

Highlights from the Ricordi Archive

VERDI: CREATING OTELLO AND FALSTAFF

An exhibition at
The Morgan Library & Museum
225 Madison Avenue
at 36th Street
New York, NY 10016

September 6, 2019
through January 5, 2020



Exhibition Subject

After *Aida* in 1871, except for occasional projects, Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901), Italy's preeminent composer, retired from opera at the age of 58. This, however, did not prevent constant pleas from his publisher, Giulio Ricordi (1840–1912), and his future librettist, Arrigo Boito (1842–1918), for the maestro to return to the operatic stage. Reluctantly coaxed out of retirement, Verdi composed what would become the crowning achievements of his career: *Otello*, premiered in 1887 and *Falstaff*, in 1893. This exhibition, based on "The Enterprise of Opera—Verdi, Boito, Ricordi" created by Bertelsmann/Ricordi and curated by Gabriele Dotto is the first in the United States to present rare documents and artifacts from Milan's Ricordi Archive and will offer visitors insight into the production of these two operas as well as the complex enterprise of bringing an opera to life. Set designs, costumes from Milan's Teatro alla Scala, autograph manuscripts, contracts, publications, publicity, video excerpts from recent productions, and other objects in many media will permit visitors to experience the tremendous collaborative efforts behind an operatic production.

"Verdi: Creating *Otello* and *Falstaff*—Highlights from the Ricordi Archive" is organized by the Morgan Library & Museum, New York in collaboration with the Bertelsmann/Ricordi Archive.

Lead funding for this exhibition was generously provided by Marina Kellen French and the Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation.



1—Giulio Ricordi, photograph by Varischi & Artico, late 19th century
2—Arrigo Boito and Giuseppe Verdi in the garden of Giulio Ricordi's residence on Via Borgonuovo, Milan, photograph by Achille Ferrario, 1892

Storyline

The exhibition describes the creative process behind Verdi's last two operas: *Otello* (first performed in 1887) and *Falstaff* (first performed in 1893). At the time of this late collaboration, Verdi was already over 70 years old and had not written a note of music for nearly 15 years. His Milanese publisher Giulio Ricordi developed a diplomatic strategy to lure "the old bear" out of retirement at his country home in Sant'Agata. He felt Arrigo Boito was the perfect librettist for this plan—full of enthusiasm, an ardent supporter of new forms, urbane and style-conscious. The exhibition describes the "making of" two ingenious libretti based on plays by William Shakespeare, their adaptation to Verdi's mature compositional style, and finally Giulio Ricordi's responsibility for marketing the operas and managing the two major productions.

The exhibition provides a deep insight into the work of three geniuses who also formed a "business community," as it were. The great artistic and commercial success of the two productions proved the music entrepreneur Ricordi right: The creation of successful art requires the interaction of several creative minds, and to make this art stand the test of time requires the meticulous documentation of all its elements. Among other things, this passion for collection and preservation culminated in the Bertelsmann-owned Archivio Storico Ricordi, whose unique holdings make the "Verdi: Creating *Otello* and *Falstaff*" exhibition possible today.



3—Giuseppe Verdi, *Falstaff*, Act 1, autograph score, 1893

Contents

The exhibition reflects the full depth and diversity of the Ricordi archive. In addition to the correspondence of the three protagonists, photos, elaborate sketches of costumes and illustrations of stage sets, the exhibition also and especially showcases the commercial side of opera: The contracts with Verdi, the first printed libretti and many other documents provide information about Ricordi's professional production management and the great artistic success of this unique collaboration. The dramatic highlight of the exhibition is the handwritten original score of the opera *Falstaff*, and visitors are invited to "leaf through" the sheet music in an interactive tool. Several audio stations, a historic film from the Ricordi workshops, costumes, and other unique objects bring the world of 19th century opera to life.



4—Vincenzo Gemito (1852-1929), Bust of Giuseppe Verdi, 1873, bronze. Image courtesy Clark Art Institute
5—Sketch of props for *Otello*, Carlo Ferrario, Ricordi Archives, 1887

The Ricordi Archive

The Archivio Storico Ricordi in Milan is one of the world's most important privately owned music collections. The archive includes the estate of the Ricordi publishing house, which was founded in Milan in 1808 and acquired by Bertelsmann in 1994. Today the name Ricordi primarily stands for 200 years of Italian opera and music history. From Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida* to Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* and Luigi Nono's *Prometeo*—the Ricordi archive is truly a “cathedral of music” (Luciano Berio). It not only contains the original scores of numerous 19th and early 20th century operas as well as numerous other works, including Niccolò Paganini's *Capricci per violino solo op.1* or Gioachino Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, which are among the highlights of the history of European music; the inventory also contains all related correspondence with composers and librettists as well as drawings of costumes, illustrations of stage sets, and photos and documents relating to the company's history—all in all, more than 100,000 archival documents.

When Bertelsmann sold its former music rights business to Universal in 2006, the historical documents and all rights to the Ricordi brand remained the property of the international media company based in Gütersloh. They are now managed by the Bertelsmann subsidiary Ricordi & C. All of its revenues go towards the development and long-term safeguarding of the archive, to which the Bertelsmann attaches high importance.

The valuable historical collections are subject to strict regulations and are under the special protection of the Italian Cultural Ministry and its supervisory authority, the Soprintendenza Archivistica. As a national cultural asset, the Archivio Ricordi must remain in Italy and may not be split up.

Bertelsmann is aware of the unique value of this European cultural asset and accepts responsibility for its long-term protection, maintenance and development.



6—The Ricordi shop in Rome, end of the 19th century
7—The Ricordi shop in Naples, photograph by B. Lauro, second half of the 19th century

Contact Information

Curated by

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Event Venue

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Hours

The Morgan Library & Museum and the Morgan Shop are open

Tuesday through Thursday: 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Friday: 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Saturday: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Sunday: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

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RICORDI **BERTELSMANN**

Images front cover:
Pietro Tempestini (1843–1917), Verdi à Montecatini Terme, 1899
Archivio Storico Ricordi, Milan and Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901)
sketches for *Otello*, act 3, scene 5, 1887(?)
The Morgan Library & Museum, Cary 208