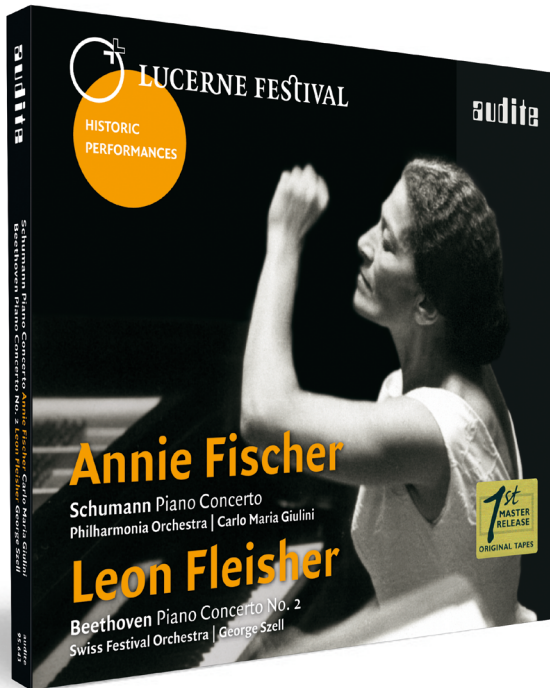


Annie Fischer • Leon Fleisher Piano Concertos by Schumann and Beethoven Lucerne Festival • Vol. VIII



Schumann: Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54
Annie Fischer • Philharmonia Orchestra • Carlo Maria Giulini

Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 2 in B flat major, Op. 19
Leon Fleisher • Swiss Festival Orchestra • George Szell

live recordings: Lucerne, Kunsthau, 1960 / 1962

Two pearls of pianism: Annie Fischer in a sensitive, chamber-like and exceptionally poetic reading of the Schumann Piano Concerto – one of her favourite pieces. Leon Fleisher, a few months before he was to lose the use of his right hand (recovering it only in old age), with Beethoven's Second Piano Concerto in an inspirationally bright and crystal clear tone.

The eighth disc in the series “LUCERNE FESTIVAL Historic Performances” is dedicated to two piano icons: in 1960 and 1962, with two years between them, Hungarian-born Annie Fischer and the American Leon Fleisher made their debuts at LUCERNE FESTIVAL. Released here for the first time in their entirety, these live recordings document them at the peak of their art.



Sviatoslav Richter called her a “brilliant musician”, accrediting her with “great breath and true depth”. András Schiff acknowledged: “I have never heard more poetic playing in my life.” Annie Fischer, born in Budapest in 1914, gave public performances even as a child, winning the International Liszt Competition in 1930 and after that, except during the war, touring worldwide. Nonetheless, she tends to be rated as an insider’s tip, not least because she left behind only a handful of studio recordings. That makes live recordings such as this, released for the first time, all the more precious: at her only performance in Lucerne in summer 1960, Annie Fischer realised a sensitive, chamber-like and exceptionally poetic reading of the Schumann Piano Concerto with which she “garnered unusually fervent success”, according to the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. She found congenial musical partners in Carlo Maria Giulini and the Philharmonia Orchestra.

Leon Fleisher made his Lucerne debut in 1962 at the age of thirty-four: on the peak of his rapid career which had – as had been the case with Annie Fischer – catapulted him into musical life while he was still a child. However, only a few months after his Lucerne performance – released for the first time in its entirety – he developed “focal dystonia”, making the use of his right hand impossible. During the following decades, Fleisher became a specialist of the left-handed repertoire until, in his old age, he was once again able to play with both hands, thanks to new medical treatments. In Lucerne, he presented himself with one of his party pieces – Beethoven’s Second Piano Concerto, which he played with an elegant and transparent tone. The Swiss Festival Orchestra was conducted by George Szell, with whom he had made a studio recording of the concerto one year previously – an interesting comparison. The second half of this concert, Brahms’ First Symphony, is already available in this series of “LUCERNE FESTIVAL Historic Performances” and has been awarded the “Diapason d’Or” as well as a nomination for the International Classical Music Awards (ICMA).

The 32-page booklet in three languages provides extensive background information on Annie Fischer and Leon Fleisher, and also features photos from the festival archives of all artists involved, published here for the very first time.

In cooperation with audite, LUCERNE FESTIVAL presents outstanding concert recordings of artists who have shaped the festival throughout its history. The aim of this CD edition is to rediscover treasures – most of which have not been released previously – from the first six decades of the festival, which was founded in 1938 with a special gala concert conducted by Arturo Toscanini. These recordings have been made available by the archives of SRF Swiss Radio and Television, which has broadcast the Lucerne concerts from the outset. Painstakingly re-mastered and supplemented with photos and materials from the LUCERNE FESTIVAL archive, they represent a sonic history of the festival.

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