

A Short Ride in a Fast Machine -----John Adams
(Born Worcester, Massachusetts, February 15, 1947)

The minimalists – and John Adams is one, even though he claims to be free of certain features of their style – have put aside many of the formal aspects of classicism, the emotional features of late romanticism, the atmospheric color treatment of the impressionists, and the calculated formulas of the serial composers in favor of simplicity and economy of materials. A minimalist, says one of our lexicographers, strives for maximum effect with minimum means. Specifically, such a composer favors simple triads, usually in root position; employs familiar harmonies without dissonances; shows a preference for duple meter; and progresses through the composition with little change, sometimes only a simple alternation between tonic and dominant chords.

A Short Ride in a Fast machine is a joyfully exuberant piece, strongly motoric with a steady marking of the beat. Its familiar harmonies outline simple triads and carry the listener along with little effort. With vigorous music like this, you don't need a melody that can be hummed on the way home.

The use of "minimum" does not imply any reduction of the instrumental forces. Adams creates blocks of sound against which the unique possibilities of many instruments are exploited individually in a variety of tonal colors. Percussion instruments are among his favorites. At the first performance, on June 13, 1986, two synthesizers were used in addition to the traditional instruments. Everything except the synthesizers will be heard in this performance.

Fasten your seat belts! Maestro Heyde will take you for a spin in his nifty sports car.

By Elwyin A. Wienandt