

BEETHOVEN

Fidelio

A Guide for Educators



The Metropolitan
Opera

Fidelio

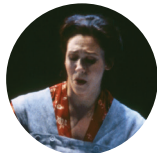
The jailer Rocco's new assistant, Fidelio, is everything Rocco could want in an employee: Clever, hard-working, and handsome, Fidelio helps around the jail and has even caught the eye of Rocco's daughter, Marzelline. But there's something mysterious about this Fidelio. Where has he come from? Why does he so carefully avoid Marzelline's romantic overtures? And what is his connection to the political prisoner being held in the jail's deepest, darkest cell? In fact, "Fidelio" is none other than the prisoner's wife—disguised as a man and desperate to save her husband from the cruel forces conspiring against him.

Fidelio, the only opera ever completed by Ludwig van Beethoven, is a deftly crafted story of love and adventure. It is also an overtly political work. When *Fidelio* premiered in 1805—12 years after revolution had toppled the French monarchy, one year after the upstart young general Napoleon had crowned himself emperor of France, and only one week after Napoleon's forces invaded Beethoven's home city of Vienna—Europe was at a tipping point. The monarchs that had ruled Europe for centuries were quaking in fear, new ideas of social justice and equality were percolating among the masses, and the continent was entering an era of profound change. Like many of his contemporaries, Beethoven was deeply invested in politics, and *Fidelio*'s plot reflects the seismic sociopolitical developments of the age.

Fidelio thus represents an opportunity to explore and examine the political landscape of the late 18th and early 19th centuries—and to consider how the ideas that shaped this new political world still affect civic life today. At the same time, the opera is a fascinating window into both Beethoven's oeuvre itself and the aesthetic and artistic developments that determined how we understand this iconic composer and his sole completed opera. Just as the political changes brought about by the Enlightenment still affect modern societies, the aesthetic ideas developed during Beethoven's lifetime continue to guide how we understand and interpret classical music. Now, on the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth, this guide invites students to explore both of these histories, learning about not only Beethoven and the world in which he lived but also the ongoing impact of 19th-century aesthetics on our modern sensibilities and ears.



MATTILA



WELCH-BABIDGE



HEPPNER



POLENZANI



PAPE

PHOTOS: ERIKA DAVIDSON/MET OPERA; WINNIE KLOTZ/MET OPERA (MATTILA)

THE WORK

An opera in **two acts, sung in German**

Music by **Ludwig van Beethoven**

Libretto by **Joseph von Sonnleithner**, with later revisions by **Stephan von Breuning** and **Georg Friedrich Treitschke**

Based on the libretto **Léonore, ou L'Amour Conjugal** by **Jean-Nicolas Bouilly**

First performed **November 20, 1805**, at the **Theater an der Wien, Vienna**; revised version first performed **May 23, 1814**, at the **Theater am Kärntnertor, Vienna**.

PRODUCTION

Jürgen Flimm
Production

Robert Israel
Set Designer

Florence von Gerkan
Costume Designer

Duane Schuler
Lighting Designer

PERFORMANCE

Metropolitan Opera Presents
telecast: October 28, 2000

Karita Mattila
Leonore

Jennifer Welch-Babidge
Marzelline

Ben Heppner
Florestan

Matthew Polenzani
Jaquino

Falk Struckmann
Don Pizarro

René Pape
Rocco

Robert Lloyd
Don Fernando

James Levine
Conductor

Production a gift of Alberto Vilar

HD Live in Schools is supported through a partnership with the New York City Department of Education.

Opera in the Classroom

The Metropolitan Opera Educator Guides offer a creative, interdisciplinary introduction to opera. Designed to complement existing classroom curricula in music, the humanities, STEM fields, and the arts, these guides will help young viewers confidently engage with opera whether or not they have prior experience with the art form.

On the following pages, you'll find an array of materials designed to encourage critical thinking, deepen background knowledge, and empower students to engage with *Fidelio's* story, music, and themes. These materials can be used in classrooms and/or via remote-learning platforms, and they can be mixed and matched to suit your students' individual academic needs.

Above all, this guide is intended to help students explore *Fidelio* through their own experiences and ideas. The diverse perspectives that your students bring to opera make the art form infinitely richer, and we hope that your students will experience opera as a space where their confidence can grow and their curiosity can flourish.

WHAT'S IN THIS GUIDE:

Philosophical Chairs: A series of questions that will introduce students to the opera's main themes while sparking their creativity and encouraging debate

Who's Who in *Fidelio*: An introduction to the opera's main characters and their roles in the plot

Synopsis: A complete opera synopsis for young readers

The Source: Information about the literary sources and/or historical events that inspired the opera

Timelines: One or more timelines connecting the opera to events in world history

Deep Dives: In-depth looks at various topics relating to the opera

Active Exploration: Interdisciplinary activities connecting the opera to topics in music, the humanities, STEM, and the arts

THROUGHOUT THE GUIDE, YOU'LL ALSO FIND:

Critical Inquiries: Questions and thought experiments designed to foster careful thinking

Fun Facts: Entertaining tidbits about *Fidelio*



FUN FACT

Fidelio is the only opera Beethoven completed, but throughout his life he experimented repeatedly with the form. Among the operatic subjects he considered were Macbeth, Alexander the Great, Attila the Hun, Romulus and Remus (the mythological founders of Rome), and a libretto titled *Vesta's Fire* by Emanuel Schikaneder, the librettist for Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*).

Above: *Alexander Cuts the Gordian Knot* by Jean-Simon Berthélemy

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

This guide invites students to explore the opera through:

Music
History
English Language Arts
German Language and Literature
Sociology
Debate
Law and Criminal Justice
Creative Writing
Critical Thinking
Ethics
Social-Emotional Learning
Speech and Communication

Philosophical Chairs

Philosophical Chairs is an activity designed to foster critical thinking, active inquiry, and respectful dialogue among students. To play a game of Philosophical Chairs, participants agree or disagree with a series of statements, but the game doesn't end there. The most crucial element of the game is what happens next: Participants discuss their points of view and can switch sides if their opinions change during the discussion. (For more tips on using Philosophical Chairs in a classroom or via a remote-learning platform, see the activity description in your Google Classroom.)

Each Philosophical Chair topic statement is deliberately open-ended yet ties into a number of the themes present in *Fidelio*—from persecution and despair to love, loyalty, and sacrifice. As you and your students explore and learn about *Fidelio*, you can return to these statements: What do they have to do with the opera's story? How might these questions help us explore the opera's story, history, and themes?

THE STATEMENTS

- Everyone deserves to be free.
- Justice always reigns supreme.
- Every person should be treated equally before the law.
- Follow your heart, not your mind.
- If you have to choose between faith, hope, and love, the most important is love.
- Love fears nothing.
- Political dissidents must be silenced.
- Imprisonment is an ethical form of punishment.
- Light shines even in the darkest of times.
- Everyone needs to be rescued at some point in their life.
- I would risk my life for love.
- Human will and freedom will always triumph over injustice and tyranny.
- Everyone has a soulmate.
- Love knows no bounds.



ERIKA DAVIDSON / MET OPERA

Keep in mind that the process of this activity is just as important as the statements themselves. Imagine a world in which everyone actively listens to one another and engages in respectful dialogue, honoring others and showing respect for the wide array of diverse ideas and opinions that others hold. Philosophical Chairs fosters exactly this kind of space, encouraging students to take what they've learned and change the global landscape for generations to come.

Who's Who in *Fidelio*

CHARACTER	PRONUNCIATION	VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
<p>Leonore A noblewoman, disguised as "Fidelio"</p>	leh-oh-NOHR-eh, fee-DEH-lee-oh	soprano	Leonore's husband, Florestan, has been arrested and imprisoned for his revolutionary political views. In a desperate attempt to save him, Leonore has disguised herself as "Fidelio" and taken a job at the prison ... But between romantic entanglements and a murderous plot, this job will turn out to be much more than she bargained for.
<p>Florestan Leonore's husband</p>	FLOH-res-tahn	tenor	Although he has committed no crime, the revolutionary leader Florestan has been thrown into prison by the cruel (and politically conservative) Don Pizarro.
<p>Don Pizarro The governor of the prison</p>	Don pee-DZAH-roh	bass-baritone	A sadistic tyrant tasked with overseeing the prison, Don Pizarro treats the inmates terribly. He is the reason Florestan has been arrested without cause, and he has decided to cover up this unlawful arrest by making Florestan "disappear."
<p>Rocco A jailer</p>	ROHK-koh	bass	A doting father, Rocco cares first and foremost about his daughter Marzelline's happiness. But he is easily swayed by Don Pizarro's cunning schemes, and when he agrees to "take care of" Florestan, Leonore must find a way to stop him before he can go through with Don Pizarro's plan.
<p>Marzelline Rocco's daughter</p>	mahr-tsehl-LEE-neh	soprano	Rocco's daughter is in love with Jacquino—until the newcomer Fidelio catches her eye.
<p>Jacquino A young man, in love with Marzelline</p>	zha-QUEE-no	tenor	The loyal, devoted Jacquino wants nothing more than to marry Marzelline.
<p>Don Fernando A government minister</p>	Don fehr-NAHN-doh	bass	A kind leader, Don Fernando is horrified when he discovers how Don Pizarro has been running the prison.



LEONORE



FLORESTAN



DON PIZARRO



ROCCO



MARZELLINE



JACQUINO



DON
FERNANDO

PHOTOS: ERIKA DAVIDSON/MET OPERA (LEONORE, FLORESTAN, DON PIZARRO, ROCCO); MARTY SOHL/MET OPERA (MARZELLINE, JACQUINO); WINNIE KLOTZ/MET OPERA (DON FERNANDO)

Synopsis

ACT I *A prison in Spain.* Jacquino is in love with Marzelline, the daughter of the jailer Rocco. Marzelline, however, has recently developed a crush on Fidelio, her father's new assistant. Jacquino is heartbroken by this development, but Rocco thinks that the clever young Fidelio will make a fine match for his daughter, and he happily blesses their union.

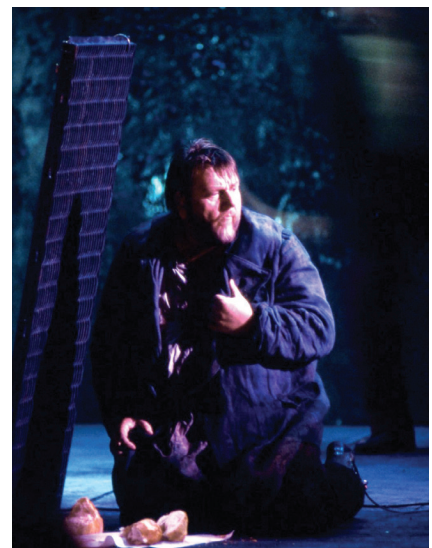
There's just one problem: Fidelio isn't actually Fidelio. In fact, he isn't a man at all. "He" is a young woman named Leonore, a Spanish noblewoman whose husband, Florestan, has been arrested for his revolutionary political views. Desperate to find and free her husband, Leonore has dressed in men's clothing and taken a job at the prison. But where is Florestan? Leonore has access to all the prison's cells, yet her husband is nowhere to be found.

Then Leonore hears about a prisoner locked in a dungeon on the prison's lowest level, where only Rocco is allowed to go. Hopeful that this prisoner might be Florestan—but terrified by how badly the unknown prisoner is being treated—Leonore begs to go with Rocco on his rounds. Rocco refuses.

News arrives that the government minister Don Fernando is on his way to inspect the prison. This infuriates the prison's cruel governor, Don Pizarro: He knows that Fernando and Florestan are friends, and he is terrified that Fernando will find out that Florestan, who has committed no crime, is languishing in the prison simply because Pizarro bears a grudge against him. So Pizarro decides to get rid of the evidence—by killing Florestan and burying him in the dungeon. He tells Rocco about his wicked plan and asks the jailer to dig a grave. Leonore overhears Rocco and Pizarro's conversation. Desperate to save Florestan, she once again begs Rocco to let her accompany him into the dungeon. Finally, he relents.

While Rocco and Pizarro finish plotting Florestan's death, Leonore, feeling sorry for the other prisoners, arranges to let them out into the courtyard for some fresh air. Technically this is allowed, but when the sadistic Pizarro sees the prisoners out of the cells, he flies into a rage and demands that Leonore lock them back up. Rocco leaves to dig the grave, and Leonore follows him.

ACT II In the dark dungeon, Florestan dreams that he sees Leonore arriving to free him. He wakes up and thinks fondly of Leonore, but then he is once again gripped by despair. Rocco and Leonore (still dressed as Fidelio) arrive and begin digging the grave. Florestan does not recognize his wife, but when he speaks to Rocco, Leonore immediately recognizes the sound of her husband's voice. It takes everything in her power to keep from calling



PHOTOS: MARTY SOHL / MET OPERA

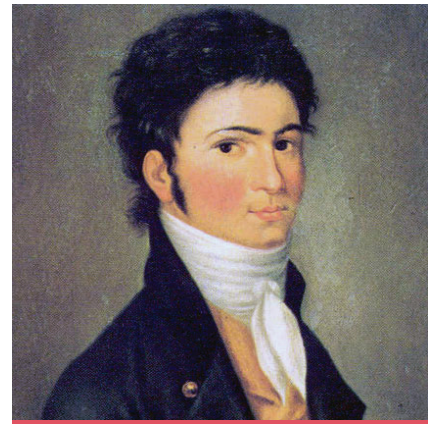


out to him. Rocco, feeling sorry for the condemned Florestan, offers him some water, and Leonore gives him a bit of bread, whispering to him not to lose hope.

Rocco blows his whistle to signal to Pizarro that the grave is ready. Pizarro arrives with his dagger drawn. As he enters the cell, Leonore pulls a pistol from her pocket. Pointing it at Pizarro, she jumps between him and Florestan, declaring that he will have to kill Florestan's wife before he will be able to touch Florestan himself. Rocco, Pizarro, and Florestan are all shocked to discover that Fidelio is really Leonore in disguise.

A trumpet call announces that Don Fernando has arrived at the prison. When Rocco appears with Florestan, Fernando is amazed to find his old friend in prison. Rocco tells Fernando about Leonore's heroism and Pizarro's villainy. Pizarro is arrested, and Leonore herself cuts Florestan's chains. Don Fernando proclaims amnesty and justice for all, and the remaining prisoners are freed. Everyone cheers for Leonore.

FIDELIO PRODUCTION PHOTOS: ERIKA DAVIDSON/MET OPERA



FUN FACT

Today, Beethoven is remembered primarily as a composer, but when he first moved to Vienna, he was known for his remarkable skill as a pianist. To make a name for himself in the Austrian capital, he engaged in a number of piano contests with other noted virtuosos (a common event at social gatherings at the time). One competitor, Abbé Joseph Gelinek, was so impressed by Beethoven's playing that he jokingly remarked that Beethoven "must be in league with the devil."

Timeline

POLITICS IN BEETHOVEN'S EUROPE

Beethoven was deeply invested in politics, and his compositions often reflect the turbulent political environment in which he lived. This timeline includes some of the major sociopolitical events that took place in Europe during Beethoven's lifetime.

1770
BEETHOVEN IS BORN in Bonn.



1792
The **FRENCH MONARCHY** is officially **ABOLISHED**. Beethoven moves to Vienna.

1793–94
The **REIGN OF TERROR** descends on France. King Louis XVI and his wife, Marie Antoinette, are executed, along with thousands of other perceived enemies of the republic. The librettist Jean-Nicolas Bouilly spends this period working as a prosecutor in the city of Tours; he will later claim to draw on these experiences in crafting stories for his operas.

1798
The opera *Léonore, ou L'Amour Conjugal* (*Leonore, or Conjugal Love*) premieres in Paris.

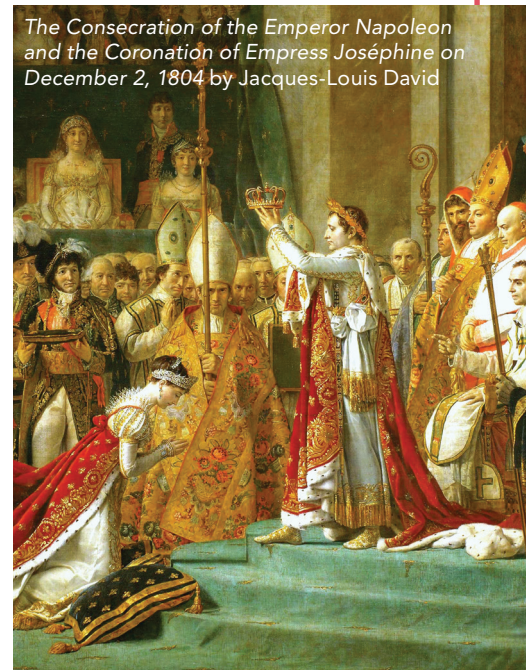
1789
The **FRENCH REVOLUTION** begins.

1790
The Habsburg emperor **JOSEPH II DIES**. A ruler noted for his deep interest in the science, philosophy, and ethics of the Enlightenment, Joseph will be succeeded in 1792 by Franz, an unapologetic autocrat who institutes a repressive police state.



Kaiser Joseph II by Georg Decker

1799
NAPOLEON seizes control of France, essentially turning the country into a **MILITARY DICTATORSHIP**.



1804
In January, Beethoven tells a friend that he is working on a German version of *Léonore*.

In May, **NAPOLEON CROWNS HIMSELF EMPEROR OF FRANCE**. Beethoven had previously admired the French revolutionary general and even considered naming his Third Symphony “Napoleon,” but, infuriated by Napoleon’s power grab, he renames the symphony simply “Eroica,” or “Heroic.”

1805

BEETHOVEN COMPLETES

his opera **LEONORE**. Yet the Viennese censors, skittish about the recent bloodshed in France and the ongoing threat to aristocratic rule posed by Napoleon and his armies, delay rehearsals. A premiere date is finally set for November 20, but on November 13, **FRENCH FORCES INVADE VIENNA**. The premiere goes ahead, but the opera receives a chilly response and closes soon after.

1814

After a decade of remarkable successes on the battlefield, **NAPOLEON** suffers a series of stinging defeats. He abdicates his position as Emperor and **IS EXILED** to the island of Elba in April.

In May, **THE REVISED VERSION OF FIDELIO PREMIERES** to enthusiastic acclaim.

ALEXANDER ALTEHOF/WIKICOMMONS



1814–15

Between September and June, the crowned heads of Europe meet at the **CONGRESS OF VIENNA** to discuss rebuilding the continent after Napoleon's downfall.

1827

Beethoven dies in Vienna.

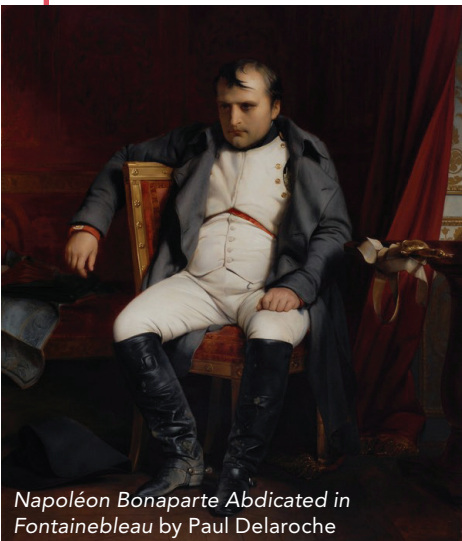


FUN FACT

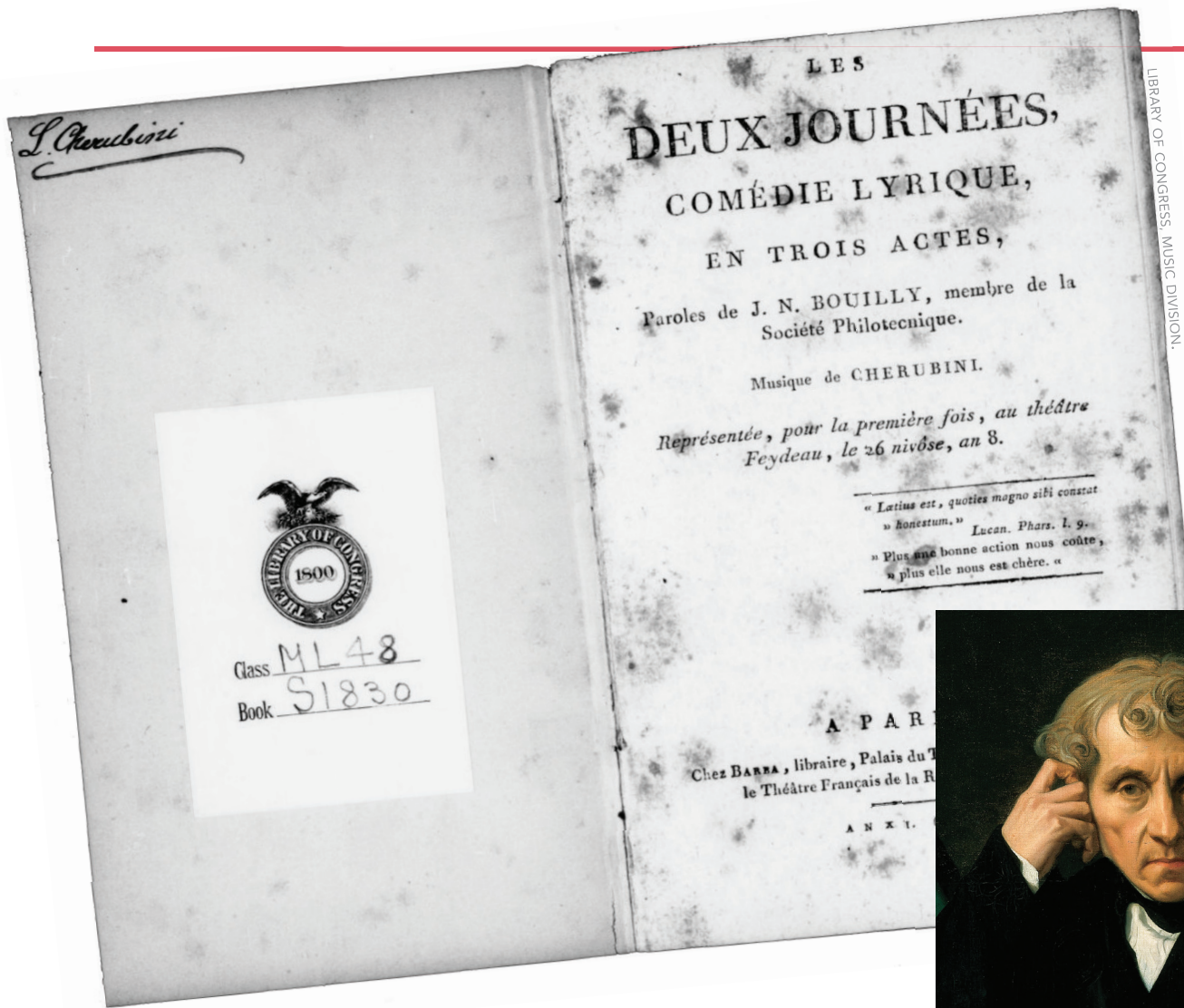
Librettist Jean-Nicolas Bouilly claimed that his opera *Léonore* was based on real events that he had personally witnessed in the French city of Tours during the Reign of Terror. What he didn't add was that during the Revolution he had worked as a public prosecutor, a job that included stifling counter-revolutionary activities. Thus, while Bouilly may have felt that he was on the side of good, from another perspective he was more like *Fidelio's* repressive Don Pizarro than the noble Florestan.

CRITICAL INQUIRY

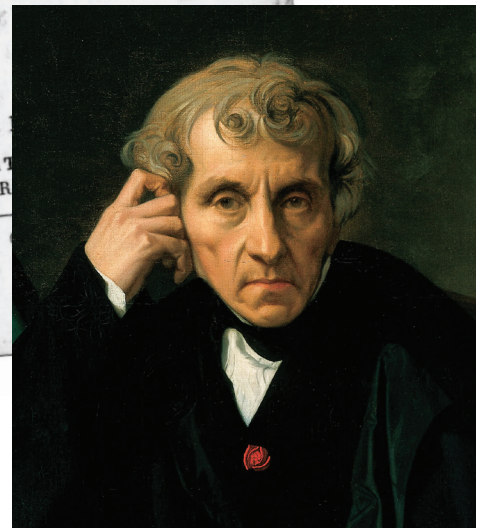
How does the plot of *Fidelio* reflect the events included in this timeline?



Napoléon Bonaparte Abdicated in Fontainebleau by Paul Delaroche



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, MUSIC DIVISION.



The Source

THE FRENCH LIBRETTO *LÉONORE, OU L'AMOUR CONJUGAL* BY JEAN-NICOLAS BOUILLY

In 1803, the French opera *Les Deux Journées* was performed in Vienna to great acclaim. The opera, which featured a libretto by Jean-Nicolas Bouilly and music by Luigi Cherubini, told the story of Armand, a heroic parliamentarian on the run from the cruel Cardinal Mazarin. Over the course of the opera, Armand effects a number of daring escapes (including a memorable scene in which he hides out in a water barrel), his wife disguises herself as a peasant girl to evade detection, and the cardinal, bowing to political pressure, eventually agrees to forgive his political enemy. In other words, the opera was full of the heroic hijinks and feel-good narrative turns that audiences loved. It was also a shameless piece of propaganda.



Above (top to bottom): Libretto from *Les Deux Journées*, composer Luigi Cherubini, librettist Jean-Nicolas Bouilly

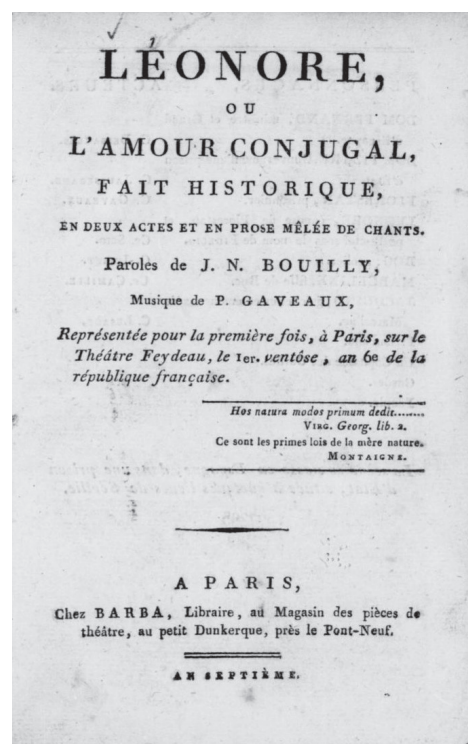
In fact, *Les Deux Journées* (or *The Water Carrier*, as it came to be known in English), was one of the chief exemplars of an idiosyncratic genre that appeared in the decade following the French Revolution. These “rescue operas,” as they were called, overtly espoused the ideals of the revolution—including love, fidelity, and freedom—while taking an obvious stand against political tyranny and repression. In *Les Deux Journées* and other operas, Bouilly claimed that his stories had been drawn from real-life events that he had personally witnessed during the Reign of Terror. Bouilly’s claim to historical authenticity was most likely false, but it served its purpose: His operas were phenomenally successful, and *Les Deux Journées* counted among its most ardent admirers both the poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and the composer Ludwig van Beethoven.

When Beethoven saw *Les Deux Journées* in Vienna, he was already working on an opera, the never-to-be-completed *Vesta’s Fire*. But after seeing Bouilly and Cherubini’s work, Beethoven, who was deeply invested in politics, felt the need to write something more in tune with the events of the day. By the following January, he was hard at work adapting another of Bouilly’s rescue operas for the Viennese stage: *Léonore, ou L’Amour Conjugal*. Like *Les Deux Journées*, *Léonore* was purportedly based on real events that had taken place during the French Revolution. Like *Les Deux Journées*, it featured a daring disguise, the triumph of goodness over evil, and a rousing chorus at the opera’s end. Unlike *Les Deux Journées*, however, the central character was not a brave revolutionary fighting tyranny and oppression. Rather, the hero was this man’s wife, the faithful Leonore.

For audiences in the early 1800s, *Léonore* was a profoundly political opera, but the politics of the plot would soon be overshadowed by its heroine’s savoir-faire. In particular, 19th-century audiences swooned over the moment at the opera’s end when Leonore draws her pistol and brandishes it at a shocked Don Pizarro. (In fact, one singer went so far as to draw *two* pistols at the moment of her character’s big reveal!) Yet in the 21st century, opera directors have begun to rediscover the powerful political message behind Beethoven’s work, for *Fidelio*’s core messages about loyalty, freedom, and justice remain as pertinent today as they were 200 years ago.

CRITICAL INQUIRY

Music and songs often play a major role in revolutions and other movements for social change. Can you think of any protest songs you know? If you were to write a protest song, what might it be about?



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BIBLIOTHEQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE

Above (top to bottom): Libretto for *Léonore, ou L’Amour Conjugal*, composer Pierre Gaveaux



A performance of *Fidelio* in Paris in 1860
BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE

Deep Dive

BEETHOVEN AND MUSICAL AESTHETICS

Today, Beethoven is generally remembered as a composer of instrumental works: His symphonies and sonatas are among the most highly respected in the classical repertoire, while *Fidelio*, the composer's only completed opera, is often viewed as a fluke in a grand instrumental oeuvre. Yet the very concept of Beethoven as an "instrumental" composer is worth delving into, because it reflects specific aesthetic notions—and conscious historiographic decisions—made in the years after Beethoven's death.

Around the turn of the 19th century, new ideas about music and the arts began to shake German-speaking lands. For centuries, art had been judged by how well it could depict or represent real-life objects and ideas. Consider the example of a tree: Visual arts (such as painting and drawing) could depict a tree in a recognizable way. Poetry could describe the tree. Yet music could do neither; although music could evoke ideas, it had no inherent ability to depict or describe real-world objects. Thus, well into the 18th century, visual arts and poetry were viewed as foremost among

the arts, while music was considered a lesser art form.

Then, around the turn of the 19th century, a profound about-face took place. Philosophers—especially Germans inspired by the work of Immanuel Kant—began to claim that it was music's very inability to depict the real world that made it the greatest of art forms. No longer was it the purview of art to describe our surroundings, they declared; rather, the purpose of art was to help us experience the indescribable: the realm of feelings and emotions and ideas that could never truly be put into words. And which art form was best suited to this indescribable realm? Music. Almost overnight, music's inability to describe or depict the world went from being a perceived defect to a perceived artistic advantage.

One of the best expressions of these new aesthetic criteria appeared in 1805 (the very year of *Fidelio*'s premiere) in a review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony by the novelist, composer, and lawyer E.T.A. Hoffmann. In this review, Hoffmann clearly laid out his perspective on the aesthetic purpose of music. "Music," he



E.T.A. Hoffmann

wrote, “opens up to humanity an unknown realm; a world that has nothing in common with the external world of the senses, but in which a person leaves behind all reason and intellectual explanations to give themselves over to the inexpressible.” Not all music was created equal, however. Hoffmann wasted no time in explaining that these criteria applied only to instrumental music. “If we are to describe music as an individual art form, we can only mean instrumental music,” he declared, “since it scorns ... the addition or help of every other kind of art.” (In other words, instrumental music makes no recourse to words or images to convey its meaning.) By contrast, vocal music “allows no space for undefined yearning but [instead presents] only those feelings that can be expressed in words.”

In the broadest terms, then, the 19th-century German musical aesthetics advocated by thinkers like Hoffmann prized abstract instrumental music while treating music with words as aesthetically inferior. And this perception would have a profound impact on early biographies and musical studies of Beethoven. Within a few years of his death, Beethoven was being held up as the greatest of German composers, the musician whom all subsequent German composers should strive to emulate. Yet in light of the aesthetic priorities described above, “emulating” Beethoven meant forging bold new paths for *instrumental* music



Immanuel Kant

alone. Debates would rage over how best to carry on the symphonic tradition exemplified by Beethoven (most notably in the absolute versus program music schism of the latter half of the century), but the image of Beethoven as a symphonic composer first and foremost went essentially without saying.

As we study music history today, however, it is crucial to recognize that this aesthetic decision to prioritize Beethoven’s instrumental music over his operatic and choral compositions was just that: a decision. Aesthetic hierarchies are always culturally defined, and a careful study of “historiography” (the way a history has been told) will help us understand how the ideas and agendas of previous generations may affect our own musical perceptions and tastes. Happily, *Fidelio* is now embraced as an element of Beethoven’s oeuvre worthy of performance and study. What might be the next musical work or genre to be granted the same level of respect?

CRITICAL INQUIRY

Can you think of any kinds of music or art that are considered good or bad? Serious or silly? High-brow or low-brow? Why do you think these genres might be designated this way? Do you agree with these designations? Why might designations like these be problematic or unfair?

Timeline

THE COMPOSITION OF FIDELIO



Ludwig van Beethoven



Beethoven's birthplace in Bonn
SIR JAMES / WIKICOMMONS

1770

On December 17, Ludwig van Beethoven is baptized in Bonn, the capital city of the Electorate of Cologne. His birthdate is uncertain.

For several generations, members of the Beethoven family have been employed as musicians in and around the Cologne court. The young boy's grandfather, also named Ludwig, is a bass singer and court musician; his father, Johann, is a tenor and music teacher. Beethoven's earliest music lessons come from his father, but the experience is far from happy: Johann van Beethoven is an abusive alcoholic, and a local musician will later recall how, after a night of carousing, Johann often wakes his child and makes him practice until dawn.

1782

Christian Gottlob Neefe, Bonn's court organist, hires Beethoven as his assistant. Neefe also gives Beethoven his first formal composition lessons.

1792

Beethoven moves to Vienna, where he quickly makes his name as a pianist of astonishing virtuosity. He spends his first 14 months in Vienna studying composition with Joseph Haydn, the city's reigning musician. Slowly, he begins to develop a reputation as a composer as well.

1798

On February 19, the opera *Léonore, ou L'Amour Conjugal* (*Leonore, or Conjugal Love*) premieres in Paris. The opera's creators claim that it depicts real events that took place in Tours, librettist Jean-Nicolas Bouilly's home city, during the Reign of Terror. There is no evidence that the opera was actually based on a true story, but the plot does reflect the concerns about political repression and liberty that grip France at this time.

1802

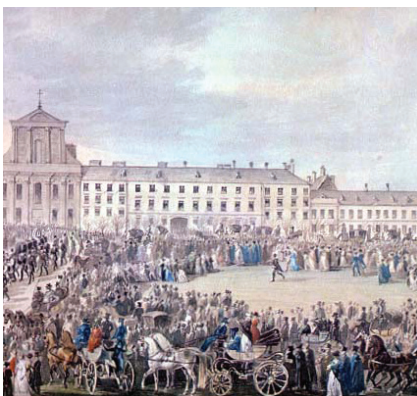
In a letter to his brother, Beethoven admits that he has been losing his hearing. His increasing deafness has caused him much embarrassment and led him to withdraw from social encounters, but for now, he can still perform regularly. His hearing will continue to deteriorate until the late 1810s, at which point he will be almost completely deaf.



The Theater an der Wien



Librettist Georg Friedrich Treitschke



Beethoven's funeral procession

1804

In January, Beethoven writes to a friend that he is working on a new opera based on “an old French libretto.” The libretto in question is Bouilly’s *Léonore*.

1805

Beethoven completes the new opera, titled *Leonore*, by the summer, but rehearsals are delayed by Vienna’s censors. A premiere date is finally set for November 20. On November 13, however, French troops occupy Vienna. The opera’s premiere goes ahead as planned, but its reception is far from enthusiastic, and it is performed only three times before being withdrawn.

1806

Stephan von Breuning revises *Leonore*’s libretto, slimming the opera’s three acts down to a more manageable two and convincing Beethoven to shorten the opera’s music. The new version premieres March 29 at the Theater an der Wien, but Beethoven, infuriated by both the changes to the score and the quality of the theater’s orchestra, pulls the work after only a single performance. Between 1806 and 1813, Beethoven will undertake various operatic projects, but none will come to fruition.

1814

Three singers working at the Viennese court approach Beethoven about resurrecting his opera. Beethoven hires Georg Friedrich Treitschke to revise the libretto once again, and he sets about rewriting much of the music. The revised version of the work premieres on May 23, 1814, at the Kärntnertor Theater, and the opera, now titled *Fidelio*, enjoys an enthusiastic response.

1824

For more than 20 years, Beethoven has expressed an interest in setting to music Friedrich Schiller’s poem “An die Freude,” an “ode to joy” celebrating the Enlightenment-era ideals of brotherhood and happiness. He finally works the poem into the last movement of his Ninth Symphony, which premieres on May 7 to rapturous acclaim. Despite his near-total deafness, Beethoven conducts the performance. As several people present at the premiere will later recall, Beethoven remains unaware of the audience’s thunderous applause until the contralto soloist takes him by the sleeve and turns him around to see his admirers.

1827

On March 26, Beethoven dies in Vienna. His funeral, which takes place three days later, is a mass public event, drawing some 10,000 people to celebrate and mourn Vienna’s most famous composer.

Active Exploration

The following activities will help familiarize your students with the plot of *Fidelio*, forge connections between a variety of classroom subjects, and encourage creative responses to the opera. They are designed to be accessible to a wide array of ages and experience levels.

GOING AROUND IN CIRCLES

Introduce your students to imitative counterpoint and the compositional technique of the “canon” (or “round”). Invite them to sing “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” or “Frère Jacques” with their classmates, friends, or families, and then ask them to listen for and analyze the canon in the overture to *Fidelio*.

MUSICAL SCAVENGER HUNT

Ask your students to listen to the overture to *Fidelio* while following along with a score. As they listen and read, invite them to search for specific musical elements (chords, dynamics, etc.).

“PAINTING THE TEXT” WITH MUSIC

Have students listen to the famed “Prisoners’ Chorus.” Provide a musical score and/or a translation of the text, and ask them to circle any moments that capture their attention. Which words did they circle? Why did these moments stand out in the music? Why might Beethoven have chosen to highlight these moments?

WRITE A RESCUE OPERA

Invite students to write their own story for a rescue opera. They might choose to set this opera in the late 18th century or early 19th century (like *Fidelio*), or they might use it to respond to events (such as a global pandemic) that affect us today.

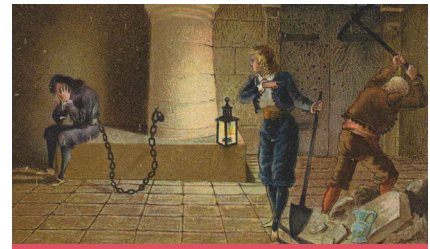
TRUE LOVE AND SACRIFICE

Ask your students to think of stories about love and sacrifice and then compare these stories to *Fidelio*. Ask your students: Who or what might they be willing to make a sacrifice for?

MY MANIFESTO

Invite students to write a personal manifesto from Leonore/Fidelio’s or Florestan’s perspective. To deepen this study, invite students to learn about some of the ways in which people have sought liberation from oppression. Students can read other manifestos that take a stand against political injustice and tyranny, and perhaps write their own manifesto expressing their personal values and celebrating their commitment to others.

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FUN FACT

Beethoven was known to heavily edit and revise his works during the composition process. While writing the first version of *Fidelio*, he rewrote the first scene’s quartet nearly a dozen times. As for Leonore and Florestan’s Act II duet, it was a revised version of a duet Beethoven had drafted for an opera (that never came to fruition) about Alexander the Great in India.

COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

These activities directly support the following ELA-Literacy Common Core Strands:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.3

Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6–8.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6–8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH. 6–8.6

Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).