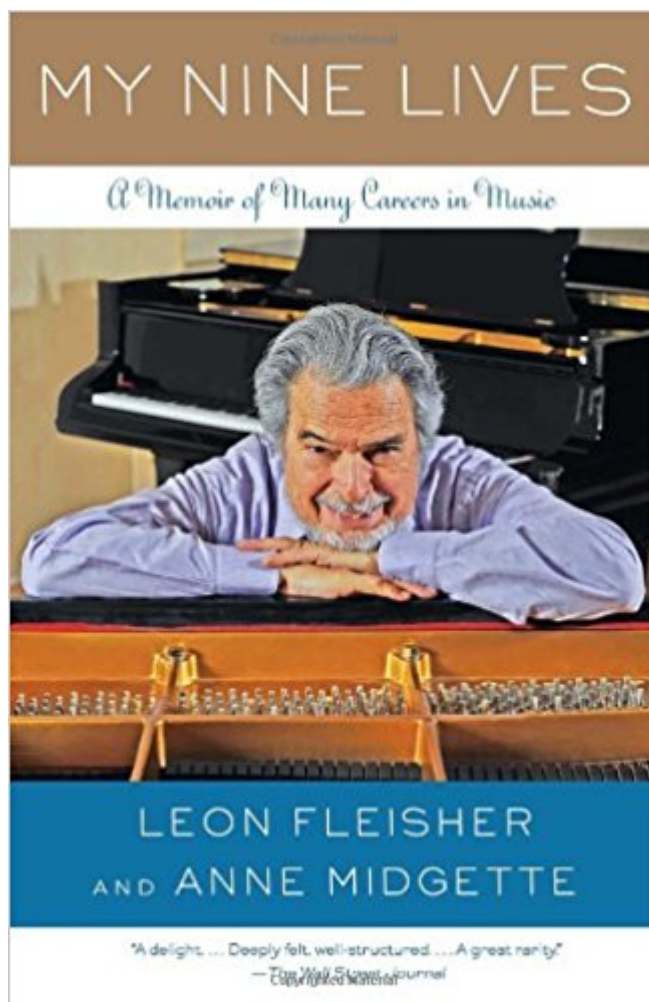


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My Nine Lives: A Musical Memoir



Synopsis

My Nine Lives is a powerful and stirring memoir of one of the greatest pianists of the postwar era—an inspiring tale of courage, compassion, and triumph over outstanding odds. At the peak of his career, celebrated pianist Leon Fleisher suddenly lost the use of two fingers on his right hand. Miraculously, at the age of sixty-six, he was diagnosed with focal dystonia, and learned to manage it through a combination of physical therapy and experimental Botox injections. In 2003 Fleisher returned to Carnegie Hall to give his first two-handed performance in over three decades and brought down the house. With his coauthor, celebrated music critic Anne Midgette, Fleisher reveals here for the first time the depression that threatened to engulf him as his condition worsened, and the sheer love of music that rescued him from complete self-destruction.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Pianist Leon Fleisher's story is a lesson in adaptation. After a mysterious condition robbed him of the use of several fingers in his right hand, Fleisher's promising career temporarily ground to a halt. His memoir naturally focuses a great deal of attention on his life-changing condition, from the suicidal feelings he experienced early on, to the struggle to get an accurate diagnosis and cure, all the while never giving up hope that he would regain the use of his hand. We feel some of the anguish and frustration Fleisher experienced as he trudged from one doctor to the next and seemed to have tried every conceivable treatment in his search for relief - and added to this was the question of whether or not he had brought this malady on himself. Did he depart from his teacher Schnabel's advice and take on too rigorous of a practice regimen à la Rudolf Serkin, or, perhaps

worse yet, was he a victim of his own psychological processes, subconsciously programming himself to fail? All of this is played out in this absorbing memoir by the 82 year old pianist. Fleisher's story is interesting from several perspectives. First, he recounts his youth in San Francisco, the child of parents who were willing to make huge sacrifices to get their son the musical training they believed his nascent talent merited. His mother in particular seems to have been the catalyst for much of this, while his father, who we hear little about other than the business he was in, closed his millinery stores in San Francisco and relocated the family to New York and went to work in a factory so that Leon could be close to his teacher, Artur Schnabel. On the one hand, Fleisher was aware that he was responsible for the upheaval in his family and says "it was a heavy burden for a ten-year old.

In Hemingway's "Death in the Afternoon" there is a conversation between the author and a woman who begins as a fan of his. After they talk for a while and she gets to know a new story of his she declares, "You know I like you less and less the more I know you." And Hemingway replies, "Madame, it is always a mistake to know an author." I felt this way after reading this autobiography by Leon Fleisher. He is a great pianist. Some would declare him a genius, and I would not resist that judgment. However, there is a level of openness and frankness about his life and very human frailties that I think make it unsuitable fare for children and even adolescents who might be interested in finding out about the life and musical views of this historically important pianist. Not that he is graphic, but what parent would want their child reading about Mr. Fleisher's multiple failed marriages, multiple girlfriends, crushes on female colleagues and even some of his female students (his present marriage has been long lasting and seems to have had its beginnings when she was a student of his). He also speaks of drug use positively and helpful in "finding things" in that other state. For me, this is all hogwash and human frailty. I am understanding of human frailty, since I am human myself. I bring this up not to condemn Mr. Fleisher or to make excuses for him. He wrote the book with his co-author, he wanted to be truthful and frank about who he is, warts and all. Fine. I think the book is worth reading for people interested in his life and his thoughts on music. But I would not encourage a young music student to read it. I wouldn't want an impressionable teenager to read it who might think all this poor behavior to be exotic and worth emulating as an experiment with their own life.

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