

# Fidelio

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## Synopsis

Background: **Florestan**, a Spanish noble, had learned of atrocities committed by **Pizarro**, the evil governor of the state prison. As a result, Pizarro has had Florestan thrown into the darkest dungeon of the prison where, for two years, he has been slowly starving to death. Now his faithful wife, **Leonore**, suspecting where he might be, has disguised herself as a young man, Fidelio, and has obtained a position as assistant to the jailer, **Rocco**. Rocco does not know the identity of the prisoner nor why he is there. Rocco's daughter, **Marzelline**, has fallen in love with Fidelio and spurns the advances of the prison porter, **Jaquino**.

(Note: the original story had its roots in the French Revolution but was moved to the sixteenth century to avoid censorship. Because of the universal nature of the story, later productions have set it in many different times and places. The present San Diego Opera production is set during time of Beethoven and Napoleon.

### **ACT I: The courtyard of the prison**

Jaquino is watching Marzelline iron. When he tries to strike up a conversation, she puts him off. Marzelline sympathizes with Jaquino but can think only of her love for 'Fidelio'. They are interrupted by a knock at the door. When Jaquino returns to continue his suit she answers with a firm 'No!'.

Left alone, Marzelline dreams of her future happiness with Fidelio (*O wär' ich schön mit dir vereint* — Oh, if I were already one with you). Rocco enters, looking for Fidelio, just as 'he' returns, struggling with heavy, newly repaired chains, from a trip to the blacksmith. He also brings dispatches for Pizarro.

Rocco praises him for his diligence and promises that his assistant will soon be rewarded, hinting he may marry Marzelline.

In a quartet, the characters sing of their feelings (*Mir ist so wunderbar* — It is so wonderful to me). Marzelline thinks of her future happiness, Leonore is apprehensive of the danger she is in, Jaquino is jealous and Rocco thinks of the happiness of the young 'couple'. Rocco announces that Fidelio and Marzelline can be married as soon as Pizarro leaves for Seville, then sings of the happiness money brings (*Hat man nicht auch Gold* -- If one doesn't also have money). Fidelio tells him married love is better than gold. She begs to be allowed to help him in caring for the prisoners in the dungeons. Although he has had orders that no one else is to go to the cells, he admits he needs help. He agrees to let her accompany him to all but one very secret dungeon. There is a prisoner there that cannot last much longer. Leonore guesses he must be her husband. In a, Marzelline begs her 'fiancé' not to go to the dungeons, Leonore states her determination to go, and Rocco signifies his acceptance of her help.

The sound of a march announces Pizarro's arrival. He is handed his dispatches which warn him that the government is sending Don Fernando to investigate stories of abuse at the prison. (Fernando is a friend of Florestan's but believes him dead.) Pizarro decides Florestan must die at once (*Ha! Welch ein Augenblick!* — Ha! What a moment!). He orders that trumpeters be posted to warn him of Fernando's arrival, then flatters Rocco and offers him money to kill the special prisoner. When Rocco demurs, Pizarro decides to do the act himself and orders the jailer to dig a grave in a ruined cistern for the corpse. Leonore has overheard and resolves to save the prisoner (*Abscheulicher!* — Abominable one!).

Jaquino is still pursuing Marzelline, but Rocco tells him she will marry 'Fidelio'. In turn, Leonore and Marzelline beg Rocco to allow the prisoners to come up into the courtyard for some fresh air. He agrees but only for the prisoners in the upper cells.

As Leonore searches the face of each emerging prisoner, hoping to find her husband, the prisoners rejoice in the sunlight (*O welche Lust* — Oh, what joy). Rocco has asked Pizarro's permission for Marzelline and 'Fidelio' to marry, and it has been granted. The jailer will also be allowed to take his helper with him into the dungeons where they must dig a grave. At her anxious question, he admits the man is not yet dead; Pizarro is to kill him. She asks if they could not set him free, but Rocco says that is impossible.

Pizarro enters, raging that the prisoners have been let out. Rocco explains it was to celebrate the king's name-day. Pizarro orders them back to their cells. and sadly, they say farewell to the sun (*Leb' wohl* — Farewell). As they leave, Rocco and Leonore start their descent to the dungeon.

### **ACT II, Scene 1: Florestan's dungeon**

Alone in the darkness, a chained Florestan sings of his despair (*Gott! Welch Dunkel hier!* — God, What darkness here!). He does not complain, he has done his duty by speaking up, even if it has led to his imprisonment. In his delirium, he sees a vision of Leonore leading him to Heaven, then sinks down as Rocco and Leonore descend into the cell. Leonore tries unsuccessfully to see the prisoner's face. As she and Rocco start to dig in anticipation of Pizarro's arrival, Leonore resolves to save the prisoner whomever he is.

When Florestan wakes and demands the name of the prison's governor, Leonore recognizes him. When he is told Pizarro's name, he begs Rocco to send a message to a certain Leonore Florestanin Seville, saying her husband is lying in chains. Rocco responds that is impossible but, when asked for some water, tells his helper to give the prisoner some wine. As Florestan thanks 'Fidelio', she manages him to give him a little bread. The prisoner realizes that 'the 'boy' and Rocco are moved by his plight. As Rocco whistles to signal Pizarro, Florestan wonder if he shall ever see Leonore again.

Pizarro arrives, disguising his voice as he orders 'the boy' to leave. Instead she hides. Gloatingly, Pizarro reveals himself to Florestan and draws a dagger to stab him. Leonore throws herself between them announcing: "First you must stab this breast". When Pizarro pushes her away, she draws a pistol: "First kill his wife!". At this dramatic moment, a trumpet sounds announcing the arrival of Don Fernando.

As Pizarro and Rocco stand dumbfounded, Florestan and Leonore embrace, and Jaquino and some soldiers enter to announce the arrival of the minister. Pizarro curses, and Rocco, glad to be free of the oppressor, wonders about his own fate. Leonore and Florestan sing of their joy (*O namenlose Freude!* — On nameless joy!).

### **Scene 2. The castle courtyard.**

The castle guards march in, followed by Don Fernando and Pizarro. Jaquino and Marzeline lead in the prisoners, and Don Fernando, on orders of the king, frees them all. Rocco brings in Florestan and Leonore, asking mercy for them also. As a stunned Don Fernando recognizes his old friend whom he had thought dead, Rocco tells how Leonore has come to the prison disguised as a boy. The villain Pizarro is led away, the crowd (including many

townspeople) calls for the his punishment, and Don Fernando gives Leonore the privilege of removing Florestan's chains. All join in a paean to married love (*Wer ein solches Weib errungen* — He who has won such a wife). —  
*Article written by Elizabeth Otten.*

## The Music of *Fidelio*

*When I look back across my entire life, I find no event to place beside this in the impression it produced on me.*

— Wagner on seeing a performance of *Fidelio*

Beethoven was *not* a facile composer; virtually everything he wrote was accompanied by tremendous, sometimes monumental effort. We can easily see this when we look at existent manuscripts and sketch books from the composer's hand. The surfaces are often covered with erasure marks, cross-hatching, passages hidden by solid ink blots and disconnected notes flying from one end of the page to the other. It often took years for him to complete a symphony, sonata or string quartet, to say nothing of *Fidelio* which was the result of a twelve-year creative process, at the end of which the composer had *still* not produced a single, definitive version of the work.

Whether by accident or purposeful calculation, this sense of struggle is communicated in the music of *Fidelio* to a great degree. Surely all of the classic elements that we recognize as being peculiar to Beethoven are present in the score: heightened emotion, syncopation and heavily accented weak beats, a sense of equality amongst all of the sections of the orchestra, a motivic rather than a melodic approach to musical development and an overall sense of craggy individualism, the singular artist battling against all odds for meaning and understanding. One will find all of these Beethovenian hallmarks in nearly every one of the composer's mature works. These style characteristics were surely enhanced by his gradual deafness, a handicap that must have underscored the sense of isolation that he already experienced due to his unique personality.

But what is remarkable about this opera is that the pervasive sense of struggle exists not only in the orchestral parts but in the vocal lines as well. Writing on the heels of the most elegant shaper of melody in Western Music (Mozart), and parallel to an Italian master of nearly equal skill (Rossini), Beethoven's vocal lines for the characters in *Fidelio* seem perverse in comparison. So much of the vocal music is angular and 'athletic' in character. Phrases are unwieldy, at times seeming more instrumentally derived and 'anti-vocal'. The cumulative effect is of characters struggling mightily to communicate, singers battling their own limitations and (hopefully!)

overcoming all odds in order to emerge victorious. It all works wonderfully well because that's what **Fidelio** is all about: the triumph of good over evil through selfless acts of steadfast love *against all odds*.

Within this context of a monumental struggle successfully achieved the shape of Leonora's vocal lines in *Abscheulicher!* (Abominable man!) and the cruel *tessitura* of Florestan's *Gott! Welch Dunkel hier* (God! What darkness here) make logical sense. These *are* characters struggling against forces that seem stronger than them. At the same time, these are *singers* who seem to be (and very often *are*) struggling against musical demands that are very nearly impossible to achieve with any perfection. Intentional or not, Beethoven's vocal style works ideally in order to communicate this story.

Another device that Beethoven uses to tell the story can be seen in the emotional progression of the opera's musical numbers. Beginning with the first vocal piece (the Marzelline/Jacquino duet, *Jetzt Schätzchen* — Yes, sweetheart), there is a slow progression from light to dark, and back to light again. This emotional development parallels the progression of the story from the relative light of the prison courtyard to the impenetrable darkness of Florestan's dungeon cell to the courtyard of the fortress in the full daytime sun. Compare the orchestral accompaniment of the Marzelline/Jacquino duet to the introduction to Act II and you will hear the difference in tone, color and emotion immediately. Quickly move from there to the final chorus (*Wer ein holdes Weib errungen* — Who has a fair wife) which ends the work in a blaze of glory and you'll have a quick aural snapshot of the dramatic traversal that this opera encompasses.

Among the many things to listen for in the score, the quartet in Act I, *Mir ist so wunderbar* (It is so wonderful), is the first truly sublime moment in an opera with *many* sublime moments! In this quartet, Marzelline, Leonore, Rocco and Jacquino reveal their innermost thoughts. Marzelline speaks of her overwhelming feelings for this stranger, Fidelio; Leonore remarks on her anxiety and the danger that she now finds herself in given Marzelline's feelings; Rocco, the loving father, sees in Fidelio the perfect match for his daughter; and Jacquino despairs that Marzelline will ever love him. All of these disparate feelings are dealt with in a *canon* which is begun by Marzelline. The tune is 32 bars long and each singer enters after the first eight bars have been sung by the previous singer. The *canon* breaks down at the 32nd bar after all four singers have entered, and a short coda is provided to finish the piece. The musical structure of the quartet seems remarkable enough in itself, but what is truly extraordinary about it is the fact that Beethoven built the tune itself in such a way that each character's feelings

are perfectly described. Marzelline's and Rocco's positive feelings, Leonore's anxiety and Jacquino's despair are *all* delineated with the utmost sensitivity.

The musical highlights certainly include Leonore's remarkable first act aria, *Abscheulicher!*, which is cast in the typical Italian *double-aria* form with a recitative as an introduction, a slow movement (Komm, Hoffnung — Come, hope) and a fast movement to end (*Ich folg' dem inner Triebe* — I follow an inner drive). This being a German opera, we cannot strictly call these movements *cavatina* and *cabaletta* but they are essentially identical to the Italian practice. What is *not* Italian about this piece is the way the voice is treated, particularly in the final section. The soprano is treated as if she were a member of the orchestra, an oboe or a clarinet! Listen to the wide, ungainly leaps required, the scales and arpeggios that the composer demands at this brisk tempo (*Allegro con brio*). On top of that the soprano is often expected to sing in competition with the three horns in the orchestra: even with the relative weakness of the horns in Beethoven's orchestra, this was certainly a daunting prospect. But with a little bit of thoughtful listening it becomes clear that Beethoven wants to portray Leonore's monumental struggle through musical means. If that is accepted and understood, the composer certainly hit his mark.

Many critics consider *Fidelio* a flawed masterpiece, basing their judgment on the unevenness of the dramatic through-line and a superficial glance at the seemingly awkward vocal lines. But in a fine production, well-directed and with excellent singers, *Fidelio* can be an overwhelming emotional experience and music-drama at its very best. -- *Article written by Nicolas Reveles.*

## Beethoven and Fidelio

Beethoven was living at the *Theater an der Wien* when he began work on *Fidelio* in 1804 and, although he had other commissions, devoted himself almost full-time to the opera. He produced at least 436 pages of sketches and changed Florestan's aria 18 times. The opera was ready for rehearsal in the autumn of 1805 but there were censor troubles. For one thing, they objected that the end of the opera was too much like the fall of the Bastille. Sonnleithner protested, pointing out that Paër's version had already been given in Dresden, and that it was set in sixteenth-century Spain. The censors were finally convinced when they learned the Empress admired the story. They approved the operas after "the alteration of the more lurid scenes".

Although Beethoven strongly objected, the theatre management insisted on changing the name from *Leonore* to *Fidelio*. They were afraid it might be

confused with the other *Leonores* by Paër and Mayr. Overly long, the November 20, 1805 opening was not a success, and it could not have come out at a worse time. Napoleon's forces had recently occupied Vienna; other than a few of Beethoven's friends, most of the audience consisted of French officers who did not understand German. (The Court had abandoned Vienna.) The press was unenthusiastic, and Beethoven withdrew it after three performances.

Revisions were made by Stephen von Breuning, and the new version produced five months later was fairly well received. The second Act I chorus was added for this version. However, a quarrel with von Braun, the director of the theatre, induced Beethoven to withdraw it.

May 23, 1814 saw the opening of what was to become the definitive version of *Fidelio* at the *Theater am Kärnthnerthor*. Beethoven had added music so that it was less of a *Singspiel*. Not only was it much improved, but it benefitted from Napoleon's defeat -- he had abdicated and been sent to Elba in April of that year. It was the first opera given before the delegates to the Congress of Vienna (1814-15) and it soon appeared in many German cities and in Prague. Eight years later the very young **Wilhelmine Schröder** sang the role and was a sensation. Its fame spread and, in 1832, it was given in Paris (in French) and in England (in German). It was given again in England in 1835 (in English) and yet again in 1851 with the dialog in Italian! It came to New York's Park Theatre in English in 1839 and to the Metropolitan Opera in 1884.

As a footnote: Beethoven had been impressed by the story of another Leonore who acted as a soldier in the wars of Neapolitan liberation and, in 1814, he composed incidental music for a play on her story, *Eleonore Prohaska*, by Friedrich Duncker

On his deathbed Beethoven presented the manuscript for *Fidelio* to Anton Schindler saying, "Of all my children, this is the one that cost me the worst birth-pangs, the one that brought me the most sorrow; and for that reason it is the one most dear to me".

#### **A NOTE ON THE OVERTURES.**

There are four overtures associated with *Fidelio*. The so-called *Leonore #1* was used only a few times in later productions. The 1805 performance opened with *Leonore #2*. *Leonore #3* was composed for the 1806 version. Finally a new *Fidelio* overture premiered with the 1814 production.

In most modern productions it is the practice to start with *Fidelio* and use *Leonore #3* as a later interlude, a custom usually credited to Mahler. When the current San Diego Opera production was used in San Francisco, *Leonore #3* was used before the opera, and there was no later interlude.

### **MODERN PERFORMANCES**

Almost from its inception, *Fidelio* has been taken as symbol of freedom and release from oppression. As a consequence, although the original was set in sixteenth-century Spain, it has since been moved to many different times and locales. San Diego's (originally San Francisco's) version is set during Beethoven's time.

Some people have objected to the spoken dialogue and set it to music. An 1851 version by Balfe became the standard such for decades.

Some examples of recent versions:

A Peter Hall 1979 production took place behind was apparently a prison farm. Rocco cultivated his vegetables and Marzelline hung out washing.

During a scene change in a 1980 English National Opera production, Rocco climbed a ladder on the auditorium wall to remind the audience that not all prisoners would be released.

Kupfer, in 1981, used a concentration camp version complete with searchlights. In the final scene Leonore, Florestan and the prisoners were removed and there was a tableau with Socrates, Che Guevara, Jesus, members of the PLO, and other "revolutionaries" who emerged from the sculpture *Marseillaise* on Paris's Arc de Triomphe. At the end, only Pizarro was left onstage with two coffins, presumably those of Leonore and Florestan.

The last production in San Diego took place in a Latin American banana republic. At the end, the townspeople waved small American flags after they were released by the American soldiers.

In a recent performance in Antwerp, Jaquino monitored the prisoners with a video and Marzelline was also a guard. This led to a number of anachronisms. Pizarro still recognized the *handwriting* on dispatches and tried to use a knife on Florestan.

*Fidelio* was seen as particularly significant during and after World War II. It was shown in Salzburg just before the Nazis entered the city. During the war,

the conductors Furtwängler and Karajan remained in Germany and both conducted the opera. Thomas Mann said that *Fidelio* under the Nazis was an obscenity, but Furtwängler replied, "*Fidelio* never has been presented in the Germany of Himmler, only in a Germany raped by Himmler".

*Fidelio* was especially significant in Vienna after the war. The Vienna State Opera House had been destroyed, but the Vienna State Opera company produced it on October 6, 1945 at the *Theater an der Wien*, the house where it had premiered. One of Austria's priorities was the reconstruction of the Opera House. In spite of the country's poverty, the government spent some 10 million dollars to rebuild the bombed-out building. Its reopening was a cause for rejoicing throughout the country; Karl Böhm led the orchestra in a gala performance of *Fidelio*; the house was sold out and thousands waited all afternoon outside for a chance to listen to the music on loudspeakers. There were few dry eyes that evening, and the Viennese tell of miracles happening during the performance. –Article written by Elizabeth Otten.

## Libretto & Source

[Tracing the history of the libretto and librettists for *Fidelio* is a complicated matter. Joseph von Sonnleithner was the first librettist in 1805, with revisions made by Stephan von Breuning in 1806 and the brilliant stage director Georg Friedrich Treitschke in 1814. All three versions were based upon Jean-Nicolas Bouilly's French libretto *Léonore, ou L'amour conjugal*. The following article concerns this source alone. - NMR]

### JEAN-NICOLAS BOUILLY (1793-1842) AND *LÉONORE, OU L'AMOUR CONJUGAL*

Beethoven's *Fidelio* was written in a time when the French Revolution and the subsequent Reign of Terror were fresh in everyone's mind. There were many tales of unjust imprisonment and heroic rescues, but Beethoven's immediate source was a libretto by Jean-Nicolas Bouilly, *Léonore, ou L'Amour conjugal* which was set to music by Pierre Gaveaux in 1798. Years later, in his 1836 autobiography *Mes Récapitulations*, Bouilly claimed the story was a true one and one in which he had actually participated while he was a judge of the Criminal Tribunal in Tours. However, no records justifying his assertions have ever come to light. Did the events depicted really happen?

Jean-Nicolas Bouilly was born near the city of Tours in the Loire Valley of France on January 24, 1763. He early exhibited a gift for writing but was encouraged to study law and received his law license in Paris in 1787. He practiced briefly but preferred writing for the theatre. Two of his early plays

were successful and attracted the attention of Queen Marie Antoinette. He was invited to the literary salon of Madame de Staël. In February 1791, however, he left Paris abruptly and returned to Tours. It was a time of turmoil in the capital and many fled to the countryside. Five months later the Royal family made their abortive attempt to flee.

Brought up on the teachings of Rousseau and Montesquieu, Bouilly had liberal ideas on the equality of men, but still supported the idea of a benevolent monarchy. In Tours, he became an active member of the *Société des Amis de la Constitution* a group formed to try to maintain stability in those turbulent times. Soon he was appointed as one of the administrators of the District of Tours. He still supported the monarchy and, in 1792, proposed asking the National Assembly to form a royal bodyguard to prevent harm to the king. The suggestion failed. (This is the year in which Beethoven moved to Vienna.)

Conditions continued to worsen. There were bread riots in Tours, and men were conscripted to fight the insurgents. The King was in prison and the new regime introduced draconian measures. Suspected dissidents were imprisoned upon the flimsiest of pretexts. Bouilly was made a judge and publicly condemned all kings and royalty. He signed the death warrants for at least five convicted anti-Revolutionists. Had he changed his thinking? He later claimed that, in secret, he was saving the citizens of Tours from the depredations of the extremists. While these claims are unsubstantiated, the actual number of death sentences did decline significantly during his term of office.

The roots of *Fidelio* are in those times. Robespierre fell in July 1794, and the Reign of Terror was at an end. By 1795, Bouilly had completed the libretto, *Léonore, ou l'amour conjugal*. He and his family returned to Paris where he was active in the revival of theatre and also became an advisor to the Committee of Public Instruction. He soon persuaded the singer and composer, Pierre Gaveaux, to collaborate with him by composing and producing his libretto as an opera.

The result was a success, and it remained in the répertoire for several years, having its last performance in 1806. However, when *Fidelio* finally reached Paris twenty years later, *Léonore* had been largely forgotten.

Bouilly took an active interest in education, helped to organize a new system of primary schools and wrote more than 20 books for young people. One of his plays was about Abbé Sicard who had invented a method of teaching deaf-mutes. The Abbé had been imprisoned, but the play led to his release.

Bouilly was now a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur, a full-time writer of plays and libretti and an important member of the Paris literary establishment. (He was known as the 'lachrymose poet' because of the sentimental vein in his stories.) It was time to write his memoirs.

According to him, the events depicted in *Léonore* were absolutely true, and he himself played the role of Don Fernando. He wrote of "... a sublime deed of heroism and devotion by one of the ladies of the Touraine, whose noble efforts I had the happiness of assisting". He thought it advisable to move the events to sixteenth-century Spain and use Spanish names, fearing that the authorities in Tours might recognize some of the characters. But what is the true story?

One possible inspiration was the story of a friend of his, a woman married to a much older man. A police agent in Paris owed the husband money and tried to seduce the wife, but she refused his advances, remaining faithful to her husband. In revenge, the agent later wrote a letter to Tours denouncing the couple as royalists, apparently hoping for their execution. Bouilly was able to prevent this. Was this the germ of *Léonore*? Did he build up the story in his imagination as years went by? As his ward later wrote of Bouilly: "...the simplest events, transformed themselves for him into scenes and dialogues which soon assumed in his mind the state of reality. He believed everything which he imagined". Possibly his story of wifely devotion and heroism was really a result of Bouilly's tendency to make imaginary happenings real !

For more on Bouilly and his libretto see the article, "*Léonore, ou l'amour conjugal*: a celebrated offspring of the Revolution", by David Galliver in the book "Music and the French Revolution", Malcolm Boyd, editor. Cambridge University Press, 1992.

The opera by Bouilly and Gaveaux was an *opéra-comique* with spoken dialogue between musical numbers. Roc, Marceline and Jacquino speak in dialect, and the entire role of Pizare is spoken. At the end Dom Fernand turns to audience and says: "You who applaud Léonore's zeal, patience and daring -- you women, make her your model, and let your happiness consist in fidelity!", a theme sure to appeal to Beethoven. Gaveaux's opera was never shown in Vienna but Beethoven probably knew of it because the score was printed all most at once.

1804 saw the production of *Leonora, ossia l'amore conjugale* by Ferdinando Paer (1771-1839) which adapted an Italian translation of Bouilly's libretto. It was seen in Dresden and Prague. While Beethoven and Paer were friends, Beethoven may not have known the opera which is very different in feel from

his own. It is a comedy with sexual overtones and Leonora is a virtuoso both as to her coloratura and to her tantrums. Fedele is the only prisoner.

Simone Mayr (1763-1845) contributed *L'amor conjugale* (1805), a one-act *farsa sentimentale*. It takes place in Poland and the characters are given Polish names. It is a comedy and not at all political. Pizarro is motivated by his love for Leonore; Rocco drinks. – *Article written by Elizabeth Otten.*

## Social and Political Background

Beethoven lived in a world of social and political change. It was an age of revolution with major revolts in America and in France. In addition, new inventions were changing the way people lived, and artists and writers were expressing new ideas of freedom. Significant events which occurred during his lifetime are shown below. There are links to more details on some of the events listed.

1770: Beethoven is born. The "Boston Massacre"/ Marie Antoinette becomes Queen of France/ William Wordsworth is born/ Gainsborough paints "The Blue Boy".

1771-1707: First edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica/ Samuel Adams forms Committees of Correspondence in Massachusetts/ Boston Tea Party/ Continental Congress meets in Philadelphia/ Paul Revere's ride/ Battle of Bunker Hill/ Declaration of Independence/ Inquisition abolished in France/ Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*/ James Cook's voyages/ Lavoisier proves air is mainly oxygen and nitrogen.

1778: Beethoven is presented by father as a "six-year old" prodigy. Rousseau and Voltaire die/ La Scala opera house opens/ Cook discovers Hawaii.

1779-82: Benedict Arnold's plot/ British surrender at Yorktown/ Joseph II succeeds the Empress Maria Theresa in Austria/ Mozart's *Idomeneo*/ James Watt's rotary steam engine.

1783: Beethoven's first printed works. Peace of Versailles ending the American Revolution/ Montgolfier brothers fire balloon.

1784-1788 United States Constitution signed/ Beaumarchais and *Le mariage de Figaro*/ The Parlement of Paris demands the summoning of the States-General and presents a list of grievances/ Bread riots in France/ Invention of the threshing machine/ English Channel crossed by balloon/ steam engine

installed in spinning factory/ Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*/ Schiller's *Don Carlos*.

1789: In May the States-General meet at Versailles/ the Third Estate declares itself the National Assembly and refuses to depart without a constitution. When the king suspends meetings for three days and closes the hall/ the members meet at a tennis court and take an oath not to leave until they have a constitution. In July a mob assaults the **Bastille** and Lafayette becomes commander of the National Guard. Royalists begin to leave Paris, **Bouilly** among them/ First United States Congress meets/ Mutineers of H.M.S. "Bounty" settle on Pitcairn Island.

1790: Benjamin Franklin dies/ Louis XVI accepts the French constitution/ First session of the United States Supreme Court/ Mozart's *Così fan tutte*.

1791: Royal family attempts to flee Paris/ Bill of Rights ratified/ First performance of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*/ Death of Mozart

1792: Beethoven moves to Vienna. French royal family is imprisoned/ the French Republic is proclaimed/ Danton comes to power/ use of the guillotine starts/ France declares war on Austria, Prussia and Sardinia/ Gustavus III of Sweden assassinated/ Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man/ Part I* / Rossini is born/ Gas light is used in England for the first time.

1793-1794: Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette executed/ **Reign of Terror**/ mass executions in France/ Danton, Robespierre and St. Just executed/ The Holy Roman Empire declares war on France/ the Electorate of Bonn is dissolved after the occupation of the city by French troops/ Eli Whitney invents the cotton gin/ Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason, Part II*.

1795-1803 Bouilly writes *Léonore, ou l'amour conjugal*, Heiligenstadt Testament, Beethoven works on first attempt at opera, **Vestals Feuer**, Bread riots in France/ Napoleon appointed commander-in-chief/ French capture Rome/ Napoleon becomes progressively: a Consul/ First Consul and First Consul for life/ George Washington dies/ Louisiana Purchase/ Robert Fulton's steamboat/ Jenner introduces smallpox vaccination/ John Dalton introduces atomic theory/ Darwin dies/ Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*/ **Donizetti** and **Bellini** are born/ **Victor Hugo** is born.

1804: Beethoven starts work on *Fidelio*. Napoleon declared emperor/ Alexander Hamilton killed in duel with Aaron Burr.

1805: First performance of **Fidelio**. French in Vienna/ Nelson's victory at Trafalgar.

1806-13: Second version of **Fidelio**, Letter to the 'Immortal Beloved', Incident at Teplitz. Official end of the Holy Roman Empire/ War of 1812, Napoleon's retreat from Moscow/ French conquer Vienna in 1809/ Mexico declares independence/ Grimms' *Fairy Tales*/ Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*/ **Verdi** and **Wagner** are born.

1814: Final version of **Fidelio**. Napoleon abdicates and is banished to Elba/ Congress of Vienna opens/ Francis Scott Key writes The Star-Spangled Banner.

1815-1821: Battle of Waterloo/ Death of Napoleon/ "Missouri Compromise".

1822-1826: **Wilhelmine Schröder** sings her first Leonore, Erie Canal finished/ Mexico becomes a Republic/ James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*.

1827: Death of Beethoven.

## **THE BASTILLE**

The fall of the Bastille, on June 14, 1789, marked not only the start of the French Revolution, it almost immediately became the symbol of the overthrow of tyranny everywhere. Today France celebrates Bastille Day as the United States celebrates the Fourth of July. It was probably on the mind of Bouilly when he wrote his libretto *Léonore, ou l'amour conjugal*.

The Bastille, constructed in the fourteenth century, was massive, 100' high, with 30' thick walls and a moat 75' wide. It was used for 'gentle confinement for the well-to-do'. Just before it was attacked, the Bastille housed only seven prisoners, and the conditions under which they lived were not particularly stringent. True it was still a prison; the rooms were hot in the summer and cold in the winter, and activity was limited. Money was allotted to the governor for the upkeep of the prisoners according to their class. (Writers received the most.) In addition, prisoners could bring their own furnishings, receive gourmet food and wine from outside, and even keep cats and dogs. They could receive visitors and play cards among themselves. The exterior court of the prison was usually open to the public who could chat with the gatekeeper and admire the governor's vegetable garden. The rooms in the towers measured about 200 square feet. Cells on California's Death Row measure 40 square feet. While he was certainly an exception to the general rule of prisoners, the Marquis de Sade who had been released only a

few days before the attack, brought an extensive wardrobe, furniture including portraits and tapestries, and a library of 133 volumes.

Still it was a symbol of oppression. The streets of Paris were filled with rioters and it soon became apparent that they could not longer be controlled by the regular troops. The royal troops retreated from the center of Paris. Those who remained were commoners, identified with the revolutionaries, and hesitated to fight against them. Seeking weapons, the mobs forced gunsmiths and armorers to turn over guns and powder. There were rumors of badly-needed gunpowder having been moved into the Bastille. Some 8,000 citizens invaded the Hôtel des Invalides and captured 32,000 muskets, some powder, and twelve piece of artillery. The someone called out, "To the Bastille!"

The prison was garrisoned with 82 French soldiers and 32 Swiss Guards. During four hours of fighting, 98 of the attackers and one defender were killed. Finally there was an unconditional surrender. The crowd rushed in and liberated the dazed and confused prisoners: two lunatics, four forgers and one aristocrat who had been locked up at the request of his family.

Demolition of the prison started immediately and by November most was gone. Then the symbolism grew. There were tales of the discovery of skeletons and torture instruments including the famous iron mask. Tourists were entertained with morbid descriptions of pre-Revolutionary conditions.

### **THE REIGN OF TERROR**

Ironically, it was during the Reign of Terror (September 17, 1793 to July 28, 1794) that the prisons were really filled. Aristocrats were jailed for no valid reason, death sentences were passed at the rate of about seven a day. Madame Guillotine was kept very busy. When Robespierre fell in 1794, 10,000 detainees in Paris were released within a few days. But it was the Bastille which remained the symbol.

Conditions in the provinces were just as bad. In Nantes, on the river Loire, prisons were so crowded that barges, rafts, etc. were filled with 1,500 men, women and children and then scuttled in the river. Bouilly up river in Tours was certainly aware of these atrocities. In all, the Reign of Terror took 2,700 lives in Paris, and over 18,000 in all of France. (Some claim the numbers were much higher.) In addition, 300,000 were jailed. The property of those executed reverted to the state so harsh methods were very profitable.

Today, the new Paris Opera House is named the Bastille. – *Article written by Elizabeth Otten.*

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