



## JOHN ADAMS

### Piano, Vocal and Chamber Works

Road Movies • I Still Play • Short Ride in a Fast Machine

Ralph van Raat, Piano

Laura Bohn, Soprano • Rosanne Philippens, Violin • Maarten van Veen, Piano



John  
**ADAMS**  
(b. 1947)

## Piano, Vocal and Chamber Works

|   |                                                                                                                                                                                        |              |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
|   | <b>Road Movies</b> (1995)                                                                                                                                                              | <b>14:57</b> |
| ❶ | I. Relaxed Groove                                                                                                                                                                      | 4:55         |
| ❷ | II. Meditative                                                                                                                                                                         | 4:59         |
| ❸ | III. 40% Swing                                                                                                                                                                         | 5:03         |
| ❹ | <b>I Still Play</b> – Pocket Variations for Solo Piano (2017)                                                                                                                          | <b>4:44</b>  |
|   | <b>Roll Over Beethoven</b> (2014)<br>(arr. of the composer's <i>Second String Quartet</i> for two pianos by Preben Antonsen)                                                           | <b>22:21</b> |
| ❺ | I. Allegro molto                                                                                                                                                                       | 8:54         |
| ❻ | II. Andantino                                                                                                                                                                          | 13:27        |
| ❼ | <b>Am I in Your Light?</b><br>(from <i>Doctor Atomic</i> , 2005)<br>(arr. Chitose Okashiro for voice and piano, 2018)<br>Text: Peter Sellars (b. 1957)                                 | <b>5:39</b>  |
| ❽ | <b>Consuelo's Dream</b><br>(from <i>I Was Looking at the Ceiling and Then I Saw the Sky</i> , 1995)<br>(arr. John McGinn for voice and piano, 2012)<br>Text: June Jordan (1936–2002)   | <b>6:25</b>  |
| ❾ | <b>Leila's Song: Alone (Again or At Last)</b><br>(from <i>I Was Looking at the Ceiling and Then I Saw the Sky</i> )<br>(arr. J. McGinn for voice and piano, 2012)<br>Text: June Jordan | <b>4:34</b>  |
| ❿ | <b>Short Ride in a Fast Machine</b> (1986)<br>(arr. P. Antonsen for piano four hands, 2018)                                                                                            | <b>4:29</b>  |

## John Adams (b. 1947)

### Piano, Vocal and Chamber Works

“My roots are profoundly affected by American popular music, jazz, ragtime, swing, rock... my personal style does not deny its roots.” (*Opera News*, 1987). With this remark, John Coolidge Adams captures something essential about his musical identity: a composer shaped by the full breadth of American sound, yet equally grounded in the Classical and Romantic traditions that inform his sense of form, harmony, and expressive line. His music moves with an ease that reflects the openness of contemporary culture, drawing on minimalism, jazz, popular idioms, and a clear architectural logic inherited from earlier centuries. What makes Adams distinctive is not only the range of influences he absorbs, but the coherence with which he brings them together: a language that is rhythmically alive, harmonically lucid, and emotionally direct. It is this combination of stylistic breadth and a recognizably personal voice that has made him one of the most versatile and influential composers of our time.

That rhythmic vitality, so characteristic of Adams’ musical language, appears early and clearly in the orchestral fanfare he composed in 1986, *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, later arranged for piano four hands by his former student, composer and pianist Preben Antonsen. The piece is built around a steady, driving pulse (as marked by the famous woodblock in the original orchestral version) that functions as a structural anchor, while layers of rhythmic activity accumulate above it. This pulse can be heard as reflecting the speed and pressure of contemporary life, and in this work the idea of the “machine” becomes a practical organizing principle: relentless, efficient, and tightly controlled. Adams liked to compare the work to driving a great sports car: thrilling at first, until its wild handling makes you regret accepting the ride. What stands out is how this mechanized propulsion recalls, in a late-20th-century context, certain qualities associated with Beethoven’s symphonic writing: clarity of gesture, heroic and dramatic qualities, and a sense of musical direction that is always pushing ahead. Adams’ approach, however, is different in emphasis – rather than projecting a narrative of struggle or resolution, the music focuses on the physical sensation of motion itself, articulated through constantly shifting accents and meters.

Adams’ development as a composer over time can clearly be noticed in *Road Movies* (1995), a work that emerges from his gradual move away from the large, resonant orchestral canvases of his early career, pieces such as *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, *Harmonielehre*, *Harmonium*, and *Grand Pianola Music*, toward a more transparent, chamber-oriented language. The experience of writing his opera *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991), with its long, pliant vocal lines, proved important in opening a path toward a more linear and expressive way of composing, one in which melody could carry structural and emotional weight. *Road Movies* marks Adams’ new focus that emphasizes melodic development in combination with a rhythmic drive, exhibiting a close textural interplay between violin and piano.

The first movement unfolds like a relaxed drive on a familiar road, its recurring material creating a gentle, rondo-like sense of return. At the center lies a slow, meditative movement, its long, chromatically colored lines evoking the solitude of a wide, open landscape. The violin’s *scordatura* tuning in this movement, lowering the G string to F, gives the instrument an exceptionally sonorous, languid timbre. The whole movement is rather reminiscent of a slow shot in a film or a long trip through the desert. The finale launches into a buoyant, perpetual-motion ride in “40% swing,” its syncopated energy and cross-hand piano writing giving the music a playful, slightly unpredictable lift. As in the first movement of this work, as well as *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, the pace of this third movement again reminds one of driving a car, and a rather speedy one as well, possibly involved in a car chase scenario. Celebrated for its blend of technical challenge and vivid expressive imagery, *Road Movies* has become one of the most distinctive and enduring works in Adams’ chamber-music catalog.

Following *Road Movies*, Adams’ turn toward a more linear, vocally oriented style also becomes clear in his stage works of the mid-1990s. His vocal

writing traces the same stylistic evolution visible in his instrumental music, moving from the process-driven language of the 1980s toward a more flexible, text-centered and lyrically expressive style. *I Was Looking at the Ceiling and Then I Saw the Sky* (1995), written shortly after *The Death of Klinghoffer*, also marks a deliberate shift away from the large orchestral canvases of his early career toward a lighter, more popular idiom. It draws on rock, pop, gospel, and musical theatre traditions while retaining the clarity and motivic focus of his concert works. *Leila's Song: Alone (Again or At Last)* presents an introspective portrait of a young woman torn between independence and the desire for emotional security, its R&B- and jazz-inflected vocal line supported by jazz and pop harmonies in a straightforward structure. *Consuelo's Dream* offers a contrasting perspective: the vision of an undocumented immigrant imagining a world free of violence, borders, and fear. The song's simplicity of texture and direct melodic writing reflect Adams' interest in using popular idioms to address contemporary social realities with immediacy and clarity.

By the early 2000s Adams' stage works had become even more psychologically focused, with less reliance on repetitive processes. *Doctor Atomic* (2005), created with Peter Sellars, exemplifies this shift. The aria *Am I in Your Light?*, sung by Kitty Oppenheimer, combines long, arching vocal lines with a restrained, unsettled harmonic backdrop, creating a musical language that is more intimate and text-responsive than his earlier operas while retaining the rhythmic clarity characteristic of his work.

*Roll Over Beethoven* (2014) demonstrates how far Adams had moved from the procedures of traditional minimalism by the 2010s. In multiple works of around this period, especially Beethoven is given a direct and prominent presence. In 2011 Adams composed *Absolute Jest* for string quartet and orchestra, a large-scale score built almost entirely from fragments of Beethoven's late quartets. Working so intensively with Beethoven's material led him to explore this approach further, first in his *Second String Quartet* (2014) and then in the two-piano version heard here, arranged once again by Preben Antonsen. The title nods to Chuck Berry's 1956 hit *Roll Over Beethoven*, a song that playfully functioned as a manifesto for the rising genre of rock 'n' roll as opposed to classical music. The parallel is apt, since Adams has long recognized that the rhythmic pulse driving Beethoven's music can feel every bit as charged as the backbeat of American popular music.

Almost all of the musical material for Adams' *Roll Over Beethoven* comes from two late piano works: the *Piano Sonata, Op. 110* and the *Diabelli Variations*. Adams takes short phrases, cadential patterns, and rhythmic cells from these pieces and subjects them to continuous transformation. As he puts it, he "takes these tiny musical fractals through a grand tour of a harmonic and rhythmic hall of mirrors." The result is a 20-minute structure that alternates between tightly driven *scherzo*-esque writing and passages of more lyrical, exploratory character. Like its Beethoven models, the music is full of emphatic gestures, frequent *sforzandi*, and busy, high-energy textures marked by sharply articulated rhythmic detail.

Composed in 2017, *I Still Play* is a brief set of variations that incorporates many features of Adams' late style into an intimate piano miniature. The title comes from a remark Adams once overheard from his friend Robert Hurwitz, who had casually explained, about his own piano playing, "I still play." Adams described the resulting piece as "Satie meets Bill Evans": transparent, gently lyrical, and harmonically supple, with turns that subtly allude to the great masters from the past. In its gentle lyricism and lively rhythmic poise, *I Still Play* offers a beautifully distilled glimpse of Adams' enduring artistry.

**Ralph van Raat**

## Laura Bohn

Photo: Marco Borggreve



American born, Amsterdam based soprano Laura Bohn is celebrated for her visceral interpretations of operatic heroines, and internationally recognized as a creative force in innovative and interdisciplinary opera. Recent highlights include the title role of the Duchess in Adés' *Powder Her Face* with the Nederlandse Reisopera; her Concertgebouw debut singing Weill and Bernstein; and the solo opera *Lullaby*, which was written for her by Kamala Sankaram, at Dutch National Opera's Boekmanzaal and Santiago a Mil in Chile. Bohn appeared as a soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and The Industry (Los Angeles); The Mostly Mozart Orchestra, Syracuse Opera and Center for Contemporary Opera (New York); The Dallas Opera; Residentie Orkest, Operadagen Rotterdam, The Millennium Jazz Orchestra and Der Silbersee (Netherlands); and I Solisti del Vento (Belgium). Highlights of the 2026 season include Poulenc's *La Voix humaine* with the Seattle Chamber Orchestra, the Governess in Britten's *Turn of the Screw*, and Marcel in the orchestral premiere of *Claude and Marcel* at West Edge Opera.

[www.laurabohn.com](http://www.laurabohn.com)

## Rosanne Philippens

Photo: Simon van Boxtel



Rosanne Philippens is an exceptional communicator whose innate musicality and joyful yet sincere approach to performance has captivated audiences across Europe. Her playing combines refinement, exuberance and depth. She is also the founder of De Salonconcerten, a series of intimate minifestivals in distinctive and unexpected locations. Philippens has appeared with major orchestras including the Symphoniker Hamburg at the Elbphilharmonie, the Hallé, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Recent seasons have brought performances with the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra at Suntory Hall, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and playing/direct projects with the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal and Orchestre national d'Ile-de-France. In the Netherlands she has performed with the Rotterdams Philharmonisch Orkest, Radio Filharmonisch Orkest in the ZaterdagMatinee, and the Residentie Orkest. During the Covid-19 pandemic she founded The Vondel Strings, leading to a performance at Het Concertgebouw, and a warmly received recording of Haydn and Stravinsky. A dedicated chamber musician, she collaborates with leading artists across Europe. Philippens plays the 1727 Barrere Stradivarius, generously supported by the Elise Mathilde Foundation.

[www.rosannephilippens.com](http://www.rosannephilippens.com)

## Maarten van Veen

Photo: Dimitri Louis



After graduating from the Conservatorium van Amsterdam's Sweelinck Academy Maarten van Veen became a fixture in the contemporary scene, collaborating with composers such as Steve Reich, John Adams, Louis Andriessen and Tan Dun. His Stravinsky recordings at Abbey Road were highly acclaimed, including by *The New York Times*. Since 2003, he has expanded his mastery into conducting and artistic leadership. Having studied under Philippe Herreweghe, he now serves as artistic director of the DoelenEnsemble, curating 35 annual concerts that reach 120,000 listeners. His work blends music with theatrical innovation, including acclaimed collaborations with Theater Babel and Scapino Ballet. Formerly musical director of the Dranoff International 2 Piano Foundation in Miami, he continues to bridge genres as a performer, conductor and creator of multidisciplinary stage works. His extensive discography includes recognized releases on the TRPTK and Naxos labels.

[www.maartenvanveen.com](http://www.maartenvanveen.com)

## Ralph van Raat

Photo: Heather Pinkham



Ralph van Raat has been completely fascinated by 20th- and 21st century classical music since the age of 14. Although his repertoire ranges from Bach to Boulez, his primary focus has always been on composers dating from Debussy, Bartók and Ives to present day masters. His aim is to convince his audiences of the immense beauty and diversity of music of our own time through solo recitals, lecture recitals, concerto performances, album releases and special projects. He is the recipient of a substantial number of national and international awards. Many composers, ranging from Louis Andriessen and Gavin Bryars to Frederic Rzewski and Tan Dun, have written solo works for him, and he has performed over 60 piano concertos with orchestras worldwide such as the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and BBC Symphony Orchestra. He has recorded over 40 albums. Van Raat also is a frequent speaker and performer on radio and television shows, and he teaches at both the Conservatorium van Amsterdam and the Accademia di Musica di Pinerolo (Turin). He was named a Steinway Artist in 2003.

[www.ralphvanraat.com](http://www.ralphvanraat.com)

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| <b>5–6</b> | <b>Roll Over Beethoven (2014)</b><br>(for two pianos)                                    | <b>22:21</b> |
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**Laura Bohn, Soprano** **7–9**

**Rosanne Philippens, Violin** **1–3**

**Maarten van Veen, Piano I** **5** **6**, **Piano secondo** **10**

**Ralph van Raat, Piano**

A detailed track list can be found in the booklet

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AMERICAN CLASSICS

John Adams is a composer whose works are shaped by the full breadth of American music, while being equally grounded in Classical and Romantic traditions that inform his sense of structure, harmony, and expressive line. Both *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* and *Road Movies* combine this aesthetic with a distinctive rhythmic drive that has made these some of his most enduring pieces, while *Roll Over Beethoven* demonstrates how far Adams has been able to move away from traditional minimalism. With the lyrical eloquence of arias from his stage works, and the “Satie meets Bill Evans” transparency of *I Still Play*, this program is a vivid reminder of what makes John Adams one of the most versatile and influential composers of our time.

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Playing  
Time:  
**63:51**