

Beethoven's *Fidelio* represents in microcosm the frustrations and hopes that marked his music as well as his life. It was not lack of interest in the medium that resulted in his completing only one opera in his lifetime; rather, it was because his search for a libretto that met his standards was unrewarded. He rejected the idea of composing an opera to a comic story or one that employed magic in the resolution of the drama, and instead occupied much of his time in a search for a libretto that displayed lofty characters, the steadfastness of conjugal life, and the rewarding of virtue over villainy.

When Beethoven finally settled on *Leonore*, a highly dramatic, nick-of-time-rescue story of the type that became popular after the French Revolution, he found his task no easier. (The title was changed to *Fidelio*, the name under which the heroine appears in disguise.) The first two versions of the opera (1805 and 1806) were withdrawn after a few performances. After a drastic revision, it was finally produced with great success in 1814.

Beethoven wrote four different overtures in his search for the ideal instrumental opening music for *Fidelio*. The three that were discarded are named after *Leonore*, the heroine. At first performance, the one now known as *Leonore No. 2* was performed. The revision of 1806 brought with it a new overture, *Leonore No. 3*, and the performances in 1814 were introduced by still another effort, the *Fidelio* overture. It is the one now used with productions of the opera. *Leonore No. 1* was never played with a performance in Beethoven's lifetime.

The *Leonore No. 3* overture, and the original substance of the opera itself, come from the same period as Beethoven's Third (*Eroica*) Symphony. A complete symphonic movement, the overture summarizes the opera in spirit and employs some of its high points, notably the aria of Florestan (the unjustly imprisoned hero), and the trumpet calls that mark the arrival of the minister of state who rescues Florestan from the evil governor of the prison. The trumpet calls, although they represent the climatic point for many listeners, occur halfway through the overture, and, in the interest of the musical form, are followed by a complete recapitulation of the thematic material. Throughout the overture, the character of the opera, serious and intense, is dramatically portrayed by the music.

The trumpet calls in *Leonore No. 3* are played offstage. Numerous stories, probably apocryphal, have arisen concerning mishaps that have befallen trumpeters in this piece. The common thread is as follows: The concert is outdoors in Grant Park, Robin Hood Dell, Hollywood Bowl, or anywhere the raconteur chooses. The first trumpet player leaves the stage and awaits his turn behind some bushes. As the big moment approaches, he raises his instrument to his lips, ready to

play, and he feels a hand on his shoulder. It belongs to a park policeman, who says: "You can't play that horn here, fellow. Don't you know there's a concert going on?"

- Elwyn A. Wienandt