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## Star-Telegram FORT WORTH

### CONCERT REVIEW

By Punch Shaw, June 29, 2012

*“The first half closed with Chaconne for the Left Hand from the Violin Partita No. 2 in D minor, Johannes Brahms' pared-down transcription of the Bach composition that may be the most magical 20 minutes of music ever composed. It was in this piece, especially, that we were reminded that we were in a room with greatness. All the technical aspects, like the unerring evenness of the piece's many little runs, were there. But it was the way Fleisher crawled inside and owned the piece that really made his performance soar.”*

FORT WORTH -- No matter how many hands were on the keyboard, the result was the same.

Pianist Leon Fleisher and his wife, Katherine Jacobson Fleisher, offered a performance at PepsiCo Recital Hall on Thursday night that included pieces played with two hands, four hands and the left hand alone. **Regardless of the number of digits striking the keys, it was all wonderful.**

Performing as part of the PianoTexas International Academy & Festival at TCU, Leon Fleisher opened as a solo act with a program built around works by J.S. Bach.

First up was the great German Baroque composer's Sheep May Safely Graze (which Fleisher introduced as "the vegetarian anthem"). This work is often played with a modern sheen of legato that gives it an almost ethereal, floating feel. **But Fleisher's reading was much more staccato in its approach, which is truer to the Baroque style. Consequently, Bach's brilliant structures were easier to appreciate and, overall, the piece came across as more forceful and sharply defined than usual.**

The legendary, 83-year-old pianist, who famously lost the use of his right hand for much of his illustrious career, followed the Bach with Toccata and Fugue for Left Hand by 20th-century Hungarian composer Jenő Takacs. Fleisher said the piece was an homage to the great organ toccata and fugues by Bach, and the mostly tonal work lived up to that description quiet well. It was astonishing to hear a piece written for only one hand that could so successfully mimic those incredibly complex Bach masterpieces.

Fleisher-Jacobson Piano Duo

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Fleisher then returned to Bach, performing his well-known Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring in a transcription by Myra Hess. **Unlike the opening Bach piece, his reading of this work was more modern and flowing. Overall, it was pure, simple and clean.**

He then maintained his pattern by moving to another 20th-century work, a piece composed for him by Leon Kirchner called simply For the Left Hand. Inspired by a poem by Emily Dickinson, it was surprisingly busy, dramatic and expansive. The piece's personality was a bit like the Takacs work, but it had even more meat on its bones.

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With Katherine on the right and Leon on the left, and taking care of the pedals, the pair sailed through Schubert's Fantasy for Piano Four Hands. The four-movement work, built on the fragile back of a little Italianate theme that appears in the first and last movement, offered plenty of opportunity for intense interaction by the players.

Still more pleasing was the closing work on the program, Ravel's La Valse, an orchestral work the composer also arranged for piano four hands. This dark and slightly tipsy waltz has a delicious element of danger to it, as if the dancers are about to tumble to the floor at any second. **Their performance walked that hazardous line adroitly, earning a standing ovation from the crowd once the final note had sounded.**

The couple returned and switched places on the bench for an encore -- a brisk and charming Slavonic Dance by Dvorak.

So once again, PianoTexas has reminded us how great it is to live in Fort Worth, where world-class pianists perform recitals so intimate that you feel like they dropped by to play a few numbers for you in your living room.

Fleisher-Jacobson Piano Duo