

Music to lose ourselves and find ourselves

Simone Dinnerstein recorded her debut album in 2007. Now she offers *Undersong*, an album faithful to her poetic spirit.

Simone Dinnerstein's new album is a poem. It is beautiful, graceful, it swings from the simple to the sublime. Its title, *Undersong*, is faithful to the poetic spirit that moves pianist Simone Dinnerstein: maker of projects of poetic depth, full of concepts.

Since her debut album in 2007, with a surprisingly original version of one of the references of all piano literature, Bach's Goldberg Variations, the record label has followed her trajectory, where Bach is the main figure.

The American composer Richard Danielpour is a good example of the listeners who follow Simone Dinnerstein with devotion: at the beginning of the pandemic, [Danielpour's] doctor warned him that in case of infection, he would have a minimal chance of saving his life. As part of his treatment to strengthen his immune system, the composer Danielpour listened again and again to Simone Dinnerstein's records, especially those dedicated to Bach.

Danielpour sought out Dinnerstein to thank her for the good therapeutic effects of listening to her records, and together they devised what was the album before the one we are reviewing today.

Richard Danielpour devised a cycle of 15 compositions for a recital that was streamed and to complete the content of the disc, he gifted Dinnerstein with Bach transcriptions. The result was the album, *An American Mosaic*, recorded last year, featuring the 15 miniatures Danielpour wrote with the COVID pandemic fighters as the protagonists. Some of the titles of those 15 episodes stand out: fathers and sons; journalists, poets and writers; doctors and nurses.

In addition to the battle against COVID, composer Richard Danielpour dealt in this cycle of compositions with other social issues; malignant elements such as the coronavirus, whom he calls in one of his chapters "The Invisible Enemy", and other bugs such as Donald Trump, whom he calls "The Visible Enemy", and refers to that character's presidency as "one of the darkest periods in our American history".

The album, *An American Mosaic*, is a chronicle of recent social history in the United States and is the predecessor of the album that now concerns us: *Undersong*. The title, like those of all Dinnerstein's albums in general, is polysemous. All the music on this album, the pianist explains, consists of musical forms that have refrain.

Refrain comes from the Latin *refringere*: to repeat, and then from the Old French: *refraindre*. For me, the deep meaning of this album is: to refrain.

To endorse love. To endorse poetry. To endorse beauty. To endorse trust, solidarity, generosity.  
To endorse is to give. To give again.

On this album, Dinnerstein elaborates, "Philip Glass, Robert Schumann, François Couperin and Erik Satie consistently revisit materials in their works, placing them in ever-changing harmonies and different rhythmic profiles."

This is the third album Simone Dinnerstein recorded in the pandemic. She thought of it during her daily evening walks in Brooklyn's Green-Wood Cemetery near her home. "I realized that I built a path that I repeated daily and varied imperceptibly afternoon to afternoon during my walks."

Undersong, she explains, "is an archaic term that defines a song with a refrain and to me, suggests a hidden text. Glass, Schumann, Couperin and Satie always seem to be trying to find what they want to say, through repetitions, in their constant changes and restarts focused on the ear and the mind."

That, the ear and the mind. After listening to this album, it remains fixed, caught, ignited in our inner ear and in our open mind. The content of this album, kindly challenges Simone Dinnerstein, "is music to get lost in."

In his poem *The Undersong*, the American poet Emerson (Ralph Waldo Emerson: 1803-1882) wrote about what that word, undersong, means to him "and it makes me reflect on how constrained we are by time, conscious scarcely of the mighty forces that surround us with their long beating."

This is Emerson's poem *The Undersong*:

To the open air it sings sweet the genesis of things, of tendency through endless ages, of star-dust and star-pilgrimages, of rounded worlds, of space and time, of the old flood's subsiding slime, of chemic matter, force and form, of poles and powers, cold, wet and warm the rushing metamorphosis dissolving all that fixture is, melt things that be to things that seem, and solid nature to a dream.

A dream, the sweet genesis of things through endless ages of stardust and pilgrimages, of round worlds of time and space, of chemical matter, force and form, of poles and powers, cold, wet and warm the rushing metamorphosis dissolving all that fixture is, melt things that be to things that seem, and solid nature to a dream.

A dream, the sweet genesis of things through the endless ages of stardust and pilgrimages, of round worlds of time and space, of chemical matter, force and form, poles of power, cold, wet and warm in the rapid metamorphosis that dissolves all that is impermanent, acrisolates all that is apparent in the solid nature of a dream.

The album Undersong begins with one of those works born of a dream: Les Barricades mystérieuses, by François Couperin, a title that automatically leads us to Pascal Quignard's book entitled Les solidarités mystérieuses. A melody of enchantment that repeats itself as beautiful dreams repeat themselves every night.

The next piece is the famous Arabesque by Robert Schumann, also endowed with mystery, followed by Mad Rush, by Philip Glass. And as there are no coincidences, but causalities, that title is immersed in the verses of Emerson (the rushing metamorphosis) and that work was written by Don Felipe Vidrio for the Dalai Lama, on one of his visits to New York, where the Buddhist composer, Philip Glass, lives.

Simone Dinnerstein is a close friend of Glass, his neighbor in Brooklyn, and for her he wrote his Third Concerto for piano and orchestra. In fact, Simone Dinnerstein's previous, beautifully titled disc, A Character of Quiet, intersperses scores by Philip Glass with works by Franz Schubert.

After Glass's fascinating work, Undersong continues with a playful piece: Le Tic Toc Choc ou les maillotins (18e Ordre), from the harpsichord Pieces, Livre Troisième, a little toy by Couperin, and that lively spirit continues in a reflective tone in the next track, in the sublime: The third of the six Gnossienes by Satie, to open the way to a masterpiece: Kreisleriana, one of the great references of all piano literature in history, by Robert Schumann.

The encounter between music and literature is evident throughout Simone Dinnerstein's discography. Schumann's Kreisleriana, which occupies the next 30 minutes of Undersong, takes as its starting point, a text by a great composer and writer: Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffman (1776-1822): Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler, musical genius who falls into madness.

In addition to its monumental condition, that score contains more than autobiographical features, the human nature of Robert Schumann, who in real life also lost his mind and died in an asylum, in love with the love of his life: the extraordinary pianist and composer Clara Wieck (whom the official history of music, is so patriarchal, he insists on calling her Clara Schumann), to whom he once wrote in a letter: "She plays my Kreisleriana often. In some moments there is certainly a wild love, and your life and mine, and how are you."

Wild. It is indeed wild music, of extremely high emotional intensity, agitation, euphoria and sudden calm.

Simone Dinnerstein likes a challenge. Her recording of this work, which is a philosopher's stone, is already registered as a new discographic reference, together with other jewels she has recorded and which we recommend here with delight, especially her Bach recordings, in addition to the aforementioned Goldberg Variations, the beautifully titled Something Almost Being Said, where she brings together the sonorous poetry of Franz Schubert with the beauty of divinity: the music of Johann Sebastian Bach.

To paraphrase Simone Dinnerstein: This is music to get lost in. And to find ourselves.

