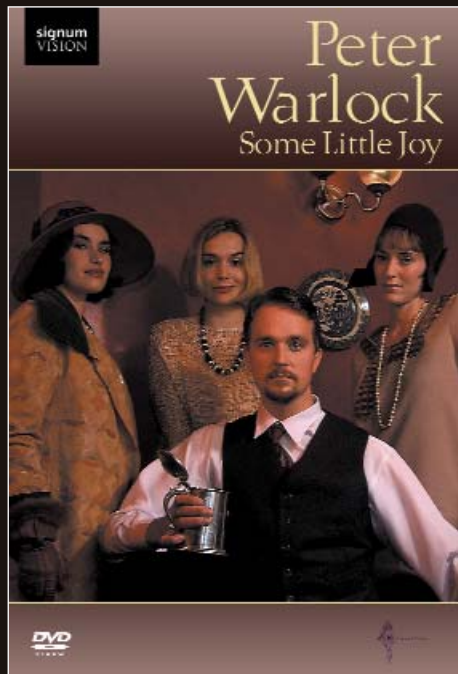


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# Falstaff



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# FALSTAFF

IN A NEW VERSION BY  
TONY BRITTEN

BASED ON THE OPERA BY VERDI AND BOITO

At a golf club near Windsor, "Big John" Falstaff props up the bar at the nineteenth hole, (the member's bar) which is where he is invariably to be found. He doesn't actually *play* golf, because no-one wants to play with him - and anyway he's probably too plump to make it beyond the first green. However he takes comfort in the fact that his bar bill is about to be settled, and all he has to do to achieve this extraordinary feat is to seduce the lovely Alice Ford, a task that he considers himself eminently qualified to undertake. As the big man blunders from one catastrophe to another and the plot races towards its uproarious conclusion, Tony Britten's trademark wit and accessibility perfectly compliments Verdi's glorious comedy

**John Falstaff**  
**Alice Ford**  
**Francis Ford QC**  
**Doctor Cajus**  
**Bardolph**  
**Pistol**  
**Mrs Quickly**  
**Meg Page**  
**Nanetta Ford**  
**Fenton**

*Ian Jervis*  
*Jan Hartley*  
*Julian Forsyth*  
*Simon Butteriss*  
*Daniel Gillingwater*  
*Simon Masterton Smith*  
*Marilyn Cutts*  
*Rosamund Shelley*  
*Katie Lovell*  
*Andy Morton*



Written & directed by Tony Britten  
Released in association with Capriol Films Ltd.  
[www.capriolfilms.co.uk](http://www.capriolfilms.co.uk)

Shot in high definition entirely on location in England.  
[www.signumrecords.com](http://www.signumrecords.com)



Based on the stage version by Music Theatre  
London produced at the Drill Hall Theatre, London

Menu screens: English	Colour mode: Colour	Screen Format: 16.9	DVD format: DVD 9	Duration: 118 mins	Subtitles: none	AC3 5.1 PCM stereo	
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Screen Agency  
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# FALSTAFF

## SCENE LIST

1.	00.00	Act 1, Scene 1 - The member's bar
2.	07.50	Falstaff's plan
3.	15.26	Act 1, Scene 2 - The ladies foursome
4.	20.40	Sneaking to Francis Ford QC
5.	22.47	The young lovers
6.	24.42	The ladies are plotting
7.	29.31	The octet
8.	32.00	Act 2, Scene 1 - Mrs Quickly's proposition
9.	39.04	Signor Fontana
10.	54.56	Act 2, Scene 2 - Alice Ford's house
11.	1.01.15	The big seduction
12.	1.04.57	Ford is home!
13.	1.10.10	Bathroom action
14.	1.13.52	Act 3, Scene 1 - off to the dump
15.	1.14.56	Falstaff the health hazard
16.	1.20.03	Mrs Quickly tries again
17.	1.25.50	Alice and Ford counter-plotting
18.	1.30.24	Act 3, Scene 2 - Herne's oak
19.	1.34.59	Herne the horny hunter
20.	1.39.00	Wood nymphs and fairies
21.	1.42.38	The revenge of the Mafia
22.	1.47.29	The denouement
23.	1.52.48	The fugue
24.	1.56.24	End titles

Behind the scenes documentary

[www.signumrecords.com](http://www.signumrecords.com)

# FALSTAFF BY VERDI AND BOITO IN A NEW VERSION BY TONY BRITTEN

**Act 1 scene 1** The member's bar of a golf club somewhere near Windsor. Big John Falstaff is a permanently "resting" actor whose one claim to fame is his role as "The Protectionist", a television series which was mercifully cancelled after the first season. Falstaff is holding court to his two taxi driver cronies, Bardolph and Pistol, who have just played a round. Falstaff doesn't actually play golf because a) he is too fat and lazy and b) he considers the green fees better spent on gin. Given that he always seems to end up picking up Bardolph and Pistol's tab and his only source of income is the odd Croatian TV repeat fee, the big man is in a bit of a bind. In bursts the rather bizarre psychiatrist Dr Cajus, who accuses Falstaff of bashing into his car the previous night and destroying the rear bumper. Further more, he is certain that Bardolph and Pistol spiked his drink and stole all his money. Amidst much derision Cajus is frightened off, and Falstaff is left to scrutinise his bar bill, which is several feet long. He decides that his inescapable charms should be brought to bear on a couple of the lady members, not only for the physical gratification he can offer but the financial perks he is likely to receive from women who are married to rich husbands. The two unlucky victims of this deluded nonsense are Alice Ford, whose husband is a wealthy solicitor, and Meg Page whose husband is - just wealthy. Falstaff fails to persuade his henchmen to be his emissaries in this matter, and so gives the barmaid notes for the ladies. The scene ends with him arguing with Bardolph and Pistol about the fact that they never stand their round - "proper rules" in these matters being a moral imperative!

**Act 1 scene 2** The ladies locker room, a taxi, a pub, the golf course. Alice Ford, an attractive forty - something and her daughter Nanette, a pretty, vivacious girl in her early twenties are preparing to play a foursome. Their fellow players are Meg Page, a similar age to Alice, and Mrs Quickly, who is of indeterminate age and indomitable cheeriness. Alice and Meg are by turns intrigued and repelled by the letters that they have received from Falstaff, and decide to take revenge on the would be seducer. Meanwhile Bardolph and Pistol meet with Ford, and fed up with the bullying of their bloated boozing buddy, inform him about Falstaff's intentions towards Mrs Ford. Dr Cajus puts his two pennyworth in, and Fenton, the handsome young pro volunteers his assistance in punishing Falstaff. His reasons for helping are less to do with revenge and more with getting in Ford's good books - he is in love with Nanette, and aware that her father considers golf pros to be in the same category as second hand car salesmen. Fenton manages to steal a few moments with Nanette on the tenth green, where his energetically dishonourable intentions become clear. The ladies formulate a plan for Mrs Quickly to inform Falstaff that Alice is eagerly awaiting a clandestine visit from the great lover.

**Act 2 scene 1.** Back in the members bar Falstaff receives a visit from Mrs Quickly, who informs him that both Meg Page and Alice Ford are very attracted to him, and indeed Alice desires a rendezvous that very afternoon whilst her husband is out. Falstaff is totally taken in by this and sends Mrs Quickly off to confirm the assignation. Bardolph comes into the bar and announces that a Signor Fontana wishes to

speak to Falstaff on the putting green. Fontana is, of course Ford, ludicrously disguised as a moustachioed Mafioso. He explains that he has been approached by a third party who needs to move a large amount of cash discreetly, which he suggests is done via Falstaff's bank account. Falstaff is delighted, but puzzled as to why he has been chosen. Fontana tells him that he has met a beautiful woman, Alice Ford who has rejected his advances. The second half of the deal is that Falstaff must seduce Mrs Ford, in order that Fontana's honour is satisfied. This is music to Falstaff's ears, and he explains that he is about to taste the delights of "l'amor" with the very same lady. Fontana is delighted by this news, and they shake hands on this extremely naughty bit of money laundering and husband baiting. Falstaff disappears to spruce himself up for his amorous encounter, and Ford is left alone to rant and rave about his faithless wife.

**Act 2 scene 2** takes place in various parts of Ford's large and luxurious house. On the landing is a battered old wardrobe which is due to be taken to the dump. Mrs Quickly arrives with the news that Falstaff has swallowed the bait, and the ladies go into action. Nanette is upset; she tells Alice that her father has decreed that she must stop seeing Fenton, that a liaison with Dr Cajus would be far more appropriate. The women are horrified by this Victorian behaviour, and Alice instructs her daughter to disregard such nonsense. Mollified, Nanette joins in with the preparations. The women hide, and Alice is left to welcome her unwelcome admirer. Falstaff arrives, and clumsily starts the grand seduction, interrupted by the (planned) arrival of Mrs Quickly, who announces that Ford, mad with jealousy is outside. Falstaff hides in the wardrobe, at which point life overtakes art and Ford, accompanied by Dr Cajus, Bardolph, Pistol and Fenton actually arrives. As the avengers rush fruitlessly round the house, Fenton and Nanette pop into the bathroom for a spot of rest and recreation, where they are discovered by her





furious father. Two men arrive to collect the junk, and Falstaff ends up being carted off to the rubbish dump, much to the entertainment of all, particularly “Signor Fontana”, who has now been let into the joke.

In **Act 3 scene 1** it is early evening and Falstaff has been forced to drink his multiple brandies outside the member’s bar because he smells so much of the rubbish dump. Naturally he is not best pleased when Mrs Quickly joins him, but she assures him that the afternoon was a terrible mistake and Alice still pines for him. She has asked to meet him on the eighteenth green, near the old tree known as Herne’s Oak, at midnight. He is to come disguised as the “dark golfer”, the ghost of a man who hung himself from the boughs of Herne’s Oak when he was caught flashing! The combination of nearly being recycled at the dump and too much brandy has obviously affected his reason and Falstaff agrees with this ludicrous idea. Alice, Meg, Nanette and Fenton now plan the denouement; it’s the annual “Merry Wives of Windsor” costume party, all are to be in fancy dress, with Nanette as the Queen of Fairies. Meanwhile Ford has not given up his matchmaking, he tells Dr Cajus that if, on this special night a holy friar kisses the Queen of Fairies, he is deemed to be attached to her - this is his big chance.

**Act 3 scene 2** commences with the arrival of Fenton and Nanette. Their tryst is disturbed by Alice, Meg and Mrs Quickly and as they leave, Falstaff arrives, to the distant chimes of midnight. He wears ridiculous antlers and has clearly been at the bottle. When Alice reappears his attempts at seduction are rudimentary at best, and he is interrupted by Meg calling for help. Alice runs away leaving Falstaff terrified by fairy like apparitions which his befuddled brain doesn’t connect with the ladies foursome. The men arrive and in the darkness Falstaff assumes they are the Mafia, come to punish him

for failing in his part of the contract. The plotters descend on the recumbent form of Falstaff, who is gibbering with terror. “Pizzica pizzica pizzica!” they prod and hit him with golf clubs, until at last their victim recognises Bardolph, and realises that this is not in fact a blood feud with la cosa nostra. He suggests that despite his faults, he has at least given everyone some entertainment. In this spirit of reconciliation Ford announces the traditional climax of the evening - the “marriage” of the Friar and the Queen of Fairies. Smirking, Ford brings the hooded figure of Dr Cajus to the veiled Queen. Alice suggests that two other hooded figures be brought together, and as veils and hoods are removed Cajus gives a smacking kiss to - Bardolph! Fenton and Nanette kiss passionately, and Ford confesses with relatively good grace that he should mind his own business where his daughter’s love life is concerned. In the great final fugue everyone agrees that laughter is the best possible antidote to all life’s vicissitudes, and the party returns to the member’s bar for a well-earned night-cap.

Duration: **118 minutes**

*Falstaff* was the crowning achievement of Verdi’s last years, made all the more remarkable by the fact that it is perhaps his only great comedy. The composer had become very wealthy, and in the ten years from 1870 had no financial need to compose. He was also disillusioned by the inadequacies of the new Italian state and concerned about the influence of French and German opera. However his relationship with the younger librettist/composer Arrigo Boito seemed to rejuvenate him and their work on *Simon Boccanegra* and *Otello* gave Verdi the confidence to tackle their last great collaboration, *Falstaff*.

This new *Falstaff* is set in and around a golf club that is perhaps not a million miles from Windsor, and what is left of its forest! Big John Falstaff, known ironically to all as “Sir John” is generally to be found drinking at the nineteenth hole, (the bar, to the uninitiated!). He doesn’t actually play golf because he is too fat and lazy and anyway no-one really wants to play with him. The complicated social structure of an English golf club becomes a mirror for the original plot; Ford doesn’t play and resents his wife Alice spending so many days out with her women’s foursome, Young Fenton is socially unacceptable because he is the course professional, and so on.

We were lucky enough to find a soon to be closed golf course deep in rural Norfolk, which we had sole access to for the shoot. Shooting there and in various other locations in Norfolk gave us plenty of scope for taking the action away from the confines of a traditional set. This was very important, because the whole point of my Music Theatre London / Capriol Films projects is to give the work the dramatic dimension which is all too often lacking in conventional stage relays. The golf course was a popular choice for my Fenton - Andy Morton, who is a keen golfer.

Our four ladies also took golf lessons, they not only had to sing beautifully but work on their swing and putt like Tiger Woods!

Verdi was very concerned that *Falstaff* be performed in a much more naturalistic fashion than his tragic operas, the libretto sparkles and the musical construction is sharp and economical. In my new version I have endeavoured to reflect the wit and pace of the original - the English translation is modern and colloquial and, as is, as usual, performed by some of my favourite artists, both opera singers who can really act and play comedy and musicals performers who have the necessary technique for Verdi’s vocal demands. The composer declared that in *Falstaff* there was “No room for artists who want to sing too much...and fall asleep on the notes” above all they would need to “loosen up their tongues and clarify their pronunciation”. Anyone who has seen my work on stage or screen over the last ten years will understand my excitement at this opportunity to realise the maestro’s intentions in precisely that manner.

Tony Britten



