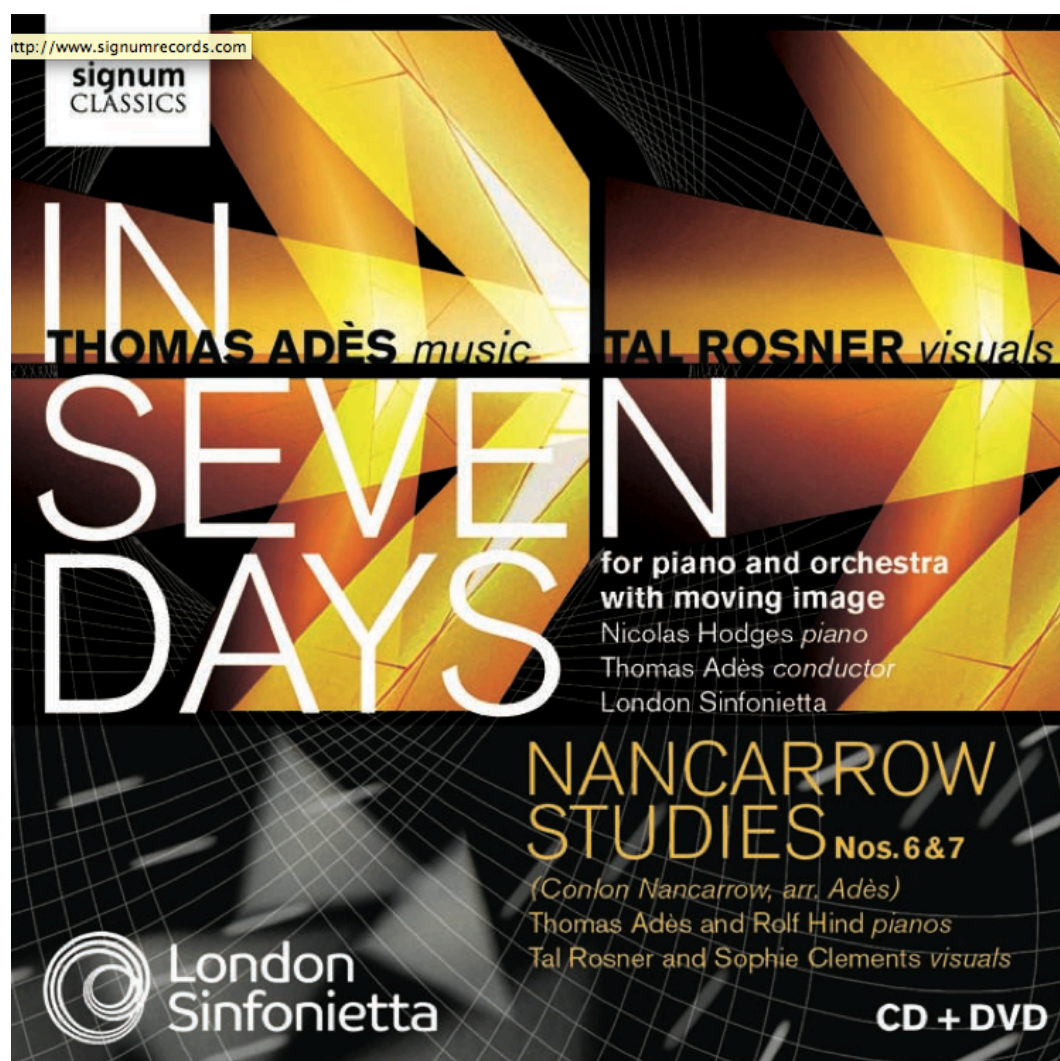


Thomas Adès

In Seven Days

for piano and orchestra with moving image by Tal Rosner
2008



Overview*About the music*

The subject of Creation suitably elicits music focussing on creation – on how tiny particles of sound can combine, and recombine, and jostle against one another, to produce a half-hour continuity. In Seven Days is a fractal composition, a work in which certain simple elements – as simple as the rising scale step that kicks the whole thing off – are repeated again and again in contexts that are in a perpetual state of change thanks to the composer's virtuoso control of rhythm and, especially, harmony, his twisted tonality emerging, totally fresh, from decades of popular music as well as from the classical tradition.

Composing against a visual counterpoint, Adès does not attempt to evoke the objects of Creation so much as the processes, and the energies. The separation of sea and sky, for instance, is imagined in what might be an infinite simultaneity of ascending and descending lines, perhaps suggesting Escher's perpetual staircases. Plant life burgeons as growing variation (but then, everything here is growing variation), from the extreme bass to a majestic climax. Astronomy reminds us that this work is also very much a piano concerto. The fugue in two sections – one escaping the piano, the other with the piano to the fore – tells us that everything is gentle fall, calming benediction. But then, at the end of the following contemplation, the whole process seems about to start over again. Creation is neverending.

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Overview

About the visuals

The video element in the piece originates from an in-depth documentation of two architectural sources: the Royal Festival Hall in London and the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles (the two venues that hosted its live premieres). The visuals are an exploration of these magnificent structures, their interiors and exteriors, as well as facades and immediate surroundings.

In restricting myself to using only elements from these two buildings, whether they were recorded on film or in still photographs, I created a new vocabulary of forms and compositions. The result is a wide spectrum of colours, shapes and rhythms that form a sound-responsive interpretation of the music across 6 screens, changing speed and direction, and moving between canon and independence.

The material alternates from the obvious (e.g. the silhouette of the Disney Hall against a blue sky), to the obscure (e.g light fixtures, air-vents and so on). It was a fascinating process to illustrate the Genesis story of creation by abstracting these elements. For example, the trees in Day 3 are in fact many layers of scaffolding super-imposed on top of each other, creating a very organic texture from a very man- made source.

In my view, contemporary music has been neglected in terms of visual interpretation in comparison to other musical fields. Being a big fan of the genre, I saw this piece as an opportunity to communicate my own understanding of the music and enable the viewers to follow my personal interpretation of various patterns and progressions with both ears and eyes.

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Wk8A - Improvisation

Using Rosner's video as inspiration, improvise as a class using you past composition experiences as a guide.

Reflection:

- What did you notice about other class people's improvisations?
- How was your improvisation different or similar?
- How did you think of what to play? What inspired or informed you?