

# Conductor gets a second look by the Utah Symphony

Thierry Fischer » A speedy return for the Swiss musician.

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Swiss conductor Thierry Fischer is back again, already, and that means he is someone Utah Symphony watchers should keep their eyes on.

Fischer's guest appearance with the orchestra in October 2007 ended with shouts of praise from audiences, foot-stamping approval from the orchestra's musicians and critical raves in the press. His speedy reappearance on the Abravanel Hall podium is significant in light of the orchestra's need to find a new music director to replace Keith Lockhart, who will step down in May.

Guest conductors of the 2007-08 and 2008-09 seasons are potential candidates for the post, according to the orchestra's management, but the list of actual candidates hasn't been revealed. Minutes of the May 2008 Utah Symphony | Utah Opera board meeting indicate that guest conductors being considered for Lockhart's job must visit Salt Lake City at least twice and perform different musical programs each time.

For his second date with the Utah Symphony, Fischer chose a repertoire that shows he is looking the Utah Symphony over carefully, just as the orchestra's players and managers may be scrutinizing him.

Fischer said he chose to conduct Stravinsky's "Petrouchka" because he wants "to hear the orchestra do a big, showy piece, and to be able to hear all the different registers of the orchestra."

"It's a fantastic piece for a conductor," he said, "because it shows all the different parts of the orchestra pushed to their boundaries, and I wanted to have a better idea of the orchestra's abilities."

Fischer was asked to include a classical piece on his program and chose Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony. "I didn't want to do a Beethoven symphony because it is better to do Beethoven with an orchestra you know very well," Fischer said. He terms himself "very picky" about details of classical style.

Fischer will be joined by Canadian pianist Louis Lortie, with whom he has shared many musical

collaborations, for performances of Mendelssohn's Piano Concerto No. 1.

"[Lortie] is a real musician who really likes the collaboration with the conductor, not one of those guys who is just playing on his own, and you have to be an acrobat with the orchestra to follow him," Fischer said. "He cares about the chamber music way of playing, even with a huge orchestra. This I really appreciate."

During last season's trip to Utah, Fischer was impressed by the Utah Symphony's collaborative spirit and great musical attitude, and the excellence of Abravanel Hall. He loved the mountain setting of Salt Lake City, which reminded him of his home in Geneva, Switzerland. "It's a week I remember with high enthusiasm," he said.

When asked about his interest in the Utah Symphony's music director post, Fischer said it's difficult to give a clear answer.

"The only thing I can say is that I'm incredibly looking forward to coming back, especially to do this program," he said. "Then I will see how I like the orchestra and how they like me. If I hear after this week that the orchestra is interested in working more regularly with me, I will be interested, too -- that is all I can say."