O.k., thank you. Tower is a performer/composer rather than just a composer who has not performed very much. Do you think that this quality shows through in her music more than in just the piano part?

EV: Well, I think that in general, it gives her an appreciation of the many difficulties that performers encounter, as for example, the piano passages near the end of *Rain Waves*, which are certainly difficult but not impossible, and provide a wonderful challenge. I think that’s one of the things that we’ve enjoyed most while learning all the music we have over the years; it’s one unique challenge after another. I’m sure she [Tower], having performed so often, understands how it is to put a piece together from an ensemble standpoint; how it is to work out really
difficult technical passages—she certainly would understand that better than others. So, yes, it’s bound to be a huge advantage for her and then for those of us who are lucky enough to play her pieces.

LB: Well, thank you. That is all I have. I really appreciate your time today. I’m very glad to be able to talk to you, and I’m sorry to bother you in the middle of the summer. [Laughs]

EV: Oh, you don’t have to worry about that at all. I’m very keen on her, and I like to help people with their doctoral papers. That’s why one teaches—to be helpful. [Laughs] I’m delighted you wanted the information, and let me know if there’s anything else I can provide.

LB: O.k., thank you very much.
Appendix E

Telephone Interview with Robert Spring
Discussing the Music of Joan Tower
8/16/09
Lori Baruth

LB: I am hoping to use your expertise on Joan Tower’s music and to generally discuss her style of writing over the past several decades.

RS: I’ve played everything recently, but the recording was almost twenty years ago.

LB: Right, and I thought that something more updated would be necessary for her at this time to examine her writing since she’s written so many pieces for clarinet, and there are only a handful of sources available.

RS: Yes.

LB: My first question is to find out why you chose Joan Tower to record a CD of all works by one composer, rather than choosing any other composer.

RS: I’d never done anything like this before. It was out of necessity; I was asked by Summit Records to do a recording and it was very important to me, because I wasn’t tenured yet, or anything like that. I’d like to make it sound more romantic than that, but that was the issue at the beginning. Summit Records wanted an all one–composer disc as they thought that would sell
better, or market better. And, you know, everything is nowadays all marketability. Plus, it was 1991, maybe 1990 when we started planning; I’m not sure. I had done research on composers of clarinet music, and she was one that I had put down, because I was to be doing *Wings* on a visiting composers series concert when she was visiting Arizona. This was back when the federal government was still funding things like that.

We had a visiting composer’s series, and she was coming out to do it. So, I had prepared *Wings*, and I played it for her; it was February of 1990 or 1989. She really liked the way I played the piece. I remember she sat in my office with her eyes closed—you can ask her about this—eyes closed. I was about four feet away from her and I just played my guts out on this piece. She was just ecstatic about it, and so I proposed the project to her at that point. There was a lot of negotiation on how we were going to do it, and Summit Records agreed. They really liked her name, thought it would be a great selling album. Plus, she had just won the Grawemeyer Award and they thought it would be a good way to celebrate this achievement.

So, we proposed recording *Breakfast Rhythms I and II*, *Wings*, the *Concerto*, and the *Fantasy*. *Breakfast Rhythms* and *Wings* had been recorded before, but the *Fantasy* and the *Concerto* had not. It was very important to her that the first recording be a benchmark, so she promised us that we could do it. I still have a letter still from her giving me first recording rights—you know to get first recording rights of something by a living composer, you have to get the rights to do that if the piece has not been recorded before. So she gave me first recording rights, and it was really exciting! I had never done anything like this before! I was thirty-three or thirty-four, and I was so excited. So she sent me the music, and we got through this contract, and she said, “But you have to wait nine months before you can record it.” I said, “Nine months, why?” She said, “Because it is going to take you that long to learn to play the music.” I thought
that it was nuts. So she sent me the music, and the *Concerto* was still in manuscript at that point, and I had a manuscript copy of the *Fantasy* that she had given me, as it had just been published. We went through these pieces.

I remember that a package from her came on a Saturday, and it must have been 1991, because we had just moved into this house. I opened the package, and I was so excited, and I looked at the *Concerto*. I looked at the first two pages, and I realized that there’s not place to breathe. So I called Joan, and I said: “I’m very excited. I got the music, and I’m just thrilled about you allowing me to do this. I just have a couple of questions before I get started on the music.” She said, “Sure, what?” I said, “Well, first of all, there’s no place to breathe in the first pages of the *Concerto*.” She said, “Well, you do circular breathe, don’t you?” And I said: “Sure; I just didn’t know if that’s what you wanted. I just wanted to make sure.” So I hung up the phone, and my wife said to me, “Why are you so pale?” and I said, “Because I have to learn to circular breathe!” So I had a student who was a hot dog Army Band player at the time, and he kind of showed me how to do it. So I worked on it for nine months.

She also told us we had to perform it a couple of times before we could record, which we did. We sent her recordings for all that we performed, and she gave us a good amount of feedback on that, so that what we presented in the end was what she wanted the recordings to be. I was also very lucky in that there was a man who just recently died, a very dear friend named Arthur Weisberg, who was working here as a bassoonist and was a big proponent of new music. He conducted *Breakfast Rhythms*. So I was able to get from him exactly what she wanted—the whole rhythmic stability that she desired.
LB: That’s great. I had read that story about you learning to circular breathe, but I thought I had read that about Wings, but it was in fact the Concerto?

RS: Yeah. You can get through Wings without circular breathing, I use it now, but on the Fantasy and the Concerto, but especially in the cadenza in the Fantasy, if you don’t circular breathe it, there are way too many breaks in it. The same goes for the Concerto—you can actually sneak one in here and there, but I really don’t like that. I like the flow of the whole thing if you can circular breathe through it. I think it just adds so much excitement to the whole concept.

LB: O.k. I remember reading about your recording of this project, that when Tower listened to the takes from the recording, she asked you to splice things anyway where the circular breathing had happened.

RS: Well, I think that circular breathing has really come a long way since I started doing it. When Charlie Neidich first came out with all of this stuff he was doing, there was a lot of noise involved, and we’ve learned how to be a little quieter with it. About eighty percent of my students circular breathe and I can’t even hear it, and I think, “You rats!” They play, and I can’t hear it from the audience, and it’s extremely irritating to me [both laugh]. But I think it’s come a long way since we’ve all started doing this, and it’s become almost a vital part of clarinet performance now.
The interesting thing about Joan is that the stuff that I didn’t see on the page, she wanted us to do. To this day, this still gets me. One of the things, particularly in *Wings*, is that sections fit together that I didn’t see. I also had a student at that time that, and if you can get a copy of this dissertation, it’s amazing.

LB: Is it Nancy Bonds?

RS: Yes, Nancy Bonds. Have you read it?

LB: Yes, I’ve read it.

RS: That’s an interesting story in itself. I found her name on a list of people who had not finished D.M.A. degrees [at ASU] and called her. In addition, she had studied with John Mohler, who had been my teacher when I was at Michigan. She said: “Well, I doubt very much that you’d want to work on my dissertation [thesis] with me. It’s about an American composer named Joan Tower and her piece called, *Wings.*” And I said, “Wait a minute—I just recorded that last weekend!” So, anyway, in reading her paper, going over and over it—she’s Canadian, so I had to take every “u” out of color and neighbor. [Both laugh] But, in reading her paper, she taught me so much about that piece and the whole form, like how she [Tower] treats octaves as unisons, and how she revolves around a pitch before really defining it. It made the whole piece make so much sense to me, and I wish I had read the whole paper [thesis] before I recorded it.
The other idea with Joan is the idea of tension and relaxation, and where you’re going with something to create the tension that’s involved. The tension is not necessarily by harmonic reasons, but also dynamics, and motion and all of those things—it was just amazing.

LB: Great. We’ll come back to that, but in getting back to the CD, which work was the most challenging to learn, and which was the most challenging to record? Is that the same piece?

RS: The *Concerto*. Mainly because I had to learn to do so many new things, and it’s technically so incredibly demanding. I did the clarinet and piano version, and David [Shifrin] recorded the orchestral version a few years later. But, the ensemble aspect, making everything as tight as necessary, was really difficult. Just in knowing what was going on in the other part. Additionally, the circular breathing aspect—having the—I think it goes up to a high C# at one point. I don’t remember right now, but regardless, I had to do many new things. The other thing that was difficult was getting all of the exact rhythms together in *Breakfast Rhythms I and II*. For example, the quintuplets or septuplets (I don’t remember) that lead from one instrument to another.

Regarding *Wings*, we recorded it out of order. We did all of the fast stuff first, and then we did the opening last. Big mistake. [Laughs]. By that point, I was very tired. We did the opening twenty-seven times to get it quiet enough for her [Tower]. David Harris accused me of turning the volume down at the end to get that high F# so soft, and I actually didn’t. It was the only take I had where it actually worked.
LB: O.k. Getting back to Wings for just a minute and Bonds’s dissertation [thesis]. Do you feel that you play that piece differently now, after having read that paper [thesis]?

RS: Yeah, maybe. I’m not sure how much was because Joan wanted it that way, and how much is what I now think about because I’ve read the paper [thesis]. Essentially, we recorded the piece the way Joan wanted it to be done. So, I think I play it that way, because it’s how Joan wanted it, but I think after having read the paper [thesis] I understand it more. I think a lot of it was done by intuition and a lot of it was done because that’s how she [Joan] wanted it to be done.

LB: And you figured out the reasons why afterwards?

RS: Yes. I can’t remember if the paper [thesis] was going on during that time, or just before. The reality may have been a combination of reading her work and working with Joan.

LB: I believe Bonds’s publishing [submission] date was 1992. She really did a wonderful job; it’s very well done.

RS: Yes. I still can’t get through it in one sitting.

LB: O.k. May I ask now about Tower’s writing in general, and what do you find most attractive as a player, and what do you think comes across most to the audience?
RS: As a player, I think that she challenges the performer on all levels—almost threatens the performer on all levels. It forces us to re-think how we play the instrument. I find that challenge incredibly desirable. If we don’t constantly thrive to grow in new directions, then we become staid and we don’t change. The only way our art is going to continue to grow and flourish is if we try to take it to new levels. Joan challenges us technically and musically with her music. Her music doesn’t play itself. You need to take things to a new level by increasing your technical prowess, and your musical prowess. Perhaps that sounds like a “take no prisoners approach,” but it’s just that she demands things from us that are not part of our vocabulary until she has exposed us to them. I don’t think the extreme high register of the clarinet, or the circular breathing aspect would have necessarily gone as far as it has at this point if it had not been for Joan pushing things at a time we needed to be pushed.

From the audience standpoint, I think that if her music is done well, it’s very listenable. There is a sense of tonality, not defined perhaps by I–V–I, but defined by repetition and revolving around pitches. I’ve found that most audiences, even community concert series goers, enjoy listening to what she writes.

That’s all on a technical level, but there is also an emotional level of involvement on the parts of both the performers and the composer, that is not often found in music by all composers. She [Joan] tries to bring the performer and the audience to an emotional point, in other words—the technical requirements are used to take the music to an emotional level, perhaps more than you find with a lot of other composers.

LB: Yes, well said. Can I ask you about the energy found in her works? There is much written on the energy lines and the pacing in her works. In which of the works you’ve performed by Tower,
either from the CD or others since then, do you immediately feel the overall energy flow of the work, and are there works with which you have had to become acquainted before you felt the overall energy that carries the piece?

RS: I think that the *Concerto* has the greatest amount of energy, particularly when it’s played with an orchestra. I think that the *Fantasy* takes longer to get used to. The energy level in the *Fantasy* does take you beyond. Her piece [*Turning Points*] for clarinet and string quartet is also amazing in that aspect. But, the *Concerto*, particularly when you’re playing it with a full orchestra, and I’ve played it with full orchestra seven or ten times, and I haven’t played it for a number of years, but for a long time I was playing it quite often. It requires a huge commitment from the orchestra as well. I remember in particular playing it in Columbus, Ohio with an orchestra there.

LB: With Pro-Musica?

RS: It was actually about two years before I started playing with them. My tenure with the group is because of that performance that I did. To make a long story short, I ended up joining the orchestra after that. I didn’t even know about the orchestra until Joan arranged that. I remember playing that piece, and about halfway through the introduction before the clarinet comes in, thinking as I heard these enormous sounds coming from the orchestra, and being taken to a different place. It was so powerful at the time that I didn’t even realize we were playing for people until about halfway through the cadenza. It was just one of those moments. I opened my
eyes to what was going on beyond the page, and all of a sudden I realized, “Holy smoke; there are people here!” It was amazing. That one performance I will never forget.

LB: Wow. Do you remember the year? Was that for Joan’s 60th Birthday?

RS: No, it was before that, 1996 perhaps, or 1997. I will never forget it. It was just an incredible feeling of—I just can’t describe it. The emotional level was something I had never experienced.

LB: I am doing a style study of Tower’s writing from 1975 forward. Since you have played all of those works involving clarinet, do you sense that all of those works are similar in nature, post Breakfast Rhythms I and II, or do you sense a maturation or metamorphosis in her style of writing for the clarinet?

RS: Metamorphosis. A huge metamorphosis.

LB: O.k., how so?

RS: I don’t know. I’m not a composer, but I can’t listen to one and think, “That’s Joan.” For example, if you listen to Island Preludes—I was part of a commissioning project on that many years ago, the quintet piece. Although that’s an oboe piece more than anything else, I hear a change in her style.
LB: Do you think that work [Island Preludes] is different from previous works, and that her works past that are different as well? Is there a pivotal point that you hear?

RS: No, I don’t know if you can say that there’s a step when things change, just an overall general evolution of style.

LB: O.k. Before that, how would you categorize or characterize her music, and after?

RS: I can’t. For me, it’s a timeline from point A to point whatever. There is something definitely different in Breakfast Rhythms I and II in that period of time. But from Wings on, I think there’s a line that you can follow. I don’t think it changes dramatically one way or another, but I feel a change in style as time goes on.

LB: O.k. I’m guessing that with Joan’s close collaboration with Laura Flax on Wings that maybe that was the catalyst for that change.

RS: Well, she said that Laura had great high notes; she could play them really softly, and that probably had an effect on how she feels high notes on the clarinet.

LB: I was speaking to Elsa [Ludewig-]Verdehr last weekend about Rain Waves, and she mentioned that the one thing she asked Joan to do was to end the work “loud and not high” [both laugh] because most of her other works end that way.
RS: Yes, most of her works do end that way.

LB: Can I ask about the rhythmic vitality versus the slow, gentle, almost Messiaen-like qualities that she tends to employ? Do you hear any other influences in her soft writing?

RS: No, I have never thought of comparing her to other composers like that. It’s kind of interesting, though.

LB: Do you feel that she has enough of her own voice that Tower sounds like Tower, like Copland sounds like Copland?

RS: Oh, yeah.

LB: Do you have any recommendations for practicing and learning a new work by Joan Tower for other clarinetists?

RS: Oh, yeah. If you can’t play them technically, you won’t be able to play them musically. The technical sections have to be worked out slowly and extremely accurately. A lot of metronome practice is vitally important. That sounds mechanical, but you must get beyond the mechanics. I am a big fan of Leslie Bassett’s music, and with his music it’s the same thing: you simply have to get beyond the technique before you can get into the music. I have so many students who might want to play her [Tower’s] pieces, but they do not want to get to the level that it takes technically in order to be effective musically. I just think it takes a lot of wood-shedding. You
simply cannot be at all limited technically in order to play her music. You simply have to be over that hump so that you can produce the music.

LB: O.k. Joan Tower talks a lot about her organic style of composition. Do you sense that as you’re playing through her pieces?

RS: It’s interesting. As part of Pro-Musica, I participated in the first recording of her *Purple Rhapsody*, the viola concerto. The clarinet solo in it is so reminiscent of *Wings* in many ways. It’s funny, though—everything melds from one into the other, even as you change from fast to slow and slow to fast, everything makes sense from beginning to the end, so there is an organic idea to the whole thing.

LB: O.k. One last question: do you have any specific adjectives that you would use to describe Joan’s musical language that makes her music hers, as opposed to if you put on a recording and you didn’t know who it was?

RS: I guess the word you just used, organic, would come to mind immediately. One thing she made me do in order to do this recording was that I had to send her recordings of me playing different pieces. One of the works she requested in order to give me first performance rights was the Debussy *Premiere Rhapsody*. She wanted to see if I could carry a musical idea from beginning to end.
I think that’s her music in a nutshell: there’s a germ that’s presented at the beginning that grows and matures and becomes something, and then one way or another, ends, and I think that’s her music.

LB: You’ve been extremely helpful. Thank you for your time today, and your expertise and comments. If I come up with anything else, may I contact you?

RS: Yes, call or email. I’ll be around for long periods of time now. If you need anything else, please contact me.
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