

audite

# CONCERTI

Prinz Johann Ernst  
von Sachsen-Weimar

Thüringer Bach Collegium



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## Prinz Johann Ernst von Sachsen-Weimar

**Concerto No. 3 in E minor**

- I. *Vivace* 1:53
- II. *Pastorella* 2:41
- III. *Presto* 1:04

**Concerto No. 4 in D minor**

- I. *Adagio – Presto* 1:43
- II. *Allegro – Adagio* 1:56
- III. *Vivace* 1:06

**Concerto No. 7 in G major**

- I. *Allegro assai* 2:25
- II. *Adagio* 2:12
- III. *Presto e staccato* 1:06

**Concerto No. 5 in E major**

- I. ... 2:10
- II. *Siciliana* 1:55
- III. *Allegro* 2:12

**Concerto for 2 Violins in C major**

- I. ... 2:57
- II. *Adagio e affettuoso* 2:13
- III. *Allegro assai* 2:25

**Concerto No. 8 in G major**

- I. *Adagio* 1:24
- II. *Allegro* 1:59
- III. *Adagio* 1:12
- IV. *Allegro* 1:57

**Concerto No. 1 in B flat major**

- I. *Allegro* 1:48
- II. *Adagio – Allegro* 3:04
- III. *Un poco presto* 1:38

**Concerto No. 2 in A minor**

- I. *Allegro* 2:11
- II. *Largo* 4:56
- III. *Andante* 2:21

**Concerto No. 6 in G minor**

- I. *Vivace* 2:34
- II. *Recitativo* 1:32
- III. *Allegro* 2:59

**Concerto for Trumpet in D major**

- I. *Vivace* 0:52
- II. *Largo* 1:20
- III. *Allegro* 1:09

## Thüringer Bach Collegium

**GERNOT SÜSSMUTH**

Solo violin / ensemble leader

**DAVID CASTRO-BALBI**

violin / soloist double concerto

**IRINA ZWIENER** violin**RAPHAEL HEVICKE** violin**JÜRGEN KARWATH** viola**DAGMAR SPENGLER-SÜSSMUTH** cello**CHRISTIAN BERGMANN** double bass**JÖRG REDDIN** harpsichord**RUPPRECHT DREES** trumpet



### **The „Six Concerts à un Violon concertant“ by Prince Johann Ernst IV and their background**

There have always been musical regents who have composed, from King David playing the harp and singing psalms to Emperor Ferdinand III as well as the Duchess Anna Amalia of Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach and Princess Anna Amalia of Preussen. Prince Johann Ernst IV of Sachsen-Weimar was no exception. The circumstances under which his violin concertos were written were, however, special. This applies not only to the environment in which the pieces were composed in the years 1713/14, but also to the people who were directly or indirectly involved in the creation and printing of the works – among them such prominent figures as Georg Philipp Telemann, Johann Gottfried Walther and Johann Sebastian Bach. But one thing at a time.

Johann Ernst IV, the youngest son of Duke Johann Ernst III (1664-1707) and Charlotte Dorothea Sophia (1672-1738), née Princess of Hessen-Homburg, was born in Weimar on Christmas Day 1696. His father, co-regent of the duchy, was known to be a lover of art, but he was also an alcoholic and had long fallen out with his brother, Wilhelm Ernst, the actual reigning Duke of Weimar; he died in 1707. The surviving son Johann Ernst and his half-brother Ernst August (born 1688) not only inherited the notoriously bad relationship with



their strict and pious uncle, but also their father's keen artistic sense and love for music. In their Weimar residence, the so-called Red Castle, the young co-regents present a contrast to the puritanical life next door in the Wilhelmsburg. It is quite possible that the decisive impulse to bring back organist Johann Sebastian Bach from Mühlhausen to Weimar as a court organist in 1708 came from them or even from their father; under their father, Bach had been a minion at the Weimar court for a few months in 1703.

The entries in the account books of Ernst August and Johann Ernst demonstrate the enthusiasm with which the two half-brothers cultivated their passion for music in the Red Castle – undoubtedly to the complete incomprehension of their uncle Wilhelm Ernst. Nearly every week they would pay writers to copy dozens of pages of music. The court organist Bach – whose apartment is only a stone's throw away from the Red Castle – turns up here almost every month around 1709 to tune the various keyboard instruments in the castle and no doubt even more frequently to play on them himself. And there is a regular coming and going of him and his cousin Johann Gottfried Walther, who becomes the city of Weimar's organist in 1707 and later, in 1732, publishes his famous music encyclopaedia. It is also Walther who repeatedly receives large sums from the two dukes' private coffers to give lessons to young Johann Ernst "on the clavicymbalum". Walther later remembers: "His Honourable Prince was given



[harpsichord] lessons until about 1710 [...]”. The harpsichord is of course not the only instrument that Johann Ernst learns with great zeal. At the same time he – and probably his half-brother Ernst August, too – received violin lessons from Gregor Christoph Eystenstein, the first violinist of the court orchestra. An inventory from 1709 also attests to the fact that there were about one hundred musical instruments in the Red Castle at that time, including more than a dozen keyboard instruments. A contemporary was astonished that in the “so-called Red Panel Chamber” there were only “five musical instruments, namely the Nuremberg violin, two clavicymbalums, a green spinet, and another spinet”.

Music at the Red Castle received a new boost when Prince Johann Ernst set off on his Grand Tour to Holland and Belgium in 1712. In addition to enjoying himself and a few months of study at the University of Utrecht, the Prince’s agenda also included buying as much new music as possible for the Weimar Court Orchestra from sheet music dealers in Brussels and Amsterdam. In April 1713, Philipp David Kräuter from Augsburg, who was then taking lessons with Bach after having received a scholarship from his hometown, used the Prince’s imminent return and fully packed suitcases to successfully persuade the Augsburg City Council to extend his scholarship:

“2. Because the local royal Weimar Printz [Johann Ernst], who is not only a great lover of music but also a violinist of unparalleled ability, will come from



Holland to Weimar after Easter and will remain there over the summer so that he may listen to some beautiful Italian and French music, which would be exceptional beneficial for me in order to compose concertos and overtures.

3. If the condition of the local organ at the castle can be improved as much as possible until Whitsun, I could familiarise myself with the actual quality of the organ, and thus be able to judge, at least reasonably accurately, whether this or that kind of adjustment would be better for the organ [...]. Now, I also know that Mr Bach, having had this new organ made in Weimar, will no doubt initially play exceptional things on it, but he could also have plenty of opportunity to see, hear and copy music here.”

In fact, soon after J.S. Bach brought forth “unparalleled” sounds from the organ, which was in the process of being rebuilt in the Weimar Castle Church – sounds that had never been heard before in the Wilhelmsburg – and those sounds were undoubtedly linked with the Prince’s Grand Tour. It was precisely at this time that Bach began to transcribe violin concertos for organ or harpsichord based on Antonio Vivaldi’s famous collection *L’Estro Armonico*, Opus 3, published in Amsterdam in 1711. And not only that. A real Vivaldi mania broke out in Weimar around 1713. Bach and Johann Gottfried Walther arranged several instrumental concertos for organ or harpsichord for their own use, next to works by Vivaldi also those by Torelli, Albinoni and Marcello – and thus play-



fully learnt the principles of the modern Italian concerto. On his return, Prince Johann Ernst intensified his composition lessons and began composing his own Vivaldi-style concertos – that is to say, in the epoch-making concerto form consisting of ritornellos and solo sections, tonal centres and endless sequences.

For Johann Ernst, composing ardently was a form of escapism, as the 17-year-old was seriously ill. His teacher Walther later reports that even though his protégé was suffering pain due to his illness, he had given him lessons in composition “from June 1713 to March 1714”, during which time “he had to go to the spas in Wiesbaden and Frankfurt due to the poor condition of one of his thighs and hips”. During this period, the prince nevertheless “managed to produce 19 instrumental pieces within those 9 months [...]”.

The fact that the Prince’s works were largely preserved is due to his harsh fate. In an attempt to get rid of the tumour that is spreading in his leg, Johann Ernst sets off to stay at various spas in Hesse in the summer of 1714. Here he meets Georg Philipp Telemann, director of the Frankfurt Chapel, and both quickly become friends. Telemann dedicates six printed violin sonatas to the prince in 1715. However, the tumour also spreads to the prince’s abdomen, and the 18-year-old dies of this in Frankfurt on 1 August 1715. Three years later, Telemann – who remained in close contact with Duke Ernst August, Johann Ernst’s half-brother – commemorates him. In 1718, he pub-



lishes six of these violin concertos, entitled *Six Concerts à un Violon concertant, deux Violons, une Taille, et Clavecin où Basse de Viole* and composed under Walther's supervision, in a magnificent edition. In the same year, in the *Leipziger Gelehrten Zeitungen*, an anonymous but well-informed reviewer gives an account of the circumstances under which the pieces were written:

“Following a widespread request, the famous kapellmeister G.P. Telemann presented an early mass of his Most Serene Highness, Johann Ernst, Duke of Sachsen-Weimar to commemorate his enormous talent at composing concertos. It is only the first part of it, consisting of 6 neatly structured five-part concertos. Soon, the second part will follow. There is so much to admire in this honourable prince who managed to accomplish so much in this complex art, even though he did not live to be much older than 18, and who was able to play so many instruments so brilliantly, especially the violin.

Due to his painful illness, from which he suffered for 21 months, and which ultimately cost him his life, he saw composing music as his greatest relief. He did indeed have his current work engraved in copper, although he did not have the joy of seeing it completed before he died.”

The joy is now with posterity, and it really is a joy. No matter how great the Prince's contribution may have been and how strongly the structure of the pieces was influenced by Walther or Telemann, the six concertos radiate the





modern Vivaldi style through and through. One could find fault with them and criticize them for a certain imbalance in the proportions between the ritornellos and the solo sections, point to the sometimes rather compact themes or complain that playing strings of sequences is sometimes a little strenuous. But, in fact, this proves that they are original pieces with sometimes surprising and entertaining twists and turns written by a composer who must have developed considerable compositional skills within a very short space of time, and indeed produced creative variations as he dealt with the Italian concerto form.

Above all, however, the pieces – like hardly any other works – provide original insights into the dazzling virtuoso concerto repertoire of the Weimar Court Orchestra at the time of Johann Sebastian Bach, a repertoire which was equally influenced by Italian and French music.

The special attention that Johann Ernst's musical works must have received during his lifetime is documented by the fact that, in addition to the six printed violin concertos, other works composed by the prince have also survived. None other than the Weimar court organist J.S. Bach himself arranged four concertos by Johann Ernst for keyboard instruments: the concertos in G major and C major for organ (BWV 592 and BWV 595) and the three concertos in B flat major, C major and D minor for harpsichord (BWV 982, 984 and 987). The arrangements thus belong to the series of Vivaldi and Marcello arrangements



which Bach produced in Weimar. One of these concertos in C major (after BWV 984 and 595), which was only preserved in Bach's arrangement, has been what one might call 'retrospectively scored' by Gernot Süßmuth for the present CD recording: he has reconstructed Johann Ernst's lost original – apparently a double concerto – on the basis of Bach's arrangement.

In addition to the six concertos from the opus edited by Telemann, the CD also contains two concertos in G major. Written during Johann Ernst's lifetime in Weimar, the parts were donated to the Württemberg-Stuttgart royal court and are now kept in the Rostock University Library. For a long time, one of these concertos was regarded as a work by Vivaldi (Pincherle Catalogue 115, Ryom Catalogue, Annex 12) – further indirect proof of Johann Ernst's remarkable skill in the Vivaldi style. On the other hand, it is not certain if the concerto for trumpet, strings and basso continuo can be attributed to the Prince.

*Michael Maul*

*Translation: Celine Cullum*



## **GERNOT SÜSSMUTH**

Gernot Süßmuth appeared as a soloist with orchestra for the first time at the age of 9. This was followed by prizes at children's and youth's competitions. At the age of 16, he was admitted to the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler Berlin. He completed his violin studies in 1984 with a soloist diploma. Afterwards, the Rundfunk-Sinfonie-Orchester Berlin engaged him as concertmaster. From 2000 to 2002 he was concertmaster of the Staatskapelle Berlin; since August 2002 he is first concertmaster of the Staatskapelle Weimar.

Gernot Süßmuth is also a passionate chamber musician. From 1983 to March 2000, he was a member of the Petersen Quartet, performing in the great international concert venues and releasing numerous CDs. At the turn of the millennium, he founded the Aperto Piano Quartet together with his former quartet colleague Hans-Jakob Eschenburg, and in 2018 the Thüringer Bach Collegium, whose Artistic Director he is. He has also performed with other renowned chamber music partners, including Steven Bishop, Paul Meyer, Daniel Barenboim, Norbert Brainin (†) and Martin Lovett. In addition to his chamber music activities, he regularly performs as a soloist.

Gernot Süßmuth was Artistic Director of the European Union Chamber Orchestra until 2011. Concert tours led him as the ensemble's conductor and soloist through Germany, to various countries in Central and South America as well as to England. He was concertmaster at the Oregon Bach Festival for many years. In 2012, he became director of the WestfalenClassics festival.



### Das Thüringer Bach Collegium

Thuringia is often described as the land of Bach, as Johann Sebastian Bach spent the first 30 years of his life in Eisenach, Arnstadt, Weimar and other towns and cities of Thuringia. In addition, at the time of his birth his family dynasty had already shaped the Thuringian music scene for 150 years. The Thüringer Bach Collegium plays works by Johann Sebastian Bach, his ancestors (from the *Altbachisches Archiv*), his sons and his contemporaries in historically informed performances on historic instruments. The “Bach” in the ensemble name refers on the one hand to the programming itself, but on the other hand also to Bach as an innovator and pioneer.

The founders of the Thüringer Bach Collegium are deeply rooted in Thuringia’s cultural scene: Gernot Süßmuth, the director of the ensemble, is concertmaster of the Staatskapelle Weimar. Christian Bergmann, general manager and double bass player of the ensemble, has been performing in the Staatskapelle Weimar for 17 years. Also other members of the Thüringer Bach Collegium have many years of experience as soloists and first-chair players in large symphony and opera orchestras. If required, the ensemble is complemented by freelance specialists for Early Music, in particular by players of instruments which are not part of the classical orchestra, such as the viola da gamba, recorder and natural horn.

The ensemble plays on valuable historical string instruments (e.g. violins by Giovanni Grancino) and replicas of historical wind instruments.



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*executive producer:*

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AB•Design

audite

info@audite.de

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Ludger Böckenhoff

