

1806, but there was only one performance. However, Napoleon's subsequent losses throughout Europe in 1812–1814 emboldened the Viennese, and in this atmosphere of triumph the Kärntnertor-Theater in Vienna requested a revival of the opera. Beethoven made numerous changes to the score and composed a new overture. Beethoven's third version of Fidelio was first performed May 23, 1814; however, the overture would not be heard until the second performance on May 26. This overture, the fourth that Beethoven composed for the opera, has remained as the standard overture since its composition. The Leonore Overture No. 2, performed for the first version of the opera, is a successful curtain raiser, but its anticipation of the climax of the second act proved destructive to the drama. Leonore Overture No. 3 is a revision of No. 2, while the overture Leonore No. 1, Op. 138, was found among Beethoven's papers after his death; it is not linked to either of the first two productions, and may have been written for a projected Prague performance of 1807. Unlike Leonore Overtures 2 and 3, this work does not anticipate the music of the drama.

Shakespeare's Coriolanus was not the direct inspiration for Beethoven's overture of the same name; instead, the work was written to accompany Heinrich Joseph von Collin's all-but-forgotten drama Coriolan, which was revived in Vienna's Burgtheater in 1807. Beethoven's music depicts the story of Coriolanus in an often stormy essay whose evolution mirrors the action in the drama.

In the drama, Coriolanus is a Roman patrician who has been banished from his native city as a result of his lack of concern for the starving people there. After taking up with the Volscians and plotting revenge, the proud and disgraced Coriolanus leads their armies against Rome. Upon reaching the border of his former city, he is approached by emissaries who plead with him to abandon his intentions to invade. Coriolanus, who has long waited for the day on which he will finally avenge his eviction and humiliation, sends them away and prepares for attack. A last effort to save Rome comes when his mother and his wife plead with him to desist. He is at last dissuaded from carrying out his plans, realizing they are now abhorrent to him. In Collin's play, he determines that he must regain his honor, which can only be effected by death at his own hand.

The Coriolan Overture is one of the most frequently performed and recorded of Beethoven's orchestral works. It was premiered in March 1807 and first published in Vienna in the following year.

BEETHOVEN OVERTURES

Leonora Overture No.1 Op.138

Leonora Overture No.2 Op.72a

Leonora Overture No.3 Op.72a

Fidelio - Overture Op.72b

Coriolan - Overture Op.62

Otto Klemperer Philharmonia Orchestra



C. Rottmann 1823

Beethoven wrote four overtures for his only opera, *Fidelio*; three "Leonore" overtures, each numbered; and one called *Overture to Fidelio*. It has been common practice to use the latter as a prelude to the opera in productions of *Fidelio*. The *Leonore No. 1* was withdrawn by the finicky Beethoven and not heard until 1828, the year after his death. That circumstance explains its high opus number and the fact that the *Overture* is generally heard as an independent concert work today, apart from productions of the opera.

The *Leonore Overture No. 1* opens somberly, the strings rising slowly from their lower ranges, finally finding brighter territory, as woodwinds join in and the pacing becomes a bit livelier. Still, the mood remains unsettled, with a sense of probing, of uncertainty. Soon, however, the tempo turns animated and the music brightens, a sense of joy and hope emerging in the lively, muscular theme. Another slow section ensues, but here the music quickly casts off the sense of doubt that reemerges and develops an epic character with a soaring, heroic theme. The triumphant, joyful closing episode builds upon this all-conquering feeling to banish all sense of doubt. Throughout this approximately ten-minute *Overture*, the music comes across as a deft admixture of the serious and light in its colorful but necessarily cursory summation of the opera's story about the faithful and persistent Leonora, disguised as the young man *Fidelio*, to free her husband Florestan from the prison of the evil Pizarro.

This second of the four overtures Beethoven wrote for the opera that would eventually become *Fidelio* was actually the one that introduced the work's first three performances in 1805, but it has never achieved the popularity of its successors. Even so, it's played in concert a bit more frequently than its predecessor.

It's a hefty work, of about the same duration and structure of the well-known *Leonore Overture No. 3*, but some of the themes are substantially different. A slow, foreboding introduction that clearly influenced the later overtures of Weber drifts forward in darkness without establishing a particularly strong melody, until the appearance of scalar figures in the woodwinds (familiar from the third overture). While the initial slow material continues, these figures flip bar by bar from the top of the orchestra (where they ascend) to the bottom (where they descend). Heavy chords bring an end to this, after which the woodwinds introduce a cautiously more optimistic theme, with the strings dwelling on a rhythmic figure related to the scalar motif. Gradually the orchestra

builds up to the galloping main theme of the allegro section (melodically identical to that in the third overture, although its development is different). This and a broader, noble subsidiary theme dominate the second half of the overture, although at the climax the orchestra pulls up short for the offstage trumpet calls that, in the opera, announce the arrival of the king's representative, who brings justice to the imprisoned hero. After this episode, cascading string figures rev up the orchestra for the fast, full-bodied concluding pages, although the final, widely spaced chords make a far less thrilling effect than the linked and more concise chord sequence ending the third overture.

The *Leonora Overture No. 3*, Op. 72, was composed in 1806, and is much the most successful of the three *Leonora* overtures. One important distinction between the *Leonora* overtures and the *Fidelio* overture of 1814 is that the later work makes no attempt at a précis of the whole opera, but instead it provides the powerful curtain-raiser that Beethoven by now sensed was needed to properly complete the piece. Mendelssohn was the first conductor to program all four overtures together, during a concert at the Leipzig Gewandhaus given in 1840.

Leonora No. 3 opens with a solemn slow introduction, entirely fitting given the lofty themes of personal freedom under review in the opera. The main C major allegro begins softly, in unison on the strings, but develops into a magnificent heraldic hymn to liberty. Further points to note are the two off-stage trumpet fanfares heard in the central development section, the second sounding closer, thus signifying the moment of approaching release. The coda begins with a spectacular rising passage for the violin section, a virtuoso ensemble device that was again designed to make the climax of the overture prefigure the ultimate outcome of the opera as decisively as possible.

The premiere of *Fidelio*, at the Theater an der Wien on the evening of November 20, 1805, took place only seven days after Napoleon's army had entered Vienna. Members of the Austrian nobility, who typically supported Beethoven, had fled the city, which means that not many people attended the first performance. Poor attendance and unfavorable reviews led to the withdrawal of the opera after only three performances. Beethoven's subsequent revision, combining the first two acts into one (resulting in a two-act format), premiered on March 29,

BEETHOVEN OVERTURES

Otto Klemperer Philharmonia Orchestra

- 1 Leonora Overture No.1 Op.138 9:46
- 2 Leonora Overture No.2 Op.72a 13:53
- 3 Leonora Overture No.3 Op.72a 14:33
- 4 Fidelio - Overture Op.72b 6:56
- 5 Coriolan - Overture Op.62 7:55



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