Giuseppe Verdi – Luisa Miller (Met 1982)



1. Act I
2. Act II
3. Act III

Luisa.....Katia Ricciarelli
Rodolfo.....Luciano Pavarotti
Miller.....Leo Nucci
Count Walter.....Paul Plishka
Wurm.....John Cheek
Federica.....Bianca Berini
Laura.....ClaudiaCatania
Peasant.....Lou Marcella

Nello Santi - conductor

Metropolitan Opera House January 23, 1982

Matinee Broadcast

The last important opera before Verdi's great middle period, Luisa Miller highlights the composer's efforts to move beyond the strict operatic conventions of the 1840s. It dates from a time in Verdi's career during which the public was less receptive to his work -- a period which saw the premiers of Il Corsaro, La battaglia di Legnano and Stiffelio, none of which have any significant performance history. However, Luisa Miller has managed to remain on the perimeter of the repertoire since its premiere in Naples on December 8, 1949. As was typical at the time, Verdi's librettist, Salvadore Cammarano, based Luisa Miller on a pre-existing dramatic work, namely Schiller's play, Kabale und Liebe (Schiller's plays were a very popular source for opera librettos, and Verdi had already used his Die Rauber as the basis for I Masnadieri). The plot

revolves around a pair of lovers, Rodolfo and Luisa, whose desire to marry is in conflict with the political and personal aspirations of Rodolfo's father, the somewhat nefarious Count Walter. The overture to Luisa Miller is of interest. Except for a slight quickening of the tempo at the very end, the entire piece is in one tempo and based on single theme from the third act; the thematic development Verdi brings to this single theme is rare at this time. The grander overtures to I vespri siciliani and La Forza del destino cannot match the concentrated intensity of this masterpiece. Verdi begins to depart from tradition in other ways as well. In most operas of the period, the curtain opens to a chorus and then a two-part (slow-fast) aria sung by a major character. However, in Luisa Miller, the introduction leads directly into the first aria which, although in the traditional two parts, contains numerous choral interjections. Aside from condensing what would have traditionally been two set pieces into one more compact statement, this device serves to embed the aria itself more firmly into the texture of the work, and harder to excerpt. Similarly, Rodolfo's great Act Two aria, "Quando le sere al placido," is actually a portion of the Act Two finale and, though it is easy to pull the slow section out of context, the cabaletta (the faster, contrasting section) is harder to remove. This style of embedding the arias into the entire fabric of the opera will reach its zenith in the operas of Puccini. Verdi followed convention in casting the important roles; the soprano and tenor are the young lovers, and the father is a baritone. The role of Miller is in that great line of baritone fathers which brought out Verdi's best writing, beginning with Nabucco and continuing through Rigoletto, Germont (La traviata), and ending with Ford (Falstaff). The "other woman" is, of course, a mezzo-soprano. The vocal writing of the opera does not make unusal demands on the singers, but they must all have some degree of flexibility and good dynamic control. There is also a long unaccompanied quartet preceding the Act Two finale which can prove very difficult if any of the performers have pitch problems. Although first heard at the Metropolitan Opera in 1929, it was the 1967 production there which brought the beauties of this score to public attention and established it as a permanent repertoire work. ---Richard LeSueur, Rovi

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