

Joan Tower

Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman No. 1 (1986)

Aaron Copland famously wrote a *Fanfare for the Common Man*, and Joan Tower answered that miniature masterpiece with not just one, but a series of orchestral fanfares which came about, gradually, from 1986 to 2016. She consciously echoed Copland in the similar instrumentation and mood for the first fanfare in the series. As the title implies, Tower celebrates the achievement of women “who take risks and who are adventurous,” dedicating it to conductor Marin Alsop, who commissioned the most recent fanfare thirty years later.

Now in her eighties, Joan Tower was one of perhaps the first generation of female composers to achieve success on a par with her male counterparts. She was often asked what it meant to be a female composer, but she describes music as genderless unless it includes lyrics from a certain perspective. While this fanfare was written for and premièred by the Houston Symphony, Tower was in residence at the time (1985-87) with the St. Louis Symphony. She considers this type of mutually beneficial relationship vital to nourishing the art form through new music and regular collaboration. The residency was a turning point for her, as she began to write much more for orchestra and become better known to the public. Tower considers herself self-taught, and declares, “the greatest teacher is hearing your music ...” Tonight’s fanfare, though short as befits the genre, is among her most played pieces.

Michael Daugherty

Dreamachine (2014) (notes by Michael Daugherty)

Dreamachine for solo percussion and orchestra was commissioned by the WDR Rundfunkorchester Köln for the Eight Bridges Festival in Cologne, Germany. The world premiere was given by the WDR Rundfunkorchester Köln, under the direction of Frank Strobel, with Dame Evelyn Glennie, solo percussion in the WDR Funkhause Cologne on May 11, 2014. The percussion concerto is 30 minutes in length and divided into four movements, each featuring a different solo percussion instrument. As part of the festival theme, “Man and Machine,” the concerto is a tribute to the imagination of inventors who dream about new machines, both real and surreal. The music is inspired by images that connect man and machine in surprising ways.

The flying machines of Leonardo DaVinci are the inspiration for the first movement, “DaVinci’s Wings.” To imagine different ways for man to fly, the great inventor of the Italian Renaissance (1452-1519) made many drawings of wings patterned after birds and bats, with wooden frames. Playing the marimba (also made of wood), the percussion soloist performs music that I have created to hover, flutter, and rise in the imagination.

The second movement is named after Rube Goldberg (1883-1970), the American cartoonist, engineer, and inventor. Syndicated in newspapers across America, his cartoons feature witty contraptions (with pulleys, pipes, wires, gears, handles, cups, fingers, feathers, birds, dogs, monkeys, and so on) that perform simple tasks in complicated ways. In “Rube Goldberg’s Variations,” I have composed music for the soloist to play a series of small hand-held instruments, creating a chain reaction like one of Goldberg’s carefully designed machines. “Electric Eel” is the third movement, inspired by Fritz Kahn’s eerie drawing of an incandescent light bulb plugged into an electric eel. The German artist and scientist Kahn (1888-1968) invented a unique graphic style to illustrate the relations of man, machine and nature through brilliant visual analogies. Featuring the vibraphone, I have composed music to suggest an eel slithering through murky waters. The first section incorporates impressionist harmonies to create a spectrum of light that becomes brighter as the music progresses. The next section is a voltaic

burst of energy in syncopated rhythms and atonal sound clusters. After reaching a white heat, the musical glow gradually fades back into silent darkness.

The final movement, "Vulcan's Forge," refers to the Roman god of fire and to Mr. Spock, the half-human, half-Vulcan science officer aboard the starship Enterprise in Star Trek. Vulcan invented weapons and other marvels for gods and heroes, such as self-propelling robots, the shield of Achilles, Apollo's chariot, and the thunderbolt of Jupiter. Featuring the snare drum, I have created striking, fiery rhythms to imagine the god creating his inventions at the forge. The concerto ends with music that blasts us from our seats, like a bolt of lightning.

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov *Scheherazade, Op. 35 (1888)*

Russia was still a young musical powerhouse at the time of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908). Through the early 1800s, the country often relied on imported musicians from the West to populate the court and provide an intended veneer of sophistication. Meanwhile, a generation of homegrown artists matured, and a reaction against the West developed with "The Mighty Handful." This group of composers, including Rimsky-Korsakov, wanted music based on Russian folk song and subject matter. While sympathetic to this idea, Rimsky had a degree of self-discipline beyond many of his colleagues, and strove to also match the technical finesse of the great French and German composers.

Like many of his Russian counterparts, he had an unrelated job for some time before giving himself entirely over to composing. As a sailor in the Russian imperial navy, his voyages in the Pacific gave him a taste for adventure and exoticism. Seafaring and foreign lands found their way into his symphonic suite *Scheherazade*. The notion of "Orientalism," or including stylistic elements perceived as Eastern, was not new for him. Scales and harmonies of that cast had appeared in Rimsky's songs of decades before and in his symphony *Antar*, on a Middle Eastern religious myth. Nonetheless, he felt slightly specious, saying the style was neither "in his blood," nor "authentic." Not that most listeners of his (or our) time could tell the difference. What is certain is that *Scheherazade* is his most successful Eastern-tinged piece, infused with the legendary *Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. Rimsky's preface to the music reads:

The Sultan Shahriar, convinced of the duplicity and infidelity of all women, vowed to slay each of his wives after the first night. The Sultana Scheherazade, however, saved her life by the expedient of recounting to the Sultan a succession of tales over a period of one thousand and one nights. Overcome by curiosity, the monarch postponed the execution of his wife from day to day, and ended by renouncing his cruel resolution altogether.

The Sultana thus left off each tale as a "cliffhanger," compelling the Sultan to wait for its ending the next night, then repeating the process with the beginning of a new thread. However, the musical suite *Scheherazade* doesn't contain direct, linear storytelling. It mostly uses a loose set of suggestions from specific legends to guide the mood and character of the music. There are a few direct representations, such as the solo violin as the voice of the sultana herself, recurring as she sets the scenes and spins an eloquent postlude. The stern brass opening invokes the implacable Sultan. But mainly Rimsky considered the music "a kaleidoscope of fairy-tale images and designs of Oriental character..."

At one point he conceived of the suite in abstract terms, merely a sequence of Prelude-Ballade-Adagio-Finale. Eventually, he let slip a general correspondence with "(I.) the sea and Sinbad's ship, (II.) the fantastic narrative of Prince Kalender, (III.) the Prince and Princess, (IV.) the Baghdad festival, the ship dashing itself against the rock." But again, we

can't construe note-by-note storytelling, and his metaphor of a kaleidoscope is especially revealing, given the dazzling range and variety of orchestral tone color he employs. Rimsky is known as one of the great masters of instrumentation- deciding which notes go to which players, and why. Nowhere is that on better display than in *Scheherazade*. The second movement's passage of rapid string plucking, in which players "vamp" a background to improvisatory-sounding wind instrument solos, is one of the most imaginative in the suite. All these vivid musical and extra-musical ideas were too much for the heavy-handed Russian establishment. The Imperial Russian Musical Society almost canceled the 1888 premiere of *Scheherazade* on grounds it "might corrupt the taste of our musical youth." The St. Petersburg Conservatory director intervened to make sure it got played under the composer's leadership, but even so, Rimsky was only paid half the normal rate for a score so odiously "light and playful." As it happened, *Scheherazade* was almost his last work for orchestra alone, and he dedicated himself passionately to opera for the remainder of his career, turning to mostly magical and nationalistic subjects that pushed him to explore the further reaches of harmony.