

## PRESS RELEASE

## Archivio Storico Ricordi Makes Extensive Photo Collection on Italian Opera History Available Online

- Bertelsmann-owned archive makes another key area of famous Casa Ricordi's cultural heritage publicly accessible
- Over the course of the year, 6,000 photos spanning two centuries will be published on [www.digitalarchivioricordi.com](http://www.digitalarchivioricordi.com)

Milan/Gütersloh, January 18, 2023 – The Ricordi Archive in Milan, part of Bertelsmann, is expanding its freely accessible database at [www.digitalarchivioricordi.com](http://www.digitalarchivioricordi.com) to include an extensive collection of photos relating to Italian opera history. In cooperation with the renowned Turin-based institution “CAMERA – Centro Italiano per la Fotografia,” a thousand photographs will initially be made available online in web-optimized resolution; the Archivio Storico Ricordi's photo collection consisting of around 6,000 historical photographs is to be online in its entirety by the end of the year.

The process of digitizing the archive, which began in 2016 with the digital publication of around 13,500 historical costume drawings, stage designs and portraits and was expanded in subsequent years to include the extensive business correspondence and the magazine collection of the music publisher Casa Ricordi, reaches a new high point with the publication of the photo collection. In the course of this elaborate, academically accompanied process, all of the archive's significant holdings are gradually being transferred to its freely accessible Collezione Digitale, and thereby made available to the general public.

Karin Schlautmann, Executive Vice President Corporate Communications at Bertelsmann, says: “The publication of the photo collection is another milestone for the Archivio Storico Ricordi. As the owner of the archive, Bertelsmann feels it has a responsibility not only to preserve the documents it houses as best as possible, but also to make them accessible to anyone interested in music, anywhere in the world. We have made great progress in digitizing the holdings and are delighted that the Collezione Digitale has become a real treasure trove for academics and music lovers from all over the world.”

The visionary publisher Giulio Ricordi (1840–1912), who beyond his extraordinary instinct for musical trends was also an innovator in areas such as printmaking, design, and advertising, was quick to recognize the possibilities of the new medium of photography. Illustrative photographs soon appeared in many of the articles in “Musica e Musicisti” and “Ars et Labor,” the music magazines published by Ricordi. They helped establish the Milan-based music publisher's formative role in the Italian – and in many cases the European – music discourse for decades. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the journals also devoted articles to the increasingly popular technology and art form of photography. This discourse was accompanied by the development of modern marketing and distribution strategies that gave greater emphasis to the visual and created new opportunities outside the core publishing business. In 1881, for example, Giulio Ricordi's brother Giuseppe (1853–1902) co-founded the Pagliano & Ricordi studio with the photographer Leonida Pagliano, and Giulio's son Manolo was also fascinated by photography.

The collection, with oldest images dating back to the early days of photography in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, shows the stars of the Italian opera scene on the one hand. Besides photos of composers such as Giuseppe Verdi and Giacomo Puccini, there are also pictures of the world-famous soprano Romilda Pantaleoni as the first Desdemona, and of actress Sarah Bernhardt as Tosca di Sardou - the latter inspired Adolf Hohenstein to create the costumes and also the famous "Tosca" poster. On the other hand, there are postcards, carte-de-visites, collector's editions, and photographs of sets, costumes, and performances. These photographs in particular give a detailed insight into the past of great opera houses and provide valuable information on the performance history of many operas that are still celebrated today.

The history of photography in the Archivio Storico Ricordi also traces the development of important photo studios that flourished in the decades around the turn of the century. The archive houses photos from more than 900 photo studios and publishers, mainly from Italy (e.g. Pilotti & Poysel, Varischi & Artico, and Achille Ferrario), but also from other countries (e.g. Disdéri and Félix Nadar from France as well Germany's Ross Verlag, Louis Held, Albert Meyer, and Hermann Leiser). Besides the early photos, the collection also includes numerous shots from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as the charismatic portrait of Maria Callas during the iconic 1957 recording of "Medea" at La Scala in Milan, and pictures of contemporary composers like Franco Donatoni, Luigi Nono, and the recently deceased Sylvano Bussotti.

The Archivio Storico Ricordi, which has been part of Bertelsmann since 1994, is regarded as one of the world's most valuable privately owned music collections. Its holdings comprise around 7,800 original scores of more than 600 operas – including valuable original manuscripts by Giuseppe Verdi and Giacomo Puccini – as well as some 10,000 libretti, numerous costume drawings, and Casa Ricordi's complete business correspondence from 1888 to 1962. Bertelsmann is having the archive materials comprehensively indexed, and in many cases restored and digitized.

For many years, the international media, services, and education group has been engaged in a variety of cultural initiatives both in Germany and internationally. The Group's "Culture@Bertelsmann" activities comprise exhibitions, readings, concerts and the "Blue Sofa" literary format, as well as a commitment to preserving Europe's cultural heritage as in the case of the Ricordi Archive. As a company with a long cinematic tradition of its own, Bertelsmann is also committed to the restoration, digitization, and screening of significant silent films.

More information about the Ricordi Archive can be found at [www.archivioricordi.com](http://www.archivioricordi.com) and [www.bertelsmann.com](http://www.bertelsmann.com).

### **About Bertelsmann**

Bertelsmann is a media, services and education company that operates in about 50 countries around the world. It includes the entertainment company RTL Group, the trade book publisher Penguin Random House, 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 around 145,000 employees and generated revenues of €18.7 billion in the 2021 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. Bertelsmann aspires to achieve climate neutrality by 2030.

**Bertelsmann online**



For further questions, please contact:

**Bertelsmann SE & Co. KGaA**  
Susanne Erdl  
Communications Content Team  
Phone: +49 (0)5241 8042 629  
[susanne.erdl@bertelsmann.de](mailto:susanne.erdl@bertelsmann.de)