



IGOR LEVIT - NO FEAR



STUDY GUIDE

Igor Levit—No Fear

At 34, Igor Levit is one of the world’s greatest living classical pianists. Over the course of 2 years, *Igor Levit: No Fear* presents an intimate portrait of his all-consuming passion with the piano, his collaborations with conductors, orchestras and recording artists, and the embrace of his audiences. When Covid hit, Levit adapted and began an online home concert series that inspired and became a sensation. *Igor Levit: No Fear* reveals his philosophies, passion and commitment to his art.

About Igor Levit

Igor Levit was born in 1987 in Nizhni Novgorod, Russia. His father, Simon, is a construction engineer and his mother, Elena, is a pianist and music teacher. He also has an older sister. His family is Jewish, but according to a recent *New Yorker* article, they are “not particularly religious.”¹

In 1995 the family left Russia and moved to Hannover, Germany. Levit says, “My parents simply wanted a better life—a better education for my sister and for myself, a better perspective for themselves.”² Levit was eight years old when he moved to Germany, and his sister was 14.

He started playing the piano when he was three years old, taught by his mother. He says, “I have no idea why I started – first by ear, but reading music too.”³ In Hanover, he attended the Hanover Academy of Music, Drama, and Media, where his mother taught, graduating in 2009. According to his website, he had “the highest score in the history of the institute.”⁴ In 2019 Levit was appointed as a professor of piano at the Academy.

Professional Career

Levit has received many different awards and recognitions. In 2005 he was the youngest participant at the 2005 Arthur Rubinstein Competition in Tel Aviv, and won a number of prizes there. He won the Gilmore Artist Award in 2018, and was also named as the Royal Philharmonic Society’s Instrumentalist of the Year in 2018. He 2020, he was named as Musical America’s Recording Artist of the Year. That year he also received the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany. In 2022, his album, *On DSCH*, received the Recording of the Year Award. In addition to performing live, Levit has released numerous piano albums. In 2012, he was signed by Sony Classical and his first recording was released in 2013, an album of Beethoven’s late piano sonatas. His most recent album, *Fantasia*, was released by Sony Classical in 2023.

¹ Alex Ross, “Igor Levit is Like No Other Pianist,” *New Yorker*, May 11, 2020.

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/05/18/igor-levit-is-like-no-other-pianist>

² Igor Levit, quoted in Alex Ross, “Igor Levit is Like No Other Pianist,” *New Yorker*, May 11, 2020.

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/05/18/igor-levit-is-like-no-other-pianist>

³ Igor Levit, quoted in Fiona Maddocks, “Igor Levit: The Leaner, Meaner Piano Machine,” *Guardian*, September 1, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/sep/01/igor-levit-the-leaner-meaner-piano-machine>

⁴ Igor Levit, “Life,” <https://www.igor-levit.com/>

He has also been a soloist with a number of different world-famous orchestras including the Cleveland Orchestra, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Amsterdam's Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and the Vienna Philharmonic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Levit live-streamed 52 performances on Twitter. In an interview for the *New Yorker*, he explained how the live-streaming started. He says, "I did what I usually do, which is to throw a thought into the public arena without thinking about any consequences. I went on Twitter and said, 'O.K., I'm going to play for you guys tonight at my place.' After having tweeted that, I realized, Hang on—I've never streamed anything." He says, "It was a catastrophe. I ran to the last electronics store that was still open, and got some stuff for twenty-four euros."⁵

Activism

Levit is also known for his activism. For instance, he has spoken out publicly about antisemitism. He has even received death threats for some of the things that he has said.⁶ In a recent interview he explains his activism by saying, "If someone were to tell me, 'Why don't you just shut up and play?' my response, in a very gentle way, would be something like, 'Why don't you just shut up and go?' It's just that simple. It's an easy response, and the true response, well, would be simply, 'Because I can.' I just think that this is what being a citizen means, in general, to care for other people. That's it. Plain and simple. I do. I always did. This has nothing to do with my job, that I'm a pianist. I'm just a caring human being. I will not stop just because some whatever, whoever, would come and say that."⁷

Levit currently lives in Berlin and plays a Steinway D Grand Piano.⁸ He quit Twitter in 2022.



⁵ Igor Levit, quoted in Alex Ross, "Igor Levit is Like No Other Pianist," *New Yorker*, May 11, 2020. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/05/18/igor-levit-is-like-no-other-pianist>

⁶ Kyle MacMillan, "Activism Plays a Big Role in This Pianists Repertoire," *Experience*, January 24, 2022. <https://cso.org/experience/article/8163/activism-plays-a-big-role-in-this-pianists-re>

⁷ Igor Levit, quoted in Victoria Looseleaf, "Igor Levit: Artist, Mensch, Activist," *San Francisco Classical Voice*, March 7, 2023. <https://www.sfcv.org/articles/artist-spotlight/igor-levit-artist-mensch-activist>

⁸ Sony Classical, "Igor Levit." <https://www.sonyclassical.com/artists/artist-details/igor-levit-1>

Additional Resources

- Igor Levit, “Life,”
<https://www.igor-levit.com/>
- Victoria Looseleaf, “Igor Levit: Artist, Mensch, Activist,” *San Francisco Classical Voice*, March 7, 2023.
<https://www.sfcv.org/articles/artist-spotlight/igor-levit-artist-mensch-activist>
- New York Philharmonic, “Igor Levit: Biography.”
<https://nyphil.org/about-us/artists/igor-levit>
- Alex Ross, “Igor Levit is Like No Other Pianist,” *New Yorker*, May 11, 2020.
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/05/18/igor-levit-is-like-no-other-pianist>
- Sony Classical, “Igor Levit.”
<https://www.sonyclassical.com/artists/artist-details/igor-levit-1>

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