

Dear Giacinto: Letters from the Multimedia Archive of the Fondazione Isabella Scelsi

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The Isabella Scelsi Foundation was founded by the Italian composer Giacinto Scelsi (1905–1988) in 1987, one year before his passing. He decided to name it after his sister Isabella, who died twelve years before him and was a great admirer and active promoter of his music. Recognised by a decree issued by the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage in 1990, the Isabella Scelsi Foundation is the universal heir and caretaker of the Maestro's legacy. Its main mission involves the study and promotion of contemporary music, with a particular focus on Giacinto Scelsi's musical, literary and artistic activity, together with the goal of creating an Archive able to preserve and recognise the full value of Scelsi's legacy.

In this perspective, the Archive represents the primary core responsible for accomplishing the Foundation's statutory objectives: in a synergistic and consequential way, it combines preservation, inventorying, cataloguing, consulting, research, valorisation, dissemination, promotion and production.

The Scelsi Foundation – and its Archive – are located in the building in which Giacinto and Isabella resided as of the 1960s. Declared 'of considerable historical interest' by the Soprintendenza Archivistica del Lazio [Archival Superintendence of Lazio, Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage] in July 2000,

the Archive preserves more than 30,000 paper and sound documents, collected after Scelsi's death in order to safeguard them from the risk of dispersion and destruction. Since 2006, the Archive has been undergoing a complex operation of rearrangement, inventorying, cataloguing and digitalisation carried out in close cooperation with the Direzione Generale per gli Archivi [Italian General Directorate of Archives] and the Istituto Centrale per i Beni Sonori ed Audiovisivi [Central Institute for Sound and Audiovisual Heritage] as regards the section of sonorous documents. After three years of intense work, the Archive has been open for consultation since May 2009; and it has been regularly visited ever since, a prestigious destination for scholars and performers from all over the world. The works have focused on a comprehensive reorganisation of the archive following an order attributable to Maestro Scelsi, when understandable.



FIGURE 1. Giacinto Scelsi in the 1930s. (© Archivio Fondazione Isabella Scelsi. All rights reserved)

COLLECTION OVERVIEW

We have proceeded in building and organising a new structure for the Archive, following a hierarchical tree that classifies items from the general to the specific, within which Scelsi's personal documents have been grouped into a private archive, while his scores and recordings have been transferred into a musical archive. We have also created a section related to the Foundation itself, where we preserve the materials produced or collected by the Institution, serving mainly as a preliminary orientation for scholars.

The archive is organised as follows:

- Musical archive;
 - I. Recordings / Tapes
 - II. Scores
- Private archive;
 - I. Personal and patrimonial documents
 - II. Family documents
 - III. Iconographic material
 - IV. Correspondence
 - V. Literary production
 - VI. Esoteric cultures
 - VII. Associations
 - VIII. Music catalogue
 - IX. Copyright, publishers and record labels
 - X. Library
- Isabella Scelsi Foundation.
 - I. Bibliography
 - II. Concert and festival programmes
 - III. Multimedia
 - IV. Printed Scores

LETTERS

The correspondence series stands out for its vast documentation of the extraordinary breadth of Scelsi's contacts with many personalities from the worlds of music and art. Preserved at the Scelsi Archive, it includes letters, telegrams, rough copies, postcards, correspondence envelopes, aerogrammes,

greeting cards, etc. To this day, the series counts 697 files ordered in 14 folders. In addition to this, we preserve 24 files in 4 folders assigned to the class of Associations, Publishers and Record Labels that also include correspondence, among other kinds of documents.

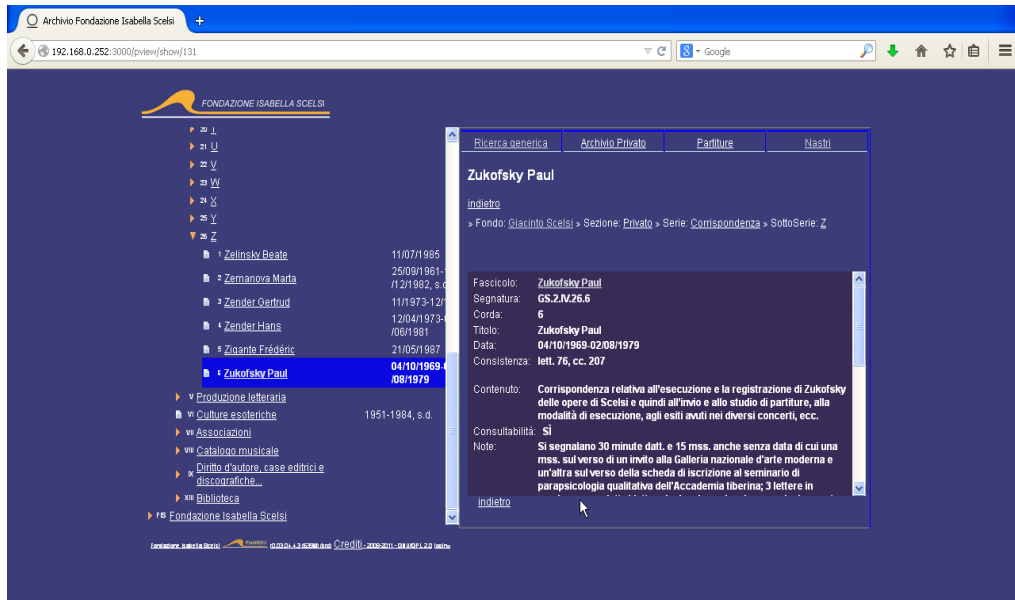
DESCRIPTION AND ACCESSIBILITY

The description of the correspondence series involves the use of a record that corresponds to ISAD(G) and ISAAR (General International Standard Archival Description; International Standard Archival Authority Record) applied to operations aimed at managing, cataloguing and inventorying all archival series. The record is registered using the FisHRDB interface, a dedicated software created by the Foundation itself thanks to Nicola Bernardini, in collaboration with the scientific director, the archive coordinator and the archivists. One of the software's main goals is to connect documents corresponding to a specific composition in order to obtain a complete retracing of the composer's creative process, from sketch to score, including corrections made during phases of revision, concert programmes, press reviews that testify their live performance, vinyl and CD recordings – and of course tapes, when data is available.

The dedicated open source software – that combines the hierarchical tree-structure approach, typical of applications used in the archival field, with a more efficient relational database – fully satisfies the Scelsi Archive's need to integrate different document typologies, thanks to the employment of key words or authority files related to names, organisations and score titles that allow a transversal analysis on all the archival series to be carried out. Therefore, the insertion of a title inside the search string not only allows all materials related to that composition of choice to be accessed, but also all related information in books, reviews, annotations or recordings. Nevertheless we decided to get in contact with Promemoria (www.promemoriagroup.com) to plan to transfer to CollectiveAccess software (www.collectiveaccess.org), in order to envisage and take advantage of the closest connections present in other archives.

FIGURE 2 shows the 'correspondence record' that at present the archivist works with, including following fields: File; Reference Number; Record Identity; Title; Date; Archival Holdings; Subject; Accessibility; Annotations, and completed fields displayed to the user.

FIGURE 2. Screenshot from database Archive, correspondence series



In November 2012, a significant expansion of the correspondence archive required an intermediary alphabetical index to be inserted in order to assure a more orderly and efficient access to single documents. The procedure is automatic and uses the first letter of the recipient's surname.

Our most important files include letters from composers and artists of the calibre of Sylvano Bussotti, Jani Christou (FIGURE 3), Franco Evangelisti, Henri Michaux and Goffredo Petrassi, performers such as the Arditti String Quartet, Michiko Hirayama and Stefano Scodanibbio and important Italian and international institutions including the American Academy in Rome, the Accademia Filarmonica Romana, the Venice Biennale and The Center of the Creative and Performing Arts (FIGURE 4). Other documents have recently been merged with further material found in Scelsi's apartment. This recovery mostly consisted of press reviews, concert programmes, photographs and also a number of vinyl and wax disks. Looking through these documents we found a fair amount of letters that have either been integrated into pre-existing files – both private and institutional – or required the creation of new files.

Accessibility to correspondence follows current regulations, with reference to the *Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio* (Legislative Decree of 22 January 2004, n. 42) and the *Codice di deontologia e di buona condotta per i trattamenti di dati personali per scopi storici* (Prov. 14 March 2001, n. 8/P/2001, published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* of 5 April 2001, n. 80). In the light of what we have

explained regarding cataloguing and consultation, it is quite evident that our present methods and work tools are efficient and clearly defined.



FIGURE 3. Postcard from Jani Christou to Giacinto Scelsi. Copenhagen, 9 March 1965. (© Archivio Fondazione Isabella Scelsi. All rights reserved)

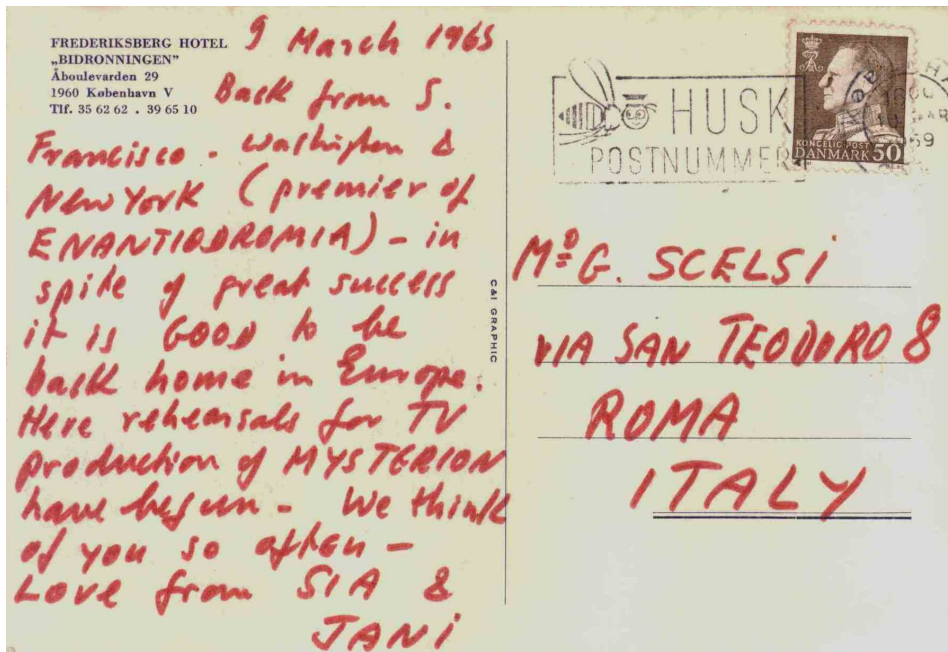


FIGURE 4. Letter from Morton Feldman, Music Director of The Center of the Creative and Performing Arts, to Giacinto Scelsi. Buffalo, 12 October 1976 (© Archivio Fondazione Isabella Scelsi. All rights reserved)

**THE CENTER
OF THE
CREATIVE AND
PERFORMING ARTS**

Music Director
Morton Feldman

Managing Director
Renée Levine

Advisory Board
Melissa Banta
Robert Buck
Harold Cohen
Lukas Foss
Lejaren Hiller
Robert Moog
Gerald O'Grady
Allen Sapp
Michael Tilson Thomas
William Thompson
Jan Williams

Research Consultant
Lejaren Hiller

Resident Conductor
Jan Williams

October 12, 1976

Mr. Giacinto Scelsi
Via San Teodoro 8
Rome, ITALY 853303

Dear Giacinto:

Forgive such a brief note and while you are forgiving also the fact that I am not signing this as I am dictating over the telephone. We will be performing Okanagon in Carnegie Recital Hall in two weeks and for some reason or other overlooked writing you before for program notes. Please, if possible, send one immediately.

Fondest regards,

Morton Feldman

Morton Feldman

MF/lab

State University of New York at Buffalo
Cooke Hall
Buffalo, New York 14214

(716) 831-4507

DISSEMINATION

Although the Scelsi Archive is still young and constantly undergoing renovations, we have chosen to carry out our mission of promoting and disseminating the composer's documentary heritage. To consider the first significant results of our activity devoted to Scelsi's correspondences one can refer to a number of recent studies and publications, such as the PhD dissertation by Sandro Marrocu, *Il regista e il demiurgo. Giacinto Scelsi e Vieri Tosatti: una singolare sinergia creativa* (Università degli Studi di Roma 'Tor Vergata', 2014) based on the correspondence between the two composers.

Further letters were partially featured in a two-volume release published in 2013 by German editor Musiktexte, containing a collection of Scelsi's writings and documents edited by Friedrich Jaecker. This selection contains letters addressed to the musician's mother Donna Giovanna d'Ayala Valva, the violinist Paul Zukovski, the conductor Hans Zender, the pianist Yvar Mikhashoff and the violist Geneviève Renon. Another example that demonstrates the valorisation of this epistolary collection is represented by the publication of Giacinto Scelsi and Walter Klein's exchanges in the American volume *Music as Dream. Essays on Giacinto Scelsi* (ed. by Franco Sciannameo and Alessandra Carlotta Pellegrini, Lenham: Rowan and Littlefield / The Scarecrow Press, 2013), included in the essays by Sciannameo and Luciano Martinis. A final example is the essay 'Scelsi and Zagreb: some episodes' by Ingrid Pustijanac (in *New unknown music: essays in honour of Nikša Gligo*, ed. by Dalibor Davidović and Nada Bezić, Zagreb: DAF, 2012) – illustrating connections between Scelsi and the Croatian context in the 1970s, including the edition of Gligo–Scelsi correspondence.

PARTNERSHIPS

The proper functioning of the Archive is made possible thanks to decisions approved by the Foundation's President and Board, to its active staff and a strong and profitable relationship with the relevant public institutions (see above), among which we must underline the prominent function of the Italian General Directorate of Archives that has supervised, directed and economically supported the Archive's works from the very beginning. This cooperation has actually enabled an interaction between the Scelsi Archive and Foundation, the Music Portal of the Sistema Archivistico Nazionale (SAN) [National Archival System] and the Sistema Informativo Unificato per le Soprintendenze Archivistiche (SIUSA) [Unified Information System for Record Office Superintendencies].

Relations and cooperation with other Italian, European and American archives are becoming more and more profitable and solid, a basis that will become even more important during the reconstruction of correspondence with inter-institutional exchanges.

In a European perspective, our Archive is now projecting its interests towards the Archives Portal Europe, a network created as part of a European project currently involving 28 participating countries, boasting an impressive total of 61 archival institutions.