

# Greater Lansing Ubiquitous Theatre

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## Falstaff

3/22/2023

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### FALSTAFF

by Guest Reviewer T.E. Klunzinger

There's always something new: in the late 1880's, the relatively new thing in opera was the "through-composed" show (like "Les Mis" 100 years later) as opposed to the traditional "by the numbers" operas with defined sections and recitatifs.

So the Italian master Giuseppe Verdi, nearing 80 and seeking a challenge for his 28th and last opera, undertook to write a Shakespearean riff on "Henry IV" and "The Merry Wives of Windsor" and it was a comedy as well, something which he hadn't written since his second opera many years before. Like a lot of new shows of whatever time, it was not immediately embraced but then caught on, to the point where it's now part of the standard opera canon.

Ah indeed; but is it fun and good? Well yes: first off, this MSU Opera Theatre directed by Melanie Helton, now playing at Fairchild Theatre for only three more performances, is a sumptuous feast for the eyes. The simple yet elegant faux-Globe set by Kirk Domer frames the action very well, reinforced by pastoral projections and lighting design by Brent Wrobel.

The jaw-dropping, fantastic elegance of Glenn Breed's 16th Century costumes are worth the price of admission alone, no more so than in the well-populated third act when the Fairies come out in full force. Wigs and makeup by Martha Ruskai complete the effect.

And then there's the music, which moves right along pleasantly enough but takes a while to get to the really impressive numbers later on, with several singers presenting distinctive arias and a spectacular twelve-part fugue featuring fast, intricate, Italian lyrics, well worth waiting for at the very end of the show. The 26-piece MSU Symphony Orchestra conducted by Dr. Katherine Kilburn fully realizes Mr. Verdi's score in fine style.

All MSU Opera shows are double-cast for maximum performance opportunity, such that the principals of the Wednesday-Saturday and then the Friday-Sunday casts are the same. This is the Wed-Sat cast:

As the fat, swaggering, blustering Falstaff, Eduardo de la Torre is onstage for almost the entire show and his strong, rich bass-baritone prompts you to anticipate what he'll be singing next. As Ford, the powerful Pengyu Yang tears up the stage with his killer second-act aria.

The several Merry Wives add much fun and intrigue to the proceedings, particularly Alice (Paige Heidrich), Meg (Jackie Conlon) and the heavenly-voiced Nannetta (Anna

## Reviews

Read more about Jane and the creation of the G.L.U.T. on the "[About G.L.U.T.](#)" page.

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The script's setting is problematic in that much of it takes place in Falstaff's favorite hangout of the Garter Inn where he, well, hangs out and sits in a chair for seemingly long stretches at a time. But then the third act rolls around with some 30 people playing hide-and-seek in the night woods and you tend to forget about that.

We're told that this is the first Verdi production by MSU Opera in the past 20 years – let's hope it won't be that long until the next one!

<https://www.music.msu.edu/event-listing?category=11> (click on “details and tickets coming soon” to buy tickets; apparently, “soon” is now.