

# The Growing Importance of Archives for Performers and Publishers (not *just* Historians): The Case of the Archivio Storico Ricordi

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While archives of musical sources have long been recognised as vital resources for such editorial undertakings as the reconstruction of ‘early-or-interim’ versions of works, the preparation of critical editions, and the like, archives of collateral material (such as correspondence, photographs, staging materials, etc.) have normally been viewed as having relevance for historians or biographers, but much less so for those involved in producing optimal (or even simply ‘optimised’) editions of scores.

This remains very much the case when working with editions of music of early eras, up through the mid-nineteenth century. However, beginning with the music of the later nineteenth century, and certainly (in even more significant ways) by the mid-twentieth century, it has become clear that editions (and performances) needed to be informed (indeed, *enriched*) by a variety of information and understanding that derives from a much broader range of documentation (and media). As one case in point, we might cite the situation of the works of Giacomo Puccini (half of whose career as a composer of opera, after all, took place in the twentieth century). The complete critical edition of his operatic works, recently launched by Casa Ricordi<sup>1</sup> but many years in the

planning and preparation, had to come to terms with a complex situation of sources both musical and epistolary, which required a quite different approach to textual criticism<sup>2</sup> with respect to what might have been used when dealing with composers of the Classical and the early Romantic eras. Working with a composer (like Puccini) who quite frequently revised his works, for whose operas a variety of musical sources can alternately take on the role of ‘primary’ source in different sections of a score, and (especially) who might in later years express the desire to overturn earlier revisions he had made, requires the possibility of examining a broad range of collateral material that can contribute to, and help guide, editorial decisions throughout the process of the scholar’s work. And not just the scholar: epistolary material (for instance) can prove to be of fundamental importance in establishing ‘final versions’ and authorial intent (a very loaded term, but one with which all scholars involved in the work of textual criticism must come to terms); but for *performers*, such material can be a rich trove of important insights into performance practices that go ‘beyond the printed page’. This latter consideration has become critically relevant in the case of late twentieth century repertoires, and especially important as the musical scores of the twentieth century became notationally more and more complex.

The scores of some composers (by the 1970s and 1980s) had come to contain at times an overwhelming richness of musical diacritics (one thinks, for instance, of the scores associated with the ‘New Complexity’ movement) and even ad hoc graphic notation, toward the goal of specifying not only complex rhythmic, timbric and pitch parameters, but also to indicate new performance techniques with absolute precision; techniques that, thanks to such abundant, precise and case-specific indications, could thus (in the author’s intentions) be completely controlled and (ideally) never vary from performer to performer. This led to daunting levels of graphic information which, in some cases (in the absence of the possibility of direct communication between composer and performer), may now have become almost unintelligible. In such instances, secondary material of various kinds and media can be crucial to the modern performer: correspondence, recordings and video documentation of master classes, seminars or rehearsals, interviews, contemporary performance manuals, and so on.

A further complexity, for composers of the last quarter of the twentieth century, stems from a reliance on various forms of technology used in generating musical scores (computer notation software) but also *music generating* sources (taped, and later digital, electronic music), the technologies for which may have become obsolete. As may have also faded the *memory* of some ‘avant-garde’ performing techniques: reliance on recorded evidence, and certainly on traditional ‘printed scores’ is insufficient, in many cases, for modern performers

to reproduce the required effects. Interviews with performers contemporaneous with the creation of the works; detailed letters by composers; technical notes by sound engineers; even staging designs and such matters as the placement of sound-reproduction equipment (think of the critically important ‘spatialisation’ in live performance for the works of such authors as Luigi Nono) are matters that range far beyond what the ‘notated score’ alone can provide. This is a problem that is becoming increasingly understood with music from a deeper past as well. As I had occasion to observe years ago, regarding the music of the nineteenth century and earlier,

A full score is necessarily only a sort of blueprint. The rest of the information needed for ‘fleshing out’ is transmitted to us by tradition. But what is tradition? A number of treatises regarding performance practice survive that provide us with a significant amount of information, but most of the knowledge necessary for interpretation ‘as it was done at the time’ was never consigned to print; it was transmitted orally and, as any anthropologist will tell us, while oral transmission is highly reliable, consistent, and complete in a non-literate society, in a literate one the reverse is true because people assume that someone somewhere is codifying the information and consigning it to paper. But the commonplace is rarely recorded for posterity: it is the unusual or the curious, the exceptional or the difficult that tend to be immortalized in books or museums. And we need layers of commonplace information to flesh out our understanding of how this or any other music is to be performed.<sup>3</sup>

This ‘commonplace information’, in the case of twentieth century music, becomes even more critical due to the extreme segmentation and diversification of musical performance styles, which can at times be specific to a single composer or indeed, unique to a single *work* of a given composer. In a highly technological society where information transfer, and the means of media transmission, change with ever increasing rapidity, access to a broad range of archival sources will become crucial for future generations who wish to reproduce this repertory in performance.

The Archivio Storico Ricordi offers a collection that is particularly rich in the range of its holdings, when compared to other ‘publisher’s archives’, and is in some ways unique. Born at the dawn of the nineteenth century out of necessity (that of safeguarding original scores of composers as a form of ‘legal protection’ in an era of rampant piracy, before the establishment of effective international copyright laws) and then sustained (even after the strict legal necessity of ‘ownership of the original document’ had ceased to be crucial) thanks to a four-generation leadership by the same family whose members pursued the augmentation of the archival holdings through a passion for collecting, it

expanded at the same astonishing rate as the company itself. Through the acquisition of other archives (most famously, the musical archives of the Teatro alla Scala in the mid 1820s) and the catalogues (complete with archives) of other copy-houses or publishers, and through the rapid expansion of its own activities to embrace such fields as graphic arts and the first-hand involvement as 'impresarios' of opera and ballet productions, the holdings (and diversity) of the archives grew exponentially. Over the course of its two-century history, of course, various historical, personal or practical events intervened to diminish some parts of the holdings – damages caused by the upheavals in the headquarter-city of Milan during the Risorgimento, for instance, or the significant losses during the bombing of the city in WW II; the common early-nineteenth century practice of making 'gifts' of some autograph letters to important artists or dignitaries; or the practice of returning scores of chamber or instrumental music to the composers rather than keeping them in the archive (since the main revenue stream for the company came from the 'grand rights' earned through the performance of stage works, the principal aim was to keep above all the musical and literary material relevant to opera, ballets and incidental music as the more important part of the collection). Nonetheless, the figures of the current collection are impressively huge (see Pierluigi Ledda's article for an overview of that data). As an example of the breadth and range of the holdings, the researcher will find letters to and from performers, librettists, artistic programmers and impresarios, conductors, agents and journalists. Of broader scope, such things as business correspondence that traces early-twentieth century technological developments such as the negotiations between the publisher and entrepreneurs of the young recording industry and the nascent cinema industry, as well as the development of concepts of modern advertising. Singular to this archive is the 'inter-office' documentation dealing with aspects of the publishing business, contractual matters, discussions about programming and casting of performers, the timing of publicity launches for maximum effect, issues of staging (when the publisher is directly involved) as well as close control over the quality levels of performance that theatres are expected to guarantee. And of course, of significant interest to music scholars is correspondence regarding revisions, alternate versions, and the like. Such documentation, especially correspondence between composers and various colleagues in the arts (and in their private lives), can, as we know, be important for revealing a composer's underlying artistic philosophy and musical aesthetics, as well as offering glimpses into the author's creative process.

As rich and varied as the Archivio Storico Ricordi is (in some ways, as we have seen, uniquely so), no one archive can provide the range of materials that future

research must rely on. Such things as (for instance) composer's private diaries; correspondence not just with composers but among performers themselves; annotated performance materials; even such material as the archives of recording companies, production studios, software developers and the like, may prove to be extremely important in establishing future texts that recreate performance conditions. Such material will inevitably reside in a large variety of different kinds of archives, and as the parameters of musicological and performance-practice research expand to embrace the increasing complexities of the twentieth-century repertoire, a broad network of information 'discoverability' and cross-platform research becomes an ever more urgent necessity.

## Notes

- 1 The first volume in the *Opere teatrali di Giacomo Puccini* series, *Manon Lescaut* (edited by Roger Parker), was published in 2013, but discussions among members of the critical edition's editorial board had begun in 1999, while early drafts of the 'editorial philosophy' date back to the early 1990s.
- 2 See the 'Preface' (by the present author) as well as the 'Introduction' and the 'Source Descriptions' (by the volume editor Roger Parker) of the critical edition of *Manon Lescaut* (Milano: Ricordi, 2013), for discussions of these issues.
- 3 Gabriele Dotto, 'On "Traditional" Performance', in: *Verdi in Performance*, ed. by Alison Latham and Roger Parker, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 151–156, especially 151–152. In recent years other authors have dealt with these and related issues in depth; see for instance Nicholas Cook *Beyond the Score: Music as Performance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.