

Thomas Adès Studies

Thomas Adès is a dominant force in contemporary music, whose work attracts significant attention and acclaim, and has been performed by many renowned ensembles. This volume – the first to present a range of scholarly essays on every aspect of Adès’s music – offers authoritative accounts of Adès’s major compositions from a variety of analytical, critical, cultural and historical perspectives. The opening chapters focus on Adès’s earlier music, offering close readings of key works. Further essays focus on his engagement with forms and instrumental genres. The final chapters turn to Adès’s texted music and highlight how themes introduced in earlier chapters cut across Adès’s entire output. Richly illustrated with musical examples and supported by further online material, this book provides a multi-faceted portrait of Adès’s work that opens up new ways of thinking about, and engaging with, his music.

EDWARD VENN is Professor of Music at the University of Leeds. He is author of *Thomas Adès: Asyla* (2017) and *The Music of Hugh Wood* (2008) and has published many book chapters and journal articles on the analysis and interpretation of twentieth-century and contemporary music. He is editor of the journal *Music Analysis*.

PHILIP STOECKER is Professor of Music at Hofstra University. His research focuses on post-tonal theory and analysis and the music of Thomas Adès, George Perle and the Second Viennese School. He has published numerous journal articles on the music of the twentieth century.

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Edited by EDWARD VENN

University of Leeds

and

PHILIP STOECKER

Hofstra University



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To the Arnold Schönberg Center

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

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Contributors

Editors

EDWARD VENN
University of Leeds, UK

PHILIP STOECKER
Hofstra University, USA

Other Contributors

AMY BAUER
University of California, Irvine, USA

YAYOI UNO EVERETT
University of Illinois at Chicago, USA

JANE FORNER
University of Aberdeen, UK

EMMA GALLON
Independent, UK

SCOTT LEE
University of Florida, USA

BRIAN MOSELEY
SUNY Buffalo, USA

RICHARD POWELL
University of York, UK

JOHN ROEDER
University of British Columbia, Canada

PHILIP RUPPRECHT
Duke University, USA

NICHOLAS DAVID STEVENS
Naxos of America, Inc., USA

HENRY WEEKES
Independent, UK

Preface

Even a partial roll-call of the awards and recognition for the British composer Thomas Adès (b. 1971) demonstrates the global appeal of his music. His rise to prominence was swift: his 1997 orchestral work *Asyla* was awarded the Royal Philharmonic Society large-scale composition award (London, 1997), his Op. 12 string quartet *Arcadiana* (1994) received the Elise L. Stoecker Prize (New York, 1998), and he was awarded in 1999 the Ernst von Siemens Prize for young composers (Munich). In 1998 he was composer-in-residence at the Minnesota Orchestra's Sommerfest, and the following year his music was celebrated at the Musica Nova festival in Helsinki. The year 1999 also witnessed the premiere of his first international commission, *America: A Prophecy*, by the New York Philharmonic, and in November that year it was announced that he was to receive the 2000 Grawemeyer Award, the largest prize available to a classical composer; Adès remains the youngest composer to have received this prestigious award.

Plaudits continued into his fourth and fifth decades. Adès received the Hindemith Prize in 2001 and was celebrated at the 2004 Salzburg Easter Festival. His second opera, *The Tempest* (2003–4), won for Adès his second Royal Philharmonic Society prize (2005); *Tevot* (2007) earned him his third. There were three international retrospectives of his music in 2007: the Présences Festival in Paris, the Ultima Festival in Oslo and Traced Overheard in London, and in 2007–8 Adès held the Richard and Barbara Debs Composer's Chair at Carnegie Hall. In 2010 he was appointed foreign member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music, having been a featured composer the previous year in the Stockholm Concert Hall's annual Composer Festival. Adès's third opera, *The Exterminating Angel* (2015–16), was co-commissioned by the Salzburg Festival, the Royal Opera House, the New York Metropolitan Opera and the Royal Danish Opera; 2015 saw him receive the Léonie Sonning Music Prize, Denmark's most prestigious musical honour. In 2018 he was appointed CBE in the Queen's Birthday honours.

Given the prominence and unarguable success of Adès's music, it is not surprising that he has been subject to far greater musicological attention

than many of his peers. A positive review in the *New York Times* by Richard Taruskin of Adès's music became an early reference point as well as a marker of Adès's growing global standing;¹ writings by Arnold Whittall and Christopher Fox followed shortly afterwards.² In the last fifteen years, there has been a growing body of articles, book chapters and postgraduate theses dedicated to or featuring Adès's music. The first book on Adès's music, again testifying to his international stature, appeared in French in 2007;³ a collection of interviews with the writer and music journalist Tom Service followed in 2012;⁴ a monograph on Adès's *Asyla* was published in 2017;⁵ and a further monograph followed in 2021.⁶

Why, then, another volume of writings on Adès's music? First, it is timely. The commission, writing and publication of this collection encompassed a period that began shortly before the twentieth anniversary of the appearance of Taruskin's review and concluded with Adès's fiftieth birthday in 2021. These two anniversaries offered the contributors – who combined represent a wide cross-section of Adès scholars in the United Kingdom and North America (locations that to date have accounted for the vast majority of publications on Adès's music) – the opportunity not only to take stock of the evolving body of work dedicated to Adès over the last two decades, but also to consider future directions that the growing field of Adès studies might take. In common with other entries in the Cambridge University Press Composer Studies series, while one might tease out from the various chapters certain biographical and cultural details on the one hand, and Adès's (critical) relationship with his peers (both national and international) on the other, the emphasis remains primarily on his musical output. The volume is correspondingly organised in a loosely chronological order, beginning with Adès's early music and working through to *The*

¹ Richard Taruskin, 'A Surrealist Composer Comes to the Rescue of Modernism', *New York Times*, 5 December 1999. Reprinted with a postscript in *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-utopian Essays* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), pp. 144–52 (p. 145).

² Arnold Whittall, 'James Dillon, Thomas Adès, and the Pleasures of Allusion', in *Aspects of British Music of the 1990s*, ed. by Peter O' Hagan (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 3–27; Christopher Fox, 'Tempestuous Times: The Recent Music of Thomas Adès', *Musical Times*, 145/1888 (2004), 41–56.

³ Hélène Cao, *Thomas Adès le voyageur: devenir compositeur, être musicien* (Paris: MF Éditions, 2007).

⁴ Thomas Adès and Tom Service, *Thomas Adès: Full of Noises – Conversations with Tom Service*, paperback ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 2018).

⁵ Edward Venn, *Thomas Adès: Asyla* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

⁶ Drew Massey, *Thomas Adès in Five Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

Exterminating Angel. Nearly all of Adès's major works are discussed at some point in what follows, and some (particularly the operas) are given close readings from multiple perspectives.⁷ All contributors expand their arguments with reference to a range of examples drawn from a variety of works by Adès, thus critiquing and rethinking patterns of development and innovation in Adès's career.

Second, an edited volume offers space for multiple voices, and a methodological and theoretical plurality, that distinguish it from single-authored monographs. Yet the diversity of approach is counterbalanced by a genuine sense of shared scholarly purpose, fostered through opportunities to disseminate and critique one another's work-in-progress in conference sessions (a 2017 event dedicated to Adès's operas, and a 2019 Special Session at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Music Theory) and, most significantly, in a series of online virtual workshops during the summer of 2020. Such encounters emphasised the continued value the contributors placed on prior writing on Adès's music – much of which might be understood, methodologically, as music-analytical and/or hermeneutic in its ambition⁸ – against which newer perspectives and approaches are positioned not in conflict, but as means of enriching and broadening of the field. The generosity and communality that informed the discussions, formal and informal, in the writing of this volume led not only to a deepening of the arguments that are contained within it, but also to the illumination of themes and concepts that cut across, in sometimes surprising and unexpected ways, work that ostensibly faces in different directions.

Chapters 1–4 focus on Adès's earlier music (up to *The Tempest*), offering not only close readings of key works but also new or revised ways of thinking about Adès's music in general. Philip Rupprecht's opening chapter on gesture (Chapter 1) draws together many of the characteristic features of Adès's music (more often treated discretely in earlier writings

⁷ We have taken the decision not to publish a comprehensive catalogue of Adès's published works. This information, and much more besides, is provided on the composer's own website, www.thomasades.com, and the similar information, along with reviews, commissioning information, programming notes and copies of scores, can be found via the relevant section of Faber Music's website, www.fabermusic.com/composers/thomas-ades. As the information on these pages is updated regularly, we would seek to direct interested readers to them.

⁸ An early juxtaposition of these contrasting (though not mutually exclusive) approaches can be found in a 2006 issue of the journal *Music Analysis*, with articles by John Roeder ('Co-operating Continuities in the Music of Thomas Adès', *Music Analysis*, 25/i–ii (2006), 121–54) and Edward Venn ('Asylum Gained? Aspects of Meaning in Thomas Adès's *Asyla*', *Music Analysis*, 25/i–ii (2006), 89–120).

on the composer) to explore a dramatically charged patterning of musical shapes and sounding identities forged on the micro- and macro-levels in the *Chamber Symphony* (1990), *Living Toys* (1993) and *America: A Prophecy* (1999). While analytically modelled gesture provides one way of rethinking structure in Adès's music, Edward Venn and Henry Weekes demonstrate in Chapter 2 how pianists, including the composer himself, offer alternative and complementary interpretations of Adès's musical designs, navigating tensions between continuity and discontinuity, and between foreground and background, in their realisations of *Darknesse Visible* (1992) and the *Mazurkas* (2009). Chapters 3 and 4 turn to Adès's first two operas, hermeneutic interpretation, the socio-political implications of Adès's music and matters of cultural memory. In Chapter 3, Nicholas David Stevens employs *Powder Her Face* (1995) as a lens to (re-)examine Adès's aesthetic sensibilities, teasing out the interpretative ramifications of metaphors of surface and depth, not least his use of camp as a device for social commentary. This is followed in Chapter 4 by Jane Forner's placement of *The Tempest* in the context of contemporary debates around colonial legacies, a move that allows her to model critically the ways in which Adès's reworkings (with his librettist, Meredith Oakes) of Shakespeare's play open up new interpretative vistas for the opera.

Chapters 5–8 offer close analytically informed readings of Adès's engagement with forms and instrumental genres to explore Adès's compositional rhetoric and play with (musical) history. Philip Stoecker (Chapter 5) turns to the chaconne and demonstrates how existing approaches to pitch in Adès's employment of the form in *Arcadiana* (1994), *Concerto Conciso* (1997–8) and the *Violin Concerto* (2005) might be enriched through an appreciation of his handling of rhythm and texture to generate larger-scale musical and dramatic structures. In Chapter 6 Richard Powell turns to *Tevot* and its dialogue with symphonic thought. Drawing on Sibelius's *Seventh Symphony* as a lens through which to understand better *Tevot*'s play with concepts of musical resolution, Powell points to the new aesthetic possibilities opened up by Adès's renewal of the symphonic genre. Amy Bauer's discussion in Chapter 7 of *In Seven Days* (2008) situates her detailed examination of the work's theme-and-variations structure in the context of an allegorical journey that parallels the story of creation found in Genesis, thereby demonstrating the inseparability of Adès's musical and extramusical thought. Adès's sometimes incongruous and disjunct reworkings of the potentialities bound up in generic and tonal norms form the focus of Brian Moseley's reading of Adès's *Mazurkas* and *Thrift (a Cliff-Flower): Mazurka-Cortège* (2011),

which revisits and recontextualises the relationship between Adès's musical designs and surrealist practice.

Chapters 9–12 return to Adès's texted music, in particular the operas, and highlight how themes introduced in earlier chapters cut across Adès's entire output. Scott Lee's examination (Chapter 9) of Adès's response in *Totentanz* (2013) to a fifteenth-century frieze representing the Dance of Death demonstrates how the composer's musical narration of the dance offers, in the form of allegory, a pointed social critique. In her discussion of voice, vocality and narrative in Adès's three operas (Chapter 10), Emma Gallon gives prominence to the materiality of Adès's music and the importance of recognising its physical, embodied qualities in interpretative practice. Approaching *The Tempest* and *The Exterminating Angel* from a complementary perspective, John Roeder (Chapter 11) offers a detailed and compelling account not only of the intervallic logic that underpins Adès's compositional language, but also of the ways in which such structures respond to, and shape, the onstage drama. Finally, in her reading of *The Exterminating Angel*, Yayoi Uno Everett (Chapter 12) proposes that the opera's play of topical references, intervallic cycles and multiple temporalities presents the audience with a sonic allegory of an existential void.

EDWARD VENN
PHILIP STOECKER

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