

# VERDI · FALSTAFF

Deutsche  
Grammophon





GIUSEPPE VERDI

Giuseppe Verdi  
(1813–1901)

# FALSTAFF

Commedia lirica in tre atti  
Lyric comedy in three acts · Lyrische Komödie in drei Akten · Comédie lyrique en trois actes  
Libretto/libret: Arrigo Boito, da/after/nach/d'après Shakespeare

Sir John Falstaff	Renato Bruson
Ford, marito d'Alice <small>husband of Alice · Alices Mann · mari d'Alice</small>	Leo Nucci
Fenton	Dalmacio Gonzalez
Dr. Cajus	Michael Sells
Bardolfo, seguace di Falstaff <small>Bardolph, follower of Falstaff · Falstaffs Diener · compagnon de Falstaff</small>	Francis Egerton
Pistola, seguace di Falstaff <small>Pistol, follower of Falstaff · Falstaffs Diener · compagnon de Falstaff</small>	William Wildermann
Mrs. Alice Ford	Katia Ricciarelli
Nannetta, figlia di Alice e di Ford <small>daughter of Alice and Ford · Tochter von Alice und Ford · fille d'Alice et de Ford</small>	Barbara Hendricks
Mrs. Quickly	Lucia Valentini Terrani
Mrs. Meg Page	Brenda Boozar

## Los Angeles Master Chorale

(director/Chordirektor/maitre des chœurs/maestro del coro: Roger Wagner)  
Musical assistance/musikalische Assistenz/assistance musicale/assistenza musicale: Roberto Benaglio

## Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra

conducted by/Dirigent/chef d'orchestre/direttore:

## CARLO MARIA GIULINI

Live recording/Live-Mitschnitt/Enregistrement public/Registrazione dal vivo  
Production staged by/Inszenierung/mise en scène/allestimento: Ronald Eyre

## "FALSTAFF": VERDI'S FAREWELL TO OPERA

James Hepokoski

"I don't have any news of Verdi to report, but doubtless he's getting along marvellously," wrote Arrigo Boito to Camille Bellaigue after the 1887 premiere of *Otello*, for which Boito had written the libretto. "I would like to make that bronze colossus resound one more time. Would he answer me?" Persuading the *maestro*, now in his late seventies, to undertake another opera would be a difficult task. Verdi basked in an almost obsessively private retirement at his villa in Sant'Agata, near Busseto, having written some two dozen operas from 1839 to 1887. In many respects he had little to gain by composing yet another. His career was already complete and illustrious. Why tempt fate by risking a failure, or only a polite success, at the end of his life? Moreover, his creative energies clearly lay back in the musical environment of the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s. The operatic world had changed radically since then — and it had not changed to his liking. After the Bolognese premiere of *Lohengrin* in 1871 the Italian operatic style, essentially vocal, was under siege by the Wagnerian, symphonic music drama. Perhaps sensing that the tide of history was running against him, Verdi had turned intermittently to non-operatic composition — a String Quartet (1873), the *Messa da Requiem* (1873–74), a *Pater Noster* (1880), an *Ave Maria* for soprano and strings (1880), and a choral *Ave Maria*

(1889) — and to various reworkings of earlier, problematic operas — most notably, revisions of *Simon Boccanegra* (1881) and *Don Carlos* (1882–83). Finally, of course, there towered the resplendent exception, *Otello* (1884–87), to which Verdi had been attracted by both the subject and Boito's magnificent text.

Now, after *Otello*, Boito perceived that Verdi was to be enticed into another major work only by offering him the possibility of succeeding in an area that had eluded him for fifty years: comedy. Only one of Verdi's works had been an *opera buffa*: the unsuccessful *Un giorno di regno*, his second opera (1840). And it pained him to be considered a master only of tragedy, even though portions of his mature works — such as the music of Fra Melitone in *La forza del destino* — had suggested that a comic gift lurked behind the more "typical" Verdi. So it was that, gently and with consummate tact, Boito suggested in the summer of 1889 that they collaborate on a "*Falstaff* or *Merry Wives*," a subject with which the composer had been toying for decades. After sending Verdi a proposed scenario, Boito delicately touched the decisive string on 9 July: "There is only one way of ending your career more effectively than with *Otello*, and that is to conclude victoriously with *Falstaff*. After having brought forth all of the human heart's cries and la-

ments, to conclude with an immense burst of hilarity! That will astonish them all!" The next day Verdi responded, "Amen, and so be it; let's make this *Falstaff* then!" And the project had begun.

The principal source of the plot was to be Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, a story that had found its way to the operatic stage several times before, in works by Papavoine (1761), Ritter (1794), Dittersdorf (1796), Salieri (1799), Balfe (1838), Nicolai (1849), and Adam (1856). The subject itself has an Italian source, a matter of no small consideration to Boito and Verdi in those heated days of defending Italian purity from the onslaughts of the *ultramontani*: Shakespeare had drawn *The Merry Wives* from Ser Giovanni Fiorentino's *Il peccorone*, a collection of fourteenth-century tales eventually published in 1558. But Boito and Verdi wisely enriched the *Merry Wives* plot by borrowing copiously from the two parts of Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, the other plays in which Falstaff appears. Falstaff's Honor Monologue at the end of I.i, for instance, derives from the Honor Catechism in *Henry IV*, Part One, before he enters the bloody battle of Shrewsbury; this explains the references to the loss of limbs, surgeons, and dead men, which might otherwise seem overworked in the context of his amorous plottings in the Garter Inn. Similarly, Falstaff's "Quand'ero paggio" in II.ii intertwines two brief speeches from the historical plays, not the comedy. And although the opening monologue of the third act springs from an analogous portion of *The Merry Wives*, most of its words are chosen from the *Henry IV* plays.

As for *The Merry Wives* itself, it was to be much condensed in the interests of concentration, energy, and brevity. Boito required the fat knight to undergo only two trials (the laundry basket and Windsor Forest),

not three as in the play, in which Falstaff is also duped to dress up as the "old woman of Brainford," only to be cudgelled out of Ford's house. Of Falstaff's original three henchmen, only Bardolph and Pistol remain; likewise absent are George Page (whose daughter, Anne, thus becomes Nannetta Ford by default), Sir Hugh Evans, and a number of other characters. Boito's Dr. Caius is a telescoping of the country justice Robert Shallow and his nephew Abraham Slender; not a line of the original Caius, a French physician with an excruciating accent, is transferred to the opera. Mistress Quickly is shorn of most of her scheming ways and addle-headed malapropisms to become merely a willing neighbor who enjoys a good joke. And Shakespeare's Fenton is scrubbed clean to become the standard, idealistic tenor: we never learn, as in the play, that he is a peer who had squandered away his wealth, and whose original interest in middle-class Anne Page was to obtain a large dowry. Questions of social status that loom large in the play are merely implicit in the opera.

A few things happen in *Falstaff* that can be found in neither *The Merry Wives* nor the *Henry IV* plays. To Boito we owe the planting and discovery of Fenton and Nannetta behind the screen in II.ii as well as most of the former's sonnet and the latter's song in III.ii. The kiss imagery in the sonnet derives not only from a passage from Ugo Foscolo's *Le grazie* but also, as Wolfgang Osthoff has recently demonstrated, from portions of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and Sonnets 8 and 128. Moreover, Andrew Porter has shown that the magical couplet, "Bocca baciata non perde ventura/Anzi rinnova come fa la luna," which appears twice in I.ii and once more near the end of the III.ii sonnet, quotes directly from the conclusion of the much racier Seventh Story of the Second Day of

Boccaccio's *Decameron*. The addition of a concluding fugue was Verdi's idea in August 1889 and a stroke of genius: no other genre could suggest as well the reconciliation of the characters and the restoration of order into Windsor society. The fugue's opening line, "Tutto nel mondo è burla," recalls Jaques' bitter "All the world's a stage" in *As You Like It* — a provocative quotation, since, despite the joyous music, it evokes images of ashen pessimism at the moment of resolution.

Thus the completed libretto is a brilliant composite of many sources. Boito's rich language, borrowed in large measure from the Italian Shakespearian translations of Carlo Rusconi and Giulio Carcano, contrasts sharply with standard nineteenth-century operatic Italian. Here the thought is more subtle, the images more extravagant, the poetic metres more free. This, too, must have appealed to the *maestro*, who had surely provided Boito with an ongoing critique of the text as the latter was working on it during the winter of 1889–90, when composer and librettist were virtual neighbors in Genoa and Nervi.

Verdi's composition of the opera was repeatedly interrupted by illness, self-doubt, and depression. He began composing energetically enough, having completed a preliminary draft of Act I in mid-March 1890, only nine days after Boito had formally given him the libretto. But intricate legal battles and especially, the deaths in 1890 of three close friends, Franco Faccio, Giuseppe Piroli, and Emanuele Muzio, drained him of much of his will to compose. Now in late 1890 and early 1891 he began to lower the public's expectations by defensively insisting that he was writing the opera only for his own amusement, not for performance. "solely to pass a few hours of the day,"

In September 1891 Verdi began to orchestrate and revise what he had composed up to that time. Nine months later, with most of the first two acts orchestrated and all of the opera drafted, he began planning with the editor Giulio Ricordi for the eventual Milanese premiere at La Scala. As he and Ricordi considered and auditioned singers in the summer of 1892, he revised his score further — inserting, for example, a new monologue, "Giunta all'Albergo," for the proposed Quickly, Giuseppina Pasqua, and touching up many of Falstaff's lines to take advantage of the superb declamatory gifts of Victor Maurel, who had created the role of Iago in *Otello* five years earlier.

Verdi completed the orchestral score in the autumn of 1892, but his work on the opera was far from finished. At the end of the year he taught many of the singers their parts at his winter home in Genoa, and in the following January he supervised the almost sixty rehearsals that La Scala, building their entire season around *Falstaff*, devoted to the new work. Two months after the triumphant 9 February 1893 premiere — a carefully staged spectacle that Ricordi had engineered to maximize publicity — the composer decided to rewrite two portions that he found ineffective. He reduced the dimensions of the laundry-basket ensemble in II.ii by removing the sixteen bars immediately before Nannetta's "Dolci richiami d'amor" and replacing them with six new ones; and he rewrote the conclusion of III.i, beginning with Meg's and Alice's words, "Rincasiam"/"L'appuntamento è alla quercia di Herne." The two revisions were first performed together in Rome in April 1893, and the original music, which Verdi subsequently removed from the autograph score, has never been performed since — indeed, it now exists only in piano-vocal score. In early 1894 Verdi sanctioned five small alterations for

the Parisian premiere the following April. The most prominent of the five, the insertion of a new dialogue, "Inoltriam," etc., over pre-existing instrumental music nine bars before Nannetta's song in III.ii, has been commonly performed as part of the opera's standard text throughout the twentieth century.

*Falstaff*, Verdi's last opera, is also his most musically sophisticated. Here the watchwords are spontaneity, continual freshness, and avoidance of literal repetition; the opera abounds in lustrous ideas that are heard only once or twice, fleeting thoughts that last a moment or two before giving way to something else. In its rejection of square-cut, predictable formulas and old habits — gone are the standardized arias or cavatinas with repeated cabaletta, formally schematic duets, etc. — the music of *Falstaff* spotlights a nearly constant succession of highly dramatic moments. Never before had the orchestra played such an important role in a Verdi opera. The instrumental effects are as famous as they are numerous: the piccolo doubling the cello at a four-octave interval in I.i as the knight sings "Se Falstaff s'assottiglia," the brilliant perpetual motion in the strings in II.ii as the jealous Ford searches for the concealed Falstaff, the exquisite mixture of staccato, muted violins, string trills, string and harp harmonics, and gentle woodwinds that accompanies Nannetta's song in III.ii, and so on. But beyond furnishing a backdrop of unerring color, the orchestra is a primary center of motivic development and growth — symphonic growth, many have observed, in the manner of Beethoven. Falstaff's Honor Monologue at the end of I.i is a case in point. The seven-note cell first heard vocally to the words "riempirvi la pancia" recurs as a bonding agent in the orchestra throughout the solo piece, even forming its

swaggering, fortissimo climax (immediately after "per me non ne voglio") and, totally transformed bringing down the curtain in the trumpets and woodwinds at the very end of the scene.

Above the busy — but never dominating — orchestra the inhabitants of Windsor sing their quasi-declamatory parts, which blossom here and there into graceful *ariosi*, brief songs, or larger, more ambitious monologues. Falstaff typically delivers his lines as broad pronouncements, carefully enunciated fiat: (compare this, for instance, to the high, repeated-note sputtering typical of the petulant Caius). There is a grand, pontifical quality to much of what Falstaff utters, and more than once his men pretend to reverence him as an ecclesiastical superior, as does Quickly in addressing him as "Reverenza." Characteristically, Falstaff's words are as stout as his belly, as in the "overstuffed," fourteen-syllable lines that form his Honor Monologue. Yet the clever knight strives to modify his tone when the occasion warrants it: witness his exaggeratedly formal wooing of Alice in II.ii and the subsequent evocation of his trim youth ("Quand'ero paggio"). Ford, a man of substance and property, similarly wishes to enjoy the broad, declamatory style, but his fundamental insecurities often surface to distort his lines. His tormented monologue in II.i, "E sogno? o realtà," goaded onward by the orchestral motives of Falstaff's proposed assignation ("Dalle due alle tre") and the fear of his own cuckolding ("Te lo cornifico"), rises at moments to the intense seriousness of *Otello*. Alice's music brims over with mischievous sparkle and short, staccato phrases that mirror her nimble wit. She surely has the shortest principal "aria" ever written for a *prima donna*: "Gaie comari di Windsor," a mere handful of rapid phrases driven by the ephemeral

spark of laughter, which ultimately discharges on a high C near the end of the song. To Nannetta and Fenton alone does Verdi habitually give extended, lyrical lines; their music thus becomes an idyllic refuge from the intrigues of the main plot. As compelling as any individual moment in *Falstaff* is its overall shape: the opera proceeds from the rapid dramatic and musical action of the opening, with its tremendous forward thrust, to the comparative leisure and stillness of the final scene. By the end of the second act the main plot is over: Falstaff has been tricked and punished. The third act functions rather like a dramatic coda, in which additional tricks are devised to punish Falstaff further and resolve the Fenton-Nannetta subplot. Here the rapid stream of the first two acts broadens into a delta of increasingly

static and stylized pieces – Verdi's farewell to opera. This is particularly true of the final, Windsor Forest scene, where the stage action unfolds more in archetypal gestures than in the free flow of "realistic" behavior. One stylized piece now follows another: Fenton's sonnet, Nannetta's strophic song, the ABA'B' form "Pizzica, pizzica" chorus, the sixteen-bar Litany ("Domine fallo casto"), the nuptial minuet with miniature trio, and the concluding fugue. Sonnet, litany, minuet, and fugue: that Verdi reaches beyond the standard nineteenth-century genres into an idyllic, archaic past at the end only deepens the valedictory flavor of the entire opera. For it is in this scene, above all, that we sense a nostalgic evocation of music for its own sake, the final, loving gift of a grand *maestro* who refused to grow old.

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When Carlo Maria Giulini gave up the opera house in 1968, he was disillusioned, he said, with prevailing vocal standards and with star singers who couldn't, or wouldn't, forswear airplanes long enough to prepare a role carefully, to stay in one place long enough to appear in a series of delicately integrated performances. He was impatient, too, with star stage directors who played fast and loose with the specific instructions of the composer and librettist. Giulini is a man of principle and a purist. He would rather conduct no opera at all than conduct compromised

opera. He has, in the wake of that valedictory *Figaro* with the Rome Opera company at the Met in New York, been lured back to opera on records a couple of times. Until 13 April 1982, however, he graced no orchestra pit. He did so on that date only because he could be assured special working conditions. The Los Angeles Philharmonic – his Los Angeles Philharmonic – was not only the accompanying ensemble, it was the sponsoring force for a fastidiously fashioned, internationally oriented new production of an old Giulini spe-

cialty, *Falstaff*. "I will take full responsibility for everything", the maestro had declared, "from the shoes worn by the chorus to movement to the lights and the scenery." And he proved true to his word. He attended every rehearsal, whether it happened to be a musical one, a dramatic one or even a technical one for the scenic engineers. He worried about minute details, about grandiose concepts, about the grave trust that he bore as a spokesman for Verdi. This would be Giulini's *Falstaff*, not the baritone's or the director's or the designers'. "Touch wood", he said before the premiere. "I hope we are worthy."

Verdi certainly would have approved of this *modus operandi*. The conductor, he wrote to Arrigo Boito in 1891, "must be independent of the management; he must assume the total musical responsibility..." But Verdi voiced other concerns, too: "Choose a good chorus master, who is subordinate to the conductor and whose job it is not only to teach the notes but also to assist the production as directed by the producer... Then choose a head producer who is again subordinate to the conductor." Giulini entrusted the choral duties and some of the musical preparation to a past master, Roberto Benaglio. For his *regisseur*, he turned to a Shakespearean, and a traditionalist: Ronald Eyre. The three worked together harmoniously, though there never was any question as to who was boss.

A significant demonstration of priorities came up at an early blocking rehearsal. It was at the beginning of the last act. Falstaff, having dragged his wet, ample form from the Thames, is lost in melancholy reverie outside the Garter Inn, musing first in anger, then in pain, finally in benign nostalgia about a world that can not only dump a knight into the water but then laugh at his plight. Some productions stress agitation

and comedy at this juncture. Giulini insisted that there be no movement at all, that the drama be carried by Falstaff alone, and by the music. Eyre seemed to agree, but he did want one touch of visual counterpoint: a couple of anonymous faces stationed at windows inside the inn to observe the fat knight's humiliation. Giulini conferred for a moment with Benaglio, then exchanged a few polite words, *sotto voce*, with the producer. The windows closed and the faces were never to be seen. "I did not want anything – anything! – to distract from Falstaff here", Giulini later explained. "Even one unnecessary nuance would be too much."

The maestro does not regard *Falstaff* as a *buffo* opera in any sense. That was one of the reasons for his choice of singers. "I wanted 'virgins', singers without preconceptions", he explained, "and no bad habits. I wanted to start from zero. Most of all, I wanted no clown routines, no jokes." A visitor suggested that *Falstaff* actually builds up to one mighty eight-part joke in the fugal finale: "Tutto nel mondo è burla." Giulini closed his eyes and slowly shook his head. "*Falstaff*", he replied, "is a very serious opera until the final fugue. For my taste, it cannot be too serious."

Why had he chosen this work for his return to the stage? "Because it is one of four or five ideal operas that I know, an opera equally strong in text, music and action." In preparing *Falstaff*, Giulini insisted that every member of the orchestra be provided with a complete libretto and translation. "Everyone must understand the words", he said. "Here no one and no thing is unimportant. The mood must be projected on the stage and reflected in the pit. Every tone has its own meaning."

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Giulini first saw *Falstaff* when he was a student in

Rome. He remembers that Tullio Serafin was the conductor. "Serafin was the last who really, really understood the voice", says Giulini. Significantly, he does not recall who sang the title role on that occasion. When he conducted the opera himself for the first time, at the Edinburgh Festival of 1955, Fernando Corena was his protagonist. "He was very good", the maestro hastens to add. "Not at all *buffo*. We worked on this." Subsequently he worked, very rewardingly, he says, with Sir Geraint Evans and Tito Gobbi. His favorite Falstaff at the moment, however, is his present one. "I believe Renato Bruson now is *the Falstaff*", Giulini proclaims. "He has the wit, the intelligence, the dignity and, of course, the voice. Basta."

An iconoclast asks how, if Falstaff is so intelligent, he could do anything as silly as send the same love letter to two women who happen to be neighbors. Giulini pauses a moment. "Falstaff", he answers, "has an in-

teresting flaw in his character. He has no respect for anyone else's intelligence, only for his own. He is a sexist, too. He doesn't think women are that clever. That does not prevent him from being a man of bravery and honor, however. We must sense that. He is capable of introspection, and of violence. He wouldn't be afraid in a battle, yet disgrace in a laundry basket, that is another matter. It damages his self-confidence. Ah, such a wonderful character!" Then an afterthought emerges. "In any case, we must remember that Falstaff's primary interest in the merry wives isn't complicated. They represent money. He needs money. The other considerations come later. . . . Also, one must remember: the situations in the opera are comic — the people are not."

*Martin Bernheimer is Chief Music Critic of the Los Angeles Times.*

**Synopsis** *The action takes place in Windsor during the reign of Henry IV (1399–1413).*

## ACT I

**Part One:** The interior of the "Garter" Inn.

Dr. Caius accuses the aging, fat rogue, Sir John Falstaff, of housebreaking and the knight's two henchmen, Bardolph and Pistol, of pickpocketing. Calmly ordering more sherry, Falstaff refuses to make amends, and Bardolph and Pistol deny everything. His charges unsatisfied, Caius storms out of the inn. Falstaff, after examining his bill and grumbling at his spendthrift lackies ("*So che se andiam, la notte*"), dis-

closes another scheme for financial gain, for he must support the expanding reign of his magnificent paunch. He plans, he says, to seduce Alice Ford and Meg Page ("*V'è noto un tal, qui del paese*"), both wives of prosperous Windsor citizens. Citing newly found principles of honor, Bardolph and Pistol refuse to deliver Sir John's love letters to the two women. Falstaff gives the letters to a page and discharges the two ruffians from his service, but not before giving

them an extended lecture on the bankruptcy of honor itself ("*L'Onore! Ladri!*").

**Part Two:** A garden.

Alice and Meg show each other Falstaff's "wicked" letters and discover that they are identical ("*Fulgida Alice! amor t'offro*"). Together with Mistress Quickly and Alice's daughter Nannetta they denounce Falstaff in a brief, unaccompanied quartet ("*Quell'otre! quel tino!*") and vow to trick him. As they leave, Ford, Caius, young Fenton, Bardolph, and Pistol enter, burning with rage: the two discharged thieves have just told the gullible Ford of Falstaff's intentions. The men's quintet is succeeded by two interludes for the young lovers, Fenton and Nannetta ("*Labbra di foco!*"), between which the wives momentarily re-enter to elaborate their plan: Quickly is to visit Sir John at the "Garter" Inn and arrange a supposed assignation with Alice. Ignorant of the wives' plans, the men concoct their own scheme: under an assumed name, Ford will go to see Falstaff to ensnare him in a plot of revenge. The men and women simultaneously restate their feelings, and after the men depart the wives mock Falstaff's presumption with a burst of laughter.

## ACT II

**Part One:** The interior of the "Garter" Inn.

Feigning penitence, Bardolph and Pistol rejoin Falstaff's service and introduce Mistress Quickly, who through flattery ("*Reverenza*") arranges a rendezvous between Falstaff and Alice from two until three o'clock that very day. Quickly having departed, Falstaff congratulates himself on his continuing irresisti-

bility ("*Va, vecchio John*"). Within moments a second visitor approaches. This is "Signor Fontana" — Ford in disguise — and he comes with a lucrative offer. Claiming to be Alice's unrequited lover ("*C'è a Windsor una dama*"), "Fontana" asks Falstaff, a more seasoned lady-killer, to seduce Ford's wife for him as a prelude to his own advances. Falstaff accepts, divulging that Alice has already agreed to meet him. This shatters Ford. Once Sir John has left the room in order to change, he erupts in a furious monologue ("*E sogno? o realtà*"): all faith in his wife now gone, he contemplates the nightmare of cuckoldry and vows to avenge the insult. Falstaff returns, and the two leave the inn.

**Part Two:** A room in Ford's house.

Mistress Quickly tells the women of her interview with Falstaff ("*Giunta all'Albergo*"). Alice, after assuring a tearful Nannetta that she will not have to marry Dr. Caius, as Ford has been hoping, prepares the room for Falstaff's visit and the ensuing mischief ("*Gaie comari di Windsor!*"). Soon Falstaff arrives, but his aggressive wooing is interrupted when Quickly rushes in, warning of Meg's approach; Falstaff is forced to hide behind a screen. Meg reports that Ford is on his way home with a band of men, all swearing vengeance. Ford enters and searches frantically, but unsuccessfully, for Falstaff — he even throws the linen out of the laundry basket. As he leaves to look elsewhere, the wives squeeze the trembling Falstaff into the basket as a means of escape. While they cover him with the dirty clothes, Fenton and Nannetta slip behind the screen to steal a few kisses in secret. Ford and the men return, and, hearing a kiss, they become convinced that Falstaff and Alice are behind the screen. They slowly converge on it

ly to discover — Fenton and Nannetta! This, of course, enrages Ford all the more. The men depart, and the wives call for the servants, who dump the basket out of the window and into the Thames below. Ford, summoned by Alice, has returned with the other men; he is led by her to the window to witness the spectacle of Falstaff in the river.

### ACT III

**Part One:** A square outside the “Garter” Inn.

The drenched Falstaff orders a glass of warm wine, which gradually changes his spirits from growling desolation to trilling exhilaration. Suddenly Quickly enters, claiming that Alice wishes to meet him again, only this time at midnight, in Windsor Forest: for mystery’s sake, Falstaff is to wear the horns of the spectral “Black Hunter”. As Quickly and the aroused Falstaff depart to converse further, Alice tells the tale of the Black Hunter (“*Quando il rintocco della mezzanotte*”) and prepares the rest of the characters for the coming evening’s masquerade, the final trick on Sir John. Ford privately promises Caius that he can marry his daughter that evening and reminds him to wear the proper disguise. Unnoticed by the men, Quickly overhears the plan.

**Part Two:** Windsor Park.

In this nocturnal setting Fenton sings a sonnet equating music with kisses (“*Dal labbro il canto estasiato vola*”). Falstaff soon enters, with antlers tied onto his head. He counts the midnight hours self-consciously, meets Alice, and begins his seduction at once. Suddenly Meg is heard crying for help, and Falstaff hears what he believes to be fairies’ voices. To protect himself he stretches out on the ground. Nannetta enters, disguised as the Fairy Queen, with children of the vicinity in similar costume. After she sings an atmospheric fairy song (“*Sul fil d’un soffio etesio*”), all of the others enter, also disguised, and torment the prostrate Falstaff with denunciations and pinchings (“*Pizzica, pizzica*”). Under this barrage, Falstaff repents. He soon discovers that his tormentors are human, not supernatural, but he eventually accepts his punishment in good humor. Ford announces the wedding procession of his daughter and agrees to marry a second, similarly disguised couple. After the marriage pronouncement he learns that, quite against his will, he has married Nannetta to Fenton, and that Caius has mistakenly married a veiled Bardolph. Ford admits that he, too, has been duped and blesses his daughter’s marriage. All of the participants join in a fugue of reconciliation (“*Tutto nel mondo è burla*”).

James Hepokoski



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