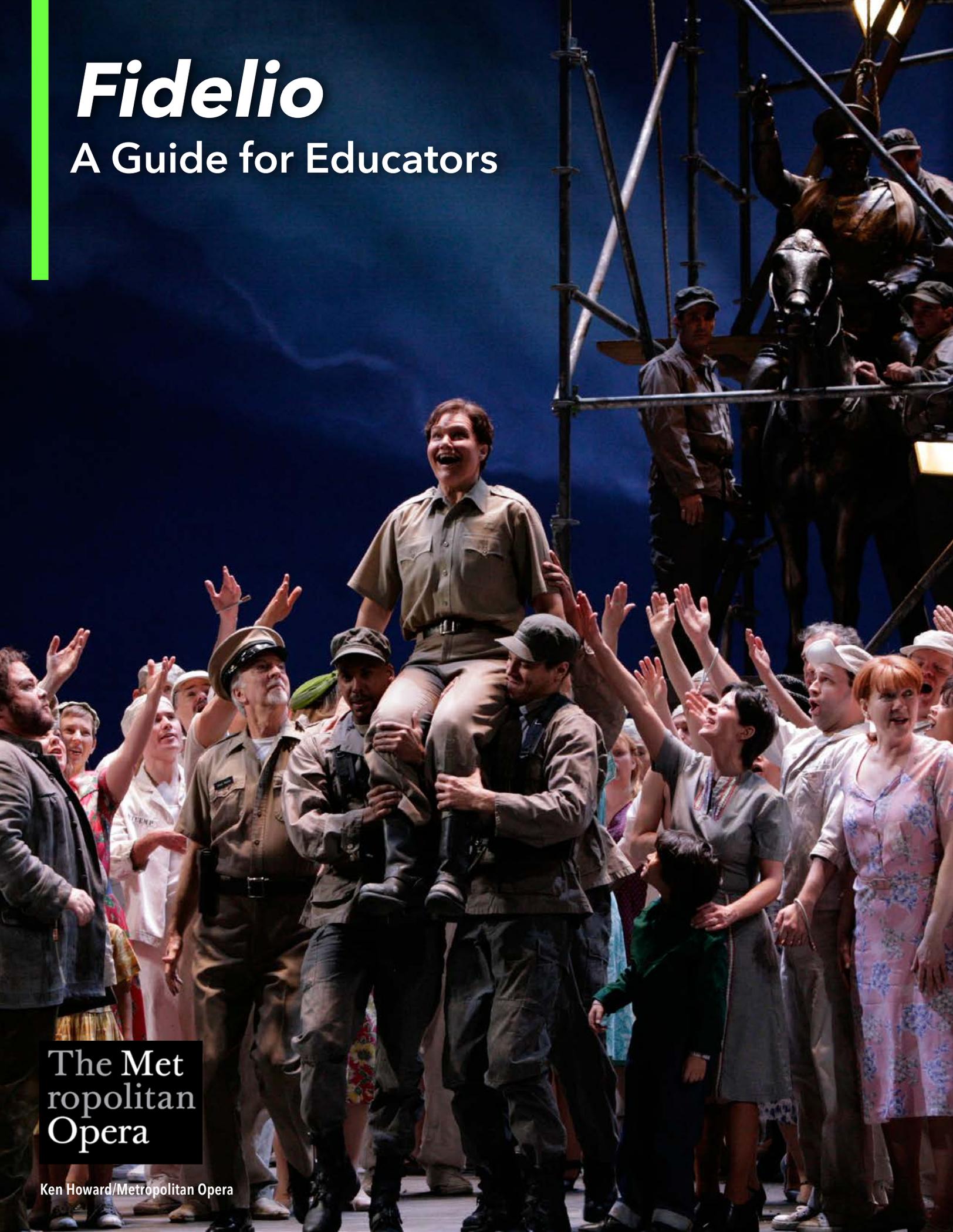


# *Fidelio*

## A Guide for Educators



The Met  
ropolitan  
Opera

Ken Howard/Metropolitan Opera

# WHAT TO EXPECT FROM *FIDELIO*

## ***FIDELIO*, BEETHOVEN'S ONLY OPERA, HAS ALWAYS HELD A UNIQUE PLACE IN THE REPERTORY**

a status compounded by its surprisingly long genesis and close association with the overarching themes of Beethoven's personal biography: struggle, forbearance, and heroic victory. Out of the plot's twists and turns, one idea emerges of the utmost power: 'Freiheit,' or 'freedom.' Based on a roughly contemporary play from the French Revolution, *Fidelio's* message of freedom and the power of love to rescue the oppressed elevates it above the status of mere entertainment and transforms it into a moral statement. But at the same time, it showcases the lives of smaller characters in a comically domestic situation. Indeed, this contrast has unsettled critics since its inception. The opera is almost strikingly conventional for the first half of the first act, with duets and comic arias, before it swerves radically into expanded forms and a much darker tone. The action takes us from the middle bourgeois realm of the prison down into its deepest and darkest cells, before emerging triumphantly into the light and fresh air at the end, in one of opera's most remarkable catharses.

Jürgen Flimm's production for the Metropolitan Opera updates the setting to roughly modern times. Instead of period coats and black powder rifles, he gives us automatic weapons, trench coats, and the mechanized cells of the twentieth century. The subtitles reflect these changes, among other things rendering 'King' as 'President.' The intent of these changes is to reduce the sense of historical distance, and let the audience experience *Fidelio* as a work grounded in a still-existent reality. *Fidelio* was intensely contemporary at its time, and this production aims to capture the immediacy of that experience.

This guide is intended to lead your students through this classic work and learn how it functions as a comedy that develops into a deeply political and personal drama and a remarkable statement about freedom. By exploring the historical background of the opera and the way it is constructed, students will gain an understanding of Beethoven's opera and be better prepared to experience it live in the opera house. The information on the following pages is designed to provide context, deepen background knowledge, and enrich the overall experience of attending a final dress rehearsal at the Metropolitan Opera.

### THE WORK:

#### ***FIDELIO***

An opera in 2 acts, sung in German  
Music by Ludwig van Beethoven  
Libretto by Joseph Sonnleithner,  
Stephan von Breuning, and Friedrich  
Treitschke

Based on the play *Léonore, ou l'Amour  
Conjugal* by Jean-Nicolas Bouilly  
First performed May 23, 1814  
at the Kärntnertheater, Vienna,  
Austria

### PRODUCTION

Sebastian Weigle, Conductor  
Jürgen Flimm, Production  
Robert Israel, Set Design  
Florence von Gerkan, Costume Design  
Duane Schuler, Lighting Design

### STARRING

Adrienne Pieczonka  
LEONORE (soprano)

Klaus Florian Vogt  
FLORESTAN (tenor)

Falk Struckmann  
ROCCO (bass)

Greer Grimsley  
DON PIZARRO (bass-baritone)

Günther Groissböck  
DON FERNANDO (bass)

Production a gift of Alberto Vilar

## ABOUT THE METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE



Photo: Johnathan Tichler/  
Metropolitan Opera

The Metropolitan Opera is a vibrant home for the most creative and talented singers, conductors, composers, musicians, stage directors, designers, visual artists, choreographers, and dancers from around the world.

The Metropolitan Opera was founded in 1883, with its first opera house built on Broadway and 39th Street by a group of wealthy businessmen who wanted their own theater. In the company's early years, the management changed course several times, first performing everything in Italian (even *Carmen* and *Lohengrin*), then everything in German (even *Aida* and *Faust*), before finally settling into a policy of performing most works in their original language.

Almost from the beginning, it was clear that the opera house on 39th Street did not have adequate stage facilities. But it was not until the Met joined with other New York institutions in forming Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts that a new home became possible. The new Metropolitan Opera House, which opened at Lincoln Center in September of 1966, was equipped with the finest technical facilities of the day.

Each season the Met stages more than 200 opera performances in New York. More than 800,000 people attend the performances in the opera house during the season, and millions more experience the Met through new media distribution initiatives and state-of-the-art technology.

This guide includes several sections with a variety of background material on *Fidelio*.

- **The Source, The Story, and Who's Who in *Fidelio***
- **A Timeline: The historical context of the opera's story and composition**
- **A Closer Look: A brief article highlighting an important aspect of Beethoven's *Fidelio***
- **Guided Listening: A series of musical excerpts with a roadmap to musical understanding**
- **Student Critique: A performance activity, highlighting specific aspects of this production; and topics for wrap-up discussion following students' attendance**
- **Further Resources: Recommendations for additional study, both online and in print**
- **Glossary: Common musical terms found in this guide and in the concert hall**

The materials in this guide will focus on several aspects of *Fidelio*:

- The themes of struggle and freedom in the opera
- Beethoven's use of music to create entertaining and memorable characters
- Creative choices made by the artists of the Metropolitan Opera for this production
- The opera as a unified work of art, involving the efforts of composer, librettist, and Met artists

This guide is intended to cultivate students' interest in *Fidelio*, whether or not they have any prior acquaintance with opera. It includes materials for students with a wide range of musical backgrounds, and seeks to encourage them to think about opera—and the performing arts as a whole—as a medium of both entertainment and creative expression.

Photo: Ken Howard/  
Metropolitan Opera



## SUMMARY

In a prison in Spain, Jaquino, the jailer's assistant, flirts with Marzelline, the daughter of Rocco, the prison warden. She is instead interested in a young man named Fidelio who is secretly a woman named Leonore, herself searching for her lost husband, whom she suspects is imprisoned there. In her disguise as Fidelio, Leonore asks Rocco to let her go down into the secret lowest cells. Soldiers arrive with the prison governor, Don Pizarro. After reading this mail, he discovers that his superior Don Fernando will come inspect the prison the next day, looking for victims of unjust imprisonment. He resolves to kill one of his prisoners before his and orders Rocco to dig a grave. Leonore overhears his plans and prays for strength, and convinces Rocco to let her help. Before going down, Leonore opens the jail cells and lets the prisoners into the yard, angering Pizarro.

The prisoner Florestan awakens and cries out in despair, but is calmed by a vision of Leonore saving him. Rocco and Fidelio arrive to dig the grave. Leonore recognizes Florestan's voice, and gives him wine and bread. When Pizarro arrives to kill Florestan, Leonore reveals her identity and confronts him with a pistol. Suddenly the trumpets sound from above: Don Fernando has arrived. Up in the courtyard, Florestan and Leonore are fully reunited, Pizarro is jailed, and the prisoners are freed.

**Ken Howard/  
Metropolitan Opera**



## THE SOURCE:

*Fidelio* is based on the French playwright Jean-Nicolas Bouilly's 1798 play *Léonore, ou l'Amour Conjugal* ("Leonore, or Married Love"), which was supposedly based on events during the French Revolution that the author personally witnessed. However, Bouilly changed the play's setting from France to Spain to appease the censors, given the clear political content of the work. The play has been set musically by a number of composers—first by Pierre Gaveaux in 1798, and later by Simon Mayr and Ferdinando Paer. These earlier operas emphasized the comedic aspects of the text. Likewise, Beethoven's first two attempted versions of the opera (both named *Leonore*) also highlighted the comic aspects of the plot. However, in *Fidelio*, the operatic version known and performed today; the opera's attitude is somewhat more ambivalent. Whereas *Leonore* takes a hopeful view of the French Revolution and Napoleon, *Fidelio* is imbued with a darker tone, stemming from Beethoven's ultimate disillusionment with the French Emperor.

**Photo: Ken Howard/  
Metropolitan Opera**



## SYNOPSIS

*Act I: Spain, eighteenth century.* In a prison, Marzeline, daughter of the jailer, Rocco, rejects her father's assistant, Jacquino, who hopes to marry her. Her heart is set instead on the new errand boy, Fidelio. He arrives with provisions and dispatches and is distressed by Marzeline's interest in him, especially since Rocco approves. Fidelio is in fact Leonore, a noblewoman of Seville who has come to the jail disguised as a boy to find her husband, Florestan, a political prisoner languishing somewhere in chains. When Rocco mentions a man lying near death in the vaults below, Leonore, suspecting it might be Florestan, begs Rocco to take her on his rounds. He agrees, though the governor of the prison, Don Pizarro, allows only Rocco in the lower levels of the dungeon.

As soldiers assemble in the courtyard, Pizarro learns from the letters brought to him that Don Fernando, minister of state, is on his way to inspect the fortress. At this news the governor resolves to kill Florestan, his enemy, without delay and orders Rocco to dig a grave for the victim in the dungeon. Leonore, overhearing his plan, realizes Pizarro's evilness and the plight of his victim. After praying for strength to save her husband and keep up hope, she again begs Rocco to let her go with him to the condemned man's cell and also to allow the other prisoners a few moments of air in the courtyard. The gasping men relish their glimpse of freedom but are ordered back by Pizarro, who hurries Rocco off to dig Florestan's grave. With apprehension, Leonore follows him into the dungeon.

## Act II

In one of the lowest cells of the prison, Florestan dreams he sees Leonore arrive to free him. But his vision turns to despair, and he sinks down exhausted. Rocco and Leonore arrive and begin digging the grave. Florestan awakens, not recognizing his wife, and Leonore almost loses her composure at the familiar sound of his voice. Florestan's condition moves Rocco to offer him a drink, and Leonore gives him a bit of bread, urging him not to lose faith. Rocco then blows on his whistle to signal Pizarro that all is ready. The governor advances with dagger drawn to strike, but Leonore stops him with a pistol. At this moment a trumpet sounds from above: Don Fernando has arrived. Rocco leads Pizarro out to meet him as Leonore and Florestan rejoice in each other's arms.

In the prison courtyard, Don Fernando proclaims justice for all. He is amazed when Rocco brings his friend Florestan before him and tells about Leonore's heroism. Pizarro is arrested, and Leonore herself removes Florestan's chains. The other prisoners too are freed, and the crowd hails Leonore.

### VOICE TYPE

Since the early 19th century, singing voices have usually been classified in six basic types, three male and three female, according to their range:

#### **SOPRANO**

the highest-pitched type of human voice, normally possessed only by women and boys

#### **MEZZO-SOPRANO**

the female voice whose range lies between the soprano and the contralto (Italian "mezzo"=middle, medium)

#### **CONTRALTO**

the lowest female voice, also called an alto

#### **COUNTERTENOR**

a male singing voice whose vocal range is equivalent to that of a contralto, mezzo-soprano, or (less frequently) a soprano, usually through the use of falsetto

#### **TENOR**

the highest naturally occurring voice type in adult males

#### **BARITONE**

the male voice lying below the tenor and above the bass

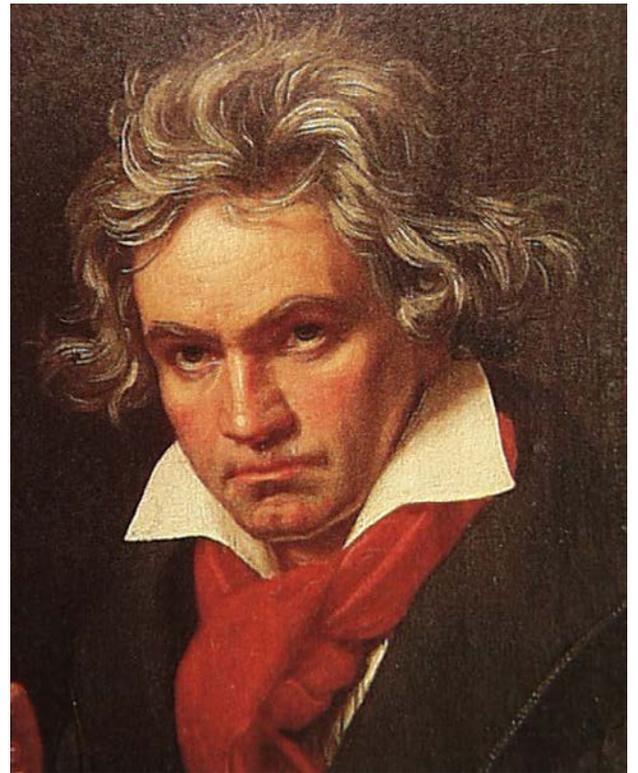
#### **BASS**

the lowest male voice

# WHO'S WHO IN *FIDELIO*

Character		Pronunciation Guide	Voice Type	The Lowdown
Leonore/Fidelio	Florestan's wife, disguised as a boy	LAY-oh-NOH-ruh/ Fih-DAY-lee-oh	soprano	Leonore is determined to find her husband; disguised as a young man, she infiltrates the prison.
Florestan	A political prisoner and husband to Leonore	FLOH-reh-stahn	tenor	Unjustly imprisoned, Florestan is bound in chains and languishes close to death.
Rocco	The jailer	ROCK-oh	bass	Rocco is an honest man but is fearful of breaking with authority.
Jaquino	Rocco's assistant	yah-KEY-noh	tenor	Rocco's assistant, in love with Marzelline
Marzelline	Rocco's daughter	MAHR-tsell-EEN-ah	soprano	Rocco's daughter, loved by Joachino but in love with Fidelio
Don Pizarro	Governor of the prison	Dahn Pih-ZAH-roh	baritone	The villain of the story
Don Fernando	A minister of state	Dahn fair-NAHN-doh	bass	Fernando is fair-minded and is a friend of Florestan's from long ago

- **1770** On December 16, Ludwig van Beethoven is born in Bonn, at that time the capital of the Electorate of Cologne, part of the Habsburg Empire. The Beethoven family is a musical one though provincial and obscure and although his formal education only rudimentary, Ludwig receives instruction in music from his father and soon displays a strong aptitude for composition. By the time Beethoven is 11 years old, he is working as unofficial assistant to Christian Gottlob Neefe, the court organist in Bonn.
  
- **1783** Again assisting his teacher Neefe, Beethoven performs as cembalist in the court orchestra. In this role, he has the opportunity to hear and perform in all of the popular operas of the day.
  
- **1787** With a growing reputation locally as a musical genius, Beethoven travels to Vienna in April, where he meets Mozart and likely studies with him very briefly. Within two weeks, however, he receives news that his mother is gravely ill, and he hurriedly returns to Bonn. She dies on July 17, and although Beethoven's father is still alive, Ludwig assumes his place as the head of the family.
  
- **1789** Having exhausted his musical opportunities in Bonn, Beethoven leaves his native city in November for Vienna, then the musical capital of the Habsburg Empire. Among its many cultural attractions, Vienna would provide Beethoven with access to patrons and composition teachers; for a brief time, Beethoven studies with Franz Joseph Haydn. After the death of his father in December, Beethoven sees no need to return to Bonn and makes Vienna his home for the rest of his life. During these early years in Vienna, Beethoven is extremely active in composing, writing piano sonatas and other chamber works, in addition to enjoying an unchallenged status as the greatest piano performer in the city.
  
- ca.1796** Beethoven begins to realize that he is slowly losing his hearing. As it becomes clear that his deafness is incurable, he confides in a number of friends his distress in his situation and the dire effects on his personal relationships and performing career.



A portrait of Bellini (Bologna, Museo internazionale e biblioteca della musica)

- **1802** In profound psychological crisis caused by his increasing deafness, Beethoven withdraws to the spa town of Heiligenstadt, where he records his despair in a document now known as the 'Heiligenstadt Testament,' found among his papers after his death. Addressed to his brothers, it is an eloquent reflection on his internal struggles and resolute commitment to his calling. In it, he confesses to having contemplated suicide, but was held back by his dedication to his art.
- **1803** Beethoven begins composition on his first opera, based on a libretto by the impresario Emanuel Schikaneder. Within a year, he abandons the libretto and begins work on an opera based on the revolutionary drama *Léonore, ou L'amour Conjugal* by Jean-Nicolas Bouilly. Beethoven continues work on the opera for the next two years.
- **1804** Beethoven, long an admirer of Napoleon--even having conceived of his Third Symphony (originally entitled the 'Bonaparte' Symphony) as a tribute to the revolutionary hero--is disgusted when Napoleon proclaims himself Emperor. Beethoven tears up the dedication page of the symphony and re-names it the 'Eroica Symphony,' composed to celebrate the memory of a great man. Despite this disillusionment, however, Beethoven continues to find creative inspiration in the themes of heroic struggle, political injustice, and patient forbearance.
- **1805** *Leonore* premieres on November 20 in Vienna, with only three performances. Its tepid reception was likely due to anti-French sentiment owing to the city's occupation by the French army following the Battle of Austerlitz.
- **1806** Partly in response to public sentiment that *Leonore* was too long, Beethoven re-presents *Leonore* on March 29 in a revised and abridged version, but he quickly withdraws it from further performance when he quarrels with the theater manager over money.
- **1814** The Kärntnertheater approaches Beethoven about further performances of his opera, but Beethoven insists on further revisions. In February, he begins to rework the opera with the assistance of Georg Trietschke, who rewrites the libretto. Before Beethoven completes his work, he has revised nearly every number in the entire opera.

On May 23, the heavily revised opera premieres at the Kärntnertheater as *Fidelio*; a young Franz Schubert is in the audience.
- **1824** Beethoven's Ninth Symphony premieres in Vienna on May 27; the composer is by now totally deaf, but indicates the tempo for each movement.
- **1826-7** After having suffered for many years from various ailments, Beethoven declines rapidly. He dies on March 26, 1827 in Vienna, likely from liver disease. Nearly 10,000 people attend his funeral.

## FIDELIO AS A POLITICAL ARTWORK

Like many artists across history and over diverse artistic specialties, opera composers have often responded to the politics of the day in their creations, and have used their works to comment, whether covertly or directly, on the state of their worlds. Although *Fidelio* takes the precautionary step of re-setting its plot and action elsewhere (a device designed to appease the censors), it still offers up a strikingly contemporary—and uninhibitedly political—story. Its compositional history is of the same era as the rise and fall of Napoleon, whose ideas and actions were of supreme interest to Beethoven. His admiration of the revolutionary hero was such that Beethoven initially dedicated his Eroica Symphony—the first major work in his ‘heroic’ style—to Napoleon. But when Napoleon crowned himself Emperor in 1804, Beethoven reportedly flew into a rage and tore up the title page to his symphony.

Beethoven’s opera *Fidelio* belongs to a sub-genre of works known as “rescue operas,” in which the opera’s climax is achieved when a leading character is rescued from some kind of danger. Like many of these works, *Fidelio* is deeply concerned with questions of justice and the rule of law, especially the power of one absolute ruler to condemn human beings to prison and to death. Beethoven’s deep empathy for the plight of prisoners and the unjustly accused finds musical representation in the famous Prisoner’s Chorus in the finale of Act I, some of Beethoven’s most sublime music in any genre.

It was this music in particular that helped establish *Fidelio*’s reputation as a work standing for deliverance and freedom. The opera has a long history of being used to commemorate events of liberation: it was performed at the Congress of Vienna upon Napoleon’s defeat; in Berlin after the end of World War II in 1945; and at the reopening of the rebuilt Vienna State Opera in 1955. A performance in Dresden in 1989, only four weeks before the fall of the Berlin Wall, was interrupted by lengthy applause at the Prisoner’s Chorus. Beethoven’s sublime music, refracted through the lens of political interest and human empathy, continues to speak to audiences today, arguing that art, and opera, may illuminate injustice, act as a moral standard, and elevate public discourse.



The Guided Listening Activities are designed to introduce students to a selection of memorable moments from the opera. They include information on what is happening dramatically, a description of the musical style, and a roadmap of musical features to listen for. Guided Listening Activities can be used by students and teachers of varying levels of musical experience.

## IN PREPARATION

For this activity, teachers will need access to a recording of *Fidelio* and the libretto.

## "HA! WELCH' EIN AUGENBLICK!" (CD 1, TRACK 11)

Pizarro has arrived at the jail and reads the sealed letters left for him. One of them notifies him that his superior official Don Fernando has learned that there are unjustly held prisoners there, and will be arriving secretly tomorrow. Pizarro cannot let his imprisonment of Florestan be uncovered, and in a remarkably villainous monologue, vents his rage and glories in the revenge he will soon take on his political enemy.

What to listen for:

- The focus on a single repeated note by the singer
- The intense, forceful orchestration, which includes the timpani and brass
- The sustained intensity of the aria, which presents one mood or affect

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| (00:00) | The aria begins in the minor mode with swirling strings and emphatic brass and timpani punctuations, supporting the voice, which sings in a declamatory style. The music continues in an intense style. |
| (01:03) | The music of the opening music returns, repeating the same text.  |
| (01:40) | Pizarro enters again on an upper D, a note he sings in the aria over forty times—it acts as an inescapable focal point from which the music can never fully break.                                      |
| (02:06) | In the background, the chorus quietly murmurs, not wanting to attract Pizarro's notice. The music shifts into a fragmented, transitional passage.   |
| (02:22) | The music returns to the home key again. The chorus sings underneath the soloist to conclude the aria in a thunderous manner, as Pizarro imagines his ultimate triumph.                                 |

## "ABSCHUELICHER! WO EILST DU HIN?..." (CD 1, TRACK 14)

Pizarro has ordered Rocco to go down into the dungeon to dig a grave in the cistern, and then to give a signal so that Pizarro can descend in secret and kill the prisoner himself. Leonore/Fidelio overhears what Pizarro intends to do and expresses first her outrage, and later, her hope and resolve. This aria marks the first time she is truly alone on stage; in it, she expresses her true feelings without the mask of Fidelio.

What to listen for:

- An initial section of recitative, followed by an aria in two parts
- The role of the orchestra, which provides both support and contrast

- (00:00) For the first time, Leonore is on stage completely alone, and the orchestral introduction reflects her agitation. As the voice enters at (00:06), Leonore's first word is 'Abscheulicher,' ('criminal,') set to a large leap downwards of a dissonant diminished seventh.
- (00:21) According to shifts in the meaning of the text, the recitative cycles through sections of both calm and agitation.
- (01:08) The music settles on a beautiful, sustained note on the word 'Farbenbogen,' ('rainbow')—a symbol of hope and promise.
- (01:59) Three horns enter, introducing the lyrical melody that begins the formal aria.
- (03:07) Elaborating scales in the voice combine with scales in the horn in a delicate interplay.
- (04:52) The horns quickly change character from lyrical to martial, with arpeggiated calls often associated with hunting or war. This shift signals the beginning of the second section of the aria, in which Leonore states her resolution and prepares to act.
- (05:30) A short pause in the action for reflection.
- (06:11) The quick tempo resumes, in a repeat of the opening of the fast section.
- (06:48) An ascending scale in the voice at builds to the climactic high of the aria, ending in a solidly major key and with a strong cadence.

## "O WELCHE LUST!" (CD 1, TRACK 16)

Fidelio asks Rocco to let the prisoners out of their cells and into the courtyard to enjoy some of the fresh air. He hesitates, afraid of Pizarro, but finally agrees. In this famous number, known as the "Prisoners' Chorus", the prisoners sing in wonder of the fresh air and the sunlight, compared to the gloom and hopelessness of the inside. This theme was clearly of great musical importance to Beethoven, who lavishes on the text some of his finest choral writing.

What to listen for:

- The dramatic use of vocal register, which slowly progresses from low to high
- The vocal Interjections by solo prisoners
- Beethoven's musical technique in emphasizing the central ideas of the text

- (00:00) The number begins almost imperceptibly, very quietly in the strings, with slow-moving harmonies growing as more instruments enter.
- (00:47) The woodwinds enter with flowing counterpoint as the male voices enter sequentially.
- (02:12) This expansive texture collapses back into a unison in the low register on the word 'prison,' which musically emphasizes its contrast to the 'fresh air.' The music then returns to the texture heard at the opening.
- (02:52) The first soloist enters, supported by higher stringers and winds, calling upon God and the help of heaven. The musical setting is reminiscent of a chorale, a work of sacred church music.
- (03:25) As the prisoners re-enter, the music emphasizes the word 'Freiheit,' which Beethoven sets with chord modulations far from the home key.
- (03:52) This climax fades down as the second soloist enters. With recitative set in a minor mode, he warns the prisoners of hostile listeners.
- (05:00) The music from the opening of the chorus returns, gradually fading back downward, and eventually ending quietly.

## IN PREPARATION

For this activity, students will need the *My Highs & Lows* reproducible handout found in the back of this guide.

### COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND FIDELIO

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1d

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

## ENCOURAGING STUDENT RESPONSE IN ATTENDING THE FINAL DRESS REHEARSAL

Watching and listening to a performance is a unique experience that takes students beyond the printed page to an immersion in images, sound, interpretation, technology, drama, skill, and craft. Performance activities help students analyze different aspects of the experience and engage critically with the performance. They will consider the creative choices that have been made for the particular production they are watching and examine different aspects of the performance.

The Student Critique activity incorporates a reproducible sheet. Students should bring this activity sheet to the final dress rehearsal and fill it out during intermission and/or after the final curtain. The activity directs attention to details of the production that might otherwise go unnoticed.

The activity sheet is called *My Highs & Lows*. It serves to guide students toward a consistent set of objective observations, as well as to help them articulate their own opinions. It is designed to enrich the students' understanding of the art form as a whole. The ratings system encourages students to express their critique: use these ratings to spark discussions that require careful, critical thinking.

The *My Highs & Lows* handout can be found at the back of this guide.

## FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION

Students will enjoy starting the class with an open discussion of the Met performance. What did they like? What didn't they? Did anything surprise them? What would they like to see or hear again? What would they have done differently? The discussion offers an opportunity to apply the notes on students' *My Highs & Lows* sheet, as well as their thoughts about the visual design of the Met production in short, to see themselves as *Fidelio* experts.

*Fidelio* raises enduring questions about imprisonment and freedom, and the nature of justice within a political system. Leonore is willing to sacrifice everything to find her husband, but he has been willing to sacrifice himself to denounce the unspecified corruption of Don Pizarro. The other characters are caught up in enforcing the commands of authority, as Jaquino and Marzelline are essential to Rocco's management of the prison. Rocco invokes the authority of the King's/President's Birthday as a holiday to give the prisoners some respite, and Don Fernando's personal power is what guarantees a happy ending.

Your students may want to discuss the following questions:

- As the jailer, what is Rocco morally responsible for? Do you think he is a decent man in a tough situation, is he an active collaborator with evil, is he just out to save himself, or some bit of all of the above?
- What do you think happens at the end with Jaquino and Marzelline? Could they have a happy life together?
- In her disguise as Fidelio, Leonore seems to reciprocate Marzelline's affections. Do you think this is justified by her cause, or is it cruel to lie?
- The plot hinges on Don Fernando's convenient arrival and his ability to single-handedly dispense justice. Is this a convincing plot, or is it too easy?
- How might you imagine the plot of this opera to be relevant to recent or current events?

# FURTHER RESOURCES

## IN PRINT

Gardiner, John Eliot. *Leonore*. Archiv Production, 1997. (sound recording)

*A performance of the reconstructed 1805 version of the opera, based on published material and sketches, with material discussing the changes made.*

Robinson, Paul. "Fidelio and the French Revolution", *Cambridge Opera Journal* Volume 3, Number 1 (March 1991), pp. 23-48.

*Argues for a conception of the opera as an explicitly political statement, and includes some detailed but very clear musical analysis in support.*

Robinson, Paul, ed. Ludwig van Beethoven: *Fidelio* (Cambridge Opera Handbooks). Cambridge University Press, 1996.

*A complete overview of the opera with essays by various contributors, covering revisions, musical analysis, and history.*

Solomon, Maynard. *Beethoven*. New York: Schirmer, 2nd revised edition, 2012.

*One of the most widely-read biographies of the composer, offering an excellent overview and introduction to the literature.*

## ONLINE

[http://www.beethoven-haus-bonn.de/sixcms/detail.php?template=portal\\_en](http://www.beethoven-haus-bonn.de/sixcms/detail.php?template=portal_en)

-Website of the Beethoven Haus Bonn, with extensive resources on everything related to the composer. Includes extensive digital holdings of documents and music.

<https://www.sdopera.org/Content/Operapaedia/Operas/Fidelio/LibrettoSource.htm>

-A more detailed overview of the play that *Fidelio* is drawn from.

<http://www.classicalnotes.net/classics2/fidelio.html>

-An extensive overview of the opera, including a detailed guide to recordings.

### act/scene

Acts and scenes are ways of categorizing sections of operas. An act is a large-scale division of an opera, and each opera will typically include from two to five acts. Acts can be subdivided into scenes, which are often differentiated by a change in setting or characters.

### adagio

Literally “at ease,” adagio is a tempo marking that indicates a slow speed. An adagio tempo marking indicates that the performer should play in a slow and leisurely style.

### allegro

Italian for “cheerful” or “joyful,” Allegro is the most common tempo marking in Western music, indicating a moderately fast to quick speed.

### aria

A song for solo voice accompanied by orchestra. In opera, arias mostly appear during a pause in dramatic action when a character is reflecting musically on his or her emotions. Most arias are lyrical, with a tune that can be hummed, and many arias include musical repetition. For example, the earliest arias in opera consist of music sung with different stanzas of text (strophic arias). Another type of aria, da capo arias, became common by the eighteenth century and feature the return of the opening music and text after a contrasting middle section. Nineteenth-century Italian arias often feature a two-part form that showcases an intensification of emotion from the first section (the cantabile) to the second section (the cabaletta).

### articulation

The smoothness or hardness with which a note is begun and ended. Articulation is a way of indicating the degree to which each note connects to the next, and can be seen while watching the bow of a stringed instrument player. A note can be attacked sharply and made short, or it can flow smoothly into the next note.

### baritone

Literally “deep sounding,” a baritone is what a typical male voice sounds like—the term refers to a male singer with a low but not extremely low vocal range. A baritone will sing notes that are higher than those sung by a bass and lower than those sung by a tenor. Uncommon until the nineteenth century, baritone roles have grown in popularity in opera since the works of Verdi, who often reserved the voice type for villains.

### baroque

A period of music history lasting from approximately 1600 to 1750. The beginning of the Baroque period coincides with the invention of opera as a genre, and its end coincides with the death of the composer Johann Sebastian Bach. The Baroque period saw the rise of modern tonality, an expansion of performing forces, and increased ornamentation. The term “baroque” means bizarre or exaggerated, and was used by critics in the Eighteenth century critics who preferred a simpler and less-ornamented style.

## bass

The lowest sounding line in music. Bass also refers to the lowest singing range for the male voice. Opera composers often choose a bass voice to sing one of two opposite types of roles: comic characters or dramatic and serious characters. For example, Mozart and Rossini wrote comic parts for bass voice, using musical repetition and low register for comic effect. Wagner and Mozart wrote serious parts for bass voice, focusing on the gravity that a low register can contribute to the overall musical texture.

## bel canto

Referring to the Italian vocal style of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, bel canto singing emphasizes lyricism and ornamentation in order to showcase the beauty of the singer's voice. Its focus on lyrical embellishment directly contrasts with a contemporary Germanic focus on a weighty, dramatic style. Bel canto singing is most closely associated with the music of Gioachino Rossini, Vincenzo Bellini, and Gaetano Donizetti.

## cadenza

An ornamented musical elaboration played in a free style by a soloist to display his or her virtuosity. Cadenzas are typically improvised—that is, created by a performer on the spot—though they can also be written out in advance. They most frequently occur near the end of a piece, at a point of harmonic tension when the piece is about to conclude.

## chorus

A section of an opera in which a large group of singers performs together, typically with orchestral accompaniment. Most choruses include at least four different vocal lines, in registers from low to high, with multiple singers per part. The singers are typically from a particular group of people who play a certain role on stage—soldiers, peasants, prisoners, and so on. Choruses may offer a moral or commentary on the plot, or participate in the dramatic action.

## Classical

A period of music history lasting from approximately 1750 to 1830, bordered by the earlier Baroque period and the later Romantic period. Contrasting with the ornamentation common to the preceding Baroque period, Classical music is characterized by simple and elegant melodies, regular harmonic accompaniment, and contrasts between melodic themes. The composers most closely associated with the Classical period include Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Ludwig van Beethoven.

## coloratura

A rapid and elaborate ornamentation by a solo singer, particularly common in operas of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Requiring vocal agility and a wide and high range, coloratura showcases the virtuosity of a singer by featuring repeating melodic figures, rapid scales, trills, and other embellishments.

## conductor

The person who directs the orchestra, setting the tempo, giving interpretive directions to the musicians, and generally holding all the musical elements of a performance together. In orchestra performance, the conductor typically stands on a podium in front of the players and uses a baton to communicate the meter and tempo, and his or her non-baton hand to indicate dynamics, phrasing, and articulation to the musicians. The gestures of a conductor can be likened to a non-verbal language that the musicians understand.

## contralto

A deep female voice, with a vocal range that extends lower than that of a mezzo-soprano. Contraltos are known for having a very wide range and for the power and depth of sound with which they can sing. As is the case for roles for basses, many of the earliest roles in opera for contraltos are comic roles, though nineteenth-century composers also wrote dramatic roles for female singers with a lower range.

## crescendo

A gradual raising of volume in music achieved by increasing the dynamic level. When music crescendos, the performers begin at a softer dynamic level and become incrementally louder. One of the most famous types of crescendos in opera, the Rossini crescendo, includes an increase in volume together with repeating melodic and rhythmic phrases, higher instrumental registers, and the gradual addition of instruments in order to create a particularly dramatic effect.

## diminuendo

A gradual lowering of volume in music achieved by decreasing the dynamic level. During a diminuendo, the performers begin at a louder dynamic level and become incrementally softer.

## dynamics

A musical trait pertaining to loudness and softness. During the eighteenth century, composers began indicating their desired intensity of volume in music by writing words such as piano (soft) and forte (loud) into the musical score. Dynamics encompass a spectrum from pianissimo (very soft) to piano (soft) to mezzo piano (moderately soft), all the way up to fortissimo (very loud). Music can shift to another dynamic level either suddenly or gradually, through a crescendo or diminuendo.

## ensemble

A musical piece for two or more soloists, accompanied by orchestra. Types of ensembles include duets (for two soloists), trios (for three soloists), and quartets (for four soloists). Sometimes singers will respond directly to one another during an ensemble. At other times, singers will each sing to themselves as if the other singers were not on stage. In ensembles, multiple characters may simultaneously express very different emotions from one another.

## finale

The last portion of an act, a finale consists of several musical sections that accompany an escalating dramatic tension. Finales frequently consist of multiple ensembles with different numbers of characters. When it occurs at the end of an early act in the opera, a finale may create a messy situation—and the resolution of this situation will only happen in subsequent acts. One type of finale common in comic operas, a chain finale, features characters entering or exiting from the stage to create unexpected combinations of characters, in turn increasing the opera's dramatic tension.

## forte

Meaning "loud" or "strong" in Italian, forte is a dynamic level in music that indicates a loud volume. Adding the suffix "-issimo" to a word serves as an intensifier—since forte means "loud," fortissimo means "very loud."

## harmony

The simultaneous sounding of pitches to produce chords, and the relationship between different chords as they succeed one another. Throughout much of Western music, systems of rules govern these progressions to help create our sense of musical tension, expectation, and conclusion. Tonal harmony is based on progressions of chords in relationship to a tonic (or home) key. In the 19th century, as composers sought novel sounds to reflect the originality of their invention, they began to employ chords and progressions of greater dissonance and greater distance from the home key. As such dissonances moved beyond mere sound effects into the musical structure itself, the traditional theory of tonal harmony began to become insufficient as a way to understand and describe musical structure.

## intermission

A break between acts of an opera. At the beginning of an intermission, the curtain will fall (that is, close) on stage, and the lights in the auditorium, called the house lights, will become brighter. Intermissions provide audiences with a chance to walk around, talk with one another, and reflect on what they have seen and what could happen next. The break in the performance may also correspond with a change of time or scene in the story of the opera—the next act may take place hours or months later, or be set in a different location. Usually lights will dim and a bell may sound to indicate that the intermission is drawing to a close and the opera is about to resume.

## legato

A type of articulation in which a melody is played with smooth connection between the notes. A legato passage does not include any pauses between notes or any accents at the beginnings of notes, as the notes blend into one another without a break. In contrast, a passage that is played staccato features notes played in a separated manner.

## Leitmotif

From the German for “leading motive,” a leitmotif is a recurring musical idea, or motive, that represents a particular person, object, idea, emotion, or place. This musical idea is usually a few seconds in length and can occur in the music’s melody, harmony, rhythm, or a combination of the three. Leitmotifs are most closely associated with the operas of Richard Wagner, where they are used repeatedly throughout the opera to provide unity; they also less frequently appear in operas of other composers, including Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Strauss.

## libretto

The text of an opera, including all the words that are said or sung by performers. Until the early eighteenth century, a composer would frequently set music to a pre-existing libretto, and any given libretto could thus be set to music multiple times by different composers. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, collaboration between the author of the libretto, known as the librettist, and the composer became more frequent. Some opera composers, most notably Richard Wagner, are known for writing their own text.

## maestro

A title of respect used to address a conductor. The term is often applied to conductors with several decades of experience. However, performers often use this honorific when addressing the conductor.

## melody

A succession of pitches that form an understandable unit. The melody of a piece consists of the tune that a listener can hum or sing. During arias, the singer will usually sing the main melody, though other instruments may play parts of the melody. Sometimes, such as during ensembles, multiple melodies can occur simultaneously.

## mezzo-soprano

A female voice with a range between that of a contralto and soprano. A mezzo-soprano's voice is slightly deeper than that of a soprano, so mezzo-sopranos are often cast in supporting roles as older women, including nurses, confidantes, or maids.

## opera buffa

A term applied to Italian comic operas from the mid-eighteenth through mid-nineteenth centuries. The plot of an opera buffa often features scenes and characters from everyday life and addresses a light or sentimental subject, concluding with a happy ending.

## opera seria

An eighteenth- or nineteenth-century Italian opera employing a noble and serious style. The plot of an opera seria often upholds morality by presenting conflicting emotions such as love versus duty, or by modeling enlightened rulers.

## operetta

Featuring spoken dialogue, songs, and dances, an operetta is a short theatrical piece. Shorter in duration than operas, operettas typically feature a light subject matter, incorporate melodies composed in a popular style, and feature spoken dialogue. Most popular from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, the genre is the precursor of the American musical.

## ornamentation

An embellishment to the melody, rhythm, or harmony of music, intended to make a melody more expressive or ornate. Ornamentation can be either indicated through symbols written into the music or improvised by the performer.

## overture

An instrumental piece that occurs before the first act as an introduction to an opera. After the conductor enters the orchestra pit and takes a bow, the music for the overture begins. Most overtures are a few minutes in duration, and set the mood for the opera—even featuring musical themes that will occur later in the opera.

## piano

Abbreviated *p* in a musical score, piano indicates a soft dynamic level. Musicians may achieve a piano sound by using less bow, less air, or less force. In opera, soft music will often correspond with emotions of sadness or moments in the plot when a character is reflecting on a course of action or emotional state. Pianissimo is “very soft,” and can be so quiet that an audience may need to listen carefully in order to discern its melody and harmony.

## pitch

The quality of a musical sound corresponding to its perceived highness or lowness. Scientifically, pitch can be measured as the number of vibrations (or repetitions) of a sound wave per second, which is called its frequency. A sound with a low frequency, like a bass drum, will sound low and have a low pitch, while a sound with a high frequency, like a siren, will sound high.

## prima donna

Meaning “first lady” in Italian, the prima donna is the leading female role in an opera. The term may apply to the role or to the singer herself, who usually sings in the soprano register and is the star of the show. Since the nineteenth century, the term has also been applied to a singer of any gender with a self-centered and demanding personality.

## recitative

A type of vocal writing between speech and song that imitates the accents and inflections of natural speech. Composers often employ recitative for passages of text that involve quick dialogue and the advancement of plot, since the style allows singers to move rapidly through a large amount of text. Recitative may be accompanied either by keyboard or by the whole orchestra.

## rhythm

Rhythm refers to the way music unfolds over time; it is a series of durations in a range from long to short. Along with pitch, it is a basic and indispensable parameter of music. Rhythm is perceived in relation to an underlying beat and within the context of a meter. Western musical notation indicates to the performer the exact duration of each note or rest.

## Romantic

A period of music history lasting from approximately 1830 to 1900. Beginning in literature and later adopted by composers, romanticism reflected a newfound focus on individuality, nature, and emotional extremes. Music from the Romantic period often explores music’s redemptive power, focusing on the sublimity of nature, love, and the mysterious. Composers began to experiment with shortening and lengthening the standard forms and durations of musical works, and also added more expressive harmonies to convey the originality of their musical vision.

## score

The complete musical notation for a piece, the score includes notated lines for all of the different instrumental and vocal parts that unite to constitute a musical composition. In an opera orchestra, the conductor follows the score during rehearsals and performances, while each performer follows his or her individual part.

## Singspiel

Literally “sung play,” a Singspiel is an opera with spoken dialogue. Singspiels are typically in German and are from the Classical or early Romantic eras. The plot of a Singspiel is usually comic in nature, and its music may include songs, choruses, and instrumental numbers that are separated by spoken dialogue.

## solo

A piece, musical passage, or line for a lone singer or other performer, with or without instrumental accompaniment. The most common type of solo in opera is the aria, which is composed for a single voice with orchestral accompaniment.

## soprano

The highest singing range for the female voice. Roles composed for soprano singers are typically among the leading roles in the opera and require soprano singers to show off their virtuosic flexibility and range.

## tempo

Literally “time” in Italian, tempo refers to the speed of a piece of music. Tempo is indicated in a score by a variety of conventional (often Italian) words—such as *allegro*, *adagio*, *vivace*, *moderato*, *grave*, and many more—that not only provide direction on the composer’s desired rate of speed, but also carry associations of gesture and character. For instance, *vivace* indicates not only a brisk speed but also a lively spirit. Additional tempo markings may indicate when a composer asks for a section of music to be sped up (such as “*accelerando*”) or slowed down (such as “*rallentando*”).

## tenor

The highest natural male vocal range. By the nineteenth century, the tenor had become the most common vocal range for male leading roles in operas. Tenor roles often feature high-pitched notes for male voice in order to showcase the singer’s range and power. A related voice type is the countertenor, with a range above that of a tenor and similar to that of a contralto.

## theme/motive

Themes are the melodic ideas that are musical building blocks for a piece. A theme is often recognizable as a distinct tune and may reappear in its original form or in altered form throughout the piece. A motif (or motive) is a brief musical idea that recurs throughout a musical work. Motives can be based on a melodic, rhythmic, or harmonic component, and their repetition makes them recognizable to the listener. In opera, musical motives are often symbolically associated with specific characters or dramatic ideas.

## timbre

Pronounced TAM-bruh, a French word that means “sound color.” It refers to the complex combination of characteristics that give each instrument or voice its unique sound. Just as we can recognize each other by the differences in our speaking voices, operatic singing voices are distinguishable by their unique timbres. Listeners can also identify orchestral instruments by their timbre without being able to see them. The creative combination of different instrumental timbres is one of the artistic aspects of orchestration.

## trill

A rapid alternation between two pitches that are adjacent to one another. Trills are a type of ornamentation, serving to embellish the melodic line, and appear regularly within coloratura passages. Trills also may appear near the end of a piece in order to prolong the musical tension before the music concludes.

## verismo

A movement in Italian theater and opera in the late 19th century that embraced realism and explored areas of society previously ignored on the stage: the poor, the lower-class, and the criminal. Its characters are driven by passion to defy reason, morality, and the law. In order to reflect these emotional extremes, composers of verismo opera developed a musical style that communicates raw and unfiltered passions. Musically, verismo operas react against the forced ornamentation of the *bel canto* style and instead emphasize a more natural setting of the text to music. Before its exploration on the operatic stage, the verismo aesthetic first developed within the realm of literature.

# FIDELIO: MY HIGHS & LOWS

March 13, 2017

Conducted by Sebastian Weigle

Reviewed by \_\_\_\_\_

THE STARS:	STAR POWER	MY COMMENTS
Adrienne Pieczonka as Leonore	*****	
Klaus Florian Vogt as Florestan	*****	
Falk Struckmann as Rocco	*****	
Greer Grimsley as Don Pizarro	*****	
Günther Groissböck as Don Fernando	*****	

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN/STAGING
Jaquino flirts with Marzelline (duet)			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Marzelline loves Fidelio (aria)			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Rocco wants Fidelio to marry his daughter (trio)			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Rocco says a marriage needs money (aria)			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Fidelio convinces Rocco to let him go with him			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Pizarro enters and revels in his evil nature (aria)			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Pizarro tells Rocco to dig a grave for the prisoner			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN/STAGING
Fidelio angrily denounces Pizarro (aria)			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Fidelio lets the prisoners out into the yard			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Pizarro forces them back to their cells			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Act 2			
Florestan sings of hope and despair			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Rocco and Fidelio begin to dig a grave			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Florestan thanks them for bread and water			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Pizarro enters and prepares to take revenge			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Leonore reveals herself and stops Pizarro			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Leonore and Florestan are reunited in a duet			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
The prisoners rejoice at their freedom (chorus)			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Don Fernando recognizes and frees Florestan (Finale)			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5