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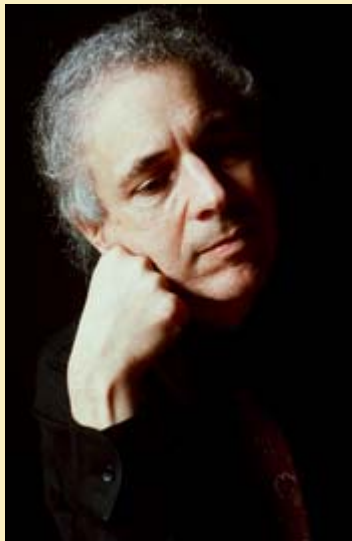


*Bach: A Signature Season*  
*Johann Sebastian Bach.*

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## *Pianist Russell Sherman Returns To Emmanuel Music For His First Concert Performance of Bach's English Suites*



Two years ago, when celebrated pianist Russell Sherman and Emmanuel Music's Artistic Director Craig Smith were dining in Cambridge, Craig posed a provocative question to his colleague and mentor, "Would you be interested in performing Bach's six *English Suites* during the 2007-08 Emmanuel Music season?"

Sherman's answer? A resounding 'yes.' Today he adds: "I jumped at the opportunity, since I had been away from Bach far too long. It was very important for me to return to his music. The *English Suites*, which I had never performed as a group, constitute music of the greatest difficulty, requiring many hours of preparation."

The results of his dinnertime conversation with Smith will soon become a reality. Midway into the Emmanuel Music Bach Signature Season on three consecutive Saturdays--January 26 and February 2 and 9--Sherman will play all six of Bach's *English Suites* for a very attentive audience.

Other stellar musicians in the 2008 Russell Sherman Piano Series will present Bach's *Sonatas for Viola da Gamba and Keyboard*. *Sonata No. 3 in G minor* (BWV 1028) on January 26 features Mary Ruth Ray, viola, and Minsoo Sohn, piano; *Sonata No. 2 in D major* (BWV 1029), on February 2 features Rhonda Rider, cello, and Katherine Chi, piano; and *Sonata No. 1 in G major* (BWV 1027), on February 9 features Emmanuel Music's Lorraine Hunt Lieberson Fellow Rafael Popper-Keizer, cello, and HaeSun Paik, piano.

Each of the three Sherman concerts will also include Bach-Busoni *Chorale Preludes*. Two of the preludes, *In dir ist Freude* and *Nun komm' der Heiden Heiland*, will be played by Minsoo Sohn on January 26. On February 2, Katherine Chi will present *Herr Gott, nun schleuss' den Himmel auf'* and *Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ*. On February 9, HaeSun Paik will play *Wachet auf, ruft uns*

*die Stimme* and *Nun freut euch, Lieben Christen*.

Given that the program is so rich in musical and personal connections, the series is forecast to sell-out. [To order tickets, go to the secure Emmanuel Music web site.](#)

Further details on all segments of this exciting series, plus Russell Sherman's own appreciation of Craig Smith's life and work, appear below.

### **Bach's *English Suites***

Sherman describes these works as three sets of suites. "It was originally thought that Bach had dedicated them to some Englishman of unknown rank. I don't think that he gave them that title. Borrowing works from other composers was more accepted in Bach's time, and he drew from a model of six harpsichord suites by French composer Charles Francois Dieupart [1667(?) -1740] for the *English Suites*.

"The first *Suite* has Couperin influences. It opens with a very rapid tempo. In contrast, the remaining five *Suites* contain an opening movement that is a solo version of a *concerto grosso*. It alternates *tutti* with a solo emphasis, then returns to a *tutti* that is more varied and delicate than the first one."

All of Bach's *English Suites* share a series of dances: *allemande*, *courant*, *saraband* and *gigue*, interspersed with *gavotte*, *passacaglia*, and *bourée*. Considering this lively structure, Sherman was reminded of his own "Bach awakening," which occurred in his early teens.

"I had a summer job accompanying the dancers in a Connecticut College program. They were in a troupe directed by José Limon and Doris Humphrey. She asked me to play the piano part of the *G Major Partita*. Up until then, the sense of Bach that I grew up with was that his music was demanding, contrapuntal and uninflected. But when I saw those people doing their Elizabethan dances to Bach's music, with such graceful gestures, I was astonished. I knew then that Bach had to be played in an expressive way."

Sherman quotes from Johann Nikolaus Forkel's 1802 Bach study, "Bach knew how to introduce such variety to each performance that each piece, under his fingers, sounded just like a speech." As postscript, Sherman described his own relationship and attitude to Bach, "His is not just methodical, calculating, perfect music to be laid out in metrical form. It must be inflected and calculated according to its own inventions."

### **Bach's Sonatas for Viola da Gamba and Keyboard**

Emmanuel Music violist Mary Ruth Ray, who will perform *Sonata No. 3 in G minor* (BWV 1028) with Minsoo Sohn on January 26, is also known worldwide as violist for the Lydian String Quartet. She describes how the Bach sonatas in the Russell Sherman Series have been adapted for the modern-day viola.

"Little music exists that was written in the Baroque period specifically for the viola. So modern viola players are in the habit of freely borrowing pieces originally written for other instruments by Telemann, Handel, Bach, and other composers of their time. The practice of 'recycling' music

from earlier compositions into new works for new combinations of instruments was a common one of the time, so the borrowing of these captivating sonatas by violists and cellists today is perfectly within reason.”

“The somewhat subdued yet clear tone of the gamba translates easily to the viola, with its dark, mellow sensibility. But transcribing this music requires thought and planning because of the difference in the two instruments’ ranges. For the viola, performing these works requires moving the very lowest passages up an octave and deciding where to make the octave break, so as not to disturb the long, contrapuntal lines.”

Ray’s January 26 performance piece is sometimes called “The Seventh Brandenburg Concerto” because of its three-movement form. “It’s the most virtuosic of the three, making full use of the technical and expressive capabilities of the gamba. As a viola piece, it maintains its expressive nature while transforming into a vigorous romp with its keyboard partner,” she concludes.

### **Bach-Busoni *Chorale Preludes***

Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924) had a celebrated career as pianist, teacher, writer and conductor. Born in Tuscany, he gave his first public concert at age 7 and then performed some of his own music two years later. His career took him all over Europe and to the United States.

While most of Busoni’s compositions are for the piano and extremely difficult to perform, his transcriptions of Bach *Chorale Preludes* do not utilize his own unique harmonic languages.

Minsoo Sohn reflects on both composers:

“Bach is the father of all musicians, and I think Busoni also felt that way about him. I can only guess that he had such respect for Bach that he didn’t want to interfere with his original works. Playing Busoni’s transcriptions as part of this concert series was completely Mr. Smith’s idea, and I admire his thoughtful programming. Since both of us were Mr. Sherman’s students, I felt that we were like brothers.”

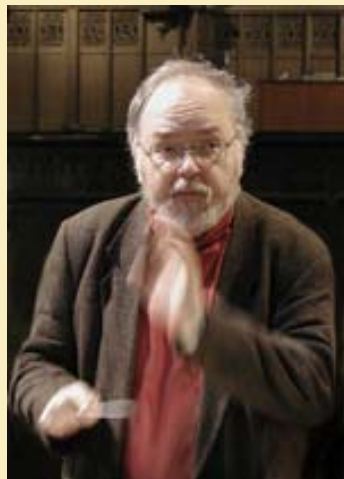
The fact that Smith included the *Bach-Busoni Preludes* in the 2008 Russell Sherman Series underscores their connection to New England Conservatory. Sohn speculates that Craig was thinking of the time when Busoni himself taught at NEC in the early 1890s. Busoni had also premiered his other Bach transcription, *Chaconne*, at the Union Hall in Boston.

“Our teacher, Mr. Sherman, studied with Edward Steurmann, who was a pupil of Busoni. So this program is connected to all of us, as we represent the second and third generation of Busoni’s students,” Sohn concludes.

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Over the decades, Russell Sherman has returned to Emmanuel Music for chamber music, orchestral and solo appearances. He has performed regularly at Emmanuel Music’s Mozart Birthday celebrations, the most recent in 2006, when he played Mozart’s complete *Piano Sonatas*. But this year will be different in one major respect, with Craig’s death two months ago. Sherman reflects on his first impressions of Smith as a young graduate student.

"I remember his wonderful Schubertian red cheeks. To me, they symbolized his enduring optimism, cheerfulness, warmth and fire. He simply adored music in every shape and form. All through his conducting life, even when he was performing tragic works, he filled them with a sense of nobility and inspiration. He had the absolute conviction that he was so fortunate to be making music with his friends."



Sherman recalls Craig as the Pied Piper, with a circle of musicians who followed him around. "We called them Craig's Gang, and he was their Spirit of Music Making." He likens them to Schumann's *Davidsbündler*, a group of classical artists who grew up together and deeply admired each other. "They supported Craig from the very beginning. When he selected a Mozart piano concerto for his graduate recital, he gathered other students to form the orchestra. This was a first at New England Conservatory."

The professor and the graduate student also cemented a friendship that endured for close to 40 years. But there was one unusual feature. Emmanuel Music's Artistic Director would never call his teacher by his first name. Years passed, but that aspect of their warm alliance never changed.

"No matter how many times I suggested that he call me 'Russell,' he always used 'Mr. Sherman.' He would never cross this threshold. It was part of what I call his aristocracy of the heart. Actually, I was fortunate to become *his* student, in addition to his teacher. I learned much about Handel oratorios from him."

Sherman says that he and Smith had very different approaches to music. "Craig's [approach to music] ascends in a spiral to heaven. It is otherworldly, direct, substantial and full. Not a wilting lily! As for me, my music has a *chiaroscuro*, fluctuating between darkness and light."

The Sherman/Smith alliance continues to this day. "I continue to celebrate his life. Almost everything I play reminds me how happy I am to sense his unforgettable spirit." *Ann Carlson*

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