

PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

Emma Leiuman, a classical pianist born in Moscow in 1984, brings together tradition and innovation to redefine the art of piano performance and pedagogy.

Her education includes:

- The Central Music School (under Kira Shashkina, teacher of Mikhail Pletnev)
- The Moscow State Chopin College (under Professor Lev Naumov, student of Heinrich Neuhaus)
- The Moscow Tchaikovsky State Conservatory (Master's degree under Pavel Nersessian, Professor at both the Moscow Conservatory and Boston University)

Emma has performed across Russia, Germany, the USA, France, and Spain, and has given lectures and masterclasses at LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore. She is also a prizewinner of international competitions in Prague, Paris, and Hannover.

She is the creator of the PianoWell© System, a pioneering method designed to support the technical and artistic development of professional pianists.

Rooted in over 30 years of intuitive research and practical application, the PianoWell System Recovery Program provides a clear, step-by-step approach to cultivating mental practice, inner singing, efficient hand motion, and authentic, expressive performance.

Emma Leiuman

Innovative Teacher · Classical Pianist · Author



SHADOW

My mother dreamed of nurturing one of the world's greatest pianists.

And she pursued that dream with the only tools she knew—strict discipline and total dedication. From an early age, she guided my practice for eight hours a day, supplementing it with lessons from as many private teachers as she could find.

At the age of six, I was accepted into one of the most prestigious and competitive music schools in the world—the Central Music School of the Moscow Tchaikovsky State Conservatory. There, I studied under Kira Shashkina, one of the school's most demanding and ambitious teachers. By then, she had already taught several renowned pianists, including International Tchaikovsky Competition winner Mikhail Pletnev.

But despite studying with such highly regarded teachers, I lacked the most essential element of piano playing: correct tone production. This missing foundation made it difficult to learn new pieces. Everything took more time, more effort, and came with more pressure. None of my teachers could seem to help. I hit a plateau—and stayed there.

What followed was a decade of mental and emotional stress, rooted in being pushed far beyond my technical readiness.

I was expected to study and perform an advanced repertoire I wasn't yet equipped to handle.

Year after year, the pressure of competitions, large programs, and constant fear of rejection and failure began to weigh on me. I felt guilty for not being “good enough,” for falling behind my classmates. Eventually, that pressure manifested in my body—tendinitis in both hands.

To protect myself, I began to avoid technically demanding repertoire—especially virtuosic works by Chopin or Liszt. My first priority in choosing music became safety: how physically challenging is this piece? If it had too many fast passages, octaves, or wide leaps, I simply couldn't risk it.

By the age of thirteen, I wanted only one thing: to play well.

Not to win. Not to impress. Just to express what I felt inside—something deeper, something real. A realm I often sensed beneath the surface of ordinary life. A space of peace, beauty, and belonging. A space that felt more true than the world around me.

But I was met, again and again, with frustration—the crushing weight of not succeeding, despite so much effort and sacrifice.

SHADOW

The feedback I received was constant, but confusing:

"Practice more."

"Listen to yourself."

"Don't play with a harsh tone."

"Play faster."

"Understand the music better."

"Learn pieces quicker."

"Use more arm weight."

"Octaves are easy."

"Release tension."

"Don't hold tension in your shoulders."

"Shape the phrasing."

"Play louder here. Softer there."

"Follow the score."

"Play so everyone in the back row of a concert hall can hear you."

*It went on and on—advice without clarity, correction without explanation.
So much help, but no clear direction.*

Sometimes, I wondered if the criticism was a mask. Maybe they, too, felt uncertain. Maybe they didn't know how to help—but couldn't admit it. So they pushed harder. Or turned away. Desperate to please, I shaped my playing around their ideas of how music "should" sound—even when it only increased the tension in my mind, my emotions, and my body.

I often left lessons feeling diminished, misunderstood—and sometimes, even hurt.

I was thirteen.

I didn't care about new clothes.

I didn't care about socializing.

I just wanted to play the piano well.

LIGHT

One sunny day in 1997, while practicing Bach's Prelude in E-flat minor (WTC Book I), I suddenly heard something unexpected—angels singing the piece in my mind. The sensation was so liberating, so vivid, that in that very moment, I knew I would find a way to express myself through music. The idea of bringing that celestial chorus to life filled me with joy. It was a quiet, powerful revelation.

*From that point on, I stopped trying to simply replicate my teachers' interpretations.
I began to trust the voice within—what I truly felt and imagined.*

At the time, I couldn't have known how long or demanding this journey would be. But that didn't matter. I had found something essential: the ability to touch a single note and express the sound of that ethereal choir I carried within.

What followed was a 30-year journey of exploration—full of moments of deep frustration, but also profound inspiration. It was during this period that I discovered a passion so sustaining, so real, that it would carry me through every challenge to come.

The seed of what would become The PianoWell System was planted in those early years—not through a single insight, but through intuition, curiosity, and a growing body of research. I recorded nearly every lesson I had with my teachers and spent countless hours analyzing them. Ideas and patterns began emerging—while practicing, walking, eating, even sleeping. New insights would surface constantly, often in the quiet moments between things.

I became fascinated by watching other pianists, particularly those with light, effortless technique and expressive freedom. I was especially drawn to the International Tchaikovsky Competition, where the world's finest pianists would gather every four years to perform extended recitals. But my most powerful inspirations came after my own lessons. The feedback from my teachers would unfold over time, often becoming clearer days later, eventually transforming into methodical, repeatable insights. During my studies at the Moscow Conservatory, I was deeply inspired by Professor Pavel Nersessian. I recorded all of his performances and listened to them at night, trying to understand how he created that lyrical tone, the smooth phrasing, and subtle shading.

There were no explicit answers—only sound, and my relentless desire to decode its mystery.

Eventually, I began to see how every new insight was part of a larger whole. What once seemed like isolated discoveries revealed themselves to be pieces of a deeply interconnected system. Most importantly, I realized that this system could be applied universally—to any piece, at any stage of learning. It wasn't just a more efficient way to practice; it was a path from something as simple as touching a note with intention to performing with confidence, freedom, and deep expression.

At the Conservatory, I had access to an extraordinary library filled with works on piano technique by great Russian pianists and pedagogues of the 20th century. As I read, I came to understand that the challenges I faced had existed for generations. Occasionally, a devoted teacher or artist would attempt a new approach. Yet even the most thoughtful authors acknowledged the same truth: there is no final answer, and the process of discovery never ends.

TWILIGHT

There were times when it took nearly a year of experimenting and analysis to truly master a single piece. To my teachers, this made me appear slow—or even lazy. I often had to skip lessons, exams, or concerts, pretending to be unwell just to buy myself more time to study on my own terms.

In the middle of my conservatory studies, at the age of twenty-four, everything came to a breaking point. The pressure from my ongoing research, the emotional weight of not earning top grades, and personal anxieties began to take their toll. One day, I felt a strange and unfamiliar sensation in both of my hands: subtle tingling, electric spasms that traveled through my elbow, wrist, and little finger. My fourth and fifth fingers curled inward and stopped responding. I even lost coordination in my thumb.

At first, I thought it was tendinitis—something I had experienced before. I tried all the familiar remedies: medication, massage, rest. But nothing helped. My symptoms worsened until I couldn't write, type, or even press a number on my phone. I had to teach myself to use a pencil with my toes—or hold it between my teeth—just to perform the most basic tasks.

That was the moment everything stopped.

My passion for playing, for becoming a pianist, and for continuing my research seemed to slowly fade away. I took a sabbatical year. The idea that my hands might never function again was too overwhelming to face. I didn't want a diagnosis—I simply turned away from the reality in front of me. I was in denial.

Months passed without touching a computer or piano. Gradually, the symptoms began to ease. A year later, I returned to the conservatory to complete my final exams. I knew I had to delay playing for as long as possible, so I prepared my entire program solely in my mind. I skipped lessons and stayed away from the piano. I showed up only a few days before the exam to meet with my professor and confirm the tempo for the first movement of Rachmaninoff's Second Concerto.

On the day of the exam, I had a 45-minute program to perform—and just two days of physical practice behind me. I was given ten minutes to warm up backstage. For the first time, I allowed myself to play parts of the program in full tempo. Then, I walked onto the stage.

Bach. Beethoven. Rachmaninoff. I played the final c-minor chord, bowed, and walked off stage.

I had done it.

I never stopped. I didn't falter in the technical passages. I had no memory slips. After twenty years of study, I had finally graduated.

On the way home, I felt a kind of joy and profound fulfillment I hadn't known in years. My hands were pain-free. I smiled so brightly it felt like I could have lit up the streets of Moscow. That day, I knew with certainty: my method of mindful practice and carefully designed hand motion truly worked.

DAWN

Five years later, I was still living with the same condition—unable to play the piano or use a laptop. Eventually, I underwent two painful diagnostic procedures, where needles were inserted into my spine and forearms while the data was monitored in real time on a computer screen. The results confirmed what I had long feared: I had developed focal hand dystonia, a neurological disorder that can affect pianists who practice under prolonged stress and a fear of rejection. The only advice I received from doctors was to eliminate stress from my life.

*There was, they said, no known cure at that time.
But something within me could not fully accept that verdict. I simply couldn't give up.*

With no choice but to step away from performance, I turned inward—toward something deeper. I turned to God. At the time, I was living in Florida, where I began attending a gospel church. I sang, danced, and allowed others to pray for me. What followed was a mystical and profoundly healing experience—one of spiritual connection, love, and acceptance. As one of the few white people in the congregation, I was welcomed into a community whose depth of faith and joy touched me in ways I had never known.

Soon after, I moved to Singapore, where I found another community—people who listened with compassion, shared their stories, prayed together, and lifted their voices in song alongside mine. I opened up about my trauma. In return, they offered kindness, understanding, support, and a quiet, sustaining love.

A year later, in 2013, I returned to the piano—with more gentleness, and without fear. I touched the keys with love. But whenever I turned back to classical pieces, the old symptoms would creep in again. Then, something shifted.

I decided to set aside the classical repertoire and began playing simple, devotional music—music written to praise God. To my surprise, this music didn't trigger the old trauma. I could play for fifteen seconds at a time, completely free from tingling or tension. Before and after each session, I thanked God. I began to feel peace, joy, and confidence again.

DAWN

After seven years with dystonia and five years away from the piano, something unexpected happened. In 2014, I launched a YouTube channel—The Art of Piano Technique—and uploaded my first video. One month later, I returned to classical music. But this time, I did it differently. I learned two new pieces each month, never returning to the old repertoire that might retrigger past sensations. I rebuilt everything. I recorded scales, arpeggios, chords, and octaves.

*I even learned the most difficult pieces I had ever encountered—
Chopin's Etude No. 1, 2, 4, 18, 22, 23
Liszt's La Campanella, Hungarian Rhapsody No.2...
I learned over 100 new pieces, many in just ten days each.*

Although focal dystonia is still mildly present, it no longer affects my piano playing. At times, I still notice symptoms after extended laptop use—especially when accompanied by anxiety—but I now understand their source and know how to respond with care and awareness. When I feel it returning, I simply pause, shift my focus, and reconnect with the world around me.

I also began teaching students online. Through this, I refined my method and developed a scaffolding approach—breaking the learning process into manageable steps, building understanding layer by layer, and gradually guiding each student toward independence and mastery.

My deepest passion now is to share everything I've learned—to help pianists overcome their own struggles, especially those facing pain or discouragement. If you follow the steps in this course with care and patience, joining our group lessons—I sincerely believe it can help you. And if you've experienced something similar, it would bring me great joy to connect and support you on your own path to healing and expression.