

# International Ernest Bloch Society

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## News Sheet No 7 – January 2022

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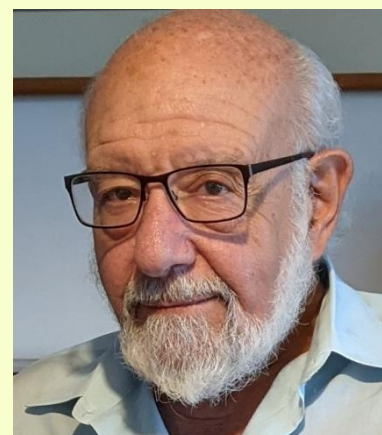
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## The Laurel Records Bloch Project

**Walter Simmons** the new editor of the Ernest Bloch News Sheet (pictured above) writes:



I discovered the music of Ernest Bloch more than 60 years ago, when I was 13. The pieces that drew me in at that time were 'Nigun' from the *Baal Shem Suite*, the Concerto Grosso No. 1, and *Schelomo*. As time went on, I discovered more and more of Bloch's works, most of which only confirmed my initial sense that here was a composer who was able to plumb the depths of musical expression with consummate artistry and did so throughout a compositional career that lasted almost 60 years.

But what baffled me as I grew older, and developed a more thorough understanding of music history, was that the music world seemed content that those three pieces that first hooked me, in addition to the widely and justly admired *Sacred Service*, constituted Bloch's allotment of attention granted by the institutions of musical performance and scholarship.

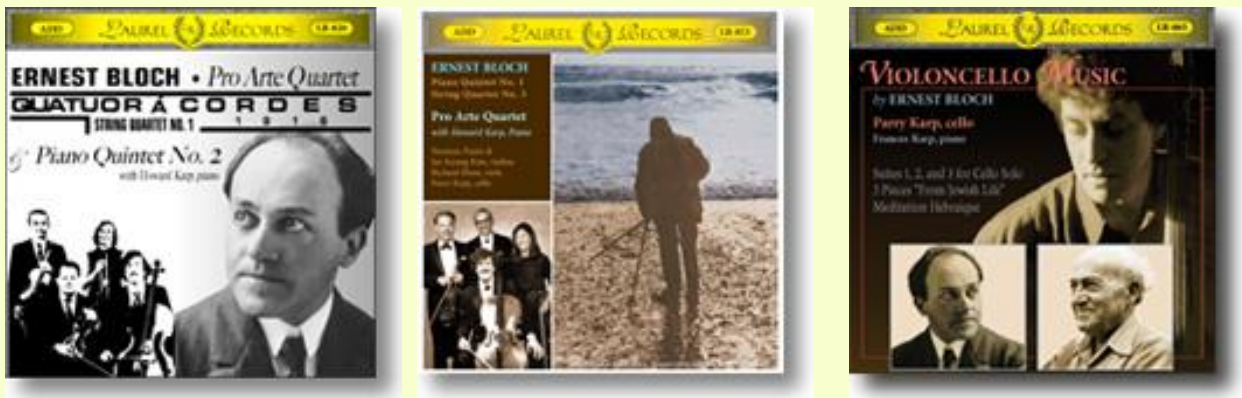
During my decades of studying the music of Bloch I discovered many major works of the highest quality that are rarely performed, although many are represented on recordings. These recordings enable the interested listener to discover such works and thereby develop a fuller understanding of the depth and breadth of this composer's expressive range.

I make no secret of the fact that my primary interest in participating in the Bloch Society is to encourage a greater awareness of the many works of the highest quality that Bloch contributed throughout his creative life. I have decided to begin this ongoing discussion with reference to a little-known series of recordings that have represented many of Bloch's less-familiar works through performances of unparalleled brilliance. These recordings are all currently available to those willing to contact their source directly.

### **Herschel Burke Gilbert, the Creator of Laurel Records**

Herschel Burke Gilbert (1918-2003) was a Juilliard-trained composer, conductor, and orchestrator who worked in Hollywood on more than 60 films and numerous TV shows. Perhaps his best-known score was written for the wordless film *The Thief*. His score was nominated for an Academy Award. His theme music for the show 'The Rifleman' was probably the best known of his dozens of TV scores. After decades of working in Hollywood, he retired during the mid-1960s, to pursue a plan to set up his own record company, which would focus especially on lesser-known concert music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

During the 1970s, together with his wife Trudy, he formed Laurel Records, managing it from their home in Laurel Canyon, California. Funding, recording, editing, and promoting their recordings himself, he worked painstakingly, issuing new releases slowly, one at a time. One of his major projects was to promote the music of Ernest Bloch, especially those works that had never been recorded or hadn't been in many years.



He had largely chamber music in mind, and for these recordings he decided to use the Pro Arte Quartet, a distinguished group that had formed in 1912 and performed widely for many years, although more recently had played a less prominent role in residence at the University of Wisconsin.

When Gilbert engaged the quartet during the early 1980s, the group comprised Norma Paulu and Martha Blum, violins; Richard Blum, viola; and Parry Karp, cello. Their recordings became the first complete set of Bloch's five String Quartets on disc. (The venerable, highly-esteemed set featuring the Griller Quartet in England was made before Bloch completed his Quartet No. 5). For the Piano Quintets, Howard Karp contributed his keyboard artistry. Ultimately Laurel's Bloch project amounted to almost two dozen works! (See <http://www.laurelrecord.com/>)

During the 1980s and 90s I was very active as a reviewer for *Fanfare*, focusing on new recordings that featured the repertoire that interested me, which included the music of Bloch. So not only did I receive all these new Laurel releases, but I had the benefit of listening to all the other extant recordings of the works in question, to compare both their merits and deficiencies. (I direct those interested in my individual comments about each recording to my website at [Walter-Simmons.com](http://Walter-Simmons.com).)

In almost all cases the Laurel recordings exceeded all other efforts, with regard to quality of both performances and recorded sound. The performances display a precision and intensity unmatched by most other recordings. (I must add the caveat that the recording of Quartets Nos. 3 and 4, made during the transition between analogue and digital recording techniques, suffered certain technical deficiencies.)

**The Laurel Bloch Project comprise the following recordings:**

1. String Quartet No. 1; Piano Quintet No. 2 (LR-820)
2. String Quartet No. 2; Two Pieces for String Quartet; In the Mountains (LR-826)
3. String Quartets Nos. 3 and 4; *Paysages* (LR-841)
4. String Quartet No. 5; Piano Quintet No. 1 (LR-853)
5. Suites Nos. 1, 2, and 3 for Cello Solo; *Suite Hébraïque*; From Jewish Life (LR-865)  
(Parry Karp, cello; Frances Karp, piano)
6. Concerto for Violin and Orchestra; Suites Nos. 1 and 2 for Violin Solo (LR-834)  
(Mischa Lefkowitz, violin, London Philharmonic, Paul Freeman, cond.)
7. *Concerto Symphonique* for Piano and Orchestra; Scherzo Fantasque for Piano and Orchestra; Concerto Grosso No. 2 (LR-851)  
(Micah Yui, piano; London Symphony, David Amos, cond.)
8. Suite for Viola and Piano; Suite for Viola Solo; *Nigun*; and *Suite Hébraïque*. (LR-864)  
(Karen Elaine, viola; Delores Stevens, piano; London Symphony, D. Amos, cond.)

Let me ask all you Bloch enthusiasts the rhetorical question: With how many of the works listed above are you familiar? Since Herschel Gilbert's death, Laurel has been managed by his son John, who assures me that all the above releases are still available and can be purchased by writing to [sales@LaurelRecords.com](mailto:sales@LaurelRecords.com).



Newly refurbished website [www.ernestbloch.net](http://www.ernestbloch.net)



**The new website stresses Ernest Bloch's love of nature. It uses as a strapline: 'Ernest Bloch – composer in nature's university'**

In presenting Ernest Bloch on the internet for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, IEBS is stressing his abiding love of nature, of the mountains and oceans as well as his diverse musical interests and influences. It is not yet quite complete, but you can see at [www.ernestbloch.net](http://www.ernestbloch.net) how all the materials assembled on the previous websites have been carefully organised and are easy to find.

You can search Bloch's compositions by instrument, chronologically and alphabetically. You can see publications about him. There is a new section on Bloch as a photographer. There is a biography that people can take to print in their concert programmes – and much more. Do have a look, and your comments would be valuable. This has been lovingly created by Ernest Bloch's Great-Great Grandson Aaron Allen who was pleased to get to know his great-great grandfather in this way. Many thanks to Aaron.



## **Ernest Bloch Study Group Zoom Presentations**

Members and friends of the International Ernest Bloch Society have been treated to illuminating presentations on a surprising variety of aspects of Ernest Bloch's life and work. Throughout 2021, usually on the second Wednesday of the month, we have been rewarded with enthusiastic illustrated talks by scholars and musicians on Bloch's music for trumpet, violin, viola, piano and one of his cello suites transcribed for double bass – as well as Ernest Bloch the Photographer. See below for the details and you can look at and enjoy these again on the IEBS YouTube channel. (video links included)



Alexander Knapp



Rivka Golani



Joshua Friedlander



Malcolm Singer

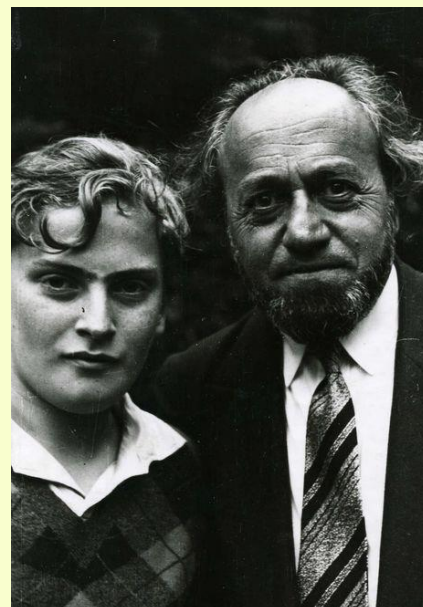
In a very special presentation, Ernest Bloch's granddaughter Sita Milchev (below right) was in discussion with her daughter Lucienne Allen on her memories of her grandfather.



### **Presentations of 2021 and how to hear them again:**

1. **Evan Pardi, a double-bassist** a doctoral student at Arizona State University, presented a discussion and analysis of the Suite No. 1 for Cello Solo. His discussion included reference to cellist Zara Nelsova, who played an important role in the performance of Bloch's works featuring the cello. Listen again at this Video link <https://youtu.be/IT5HYJ9FtSg>

2. **Aaron Klaus, trumpeter**, presented a discussion of the *Proclamation* for Trumpet and Orchestra, with special reference to the musical elements that appear to suggest Jewish inflections in the work's musical language.  
Video link [https://youtu.be/A\\_QRoPiq8WY](https://youtu.be/A_QRoPiq8WY)
3. **Joshua Friedlander, violinist** and music director of the Pacific Northwest Chamber Orchestra, earned his doctorate with a treatise on Bloch's Violin Concerto. His presentation focused on Native American musical elements that infused the thematic material of the concerto.  
Video link <https://youtu.be/34x6K7pde5E>
4. **Jesse Rosenberg, musicologist** on the faculty of Northwestern University, has done considerable research on the musical role played by Jews in Italy. His presentation focused on the way Bloch was regarded in Italy during the period of Italian fascism.  
Video link <https://youtu.be/WRq9hZcf5j4>
5. **Malcolm Singer, composer, conductor, and educator**, discussed the long and fruitful relationship between Bloch and violinist Yehudi Menuhin, which dated back to the latter's childhood. (See picture on the right of the teenage Menuhin with composer Bloch in San Francisco.)  
Video link <https://youtu.be/bxX7WJ0EDAg>
6. **Rivka Golani, pre-eminent violist**, and the renowned scholar **Alexander Knapp**, discussed various aspects of Bloch's works for viola, and played excerpts from Golani's live and recorded performances.  
Video link <https://youtu.be/88cCs1-8MIY>
7. **Myron Silberstein, pianist and composer**, presented an analysis and discussion of Bloch's Piano Sonata. Silberstein made a widely-praised recording of the sonata when he was 18! Video link <https://youtu.be/oOjFW8NvGt8>
8. **Edison Verbisck, Portuguese violinist**, discussed one of Bloch's most widely-performed works: the 'Nigun' movement from the *Baal Shem Suite*. (unfortunately there is no recording)
9. **Eric Johnson** has been studying Bloch's photography for some five decades, and he provided an in-depth presentation on this side of the composer's creative work. Video link <https://youtu.be/R4PAPahQuQg>
10. **Sita Milchev and Lucienne Allen**, Bloch's great-grand-daughter, offered us an interview with her mother Sita Milchev. Ms. Milchev shared illuminating memories of her grandfather. Video link part 1 <https://youtu.be/iZ3CGbf2faM>  
Video link Part 2 [https://youtu.be/Tx\\_sMjKYy3o](https://youtu.be/Tx_sMjKYy3o)
- 11 **Matthias Brack**, a Swiss physicist with advanced musical training, gave a presentation sharing his insights into Ernest Bloch's *Poème Mystique* for violin and piano, covering the background of its creation and the discrepancies between different versions, and putting forth an interpretation of a central episode in the context of Bloch's religious identity. Video link <https://youtu.be/zfrsqb3XaSA> Matthias says: have presented my hypothesis that Bloch in the *Poème Mystique* describes a vision of his encounter with God, expressed both musically and through explicitly written quotations in the score (above the musical quotations of the Gregorian chant). In the discussion after my presentation, this hypothesis was supported in statements by Alexander Knapp and Lucienne Bloch.



## Presentations for 2022

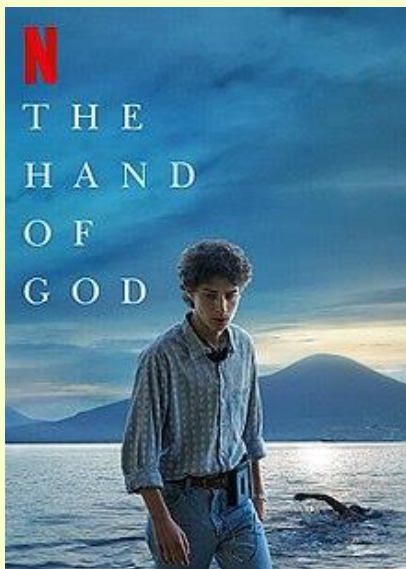
### Mark your diaries for the forthcoming Study Group presentations

- **February 16 Charles Peebles 7.00pm UK:** Thoughts on Bloch's only completed opera, *Macbeth*
- **March 23 Norman Solomon (time tbc)** Bloch, Jewish Angst and Me: Reflections on musical identity. Bloch's ambiguities about his identity as a composer are very much in line with the experience of European Jewish artists and intellectuals of his time. I shall reflect on how he handled his problems and more generally on whether and how such issues might manifest themselves today.
- **April 13 Walter Simmons (time tbc)** Bloch's String Quartet no 2

These sessions will take place usually on the second Wednesday of every month. They are held via Zoom at **09:00 Pacific time / 12.00 Eastern USA / 17:00 UK / 18:00 Western Europe / 19:00 Israel** (NB Due to summer-time changes in the USA, the times on 23 March will be an hour later in the USA only.) The zoom link is <https://northwestern.zoom.us/j/98715929073?pwd=Wmo2ZjVMeE5MM2x6NVlWNmF2aXM0UT09> Jesse Rosenberg who organises and runs these presentations says: 'We very much look forward to your joining in for these sessions, wherever in the world you may be. Together we will illuminate further aspects of Ernest Bloch's life and music.'

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### Film, *The Hand of God* – uses Bloch's *Prayer*



In December 2021 a new Italian film was released: *E stata la mano di Dio*, translated in English as *The Hand of God*. It is a touchingly sensitive autobiographical reminiscence of the coming-of-age of the director, Paolo Sorrentino.

The film won the Grand Jury prize at the 78<sup>th</sup> Venice International Film Festival. It was released on 24 November 2021, followed by streaming on Netflix on 15 December 2021. It was selected as the Italian entry for the Academy Awards.

As enjoyable as it was, for some of us an especially intriguing aspect was the sparing use of background music. What made it so intriguing were the choices of music selected. Within the context of the film, they were thoroughly effective in enhancing the poignancy of the moments when they were heard. But why these particular excerpts were chosen is a little hard to fathom. The main selection—heard three times during the film—was 'Prayer,'

from Bloch's *From Jewish Life*, heard in a lovely arrangement for cello and strings. I thought that perhaps Sorrentino is of Jewish descent but was not able to confirm this. (Equally baffling, though effective, was a movement from Holst's *St. Paul Suite*.)

Malcolm Singer, IEBS committee member says: I don't know if any of you are aware, but Paolo Sorrentino latest film **The Hand of God** features Sol Gambetta playing Bloch's 'Prayer' throughout. This glorious music functions as an *idée fixe* in this truly wonderful film!!! It comes out on December 15th - I saw a preview. It has already won 4 awards in the Venice Film Festival. Go see it. Malcolm

**Hear IEBS President, Steven Isserlis, play 'Prayer' at the Wigmore Hall**

[Prayer Isserlis Wigmore 21](#)

**Hear Nicola Benedetti and friends play 'Prayer' here:** [Prayer Nicola Benedetti](#)

**Nicola Benedetti** and colleagues play a new arrangement of Ernest Bloch's 'Prayer' for string quintet by the Ayoub Sisters. It was originally composed in 1924 for cello and piano. The performance in this video features Yume Fujise and Charlie Westhoff (violins), Jenny Lewisohn (viola) and Ariane Zandi (cello).

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## **Roundup of recent and forthcoming recordings**

In the Spring of 2022, **Heritage Records** will be releasing a CD that features clarinetist Yevgeny Dokshansky and pianist Richard Master in works by Bloch transcribed for clarinet and piano. The program features *From Jewish Life*, *Meditation and Processional*, *Suite Hébraïque*, and the *Suite for Viola and Piano*.

[From Jewish Life](#)

**Arion Records** has released for the first time, the final studio recordings of the famed violinist Ivry Gitlis. The recording will include 'Nigun' in an arrangement for violin and orchestra, in this case the National Chamber Orchestra of Toulouse, c. Alain Moglia. [Ivry Gitlis Nigun](#)

**The European Institute of Jewish Music** has issued Volume II of *Hebraic Melodies for Cello and Piano*, featuring cellist Sarah Iancu and pianist David Bismuth. Included on the program are Bloch's *Méditation Hébraïque* and *Abodah*. Listen here [melodies-hebraïques](#)

**Ambiente** has released an album called *Bible Poems: Jewish Music for Viola and Organ*. The program includes 'Prayer' from Bloch's *From Jewish Life*, and features violist Semjon Kalinowsky and organist Torsten Laux.

**Warner Classics** Young French cellist Edgar Moreau, salutes his family heritage and highlights landmarks in his artistic development with a new CD called *Transmission*



with music by Bloch, Korngold, Bruch and Ravel, recorded with the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra and its chief conductor Michael Sanderling. Moreau's mother is of Polish-Jewish extraction and all five works on the album have a connection with Jewish culture. The largest work on the programme is Bloch's Schelomo, which Moreau describes as 'a majestic meeting of concerto and symphony, rich and colourful in its orchestration and full of contrasts'. Listen and buy here <https://www.warnerclassics.com/release/transmission>

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## **'2030 Bloch 150' – the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Bloch's birth**

2030 will mark the 150th anniversary of Bloch's birth. Musicians and organisations world-wide, professional, and amateur, are gearing up to perform Bloch's music, especially the lesser-known works. Many will be putting on performances and creating mini-festivals along the way – in 'Building Blochs' up to the anniversary.

**The Cleveland Institute of Music** is performing Bloch's Macbeth this year. This, Bloch's only completed opera, is rarely performed, although it is one of his most ambitious and important major works. The performance will be available as a free livestream event on February 24 and 26 (see <https://www.cim.edu/concerts-events/cim-opera-theater-shakespeare-operatically-0>). This performance is especially appropriate as Bloch was the founding director of the Cleveland Institute (from 1920-1925). Bloch's stated mission, which has guided the Institute for more than 100 years, was that 'Musical education, in addition to the thorough study of technique, ought above all else, to develop qualities of appreciation, judgment and taste, and to stimulate understanding and love of music.'

**In London, Bloch's sadly under-played Violin Concerto**, will be performed in March 2023. Distinguished conductor and cellist Robert Max says: 'A date for your diaries: Saturday 25th March 2023. I will conduct the North London Symphony Orchestra in Bloch's Violin Concerto. Our excellent young soloist is Hana Mizuta-Spencer <https://www.hanamizutaspencer.com/>. If you live within striking distance of northwest London, you will be more than welcome to come and hear it. I can say that it's because of all our discussions and the information that has been shared over the past months that I explored this possibility - it wouldn't have been on my radar otherwise. I'm very excited, so is Hana.'

**Let us hope that many more conductors, soloists, orchestras and chamber groups** will be equally excited to discover the many wonderful and seldom heard works, just waiting to be performed. You can peruse Bloch's works by instrument here [Ernest Bloch's music, by instrument](#)

All are invited to participate in this anniversary year. Please contact [enquiries@ernestblochsociety.org](mailto:enquiries@ernestblochsociety.org) with information about what you are planning, so we can publicise it. For information about how to source Bloch scores, contact [music@ernestblochsociety.org](mailto:music@ernestblochsociety.org)

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## In Memoriam David Sills

We remember Violist David Sills who passed away on January 1, 2022, at the age of 68. The distinguished violist was an active advocate of the music of Bloch throughout his life, having earned his doctorate with a dissertation on the Suite for Viola and Piano. He will be missed.

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## How to keep in touch:

<https://ernestbloch.net/news/> go here to see the google alerts for Ernest Bloch and to know who is performing Bloch all over the world.

**IEBS Electronic Mailing List** IEBS has an academic mailing list which includes 80 people interested in Bloch who can be informed and communicate with each other. Please steer anybody interested in Bloch to join this mailing list: send an email to [listserv@jiscmail.ac.uk](mailto:listserv@jiscmail.ac.uk). Leave the subject line BLANK and in the Message say: SUBSCRIBE ERNESTBLOCHSOCIETY followed by your First name and your Last name only (please delete any automatic signatures).

**IEBS Facebook Group** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2810320052621256>

For those who like Facebook we have a new Facebook group for International Ernest Bloch Society. You may like to join to see what is going on and post your own ideas. So far there are fifty-six members.

**IEBS YouTube Channel** IEBS YouTube Channel stores the study session presentations. [IEBS Bloch Playlist](#)

**Lewinski-Dijon books available free** Alex Knapp reminds us that he has several sets of the substantial **four-volume Lewinski-Dijon Compendium in French** and is happy to give them to whoever would like one, for the cost of just the packaging and postage. We will invoice you for postage and packing to be paid to IEBS bank account details here: **HSBC Bank:** Sort Code: 400321 A/C number: 62240548 **International Bank Account Number:** GB73HBUK40032162240548 **Branch Identifier Code:** HBUKGB4106P. identify your payment with your name, followed by 'books'.

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**If you know someone** who may be interested in receiving this occasional News Sheet, please either pass on their details or invite them to join our electronic mailing list (see above).

**If you no longer wish** to receive these occasional Ernest Bloch News Sheets, please contact [info@ernestblochsociety.org](mailto:info@ernestblochsociety.org) and we will remove your name from our list.

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## Bloch News Sheet #7, January 2022

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