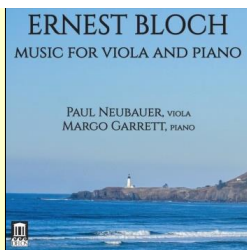


Phil's Classical Reviews

Atlanta Audio Club

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Bloch: Music for Viola and Piano
Paul Neubauer, viola; Margo Garrett,
piano (Delos)

It's a funny thing, but you can almost always name Ernest Bloch whenever a friend pops a disc in the machine and asks you to "Name That Composer." The music of Bloch, (1880-1959) is instantly identifiable by its conflict between formal restraint and rhapsodic emotion. There's an economy here, even in large scale works, that gives the impression there are no throw-away phrases or wasted notes. The music of this hard-minded composer is quite personal and individual, considering his broad range of influences, from Bach to Modern, including the modes and rhythms of his own Jewish tradition.

As Paul Neubauer and Margo Garrett, performers on the present album, explain it, the digital audio tapes from the March, 2001 sessions had been unaccountably misplaced for a number of years, until just recently. What a loss that would have been, you may judge for yourself. The recordings were not merely salvageable, they were magnificent. The performances help to enhance our insight into one of the great voices of the past century.

Suite for Viola and Piano (1919) is laid out in four movements: *Lento*, *Allegro ironico*, *Lento*, and *Molto vivo*. Bloch claimed to have been inspired by a vision of the Far East – Borneo, Java, and Sumatra. And for sure there is much in this music that you could relate to an eastern setting, beginning with a mysterious phrase in the third measure of the opening when the viola enters with what Bloch himself termed "a kind of

savage cry, like that of a fierce bird of prey." As in a tropical jungle, elements of light and darkness contend in this suite until we reach an up-tempo finale which even has a mood of what annotator David Brin terms "energetic cheerfulness," which is almost the last thing you expect to find in this composer.

Suite for Solo Viola (1958) is a very remarkable work in four interconnected movements, played without pause. Bloch implies harmony and counterpoint in this work much as did J.S.Bach in his suites for solo cello and unaccompanied violin. At the end, the music simply breaks off, an indication Bloch was in his final illness and did not have the stamina to complete the work.

Finally, we have Five Jewish Pieces (1950-1951) that Bloch wrote to celebrate his 70th birthday. He later broke them down into the two works we have here, the Suite Hébraïque and Meditation and Processional. Dynamic contours and glowing tones make for attractive music in both works. Neubauer and Garrett are not slow in making the best of their opportunities.

By - **Phil Muse**