

The Correspondence Collection of the Archivio Storico Ricordi: a Key Component of a Future European Network of Archives

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BACKGROUND, DEVELOPMENT AND FUTURE PROJECTS

Introduction

The Archivio Storico Ricordi began and grew with the Ricordi publishing house, founded in 1808. Considered one of the most important private musical archives, it preserves the original handwritten scores of 23 of Verdi's 28 operas, all the operas composed by Giacomo Puccini (except *La Rondine*), as well as a great many works by composers like Bellini, Rossini and Donizetti or contemporaries including Nono, Donatoni, Sciarrino and Bussotti.

The extraordinary importance of the Archive resides in the variety of documents it preserves, which offer a broad panoramic vision of culture, industry and society over the course of two centuries of Italian history. The Archive, housed in the Braidense National Library in Milan, preserves around 8,000 scores, more than 16,000 letters by musicians, librettists, singers and other professionals connected to these arts, roughly 10,000 costume and set designs, more than 9,000 librettos, 6,000 historical photographs, and a large collection of

Art Nouveau and Deco posters created by some of the principal artists of the time.

The Archive has a rich iconographic collection related to many world or local premières and includes set and costume designs, collections of photographs and letters, and also a large amount of business documentation, which enable scholars to reconstruct the genesis of major opera masterpieces and the development of the musical publishing industry in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The iconography section of the Archive offers important information not only related strictly to musical activity, but also the pictorial, scenographic and decorative arts (such as the history of costume design, jewellery design and stage props), the publishing company itself (reconstructing the relationship between the publisher and various artists, whether they be musicians, librettists or visual artists) and the world of theatre. The collection allows scholars to trace the personal and professional life of many composers, starting from their earliest operas, for example *Oberto Conte di San Bonifacio* by Verdi and *Le Villi* by Puccini, through to their last masterpieces such as Verdi's *Falstaff* and the unfinished *Turandot* by Puccini.

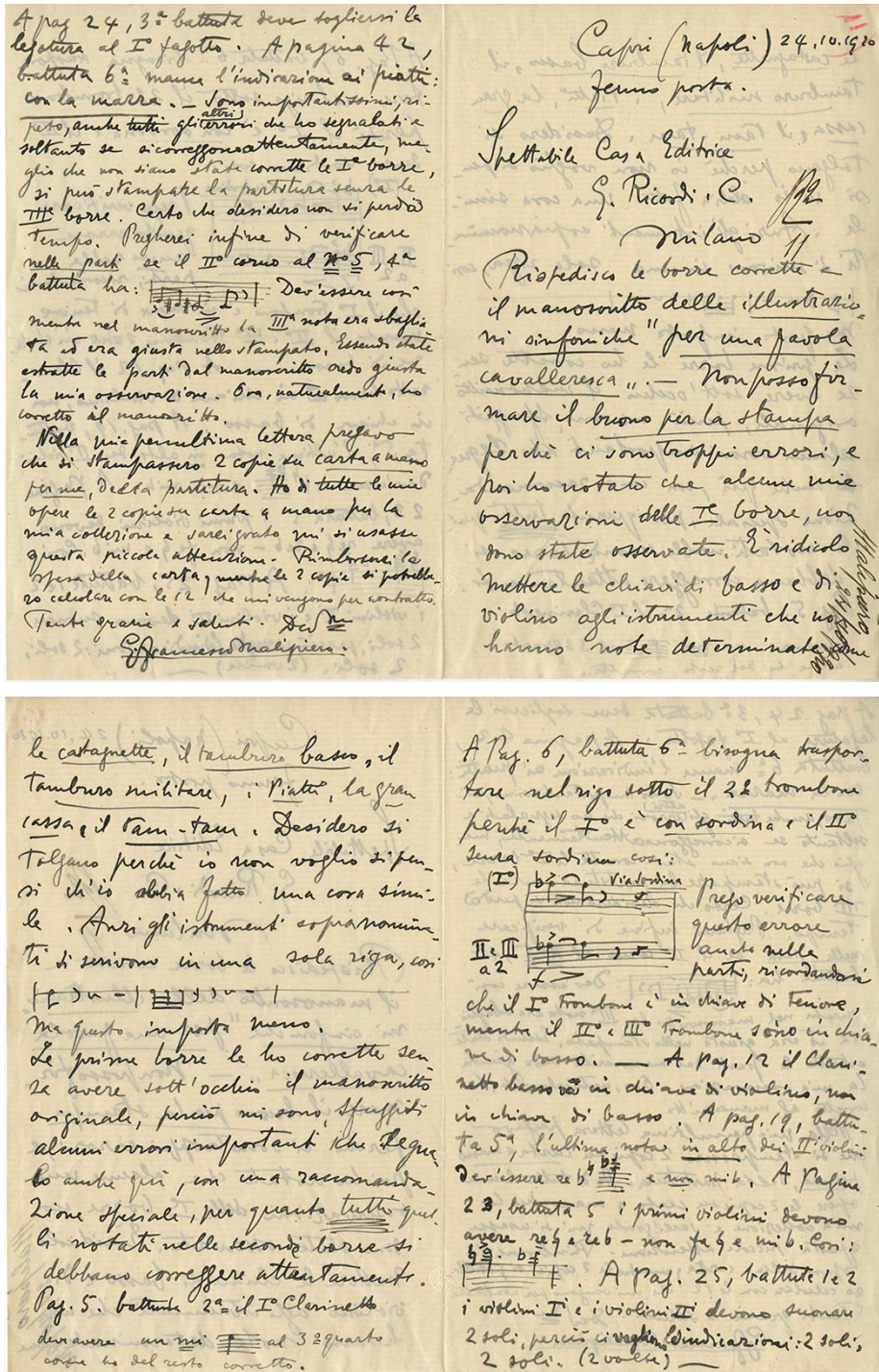
In 1994 the German media company Bertelsmann acquired Ricordi. In the same year the entire collection of the Archive was placed under the protection of Italy's cultural authorities. The new investor dedicated considerable attention to the care and appreciation of the company's precious Historical Archive, a unique testament of its own cultural and entrepreneurial history.

The Archivio Ricordi protects, preserves and promotes the knowledge of this artistic and documentary heritage, providing research services, digitisation, and making the materials available to organisations with cultural purposes, universities and educational institutions.

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The collection of manuscript letters covers the period from the early nineteenth century through the late twentieth and tells the history of Italy's foremost music publishing company, which had an international impact and left its mark on the general history of music, and its most important collaborators. It consists of letters to Casa Ricordi by writers, librettists, conductors, singers, impresarios and composers including Giuseppe Verdi, Gaetano Donizetti, Giacomo Puccini, Franz Liszt, Ottorino Respighi, Jules Massenet, Alfredo Casella and Luigi Nono; librettists such as Luigi Illica, Giuseppe Giacosa and Arrigo Boito; literary figures such as the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio; and singers like Teresa Stolz, Maria Waldmann and Victor Maurel. There are also further extensive inventories from the twentieth century, both manuscript and typewritten: for instance, letters by

FIGURE 1. Letter from Gian Francesco Malipiero of 24 October 1920 (Milano, Archivio Storico Ricordi)



composers such as Gian Francesco Malipiero (1942-1954) and Ildebrando Pizzetti (1942-1956), letters from the managing directors of the company, Tito I, Giulio and Tito II Ricordi, and numerous letters associated with specific compositions (FIGURE 1).

The ‘Copialettere’ (FIGURE 2), the outgoing business correspondence, form the second part of the collection of letters. They are complete from 1888 to 1962, with some gaps from 1944 to 1953. Each fiscal year is divided into several volumes. An index volume lists the addressees. The ‘copialettere’ enable the reconstruction of correspondences, as was the case for the letters to Arturo Toscanini, for example.

Thanks to an ongoing cataloguing project, the main collection of letters has been fully listed, indexed and catalogued, recently enriched by other important documents discovered as part of collateral collections including letters of contemporary composers (folders of the years 1942–1960) never before catalogued in detail, with the important and interesting correspondence to Casa Ricordi from composers such as Franco Alfano, Alfredo Casella and Bruno Bettinelli (FIGURES 3-4).

FIGURE 2. ‘Copialettere’



The measures adopted for promoting knowledge of the archive and its precious content can be divided into two macro-categories that, as we will see, are closely linked. The first concerns an ‘internal’ appreciation of, or introduction to, the collections of documents. The second involves their ‘public’ appreciation, consisting in various projects for access to and promotion of their contents (exhibits, web-based projects, publications, conferences, etc.).

Internal processing: cataloguing, indexing, digitisation, restoration

Thanks to more advanced technical processes, by the end of 2005 it was possible to begin the digitisation, cataloguing and computerisation of our archive’s documents according to the standards set by the Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale (SBN) [National Library Service]. On the cultural internet site of Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo Unico (ICCU) [The Central Institute for the Union Catalogue of Italian Libraries and Bibliographic Information] currently available

FIGURE 3. Letter from Bruno Bettinelli of 1 June 1943 (Milano, Archivio Storico Ricordi)

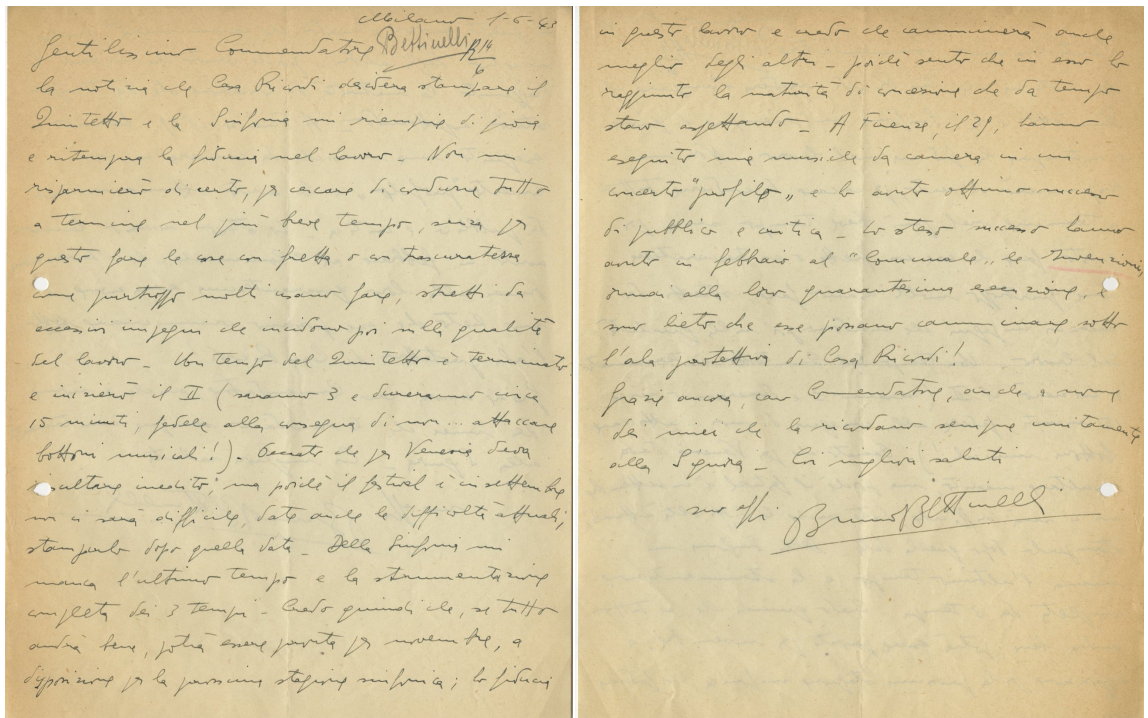
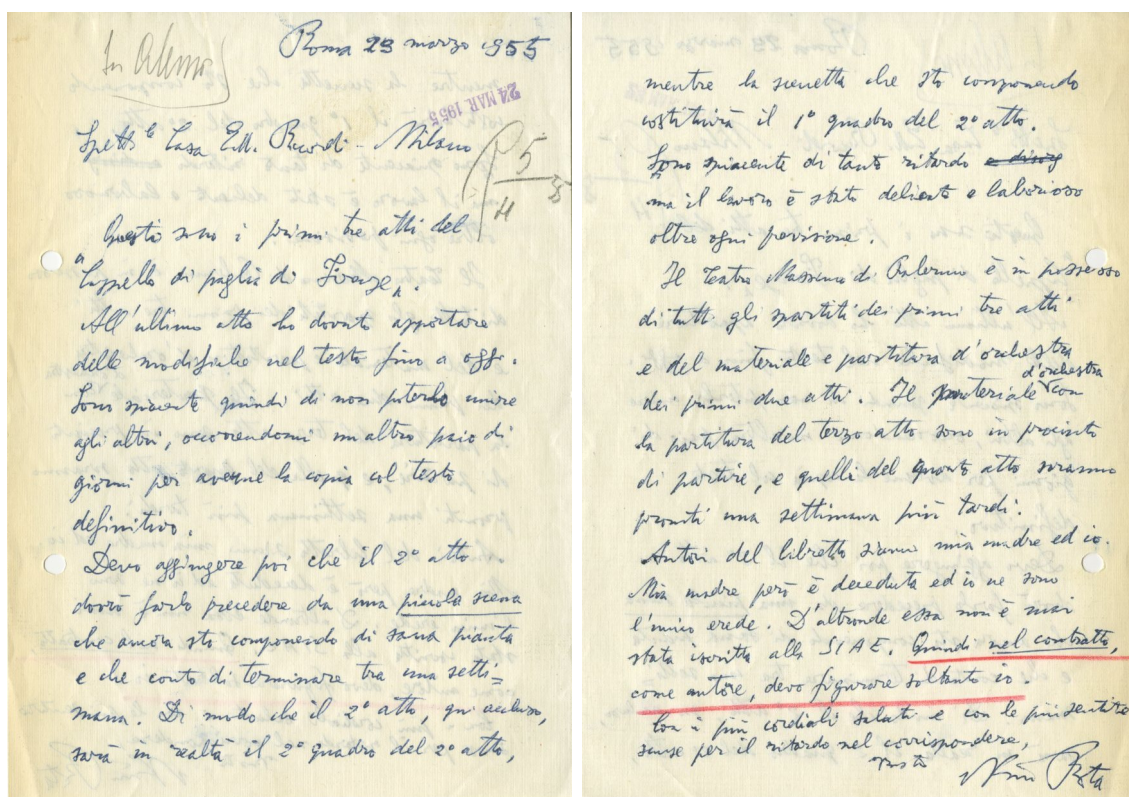


FIGURE 4. Letter from Nino Rota of 29 March 1955 (Milano, Archivio Storico Ricordi)



only in Italian, but with plans for mirror sites in English, French and Spanish (<http://www.internetculturale.it/opencms/opencms/it/>), our documents pertaining to Giuseppe Verdi and Giacomo Puccini are now available to both scholars and general readers. The project was made possible thanks to an agreement stipulated between Ricordi, the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali e del Turismo [Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism], the Dipartimento per i Beni Archivistici e Librari and the headquarters for the Beni Librari ed Istituti Culturali, all flanked by the Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense [National Braidense Library], home to the Ricordi archive since 2003, and the LIM - Laboratorio di Informatica Musicale of Milan's state university, which furnished the cataloguing and content management program developed specifically for the project at hand.

For this project, all the scanned documents were digitally delivered in a double format: at high definition (600 dpi) and at low definition (72 dpi), making it possible to satisfy different needs and projects. Thanks to the high resolution images it will be possible, for example, to obtain facsimiles of particularly rare handwritten scores and libretti, such as the recent release by the Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani of Francesco Maria Piave's libretto for *La Traviata* with his handwritten notes for directing. The high resolution is also suitable for the realisation of large-scale scenographic museum displays, as was done with a very famous historic photo shown at the entrance of the exhibit honouring Verdi, *L'Uomo, l'opera, il mito*, held in Milan's Palazzo Reale for the centennial of the maestro's death in 2001, portraying the Sforza castle's piazza packed with people for Verdi's funeral procession. The lower resolution, on the other hand, is ideal for publishing online, or for consultation on a screen.

The availability of excellent reproductions of handwritten scores has made it possible for scholars working on critical editions to analyse at their own desks even the minutest details of every sheet and every change made by the composer, and thus to have to visit the archive on-site only when it is necessary to analyse the original document. This procedure optimises the time and modes of consultation. The amount of time spent in the archives is decidedly less than in the past. Musicologists have in front of them a text that has virtually no more secrets, but which, at the same time, can be conserved in a better state because it will be handled less.

Cataloguing and scanning the archive's documents has also been crucial for a correct evaluation of its holdings, and constitutes a point of departure for every project. Indeed, in the last two years, these activities have become systematic thanks to plans for the massive undertaking of digitising all the original documents conserved in the archive. It is fundamental to make the contents of the archive available to international scholars and researchers, because the exchange of information and research brings about a mutual enrichment that has no equal. To this end and because the documentation it possesses is so rich, the archive is building a network with cultural and scholarly institutions that is ever more ample. Our conviction is that a multi-disciplinary approach that is 'open' to the external world is necessary for the correct investigation of such a vast and greatly diversified range of material. The most important result of this encounter between the documents and the 'external eyes' of those studying them is a greater and more complex understanding of the archive's patrimony, its corpus of new content, and the new means of access now available to the public.

PUBLIC DISSEMINATION

The Ricordi portal and web-based projects

The Ricordi archive is currently engaged in implementing its own online portal, which will become the principal instrument for consulting the collections, as well as a vehicle for projects that are created and developed specifically for the internet. A significant example of this is the publication, planned for October of 2015, of the *Catalogo Numerico Ricordi*, created in collaboration with Agostina Zecca Laterza, who edited the first printed version. This catalogue represents the activity of the famous Milanese music publishing house since its foundation in 1808. All the works that were acquired by Ricordi are presented in a progressive numerical order that is also approximately chronological. They are also described with information that is essential for identifying the compositions. Furthermore, the sale price at the time of the original publication of the catalogue – information that allows many first editions to be identified – is also included.

It is possible to navigate within the catalogue, an important bibliographic resource for the history of music and of the Italian and European music publishing industries, containing more than 40,000 records covering the editorial production of Casa Ricordi from 1808 to 1870. Research can be done by catalogue number, author, title of the composition and date of publication (or acquisition) by Ricordi. The printed version of the numerical catalogue published information drawn from the so-called ‘libroni’ (production books), that is, the original registers handwritten at the moment of the acquisition of a new work. Users can view online the photographic reproductions of the pages of the original printed catalogue and the registers.

The Ricordi Numerical Catalogue project will be continually enriched following the temporal progression of Ricordi’s publications. A project is already planned that will make other holdings and metadata of the archive available online, as well as, for example, scores and correspondence, and that will explore the possibility of using new functionalities of the web, for example, text contents (letters, magazines, etc.) and the semantic web. Collaboration with other institutes engaged in parallel projects is also part of the planning.

Currently, on the Ricordi site it is possible to find information about past and future exhibits curated by the archive that were created in order to attract a younger audience, one which includes not just scholars but also aficionados. In fact, digitising the collection has made it possible to offer exhibits that have brought the general public closer to the world of music in a way that is more inviting, while still maintaining scholarly rigour.

The exhibits

Reconfiguring the digital assets of the collection in an interactive manner is one of the constants in the exhibit activities of the Ricordi archive thanks to the conviction that elements such as entertainment, technology and interactivity may bring a diversified and not necessarily specialised public closer to the collection and its contents. In 2008, the archive's exhibit *That's Butterfly* (which focused on Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* at Milan's Sforza castle) included a touch-screen (developed by the LIM) that allowed visitors to listen to various renditions of the famous operatic piece 'Un bel di vedremo' while simultaneously following the score note-by-note on a reproduction of Puccini's handwritten score. In 2006, at the exhibit *Celeste Aida* at the Museo Teatrale alla Scala, visitors could, with a simple touch of the screen, see the temple conceived by Girolamo Magnani for the Italian première of the opera in 1872 at the Scala: the temple based on a drawing of the Egyptian original found among documents dating to the Napoleonic period, which Magnani had used for the inspiration of his set design.

In honour of the bicentenary of Verdi's birth, in 2013 the Ricordi archive was a moving force for various initiatives in which digitisation proved to be fundamental. The most important among these was the exhibit *L'Impresa Opera*, organised at Bertelsmann's representative offices in Berlin. Thanks to audio guides, the public could listen to 'dialogues' (recited by professional actors) reconstructed from original letters exchanged by the composer Verdi, the librettist Arrigo Boito and the publisher Giulio Ricordi leading up to the creation of Verdi's last operas, *Otello* and *Falstaff*. The exhibit later travelled, using high quality facsimiles of the original documents, to Gütersloh, Milan and Brussels.

In the context of the Verdi bicentennial celebrations another Ricordi project appeared alongside this exhibit: Ricordi's participation in the 'Verdi online' portal, together with other institutions that conserve material related to Verdi, such as the Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani, the Museo Teatrale alla Scala, the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei and the Rai archives. In fact, the respective managements of the archives and libraries, the ICCU together with the Istituto Centrale per gli Archivi (ICAR), and the National Braidense Library collaboratively created a portal exclusively dedicated to Verdi. This portal serves as a search engine, as well as a source for digitised images and audio and audio-visual material for an ever greater and deeper understanding of this great composer, on an international level as well. The Ricordi archive participated by interacting with the other partners of the project, and placing at the project's disposal a selection of its precious documents.

Another example of the archive's digital dissemination, highlighting and promotion of its valuable contents is the iPad app 'Giuseppe Verdi', part of the 'Masters Composers' series, entirely produced by Ricordi & C., and available free-of-charge from Apple's app store from 2013 until 2015. Created in collaboration with the Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani, the app presents the principal events in the life of the composer from Busseto, their historical context, his relationship with the publisher Ricordi, his operas and compositions, and the places where he lived. Enriching the app are reproductions of documents preserved in the archive, which houses one of the most important collection of Verdi documents in the world: handwritten scores, libretti, set and costume designs and illustrations for numerous premières, in addition to photographs of the maestro and of people and places related to him.

CONCLUSIONS

The Archivio Storico Ricordi, through the continuous improvement of access and the in-depth analysis of its greatly varied collection and documents, is ever more involved and active in projects that are being created both by the archive itself and in collaboration with public and private institutions. The organisation of encounters and conferences, during which Italian and international experiences can be shared, allows not only the knowledge and comparison of diverse historical musical realities, but also offers interesting opportunities for development and future collaborative efforts, towards the goal of making ever more alive and available that which has been conserved with passion and dedication, in order to involve an ever larger audience in the knowledge of national and foreign historic and cultural heritage.

References

<http://www.archivioricordi.com>

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