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■John Adams (1947–)

■Saxophone Concerto (2013) (32')

American composer John Adams was born in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1947. He became interested in composing at a relatively young age and started to write music in his early teens. He studied composition at Harvard University, earning a BA in 1969 and a MA in 1972. His teachers there include Leon Kirchner and Roger Sessions. In 1971, he moved to California and began teaching at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. He received the Composer-in-Residence appointment with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra in 1982. In 1987, Adams composed one of the most talked-about pieces of his early period, *Nixon in China*, an opera inspired by the historical visit of President Richard Nixon to China in 1972. Incidentally, the composition calls for a quartet of saxophones, instruments that are rarely utilized by composers of serious music. His other operas include his highly controversial *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991), *Doctor Atomic* (2005), *A Flowering Tree* (2006), and *Girls of the Golden West* (2017).

Adams composed his Saxophone Concerto in early 2013. Its first performance took place in Sydney on August 22 of the same year, with the composer conducting the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. The soloist was Timothy McAllister, who inspired Adams to write the piece. Adams had known the saxophonist since the time he composed his jazz-inflected symphonic work *City Noir* (2009). According to Adams, “His [McAllister’s] exceptional musical personality had been the key ingredient in performances and recordings.” For the performance of the Saxophone Concerto, Adams prefers the sound in the style of jazz playing over the so-called classical French manner. What the composer expects from the saxophone is, however, beyond the question of the jazz or classical sound. Adams writes technically demanding passages as well as highly expressive melodies for the soloist.

The Concerto has two movements, a structure different from that of Adams's well-known compositions, including his Violin Concerto (1993) and *Century Rolls* for piano and orchestra (1997). The long first movement comprises contrasting segments, some fast and vigorous, others, slow and lyrical. The opening saxophone passage, for instance, consists of a series of short motifs appearing in a brisk manner that immediately becomes smooth and expressive. The shorter but more jubilant second movement exhibits jazz-related rhythms from beginning to end.

[Akira Ishii]