

The Philadelphia Inquirer

Reviews of new pop, blues, jazz and classical releases

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Classical:

BACH

"Partitas No. 3-6" Jeremy Denk, piano (Azica, 3 1/2 stars)

"Keyboard Concertos Nos. 1 and 5; English Suite No. 3 and others" Kammerorchester Staatskapelle Berlin, **Simone Dinnerstein**, piano (Sony, 4 stars)

"French Suites Nos. 1-6 plus Italian Concerto" Andras Schiff, piano (Euroarts, DVD, 3 1/2 stars)

J.S. Bach has been winning popularity contests anew - partly because some of the best pianists, young and not-so-young, have ongoing devotion to the music. Andras Schiff is now a Bach elder statesman, and the newfound Beethovenian edge in his performances is indeed present here - even if, amid all his artistry, you could wish for a greater sense of discovery in his performances.

Jeremy Denk's Bach has lost some of the metallic edge of his performances in years past, but in its place is an unsentimental, intelligent ebullience that works much better. His interest in the music's structure sometimes means that the drama of certain passages - the opening of "Partita No. 6," for example - is almost startlingly downplayed. Then you realize that drama is only the music's most superficial element.

Simone Dinnerstein's Sony Classical debut follows familiar patterns: A catchy title ("A Strange Beauty") and high-fashion photos of the stylish pianist. Behind that, as ever, are high-integrity performances of Bach that have more authority than ever. As engaging as the concertos are, the best moments are in the "English Suite No. 3," in which she digs deep into the musical substance and knows with etched-in-granite certainty exactly how each phrase should go.