

Interview with Gabriele Dotto, Curator of the “Enterprise of Opera” Exhibit

(from the Bertelsmann Intranet BENET)

How would you rate the importance of the Archivio Ricordi for the music world?

In a word: unique. Several collections around the world contain large amounts of music manuscripts, publications, or letters. But the wide range of documents the Ricordi archive comprises – including staging and costume designs, business correspondence, rare librettos, production documents, etc. – makes for a singular collection that offers a broad panorama of information from nearly two centuries of activity of one of the most important publishers in the field.

What is the concept behind the “Enterprise of Opera” exhibition? What do you hope to communicate to visitors?

That complex works like operas — even if one master “artist” is identified as the principal creative force – are the result of an amalgam of ideas and energies from many talented people. That the creative process involved in a “meeting of minds” of strong but contrasting artistic personalities can be as fascinating as the final products themselves. And that the role of creative entrepreneurship can represent a vital, stimulating component that contributes to both the immediate and to the enduring success of a work.

The extensive holdings of the Archivio Ricordi are not yet fully indexed. Are you expecting any surprise finds and/or new insights for music research?

Absolutely. The original cataloguing served as an “inventory” but did not describe every artifact in detail. As the music and librettos are studied more closely, experts may continue to discover important variant versions, or neglected music worthy of revival: the archive contains many forgotten works by composers who were nonetheless famous and influential in their day. Scholars are also increasingly interested in the composers of the first half of twentieth century, well represented in the Archive. Further, the opportunity for new, cross-disciplinary studies about the economics and strategy of the publishing business, of the “publisher as impresario”, of the development of modern marketing techniques, etc., will offer new insights in how we view these facets of music history.

Curriculum Vitae Gabriele Dotto

Gabriele Dotto (Milan 1952) studied music composition, history, and analysis in the USA and Italy, and taught at the University of Cincinnati and the Conservatory of Milan.

Since 1979, he has been concentrating on a career in publishing: first as editor and later editor-in-chief at G. Ricordi & Co. of Milan, then from 1986 onwards at the University of Chicago Press, where he became the first managing editor of the Works of Giuseppe Verdi critical edition. Some of his concurrent work included, inter alia, critically editing operas of Donizetti and Puccini.

Returning to Ricordi in 1992, he continued to work as a publisher of musicology; at the same time, he held the position as director of the Archivio Storico Ricordi until 2001. He then retired from his position as publishing director in order to supervise the transfer of the archive's holdings to its current location in the Biblioteca Braidense of Milan.

Dotto has, among other things, published scholarly essays on 19th and 20th century music and the history of music publishing, critical editions of operas by various Italian composers and served as the administrative director of the Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani (Parma) from 2004-2006. Since 2007 he is the director of the Michigan State University Press.