Tower of sound

PONÉ ENSEMBLE PERFORMS “MUSIC BY HUDSON VALLEY COMPOSERS” THIS TUESDAY AT SUNY-NEW PALTZ

Among the many native treasures of the Hudson Valley that we locals tend to take for granted, Joan Tower stands as tall as her surname. How many of us realize that Tower – born in New Rochelle in 1938 and a Bard College faculty member for four decades now – is widely regarded as one of the top women classical composers alive today?

The daughter of a mineralogist, Tower spent part of her childhood living in Bolivia, and is known for her frequent use of environmental themes in her work. She was the founding pianist of the Da Capo Chamber Players and in 1990 became the first-ever female recipient of one of the most prestigious prizes for excellence in musical composition, the Grawemeyer Award, in recognition of her 1986 piece...
Silver Ladders. In 1998 she won the Delaware Symphony's Alfred I. DuPont Award for Distinguished American Composer; she has also racked up a Guggenheim, a long string of artist-in-residence gigs with major orchestras and commissions aplenty. Tower is a special favorite of the great conductor Leonard Slatkin, who has recorded many of her works and snagged three Grammies in 2008 – for Best Orchestral Performance, Best Classical Album and Best Classical Contemporary Composition – for his recording of her magnum opus Made in America with the Nashville Symphony.

One of Tower's earlier and most popular chamber works, Petrushkates (1980), for flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano, is a whimsical combination of an idea from a scene in Stravinsky's Petrushka with the flowing motion of ice skating. You can hear it played live, along with a selection of other chamber works by 20th- and 21st-century composers based in the Hudson Valley, on Tuesday, February 14 in the lovely McKenna Theatre on the SUNY-New Paltz campus. The college's Poné Ensemble for New Music, which specializes in building audiences for contemporary classical pieces, will also perform Onomatopoeia by Vassar College's Jonathan Chenette; the string quartet Four Moods by the late Alan Shulman of Mount Tremper; the trio On Black Holes by the ensemble's late founder, Gundaris Poné; and a work by SUNY-New Paltz composition teacher John B. Hedges.

The "Music by Hudson Valley Composers" concert begins at 8 p.m.; but don't miss the pre-concert talk with some of the composers beginning at 7 p.m., which will include computer-projected images of a scroll painting by Signe Stuart that inspired Chenette's composition to be performed that evening. Tickets go for $10 general admission, $8 for seniors and SUNY-New Paltz faculty and staff, $3 for students, and will be available at the door. For more information, visit www.newpaltz.edu/events/event_view.php?event_id=84783.

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