

## Leonore, Beethoven

Nathalie Paulin (*Leonore*), Pascale Beaudin (*Marzelline*), Jean-Michel Richer (*Florestan*), Keven Geddes (*Jaquino*), Andrew Sauvageau (*First Prisoner*), Matthew Scollin (*Pizarro*), Stephen Hegedus (*Rocco*), Alexandre Sylvestre (*Don Fernando*), James Rogers (*Second Prisoner*), Chorus and Orchestra of Opera Lafayette, c. Ryan Brown, d. Oriol Tomas, des. Laurence Mongeau, *video director* Jason Starr. Naxos DVD 2.110674/Blu-ray NBD0121V (148 minutes)

Much ink was spilled in 2020 sorting out the three principal iterations of ‘Beethoven’s only opera’. In March Opera Lafayette’s production of the 1805 *Leonore* at Manhattan’s Hunter College was among New York’s last and best productions of the pre-pandemic opera season, and I second George Loomis’s positive take on this simple but generally pleasing staging (July 2020, pp. 874-6); this video, a composite of the three performances, provides a valuable visual counterpoint to René Jacobs’s recent recording of the three-act 1805 *Urtext*. Jacobs may have starrier soloists (Marlis Peterson sings the title role) and the services of the Freiburger Barockorchester, but Ryan Brown leads his largely Canadian cast and fine players with directness and skill, and Jason Starr’s video direction allows us to see the instrumentalists in close-up. The solo obbligatos that characterize the less familiar numbers here—an Act 1 trio for Rocco, Marzelline and Leonore and a duet for Leonore and Marzelline following that for Pizarro and Rocco—are by and large excellent, though the brass accompanying ‘Komm, Hoffnung’ could be better. Will Crutchfield’s daring yet sensible recomposition of Beethoven’s (partially

obscured) sketches for Florestan’s aria is this edition’s biggest ‘news’; Charles Brink carries off its Mozartian solo flute writing well. One misses some things from *Fidelio*, such as its wonderfully complex first finale; but anyone admiring that work would profit from knowing its composer’s fascinating original thoughts. Some dramatic moments differ: the lovers’ ecstatic reunion duet finds them doubtful as to their survival as in *Entführung*.

Oriol Tomas’s inventive stage direction occasionally overeggs the initial scenes’ domestic comedy. The period costumes, by Laurence Mongeau, are apt. Not everyone sounds idiomatically German, but Delores Ziegler (no less) has coached the diction to expressive effect. Nathalie Paulin’s Leonore is moving and mightily impressive despite some pressured moments in extremis. Jean-Michel Richer, as a Florestan convincingly lean for once, is not rich of timbre, sounding more Patzak than Vickers, and Keven Geddes’s amiable, Billy Bunterish Jaquino is more Monostatos than Tamino. Stephen Hegedus is a sympathetic, musical Rocco alongside Pascale Beaudin’s spirited, bright-toned if reedy Marzelline. Convincingly military in bearing, Matthew Scollin copes decently with Pizarro’s challenging music but, when caught in close-up, veers a little too far towards moustache-twirling melodrama. Alexandre Sylvestre brings substantial sound if not much noble presence to Don Fernando, and the chorus—both Prisoners included—fares well. A worthwhile acquisition.

DAVID SHENGOLD