

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 baritone in Halle. 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“ at the Handel Festival in Halle under the baton of Christian Kluttig. 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 „Giustino“ and „Tamerlano“ at Komische Oper Berlin, as well as Orlovsky in „Fledermaus“ at Hamburgische Staatsoper and Komische Oper Berlin. The 1998-/2000 seasons also included guestings at Aalto Theater Essen, a tour to Japan with Ottone in „Poppea“, Daniel in „Belsazar“ at Dresden Semper Opera, David in „Saul“ in Karlsruhe and Berlin, Ottone in „Agrippina“ in Halle. He sang Orlovsky in „Fledermaus“ at Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome, his recital „Falsetto grazioso“ in Berlin, Halle, Essen, Duisburg and concerts.

In 1998 he was appointed Kammersänger and 1999 received the renowned Critics' Award of Berliner Zeitung.

In 2003 he performed the part of Türkenbab in a production of „Rake's Progress“ in Halle. Since 2005 he has been singing Poro in „Cleofide“ at Dresden Semper Opera House. In 2006, on the occasion of farewell to Sir Peter Jonas at Bavarian State Opera there was a revival of successful productions during his management. Axel Köhler again sang all the parts he had been engaged for since 1997: Ottone in „Poppea“, Eustazio in „Rinaldo“ and Nireus in „Giulio Cesare“. During his career several composers have written parts for the voice of Axel Köhler: 1995 the part of Bacco in „Arianna“ by Alexander Göhr (debut at Royal Oper House of Covent Garden); 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 in Halle; 2003 the part of Adschib in „L'Upupa“ by Hans Werner Henze at Salzburger Festspiele and Teatro Real de Madrid; and last but not least 2006 the titel role in „Cantor“ by Ingomar Grünauer in Halle, which gave him the opportunity not only to sing as a countertenor but also a baritone and to play the violine. In 2007 Axel Köhler sang in Monteverdi's „L'Orfeo“ the part of La Speranza and in Handels „Ariodante“ the part of Polinesso at operahouse in Halle. In addition to that he sings the part of Artemis in „Phaedra“. This opera work by Hans Werner Henze presented at the Berlin State Opera in 2007 till 2011, additionally by performances in Brüssel, Wien, Frankfurt, Köln und London. In 2008 Axel Köhler sang in productions in Halle („Ariodante“) and Dresden („Cleofide“). Axel Köhler divides his time between opera engagements performed in the international arena, concerts and festivals in the major music capitals of Europe.

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. As a result, he was invited to direct the production with students of Bavarian Theatre Academy at Prinzregententheater in Munich. In 2003 he directed „Teseo“. A production so successful that it was shown afterwards in 27 performances in Germany, Switzerland and England and is also available on DVD. An open-air production, „Spettacolo barocco“, a world of baroque phantasy and music, was put on stage in Halle in summer of 2003. In 2004 he directed Britten's „A Midsummernight's Dream“, again with students in Munich and then, in 2005, with the ensemble in Halle, himself also as Oberon. In 2006 he directed „Amadigi“ with students in Dresden. At Handel Music Festival of 2006 he produced „Admeto“, a DVD is available, too. Axel Köhler's productions in 2007 included Johnson's „Riemann Opera“ in Leipzig and „Don Giovanni“ in Schwerin. His projects in 2008 were Mozart's „Die Zauberflöte“ at Staatsoperette Dresden, „Die weiße Dame“, a opéra comique by François Adrien Boieldieu, at International Festival of Young Singers in Rheinsberg, and Monteverdi's „L'incoronazione di Poppea“ as a coproduction of Music College and Theatre in Dresden. The productions in 2009 were also very successful: „Argenore“ at Markgräfliches Opernhaus Bayreuth, a colourful piece of baroque music put on stage in a „nearly ideal balance between historically precise baroque style and gentle irony“ (FAZ), and „Land des Lächelns“ in Augsburg and „Die Zauberflöte“ in Innsbruck. In 2010 followed by „Gräfin Mariza“ at Staatsoperette Dresden, „Die Blume von Hawaii“ and Verdi's „Macbeth“ at Oper Halle. In 2012 Axel Köhler will produce amongst others opera work by Jaromír Weinberger „Schwanda, der Dudelsackpfeifer“ in Dresden.

With the beginning of the season 2009/2010 Axel Köhler is Artistic Manager of Oper Halle.