

JEWISH WOMEN INTERNATIONAL

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# Jewish Woman

MAGAZINE

(Classically)

# MODERN

Pianist  
Simone  
Dinnerstein

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SIMONE DINNERSTEIN

**A**s acclaimed classical musicians go, Simone Dinnerstein is (if you'll pardon the pun) uniquely self-composed. She began piano lessons at age 7—late for a prodigy; at just 18, she left Juilliard for London to study with Maria Curcio and live with Jeremy Greensmith (famed instructor and future husband, respectively, both of whom she'd met while in high school three years before). Yet, in her 20s—her Juilliard training completed, her artistic reputation on the rise—Dinnerstein's career seemed stuck at the starting gate. Her often-contemporary interpretations of classical works, which distinguished her among young artists, were also holding her back. So she took another detour, this time with a self-produced recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* that the music industry could not ignore. Now 35, Dinnerstein is represented by IMG Artists, recording with Telarc International, performing worldwide—and proving to the tradition-steeped classical world that an artist can follow her own path and still arrive.

Your music studies began not at your parents' urging but at your own request. What inspired you to ask for piano lessons?

When I was 4 years old, we were living in Rome, where my father [painter Simon Dinnerstein] was a fellow at the American Academy. I was taking ballet classes, and they had a pianist who would play Chopin; that was where I first heard the piano. I asked my parents for lessons, but we didn't have a piano. One of the composers at the Academy advised that I take recorder lessons, which I did. My parents told me that when I moved back to Brooklyn, my grandmother would give me her piano and I could start taking lessons then.

Has your father's art influenced the way you approach music?

Growing up in a household where being an artist was a very well-respected thing to be—a serious profession—I think that gave me a different set of values than if my parents had been a different sort of professional. We used to travel a lot when I was a kid, always to see a particular museum or painting. I think that looking at art with my father influenced me in terms of observing art and understanding the



LISA-MARIE MAZZUCCO

details of what I was seeing. He used to have me copy what we were seeing in sketchbooks. There's a difference between viewing a painting and really looking at the details, the composition of it and the history surrounding the artist... It's the same thing with music—you're bringing out the colors of the sounds, thinking about the world of the composer... there are a lot of parallels to be drawn there.

You've said before that you like making music for its own sake. Do you feel any ambivalence about performing?

I have very mixed feelings about the aspect of performing that has to do with showing off, being part of a spectacle. I have played concerts where the repertoire is about that, and it can be very exciting, but I just don't relate to it. But going to concerts myself—those that were personally meaningful to me in an introspective way—has made me understand why concerts are important; when I perform, I think about how I'm playing to connect with the audience in that way.

Experienced ears will form their own opinions, but can—or should—musical interpretations be explained to the uninitiated?

This goes with the whole notion that you need to know about classical music to appreciate it. I don't necessarily agree with that. I enjoy listening to early Baroque and Renaissance, but I don't really know what I'm listening to. What I respond to is the freshness and honesty of the playing when I hear it, and the beauty of the music, and I just enjoy it without being a critical listener. It's really nice to listen to music with open ears, and that's a hard thing to do if you're a musician listening to music that you've played or you know.

Has becoming a parent changed the way you perform?

There has been a real transition, since before I had my son to after, from thinking of myself as a student to thinking of myself as an artist. I've matured a lot. It was a kind of rite of passage. It's okay for me now to make a real decision about what kind of musician I am; I feel like I'm allowed to do that now that I'm a mother. It made me more decisive about my musical ideas.

—Danielle Cantor



Find more from JW's interview with Simone Dinnerstein at [jwmag.org](http://jwmag.org).