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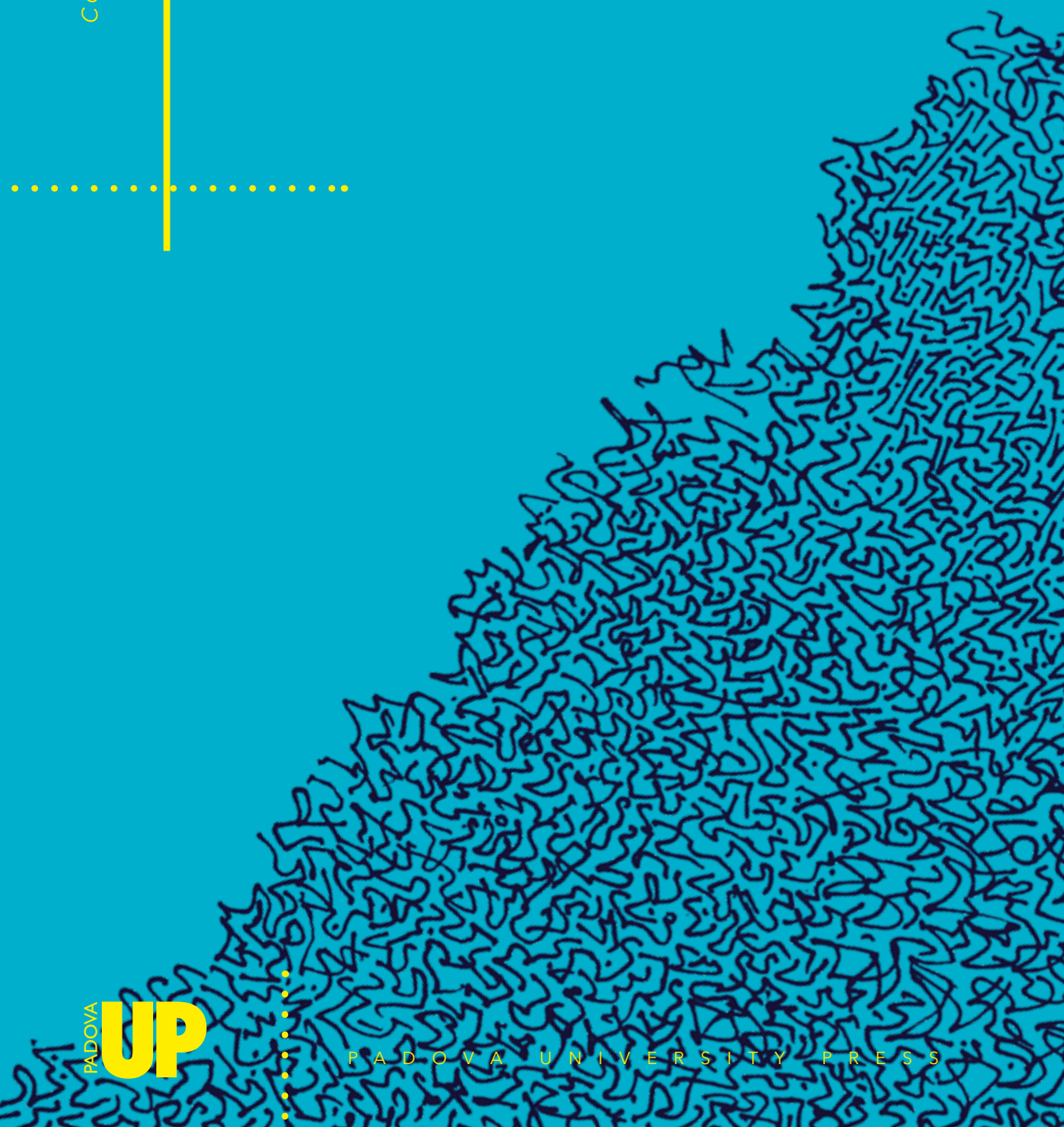
Il teatro delle emozioni: la gioia

a cura di
Mattia De Poli



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Indice

La gioia e l'amore

Beethoven's Ninth and *Fidelio*: An Ineffable Joy

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Abstract: Beethoven's reflections on joy find representation in his musical compositions, among which the most notable is the *Ode to Joy*. The theme of joy as expressed in the Ninth Symphony, however, finds an intriguing antecedent in *Fidelio*, in which joy is the theme of the duet of the second Act and of the following finale. By looking at these scenes in their context, this essay investigates how Beethoven plays with the relationship between words and music, using instrumentation (particularly the oboe in its interaction with human voices) and melody to express the ineffable, charging the scene with meaning beyond what words may express.

As an emotion that manifests itself through its ineffability, joy may find its proper expression in music: as Arthur Schopenhauer observes, «it is in music that what is perceived is not a representation or a copy of the Platonic idea but, in substance, is the idea itself»[1]. German classical music at the turn of the nineteenth century explores the possibility of joy, with the most obvious connection between this emotion and music being represented by the *Ode to Joy*, the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony; for modern-day listeners, a representation of joy, in visual and aural terms, is conductor Leonard Bernstein unable to hold his tears while conducting the Ninth. This episode took place on a memorable political occasion: the concert was performed on Christmas Day, shortly after the destruction of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989; the musicians who composed the orchestra and choir hailed from East and West Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, France and the Soviet Union. Looking today at this list of political entities, and realising how some of them have changed or are about to change, helps us to realise what a cataclysmic year 1989 was. As the commentator of the official video of the concert says, this version of the Ninth was all keyed towards its jubilant finale: «Its grand design is crowned by a setting of Schiller's *Ode to Joy*, a poem which

[1] Quoted in Vettore 2011, p. 172.

sings exultantly of the brotherhood of men»[2]. The Berlin celebration was of course far from being the first time in which the Ninth Symphony had been used for a political aim – indeed, it has been convincingly argued that even for the composer this work was «une sorte de fantasmagorie politique, le projet de créer une œuvre monumentale qui constituerait un discours sur le pouvoir idéal, voire qui serait elle-même un acte de pouvoir»[3]. The whole afterlife of the Ninth closely charts pivotal moments in world history: over the past two centuries it has been performed in the most diverse occasions, to celebrate Hitler's birthday as well as by prisoners in concentration camps, as the national anthem of the Rhodesia racist government and as the European Union official hymn. Two orchestras that were most closely connected with the development of Nazism, the Vienna Philharmonic and the Berlin Philharmonic, have made it a regular staple of their repertoire, but have also performed it to signal moments of change: in 2000 the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra played it in the concentration camp of Mauthausen, in front of an audience of survivors; in 2019, it was chosen by the Berliner Philharmonic for the opening concert with its new *Generalmusikdirektor*, Kirill Petrenko, the first conductor of Jewish descent to be given this post. In July 2019, the newly-formed Brexit Party caused a scandal in the European Parliament when its members turned their back while the anthem of the European Union was played: as one journalist wrote, "This was an emotionally provocative act at a time of political sensitivity, and there is something about the shunning of the anthem itself, an instrumental arrangement of the *Ode to Joy* from the final movement of Beethoven's iconic Ninth Symphony, that makes the demonstration particularly inflammatory"[4]. Seen as part of this controversial history, the Berlin Celebration Concert is a moment our time looks back on with pride, and perhaps nostalgia: in Bernstein's tears, and in the choral jubilation that prompts them, we may find an expression of communal joy.

Memorably, for the 1989 performance Leonard Bernstein and his team had decided to change the key-word of the final choral section: instead of *Freude*, soloists and chorus sang *Freiheit*, freedom. This decision prompted newspapers and commentators to resurrect the old myth concerning the composition of the original ode, supposing that Bernstein was actually interpreting Schiller's (and Beethoven's) real intentions, or even that the poet had originally meant to write a *Hymn an die Friede*, an *Ode to Peace*, rather than an *Ode to Joy*. It is true that

[2] The concert is described in Geitel online. A full video of the concert is available on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IInG5nY_wrU.

[3] Buch 1999, p. 9: "A sort of political phantasmagoria, the project of creating a monumental work which could make a statement on ideal power, and which itself could really be an act of power" (all translations, unless otherwise noted, are mine).

[4] Cormac 2019.

both poet and composer may have felt some qualms at using the word *Freiheit*: in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries this word was the special target of the censor, and "in his 1795 'Guidelines', the censor Hägelin devoted a whole paragraph to the use of 'Freiheit' in theatrical texts; he advised an utmost carefulness in using the word and strictly forbade its use in a political context, allowing for its appearance only as a reference to liberation from prison. The prisoners in *Fidelio* do use the word in the latter sense, but as numerous later interpretations of the opera indicate the word 'Freiheit' can easily acquire political undertones"[5]. As heard in the Berlin concert, the word resonates today still, with a far stronger political overtone than what we perceive in *Fidelio*. However, in spite of a number of legends and anecdotes born around this ode, it has been amply demonstrated that Schiller did mean his work to be called *Hymn an die Freude*, Ode to Joy, from the start; with this title he published it in 1786, in the journal *Thalia*. In 1803 he published a revised version, with the same title, which is the one used by Beethoven. Apart from Beethoven's, there are about 40 different musical settings of this ode – from its publication it excited great interest in the musical world[6]. But the fact that such a discussion is still alive tells us something about the central word, joy, and how we react to its expression in artistic form: as is shown also in other contributions appearing in the present volume, joy is a perpetually sliding signifier – it can be convincingly argued that on occasions such as the 1989 concert *freedom* and *joy* were happily synonymous.

What the episode from the Berlin celebration concert suggests is not only that joy may be expressed through music, but also that it may express (and be expressed by) the realisation of a communal aspiration (freedom) thanks to a communal effort; through the fusion of this particular music with this particular occasion we glimpse at the meaning of humanism in its nineteenth-century sense. As has been noted, in Beethoven's works "the music acts as the liturgy of secular humanism, performing the sacrilegious rites of the Enlightenment"[7]. But it is also true that it is not by mere coincidence that this liturgy finds its supreme celebrant in Ludwig van Beethoven: the idea of joy, as an ethical rather than aesthetic pleasure, was the object of a lifelong, careful exploration on the part of the German composer. His reflections on the meaning of joy find expression in a number of his musical compositions, among whom the *Ode to Joy* section in the Ninth Symphony is only the most memorable; other key moments are signalled by the use of the word *Augenblick* (moment, instant) in some of his works, such as *Der glorreiche Augenblick* (1814), or by his celebration of political

[5] Nedbal 2017, p. 196.
[6] See Parsons 1994, and Baird 2013.
[7] Chua 2009, p. 572.

events in many of his cantatas. These works could be said to belong to the genre of *musique d'état*, music composed to celebrate public moments, in an era in which the concept of national anthem was being born[8]. They are not uniformly successful from a strictly musical point of view – *Der glorreiche Augenblick*, for instance, is considered one of Beethoven's weakest compositions, while there is general agreement that the *Ode to Joy* remains «la plus convaincante des images sonores de l'utopie»[9]. But all these works show the composer exploring this principle and striving to translate it into music. The theme of joy as expressed in the Ninth Symphony also finds a notable antecedent in Beethoven's only opera, *Fidelio*, in which joy is the theme of the central duet of the second Act, «O namenlose Freude», and is the pivot around which the whole of the extraordinary second Act develops. In the following pages I analyse this section of *Fidelio* and focus on the way in which the interaction of words and music expresses this emotion.

Composed between 1804 and 1814, *Fidelio* belongs, chronologically, to what W. H. Auden calls the golden age of opera. The poet, who was also a notable librettist and collaborated with composers such as Benjamin Britten, offers a definition that may be useful for our present concern:

> The golden age of opera, from Mozart to Verdi, coincided with the golden age of liberal humanism, of unquestioning belief in freedom and progress. If good operas are rarer today, this may be because, not only have we learned that we are less free than nineteenth-century humanism imagined, but also have become less certain that freedom is an unequivocal blessing, that the free are necessarily the good. To say that operas are more difficult to write does not mean that they are impossible. That would only follow if we should cease to believe in free will and personality altogether. Every high C accurately struck demolishes the theory that we are the irresponsible puppets of fate or chance[10].

Auden, however, may be simplifying the issue. Rather than an age of unquestioning belief in freedom, the "golden age of opera" he describes is marked by the struggle for freedom – whether it is the domestic and social freedom evoked in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, the sensual freedom of *Don Giovanni*, or the political and religious freedom of Verdi's *Nabucco*. Freedom is often denied in acts of repression which lead to imprisonment and death, as in so many of Verdi's operas; the attainment of freedom can lead to the musical expression of shared exultance that we find in the finale of *Figaro*, or of quasi-religious awe as we hear in *Die Zauberflöte* – or indeed, in the finale of *Fidelio*, where exultance and awe are closely entwined. But the essence of all these

[8] For the concept of *musique d'état*, see Buch 1999, pp. 21-80.
[9] Buch 1999, p. 12: "The most persuasive among acoustic images of utopia".
[10] Auden 1975, p. 474.

operas lies in the struggle rather than in freedom itself: the joy promised by the reaching of the goal often remains an aspiration.

A complex struggle for different kinds of freedom is at the heart of *Fidelio* – something that becomes evident if we look more closely at this opera and its genesis[11]. Beethoven took his inspiration from a libretto written by Jean-Nicolas Bouilly for an opera by Pierre Gaveaux, *Léonore, ou l'amour conjugal*, who had first been performed in Paris on 19 February 1798: apparently based on a real-life episode, it was the story of a wife who rescued her imprisoned husband by dressing up in men's clothes and getting employment in the prison in which he was held. According to Bouilly, this had actually happened during the years of the Terror in Tours, and he himself had been a witness to the wife's heroism. The story quickly became popular: by the time Beethoven and his librettist Josef Sonnleithner completed a first version of their opera, other works taken from the same libretto were under way – notably, Ferdinando Paër's *Leonora* (Dresden, 1804) and Johann Simon Mayr's *L'amor coniugale* (Padua, 1805). Beethoven was thus working with a well-known story that had already lost some of its topicality, given the passage of years, and given the fact that Bouilly himself had prudently covered his tracks by setting the scene near Seville in an unspecified past: «La Scene se passe en Espagne, dans une Prison d'Etat, située à quelques lieues de Séville»[12]. The deliberately vague setting poses some critical problems: in one of his occasional writings on music, Edward Said offered a reading of Beethoven's opera that is decidedly sociological («*Fidelio* is in many ways not only Beethoven's remorselessly middle-class answer to Mozart's libertine perspectives in the Da Ponte operas but also an attempt to give musical life to a set of abstract ideas about human justice and freedom taken from the French Revolution»)[13], but such a reading does not account for the fact that the links to the French Revolution are only implicit and often denied; the vagueness in socio-political references takes the opera beyond the circumstances of its composition. At the same time the German composer was inevitably striving to free his work from the association with all the versions that had appeared before his, and his interventions on the libretto show a further move away from topicality, into a more philosophically inspired reflection. Thus, for instance, librettist and composer added to Bouilly's finale a maxim that appears closely connected with Schiller's *Ode*:

> Wer ein holdes Weib errungen
> Stimm' in unser Jubel ein,

[11] For a fundamental guide to the opera see Robinson 1996.
[12] Bouilly, Gaveaux 1798, p. 4 (unnumbered): "The scene takes place in Spain, in a State prison, a few leagues from Seville".
[13] Said 2008, p. 132.

> Nie wird es zu hoch besungen
> Retterin des Gatten sein[14].

The corresponding passage in Schiller's *An die Freude* shows decided similarities:

> Wer ein holdes Weib errungen,
> mische seinen Jubel ein[15]!

Whether the responsibility for this change rests with Beethoven or Sonnleithner, it underlines the movement from the private to the public dimension: the protagonists' vicissitudes become a sort of *exemplum* for mankind. What had been primarily motivated by Bouilly's prudent move transformed Beethoven's adaptation of a well-known story into a timeless exploration of the human aspiration to happiness.

By avoiding any close historical reference, *Fidelio* forces us to reflect on the very meaning of history and on its relation to individual destiny; this interpretive possibility is supported by the plot, which I will summarize briefly here. The opera opens quietly enough with two young lovers, Marzelline and Jaquino, bickering; but soon, thanks to the introduction of the mysterious Fidelio, with whom Marzelline has suddenly fallen in love, events take a completely different turn. Fidelio is revealed to the audience to be Leonore, a noblewoman who, dressed as a man, has entered the prison where her husband, Florestan, is unjustly and secretly kept; she succeeds in foiling the attempt of Florestan's arch-enemy, the Governor don Pizarro, to kill him, only for her small, individual effort to be overcome and made good by the unexpected arrival of the Minister, who recognises Florestan as a long-lost friend and immediately sets him and the other prisoners free. Within such a plot the male protagonist, Florestan, has very little to do, and indeed his condition as a chained prisoner prevents him from attempting any action; Leonore/Fidelio has an unusual degree of autonomy for a female character, yet even her actions avail very little. The fact that (rather inexplicably) in the finale all prisoners are pardoned and freed by a benevolent authority turns this episode of the Terror into a celebration of humanity, and makes it possible for the story to be lent to all kinds of allegorical readings. The role of individual characters within the great march of history is undefined and undecided – there is nothing of the pessimism that characterises, for instance, Verdi's *Don Carlos* or Berlioz's *Les Troyens*, two works that decidedly point at a view of history as an irreversible and sometimes incomprehensible mechanism,

[14] "Whoever has found a devoted wife, | Let him join in our jubilation. | One can never praise enough| A wife who becomes her husband's savior".
[15] "Whoever has found a devoted wife | Let him share his jubilation!". The quotations and translations from the *Fidelio* finale and from Schiller's poem are taken from Nedbal 2017, p. 202.

inexorably led by forces outside human power and even human understanding; rather, the double rescue of Florestan – the first, individual one by his wife, the second, collective one by the Minister – expresses a tension towards hope based on a fundamental faith in the goodness of mankind. An analogous kind of tension may have been felt by the composer at a purely musical level: with this, his only opera, Beethoven was forced to come to terms with the heavy Mozartian legacy and find his true voice as a composer for the musical theatre (we know from his and his contemporaries' letters that, even though *Fidelio* had an immensely difficult and long conception, Beethoven struggled all his life to find other suitable subjects for operas); the very fact that, partly because of external circumstances, he was forced to rewrite substantial parts of his work more than once, and radically re-think its structure (there are no less than three different overtures, composed over ten years) helps to make *Fidelio* into a fascinatingly imperfect work, which surprises the listeners by turning from a domestic drama into a celebration of mankind. It is just this unease, this lack of stability in the overall form, that allows us to explore in *Fidelio* the development of themes and intellectual attitudes, and to trace the evolution of the idea of joy from a private impulse to a public, therefore political, celebration.

Fidelio then proposes itself as an opera of contradictions, inherent in its very title: it is known that this is not the original title Beethoven had in mind, since he preferred the more traditional *Leonore*; *Fidelio* was rather the decision of the theatre management for its 1805 première[16]. Yet the choice turned out to be serendipitous: the name points at a character who contradicts his/her essence, by choosing to hide herself and her sex under a name whose etymology highlights truth and faithfulness. Within the rather obvious and static plot offered by the libretto, the composer works by giving music a strongly ideological role, forcing us to reflect on the relationship between words and music, using instrumentation to express the ineffable, charging the work with a meaning that goes beyond what is actually expressed by the text. He does so by working on what is apparently the very weakness of the opera, that is, its passage from a domestic to a public dimension. Paul Robinson describes the passage very well:

> Put baldly, the opening scenes belong to the world of eighteenth-century domestic comedy, in which attention is directed to character and human relationships, but by the end of the opera, these characters and their predicaments have been utterly forgotten – indeed, the actual figures with whom the opera begins have become almost invisible. Instead, dramatic interest has been lodged exclusively in the liberated prisoners, who come to stand for all humanity and express their joy over their new estate[17].

[16] Solomon 1998, p. 187.
[17] Robinson 1991, p. 23.

This passage from the private to the public carries strong echoes of Enlightenment ideals, and in musical terms characterises the culture of *Bildung* in nineteenth-century Europe: «through opera, song, and non-staged choral works, music converted the private act of reading to a public confirmation of the aesthetic priorities of a growing middle class and instilled a more general cultural literacy»[18]. Within these ideological premises, the idea of joy finds an echo in Schiller's ode, and in the reflection of some eighteenth-century ideologues: «joy as the fountainhead of universal community, deism and Nature; joy that suffuses the anacreontic rituals of human bonding»[19]. In this sense Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, by introducing a strong and prolonged chorale section at the end of an essentially instrumental work, would mark an ideological as well as an aesthetic novelty. At the same time, we can see a connection between the chorus of the Ninth and the German *geselliges Lied*, or sociable song – an eighteenth-century song that celebrated sociability in singing, suggesting that sections should be sung by a soloist and then answered by a chorus (as happens in the Ninth), celebrating social moments such as the seasons of the years, or a wedding, or analogous festive occasions. A notable instance in German literature is Goethe's *Gesellige Lieder*, prefaced by the motto:

> Was wir in Gesellschaft singen,
> Wird von Herz zu Herzen dringen[20].

As has been noted, this is «a sentiment which Beethoven echoes in a completely different context, the inscription to his 'Missa solemnis': 'Von Herzen – Möge es wieder – zu Herzen gehn!'»[21]. Religious music thus contributes to the enhancement of human brotherhood.

In *Fidelio* Beethoven explores this passage from the individual to the community with care: the shift begins with the apparition of the prisoners towards the end of Act One, in a section in which individual voices speak for a collective humanity that responds in the choral passages, exactly as happens in the *geselliges Lied*: as we, the audience, discover Leonore's true identity and Florestan's plight, and as the female protagonist overhears Pizarro's plot to murder his prisoner, the scene moves to show all prisoners, temporarily granted free air and a breathing space thanks to Leonore's pleading with the gaoler. Although their yearning for freedom is quickly and brutally repressed by Pizarro, we have heard a plea to which Leonore shall indirectly respond in the second

[18] Marvin 2003, p. 430.
[19] Marvin 2003, p. 437.
[20] "What we sing in company will enter from heart to heart". On this point, see Kirby 1966. The quotation from Goethe appears on p. 119.
[21] Kirby 1966, p. 119. The motto can be found in the autograph score, and can be translated as "May this go from the heart to the heart".

Act, just after Florestan's aria: she enters the dungeon as he lies unconscious on the ground, and, unable to ascertain whether the prisoner actually is her husband, she declares her determination to free him regardless of his identity, with the words «Wer du auch seist, ich will dich retten» ("Whoever you are, I will save you"). Individual love is subsumed in the love for humanity. *Fidelio* reflects on this by gradually abandoning the domestic concerns of the opening scene (the two bickering lovers, Marzelline and Jaquino, are granted only a very marginal status by the end) and progressively underlining the parallel between the private and the public: if Florestan comes to represent all prisoners, as explicitly shown in Leonore's words quoted above, the female protagonist in her turn becomes mankind, engaged in a struggle that may be in the end useless, but is nonetheless essential. Pursuing to the limit this parallelism, the opera presents two separate endings, one private – the love duet that celebrates the reunion of Leonore and Florestan – the other public – the grand finale in which the Minister frees Florestan and the other prisoners.

The two endings seem to sit uneasily together, in part because they require different settings: if the lovers recognise each other in the dungeon in which Florestan is chained, the final apotheosis, at the presence of the Minister acting as a *deus ex machina*, takes place in the courtyard of the prison, which one imagines bathed with light. The uneasiness resides, furthermore, not only in the setting but also in the dramatic intention: the two endings seem to belong to different frames of mind, since if what saves Florestan is the intervention of the Minister, then Leonore's efforts, however heroic, are also slightly ridiculous. Musically speaking, too, there seems to be a hiatus: the love duet, generally taken at a frenzied pace, is followed by the solemn march introducing the arrival of the Minister; puzzlingly, the indication of tempo given by Beethoven is *allegro vivace* for both pieces. A number of productions of *Fidelio* have solved the problem by strongly breaking the continuity at this point: they insert a musical interval in the form of an instrumental piece. Normally the chosen piece is a second overture, generally *Leonore 3*; the interval this provides is generally filled by a change of scenery. However, there is no denying that, however beautiful *Leonore 3* may be from a purely musical point of view, in dramatic terms its insertion has disastrous effects; and of course, it was never contemplated by the composer. As the conductor Nikolaus Harnoncourt noted, Beethoven's own indication suggests that the two endings are meant to be heard consecutively and understood together: if the composer asked for the two sections to be played in the same tempo, the love duet, rather than being played fast and emotionally, should be put in close relations to the stately march[22]. In an interview the conductor underlined the reasons for his decision:

[22] Harnoncourt 1994, p. 21.

> All three versions are in agreement on this point: the duet and the march, "Heil sei dem Tag", have exactly the same tempo marking, which means that the duet should be taken more slowly and the march more quickly than usual. Dramaturgically speaking, this makes a great deal of sense: the jubilation of the lovers is still coloured by the suffering they've been through [and remember that Florestan should still be in chains at this point], it's not just ecstatic but also inward, whereas the jubilation of the finale is like an explosion liberating all the characters' pent-up feelings[23].

Harnoncourt's decision, highlighted in the recordings of the opera he left, was to slow the tempo of the duet – a fact which perplexes a number of listeners, but also suggests a fascinating interpretation of this passage.

Both endings are meditations on the idea of joy. Joy takes different forms in the opera, and different names in the libretto: when the two lovers have their duet, they call it *namenlose Freude*, ineffable joy, and strive throughout the duet to express what they feel: they seem to struggle to find appropriate expression as they work their way through words such as *unnenbarem*, unnameable, *übergroße*, overwhelming, *himmlisches*, heavenly. Significantly, the central word is not *Liebe*, love, but *Freude*, joy. If the libretto struggles with ineffability, the music appears to express from the start what the lovers aim at: they sing the same melodic line, first antiphonally, then together in thirds, taking turns in the upper zone of the register, then once again antiphonally. Halfway through the duet, there is a moment in which the melody almost stops, after the two lovers have repeated *du bist … ich bin …* ("you are … I am …"), to allow for a quasi-matrimonial exchange of names: earlier on Florestan and Leonore had referred to each other simply, and rather ritualistically, as *mein Mann* and *mein Weib*, my husband and my wife. Harnoncourt's decision regarding the tempo has the effect of highlighting the antiphonal quality of this duet, suggesting an almost liturgical overtone. On the other hand, in the Finale the celebration of reconquered freedom for Florestan and all the other prisoners is not described with the word *Freude*, but marked as an *Augenblick*, a sublime moment towards which the Minister's long recitative and the revelation of Florestan's condition have led. In the pivotal moment of the finale, the Minister first commands the gaoler to free the prisoner, in a gesture that may be meant as a form of retaliation, then changes his mind and instead asks Leonore to cut the chains that bind Florestan. Recognising the symbolic value of this moment, Leonore exclaims, «O Gott, welch ein Augenblick!» ("O God, what a moment!"); Florestan answers by exclaiming, «O unaussprechlich süsses Glück!» ("O joy, inexpressibly sweet!"). The ascending fifth in the word *unaussprechlich* may evoke the analogous interval in «Più docile io sono» ("Far milder I am"), the

[23] Harnoncourt 1994, p. 21.

words with which the Countess celebrates reconciliation and forgiveness in the finale of Mozart's *Nozze di Figaro*, an opera that exercises a strong influence on *Fidelio*. Analyzing Mozart's work, Paul Robinson writes:

> The most important of those values is the conviction that human beings can overcome the antagonisms that separate them from one another. Like the *philosophes*, Mozart believes that we have within us the intellectual and emotional resources to transcend our hostilities. To put the matter in a word, he believes in the possibility of reconciliation[24].

A similar reading can be applied to this passage in *Fidelio*. Leonore's and Florestan's exclamations are followed by a phrase sung by the Minister, «Gerecht, o Gott, gerecht ist dein Gericht» ("O God, your judgement is just"): this suggests that the utterance of joy in Beethoven's work is associated with the acknowledgement of the power of God, but also with the idea of restorative social justice as a fundamental component in the achievement of joy. In this case, as in the duet, what is underlined is the ineffability of the moment: something that is highlighted also by the music, which works from the religious antiphon in the duet to the stately melody in this passage (the music here is taken from the *Cantata on the Death of Joseph II*, in a passage in which the Emperor is praised for having overcome fanaticism)[25], and suggests a harmonious coming together of all mankind in the second case, in a musical construction that has a strong ideological component.

Long before Beethoven, music has been used to give an objective correlative to the idea of harmony: as Boethius warns us, *nulla enim magis ad animum de disciplinis via, quam auribus patet* ("there is no better way for teaching to enter the soul than through the ears")[26]. Music is the sublime message our hearing can receive. The relation between music and an ethical way of life, and the vision of music as an ordaining principle of the universe are well known axioms of medieval thought. Medieval writers and thinkers focus on figures such as Orpheus or, in the Christian tradition, King David, and represent them as playing basically the same instrument, a harp or lyre, or, in the Renaissance, a lute: these string instruments become ideal symbols of good government, of harmonious order, represented by the fact that an individual string will not produce good music unless it is tuned with the others; the triangular shape of the harp also evokes, in the case of King David, connections with the Trinity[27]. Musical instruments are often seen as the natural intermediaries between mankind and the divine forces

[24] Robinson 1985, p. 14.
[25] See Deane 2011, 15-28, pp. 27-28.
[26] Boethius 1973, I.i.
[27] On this point see Petrina 2005.

of the cosmos[28], and the organic materials, sometimes very specific ones, used to build them, together with their odd shapes and numerically-based proportions, make them admirable vehicles of symbolism; this appears particularly often in medieval theological texts, in Biblical commentaries, but also in political texts in which Biblical teaching or analogies might make the didactic element of the treatise more forceful. On this traditional basis Beethoven, building the *Augenblick* moment of *Fidelio*, inscribes a concept that derives from his acquaintance with the German *geselliges Lied*: the march in C major that has greeted the entrance of the Minister in the finale is left unfinished, and a number of rapid changes of keys express the various moments of the dénouement (A major for the recognition of Florestan on the part of the Minister, F# minor for the denunciation of Pizarro and his despatch); only then does the Minister invite Leonore, with a descending phrase, to free her husband. At this point the melody soars into F major, once Pizarro, the one truly negative character of the opera, is eliminated, in «an ethereal concerted movement», in which the tempo slows to *sostenuto assai*, «establishing an atmosphere of hypnotic stillness»[29]. The chorus will conclude the section affirming its role as «the uppermost and most powerfully expressive part of the orchestra, abandoning more and more the 'logic' of words, programme music and drama, and forming the mightiest climax of the pure symphony that has flourished along with the chorus»[30]. But this scene of symbolic enfranchisement had been opened not by any of the characters, but by the instruments, and in particular by the oboe, who proposes the musical phrases that will be taken up in turn by the characters and finally by the chorus: pure music anticipates what the words will thereafter declare. Ernst Bloch describes the moment thus:

> First the sudden switch to a distant key, then an oboe melody expressing fulfilment; the Sostenuto assai of time standing still and absorbed in the moment. Every future storming of the Bastille is implicitly expressed in *Fidelio*, and an incipient substance of human identity fills up the space in the Sostenuto assai[31].

The passage expresses a moment of reconquered harmony: the use of the oboe is connected to what the listeners have experienced throughout the opera. In fact thus far the oboe has been heard whenever Leonore was evoked or the power of love expressed: its most important appearances are during Florestan's aria, when its melody introduces the vision he has of «ein Engel, Leonoren, der Gattin, so gleich» ("An angel, so much resembling my wife, Leonore"), and in

[28] Mainoldi 2001, p. 285.
[29] Robinson 1996, p. 21.
[30] Bloch 1985, p. 83. See also Kerman 1988, pp. 74-78.
[31] Bloch 1985, p. 243.

the section immediately following, the Melodram, in which it takes the place of the singers who, in front of extreme grief, are unable to express themselves. As joy springs from the depth of grief, so the oboe marks the transition from the depth of despair to the soaring of exultation.

In *Paradiso* XIV, Dante offers an image of the ineffability of joy that, as in Beethoven, acknowledges the insufficiency of words and recurs to music:

> E come giga e arpa, in tempra tesa
> di molte corde, fa dolce tintinno
> a tal da cui la nota non è intesa,
> così da' lumi che lì m'apparinno
> s'accogliea per la croce una melode
> che mi rapiva, sanza intender l'inno[32].

As Leonore finally cuts the chain that binds Florestan, we are equally ravished by a music that makes words temporarily redundant: the oboe, supported by flutes, clarinets, bassoons and horns, begins a long melody that is then taken up by the human voices – Leonore first, then Florestan, then the Minister, then the other characters and chorus. Instruments and voices find a celestial harmony, entering one after the other as in a ritual, courtly dance, letting first the lovers, then the Minister, then the apparently forgotten characters, the forlorn Marzelline and her father, join one another and the orchestra in this celebration of reconquered peace. Music comes to the rescue of humanity and its limitations, suggesting the natural form of harmonious joy[33].

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[32] *Paradiso* XIV.118-23. "And as, with many strings which harmonize, | viol and harp din sweetly on an ear | too gross to catch their subtle melodies, | so from the light before me did I hear | throughout the cross enrapturing music swell, | though what the hymn they carolled was not clear" (Alighieri 1981).

[33] This essay is dedicated to Christiania and Denis, newly wed.

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ἔφριξ’ ἔρωτι, περιχαρὴς δ’ ἀνεπτάμαν
Che brivido di piacere! Che gioia straordinaria! Spicco il volo.
(Sofocle, *Aiace* 693)

Questo volume raccoglie gli interventi presentati al 2° Convegno internazionale “Il teatro delle emozioni – La gioia” (Università degli Studi di Padova, palazzo del Bo’, aula I. Nievo, 20-21 maggio 2019). I diversi contributi mostrano la “teatralità” della gioia, ovvero la possibilità di rappresentare questa emozione sulla scena, negli spettacoli sia tragici che comici, e sono stati organizzati in quattro sezioni per affinità tematica (“La gioia fra tragedia e commedia”, “La gioia e l’amore”, “Realtà, illusione, apparenza, finzione”, “Teatro e società”) e secondo un ordine cronologico all’interno di ciascuna di esse: si è inteso cercare così un equilibrio fra l’approccio che intende le emozioni come il prodotto particolare di una società, legato ad un tempo e un luogo ben precisi, e quello che le intende come l’espressione universale di qualcosa di innato, di intrinsecamente umano, indipendente da qualsiasi condizionamento esterno all’individuo.

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