

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.

Adams has longstanding connections to both the San Francisco Symphony and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Many of his orchestral works have had their premieres with these distinguished orchestras, including *Harmonium*, *Harmonielehre*, *Absolute Jest*, *The Dharma at Big Sur* and *The Gospel According to the Other Mary*. Adams's stage works, most done in collaboration with director Peter Sellars, have resulted in more than three decades of ground breaking 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). *Antony and Cleopatra* (2022), with a libretto adapted by the composer from Shakespeare and Virgil, opened the centennial season of the San Francisco Opera in a production by Elkhanah Pulitzer.

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 2023 *New York Times Arts & Leisure* cover story called Adams "arguably our greatest living composer."

Adams has received numerous Grammy awards, many of them for his over thirty releases on Nonesuch Records. To celebrate his 75th birthday Nonesuch Records released its "John Adams Collected Works," a 40-CD box covering his entire output since 1973.

Both Harvard and Yale universities have conferred honorary doctorates on Adams, as have Northwestern University, the Juilliard School, the San Francisco Conservatory and Cambridge University. 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.

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 Chicago Symphony, and the Metropolitan Opera. His programming combines his own works with a wide variety of repertoire ranging from Beethoven, Mozart and Wagner to Ives, Stravinsky, Carter, Glass, and Ellington.

The coming season will include a new production at the Metropolitan Opera of Adams's *El Niño* in a staging by Lileana Blain-Cruz; the European premiere of *Antony and Cleopatra* in Barcelona, staged by Elkhanah Pulitzer; several productions of *Nixon in China* and *Doctor Atomic* in Germany and Holland; and a new Nonesuch release of *Girls of the Golden West* with the composer conducting the Los Angeles Philharmonic. In March of 2024 Simon Rattle will premiere Adams's latest orchestral work, *Frenzy*, with the London Symphony Orchestra.

Through his conducting and commissioning of new works, Adams has become a significant mentor of the younger generation 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, the New World Symphony and the Berliner Philharmoniker

Akademie). As an advocate of young composers, Adams has conducted over 100 premieres of new works over the course of his career. He received the 2021 Ditson Conductor's Award from Columbia University in recognition for his "exceptional commitment to American composers."

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, 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.

Since 2009 Adams has been Creative Chair of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. The official John Adams website is www.earbox.com.

July 2023