

Thomanerchor Leipzig

The history of Thomanerchor Leipzig dates back to more than 800 years and therefore it is the oldest cultural institution of the City of Leipzig.

In 1212 Emperor Otto IV. confirmed the foundation of the Augustinian monastery of St. Thomas, which was initiated by margrave Dietrich the Oppressed of Meissen. The monastery contained a convent school to educate the young cleric, but soon the school was made accessible also for boys who did not live in the monastery. Liturgical singing has been part of the education from the beginning in order to deploy the boys in the numerous weekly church services. In the course of the reformation in 1539 Leipzig acquired a reputation for being a musical and cultural centre, not least because of the significant "Thomaskantoren" (cantors at St. Thomas).

The musical focus of the Thomanerchor Leipzig is on the maintenance of the "Musica Sacra". The works of Johann Sebastian Bach – who was introduced as Thomaskantor on 1 June 1723 and who stayed in that position for 27 years until his death on 28 July 1750 – form the main musical centre of the choir. Nevertheless, the choir's programs contain choir works of all ages of musical history – from Gregorian chants to contemporary compositions – which is documented by numerous audiovisual productions.

In daily rehearsals the choir prepares for the "motets" (in Leipzig also a form of musical church service) on Fridays (6 p.m.) and Saturdays (3 p.m.) as well as the Sunday church service (9.30 a.m.) in St. Thomas Church Leipzig with weekly over 2000 listeners. In the motet on Saturday the choir regularly also performs a cantata by Johann Sebastian Bach accompanied by the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig and vocal soloists – of course the organist and the pastors of St. Thomas also participate in the motets and services.

In the 20th century the choir also began to travel and to perform abroad regularly. That helped Thomanerchor Leipzig to gain also a big international reputation. Nowadays the choir is an established constant in the German and European music scene, and furthermore a popular cultural ambassador of Leipzig worldwide. On its regular concert tours the Thomanerchor Leipzig travelled to North- and South-America, Middle- and Far-East as well as Australia.

The choir members, the "Thomaner", live, learn and rehearse in the "Thomas-Alumnat" – the big boarding house. The school education from grades 5 to 12 is in the responsibility of the St. Thomas School Leipzig, a secondary school of the City of Leipzig, located across the street. The youngest Thomaner (grade 4) are taught in special classes at the Anna-Magdalena-Bach-Schule, a primary school of the City of Leipzig or at the forum thomanum primary school directly on the campus.

Since 2016 Gotthold Schwarz is the 17th Thomaskantor after Johann Sebastian Bach. On 9 June 2016 he has been appointed as Thomaskantor and has been inaugurated by the Mayor of the City of Leipzig, Burkhard Jung, on 20 August 2016.

The line of famous Thomaskantoren was opened by Georg Rhau, who was head of the choir when the famous disputation of Leipzig between Martin Luther and Johannes Eck in 1519 took place. At first the cantors changed frequently, still Sethus Calvisius remained Thomaskantor for over 20 years (1594–1615). He was succeeded by Johann Hermann Schein (1616–1630), Tobias Michael (1631–1657), Sebastian Knüpfer (1657–1676), Johann Schelle (1677–1701), Johann Kuhnau (1701–1722) and Johann Sebastian Bach (1723–1750). On 30 May 1723 Bach's inauguration cantata was performed. On 1 June 1723 he was introduced as Thomaskantor which he stayed to his death on 28 July 1750. He was followed by Gottlob Harrer (1750–1755), Johann Friedrich Doles (1756–1789), Johann Adam Hiller (1789–1800), August Eberhard Müller (1801–1810), Johann Gottfried Schicht (1810–1823), Christian Theodor Weinlig (1823–1842), Moritz Hauptmann (1842–1868), Ernst Friedrich Richter (1868–1879), Wilhelm Rust (1880–1892), Gustav Schreck (1893–1917), Karl Straube (1918–1939), Günther Ramin (1940–1956), Kurt Thomas (1957–1960), Erhard Mauersberger (1961–1972), Hans-Joachim Rotzsch (1972–1991), Georg Christoph Biller (1992–2015) and currently Gotthold Schwarz.

For further information visit www.thomanerchor.de