

Simone Dinnerstein

Pianist

New York-born Simone Dinnerstein hit the top of the Billboard charts in 2007 with her self-financed recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. Her busy career has included premiering Philip Glass's Third Piano Concerto, and her latest recording, *A Character of Quiet*, recorded at home in Brooklyn during lockdown, couples three of Glass's Etudes with Schubert's Sonata in B flat.

I fell in love with the piano aged five at ballet classes, dancing to Chopin. We were living in Rome where my father, an artist, was at the American Academy; and instead of piano lessons I started with a Renaissance recorder. I'd actually been listening to Renaissance music since I was tiny because my parents' friends, Lucy Bardo and Ben Harms, were members of the band Calliope. Lucy is a gamba player – you can hear her solo on the group's recording of **PRAETORIUS**'s 'Bransle simple' – and her almost improvisatory freedom of line and Calliope's infectious rhythms are part of my musical DNA.

It's not often you hear **BYRD** and Gibbons played on a piano, but Glenn Gould takes your ear away from the instrument itself; you're just hearing pure music. When I was growing up, Gould was both a strong inspiration and a looming presence. It took a long time before I learnt that I could love his playing fiercely and not play like him at all. Some people think that his playing is motoric but I disagree. And they say he has a kind of staccato attack, but actually his touch is quite varied. There's a distinctive articulation which is neither staccato nor legato. My touch is more legato and that's how I feel music. It took a long time for me to accept that.

I heard this extraordinary recording of **SCHUBERT**'s *Du bist die Ruh* when I was a fellow at the Tanglewood Institute, after I'd graduated from Juilliard. Soprano Renée Fleming and pianist Christoph Eschenbach took an enormous risk and



The choices

Praetorius Bransle simple

Calliope *Nonesuch 0349710276*

Byrd Sellinger's Round

Glenn Gould (piano) *Sony G010003290606R*

Schubert Du bist die Ruh, D776

Renée Fleming (soprano), Christoph Eschenbach (piano) *Decca 455 2942*

Beethoven Violin Concerto

Yehudi Menuhin (violin); Philharmonia/
Wilhelm Furtwängler
Warner Classics 2564636912

JS Bach Ich habe genug, BWV82

Lorraine Hunt Lieberson (mezzo);
Orchestra of Emmanuel Music/Craig Smith
Nonesuch 7559796922

took it at an incredibly slow tempo. I think they were thinking about the evolution of sound. From this recording I learnt how tone can affect everything. It's impossible, as a pianist, to change colour after you've struck the key but there are things you can do to give that illusion. I've just made a recording of Schubert's Sonata in B flat and I probably started thinking about

Schubert's sound when I first heard this recording. Last summer I had the experience of collaborating with Renée at Tanglewood when we premiered André Previn's last work, *Penelope* (written with Tom Stoppard), with the Emerson Quartet and actress Uma Thurman.

I struggle with the concept of concertos – there always seems to be an imbalance between the piano and the orchestra. Hearing Yehudi Menuhin play **BEETHOVEN**'s Violin Concerto under Wilhelm Furtwängler was the first time I thought, 'This is a unified vision'. Furtwängler had an ability to meld the orchestra so it felt like a breathing organism integrated with the violin. I had the same feeling working with the Havana Lyceum Orchestra on our recording *Mozart in Havana*. José Antonio Méndez Padrón founded the orchestra, and has a phenomenal rapport with the musicians. They had an incredible sound, and when I played with them it felt as though we were completely enmeshed. I organised a US tour for them just after Donald Trump's election – an amazing feat!

The mezzo Lorraine Hunt Lieberson's recording of **JS BACH**'s *Ich habe genug* is one I come back to again and again. When I first heard it I was particularly struck by how the oboist and the singer played off each other, and how the instrumental line reflected the words of the singer. Years later I wrote to the oboist, Peggy Pearson, to say how much her playing meant to me. She wrote back and it led to us playing Bach together! Being a pianist can feel very solitary and when you collaborate with other people it's a joy to share a language. In March I conducted *Ich habe genug* from the keyboard with my string ensemble Baroklyn, but the concert became a live stream from an empty hall because COVID arrived in NYC. That frightening and uncertain time gave the performance an intimacy that was profound. 🎧

Interview by Amanda Holloway