

Axel Köhler

DIRECTOR + SINGER

Born in Schwarzenberg, began his musical studies at Carl Maria von Weber music school in Dresden where he concentrated on violin pedagogy and singing. Upon graduating he was engaged as bariton in Halle in 1984. Two years later, following the advice of Marianne Fischer-Kupfer in Berlin and Jessica Cash in London, he switched to altus.

Axel Köhler made his professional debut as an altus as Eustatio in Handel's RINALDO in Halle in the legendary production by Peter Konwitschny in 1987. In the time since, he has become known internationally as a Handel specialist, appearing in the titel roles of Sosarme, Giulio Cesare, Orlando, Tamerlano, Tolomeo. He made his American debut as Tamerlano in 1990 at the Kennedy Centre in Washington, DC, with the Handel Festival Orchestra conducted by Stephen Simon. He made his Carnegie Hall debut with Richard Westenberg's Musica Sacra in Handel's Messiah. Other projects included Orpheo by Telemann in Innsbruck and at the Berlin State Opera conducted by René Jacobs, the title role of GUISTINO and TAMERLANO at Komische Oper Berlin, Daniel in BELSAZAR and Poro in CLEOFIDE at Dresden Semper Opera, David in SAUL in Karlsruhe and Berlin, Ottone in AGRIPPINA in Halle. He sang Orlovsky in DIE FLEDERMAUS at Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome, in Hamburg and Berlin, Ottone in L'INCORONAZIONE DI POPPEA, Eustazio in RINALDO and Nireus in GIULIO CESARE at Bavarian State Opera.

During his career several composers have written parts for Axel Köhler: 1995 the part of Bacco in ARIANNA by Alexander Göhr (his debut at Royal Oper House in London), 1998 the titel role of FARINELLI by Siegfried Matthus, performed in Karlsruhe and Dresden, 2001 the devil in SCHERZ, SATIRE, IRONIE UND TIEFERE BEDEUTUNG by Detlef Glanert and the title role in CANTOR – DIE VERMESSUNG DES UNENDLICHEN by Ingomar Grünauer at Oper Halle. A particular importance for the singer reached the works by Hans Werner Henze – the part of Adschib in L'UPUPA at Salzburger Festspiele and at Teatro Real de Madrid in 2003, and the part of Artemis in PHAEDRA in Berlin, Brüssel, Wien, Frankfurt, Köln and London.

Axel Köhler is a virtuos song singer, his altus-recitals „Falsetto grazioso“ und „Falsetto amoroso“ in Berlin, Halle, Essen, Duisburg, Dresden and Rom were very successful. He worked with renowned early music ensembles such as Concerto Köln, Musica Antiqua Köln, Lautten Compagny and with conductors such as René Jacobs, Marcus Creed und Howard Arman.

In 1994 Axel Köhler was awarded the Handel Prize, in 1998 he was appointed Kammersänger and 1999 received the renowned Critics' Award of Berliner Zeitung.

Again and again the countertenor was to be experienced in operettas. Orlofski in DIE FLEDERMAUS he played at the Komische Oper Berlin, the Staatsoper Hamburg, the Staatstheater Karlsruhe and at the Oper Halle. In 1998 he was invited in this role with the ensemble of the Vienna State Opera to the Accademia Santa Cecilia. He performed the title role in ORPHEUS UNDERWELT at the Komische Oper Berlin and at the Oper Halle. Since 2005, Axel Köhler also sings and plays in humorous cabaret programs. Since 2016, the singer has been making leading roles at the Staatsoperette Dresden - such as in the musical ZZAUN! (world premiere) and Prof. Higgins in the musical classic MY FAIR LADY.

In 2000 Axel Köhler presented his first production as a director: L'INCORONAZIONE DI POPPEA in Halle got enthusiastic acclaim both by critics and audience. He was asked to direct RODRIGO at 50th Handel Music Festival in Halle. Handel's TESEO as production by Axel Köhler was acclaimed in 27 performances in Germany, Switzerland and England and is also available on DVD. In following he staged in Munich, Schwerin, Augsburg, Bayreuth, Leipzig, Innsbruck, Dresden, Palermo und Graz. At the Semper Opera in Dresden in 2012 Axel Köhler directed the opera ŠVANDA DUDÁK by Jaromir Weinberger, hailed by the journal „Opernwelt“ as rediscovery of the year. There also successful were his productions of CARMEN by Georges Bizet and DER FREISCHÜTZ by Carl Maria von Weber, honored with the Bachtrack Opera Award 2015. The DVD was honored by the renowned Japanese Record Geijutsu Magazine with his Record Oscar 2016.

With Philip Jenkins's dramatic version of DR. JEKYLL & MR. HYDE, Axel Köhler staged his first acting (without music) at the Landesbühnen Sachsen. In the following, he staged Mozart's DIE HOCHZEIT DES FIGARO at the Staatsoperette Dresden, Zeller's operetta DER VOGELHÄNDLER at the Seefestspiele Mörbisch and Franz Lehár's DIE LUSTIGE WITWE at Theater Erfurt. In 2018 he brought the operas on stage: DER OPERNBALL (Heuberger) at the Volksoper Wien, LA CENERENTOLA (Rossini) at Oldenburgisches Staatstheater and DIE CSÁRDÁSFÜRSTIN (Kálmán) at Staatsoperette Dresden, the two-piece event DIE SCHÖNE GALATHÉE|GIANNI SCHICCHI at Staatsoperette Dresden and DIE FLEDERMAUS (Strauss) at Deutschen Oper am Rhein. The year 2019, the director began with Paul Burkhardt's DAS FEUERWERK at the Musikalischen Komödie Leipzig and concluded it with the world premiere of the musical THE NAME OF ROSE (Kverndokk|Wiik) after the novel by Umberto Eco at the DomStufen-Festspielen Erfurt.

From 2009 to 2016 Axel Köhler was artistic director of the Oper Halle. From the season 2016|2017 until the end of the season 2018|2019 he was a singer and a director of the ensemble of the Staatsoperette Dresden. From the beginning of academic year 2019|2020 Axel Köhler is the Principal of Academy of Music Carl Maria von Weber Dresden.

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