Opening Weekend

Saturday, October 11, 2008 at 8 pm

Sunday, October 12, 2008 at 3 pm

Itzhak Perlman, conductor

Leon Fleisher, piano

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-Flat Major, Op. 73 "Emperor" (1809)

Allegro

Adagio un poco mosso

Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo

Mr. Fleisher

INTERMISSION

Symphony No. 7 in A Major, Op. 92 (1812)

Poco sostenuto – Vivace

Allegretto

Presto

Allegro con brio

The Westchester Philharmonic's 2008-09 season is made possible in part by the Basic Program Support Grant of the Westchester Arts Council with funds from the Westchester County Government.

PIANO CONCERTO NO. 5, IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 73 ("EMPEROR")

Ludwig van Beethoven
(Born December l6, 1770, in Bonn; died
March 26, 1827, in Vienna)

Beethoven wrote this concerto in Vienna when the city was under occupation by Napoleon's troops. Beethoven, who did not give the subtitle, "Emperor," to the concerto, would have resented the name, if for no other reason than his bitterness and disappointment in the imperial motivations of Napoleon, whom he felt had completely betrayed his republican beginnings. The most widely accepted of several theories about the title's origin is that one of the early publishers thought it an appropriate term to describe the concerto's "grand dimensions and intrinsic splendor." Some musicologists have found the work martial and imperious, at least in its external features, but it is rather a radiant, positive and self-confident composition that gives homage to the unconquerable nature of the human spirit.

While composing this work, the noise of of howitzer shells tortured the composer whose hearing was already poor. It was a very difficult time for him: Food was scarce and expensive. His wealthy and noble friends had escaped to their country estates, and the city parks were closed, thus the peaceful solace Beethoven had found in them was unavailable.

By the time he composed this concerto, Beethoven's hearing was so limited no possibility remained that he could perform for its premiere in Leipzig with the Gewandhaus Orchestra on November 28, 1811. Instead, Johann Schneider became the piano soloist, and Johann P. C. Schulz conducted. An inf uential music critic wrote about the excited and enthusiastic audience as well as the music, "It is without doubt one of the most original, imaginative, most effective but also one of the most difficult of all concertos in existence."

Except for the first emphatic orchestral chords, the soloist, rather than the orchestra, begins the concerto's *Allegro* first movement. In other ways, too, the beginning is a departure from common practice. The piano introduction is a huge rhapsodic f ourish, a kind of *cadenza*, that Beethoven wrote out completely. The orchestra later introduces the thematic subject matter of the movement, and to a great extent undertakes the task of developing the themes with the piano as an accompaniment, a musical mannerism that Brahms would later also use to great effect in his piano concerti. In another structural and stylistic advance, the orchestra does not halt for the insertion of a *cadenza* for the soloist to improvise. Breaking with the tradition, Beethoven weaves the *cadenzas* into the score as an integral part, giving the music continuity, but at the same time denying the soloist opportunity for impromptu virtuosic display.

The comparatively brief slow movement, *Adagio un poco mosso*, opens with the muted strings playing a solemn hymn-like melody and the piano answering it. This tranquil and reflective movement consists mainly of a duet between the piano and the orchestra. The center of the movement is a sequence of quasi-variations on the theme that the strings announce. At the movement's end, the piano quietly plays a figure that gives intimations of the exuberant theme of the last movement. Suddenly and without pause, Beethoven transforms that figure into the exultant main theme of the rondo finale, *Allegro*, which begins without the customary break between movements. In this impetuous and spontaneous sounding movement, the piano delivers and develops the dynamic themes in what has been called the "most spacious and triumphant of concerto rondos." At the end of the coda, in a renowned section, the kettledrums quietly mark the rhythm of the first subject to accompany the piano's soft chords.

The *Emperor Concerto* is Beethoven's last concerto for the piano, although he lived for another 20 years. It has been conjectured that perhaps he never wrote another because his deafness ended his days as a pianist.

He dedicated the concerto to the Archduke Rudolf, a musician, a good friend and patron: He was Beethoven's only composition student and Beethoven dedicated many works to him.

The concerto is scored for two f utes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, kettledrums and strings.

SYMPHONY NO. 7, IN A MAJOR, OP. 92

Ludwig van Beethoven
(Born December 16, 1770, in Bonn; died
March 26, 1827, in Vienna)

Although Beethoven wrote his first six symphonies in the first eight years of the new century, he stopped writing symphonies altogether for four years after that. Unlike many of his other major works, the Symphony No. 7 did not occupy his attention for years before it took final shape. He completed it in early 1812. In the four years that intervened between the composing of the 6th and the 7th symphonies, Beethoven had consolidated new styles and techniques: He had enlarged his harmonic scope and intensified the technique of his subjective expression.

In April 1813, the Symphony No. 7 was performed privately at the residence of Beethoven's pupil, the Archduke Rudolph, and on December 8th, the composer conducted the first public performance of the work. Its premiere was a benefit concert for soldiers wounded in the battle that had failed to stop Napoleon at Hanau earlier that year. Johann Nepomuk Maelzel, Beethoven's friend and a good musician as well as a mechanical genius, organized the fundraiser.

Over the course of time, the musical intensity of the Symphony No. 7 has been described as transcendent, astonishing, and universal. Critics and other composers have variously tried to describe the movements programmatically, teetering on the edge of absurdity with their analyses. What does bind all of their comments together is the finding that many parts of this symphony embody dance and march rhythms, and that rhythm itself seems to be the driving force of the work. Each of the movements grows out of a rhythmic figure that characterizes the whole movement in much the same way that Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is dominated by its well-known opening, rhythmic four-note motto. In emphasizing the rhythmic aspects, Beethoven seems to have limited the use of melody, and some of the rhythmic figures are defined by one note while others are understated, allowing the listeners to concentrate on the rhythmic force.

After a long, slow introduction, *Poco sostenuto*, the charming melody of the first movement, with its mounting rhythmic tension, evolves into the dancing *Vivace* that led Wagner to call this symphony the very apotheosis of the dance. The second movement, *Allegretto*, mostly in minor, is a lovely, varied processional, both peaceful and solemn. During the 19th century, this movement was very popular and played frequently on occasions of mourning. The movement can be divided into five sections, with the first, third and fifth encompassing one set of themes and the other sections presenting another theme. The second section relieves the tension of the first. The third movement, in which the winds have a prominent place, is an expanded *scherzo, Presto,* with the contrasting, slower trio section repeated. The French composer d'Indy, perhaps correctly, traced its thematic origins to an Austrian pilgrim hymn. The finale, *Allegro con brio*, heavily and often irregularly accented, is a movement of enormous vigor and energy, which critics have often labeled bacchanalian because of its wild and surging rhythmic motion. The coda grows out of two repeated bass notes, also rhythmically defined.

The symphony is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings.

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Leon Fleisher, Piano

Renowned pianist, conductor and teacher Leon Fleisher, now in his sixth decade before the public, started piano lessons in his native San Francisco at age four, and gave his first recital at eight. A year later, he began studying with the great German pianist Artur Schnabel, and by 16, in 1944, made his debut with the New York Philharmonic. He was the first American to win the prestigious Queen Elisabeth of Belgium competition, in 1952. Fleisher's career was on a smooth upward trajectory for the next dozen years: He concertized all over the world with every major orchestra and conductor, gave recitals everywhere, and made numerous touchstone recordings with George Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra of the piano concertos of Beethoven and Brahms, as well as pieces by Grieg, Schumann, and Rachmaninov (all available on CD).

Fleisher was suddenly struck silent when two fingers of his right hand became immobile in 1965. Undergoing many treatments that gave only temporary relief, he was forced to "retire" when only 37 years old. This was the defining moment in his career until recently, when he began treatments that finally helped relieve the neurological affliction known as focal dystonia that had been plaguing him for more than half his life.

Overcoming decades of seemingly insurmountable challenges, Fleisher has been playing with both hands again for the last several seasons, and recently made his first two-hand recording in 40 years: The critically acclaimed *Two Hands*. Its repertoire ranges from

J.S. Bach and Domenico Scarlatti via Chopin and Debussy to Franz Schubert's monumental final Piano Sonata in B Flat Major (Vanguard Classics). The same title was given to a biographical film by Nathaniel Kahn that was nominated for Best Documentary Short at the 2006 Academy Awards. In May 2007, his recording of the Brahms Piano Quintet with the Emerson Quartet (Deutsche Grammophon) was released to rave reviews, and his recital and concerto appearances in recent years have re-affirmed his place among the legendary pianists and musicians of our time.

Forthcoming engagements include his annual appearances at Carnegie Hall; the Beethoven "Emperor" Concerto with the Boston Symphony, the Chicago Symphony and the NHK Symphony in Japan; a recital in Essen (Germany), Brussels (Belgium) and in the Lucerne Festival (Switzerland), among many others.

In the nearly 40 years since Leon Fleisher's keyboard career was so suddenly curtailed, he has followed two parallel careers – as conductor and teacher – while learning to play the extensive but limiting repertoire of compositions for piano left-hand. Mr. Fleisher's reputation as a conductor was quickly established when he founded the Theatre Chamber Players at the Kennedy Center in 1967 and became Music Director of the Annapolis Symphony in 1970. He made his New York conducting debut at the 1970 Mostly Mozart Festival, and in 1973, became Associate Conductor of the Baltimore Symphony. He has appeared as guest conductor with the Cleveland Orchestra and the symphony orchestras of Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Montreal and Detroit, among others. He also had a regular association with the New Japan Philharmonic as its Principal Guest Conductor, leading the orchestra in a series of concerts each season, as well as with the Chamber Music Orchestra of Europe and the Gustav Mahler Chamber Orchestra.

Teaching has been a crucially important element in Leon Fleisher's life. As a revered pedagogue, he has held the Andrew W. Mellon Chair at the Peabody Conservatory of Music since 1959, and also serves on the faculties of the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto. From 1986-97, he was Artistic Director of the Tanglewood Music Center. His teaching activities at the Aspen, Lucerne, Ravinia and Verbier festivals, among others, have brought him in contact with students from all over the world. He has also given master classes at the Salzburg Mozarteum, the Paris Conservatory, the Ravel Academy at St. Jean de Luz, the Reina Sofia School in Madrid, the Mishkenot in Jerusalem and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Fleisher received the 2007 Kennedy Center Honors at the 30th annual celebration of the arts where he was recognized as "a consummate musician whose career is a testament to the life-affirming power of art." This year's World Piano Pedagogy Conference is dedicated to Fleisher, celebrating him as "one of the giants of classical music." In 2005, Fleisher was honored by the French government and was named to the rank of Commander in the French Order of Arts and Letters, the highest rank of its kind. He and his wife, Katherine Jacobson-Fleisher, have opened their private life by regularly playing duos together for audiences around the world.

"Suddenly I realized that the most important thing in my life wasn't playing with my two hands: it was music," says the fifth-generation Beethoven pupil.

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Leon Fleisher, continued

His teacher, Schnabel, who left Germany for the United States in 1939, had been a pupil of Polish keyboard giant and pedagogue Theodor Leschetizky, who was a pupil of Carl Czerny, who studied with Ludwig van Beethoven.

"In order to be able to make it across these last thirty or forty years, I've had to somehow de-emphasize the number of hands or the number of fingers and kind of go back to the concept of music as music – whether it be a single line for a wind instrument or a single line for one hand, or one hand sounding like two hands."

"Passion, not technique, is what I learned from Schnabel," Fleisher has said.

"In order to be able to make it across these last 30 or 40 years, I've had to somehow de-emphasize the number of hands or the number of fingers and kind of go back to the concept of music as music – whether it be a single line for a wind instrument or a single line for one hand, or one hand sounding like two hands. In other words, the instrumentation becomes unimportant and it's the substance and the content that take over. It seems less momentous in a sense – but more an extension and a continuation. In a way, that denies whatever glory and exaltation there is in this whole event – but perhaps that best describes what this is, 'Two Hands'."