



BEETHOVEN

Leonore Overture No. 3, Op. 72b

Ludwig van Beethoven (December 1770 – 26 March 1827) was a German composer and pianist. A crucial figure in the transition between the Classical and Romantic eras in Western art music, he remains one of the most famous and influential of all composers. His best known compositions include 9 symphonies, 5 concertos for piano, 32 piano sonatas, and 16 string quartets. Born in Bonn, Beethoven intended to study with Mozart, but sadly only met him once before the master's death in 1791. Beethoven permanently moved to Vienna in 1792 and began studying with Haydn, quickly gaining a reputation as a virtuoso pianist. Haydn's influence is strongly seen in the music of this "early" period, though Beethoven also explored new directions and gradually expanded the scope and ambition of his work. In about 1800 his hearing began to deteriorate, and by the last decade of his life he was almost totally deaf. He gave up conducting and performing in public but continued to compose; many of his most admired works (including 7 of his 9 symphonies) come from these "middle" and "late" periods. Common themes of his "middle" period include heroism, struggle, and triumph, seen through his opera *Fidelio*, Overture to *Egmont*, and his Third and Fifth Symphonies. Works from his "late" period are characterised by their intellectual depth, their formal innovations, and their intense, highly personal expression. The String Quartet, Op. 131 has seven linked movements (instead of the usual four), and the Ninth Symphony adds choral forces to the orchestra in the last movement and embraces Enlightened ideals of brotherhood through Schiller's poem *An die Freude* (To Joy). Almost universally admired by the time of his death, some 20,000 Viennese citizens attended his funeral procession.

Beethoven actually wrote four overtures to his opera ***Leonore, oder Der Triumph der ehelichen Liebe*** ("Leonore, or The Triumph of Married Love"), although the first performances were billed as *Fidelio* to avoid confusion with two contemporary operas with the same name (the current convention is to use *Leonore* for both the 1805 (three-act) and 1806 (two-act) versions and *Fidelio* only for the final 1814 revision). *Leonore Overture No. 3* is considered by many listeners as the greatest of the four overtures, but as an intensely dramatic, full-scale symphonic movement it had the effect of overwhelming the (rather light) initial scenes of the opera. Beethoven accordingly experimented with cutting it back somewhat, for a planned 1808 performance in Prague; this is believed to be the version now called "Leonore No. 1". Finally, for the 1814 revival Beethoven began anew, and with fresh musical material wrote what we now know as the *Fidelio* overture. As this somewhat lighter overture seems to work best of the four as a start to the opera, Beethoven's final intentions are generally respected in contemporary productions. Some performances of the opera insert "Leonore No. 3" between the two scenes of the second act, something which was common until the middle of the twentieth century, where it acts as a kind of musical reprise of the rescue scene that had just taken place. Although some credit Gustav Mahler with this addition, others maintain that the practice predates Mahler.