

The Merry Wives of Windsor

Audition Pieces

Directors Note - remember that this is comedy, not high drama! Think farce and even pantomime.

Mistress Ford, Mistress Page & Falstaff

FALSTAFF.

Mistress Ford, your sorrow hath eaten up my sufferance. But are you sure of your husband now?

MISTRESS FORD.

He's a-birding, sweet Sir John.

MISTRESS PAGE.

[*Within.*] What ho, gossip Ford, what ho!

MISTRESS FORD.

Step into the chamber, Sir John.

Exit Falstaff.

Enter Mistress Page.

MISTRESS PAGE.

How now, sweetheart, who's at home besides yourself?

MISTRESS FORD.

Why, none but mine own people.

MISTRESS PAGE.

Indeed?

MISTRESS FORD.

No, certainly.

[*Aside to her.*] Speak louder.

MISTRESS PAGE.

Truly, I am so glad you have nobody here.

MISTRESS FORD.

Why?

MISTRESS PAGE.

Why, woman, your husband is in his old lunes again.

MISTRESS FORD.

How near is he, Mistress Page?

MISTRESS PAGE.

Hard by, at street end. He will be here anon.

MISTRESS FORD.

I am undone! The knight is here.

MISTRESS PAGE.

Why, then, you are utterly shamed, and he's but a dead man. What a woman are you! Away with him, away with him! Better shame than murder.

MISTRESS FORD.

Which way should he go? How should I bestow him? Shall I put him into the basket again?

Enter Falstaff.

FALSTAFF.

No, I'll come no more i' the basket. May I not go out ere he come?

MISTRESS PAGE.

Alas, three of Master Ford's brothers watch the door with pistols, that none shall issue out, otherwise you might slip away ere he came. But what make you here?

FALSTAFF.

What shall I do? I'll creep up into the chimney.

MISTRESS FORD.

There they always use to discharge their birding-pieces.

MISTRESS PAGE.

Creep into the kiln-hole.

FALSTAFF.

Where is it?

MISTRESS FORD.

He will seek there, on my word. Neither press, coffer, chest, trunk, well, vault, but he hath an abstract for the remembrance of such places, and goes to them by his note. There is no hiding you in the house.

FALSTAFF.

I'll go out then.

MISTRESS PAGE.

If you go out in your own semblance, you die, Sir John—unless you go out disguised.

MISTRESS FORD.

How might we disguise him?

MISTRESS PAGE.

Alas the day, I know not. There is no woman's gown big enough for him; otherwise he might put on a hat, a muffler, and a kerchief, and so escape.

FALSTAFF.

Good hearts, devise something. Any extremity rather than a mischief.

MISTRESS FORD.

My maid's aunt, the fat woman of Brentford, has a gown above.

MISTRESS PAGE.

On my word, it will serve him. She's as big as he is. And there's her thrummed hat, and her muffler too.—Run up, Sir John.

MISTRESS FORD.

Go, go, sweet Sir John. Mistress Page and I will look some linen for your head.

MISTRESS PAGE.

Quick, quick! We'll come dress you straight; put on the gown the while.

Exit Falstaff

MISTRESS FORD.

I would my husband would meet him in this shape. He cannot abide the old woman of Brentford; he swears she's a witch, forbade her my house, and hath threatened to beat her.

MISTRESS PAGE.

Heaven guide him to thy husband's cudgel and the devil guide his cudgel afterwards!

MISTRESS FORD.

But is my husband coming?

MISTRESS PAGE.

Ay, in good sadness is he, and talks of the basket too, howsoever he hath had intelligence.

Falstaff & Mistress Quickly

MISTRESS QUICKLY.

Give your worship good morrow.

FALSTAFF.

Good morrow, goodwife.

MISTRESS QUICKLY.

Shall I vouchsafe your worship a word or two?

FALSTAFF.

Two thousand, fair woman; and I'll vouchsafe thee the hearing.

MISTRESS QUICKLY.

There is one Mistress Ford, sir—I pray, come a little nearer this ways. I myself dwell with Master Doctor Caius.

FALSTAFF.

Well, on; Mistress Ford, you say—

MISTRESS QUICKLY.

Your worship says very true. I pray your worship come a little nearer this ways.

FALSTAFF.

I warrant thee, nobody hears. Mine own people, mine own people.

MISTRESS QUICKLY.

Are they so? God bless them, and make them His servants!

FALSTAFF.

Well, Mistress Ford, what of her?

MISTRESS QUICKLY.

Why, sir, she's a good creature. Lord, Lord, your worship's a wanton! Well, heaven forgive you, and all of us, I pray!

FALSTAFF.

Mistress Ford, come, Mistress Ford.

MISTRESS QUICKLY.

Marry, this is the short and the long of it: never a wife in Windsor leads a better life. Do what she will, take all, pay all, all is as she will. You have brought her into such a canaries as 'tis wonderful. The best courtier of them all, when the court lay at Windsor, could never get an eye-wink of her. And, I warrant you, they could never get her so much as sip on a cup with the proudest of them all.

FALSTAFF.

But what says she to me? Be brief, my good she-Mercury.

MISTRESS QUICKLY.

Marry, she hath received your letter, for the which she thanks you a thousand times; and she gives you to notify that her husband will be absence from his house between ten and eleven.

FALSTAFF.

Ten and eleven?

MISTRESS QUICKLY.

Ay, forsooth; and then you may come and see the picture, she says, that you wot of. Master Ford, her husband, will be from home. Alas, the sweet woman leads an ill life with him. He's a very jealousy man; she leads a very frampold life with him, good heart.

FALSTAFF.

Ten and eleven. Woman, commend me to her; I will not fail her.

Page & Ford

PAGE

How now, Master Ford?

FORD.

You heard what this knave told me, did you not?

PAGE.

Yes, and you heard what the other told me?

FORD.

Do you think there is truth in them?

PAGE.

Hang 'em, slaves! I do not think the knight would offer it, but these that accuse him in his intent towards our wives are a yoke of his discarded men, very rogues, now they be out of service.

FORD.

Were they his men?

PAGE.

Marry, were they.

FORD.

I like it never the better for that. Does he lie at the Garter?

PAGE.

Ay, marry, does he. If he should intend this voyage toward my wife, I would turn her loose to him; and what he gets more of her than sharp words, let it lie on my head.

FORD.

I do not misdoubt my wife, but I would be loath to turn them together. A man may be too confident. I would have nothing lie on my head. I cannot be thus satisfied.

Evans, Shallow & Slender

SHALLOW.

Sir Hugh, persuade me not. I will make a Star Chamber matter of it. If he were twenty Sir John Falstaffs, he shall not abuse Roberta Shallow.

EVANS.

Yes, py'r Lady. If Sir John Falstaff have committed disparagements unto you, I am of the Church, and will be glad to do my benevolence to make atonements and compremises between you.

SHALLOW.

Ha! O' my life, if I were young again, the sword should end it.

EVANS.

It is petter that friends is the sword, and end it; and there is also another device in my prain, which peradventure prings goot discretions with it. There is Anne Page, which is daughter to Master George Page, which is pretty virginity.

SLENDER.

Mistress Anne Page? She has brown hair, and speaks small like a woman?

EVANS.

It is that fery person for all the 'orld, as just as you will desire, and seven hundred pounds of moneys, and gold, and silver, is her grandsire upon his death's-bed—Got deliver to a joyful resurrections!—give, when she is able to overtake seventeen years old. It were a goot motion if we leave our pribbles and prabbles, and desire a marriage between Master Abraham and Mistress Anne Page.

SHALLOW.

Did her grandsire leave her seven hundred pound?

EVANS.

Ay, and her father is make her a petter penny.

SHALLOW.

I know the young gentlewoman; she has good gifts.

EVANS.

Seven hundred pounds, and possibilities, is goot gifts.

SHALLOW.

Well, let us see honest Master Page. Is Falstaff there?

EVANS.

Shall I tell you a lie? I do despise a liar as I do despise one that is false, or as I despise one that is not true. The knight Sir John is there, and I beseech you be ruled by your well-willers. I will peat the door for Master Page.

Dr Caius & John Rugby (also for Simple as John Rugby)

CAIUS.
Jack Rugby!

RUGBY.
Sir?

CAIUS.
Vat is de clock, Jack?

RUGBY.
'Tis past the hour, sir, that Sir Hugh promised to meet.

CAIUS.
By gar, he has save his soul, dat he is no come. He has pray his Pible well dat he is no come. By gar, Jack Rugby, he is dead already, if he be come.

RUGBY.
He is wise, sir; he knew your worship would kill him if he came.

CAIUS.
By gar, de herring is no dead so as I vill kill him. Take your rapier, Jack; I vill tell you how I vill kill him.

RUGBY.
Alas, sir, I cannot fence.

CAIUS.
Villainy, take your rapier.

RUGBY.
Forbear; here's company.

Pistol & Nym (also for Bardolph)

PISTOL

Let vultures gripe thy guts! For gourd and fullam holds,
And high and low beguile the rich and poor.
Tester I'll have in pouch when thou shalt lack,
Base Phrygian Turk!

NYM.

I have operations in my head which be humours of revenge.

PISTOL.

Wilt thou revenge?

NYM.

By welkin and her star!

PISTOL.

With wit or steel?

NYM.

With both the humours, I.
I will discuss the humour of this love to Ford.

PISTOL.

And I to Page shall eke unfold
How Falstaff, varlet vile,
His dove will prove, his gold will hold,
And his soft couch defile.

NYM.

My humour shall not cool. I will incense Ford to deal with poison, I will possess him with yellowness, for the revolt of mine is dangerous. That is my true humour.

PISTOL.

Thou art the Mars of malcontents. I second thee. Troop on.

Host of the Garter. Caius & Evans

HOST.

Disarm them, and let them question. Let them keep their limbs whole and hack our English.

CAIUS.

I pray you, let-a me speak a word with your ear. Verefore will you not meet-a me?

EVANS.

[*Aside to Caius.*] Pray you, use your patience. In good time.

CAIUS.

By gar, you are de coward, de Jack dog, John ape.

EVANS.

[*Aside to Caius.*] Pray you, let us not be laughing stocks to other men's humours. I desire you in friendship, and I will one way or other make you amends.

[*Aloud.*] By Jeshu, I will knog your urinal about your knave's cogscorb.

CAIUS.

Diable! Jack Rugby, mine Host de Jarteer, have I not stay for him to kill him? Have I not, at de place I did appoint?

EVANS.

As I am a Christians soul, now look you, this is the place appointed. I'll be judgment by mine host of the Garter.

HOST.

Peace, I say, Gallia and Gaul, French and Welsh, soul-curer and body-curer!

CAIUS.

Ay, dat is very good; excellent.

HOST.

Peace, I say! Hear mine host of the Garter. Shall I lose my doctor? No, he gives me the potions and the motions. Shall I lose my parson, my priest, my Sir Hugh? No, he gives me the proverbs and the no-verbs. [*To Caius.*] Give me thy hand, terrestrial; so. [*To Evans.*] Give me thy hand, celestial; so. Boys of art, I have deceived you both. I have directed you to wrong places. Your hearts are mighty, your skins are whole, and let burnt sack be the issue. Come, lay their swords to pawn. Follow me, lads of peace, follow, follow, follow.

Anne Page & Fenton

FENTON.

I see I cannot get thy father's love;
Therefore no more turn me to him, sweet Nan.

ANNE.

Alas, how then?

FENTON.

Why, thou must be thyself.
He doth object I am too great of birth,
And that my state being galled with my expense,
I seek to heal it only by his wealth.
Besides these, other bars he lays before me:
My riots past, my wild societies—
And tells me 'tis a thing impossible
I should love thee but as a property.

ANNE.

Maybe he tells you true.

FENTON.

No, heaven so speed me in my time to come!
Albeit I will confess thy father's wealth
Was the first motive that I wooed thee, Anne,
Yet, wooing thee, I found thee of more value
Than stamps in gold or sums in sealed bags.
And 'tis the very riches of thyself
That now I aim at.

ANNE.

Gentle Master Fenton,
Yet seek my father's love, still seek it, sir.
If opportunity and humblest suit
Cannot attain it, why then—hark you hither.

Anne Page, Shallow & Slender

SHALLOW.

[*To Slender.*] She's coming; to her, coz. O boy, thou hadst a father!

SLENDER.

I had a father, Mistress Anne; my aunt can tell you good jests of him.—Pray you, aunt, tell Mistress Anne the jest how my father stole two geese out of a pen, good aunt.

SHALLOW.

Mistress Anne, my cousin loves you.

SLENDER.

Ay, that I do, as well as I love any woman in Gloucestershire.

SHALLOW.

He will maintain you like a gentlewoman.

SLENDER.

Ay, that I will.

SHALLOW.

He will make you a hundred and fifty pounds jointure.

ANNE.

Good Mistress Shallow, let him woo for himself.

SHALLOW.

Marry, I thank you for it, I thank you for that good comfort.—She calls you, coz; I'll leave you.

ANNE.

Now, Master Slender.

SLENDER.

Now, good Mistress Anne.

ANNE.

What is your will?

SLENDER.

My will? 'Od's heartlings, that's a pretty jest indeed! I ne'er made my will yet, I thank heaven. I am not such a sickly creature, I give heaven praise.

ANNE.

I mean, Master Slender, what would you with me?

SLENDER.

Truly, for mine own part I would little or nothing with you. Your father and my aunt hath made motions. If it be my luck, so; if not, happy man be his dole. They can tell you how things go better than I can. You may ask your father.