

Of all the composers in Toscanini's repertory, Verdi was probably closest to him. The conductor's third appointment as music director of La Scala (1920–29) may have produced the most organic Verdi productions of the century. During that appointment the composer's operas formed the core of Toscanini's work. He directed a dozen in all, more than those of any other composer he led in the theater. The extraordinary integrity of Toscanini's Verdi at La Scala was noted by the young Herbert von Karajan, who wrote after witnessing Toscanini's production of *Falstaff* in 1929:

"From the first ... I was completely disconcerted by the perfection which had been achieved ... For the first time I grasped what "direction" meant. To be sure, Toscanini had employed a stage director; but basically the essential conception came from him. The agreement between the music and the stage performance was something totally inconceivable for us: instead of people senselessly standing around, here everything had its place and its purpose."

The key word in Karajan's comment is "agreement." We know, for example, that Toscanini took great pains with all the details of production, even to the point of objecting to the shoes worn by the cast of *Falstaff* for being anachronistic. But, most significantly, such care suggests that the overall pacing and musical approach of Toscanini's productions may have differed from his concert performances of Verdi's opera at NBC. Even some surviving NBC evidence suggests that those productions were not necessarily typical of a specific interpretive view; the dress rehearsals for *La traviata* and *Falstaff*, for example, were paced differently from their broadcast presentations. Then, too, the 1943 broadcast of the third act of *Rigoletto* is often broader and more rhythmically inflected than the 1944 concert performance released by RCA. Similarly, the 1943 broadcast account of the aria "Eri tu" (from *Ballo*) features far more *rubato* than in the 1954 broadcasts of the complete opera released by RCA. In part this may be rooted in the different styles of the two singers, Frank Valentino in 1943 and Robert Merrill in 1954. Still, it would seem that with operatic works, as well as symphonic ones, Toscanini was constantly revising his views.

But over and beyond this issue should be the obvious one that the exigencies of staging must affect the musical pacing of an opera. Consequently, some of the faster tempos in Toscanini's broadcast performances may well have been at variance with what he did in the theater. It is interesting, for example, to compare a recording of his staged 1937 Salzburg production of *Falstaff* [Pristine PACO 035] to the 1950 NBC broadcasts released by RCA. Similarities notwithstanding, the earlier version has greater breadth, wit, and (understandably) theatrical ambience. In short, although all of the conductor's broadcasts of operas are valuable documents of his view of Verdi, they should not necessarily be taken as completely representative of how he may have performed the composer in the opera house.

Mortimer H. Frank, "Arturo Toscanini, The NBC Years" (2002)

By 1950 the use of tape recording technology was widespread in the world of radio, something for which we have Bing Crosby to thank as much as anyone – but that's another story! What it means for this recording and others of the era is that we're no longer relying on direct-cut acetate discs to preserve broadcasts, and this is greatly to the benefit both of sound quality and relatively noise-free backgrounds. That said, the two broadcast recordings which make up this 1950 *Falstaff* emanated from the acoustic dead-zone that was NBC's Studio 8H, which can make the taped recordings seem even more arid than their predecessors. The combination here of both XR remastering, which compensates for inaccuracies in microphone frequency responses, and Ambient Stereo (with a little convolution reverb, bringing with it a sense of real-world opera-house acoustics), makes for a much more enjoyable listening experience – indeed the sound here would surely not be out of place in a studio recording made several decades later.

Andrew Rose

Pristine
XR

PACO 204



toscanini
conducts verdi

falstaff

giuseppe valdengo
herva nelli
nan merriman
cloë elmo
frank guarrera

nbc symphony orchestra
robert shaw chorale

live broadcast recordings, 1950

disc one
(54:54)

act one scene 1

1. Falstaff! Ola! (5:08)
2. Sei polli: sei scellini...So che andiam, la notte (2:47)
3. Ma è tempo d'assottigliar l'ingegno...V'è noto un tal, qui del paese (3:48)
4. L'Onore! Ladri! (4:07)

scene 2

5. Alice. Meg. Nannetta (1:22)
6. Fulgida Alice! amor t'offro...Quell'otre! quel tino! (3:56)
7. In due parole (1:30)
8. Pst, pst, Nannetta... Labbra di foco! (5:16)
9. Udrai quanta egli sfoggia (3:29)

act two scene 1

10. Siam pentiti e contriti... Reverenza! (6:19)
11. Alice è mia!... Va, vecchio John (1:56)
12. Signore, v'assista il cielo! (2:43)
13. C'è a Windsor una dama (6:46)
14. È sogno? o realtà (5:47)

disc two
(62:37)

scene 2

1. Presentereno un bill...Giunta all'Albergo della Giarrettiera (4:02)
2. Gaie comari di Windsor! (1:44)
3. Alfin t'ho colto, faggiante fior (3:20)
4. Quand'ero paggio (0:59)
5. Mia signora! (2:48)
6. Vien qua. Che Chiasso! (1:34)
7. C'è. C'è. Se t'agguanto! Se ti piglio! (5:08)

act three scene 1

8. Eh! Taverniere! Mondo ladro (5:48)
9. Reverenza. La bella Alice...Quando il rintocco della mezzanotte (4:55)
10. Brava. Quelle corna saranno la mia gioia! (4:40)

scene 2

11. Dal labbro il canto estasiato volla (4:30)
12. Una, due, tre, quattro (3:49)
13. Ninfel Elfi! Silfi!... Sul fin d'un soffio etesio (5:45)
14. Alto là!...Pizzica, pizzica (6:13)
15. Ogni sorta di gente dozzinale (3:38)
16. Facciamo il parentado... Tutto nel mando è burla (3:47)

CAST

Falstaff - **Giuseppe Valdenigo** (baritone)
Mistress Alice Ford - **Herva Nelli** (soprano)
Mistress Meg Page - **Nan Merriman** (mezzo-soprano)
Mistress Quickly - **Cloè Elmo** (mezzo-soprano)
Ford - **Frank Guarrera** (baritone)
Nannetta - **Teresa Stich-Randall** (soprano)
Fenton - **Antonio Madasi** (tenor)
Dr. Caius - **Gabor Carelli** (tenor)
Bardolph - **John Carmen Rossi** (tenor)
Pistol - **Norman Scott** (bass)

Robert Shaw Chorale
directed by **Robert Shaw**

NBC Symphony Orchestra
conducted by **Arturo Toscanini**

NBC broadcast performances, 1 & 8 April 1950
Studio 8H, Radio City, New York.

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