

## Sound Space Court: Architecture, Function and Music of Aristocratic Representation Rooms in Early Modern Europe

International and Interdisciplinary Conference  
Rudolstädter Arbeitskreises für Residenzkultur  
in Cooperation with Stiftung Thüringer Schlösser und Gärten

**20–22 June 2025, Schloss Heidecksburg in Rudolstadt**

In recent years, the acoustic dimension of historical buildings has increasingly become the focus of various disciplines in the humanities and cultural studies. A multitude of research has been devoted to sacred spaces and sound-specific architecture such as theatres, concert halls or ancient senate buildings. Courty buildings such as palaces and pleasure houses are hardly considered in current research. The planned conference takes this desideratum as an opportunity to explicitly investigate the 'sound space court'.

Numerous early modern palaces integrated specific 'sound spaces' that were designed and constructed regarding certain sonic aesthetics and musical performance practices. Among the well-known examples are the princely Lusthaus auf dem Wall in Darmstadt, the Schallhaus at Heidecksburg Castle in Rudolstadt and the former Himmelsburg in Weimar Stadtschloss, where Johann Sebastian Bach served as organist at the beginning of the 18th century. In addition, palaces featured a variety of rooms that responded to specific acoustic requirements according to their ceremonial and musical use: throne and audience halls, music rooms and main halls as well as gateways, courtyards and gardens.

Apart from specific acoustic constructions such as domes and balconies, courtly rooms could include other architectural and (permanent as well as ephemeral) technical constructions that were intended to influence or manipulate the sound of music and spoken word – such as room vaults, wall coverings or sunken floors. With regards to the prominent position that music attained in courtly ceremonies and entertainment, education and formation, patrons and architects may well have paid far greater attention to acoustic conditions than previously thought.

The planned conference will focus on the early modern ensemble of palace, chapel and garden as a sound space in relation to its acoustic and sonic dimensions. The guiding questions are: Which functions did special Schallhäuser (sound houses) fulfil, and what ideas and concepts were behind these specific architectures? How did contemporaries such as Athanasius Kircher, treatise writers and ceremonial scholars comment on the relationship between space, acoustics, and sound at court?

To what extent can interactions between musical compositions, performance practices and spatial conditions be identified? What was the emotional impact of certain sonic events, in particular the instrumental and vocal music, produced by musicians hidden from the audience's view? Finally, what potential do digital technologies such as 3D simulations and virtual acoustics (auralisations) in combination with historical performance practice offer for the reconstruction of historical sound architectures? The decidedly interdisciplinary conference is aimed at scholars in architectural and art history, musicology and historical performance practice, sound studies, history, (archaeo)acoustics and digital engineering.

Papers of 30 minutes will be accepted in English and German. Interested speakers are invited to submit an abstract of their proposed paper (max. 500 words) and a short CV (max. 300 words) by **15 July 2024** to: [heiko.lass@kunstgeschichte.uni-muenchen.de](mailto:heiko.lass@kunstgeschichte.uni-muenchen.de), [margret.scharrer@unibe.ch](mailto:margret.scharrer@unibe.ch) and [tobias.weissmann@uni-mainz.de](mailto:tobias.weissmann@uni-mainz.de).

Travel and accommodation expenses will be reimbursed subject to successful financing.

### **Conception and Organisation:**

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