

May 2, 2019 – Otto Nicolai's *Die Lustigen Weiber von Windsor*

A German adaptation of Shakespeare's comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is featured on this week's Opera House: Otto Nicolai's *Die Lustigen Weiber von Windsor*. The roguish Sir John Falstaff also appears in Shakespeare's *Henry IV*. In addition to this work, Falstaff has inspired several other operatic composers: Antonio Salieri's *Falstaff* (1799), Giuseppe Verdi's *Falstaff* (1893), Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Sir John in Love* (1928), and Gordon Getty's *Plump Jack* (1984). Nicolai wrote both music and libretto for his setting of *Merry Wives*, completing the work in 1848. The premiere took place at the Royal Opera House in Berlin on March 9, 1849.

In fifteenth-century Windsor, Falstaff (bass **Gottlob Frick**) sends love letters to Frau Fluth (soprano **Ruth-Margret Pütz**) and Frau Reich (mezzo-soprano **Gisela Litz**), who determine to teach the fat knight a lesson. Herr Fluth (baritone **Ernst Gutstein**) wishes his daughter Anna (soprano **Edith Mathis**) to marry Spärlich (tenor **Friedrich Lenz**) and repels her admirer Fenton (tenor **Fritz Wunderlich**). Falstaff, arriving for his assignation, is dumped into the Thames River in a laundry basket. The disguised Herr Flut visits Falstaff at the Garter Inn while Anne is serenaded in her garden by her admirers. Fluth institutes a search for his wife's supposed lover and Falstaff is smuggled out, disguised as a deaf old woman. In Windsor Forest, Falstaff is discomfited by the merry wives disguised as fairies, but all ends happily without malice.

Robert Heger leads the Bavarian State Orchestra and the Bavarian State Opera Chorus in this 1963 EMI recording.

Gottlob Frick sings Falstaff's drinking song "Als Büblein klein an der Mutterbrust":
https://youtu.be/IHNQivEW_L0.

This Saturday, May 4th, at 1:00 p.m., the Metropolitan Opera rebroadcasts the October 6, 2018 performance of Verdi's *Aida*. **Anna Netrebko** sings her first Met *Aida*, going toe-to-toe with **Anita Rachvelishvili** as Amneris. Other principals include **Aleksandrs Antonenko** (Radamès), **Quinn Kelsey** (Amonasro), **Dmitry Belosselskiy** (Ramfis), and **Ryan Speedo Green** (The King). **Nicola Luisotti** conducts.

Be sure to join me next Thursday, May 9th, for George Frideric Handel's *Faramondo*, a story about the legendary King of the Franks featuring **D'Anna Fortunato** in the title role. Heard in other principal roles are **Julianne Baird** (Clotilde), **Peter Castildi** (Gustavo), **Jennifer Lane** (Rosimonda), **Mary Ellen Callahan** (Adolfo), **Drew Minter** (Gernando), **Mark Singer** (Teobaldo), and **Lorie Gratis** (Childerico). Rudolph Palmer conducts the Brewer Chamber Orchestra in this 1996 Vox Classics recording.

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Bob Chapman

W. Robert Chapman, Host of the WCPE Opera House