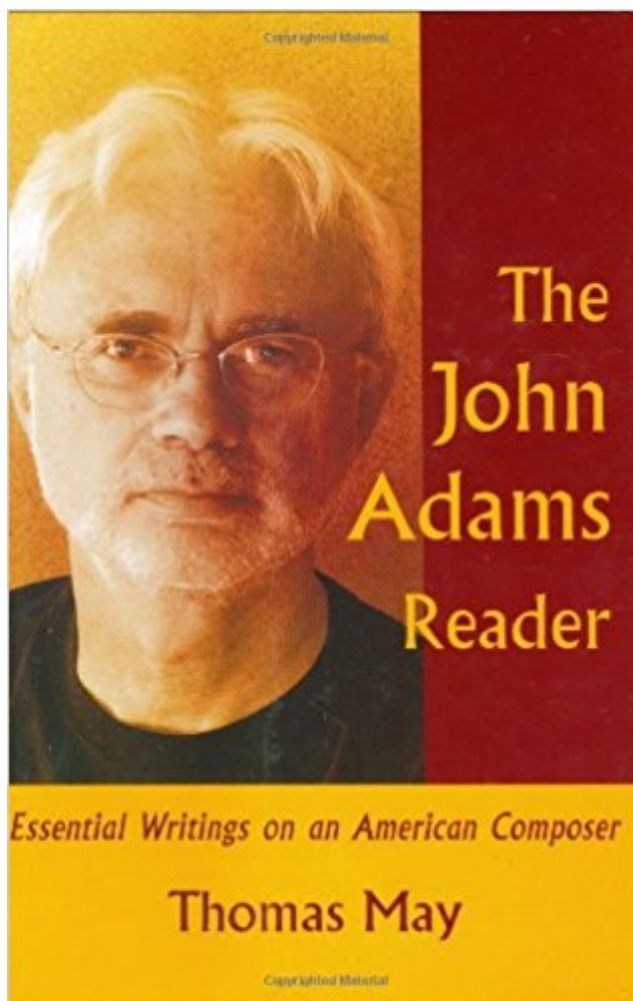


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The John Adams Reader: Essential Writings On An American Composer



Synopsis

(Amadeus). The John Adams Reader: Essential Writings on an American Composer gathers a colorful and wide-ranging selection of pieces from leading musical commentators and critics. Included are revealing interviews with the composer as well as eloquent essays by Ingram Marshall, Michael Steinberg, Alex Ross, Sarah Cahill, Alan Rich, and many others. Editor Thomas May has grouped this collection into four sections: profiles of the artist (including a fascinating memory piece from Ingram Marshall on Adams's early San Francisco years), detailed essays on the major works, interviews with some leading collaborators and interpreters, and critical reception. This reader should be of use both as an introduction for the general reader to a preeminently significant American artist and as a reference for the more serious student or scholar.

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Customer Reviews

It is a measure of John Adam's success as a composer of art music, for want of a better term, that such a work as this has been published at all. Adams is barely 60 years old, still active, and arguably at his most influential, but hardly the stuff of the popular press. But Thomas May has done us a service. This is a serious book about a serious artist, consisting of dozens of articles and interviews by a range of contributors published over many years. Inevitably, some ground is covered more than once: for example, the composer's journey from an East Coast student of a student of Schoenberg, to a West Coast minimalist icon. Although Adam's music itself is often described as positive in its outlook in comparison to his post-serialist European peers, Adams has

never stood back from tackling big philosophical matters such as China-Western relations or the labyrinth that is Middle Eastern politics. This is reflected in the extensive debate documented in this book in regard to the Adam's opera, *The Death of Klinghoffer*, which is a fictionalised account of the Palestinian hijack of a cruise ship. There are controversial productions of the opera canon that create a furore, but few modern operas post World War II that generated such debate that the productions themselves were withdrawn. Much of the writing is very good, including Thomas May's own contributions, which speaks well of the capacity of a society to reflect on the contribution of an artist whose chosen art form is arcane to the great majority of the population. My only quibble is with the choice made to publish a comprehensive rather than a more selected set of articles which means the book will no doubt serve a purpose as a reference resource rather than a shorter publication readers might dig into on a more casual basis.

Am a fan of John Adams. Read it first on the kindle. Prefer holding an actual book in my hands, if I like it. The reason for buying the book and adding it to my library.

John Adams is probably the most performed living American composer of classical music. And in this book, really a tribute to Mr. Adams, some sixty writers have written on some aspect of John Adams life. The essays are broken down into four major categories: Portraits of the Artist, The Musical Works, Collaborators and Interpreters, and Critical Reception. The book is biographical in part, talking of Mr. Adams early years and his decision to spend his life writing music. Other aspects of the book discuss most of his major works from looking at the content and then critically. The writers of these essays are a who's who of the classical music world. They include performers (Emanuel Ax, Sarah Cahill), critics (Justin Davidson, Rupert Christiansen), composers (Ingram Marshall, David Schiff), critics (Renaud Machart, Alan Rich), directors (Robert Spano, Peter Spano), professors (Richard Taruskin, Arthur C. Danto), and of course Thomas May who basically put this whole book together.

The John Adams Reader presents an anthology of writings by a wide variety of authors about one of the most frequently performed American composers in the realm of classical music. Friends and collaborators of John Adams, including director Peter Sellers, conductor Robert Spano, performers Emanuel Ax and Dawn Upshaw, and friend Ingram Marshall, as well as extensive interviews with John Adams himself, allow for a thorough tour of his personality, his musical works, collaborators and interpreters, his critical reception, controversies about his work and his political views, and

much more. As accessible to lay readers as it is to advanced music students and practitioners, The John Adams Reader is a "must-read" portrait for anyone striving to better understand both the artist and his musical art, presenting the compiled wit and charm of expert musicians.

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