

PRESS RELEASE

Bertelsmann Presents Six Decades of Music History in Online ‘Vinyl Collection’

- **The collection offers music fans pictures and information on more than 11,500 records from the former club range.**
- **Covers, facts, and artist information for singles and albums by Udo Jürgens, Cat Stevens, Heintje, Boney M. and many other stars**

Gütersloh, November 23, 2018 – From 1956 to 1992, the former Bertelsmann music clubs offered their members an extensive selection of records – a musical treasure trove, large parts of which can now be viewed and searched online. There is still a great deal of interest in the vinyl records of the former clubs, even today. What did the covers look like? What were the names of the artists involved? When did the records appear as special editions in Bertelsmann’s clubs? All these questions are now answered by the “Vinyl Collection”, a new, richly illustrated online database that provides detailed documentation of more than 11,500 records. The offer is freely available to music lovers in German and English at <https://vinyl.bertelsmann.de> and <https://vinyl.bertelsmann.com>, respectively.

Karin Schlautmann, Head of Corporate Communications at Bertelsmann, said: “The ‘Vinyl Collection’ is a project by our Corporate Archive, which took over more than 40,000 vinyl records from the then Bertelsmann Club in 2005, followed later by other, individual, holdings. These singles and albums were meticulously reviewed, sorted and photographed and combined with extensive musical expertise to make them available online to a wide audience. Now, six decades of the club’s music history can be researched and reconstructed.”

The often colorful covers and accompanying information tell of the vibrant diversity of the club’s vinyl era in their own way; the music from the era cannot be included for licensing reasons.

The music history of the Bertelsmann Club began when shellac records were gradually replaced by considerably more stable vinyl records. In 1956, the Bertelsmann Schallplattenring was created as an offshoot of the early Lesering reading club. At the time, nobody had any idea how strongly the business model would come to shape the German music industry in the following decades. In the beginning, the Schallplattenring had only a small portfolio of its own. The big names in the record industry refused to grant Bertelsmann licenses from their repertoire. So in 1958, the company founded its own record label, Ariola, and that same year put its own pressing plant, Sonopress, into operation. One year later, Ariola had its first number one hit with “Am Tag, als der Regen kam” (The Day the Rain Came) by Dalida, and subsequently developed into a real hit machine. The music industry was impressed. In 1959, a first license agreement was concluded with the then largest German record company, Deutsche Grammophon – the ice was broken.

Success attracted other artists, who were then of course included in the Club's range as well: In 1965, Ariola signed Peter Alexander as its first Schlager (German pop) star. Heintje, Udo Jürgens and Tony Marshall soon followed, as did the distribution rights for international stars such as Shirley Bassey, The Equals, The Hollies, and The Troggs. In the 1970s Jethro Tull, Patti Smith, Bob Marley, Cat Stevens, Roxy Music and Boney M. were added. The Club compilation "Elvis – 20 Fantastic Hits" alone sold more than half a million copies in Germany and went platinum. The selection on offer for classical music lovers consisted of greats such as Rudolf Schock, Anna Moffo, Emil Gilels, David Oistrach, Robert Stolz – the classical music catalog of the Club spin-off Eurodisc was among the most renowned in the world.

The market launch of compact discs, which were first included in the club range in 1985, heralded the end of the golden era of club records. Demand for vinyl declined, while CD sales increased tenfold by 1991. In 1992, the club discontinued its record range after 36 years. It was not until years later that vinyl experienced a renaissance, in which Bertelsmann is participating commercially again. Today, its subsidiary Topac produces several million record covers annually for the LP ranges of numerous music companies.

The "Vinyl Collection" is part of a wide-ranging archival and cultural commitment at Bertelsmann. The Group's domestic and international "Culture@Bertelsmann" activities comprise exhibitions, readings and concerts, the "Blue Sofa" literary format, as well as a commitment to preserving Europe's cultural heritage. For instance, Bertelsmann owns the Archivio Storico Ricordi in Milan, a music archive that contains a wealth of unique testimonies to Italian opera history. Bertelsmann is indexing the archive's holdings to the latest standards, and is making its cultural treasures accessible to a broad public. As a company with a long cinematic history of its own, Bertelsmann also champions the restoration, digitization and screening of important 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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