

11-19-1977

'Merry Wives' Well Cast

Walter Lazenby

Follow this and additional works at: http://thekeep.eiu.edu/lazenby_reviews

Recommended Citation

Lazenby, Walter, "Merry Wives' Well Cast" (1977). *Walter Lazenby Reviews*. 33.
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/lazenby_reviews/33

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Theatre Arts at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walter Lazenby Reviews by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.

'Merry Wives' Well Cast

By WALTER LAZENBY

CHARLESTON — One of Shakespeare's most lovably laughable characters is central to a comic opera being presented by Eastern's Music Theatre through Monday evening, with a matinee Sunday.

The character is Sir John Falstaff, the opera Otto Nicolai's "The Merry Wives of Windsor."

Less known than Verdi's "Falstaff," Nicolai's 50-years-older version is given here in an often rhymed modern translation from the German (Sample: "I had a date with her") and with piano accompaniment. It does not present a very "round" characterization of the merry old coward who in Shakespeare's plays boasts of his prowess in battle and loves wine and romantic adventure.

The "spine" of the action throughout is Falstaff submitting to various comic punishments for his cowardice and for the hypocrisy of swearing eternal love to two different women at once. The pattern, when it is repeated for the third time in the third act, becomes somewhat monotonous; but to offset this, Nicolai's music becomes richer and more varied as the third act unfolds.

The third act also provides visual interest: in C.P. Blanchette's magical forest

A Review

setting and Nancy Paule's goblins' costumes, though the lighting could be more colorful for the comic effect.

A plot complication that (supposedly) affords additional humor is the two-fold punishment of Mr. Ford for his inordinate jealousy of his wife.

Thus Falstaff must suffer the indignities of being dumped with dirty laundry into a pond to escape detection by the jealous man on one occasion, and on another seeking refuge in a disguise which gets him into more difficulties.

Evidently blessed with an abundance of female talent, the directors, June Johnson and Gerald Sullivan, have double-cast the major women's roles.

Dawn Decker and Becky Pennington share the role of Mistress Ford; Hillary Nicholson and Anne Timblin, that of Mistress Page; and Monica McRoberts and Carol Hancock, that of Ann Page.

At dress rehearsal I saw Decker-Nicholson-McRoberts, who play again on

Saturday and Monday nights.

That Decker and Nicholson have had stage experience is apparent from their ease, and vocally both are quite good. One little deficiency: lack of dramatically motivated surprise on finding that both characters have received identical letters from Sir John.

Decker's "It Sends Me to My Grave" as a solo was a musical peak for me, but it lacked the dramatic edge of playful irony: it is not a true lament but an elaborate pretense at being outraged by Mr. Ford's accusations. But the actress again and again redeems her performance with charming and appropriate facial expressions.

McRoberts makes a striking and convincing initial entrance as the distraught girl seeking to marry a suitor of her own rather than her parents' choosing.

Peter Samuel's comical bearing and face and his deep, rich voice make his Falstaff outstanding; but it's a pity that he couldn't have been made to look older. I simply didn't see him as the old winesack and windbag.

Well cast as Slender, Terry Kelly is perfectly delightful in his ridiculous costume, with his affected lisp, and in voice and acting.

Saturday 19 November 1977