

Exploring Beethoven



A LIFE Institute Course
Session Four

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<http://CoursePages4LIFE.ca/Beethoven>

Session Plan

- Beethoven Life-Line
 - Life Experiences, Key Compositions
- Beethoven's one opera – Fidelio (1803-14)
 - Bernstein explaining & conducting the opera
- Wellington's Victory (1813)
 - Great commercial success
- Missa Solemnis (1819-23)
 - Great work, listen to as much as time permits

The Three Periods

- Early Period (1770 - 1800)
 - Rising fame as a performer, start as composer
- Middle Period (1800 – 1818)
 - Troubles with his nephew, with his love life
 - Increasing deafness, frequent health problems
 - Difficult to perform, difficult to converse
- Late Period (1818 – 1827)
 - Studied Bach, Handel; “abstract” music
 - His greatest, most “difficult” compositions

Selected Compositions

- Early Period (building skill)
 - First two piano concertos, first two symphonies
 - String quartets, Op. 18, Septet, Op. 20
 - Piano sonatas (performed by him)
- Middle Period (mature expression)
 - Piano concertos 3 – 5, Symphonies 3 – 8
 - Key piano sonatas (Waldstein, Appassionata)
 - Key string quartets (Rasumovsky)
 - Fidelio
- Late Period (deep inner thoughts)
 - Last 5 piano sonatas, string quartets
 - Symphony No. 9
 - Missa Solemnis

Key Life Events

- 1787 – 1892
 - Ludwig took on many of the responsibilities of head of his family's household
- 1802
 - “Heiligenstadt Testament” - letter to his brothers. Coming to grips with his growing deafness.
- 1812
 - “immortal Beloved” letter written. Unclear who was in his mind. Letter never sent. Unrequited love.
- 1815 – 1820
 - Battle over custody of his brother's son. Mother deemed “unfit”. Extensive court battles.

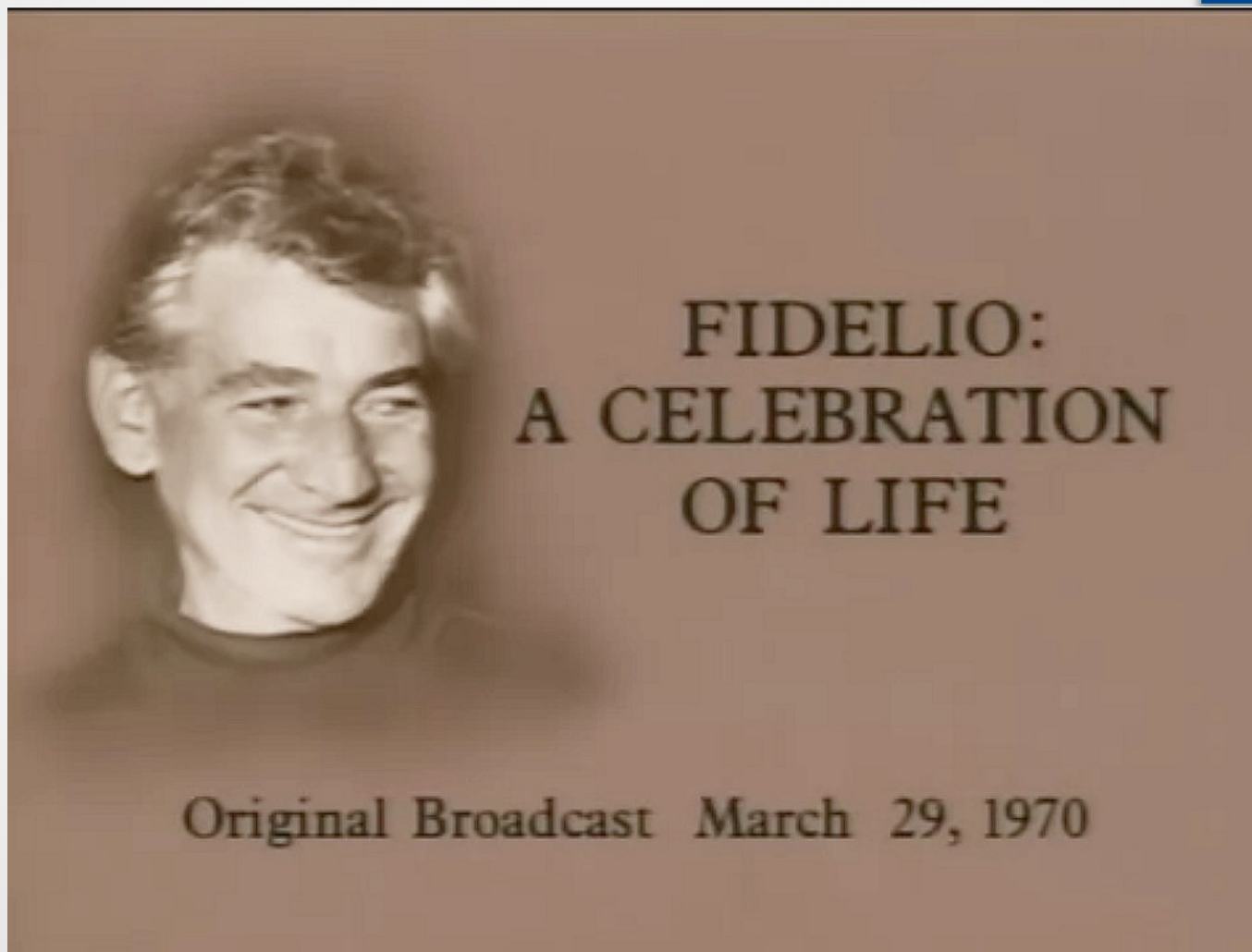
My Take-Away

- Early Period
 - Not an easy youth. Music is “good”, but not revolutionary. He was learning his craft, establishing his fame.
- Middle Period
 - Continuing troubles with his family, his love life, his health. Took a “revolutionary” approach in his music. Defined how music was to be written for years.
- Late Period
 - Deafness was a constant presence. His music became deeply personal. Established a musical bar that requires struggle by audiences and performers.

Fidelio

- Originally called Leonore
 - English: Leonore, or The Triumph of Martial Love
- Commission accepted in 1803
- Premiered in 1805, shortened in 1806
 - Leonore Overture No. 1, 2, & 3
- Final version appeared in 1814
- Struggle for love, for freedom.
- Not always comfortable mix of styles, but does contain great, uplifting music

Bernstein Introduction



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7fg4o7T6Cy0>

Other 4 parts of introduction

- Part 2:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJuxfyr_C8g
- Part 3:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3LG9RWeido>
- Part 4:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znjkS1u_vbc
- Part 5:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_y735uP7Lsw

Bernstein Conducting



Vienna State Opera
Orchestra

Conducted by
Leonard Bernstein

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YI-CF_rOApI

Subtitles added by Stanley Chang

No Leonore 3 in Act II

Multiple Versions

- 1806 version (second)
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=alu3A-qgbpM>
 - Performance prepared by Nikolaus Harnoncourt
- 1814 version (final)
 - DG DVD “Fidelio at the Met”
 - James Levine conducting, Ben Heppner Florestan
 - In modern dress
- Wikipedia list 11 video recordings and 38 audio recordings

Wellington's Victory

- ~ or ~ The Battle for Vitorio, Op. 91 (1813)
 - Composed rapidly after Wellington's victory over the army of Napoleon, Vitoria, Spain, spring 1813
- One can “see” the two armies marching into battle – clear programmatic music
- Critical and financial success, only limited modern performances
- Great Fun!

Wellington's Victory Op. 91



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewMACyKNdFw>
Tel Aviv Museum of Arts, July 13th, 2016. Shalev Ad-El conductor

Missa Solemnis, Op. 123

- Composed between 1819 & 1823
- First Performance: St. Petersburg, 1824
- Generally regarded as one of his finest compositions
- Atypical – limited attention to theme and variation
- Perhaps drew on Josquin des Prez (1450 – 1521) and Johannes Ockeghem (1410 – 1497); certainly drew on Bach and Handel

Basic Structure

- Kyrie – Lord have mercy upon us!
- Gloria – Glory be to God on high, and peace on earth to men of good will
- Credo – I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible
- Sanctus – Holy is the Lord God Sabaoth
- Agnus Dei – O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us, grant us peace

Dedication

- Archduke Rudolf of Austria, archbishop of Olomouc
- “From the heart – may it return to the heart!”
[“Von Herzen—Möge es wieder—Zu Herzen gehn!”]
- Deep profession of Catholic faith
- Too rich, too steeped in history to achieve the popularity of the 9th Symphony

Colin Davis. BBC Proms 2011



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obwyxYmSJ3g>
Includes good introduction

Alternative Versions

- Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century (period instruments)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYvpMeaaS3A>
- Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique, John Eliot Gardiner (BBC Proms 2014)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYvpMeaaS3A>
- Staatskapelle Dresden, Christian Thielemann, conductor
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUUEIRVrTeY>

Next Session – String Quartets +

- 16 String quartets, plus Grosse Fuge
 - Especially important in the Late Period
- 11 Piano trios
- 7 String trios
- 3 Piano quartets
- 5 Piano quintets
- Sonatas for violin, cello & horn
- Plus small wind ensembles, plus ...

Creatures of Prometheus

- Ballet (1801), libretto of Salvatore Viganò
 - Greek Prometheus helped humans through art, knowledge and laws of right conduct
 - Beethoven's only ballet, concert version excellent early period composition



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUGgzgprJ5M>

End Note ...

- No good video of Creatures of Prometheus ballet, but...
- We have: Rudolph Nureyev at Muppet Show - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHbGqJ_MonU



see you next week ...