

Ludwig van Beethoven - *Fidelio*, overture in E major op. 72

(text by Daniele Spini for the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino)

For his only work (more precisely a *Singspiel*, with musical pieces alternating with prose dialogues, according to the use of the Viennese light theater, instead of recitatives as in the Italian opera), Beethoven wrote four different overtures in the span of ten years, attesting also in this the laborious work of retouching and remaking that gave the *Fidelio* its final shape. The overture today cataloged as Leonora n. 1 (title originally wanted by Beethoven, then induced to change his mind to avoid confusion with the then well-known works of Gaveaux and Pärer, based on the same subject), certainly the weakest of the four, was never performed while the author was ; the Leonora n. 2 instead opened the first version, on a libretto by Joseph Sonnleithner, performed on November 20, 1805 at the Theater an der Wien. The one known as Leonora n. 3, a remake and extension of the previous one, was instead prepared during the profound reworking (also in the libretto, almost entirely redone by Friedrich Treitschke), to which Beethoven submitted the work after repeated and unfortunate attempts to give it back life by adjusting it here and there. But in the face of facts, such a grandiose and elaborate symphonic page turned out to be disproportionate and theatrically unsuitable: so that for the first performance of the new *Fidelio*, on May 23, 1814, at the Teatro di Porta Carinzia, Beethoven recycled the overture of the Ruins of Athens. Only three days later, at a rerun, *Fidelio* showed up with his new overture, which since then has accompanied him by repeating the title.

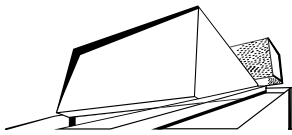
If the Leonora overtures n. 2 and Leonora n. 3 are configured as summarized ideals of the work, both on the narrative and on the musical level and on that of the moral and poetic contents, in this helping to lay the foundations of the all-romantic story of the symphonic poem, the one definitively assigned to *Fidelio* seems to have above all the characteristics of a concise and effective page in preparing the transition to theatrical fiction. Instead of painting with dramatic conflictuality the contrast between good and evil and the itinerary from pain to salvation and from imprisonment to freedom that marks the plot (taken from Jean-Nicholas Bouilly's *Léonore*, typical *pièce à sauvetage* of the revolutionary age), Beethoven in this last overture prefers to introduce the action almost in the name of joy, as if to prefigure the dissolution from the beginning, without using motifs taken from the work.

Characterized in the thematic invention as in the instrumentation by a lightness and purity of lines that now seems to deliver it to the same limpid and neoclassical world of the Seventh Symphony rather than to the heroic Beethoven of the "middle" period that had seen the birth of the first version of the *Fidelio*, the overture flows along a simple but original formal design. Two introductory episodes, one predominantly rhythmic, the other more interrogative proposed by the horns in Adagio time, bring out an elementary expressive dualism, in complementary rather than contrasting terms, between a more joyful and incisive sign and a more relaxed and lyrical one.

Again to the horns, but returning to the initial Allegro, it is then up to expose the first theme (directly derived from the rhythmic motto of the introduction) of the sonata-form that forms the central part of the overture. After the development, synthetic and refined, the reprise results in a revival of the double introductory episode: from the Adagio dei Corni a very fast coda melts, bringing the piece towards a sparkling and optimistic conclusion.

***Elegischer Gesang op. 118* for choir and string orchestra**

A separate space belongs to the *Elegischer Gesang* for choir and string quartet op. 118, an elegiac song composed by Beethoven in 1814 to pay homage to the memory of Baroness Eleonora Pasqualati on the third anniversary of her death. The emotional tension of the text finds its form here in the moving intonation of the choir that hovers over the collected accompaniment of the string quartet alone. A stylistic choice that gives this work a chamber flavor of suffused sweetness.



Ludwig van Beethoven - Coriolan, overture in C minor op. 62

The Coriolano Overture op. 62 was initially created by Beethoven as a musical commentary on Joseph von Collin's tragedy of the same name but in truth the work was not performed during the first performance of the drama but only later and in its own way, quickly earning a privileged space in the orchestral repertoire. The overture dates back to 1807, the year in which the Fifth Symphony was also composed, with which it shares the same corrupt key of C minor. A symbolic page of Beethoven's heroic style, the Coriolanian overture is distinguished by the intense dramatic charge already present from the initial incision, a very strong chord that leads to a restless and moved first theme which is contrasted by a second, lyrical and cantabile. The dialectic of the literary source - which sees the hero die suicide because torn between remorse and love of country - becomes a musical dialectic and after a series of thematic conflicts that chase each other for the entire duration of the page, the end is marked by the peremptory engraved initial that goes out in the low register of the strings.

Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt op. 112, Cantata for choir and orchestra

Beethoven had met Goethe, his literary idol, in 1813 in Teplitz. The meeting did not turn into friendship, but despite the coldness shown to him on several occasions, Beethoven continued to have boundless admiration for Goethe, dedicating to him, among other things, the Cantata for solos, choir and orchestra Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt op. 112, composed in 1815 and inspired by the poems Calma di mare and Viaggio felice. The poetic content is well reflected in Beethoven's musical writing careful to underline every descriptive element: the stillness of the sea in a calm day (with the held notes of the strings), the rising of the wind (with the impetuous entry of the winds) and finally the navigation among the fluctuating waves to the rhythm of a barcarola.

Choral fantasy for piano, choir and orchestra op. 80

Composed in 1808 after the Sixth Symphony, the Choral Fantasia for piano, choir and orchestra op. 80 is characterized among Beethoven's works for its singular and heterogeneous nature. A particular page already from the subtitle, 'Friendly Lusinga', in the ensemble, in which the orchestra comes into action little by little while the choir only in the final part, just as the idea of combining instrumental music and choral music was particular, which for Beethoven assumed the subliminal value of a collaboration capable of transforming the world. Furthermore, the Fantasia owes much of its notoriety to the main theme, which Beethoven had taken from a Lied composed years earlier, Gegenliebe, and which he would later develop in the Hymn to Joy of the Ninth Symphony. Articulated in the form of the Theme with variations, the Choral Fantasy opens with the absolute protagonism of the piano which, after a rhapsodic style entry, almost timidly exposes the main theme. This is then taken up by some orchestral instruments: first the flute, then the oboe, the clarinet, the string quartet and finally the whole orchestra involved together with the piano in a series of increasingly concertante variations. In the last variation Beethoven adds the choir (with a solution that anticipates the structure of the Finale of the Ninth) which intones the verses written for the occasion by the Viennese poet Christoph Kuffner, inspired by the theme of love combined with strength.