

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra terminates employment of Charles Dutoit over allegations of sexual misconduct

Paul Bond
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London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO) issued an official statement January 10 declaring that 81-year-old Charles Dutoit has been removed as its principal conductor and artistic director.

The decision was taken following "an emergency board meeting and further dialogue with Charles Dutoit," after which "the RPO and Charles Dutoit have together decided to bring forward his resignation... Charles Dutoit had already announced in June 2017 that he would stand down in October 2019; this will now take place with immediate effect."

The initial suspension of Dutoit in December occurred after accusations, of which one was contested by witnesses, of sexual propositions and misconduct by four accusers. It was one of the most telling examples of the wave of censorship and tightened control over the arts and critical thought unleashed by the #MeToo campaign.

Dutoit denied the allegations, noting that "within this current climate, media accusations on serious physical abuse do not help society tackle these issues properly if the claims are in fact not true."

In December, the RPO announced only that it had cancelled all appearances by Dutoit, but he was sacked from positions at the San Francisco, Boston and Sydney Symphony orchestras. Performances were cancelled by orchestras in New York, Chicago and Cleveland and his status as conductor laureate at the Philadelphia Orchestra, with which he was associated for over two decades, was revoked. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra has since announced that French conductor Emmanuel Krivine will replace Dutoit at concerts scheduled for March 8-11, and German conductor and composer Matthias Pintscher will replace him for

concerts between April 5 and April 10.

Initially, the RPO acknowledged Dutoit's denial of the claims against him and recognised that he had a legal right to defend himself, saying, "The truth of the matter should be determined by the legal process." It justified his temporary removal as necessary for him to prepare his legal defence.

This recognition that Dutoit "needs to be given a fair opportunity to seek legal advice and contest these accusations" has now been junked by the RPO. The orchestra decided to end his contract immediately after the Associated Press sent it summaries of new allegations against Dutoit. According to the AP, six women in the United States, France and Canada accused him of sexual assault, with one anonymously claiming she was raped in the US in 1988. Dutoit again issued a statement that he was "sickened" to be accused "of the heinous crime of rape."

"I am shaken to the core by this bewildering and baseless charge," he wrote. "To this, I submit my categorical and complete denial."

The RPO's response made clear that, given the media's focus on the latest accusations, it was no longer considered commercially viable to take a stand on due process. Its statement read, "Whilst Mr. Dutoit continues to seek legal counsel to defend himself, the protracted uncertainty and media reporting makes Mr. Dutoit's position with the Orchestra untenable."

The RPO acknowledges that Dutoit continues to profess his innocence and that the claims made against him remain allegations. However, like so many other institutions, and not only in the case of Dutoit, it refuses to oppose a media campaign that treats allegations as facts.

Dutoit was appointed artistic director of the RPO in 2009 on a 10-year contract. It was widely understood that he was to be appointed honorary conductor for life on completion of that contract. The current statement refers only to him having agreed to stand down in 2019 at the end of his tenure, not to any subsequent honorary appointment.

Dutoit's professional banishment and personal humiliation follows that of the long-time director of the New York Metropolitan Opera, James Levine. The distinguished conductor is not only being denied work, but, as with the actors Kevin Spacey and Ed Westwick, comedian Louis CK and others, he is being "disappeared" by the removal of his previous work from public access. In the case of Dutoit, this involves excising someone who has played a major role internationally and a preeminent role in Canada, which created problems for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC).

CBC Radio Two is still broadcasting Dutoit's recordings with the Montreal Symphony Orchestra (OSM), but it is imposing a bizarre act of censorship. Responding to an email from *Montreal Gazette* journalist Arthur Kaptainis, CBC public affairs spokeswoman Emma Bédard explained that the broadcaster had "carefully considered our actions" given the "serious allegations against Charles Dutoit and the OSM third-party investigation that is currently pending."

The OSM recordings "make up an important part of our Canadian classical repertoire on CBC Radio Two," she writes. But this is not the decisive consideration in continuing to broadcast Dutoit, Bédard explained. Rather, it is the fact that under Canadian law, radio broadcasts must contain between 20 and 40 percent of material at least partly contributed to by Canadians. Eliminating the extensive Dutoit/OSM recordings altogether would have an impact on CBC Radio Two's ability to fulfil its Canadian content requirements.

Bédard added apologetically, "While the allegations made towards Charles Dutoit are serious, we truly believe that removing these recordings entirely from our broadcasts would unjustly diminish the efforts of the many talented musicians who are featured in them."

Her despicable solution? "At this point, we are no longer crediting Mr. Dutoit as conductor."

This is extraordinary. You can broadcast recordings,

but must not mention the conductor, Dutoit, by name!

Kaptainis notes both the extent and the importance of Dutoit's OSM recordings. They include more than 80 recordings for the Decca label between 1980 and 2002, winning Dutoit two Grammys along the way. It was Dutoit, in his 25-year stint as artistic director, who developed the orchestra into the widely recorded and internationally recognised ensemble it is today.

Those recordings offer evidence of the sensual richness and sinuous versatility Dutoit cultivated at the OSM. To play the recordings without mentioning his name is to deny how the orchestra came to play with such artistry. As Kaptainis asks, "Why deny credit to a conductor whose staunchest opponents will recognize him as an indispensable component of the success of those recordings?"

Kaptainis also notes the role played by the Decca recordings in consolidating digital recording technology as a viable alternative to its analogue forebears. These recordings have something of an historical quality. However, the journalist's concern to mark the role played by Decca's technicians is clearly not shared by the label itself. Without facing the legal difficulties of the CBC, Decca has had no qualms about making Dutoit a non-person.

Dutoit is currently not listed on the "Artists" page of the label's web site—despite the fact that a 35-CD box set of the Dutoit/OSM recordings, proudly and accurately subtitled "The Decca Sound," is available from the label. Searching the "Catalogue" section of the web site does reveal Dutoit, but a general search of the web site directs one back to the "Artists" page where he is absent.



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