



CONTEMPORARY WORLD MUSICIANS

Classical

Pop

Rock

Opera

Jazz

Folk

Country

R&B

World

Blues

Rap

And Much More

Edited by Clifford Thompson

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INTRODUCTION

No doubt the first thing that should be explained about *Contemporary World Musicians* is that the book is not dedicated exclusively to what is often called "world" music, i.e., music of non-Western peoples lumped for the sake of convenience into one category. Rather, in keeping with the tradition established by the H. W. Wilson series *World Authors* and *World Artists*, this is a volume containing biographical profiles of musicians working in many genres, all over the world.

How does one select the musicians for such a book without incurring accusations of either wrongful omission or wrongful inclusion? The short answer is, one cannot. Those involved in the wholehearted attempt to do so, however, include two highly renowned consultants, Lewis Porter of Rutgers University and Justin Dello Joio of New York University; a very talented and dedicated in-house staff; and others who are knowledgeable in specific areas of music. What has resulted is a list of 404 *living* performers, composers, bandleaders, and conductors, each of whom has done one or more of the following: (1) originated, or made original contributions to, his or her respective genre; (2) emerged as a world-class practitioner of a particular area of music; (3) commanded a level of popularity that, all issues of musical brilliance aside, argues for his/her inclusion in this book; and (4) demonstrated staying power as a serious, highly regarded artist. Gunther Schuller, for example, earned a place in this book by his pioneering of what he terms "third-stream" music, through which he has sought to combine elements of classical music and jazz. Michael Jackson certainly did not invent pop music, but at his peak as a performer he raised it to a rare level of excitement. Lee Perry's name may not be a household word, but without him reggae would not exist as we know it today. Then there are the names that speak for themselves, among them Ray Charles; Aretha Franklin; Loretta Lynn; Paul McCartney; Joni Mitchell; Luciano Pavarotti; Beverly Sills; and Isaac Stern.

The biographical profiles in *Contemporary World Musicians* range in length approximately from 500 to 3,500 words. The length of an article is not necessarily an indication of the musician's relative importance; in our efforts to profile first-rate musicians from as many genres as possible, we have included some artists for whom there are few secondary sources of biographical information. What all of these articles have in common, regardless of length, is that each defines the subject's contribution to his or her area of music.

One of the pleasures of editing this volume has been the discovery of the many connections between seemingly disparate artists—connections that make the wonderfully diverse world of music seem also intimate, and that reaffirm the notion of music as, in the shopworn phrase, "the international language." So that the general reader (for whom this book is intended) may experience some of this, the book is complete with a musicians' index, in which names are followed by a list of the articles in which they appear. Consulting the index, one can learn, for example, that the Rolling Stones took their name from a song by Muddy Waters; that the New Zealand-born opera singer Kiri Te Kanawa admires the work of Tina Turner; that the pianist Krystian Zimerman, as a boy in bleak postwar Poland, played the music of the black American jazzmen Art Tatum and Erroll Garner; that the jazz pianist Herbie Hancock was greatly influenced by the classical composers Igor Stravinsky and Karlheinz Stockhausen; that the classical conductor Kent Nagano introduced the music of Frank Zappa into the repertoire of the Berkeley Symphony Orchestra; that Grace Slick would like to be reincarnated as Alanis Morissette; that Bob Dylan called Smokey Robinson "America's greatest living poet." The list goes on.

In addition to the consultants and staff contributors, I would like to thank the following people for their invaluable advice during the preparation of this volume: Tracy Brower; Tony Coulter; Amadou Diallo; Howard Mandel; Frank McGuckin; Joseph Miller; Elizabeth Schick; Joe Sora; and my wife, Amy Peck.

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Clifford Thompson
December 1998

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Abbado, Claudio

June 26, 1933– Conductor

Claudio Abbado's galvanism, rhythmic energy, thrust, and drive place him in the tradition of his great countryman Arturo Toscanini. Like Toscanini, he conducts completely from memory, without relying on the orchestral score, and is known for the clarity of his interpretations and faithfulness to the composers' intentions. After receiving the Koussevitsky Award at the Berkshire Music Center in 1958 and winning the Dimitri Mitropoulos International Music Competition in New York in 1963, Abbado went on to worldwide recognition, becoming permanent conductor and musical director of the Teatro alla Scala, in Milan, and permanent conductor of the Vienna Philharmonic. He served from 1986 to 1991 as music director of the Vienna State Opera. Abbado was also the principal guest conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra and often served as guest conductor of the New York Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony, the Cleveland Orchestra, and the Philadelphia Orchestra. He was named Generalmusikdirektor (Music Director) of the City of Vienna in 1987. His recordings have won major international prizes; a recording of Schubert's *Fierrabras*, on which Abbado was the conductor, won a Grammy Award in 1992, and his recording of Hindemith's *Kammermusik* no. 1 with Finales 1921 with members of the Berliner Philharmonic captured that honor in 1998.

With music as his birthright, Claudio Abbado was born in Milan, Italy, in 1933 to Michelangelo Abbado and his wife. His father was a violinist who taught at the Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory in Milan; his mother, who wrote children's books, was also a pianist. One of the Abbado brothers, Marcello, became a pianist and director of the Rossini Conservatory, in Pesaro, and the other, Gabriele, an architect. His nephew Roberto Abbado became an internationally known conductor. Abbado's sister plays the piano. Michelangelo Abbado often organized chamber music trios and quartets, using the members of his own family. Claudio Abbado studied piano and composition privately before enrolling at the Verdi Conservatory and often found it difficult to carry a normal class load at the local liceo at the same time.

Among Abbado's ineradicable childhood memories are the Nazi occupation of Milan, during which his mother was imprisoned, and the family's vain attempt to shelter a Jewish child in their home during the last month of the war. His earliest musical recollections include a performance of *Aida*, conducted by Antonino Votto at La Scala with Chloe Elmo in the role of Amneris, and Arturo Toscanini's postwar concerts of Verdi, Wagner, and Beethoven at La Scala. Thanks to his father he saw both Toscanini and Wilhelm Furtwängler in rehearsal. He soon made up his mind that the more quiet style of Furtwängler was more to his liking than Toscanini's dictatorial shouts, according to Edward Greenfield, writing in the *Guardian* (October 22, 1989). He also watched Bruno Walter conduct, both in Vienna and in Milan, and among his other early influences were Victor de Sabata and Rafael Kubelik.

At the age of eight Claudio Abbado decided to become a conductor, when he heard Antonio Guarnieri lead the orchestra of La Scala in a performance of Debussy's *Nocturnes* that prompted him to make a note of the composition in his diary as one that he would like to conduct. In Milan in 1948 Abbado met Leonard Bern-

stein for the first time, on which occasion Bernstein told the adolescent, "You have the eyes to be a conductor."

After completing his studies at the Verdi Conservatory in Milan, Abbado enrolled in 1956 in the Vienna Academy of Music, where he studied conducting under Hans Swarowsky, who was known for his advocacy of economy of gesture. From Swarowsky, Abbado learned literally to conduct with one hand tied behind his back. Along with his mentor, Abbado believes that "the conductor should be able to change the sonority of an orchestra even with movements of his eyes. He should get what he wants with just a flick of his head." His fellow student and close friend at the Vienna Academy of Music was Zubin Mehta. Unable to gain entry into local orchestra rehearsals, the two used their bass voices to advantage by joining the celebrated Musikfreunde chorus, a tactic that enabled them to observe at first hand Bruno Walter's approach to Mozart's *Requiem* and Herbert von Karajan's preparation of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* and Brahms's *Deutsches Requiem*.

Conducting works by Brahms, Schumann, Tchaikovsky, and Hindemith, Abbado made his professional debut in 1958 in Trieste, Italy. That city was also the scene of his opera debut, which took place in 1959 with his conducting of Prokofiev's *The Love for Three Oranges*. Engagements followed in cities in the United States and in London, Amsterdam, Berlin, Florence, Edinburgh, Prague, Vienna, and Salzburg. Abbado impressed visitors to the Vienna Festival and the Salzburg Festival in 1965 and to the Edinburgh Festival, Lucerne Festival, and Prague Spring Festival in 1966.

In 1958 Abbado and Mehta traveled to the United States together, to spend a summer at the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood, Massachusetts. Abbado won the Serge Koussevitsky conducting prize. (Zubin Mehta placed second.) Because he hated competitions, the Dimitri Mitropoulos International Music Competition for young conductors in 1963 proved a more arduous experience for Abbado, although he was one of the three winners, a distinction that brought with it a \$5,000 prize and a season as assistant conductor with the New York Philharmonic. An assistant conductor must be ready to step in if the regular conductor becomes indisposed and continually works with both the conductor and the orchestra.

When, on April 7, 1963, Abbado shared the podium in Philharmonic Hall (later Avery Fisher Hall) with his cowinners, Pedro Calderón of Argentina and Zdenek Kosler of Czechoslovakia, Harold C. Schonberg of the *New York Times* reported: "The most idiosyncratic and much the showman of the three is Mr. Abbado. He conducts with a good deal of personality and a somewhat strenuous podium manner, with a good deal of body English. He knows he is before the public, and every gesture, including an imperious way of shaking the hair from his eyes, shows that he has thoroughly researched this aspect of the conductor's art." Schonberg notwithstanding, Abbado was actually shy and disliked theatrics.

Abbado's year in New York City as assistant conductor with the New York Philharmonic turned out to be difficult, since he did not speak English at the time, and he ran into trouble with the acoustics of Philharmonic Hall—later to be corrected. He did, however, learn a great deal from George Szell and found Leonard Bernstein "very kind." He highlighted his year of internship with Bernstein as assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic with a January 30, 1964, performance of works by Mozart, Prokofiev, and Tchaikovsky that won over the local critics completely. After hearing his inter-

pretation of Prokofiev's ballet suite *Chout*, Harold C. Schonberg pronounced Abbado a talented conductor with a temperament and special affinity for Prokofiev. Finding Abbado "an elegant podium figure with real control over the audience as well as over the musicians," Eric Salzman, writing in the *New York Herald Tribune* (January 31, 1964), admired his drive, excitement, controlled color, and big sound.

Returning to Europe, Abbado was invited to conduct at the 1965 Salzburg Festival after Herbert von Karajan attended one of his performances in Berlin. He made his Salzburg debut late in August 1965 by conducting Mahler's monumental Second Symphony (*Resurrection*) without benefit of a score. Among the critics in attendance who were favorably impressed was Michael Marcus of the *Guardian* (August 27, 1965), who cabled back to his newspaper: "Abbado proved that he knew what he wanted and how to get it from the Vienna Philharmonic. He showed a rare feeling for the grotesque elements in Mahler and displayed a keen regard for dynamic contrast and nuance. Perhaps the overall effect was a trifle calculated, with a consequent lack of humanity in the finale, but there was no doubting Abbado's control and the thoroughness of his technique."

Reporting on the Edinburgh Festival the following year, another *Guardian* (September 5, 1966) critic, Neville Cardus, speculated: "It is possible, even likely, that the young conductor Claudio Abbado will, within the next few years, bestride the orchestral world, masterful and dominating." Abbado led the New Philharmonia Orchestra in Edinburgh's Usher Hall to the heights of instrumental virtuosity, Cardus observed. On the occasion of his second London appearance with the London Symphony Orchestra at the Royal Festival Hall in the following month, the *Observer's* music critic, Stephen Walsh, expressed the wish that Abbado's association with the orchestra would prove permanent, since everything he conducted was exciting and memorable. In his October 30, 1966, review of a concert that included compositions by Prokofiev, Schubert, and Tchaikovsky in addition to Mahler's Sixth Symphony, Walsh noted that Abbado had clearly surmounted the greatest obstacle in a young conductor's path—that of winning the respect and confidence of a large body of experienced and critical judges, the members of the orchestra.

When Abbado fulfilled a return engagement with the New York Philharmonic at its Lincoln Center home in the autumn of 1967, he was saluted by Winthrop Sargeant of the *New Yorker* (November 11, 1967) as "certainly one of the outstanding talents in the field." According to Sargeant, in conducting works by Brahms, Dvořák, Berg, and Richard Strauss with "a degree of tension and vigor that only a master conductor could sustain," Abbado turned a rather conventional program into a brilliant event. Noting that Abbado had undergone considerable artistic development since his apprentice year with the New York Philharmonic, Harriett Johnson of the *New York Post* (November 3, 1967) called him "a born conductor and on the way to being a great one." Critics who attended his New York and Washington concerts with the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1970 acclaimed his more relaxed manner on the podium, his intense musicality and energy, and his devotion to the intention of the composer. In the *New Yorker* (February 13, 1972), Winthrop Sargeant observed: "Claudio Abbado seems to be the leader among the younger conductors in the continuation of the Toscanini tradition. He is a skillful man with the baton, and a great impeller of orchestras in fine, dramatic performances." Abbado returned to New York for a series of concerts with the Cleveland Orchestra in February 1973.

Aided by Paolo Grassi, the new Socialist manager of La Scala, Claudio Abbado instituted some radical changes after becoming permanent conductor and musical director of the Milan opera house in 1968. Both men wanted to break what they considered the stranglehold of the upper middle industrialist class on La Scala by enticing young people, workers, and impoverished music lovers into an auditorium that the bewigged and bejeweled too long considered their exclusive stomping ground. Produced on a low budget, Abbado's 1972 *Aida* dispensed with the usual Cecil B. De Mille panoply of horses, camels, elephants, and Nubian slaves to devote more attention to the refinements of Verdi's score. After becoming the permanent musical director in June 1969 Abbado doubled the length of the La Scala opera season to four months. By introducing such avant-garde composers as Dallapiccola and Nono into its usually staid concert repertory, he increased the number of seats vacated in protest by conservative subscribers. At the end of the June 1972 season Abbado conducted an "antifascist program" of music by Verdi, Prokofiev, and Beethoven. In a communal statement the workers on the staff of La Scala explained to the citizens of Milan that their aim was to achieve "a meeting between the world of culture and that of labor," to fortify democracy, and to promote social reform. Abbado remained the music director of La Scala until 1986. He was a founder and initiator of the Filarmonica della Scala (the La Scala Philharmonic) in 1982.

In 1979 Abbado was named music director of the London Symphony Orchestra, remaining until 1988. He became music director of the Vienna State Opera in 1986, with a contract that was to run until 1997. The Vienna State Opera orchestra also doubles as the Vienna Philharmonic, and, although Abbado resigned as music director of the Vienna State Opera, he continued as music director of the orchestra, which is considered one of the world's greatest. In the *New York Times* (February 28, 1991), John Rockwell, reviewing a Vienna Philharmonic concert in Carnegie Hall, in New York, termed the orchestra "archetypally Viennese," representing a "conservative musical tradition." It was "one of the mandates of . . . Abbado," however, Rockwell maintained, to modernize the orchestra by making "the music of Schönberg's Second Viennese School a part of the orchestra's central heritage." In the Carnegie Hall concert, Rockwell found that the Vienna Philharmonic under Abbado's baton "played the Schönberg gorgeously. . . . The music seethed with all the lush chromaticism that its composer intended for this passionate, rhapsodic aria." Bernard Holland, reviewing the same series of concerts for the same newspaper (March 3, 1991) remarked on Abbado's conducting of Mahler's First Symphony that he gave "Mahler's brass" a somewhat "narrowed brilliance . . . not the Viennese breadth we are so used to." Both critics noted Abbado's attachment to orchestrations and instrumental color, but Holland concluded that "Abbado is too serious and too wise a musician to flex his conductorial muscle for its own sake," and was not creating an "internationalized, hence faceless, Vienna Philharmonic." Reviewing the 1991 release of Modest Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina*, recorded from a live performance in 1989 with the Vienna opera, Peter Davis in *New York* (March 18, 1991) praised the recording, although he felt that Abbado's general conducting style lacked "atmosphere or electricity" even if Abbado was "a conductor with a firm grasp on a score's basic materials, a willingness to trust the music, and an ability to keep a virtuoso orchestra playing with vigor and at top capacity." Davis remarked

that "Abbado responds more passionately and less self-consciously when he can take on . . . works not in the standard repertory. . . . The *Khovanshchina* he conducted at the Vienna State Opera in 1989 sounds . . . alive and committed. Obviously much care and affection was lavished on this unfinished problem opera, including the wise decision to perform the recently rediscovered final chorus that Stravinsky composed in 1913 for Diaghilev's production in Paris—a moving and beautiful piece that should now become a permanent part of the score."

At the time of his resignation as music director of the Vienna State Opera, reports circulated about unhappiness over the amount of time Abbado spent in Berlin, according to the *New York Times* (October 11, 1991). He had been named music director of the Berlin Philharmonic in 1989, after the death of Herbert von Karajan, its previous leader. Abbado had been mentioned as a possible leader for both the Chicago Symphony and the New York Philharmonic. The music directorship that he accepted, however, was that of the Berlin Philharmonic. As is the case when any major orchestra that has been led by a world renowned maestro comes under a new baton, the world watched closely Abbado's stewardship of the Berlin Philharmonic after Herbert von Karajan's generally acknowledged brilliance. Abbado made several innovations in the programming of the Berlin Philharmonic. He introduced thematic concerts: in 1992 the theme was music inspired by the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin. Another of his themes was the Faust legend, which was set to music by Berlioz, Liszt, Schumann, and Mahler, among others. He also used the story of Oedipus, as set to music, as a thematic inspiration and scheduled music based on Shakespeare. In addition, Abbado developed for every season a series of concerts in which the music of Beethoven is contrasted with the music of modern composers. He has won acceptance for 20th-century composers from Schönberg to present-day masters. Whereas members of the Berlin Philharmonic had considered Karajan too highhanded in imposing his choice of a female clarinetist and had rejected her, Abbado has succeeded in getting the orchestra to accept women as players.

Critical response to Abbado's leadership of the Berlin Philharmonic was typified by Edward Rothstein's in the *New York Times* (October 30, 1993). Describing a performance of Mahler's Ninth Symphony in Carnegie Hall, Rothstein observed: "Abbado was an eloquent singer of orchestral melody, giving a noble shape to lines, controlling dynamics from quadruple forte to quadruple piano, and making dance rhythms swing with subtle accents." John Rockwell, another *New York Times* critic, summed up (October 24, 1993): "English, French, and German critics have found nobility in Mr. Abbado's interpretations and the orchestra's playing. The *Neue Zeit* of Berlin praised Mr. Abbado's 'high spiritual concentration and remarkable sensitivity to sound,' and the *Berliner Morgenpost* wrote of the 'almost overpowering conviction' of his Mahler Fifth Symphony with the Philharmonic."

Among the opera recordings that Claudio Abbado has made for Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft are Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* and *La Cenerentola*. His live performance recordings include Schubert's *Fierrabras* and Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina*. Symphonies of Bruckner and Dvorak, as well as the complete symphonic works of Beethoven, Brahms, Mahler, Mendelssohn, and Schubert have been recorded by Abbado. His recording of Hindemith's *Kammermusik* no. 1 with Finale 1921 with members of the Berliner Philharmonic won a Grammy in 1998.

His awards include the Philips Prize he won in 1965 at Salzburg, the Diapason Prize in 1966 and 1967, the Grand Prix du Disque in 1967, the Deutscher Schallplatten Preis in 1968, the Mozart-Medaille, Vienna in 1973, the Gold-Medaille Internationale Gustav Mahler Gesellschaft, Vienna in 1985, the Gran Croce d'Italia in 1984, the Cross of the Legion d'Honneur in 1992, the Bundesverdienstkreuz in 1992, and the Ehrenring of the City of Vienna in 1994. Abbado has received honorary degrees from Aberdeen (1986), Ferrara (1990), and Cambridge (1994) Universities.

Abbado makes his home with his wife, Gabriella, a dress designer. He has a dazzling smile, but while he is on the podium his intense absorption in the music at hand sometimes gives listeners the impression of a kind of quiet ferocity. "I do not specialize," he once told an interviewer. "I like to be open to everything. All my life I have hated to be closed in. You must look for the possibilities . . . there are so many interesting things in life." His cultural interests are wide enough to encompass painting, architecture, contemporary books, and theater; the sports he has enjoyed include tennis, soccer, skiing, swimming, and ping pong. He has been considered a political leftist. "I'm for freedom," he has said. "Everything that is not for freedom I protest." Self-critical and patient, he believes that since the life of the artist is a constantly unfolding process, a musician never truly "arrives." John Rockwell termed his leadership of the Berlin Philharmonic, which he is set to relinquish as of 2002, "intellectually alert and musically refreshing," praising his ability "to weld great individual talent into ensemble excellence."

SUGGESTED READING: *Guardian* p26 Oct. 22, 1989, with photo; *New York Times* II p15 Feb. 4, 1973, with photo, C p15 Feb. 28, 1991, I p64 Mar. 3, 1991, II p23 Oct. 24, 1993, with photo, C p15 Nov. 2, 1993; *Newsweek* p113 Oct. 21, 1968, with photo; *New York* p78 Mar. 18, 1991, with photo; *Opera News* p14 Nov. 23, 1968, with photo, *International Who's Who 1972-73*; *Who's Who in America 1972-73*; *Who's Who in the World 1971-72*

SELECTED RECORDINGS: *Mendelssohn: Violin Concertos*, 1987; *Mozart: Symphonies Nos. 25 and 31*, 1992; *Mozart: Piano Concertos Nos. 17 and 21*, 1993; *Debussy: Pelleas et Melisande*, 1993; *Wagner: Lohengrin*, 1995; *Mozart: The Marriage of Figaro*, 1996; *Hindemith: Kammermusik* No. 1, 1997

Adams, John

Feb. 15, 1947—Composer; conductor

The composer John Adams began his career in the early 1970s as a disciple of the minimalist Steve Reich, but he soon abandoned pure minimalism to embrace the full range of musical history. Described by Edo de Waart, who has conducted most of his works, as being "in the forefront of a group that believed music didn't have to be ugly to be contemporary," Adams's works have become among the most widely performed in the United States, but critics have been sharply divided over the quality of his compositions, including his controversial first opera, *Nixon in China* (1987). Neither his second opera, *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991), nor such recent orchestra pieces as *The Wound-Dresser* (1989) and *El*



Deborah O'Grady

John Adams

Dorado (1992) have fared much better in the eyes of critics. His music has been ridiculed for being merely decorative or too "accessible," and his frequent use of historical musical references has led some critics to brand him a purveyor of clichés. "My roots are profoundly affected by American popular music, jazz, ragtime, swing, rock," he explained to Stephanie von Buchau in an interview for an *Opera News* (October 1987) profile. "I'm not a quoter, nor a musical chameleon like William Bolcom, but my personal style does not deny its roots. In today's so-called classical music, we've lost track of the vernacular."

John Coolidge Adams was born on February 15, 1947 in Worcester, Massachusetts, the son of Carl John and Elinore Mary (Coolidge) Adams. Both his parents were jazz musicians. Reared in Massachusetts and neighboring New Hampshire, he began taking clarinet lessons at an early age. By the time he was 13, he had completed several orchestral compositions. While he was still in his teens, Adams saw some of his pieces performed by an orchestra of teachers and patients at a New Hampshire state hospital for the mentally ill. "I look back on that experience as being the genetic code of my musical personality," he said years later, as quoted in *People* (December 14, 1987). "You never knew in the course of a concert if someone was just going to go completely bananas. There was a sense of music being very emotional and meaningful, yet capable of complete, off-the-wall insanity."

After graduating from high school in 1965, Adams entered Harvard University, where he studied musical composition under the composers Leon Kirchner, Roger Sessions, Earl Kim, and Mario di Bonaventura. He himself composed a number of works during his undergraduate years, most notably *Electric Wake*, written in 1968. He also played clarinet in performances of compositions by other students. The first Harvard undergraduate ever permitted to submit a musical composition as his required senior thesis, Adams earned an A.B. degree, magna cum laude, in 1969, then stayed on at the university for graduate study. During the summer of

1970, he took time out to serve as composer-in-residence at the annual Marlboro Festival in Vermont. Numbered among his completed works from this period is *Heavy Metal*. Adams had intended to study toward obtaining a doctorate, but as the months passed he began to question the value of a classical-music education. After receiving his M.A. degree in 1971, he left the university and moved to California.

Settling in the San Francisco area, Adams worked for a time as a forklift operator on the Oakland docks, then, in 1972, he was hired as an instructor at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, a post he held until 1982. The conservatory was known for nurturing innovation, and during his tenure there Adams directed the school's New Music Ensemble. In his free time, he continued to compose, adding to his list of credits *Hocky Seen* in 1972; *American Standard*, *Mary Lou: A Routine*, and *Kataadn* in 1973; and *Onyx* and *Etudes and a Continuum* in 1976. It was during this period that Adams began to listen seriously to John Cage's esoteric compositions and to experiment with electronic music. Perhaps most important, he met and became friends with two of the early exponents of minimalism in music—the composers Terry Riley and Steve Reich. The tonality of minimalism immediately appealed to Adams: "It expressed the way I experience music—on a very visceral level," he explained to David Sterritt of the *Christian Science Monitor* (October 19, 1987). "Tonality has this incredible potential for human expressiveness. I find it was really a sacrifice when a composer started writing atonal music."

Reich's music, in particular, profoundly affected Adams, as he told K. Robert Schwarz in an interview for a *New York Times* (January 14, 1987) profile. "I heard *Drumming* in 1974 and I was quite astonished by its rigor, because that was during a period when we were all doing these messy free-form aleatoric pieces. A couple of years later I conducted *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ*. I liked the very long, sustained harmonic areas, and then the quick modulations, and that became the generating idea behind my own *Phrygian Gates*."

As more than one critic has pointed out, both *Phrygian Gates*, a piano piece completed in 1977, and *Shaker Loops*, written for a string septet in 1978, show Reich's influence. When the two pieces were performed as part of a Reich Music Foundation concert at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City in January 1979, John Rockwell, who reviewed the concert for the *New York Times* (January 10, 1979), dismissed *Phrygian Gates* as "minimalism reduced from the sublimely simple to the simplistic." Rockwell greatly preferred the melodic *Shaker Loops*, which he described as "magical." A recording of the two pieces, released on the 1750 Arch label, was named one of the "best of the year" by the *New York Times*, the *Soho Weekly News*, and *High Fidelity* magazine.

In 1978 Edo de Waart, then the conductor of the San Francisco Symphony, hired Adams as the orchestra's new-music adviser. In that post, Adams founded and directed the controversial New and Unusual Music Series, the forerunner of the nationwide Meet the Composer program, which arranges for young composers to serve as advisers and resident composers with major American orchestras. Adams himself later participated in the Meet the Composer program, serving as composer-in-residence to the San Francisco Symphony from 1982 until 1985. Among the many pieces he created during his tenure with the San Francisco Symphony were *Onyx*, *Grounding*, *Sermon*, *Strident Bands*, *Wave-*

Makers, Common Tones, Bridge of Dreams, and, perhaps most important, *Harmonium* and *Grand Pianola Music*.

Commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony for the inaugural 1980–81 season of its Louise M. Davies Symphony Hall, *Harmonium* set to music poems by John Donne and Emily Dickinson. Adams's first work for chorus, *Harmonium* impressed many listeners, among them Alan Rich, who, in his review for *Newsweek* (March 18, 1985) of an ECM recording of the cantata by the San Francisco Symphony, rated the piece "among the major choral works of any era." Rich especially admired the "amazing range of sound," from "a mumbled hollowness" to "an exultation as of tongues of audible flame," that Adams managed to draw from his singers.

Grand Pianola Music, a high-spirited frolic for wind, brass, and percussion ensemble, three female vocalists, and two pianos, expanded and transcended minimalism to such an extent that it shocked sobersided audiences and alienated many of Adams's erstwhile supporters. Described by one critic as "Charles Ives on amphetamines," the piece is a conglomeration of allusions to American popular music of the early 20th century, particularly marches and player-piano tunes. When *Grand Pianola Music* was performed by the New York Philharmonic as part of a contemporary-music festival at Avery Fisher Hall in New York City on June 4, 1983, it was lustily booed by a sizable segment of the audience—a "telling tribute to its vitality," in the opinion of the *New York Times*'s John Rockwell. Nevertheless, a recording of the work, paired with Steve Reich's *Eight Lines*, by the Solisti New York under the direction of Ransom Wilson on the EMI/Angel label, became a best-seller.

The controversy surrounding *Grand Pianola Music* temporarily silenced Adams, but he soon rediscovered his voice, in *Harmonielehre*, an orchestral work that progresses from minimalist repetition to sweeping lyricism, with echoes of Sibelius, Berg, Tchaikovsky, and Mahler. Commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony, the 40-minute composition takes its title from Arnold Schönberg's classic text on the theory of harmony, which was published in 1911. "I chose the title because I have a deep affection for that period when Schönberg was making his break with tonality and composing works like *Gurre-lieder* and *Erwartung*," Adams explained, as quoted in *High Fidelity* (March 1985). "All my pieces start with images. The image for *Harmonielehre* is of immensely powerful, driving, huge chords played in an almost obsessive way."

Harmonielehre received a standing ovation at the Tanglewood Festival of Contemporary Music in August 1985, and a Nonesuch recording of the work by the San Francisco Symphony conducted by Edo de Waart was ranked among the 10 best albums of 1985 by *Time* magazine. The piece also won Adams second prize in the 1986 Kennedy Center Friedheim Awards, which are given annually to promising young American composers of instrumental works. In their generally favorable assessments of *Harmonielehre*, several critics commended Adams for the skill with which he had synthesized classical and modern traditions without sacrificing artistic integrity or craftsmanship. Edward Rothstein, writing in the *New Republic* (December 2, 1985), was among the few dissenters. In his opinion, Adams's "unique combination of bad taste and bad faith" had "undermined" both traditions. Adams's "sole accomplishment," Rothstein argued, was "to join the minimalist audience with the mainstream, offering condescendingly accessible

works that speak to both . . . What [he] has done is to use minimalism as just a tool in his grab bag of clichés, a cover for an absence of thought, a gesture toward the avant-garde in music that is fundamentally directionless."

Speaking in his own defense, Adams has maintained that some of the "old-school critics" seemed to be "offended by the fact that there are some elements in the audience that really *like* the music." As he explained to David Sterritt in the interview for the *Christian Science Monitor*, "This has been a century where, by and large, the best and most influential art has been very difficult and very complex. . . . Ever since I can remember, though, I have been very much affected and inspired by the notion of an art form that provides access on the first experience—that is simple, perhaps, on its most superficial level—but on repeated experiencing can continue to reveal further and further layers of depth."

After hearing *Shaker Loops* at the Monadnock (New Hampshire) Music Festival in the summer of 1982, Peter Sellars, the brash young director whose imaginative stagings of classical plays and operas have won increasing critical respect, discussed with Adams his idea for an opera based on former president Richard Nixon's historic week-long trip to the People's Republic of China in February 1972. Adams was skeptical at first, but Sellars persisted, and over the next few years, Adams began to see the dramatic possibilities. He eventually came to envision the principal figures—President Nixon and his wife, Patricia; Mao Ze-dong and his wife, Jiang Qing; Zhou Enlai; and Henry A. Kissinger, then Nixon's national security adviser—not as political cartoons but as "mythological characters of our time." "The very name Nixon brings in all kinds of things that happened *after* the China episode," Adams explained to David Sterritt. "I think something with that kind of power—to summon up an immediate repertoire of responses—is the perfect thing for an opera. That to me is what myth is all about: a constellation of stimuli which on contact just *explodes* into a wealth of relationships."

Finally, in December 1984, Adams, Sellars, and the poet Alice Goodman, who was to write the libretto, went into a huddle at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., where for three days they studied news reports and television footage of Nixon's visit to China. "Alice and I created our own Nixon, and we fell in love with him. . . ." Adams told Stephanie von Buchau for the *Opera News* profile. "We've focused on his more heroic aspects. He's such an interesting character because he's so vulnerable." Of the other historical figures, he said, "We didn't try to make saints of these people or to rehabilitate them. We tried to make each character speak as eloquently as he or she could." They viewed Mao, for instance, as a "fantastically good poet" whose every utterance was "a kind of riddle," and Jiang Qing as "an iron butterfly." In sharp contrast to the strong-willed Jiang Qing, Pat Nixon was portrayed as "the epitome of the subservient American wife."

After Goodman had completed about half the libretto, Adams set to work on the score, taking as a model Mozart's ironic treatment of serious themes. In creating a musical personality for Nixon, a role to be sung by a baritone, Adams borrowed freely from American popular music, using, for example, swing music of the 1940s to express the sentimental side of the president's nature. To underline Mao's peasant roots, Adams wrote the part for a heldentenor and gave him "very gritty, earthy" music and a funky, Motown-like backup group nicknamed the Maoettes. Carnegie Hall concertgoers got a preview

of *Nixon in China* in January 1987, when Dennis Russell Davies conducted the American Composers Orchestra in a performance of *The Chairman Dances*, a parodistic amalgam of foxtrot rhythms and "plush," to use Adams's word, string lines. Inspired by an image of Mao dancing with Jiang Qing, the piece was subsequently dropped from the score, but its irreverent reinterpretation of vernacular musical idioms set the tone for the opera. A concert version, for two pianos and a synthesizer, of the full score was first performed in public at the Herbst Theater in San Francisco in May 1987. According to published reports, as many as one-third of the audience, including Terence A. McEwen, then the artistic director of the San Francisco Opera, left in disgust.

On October 22, 1987 *Nixon in China* was given its official world premiere in a lavish production by the Houston Grand Opera at the company's new Gus S. Wortham Theater Center. Two months later, the production traveled to New York City for a two-week engagement at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and then to the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. The opera was later performed in Amsterdam and in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1988. A recording of *Nixon in China*, including the full libretto, was released in the spring of 1988.

A fairly straightforward recounting of events, the first act of *Nixon in China* begins with Nixon's arrival at the Beijing airport, moves on to his first political discussions with Chairman Mao and Zhou Enlai, and closes with a state banquet in the Great Hall of the People. In the more introspective and somewhat surreal second act, Pat Nixon is taken on a guided sightseeing tour, visiting a medical clinic, a model pig farm, and the Ming tombs. She then joins her husband and Henry Kissinger at the Beijing Opera for a performance of Jiang Qing's revolutionary ballet *The Red Detachment of Women* (recreated in mock socialist-realist style by the dancer and choreographer Mark Morris), where the three Americans are eventually drawn into the nightmarish action onstage. The opera concludes with another formal banquet at the Great Hall, at which the principal characters, in a series of contemplative duets and solos, reminisce and reflect upon their lives.

Critical response to the opera was mixed, with those reviewers who had applauded Adams's musical experiments over the years hailing the piece as "arguably the most significant American opera of the decade," to quote the *Chicago Tribune's* John von Rhein, and those who generally belittled his efforts condemning it as, in Donal Henahan's words, a "coy and insubstantial work." Andrew Porter, who commented on the opera for the *New Yorker* (November 30, 1987), quibbled about the, in his view, repetition of certain musical elements, but conceded that Adams's predilection for such formulas did not destroy the richness of his vocal writing, which succeeded in giving "each character a distinctive, revealing mode of utterance—of rhythm, of gait, of melodic outline." To John Rockwell, *Nixon in China*, "while not perfect," was nonetheless "a stirring creation, full of charm and wit and, in the end, beauty." "This one's likely to last," he predicted in the *New York Times* (December 6, 1987).

Peter G. Davis and Donald Henahan disagreed with Rockwell's evaluation. Never an admirer of Adams's work, Henahan found *Nixon in China* "hardly a strong candidate" for inclusion in the standard operatic repertoire. "Beneath the lacquered surface, there is more lacquer," he wrote in his devastating assessment for the *New York Times* (October 28, 1987). "In spite of chic staging, eye-catching sets, and a couple of lively ballet sequences, *Nixon in China* works to redefine the con-

cept of boredom." In his review for *New York* (November 9, 1987), Davis concurred, calling the score "musically uneventful and prosaic." The fact that *Nixon* was Adams's first opera showed, he claimed, "mainly in the clumsy prosody, turgid instrumentation that often obscures the words, ineffective vocal lines, and inability to seize the moment and make the stage come to life in musical terms."

Undaunted, Adams returned to orchestral composition with *Fearful Symmetries* (1988), a half-hour work for full orchestra (augmented by saxophones and a synthesizer) that was given its world premiere in a concert of Adams's music, conducted by the composer himself, by the Orchestra of St. Luke's at Avery Fisher Hall in New York City on October 29, 1988. Allan Kozinn, who reviewed the program for the *New York Times* (October 31, 1988), found there was "less apparent symmetry" in the "rambling" *Fearful Symmetries* than its title suggests, but "its dramatic thrust unfolds in a decidedly non-minimalist way, with carefully built and skillfully released climaxes."

The next year Adams set Walt Whitman's graphic Civil War poem "The Wound-Dresser" to music for baritone and chamber orchestra. The poem—about Whitman's experiences as a nurse in a battlefield hospital—was transmuted by the composer into his personal response to the AIDS crisis and the death of his father from Alzheimer's disease. To many critics, including the one who reviewed the recording in *Musical America* (September 1990), the piece proved to be something of a disappointment. "The Wound-Dresser is a much more 'respectable' composition than *Fearful Symmetries*, but 'respectable' is not what music is about. Here there is no rock-'n'-roll, no musical pocket-picking, no orchestral flash and dazzle—but no power either, and little personality." The anonymous critic later noted in the review: "The text [of the poem] is merely presented, in a bland arioso that makes for a pleasant 19 minutes and nothing more."

Adams continued to develop as a composer through the 1990s, shrugging off negative reviews and pressing on. In 1991 he presented the opera *The Death of Klinghoffer*, which was based on the Palestinian hijacking of the *Achille Lauro*, a luxury cruise ship, in October 1985. A crippled American Jew, Leon Klinghoffer, was murdered by the terrorists during that hijacking. Finding the story to be "immensely poetic and tragic," Adams set out to portray this event in high operatic fashion, again collaborating with the librettist Alice Goodman and the director Peter Sellars. Using the same singers in multiple roles of Palestinian terrorists and Jews, Adams wished to dismiss any preconceived ideas regarding identity, with the Palestinians and Jews shown as equal victims of one another's hatreds. The results received a mixed response. Reviewing the New York City premiere, Edward Rothstein of the *New York Times* (September 7, 1991) remarked: "Mr. Adams's music has a seriously limited range. He creates languid but ominous murmurings of ostinato figures, frenetic pulsings of rising pitches that indicate approaching climaxes, and pop-like riffs used for mockery and irony. That is about it; the music is either atmospheric or emotionally elementary, while the text is set in so unmusical a fashion that the surtitles are required to decipher it." Lisa and Ilsa Klinghoffer, the daughters of Leon Klinghoffer, also objected to the opera, which they saw as anti-Semitic and exploitative of the death of their father.

Still, not all evaluations of *Klinghoffer* were negative. In his review of the opera's recording, John Rockwell of the *New York Times* (November 8, 1992) wrote, "Here

[on the album] the music emerges with an unforced naturalism, sounding sweeter and clearer than ever before. Mr. Adams has devised an effective extension of Steve Reich-style minimalism, one that manages to embrace the American symphonic tradition. The music sounds fresh and original . . . it adapts to dramatic needs and operatic conventions."

For the next two years Adams composed smaller pieces: *El Dorado* (1992), an orchestral piece written for the Columbus anniversary, and *Violin Concerto* (1993). He did not release another major work until *I Was Looking at the Ceiling and Then I Saw the Sky* (1995), which was billed as a musical, although most involved with the work regarded it as something much more. The story of a multiracial cast in Los Angeles, it is a collaboration between Adams, the poet June Jordan, and Peter Sellars. Jordan's libretto pulls together seven city-dwellers, all under 25, all from different ethnic backgrounds, and describes how they try to survive in an environment filled with poverty, racism, and natural disasters. K. Robert Schwarz of the *New York Times* found several problems with the musical in his July 9, 1995 review, chief among them: "Not quite a musical, not quite an opera, *Ceiling/Sky* defies easy categorization." A critic for the *Wall Street Journal* (July 21, 1995) neatly summed up another of the show's weaknesses, contending that for all its political messages, "*Ceiling/Sky* sends the audience out humming the tunes, but without any intellectual or emotional payoff."

Despite the controversy his work has tended to inspire, Adams still has his admirers. Alex Ross, writing for the *New York Times* (April 7, 1996), wondered why, almost 10 years after its opening, *Nixon in China* was not being performed by any major opera company. "It is too good, too beautiful, too necessary. It is one of the few American operas that stick in the mind, one of the very few that compel attention for their music alone." An anonymous writer for the *Economist* (September 14, 1996) asserted that, after almost a century, modern composers and listeners are finally coming to terms with one another, but that just as they are about to reach a mutual understanding, John Adams, ever the experimentalist, "accepts a need to move on, to find more variety and to give his music a greater sense of movement."

John Adams lives in Berkeley, California, with his second wife, the former Deborah O'Grady, a freelance arts administrator and fund-raiser. They have two children, Emily and Sam. Even though he regularly works at home, Adams keeps to a strict nine-to-five schedule so that he can spend more time with his family. Speaking of his sudden fame, he told the interviewer for *People* magazine, "In my profession, you go from being a young composer to being a dean—there is no middle ground. There are people like Bach and Mozart who were often ignored in their day and are with us constantly. And there are many, many composers who were very famous in their time whom we don't even know now. I could be completely unknown in 50 years."

SELECTED WORKS: Chamber compositions—*Piano Quintet*, 1970; *American Standard for Unspecified Ensemble*, 1973; *Grounding for Three Solo Voices, Instruments, and Electronics*, 1975; *Onyx for Tape*, 1976; musical—*I Was Looking at the Ceiling and Then I Saw the Sky*, 1995; Operas—*Nixon in China*, 1987; *The Death of Klinghoffer*, 1991; orchestral compositions—*Common Tones in Simple Time*, 1979; *Grand Pianola Music for Two Sopranos, Two Pianos and Small Orchestra*, 1981–82; *Shaker Loops for String Orchestra*, 1983; *Harmonielehre*, 1985; *Harmonium for Chorus and Orchestra*, 1985; *Fearful Symmetries*, 1988; *The Wound-Dresser for Baritone and Orchestra*, 1989; *Eros Piano for Piano and Orchestra*, 1989; piano—*Ragamorale*, 1973; *China Gates*, 1977; *Phrygian Gates*, 1977



Levon Layan

Alagna, Roberto

1963– Opera singer

During his meteoric rise to fame in the opera world in the early 1990s, the media began calling Roberto Alagna the "Fourth Tenor," thus linking him with the famous trio of singers known as the "Three Tenors"—Luciano Pavarotti, Plácido Domingo, and José Carreras. The connection has not pleased Alagna. "I hate being compared to Pavarotti," the then 31-year-old singer told Victoria Bevan of *Classic CD* (September 1995). "It's not fair, because I'm being compared to huge stars who are 25 years older than me. It's like talking about unequally matched boxers. I want to be compared to tenors of my own generation. And yes, in that category, I'm doing very well." With his distinctive, romantic appeal to audiences, with offers from opera companies all over the world, and with an ambitious recording agenda ahead of him, it is probably safe to say that the handsome Alagna is doing very well indeed.

SUGGESTED READING: *Christian Science Monitor* p21+ Oct. 19, 1987; *Economist* p85 Sept. 14, 1996; *Esquire* p160+ Dec. 1984; *Musical America* p72+ Sept. 1990; *New York Times* II p25 Jan. 14, 1987, II p25 Nov. 29, 1987, I p15 Sept. 7, 1991, C p13 Sept. 11, 1991, II p27 Nov. 8, 1992, II p25 July 9, 1995, II p24 July 30, 1995, II p27 Apr. 6, 1996; *Opera News* p24+ Oct. 1987; *People* p127+ Dec. 14, 1987; *Stereo News* p96 Apr. 1997; *U. S. News and World Report* p64+ Dec. 14, 1987; *Wall Street Journal A* p8 July 21, 1995; *International Who's Who in Music and Musicians' Directory*, 1996/97; *Who's Who in America*, 1998