

DAVID CHARLES ABELL

Biography

For conductor David Charles Abell, classical music, opera, film music, and musical theater all contribute to a diverse career, unified by a serious yet theatrical approach. Born in North Carolina, Abell studied viola, trumpet, piano, organ, and composition, turning his attention to conducting at the age of fourteen. He subsequently studied with Leonard Bernstein and Nadia Boulanger, earning degrees from Yale University and the Juilliard School. He has worked with many distinguished artists from both the classical and pop worlds, including Bryn Terfel, Simon Keenlyside, Diana Damrau, Stephen Hough, Judi Dench, Emma Thompson, Lea Salonga, Idina Menzel, Heather Headley, Petula Clark, Josh Groban, Matthew Morrison, Michael Ball and Michael Feinstein.

Residing in London from 1996 to 2020, Abell conducted many of the leading British orchestras, including the London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Bournemouth Symphony, Hallé Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and Royal Scottish National Orchestra. He has made frequent appearances with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in repertoire ranging from Copland to Puccini to Gershwin. He has also guest conducted around the world with the Hong Kong Philharmonic, Iceland Symphony, RTÉ Concert Orchestra, Trondheim Symfoniorkester, West Australian Symphony, Cape Symphony (Massachusetts) and Boston Pops, among many others.

Abell made his BBC Proms debut conducting the BBC Concert Orchestra in a live telecast of Richard Rodgers' *Oklahoma!* in 2002. He has worked with the Concert Orchestra on many other occasions, including a BBC Proms tribute to Stephen Sondheim and the *War Horse* Prom in 2014 (both broadcast live on BBC television). His work with the BBC Symphony Orchestra includes a centenary concert honoring his mentor, Leonard Bernstein, at the Barbican in 2018. His performance with Peter Donohoe of the Gershwin *Concerto in F* with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales was featured in BBC Music Magazine. A much-respected artist in London's West End, Abell conducted the Olivier Awards ceremony for four years and was the musical director for the world premieres of Schönberg and Boublil's *Martin Guerre* and Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Love Never Dies*.

His operatic projects have included Barrie Kosky's production of *Die Zauberflöte* at Opera Philadelphia, *Eugene Onegin* at Hawaii Opera Theatre, *La gazza ladra* at Opera North (UK), *Die Fledermaus* at Cincinnati Opera, *La bohème*, *Rigoletto* and *Carmen* at Lyric Opera of Kansas City, and Kevin Puts' acclaimed World War I opera *Silent Night* in Kansas City, Cincinnati and Detroit. He is particularly associated with two American masterpieces: *Porgy and Bess* (Cape Town, Cincinnati and Atlanta) and *West Side Story* (Glimmerglass, Kansas City, Opera Pacific, Opéra du Rhin, Bregenz Festival). Most recently, he made his Seattle Opera debut with *The Pirates of Penzance*.

At London's Royal Albert Hall, Abell conducted three productions for Raymond Gubbay, Ltd.: *Madama Butterfly*, *Carmen* and *Show Boat*. In 2007, he led Menotti's opera *Maria Golovin* and an all-Menotti concert at the Spoleto Festival, winning the Pegasus Prize for artistic excellence. He conducted his own critical edition of *Kiss Me, Kate* for different productions at Opera North and the Théâtre du Châtelet. In 2015, Abell made his debut with English National Opera conducting *Sweeney Todd* (starring Emma Thompson and Bryn Terfel). He returned to ENO in 2017 for an equally-acclaimed *Carousel* with Alfie Boe. He made his Opernhaus Zürich debut in 2018 with *Sweeney Todd* (starring Angelika Kirchschlager and, again, Bryn Terfel). In celebration of the Curtis Institute's centennial in 2025, Abell conducted the students in Bernstein's *Candide* at Philadelphia's Forrest Theater.

An established name in France, Abell has conducted the French premieres of four Sondheim musicals: *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Sweeney Todd* and *Into the Woods* at the Théâtre du Châtelet and *Follies* at the Opéra de Toulon. His orchestral work in France includes concerts with the

Orchestre national de Lyon, Orchestre national Bordeaux Aquitaine, Orchestre national d'Île-de-France, Orchestre national de Lille, Orchestre de Cannes and the Orchestre Padeloup.

Abell's decade-long relationship with the Philly Pops culminated with his tenure as Music Director from 2020 to 2023. He helped the organization pivot during the Covid-19 pandemic by planning and conducting one of the first US orchestral streaming events in July, 2020. The Pops' subsequent Christmas celebration was broadcast to half a million US servicemen and women by the American Forces Network. The organization's return to live performance in autumn, 2021 was marked by a series of custom-designed programs, including tributes to Oscar Hammerstein 2nd, ABBA and the Beatles, plus the traditional ten-concert Christmas series.

David Charles Abell has appeared regularly on television, most notably conducting the 10th and 25th Anniversary concerts of *Les Misérables*, broadcast worldwide. Other TV projects include Rachel Portman's opera *The Little Prince*, *The Waltz King* (a BBC drama/documentary about the Johann Strausses, father and son), the Châtelet production of *Sunday in the Park with George* and the Toulon *Follies*. In 2004, he conducted *Cymru for the World*, the grand opening concert of the Wales Millennium Centre, broadcast live on BBC television with bass-baritone Bryn Terfel, tenor Dennis O'Neill, harpist Catrin Finch and actor Matthew Rhys.

Abell's commercial recordings include *Something's Gotta Give* with baritone Simon Keenlyside, *Forever* with soprano Diana Damrau, Jonathan Dove's opera *Tobias and the Angel*, *State Fair* and *The 20th Century Fox Songbook*, the musicals *Les Misérables*, *Miss Saigon*, *Martin Guerre* and *Man of La Mancha*, and highlights from *La bohème* and *Madama Butterfly* with the Royal Philharmonic.

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