

Namenlose Freude

by David Shavin

The following is an edited transcript of the opening remarks of David Shavin, author, historian, and professional violinist, to Panel 4, “A Human Future for Youth: A Beethoven-Driven Renaissance of Classical Culture,” of the Schiller Institute’s December 12-13 Conference, “The World after the U.S. Election: Creating a World Based on Reason.” Mr. Shavin is the author of an in-depth article, “Think Like Beethoven: Fidelio, Lafayette and La-Rouche—or, the Big Elephant in the Room,” published in EIR: [Part 1](#) on November 13, 2020, and [Part 2](#)

I’m speaking today on the only opera that Ludwig von Beethoven composed, *Fidelio*. The theme of *Fidelio*, to state it briefly, is the transition from *namenlose Pein*—nameless pain—to *namenlose Freude*—nameless joy.

And that’s appropriate. If you find out that you’re in a world in which 270 million people are starving to death, or you find that neo-cons of all stripes are itching to play nuclear chicken with Russia or China, or you’re simply watching friends and loved ones around you being tortured every day by the daily media, it’s not very joyful.

One of the keys to how Beethoven thinks and what is shown in this opera, is that one of the most important things is simply courage, not turning one’s back on the most intractable of problems, even if you fear that in the attempt to take in the scope of all the problems, that your heart will break. You have to have courage.

It’s intimately related to the theme of the Coincidence of Opposites of this conference, that the Creator created a world in which there’s actually no problem that can possibly be posed that cannot be mastered. There’s no evil that cannot be conquered; but there’s also no



Unknown artist
Gen. Lafayette’s wife and daughters join him in the prison at Olmütz.

guarantee that it will be.

Historical Basis for *Fidelio*

The opera *Fidelio* is based on the historical Marquis de Lafayette and his wife Adrienne, and his imprisonment by the British, basically. The British were in an alliance with the Germans and the Austrians in attacking France. They detained and arrested Lafayette in the fall of 1792 and kept him in prison for over five years. Lafayette was

key to this historical period because he had fought in the American Revolution along with many other French Constitutionalists, Frenchmen who had established a Constitution in France in 1789.

In August 1792, the Jacobins overthrew that Constitution. Lafayette tried to stop the overthrow and was targeted for arrest. He fled toward the American Embassy in the Hague, but was captured. He was put in jail, but denied the status of prisoner of war. Rather, they kept him for five years as a “prisoner of state,” an undefined phrase that meant they could do whatever they wanted with him.

Lafayette represented the America option for Europe. The British policy, under Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger, was one of gang and counter-gang: Jacobins on one side, and the partisans of aristocratic power and privilege on the other, with the poor population caught in between. With Lafayette removed from the scene, the gang-counter-gang scenario would play out.

At the same time, Lafayette’s wife Adrienne was arrested in France. He was being detained supposedly by the royalists; she was being detained by the Jacobins. They arrested husband and wife, supposedly by two opposing sides. In July 1794, Adrienne’s sister, mother, and grandmother were taken from the prison she was in,

and guillotined. Adrienne herself was not guillotined only due to the intervention of President George Washington and the American Ambassador to France, Gouverneur Morris. She finally did get free, and in 1795, shortly after she was freed, she decided to go to Austria to confront the Austrian Emperor, saying, "Release my husband from prison, or put me in prison with him." This is a woman who had just been in a horrible situation for several years. She joined her husband in prison.

The story became very public in 1797. Austria was being defeated by the French, and it was imminent that Lafayette and his wife would be released. There was a mobilization to release them involving George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and in France, Lazare Carnot.

There were poems, songs, and plays about the events in 1797, including the libretto that Beethoven ended up composing from. In 1803, Beethoven decided to compose the opera. It had been very much on his mind for the previous five years, from 1798 to 1803. He knew that the best hope for Europe and for civilization was to have the Constitutionalists in France, whether republican or monarchist, but Constitutionalists, come to the fore and dominate the Napoleon government.

Beethoven had been composing a symphony directly to this end, for Napoleon, called the *Bonaparte Symphony*. In May 1804, Napoleon declared himself emperor. (Later, he placed the crown on his own head.) When Beethoven heard about this, he ripped up the title page to his *Bonaparte Symphony*, saying this man has disgraced the cause. That symphony is known today as the *Eroica Symphony*. Beethoven himself retitled it, dedicating it to the "memory of a great man." We know that for the next several months he passionately dove into the composition of the *Fidelio* opera. At the time, he called the opera *Leonore*.

The Opera *Fidelio*

So, a little bit on the opera itself.

Leonore is the wife of Florestan, a political leader who has been imprisoned. He spoke the truth, and his corrupt enemies wrongfully imprisoned him. What is she to do? She could try to put up with the situation, but she decides she has to intervene.

What could she do? She goes to the city where the prison is; it's not her native city where she has been living. She dresses up as a man, using the male name Fidelio, in hopes of obtaining employment at the prison, and thus gain access to her husband. But what possible

plan could she have to find out where her husband was inside the prison? It turns out he's in the lowest prison cell; nobody can see him except for the top jailer, Rocco. She has to figure out how to get down there. It's not obvious how she's going to save her husband, but she had decided she's going to make history. She has to do this.

This is beautifully put in one of the early compositions in the opera, "*Mir ist so wunderbar*." Beethoven inserts this scene in the libretto; it's not in the original play. People should rethink this if they think they know "*Mir ist so wunderbar*." You have the jailer, his daughter, and the suitor of his daughter all singing about domestic matters. The suitor is wondering why the daughter doesn't love him anymore, why she's now enraptured with Fidelio. Rocco, the father and head jailer, is talking about domestic happiness.

However, this is the last thing on the mind of Leonore. She's one of the four singing, and she's tremendously alone. She's singing about the nameless pain, a pain so general and pervasive that it's not even located in any particular part, it's just a general, nameless pain. She's put herself in a situation she does not know how to resolve.

Again, Beethoven composed this scene. I think there's something very self-revelatory about it. This came shortly after his famous Heiligenstadt Testament, written the previous fall, in 1802. Beethoven wrote to his brothers about his horror, in losing his hearing. His sense of hearing, which was superior to most human beings, was betraying him. For a composer, that's pretty difficult. He knew he was going to be alone in life, that he would not have intimate conversations, he would not have these types of experiences: For the last ten years in Vienna, he had been a passionate republican; he went to coffeehouses, he talked over issues with friends. His future was that he would have to go forward alone, and he would stay alive only because his art had something to contribute to the human race. But he would never share in the same joys that the rest of the population would have.

This unique loneliness informs Beethoven's composition. This composition is a canon, in which all four people are singing the same melody, which only serves to put into contrast what Leonore is saying, what she is singing. There's nothing domestic about what she's talking about, but because it's a canon, it promises there is a higher common bond among the four of them; not to be realized at that point in the opera. It sets up in the

audience's mind this *namenlose Pein*, this nameless pain. That is what's going to be transformed to a *namenlose Freude*, nameless joy. A joy so pervasive that it's not located in any particular place. This transformation from pain to joy, is the same theme we need in confronting a world in which we have the capacity to produce food, and yet 270 million people are on the verge of starvation. It has to be taken in, even if you don't know the immediate way out.

The Requirements of Agapic Love

In *Fidelio*, Beethoven borrows from Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, written twelve years earlier, and performed in the same opera house in Vienna. Beethoven found in *The Magic Flute* a unique solution put forward there: that it's the love of a man and a woman that guarantees you can have a republic.

It's not an obvious argument. In *The Magic Flute*, you have a rather benign, benevolent brotherhood ruling, with Zarastro being the leader. But he decides that that can't be the future; that Pamina and Tamino—a couple—must rule together. And it's their love and the courage of their love that guides them to be the type of leaders that his brotherhood can never be.

Beethoven develops that much further, because Leonore is first motivated by the love of her husband. But she finds out her love for her husband was because her husband is qualified to be a political prisoner. In the type of world that they live in, being a political prisoner was the honorable place to be.

People can ridicule this argument, but even with giggly, immature teenagers in their first opening up to a teenage type of love, and all the silly things that happen there, there's still a hint of world leadership in it. Because a teenager feels that if only their beloved would return their feelings, they could have their soulmate, that everything is possible. You could run the world, you can conquer disease, everything is possible.

It's pretty immature, so I don't want to leave it there. The point is, love is not a nice thing as a gift to the human race that we can simply enjoy. It's actually the most indicative quality of human beings that we can experience love, that we are a species that can experi-



Leonore confronts the evil Pizarro in Act III, Scene 3, in the Paris premiere of Beethoven's opera, *Fidelio* at the Théâtre Lyrique.

Ange-Louis Janet

ence love. That type of species can't have a monarchy and can't have Jacobins. It must have a republic. It's the same quality that qualifies someone to be a creative scientist, to be the head of a republic, or just to be a competent citizen.

I'm not going to try to review the opera; you're going to have to go watch it. But there comes a point where Leonore is sent down with Rocco to dig the grave of the poor man in the cell at the lowest part of the prison. She hopes that it's her husband who she can save, but she's not sure it's him. When she's down there, she can't recognize the man because he's not facing toward her. Nevertheless, she vows that she will save this poor man, who may be a total stranger to her. Her love is agapic. Of course, she does find out that it is her husband.

Pizarro, the governor of the prison, is modelled upon William Pitt, the enemy of France, the enemy of Europe, the one actually keeping Lafayette in prison. Pizarro has vowed that he's going to murder Florestan; that's why they're digging the grave. He's going to get rid of him, and he's going to whisper in his ear that evil has conquered the good Florestan. Pizarro is going to have vengeance by whispering in Florestan's ear that he has conquered Florestan and he's the man putting him to death. The important word there is *Augenblick*. In a *sudden moment*, Pizarro is going to have his sterling moment of revenge. This was tied to the word *Augenblick*.

The Sublime Moment

I'll jump to the end now, because Beethoven here transforms this horrid image of that *Augenblick*, to the *sublime moment* when Leonore can take the shackles off of her husband, Florestan, in front of the whole assembly—all of the now freed prisoners and their wives. And time stops. Listen to the music there; the time stretches out inexorably, and this *Augenblick*—it's maybe two minutes, three minutes, four minutes—but time stops, and you don't sense time passing. And that *Augenblick* is now the moment of freedom. All of Leonore's efforts and troubles have now flowered. She's experiencing the joy of freeing her husband.

The other part is that *namenlose Freude*, now radiates throughout. Leonore sings it, the prime players in the opera sing it, the gathered chorus of prisoners and all their wives who now have come to join their formerly imprisoned husbands, they sing it. It radiates throughout everybody on stage and into the audience. This is the transformation of this *namenlose Pein* into *namenlose Freude*.

I'll end with a most appropriate analysis by Lyndon LaRouche. In 1998, a U.S. hedge fund called Long-Term Capital Management was at the center of manipulating a lot of Russian government paper. The Russian government finally said, "Enough!" in middle to late August. On September 15, President Bill Clinton went before the Council on Foreign Relations, to ask its permission to maybe deal with these financial derivatives. In between those two events, LaRouche intervened on September 1 with an [article](#) he called "The Death-Agony of Olympus." I'll just read a little bit from it; the quote is not that long:

When one experiences a terribly perplexing sense of shock, of the type we are referencing here, the indispensable first step toward a fruitful peace of mind, is the victim's successful identification of the source of the personal inner tension which has prompted that sense of shock.

Then he has a footnote:

[T]his matter of *identifying the source of the inner tension which has prompted a sense of shock*, is identical with the experience leading to the validatable discovery of a new physical principle. Faced with a perplexing, vicious paradox

in the relevant scientific evidence, the first task of the prospective discovery of a new physical principle, is to identify, to locate the features of the problem which point to the origin of the paradox itself.

So, what we're talking about is, whether it's a musical composition, a political intervention, or a scientific discovery, the first step is that you've got to face what's causing the problem. Even if you think your heart will break.

The Importance of Classical Tragedy

Continuing from LaRouche:

In other words, to define the issue posed by that paradox. In other words, one must ask oneself, "What is the problem here?" It is at that point, that the paradox is transformed from an anxiety-ridden state of confusion, into a more or less well-focussed investigation....

Those who are most likely to find the kind of peace of mind the present crisis requires, are to be met among those persons who have at least some degree of literate familiarity with Classical tragedy on stage.

Including, I'm saying, Beethoven's *Fidelio*.

Indeed, the political importance of Classical tragedy on stage is that, since Sophocles and Aeschylus, it was a form of art crafted to the purpose of providing living audiences the impassioned intellectual sources of insight, and renewed moral strength needed, to deal successfully with precisely the relevant type of shock....

LaRouche did not brag that he was right about Long-Term Capital Management, about the financial bubble, in the correctness of his analysis. He chose instead to identify the deadly habits, which he knew would leave leaders of the world shell-shocked—and why they could not afford those deadly habits. And he offered his direct testimony from his own developed problem-solving approach, for a way forward.

Fidelio is Beethoven's gift to an aching population on this, his 250th Birthday.

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