

# Fifty years of Casalini Libri, Ten years of the Fiesole Conferences<sup>1</sup>

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On this occasion of celebration, in these days of challenges to the roles and responsibilities of libraries, understanding the past as prologue is important. Dwelling on the past for comfort or as the means to avoid confronting the present or planning the future, however, is unlikely to be productive. Permit me to reflect -- as a librarian, a publisher, a director of an academic computing service, a beneficiary of the services of Casalini Libri, a friend of Mario Casalini and his estimable family, and as an unabashed Italophile -- permit me to introduce the 2008 Fiesole Conference with some observations about our roles and methods now and in the foreseeable future, admittedly not a look that can accurately predict trends and accomplishments, but which may inform our thinking about our roles and responsibilities. Then I will reflect on Mario Casalini's life and works as a way of stimulating your thoughts on how our work now might benefit from understanding and transferring to our own times and circumstances Mario's approaches in serving his library clients.

As a university librarian and academic computing director, one finds oneself spending a lot of time these days talking about and advocating for the development of true digital archives and digital libraries.

This could be described as a time of digital distraction and digital focus. There are good reasons for this, but we must not neglect traditionally published materials, because the two universes, those of printed and digital publications, overlap only partially. The whole record, or even the small part of it selected as representative and significant for whatever reasons for library collections, can only be comprehended by observing -- and navigating -- both realms.

Libraries of whatever type have a cultural role, but that role is a practical one, documenting by selecting, describing, interpreting, distributing and preserving records of our civilization. The more commonly available some of those records are, whether published traditionally or digitally, the more important collecting the unusual becomes.

Big libraries collect with a wider net, but also with finer mesh. We collect with the help of booksellers, who themselves have a cultural role, the promulgation of publications and sometimes manuscripts, rare books, and other things that find their ways into our special collections, the home of the unusual records of human thought and observation.

As more and more of our collections budget is consumed by digital acquisitions, we need to be ever more vigilant to collect that which is not yet digital. Even when material is digital, we need

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<sup>1</sup> This talk was accompanied by a selection of candid photographs illustrating the various relationships, including especially family ones, but including publishing and book-selling scenes, from Mario Casalini's life. These were selected from a larger exhibition presented during the opening session of the Fiesole Conference of 2008; the images came from the Casalini family's photo albums.

to continue to build some collections deeply and to be especially careful to acquire materials that are truly representative of the myriad aspects of life and lives from areas of the world in which we are interested. I speak here of going beyond the obvious, looking over and around our own cultural limitations, and trying to understand other cultural contexts by their own expressions, their own expectations and experiences. To do this we need both to reach around our own limitations and, frankly, get some help from those closer to those other cultures of interest. And we need to do this even in the age of broad digital distribution of cultural manifestations, because by selecting material, we assure that it is noticed. And by preserving it, we assure that what we have selected will be usable and used in generations to come.

Given that we are at the front edge of a digital age, we need to take care NOT to relinquish our cultural role even though we must expand our methods to provide for our patrons and clients through our basic functions. This includes digital collecting and archiving, roles and functions we need to be careful to retain for ourselves so we continue to provide direct service on our terms and with our sensibilities, our ethics clearly in focus. So, among other things, we will continue to depend upon and collaborate with booksellers who themselves are immersed in and arise from particular cultures.

Of course, I am speaking of booksellers like our friends and colleagues at Harrassowitz, Librairie Touzot, Aux Amateurs des Livres, Coutts, Blackwell, Yankee Book Peddler, and Casalini Libri. The people responsible for these firms and others like them, immersed and expert in a different cultural context than our own, usually, make it possible for us as selectors, as providers of intellectual access, and as interpreters to get around our own biases and backgrounds. With some few exceptions, all of us are assisted in subverting or rising above our situations by specialist booksellers as we build over the generations collections that support teaching, learning, and especially research in the quests for new understanding and new knowledge in our universities, colleges, and public libraries.

With your indulgence, I will speak briefly of our departed friend Mario Casalini, his life, his firm, his family, and his work with his librarians who were customers, as an example of what was and what is and what could be in the future of reaching around cultural limitations to build and maintain library collections of record, of use and significance for readers who otherwise certainly would miss, perhaps entirely, subtleties. I will also remind us all briefly of the special services we enjoy and employ through such people as those who own and work for these firms. Maybe not all of you know of all of these services, and maybe I do not know and will not speak of the full range, so I urge you to listen and particularly to add to the wider knowledge of our practices and possibilities.

Mario's parents and grandparents owned and operated Tipografia G.Carnesecchi e figli, a Florentine printing company. When Mario went into the family business, he became very interested in publishing, the noble work of cultivating and encouraging authors, of selection of texts and other genres for public distribution, and the preparation of those materials for printing, then marketing and distribution. He acquired part ownership in a publishing firm, La Nuova Italia Editrice, which eventually evolved to a majority interest. As a result of this enterprising spirit, Mario probably discovered publishers' needs to market their publications. Eventually and after WWII, for the association of Italian publishers, he made trips to North America and

became fascinated with North American cultures. Eventually, he met with a Harvard professor who asked him to provide him with an Italian book recently issued. Mario did this and with this act, began what is now Casalini Libri.

Mario developed a book and serial exporting service to research libraries not in Italy, starting at first with a tiny staff consisting of his wife, Gerda, and a few others. Casalini Libri's services became highly valued, in part because Mario, and eventually his daughter, Barbara, and son, Michele, visited clients and potential ones to listen and then to respond to their needs. That responsiveness is another hallmark of the best of the book exporting firms that serve research libraries. Eventually Casalini Libri has expanded the range of possibilities to Spanish and French publications.

Mario was active as a citizen of Florence and Fiesole. He was not a politician, though he easily could have become one. Rather, he was a respected, influential member of the communities in which he lived, worked, and from which he employed many of the effective and pleasant staff of his businesses.

Mario Casalini's keen interest for music, cultivated through the study of the pianoforte in his youth, always had a central role in his activities, especially between the mid 1970's and mid 1980's.

Mario expressed his interest in music through his publishing activities, most notably in the creation of the series "Discanto". Discanto started in the publishing division of Casalini Libri, and later included in the catalogue of the Nuova Italia Editrice, edited for many years by the distinguished Italian musicologist, Francesco Degrada. Discanto published important original studies and translations of various texts of great significance, such as the theoretical writings of Carl Dalhaus, and is today part of the Casalini Libri imprint Cadmo, another publishing house.

Mario was also active in the field of musical instruction, and had an important role in the birth of the Scuola di Musica di Fiesole, of which he was president for a brief period. The institution is recognized today as one of the most important national academies and enjoys a reputation of high international prestige for musical teaching at all levels, from basic courses to specialized and advanced studies, and orchestral training.

The most significant expression of Mario's musical interests and competencies, however, exhibited itself in his work for the organization of concerts in Florence. In 1975, together with a small group of musicians and university tutors, he founded the "Musicus Concentus", of which he was president for many years. The "Musicus Concentus" was an exceptionally innovative institution in the musical scene of the 1970's, being particularly open to contemporary music, creating different approaches to traditional concepts and practices, and involving an equally forward-thinking and innovative public composed mainly of students and workers.

During his final years as president of the "Musicus Concentus", Mario had already been invited to join the committee of the "Amici della Musica di Firenze", a long-established and prestigious institution, acclaimed both in Florence and abroad, whose chamber music seasons were - and remain - among the most distinguished in Italy. Mario assumed the presidency (succeeding

Franco Passigli) in September 1979. Not long after having taken up this new and more demanding commitment in musical organization, Mario decided to resign as president of the "Musicus Concentus". In his six years as president of the Amici della Musica, a post which he left at the end of 1985, he enabled the association not only to overcome a relatively difficult period in terms of finance (due, mainly, to the weakness in value of the lire in comparison with other currencies and, in particular, the dollar), but also to develop both the quality and quantity of its activities. At the end of 1985 the association's funds had increased by 500% compared to the beginning of Mario's presidency, with a significant increase in public and private contributions, and the number of concerts held had almost doubled to over 30 each season.

In November 1998, a few months after Mario Casalini's death, the association dedicated Murray Perahia's recital at the Teatro della Pergola to his memory.

Mario, wooed, then married and raised with Gerda a family of warm and engaged children Barbara, Ulla, Michele, eventually welcoming into the family Francesco and Beppe, even Susanna and the grandchildren, Arianna, Sofia, & Piero Niccolò. Mario made his family home and business a welcoming portal to the varieties of Italian culture for his customers. Barbara and Michele are followed his bookselling and publishing trail, while Ulla, Beppe, and Francesco follow his musical life.

Over the years Mario and Casalini Libri worked with selectors, collection development officers, curators, bibliographers, and acquisitions librarians, sometimes working collectively to...

1. collect Italian regional, provincial, and city documents;
2. collect regional & dialect literature;
3. collect books published by banks and other institutions for their friends that were and are essentially out of the trade;
4. collect the multi-volume city histories (I remember this as particularly for Yale);
5. Catalog Italian publications for the Bibliographia Nazionale Italiana in order to provide cataloging for American libraries long before the ordinary stream of work by the BNI would have resulted in bibliographic mention or records;
6. Catalog books directly for American libraries;
7. produce exceptionally high quality bibliographic records for the slips so that we knew precisely what we were selecting;
8. design and operate highly nuanced blanket orders and approval plans;
9. provide services identifying and collecting rare and unusual books and documents, sometimes doing so to preserve the anonymity of the client and often doing so in remarkably short time frames;
10. open doors at libraries and other cultural organizations for visiting or distant scholars, students, and libraries.

Our colleagues at Harrassowitz, really the originating agency of monograph approval plans and are represented at this meeting by Knut and Renate Dorn. Like Casalini Libri, Harrassowitz is a business owned by families, so the older of us remember with fondness and respect Knut's father Richard, who at the close of WWII moved Frau Harrassowitz and the essential papers of the business from Leipzig, then coming under control of the USSR to Wiesbaden. Richard re-built

the Harrassowitz business on the basis of the North American clientele and service to them despite the interruptions of two world wars. It is significant to note that the next generation of Harrassowitz family members is in place as signified by the presence of Claudia Dorn, herself an accomplished scholar of American literature and budding Buchhändler! Harrassowitz too has offered and provided numerous services in support of its library clientele, such as book and music approval plans (Harrassowitz has the most extensive music department among booksellers, competing effectively in the European music publishing industry with firms specializing solely in music) and serial offerings from publishers everywhere. Harrassowitz also has engaged with us in the supply of maps, globes, and geographical publications. And like Casalini Libri, Harrassowitz has been effective in providing unusual government documents and non-governmental organizational documents too.

The French compatriot of Casalini Libri and Harrassowitz Buchhandlung was Touzot Librairie. It should be no surprise to anyone that Mario Casalini and Jean Touzot were good friends. Among the sterling qualities of Touzot Librairie were the excellent and deeply understood approval plans which provided American clients with carefully selected French publications that were the most representative and most significant of French intellectual and political life. That engagement helped us build collections of French imprints that were and are as superb and serviceable for research as the Italian and German collections amassed through our partnerships with Casalini Libri and Harrassowitz. Jean Touzot was especially impressive in the long memory of our desiderata lists, occasionally reporting on the availability of long out of print works requested one decade and offered in another. The next generation of the Touzot family attempts to continue in Jean's footsteps and has been joined by Aux Amateurs de Livres, another French firm, now in the hands of Gilles de la Rochefoucauld, following in the traditions of service and responsiveness of the famous bookman, Jean-Marie Martin, and certainly similar to the other family firms mentioned in these remarks.

We are all aware of the constant presence of Barbara and Michele along with the principals and customer service staff at conferences of librarians and publishers. And their visits to our offices on campus along with those intense conference conversations serve in the working out of the plans, the orders, the many details of acquiring books from prolific, yet distant publishing regions. Even more significant for our work have been the conferences, not just the ones our bookseller friends attend, but special ones. This 10th anniversary Fiesole Conference is the latest in a series that began under Mario's tutelage in 1988 with the Western European Subject Specialists Conference. That event was devised by Mario to bring European and American humanities and social science selectors together along with the principal European book sellers whose customers were research libraries, whether academic, specialized, or national. The meeting was a grand success with a score or so papers, active question and answer sessions following them, plenty of time for informal conversations, and a splendid conference dinner in a country-side villa that reinforced the sense of pride in our professional and social roles. We learned much in the WESS conference of 1988, not least that we had colleagues in European libraries with whom we have common missions and issues.

The first Fiesole Conference was planned by Mario as a programmatic successor to the WESS Conference of 1988 and its later incarnations. Mario worked with Katina Strauch and Becky Lenzini to compose a conference that was broader in its program, incorporating more issues,

including especially digital ones, and meaning to appeal to persons from a wider range of professional specialties than the collection development focus of the WESS conferences. The Fiesole Conferences have achieved a small but fervent following among those who value the intense discourse, immediate and foresightful disclosures, and amiable disagreements fostered by the Fiesole planners, Barbara & Michele Casalini, Katina Strauch, and Becky Lenzini. They follow in Mario's footsteps and we are delighted that they do.

Mario Casalini's friendship and professional services have sustained us. His life should continue to inform and inspire us.

Delivered viva voce at the Fiesole Conference of 2008