

SEO, MINJUNG, D.M.A. Ernest Bloch's Musical Style From 1910 To 1929
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The purpose of this paper is to describe the change in Ernest Bloch's musical style between 1910 and 1929. His Jewish heritage was a great source of inspiration for his compositions throughout his lifetime, many of which include elements of Jewish melodies and rhythms and use Biblical and descriptive titles. This is especially true of the large orchestral works of the 1910s written when he was still living in Switzerland.

After Bloch came to the United States in 1916, his musical style gradually began to change. During the 1920s his role in the classical music field motivated him to accept and apply modern techniques and ambiguous tonalities to his abstractly titled compositions. As a professor and a leader in various music schools, including the David Mannes School, Cleveland Institute of Music, and the San Francisco Conservatory, he composed smaller ensemble works rather than large orchestral works in order for his music to be accessible to students.

The paper examines the general stylistic traits of Bloch in this period and discusses, through an analysis of melodic and rhythmic motives and an outline of his application of modern techniques, how his style changed most in his compositions. In conclusion, it suggests possible reasons for this stylistic change.

ERNEST BLOCH'S MUSICAL STYLE FROM 1910 TO 1929 A SHIFT FROM
JUDAIC IDENTITY TO MODERN IDENTITY

by
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Ernest Bloch (1880-1959) is known as a composer whose Jewish heritage was possibly the greatest inspiration for his compositions throughout his lifetime. Many of his compositions include elements of Jewish melodies and rhythms and use Biblical and descriptive titles associated with the Jewish faith, especially in the 1910s when he was still living in Switzerland. He absorbed a variety of European musical styles while studying in several European cities including Geneva, Brussels, Frankfurt, Munich and Paris. His compositions at this time were mostly large, colorful orchestral works: for example, the *Symphony in C-sharp minor* (1903) and the *Hiver – Printemps, deux poèmes symphoniques* (1905), reveal the influence of German post-Romanticism in the style of Strauss, as well as the colorful impressionistic orchestration and instrumentation of French music. After his return to Geneva, Bloch continued to search for his own musical identity and found it in a number of Biblical stories. The compositions that especially mark Bloch as a Jewish composer are known as the ‘Jewish works,’ and include such compositions as *Psalm 137* and *Psalm 114* for soprano and orchestra (1912–14), *Psalm 22* for baritone and orchestra (1914), the *Israel Symphony* with five solo voices (1912–16), and *Schelomo, a Hebraic Rhapsody* for cello and orchestra (1915–16). Those compositions contain authentic Jewish materials, such as the citation of psalms, as

well as suggestive features that include melodic augmented seconds, long melismatic melodic lines, and Scottish-snap rhythms¹ from Jewish melodies. He seldom quoted original melodies in his works, instead preferring to borrow certain fragments of the melodies and use them to evoke a Jewish flavor.

While Bloch was in Geneva, he served briefly as the conductor of the Lausanne Orchestra in 1909 as well as the Geneva Orchestra in 1914. While these positions provided him with the opportunity to premiere his symphonies and other works, Bloch experienced significant financial difficulties. In 1915, he asked his old friend Alfred Pochon, second violinist of the Flonzaley String Quartet,² about the possibilities in America, the musical New World. Pochon encouraged him to apply for a position as conductor of the European based Maud Allan Dance Company Orchestra which was on its American tour.³ Bloch decided to join the tour and he and his family landed in America on July 20, 1916. In December of that year, Bloch had one of his first major public successes with a performance of his first string quartet by the Flonzaley String Quartet. Further successes included performances of his orchestral compositions by major American orchestras such as the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Philadelphia

¹ A rhythmic figuration in which a dotted note is preceded by a note of shorter value. It is a feature of *Strathspey* (lively Scottish dance music) and is found in some Scottish songs. "Scotch Snap (Catch)." In *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. rev., edited by Michael Kennedy. *Oxford Music Online*, (accessed 9 March 2011); available from <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e9191>; Internet.

² American string quartet. It was established in 1902 in New York by Edward J. De Coppet, a banker of Swiss descent, for private performances in his house. 'Flonzaley' was the name of De Coppet's summer estate, near Lake Geneva, where the first rehearsals were held. The Flonzaley Quartet was known for performing works by living composers. Richard Aldrich and Robert Philip, "Flonzaley Quartet." In *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, (accessed 9 March 2011); available from <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/09842>; Internet.

³ David Z. Kushner, *The Ernest Bloch Companion* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press), 43.

Symphony Orchestra in 1917. The programs for these concerts included his “Jewish works” such as his *Israel Symphony*, *Three Jewish Poems*, and *Schelomo*, performed by the Boston Symphony Orchestra with Austrian conductor Artur Bodanzky (1877-1939) and the Dutch cellist Hans Kindler (1892-1949). In connection with his “Jewish works” programs, Bloch himself conducted the New York Philharmonic and the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra. Further evidence of his growing reputation within America can be seen in his signing a contract with G. Schirmer to publish his works, as well as his winning the Coolidge Prize with his *Suite 1919* for viola and piano. Around this time, Bloch was appointed as a theory professor in the David Mannes School in New York and taught theory and composition there from 1917 to 1920. Also, he served as a founding director of the Cleveland Institute of Music from 1920 to 1925 and was appointed as artistic director of the San Francisco Conservatory in California from 1926 to 1929. After Bloch settled in America his musical style gradually began to change. During the 1920s, as a professor and a leader within the American musical education system, he began to apply modern techniques such as quarter tones and ambiguous tonality to many of his compositions and began moving away from Jewish-related themes and motives. For these later compositions he preferred neutral titles, such as sonata, trio, and quintet rather than descriptive titles associated with his Jewish heritage. Instead of large orchestral works, he composed works for smaller ensemble including the Piano Quintet No. 1 (1921-3), *Three Nocturnes* for piano trio (1924) and Concerto Grosso No. 1 (1924-5) in order to make his music more accessible to students. For the rest of his life as a

composer, he never truly returned to the strong Jewish influences, but instead kept moving forward towards a more modern style.

This paper outlines Bloch's life and works, describes the general stylistic traits of Bloch's music during this period by means of rhythmic and motivic analysis, and discusses the manner in which his musical style changed as exemplified in his compositions from the 1920s. In conclusion, it suggests possible reasons why his musical style changed especially in light of his positions within the American educational system and the growing influence of Neo-Classicism.

CHAPTER II

BLOCH'S MUSICAL BACKGROUND

Ernest Bloch (1880-1959) was born into a Jewish family in Geneva, Switzerland. His grandfather was the president of the Jewish community of Lengnau, and his father, as a young man, studied for the rabbinate. As a result, Bloch grew up with the influence of Jewish cantors and the Hebrew language, hearing his grandfather and father singing Jewish prayers and melodies both in religious and domestic settings. When his father passed away in 1913, Bloch composed *Three Jewish Poems (Trois Poèmes Juifs)* for *Orchestra* and dedicated it to his memory. Bloch described his father's influence on the Jewish aspects of his compositions in a letter to Henry Minsky in 1943 writing, "My father Maurice Bloch often sang Hebrew melodies which impressed me deeply."⁴

Three Jewish Poems conveys emotional intensity and sorrow as the titles of the movements — "Danse," "Rite," and "Cortege funèbre (Funeral Procession)," — would suggest. Bloch described the "Danse" as "somber, mystical, languorous"⁵ and attempted to suggest the glory of King Solomon's court in orchestral colors. Bloch wrote of the "Rite," "This music is more emotional, but there is something solemn and distant, as in

⁴ Henry Shaffer Minsky, "Ernest Bloch and His Music," unpublished dissertation, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1945; quoted in Robert Strassburg, *Ernest Bloch: Voice in the Wilderness* (Los Angeles, California: The Trident Shop), 6.

⁵ Ernest Bloch, "Program Notes," *Boston Symphony Orchestra*, (March 17, 1939): 889-893; quoted in "Program notes of Three Jewish Poems," *G. Schirmer, Inc.*, (accessed on March 10, 2010); available from <http://www.schirmer.com/>; Internet.

the ceremonies of a cult.”⁶ Of the last movement, “Cortege funèbre,” he wrote, “This is more human. My father died and these poems are dedicated to his memory...at the end, sorrow bursts forth and at the idea of an eternal separation, the soul breaks down.”⁷

Bloch’s own musical training started with a toy flute at six years old, purchased by his mother, Sophie Brunschwig Bloch. After three years, Bloch started to study the violin, an instrument on which he excelled. He also composed short tunes for the violin and talked about composing an opera based on a French epic poem.⁸ Bloch remembered:

I don’t believe that I was more than nine or ten when I made up my mind what I would do. Certain professions were closed to me. Neither of my parents was musical, yet music it was to be. I would compose music that would bring peace and happiness to mankind.⁹

He studied composition with Émile Jacques-Dalcroze (1865-1950) and violin with Louis Etienne-Reyer (1832-1909) at the Geneva Conservatory. His studies with Dalcroze strengthened his skill with orchestration, instrumentation and notation, while the influence of Swiss folk music and post-Romantic music was significantly developed. Works composed during this time include his String Quartet (1896, unpublished) and *Symphony Orientale* (1896, unpublished).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Suzanne Bloch and Irene Heske, *Ernest Bloch, Creative Spirit*. (New York: Jewish Music Council of the National Jewish Welfare Board, 1976), 47.

⁸ Robert Strassburg, *Ernest Bloch, Voice in the Wilderness*. (Los Angeles: The Trident Shop, 1977), 5.

⁹ Norma Ryland Graves, “At Home with Ernest Bloch,” *Etude* (October, 1955): 16; quoted in Strassburg, 5.

In 1896, at the age of 16, Bloch moved to Brussels to study violin and conducting with Eugene Ysaÿe and remained there until 1899. At this time, Bloch lived with a guardian, Franz Schörg, who was a well-known violinist, Professor of Violin at the Royal Conservatory of Music, and the leader of the Brussels String Quartet. Schörg and Ysaÿe often held chamber music concerts at their houses where Bloch heard the music of César Franck, Claude Debussy, Camille Saint-Saëns, and Gabriel Fauré, all of whom were close friends of Ysaÿe.

In 1899 Bloch decided to leave Belgium for Germany to study with Iwan Knorr (1853-1916) and Ludwig Thuille (1861-1907). Bloch absorbed different elements from both composers. Knorr was a passionate teacher at the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt and was known as one of the greatest masters of counterpoint and fugue of his time. A prolific composer, Thuille was a professor at the Akademie der Tonkunst in Munich and was a leading figure at the time. Thuille's friendship with Richard Strauss (1864-1949) attracted him to rich orchestral colors and bold harmonic ideas, as shown in his Sextet, Op. 6 (1891) and Piano Quintet, Op. 20 (1901). With Knorr, Bloch embarked upon an in-depth analysis of the works of Bach and Beethoven, and from Thuille he developed his orchestral palette of colors in the style of Strauss. While studying with Thuille, Bloch completed his Symphony in C-sharp minor in 1903, a dramatic and lengthy cyclic work and being a mature composition emulating the style of Strauss's orchestration. In 1917, Bloch stated in his program notes for the New York Philharmonic performance of the Symphony,

The work represents me as I was at twenty-one, with my struggles. I only tried to express myself, simply, sincerely, without looking for originality. I had just finished my preparatory musical studies and was ready to begin the real studies about life, about everything.¹⁰

After completing nine years of studies in Switzerland, Belgium, and Germany, Bloch stayed in Paris for a year in 1903. While in Paris, he met Debussy and became an admirer of his music, especially his opera, *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Also during this period, he became good friends with a Jewish poet and historian Edmond Fleg (1874-1962). Over the next five years, they worked together on composing an opera *Macbeth* (1904-9) with Fleg as librettist. In this work, one can sense the influence of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, and Wagnerian music drama. Although Bloch made acquaintances in Paris and attempted to stage performances of his compositions, he was not entirely successful.

Upon his return to Switzerland in 1903, Bloch found occasional work as a conductor, performer and composer such as writing the symphonic poem, *Hiver – Printemps, deux poèmes symphoniques* (1905), which was premiered in Geneva. It was during this time that he met the young female poetess Béatrix Rodès, setting her poetry in *Poèmes d'Automne* for soprano and orchestra (1906). After ten years in Switzerland, Bloch finally established himself as a conductor, composer, and professor in Lausanne and Geneva. Between 1910 and 1914, he was appointed as a director and conductor of both the Lausanne and Geneva orchestras, premiering his own orchestral compositions and works by Debussy, Liszt, Fauré, and others. However, in 1915, his contracts for both

¹⁰ Strassburg, 14.

his lecture series at the Geneva Conservatory and the directorship of the Geneva orchestra were not renewed. Those failures and the resulting financial struggle led him to ask his friend Alfred Pochon, the second violinist of the Flonzaley String Quartet, if he knew of any opportunities in America. Bloch decided to leave his country and landed in New York in 1916 as a conductor of the Maud Allen Dance Company Orchestra.

CHAPTER III

THE SHIFT IN ERNEST BLOCH'S MUSICAL STYLES

Judaic Identity during the 1910s

Bloch experienced a wide variety of European musical styles after studying with several different teachers, although at first he was unable to find his own stylistic identity. After searching for his own style, closely conversing with a Jewish poet and friend, Edmond Fleg, and reading the Bible, he finally came to terms with his Judaic heritage. Bloch rediscovered his Jewish heritage and roots while he was closely working with Fleg on *Macbeth*. At this time Bloch wrote to Fleg, further demonstrating his growing identity as a Jew: "I have read the Bible ... and an immense sense of pride surged in me. My entire being vibrated; it is a revelation. ... I would find myself again a Jew, raise my head proudly as a Jew."¹¹ Further collaborations with Fleg include settings of the psalms 114, 137, and 22, each for a different solo voice with orchestra. Fleg chose and wrote the French adaptations from the verses of the Bible for these psalm settings.

During the 1910s, Bloch's compositions had strong Jewish elements, notably his "Jewish works," including *Psalm 137* and *Psalm 114* for soprano and orchestra (1912-14), *Psalm 22* for baritone and orchestra (1914), the *Israel Symphony* with five solo voices (1912-16), and *Schelomo, a Hebraic Rhapsody* for cello and orchestra (1915-16).

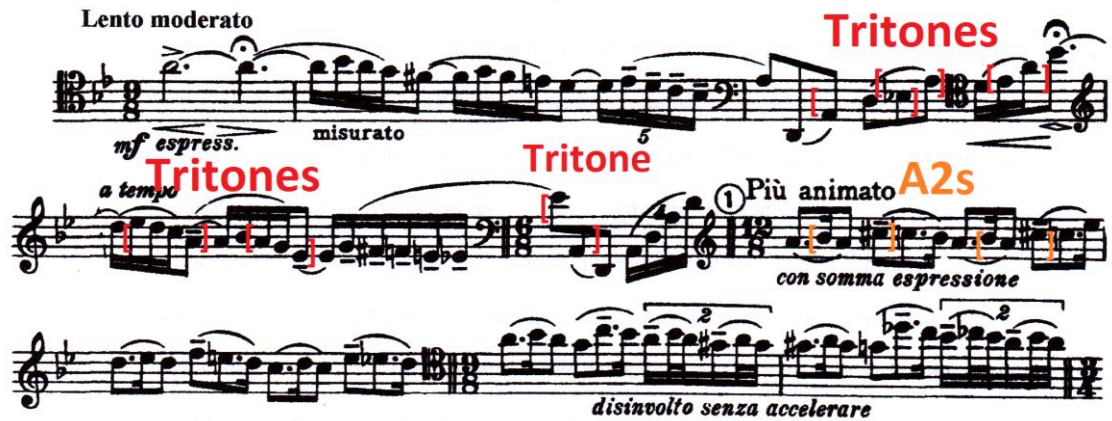
¹¹ Letter from Bloch to Fleg, November 30, 1906, in David Kushner, *The Ernest Bloch Companion* (Westport, CT: The Greenwood Press, 2002), 29.

All of these compositions were composed between 1912 and 1916 and were inspired by Biblical stories, characters and Jewish melodies. The components of his orchestral style at this time include a grand scale, free forms, and rich and colorful harmonies and instrumentation. In many respects, this kind of orchestral setting is a perfect medium to describe Biblical images, delivering majestic characters and images of Jewish Biblical stories. In *Schelomo*, for example, the dramatic and oversized orchestra describes the vastness of the kingdom of Solomon as well as his long life.

Another significant feature of his style at this time involves Jewish thematic melodies, which imitate Jewish cantors and prayers and contain melismatic figures with modal qualities and dissonant melodic leaps. As shown in Figure 1, *Schelomo* begins with a long lamentation-like melisma in the cello. Bloch explained that the cello can be imagined to be the reincarnated voice of King Solomon.¹² The mix of descending scales and leaps imbues the melody with a narrative character imitating King Solomon's voice. In addition, the A-to-E-flat tritones in mm. 3-5 and the B-flat-to-C-sharp augmented seconds in m. 6 lend the melody a Jewish quality.

¹² Suzanne Bloch and Irene Heskes, *Ernest Bloch: Creative Spirit* (New York: Jewish Music Council of the National Jewish Welfare Board, 1976), 44.

Figure 1: *Schelomo, a Hebraic Rhapsody* for Cello and Orchestra, mm. 1-9



Another excerpt that incorporates Bloch's use of dissonant intervals is in the last movement of *Three Jewish Poems*. As shown in Figure 2, the augmented second between C-sharp and B-flat in m. 3, as well as the mixing of G Dorian and G minor modes, create an atmosphere of a Jewish procession. Viola 1 and 2 move in nearly parallel motion, creating perfect fourths, augmented fourths, perfect fifths, and one diminished fifth. The combination of these harmonic intervals with the mixed modes in the melodies lends an antique quality to the passage.

Figure 2: “Funeral Procession” from *Three Jewish Poems*, mm. 1-4

Bloch seldom directly quoted Jewish prayers in his compositions preferring instead to imitate Jewish melodies by incorporating characteristic motives from them. For example, he used one of the Jewish prayers that his father used to sing as a motive in the middle section of *Schelomo*.¹³ Figure 3 compares the excerpt from *Schelomo* with its model. The melody of prayer features repeated notes and arpeggiation; Bloch employs these elements, repeating the melody on different instruments.¹⁴

Figure 3: The Model for an Excerpt from *Schelomo*

a. Jewish prayer, *Magen 'Abot* on B

¹³ Max Wohlberg, *Illustrations for Lectures on Modes and Melodies of the Synagogue* (unpublished), F. Ogutsch, *Der Frankfurter Kantor*, Frankfurt, 1930, and M. Wodak, *Hammazeach*, Vienna, 1898; quoted in Alexander Knapp, “The Jewishness of Bloch: Subconscious or Conscious?,” *The Journal of the Royal Musical Association* Vol. 97 (1970), 104.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

b. *Schelomo*, Oboe part, mm. 8 and 9 after ⑩



Another way in which Bloch assimilates characteristics of Jewish melodies is through his incorporation of innate rhythmic patterns of the Hebrew language. For example, in his processional music, he imitated the Hebrew language by using what is known as “Scottish snap rhythm,” which frequently accents the final vowel of each word. Figure 4 shows how Bloch elongates every other note to imitate the patterns of the Hebrew language.

Figure 4: *Schelomo*, mm. 35-38



Another way in which Bloch incorporated Jewish elements into his musical language is through his approach to form. Bloch was eager to express his Judaic identity by using free forms as opposed to more traditional, more conventional forms. In many respects this approach makes logical sense: the scale of the Biblical narratives seem to call for less rigid and more rhapsodic formal structures. In 1911, while Bloch was sketching these Jewish works, he wrote the following to Fleg,

I note here and there themes that are, without my willing it, for the greater part Jewish, and which begin to make themselves precise and indicate the

instinctive and also conscious direction in which I am going. I do not search to give them a form. I am producing nothing so far, but I feel that the hour will come and I await it with confidence, respecting this present silence imposed by the natural laws that know...All my musical Bible shall come, and I would let sing in me these secular chants where will vibrate all the Jewish soul, in what it has profoundly national and profoundly human. New forms should be created, free and well defined, also clear and sumptuous.¹⁵

The structure of the *Israel Symphony* is like a symphonic poem, in contrast to his Symphony in C-sharp minor which has four clearly divided movements. The *Israel Symphony* is through composed and divided into three parts that are connected by short transitions. Bloch explained,

Though a single unit, the symphony falls into three sections: a slow introduction, *Adagio Molto* (Prayer of the Dessert) is immediately followed by the *Allegro Agitato* (Yom Kippur) with a main theme of bold barbaric character...a short transition leads into the second part *Moderato* (Succoth), which after a fierce climax, brings in the voice...The second part of the work is more contemplative, serene, a kind of prayer.¹⁶

Bloch's Judaic identity also appears strongly in his melodic elements with the use of repetitive notes and rhythms, modal melodies with dissonant leaps, and prayer-like melismas. He expressed his passion for being a Jew with both his lyrical and dramatic musical style.

¹⁵ Strassbug, 44.

¹⁶ Ibid., 48.

Modern Identity during the 1920s

In July 1916, Bloch arrived in New York after having been hired as conductor of the Maud Allen Dance Company orchestra. His New York performance at the Forty-fourth Street Theater was praised as having “taste, distinction, and authority” in the *New York Times*,¹⁷ and a few months later his String Quartet No. 1 was successfully premiered by his supportive friends, the Flonzeley Quartet. Through the Flonzeley Quartet members, Bloch became acquainted with many musicians in the New York and Boston areas, and consequently spreading his reputation. Eventually Bloch was appointed as a professor at the David Mannes School (later the Mannes College of Music). There he taught courses on harmony, counterpoint, fugue, instrumentation, orchestration, and musical form from 1917 to 1919. In 1920, Bloch served as founding director of the Cleveland Institute of Music, where he taught composition and conducted the student orchestra. It was during his time at CIM that he composed *Poems of the Sea* (1922) and *Enfantines* (1923), both for piano, *Baal Shem*, *Three Pictures from Hassidic Life* for violin and piano (1923), *From Jewish Life* for cello and piano (1924), Violin Sonata No. 2, *Poème mystique* (1924), Piano Quintet No.1 (1924), and Concerto Grosso No. 1 (1925). In 1926, he was appointed as director of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, a position he held until 1929. While on the west coast, he composed *America, an Epic Rhapsody* for chorus and orchestra (1926), *Four Episodes* for chamber orchestra (1926), and *Helvitia* for orchestra (1929).

¹⁷ “Maud Allen Dances Anew,” *New York Times* (October 17, 1916); quoted in David Z. Kushner, *The Ernest Bloch Companion* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press), 43.

During the 1920s, his compositions were quite different from his “Jewish works.” In general he wrote smaller ensemble pieces rather than grand orchestral pieces and, in some respects, the intimacy of these chamber or solo compositions reveal more of Bloch’s personality and character. His knowledge of J.S. Bach, Palestrina, and counterpoint in general influenced his composing as other Neo-Classical composers also adapted forms, textures and compositional techniques of the Baroque and early Classical periods. Pianist Sophia Melvin recalled from her correspondences with Bloch that the compositional techniques in *Poems of the Sea* are quite similar to J.S. Bach’s voicing techniques in the fugues. When she visited Bloch, she noted that he had memorized all the Fugues from the *Well-Tempered Clavier* and analyzed each motive and its relationship to the opening exposition, using colored pencils for clarification.¹⁸ His enthusiasm for Baroque music drew his own musical style closer to the more modern Neo-Classical style. On the surface at least, his Judaic identity weakened and a more progressive sound began to emerge. His Concerto Grosso No. 1 is similar to Bach’s Brandenburg concertos and has four movements, including “Prelude” and “Fugue” with piano obbligato, which has a similar role to the harpsichord in the Baroque period. However, using the piano as a continuo obviously creates a huge difference in sound from the Baroque era, and the harmonic progressions he used reflect modern techniques such as pandiatonicism and enharmonic modulations. He composed only two Jewish pieces during this period — *Baal Shem* and *From the Jewish Life* — but they were more inspired by present-day Eastern European Jewish cultures rather than by Biblical stories.

¹⁸ Sophia Melvin, “Recollections of Ernest Bloch,” *Clavier*, Vol. 19 (November 1980), 32.

Bloch's melodies in his music of the 1920s generally contain larger intervallic leaps — fourths and sevenths — instead of stepwise motions. During the 1910s, Bloch often used stepwise melodic passages with perfect fourths (for proclamation) in the Jewish compositions, but in the later music these larger intervals function motivically to create clashes and an agitated atmosphere. As shown in Figure 5, at the beginning of the Piano Quintet No. 1, fourths and sevenths continue to appear as motivic intervals. Also, the example demonstrates the use of polytonality — C minor in the strings and B major in the piano in m. 9 — and rhythmic instability created by simultaneous simple and compound divisions of the beat. The combination of polytonality and rhythmic instability creates harsh sounds and an agitated mood. Bloch indicated how to play quarter tones at the beginning of the first movement.

Figure 5: Piano Quintet No.1, I, mm. 7-10

The sign \nearrow before a note indicates $\frac{1}{4}$ tone *above* that note
The sign \searrow before a note indicates $\frac{1}{4}$ tone *below* that note

The image displays a musical score for the first movement of Piano Quintet No. 1, measures 7 through 10. The score is written for five staves: four for strings (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello) and one for piano. The key signature is C minor, indicated by two flats (Bb and Eb). The time signature is 3/4. The score features complex rhythmic patterns with many beamed sixteenth and thirty-second notes. A red box highlights the string parts in measures 7-10, with the text "c Minor" written in red above the box. Another red box highlights the piano part in measures 7-10, with the text "B Major" written in red above the box. This illustrates the polytonality of the piece. The notation includes various accidentals, including sharps and flats, and some notes have a quarter-tone symbol (a small 'v' or '∧') above or below them, indicating quarter-tone intervals.

Another notable feature of his developing modern identity is the abundant use of modern string techniques and markings, including quarter tones, *sul ponticello*, *col legno*, and *sulla tastiera* (*sulla tasto*). Some of these techniques were introduced in the symphonies of Berlioz and the orchestral works of Debussy, but only appeared a few times. Bloch, however, used those techniques throughout his pieces in order to create different moods and sounds. As shown in Figure 5, the first movement of his Piano Quintet No.1 opens with the strings playing quarter tones for approximately twenty measures while the piano plays fourths and sevenths in unison in order to create a menacing mood. In the second movement he used *sul ponticello* to create an ambiguous and mysterious atmosphere while emphasizing tonal ambiguity, changing modes almost every few measures. In the last movement he used *col legno* and *sulla tastiera* for rhythmic emphasis and to create a somewhat primitive sound. Bloch also uses an abundance of *glissando* markings in the strings.

The use of ambiguous tonality is one of the most notable features of his modern identity. The second movement of the Piano Quintet No.1 begins with an open fifth on A, which creates a mysterious and distant character. Figure 6 displays a passage from the second movement that superimposes A-major and A-diminished triads, creating clashes between E-flat and E and between C and C-sharp with a soft dynamic marking. An ambiguous atmosphere is created through this combination of harmonies as well as through the use of *sul ponticello* on the strings.

Figure 6: Piano Quintet No. 1, II, mm. 6-8

The image displays a musical score for Piano Quintet No. 1, II, measures 6-8. The score is written for five staves: four for the string quartet (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass) and one for the piano. The key signature is one sharp (F#), indicating A Major. The time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into two sections by a red box. The first section, labeled 'A Major' in red, covers measures 6-7. The second section, labeled 'A Diminished' in red, covers measure 8. The piano part in measure 8 is marked 'p ma marcato' and features a diminished chord. The string parts in measure 8 are marked 'sul ponticello' and 'pp'. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'pp' and 'p'.

His modern identity is expressed equally in melodic motives and his use of tonality. More angular melodies combined with ambiguous tonality and polytonality create a more pessimistic and ironic character. The music sounds mechanical and harsh in fast movements and very nostalgic and distant in slow movements. Many of his performance directions on the scores show that his pieces were inspired by natural sounds and images in the New World, rather than by the Biblical or Jewish heritage of his past.

CHAPTER IV

REASONS FOR CHANGE

After Bloch came to America in 1916, his reputation rapidly grew as he successfully combined his careers as both composer and teacher. During the 1920s, he re-examined the counterpoint of J.S. Bach and Palestrina which became a significant influence on his style. Like many of his contemporaries, Bloch's compositions of this period were influenced by Baroque and Neo-Classical compositional practices. Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) and Paul Hindemith (1895-1963) led the Neo-Classical movement which revived balanced forms, clearly recognizable thematic processes, and the techniques of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Some of Bloch's compositions, including Piano Quintet No.1, Concerto Grosso No. 1, and *America, an Epic Rhapsody* for chorus and orchestra, contain clearly divided sections and thematic motives rather than lyrical thematic melodies. Bloch's earlier rhapsody, *Schelomo, a Hebraic Rhapsody*, unfolds in a through-composed form, whereas *America, an Epic Rhapsody* clearly conforms to a traditional symphonic form with three movements. In the latter work Bloch used traditional American melodies that trace back to the early seventeenth century. The first part explores the early history of Native Americans: "The Soil - The Indians (England) - The Mayflower - The Landing of the Pilgrims - 1620." The second part is entitled "Civil War: Hours of Joy - Hours of Sorrow - 1861-1865," while the third part, "The Present-The Future-1926," deals with the twentieth century. Bloch built the

symphony from tangible thematic materials and motives of the anthem, “America the Beautiful,” as well as the tunes he collected of various types of folk music from Native Americans, Pilgrims, Celts, Negros, Creoles, and the Civil War.¹⁹ He used motives of the anthem throughout the symphony to create a common thread, steadily building the intensity through increased dynamics and orchestration to its majestic climax at the end. Presently, Bloch has not been singularly categorized as a Neo-Classical composer, but his use of sound, techniques and forms in his compositions is very similar to that of Neo-Classical composers.

An influential teacher, Bloch had many celebrated composition students including Roger Sessions (1896-1985), Ernst Bacon (1898-1990), Bernard Rogers (1893-1968), Randall Thompson (1899-1984), and Leon Kirchner (1919-2009). When the Cleveland Institute of Music opened in 1920, only seven students enrolled; by October of 1921 this number had increased to two hundred. By 1922 four hundred students were enrolled.²⁰ Bloch’s daughter Suzanne recalled his dedicated and passionate teaching life at Cleveland: “He would work from 9 to 5, six days a week, visited classes, conducted the student orchestra and chorus and gave masterclasses in compositions.”²¹ Composer Roger Sessions (1896-1985), Bloch’s teaching assistant at the Cleveland Institute of Music, mentioned in his 1927 article “Ernest Bloch:” “Bloch has established himself in

¹⁹ Dalia Atlas, “Ernest Bloch (1880-1959), America (An Epic Rhapsody for Choir and Orchestra) and Suite hébraïque.” *Classicsonline* (accessed 27 March 2011); available from <http://www.classicsonline.com/catalogue/product.aspx?pid=4391>; Internet..

²⁰ Joan Purswell, “Ernest Bloch: Composer, Conductor, Educator,” *Clavier*, Vol. 19, Issue No. 9 (1980), 27.

²¹ Suzanne Bloch, “Ernest Bloch,” *Musical America*, Vol. 76 (February, 1956), 22.

the country at large as an important influence in our artistic development.”²² Sessions also stated that after Bloch settled down in America, his musical style had changed and the changes penetrated to the very depths of the soul of Europe and America.²³ Sessions was actively involved with Aaron Copland (1900-1990) who founded the International Composers Guild in 1922. Together they created “The Copland-Sessions Concerts of Contemporary Music” in 1928,²⁴ which sponsored the performances of new works. Interestingly, in 1928 Aaron Copland composed his piano trio *Vitebsk*, which was likely influenced by both Bloch’s Piano Quintet No.1 and *From Jewish Life* for cello and piano. In 1920, Copland heard Ernest Bloch’s Violin sonata and began acquiring that composer’s works, while he was in Paris.²⁵ Unusual for Copland, *Vitebsk* employs quarter tones and musical materials that reflect the desire to portray his own Jewish heritage. The beginning of Bloch’s quintet uses quarter tones in the strings against piano octaves. Copland’s abundant use of quarter tones is similar to Bloch’s Quintet, but Copland invented his own quarter tone markings. As shown in Figure 7, the texture is laced with strong dissonances and exaggerated articulations, juxtaposing quarter tones in the strings against loud chords in the keyboard part, elements that clearly evoke Bloch’s Quintet (Figure 5, p. 19).

²² Roger Sessions, “Ernest Bloch,” *Modern Music*, Vol. V, No. 1 (November-December, 1927), 5.

²³ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁴ Carol J. Oja, “The Copland-Sessions Concerts and Their Reception in the Contemporary Press,” *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (April 1979): 212.

²⁵ Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland, The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man*, (New York: Henry Holt and company, 1999), 36, 571.

Figure 7: Aaron Copland *Vitebsk*, *Study on a Jewish Theme*, mm. 1-5

TO ROY HARRIS
-Vitebsk-
STUDY ON A JEWISH THEME

1
AARON COPLAND
1929

PIANO

-->NOTE { = Sharp 1/4 tone
 = Flat 1/4 tone

Lento molto marcato (♩=52)

VIOLIN

CELLO

PIANO

C major E minor C minor E major G-flat major A-flat major F major G major

Copland also imitated Bloch's Scottish snap rhythm in the strings with doubly dotted rhythms and created clashes between major and minor triads in the piano part: C major and C minor, E major and E minor, F major and G-flat major, and G major and A-flat major. In particular, the last combination creates a very dissonant clash because there are three different half steps.

Figure 8 displays a slow and mysterious tune in the cello in the second movement of Bloch's Piano Quintet No. 1. As shown in Figure 9, a similarly reflective folk tune also appears in the cello part in *Vitebsk*. The tune has roots that can be traced to Vitebsk, Belarus, a town near the border of Russia. Copland heard this Yiddish folk tune in a

Figure 8: Piano Quintet No. 1, II, mm. 35-38



Meno mosso - Grave (♩=84)

cantabile

mf espress

Tempo I° (♩=52)

senza espress.

p

In both excerpts, the piano offers harmonic support; in the quintet, the other instruments play countermelodies, while in *Vitebsk*, the violin plays fragments of the tune in imitation. Although Copland never again attempted to portray his Jewish heritage in subsequent works, it is a powerful indication of Bloch's music that a composer of Copland's stature created a work directly reflecting Bloch's Judaic influence. In 1951, Copland even gave a lecture in Jerusalem on the subject of Jewish composers and he described Bloch as a symbol of Jewish inspiration.²⁶

Before Bloch came to America, he had composed little for solo piano or piano chamber music, but upon his arrival in America both his style and his media changed significantly. These later compositions reveal another side of Bloch's personality and warmth, different from his earlier works for orchestra. Not only was Bloch beginning to draw less on his Jewish heritage for his musical inspiration, his literary tastes were also changing. When Bloch composed *Poems of the Sea*, he was inspired by verses from *Leaves of Grass* by the American poet Walt Whitman (1819-1892). While not technically demanding, *Poems of the Sea* conveys vivid images of the sea, using beautiful melodies accompanied by tremolos and arpeggios in the bass with impressionistic harmonies.

Bloch wanted his music to be accessible to students and therefore composed smaller chamber pieces instead of orchestral masterpieces. Notably in Concerto Grosso No. 1, which was composed for the chamber orchestra at the Cleveland Institute of Music, Bloch structured the piece around thematic material from compositions written by his

²⁶ Ibid., 523.

students. Bloch encountered some composition students who were concerned about the validity of tonality and form in contemporary music and who were unable to distinguish the difference between major and minor thirds.²⁷ He composed the Concerto Grosso No. 1 in order to persuade them that music can still be original and vital using traditional means. Of his thirty compositions between 1920 and 1930, only two were orchestral pieces: *America, an Epic Rhapsody*, which won the *Musical America Award* in 1928 and *Helvetia*. The other twenty-eight compositions are written for either solo piano or chamber ensemble, which marks a tremendous shift in the media with which Bloch used to express his changing style.

²⁷ Suzanne Bloch and Irene Heskes, 64.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

If Bloch recognized these changes in his musical style, what did these changes mean to him? In 1955 Bloch was interviewed by Olin Downes (1886-1955) about the evolution of his style, and said, “After all, it all originates from the same individual, a continuation.”²⁸ The changes were a completely natural process for Bloch, who moved between countries and cities when he was a young student in Europe and, at the age of thirty-six, crossed the Atlantic Ocean to America. In the early 1910s, Bloch found his musical identity in his Jewish heritage, notably in the Jewish religion and the Bible, through which his affection grew for his musical father and grandfather. After he moved to America, he received new musical influences from his renewed interest in Baroque counterpoint and the Neo-Classical movement. However, Bloch did not want to be categorized in “-isms.” In this interview, he said he witnessed so many of them prevail and disappear during his lifetime. He said,

I had always to pay for not belonging to a group. But I never changed. And so I can enjoy very different styles and conceptions when a master was able to convey his message...So I have no theories, no system. I always made my music as I felt I had to — tonal, atonal, polytonal, chromatic — each work has its own style.²⁹

²⁸ Olin Downes, “A Great Composer at 75,” *New York Times* (July 24, 1955); quoted in Suzanne Bloch and Irene Heskes, 22.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

Before Bloch came to America, he composed most of his Jewish compositions. He described the Israelites' journey in the wilderness, the vast landscape of King Solomon's kingdom, and majestic images of God by using grand scales of orchestration, instrumentation and harmonic colors. When he came to America, these Jewish compositions impressed many Americans and gave him an identification as a Jewish composer. However, he was ready to explore new musical influences and techniques rather than writing more compositions with a Jewish identity. He wrote chamber music and solo piano music that feature more traditional forms, thematic motives, tonal ambiguity, and modern techniques on string instruments. What caused him to change the direction in his musical style? It is possible he thought that the Jewishness was perhaps limited in conveying universal messages, or that being only a Jewish composer was not the most effective way to express his musical ideas to his students, American public, and international community. Bloch said,

Spiritual values never die. The universal idea must prevail. This crucial idea has permeated all my life and most of my works... my ultimate faith and belief is in the unity of man, in spite of real racial values and dissimilarities. My faith is in justice...on earth, on the right of each man to live his life as decently and usefully and giving to the community what he has to give, according to his gifts, his forces. This is the great idea of our great prophets, and also, in many ways the ideals of other races, like Confucius, Buddha and Christ.³⁰

It is possible that Bloch was also concerned about anti-Semitism in the United States and how it might have affected his life both professionally and personally. When

³⁰ David Ewen, "Ernest Bloch, the Composer Speaks," *The Book of Modern Composers*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), 252.

he immigrated to America in 1916, Jewish people from Europe and other regions had been flourishing in America, enjoying relative freedom from anti-Semitism. But like other minorities, Jewish Americans also faced prejudice, especially after World War I, and were often targeted as victims.

Ernest Bloch was one of the most complex and interesting figures in twentieth century music history. His use of Jewish identity, the embracing of modern compositional styles and techniques, his capacity to change and adapt his musical language over time, and his activities as an educator are all indications of a composer who was completely equipped to make such a shift from composing works which primarily describe Jewish elements to works which became less ethnic. It is no accident that these changes occurred after his immigration to the United States. This new environment provided the framework that enabled Bloch to reassess his philosophy of music and its effect on his own compositions.

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