



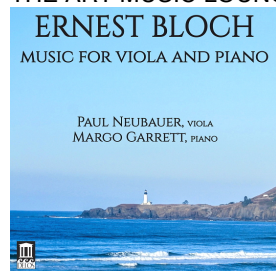
THE ART MUSIC LOUNGE

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Neubauer & Garrett's Lost Bloch Recordings

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BLOCH: *Suite for Viola & Piano. Suite for Solo Viola. Suite Hébraïque. Meditation & Processional* / Paul Neubauer, *vla*; Margo Garrett, *pn* / Delos DE 3498

Here's a bizarre story if there ever was one. Violist Paul Neubauer and pianist Margo Garrett recorded this album back in 2001. So far, so good. But then, we are told in the publicity sheet accompanying this album, the tapes were lost for *fifteen years*, and when they were rediscovered Neubauer and Garrett were utterly delighted by them and wanted them issued.

Whoa, wait a minute. Who the hell, nowadays, loses tapes of classical music for 15 years? What storage shed, basement, attic, garage or closet shelf did they go to? Normally, upon leaving the recording studio, the artists are either given the tapes or told where they can get them in the future. Who was handling this project? The FBI? George Papadopoulos? Hillary Clinton? And who found them? Hey, at this point, what difference does it make?

As it turns out, they are indeed splendid performances of some of Bloch's

most interesting works: atmospheric yet well-written with meaty themes and interesting development. The music engages both the mind and the heart, and the duo did indeed find just the right tone and mood for each piece. You really *feel* these performances; they're not just professional read-throughs but emotionally engaged, even gripping in places. You'd almost think they wrote this music themselves.

Moreover, even the earliest work on this disc, the 1919 *Suite for Viola & Piano*, is harmonically adventurous and interesting. Already Bloch was being influenced by some of the modern French and Russian school that was in the air at the time. Neubauer and Garrett catch each and every nuance in these scores, feeling each others' pulse, so to speak, as they wend their way along through the music. Listen, for instance, to how well they catch the feeling of mystery in the "Lento" movement of the opening Suite...pure magic.

In the solo *Suite*, Neubauer has to carry the load on his own, but this is no deterrent for him. I was struck throughout this recital by how bright his viola tone was, sounding much closer to that of a violin than such famed violists of the past as Lionel Tertis, Paul Hindemith or William Primrose. The music here, written much later than the *Suite* with piano (1958), is even more modern, particularly the finale which ends in the middle of a phrase. Very strange indeed!

In the *Suite Hébraïque* (1951), Bloch's style is more advanced than his famous *Schelomo*, denser in structure and tonal expression. Once again, Neubauer and Garrett go straight to the heart of the music but, more importantly, keep it flowing and make the structure intelligible. The program closes with the *Meditation and Processional*, the former so deeply played that it almost breaks your heart. The latter, less emotional and more ceremonial, makes a fine finale to this disc.

This is surely one of the finest albums of Bloch's chamber music I've heard, outstanding performances of both the earlier and later material. Neubauer and Garrett uncover the relationships between these scores and make the program sound as gripping as a live performance.

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