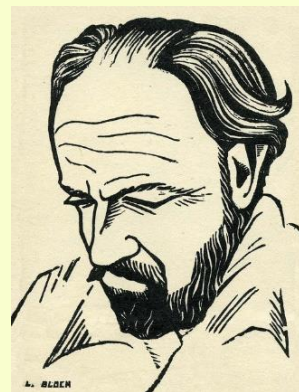


# International Ernest Bloch Society (IEBS)



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Associate Artists: Natalie Clein, Danny Driver, Rivka Golani, Mark Kligman  
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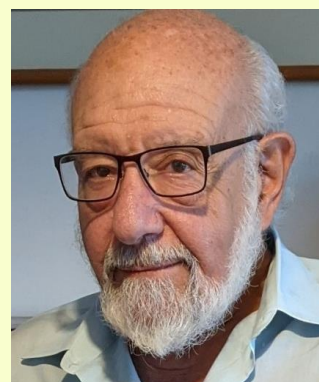
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Newsletter No 12 – February 2023 Editor, Walter Simmons

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## ~~~~~ Building Blochs - towards Ernest Bloch’s 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary

With the approach of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bloch’s birth, we are eager to encourage performances of the composer’s major works — especially those that have not enjoyed significant exposure during recent years. Many of these works rank among the composer’s finest and deserve to be heard as a means of gaining a deeper understanding of the meaning of his output as a whole.

One of our plans is to draw attention to those works composed 100 years ago. This year being 2024, we are highlighting those works that Bloch composed in 1924. In that year he completed:

- **Three Nocturnes** for piano trio
- **Nuit Exotique** for violin and piano
- **From Jewish Life** for cello and piano
- **Méditation Hébraïque** for cello and piano
- **Sonata No. 2, “Poème Mystique”** for violin and piano
- **In the Mountains** for string quartet

All these works are available on recordings. We encourage members to listen to them, and if they enjoy these pieces, play them for friends, especially if they’re performing musicians. We would also encourage members to convey to the Society their reactions to the music.

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## **Blochs 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1980 – an Article by Alan Hershowitz**

I happened to encounter an article written almost 50 years ago by a good friend of mine, in honor of Bloch's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. I hadn't read it in ages, but doing so now reminded me what an excellent article it was as an introduction to the composer, intended for general readers. I thought members might enjoy it and would perhaps spread it to others who may be interested. We have circulated this on a separate email to the Ernest Bloch Society

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## **Forthcoming performance in the UK**

**Violin Concerto – Oxford Town Hall, Saturday 16 March, 7.30pm**



(Photo, courtesy of Judy Obrart)

On March 16, 2024, Bloch's rarely-performed Violin Concerto will be performed again by Hana Mizuta-Spencer, conducted by Robert Max, this time with the Oxford Symphony Orchestra in the Oxford Town Hall.

You might remember that on February 8, 2023 Maestro Max gave a presentation on this work at our Ernest Bloch Study Group. Ms. Mizuta-Spencer participated in the talk as well, sharing some of her observations about learning the work. You can revisit this presentation here: [Robert Max - the Violin Concerto](#) More about the concert here: <http://www.oxfordsymphonyorchestra.org.uk/concerts/Mar2024.htm>

Read a review by Malcolm Miller of the North London performance in 2023 on music and vision – click here: <https://www.classicalmusicdaily.com/2023/03/bloch.htm>

Rob Cowan, journalist, who has written extensively on Bloch's music, points out that Bloch's work was, coincidentally, written in 1938, the same year as Bartók's celebrated Second Violin Concerto. He asserts that both works share 'a formidable sense of scale, a powerful emotional subtext and a human dimension,' adding that the Bloch is superbly written for the instrument, reflecting the fact that the composer's primary instrument was the violin. Bloch emphatically denied any Jewish background to the concerto, insisting that its themes were based on fragments of Native American melodies. The premiere of the work was given by Joseph Szigeti.

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## RECENT ARTICLES

Last September an article appeared in *The Jewish Press*, entitled "The 'Jewish Music' and Photography of Ernest Bloch," written by Saul Jay Singer.

The article offers a fine overview of the composer's contributions, both musical and photographic. Singer notes that

"While Bloch is best known for his Jewish works and he was unabashedly proud of his Judaism, he did not want to be known solely as a Jewish composer and, in fact, an over-emphasis on Bloch's Jewish work (as in this article) often misses the greater breadth of his oeuvre, which includes many important 'non-Jewish' works." He adds that many musicologists "are generally and justly mystified that so many of Bloch's award-winning masterpieces that were standards in the repertoires of the greatest conductors and performers of his time are now rarely, if ever, performed."

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## RECENT RECORDINGS

### Sheku Kanneh-Mason

The brilliant young cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason has featured two pieces by Bloch on a recent CD (Decca 31491): the Prelude for string quartet and the ever-popular "Prayer," the first movement of *From Jewish Life*. *Ideastream Public Media* chose it as "Recording of the Week" in August, 2023.

### The Griller Quartet

The historic 1954 recording of the Griller Quartet's performances of Bloch's String Quartets Nos. 1-4 (No. 5 had not yet been composed) has been re-issued by Pristine, a company that specializes in using the latest technology to present archival recordings in optimal sound quality (Pristine 120). The original recordings were made under the supervision of the composer.

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## RECENT PERFORMANCES around the world – from Seoul to Tasmania

### Baal Shem Suite

Ukrainian violinist Vadim Gluzman performed the rarely-heard orchestral version of **Baal Shem** with the **Winnipeg** Symphony Orchestra last September. The orchestra was conducted by David Raiskin.

The second movement of this work, “Nigun,” is performed frequently by itself, in its original violin-and-piano version. Over the years it has become a mainstay of the solo violin repertoire throughout the world. Last October “Nigun” was included in a program at **Michigan** State University, entitled: “Israel: 75 Years in the Promised Land—Celebrating Jewish Identity in Music”. The violinist was Dmitri Berlinsky, and the pianist was Deborah Moriarty.

Just a few days later “Nigun” was featured again, this time as part of *Harmony Unites*, a virtual concert for peace in the Middle East, by the United Nations Chamber Music Society. The violinist was David Strongin, and the pianist was Brenda Vongova.

This past January, “Nigun” was performed at “Art from Ashes,” a concert in celebration of Holocaust Remembrance Day, presented by *Music of Remembrance*. The concert, at the Nordstrom Recital Hall at Benaroya Hall in **Seattle**, Washington, featured violinist Seohyun Hwang and pianist Mina Miller.

### Concerto Grosso Nos. 1 and 2

One of Bloch’s most popular compositions, the first **Concerto Grosso** was performed by the Red Deer Symphony Orchestra last October in Red Deer, **Alberta**, Canada.

That same month the work was performed again, this time at **Northern Michigan** University, by the College’s orchestra, together with the Symphony Strings from Marquette High School in Marquette, Michigan. The conductor was Barbara Rhyneer. The **Concerto Grosso No. 1** was also performed last December by the Ukiah Symphony Strings in **Mendocino**, California. The conductor was Philip Lenberg.

**Concerto Grosso No. 2 et al.**—*Jewish News of Northern California* reports that the ninth annual Jewish Music Series at **Sonoma** State University presented a six-concert series last fall. The final concert, on November 16, was entitled “Bloch Party,” and featured Sonoma State students and faculty in performances of the lesser-known **Concerto Grosso No. 2**, along with the ever-popular “Prayer,” the first movement of **From Jewish Life**, and the **Méditation Hébraïque**.

### From Jewish Life

**From Jewish Life** was composed in 1924, making it another of Bloch’s works enjoying its centennial.

As noted in previous issues of the Newsletter, “Prayer,” the first movement of Bloch’s ***From Jewish Life***—a work for cello and piano—has become one of the composer’s most frequently performed pieces, heard in a number of different arrangements.

It was performed in November at **Seoul** National University in Korea. The event, titled “Concert of the Missing,” was organized by the Israeli Embassy in Korea, in an effort to shed light on the plight of those who have been held captive during the current political violence in the Middle East. The “Prayer” was also performed in Montclair, **New Jersey**, at the Congregation Shomrei Emunah, this time in an arrangement for cello and string quartet. The performance, also in November, featured the distinguished cellist Alan Stepansky with the American String Quartet. This past January, “Prayer” was featured in two performances in **New Mexico**: one in Las Cruces, and the other in Deming, as well as a broadcast on New Mexico Public Radio. The cellist was Evan Drachman, who happens to be the grandson of the world-famous cellist Gregor Piatigorsky, and the pianist was Doris Stevenson.

In November of last year, the Essex Chamber Music Players performed all three movements of the work in North Andover, **Massachusetts**. The cellist was Daniel Lelchuk and the pianist was Constantine Finehouse. On February 23, 2024, cellist Natalie Clein and pianist Qing Jiang performed the entire work as well, at the University of **Chicago**’s Mandel Hall, on a program of music by Jewish composers. The program will also include Bloch’s ***Méditation Hébraïque*** — another work reaching its hundredth birthday this year.

### **In the Mountains**

This rarely-heard diptych for string quartet was performed by the Coffs Coast String Quartet last October in **New South Wales**, Australia.

### **Three Nocturnes**

One of the works composed 100 years ago in 1924 that IEBS is promoting this year is the Piano Trio ***Three Nocturnes***. Last Fall it was performed at the Palatine at Lewis & Clark College, in Portland, **Oregon**.

In November 2023, the New Zealand Trio performed the ***Three Nocturnes*** at the **Auckland** Town Hall. William Dart, writing in the *New Zealand Herald*, commented on the frank emotionalism of the music. “Fervour was initially restrained, and beautifully so, but all broke loose in the *Tempetoso* finale, with dancing syncopations leading to strings bursting forth against the sweeping washes of Somi Kim’s piano.”

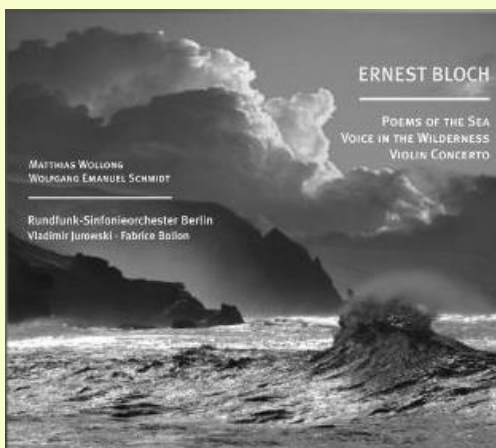
### **Piano Quintet No. 1**

The Lincoln Center Chamber Music Society, one of America’s most prominent chamber music organizations, has been featuring Bloch’s ***Piano Quintet No. 1*** both in the **New York** area and during its tours around the country. In July 2023, the Society performed the Quintet in Atherton, **California**, as part of

Music@Menlo's multi-concert series, "The Turbulent Century". Writing in San Francisco's *Classical Voice*, David Bratman pointed out that while the Quintet pursues a generally post-Romantic aesthetic, it is also a bold showcase for modernistic techniques. "Like much of Bloch's music for piano and strings, this quintet merges chords among the instruments for a characteristically crisp and crunchy sound. There was also much churning from the strings and, in the slow movement, lines held so tentatively that they threatened to disappear into thin air over deep chordal descents in the piano.... Quarter tones were often dropped into from the note above, producing a sound akin to the Doppler shift. Bloch uses whole-tone scales to keep the harmonic language of his work hovering indeterminately until the very end, where he treats the ear to a satisfying conclusion in the form of a firm major-key cadence". The ensemble "flew through Bloch's fast and jagged rhythms with uncannily coordinated assurance. This was an awesome performance of a tough but attractive work that showed, more strongly than anything else on the program, the treats that typically 20th-century music has to offer."

The Lincoln Center Chamber Music Society also performed the Piano Quintet No 1 in January, 2024, at the Wolf Trap Festival in Vienna, **Virginia**. The concert was entitled, "Imagination". Writing in *Washington Classical Review*, Alex Baker described Bloch's **Quintet** as the program's "centerpiece". "This monumental work straddles the sound worlds of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with passages of traditional tonality coexisting with atonal and microtonal passages in a swirl of invention. The players brought a righteous sense of commitment to the opening *Agitato*, though the robust sound of the strings sometimes came at the expense of balance with the piano. The *Andante mistico* began with ghostly strings against repeated figures in the piano, building to a pitch of heady sustained tension as the string players traded lines. A special highlight here were several passages featuring the vivid sound of Yura Lee's viola which stood out against the roiling texture. In the closing movement the quintet leaned into the brutality of the machine-like figures in the strings pitted against driving figures in the piano. A slow middle section again featured Yura Lee's unique viola in a mournful passage, before diving into the mounting exhilaration of the finale". Two days later the Lincoln Center Ensemble presented the work again, this time for the **Arizona** Friends of Chamber Music in Tucson (with program notes by yours truly).

Camerata San Antonio presented two concerts last September, which explored works composed between the two World Wars. The second of these featured Bloch's **Quintet**, and took place at Christ Episcopal Church in San Antonio, **Texas**.



### Poems of the Sea

Last November the Newport (**Oregon**) Symphony Orchestra performed the rarely heard orchestral version of Bloch's familiar work for piano solo. The conductor was Adam Flatt.

## Prelude

This brief but lovely work was presented last September by the Vision String Quartet at Hobart Town Hall in **Tasmania**, the beautiful island off the coast of Australia. The popular ensemble performs without scores and encourages a more casual concert atmosphere than the typical string quartet. One reviewer described the **Prelude** as the “perfect introduction” to the program.

Last November, **Prelude** was also performed the Harrington String Quartet, together with **Night** and **Rustic Dance**, two other short pieces. The concert took place at West Texas A & M University in Amarillo, **Texas**.

## Schelomo

Last September cellist Tim Posner, principal cellist of the **Amsterdam** Sinfonietta, performed Bloch’s perennially popular work in a version with piano accompaniment provided by Edward Leung. A recording is expected to follow.

**Schelomo** was also performed last October in its full orchestral splendor by the **Chicago** Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider. The celebrated Chinese cellist Jian Wang was the soloist. Critic Lawrence Johnson praised Wang’s “intelligent, deeply expressive performance.... The cellist brought a focused intensity and apt febrile quality to Solomon’s dark ruminations, with the slight trace of rawness in his burnished tone feeling wholly idiomatic. Wang showed easy fluency in the fast passagework and his impassioned yet nuanced phrasing and hairpin dynamics were put entirely at the service of the score. Wang rendered the final solo meditation in a hushed inward quality that brought rich eloquence to Bloch’s music. Szeps-Znaider led the orchestra in a fervent, full-blooded performance that supported the soloist while bringing out Bloch’s exotic scoring.”



Some commentators have speculated that Bloch’s strong association with his Jewish cultural heritage has discouraged some non-Jewish musicians from performing his music. Apparently, despite many examples to the contrary, some feel that Bloch’s music remains the province of Jewish musicians. Wang’s performance of **Schelomo**, as do Sheku Kanneh-Mason’s (left) recent performances, give the lie to this misconception.

## Suite Modale

This lovely late work for flute and strings was performed last November by the **Tuscaloosa** Chamber Orchestra. The solo flutist was Diane Boyd Schultz, and the conductor was Adam Flatt.

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## My Retirement as Newsletter Editor

It has become time for me to step down as editor of the IEBS Newsletter. I have enjoyed preparing these documents for the past couple of years, but unfortunately, my various activities don't allow me the time necessary for me to continue in this capacity. However, I intend to remain involved with the Society, and look forward to other opportunities in which I might pursue my dedication to Bloch's music.

Walter Simmons

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## Catch up on the 2023 Presentations of the Bloch Study Group

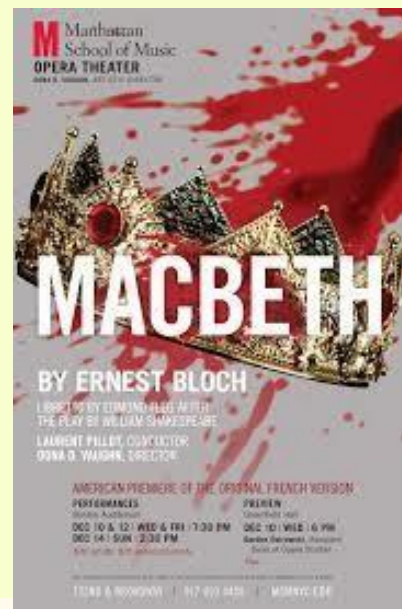
**25 October 2023:** David Z. Kushner, Professor of Music Emeritus at the University of Florida School of Music and author of numerous publications on the composer Ernest Bloch, discussed the complex issue of Bloch's Jewishness and its relation to his music. [David Z Kushner on Bloch's Jewishness](#)

**15 March 2023:** the study group welcomed **Jehoash Hirshberg**, Professor of Musicology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The subject of his talk was a work by Tzvi Avni (b. 1927) an important Israeli composer. The work was a cello sonata subtitled *Hommage a Bloch*, composed in 2008. Avni was present for the presentation of his work, which reflects Bloch's identity as a composer of Jewish music, while also revealing non-Jewish aspects of his complex personality. Professor Hirshberg was recently awarded the prestigious Israel Prize in Musicology. The presentation may be viewed here [Jehoash Hirschberg Tzvi Avni Homage to Bloch](#)

**8 February 2023:** As noted above, conductor Robert Max gave a presentation on his upcoming performance of Bloch's **Violin Concerto** on March 25, 2023. Violin soloist Hana Mizuta-Spencer participated in the presentation, which is available on video, at the following link: [Robert Max - the Violin Concerto](#)

## 2022 Presentations from the Bloch Study Group

Members and friends of the Ernest Bloch Society have been treated to some illuminating presentations on a surprising variety of aspects of Bloch's life and work. Throughout 2022, usually on the second Wednesday of the month, we have been rewarded with enthusiastic illustrated talks by scholars and musicians on Bloch's only opera Macbeth, on his Jewish identity, his photography and about the String Quartet No 2. See below for the details; and you can look at and enjoy these again on the Bloch Society YouTube channel. (video links included)





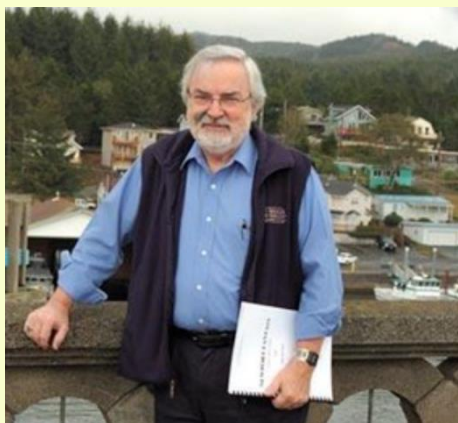
**February 2022**—**Charles Peebles** who conducted the University College (London) Opera Company in four performances of Bloch's *Macbeth* in 2009, shared his thoughts on what he considers a neglected masterpiece and the reasons behind its equivocal status within the operatic world today. [Peebles, Macbeth](#)

**March 2022**—**Norman Solomon** rabbi and scholar in the field of Jewish studies, gave a talk entitled 'Bloch, Jewish Angst, and Me: Reflections on Music and Jewish Identity.' In it he discussed the ambiguities and complexities involved in determining what is 'authentic Jewish music.' [Solomon Reflections](#)

**April 2022**—**Walter Simmons**, musicologist, critic, and record producer (and Editor of this Newsletter) discussed Bloch's String Quartet No. 2, providing his reasons for citing this work as a consummate masterpiece, focusing especially on the brilliant structure of the last movement. [Simmons, String Quartet no2](#)

**May 2022**—**Eric Johnson**, photographer and photography professor, discussed the 1922 meeting between Bloch and the master photographer Alfred Stieglitz, delving into the confluence of these two important creative personalities and their mutual exchange of ideas on the commonalities between their respective arts. [Bloch and Stieglitz](#)

**October 2022** - pianist **Zecharia Plavin** of the Jerusalem Academy for Music and Dance shared his insights into **Bloch's *Visions and Prophecies***, a cycle of five eloquently moody preludes for piano solo, based on material from *Voice in the Wilderness*, a work for cello and orchestra. Prof. Plavin drew particular attention to the connections between this work, the geography of the Negev desert, and Bloch's reading of the book of Isaiah. A brief comparison to Hans Sachs' workshop scene in Act 3 from *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* highlighted the profound difference between the approaches of Bloch and Wagner, and why these affect different plateaus of human psyche. Video link [Plavin Visions and Prophecies](#)



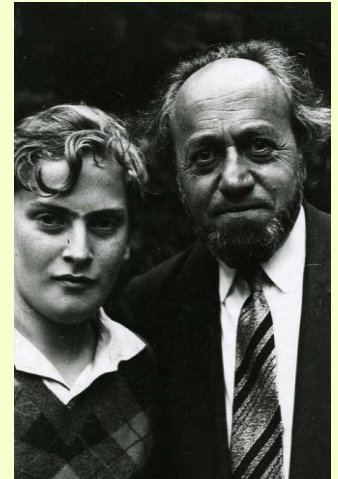
**November 2022 Greg Steinke** (left) was our guest speaker. He is a composer, author, and oboist, on the faculty of Marylhurst University, in Marylhurst, Oregon. There he is Associate Dean of Graduate Studies. From 1993 to 1997 he was **Associate Director** of the **Ernest Bloch Music Festival** in Newport, Oregon. He was also involved with the Bloch Composers Symposium activities in Newport. His fascinating talk was entitled “**The Ernest Bloch Music Festival, Bloch’s Music, and My Own.**” Video link [Steinke Festivals](#)

### **Presentations prior to 2022:**

**If you missed any of the previous presentations, here is a reminder of what they were and links to where you can see and hear them.**

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\\_QRoPjq8WY](https://youtu.be/A_QRoPjq8WY)
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. Excerpts from Golani's live and recorded performances were played. 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 frequently performed works: the 'Nigun' movement from the *Baal Shem Suite*. (Unfortunately there is no video recording of this session)
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/R4PAPahQuOg>
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/zfrsrgb3XaSA> Matthias says: 'I 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.'



## The 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Bloch's birth in 2030

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.

Many musicians and organisations will be putting on performances and creating mini-festivals along the way – in ‘Building Blochs’ up to the anniversary.

**We hope this anniversary will stimulate many more conductors, soloists, orchestras and chamber groups** 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](#) For information about how to source Bloch scores, contact [music@ernestblochsociety.org](mailto:music@ernestblochsociety.org) Please contact [enquiries@ernestblochsociety.org](mailto:enquiries@ernestblochsociety.org) with information about what you are planning, so we can publicise it.

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## How to keep in touch:

**Ernest Bloch Society Mailing List:** There is an interactive mailing list of people who are interested in or involved with the music of Ernest Bloch. Please join this list (which is free of charge) to be informed about activity, post questions and announce your Bloch programmes. 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). (Or you can contact [info@ernestblochsociety.org](mailto:info@ernestblochsociety.org) for assistance)

**Ernest Bloch Society Facebook Group** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2810320052621256> For those who like Facebook we have a new Facebook group for the Ernest Bloch Society. You may like to join to see what is going on and post your own ideas. **Ernest Bloch Society YouTube Channel** [Bloch Playlist](#) stores the study session presentations. **If you know someone** who may be interested in receiving this occasional Newsletter, please either pass on their details or invite them to join our electronic mailing list (see above).

**Lewinski-Dijon books available free.** Alex Knapp reminds us that he has several sets of the substantial **four-volume Lewinski-Dijon Compendium in French** entitled: *Ernest Bloch: sa vie et sa pensée* (‘his life and his thought’). Alex is happy to send them to whomever would like one, for the cost of just the packaging and postage. Email [knappalexander1@gmail.com](mailto:knappalexander1@gmail.com) to request a set.

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## Bloch Newsletter #12, February 2024

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