



# Michael Sellers

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# Michael Sellers- BIOGRAPHY

Michael Sellers is an internationally acclaimed pianist known for a strong and commanding presence, temperament, exceptional virtuoso equipment with a warmly personal, spacious and poetic style of performance. Sellers has presented premieres of many new works, among them "Touches" by **Leonard Bernstein**. A number of these works were written for and dedicated to him. A seasoned artist, Sellers has built a universal repertoire that reflects his eclectic tastes and interests: Bach and Scarlatti to Stravinsky's "Petrouchka" and Bartok, Chopin, Schumann, Liszt, and Brahms, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert. to the impressionists and contemporary composers.

Mr Sellers' annual tours which have taken him to most of the European countries, South America and throughout the United States and Asia, have included concerts at **Queen's Hall** in Edinburgh, Sir Henry Wood Hall in Glasgow, **Wigmore Hall** in London and the Musikverein in Vienna. These have won for him enthusiastic audiences, re-engagements and critical reviews.

His recordings for Orion Records under the auspices of the **Yehudi Menuhin Foundation** have received wide recognition and acclaim including a "**Recording of Special Merit**" accolade from Stereo Review. He has made a number of recordings for New York's WQKR and WNYC in addition to Los Angeles' KFPK and KUSC and many others. A new CD has just been issued on Whisper Films label: "**Michael Sellers: Live from San Francisco**"

In November 1999, he made a most successful 17th European tour, where he played recitals in Italy, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland. Highlights were a recital at Budapest's **Liszt Museum** in Liszt's own concert hall where Liszt gave master classes and which opens up to his last Hungarian residence; also a private concert in Chopin's birth home at Zelazowa Wola. Some of these concerts were filmed for TV. He gave a number of master classes in Italy and Poland and his concerts in Poland were particularly successful, prompting one critic to say "**he played Chopin in a truly Polish style with wonderful nuances and colors**"

Born in Chicago, Illinois, Michael Sellers was the recipient of the **Rudolph Ganz Scholarship Award**, a **Rockefeller grant** to study at the Aspen Music School and a scholarship to study at the Manhattan School of Music. He earned degrees of Northwestern University and the Manhattan School of Music and received a certificate from the Moscow Conservatory for his participation in a series of master classes given by Mikhail Voskressensky and Halina Czerny-Stefanska. His teachers have been Rudolph Ganz, Aube Tzerko, Mario Feninger, Nina Scolnik and Marc Steiner. He worked in the compositional and theoretical areas with Dane Rudhyar, Karol B. Jirak and Ingolf Dahl.

# Michael Sellers-Reviews

At home throughout the world.

**Saarbrücken: Saarbrücker Zeitung.**

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A great pianist ... playing in a grand style (and) with plenty of character.

**Brussels News**

---

Clearly a virtuoso.

**Frankfurt: Allgemeine Zeitung**

---

A genuinely stirring exhibition of bravura... massive in tone and imposing in concept.

**Los Angeles Times**

---

Exciting performances ... exceptional imagination and virtuosity.

**New York: Soho News**

---

Rare insight, ease, and striking intensity.

**Edinburgh Evening News**

---

A pianist of great personality and wide-ranging technique, with great powers of interpretation.

**Malta Times**

---

...Has a lot in his favor including intelligence, dexterity and taste...His playing is quite polished....seemed at one with Chopin and Debussy.

**Washington Post**

---

The audience responded with a standing ovation at the end

**Los Angeles Times**

---

Sellers interpreted the program with understanding and sensitivity. The public responded with extended applause

**Berliner Morgenpost**

---

For Sellers the sonority of the instrument is paramount  
**London Times**

---

Played with obvious dedication and all the technical command required  
**New York Times**

---

Sellers...magnificent....unexceptionable display of spirited pianism  
**Contemporary Keyboard**

---

Plays in a propulsive style, seemingly uncowed by the ferocious technical demands  
**High Fidelity**

# Michael Sellers-Writings

## Excerpts from the Diary of a Concert Pianist

Do you think that playing concerts all over the globe is glamorous and exciting? Sometimes it can be exciting, rarely is it glamorous and it can be fraught with unexpected surprises, perils and every sort of pitfall. Years ago a dreamy-eyed music student at a Midwestern college asked me "What's life like on the road?" expecting me to pour out stories that would make Tales of a Thousand Nights sound tame by comparison.

Last December I returned from a month's concert tour that took me to Italy, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland for a number of concerts and master classes. It was a wonderful trip in many ways. I will tell you a few details and you decide what kind of life the "road" is.

When I arrived in Budapest in the later evening, it was snowing. Budapest was transformed into a magical and fairytale city. Little did I know that the snow was part of an unexpected winter storm, the likes of which Europe had not experienced for quite some time. It was freezing cold and the snow kept coming. I got soaked and caught a nasty cold.

After my concert in Budapest, I caught a train for Vranov City, Slovakia, my next concert stop. At the train station and in the train nobody spoke English or German, the only languages I could communicate in, which created a minor problem regarding the correct connections. I had to resort to sign language and pointing to my watch. The platform where I had to wait for my train was freezing. There was no warm place to wait. To make matters worse, the train was 1 1/2 hours late because of the storm.

I was rescued, I mean met, at Vranov City by a very interesting Slovakian who is an English instructor. He was my translator. After a pleasant lunch with the concert organizer, who gave me an informative history of Vranov City, one of the oldest cities in Slovakia, we went to the hall for a rehearsal and to check the piano. The hall wasn't designed for concerts, but was rather an all purpose meeting room that was part of the Town Hall. It was wall-to-wall carpeted with an acoustic deadening rug. Because I was not happy with the position of the piano, I tried to help things along by moving the piano by myself while my translator and concert organizer tended to other matters. Big mistake! The rollers on the piano did not move easily against the grain of the thick rug. When I applied ever so gentle a force with the deftest of touches, the back leg of the piano snapped like a gingerbread cookie and the back end of the piano crashed to the ground with the most sickening groan and deafening crash, not unlike the fall of Valhalla in Gotterdammerung, or so it seemed to me.

The commotion that ensued was out of a comic opera. Here is Michael, the Piano-Destroyer Klutz from Los Angeles, who has come to Slovakia to perform a concert and thereby to represent the United States, and who has single-handedly demolished the piano for that evening's concert. Fortunately, the internal parts of the piano were O.K. There were chairs in the room that had arms. With the greatest of Chutzpah, I directed the translator and concert organizer to lift the piano and I pulled over a chair

and placed it under the back end of the piano. Miraculously, the height of the arms on the chair for the piano and the chair was able to take the weight of the piano. That's how I played the concert a few hours later. The concert went very well. I was received with warmth and enthusiasm. There was a large audience, curious to hear, more specifically to "see" an American. Foreigners, particularly Americans, barely come to Slovakia.

The next morning I was driven to Kosice to take the train to Poland, and that's another story.

*This is the first in a three-part series about Michael Seller's experiences while on a recent European tour.*

For more wonderful writings, please visit the [artist website](#)

## Michael Sellers-Recent Tours

- First tours of Czech Republic (2010) and Russia (2006). His recital in at the Anichov Palace in St. Petersburg for recorded by one of the leading Russian TV stations and broadcast throughout the country.
- A tour of Hungary, in which he played a number of concerts in the annual Spring Festival
- A recital on the prestigious Phillips Collection Series in Washington, D.C.
- Live broadcast recitals on the "Sunday Live" Series at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, WFMT Radio in Chicago, the European International Festivals I and II, and for the International Red Cross in Geneva, Switzerland.
- An Asian tour which included concerts and master classes at Hong Kong University, the Jockey Club of Polytechnic University of Hong Kong and Taiwan's Tunghai and Fu Jen Universities.
- Recordings for NCRV (Holland), Radio Suisse Romande, WFMT (Chicago), Vatican Radio (Rome, Italy)
- Fall of 2010, launch of 27th European Tour.
- A recital on the Dame Myra Hess Concert Series in Chicago.
- Recitals in Geneva, Switzerland for the European International Festivals I and II and the International Red Cross.

# Michael Sellers-Upcoming Events

October 15<sup>th</sup> 2011, Encore Concert Series, Palm Desert, CA

November 13<sup>th</sup> 2011, Eglise St Merry Concert Series, Paris, France

November 17<sup>th</sup> 2011, American Cathedral, Paris, France

November 19<sup>th</sup> 2011, Charity Concert (all Chopin), London, England

November 20<sup>th</sup> 2011, International Red Hedgehog Concert Series, London, England

November 24<sup>th</sup> 2011, Roselyn Hills Chapel Concert Series, London, England

April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2012, Lincoln Center, New York, New York

# Michael Sellers-Recital Programs

## All Chopin Program

Polonaise- Fantaisie, Op. 61  
Six Mazurkas

Nocturne B major, Op. 32 #1  
Scherzo #1 B Minor, Op 20

Fantaisie F Minor Op. 49  
Ballade Ab Major, Op. 47

Nocturne F Major, Op. 15 #1  
Polonaise Ab Major, Op. 53

## All American Program

### **Dane Rudhyar**

Granites (1929)  
Third Pentagonam (1924-26)

### **Mario Feninger**

Three Etudes (2003) (San Francisco Premiere)

### **Gershwin**

Three Preludes (1926)  
Six Songs from "George Gershwin Songbook" (1932)

### **Barber**

Sonata Op. 26 (1949)

## Varied Program

### **Brahms**

Three Pieces Op. 118

### **Beethoven**

Sonata Eb Major Op. 81a

### **Mario Feninger**

Three Etudes (2003) (San Francisco Premiere)

### **Piazzola**

Adios Nonino  
Milonga Del Angel

**Milhaud**

Tango Des Fratellini

**Bernstein**

Four Anniversaries

**Poulenc**

Nocturne C Major

15eme Improvisation

"Hommage a Edith Piaf"

Pastourelle

Toccata

**Schubert**

Sonata in A minor, Op. 143

**Brahms**

Fantasiien Op 116

**Bartok**

Suite Op. 14

Allegro barbaro

**Ravel**

Alborada del gracioso

**Liszt**

Funerailles

En reve

Transcendental Etude #10 in F minor

# Inside the mind of a concert pianist

Michael Sellers, who is scheduled to perform today in Irvine, tells us what it's like to be in his shoes.

By MICHAEL RYDZYNSKI  
FOR IRVINE WORLD NEWS

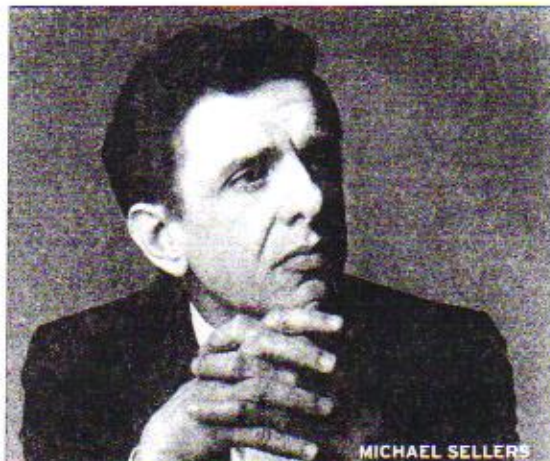
**M**ichael Sellers is an in-demand pianist who makes his Irvine debut this afternoon in the Irvine Classical Music Series.

Among other songs, he will perform two of Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words"; Liszt's transcription of a Schumann song, "Widmung"; two original works by Liszt; and four by Chopin.

Sellers earned a bachelor's degree from Northwestern University and a master's degree in music from the Manhattan School of Music. The Chicago native now lives in Los Angeles, where he studied with Aube Tzerko, pupil of and assistant to the legendary Artur Schnabel. He also studied with Nina Scolnik, who teaches piano at UC Irvine. Here, he gives us some insight into the very busy life of a pianist and teacher.

**Q: How do you decide what you will perform in a recital?**

**A:** First, the repertoire I happen to be playing at the time. Then, it's the venue: I heard a concert once (at Irvine Presbyterian) and so I heard the acoustics there and the piano they have, a wonderful nine-foot Steinway grand. And then there's the audience: I get the feeling they are a bit conservative. So I really like this good mixture of composers and compositions I made, as



MICHAEL SELLERS

all have a certain ethos and lyrical Romantic spirit in common. I'm after what I feel would work at that venue for that kind of audience. For example, I don't feel Schoenberg would be suitable for them. But this program is. It's especially communicative and speaks to the heart. And all are beautiful and special compositions.

**Q: How do you get booked for concerts, such as this one?**

**A:** M'lou Dietzer (co-manager of the series) called me and invited me to play. I had played for her two years ago, when this series was at another location (Orange Coast Unitarian Universalist Church). She had called me then to substitute for a pianist who had fallen ill on only 24 hours notice, but it worked out just fine with me.

So she remembered me and called this time to ask if I wanted to play on her series in Irvine.

A number of my concerts come about this way, with direct calls. Others through management, still others I ask for if I like a venue.

**Q: Where do you perform?**

**A:** I've played throughout the U.S., both in western and eastern European countries and, a couple of summers ago, in South America, as part of the International Cello Festival in Rio de Janeiro. I've played in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Some of my performances are single dates, some are part of a festival, some are part of a series. Some are solos, some chamber music, others with orchestra. This season, I'll give 60 (performances) in all, which is typical for me, and include New York City last October, my 22nd European tour last November and, after Irvine, San Francisco.

**Q: In addition to your performing career, you also teach. How do you manage to juggle these two careers?**

**A:** (He's been teaching at Mount St. Mary's College and Southern California Conservatory of Music the past eight years.) It's very tricky. It's not an easy thing to do both. I'm gone for two or three weeks at a time, but sometimes it's been for up to two months. I have

about 30 students at both schools and my private studio and they wait for me until I return. Yet it hasn't created a problem: I do make up for missed lessons and manage to stay on top of their progress. And they participate regularly in competitions and take rigorous examinations that are given throughout North America - such as from the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto - and they do well with both, winning medals.

**Q: Have you had a student who has gone on to international fame?**

**A:** Yes, so far, one former student, Joan Kwoun - but, ironically enough, on the violin, which she studied concurrently.

After nine years studying the piano with me, she decided on the violin as her primary instrument, and has played with such orchestras as the Boston Symphony under Andre Previn. She has a concert this month at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (in New York) that's billed "Joan at the Met." I'm really proud of her.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

**Who:** Pianist Michael Sellers

**What:** Performs during the Irvine Chamber Music Series

**When:** Today at 2 p.m.

**Where:** Irvine Presbyterian Church, 4445 Alton Pkwy. at Meadowbrook in Woodbridge.

**Cost:** \$10 (advance), \$12 (door) general; \$7-\$8 students, \$25-\$30 family, \$5 each for groups of 10 or more (advance or door).

**Information:** (949) 733-1383

## EXCERPTS FROM THE DIARY OF A CONCERT PIANIST Liszt and Budapest

by Michael Sellers



Franz Liszt is regarded as a national hero in his native Hungary and embodies for the Hungarians, their nationalistic aspirations. Even though Liszt spent most of his life outside of Hungary, he always was aware of his heritage and supported Hungarian causes all his life. Outstandingly, he supported the Hungarian Revolution of 1848-49. He was friends with all of the great patriots and had many close friends who fought in that Revolution. To honor his friends who died in that Revolution, he wrote *Funeralles* in October, 1849. Throughout his career he gave many concerts gratis for Hungarian causes.

In 1998, I was invited to play my first concerts in Hungary as part of their annual Spring Festival and the 150<sup>th</sup> year celebration of the anniversary of the Revolution of 1848. I felt like I was reconnecting with my own musical roots. My first piano teacher, Marie Wolfram, had been a pupil of Arthur Friedheim, who had been a disciple of and secretary to Liszt for the last six years of Liszt's life. Another teacher, Rudolph Ganz, was nine years old when Liszt died, and although he never met Liszt, he knew and collaborated with many Liszt pupils, such as Siloti, Rosenthal and Sauer.

Everywhere I went in Hungary, I encountered Liszt's presence. My first concert was in Pecs, an historic city with many nationally designated landmarks. To commemorate an outdoor concert Liszt gave in Pecs in the summer of 1836, in the courtyard outside the Archbishop's Palace and the Cathedral, there is a life-size sculpture of Liszt on the window sill towering over the courtyard and the park. In Debrecen I played

a recital at the Franz Liszt Academy. As I played my program, particularly my healthy passel of Liszt pieces, I was keenly aware of the enlarged photo of the older Liszt peering at me from his perch on the center wall of the stage.

In Buda, I stayed just a few steps away from the ancient St. Mateus Church where Franz Liszt had conducted his newly composed *Coronation Mass* for the coronation of Franz Josef II as Emperor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

When I was subsequently invited to perform in Budapest in November, 1999, it was on the eve of Hungary's millennium as a nation. It marked my debut in this ancient capital and was especially auspicious because I was to play in the concert hall where Liszt gave master classes, performed and attended many concerts. The hall opens up to his last apartment in Budapest. The apartment and hall were originally part of the Franz Liszt Academy, which has since relocated, and are now part of the Liszt Museum.

The day before my concert, it snowed, which created a magical effect for me in this most beautiful city, a good omen. The hall is ornate and strikingly furnished in the style of the 1880's, as is Liszt's apartment. The sparkling chandeliers evoke the aura of a vanished era. I played my concert as if my very life depended on it. I felt Liszt's spiritual and physical presence very powerfully. That presence terrified and inspired me to play my heart and soul to their fullest. At the end of the recital it was thrilling and exciting to be rewarded with the "iron-clap", which is when the audience claps loudly and in unison to demonstrate their appreciation and approbation.

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*Michael Sellers is an internationally acclaimed pianist known for a strong and commanding presence, exceptional virtuoso equipment and a warmly personal and poetic performance style. He has presented premieres of many new works, among them "Touches" by Leonard Bernstein. Many of these works were written for and dedicated to him. Mr. Sellers' annual tours have taken him to most of the European countries and throughout the United States and Asia, including concerts at Queen's Hall in Edinburgh, Sir Henry Wood Hall in Glasgow, Wigmore Hall in London and the Brahmsaal in Vienna. His recordings for Orion Records under the auspices of the Yehudi Menuhin Foundation have received wide acclaim including a "Recording of Special Merit" from Stereo Review. This season Mr. Sellers has been featuring all Chopin programs. He just completed his 18<sup>th</sup> European tour with recitals in France and Poland and has been invited back for more concerts in 2001 and 2002. Mr. Sellers will perform in Los Angeles at the Westwood United Methodist Church on January 28, 2001 and on the Sundays Live radio broadcast from the Bing Theater at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Mr. Sellers is currently on the faculties of Mount St. Mary's College and the Southern California Conservatory of Music and is the founder and director of The William Kapell Piano Foundation for Contemporary Music and Musicians which commissions composers to write new works for the piano.*

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