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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

JOAN TOWER'S *FASCINATING RIBBONS* FOR BAND: GENESIS AND ANALYSIS

A Document

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts

By

JOHN FLETCHER
Norman, Oklahoma
2002

UMI Number: 3067108



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JOAN TOWER'S *FASCINATING RIBBONS* FOR BAND:
GENESIS AND ANALYSIS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am grateful to several individuals for their assistance and encouragement as this project took shape. The ongoing support of my advisory committee has been of inestimable value. Of particular note are Dr. Michael Rogers, for his encouraging and insightful comments, and Dr. Bill Wakefield, for his unswerving commitment to excellence, his supportive counsel, and his guidance throughout the D.M.A. program.

My students, colleagues, and administrative supervisors at Oklahoma Christian University have assisted me in many ways, and have endured with me through my pursuit of this degree. I am immeasurably grateful for their understanding and support.

To Dr. Joan Tower and Dr. Jack Stamp, I offer my sincere appreciation for their dedication to musical creativity and excellence, and for their willingness and enthusiasm to share of their time and expertise to assist me.

For my wife Cynthia and daughter Laenie, who have shouldered heavy burdens as this project took shape, I am more appreciative than words can express. Their loving support and long-suffering have enabled me to pursue my personal, professional, and educational goals, often at the expense of time and energy that might have otherwise been devoted to them. It is to Cynthia and Laenie, and to the memory of my mother Mary Helon Fletcher, that this document is lovingly dedicated.

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ABSTRACT

Fletcher, John M. "Joan Tower's *Fascinating Ribbons* For Band: Genesis and Analysis." D.M.A. document, University of Oklahoma, 2002.

Fascinating Ribbons was Joan Tower's first composition for wind band. The purpose of this study was to analyze the work, and to examine the commissioning and compositional events leading up to its premiere. The study is additionally intended to serve as a reference for the conducting community.

The commission story was compiled primarily through interviews between the author and Joan Tower, and between the author and Jack Stamp, a pivotal figure in leading the project to fruition. Tower's compositional procedures were examined, and the creation and revision phases of this work were considered within the context of those procedures.

Separate chapters contain three analyses of *Fascinating Ribbons*. Each type of analysis recognizes eight formal divisions in the work, and presents material in a chronological format. In the descriptive, graphic, and imagery analyses, the author combined subjective and objective approaches. Descriptive terms were assigned to numerous motives and rhythmic and melodic patterns.

Transcripts for the Tower and Stamp interviews appear in appendixes.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION, PURPOSE, OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY, AND BACKGROUND AND BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Introduction

During the past twenty years, Joan Tower has emerged as one of America's most celebrated living composers. She served as composer-in-residence with the St. Louis Symphony from 1985-88, and in 1990 received the prestigious Grawemeyer Award for her orchestral work *Silver Ladders*. In 1992 Tower was named a Pulitzer Prize finalist for her *Violin Concerto*, and she was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1998. Leonard Slatkin, music director of the National Symphony Orchestra and champion of new music, considers Joan Tower one of America's outstanding modern composers.[1] Internationally acclaimed artists and ensembles perform her music, and she is in continuous demand as a commissioned composer. Tower's reputation as a performer, educator, and proponent for new music is widely known.

Joan Tower's entire compositional output to date is for instrumentalists. With the exception of one orchestral transcription, all her

[1] "An Interview with Leonard Slatkin," Interview by Frank Byrne, *CBDNA Report* (Spring 1998): 13.

publications prior to 1981 are scored for chamber groups or soloists. Since that time Tower has composed numerous orchestral works, including several concerti. Tower's catalog contains unaccompanied solo pieces, as well as chamber and large ensemble works. Her compositions feature string, woodwind, brass, percussion, keyboard, and guitar soloists. Tower has composed music for one ballet (*Stepping Stones*), and three additional works (*Sequoia, Silver Ladders,* and *Wings*) have been choreographed since their premiere. Most of her pieces are written in single-movement form, and the duration of her longest work (*Concerto for Orchestra*) is approximately thirty minutes.

Though two arrangers have crafted wind and percussion versions of the *Celebration* scene from her *Stepping Stones* ballet, *Fascinating Ribbons* is Tower's first original work for wind band.[2] Under the auspices of the College Band Directors National Association (CBDNA), a consortium of thirty college bands and one high school ensemble commissioned the piece in 1999. The premiere performance of the resultant work—a single-movement piece of approximately six and one-half minutes duration—was given on 22 February 2001 in Denton, Texas at the biennial CBDNA national conference. Tower,

[2] The terms band, concert band, wind ensemble, and wind band are used synonymously throughout this document.

who was sixty-two years of age when she completed *Fascinating Ribbons*, was present for the premiere.

Joan Tower joins a growing list of high-profile composers who have thrived primarily in the worlds of orchestral and/or chamber music, but who have eventually written at least one work for wind band. *Fascinating Ribbons* represents a substantial addition to the band repertoire by a composer of considerable stature.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to analyze Joan Tower's *Fascinating Ribbons* for band, and to examine the commissioning and compositional events leading up to its premiere. The current study is intended to join other research documents in providing the conducting community with resources concerning wind band literature.

Overview of the Study

Though it is beyond the scope of the study to provide a detailed biographical sketch of Joan Tower, Chapter One contains limited background material. Available resources that provide more extensive information are identified.

Chapter Two includes information regarding other researchers' analytical work on Tower's music, and also describes the procedures that have been applied in the analysis of the *Fascinating Ribbons* score.

Chapter Three contains information regarding the genesis of *Fascinating Ribbons*. An overview of notable band commissioning efforts precedes the story of the project to secure a commitment for a piece from Joan Tower. Tower knew virtually nothing about wind bands or band music prior to 1993, when she was first approached about writing a band work. It was more than five years later when she accepted the commission. The story of the *Fascinating Ribbons* commission was compiled primarily through interviews between the author and the leading figures in the project.

The second portion of Chapter Three addresses Tower's compositional procedures, and considers the creation and revision phases of the *Fascinating Ribbons* project within the context of those procedures.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six contain the three types of analyses. Chapter Four features a descriptive analysis of the musical elements in the piece, and includes vivid descriptors of various melodic figures and motives as assigned by the author. Events in each of the eight identified formal sections are described as they occur chronologically in the score. Chapter Five contains graphic analyses of five parameters: forces in use, pitch range, pitch density, attack frequency, and dynamics. Graphs for each of the parameters are included for all eight identified sections of the work, and written information accompanies each graph. An imagery analysis, in which the author assigns dramatic plot characteristics to the musical events of the *Fascinating Ribbons* score, is located in Chapter Six. Though informed by the descriptive and graphic analyses, the imagery analysis is extremely subjective.

Chapter Seven summarizes the findings of the preceding chapters and offers recommendations for further study.

Two Appendixes contain transcripts of interviews between the author and Joan Tower, and between the author and Jack Stamp. Stamp was the principal figure in the project to secure a commitment from Tower for a commissioned band work, and he also conducted the premiere performance of *Fascinating Ribbons*.

Background and Biographical Information

Joan Tower was born on 6 September 1938 in New Rochelle, New York. She spent the years between age nine and eighteen in South America, where her father was a mining engineer. She received her undergraduate education at Bennington College in Vermont, and completed masters and doctoral degrees at Columbia University.

Tower studied piano throughout her childhood, and developed a love for percussion and rhythmic music through her South American experiences. She did not attempt composition until required to do so as a student at Bennington. It was not until many years later that she began to think of herself primarily as a composer.

Throughout the 1960s Tower was active as a performer, teacher, and composer in New York City. In 1969 she founded the Da Capo Chamber Players, an ensemble specializing in the performance of new music. The group received the Naumburg Award for chamber music in 1973. For fifteen years Tower was the pianist in this quintet that also includes flute, clarinet, violin, and cello, and she composed feature pieces for members of the group. Tower eventually left the Da Capo Chamber Players to focus more substantial energy on composition.

Joan Tower accepted a part-time teaching position in 1972 at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. In 1988, following her composition residency with the St. Louis Symphony, she accepted a full-time position at Bard and assumed the chairmanship of the music department. In recent years she has begun conducting on an occasional basis, accepting offers from a number of orchestras. Tower now splits her time primarily between teaching and composing, and she frequently participates in music festivals and other events where her music is featured.

Tower's compositions of the 1960s and early 1970s reflect her involvement at that time with serial music. She observes, "When you start writing as a young composer, you write the way you think you should be writing because that's the way your teacher or your colleagues write."[3] She was performing 12-tone music with the Da Capo Chamber Players, and as a composer she associated with Milton Babbitt, Benjamin Boretz, and Charles Wuorinen, among others.[4] Her works from that period were constructed using pre-compositional maps.

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[3] Ann McCutchan, *The Muse That Sings: Composers Speak About the Creative Process* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 58.

[4] Carol Neuls-Bates, ed., *Women in Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), 347.

In the 1970s Tower's perspective and compositional approach began to change. As a pianist she had become "bored with being an acrobat,"[5] as she described the act of performing much of the contemporary repertoire. She heard live performances of Olivier Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la Fin du Temps* and George Crumb's *Voice of the Whale,* and was struck by the relative simplicity of both works.[6]

Tower sensed that the complexities of serialism did not offer the most effective avenue for expressing her own compositional voice. She began to shift away from serial writing in 1975 with the sextet *Breakfast Rhythms II,* and made a clean break in 1976 with *Black Topaz,* written for piano and six instruments.[7] By the early 1980s Tower had stopped using pre-compositional maps of any kind,[8] and the act of composing had evolved into "a completely organic and intuitive" process.[9] In defense of her intuitive approach to composition, Tower says, "We have this vague suspicion that intuition has no

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[5] McCutchan, 59.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Kyle Gann, "Uptown Dropout" *Village Voice* (22 September 1998): 132.

[8] Joan Tower, interview by Jan Fournier, 8 July 1983, American Music Series No. 55, transcript, Yale University School of Music, New Haven, CT: 9.

[9] Joan Tower, "A Conversation with Joan Tower," Interview by John Zech, transcript excerpt of interview broadcast over Minnesota Public Radio 22 October 1998 (http://www.newmusicnow.org/works/interviews.cfm?id_work=34919024): 2.

real depth. That's a dangerously wrong idea."[10] Tower now views her years writing serial music as a "ten-year detour" in her development as a composer.[11]

In 1995 Tower said, "Writing music is my emotional survival ... ."[12] She even attributes an illness that overtook her on a European vacation to a lack of musical involvement at the time.[13] In earlier years the writing of music was a slow and difficult, if not torturous, process for her. Performing an existing work, though certainly a demanding activity, was much less stressful for her than composing a new one.

Unlike those of many of her peers, however, Tower's works were receiving multiple performances, and she continued to receive regular commission offers. Tower eventually realized that, though the rewards associated with performing music may be relatively immediate, those for composing do not typically arrive until much later. Tower values the awards and recognition she has received through composing, but it is the positive

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[10] Tower's quote comes from online notes for BalletMet Columbus, by Gerard Charles, "*Stepping Stones*" compiled in February 1998 (http://www.balletmet.org/Notes/Stones.html).

[11] McCutchan, 59.

[12] Neuls-Bates, 353.

[13] Joan Tower, interview by Jenny Raymond, 4 January 1998, American Music Series No. 55, transcript, Yale University School of Music, New Haven, CT: 29.

responses of performers and audiences that prove most gratifying to her. "To have a player get excited about my music is an incredibly big reward .... So the internal private struggle of composing in your room alone is paid off later, in a big way."[14]

Composition remains a slow process for Tower, and she is far from prolific in her output. Noting that the act of writing eventually became a less agonizing activity, however, Tower said that what "used to be an agonizing process [evolved into] a challenging process."[15]

Though intended for younger readers, Nichols' chapter on Joan Tower provides a concise biographical overview of her formative years.[16] Among the richest resources on Tower's life and music are the interviews available in various media. In both *The Muse That Sings: Composers Speak About the Creative Process* and *Women in Music*, she addresses the musical impact of her adolescent years in South America, her first forays into composing, her tenure with the Da Capo Chamber Players, and her separation from the "uptown"

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[14] Tower, "A Conversation with Joan Tower," interview by Zech, 1.

[15] McCutchan, 57.

[16] Janet Nichols, *Women Music Makers: An Introduction to Women Composers* (New York: Walker and Co., 1992).

serial composers. She also discusses gender issues, her relationship to academia, and her shift during the 1980s into writing for orchestral forces.[17]

Other interviews and lectures amplify the details summarized in these volumes. Transcripts or audio copies of Tower interviews are available from various printed, online, and other sources. The sequence of four interviews, spanning nearly twenty-two years, from Yale University's "American Music Series" of the Oral History Collection is especially enlightening.[18]

The first of the Yale interviews, conducted by Harmeyer, is notable in part because it coincided with Tower's writing of her serial breakaway piece *Black Topaz*. Tower makes veiled references to changes in her compositional style that were beginning to emerge at that time, though there is no direct statement to suggest she was abandoning serial procedures. With the benefit of historical perspective one can infer much from this interview about Tower's impending compositional shift.

Fournier's interview was conducted at the time when *Sequoia* was generating considerable excitement in the orchestral world. Tower discusses

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[17] McCutchan, and Neuls-Bates.

[18] Joan Tower, interview by Frances Harmeyer, 9 January 1976, American Music Series No. 55, transcript, Yale University School of Music, New Haven, CT; Tower, interview by Fournier; Tower, interview by Raymond; Tower, interview by Julie Niemeyer, 30 April 1993, American Music Series No. 55, transcript, Yale University School of Music, New Haven, CT.

her recent successes with Fournier, and also addresses several issues relative to the status of contemporary music.

The interview with Niemeyer primarily concerns Tower's clarinet music. Tower is especially fond of the clarinet, and has featured the instrument in several of her compositions. Raymond's interview covers a broad range of topics, including Tower's activism on behalf of women's music, her growing passion for conducting, and the celebrations acknowledging her sixtieth birthday.

Additional Tower interview transcripts are included as appendixes to dissertations by Bonds and Janssen.[19] The two interviews conducted by Bonds focus on issues concerning the clarinet solo *Wings*, and Janssen's interview addresses the clarinet and piano work *Fantasy ... those harbor lights*. Schloss also interviewed Tower for her dissertation that discusses *Silver Ladders* and additional works by Tower and other composers, but Schloss provides no interview transcript.[20] She does, however, glean from the interview

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[19] Nancy E. Leckie Bonds, "An Analysis of Joan Tower's *Wings* for Solo Clarinet" (D.M.A. diss., Arizona State University, 1992), 194-228; and Robert Janssen, "Intuition and Analysis: A Performer's Perspective on Joan Tower's *Fantasy* for Clarinet and Piano" (D.M.A. diss., City University of New York, 2000).

[20] Myrna F. Schloss, "Out of the Twentieth Century: Three Composers, Three Musics, One Femininity" (Ph.D. diss., Wesleyan University, 1993).

information pertaining to several Tower works. The detailed material on Tower's interpolation of music by other composers is particularly interesting.

In recent years Tower has presented lectures to diverse audiences in varied settings. One lecture, entitled "Choreographing Sound," offers insight into Tower's view of the way in which physical action and reaction impact her approach to composition. A second lecture, "On Approaching Senior Status as a Woman and Composer," represents Tower's only attempt to date to provide an autobiographical summary. Though transcripts are not available of these presentations, audio recordings exist.[21] A transcript of a lecture given in September 1987 to the St. Louis Clarinet Society can be found in an appendix to Bonds' dissertation.[22]

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[21] Joan Tower, "Approaching Senior Status as a Woman and a Composer" (audio cassette recording of Patten Foundation Lecture at Indiana University, 27 October 1998), Indiana University Library, Bloomington; and Joan Tower, "Choreographing Sound" (audio cassette recording of Patten Foundation Lecture at Indiana University, 26 October 1998), Indiana University Library, Bloomington.

[22] Bonds, 230-241.

CHAPTER TWO

ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES

Joan Tower's doctoral dissertation, a detailed study of her composition *Breakfast Rhythms I and II*,[1] might initially seem to provide an analytical model for the present study. Tower still used pre-compositional maps at the time she completed *Breakfast Rhythms I and II*, however, and her writing method changed radically in the ensuing years to a more organic and intuitive approach. The analytical procedures utilized in her dissertation are valid in the context of her own study, but are of minimal value when examining Tower's more recent compositions.

Other writers have adopted a variety of approaches when analyzing Tower's music. Jones provides a serial analysis of *Hexachords* (a solo flute work from 1972) in her dissertation, and compares the flute writing to that found in the non-serial *Flute Concerto* (1989).[2] Lochhead's essay examines the various functions that repetition fill in contributing to formal coherence in

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[1] Joan Tower, "On Breakfast Rhythms I and II" (D.M.A. diss., Columbia University, 1978).

[2] Margo S. 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 Works of Vivaldi, Rivier, Mozart, Davidowsky, and Others" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Texas, 1993), Text-fiche.

Breakfast Rhythms I and II and the unaccompanied clarinet solo *Wings*.[3] Bonds approaches the analysis of *Wings* from the perspective of a performer, and applies four analytical methods—formal, Hindemithian, graphic, and linear—to the work.[4] Similarly, Janssen considers *Fantasy ... those harbor lights* for clarinet and piano from a performer's perspective, but his project emphasizes the role of intuition in the analysis and performance experience.[5]

Schloss presents a narrative-descriptive analysis of *Silver Ladders*, and assigns feminine and masculine characteristics to portions of this orchestral piece.[6] Bryden examines the chamber work *Petroushkates*, along with works of four other composers, and displays graphs depicting the relative intensity of various musical parameters in each piece. Bryden also discusses ways in which changes in intensity contribute to closural processes in non-tonal music.[7]

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[3] Judy Lochhead, "Joan Tower's *Wings* and *Breakfast Rhythms I and II*: Some Thoughts on Form and Repetition," *Perspectives of New Music* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 132-156.

[4] Bonds.

[5] Robert Janssen"Intuition and Analysis: A Performer's Perspective on Joan Tower's *Fantasy* for Clarinet and Piano" (D.M.A. diss., City University of New York, 2000).

[6] Schloss, 198-218.

[7] Kristy A. Bryden, "Musical Conclusions: Exploring Closural Processes in Five Late Twentieth-Century Chamber Works" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2001).

Robinson draws on the visual imagery of the namesake tree in her analysis of Tower's *Sequoia*. She focuses chiefly on *Sequoia's* dynamics, tempo, motivic figures and intervallic relationships, and intends primarily to inform prospective conductors regarding the work.[8] Ball's cursory analytical overview of *Silver Ladders*, one of seventeen contemporary American orchestral compositions examined in his study, is also geared toward providing data for conductors.[9]

Carol Wincenc is the performer who invited Tower to compose the *Flute Concerto*, and she was also the soloist for the premiere performance. Her performance guide to the work appears in one of several journal articles that address Tower compositions.[10] Schwenk treats Tower's solo guitar work *Clocks* as a model for the analysis of contemporary music.[11] Prado briefly

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[8] Susan Robinson, "Three Contemporary Orchestral Compositions by American Women: A Guide to Rehearsal and Performance for the University Orchestra Conductor" (Ph.D. diss., Texas Tech University, 1991), 35-55.

[9] James S. Ball, "A Conductor's Guide To Selected Contemporary American Orchestral Compositions" (D.M.A. diss., University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1992), 109-114.

[10] Carol Wincenc, "Performing Tower's Concerto," *Flute Talk* 19, no. 3 (November 1999): 8-15.

[11] Noel Schwenk, "Analyzing Contemporary Music From a Performer's Perspective," *Soundboard* 26, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 21-23.

examines *Sequoia* and *Silver Ladders*, noting ways in which Tower utilizes traditional ensembles and musical materials in a contemporary manner.[12]

When asked what type of analysis she would recommend for her own non-serial works, Tower suggested starting with "a physics point of view. What direction is [the musical intensity] going? There are three directions: one is up, one is staying, one is down. ... In other words, music can get more intense, get less intense, or it can stay the same."[13]

As a composer, Tower is continually concerned with musical action and reaction, especially as they impact musical intensity. In the physical realm, if a ball is thrown against a wall, for example, there are logical reactions that may be expected to result. Each reaction depends upon a number of factors, including the velocity at which the ball is thrown, the type of surface it hits, and the prevailing climatic conditions at the time of the experiment. Similarly, when Tower writes a musical passage, she considers the context of the current musical moment as both a reaction to and an outgrowth of the preceding events.

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[12] Sharon Prado, "New Wine into Old Bottles: Traditional Media and Contemporary Women Composers," *Contemporary Music Review* 16 (1997): 45-57.

[13] Bonds, 211.

Tower's description of increasing, decreasing, or maintaining intensity levels corresponds to Berry's statement that all musical actions and interactions may be defined as progressive, recessive, or stasis.[14] Berry does not provide a model for musical analysis that encompasses these concepts, but Wakefield does in his dissertation on Ernst Krenek's serial work for band, *Dream Sequence*.[15]

In the present study, intensity is but one aspect of *Fascinating Ribbons* that is evaluated. The three types of analysis presented in chapters four through six represent an attempt to assess several parameters that contribute to the unity and dramatic impact of the work.

Since writing is an organic process for Tower, and she composes each individual work in sequential order, the analysis information in each chapter is presented primarily in a chronological format. Chapter Four contains a descriptive analysis of *Fascinating Ribbons*, and Chapter Five contains graphic analyses of several musical parameters, along with written descriptions and clarifications of the graphed information. The author has modeled the current

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[14] Wallace Berry, *Structural Functions in Music*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1976; reprint, New York: Dover, 1987), 7.

[15] William K. Wakefield, "Ernst Krenek's *Dream Sequence*, Opus 224 for Concert Band: An Analysis and Discussion of Performance Problems" (D.M.A. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1990), 18-23.

graphic analysis to an extent after that utilized in Bryden's study.[16] Chapter Six contains an imagery analysis, in which the author assigns plot characteristics to the musical action of the piece.

Joan Tower advocates the type of subjective reaction to her music that is presented in Chapter Six. As was previously noted, many of Tower's titles are intended to evoke images, and she is especially fond of those that suggest action.[17] Referring to herself as a "choreographer of sound," Tower also utilizes visualization and physical activity to urge performers toward effective interpretations of her music.[18]

Though such visualizations regarding Tower's music are subjective, their value is no less significant than more objective descriptions of scales, chords, rhythms and textures. Though it is apparent that Tower's music is not specifically programmatic, it is reasonable to suggest that her music can have image-filled meaning beyond the printed notes. As McClary states regarding musical analysis, "as long as we approach questions of signification *exclusively* from a formalist point of view, we will continue to conclude that it is impossible to get from chords, pitch-class sets, or structures to any other

---

[16] The specifics of her approach are outlined in Bryden, 19-69.

[17] Tower, interview by Raymond, 5.

[18] Ibid., 8.

kind of human or social meaning. Indeed, the more deeply entrenched we become in strictly formal explanations, the further away we are from admitting even the *possibility* of other sorts of readings ... .[19]

Through the three analytical approaches to *Fascinating Ribbons*, it is intended that the following questions will be addressed:

1. Is there germinal material in the opening of the piece that seems to have spawned subsequent events?
2. Is there an apparent logic to the structure of the work, befitting an organically created piece? In other words, do events flow out of those that preceded them?
3. Is the musical landscape indeed a coherent one, as Tower clearly seeks to create? In other words, is there a sense of beginning, middle and end?
4. In what ways does Tower use the various musical elements to alter intensity levels in the piece?
5. Are there characteristics of dramatic plot displayed in this purely instrumental composition?

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[19] Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 20.

6. Is there visual imagery one can associate with *Fascinating Ribbons* befitting a piece with such a title?
7. How do the various melodic "ribbons" relate to one another and contribute to the psychological impact of the work?
8. How are musical expectations set up and fulfilled or denied in this composition?

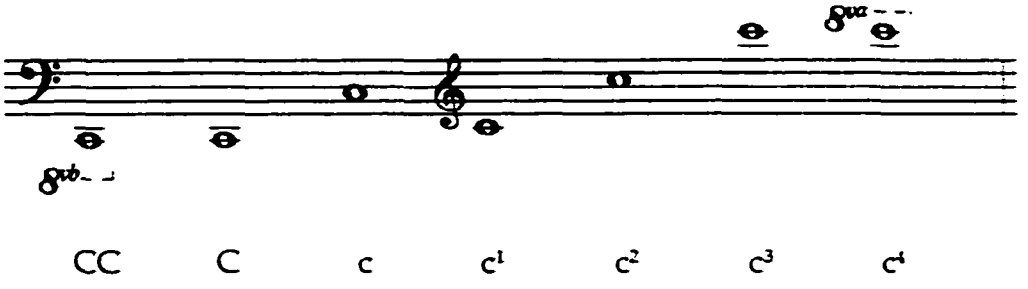
Descriptive Analysis

Fascinating Ribbons contains melodic and rhythmic gestures that return in various guises, clearly suggesting formal organization. The present author has identified and labeled eight formal sections in the work, and each section is discussed in detail in Chapter Four. Rhythmic, melodic, harmonic, textural, timbral, registral and dynamic elements are considered in the discussion. A summary chart of the formal findings is included at the close of the chapter.

Unless otherwise noted, all identified pitch classes refer to concert pitches. Musical examples drawn from transposing instrument parts in the score, however, are shown as written unless otherwise indicated. Though in most instances pitches are identified by their generic descriptors (C, F-sharp, G-flat, etc.), in circumstances when octave classification of pitches is pertinent, the octave designation system shown below is utilized (see Fig. 1).

When referring to harmonic and melodic intervals, the abbreviations 2d, 3d, 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th are used.

Fig. 1: Octave designation.



Fascinating Ribbons contains a variety of tonal and non-tonal harmonic materials. When describing non-tonal pitch collections of apparent significance, the prime form versions of set classes, as listed in Straus' *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*, are utilized.[20]

Use of octatonic scales is a common feature in Tower's music. Analysts have identified and discussed octatonic materials in *Silver Ladders* and *Music for Cello and Orchestra*,[21] the *Flute Concerto*,[22] *Clocks*,[23] *Petroushkates*, and the

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[20] Joseph N. Straus, *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*, 2d ed., (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 2000), 225.

[21] Charles Hoag, "In Quest of *Silver Ladders* in the Americas," *Contemporary Music Forum: Proceedings of the Bowling Green State University New Music and Art Festival* 4 (1992): 9-16.

[22] Jones, 40.

Violin Concerto.[24] *Fascinating Ribbons* also contains considerable octatonic melodic and harmonic materials. When labeling octatonic scales, classifications described by Messiaen are utilized. According to Messiaen the octatonic scale, consisting of alternating whole and half steps, is the second of seven "modes of limited transposition." His designations label the octatonic pattern beginning on C as the first transposition of the scale. This first transposition is designated as T1 throughout the analysis chapters in this document. Scales beginning on C-sharp and D are the second and third transpositions, and are labeled respectively as scales T2 and T3 (see Fig. 2). Any other transpositions provide a repetition of one of the original three versions of the scale.[25]
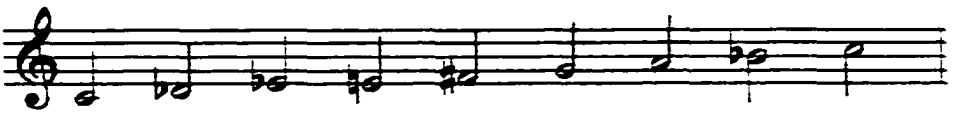
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[23] Schwenk, 22.

[24] James Denman is completing research for a Ph.D. dissertation tentatively entitled "Modes of Octatonic Discourse: Traditions, Terms and Techniques 1880-1999" through the University of Washington. Denman has examined the *Concerto for Violin*, *Petroushkates*, and *Silver Ladders*, along with works by Messiaen, Bartok, Stravinsky and others. In e-mail correspondence with the present author (16 May 2001), Denman indicated the Tower pieces contain some of "the clearest and most interesting illustrations" of octatonic writing he has found in his research.
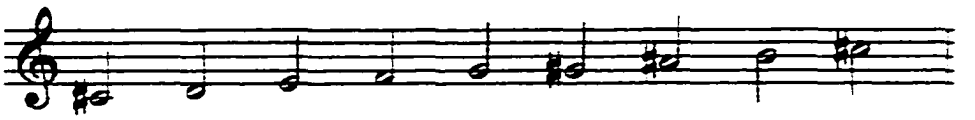
[25] Olivier Messiaen, *The Technique of My Musical Language*, Vol. 1, Translated by John Satterfield, (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1956), 59.

Fig. 2: Three Transpositions of the Octatonic Scale.
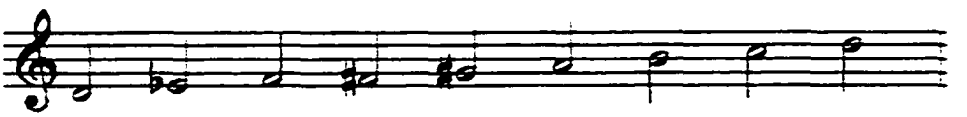
A. Transposition 1 (T1)



B. Transposition 2 (T2)



C. Transposition 3 (T3)



Each of Messiaen's examples of the octatonic scales begins with an ascending half step, but Tower often begins her scales with an ascending whole step. Messiaen's designations apply whether scales begin with an ascending half or whole step, so long as the pitch classes of the scale in use are consistent with those shown in the three transpositions. When a determination is made regarding the starting pitch of a particular scale, each scale is identified by type and centricity. For example, an E-centric T1 scale is a scale in which the pitch E displays polar pull, and the pitches of the scale belong to the first octatonic transposition as identified by Messiaen. In

instances where centricity is unclear, any ambiguity is noted and octatonic scales are identified by type (T1, T2, T3) only.

Numerous descriptive terms have been assigned to motives, and rhythmic and melodic patterns in *Fascinating Ribbons*. Inspired by Tower's own comments,[26] several patterns are identified as types of "ribbons." Any such nomenclature included in this document represents the author's opinions and is not necessarily indicative of Joan Tower's views.

Findings regarding all of the preceding material are combined into a chronological narrative.

Graphic Analysis

Chapter Five contains the graphic analyses of *Fascinating Ribbons*. Five types of measurements were taken and the results plotted on graphs. The measured parameters are:

1. Forces in use
2. Pitch range
3. Pitch density
4. Attack frequency
5. Dynamics

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[26] Tower wrote, "...many of the contours of motives in the piece are shaped in curved 'ribbon' patterns—hence the title *Fascinating Ribbons*." In Joan Tower, Program notes, Keystone Winds concert at College Band Directors National Association Conference, Denton, Texas (22 February 2001): 3.

Particularly when combined with the descriptive analysis, graphic analysis provides an effective method for locating sectional boundaries. Because there is much about the music that graphs alone do not make apparent, each graph is accompanied by written information for clarity and context.

For each of the five measured parameters, one graph is shown in Chapter Five for each of the eight identified sections in the piece. Summary graphs for the five parameters, covering the entirety of *Fascinating Ribbons* and indicating sectional divisions, are included at the close of the chapter. On every graph, quantitative values of the parameter under consideration are plotted on the vertical axis. The range displayed on the vertical axis reflects the extreme range of each parameter as demonstrated in *Fascinating Ribbons*. For example, though there are twelve possible pitch classes that could sound at any given moment, Tower uses no more than eight simultaneously in this piece. Tower also includes occasional moments of silence, so the vertical axis on *Pitch Density* charts exhibits a range from zero up to eight simultaneous pitches. The horizontal axis on all charts represents the total duration of the section in which the parameter has been measured. Except on the summary graphs, measure numbers appear beneath the horizontal axis of each graph. Section numbers appear beneath the horizontal axis on summary charts.

Though multiple measurements of parameters were taken in each measure of the work, graphs reflect only two measurements per bar. In measures featuring more than two notable shifts in a given parameter's quantitative value, the author selected those two values that best seem to reflect the trends of each specific instance.

There is no direct correlation between the appearance of the graphs and the length of the segment under consideration. Though individual sections of *Fascinating Ribbons* contain varying numbers of measures and may also feature varied tempi and changing meters, all graphs are approximately the same size. Further, individual measures are considered equal in length and duration, regardless of the meter or tempo of the segment. A sudden rise and fall on any of the graph types is referred to as a "spike."[27]

Descriptions and explanations follow for each of the five parameter measurements.

Forces

The primary function of the *Forces* graphs is to indicate how many of the forty available parts in *Fascinating Ribbons* are instructed to play at a given

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[27] The term "spike" is sometimes used in scientific fields to refer to the sudden rise and fall of a given measurement—such as heart rate or seismic activity—as displayed on a monitor or printer.

moment. Though it is anticipated that multiple performers will be assigned to certain parts during rehearsal and performance, no such assumptions were made when creating the *Forces* graphs. Clarinet I, for example, is considered a single part regardless of the number of clarinetists who might be assigned to that part. Also, when multiple pitches simultaneously sound in an individual part (in the piano and mallet parts, for example), all concurrent pitches constitute a single part. On each *Forces* graph, the vertical axis range extends from zero up to forty parts.

The *Forces* graphs do not indicate how many of the forty available parts play during a more extended period of time. It is possible, for instance, that all forty parts will play *at one point or another* in a particular section of the piece, though perhaps no more than ten parts ever play *simultaneously* in that section. Further, the graphs do not reflect timbral shifts, nor do they indicate when two or more parts play unison or doubled lines. Some of the spikes appearing on the *Forces* graphs occur at points of phrase elision, where timbres momentarily overlap.

Pitch Range

The primary function of the *Pitch Range* graphs is to indicate both the highest and lowest pitches utilized throughout *Fascinating Ribbons*. This is the

only type of included graph that displays more than one simultaneous measurement. One can draw from these graphs data relating to the simultaneous distance between high and low pitches at a given point in time or across an extended period of time, as well as shifts in tessitura. Sounding pitches in the piece range from a low of CC up to a high of b^4, and both the highest and lowest pitches sounding at any given moment are plotted on the vertical axis of each *Pitch Range* graph.

In the written descriptions that accompany *Pitch Range* graphs, references are made to the vertical pitch range and horizontal pitch range. Vertical pitch range measures the simultaneous span between the highest and lowest pitch classes. The horizontal pitch range, by comparison, is the span between highest and lowest pitches across a specified period of time.

No attempt is made to represent indefinite pitch percussion instruments on the *Pitch Range* charts. Therefore, in passages featuring only indefinite pitch percussion instruments, as well as during periods of ensemble silence with at least one quarter note duration, gaps appear on the *Pitch Range* graphs.

Pitch Density

The primary function of the *Pitch Density* graphs is to indicate the number of unique pitch classes that sound simultaneously. All octave doublings are disregarded in this measurement, and enharmonics are considered as a single pitch class. At no point in *Fascinating Ribbons* does Tower call for more than eight pitches to sound simultaneously. The vertical axis on *Pitch Density* graphs therefore displays values from zero up to eight pitch classes.

No attempt is made to account for indefinite pitch percussion instruments on the *Pitch Density* charts. Gaps in the graphs appear in locations either where only indefinite pitch percussion instruments play, or where ensemble silences of at least one quarter note duration are located.

Pitch Density is a measurement of simultaneous events, and therefore does not indicate how many of the twelve possible pitch classes occur across any extended period of time.

Attack Frequency

Attack Frequency is measured in attacks per second (APS). Graphs indicate the number of musical attacks that occur within a given second of time. For purposes of measuring this parameter, the term "attack" is not an

indicator of articulation. Whether a note is separately articulated, accented, or slurred has no impact on the APS rate. As long as two adjacent notes are not tied together, for example, they are counted as two "attacks" when figuring the APS measurement. The *Attack Frequency* graphs, therefore, provide an assessment of activity, but not articulation. Further, the graphs do not inform regarding the relative simplicity or complexity of a particular rhythmic pattern. It is possible that a given passage with a relatively low APS rate would be considered more complex than one with a higher APS rate.

The *Attack Frequency* measurements are obtained by following a three-step process. First, the tempo marking for each passage is utilized to determine a "beats per second" figure. In instances where Tower specifies an acceptable tempo range, the mean tempo is utilized. In m. 52, for example, Tower's marking of "quarter note = 138-144" yields a mean tempo of "quarter note = 141" and a resulting "beats per second" figure of 2.35 (141 quarter notes per second divided by 60 seconds). Second, the number of unique attacks in each beat of each measure is determined through examination of all parts. Third, the number of attacks per beat is multiplied by the "beats per second" figure. The resulting figure is the APS for the passage under consideration. Referring again to the previous example, the constant sixteenth notes in m. 52 equal four attacks per beat. Multiplying the attacks per beat (4)

by the "beats per second" figure (2.35) yields an APS rate in m. 52 of 9.4. In measures containing "incomplete" beats (bars with meters 3/8 and 5/8, for instance), fractional measurements are utilized. For purposes of determining *Attack Frequency*, notes sounding during fermatas are considered to have twice their indicated durational value.

Attack Frequency in *Fascinating Ribbons* ranges from a low of zero during rests and some sustained pitches up to 15.2 APS, and this measurement is plotted on the vertical axis.

Dynamics

The primary function of the *Dynamics* graphs is to convey the prevailing dynamic at any given moment in *Fascinating Ribbons*. The graphs also indicate the progression of dynamics over a more extended period of time. The softest indicated dynamic in the work is *ppp*, and the loudest indication is *ff*. Because Tower occasionally specifies two or more simultaneous dynamic levels, all the printed dynamic indications in a given location are averaged in order to arrive at an overall dynamic for each measure. The dynamic averages are then plotted on the vertical axis of the graphs.

Because dynamics are relative, the graphs do not reflect the actual volume of a given passage. Scoring issues, including the number and type of instruments utilized, along with the tessitura in which those instruments play, substantially impact the audible volume level. Perhaps more so than with any of the other measured parameters, one must evaluate the *Dynamics* graphs in conjunction with those for other parameters, and must consider the context in which the prevailing dynamic level occurs.

Imagery Analysis

A third, though clearly related type of analysis follows the descriptive and graphic analyses. One might suggest that the imagery analysis emerges as a natural outgrowth of the investigation undertaken for the first two analysis chapters.

Chapter Six contains an associative description of the musico-dramatic landscape of *Fascinating Ribbons*. Completion of the imagery analysis constitutes an informed-intuitive process. It is intuitive in that there is no prescribed method to follow that leads to selection or inclusion of the included material. It is informed, however, by the analyst's experience with the piece under consideration, and also by the sum of his or her educational and other experiences. The contents of Chapter Six surface, therefore, through

allowing the imagination to envision extra-musical connections with the musical events of the work.

Though the descriptions in Chapter Six are intensely subjective, it is intended that their usage will lead to effective musical interpretations. There is no assumption that readers will agree with the interpretive musings of the present author. Rather it is hoped that, perhaps even prompted by vigorous disagreement with the images described, the reader will be spurred to seek his or her own fact-supported, image-filled interpretation.

Plot characteristics have been assigned to various events in the piece, though the descriptions are not intended to serve as a continuous programmatic storyline. Questions are occasionally posed in the text, serving as an indication of how one might react to the sequence of musical events upon hearing the work for the first time, not yet cognizant of the material that will follow. The queries also reflect that Tower has, through her compositional choices, set up expectations for the listener.

The images and plotlines occasionally shift as the work progresses, and similes and metaphors are not entirely consistent. The descriptions of ribbons and motives first applied in Chapter Four appear again as part of the imagery analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

THE COMMISSION, AND THE COMPOSITION PHASE

The Commission

William Revelli, founder and first president of the College Band Directors National Association (CBDNA), issued a challenge to college and university band conductors in 1946 by calling those in the profession to "devise ways and means of motivating our better composers to give us masterpieces of original music."[1] In 1961 Richard Franko Goldman said, "The most important factor in the world of bands and band music today is the growth of a new and original repertoire."[2] Donald Hunsberger, in a 1994 essay reflecting on more than forty years of Eastman Wind Ensemble history, said, "the most important key to the success of any performing ensemble lies in the quality of its repertoire."[3]

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[1] "The University or College Band as a Concert Organization," in *The College and University Band*, compiled by David Whitwell and Acton Ostling, Jr., (Reston, Virginia: MENC), 7.

[2] Richard F. Goldman, *The Wind Band: Its Literature and Technique* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1961), 12.

[3] Donald Hunsberger, "The Wind Ensemble Concept," in *The Wind Ensemble and Its Repertoire*, ed. Frank J. Cipolla and Donald Hunsberger (Rochester, New York: Univ. of Rochester Press, 1994), 10.

Since the eighteenth century, wind bands of various incarnations have filled military, social, entertainment, educational and artistic roles. Until at least the middle of the twentieth century, most band music was intended for functional rather than artistic purposes.[4] Throughout much of the twentieth century and continuing to the present, members of the wind band community have sought to achieve recognition for their medium as one of artistic merit. As advocates have strived to elevate the quality of musical experiences, and to raise awareness of the aesthetic value of bands, concern regarding the quality of available literature has been ever present.

The resolve of members of the band community to advance the medium's goals has been a primary factor leading to the steady growth of original band literature in recent decades. Several activists have successfully secured new music for wind groups—often with minimal financial outlay—while other efforts have revealed unknown, lost or forgotten works.

Captain Francis E. Resta, then conductor of the United States Military Academy Band, invited numerous composers to create works for the 1952 Sesquicentennial Celebration of the Academy at West Point. This invitation resulted in band submissions from Henry Cowell, Morton Gould, Roy Harris,

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[4] David Whitwell, "Band Music from a Historical Perspective," in *The College and University Band*, compiled by David Whitwell and Acton Ostling, Jr., (Reston, Virginia: MENC), 59.

Darius Milhaud, William Grant Still, and others. A remarkable aspect of this project was that participating composers were not offered compensation for their submissions.[5]

Also in the early 1950s, Frederick Fennell invited hundreds of composers to submit existing works or new scores for performance by the Eastman Wind Ensemble. At the time of his invitation, the ensemble was months away from holding its inaugural rehearsal. Like Captain Resta, Fennell offered no money to composers who wished to present their music. Fennell did, however, promise a "performance prepared and played with love and affection."[6]

These and similar efforts have proven remarkably successful in expanding the available literature for wind bands, but it has been chiefly through paid commissions that the body of quality wind works has increased.

Neither the Goldman Band nor its directors ever directly commissioned a piece of music, but founder Edwin Franko Goldman and his son and successor Richard were great motivators in promoting the creation of

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[5] Frank Battisti, *The Twentieth Century American Wind Band/Ensemble: History, Development and Literature* (Ft. Lauderdale, Florida: Meredith Music Publications, 1995), 68.

[6] Frederick Fennell, *The Wind Ensemble* (Arkadelphia, Arkansas: Delta Publications, 1988), 24.

band works.[7] Beginning in the late 1940s and continuing until the 1970s, the Goldmans enlisted the support of the League of Composers, the American Bandmasters Association, and the Guggenheim Foundation for commissioning selections from leading composers, including Howard Hanson, Vincent Persichetti, Walter Piston, and Virgil Thomson.[8]

Jeffrey Renshaw has catalogued and described the collection of more than 350 pieces commissioned by the American Waterways Wind Orchestra from 1957 to 1991, including submissions by Samuel Adler, Henry Brant, Alan Hovhaness, Krystof Penderecki, Ned Rorem and Heitor Villa-Lobos.[9]

These efforts by the Goldmans and by those associated with the American Waterways group are but two examples from a lengthy list of notable concert band commissioning projects undertaken since the mid-1900s. Numerous other organizations, high schools, universities, publishers, individuals, and even instrument manufacturers have participated in

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[7] William D. Nicholls, "Factors Contributing to the Commissioning of American Band Works Since 1945" (D.M.A. diss., University of Miami, 1980), 11.

[8] Jason Belser, "Original Works for Concert Band Premiered or Commissioned by Edwin Franko Goldman, Richard Franko Goldman, and the Goldman Band 1919-1979" (D.M.A. diss., University of Iowa, 1994), 54.

[9] Jeffrey Renshaw, *The American Wind Symphony Commissioning Project: A Descriptive Catalog of Published Editions, 1957-1991* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).

commissioning efforts, resulting in rich additions to the band repertory from respected composers.

Despite William Revelli's urging in 1946, the first CBDNA commission did not occur until 1961, when the organization's Western and Northwestern Divisions sponsored Ingolf Dahl's *Sinfonietta for Concert Band*.[10] The national organization began issuing commissions on a regular basis in 1964, resulting in new literature from Pulitzer Prize winners Leslie Bassett, Aaron Copland, Mario Davidowsky, Howard Hanson, John Harbison, Joseph Schwantner, George Walker, and other respected composers. In 1991 CBDNA established the Consortium Commissioning Project to further encourage colleges and universities to participate directly in the commissioning process.[11]

Through efforts to enrich their medium's literature, band proponents have demonstrated great enthusiasm for the music of living composers. In the words of Frank Battisti, himself a central figure in many commissioning projects, "No constituency in the United States has shown a greater interest

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[10] Shelley Smithwick, "Familiarity of CBDNA Commissioning Projects Among College Band Directors in the United States" (D.M.A. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1999), 6.

[11] Frank Battisti, "The Legacy of Leaders with Vision" *The Instrumentalist* 47, no. 6 (January 1993): 21.

and support for contemporary composers and their music than the wind band/ensemble community."[12]

Joan Tower composes solely on commission. Her past commissions have come from many sources, including the Carnegie Hall Corporation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Walter M. Naumberg Foundation, and the Aspen Music Festival, plus ensembles, individuals and consortia. According to Tower, Associated Music Publishers (G. Schirmer, Inc.) will publish any piece that she presents to them, and they impose no expectations regarding the number or type of compositions she must produce.[13] Because she is in constant demand, Tower selects judiciously from among the commissioning offers she receives. In 1998 Tower stated, "people call me up regularly to ask me for pieces, and regularly I have to turn them down because I can't do them all ... I pick and choose what I want to do."[14]

Dennis Russell Davies and the American Composers Orchestra approached Tower about writing an orchestral piece in 1979, but she hesitated due to her lack of familiarity with the medium. Tower's transcription of her 1977 chamber piece *Amazon* was her only published

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[12] Battisti, *Twentieth Century American Wind Band*, 66.

[13] Joan Tower, personal interview with the author, 22 March 2002.

[14] Tower, interview by Raymond, 4.

orchestral work at the time—all other compositions were solo or chamber works. Eventually Tower accepted the orchestral commission, and the resultant work, *Sequoia*, became a landmark success for her.[15] Zubin Mehta programmed it with the New York Philharmonic, and performances by other major orchestras followed. Leonard Slatkin offered Tower the composer-in-residence position with the St. Louis Symphony based primarily on the strength of his reaction to *Sequoia*.[16] As she had done when approached about the *Sequoia* commission, Tower showed resistance when first offered commissions for solo organ and solo guitar, citing lack of fluency with the media.[17] Eventually she completed both projects, however.

In addition to seeking variety in the projects she undertakes, Tower desires to write for those who are eager to perform her music. Her work with orchestras has often proved exhausting in this regard, as she has met with significant resistance from members of some orchestras with which she has worked. Tower considers herself a "performer who composes,"[18] and she

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[15] Neuls-Bates, 348.

[16] Tower, interview by Raymond, 2.

[17] Joan Tower, "A Conversation with Joan Tower," Panel discussion moderated by Jack Stamp, (discussion date 27 February 1999) *CBDNA Journal* 14 (Fall 2000): 53.

[18] Joan Tower, interview by Frank Battisti, 22 February 2001, unpublished transcript.

realizes the personal investment that is required from performers in order to make their musical renditions convincing. Before accepting a commission offer, Tower must be persuaded that the commissioning soloist or organization has a passion for new music in general, and an interest in one of her compositions specifically.[19]

Tower enjoys participating in a collaborative experience with performers and conductors during the creation of a piece. While composing *Silver Ladders* for the St. Louis Symphony, Tower worked closely with individual members of the orchestra, seeking input and feedback about her writing. She does not wish to write music in the privacy of her studio and simply hand it to the performers upon its completion, but considers the process a joint endeavor between composer and performer.[20]

Tower said in 1983, regarding the paucity of modern literature for a particular instrument, that, "Those players are simply not asking for [new] music to be written!"[21] In 1993 Tower said, of an apparent shortage of

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[19] Tower, Panel discussion moderated by Stamp, 52.

[20] "Joan Tower: The composer in conversation with Bruce Duffie," Interview by Bruce Duffie, Transcript of interview conducted in Chicago, Illinois, April 1987 (http://my.voyager.net/duffie/tower.html): 4

[21] Laura Koplewitz, "Joan Tower: Building Bridges for New Music," *Symphony Magazine* (June 1983): 39.

woodwind quintet literature, that quintet activists should "find the composers they really like, and really pursue them, and say, 'I'm not taking "no" for an answer!'"[22]

Jack Stamp is a respected wind band composer and conductor, and a member of the music faculty at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Stamp is also an activist who seeks out celebrated composers who have not written band music. It was Stamp, for example, who led the commissioning effort resulting in David Diamond's writing of *Tantivy* for band. Joan Tower refers to Stamp as a "composer stalker," due to his persistence in seeking a commitment to write a piece.[23]

An avid fan of American music, Stamp was first enamored with Tower's music when he heard a recording of *Silver Ladders*. One of his first communications to Tower was a request for a private composition lesson. It was during the ensuing lessons that Stamp began, on behalf of CBDNA, to encourage her to write a band piece.[24] As she had done when initially asked to write for orchestra, guitar, and organ, Tower turned down the offer to write for band.

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[22] Tower, interview by Niemeyer, 18.

[23] Jack Stamp, phone interview with the author, 15 February 2002.

[24] Ibid.

During one of their sessions together, Tower played a recording for Stamp of Daniel Forlano's brass ensemble transcription of the *Celebration* section of her ballet *Stepping Stones*. The work was originally scored for orchestra, and Forlano completed the brass version for Tower to conduct during a women's forum at the White House.[25] Stamp commented that the movement "would be a better wind band ... than brass ensemble [piece]."[26] Still non-committal about writing a work for band, Tower invited Stamp to prepare a band transcription of the *Stepping Stones* movement. The United States Military Academy Band premiered the resultant work—entitled *Celebration Fanfare*—on 2 July 1994.

Tower had prospered first as a composer of chamber music and eventually as an orchestral writer. When she first expressed uncertainty at composing for orchestra, Tower was at least acquainted with the orchestral literature and its rich history, along with the sonorous capabilities such an ensemble afforded. She had no such experiences or expectations regarding wind groups.

Joan Tower had almost no association with wind bands prior to meeting Jack Stamp in 1993. She lived in South America throughout junior

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[25] Tower, interview with the author.

[26] Stamp, phone interview.

high and the first two years of high school, in a region where wind bands were not a part of the educational or cultural landscape. Upon returning to the United States, Tower attended schools that did not offer band programs. Her only direct experience with bands came through a brief stint as a trumpet player in a makeshift marching band at Bennington College.[27]

Tower learned to love percussion as a child in South America, and she occasionally performed as a percussionist during and after college.[28] Her percussion work was never within the concert band realm, however. Tower was unaware of the existence of any sort of band "community" or its passion for new music. In fact, up until the time when Stamp contacted her, bands were simply, as she put it, "not on my radar screen."[29]

A visit to Austin, Texas in October 1996 began to broaden Tower's perspective on the band world. While serving a brief "visiting composer" residency at the University of Texas in Austin, she attended a concert of the university's Wind Ensemble. Under Jerry Junkin's direction the group performed Tower's *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman No. 1* and Jack Stamp's transcription of *Celebration Fanfare,* plus several works of other composers.

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[27] Tower, interview with the author.

[28] Tower, interview by Harmeyer, 7.

[29] Tower, interview with the author.

Junkin knew that Stamp had approached Tower about writing a band piece, and he was aware of her limited background with wind band music. Junkin programmed a varied concert, including one of the traditional band masterworks (Gustav Holst's *Second Suite in F*), and he was eager to gauge Tower's reaction to the concert. She was quite impressed with the Wind Ensemble performance and afterward visited at length with Junkin about band music and Jack Stamp's commission offer. Tower again expressed reservations about writing a piece for band, but Junkin was encouraged that she was at least considering the possibility.[30]

In the ensuing months Stamp and Junkin visited regarding the status of the Tower commission project. Junkin encouraged Stamp to invite Tower to the 1999 CBDNA conference, which was also scheduled to take place at the University of Texas in Austin. Their goal was to bring Tower to the conference so she could hear several band concerts and visit with conductors and other composers. They believed her participation in this event would keep the commission dialogue moving forward.[31]

Tower expressed amazement that CBDNA desired to fly her from New York to Texas for the sole purpose of increasing her familiarity with the band

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[30] Jerry Junkin, phone interview with the author, 25 June 2002.

[31] Ibid.

milieu. She accepted the conference invitation, and the experiences of those few days substantially impacted her. Tower says she was "blown away" by the performance level of the bands she heard. She was intrigued by this "generous ... unpretentious world" in which conductors share podiums and repertoire, and by the enthusiasm displayed for the music of living composers.[22]

The project to secure a commitment from Joan Tower to write a band piece had begun with Jack Stamp's first suggestions more than five years earlier. The commitment finally came during a conference composer's forum on 27 February 1999, with Jack Stamp moderating as Tower interacted with an audience of between two hundred and three hundred band directors. She was shocked that such a large number of conductors would attend a session featuring a living composer, and was further surprised that most if not all of those in the room responded in the affirmative when asked if they would program a new Joan Tower piece. For a composer—a living *female* composer—to receive such a warm response from a group of conductors was

[22] Tower, interview with the author.

inconsistent with her prior experience. At a later date she said about the event, "This would never happen in the orchestral world—ever!"[33]

Tower felt, as had many composers before her, that her lack of familiarity with bands was a hindrance to writing effectively for the medium. In the end, however, her skepticism was outweighed by other factors. The high quality of band performances she heard at the conference, and the eagerness and generosity shown by conductors to a living composer far surpassed Tower's expectations. It was clear to Tower that the band community wanted a piece of new music from her. She then stated, in front of the composer's forum crowd, "I definitely will say now that I will write a band piece."[34]

Following the 1999 conference, Jack Stamp negotiated details of the commission contract with representatives of Associated Music Publishers, Inc., and began to assemble the consortium. Acting as CBDNA's representative, Stamp issued a call for participants through the organization's website. Within one week of the consortium invitation, thirty-one institutions had committed to the project. The response was both greater and more rapid than Stamp had anticipated. In fact, because such a large number of schools

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Tower, Panel discussion moderated by Stamp, 54.

joined the consortium, the per-institution commission fee was reduced from the figure originally announced.[35]

Tower was attracted to the band world in part because of the increased likelihood of multiple performances of her music. The prospect of numerous performances also increased her uneasiness with the project, however. Each of the thirty-one commissioning groups participated in a one-year "period of exclusivity," during which only consortium members were permitted to perform *Fascinating Ribbons*. Tower is accustomed to having her works "become [their] own 'fuel' for repeated performances,"[36] with conductors and performers programming a piece because they want to play it. Due to the consortium arrangement, however, all the commissioning groups had expressed their intention to perform *Fascinating Ribbons* before it was written. This realization led Tower to feel much greater pressure to produce a composition worthy of so many performances.[37]

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[35] Stamp, phone interview.

[36] James R. Briscoe, ed., *Contemporary Anthology of Music by Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 297.

[37] Tower, interview by Battisti.

Because this was Tower's first band piece, she told CBDNA to expect a brief work. She projected the duration at approximately six minutes.[38] Jack Stamp provided Tower with a recommended instrumentation for the work, including some variables. He stipulated that the piece should not simply require orchestral winds—saxophones and euphoniums, for instance, should be used.[39] Stamp's requirement meshed with Tower's wish to write for standard band instrumentation.

The Composition Phase

Tower composes at her Red Hook, New York home, in a studio offering a view of the surrounding countryside. Tower works on only one composition at a time,[40] and is extremely disciplined about the process. She typically writes from approximately one o'clock to six o'clock each afternoon, and she vigilantly avoids conflicts with that five-hour period.[41]

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[38] Tower, interview with the author.

[39] Stamp, phone interview.

[40] Tower, interview with the author.

[41] Tower, interview by Battisti.

Tower sits at her piano and improvises to come up with musical ideas, and begins notating once an idea starts taking shape.[42] She occasionally uses the Disklavier feature on her piano so she can record and play back passages.[43] Though she rarely does so now, Tower has at times drawn sketches to help inspire a musical thought or conjure an image.[44] Whether writing for a small or large ensemble Tower notates her music by hand beginning with a three-stave sketch score.[45] When writing for orchestra, for example, she keeps the full timbral palette in mind as she develops ideas on the small score. Tower often has specific scoring intentions from the beginning of the process,[46] though she says the orchestration must be driven by the musical ideas.[47]

Before embarking on the *Fascinating Ribbons* project, Tower listened to several recordings of band works. She says, "I got more depressed because most of the music written for band is written by a band composer—people

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[42] Bonds, 196.

[43] Tower, interview with the author.

[44] McCutchan, 56.

[45] Tower, interview with the author.

[46] Bonds, 196.

[47] Tower, interview with the author.

who know the band—and so the sound is phenomenal."[48] She also examined band scores of several composers, including Donald Grantham, Paul Hindemith, Nicholas Maw, and Joseph Schwantner. Hearing Jack Stamp's transcription of the *Celebration Fanfare* gave Tower an idea of how her music might sound performed by a band. She did not, however, model her work after these pieces or those of any composer.[49] Jack Stamp believes Tower did not want to be overly influenced by other band works.[50] Though hearing other band pieces and viewing scores offered Tower a glimpse into the wind band sound world, she wanted her own compositional voice to emerge through this piece.

Fascinating Ribbons was composed during a period when Tower was simultaneously involved in writing, teaching and traveling activities. During such periods she composes music at a rate of approximately two and one-half minutes per month. When composition is her primary focus, minus the other activities, the pace quickens to about four minutes per month.[51] This productivity rate has been predictable and consistent for many years, and

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Stamp, phone interview.

[51] Tower, interview by Raymond, 5.

applies whether Tower is writing for soloists, chamber ensembles or large groups.

Tower had not completed the trio *Big Sky* at the time she intended to begin the *Fascinating Ribbons* project. Progress on the trio was slower than anticipated, and Tower suggests that anxiety about the band project may have impacted her productivity on *Big Sky*.[52]

Despite holding a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in composition, Tower considers herself essentially a self-taught composer, saying, "Everything I learned about writing music that was meaningful came from writing and hearing it."[53] She also says that the music of Beethoven, Messiaen, Stravinsky and other composers had greater impact on her writing than did the instruction of any teacher.[54]

The years spent writing for and performing with the Da Capo Chamber Players afforded Tower the opportunity to experiment with her musical ideas in an environment conducive to lively exchange. She says, "In an ideal musical world, a composer has a friendly, creative and ongoing

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[52] Tower, interview with the author.

[53] Tower, "A Conversation with Joan Tower," interview by Zech, 1.

[54] Bonds, 195.

working relationship with performers for whom s/he writes."[55] When Tower began writing for orchestra, she realized it would not be possible to maintain the same type of musical dialogue with larger ensembles that she had enjoyed in the chamber setting. Tower continued to collaborate with orchestral players outside of the full-group rehearsal setting, however, honing her writing skills and her understanding of the different instruments. Tower says it took her ten years to learn to write for the orchestra,[56] and it was through writing and hearing her music that she gained greater proficiency.

Prior to beginning the *Fascinating Ribbons* project, Tower had written for all band instruments except the euphonium and members of the saxophone family.[57] She consulted with a saxophone instructor at Bard College while working on *Fascinating Ribbons*, and Tower ended up writing an extremely prominent part for the saxophone section. In keeping with her "learning by doing" approach, Tower believed the best way to gain

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[55] Joan Tower, Liner notes for Composers Recordings Incorporated CRI SD 517, 1985.

[56] Tower, interview with the author.

[57] Her unaccompanied clarinet work *Wings* is available in a published version for alto saxophone, but Tower was not the arranger. Tower, interview with the author.

proficiency in writing for saxophones was to compose a substantial part for them.[58]

As was previously noted, Tower's approach to composition has evolved dramatically since the 1970s. Though she formerly worked with pre-compositional pitch maps, her approach is now organic and intuitive. The only foreknowledge she brings to a new work concerns the forces for which she is writing and the approximate duration of the piece.[59]

Tower's pieces typically begin with simple, brief musical ideas. She notes that "the beginning idea is very minimal, and it's what you do with the idea that makes the piece."[60] Occasionally the germinal idea will reflect some aspect of the intended performer's style. "For instance," she says, "perhaps the performer I'm writing for has a lovely lyrical mode of playing, and so I will begin with a lyrical phrase."[61] The opening ascending minor 3d was the seminal idea for *Fascinating Ribbons*, but Tower has no idea how or why it emerged.[62]

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[58] Tower, interview with the author.

[59] Tower, "A Conversation with Joan Tower," interview by Zech, 2.

[60] Neuls-Bates, 355.

[61] Neuls-Bates, 355.

[62] Tower, interview with the author.

She then begins to sculpt the musical ideas. Tower says, "I take a look at what I've done and reshape it until it's the way I think I want it to be. Then I go on. Then I take another look at what I've done. I spend more and more time reshaping ..."[63] This reshaping process consists largely of evaluating the music's organic growth. Tower must be convinced that what she has written has logically emerged from prior material, and that the material she is currently writing contains the seeds for what will follow. Tower refers to this approach as "motivating the architecture,"[64] and says, "if there is no motivation for anything, it doesn't matter how good the idea is, it's not relevant."[65] Beethoven is Tower's model in this regard. She says of his music, "Every phrase—within a larger phrase, within a section, within a movement—is tightly balanced and motivated."[66] Because she writes in this organic fashion, the composition unfolds sequentially. She literally composes from "left to right ... with the music's character unfolding as it goes."[67]

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[63] James Wierzbicki, "Every Instant of Music Has a Past, Present and Future" *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (4 January 1987): D4.

[64] Tower, interview with the author.

[65] Schloss, 189.

[66] Neuls-Bates, 354.

[67] "Joan Tower: Music Must Unfold," *American Record Guide* 55, no. 4 (July 1992): 22.

At times the musical ideas of a composition seem to exert a sort of mystical power over Tower, leading her in musical directions she neither anticipates nor necessarily desires. She says the "music is creating itself, and I'm trying to listen to what it's trying to do."[68] Though she still makes many compositional decisions, she evaluates each choice based on its logic as an unfolding portion of the whole. As work on a piece progresses, she develops a vague sense of what future musical events may occur.[69] She compares a maturing musical work to a growing tree when she says, "When it first sprouts you don't know how it's going to grow, but after it's been growing for a few years you have a pretty good idea of what it will grow into."[70]

Tower senses when a work is nearing its conclusion, noting, "I like to think that my landscape has a shape. I know pretty much when it's done because I work very hard on the whole sense of a contour and a shape—a beginning, middle and end."[71]

Tower is accustomed to writing for professional musicians. Though she was conscious of the potential difficulty level of certain passages as she

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[68] Tower, "The composer in conversation with Bruce Duffie," 3.

[69] Bonds, 216.

[70] Wierzbicki, D4.

[71] "Tower, "The composer in conversation with Bruce Duffie," 3.

worked on *Fascinating Ribbons,* Tower did not simplify the music in order for amateur musicians to perform it.[72] One of Tower's initial difficulties in writing the band piece concerned the large number of instrument transpositions in the score. She noted that "it took me about one day to write the first whole chord because there were all these transpositions!"[73]

The two-note opening idea in *Fascinating Ribbons* is typical of Tower scores in its simplicity, but the full ensemble scoring of the opening is uncharacteristic. Tower attributes the heavier scoring to fear of dealing with the new medium, saying, "I got so scared that on the opening ... I piled everything on because I wasn't sure what I was doing."[74] Tower was also concerned that the weight of the full band sound, when compared to that of the orchestra, would create scoring problems. "Parceling out solos ... is a different challenge [with the band] than it is with the orchestra."[75]

As Tower completed sections of the *Fascinating Ribbons* score, she sent photocopied pages to Jack Stamp for his input. His return suggestions were

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[72] Tower, interview with the author.

[73] Tower, interview by Battisti.

[74] Tower, interview with the author.

[75] Ibid.

minimal, and addressed issues such as range problems and idiomatic parts.[76] At one point Tower and Stamp sang passages to one another over the phone in an attempt to convey concerns and preferences about phrasing, style, and articulations.[77]

A curious sequence of events resulted in Jack Stamp conducting the premiere performance of *Fascinating Ribbons*. The Northwestern University Symphonic Wind Ensemble, one of the featured performing groups at the 2001 CBDNA conference, was slated to premiere George Walker's *Canvas*. When Walker added a choral part to his piece, however, Northwestern was forced to back out of the premiere. The university was unable to fund a trip to Texas by both the band and the choir. Since the 2001 conference was held on the University of North Texas campus, the host institution's ensembles agreed to present Walker's band/choir premiere.[78]

The University of North Texas Wind Symphony was the only member of the *Fascinating Ribbons* consortium scheduled to perform at the 2001 conference. As such, they were the logical choice to perform the Tower premiere. When the group assumed the *Canvas* premiere project, however, an

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[76] Stamp, phone interview.

[77] Tower, interview by Battisti.

[78] Stamp, phone interview.

alternate plan was sought for the *Fascinating Ribbons* performance. Since Jack Stamp was scheduled to appear on the conference program as conductor of the Keystone Wind Ensemble, it was eventually agreed that the Keystone group would perform Joan Tower's piece. Tower was pleased that Jack Stamp, as the one who led the commission charge, and as the one to whom the work is dedicated, had the opportunity to conduct the premiere of *Fascinating Ribbons*.[79] The first performance took place on 22 February 2001, almost two years from the day when Tower accepted the commission.

Stamp founded the Keystone Wind Ensemble in 1992. The group was formed with the intent of recording new and traditional works from the concert band repertoire for national release on compact disc. The ensemble consists of alumni, students, faculty, and administrators of Indiana University of Pennsylvania. At their own expense, group members travel from their places of residence throughout the country to participate in rehearsals, recording sessions, and performances.[80] In preparation for the CBDNA appearance, the ensemble met in Pennsylvania during the three-day Martin Luther King holiday weekend in January 2001. The group was preparing a

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[79] Ibid.

[80] Program notes, Keystone Winds concert at College Band Directors National Association Conference, Denton, Texas (22 February 2001): 9.

full concert for the conference, including four world premieres. After completing the first readings of *Fascinating Ribbons*, Stamp sent a recording to Tower, and she subsequently made several changes to the score. The ensemble incorporated Tower's revisions at their next rehearsal, which did not take place until group members convened in Denton, Texas, one day prior to the premiere. Tower was present for the Denton rehearsals, and she continued to make minor adjustments to the piece.[81]

Tower prefers not to do extensive rewriting of her pieces. She says, "Revising is complicated. You have to be very careful how you do it. It's better to solve a problem in the next piece."[82] When she heard the *Fascinating Ribbons* premiere, however, Tower realized that certain changes were needed. Since she had not previously written for saxophone, Tower suggests she had been tentative when writing the feature passage now found in mm. 178-209. Upon hearing the inaugural performance, she knew immediately that this section should be lengthened.[83]

Prior to the second performance of the piece, conducted by Max Plank at Eastern Michigan University on 2 March 2001, Tower extended the

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[81] Stamp, phone interview.

[82] McCutchan, 57.

[83] Tower, interview with the author.

saxophone passage by repeating a portion of the existing part.[84] Later still she removed those repeats and inserted new material, and also extended by two measures the tutti ostinato pattern that follows the feature passage. Other changes implemented following the premiere involved minor adjustments in tempi and articulations, along with corrections of several mistakes. Jack Stamp facilitated communications between Tower and the music copyist during the revisions phase of the process.[85]

Listeners are often struck by the titles of Joan Tower's pieces. In the mid-1970s, at about the time she altered her approach to composition, Tower began to devote more effort to the selection of titles. She realizes the potential positive or negative power of a title and now spends considerable time selecting each. In the case of her first *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman*, for example, Tower believes the title itself has generated more performances for the work than its musical substance warrants, saying, "It's the title that's making that piece go."[86] Conversely, Tower nearly changed the title *Strike Zones*, assigned to the percussion concerto premiered in October 2001 by

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[84] Unpublished recording of Eastern Michigan University Wind Symphony performance, 2 March 2001.

[85] Stamp, phone interview.

[86] Tower, "A Conversation with Joan Tower," interview by Zech, 4.

Evelyn Glennie and the National Symphony Orchestra. She was concerned that audiences in Washington, D.C. and New York City—ironically the first two cities to host performances of the new work—would assume a connection existed between the title of her composition and the recent terrorist attacks on those cities.[87]

Tower gathers title suggestions from friends, colleagues, and students. Most titles are inspired in some way by the music itself, and she usually settles on a name either after the composition has been completed or during the final stages of writing.[88]

Many of Tower's titles suggest motion or action, such as *And...They're Off, The Last Dance, Noon Dance,* and *Turning Points.* A number of titles specifically suggest an upward motion, and the music within those pieces often features a prominent rising quality, such as in *Ascent, Platinum Spirals, Silver Ladders, Stepping Stones,* and *Wings.*

Fascinating Ribbons is another of Tower's evocative titles. As work on the piece progressed she considered several titles that included the word "ribbons," because of the undulating, ribbon-like scales in the piece. Igor Stravinsky, whom Tower acknowledges as a strong influence, once referred

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[87] Tower, interview with the author.

[88] Tower, interview by Raymond, 5.

to writing "ribbons of scales" in the *Theme and Variations* movement of his *Octet for Winds*.[89] Tower says she was unaware of Stravinsky's comment, however, as she worked on *Fascinating Ribbons* or considered title choices.[90]

Tower had nearly finished the project when someone suggested to her the title *Fascinating Ribbons*. She immediately made a connection with the George and Ira Gershwin song *Fascinating Rhythm* and adopted the title. She then inserted a brief hint at the Gershwin song in the concluding measures of the piece.[91] In the program notes for the premiere performance, Tower wrote, "One of the rhythmic motives was taken from George Gershwin's *Fascinating Rhythms* [sic] and many of the contours of motives in the piece are shaped in curved 'ribbon' patterns—hence the title *Fascinating Ribbons*."[92]

The incorporation into her own works of the music of other composers is a recognized trait in much of Tower's music. At times this usage is overt, such as the quotation of three Beethoven piano sonatas in her *Piano Concerto*

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[89] Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Dialogues* (London: Faber Music Limited, 1982), 39.

[90] Tower, interview with the author.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Joan Tower, Program notes (22 February 2001), 3.

(Homage to Beethoven).[93] More subtle quotations are found in *Tres Lent (Homage to Messiaen)* and *Petroushkates* (though not included in the title, Tower refers to this work as an "homage to Stravinsky"),[94] her other tributes to strong musical influences. In numerous other instances, Tower has absorbed a musical idea from a particular composer, and incorporated it into her own work. An example is the sequence of ascending 4ths that she picked up from Schoenberg's *Chamber Symphony*. Though this is a work for which, and composer for whom she has limited appreciation, the ascending 4ths pattern appears in several of her compositions.[95] As is the case with the Gershwin song in *Fascinating Ribbons*, there is just a hint at the popular song *Harbor Lights* in Tower's *Fantasy ... those harbor lights.*[96]

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[93] David Raymond, Liner notes for *Joan Tower Concertos*. D'Note Classics DND 1016, 1997, 3.

[94] Joseph Machlis and Kristine Forney, *The Enjoyment of Music*, 7th ed. Chronological (New York: Norton, 1995), 597.

[95] Schloss, 180.

[96] Tower, interview with the author.

CHAPTER FOUR

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

Joan Tower wrote forty distinct wind and percussion parts in *Fascinating Ribbons*. There are four flute parts plus piccolo, two oboe parts plus english horn, and two bassoon parts plus contrabassoon. Clarinet requirements include E-flat clarinet and B-flat bass clarinet, in addition to three B-flat soprano parts. In the saxophone section Tower opted to write for one soprano and one alto instrument, plus tenor and baritone.

Four trumpets in C (no cornet parts) and four horns are required, plus three trombones and bass trombone. Euphonium and tuba parts round out the wind section, and there is no part for string bass. Tower composed a substantial part for piano, and a minimum of five players are required to cover percussion parts. All specified percussion instruments are relatively standard. Though *Fascinating Ribbons* is a technically challenging piece, no unusual requirements or extended techniques are demanded from any members of the ensemble.

Berry refers to the motive as "a motivating idea in music—the small cell out of which the music evolves."[1] For Tower the opening idea of a piece of music contains the germinal material from which her music emerges.[2] Her introductory musical statements are characteristically quite simple, often beginning with a single pitch or simple ordering of pitches performed by a solo instrument in its middle or low register. The ascending minor 3d interval that begins *Fascinating Ribbons* recalls the openings of Tower's *Flute Concerto, Piano Concerto (Homage to Beethoven), Snow Dreams,* and the fifth *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman.* Each of these works begins with either an ascending or descending minor 3d.

Melodically, the opening minor 3d interval is indeed a germinal figure that helps unify *Fascinating Ribbons.* Several of the ribbon patterns begin either with a minor 3d or with a group of pitches that span a minor 3d, and numerous accompanying figures and harmonic collections can trace their origins to the interval. The opening dotted rhythmic figure is similarly significant throughout the piece.

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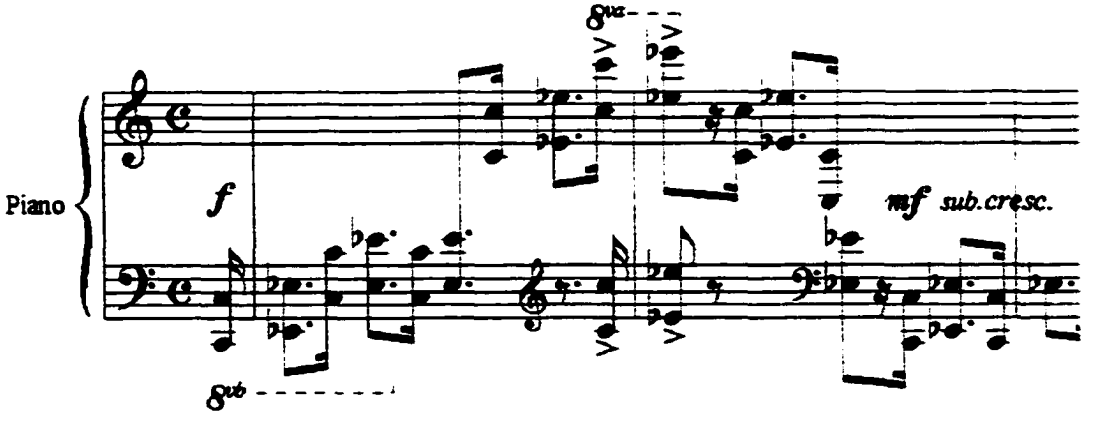
[1] Wallace Berry, *Form in Music,* 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1986), 2.

[2] Neuls-Bates, 254.

Section One

Atypical of Tower scores, the opening measures of *Fascinating Ribbons* utilize all the wind instruments of the ensemble, though not all instruments play simultaneously. Most of Tower's works open with relatively sparse scoring. The opening measures consist almost entirely of the ascending minor 3d pattern C to E-flat. The present author refers to this figure as the *third motive* (see Fig. 3).

Fig. 3: *Third Motive* in mm. 1-3.



The *dotted rhythm* aspect of the *third motive* permeates *Fascinating Ribbons,* appearing in several melodic guises. Often, as in the opening measures, Tower uses the "short-long" version of the *dotted rhythm*. She also frequently reverses the pattern, using instead the "long-short" version.

Through the use of rests and augmentation, the *dotted rhythm* also emerges in less obvious fashion. This pattern, or variations on it, dominates several passages of the piece. It is the only rhythmic pattern to be found, for instance, in mm. 1-3, and mm. 6-8.
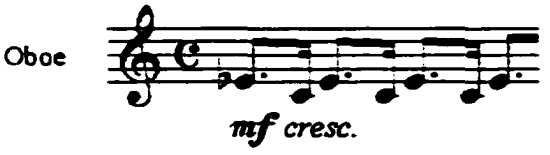
Pitches C and E-flat are the prevailing tones in the opening measures of *Fascinating Ribbons*. The only other pitch to appear in the first three measures is a unison B for trumpets I and II in m. 1. The pitches B, C and E-flat form a 014 pitch class set, and they appear again as a trichord in mm. 4 and 5. Only C and E-flat pitches are heard in mm. 6 through 8.

Another 014 pitch class set opening collection can be found in Tower's *Piano Concerto (Homage to Beethoven)*, in which the piano performs the ascending line C-sharp, E, B-sharp. This is intervallically identical to the vertical combination C, E-flat, and B in m. 4 of *Fascinating Ribbons*. *Snow Dreams* also begins with a 014 melodic collection.

The sustained 014 collection in m. 4 leads to a fermata in m. 5. The pitch range of the opening measures ascends rapidly from the low notes of the tuba, bass trombone, contrabassoon and piano up through the ensemble to the piccolo and E-flat clarinet in m. 1, and then descends even more rapidly

in m. 2.[3] In the latter portion of m. 2 the *third motive* settles into a consistent pitch range in the middle to low register of the ensemble. The author refers to this type of figure as a *rocking pattern* due to the back and forth motion between two pitches (see Fig. 4).

Fig. 4: *Rocking Pattern* in m. 3.



Though the pitch parameter achieves greater stability in m. 3, other elements change and suggest progression toward a goal. Measure 3 contains a *poco accelerando* marking, a *crescendo* in all parts, and is scored more densely than the first two measures. Following the fermata in m. 5, the *dotted rhythm* resumes, again featuring the *third motive*. A second climbing section begins similarly to m. 1, but immediately drops in m. 7 to a lower range. The *third motive* then settles into a *rocking pattern* once again. A *poco accelerando* marking again accompanies the shift into a more static pitch pattern. Unlike the

[3] The opening piano pitch CC is the lowest that occurs in the entire piece, though it appears in other measures as well.
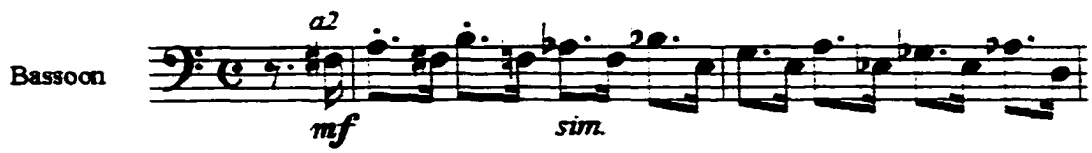
crescendo in m. 3, however, the second volume increase does not coincide with a tempo adjustment. Another rhythmic cessation and fermata occur in mm. 9-10.

The prominence of melodic motion by the interval of a 3d, and the frequent presence of tertian structures in the introductory section, are notable characteristics of *Fascinating Ribbons* as a whole. Successions of melodic minor 3ds are almost ever-present in mm. 1-8. The ascending trumpet B to E-flat interval in m. 1, though notated as a diminished 4th, is aurally identical to a major 3d. Vertical pitch combinations also frequently consist of stacked major and/or minor 3ds. Scoring during the first fermata accentuates the minor 3d and major 7th intervals above the bass. The two sustained pitches at the beginning of m. 9 (E-flat and B-flat) are scored as an open 5th. When the next pitch is added (D-flat), it is stacked on top of the open fifth, resulting in a perfect 5th and minor 7th above the bass during the second fermata. At the anacrusis to measure 11, there is a vertical structure containing a minor 3d, perfect 5th, and minor 7th above the bass note. This tetrachord is nominally a minor seventh chord, and consists of stacked major and minor 3ds.

Pitches sounding during the fermata in m. 10 (E-flat, B-flat, and D-flat) form pitch class set 025. This set is the basis for a chromatic descending sequence in mm. 10-12. Oboes and english horn, bassoons, clarinets I and II,

saxophones, and xylophone have a pattern that begins at the close of m. 10 with a minor 3d ascent, followed by a return to the first pitch and then a leap up by perfect 4th. The three pitches in the four-note pattern also form a 025 set, providing a connection with pitches at the fermata in m. 10. The pattern is then sequenced chromatically down in mm. 11-12. This four-note pattern, which combines characteristics of the *dotted rhythm* and the *third motive*, is referred to by the author as the *ascent motive* (see Fig. 5).
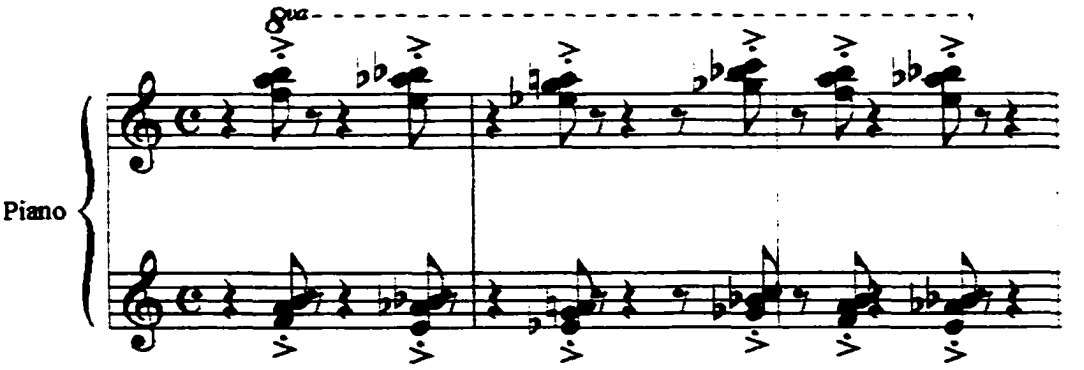
Fig. 5: Sequence of *Ascent Motives* in mm. 10-12.



A group of percussive trichords accompanies the descending sequence of *ascent motives* in mm. 11-13. Each of the trichords, which are played by flute, piccolo, clarinet III, bass clarinet, horns (and eventually trumpets), piano, and temple blocks, consists of a 026 set. The first three trichords descend chromatically, accenting the highest pitch of each *ascent motive*, and occur every two beats. The trichord pattern then separates from the *ascent motive*, both in pitch and rhythm. The fourth trichord arrives a half beat later

than previous entries, and sounds a half step higher than the first trichord. The fifth and sixth trichords descend chromatically from the fourth. The fourth, fifth, and sixth trichords also sound in more rapid succession than the first three, and the rhythmic interval between the final three entries is irregular. The author refers to the melodic contour of the six trichords as the *descent figure* (see Fig. 6).

Fig. 6: *Descent Figure* in mm. 11-13.



The *ascent motive* sequence and the accompanying *descent figure* propel the music forward toward a third two-measure slowing of activity. The marking *accelerando poco a poco* in m. 11 enhances the sense of forward motion. For the third time in section one, the slowing of activity is preceded by a *crescendo* and a relatively static presentation of pitches (mm. 15-16). In this occurrence the *rocking pattern* outlines the interval of a major 2d, rather than

the minor 3ds of the first two appearances. In contrast to the first two pauses, a *ritard* is indicated at the approach to the third fermata. At the downbeat of m. 17, the pitches C, E, F-sharp, and B (set 0157) sound. For the third time in the introduction, a combination of major and minor 3ds stacked above the bass note results in each of the pitches.

The pitch B quickly dies away in m. 17, leaving C, E, and F-sharp as the sustained pitches in the remainder of mm. 17-18. This constitutes a 026 set, like each of the percussive trichords in the *descent figure*.

Though *Fascinating Ribbons* does not lend itself to analysis using traditional principles of functional harmony, there are regions of this piece that clearly exhibit tonal tendencies. Within the three subsections of the first section (mm. 1-5, mm. 6-10, and mm. 11-19) one can see a tonal pattern drawn from the intervallic relationship between the opening three pitches of the piece. At the first slowing of activity (mm. 4-5), the pitch C can be said to display centricity, based largely on its position as the lowest sounding tone of a tertian structure, but also due to its frequent repetition. At the second cessation (mm. 9-10), E-flat displays polar pull. Upon arrival at the third pause (mm. 17-18) there is greater ambiguity concerning a tonal home pitch, but E arguably emerges (and its centricity is confirmed in the section that follows).

If one considers E as the central pitch at the conclusion of the third subsection of the opening, the pitches C, E-flat and E provide centricity to respective portions of section one. These pitches constitute a 014 set, and the first three pitches heard in the work also represent a 014 set. Section one could collectively be seen, therefore, as a "composing out" of the opening pitch class set of the work.

The third fermata occurs relatively later than the first two. During the first two fermatas all pitches were held that had sounded since the beginning of the piece or since the prior fermata. The third fermata occurs at the downbeat of m. 19, ostensibly connecting the introduction and section two. Pitches E and F-sharp sound continuously before, during, and after the fermata, contributing to a smooth seam between the first two sections.[4]

Section Two

Section two begins in m. 19, as an octatonic melody emerges in the first flute part. The tempo marking (quarter note = c. 84) is slower than any previous marking. The scoring is also the lightest thus far, featuring few instruments playing in their low to mid-registers at very soft dynamic levels.

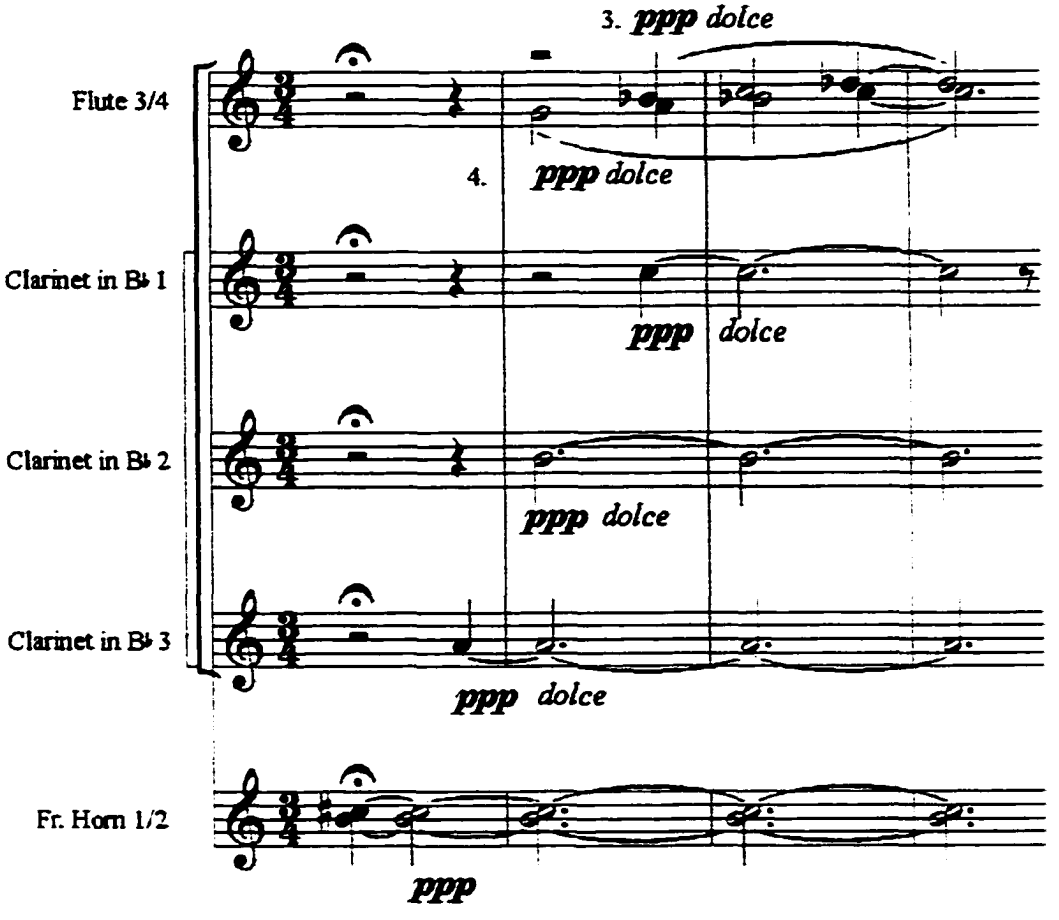
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[4] Tower refers to passageways between musical regions as "seams." A seam may be as small as the connection between two musical phrases, or as large as the connection between two sections of a lengthy composition. See Janssen, 137.

The flute melody, which begins with an ascending minor 3d, is the first of several melodic "ribbons" to appear in the piece.

Ascending melodic lines, and rising octatonic melodies in particular, are common in Tower's music. The flute melody and its accompaniment consist entirely of pitches found in the E-centric T1 octatonic scale. The texture of the accompaniment thickens as the melody unfolds, with one or more instruments sustaining each new pitch as the flute introduces it. The cumulative effect is one of rising and thickening. This thickening, fog-like accompaniment is referred to by the author as the *octatonic haze* (see Fig. 7).
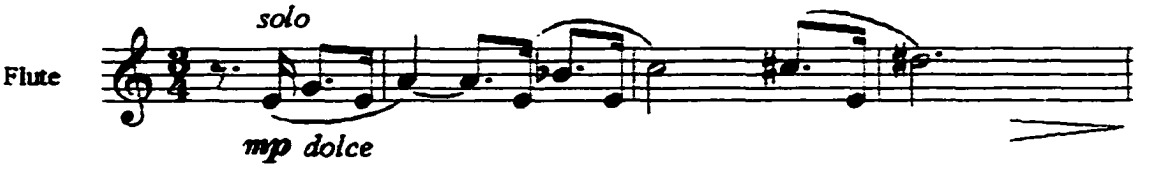
Fig. 7: *Octatonic Haze* in mm. 19-22.



Above a foundation of E and F-sharp, the first two pitches of the T1 octatonic scale on E, the flute solo alternately plays E and an ascending pitch from the scale. The interval between successive pitches grows wider as the scale reaches higher. The *dotted rhythm* continues as the prevailing rhythmic pattern. The first four notes of this initial ribbon, called the *emerging ribbon* by

the author (See Fig. 8), constitute a 025 set and precisely recall the intervallic pattern of the *ascent motive* from m. 11 and following.

Fig. 8: *Emerging Ribbon* in mm. 19-22.



The flute solo concludes as the melody arrives on D-sharp, the penultimate tone of the ascending scale. Following a pause in the flute line, and buoyed by a brighter tempo marking (quarter note = c. 108) the solo clarinet I part presents an altered version of the *emerging ribbon* melody in m. 22. Like the flute line, the clarinet statement begins on E and ascends by a minor 3d, and rises through the scale. Alternating clarinet pitches, however, do not return to E following each higher note. Instead, the line drops by one scale step following each upward motion. The resulting clarinet line contains a sequence of *third motives*, and possesses more of a stair-step quality than the flute line.

The *octatonic haze* emerges again along with the clarinet line, but new and more numerous timbres are featured. The haze reaches its thickest point

in m. 26, where all members of the scale sound simultaneously throughout the measure. When the clarinet reaches the upper home pitch of E it settles into a *rocking pattern* that spans a minor 2d in mm. 25-26. Earlier appearances of the *rocking pattern* contributed to a slowdown of the momentum built up in preceding events. In mm. 25-26 little rhythmic momentum exists, but the appearance of the pattern signals that change of some sort is impending. The particular change to come is the emergence of a second ribbon.

A *ritard* and *decrescendo* lead, along with the *rocking pattern*, to the appearance of a new ribbon in m. 27. At m. 28 the tempo drops to its slowest marking yet (quarter note = c. 54), and the scoring is reduced for a time to only two flutes. Like the *emerging ribbon*, the source of the opening notes of ribbon two can be traced to the *third motive* and the *dotted rhythm*. The up and down motion in m. 28 is drawn from the *rocking pattern*. Aside from the cessations in section one, the second ribbon contains the first departure from the *dotted rhythm*, though it is clearly related to the *emerging ribbon* it supplants. Because ribbon two unfolds almost entirely in parallel 3ds and is presented by pairs of instruments (or pairs of parts that may be performed with multiple players on each part), the author refers to the second ribbon as the *duet ribbon* (see Fig. 9).

Fig. 9: *Duet Ribbon* in mm. 27-30.



The *duet ribbon* is notable for its conjunct motion, and its ethereal floating quality. Following the *third motive* opening to this ribbon, mm. 28 through 40 feature almost entirely stepwise motion.

The *octatonic haze* concluded as the *duet ribbon* began to emerge. Harmonies found in m. 30 consist of a 0347 set, a combination known as the major-minor tetrachord because it simultaneously contains elements found in major and minor triads.[5] This set becomes more prominent later in the work, and is another example of a structure built by stacking a combination of major and minor 3ds above a given note. Furthermore, the harmony in m. 32 is a fully diminished seventh chord (0369), a subset of the octatonic scale.

Clarinets I and II join the flutes in m. 30, first providing harmony for, and then joining in the unfurling of the *duet ribbon*. The tempo increases slightly in m. 60 as clarinet parts gain prominence. Oboes plus soprano and alto saxophones join in presenting the *duet ribbon* in m. 33. During the first

[5] The 0347 collection is also known as a "split-third triad."

beat in which flutes, oboes, clarinets, and saxophones play simultaneously, all sounding parts move together in parallel 3ds. Subtle changes in individual parts are observed in mm. 34-35, but all parts move in parallel diminished seventh chords in m. 36. The parts begin to diverge into two groups of parallel lines in m. 39, with flute, piccolo and oboe joining to form one group, and clarinets and the upper two saxophone parts combining to create the other. For a brief period the E-flat clarinet part fills a dual role, moving with the clarinet and saxophone group in m. 44, and shifting to join the upper group in m. 45.

Measure 41 is nearly static rhythmically, with the flute, piccolo, and oboe group joined by piano and vibraphone on a 0347 pitch class collection. Measures 42-44 contain parallel 0347 major-minor tetrachords in the clarinet and saxophone group. Beginning at the anacrusis to m. 42 and lasting through m. 45, harmonic collections on alternating sixteenth notes contain a cluster of all pitches in the E-centric T1 octatonic scale.

Virtually every pitch between mm. 18-47 belongs to the T1 scale.[6] The appearance of the pitch D—not a member of the E T1 octatonic scale— near

[6] The lone exception is the flute II A-flat in m. 27.

the end of m. 47 joins with other events in pointing toward the arrival of a new section in m. 52. In m. 45 the articulation changes from legato and slurred to marcato, and the addition of trumpet infuses a substantial timbral change to the texture. No brass instruments had previously played as the *duet ribbon* unfolded.

In addition to a *crescendo*, there is a written *accelerando* in m. 48, and also an *internal accelerando*.[7] The trumpet parts shift from triplet eighth notes in m. 49 to sixteenth notes in m. 50 (thirty-second notes in the xylophone), and triplet sixteenth notes in m. 51. The addition of a cymbal roll with *crescendo* in m. 51 is also notable. The combination of these elements seems to push the music inexorably toward measure 52.

The descending material in mm. 50-51 is reminiscent of the *descent figure* and *ascent motive* material from mm. 11-13. The melodic content of trumpets I and III in mm. 50-51 is a retrograde version of the solo clarinet stair-step pattern in mm. 22-24.

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[7] An *internal accelerando* can occur regardless of a marked tempo change. Through the use of increasingly shorter note values a composer can convey a sense of tempo increase while the tempo itself remains constant. Other factors, such as the presence of a descending chromatic line, can contribute to the sensation of increasing speed and/or momentum.

Section Three

Section three begins in m. 52. It is characterized initially by a nearly continuous sixteenth note accompaniment part. This *swirling ribbon*, as the author refers to this pattern, alternately descends and ascends, outlining the lower five pitches of the D-centric T2 octatonic scale (See Fig. 10). Source material for the *swirling ribbon* can be seen in the *duet ribbon* passage in mm. 32-33, and its generally conjunct, legato character is also reminiscent of the *duet ribbon*.

Fig. 10: *Swirling Ribbon* in mm. 52-54.

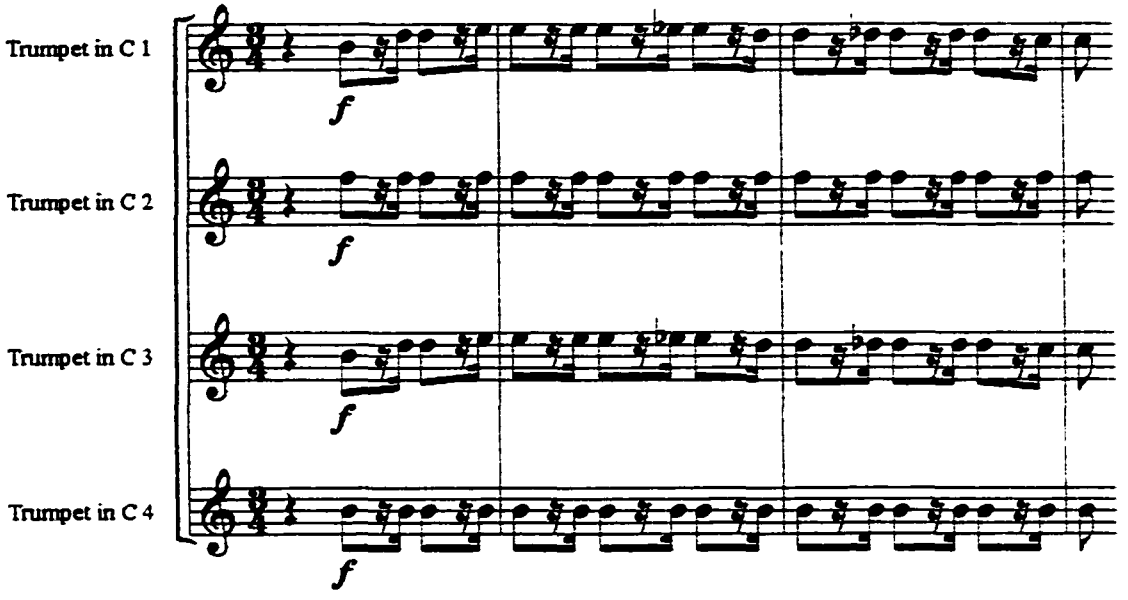


An accompaniment part in vibraphone and trumpets in mm. 52-53 precisely follows the melodic contour of the *descent figure*. The trombone and piano parts have the *descent figure* plus additional notes. The resulting rhythm for the latter group of instruments is a variation on the *dotted rhythm*, and the overall melodic pattern—particularly for trombones—recalls in retrograde form the solo flute line at the beginning of the *emerging ribbon*.

Trumpets and trombones present a fragmented sounding, staccato line above the *swirling ribbon* in mm. 56-58. The author refers to this line as the *staccato ribbon*. Rhythmically the *staccato ribbon* is based on the *dotted rhythm*, and melodically the pattern begins with a slightly altered version of the *ascent motive* in the trumpet I and III and trombone I parts. The *staccato ribbon* also bears resemblance to the *octatonic haze*, featuring a gradually ascending line with growing clusters of pitches surrounding the line.

After reaching the top pitch of the *ascent motive*-like material, the line gradually descends chromatically (see Fig. 11). All trumpets and trombones play in rhythmic unison, but pitches for trumpet II and trombones II and III remain static on either B or F. The second appearance of the *staccato ribbon*, found in m. 62, begins on D (a minor 3d higher than the first presentation). At the close of m. 63, Tower adds an anacrusis to the *staccato ribbon*, suggesting a closer connection with the *dotted rhythm* found at the opening of the piece.

Fig. 11: *Staccato Ribbon* in mm. 56-58.



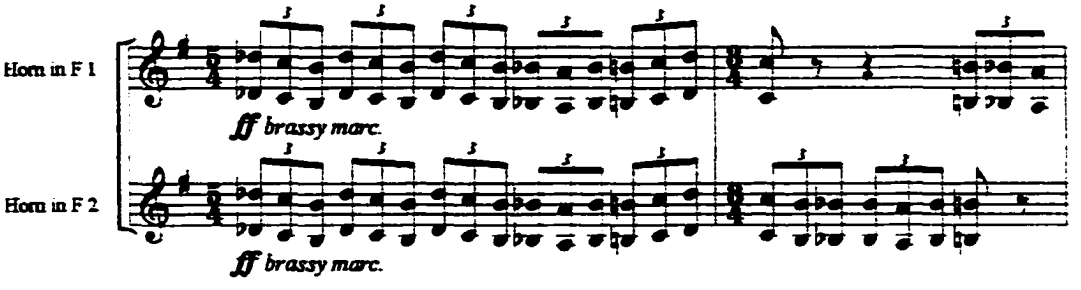
At times the *swirling ribbon* breaks from the alternating descending/ascending sequence, and descends two or more times in succession. Examples can be seen in mm. 56, 57, 59, 61, and 62. The *swirling ribbon* succumbs to gravity as it becomes a repeated descending pattern in mm. 64-65.

The break in the swirling pattern is an indicator of lessening stability. Other indicators include the addition of a tambourine roll and a shift of the brass to a higher tessitura in m. 62. Also, a *crescendo* is written in all parts in mm. 64 and/or 65, and the sustained pitch G-flat, introduced in the upper brass parts in m. 65, is foreign to the T2 octatonic scale on D. This event, in

which the introduction of a pitch foreign to the prevalent scale signals impending change, is reminiscent of that found in m. 47, near the conclusion of section two.

Measure 66 introduces new elements to the third section. In contrast to the smooth *swirling ribbon* that it supplants, each note in the eighth-note *triplet ribbon*, as the author refers to the new line, is articulated. Tower indicates that this passage is to be played *brassy marcato*, and the use of brass rather than primarily woodwind timbres also changes the character of the line. The *triplet ribbon* logically evolves from the material immediately preceding it, however. Like the *swirling ribbon*, the new pattern is primarily conjunct, initially continuing the repetitive descending pattern of mm. 64-65 (see Fig. 12).

Fig. 12: *Triplet Ribbon* in mm. 66-67.



The opening pitch for this ribbon, and one which is repeated at the beginning of the first three sets of triplets, is the G-flat that appeared at the

close of m. 64. The groupings of three descending pitches at the beginning of the chromatic *triplet ribbon* seem to exert downward force, as if attempting to straighten a curled ribbon. The *triplet ribbon* spans a tritone (C to G-flat) as it courses from m. 64 to m. 76, and reaches upward to A-flat as the next section begins. Eighth notes in the bass line punctuate the first note of each group of triplets.

Trumpets continue playing a form of the *staccato ribbon* above the *triplet ribbon*. The pattern rises from D, mostly chromatically, for one measure, spanning an interval of a minor 3d. The upward motion contrasts with the downward push of the *triplet ribbon*. The staccato pattern then drops back to the starting pitch and begins the climb again, joined by several of the upper woodwinds. Following a second drop to D, the pattern moves upward for three measures, eventually reaching A-flat. This sequence of restarting a pattern, and ascending higher in subsequent entries recalls the metamorphosis of the *emerging ribbon*.

Tension remains constant or continues to build through section three until approximately m. 75, where Tower drops instruments from the texture and writes a *decrescendo* for others. She also thins the scoring on the *triplet ribbon* as it begins to ascend toward m. 77. In this particular location, the

rising pitch lines are associated with a lessening of tension. The author describes the passage that begins in m. 77 as a *respite*.

Elements from earlier portions of section three are present in the *respite*, but parameters have been adjusted to lessen the tension. The dynamic is softer, the scoring is considerably thinner, and ranges are less extreme. The *swirling ribbon* returns in mm. 77-83, and is now written as a duet moving in parallel tritones (the parallel writing suggests a kinship with the *duet ribbon*). This version of the *swirling ribbon* is still based on notes from the D-centric T2 octatonic scale, and the span of each thread of the ribbon outlines a tritone. Horn parts sustain a tritone pedal point (D and A-flat) between mm. 81-83.

Clarinets, piano, and triangle present the *staccato ribbon* in m. 77, and clarinet I plays a version of the *ascent motive*. In mm. 81-82 the flutes play a hybrid form of the *staccato ribbon* and the *descent figure*.

Measures 84-90 are transitional, pointing toward new material in m. 91. The timpani plays a pedal point on E beginning in m. 84, and piano joins with a B-flat pedal in m. 85. The *swirling ribbon* shifts back to the *triplet ribbon* in m. 84, but in this location the *triplet ribbon* is slurred. The triplets initially maintain the tritone compass of the *swirling ribbon*, and chromatically cover the range of the B-flat and E pedals.

Measures 84-85 also contain oboe parts (running in parallel tritones) that relate to the *descent figure* in at least two respects. The first three descending oboe pitches are followed by a leap to a note one half-step higher than the first pitch. Three more chromatic pitches follow, but in mm. 84-85 the second set of chromatic pitches ascends (the second group of three pitches moved downward in the original *descent figure*). Also like mm. 11-13, the second set of three pitches sound in more rapid succession than the first three in mm. 84-85, contributing to an increase in tension. Clarinets I and II join the oboes in m. 85, and each clarinet part moves a parallel major 7th below the respective oboe part.
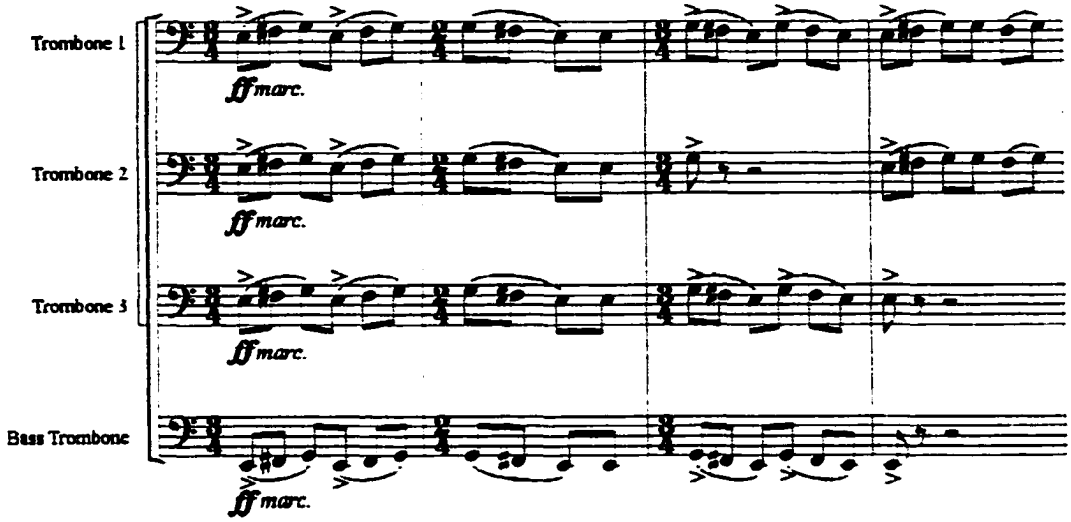
Numerous other events in mm. 84-90 signal a coming change. The downbeat of each successive measure contains a new instrument entry. The pitch range expands at both the high and low end of the spectrum. The oboe and clarinet *descent figure* is thickened through the addition of higher and lower-pitched instruments, and the pattern evolves first to a one-measure descending pattern that is repeated at a higher level (in mm. 86-87), and the note values are then shortened in mm. 88-90 (another *internal accelerando*). Percussion rolls commence as new instruments enter in mm. 85, 86 and 87, and many parts have a *crescendo* marking in mm. 88-90.

Section Four

Section four begins in m. 91, and the downbeat contains the thickest scoring up to this point in the score. Melodic material for the new ribbon is presented first by the low brass, and joined by piano in m. 102, and then in m. 111 by the horns. This section is weightier and darker than previous ones due in part to the relatively low-range scoring Tower employs. Paradoxically, though much of this section remains in a relatively low tessitura, it also contains the highest pitch of the work (found in the piccolo part in m. 101).

The *ponderous ribbon*, as the author named this melodic material, is slightly reminiscent of the opening of the *triplet ribbon*. Both ribbons are presented by brass, and both are marked *fortissimo*. Both also have initial groupings of three notes, with multiple statements of a narrow-range three-pitch pattern. Pitches in the *ponderous ribbon* span a wider interval than, and move in the opposite direction to those of the *triplet ribbon*, however. The articulations and rhythmic values also differ (see Fig. 13).

Fig. 13: *Ponderous Ribbon* in mm. 91-94.



Each portion of the *ponderous ribbon* is drawn from one of the three octatonic scale transpositions. Melodic cells oscillate and shift between scales in mm. 91-107. Beginning as three-note units, the cells gradually lengthen and span a wider interval as the passage progresses. This gradual expansion leads to an uninterrupted octatonic scale in mm. 108-110, spanning an interval of a 12th during the ascent and a 10th on the descent. This is the widest ranging such scale passage in the work.

Ribbon material in mm. 91-94 comes from the E-centric T1 scale, and that found in mm. 95-98 comes from the T2 scale and centers on E and F. Ribbon pitches in mm. 99-102 belong to the T3 scale, and are of ambiguous centricity. Between mm. 103-107, all melodic pitches but one (the exception is

the trombone A-flat in m. 104) belong to the T1 scale, and the pattern centers on A. Octatonic scale T3 is the source for material in mm. 108-117. Centricity is unclear in mm. 108-110, but centers on D and A-flat in mm. 111-117.

Accented, percussive *hammer chords*, as labeled by the author, accompany the *ponderous ribbon*. The origin of the *hammer chords* can be traced to the *descent figure* in mm. 11-13, and they are presented in rhythmic unison by various portions of the ensemble. Sixteenth note *hammer chords* in m. 95 are incorporated into the *ponderous ribbon* at the conclusion of the measure, and become an integral part of the ribbon in m. 111. There, as part of a cross-rhythm descending line,[8] the sixteenth notes occur in metrically irregular locations, providing downward propulsion at a point when the *ponderous ribbon* seems to be running out of energy.

During this percussive passage (mm. 91-116), pitch class set 01367 appears eight times in *hammer chords*, twice as frequently as sets 01347 and 0167. Set 0147 appears three times, and no other *hammer chord* set occurs more than once in this passage. All sets appearing in multiple *hammer chords* are subsets of the octatonic collection 0134679T.

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[8] Each measure in this passage (mm. 111-115) contains the equivalent of six eighth notes, and the descending ribbon pattern regenerates on every sixth eighth note, resulting in a metric shift by one eighth note with each repetition of the passage.

The *hammer chords* cease, texture thins, dynamic levels soften, and the *ponderous ribbon* passages ascend in the approach to m. 118, where a *respite* ensues. This region is comparable to the measures leading up to the *respite* in m. 77, featuring a similar ascending line and *decrescendo*. At m. 118, the bass clarinet plays a combination of the *swirling ribbon* and *triplet ribbon*, spanning the same tritone ambitus and featuring articulations identical to the passage found in mm. 84-88. The section-four *respite* ribbon moves in the opposite direction to the earlier line, however.

Sustained harmony returns at m. 118, recalling the *octatonic haze* from section two. Particularly reminiscent is the portion of the *emerging ribbon*, drawn from the T1 scale, found in the clarinet parts beginning in m. 120. Like the original flute *emerging ribbon* and the clarinet presentation that followed, this ascending ribbon unfolds more completely and rapidly in its second statement (in m. 123 and following) than in the first (in m. 120). The octatonic harmony is ambiguous in the current section, and it contains pitches found in both the T1 and T3 scales.

In m. 126 the flutes bring back the *third motive* from the opening of the composition, including the ascending octave leaps. Piano joins in presenting the *third motive* in m. 127, and other instruments are added in mm. 132-133. The harmonic structure in m. 127 contains a cluster of pitches from the T1

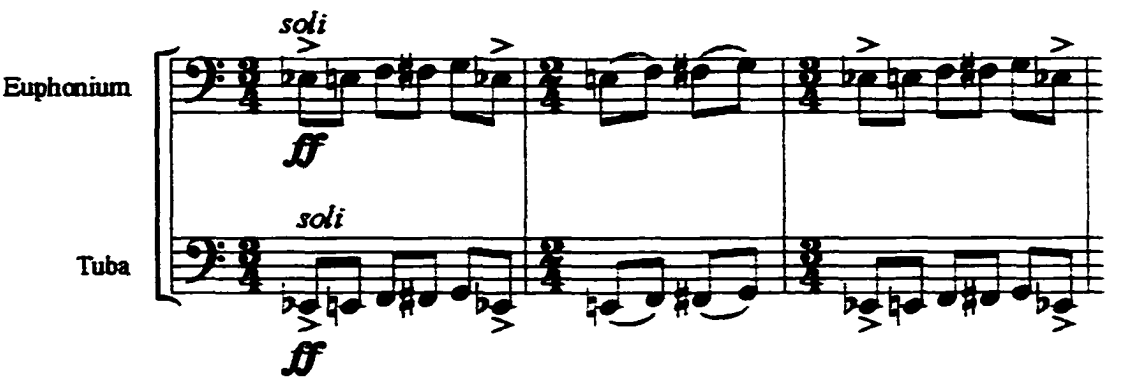
octatonic scale on E (some pitches are heard only due to vibraphone pedaling) plus the pitch D. This appearance of D recalls m. 47 of section two, where the same pitch contributed to a breakdown of T1 E centricity and led toward the arrival of section three. In the current location D helps signal the close of section four. Harmonies in mm. 128-131 consist of a tetrachord belonging to set 0148.

As the *third motive* reappears, the *triplet ribbon* begins to evolve, eventually transforming completely into an ascending line in m. 128. The pitch range reaches its highest point of this passage in m. 133, and is accompanied by an increasing dynamic and the addition of several accented articulations. Descending chromaticism, a familiar technique in this piece for announcing upcoming changes, begins in m. 134 above an F-sharp that is sustained by several instruments. The *triplet ribbon* has an identical shape, during the first two beats of m. 134, to the original version found in m. 66. Beginning on beat two in m. 135, each three-note group begins one half-step lower than the previous group. In mm. 136-138 the *triplet ribbon* becomes a continuous descending chromatic line that is gradually taken up by lower-pitched instruments as the line descends and grows louder. This descending line serves to clear the stage for the next set of events.

Section Five

Section five, which begins in m. 139, is similar to section four, in that low brass present *ponderous ribbon* material. Like that found in section four, the section five ribbon is an ascending fragmented pattern that moves back to its starting point and begins ascending once again. Over a period of several measures the pattern gradually moves upward. The general shape and character of the fragments are similar to those in section four also, and the five-note groups that begin section five recall the descending cross-rhythm figures in mm. 111-115. There is sufficient similarity between the two ribbons that the author refers to the section five line as *ponderous ribbon II* (see Fig. 14).

Fig. 14: *Ponderous Ribbon II* in mm. 139-141.



In contrast to the *hammer chords* that accompanied the *ponderous ribbon* in section four, *third motives* escort *ponderous ribbon II*. In mm. 141-144 the accompaniment bears a striking resemblance to the opening measures, as the

third motive progresses up from lower to higher timbres with successive entries. In m. 149 there is a precise pitch, rhythm and interval quote (though beginning on a different part of the measure) of the *ascent motive* from the anacrusis to m. 11. The pattern in mm. 150-152 correlates to the *descent figure* of mm. 11-13 in terms of rhythm, pitch, harmony and function. Trichords supporting the descent figure in these measures consist of 026 sets, as they did in mm. 11-13. A retrograde version of the *dotted rhythm* is found in m. 153. This rhythmic pattern recalls the two-note *hammer chords* of m. 111 and following.

Section Six

Quarter note triplets in contrary motion lead to the beginning of section six in m. 156. The new section contains the quickest tempo marking thus far (quarter note = c. 152), and features a return of both the *swirling ribbon* and the *staccato ribbon*. In mm. 156-160 the *swirling ribbon* encompasses the lower tritone of a T3 octatonic scale centered on C. The ribbon then shifts from one octatonic scale to another for its source material every two measures, and it eventually evolves and breaks apart. In mm. 161-162 the pattern shifts up to a T2 scale on D. In mm. 163-164 it moves to a T1 pattern on C, and the ascending/descending pattern is momentarily interrupted.

After shifting to a T3 pattern on E-flat in mm. 165-166, the *swirling ribbon* moves back to the T1 scale on C in mm. 167-168. For mm. 169-170 Tower uses a T3 pattern on F. Each of these examples features a tritone span up from the noted pitch. In m. 171, however, the pattern spans a diminished 4th and lasts for only one measure. Measure 171 pitches are drawn from the T1 scale on D-sharp. The *swirling ribbon* then becomes chromatic, with a span of a minor 3d, in mm. 172-173, and disappears entirely thereafter.

The *dotted rhythm* of the *Fascinating Ribbons* opening featured repeated pitches briefly at the close of mm. 4 and 8, and more prominently in mm. 15-16. Trumpets and trombones have occasional repeated notes in the related *staccato ribbon* that starts in m. 56. Beginning in m. 157, however, repeated pitches in the *dotted rhythm* become commonplace for the remainder of the work. Oboe and E-flat clarinet begin the repeated dotted pattern on E-flat, and are joined by several instruments on E-flat and A in m. 159.

The trumpet and trombone *staccato ribbon* reappears in mm. 161-162, featuring once again the *ascent motive* pattern displayed in m. 56. This statement is somewhat abbreviated, and the rhythm is notated as a dotted eighth note followed by sixteenth note. Percussion plus alto and soprano saxophone join trumpet and trombone for the statement in m. 161.
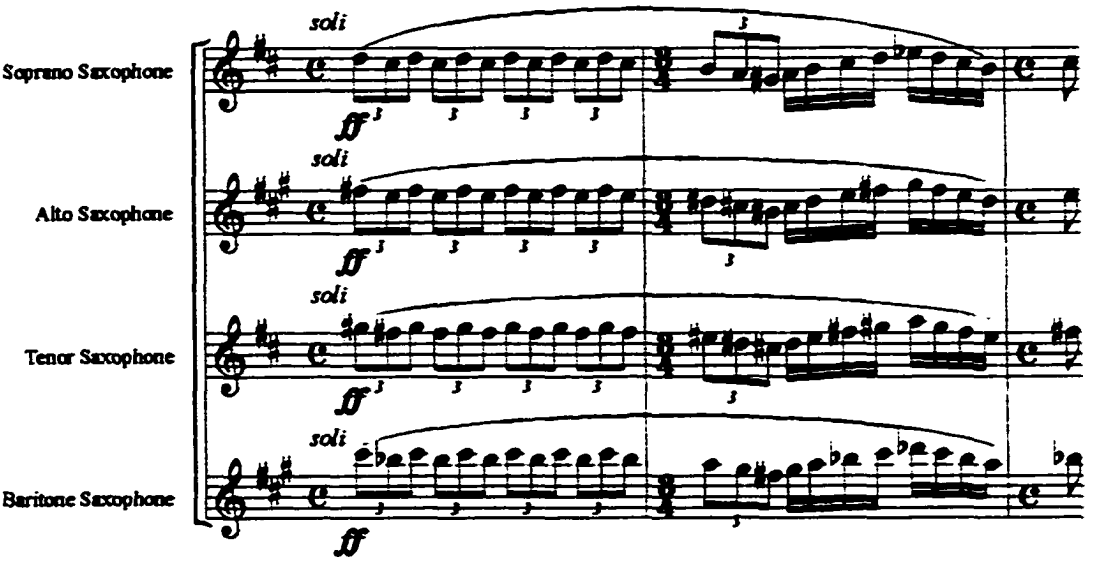
The *staccato ribbon* begins to evolve in m. 166. The *ascent motive* melodic shape begins to disappear as the pattern moves only upward (or remains stationary) between mm. 165-170, and covers a span of a tritone from the T3 octatonic scale. The *staccato ribbon* texture (now essentially merged with the *dotted rhythm*) becomes thickest in m. 172, with repeated octatonic clusters of F-sharp, G-sharp, B, and C (a 0146 set). The repeated upward motion resulting in octatonic clusters in mm. 167-172 is reminiscent of the *octatonic haze* from mm. 19-26 and mm. 120-127. The *haze* characteristic is less apparent in section six, however, due primarily to increased rhythmic activity and thicker texture.

Measure 174 contains only the repeated *dotted rhythm* (a 0126 set), repeated quarter notes, and percussion rolls marked with *crescendi*. Measures 175-177 contain only the *dotted rhythm*, the first instance since m. 9 that all sounding parts feature identical rhythms. In mm. 176-177, trumpets I and III, horns, and trombones II and III play a line that resembles the *ascent motive* and the first appearance of the *staccato ribbon*. The melodic aspect of the original *staccato ribbon* ascended by a minor 3d followed by a major 2d, and in this location the ascent is first by minor 3d and then by minor 2d. The melodic collection F-sharp, A, and B-flat constitutes a 014 set, like that which opens the piece.

Section Seven

The *dotted rhythm* ceases on the downbeat of m. 178, with all players performing pitches from a diminished seventh chord (F-sharp, A, C, and E-flat). This downbeat marks the beginning of section seven, which features the saxophone and percussion sections and extends through m. 209. In mm. 178-184, saxophones plus percussion III participate in a dialogue with the brass section and other percussionists. Saxophones play parallel ribbon patterns drawn from the T1 octatonic scale, and brass respond with fragments of the *staccato ribbon*. The author refers to this extended ornate passage as the *florid ribbon* (see Fig. 15). After the *dotted rhythm* dies away at the beginning of m. 184, a saxophone and indefinite-pitch percussion dialogue ensues for twenty-five measures.

Fig. 15: *Florid Ribbon* in mm. 178-180.



Following the downbeat of m. 178, only the tam-tam and saxophones—the latter moving in parallel diminished seventh chords—play in mm. 178-179. Between mm. 178-185, almost every pitch belongs to the T1 octatonic scale (centricity is ambiguous).[9]

In mm. 181-183, the saxophone texture on the *florid ribbon* is reduced from four distinct pitch classes to three (soprano and tenor saxophones are doubled at the octave), resulting in parallel diminished triads. The texture is simplified further in mm. 184-185, where soprano and tenor play one line

[9] The author believes the third tenor saxophone pitch in m. 179 of the score should be written as C-double-sharp instead of C-sharp, in order to maintain the consistent string of parallel diminished 7th chords in mm. 178-179. Joan Tower, however, has not confirmed that the score is incorrect.

doubled in octaves, and alto and baritone saxophone do the same with the other line. What were originally parallel diminished seventh chords are reduced to diminished triads, and are further reduced to minor 3d dyads. The parallel writing recalls the *duet ribbon* from section two.

Beginning in m. 186, the *florid ribbon* material is drawn from the T2 octatonic scale on D, and the use of parallel minor 3ds with octave doublings continues. From m. 184 through m. 208, a consistent pattern of dialogue is followed. While saxophones are playing, one or more percussionists perform a roll. When each saxophone passage concludes, a response follows from the percussion section. The two instrument groups come together in m. 209, only then playing similar or identical rhythms.

The saxophone pattern in m. 189 alternates between two collections—a diminished seventh chord that occurs in both the T1 and T2 octatonic scale and a 0347 set (the major-minor tetrachord)—and is the only portion of section seven thus far during which the saxophones move in contrary motion. This also marks the first return to four distinct parts since m. 180. The 0347 collection recalls the harmonies and parallel patterns from mm. 41-44.

In mm. 192-195 the saxophones return to the duet arrangement, and all pitches are drawn from the T3 octatonic scale. The tenor and baritone saxophone lines in m. 197 move in oblique motion to the soprano and alto

parts, resulting in a major-minor tetrachord collection (set 0347) in m. 198. The passage extending from m. 198 to the middle of m. 205 consists of a sequence of parallel major-minor tetrachords, accompanied by an extended roll on tambourine and sleigh bells. Tower constructed these tetrachords by drawing from T2 octatonic scales for soprano and alto saxophone parts, and from T3 scales for the tenor and baritone parts.[10]

In the middle of m. 205, Tower reverts once again to the duet arrangement, using pitches from the T2 octatonic scale and moving in parallel minor 3ds.[11] This scoring arrangement continues to the middle of m. 208, where one final pattern change is introduced in section seven. During beats two and three, the duet shifts so that soprano and alto saxophones are doubled at the octave, and tenor and baritone saxophones also play in octaves. This passage ascends in parallel minor 3ds. Beat two of m. 208 draws from the T2 scale, and beat three ascends chromatically.

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[10] In the soprano saxophone part in the score, written A-flat in m. 202 and written B-natural in m. 204 are foreign to the T2 scale. The harmonic collections in these two locations are the only ones between mm. 199-205 that are not major-minor tetrachords. The author believes the respective pitches should be written as A-natural and B-flat, though the composer has not confirmed that the score is incorrect.

[11] There appear to be two score errors in m. 207, though the composer has not confirmed that either is incorrect. In the author's opinion, the final tenor saxophone pitch should be a written B-flat (as is the soprano saxophone note), and the penultimate alto saxophone pitch should be a written C-sharp (as is the baritone saxophone note) rather than C-natural. The suggested changes would maintain the duet arrangement that extends from mm. 205-208.

In m. 209, the final bar of section seven, all saxophone parts ascend chromatically.[12] The tenor and baritone duet moves one additional half step after the soprano and alto duet has stopped, resulting in a harmonic interval of a whole step (plus octave doublings) at the fermata, in contrast to the minor 3d intervals so prominent in the preceding measures. The C-sharp and E-flat pitches of the m. 209 fermata are both resolved inward to D in m. 210. The centricity of D is affirmed throughout the concluding section of the work.

Stylistically, the *florid ribbon* material of section seven recalls the *swirling ribbon* and the smoother versions of the *triplet ribbon*. Motion is primarily conjunct and most passages are slurred. There are two groupings of four pitches (one tongued and three slurred)—like those found in the original *swirling ribbon*—in m. 182, and some adaptations of the *rocking pattern* in mm. 189 and 193.

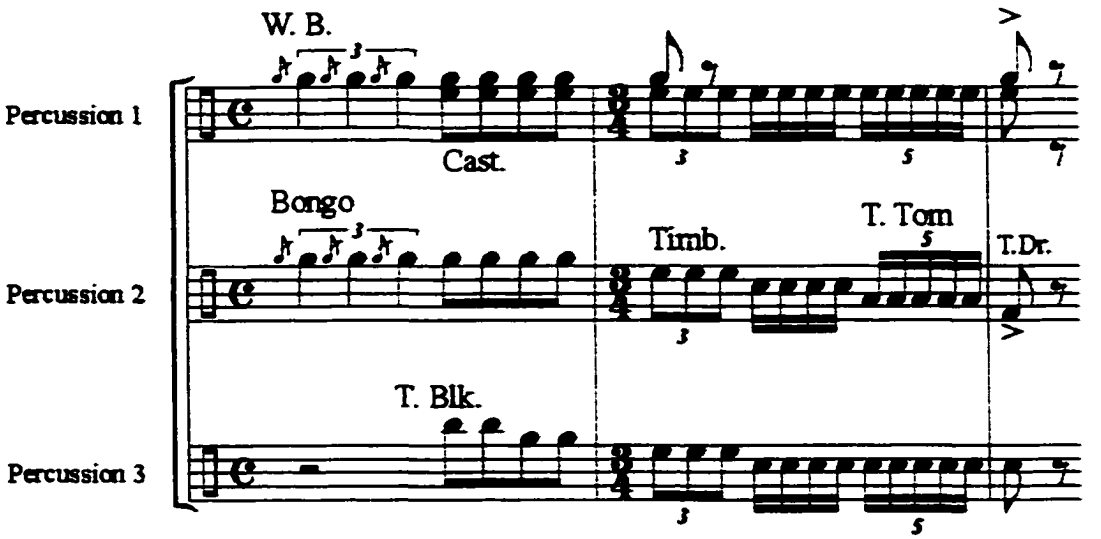
After the brass drop out in m. 184, all percussion instruments that participate in the dialogue with saxophones are of indefinite pitch. Patterns played on temple blocks, tenor drum, tenor tom, timbales, and bongos

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[12] There appears to be a mistake in the soprano saxophone part during the fermata in m. 209 of the score, though the composer has not confirmed the error. F-flat is written, but this is enharmonic to the E-natural that precedes it. The alto saxophone part has a concert E-flat on the fermata, and the author assumes the soprano saxophone should have a written F-natural to agree with the alto saxophone part. This suggested change would maintain the duet arrangement that extends from mm. 208-209.

provide relative pitch during the percussion statements, however. Each of the three percussion responses to saxophone statements begins with quarter note triplets. Each response concludes with an *internal accelerando* (see Fig. 16).

Fig. 16: Percussion *Internal Accelerando* in mm. 195-197.



Section Eight

Section eight extends from m. 210 to the end of the piece. The fastest tempo marking of the work is indicated at the beginning of the section (quarter note = c. 160). Accompanied by a suspended cymbal roll, the *dotted rhythm* repeated pitch pattern starts up immediately in the timpani and low range of the piano. The only pitch heard in m. 210 is D, and the first four ascending pitches of the D-centric T2 octatonic scale gradually appear

through mm. 211-214. Pitches appear in ascending scale order, and the dynamic level gradually increases from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*.

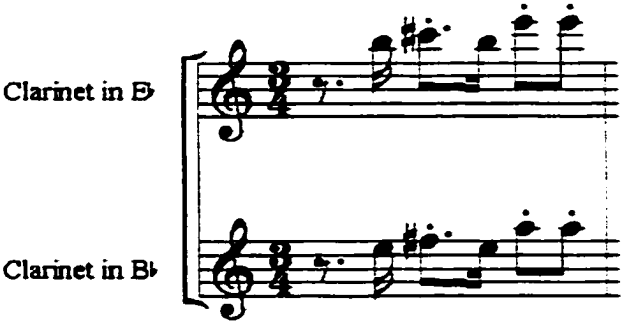
In m. 214 a cluster consisting of pitches D, E, F, and G sounds throughout the measure. The cumulative effect of the ascending line and the cluster is similar to the *emerging ribbon* and *octatonic haze* from section two, though the more vibrant rhythms of section eight considerably obscure the connection between the two passages.

The first tutti of the piece occurs, albeit very briefly, at the downbeat of m. 216. At this point the lower five pitches of the D-centric T2 octatonic scale sound simultaneously. For the remainder of mm. 216-221, only the pitches D and A-flat sound. Most members of the brass and percussion sections perform the dotted rhythm, and there are no changes whatsoever in melodic motion, dynamics, timbre, or articulation during the six measures—the presentation is utterly static.

Measure 222 contains the brief suggestion of the tune from George and Ira Gershwin's *Fascinating Rhythm*, primarily stated by the woodwind family. Though not a literal quote, it hints at the melodic shape and rhythm of the Gershwin tune, and the author refers to this figure as the *Gershwin motive* (see Fig. 17). The pitches in m. 222 are also a retrograde inversion of the principal

pitches of the *ascent motive*, and m. 223 contains the *dotted rhythm* in augmentation.

Fig. 17: *Gershwin Motive* in m. 222.



An altered version of the *Gershwin motive* appears in mm. 224-225. Other than the F-sharp in m. 223, all pitches in the closing section belong to the D-centric T2 octatonic scale. The concluding four measures of *Fascinating Ribbons* are presented entirely in unison and octaves, spanning six octaves from contrabassoon up through piccolo. The six-octave range recalls that covered by the *third motive* in the opening two measures of the work. Also, except for the trumpet I and II pitches in m. 1, all pitches in the opening three measures are presented in unison and octaves.

The concluding two pitches of *Fascinating Ribbons* descend by a minor 3d, a retrograde of the *third motive* (and presented one whole step higher) that

opens the piece. The final three pitches are also a retrograde of the *ascent motive* intervals.

Formal Summary

The chart shown in Fig. 18 summarizes material from the eight identified formal sections of *Fascinating Ribbons*. Tower achieves unity in this work through her use of recurring and interrelated versions of the various ribbons. Elements of earlier ribbons appear in later passages, and characteristics of later ribbons may be traced to material in the opening of the work. Despite numerous similarities, the ribbons display considerable contrast, ranging from the ethereal floating *duet ribbon* to the heavy, dark *ponderous ribbon*, and from the percussive, aggressive *staccato ribbon* to the tentative *emerging ribbon*.

The work is further unified through Tower's frequent use of the *dotted rhythm* and the *third motive*, as well as the melodic and harmonic use of the 3d interval in general. Prevalent use of octatonic scales and chordal collections provides melodic and harmonic cohesion. Many of Tower's compositions prominently feature rising melodies, and several ribbons and other figures in *Fascinating Ribbons* have an "upward reaching" quality. The "climbing" characteristic is typically apparent at least at the beginning of the figure, as

observed in the *duet ribbon* and the *staccato ribbon*. Often the upward reaching continues for a more extended period, such as in the *octatonic haze*, the *emerging ribbon*, and the *third motive* in the opening measures of the piece. Sometimes the climbing takes place over a period of time, such as with the *ponderous ribbon* and *ponderous ribbon II*.

Fig. 18: Formal Divisions in *Fascinating Ribbons*.

Section:	Measures:	Section Duration:	Prominent Features:
1	1-18	18 mm.	*Third Motive, Dotted Rhythm, Ascent Motive, Descent Figure*
2	19-51	33 mm.	*Emerging Ribbon, Octatonic Haze, Duet Ribbon*
3	52-90	39 mm.	*Swirling Ribbon, Staccato Ribbon, Triplet Ribbon, Respite*
4	91-138	48 mm.	*Ponderous Ribbon, Hammer Chords, Respite*
5	139-155	17 mm.	*Ponderous Ribbon II, Third Motive*
6	156-177	22 mm.	*Swirling Ribbon, Dotted Rhythm, Staccato Ribbon*
7	178-209	32 mm.	*Florid Ribbon,* Saxophone/Indefinite Pitch Percussion Dialogue
8	210-227	18 mm.	*Dotted Rhythm, Gershwin Motive*

Though the form of *Fascinating Ribbons* defies simple categorization, elements of arch form symmetry are notable. For instance, sections one and eight respectively fill introductory and closing roles, and have similar durations. Sections two and seven are also similar in length, and both prominently feature parallel writing for woodwinds in the *duet ribbon* and *florid ribbon* passages. Sections three and six both feature the *swirling ribbon* and *staccato ribbon*, and the two central sections both contain *ponderous ribbons*.

CHAPTER FIVE

GRAPHIC ANALYSIS

The current chapter includes descriptions and graphs concerning various parameters observed in each formal section of *Fascinating Ribbons*. Each section of the work, as identified in Chapter Four, is considered in order. The quantitative value of the measured parameter is reflected on the vertical axis of each graph, and measure numbers appear beneath each horizontal axis. On the summary graphs that appear at the close of the chapter, dotted vertical lines divide each chart into the eight identified formal sections, and section numbers appear beneath the horizontal axis.

Though the individual graphs reveal valuable information regarding *Fascinating Ribbons*, they are perhaps of greatest value when considered in tandem. Awareness that a particular section features consistent *forte* dynamics, for example, becomes more meaningful knowledge when one also realizes how many parts are performing, in what pitch range, with what degree of pitch density, and with what attack frequency. Obviously a solo flute playing *forte* sustained notes in its low register does not create the same musical impact that fifteen instruments playing *forte* sixteenth notes across a wide vertical and horizontal pitch range do. The most substantial merit of the

graphic analyses may be realized through synthesizing and contextualizing the information.

Section One

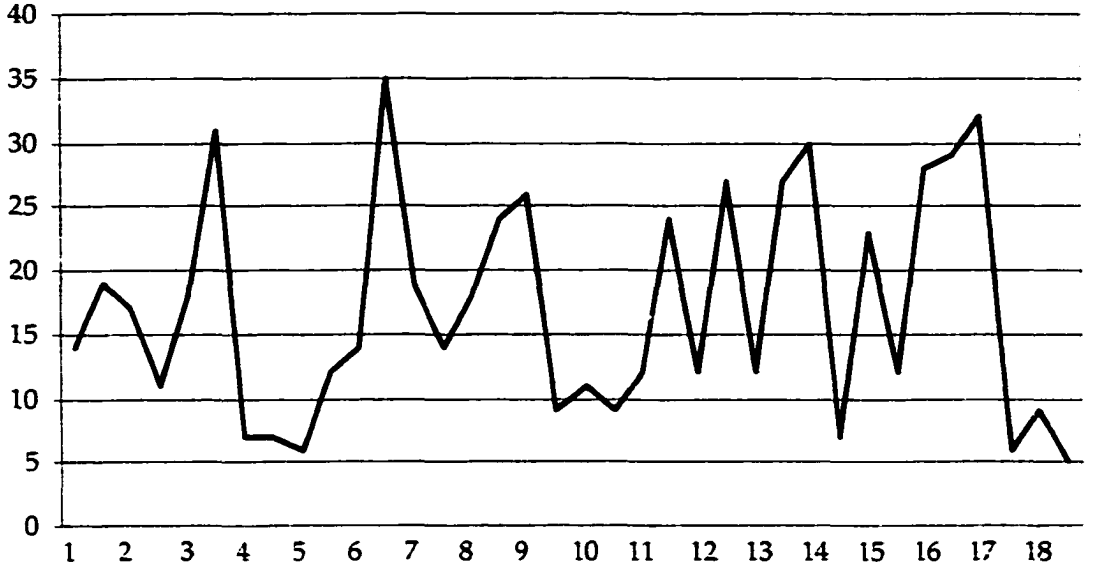
As was previously noted, Tower believes the musical events in her compositions must flow logically from the preceding material, and that the opening of each piece contains the germinal material for the entire work. The graphic representations of section one offer a view of the musical palette for *Fascinating Ribbons*. Particularly with regard to forces and pitch range, Tower demonstrates in the opening measures almost the full array of materials with which she will work in the remainder of the work. All voices participate in the opening measures, and in the first two bars alone, more than six octaves of the nearly seven-octave range of the piece are covered.

Only briefly does pitch density exceed three simultaneous pitch classes in section one, and there is often only one pitch class sounding. One could accurately infer from this relatively low density that thick chordal collections will not play prominent roles in the piece. In fact, pitch density in *Fascinating Ribbons* never exceeds eight of the twelve possible pitch classes, and often hovers in the range of one to three simultaneous pitch classes.

All forty parts play during section one, though there is no tutti ensemble writing until the closing measures of the piece. The number of parts simultaneously sounding in section one ranges from five up to thirty-five. Required forces reach a peak prior to each of the three fermatas in section one, followed by a sudden decrease to relatively few parts during each fermata. Tower utilizes only brass and percussion timbres during each of the three fermatas as well as during the slowing of activity that precedes them (in mm. 4-5, 9-10, and 17-18).

Spikes that appear on the graph at mm. 11-13 indicate the additional parts performing the staccato *descent figure* (see Fig. 19). Similar spikes appear on the pitch range and pitch density graphs.

Fig. 19: Forces Required in Section One.



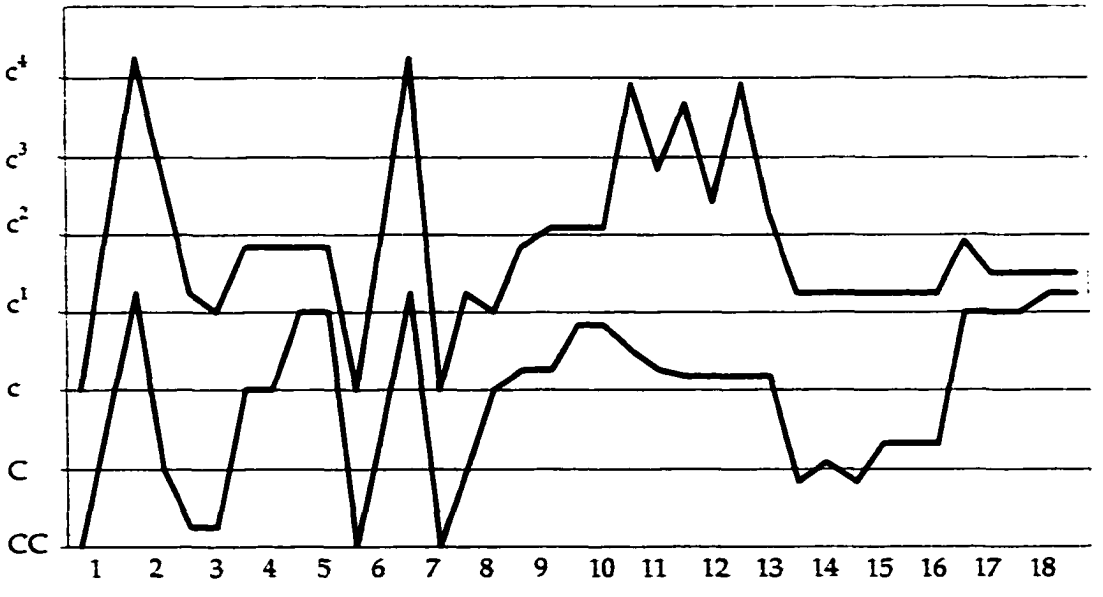
Both the highest and lowest pitches of section one are heard within the first five beats of the piece. Piano presents the lowest sounding pitch in the entire work (CC) at the anacrusis to m. 1. This pitch reappears several times later in the work. The same pitch ambitus of the first five beats (greater than six octaves) is covered again in mm. 6-7, following the first fermata.

The vertical pitch range typically varies between two and three octaves in section one. The widest such range in section one is nearly four octaves, and occurs between piccolo and bassoon in mm. 12-13. The narrowest range is a major 2d at the close of m. 18. Note that there are wide swings in pitch

ambitus preceding the first two fermatas, followed by a settling into a moderate and more stable range prior to each fermata.

The vertical pitch range is wider following the second fermata than in the opening bars, though the horizontal pitch range is smaller. Like the first two subsections of section one, pitches move into a more moderate and stable pattern preceding the third fermata (see Fig. 20).

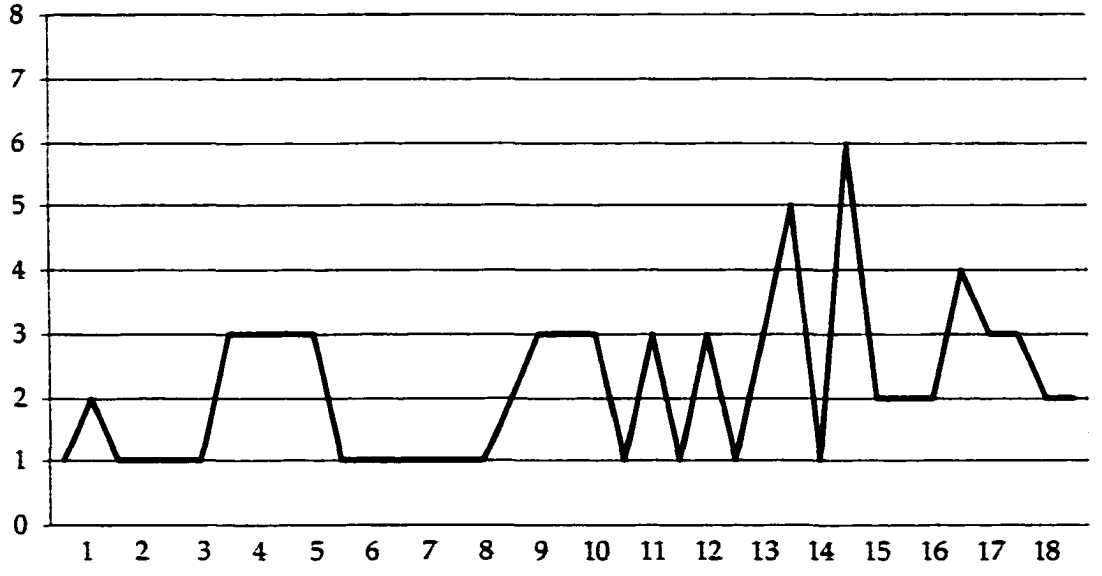
Fig. 20: Pitch Range in Section One.



Pitch density in section one is relatively light, ranging from one to six simultaneous pitch classes. Through the first ten measures there are no more than three pitch classes sounding at any given moment. It is notable that the

densest pitch collections of the first ten measures occur at points containing the least rhythmic motion, and the least dense collections occur during periods of greater rhythmic motion. Five and six-note chords heard at the beginning of mm. 14 and 15 are the densest collections found in section one, and these collections foreshadow the increased pitch density that emerges early in section two (see Fig. 21).

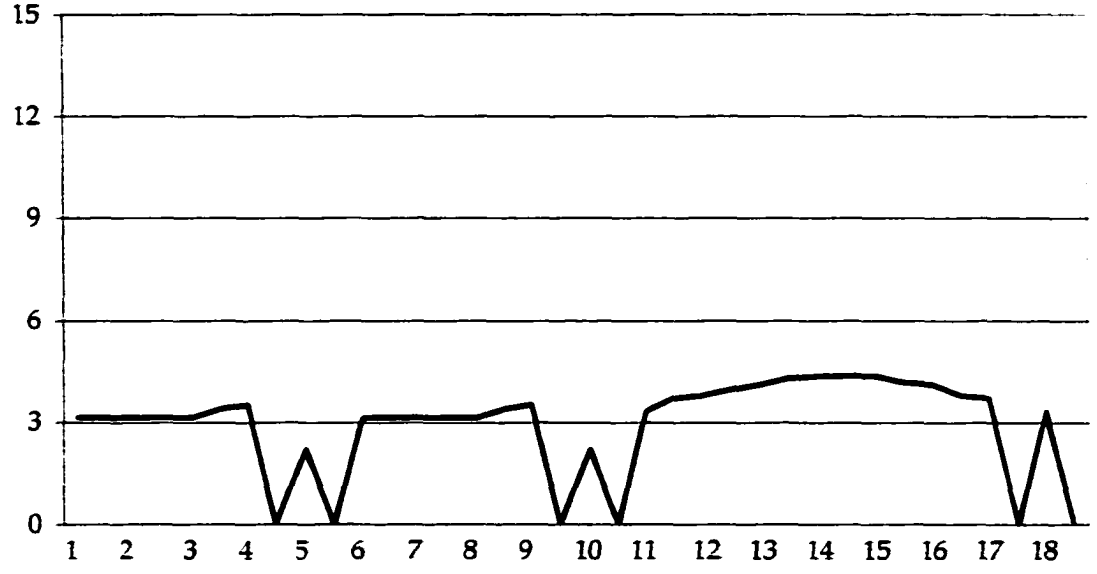
Fig. 21: Pitch Density in Section One.



In the same way that the pitch range pattern in mm. 1-5 is similar to that found in mm. 6-10, attack frequency in section one follows a repetitive pattern. Each of the first two fermatas is preceded by two measures

possessing a stable attack frequency, followed by a third measure of quickening attacks (due to an *accelerando*), and a sudden decrease in frequency. The attack frequency is less stable in mm. 11-16 due to tempo fluctuations, but the attack pattern observed in the third subsection might best be described as a variation on those in mm. 1-10. Overall the attacks per second (APS) rate in section one ranges from 0.0 (during the pauses) up to 4.4 (see Fig. 22).

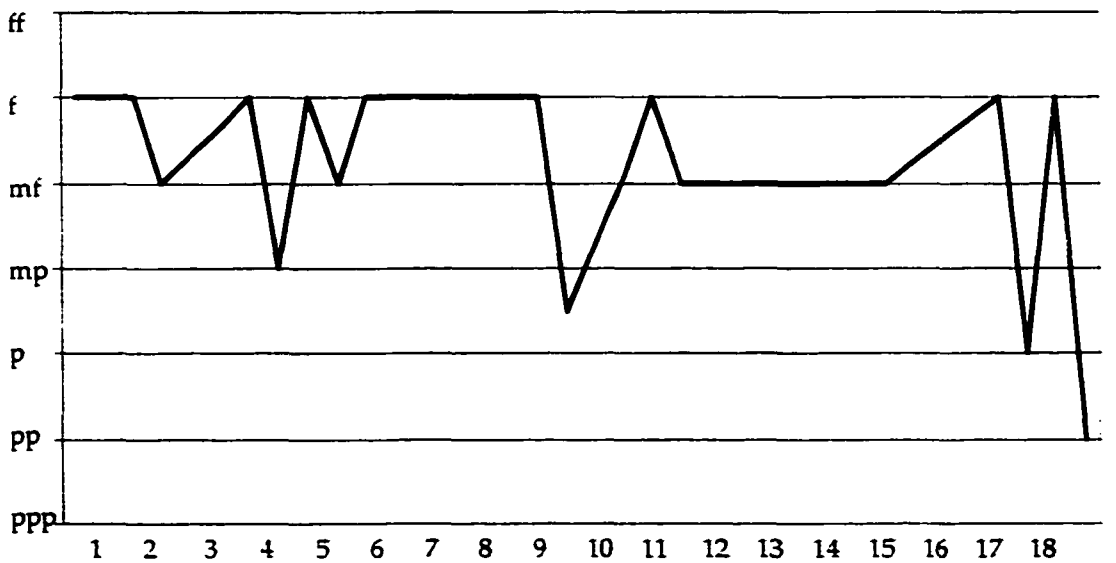
Fig. 22: Attack Frequency in Section One.



The dynamic range indications for section one are relatively moderate, though Tower's scoring obviously impacts the aural result of the printed

dynamics. The loudest indicated dynamic (*forte*) occurs several times in the first section, and the softest dynamic (*pianissimo*) occurs only at the close of the section. As is the case with the other observed parameters, the most distinct variation in dynamics is seen in the third portion of section one (see Fig. 23).

Fig. 23: Dynamics in Section One.



Almost all of the section one graphs offer visual evidence that one section is concluding and another is upcoming. In the closing measures of section one, Tower uses the fewest forces, the narrowest pitch range, and the softest overall dynamic of section one. All five of the section one charts show

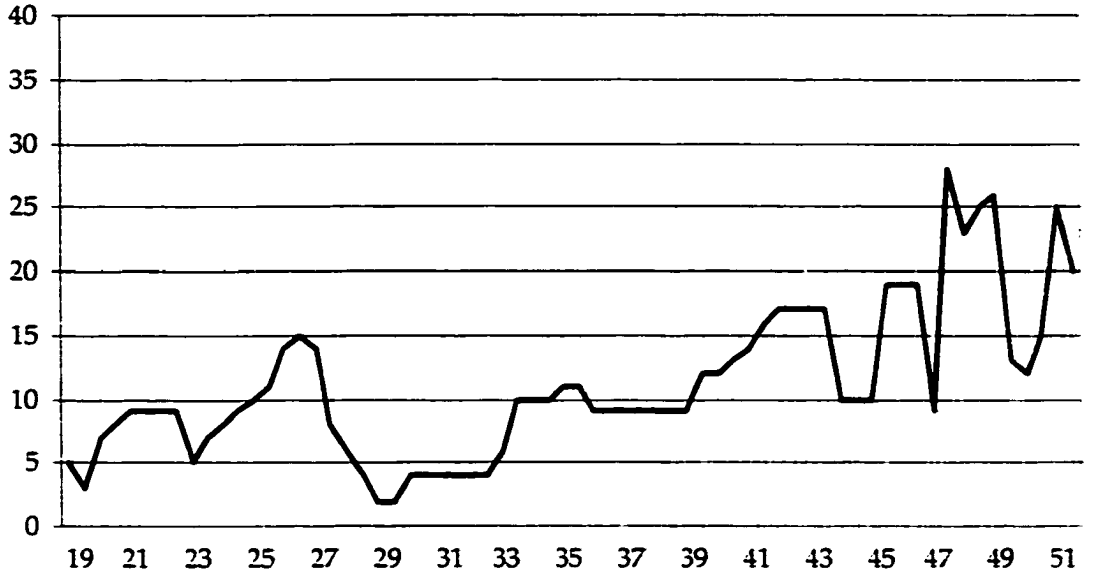
that the first two subsections (mm. 1-5 and mm. 6-10) are similar to one another, and that the third subsection differs more substantially from the first two subsections. The momentum generated in the first two subsections dissipates fairly rapidly in mm. 4-5 and mm. 9-10. The shifts in the various parameters that begin in m. 14 contribute to a slowing of the considerable momentum built up in mm. 11-13.

Section Two

Woodwind instruments are featured throughout section two, and all other timbres are either absent entirely or little used until the transition to section three begins. The number of parts increases from three up to nine as the solo flute presents the *emerging ribbon*. The number drops to five for the beginning of the clarinet solo, and grows to fifteen by the beginning of m. 27. The added parts sound the *octatonic haze* during mm. 19-26.

The texture thins to the fewest required parts up to this point of the piece in m. 29, where the *duet ribbon* appears. The texture then gradually thickens from the minimum of two parts up to a peak of twenty-eight parts in m. 47, and then fluctuates until the close of the section (see Fig. 24).

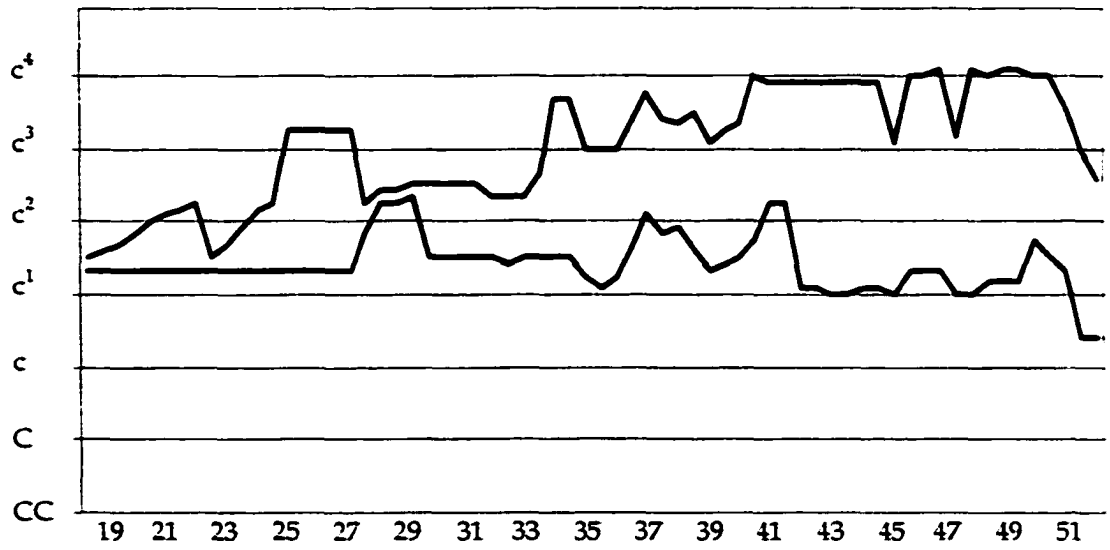
Fig. 24: Forces Required in Section Two.



The horizontal pitch range in section two (less than four octaves) is considerably narrower than in section one. The tessitura in this section is, on average, the highest in the entire work. Until the final measure of section two, the lowest pitch is three octaves higher than the lowest pitch in section one. Also, the vertical pitch range typically covers a narrower span in section two than in section one. A visual representation of the emerging *octatonic haze* may be observed on the graph between mm. 19 and 26 (see Fig. 25). The narrowest vertical pitch range of section two occurs at the beginning of m. 19 at the same major 2d interval that closed section one. The widest vertical pitch range of the section is three octaves between baritone saxophone and piccolo

in m. 47. The vertical pitch range in general grows gradually wider as the section progresses. The horizontal pitch range collectively descends in mm. 50-51, as section two concludes.

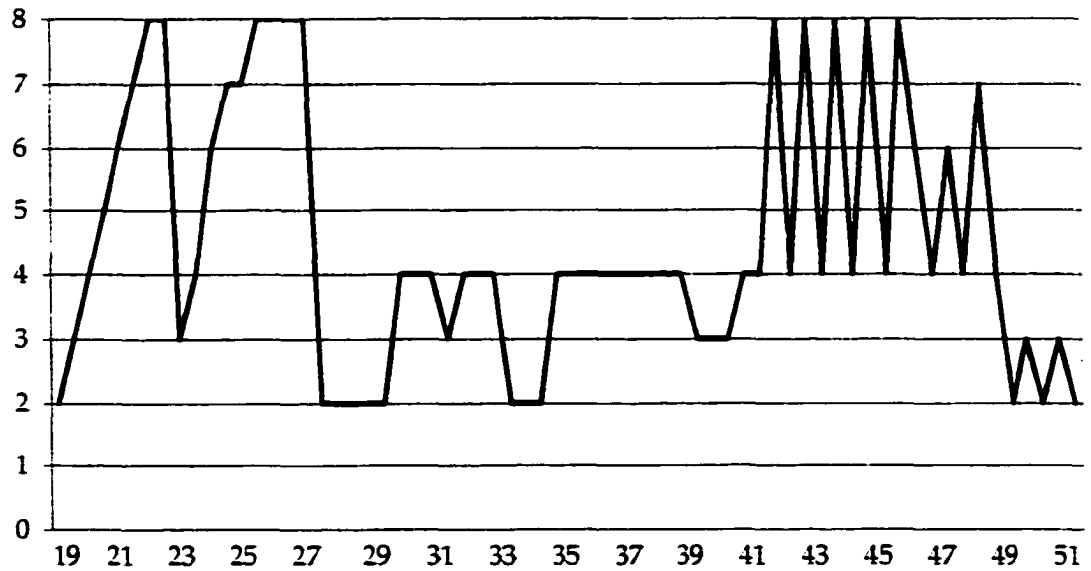
Fig. 25: Pitch Range in Section Two.



In contrast to the sparse scoring, soft dynamics and narrow pitch range found at the beginning of section two, pitch density in the first nine measures of the second section is the thickest yet in the piece. As the *octatonic haze* builds first in mm. 19-22, and again in mm. 23-27, all eight pitches of the E-centric T1 scale eventually sound simultaneously. During the *duet ribbon* presentation, a range of from two to four pitch classes is simultaneously present as the ribbons overlap. Spikes in the pitch density graph (in mm. 41-

45) reflect the alternation between four and eight simultaneous pitches as saxophones and clarinets perform *rocking patterns* in contrary motion. The alternation between more and fewer pitches continues until the close of the section. Overall, pitch density in section two ranges from two to eight, up slightly from section one (see Fig. 26).

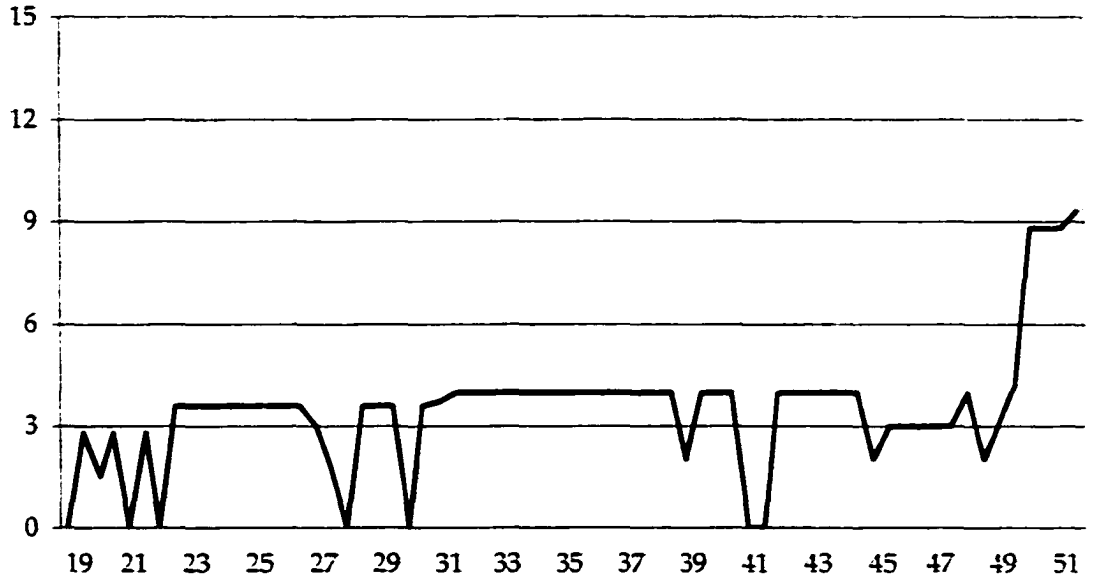
Fig. 26: Pitch Density in Section Two.



Frequency of attacks is relatively moderate and stable in section two until m. 50. There, due to the introduction of thirty-second notes in the xylophone part, the rate increases to more than double the quickest previous

pace in the work. The APS rate for section two ranges from 0.0 to greater than 9.0 in the closing measures (see Fig. 27).

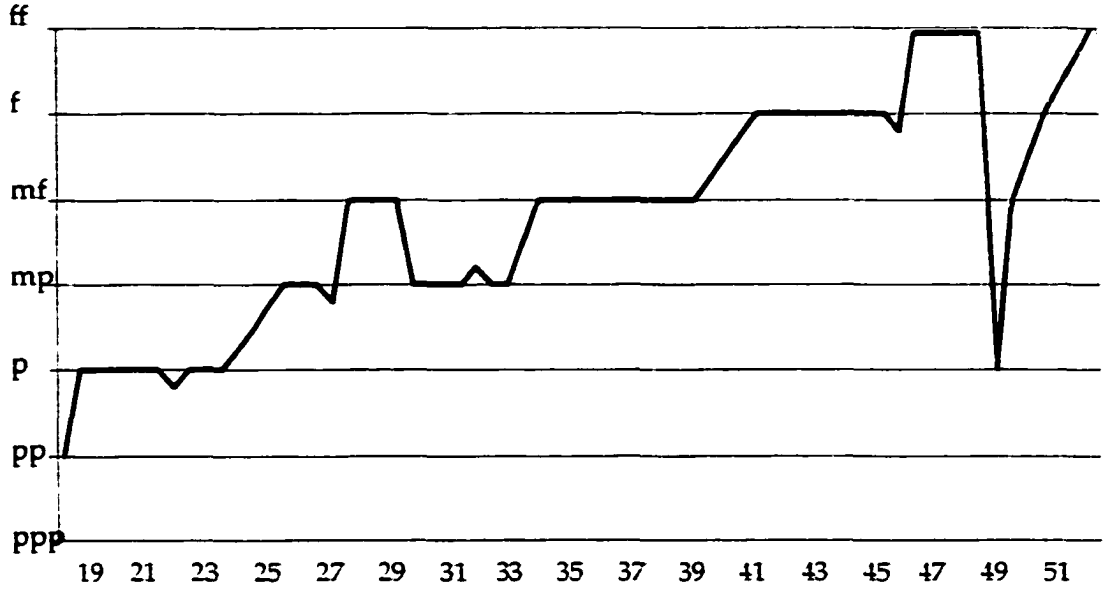
Fig. 27: Attack Frequency in Section Two.



The progression of dynamics suggests a relatively gradual and steady increase in volume in section two (see Fig. 28). The softest marking (*pianissimo*) is found at the beginning of the section, and the first *fortissimo* marking of the piece appears in m. 45. The use of lighter timbres in moderate ranges tempers the marked dynamic increases in some locations. The louder dynamics in the concluding portion of section two are, however, a significant

contributor to the sense of impending change. The sudden dynamic drop in m. 48 coincides with the *poco accelerando* marking.

Fig. 28: Dynamics in Section Two.



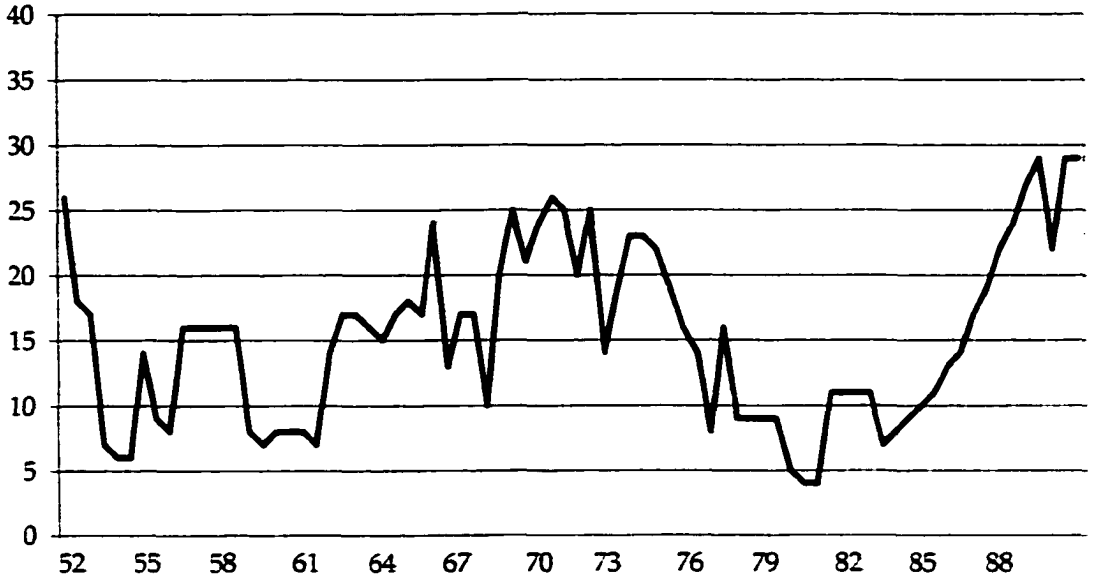
As is also the case in section one, the majority of the graphed parameters in section two undergo their most dramatic changes in the closing measures of the section. The forces, pitch range, pitch density, and attack frequency graphs all show at least two increases in their respective rate during the *emerging ribbon*, followed by a decrease at or near the beginning of the *duet ribbon*. Each of those four graphs then shows further and more frequent changes as section three approaches. The dynamics graph shows a

relatively constant increase throughout the section, until m. 48. In contrast to the close of section one, where Tower slowed the pre-existing momentum, in the closing measures of section two she builds up momentum that leads toward section three. There is a simultaneous increase in dynamics and attack frequency, a decrease in the horizontal pitch range, and fluctuating pitch density and use of forces that contribute to a sense of forward motion in mm. 48-51.

Section Three

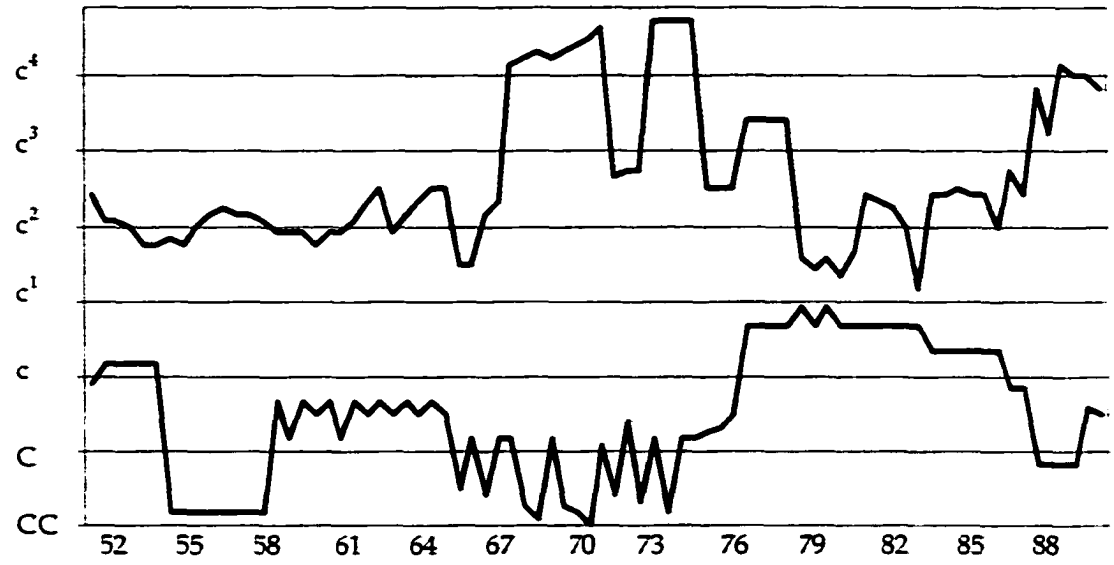
The number of simultaneous parts required in section three ranges from four (in m. 80) to twenty-nine in the closing measures. Unlike section two, which until the closing measures featured relatively gradual changes in the number of simultaneous parts, frequent sudden changes occur in section three. Occasionally the sudden changes reflect the brief overlapping of two groups of timbres at the moment when phrases intersect, such as at the beginning of m. 66. Section three also features more frequent timbral changes than previous sections. Of particular note is the consistent increase in forces called for in mm. 83-89, as the section draws to a close (see Fig. 29).

Fig. 29: Forces Required in Section Three.



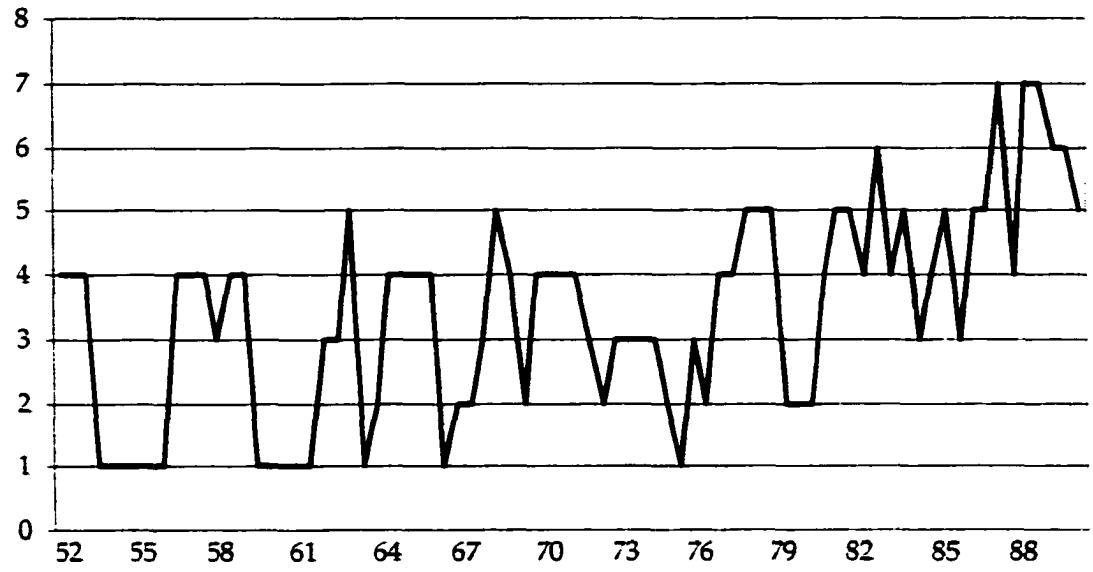
Section three features by far the widest vertical pitch range yet seen in *Fascinating Ribbons*. In fact, the span of nearly seven octaves separating the contrabassoon/piano and piccolo pitches in m. 73 is the widest such range in the entire work. This is also the first instance in which the highest and lowest pitches of a single section sound simultaneously. The narrowest vertical pitch range is located in mm. 79-80, during the *respite* passage. The higher tessitura of the *respite* passage recalls the overall range of section two. From m. 81 through m. 89, the vertical pitch range gradually and rather erratically expands outward at both the low and high ends of the spectrum (see Fig. 30).

Fig. 30: Pitch Range in Section Three.



Pitch density is generally lower in section three than in section two, and the overall range is from one to seven pitch classes. Like sections one and two, the most rapid fluctuations between higher and lower density levels occurs in the latter portion of section three (see Fig. 31).

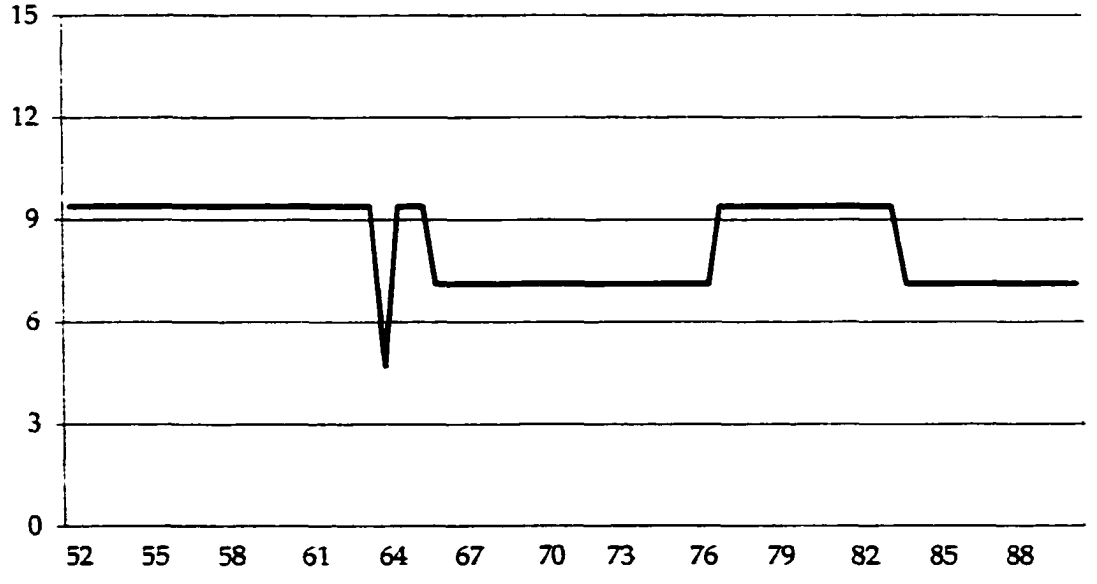
Fig. 31: Pitch Density in Section Three.



The attack frequency rate in section three is roughly twice that of either previous section. Tower indicates a quicker metronome marking at the beginning of the new section, and also uses relatively short rhythmic values throughout. In contrast to the numerous tempo adjustments in sections one and two, tempo remains steady throughout section three. Because of the nearly constant presence in section three of either the *swirling ribbon* or *triplet ribbon*, attack frequency remains relatively stable. Rate changes typically reflect a shift between the two ribbon patterns. The sudden momentary drop in attack frequency in m. 64 indicates a brief pause in the *swirling ribbon*.

The stable appearance of the attack frequency graph for section three is somewhat deceptive, however. Rhythmic relationships between the various parts combine to create the most active, complex texture yet seen in the piece. The overall APS rate for section three ranges from 4.7 to 9.4 (see Fig. 32).

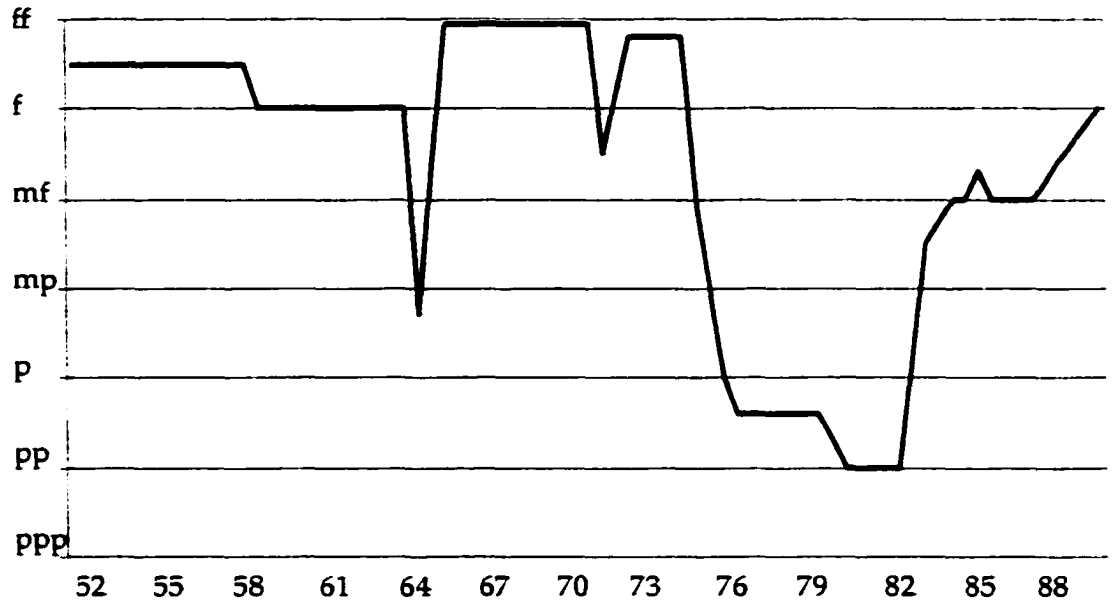
Fig. 32: Attack Frequency in Section Three.



Sections two and three contain the same range of printed dynamics, though the actual volume generated by the ensemble in section three should be considerably greater than in section two. While section two is scored relatively lightly, and features primarily woodwinds, section three is scored more heavily and prominently features brass instruments. Articulations are

generally more percussive in section three as well. The loudest marked dynamic of the section occurs during the *triplet ribbon* passage, and the softest marking comes during the *respite* section (see Fig. 33).

Fig. 33: Dynamics in Section Three.



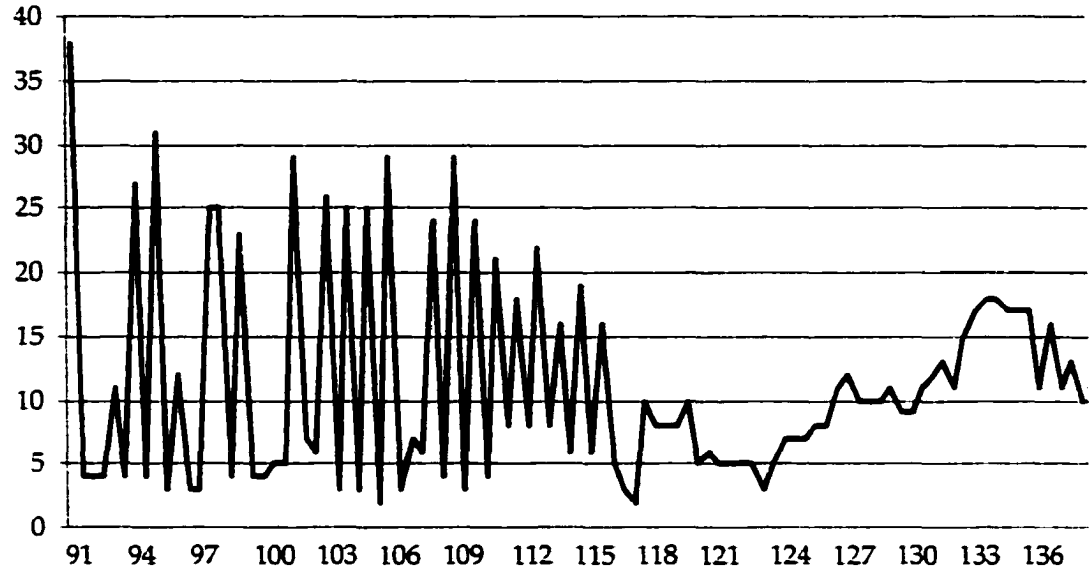
Following the section three *respite* section, Tower builds momentum once again toward m. 91. Forces and the overall dynamic level increase while the vertical pitch range expands and pitch density fluctuates. Attack frequency remains constant in the closing measures of the section. Collectively the greatest changes in section three parameters take place between mm. 83-90.

Section Four

Due to elision, section four begins with thirty-eight of the forty voices sounding simultaneously. This is the largest such number up to this point in the piece. From mm. 91-116, a group of two to seven instruments presents the *ponderous ribbon*, and many other parts play the accompanying *hammer chords*. These sudden shifts in required forces account for the numerous spikes seen in the forces graph. As the *ponderous ribbon* unfolds, scoring gradually involves fewer parts on the *hammer chords*.

The texture thins to only two parts in m. 105 of the *ponderous ribbon* passage, and again in m. 117, just prior to the *respite*. Required parts during the *respite* passage reach a maximum of eighteen in m. 134, as the chromatic descent toward section five is beginning. Overall the forces vary between two and thirty-eight simultaneous parts, the widest range yet in the work (see Fig. 34).

Fig. 34: Forces Required in Section Four.

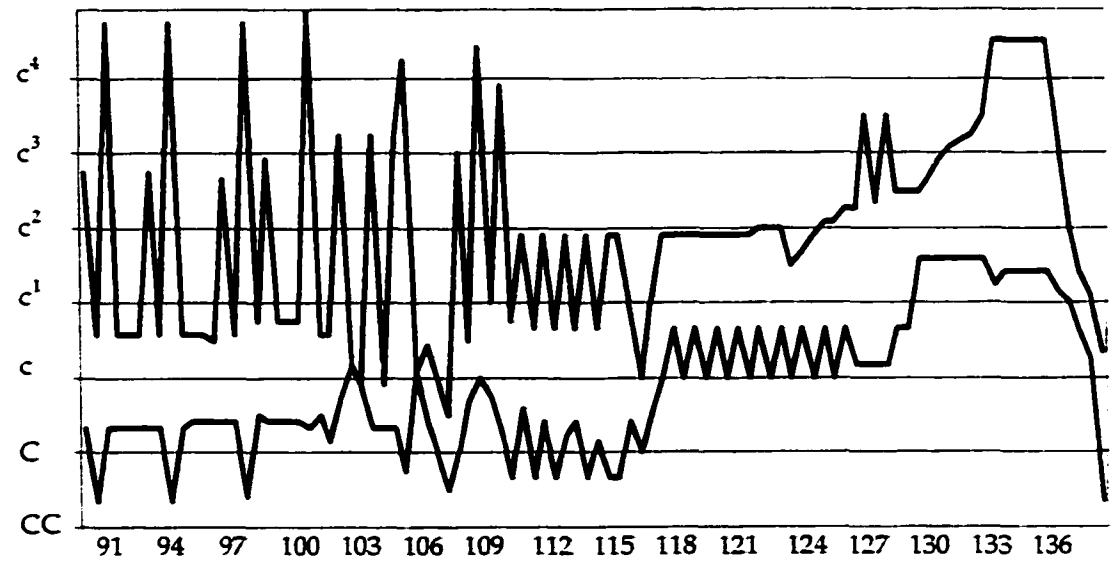


Vertical pitch range among voices presenting the *ponderous ribbon* is no greater than one octave, even narrowing to the first unison of the piece in mm. 103 and 106. The *hammer chords* cover a wide pitch range, however, with three structures spanning greater than six octaves. The lowest pitches of section four (EE) are found in contrabassoon in mm. 91 and 95, and in piano in m. 138. The highest pitch of the entire work (b^{4}) is found in the piccolo part in m. 101.

The tessitura shifts upward by approximately one octave for the beginning of the section-four *respite* passage. The overall pitch range of this second *respite* passage is comparable to that found in section three. In m. 130

the tessitura moves higher still, followed by a collective and dramatic pitch descent as momentum builds toward section five (see Fig. 35).

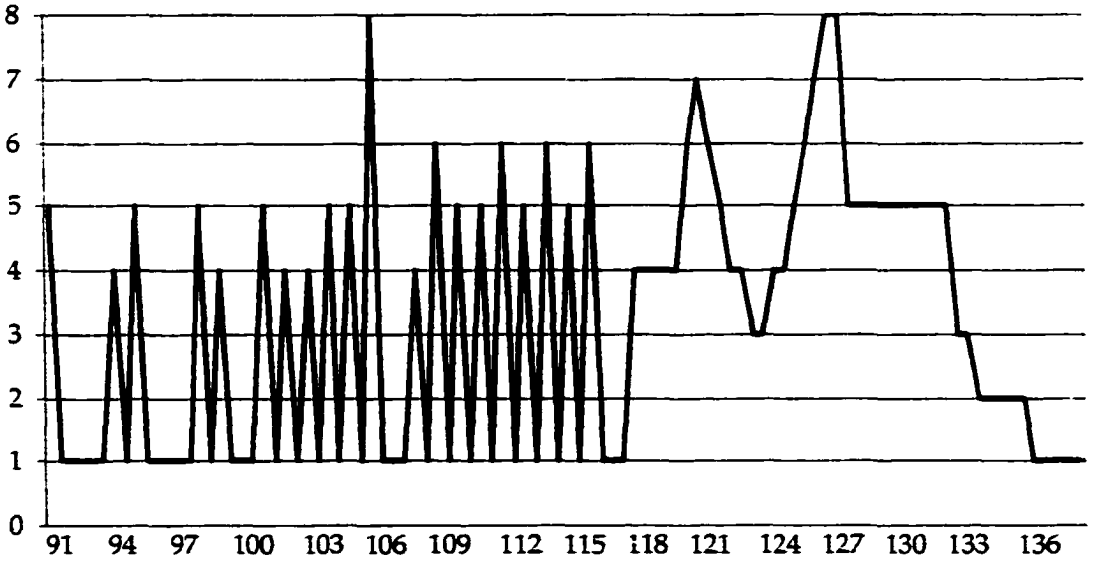
Fig. 35: Pitch Range in Section Four.



Ponderous ribbon material is presented entirely in unison and octaves. Pitch density of two or more pitch classes occurs in this region only due to the presence of the *hammer chords*. Density ranges from one to eight pitch classes throughout the *ponderous ribbon* passage, as well as through the remainder of section four. This is the widest density range of any section in *Fascinating Ribbons*.

The pitch density graph provides visual evidence of similarities between the *respite*-passage material in mm. 119-127 and the *octatonic haze/emerging ribbon* material from mm. 19-27. The visual similarity observed on the graphs is supported by evidence in the score of a relationship between the two passages. As the *respite* concludes, the texture gradually thins from a peak of eight pitch classes down to one (see Fig. 36).

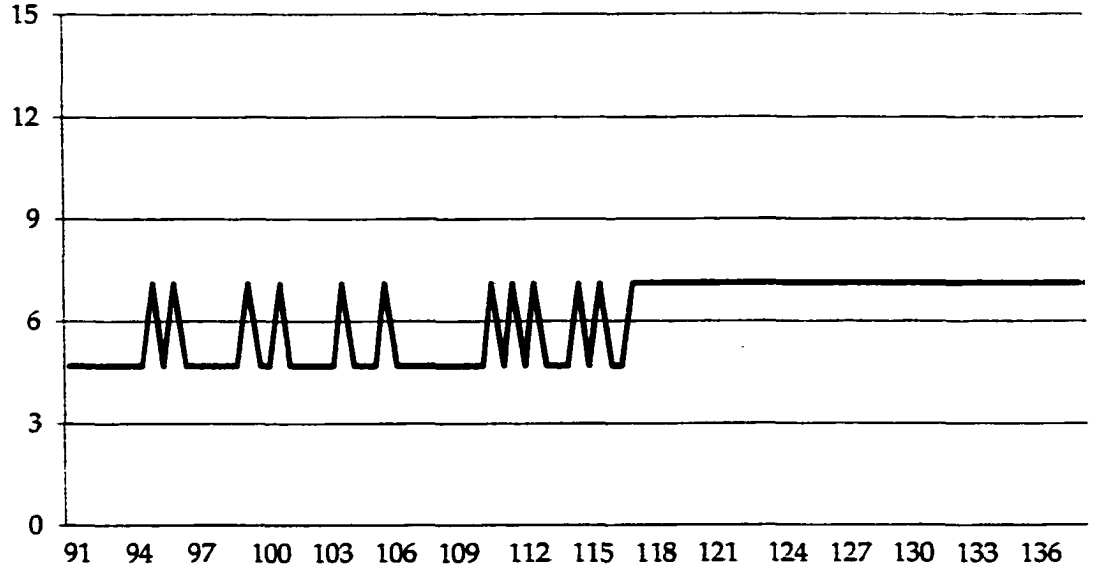
Fig. 36: Pitch Density in Section Four.



The section-three tempo marking remains in effect through all of section four. There are either two or three attacks per beat throughout the

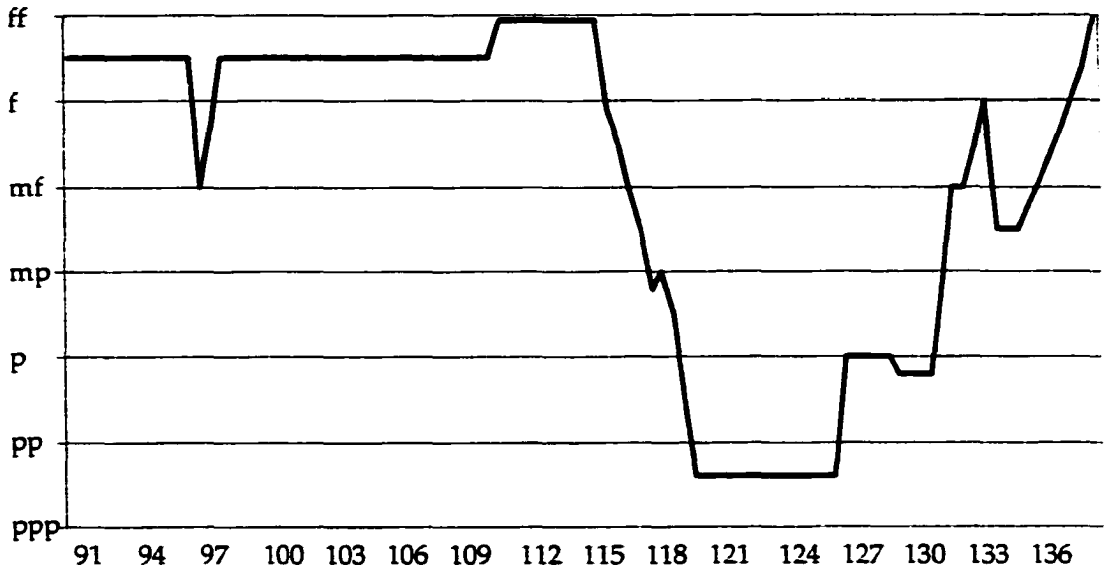
entire section, resulting in an APS rate ranging from 4.7 to 7.1—the narrowest such range in the entire work (see Fig. 37).

Fig. 37: Attack Frequency in Section Four.



Dynamics in section four remain relatively loud during the *ponderous ribbon* passage, and soften dramatically during the *respite* section. The *respite* passage features the softest collective dynamic yet in the work, and the overall dynamic range of section four is the widest (along with section eight) in the entire piece. Like sections two and three, section four concludes with a *crescendo* (see Fig. 38). Visually there is considerable similarity between the dynamics graphs for sections three and four.

Fig. 38: Dynamics in Section Four.



The *hammer chords* that accompany the *ponderous ribbon* are visually represented by spikes on the forces, pitch range, and pitch density graphs. Similarities are evident between the *respite* passages of sections three and four when viewing the various graphs. Both passages feature a drop in forces and dynamics, a narrowing of pitch range (and a shift to a similar tessitura), and an increase in pitch density and attack frequency.

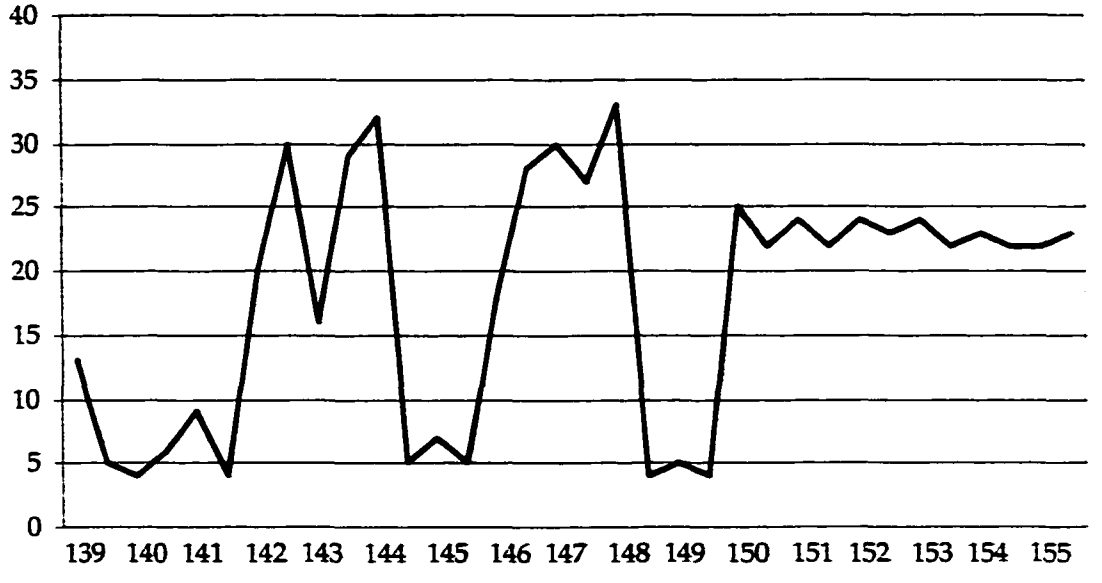
A decrease in pitch density and performing forces, as well as a drop in pitch range (both horizontal and vertical) accompany the *crescendo* in mm. 134-138 that leads to section five. Like the close of section three, attack

frequency remains constant at the close of section four, though other parameters undergo change.

Section Five

Forces used in section five range from four up to thirty-three during one of the *third motive* passages that occasionally accompany *ponderous ribbon II*. Graphic and aural impressions of mm. 142-147 are reminiscent of the opening measures of *Fascinating Ribbons*, due to the presence of rapidly rising and falling groups of *third motives* in both passages. In contrast to previous sections, the number of parts remains relatively constant in the closing measures of section five (see Fig. 39).

Fig. 39: Forces Required in Section Five.



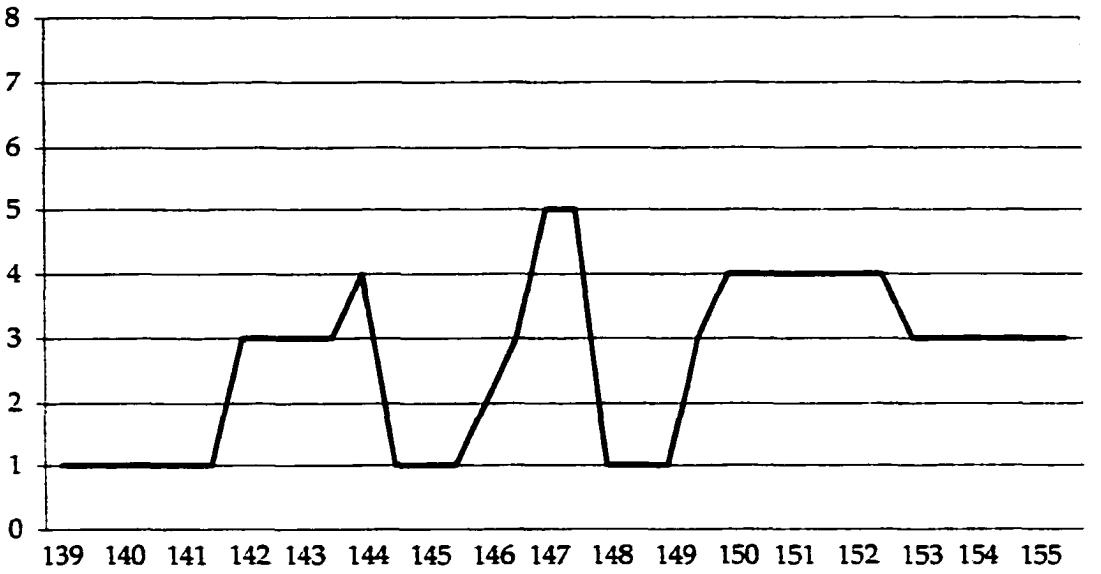
There is a five-octave span between the highest and lowest simultaneous pitches in section five. The highest pitch (a^4) is heard in the piccolo *third motive* in m. 148, and in a few locations the piano plays a low CC (the same pitch with which it opens the work). Like the *ponderous ribbon* material from section four, the vertical pitch range in section five typically spans an octave during the *ponderous ribbon II* passage, except when accompaniment parts join. Also like section four, the tessitura shifts upward following the *ponderous ribbon II* material. The higher tessitura passage in mm. 149-155 maintains a vertical pitch range of approximately three octaves. Unlike the close of previous sections, pitches remain in a static range as section six approaches (see Fig. 40).

Fig. 40: Pitch Range in Section Five.



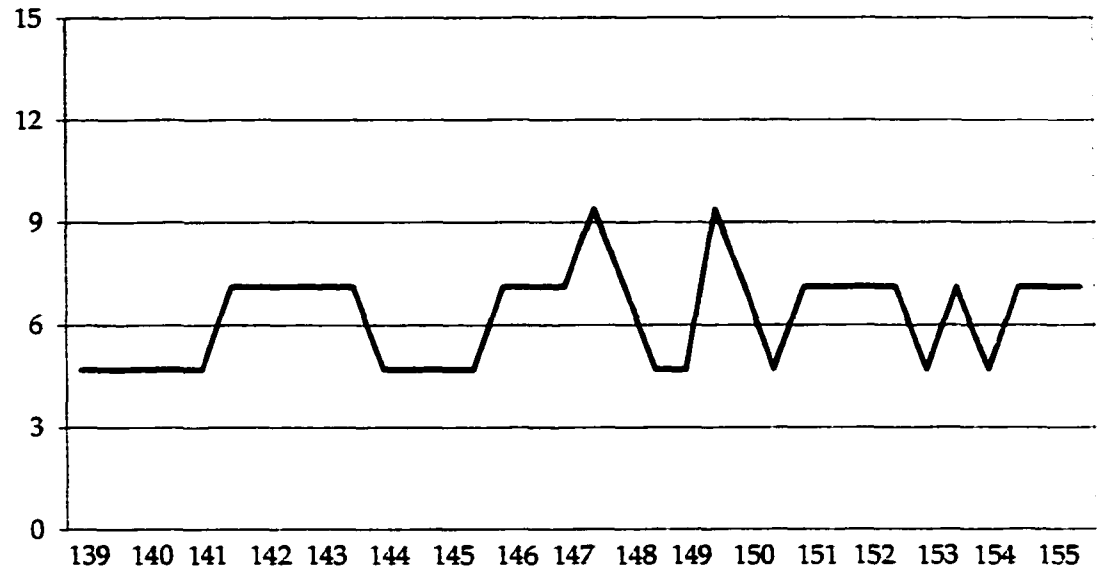
Pitch density ranges from one to five in section five, the narrowest such span to this point in the piece. Like the *ponderous ribbon* from section four, *ponderous ribbon II* material is presented in unison and octaves, though the texture thickens at times due to the addition of accompaniment figures (see Fig. 41).

Fig. 41: Pitch Density in Section Five.



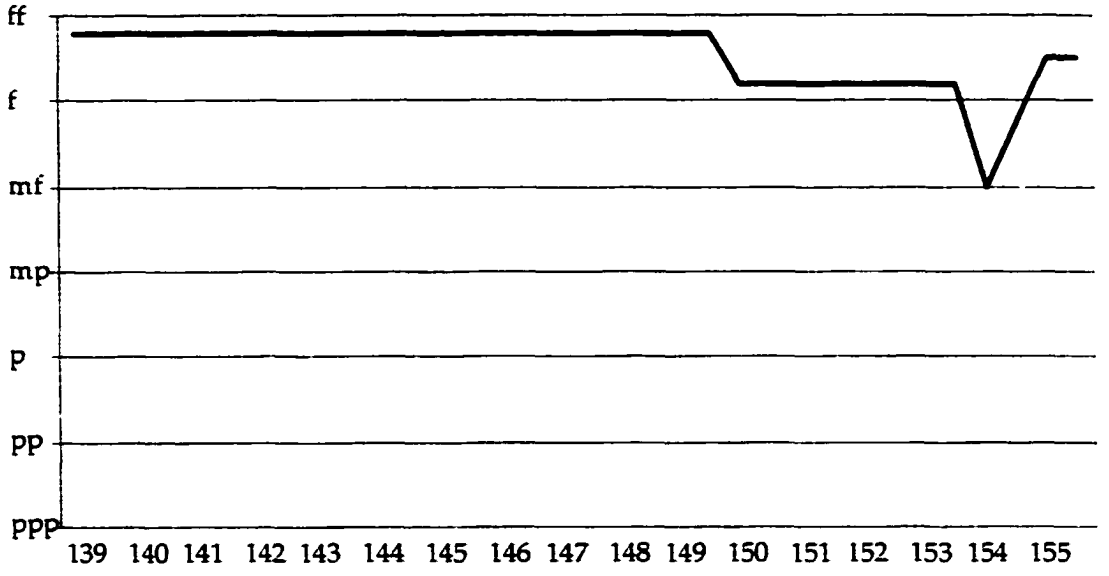
The tempo marking at the beginning of section three remains in effect throughout section five. There are either two or three attacks per beat through almost the entire section, though there are four attacks per beat at the close of mm. 147 and 149. The resulting APS rate ranges from 4.7 to 9.4. This APS range is identical to that found in section three, though the average rate in section five is considerably slower than in section three (see Fig. 42).

Fig. 42: Attack Frequency in Section Five.



Written dynamics in section five suggest relatively little variation in the loudness level. The aural impression should suggest considerable *crescendo* effect throughout the section, however, due to Tower's scoring choices, exploitation of extreme registers, and use of percussive articulations (see Fig. 43).

Fig. 43: Dynamics in Section Five.



Graph information in the concluding measures of section five is initially less revealing than that for previous sections. All evaluated parameters remain relatively stable in the closing bars of section five, but even in that stability, clues of impending change can be seen. For instance, the required forces number from twenty-one to twenty-five between mm. 150-155, the longest period of such stability yet in *Fascinating Ribbons*. In addition to being a stable group of forces, it is a relatively large number of parts. Previous passages requiring twenty or more parts lasted only briefly.

Due in part to an extended roll in the timpani part, the pitch range in mm. 150-155 is also the most stable up to this point in the piece. The range

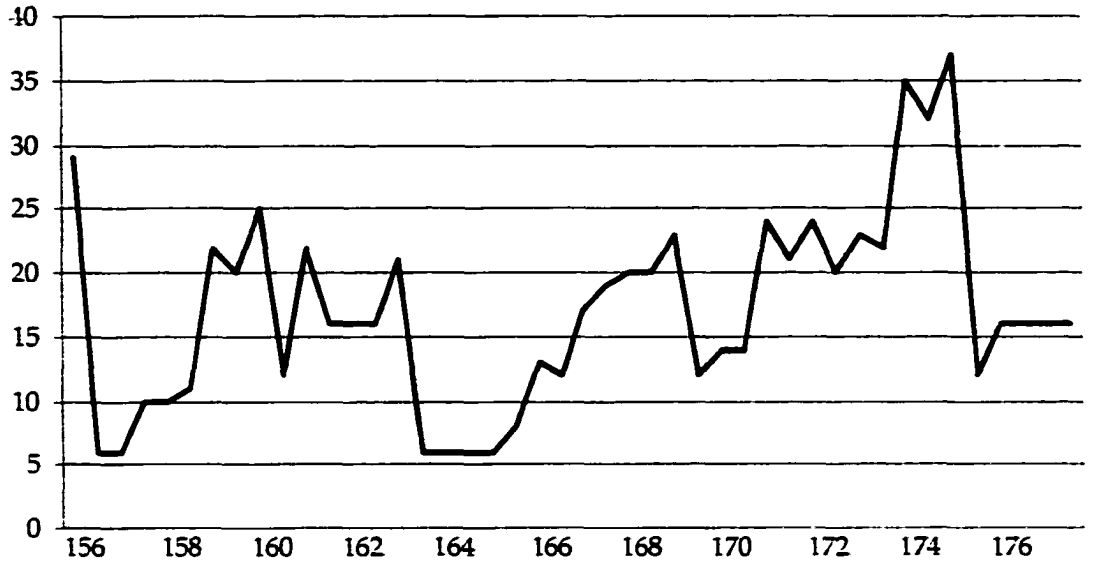
remains in a moderate to high tessitura through these measures as well. The timpani roll itself, along with other percussion rolls, is an indicator of increasing tension in this location. Percussion rolls also filled an anticipation-building role in the closing measures of sections three and four.

In contrast to previous sections, where Tower used changes in parameters to signal coming change, she uses sameness and repetition in parameters at the close of section five to lead the ear to anticipate and expect release of the growing tension. Especially in terms of required forces and pitch range, the anticipated release does indeed arrive at the beginning of section six.

Section Six

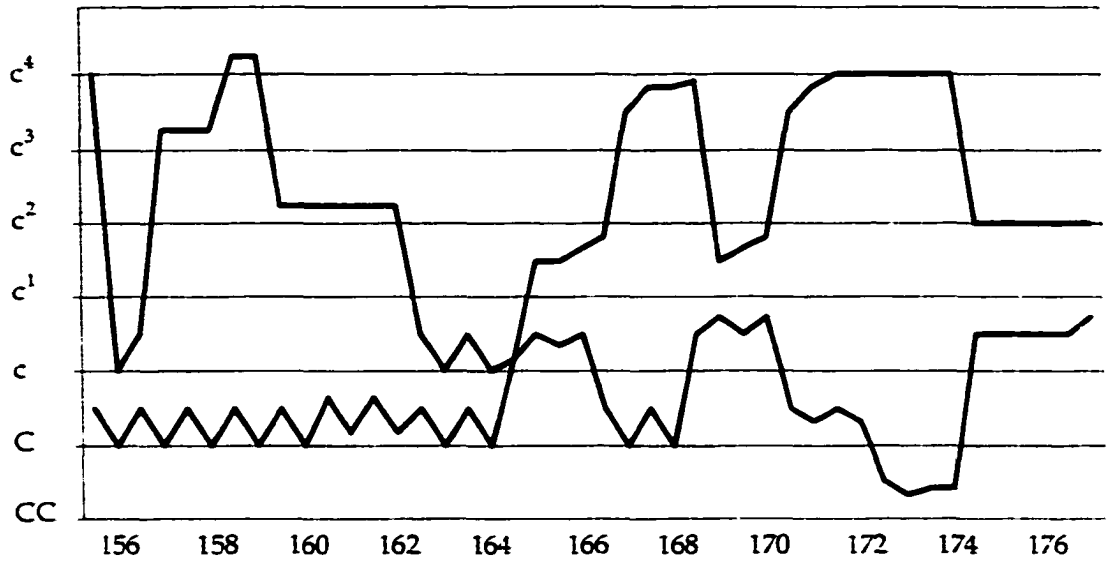
Simultaneous use of forces ranges from a low of six in mm. 156-157 and mm. 163-164 up to a peak of thirty-seven at the beginning of m. 175. This is the most parts required since m. 91, and the second greatest number to this point in the work (see Fig. 44).

Fig. 44: Forces Required in Section Six.



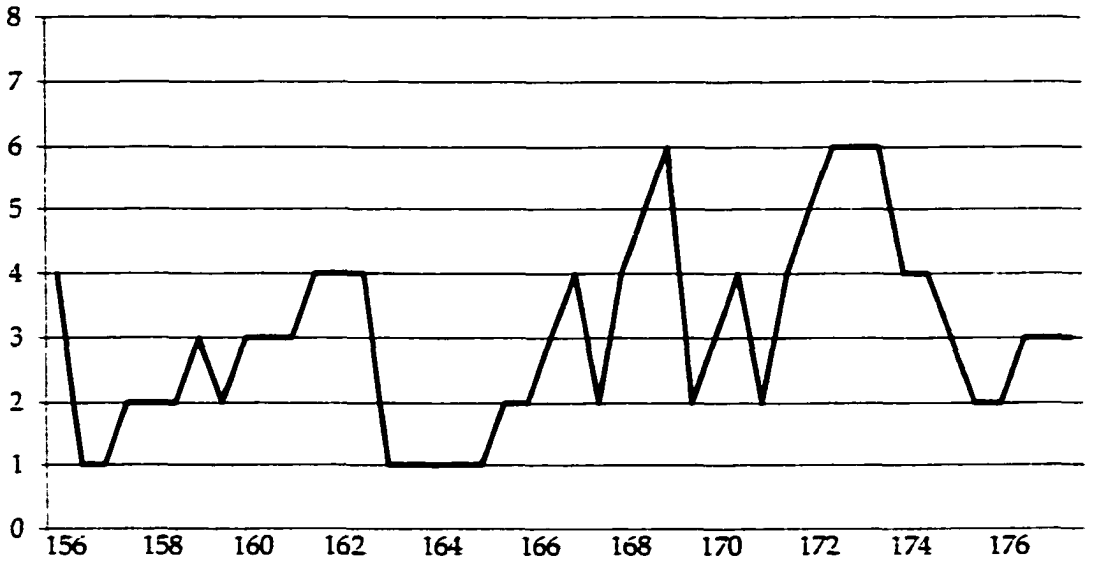
The lowest pitch in section six (EE) appears in the contrabassoon part in m. 173. The highest pitch (e-flat^4) is in the piccolo part in m. 159. The widest vertical pitch range occurs in m. 159 and again in mm. 173-174, spanning greater than five octaves. Unison occurs briefly in m. 165—the first since m. 106. Tower shifts the tessitura more frequently in section six than anywhere else in *Fascinating Ribbons*, with the possible exception of section one (see Fig. 45). The ensemble settles into a stable moderate range in m. 175, similar to that seen in the *respite* passage of section four (mm. 118-122).

Fig. 45: Pitch Range in Section Six.



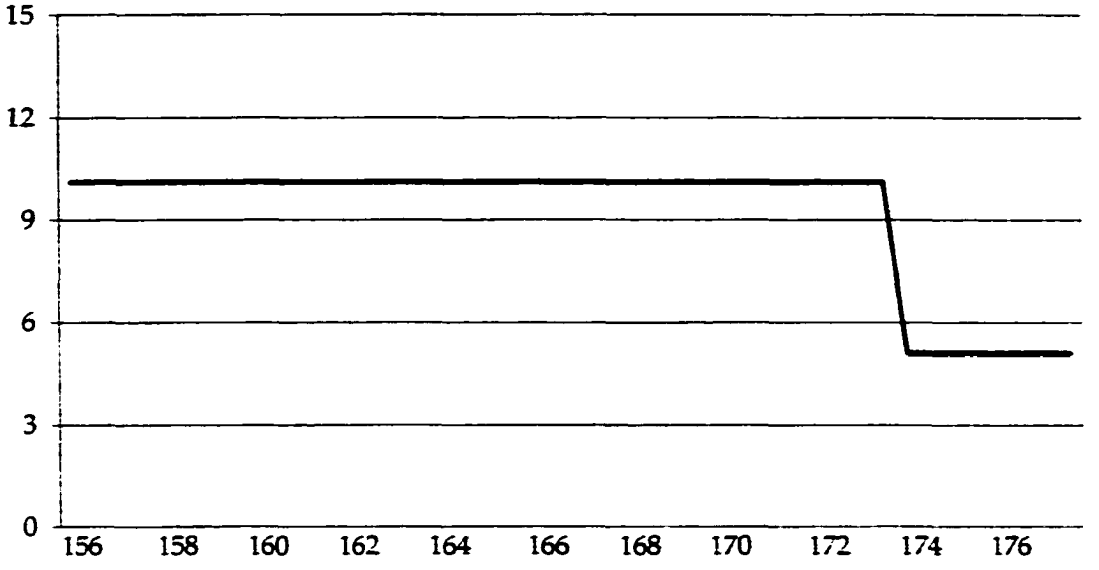
Pitch density in section six ranges from one to six. The *octatonic haze* characteristic of the *staccato rhythm* in mm. 167-173 is evident in the section-six pitch density graph (see Fig. 46). The way in which the texture gradually thickens and suddenly thins, and then thickens once again, is similar to passages in mm. 19-27 and mm. 120-127.

Fig. 46: Pitch Density in Section Six.



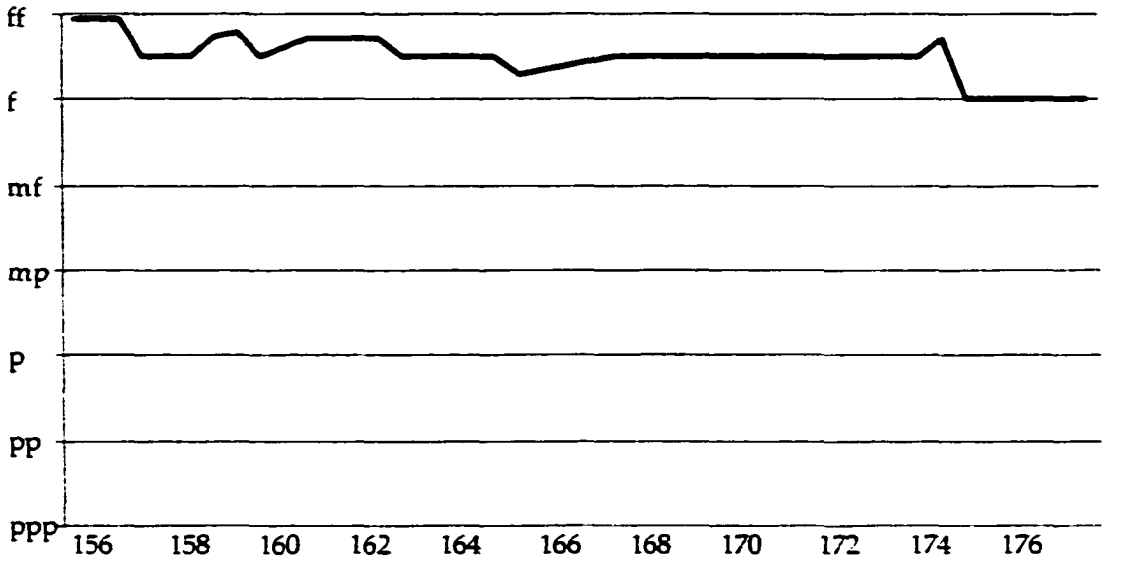
The APS rate in section six ranges from 5.1 to 10.1, the most rapid overall rate yet in *Fascinating Ribbons*. The APS rate remains utterly consistent in mm. 156-173, where the *swirling ribbon* is in constant evidence. The *dotted rhythm* is then continually present in mm. 174-177, resulting in another static APS rate. With only one rate change, section six has the most stable attack frequency in the entire work (see Fig. 47).

Fig. 47: Attack Frequency in Section Six.



Dynamics in section six are also extremely consistent, exhibiting the narrowest overall range in the entire work. This is the first section of *Fascinating Ribbons* with no portion of the section collectively sounding softer than a *forte* dynamic (see Fig. 48).

Fig. 48: Dynamics in Section Six.



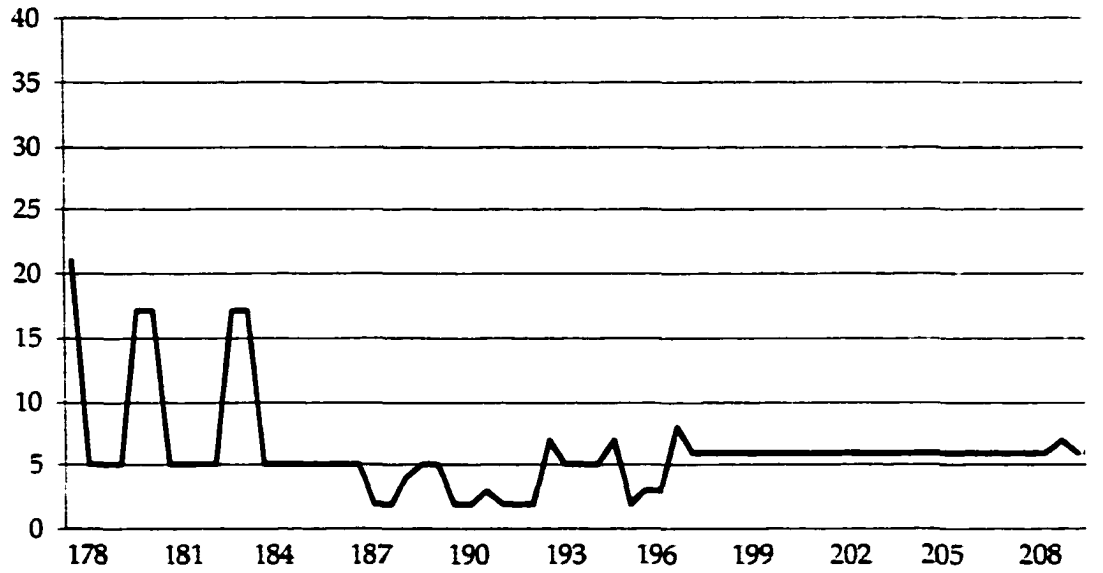
The repetitive stability at the close of section six is reminiscent of that at the close of section five. Among the measured parameters, only the pitch density is the same at the close of the two sections, but the aural impact generated in the two concluding passages is quite similar. The listener anticipates a release from the tension built up in the closing measures.

Section Seven

Other than two brief passages containing brass, only saxophones and indefinite pitch percussion perform the material in section seven. As one might expect, this is the most sparsely scored section of the work. The lowest number of simultaneous forces required is two, occurring three times in the

percussion section (mm. 187-88, 190-192, and 195). The brief brass and percussion statements contain seventeen simultaneous parts, and the opening moment of m. 178 contains the thickest texture of section seven, with twenty-one parts at the moment of elision (see Fig. 49).

Fig. 49: Forces Required in Section Seven.

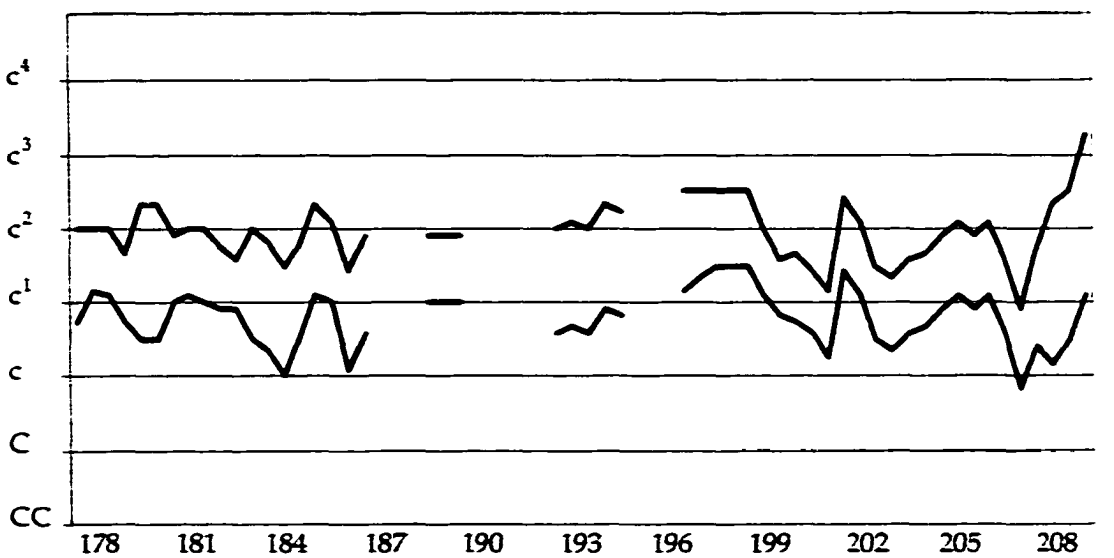


Section seven features the narrowest pitch range in the piece. Until the fermata in m. 209, the vertical pitch range never spans greater than two octaves. Also, the tessitura is the highest overall since section two, and the stability of its range stands in contrast to the frequent tessitura shifts in section six. Given the limited timbral variety of section seven, however, the

horizontal pitch range span of more than three octaves is considerable. It is also noteworthy that, though the pitch range chart does not reflect the impact of the indefinite pitch percussion instruments, the prominent percussion timbres effectively extend the pitch range beyond that shown in the graph.

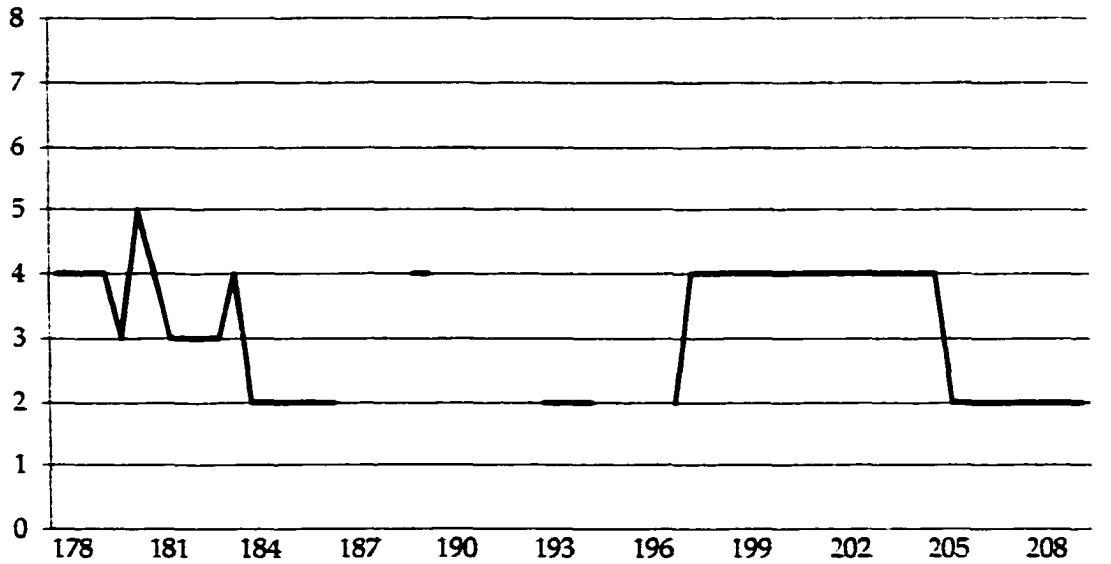
Both extreme pitches of section seven (baritone saxophone A-flat in m. 207 and soprano saxophone e-flat^3 in m. 209) appear in the final measures of the passage. Throughout section seven, saxophone parts move primarily in parallel motion with one another. Gaps in the pitch-range graph indicate passages containing only indefinite pitch percussion instruments (see Fig. 50).

Fig. 50: Pitch Range in Section Seven.



Pitch density in section seven ranges from two to five, the narrowest span in the piece. Saxophones move in parallel tetrachords through most of the section, though a few passages consist of parallel dyads doubled at the octave, and one brief section moves in parallel trichords. Like the pitch range graph, there are gaps in the pitch density graph where only indefinite pitch percussion instruments sound (see Fig. 51).

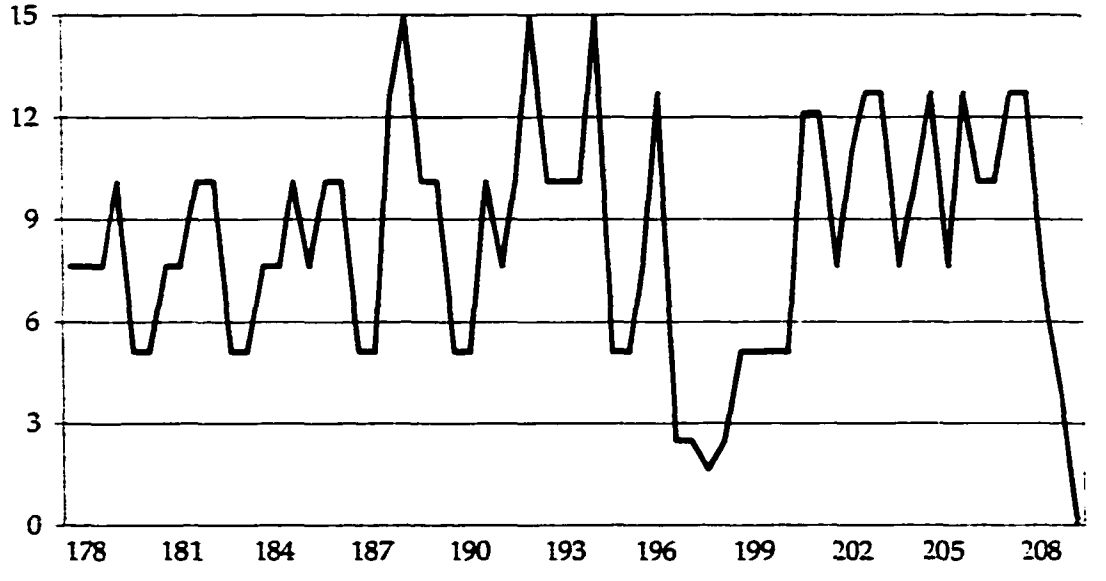
Fig. 51: Pitch Density in Section Seven.



Section seven features the narrowest range of pitch density, pitch range, and forces of any section in the work. By contrast, the section contains by far the widest span of attack frequencies in any section of *Fascinating*

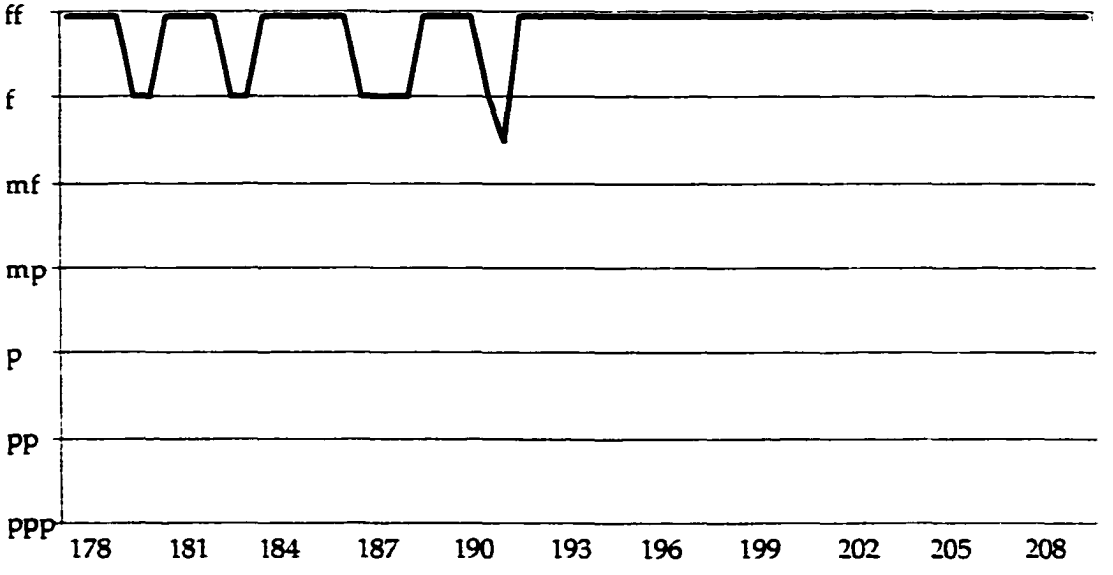
Ribbons. The APS rate ranges from less than 2.0 up to 15.2, and the peak of 15.2 APS is the fastest rate in the piece. Also, there is much greater variety in the types of rhythmic patterns found in section seven, as well as in the frequency with which Tower shifts from one rhythmic pattern to another, than in any other section of the work (see Fig. 52).

Fig. 52: Attack Frequency in Section Seven.



Like sections five and six, the collective dynamic level in section seven is consistently loud. Only a brief drop during one of the percussion passages temporarily brings the cumulative level below *forte* (see Fig. 53).

Fig. 53: Dynamics in Section Seven.



When asked whether section seven fills an intensifying, holding, or deintensifying function, Tower responded with uncertainty, noting it possesses characteristics of at least two of those three descriptors.[1] Clearly the arrival of section seven brings with it a sense of release from the tension built up in section six. The rather frenetic, non-stop activity of section seven suggests at least a holding of intensity as well, however, though perhaps at a lower level than in the previous section. The perceived lower intensity level results primarily from changes in required forces and pitch range. The shift

[1] Tower, interview with the author.

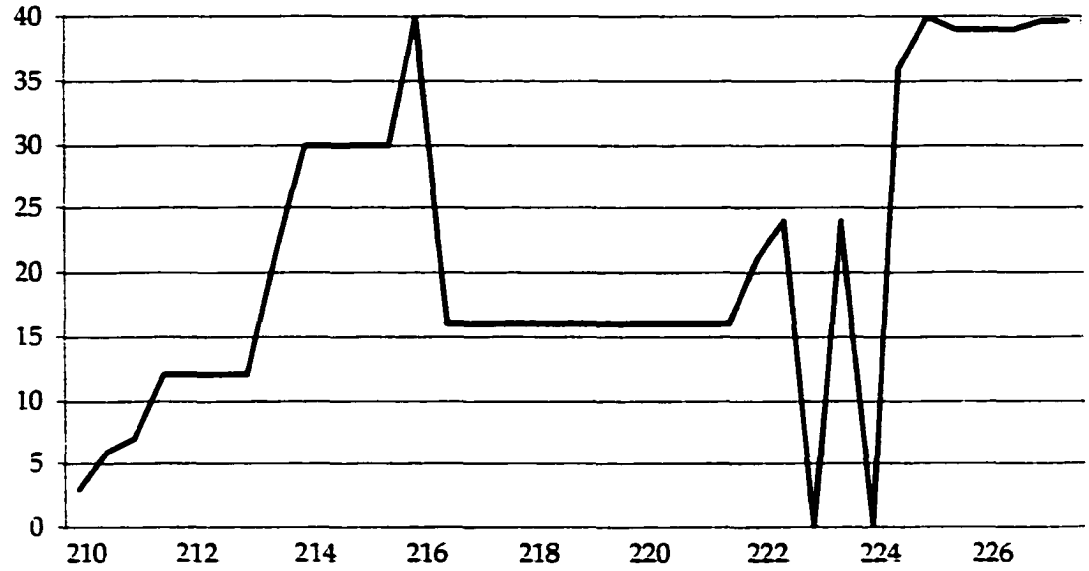
toward a higher tessitura and the accompanying slowing of attack frequency in mm. 207-209 contribute to a reduction of momentum.

Section Eight

Required forces rapidly increase from three parts to forty during the first six measures of section eight. The downbeat of m. 216 is the location of the first tutti scoring in *Fascinating Ribbons*. Following the sudden drop to sixteen voices, there are no part additions or reductions until m. 222. Two additional tutti passages occur in mm. 225 and 227.

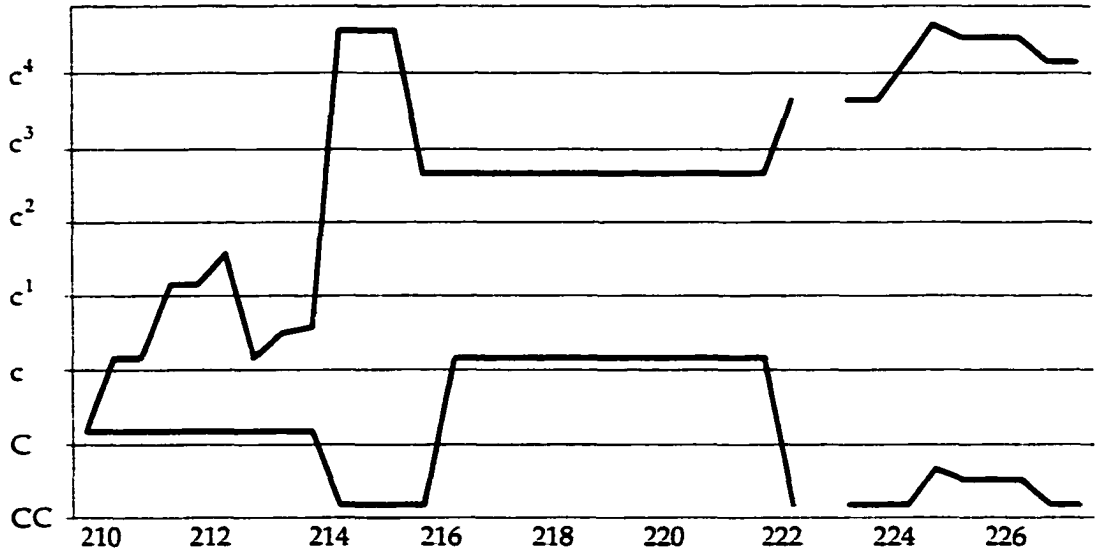
Tower notated unison rests of sixteenth-note duration in a few locations in section seven, though the aural impact of those brief rests may be negligible. She wrote quarter-note tutti rests in mm. 223 and 224 of section eight, however, providing the only substantial examples of the use of ensemble silence in the work. Overall the closing section contains both the most and fewest required parts (ranging from zero to forty) in the work. It is noteworthy that the section featuring the widest range of forces immediately follows the section with the narrowest such range (see Fig. 54).

Fig. 54: Forces Required in Section Eight.



Section eight begins on a unison D, and this remains the low pitch for almost the entire concluding section. Contrabassoon has the lowest pitch of the section in several locations (DD in mm. 214-215, 222-224, and 227), and piccolo plays the highest pitch (g^4 in mm. 214-215, and mm. 224-225). The widest vertical pitch range occurs in mm. 214-215, where the distance between extreme pitches exceeds six octaves. The concluding four measures of the work are performed entirely in unison and octaves, and span a six-octave range (see Fig. 55).

Fig. 55: Pitch Range in Section Eight.



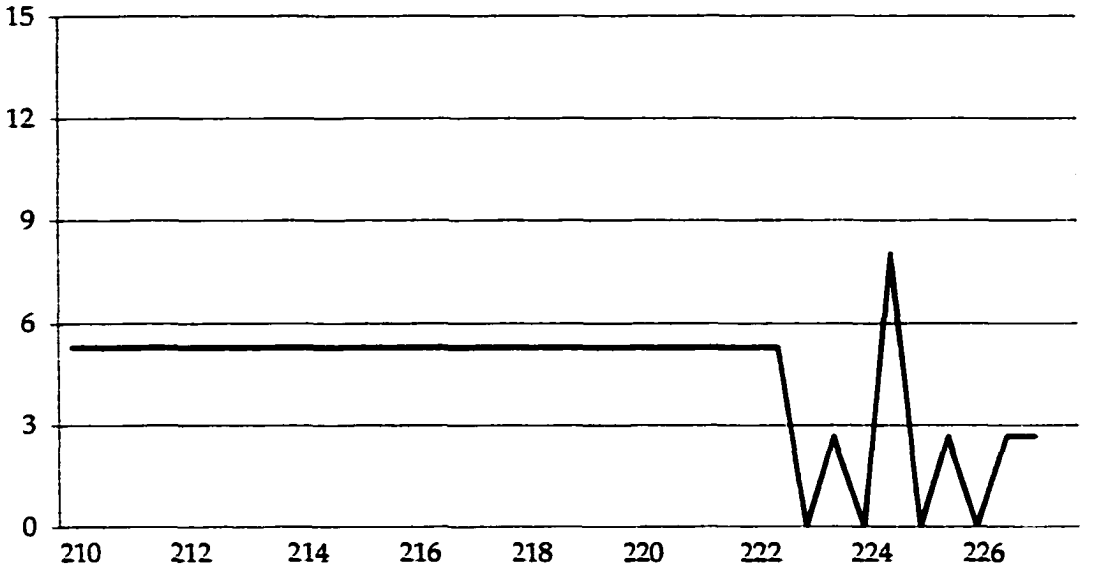
Pitch density begins and ends with a single pitch class in section eight. The overall pitch density ranges from zero to five, and this is the only section to contain tutti silence for longer than a sixteenth-note duration. The graph in mm. 211-213 displays the signature shape of the *octatonic haze*, and the thickest pitch density of section eight occurs during the static brass and percussion passage in mm. 216-221 (see Fig. 56).

Fig. 56: Pitch Density in Section Eight.



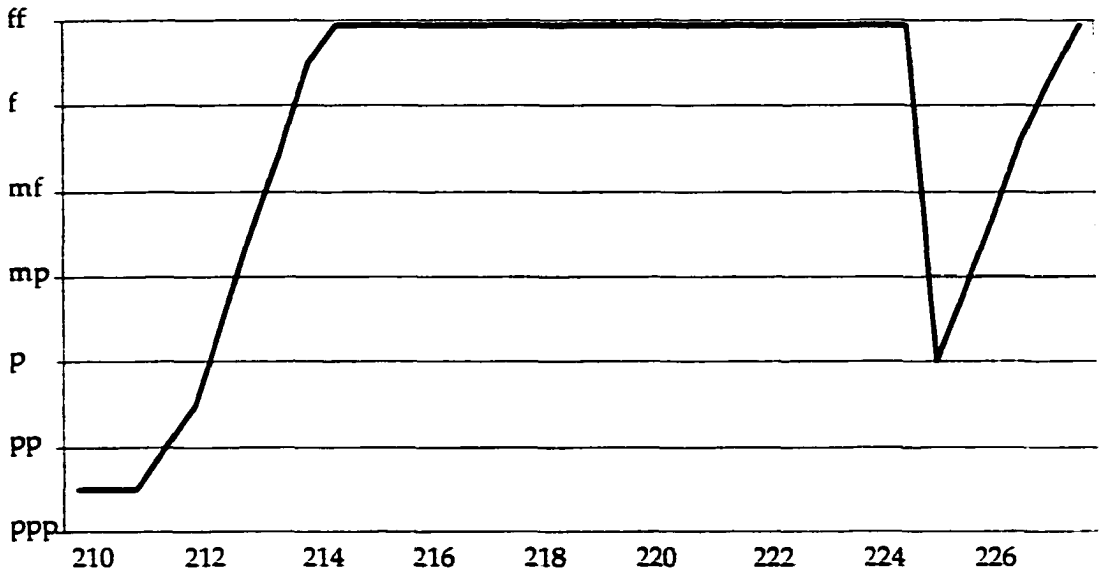
The *dotted rhythm* is ubiquitous through much of section eight, and the attack frequency is predictably stable from the beginning of the section through m. 222. During the *Gershwin motive* and following, there is greater variety in attacks, resulting in an overall APS rate that ranges from 0.0 during rests and sustained pitches to 8.0 (see Fig. 57).

Fig. 57: Attack Frequency in Section Eight.



The dynamic level increases along with the number of performing forces at the beginning of section eight, and the collective level remains at *fortissimo* nearly until the conclusion of the piece. A *fortissimo-piano* attack on the penultimate note of the work, followed by a *crescendo* back up to *fortissimo*, provides the only interruption to the static dynamic scheme in the final fourteen measures. The overall dynamic range of section eight is, along with that in section four, the widest in *Fascinating Ribbons* (see Fig. 58).

Fig. 58: Dynamics in Section Eight.



All the measured parameters except attack frequency increase as the music progresses toward m. 216. From mm. 216-221 the various graphs provide evidence of the completely static nature of the music during that passage. Like the opening of the work, *Fascinating Ribbons* concludes with a single pitch class, with a relatively low attack frequency, and with a wide horizontal pitch range. Unlike the opening measures, all voices play simultaneously, and the vertical pitch range is among the widest in the work.

Summary Graphs

The following pages contain summary graphs for each of the five measured parameters (see Fig. 59 through 63). Though small-scale details are

less evident on the summary graphs than on individual section charts, overall trends are more easily visualized.

Tower expends considerable effort addressing "how you get from one place to another, and in effect, how [the musical] information jump[s] across the seam ..."[2] In the summary graphs one can observe ways in which she transitions between sections of *Fascinating Ribbons*. For example, sections two, three, four and eight all conclude with a *crescendo*. In sections two, three and four, the closing *crescendo* of each successive section begins from a softer originating dynamic, and extends for a greater number of measures than the previous instance. Additionally, the concluding measures in each of these three sections feature a drop in pitch density, though that found in section three is minimal. The section-four density change is the most dramatic of the three sections.

Pitch range changes in the closing measures of sections two and four are comparable (both descend), though, again, the change in section four is greater. The end of section three, in contrast, moves both higher and lower in pitch range. Forces fluctuate at the close of section two, increase dramatically at the end of section three, and decrease at the conclusion of section four. The

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[2] Bryden, 68.

only dramatic shift in attack frequency in the closing bars of these three sections occurs in section two. In sections two and four Tower simultaneously utilizes a dynamic increase along with a descending pitch range and a drop in pitch density.

Tower typically increases forces at the close of a section, and reduces forces dramatically at the beginning of a new section. Perhaps the most notable trend on the pitch range graphs is Tower's tendency to shift among tessituras fairly frequently. The changes are most often tied to instrumentation issues, rather than to shifts within the available range of a given instrument or group of instruments.

As was noted previously, greater pitch density often coincides with periods of lower rhythmic activity, softer dynamics, and lighter scoring. Attack frequency reflects a gradual but irregular increase throughout much of the work. Dynamics are the most context-sensitive of all the graphed parameters.

Overall, though some patterns of usage may be observed, there is no formula of parameter combinations that characterizes Tower's transitions. She manipulates the parameters with considerable variety to achieve the desired musical ends.

Fig. 59: Summary Forces Chart.

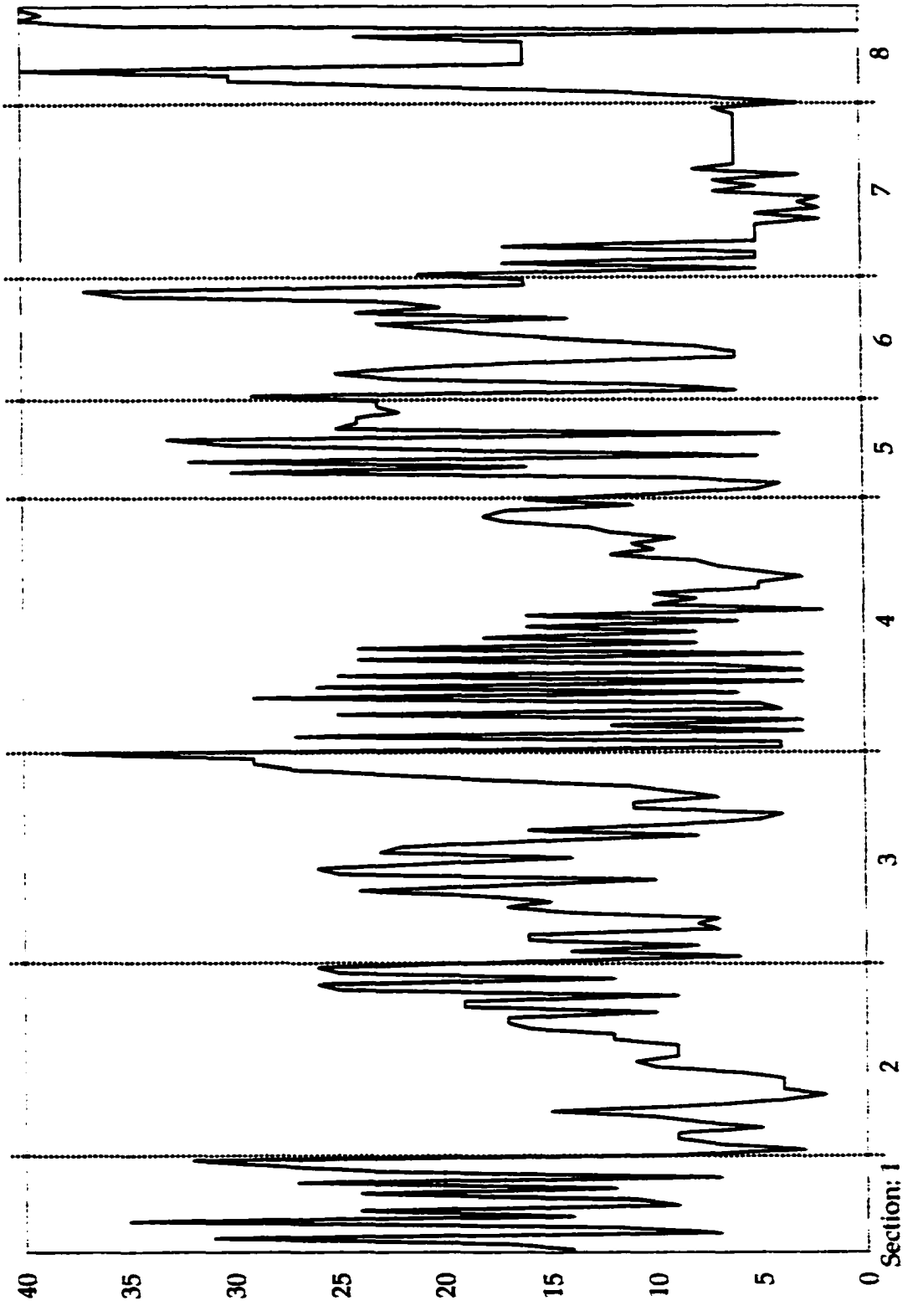


Fig. 60: Summary Pitch Range Chart.

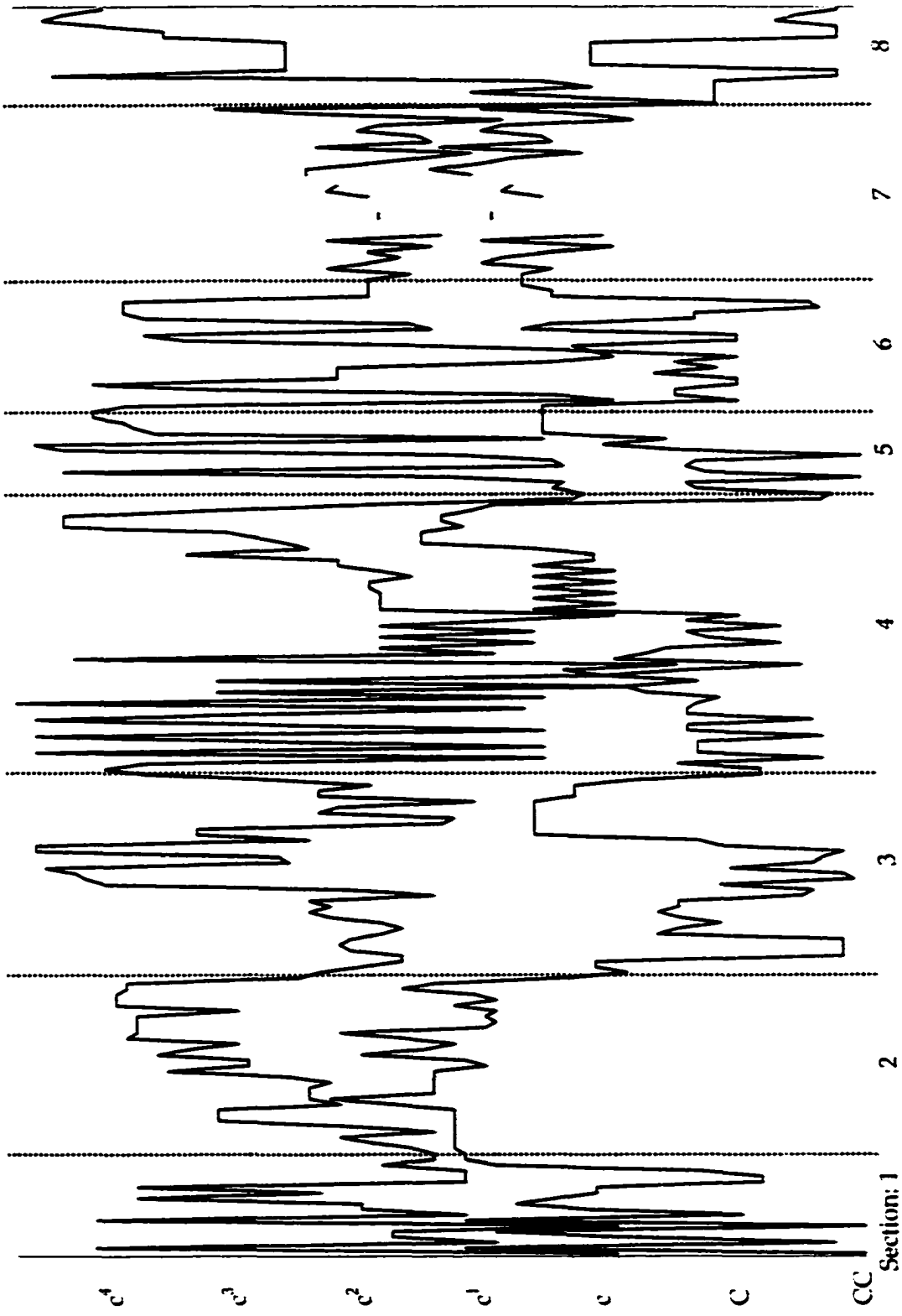


Fig. 61: Summary Pitch Density Chart.

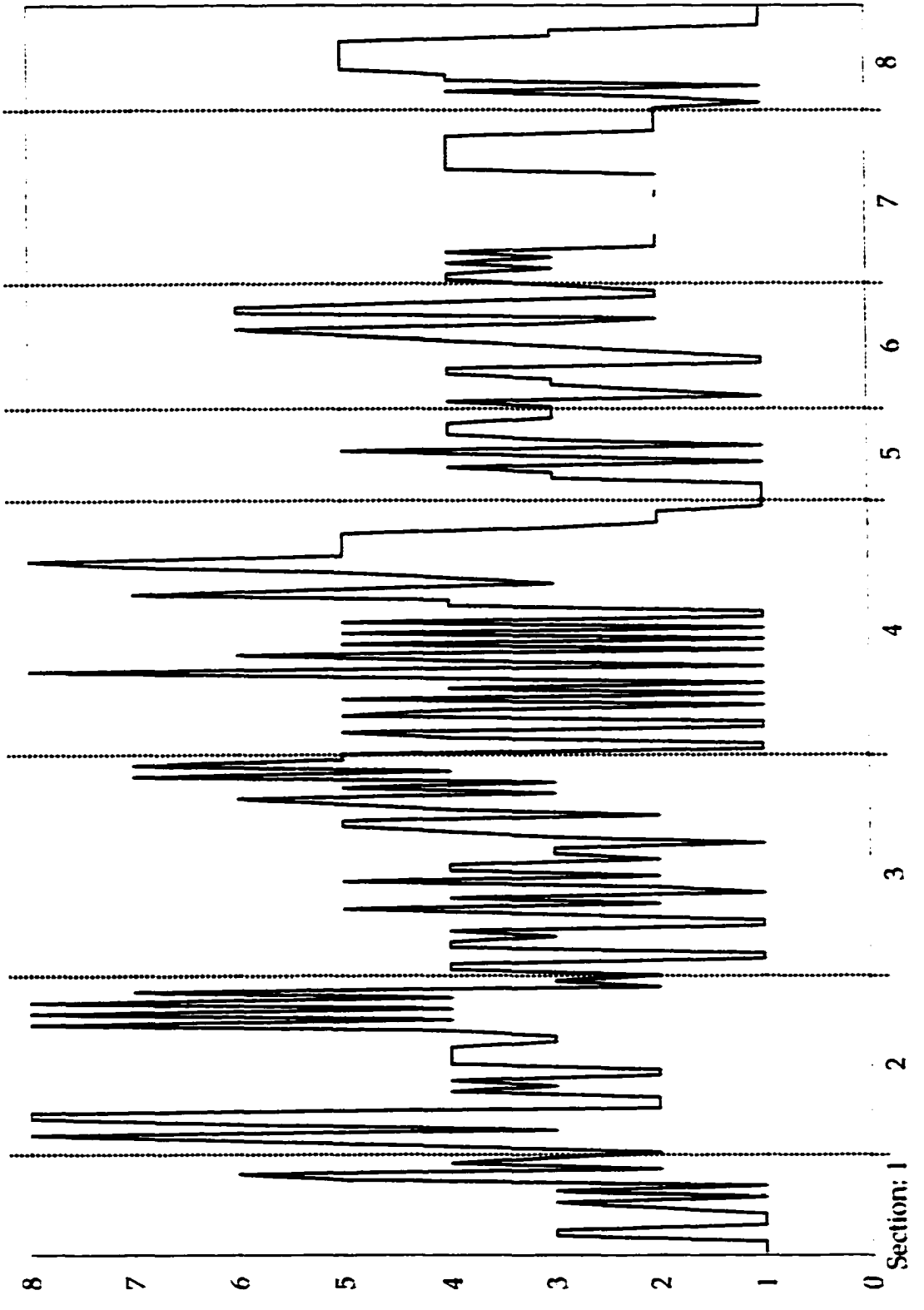


Fig. 62: Summary Attack Frequency Chart.

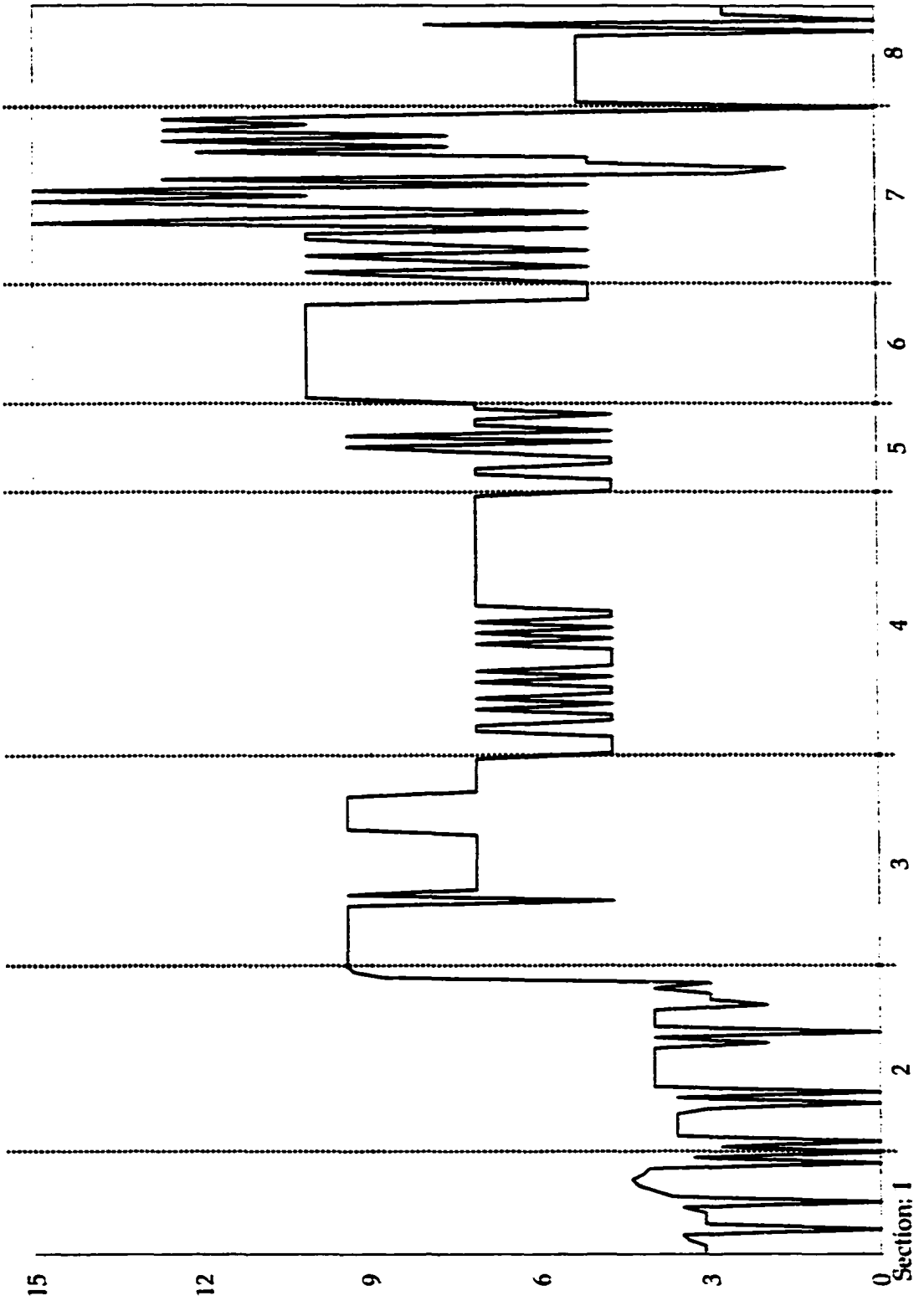
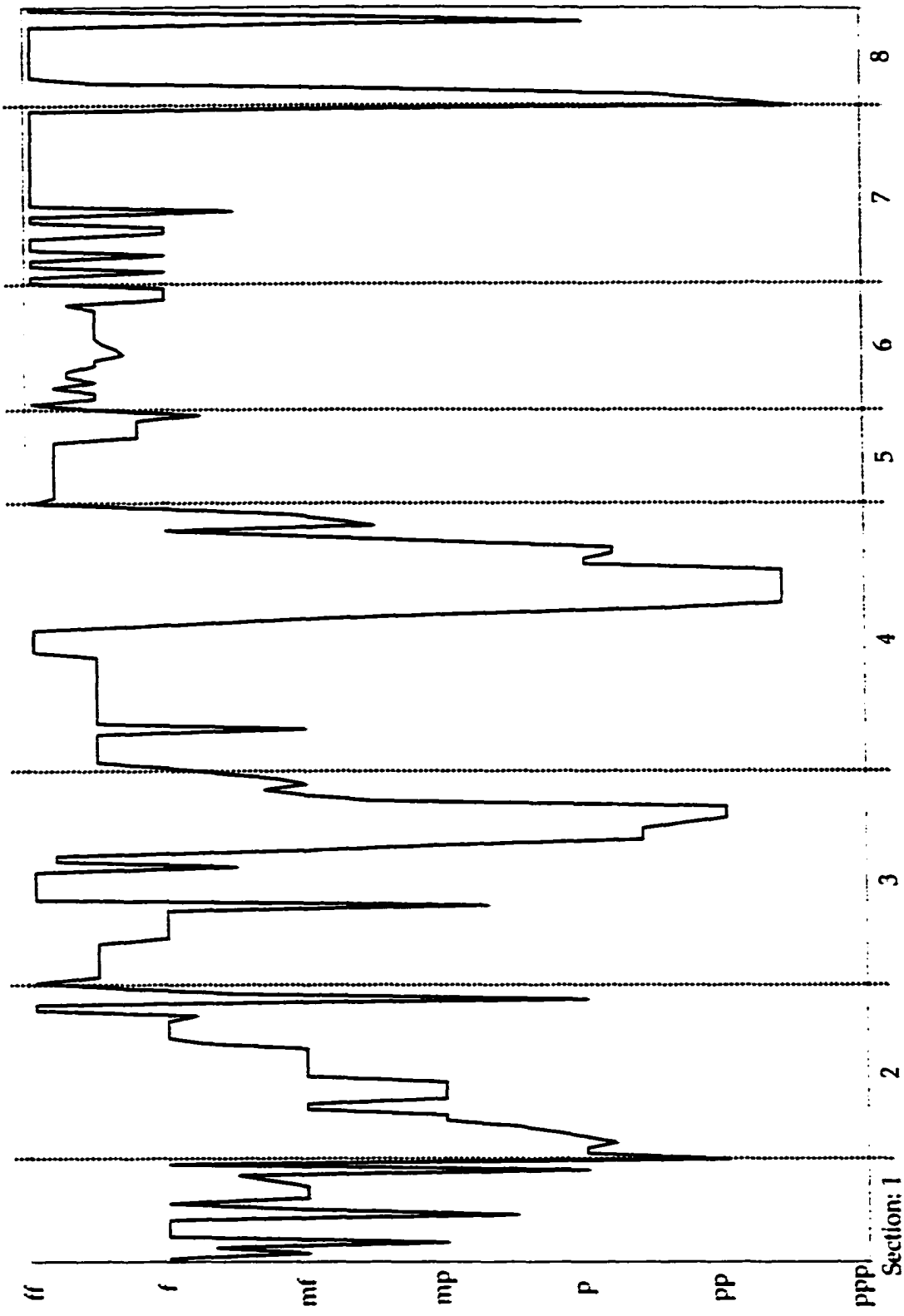


Fig. 63: Summary Dynamics Chart.



CHAPTER SIX

IMAGERY ANALYSIS

Joan Tower encourages the use of visual imagery as a means of making connections with, and developing a meaningful interpretation of her music. When selecting a title, Tower seeks a moniker that inspires images consistent with the musical actions of the composition.

An imagery analysis might be compared to the view of an iceberg from above the water's surface. What is seen of an iceberg typically represents a small percentage of the floating object's actual mass, and the visible portion is supported by an unseen foundation. Similarly, an imagery analysis should be anchored to a substantial foundation of score study and investigation of the composer and his or her music. Fueled by imagination and the analyst's unique perspective, however, the descriptions will remain intensely subjective. The following is one set of images that might be associated with *Fascinating Ribbons*.

Fascinating Ribbons opens with an unleashing of energy that apparently welled up prior to the initial downbeat. In contrast to many Tower works, this piece moves boldly forward from the first entry. It is as if some unseen force triggers a musical explosion that bounces high and low, ricocheting off

horizontal and vertical surfaces, yet possessing strong forward momentum. Though the action of the opening measures is intense, it is controlled and not chaotic. A *crescendo* during the first fermata suggests that internal pressure is welling up again, like a dome of volcanic lava preparing to erupt. The music surges forward a second time near the end of m. 5, careening about as in the opening measures, before forward motion is suspended once more in mm. 9-10.

The first two pauses are both expected and unforeseen. The shift to a moderate pitch range and a more stable melodic pattern in mm. 3 and 8 suggests a state of equilibrium, while the *accelerandi* in both measures fosters anticipation of increased rhythmic activity. Another *crescendo* leads to a third high-energy passage, though this third passage possesses a different character than the first pair. Perhaps due to the substantial expenditure of energy during the opening ten measures, the music possesses less "force of will" in m. 11. Or possibly, following the rapid ascent and plunge of the opening two phrases, the music seeks a more horizontal avenue of expression. Regardless, the music slowly gains speed and impetus again in m. 11 and following, pressed forward by the weight of the musical ideas it still harbors. It is like a sphere that gradually gains momentum as it descends a gentle slope. During the *ritardando,* many join the effort to slow the musical

motion of the third phrase, and the energy eventually recedes leading up to the fermata in m. 19. A *crescendo* in m. 17 initially hints at another intensity build-up, but the *decrescendo* in m. 18 indicates arrival at a moment of relative rest.

From the subdued mass of musical energy, small strands or ribbons begin to emerge in section two. The opening of the piece represented a collective effort, with all members of the ensemble moving forward in a relatively unified manner. As section two opens, however, a handful of instruments cautiously separate from the full group. If one imagines a ball of yarn or ribbon moving about and eventually coming to rest in the first section, section two features individual ribbon strands that peel away from the larger object. A single flute surfaces in m. 19, followed one after another by several similar instruments. Calmly, slowly, and tentatively they rise, exposing the *emerging ribbon*.

In m. 23 a second corps takes up the *emerging ribbon*, displaying greater confidence than their predecessors. The first group had carefully and deliberately explored the surroundings, thus allowing followers to proceed more boldly in their footsteps. Bolder still is the *duet ribbon* that rises in m. 27. This ribbon breaks free from the rhythmic patterns demonstrated thus far. A second *duet ribbon* follows in m. 30. Both pairs lazily undulate, and are joined

by additional duos in m. 33. The initial presenters seem to call out "come on in ... the water's fine." At times the *duet ribbons* overlap and converge, but they appear to relish their unfettered status.

A slight interruption to the undulations appears in m. 39, as if some subtle disturbance has been detected. The gentle rocking resumes in m. 42, but the ribbons are either evolving or perhaps anticipating the emergence of more powerful siblings. Could it be that the section two ribbons serve the function of scouts, surveying the landscape before announcing the "all is clear" call for the waves of ribbons that may follow? As brass instruments join the texture, there is a sensation that the energy displayed in section one is showing signs of returning once again. The *duet ribbons* begin to push against one another, and contrary motion, syncopations, dynamic increases, added instruments, and the use of more extreme ranges contribute to the growing tension. Pressure is building towards some unknown event. Will it be a return to the rocket-theme like *third motives* of the opening, or will some new ribbon emerge?

Beginning in m. 49 there is a palpable sensation of pulling toward a dramatic change, almost like what one experiences at the moment a roller coaster begins descending its first and largest hill. One is reminded of the pull experienced in m. 11, though the force is considerably stronger in this

location. If m. 11 represents an object rolling downhill assisted only by gravitational pull, in mm. 49-51 someone at the bottom of the hill is tugging on a rope, accelerating the rate of descent. Some sort of musical vortex is drawing all the elements downward in a quickening spiral toward m. 52.

To borrow the title from another Tower composition, the onset of the new section prompts the announcement "And...They're Off." Section three ushers in an immediate quickening of pace, yet also brings increasing stability. The vortex at the seam between sections two and three has transported the musical elements to a new level. Though stability is greater than during the seam, everything moves at a faster pace in the new environs than at any previous time. Perhaps the new tempo is the one towards which all of section two was pointing.

The ribbons proceeded tentatively in section two, but perhaps now have reached their optimum speed. Has the engine attained normal operating temperature? The undulations immediately settle into a repetitive down/up pattern. The *swirling ribbon* is not decorative and gossamer like the section two ribbons, but is a foundation on which the other material rests. The action of this ribbon is akin to the internal combustion process churning along incessantly. Only occasionally does a misfire result in an interruption in the down/up sequence. As if on a relay team, the carriers of the *swirling ribbon*

occasionally hand the material off to a teammate, but with no loss of speed. The energy that seemed to wane at the close of section one had not permanently disappeared, but was simply restrained momentarily, awaiting conditions conducive to rising again.

Meanwhile, the pointillistic articulations of the *dotted rhythms* contrast with the smoothness of the *swirling ribbon*. In mm. 56-58, the *staccato ribbon*, which was born through the fusion of the *dotted rhythm*, *ascent motive* and *descent figure*, and which is a percussive cousin to the *octatonic haze*, reaches upward, thickens, and cries out, only to be persuaded to silence by the incessant swirls. It rises again in m. 62, however, building higher and thicker than before. This time the *staccato ribbon* seems to overpower the *swirling ribbon*, or at least to bring about stalemate through the sustaining of notes in m. 65. The swirling does not entirely disappear, however. Instead it transforms into the *triplet ribbon* in m. 66. Or, perhaps, by focusing on halting the *swirling ribbon*, the staccato pattern allowed the triplet line to break free. By plugging one leak in the levy another has been allowed to pop open. The *staccato ribbon*, having apparently endured the stalemate, continues to reach upward and is adopted by other instruments.

The *swirling ribbon* was energy efficient and might have continued its coursings indefinitely if not subdued by the *staccato ribbon*. The *triplet ribbon*

by contrast is a gas-guzzler. Though perhaps more powerful than previous ribbons, it will be unable to endure for long without refueling. The energy at least temporarily subsides in mm. 77-83, as the ribbons soften and the texture thins during the *respite*. The pace remains constant, but the intensity level drops dramatically. The *swirling* and *staccato ribbons* peacefully coexist during the calm. Is it a time of regrouping and recharging? The internal force begins to well up again in m. 84 as the triplets return, and there is a collective shift to things higher, lower, and louder. A new offensive is being mounted, but what sort of ribbon will lead the charge? It is clear the brief calm is ending, but unclear what awaits in section four.

At m. 91, the *ponderous ribbon* plods more heavily than did either the *swirling* or *triplet ribbons*. While section two was comparatively light in terms of the scoring, range, and materials Tower used, section three featured thicker scoring and prominent material in both lower and higher ranges. Section four begins much darker than either preceding section (though the *triplet ribbon* clearly foreshadowed section five), with heavy dynamics and articulations, and with ribbon presentation by the low brass. One might view the progression from sections two through four as a peeling back of layers, moving from a rather fragile surface in section two toward an intense core in

section four. On a ship, if section two represents the activity on deck, section four shows the heavy machinery of the steam-filled engine room.

The musical equivalents of thunderbolts strike frequently and violently during the *ponderous ribbon*. Are these *hammer chords* emanating from the *ponderous ribbon* itself, serving as an indicator of the tremendous inherent power of the line, or are they imposed upon the ribbon by some external source? The *ponderous ribbon* has greater endurance than the *triplet ribbon*, but the increasingly frequent *hammer chords* in mm. 111-116 eventually pound the *ponderous ribbon* into submission, leading to a second *respite* section.

In addition to repose, the second *respite* offers a period for reflection on earlier events. A hybrid, swirling triplet pattern accompanies the flashback to the *octatonic haze* and the *third motive*. Given what transpired in previous sections, another period of increasing tension and eventual and inevitable transformation is expected. When the triplets begin a steady climb in m. 128, those expectations begin to crystallize and grow. If the line ascends it will likely descend once again, forging ahead toward a new unveiling. Will passage through the approaching seam reveal even darker and more intense ribbons? Will what follows seem new or familiar?

In section five, *ponderous ribbon II* is accompanied not by the thunderbolt *hammer chords*, but by the *third motive* from the opening. It is as if the music is regaining the full measure of strength displayed in the first measures of the piece. As its name suggests, *ponderous ribbon II* bears strong resemblance to its predecessor from section four. It yearns to reach upward, however, and is encouraged to do so by the *third motive*. The *third motive* had emerged only briefly in the second *respite* to remind of its continuing availability, and in this location fills dual roles as unmistakable connection with the past and indispensable partner in the present. Together, *ponderous ribbon II* and the *third motive* seem to grow progressively stronger as the lines ascend.

Another reminder of earlier events surfaces as the *ascent motive* supplants the *third motive* in m. 149. Section five now seems a coalescence of sections one and four. Since Tower recycled the *third motive* followed by the *ascent motive*, in the same order as presented in section one, one might anticipate a pause or *respite*, like those at the close of sections one, three, and four. Rather than move toward a *respite*, however, the energy in this brief section builds toward yet another climactic moment. Perhaps the section five material has garnered such strength that no entity can force a *respite*. Or, perhaps, no relaxation is desired or needed.

In m. 156, due to a tempo increase and a reduction of forces, there is simultaneously a release from some of the mounting pressure and also an intensifying. Primarily because of the quicker tempo, there is a greater sense of urgency in section six. The *swirling* and *staccato ribbons* have returned, with the former now running in overdrive, and the latter at least temporarily less antagonistic to the *swirling ribbon*. The various elements in use remain fairly constant throughout section six, but timbre and register shifts create a sense of instability and urgency as the section progresses. The relay team now hands off the *swirling ribbon* with greater frequency, and the up/down pattern features more frequent interruptions. Beginning at m. 165 the *dotted rhythm* is nearly ever-present, and it begins to overpower the *swirling ribbon*.

As *dotted rhythm/staccato ribbon* intensity increases, dynamic levels rise, and the *swirling ribbon* decreases in prominence, one anticipates another transition. Since there was no *respite* prior to section six, perhaps a period of calm is approaching. Once the recurring pattern of "high energy passage followed by *respite*" has been established, the listener expects a continuation of the cycle. Tower develops this cyclical pattern through three small-scale alternations in section one, then on a larger scale by contrasting the calm of section two with the overall intensity of section one, and finally by providing the *respites* in the latter portions of sections three and four. She broke the cycle

in section five, however, leading to increased expectations for the release that has not yet arrived.[1]

Once again Tower provides no *respite,* and the change encountered in m. 175 is an unexpected one. There, instead of presenting new material, Tower simply changes timbres, but continues the pounding *dotted rhythm/staccato ribbon*. She continues to ratchet the musical tension upward for three additional measures before the dotted pattern finally collapses in m. 178. As the *dotted rhythm* gains strength during section six, it seems that the melodic elements are waning. Perhaps the ribbons' melodic resources have been exhausted, and the rhythmic elements are asserting supremacy.

The saxophone and percussion presentation in section seven can be likened to a water hose that has been turned on, but which has had its flow suppressed, thereby allowing substantial pressure to build up. Once the blockage has been cleared, the hose sprays wildly for a time. In the same way that the action in the *Fascinating Ribbons* opening is intense yet controlled, the musical unfolding (one might even describe it as an unraveling) in section seven is dramatic, rapid, abundant and powerful, but is also focused.

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[1] The ability to intensify the music and to thwart expectations is one that Tower relishes. She once said that, "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." Joan Tower, quoted in Mary Lou Humphrey, *Joan Tower*, 1991 rev. ed. New York: G. Schirmer, 1991 (original edition copyright 1988), 4.

The saxophones and percussion relieve the musical pressure that welled up during sections five and six, but because the intensity had reached such a high level, relief was achieved through a "pressure-valve release" method rather than through a *respite*. So much backpressure existed that an extended steady stream of outflow was required before equilibrium could be achieved.

Though melodic aspects filled a secondary role to rhythmic elements as section six concluded, melodic and rhythmic dimensions are equally evident and significant in section seven. First punctuated by the *dotted rhythms*, and then pausing only occasionally for percussion responses, the *florid ribbon* rises and falls, swirls and pauses.

Section seven also seems part cadenza and part jazz solo break. The dialogue with percussion reminds of the solo call and response trading that sometimes takes place in the jazz setting.[2] The lead-in by the full ensemble to a virtually unaccompanied virtuosic solo display (actually a soli in this case) is reminiscent of the concerto cadenza.

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[2] Though Tower had not written for saxophones prior to her work on *Fascinating Ribbons*, she was familiar with their capabilities. She was once married to a jazz pianist, and as a result heard many outstanding jazz performers—on saxophone and other instruments—in New York City. Joan Tower, phone interview by Robert Taylor, 14 February 2002, unpublished transcript.

The saxophone energy is fully expended and all motion ceases in m. 209. To continue, the wind band must begin forward progress from a complete standstill. Unlike the opening, where there is abundant pent-up energy to expend and the group essentially is turned loose to begin the piece, the ensemble may require some sort of jump-start to resume motion in section eight. Concluding in a high tessitura, the end of the saxophone soli leaves one feeling that virtually all resources have been exhausted. Unlike previous passages, there is no suggestion that momentum will bring the music down from its lofty perch. It is like a car that barely possesses the horsepower to climb a steep hill, and which promptly runs out of fuel upon reaching the plateau.

The sensation might alternately be compared to a child's balloon which, when released while full of air, flies around the room until all the air is depleted. There is no hope of further flight until additional air is pumped into the balloon. Nevertheless, the conclusion of the saxophone passage does not provide complete closure for the piece, and further material clearly remains to be presented. Though exhausted, pitches sustained during the fermata cry out for resolution. What form will the closing section take? Does Tower have additional ribbons to reveal? Are there surprises that might yet emerge?

As the opening bars of section eight are heard, the listener is convinced that Tower made a wise choice in selecting material to follow the saxophone fermata. Though the engine had momentarily shut down, it begins to rumble to life once more. Any lingering dissonance is resolved, and sound wafts up from the ship's engine room to the topmost levels, growing stronger with each passing beat. Within measures the *dotted rhythm* is running in high gear, reminding of the moments immediately preceding the saxophone break.

Also recalling the bars leading up to m. 178, the woodwinds drop out at m. 216, but this time the brass and percussion dotted pattern extends for twice the number of measures as in section six. The precise repetition of all elements for six measures (in mm. 216-221) builds tension to perhaps its highest level yet in the work. Keep pushing ... and sustaining the pattern ... for just ... a ... bit ... longer. Surely there is nothing melodic remaining to be stated. Will yet another saxophone break follow? Is this truly the final expenditure of energy?

Though Tower teased somewhat with her title choice, she ultimately does deliver a brief fragment of the Gershwin brothers' *Fascinating Rhythm* at the moment when the *dotted rhythm* stops. Though not a new ribbon, Tower infuses this *Gershwin motive* with characteristics found throughout *Fascinating Ribbons*. This is not a summation moment, but a postscript—one final thought

to share, and maybe even a tongue-in-cheek tip of the hat. Following the *Gershwin motive,* there is momentary group silence in mm. 223 and 224. No particular ribbon is given the final say in the piece. All the ribbons have been unfurled, and the rich rhythmic and melodic resources have been expended. The unanimity and force with which the concluding measures are presented affirm that the work can and should now conclude.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Summary

The purpose of this project is to examine the commissioning and compositional events leading to the premiere of Joan Tower's *Fascinating Ribbons* for band, and also to analyze the work. It is intended that this document will join similar research projects, providing resources for conductors and other musicians.

For more than half a century, proponents of wind band music have aggressively promoted the creation of quality literature, and numerous commissioning efforts have yielded a growing body of outstanding band music. The development of the Consortium Commissioning Project, by the College Band Directors National Association, has led to greater involvement of colleges and universities in the commissioning process.

Thanks in large measure to the efforts of Jack Stamp, a composer, conductor and activist on behalf of band music, celebrated composer Joan Tower accepted a commission to write a work for concert band. Tower's compositional background consisted primarily of writing chamber and orchestral music, and her familiarity with the band medium was virtually

non-existent. After several years of "courting" by Stamp and others, however, she accepted the commission in early 1999. Tower's positive assessment of the wind band community—particularly its eagerness to embrace the music of living composers—proved pivotal in her decision to write the band work. *Fascinating Ribbons*, a single-movement piece for concert band, received its premiere at the 2001 CBDNA Conference, performed by the Keystone Wind Ensemble under the direction of Jack Stamp.

Though she was initially intimidated by the *Fascinating Ribbons* project due to her lack of familiarity with band music, Tower's compositional processes remained unchanged during the writing phase. She perused scores and recordings of recommended wind band works, and consulted with Stamp and others while composing and eventually revising the piece.

Three analytical approaches have been applied to the *Fascinating Ribbons* score. Each type of analysis recognizes eight formal divisions in the work, and presents material primarily in a chronological format. The descriptive analysis accounts for much of the observable information in the piece, including melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, timbral and textural materials. Prominent melodic and rhythmic figures are assigned descriptive names, and the relationships between those figures are discussed.

The graphic analysis contains quantitative evaluations of five parameters: forces in use, pitch range, pitch density, attack frequency, and dynamics. Individual graphs for all eight sections of the work, as well as summary graphs for each parameter, are included.

The observations and measurements completed for the descriptive and graphic analyses inform the imagery analysis. The author takes a subjective, imaginative view of the score in the imagery chapter, and assigns plot characteristics to the musical landscape. Regardless of whether one agrees with the interpretation presented in Chapter Six, each prospective conductor of *Fascinating Ribbons* is encouraged to craft his or her own image-filled analysis of the work. Such an analysis should be informed by thorough investigation of the score and an understanding of Tower's approach to composition, and should be fueled by the analyst's imagination.

Fascinating Ribbons displays evidence of the organic approach Tower applied during the composing process. Each portion of the work logically emerges from material that preceded it, though the logic of the work's construction does not imply predictability or inevitability. Numerous surprises dot the musical landscape, yet in hindsight even the surprise moments are grounded in prior events.

Fascinating Ribbons is unified in part through Tower's use of recurring motivic patterns and of several interrelated melodic *ribbons*. Particularly notable are the frequent appearances of the *dotted rhythm* and the *third motive*. The octatonic palette of melodic and harmonic materials serves as a woven fabric of specific colors from which Tower regularly draws to provide a background of familiar sounds.

Tower effectively generates musical tension in her compositions, and convincingly dictates its ebb and flow. She has often stated her interest in monitoring the intensity (or energy) level in her works, and of balancing its rise and fall. In *Fascinating Ribbons*, her use of a given musical parameter by a specific means might contribute to an increase in tension in one context, though similar use of that same parameter in a different context might suggest a tension reduction. As one can observe in the graphic analyses, it is the way in which Tower combines the various parameters that dictates the type of response she seeks to engender in the listener. The analyst or conductor must contextually evaluate the available information in order to reach informed conclusions and interpretations regarding the piece.

One of Tower's compositional goals is to "choreograph a landscape of sound that reaches people in an emotional, visceral, and [coherent] kind of

way."[1] Noting that a dancer acts and reacts, moving faster and slower and higher and lower within a defined physical space, Tower considers her music to function in much the same way. As her compositions unfold, Tower thinks in physical terms of moving from room to room. One room features the actions associated with a portion of the piece, and those actions eventually and logically lead into the next room.

It is perhaps in this regard that Tower's craftsmanship is most evident in *Fascinating Ribbons*. Between adjoining sections, and even as one subsection transitions to another, Tower often ushers the listener gently from one "room" to the next. At other times, however, it is as if Tower says, "As you can tell, we will encounter a large door in just a few moments, and you will either be pulled or shoved through it to the next room!" There is inevitability to many of the transitions, yet the results of those transitions are not entirely predictable. One may hold expectations regarding what awaits in the next room, but there is considerable anticipation of the moment of arrival to determine if those expectations will be fulfilled or thwarted.

In conclusion, through the unfurling of these smooth, jagged, gentle, intense, independent and interrelated musical ribbons, Tower leads the

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[1] Tower, "The composer in conversation with Bruce Duffie," 10.

listener through a meticulously crafted and ultimately satisfying journey. *Fascinating Ribbons* is a composition that stands comfortably alongside Tower's other outstanding works, and is deserving of careful attention from devotees of the wind band medium.

Recommendations for Further Study

Though numerous biographical summaries of Joan Tower's early years are available, there is currently no comprehensive overview of her life and career. Though she continues to enjoy a celebrated career as a performer, educator, and composer, it is recommended that studies be undertaken to chronicle her varied musical achievements and to systematically examine her compositional output.

In addition to witnessing the premiere, the author has obtained two recordings of *Fascinating Ribbons* performances. The conductors represented on the recordings applied differing interpretations to the *dotted rhythms* in the work. Tower was non-committal when asked whether the *dotted rhythm* should be performed strictly as written or interpreted with a triplet feel.[2] Considering Tower's background familiarity with jazz, the hint of jazz influence in the section seven saxophone soli, and the brief appearance in

[2] Tower, interview with the author.

section eight of the Gershwin song *Fascinating Rhythm*, one might make a case that the jazz influenced triplet interpretation is justified. A closer stylistic examination of the work, augmented by further communication with Tower, might lead to recommendations regarding a preferred interpretation of the *dotted rhythms*.

Because *Fascinating Ribbons* is currently available only as a rental piece, the author anticipates it will receive fewer performances than if it were made available for purchase. Wind band conductors are regularly notified of new band music releases that are available for purchase via a network of national and regional music vendors. Reference recordings of new works are often included with music catalogues or are made available at vendor web sites. As a result, conductors are likely to have greater awareness of music that can be purchased than of works that are available only for rental. There may be numerous conductors who would program selections, for example, from the American Waterways Wind Orchestra collection, if they were aware of the existence of these commissioned works and knew the procedures for accessing the collection holdings.

One possible topic for future study is an evaluation of the performance frequency of, and the familiarity of conductors with band works that are available for rental only, as compared with those works that are available for

purchase. A related topic might address ways in which greater awareness of "rental only" pieces could be promoted among the wind band conducting community.

When respected composers like Joan Tower create band works of artistic merit, it is vital to the future growth of the medium that such works are adequately publicized, so that those who make programming decisions are aware of their existence. By promoting and performing the existing masterworks of the literature—whether such pieces are available for purchase or rental—conductors not only enhance the musical experiences of their ensembles and audiences, but they also help ensure that outstanding composers will continue to create new works for wind bands.

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APPENDIX A:

PRIVATE INTERVIEW WITH JOAN TOWER

RED HOOK, NEW YORK; 22 MARCH 2002

JF: Thank you very much for agreeing to meet with me today. I'd like to begin with some questions related to the commissioning of *Fascinating Ribbons.* Does your publisher grant free rein to you in determining which commissions you will accept, and, put in another way, will Schirmer publish any new work that you bring to them?

JT: Yes.

JF: Are you expected to fill a certain type or number of commissions?

JT: No.

JF: Please describe your knowledge of and experience with concert bands prior to having been approached about this particular commission.

JT: I had none. I was never in a place where there were bands. I was not in a high school where there were bands, I was not in a college where there were bands, and I have not been in a town...well, actually that's not entirely true. I remember, now that I think of it, I played third trumpet in a marching band at Bennington, Vermont, because the guy got together this band—he was a teacher at Bennington—and we marched. I think I did it once, but I was so bad! I couldn't keep up with the repeat signs.

JF: So in college you picked up the trumpet for a short time?

JT: Yes, but just to play in the marching band.

JF: And living in New York, you didn't ever hear the Goldman Band, for instance?

JT: No. Well, maybe I heard the St. Patrick's Day bands, but it was always extremely foreign to me, culturally speaking, because it was not on my radar screen.

JF: Do you recall the first time you heard a concert band performance that caused you to stand up and note "Wow, this is a quality ensemble"?

JT: No, because I wasn't going to any concerts that had bands in them.

JF: So when did you first hear a concert band?

JT: Well, Jack Stamp called me and said, "I'd like to come and take a lesson with you—a composition lesson." And I said, "I don't really teach privately. I teach school and that's enough." I really discourage people from coming to study with me, because I don't think it's fair to them. He said, "Oh, but I just want one lesson, and I'm going to drive eight hours to have the lesson." He was so persistent, and I thought, gee, he really wants to do this and is willing to drive eight hours, so I decided I've got to do this. So he drove up here and I looked at his music, and he had sort of a lesson. Then he said, "Now listen: you have a piece called *Stepping Stones*—a ballet—and I think the last movement would sound a whole lot better played by a band than an orchestra." And I said, "Maybe it would. I don't know. But I'm not going to do it. If you want to do it, that's fine." He said, "Oh, okay I'll do it." So he transcribed the last movement, called *Celebration* for band.

JF: Had Daniel Forlano already done the brass version of that movement beforehand?

JT: Yes. That's correct.

JF: So, the original version was for orchestra, and didn't Daniel Forlano conduct the orchestra for the ballet?

JT: Yes, sorry I forgot that step. The Milwaukee Ballet Orchestra was conducted by Daniel Forlano, and they commissioned this ballet which was done in Milwaukee. And then a few years later the International Woman's Forum, which is this group of really high-powered political and business women leaders from around the world, asked me to write a piece for their next meeting. And they didn't give me much notice, and I said, "I really don't

have time to do that, but maybe I could do a transcription of some kind. Let me think about it." So I had just done this ballet about women, and I thought this might be interesting. And he said "Well I could transcribe this for brass band." And I said, "Fine—this is great." So he did transcribe it for that group, and then I conducted it at the White House. It was dedicated to Hillary Clinton, because she was the host of this event—and it was quite an event. All the players were women selected from the service bands in Washington. It was a spectacular event. We all felt so honored to be there. There was this parade of women leaders that would come through the foyer and we were all sitting there. And they sort of did a double-take, like "What is this?" And they looked at all these women playing brass instruments, like it was not something you would see ordinarily. And then they smiled and would go on. They had to divide the group up into three places because there wasn't enough room to house the band and these four hundred women. So they shuttled the women over to another room while Hillary and Donna Shelela and Tipper Gore gave speeches. And I was the only one of the musicians allowed to go because I was mobile, and I was the conductor. So I went, and that was just down the corridor. And they said, "Now when Hillary finishes her speech, that's your cue to go back to your place of conducting and start the band." Then the four hundred women will come through the corridor, and they have a choice of either staying and listening to the piece or just moving on to the tea room, which was the next room. So, the first note is a held note, and I held the note forever because I wanted the women to get as close as they could—it's a very short piece. Trombone players were exchanging green faces holding this note. So finally I start, and we're in this foyer which is really high, and with marble floors, so the sound is really quite impressive and big. Well I got totally involved in the conducting—I didn't know what the women were doing. What had happened was that they got more and more involved with what was happening. They all gathered around into this foyer where the band was, and they were all listening to the piece. When I turned around when it was finished, there was this huge yelling and uproar like they were so...well they were so excited about this event to begin with, and this was just another part of the excitement. So I was so excited that I gave a speech! And I said, "I would just like to say on behalf of myself and the band that we are really honored to be able to contribute something musical to this occasion." Then there was another round of applause and cheering, and it was an unbelievable event.

JF: So that was the *Celebration Fanfare* in its brass ensemble version, and then Jack Stamp did the full band version.

JT: That's right. The West Point band played it up here, and it was not a good performance. There were three percussionists missing, and the tempos were really too slow. It was just terrible. And then I've heard it played several times by orchestras and schools where I am going as a resident composer. But then Jack—and I'm still learning about the band by osmosis—but I am learning about winds and brass through writing for orchestra.

JF: And through your writing the fanfares for brass and percussion.

JT: And through the fanfares, yes. So I had accumulated some knowledge, but I still didn't know what the band sound was. So Jack called me and said, "Okay, are you going to write a band piece or what?" because he had been pursuing me about a band piece. And I said, "Jack I don't know anything about the band." And he said, "Oh okay, I'll get back to you." So the next thing he gets back to me with an invitation to come to the CBDNA conference in Austin, just to hear bands. So they invited me down just to hear bands, and that's it. Ursula [Oppens] was doing my piano concerto in New Orleans, and I said, "This is ridiculous that you're paying for my airfare and my hotel just to hear bands. I'll tell you what—you pay for the hotel and part of the airfare, because I'm going to New Orleans anyway." So I went to Austin and listened to three days of bands. Once I got there, Jack—intrepid Jack—said, "Oh I forgot to tell you that you're giving a talk." I said, "Jack, why are you doing this to me? On what?" He said, "Well, on your music and on the state of band music." I said, "State of band music? I don't know what the state of band music is!" [laughter] And we're walking over to the session, and I said, "Jack, do me a favor—first of all there won't be anyone there, because I'm just a composer—don't ask me any hard questions about the state of band music, or anything like that." He said, "Oh, don't worry about it, you'll have a ball." We walked into this room and there were three hundred fifty band directors sitting there. I asked him, "Why are they here?" and he responded, "Because I told them to be here." He played *Silver Ladders* on this ghetto blaster type thing, and then he says, "I'm here with Joan Tower, my favorite composer," or something like that. Then he said, "Now, my first question is 'What do you think the state of band music is?'" [laughter] And I looked at him—and I'm very natural in public, you know; I don't change facades or anything like that—and I said, "Jack, you said you weren't going to ask me any difficult

questions!" Everybody laughed, and then I knew that this group had a sense of humor. We had a great time. I talked with a lot of the people, and I heard a lot of really outstanding playing. I was blown away by the playing. I started to see a lot about this world that was so intriguing—that it was a generous world, an unpretentious world. Conductors share podiums a lot, they share music a lot. They've got these great wind players coming up. There's a lot of enthusiasm for playing new music—just so many things. But the one thing is that they are very apologetic about who they are and the music they have. I picked that up loud and clear. I said to them, "You know you treat yourselves a little bit like the viola section in the orchestra. You put yourselves down because there are certain things that make you feel like you're second fiddle to the orchestra." Well, let me tell you something...you are first fiddle in some areas in comparison to the orchestra, because you've got a lot of things going for you that the orchestral world does not have. They would never put three hundred fifty conductors in the same room and then invite a composer to speak to them. It would never, ever happen that way. Second of all, they stood up after I had finished and gave me a standing ovation. I said "This would never happen in the orchestral world—ever!" There's just so much about this world that is wonderful, and I think you should stop apologizing and keep trying to get good composers to write good music for you. That way your repertoire will get better.

JF: Was it that experience in Austin that pushed you over the edge to agree to the commission, or had you decided before that time?

JT: That experience—hanging out with that culture—definitely pushed me over the edge. And so Jack, in that meeting, said, "Okay, let's cut to the chase. Are you or are you not going to write a band piece?" He put me on the spot; he really did, because I had not made a decision. And I said, "Given that you have brought me down here just to hear bands (which I still to this day find absolutely formidable), and that you have been so wonderful to me, and that you want me to write a piece so badly—with all of this I just have to say 'yes'." That was some wining and dining that I had never experienced. I've experienced lots of wining and dining, but this is a level that's pretty deep.

JF: Was there any 'buyer's remorse' a day or two after that, once you realized the type of commitment you had made?

JT: Well, I was scared, but then about sixteen people sent me CD's of band music, and I started listening to the band music over dinner. I got more depressed, because most of the music written for band is written by band composers—people who know the band—and so the sound is phenomenal. All the doublings are just perfect, and the spacing is perfect. It's like the guitar world. Most of the guitar music you hear is written by guitarists. In the organ world it's the same thing. Or the music was written by composers who lived in the universities that have big bands. So I got depressed and told Jack "I don't think I can do this. I mean this music sounds so great." I wasn't as impressed about the music itself. I was more impressed by the orchestration. But in Texas I heard a lot of great music.

JF: Do you recall what some of the recordings were that you listened to?

JT: Yes, let's see. I listened to Jerry Junkin's group...

JF: The Dallas Wind Symphony?

JT: Yes, and Jack's Keystone group, and the Air Force Band. I have several recordings of all of those.

JF: Did you have access to any scores of the works you listened to?

JT: I've got some scores. Jack sent me some scores of specific pieces that I asked for. There's a Grantham piece, a Nicholas Maw piece, a Schwantner piece, and the Hindemith. But you know, the orchestration is so tied up with your ideas. You can get orchestrational ideas, but they have to be tied up with the musical ideas. So, you can study the orchestration, and you can steal things or not steal things, but I'm not good at that, because I feel it has to come from the music itself.

JF: Did Jack Stamp's transcription of the *Celebration Fanfare* give you any glimpse into what your music might sound like when played by bands?

JT: That helped a little bit, but I think you have to learn by doing it. I'm a 'learning by doing' kind of person.

JF: Did writing the fanfares for brass and percussion make a big difference for you?

JT: That definitely helped me to learn how to write for brass.

JF: And you had completed all five fanfares before you began work on *Fascinating Ribbons*.

JT: That's correct, yes.

JF: When you started writing for band, were you concerned that the potential power of all the winds and percussion would be overwhelming when compared to writing for the orchestra—were you concerned that you wouldn't be able to achieve the quieter moments in the way you'd like?

JT: Definitely that, because the weight of the ensemble is considerable—just the sheer weight of that wind and brass sound. And so parceling out solos and things like that is a different challenge than it is with the orchestra. But it took me ten years to learn to write for the orchestra, and I'm still learning. You just have to go through it and learn how to do it. And of course I got so scared that on the opening of *Fascinating Ribbons* I piled everything on because I wasn't sure what I was doing.

JF: The introduction seems atypical in its scoring compared to your other works. The musical ideas are typical, but the power and forces seem heavier than many of your other openings.

JT: That's fear.

JF: Not that it seems ineffective—just different.

JT: It's called fear. I don't have enough strength down here, so I'd better put everything I have down there.

JF: Well it's a very powerful opening. You have said that you typically know the approximate length and instrumentation of a piece before you write it. For *Fascinating Ribbons*, did you have in mind that this would be a six-minute piece?

JT: Yes, I told them this would be a short-ish piece because I didn't know the medium. So, it turns out it's not so short in the band world, but I didn't know that band music tends to be shorter.

JF: Regarding the instrumentation, did you make any choices there, or did Jack or someone else give you a listing of instruments to choose from?

JT: I said that I wanted a standard orchestration. I didn't want anything fancy. And I took out the bass.

JF: And on the saxophone parts, was it your choice to use a soprano and alto in place of two altos?

JT: Yes. And I had never written for saxophones. That and euphoniums were the instruments I hadn't written for before.

JF: The sax part is quite impressive, especially considering it was your first writing for the instruments. What led you to feature them so prominently in this piece?

JT: I just decided that it was about time I got to know the saxes, and the best way to do that was to put them out front.

JF: Just dive in head first...

JT: Just dive in head first, and I had a saxophonist here at school who helped me with the ranges. In fact she caught me on a couple of range problems. And I've heard jazz saxophones all my life, so I sort of know the DNA of the instrument. So I said I'm going to have them run around.

JF: Well you definitely did. And did it surprise you, having heard saxes in jazz settings, the different tone quality they can achieve when playing on the 'legit' side of the fence?

JT: Oh yeah, definitely. Well it's a different ballgame. It's a different group; there are more saxes, and so many different sounds surrounding them.

JF: Speaking of saxophone, I know that *Wings* was originally written for clarinet, but was later transcribed for saxophone. I recently heard a CD called

The Electric Saxophone, and the performer had recorded a version of *Wings* and achieved a sort of echo effect.

JT: That's actually two saxophones on that recording. That's John Sampen from Bowling Green. He had been teaching this piece so much to his students, and he was one of the ones who transcribed the piece. There were actually three people transcribing, and I couldn't decide between the three choices, so I made an amalgam. So it's dedicated to the three of them. But anyway John was teaching it all the time, and I guess he started playing alongside one of his students or something, and it started to go into canon. And they started experimenting with that, and he sent me a tape of it after having done it a number of times.

JF: The clip I heard was reminiscent of a phase piece.

JT: Yes, it's fascinating.

JF: Did the writing of *Fascinating Ribbons* conform to your typical productivity output of about two and one-half minutes of music composed per month?

JT: Yeah, except that it got a little squished in because I had to write this trio for violin, cello and piano—it's called *Big Sky*—and I got very involved in that piece for some strange reason, so it took a month off from *Fascinating Ribbons*. And since I was so scared of the band piece, I think I was using *Big Sky* as an excuse not to face it [laughter].

JF: Since this was to be performed by college groups, did you approach the writing of *Fascinating Ribbons* any differently—knowing that these are not necessarily professional musicians who will be playing it most of the time?

JT: I don't usually 'write down' to groups, so no. But I think I was aware probably of some level of difficulty, you know, height and speed. Is it a hard piece?

JF: For my group it would be quite challenging. I'm at a smaller school and can't always count on having enough players with chops for a piece like this, but for many college groups it would be very playable. Since the premiere of the piece, the primary revisions that have taken place appear to be with substantially lengthening the sax cadenza and then adding three bars to the

ostinato pattern immediately following the cadenza. Would you explain what caused you to decide to extend this portion of the work?

JT: I think one of the most important things about writing a piece of music is having the right size room for the ideas, because that's what creates a lot of the power of a piece. And when I first heard it I said—see I was afraid of the saxes, because I had never written for sax before, so I short-circuited—and then when I heard it, I said, "Oh, this is too short, way too short."

JF: Do you think of that particular section as a culminating moment, or a period of release from the tension that has built up?

JT: It's sort of an unraveling of the energy momentarily, although you can see it as a picking up of energy, because it's suddenly very thin. It gets a little tense.

JF: You nearly doubled the length of the cadenza when you revised it. And then the three added bars in the ostinato—are those there to balance the longer cadenza? I know you're concerned with balancing time structures.

JT: Yes, I think so.

JF: You've talked about how the music sometimes leads you during the composition process instead of you leading the music. Are there any specific instances you can recall and point out in this piece where you had one thing in mind, but the music seemed to point you in a different direction?

JT: I can't remember.

JF: Maybe the sax cadenza is an example of that.

JT: Oh, that's true. I had no plans for a sax cadenza.

JF: In an interview with Robert Craft, Stravinsky referred to the Theme and Variations in his *Octet for Winds* as containing 'ribbons of scales.' I know you're a big fan of Stravinsky, and wondered whether, at any point during the composition process, that quote surfaced in your mind.

JT: No, I didn't know about that quote, but I like it.

JF: Obviously there are musical quotes or gestures that show up in a number of your pieces. Sometimes these appear to be a tribute of some sort, or a brief musical quotation, or maybe they have become absorbed into your compositional language. I think of the ascending perfect fourth, for instance, that I've not noticed as much in your more recent pieces. The brief hint at Gershwin's *Fascinating Rhythm* that comes in the closing measures of this piece—how would you characterize it? Is it a tribute, a simple quotation, a serendipitous coincidence that his tune fit well in your piece?

JT: I think of it as more serendipitous because I was looking for a title, and I knew that 'ribbons' had to be in the title, because the piece is about that kind of action—of undulating scales. And I was trying so hard to find, um, *Magic Ribbons*, or *Blue Ribbons, Red Ribbons*—anything to go with 'ribbons', but it couldn't be just *Ribbons*. *Ribbons* by itself was a little bit bland. So, somebody else came up with *Fascinating Ribbons*, and that's when I put that rhythm in at the end. So it was sort of serendipitous.

JF: Do you recall at what point in the process that your friend made the title suggestion to you? Was the piece nearly finished at that point?

JT: Yeah, they were bugging me about a title, and I was close to the end.

JF: Do you go to the same sources for help with piece names?

JT: No, I drive my friends nuts. And I discovered there are certain friends who are terrible with titles, just terrible. And they think they are great, you know. Writers are the worst—because they come up with these very esoteric meaning titles that nobody can get. And my students are very good with titles. I get them from various sources.

JF: I haven't even heard your recent percussion concerto *Strike Zones*, but it's such a great title. I expect to like the piece before I've heard it.

JT: Really? Good, because we almost axed it.

JF: Why?

JT: Well the piece was premiered in Washington and played at Carnegie, and it was one month after 9/11. It was just an unfortunate coincidence. But I did get to meet Tom Daschle and Condi Rice! I called Leonard Slatkin and asked him if we should change the title, and he said, "No, you wrote this before, and you've got a definite meaning for this title." And right in the program note I wrote that the title has nothing to do with military action or baseball. It has to do with timbral zones.

JF: Well it's a great title. All right, I've got a theory question for you.

JT: Ugh!

JF: As you write a melodic line, for instance, are you even consciously aware that this is a whole-tone scale that you're using, or that this is an octatonic scale, or does your intuitive writing take over to the point that you don't even think in such terms?

JT: Well sure. I know that that's what it is.

JF: Do you intentionally decide to use a particular type of scale?

JT: I use scales sort of like—let's say you're building a house and trying to decide between tile, stone, wood, and marble. I use those scales to achieve a certain flavor, so I do know I'm using them. I'm not quite that intuitive. I mean, I can label things.

JF: You just don't like to label unnecessarily.

JT: I just don't like the labeling routine.

JF: You've already said you were working on *Big Sky* at the same time you were working on *Fascinating Ribbons*.

JT: No, no, no. Not at the same time. It just impinged on the time—in other words I had to move this a month later.

JF: I see.

JT: I never work on two pieces at the same time.

JF: You're always focused on one piece at a time.

JT: Yes.

JF: Do you maintain sketchbooks of your pieces? What form did the early writing of *Fascinating Ribbons* take—did you write at your Disklavier?

JT: I write in a short score of like three staves, and I play it over and over and over until I get it right.

JF: Are you recording all the time as you do that?

JT: Sometimes. No, I'll only record when there are three or four voices that I want to hear away...sometimes. Most of the time I actually don't.

JF: With this piece, was it that opening ascending minor third...was that the first idea that came to you?

JT: Yeah, I don't know why. I've got no idea where that came from.

JF: You talk about seams in music. You'll refer to a major seam or a minor seam. In my mind this conjures an image of fabrics—two pieces that are connected by a seam. Is that consistent with the musical image you have in mind when you refer to a seam?

JT: Well a seam is the end of a phrase. There's an old phrase and a new phrase. And the seam can be very big—it can be like two movements—a huge seam. Or it can be like a section. There is a hierarchy of seams, and I'm very, very big on making those work. I spend a lot of time making those work.

JF: Is that a terminology that you've come up with?

JT: Yeah, that's my terminology.

JF: I'd like to return for a moment to the saxophone cadenza. In some correspondence following the premiere of *Fascinating Ribbons*, you used the term 'retreat' to describe a portion of the cadenza. Along the 'going, staying,

retreating' continuum of intensity, do you consider that cadenza to be filling primarily a retreating function?

JT: I don't know anymore, because I think you have to weigh...it's a holding pattern, but at the same time it's an intense one, because it lost the rest of the sound. It's suddenly these four little things scurrying around without the environment and so it has an intensity to it. So it's hard to use the word 'retreating' or even 'holding'—it has a mixed intensity about it.

JF: In an earlier interview you suggested 'energy lines' analysis for looking at your music. I wonder if you would elaborate a bit on that for me, and put yourself in the position of looking at your own music and talk about how you might use the concept of energy line analysis.

JT: I think of music very much in terms of physics. It has an up, a down, and a straight line, and it can be thrown up with intensity, or thrown up with non-intensity, and so the force of the action in time is what makes the energy line for me. I spend a lot of time trying to understand the underlying action of the throwing up of the line and then what happens when it falls down. Well, it depends on how hard you throw it, how high you throw it, and how fast you throw it. So it's a language and a perceptual reality for me that is very strong. And I can't think of music without that. That's why I can't do pitch stuff as a pure motivating DNA action. I can't separate that out from the action of the energy.

JF: So the energy could encompass all the musical parameters.

JT: Yes, definitely.

JF: Well, I've been thinking about 'energy lines' and hoping to develop a system that will permit me to address this piece and its energy lines.

JT: Great. Do you have any physics friends?

JF: No, but the theory representative on my doctoral committee encourages his students to 'think outside the box' when approaching analysis.

JT: Oh, you are so lucky! You know what—I've got to show you something. There was this woman [Kristy Bryden at the University of Wisconsin-

Madison] doing an analysis of the first forty measures of *Petroushkates* according to every parameter. She did a graphic analysis in color. And she put the pages on top of each other with transparencies, so at one stage you'd get just the textural, and then at another stage you'd get the rhythmic line, and at another stage you'd get the height. Another line you'd get the dynamics. And then she put them all together, and it's amazing how they all...

JF: And can you 'see' the energy lines?

JT: Yes, you can see the energy lines.

JF: I've also been reminded of an analysis class I took in my masters program in which the instructor had us look for the logic in any particular element of the music, and I thought about your organic writing and how you are always looking back to the 'left side' to determine if what you are writing now is justified by what you've already written, and do these together suggest where you'll go from here. And so this idea of a logical analysis is something that I'm exploring also.

JT: To me it's called motivating the architecture. That's what Beethoven does so well. He has kind of a general consensus in all the parameters.

JF: I've got two recordings of *Fascinating Ribbons* performances. On one recording the dotted-eighth sixteenth rhythm in the opening is strictly maintained, and in the other it's more of a triplet swing interpretation. Is one of those readings more in keeping with your intent than the other?

JT: I would have to hear the recordings. I think it depends on the speed, and it depends on where it's headed.

JF: Have you been asked to conduct the piece?

JT: No.

JF: But you're comfortable conducting your orchestral pieces aren't you?

JT: Yes, I've gotten comfortable, but I've never conducted a band. I don't even know where the players sit.

JF: You could tell them to sit anywhere that you want!

JT: That wouldn't make any difference. I would have to learn.

JF: How many performances have you heard of *Fascinating Ribbons* so far?

JT: Probably four or five.

JF: And have others sent recordings of their performances?

JT: No, only Eastern Michigan. I would love to hear some others.

JF: Is there a particular recorded version of Gershwin's *Fascinating Rhythm* that comes to mind when you think of that song?

JT: No, I just know the song.

JF: What sort of reaction have you received regarding this piece thus far, from conductors and performers?

JT: I'm not sure. It's a little early. I think when it was first premiered, I thought I got a very good response.

JF: Jack Stamp said that the ensemble enjoyed playing the piece.

JT: Yeah, that's what he said. But then when I was at Eastern Michigan...I don't know. Sometimes it's very hard to judge reactions. And I'm very honest about it, because I have to be. As a composer I have to be very clear. I'm not one of those composers who buries their head in the sand and thinks their music is just great when everyone else thinks it's terrible. I'm very clear about this. I have some music that I know people really, really like, and I have some music that I know people don't react to. And it's not just that they don't like it, but they don't react strongly. I don't know about *Fascinating Ribbons* yet—the jury's still out on it.

JF: When it's finally released for the public to purchase will you have your radar up to see what happens with it?

JT: Absolutely.

JF: Do you have any idea yet if it will be a rental or purchase piece?

JT: I think Jack said it would be better to have it for sale, but I'm not sure yet.

JF: In one of your Yale interviews—in 1983 with Jan Fournier—you referred to an early orchestral piece called *Fantasia* that you pulled from circulation. Is there any such early effort at writing for band that either was never published or was pulled?

JT: No.

JF: Well, thank you for spending this time with me today. I enjoyed visiting with you, and look forward to spending more time with this piece.

JT: You're welcome. Good luck on your project, and please keep me posted as it moves along.

APPENDIX B:

PHONE INTERVIEW WITH JACK STAMP

15 FEBRUARY 2002

JF: I appreciate your willingness to spend some time talking with me about your involvement in the commissioning of *Fascinating Ribbons*. Could we please begin by having you describe how you came to study composition with Joan Tower?

JS: I don't remember how I first met her; if it was at a concert in New York City where I introduced myself, or if I perhaps got her address and phone number and called her. I just don't remember how our first association happened. I do know that I just kept pestering her about possibly having a composition lesson with her sometime. I can remember that my wife was doing a workshop in Philadelphia and I was thinking that Joan lived pretty close to Philadelphia, when in fact she lives about a three-hour drive away, up toward Albany, New York. I had set this lesson up and then realized when I checked the map that I was forever from her house. So I ended up driving six hours round-trip in order to have a two-hour lesson with her. I remember another time flying up there and having a lesson with her. I think I had two or three lessons total with her.

JF: How had you become acquainted with her music? Had you heard performances in concerts or on the radio?

JS: I'm a real American music nut. Nonesuch used to put out recordings of these "Meet the Composer" residencies—occasionally you'll still see one come out—they had put out the one on Joan Tower that had *Silver Ladders* with all of her music on there.

JF: Is that the recording with Leonard Slatkin and the St. Louis Symphony?

JS: Yes, he had already recorded *Sequoia* on an old vinyl disc of pieces by Christopher Rouse, Donald Erb, and Joseph Schwantner and some shorter pieces, so that's where I first heard it. Then I heard *Silver Ladders* on a radio broadcast, I believe, and I was just knocked out with it. So I tried to find as

much of her music as I could. Again, I don't remember what made me first contact her—she might even remember that—but I just know that I pestered her until she would let me visit her.

JF: So you pestered her to get a lesson, and then you began to pester her to write a band piece?

JS: Well, here's what happened. Yeah, that's pretty much been my operation—that's how I got to meet and talk to David Diamond and got him to write *Tantivy* because I first talked to him and then talked to him about writing a band piece. What happened with Joan is that I took her a piece to look at—it was the *Divertimento in F* that I was writing. There was one movement that I showed her, and she just ripped it apart and had me rewrite it. I came back probably a month or two later, and she looked at it and she really liked it. So I decided that's the movement I would dedicate to her. But when I came back she said, "I want you to listen to something." Somebody had transcribed the last movement of her ballet for brass ensemble.

JF: Yes, that was Daniel Forlano, I think.

JS: Yes, that's right. And she played this tape for me and I said, "Well Joan, you know that would be a better wind band piece than brass ensemble, because you don't have any timbral changes here." She said something to the effect of "Well, then before I write a piece for band, why don't you transcribe this movement for wind band, and let's hear how it sounds, and then I'll decide whether I want to write a piece or not." It was her way of putting me off, I think. I said, "Well fine, I'll think about it and try to fit it into my schedule." She gave me a score to the ballet, and I really didn't think much about it. Then I had a call around Memorial Day of that year from the conductor of the West Point band, and he said, "I understand you're doing a transcription of a movement from Joan Tower's ballet, and we'd like to premiere it on our Fourth of July concert." Well, I hadn't even started it. So as I worked on some disc editing in California during the days, I spent my evenings at the laptop completing the transcription of the *Celebration Fanfare* piece. But she was kind of using that piece as collateral or ransom for writing a piece of band music.

JF: Once the *Celebration Fanfare* was completed, did she hear it and like the sound of it, and think, "Well maybe I will go ahead and write a band piece"?

JS: Well, what I did was follow-up and say, "now we've got to get you to write a band piece." What eventually happened was that, because she had gone to the University of Texas as a composer-in-residence, and they had played this *Celebration Fanfare* that I had done, along with a lot of her chamber music, she had met Jerry Junkin down there. Well, Jerry convinced her to come to the 1999 CBDNA conference in Austin. So she came to that conference just to hang out with bands and band directors, and that's why Joan has referred to this commissioning process as a courtship. We actually courted her. Then we had a composers' forum at the conference where I interviewed her in front of, oh, probably 250 or 300 college band directors. She had been talking about how she couldn't believe how dedicated band directors were to new music, and to music of living composers. Then I said, "Well I want to show you something else, Joan." I looked out into the audience and said "how many of you would play a Joan Tower piece for band if she were to write one, would you please stand?" And the whole group stood. She was just flabbergasted. And I got her, in front of all those band directors, to agree to write a piece. So, I guess I guilted her into it in front of all those band directors.

JF: Do you think that some of her hesitation to write a band piece came from her lack of familiarity with the medium?

JS: It's interesting, because I've talked with a lot of composers. Recently I've talked with Richard Danielpour, Michael Torke, and it's like they don't know what to do without strings. And they think that scoring for the band is so far different from how they think about orchestration. Certainly there is the timbral problem that you don't have the strings, but every person who has been concerned about this, when you listen to their orchestral music, writes wonderfully for winds and percussion. I will give them the line, as I gave to Joan, the line that Persichetti spoke when he was writing the *Divertimento*—that he was working with some figures for brass, woodwinds, and percussion, and the strings just never came in. And I said, "just don't have the strings come in." So, I don't think there was reticence about the level of performance. I think it's just specifically about orchestrating, and feeling like they have a big enough palette to express themselves. When she found out just how expressive bands were, and the quality of band performances in the country, I think she was overwhelmed by it. She literally didn't know that that world existed. And that's why I think she refers to the courtship, because

she realized that this whole world was out there, almost like a cult, or a whole community of musicians committed to new music, that she had never known about. Where she had taught, they didn't have a band, and where she went to school they didn't really have a band. And I guess any of her dealings with bands as a student or as a child were with community bands—I don't know that for sure—but she wasn't aware of the artistic side of that whole culture that exists in academia of the college wind ensemble/concert band. So I think she was taken by that, and that's why she decided she had to do the piece—because there's such a commitment, and she'd feel like she was somewhat hypocritical if she didn't actually write a piece for people who really wanted her to write one.

JF: Well, so she made the commitment there at the 1999 CBDNA meeting, and then, based on that commitment, did you pull together the commissioning consortium?

JS: Yes, I did. I negotiated the contract with Peter Herb of G. Schirmer about all the stipulations about who could play it, what the commission would entail, who would get parts, the period of exclusivity. He actually drew up a contract which I reviewed, and then I signed it as a representative of CBDNA.

JF: Was it difficult to attract the thirty-one consortium members?

JS: You aren't going to believe this. I had it put on the CBDNA website and had an e-mail sent out on a Thursday night. By the next Tuesday—less than a week—I had enough people. In fact, I had so many people that I had to lower the consortium fee for each school, because I didn't need that much then. So, I had to figure then how much it would cost for thirty-one sets of parts, and balance that with Joan's fee. But it was amazing to end up saying "no, we don't need a thousand dollars from everybody." It ended up being either seven hundred or seven-fifty—I can't remember.

JF: Was it also you who decided some things about, for instance, the length of the piece?

JS: Actually I would have preferred a longer piece. I was hoping she would write between an eight- and ten-minute piece, but she didn't. You know, when she thought it was over, she thought it was over, and I respected that. As a composer, I know how that works—it's really hard for me to set a time-

limit on a piece. Once you develop the ideas, and you feel like you've finished stating, you don't say, "Oh, well now I've got to tag another two minutes on." But initially I thought the piece was going to be longer. It's about six minutes is all. What I did tell her—and I guess I'm kind of a die-hard band guy when it comes to this—but since I was instigating this consortium I said I want it to be for band. I don't want it to be for orchestral winds. I want it to have saxophone parts, I want it to have euphonium parts. I want this to exist in the band world, not something that an orchestral wind section could play too. And most of the time, if I'm involved in a commission—unless it's somebody who will not agree to do it—if they're open to instrumentation then I will always state that I want it to be a band piece and not an orchestral wind piece. So I gave her the instrumentation. Actually I gave her kind of a variable instrumentation. I said, "You can use as little as this many, or as many as this."

JF: In the sax section, did you give her the option of two altos or one soprano and one alto?

JS: That's correct.

JF: I've not found any evidence of Tower having written anything else before that includes saxes. For a first effort at writing for saxes she certainly gave them a prominent and demanding part.

JS: She did, and I don't know if you've played it yet, but my players said, "Has she ever written for saxophone before?" And I said, "Well, no", and they said that this lays really well for the saxophone, and it's very idiomatic. It's interesting because Joan's a person who, if she were to write for band, I think she might have listened to bands, but she's not the type of person that would say, "Okay let me listen to the Hindemith *Symphony*, and let me listen to the Dahl *Sinfonietta*." When she was writing her string quartet she told me she didn't go listening to everybody's string quartets. And you know that's the way certain composition teachers teach—you should go listen to the great works in that genre before you write in it, and she believed just the opposite. She didn't want the influence of past string quartets when she was writing her first string quartet. And I believe she probably took that same approach when writing for band. She heard what the concert band sounded like, so she got an idea of the quality, but I don't think she was listening to bands for an idea of how to score it.

JF: Did you make any suggestions regarding style of the piece, or the difficulty level?

JS: No, none of that. She would send a couple of pages of score to me at a time, and just say, "Is anything on there impossible?" And, except for maybe one instance where I said, "Well this is a little nasty, and you might think about doing this"—and I really don't remember what that specific instance was, or I'd tell you—I made a few suggestions to her, but very few. But she would run things by me, and sent score pages that were...

JF: She writes out her scores by hand, doesn't she?

JS: She does, yes. There were score pages that were taped, because she couldn't fit them on one photocopier; so she'd tape them together and send them to me. And her manuscript is not the most readable. And I would look at them and make a few suggestions. But really very few, because mostly I didn't want to interfere, I just wanted to tell her if things were not idiomatically correct, or would present range problems—those sorts of things.

JF: As you began to rehearse the piece with the Keystone Winds, did some issues emerge that you consulted with her about?

JS: What happened was... did you hear our performance at the premiere?

JF: Yes, I was there.

JS: What you need to realize is that we got together over Martin Luther King weekend—we rehearsed Saturday, Sunday and the morning of Monday. Then the next time we got together was the Wednesday before we played the concert. That was it for rehearsals for that whole program. So there was very little time. What I did is I sent Joan—we played through it before we left here during that Martin Luther King weekend, but you realize that's only a month before the conference—and I sent her a tape of that. So she listened to it, and then when she came she sent me some changes from that tape which we incorporated then at the site. The day before we played the concert. We incorporated the changes, and then she came down and heard. And she couldn't believe how the piece sounded live—just the visceral reaction she

had to it. She was very excited about that. And she made a few slight changes, and then once she heard the work a couple of times, made, not a lot, but a fairly hefty revision including extending the saxophone cadenza which I think you've gotten a copy of.

JF: Yes.

JS: But then she made more changes after she heard a couple of performances than she made before the premiere. But she did make changes right there the Wednesday before we played it.

JF: How did the ensemble react to her?

JS: The ensemble loved her, because she was so excited and she was so appreciative that we were doing this. They really loved her, and she's so down-to-earth--just a terrific person. So, you might think they'd be saying, "We've got to play this tomorrow and you're making all these changes?" But they were fine about it.

JF: I've got a recording of Max Plank conducting the Eastern Michigan band just a matter of weeks after you conducted the premiere, and she had extended or in some way revised the sax cadenza further by then, I think. Do you recall the sequence of events in those weeks following the premiere?

JS: No I don't recall.

JF: I believe for Eastern Michigan she put in a repeated passage, but in the final version of the score she has actually extended the cadenza.

JS: You see, I don't know because I never heard that, and that was one of those things where she was there for four days or so. So she had a chance to actually work with the ensemble a little more than she had with us.

JF: Since those first few performances, what role have you taken in the revisions phase of the piece?

JS: What I had to do was get her revisions. She sent me revisions, and again her manuscript was so hard to read, and with how busy she was ... she was on the road for a premiere of her percussion concerto, and things like that. So

to finally get her to confirm some of these changes that she requested took some effort, and when I finally got those solidified I sent it back to the copyist who put them on Finale. He incorporated the changes, and of course Schirmer was all over me about getting them a copy of it. I told Schirmer, "I appreciate your enthusiasm, but you need to realize there's still a period of exclusivity until the end of February." So I got them the piece with the final corrections in November. And I don't know—in fact I talked to Schirmer yesterday—I was trying to find out whether it's going to be published or just rented. I hope it will come out and you can actually buy it. Being a six-minute piece, I was hoping that would be the case.

JF: Have you had any other opportunity since the premiere to conduct *Fascinating Ribbons*?

JS: I haven't, no. I was going to program it here at the university, but I haven't done that.

JF: To the best of your knowledge, what has been the reaction to this piece from conductors and performers who have worked on it?

JS: I haven't heard anyone say they didn't like it. But of course maybe they wouldn't tell me that. But everyone that I've talked to that heard it—in fact a number of people came up to me and wanted to play it right away, and of course they couldn't. But a lot of people have talked with me about how much they enjoyed the piece, and I was really pleased because I didn't know what the reaction would be. The players loved it. The Keystone players loved playing it, and the audience reaction was very positive. Of course because I'm so involved with the piece, people might not have come up to me and said, "Boy, you just wasted your money." Now I guess some people were hoping for a bigger piece, and that type of thing, but they couldn't deny that it was really a pretty exciting work that she had packed into those six minutes.

JF: You're well acquainted with a lot of her music. Do you feel that this piece stacks up well as a part of her compositional output?

JS: Yes. I don't believe she wrote "down" to the band or wrote out of her style at all to compose this piece. I believe it's pretty much Joan Tower.

JF: It certainly sounds like a Joan Tower piece.

JS: It does, and that's what pleased me. Because, though she was a little bit apprehensive about writing, I wanted the Joan Tower style in a band work. I didn't want her to go out of that style because she was reticent about writing for winds, and I don't believe she did. I think she was conservative in the length of the piece. That's where she protected herself, if you want to call it that. She was able to not go out on a limb by just restricting how long it was, and that's okay by me.

JF: Let's go back for a moment to the commission. When she did finally agree to the commission, was it intended that it would be premiered at the 2001 CBDNA conference?

JS: Yes, the idea was that in two years we would premiere it. But, you see, I wasn't actually supposed to premiere it. Because I was so closely involved I called Gene Corporon, because of the quality of the North Texas band, and I said, "Would you premiere it?" He said, "I'd love to", and then what happened was that George Walker's piece took on a choir. Initially Northwestern was supposed to premiere the George Walker piece, but when Walker included a choir, Northwestern said, "We can't bring a choir on tour with us too. We can't afford that." Which is perfectly understandable. So Corporon had to say, "Well, since we're hosting this event, and we've got a resident choir, we can do it with choir." And then he called me and asked, "Well who's going to do the premiere of *Fascinating Ribbons*," and I said that no other members of the consortium besides us will be playing at the convention, so I think it will have to be us. So I told that to Joan, and she was just ecstatic that I was going to have the chance to premiere it. And so that was just a real treat.

JF: And it was a fine performance. Now that the piece has been "out there" for a while, have you visited any further with Tower about the project?

JS: Well I think that Schirmer was on her about the piece, so most of our dealings lately were with trying to get the final revisions completed. She hasn't really talked with me about performances or anything like that, and of course she's been very busy. As I mentioned, she wrote this percussion concerto for Evelyn Glennie, and the Tokyo String Quartet is premiering a string quartet next Saturday night, I think, so she's on to the next piece. I think she's pleased with this piece, but she's moved on now.

JF: Have you mentioned the possibility to her of writing a second band piece?

JS: I haven't talked to her about that, and I'm not going to for a while. I want this one to succeed on it's own, without me saying, "Oh, it's going to." So, I think she needs to come back to the medium when she's ready, and then I'll be standing there ready to put together the consortium.

JF: So she would realize that you, and/or a commissioning group, would be ready to welcome her back to write another piece whenever she wants to do so?

JS: Yes.

JF: I recall from the transcript of that 1999 CBDNA interview that you moderated that she said something like, "Well, I think I may be about done writing orchestral pieces, and may move in a different direction. Perhaps I'll become a band composer now." I wondered if that might have been a statement made in the excitement of the moment, or if she might actually make such a shift.

JS: Well, she had promised Slatkin this percussion piece back at the time we were talking with her about this piece, but I think she had gotten so disillusioned with the orchestral world, and is going to write more chamber music. She looked at the band as a totally different venue. She was concerned with the lack of performances that the big orchestral pieces are getting.

JF: Yes, and I've read of her concerns about the life of a piece after its premiere.

JS: Yes, do you know that talk that Jacob Druckman gave?

JF: I've seen references to it, but haven't heard or read it.

JS: I have or had it on cassette, but yes, it's called "Is there life after the premiere?" and it's a really great talk that Druckman gave.

JF: As a conductor of this piece, are there some special features or challenges you've encountered that might distinguish this from any number of other new band works?

JS: Well, there's really nothing unique about it from the conductor's standpoint, other than there are some pretty hard sections—especially for low reeds and low brass, where they must work to keep the energy going. They're not out of the ordinary, but like any piece there will be these sections that you'll have to deal with. Just because it's Joan's piece, I don't think there's necessarily anything inherent in it that is uncommon compared to any number of other new pieces.

JF: Is there anything else you would like to share about this piece, your role in bringing it to life, or about Joan Tower?

JS: Well, when she said that at the 1999 CBDNA conference, I almost burst into tears, because it had been like a five- or six-year ordeal for me to get her to say "Yes." So, there was such a degree of satisfaction—and being able to premiere it was icing on the cake. But the idea that—and I mean she called me a "composer stalker," which is kind of funny, but I'm proud of that. And I'm continuing to stalk right now, but I don't want to give away the names of people because we haven't gotten them on board yet. But there are three people that I'm stalking right now, and they are seriously considering writing band pieces, and have never written for band before. I'm excited about that, and I guess what the Joan Tower experience showed me was that persistence and dedication can pay off. The thing is, when you become a composer stalker, you'd better know a lot about the composer and a lot about their music. Otherwise they find out that you're just some person that's trying to rub elbows with them. And so the idea of having to do your homework is very important. But the idea that that dedication and "stick-to-it-iveness" with Joan came to fruition was really satisfying, and it also inspires me to keep doing it. And I will keep doing it. I guess it's something that I'm possibly good at. But that really gave me a lot of self-satisfaction when she said those words, "Yes, I'll write a piece for band." That was a pretty exciting moment, not just for the band world but also for me personally.

JF: As a member of the band community, I'm grateful to you for your continued efforts to expand the literature for our ensembles, both through

your "stalking" of other composers and also through your own compositions. Thank you once again, also, for spending time visiting with me today.

JS: Thank you, and I enjoyed talking with you.