

# Frank Salomon Associates

Your partner for the most exceptional musical experiences



## Leon Fleisher conducts Peabody Symphony in works by Beethoven, Brahms, Frank Martin

by Tim Smith, May 2, 2014

***“He brings to the podium the same striving for musical honesty and communicative depth that has always characterized his keyboard work (one- or two-handed).”***

***If he lacks some refinements of baton technique, Fleisher easily compensates with a keen sense of musical structure and balance, an appreciation of what is behind and beneath the notes on a page. He knows how to make music sound crucial, inevitable and so very right.”***

**Well, that was exhilarating.** The Peabody Symphony Orchestra's concert Thursday night delivered some impressive sonic power, with the near-legendary Leon Fleisher providing the ignition.

Most celebrated as a pianist of uncommon insight, Fleisher began conducting decades ago when, due to focal dystonia, he lost use of his right hand. **He brings to the podium the same striving for musical honesty and communicative depth that has always characterized his keyboard work (one- or two-handed).**

So it was on this occasion, as Fleisher led the Peabody ensemble in a program that included Beethoven's iconic Fifth Symphony, a popular overture by Brahms and a rarely encountered concerto by 20th-century Swiss composer Frank Martin.

**If he lacks some refinements of baton technique, Fleisher easily compensates with a keen sense of musical structure and balance, an appreciation of what is behind and beneath the notes on a page. He knows how to make music sound crucial, inevitable and so very right.**

That's what he did on Thursday with the Beethoven war horse. Unlike most younger-generation conductors, Fleisher did not go for the lean, breathless approach, but for something more muscular and weighty. I'm talking gravitas, folks. Lots of it.

There was plenty of thrust in the first movement (I'm probably the only one who would have welcomed space between some statements of the four-note motto, as was considered acceptable once upon a

Leon Fleisher

# Frank Salomon Associates

Your partner for the most exceptional musical experiences

time). The Andante unfolded beautifully, tinged with tension that carried over to the scherzo. The finale had terrific uplift.

All the while, **Fleisher drew a big, meaty tone from the orchestra that seemed on the verge of shaking the concert hall walls. And he had the young players digging into the music as if uncovering its riches for the first time.**

So, OK, a few spots sounded a little too much like a first time -- the start of the development section in the first movement was especially dicey, and articulation in the zippy bits of the scherzo could have been cleaner. But most of the playing was as cohesive and centered as it was highly charged.

The other standard on the concert, Brahms' "Academic Festival," was deftly shaped, so that its amiable and noble qualities received equal attention. There was a good deal of color in the playing.

In between, providing a terrific contrast, came Martin's 1949 Concerto for Seven Winds, Timpani, Percussion and String Orchestra. I like musicologist/critic Michael Steinberg's description of this score: "sportive."

The playful and competitive side of this intricately constructed music came through tellingly here, but Fleisher also ensured that the slow movement's unsettled lyricism (Martin uses a tick-tock motive to great effect) received equal attention.

There were poised and communicative contributions from all the soloists: Jared Harrison (flute), Patrick Bryan (oboe), James Duncan (clarinet), Dillon Meacham (bassoon), Jacob Poulos (horn), Yanbin Chen (trumpet), William Marrin (trombone) and Jeff Stern (timpani). Their colleagues onstage also played this "sport" admirably.

Leon Fleisher