



SIMONE DINNERSTEIN, PIANO

SAT, JAN 30
VIRTUAL PERFORMANCE

DUKE PERFORMANCES

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PROGRAM

Ich Ruf Zu Dir

Frederico Busoni

(1866-1924)

Johann Sebastian Bach

(1685-1750)

Three Chorales

Johann Sebastian Bach

Richard Danielpour

(b, 1956)

Les Barricades Mysterieuses

François Couperin

(1688-1733)

Arabesque in C major, Op. 18

Robert Schumann

(1810-1856)

Mad Rush

Philip Glass

(b. 1937)

Tic Toc Choc

François Couperin

BACH: “ICH RUF’ ZU DIR,” BWV 639 (ARR. BUSONI)

Relatively early in his career, Bach worked in Weimar as the court organist. While serving in this capacity, he produced his *Orgelbüchlein* (little organ book): a collection of 46 chorale preludes. Each piece borrows a Lutheran hymn tune, set in long notes against a freer backdrop. “Ich ruf’ zu dir,” a general prayer for God’s grace, takes a particularly plaintive approach. The melody is presented with light ornamentation in the right hand, a flowing middle voice is carried by the left, and the organ’s pedals offer a steady walking bassline. The work is further colored by Bach’s uncommon choice of key, F Minor, which he tended to reserve for more wrought contrapuntal works. In this context, though, it lends a warmth to the original text’s supplication.

In arranging the work for piano, around the year 1900, Busoni’s main challenge was to condense the original three-limbed texture to two. Not only did he manage to do this, while preserving the original pitches almost exactly, he found a way to imitate the organ’s timbral fullness. Busoni focused on enriching the bassline with octave doublings and extra chord tones. As the piece progresses, he does so more and more, ultimately resulting in very dense voicings down in the piano’s lower reaches. This thickening of the sound continues through to the end, where Busoni added a lower-octave repetition of the hymn’s final phrase. Into the depths of piety we go.

A NOTE ON FORM AND TEXTURE

The following suite of pieces links four works by three composers separated by centuries. And yet, these disparate works share an uncannily similar approach to form and texture. Theorists use the term form to describe the life of a work — its overall shape and trajectory. Texture, meanwhile, describes the feel of the music — how its various lines and parts layer on top of one another. History has produced many standard approaches to these parameters, with all four of these pieces demonstrating a similarly idiosyncratic take. Each involves a refrain-based form, where a main section is heard several times, ensconcing some number of retorts. And each builds its refrains (or, in fact, the entire work) on motoric textures, wherein the fingers’ repetitive motions yield fascinating harmonic and rhythmic patterns. Such parameters are not the usual stuff of dramatic development in classical music; composers typically engage in complex tonal schemes or melodic transformations. But there is a special magic that emerges from a focus on sound in the

abstract, afforded by an emphasis on form and texture. Doing so draws our attention to colors, moods, and the inner life of individual notes and chords. Each of these works taps into this realm, sharing some of sound's secrets in the process.

DANIELPOUR & BACH: THREE CHORALES

I arranged Three Bach Transcriptions for Simone Dinnerstein as a coda of sorts to the 15 movement, 52 minute work that I wrote for her titled '*An American Mosaic*'.

At that time in August 2020 we realized that the 52 minutes solo piano cycle would not be long enough for a normal length CD . It was Simone's idea that I arranged three Bach chorales , as a way of topping off our project and having enough minutes for a CD. It made perfect sense to me; it was my love and admiration for Simone Dinnerstein's Bach recordings that drew me to her as the ideal pianist for *An American Mosaic*, so it made perfect sense, that the composer who had brought us together should be a part of the work that we would make together.

I decided on arranging a chorale from the Saint Matthew Passion, an aria, from the B Minor Mass, and the final epilogue from the Saint Matthew Passion which is a gigantic chorale prelude. Although I had quoted Bach's music in other works of mine, I had never made an arrangement of any of his work. The experience of doing so made me feel as if I was standing before God. It was at once humbling and and at the same time deeply enriching.

– Richard Danielpour, January 2021

COUPERIN: LES BARRICADES MYSTERIEUSES

Composed over the first decades of the 18th century, Couperin's many harpsichord works stand out for their unique synthesis of complexity and approachability. Many have cryptic titles, whose true meanings will likely never be uncovered. *Les barricades mysterieuses* — “the mysterious barricades” — is no exception. Much speculation has produced no conclusive rationale for the title, which may refer to anything from the music's relegation to the keyboard's middle-low register, its textural stickiness, or even a bevy of more racy interpretations.

Whatever the case may be, the piece is a delightful study in rocking motions; more oscillations than melodies. Through its back-and-forth texture, fantastic coloristic nuances continuously ebb and flow. Notes lap against one another, often creating tiny kisses of dissonance before leading to sweet resolution. This is true of both the refrain and its intervening couplets, which embark on some mild harmonic wanderings before always returning home to B-flat Major. Between this tonal resiliency, malleable texture, and low-range emphasis, the work takes on a rich and supple character. Paradoxically, it's an inviting sound — whatever Couperin's barricades were blocking clearly beckoned with warmth.

SCHUMANN: ARABESKE, OP. 18

In the midst of a famously challenging courtship, Robert Schumann found himself separated from his beloved Clara Wieck in 1839. Unhappy, but creatively productive, he poured some of his more wistful feelings into his Arabeske — a piece of contrasts and uncommon restraint. Its main section has a beautiful limpidity about it, clearly set in C Major. But its melody constantly flirts with allusions to darker, minor realms — flirtations that initially seem harmless enough, before eventually taking on thematic significance. “Minorness” is treated concretely by the first contrasting section, which ends with a discomfiting and ambiguous transition back to the refrain. When the second contrasting section appears, again in a minor key, evidence of a troubling undercurrent is clear. Following this section, it is much more difficult to hear the refrain as completely untroubled. Twice its flow has been disrupted, and twice it has been clouded with doubt. Schumann never tries to mollify the doubt; in fact, he leans into it. After what sounds like the final cadence, he recalls the ambiguous egress from the first minor section. It's a remarkable passage, floating without allegiance to any particular key or obvious destination. Rather than purely cadence, it eventually just settles, letting closure precipitate out of this unusual and deceptively complex work.

PHILIP GLASS: MAD RUSH

During the 1960s, Philip Glass developed a minimalistic style based on slowly-evolving repetitive gestures, often developing according to mathematical principles. He abandoned this process-based approach by the late-1970s, choosing instead to create vast musical

environments from basic elements. *Mad Rush*, originally for organ, comes from this period. It is entirely defined by just three chords: in each section, we hear F Major alternate with either A Minor or G Minor. Glass also alternates between two basic textures: one, his signature two-against-three arpeggios, with the other being more rhythmically rambunctious. And, every once in a while, a rogue D-flat appears. Don't worry about it. Simply put, that's the scene, more or less, for the piece's first nine minutes — you will grow very accustomed to what you hear in the first nine seconds.

Which begs a question: why? There are at least two ways to answer. Answer 1: why not? If you are among the millions of people (your humble author included) who enjoys these three chords and their juxtapositions, no further explanation is needed! Harmony is beautiful, after all, and here we have an opportunity to revel — truly — in this luminous microcosm of tonal sound. The piece offers a space in which to relinquish the need for development and instead surrender to the fundamental joys of consonant harmony. Glass's choices regarding texture and rhythm are deliberate, helping to animate those joys and draw attention to all the intricacies of this world.

But the final section, by adding a dimension, offers a second answer. Floating above the ubiquitous eighth notes appears, indeed, a melody. It's not a complicated melody (in fact, it's just the combined notes of the F and A chords...plus that rogue D-flat), but its appearance is *glorious*. And that's an amazing fact: that a melody which hardly qualifies as such can, by anyone, in any situation, be deemed glorious. But it is, and this is part of Glass's unique talent. With this piece, he demonstrates that, with time and space and patience, absolute glory can be found in even the humblest of musical objects. And if that's true about something as fleeting and small as a musical triad, imagine what other wonders must be hiding in plain sight.

COUPERIN: LE TIC-TOC-CHOC, OU LES MAILLOTINS

Concluding the suite is a return to the baroque, with the opener's sibling offering a form of balance. In contrast to *Les barricades mystérieuses*, *Le Tic-Toc-Choc* is cast in the keyboard's treble range, and is almost entirely worry-free. It's a piece that seems content in its happiness, especially in how it carries out the work of entertainment. Couperin originally called for both the left and right hands to play in exactly the same register, an semi-easily achievable

feat on a two-manual harpsichord. This produces a sparkle of repeated notes and more of those cheeky little dissonances that flit away before you realize you've heard them. On a modern piano, though, one is faced with a challenge: either to transpose one hand to make use of the instrument's sprightly high range, or perform the minor miracle of crowding both hands in the same place at the same time. Either way, the music makes its cryptic title seem a little less so — whether it's referring to a clock, or some other diminutive mechanical beastie, *Le Tic-Toc-Choc* certainly ignites the imagination with wonder and delight.

SIMONE DINNERSTEIN

Simone Dinnerstein is an American pianist. She lives in Brooklyn, New York with her husband, son and dog, less than a mile from the hospital in which she was born.

Simone has a distinctive musical voice. *The Washington Post* has called her “an artist of strikingly original ideas and irrefutable integrity.” She first came to wider public attention in 2007 through her recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, reflecting an aesthetic that was both deeply rooted in the score and profoundly idiosyncratic. She is, wrote *The New York Times*, “a unique voice in the forest of Bach interpretation.”

Since that recording, she has had a busy performing career. She has played with orchestras ranging from the New York Philharmonic and the Montreal Symphony Orchestra to the London Symphony Orchestra and the Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale Rai. She has performed in venues from Carnegie Hall and the Kennedy Center to the Berlin Philharmonie, the Vienna Konzerthaus, the Seoul Arts Center and the Sydney Opera House. She has made ten albums, all of which topped the Billboard classical charts, with repertoire ranging from Beethoven to Ravel.

In recent years, Simone has created projects that express her broad musical interests. Following her recording *Mozart in Havana*, she brought the Havana Lyceum Orchestra from Cuba to the United States for the very first time, raising the funding, booking the concerts, and organizing their housing and transport. Together, Simone and the orchestra played eleven concerts from Miami to Boston. Philip Glass composed his *Piano Concerto No. 3* for Simone, co-commissioned by twelve American and Canadian orchestras.

She collaborated with choreographer Pam Tanowitz to create *New Work for Goldberg Variations*, which was met with widespread critical acclaim. Working with Renée Fleming and the Emerson String Quartet, she premiered André Previn and Tom Stoppard's *Penelope* at the Tanglewood, Ravinia and Aspen music festivals. Most recently, she created her own string ensemble, Baroklyn, which she directs from the keyboard. Their performance of Bach's cantata *Ich Habe Genug* in March 2020 was the last concert she gave before New York City shut down.

Simone is committed to giving concerts in non-traditional venues and to audiences who don't often hear classical music. For the last three decades, she has played concerts throughout the United States for the Piatigorsky Foundation, an organization dedicated to the widespread dissemination of classical music. It was for the Piatigorsky Foundation that she gave the first piano recital in the Louisiana state prison system at the Avoyelles Correctional Center. She has also performed at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women in a concert organized by the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. Simone founded Neighborhood Classics in 2009, a concert series open to the public and hosted by New York City Public Schools to raise funds for their music education programs. She also created a program called Bachpacking during which she takes a digital keyboard to elementary school classrooms, helping young children get close to the music she loves. She is a committed supporter and proud alumna of Philadelphia's Astral Artists, which supports young performers.

Simone counts herself fortunate to have studied with three unique artists: Solomon Mikowsky, Maria Curcio and Peter Serkin, very different musicians who shared the belief that playing the piano is a means to something greater. *The Washington Post* comments that "ultimately, it is Dinnerstein's unreserved identification with every note she plays that makes her performance so spellbinding." In a world where music is everywhere, she hopes that it can still be transformative.



Alsarah talking to students at Durham School of the Arts.

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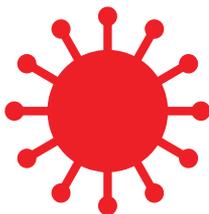
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