

## Dinnerstein, orchestra revel in Ravel

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By Rob Hubbard

When a classical musician lands an album on the Billboard 200 - thus sharing chart space with pop, rock and hip-hop artists - it's usually some crossover effort that's more pop than classical. But pianist Simone Dinnerstein did it earlier this year with an album full of J.S. Bach, racking up big sales for music written almost three centuries ago.

However, Dinnerstein clearly doesn't want to be pigeonholed as a Bach specialist, so she's launched something of a Ravel rebellion. She's performing Maurice Ravel's Piano Concerto in G with Osmo Vanska and the Minnesota Orchestra this weekend, exploring 20th-century terrain studded with jazz harmonies and rhythms. On Thursday morning, hers was a Ravel of romance and reverie, blithe bounce and breathtaking beauty.

But the concert was a forum for far more than Dinnerstein's increasingly versatile talents. Ravel was also one of history's great orchestral minds, and Vanska and the orchestra did exceptional things with his concerto before launching into a captivating, full-voiced interpretation of Richard Strauss' colossus of a tone poem, "Ein Heldenleben," marked by strong solos.

An exquisitely evocative concert-opening rendition of Darius Milhaud's "Creation of the World" invited the audience inside the sound of the "jazz age."

It permeated that work and bubbled to the surface in the ensuing Ravel concerto, which opened with admirable abandon, Dinnerstein thundering up and down the keyboard with explosive runs.

But the second movement was the standout, starting with a contemplative solo piano passage that was pure poetry in Dinnerstein's hands. Sounding at once as lushly romantic as Claude Debussy and as stark and simple as Erik Satie, it was a gorgeous performance that made the fleet finale almost seem an anticlimax.

This program also serves as a coming-out party for the Minnesota Orchestra's new concertmaster, Erin Keefe. Yes, she played on last week's season-opening concerts, but the mercurial violin solos of "Ein Heldenleben" demand radical mood shifts that Keefe pulled off impressively. Hers were among many exceptional solos in a performance that could very well be looked back upon as one of the season's best.

Who: The Minnesota Orchestra with conductor Osmo Vanska and pianist Simone Dinnerstein

What: Works by Darius Milhaud, Maurice Ravel and Richard Strauss

When: 8 p.m. Saturday

Where: Orchestra Hall, 1111 Nicollet Mall, Minneapolis

Tickets: \$84-\$22, available at 612-371-5656 or minnesotaorchestra.org

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