Audition Pack – *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor*

Musical Director's Notes

I'm Anna, a third-year music student and Musical Director of this year's CUOS Mainshow. I'm very excited to bring this delightful, yet underperformed opera to life, and am looking forward to hearing your auditions!

Set during the reign of Henry V, *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor* (The Merry Wives of Windsor) is Otto Nicolai's wonderful adaptation of Shakespeare's play of the same name. The opera premiered in 1849 at the Königliches Opernhaus in Berlin. The story follows two noble ladies – Frau Fluth and Frau Reich – as they hatch a plan to outwit and prank the pompous John Falstaff, who is trying to woo both of them simultaneously. Meanwhile, a secondary romantic subplot unfolds as the young lovers Anna Reich (daughter of Frau Reich) and Fenton attempt to continue their love affair, while Anna's parents have different suitors in mind for her (Spärlich and Cajus). My vision for this production is to create a vivid, witty, and theatrically engaging staging that highlights the opera's dual nature as both romantic and comic. Nicolai himself called it a *komisch-fantastische Oper* (a *comic-fantasy opera*). The music is typical early German Romantic (think Mendelssohn) with some Italian influences.

The opera has plenty of varied characters, from scheming and witty women to pompous old men to pining lovers, so there's something for every voice type. I plan that the whole opera will be staged in German, but please don't worry about having good German pronunciation at this point – I'm not expecting prior German knowledge, I just want to see you bring the character to life! I've detailed the extracts for audition of each character below – the full vocal score can be found on IMSLP. If you have any questions about any of the roles or what's required in the audition, don't hesitate to contact me! (ag2288@cam.ac.uk)

The shows will be from the 26th to 28th February, with an 8pm start each evening and also a 2pm matinée on the 28th.

Auditions will be on the 29th and 30th November, and 2nd December. Please use the following doodle poll to book in a time for your audition: https://doodle.com/sign-up-sheet/participate/04a1982b-4e92-46b3-9564-af9ea0ddc9a1/select.

If you cannot make any of these times, no problem, don't hesitate to reach out to me and we can arrange another time! Auditions are planned to take place in Catz music room, but this will be confirmed with you once you've booked a slot.

Preparation for the audition

Ahead of the audition please prepare BOTH a song of your choice which suits your vocal range AND the relevant extract, from those detailed below, for the character you're auditioning for. We will have an accompanist at each audition, and please aim for a song with an easily sight-readable piano accompaniment. If you'd like to sing something with a complicated accompaniment, please bring your own accompanist and notify me of this in advance. There will be a copy of each extract in the audition room; being off-book is not required.

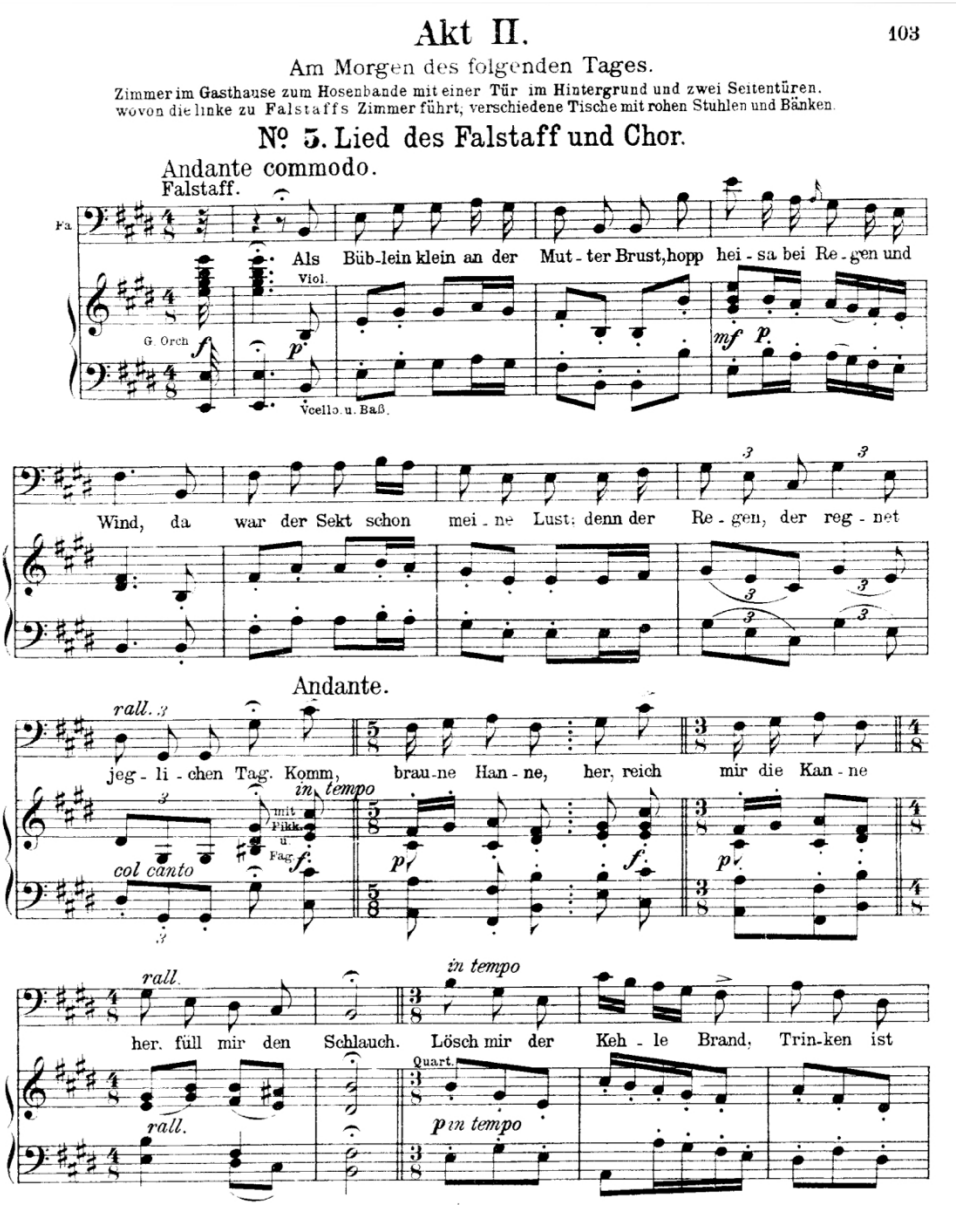
Falstaff (bass)

Falstaff is an ageing knight who believes he can charm any woman, and attempts to woo both Frau Fluth and Frau Reich simultaneously. He is bold and misguided, and takes himself very seriously, although the world around him rarely does. He dominates his scenes with a large ego and hilarious comic presence.

Singing extract

Act II, Nr 5

From beginning - ‘Als Büblein klein an der Mutter Brust’ to end of ‘Füll mir den Schlauch!’



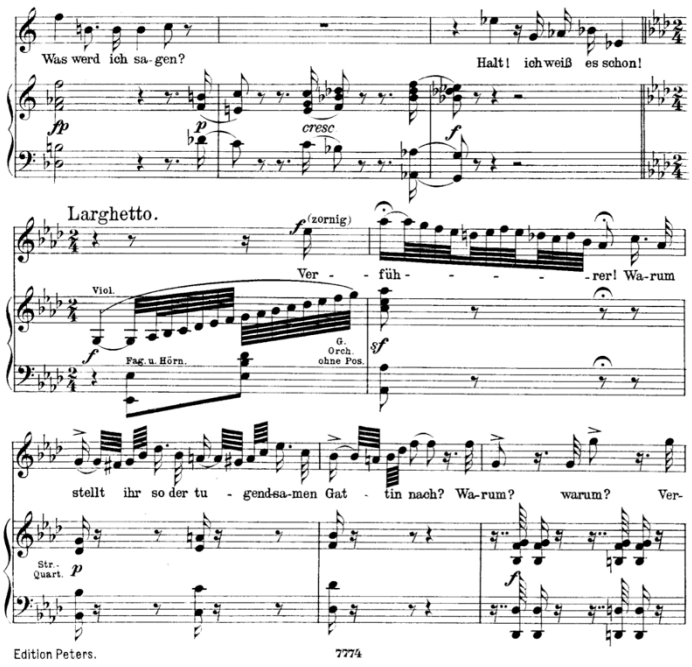
Frau Fluth (soprano)

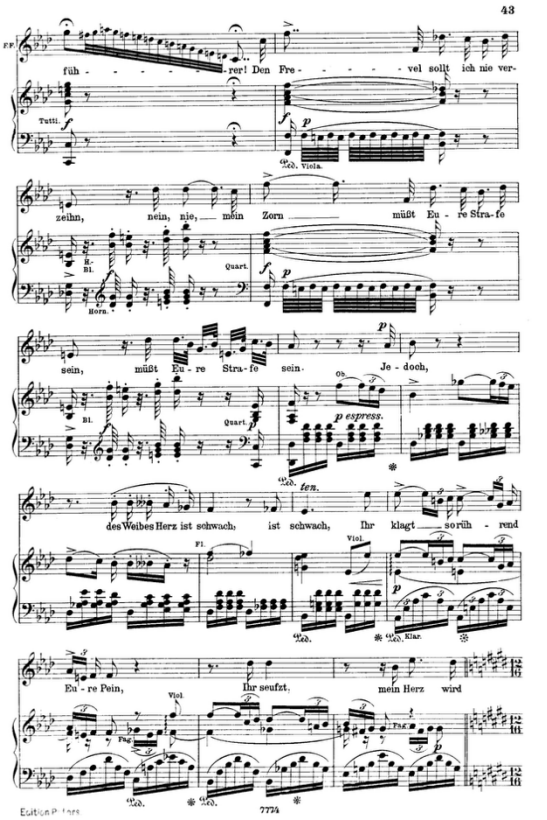
Frau Fluth is a strong female lead, using her wit and intelligence to expose Falstaff's plans. She enjoys plotting her revenge but shows warmth and intelligence as she interacts with the other characters.

Singing extract

Act I, Nr 3

From 'halt! Ich weiß es schon!' to end of 'Ihr klagt so rührend Eure Pein'





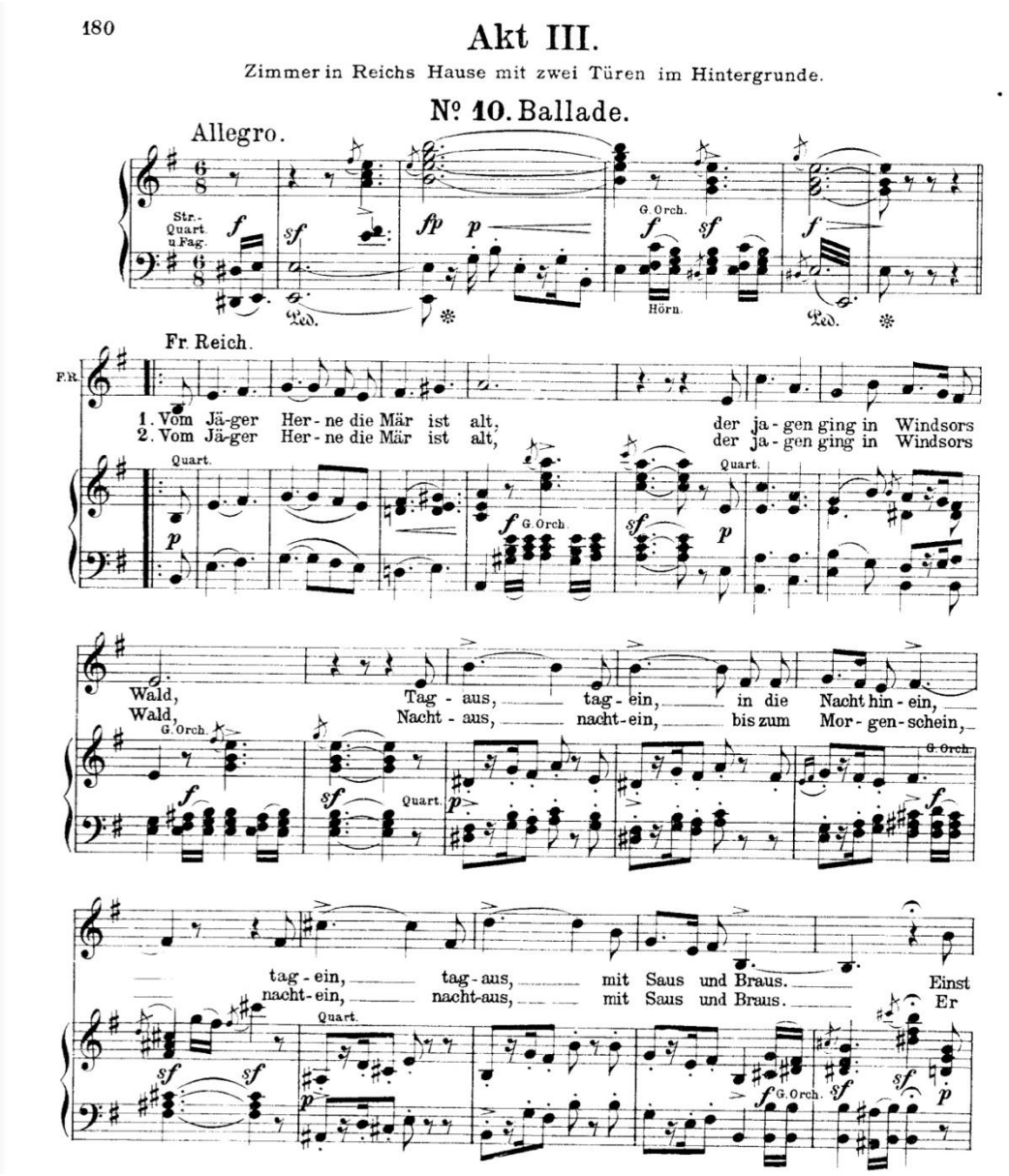
Frau Reich (mezzo-soprano)

Frau Reich is Frau Fluth's partner-in-crime, working with her to unravel Falstaff's intentions and teach him a lesson. She is intelligent and dryly humorous and the measured counterpart to Frau Fluth.

<u>Singing extract</u>

Act III Nr 10 – Ballade

From 'vom Jäger Herne' to 'mit Saus und Braus'

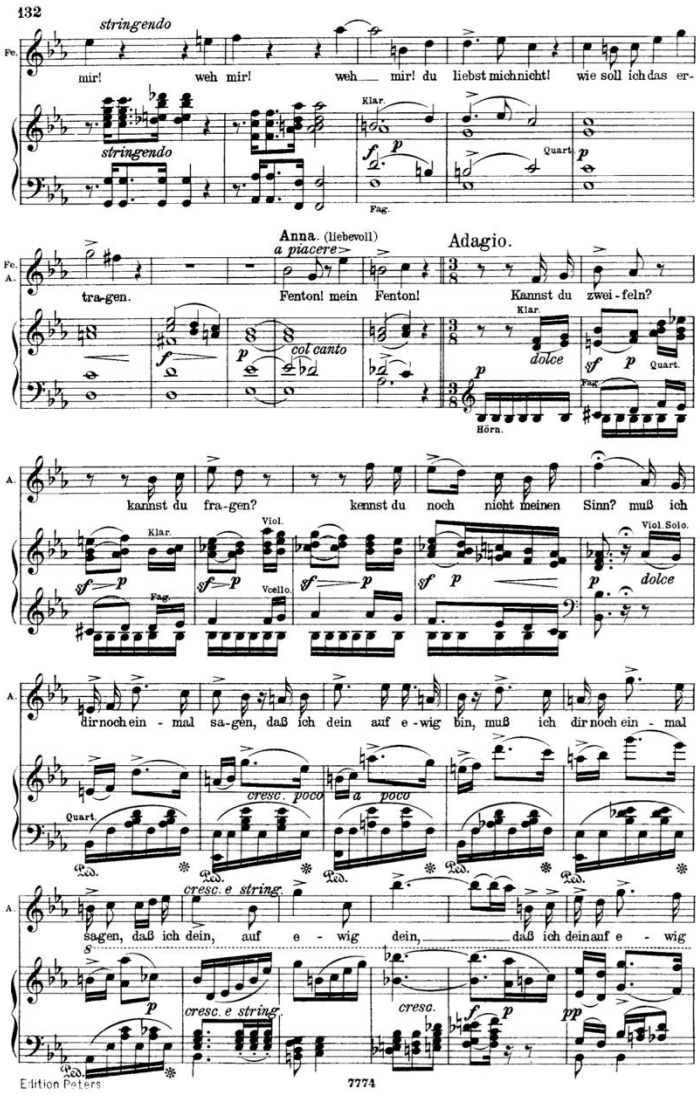


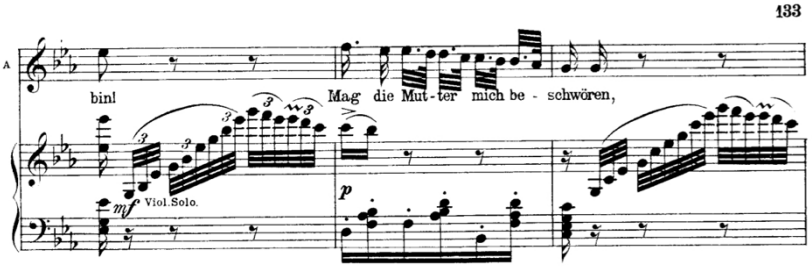
Anna (soprano)

Anna is at the centre of the romantic relationships which unfold in this opera. She has three suitors vying for her love, and though she feels sure in her love for Fenton, her parents have other plans for her. Mature and intelligent, she attempts to work around her parents' plans whilst remaining faithful to Fenton.

Act II, Nr 7c

From 'Fenton, mein Fenton' to 'daß ich dein auf Ewig bin'





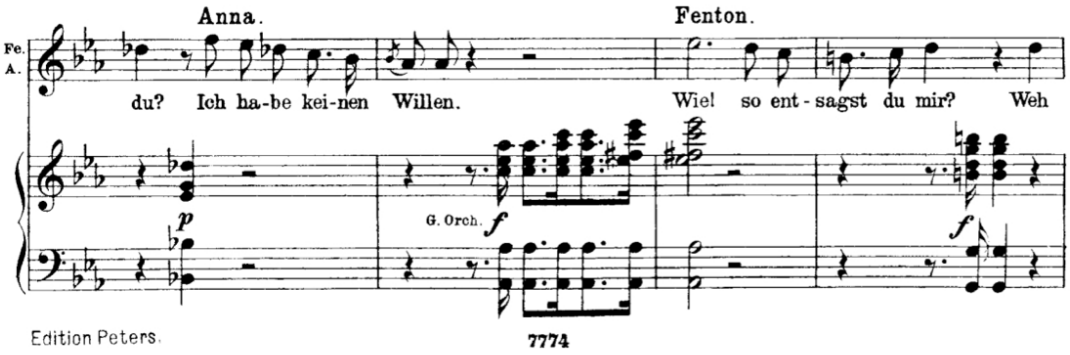
Fenton (tenor)

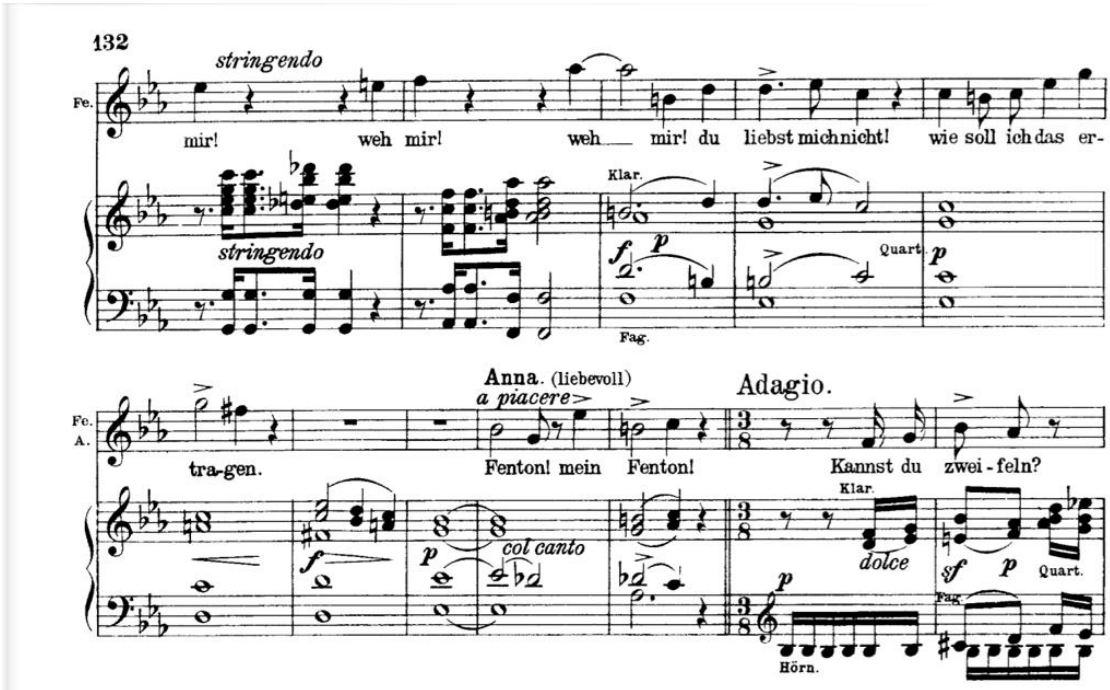
As Anna's love interest, Fenton is sincere and genuine in his affection for her. He brings a lyrical and earnest edge to the opera, which otherwise has many comic characters.

<u>Singing extract</u>

Act II, Nr 7c

From 'Wie so entsagst du mir?' to 'wie soll ich das ertragen'





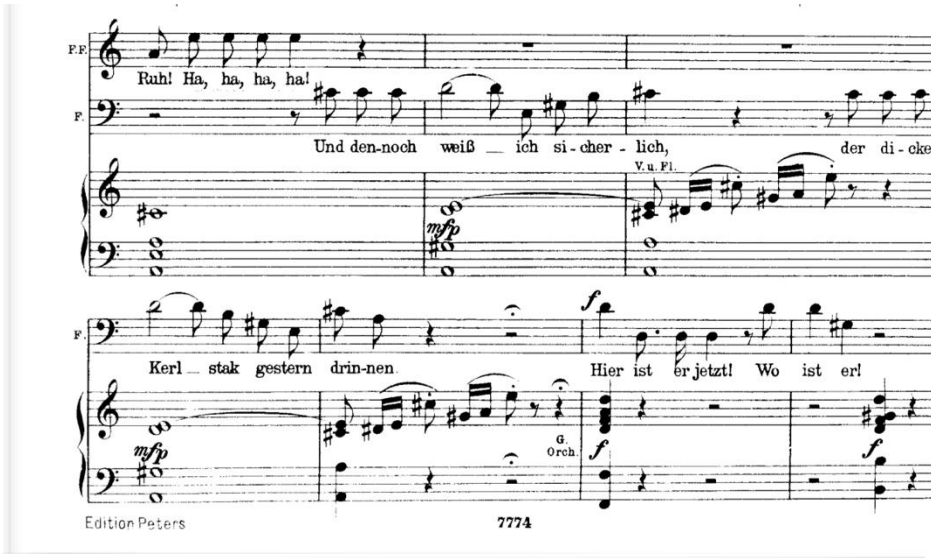
Herr Fluth (baritone)

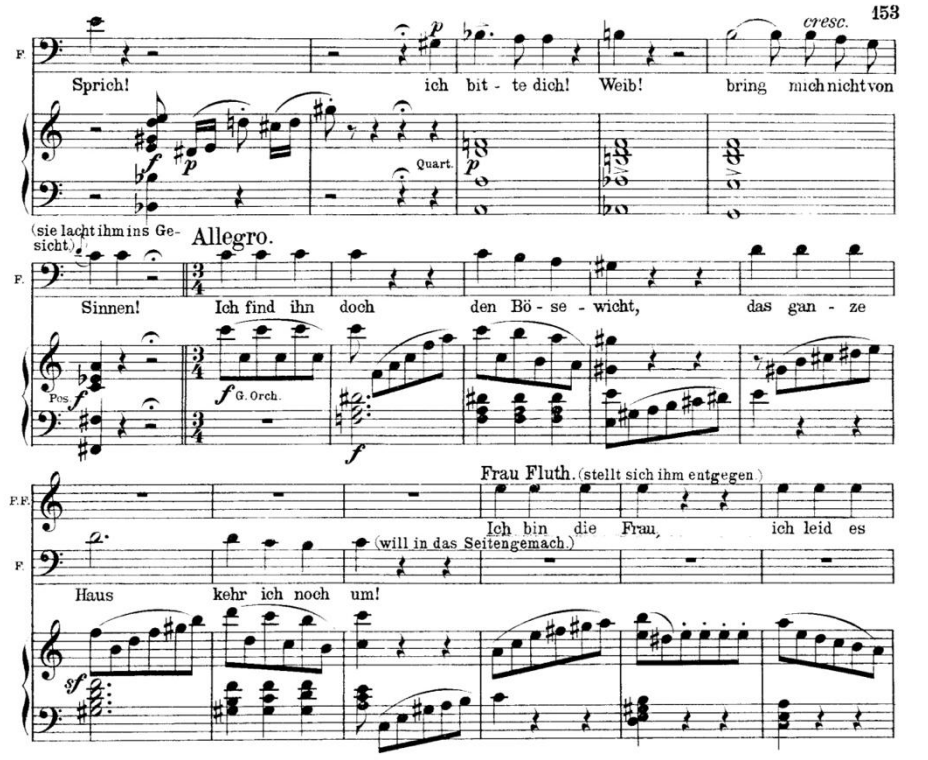
Frau Fluth's jealous husband, Herr Fluth is highly expressive in emotions and comedic effect. His paranoia in suspecting that his wife is being unfaithful to him leads him to a series of frantic, though hilarious, attempts to catch her in wrongdoing.

<u>Singing extract</u>

Act II, Nr 8: So! Jetzt Hatt' Ich Ihn Gefangen!

From 'und den noch weiß' to 'das ganze Haus kehr ich noch um!'





Spärlich (sing same extracts as Fenton - tenor)

One of Anna's suitors, Spärlich is awkward, socially inept and easily intimidated by others, leading to him often being laughed at.

Herr Reich and Dr Cajus (sing same extracts as Falstaff – bass)

Herr Reich is the husband of Frau Reich, and a far less jealous and more relaxed foil to Herr Fluth. He is also important in guiding his daughter Anna, in her choice of suitor, becoming an anchor in the face of volatility.

Dr Cajus is one of Anna's suitors – a favourite of Frau Reich (Anna's mother) but not of Anna herself. His seriousness and sense of self-importance leads to many hilarious comic moments.