

**Verdi's *Luisa Miller* – a survey of the major recordings**  
by Ralph Moore

First performed in 1849, *Luisa Miller*, was the last of Verdi's middle-period, *anni de galera* operas. It was a transitional and experimental opera for Verdi, ushering in a more mature style with more lyrical elements, some interesting musical innovations and greater psychological penetration of the kind evinced by the insight of the *a cappella* quartet which ends Act II. Adapted from Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*, the plot places more emphasis upon love than intrigue and the setting is essentially realistic and bourgeois; the drama is domesticated, thus lacking the epic sweep of larger-scale operas. Musically, too, it is predominately gentler in character, employing prominent woodwind and a cantilena more in the line of Bellini; the score responds to a lighter hand, is very melodic throughout and often memorable. Nonetheless, it is a rather grim and dismal tale, ending melodramatically in the last scene which is highly dramatic and declamatory, culminating in two needless suicides and a murder. As is so often the case with Verdi, the central relationships are those between two doomed lovers and between parents and children. The father-daughter exchanges beginning Act III and Luisa's death scene are especially touching, foreshadowing *Rigoletto*.

There is one substantial role for every voice-type plus two basses, so a good cast and ensemble without weaknesses are crucial. The most celebrated item is Rodolfo's, "Quando le sere al placido" but there are lovely arias for Luisa and Miller, too, and some extended duets. As such, it has attracted great singers; Rodolfo, along with Riccardo in *Un ballo in maschera*, was among Pavarotti's favourite roles and he features below in four recordings, more than any other tenor. Domingo has recorded it twice and it has been in the repertoire of virtually every important tenor of the last sixty years – even Corelli, who ducked out of performing it at the Met and to whom the role was hardly suited. I quote from the operavivra.com website: "Plácido Domingo advanced his Met debut (if only by four days) in September 1968 when Corelli cancelled his part in Adriana Lecouvreur less than an hour before curtain time. The excuse was hoarseness [sic]."

It has been somewhat neglected by recording companies; there are only four studio and about fifty live recordings in the catalogue, whereas *Macbeth*, composed two years earlier, has over twice as many studio and live recordings, and *Rigoletto*, two years later, four times as many live and no fewer than ten times as many studio versions. Nonetheless, it remains more popular than its predecessor, *La battaglia di Legnano*, and successor, *Stiffelio*, has retained a place in the repertoire and provides a very satisfying evening's entertainment.

That relative paucity of recordings means that I consider nowhere near as many as in most previous operatic surveys but, as usual, I have confined myself to recordings in Italian and, for the most part, included live recordings only if they are both in listenable sound and of exceptional artistic quality, making a total of twelve. A whole clutch of really superb recordings was made in the 70's as the opera gained popularity and the right singers were on the circuit to perform it, then there is a As I tirelessly – and, no doubt, for some, tiresomely - observe in every survey, the standard of singing in general begins to drop off starting about a generation ago and there has not been a studio account since Levine's in 1991.

### **The Recordings**

**Mario Rossi – 1951** (live radio broadcast; mono) Cetra; Warner Fonit; Mondo Musica; Opera d'Oro Orchestra & Chorus - RAI Roma  
Luisa - Lucy Kelston  
Rodolfo - Giacomo Lauri-Volpi  
Miller - Scipio Colombo  
Walter - Giacomo Vaghi  
Federica - Miti Truccato Pace

Wurm - Duilio Baronti  
Laura - Grazia Calaresu  
Contadino - Salvatore De Tommaso

This live radio performance was broadcast marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Verdi's death and has an energised and experienced conductor, a fine orchestra and chorus and a distinguished cast recorded in clean, narrow mono, all constituting a tempting prospect for the opera aficionado. Cetra's sound could be edgy and tippy but this is perfectly acceptable, without distortion – one of the best of this provenance I have heard. However, there are some severe cuts, including the whole of one scene, such that we lose the best part of half an hour of music – most performances run to nearly two and a quarter hours whereas this is just over an hour and three-quarters.

The cast consists of distinguished singers all of whom had significant careers singing in major houses but only Lauri-Volpi is still really famous. However, he was nearly sixty here and somewhat past his best after many years on stage; his lyric-dramatic tenor has turned hard and nasal, his phrasing can be gusty and unsteady, especially in soft singing, and he sometimes goes flat; top notes are intact, however and he brings plenty of temperament to his singing, still producing thrilling sounds when in can belto mode. Lucy Kelston has a flexible, sometimes rather shrill, piping soprano but she has some lower register and sings both prettily and *con gusto*, especially in her death scene. Colombo has a neat, elegant baritone and Vaghi was a major bass of his era, sharing his contemporary Pasero's quick vibrato and dark timbre but occasionally experiencing problems with his intonation. Miti Truccato Pace is a warm-voiced Federica but her role is so severely cut that it is reduced to a few phrases; the second scene of Act 1 containing the duet where she offers her bosom to Rodolfo's sword has gone. The Wurm is adequate if a bit cloudy-voiced. Both basses' parts are trimmed. The Laura is a Minnie Mouse soubrette.

This might not be anyone's first choice given the cuts, limited sound and some vocal failings but it remains idiomatic and highly enjoyable.

**Nino Sanzogno – 1963** (live; mono) Urania; Premiere, Encore  
Orchestra & Chorus - Teatro Massimo di Palermo  
Luisa - Antonietta Stella  
Rodolfo - Giuseppe di Stefano  
Miller - Cornell MacNeil  
Walter - Raffaele Arié  
Federica - Oralia Domínguez  
Wurm - Enrico Campi  
Laura - Laura Zannini  
Contadino - Glauco Scarlini

Another starry cast promises much; it might be getting a bit late in the day in Di Stefano's short but brilliant career but he is in charge here, singing out with passion and confidence. The audience responds enthusiastically to his big aria and really he sounds as good ever. Stella, too, is in excellent voice: she has power and agility but still sounds young and sensitive; the slight break in her voice and smoky timbre remind me of Leyla Gencer. Her sustained top notes are impressive. MacNeil repeats a splendid, generous-voiced Miller which despite its robustness is capable of being softened to convey pathos. However, he may be heard to much better advantage in his studio recording conducted by Cleva. Oralia Domínguez was the finest mezzo of her era and Arié is firm and sonorous, completing a first-rate team of soloists.

Unfortunately, poor sound puts this out of court whatever its merits, so I include it here as a warning to the casual browser: this is territory only for the committed devotee of historical recordings who

wants to hear the artists in question. That is such a pity because the singing here is really excellent and Sanzogno's conducting is ideal.

**Fausto Cleva – 1965** (studio; stereo) RCA  
Orchestra & Chorus - RCA Italiana Orchestra  
Luisa - Anna Moffo  
Rodolfo - Carlo Bergonzi  
Miller - Cornell MacNeil  
Walter - Giorgio Tozzi  
Federica - Shirley Verrett  
Wurm - Ezio Flagello  
Laura - Gabriella Carturan  
Contadino - Piero De Palma

This is a good a cast as could be assembled in the mid-60's, every principal singer being a major star and working under an experienced conductor directing an orchestra wholly habituated to the Verdian idiom. Cleva conducts unobtrusively and really supports his singers but is sometimes rather brisk and unyielding.

I find the casting here marginally preferable to that of the Decca studio recording in that Caballé sounds too matronly compared with Moffo's naïveté and Milnes is a bit woolly compared with MacNeil - but Pavarotti is great there and the conducting is more exciting. Unlike too many exponents of the role of Frederica, Verrett here tames her opulent sound here to be both more vulnerable and incisive, inflecting the words sensitively. Cornell MacNeil uses his lovely, pharyngeally resonant, true Verdian baritone tastefully, if not over-subtly, Moffo sounds pure and innocent while despatching the coloratura easily and Bergonzi is his usual model of style and restraint, but still rises to the passion of "Quando le sere al placido".

My MusicWeb colleague Göran Forsling shares my admiration for this set and delineates many of its virtues so I won't further elaborate but refer you to his [review](#).

**Thomas Schippers – 1968** (live; mono) Sony; Nuova Era; Memories; Living Stage  
Orchestra & Chorus - Metropolitan Opera  
Luisa - Montserrat Caballé  
Rodolfo - Richard Tucker  
Miller - Sherrill Milnes  
Walter - Giorgio Tozzi  
Federica - Louise Pearl  
Wurm - Ezio Flagello  
Laura - Nancy Williams  
Contadino - Lou Marcella

This is yet another in the series of re-mastered issues of the Saturday matinee broadcasts from the Metropolitan Opera in what from our perspective definitely now looks like its heyday. While it stands to reason that not all of them are equally valuable, the standard has been astonishing high and serves to remind us what a really top-class opera cast looks like when drawn from a roster which has talent in depth, as opposed to today's unseemly scramble by the big houses to nab the one or two singers in the world capable of singing Verdi to the requisite standard. As they are all recorded live in mono sound, their desirability might depend upon the availability of competitive studio recordings in stereo; certainly, before you buy it, you should be sure that this issue has advantages over the 1975 Decca set made with two of the same principals, arguably a singer much better suited to the demands of the heroic tenor lead and, by and large, a superior supporting cast all recorded in splendid stereo.

However, it must be admitted that both the performance and the sound are so good on this Met set that one almost forgets it is mono.

I am certainly trying to dissuade anyone from purchasing this. For one thing, good as she is for Decca seven years later, Caballé is decidedly more delicate here in this live performance, floating her trademark top B's so seductively whereas in 1975 she goes for power more often. On the other hand, here, live at the Met, some top notes are a little shrill, Milnes is less nuanced than for Peter Maag and that more experienced conductor's direction is decidedly more subtle than Schippers' energised, even gung-ho, approach. The *a cappella* quartet which ends Act II is here beautifully sung with no sagging of pitch and lovely ensemble in the matching of the voices.

There is no doubt that we have some faintly inappropriate casting with a young, virile-sounding Milnes as Luisa's father, supposedly "un vecchio debole" (weak old man) and Richard Tucker in the latter years of his career sounding heroic but decidedly mature for the callow, headstrong lover who rebels against his father's wishes. This is another reason why the later Decca set is preferable with a fresh-sounding Pavarotti and Milnes' more seasoned characterisation of Miller. And while Tucker's passion is impressive and clearly appreciated by the audience, all those gulps and sobs can become irritating on repeated listening. Still, he is good voice and his fans will know what to expect. Flagello is malice incarnate as Wurm, Tozzi resonant as the Count, Louise Pearl adequate as Federica.

There is some great singing here, not least in the superb finale. This Sony issue makes a very good case for the dramatic impact of this opera - as long as you can manage without a libretto.

**Alberto Erede – 1974** (live, stereo) *Mitridate Ponto*; *Orfeo*

Orchestra & Chorus - Wiener Staatsoper

Luisa - Lilian Sukis

Rodolfo - Franco Bonisolti

Miller - Giuseppe Taddei

Walter - Bonaldo Giaiotti

Federica - Christa Ludwig

Wurm - Malcolm Smith

Laura - Milkana Nikolova

Contadino - Horst Nitsche

I was unfamiliar with Lithuanian-Canadian soprano Lilian Sukis but she is part of a distinguished cast here under a conductor who knew his Verdi inside-out. She has a light, slightly shrill sound – pleasant and flexible but of no great distinction, somewhat lacking in heft and tonal variety. Taddei displays more than a little wear in his voice not entirely inapt for the retired soldier but he lacks the easy resonance, sustained tone and top notes of baritones in fresher voice. Malcolm Smith makes a powerful but windy, coarse-voiced Wurm. Things look up with the real quality voices here of a trio of singers: Bonisolti, Ludwig and Giaiotti. The bass has a big, black, incisive sound and frankly I have never heard anything sung by Bonisolti which I do not like. He as a great tenor, huge of voice with ringing top notes but also capable of considerable delicacy despite the robustness of his basic sound. He interpolates an easy, beautiful top D-flat at the end of his big aria – stunning. Ludwig's vibrato is rather more pronounced here than is usual but the expressive and tonal variety she displays is most winning; she makes a real character out of Federica, who can come across as bland.

The sound is excellent, live stereo – apart from the opening *Sinfonia*, which seems to have been derived from a different source – then the hiss suddenly ceases and it becomes so full and clear it could be digital, providing an open, atmospheric, well-balanced acoustic redolent of live theatre. I want this for Bonisolti and Ludwig, but the inconsistency of casting across the board with weaknesses in some leads prevents this from being a prime recommendation.

**Jesús López Cobos – 1974** (live; mono) Bella Voce; Live Opera Heaven  
 Orchestra & Chorus - San Francisco Opera  
 Luisa - Katia Ricciarelli  
 Rodolfo - Luciano Pavarotti  
 Miller - Louis Quilico  
 Walter - Giorgio Tozzi  
 Federica - Huguette Tourangeau  
 Wurm - Dieter Weller  
 Laura - Gwendolyn Jones  
 Contadino - Joseph Frank

Just as Pavarotti pretty much cornered the role of Rodolfo in the 70's, in the same era Ricciarelli made something of a specialism of her portrayal of Luisa, but by the time she came to make a studio recording – albeit still relatively early in her career – parts of her voice were already thin and breathy and she had lost power. Here, her delicate, plangent timbre is still intact; she remains in many ways the ideal exponent of the role of Lucia because she suggests a frail, vulnerable innocence, yet has the amplitude to rise to the more dramatic moments. Pavarotti's many and manifest virtues in the role of Rodolfo are as much in evidence here as in the three other recordings reviewed below; he was a model of consistency in the 70's.

Their co-singers are also feature big names. Louis Quilico's clean, powerful baritone sounds rather too youthful to characterise Miller ideally – a frequent problem in these recordings – but his singing provides almost unalloyed pleasure. His voice loosened later in his career but here he is firm and expressive with ringing top notes; the audience respond enthusiastically to his arias – indeed, the applause for all the singers is frequently and deservedly tumultuous. Dieter Weller's Wurm is dark and threatening without resorting to growl or wobble. I have heard Tozzi in somewhat better voice than here – he has lost a bit of resonance – but he is still impressive and again, like Quilico, receives appreciative applause for his solo. While acknowledging the peculiarity of Huguette Tourangeau's vocal production I confess a weakness for its dark colouring, exaggerated lower register and fast vibrato and she makes a vibrant, dignified Federica.

López Cobos directs an alert, energised performance and gets good playing out of orchestra which could be variable and the chorus is excellent. The mono sound is very good, if just a tad tubby and there is a bit of coughing. This is thoroughly enjoyable without weaknesses and a definite contender for top choice among live performances; it was the surprise of this survey. What a pleasure it would have been to be present in the audience that night.

**Peter Maag – 1974** (live radio broadcast; stereo) Intaglio; Myto; Arts Archive  
 Orchestra & Chorus - RAI Torino  
 Luisa - Gilda Cruz-Romo  
 Rodolfo - Luciano Pavarotti  
 Miller - Matteo Manuguerra  
 Walter - Raffaele Arié  
 Federica - Cristina Angelakova  
 Wurm - Ferruccio Mazzoli  
 Laura - Anna Di Stasio  
 Contadino - Walter Artioli

This live radio broadcast from 1974 is in excellent stereo sound with little audience noise apart from a little more hiss than in Pavarotti's studio version, the occasional cough and applause only at the end of the acts. It fields three absolutely first-rate singers in the leading roles and a good supporting cast. It scores over both excellent studio recordings starring Moffo and Caballé by virtue of enjoying the extra excitement generated in a live concert performance; both Maag and Pavarotti are considerably

more urgent and animated in their conducting and singing respectively and soprano Gilda Cruz Romo delivers a much more dramatic and involved characterisation of Luisa than Caballé's and Moffo's more delicate, nuanced portrayals but can still float a note. She sometimes has something of an edge in her voice but is technically highly proficient, agile and flexible despite the heft and amplitude of her juicy spinto voice, with a working trill and a real facility with roulades and in divisions. She made no studio recordings despite her successful international career so is this the only way you'll get to hear and admire her.

Pavarotti in his sappiest, most youthful and gleaming phase of his career, singing flawlessly with huge passion and commitment - and of course great tonal beauty; everything he does turns to gold, no cracks, no gulps, no loss of resonance at any pitch. He sings "Quando le sere al placido (Domingo?)" divinely and the singers stay beautifully on pitch during the a cappella quartet which concludes Act II Scene 2, as the re-entry of the orchestra confirms. However, Manuguerra matches Pavarotti for those qualities, the only problem being that his voice is so virile that it hardly suggests the wrinkled, white-haired old man he describes himself as - but I find that a price worth paying to hear such marvellous singing by a true - and still under-rated, Verdi baritone. He is incisive steady and capable of the most seamless legato, delivering a great top G flat to cap it all off.

The supporting cast is marginally less impressive: Mazzoli is an adequate Wurm, Arié a bit gruff as the Count but both are wholly credible and competent. I had not previously encountered the Duchess Federica but Cristina Angelakova is clearly a fine mezzo, even if I would like a tad more depth to her tone. The Turin orchestra and chorus are both really superb, responding to Maag's urgency and drive.

I have the German Intaglio label issue of this rather than the Arts Archives one but it's the same. It wrongly dates the broadcast as 1969 and Act I of the brief synopsis in the insert is garbled - but never mind.

This has also been admiringly reviewed for MusicWeb by two colleagues: [review](#) ~ [review](#)

**Peter Maag – 1975** (studio; stereo) Decca  
 National Philharmonic Orchestra; London Opera Chorus  
 Luisa - Montserrat Caballé  
 Rodolfo - Luciano Pavarotti  
 Miller - Sherrill Milnes  
 Walter - Bonaldo Giaiotti  
 Federica - Anna Reynolds  
 Wurm - Richard Van Allan  
 Laura - Annette Celine  
 Contadino - Fernando Pavarotti

This has long been the standard recommendation for *Luisa Miller*, not without reason, although I would alert the collector to one or two minor caveats.

The sound is superb – Decca at its best – and the cast an assemblage of the finest voices of its era. Caballé spins fine, legato lines, floats beautifully controlled pianissimi, deploys a flawless trill and produces power a-plenty. My only problem is that she sounds mature and knowing compared with Moffo or Ricciarelli and her loud top notes can be shrill. Milnes shares with singers such as Manuguerra and MacNeil the disadvantage of paradoxically having too robust and youthful a baritone to suggest the care-worn Miller and he almost over-sings, seizing every chance to hurl out huge top notes but when he is joined by Pavarotti and Caballé, the sound they make together is so glorious that it seems churlish to cavil. Anna Reynolds is a capable, if rather anonymous Federica. Richard Van Allan is a saturnine, resonant Wurm and the ever-reliable Giaiotti is a big, burly-voiced Walter, short on subtlety but strong on menace. The clash or complotting of two basses together is a common feature of Verdi's

operas - think the two conspirators in *Un ballo in maschera* or the confrontation between the King and Il Grande Inquisitore in *Don Carlo*; here, Gaiotti matches Van Allan well to make another classic pair of bass villains.

Maag is careful, nuanced conductor, often slowing down the music quite daringly to milk the gentler emotions but not shy of whipping up tension when required – and he is directing a proven combination of orchestra and chorus which made many successful recordings together.

This remains a deeply satisfying recording and a top contender.

**Fernando Previtali – 1976** (live; stereo) Opera d'Oro; Legato; Premier  
Orchestra & Chorus - Teatro Regio di Torino  
Luisa - Katia Ricciarelli  
Rodolfo - José Carreras  
Miller - Renato Bruson  
Walter - Mario Rinaudo  
Federica - Stella Silva  
Wurm - Gianfranco Casarini  
Laura - Maria Grazia Piolatto  
Contadino - Eugenio Prando

The presence of Carreras and Ricciarelli before her decline presents a distinct incentive to acquire this recording. However, leaving aside my personal antipathy to Bruson's baritone, I think I can say that, good as Bruson is, Louis Quilico is objectively a superior Miller in the live San Francisco performance two years earlier and the sound here is not as good, being mushy and over-resonant. Once again, as in the live performance from the same year conducted by Gavazzeni, this was clearly taped on mediocre equipment by someone in the audience and often extraneous noises – including even throat-clearing in close-up - and coughing are more present than the singing. Ricciarelli is still excellent and Carreras is in fresh, plangent voice – but he cannot rival Pavarotti for verve and sweetness. Furthermore, the supporting cast-members are mostly unknown comprimarios, nowhere near as distinguished as those singers taking the same roles in San Francisco.

This is not really an option; the sound is too poor and the singing less attractive.

**Gianandrea Gavazzeni – 1976** (live; stereo) Opera d'Oro; Myto  
Orchestra & Chorus - Teatro alla Scala  
Luisa - Montserrat Caballé  
Rodolfo - Luciano Pavarotti  
Miller - Piero Cappuccilli  
Walter - Carlo Zardo  
Federica - Bruna Baglioni  
Wurm - Carlo Del Bosco  
Laura - Milena Pauli  
Contadino - Saverio Porzano

What a pity that, whatever the merits of this performance – and they are many – it is recorded in distant mono sound; evidently the tape machine was being operated by someone at the back of theatre and often the coughing is more prominent than whatever is happening on stage. In any case, Caballé and Pavarotti may be heard to advantage elsewhere; she screeches too often, Cappuccilli is in bawling mode and their (mostly unknown) co-singers are nowhere as distinguished as in their other recordings.

I include this in case anyone should be understandably tempted by the trio of lead singers. Really, don't bother – it is sonically and artistically disappointing.

**Lorin Maazel – 1979** (studio; stereo) DG

Orchestra & Chorus - Covent Garden

Luisa - Katia Ricciarelli

Rodolfo - Plácido Domingo

Miller - Renato Bruson

Walter - Gwynne Howell

Federica - Elena Obraztsova

Wurm - Wladimiro Ganzarolli

Laura - Audrey Michael

Contadino - Luigi De Corato

For me there are too many things wrong with this recording: Ricciarelli, even at this stage of her career, was already resorting to too many breathy, unsupported pianissimi to cover a lack of top notes, Domingo, as much as I admire him, compared with Bergonzi and Pavarotti seems too beefy here in what is often very delicate, plangent music for the tenor and, as my regular readers know, I do not enjoy Bruson's baritone - while acknowledging that maybe it is just my ears; I always hear a bleating quality to his tone (though *Gramophone* reviewer Alan Blyth, whose judgement I usually esteemed, always raved about his being the best post-war baritone). As for Obraztsova (excellent when aptly cast), she is a disaster; it sounds as though Amneris has dropped by to chew everyone's ear off. Ganzarolli is lumpy and choppy; he struggles with his music in a manner I would not have expected given the adeptness of, for example, his Leporello for Colin Davis only a few years earlier. Finally, Maazel's direction is choppy.

As much as I value Gwynne Howell's Walter, no other singer here gives a performance superior to what we can hear elsewhere; even Domingo surpassed his own Rodolfo here when he recorded the same role for Levine twelve years later. This is thus the least attractive of the four studio versions.

**James Levine – 1991** (studio; stereo) Sony

Orchestra & Chorus - Metropolitan Opera

Luisa - Aprile Millo

Rodolfo - Plácido Domingo

Miller - Vladimir Chernov

Walter - Jan-Hendrik Rootering

Federica - Florence Quivar

Wurm - Paul Plishka

Laura - Wendy White

Contadino - John Bills

Levine was always superb in early Verdi, energised and exciting, and this is no exception. The Met forces are on top form and the digital sound enhances their virtuosity; the opening Sinfonia alone is a tour de force of sonorous ensemble.

The cast is as good as could be assembled in the early 90's and best of all is Chernov's lean, even, resonant baritone which you would guess as coming from the great Italian tradition rather than his native Russia. His timbre is very similar to that of Ingvar Wixell at his best but Chernov has more power up top. Aprile Millo is in fine voice: delicate and powerful by turns with a working trill, her top notes can be a tad harsh and their vibrato is very slightly too pronounced but not troublingly so; her passion and feeling are very convincing and she is prepared to take vocal risks. Her duets with Chernov and Domingo are the highlights they should be, especially when she is singing *pianissimo*. This surely the best thing she has recorded, much better than her Elisabetta in *Don Carlo*. Domingo is in heroic voice



– agile, warm and generous of tone with an attractively fast vibrato. Although he is considerably older here, he is much more boyish than he was for Maazel. Quivar's plush mezzo makes a pleasing Federica, sympathetic and not too stentorian unlike Obraztsova and thus credible as the reluctant Rodolfo's fiancée. Her Act 1 confrontation with Domingo goes especially well; it is such a tuneful scene and I am always dismayed when it is cut. Plishka is a suitably brutal, bullying Wurm, rich of voice and growling menacingly. Rootering, too, is in the best and smoothest voice I have ever heard him on disc and he completes a line-up which I admit to finding considerably more impressive than I would have predicted. He and Plishka are as successful a pair of basses as on any recording.

I hardly expected this recording to displace my favourites but it was the second of the two surprises of this survey.

### **Recommendations**

Making a prime choice is difficult, as despite there being only four stereo, studio recordings, with the exception of the flawed Maazel account, they are almost equally recommendable, so any one of three will do, according to taste. My own, marginal preference is for Levine, as his conducting is better than Cleva's, but then I miss Pavarotti in either of the performances above conducted by Maag or the live López Cobos from San Francisco in 1974. The answer, of course, is to have more than one set.

Live mono: Jesús López Cobos – 1974\*

Live stereo: Peter Maag – 1974

Studio stereo: James Levine – 1991\*

First choices\*

### ***Ralph Moore***