

Bach in Arnstadt

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When Johann Sebastian Bach came to Arnstadt in Summer 1703, no-one knew how long he would stay, but he was welcomed and found ideal starting conditions, which had a lasting beneficial effect on his professional and private life.

Johann Sebastian lived at the centre of a ramified and old-established Bach family and its relations. In Arnstadt Bach received his first position as organist; here he had the chance to develop his musical talents and to perfect them, and in Arnstadt he experienced his first love. At last the reigning count and later prince Anton Günther II had a Bach once again, which he had yearned for since 1693, when the town and court musician Johann Christoph Bach died.

In 1700 the town experienced a political, economic and spiritual-cultural renaissance. Following the absolutist trend, many Thuringian principalities imitated the pomp of leading European courts. The music and theatre culture blossomed.

Arnstadt was the residence of Prince Anton Günther II. He ruled Schwarzburg-Arnstadt from 1681 until 1716 and brought the administration, the guilds, the health system and the police under his comital control. The sciences and the arts were cultivated at the highest level. With his particular fondness for music he promoted the entire cultural life in the 3,800-inhabitant town. As a passionate collector the Count possessed an extensive coin collection, an art gallery and a library.

Prominent scientists and artists now worked in Arnstadt, for instance, the Numismatist Andreas Morelli and Christian Schlegel, the historian Johann Christoph Olearius and the consistorial secretary Salomo Franck. In 1683, Anton Günther II summoned the chapel master Adam Drese from Jena to take charge of his court chapel, which heralded a new zenith for Arnstadt's court music. When Paul Gleitsmann took over the court chapel in 1701, he found a substantial and outstanding orchestra, adequately manned with 22 musicians.