

Concerts of Thursday, June 6 and Saturday, June 8, 2019, at 8:00p

Robert Spano, Conductor

Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus, Norman Mackenzie, Director of Choruses

Don Fernando, a minister of state—Morris Robinson, bass

Don Pizarro, Governor of a royal prison—Nmon Ford, baritone

Florestan, a prisoner—Joseph Kaiser, tenor

Leonore, his wife, using the name Fidelio—Christine Goerke, soprano

Rocco, chief jailor—Arthur Woodley, bass

Marzelline, his daughter—Laura Tatulescu, soprano

Jacquino, a turnkey—David Walton, tenor

First Prisoner—Richard Clement, tenor

Second Prisoner—Stephen Ozcomert, bass

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

***Fidelio* (1805, rev. 1806, 1814)**

Act I

Intermission

Act II

English surtitles by Ken Meltzer

Notes on the Program by Ken Meltzer

Fidelio (1805, rev. 1806, 1814)

Ludwig van Beethoven was baptized in Bonn, Germany, on December 17, 1770, and died in Vienna, Austria, on March 26, 1827. The first performance of *Fidelio* took place at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna on November 20, 1805, conducted by the composer. *Fidelio* is scored for two soprano, three tenor, and four bass solos, mixed chorus, piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, two trombones, timpani, and strings. Approximate performance time, with intermission, is two hours, thirty minutes.

First Classical Subscription Performances: May 27-30, 1971, Robert Shaw, Conductor.

Recording: Telarc CD 80333, "O, welche Lust!" Men of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus, Robert Shaw, Conductor.

Fidelio, Beethoven's only opera, is based upon a libretto created by the French lawyer and writer, Jean-Nicolas Bouilly (1763-1842). The plot, which Bouilly claimed was derived from an actual incident, recounts the story of a woman who is willing to risk all to rescue her husband from political oppression. *Léonore, ou L'Amour conjugal* (*Leonora, or Conjugal Love*), with a text by Bouilly, and music by Pierre Gaveaux (1761-1825), premiered at the Paris Théâtre Feydeau in 1798. Later, composers Ferdinando Paer (1771-1839) and Simon Mayr (1763-1845) composed operas (1804 and 1805, respectively) to Italian-language adaptations of Bouilly's French text. Joseph Sonnleithner (1766-1835) created a German-language version of *Léonore*, and it was this libretto Beethoven set to music. The original version of Beethoven's *Fidelio* premiered at the Vienna Theater an der Wien on November 20, 1805.

Toward the end of his life, Beethoven confessed to his friend, Anton Schindler: "Of all my children, (*Fidelio*) is the one that caused me the worst birth-pangs, the one that brought me the most sorrow; and for that reason, it is the one most dear to me." And indeed, the creation of *Fidelio* (called *Leonore* by the composer) was not an easy process. Beethoven composed at least three versions of the opera (as well as the three *Leonore* and *Fidelio* Overtures), all the while filling his sketchbooks with revision upon revision. A subsequent version of the opera, reduced from three acts to two, premiered on March 29, 1806. The final (and preferred) version, with a revised libretto by Georg Friedrich Treitschke (1776-1842), premiered in Vienna on May 23, 1814. The opera's multiple versions document Beethoven's tireless quest to create a work of striking economy of expression and irrepressible momentum. Beethoven was finally able to say of *Fidelio*: "before all others I hold it worthy of being possessed and used for the science of art."

Still, Beethoven's *Fidelio* presents considerable challenges for the performers and audience. To be dramatically convincing, the convention of a woman disguised as a young man must be handled with the utmost deftness and sensitivity. Beethoven was often uncompromising in his vocal writing, and the roles of Leonore and Florestan demand singing-actors of extraordinary range, power, and stamina. The first portion of the opera, too, has inspired a fair amount of criticism. Many have found the light touch of several of the opening numbers inappropriate for a tale of heroic rescue from political oppression and attempted murder. But like any great dramatist, Beethoven understood the power of the juxtaposition of elements of light and dark. The cheerful domestic tranquility in the home of the jailor Rocco intensifies the horror of the suffering of the prisoners held below ground. That, in turn, redoubles the catharsis of their liberation at the hands of Leonore. And of course, the life-and-death struggle is expressed in music by one of the art form's singular geniuses. Leonore's description of her husband Florestan's pleading voice applies with equal force to Beethoven's *Fidelio*: "It penetrates the depths of one's heart" ("Sie dringt in die Tiefe des Herzens").

Act I

The story of *Fidelio* takes place in 18th-century Spain, near Seville. The curtain rises on the courtyard of the State Prison. Jaquino, the prison turnkey, professes his love for Marzeline, daughter of Rocco, the chief jailor ("Jetzt Schätzen, jetzt sind wir allein"). Marzeline, however, is in love with Fidelio ("O wär ich schon mit dir vereint"), a young man who now works at the jail.

Rocco enters, looking for Fidelio, who soon arrives, carrying provisions. Fidelio is actually the woman Leonore, in disguise. Leonore has come to work at the prison because she believes her husband, Don Florestan, has been imprisoned there for daring to speak out against the regime of the evil Governor, Don Pizarro. Rocco, unaware of Leonore's real identity, believes that Fidelio loves Marzeline. In a majestic quartet, Marzeline, Leonore, Rocco and Jaquino express their emotions ("Mir ist so wunderbar"). Rocco tells Fidelio that he will make a fine son-in-law, but lectures that money is needed for true happiness ("Hat man nicht auch Gold beineben").

Leonore tells Rocco that she values his trust above all else. Leonore urges Rocco to allow her to accompany him to a secret dungeon, where she believes Florestan is being held captive. Rocco finally agrees, and Leonore prepares herself for the challenge that lies ahead ("Gut, Söhnchen gut, hab' immer Muth").

A march heralds the arrival of Don Pizarro and his guards. Rocco hands Pizarro a series of dispatches, including one that warns the Governor the benevolent Minister, Don Fernando, is coming to inspect the prison. Pizarro resolves to kill Don Florestan, rather than have his wrongful imprisonment discovered by Don Fernando. Pizarro gloats at the impending triumph he will enjoy over his political enemy ("Ha! Welch ein Augenblick!").

Pizarro orders a trumpeter to stand guard at the tower and immediately signal upon Don Fernando's arrival. Pizarro then turns to Rocco and tries to bribe the jailor to murder Don Florestan. When Rocco refuses, Pizarro vows to carry out the deed himself. Pizarro orders Rocco to dig Florestan's grave ("Jetzt, Alter, hat es Eile").

After Rocco and Pizarro depart, Leonore emerges from hiding. She has heard everything, and vows to rescue her husband ("Abscheulicher! wo eilst du hin?...Komm, Hoffnung, laß den letzten Stern"). When Rocco and Jaquino return, Leonore asks the jailor to allow the prisoners to come out of their cells to walk in the courtyard. Rocco finally agrees, and the prisoners emerge, thankful for even the briefest glimpse of sunlight and breath of fresh air ("O welche Lust, in freier Luft"). Rocco tells Leonore that they must immediately go to the secret dungeon and prepare the grave for the prisoner who remains there ("Nun sprecht, wie ging's").

Pizarro angrily rushes in and chastises the jailor for allowing the prisoners to come out of their cells. The prisoners return below as the curtain falls on Act I of Ludwig van Beethoven's *Fidelio* ("Leb' wohl, du warmes Sonnenlicht").

Act II

The second act takes place in Don Florestan's dungeon. Florestan, in chains, awakens and laments his tragic fate. A vision of his beloved Leonore briefly revives Florestan, but the weak man soon falls to the ground ("Gott! welch Dunkel hier!...In des Lebens Frühlingstagen"). Rocco and Leonore enter the dungeon. Leonore desperately tries to find out whether the prisoner is her husband, but it is too dark. Rocco, with Leonore's aid, begins to dig Florestan's grave ("Wie kalt ist es in diesem unterirdischen Gewölbe!...Nun hurtig fort, nur Frisch gegraben"). Florestan begins to talk to Rocco, and Leonore finally recognizes her husband. Florestan begs Rocco to tell his wife that he is still alive and in prison. When Florestan pleads for water, Rocco tells Leonore to give the prisoner what remains in his jug of wine. Leonore also gives Florestan a crust of bread ("Euch werde Lohn in bessern Welten").

Rocco gives the signal to Pizarro that all is ready. Florestan believes that it is the signal for his death, but Leonore urges him to have faith. Pizarro enters and taunts Florestan, but the prisoner boldly confronts his adversary. Just as Pizarro is about to stab the prisoner, Leonore intervenes and reveals herself as Florestan's wife. Pizarro quickly recovers and vows to kill them both, but Leonore holds the governor at bay with a pistol. Suddenly, a trumpet sounds from the tower, heralding the arrival of Don Fernando. Pizarro realizes that his plot has been defeated. He rushes away, followed by Rocco ("Er sterbe! Doch er soll erst wissen"). Alone, Florestan and Leonore celebrate their reunion ("O namenlose Freude").

The scene changes to the castle parade ground. The townspeople and prisoners gather for the arrival of the Minister Don Fernando (“Heil se idem Tag, Heil sei der Stunde”). Rocco tells Fernando of Pizarro’s evil plan, and Florestan’s rescue by Leonore. Fernando orders that Pizarro be punished, and that Leonore remove Florestan’s chains. Everyone celebrates the triumph of love and liberty over tyranny as the curtain falls on the second and final act of Ludwig van Beethoven’s *Fidelio*.