

Swiss conductor returns to Utah

By [Edward Reichel](#)

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Swiss-born Thierry Fischer didn't plan on becoming a conductor. A flutist who had studied with Aurele Nicolet, he had a rewarding career as principal flute with a number of European orchestras.

He was also a favorite of conductor Nicolas Harnoncourt, who hired him as principal whenever Harnoncourt conducted at the Zurich Opera.

But Fischer's career took a different path some 20 years ago when he was principal flute with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe.

"I was asked to replace a colleague who was sick, so I actually became a conductor quite by accident," he told the Deseret News by phone from his home in Geneva.

Fischer enjoyed the experience of being on the podium and, encouraged by Claudio Abbado, who was the chief conductor of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe at the time, decided to put his flute down and take up the baton.

"I discovered I had a strong attraction to conducting," Fischer said. "And by will power and perseverance I started to slowly and steadily build a career as a conductor."

His time playing for Harnoncourt gave him a jump start as a conductor, although Fischer didn't realize it then.

He came to spend a great deal of time studying scores with Harnoncourt. "He has good knowledge of the Second Viennese School and, of course, of the classical repertoire," two stylistic periods that lie at the core of Fischer's own repertoire.

Fischer is currently the principal conductor of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and, since last April, the chief conductor of Japan's Nagoya Philharmonic.

"I spend 12-14 weeks with the BBC orchestra and six weeks with Nagoya. The rest of the

time I am guest conducting."

Last season, Fischer made his debut with the Utah Symphony. He made a huge impression on the members of the orchestra and the public at that time, which set the stage for a return appearance. And no one has had to wait very long for his return.

Fischer is coming back to Utah this week and will lead the symphony in a pair of concerts Friday and Saturday.

"I am looking forward very much to coming again," he said. "It will be nice to see the band again."

The major work on the program will be Igor Stravinsky's "Petrouchka." Fischer chose it for several reasons.

"I have always been very attracted to Stravinsky," he said. "It is a sound world I feel comfortable in. It is one of the classics of the 20th century. This is the kind of repertoire I feel at home with."

"Petrouchka" is also one of Fischer's personal favorites among Stravinsky's orchestral works. "It is a well-written work that is colorful and very rhythmic. And I also love the ballet — it is such a sad and touching story."

The score also offers Fischer the opportunity of getting to know the musicians of the Utah Symphony better. "I wanted to have a piece that would show off the orchestra," he said. "With the many solos in the score, I can get a good impression of everyone in the orchestra."

The rest of the concert consists of Franz Schubert's Symphony No. 8 ("The Unfinished") and Felix Mendelssohn's Piano Concerto No. 1 in G minor.

"I was asked by the symphony administration to program some classical pieces," Fischer said.

Normally, he refuses to do so when it's a guest conducting engagement in the United States or Great Britain for a simple reason. Unlike Europe, rehearsal time is at a premium with

orchestras in the United States and the United Kingdom.

"I usually say no, because with only two days of rehearsal, your time is very limited to work with the orchestra adequately. Music from the classical period is challenging, especially with an orchestra you don't know very well, because you have to be careful about intonation, the shape of the phrases and orchestral colors. You need time to rehearse all this."

Soloist for the Mendelssohn is Louis Lortie, a colleague with whom Fischer has collaborated on a number of occasions over the years.

"We have worked together at least six or seven times," Fischer said. "We have done concertos by Ravel, Liszt, Mozart, Schumann and others."

Fischer was pleased when he learned that Lortie was going to be the soloist. "It is always nice to have somebody that you know as well as I know him.

"And when I spoke with him he said he is also looking forward to coming back to Utah again."

If you go

What: Louis Lortie, piano, Thierry Fischer, conductor, Utah Symphony

Where: Abravanel Hall

When: Jan. 30-31, 8 p.m.

How much: \$16-\$60

Phone: 355-2787 or 888-451-2787

Web: utahsymphony.org

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