



SAN FRANCISCO  
OPERA

## LIVE OPERA CONTINUES WITH NEW PRODUCTION OF BEETHOVEN'S *FIDELIO* OCTOBER 14–30

Music Director Eun Sun Kim Conducts Beethoven's Only Opera and Matthew Ozawa  
Directs Updated Interpretation Set in a Modern Detention Facility



Eun Sun Kim (Photo: Kim Tae-hwan); General Director Matthew Shilvock with *Fidelio* creative team (Photo: Matthew Washburn); Set rendering for *Fidelio* by Alexander V. Nichols; Costume design for Leonore by Jessica Jahn

Elza van den Heever Makes Long-Awaited Company Return in a Cast Featuring  
Russell Thomas, Greer Grimsley, James Creswell and Soloman Howard



The cast of *Fidelio* features Elza van den Heever (Leonore), Russell Thomas (Florestan), Greer Grimsley (Don Pizarro), James Creswell (Rocco), Soloman Howard (Don Fernando)

Digital and Live Events, Exhibitions and Podcast Offer Opportunities to Delve Deep into  
Beethoven's Masterwork

Tickets Available at [sfopera.com](https://sfopera.com) and (415) 864-3330  
Livestreaming Tickets will be Available in October

San Francisco, CA (September 17, 2021; Updated) — San Francisco Opera's return to live performances in the War Memorial Opera House continues October 14–30 with a bold,

new production of Ludwig van Beethoven's only opera, *Fidelio*. Caroline H. Hume Music Director Eun Sun Kim conducts the San Francisco Opera Orchestra, Chorus and cast in this monumental work in which love and courage overcome tyranny. Director Matthew Ozawa's interpretation of the work updates its original eighteenth-century prison setting to a modern government detention center. Soprano Elza van den Heever stars as the opera's heroine, Leonore, heading an all-star cast that includes tenor Russell Thomas, bass-baritone Greer Grimsley and basses James Creswell and Soloman Howard. Chorus Director Ian Robertson, who retires this year after 35 seasons, prepares the acclaimed San Francisco Opera Chorus for two exhilarating choral highlights of the operatic repertory: the famous Act I Prisoners' Chorus and *Fidelio*'s exuberant finale.

For the first time in its history, San Francisco Opera will livestream select performances of the new production. Several virtual and in-person events and exhibitions will be presented to foster deeper discovery.

First presented in 1805 to a near-empty Viennese theater due to Napoleon's recent occupation of the city, *Fidelio* underwent two major revisions (and four overtures) before the composer's ode to freedom was realized as the enduring opera it is today. The story follows Leonore who, disguised as a man, Fidelio, infiltrates a prison to find her wrongfully imprisoned husband, Florestan. Facing a powerful adversary, she discovers the courage to stand against injustice. The contest in *Fidelio* between good and evil, darkness and light inspired Beethoven to create many charged musical episodes, including Leonore's pivotal aria ("Abscheulicher!"), Florestan's anguished solo ("Gott! Welch Dunkel hier"), a quartet of unequivocal grace and beauty ("Mir ist so wunderbar") and rousing choral episodes that compare with the ecstatic energy of the composer's Symphony No. 9.

Known for bringing insight and emotionally resonant experiences to cross-cultural interdisciplinary works, especially through his Chicago-based MOZAWA incubator for arts collaborations, American director Matthew Ozawa is firmly grounded in the world of opera as a stage director, musician and educator. Ozawa made his directorial debut with the Company last spring with the drive-in production of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* at the Marin Center, presented under strict COVID safety protocols. That staging utilized a reconfigured version of Alexander V. Nichols' set originally created for *Fidelio*, which was completed even after its 2020 opening was canceled by the pandemic. Originally planned to coincide with the global celebrations of the 250th anniversary of the composer's

birthday in 2020, Ozawa's contemporary vision for *Fidelio* remains a celebration of shared humanity amid the trials of political incarceration.

Ozawa, whose father was born in a Japanese American internment camp in Wyoming during World War II, said: "At the heart of *Fidelio* is the heroism of a woman, a vision for the modern age, whose personal sacrifice to free her husband from wrongful incarceration results in the liberation of all those imprisoned. Beethoven's revolutionary opera remains as relevant today as the numerous times it has served as a symbol of hope for generations of people afflicted by forms of oppression. Our new production embraces Beethoven's emotionally profound music while viewing the opera through a modern lens. My hope is that experiencing this opera not only helps us shine a light on injustice but reminds us that we too have the power to be agents of change."

Nichols' setting for the production features a rotating cube of cells, interrogation rooms and offices with projected video surveillance feeds that show the activities of detainees in all areas of the holding facility. The creative team also features the work of costume designer Jessica Jahn and co-lighting designers JAX Messenger and Justin A. Partier.

Eun Sun Kim, who opened her inaugural season as music director last month with Puccini's *Tosca*—"a performance of heaving intensity, subtle mood shifts and piquant details" (*San Francisco Chronicle*)—leads the Company's artistic forces. As Beethoven's sole opera, *Fidelio* offers a rare opportunity for operatic and symphonic conductors to bring the composer's music into the opera house. For Kim, the work is a "dream project" with which to launch her music directorship in San Francisco and bring audiences into the Opera House for a shared cathartic experience.

Soprano Elza van den Heever makes her long-awaited return to San Francisco Opera in the formidable role of Leonore. Since her 2007 Company debut as Donna Anna in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* while still a San Francisco Opera Adler Fellow, van den Heever has emerged as "one of the most important dramatic sopranos in the opera world" (*Opera News*). Her first Leonore at the 2016 Caramoor Festival was greeted with rapturous praise, including Operavore's Fred Plotkin who said: "Arias such as 'Abscheulicher! Wo eilst du hin?', with some of the most treacherous passages in opera, have challenged the likes of Birgit Nilsson and Hildegard Behrens. And yet van den Heever sang it at Caramoor with seeming ease, making beautiful sounds where even the most accomplished singers have sounded labored." Parterre Box's Christopher Corwin said, "it was exceptionally gratifying to witness

deeper, more complex aspects of her artistry" and observed that van den Heever's upcoming appearances would immediately become "must-see" events.

Following acclaimed performances in bel canto works by Bellini and Donizetti with San Francisco Opera, tenor Russell Thomas portrays Florestan, the detained political dissident and Leonore's husband. Possessing "a tenor of gorgeously burnished power" (*New York Times*), Thomas has won extensive acclaim for his portrayals of opera's leading heroes. The *Wall Street Journal* said of his Florestan: "the superb Russell Thomas held nothing back in his big aria, his clarion tenor rising inexorably to the desperate cry of 'Freiheit,' truly a man in extremis."

Taking on the low-voiced roles in Beethoven's opera are three stalwart artists well known to San Francisco Opera audiences. Bass-baritone Greer Grimsley, who triumphed on the War Memorial Opera House stage in 2018 as Wotan in Wagner's *Ring* cycle, is Pizarro, the corrupt tyrant and enemy of Florestan. Bass James Creswell portrays Rocco, the facility's manager who hires Fidelio, unaware that "he" is, in fact, Leonore, searching for her missing husband. Bass Solomon Howard, who appeared earlier this season as Angelotti in the Company's season-opening production of Puccini's *Tosca* and is scheduled to sing the Commendatore in next summer's new production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and a concert tribute to the music of Giuseppe Verdi, is the government leader Don Fernando. San Francisco Opera Adler Fellows Anne-Marie MacIntosh (Marzelline), Christopher Oglesby (Jaquino), Zhengyi Bai (First Prisoner) and Stefan Egerstrom (Second Prisoner) complete the cast.

Beethoven's *Fidelio* was first presented by San Francisco Opera in 1937 with celebrated Norwegian soprano Kirsten Flagstad as Leonore who reprised the role in 1939 with the Florestan of Danish tenor Lauritz Melchior. Renowned for singing Wagner's operas together during the 1930s and 40s, the famous vocal duo shared the stage in Beethoven's opera only once, in San Francisco. Subsequent Leonores for San Francisco Opera included Regina Resnik, Inge Borkh, Birgit Nilsson, Gwyneth Jones, Hildegard Behrens and Christine Brewer. Great conductors have always been drawn to *Fidelio* and the Company has featured many leading maestros on its podium for the work in previous seasons, including Fritz Reiner, Erich Leinsdorf, Pierre Monteux and former Company music directors Sir John Pritchard and Sir Donald Runnicles. *Fidelio* was last staged by San Francisco Opera in 2005.

Sung in German with English supertitles, the six performances of *Fidelio* are scheduled for October 14 (7:30 pm), October 17 (2 pm), October 20 (7:30 pm), October 22 (7:30 pm), October 26 (7:30 pm) and October 30 (7:30 pm).

### LIVESTREAM SAN FRANCISCO OPERA'S NEW PRODUCTION OF *FIDELIO*

For the first time, the Company will offer a livestream option to enable audiences from anywhere in the world to experience San Francisco Opera live. Beginning in October, virtual tickets will be available for \$25 to livestream the October 14, 17 and 20 performances of *Fidelio*. For more information about San Francisco Opera livestreams, visit [sfopera.com/online](https://sfopera.com/online).

### *FIDELIO* ANCILLARY EVENTS CALENDAR

OPERA AFICIONADO: *Behind the Scenes of Fidelio*.

Sunday, September 26 at 1 pm PT via Zoom

[sfopera.com/aficionado](https://sfopera.com/aficionado)

San Francisco Opera's Department of Diversity, Equity and Community hosts an interactive panel discussion about *Fidelio* and the Company's new staging. Panelists will include *Fidelio* director Matthew Ozawa and costume designer Jessica Jahn.

---

### NEW NORTH STAGE DOOR PODCAST EPISODE

[sfopera.com/online](https://sfopera.com/online), Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts

In late September, the third episode of *North Stage Door*, San Francisco Opera's new podcast series, will be released. The episode features stories relating to Beethoven's *Fidelio* and the opera's themes of incarceration and liberation. Segments include a conversation about the opera between *Fidelio* director Matthew Ozawa and former Arizona Governor and United States Secretary of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano; San Francisco Opera Chorus Director Ian Robertson describing the musical features that Beethoven weaves together in the opera's Prisoners' Chorus; and a conversation with San Quentin State Prison Public Information Officer Samuel Robinson and incarcerated persons at San Quentin.

---

## WAR MEMORIAL OPERA HOUSE

*We Shall Be Free, We Shall Find Peace*

*Wir werden frei, wir finden Ruh*

An Exhibit of Art from incarcerated persons at San Quentin

October 14–30

Lobby of the War Memorial Opera House, in the *Fidelio* digital program and at [sfopera.com](https://sfopera.com)

In partnership with the William James Association's Prison Arts Project, an exhibition of artworks by incarcerated persons at San Quentin State Prison will be displayed in the War Memorial Opera House lobby. Inspired by the themes and story of Beethoven's opera, *Fidelio*, the exhibition features paintings, drawings and artworks in a variety of mediums. This exhibition is open to ticket holders for all San Francisco Opera performances of *Fidelio* and will also be available in the digital program for the opera and at [sfopera.com](https://sfopera.com).

---

## COMMONWEALTH CLUB

*Beauty within Dark Places: Beethoven's Fidelio and an Exhibit on Art from incarcerated persons at San Quentin*

Monday, October 25 at 2:30 pm PT Free virtual event (pre-register [here](#))

The prestigious Commonwealth Club hosts a free online conversation about the collaboration between San Francisco Opera and the William James Association's Prison Arts Project at San Quentin State Prison to create artworks inspired by *Fidelio* and themes of liberation and freedom. San Francisco Opera's Educational Content Curator Cole Thomason-Redus moderates a panel including William James Association Arts in Corrections teacher Carol Newborg and formerly incarcerated artists who studied with Carol at San Quentin.

---

## TICKETS AND INFORMATION

Tickets for *Fidelio* and all Fall 2021 performances range from \$26 to \$398 and are available via the San Francisco Opera Box Office by phone at (415) 864-3330 and online at [sfopera.com](https://sfopera.com). Virtual tickets for the livestream performances (October 14, 17, 20) will be available in October for \$25 each.

To ensure flexibility for patrons in this transitional season, no-fee exchanges will be accepted up to two hours before performances. Refunds will be available if patrons must miss a performance due to COVID. Refund requests must be made at least two hours before the performance.

In compliance with city health mandates, San Francisco Opera requires proof of vaccination and photo ID for all patrons ages 12 and up to attend performances at the War Memorial Opera House. Face masks are also required. For more information about the Company's health and safety protocols, visit [sfopera.com/safetyfirst](https://sfopera.com/safetyfirst).

For complete information about ticketing and seating policies for the current season, please visit [sfopera.com/onstage](https://sfopera.com/onstage).

All casting, programs, schedules and ticket prices are subject to change. For further information about San Francisco Opera's 2021–22 Season, visit [sfopera.com/onstage](https://sfopera.com/onstage).

###

### FIDELIO CASTING AND CALENDAR

\*San Francisco Opera Debut †Role Debut ‡Current Adler Fellow ■ Livestream  
All performances take place at the War Memorial Opera House.

#### NEW PRODUCTION

FIDELIO by Ludwig van Beethoven

October ■ 14 (7:30 pm), ■ 17 (2 pm), ■ 20 (7:30 pm), 22 (7:30 pm), 26 (7:30 pm), 30 (7:30 pm), 2021

Libretto originally prepared by Joseph Sonnleithner, from the French of Jean-Nicolas Bouilly; later shortened by Stephan von Breuning and with further work done by Georg Friedrich Treitschke.

Approximate running time: 2 hours, 30 minutes including one intermission  
Sung in German with English supertitles

World Premiere:	Vienna; November 20, 1805
First SFO performance:	November 8, 1937
Most recent SFO performances	2005–06 Season

#### CAST:

<i>Leonore</i>	Elza van den Heever
<i>Florestan</i>	Russell Thomas
<i>Don Pizarro</i>	Greer Grimsley

<i>Rocco</i>	James Creswell
<i>Don Fernando</i>	Soloman Howard
<i>Marzelline</i>	Anne-Marie MacIntosh *♯†
<i>Jaquino</i>	Christopher Oglesby ♯†
<i>First Prisoner</i>	Zhengyi Bai ♯†
<i>Second Prisoner</i>	Stefan Egerstrom ♯†

CREATIVE TEAM:

<i>Conductor</i>	Eun Sun Kim
<i>Director</i>	Matthew Ozawa
<i>Set &amp; Projection Designer</i>	Alexander V. Nichols
<i>Costume Designer</i>	Jessica Jahn
<i>Co-Lighting Designer</i>	JAX Messenger
<i>Co-Lighting Designer</i>	Justin A. Partier
<i>Chorus Director</i>	Ian Robertson
<i>Fight Director</i>	Dave Maier

San Francisco Opera Orchestra and San Francisco Opera Chorus

---

San Francisco Opera is sponsored, in part, by The Dolby Family, Carol and Dixon Doll, Bertie Bialek Elliott, Keith and Priscilla Geeslin, Gordon Getty, John A. and Cynthia Fry Gunn, Burgess and Elizabeth Jamieson, Franklin and Catherine Johnson, Edmund W. and Jeannik Méquet Littlefield Fund, Steven M. Menzies, Bernard and Barbro Osher, Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem, Dianne and Tad Taube, Phyllis C. Wattis Endowment Funds, Diane B. Wilsey, and Barbara A. Wolfe.

*Fidelio* is made possible, in part, by The Dolby Family; Louise Gund; John A. and Cynthia Fry Gunn; Koret Foundation; Bernard and Barbro Osher; Phyllis C. Wattis Endowment Funds; Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem; and Joan and David Traitel.

Yamaha is the official piano of San Francisco Opera.

San Francisco Opera would like to acknowledge the team of UCSF doctors who have provided guidance in planning the Company's safe return to the stage. Thank you to Drs. George Rutherford, Mark Almond, Robert Harrison, Sânziana Roman and Clark Rosen.

San Francisco Opera is supported, in part, by a grant from Grants for the Arts.



OFFICIAL AIRLINE



OFFICIAL WINE SPONSOR



CHALK HILL

###

PRESS PHOTOS: High-resolution, downloadable photographs, including artist headshots and photos of *Fidelio*, are available at [sfopera.com/press](http://sfopera.com/press).

For further press information, please contact San Francisco Opera Communications:

Julia Inouye (415) 565-6430 / [jinouye@sfopera.com](mailto:jinouye@sfopera.com)

Jeffery McMillan (415) 565-6451 / [jmcmillan@sfopera.com](mailto:jmcmillan@sfopera.com)

Teresa Concepcion (415) 565-6470 / [tconcepcion@sfopera.com](mailto:tconcepcion@sfopera.com)