

Ernest  
**BLOCH**

**Symphony in E flat major**

**Macbeth: Two Interludes • Three Jewish Poems • In Memoriam**

**Royal Philharmonic Orchestra • Dalia Atlas**



## Ernest Bloch (1880-1959): Symphony in E flat major

### Macbeth: Two Symphonic Interludes • Three Jewish Poems • In Memoriam

Born in Geneva in 1880, the son of the owner of a clock business, Ernest Bloch spent periods of his life in Germany, Paris and the United States, as eclectic, perhaps, in his choice of residence as in his music. He studied in Geneva, with violin lessons from Louis Rey and composition from Émil Jaques-Dalcroze. In 1897 he went to Brussels, where he took lessons from the violinist Eugène Ysaÿe and in composition with François Rasse, a former pupil of César Franck. He went on to study further in Frankfurt and from 1901 to 1903 was in Paris, before returning to Geneva to work in his father's business, while continuing to develop his abilities as a composer. He first went to America in 1916, working as a conductor for the Canadian dancer Maud Allan and her company and going on to teach at the Mannes School in New York. From 1920 to 1925 he was the first director of the Cleveland Institute of Music. There followed a period as director of the San Francisco Conservatory, a post he relinquished in 1930 before a return to Europe, although in 1924 he had taken American citizenship. The increasing anti-semitism of the old world led to his return to the United States in 1938, and finally to a position on the staff of the University of California at Berkeley, where he continued to work until 1952. He died in 1959.

#### Keith Anderson

Ernest Bloch composed nearly thirty works for symphony orchestra or chamber orchestra. This recording comprises some of his least known masterpieces, spanning half-a-century.

From 1903 until 1910, while living in his native Geneva, Bloch's energies were focused primarily on *Macbeth*, a three-hour-long grand opera after Shakespeare. There are seven tableaux: a prologue, followed by three acts of two scenes each. Linking each pair of scenes is a symphonic interlude, and it is those from Acts I and III that Bloch abstracted and reworked, with minor modifications, into a

two-part orchestral piece, *Deux Interludes Symphoniques* (1939), some three decades after the completion of the opera. He prefaced each *Interlude* with a programme note in the score, indicating how his musical representations of characters, emotions and situations were manifested through a multiplicity of leitmotifs. These are associated, in *Interlude I*, with the Witches' prophecy, the dagger, fate, Macbeth's exaltation, the proposed murder of King Duncan, Lady Macbeth, night, and lastly, peace (in that order). *Interlude II* contains material from *Interlude I* as well as new leitmotifs, and falls into two distinct sections. The first comprises the Witches' dance, Macbeth's intoxication with power, destiny, royalty, his bitterness and doubts. The second describes the Witches, Macbeth's remorse, retribution, melancholy, desolation, and royalty. The climax centres upon his despair, following which the themes of peace and remorse bring the *Interlude* to a subdued close. The orchestration comprises triple woodwind, four horns, triple trumpets and trombones, bass tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings. Bloch, still in his twenties when writing the opera, was understandably much influenced by French and German styles; yet one can already detect elements that anticipate the idiom of his *Jewish Cycle* (1911-18; see below); for example, the extension of tonality, the use of the "Scotch snap", extremes of pitch and dynamic levels, passionate climaxes and opulent orchestration, sudden changes of timbre and atmosphere.

The three-movement orchestral suite entitled *Trois Poèmes Juifs* was the first of a group of seven large-scale, thematically related works which Bloch himself designated *The Jewish Cycle*. These "Poems" were completed in Satigny in September 1913, at a time when he was mourning the death of his father Maurice, to whose memory this work is dedicated. Although a number of traditional melodic patterns can be identified, there are no direct quotations from Jewish sources. Exotic modalities typical of the Eastern Mediterranean, however, are blended with western forms and tonality. The instrumentation (identical to

that of the *Macbeth Interludes*, but employing an expanded percussion section) is voluptuous, and the contrasts of mood are dramatic. According to Bloch, the rise and fall in intensity in the first movement, *Danse*, suggest the improvisations of tribal musicians and the erotic gestures of a half-dressed woman during a nocturnal ritual in honour of Astarte or Baal. The second movement, *Rite*, begins and ends with a priestly procession. The central section depicts sacrificial acts and their effect upon a terrified crowd. In the finale, *Cortège ténébreux*, Bloch gives full vent to grief at his father's passing. Following passages of searing intensity, a melody in C major quoted directly from *Invocation* – the last of his four *Poèmes d'Automne* for voice and piano (1906), and an echo of the first theme from *Danse*, bring the work to a peaceful conclusion.

*In Memoriam* was completed in Agate Beach, Oregon, on Christmas Eve 1952. This brief elegy was dedicated to the memory of the pianist Ada Clement, who once expressed particular affection for a teaching example that Bloch had composed as part of his detailed study of Renaissance polyphony. This theme is quoted in her honour. The calm of the outer and middle sections, as reflected in phrygian and mixolydian modalities, alternates with the impassioned character of the two episodes that separate them, the first being chromatic and the second in major tonality. The orchestra comprises double woodwind, two horns, timpani and strings.

In January 1956, Bloch wrote enthusiastically to his friend Ernest Chapman about the work that he had finished in Agate Beach in March 1955: "I thought first of a Concerto Grosso (No. 3) for small orchestra – wrote the 2 middle movements (Scherzo and Andante)... started the finale, for full orchestra! arrived at the Coda... and stopped! I felt that now... memories of the first movement – not yet conceived – had to emerge... And I realized that all the motives of 2, 3, and 4 had to originate in that 1st movement... I needed a long and tense meditation... going 'backwards' in my mind... Gradually these 'roots' took shape... and I wrote the first movement!" The succinct motto of four notes (similar in outline to the celebrated B-A-C-H motif), which rises through the whole orchestral gamut at the opening of the first movement, recurs in various guises throughout the

*Symphony in E flat major*. The key of E flat major is emphasized at the beginning by a deep tonic pedal-point, and is re-established at the very end. The basically tonal foundations of each respective movement, however, are often overlaid by extreme melodic and harmonic chromaticism. Though there are some turbulent passages, this work reflects the overall economy and relative reserve typical of the neoclassicism of many of the works that Bloch wrote during his "second American period" (1939-59). The outer two movements call for the same forces as the *Macbeth Interludes* (but with a smaller percussion section and without the harp), whereas the inner two require the instrumentation used for *In Memoriam* (plus two trumpets). The first movement comprises five short sections. The first, third and fifth, marked *Tranquillo*, contrast markedly with the second and fourth, marked *Allegro deciso*. The questioning nature and predominantly contrapuntal texture of the former alternates with the strident homophonic and unisonal writing of the latter. The second movement, *Allegro*, follows without a break. The form of this brilliant, angular Scherzo is ternary, and the overall key is B minor. The first subject of the first section begins with off beat accents. In the recapitulation, the accentuation is shifted to the down beat. Though Bloch was opposed to serialism as a system, he incorporated dodecaphonic melodies into several of his late works; and the third theme is a case in point. The middle section comprises a rocking motif accompanied by semiquaver arabesques. The short slow movement, *Andante*, in G sharp minor, is based upon a lyrical theme played at the outset by flute and solo viola, accompanied by muted strings. The mood here is intense and nostalgic throughout. The finale, *Allegro deciso*, is characterized by a series of short, lively motifs. Quotations from the first and third movements (and also from the end of the last movement of Bloch's *Piano Quintet No. 1*, completed in 1923) lead to an extensive and vigorous development section. After the climax, the mood relaxes into a reprise of the opening of the first movement (combined with a transformed restatement of the tone-row from the Scherzo); and the spacious coda is suffused with tranquility.

Alexander Knapp

## Ernest Bloch:

### Style, Interpretation and Performance

Ernest Bloch was a multifaceted and unique composer, different from any other in his exploration of musical styles. His music cannot be fully judged unless one is familiar with the full range of his compositions, the variety of his ideas, philosophies and styles: Neo-romantic, Impressionistic, Sacred, Polyphonic, Ethnological, Serial, Jewish, Chinese, Contemporary and more. One of the most striking phenomena after his death was that history neglected the greater part of his immensely varied compositions, apart from his music 'in Jewish style' for which he remained an icon.

Musicologists still puzzle over the fact that the rest of his remarkable masterpieces in other styles have been neglected, unpublished, forgotten or lost. During Bloch's lifetime, however, these works won prizes and awards and were frequently performed by the greatest conductors and performers.

The fact is that Bloch's innate music language was Jewish, influenced imaginatively after his reading of the Bible. In many of his compositions in other styles there can be found traces of Jewish scales and motifs, and this presents performers with a particular challenge.

The present recording offers examples of Bloch's differing styles: *Two Interludes* from the opera *Macbeth* (Style: Neo-romantic and Impressionistic); the last *Symphony in E flat* (Style: Contemporary, resembling in many ways his first *Symphony in C sharp minor*) [Naxos 8.573241]; *In Memoriam* (Style: Church music); *Three Jewish Poems* (Style: Jewish).

**Dalia Atlas**

*President of the Ernest Bloch Society in Israel*

## Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Patron: HRH The Duke of York, KG · Artistic Director and Principal Conductor: Charles Dutoit



Photo: Robert Taylor

Formed in 1946 by Sir Thomas Beecham, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO) has enjoyed more than 65 years of success, giving first-class performances of a wide range of musical repertoire all over the world with artists of the highest calibre. Under the inspired leadership of Artistic Director and Principal Conductor Charles Dutoit, the Orchestra maintains and builds on a demanding schedule of performances, tours, community and education work, and recordings. Throughout its history, the Orchestra has been directed by distinguished conductors including Rudolf Kempe, Antal Doráti, André Previn, Vladimir Ashkenazy and Daniele Gatti. Today the Orchestra continues to enjoy the support of high-ranking conductors such as Pinchas Zukerman, Grzegorz Nowak and Daniele Gatti. Central to the RPO's thriving concert schedule is its prestigious annual series at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall. At the Orchestra's London home Cadogan Hall, the intimate and luxurious surroundings provide the perfect concert atmosphere in an idyllic location. Completing the Orchestra's London programme of concerts, the iconic Royal Albert Hall provides the ideal setting for a varied series of monumental performances, ranging from large-scale choral and orchestral works to themed evenings of familiar repertoire. The Orchestra offers a comprehensive regional touring programme, with established residencies in Croydon, Northampton, Lowestoft, Reading, Crawley, Ipswich, High Wycombe, Aylesbury and Dartford. Internationally the Orchestra is in high demand, undertaking several major tours each season. Recent tours have included performances in the United States, Canada, China, Russia, Azerbaijan, Spain, Italy, Germany and Japan.

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## Dalia Atlas



Photo: Clive Barda

Dalia Atlas was born in Israel, graduated at the Music Academy of Jerusalem, and studied conducting with the most distinguished conductors abroad. She won seven prizes in prestigious international conducting competitions, the first woman to do so, and was immediately invited to conduct major orchestras. Maestro Fausto Cleva, a member of the jury of the Mitropoulos Competition, invited her to become his assistant conductor at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Unable to accept the offer, she returned to Israel where, inspired by her idealistic visions, she founded on a voluntary basis her two touring orchestras to spread music all over the country for the following 28 years. At the Technion in Haifa, Professor Dalia Atlas formed and directed musical activities to enrich future scientists with music and imagination. At the same time she accepted offers as a guest conductor worldwide with major orchestras and developed her international career. Her extensive repertoire includes about 750 scores, among them hitherto unknown music, some of her own discoveries, and also arrangements of her own. She has conducted some 72 orchestras, including The Philadelphia Orchestra, the Israel Philharmonic, the Philharmonia, the RPO, the LSO and the Mariinsky Orchestra, in concerts, festivals and recordings in thirty countries. Since 1996 she has undertaken extensive research into the music of Ernest Bloch to reveal and revive his neglected compositions, including the opera *Macbeth*. She is President of the Ernest Bloch Society in Israel.

This program includes some of the least known masterpieces from Ernest Bloch's nearly 30 works for orchestra. *Macbeth: Two Symphonic Interludes* is an intoxicating and passionate distillation of Shakespeare's powerful drama. *In Memoriam* is a brief elegy dedicated to the pianist Ada Clement, while the *Three Jewish Poems* were written when Bloch was mourning the death of his father. Originally conceived as a third concerto grosso, Bloch's last *Symphony*, in E flat major, is an at times emotionally turbulent and deeply spiritual work containing passages of harmonic acerbity.

Ernest  
**BLOCH**  
(1880-1959)

<b>Macbeth – Opera (1903-1910):</b>	
<b>Two Symphonic Interludes (1939)</b>	<b>13:37</b>
1 Act 1: Interlude	5:57
2 Act 3: Interlude	7:40
<b>Symphony in E flat major (1954-55)</b>	<b>25:09</b>
3 I. Tranquillo – Allegro deciso – Tranquillo – Allegro deciso – Tranquillo	9:11
4 II. Allegro	4:17
5 III. Andante	5:31
6 IV. Allegro deciso	6:10
7 <b>In Memoriam (1952)</b>	<b>4:34</b>
<b>Three Jewish Poems (1913)</b>	<b>24:41</b>
8 No. 1. Danse: Poco animato	8:07
9 No. 2. Rite: Calmo – Andante moderato	7:13
10 No. 3. Cortège funèbre: Lento assai	9:21

**Royal Philharmonic Orchestra • Dalia Atlas**

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