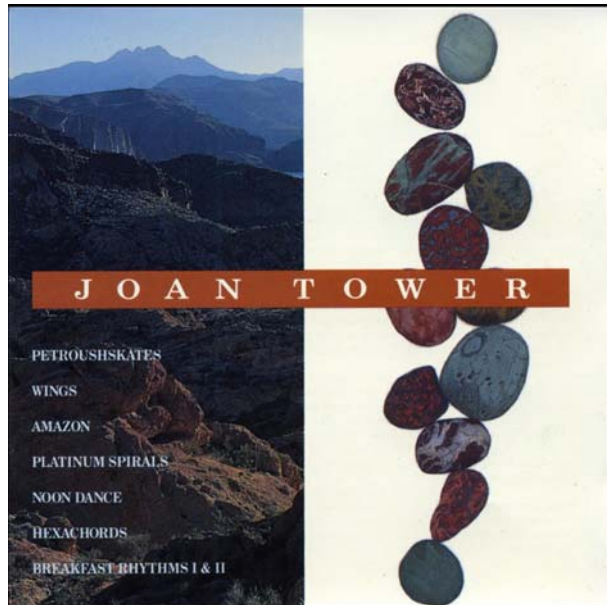


Joan Tower



1. *Petroushskates* (1980) (5:38)
Da Capo Chamber Players
2. *Wings* (1981) (10:27)
Laura Flax, clarinet
3. *Amazon* (1977) (13:01)
Da Capo Chamber Players
4. *Platinum Spirals* (1976) (6:49)
Joel Smirnoff, violin
5. *Noon Dance* (1982) (17:53)
Collage
6. *Hexachords* (1972) (7:04)
Patricia Spencer, flute
7. *Breakfast Rhythms I & II* (1974-75) for
Clarinet and Five Instruments (16:04)
Allen Blustine, clarinet, Da Capo Chamber
Players, Daniel Shulman, conductor

Total playing time: 76: 44

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Notes

For **Joan Tower**, writing good music is the natural result of knowing how to make good music. Herself a trained pianist, Tower's compositions are characterized by an instrumental color and brilliance and by her writing which is both challenging and flattering to performers. Tower's use of earthbound, physical images lends the music an accessible, tangible quality.

Born in New Rochelle, New York in 1938, Tower was raised in South America where her father worked as a mining engineer. Her early musical experiences included family musicals in which she participated on piano and percussion. After returning to New York and completing studies at Bennington College and Columbia University, Tower founded the Da Capo Chamber Players in 1969 as a vehicle for performing her music and the music of her contemporaries. She served as pianist for the ensemble until 1984.

In 1985, Tower was appointed composer-in-residence with the St. Louis Symphony by conductor Leonard Slatkin. Prior to her appointment, she had written only one orchestra work, *Sequoia* (1981). *Silver Ladders* (1986) was written for Slatkin and the St. Louis Symphony and was both her first score for large orchestra and her longest work to date. In early 1990, the piece earned Tower the University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award for music composition. The fifth recipient, Tower also is the first woman and the first American born composer to receive the Award which carries a \$150,000 prize.

Silver Ladders and *Sequoia* have placed Ms. Tower into the international spotlight with performances by the New York Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony, the San Francisco Symphony, the Berlin Radio Orchestra and the Tokyo Philharmonic among others. *Sequoia* also was choreographed by Mark Godden for the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. She has written concertos for flute, clarinet, cello, and piano and will be

writing a violin concerto for Elmar Oliveira for performances in 1992. Her third *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman* was commissioned for the centennial celebration of Carnegie Hall. Ms. Tower lives in upstate New York and has taught at Bard College since 1972 where she was appointed Asher Edelman professor in 1988.

The solo and chamber works on this disc date from Tower's years with the Da Capo Chamber Players, during which time her writing matured and benefited from Tower's regular association with skilled instrumentalists. The earliest pieces here, *Hexachords* (1972), and *Breakfast Rhythms I & II* (1974-75), display Tower's gradual movement away from serial writing to, in Mary Lou Humphrey's words, "a more fluid, organic technique." *Platinum Spirals* (1977) is one in a series of pieces, including *Black Topaz* (1976) and *Red Garnet Waltz* (1977), which used minerals in their titles and are written in memory of Tower's father. *Amazon* (1977) similarly pays homage to the composer's childhood in South America. *Petroushskates* (1980), which was composed for the Da Capo Chamber Players' tenth anniversary, and *Wings* (1981), a solo written for clarinetist Laura Flax, became perhaps Tower's most popular chamber works subsequent to their original recordings on CRI. The pieces were rerecorded in 1989 to take advantage of digital technology and to display the performers' greater familiarity with and affection for the music.

Petroushskates (1980) was commissioned by the Da Capo Chamber players and the New York State Council on the Arts to celebrate the group's tenth anniversary at a concert sponsored by the Naumburg Foundation. In an attempt to understand why figure skating, especially pair skating, was so beautiful and moving to me, I discovered a musical corollary I had been working on for a while—the idea of a seamless action—something I had started to explore in *Amazon*. I also

always loved *Petroushka* and wanted to create an homage to Stravinsky and that piece in particular. As it turned out, the figure skating pairs became a whole company of skaters, thereby creating a sort of musical carnival on ice.

Wings (1981) was written for my friend and colleague Laura Flax who premiered the piece at her recital in Merkin Hall (New York City) on December 14, 1981. The image behind the piece is one of a large bird—perhaps a falcon—at times flying very high gliding along the thermal currents, barely moving. At other moments, the bird goes into elaborate flight patterns that loop around, diving downwards, gaining tremendous speeds.

Amazon (1977) was written for the Da Capo Chamber Players with a commission from the Contemporary Music Society. The great Brazilian river, the Amazon, provides some of the images reflected in this piece. There is generally consistent background flow that is interrupted only occasionally by “static” events or by silence, and which undergoes change in speed and width through the pacing of notes and the type of texture being articulated. Some different kinds of associations with the river will be evident in the trill passages (ripples of water) and in the fast unison passages (which have the effect of a waterfall and water turbulence). There is an orchestral version of this piece, *Amazon II*.

Platinum Spirals (1977) was commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts and dedicated to the memory of my father, who was a geologist and mining engineer. Platinum is a mineral whose internal properties reveal a very malleable and flexible set of characteristics. It is said that an ounce of platinum can be stretched into a mile. A lot of this piece is about the stretching of lines of ten upward in “spirals.” Other times, there is a quiet kind of “rocking” pattern that “holds” the action in place.

Noon Dance (1982) is dedicated to Collage, who commissioned it with the support of a grant from the Massachusetts State Arts Council. The word “noon” in the title refers to this piece as a sequel to an earlier piece *Breakfast Rhythms*, written in 1974, which has the same instrumentation. Although there are some dance-type rhythms in the piece, such as square dance and folk dance motifs, the real impetus for the word “dance” in the title comes from my idea of how close chamber music playing is to dancing; how players “move” with each other, sometimes following or leading, other times blending different kinds of energies in the pacing of sections; in toto, learning the “Choreography” of the piece. *Noon Dance* is a piece that explores some of those “movements.”

Hexachords (1972) for flute was dedicated to a long-time colleague and friend, Patricia Spencer. The title refers to the basic harmony of the piece which is based on a six-note unordered chromatic collection of pitches. The use of different vibrato speeds as applied to individual notes (or groups of notes) combined with different rhythmic-dynamic articulations placed in different registers, creates a counterpoint of tunes that hopefully keeps the listener’s attention moving through all the registers. The piece is divided into five sections which are most easily differentiated by a sense of either going somewhere or staying somewhere.

Breakfast Rhythms for Clarinet and Five Instruments (1974–75) was commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts and dedicated to the excellent clarinetist Allen Blustine. The piece is influenced by Beethoven’s use of textural and

rhythmic contrast. In both movements, there is a sense of large and small-scale balancing. Pitch patterns form the basis of the harmonic structure and melodic activity as they are isolated, completed or combined with other patterns. Orderly yet angular ensemble writing regularly gives way to more lyrical passages for the clarinet which lend an at-home and away-from-home feeling.

—Joan Tower

Da Capo Chamber Players are known for the special musical vitality that comes from working closely with both established and emerging composers. They have commissioned over sixty compositions, and premiered numerous others, recording many of them on the CRI, New World, and Gunmar labels. Winners of honors from the prestigious Naumburg Chamber Music Award in 1973 to the very first ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming in 1988, Da Capo has established itself throughout North America as well as in its renowned annual series of innovative concert events in New York, sponsored by the Carnegie Hall Corporation (1974–1985), by Merkin Concert Hall (1985–89), and Town Hall (1989–90). They are in residence at Bard College, and have been featured in programs on the Public Broadcasting System and National Public Radio.

Laura Flax has come to be recognized as one of New York’s most distinguished clarinetists through her solo recitals and performances with chamber ensembles and orchestras. A native New Yorker, Flax has performed over fifty world premieres, including numerous works commissioned for her. She has recorded for CRI, Nonesuch, Philips, and New World Records.

Joel Smirnoff, violinist, was at the time of this recording, a recent recipient of the Second Prize in the 1983 International Music Competition. Mr. Smirnoff has performed the world premieres of many works by contemporary composers as a member of the Chicago Ensemble, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Collage, Boston’s New Music group and the Contemporary Chamber Players of the University of Chicago. Today he is best known as a member of the renowned Juilliard String Quartet.

Collage is a chamber music group dedicated to the performance of new music and composed principally of Boston Symphony Orchestra musicians. Under the direction of Frank Epstein and John Harbison, Collage has presented more than sixty premiered and commissioned works. Collage has had its concerts rebroadcast on the National Public Radio network, been featured on at 1986 PBS television series, and recorded for the CRI, Gunmar, Sonory and Inner City labels.

Patricia Spencer is esteemed for her performances and recordings of contemporary repertoire. Spencer is a founding member of the Da Capo Chamber Players and also frequently appears with other groups, including the Group for Contemporary Music, the New Music Consort, Music Today, and Parnassus.

Allen Blustine has performed extensively in the field of contemporary music including solo performances with the Festival Winds, the Musica Aeterna Orchestra, New York Chamber Soloists and the New York Philharmonic. Mr. Blustine has recorded extensively for CRI, Nonesuch, and Columbia Records.

Daniel Schulmann, conductor and pianist, has served as music director at the Lenox Arts Center, and as guest artist with the Group for Contemporary Music, Speculum Musicae, the Composers’ Forum, and the Society for Contemporary Music from Japan, among others.

Production Notes

The original recording of *Platinum Spirals*, *Noon Dance*, and *Amazon* was made possible by a 1983 Recording Award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. Additional funding was provided, in part, by funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University and by private donors. The original recording of *Hexachords* and *Breakfast Rhythms I & II* was made possible by a Recording Award from the American Composers Alliance. Additional funding was provided by the Ford Foundation's Publication-Recording Program.

Petroushskates, *Wings* Digitally recorded by Judy Sherman at SUNY Purchase, December 19, 1988.

Amazon Produced and recorded by Robert Cabbage at the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, NYC, December 12, 1984.

Platinum Spirals, *Noon Dance* Produced and recorded by Peter Storkerson at First and Second Church in Boston, Massachusetts, June 6, 1984.

Hexachords, *Breakfast Rhythms I & II* Recorded by David Hancock, October 1976.
Produced by Carter Harmon.

Digital remastering supervised by Joseph R. Dalton with Fran Pierce, engineer at Sony Classical Productions, Inc, NYC.

All works published by Associated Music Publishers (BMI), except *Hexachords*: ACA (BMI).
Managing Director: Joseph R. Dalton

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