

PRESS RELEASE

Ricordi Archive's Collection of Letters Now Online Alongside Stage and Costume Designs

- **More than 30,000 historical letters from Casa Ricordi's correspondence are now freely accessible and searchable at www.archivioricordi.com**
- **Bertelsmann is gradually making all of the archive's important holdings relating to Italian opera history available in digital form**

Milan, November 5, 2018 – Two years after putting its historical stage and costume designs online, Bertelsmann-owned Archivio Storico Ricordi is now adding an extensive collection of letters online that provides deep insights into the cultural industry of the 19th and 20th centuries. More than 30,000 items from the business correspondence between Casa Ricordi in Italy and artists and business partners all over the world from the years between 1808 and 1962 can now be viewed at www.archivioricordi.com. They tell the story of one of the leading music publishers of that period, and shed light on important facets of Italian opera history.

The archive's collection of letters is stored in the vault of the Braidense National Library in Milan and was previously available exclusively on request, so that only selected correspondence found its way into scientific publications. In the course of an elaborate, academically monitored digitization process, the mostly handwritten business letters were scanned and transferred into the Ricordi archive's "Collezione Digitale" (digital collection). Key exchanges were also transcribed, annotated, translated into English and indexed with links to other works of reference, making them available and researchable for musicologists and opera fans for the first time.

The letters are testimony to the professional, commercial and personal relationships between the Ricordi publishing family and librettists, composers, and singers, as well as entrepreneurs, politicians and journalists. They show how Casa Ricordi negotiated and communicated with cultural greats, and how the company made its plans and decisions.

Karin Schlautmann, Executive Vice President Corporate Communications of Bertelsmann, said: "By publishing the collection of letters, we are advancing the systematic indexing of the archive holdings to the latest standards. Our goal is to preserve the cultural treasures stored in the Archivio Storico Ricordi for posterity, and to make them accessible to a wide public."

Since the end of 2016, the Collezione Digitale has already included the complete iconographic collection of the Ricordi Archive, featuring more than 400 portraits of renowned singers, composers and librettists. It also contains some 600 stage designs and several thousand costume and prop drawings for numerous Italian operas, including the works of Giuseppe Verdi and Giacomo Puccini. Over time, all of the archive's major holdings will be made digitally available, e.g. historical photographs and posters, libretti and excerpts from scores, and administrative documents.

One of the most elucidating exchanges of letters in the newly integrated “Lettere di Casa Ricordi” collection is the previously unpublished private correspondence between Giulio Ricordi and his son Tito from 1888 to 1918. The two publishers controlled the fortunes of Casa Ricordi in very different ways: While Giulio Ricordi built up business relationships gradually over time and explained his viewpoints in long and detailed letters, his son and successor Tito was a more technical and concise communicator. His letters also bear witness to the company’s efforts to survive the difficult war years and to cope with technological advances during the transition from telegraph to telephone.

The letters in this section have been entirely transcribed, and partly translated into English (Giulio Ricordi’s letters). They have been annotated, linking them with names, places and musical works in the company’s database. Names, titles of works, previous correspondence and historical events in the transcribed texts are indexed with standard links to corresponding entries in other encyclopedias and documents in other physical archives. The places referred to are georeferenced and supported by images available online. The plan is to gradually set up an interactive commentary process and to extend it to other bundles of letters. In this way, the Ricordi Archive intends to open itself more to the scientific and archival community in the years ahead, as well as to amateur music enthusiasts. The portal also contains 50 letters from the correspondence between Casa Ricordi and Vincenzo Bellini, documents collected from external collections and transcribed in cooperation with University and Archivio Bellini in Catania. In fact, the portal is designed as a participatory platform for gradually recording all Ricordi-related content and presenting the famous Italian publisher’s rich network.

The letter collection was digitized in collaboration with renowned scholars including Patricia Rebull (Brussels), coordinator of the project, the musicologist Gabriele Dotto (Michigan State University Press), University of Sheffield - Digital Humanities Institute which provided the IT expertise, in particular for the web-representation of the collection and its crucial nodes.

The Archivio Storico Ricordi houses approximately 7,800 original scores for more than 600 operas; close to 10,000 librettos; an extensive collection of colorful stage and costume designs, mostly for world premieres; and the company’s complete business correspondence from 1888 to 1962. Casa Ricordi, founded in Milan by Giovanni Ricordi in 1808, had a formative influence on the cultural history of Italy and Europe. It published the works of the “big five” composers of Italian opera – Gioachino Rossini, Gaetano Donizetti, Vincenzo Bellini, Giuseppe Verdi and Giacomo Puccini. From the beginning, all of the company’s documents were meticulously archived. The former business archive of the Casa Ricordi publishing company has since become a historical archive that is now housed at Milan’s Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense.

Bertelsmann acquired the traditional Italian publishing house in 1994, but in subsequent years disposed of the music company and Ricordi’s music rights. The associated Archivio Storico Ricordi and its brand rights, however, remained within the Group.

For many years, Bertelsmann has been engaged in a variety of cultural initiatives both in Germany and internationally. The Group’s “Culture@Bertelsmann” activities comprise exhibitions, readings and concerts, the “Blue Sofa” literary format, as well as a commitment to preserving Europe’s cultural heritage – as in the case of the Archivio Storico Ricordi. As a company with a long history in filmmaking, Bertelsmann also supports and sponsors the restoration, digitization and screening of major silent films.

About Bertelsmann

Bertelsmann is a media, services and education company that operates in about 50 countries around the world. It includes the broadcaster RTL Group, the trade book publisher Penguin Random House, the magazine publisher Gruner + Jahr, 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 119,000 employees and generated revenues of €17.2 billion in the 2017 financial year. Bertelsmann stands for entrepreneurship and creativity. This combination promotes first-class media content and innovative service solutions that inspire customers around the world.

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