

***The Death of Klinghoffer***  
**Chronology and Critical Response**

Music by John Adams

Libretto by Alice Goodman

- Premiere: March 19, 1991, Theatre de la Monnaie, Brussels. Production is conducted by Kent Nagano and directed by Peter Sellars. Co-commissioners include Brooklyn Academy of Music, Opéra de Lyon, Glyndebourne Festival, Los Angeles Festival, and the San Francisco Opera.

Critical reaction is divided, as is reaction to the opera's treatment of the Palestinian and Jewish characters. Manuela Hoelterhoff writes in *The Wall Street Journal* that the opera "turns the sport-killing of a frail old Jew in a wheelchair into a cool meditation on meaning and myth, life and death." Katrine Ames writes in *Newsweek*, "Adams creates a revolutionary, continually shifting tapestry," calling the opera, "a work that fires the heart."

- September 1991 – The Klinghoffers' daughters attend the Brooklyn Academy of Music staging anonymously, and later object to the production in a public statement.
- Fall 1991 – Adams revises the opera for subsequent productions, deleting a scene that featured a depiction of the Klinghoffers' American neighbors in New Jersey, viewed by some as inappropriately satirical.
- November 2001 – The Boston Symphony Orchestra, citing proximity to the events of September 11, cancels performances of excerpts from the opera. Musicologist Richard Taruskin defends BSO's decision in a *New York Times* op-ed piece, condemning the opera.
- September 2003 – A film version of the opera, directed by Penny Woolcock for Channel 4 in the UK, wins the Prix Italia. The film is shown at Sundance as well as festivals in Jerusalem, Sydney, Rotterdam, Buenos Aires, Lincoln Center, and Brussels, where it wins a jury prize. The film is also telecast on Channel 4 TV in the UK.

John Rockwell writes in the *New York Times* that the film "unshrinkingly shows the viciousness of terrorism and the three-dimensional reality of victims who might otherwise recede into facelessness. There may be a bit of tweaking of American (not Jewish) material comforts. But in the end 'Klinghoffer' is not anti-American or antibourgeois or anti-Semitic but prohuman. It shows unequivocally that murder is nothing more than that, vicious and unconscionable."

- December 2003 – Brooklyn Academy of Music presents a staged concert version of the opera by the Brooklyn Philharmonic, directed by Bob McGrath. Anthony Tommasini writes in the *New York Times*: "No one will be able to dissuade those who believe that 'The Death of Klinghoffer' puts a simplistic gloss on impossibly complex hatreds or that it is even tainted with anti-Semitism. For what it's worth, my companion on this occasion, a young Israeli psychiatrist and an army veteran who could explain why Palestinians would not be likely to carry M-16 rifles, as the singers do here, found the opera humane, perceptive and engrossing. Whatever your take, this ambitious and deeply felt work deserves to be heard and debated."

- April, 2003 – Adams wins the Pulitzer Prize for "On the Transmigration of Souls," a musical memorial to the victims of September 11<sup>th</sup>, commissioned and performed by the New York Philharmonic.
- *The Death of Klinghoffer* is staged at Auckland Town Hall, New Zealand, in February 2005, and the Edinburgh International Festival, Scotland, in August 2005. Anna Picard writes in *The Independent*, "The opening choruses for the exiled Palestinians and exiled Jews -- an intoxicating blend of the devotional and the secular -- are without parallel in contemporary art music."
- January 2009 – The Juilliard Opera Center presents a concert performance by students. *Opera News* writes: "The result was an extraordinary performance of a rarely heard but important and overpowering contemporary work of continuing relevance. . . Adams' intensely pulsating score is texturally opulent, unerringly attuned dramatically and at times downright gorgeous; his use of the full orchestra is masterful."