

## Lyrical and Intimate

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By GARY DEMUTH



For the title of her latest album, classical pianist Simone Dinnerstein was inspired by a line from a 1967 poem by Philip Larkin entitled "The Trees":

"The trees are coming into leaf like something almost being said."

For Dinnerstein, "Something Almost Being Said" was a perfect description of her recordings of Bach's "Partitas Nos. 1 and 2" and Schubert's "Four Impromptus, Op. 90."

"I picked Bach and Schubert pieces that related to each other and were very intimate pieces of music -- it's almost like they're written for voice," she said. "They're very personal, and that line described what I was going for."

Since her first recording in 2007 of Bach's "Goldberg Variations," Dinnerstein, 39, a New York City native and graduate of the Juilliard School, has been praised by critics and audiences for her passionate interpretations of Bach, Beethoven, Schubert and other classical composers.

Dinnerstein will be in concert Jan. 27 at the Stiefel Theatre for the Performing Arts, 151 S. Santa Fe. Dinnerstein has received worldwide acclaim as a classical pianist, but the piano wasn't her first love. As a small child, she planned to be a ballet dancer.

"I was five years old and in a ballet class," she said. "The pianist was playing Chopin, and I fell in love with the piano. So I asked my parents for piano lessons."

The arts were important

Her parents always were supportive of her artistic ambitions, Dinnerstein said. Her father Simon is a professional painter, and her mother is a teacher.

"The arts are extremely important to my parents, and it was important that I choose a life in the arts as well as have a good education," Dinnerstein said. "They could tell I had a commitment to playing piano." Dinnerstein said she was fortunate to have great piano teachers while growing up, beginning with Solomon Mikowsky at the Manhattan School of Music.

"He taught me during my formative years from 9 to 16," she said. "When I was young, I was really emotional in my playing to the point where it was schmaltsy. He let me do that, knowing I was going to grow up."

She also studied in London with Italian classical pianist Maria Curcio and with American concert pianist Peter Serkin at the famed Juilliard School in New York City.

After graduating from Juilliard in 1996, Dinnerstein embarked on the "typical freelance musician's life" of entering piano competitions, playing with orchestras and small ensembles and teaching piano lessons.

A surprise best-seller

In 2007, she raised funds to independently record a CD of Bach's "Goldberg Variations," a composition she called "probably the greatest piece of music written for the keyboard."

"I wanted to start out at the top," she said. "Bach's my favorite composer, my favorite to play and listen to, but the most difficult to perform."

What Dinnerstein didn't expect was a best-seller. In its first week of commercial release, her CD hit No. 1 on the Billboard classical music sales chart and was named a "Best of 2007" by the New York Times and the New Yorker.

"I was surprised it became a success," she said. "It seemed to strike a chord in people."

The success of that CD led to a contract with Sony Classical. Dinnerstein's first release through Sony, 2011's "Bach: A Strange Beauty," also was a best-seller. Her second Sony release, "Something Almost Being Said," is being released Jan. 31.

Dinnerstein's performing career also has taken off during the last few years. She's played at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., the Vienna Konzerthaus, London's Wigmore Hall and the Lincoln Center Mostly Mozart Festival in New York City, as well as in Paris, Cologne, Copenhagen, Rome and Lisbon.

She's also been profiled on "CBS Sunday Morning," "NPR's Morning Edition," Minnesota Public Radio, The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Time magazine and the Sunday (London) Times Magazine.

In prisons and schools

Additionally, Dinnerstein performs throughout the U.S. for the Piatigorsky Foundation, an organization dedicated to bringing classical music to nontraditional locations. Dinnerstein has given concerts at nursing homes, schools, community centers and at women's prisons in Louisiana and Maryland.

"Both (prisons) were wonderful experiences," she said. "People had very emotional, immediate reactions to the music. It was very moving and changes preconceptions of your audience."

Dinnerstein also founded Neighborhood Classics, a concert series given in New York City public schools. "My husband teaches fifth grade in Brooklyn, so we started the program there," she said. "I invite musicians I admire to donate their time and come play in the schools. It's a wonderful environment to hear a concert and is also a fundraiser for the schools."

#### Growth for the audience

Dinnerstein said she hopes the music she plays has meaning for her audiences.

"My concerts are lyrical and intimate, and it's important the music draws you in," she said. "People look to art for spiritual strength, so I hope when you leave my concert, you feel something has been added to your life."

<http://www.salina.com/entertainment/story/Simone-Dinnerstein-1-13>