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Simone Dinnerstein review: Bach CD is magnificent

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By Joshua Kosman



The title of pianist Simone Dinnerstein's magnificent new Bach CD, due for release this week, seems a little odd at first glance (the phrase is taken from a nice maxim by Sir Francis Bacon). But it turns out to be entirely apt. In her performances of two keyboard concertos and a handful of solo works, Dinnerstein brings out the luminous, off-kilter splendor of this music in a way that is both fearless and sly. On the one hand, she lays great emphasis on nearly everything in the score, favoring intense sonorities and emphatic rhythms as if to make sure that no one stops listening for a second. Yet at the same time, there's an almost casual wisdom in her phrasing that can catch you off guard. The effect is like a conversation with someone who sits too close and fixes you with an unblinking stare, while revealing truths you'd never suspected; it's unnerving and mesmerizing all at once. This works best in slow, emotionally probing music like the Largo of the F Minor Concerto or the Sarabande of the Third English Suite (the faster movements can sometimes sound blurry and over-pedaled). And at the end comes "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" in Myra Hess' transcription - a burst of unadorned but profound bliss.

BACH: A STRANGE BEAUTY
SIMONE DINNERSTEIN SONY CLASSICAL
\$15.99

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