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## Louisville Orchestra's Teddy Abrams – Youngest Music Director of a Major American Orchestra – Renews Three-Year Contract



*Teddy Abrams (photo: courtesy of MusicMakesACity.com)*

The [Louisville Orchestra](http://LouisvilleOrchestra.org) is delighted to announce that **Teddy Abrams** – the “**energetic young maestro**” (*New York Times*) who at just 29 is the youngest **Music Director** of a major American orchestra – has renewed his contract for a further three years. Each season through 2019-20 he will not only conduct the orchestra for a full twelve weeks, but also undertake an additional six weeks of community engagement and administration – more than is offered by any other conductor of a top metropolitan or regional orchestra nationwide.

Given the truly transformative nature of Abrams's tenure to date, the news should come as little surprise. It was he whose galvanizing leadership jumpstarted the orchestra's current creative resurgence. Fueled by talent, energy, vision, drive, and an extraordinary commitment to community engagement, since launching his directorship two seasons ago, Abrams's innovative, outside-the-box initiatives have succeeded in reconnecting the orchestra with its remarkable history, integrating it into the fabric of Louisville life, and re-establishing it as the cornerstone of the city's vibrant music scene. As a result, there have been full houses, double-digit growth in contributions and ticket sales, and widespread excitement about the orchestra throughout Louisville. Even the national press is taking note. **"There's a reason for optimism at the Louisville Orchestra. Music director Teddy Abrams is the orchestra's great young hope,"** declared the *Wall Street Journal*. **"His tireless advocacy and community outreach are putting the history-rich Louisville Orchestra – and classical music – back on the map,"** agreed *Listen*. As *Time* magazine recently marveled, **"A genre-defying orchestra in Louisville? Believe it. The locals do."** Click [here](#) to see Abrams perform his own music and improvise on Beethoven's in his NPR "Tiny Desk Concert."

Abrams comments:

"I am incredibly excited and honored to continue my relationship with the Louisville Orchestra family and this extraordinary community. We have worked very hard these past three seasons to demonstrate that this great institution can be a vital part of our city's culture, and a source of strength and inspiration for every person living in the Louisville region. Over the next three years we plan on growing our reach and connectivity with our community by focusing on creative music-making, innovative and experimental projects, and engagement activities that serve our citizens in the most inclusive and fun ways! I deeply love this town and our orchestra, and I will continue to do everything that I can to support our musical culture and to bring our music to every Louisvillian."

Executive Director **Andrew Kipe** responds:

"Teddy's natural enthusiasm and love of both music and people join with his incredible musical talents to make him an exceptional Music Director. I've enjoyed working together to build his vision into our new plan for the Louisville Orchestra's future – we're just getting started!"

**Jim Welch**, retired Vice Chairman of the Brown-Forman Corporation and President of the orchestra's Board, adds:

"Needless to say we are truly pleased to be extending Teddy's contract to 2020. It's a clear statement of our commitment to him and his commitment to the community. Teddy has brought enormous creativity and energy to the Louisville Orchestra, driving the organization to inspire, enrich, and entertain in ways we've never done before. He is at the forefront of our effort to redefine what it means to be an orchestra in the 21st century. We are thrilled to continue to have his infectious spirit of engagement and creativity among us."

The many innovations of Abrams's two-year tenure include numerous initiatives to give Louisville artists a voice in the musical life of the city. He launched a series of **ambitious, immersive season-launching community collaborations** – 2014's powerhouse performance of *Carmina*

*Burana*, last season's production of Bernstein's colossal *Mass*, and this fall's account of Mahler's epic "Resurrection" Symphony – each of which has drawn on a local cast of hundreds. Integrating the orchestra ever more deeply into Louisville life, Abrams reinstated its free annual **Independence Day concert**, an open-air event that last year attracted an audience of 35,000, and initiated its participation in the "**Thunder Over Louisville**" soundtrack, which accompanies the fireworks display capping the official kick-off to the Kentucky Derby Festival. Breaking with the traditional concert formula, he presented **pop-up concerts** around the city, as well as performances at such **non-traditional venues** as restaurants, shopping centers, galleries, his own home, and – through the **LG&E Music Without Borders** series – local churches and synagogues, many of which were sold to capacity and filled by people who had never heard the orchestra before.

Reconnecting with the orchestra's history as a leading commissioner and programmer of contemporary music, Abrams has made it a key component of his tenure to expand and revitalize the orchestral literature. He has **commissioned and premiered new works from a variety of living composers**, including award-winning Californian Sebastian Chang, jazz phenomenon Chase Morrin, and a quartet of local musicians whose genre-bending group composition represented a celebration of the diverse spectrum of homegrown talent in Louisville. He launched **#SingForTheCity**, an international singer-songwriter competition by which talented hopefuls submitted applications on YouTube, after which the winners – Louisville natives both – performed their original songs with the orchestra for an audience of thousands at this year's free, season-launching "Classics Kickoff" concert. Last spring's inaugural **Festival of American Music** marked the culmination of two seasons of thoughtfully stimulating programming in which new and adventurous music played an increasingly central part. The second edition will comprise two programs, the first led by guest conductor **Michael Tilson Thomas**, one of the great champions of new American composition, and the second by Abrams himself, who looks forward to premiering his own genre-straddling *Ali Portrait* in tribute to late Louisville boxing legend Muhammad Ali. A prolific and award-winning composer, the multi-talented Music Director has already written some 15 works for the orchestra.

It is thanks to Abrams that the orchestra embarked on new partnerships with a number of key Louisville institutions. They undertook their first full co-production with the **Louisville Ballet**, comprising three fully staged ballets with original choreography. They collaborated with the city's **Center for Interfaith Relations** to supplement Bernstein's *MASS* with talks by representatives of different religions. And when the Music Director issued a recording of *Float Rumble Rest*, his improvisatory first salute to the newly deceased Muhammad Ali, he dedicated all proceeds to the city's **Muhammad Ali Center**, which is scheduled to collaborate with the orchestra this season at the second annual Festival of American Music. Under Abrams's auspices, the season brings further inspired collaborations with Louisville's **Speed Art Museum** and **Louisville Slugger Museum**, and the orchestra recently worked with such local institutions as the **University of Louisville School of Music**, the **Louisville Male High School Band**, psychedelic alt-rockers **My Morning Jacket**, the **Kentucky Shakespeare** theater company, the **Waterfront Development Corporation**, the outstanding acrobats of **CirqueLouis**, and the **Louisville Leopards Percussionists**, a non-profit organization offering free and low-cost extracurricular music to local children.

Indeed, Abrams's commitment to **education** has been another hallmark of his tenure. His reimagined take on the orchestra's signature education series, "**MakingMUSIC**," had 100% participation from all 90 Jefferson County public elementary schools as well as several private schools, with fourth grade students creating symphonies inspired by their own names, and fifth grade students creating original instruments from found objects that they played in a "**Landfill Orchestra**." In addition to **masterclasses** with school groups, extensive **social media** engagement and access, and numerous **community performances**, Abrams expanded the orchestra's educational reach through a pair of pioneering **mentorship programs**. Through "**Teddy's Kids**," he gave personal conducting coaching to fourth and fifth grade students, while "**Abrams Kids**" saw him provide intensive mentorship – complete with special projects, career guidance, and free access to orchestral concerts – to high school juniors and seniors.

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This winter and spring, Abrams and the Louisville Orchestra continue to strive for maximum engagement with the Louisville community. Upcoming season highlights include a collaboration with Grammy Award-winning young German violinist **Augustin Hadelich**, and the orchestra's second annual **Festival of American Music**, featuring guest conductor **Michael Tilson Thomas** and the **world premiere** of Abrams's *Ali Portrait*. Ultimately, Abrams's mission is simple. In his words: "**We want to become known as the most interesting orchestra on the planet.**"

## About the Louisville Orchestra

Established in 1937 through the combined efforts of the Louisville business community and later mayor Charles Farnsley and conductor Robert Whitney, the **Louisville Orchestra** is a cornerstone of the Louisville arts community. With the launch of **First Edition Recordings** in 1947, it became the first American orchestra to own a recording label. Six years later it received a Rockefeller grant of \$500,000 to commission, record, and premiere 20th-century music by living composers, thereby earning a place on the international circuit and an invitation to perform at Carnegie Hall. In 2001, the Louisville Orchestra received the **Leonard Bernstein Award for Excellence in Educational Programming**, presented annually to a North American orchestra. Continuing its commitment to new music, the Louisville Orchestra has earned **19 ASCAP awards for Adventurous Programming of Contemporary Music**, and was also recently awarded large grants from the Aaron Copland Fund for Music and the National Endowment for the Arts, both for the purpose of producing, manufacturing and marketing its historic First Edition Recordings collections. Over the years, the orchestra has performed for prestigious events at the White House, Kennedy Center, Carnegie Hall, and on tour in Mexico City. The feature-length, Gramophone Award-winning documentary *Music Makes a City* (2010) chronicles the Louisville Orchestra's founding years. More information is available at the orchestra's [newly redesigned website](http://www.louisvilleorchestra.org).

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