City Noir
John Adams

Composed: 2009
Length: c. 30 minutes
Orchestration: 3 flutes (3rd = piccolo), piccolo 2, 3 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets (3rd = bass clarinet 2), bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, alto saxophone, 6 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (tympani, bass drum, snare drum, glockenspiel, tuned gongs, jazz kit, marimba, vibraphone, tambourine, triangle, tam-tams, triangle, xylophone), piano, celesta, 2 harps, and strings.

First Los Angeles Philharmonic performance (world premiere)

Gustavo Dudamel’s first appointment of his own as Music Director Designate of the Los Angeles Philharmonic was to name John Adams to the new position of Creative Chair. Adams has a long and productive history with the orchestra, going back to 1981. Dedicated to Philharmonic President Deborah Borda “in celebration of a long friendship,” City Noir is the final panel in a triptych of orchestral works that “have as their theme the California experience, its landscape, and its culture,” Adams says. The other two are El Dorado (commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony) and The Dharma at Big Sur (a violin concerto commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic for one of the Walt Disney Concert Hall inaugural galas in 2003).

The composer has written the following note about City Noir:

City Noir was first suggested by my reading the so-called “Dream” books by Kevin Starr, a brilliantly imagined, multi-volume cultural and social history of California. In the “Black Dahlia” chapter of his Embattled Dreams volume, Starr chronicles the tenor and milieu of the late ’40s and early ’50s as it was expressed in the sensational journalism of the era and in the dark, eerie chiaroscuro of the Hollywood films that have come to define the period sensibility for us...” the underside of home-front and post-war Los Angeles stood revealed. Still, for all its shoddiness, the City of Angels possessed a certain saucy, savvy energy. It was, among other things, a Front Page kind of town where life was lived by many on the edge, and that made for good copy and good film noir.”

Those images and their surrounding aura whetted my appetite for an orchestral work that, while not necessarily referring to the soundtracks of those films, might nevertheless evoke a similar mood and feeling tone of the era. I was also stimulated by the notion that there indeed exists a bona fide genre of jazz-influenced symphonic music, a fundamentally American orchestral style and tradition that goes as back as far as the early 1930s (although, truth to tell, it was a Frenchman, Darius Milhaud, who was the first to realize its potential with his 1923 ballet La création du monde, a year before Gertrudtha Rhapsody in Blue premiered in New York).

The music of City Noir is in the form of a 30-minute symphony. The formal and expressive weight of its three movements is distributed in pockets of high energy that are nestled among areas of a more leisurely – one could even say “cinematic” – lyricism. The first movement, “The City and its Double,” opens with a brief, powerful “wide screen” panorama that gives way to a murmuring dialog between the double bass pizzicato and the scurrying figures in the woodwinds and keyboards. The steady tick of a jazz drummer impels this tense and nervous activity forward – a late-hour empty street scene, if you like. After a broad and lyrical melodic passage in the strings, the original score moves into a shifting, extended subdominant section. A sudden stasis that ushers in the second movement to a nearly chaotic climax before it suddenly collapses into shards and fragments, a sudden stasis that ushers in the second movement.

The title, “The City and its Double,” is a backward glance to the French playwright Antonin Artaud, who in his writings is said to have “opposed the vitality of the viewer’s sensual experience against a conventional concept of theater as a continued literary form.” Hence my “city” can be imagined not just as a geographic place or even as a social nexus, but rather as a source of inexhaustible sensual experience. As a child watching the early days of television I remember well the program that

Further listening: Pergolesi Gates (1937)
Gloria Cheng, piano (Telarc)
Nixon in China (opera, 1987)
Page, Maddalena, Sylvan, Orchestra of St. Luke’s, Edo De Waart (Nonesuch)

Chamber Symphony (1991)
London Sinfonietta, Adams (Nonesuch)

One of Minimalism’s shaping spirits, John Adams is a composer of distinctive stylistic range. He made an early decision to break with the modernist aesthetic prevailing in post-war Europe and U.S. academia, launching a vigorous exploration of Minimalism infused with American vernacular influences. Adams’ later music expands these elements with long-limbed polyphony, chromaticism, and his “earbox” technique of modal transposition. He won the Grammy Award in 1999 for his Violin Concerto and was named Composer of the Year in 1997 by Musical America. Adams is also an active and esteemed conductor. He has won three Grammy awards for Best Contemporary Composition, and a Pulitzer Prize for On the Transmigration of Souls.
Acclaimed worldwide as one of the most exciting and compelling conductors of our time, GUSTAVO DUDAMEL begins his tenure as Music Director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic in Fall 2009, while continuing as Music Director of the Gothenburg Symphony. Dudamel also enters his eleventh year as Music Director of the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela. His infectious energy and exceptional artistry have made him one of the most sought-after conductors by orchestras and opera companies around the world.

Following guest appearances with the Vienna Philharmonic and the Berlin Philharmonic, Gustavo Dudamel’s inaugural 2009/10 season as Los Angeles Philharmonic Music Director begins on October 3 with ¡Bienvenido Gustavo! This free, day-long musical celebration at the Hollywood Bowl for the Los Angeles community culminates with Dudamel leading the Los Angeles Philharmonic in Beethoven’s 9th Symphony. On October 8, 2009, Dudamel leads the Los Angeles Philharmonic in the inaugural gala at Walt Disney Concert Hall, featuring the world premiere of John Adams’ City Noir and Mahler’s Symphony No. 1. This concert is scheduled to be telecast on PBS’ Great Performances throughout the U.S. on October 21, with subsequent airings throughout the world, and Deutsche Grammophon is issuing the DVD. Further highlights of the LA Phil season include Dudamel directing the Americas and Americans Festival, a series of five concerts celebrating the music and shared cultural traditions of North, Central, and Latin America, as well as conducting concerts with repertoire ranging from Verdi’s Requiem to works by composers such as Chin, Salonen, and Harrison. In May 2009, Dudamel leads the LA Phil on a coast-to-coast U.S. tour with performances in San Francisco, Phoenix, Chicago, Nashville, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, New York, and New Jersey. With the Gothenburg Symphony, highlights include numerous performances in Sweden as well as tours to Hamburg, Bonn, Amsterdam, Brussels, and the Canary Islands. Gustavo Dudamel continues to lead the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra this season for multiple periods in Caracas, Venezuela, and on European and Scandinavian/Russian tours.

Gustavo Dudamel has been an exclusive Deutsche Grammophon artist since 2005. His debut recording, Beethoven Symphonies Nos. 5 & 7 with the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra, was released worldwide in September 2006, and received the 2007 Echo Award for “New Artist of the Year.” His second recording with the SBYO, Mahler Symphony No. 5, was released in May 2007, and was chosen as the only classical album on iTunes’ “Next Big Thing”Released in May 2008, Dudamel’s third album with the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra was FIESTA, featuring Latin-American works. In March 2009, Deutsche Grammophon released Dudamel’s most recent recording with the SBYO, Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 5 and Francesca da Rimini. His DVDs include the 2009 release of The Promise of Music: a documentary and concert with the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra, Birthday Concert for Pope Benedict XVI released in 2007, and the April 2009 DVD Live from Salzburg, featuring performances of Mussorgsky’s Pictures at an Exhibition and Beethoven’s Triple Concerto with Martha Argerich, Renaud and Gautier Capuçon, and the SBYO. On the iTunes front, Deutsche Grammophon has released Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic’s Berliner Symphonie fantastique and Bartók Concerto for Orchestra.

Brought to international attention by triumphing in the inaugural Bam-berger Symphoniker Gustav Mahler Conducting Competition in May 2004, Gustavo Dudamel was born in 1981 in Barquisimeto, Venezuela, where he studied violin at the Jascinto Lara Conservatory with José Luis Jiménez and later, with José Francisco del Castillo, at the Latin American Academy of Violin. In 1996, he began his conducting studies with Rodolfo Saglimbeni and that same year was named Music Director of the Amadeus Chamber Orchestra. In 1999, along with assuming the Music Director position of the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra, he began conducting studies with José Antonio Abreu, the Orchestra’s founder. In May 2007, Dudamel was awarded the Premis de la Latitudín, an honor given for outstanding contributions to Latin cultural life. In 2008, the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra was granted Spain’s annual Prince of Asturias Award for the Arts, and in 2007, Dudamel received the Royal Philharmonic Society Music Award for Young Artists. Along with his mentor Dr. Abreu, he was granted the 2008 “Q Prize” from Harvard University for extraordinary service to children. Most recently, in June 2009, he received an honorary doctorate from the Universidad Centro-Occidental Lisandro Alvarado in his hometown of Barquisimeto, Venezuela. Gustavo Dudamel was named one of the 100 most influential people of 2009 by TIME magazine and has been featured twice on CBS’ 60 Minutes.
The Los Angeles Philharmonic is reinventing the concept of a 21st-century orchestra under the exciting new leadership of Gustavo Dudamel. Now in its 91st season, the Philharmonic is recognized as one of the world’s outstanding orchestras and is received enthusiastically by audiences and critics alike. Both at home and abroad, the Philharmonic is leading the way in innovative programming that is consistently opening doors and redefining the musical experience.

This view is shared by more than one million listeners who experience live performances by the Los Angeles Philharmonic each year. The Philharmonic demonstrates a breadth and depth of programming unparalleled by other orchestras and cultural institutions, performing or presenting nearly 300 concerts throughout the year at its two iconic venues: Walt Disney Concert Hall and the Hollywood Bowl, a popular summer tradition since 1922. The orchestra to offer a live concert online exclusively for download within a week of the performance. Through a partnership with Deutsche Grammophon, DG Philharmonic are represented by Professors.

The Los Angeles Philharmonic’s commitment to the presentation of music of our time is evident in its subscription concerts, in its exhilarating Green Umbrella series, and through its extensive commissioning initiatives. Now in its 27th year, the Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group, devoted exclusively to performing compositions on the cutting edge of the repertoire, attracts leading composers and performers of contemporary music.

The Los Angeles Philharmonic Association expands the cultural offerings by producing concerts featuring distinguished artists in recital, jazz, world music, songbooks and visiting orchestra performances, in addition to special holiday concerts and series of organ recitals, chamber music, and baroque music. The Philharmonic has led the way into the digital age, being the first orchestra to offer a live concert online exclusively for download within a week of the performance. Through a partnership with Deutsche Grammophon, DG Concerts began releasing Philharmonic concerts in 2006, including music by Beethoven, Debussy, Falla, Hilberg, Lutosławski, Prokofiev, Ravel, Sibelius, and Stravinsky (conducted by Elsa-Pekka Salonen), concerts of the Amonintalat, Jukebox and Shadow of the Storm festivals, and music of Bartók and Bizet and Liszt, conducted by Gustavo Dudamel. Addi...