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The Soloist

SIMONE DINNERSTEIN ISN'T AFRAID of a tough crowd. The pianist played the first-ever classical music concert in a Louisiana state prison (with her then 3-month-old son in tow). After that, tackling the *Goldberg Variations* and landing atop the Billboard classical charts—as the 35-year-old Brooklyn resident did last year—was a piece of cake. The success of her fresh and vital interpretation of Bach was all the sweeter for being so unlikely, given the glut of *Goldbergs* (more than 170 versions on Amazon) and the project's DIY nature: Dinnerstein self-financed the CD and booked her own concert at Carnegie Hall.

Her new album is another revelation. On *The Berlin Concert* (Telarc), recorded at the storied Berlin Philharmonie concert hall, Dinnerstein digs deep into the syncopated rhythms of Beethoven's last piano sonata—as if it were a ragtime tune improvised in a smoke-filled speakeasy long after 1822. She pairs it with a world premiere by composer Philip Lasser that recasts a Bach chorale in a dozen styles: romantic, impressionistic, minimalist, jazzy...nothing you'd expect to find in a Lutheran church piece. While Berlin's notoriously fickle audiences might faze even the most seasoned performer, Dinnerstein was blissfully in the dark. "I had my eyes closed most of the time," she says. "I hear better that way." —JORGE MORALES



Pianist Simone Dinnerstein

LISA-MARIE MAZZUCCO