



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Teddy Abrams Extends Louisville Orchestra Leadership with New Three-Year Contract

Beloved Music Director will continue shaping the city's sound and spirit through the 2027–28 season

LOUISVILLE, KY. (August 25, 2025) – The Louisville Orchestra is proud to announce that Music Director Teddy Abrams, a transformative force in the city's cultural life and one of the most dynamic figures in classical music today, has signed a new three-year contract extension beginning with the 2025–26 season. The agreement ensures Abrams will remain at the artistic helm of the LO through the 2027–28 season.

Abrams arrived in Louisville in 2013 as Music Director Designate and assumed the full role in the 2014–15 season. Over more than a decade, he has redefined what a major American orchestra can be, leading with the conviction that an orchestra should serve as a public service institution. Under his guidance, the LO has become the most statewide-integrated orchestra in the country, with musicians who embrace risk, creativity, and community connection in ways rarely seen at the major symphony level.

“Louisville and its Orchestra have shaped my life in ways I could not have imagined,” Abrams said. “Louisville is my home, and the Louisville Orchestra is my family. My colleagues in the Orchestra perform brilliantly, with tremendous passion and virtuosity. Together we’ve worked incredibly hard to raise the institution to an exceptional level where our musicality and creativity are understood locally and internationally. So many of the projects we’ve dreamed about are actually happening, and are demonstrating tremendous results that have significant implications for both classical music as an industry and performing arts organizations around the country. This is the moment we can fully inhabit the institution we’ve built together, and I am beyond excited to continue this adventure with our city, our state, and our spectacular Orchestra.”

During Abrams's tenure, the Louisville Orchestra has redefined what it means for a major American orchestra to serve both its city and its state. He has spearheaded groundbreaking initiatives such as the **In Harmony Tour**, a multi-season effort that has brought music to communities in every corner of Kentucky, and the **Creators Corps**, which embeds composers in Louisville neighborhoods for a year at a time, providing housing, salary, and resources to create work in direct

collaboration with the community. Abrams has championed community programs like **Music Without Borders** and **The LO Rap School**, designed to reach residents in every neighborhood, empower musicians as community agents, and connect people who may have felt distanced from the arts. Through these efforts, the LO works to help the city achieve its own civic and cultural goals, building a thriving downtown, strengthening neighborhood identities, and making orchestral music a visible and valued part of daily life.

In 2022, **Musical America** named Teddy Abrams Conductor of the Year, and *The New York Times* called him “a Maestro of the People” for the way he has embedded himself in the community and broken the mold of the modern conductor. Under his leadership, the orchestra’s projects have drawn international attention and have been featured by *CBS Sunday Morning*, *The New Yorker*, NPR, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *PBS NewsHour*.

Abrams and the Louisville Orchestra have also built a reputation for creating boundary-breaking projects that resonate locally, nationally, and internationally. The Grammy-winning *The American Project* with pianist Yuja Wang, released on Deutsche Grammophon, brought global recognition, while *Mammoth*—an immersive performance inside Mammoth Cave National Park with Yo-Yo Ma—demonstrated the orchestra’s ability to turn Kentucky’s natural wonders into world-class performance spaces. Cross-genre collaborations have become a signature of Abrams’ tenure, weaving classical music together with Louisville’s diverse cultural voices. They have included *The Greatest: Muhammad Ali*, a rap opera with Jecorey “1200” Arthur; and *The Order of Nature*, a song cycle with Jim James of My Morning Jacket that premiered with the LO, toured to the Kennedy Center, and led to an appearance on *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon*. More recently, Abrams has brought the orchestra into high-profile collaborations with Jack Harlow, introducing orchestral music to new audiences far beyond the traditional concert hall.

Looking ahead, Abrams’s vision continues to be bold. “In the next three years, I want us to establish ourselves as the foremost public service arts institution in the country,” he said. “We have cultivated our core mission with our massive touring and engagement platforms, and we can show America - by example - what it looks like for a large arts institution to be culturally vital. This means deepening our work in urban and rural Kentucky - not just bringing Louisville to rural communities, but bringing rural communities into Louisville, building trust across demographics, and studying how these exchanges impact social cohesion and civic life. It means empowering creativity to guide us and offering the greatest living musical minds the resources and willingness to bring their dreams to life with our Orchestra. Our vision offers a cultural model where the arts take their rightful place as a unifying and necessary force at the local, state, and national levels.”

A central part of that vision is empowering LO musicians to take on leadership roles beyond the stage. “We are imagining a world where every musician in our Orchestra has the same agency and potential for creative activism as composers or conductors,” Abrams said. “That’s the next frontier for orchestras.”

Louisville’s audiences, he says, make this vision possible. “From the start, we determined our values first: to present an orchestra that belongs to the people and plays for everyone, redefining orchestral music as a form of public service. Our audiences have embraced that. They’re willing to listen with open ears, to take musical journeys that are adventurous, unexpected, and deeply connected to their lives. This quality of openness is the rarest and most precious attribute in a listener, and it is clear

that the Louisville Orchestra's audiences exhibit this quality uniquely and beautifully; such trust allows us to take risks and dream big.

"Teddy Abrams is a visionary, and we are thrilled that he will be staying at the helm of the Louisville Orchestra," said **Louisville Mayor Craig Greenberg**. "Not only is Teddy a tremendous performer, composer, conductor, and artistic director, he's also a true advocate for all arts organizations and knows the importance those organizations play in helping create a more vibrant, interesting, and inclusive community."

"Teddy's leadership has transformed the Louisville Orchestra into a national model for innovation while keeping our mission deeply rooted in service to this community," said **Jordan Harris, President of the Louisville Orchestra Board of Directors**. "His ability to connect with audiences of all ages, build bridges across neighborhoods, and attract global attention to Louisville is unmatched. We are thrilled to continue this journey with him and look forward to the next chapter of creativity, collaboration, and impact."

Beyond the concert stage, Abrams has been a visible and engaged member of the Louisville community, helping navigate moments of national attention and local challenge, from the city's response to the COVID-19 pandemic to the social justice movement following the death of Breonna Taylor. He has collaborated with local arts organizations, advised on major cultural developments like Old Forester's Paristown Hall, and participated in citywide events from the Festival of Faiths to block parties in neighborhoods.

"From day one, Teddy has seen Louisville not just as a place to make music, but as a partner in imagining what an orchestra can be," said **Nathaniel Koch, Interim Executive Director of the Louisville Orchestra**. "He has built a national reputation as one of the most forward-thinking leaders in the field, but his deepest impact is right here at home."

Founded in 1937, the Louisville Orchestra has a rich history of innovation, commissioning hundreds of new works and breaking boundaries in how orchestral music is presented. Today, under the leadership of Teddy Abrams, the LO continues to push the art form forward, bringing music to classrooms, parks, small towns, and major stages, and making Louisville a national model for how an orchestra can serve its community.

For more information, visit louisvilleorchestra.org.

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About the Louisville Orchestra

The Louisville Orchestra was created in 1937 and sprung up in a time of need, just after the great flood and in the wake of the depression. Robert Whitney was invited to conduct the newly established orchestra, known then as the Louisville Philharmonic, and arrived from Chicago that same year. In its formation, the goal was to create a new model for the American symphony orchestra, as it was conceived through an ambitious effort that emphasized innovation through the commissioning, performance, and recording of new works by contemporary composers. The Louisville Orchestra garnered international critical acclaim, became the first orchestra to establish a

record label, and cemented a place in history for its contribution to contemporary classical music. In its first two decades, the Louisville Orchestra commissioned/recorded up to 52 new works annually and ultimately created 150 vinyl recordings (LPs) of more than 450 works.

The Louisville Orchestra continues to be recognized as a cornerstone of the Louisville performing arts community. Music Director Teddy Abrams has helmed the Louisville Orchestra since 2014, and the Louisville Orchestra has returned to its origins of commissioning new music and recording, having released two albums under the prestigious Decca Gold label. A wide variety of immersive and innovative concert performances and educational programming continue to receive national attention. Recent press coverage includes articles and mentions in The New Yorker, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Rolling Stone, Pitchfork, and CBS Sunday Morning. Accolades include three invitations to perform at Carnegie Hall; the Leonard Bernstein Award for Excellence in Educational Programming; the League of American Orchestras 2019 Ford Musician Awards for Excellence in Community Service; and 19 American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) awards for adventurous programming in use of contemporary music.

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