

Verdi - Falstaff (Giulini) [1984]

Written by bluesever

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CD1 1 Michael Sells - "Falstaff!" - "Olà!" - "Sir John Falstaff!" 5:12 2 Renato Bruson - "Sei polli:sei scellini" 3:04 3 Renato Bruson - Ma è tempo d'assottigliar l'ingegno 3:58 4 Renato Bruson - L'Onore! Ladri! 4:02 5 Brenda Boozer - "Alice" - "Meg" - "Nannetta" 1:24 6 Brenda Boozer - "Fulgida Alice! amor t'offro..." / "Quell'otre! quel tino!" 4:07 7 William Wildermann - In due parole: l'enorme Falstaff vuole 1:31 8 Dalmacio Gonzales - "Pst, pst, Nannetta" 5:44 9 Francis Egerton - Udrai quanta egli sfoggia 3:07 10 Francis Egerton - "Siam pentiti e contriti" - "Reverenza!" 6:26 12 Leo Nucci - Signore, v'assista il cielo! 2:48 13 Leo Nucci - C'è a Windsor una dama 7:20 14 Leo Nucci - E sogno? O realtà 6:25

CD2

1 Katia Ricciarelli - "Presenteremo un bill" - "Giunta all'albergo" 4:12 2 Katia Ricciarelli - "Gaie comari di Windsor!" 1:48 3 Renato Bruson - Alfin t'ho colto, raggianti fior 3:25 4 Renato Bruson - Quand'ero paggio del Duca di Norfolk 1:03 5 Lucia Valentini-Terrani - "Mia signora! C'è Mistress Meg" 2:57 6 Barbara Hendricks - "Vien qua" - "Che chiasso!" 1:38 7 Leo Nucci - C'è. C'è. Se t'agguanto! Se ti piglio! 5:02 8 Renato Bruson - "Ehi! Taverniere!" - "Mondo ladro" 6:18 9 Lucia Valentini-Terrani - "Reverenza. La bella Alice ..." - "Quando il rintocco della mezzanotte" 5:43 10 Leo Nucci - "Brava. Quelle corna saranno la mia gioia!" 5:02 11 Dalmacio Gonzales - Dal labbro il canto estasiato 5:00 12 Renato Bruson - Una, due, tre, quattro 4:11 13 Barbara Hendricks - "Ninfe! Elfi! Silfi!" - "Sul fil d'un soffio etesio" 6:02 14 Francis Egerton - "Alto là!" - "Chi va là?" - "Pizzica, pizzica" 6:16 15 Renato Bruson - Ogni sorta di gente dozzinale 3:44 16 Leo Nucci - "Facciamo il parentado" - "Tutto nel mondo è burla" 3:24

Falstaff - Renato Bruson (baritone) Ford - Leo Nucci (baritone) Fenton - Dalmacio Gonzales (tenor) Dr. Caius - Michael Sells (tenor) Bardolph - Francis Egerton (tenor) Pistol - William Wildermann (bass) Alice Ford - Katia Ricciarelli (soprano) Nannetta - Barbara Hendricks (soprano) Mistress Quickly - Lucia Valentini Terrani (alto) Meg Page - Brenda Boozer (mezzo soprano) Los Angeles Master Chorale Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra Carlo Maria Giulini – conductor

Falstaff was the culmination of Verdi's long career as an opera composer. He had talked of retirement after the premiere of Un Ballo in Maschera in 1858 and really did believe he had laid

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down his compositional pen after Aida in 1871. But nearly a decade later, persuaded by his publisher, he embarked on a rewriting of Simon Boccanegra which had been premiered in 1857. This involved his working with Arrigo Boito, an accomplished librettist and also a composer; it was an association Verdi came to relish. The revised Boccanegra was a success at La Scala in 1881 and showed that even at the age of 68 Verdi's inner genius was alive and well. Ricordi and Boito subtly pointed Verdi towards Shakespeare's Othello. Verdi loved and revered Shakespeare above any other poet. Slowly, via constant personal contact and communication Othello was written. It was premiered at La Scala, six years after the revised Boccanegra. Verdi was then 74 years of age and really did think he had finished operatic composition. But he had not allowed for Boito. Three years after the premiere of Othello Verdi wrote to a friend What can I tell you? I've wanted to write a comic opera for forty years, and I've known 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' for fifty... however, the usual butts and I don't know if I will ever finish it...I am enjoying myself. Boito's vital contribution in enabling Verdi to match Shakespeare was in his capacity for drawing out a taut libretto from the plays concerned. He had reduced Othello by six-sevenths and in Falstaff reduces the 23 characters in The Merry Wives of Windsor to just ten in the opera. Verdi wrote Falstaff for his own enjoyment. Inevitably during its composition his mind must have wandered back to the tragic domestic circumstances of the death of his wife and children that surrounded the failure of his only other comic opera, Il Giorno di Regno, at La Scala in 1840. With Falstaff the outcome was utterly different. Verdi's 28th and final opera, 'my little enjoyment' as he called it, was all he could have hoped for. It was a triumph at its premiere at La Scala on 9 February 1893. The greatest Italian composer ever was 80 years of age. It was a magnificent operatic culmination to a great career as an opera composer.

Verdi's orchestration in Falstaff, with its final fugue, represents a challenge to even the best of the conductors with a natural feel for the Verdian melodic line and idiom. None has been considered to have had this feel more than Arturo Toscanini. His presence in the orchestra of La Scala at the premiere of Othello, gave him many privileged insights, albeit his tendency in his later years to over-drive the tempi detracted from them. But as with the famous 1956 audio recording of Falstaff conducted by Karajan the man on the rostrum can make or break a performance. That Karajan performance scintillated and was recorded at a time when the conductor on this performance, Carlo Maria Giulini, was dominating the opera scene at La Scala. Much of his work in that theatre was in association with the Luchino Visconti in charge of the production side as was the case in the memorable performances of Don Carlo at Covent Garden in 1958. Recollecting those cooperative occasions Giulini recounted how conductor and producer would attend all the rehearsals of the other. In that way a dramatically cohesive whole ended up on stage; many memorable performances of that level of cooperation are still remembered and recounted by those privileged to have been present. By the end of the nineteen-sixties opera production and producers had changed as had singers' attitudes and Giulini, a man of deep feelings and belief, found himself out of sympathy with the developments. In consequence he withdrew his significant insights into the conducting of opera, and particularly Verdi, from staged performances and also the recording studio. With promises of full commitment of all concerned his record company tempted him back into the recording studio for Verdi's Rigoletto with Domingo, Cappuccilli and Cotrubas (DG Originals 457 753-2). With that hurdle surmounted negotiations for him to conduct a staged production of Falstaff shared

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between Los Angeles, Covent Garden and Florence in 1982-83 were successful. A live audio recording was made in Los Angeles and issued by DG with the staged performance at Covent Garden being recorded for TV transmission by Brian Large. How far Giulini was able to stipulate a traditional production has been debated. What is certain is that Hayden Griffin's sets, Michael Stennett's costumes and Ronald Eyre's production would have been recognised by Verdi as well as pleasing Giulini. Only the first scene at the Garter Inn was rather cramped for the action that ensues.

Giulini's conducting of Falstaff is affectionate without being cloying. He is fleet as the wives do their plotting (CH 4) and the lovers serenade each other (CH 6) and appropriately serious and violent as Ford, in his jealousy, searches his house for the would-be seducer (CHs 12-13). Overall Giulini treats Falstaff with an element of seriousness that I consider to be in the plot and the music. Falstaff is not a buffa opera and the humiliations of Falstaff have a bitter flavour, which the conductor catches. In the name part Renato Bruson gives a commanding performance vocally and histrionically. His burnished baritone is full of colour, his legato and enunciation of the text full of nuance. Add the twinkling eyes of a benevolent professor and this assumption is not of an egotistical seducer. He is portly without an over-excessive belly and when he dresses up to visit the ladies and sings a mezza voce 'when I was a page' it is easy to imagine him fancying his chances (CH 9). Bruson's is a consummate portrayal fully realised. As Falstaff goes off to put on his finery Ford, fearing he is being cuckolded has his monologue. Nucci is more convincing here than in many of his Verdi portrayals although I find other audio and video recorded interpretations far superior. Katia Ricciarelli as Alice looks lovely and fines down her big voice to give a portrayal that is vocally as well as visually convincing (CH 4). Brenda Boozar as Meg is required to make less of a contribution than her colleagues and whilst looking significantly younger does her part justice. Lucia Valentina-Terrani is a traditional Quickly, her bustle making her look oversized. She is not as convincing an actress as her colleagues. Vocally she has all the notes and her facial expressions add to the sonority of those evocative reverenzas with which she approaches Falstaff (CH 7). Barbara Hendricks as Nannetta cannot quite match the sincerity of her acting with the ideal lightness of floated phrase although in the final scene under the over-large Hermes oak she is vocally most appealing (CH 20). Dalmacio Gonzales both looks the part of her ardent lover and sings with honeyed tone (CH 18). The character parts of Bardolph and Dr Caius are in the capable hand of stalwarts Francis Egerton and Michael Sells. --- Robert J Farr, musicweb-international.com

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