



Hallelujah Junction: Composing an American Life

By John Adams

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Hallelujah Junction: Composing an American Life By John Adams

John Adams is one of the most respected and loved of contemporary composers, and "he has won his eminence fair and square: he has aimed high, he has addressed life as it is lived now, and he has found a language that makes sense to a wide audience" (Alex Ross, *The New Yorker*). Now, in *Hallelujah Junction*, he incisively relates his life story, from his childhood to his early studies in classical composition amid the musical and social ferment of the 1960s, from his landmark minimalist innovations to his controversial "docu-operas." Adams offers a no-holds-barred portrait of the rich musical scene of 1970s California, and of his contemporaries and colleagues, including John Cage, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass. He describes the process of writing, rehearsing, and performing his renowned works, as well as both the pleasures and the challenges of writing serious music in a country and a time largely preoccupied with pop culture.

Hallelujah Junction is a thoughtful and original memoir that will appeal to both longtime Adams fans and newcomers to contemporary music. Not since Leonard Bernstein's *Findings* has an eminent composer so candidly and accessibly explored his life and work. This searching self-portrait offers not only a glimpse into the work and world of one of our leading artists, but also an intimate look at one of the most exciting chapters in contemporary culture.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Best known for his groundbreaking musical works *Nixon in China* and *The Death of Klinghoffer*, Adams helped shape the landscape of contemporary classical music. Combining the narrative power of opera, the atonal themes of 20th-century classical music, the spooky modulations of jazz and the complex rhythms of the Beatles and the Band, Adams created a new music that could express the fractiousness of the political scene of the 1960s and 1970s. In this entertaining memoir, Adams deftly chronicles his life and times, providing along the way an incisive exploration of the creative process. A precocious musician, Adams began playing clarinet in the third grade, and, after hearing his teacher read Mozart's biography, tried his hand at composing music. During his undergraduate years at Harvard, he threw himself into performing and conducting when his own inadequacies as a composer began to dawn on him. By his final year at Harvard, however, the chaos of the late 1960s and the creative turbulence of the music scene drove him back to composing. After two years in graduate school, Adams set out for California, where he taught numerous composition classes and private clarinet lessons while working on his own music and with a who's who of the music world, from Cage and Leonard Bernstein to Philip Glass and Steve Reich. Adams's searingly introspective autobiography reveals the workings of a brilliant musical mind responsible for some of contemporary America's most inventive and original music. (Oct.)

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From School Library Journal

Celebrated American composer and conductor Adams's memoir chronicles his life from his upbringing as a talented clarinetist in rural New England to his countercultural coming-of-age as a Harvard undergraduate in the 1960s to his embrace of the musical life and vibrant scene of the Bay Area. Adams writes candidly of his compositions and those of his contemporaries in language accessible to the lay reader. Adams—through his engaging orchestral works, such as the Pulitzer Prize-winning *On the Transmigration of Souls* and his several landmark "docu-operas" like *Nixon in China* and *Doctor Atomic* (opening at the New York Metropolitan Opera this October)—has emerged as one of the most admired of all living composers. His book proceeds chronologically, but Adams frequently pauses to reflect on the nature of composing and the state of contemporary music. As one of the most inclusive of contemporary composers—his palette covers pop, jazz, and myriad global idioms—he shares his unique perspective on the multiple traditions that inform his musical language. Adams writes articulately about his life and works and the larger social context from which they emerge. Highly recommended for all collections.—Larry Lipkis, Moravian Coll., Bethlehem, PA

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From [Booklist](#)

In his New England childhood, Adams listened to records, learned clarinet, and even conducted small groups. At Dartmouth, he discovered such modernist composers as Carter, Nancarrow, Copland, Chávez, and Kodály, and substituted in the Boston Symphony in Schoenberg's *Moses and Aron*. After six years at Harvard, honing his conducting skills and starting to compose, he moved to teach at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where his career blossomed. While John Cage influenced his instrumental music that includes synthesizers and taped passages, Adams is best known for the documentary operas *Nixon in China*, *The Death of Klinghoffer*, and *Doctor Atomic*. Not a memoir per se, this book is first and foremost about Adams' major compositions and incidentally concerned with the culture in which they were produced and the people with whom they were developed, including theatrical director Peter Sellars and poet Alice Goodman. It provides enlightening insight into the fertile mind of one of the most important and popular contemporary composers and conductors. --Alan Hirsch

Users Review

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Barbara Saddler:

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