



Enlightening music: the catalogue and digitisation project of Verdi's archive at the "Archivio Storico Ricordi" in Milan

Mathias Balbi, Alberto Abis

1 The Catalogue

The occasion of celebrations dedicated to the Bicentenary of Verdi, held in 2013 and outlined in the "Verdi 200" Project, was promoted by the DGA and celebrations committee that were responsible for setting up the ambitious project of a cultural portal "Verdi on-line".¹ The highly significant presence and contribution of the "Archivio Storico Ricordi" of Milan led to the development of an app dedicated to Verdi² as well as the start of the mammoth task of cataloguing and digitising the vast number of documents in the Archive. These documents include letters and business papers as well as libretti and prints of particular historical value from people connected professionally or through friendship to the Maestro. The intention of the project is to examine the contents of these documents and complete the historical profile of Giuseppe Verdi and his music. It is necessary

¹http://www.verdi.san.beniculturali.it/verdi/?page_id=2723.

²<http://www.ricordicompany.com/it/page/79>.



to give a brief definition of the aim of this work in order to put the origins and evolution of the project to be analyzed into context. The "Archivio Storico Ricordi", which is considered one of the most important Italian company archives of notable historical and cultural interest, thrives on the wealth of the themes it covers; these have made it a research and cultural center of inestimable value. The Archive preserves a rich collection of correspondence between composers, librettists, singers, writers and musicians and the Ricordi company. The collection is made up of a principal nucleus of more than 15,000 letters.³.

In 2006 the first project for the cataloguing and digitisation, proposed by Mibac, was aimed at the study of the figures of composers Giuseppe Verdi and Giacomo Puccini and began with the analysis of their two most important works: *Falstaff* for Verdi and *La Bohème* for Puccini. This preliminary phase involved the indexing and digitisation of all material relevant to the two pieces and was then extended to include everything concerning the works of the two composers during the course of their lives. Correspondence between Verdi and the Ricordi Company, including both dated and undated documents as well as letters, visiting cards, telegrams and also plain envelopes in the period from 1845 to 1900 and numbering a total of 1787 documents, was catalogued and digitised. In addition to this, there are replies to the letters, the so called letter-books, which are the outgoing correspondence from the Ricordi Company.

³It should be remembered that the treasures of the Ricordi Historical Archive are divided into a rich series of different types of document: Manuscript scores (7,800) Libretti (10,000), sketches, figures and tool plates (10,200) Photographs (6,000), Prints (200) Posters (100), more than one hundred magazines from that time and some thousands of printed editions a detailed description can be found in *Una Cattedrale della musica. L'Archivio Storico Ricordi* 163-219; p. 150-153 *Una Cattedrale della musica. L'Archivio Storico Ricordi* for a discussion on the Archive and its importance in the cultural history both of Italy and internationally between the 19th and 20th centuries, please refer to.

These include both letters and telegrams going back to 1888 (the first year in which the letters as well as the indexes were kept) until the death of Verdi; the Maestro of Busseto died on 27th January 1901. Since the original project took into consideration the last work composed by Verdi (*Falstaff*), the decision to catalogue and digitise all the hand-written letters of Arrigo Boito, librettist of the opera, was also made. This material, consisting of 165 letters, is additionally interesting because Boito was also the librettist of *Simon Boccanegra* (new version 1881) and *Othello*. This documentary heritage, which is under the guardianship of the Ministry for Cultural Heritage because of its important historical interest, is connected to the portal of the MagTeca of the Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo Unico delle Biblioteche Italiane e per le Informazioni Bibliografiche (ICCU) from which it takes the precepts for the production of the metadata needed for cataloguing. It has been «produced according to the rules and restrictions of the MagTeca» while the Archive/Institution «signs an agreement for the usage of the web-version data which is destined for the MagTeca for the Internet Cultural Portal». These metadata are “produced in xml format, according to the MAG⁴ (and therefore controlled by specifications which also define publishing rules for diffusion on the web).⁵ The cataloguing in question, therefore, uses application platform profile 2 of Metadata Administration and Management (MAG) which lays out formal specifications for the collection phase, the transfer and publication of the metadata and of digital data in the respective archives (Pierazzo) This originated from the work of the Study Group based on the standards and applications of metadata of cultural heritage and which since 2000 has been in accord with an international debate to which the

⁴<http://www.iccu.sbn.it/opencms/opencms/it/main/InternetCulturale/MagTeca>.

⁵http://www.iccu.sbn.it/upload/documenti/capitolato_tecnico_digitizzazione.pdf.

“Lund Principles” of 2001⁶ have given recognition and legitimacy. It has the «objective of coordinating the implementation of metadata in digitisation projects in the different areas of cultural heritage at the national level and linking Italian initiatives with European and International ones».

This policy of connecting and conciliating with the most important initiatives in the field of definition and production of descriptive metadata for the preservation and publication of documents is also mirrored in the adoption of the Dublin Core.⁷ This can be found in section BIB of MAG-Metadigit.xsd (figure 1 on the facing page)⁸ relative to the catalogued data of analogical documents (available on the ICCU website with Dublin Core/Unimarc mapping) and in the segmentation of seven primary elements (*identifier, creator, publisher, subject, description, contributor, date*) which are followed by other six fields relative to the material data of the document (*type, format, language, relation, library, shelfmark*).⁹ In cataloguing the letters and business documents of what is a significant number of creators and contributors to the “Archivio Storico Ricordi” the archiving construction of placing the description element at the top of the set has been used. Starting with an analogical document examination and collection of documentary data, the complete metadata can be defined. The important identification of further contributors (specified by identification of the operas and institutions named in the text of the document) including highlighted information concerning times and

⁶http://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/ist/docs/digicult/lund_principles-it.pdf?l=it. To mention at least one of the most important debates of the same period about the conservation of cultural heritage in the Anglo-saxon world please refer to: (OCLC/RLG Working Group on Preservation Metadata)

⁷<http://dublincore.org>.

⁸<http://www.iccu.sbn.it/opencms/opencms/documenti/mag2-2006.html>.

⁹For the preliminary cataloguing of the documents, a set of slightly simplified elements has been adopted, which does not include some fields (as for example the source and coverage elements)

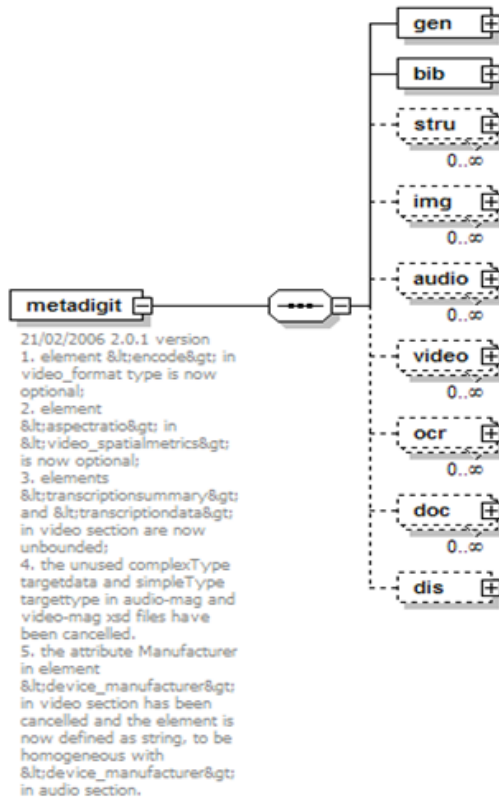


Figure 1

places as well as significant notes about the physical nature of the item, which can also reveal the origin and function of the same, has been taken into consideration.. The complement (and completion) of the cataloguing phase is inevitably found in the part relative to the digitisation of the documents.

2 Digitisation

Progress in digital technology has combined the implacable need to protect and preserve our documentary heritage while at the same time offering the widest possible access of documentary material of inestimable historical value to both scholars and others. The digitisation of the "Archivio Storico Ricordi" was started in 2006; all letters to and from Giuseppe Verdi as well as sketches, figures, tool plates, scenic plans, manuscript librettos and photographs are currently present on the Cultural Internet Portal. The digitisation project intends to promote and enrich the knowledge of the most important music reserves in the world. This digital information will be made available not only to specialists in the field but to all those users who are unable to go to the Ricordi Archive in person. The archive is presently housed at the Braidense National Library in Milan. The optical scanning of all letters will be carried out using a Suprascan i2s 7600 RGB. After acquiring the digital items, three different types of file will be produced for each image; each file will differ in quality levels depending on the use that will be made of it. Every image will be archived both in a format suitable for long-term conservation, called master, and also in a lighter format, destined for on-line consultation (Degl'Innocenti). The master images will have standards and characteristics of high quality: TIFF 6.0 format, uncompressed with a resolution of 600 dpi (dots per inch), not interpolated, with a 24 bit RGB depth of color. From the master copy, two digital objects will then be produced with different characteristics and standards: the first image file, to be consulted and distributed in local networks, will have a JPG format compressed to a resolution of 300 dpi with a color depth of 24 bit RGB. This format will enable the document to be clearly read and used but will not allow reproduc-

tion for commercial purposes.¹⁰ The second image file, for use on Internet, will be in JPG format compressed to a resolution of 150dpi with a color depth of 24 bit. Each digitised document will have its own eXtensible Markup Language (XML) MAG document, which will hold administrative and management metadata following the guidelines of the ICCU.¹¹ The information available to users for each document is the following: *identifier, creator, publisher, subject, description, contributor, date, type, format, language, relation, library and shelfmark*, as illustrated in part 1a of this presentation. All images and metadata will be published on the portal of the ICCU Cultural Internet.

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¹⁰Ibidem

¹¹Can be seen in <http://www.internetculturale.it/opencms/opencms/it/main/partner/servizi/standard>; http://www.internetculturale.it/opencms/opencms/export/sites/ntc/documenti/pagine/Restrizioni_di_MagTeca.pdf

MATHIAS BALBI, Archivio Storico Ricordi" in Milan.

mathias.balbi@gmail.com

ALBERTO ABIS, Archivio Storico Ricordi" in Milan.

alberto.abis@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT: Our contribution concentrates on the processes of cataloguing and digitising of hand-written letters and business documents belonging to the "Ricordi Historical Archive" in Milan, which is at present housed in the Braidense National Library; the archive possesses documents referring to the history of the publishing company covering the two centuries of its activities. Starting from the ledgers compiled by Giovanni Ricordi, which cover a period from 1814 up to the middle of the 19th century to the documents relative to the school of engraving, the archive also houses a large number of editorial catalogues, published by Ricordi and by other publishing houses which it took over, as well as the original contracts stipulated with composers and librettists from Giuseppe Verdi and Giacomo Puccini to Arrigo Boito. The collection of about 15,000 hand-written letters covers the period from the beginning of the 19th century to the end of the 20th century and includes documents sent to Ricordi from writers, singers authors, and composers such as Giuseppe Verdi, Giacomo Puccini and Ottorino Respighi and librettists Luigi Illica, Giuseppe Giacosa and Arrigo Boito. The second part of the correspondence is made up letter-books and business correspondence which were kept intact from 1888 to 1962, except for the period from 1944 to 1953. Since 2006, work has been carried out to catalogue and digitise the Ricordi Archive based on the standards set out by the National Library Service (Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale – SBN) which is head of the Central Institute for the Single Catalogue (ICCU). The structure and use of the archive and the external transmission of its contents are safeguarded and enhanced thanks to the combined work of cataloguing and digitisation of this heritage: the preliminary cataloguing of the documents uses a simplified model of the scheme adopted in the description of the manuscript according to sw Manus, elaborated by ICCU: the detailed cataloguing uses seven main fields (identifier, creator, publisher, subject, description, contributor, date) followed by six fields relative to the material details of the document (type, format, language, relation, library, shelfmark); digitisation is done after cataloguing of the pieces: in this brief contribution we will show the production phases (Shoot-

ing mode, electronic formats of the digital articles, identification of images) and post-production (Indexing and editing of metadata mag) of the digitised files.

KEYWORDS: Archivio Storico Ricordi; Music cataloguing; Digitisation.

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