

## **Practice Got Him Into Carnegie Hall, Repetitive Stress Syndrome Kept Him Out; Leon Fleisher's Story**

Boulder, CO...Good Morning America, People magazine, Dateline, and the New York Times reported in '97 that Rolfing® structural integration enabled Leon Fleisher, a Peabody virtuoso concert pianist to make a 30 year comeback from a repetitive stress injury (RSI). "When a crippling hand injury ended his performing career, Peabody pianist, Leon Fleisher went down a different musical road. Thirty years later, he's turned up an unexpected corner (when he met Certified Advanced Rolfer, Tessy Brunghardt)...The (Rolfing) results were remarkable." John Hopkins magazine, 1995.

"The famous answer to the question. "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?" posed by a tourist to a native New Yorker is "Practice, practice, practice" but in Leon Fleisher's case, spending hours at the piano had just the opposite effect," says Deborah Stucker, Certified Advanced Rolfer, an expert on the Rolfing approach to repetitive stress injuries. "After his early and spectacular success, Fleisher effectively lost the use of his right hand due to a punishing schedule of practice and performing. "Afflicted almost two decades before this type of impairment- where tissue is damaged from overuse-- was widely understood," says Stucker. "Fleisher explored dozens of diagnostic and therapeutic avenues in the hope of regaining the flexibility needed to play compositions for two hands. While trying all the traditional, and some not so traditional treatments, Fleisher channeled his passion for the piano into teaching, conducting, and performing pieces for the left hand, some written for him by Leon Kirshner, Jean Hasse and Robert Saxton. His career, though hampered by his injury, continued to flourish."

"In 1995, Fleisher's piano playing made headlines once again, doing what most pianists take for granted: He performed a composition for both hands," says Stucker. "Ten months before, at the prompting of his wife, Fleisher began seeing Certified Advanced Rolfer, Tessy Brungardt. Brungardt manipulated the connective tissue of his hand and forearm -- where the muscles of the fingers begin -- and taught him how to release the contractions of playing after each practice session. Gradually the structures of his right hand began to respond. If you ask Leon Fleisher how to get to Carnegie Hall, he will tell you. "Practice, practice, practice, rest and see a Rolfer!"

### **BIO:**

Fleisher was the student of renowned Austrian pianist, Artur Schnabel at 9 years old and made his Carnegie Hall debut at 16. When he won the prestigious Queen Elizabeth of Belgium International Music Competition at 24, he became an instant celebrity. The prize

brought invitations to perform all over the world, and it also brought pressure. Years later his overworked hands developed RSI and his concert career was halted. Fleisher then redirected his passion for the piano through teaching and conducting at the Tanglewood Music Festival. With the help of his Rolfer, Tessy Brungardt, his triumphant return to Carnegie Hall, for a concert with Andre Previn and the Orchestra of St. Luke's, began the start of a new era.