

EMMANUEL MUSE



Bach: A Signature Season
Johann Sebastian Bach.

THE NEWSLETTER OF EMMANUEL MUSIC

VOLUME 8 ♦ NUMBER 4 ♦ 2007-2008

CRAIG SMITH
FOUNDER AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, EMMANUEL MUSIC
JANUARY 31, 1947 – NOVEMBER 14, 2007

Craig Smith, founder and artistic director of Emmanuel Music, died on Wednesday in Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital after a long struggle with illness. He was 60. Between 1970 and 1977 at Emmanuel Church, where Emmanuel Music is the Ensemble-in-Residence, Smith conducted the complete cycle of Bach Cantatas, the first time all of these works had been performed in America. In subsequent seasons he continued to perform Bach – the B-Minor Mass, the Passions, and the Christmas Oratorio as well as a weekly cantata – and over the years he built Emmanuel into a major musical center that presented and recorded music of Schütz, performed many operas and oratorios of Handel, and cycles of the complete vocal, piano and chamber music of Schubert (a 51-concert series spread over seven seasons), Schumann, Brahms, Debussy, and Ravel, as well as contemporary music, especially works by John Harbison, several of which were written for Emmanuel Music or artists who performed there. Smith led his final Bach cantata November 4, BWV 72, *Alles nur nach Gottes Willen*, although he led the rehearsal for last Sunday's motet, BWV 227, *Jesu, meine Freude*.



Born January 31, 1947 in Lewiston, Idaho, Smith studied piano from the age of

four in Lewiston and at Washington State University. In 1967 he came to New England to study in a New England Conservatory summer program where he encountered the pianist Russell Sherman, who became a major influence in his musical thinking, along with Rudolf Kolisch, his mentor in chamber music.

In 1970, he became music director at Emmanuel Church on Newbury Street and scheduled a Bach cantata for his first Sunday; soon he formed the idea of programming all of them in the liturgical setting for which they were intended. In 1980 he began a fruitful association with the stage director Peter Sellars that came to embrace fully-staged productions of Mozart's three daPonte operas (*Così fan tutte*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Le Nozze di Figaro*), Handel's *Giulio Cesare*, and works by Bach, Weill, Gilbert & Sullivan and Gershwin; these productions were seen in prominent venues in America and Europe and preserved on DVD – they were immensely influential and generated furious controversy.

A continuing association with choreographer Mark Morris began a few years later. He led the world premiere of Morris's masterpiece, Handel's *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, and Il Moderato* in Brussels, where he was principal conductor of the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie (1988-1991), and he led subsequent performances of that work in Boston, Minneapolis, New York (Lincoln Center), Hong Kong, Holland, Israel and New Zealand. He and Emmanuel Music were regular collaborators with the Mark Morris Dance Group in Boston and in other venues as well.

Smith was a comprehensively educated musician who always strove to arrive at the deepest levels of understanding and communication in performance; he was curious about everything and passionate about musical values – and the values that great music embodies and celebrates. He was equally serious about Johann Strauss's effervescent and popular *Die Fledermaus* and neglected works like Schumann's only opera *Genoveva*. He was always full of ideas – a recent Emmanuel benefit featured 13 pianists in Bach's *Art of Fugue*; Smith introduced the concert but at the last moment didn't feel up to playing in it. At the time of his death he was busy planning the 2008-2009 season for Emmanuel Music.

An inspirational figure, Smith consistently drew the most outstanding young singers and instrumentalists in the area into Emmanuel's orbit, and he played a key role in the artistic development of the late mezzo Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, baritone Sanford Sylvan, and a host of others. A program of Bach cantatas with Lieberson, staged by Sellars, and conducted by Smith, was performed in Boston, New York, Paris, Amsterdam, London and Vienna; a Nonesuch recording made in conjunction with the performances, became the best-seller among Emmanuel Music's many recordings of Bach, Schuetz, Mozart and Harbison. A disc of

Lieberson's live performances with Smith and Emmanuel Music is forthcoming. Smith was proud of his accomplishments and those of individual Emmanuel musicians, but the celebrity music circuit didn't interest him nearly as much as what could be achieved by ensemble effort. For him there was no distinction between soloists and ensemble musicians.

Over the years Smith taught at Juilliard, MIT, New England Conservatory, Boston University, Songfest at Pepperdine University, and the Tanglewood Music Center. He conducted at the Chicago Lyric Opera, the Boston Lyric Opera, the Houston Grand Opera, and other major venues, but he always came home to Emmanuel.

In a statement of Emmanuel's artistic philosophy, Smith wrote in 2000, "Our musicians are in this journey with me: they are giving us the results of their exploration and wrestling with this often difficult material. In the world of classical music, many of the concerts we hear are familiar works rehashed. By the very nature of our projects, that does not and will not happen here. Every Emmanuel performer's life is enriched by the exploration of music this great. Every audience member is in kind changed by this exploration of the literature."

Smith was a larger-than-life personality, a cross between Don Quixote and Valiant-for-Truth in Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress." This had its amusing side – once he strode into a new Banana Republic store and lectured the startled staff. "You should be ashamed of yourself, celebrating the horrors of colonialism in this fashion." But this was just another example of how Craig Smith stood for something.

Russell Sherman said yesterday, "Craig's work was both complete and endless, and in that way he represents an ideal model of devotion to music. I was once his teacher but I gladly follow his path – everything he touched he cherished and relished with an incredible tenderness, conviction and belief, and with complete selflessness. He wasn't a humble monk; everything he did, he did with flair, a cherubic smile and a Mozartean sense of absolute pleasure and happiness in the task itself. And he created a place for music that was indomitable."

John Harbison said, "Craig always knew that the world's scorecard didn't always correspond to fundamental artistic values, the basic sense of being there for the music. The mysterious thing about him was that even people with very different attitudes towards music and careers recognized that he had a very pure relationship to music that never wavered; he was completely invested in everything he did. He was also a generous welcomer – if you were a pianist or a conductor, that didn't mean you couldn't perform at Emmanuel. His plans were always huge and his vision was never curbed by the fact other people had to

figure out how to do it, but the people around him kept the terrain clear so he could build what he believed in, and it couldn't have happened without the adventurousness of Emmanuel Church. Through a unique kind of energy he brought all these people together and convinced them this was a way to exist – and now Craig's community of musicians spans generations, and some of them have spread all over the country. Part of Craig's vision for Emmanuel is now being realized in many other parts of the musical world, the spirit of it, and also the level of expertise.”

Craig is survived by his brother, Kent Smith, of Brussels, Belgium and by his many friends and colleagues.

There will be a memorial service in Emmanuel Church at a later date.

EMMANUEL MUSIC ♦ 15 NEWBURY STREET ♦ BOSTON, MA 02116 ♦ 617.536.3356 ♦ WWW.EMMANUELMUSIC.ORG

