

ERASMUS  
PRIZE  
2019  
ASSOCIATION

# Annual Report Erasmus Prize John Adams







# Annual Report Erasmus Prize 2019

Composing  
for  
Today



## Colophon

Annual Report Erasmus Prize Foundation

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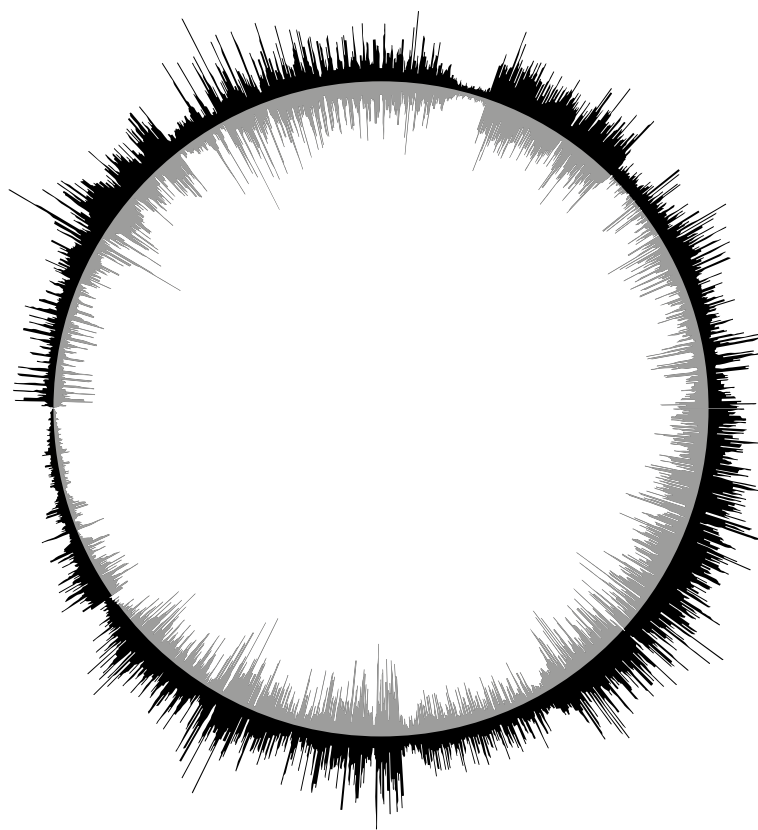
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Amplitude of *Road Movies* (John Adams, 1995), around an imaginary globe

# Preface

The Erasmus Prize 2019 was awarded to the American composer and conductor John Adams for his contribution to contemporary classical music. The theme of the prize this year was 'Composing for today', a subject that seems to inspire all of Adam's music. Not only does he succeed in bringing together elements of jazz, popular and classical music to create a new musical world that appeals to a wide audience, but he also succeeds in addressing complex societal issues through music that speaks to audiences. Accessibility to contemporary classical compositions — connecting with the public rather than isolating oneself inside a hermetic universe — is an important goal of this major composer.

The diversity of Adam's work was reflected in a varied programme of activities aimed specifically at young musicians and emerging composers. On the day of the Erasmus Prize award ceremony, Adams' music could be heard at the Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ, performed by the Nieuw Ensemble, conducted by Ed Spanjaard. The evening included a homage to Adams specially composed for this concert, a new score by the Dutch composer Rick van Veldhuizen. Young composers also featured in the intensive masterclass that Adams led at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague. In addition, Adams spoke at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam with young composers during a jazz event entitled 'An Evening with John Adams'. Framed by live music from the conservatorium's big band, Andrea van Pol interviewed Adams about his musical memories, and Adams spoke to tutors and students about the music profession and discussed why young people would still want to explore the profession today. Adams the film composer was highlighted with a screening of *Io Sono l'Amore* at the Louis Hartlooper Complex in Utrecht, with an extensive introduction by Michel Schöpping. NPO Radio 4 devoted plenty of attention to John Adams throughout the week leading up to the Erasmus Prize award ceremony, culminating in a highly appreciated radio interview with him that was broadcasted during the award ceremony. Excellent articles about him also appeared online and in the national newspapers.

Besides the Erasmus Prize, the Foundation in 2019 also awarded its annual Dissertation Prizes to five young PhD scholars who, according to the jury, produced excellent dissertations. The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences hosted the award ceremony.

This annual report contains short reports about all these activities. We thank all our collaboration partners who took part so enthusiastically: the Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ, the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague, the Conservatorium van Amsterdam, the Louis Hartlooper Complex and NPO Radio 4.

The highlight of the year was the Erasmus Prize award ceremony on 28 November 2019 at the Royal Palace in Amsterdam. His Majesty the King presented the Erasmus Prize to John Adams during the festive ceremony, in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen and Her Royal Highness Princess Beatrix. We are very grateful to the Royal Family for their hospitality.

Jet de Ranitz, chair  
Shanti van Dam, director

# Citation

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies,  
ladies and gentlemen,

“Music can distract the mind from all that is sacred. If one is not careful, the power of music – appreciated by the ancient Greeks as an important part of their education – can lead us into vulgarity, levity and absurdity.”

Thus wrote Desiderius Erasmus around the year 1519 in a letter to a close friend.

Erasmus claims that by stirring the heart, music can be dangerous to the mind.  
In an ode to his composer friend Ockeghem, however, he wrote: “Divina res est musica” —

“Music is a godly thing...”

“...it can function as a tool to get to the deepest understanding of Our Lord.”

“For this to happen” – Erasmus claims – “music needs to be minimal in form and humble in appearance.”

The Board of the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation has decided to award the Erasmus Prize 2019 to the American composer and conductor John Adams for his contribution to contemporary classical music.

The Prize is awarded to him on the following grounds:

- He has created a new musical idiom by fusing elements from jazz, pop and classical music.
- According to the jury, he has made contemporary classical music ‘communicate’ again. That is to say, he has found ways to bridge the gap with audiences previously alienated. This is vital at a time when the genre has increasing difficulty in finding a following.
- He often addresses social issues, something he sees as the artist’s duty. What distinguishes him furthermore, is the deeply humanistic nature of his themes.
- He is not just a great composer, but also a writer who reflects on the social relevance of classical music. He expresses both musically and intellectually — with the heart and with the mind — the importance of classical music in our time.

Read by Shanti van Dam, director

*“He has made  
contemporary classical  
music ‘communicate’ again”*





Welcome by Chair Jet de Ranitz.



Director Shanti van Dam reading the Citation.

# Laudatio

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies,  
ladies and gentlemen,

Please allow me to start this laudation in an  
unconventional manner; with a poem by Emily Dickinson.  
It's titled: To make a prairie.

To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,  
One clover; and a bee,  
And revery.  
The revery alone will do,  
If bees are few.

This airy and touching poem, which seems to capture  
the creative process in so few words, was imaginatively  
translated into Dutch by Peter Verstegen:

Het maken van een wei vereist een klavertje en één bij,  
Eén klavertje, een bij,  
En dromerij,  
Genoeg is enkel dromerij  
Bij weinig bij.

To me, these lines by Emily Dickinson also relate to  
the music of John Adams: inventive, seemingly evident,  
but made on the strength of a close connection with  
the surrounding world. For those of us who are not  
composers – in other words, for many of us – that  
reverie is especially intriguing.

Let me digress for a moment and mention Franco  
Donatoni, the Italian composer who died in 2000.  
Nothing to do with John Adams, it might seem. I  
performed a lot of Donatoni's music with the Nieuw  
Ensemble, and I remember he told me how a woman  
once asked him what his profession was. His answer?  
I'm a *compositore*. Now you should know that the Italian  
word 'compositore' does not just mean 'composer' but  
also 'typesetter': a newspaper typesetter. Aha, replied  
the woman, 'My cousin also works for the newspaper.  
You arrange the letters in the right order!' Exactly, said

Donatoni, 'I'm just like a typesetter. I arrange the notes in  
the right order.'

Some Italian terms we musicians use every day, such as  
'staccato' and 'legato'.

Thinking about the music of John Adams a 'staccato'  
evokes an association with his rhythmic vitality and  
colour brilliance. And 'legato', with his gift for composing  
large-scale structures and moving lyrical melodies.

Yet for him, composing never becomes routine. It  
is an intense, partly intellectual, partly subconscious  
process. That's what Adams said in a conversation  
with composition students at the Conservatorium in  
Amsterdam. I was touched by the fellow-feeling he  
demonstrated as he engaged with the students. His  
attitude wasn't one of: "Wait till you're as old and famous  
as I am", but more of: "Indeed, it's a real art to come up  
with a catchy opening and then follow it up coherently". I  
was struck by the compassion he showed towards those  
budding composers.

John Adams is a highly esteemed and respected composer  
in Dutch musical life. He maintains close relationships  
with the Concertgebouworkest, the Netherlands Radio  
Philharmonic Orchestra and the Schönberg Ensemble  
– three ensembles that over the years have performed  
much of his work, with the laureate himself often on  
the rostrum. Edo de Waart occupies a special place  
because in the early 1980s – almost 40 years ago – he  
was chief conductor with the San Francisco Orchestra.  
He premiered various pieces by Adams, and he  
encouraged him to compose large-scale works, no doubt  
giving the budding composer some decisive words of  
encouragement in the process.

That resulted in 1981 in *Harmonium*, an impressive  
composition first performed by Edo de Waart. This choral  
symphony is partly based on a text by – there she is  
again – Emily Dickinson. It's a dazzling and ecstatic piece  
that calls to mind the fascinating title: *I was looking at the  
Ceiling and then I saw the Sky*, Adams' rock opera that  
premiered in 1995 at UC Berkeley, directed by his trusty  
lieutenant Peter Sellars, and featuring a decor by graffiti

artists from LA. Even though *Harmonium* is written for a more conventional choir and orchestra, what unfolds in the music is anything but ordinary: the heavens open and light starts to pour in.

*Harmonium* proved to be a key piece in the oeuvre of John Adams, rooted in the minimal music of his slightly older compatriots Philip Glass and Steve Reich. *Harmonium* is a work in which Adams allows himself more complexity and freedom. Like Louis Andriessen here in this country, Adams has elevated minimal music to a new level. Or, perhaps more accurately, has ushered in a new era. The basis remains the energetic movement, the sequence of repeating notes that seem to express a modern way of living: speed, activity, excitement, optimism – yet also melancholia, reflection, reverie.

He has opened up that repetitive structure to musical influences that he then could absorb. And of those there are many. A wide-ranging taste is something he grew up with. His mother excelled as an untrained singer in local musical productions. His father was a virtuoso clarinetist who passed on his love for that instrument with devotion to his son. What other contemporary composer can claim to have played with their father in a local concert band?

Classical, jazz, musical, folk, pop... even musical traditions from Asia and Latin America – Adams is an omnivore, able to distil ingredients from them all and serve them up in that appealing, typically Adamsian idiom that many performers and listeners will instantly recognize.

John Adams himself once explained that European classical music, with its 12 standard notes, is insufficient for him. The slide, the blue note – from Jimi Hendrix to Indian raga, they all distort those strictly defined notes.

‘Composing for today’ is the theme of the Erasmus Prize 2019. The board unanimously holds the view that John Adams more than lives up to this motto. After Olivier Messiaen in 1971 and Mauricio Kagel in 1998, Adams is the third composer to receive this award. His music resonates with a wide and varied audience, impacting on contemporary classical music as a whole. Adams sensitivity to what’s happening in society is perhaps most clearly illustrated by the series of operas he has been creating since 1985 with director Peter Sellars: *Nixon in China*, *Doctor Atomic*, *El Niño* and *A Flowering Tree* – each and all musical theatre productions that comment on events, political or otherwise. I was very touched by the prologue of *The Death of Klinghoffer*, an opera whose central theme is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the choirs of both the Palestinian as the exiled Jews, Adams immediately demonstrates his empathy with both camps, a stance not appreciated by everybody, but to me humane and ground-breaking.

It is a great honour for me this evening to conduct the concert for John Adams, featuring three of his compositions. In the spirit of His Royal Highness Prince Claus, the father of our king and late husband of Her Royal Highness Princess Beatrix, who 21 years ago – during an official speech – took off his tie, I do not know exactly what part of this outfit I’ll keep on.

Read by Ed Spanjaard, on behalf of the Board

“Like Louis Andriessen here in this country, Adams has elevated minimal music to a new level”





Board Member Ed Spanjaard reciting the laudatio.



Laureate John Adams reading his acceptance speech.

# Acceptance Speech John Adams

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I am profoundly grateful to receive the Erasmus Prize. I suspect that every winner looks at the list of previous laureates and wonders whether he or she is worthy to be included among such eminent company. I certainly do, and I can assure you that it is a humbling experience. As an American with a very American name, to be chosen at this particular moment in history when our country is not presenting its best face to the world—that makes receiving this prize all the more meaningful.

In a period of social upheaval like what we are currently experiencing, one that is restless and unstable both politically and culturally, many artists feel impelled to turn their activity outward, to take a stand and to use whatever communicative powers they possess to address the crucial issues that affect us all. One might imagine that, because the current mood, not only in the United States but here in Europe as well, is taking such a conservative turn, fearful of change and determined to preserve the status quo, so must artists feel compelled to respond by using the communicative power of art to address just those issues, whether they be social or environmental, that they feel government is ignoring.

This move toward social activism among artists is not a new thing. We can see over and over throughout history how the concerns among artists have oscillated back and forth from inward to outward—from, on the one hand, cultivating a personal voice and “shutting the world out,” to, on the other hand, being socially committed and determined, like Victor Hugo or Charles Dickens, to get the world’s attention. For some artists the abstract ideal and the perfection of the artwork itself is what matters most, is in fact all that matters. For others the artwork should carry a message, social or political, that, regardless of how it is framed, hopes to influence as large an audience as possible. Fortunately great art can emerge from either of these two positions. No one would think to disparage *The Well-Tempered Clavier* or the *Goldberg Variations* for the absence of social import; nor would we deny the emotional and artistic importance of as publicly motivated a music as the finale to Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*.

My life story is a curious narrative that bounces back and forth from these two poles, the introvert and the extrovert. I was never a pure example either, neither an ivory-tower musical formalist nor a socially engaged activist. I have nonetheless been deeply touched by both impulses, the public and the private. I came of age during the turbulent years of the Vietnam War and the birth of the Counterculture when music, in this case rock music, possessed an astonishing power to unite people unlike anything I’ve witnessed since. Rock music of that era was literally the voice of the collective consciousness. It was a thrilling time and I’ll never forget how powerfully that music felt at the time. Nonetheless, I have to admit that the most important moments in my life have been spent with music, painting and literature of the greatest intimacy, created in the most personal and most private sense: the poems of Emily Dickinson, the string quartets of Mozart and Brahms, the landscapes of Cezanne and Van Gogh, work by artists who, as far as I can imagine, had no thought of addressing millions of people or of making a political statement.

I experienced music-making first-hand from my earliest years. My parents were both musical, although not professionally so. My first musical memories were of my father playing the clarinet and my mother singing. They had met when my father was playing in a jazz orchestra which at the time was hired at a dance hall owned by my mother’s stepfather. So all during my youth I heard in our home both jazz and classical music. We listened to both “art” music and “popular” music without necessarily prizing one form over the other. In retrospect I think that was a curiously American attitude, and I’m sure that exposure to both kinds of music formed my own musical DNA.

Because we lived in a rural area a long way from the nearest large city, I had to create my own musical experience by myself. I discovered the great composers, from Bach through Stravinsky, entirely through recordings and by reading the scores, most of which I had to order through the mail. I never heard a Mahler symphony in live performance until I was in my twenties. Music, especially during my adolescence, was an intensely emotional experience. I couldn’t get enough of it, listening, playing,



conducting student performers and composing my own. My first orchestra composition was performed by a local amateur orchestra at a concert in a mental hospital before an audience of severely disabled mental patients for whom the sound of live music instantly affected them, making them shout with joy or weep uncontrollably. I am sure that this experience taught me the most about the power of music to unlock people's deepest feelings.

*“I was thrilled by the energy, the colour and the emotion of much of this pop music”*

Then I went off to university, and the cognitive dissonance began. It was the late 1960s, in contemporary music the era of what we now call “High Modernism.” Serialism, twelve-tone composition, and the radical atomization of all music's elements was for serious composers the prevailing Zeitgeist. The new music that had the greatest prestige was that which was composed most consciously, most systematically, most rationally. I say that I experienced “cognitive dissonance” because, as an impressionable student, I felt torn between, on the one hand, feeling that if I wanted to be a serious composer I *ought* be writing in an atonal and rhythmically discontinuous style, something that was utterly alien to me. And on the other hand, I could see that most of the other students were wildly, passionately captivated by all the great popular music that blossomed during those years of the late sixties and early seventies. It disturbed me profoundly to think that in order to be a composer one had to do what my professors seemed to be suggesting: that I shut myself off, ignore the Dionysian energy of rock and soul music and instead live and compose like a monk, writing music intended for a tiny audience consisting mostly of other composers.

Newly composed classical music during the twentieth century had, with some exceptions, evolved to a state of ever increasing complexity, and, especially with the abandonment of tonal harmony, its audience had diminished to the point of being a miniscule elite. When I was in college during the late sixties and early seventies, the model for a serious composer was to adopt the identity and behaviour of a scientist. You viewed the composing of music as a kind of research. You did not concern yourself with communicating with anyone who was not equally informed and sophisticated. The contemporary composer would not worry an audience, because that was no longer the goal. The goal was advancing the language and the technology of music, and for this working in isolation would free composers from having to consider their art as a commodity. The model was to adopt a “scientific” approach to composing. This of course resulted in an ever widening divide, the virtual alienation between composer and audience. And we young composers were told that this isolation would be a permanent condition, and that was a good thing, presumably because the composer would no longer have to worry whether his work was accessible.

Many of the most influential composers at the time were European, some of whom had emerged from the post-war period determined to make a radical break with the art-historical past. Many created works of great originality, intricately organized and brilliantly imagined, but which were nonetheless impenetrable to all but a small audience of cognoscenti. Even Stravinsky, one of the greatest creative artists of all time, in his last years, felt the necessity to systematize his music and adopt the serial method. (But he was too much a man of the theatre not to make even his most rigorous works somehow appealing and accessible.)

And, as I say, the paradox was that while contemporary art music was becoming increasingly difficult and “specialized”, the popular music of the late 1960s and early 1970s was brimming with activity. It was the great era of The Beatles, Miles Davis, Jimi Hendrix, Bob Dylan, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, The Supremes. I was thrilled by the energy, the colour and the emotion of much of this pop music, and I was also aware of how dominant

a role some of these artists played in the culture.

Through their art, and of course their very charismatic personalities, they spoke to millions, in the same way that the great novelists of the 19th century like Dickens, Hugo and Tolstoy affected a huge audience. I recently saw an article in an Italian newspaper about the fall of the Berlin Wall. The headline was: "Dylan, Springsteen, Bowie: The Voices that Made the Wall Come Down." Now, I don't for a minute believe that some pop singers, even the Nobel Prize-winning Bob Dylan, were the reason the Soviet Union fell apart. I suspect economics probably had more to do with it than a couple of rock anthems. But what interests me about the headline is the mythology that a work of art, whether it be a Dylan song, a novel by Emile Zola, a play by Brecht or a symphony by Shostakovich, could have such an impact on people's social awareness that an actual change in society might result.

I draw these two distinctions—the composer-as-scientist and the rock star—just to describe the vast terrain that the world of music embraces and in which I have had to live and work. I am old enough now to have respect for both points of view, and every day when I sit down to work I struggle with trying to find the best way to create a work of art that has its own integrity and yet can speak to as wide an audience as possible.

I note that the Erasmus jury, in awarding the prize this year, said that I have "made contemporary classical music 'communicate' again, important at a time when this genre has increasing difficulty in finding a following." I am humbled by this citation, but in accepting the honour I also acknowledge that the world of artistic creation is as varied as there are artists who inhabit it, and there is no single ideal model of how an artist should or ought to behave. Quite honestly, I don't know a composer who doesn't want to communicate. A lifetime in music has taught me that there are many voices, each communicating in its own way, be it intimate or public. What for me counts most is the depth of a work's feeling, the delight of its invention and the beauty of its form.

Read by John Adams



His Majesty the King invests John Adams with the Erasmus Prize adornments.



H.R.H. Princess Beatrix, H.M. the King, John Adams and H.M. the Queen after the ceremony, Royal Palace Amsterdam.

# Biography John Adams

John Coolidge Adams (1947) has an extensive body of work that encompasses chamber music, orchestral composition and opera. Although his musical roots lie in New England (US), he currently lives and works in California. John Adams grew up with the big bands in which his father played and the musicals in which his mother sang. He saw Mozart as his great idol but was equally carried away by Jimi Hendrix, The Beatles and The Beach Boys. He began composing at the age of ten and went on to study composition at Harvard University. It was there that he distanced himself from the inflexibility and atonality of post-war composers. He felt more drawn to the minimalism that was emerging around that time. A hallmark of his work is the fusion of 'western' musical traditions and popular culture – minimal music first and foremost, but also pop and jazz.

Adams became famous for his music-theatre productions – collaborating for many years with director Peter Sellars – in which he regularly tackles sensitive social issues. His best-known orchestral compositions are *Shaker Loops* (1978), *Harmonielehre* (1985), *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* (1986), *Chamber Symphony* (1992) and *Naive and Sentimental Music* (1999). The operas that established his reputation include *Nixon in China* (1987), *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991) and *Doctor Atomic* (2005). In 2002, he wrote *On the Transmigration of Souls*, in memory of the victims of the attack on the World Trade Center. For this, he was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for Music. In recent years he has written a *Saxophone Concerto* (2013), as an ode to the great jazz saxophonists John Coltrane,

Eric Dolphy and Wayne Shorter. Another recent piece of his is the oratorio *The Gospel According to the Other Mary* (2013). In 2015, a new violin concerto, entitled *Scheherazade.2*, premiered. In this piece he calls attention to the oppression of women around the world. The works of Adams have earned him numerous Grammys and a Pulitzer Prize for music. He has also been awarded honorary doctorates from Harvard, Yale and the Royal Academy of Music.

On 28 February 2019, his opera project *Girls of the Golden West* – again directed by Peter Sellars – had its European premiere at the National Opera in Amsterdam.







# Activities

## Concert 'Spot on John Adams'

28 November, Main Hall/Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ, Amsterdam

On the evening of the Erasmus Prize award ceremony, the music of John Adams was the highlight of an exciting concert by Het Nieuw Ensemble, conducted by Ed Spanjaard. They created a programme of new and older work by like-minded composers, and of course by John Adams himself. It included the rarely performed *Gnarly Buttons*, with a virtuoso solo for clarinetist Anna voor de Wind: the instrument of both the composer and of his father. The programme also featured the jazzy *American Berserk* by piano soloist Paolo Gorini, and the ensemble piece *John's Book of Alleged Dances*, with catchy dances of all kinds. Finally, the young Dutch composer Rick van Veldhuizen composed a short homage to John Adams. It was a memorable evening that introduced audience members to the many facets and themes in the work of John Adams.

i.c.w. Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ

## John Adams composition masterclass

'The sound of the future'

29 November, Royal Conservatoire The Hague

During an interactive masterclass, John Adams spoke passionately with young composers about their work. They talked about music but there was of course plenty of new music to be heard. Student ensembles from the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague performed three new compositions by emerging talents. After each piece, John Adams spoke to the young composers about the technical aspects of composing and about their important role as composers in today's world. There was also ample opportunity for members of the audience to join in, often giving the conversation an interesting change of direction. The afternoon offered insight into the inspiring work method of John Adams and introduced the audience to an emerging generation of composers.

i.c.w. Royal Conservatoire The Hague

## John Adams in conversation about jazz

'It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing'

30 November, Conservatorium van Amsterdam

Big band music lies at the basis of the musical life of John Adams. The pulse of jazz has always remained a consistent factor in his music and, accordingly, couldn't be overlooked. Sources of inspiration for Adams featured prominently during a varied programme: from Mozart and Duke Ellington to Jimi Hendrix. Particular attention was given to old and new jazz, passionately performed by students and alumni from the Conservatorium van Amsterdam. In an accessible talk-show setting Andrea van Pol interviewed John Adams about his musical memories and the influence of the Californian landscape on his music. In addition, Adams talked with students and staff about jazz, pop culture and new music, sparking new insights and animated conversations.

i.c.w. Conservatorium van Amsterdam

## John Adams in film 'Io Sono l'Amore'

1 December, Louis Hartlooper Complex, Utrecht

The musical soundtrack by John Adams forms an integral part of the Italian feature film *Io Sono l'Amore* (2009, 120 minutes), an Italian family drama with Tilda Swinton in the lead role. Before the screening, film music specialist Michel Schöpping gave an absorbing introduction. He discussed how music and film can enhance each other and which role the compelling music played by John Adams in this film.

i.c.w. Louis Hartlooper Complex



Fl.t.r.: chair Jet de Ranitz, musicians of the Nieuw Ensemble, clarinetist Anna voor de Wind, conductor and board member Ed Spanjaard, John Adams, H.M. the King and pianist Paolo Gorini.



John Adams in conversation with composition students during the masterclass at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague.

## Media

### John Adams on NPO Radio 4

NPO Radio 4 devoted ample attention to John Adams throughout the week leading up to the Erasmus Prize award ceremony, for example via the programme Podium and online at [www.npo.radio4.nl](http://www.npo.radio4.nl). This culminated in a highly appreciated radio interview with John Adams that was broadcasted during the award ceremony.

### Publications in newspapers and online

There has been much praise for the laureate John Adams. Numerous articles have run in, among others, national newspapers Het Parool, the NRC and De Volkskrant. John Adams was also applauded online. Place de l'Opera, the Strad, Strings and the Violin Channel posted laudatory messages. In addition, many renowned venues and persons responded with praise via Facebook and Twitter, such as Het Muziekgebouw, Nonesuch Records and Podium Radio 4.

## Publications

### Erasmus Essay by Bas van Putten 'Een klinkend landschap'

In the series of Erasmus Essays of the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation, on the occasion of the Erasmus Prize 2019.



Erasmus Essay by Bas van Putten.





John Adams in conversation with two composition students and Andrea van Pol during the programme at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam.



Bigband of the Conservatorium van Amsterdam during the programme.



# Research Prizes 2019

Since 1988, the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation awards annual Research Prizes. Five prizes of € 3,000 each are awarded to young academic researchers in the humanities and social sciences, who have written a PhD dissertation of outstanding quality at a university in the Netherlands. Important criteria for the award are the broad, case transcending treatment of the subject and the wider relevance of the book for other disciplines. This year's selection committee was formed by Dr. Barnita Bagchi, Dr. Shanti van Dam, Dr.mr. Max Drenth, Prof.dr. Naomi Ellemers, Prof.dr. Bas ter Haar Romeny, Prof.dr. Rick Lawson en Prof.dr. Jos de Mul.

The Research Prizes award ceremony took place on Thursday 16 May 2019 at the Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences in Amsterdam.

The winning dissertations of 2019:

**Evelyn Wan**

Clocked! Time and Biopower in the Age of Algorithms

**Marijke Naezer**

Sexy Adventures. An ethnography of youth, sexuality and social media

**Dilek Kurban**

The Limits of Transnational Justice: The European Court of Human Rights, Turkey and the Kurdish Conflict

**Eva Groen-Reijman**

Deliberative Political Campaigns: Democracy, Autonomy and Persuasion

**Annemarie van Geel**

For women only. Gender segregation, Islam and modernity in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait



F.l.t.r.: Eva Groen-Reijman, Dilek Kurban, Evelyn Wan, Shanti van Dam, Annemarie van Geel.



# Evelyn Wan

## *Clocked! Time and Biopower in the Age of Algorithms*

**Supervisor** Prof. dr. Maaïke Bleeker  
**Nomination** Utrecht University, Faculty of  
Humanities (Media and  
Performance Studies)

### Report of the Selection Committee

Are we still in control of our own time? Or are algorithms taking over our time and governing our lives? In her thesis, Wan shows how contemporary technological developments are creating new forms of control, discipline and even exploitation. Just as the invention of the clock made it possible for the first time to quantify and synchronize work and other activities, and thus influence our daily lives, technology – partly invisible – is now intensifying that control and discipline. In her thesis, Evelyn Wan puts forward a dystopian image in which the impact of algorithms and digital technologies extends to a biological level, right into our bodies.

Evelyn Wan shows how over the centuries the idea of measuring time has evolved, from the first mechanical clocks to today's digital data collections, and increasingly determines our lives. She also issues an urgent warning. For the clock is ticking, literally and figuratively. Wan has written a very timely book, and it is for good reason that it has already garnered so much media attention. The book is also compiled with the precision of a Swiss watch. The author succeeds in bringing various sources of information together in an exciting mixture, and she manages to translate even the most impenetrable philosophical or technical discussions into a legible text.



# Marijke Naezer

## *Sexy Adventures. An ethnography of youth, sexuality and social media*

**Supervisors** Prof.dr. Marieke van den Brink  
Prof.dr. Willy Jansen

**Co-supervisor** Dr. Els Romnes

**Nomination** Radboud University Nijmegen,  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
(Gender & Diversity Studies)

### Report of the Selection Committee

In this thesis, Naezer examines how young people shape sexuality through social media. The author interprets sexuality as a broad-ranging and multi-layered concept that encompasses both personal feelings and desires as well as social ideologies and practices, which range from gender relations to power relations and moral discourses. She creatively combines qualitative and quantitative methods to gain insight into the experiences and opinions of young people. Naezer introduces the concept of 'adventure', which has a less negative connotation than the term 'risk behaviour', and implies a complex mixture of danger and pleasure.

In recent years the jury has often received books about similar subjects. Everybody is obviously all fascinated by what our children or young relatives are doing behind their captivating screens. But this book is quite simply peerless, both in its interdisciplinary approach and in its critical attitude towards existing discourses which marginalize certain youth groups. Through her innovative and individual approach, Naezer succeeds in elaborating constructive insights into this topical theme, thereby contributing to the development of an academic tradition that centres on empowering young people.



## Dilek Kurban

# *The Limits of Transnational Justice: The European Court of Human Rights, Turkey and the Kurdish Conflict*

**Supervisors** Prof. dr. Bruno de Witte  
Prof. dr. Monica Claes  
**Nomination** Maastricht University,  
Faculty of Law  
(International Law)

### Report of the Selection Committee

According to the jury, this thesis can best be described as “bold”. It focuses on the crucial issue of what an international organ like the European Court of Human Rights (EHRM) can achieve when it really matters. Not much, is the sombre conclusion. It examines ‘from the bottom up’ how, from the 1990s on, Kurdish activists have turned to the Court in Strasbourg to highlight their distressing plight, how the Court has responded to these complaints, and what effects the numerous judgements have caused. That is ultimately not much in an authoritarian state like Turkey, the author concludes. Accordingly, the conventional image of the European Court of Human Rights as a success story needs to be adjusted.

The ‘bottom up’ perspective in which the perceptions and strategies of Kurdish lawyers and activists are vividly described, in combination with a sharp analysis of secondary sources, make this an original book that amounts to more than just a ‘case study’ on the position of the Kurds. The author has translated into a razor-sharp and all-revealing argument her palpable indignation about how it is possible that the state repression of and violence against Kurds in Turkey still continues, despite almost 25 years of disputes, processes and numerous breaches. Her analysis grabs us by the throat, and the disillusionment still lingers.



The jury commends Kurban’s energetic and ruthless style of writing, and is particularly impressed that the activist character of this thesis has resulted in an excellent work of scholarship. That combination commands respect.

# Eva Groen-Reijman

## *Deliberative Political Campaigns: Democracy, Autonomy and Persuasion*

**Supervisor** Prof. dr. Beate Roessler  
**Co-supervisor** Dr. Robin Celikates  
**Nomination** University of Amsterdam, Faculty of Humanities (Political Philosophy & Digital Media)

### Report of the Selection Committee

Where lies the boundary between political information, critical debate and manipulation during political campaigns? A complicated and difficult question that the author of this thesis addresses in extremely lucid fashion. This study of the importance of ‘deliberation’ to democratic politics, and the question whether campaign techniques such as ‘framing’ and ‘spinning’ facilitate deliberation or hinder it, is tackled by Groen-Reijman in an original and interdisciplinary manner.

Applied areas of research are political psychology, political philosophy and political communication studies, a growing mountain of recent insights that the author deftly and effectively juggles. New campaign techniques are impartially examined, leading to surprising and more positive judgements than are customary in contemporary debate. The jury was struck by the original and balanced perspective, and suspects that Erasmus would have enjoyed reading this well-written discourse. After all, the detached gaze in this book is always accompanied by a manifest concern for the state of current Western democracies. That positions the book in an Erasmian tradition in which academic research informs and serves the public sphere.



# Annemarie van Geel

## *For women only. Gender segregation, Islam and modernity in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait*

**Supervisor** Prof. dr. C. van Nieuwkerk  
**Co-supervisor** Prof. dr. C. Versteegh  
**Nomination** Radboud University Nijmegen,  
Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and  
Religious Studies

### Report of the Selection Committee

This study of gender segregation and attitudes towards modernity convincingly opens the door to a world often inaccessible to the West – the world of women in Arab countries. The research findings, especially the striking contrast between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in terms of the attitudes of women themselves towards their religion and role in society, are highly relevant to both the academic and political domains.

In her thesis, Van Geel analyses in a highly original manner the emergence of public spaces that are ‘women only’, as expressions of a specific, local modernity with a religious and spiritual dimension. Never before has a Dutch researcher conducted research in these countries into the position of women by speaking to the women themselves. Van Geel has demonstrated courage in taking on this challenge and, in the eyes of the jury, done it successfully.

There are special universities and banks in Saudi Arabia where women can study and arrange their financial affairs without coming into contact with men. In Kuwait, however, contact between men and women is the norm. Van Geel asks what women think about this situation. The author comprehensively examines views of modernity versus Westernization, making excellent use of social science theories and also making this book all the more relevant today.

Finally, Van Geel’s mission is to “contribute to knowledge and understanding of the Middle East in the Netherlands, especially in relation to women”, as she writes in her public summary, highly successful not least on account of her easy and smooth style of writing.



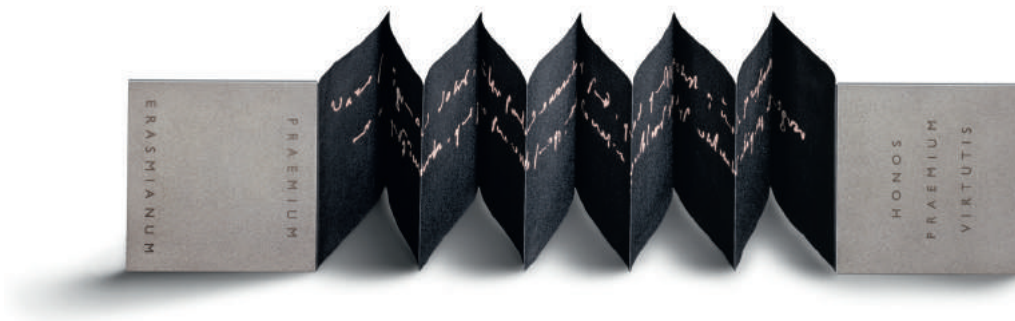




# Origin and Aim of the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation

On 23 June 1958, His Royal Highness Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands founded the Praemium Erasmianum. The aim of the organisation, as described in article 2 of its constitution, is to enhance the position of the humanities, the social sciences and the arts and to promote appreciation of these fields within society, within the context of the cultural traditions of Europe in general and the ideas of Erasmus in particular. The emphasis is on tolerance, cultural multiformity and undogmatic critical thinking.

The Erasmus Prize consists of €150,000 and adornments. The Board is composed of leading members of the Dutch cultural, scholarly and business communities.



The adornments are designed by Bruno Ninaber van Eyben. The adornments consist of a harmonica folded ribbon with a titanium plate at both ends. In closed form it is a booklet; when opened a ribbon with a text in Erasmus' handwriting. This text, taken from a letter to Jean de Carondelet (Basel 5 January 1523), is characteristic of Erasmus' thinking:

*Diverse are the gifts of men of genius and many are the different kinds of ages. Let each one reveal the scope of his competence and let no one be envious of another who in keeping with his own ability and style tries to make a useful contribution to the education of all.*

Erasmus to Jean de Carondelet  
Basel, 5 January 1523

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1958 Het Oostenrijkse volk

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