

Introduction

Norman Solomon

The period from the end of the nineteenth century until after World War II is one of the richest in the history of ‘serious’ music, ranging from Debussy and Ravel to Stravinsky and Bartók, from Elgar, Sibelius and Vaughan Williams to Prokofiev and Szymanowski, from Puccini to Benjamin Britten. And if we focus on music by composers of Jewish origin, we have Mahler and Schoenberg, Gershwin and Copland, Milhaud and Kurt Weill, not to speak of *Hazzanut* (cantorial art) and the more ‘popular’ klezmer.

Though the evaluation of Bloch as “The fourth “B” after Bach, Beethoven and Brahms”¹ seems exaggerated, there is no doubt that the best of his music can hold its own among the masterpieces of his time. It is not easy, therefore, to account for the relative neglect of his music in the second half of the twentieth century. The popular *Baal Shem Suite* retained its place in the violin repertoire, and the *Sacred Service* has a special niche, but performances of the quartets, the piano quintets, the Concerti Grossi, the symphonies, the ‘rhapsody’ *Schelomo* (in effect a cello concerto, and strongly championed by Zara Nelsova), the violin concerto, the opera *Macbeth* and so many other fine compositions became much less frequent.

Bloch’s personal style is readily recognizable across various genres of composition; his inclusion, and sometimes invention, of ‘national’ melodies (Jewish, Swiss, Chinese, Native American) never obscures his powerful, frequently passionate, individuality. To categorize him as a ‘late Romantic’ overlooks his eclectic use of Eastern and Western modalities, his frequent polytonality and less frequent experimentation with microtones, as well as his utilization of Gregorian chant, Renaissance-style polyphony and of classical forms.

Recently there have been signs of a revival of interest. Especially noteworthy for performance are the efforts of the Israeli conductor Dalia Atlas to promote his work; she has conducted his compositions internationally and recorded most of the orchestral repertoire. From 1998 Hayuta Dvir, often

¹ The origin of this frequently cited evaluation is unknown. Alexander Knapp

heard it from the composer’s daughter, Suzanne, as early as 1969.

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working with Atlas, introduced and discussed many of Bloch's works in his *Etnakhta* series on Israel Radio.

Academic study of Bloch, unlike performance, continued steadily throughout the twentieth century and is ongoing, as witness the pioneering studies of David Kushner (1967 onwards), Alexander Knapp (1971 onwards), David Schiller (1996, 2003), Zecharia Plavin (1997), Jacques Tchamkerten (2001), Klára Móricz (2008) and others, and the four-volume anthology of correspondence and other documentation edited by Joseph Lewinski and Emmanuelle Dijon between 1998 and 2005.

In 2004, some members of the London-based Jewish Music Institute, noting that the 50th anniversary of Bloch's death would fall in July 2009, began planning for the occasion, the first fruit of their work being the 2007 Cambridge Conference described below. Following this, in July 2008, the International Ernest Bloch Society, originally founded² in 1937 with Albert Einstein as its honorary president, was relaunched at the London home of Bob and Elisabeth Boas.³ Sir Charles Mackerras was its first president; following the death of Sir Charles, Steven Isserlis CBE was confirmed as president in 2011. The International Society, which has associates in several countries, produces a regular *Newsletter*, operates a website, encourages performance of Bloch's works, and supports the International Bloch Competition (for performance of his works).

The 2007 Cambridge Conference

From 29 to 31 July 2007, with the backing of the London-based Jewish Music Institute, the first ever International Academic Conference on Ernest Bloch took place at Fitzwilliam College, University of Cambridge. This brought together many of the leading Bloch scholars from around the world, as well as several performers and a number of members of the Bloch family, including Ernest Bloch II, the composer's grandson, whose presence and words gave an added sense of purpose to the occasion.

Keynote papers were delivered by Philip Bohlman on 'Journeys between Utopia and Dystopia: Chronotypes of Displacement on Ernest Bloch's Epic Landscapes', and by Klára Móricz on Bloch's self-understanding as a genius. Dalia Atlas drew on her extensive conducting experience to illustrate 'New Approaches to Interpreting the Multiplicity of Styles exhibited in Selected Compositions by Ernest Bloch'; Stanley Henig reviewed the premiere and performance history of Bloch's only completed opera, *Macbeth*; Jehoash

² Societies were founded in both New York and London.

³ An American-based Ernest Bloch Society was formed in 1967, but did not last.

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Hirshberg's theme was 'Bloch as a Model for the First Generation Composers of the Yishuv and Early Israel (1920–1960)'; Alexander Knapp focused on Bloch's self-understanding in the period 1916–19; Zecharia Plavin spoke on 'Bloch's Reception and his Standing in Israel since 1955'; and David Schiller compared and contrasted Bloch and Leonard Bernstein as composers of Jewish religious music. In addition, Joella Werlin offered insights into the 'Bloch Family Dynamics and Creative Forces', Frank Geltner outlined the Ernest Bloch Legacy Project (www.ernestblochlegacy.org/) and Akinori Itoh gave an account of his website, 'A Young Person's Guide to Ernest Bloch' (homepage3.nifty.com/bloch/), set up in 1999, and of the reception of Bloch in Japan. The proceedings were further enhanced by a recital consisting of a performance by Miriam Brickman (piano) of *Poems of the Sea* (1922), a lecture-recital of Bloch's *Poèmes d'Automne* (1906) by Andrea Rivers Baron, accompanied by Zecharia Plavin, and a performance by the Russian cellist Yosif Feigelson of the Suite No. 1 for Solo Cello and, accompanied by Malcolm Miller, of other works by Bloch, Mieczyslaw Weinberg and Solomon Senderer.

This event stimulated further activity, especially in connection with the International Jubilee Festival already mooted for the 50th anniversary of Bloch's death in 2009. Work towards the festival was coordinated by the Jewish Music Institute at the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London, by the Oregon Coast Council for the Arts and by the Ernest Bloch Legacy Foundation. Musical organizations large and small, including opera companies, orchestras, choirs, ensembles, soloists and venues worldwide were invited to include Bloch's music in their programmes for 2009 and beyond, and some responded positively; there was, for instance, a notable performance of Bloch's Piano Quintet No. 1 at the Wigmore Hall on 20 April 2009 by the Goldner Quartet with Piers Lane (piano). The same artists had recorded the work for Hyperion in 2007.

Also in 2009 the first annual International Bloch Competition, organized independently by the cellist Sagi Hartov but with support from the International Ernest Bloch Society, took place in London.

Academic research on Bloch received a further boost at the 15th World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem in 2009 when several sessions were devoted to Bloch's music, some of them by contributors to this volume.

Uniqueness of This Publication

A glance at the Select Bibliography will indicate the wide range of existing publications on Bloch and his music. The present volume focuses this

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activity by offering key studies by the leading authorities, combined with leads to available resources in print, online and on disk, for scholarship on and performance of Bloch's work. The chronology and list of works, with full publication and copyright details, are also presented here in easily accessible form for the first time. It is the hope of the editors that this volume will remain an authoritative reference source on Bloch, his work and Bloch scholarship for many years to come.

Summary of Contents

Specific compositions are discussed by Bohlman (*Israel Symphony, Helvetia and America*), Henig (*Macbeth*), Knapp (*Schelomo and the Baal Shem Suite*), Kushner (works from 1939) and Schiller (*Sacred Service*). Periods of Bloch's life and work are covered by Knapp (early period), Bohlman (1916–30) and Kushner (from 1939). Several articles (Móricz, Miller, Bohlman) touch, from various aspects, on Bloch's ambivalence about his Jewish identity and the relationship between nationalism and universalism, and the effect (if any) this ambivalence had on his music. Bloch's equally ambivalent relationship with Palestine/Israel, and the reception of his music there both before and after the foundation of the state, are dealt with by Bohlman, Hirshberg and Plavin, and tangentially by Kushner. Additional sections provide chronology, a list of works, a selective bibliography and a guide to recordings.

In the summaries that follow footnotes are kept to a minimum. For sources for the quotations refer to the articles in the main body of the book.

In the opening chapter Alexander Knapp addresses one of the most intriguing and confusing issues surrounding Bloch's musical and personal identity. In 1917, in the context of the set of seven works that he entitled his 'Jewish Cycle' (written mainly in Geneva, c.1911–16), he proclaimed his aspiration, as a Jew, to write Jewish music, because he was sure that this was the only way in which he could produce music of vitality and significance. Two years later, he wrote that his *Viola Suite* (recently completed in New York) did not belong to his 'so-called Jewish works', but that it was, instead, a vision of the Far East, of which he had so often dreamed. Knapp examines, first of all, some lesser known facts concerning Bloch's religious and domestic background and early years; second, his perception of Jewish music and of himself as an evolving 'Jewish composer'; third, the works of the 'Jewish Cycle'; and finally, the circumstances that appear to have brought about the end of the cycle itself, and the beginning of new musical directions.

Klára Móricz writes on 'The "suffering and greatness" of Ernest Bloch: concepts of the composer as genius'. She explains aspects of Bloch's personality, aesthetic and political views by pointing to their origin in his self-conception as

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a genius, a concept formed on models of Beethoven and Wagner. Drawing on Tia DeNora's 1995 biography of Beethoven, she argues that the concept of genius as distinguished from great talent appeared at the end of the eighteenth century in the context of the North German *Sturm und Drang* movement, which emphasized and valued creative originality and saw alienation and suffering as indispensable accessories of a genius. Mórícz attributes contradictions and inconsistencies in Bloch's views in part to the untenability of the Romantic role of genius in the twentieth century, when Romantic individualism gave way to social theories inspired by biological determinism.

Bloch's sense of alienation was not merely an acquired pose; born into a Jewish family in Switzerland, nurtured on German and French cultures, and spending most of his adult life in the United States, he declared himself at home nowhere:

In *Switzerland*, they say I am a Swiss renegade—In *America*: a Swiss expatriate who steals the prizes from *our* native composers . . . In *Germany*, I am a 'Frenchman' because I fought for Debussy!—in *France*, I am a 'German' because I defended G. Mahler—and now . . . the *Jews* put me 'out', say I am not a 'Jew' . . . *where* must I go to live and to belong! [To] the Moon?!!

Bloch's biological determinism became a pretext to push aside 'petit bourgeois' morality, and he found further 'justification' for his ideas on sexual freedom in the writings of Havelock Ellis. He welcomed the category of race as a determining factor in society, history and art. 'Does any man think he is only himself?' he asked Olin Downes in an interview. 'Far from it. He is thousands of his ancestors. If he writes as he feels, no matter how exceptional his point of view, his expression will be basically that of his forefathers.'

Malcolm Miller, in an essay on Bloch, Wagner and creativity, explores the relationship of Bloch and his music to Wagner: 'Bloch the Jewish composer and Wagner the anti-Semitic composer would appear not to be likely bedfellows. Yet for Bloch, the romantic searcher after Jewish identity at the cusp of musical modernism, Wagner, the forger of a German national identity in music and the romantic prophet of musical modernism, was a natural reference point.'

The crucial work for Bloch's situation as a Jewish composer was *Die Meistersinger*. In 1911, the year of the 'Jewish Cycle', he articulates how he sees the work not merely as a plea for German nationalism, but as a spur to develop both his own cultural nationalism and his search for a personal identity. Of a Berlin performance in 1911, he wrote to his friend the playwright Edmond Fleg:

It was not only Wagner I found there, but also a part of myself . . . our sensibility as Jews is closer to the complete human realisation (fulfilment) which is German music than the pretty forms of French music.

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In the 3rd act I was vibrant and sad at the same time – How beautiful it is to belong to a NATION, to feel around one a Harmony, to plunge one's roots deeply into a sacred soil. Wagner, exiled and alone proclaimed that, what a lesson.

Ernest Bloch, by becoming the 'Jewish composer' par excellence, deliberately took over the Wagnerian mantle at the same time as throwing down the gauntlet at Wagner. In his Jewish works, of the 'Jewish Cycle' and later, he set Jewish texts, and his choice of Jewish topics and conscious or unconscious musical elements was nurtured from within his Jewish historical community; he seeks to uphold Wagner's aesthetic while challenging Wagner's anti-Semitism.

Like Móricz, Miller stresses the composer's sense of alienation. Bloch himself, in a letter from Havelock Ellis in May 1932, published in this volume for the first time, points to the sense of fracture in integrating his identity. He declares that he cannot write 'abstract' music, a thought expressed also in his *Man and Music*:

Only that art can live which is an active manifestation of the life of a people. It must be a necessary, an essential portion of that life and not a luxury. It must have its roots deep within the soil that brings it forth.

As Miller observes, Bloch's words carry resonances of Wagner's definition of art in *The Art Work of the Future* (1849) as emanating from the life force of 'the people'. The opposite of such need is luxury, or superficial art, which Wagner, in the essay 'Judaism in Music' published shortly after, connects with the Jews, who lie outside the *Volk*, therefore out of reach of true creativity.

Most critics of Bloch readily accept him into the 'pantheon of universal composers'. British critics, in particular, have considered Bloch as part of the evolving international *zeitgeist* for national/racial/ethnic styles, as the creator of a Jewish style and as a composer with a very personal idiom that speaks to a universal audience. As Ernest Chapman wrote:

Bloch is essentially a man of his time, speaking to his people in a tongue that is their own and is understandable. By 'his people' is meant not only the Jewish race, but all men. He has a deep love for his fellows.

Miller concludes that Bloch knew that only by being true to himself and reaching inward could he speak to everyman; his search for identity may be seen as a modernist reinterpretation of Wagner's Romantic aesthetics.

David M. Schiller explores the relationship among religious works by three Jewish composers, all of whom, commencing with Bloch, are inspired by the notion of the 'Mass', a form with no obvious Jewish counterpart. The works are Bloch's *Sacred Service* (1933), Leonard Bernstein's *Kaddish Symphony* (1962), *Mass: A Theater Piece* (1971) and *Missa Brevis* (1988)

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and Shulamit Ran's *Credo/Ani Ma'amin* (2006). 'In tracing this trajectory,' he writes, 'the concept that links these compositions and the family resemblance that they share is clarified and redefined'.

On 23 April 1925, Ernest Bloch wrote of his desire to compose a musical setting of the Mass – 'a catholic, but symbolical, universal Mass!' He never wrote it; the *Sacred Service* took its place, without the all-embracing universality Bloch originally envisaged. Even so, Bloch clearly attempted to 'universalize' his work by not setting the traditional *Kaddish*, emphasizing Gustav Gottheil's proem instead. Bernstein, in his performances, wrote the *Kaddish* back in, and made great play with it in his own work: 'Bernstein thus creates [in *Mass: A Theater Piece*], on a verbal level, his own eclectic mix of "Jewish motives, Protestant Chorales, Gregorian chant!"'

In Schiller's view, Shulamit Ran's *Credo/Ani Ma'amin*, though musically remote from Bloch's *Sacred Service*, comes remarkably near to his conception of the Catholic Mass as a text of universal appeal; Ran's texts include the Nicene Creed and Maimonides's Thirteen Principles of Faith, as well as 'testaments' recalling the Shoah and the 11 September attacks on the World Trade Center. Unlike Bloch, Ran does not see 'Jewish' and 'universal' as mutually exclusive categories, nor does she conflate Catholicism (a religion) with catholic (as universal). And, unlike Bernstein, she does situate her *Credo* within a dramatized theatre piece, but allows it to speak for her.

Schiller concludes, 'The Mass Bloch never wrote continues to exist, not as a musical composition, but as a conceptual art work.'

David Kushner takes up the story in 1939, when Bloch settled in Oregon near his son, Ivan. In 1941, Bloch purchased the residence in Agate Beach where he based himself for the rest of his life, with 'the confluence of mushrooms, agates, and nearby mountains, and the impressive home'.

In 1940, he observed to the journalist Daniel L. Schorr, 'Time alone will tell, I did my best – I never bowed to fads or fashions of the day. I never attempted to be "new," but to be "true" and to be human, in a general sense, though faithful to my roots.' Kushner lists the Oregon compositions adding comments on each, liberally sprinkled with anecdotes, notes on performances, criticisms, and details of meetings with musicians such as Zara Nelsova and Menuhin.

Philip Bohlman's chapter, 'The future alone will be the judge: Ernest Bloch's epic journeys between utopia and dystopia', opens with a discussion of Bloch's relationship, when he was living in Europe in the 1930s, with the World Centre for Jewish Music in Palestine – something he envisaged at the time as a 'journey to Utopia', towards the future of Jewish music. The chapter then focuses on three large-scale orchestral works that in different ways chart utopian journeys: the *Israel Symphony* (1912–16), *Helvetia* (1900–29), and *America* (completed 1926).

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Utopia (Greek *ou topos* – ‘no place’) is that which is perfect, unlimited, universal. But the composer lives in ‘dystopia’, and is consequently subject to the limitations of time and place, to ‘chronotopes’ (the music of specific times, places, ethnic groups); he is condemned to be forever on a journey that cannot be completed. Bloch, whether as a Jewish, a Swiss or an American composer, inevitably fails to achieve the universality he craves. The three works therefore represent ‘places that he and those who might join him as co-utopians could never inhabit’.

Bohlman takes as his primary theoretical models for utopianism Augustine’s *City of God* and Thomas More’s *Utopia*, rather discounting their theological aims. He also invokes more recent Jewish models: Herzl’s *Altneuland*, Buber’s *Pfade in Utopie* and the philosopher Ernst Bloch’s utopian writings (e.g., Bloch 1988, 2000). But ‘The cosmopolitanism of the utopian world, however, remains unachievable no less for Bloch than for Augustine and Thomas More . . . the imagined unity of utopia . . . gives way to the difference that dominates dystopia.’ In musical terms, the gathering of fragments as in Bloch’s three symphonic works is the striving for broad, universal values; the *locally focused* ‘fragments’ of dystopia, seen for instance in the Jewish music of Djerba, are the ‘chronotope’.

Bohlman sees *Helvetia* as aesthetic in concept, *Israel* as ideological and *America* as negotiating between these contrasting approaches: ‘The Jewish works, in contrast [to *Helvetia* and *America*], demonstrate an urge to treat particular melodies creatively, to penetrate beyond the sound in its traditional forms to an ideological background, more often than not one that bears witness to Bloch’s personal voice. In this sense, the *Israel* Symphony provided a means for Bloch to turn his personal vision towards a utopian goal particularly well.’ These arguments are supported by an analysis of the musical techniques used in the three works, in particular the ‘experimentation’ in *America*, the use of ‘programmes’, and the contrasting treatment of folk melodies in each of the three.

Bohlman expresses the hope that he might have introduced a new dimension to the understanding of Jewish identity in Ernest Bloch’s work: the place of *ou-topia*, or ‘no place’, on the vast landscape of utopian thought. *Ou-topia* ‘might ultimately afford even richer possibilities to chart more clearly the paths that form the landscape of the modern world through which Bloch, as a self-consciously Jewish composer, chose to travel on a journey that he believed ultimately might lead to the very shores of utopia’.

Jehoash Hirshberg details the reception of Bloch in the Yishuv (Jewish community of pre-Israel Palestine) and the early years of the state of Israel. In the 1920s, concert life was dominated by emigrant members of the Society for Jewish Folk Music, founded in St Petersburg in 1908; small-scale works by Bloch appear in programmes from 1927.

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The inaugural broadcast of the Palestine Broadcasting Service on 31 March 1936 consisted of a short live performance including vocal compositions by Milhaud, Bloch and Ben-Haim; chamber works by Bloch became frequent in broadcast and public concerts. Later the same year the Palestine Orchestra was formed; its creator, the violinist Bronislaw Huberman, an admirer of Bloch, encouraged performance of the *Three Jewish Poems*, which met with mixed critical reception.

At the inaugural meeting of the World Centre for Jewish Music in Palestine (WCJMP) Jerusalem in 1938, Bloch and Milhaud were elected honorary presidents, and in 1940 the first performance of *Avodath Hakodesh* (the *Sacred Service*) took place in Palestine to enthusiastic acclaim. Following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the Palestine Orchestra, renamed the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra (IPO), performed *Schelomo* with cellist Zara Nelsova, the Violin Concerto with Yehudi Menuhin and the *Sacred Service*; yet Bloch himself never visited the country.

Zecharia Plavin continues the story, reviewing Bloch's reception and his standing in Israel since 1954. This emotionally charged topic is discussed on two levels. How is Bloch rated as a composer? What is the cultural meaning of his music, whether 'Jewish', 'Hebraic' or even 'Israeli'?

The years 1954–67, writes Plavin, were a period of 'internal cultural youth', when performances of Bloch's music, especially by the IPO and the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, along with some thoughtful programme notes, succeeded in shaping the overall cultural significance of Bloch (usually *negative*) to Israeli culture. Bloch is presented as a contemporary composer with a distinct Jewish cultural orientation, but 'out of tune' with the values of the new state.

The years 1967–74 began with a short, effective war and ended with a dark and bloody one. Israel gained a new romantic prominence among the world's Jews, so that practically everything Hebraic and/or biblical became linked to the centrality of what was perceived as a renewed Israel. This was followed by a decline in national mood, further aggravated by constant war in Lebanon in the years 1982–92; the musical public developed a growing passive acceptance of foreign imports.

After 1992, a second generation of native Israelis, educated and socialized abroad, returned to work in Israel. The social bifurcation of musical generations began: elders against Bloch, younger musicians with slight 'pro'-Bloch leanings. Immigration of highly professional musicians from the former Soviet Union transformed Israel's veteran musicians into a near-minority.

Since 2000 there has been an upsurge in broadcast performances of Bloch's chamber music; this owes much to Hayuta Dvir's promotion of each composition with a deeply researched discussion; Dalia Atlas's performances, recordings and advocacy also had great impact. At the same

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time, there has been rising attention to Bloch's work in academic circles; the 15th World Congress of Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University (2009) hosted day-long sessions and concerts devoted to Bloch's music.

Plavin concludes by noting that a new generation of Israeli concert-goers, in search of a humanist identity, find a safe haven in Bloch's music with its outspoken concepts of prophetic humanism and its all-embracing warm openness to all humans of the world, an openness uttered in musical Hebrew: 'For them, the lines "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (Isaiah 56:7), which are inscribed on the entrance of the synagogue of Lengnau, Bloch's father's birthplace – are words of comfort and redemption, like the music of Bloch himself.'

Stanley Henig places Bloch's only completed opera, *Macbeth*, in the context of expressionist compositions of the era, such as Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Bloch made the acquaintance of the dramatic soprano Lucienne Bréval in Switzerland and it is probably through her influence at the Opéra Comique that *Macbeth* (it was dedicated to her) was performed there in 1910, with herself in the role of Lady Macbeth. There were about ten performances that year, but Bréval broke with the company at the beginning of 1911 for reasons unknown and went on tour in Russia, leaving Bloch feeling betrayed. Henig discusses both the situation of opera in Paris in that era and Bloch's interpretation of Shakespeare. The opera was not performed again until 1938, when it was produced at the San Carlo Opera in Naples in an Italian version, at a time when fascist Italy and Nazi Germany were drawing closer, making the production of a work by an avowedly Jewish composer problematic. Only after the war, in 1953, was *Macbeth* revived, this time in Rome's Teatro Costanzi, since when there have been sporadic performances on both sides of the Atlantic, mostly with cuts. Henig ends with a passionate plea to 'let *Macbeth* come to us with "full force"'. In a useful supplement Henig lists over ninety performances of *Macbeth* in English, French and Italian.

In a second essay, 'King Solomon and the Baal Shem Tov: traditional elements in Bloch's musical representation of two iconic personalities from Jewish history', Alexander Knapp offers a brief introduction to two of Bloch's most celebrated works, *Schelomo* (cello and orchestra) and *Baal Shem* (violin and piano); he explores the contrast between Bloch's perceptions of biblical Israel on the one hand, and the Hasidic culture of pre-World War II on the other. These images are focused in his understanding of the personalities of King Solomon and Israel Baal Shem Tov, and are given musical expression in *Schelomo* and *Baal Shem*, respectively. Accounts of the inspiration for, and genesis of, these works lead to a commentary and analysis of the relationship between Bloch's melodic style and traditional Ashkenazi elements drawn from sacred and secular genres, as demonstrated