

## Leon Fleisher at Snape Maltings, Suffolk By Hilary Finch



Like a character out of Oliver Sacks, the pianist Leon Fleisher was struck at the height of his career by a neurological affliction known as focal dystonia. It turned him into a one-handed pianist. But he found his way out and, in recent years, the resurrected right hand has been joining the left in some very special concerts.

At the Aldeburgh Festival Fleisher will figure in a series of talks and workshops on *Music and the Brain*. He speaks of the transformative effect of his experiences on his life as a musician. And **both transformation and transcendence were on offer in Fleisher's dance-based recital.** The waltz went from Schubert's *Ländler*, through Brahms's *16 Waltzes for Piano*, to Ravel, waltz-conjuror supreme.

**Fleisher walked on, to warm applause, leant back, and relaxed into Schubert. It seemed like artless simplicity, but he was in fact artfully crafting these *Deutsche Ländler* to his own mould. And because he was rapt, so were we — whether eavesdropping on a private musing, or glimpsing the fleeting spectre of a dance that seemed almost a pre-echo of Mahler.**

Brahms, by contrast, leapt high, cavorted dangerously with caprice, only to sidle into secret song. Was the ebb and flow of rubato part of the dancemaster's art? Or did it sometimes betray a note of caution? Whichever, Fleisher's deep feeling for the character of each waltz was seduction enough. After Ravel's magicking of the waltz in the *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, Fleisher was joined by his duo partner, Katherine Jacobson Fleisher, for three of Dvorák's *Slavonic Dances*, and then for a heady four-hand arrangement of Ravel's *La valse*. These moments of shared domestic music-making ended with a delightful rag by William Bolcom as encore.

On Sunday there was the festival debut of the excellent young consort, La Nuova Musica, in refreshingly spirited and unselfconscious vocal and instrumental performances of Gabrieli and Schütz under the carved roof angels of Blythburgh Church.

Leon Fleisher's recital is broadcast on Radio 3 on June 22