

## The Development of the Archivio Storico Ricordi

The Archivio Storico Ricordi houses one of the most important music collections in the world. It came into being in parallel to the rise of the music publisher Casa Ricordi. Over the course of two centuries, the archive has gathered a wide documentation of Italian music and theater history of inestimable value.

Its cultural treasures consist primarily of manuscripts by the most famous 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century musicians, of correspondence between them and their publisher, and of a wide range of more than 10,000 iconographic documents that were created in connection with large-scale theatrical productions: sketches, set and costume designs for the premieres of major works such as Verdi's *Otello* and *Falstaff* or Puccini's *La Bohème* and *Tosca*, and beautifully designed opera posters are just a few examples. This part of the archive builds a chronological bridge from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – when Ricordi also took on the role of impresario and accompanied the entire creative process of producing an opera, from composition to premiere, with great passion – until about the year 1935, when this activity ended and responsibility for the operatic production was transferred to the individual, newly independent opera houses.

The Archivio Storico Ricordi maintains and cares for this musical and artistic legacy to this day and makes its inventory available not only to academe. Activities such as the documentation and reproduction (including digitization) of the stocks mainly serve to bring the archive into an intensive cultural exchange with subsectors of fine art, architecture, film and the theater.

Not quite two years ago, Bertelsmann and Ricordi & C., the legal entity of the Archivio Storico Ricordi, jointly launched a project to index and digitize the collection and conserve the original documents. The archive's inventory is also to be made available to the international research community in digital form – the archive is building networks with other cultural and scientific institutions for this purpose. Also, the opening to a wide audience is provided. All these measures follow the firm belief that the possession of such a unique collection brings a great responsibility to preserve this heritage for future generations. Bertelsmann and Ricordi & C. aren't the sole custodians of the archive: due to its high historical and cultural value, the inventory is under the supervision of the Italian Ministry of Culture and the associated regulatory authority, the *Soprintendenza Archivistica per la Lombardia*.

The measures taken to develop the archive are briefly explained in the following:

### **1. Cataloging (Indexing) / Electronic database**

As banal as it seems: to be able to develop an archive, it is first necessary to know what it contains. The Archivio Ricordi is so extensive and complex that large sections have yet to be properly indexed. For this reason, an ongoing cataloging process has been initiated which will eventually provide digital access to the entire archive. Building on previous projects, e.g. the digitization of Verdi and Puccini-related documents for the “Internet Culturale” website, the project team has developed an electronic database which will encompass all relevant stocks. The general aim is to index the content not only for internal (business) purposes, but also and especially for its publication on the Internet to make it accessible for a wider audience. In addition, the cataloging will yield a highly advanced tool for reorganizing the stocks, which will allow for studying the documents by entirely new means. In 2012, the collection of approximately 7,800 handwritten scores was indexed. At this time, the focus is on indexing the approximately 15,000 handwritten letters, a process that will take approximately two years. This correspondence is of fundamental importance for researching not only the economic and personal relations between the publisher and its artists (composers, librettists, illustrators, etc.), but also for studying interrelationships in the Italian and European cultural scene of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **2. Digitization**

The digitization of the documents – and thus the creation of a digital “asset” – has several advantages: first and foremost, the lasting preservation of the documents; then, the possibility of digital research (with correspondingly lower wear-and-tear on the originals); and finally the possibility of reproduction for the purpose of exhibition, online publication, reporting, etc. The digitization process is closely bound up with the cataloging/indexing process, and the long-term objective is to digitally capture the entire inventory of unique documents.

### **3. Restoration**

Restoration not only ensures the physical preservation of the documents, it also provides valuable information about the composition process – for example, by revealing corrections made by Puccini that only came to light in the context of restoration measures. In 2012, 149 volumes containing handwritten scores by the archive’s “big five” were restored: Verdi, Bellini, Rossini, Donizetti and Puccini.

### **4. Network-building**

The Archivio Ricordi strives to cooperate with cultural institutions in Italy and abroad to enrich our collective knowledge of music culture and to promote interdisciplinary approaches to the archive’s inventory and academic research on it. For this reason, the archive is currently building a virtual network of cultural institutions that have some connection with its own content and objectives. In particular, its existing partners include the *Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani* in Parma, the *Università Luigi Bocconi* in Milan and the *Accademia del Teatro della Scala*.

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