

OPERA WALKTHROUGH

Fidelio (1814)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827)

<u>Characters</u>	<u>Voice</u>	<u>Occupation</u>
Florestan	tenor	Prisoner
Leonore/Fidelio	soprano	Florestan's wife
Rocco	bass	Prison guard
Marcellina	soprano	Rocco's daughter
Jaquino	tenor	Rocco's assistant
Don Pizarro	baritone	Governor of the prison
Don Fernando	baritone	King's minister
Two Prisoners	tenor/bass	Prisoners

BACKSTORY – In late 18th century Spain, Florestan has been unjustly jailed as a political prisoner, and his loyal wife Leonore has a daring plan to save him. She dresses as a young man, adopts the name Fidelio, and lands a job at the prison where Florestan is being held in secret, chained in an underground dungeon.

OVERTURE

The Overture begins and ends in the key of E Major which matches the key to Leonore/Fidelio's aria in the opera about hope. The alternating fanfares and distant horns represent Leonore's steadfast determination and tender resolve to free her husband.

Act I – Scene 1

In the courtyard of a fortress used to confine political prisoners near Seville, Spain.

1) Duet – Marcellina and Jaquino – Marcellina is ironing linen while Jaquino attends to his door, which he opens to various people delivering parcels to the lodge. Jaquino proposes marriage to Marcellina, who rejects him because she has fallen in love with Fidelio. Jaquino continues to insist but is constantly interrupted by people at the door. Finally, Rocco calls for Jaquino and he reluctantly leaves Marcellina alone.

This working class “couples” duet is reminiscent of Mozart's opening duet in “The Marriage of Figaro”.

Spoken Dialogue – Marcellina feels sorry for Jaquino but her love for Fidelio is too strong. She hopes Fidelio loves her in return.

2) Aria - Marcellina – Marcellina sings of her desire for Fidelio to become her husband.

Spoken Dialogue – Rocco enters and tells Marcellina that he approves of her love for Fidelio. Fidelio enters with Jaquino waiting nearby.

3) Quartet – Marcellina, Fidelio, Rocco, and Jaquino – each character sings their feelings. Marcellina is elated, thinking Fidelio is in love with her, and Fidelio is worried about Marzelline's obviously deep feelings. Rocco is happy to see his daughter in love, and poor Jaquino is growing more jealous by the minute.

This is the famous “Canon” Quartet where each character enters on the same melody at different times.

Spoken Dialogue – Rocco tells Fidelio that as soon as the governor has left for Seville, Marzelline and Fidelio can be married. He tells them, however, that unless they have money, they will not be happy.

4) Aria - Rocco – Rocco tells Marcellina and Fidelio that the secret to a happy marriage is having enough gold to live a prosperous life.

Spoken Dialogue – Fidelio wants to know why Rocco will not allow anyone to help him in the dungeons, especially as he always seems to return short of breath. Rocco says that there is a dungeon down there where he can never take Fidelio, which houses a man who has been wasting away for two years. Rocco says that he has been ordered to starve the prisoner by cutting his rations. Marzelline begs her father to keep Leonore away from such a terrible sight, but Fidelio claims his/her courage is sufficient to cope with it.

5) Trio – Fidelio, Rocco, and Marcellina – Rocco approves of Fidelio's courage while Marcellina tells Fidelio that though his/her tender heart may be affected in the dungeon, Marcellina's love will await Fidelio's return afterwards. Rocco says he will ask the governor to let Fidelio accompany him to the dungeon.

Act I – Scene 2

Courtyard of the prison.

6) March – Instrumental – During the march, Don Pizarro enters with officers.

Spoken Dialogue – Pizarro learns from a note delivered by Rocco that the regional minister is planning an inspection of the prison, to see how well the inmates are being treated. Knowing that Florestan is being held illegally, Pizarro decides to kill Florestan before the regional minister arrives.

7) Aria – Pizarro – Pizarro is excited to get his vengeance by killing Florestan.

Spoken Dialogue – Pizarro tells one of his soldiers to keep watch and sound a trumpet when the minister's carriage is spotted.

8) Duet – Pizarro and Rocco – Pizarro offers Rocco money to kill Florestan, but Rocco refuses. Pizarro says he will kill Florestan himself instead, and orders Rocco to dig a grave for him in the floor of the dungeon. Once the grave is ready, Rocco is to sound the alarm, upon which Pizarro will come into the dungeon and kill Florestan. Rocco reluctantly agrees, reasoning that it will put an end to Florestan's suffering.

Orchestral Recitative – Fidelio – Fidelio overhears the plan and is agitated but hopes to rescue her husband.

9) Aria – Fidelio – Fidelio is shocked by Pizarro's cruelty, and wonders if the unnamed dungeon prisoner might be her husband. She is strengthened by her deep faith in her love for her husband.

This particular aria is extremely difficult as the horn parts are highly exposed and the soprano is expected to stretch the abilities of range and technique.

Spoken Dialogue – Jaquino once again begs Marcellina to marry him, but she continues to refuse. Fidelio, hoping to discover Florestan, asks Rocco to let the poor prisoners roam in the garden and enjoy the beautiful weather. Marcellina similarly begs him, and Rocco agrees to distract Pizarro while the prisoners are set free.

10) FINALE – The prisoners ecstatic at their temporary freedom, sing joyfully of life and hope, but remembering that they might be caught by the prison's governor Pizarro, are soon quiet.

The music here as the prisoners ascend from the dungeon is a rising passage in the orchestra and then a staggered entrance of the male voices from lowest to highest (2nd baritone, 1st baritone, 2nd tenor, 1st tenor).

Rocco tells Fidelio that Pizarro has agreed to let him/her marry Marcellina and to let him/her accompany Rocco into the lower dungeon. Rocco and Fidelio prepare to go to Florestan's cell, with the knowledge that he must be killed and buried within the hour. Fidelio is shaken, and Rocco tries to discourage Fidelio from coming, but Fidelio insists.

Jaquino and Marcellina rush in and tell Rocco to run, as Pizarro has learned that the prisoners were allowed to roam, and is furious. Before they can leave, Pizarro enters and demands an explanation. Rocco, thinking quickly, answers that the prisoners were given a little freedom in honor of the Spanish king's **name day**, and quietly suggests that Pizarro should save his anger for the prisoner in the dungeon below. Pizarro tells him to hurry and dig the grave, and then announces that the prisoners will be locked up again. Rocco, Leonore, Jacquino, and Marzeline reluctantly usher the prisoners back to their cells.

END OF ACT I

Act II – Scene 1

In a subterranean dungeon.

The long orchestral introduction is designed to emphasize the distance between Floristan's dungeon and the outside world, and also gives the character's introduction more gravitas.

11) Aria – Floristan – In Floristan's cell, he affirms his trust in God, maintains he has done his duty by opposing Pizarro, and then has a vision of his wife Leonore coming to save him. Florestan then collapses and falls asleep.

Spoken Dialogue - Rocco and Fidelio come to dig Floristan's grave. They notice Florestan on the ground and wonder if he is already dead. Rocco confirms that he is only asleep and begins to dig at the well.

12) Duet – Fidelio and Rocco – As they dig, Rocco urges Fidelio to hurry before Pizarro arrives. They lift a stone together which fatigues Fidelio. As Fidelio rests, she vows to save the prisoner whoever he is.

Spoken Dialogue – Floristan wakes and Rocco goes to talk to him, telling Fidelio to keep working. Florestan awakes and Fidelio recognizes him. When Florestan learns that the prison he is in belongs to Pizarro, he asks that a message be sent to his wife, Leonore, but Rocco says that it is impossible. Florestan begs for water, and Rocco tells Fidelio to give him wine as there is no water. Florestan does not recognize Fidelio as his wife Leonore in disguise.

13) Trio – Florestan, Rocco, and Fidelio – Florestan tells Fidelio that there will be reward for the good deed in Heaven. Fidelio further begs Rocco to be allowed to give Florestan a crust of bread, and Rocco consents, realizing that Florestan is to be killed soon anyway.

The giving of wine and bread is analogous to Jesus giving communion to his disciples.

Spoken Dialogue – Rocco obeys his orders and sounds the alarm for Pizarro, who appears and asks if all is ready. Rocco says that it is, and instructs Fidelio to leave the dungeon, but Fidelio hides instead.

14) Quartet – Pizarro, Florestan, Fidelio, and Rocco – Pizarro reveals his identity to Florestan, who accuses him of murder. As Pizarro brandishes a dagger, Fidelio leaps between him and Florestan and reveals her identity as Leonore, the wife of Florestan. Pizarro raises his dagger to kill her, but she pulls a gun and threatens to shoot him. The trumpets signal the arrival of the regional minister, Don Fernando.

Spoken Dialogue – Jacquino enters to report that Don Fernando has arrived and sends soldiers to escort Pizarro to him.

14a) Quartet (continued) – Pizarro, Florestan, Leonore, and Rocco – Pizarro knows his plot is foiled. Rocco is relieved that he won't have to work for a tyrant anymore. Leonore and Florestan are reunited. Rocco and Pizarro exit.

15) Duet – Leonore and Florestan – profess their love for each other and are happy to be together again.

In many performances, the overture known as **Leonore #3** is performed here as a musical interlude.

Act II – Scene 2

At the castle entrance.

16) FINALE – The prisoners are freed. They rejoice with the townsfolk for the hour of justice which has come. The minister, Don Fernando, announces that tyranny has ended. Rocco enters, with Leonore and Florestan, asking Don Fernando to help them. Don Fernando is dismayed to find his friend in chains. Rocco explains how Leonore disguised herself as Fidelio to save her husband. Previously in love with Fidelio, Marcellina is shocked. Rocco describes Pizarro's murder plot, and Pizarro is led away to prison. Florestan is released from his chains by Leonore, and the crowd sings the praises of Leonore, the loyal savior of her husband.

In many performances, the stage action infers that Rocco now gives Marcellina and Jacquino his blessing for them to marry.

END OF ACT II