

Under the Eye of the Verdian Bear: Notes on the Rehearsals and Première of *Falstaff*

JAMES A. HEPOKOSKI

AS Verdi composed *Falstaff* and planned for its première, he kept the memory of his recent *Otello* experience very much in mind. Despite *Otello*'s success, he had been dissatisfied with its 1877 première and early revivals at La Scala: his complaints included what he considered to be inappropriate sets and staging and inadequate interpretation of some of the major roles.¹ Now, with his new opera, he gave notice quite early that he intended to remain more firmly in control of the production. He explained to Giulio Ricordi on June 13, 1892, just as the two were beginning to plan the performance that would eventually take place some eight months later:

For the love of God, let's not do as was done for *Otello*. In wanting to do too well [with the scenery, costumes, staging, lighting, etc.], it was overdone. . . . Let me add that the piano and stage rehearsals will be long, because it will not be very easy to perform it as I want; I am going to be very demanding, and not like for *Otello*, where I accepted everything out of deference for this person or that in order to *pose* as a serious, weighty—indeed, a venerable man. No, no, I'm going to become the bear that I once was, and everyone will profit by it.²

Verdi's intimate participation in the production details of *Falstaff* led to a première that, from all indications, was more aesthetically gratifying to him than that of *Otello*. As he had done for *Otello*, but now more uncompromisingly, he again selected—in some instances auditioned—

¹ See, e.g., Verdi's letters to Giulio Ricordi on Mar. 14, Apr. 22, Apr. 29, May 1, 1887, Jan. 1, 1889, Jan. 31, 1892, and June 13, 1892, in Franco Abbiati, *Giuseppe Verdi*, 4 vols. (Milan, 1959), IV, 328-29, 331-34, 366, 433-34, 442-44, and Franca Cella and Pierluigi Petrobelli, eds., *Giuseppe Verdi-Giulio Ricordi: Corrispondenze e immagini 1881/1890* (Milan, 1982), pp. 59-60. A convenient summary in English of some of the letters may be found in Martin Chusid, "Verdi's Own Words: His Thoughts on Performance, with Special Reference to *Don Carlos*, *Otello*, and *Falstaff*," in *The Verdi Companion*, ed. William Weaver and Martin Chusid (New York, 1979), pp. 161-69. For a discussion of the *disposizione scenica* ("production book") of *Otello* prepared by Giulio Ricordi, see Doug Coe, "The Original Production Book for *Otello*: An Introduction," *19th-Century Music*, II (1978), 148-58. Both Chusid and Coe also mention other *disposizione sceniche* for Verdi's operas.

² Abbiati, IV, 442-44. See also, e.g., Verdi to Ricordi, Sept. 18, 1892, in Abbiati, IV, 459: "With regard to the [*Falstaff*] rehearsals, we'll do them as we have always done them before. Only the dress rehearsal must be done differently from before. I have never been able to get a dress rehearsal at La Scala as it ought to be in that theater. I won't complain, but if anything is lacking, I'll leave the theater, and you will then have to withdraw the score."

the singers;³ he approved the historical stage and costume designs (by Adolph Hohenstein for *Falstaff*), and suggested much of the staging;⁴ he painstakingly rehearsed five of the singers privately in November and December, 1892; and he actively supervised the extensive piano, orchestral, and stage rehearsals in January and February, 1893. Verdi's production concerns and the première itself at La Scala on February 9, 1893, are consequently of value to those interested in the performance practice of his late operas.

Because of the usual elaborate, printed description of the original staging (the *disposizione scenica*) is lacking for *Falstaff*—or at least has not yet turned up—information about Verdi's rehearsal technique and details of the première may be gleaned today only by assembling isolated comments widely scattered throughout contemporary letters, telegrams, early scores, and anecdotal reports or printed reviews of varying degrees of verifiability.⁵ What follows is a selective survey of these comments, an attempt to gather together some of the more significant (or provocative) elements. A few of

³ See especially Verdi to Ricordi, June 13 and June 17, 1892, in Abbiati, IV, 442-44. Verdi personally auditioned Giuseppina Pasqua for the role of Quickly and Emma Zilli for that of Alice: see Verdi to Ricordi, July 12 and July 14, 1892, in Abbiati, IV, 446-47. Some of Verdi's comments about the essential personalities and vocal styles of many of the characters in *Falstaff* have been translated in Chusid, "Verdi's Own Words," pp. 166-74, and my "The Interpretation of *Falstaff*: Verdi's Guidelines," in *Giuseppe Verdi: Falstaff* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 110-28, of which the present essay is a more thoroughly documented expansion. For more on Pasqua's audition and the effect that it had on the score, see also my "Verdi, Giuseppina Pasqua, and the Composition of *Falstaff*," *19th-Century Music*, III (1980), 239-50.

⁴ On Oct. 4, 1892, e.g., Boito and Ricordi (and possibly Hohenstein) brought to Sant'Agata a small replica of the La Scala stage—a *teatrino* no larger than a half-meter square furnished with Hohenstein's proposed sets in miniature and tiny replicas of the scenic accessories planned for *Falstaff*. Verdi's verbal instructions at this time probably rendered his Sept. 18, 1892, stage drawings to Ricordi (reproduced in Chusid, "Verdi's Own Words," p. 173) no longer actively relevant to the *Falstaff* première. See Boito to Verdi, Sept. 25, 1892, in Abbiati, IV, 459-60, along with the comments on p. 462. Ricordi mentions Hohenstein as a possible visitor to Sant'Agata in a letter to Verdi, Sept. 30, 1892 (unpublished). For an early and probably reliable discussion of Hohenstein's historical sets and costumes (the original paintings of which are still preserved in the Ricordi archives: some are reproduced in my *Giuseppe Verdi: Falstaff*, pp. 114-22), his trips to London and Windsor, etc., see Anon., "L'allestimento scenico—I costumi," *Verdi e il Falstaff* (Numero speciale della *Illustrazione italiana*) [February, 1893], pp. 19-20.

The exact dating of the visit may be determined by consulting unpublished correspondence now located in the Ricordi archives in Milan (henceforth Mr): Verdi's letters to Giulio Ricordi, preserved in a numbered set of albums, and copies of Ricordi's telegrams to Verdi, preserved in a multivolume, dated set of *Copia lettere* (henceforth Mr *Cop*, along with the relevant years and the volume and page of the telegram copy). Thus Ricordi's telegram to Verdi on Oct. 3, 1892, Mr *Cop* 1892-93, VI, 228, reads: "Lietissimo vederla sarò domani Fiorenzuola ore nove. Anticipo ossequi anche Signora Peppina." ("Delighted to see you, I'll be [in] Fiorenzuola tomorrow at nine o'clock. I also look forward to greeting Signora Peppina.") This and extracts from further unpublished correspondence are transcribed here with the kind permission of G. Ricordi & C., S.P.A., Milan.

⁵ Certainly the "missing" *disposizione scenica* for *Falstaff* would contain many insights into that first performance. Although Giulio Ricordi may never have written such a production manual, he certainly planned to do so: on July 25, 1893, he assigned it a future plate number, 95685, in a catalogue still preserved in the Ricordi archives (the *libroni*).

these are quite well known; others are drawn from either unpublished material or sources that, to my knowledge, have not been reprinted for many decades—in some cases, not since 1893.

Verdi's rehearsal activity began during the last two months of 1892 in Genoa, where he was preoccupied with two projects: correcting the proofs of the first vocal score⁶ and holding private sessions with five of the singers of *Falstaff*, teaching them the parts, while he accompanied them on the piano. The baritone Antonio Pini-Corsi (Ford) was the first of the five that Verdi heard: he arrived on November 10 and was able to rehearse often, since he was engaged to sing at the Politeama Genovese through December 11.⁷ The composer was apparently satisfied with Pini-Corsi: on November 20, for example, he described him to Ricordi as "un forte musicista."⁸

However, Verdi was not pleased with the first Fenton, Edoardo Garbin, who arrived by at least November 16 and was able to make frequent successive visits because he, too, was singing at the Politeama.⁹ The demanding Verdi intimidated poor Garbin during these meetings, especially at the beginning. His principal objections—issued in a series of letters to Ricordi—were Garbin's inexperience, his inability to sing a line that was not explicitly doubled by the orchestra, his difficulty in learning the part rapidly, and his faulty pronunciation, in particular his changing of vowel characters. Verdi elaborated some of his grievances in an explosive letter to Ricordi on November 20, 1892:

Near the end of the month [perhaps] Garbin could go to Milan, and there he would need to find not a Singing Teacher but a Pedant who would teach him *notes*, *tempo*, and the *neat and clear word* well. And who wouldn't let him open his final vowels. For example, when he pronounces "che gli risponde alla [sic] sua parolāāā," the *a* is so open that his voice changes and seems to be somebody else's. This is a serious defect, above all in *Falstaff*, where there are many things delivered without the support of flutes and clarinets.¹⁰

⁶ Guglielmo Barblan, *Un prezioso spartito del "Falstaff"* (Milan, 195-); *Idem*, "Spunti rivelatori nella genesi del 'Falstaff,'" *Atti del 10° congresso internazionale di studi verdiani . . . 1966* (Parma, 1969), pp. 16-21; and Abbiati, IV, 472, erroneously report that Verdi corrected the proofs during the January rehearsals in Milan. Extensive, unpublished correspondence between Verdi and Ricordi from the last two months of 1892 make it clear that the composer completed nearly all of the proof corrections before the Milanese rehearsals. The issue is dealt with in my "The Compositional History of Verdi's *Falstaff*: A Study of the Autograph Score and Early Editions" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1979), and more briefly in my *Giuseppe Verdi: Falstaff*, pp. 45-53. The corrected piano-vocal proofs are now located in the library of the Milan Conservatory. See also n. 27 below.

⁷ Verdi to Ricordi, (Nov. 10, 1892, envelope postmarked Nov. 11) (Mr 1059): "Erano le tre quando Corsi è arrivato qui dopo la prova credo del Fritz. Abbiamo passati i suoi due pezzi e gli ho consegnato il libretto e la prima parte del Second'Atto." ("It was three o'clock when Corsi arrived here, after the rehearsal of [*L'Amico*] Fritz, I think. We went over his two pieces and I gave him the libretto and the first part of the Second Act.")

⁸ Mr 1064.

⁹ Verdi's first reference to hearing Garbin in Genoa is in a letter to Ricordi, Nov. 16, 1892, reprinted in Abbiati, IV, 466.

¹⁰ Mr 1064: "Ma Garbin potrebbe verso la fine del mese venire a Milano, e là bisognerebbe trovare

In Genoa Garbin made little improvement under Verdi's rigorous criticism and sang himself hoarse at Politeama near the end of November.¹¹ Even the extra coaching that Pini-Corsi regularly gave him (at Verdi's request) produced only meager results. Finally, on December 9 the composer insisted to Ricordi that the two singers rehearse together without him in Milan after their obligations in Genoa were fulfilled: "[In Milan Garbin] will forget everything that I taught him. I wish that Pini-Corsi would come to Milan soon, and I would like Garbin to move in with him, and the management [of La Scala], whether it is obliged to or not, to send him (Corsi) a little pianoforte to make Garbin study."¹²

Other singers besides Pini-Corsi and Garbin came to Genoa in late 1892. Adelina Stehle (Nannetta) arrived on November 21 and rehearsed regularly for several days thereafter.¹³ Vittorio Arimondi (Pistola) came on December 1.¹⁴ Verdi was just as displeased with him as with Garbin—and for generally the same reasons: "All of the syllables wrong; he never supports his voice; and, for example, instead of an *a*, he pronounces an *i*, an *e*, an *o*, and the same is true of the other vowels."¹⁵ Arimondi and Garbin, doubtless relieved to escape, left together for Milan on December 10. Verdi was distraught. "Who knows music these days?," he thundered to Ricordi on December 11. "You tell me. *Who knows how to sing?* Would I be satisfied this time if they knew how to *pronounce?*"¹⁶ In this temper he received the last of

non un *Maestro di Canto* ma un *Pendente* che insegnasse bene *le note*, e *la parola* netta e chiara. Più non gli permettesse di aprire le vocali finali. *Per es.*, se Egli ha da pronunciare "*che gli risponde alla [sic] sua parolāāā*" L'*a* è talmente aperta, che la voce si altera, e pare la voce di un'altro. È un difetto gravissimo soprattutto per Falstaff ove vi sono molte cose parlate senza aver l'appoggio di Flauti e Clarini." See also the related letter, Verdi to Ricordi, Nov. 16, 1892, in Abbiati, IV, 466.

¹¹ Verdi to Ricordi, Nov. 27, 1892 (Mr 1070): "Garbin viene in questo momento (1½ p.) ma è molto rauco, e l'ho mandato a casa." ("Garbin was just here [1:30 p.m.] but he is very hoarse, and I sent him home.") Omitted in Abbiati, IV, 467.

¹² Mr 1077: "Io m'auguro che *Pini-Corsi* venga presto a Milano, e vorrei che *Garbin* andasse ad alloggiare con Lui, che l'Impresa, obbligata o nò le mandasse (a Corsi) un piccolo Piano Forte per far studiare Garbin."

¹³ Verdi to Ricordi (Nov. 21, 1892, dated by postmark) (Mr 1066): "Chi ha promesso alla Stehle [*sic*] la parte d'Alice? o almeno la speranza di fare quella parte! . . . Inutile vi dica che la Stehle è stata qui e che ha passato alla meglio la sua parte." ("Who promised Stehle the part of Alice? or at least the hope of doing that part? . . . It is unnecessary to tell you that Stehle has been here and went through her part after a fashion.")

¹⁴ Verdi to Ricordi, Dec. 1, 1892, in Abbiati, IV, 467-68.

¹⁵ To Ricordi (Dec. 5, 1892, dated by postmark) (Mr 1074): "Oh come sa poco la musica! per imparare questa piccola parte ci vorrà del tempo. È un vocione, e non pensa che a dar voce; tutte le sillabe sbagliate, non appoggia mai la voce, e per es: invece d'un *a* pronuncia un *i* un *e*, un *ò* e così delle altre vocali." ("Oh, how little he knows about music! We'll need time to learn this little part. It's a big voice, and he thinks only about vocal production. . . .")

¹⁶ Mr 1078: "*Ma chi sa oggi giorno la musica?* Dite voi. *Chi sa cantare?* Io mi contenterei questa volta che sapessero *pronunciare?*"

the singers to visit him, Emma Zilli (Alice), on the evening of December 11; she remained in Genoa until December 22.¹⁷

Meanwhile, in Milan Ricordi had instructed the conductor, Edoardo Mascheroni, to teach the parts (but *not* the interpretation) to the future Meg, Cajus, and Bardolfo. These non-Verdian “pre-rehearsals” began by at least December 13 in order to make the official January rehearsals more fruitful.¹⁸ Moreover, Hohenstein was finishing the last of the costume designs for the composer to approve. In short, all of Milan associated with La Scala anticipated the maestro’s arrival and the beginning of the formal rehearsals, at which, as Verdi had promised Ricordi on December 21, “the bear will jump out” again.¹⁹

Traveling from Genoa, Verdi arrived in Milan on the evening of January 2, 1893.²⁰ The following day he conducted a private *prova parziale* in the Hotel Milan with Victor Maurel and Giuseppina Pasqua (Falstaff and Quickly), whom he had not seen for months. He began to supervise the formal piano rehearsals with full cast at La Scala on January 4.²¹ Verdi insisted that the *Falstaff* rehearsals take place in the strictest privacy. The public was to know almost nothing of what occurred behind the doors of La Scala: not a note of the opera could be disclosed in advance; the already completed vocal score was to be released for sale only after the première; critics and journalists were barred from the rehearsal chambers; and the performers (and Ricordi’s engravers) were sworn to silence. Verdi limited his activities in Milan to ensure secrecy. Nobody could see him without permission.

As public curiosity about the work mounted, much of the Milanese press grumbled about their inability to pass on reliable operatic gossip. From *La sera* on January 16, 1893:

¹⁷ Mr 1078: “Se stassera viene la Zilli domattina cominceremo [*sic*] subito a studiare.” (“If Zilli comes tonight, we’ll begin studying immediately tomorrow morning.”) Confirmed in Verdi to Ricordi, Dec. 12, 1892 (Mr 1089). See also Verdi to Ricordi, Dec. 21, 1892, in Abbiati, IV, 468-69.

¹⁸ Ricordi telegram to Verdi, Dec. 13, 1892 (Mr *Cop* 1892-93, X, 356): “Mascheroni incaricasi Guerini [*sic*] Paroli Pelagalli. Sapranno materialmente parte salvo sua venuta istruirli interpretazione come vorrà. Abbiamo fatto programma prime rappresentazioni in modo Lunedì due gennaio interamente libero mattina sera sua disposizione. Mercoldì [*sic*] quattro ugualmente. Prego scrivermi se sta bene.” (“Mascheroni [*is*] taking charge of Guerrini, Paroli, [*and*] Pelagalli. They’ll know the substance of their parts, awaiting only your coming here to teach them the interpretation you want. We’ve made [*the*] program [*of the*] first performances [*of the*] La Scala season] so that on Monday, January 2, [*both*] morning [*and*] evening [*are*] entirely free [*and at*] your disposal. Wednesday the 4th, the same. Please write me whether this is all right.”)

¹⁹ Abbiati, IV, 468.

²⁰ Ricordi telegram to Verdi, Jan. 2, 1893 (Mr *Cop* 1892-93, XI, 386): “Spiacente avvertirla contro tutte previsioni jeri serata [alla Scala] cattiva. Ansioso vederli stassera—auguro felicissimo viaggio.” (“Sorry to warn you [*that*] contrary to all expectations, yesterday evening [*at*] La Scala was] bad. Anxious to see you tonight. I wish you a very pleasant trip.”)

²¹ Verdi to Ricordi, Dec. 21, 1892, in Abbiati, IV, 468-69.

In his room in the Hotel Milan the illustrious *maestro* is in a sort of fortified castle. Except for Ricordi, Maestro Mascheroni, sometimes Arrigo Boito, and the artists (each in his own turn), one may truly assert that nobody approaches him. He always has Signor Ricordi respond for him to the letters that he gets—and they are fewer than one might think—unless they deal with family matters.²²

On February 3 another periodical, *Il trovatore*, printed a series of humorous drawings that depicted the silence from La Scala: an earmuffed bassoonist unable to hear the music that he was playing; muzzled singers leaving the theater after a rehearsal; “John Stix” serving “Acqua di Lete” to the performers to blot out their memory of the libretto. Giulio Ricordi, the “official” disseminator of facts about Verdi, reported in his *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* only the bland (and perhaps inaccurate) information that Verdi was tireless and very satisfied with the performers.²³

The virtual blackout of information has consistently worked to the disadvantage of Verdi’s biographers and those interested in performance practice. Nevertheless, a few clues do exist to help illuminate this unfamiliar period. One may determine from either various *indiscrezioni* or authorized press releases reported in the Milanese newspapers that the almost daily piano rehearsals, which had begun on January 4, gave way to orchestral and stage rehearsals under Verdi’s supervision less than three weeks later, perhaps as early as January 21, and lasted until February 7.²⁴ Assuming that Verdi rehearsed daily, including Sundays, and that days of *riposo* at

²² “Nel suo appartamento dell’Hôtel Milan l’illustre maestro si trova come in una specie di castello bastionato. Tranne Ricordi, il maestro Mascheroni, Arrigo Boito qualche volta, e gli artisti a turno, si può proprio giurare che nessuno lo avvicina. Alle lettere che gli pervengono—e sono meno di quanto si potrebbe credere—egli fa costantemente rispondere a mezzo del sig. Ricordi, purchè non si tratti di cose di famiglia.”

²³ One typical report from the *Gazzetta musicale*, Jan. 22, 1893, p. 50: “Lo studio del *Falstaff* continua sotto la direzione dell’illustre autore, che è di una attività e di una instancabilità assolutamente fenomenali. Gli esecutori del *Falstaff*, è quasi superfluo dirlo, vennero, come sempre, scelti da Verdi. . . . Possiamo assicurare che il maestro Verdi, il quale, com’è noto, non è di facile accontentatura, è soddisfatto di tutti gli interpreti del suo *Falstaff*.” (“The study of *Falstaff* is continuing under the direction of the illustrious author, whose activity and stamina are absolutely phenomenal. It is virtually superfluous to say that, as always, the performers of *Falstaff* were chosen by Verdi. . . . We can assure [you] that Maestro Verdi, who, as is well known, is not easy to please, is satisfied with all the interpreters of his *Falstaff*.”)

²⁴ *La lega lombarda*, Jan. 22-23, 1893: “Ieri si è fatta la prova di scena dell’atto primo e ci si dice sia riuscita stupendamente.” (“The stage rehearsal of Act I took place yesterday, and we hear that it was a stupendous success.”) But cf. the report in *La sera*, Jan. 22, 1893, which suggests that these rehearsals began on Jan. 23: “In quanto al *Falstaff* le prove continuano alacramente e, domani, probabilmente, cominceranno quelle d’orchestra.” (“With regard to *Falstaff*, the rehearsals are continuing apace, and those with the orchestra will probably begin tomorrow.”) Further evidence is provided by *L’Italia del popolo*, Jan. 24-25, 1893: “Sono già cominciate le prove di scena, e si ritiene che la prima rappresentazione possa aver luogo il 5 o il 7 febbraio.” (“The stage rehearsals have already begun, and it is thought that the première will be able to take place on February 5 or 7.”) Mascheroni, of course, had been preparing the orchestra himself for weeks before Jan. 21.

La Scala permitted further work in the evenings, there were about twenty-nine piano rehearsals and twenty-nine orchestral and stage rehearsals; indeed, the Milanese *La sera* reported on February 9, 1893, that “there were thirty-five orchestral rehearsals in all. There were some rehearsals dedicated to the strings alone. . . . [Verdi] did not actually attend any orchestral rehearsals before they were done together with the singers. Boito attended almost all of the rehearsals but offered advice only about matters of scenic action.”²⁵ It seems clear that Verdi presided over a total of at least from fifty-five to sixty-five *Falstaff* rehearsals, about half of them orchestral.

The most generalized discussion of Verdi’s activity during January and early February is Giulio Ricordi’s problematic article, “How Giuseppe Verdi Writes and Rehearses” (“Come scrive e come prova Giuseppe Verdi”), which appeared in early February, 1893, just before the première, in a special issue of *L’illustrazione italiana* devoted entirely to *Falstaff*. Here Ricordi—although avoiding specific details—claims to outline Verdi’s rehearsal techniques after a much larger discussion of his compositional methods. An English translation of the entire essay appears as Appendix I.

Readers familiar with the current state of Verdi research will need no reminding that Ricordi’s report is to be received with considerable skepticism. As the composer’s public spokesman and personal friend, and as an individual with immense economic interests in preserving the Verdi legend untarnished, the editor consistently wrote only what he and Verdi wanted the public to know; consequently, his reports often resemble carefully executed image building rather than objective truth. Portions of the “come scrive” portion of the article, for instance, are patently false. Here Ricordi, for instance, is eager to create a reverential image of a spontaneous Romantic genius and misleads his readers into believing that Verdi’s autograph scores show no signs of revision. Quite the reverse is true.²⁶

Notwithstanding the inauspicious beginning, Ricordi’s “come prova” conclusion may well have been based more accurately on actual, recent experience. The rehearsal activity reported here is undoubtedly a positive

²⁵ “Le prove d’orchestra furono in tutto 35. Ci furono delle prove dedicate a degli accordi isolati. . . . [Verdi] non assistette infatti ad alcuna prova orchestrale prima che venissero fatte assieme agli artisti di canto. Boito assistette a quasi tutte le prove: ma interloquiva solo in quanto riferivasi al movimento di scena.”

Ricordi and a few others associated with the opera also attended from time to time. One such lucky observer was Adolph Hohenstein, who even managed to draw a sketch of one of the last piano rehearsals. First reproduced in the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* on May 14, 1893, it shows the cast singing the final fugue from memory, while Verdi looks on, Mascheroni conducts, and the substitute conductor, Pietro Nepoti, accompanies at the piano. Convenient reproductions of the sketch may be found, e.g., in David G. Hughes, *A History of European Music* (New York, 1974), p. 429, and in the recent *Music, Musicians, Publishing: 175 Years of Casa Ricordi* (Milan, 1983), pp. 104-5.

²⁶ For the revisions in the autograph score of *Falstaff* see my “The Compositional History of Verdi’s *Falstaff*.”

caricature that excludes all negative or ambiguous information—but at least Ricordi's picture of the rehearsals does not ring false with other data that we do have. On the contrary, most of the existing facts (letters, reports in other printed sources, etc.) reinforce Ricordi's description of an intense, untiring, precise composer concerned with careful pronunciation, vocal inflection, and appropriate, natural stage gestures. To approach Ricordi's article with skepticism need not mean rejecting it entirely.

A number of other documents furnish more details. Particularly instructive are the observations that Verdi wrote during the rehearsals. Some thirty of these comments may be gathered from three different sources. One collection of thirteen pencil comments written in haste during the rehearsals ("The sack of money *poco marcato*"; "'Quand'ero paggio' too slow"; etc.) was preserved by Edoardo Mascheroni, the conductor of the première; in 1924 Mascheroni permitted them to be reprinted in Edoardo Susmel's *Un secolo di vita teatrale fiumana*. Another collection of eleven slips in Verdi's hand ("Tell *Falstaff* and *Ford* to beat the sack of money in time"; "Falstaff's solo 'L'amor, l'amor' more *scherzoso*"; etc.) is preserved within the corrected piano-vocal proofs now located in the library of the Milan Conservatory. Finally, in the fourth volume of the *Carteggi verdiani*, Alessandro Luzio published six similar comments that he found in Verdi's copy of the French translation of *Falstaff*; these slips may date from the 1894 Paris rehearsals and are by and large less revealing—or more enigmatic—but they do show Verdi's active interest in supervising rehearsals. All thirty comments appear in Appendix II.

Apart from such documents there remain a few anecdotes to add color to the fragmented picture of Verdi at the rehearsals. Abbiati has reported a few of these in his biography: the contrabassists' complaint about their instruments inadvertently being ruined by being set too near the radiators; the ever-present reports about Verdi's stamina; the composer's modifications of the score.²⁷ A few other stories may be found in contemporary journals

²⁷ Abbiati, IV, 472-73. Again, the score in question was definitely not, as presumed by Barblan and Abbiati, the piano-vocal proofs: see n. 6 above. Mascheroni, who owned the proofs in the early twentieth century and gave them to the library of the Milan Conservatory on Feb. 1, 1923, may have begun the false report that Verdi corrected them at the rehearsals. The earliest references that I have found for this story occur in articles about Mascheroni: e.g., Susmel, *Un secolo di vita teatrale fiumana* (Fiume, 1924), p. 23 ("Si sa che durante le prove lo spartito fu quasi completamente ritoccato. . . .") ("It is known that the vocal score was almost completely retouched during the rehearsals. . . ."); and Andrea della Corte's interview of Mascheroni, reported in "Verdi e Boito inediti nei ricordi di Edoardo Mascheroni," *Musica d'oggi*, VII (1925), 243 ("[Una lettera di Verdi e] la copia per canto e pianoforte del *Falstaff*, che Verdi seguì e annotò durante le prove e poi donò al direttore, sono state consegnate dal Mascheroni alla Biblioteca del Conservatorio di Milano"). ("[A letter of Verdi and] the copy of the *Falstaff* vocal score that Verdi used and annotated during the rehearsals, and then gave to the conductor, have been given by Mascheroni to the Milan Conservatory Library"). Even Mascheroni's claim to have received the proofs from the maestro's hands should not

and documents. Giulio Ricordi, for example, took great pleasure in reporting in the *Gazzetta musicale* that Fenton and Nannetta (Garbin and Stehle—later husband and wife) approached each other too shyly during one rehearsal of their Act I *duettino*. Even Boito's advice failed to remedy the situation. Finally, according to Ricordi, Verdi rose impatiently: "Why are we daydreaming here? Make these two kisses real, and there will be the naturalness that you are seeking. Here, Nannetta, I'll be Fenton for a moment: you do it like this—and like this."²⁸ Other contemporary stories balance the usual asseverations of Verdi's precision and demanding nature with illustrations of his good humor: his affectionate reference to Giuseppina Pasqua (Quickly) as "La mia Pasquetta" and the wives as "le mie comarelle"; his embracing of the young children of the performers, and his exclaiming to one of them, "Oh! la mia vecchia amica!"²⁹

Other anecdotes are less pleasant and show some of the strains of the rehearsals. Despite the imposed ban on *Falstaff* information, a reporter from *La sera* managed to see (or hear?) the score prior to its release and was able to characterize the music very generally—including the inaccurate transcription of the incipit of "Bocca baciata non perde ventura"—in a column printed on January 25, 1893. The *indiscrezione* provoked a scandal and Ricordi proceeded against the newspaper immediately.³⁰

go unquestioned. Verdi wrote no inscription into the score for him; and *La sera* reported on Feb. 21, 1893: "Giuseppe Verdi, prima di partire per Busseto . . . mandò in dono alla signora Ginetta Ricordi lo spartito originale del *Falstaff*." ("Before leaving for Busseto, Giuseppe Verdi . . . sent Signora Ginetta Ricordi [Giulio's daughter, the wife of the industrialist Luigi Origoni] the gift of the original vocal score of *Falstaff*.") One would be curious to learn precisely which "spartito" is in question here.

Even if Verdi did not correct the *bozza di stampa* during the rehearsals, one must recognize that from as early as February, 1893 (Ricordi's "Come scrivo e come prova Giuseppe Verdi") there exists a strong tradition that Verdi actively corrected some type of score during that period. (Ricordi mentions "the score, parts, and reductions.") Since one of the current problems of *Falstaff* research is the lack of an adequate, extant link between the autograph score and the quite different, earliest printed orchestral edition (Ricordi pl. No. 96180, July, 1893), it is tempting to suggest that what Verdi corrected in January, 1893, might well have been the manuscript conductor's score and the performer's parts, or copies thereof—material, at any rate, that could have served as the exemplar(s) for the engravers of the printed edition. Should this prove true, the engraved orchestral score would take on added editorial importance; but until such a "missing link" turns up, or can be proved to have existed, one must be content merely to speculate.

²⁸ *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, May 14, 1893, p. 334: "La spigliatezza non c'è. Allora Verdi si alza di scatto e dice: Sono due giovani innamorati, e sono due baci che si vogliono fare? ... perchè stiamo qui ad almanaccare? fateli davvero questi due baci ... e vi sarà la naturalezza che si cerca!—Qua Nannetta: io sarò per un momento Fenton: si fa così e così!"

²⁹ Raffaello Barbiera, "Alla vigilia del 'Falstaff,'" *L'Illustrazione italiana*, XX/6 (Feb. 5, 1893), 87-90; *La sera*, Feb. 9, 1893.

³⁰ *La sera* had provoked Verdi and Ricordi throughout the period of the rehearsals with lesser revelations and secret reports, some of which may have been true. On Jan. 16, for example, the paper reported that "Verdi è severissimo ed esigentissimo. Sappiamo questo solo finora: che la Stehle,

What could have been the most distressing incident was never reported in the newspapers and has remained unknown until now. During the rehearsals Verdi had demanded total control over the singing schedules of the *Falstaff* performers. A problem arose, however, when the impresario, Luigi Piontelli, had assured Ricordi (and Verdi) that by late January Edoardo Garbin, who had begun the La Scala season in Franchetti's *Cristoforo Colombo*, would be replaced, but in fact failed to honor his promise. All this can be learned from the copy of a lengthy, explosive telegram that Ricordi sent to Piontelli on January 28, 1893. Most interesting is that the telegram exists in two drafts in the Ricordi archives, and that the first, the fierier of the two, was never sent but more explicitly states Ricordi's position, a stance evidently suggested by the composer himself:

As far as the firm is concerned, we inform you that from this moment the music of *Falstaff* is withdrawn: when the management has upheld its repeated promises, when it has replaced Signor Garbin in *Colombo*, when it has put the theater and the cast *totally* at the disposal of Maestro Verdi for the continuing *Falstaff* rehearsals, only then will we reserve [the right] to judge whether it is advisable or not to bring the music of *Falstaff* back to a theater entrusted to a management that continually fails to keep its own word.³¹

Without Verdi's instigation Ricordi could not have considered such a threat, even though he muted it considerably in the telegram actually sent to Piontelli: clearly, that was an aspect of the Verdian bear that the editor did not care to publicize. Piontelli had no choice but to relent, and the rehearsals continued on Verdi's terms. It might be added that Verdi avoided setting an unalterable date for the première: *Falstaff* would not be performed until he was satisfied. Thus Ricordi finally informed the helpless management on February 3, 1893: "After the penultimate dress rehearsal of Monday the 6th, we will decide to announce the première, which eventually could take place on Thursday the 9th."³²

in seguito all'esito poco fortunato del *Rigoletto* [in that season at La Scala], verrà sostituita colla signora Emilia Corsi." ("Verdi is very severe and demanding. As of now we know only this: that because of the unfortunate reception of *Rigoletto* [at La Scala], Stehle will be replaced by Signora Emilia Corsi.") Stehle, of course, was not replaced, but the report in *La sera* could well have pointed toward some underlying rehearsal tensions.

³¹ Mr *Cop* 1892-93, XIII, 313-14: "Per ciò che riguarda la Ditta, si previene che da questo momento la musica del *Falstaff* è ritirata: quando L'Impresa avrà mantenuto le ripetute promesse fatte, quando avrà sostituito il Sig. Garbin nel *Colombo*, quando avrà messo *interamente* a disposizione del M. Verdi il teatro ed il personale per le prove occorrenti del *Falstaff* solo allora ci riserbiamo giudicare se sia opportuno o meno riportare la musica del *Falstaff* in un teatro affidato ad una Impresa la quale ad ogni momento manca alla propria parola."

³² Ricordi to Piontelli (Mr *Cop* 1892-93, XIV, 85-86): "Dopo l'antiprova generale di lunedì 6 crt.: si deciderà l'annuncio della prima rappresentazione, la quale, eventualmente, potrebbe aver luogo Giovedì 9 corrente."

Although the Milanese press had consistently been excluded from the rehearsals, two reporters did manage to slip unobserved into the dress rehearsal on February 7: a Signor De Marzi from *Il secolo XIX* of Genoa and the critic from the gossipy, Milanese *La sera*. According to the account in the latter, “The opera proceeded as if it were a real and actual public performance. No interruptions, no repeats, not a single observation by the *maestro* or anyone else.”³³ The few invited spectators, including Milanese dignitaries and their families, Teresa Stolz, and Giuseppina Verdi, applauded only at the fall of the curtain. This was the only uninterrupted performance of *Falstaff* that Verdi ever saw. In this respect the timings of the acts as reported in still another newspaper, *La Lombardia*, are informative: “The [dress] rehearsal began at exactly 9 o’clock. The first act lasted precisely one half hour, the second and third fifty minutes each.”³⁴

One may supplement these general durations, each of which must have included the span of a brief break for scenery and costume changes, with four more precise timings that Verdi wrote into the piano-vocal proofs, probably at some time during the rehearsals. At the end of Act I, Part i (p. 46) he wrote “14½ minutes”; at the end of the second part of Act I (p. 126) “14 Min!!!” In the final scene of the opera Verdi timed the passage from rehearsal No. 34 (immediately after Falstaff’s “Sono le Fate. Chi le guarda è morto”) to No. 42 (the double-bar and 2/4 after the “Pizzica, pizzica” section) at “5½ minutes”; and the passage from No. 42 (“Cialtron! Poltron! Ghiotton!”) to the measure before No. 45 (“Riconosco Bardolfo”) at “1½ minutes.”³⁵

The première and early performances were reviewed in dozens of newspapers and periodicals, and in 1893 Ricordi collected many of them (excepting those published in his own *Gazzetta musicale*) and published them in a commemorative, 296-page volume, *Falstaff . . . Giudizi della stampa italiana e straniera*. The book itself is undated, but the *libroni* records of the Ricordi Archives in Milan reveal that it was assigned a plate number, 96423, on April 30, 1893 (probably the date on which the reviews were

³³ Feb. 9, 1893: “Lo spettacolo procedette come si trattasse d’una vera e propria rappresentazione pubblica. Non un’interruzione, non una ripetizione, non un’osservazione sola da parte del maestro o di altri.”

³⁴ Feb. 9, 1893: “La prova cominciò alle 9 in punto. Il primo atto durò mezz’ora precisa, il secondo ed il terzo cinquanta minuti ciascuno.”

³⁵ Cf. the following timings, derived mathematically from the metronome markings in the score and rounded to the nearest half-minute: I.i, 14½ minutes; I.ii, 13½ minutes; III.ii, No. 34 to No. 42, 6 minutes; III.ii, No. 42 to 1 m. before No. 45, 2 minutes. Even conceding the rough rounding methods used by the composer and in these metronomic calculations, one may assert that the composer’s designated tempi appear to be remarkably precise. With the exception of markings in I.ii, the evidence suggests that Verdi’s designated metronome markings, if anything, are slightly on the slow side.

given to the printer), and it probably appeared shortly after that time.

The reviewers devoted much attention to public response and demands for the repetition of certain pieces: calls of *bis* were considered—even by Verdi—to be the touchstone of success. The composer permitted two pieces to be sung twice at the première: the unaccompanied women's quartet in Act I, Part ii, "Quell'otre! quel tino!"; and (the greatest success of the evening and thereafter) Falstaff's "Quand'ero paggio" from Act II, Part ii.³⁶ The repetition of the quartet is particularly striking, since the women are supposed to exit with its final note, and the men are to plunge at once into their complementary quintet. One would think that the sudden shift to the men's quintet would occur so rapidly that the applause and the *bis* would be inconceivable, unless, of course, Mascheroni had inserted (with Verdi's approval) a brief break or *Luftpause* just before the men's quintet—thus, in some senses, "inviting" the applause at this point. Verdi, however, did not grant all demands for an encore. At the première he refused to permit a repetition of Nannetta's Song of the Queen of the Fairies in Act III, Part ii, even though shouts of *bis* were very much in the air.³⁷ The evidence supports the conclusion that Verdi staged the early performances of *Falstaff* in such a way as to elicit the calls for repetition at certain points—after the women's quartet, for example—but that where repetition was not part of his original planning, it was not granted.

Subsequent performances expanded the availability of the *bis*. By the time of the performances in Rome from April 15 to 25, 1893, and certainly by the time of those in Paris beginning April 18, 1894, Verdi permitted Maurel to sing "Quand'ero paggio" three times each night;³⁸ there are reports of four hearings of the solo piece in Florence on April 29,

³⁶ E.g., from the review of the première in *La perseveranza*, as printed in *Falstaff . . . Giudizi*, p. 7: "A questo episodio succede tosto quello del cicaluccio delle quattro comari a voci sole. . . . Il pubblico prorompe in un grande applauso, il primo veramente entusiastico [!]. Si domanda Verdi, che non appare. Si chiede la replica, che è accordata; alla fine nuova ovazione." ("Soon after this episode occurred that of the solo-voice chattering of the four women. . . . The public burst into loud applause, truly enthusiastic for the first time[!]. They called for Verdi, but he did not appear. They asked for a repetition, and this was granted; at the end, another ovation.") From the *Corriere della sera*, reprinted on p. 22 "Quando ero paggio del Duca di Norfolk, detto stupendamente da Maurel, fa scoppiare applausi così generali, ch'egli è costretto a replicarlo." ("Quando ero paggio del Duca di Norfolk,' stupendously delivered by Maurel, called forth such a general round of applause that he was obliged to repeat it.")

³⁷ From the *Corriere della sera*, reprinted in *Falstaff . . . Giudizi*, p. 23: "La canzone della Regina delle fate, col coro e con le danze, che mette nell'opera una tinta così diversa, è gustata così che se ne chiede il *bis*, giustamente non accordato." ("The Song of the Queen of the Fairies, with the chorus and the dances—which adds such a different color to the opera—was savored so much that a *bis* of it was requested, and, correctly, it was not granted.")

³⁸ E.g., the April 16 review in *Falstaff . . . Giudizi*, reprinted in the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, Apr. 16, 1893, p. 284: "Ovazione solenne a Maurel, che deve replicare tre volte fra gli applausi frenetici: *Quand'ero paggio*." ("A solemn ovation for Maurel, who had to repeat 'Quand'ero paggio' three times amid frenetic applause.")

1894,³⁹ and when the baritone Lucien Fugère substituted for Maurel in Aix-les-Bains on August 12, 1894, he performed the piece five times.⁴⁰ The repeat of the *cicaleccio*, or women's quartet, was consistently obligatory. Other pieces, too, were occasionally repeated at various theaters: the Queen of the Fairies' Song, first repeated in Rome, with Verdi attending;⁴¹ Ford's monologue, repeated in Trieste, May 11-16, 1893, with Verdi not present;⁴² a "phrase for Alice, Third Act" ("Fandonie che ai bamboli" or, more likely, "Avrò con me dei putti") in Florence, April 29, 1894, without Verdi;⁴³ and even a threefold repetition of Quickly's "Giunta all'Albergo" from Act II, Part ii, in Paris on October 17, 1894, with Verdi attending.⁴⁴ Although Verdi was strict about the repetitions that he personally granted at the première, he seems not to have objected to expanded or more spontaneous repetitions in later performances.

Finally, any consideration of the original performance of the opera should deal with what would seem to be a most significant document: Victor Maurel's 1907 recording of "Quand'ero paggio," in which he provides his own small claque to clamor for the *bis* and performs the song three times, the third time in French, "Quand j'étais page."⁴⁵ Although the performance, brimming over with self-confidence and dramatic projection, is in many respects very artistic and displays many of the superb qualities that attracted the composer to Maurel in the first place, it is difficult to believe that Verdi would have accepted it without criticism, for three reasons: the occasionally defective, but extremely important pronunciation; the types of liberties taken with the rhythmic and note values; and the tempo. Maurel's declamatory gifts are evident and admirable, but he changes

³⁹ *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, Apr. 29, 1894, p. 272 ("Telegrammi"): "Replicato cicaleccio comari, quattro volte canzone *Quand'ero paggio*, frase Alice terzo atto, canzone della Fata." ("Wives' chattering repeated, the song 'Quand'ero paggio' four times, the phrase for Alice, third act, the Song of the Fairies.") Four repetitions were also heard in the Trieste performances beginning May 11, 1893: see Abbiati, IV, 507.

⁴⁰ *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, Aug. 12, 1894, p. 511 ("Corrispondenze"): "Il baritono Fugère (protagonista), stupendamente sotto ogni rapporto. Stasera dovette replicare ben 5 volte il celebre: *Quand j'étais page*, suscitando infiniti applausi." ("As the protagonist the baritone Fugère [performed] stupendously by any consideration. Tonight he had to repeat the famous 'Quand j'étais page' five times, giving rise to infinite applause.")

⁴¹ *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, Apr. 16, 1893, p. 274 ("Telegrammi"): "ROMA, 16 Aprile. *Falstaff* trionfo completo. Replicati: Quartetto donne, *Quand'ero paggio*, Canzone Fata." ("ROME, April 16. *Falstaff* complete triumph. Repeated: women's quartet, 'Quand'ero paggio,' Song [of the] Fairies.")

⁴² Abbiati, IV, 507.

⁴³ See n. 39 above.

⁴⁴ Abbiati, IV, 556.

⁴⁵ Originally recorded in Milan, Fonotipia, 62016; International Record Collector's Club, 4; reissued on LP as Everest/Scala, SC-822.

“Norfolk” into what seems to be “Norfo” or at best “Norfol” (curiously, in the French version he pronounces the final *k*), “sottile” into “sottili,” and “snello” and “anello” very nearly into “snillo” and “anillo”—apparently the sort of vowel mutation that Verdi deplored.⁴⁶ With regard to Maurel’s rhythmic liberties, the issue is only one of appropriateness. Normally, of course, one expects some sort of interpretive, declamatory deviation from a mere delivery of notes as written, and in many instances, such as in Maurel’s own magnificent recording of Iago’s “Era la notte” from *Otello*—another role that he created—the deviations reflect the highest artistry. In “Quand’ero paggio,” however, Maurel’s relaxed, legato, rhythmically loose interpretation may strike one as being at odds with Verdi’s notational insistence on crisp, often staccato eighth and sixteenth notes with no dotted note values.

But it is in the choice of tempo that Maurel’s recording seems least likely to have received Verdi’s unreserved praise. The written tempo is “Allegro con brio, ♩ = 112” (*leggerissimo*) in all printed editions and in the autograph score. Maurel sings “Quand’ero paggio” at about ♩ = 88-90, about four-fifths of the designated speed. The result, especially when coupled with his rhythmic changes, is a performance that defies the *leggerissimo* and fails to project the brisk, nimble athleticism of Falstaff’s extravagant image of youth.

Maurel probably interpreted this piece too slowly from the beginning: one recalls Verdi’s January, 1893, note in the Mascheroni-Susmel collection (see Appendix II): “‘Quand’ero paggio’ too slow.” And on March 19, 1893, a few weeks after the première, and after Verdi had returned from Milan to Sant’Agata, Ricordi issued the following suggestion to the *Falstaff* cast in the unsigned “Rivista milanese” section of the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*:

[Much as I am] a sincere admirer of that great artist, Maurel, and no less an admirer of Pini-Corsi, I believe it my duty to recommend to them both to refrain from slowing down the tempos so clearly indicated by Maestro Verdi. The humor of *Falstaff* arises naturally from the comedy and the music, and the singers do not have to underline

⁴⁶ Maurel, interested in the “scientific” study of voice production, advocated the careful modification of certain vowels that were awkward to sing. In July, 1892 (only about a month and a half, that is, before signing the *Falstaff* contract) he lectured in London on this and other topics, and George Bernard Shaw devoted considerable space to Maurel in his column in *The World* of July 20, 1892, reprinted in Shaw, *Music in London 1890-94* (London, 1932), II, 136-38. Relevant to the pronunciation issue are Shaw’s remarks: “[Maurel] declares that it is possible to modify every vowel so as to accommodate it exactly to the pitch, and yet to deceive the ear so completely that the modified sound will be accepted as unmodified. This art of vocal prestidigitation—of substituting what he calls a *trompe d’oreille* for the true vowel where the pitch is not favorable to the latter, is one of the things that he proposes to explain in his forthcoming book on the art of singing. The need for it is also the main theme of his *Le Chant renové par la Science*, a report of his lecture at Milan, just published by Quinzard & Cie, of Paris.”

Verdi and Ricordi opposed this practice. See nn. 10, 15, and 16 above and Ricordi’s comments near the end of “How Giuseppe Verdi Writes and Rehearses,” Appendix I.

it with vocal effects that retard the motion or with too marked jests in order to evoke the color of an *opera buffa*.⁴⁷

It would appear that, once free of the watchful eye of the Verdian bear, the performers allowed themselves indulgences that the composer did not sanction.

This conclusion is strengthened when one considers the notorious Maurel performances in Paris in late May and early June, 1894. At that time Camille Bellaigue informed Verdi not only that Maurel was distorting “Quand’ero paggio” (“The other day he massacred the second reprise of *Quand’ero paggio*”), but also that Maurel had cut Falstaff’s monologue, “Ehi! Taverniere! Mondo ladro. Mondo rubaldo,” at the beginning of Act III, Part i (“The curtain has scarcely gone up by the time that Quickly enters with *Révérènce*”).⁴⁸ Verdi, of course, condemned Maurel’s cuts at once. This history of troublesome performance makes one even more reluctant to endorse Maurel’s 1907 “Quand’ero paggio.”

The history of Verdi’s production and rehearsal activity shows that his strictest and most exacting demands concerned the première and the very first performances of *Falstaff*—that is, to launch it properly, exactly, and effectively. The première-centered attitude is precisely mirrored in his work on the score and the editions: there, too, he revised and rewrote much of the piece up to the première on February 9, 1893, and then relaxed his attention once the date of the première had passed. Certainly he would continue to offer advice and criticism about the performance of *Falstaff* after the première—just as he would continue (at leisure) to recompose major portions of the work—but his advice would seem more tolerant and less urgent, unless he were confronted with outright vandalism, such as Maurel’s cuts.

With *Falstaff*, Verdi had vowed to be more vigilant in his selection of singers and rehearsal techniques than he had been with *Otello*. In retrospect there seems to be hardly any aspect of the *Falstaff* production with which he did not intersect at one time or another. Even in those areas of staging, scenery, costumes, and so on, in which he delegated many of the details to others, he retained a strong veto power that he probably used fairly often. And certainly all sources—even the less reliable ones—agree about his nearly total dominance in musical matters. The February, 1893, première of *Falstaff*, then, is a paradigmatic example of a carefully supervised Verdian production—not absolute control, perhaps, but powerful

⁴⁷ P. 193: “Ammiratore sincero di quel sommo artista ch’è il Maurel, e non meno ammiratore del Pini-Corsi, credo mio dovere raccomandare a entrambi di guardarsi dal rallentare i *tempi* così chiaramente indicati dal maestro Verdi. La comicità nel *Falstaff* nasce naturale dalla commedia e dalla musica, nè occorre che gli esecutori l’abbiano a sottolineare con effetti di voce che rallentano i movimenti, o con lazzi troppo marcati, così da pigliar colore d’*opera buffa*.”

⁴⁸ Abbiati, IV, 544.

influence. As such, even lacking a *disposizione scenica*, it remains one of the most authoritative sources of information about the historical performance practice of Verdi's late operas.

APPENDIX I

How Giuseppe Verdi Writes and Rehearses

by Giulio Ricordi

When one examines or compares one of the first autograph scores, e.g., *I lombardi* or *Macbeth*, with others that are later, such as *Aida* and *Otello*, and finally with the autograph score of *Falstaff*, one discerns no changes whatever in the handwriting: the same certainty of hand, the identical clarity of notes! Whether it is guided by a youthful hand or by a hand that reckons almost eighty years of vitality, the pen that has written so many masterpieces enters the notes onto the musical staff rapidly and steadily.

Giuseppe Verdi's autograph scores are admirable for their exactness: the driving force of the writing produces neither confusions nor uncertainties in the maestro. At the very moment that he creates, his fervid fantasy knows how the new creation must be extended throughout the many voices and orchestral sonorities. One sees clearly that the opera emerges spontaneously in one block and that at the same time it emerges with each line, each part, and each detail beautifully molded. The orchestra is therefore no [mere] reinforcement for the voices, not a frame or a picture. One discerns in [Verdi] the orchestrator (who has the composed piece inside himself) neither the tiresome nor the subtle search for orchestral effects; rather, these arise spontaneously, united to the melody, to the piece. This leads to the perfect fusion of the voice part with the instruments, of the staging with the orchestra; this leads to the complete homogeneity of the various factors that converge to blend into the final product.

Verdi writes very few sketches during the period of composition: [only] simple reminders, indications of musical impulses, and nothing more. Verdi conceives the opera while reading the libretto. The composer plans the first general outlines of his own work by reciting the lines. In so doing, he studies the inflections of his voice, the various colors that the words assume in the sentiments of wrath, pity, and love. The great maestro has always done it in this way, and, even conceding that he has widened his horizons with the passing of years, it still cannot be said that one could not also clearly find in his preceding operas many interesting examples of this way of composing.

Consider the famous recitative of *Macbeth*:

Mi si affaccia un pugnàl?. L'elsa a me volta?
(Is this a dagger which I see before me, The handle toward my hand?)

The voice part exactly expresses the quality of the words. This excerpt, when declaimed by a great actor or sung by a great artist, achieves the identical powerful effects.

Consider Lady Macbeth's Sleepwalking Scene: the fusion of the voice and the orchestral timbres is perfect. When Verdi was reciting that scene, he certainly saw within himself the pale figure of the fatal woman, creeping along like a ghost, with wide-open, immobile eyes.

Rigoletto's recitative:

Pari siamo! . . . io la lingua, egli ha il pugnale.
(We are alike! I have my tongue, he his dagger.)

and the preceding scene with Sparafucile: are these not perhaps two true masterpieces of musical declamation? And—the power of genius—even though every word is, so to speak, musically underlined, still, however, one feels no forcing, no breaking [of continuity] caused by difficult searching: the piece exists in its complex form, and the listener easily grasps the general line and the detail, because of the perfect fusion of the dramatic value of the words and the musical expression of the notes.

But there exist hundreds of such examples in all of the operas of Verdi, and there is no need to recall them all now.

With this manner of creation Verdi proceeds securely and goes directly to his goal. When the opera is composed and entirely orchestrated, the author has already intuited its [eventual] effect; therefore there are very few second thoughts or changes of form or workmanship. The maestro knows well where to find the best or most qualified interpreters—of course having to accept the inevitable consequences of the more or less intrinsic ability of the artists who are at his disposal at that given moment.

The facility with which Verdi conceives and writes an opera is absolutely phenomenal. The most intensely creative period was between 1849 and 1855, when he composed *Luisa Miller*, *Stiffelio*, *Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore*, *La traviata*, and *I vespri siciliani*. And one should not believe that the celebrated maestro uses for his creation any haphazardly found musical reminders that he had sketched [earlier] on a page of music paper to use when needed. On the contrary, that [method of composing] is not admissible for one of the true and great composers of opera. It is the dramatic situation, the words, that excite and awaken the creative fantasy, and no successful operatic piece has been composed on a template of a little *motive* found here or there and hastily scratched onto paper for later use. Verdi, however, has never done this, and as has already been said, he does not even use very many sketches when he composes an opera. For his *Falstaff* he jotted down very few notes [*appunti*] that filled only two pages: then he immediately wrote the vocal parts on score paper with

a certainty that excites the highest wonder and that proves his facility in conceiving the entire vocal and instrumental work.

What else? Here are some exact dates, perhaps revealed only for the first time now. In 1853 Verdi had undertaken the responsibility of writing two operas: one for the Apollo Theater in Rome, and the other for La Fenice in Venice. The writing of the librettos had required a great deal of time: it was already late autumn, and the maestro had not yet written a note. Moreover, he was tormented by rheumatism in his right arm; he trusted that it would have to let up one day or another, but the rheumatism persisted and . . . no music!

Precisely on November 1, 1852, Verdi began to plan and compose *Il trovatore*. On the 29th of the same month, not only was it composed, but also entirely orchestrated. On the 30th the score was taken from the countryside of Sant'Agata to Cremona and given to the editor, Giovanni Ricordi, to engrave the necessary parts for performance. Verdi had to be in Rome for the beginning of the 1852-53 *Carnevale* season. A sea voyage was the easiest way there: he went to Genoa to embark, planning to go through Civitavecchia to Rome. The maestro arrived during Christmas week, and the steamboats would not leave until after the holidays. There were three days of useless waiting . . . what to do? And what about the obligation for Venice? He had to use these three days, and . . . he wrote the first act of *La traviata*. He then left for Rome and staged *Il trovatore*, whose première was on January 19, 1853. A few days later Verdi departed again for his tranquil residence of Sant'Agata, and in thirteen days he composed and wrote the other acts of *La traviata*. And so in only sixteen days Verdi created the most daring masterpiece of passion and sentiment, which signaled a new path for art! *La traviata* was first performed at La Fenice on March 6, 1853, and . . . was a solemn fiasco.

Verdian scores are extremely exact and precise. The clarity of conception that the maestro has while composing is found again during the period of the rehearsals, which he establishes in advance, and which unfold perfectly according to the planned program—and the opera is ready to be performed at the time designated a long time before. It is not true that Verdi is gruff and excessively severe, as is commonly believed; rather, the opposite is true. With military exactness he arrives at the appointed time at the theater; moreover, he quite rightly insists that all of the artists be as exact as he is, and he therefore wishes no time to be wasted. He begins the study immediately after entering the rehearsal hall and greeting those present. Verdi is quite patient and knows how far the vocal abilities and the intelligence of each individual artist will go, and how to draw out the best possible results from them. Above all, he asks for a clear, exact pronunciation, because, he says, the public must understand and become

interested in what the characters wish to express. In a single line not only does he designate that given word that must attract the attention of the audience, but sometimes also even the syllable that must be more markedly pronounced. He desires no phrase or rhythm to be changed by useless holds and *rallentandi*. He is concerned with every measure, every note. In order to obtain an elegant diction he has a single measure repeated ten, twenty, or thirty times and does the same for the exact pronunciation of a vowel, not infrequently changed by the so-called famous singing methods!

When the musical portion is known perfectly, Verdi begins to *give color* [*dar colore*] to the various characters. He indicates to each the type that he wants him to portray and, thus, the requisite vocal and physical expression. All the artists remain around the pianoforte, attentively follow the maestro's instructions, and seek to interpret them, while he shows a *mezza voce* the inflections of the voice part. This is the true point of departure for the so-called staging [*messa in scena*]. The singers, more secure in their parts, begin to come alive. The more intelligent try out a few gestures: Verdi observes them attentively, admonishes or encourages or praises them, or animates them even more. The parts used for study are little by little, almost unconsciously, left on the pianoforte: the artist gets away from them and begins (as Verdi says) to put on the clothes [*vestire l'abito*] of the character. Verdi's gaze begins to flash at once and remains constantly on the performer. Then two or three form a group, and Verdi directs their steps, motions, and gestures—he suggests and corrects. Should a motion or gesture not satisfy him, he himself takes the place of the character and vigorously indicates by reciting or singing how the role must be interpreted.

They eventually pass from the rehearsal room to the stage. The "first sketch" of the staging now takes on its full development: instruments are added to the voices and nothing onstage or in the orchestra escapes Verdi's attention. He has already exercised the minute care that he took before in teaching the singers with the scenery and the costumes, which he studies and examines in detail, and which he has changed until everything has become clear and evident. He is the true creator of his opera. He impresses it with his potent vitality, and so, in a relatively brief time (considering the minute study of all the details) the new work is ready to face the artistic battle of the première.

Last October Verdi was seventy-nine years old; he is therefore by now well into his eightieth year, preserving intact a youthful fantasy, an ironclad memory, and an absolutely miraculous vigor. His tall and robust figure, his penetrating and fiery gaze, and his broad and secure gait excite a respectful wonder in those who approach him.

Would you like proof of Verdi's activity? One need only report what his work was during the *Falstaff* rehearsals: from 9:00 to 10:30 in the

morning, revision of the score, parts, and reductions; from 12:30 to 4:30 in the afternoon, a rehearsal in the theater; often from 5:00 to 6:00 o'clock, a partial rehearsal with a few artists in the drawing room of the Hotel Milan; from 8:30 to 11:30 in the evening, another rehearsal in the theater!

And after this program of personal activity, what more remains to be said? Does it not follow naturally to conclude with this close: "We'll see you soon, oh young Maestro" [*A rivederci presto, o giovane Maestro*]?

Source: Giulio Ricordi, "Come scrive e come prova Giuseppe Verdi," *Verdi e il Falstaff* (Numero speciale della *Illustrazione italiana*), [ca. Feb. 1-5, 1893], p. 23. For the dating of the article in early February, see Raffaello Barbiera, "Alla vigilia del 'Falstaff,'" *L'Illustrazione italiana*, XX/6, Feb. 5, 1893, 88.

APPENDIX II

Verdi's Written Instructions during the *Falstaff* Rehearsals (see above p. 142)

Edoardo Susmel, *Un secolo di vita teatrale fiumana con uno scritto inedito di Giuseppe Verdi* (Fiume: "La vedetta d'Italia," 1924), pp. 24-25:

Second Act

1. The sack of money *poco marcato*.
2. *Al posto al posto al posto*; Alice takes too long to play the guitar.
3. "Quand'ero paggio" too slow.
4. The finale always pianissimo except for the phrase "Voi sarete l'ala destra"; then the rest *ppp*, always less *marcato*; then the first time for "*affogo, affogo*," and I would like to see Falstaff's snout come out of the laundry for the first time. When the curtain falls it ought to be done more impetuously, and by everybody: Caius, Bardolfo, Pistola. So the basket is prepared a little bit later, and all the men ought to come out impetuously when they say "*Patatrac*."

Third Act

- "Quand il ritocco [*sic*] della," etc.: pay attention to the piccolo.
 "Prepara la canzone della fata" too distant; and the same for "è preparata."
 The sonnet ought to be delivered more *a tempo*, without haste. At the end of the sonnet they ought not to kiss because they are interrupted by Alice.
 The *Chorus, Nymphs, Sylphs, Sirens* a little bit closer.
 "Globo d'impurità" a little bit faster.
 Wait after "L'accetti di buon grado."
 The piccolo louder in the fugue.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Susmel, p. 24, describes these as hasty pencil notes on square, pale, yellow-gray paper. The originals, then in the possession of Edoardo Mascheroni, often lack proper punctuation and capital letters:

Atto Secondo.

1. Poco marcato il pacco di monete.
2. *Al posto al posto al posto* Alice ritarda troppo a suonare la chitarra.
3. Troppo lento "quando ero paggio."
4. Il finale sempre pianissimo ad eccezione della frase voi sarete l'ala destra il resto poi *ppp* sempre

Eleven small slips in Verdi's hand inserted into the proofs of the first edition of the Ricordi piano-vocal score. (The proofs are now located in the library of the Milan Conservatory, through whose kind permission these slips are transcribed here. Page numbers refer to the corresponding page of the first piano-vocal edition, pl. No. 96000, 474 pp., January-March, 1893. Because paginations after p. 272 in subsequent editions can be confusing, I also include bracketed references to the first measure of the relevant page by means of rehearsal numbers.)

1. P. 25 [I.i, No. 9]: "Si. Si" louder.
2. P. 39 [I.i, 5 mm. before No. 15]: "L'onore" delivered less to the public and closer [to] the two thieves.
3. P. 156 [II.i, 5 mm. after No. 12]: Tell *Falstaff* and *Ford* to beat the sack of money in time [to its music].
4. P. 161 [II.i, 3 mm. after No. 14]: Falstaff's solo "L'amor, l'amor" more *scherzoso*.
5. P. 191 [II.ii, beginning]: The violins more *marcati* and the tempo a little slower.
6. P. 213 [II.ii, 6 mm. after No. 37]: Alice goes to her place ["Al posto"] more quickly.
7. P. 247 [II.ii, 5 mm. before No. 55]: ☒ The two flutes more *marcati*. [The corresponding sign is found on p. 246, m. 1, below the word "Seguimi."]
8. P. 273 [II.ii, 2 mm. after No. 63, first edition only]: the *parlanti* always *piano*, and without ever covering the body of Falstaff.
9. Opposite p. 300 [II.ii, conclusion]: Pay much attention to the falling of the basket and the entrance of the men, "Patatrac."
10. P. 337 [III.i, 25 mm. after No. 20, first edition only]: Always keep the same movement, and perhaps accent the motive like this:



meno marcato poi la prima volta *affogo, affogo* e mi piacerebbe vedere la prima volta vedere [sic] il muso di *Falstaff* sortire dalla biancheria.

Quando cala il paravento dovrebbe essere fatto più impetuosamente e fatto da tutti Caio, **Bardolfo**, Pistola.

Così il cesto preparato un po' più tardi e tutti gli uomini dovrebbe sortire impetuosamente quando dicono *Patatrac*.

Atto terzo.

Quando il ritocco [sic] della et badare all'ottavino.

Troppo lontano *prepara la canzone della fata* . . . E così è *preparata*.

Il sonetto dovrebbe essere detto più a tempo senza fretta. Alla fine del sonetto non dovrebbero baciarsi perchè interrotte da Alice.

Un poco più vicini i *Cori Ninfe Silfi Sirene*.

Un poco più mosso *Globo d'impurità*.

Aspettare dopo l'*accetti di buon grado*.

Ottavino nella fuga *più forte*.

11. P. 407 [III.ii, No. 45]: Bardolfo's "Furfanteria" a little bit towards the public.⁵⁰

Alessandro Luzio, *Carteggi verdiani*, IV (Rome: Reale accademia d'Italia, 1947), 50.

For the rehearsal at noon.

Passages, D, two contrabasses.

1. Women's quartet, second act.
2. Beginning of the second act. Duet Falstaff-Ford for the fourth string [per la quarta corda].
3. Attach the slip [*stacco*] in the same duet: *Te lo cornifico*.
4. The andante of the *finale*; and the change "m'affogo" [*sic*] so that it is in time.
- [5.] The "patatrac" directed by Alice.
- [6.] In the third act E flat. Two contra. Later on let the "Pizzica, pizzica" and the *Litany* ["Domine fallo casto"] be well exposed.

⁵⁰ Some of the originals are mentioned in Guglielmo Barblan, *Un prezioso spartito del "Falstaff"* (Milan, n.d.). The complete list of the originals is found below. The numbering is mine.

1. *Si: s'è più forte*.
2. *L'onore* Detto Meno al Pubblico e più vivino [a] i due Ladri.
3. Dire a *Falst* e a *Ford* di battere il sacco delle monete a suo tempo.
4. Più scherzoso il solo *Fals: L'amor l'amor*.
5. *Più marcati i violini* ed un poco meno il tempo.
6. Alice più presto andare *al posto*.
7. ✕ Più marcati i due Flauti.
8. sempre piano i parlanti e senza mai coprire il corpo di *Fals*.
9. molta attenzione per la caduta della cesta e l'entrata degli uomini *Patatrac*.
10. Ritenerne lo stesso movimento e forse accentar così il motivo [music] et.
11. Bar. *Furfanteria* un poco verso il Pubblico.