

# **1. Ernest Bloch- Suite Hébraïque for Viola and Piano**

Ernest Bloch was born on July 24, 1880, in Geneva and took his initial music training in that city, later attending courses in Brussels (studying violin with Ysaÿe), Frankfurt, and Munich. He returned to Geneva in 1903 to teach composition and esthetics at the conservatory, gaining a reputation as a conductor of his own works during the following years. In 1917, he moved to New York, where he joined the faculty of the Mannes School of Music. Three years later, he became Director of the Cleveland Institute of Music, a post he held for five years; in 1925, he was appointed Head of the San Francisco Conservatory. Bloch left San Francisco and the United States in 1930 to return to Switzerland, but he was forced from Europe in 1939 by World War II and came back to America, settling in 1941 along the Oregon coast, where he spent the rest of his life. From the time of his return until he died on July 15, 1959, except for a few summers teaching at Berkeley, Bloch devoted himself entirely to composition. "It is the Jewish soul that interests me, the complex, glowing, agitated soul that I feel vibrating throughout the Bible," wrote Ernest Bloch in 1917, soon after he had finished *Schelomo*, his "Hebraic Rhapsody" for Cello and Orchestra portraying King Solomon. "The freshness and naïveté of the Patriarchs; the violence that is evident in the prophetic books; the Jew's savage love of justice; the despair of the Preacher in Jerusalem; the sorrow and immensity of the Book of Job; the sensuality of the Song of Songs—all this is in us; all this is in me, and it is the better part of me. It is all this that I endeavor to hear in myself and to transcribe in my music." Bloch found deep creative inspiration in his Judaism throughout his life and composed many works grown from Jewish subjects, thought, and music. His *Suite hébraïque* was written in 1951 in appreciation of a weeklong celebration of his seventieth birthday the previous December in Chicago, sponsored by the city's Covenant Club under the supervision of Sam Laderman (whose nephew, Ezra, was one of America's most distinguished composers and teachers); the work was orchestrated three years later at the insistence of Rafael Kubelík, Music Director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, who had conducted two concerts of Bloch's music at the birthday observances. The three movements of the *Suite hébraïque*—*Rapsodie*, *Processional*, and *Affirmation*—are characterized by the exotically altered scales, melancholy lyricism, and pungent harmonies that Bloch used to evoke his Jewish heritage

## 2. Scherzo from the "F-A-E" Sonata-Johannes Brahms

German composer Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) wrote the Sonatensatz, or sonata movement in c minor in 1853 at only 20 years of age. This very energetic and youthful Scherzo is part of the FAE sonata, a four movement work for violin and piano and was the result of an interesting collaborative effort by three composers of the time, Johannes Brahms, Robert Schumann and his pupil Albert Dietrich. Each of them wrote one movement of this unique work (with the exception of Schumann who wrote both the second and last movements) which was intended as a gift and tribute to their friend, the great violinist Joseph Joachim. Joachim had taken as his personal motto the Romantic phrase *Frei aber einsam* ("Free but lonely") and the idea was for all of the movements of the sonata to make use of the musical notes F-A-E. Since its initial performance, the Scherzo has enjoyed a successful life of its own.

## 3. Bax Sonata for Viola and Piano

Arnold Bax's Viola Sonata was completed in 1922 and was dedicated to the well-known British viola virtuoso, Lionel Tertis. The two premiered the work. It is no set key although it is tonal though not in the traditional sense. It begins with a flowing *Molto moderato* which at times rises to an agitated feverish pitch. The middle movement, *Allegro energico ma non troppo presto*, is restless and thrusting. The work ends in a somber fashion with a *Molto lento*.

Arnold Bax (1883-1953) was born in London. He studied at the Royal Academy of Music. Of independent means, he never needed to teach or conduct. He was a fine pianist but his main interests were composing music and poetry. His strong affinity for Ireland led him to spend considerable time in that country which influenced his outlook and music. The 1916 Easter Uprising in Ireland and its brutal suppression, which included the execution of several of his friends, was to have a profound influence upon him. He is remembered mostly for his orchestral compositions but he wrote a great deal of chamber music. His music shows many influences, perhaps the strongest of which is impressionism.