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VARIETY Ludwig
 2/21 (ITALO-FRENCH-
 1973 GERMAN-COLOR)

Visconti's latest is physically handsome, dramatically thin. Better outlook in foreign markets. Now being re-edited.

Hollywood, Feb. 16.

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer release, presented by Ugo Santalucia; executive producer, Robert Gordon Edwards. Directed by Luchino Visconti. Screenplay, Visconti, Enrico Medioli, Suso Cecchi D'Amico; English translation, William Weaver; camera (Technicolor), Armando Nannuzzi; editor, Ruggero Mastroianni; music supervision, Franco Mannino; art direction, Mario Chiari, Mario Scisci; set decoration, Enzo Eusepi; sound, Vittorio Trentino, Giuseppe Muratori, International Recording; asst. director, Albino Cocco. Reviewed at MGM Studios, Culver City, Feb. 15, '73 (MPAA Rating not yet determined). Running Time: 186 MINS.

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| Ludwig | Helmut Berger |
| Empress Elisabeth | Romy Schneider |
| Richard Wagner | Trevor Howard |
| Cosima Von Bulow | Silvana Mangano |
| Father Hoffman | Gert Frobe |
| Capt. Durchein | Helmut Griem |
| Queen Mother | Isabella Telezyska |
| Count Von Holnstein | Umberto Orsini |
| Prince Otto | John Moulder Brown |
| Sophie | Sonia Petrova |
| Joseph Kainz | Folker Behnet |
| Prof. Gudden | Heinz Moog |
| Lisa Von Bullowski | Adriana Asti |
| Richard Hornig | Marc Porel |
| Countess Ida Ferenczy | Nora Ricci |
| Hans Von Bulow | Mark Burns |

As his 12th feature film, and third project based on German history and personages, Luchino Visconti has chosen King Ludwig II, the so-called "mad" monarch of Bavaria. The 186-minute "Ludwig" bears the Visconti stamp of dazzling, tasteful opulence and an operatic style. However, story construction is at first confusing, later becoming incomplete and unduly presumptive of audience familiarity with era subject. MGM is releasing in domestic market, where MPAA rating is uncertain. Visconti is cutting 30 minutes since its local tradeshowing.

Commercial outlook, even in the U.S. primary sophisticated market, is thin, but foreign acceptance of Visconti films is normally substantially stronger.

The time is a century ago, as the many German states were coalescing into a unified empire under Prussia and the victim of world industrialization. The basic story, then, is really posing two problems, the status of a monarchy in a growing world, and in particular the status of an eccentric monarch. The former problem is barely and haltingly sketched, the latter so personalized as to deny perspective.

After a fumbling first reel which first introduces title-star Helmut Berger on his coronation day at age 19 and cuts to him 22 years later on the eve of house arrest upon being declared incompetent by political and governmental enemies, the plot assumes the format of flashback sequences captioned by assorted charges and accusations made by longtime associates in testimony to the rump commission headed by Umberto Orsini, as Count Von Holnstein, and Heinz Moog, a medical authority.

Script is by Visconti, Enrico Medioli, with collaborator Suso Cecchi D'Amico, and English translation by William Weaver. To its credit the English version is literate, free of arch transliteration, and dotted with occasional brilliant aphorism. But it barely helps the limitations of the overall structure, combined with Berger's inability to carry the role successfully through all stages of Ludwig's life. Berger hits the mark on several occasions, but the character's evolution is erratic.

Major phases of Ludwig's life include his patronage of composer Richard Wagner, portrayed effectively by Trevor Howard; the spendthrift erection of castles; the introverted indifference to his responsibilities as king; a long platonic love affair with Empress Elisabeth of Austria, played with great compassion by the spectacularly beautiful Romy Schneider; and a pervading atmosphere of latent, then overt homosexuality.

The major disappointments in the film come from its being interesting without ever being compelling, eye-filling but mind-starving, outstanding in appearance and production (the imported Technicolor prints in Panavision are masterful) but deficient in complementary drama. Visconti is among the few directors who can deploy physical grandeur without vulgarity (many authentic locales were utilized to perfection), but this achievement, sadly, even further emphasizes the shallowness and

muddled nature of this particular story-telling.

Among the strongest performances are those of Howard; Miss Schneider; Silvana Mangano as Wagner's mistress; Mark Burns as her cheated lover; Helmut Griem, again outstanding, this time as a loyal officer in Ludwig's army; Sonia Petrova, as Ludwig's discarded fiancée; Marc Porel, as one of Ludwig's male lovers (apparently his first actual physical affair); Folker Bohnet, a contemporary actor worn out by Ludwig's appetite for dramatic declamation, not by his lust; John Moulder Brown as Prince Otto, Ludwig's younger brother who succumbs to the ancestral strain of insanity on the maternal side; Adriana Asti, as an actress planted to test Ludwig's virility; and Maurizio Bonuglia, who projects with subtle precision the casual loyalty and contempt of a sybarite's entourage.

Orsini, plus Gert Frobe as Ludwig's Jesuit confessor, Isabella Telezyska as Ludwig's mother, Moog, and Nora Ricci as Miss Schneider's companion, all are hindered by incomplete and-or ambiguous character plotting.

The score utilizes themes of Wagner, Robert Schumann and Jacques Offenbach, with piano solos and orchestra conducting by Franco Mannino. Wagner's last original piano composition is performed publicly for first time herein.

Armando Nannuzzi's cinematography is superb, and entire technical production staff has accomplished sheer visual magic. Film is a co-production of Italy's Mega Film (headed by producer-presenter Ugo Santalucia, with Robert Gordon Edwards exec producer), France's Cinetel, and Germany's Dieter Geissler Filmproduktion Divina Film. *Murf.*