

# The Washington Post

## CLASSICAL CD REVIEWS

### 'A Strange Beauty': Dinnerstein's Bach CD

By Mark Estren  
January 28, 2011



*Bach: A Strange Beauty*

*Bach: Keyboard Concertos Nos. 1 and 5; English Suite No. 3; "Ich ruf zu Dir, Herr Jesu Christ," BWV 639, arr. Busoni; "Nun freut euch, lieben Christen gmein," BWV 734, arr. Kempff; "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring," BWV 147, arr. Hess. Simone Dinnerstein, piano; Kammerorchester Staatskapelle Berlin. Sony. \$11.98.*

Poised, elegant, wonderfully played and very, very romantic, Simone Dinnerstein's new Bach CD conveys what its title promises: "Bach: A Strange Beauty." Whether it delivers mostly Bach or mostly Dinnerstein, though, depends on the listener's feelings about interpreting this music. Dinnerstein offers beautiful Bach, but it is far from historically informed Bach in terms of presentation. It is not just that Dinnerstein makes full use of the capabilities of a modern piano - it is that she employs them to extract emotion from the music that not all believe Bach put there.

Reaction to this CD will depend on one's feeling about the word "expressiveness." Dinnerstein argues, both verbally and through her performances, against the notion that Bach's foundational regularity is the core of his music. It is the variances from the regular on which she focuses - the syncopation, the crossing of bar lines.

This leads to some highly intriguing interpretations: In the English Suite No. 3, the Prelude is practically Chopinesque, and the Allemande and Sarabande scarcely seem to be dances at all, while the three transcribed chorale preludes partake of depth of feeling that would not be out of place in 19th-century music. But there is no swooning anywhere: Although this is emotive Bach, ranging from the contemplative to the exuberant, it is never uncontrolled.

Is this "authentic" Bach? If by that a listener means Bach played in accordance with the notes as written, on period , then the answer is no. There is scarcely a bar in either concerto without a modicum of rubato, and even the 14-piece Kammerorchester Staatskapelle Berlin, while deferring to period performance practices, uses modern instruments (and does so well, giving the concertos the feeling of chamber works in which the piano is merely first among equals).

But if one agrees that there is substantial underlying emotion, not merely mathematical precision, in Bach's music, then Dinnerstein's readings may be said to plumb these works' genuine depths.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/28/AR2011012804189.html>