

Mom's Joy Room

2964 Fairmont Road • Morgantown, West Virginia 26501 • (304) 282-3671

Vintage Otagiri Unicorn Music Box

Porcelain Musical Figurine • Japan • circa 1970s–1980s • 5.25 Inches

ESTIMATED WORTH

\$30 – \$60

“You must remember this...”

She plays “As Time Goes By” — Herman Hupfeld, 1931, made immortal by *Casablanca* (1942)



Rearing white unicorn on her fluted pedestal base

History

For nearly forty years, the name Otagiri meant quality giftware in American homes. The Otagiri Mercantile Company (OMC) was a San Francisco importer that sourced its ceramics from Japanese workshops from the 1950s onward, at a time when “Made in Japan” carried an unfair reputation for shoddiness. Otagiri’s answer was craftsmanship: heavier, whiter porcelain, glossy hand-finished glazes, and — most famously — music boxes fitted with reliable brass mechanical movements, most of them made by Sankyo of Japan. The pieces carried the round Otagiri foil sticker, and collectors learned to look for it. When the company closed its doors in 1994, its output quietly passed from giftware into collectible territory, and today there is a dedicated community that hunts the musical figurines, carousels, and holiday pieces above all.

The unicorn was a natural star for Otagiri’s line — the 1970s and 1980s were the golden age of unicorn imagery, when

the creature decorated everything from notebooks to black-light posters — and Otagiri rendered her classically: a glossy white porcelain figure in a proud rearing pose, horn lifted, mane flowing, mounted on a fluted pedestal base with the wind-up movement hidden beneath. No chips, no cracks, and the music still plays, which is everything to a collector of these pieces.

Her tune is one of the great standards. Herman Hupfeld wrote *"As Time Goes By"* in 1931 for the Broadway show *Everybody's Welcome*, but it was Dooley Wilson's rendition as Sam the pianist in *Casablanca* (1942) that made it immortal — a song about love and memory that never goes out of fashion, wound here into a small porcelain unicorn that carries it as sweetly today as she did forty years ago.

"Wind the little key and 1942 comes back: a kiss is still a kiss, a sigh is still a sigh."

Features & Description

- Vintage Otagiri (Otagiri Mercantile Company, Japan) porcelain musical figurine
- Rearing white unicorn with flowing mane and defined horn
- Fluted pedestal base with wind-up music movement beneath
- Plays "As Time Goes By" (Herman Hupfeld, 1931)
- 5.25 inches tall, circa 1970s–1980s
- Glossy off-white glaze; pristine condition, no chips or cracks; music works

Collector's Notes

Otagiri musical figurines are a recognized collecting niche; value assumes clean working condition, which this example appears to have. Retention of the original foil sticker would add modestly. The tune matters to buyers — "As Time Goes By" is among the most beloved standards and pairs beautifully with display. Wind gently and not to full tension to preserve the brass movement, and dust with a soft dry cloth; never immerse, as water damages the mechanism. She makes a natural companion piece to other Otagiri music boxes in the collection, including the carousel pair.

Mom's Joy Room — *Where Obsolescence Ends and Wonder Begins*
Sandy Wade, Proprietor