

PRESS RELEASE

OPERA IS DEAD – LONG LIVE OPERA!

Exhibition at Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn Features Numerous Loans from Ricordi Archive

- **The Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn will be dedicating a unique exhibition to opera from September 30, 2022 to February 5, 2023**
- **Bertelsmann-owned Archivio Storico Ricordi is the most important lender with close to 70 valuable exhibits**

Gütersloh, September 30, 2022 – Fans of classical music are in for a treat: The exhibition “Opera is Dead - Long Live Opera!” will be on view in Bonn from September 30, 2022 to February 5, 2023, supported by the legendary Ricordi Archive in Milan. The archive, which is part of Bertelsmann, houses a wealth of unique testimonies to 200 years of Italian opera history.

The exhibition at the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn represents a *tour de force* through opera history. Starting with the precursors of opera at the court of the Medicis in Florence, it traces the process of creation and transformation of opera as an art form up to the present day and presents the combination of the various forms of art (music, singing, acting, dance) and craft (costume, stage, lighting) to create a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art). This is illustrated by means of paintings and opera posters, costume and stage designs, scores and programs, film clips and recordings of numerous works of opera. Kaleidoscopic glimpses of some of the world’s foremost opera houses – including La Scala in Milan – serve to convey a comprehensive picture of this special form of musical theater, from its beginnings in the 16th century to modern-day opera productions.

The Ricordi Archive, regarded as one of the world’s major privately owned music collections, is contributing nearly 70 exhibits, making it the show’s most important lender. Each of these valuable documents and artifacts tells a story of its own, such as the original portrait of Giuseppe Verdi by Leopoldo Metlicovitz, a copy of which every subscriber to the Ricordi magazine *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* received as a gift at the time. Or facsimiles of the stage designs for Puccini’s *Turandot*, which were sent to opera houses so that exact copies of the premiere stage design could be created there, and the original costume designs for the Verdi operas *Aida* and *Falstaff* as well as for Giacomo Puccini’s *Turandot* and *Madama Butterfly*.

Alongside Giuseppe Verdi, Gaetano Donizetti, Vincenzo Bellini and Gioachino Rossini, Giacomo Puccini is one of the five greats of 19th-century Italian opera whose works were published by Casa Ricordi and are documented in the Archivio Storico Ricordi. The exhibition in Bonn pays special attention to the exceptional composer, devoting several chapters to Puccini: “*Vissi d’arte: Giacomo Puccini’s Tosca at the Vienna State Opera*,” “*La Scala in Milan – From failure to blockbuster: Madama Butterfly*,” and “*Puccini’s Enigmatic Opera: Turandot*.”

The history of La Scala in Milan is closely interwoven with that of Casa Ricordi: Just a few years after the publishing house was founded in 1808, the publisher Giovanni Ricordi took over the archives of the famous opera house and from then on maintained close ties with its artistic directors.

In the following decades, the publishing house secured the rights to the operas of the “Big Five” as well as those of numerous other important composers, and in some cases handled the worldwide distribution of their works. The publisher’s managers very successfully marketed opera productions and exerted a great deal of influence over productions and performances.

The show, carefully prepared by curators Katharina Chrubasik and Alexander Meier-Dörzenbach, offers visitors a unique opportunity to gain direct insights into 400 years of growth and change in the institution of opera. The exhibition also marks another milestone in the public presentation of the Ricordi archive: Bertelsmann is bringing valuable original documents from Milan to Germany for the second time. In Verdi Year 2013, the 200th anniversary of the composer’s birth, the archive’s treasures were presented for the first time in Germany as part of a European traveling exhibition. The show at that time - “The Enterprise of Opera: Verdi. Boito. Ricordi” - was shown in Berlin and Gütersloh, and subsequently traveled to Brussels, Milan and Vincenzo. This was followed in 2019/20 by the show “Verdi: Creating Otello and Falstaff – Highlights from the Ricordi Archive” at New York’s renowned The Morgan Library & Museum. The Ricordi Archive, unique for its cohesiveness, is thus increasingly gaining visibility and importance in an artistic and art historical context.

In all, the Archivio Storico Ricordi houses some 7,800 original scores from more than 600 operas and hundreds of other compositions, close to 10,000 libretti, a large iconographic collection with valuable stage and costume designs, and the extensive historical business correspondence of Casa Ricordi. The Italian music publisher, founded by Giovanni Ricordi in Milan in 1808, had a significant impact on the cultural history of Italy and Europe. Bertelsmann, the international media company that also owns the BMG music group and the New York-based trade publishing group Penguin Random House, acquired Casa Ricordi in 1994, but disposed of the music company and Ricordi’s music rights again in the following years. Only the affiliated Archivio Storico Ricordi remained in the Group. Since then, Bertelsmann has had the archival materials comprehensively indexed, digitized and, in many cases, restored. The company also organizes concerts and exhibitions to keep Casa Ricordi’s cultural heritage alive and make it accessible to as many people as possible.

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September 30, 2022 to February 5, 2023

Bundeskunsthalle
Helmut-Kohl-Allee 4
53113 Bonn
Germany

The exhibition is being realized by the Bundeskunsthalle with the support of Archivio Storico Ricordi, which is part of Bertelsmann.

For more information about the exhibition, please visit www.bundeskunsthalle.de/en/oper.html

An extensive supporting and educational program is planned to accompany the exhibition: Film screenings (e.g. Franco Zeffirelli’s film “La Traviata”), workshops (e.g. “Designing Opera Stages – Mise en Scène”), an academic conference, a lecture series, and more.

Supporting program: www.bundeskunsthalle.de/en/oper/veranstaltungen.html

For more information about the Ricordi archive, please visit www.archivioricordi.com and www.bertelsmann.com

About Bertelsmann

Bertelsmann is a media, services and education company that operates in about 50 countries around the world. It includes the entertainment group RTL Group, the trade book publisher Penguin Random House, the music company BMG, the service provider Arvato, the Bertelsmann Printing Group, the Bertelsmann Education Group and Bertelsmann Investments, an international network of funds. The company has 145,000 employees and generated revenues of €18.7 billion in the 2021 financial year. Bertelsmann stands for creativity and entrepreneurship. This combination promotes first-class media content and innovative service solutions that inspire customers around the world. Bertelsmann aspires to achieve climate neutrality by 2030.

As a creative content company with a history stretching back nearly 190 years, Bertelsmann is engaged in cultural efforts at various levels. Its “Culture@Bertelsmann” activities are focused on preserving important cultural assets and making them accessible to a broad public, e.g. through digitization or exhibitions and concerts. For many years, Bertelsmann has organized the popular UFA Film Nights, a silent film festival in Berlin, and has repeatedly acted as the main sponsor for the digital restoration of important silent films. The Group also owns the Archivio Storico Ricordi in Milan, which houses a wealth of unique testimonies to 200 years of Italian opera history. Bertelsmann is indexing the archive holdings according to the latest standards and makes thousands of documents, set and costume designs, libretti, and items of business correspondence publicly accessible online. With the Blaues Sofa (Blue Sofa) literature format, Bertelsmann and its partners ZDF, Deutschlandfunk Kultur, and 3sat have provided authors with a prominent stage for their latest works for over 20 years.

About the Bundeskunsthalle

The Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany), or Bundeskunsthalle for short, is a unique venue for art, culture and science. Its program focuses on art from all periods, including contemporary art, as well as exhibitions on cultural history, archaeology, natural science, and other fields of knowledge. The Bundeskunsthalle also develops and presents/hosts a separate/standalone program in the field of the performing arts, with guest performances and original productions by various artists and ensembles from the fields of theater, performance, dance, and music.

The Bundeskunsthalle’s declared aim is to not only focus on Western culture, but to present a global perspective. Its commitment to broad cultural participation to promote a comprehensive spirit of inclusion and integration also plays an important role. This is reflected in the artistic program as well as in the accompanying events, which include discussions, readings, and lectures, as well as guided tours and workshops.

Through its diverse collaborations, the Bundeskunsthalle has built up an international network of cultural and scientific institutions, while at the same time tapping into very different audiences with whom it constantly engages in dialog. The Bundeskunsthalle’s mission is to be a showcase, both nationally and internationally, for the open concept of culture that is central to the identity of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Bertelsmann online



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