



## Joan TOWER

**Violin Concerto**

**Stroke**

**Chamber Dance**

**Cho-Liang Lin, Violin**

**Nashville Symphony**

**Giancarlo Guerrero**

## Joan Tower (b. 1938)

### Stroke • Violin Concerto • Chamber Dance

Like all good composers, Joan Tower brings to her writing desk life and musical experiences that inform her music in unique ways. These include her childhood in South America, her formal education and her work as a professional chamber-music player. A member of the generation that broke the glass ceiling for female composers (or at least opened a wider hole in it), Tower creates music that is bold, colorful and emotional. The list of her commissions, awards and residencies bears witness to her ability to engage performers and audiences alike.

Tower was born in New Rochelle, New York, but her family moved to La Paz, Bolivia, when she was nine years old. There she continued the piano lessons her father, an amateur violinist, had encouraged her to start at the age of six. During the seven formative years she spent in South America – traveling extensively with her father in his role as a supervisor of mines – she absorbed much of the native flair for percussion which has become such an important element of her style. The family returned to the States for her last two years of high school, and in 1957 she enrolled at Bennington College to study piano and composition. She went on to earn her Master of Arts and doctoral degrees from Columbia University. Her teachers included Chou Wen-Chung, Jack Beeson, Darius Milhaud and Wallingford Riegger, but she professes to be a self-taught composer. Her earliest pieces were composed in the serial system, but her style slowly developed a more flexible, even tonal, aspect, allowing her to absorb influences from such diverse composers as Beethoven, Debussy, Copland, Messiaen and Stravinsky.

She founded the Da Capo Players in 1969 to both promote contemporary music and provide herself with more opportunities to compose. The award-winning chamber group (still in residence at Bard College – where Tower is currently Asher Edelman Professor of Music) consists of flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano. Performing as pianist with the group until 1983, Tower composed works for her fellow musicians and developed her instinctive feeling for instrumental techniques and

capabilities. Her first concerto, *Music for Cello and Orchestra*, was written for the group's cellist, and she has since composed concerti for the other four instruments in the ensemble. She has held orchestral residencies with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra (1985-88), the Orchestra of St. Luke's (1997-2007) and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (2010-11).

### Stroke

*Stroke* was commissioned by the Pittsburgh Symphony, which premiered the work under Manfred Honeck in 2011. The composer dedicated the piece to her younger brother, George, who had suffered a stroke that left him paralyzed on his left side just before she began work on the commission. For that reason, she describes it as “a pretty emotional piece.”

From a whisper of percussion, a brutal unison G bursts forth with unsuspecting fury – soon made even more aggressive by the addition of a minor second. The pulse established by this opening onslaught continues unabated until a passage for two bassoons introduces a note of calm. The inexorable rhythmic pulsations return, however, as if in imitation of a beating heart that cannot be quelled. Thereafter the composer alternates between passages of strong (almost pounding) rhythm and reflective solos for clarinet, horn and violin. The final solo is for trumpet, preceded and followed by a solemn brass chorale. Tower intended these contrasts to reflect not only the many different emotional stages experienced by a stroke victim (“crying, anger, anxiety and depression”) but also “the welcome rests of peace and deep love that become more pronounced as the stroke victim adjusts to his new reality.” The tension builds after the trumpet solo to a fierce reprise of the opening unison (although the G is now an E), but the piece ends on a note of “quiet hope,” with a heart-wrenchingly slow and wide string glissando leading to a radiant E-major resolution.

### Violin Concerto

The composer first met violinist Elmar Oliveira while she was working as composer-in-residence for the St. Louis Symphony. “The first time he heard my music, he really liked it,” she says. Eventually he told her, “You know, I just love your music, and I would like you to write a piece for me.” Tower set out to compose a work that would highlight traits she greatly admired in Oliveira's technique. “He's just an incredible virtuoso player, and also he can sing – really make any note sing. He has a double talent, so I decided, even before I started the piece, that I was going to try to do those two things in the piece ... and I think I did actually.” Nine months later she delivered her new concerto. Oliveira premiered the piece in Salt Lake City on April 24, 1992. Critic William S. Goodfellow declared the concerto “prime Tower, typically bold and colorful yet with a pronounced lyrical streak and an unexpectedly strong formal design.” He had particular praise for her orchestration: “The orchestral writing ... runs the gamut, from the forcefulness of the brass, at times jazzily inflected, to the almost Impressionistic central section, with its shimmering percussion and strings.”

Tower has described her compositional process as “organic.” She always starts at the beginning and allows the material to develop according to its own logic and rules. In the *Violin Concerto*, this idea is demonstrated by the way in which many of the melodic contours in the work are generated within the first measures. The soloist begins with a quick, descending whole step (echoed by the orchestra), which then contracts to a semitone. This is quickly followed by a sixteenth-note figure in which a repeated note alternates with pitches that move away from and/or return to it – a “wedge” idea that, along with the whole-step/half-step idea, permeates the entire piece. Although organized in a single movement, the concerto features three clearly delineated sections in the traditional fast-slow-fast order. There are two cadenza passages with an unusual twist: because Oliveira's brother – who was also a violinist – had recently died, Tower provided a second part in the cadenzas for the orchestra's concertmaster as a way of personalizing and

memorializing Oliveira's love for his sibling. The middle section, with its Ravel-like woodwind murmurings, opens with the opening whole-step idea given particular poignancy by octave displacement. It reaches great heights of emotional intensity before segueing effortlessly into the “finale,” the beginning of which is marked by a descending whole step from pizzicato strings.

### Chamber Dance

Listeners approaching *Chamber Dance* expecting something small-scale may be surprised. The work was commissioned by the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and premiered by that ensemble at Carnegie Hall on May 6, 2006. It features a constant shifting of colors that alternate between huge blocks of sound and intimate solos and duets. Tower, who has extensive, firsthand knowledge of chamber music – both as a composer and a performer – was very mindful of the particular qualities of the Orpheus players and their “democratic” approach to music-making. “It is chamber music in the sense that I always thought of Orpheus as a large chamber group, interacting and ‘dancing’ with one another the way smaller chamber groups do,” she says. “Like dancers, the members of this large group have to be very much in touch with what everyone else is doing, and allow for changing leadership to guide the smaller and bigger ensembles. *Chamber Dance* weaves through a tapestry of solos, duets and ensembles where the oboe, flute and violin are featured as solos, and the violin and clarinet, cello and bassoon, two trumpets and unison horns step out of the texture as duets. The ensemble writing is fairly vertical and rhythmic in its profile, thereby creating an ensemble that has to ‘dance’ well together.”

*Chamber Dance* opens with a short, rising figure that is the generating motif – along with a corresponding descending idea – for much of the piece. Its stepwise character is maintained throughout passages of irrepressible rhythmic energy. (Tower clearly did not worry that her complex rhythms – with constantly changing meter signatures – would be any challenge for the conductor-less Orpheus ensemble.) The few passages

featuring wide melodic leaps (such as the first violin solo and a central episode that grows increasingly slower) are thus set off from the main musical argument and given particular poignancy. By the end of the piece, the rising figure has expanded to a whole-tone scale, emphatically stated by the full orchestra, which concludes with a questioning tritone.

Tower's scoring in *Chamber Dance* is notably lucid. She makes each instrumental timbre count in an ever-evolving riot of colors. Instrumental families (especially brass) are often treated as independent groups. Virtuoso passages for the players appear often – it would not be surprising if the piece were as much fun to play as it is to listen to.

Frank K. DeWald

## Cho-Liang Lin



Photo: Paul Body

Cho-Liang Lin is a violinist whose concert career has spanned the globe for 35 years. He was born in Taiwan in 1960 and began playing the violin at the age of five. He went on to study in Sydney, and in New York City with Dorothy DeLay at The Juilliard School. Since his debut at Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival at the age of nineteen, and with the New York Philharmonic the following year, he has appeared with virtually every major orchestra in the world. He has over thirty recordings to his credit, ranging from the concertos of Mozart, Mendelssohn, Sibelius and Prokofiev, to Christopher Rouse and Tan Dun, as well as the chamber music of Schubert, Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Ravel. His recording partners include Yefim Bronfman, Yo-Yo Ma, Wynton Marsalis, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Leonard Slatkin, Michael Tilson Thomas and Isaac Stern in albums that have been critically acclaimed, winning multiple GRAMMY® nominations and *Gramophone's* Record of the Year award. He joined The Juilliard School faculty in 1991, and he was appointed professor at Rice University in 2006. He is also the music director of La Jolla SummerFest in California as well as festivals in Hong Kong and Taiwan. His recordings of the music of Bright Sheng, Christopher Rouse, Georg Tintner, Gordon Chin, Zhou Long and Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* are available on Naxos.

## Nashville Symphony



Photo: Mickey Dobo

Led by Music Director Giancarlo Guerrero and President and CEO Alan D. Valentine, the Nashville Symphony has established an international profile with its innovative programming and steadily expanding discography. Founded in 1946, the orchestra is today the largest performing arts nonprofit in the state of Tennessee. With 140 performances annually, the Symphony's concert schedule encompasses a diverse mix of classical, pops, jazz and family programs, along with extensive community outreach efforts. One of the most active recording orchestras in the country, the Nashville Symphony has released 23 recordings on Naxos, the world's leading classical label, and two recordings on Decca. These recordings have received a total of 15 GRAMMY® nominations and seven GRAMMY® wins, including two for Best Orchestral Performance. Throughout its history, the Nashville Symphony has championed the music of America's leading composers, which has earned the orchestra three ASCAP Awards for Adventurous Programming and an invitation to perform at Carnegie Hall's Spring For Music Festival in 2012. In 2003, the Nashville Symphony broke ground on the \$123.5 million Schermerhorn Symphony Center, which opened in September 2006. Notable for its remarkable acoustics and distinctive architecture, this 197,000-square-foot facility has become an integral part of cultural life in Music City and is regarded as one of the finest concert halls in the United States.

## Giancarlo Guerrero



Giancarlo Guerrero is Music Director of the Nashville Symphony and Principal Guest Conductor of Cleveland Orchestra Miami. He has established himself with many of the major North American orchestras, including those of Boston, Cincinnati, Dallas, Detroit, Houston, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, among others. He is also known to audiences of large summer festivals such as the Hollywood Bowl and Blossom Music Festival. Equally at home in operatic repertoire, Guerrero has conducted new productions of *Madama Butterfly*, *Carmen*, *La bohème* and *Rigoletto*. Guerrero is cultivating an increasingly visible profile in Europe, where his engagements include the BBC Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France and the Frankfurt Radio Symphony. For many years, he has maintained a close association with the São Paulo State Symphony Orchestra in Brazil, as well as with the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra and El Sistema in Venezuela. Guerrero's recordings with the Nashville Symphony won GRAMMY® Awards in 2011 and 2012, including Best Orchestral Performance. A fervent advocate of contemporary music and composers, he has championed works by several of America's foremost composers, including Joan Tower, John Adams, John Corigliano, Osvaldo Golijov, Jennifer Higdon, Michael Daugherty, Roberto Sierra and Richard Danielpour.



Joan  
**TOWER**  
(b. 1938)

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|----------|---|--------------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>Stroke (2010)<sup>†</sup></b>        | <b>19:45</b> |
| <b>2</b> | <b>Violin Concerto (1991)*</b>          | <b>21:26</b> |
| <b>3</b> | <b>Chamber Dance (2006)<sup>†</sup></b> | <b>16:19</b> |

<sup>†</sup>WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS

**\*Cho-Liang Lin, Violin**  
**Nashville Symphony**  
**Giancarlo Guerrero**

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Producer: Blanton Alspaugh (tracks 1 and 2)

Recording engineer: Gary Call (tracks 1 and 2)

Mixing: Daniel Davidsen (tracks 1 and 2)

Mastering and editing: Blanton Alspaugh (tracks 1 and 2)

Track 3 produced and engineered by Tim Handley

Booklet notes: Frank K. DeWald

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AMERICAN CLASSICS

Joan Tower creates music which is bold, colorful and communicative, her list of commissions and awards providing ample evidence of her ability to engage performers and audiences alike. Emotional intensity characterizes *Stroke*, which vividly conveys a stroke victim's dramatic turmoil while also offering a vision of hope. The *Violin Concerto*, selected for the final round of the Pulitzer Prize in Music, is both a virtuoso showcase and a lyrical vehicle for the soloist, its conversational cadenzas representing a poignant exchange between the living and the departed. The deceptively titled *Chamber Dance* alternates huge blocks of sound with intimate solos and duets in an ever-evolving riot of colors. Joan Tower's *Made in America* (8.559328) won three GRAMMY® awards.

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Playing  
Time:  
**57:30**