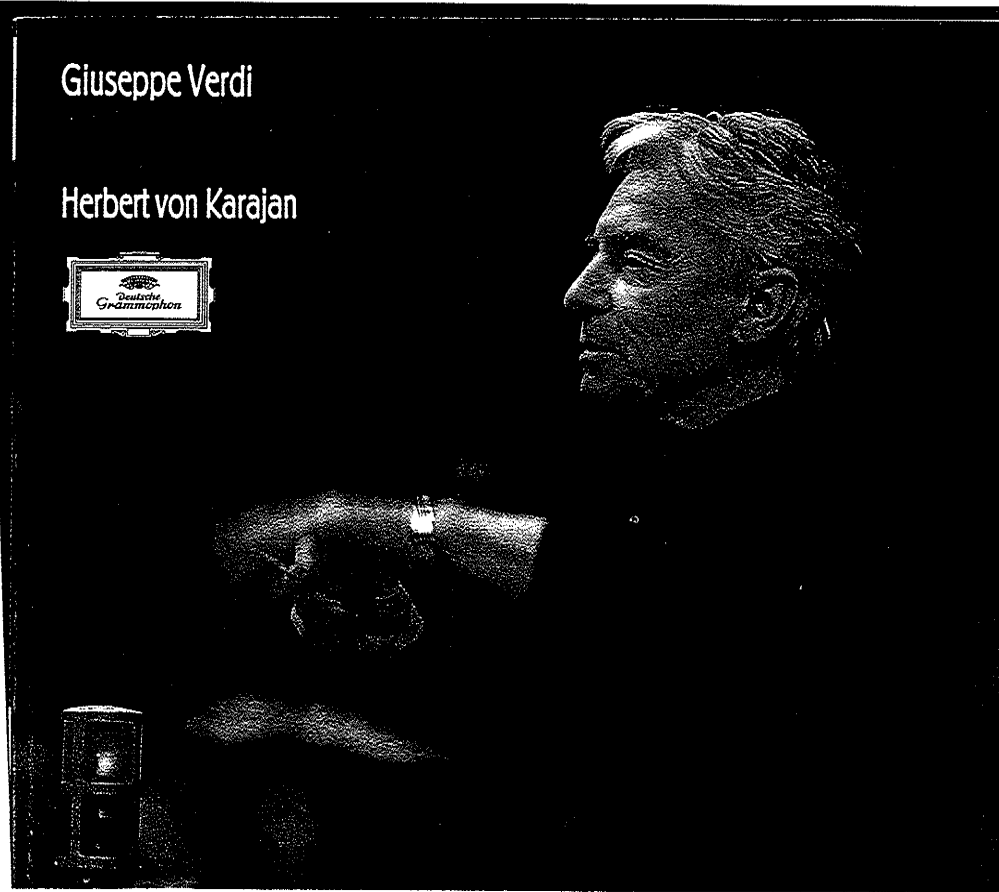
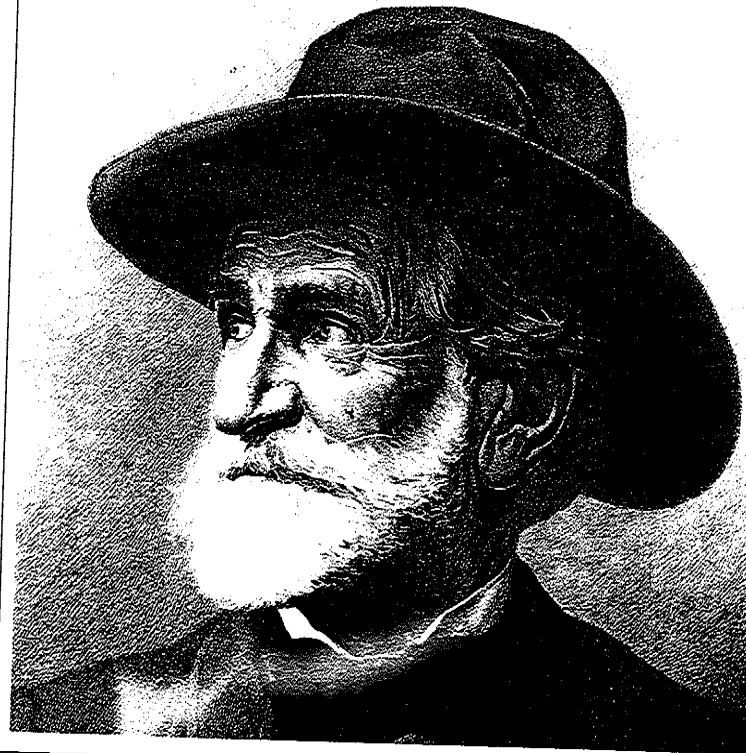


Giuseppe Verdi

Herbert von Karajan





GIUSEPPE VERDI



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(1813-1901)

## **FALSTAFF**

Commedia lirica in tre atti  
Lyrische Komödie in drei Akten · Lyric comedy in three acts  
Comédie lyrique en trois actes

Libretto/livret: Arrigo Boito  
da/nach/after/d' après Shakespeare

Wiener Staatsopernchor  
Einstudierung/Chorus Master/Chef des choeurs/Maestro del coro: Walter Hagen-Groll

Wiener Philharmoniker  
HERBERT VON KARAJAN

*Uraufführung: Mailand, Teatro alla Scala, 9. Februar 1893*  
*Première: Milan, Teatro alla Scala, 9 February 1893*  
*Création: Milan, Teatro alla Scala, 9 février 1893*  
*Prima rappresentazione: Milano, Teatro alla Scala, 9 febbraio 1893*



ARRIGO BOITO - GIUSEPPE VERDI

## SYNOPSIS

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

### ACT I

#### Part One: 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 (1) "Falstaff!" / "Olà!"). 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 (2) "Sei polli: sei scellini" - "So che se andiam, la notte"), discloses 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 (3) "Ma è tempo d'assottigliar l'ingegno"), both wives of prosperous Windsor citizens. Citing newly found principles of honour, Bardolph and Pistol refuse to deliver Sir John's love letters to the two women. Falstaff gives the letters to a page ("Ehi! paggio!") and discharges the two ruffians from his service, but not before giving them an extended lecture on the bankruptcy of honour itself (4) "L'Onore! Ladri!").

#### Part Two: A garden

In Ford's garden, Meg Page and Mrs. Quickly encounter his wife, Alice, and his daughter, Nannet-

ta (5) "Alice" / "Meg" / "Nannetta"). Alice and Meg show each other Falstaff's "wicked" letters and discover that they are identical (6) "Fulgida Alice! amor l'offro"). Together with Mistress Quickly and Nannetta they denounce Falstaff in a brief, unaccompanied quartet ("Quell'otre! quel tino!") and vow to trick him. While they leave gradually, Ford, Caius, young Fenton, Bardolph, and Pistol enter. The gullible Ford is burning with rage ("È un ribaldo, un furbo, un ladro"); the two discharged thieves have just told him of Falstaff's intentions and now repeat themselves at length (7) "In due parole: l'enorme Falstaff vuole"). The women observe the men sceptically from a distance. Ford and Alice resolve independently of one another to pursue the matter with caution. In an interlude, the young lovers, Fenton and Nannetta, take advantage of the general confusion to steal a few kisses (8) "Pst, pst, Nannetta" / "Labbra di foco!"). The wives momentarily re-enter ("Falstaff m'ha canzonata") to elaborate their plan: Quickly is to visit Sir John at the "Garter" Inn and arrange a supposed assignation with Alice. A second, brief love scene between Nannetta and Fenton ("Torno all'assalto") is broken off by the re-entry of the men ("Udrai quanta egli sfoggia"). 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 (9) "Del tuo barbaro diagnostico"), and after the men depart the wives mock Falstaff's presumption with a burst of

laughter. Only Fenton, preoccupied with his own feelings of love, views the proceedings from a distance.

## ACT II

### Part One: The "Garter" Inn

Feigning penitence, Bardolph and Pistol rejoin Falstaff's service (10) "*Siam pentiti e contriti*") 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 irresistibility (11) "*Alice è mia! Va', vecchio John*"). Within moments a second visitor approaches. This is "Signor Fontana" – Ford in disguise – (12) "*Signore, v'assista il cielo!*") and he comes with a lucrative offer. Claiming to be Alice's unrequited lover (13) "*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 (14) "*È sogno? o realtà?*"): all faith in his wife now gone, he contemplates the nightmare of cuckoldry and vows to avenge the insult. Falstaff returns ("*Ecco mi qua. Son pronto*"), and the two leave the inn.

### Part Two: A large room in Ford's house

Alice and Meg are still amusing themselves at the fat knight's expense (15) "*Presenteremo un bill*") when Mistress Quickly rushes in to tell the women of her interview with Falstaff ("*Giunta all'alber-*

*go*"). After Alice has assured a tearful Nannetta that she will not have to marry Dr. Caius, as Ford has been hoping, the women prepare the room for Falstaff's visit and the ensuing mischief (16) "*Fra poco s'incomincia la commedia. Gate comari di Windsor!*"). Soon Falstaff arrives (17) "*Alfin t'ho colto, raggiate fior*"), but his aggressive wooing (18) "*Quand'ero paggio*") is interrupted by Quickly, warning of Meg's approach. Falstaff is forced to hide behind a screen (19) "*Mia signora! C'è Mistress Meg*"). 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 ("*Vien qua!*" / "*Che chiasso!*"). 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 (20) "*C'è. / C'è. / Se t'agguanto!*") only 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 (21) "*Ehi! Taverniere!*"), which gradually changes

his spirits from growling desolation to trilling exhilaration. Quickly enters (22) "*Reverenza. La bella Alice...*"), claiming (while all the others, unseen by Falstaff, look on from a distance) 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 for the inn to converse further, Alice finishes 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 (23) "*Sarai la Fata Regina delle Fate*"). 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 (24) "*Dal labbro il canto estasiato vola*"). Falstaff soon enters, with antlers tied onto his head. He counts the midnight hours self-consciously (25) "*Una, due, tre, quattro*" – "*Odo un soave passo*"), 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 (26) "*Ninfe! Elfi! Silfi!*"). 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. Bardolph stumbles over the prostrate Falstaff (27) "*Alto là! / Chi va là?*"), and the others torment him with denunciations and pinchings ("*Pizzica, pizzica*"). Under this barrage, Falstaff repents. He soon discovers that his tormentors are human, not supernatural (28) "*Ogni sorta di gente dozzinale*"), but he eventually accepts his punishment in good humour. 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 (29) "*Facciamo il parentado*"). All of the participants join in a fugue of reconciliation ("*Tutto nel mondo è burla*").

James Hepokoski