

PRESIDENT: STEVEN ISSERLIS CBE ❖ CHAIRMAN: MALCOLM TROUP ❖ SECRETARY: J. AUDREY ELLISON

The 3rd Ernest Bloch Music Competition, London 2011



Winner Ayaka Tanimoto who crowned the evening with a superb rendition of *Historiettes au Crepuscule*.

Competition finals frequently attract audiences since the level of focus and concentration surpasses many regular concerts. Such was the impressively high standard of artistry at the Royal College of Music on 14 July 2011, where young talented soloists performed in the finals of the Third Ernest Bloch Music Competition and the Fourth Israeli Music Competition. The event was organized by the enterprising cellist

Sagi Hartov, who presided over a distinguished Jury comprising Professor Malcolm Troup, Chairman of the IEBS, international concert pianist Daniel Adni, violinist Paul de Keyser, composer Julian Dawes, singer Teresa Cahill and arts administrator Ken Gould, Director of the Jewish Music Festival in Holland. Compere for the evening was Cantor Jeremy Burko.

There were four finalists for the Bloch competition. Polish violinist Magdalena Filipczak

gave a strident account of the *Nigun*, though one missed some supple expressivity required of the style, and intonation was occasionally shaky. Canadian flautist Lindsay Bryden showed mature musicianship in her balanced and evocative account of the *Suite Modale* (1956), her tender tone finely supported by the accomplished accompanist. Each movement flowed with delicacy the lively third movement followed by a compelling finale. The 16-year old French cellist Raphael Unger impressed with a polished and heartfelt performance of *Nigun* in the cello version, producing a sweet and impassioned tone. Yet it was the rich and rounded vocal projection of Japanese mezzo-soprano Ayaka Tanimoto who crowned the evening with a superb rendition of *Historiettes au Crepuscule*., six songs composed in 1903-4 to poems by Camille Mauclair which merge idioms of Debussy and Ravel, characteristic of Bloch's 'Paris' period. Ayaka Tanimoto brought contrasts of character to each song with engaging inflections shaping a direction from the slow lyrical opening song *Legendes*, the brighter



Canadian flautist Lindsay Bryden won second prize with her balanced and evocative account of the *Suite Modale*

second song *Les Fleurs*, impassioned third, evocative *Ronde* fourth and playful fifth, with its sober framing sections, and equally dancelike *Complainte* sixth song, melding into a more plangent expression.

At the Award ceremony, Sagi Hartov thanked the RCM for hosting the event, and the competition sponsor, Rabbi Norman Solomon of the International Ernest Bloch Society, for the Bloch prizes. First prize was awarded to Ayaka Tanimoto and second prize to Lindsay Bryden. However, all four finalists showed immense promise and one awaits the chance to see and hear their performances at future competitions and concerts.

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Our President

Sir Charles Mackerras was a towering figure in British musical life and we were delighted when he agreed to become the first President of the revived International Ernest Bloch Society. His death has been a great loss to the world of music, to many musical organisations and to our Society in particular. However, we are pleased and privileged to announce that the

internationally distinguished cellist, Steven Isserlis CBE, long an admirer and performer of Bloch's works, has accepted our invitation to succeed Sir Charles and become our new President. The cello was the instrument chosen by Bloch for some of his most renowned compositions including *Schelomo* and *From Jewish Life* both of which have been recorded by Steven Isserlis.



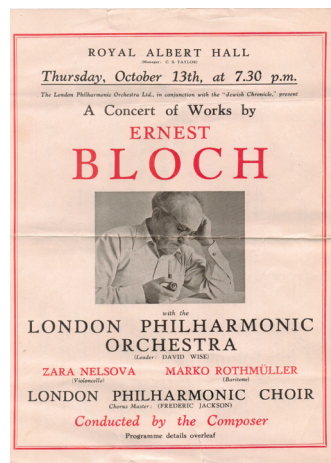
Steven Isserlis enjoys a distinguished career as a soloist, chamber musician and educator.

An unknown recording by a Bloch pioneer – Sir Adrian Boult

Perhaps there should be a question mark relating to the word unknown in the above title. When Bloch visited London in October 1949 his Royal Albert Hall concert included three works – *Schelomo*, *Sacred Service* and *Suite Symphonique*. The last of these had been composed as recently as 1944 but this was not its first British performance.

In October 1946 Sir Adrian Boult conducted the BBC symphony orchestra in a concert of what was then modern music. I suspect the highlight was Berg's Violin concerto with Szigetti as soloist, but the programme also included the *Suite Symphonique*. Fast forward and the editor of this newsletter is on the way to a meeting of the International Ernest Bloch Society committee when he spies a second hand shop selling recordings of all eras.

Amongst the old 78rpm discs are a set of transcription records of that very



Poster for the 1949 concert at The Albert Hall with The London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Ernest Bloch.

performance. It is a moving piece with purposeful playing. Whether and on what basis it might ever be possible for this to be released is one question, but at least I can report that the recording is now saved! Claude Torres' website devoted to Bloch recordings lists four versions: Boult's would be a fifth unpublished as yet, but no longer unknown!

SH



The internet offers much invaluable material about Ernest Bloch. An obvious starting point is Claude Torres' discography of recordings of Bloch's music. The first feature is that the contents are bi-lingual – French and English. Introductory sections offer biography, bibliography and links to other sites (some of which will be featured in future issues of this

Bloch on the web

newsletter). The heart of the discography is a detailed entry for every recording known to the compiler – and I frankly very much doubt that any are missing. The covers of the recordings have also been beautifully reproduced. These individual entries can be accessed by three different routes – alphabetical by the name of the work; by date of composition; and the nature of the work in question – keyboard, orchestral, chamber, vocal. Finally the most recent recordings – those from 2008 onwards – can also be accessed by date of issue.

As discographies go, this is a model of its kind and it is a joy to read. It is hard to imagine any publication of greater value to Bloch enthusiasts.

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Studying Bloch's music

One of Britain's leading authorities on the life and work of Ernest Bloch is the musician and musicologist Dr Alexander Knapp, Research Associate at the School of Oriental and African Studies of London University. Lecturing internationally, he has built up an incredible portfolio complemented by audio-visual presentations.

The following is a list of titles:-

1. General Context: A Brief Introduction to Jewish Art Music in the "Diaspora" from the French Revolution to the Present Day

2. Swiss, Jewish, American, Chinese

- Helvetia - Israel - America: Identity in Bloch's Life and Work
- The Influence of Chinese Elements upon Selected Works by Bloch
- Ernest Bloch: Swiss-American Composer and Educator
- Ernest Bloch in the USA

3. Jewish Music

- The Life and Music of Bloch: Problems and Paradoxes
- The Jewishness of Bloch: Subconscious or Conscious?
- Ernest Bloch Reconsidered: an assessment of his "Jewish Works"
- From Geneva to New York: radical changes in Bloch's view of himself as a "Jewish Composer" during the period 1916-1919
- The Life and Music of the Celebrated Oregonian Composer Ernest Bloch: a Jewish Perspective
- Bloch and Bruch and the Cello as Cantor

4. Instrumental-Vocal repertoires and Specific Works

- The Complete Songs of Bloch
- The Piano Music of Bloch
- Bloch's Chamber Music: an overview
- Bloch's Chamber Music in the 1920s: the "Academic Period"
- Musical Style in Bloch's "Agate Beach" Works
- Bloch's Symphony in C sharp minor
- "Macbeth's line is a gigantic crescendo; Lady Macbeth's line is a diminuendo": the fusion of music and psychology in Ernest Bloch's opera of 1910
- The Shtetl and Ghetto through Bloch's Eyes: Baal Shem Suite and From Jewish Life
- Bloch's Sacred Service
- Ernest Bloch at Agate Beach, with special reference to the Concerto Grosso no.2
- Numerous articles for CD liner notes and programme notes concerning specific compositions:
 - Israel Symphony, Viola Suite (1919), Suite Hébraïque, Piano Quintets nos.1 and 2
 - Quatuor à Cordes (1896), String Quartet no.3, Night, Paysages (Landscapes), Prélude
 - (Recueillement), In the Mountains (Haute-Savoie), Two Pieces for String Quartet, Violin Sonatas nos.1 and 2, Mélodie, Nuit exotique, Abodah, Two Suites for unaccompanied Violin

5. Bloch Festivals

Ernest Bloch Music Festivals in Newport, Oregon
Four Pre-concert Lectures on Music by Bloch:

- (i) Two-piano works; (ii) Solo piano works; (iii) String quartets; (iv) string orchestra works

CD Review – Galatea Quartet

It is useful to have Bloch's short pieces for string quartet gathered together; but the main news must be the first recording – perhaps the first performance – of the student quartet he wrote aged 15. The title page, reproduced in the interesting booklet, says 'Quatuor á Cordes I', so the teenager already contemplated a series of such works. In the event he waited 20 years before giving us his official First Quartet.

As a violinist, Bloch knew the string medium well, even at 15. The first movement, in sonata form, is jolly and Haydnesque, although multiple stopping gives some passages a more orchestral sound than Haydn would contemplate. The Scherzo is almost like a Minuet but its slower Trio has a more modern feeling. The lovely Romance looks beyond Haydn to early Beethoven; and the sonata form Finale, beginning in zippy style, offers plenty of thematic contrast before the Haydnesque surprise ending.

This enjoyable work ends the programme. Going back to



the beginning, we fast-forward virtually three decades to the slow fugal Prelude of 1925, a beautiful piece which Bloch described as 'intensely Jewish'. The three Landscapes (1923) highlight Bloch's taste for the exotic. North, inspired by Flaherty's film *Nanook of the North*, evokes the atmosphere of frozen wastes; Alpestre is an impression of the Alps; and Tongataboo takes us to the island of Tongatapu in the Tongan archipelago: amid dancing rhythms, the instruments make percussive sounds including pizzicato. The familiar Prayer, originally for cello and piano, has been adapted for string quartet accompaniment by the cellist of the Galatea Quartet. It is

Bloch – String Quartet in G (1896); Prelude (Recueillement); Landscapes (Paysages); From Jewish Life – Prayer*; Deux Pièces; Night (Nuit); In the Mountains (Haute Savoie), Two Sketches

Jens Peter Maintz, solo cello*; Galatea Quartet (Yuka Tsuboi & Sarah Kilchenmann, violins; David Schneebeli, viola; Julien Kilchenmann, cello)

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nice played by the German cellist Jens Peter Maintz.

The Two Pieces were written for Bloch's devoted interpreters the Griller Quartet, the first in 1938, the rather jolly second in 1950, although annotator Alexander Knapp thinks they were based on earlier material. Night, from 1923, and the first of the Two Sketches, Dusk, use ostinato to create a crepuscular atmosphere and are very evocative. Rustic Dance, the second Sketch, does exactly what its title suggests.

The performances, superbly recorded in a German studio, are well played by the Zurich-based ensemble. However, *Music & Arts* has issued some

live concerts by the London String Quartet, including a 1950 performance of a suite consisting of Prelude, North, Tongataboo, Alpestre and Rustic Dance. By slightly slowing down the first, second and fourth pieces, the LSQ makes much more of them. Similarly, the Griller Quartet's 1947 recording of Night (Dutton CDBP 9713) is both slower and infinitely more atmospheric than the Galatea version, also making it clearer that the strings are muted. I wish the Galatea players had lived longer with some of these pieces before recording them, but in their brighter, more youthful way they do well enough.

Tully Potter

Bloch and the concept of 'Jewish' music

Many commentators have differentiated Bloch's 'Jewish' cycle from the rest of his very substantial oeuvre. In this context it is interesting to turn to Bloch's own assessment of his work

1. Extracts from a letter written by Ernest Bloch to Edmond Fleg (written as he prepared to compose the Jewish Cycle (1911-16):

"Here and there, I'm noting down some themes, mostly Jewish without my willing it, and which seem to crystallize gradually and show me the path that I'm instinctively and consciously to follow. I feel a complete flowering developing within me. I'm not pushing it; I'm not producing anything; and I'm not seeking to give form to these sketches for the moment. But I feel that the hour will come; and I await it with confidence, and with due deference to the present stillness that is determined by all-knowing natural laws.

There'll be Jewish rhapsodies for orchestra, Jewish poems, above all dramas; poems for voice, for which I don't have any words but for which I'd like Hebrew. A whole musical Bible will come; and I would like to allow "ancient tunes" to sing within me; in these the entire Jewish soul - profoundly national and profoundly human - will reverberate. New forms - free and pure, yet clear and magnificent - would have to be created. I sense them intuitively without as yet seeing them in front of me. I believe that one day I'll compose chants to be sung in the synagogue, partly by the Minister, partly by the faithful. It's really strange that all this is emerging slowly, and that

this power has chosen me, one who is outwardly so remote from all that's Jewish." [Bloch to Edmond Fleg, Satigny, near Geneva, Sunday 16 July 1911. See Joseph Lewinski and Emmanuelle Dijon, Ernest Bloch: Sa vie et sa pensée, Tome I: Les années de galères (1880-1916), Editions Slatkine, Geneva, 1998, p.543, translated from the French by Alexander Knapp]

2. Section on Bloch in Gdal Saleski's Great Musicians of a Wandering Race (1927) and the enlarged second edition re-titled Great Musicians of Jewish Origin(1949):

"Nationalism is not essential in music, but I think that racial consciousness is. The

two things are not the same, and I think that is where many composers get confused about the real issue. A man does not have to label a composition 'American' or 'German' or 'Italian', but he does have to be an American, German, Italian or even Jewish at the bottom of his heart if he expects to produce any real music. I, for instance, am a Jew, and I aspire to write Jewish music; not for the sake of self-advertisement, but because I am certain this is the only way in which I can produce music of vitality and significance if I can do such a thing at all".

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(N.B. Saleski actually gives more space to Bloch than to Mahler, Mendelssohn or Meyerbeer)

MARKO ROTHMÜLLER – a profile

The baritone Marko Rothmüller was the cantor in the very first London performance on October 13th 1949 of Bloch's *Avodath Hakodesh* or *Sacred Service*. The event was long overdue. The work had already been extensively performed in Europe and the USA; the first English performances back in 1938 were in Birmingham and Bristol with Roy Henderson, later a teacher of Kathleen Ferrier. Many important singers had performed as cantor, but a part of Rothmüller's claim to fame was that his performance with Bloch as conductor was broadcast live on the BBC and during the subsequent two days was recorded at the Decca studios for release originally on six double sided 78rpm shellac records. The very first recording of the work, it has subsequently been re-issued on long playing vinyl records and CDs.

So who was Marko Rothmüller? He was born in 1908 in Zagreb now the capital of Croatia. But back in 1908 it was in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and subsequently part of Yugoslavia. Apart from the fact that he was Jewish, this leaves a bit of a conundrum in seeking to define Rothmüller's nationality

prior to his settling in the USA much later in life. Rothmüller obtained a contract from the Opera company in Altona near Hamburg in 1932 – hardly an auspicious moment for a Jewish artist in what would soon be Nazi Germany! He returned to Zagreb where he spent two years with the opera company there – probably his only prolonged stay as an adult in the land of his birth. There

he sang a variety of major roles particularly in Verdi operas. An extant programme in my own collection shows him singing in *Il Trovatore* alongside Zinka Milanov who would shortly become a mainstay of the Metropolitan opera in New York. Rothmüller himself was at Covent Garden for the 1939 season but seemingly only appeared once on account of illness.

The war years were spent in Zurich and this was where Rothmüller really developed his operatic repertoire which

would ultimately extend to 96 roles – from Gluck to Berg! He also made his first recordings including one of the earliest versions of Schubert's song cycle *Die Winterreise*. Given what was happening in Europe at the time, this performance of a song cycle which focuses on a long winter journey ending in total desolation has an almost



Rothmüller made relatively few recordings but among them Bloch's *Sacred Service* is perhaps the best known.

haunting quality. Only from 1946 could Rothmüller launch a truly international career with 65 performances at the Vienna Opera. In the UK he appeared in opera seasons at London's Cambridge Theatre and subsequently at Glyndebourne, Edinburgh and Covent Garden. Further afield he sang with success in Paris, New York, New Orleans and at the Colon in Buenos Aires. At the very end of his operatic career he took on some small roles at the Metropolitan in New York. Rothmüller had already joined the music faculty of the University

of Indiana: as a teacher, musician and author in which latter capacity he completed his 'magnum opus' *The Music of the Jews*.

Rothmüller made relatively few studio recordings. The songs and lieder recorded in Switzerland during the war had very limited circulation in original form, although happily they have been reissued on CD. Later in London there were a few more shellac records issued by HMV on their mauve label rather than the higher priced red label. They enjoyed a reasonable circulation at the time and have also subsequently been reissued. I suspect the recording of *Sacred Service* is the best known of his recorded output and it is of course the version conducted by the composer. Could there have been anything else? On January 18th 1950 Ernest Bloch wrote to Marko Rothmüller about his opera *Macbeth*. Might the title role suit his voice and would he be interested? We have no knowledge of the reply if any!

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(editor's note: hopefully this article on Rothmüller will be the first in a series about important interpreters of Bloch's music, past and present. Contributions welcomed!)

Books about Ernest Bloch

The major work by Dr Joseph Lewinski and Emmanuelle Dijon *Ernest Bloch; sa vie et sa pensée* published by Slatkine, Genève, Switzerland is in French: hopefully there will in due course be an English edition. Its four volumes run to a total of around 3,500 pages: they contain an exhaustive coverage of Bloch's entire life virtually on a day to day basis complete with letters to an

enormous range of people. One invaluable feature consists of the detailed biographical notes about all the important people in Bloch's life. There are a huge number of illustrations of Bloch himself, performers of his music, programmes and much else. At the beginning of the material for each year we have a summary of what happened during the next twelve months – making it easy then to refer to the appropriate

place for more information. Performances of Bloch's works are covered in all countries. There is a people index at the end of each volume and in the final volume a detailed listing of all Bloch's compositions. A work of immense scholarship and research, this is exhaustive and definitive.

Another extremely useful book is David Z. Kushner *The Ernest Bloch Companion* published by the Greenwood

Press, Westport, Connecticut, USA. Much shorter in scale, this focuses on the relationship between Bloch the man and Bloch the artist. Moving through his life chronologically the book analyzes Bloch's work. There are many footnotes at the end of each chapter, some illustrations and an excellent bibliography. Highly recommended.

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