



H.C. & CULTURE

Bach's comic satire on coffee overconsumption (Video)

Music

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The Café Zimmermann, or Zimmermannsches Kaffeehaus was the coffeehouse of Gottfried Zimmermann in Leipzig which formed the backdrop to the first performances of many of Bach's secular cantatas, and instrumental works.

In 1723, the year Bach moved to Leipzig, it was the largest and best-appointed Kaffeehaus of Leipzig and a centre for the middle classes and gentlemen. While women were forbidden from frequenting coffeehouses, they could attend public concerts at Zimmermann's coffeehouse.

The coffeehouse was located at 14 Katharinenstrasse, then the most elegant street of Leipzig, connecting the Brühl to the market place. The name of the street had been taken

from the old St. Catherine's Chapel which had been demolished in 1544.

During the summer months, Zimmermann also ran an outdoor coffee garden in the Grimmaischer Steinweg outside the city walls, near the East Gate.

The four-and-a-half-story Baroque building was constructed by Doering around 1715. It consisted of two adjoining rooms, one approximately 8 by 10 metres (26 ft × 33 ft), the other approximately 5.5 by 10 metres (18 ft × 33 ft).

Unfortunately, it was destroyed during an Allied air raid on Leipzig in December 1943.

Zimmermann also ran a coffee garden as a summer venue.

Bach directed a musical ensemble based at Zimmermann's coffee house

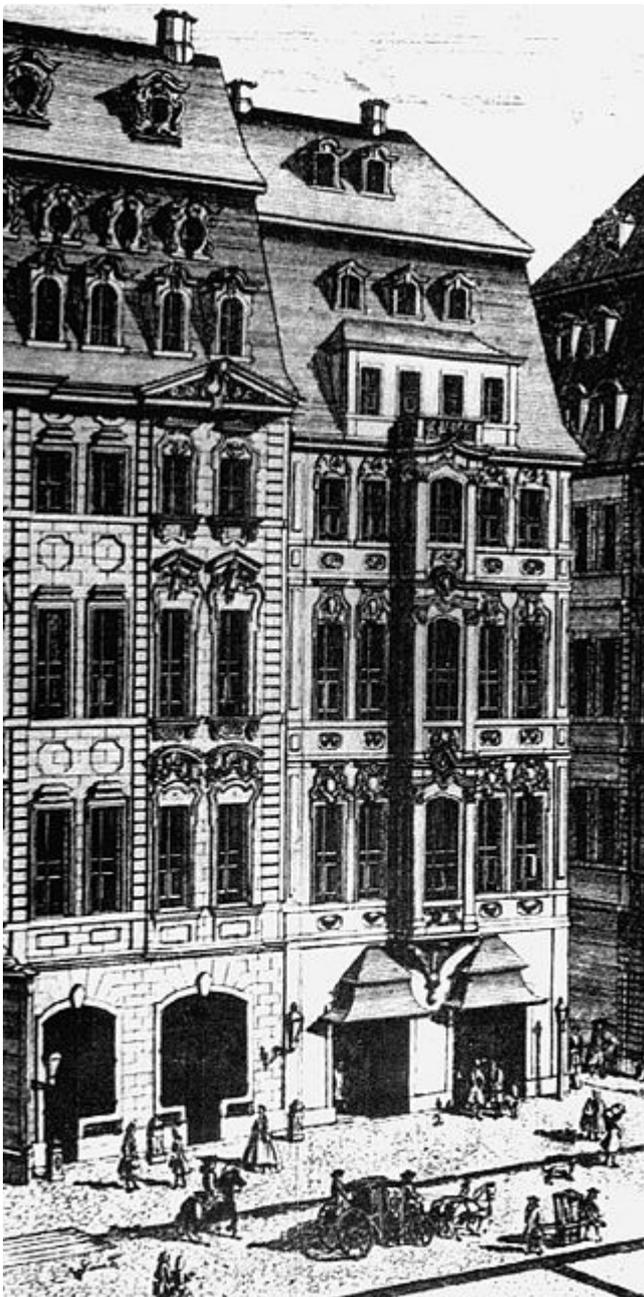


Photo: Wikipedia

Bach regularly directed a musical ensemble based at Zimmermann's coffee house called a collegium musicum, founded by Georg Philipp Telemann in 1702. The libretto suggests that some people in eighteenth-century Germany viewed coffee drinking as a bad habit. However, the work is likely to have been first performed at the coffee house in Leipzig.

The cantata's libretto (written by Christian Friedrich Henrici, known as Picander), features lines like "If I couldn't, three times a day, be allowed to drink my little cup of coffee, in my anguish I will turn into a shriveled-up roast goat".

Bach wrote no operas: the cantata was written for concert performance, but is frequently performed today fully staged with costumes.