

“OPERA MEETS NEW MEDIA – PUCCINI, RICORDI AND THE RISE OF THE MODERN ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY” April 18 – May 16, 2024, daily 11 a.m. – 6 p.m. in Berlin



## Interview with curator Ellen Lockhart

Ellen Lockhart is Associate Professor of Musicology at the University of Toronto. She received her PhD from Cornell University in 2011, followed by a postdoctoral position at Princeton University from 2011-2014. Lockhart has published widely in journals such as *Representations*, *Eighteenth-Century Music*, and the *Cambridge Opera Journal*. In 2017, she published *Animation, Plasticity, and Music in Italy, 1770-1830* with University of California Press, which was funded by the AMS75 Book Grant Prize. She co-edited *Sound Knowledge: Music and Science in London, 1789-1851* with James Davies (UC Berkeley) and is currently co-editing *La fanciulla del West* for the Critical Edition of the Operas of Puccini (Ricordi). With Sarah Hibberd, she is co-editor of the *Cambridge Opera Journal*.

*Professor Lockhart, how did your collaboration with the Archivio Storico Ricordi for the Puccini exhibition come about?*

I'm preparing a critical edition of Puccini's 1910 opera, *La fanciulla del West*, for Ricordi, and I've published articles on the history of staging of this opera.

*What do you feel makes this exhibition special?*

This exhibition is noteworthy for encompassing early film, advertising, merchandise, historical journalism and photography, musical scores, archival letters and other documents surrounding the composition, premieres and early performance history of Puccini's operas.

In my view, it really does justice to the incredible scope of Ricordi & Co. during this period, as well as the wide reach of Puccini's operas as cultural products. It also helps us to understand why historians of twentieth-century visual culture consider the visual output of the firm to be so important for the development of Italian art and design.

*In your essay, you write about the Puccini "brand." Can modern terms such as "brand" and "branding" even be applied to a late 19th-century composer?*

This sounds like a question I would ask! It's absolutely true that the concept of a brand was rather nebulous at this point, but I argue that we can see the idea of a brand emerging precisely in the images and objects being displayed here, i.e., recognition and a degree of stylistic consistency on the one hand, reminding the consumer of things they've enjoyed before; but also new "seasons," we might call them, with each consecutive opera having its distinct aesthetics; direct links between Puccini's operas and other luxury objects in an upper-middle-class market; and also a sense that in the composer himself we see how modern Italian opera is cultivated alongside a love of other exquisite (and upmarket) objects and tastes.

*What exactly did the music publisher Ricordi's "branding" look like in the case of Puccini?*

The composer's name and his distinctive face – the well-groomed moustache, square jaw and melancholy eyes – provide one kind of continuity across their promotions. They frequently published articles about his gentleman's lifestyle and luxury pursuits in the house journal, *Ars et Labor*. Another kind of continuity can be found in the posters and other promotional materials for the operas themselves, which you can see have a consistent Art Nouveau (or *Stile Liberty*) look, with the title in big letters, high-contrast colours, richly organic background textures and framing, and often the heroine in the centre of the image.

*How important were Puccini merchandising products for publishers and artists?*

The posters and postcards were immensely important; the perfume cards and pocket calendars seem also to have been quite popular. The tableware, by contrast, seems to have been quite a niche product – very few of the *Bohème* plates made by Richard Ginori survive, and we speculate that they were made in limited quantities. Perhaps Ricordi was imagining a larger merchandising initiative into homeware that did not end up happening.

*Were there comparable products for other artists who were signed to Ricordi?*

There are beautiful posters for operas such as Mascagni's Iris and Catalani's La Wally, even Verdi's Falstaff. But I don't think there's anything comparable to what was done for Puccini.

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