Verdi Treasures from Milan’s Famed Ricordi Archive Make U.S. Debut

Verdi: Creating Otello and Falstaff—Highlights from the Ricordi Archive
September 6, 2019 through January 5, 2020

New York/Milan (August 27, 2019) – After Aida in 1871, except for occasional projects, Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901), Italy’s pre-eminent composer, retired from opera at the age of 58. This, however, did not prevent constant pleas from his publisher and future librettist 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 and Falstaff. From September 6, 2019 to January 5, 2020, the Morgan Library & Museum will present highlights from the Milan-based, Bertelsmann-owned Ricordi Archive, offering visitors insight into the production of these two operas, as well as the complex enterprise of bringing an opera to life. Based on The Enterprise of Opera: Verdi. Boito. Ricordi, created by Bertelsmann/Ricordi and curated by Gabriele Dotto, Verdi: Creating Otello and Falstaff—Highlights from the Ricordi Archive traces the genesis and realization of Otello and Falstaff through original scores, libretti, selected correspondence, set and costume designs, and more, marking the first exhibition of these rare documents and artifacts in the United States.

Giuseppe Verdi—alongside Gaetano Donizetti (1791–1848), Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868), Vincenzo Bellini (1801–1835), and Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924) — is one of the five great names of nineteenth-century Italian opera, whose works were published by Casa Ricordi and documented in its Archivio Storico Ricordi. The Ricordi Archive is regarded as one of the world’s foremost privately owned music collections. In this exhibition, treasures from the Archive are complemented by rarities from the Morgan’s collection, including early editions of texts by William Shakespeare, whose dramaturgical material served as the basis for Verdi’s last two operas, in addition to rare editions of scores and libretti, contemporary publicity material, an autograph letter from Verdi’s wife, and autograph sketches for Otello.
This combination of materials from the two institutions, under the guidance of curators Fran Barulich, Mary Flagler Cary Curator and Department Head of Music Manuscripts and Printed Music at the Morgan, and Gabriele Dotto, Ricordi Archive Director of Scholarly Initiatives, gives visitors a unique opportunity to gain firsthand insights into the European cultural scene of the late nineteenth century. A number of important loans from the National Gallery of Canada, Yale Center for British Art, and the Clark Art Institute help complete the story. The supporting program of the exhibition includes a concert with Verdi arias, a screening of Franco Zeffirelli’s Otello, and a discussion featuring experts from the Ricordi Archive.

Colin B. Bailey, Director of the Morgan Library & Museum, said: “We are delighted with the support of Marina Kellen French and the Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation to present these highlights from the Ricordi Archive, showing how Italy’s pre-eminent composer shaped what would become two of his crowning achievements, Otello and Falstaff. A selection of set designs, costumes from Milan’s Teatro alla Scala, autograph manuscripts, contracts, publications, publicity, video excerpts from recent productions, and objects from the Morgan’s collection enables visitors to experience the tremendous collaborative efforts that go into an operatic production.”

Thomas Rabe, Chairman and CEO of Bertelsmann, said: “The name Ricordi stands for two hundred years of Italian opera and music history. As the owners of the Ricordi Archive, we are very aware of the importance of this European cultural asset and take responsibility for its sustained preservation, care, and development. Exhibitions like the one in New York, in partnership with the Morgan Library, are a great opportunity to keep the creative work of earlier generations alive and to reach audiences beyond the musicological community.”

A formative influence on European cultural history

The richly textured exhibition Verdi: Creating Otello and Falstaff—Highlights from the Ricordi Archive illuminates the genesis and realization of the two world-famous operas, from initial deliberations about commissioning the celebrated composer to their premieres. In doing so, it provides a deep insight into the work of three geniuses who formed a kind of business partnership. Although the idea for Otello first arose in 1879, when Verdi was 65, he did not begin to work on the project in earnest until he was in his 70s, after his Milanese publisher Giulio Ricordi (1840–1912) teamed up with the librettist Arrigo Boito (1842–1918) to develop a
diplomatic strategy for luring “the old bear” out of retirement. Their plan worked. Applying his mature compositional skills to two brilliant libretti by Boito, Verdi created two of the greatest operas ever composed. There was a hiatus of almost sixteen years between the 1887 premiere of Otello and the 1871 premiere of Aida; Falstaff premiered in 1893. Giulio Ricordi was ultimately responsible for marketing and managing both large-scale productions.

The Ricordi Archive houses a total of some 7,800 original scores from more than 600 operas and hundreds of other compositions; approximately 10,000 libretti; an extensive iconographic collection with precious original stage and costume designs; and a vast amount of historical business correspondence of Casa Ricordi. Founded in 1808 by Giovanni Ricordi in Milan, the Italian music publisher had a fundamental influence on the cultural history of Italy and Europe. Bertelsmann, the international media company that also includes the BMG music group and the New York–based trade publishing group Penguin Random House, bought Casa Ricordi in 1994, but sold the company and its music rights in subsequent years. Only the associated Ricordi Archive remained within the group. Since then, Bertelsmann has had the archived items comprehensively indexed, digitized, and in many cases restored. Bertelsmann also organizes concerts and exhibitions to keep Casa Ricordi’s cultural heritage alive and make it accessible to as wide a public as possible.

Verdi: Creating Otello and Falstaff—Highlights from the Ricordi Archive

September 6, 2019 to January 5, 2020
The Morgan Library & Museum
225 Madison Avenue at 36th Street
New York, NY 10016

For more information about the exhibition, hours, and admission, please visit www.themorgan.org

For more information about the Ricordi Archive, please visit https://www.archivioricordi.com/en or https://www.bertelsmann.com

Public Programs

GALLERY TALKS
Verdi: Creating Otello and Falstaff—Highlights from the Ricordi Archive
Fran Barulich, Mary Flagler Cary Curator and Department Head, Music Manuscripts and Printed Music

Friday, September 13, 2019, 6 PM
Friday, November 15, 2019, 1 PM

FILM SCREENINGS

Otello
Legendary Italian director Franco Zeffirelli (1923–2019) and renowned tenor Plácido Domingo unite for this lavish production of composer Giuseppe Verdi's classic opera based on Shakespeare’s Othello. Victorious general Otello (Domingo) returns in triumph to his adopted city of Venice, but not everyone is poised to give him a hero’s welcome. As his wife, Desdemona (Katia Ricciarelli),lavishes him with affection, Iago (Justino Díaz) plots his downfall. 

Friday, September 20, 2019, 7 PM*

Exhibition-related films are free with museum admission. Advance reservations for members only. Tickets are available at the Tickets Desk on the day of the screening.

* The exhibition Verdi: Creating Otello and Falstaff—Highlights from the Ricordi Archive will be open for program attendees.

Tosca’s Kiss
Meet the residents of the “Casa di Riposa” in Milan, the world’s first nursing home for retired opera singers, founded by composer Giuseppe Verdi in 1896. A touching and often hilarious film on the subject of aging and the enduring power of music, Tosca’s Kiss captures a world in which these singers relive and reenact their triumphant roles of the glorious past.

Friday, October 18, 2019, 7 PM*

Exhibition-related films are free with museum admission. Advance reservations for members only. Tickets are available at the Tickets Desk on the day of the screening.

* The exhibition Verdi: Creating Otello and Falstaff—Highlights from the Ricordi Archive will be open for program attendees.

FAMILY PROGRAMS

Curtain’s Up! Theatrical Design at the Morgan
Through the works of Maurice Sendak and Giuseppe Verdi, find out what it takes to put on a show—from sets and costumes to music and more! After viewing the exhibition Drawing the Curtain: Maurice Sendak’s Designs for Opera and Ballet with composer and educator Ben Moore, participants will construct a theater model while experiencing the music of composers including Mozart and Verdi.

Appropriate for children ages 6–14

The program consists of a thirty-minute exhibition experience followed by a ninety-minute art-making activity. Materials included.
Saturday, September 21, 2019, 11 AM

Tickets: $20; $15 for Morgan Members

* Each ticket is valid for one child and up to two adults; for each child thereafter, an additional ticket is required.

**Dance: Inspired by Verdi**

In a special one-hour performance, students from the American Ballet Theatre Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School present a newly choreographed work by Robert LaFosse, inspired by Verdi’s *Otello*. Additional works to be announced.

*This performance is made possible with generous support from the Joan and Alan Ades-Taub Family Foundation.*

Saturday, November 9, 2019, 2 PM

Tickets: $20; $15 for Morgan Members; $10 for children 12 and under

* The exhibition *Verdi: Otello and Falstaff—Highlights from the Ricordi Archive* will be open for performance attendees.

**CONCERTS**

**George London Foundation Recitals**

Pairs of outstanding opera singers, many of whom have won a George London Award, perform in this annual series of recitals, now in its twenty-fourth year. Works by Beethoven, Boito, Duparc, Hahn, Liszt, Mahler, Verdi, Wagner, and Wolf will be performed. A reception with the artists follows the recital.

Latonia Moore, soprano
Ryan Speedo Green, bass-baritone
Ken Noda, piano

Moore, a 2002 George London Award winner, received acclaim last fall for her performance in an English National Opera production of *Porgy and Bess*, with Anthony Tommasini writing in the *New York Times*, “Perhaps best of all is the impassioned, radiant soprano Latonia Moore as Serena.” Green won the George London Award in 2014 and the Marian Anderson Vocal Award in 2018. He appeared as the King in *Aida* at the Metropolitan Opera last season and was the subject of a recent profile on *60 Minutes*.

Sunday, October 20, 2019, 4 PM

Tickets: $55; $45 for Morgan Members

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**LECTURES AND DISCUSSIONS**

**Verdi and the Ricordi Archive: An Evening with Pierluigi Ledda and Gabriele Dotto**
The Archivio Storico Ricordi is considered one of the world’s most important private musical archives; it preserves original handwritten scores and letters by composers such as Giuseppe Verdi and Giacomo Puccini as well as a rich iconographic collection that includes set and costume designs, photographs, and promotional documents. In this conversation, Pierluigi Ledda, Managing Director of the Ricordi Archive, and Gabriele Dotto, Ricordi Archive Director of Scholarly Initiatives and exhibition curator, discuss the history and resources of the Archive in general, and specifically the creation of Verdi’s operas Otello and Falstaff.

Wednesday, October 2, 2019, 6:30 PM

Tickets: $20; $15 for Morgan Members; free for students with a valid ID

* The exhibition Verdi: Creating Otello and Falstaff—Highlights from the Ricordi Archive will be open at 5:30 p.m. for program attendees.

Le Conversazioni: Films of My Life
Renowned multimedia artist, composer, poet, instrumentalist, and filmmaker Laurie Anderson (Habeas Corpus, Homeland, Songs and Stories from Moby Dick) and Nicole Krauss, award-winning author of Forest Dark, Great House, and The History of Love, discuss the films that have inspired their lives and work. Moderated by Antonio Monda, Artistic Director of Le Conversazioni festival. Produced by Dazzle Communication.

Thursday, December 5, 2019, 7 PM

Tickets: $20; $15 for Morgan Members; free for students with a valid ID

* The exhibition Verdi: Creating Otello and Falstaff—Highlights from the Ricordi Archive will be open at 6 p.m. for program attendees.

Organization and Sponsorship
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.

The programs of the Morgan Library & Museum are made possible with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

About the Morgan Library & Museum
A museum and independent research library located in the heart of New York City, the Morgan Library & Museum began as the personal library of financier, collector, and cultural benefactor Pierpont Morgan. The Morgan offers visitors close encounters with great works of human accomplishment in a setting treasured for its intimate scale and historic significance. Its collection of manuscripts, rare books, music,
drawings, and works of art comprises a unique and dynamic record of civilization, as well as an incomparable repository of ideas and of the creative process from 4000 BC to the present.

About Bertelsmann
Bertelsmann is a media, services, and education company that operates in about fifty countries around the world. It includes the broadcaster RTL Group, the trade book publisher Penguin Random House, the magazine publisher Gruner + Jahr, 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 117,000 employees and generated revenues of €17.7 billion in the 2018 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 engages in a variety of cultural initiatives both in Germany and internationally. The group’s Culture@Bertelsmann activities comprise exhibitions, readings, and concerts and the “Blue Sofa” literary format jointly created with partners, alongside a commitment to preserving Europe’s cultural heritage.

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