

# Emile Pandolfi

## Emile Pandolfi in Concert • Christmas with Emile Pandolfi

goingbarefoot•inc. a presenter's point of view... an artist's standard of performance

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Reviews of concerts by popular piano recording artist Emile Pandolfi almost always comment upon his performances of selections by Andrew Lloyd Weber or Rogers and Hammerstein - or stylistic influences of Debussy or Chopin. One could easily presume that his artistic inspirations would be a litany of the great classical composers and pianists of our time.

But ask Pandolfi to switch places - to leave his piano bench, come down off stage and speak from a perspective as an audience member sitting in a concert hall - and whom would *he* most want to see? Who are his personal favorites? Who would move him most?

Responses might surprise you.

"Astrud Gilberto.... She is very honest. It's a pure, innocent, sincere communication.

"Janis Ian... Her lyrics are so intelligent. Her music makes me think. She stirs deep emotions way down inside.

"Pavarotti...He makes me want to be a better artist. It's a glorious instrument combined with an unequalled mastery of technique.

"Diana Krall...Again, it's the honesty. No imitation. No tricks. She plays beautifully, but she also talks the lyrics to you. She knows what the words mean."

### A Personal Connection

With almost thirty recordings in his own discography, Emile Pandolfi ranks among America's most popular piano artists. With the majority of his performance repertoire being lush, intricate arrangements of Broadway and

standards that form the pantheon of the “American Popular Songbook,” his influences are, in fact, more classical than pop. And it is this subjective layering of classical style that Pandolfi infuses onto the broad palate of selections performed in his frequent concerts that seems to pluck that connective thread with audiences everywhere.

There’s a communication that takes place, that makes a listener feel valued, important, familiar... actually “known.” When lines form at the end of an evening with hundreds of persons in queue to have CDs signed, it’s more akin in tone to a family or class reunion than it is a line of unknown faces waiting for a signature.

### Family Approach

Emile Pandolfi grew up in an Italian household with five children. Interactive family fun, art and entertainment were always part of the scene.

“Our house was always the place friends gathered,” he comments. “I had a mother who was an intuitive entertainer. And she taught me to entertain people. She loved people. She was a mom and a housewife by choice, but she was one of the best people I’ve ever known at knowing how to make people have a good time.

“My dad used to put art prints up on the wall - works by Raphael, Bellini, Modigliani, Monet, Utrillo, Cezanne, Picasso -- a wide variety. We, as children, four-years-old and up, would have to recognize the individual style, and tell him why we thought which piece was this or that artist. It was a great art appreciation course, and has been a dynamic factor in shaping my sense of artistic confidence.

“My dad and mom always encouraged all of us to follow our dreams. They never pushed us in any direction except to pursue - no matter what - those things we believed in.”

Some might say that this merged foundation of fine art with humor and a sense of entertainment is what shapes the concert format that has gained Emile Pandolfi such acclaim and popularity today.

Pandolfi’s performances are far from straight-backed, formal “recitals.” While, unquestionably, there is finely-tuned, trained technique on display, it is tempered with a gleam in his eye, a quick card trick, an hilarious tale about some early date with his wife, a comic’s turn of phrase, that brings the performance to a different place from what an unknowing first-time audience member might be expecting.

## Would You Like Some Piano with that Joke?

Having been a student of “serious” piano since the age of five, with his symphony debut at fourteen, Pandolfi received his graduate degree in piano performance. His interests didn’t turn toward popular music until after he had finished his schooling and was out on the road.

He began traveling the globe, playing wherever he went. He ended up in Los Angeles for fifteen years where he made his living playing for dancing, acting, and opera coaches, along with working the nightclub scene and cruise ships.

He spent six years as the “piano man” in major comedy clubs, providing music for improv groups and a line-up of comedians including Jay Leno, Robin Williams, Jerry Seinfeld, David Letterman, Yakov Smirnoff and others. An audience’s laughter became part of the overall experience that brought him most satisfaction as a performer.

In 1984, he was one of four pianists chosen to record the broadcast version of Gershwin’s “Rhapsody in Blue” for the official Opening Ceremony of the Olympics in L.A., and was one of the 84 pianists performing live during the ceremony.

Eventually deciding that he wanted to raise his children somewhere other than Los Angeles, Pandolfi moved cross-country to Greenville, SC in 1986. Within 45 minutes of arriving in town, he became the pianist at the City Club and stayed until 1994.

He recorded his first solo CD in 1990. Since that time, Emile Pandolfi has recorded 26 albums, with sales exceeding three million units. He now ranks as the top-selling recording artist in the specialty “alternative” market in which gift shop and bookstore sales are classified. His holiday-themed recordings, as are his holiday performances, are best-sellers wherever he goes.

### Lessons

“When I was about six years old, I remember losing my pencil holder. It was so special to me, one I had longed for well before my parents got it for me...

“Rather than replace it, my mom told me, ‘It’s only things. It doesn’t matter.’ And somehow, I actually got what she meant. It was my first philosophy lesson. It’s only things. I still say that to myself when I need it.

“I can’t imagine a more gratifying profession than I have – there’s nothing that can compare to being in front of a live audience,” Pandolfi reflects.

"I want them to want and expect to be taken somewhere, on an emotional journey. They can laugh and cry and be excited and get all dreamy in one evening, in one place. It's an intense, passionate thing we're sharing together. It's visceral - for both of us. I need to feel it in my bones just as much as they do.

"There's a moment that I'll never, ever forget," he concludes.

"At the end of one show, I was asked to meet someone in the audience who was in a wheel chair. He had been a rock climber and had suffered, about three or four years past, a severe injury that put him in the chair. He was working fiercely at regaining his strength.

"He told me that on this night, he'd had such a wonderful experience that he knew he had to be able to give me a standing ovation. And he did. This was the first time he had stood since the accident.

"I could never, ever ask for more than that moment."

***"He plays in a manner that seems to go to the music's very soul."***  
Stereophile Magazine

***"Pandolfi is better than Borge. Borge was a comedian first and pianist second. Pandolfi is first and foremost a musician, albeit a highly entertaining one."***  
Encore Magazine

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