

ERNEST BLOCH IN SAN FRANCISCO

DAVID Z. KUSHNER

Ernest Bloch's arrival on American shores, on 30 July 1916, marked the beginning of his lengthy career in the United States. Like other European fortune seekers who left behind a war-stricken Europe, which offered little hope for financial survival, he went through a period of economic instability, networking with his connections and experimenting with a variety of musical and artistic enterprises. Despite early financial disappointment as conductor of an ill-fated tour by the Maud Allan dance company, he capitalized on such European connections as the Flonzaley Quartet, and support from such influential luminaries as Paul Rosenfeld, Waldo Frank, and Olin Downes. He was thus able to get important performances and to cement further a network of devoted yeasayers. Brief teaching engagements at the recently founded Mannes Music School in New York (1917-20), the Hartt School of Music (1919-20), and the Bird School in Peterborough, New Hampshire (summer 1919) paved the way toward his appointment as director of the newly formed Cleveland Institute of Music (1920-25). During his final year there, increasing strife between the maestro, his assistant director, and the trustees of the school eventually led to his resignation.¹ Bloch once again was called by fate and by the invitation of Ada Clement and Lillian Hodghead to go further west to serve as artistic director and teacher at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.²

Bloch was a public figure by then, and the press heralded his arrival on the western frontier. The editorial page of the *San Francisco Chronicle* waxed lyrical about the composer's arrival in their city, while the *San Francisco Call and Post's* approbation was replete with frequent quotes from the artist, in his most effusive manner. Bloch's spirits were raised by this warm welcome. While he was quoted as saying that in New York "men have become the slaves of size, the slaves of their buildings and subways,"³ and that in Cleveland "there is dirt and bad air, and ugliness,"⁴ he seems to have eulogized San Francisco: "The streets here fascinate me with their diversity. The people have more pre-

¹ David Mannes, the founder of the Mannes Music School and Bloch's first American employer, stated that the composer was "born to create and not to observe a teacher's schedule and a routine scholastic timetable." David Mannes, *Music is My Faith: An Autobiography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1938), 243. For an account of Bloch's years in Cleveland, see David Z. Kushner, "Ernest Bloch: The Cleveland Years (1920-25)," *Min-Ad* 8, II (2010): 175-200.

² Bloch met Ada Clement and Lillian Hodghead, the San Francisco school's founders in 1924, when he was still in Cleveland, during their tour visiting various music schools to gain insights into the development of their own institution.

³ George P. West, "Ernest Bloch, World Famed Musician, Lauds S.F.," *San Francisco Call and Post* (26 September 1925), 22.

⁴ *Ibid.*

occupation with art. A greater proportion have time and inclination to enjoy life for its own sake.”⁵

Shortly after his arrival in the city, a notice in a major American musical journal arrested the musician’s attention: “*Musical America* offers prize of \$3000 in Contest for American Symphonic Work.”⁶ Thus it was that the Swiss émigré, who had become an American citizen only two years earlier, in 1924 seized on this opportunity to express his love for his adopted country in the forum in which he expressed himself best. According to the rules of the competition, the decision of the judges would be announced on 1 October 1927, and the winning work would receive its premiere during the 1927-28 musical seasons in New York, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and other cities. The judges of the competition were the foreign-born maestros Walter Damrosch (New York Philharmonic), Serge Koussevitzky (Boston Symphony), Frederick Stock (Chicago Symphony), Leopold Stokowski (Philadelphia Orchestra), and Alfred Hertz (San Francisco Symphony)—another perhaps ironic situation, since the prize was intended for an American musical work.⁷

Not one to shun contests (he had won the Coolidge Prize for his *Suite for viola and piano* in 1919), Bloch, while considering how to structure a large-scaled opus for *Musical America*, was attracted to another, smaller competition sponsored by the New York Chamber Music Society. Thus, along with his new position at the San Francisco Conservatory, he served notice that he was primarily a composer. In May 1926, he completed his four *Episodes* for piano, flute, clarinet, oboe, bassoon, French horn, and string quintet; the titles of its four movements evoke something of the content: 1) Humoresque macabre; 2) Obsession; 3) Calm; 4) Chinese Theater.

Here one finds a clear break from the Hebraic epics, *shtetl* reminiscences, and abstract constructions found in Bloch’s earlier “Jewish Cycle,” *Baal Shem*, and the violin-piano sonatas. The *Episodes* offer instead a touch of grotesquerie, humor, and local color.

In the first movement, for example, the bassoon’s opening solo (Example 1) sets the mood for the engaging interplay of the other winds; the macabre elements are clearly of a tongue-in-cheek nature.

⁵ Ibid. These observations were based on Bloch’s earlier visit, when he gave a five-week course at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music during the summer of 1924.

⁶ *Musical America* (12 December 1925): 1.

⁷ The judges did not know in advance who had composed the works that they were judging, so there is little likelihood that there was bias in favor of a foreign-born composer, nor should such a bias be inferred.

Example 1 “Humoresque macabre,” *Four Episodes*, mm. 6-13



The obsessive reiteration of a jocular rhythmic motif in the second movement (Example 2) bears a striking resemblance to a leading theme of the “Rustic Dances” in the third movement of the first *Concerto Grosso*, completed a year earlier (Example 3).⁸

Example 2 “Obsession,” *Four Episodes*, mm. 1-3



Example 3 “Rustic Dances,” *Concerto Grosso* (No. 1), Rehearsal No. 22, mm. 11-13



The twenty-four variations and fugato of this “Obsession” movement recall the composer’s own obsession with contrapuntal formal procedures embedded in his musical persona from his earliest studies in Europe. The third movement, like the “Pastorale” of the *Concerto Grosso*, contains a touch of the melancholic, but the bucolic atmosphere here, with the added timbre of wind, absent from the earlier work, alludes to a mysterious nature. In his program notes, Bloch relates the opening clarinet motif to the sound of a shepherd’s pipe (Example 4).

Example 4 “Calm,” *Four Episodes*, mm. 1-7



⁸ Ernest Bloch, *Concerto Grosso for String Orchestra and Piano Obligato* (Boston: C.C. Birchard, 1925).

The solo flute that follows establishes an environment of peace and tranquility.⁹ The “Chinese” movement, which reflects one of Bloch’s strongest impressions of his life in San Francisco, is described in detail by the composer:

Impressions of the Chinese Theater in San Francisco: I went there every evening for a whole week from 7 p.m. to midnight, fascinated by its music, its colors, its mysteries, its little fragile and chaste princesses, its wild warriors with their dreadful beards, their terrifying dragons, all this fantastic imagination.... I shuddered at times like a child in a dream...and feel still its irresistible nostalgia.¹⁰

That the artist spent five hours a night for five consecutive days transfixed by the sights described above speaks of a single-mindedness that characterizes his self-absorption in all the tasks he set himself.¹¹ Note that, in later revisions, the composer added optional parts in this movement for trumpet, woodblock, and tam-tam (see Example 5).

Example 5 “Chinese,” *Four Episodes*, mm. 1-6

The musical score for Example 5, "Chinese," from *Four Episodes*, measures 1-6. It is written in 2/4 time with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The score consists of three staves: Piano, Wood Blocks (optional), and Tam-tam (optional). The Piano part begins with a forte (*ff*) dynamic and a *molto* tempo marking. It features a series of chords in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with an *8va* marking indicating an octave shift. The dynamics shift to *sf* (sforzando) and then *p* (piano). The Wood Blocks and Tam-tam parts are marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and feature rhythmic patterns of eighth notes. The score includes various musical notations such as accents, slurs, and dynamic markings.

These are not included in the original score published by C.C. Birchard in 1919 and 1957, but are included in the subsequent printings by Broude Brothers in 1985 and 2006. The result of this effort was the receipt of the \$1000 Carolyn Beebe Prize of the New York Chamber Music Society; the award was made by Albert Stoessel, Carl Engel, Howard Hanson, Frederick Jacobi and Emerson Whithorne. At its premiere, it was performed from manuscript at the final concert of the New York Chamber Music Society’s 1926-27 concert season.¹² While a minor effort when compared with the gargantuan program symphony

⁹ Suzanne Bloch and Irene Heskes, *Ernest Bloch: Creative Spirit* (New York: Jewish Music Council of the National Jewish Welfare Board, 1976), 67.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Bloch spent hours in solitude, in a room in a small museum in Albuquerque, New Mexico, with only a piano and an electric light, during the creation of his first *Concerto Grosso*. When he set about composing *America: An Epic Rhapsody*, he devoted long hours to the task in a “shack” in Mill Valley, California. Some years later, in preparation for the creation of the *Sacred Service*, he taught himself Hebrew, a task that required many painstaking hours.

¹² That concert took place on 20 March 1927. The performers were Carolyn Beebe, piano; Ottokar Cadek, first violin; Jaroslav Siskovsky, second violin; Ludvik Schwab, viola; Bedrich Vaska, violoncello; Anselm Fortier, double bass; Gustave Longenus, clarinet; Lamar Stringfield, flute; Bruno Labate, oboe; Benjamin Kohon, bassoon; and Bruno Jaenicke, French horn.

that followed it, *Episodes* reveals traits established in previous works: a penchant for formal procedures, “exotic” coloration, and cyclicity (e.g. the Chinese theater depiction includes material presented in the first and second movements).

Having won two notable competitions in the chamber music genre, the composer turned to the immediate task at hand, the panoramic *America*.

The process of composition did not go smoothly. Bloch noted that from 5 June 1926, when he completed the sketch of Part I, to 22 February 1927, when he completed the manuscript on George Washington’s birthday, he was hampered by several distractions. These ranged from what he described as “heart failure”¹³ to conducting engagements in Cleveland, New York, and Washington, to an “extremely painful foot condition”¹⁴ that caused “almost absolute sleeplessness.”¹⁵

Dedicated to the memory of Abraham Lincoln and Walt Whitman, the work is unified by a motto that undergoes various permutations throughout the three movements. The artist clearly expresses the purpose of the choral ending:

The *Anthem* which concludes the work, as its apotheosis, symbolizes the Destiny, the Mission of America. The Symphony is built entirely upon it. From the first bars it appears, in root, dimly, slowly taking shape, rising, falling, developing, and finally asserting itself victoriously in its complete and decisive form. It is the hope of the composer that this Anthem will become known and beloved, that the audience will rise to sing it, becoming thus an active and enthusiastic part of the work and its message of faith and hope.¹⁶

From the ninety-two entries, the judges declared unanimously that Bloch’s homage to his new homeland was the winner of the competition.¹⁷ Alfred Hertz’s remarks, coming as they do from the conductor of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, bear quoting:

Ernest Bloch has created a masterpiece. The score may well become a classic of American symphonic literature. Bloch has succeeded superbly in doing what other composers have in some degree attempted. If *Musical America*’s excellent contest had done nothing more than bring this one to light I should think it would have been eminently worthwhile. As it is, there were in my mind half a dozen excellent scores brought to light by this contest.¹⁸

When the composer received the telegram informing him of his successful entry, he wired the following reaction to the magazine:

I am deeply moved to know that the message of faith and hope in America which, amidst sorrow and sickness, I tried to express simply and humbly, but with all my

¹³ Marjory M. Fisher, “*America*, Bloch’s Prize Score,” *Musical America* (16 June 1928): 1.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Title page of the score published by Summy-Birchard in 1928, renewed in 1956, and assigned to Broude Brothers in 1984.

¹⁷ For a complete history of the *Musical America* competition and Bloch’s involvement in all of its phases, see David Z. Kushner, “Ernest Bloch’s *America*,” *Currents in Musical Thought* II (1993): 125-40.

¹⁸ Fisher, op. cit., p. 1.

heart, found its way to the hearts of the judges too. Heartfelt thanks for your kind telegram and cordial regards.

Ernest Bloch¹⁹

The three divisions of the work have descriptive titles that suggest the subject matter: 1) 1620: The Soil – The Indians – (England) – The Mayflower – The Landing of the Pilgrims; 2) 1861-1865: Hours of Joy – Hours of Sorrow; 3) 1926: The Present – The Future.

Example 6 “Indian Songs—Mandan and Hidatsa Music.” The example is in 5 flats, and is scored for Indian drum, vlns. I and II, viola, cellos, and double bass

[Indian songs - Mandan and Hidatsa music]

Historical events central to the nation’s evolution are represented by a panoply of quotations derived from Native American sources (Example 6), English tunes, Civil War melodies (including references to such Stephen Foster plantation melodies as “Old Folks at Home” (now the state song of Florida),²⁰ flapper-era references,²¹ and the sounds of industry and of modern life. The latter includes a steel plate being struck by a heavy hammer, two anvils being struck with a hammer, and a D \flat automobile horn (on page 126 of the score only) to be “played” *ad libitum*. The anthem at the close bears the instruction that it be performed “With deep fervor and enthusiasm”; it includes an *ad libitum* organ part. The audience (“The People” in the score) is asked to rise and sing the Anthem (Example 7).²²

Example 7 Third Movement, *America*, Rehearsal No. 102, mm. 4-6

¹⁹ *Musical America* (9 June 1928): 10.

²⁰ See David Z. Kushner, “Reflections on the State Songs of Florida,” *Min-Ad* 6 (2007/8): 17 pp.

²¹ Flapper era references refer to the 1920s-era entertainments in which women displayed disdain for conventional dress and behavior.

²² Reprints of the score were published by Summy-Birchard in 1928, renewed in 1956, and assigned to Broude Brothers in 1984.

Organ

The People

lunga *ff* *fff* *With deep fervor and enthusiasm* *breve* *breve* *breve*

A - me - ri - cal A - me - ri - cal

To the European ears of the judges, this paean to a Swiss-born artist's adopted land exemplified best the intent of the contest's sponsor, namely "the development of American creative genius in its application to music...the most salient needs of the musical life and progress of this country today."²³

However, while these arbiters of musical excellence were ecstatic about Bloch's turn from biblical grandeur to populist Americana, other assessors found the work troubling or insincere. Isaac Goldberg, for example, calls the musician "one of the great consciences of contemporary music. He is the soul of artistic integrity."²⁴ However, despite recognizing the composer's impressive contrapuntal technique, he faults the rhapsody for reaching down to the populace instead of elevating them. This view is bolstered, in his thinking, by the closing anthem, which he sees as "talking down" to those for whom it was obviously intended to reach at their level of understanding. Further, Goldberg detects a remnant of the composer's racial derivation when he finds that the Native Americans, whom he calls "bravos," "dance nonetheless with a trace of Chassidic abandon."²⁵

David Ewen, as with Goldberg, seizes on the anthem for special derision, calling it "naïve and ingenuous."²⁶ He misses the metaphoric boat here by being blind to the fact that "Das Volk" respond best to a hymnic tune with words that are geared not to the elite but to "just plain folks" like themselves.

Daniel Gregory Mason goes much farther in his evaluation of *America*, which he describes as "a long, brilliant, megalomaniac, and thoroughly Jewish symphony...."²⁷ Mason had indeed linked Bloch with what he stated earlier was "the insidiousness of the Jewish menace to our artistic integrity...."²⁸ As it turns out, Mason had been an entrant in the *Musical America* contest, but his work, *Chanticleer*, was seen only by Walter Damrosch. It got lost somewhere in the evaluation process and resurfaced after the competition to become one of its composer's most popular efforts.²⁹

²³ *Musical America*, *ibid.*

²⁴ Isaac Goldberg, "Ernest Bloch and 'America,'" *The New Palestine* (26 April – 3 May 1929): 380.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ David Ewen, "Ernest Bloch," *Disques* (May 1932): 118.

²⁷ Daniel Gregory Mason, *Tune In, America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931; reprint, Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), 161-62.

²⁸ Daniel Gregory Mason, "Is American Art Growing Up? Our Emancipation from Alien Influences," *Art and Decoration* (November 1920): 40B.

²⁹ Richard Rogenstad, liner notes for an album of trios for piano, violin, and violoncello by four American composers, among them Bloch (*Three Nocturnes*) and Mason (*Sentimental Sketches, Op. 34*), Troy 35, Albany Records.

As for Bloch, his career took unusual turns, such as the performance during 4-6 May 1928, at the Manhattan Opera House. On that occasion, the Neighborhood Playhouse of New York mounted the symphony *Israel* as an orchestral drama. As conceived by Irene Lewisohn, actors, dancers, and mimes rendered the “program” so that the audience could visualize what the music alone could only suggest. Nikolai Sokoloff conducted the Cleveland Orchestra. Bloch’s remarks to Lewisohn are quoted below:

I was *bouleverse* in reading your scheme, but the extraordinary “parallelism” of your thoughts—of your soul—were mine. At times, I wrote remarks, to find them, expressed with the same words, in the next page! It made me happy and sad. Happy that you do exist, that *at least one* of our own race *has* understood. Sad, that you are so far, that in ten years, we only got a glimpse of each other, where it would have been so good, so comforting, so helpful, for me, at least, to be able to cross our *antennae*.³⁰

The catalog of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music for 1927-28 lists Bloch (see Plate 1) as Artistic Director; Ada Clement (Plate 2) and Lillian Hodghead (Plate 3) are designated Associate Directors.



Plate 1 Ernest Bloch. Courtesy of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music Library, with permission of the Ernest Bloch Foundation and the grandchildren of Ernest Bloch

³⁰ “Orchestral Drama: Bloch’s Great Symphony *Israel* Combined with Atonement Ritual to Have Impressive Performance by Neighborhood Playhouse Group,” *American Hebrew* 122 (27 April 1928): 919.



Plate 2 Ada Clement. Photo by Underwood & Underwood Studios, New York
Courtesy of San Francisco Conservatory of Music



Plate 3 Lillian Hodghead. Photo by Underwood & Underwood Studios, New York
Courtesy of San Francisco Conservatory of Music

The catalog's *Foreword* provides insight into its mission:

The aim of the Conservatory is to provide a thorough education in all branches of music for the professional and also the amateur. This includes besides the piano, string and voice department, complete training in musicianship and ensemble, starting at the age of five and extending to the highest courses in composition.³¹

³¹ Catalog of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music (1927-28), 5. The Conservatory's address is listed as 3435 Sacramento Street.

Instruction in orchestral instruments other than strings is through contact with members of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. Bloch is listed as the director of the conservatory's choir, which is to study *a cappella* music of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He is also said to be forming a string orchestra "in which the students of the String Department may study the great works of Handel and Bach, and acquire orchestral experience."³² Outreach projects are represented by Bloch's article, "Musical Education," for *The Women's City Club Magazine of San Francisco*. From this vantage point, the composer expressed his notion that "Musical education, like any education, ought first to get acquainted with the past, the experiences of our ancestors, not the dead laws of theoreticians, but with living works of art—in one word, traditions."³³

Having established a solid American presence as a composer and educator, Bloch turned next to a work whose genesis dates to 1900—*Helvetia, the Land of Mountains and Its People*. The score, which opens with the call of the Mountain in Horns 1 and 3 (Example 8), features some thirty motifs in five connected frescoes (Bloch's word).

Example 8 The horn call opening, "Call of the Mountain," of *Helvetia*, mm. 1-5



The French and German traditions embedded in Swiss history are represented in a broadly programmatic manner. The third fresco, for example, conjures reminiscences of the *Landsgemeinde*, an open air assembly in which *Das Volk* discusses and debates events of the day, and votes on any action to be taken. It is here that the program states that the Elders announce that the Fatherland is in danger, giving rise to the introduction of a folk-like German-Swiss hymn in minor (Example 9); it represents the Old Cantons.

Example 9 *Landesgemeinde* hymn, *Helvetia*, Rehearsal No. 37, mm. 5-8



At the close of the work, it returns in major as a national symbol. In the fourth fresco, the Genevan hymn, *Cé qu'è lainô* ("The One Who is Above") appears (Example 10).

Example 10 "The One Who is Above," *Helvetia*, Rehearsal No. 54, mm. 1

³² Ibid., 11.

³³ Ernest Bloch, "Musical Education," *The Women's City Club Magazine of San Francisco* (November 1927): 8.



For the composer it embodied the city's motto, *Post Tenebras Lux* ("Light after Darkness"). The phrase originated in the Book of Job (17:12)—"After darkness I hope for light" (Vulgate); "They say that night is day/ That light is here—in the face of darkness" according to the *Tanakh* English translation in the *Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford University Press, 2004). The Latin phrase, which became the motto of the Reformation, appears on the coinage of the city of Geneva, Bloch's place of birth.

Helvetia was entered in yet another competition in 1928, this time under the auspices of the RCA Victor Company. Five compositions, including Bloch's, shared the \$25,000 prize. Two of the works, *Abraham Lincoln: A Likeness in Symphony Form* and *Sights and Sounds*, were by Robert Russell Bennett; the others consisted of the *First Symphony* by Louis Gruenberg and *Dance Symphony* by Aaron Copland. The judges were Frederick Stock, Serge Koussevitzky, Leopold Stokowski, Rudolph Ganz, and Olga Samaroff.³⁴

Romain Rolland heard the 5 March 1932 performance by Ernest Ansermet and L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande. He felt that the music's flow was interrupted by the poetic motifs; despite this, he was favorably disposed to the work as a whole, and he remarked that, at the close of the live broadcast, "there was a moment of silence, and then there was an explosion. They applauded long and ardently."³⁵ Bloch felt that Rolland's criticism was the fault of the tempo, which he believed to be too slow. In any event, many years later, on 17 October 1956, Ansermet again conducted *Helvetia* in the same locale as the first rendering, namely at the Victoria Hall in Geneva. With the composer's approval, a choir sang the closing hymn. It is of more than passing interest that the anthem in *America* and the hymn in *Helvetia* are, in effect, "heart on sleeve" expressions of patriotism—firstly for Bloch's country by adoption, and secondly for the land of his birth. While commentators Isaac Goldberg and David Ewen³⁶ saw both works as somewhat contrived, and the simple hymn-like conclusions were misunderstood, they represent one category of the multiple branches on which this complex composer's art rests. The manuscript of *America* was bequeathed to the Ernest Bloch Collection in the Library of Congress, while that of *Helvetia* was deposited in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Berne.

An intimate expression of Jewish identity came as a small surprise when Bloch produced *Abodah* for the violin prodigy, Yehudi Menuhin, who presented its premiere on

³⁴ Samaroff, whose original name was Lucy Mary Olga Agnes Hickenlooper, was married to Stokowski from 1911 to 1923.

³⁵ Letter from Rolland to Bloch in *Lettres de compositeurs genevois à Ernest Ansermet (1908-1966)*, ed. Claude Tappelet (Geneva: Librairie de l'Université George et Cie, 1981), 99.

³⁶ See nn. 24 and 26.

5 December 1928 at San Francisco's Exposition Auditorium. *Abodah* (God's worship), a high point of the *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) service, is marked by melismas and emotive power (Example 11). Menuhin's remarkably mature playing prompted Bloch to pen this poignant utterance. The composer and the violinist remained life-long friends.

Example 11 *Abodah*, mm. 4-10



The Jewish link was forged irreparably once again when Bloch met Cantor Reuben Rinder of San Francisco's Temple Emanu-El; indeed, the Cantor embarked on a full-court press to enlist financial support from wealthy patrons to provide funds to entice Bloch to create music for the synagogue. The cellist Gerald Warburg was an early supporter, but it was the Rosa and Jacob Stern Fund that assured the composer of a satisfactory subsistence that would enable him to devote his full energies to the creation of his choral masterwork, the *Sacred Service*.

At the peak of Bloch's path as a composer, however, his teaching career ended. During 1929, the year of the "Wall Street Crash," and with financial difficulties at the San Francisco Conservatory, Bloch decided it would be best for him to resign. He also felt it necessary to offer a brief commentary in the Conservatory's newsletter, *The Lyre*:

Humanity has existed for centuries without machines, automobiles, airplanes, telephones, radios, but it has never been able to exist without music. From the remotest times in history, music has been an important social factor; the greatest thinkers have recognized its educational and moral power. Thus, it is a necessity and not a luxury. In the turmoil of our industrial age, we need more than ever an outlet for our unemployed emotional energies. Music, as well as the other arts, ought to be an inherent part of our lives. Its study, which thus far has been more or less the privilege of certain classes, ought to become the privilege of all. Every human being is entitled to share its beauty. The aim of a Conservatory is not only to educate the professional musicians, but to offer to all the means of studying, understanding, and loving the masterpieces of music. Its ultimate purpose is to raise the spiritual level of human beings. Any welfare institution of this kind ought to be free from commercialism, financially independent and supported by the community for which it is built. Such a Conservatory will return in a hundred fold what it receives from the community in making a better humanity and contributing to the moral health of the nation.³⁷

The official date of Bloch's resignation was 11 February 1930. During the summer of 1930, he settled in Roveredo-Capriasca in the Italianate Swiss canton of Ticino. Thus, Bloch's tenure in San Francisco ended. His legacy in the city and at the Conservatory is substantial; indeed, he brought distinction to a fledgling music school much as he had done at the Cleveland Institute of Music (1920-25). Today, the San Francisco Conservatory has

³⁷ Ernest Bloch, "The Conservatory and the Community," *The Lyre* 2, 2 (1929).

entered a new phase in its history. As of fall 2006, it is located in its new home in the Civic Center at 50 Oak Street. It is Bloch's compositions from his years in this city that continue to arrest the attention of Blochophiles, in part because they are, in general, not representative of the works for which he is best remembered. They are pragmatic in their approach to a populism that would capture the attention of those judging composition competitions, they are inclusive of subject matter that embodies the national flavor of his native and adopted countries and, in the instance of *Abodah*, there is a reference, albeit a brief one, to his Jewish roots. In retrospect, the San Francisco works are, for good or ill, among his most accessible creative efforts.

Other San-Francisco Endeavors

There was a seldom-mentioned facet of Bloch's creativity that developed during his San Francisco years. A life-long multitasker, Ernest Bloch, though always sensitive to the many demands placed upon him for reasons both personal and professional, mustered the time to devote some of his energies to painting. This avocation, albeit not nearly as significant in terms of a passion as was his involvement in photography,³⁸ was encouraged by one of his paramours from the San Francisco years, Galka Scheyer (1889-1945)—a prominent figure in early twentieth-century visual arts. Scheyer was a native of Brunswick, Germany, who trained in both painting and music in Germany, France, and England. She arrived in Switzerland in 1916 as an expatriate, the same year in which Bloch first arrived in America. It was there that she became acquainted with the work of the Russian modernist, Alexei Jawlensky (1864-1941), in particular *The Hunchback*, which was on display at an exhibition she attended in Lausanne. After a visit to Jawlenski's home in Saint-Prex, where she saw the artist's other landscapes and portraits, she began to model for him, and became a close friend until his death in 1941. Indeed, it was Jawlenski who was responsible for the first name by which Scheyer became known, Galka (her birth name was Emile Esther Scheyer). The artist had written to his admirer in December 1920, at which time she had returned to Germany, with the news that he had dreamt that she appeared to him in the form of a bird. Jawlensky referred to her from that point on as Galka, the Russian word for a blackbird, and she, in turn, adopted that name as her own.

By 1924, Scheyer had added other artists to her circle, namely the American Lyonel Feininger, the German-Swiss Paul Klee, and the Russian Wassily Kandinsky.

³⁸ See David Z. Kushner, "Appendix: Ernest Bloch as Photographer," in *The Ernest Bloch Companion* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 159-77.



Prophetess of the Blue Four," *San Francisco Examiner*, November 1, 1925. Pictured: Galka Scheyer, Lyonel Feininger, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee and Alexej Jawlensky.

Plate 4 Galka Scheyer and the artists she represented

They took the name “The Blue Four,” an adaptation of the now defunct Blue Rider group, and designated Galka as their representative in America, which country she had decided would be more amenable to the expressionist leanings of her quartet. With the artists in Europe, Scheyer sailed for New York in May 1924, taught her course “Creative and Imaginative Painting” to children in private schools, gave lectures on The Blue Four at Columbia University, and exhibited their work in Manhattan—all to a less than acceptable level by which to sustain her artists across the Atlantic.

As Bloch had left Cleveland to establish a new beginning in San Francisco, Scheyer determined to follow a similar path. In the summer of 1925, she established herself in that very city and, after three years of presenting lectures and exhibiting the works of The Blue Four, Galka and her quartet became well-known names in West Coast art circles. In another sphere of activity, she added herself to the ongoing collection of paramours in Ernest Bloch’s life, including, among the San Francisco Conservatory faculty, Ada Clement, Lillian Hodghead, and Winifred Howe (Plate 5), the latter had been hired as a piano teacher in 1928.³⁹ Various trysts were arranged between them, and many intended ones were cancelled or delayed owing, more often than not, to Bloch’s illnesses, real, feigned, or imagined (he complained in his letters⁴⁰ to Galka of “heart trouble,” foot problems, bouts of extreme itchininess, insomnia, or work-related activities).

³⁹ See Klára Mócz, “Sealed Documents and Open Lives: Ernest Bloch’s Private Correspondence,” *Notes* 62 (2005): 74-86.

⁴⁰ The Bloch-Scheyer correspondence is located in the Peg Weiss Papers in the Special Collections Section of the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles.



Plate 5 Winifred Howe and Ernest Bloch
Courtesy of the Winifred Bliss Howe Papers in the
Music Library of the University of California at
Berkeley

The salutations and closings of Bloch’s letters give the reader insight into the state of affairs between them at given points in time, and even between the opening and closing of the same letter. Letters open, for example, with “Dear Galka,” “Dear Friend,” “Dear Angel Cake!,” et al., and close with “Your friend,” “Your loving and faithful,” et al. Some letters use terms of endearment such as BBB, a triple B formulation that Bloch defines as “Boor Bainful (sic) Bloch” and, when in one of his “itchy” states, changes the first two B words to “Poor” and “Painful.” In another letter, the three B’s are given by Bloch to stand for “Better, Best, and Besten.” This closing is immediately preceded by the declaration that he doesn’t write any more, but that “I send you all kind of things that are not fit for the paper, affection, tenderness, kisses, and many more....” It is clear that a level of intimacy had been established early in their relationship for, in a letter in which he makes plans to see her, he writes: “Then, let me know how I can reach Berkeley, when, and where to go—to the ‘golden pajamas’ of course!!”

A letter from Scheyer to Bloch serves to illustrate her frustration at the frequent “excuses” he advances over the course of their friendship for canceling or postponing an assignation. In this letter, she draws a heart at the top of the stationery with the letters BBB enclosed therein, and the word “Valentine” above it. Her pique is illustrated thusly:

When your symphonie is finished, your “flu” over + “all” letters written I might see you again + then I leave it to you to remind me of your existence. If I have not forgotten thee by then all together. It may be that I will say again: “B.B.B. I have not forgotten thee!” But one never knows!! Galka.

Shortly after Bloch’s official resignation from the San Francisco Conservatory, he closes a letter to “My dear friend” with the formal “Your friend, Ernest Bloch.” What does emerge with clarity during this period, when the lovers were based in California, is that Scheyer encouraged Bloch to take up painting. He, while not enamored of the modernist work of The Blue Four, found a way to paint in a traditional manner suited to the level of the amateur; indeed, he found painting a source of relaxation. Whereas, however, his letters to his various paramours were left for posterity to read, his watercolors were entrusted to

Scheyer. They became part of her collection at the Norton Simon Museum of Art,⁴¹ where they are kept in a vault and not shown to the public. Of the nineteen watercolors by Bloch, three had titles—*American Woman*, *Suffragette*, and *The Broken Heart*. The sixteen untitled paintings are given descriptive titles in parentheses in the Scheyer Catalog. A list of the art works follows, along with their catalog numbers and the status of their signatures:

- 319 Untitled (Head). Signed with monogram EB
- 320 *American Woman*. Signed EB
- 321 *Suffragette*. Signed EB
- 322 *The Broken Heart*. Signed BBB
- 323 Untitled (Flowering Plants in Green Grass). Signed EB
- 324 Untitled (Landscape with Lacy Trees). Signed EB
- 325 Untitled (Landscape: Conifers at Edge of Precipice). Signed BBB
- 326 Untitled (Landscape or Underseascape). Signed BBB
- 327 Untitled (Primitive Art Impulse). No signature
- 328 Untitled (Lines and Plant Forms). No signature
- 329 Untitled (Landscape: Mountains Inundated by Black and Green Sea). No signature
- 330 Untitled (Regeneration). No signature
- 331 Untitled (Landscape: View in the Distance). No signature
- 332 Untitled (Scene with Five Figures). No signature
- 333 Untitled (Landscape: Eucalyptus Trees). No signature
- 334 Untitled (Flowers). No signature
- 335 Untitled (Plants with Purple Sky). No signature
- 336 Untitled (Mountainous Landscape). No signature
- 337 Untitled (Landscape with Lake). No signature

Plates 6-12 contain a sampling of the Bloch watercolors (reproduced with the permission of the Norton Simon Museum of Art):



Plate 6 Untitled (*Head*)
Courtesy: Norton Simon Museum, The Blue Four
Galka Scheyer Collection

⁴¹ Sara Campbell (Ed.), *The Blue Four Galka Scheyer Collection* (Pasadena: Norton Simon Museum of Art, 1976).



Plate 7 *American Woman*
Courtesy: Norton Simon Museum, The Blue Four
Galka Scheyer Collection



Plate 8 *The Broken Heart*
Courtesy: Norton Simon Museum, The Blue Four
Galka Scheyer Collection



Plate 9 Untitled (*Landscape: Conifers at Edge of Precipice*)
Courtesy: Norton Simon Museum, The Blue Four
Galka Scheyer Collection



Plate 10 Untitled (*Scene with Five Figures*)
Courtesy: Norton Simon Museum, The Blue Four
Galka Scheyer Collection



Plate 11 Untitled (*Eucalyptus Trees*)
Courtesy: Norton Simon Museum, The Blue Four
Galka Scheyer Collection



Plate 12 Untitled (*Flowers*)
Courtesy: Norton Simon Museum, The Blue Four
Galka Scheyer Collection

Given the fact that Bloch did not provide titles for the vast majority of his watercolors, it would be speculative to relate them with any specificity to his music of the same period or, for that matter, to music composed prior to his arrival in San Francisco. However, for those inclined to conjure up such relationships, the paintings with mountain scenes might suggest *Helvetia, the Land of Mountains and Its People*. The untitled Head shown in Plate 6 might cause those familiar with the “Jewish Cycle” to think of their personal image of a biblical prophet or wise man, whereas the untitled scene with Five Figures has the potential to bring to mind a biblical desert rite for anyone acquainted with Bloch’s *Three Jewish Poems*, the second movement of which is entitled “Rite.”

While Bloch was an award-winning composer during his years in San Francisco, he also managed to maintain a hobby that was a meaningful feature of his relationship with Galka Scheyer, but one that has received scant public attention. The watercolors serve, as does his photography, his collecting and polishing of agates, his fascination with mushrooms, and his correspondence with his paramours, as a reminder that he lived a life of many dimensions.