

Beethoven's Creative Process of Composition Reflections on *Leonore* (1806) And *Fidelio* (1814)

by Anno Hellenbroich



Florestan is saved from Pizarro by Leonore.

The musical changes from *Leonore* to *Fidelio*—the dimly conscious metaphor of ‘liberation of creative power through freedom’—can be recognized as the ‘loose cords’ through which the work of art is tightened and shaped.

*In the springtime of my life
Fortune fled from me!
I dared to boldly tell the truth,
And chains are my reward.*

Florestan's Aria, *Fidelio*, Act II

*Come, Hope! Let not the last star
Of the weary be dimmed!
Light my goal, be it ever so far,
Love will attain it.
I follow my inner impulse;
I waver not;
The duty of true married love
Strengthens me!*

Leonore's Aria, *Fidelio*, Act I

At least three completely different productions of Beethoven's *Great Opera Fidelio* (1814) were presented on German stages in 1997 alone. Can it be, that Beethoven's musical personification of a great figure as wife, Leonore—who, in her singing celebrates not only “true married love,” but, by risking her life, achieves the rescue of Florestan in the dramatic development of the “Great Opera”—might have a completely unheard-of effect at the present historical turning point? For sure, it is certain that the number of *Fidelio* performances demonstrates, that, completely contrary to the spirit of the times, people today are more than ever seeking the impact of Beethovenesque “Great Opera.”

If one examines the performances in detail, it is completely apparent from them, that there are still directors living in the old era of '68-generation “director's theater” (*Regietheater*).* According to one review, one of the

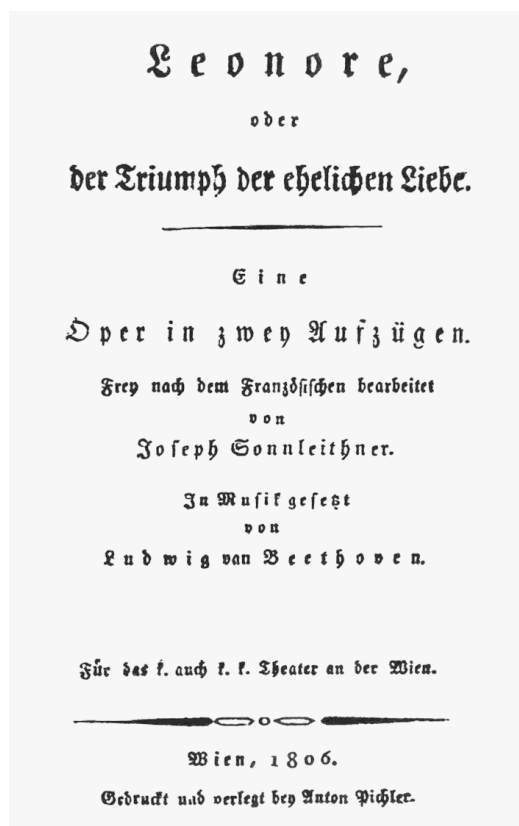
* A recent decades' fad, according to which theatrical “freedom” is expressed by discarding—or, in fact, critiquing—the ideas and intentions of even the greatest Classical authors, in favor of the titillating preoccupations of the “liberated” director.—Ed.

unfortunate directors must be a total “hard case” proponent of ’68-era “director’s theater,” and Adorno’s rage against the “affirmative character of Beethoven’s music” appears to have supplied a special arsenal for his *Fidelio*-spectacle. The critic loudly acclaims this performance in Bremen, produced by Johann Kresnick, as “political farce.” One reads: “Florestan . . . is a beatnik, a ladies’ man, a drunk, and a hardline, ideological communist.” Kresnick has also, without hesitation, shifted the central prison scene, in which Beethoven’s Florestan sings the above-cited lines, to “the meadows of Munich, at Oktoberfest”!

The conflict, the clash, of two worldviews, could not be greater. There, in Beethoven’s composition, in idea and in expression, truth, married love, and courage are celebrated; here, be it in Bremen or elsewhere, lack of character, and the misery of today’s egotist associated with it.

The concert performance in Bonn during the 35th Beethoven Festival, of *Leonore*, the early version of *Fidelio* from 1806, marked an important exception. Because, for the first time in 191 years, a performance could be modelled on a score which had been reconstructed “authentically” from notes, libretto, and also stage directions, according to scientific criteria. Thanks to the tireless work of Dr. Helga Lühning of the Bonn Beethoven-Archiv, this reconstruction of the 1806 *Leonore* will soon be published in the new Beethoven Complete Works.

The publication of the libretto from 1806, and individual studies of “*Leonore* 1806” for the Beethoven Festival, are exciting to read even today. For they create the possibility of studying, in each particular, the intricate process of creating this work of art over a decade—from 1803/4 until 1814. The successful performance of the orchestra of the Bonn Beethovenhalle, gave the accompanying three-day distinguished scientific symposium on the topic “*Leonore* 1806,” artistic confirmation of the thesis, that the juxtaposition of the *Leonore* of 1806 and *Fidelio* of 1814 with the various famous artistic figures of Beethoven’s circles, is the best way to trace the dramatic, conceptual, and declamatory-musical sharpening of Beethoven’s artistic idea. (In order to distinguish the dif-



Left: Title page of the *Leonore* version, 1806. **Facing page:** Billboard for the March 29, 1806 performance, using the title Beethoven did not wish, “*Fidelio*.” (Reproduced by permission of the Beethoven-Haus, Bonn)

ferent versions, the term “*Leonore*”—which is how Beethoven also named his first three Overtures—signifies the early versions of 1805 and 1806; the 1814 opera presented in performance is customarily called *Fidelio*.)

This lays the foundation to understand this great work of art—to term it “opera,” today, after the unspeakable theatrical spectacles of the most recent period, is difficult—more precisely than before, as the continuation of Friedrich Schiller’s thoughts on “aesthetical education,” of his “Art of Tragedy.” Particularly, because Beethoven, in the process

of the changes and development of *Leonore*, ever more intelligibly elaborated the profound ideas of the sacrifice of “personal life” for the establishment of right, justice, and freedom. However, not only this: How, in the aria of *Leonore*, and, above all, in the “keystone” aria of Florestan in 1814, Beethoven brought something to expression as metaphor, which far surpasses the transitory background plot of this dramatic work, of hope for rescue. Beethoven discovers a musical metaphor which reveals the inner domain of the individual, of his terror, not only in the face of his lonely death in a dungeon, but of his close presentiment-of-death fear of the dissolution of his creative “I,” which is overcome in the exultant duet, “*O namenlose Freude*” [“O Nameless Joy”] and in the final chorus. The musical changes which Beethoven carried out on the path from *Leonore* in 1805, up to the performance of *Fidelio* in 1814, the dimly conscious metaphor of “liberation of creative power through freedom,” can be recognized in Beethoven’s work as the “loose cords” through which the work of art is tightened and shaped.

Schiller formulates this in a general way in a letter to Caroline von Wolzogen:

There is something mysterious in the effect of music, that it moves our inner self, so that it becomes a means of connection between two worlds. We feel ourselves enlarged, uplifted, rapt—what is that called other than in the domain

of Nature, drawn to God? Music is a higher, finer language than words. In the moments, where every utterance of the uplifted soul seems too weak, where it despairs of conceiving more elegant words, there the musical art begins. From the outset, all song has this basis.

Beethoven's intense preoccupation with Schiller's view of aesthetic education, of the art of tragedy, of the sublime, can also be recognized in the shaping of the *Leonore* material, not only in the original form in 1805, the year of Friedrich Schiller's death, but also in the treatment of the *Leonore* version of 1806. Beethoven's intellectual agreement with Schiller's artistic aims is particularly clear in the final *Fidelio* version of 1814. Clearly confronted with the eight-year experience of social developments in Europe, in Austria—"the land of the Phiacians,"* as Beethoven was later wont to rail—he sharpened the principal psychological truths of Leonore, of a truly womanly character, and, of the unjustly imprisoned Florestan: a challenge to the approaching obliteration of intellectual life, and censorship of political life—an intellectual current which was at that time, after the oligarchical Congress of Vienna in 1814-15, embodied in the Carlsbad Decrees of 1818.

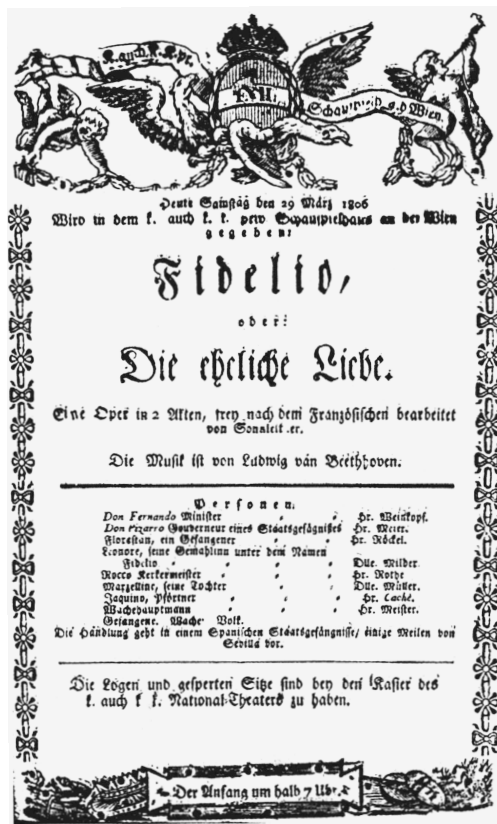
Not only Beethoven's references to Schiller's *The Virgin of Orleans* support this, but also his contact with Friedrich Rochlitz, a composer in Leipzig, with whom Schiller wished to establish a *Journal for German Women* [*Journal für deutsche Frauen*] just a few weeks prior to his death.

Leonore 1805/6

On June 22, 1806, Stephan von Breuning, a friend of Beethoven's from his days in Bonn, wrote to his sister, Eleonore, and her husband, Dr. Wegeler:

As far as I remember, I promised to write you, in my last letter, about Beethoven's opera. Since I am sure it does

* *Odyssey*, Books 5-7. An island north of Ithaca, where the stranded Odysseus encounters a people who lead lives of bucolic ease, surrounded by opulence and the bounties of nature.—Ed.



interest you, I want to keep this promise. The music is of the most beautiful and most perfect that one can hear; the subject is interesting, since it presents the freeing of a prisoner through the faithfulness and the courage of his wife; however, despite all that, nothing has caused Beethoven so much vexation as this work, whose value people will only fully appreciate for the first time in the future. First, it was staged seven days after the invasion of the French troops; therefore, at a completely unfavorable point in time. Naturally, the theaters were empty, and Beethoven, who at the same time noticed several defects in the treatment of the text, withdrew the opera after the third performance. After the return of order, he and I put it on again. I revised the entire script for him, by which the action became faster and more lively; he shortened many pieces, and it would be performed three times after this to the greatest applause. Now, however, his enemies at the theater have revolted, and several there, a few especially insulted at the second performance, have arranged that it has not been performed since then. [cited in Stephan Ley, p. 70ff]

If you read a review of the first performance, you could come to the conclusion that (as we say today) the opera "fopped." For example, you can read in a commentary by Kotzebues in *Der Freimütige*:

A new Beethoven opera, *Fidelio, or Married Love*, doesn't appeal. It was only performed a few times, and remained empty after the first performance. Both the melodies, as well as the characterization, lack (as much therein is far-fetched) that felicitous, excellent, overpowering expression of passion which grips us so irresistibly in Mozart's and Cherubini's works. . . . The text, translated by Sonnleithner, comes from a story of liberation, of the kind come into fashion since Cherubini's *Deux Journées*.

Whereas, we saw in Stephan von Breuning's judgment of the work, especially in light of the improvements, a confirmed, sensitive judgment of the story. This is not accidental. Breuning enclosed in his letter copies of two poems which he composed "as publicity" for the performances of 1805/6; the second ends with the verse, "In your music, may the power of true Beauty

always appear!”

This thought had been discussed in many ways by Schiller, so that Breuning’s wish for Beethoven is completely coherent with the discussions of art, concerning Truth and Beauty, among Beethoven’s circle of friends. Schiller often plays with this fundamental idea, whether it be the poem “The Power of Song” [*Die Macht des Gesanges*] (“Who can undo the magic of the singer; who may resist his music?”), as motivic thorough-composed metaphor in his “Ode to Joy,” or as resonating motif in “The Encounter” [*Die Begegnung*]:

On what I felt in that moment
And what I sang, I muse in vain;
I discovered a new organ in myself,
That spoke of my heart’s sacred stirring;
It was the soul, which for long years bound,
Broke at once now through all chains,
And found notes in its deepest depths,
That slept in it—divine and undreamt of.

Schiller devoted the following lines to music in the “Homage to the Arts” [*Huldigung der Künste*]:

The power of tones, which from the strings is welling,
Thou playest mightily, it well thou ken’st,
What is the bosom with foreboding swelling,
Is in my tones alone in full expressed;
Upon thy senses plays a lovely magic,
As forth my stream of harmonies doth flow,
The heart would break apart in sweetness tragic,
And from the lips the soul desires to go,
And if I start my scale of tones, I bear thee
Upon it upward to the highest beauty.

Thus, in his letter, Breuning presented a concise sketch of the story of *Leonore* 1805/6 from his own experience.

The Fate of the Republican Lafayette

Obviously, people saw some fuel in the version by Beethoven. One can sense it in Joseph Sonnleithner’s petition to the Vienna censorship authorities against the ban on performance, which plays down all contemporary political references. Sonnleithner had done the German rendering of the *Leonore* material from the French production of Jean Nicolas Bouilly. He petitioned the “k.k. Police Station” in writing on October 2, 1805, with “Five Reasons” to retract the published performance ban; among them: “the fourth, the story itself, which I forgot to note in the title, occurs in the Sixteenth century; therefore, no reference whatsoever can underlie it; and, fifth, there is such a great shortage of good librettos, and the

one in question presents the most stirring picture of wife-ly virtue, and the evil-minded governor only a private revenge, as Pedrarias exercises in Balboa.” On October 5, the k.k. Police Station permitted the performance, under the condition that the “most insulting” scenes be changed.

What really infuriated the censorship authorities? It is said, at least, that Bouilly, who was prosecutor for the French Revolution in Tours, had drawn on his own experiences. Were the Austrian public authorities so sensitive, because the *Leonore* material contained too many accusations about the vile imprisonment of the republican fighter for the American Revolution, the Marquis de Lafayette? As Donald Phau wrote in a 1978 essay, Lafayette, who had organized European support for the American Revolution, came to France to promote a republican evolution in France with Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine. He was opposed, however, by Marat’s mob, arrested after his flight from France, and thrown in prison in Austria, where he was detained between 1792 and 1797. His wife Adrienne was arrested, and only narrowly escaped the guillotine. Thanks to the help of the American government, she was able to obtain her freedom again. Disguised, Adrienne journeyed to Olmütz, where, according to the secret agreements between London, Paris, and Vienna, Lafayette remained in detention.

In 1795, Adrienne had discovered that British Prime Minister William Pitt was responsible for the imprisonment of Lafayette. Bouilly depicted him later as “Pizzaro,” the villain in *Leonore*. Thanks only to an international press campaign about the fate of this republican folk-hero, the Marquis de Lafayette; to the courage of his wife; and to effective aid (passports); could Lafayette be freed on Sept. 19, 1797.

On Feb. 19, 1798, the play *Leonore, or Married Love* [*Leonora, ou l’amour conjugal*] by Jean Nicolas Bouilly, set to music by Pierre Gaveaux, was performed for the first time in the Paris Theater Feydeau.

The visit in 1795 by Adrienne and her children to the prison, using forged passports (which, among other things, André Maurois describes in his biography of Lafayette), is amazingly similar to the description of the scene at the beginning of the second act of *Fidelio*:

They were led down a succession of long passages until they reached two padlocked doors which gave access to Lafayette’s quarters. He had not been warned of their coming. He was still kept in solitary confinement. Not only were there no letters delivered to him, but he was not even told whether the members of his family were alive or dead. The only news that reached him in this terrible solitude was conveyed in a code song hummed to him by Felix Pon-

tonnier, his young secretary, who was put on a diet of bread and water whenever he was caught in the act by the jailers. After a great grinding of bolts, the door suddenly opened and Lafayette saw before him his wife and his daughters. What a shock and what happiness!

. . . He was little more than skin and bone. She had not set eyes on him for four years. Although he was only thirty-eight, he had aged beyond all belief. . . . He had difficulty in recognizing Adrienne in this gray-haired woman with seamed face. [André Maurois, cited in Phau, p. 44]

In his biography of Schiller, Benno von Wiese poses the question:

Wasn't a figure like the thirty-two-year-old Lafayette, who, following the model of the American Declaration of Independence, put forward to the National Assembly on June 11, 1789, the blueprint for the rights of man, an exact embodiment of the Schillerian Posa? [von Wiese, p. 450]

In his answer, von Wiese alludes to Schiller's disassociation from the later developments of the French Revolution, without, however, emphasizing Schiller's clear preference for the Leibnizian ideas in the origins of the American Revolution.

In any case, however, Lafayette's fate was more on the mind of Europe's humanists—Beethoven among them—than people today suppose. Did this irritate the sensibilities of the Vienna authorities?

On Nov. 20, 1805, the original performance occurred under the title (not wanted by Beethoven, incidentally) *Fidelio, or Married Love*, concerning which Breuning wrote his sister, Eleonore, a friend of Beethoven in her youth, the above-cited letter. On Nov. 13, Vienna had been occupied by Napoleon's troops. On Dec. 2, 1805, the great battle of the three Kaisers was fought at Austerlitz, at which Napoleon was victorious over Austria and Russia.

As Breuning correctly reports, at that time Beethoven wanted to make *Leonore* a success through revisions of the imperfections in musical declamation and dramatic development. He retained Breuning to help in adapting the text.



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

The Marquis de Lafayette, the republican hero who inspired the character Florestan.

Schiller's Writings and Beethoven's *Leonore*

In his youth, Beethoven had become quite familiar with, and very engaged in, the intellectual life of the time, through his cordial reception by the Breuning family. Schiller's works, generally everything related to his writings and poetry, were quite esteemed in this family [see Schiedermaier]. Upon Beethoven's departure for Vienna in 1792, his friends inscribed quotations from Schiller in his album; his friend Klemmer wrote thus from *Don Carlos*:

They say to him, that he should bear respect for the dreams of his youth when he becomes a man; [He] should not open the heart of the tender flower of God, to the deadening insect, of more honored common sense—that he will not err, if *inspiration*, the daughter of heaven, blasphemes dusty wisdom. [cited in Schiedermaier]

These were the years of Schiller's inspiration in Rhineland Bonn. Direct connections to Schiller were established through the jurist and university professor Fischenish, with whom Schiller and his wife exchanged letters, in which Beethoven's efforts to set Schiller's "Ode to Joy" ["*Ode an die Freude*"] are also reported.

By this time, slightly altered lines of verse from Schiller's "Ode to Joy" are again found in the finale of the original performance:

Who has attained a noble wife
Join us in our jubilee!

(Schiller's verse, "Mingle in his jubilee!" ["*Mische seinen Jubel ein!*"], was later set to music by Beethoven in the Ninth Symphony.)

Thus, it appeared nothing but appropriate to Beethoven's inner development, to find in Stephan von Breuning the person to collaborate in the improvement of the *Leonore* material of 1805. (Remember, also, that Beethoven would have gladly assigned this work to a not-so-outstanding poet like Breuning. For, composing music for great poetical works is more difficult, as Beethoven commented while wrestling to set to music the Ninth Symphony, or the *Fiesco* and *Wilhelm Tell* pro-

jects. He formulated it as follows, in his well-known comment before his pupil Czerny: “Schiller’s poetical works are extremely difficult to set to music. The composer must know how to raise himself far above the poet. Who can do this with Schiller? In this respect, Goethe is much easier.”)

Schiller’s Death

In May 1805, at the time of the completion of the first version of *Leonore*, Friedrich Schiller died.

There is probably no direct evidence of how Beethoven reacted to Schiller’s death. Did Beethoven have his eye on the Schillerian tragedies, particularly *The Virgin of Orleans* [*Die Jungfrau von Orleans*], in the later years of his work on the Leonore material? Beethoven was obliged to employ precisely the image of woman which Schiller portrays in Joan of Arc.

In the *Fidelio* 1814, for example, Beethoven had textually rewritten through the librettist Treitschke (or perhaps, in fact, even himself) Leonore’s key recitative, and inserted, among other things, the metaphor of hope: “Thus a rainbow shines for me”

In Act V of *The Virgin of Orleans*, Joan dies with the words:

Do you behold the rainbow in the air?
The Heaven opens up its golden gates:
I’th’ choir of angels stands she gleaming there,
She holds th’ eternal Son upon her breast,
Her arms she smiling stretches out to me.
Her arms she smiling stretches out to me.
What comes o’er me—Light clouds are lifting me—
The heavy armor does to winged garments turn.
Upward—upward—The earth does backward flee—
Brief is the pain, the joy shall be eterne!

In November 1813, Beethoven composed a canon on this final verse, “Brief is the pain” [*Kurz ist der Schmerz*] (WoO 163)—that is, at the same time as his revision of *Fidelio*.

Was not the ongoing revision of *Leonore* into *Fidelio*, therefore, a dramatic realization of Schillerian ideas in a sung work of art, which, admittedly, was conceived by Beethoven as an opera (whose dramatic requirements he was well equipped to handle), but which went beyond the framework of all previous musical works for the stage?

After all, hadn’t Schiller called *The Virgin of Orleans* a “romantic tragedy,” and in a letter to Göschen characterized the work thusly: “This work flowed from the heart, and was meant to speak to the heart as well” (Feb. 10, 1802). Beethoven inscribed this thought above

his *Missa Solemnis*.

During the period of the preparation of this work, Schiller wrote:

Our tragedy, if we would have such, has to wrestle with impotence, flabbiness, the lack of character of the spirit of the time, and with a base way of thinking; it must, therefore, demonstrate strength and character; it must shake the soul to elevate it, but not try to shatter it. [Letter to Suevern]

This could have applied as an artistic guide to Beethoven’s revision.

Schiller, Rochlitz, and the *Journal for German Women*

Beethoven’s first mention of the fact that he was working on *Leonore* occurred in a letter of Jan. 4, 1804, to Friedrich Rochlitz in Leipzig.

Among other things, Beethoven sent him back an opera libretto (“Would that this material were not sorcery”), and then Beethoven wrote: “I have had an old French script adapted for me quickly, and am beginning now to work on it.” The latter was Bouilly’s *Leonore* libretto, translated into German by Sonnleithner.

In June 1801, Schiller wrote in a letter to Goethe, that “Rochlitz from Leipzig” was with him: “As he tells it, you [Goethe] have encouraged him to thus compete for the play prizes. He certainly has good intentions, but lacks the abilities.” Later on, Schiller came to a still critical, but favorable, view of Rochlitz’s talent.

In addition, two more letters to Goethe mention Rochlitz.

In November 1804, the publisher Göschen was on a visit to Schiller and received from him the promise, that he would participate in the new *Journal for German Women, written by German Women* (*Journal für deutsche Frauen, geschrieben von deutschen Frauen*) as a kind of patron—“managed by Wieland, Schiller, Rochlitz and Seume.” Even on April 24, 1805, two weeks before his death, Schiller had wished him luck on the “new launching of the Journal for Women.”

That was only a few months before the premiere of *Leonore*.

Therefore, at the moment when Schiller, as well as Rochlitz and Seume, all of whom were esteemed by Beethoven, wanted to participate in this *Journal for Women* project—was not perhaps the question of the image of women in history, from Joan of Arc up to Leonore-Fidelio, the substance of a dialogue amongst them?

‘In the springtime of life, Fortune has flown from me!’— The Shaping of Florestan’s Aria, from 1806 to 1814

1806 version

By shifting a few notes through the new harmonic phrasing, and through slight rhythmic touches, the declamation and expression grow in intensity (extension of the high note at “kühn” [boldly]; the highest note at “Ketten” [chains]; the opening in C \flat instead of a return to E \flat major).

1814 version

(Reproduced by permission of the Beethoven-Haus, Bonn, Dr. Helga Lühning.)

On the Path to the ‘High Musical Work of Art’

In 1827, a reviewer for the Munich *Allgemeine Musik-Zeitung* called Beethoven’s opera “a high musical work of art of the German school.” [cited in Riethmüller, *inter alia*, p. 548]

“A high musical work of art”—isn’t this description more accurate than today’s “rescue opera,” “opera of horrors,” “opera in the tradition of *opera semiseria*,” etc.?

Beethoven’s labors on the path from *Leonore* to *Fidelio* made possible the tightening of the dramatic tension, sharpening of outline, differentiation of notes, of instrumentation, and of expression. Schiller’s essay, “On the Reason We Take Delight in Tragic Objects” [“*Über den Grund des Vergnügens an tragischen Gegenständen*”] formulates many principles which were obviously followed by Beethoven in the artistic shaping. As a warning, Schiller writes at the beginning: “The well-intentioned aim, to pursue the Moral everywhere as the highest end, which already generated and took under protection so many mediocrities in art, has also caused damage in theory.”

And he continues, after a commentary on Morals:

The means through which art achieves its aim are as manifold as, in general, there are springs of free delight. However, I call “free,” that delight whereby the intellectual powers, reason and imagination, are active, and where feeling is generated through an idea; [it is] the opposite of physical or

sensuous delight, whereby the soul is subject to a blind necessity of nature, and feeling occurs directly through its physical cause.

Schiller, then, would distinguish those arts, which are concerned chiefly with the understanding and the power of imagination (arts of taste), and those, which concern chiefly reason and the power of imagination, therefore having the Good, the Sublime, and the Pathetic as the highest object (arts of the heart). Schiller then discusses the phenomenon, that normally the Sublime strongly contradicts sensuous thinking; indeed, causes listlessness and annoyance: “A Sublime object, precisely because it clashes with sensuousness, is appropriate for Reason, and delights through the higher capacity, while it pains through the base capacity.”

For the 1814 performance, Beethoven deleted a Leonore-Marzelline duet: “In order to live happily in marriage, above all else, one must be true to himself,” and a trio of Rocco-Marzelline-Jacquino: “A husband is found in a short time; a man easily takes a wife; but after the passing of time, regret can come quickly.” Many see in that, Beethoven’s surgical dramatic editing—of course, one should not criticize it—to the detriment of “the idyllic,” or of the “personal life” of Marzelline, who, seeking personal happiness, believes she perceives a beau, Fidelio, in the disguised form of the young Leonore. It would be very difficult today to emphasize the fully executed

“heroic-utopian” aspects of the *Fidelio* of 1814, say some writers of music reviews. If one recalls Schiller’s reflections: could it be, that the reason why, today, more than ever, people want to see *Fidelio*, is precisely that people—suffering under a privatist, “personal life” ethos that has been driven to the extreme (but which, ironically, does not fear to display the most intimate things on television!)—seek the opposite in Beethoven’s drama? And that Beethoven intensified, by tightening up the action of the play, the artistic effect he was seeking to produce? That mankind today seeks something, which can restore a relation of reason to the important things in life, in order to reestablish a splintered existence, the cruelly and egotistically isolated soul, in fact, in respect to, as Schiller formulates it, “the purpose of mankind—progress.”

As can be recognized from the chronology of the origin of particular segments from *Leonore*, Beethoven changed the keystone arias of Leonore and Florestan

most of all, in the course of the revisions. For the Florestan aria alone, at least eighteen outlines and rough drafts have been located. A great deal of effort flowed into the conclusions of Acts I and II. (Of course, the meaning and leading musical ideas of the four Overtures in connection with the central developmental parts, the motif arias of Florestan and Leonore, Pizarro’s aria, as well as the development of the trumpet signal as the turning of the tide in the drama, the righteous freeing of the prisoners, are worth special examination.)

It is surprising that the famous canon, “It is so wonderful for me” [*Mir ist so wunderbar*], the dramatic exposition of the four contracting parties, was composed complete and unchanged from the very beginning:

MARZELLINE

It is so wonderful for me;
It quickens my heart;
He loves me, it’s clear,

Beethoven, Mozart On Married Love

Right: Beethoven jotted down excerpts from Mozart’s opera “*The Magic Flute*,” at the time he was working on “*Leonore*.” **Below:** The Mozart score, whose text reads, “For through it [the love of man and wife] the happiness and contentment of mankind is increased.”

(Reproduced by permission of the Beethoven-Haus, Bonn, Sammlung H.C. Bodmer, authorized by Dr. Helga Lühning.)



1./2. Dame
denn durch sie wird Menschenglück und Zu - frie - den - heit ver - mehrt

3. Dame
denn durch sie wird Menschenglück und Zu - frie - den - heit ver - mehrt

Tamino
8 denn durch sie wird Menschenglück und Zu - frie - den - heit ver - mehrt

Papageno
denn durch sie wird Menschenglück und Zu - frie - den - heit ver - mehrt

I will be so happy.

LEONORE

How great is the danger,
How weak the light of hope;
She loves me, it's clear,
O unspeakable torment!

ROCCO

She loves him, it's clear,
Yes, maiden, he will be yours,
A good young couple,
They will be happy.

JAQUINO

My hair now stands on end,
Her father consents;
It's getting so wonderful for me,
I can think of no way out.

The latter is noteworthy, since, on the one hand, the “fixed canon” “forces together” the four bargaining characters; on the other hand, the dissimilar character-sketches are presented “contemplatively” to the audience as the point of departure at the beginning of the piece.

‘To Hope’

Beethoven's numerous developments, changes, enlargements, and condensations of both principal arias of “hope,” the aria of Leonore in Act I, and the Florestan aria in Act II, are particularly revealing in musical, as well as textual-dramatic, hindsight. Dr. Helga Lühning rightly emphasizes [see Riethmüller, I and II], that Beethoven, in both creative periods of the early *Leonore* version of 1804/5 and the later *Fidelio* version of 1814, had worked at the same time on composing music for Tiedge's “To Hope” [*Das Lied an der Hoffnung*], from Tiedge's *Urania* poems. Tiedge called this a “lyrical didactic poem in six songs.” Beethoven completed his first composition, Op. 32, in 1804/5, and his second composition, Op. 94, in spring 1815.

The sketches for Op. 32 are in the middle of the Leonore Sketch-Book; the oldest records for Op. 94 have been handed down in three pages which also contain a brief notice for the *Fidelio* Overture, and underneath that, the motif of the horns from the *Allegro* of the Leonore aria. Near it are printed Leonore's lines, “Come, Hope! Let not the last star of the weary be dimmed,” perhaps an imprint in speech of the common musical metaphor which Beethoven had in mind in the 1804/5 and 1814/15 psychological shaping of this aria of Leonore and his work on Tiedge's verses. The textual changes appeared as follows.

In the libretto of 1806, which Beethoven had improved together with Stephan von Breuning, the fol-

lowing is found in Leonore's key aria, following the beginning, as recitative:

O! Break not yet you weak heart!
Days of horror you have endured,
With each hour new sorrow
And alarming fear.

And then the aria opens up:

Come, Hope! Let not the last star
Of the weary be dimmed!
Light their goal! Be it ever so far,
Love will reach it!
O you, for whom I endured all,
Would I could force my way to the place
Where wickedness cast you in chains,
And bring you sweet comfort
I follow my inner impulse,
I waver not,
The duty of true married love
Strengthens me!

As Lühning relates, Beethoven had requested that the first librettist, Sonnleithner, supply an additional stanza for the aria part; obviously, the musical idea through the work by Beethoven with Tiedge's poem was the right metaphor for this strophic part, which was inserted at this stage. A similar thing recurs in 1813/14.

In the revisions in 1813/14, Beethoven, together with his third librettist, Treitschke, gives the following expression to this passage:

No. 9

Recitative

Horrible! Where do you hurry?
What do you intend in your wild rage?
The call of compassion, the voice of humanity,
(*passionately*) No longer touches your tiger instinct;
However fury and anger also rage
In your soul like ocean waves,
So a rainbow shines for me,
Which rests bright in the dark clouds,
That looks down so silently and peacefully;
That reflects former times again,
And my blood flows newly calm.

Aria

Come, Hope! Let not the last star
Of the weary be dimmed!
Light my goal, be it ever so far,
Love will reach it.
etc.

In the preliminary stage of *Leonore*—as Dr. Helga Lühning points out—Beethoven had worked on the song setting of Tiedge's “To Hope” (Op. 32), in which is found the verse line: “O Hope! Let the sufferer, having been lifted up by you, divine that there above, an angel counts

his tears.” Shortly after completing the composition of *Fidelio* in 1814, Beethoven wrote a second version of this song, which he introduces with the verse lines:

May a God exist?
May he fulfill in the future,
What longing tearfully hopes for?
May, before a Last Judgment occurs,
This enigmatic Being reveal His nature?
Man is made to hope!
He questions not!
What you celebrate on holy nights so gladly
etc.

“May He fulfill in the future, what longing tearfully hopes for?”

Beethoven, after the personal crisis of 1802 (“*Heiligenstädter Testament*”), then worked on the Third Symphony, and the “Appassionata” and “Waldstein” sonatas; but, also on the setting of the Gellert songs. In the “*Bußlied*” [“Song of Atonement”], Gellert No. 6, the resemblance to the “Recordare” (measure 47ff) from Mozart’s *Requiem* can be noticeably detected. (It existed as a printed score for the first time during this period in Vienna.)

The text inserted in the recitative, “So a rainbow shines for me,” shows echoes of the last verse lines of Joan in Schiller’s *The Virgin of Orleans*. Florestan’s “An angel, so like my wife Leonore, who leads me to freedom in the heavenly realm,” is stamped from the same coin.

As well, an impartial hearing of the 1803 projected “dramatic Oratorio” *Christ on the Mount of Olives* [*Christus am Ölberg*] (Op. 85), demonstrates new aspects of Beethoven’s understanding of “the God-like nature of man,” exactly in agreement with the later shaping of the Florestan aria [SEE “Beethoven’s *Christ on the Mount of Olives*,” this issue, p. 4].

The Prison Scene

In 1806, Beethoven composed the following scene. In the stage directions, it is described: *Florestan (alone)*. *He sits on a stone. Around his waist he has a long chain, whose end is fastened to the wall.*

Recitative

God! What darkness here! O dreadful silence!
Desolation surrounds me! I am the only living being here!
O onerous test!—But God’s will is just!
I will not complain! For the measure of my suffering is in
your power!

Aria

In the springtime of life
Fortune has flown from me!
I dared to tell the truth boldly,
And chains are my reward.

I willingly bear all the sufferings,
And would end my journey in ignominy:
Sweet consolation in my heart:
I have done my duty.
(*He pulls out a portrait from his bosom.*)
Alas! Those were beautiful days,
When my gaze hung on yours,
When I embraced you
With a joyful beat of my heart!
May love soften your complaint,
Let you travel your way in peace;
Let it speak to your heart, and say:
Florestan has done what is right.
(*He sinks onto the stone, his hands covering his face.*)

In the revision of this prison scene, Treitschke redrafted, at Beethoven’s urging (or was it Beethoven himself who did the redrafting?), the second stanza (“Alas, those were beautiful days . . .”):

(*In a rapture bordering on madness, yet peaceful*)
Don’t I feel gentle, soft, rustling air?
Doesn’t my grave appear to me?
I see, what looks like an angel in a rosy glow,
Standing at my side taking comfort.
An angel, so like my wife, Leonore,
Who leads me to freedom in the Heavenly realm.
(*He sinks down, exhausted from the extreme emotion, to the stone seat, his hands covering his face.*)

Doesn’t this remind us of Joan’s “vision?”—

Do you behold the rainbow in the air?
The Heaven opens up its golden gates:
I’th’ choir of angels stands she gleaming there,
She holds th’eternal Son upon her breast,
Her arms she smiling stretches out to me.
What comes o’er me—Light clouds are lifting me—

Now, after countless drafts—in the course of which the introduction had already long been completed—Beethoven wrote the immense oboe solo in counterpoint for this “surpassingly” beautiful tenor aria.

As the foreword to *The Bride of Messina* (*The Bride of Messina, or the Enemy Brothers. A Tragedy with Choruses*) [*Die Braut von Messina oder Die feindlichen Brüder. Ein Trauerspiel mit Chören*], Schiller wrote, “On the Use of the Chorus in Tragedy” [“*Über den Gebrauch des Chores in der Trägodie*”]. On this occasion, he discussed some aspects of art which Beethoven certainly advocated in many statements as his very own conception, as Beethoven often used to quote to his circle of friends from this work:

True art, however, did not aim merely at a passing performance; it is serious about not merely transporting man to a

momentary dream of freedom, but making him actually and in fact free; in this way, it awakens, exercises, and develops in him a power to remove the sensuous world—which otherwise only weighs upon us as a coarse substance; presses upon us as a blind power—to an objective distance, to transform it into a free work of our spirit, and to master the material world through ideas.

For exactly that reason, because true art demands something honest and objective, it cannot thus be satisfied with merely the semblance of truth; [it seeks] truth itself; in the solid and deep foundation of Nature, it establishes its ideal structure.

Thus understood, art has the power to move mankind, since it isn't satisfied "with the semblance of truth," but establishes its "ideal structure" in "the truth" alone. The changes in the *Leonore* and *Florestan* arias demonstrate Beethoven's efforts to shape more intelligibly the inner processes of tension between hopelessness, rage, resoluteness based on love, and freedom ("By loving, I succeeded in freeing you from chains" [*Liebend ist es mir gelungen, dich aus Ketten zu befrei'n*"]—Finale, 1814).

The revisions were by no means easy for Beethoven. Thus, he wrote in a letter to

the librettist Treitschke in March 1814:

I assure you, dear T., the opera would earn me the martyr's crown, had you not put forth so much effort into it, and adapted everything so well, for which I will forever be grateful to you; I would scarcely have been able to bring myself to do it—you have thereby salvaged a few remnants that are still good from a ship run aground.



Equestrian statue of Joan of Arc, St. Augustine Church, Paris. Schiller's treatment of Joan appears in the character Leonore.

Leonore and *Fidelio*, described here according to Beethoven's manner as "remnants from a ship run aground," are indeed more capable today than ever before, of confronting people with the great questions which stir and preserve mankind. In particular, the comparison of the authentic versions of 1806 and 1814, and the individual studies of multiple revisions of the key dramatic passages in Beethoven's own hand, make possible an invaluable insight into Beethoven's creative process of composition—whose creative principle, more than ever today, in this world of "Information Age linear thinking," will surely grow in importance.

—translated by Anita Gallagher

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Leonore oder der Triumph der ehelichen Liebe* (*Leonore, or the Triumph of Married Love, Opera in Two Acts* by Ludwig van Beethoven), ed. by Helga Lühning (Bonn: Beethoven-Haus, 1996).
35. *Beethovenfest, Das Buch zum Programm* (35th Beethoven Festival, Program Book) (Bonn: 1997).
- Leonore und Fidelio, Dokumente aus den Sammlungen des Beethoven-Hauses* (*Leonore and Fidelio, Documents from the Collection of the Beethoven-Haus. Catalogue*), ed. by Helga Lühning (Bonn: Beethoven-Haus, 1997).
- Beethoven—Briefwechsel, Gesamtausgabe* (*Beethoven—Correspondence, Complete Edition*), Vol. 3, ed. by Sieghard Brandenburg, under the direction of the Beethoven-Haus, Bonn (Munich: 1996).
- Beethoven, Interpretationen seiner Werke* (*Beethoven: Interpretations of His Works*), Parts I and II, ed. by Albrecht Riethmüller, Carl Dahlhaus, and Alexander L. Ringer (1994).
- Ludwig Schieder, *Der junge Beethoven* (*The Young Beethoven*)

(1925).

- Stephan Ley, *Beethoven als Freund der Familie Wegeler-v. Breuning* (*Beethoven as a Friend of the Wegeler-von Breuning Family*) (Bonn: Verlag Friedrich Cohen, 1927).
- Schillers Sämtliche Werke in zwölf Bänden* (*Schiller's Collected Works, in Twelve Volumes*) (Stuttgart: Cotta Verlag, 1860).
- Der Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Goethe* (*The Correspondence between Schiller and Goethe*), ed. by Paul Stapf (Bonn, Darmstadt: Tempel-Verlag, 1970).
- Schillers Briefe in zwei Bänden* (*Schiller's Letters, in Two Volumes*) (Aufbau Verlag, 1982).
- Peter Lahnstein, *Schillers Leben* (*The Life of Schiller*) (Munich: Paul List Verlag, 1981).
- Benno von Wiese, *Friedrich Schiller* (Stuttgart: J.P. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1978).
- Donald Phau, "Fidelio: Beethoven's Celebration of the American Revolution," *The Campaigner*, August 1978 (Vol. 11, No. 6).