

PRESS RELEASE

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American music legend John Adams in Prague

The living legend of American music John Adams will perform for the first time in the Czech Republic as part of the Prague Spring Festival. He has invited Icelandic pianist Víkingur Ólafsson to collaborate with him on a concert in which he will conduct the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra to present a programme combining his own works with the music of Igor Stravinsky and one of the most successful American composers of today, Gabriella Smith.

“In his work, John Adams combines the influences of American minimalism, pop culture and European symphonic music in a way that has made him a leading contemporary composer and one of the most frequently performed contemporary composers of all times,” says the festival director Pavel Trojan. *„ Originality is one of the most valued qualities of art. This is true for performers and authors. There are many ways to achieve originality. Many strive to sound different every time and not repeat themselves. Many resist letting anything from the outside world enter into their work. And then there's John Adams, whose music you can recognize at first listen and understand what originality can really mean,“* says Trojan.

The centrepiece of tonight's concert is *Why Must the Devil Have All the Good Tunes?* *“On the classical three-movement layout of the virtuoso piano concerto, we will hear repetitive motifs, lyrical surfaces and riffs of the bass guitar, which Adams has incorporated into the orchestra,”* says festival Programme Director Josef Třeštík. The piece was commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic for pianist Yuja Wang, who premiered it under Gustavo Dudamel at Walt Disney Concert Hall and released it on Deutsche Grammophon in 2019.

Today, Víkingur Ólafsson is one of the main ambassadors of the Adams concert in the world. The Icelandic pianist is particularly renowned for his interpretations of the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, Claude Debussy and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. It was with his *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 23 in A major* that Ólafsson made his debut with the Czech Philharmonic a year ago and his performance drew unusually warm applause from the audience. His message about returning to Prague when saying goodbye to the Rudolfinum audience referred to today's festival concert with the music of John Adams.

"Adams is unquestionably the most important American composer," wrote New York Times critic Joshua Baron last September in an article devoted to the composer's 75th birthday and the premiere of his new opera Antony and Cleopatra at the San Francisco Opera.

Opening tonight will be Adams' stirring orchestral miniature, *I'm Still Dancing*, dedicated to conductor Michael Tilson Thomas and his husband Joshua Robinson, a former gymnast and swing dancer. In the second half of the program, Adams will present one of the most successful American orchestral works of recent years, *Tumblebird Contrails*, written by the composer and dedicated environmentalist Gabriella Smith. Adams' Prague-Spring evening will be closed by the now-classic *Symphony in Three Movements*, composed by Igor Stravinsky in the United States during World War II. Although one of the greatest composers of the 20th century rarely acknowledged extra-musical inspiration, he was open about the fact that the symphony reflected his joy at the advance of the Allied armies.

Adams' work is well known to the Prague opera audience. Czech cinemas offered the operas Nixon in China and Doctor Atomic as part of the Metropolitan Opera's series of broadcasts. The only opera that has been performed on the stage in the Czech Republic so far is The Death of Klinghoffer. Twenty years ago it premiered at the National Theatre. The concert performance of this opera in Amsterdam will be John Adams' second artistic assignment during his stay in Europe this year.

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Photographs of the Prague Spring 2023 concerts are available here:
https://bit.ly/PJ2023_foto

Photographs from the festival concerts can be found [here](#).