

PRESS RELEASE

Archivio Ricordi Brings Italian Opera History to Life in the Digital Realm

- Thousands of historic stage and costume designs now online for first time
- Bertelsmann will gradually make all essential stocks of the archive available digitally
- Bertelsmann CEO Thomas Rabe: “We want to reach an audience beyond the the musicology community”

Milan, December 7, 2016 – Thousands of items documenting the history of Italian opera, from the famous Archivio Storico Ricordi in Milan, can now be viewed and researched in digital form. The international media company Bertelsmann, which owns the archive, has announced that an online platform for this purpose, *Collezione Digitale* (<http://digital.archivioricordi.com>), went live last weekend.

After several years of work indexing, restoring and digitizing the archival stock, the Ricordi Archive’s entire iconographic collection can now be accessed online for starters. It comprises more than 400 portraits of noted singers, composers and librettists, some 600 set designs, as well as several thousand sketches of costumes and props for myriad Italian operas, including the works of Giuseppe Verdi and Giacomo Puccini. Visitors can also view detailed dramatic and stage directions (*disposizioni sceniche*) for many works and performances.

The portal offers a search by composer and opera as well as a free-text search. The documents in the results list can then be zoomed up, and are enriched with curated metadata as well as permanent links.

The new site allows for exploring iconic artifacts, as well as hidden gems of opera culture:

- Extensive documentation of the creation and important stagings of *Aida* by Giuseppe Verdi: from the set and costume designs of the European premiere in 1872, to the art nouveau edition of Attilio Comelli at La Scala in Milan in 1904
- Set and costume designs by Adolf Hohenstein for the world première of Giacomo Puccini’s *Bohème* (Turin 1896)
- Giuseppe Palanti’s designs for *Roméo et Juliette* by Charles François Gounod
- The set design for “The Forest of Fontainebleau” by Carlo Ferrario for Giuseppe Verdi’s opera *Don Carlo*
- Illustrations and costume designs by Aroldo Bonzagni for Alberto Iginio Randegger’s operetta *Il ragno azzurro*

- Documentation of the posthumous premiere of *Nerone* by Arrigo Boito at La Scala in 1924

“Our goal is to gradually make all of the Archivio Ricordi’s essential inventories available online,” announced Bertelsmann Chairman & CEO Thomas Rabe. “We hope to reach an audience beyond the musicology community, and also to inspire a new, young generation for classical music and the world of opera. Bertelsmann sees it as our responsibility to treat this important legacy of cultural history with great care. We want to ensure that the treasures in the Ricordi Archive are preserved for posterity and available to friends of opera all over the world.”

Over the next few years, in addition to the iconographic collection, also business letters, then historical photographs and posters, librettos and excerpts from scores, as well as administrative documents from the archive stocks will be made available digitally.

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. The correspondence provides far-reaching insights into how the cultural industry thought and worked at that time.

The Ricordi publishing house stands for a unique combination of entrepreneurship and creativity. 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.

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 117,000 employees and generated revenues of €17.1 billion in the 2015 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.

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