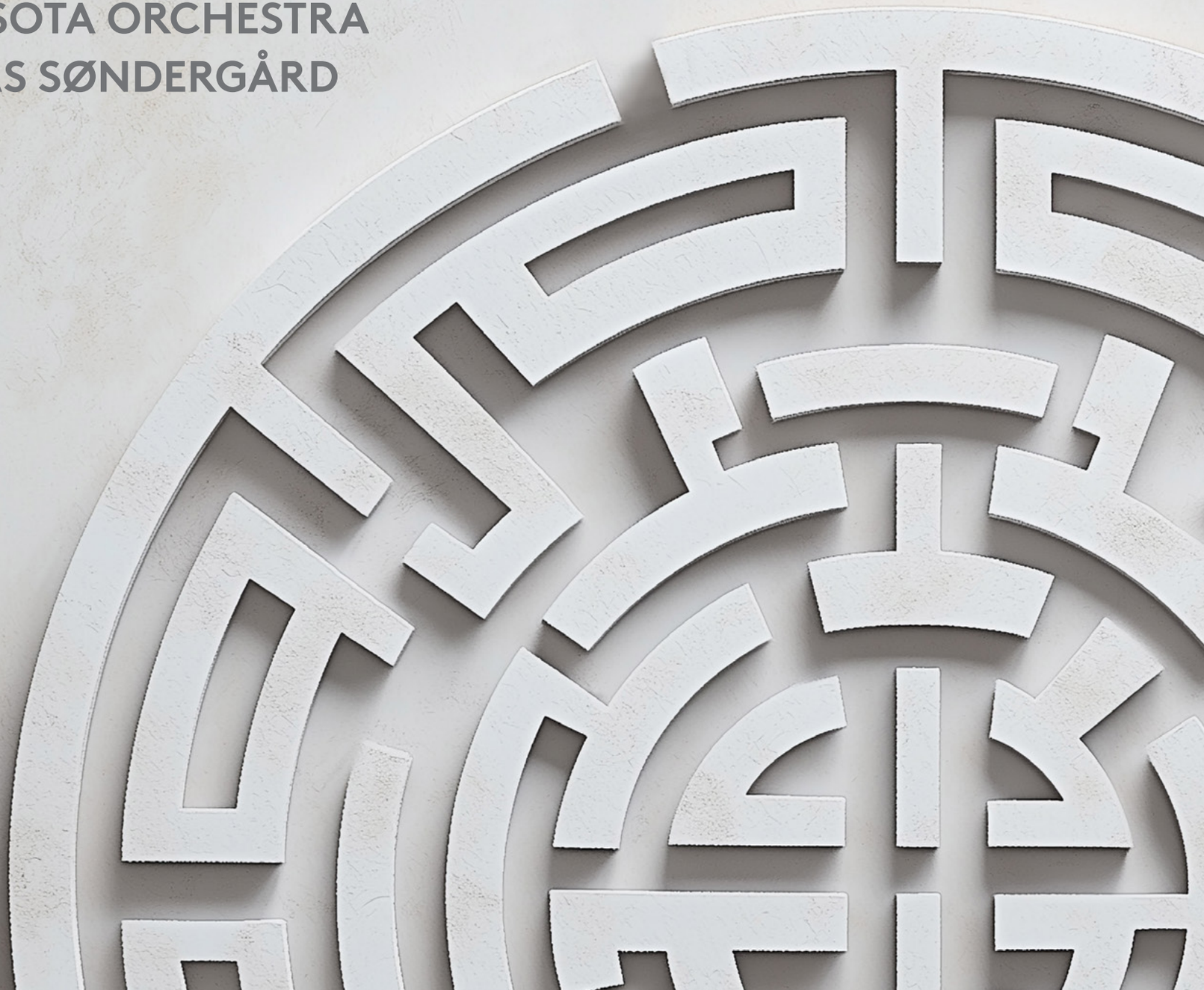
Thomas Adès

The Exterminating Angel Symphony

Violin Concerto

LEILA JOSEFOWICZ
MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA
THOMAS SØNDERGÅRD



Minnesota Orchestra & Thomas Søndergård

© Travis Anderson

Thomas Adès (b. 1971)

	The Exterminating Angel* Symphony (2020)	
1	I. Entrances	6. 01
2	II. March	3. 44
3	III. Berceuse	4. 58
4	IV. Waltzes	7. 34
	Violin Concerto (2005)**	
5	I. Rings	3. 51
6	II. Paths	8. 48
7	III. Rounds	4. 41
	Total playing time:	39. 43

**world premiere recording*

****Leila Josefowicz**, violin
Minnesota Orchestra
conducted by **Thomas Søndergård**

© Marco Borggreve

The Minnesota Orchestra was the first professional orchestra to perform my work in the United States, so it is especially touching to hear them play my music in this breathtaking recording.

I first worked with Thomas Søndergård twenty years ago in Copenhagen on *The Tempest* and couldn't imagine a finer pair of hands to entrust with this premiere recording of *The Exterminating Angel Symphony*.

I have unbounded admiration and affection for the artistry of Leila Josefowicz - without question one the greatest violinists of our time. Performing the Violin Concerto with her is one of my most exciting and moving memories, and I feel exceptionally lucky that after some sixty performances of the piece she has chosen to record her extraordinarily brilliant, deft and passionate interpretation with Thomas and his wonderful orchestra.

Thomas Adès

It is a thrill to finally record the Violin Concerto of Thomas Adès on disc, especially as a live recording. It is a piece that I fell in love with soon after it was written, and it became a main part of my repertoire over the last decades. I could say it is partly responsible for shaping me on my journey of constant evolution as a musician, performing this so many times with a multitude of great conductors and orchestras, and often with Adès.

Collaborating with Thomas Søndergård for this concert recording has been one of the most inspiring I've ever had.

I am grateful that this recording is live, because there is that extra electricity in the air and an urgency that is communicated to the audience, that encourages me to express this important work with even more intention.

I hope to highlight the extremes of emotion and the magical textural qualities that make this piece, in my opinion, one of the most powerful of Adès' oeuvre. The drama of the combination of the sounds being mystically archaic, and yet simultaneously refreshingly new, makes Violin Concerto one of the most exciting pieces in the violin repertoire — written just at the turn of this century. It is my great hope that it strikes the listener and makes them want to relisten, again and again.

Leila Josefowicz

© Tom Zimberoff

© Chris McDuffie

I first met Thomas Adès in Copenhagen in 2005 when I was conducting his second opera *The Tempest*. I was struck by his genius in shaping the music; the drama inside the opera was astonishing, and that influential first meeting has never left me. It was actually very much like my first rehearsal with the Minnesota Orchestra—a definitive moment in my life as a musician.

When I became Music Director of the Minnesota Orchestra it was a natural step for me to record Tom Adès' music—both the symphony distilled from his third opera *The Exterminating Angel* and his Violin Concerto—with my new orchestra, which is an ensemble that is so keen for new repertoire and so quick to adapt to it. And working with Leila Josefowicz, who deeply understands the Adès musical universe, was a brilliant partnership.

I have always loved Tom Adès' sense of harmony and melody, which comes through in these works. Longer lines, melody and harmony have always gone quite straight to my heart. He has that specific voice where you have no doubt whose music you are hearing. He is also an artist in the way he treats material with the love, insight and skill that allows listeners to carry something home afterward. You know you've experienced something unique in his music that has taken you from one place entirely to another, sometimes in just a few minutes.

Thomas Søndergård

In the world of contemporary concert music, few composers so perfectly marry the visceral and the intellectual as Thomas Adès. His flair for entrancing the listener with both story and substance, providing the listener with a holistic musical experience rivals that of any of the great composers of both concert music and opera.

The music of Adès is steeped in tradition yet also plunges into the modernist depths of timbre, rhythmic complexity, and surrealist texture. His wildly imaginative, luminous orchestration is tied intrinsically to his distinct sense of drama, culminating in a wide-reaching catalog of works, ranging from the sardonic to the sublime. The two Adès works recorded by the Minnesota Orchestra, under the direction of Thomas Søndergård, perfectly illustrate the composer at his most potent and facile discipline.

Adès' 2020 composition, ***The Exterminating Angel* Symphony**, is a reconstruction of his 2016 operatic adaptation of the 1962 cult-classic film of the same name by Mexican director Luis Buñuel. Though a rarity in the repertoire, the "opera symphony" (as opposed to an overture or suite) has become an attractive option to composers due to the financial obstacles of staging a full opera, with the first such notable example of the form being by another twenty-first-century compositional giant, John Adams, and his *Doctor Atomic* Symphony. *The Exterminating Angel*, in film and opera, is an absurdist dark comedy depicting the secretive boorish nature of the bourgeoisie as they arrive at a mansion for a dinner party from which they find they cannot leave. The symphony is a signature Adès production, using a large battery of percussion as well as a full complement of winds and brass.

The first movement of the symphony, *Entrances*, is excerpted from the opera's opening as the guests arrive for the dinner party. It features grotesque approximations of high society music, thumbing its nose at the bourgeoisie as they enter the mansion. The movement employs a signature Adès compositional technique of "irrational meters," which sound as sharp accelerations of tempo, jerking the listener around like a rollercoaster–one that has its rider simultaneously smiling with glee and questioning the qualifications of the architect of such a fiendish device. The orchestra pulsates with fresh energy, with flashes of brilliance from concertmaster Erin Keefe in lilting solo passages, her tone offering a bel canto-esque prima soprano quality in the best way imaginable, committing to the role bestowed on her by the references present in this movement.

The aptly titled second movement, *Marches*, ratchets up the tension with maniacal snare drum rudiments, like a haunting ode to Ravel's *Boléro*. The movement also features a strong rhythmic and harmonic motive of a short accented pickup beat preceding each menacing sonority in the orchestra, creating an auditory depiction of the party-goers searching for an exit from the mansion as they begin to realize their fate.

Adès' tense writing only relents when the third movement, *Berceuse*, begins, with its lilting triple-meter lullaby sweeping through the orchestra, a fitting requiem for two doomed young lovers attending the dinner party. The orchestration

is lush, and ripe with fatalism, and the orchestra shows a supreme understanding of the dissonant undertones of the churning harmonic progression—mournful but unlabored.

The finale, *Waltzes*, is the only movement that doesn't directly quote a large swath of music from the opera. Instead, Adès describes its construction as "joining together the bits of a broken porcelain object," with layered waltz gestures picked from various parts of the opera, both jovial and menacing, splashing about the orchestra.

The final moments of the work give way to sparkling, sparse orchestration, closing with a Britten-esque flourish of piano, chipper violin melodies, and glockenspiel, interspersed with surrealist string glissandi.

Following the success of Thomas Adès' first opera *Powder Her Face* (1995), and his Grawemeyer-winning work for a Mahlerian-sized orchestra, *Asyla* (1999), the young composer, conductor, and current iteration of a seemingly inexhaustible line of young composers championed by the British, was jointly commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Berlin Festspiele to write a concerto for violinist Anthony Marwood in 2005. The **Violin Concerto** (originally subtitled *Concentric Paths*) is a dramatic three-movement work that follows the familiar fast-slow-fast form in a spirited 20-minute performance. *Concentric Paths* has been wildly popular for a contemporary violin concerto,having been performed with some regularity since its premiere in 2005, cementing Adès' well-deserved place among the upper ranks of living composers.

The first movement, *Rings*, is a constantly swirling series of harmonics and violin arpeggios embellished by the orchestra in a signature descending chromatic sequence of Adès'. The opening oscillation in the violin conjures memories of the Ligeti Violin Concerto, a favorite wellspring of modern composers including such prominent figures as Unsuk Chin. Adès describes the music as "[...] fast, with sheets of unstable harmony in different orbits." The work highlights Adès' preoccupation with process and organization, with the length of each formal section of the music being derived from the Fibonacci sequence, an obsession found often in the composer's music. The work also curiously employs the serial technique, a bastion of the Second Viennese School, whose legacy many composers carried as a mantle throughout the twentieth century. With each formal section, Adès' signature descending progression yields a complete chromatic scale before restarting, punctuated by a declamatory punch from the ensemble. The violinist plays continuously throughout the first movement, a herculean effort and a rarity among even the most challenging of concertos in the repertoire. The virtuosity displayed by the singular Leila Josefowicz is awe-inspiring, as she seems to almost suspend time, finding space for both surgical precision and tender nuances in the cracks of each fleeting moment throughout the merciless *moto perpetuo*.

Paths opens with compulsive baroque-esque gestures traded between the soloist and the brass section in a modernist chaconne. The lyrical lines of the subsequent solo passage clash dramatically

against the orchestra, eventually joining in harmony only to devolve into brooding grunts by the movement's close. The Minnesota Orchestra, under Music Director Thomas Søndergård, find a bold new trajectory for this movement, with a more impassioned romantic feel than other ensembles. The result is sublime, and wholly signature of the marriage between conductor, ensemble, and soloist.

Following the dramatic highs of the second movement, *Rounds* opens with a brutal, ritualistic dance rhythm, reminiscent of Stravinsky or Villa-Lobos. Josefowicz again returns to the stratospheric highs of the earlier movements accompanied by ascending sequences of pitches, only to be unceremoniously swallowed up by the orchestral gestures from the work's opening.

The Minnesota Orchestra's recording of these works provides a fresh take on the works, offering a robust, romantic understanding of the works, undoubtedly due to the personal connection between Thomas Søndergård and Adès, and indeed Josefowicz's imaginative, visceral interpretation of the concerto, and her own tenure with the devilishly difficult composition. The recording shows the Minnesota Orchestra's pliancy under the baton of their new maestro, flowing seamlessly through lush romantic passages, technical precision, and visceral gesture — marking them as a pairing to watch for years to come.

Nicholas Landrum

Acknowledgements

PRODUCTION TEAM
Executive producer **Minnesota Orchestra**
Recording producer **Brad Michel**
Recording engineers **Michael Osborne**, **Jay Perlman**, **Thomas Garneau**

ARTWORK
Liner notes **Nicholas Landrum**
Cover design **Marjolein Coenrady** (PENTATONE)
Booklet cover photo **Frank Merchlewitz**
Booklet coordination & design **Karolina Szymanik** (PENTATONE)

This album was recorded live at Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, between 26-28 September 2024.

Publisher credits:
Thomas Adès' music is published by Faber Music.

PENTATONE TEAM
Managing Director **Sean Hickey** | Label Director **Silvia Pietrosanti** | A&R **Alice Lombardo**
Product Management **Ana Teodorović** | Press **Allie Summers** | Distribution **Camilla Vickerage** | Audio **Wirre de Vries** | Finance **Adrie Engels** | Admin **Lineke Steffers**

Sit back and enjoy