

Boss Sounds

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LEON FLEISHER, pianist

“You can't see music as it passes through the air. You can't grasp it and hold on to it. You can't smell it. You can't taste it. But it has a most powerful effect on most people. And that is a wondrous thing to contemplate.”

Legendary pianist Leon Fleisher represents the gold standard of musicianship and, at 83 years young, he continues to impart his life-affirming artistry throughout the world, thriving in a sustained career as conductor and soloist, recitalist, chamber music artist, and master class mentor. Fleisher's musical pedigree alone is remarkable: he was the youngest-ever student of the great Artur Schnabel, who studied with keyboard giant and pedagogue Theodor Leschetizky, a pupil of Carl Czerny, who in turn studied with Ludwig van Beethoven.

This concert season, Fleisher returns to some of Europe's most prestigious musical capitals – London, Paris and Brussels – performing as soloist with the London Philharmonic Orchestra at Royal Festival Hall and in chamber music at Wigmore Hall, with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France at Salle Pleyel in Paris and in recital at Belgium's Palais des Beaux-Arts. He makes his U.K. conducting debut with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, tours the U.S. with the Irish Chamber Orchestra, and traverses North America in appearances as conductor/soloist with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and as soloist with the St. Louis and Baltimore Symphony Orchestras. Multiple chamber music appearances include New York's Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center, and historic Town Hall.

Fleisher's dedication to sharing his insights and mentoring the next generation is evidenced by this season's commitments at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and Steans Institute at Ravinia, among others. Last season he led many master classes including the first Carnegie Hall Workshop for Pianists in Japan at Suntory Hall and the Chamber Music Workshop at Carnegie Hall in New York City, and abroad at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater, Hannover, Germany and the Dublin Conservatory of Music, Ireland. Fleisher currently holds positions at the Peabody Conservatory, Curtis Institute, and the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, and has earned a reputation among students as the 'Obi-Wan Kenobi' of the piano.

First-generation American, Leon Fleisher was born in San Francisco, 1928, and began playing piano at the age of four. To his delight, he was withdrawn from kindergarten and set up with a succession of private tutors, which constituted his formal education for the rest of his childhood. (Fleisher jokes, “I've long thought of entitling my autobiography *I Was a Kindergarten Dropout*.”) He gave his first public recital at age eight, and was thrust into the relatively new classical music scene in San Francisco and those who influenced it, including Alfred Hertz, the second-ever director of the San Francisco Symphony, and the great French conductor, Pierre Monteux. There he first met Artur Schnabel – an event that was undoubtedly the most consequential in Fleisher's musical life – which set in motion a lifelong connection to music, beyond simply the piano. Fleisher made his formal public debut in 1944 with the New York Philharmonic under the baton of Pierre Monteux, who famously recognized Fleisher as “the pianistic find of the century.”

In 1952, Fleisher became the first American to win the prestigious Queen Elisabeth competition in Brussels, placing him among the world's premier classical pianists. He concertized with every major orchestra and made numerous touchstone recordings for Columbia/Epic (now Sony) under the direction of George Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra. At the height of his success in 1965, he was suddenly struck silent at age 36 with a neurological affliction later identified as focal dystonia, rendering two fingers on his right hand immobile. Rather than end his career, Fleisher set off on an epic journey in search of a renewed life in music. He began focusing on repertoire for the left hand only, forging a new path as a soloist, conductor and teacher. In 1985 he was named Artistic Director of Tanglewood; he launched a conducting career as co-founder of the Theater Chamber Players in Baltimore, then with the Annapolis and Baltimore Symphony Orchestras. He re-established himself as a left-handed soloist and recording artist, achieving a standard equal to his early glory.

In the new millennium, experimental treatments using a regimen of Roling and 'botulinum toxin' (Botox) injections finally restored the mobility in Fleisher's right hand. The extraordinary renaissance of Fleisher's career has been documented extensively, particularly around the 2004 release of his critically acclaimed album *Two Hands*, which went on to hold a top 5 Billboard Chart position. *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *LA Times*, *Billboard*, *Gramophone* and many others hailed it as one of the top recordings of its year, in any genre. He has since made several recordings including *The Journey* (Vanguard Classics, 2006); as soloist on the Emerson String Quartet's *Brahms*, featuring the Piano Quintet in f minor (Deutsche Grammophon, 2007); a world premiere recording of Hindemith's *Klaviermusik mit Orchester* (Ondine, 2009), and his first two-handed concerto recording in 40 years, *Mozart Piano Concertos* (Sony, 2009). In 2008,

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Sony re-issued Fleisher's deep catalog, making virtually all of his recordings available on CD or digital downloads. Fleisher's Brahms piano concerto recordings are still considered definitive today and his recordings of the five Beethoven concertos on Columbia were inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame in 2008.

Award-winning music and arts documentary filmmaker Mark Kidel directed two feature films on Fleisher for ARTE (Franco-German Television) – *Lessons of A Master* (winner, Grand Prix Classiques en Image Paris 2003 and UNESCO Prize for Best Music Film 2003) and *Recital for Two Hands* (2008). Fleisher's story is also the subject of the 2006 Oscar- and Emmy-nominated documentary film *Two Hands*, written and directed by Nathaniel Kahn (*My Architect*).

Fleisher holds numerous honors including the Johns Hopkins University President's Medal and honorary doctorates from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Amherst College, Boston Conservatory, Cleveland Institute of Music, Juilliard School of Music and Peabody Institute. In 2005, the French government named him Commander in the French Order of Arts and Letters, the highest rank of its kind. He was *Musical America's* 1994 "Instrumentalist of the Year," and this year was named the Royal Philharmonic Society's "Instrumentalist of the Year." Fleisher received the 2007 Kennedy Center Honors for his contribution to U.S. culture. His memoir, *My Nine Lives: A Memoir of Many Careers in Music*, co-written with *Washington Post* music critic Anne Midgette, is available on Doubleday. He and his wife, Katherine Jacobson Fleisher, a noted pianist with whom he frequently tours, live in Baltimore, Md.

September 2011

Program bio:

Legendary pianist Leon Fleisher represents the gold standard of musicianship and, at 83 years young, he continues to impart his life-affirming artistry throughout the world, thriving in a sustained career as conductor and soloist, recitalist, chamber music artist, and master class mentor.

Fleisher's musical pedigree alone is remarkable: he was the youngest-ever student of the great Artur Schnabel, who studied with keyboard giant and pedagogue Theodor Leschetizky, a pupil of Carl Czerny, who in turn studied with Ludwig van Beethoven. He made his debut with the New York Philharmonic in 1944 and in 1952 became the first American to win the prestigious Queen Elisabeth of Belgium competition, establishing himself as one of the world's premier classical pianists, concertizing with every major orchestra and making numerous touchstone recordings for Columbia/Epic (now Sony). At the height of his success, he was suddenly struck silent at age 36 with a neurological affliction later identified as focal dystonia, rendering two fingers on his right hand immobile. Rather than end his career, Fleisher set off on an epic journey in search of a renewed life in music. He began focusing on repertoire for the left hand only, forging a new path as a soloist, conductor and teacher. Experimental treatments using a regimen of rolfing and 'botulinum toxin' (Botox) injections finally restored the mobility in Fleisher's hand, and for years he has played with both hands, winning enormous acclaim for his 2004 'two-hand' recording aptly titled *Two Hands*, and several subsequent recordings, most recently *Mozart Piano Concertos* (Sony Classical, 2009).

This concert season, Fleisher returns to some of Europe's most prestigious musical capitals – London, Paris and Brussels – performing as soloist with the London Philharmonic Orchestra at Royal Festival Hall and in chamber music at Wigmore Hall, with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France at Salle Pleyel in Paris and in recital at Belgium's Palais des Beaux-Arts. He makes his U.K. conducting debut with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, tours the U.S. with the Irish Chamber Orchestra, and traverses North America in appearances as conductor/soloist with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and as soloist with the St. Louis and Baltimore Symphony Orchestras. Chamber music appearances include New York's Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center, and historic Town Hall, with memorable master classes given at universities and conservatories around the country.

A recipient of numerous honors and awards, Fleisher received the prestigious Kennedy Center Honors in 2007 for his contribution to U.S. culture, and is the subject of the 2006 Oscar- and Emmy-nominated documentary film *Two Hands*, written and directed by Nathaniel Kahn (*My Architect*). His memoir, *My Nine Lives: A Memoir of Many Careers in Music*, co-written with *Washington Post* music critic Anne Midgette, is available on Doubleday. He and his wife, Katherine Jacobson Fleisher, a noted pianist with whom he frequently tours, live in Baltimore, Md.

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