

JOHN ADAMS BIOGRAPHY

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 40 years, Adams's 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. Many of Adams's landmark orchestral works were written for and premiered by the San Francisco Symphony, including *Harmonium* (1981), *Grand Pianola Music* (1982), *Harmonielehre* (1985) and *Absolute Jest* (2012).

In 1985, Adams began a collaboration with stage director Peter Sellars that has resulted in three decades of groundbreaking operas and oratorios: *Nixon in China* (1987), *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991), both to libretti by Alice Goodman, *El Niño* (2000), *Doctor Atomic* (2005), *A Flowering Tree* (2006), *The Gospel According to the Other Mary* (2012) and *Girls of the Golden West* (2017). Of his first opera, *The New Yorker Magazine* said, "Not since *Porgy and Bess* has an American opera won such universal acclaim as *Nixon in China*."

A winner of numerous Grammy awards, Adams' music is exceptionally well represented on recordings. In June 2022 Nonesuch Records will release the 40-disc "John Adams Collected Works," a box set spanning four decades of his music including all of his operas, orchestral and chamber music. "The John Adams

Edition" by the Berliner Philharmoniker, a multi-CD and DVD released in 2017 is a compilation of his music features performances conducted by Rattle, Dudamel, Petrenko, Gilbert and Adams himself.

Adams's new piano concerto, *Must the Devil Have All the Good Tunes?* was premiered and recorded for Deutsche Gramophone by Yuja Wang with the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Gustavo Dudamel. Pianists Vikingur Olafsson and Jeremy Denk have also taken on the work in performances in the US and Europe.

Adams's newest opera, his sixth, *Antony and Cleopatra*, will premiere in September at the San Francisco Opera in a production directed by Elkhannah Pulitzer with a libretto by Adams drawn from Shakespeare, Plutarch and Virgil.

Adams is the 2019 recipient of the Erasmus Prize, awarded to him by King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands "for notable contributions to European culture," the only American composers to be so honored in the prize's 61-year history.

Both Harvard and Yale universities have conferred honorary doctorates on Adams, as have Northwestern University, the Juilliard School and Cambridge University in England. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger of California honored him with the Governor's Award for his distinguished service to the arts in his adopted home state. His Violin Concerto won the 1993 Grawemeyer Award, and *On the Transmigration of Souls*, commissioned by the New York Philharmonic to commemorate the first anniversary of 9/11, received the 2003 Pulitzer Prize in Music. Other awards include Spain's BBVA Frontiers of Knowledge Award, Dresden's Gläshutter Festival Prize.

John Adams is a much sought-after conductor, appearing with the world's major orchestras, including the London Symphony Orchestra, the Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Berliner Philharmoniker, the BBC Symphony, the Santa Cecilia Orchestra and the Metropolitan Opera. His programming combines his own works with a wide variety of repertoire ranging from Beethoven, Mozart and Sibelius to Ives, Stravinsky, Carter, Reich, Glass, Zappa, and Ellington.

In the current season Adams returns to conduct the orchestras of Cleveland, Los Angeles, Saint Louis, Seattle as well as appearing with European orchestras in Lahti, Rotterdam, Zurich and Reykjavík.

Since 2009 Adams has held the position of Creative Chair with the Los Angeles Philharmonic where he has been instrumental in the success of that orchestra's highly creative Green Umbrella new music series.

Through his conducting and commissioning of new works, Adams has become a significant mentor of the younger generation of American composers. His long history of performing new music was recognized by his receiving the 2021 Ditson Award from Columbia University "for exceptional commitment to the performance of American composers.

The Pacific Harmony Foundation, created with his wife, the photographer Deborah O'Grady, supports commissions and performances of new works and musical education initiatives throughout the country. Adams' educational activities reach from the local (the John Adams Young Composers program in his hometown of Berkeley, California) to the national and international (the Juilliard School, the Royal Academy of Music and the New World Symphony).

John Adams is also a highly esteemed and provocative writer. He is a frequent contributor to the New York Times Book Review and has written for The New Yorker and The London Times. *Hallelujah Junction*, Adams's much praised volume of memoirs and commentary on American musical life, was named one of the "most notable books of the year" by The New York Times, whose review said of it "*Hallelujah Junction* stands with books by Hector Berlioz and Louis Armstrong among the most readably incisive autobiographies of major musical figures."

The official John Adams website is www.earbox.com.

February, 2022