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Award-winning



Submitted photo

Bennington College graduate Joan Tower won a Grammy award for best classical contemporary composition at the Feb. 10 awards show.

Making beautiful music

Bennington College graduate wins Grammy Award

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BENNINGTON — Kanye West, Amy Winehouse and 69-year-old Bennington College graduate Joan Tower may not have a lot in common, but after Feb. 10, the three now share at least one trait.

They all brought home hardware from the 50th Annual Grammy Awards at the Staples Center in Los Angeles.

Tower, class of 1961, won a Grammy, her first, in the classical contemporary composition category for her work, "Made in America," a 14-minute-long piece that works off the melody of "America the

Beautiful."

A recording of her work by the Nashville Symphony Orchestra, with Leonard Slatkin conducting, also won two more Grammy Awards for best classical album (the album included two additional works by Tower) and best orchestral performance.

A professor at the Bard College Conservatory of Music since 1972, Tower credited her experience at Bennington College as starting her path in music.

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"Bennington started me off as a composer," she said Wednesday. "It gave me



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Grammy

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a start, and I'll never forget that. I still reproduce a lot of the kind of thinking I got there in my work."

Tower called her Grammy-winning work a political statement. She said she grew up in South America and is proud to be an American, but she said the piece reflects her basic concerns with what is going on in the country. She has said the last solitary note in the piece is a statement on the overreaching government powers that came in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist

attacks.

Tower said Bennington professors Lionel Novak, George Finkel, Lou Calabro and Henry Brant were her main influences while in college.

She said the Grammy meant a lot to her and her career, but more importantly, she was pleased it recognized the work of the Made in America project.

The project is made up of a group of 65 community orchestras from all 50 states that came together in 2001 so that they could afford to commission the works of renown composers, such

as Tower, according to the project's Web site.

For instance, the world premiere of Tower's work, "Made in America," was performed by the Glens Falls Symphony Orchestra in New York in October 2005. From there, Tower's work toured the country through the consortium or low-budget orchestras until March 2007. The Nashville Symphony Orchestra is not part of the consortium, Tower said.

The project, which started in 2001 (Tower was the first composer chosen by the consortium), is funded by Ford Motor Co.,

and two national music service organizations, Meet the Composer and the League of American Orchestras.

Tower was the first woman to receive the prestigious Grawemeyer Award for Composition, an international award, in 1990. She said she will spend much of 2008 at various performances celebrating her 70th birthday.

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