

December 16, 2021 – Ludwig van Beethoven's *Fidelio*

On this week's Thursday Night Opera House, we'll hear an encore broadcast of Ludwig van Beethoven's only opera, *Fidelio*, hosted by the late **Al Ruocchio** (1937-2007). Suffused with the composer's deep humanity and burning passion for human freedom, the music totally transcends the Singspiel structure in which the opera is written. The original version, which was titled *Leonora* (after the heroine) was first performed in Vienna on November 20, 1805. The final version, which we'll hear on tonight's program, had its premiere on May 23, 1814, also in Vienna.

The opera takes place in eighteenth-century Seville. The noble Florestan (tenor **René Kollo**) has been imprisoned for political reasons. His wife, Leonora (soprano **Gundula Janowitz**), has disguised herself as the boy "Fidelio" and entered the service of the jailer Rocco (bass **Manfred Jungwirth**). Rocco's daughter Marzelline (soprano **Lucia Popp**) has fallen in love with Fidelio, to the displeasure of her admirer Jacquino (tenor **Adolf Dallapozza**), the gatekeeper. Leonore discovers that Florestan is in the deepest dungeon and that the evil governor Don Pizzaro (bass **Hans Sotin**) plans to murder him before an imminent ministerial inspection takes place. Rocco and Fidelio dig Florestan's grave in the dungeon, and Pizzaro attempts to kill Florestan but is prevented from doing so by Leonore, who reveals herself as Florestan's wife. The arrival of the minister, Don Fernando (baritone **Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau**), puts an end to the murder attempt. Pizzaro is arrested and Fernando allows Leonore herself to remove her husband's chains.

Leonard Bernstein conducts the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and the Vienna State Opera Chorus in this 1978 recording.