



## JOHN ADAMS

*Creative Chair of the Los Angeles Philharmonic*

Composer, conductor, and creative thinker - John Adams occupies a unique position in the world of American music. His works, both operatic and symphonic, stand out among contemporary classical compositions for their depth of expression, brilliance of sound, and the profoundly humanist nature of their themes. Over the past 25 years, Adams' music has played a decisive role in turning the tide of contemporary musical aesthetics away from academic modernism and toward a more expansive, expressive language, entirely characteristic of his New World surroundings.

Born and raised in New England, Adams learned the clarinet from his father and played in marching bands and community orchestras during his formative years. He began composing at age ten and heard his first orchestral pieces performed while still a teenager. The intellectual and artistic traditions of New England, including his studies at Harvard University and attendance at Boston Symphony Orchestra concerts, helped shape him as an artist and thinker. After earning two degrees from Harvard, he moved to Northern California in 1971 and has since lived in the San Francisco Bay area.

Adams taught at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music for ten years before becoming composer-in-residence of the San Francisco Symphony (1982-85) and creator of the orchestra's highly successful and controversial "New and Unusual Music" series. Several of Adams' landmark orchestral works were written for and premiered by the San Francisco Symphony, including *Harmonium* (1980-81), *Grand Pianola Music* (1982), *Harmonielehre* (1984-85), and *El Dorado* (1991).

In 1985, Adams began a collaboration with poet Alice Goodman and stage director Peter Sellars that resulted in two groundbreaking operas: *Nixon in China* (1987) and *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991). Produced worldwide, these works are among the most performed operas of the last two decades. Four further stage collaborations with Sellars followed: the 1995 "songplay", *I Was Looking at the Ceiling and Then I Saw the Sky*, with a libretto by June Jordan; *El Niño* (2000), a multilingual retelling of the nativity story; *Doctor Atomic* (2005), about J. Robert Oppenheimer and the creation of the first atomic bomb; and *A Flowering Tree*, inspired by Mozart's Magic Flute and premiered in Vienna in 2006.

*Nixon in China* received its Metropolitan Opera debut in February of 2011 in six performances of the Sellars production conducted by the composer, including a worldwide live telecast.

Other signature Adams works that have become repertory with orchestras, choruses and ensembles include *Shaker Loops* for strings, *The Dharma at Big Sur* (a concerto for electric violin inspired by the writings of Jack Kerouac), *Doctor Atomic Symphony* (a 22-minute symphony drawn from the opera), Violin Concerto, *Chamber Symphony* and *Son of Chamber Symphony* (choreographed as *Joyride* by Mark Morris).

*City Noir*, a 35-minute symphonic work inspired by "noir" films of the Forties and Fifties, was premiered by the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Gustavo Dudamel in October of 2009 and toured throughout the country the following spring.

*Absolute Jest*, commissioned to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the San Francisco Symphony, is scored for orchestra and solo string quartet and is based on scherzo fragments from late Beethoven quartets.

Harvard University has twice honored Adams with significant awards: in 2004 he received the Centennial Medal of the university's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences "for contributions to society," and in 2007 he received the Harvard Arts Medal. He has received from Northwestern University both the

2004 Michael Ludwig Nemmers Prize in Music Composition (the first ever awarded) and in 2008 an honorary doctorate. Honored with a proclamation by governor Arnold Schwarzenegger of California for his distinguished service to the arts in his adopted home state, he has also been awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Cambridge and an honorary membership in Phi Beta Kappa. He was honored by his home city of Berkeley, California, for his sixtieth birthday. He was also a 2009 recipient of the NEA Opera Awards. In July 2011, the Juilliard School awarded him an honorary doctorate degree.

John Adams is an active conductor, appearing with the world's greatest orchestras in programs combining his own works with a wide variety of repertoire. In past seasons, he has conducted the New York Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, New World Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and London Symphony Orchestra, among others. He conducted the National Symphony in Washington, DC in a two-week residency in May of 2010 and returned to the San Francisco Symphony later that year as part of an eight-concert focus on his music led by Adams and by music director Michael Tilson Thomas.

Adams has also received critical acclaim for his creative programming. In 2003, Lincoln Center presented a festival titled "John Adams: An American Master," the most extensive festival that the venue has ever devoted to a living composer. As the Richard and Barbara Debs Composer's Chair at Carnegie Hall from 2003-07, Adams conducted the first public concert in Carnegie's Zankel Hall and founded the annual "In Your Ear" festival. In 2006, he curated the hugely popular "Minimalist Jukebox" and "West Coast/Left Coast" festivals for the Los Angeles Philharmonic. He is a frequent guest with both the London Symphony Orchestra and the BBC Symphony at London's Barbican Centre and the BBC Proms at Albert Hall. He is currently the Creative Chair for the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

In 1985, Nonesuch Records released Adams' *Harmonielehre*, a landmark recording of American symphonic music. Since then, Nonesuch has released first recordings of all of his works, both symphonic and theatrical. Nonesuch's ten-disc set, *The John Adams Earbox*, documents his recorded music through 2000.

Adams' music plays a dynamic role in the highly acclaimed Tilda Swinton film *I Am Love*, directed by Luca Guadagnino. His music has also been used in films by Martin Scorsese and Barbet Schroeder.

In addition to being a composer and conductor John Adams is also a productive and provocative writer. He maintains a popular blog about music and literature called "Hell Mouth," and his writings have appeared in *The New Yorker*, the *New York Times Book Review* and the *Times* of London. *Hallelujah Junction* – Adams' volume of memoirs and commentary on American musical life – appeared in 2008, by Farrar, Straus & Giroux in the U.S., and by Faber & Faber in the U.K. The book won the Northern California Book Award for Creative Nonfiction and was named one of the "most notable books of the year" by *The New York Times*.

The official John Adams website is [www.earbox.com](http://www.earbox.com).

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