



Simone Dinnerstein: "Something Almost Being Said"

Transcript for: Simone Dinnerstein: "Something Almost Being Said"

December 22, 2011

MS. DIANE REHM

11:06:56

Thanks for joining us. I'm Diane Rehm. By the time she turned 30, classical pianist Simone Dinnerstein, had nearly given up on her dream of becoming a top concert musician. But after learning she was expecting her first child, she set out to master Johann Sebastian Bach's Goldberg variations, a self-financed recording led to a sold-out concert at Carnegie Hall and a debut album that soared to the top of the U.S. classical charts.

MS. DIANE REHM

11:07:37

Her next two albums also reached number one. Simone Dinnerstein joins me in the studio to talk about her forthcoming album titled "Something Almost Being Said: The Music of Bach and Schubert" and her unlikely rise to the pinnacle of the classical music world. Good morning, and it's so good to have you here.

MS. SIMONE DINNERSTEIN

11:08:05

Thank you, it's good to be here.

REHM

11:08:08

Tell me about your dream from childhood.

DINNERSTEIN

11:08:15

Well, I guess it started off right when I started having piano lessons when I was seven and I fell in love with the instrument and felt the most at home playing it, more at home than anything else that I did. And I wanted to become a concert pianist so in the beginning, that was very much shaped by movies and things like that, you know, and so I had this idea of what it was to be a concert pianist, which meant touring and playing in all the big concert halls and wearing gowns and that kind of thing.

REHM

11:08:56

Do you remember which movies those were that sort of got you?

DINNERSTEIN

11:09:03

Yeah they were rather dark films actually. I remember the one that made the biggest impression on me, which I must have been a young teenager when I saw, was "The Red Shoes" and I always thought that I would have to choose between, you know, love and my career. You know, it's all very romanticized in movies. I guess another movie that I remember was "The Seventh Veil"...

REHM

11:09:30

Oh, yes.

DINNERSTEIN

11:09:31

...and also, "A Star is Born."

REHM

11:09:36

So in each of those, there is a single-minded pursuit. How did your parents feel about that as you were very young?

DINNERSTEIN

11:09:51

Well I'm the daughter of an artist. My father's a painter so he has always been very single-minded himself and my mother, who was a teacher, was always very supportive of him so they were both really behind me and they understood what I wanted to do. At the same time, I was quite good at school and interested in lots of other things and I think my mother always wanted me to try to broaden myself and not, you know, pigeon-hole myself into being a musician.

DINNERSTEIN

11:10:25

I think she, in particular, was very concerned that I was going to have a very painful life and that I was going to experience lots of rejection and hardship, which of course I did.

REHM

11:10:40

You did.

DINNERSTEIN

11:10:40

Yeah.

REHM

11:10:41

And the title of your new album "Something Almost Being Said," let's hear a little of the rondo from Bach's "Partita No. 2 in C Minor".

REHM

11:11:44

And of course, rather than the rondo from "Bach's Partita No 2," that is the Schubert, but talk about the title of this album, "Something Almost Being Said."

DINNERSTEIN

11:12:03

Well, the title comes from a wonderful poem by Philip Larkin called "The Trees" and in this poem, he writes that -- it starts off the poem by saying the trees are coming into leaf like something almost being said. And to me, that really evokes the feeling of this music which feels like at any moment it could turn into speech.

REHM

11:12:27

Can you read that poem for us?

DINNERSTEIN

11:12:30

The whole poem?

REHM

11:12:31

Yes.

DINNERSTEIN

11:12:31

Oh, my gosh, right. "The trees are coming into leaf like something almost being said. The recent buds relax and spread. Their greenness is a kind of grief. Is it that they're born again and we grow old? No, they die, too. Their yearly trick of looking new is written down in rings of grain. Yet still, the unresting castles thresh in full-grown thickness every May. Last year is dead, they seem to say. Begin afresh, afresh, afresh."

REHM

11:13:10

I love that. And it really inspired you?

DINNERSTEIN

11:13:14

Well, to be quite honest, I found the poem after I did the recording, but I feel that those are very linked and it's a very musical poem and it's very hard to describe music in words. And I think that's the point of music that it doesn't need words, but at the same time, I felt that the music that I recorded for this album, which is Schubert's "Impromptus Opus 90" and the first two partitas by Bach are particularly spoken pieces of music.

REHM

11:13:47

Let's now hear that Bach partita.

REHM

11:14:30

It is a conversation?

DINNERSTEIN

11:14:32

It is definitely between the two voices, the right hand and the left hand and it's so bubbly and it's so joyful. It just feels like at any moment somebody is going to start talking, you know. And I don't know what they would say exactly and that's also what drew me to the line "Something Almost Being Said" because it's like it's almost speech. It's almost an idea. It's almost a feeling, but you can't quite get your hands on it.

REHM

11:15:17

Why do you think that music of both Bach and Schubert appeals to you so especially?

DINNERSTEIN

11:15:30

Well, I've always thought there was a relationship between those two composers. Their music is very vocal. I think that they felt most comfortable writing for the voice and as a pianist, I always want to make the piano sing. I want the piano not to sound percussive. I want it to sound lyrical and so the lyricism that is in their writing really, really speaks to me. And also this music is incredibly intimate, the particular pieces that I chose for this CD of Schubert and Bach.

DINNERSTEIN

11:16:07

Schubert's music tends to always be intimate, I think. Bach's music can vary in that respect, but these pieces feel like they're written to be played in a room and I really like music like that.

REHM

11:16:22

And of course, you did play in a number of rooms, did you not?

DINNERSTEIN

11:16:29

Yes. Are you talking about the film?

REHM

11:16:32

I'm talking about early on and the notion that it was difficult for you to gain the kind of audience you really wanted and so you played for very small groups. You played in schools. You played in prison.

DINNERSTEIN

11:16:56

Yes. I did many concerts and I still do play a lot of concerts in smaller spaces. I think that classical music can be very formal and the audience can often feel very distanced from the performer and that kind of formality is something that I like to move past and make it a warmer experience. I personally like concerts where I'm sitting there and I feel close to the performer.

DINNERSTEIN

11:17:27

And so if you play in a school auditorium or you perform in a library or something like that where people feel comfortable, it just brings everybody in.

REHM

11:17:39

And bringing everybody in when you're playing for young children, for example, playing classical music for young children, and perhaps that might be their first introduction to classical music, you can feel the reaction of that audience.

Can you not?

DINNERSTEIN

11:18:05

Very much, yes. I think that children are very honest in their reaction and so it's always interesting to play for children and to see what they respond to and what they don't respond to. I've actually found it quite fascinating that children love very avant-garde contemporary music. They always love it whenever I play something that's really crazy. And I think that they just are more open to new sounds.

REHM

11:18:32

Simone Dinnerstein, she's a world-renown concert pianist whose forthcoming album is title "Something Almost Being Said."

REHM

11:20:04

And welcome back. Simone Dinnerstein is with me. She is a classical pianist. Her latest album titled "Something Almost Being Said: Music of Bach and Schubert." Simone, you said that you always wanted to be a classical pianist and then you finally went to study at Julliard. What happened?

DINNERSTEIN

11:20:39

Well, I started at Julliard after high school and I had already met a piano teacher in London named Maria Curcio who had been a pupil of the great Artur Schnabel. And I had sort of fallen in love with her and wanted to study with her but my parents thought -- and they were probably right -- that I should get a degree, a college degree so I went Julliard. And I had also already met my not-yet husband who was in England too. So I went to Julliard for two years and then I just couldn't take it anymore.

REHM

11:21:12

You just dropped out.

DINNERSTEIN

11:21:13

And I dropped out.

REHM

11:21:14

What was it you couldn't take anymore?

DINNERSTEIN

11:21:17

Well, I couldn't take being away from my husband and from my piano teacher in London who I had just such strong feelings for. And so I moved to London and studied with her for three years. And it was really a transformative experience for me. She came from a very different tradition of piano playing and of thinking about music that was from sort of prewar sensibility.

REHM

11:21:45

How would you describe that?

DINNERSTEIN

11:21:48

Well, I think that nowadays pianists are more interested in a sort of thicker sound that can really project in a big hall, like be more forceful, more sort of arm heavy. And her sound was very translucent. You always felt like you could hear light coming through the sound. And she also didn't make a distinction between technique -- the technique of playing and the music that you played. So it was a very organic approach to music. It was being primarily a musician and being a pianist was just the vehicle for being a musician.

REHM

11:22:27

Let's hear now the Bach Partita Number 1 in B flat major from Simone Dinnerstein's new album "Something Almost Being Said."

REHM

11:23:19

I can hear what you're talking about, the light coming through.

DINNERSTEIN

11:23:27

I'm glad you can hear that. It's very important to me that I've learned so much from Maria about that sound.

REHM

11:23:36

How does -- how do you create that notion of light coming through?

DINNERSTEIN

11:23:47

Oh, it's so complicated but it's really about clarity and every line having clarity. As a pianist you're playing at least two different voices at the same time. In this particular thing that we're listening to right now there are three voices and two of them are played by the left hand, which is bouncing over the right hand back and forth, you know. So you want every sound to be clear but not to be forced. And so it's a question of every note having a kind of center to the sound, a core to the sound and yet not being too thick so that you can hear sort of the space between the notes.

REHM

11:24:49

How does hand position play into all that?

DINNERSTEIN

11:24:55

You know a lot about piano.

REHM

11:24:57

Well, I have watched my son and my daughter...

DINNERSTEIN

11:25:02

Okay.

REHM

11:25:02

...but tell me about that.

DINNERSTEIN

11:25:03

Well, actually Maria had very particular views about hand position. And I actually changed my hand position quite radically when I studied with her. I used to play before that with a very flat hand and I used to lift my fingers very high. And she wanted me to play as if I had a small orange under my hand, so that it was very circular in a way. And she wanted my knuckles to be very high. And she had distinct ideas about the separation of every part of your hand to your wrist to your arm to your shoulder to your back and being able to differentiate which part of your body you were using to produce a sound.

REHM

11:25:48

And that really does change the sound...

DINNERSTEIN

11:25:52

Very much so.

REHM

11:25:53

...that comes forward.

DINNERSTEIN

11:25:55

If you're propelling the sound from arm weight that's going to sound very different than if you're propelling the sound from your fingers and it's being supported by your arm. So, yeah, it's hard to explain on radio I guess.

REHM

11:26:07

No, no. I don't think so. I think what you're saying makes great sense. We have a caller in Leonardtown, Md. I hope our phones will work. Let's go to Amy. Good morning to you.

AMY

11:26:28

Hello. It's nice to hear Ms. Dinnerstein. And my question is a little bit about -- well, I just wondered if she would comment on her collaborative work. I've heard her CDs with Zuill Bailey the cellist and I'm thinking that her love of the conversational style of the Bach music might also go along with her collaborative work with him because those two voices working together are kind of like a conversation. So I'll take my comment off the air.

REHM

11:27:02

Thanks for calling, Amy.

DINNERSTEIN

11:27:04

Well, yes, I did do a tremendous amount of chamber music playing since I was little and very much enjoyed playing with Zuill Bailey the cellist. And we did do a couple of recordings together. So I think that studying so much chamber music and working with other musicians is kind of a very clear way of showing a pianist that there are lots of different voices with different timbers. And working with musicians that play other instruments is always a real learning experience for me because then when I go back to playing by myself I can think about how that sounded.

DINNERSTEIN

11:27:42

And, as I said, as a pianist I'm always playing at least two voices. And they often have different kinds of sounds, each hand or each voice. And if I think oh this part would be nice to sound like a cello or this part could be like an oboe it's great if I just played with somebody who played that instrument.

REHM

11:28:01

And how long did you do that?

DINNERSTEIN

11:28:05

Well, I started playing chamber music when I was about ten or eleven years old. And Zuill and I worked together for quite a long time, over ten years.

REHM

11:28:15

When and why did you turn your focus to the Goldberg Variations?

DINNERSTEIN

11:28:23

Well, I learned the Goldberg Variations in I think it was 2001. And that was kind of a combination of preparing for a debut recital that I had in Philadelphia. And also because I was pregnant and I wanted to learn a piece of music that I felt would be a significant work to learn during my pregnancy and for my son to hear.

REHM

11:28:53

Ah, for your son to hear.

DINNERSTEIN

11:28:55

Yeah.

REHM

11:28:57

Do you think he did indeed hear it?

DINNERSTEIN

11:28:59

Oh, yes, I think so, without a doubt.

REHM

11:29:02

And why that particular piece?

DINNERSTEIN

11:29:08

Well, I think that's probably one of the greatest pieces of music ever written let alone for the keyboard. And it was a piece that I never felt ready to learn before. But knowing that I was going to be a mother I felt that I was ready. I was mature enough.

REHM

11:29:25

That somehow the onset of motherhood was going to create something new.

DINNERSTEIN

11:29:35

Yes. I felt that it was giving me new authority. That I felt that now that I was going to be responsible for a child and helping to shape how that child thought about the world that it was about time that I took responsibility for my music as well.

REHM

11:30:33

The first recording of this you heard was Glenn Gould?

DINNERSTEIN

11:30:38

Yes, I heard his second recording of it which he made in 1981. And I just stopped in my tracks. I never had heard anything like that before. So it was a very important moment for me hearing that work. And then I became very interested in the piece and I collected many recordings of it over the years.

REHM

11:31:01

And then how long did it take you to accomplish it?

DINNERSTEIN

11:31:09

Well, I spent my pregnancy learning it. And then it took quite a while before I felt comfortable performing it. I performed it a lot in different places but it's a piece that really you just keep on growing with. And I'm still, you know, learning so much about it as I perform it. And I've -- last year I did a tour with it and it just keeps on growing and changing and it's that kind of piece.

REHM

11:31:36

Give me a sense of how a piece like that changes for you as you go along, as you repeat the performance. Do you hear something new? Do you perceive a new rhythm? Do you feel a new insight?

DINNERSTEIN

11:31:59

Well this is a piece of music that takes about 80 minutes to play. It's a huge architecture. And it's like this very complicated tapestry and that there are many, many voices and they're all different patterns. And each variation is written in a particularly different kind of style. And so how you balance one variation to another can really change. How you think they relate to each other. How an earlier variation relates to a later variation. Where you think the summit of the piece is, you know, where the low points are.

DINNERSTEIN

11:32:37

And also being a pianist I'm always performing it on different instruments in different halls. And playing on a different kind of piano can really change the sound of it. And sometimes that can be quite interesting in that you play on a piano that brings out a quality in it that you just didn't hear before. So it's kind of being open to the fact that every night it will be a different experience.

REHM

11:33:03

Simone Dinnerstein and you're listening to "The Diane Rehm Show." Let's take a caller in Aurora, Ill. Good morning, Mark.

MARK

11:33:17

Good morning and Merry Christmas to both of you.

REHM

11:33:19

Merry Christmas, sir.

MARK

11:33:19

I'm very appreciative of this nuanced discussion of music and how it is played. This is radio that we don't usually get. And I wanted to ask if -- how would Simone express the reconciliation that she's apparently had that the "Red Shoes" didn't offer. There was another movie -- and I believe it was called "The Piano," in which -- well, as the husband in the movie put it, your wings just needed to be clipped. And I won't say on the air how he clipped her wings because it wasn't pretty.

DINNERSTEIN

11:34:01

Wasn't nice.

MARK

11:34:01

If you've seen the movie you know and it's awful...

REHM

11:34:05

Yes, yes.

MARK

11:34:06

..and the piano ends up going into the water.

REHM

11:34:08

Yes.

MARK

11:34:08

But anyway, lots of anger associated with that and so forth. But I've known musicians where musicianship itself put a considerable strain on the marriage or attitudes toward musicianship. And I wondered if you could tell us how your experience has been different from the movies that I'm referring to.

DINNERSTEIN

11:34:30

Well, I did see "The Piano" which I thought was a great film...

REHM

11:34:34

Fantastic, yes.

DINNERSTEIN

11:34:35

...and incredible performance, too. Well, I think -- I met my husband when I was quite young. I was 15 when we met and so he saw me through my romanticized views. You know, in the beginning that's kind of what I thought. I thought I had to be anguished all the time. And that is not a good recipe for marriage. So what I realized is that I'm one person when I play and when I'm on the road and performing. And I'm another person when I'm at home and I'm married and a mother.

DINNERSTEIN

11:35:12

And so when I'm at home I try to be normal and not overreact to things, not be too dramatic. But when I'm performing and I'm alone and I'm on the road I allow myself to feel an artist -- to feel like an artist and to respond to life that way.

REHM

11:35:36

What does that mean?

DINNERSTEIN

11:35:38

Well, I think that being a musician, especially maybe being a female musicians, you have to be very sensitive. You're extremely -- you can't help it. That's what makes you interpret anything, you know, and being -- be artistic, have a reaction. But at the same time you have to have a very tough skin and be very, very sure of yourself and believe in yourself. So it's a combination of being extremely vulnerable and extremely invulnerable -- invulnerable. I cannot think of the right word. But that is how you are as an artist.

DINNERSTEIN

11:36:19

And I think that it's -- it involves having extreme ups and downs. And it's very hard to live with somebody who's like that. So, you know, you have to be on an even keel when you're at home.

REHM

11:36:30

But, you know, one thing that made me -- my eyebrows go up, as you said, playing on different pianos. You had not reached that point of sensitivity where you are insisting on traveling with your own piano.

DINNERSTEIN

11:36:51

Well, I have actually sometimes traveled with a piano. And it is an incredibly expensive thing to do.

REHM

11:36:57

Of course.

DINNERSTEIN

11:36:58

Very few people can do that. And the other thing is that piano's are temperamental. So even if you travel with one piano it will act up and it will be different in a different place. And it worries me, like, it'll be dropped or, you know, something will happen to it. So what I am very particular about is trying to have whatever piano I perform on be prepared by a piano technician with me during the rehearsal, to suit how I play. And there are lots of things they can do to change an instrument.

REHM

11:37:33

And when we come back, there is a question waiting about exactly that, how you prepare the piano. Simone Dinnerstein. Short break, right back.

REHM

11:40:05

And in the midst of these beautiful recordings, we have a number of questions about the instrument itself. This one coming from Mike here in Washington, D.C. Good morning, your question for Simone Dinnerstein, Mike.

MIKE

11:40:25

Yes, and thank you, Diane, for having her on.

REHM

11:40:28

My pleasure.

MIKE

11:40:29

Yes. I noticed immediately the sound that she was speaking of about the light coming through in that playing and it's truly a wonderful sensation of music to hear that. I worked on pianos for 17 years rebuilding old pianos, many, many old Steinways and German pianos and I'm wondering if she notices the differences between the pre-1925 pianos and the ones starting in the '30s where they redesigned pianos for more forceful and more louder sound in the halls with a heavier action and if she prefers those.

DINNERSTEIN

11:41:17

Well, yes, I think that there are -- there's a big difference between the different pianos and, in fact, the piano that I used for this recording is a 1903 Hamburg Steinway that was rebuilt and I've used it for the Goldberg Variations recording, as well. And it has a particularly lyrical singing sound, the sound sustains and that's really what I find so special about this particular instrument is that the sound sustains.

DINNERSTEIN

11:41:46

A lot of pianos they're built now to have a very big impact at the front of the note so that they project out into the hall, but then immediately they don't continue. The sound doesn't continue. And there's a lot of kind of sort of harshness to it and, I think, that has to do with them being kind of overly lacquered. They use lacquer on the hammers, which makes -- those were the -- not for this particular man. He knows all about this.

DINNERSTEIN

11:42:15

But for the average listener, they might not realize that using lacquer on a hammer can make it a harder sound. And so I prefer pianos that aren't lacquered and I actually just bought a piano that's from Hamburg. It's a recent piano. It's only six years old, but...

REHM

11:42:38

Another Steinway?

DINNERSTEIN

11:42:40

Another Steinway, a Hamburg Steinway, which I used for my recording that I did a year ago, "Bach, A Strange Beauty." I bought that piano. And that's a very unusual instrument in that it's a new piano, but it has that lyrical singing sound of an old piano and yet the action feels -- when you're playing it, it feels like a modern instrument.

REHM

11:43:00

Interesting. We have a question from Ian on Facebook who says, "Ms. Dinnerstein's playing seems much more delicate than most pianists I hear without losing any of the power. I'd love to ask her if she'll be able

to pass on the technique she's learned from pre-war Britain to a new generation. I would hate to think this style would fade."

DINNERSTEIN

11:43:32

Well, that's very nice. Well, I think it's important and there are people that are still teaching this today. Unfortunately, my teacher, Maria, passed away a little over a year ago.

REHM

11:43:42

Oh, I'm sorry.

DINNERSTEIN

11:43:43

Which is really sad, but...

REHM

11:43:44

I'm sorry.

DINNERSTEIN

11:43:45

But, yes, I think it's important that the new generation of pianists are aware of different ways of approaching playing the piano.

REHM

11:43:56

Do you believe that, at some point, you might move into teaching younger students?

DINNERSTEIN

11:44:04

Yeah, I think it could happen that I would teach. I somehow don't feel like it's the right time right now. I feel like I have to make a choice in what I do and I prefer for the time that I have to be with my family as opposed to, you know, when I'm not on the road to spend with my family. But I could see when my son is in college maybe.

REHM

11:44:29

You know, the other point that you were making just before the break was working with piano technicians to prepare the pianos you use on concert tours. How do you do that? How do you prepare that piano?

DINNERSTEIN

11:44:50

Well, pianos are very complex machines and there are two things that are going on when you play a piano. There's the voicing, which is how it sounds, like, the timber of how it sounds and that can be adjusted in different ways usually by adjusting the hammers and how they -- the shape of the hammers can change the quality of the sound. And then there's also the regulation, which has to do with the touch, how it feels to play the piano.

DINNERSTEIN

11:45:19

And those can be -- that can be regulated by, you know, changing how close the hammers are to the strings or how heavy the actual keys are. And there are all sorts of adjustments that can be made and so you could have one piano that's prepared by a piano technician for two different pianists and it can sound like a completely different instrument.

REHM

11:45:43

Oh, my.

DINNERSTEIN

11:45:45

Yeah. It's quite interesting, but it's very labor intensive, obviously, for the piano technician, but also for the pianist. You know, I often spend, I don't know, three or four hours...

REHM

11:45:58

Before a concert.

DINNERSTEIN

11:45:59

...before a concert with a piano technician and I'll be playing and then he'll do something and then I'll play some more and then, you know, we keep on talking and trying to get it to be how I want it to be.

REHM

11:46:11

But, you know, in a sense, the piano can be something -- a living organism in that it can change depending on the change of temperature, depending on the number of people in the room, depending on the entire atmosphere. So once it's been prepared, it doesn't always stay that way.

DINNERSTEIN

11:46:40

That's true, yes, it can change and often -- the thing that's quite interesting about it is that our ear can make the touch feel different. So, in other words, I can hear a sound and the sound can sound muted, say, but touch will actually be very light. But it feels hard to play the piano because the sound is soft. And it's confusing how we hear things and how we feel things. You know, the physical sensation is so influenced by our aural sensation.

REHM

11:47:18

Let's go now to John who's in Grand Prairie, Texas. Good morning to you.

JOHN

11:47:25

Well, good morning, Diane. Thank you so much for this program. As a music historian, a performer and a lover of music for my entire life, this is an amazing event that you've created here. I wanted to ask you guest about her impression of the F minor Three-part Invention of Bach, which, for me, has surfaced over and over again in my life as a touchstone for that music and all of the music that followed it.

JOHN

11:47:52

It seems to have the seeds of all of the romantic period, the post-romantics and even into contemporary and quasi-atonal elements. To have the keyboard player of this stature able to speak to us is an extraordinary thing and I just wanted to get her impressions of the work. Thank you.

DINNERSTEIN

11:48:12

Well, it's interesting because at the moment, I'm preparing the Two-part Inventions for some concerts and recordings and those are pieces of music that, you know, were, in a way, teaching pieces. Bach wrote them for his children to learn how to play the piano and how to play lyrically. He wrote specifically how to play cantabile and they're quite simple pieces as are the symphonias, the Three-part Inventions. They're kind of like Bach pared down, you know.

DINNERSTEIN

11:48:43

But I'm just struck by how radical the music is. It's really weird harmonies, strange syncopations. There are pieces where I'm -- it's not clear to me what the meter is -- what the pulse is and I think that all of that is extremely forward looking and I think that Bach in his time was considered very conservative and there was much more interest in other composers, like Telemann, but his music has survived and been so important to everyone after him because it really did contain the seeds of all the music that was to come.

REHM

11:49:31

I now want to go back to the time before your incredible success began and the frustration you must have felt playing as you did loving the music you were playing. How did you manage to go from playing in small schools, in small libraries, in women's prisons to the concert hall?

DINNERSTEIN

11:50:13

Well, it was a long and winding road and I think it's hard to put it down into a sentence. But basically I had been performing the Goldberg Variations for a couple of years, I guess, three years. And a few friends had heard me play it who were supporters and I decided that I wanted to record the piece. And I didn't have a very clear plan of what I would do with that recording, but I thought I had something really important to say about the music.

REHM

11:50:46

How did you raise the money?

DINNERSTEIN

11:50:48

Well, this is why I mentioned those friends because what I did was I approached three friends who I thought could financially support this project because at that moment, I didn't have any money. I didn't have a management -- I didn't have a record label. And they'd all heard me play the Goldberg Variations, these friends, and so I told them I wanted to record it in the highest quality way and that I thought that it might be helpful for me and my career, as well, but I wasn't quite sure what I was going to do with this recording.

DINNERSTEIN

11:51:17

But I thought it was important to record it. And they all said, yes, we will help you. It was really amazing. And I managed to line up a great team, an incredible producer, that beautiful instrument that I used and I recorded it. And then it was quite miraculous kind of what happened after that because it sort of went viral and, you know, I started showing just little clips at the beginning to different people. I gave them just the aria and the first five variations and suddenly different people in the music industry really wanted to talk to me and hear me perform it.

DINNERSTEIN

11:51:55

And so then I decided I needed to play it in New York and I found a sponsor miraculously who sponsored that recital at Carnegie Hall. And it was packed and it got really great review in The Times and it led to me being taken on by a major management company and then a year later, Telarc decided to -- that they would commercially release that recording that I had made.

REHM

11:52:28

And it zoomed.

DINNERSTEIN

11:52:30

Yes, yeah.

REHM

11:52:31

To number one.

DINNERSTEIN

11:52:32

Yeah, it was pretty exciting.

REHM

11:52:34

Pretty exciting. And you were surprised by your success?

DINNERSTEIN

11:52:42

Oh, absolutely. I mean, I still can't quite believe it. It really wasn't that long ago. I mean, it happened and the CD was released August of 2007 and my life has just completely changed since then.

REHM

11:52:57

How so?

DINNERSTEIN

11:52:58

Well, I mean, I'm now -- I really have the career that I dreamt about when I was seven, you know. And I didn't think that that was going to happen and I didn't even think that that existed. I didn't even know that this could exist, the things that I do now, the concerts that I play. Before that, I didn't even know that there were opportunities like this. So, you know, my world has just gone haywire.

REHM

11:53:32

Simone Dinnerstein and you're listening to "The Diane Rehm Show." How much are you touring, how much are you with your family?

DINNERSTEIN

11:53:44

Well, I've decided that I don't want to be on the road all the time. So I play what seems like a lot of concerts to me. I play around 50 concerts a year. There are plenty of pianists that are doing double that amount. But it's important for me to be home. So playing 50 concerts a year means that most months I'm away about half of the month because there's traveling and all of that. So that's about what I'm doing.

REHM

11:54:13

I want to hear you talk about this Bach Partita number 2.

REHM

11:55:04

Tell me about this.

DINNERSTEIN

11:55:06

Well, this piece is -- well, it's an incredible piece of music, but it's quite challenging to play, I'll say.

REHM

11:55:15

I should say.

DINNERSTEIN

11:55:17

It's so sparkly and there's so much going on and one can easily get confused, but I think that it's just so much bubbling over and I love that aspect of it that at the end of this very serious piece -- the Partita is really quite -- it's really sad and tragic and kind of full of a kind of feeling of regret going through the whole work and then for this to be the final movement. The other thing that's interesting about it is that it's so, kind of, sparkling and uplifting, but it's in a minor key. And I find that quite intriguing because usually we think of minor keys as being, you know, more down, more depressing and this is certainly not that.

REHM

11:56:31

And that is Simone Dinnerstein playing on a 1903 Hamburg Steinway for her newest album "Something Almost Being Said," the music of Bach and Schubert. Thank you so much for joining us.

DINNERSTEIN

11:56:52

Thank you for having me here.

REHM

11:56:53

A true pleasure to talk with you. Thanks for listening all. I'm Diane Rehm.

ANNOUNCER

11:56:59

"The Diane Rehm Show" is produced by Sandra Pinkard, Nancy Robertson, Denise Couture, Monique Nazareth, Nikki Jecks, Susan Nabors and Lisa Dunn and the engineer is Tobey Schreiner. A.C. Valdez answers the phones. Visit drshow.org for audio archives, transcripts, podcasts and CD sales. Call 202-885-1200 for more information. Our email address is drshow@wamu.org and we're on Facebook and Twitter. This program comes to you from American University in Washington. This is NPR.

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